



Spring 2021

ALUMNI

# NEWSLETTER

*The official newsletter of the John Island Camp Alumni and Friends of John Island Camp*

**ALUMNI BURSARY DOUBLES  
CAMPAIGN GOAL - pg 3**

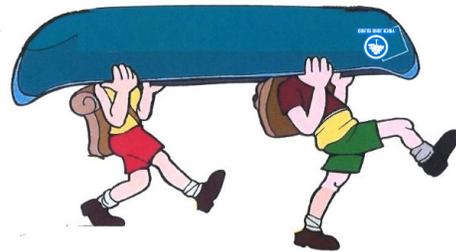
**NEW SCIENCE PROGRAM  
Pg 13**

Young Sharp-Shin Hawk  
Near Campfire Trail

**DIDINE FAMILY AT JOHN ISLAND - Pg. 6**  
**THE SEMRAU FAMILY LEGACY - Pg.10**



After  
a year like  
never before



# what a summer at camp will look like!

## Summer 2021 - The Year of the Ox

According to the Chinese culture this year is that of the ox. People born in the **Year of the Ox** are said to be reliable, strong, fair, patient, kind, methodical, calm, and trustworthy. My hope is that this summer we here at John Island camp will follow the model of the ox towards a successful summer at camp. The overwhelming and now infuriating comment is that Covid-19 has changed our lives, but we must plow toward a place where camp can safely exist while still fostering connection to each other and the outdoors.

At first glance, not all the traits of the ox are positive, as they are often opinionated and stubborn. But these traits have shown positive for those of us in camping. We have persevered on the understanding that camp can hopefully open safely and that there is a need for camp. Lockdowns have isolated children and youth. When talking to families and staff I know that folks are isolated and often struggling. Humans are programmed to thrive on connection and camp will be a driving force in moving out toward something better.

As we look toward the summer we have had to cancel many of our regular camping sessions, but are intending to operate our leadership and tripping based programs. We anticipate there will be many changes in how these sessions look, with rules around screening, new drop-off and pick-up procedures, requirements for testing, wellness checks, cohorting, and mask wearing, but we know that this can be done. These things have become the norms in schools and when going to restaurants or gyms.

Camp is a labour of love and I know with support for alumni, friend, family, and staff we will come out better than before. This has been a tough time but we will have campfires again.

Stay safe and I hope to see you this summer.

