



YMCA JOHN ISLAND

Spring 2023

ALUMNI

NEWSLETTER

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



Contributors

- Kendra MacIsaac
- Mary & Don Mitchell
- Bill McCallum
- Grant Pilkey
- Bill Bavington
- Finn Thomas
- Leslie Garber
- Kirsti Hartley
- much more



OUR 70th YEAR

I remember parts of my very first year as a camper at John Island Camp. That was 70 years ago. The Greyhound bus loaded us up in the parking lot of the YMCA on Elm St. and we were nervous about what the upcoming 4 weeks would be like. As the bus pulled up at Mitchell's Camp in Spanish, I looked around and everything was a mystery. I did not know anyone there. There were boats waiting for those of us that had arrived on the bus and everything to this apprehensive 12 year old seemed very chaotic! Where was my luggage? Where was I supposed to go?

We eventually were all loaded on the Kismet, the Flora "B", and other boats commandeered by Earl Mitchell and away we went. An hour later I was glad I had brought a change of underwear as the boat ride was very rough and I was not impressed. What seemed like hours later, we finally arrived at this brand new camp - the first campers ever to attend this place.

70 years later, bus loads of both excited and apprehensive campers will arrive at Walkhouse Bay ready to experience yet another year of overnight camping at John Island. While the one hour and twenty minute boat ride from Spanish has been reduced to an 8 minute boat ride from Walkhouse Bay. We have seen many changes in the experience over the decades in everything from programs to safety. Thankfully as the by-line in a major Sudbury Star article by Sherri Haigh proclaims, "John Island Camp—Luckily, some things just never change". That was written in May, 1991.

As alumni, regardless of the years of our involvement with camp, the influence that John Island has had on us continues to be relatively similar and very major. Life values, friendships, love of nature, appreciation of others, discovering our own talents, testing our personal limits, and just plain getting to know ourselves and the place in the world a bit better. These are the products of John Island Camp. The tools of our work are the material things such as buildings, program equipment and other tools. These things must change to keep us relevant and to keep up with today's world, as we work toward delivering our "product".

In our Alumni Newsletter you will see articles that reflect on both the influences camp has had on our lives as well as how we provide the material to facilitate our work. We hope you enjoy reading this issue - a Newsletter that started in 1991.



Mitchell's dock and ice house at Spanish in 1954

What you will find in this newsletter

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- Plus..... Work Weekend, Alumni Bursary, and more

The YMCA John Island Camp Alumni Newsletter is an alumni initiative



A Grant Pilkey

ORIGINAL

No one has more John Island Camp stories to tell than Grant Pilkey. Read here about a 1974 school group brought to camp by Grant when he began the JIC outdoor education program

After several meetings with staff, it was agreed that I could take 100 Grade 10 students to John Island Camp for four days after the Victoria Day weekend in 1974. Al Will, the camp director, suggested we try 30 students for the first year.

We arrived at camp in time for lunch on Tuesday. We were assigned cabins and started activities. That evening in our cabin, the 8 boys asked if they could go fishing in the morning. I said sure, just get up at 5 and we'll go. One of the boys volunteered to be "the waker-upper".

I woke up at 5. The cabin was quiet. I knew if we slept in the boys would kill the "waker-upper". I got up. We headed to the dock. The camp had 3 flat bottomed row boats. The boys headed out to fish. I launched a canoe to keep an eye on them.

Later, one of the boys shouted that he had a big one. By the time I got there, he had landed a monster 15 pound pike. When the breakfast siren went, we had 3 more much smaller pike. The lucky fisherman decided he would take his monster fish home, so it went into the freezer. The cook, Jean Wickstrom, cooked the other 3 fish for breakfast.

The next morning we were at the dock at 5. We were the last cabin to arrive. The back bay was dotted with canoes and row boats. Sadly, all the other monster pike had left the bay for their summer hideouts.

