

My first instinct when it comes to buying something, is to see what I've got to trade. We're all a bunch of "traders" on the Island! If you've got lobster, you might trade it to get your income tax done. If you bake good cookies, you might trade it for piano lessons for your kid. It's just imbedded in me.

-Melissa Batchilder

The Meadow Network #4

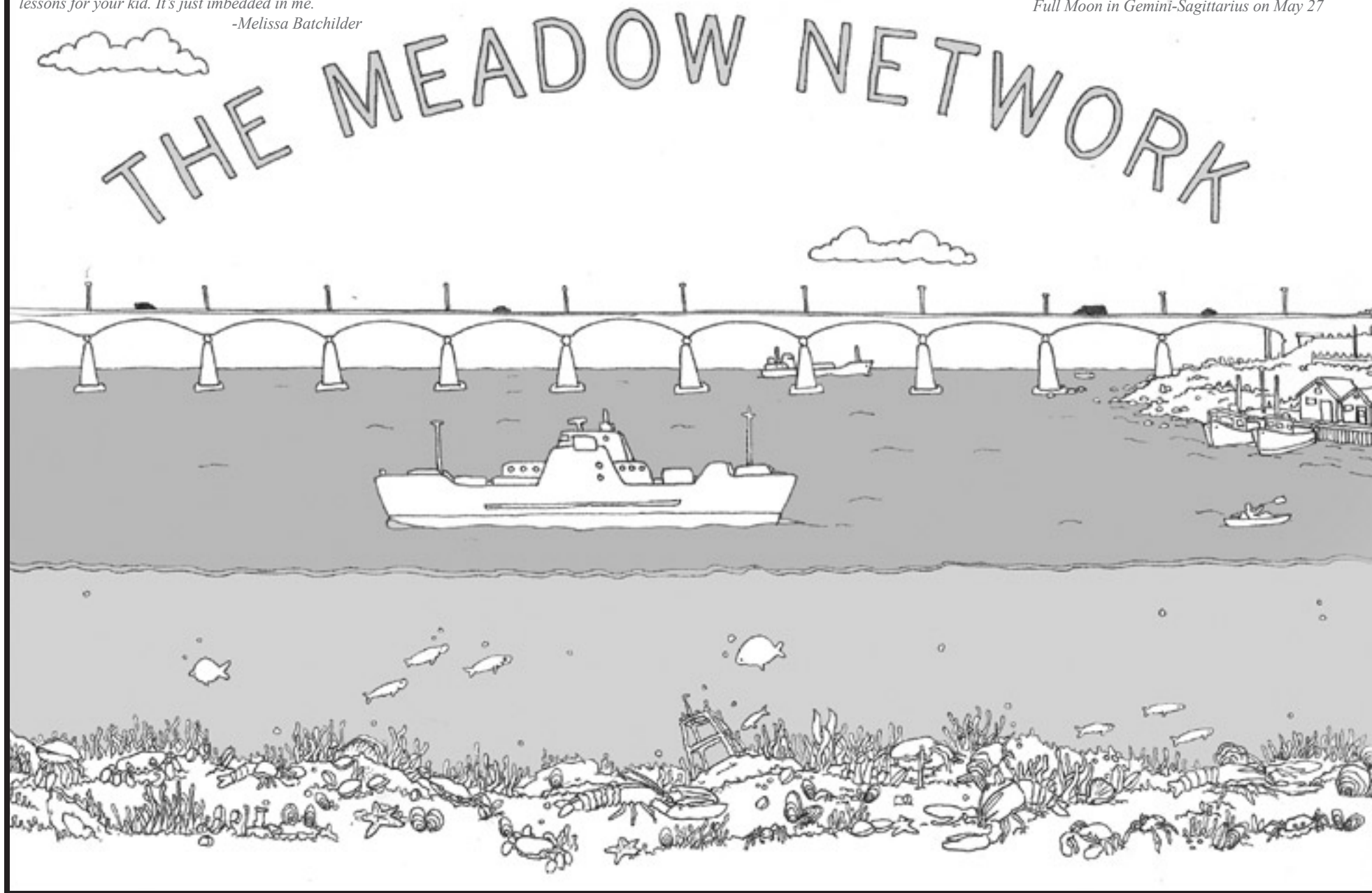
May, 22, 2010

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada

Weather Outlook: Mostly Sunny. Low 9. High 15.