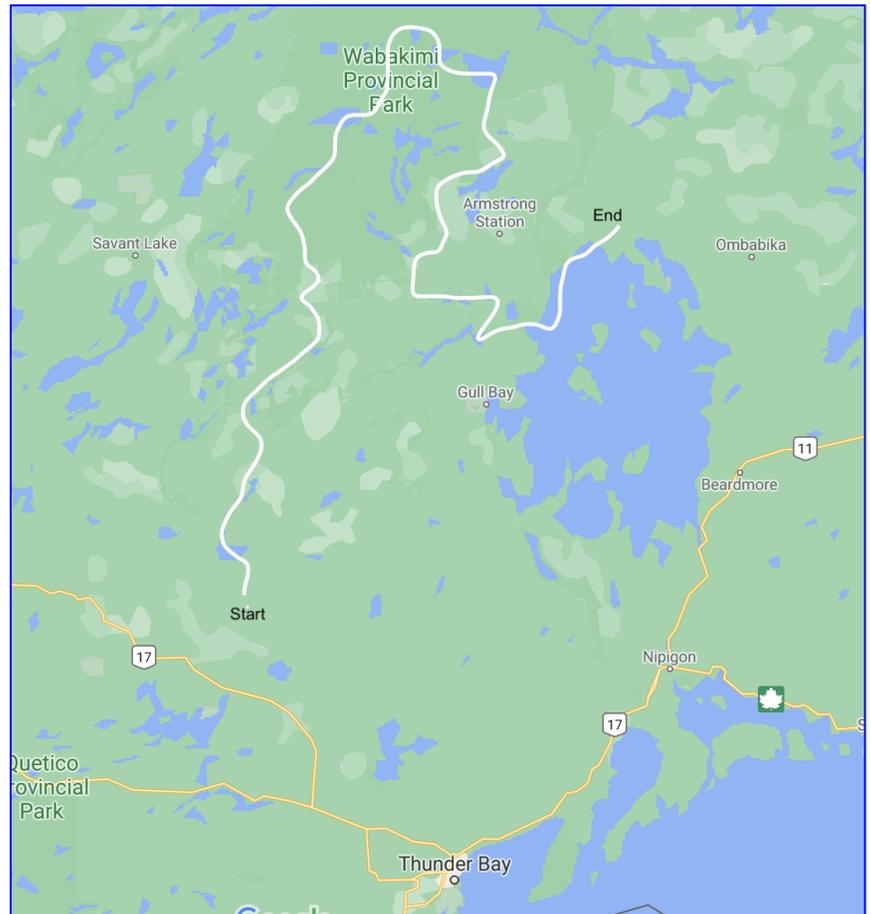
Aspen Groom



# Norquay Trip Expands to New Routes

In 2019 we looked to do something different with our Norquay trips and took on a new route. Giving Norquay participants the option to go on trip A or B. A being the traditional Missinaibi River trip that we had done for many years and B being this other trip. At camp we have taken to calling this new trip the Wabakimi Trip, though in reality it is many different locations all put together.

This trip travels through Brightsands River Provincial Park, Wabakimi Provincial Park, and Kopka River Provincial Park and the surrounding area. It has both Whitewater and flatwater paddling as participants travel over 270km of Northern Ontario wilderness. See general map below



## ALUMNI BURSARY FUND EXCEEDS GOAL

When the goal was set to kick off the Alumni and Friends of John Island Bursary in the midst of the pandemic, it was hoped we could reach \$2,000 to get started. As usual, the John Island Camp Alumni supported the brief campaign and close to \$5,000 was raised. Thanks to the idea from JIC Alumni David Horne the Bursary Fund was conceived and has been identified as a way many alumni can help ensure as many youth as possible can benefit from a camp experience each year.

With Covid restrictions still in place, we anticipate the first recipients of the bursary will be for the 2022 camping season. A heavy demand for the bursary is anticipated as we reopen after the pandemic restrictions. Until a sizable pool of funds can be obtained, the first bursaries will come from flow through funds available from the donations received to date. Bursaries are awarded dependant on the funds available. The camp will continue to offer financial assistance to campers requiring help to get to camp through its normal assistance program.

Donations to the John Island Camp Alumni and Friends Bursary Fund can be made throughout the year as can donations to the John Island Camp Capital Fund to help keep the camp facilities and equipment in the best condition possible.



# GENDER IN CAMPING

## PART 4 - GETTING IT RIGHT

I live a very insular life surrounded by two groups: folks who work in camping/the Y, and my friends. Most of my friends are part of the LGBT2Q+ community, and a lot of those who work in the camping world/Y are not. I get super jazzed when there is cross over and let me explain why.

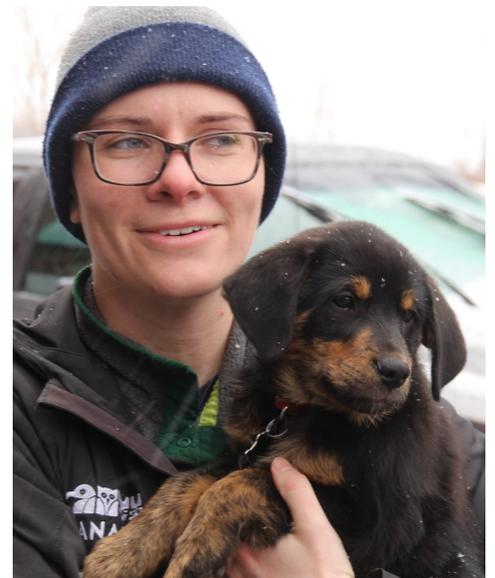
Camping has characteristically not been a safe place for queer people. This beginning in the 1940s and 50s when gay people were often categorized as pedophiles and recruiters, who want to trap children into a life of sin. So not people that were welcome around children. These ideas continued well into the 1990s and early 2000s.

Obviously, things have changed since 1940 but most folks have still seen discriminatory attacks on LGBT2Q+ people in their lifetime. We still need to continue to learn and grow when it comes to how we treat each other.

In my life, I have watched folks be reprimanded and threatened to be fired for talking about their partners at camp, even while straight peers were completely free to gossip about those of the opposite gender. I have hidden my gender identity, while working for camp that have told transgender and nonbinary persons that they could not accommodate them, and just before the pandemic I sat in camping meetings with other YMCA camp professionals, and we were asked to split ourselves up into a boy group and girl group – for context as a nonbinary person this is just an awkward interaction. These are things that happen all the time.

