You're a Goddamn Tugboat Captain

Greg Albers
Digital Publications Manager, J. Paul Getty Trust
@geealbers

"same same" as my 2yo would say
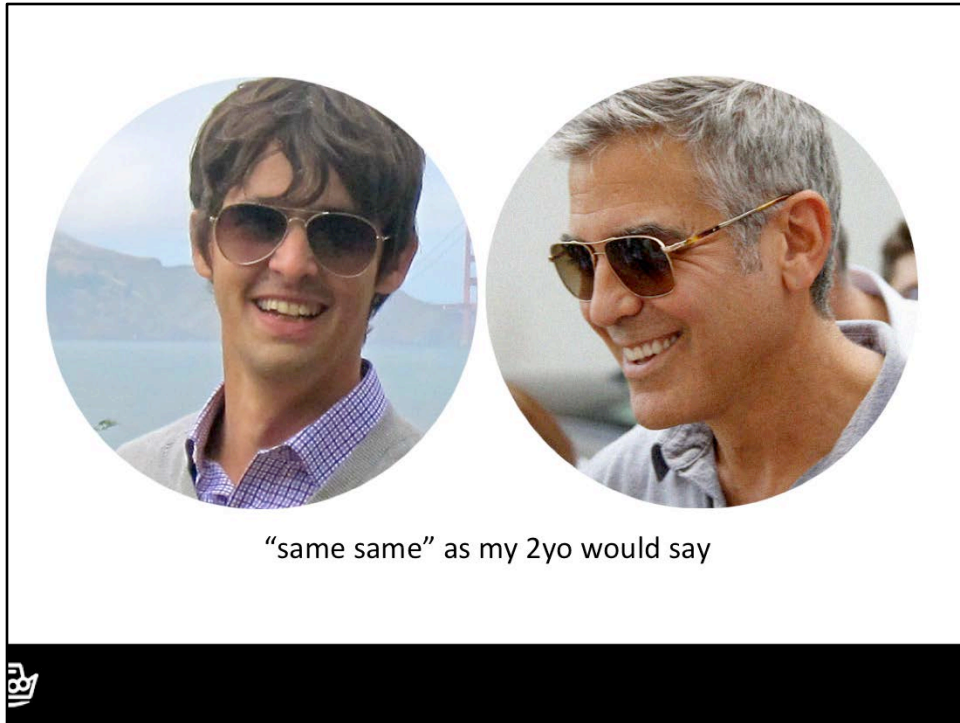
I'm sure this will not surprise you, but I have long seen myself as the George Clooney of the publishing world. Not Clooney as Dr. Doug Ross on ER, or Lt. Col. Thomas Devoe in The Peacemaker, or even Danny Ocean in Oceans 11 through 13

but George Clooney as the rugged and headstrong swordboat captain Billy Tyne in the 28th most popular film of 2000: *The Perfect Storm*. There's no end of insight we might glean from this classic Clooney pic, but it was this particular line of his that really hooked me:

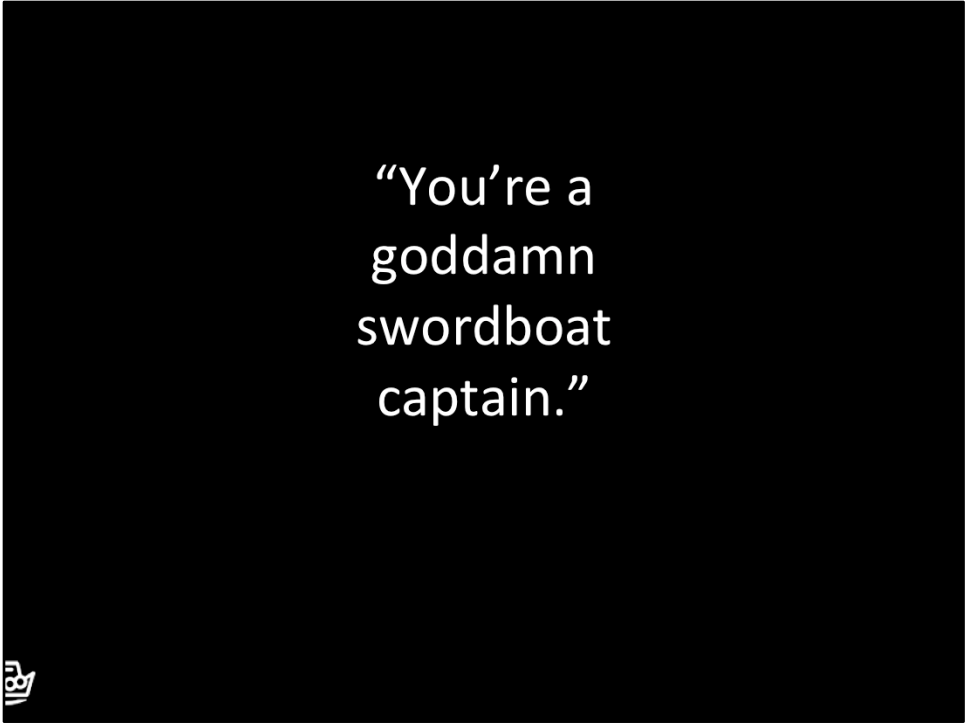Still from *The Perfect Storm*, Warner Bros. Entertainment
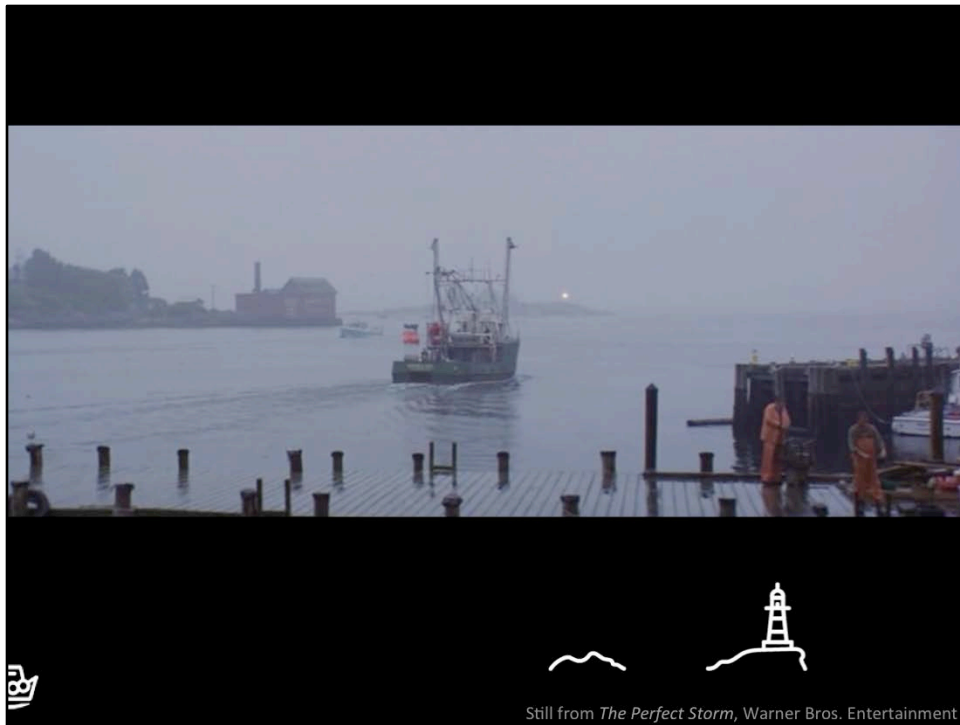
"Fog's just lifting. Throw off your bow line, throw off your stern. You head out to South Channel; past Rocky