

Joys of island life

The year that I lived on the island produced nasty words and new determination on the part of Metropolitan Toronto to finally get rid of the cottagers. They all leased their land and built small, cheap buildings in the hope they would not lose a lot of money should the eviction notice arrive.

The grand houses were gone, or going. A few lined the long, winding walk by the lake, their empty-eyed windows gazing like dead phantoms of grander times. The little homes came down as each street ended its life. The lonely sidewalks bulldozed away, grass soon concealed a century or two of individualistic island living.

My father, Lloyd Crossley, lived on the island for several years as a youth, and played baseball there in a minor league in the time Babe Ruth swatted one of his first home runs on Hanlan's Point. I don't think they met, but the proximity of their efforts as pitchers is enough justification for me to duly record that coincidence here.

I think I first began musing about living on The Island after my father casually mentioned his adventures there. I located, at length, an available room at Casita, moved out of my Macpherson Avenue attic apartment, and became an islander.

The folks were friendly. The community hall people organized corn roasts with huge fires blazing their lights across to humorless old Toronto. I saw The Man in The White Suit, with Alec Guinness, in the old wooden

hall, the cheap old camera's clatter nearly drowning out the gleep glop noise of Alec's miracle machine in the move. But nobody complained. How many other lucky souls could have their own movie-house on an enchanted island?

It seemed enchanted to me. A night, the deserted hot dog stand seemed to echo the voices of children at play, the laughter of weekend picnic crowds, the call of a mother to her child. And in the night my bicycle clinked along the pathways, queer turns familiar to me tripping by into lamp-post-lit global gloom.

The long rows of coiffured flowers amid concrete benches, losing color as the sun diminished, seemed to sigh as lake breezes swept across the quadrangles.

The magic remained with the dawn of each new day. When the children of the Orient, from places beyond my small acquaintance, raced across the high-arched bridges, thrilled at the swans, and yawned their tired faces towards the departing ferries, I thought of that lad, my father, and the excitement here he must have known.

And in that final year, I said farewell to ten thousands winds, to the warning signs of danger rocks, to the din of waves, and nights when I walked as an Indian brave. I said farewell to the lights far out on the lake, to life on an isle for my soul's good sake.

And may all of your adventures be beautiful.