As someone who tries to advocate for themselves, has privilege, and authority, you might think that I feel empowered to stand up each time these situations arise, but I can promise you I don't always have the energy. So when I encounter other LGBT2Q+ people in the camping world it is wonderful – because there is often shared experience and support. This makes me feel safe.

You might be asking why the title of *Getting it Right?* Well, it is not realistic to have LGBT2Q+ people in every space. So how can we create safety without shared experience? – particularly when we know that decision makers often don't fall into marginalized groups. The short answer is for all persons to have a better understanding of how they can foster safety in all spaces, ie. *get it right*, and below are some recommendations specifically relating to *gender identity*.



Aspen Groom  
General Manager/Director  
YMCA John Island Camp

(Cont'd on page 5)

**Make Space (metaphorically that is)**

People need to feel free to be themselves and when we “create space” we are allowing them to do that without judgement or our input. This can be done by:

**Using none-gendered language** like folks, guests, or friends over ladies and gentlemen, guys, dude etc.

This means we are allowing people to identify how they like and not labelling them how we feel fit.

**Changing traditionally gender labels to simple nongendered ones.** This could mean instead of having a gendered washrooms you just have washrooms. Or instead of having a boys/girls side of camp you just have the north and south side.

**Acknowledge those of all gender identities.** Examples of this is normalizing checking what pronouns a person uses as to not make mistakes or doing introductions that include what pronouns you use. This gives space for folks to share if they feel comfortable and does not assign potentially incorrect language.

**Be part of cultural shift.** This simply means that when you can advocate for more inclusive language that you use your voice to foster change in your community, organizations, families, or friend groups.

**Recognize and challenge your unconscious bias.** This one is very hard to do in practice but the easiest way to do it is by asking yourself a simple question. *What might I be assuming about this person because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc?* This goes beyond gender identity but is important for creating more equitable treatment of all marginalized persons. An example of this is if you meet someone and they appear to be a stereotypical feminine gay man. When you challenge yourself with the question you might quickly realize you have assigned all parts of this stereotype to the person, without having evidence to support.

**Never stop learning.** At the end of the day what is the best language and practices will continually shift, and what makes an individual feel most comfortable will depend on that individual. But what you can do is keep trying and learning. Never assume that you know best for someone else. Knowing that you will sometimes get it wrong is okay, if you create safe spaces for others to discuss and change. This gives everyone the chance to learn and grow together.

## SPRING WORK WEEKEND CANCELLED ... BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

As camp time gets closer, the YMCA is paying close attention to all the provincial guidelines as the hopefully last stages of the Covid-19 virus still linger. There are a myriad of tasks that need to be completed this year even though the annual spring work weekend has been forced to be cancelled. This work will get done by special arrangements later in the spring and throughout the summer.

Covid-19 has changed the way we operate all activities and accommodation this year, but the work will go on although in a different manner.

For alumni that would like to volunteer in different ways, we direct you to page 12 where we describe how one of our alumni has been working to prepare for a fall John Island camp on-line auction. Others have been contributing to the John Island Alumni and Friends Bursary Fund. The Bursary Fund will allow us to ensure that more campers can get to enjoy and benefit from a JIC experience when camp re-opens.

Keep up to date and help others to do the same and pass on this newsletter to others and keep tuned to the YMCA John Island Camp Facebook page.

# A Magical Island Everyone Should Enjoy

- by Jenn Didine

As the saying goes, *“John Island Camp is children and children at heart caring, sharing and daring to provide a positive and lasting effect on values and attitudes with a magical island as a common point.”*

In the summer of 1978, at 5 ½, I took the Greyhound bus with my brother Randy and sister BJ from Sault Ste. Marie to Spanish for the first time. We were dropped off at the local gas station and met by a John Island Camp (JIC) staffer in a white cube van with no seats that took us to Walkhouse to catch Ironsides across to camp. I was fortunate to have spent ten summers at camp, each one a whirlwind of activities, camp games and learning new skills.

Over the years after camp, I often reflected on my summers at JIC and the many lessons and skills I learned. There's something about summer camp and spending 24/7 with a group of people in a cabin you have never met before. It teaches you about forming connections with people and how we can all work together to accomplish the same goals. You have no choice but to figure out how to work together and appreciate our differences. It was not always easy, but we learned to come together as a cabin and make it the best session possible.