Painting unpacking brushing cleaning setting up building plumbing, & more

ITS TIME TO USE THOSE HIDDEN SKILLS

JIC SPRING WORK WEEKEND

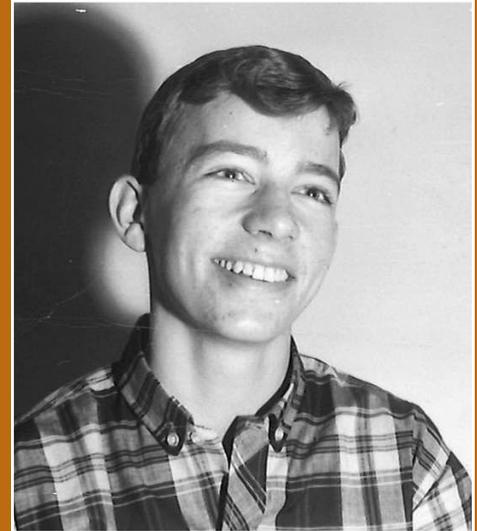
Friday, June 16 - Sunday, June 18

Getting all the details looked after for another exciting spring and summer of camp requires a lot of volunteer help. Our camp alumni, and friends willing to work, are invited to join the working group from Friday, June 16 to Sunday June 18. Camp will provide transportation from Walkhouse Bay to and from the camp, meals, and a bed along with a South Pacific type beach. You bring work clothes, sleeping bag or blankets (and pillow) and maybe a few munchies. Sound good? If interested, contact Finn at finn.thomas@ymcaneoc.ca



It is the People

By Bill McCallum - JIC 1961 - 1968



The bus pulled out of the Sudbury Y parking lot with a mixed bag of passengers. A few seniors whom I took to be in charge, some boys in their mid-teens and about 40 kids aged between 6 to 12. I was in the latter group and it was my first trip to John Island Camp. It was 1961 and I was on the first day of an adventure that would span the next 7 summers and one I have reflected on often.

But, back to the bus. My memories of that first trip are vividly imprinted. Heaps of chatter interspersed with rousing renditions of songs I had not heard before: *Dunderbeck*, though I'm sure we called it "*Gunderbeck*", *I've Got Six Pence*, *Titanic*, *Ten Green Bottles*, *John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt* and many others I'd quickly learn, and eventually lead, during the after-lunch sing-songs and many campfire sessions.

The bus trip was fun but things got even better when we arrived at the dock just out of Spanish, boarded the *Kismet* and motored across the channel toward John Island and into Moiles Harbour. The trek from the dock along a sandy track was easy for those who packed light but more of a struggle for those whose anxious mothers had compression-packed large suitcases. We passed the bridge over the River Kwai, soon spotted a few buildings and arrived at the Dining Hall where we were assigned to cabin groups. I headed to Cabin 8 in the Senior Section along with my soon-to-be cabin mates and the chap who would be our minder for the next fortnight. Everything was great and, as the day passed and evening arrived. It just got better. Our first meal in the dining room, an introduction to the Counsellors and Staff, the first Campfire and off to bed. We were exhausted but invigorated and I was in the best place in the world!

We were told about early morning exercises on the beach and not long after dawn I welcomed a loud voice calling out "Polar Bears". That was the signal I was waiting for, so I quickly dressed and headed to the beach to join a reasonably sized group led by a bright faced and remarkably enthusiastic fellow named Harry Kleinhaus. He was the man! Over the next two weeks, more and more of the first day starters opted for another 30 minutes sleep before the shrillest siren one would ever hear prompted everyone out of bed but Harry's positivity and energy never faded. He was the first Staff member I became acquainted with and, as did many others – staff, counsellors and fellow campers among them – left an indelible mark on me.

My JIC memories revolve around the routines interspersed with the unexpected. Hikes and overnights at Lost Lake and Aitken Island, Sunday mornings at Chapel Point with mandatory Carwash in the afternoon, after-lunch singsongs, campfires followed by collecting a very bright but equally pesky Coleman lantern, 50 crazy boys chasing a Black Bear right through the middle of camp, weekly cookout days coinciding with the cooks' day off. I still get a flood of memories when I see Kraft Dinner and Spam in the grocery store! The daily flag raising ceremony after breakfast was another routine that I reflect on often. I first heard the following poem at flag raising and have often recited it to my children.

Cont'd on next page.....