Neck, Ten-Pound Island. Past Niles Pond — where I skated as a kid. You blow your air horn and you throw a wave to the lighthouse-keeper's kid on Thatcher Island.
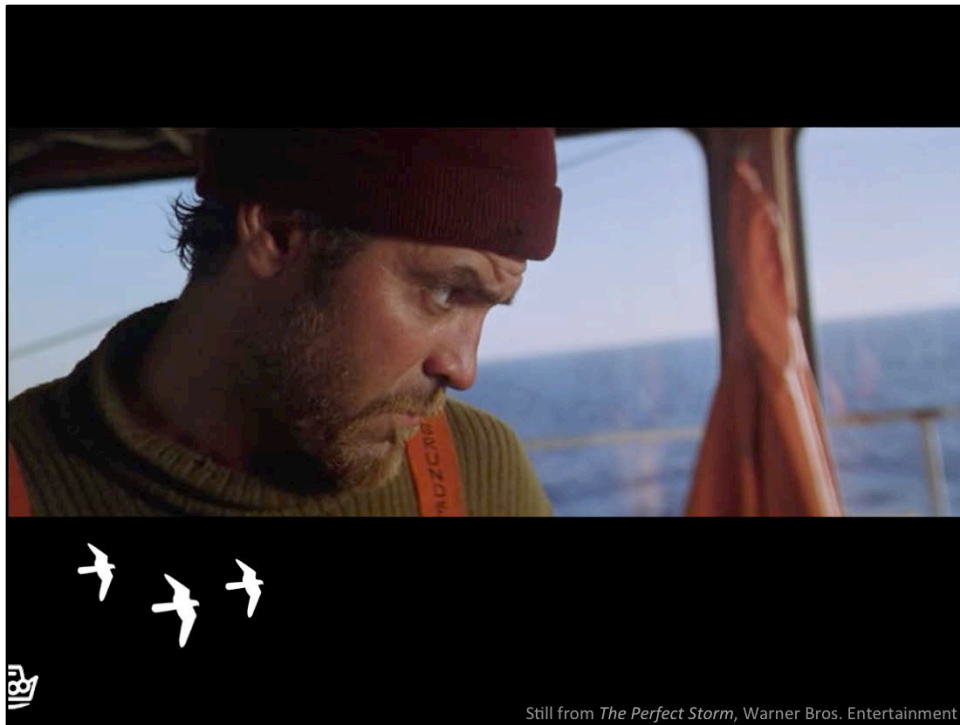
Still from *The Perfect Storm*, Warner Bros. Entertainment