In 2003 I returned as a family camper with my husband, two year old son Connor, and my brother and his children. I was beyond excited, and my husband was worried I might be disappointed coming back as an adult. John Island did not disappoint and remained a magical place.

John Island continues to be a place of serenity and adventure, where we come together with nature and new friends. We have been Family Campers for the last 18 years, and our time at camp continues to be one of our favourite annual vacations.

Here are just a few of our favourite things: sleeping in bunk beds, morning circle, Gary's oatmeal, rub a dub chats, polar bear, campfires, colour wars, book club, babysitters and adults social. Not to mention being led by counsellors still in their teens, building their leadership skills while doing their best to corral us adults. Most of all, the people who make that week extra special all make family camp a unique and amazing thing

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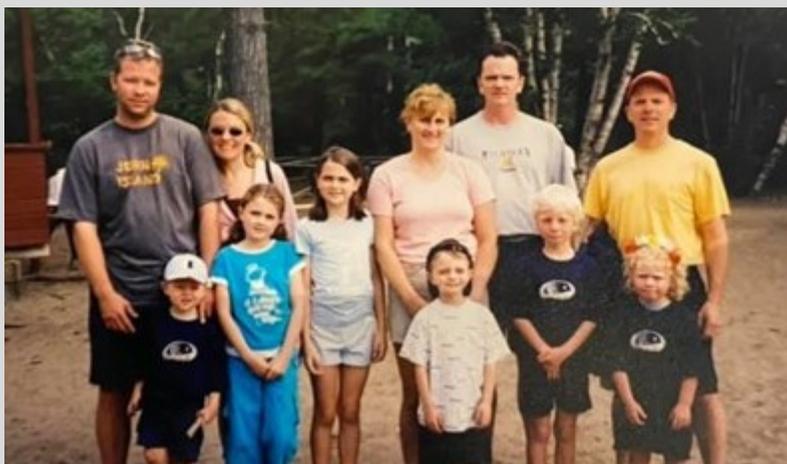
## A Magical Island Everyone Should Enjoy (Cont'd)

My time at camp continues to remind me to approach everything with enthusiasm, try my best, forget about any initial apprehensions, be open-minded, learn something, and most importantly, enjoy myself.

Throughout our summers as family campers, we have taken the opportunity to introduce our extended family members to John Island and all that it has to offer. I am grateful to have been able to return to the Island and share the experience of camp with my family. The quality time together away from the real world and the memories will last for generations.

Every summer camp is different not merely because of geography or location but because of the traditions and people who have touched the camp. John Island Camp is a hidden treasure of history and traditions. It is a safe place to unlock your adventurous spirit, push your limits, and build personal and leadership skills – even as an adult.

There is something magical about spending time at John Island camp everyone should experience it.



The Didine Clan



Early Didine Clan



Family Camp is fun!

# What's NEW for

Despite the many ways Covid-19 has affected camp, John Island Camp will see a number of new and improved changes in 2021. Here are a few of them.

**Sailboats** - Three new sailboats, new to John Island, arrived last summer at the camp but unfortunately there were no campers allowed to be at camp to use them. Three "snipe" sailboats have been delivered to the camp - rigged and tested and set to be used at camp this coming summer.



**Tripping Equipment** - We can look forward to a cornucopia of new tripping equipment including tents, packs and stoves. Most of this equipment has arrived and has been provided thanks to alumni donations.



**Bunkies** - Plans are underway to begin replacing current staff tent platforms with bunkies. These small cabins, built approximately the same size as the staff tent platforms, will allow for staff accommodation. The bunkies will be built by skilled camp volunteers with the first two expected to be ready for this coming summer.

**Shower Upgrades** - The camp shower house is one of the most used facilities in camp and will see new and lockable doors into each private changing area and other refreshing changes.

**New Swimming Facility** - Last summer, a new swimming area was set up for the camp. Same location but totally refreshing and utilitarian set up. This new facility will provide shaded shelters with benches, controlled entrances and exits as well as new lifeguard chairs for guarding.



**High Ropes Elements** - We will be constructing two new high ropes elements in July of 2021. After a few decades of use, the zip line will be decommissioned and campers will be excited to have new and challenging elements to enjoy, ready for Family Camp.



