

They are all gone now.

John was the first to go; he was the most vulnerable. He lived longer than his three brothers, who all died from what seemed to be the same kind of heart anomaly. They died suddenly. John had received CPR, managing to live a couple of years longer with a mitral valve replacement sewn onto a crippled heart; a rather miserable two years; then he collapsed, and died, after dinner, while watching 60 minutes, at home. He was 68. His younger brother had left the premises when he was 42. Another brother collapsed and died on a trip to the island to visit John and Jean. His sister lived longer than all, with her own ailments. The author imagines she is gone now too. She lived in Texas.

The author was the youngest of the social group who lived on that part of the island; at least ten years younger.

Alex was the next to leave, with a misdiagnosed lung condition that turned out to be cancer. Alex left in misery, a wasted, emaciated wreck of a person; he did not die at home. He was 76. His wife left the island permanently, and still lives in the big city. She is 85.

Dave and Aileen were worn out by island living, some forty years of it, deciding to sell out; moving to a condo in the big city. After a series of falls, and ailments that accompany the aging, Dave could no longer stave off the inevitable. He was 87. Aileen changed cities, lives today a ghost of her former self, guessing 90.

Ed and Betty also wore out on the island; needing constant care, they moved to a facility in town, where they lingered, Betty with her blindness and her failing body. They almost left together, one perishing soon after the other. The author doesn't know their exact ages at the time, but believes Ed was 86 and Betty 87.

Jean, John's spouse, left the island a few years after John, to live in town, finally being incapacitated by a series of strokes, making her into some kind of zombie, who couldn't read, although she could see, and ignominiously reduced her to a vegetable in a nursing home to finally just leave at 89.

Craig and Mary, twenty years younger, are still struggling with island living.

There were others, who associated with the 'south enders', some of whom are still around and on the island, others who are decrepit, ready for a different venue; and others simply gone.

The neighborhood had changed considerably after these ones took their leave. There is no longer a neighborhood. The new occupants barely say hello to each other.

The author recalls these former people as a social unit. He had become associated with them as a caretaker of John and Jean's place, and animals, while they went off to a warmer and sunnier place for a

while during a couple of the dreary winter months. And he looked after Alex and Gloria's property when they went away to Greece. And eventually the author and his wife acquired title to a piece of the rock next to Alex and Gloria.

At 81, the author wonders about his own future that is already beginning to appear bleak as far as island living goes. His body is failing fast into its seemingly catabolic state.

The author doesn't know why he is writing these words at this particular time.

When he was in town the other day to see the doctor, he made his usual noontime sojourn to the pub while waiting for the passenger ferry back to the island. While in the pub he noticed a lady sitting outside on the brick steps that led to the closed restaurant located above pub. The lady was sipping on a beer. After a while the lady came into the pub to get another bottle of Corona, to return to the steps. On her way, she stopped briefly to speak to someone outside. It was then he recognized the profile of one of his new neighbors, who seldom spends any time on the island. In his mind he would not be expecting to see her sitting on these particular steps sipping on a beer. She should be in Port Townsend. The author doesn't really know if she had seen him either, or recognized him before that moment when he recognized her. Anyway, she waved and motioned for him to join her. He made some gesture that was meant to convey that he would do just that soon.

As they sat on the steps, the conversation eventually came to the condition of her husband who was in a nursing home with failing eyesight and dementia at some 85 years of age. The author knew that her life had been greatly disrupted by her husband's deteriorating condition. He would no longer be coming to the island, they had to sell their boat; they had to sell their place in Mexico. He had to go into a nursing home. Lately, she rarely visits the island. The subject eventually turned to making one's exit from this planet. She, now in her late sixties, imagined herself rowing away in Puka, her Whitehall, into the sunset, or over the edge of the flat earth.

She and her husband had bought Dave and Aileen's place, after selling their other place on the 'north end' of the island. They had a new home built where Aileen used to sit by the water. It seemed a sacrilege to the author. He was inclined to look at things that way.