"Then the birds show up. Black backs, herring gulls, big dumb ducks… The sun hits you. Head north, open up to twelve … Steaming now. The guys are busy, you're in charge … you know what? You're a goddamn swordboat captain."

"You're a goddamn swordboat captain." That's a great line, right? This sense of pride, and purpose… out to sea for weeks at time, leading your crew, charting the waters, growing a beard … and seeking out a particularly exotic fish to sate wealthy appetites back home.

strange, elusive, utterly unique

Swordfish: The sole member of their biological family, this non-schooling fish commonly grows to 10 feet long and can weigh hundreds of pounds. Cod? Tuna? Herring? Not sexy. But swordfish? Strange, elusive, and utterly unique? That's the fish for me.

we've been busy providing our museums
with magnificent digital swordfish

Frank Benson / iChiaroscuro / DISimages

And what is swordfish but just a fancy word for ebook? Or app, or responsive website, mobile tour, 3d printer, virtual reality headset?... As a technologist, I've long believed it my job to provide the world with magnificent digital swordfish like these.

Damn you swordfish, I am about to meet my demise over you! Argh!

Still from *The Perfect Storm*, Warner Bros. Entertainment

But here's the thing, in the Perfect Storm, Clooney—and his entire crew—dies! Swordfishing might be sexy and romantic, but apps aren't worth it, no matter how delicious. And even when we do survive, we're only as good as our last catch, or app, and then it's once more into the sea.
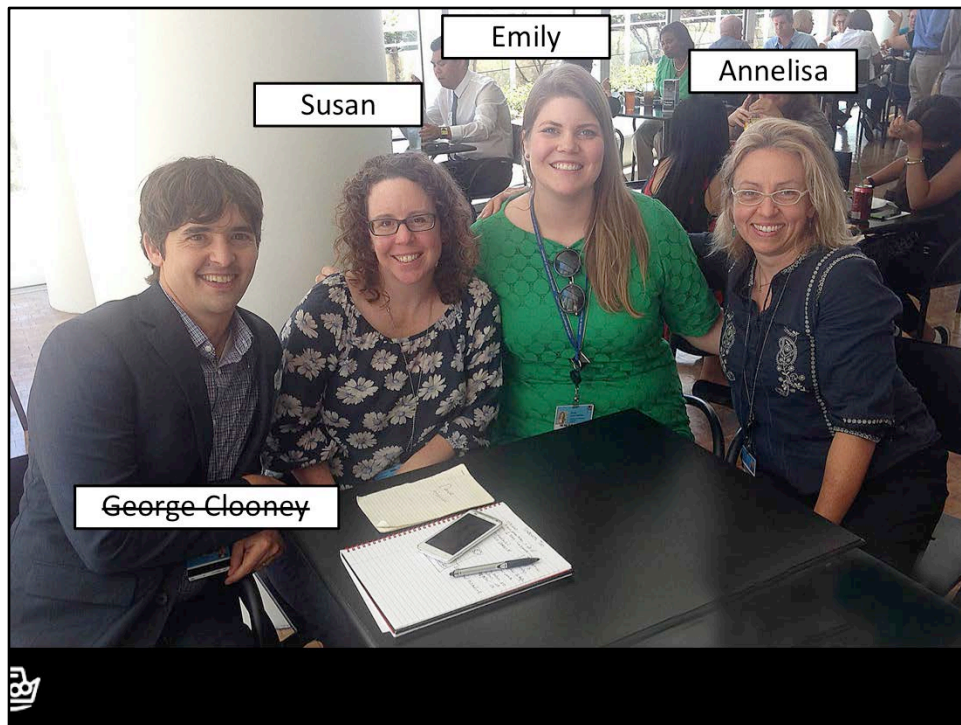
Thankfully this past year at the Getty, I made some good friends. And as good friends are wont to do, they quickly dissuaded me from my delusions. I am no George Clooney ... Disappointing as this is, we did discover a better role model. It's time for us all to retire from swordboat life ...

Pappy Greg

… and be tugboat captains instead. Here's the new me! Technology's future role isn't Clooney, but Pappy, the modest tugboat captain that works with a team of other tugs to maneuver Clooney's 200-foot yacht, and other ships like it, into berth.

Let us be reliable, hard working and humble

Being a tugboat captain isn't sexy, and it's not about being the hero. It's about humility, consistency, teamwork, making smart choices, taking responsibility, and working hard every single day. If we as technologists hope to survive into retirement ...

Let us be fundamental parts of <u>all</u> operations
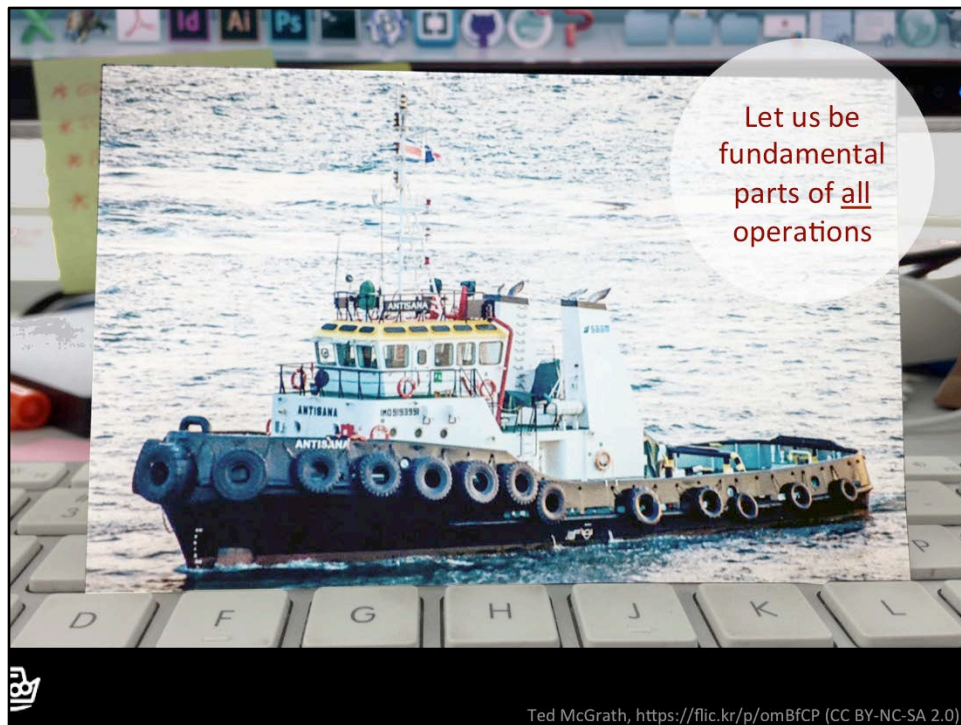
… our roles must be larger than that of a single ship providing a fancy product. Like tugboats, let us instead be integrated and fundamental parts of all operations. Let our work be to make small moves, choreographed with other like-minded boats …

… that can change the direction of even the biggest of institutions for the better. By making it our mission to provide digital support, direction and movement throughout our institutions, and at every level, we will all thrive in this post-swordfish post-Clooney age.