**New Dining Hall Porch Area and Stairs** - Thanks to volunteer work by Jody Waddell, Zach Mitchell and Hugh Gibb, a slightly enlarged staging area at the top of the dining hall steps together with a new set of stairs were built. The original dining hall was built in the early 1950's with several renovations since that time to keep the dining hall compliant with regulations.

**Flower Gardens** - In 2021 several new unique flower gardens will be unveiled. Many of the gardens are in recommissioned boats which have been carefully placed around camp. Of course, there are many other flower gardens throughout the camp property that are pleasant reminders of the lumber mill days.

**Staff Lounge** - In past years, Manitoulin cabin has been used as a Director's cabin, a Health Centre and back again as a Director's cabin. During the summer of 2020, the interior of the building was completely rebuilt with walls and ceiling removed and a new interior room created as a lounge area for staff.





**New Bug Hut** - As the nature program at camp expands and requires space for dedicated nature programs, an old platform tent framework has been developed into a bug hut, complete with lots of screened windows, a rain barrel set up and unique outdoor garden facilities. This new bug hut has been built in stages and stands ready for the 2022 camping season.

**Expanded Kayak Fleet** - Five more kayaks have been added to our ever growing fleet boats. These additions will be stored while not in use in our newly built kayak rack on the front beach. This will allow all programs using kayaks to allow all participants to have a boat of their own to use.



**Recognition Benches** - During the fall of 2020, a John Island Auction was held on line to raise funds for the camp. One of the items was a bench similar to the benches you would see in a park with a memorial plaque to recognise someone special to those donating the bench. Two benches were bought in the auction and will be in place in carefully selected locations in camp.



**More Outdoor Wash Stands** - With additional attention to be put on cleanliness and hand washing this coming summer, three new hand washing stands have been beautifully built and put in place outdoors around camp, connected to the camp water system. They will help ensure there is increased hand washing in camp.

**A Piano** - Thanks to the Starrett family we have a piano donated to the camp to be placed in the Dining Hall for this coming season. For many of the early years of John Island a piano played an important part in the camp. It can be used as an important instrument in the camp meeting is Quality Eight Guiding Principles.



**Assistant Camp Director** - Although not really new for 2021, Katie Runions will be introduced to campers and staff at John Island Camp this summer as the first full-time assistant camp director. Katie joined our staff prior to the 2020 camping season but with no overnight camping allowed in Ontario due to Covid-19, this will be Katie's first year with an operating camp.



# THE LEGACY OF JIC FOR THE SEMRAU FAMILY



Like many parents, we raise our children with the best of intentions. We try to provide them with positive experiences during their growing years so they can become independent and productive adults. For our family, JIC was one of the means whereby our young boys could be active and learn in a structured, yet fun, environment. The “boys” are now adults with families of their own. Nolan, a father of a pre-schooler and an infant, is a program manager. Alan, a father to a toddler, is a middle school science teacher. During some of our chats, we have reminisced about JIC. We have reflected on how influential JIC had been in shaping their lives.

This is an accounting of how our U.S. family came to know about JIC and what this iconic institution means to us.

Our family of four was introduced to the North Channel region in the summer of 1994 by way of the family boat. Several summers later, we met and befriended Sudbury residents and fellow boaters, Fritz and Louis Grottoli. They encouraged our then-young sons, Nolan and Alan, to attend camp at JIC, as their family had happily spent numerous summers there.

Our boys had their first camp experiences the summer of 1997. Nolan, at age 13, was enthusiastic, but Alan, at age 10, was more skeptical. After their session, they both committed to attending camp at least one more summer. As it would turn out, one or both sons continued to participate in JIC programs over the next FIFTEEN years. JIC became an integral part of each boy’s summers. Each season, they eagerly prepared and packed for their upcoming camp sessions.

Both boys started with age-appropriate camp programs and advanced to the highly regarded Greenway and Norquay groups. As Norquays, Nolan participated in the 2000 Seal River trip, and Alan joined the 2003 Winisk River expedition. After the campers’ levels, both sons continued at JIC with leadership roles. These included positions as managers, counsellors, and trip leaders. Alan was Assistant Director under Pete Kerrigan’s directorship in 2011.