*Look to this day:
For it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course
Lie all the verities and realities of your existence.
The bliss of growth,
The glory of action,
The splendour of achievement
Are but experiences of time*

*For yesterday is but a dream
And tomorrow is only a vision;
And today well-lived, makes
Yesterday a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well therefore to this day;
Such is the salutation to the ever-new dawn!*

I cannot recall who introduced the poem to me but it is a gift that sums up my JIC experience well. Camping and John Island captivated me and I returned for the next several summers as a CIT, Counsellor of Cabins 3 and 5, Craft shop Director, CIT Director, Junior Section Director and Programme Director. Following each of the last 6 seasons at John Island I went to Camp Y-Land on Lake Ramsey as a counsellor and staff member for more of the same, but not quite the same.

I have lived in New Zealand since 1972 and there is a well-known Maori proverb I'll share.

He aha te mea nui o teā o ?

What is the most important thing in the world?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

My memories of John Island Camp extend well beyond the special places and things to people I admired and respected and who influenced me from my first day at camp and well beyond my last some 7 years later. It's risky naming people because some will be inadvertently left out but, I fell into the trap of mentioning Harry, so here goes.

George Koski, supreme trip master, a strong, quiet and confident leader who seemed capable of anything. The original Bear Grills!

Don Waddell, a man I admired so much and will never forget. A special memory is the month Don and I spent together on the island prior to camp starting doing general maintenance (which for me meant painting) which included scraping off the paint on the sixteen or so fleet of canvas covered Chestnut canoes and repainting - a chore which the new fleet no longer requires.

Doug Bolten, who knew everyone, seemed to have done everything and, as Maintenance Man, could do whatever was needed with a permanent smile on his face and the most infectious laugh out there. People just loved Doug and being in his company.

Gary Gray, the best story teller imaginable, who passed on to me a modicum of his photographic and screen printing skills and has been an outstanding role model for all he has been associated with. Gary is a dedicated servant and leader with a vision of how the YMCA and John Island could protect and nurture the next generation and ensure that they are fully geared up to live good, fruitful, safe lives.

So many more... Ralph Erskine, Fred Rumper, John and Marie, Bill and Doreen, Jake Johnson. Boris Grace, Ian Thompson, the Mitchell family, Oscar Byers of Flora B fame...

I was a very lucky boy and I am thankful for it.



Bill and his cabin group in 1966



Don and Mary Mitchell

JOHN ISLAND CAMP and THE MITCHELL FAMILY

It seems like the Mitchell Family has been involved with John Island Camp "forever!" Their involvement began when the camp started to be built in the early to mid fifties. During the construction stage Don's father Earl provided boat transportation on the Gem and later the Kismet to the Island taking workers and materials as well as campers and staff.

Don remembers in his teens going with his Dad Earl and his brothers and friends to Blind River on many Friday nights to hand load lumber from the mill there onto a scow and tow it across to the Island. The towing was an allnight operation. This was done usually at the start of the season when big

work parties were held with help from the Y's Men's club from Sudbury and others. There were at least two seasons like this involving a lot of hard work for the volunteers. Other equipment and supplies were boated over from Spanish on the Maxie M which replaced the Gem.

When the camping season started, busses from Sudbury would arrive in Spanish with the children and the staff and they would be transported to the Island on Earl's three boats plus the Flora B which was Uncle Oscar Byer's boat. In later years the Mohawk Maiden and Ironsides were also used for transportation. The captains included Earl, Don, Ellwood and Max.

As a teenager Don worked at John Island as the main maintenance man during the summers when he was attending Graceland College (now a University) in Lamoni, Iowa. At that time his Dad was busy trucking during the Elliot Lake boom 1956-1959.

Don and I were married in June of 1960 and we spent the first summer out at the Island. Don was the maintenance man and ran boat trips into Spanish on the Kismet every day to pick up mail, supplies like propane and gas for the generator, passengers and groceries. Of course, he was in charge of maintaining all the machinery at the camp and on the boat. My brother, Bill Bavington, at times helped Don at the camp and took over the job when Don and I were not there for the full summer. Another job that Don and Bill had was to service all the Coleman lights each day.

I worked that first summer with Marguerite Mitchell, Gary's wife, doing dishes BY HAND, pots and pans and everything! We usually got about one hour off in the afternoon when we could relax and lay in the sun!