Sunrise 5:32 AM Sunset 8:47 PM

Full Moon in Gemini-Sagittarius on May 27



“PEI, THE FERRY, AND AWAY”

We created the Meadow Network as a form (and forum) for an ongoing investigation of the inter-relationships between rural and urban life. The project is rooted in a broad series of interviews with city residents from diverse backgrounds, which began in October 2008. Over the last year and a half, we have visited city farms, open markets, senior centers, gardening stores and public parks, talking to people about where they came from, their own memories and their personal connections to rural life. How do they hold a concept of “homeland”? What traditions of growing, preserving, festival and bartering do they hold on to or re-create? How do they see these as manifesting in their life in the city?

The trajectory of the Meadow Network investigations, has, up to this point, been one of *convergence*. The city (or market, or garden) has been a single point where paths have come together. When we were asked to bring the Meadow Network into the exhibition *Dig Up My Heart*, it presented an opportunity to take on the project from another vantage point. Prince Edward Island is a place we have never seen, about as far from our home in California as one can get on the North American Continent. We knew of no-one who lived there, and few who had visited. In thinking about working “remotely”, it made sense to use distance as something of a common denominator.

To create this issue of the Meadow Network, we asked Shauna McCabe, the curator of the exhibition, to put us in touch with people from the island who had “left” it. We wanted to interview those who moved away, to cities across Canada



First Day of School, Photo courtesy of Zach Wells

or abroad. We were curious about what they remembered and held onto about the communities and culture of the island. What traditions, memories, or customs had they “held” onto? Working entirely through email, what emerged was a range of reflections on a home with hard boundaries (indeed, what boundaries are more fixed than those of an island). From these beginnings, a range of exits and movements unfolded; those stories are told in the following pages.

More than one of our correspondents described growing up with a feeling of two worlds. On one hand, the dense specificity of the island they were raised on, on the other, larger world of “away”, of all that lay beyond its shores. For each, there was a point of embarkation. As such, this issue of the Meadow Network trades the common space of convergence for the individual choice of departure. We are deeply grateful for the participation of all of those who worked with us. We hope to see the island ourselves someday.

-Susanne Cockrell and Ted Purves, Oakland, California.



The house and pond, before the trees grew in. Photo courtesy of Zach Wells

The Meadow Network #4 • May 2010

The Meadow Network is a project by Susanne Cockrell and Ted Purves. Issue #4 was published for the exhibition *Dig Up My Heart: Artistic Practice in the Field* presented at the Confederation Centre for the Arts in Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island. For more information on the exhibition, please visit www.confederationcentre.com. For more information on the collaborative projects of Susanne Cockrell and Ted Purves, please visit www.fieldfaring.org. The texts in this issue were gathered through email correspondence with Melissa Batchilder, Shane Bryanton, Lucy Hogg, Zachariah Wells, Ker Wells and Peter Willis. Illustrations by Nicholas Sazani and Susanne Cockrell. Thank you to the Seed Fund in San Francisco for supporting this project.



Prince Edward Island felt like it's own world back in the 1970s. There was PEI, the ferry and "away". There were still trains running and retired workhorses were ending their days on many farms.

My childhood straddled the old world and the new. I had color TV and flush toilets and watched Sesame Street but some of my relatives and many older neighbors lived without indoor plumbing and only had electricity in the kitchen or barn.

I knew every kid in my class and our parents knew each other and our grandparents knew each other. I was proud to be a country kid even though I was already half removed.

Men then still wore overalls and rubber boots and ripped old caps to town and farmers still smelled like manure and cattle.

My grandmothers farm houses smelled of bleach, and homemade bread and potatoes in the cellar.

Abandoned barns and houses were scattered along old roads and among scrub trees. The world was full of forgotten mysteries.

I lived at the tail end of the old community of original farming families who built their houses facing the Hillsborough River and the beginning of the houses stretched along the road. My grandparents dragged their home up the road away from the river 3 years before I was born.

Houses were still "banked" with seaweed to keep drafts and mice out in winter. "Fishmen" traveled from door to door with cod and mackerel in the back of their trucks.

Everyone "hayed" in the early summer and dug potatoes in the fall. I remember the scratchy sensations of hay and dirt stuck to my back as I stacked

square bails on the wagon and then up in the loft. I remember feeling proud to sit at the big kitchen table with my blisters and eat supper with the men.

Rural life also came with its down side... there were very few kids my age in my community so I spent a lot of time by myself and not all of it in romantic adventure. I watched way too much TV by times and was often "bored".