As parents of JIC campers, Norm and Elaine came to share their sons’ excitement about summer camp. We were confident that the boys’ experiences were appropriate, rewarding, and challenging. The boys learned a lot - they were more confident and independent; they practiced respect for others in a co-ed setting; they were challenged and motivated. There were life skills to be practiced - they cooked; they cleaned; they packed efficiently; they developed safe boating and water skills; they learned map and chart-reading; they utilized survival skills; they engaged with a myriad of personalities and abilities; they learned patience.

The JIC years helped equip each son with skills, knowledge, and experiences that are part of lifetime successes. At this phase in their adult lives, Nolan and Alan have embraced similar ideologies that were promoted years earlier at JIC. They both have a love of the outdoors. Both work at being healthy and safe. Each has positive attitudes regarding workplace collaboration. Both are respectful of nature and mindful of its preservation. Both support group efforts. They value diversity. We parents feel that good leadership during those JIC tenures have been influential in our sons’ lives, and we believe they agree.

When our sons were recently asked to share, using single words or short phrases, those outstanding JIC memories that came to mind, these were listed:

Sand... Color wars... Canoe dumps... Sailing... Kayaking... Bush-whacking... Solos... Out trips... “Star-gazing” ... Mac N Cheese... Johnny Appleseed... Counselors... Friends... Change-over... Value Village... Capture the Flag... Outhouses... Black-flies... Campfires... Mosquitoes... POLAR BEAR!



## THE LEGACY OF JIC FOR THE SEMRAU FAMILY (Cont'd)

There were humorous and interesting parent-moments that we parents remember:

- Once we failed to pick up the younger Alan on the appointed Thursday (we were mistaken with the end-of-session date). The older, then-counsellor, Nolan, was anxious to start changeover.... Yes, Nolan left with his buddies, but not before calling us on marine radio, clearly agitated with us. A forlorn and upset Alan had to wait for his dad without his brother.
- Alan returned to our boat after one session, clearly impacted by all the tacos he had consumed the day before. He was confined to the outside of our boat, and not in the cabin, until his body ridded itself of the built-up gasses.
- One day we were anchored in Moiles Harbor. It was also a day for solos activity. Several participants were in the vicinity of the anchorage. From our vantage point, we could hear thunder to the west of us. We were relieved when we heard the jon boats start up, Nolan manning one of them, to retrieve the solos participants.
- On several occasions, the boys were ready to cross the border to return home. We cautioned them to bathe and wear fresh clothes as the lingering campfire smoke could have been misconstrued.
- We welcomed the boys back on the family boat, but not before shaking out their clothes and belongings to rid them of sand and debris. The grime on their bodies clearly required several bathing sessions. There were plenty of clothing items, towels, and personal effects that did not survive camp sessions and the resulting attempts to launder them. Those items quickly transitioned into useful rags.
- As we are Americans with "American accents," we became used to both boys returning from camp speaking with "Canadian accents." It took several weeks to readjust back to their "American accents!" - Eh?
- We know that many families have hosted JIC staff on change-overs each season. Alan offered our North Channel cottage as the spring event venue in 2011. It was a joy to be joined by a group of 14 young adults. They brought food, they cooked, they were a happy and vivacious lot. After all their backpacks were stowed in our tool shed, we marvelled at the ability to fit the bulk of the young folks into a tiny guest bunkie overnight!

Generations of campers and families, like us, feel enriched by the unique experiences JIC has to offer. Each of us has our own collections of stories and memories. We Semraus are grateful to have been closely associated with this community from 1997 through 2012, and we remain supportive today. We are confident JIC will continue to be a steadfast and important institution for generations to come.



# Alumni Support Blankets Camp . . .with love



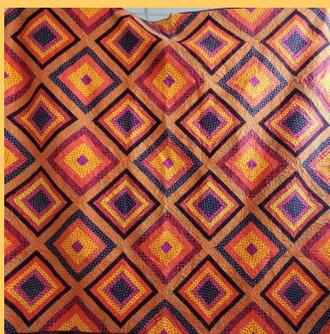
John Island Blanket (front) made by supportive alumni

When the Ontario government ruled that childrens' overnight camps could not operate in 2020, thousands of youth and parents were seriously disappointed. Without the revenue provided by camper fees which keep camps operating year after year, most camps suffered a major blow with several overnight camps across Canada being forced to close permanently.