Several of our family have worked out there as well. Our son, Mark, worked the summer of 1986 as a maintenance man. That summer he worked with his cousin Steven Mitchell. Steven worked there other summers in other roles. Both of Mark and Lisa's children, Zachary and Elisabeth, have been there as campers and Zach worked as a maintenance man one summer. Elisabeth was hired as a counsellor but Covid hit and in 2020 there were no residence camps. So, she never really worked there. As campers both Zach and Elisabeth completed the Greenway and Norquay leadership programs. Mark and Lisa and their family have attended several family camps at the Island especially when their children were younger.

Our daughter Wendy remembers when she was 10 years old selling puppies that our dog Scamp had in order to make money to go as a camper to John Island. She went at least one year and possibly two. She also remembers her cousin Cherylynn Mitchell one time finding some baby mice in her backpack when she was a camper out there. Wendy and Cherylynn did work at the camp washing dishes one summer. Her sister Wanda (who never attended as a camper) and cousin Marvia went out for a few days that summer to help Wendy and Cherylynn with their job!

So, all in all, our love and involvement with John Island Camp has been ongoing. Even now, when for some reason extra boats are needed temporarily at the camp we have loaned our boats to help out. We always love to visit the Island when we can for its beauty and tranquillity and the wonderful memories we hold in our hearts.



Mary Milie Facca Don

Written by Mary Mitchell

ALUMNI BURSARY

Jonathan got off the bus at Walkhouse Bay with a fishing rod his grandfather had given him. He was so excited to be able to go to camp for a week - especially John Island Camp. His family was not going to be able to send Jonathan to camp as they just did not have enough money. They thought other families were more in need of social assistance, so they did not ask the YMCA or the camp for a subsidy.

However, when they found out they could apply for a YMCA John Island Camp Alumni Bursary that would provide some financial help, they applied and met all the requirements to be awarded an Alumni Bursary.

Last year our Alumni and Friends Bursary fund had funding to provide bursaries averaging approximately \$250 each to 35 children. That was huge!

We urge our camp Alumni, and friends, to consider a donation to the Alumni and Friends Bursary Fund. Donations can be made to the fund on line on the John Island Camp website and all donations are tax deductible.

Camp website: www.ymcaneo.ca/john/island/camp



2023 EDITION

ALUMNI
SUPPORT HELPS

The CAMP TUCK SHOP

Opening soon



TOQUES

Feel part of camp
even when you are
stuck at home



T-SHIRTS

More items will be available
soon - keep up to date on the
John Island Camp webpage.



MUGS

2023 John Island
TUCK SHOP
Items will
be available at
the YMCA in
Sudbury
and on line

MEMORIES

of John Island Camp

by Leslie Garber

People cannot understand just how beautiful John Island is unless they have been there, and I would like to say that its location is something that we, alumni, could just keep to ourselves, with a sacred code of alumni allegiance. "You won't know where to drive", we could say to our city friends. "Yes, it is very far north-west-east." "You turn, after Espanola, but before you get to the United States." "You could get there in a boat, but you will likely never find it, so I wouldn't bother trying." I could sit with my memories and pretend that you and I are in an ancient and very exclusive VIP group. I could get tattoos of the different iterations of the camp logo, and then explain them to no one, ever. But folks, the most marvelous truth is that its location is NOT secret and our club is not exclusive! We all went to the Sudbury YMCA's summer camp and kids are still going there every summer!



Leslie Garber

Colin Veevers

Tracy Smith

Debbie Harmon

If it sounds like it has been a while since I have been to the island, that is because it has been a while since I have been to the island. Ask Gary Gray what years I worked there, please. I think it was three summers, a spring and a fall. I know this is just a jingle compared to the extended play albums of some other alumni (Tracy Smith), but even so I still feel the wind in my hair and the sand between my toes when I think of it. I relished teaching canoeing and can picture campers feeling proud of learning the J-stroke. I was thrilled to sing campfire songs and quieted down to better hear the voices of campers singing Taps. I liked sleeping in a sleeping bag in a bunk bed in the old staff cabin. I looked forward to skit nights and once did a tap dance-off with Mike Anderson, blowing on whistles to communicate. I learned how to enjoy canoe trips properly, eating wonderful meals cooked on a camping stove, and taking pleasure in stuffing my stuff sack. I experienced the joy of working spring and fall with a glorious group of women, all of us proud to deliver the Earthkeepers program and to drive the tractor. I got to sing with Stacy Daughen while she played guitar. I got to work at camp with my sister, Emily Garber, when she was a counsellor! Angela Punch and Emily acting out icy Titanic scenes in the sand was unforgettable. If you can believe it, on a day off from camp, I even found out that one of the campers was my cousin. Okay, well, now the memories are coming back! Yes!

