

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Lions Bay Historical Society (LBHS) works tirelessly to document our unique past and preserve this information for future generations of Lions Bay residents. The LBHS welcomes all submissions.

Looking Back – A Place to Belong

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Camp was the place where I scurried about the bouldered beach, heaving aside the largest low-tide rocks that I could budge with my skinny arms, watching with delight and excitement as the crabs skittered to new security. They were micro-sized, those inter tidal crabs. Some scarcely as big as the head of a single nail, the largest perhaps as big around as a quarter. When you picked them up, the little ones tickled your palm, the larger ones sometimes nipped you with their developing pinchers. Though they didn't hurt, it took stern resolution to remain calm, not squealing or dropping them, the multitudinous crabs of Brunswick Beach.

Camp is my claim, I suppose, to belong to be native of this province in the special sense of having a local tradition. In the tapestry of my life, camp is one of the few unbroken threads, weaving its way still through the swirling patterns, its own texture unchanging, yet always it's there. It is a place, most definitely, and true to the B.C. tradition it's an outdoors place, but it's also a mood, part of the way I look at the world and move within it. It's much of my sense of continuity, of family. If I belong anywhere, it's there at camp.

The beginnings of memory are etched for me with scenes of camp: the smooth green swells of the water, un-rippled except by the bow-wave of the clinker-built inboard rented from Sewell's in Horseshoe Bay, roaring its smelly way for an hour and a half up Howe Sound, Boyer Island the half-way point. I remember clutching with fervor, my arms just long enough to stretch the width of the boat from one gunwale to another, my heart pounding every time someone shifted and the

boat rocked, my eyes measuring the distance those silky green waves rolled silently to the steep, forested shore. I wondered if my uncle could swim it, or our cousin- I knew I could not. How many valiant ways I imagined my death while helping them and others- my parents, I suppose, I don't remember- get safely to shore. There is a bit of memory, too (is it my own or is it the family's?) of a Union Steamship heaving-to off the beach, a rowboat out from shore to land a new arrival- was it my father, come on the "daddy boat" for a weekend break from summer school at UBC? Without doubt it was at camp that I first got a glimpse of the miracle of reproduction, myriad glistening red eggs spilling from the belly of a fresh caught salmon.

Oddly, one of the strongest memories of camp is night: black as blackness cannot be known in the city, unrelieved even in the distance. When we wished to move in the dark, we carried a "bug" - a large jam tin with a wire handle fixed so the can hung horizontally, an X punched with a knife in one side, the four triangles this created folded back to support a thick white candle- a wind-resistant but feeble flame against that solid blind black. There was a bug-lit search for Billy, Grandfather's Persian cat, out for an explore the night of one arrival at camp. We trashed through the eerie bush, the bugs flitting through the tangle like giant fireflies, Grandfather calling in vain (Billy of course returned, in his unperturbed way, next morning.) And one of my most vivid pictures of Grandfather is one imprinted on my mind that night by the light of a bug, a feeble light yet strong enough to catch the twinkle in his ever teasing eyes. He was a small man, slight and somewhat stooped, his bald head fringed in white, his mouth all but covered by his heavy white moustache. As I recall it, his collar was detached, the studs removed so that his white shirt gaped open at the neck- the height of informality. I'm sure he wore arm-bands to hold his cuffs at the wrists, and almost certainly a vest, for that is where he kept his watch. Solid black round-toed shoes were fresh from the pavements of Dunsmuir Street.