Tugboats are in constant communication with one another, and with other boats. Answering the digital questions of staff outside digital departments is an opportunity to provide a service, and also to validate and encourage their curiosity about digitial topics.

direction through
push & pull
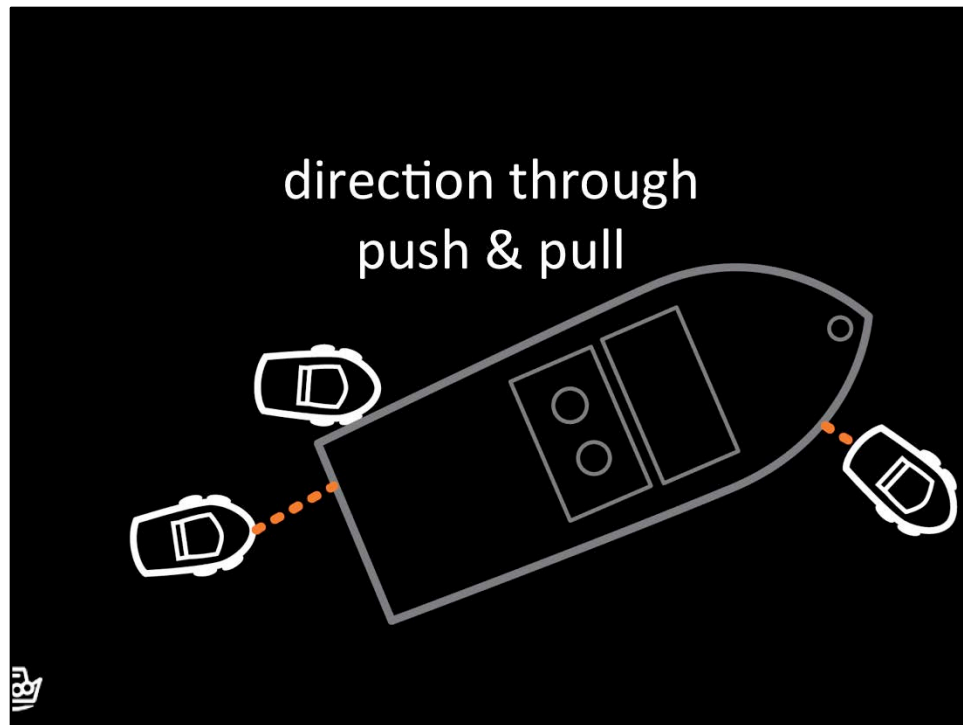
Tugboats use gentle nudges and tugs to provide direction. Taking time to introduce your staffs to emerging digital trends is an opportunity to build in them a sense of digital literacy, and to point them toward new possibilitis.

Tugboats work together and use their collective power to provide movement. Last month, inspired by other code schools and computer clubs, a group of us tugboats at the Getty launched 10-Minute Tech: Drop-in classes focused on the peer-to-peer exchange of bite-sized technology skills.

In the past six weeks, dozens of people from departments across the Getty have spent 10 minutes of their Monday lunchtimes learning from their peers; earning badges in things like the difference between at (@) and hash (#), how to resize an image, and how to use the "Open With" command on their computers.

10-Minute Tech empowers those who learn and those who teach. It develops a network of people engaged in digital topics. And it fosters a culture of genrosity, inquiry, and openness that characterize the digital mindset.

These classes, the tugboat metaphor, this talk … none of it is mine alone. Emily, Susan and Annelisa; Cathy, Mikaela, Lyra, Danielle, Miranda, Erin, Andrew, Lili, Sarah, Steve, Ahree, and Kathryn … We are all tugboats now. Join us.