Some of my fondest memories are of leading the Greenway Leadership group. My campers were the best, and I mean THE BEST. No other campers at camps in the entire history of camping at camp were as great as they were! As co-program director, I got to know the pathway between the camp office and the dining hall a little too well, because I worked in the office so much of the day. One of the best evening programs that we ever did was Andie Burk's "Stock Market Night".

Cont'd on next page



Finn Thomas

John Island Leadership Programs UPDATE

By Finn Thomas, Camp Director

As an alumni of YMCA John Island Camp, you likely have fond memories of your time spent at this beautiful and secluded camp. One of the key traditions of John Island is its leadership camps. Greenway and Norquay are an important part in a campers overall experience and helps to shape the future leaders of our communities. With the absence of Norquay last year, we are very excited to welcome the program back.

In our leadership programs, campers are given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills through engaging programs focused on personal discovery and conflict resolution as well as monumental and lifechanging canoe trips. Throughout their stay, leaders will learn about themselves and their own abilities, discover strengths and areas to focus on, develop confidence and self assurance. These qualities are essential not just in camp, but every aspect of life, from school to work to personal relationships.

John Island Leadership is a unique and valuable experience that sets us apart from other camps in Ontario. By providing campers with a challenging yet supportive environment, we are able to inspire and empower youth to become the leaders of tomorrow. As alumni of John Island, you can take pride in knowing that you were part of a tradition that is shaping the future of our camp, and our communities.

.....Cont'd from previous page

Counsellors had tables set up in the area in front of the dining hall and each was a publicly-traded business. Campers had John Island currency with which they bought shares. And then, after close, Andie would announce what had just happened in the markets. Campers would cheer or cry out in dismay, depending on how their shares had changed in value, and then the frenzy of buying and selling would begin again! Years later, I got a summer job bringing school groups on their trips to New York City. I had the chance to visit the New York Stock Exchange, but compared to what I had already witnessed at John Island, it was really quite anti-climactic.

Could someone please, again, cast me in the role of the truck driver who explains to children that when they waste food, they waste the "whole lotta energy" it took to power her "Big Rig"?

And have you ever wondered where we acquired those strangely high-quality Tickle-trunk wigs? They originally belonged to the manikins simulating patients at the nursing school where my mother worked. When the school cancelled the simulations, she acquired some of the wigs and gave them to me. I thought they deserved a home where they could be used for generations of camp skits. You're welcome.

I feel like I found my best self at John Island. And guess what? I did. I became a teacher in the Toronto District School Board where I've now been working for twenty-four years. My ways of teaching and interacting with students are shaped by YMCA camping. Hmm, am I now telling your story? Yes? I knew it. At my current school in Toronto, there are two other teachers who are John Island Alumni.

After writing this, I'm ready to sign up for the Work Weekend. We could all go together. Don't worry Finn Thomas, we don't mind cheering loudly, belaying endless climbers, carrying canoes, hanging up our wet bathing suits on clotheslines, sweeping sandy floors, passing dishes around a large table of friends, scraping our plates, walking miles in sand with skeet in it, and dressing up in old costumes. We've done it all before and loved every minute of it.

Leslie Garber was on camp staff from 1995 to 1998

A John Island Camp Update

By Kendra MacIsaac

Vice President of Health and Wellness
YMCA of Northeastern Ontario



After what feels like a very long winter, especially with the amount of snow we still have on the ground here in Northern Ontario, warm sunny days on the beach at John Island cannot come soon enough!

Over the course of the fall and winter, much work has gone into the registration and planning for an amazing season. Our team made some significant improvements to the registration process, seeing registration time go from well over 30min down to 7min. We hope that these improvements were felt by all and would love to hear any feedback you may have if you have registered anyone this season! Please reach out to Jay Mater, our Member and Participant Experience Manager! jay.mater@ymcaneo.ca

Our program registration is going really well with a 58% fill rate! We have openings in Prospector Leadership and Explorer Canoe Trip “D” camps and opportunities for spring bookings as well as our Women's Wellness Weekend!