With outstanding support from John Island Alumni and understanding parents of campers, John Island Camp is looking forward to a bright future, despite the disruption of two years operation due to Covid-19. A John Island Camp on line auction in the fall, a new Alumni Camper Bursary Fund and generous donations in support of the camp by many alumni have been a few of the ways alumni have stepped up to assist.

A devoted John Island alumni (and mother and grandmother of JIC campers) has made a beautiful John Island blanket to be part of the next YMCA John Island Camp auction. This blanket is very intricately stitched putting together hundreds of pieces of very attractive fabric and topped with John Island Camp t-shirts from past years, again with very intricate stitching.

The date for the next auction has yet to be set, but will be a fall event again in 2021. We invite all John Island alumni and friends of John Island Camp to start now to consider something special in support of the camp.



Back of blanket



Signature JIC t-shirt stitched in place with stitches forming a campfire.



Pillow made from t-shirt

# John Island's Nature Program To See Changes



*We asked Katie Runions, YMCA John Island Camp's Assistant Director, to tell us a bit about some of the exciting new changes she is planning upon which the camp nature program will be based.*

## John Island Nature Program

### Planning for 2022

With the cancellation of most of camp sessions we are planning for this program to be implemented for the 2022 season.

### Program activities snapshot

We have a set of nature activities and games that will allow campers to connect with nature and explore the world around them. In my previous article I spoke about some general goals for our activities. These nature activities that are based on understanding the landscape of John Island Camp and Northern Ontario and navigating through the landscape. Some examples of activities implement amphibian and reptile identification program and other ecology programs such as bog walks where campers learn about food chains in aquatic systems.

### Facilitation of programming

Facilitation can make or break a program. We are revamping our staff training to promote better delivery and preparedness of all our programs including nature program. A fundamental piece of facilitation these programs is inquiry-based learning – where campers are encouraged to explore and ask questions that drive groups to collaborate to seek answers to their questions.

### Bug Hut update

I have collected a bunch of nature items to go in the bug hut This will be hands on things that kids will be able to touch and discover. We have some great nature items such as insects, fossils and plants for kids to touch and explore. We will also have resources for kids to use in programs such as reptile and amphibian identification charts.

# Post Cards worth Collecting

A popular item in the John Island tuck shop is the selection of post cards available to campers. While the cards were originally printed as a way for campers to write home, they have since become popular as a photo memory for campers to take home.

The Alumni is going to be selling packages of 5 or 10 postcards (without stamps) as part of our ongoing support for YMCA John Island Camp. Details of this exciting purchase opportunity will be sent to alumni (and others) soon. To get your name on an advance order list, e-mail: [gary.gray@ymcaneo.ca](mailto:gary.gray@ymcaneo.ca)



