

This passage is adapted from the poem
“My Father in the Navy: A Childhood
Memory” by Judith Ortiz Cofer (©1990 by
Judith Ortiz Cofer).

Stiff and immaculate
in the white cloth of his uniform
and a round cap on his head like a halo,
he was an apparition on leave from a shadow-world
5 and only flesh and blood when he rose from below
the waterline where he kept watch over the engines
and dials making sure the ship parted the waters
on a straight course.
10 Mother, brother and I kept vigil
on the nights and dawns of his arrivals,
watching the corner beyond the neon sign of a quasar
for the flash of white our father like an angel
heralding a new day.
15 His homecomings were the verses
we composed over the years making up
the siren’s song that kept him coming back
from the bellies of iron whales
and into our nights
like the evening prayer.

“My Father in the Navy: A Childhood Memory” by
Judith Ortiz Cofer, from *Hispanics in the U.S.: An
Anthology of Creative Literature*, Vol. 2, 1982.