In the fall, I let you know that we toured 2 board members around the island! It was a great opportunity to showcase the island and help them better understand the camp operation! From that, we will be moving forward with a full Capital Risk Assessment Review! This is truly great news for our camp and will help guide us through capital planning over the coming years! More details to come from that review once it is complete!

For our staffing update, Finn Thomas has moved back into the world of camp full time effective April 10th after spending the winter months leading the Sudbury Y branch operation. With that being said, Finn has continued to support JIC with hiring and some planning and is diving right back in to ensure a successful summer.

In other staffing news, Julian is moving on from our Y and has accepted a role with YMCA Camp Wanakita as Program Manager. We wish Julian all the best!

A camp hiring day is being held on April 14th in Sudbury and April 27th in North Bay! We still have some vacancies and hope to see some success from these 2 days.

At any time, if you want to connect on camp, have any questions, ideas or concerns, please reach out! I am always happy to connect!

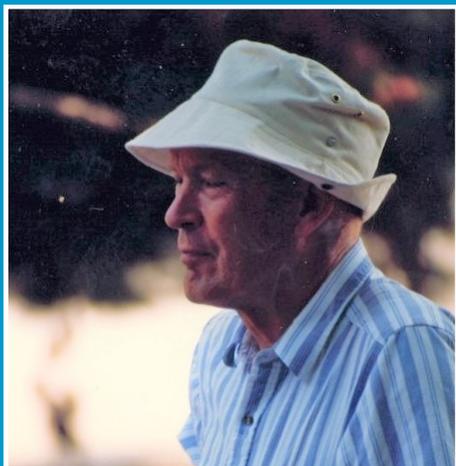
Hope to see you on the island!

Kendra

Little Known Facts from the Past

Remembered by Grant Pilkey

(and as told to Gary Gray)



Grant Pilkey is a Sudbury YMCA and John Island Camp Icon. Beside being an active member of the Sudbury Y's Men's Club for years (the club that built John Island Camp), a President of the Sudbury YMCA and a generous donor to both the Y and the camp, Grant is talented story teller.

Grant was a teacher in Sudbury and was responsible for the first spring outdoor education programs at John Island – a bold risk back in 1974 when the first programs began with Wembley Public and Sudbury Secondary schools. He tells the story of a great adventure the in the beginning years of the program. It took two boat loads on the then sturdy and dependable “Ole Ironsides” to bring the students to the camp. During their stay, the camp was also enjoyed and exploited by a very inquisitive bear. The students and their supervisors tried everything to get the bear to leave – banging pots and pans, shouting and screaming and whatever was at their disposal to try to convince the furry beast to leave the area.

With every attempt to free the animal from the confines of such a hostile area failing, the camp leadership placed a call to the Serpent River Reserve and a young resident of the area came to the camp with his rifle securely under his arm. The impressive marksman quickly shot the bear and to the amazement of the students he skinned the animal right there, on the spot. He explained the value of the skin and how it would be used when he returned home. He also took the skull with him saying it would be used in certain ceremonies. The process was not only fascinating to the students but extremely educational.

The next year when students from the same school returned to John Island for their spring outdoor educational experience, one of the first questions the camp staff were asked was when they would have the session on skinning a bear.

Grant was also very instrumental in the very special program with 25 students from Japan for two years in 1995 and 1996. Taizo Miaki, Sudbury resident who was very instrumental in the program design for both Science North and the Toronto Science Centre, wanted to bring a number of young students from Japan to Sudbury to learn more about Canada and the Canadian way of life. Grant convinced Taizo that the best way to do that was to have the students spend a week at John Island. He also suggested that each Japanese youth be placed in the home of a Sudbury family so they could experience life in Canada. A number of families, each with children the same age as the Japanese youth, billeted the Japanese youth and their own children that were paired with a Japanese youth also attended John Island for the week's experience there. The Japanese students were from a drumming school in Tokyo and brought drums with them to John Island where their drumming routines could be heard throughout the Whalesback Channel.

Grant and Taizo accompanied the students when they were at John Island and both had amazing stories to tell from their past.