# A 1988 FLASHBACK



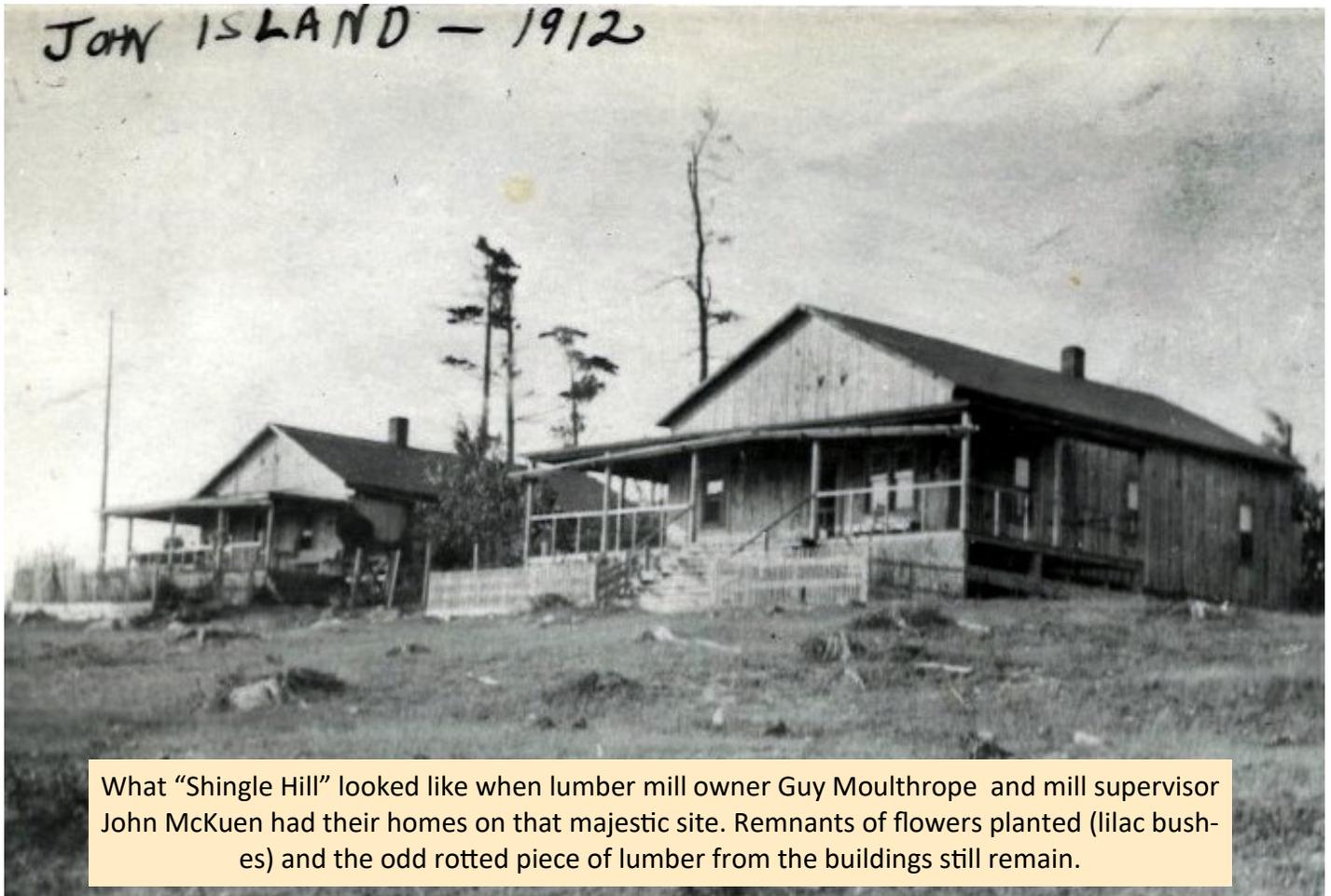
## In 2021, the good times can roll again!

John Island Camp was looking for a good, used stand-up piano. The call went out to a small group of alumni asking them to keep the camp in mind if they knew of anyone looking for a home for a used piano. Within days, Jen and John Starrett, both John Island alumni themselves, offered their piano to the camp as they were looking for a good home for their photo. Although the Whalesback Channel is still filled with ice as we write this, plans are in place to transport the piano from the Starrett's home to the John Island dining hall.

In this photo we see Peter Wobiditsch keeping a small staff group entertained back in 1988. Now, just 33 years later, we might even convince Peter to return to camp as a visiting celebrity to test the new camp piano. After all, Peter impressed Brooke Gavin back at camp several decades ago enough that they ended up getting married. A piano can work wonders.

Thanks to Jen and John Starrett and all those who helped move the piano to the camp and to those who helped pay the costs involved.





What "Shingle Hill" looked like when lumber mill owner Guy Moulthroppe and mill supervisor John McKuen had their homes on that majestic site. Remnants of flowers planted (lilac bushes) and the odd rotted piece of lumber from the buildings still remain.

## JIC ALUMNI

Alumni and friends of the camp are the life blood of John Island Camp. Our goal is to provide support to the ongoing life of the camp and to provide a means for alumni to keep engaged with the camp. There are several ways alumni can support the camp and keep it part of their lives.

- **Annual Spring and Fall Work Weekends - no special skills required**
  - **Write for the Alumni Newsletter - your story will be read**
  - **Bring your family to Family Camp - many already do**
- **Contribute to the JIC Capital Fund - help keep OUR camp in great shape**
  - **Sponsor a camper - Any amount helps**
- **Contribute to the Alumni and Friends of JIC Bursary Fund**
  - **Be a John Island Camp Ambassador**

The YMCA John Island Camp Alumni Newsletter is published 2 times a year with semi occasional Special Editions.

For comments or to submit articles or content ideas: [gary.gray@ymcaneo.ca](mailto:gary.gray@ymcaneo.ca)  
Visit the John Island page on the website of the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario to access all past issues of this newsletter.

[www.ymcaneo.ca/john-island-camp](http://www.ymcaneo.ca/john-island-camp)

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