John and Jeans place was violated in just about every conceivable way by the new occupants, near squatters who had wrangled their way into such occupancy by the meddling of another neighbor, just trying to do a good deed. They had been asked to leave (been kicked out) from their previous squat. Jean was no longer interested in maintaining the place she and John had built together. Their distant sons seemed not to care that their home was being desecrated. And the meddler grew to

regret her actions for other reasons. The sons seemed to have lost all interest in their former home, soon to be put up for sale. Little or none of the ambience created by John and Jean remains. The barn is gone, the hen house is gone, the wine shed is gone, the other outbuildings neglected in sad repair, the cedar picket fences all falling down; the outhouse and the smokehouse abandoned; the house itself suffering the worst fate, being transformed from a home to den. The garden is destitute. Yes! It is a sacrilege indeed; to be forever consigned and condemned to hell. This spring, one of Jean's surviving Rhododendrons was a blaze of white; an anomaly, a ghost.

Alex and Gloria's place is still mostly in tact, the deck replaced after one of the new owners fell through the old rotting one. They added a generator shed and a new water tank, painted the interior, added siding, and revived the old garden, but could not stomach the mouse population that invaded the house, no matter what they did to seal off their intrusions. Alex and Gloria had a vicious cat; Alex also had invented sonic devices that were supposed to drive the mice to distraction. But the two new ladies just simply don't like the verminous creatures, staying away most of the time lately.

Ed and Betty's place has been occupied, how transformed, unknown to the author.

Dave and Aileen's place is occupied, but part of the house (their former living room) has been turned into a shop, and a storage area. The author imagines the ambience to be gone.

The author doesn't know why he is writing this stuff that seems of no consequence to anybody but himself; some might question its veracity. To those removed, veracity resides in the memory of the author, perhaps only somewhat unreliable, interpreting instead of reporting.

But he has had cause to wonder what a new occupant to his own place might do. Observing the notion that 'Nothing is sacred', he feels burning the place to the ground would be an option. It might be the best. He knows that once the islanders learn of his potential demise, perhaps requiring him to leave the island (something out of his control), that all seems to fall into a category of 'fair game'. Being mindful of Kazantzakis' Zorba The Greek, he envisions the mourners picking through Hortense's drawers as she was dying, he sees the opportunists descending upon his place, as he has witnessed several times during his lifetime, helping themselves to the defenseless remainders of another man's life. 'He who hesitates is lost' he also knows from personal experience. Bedlam. When the social order breaks down, the place is ransacked; dying fits the prospectus of breaking down.

Recently he and his wife, no longer willing to maintain the sailboat they had owned and kept afloat for 39 years, gave the boat to someone who they thought would know what to do in order to maintain it and get some of the use that still remained in the good ship.

A very succinct statement by the first mate describes and assess what happened to the good ship of 39 years. "It is no longer our boat!"

So it will be with our home on the island, and our home in Oregon. When we leave, what we leave behind is defenseless without us to be there to guard it and protect it. As was the case with the old friends on the island.

The author felt life to be a wayward thing without any purpose except to cause grief to both the participants and the onlookers.

Anyway John and Jean were very kind to the author, and his wife. They appreciated what the author had done to look after their place and their animals while they were away. The author and his wife also appreciated the opportunity to spend some time on the island, an island they had encountered in one of our boating adventures. In exchange for that opportunity, and out of respect for them, the author always tried to leave the place in as good or better condition than when he received it into his care. The author engaged in this caretaking activity for five years running.

While he was there he was conned into playing badminton at the community hall with the geriatrics. This expanded the number of old folks with whom the author associated. Eric and Ruby, Cecil and Nancy, Blind Betty, Marge, Cedric, occasionally Ian and Joanne. Aileen showed up once in a while. Most of these have left the scene obeying some immutable law that forbids permanent occupancy.