Grant Pilkey lives in Peterborough and is a dedicated, long time supporter of John Island Camp. He attends weekly band practice and serenades his neighbours as he blows his horn daily.

See a Grant Pilkey Story on page 12

Driver of the Kismet (1960's) Bill Bavington - Stories to Tell



I spent most summers from the late 1950s until the mid-1960s at John Island Camp (JIC) as the maintenance person and boat operator. My first year was under the expert tutelage of Don Mitchell, my future brother-in-law, from whom I, this big city and mechanically inexperienced person, learned so much. This was followed by a year working in a similar position solo for the United Church Camp on Aird Island. Then it was back to JIC on my own for the following 5 years. I had some big shoes to fill as I was third in line in the position after the two Mitchell brothers - Ellwood and Don. During my undergraduate and medical school years I looked forward to returning in the summer to Spanish and JIC.

In those years the camp boat was the Kismet and the routine, after the camp cleanup and trip to the dump and other chores, was usually a daily two hour return trip from the dock in Spanish to the Back Bay at John Island. Campers, counsellors, staff and all supplies were transported by this route. This made for some interesting times on the water and at the camp.

I would usually begin at JIC in early June in the company of a fellow worker and YsMen weekend work parties, work through Boys' Camp and the Girls' Camp till close up near the end of August. I will outline three experiences among others that stick in my mind to this day.

Unique JIC Alarm Clock! One morning two of us were sleeping in the staff cabin in early June, preparing the camp for the arrival of the campers in early July, when we were awakened by what seemed like a knock on the door. This was strange as we were the only persons in the camp at the time. The noise at the front door continued just a foot or two from my drowsy head. Finally I roused myself to see who continued to pound on the door. To my surprise, there outside the screen door was an adult bear wanting in! With some loud noise-making on our part the bear decided to move on toward the Craft Cabin never again, in my experience, to repeat the wakeup call. Bears were also seen at the dump from time to time prior to the arrival of the campers but decided to move on to quieter locations once the staff and campers were on site.

Boat trips at night Trips on the water to Spanish during the day were one thing but trips during the night were another! The camp had a Registered Nurse (RN) on staff staying in a cabin perched on a rocky rise near the campfire circle - "the hospital". Most incidents of illness were handled by the RN but very occasionally a child or staff person needed further urgent assessment off the island at the Emergency Room in Espanola or Elliot Lake Hospital. If this situation occurred in the evening it necessitated a night crossing to Spanish. This type of trip required some familiarity with the outline of the land against the water and the sky hopefully with the help of some moonlight. Most trips were uneventful and helpful for all concerned. On this one particular occasion however, I was returning on the Kismet to JIC with an ill camper and her counsellor after such a consultation. When we left the dock in Spanish the weather was clear and the winds light with good visibility. All was well until we were suddenly surrounded by dense fog. All visual bearings disappeared. What to do out in the middle of the Channel!

Cont'd on next page

Bill Bavington - Cont'd from previous page

Estimating we were about 10 or 15 minutes from the camp just about to go through the gap between two islands - Aikens and Rainboth - to make our way to the dock. I got out the map and the compass and estimated our position. I very slowly headed in, what I hoped was the right direction, looking intently for the gap between the islands. Fortunately, it appeared as predicted and we were home free with a camper on the mend and a counsellor and Kismet captain much relieved. These trips and the advice of the various RNs were a valuable addition to my medical education in the city. In such a situation however, wouldn't a cell phone and GPS have been handy!

George Koski's Trees George Koski, was the Out Trip Director for the camp for a number of years. I remember taking George and his Out Trippers, camping gear and canoes in tow, up the Whaleback Channel for a trip up the Serpent River and to Little Detroit at the far end of Aird Island and to other locations to begin their journeys.

One year George and I were working on opening the camp in June when George informed me he had been in contact with the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests and had received a large number of young evergreen trees for planting in the JIC area. He suggested a location near the "Bridge over the River Kwai", where the Kismet was eventually hauled up in retirement. The planting area extended back towards the Old (original) Dock including, if my memory serves me correctly, part of the former townsite of the mill. With the help of others we planted the small trees. On my trips back to JIC over the years it has been very rewarding to see them grow into a thriving forest bringing back memories of George, now passed on, and other memories of those summers at John's Island Camp.

When I reflect on all those years, I feel fortunate to have spent those summers in a rich learning environment, convivial company and natural surroundings.



A young Bill Bavington in the early days at camp



Dr. Bill Bavington with Don Mitchell at the current site of the "retired" Kismet—a boat they both drove as site managers at the camp in the 1950's and '60's.

Dr. Wm. Bavington (known as Wee Willie at JIC) was site manager and driver of the Kismet from 1958 to the mid 1960's. Bill, as mentioned in his article, was one of the group that planted close to 2000 red and white pines on the site near the ball field. One of those red pines is currently the camp's flag-pole. Bill lives in St. John's Newfoundland and is Honorary Research Professor at Memorial University

The Door from The Past

- by Kirsti Hartley

*“There is an island far away
That calls us to its shores ...”*

And some 40 years later (it can't really be 40 years, can it?), it still calls me.

I first attended John Island when I was 9 and was immediately enraptured; playing the first real “Survivor” in the bush, praying that I would get to be anything but a “herbivore” running hither and thither trying to stay alive, Polar Bear dips, orienteering trips to Lost Lake, obstacle courses, trips to Chapel Point, tours of the old mill and the folk stories of the witch, camp fires, songs, songs, and more songs, learning to sail, canoe, plan for an out trip and of course, learning how to be a friend. To this day, despite all of the places in this amazing country that I've lived, if a person looks familiar to me, my first thought is, “Did I go to John Island with you?”. And, incredibly, very often the answer is “Yes”.



When we returned to Ontario 20 years ago, we took advantage of an Open House on the Island. My husband was anxious to see the place that had created such an indelible stain on my heart. Although my son was only an infant, we headed to the Island to take a tour. Of course we met old friends on the boat ride over (no longer Old Ironsides), and more once we landed on the Island. I gave my husband a tour of my old haunts and imagine my surprise when we arrived at the cabin where I had been a C.I.T (counsellor in training in those days), and saw my name written as clear as day on the door jamb, as if it had only been written days ago, and not years.

Since then, both my son and my daughter have had the opportunity to fall in love with the Island and its traditions themselves. They have both attended as campers, and my daughter was lucky enough to return to John Island this past summer as a counsellor herself. Although we all attended the same physical space, it is incredible how very different, and very similar our adventures on John Island have been. My son talks about his cabin mates and the impact they had on him, and my daughter talks about her newly found “sister from another mother”, a co-counsellor who has become a life-long friend, and the deep connections she made with her campers. I am deeply envious of both of them in that when I was a camper there, in order to maintain camp friendships through the years, we had to get the other person's mailing address, write a letter, find an envelope AND a stamp and put the letter in the mail. I'm very sad to say that I've lost touch with most of the friends that I made when I was there. Oh, to have had Snap Chat, or Instagram then! But the memories live on in my head, and my heart. And I am so grateful that my children have been able to experience the place that still calls me.

“We're campers through and through”.

Get Ready for it!

YMCA John Island Camp's

70th Anniversary

COMING in 2024

Have a good idea? Let us know!

IF YOU WANT TO HELP, HERE'S HOW!

On the back cover we list several ways to help. We are fortunate that we have a very dedicated alumni at YMCA John Island Camp and they want to help camp continue for years ahead.

FINANCIAL HELP - to assist with **capital improvements**, the easiest way is to donate on line at ymcaneo.ca/john-island-camp# At that site, hit the "donate" button and when asked where you want your donation to go, choose "John Island Camp Capital"

- to assist with the John Island Camp **Alumni Camper Bursary Fund**,
- to assist with the **camp operation** or to generally help the camp, go to the camp website as above and when asked where you would like your donation to go, choose camp operation.

VOLUNTEER HELP - There are **Work Weekends** - contact finn.thomas@ymcaneo.ca

- There are **Newsletter stories** to be written -contact gary.gray@ymcaneo.ca

And most important, be a **Camp Ambassador** by telling your family members and friends about the great opportunities at an outstanding YMCA overnight camp for youth. Information will be on line at ymcaneo.ca/john-island-camp/

YMCA John Island Camp—an important part of growing up



When you're here, you're home

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**
- It is easy to donate on line - see page 15 for details**

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
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

on Facebook: YMCA John Island Camp