I still call the evening meal "supper" and an evening snack "a lunch".

I still prefer tea rather than coffee.

I still make a "boiled dinner", corned beef, potatoes and cabbage, every fall.

I still keep molasses in the house even though it's no longer a staple on the table and remains unopened for years.

I still look people in the eye and say hello.

I'm still a little offended when I'm not acknowledged when someone passes me on the street.

One more impression; lilacs in a mason jar on a table covered in oil cloth in my grandmothers kitchen...Here in Ottawa I steal them from the park across the street; they have an overpowering effect on me instantly transporting me back to June in childhood on the Island with school about to end and summer stretching out forever.



-as told by Shane Bryanton

Photographs provided by Stan and Liz Bryanton

My family's world pivoted between the town in the winter, Charlottetown, and the cottages in the summer, which started as one, then two, then six housekeeping cottages, which we rented to tourists. In the summer we spent the mornings usually cleaning cottages that were changing over, or other maintenance tasks such as raking grass or dirt, moving rocks, dragging dead trees around. In the afternoons we went to the beach, but we'd come back in time to watch the soaps on TV: The Edge of Night, and As The World Turns.

The cottages at times offered a certain amount of glamour. Once, someone from the Charlottetown Festival stayed with us. They had a party and I got to meet Wayne and Shuster. We'd be excited if kids our own age were staying for a couple of weeks, it seemed important that they be exactly the same age. They'd be from Boston, Montreal, or Toronto. They always seemed a little more sophisticated. I remember a girl named Anna who wore Dr.Scholls sandals. We were pen-pals for about a year.

At the cottages, there was a distinct line drawn between us and the local kids, children mostly of fishermen. It wasn't something anyone talked about or thought about, but that was the way it was. There was a subtext of class divide, more consciously maintained by my father. The kids, whose fathers were fishermen, would come by our cottage selling blueberries in little jars. You knew they needed the money. I drove by one of their houses a couple of summers ago and realized that they had lived in a shack. That was in the 60's. The shack is still standing, but no one lives in it now.

Being from town, we never thought of ourselves as living in a rural place. Most of my parents' associates were in professions of one kind or another, and lived in town. My dad, being for many years one of the two dentists in town, knew just about all the farmers and the fisherman because he fixed their teeth.

My father's grandfather arrived on PEI from Scotland as an orphan in the 1850's. He was taken in by an aunt who lived near Summerside. The aunt's family had probably arrived there much earlier, when there had been a huge influx of people to Prince Edward Island from Scotland in the 1770's. They left as economic refugees, and had been persecuted by the English for speaking Gaelic. My father's

grandfather became a banker.

There are a lot of Hoggs in Scotland. My mother's family was also of Scottish origin, having moved to Manitoba in the 1880's. She was a trained Dietitian, and so had some modern 1950's ideas about food, but mainly catered to my father's anglo-centric diet of meat and potatoes. Although we ate fish, it was years before I realized it didn't come naturally in a frozen white rectangle. Later on my mother learned how to cook Chinese food, and would do a special buffet dinner for guests in the summer.

I'm not sure if my upbringing filters much into my life here in Washington DC. Despite living in the center of the city we do have a yard, so I find myself raking the garden, moving rocks, and dragging dead trees around. I stopped watching TV as soon as I left home at age 17.

Being in the visual art and an educator, I find that it is easy to find a community in any city. Art people are a well-traveled group and quite social, using whatever means available to stay in touch. My own orientation has never been toward location, but finding where my friends are.

-as told and photographed by Lucy Hogg.



First of all, I grew up on an island, one island. Everyone there has always referred to it as “The Island”. I remember thinking distinctly “I live on Prince Edward Island” and “Prince Edward Island is part of Canada”. I had no idea what “Canada” was and didn’t feel part of it at all. I did feel very connected to Prince Edward Island though. I felt connected to the land. I knew that my family had been there for as far back into the past as anyone ever talked about.

My father talked about how his grandfather once saw a group of 200 Micmac Indians walking down the Kingston Road, right in front of our house, when he was a boy. I knew that his own grandfather lived his life on PEI too.

It was a tremendously variable place, with visual extremes beginning in the lowest pits of grey overcast February. As a child I loved the winter because in the 70s and 80s there was a LOT of snow, which was instant fun.

We lived in the countryside just down the road from my grandfathers farming operation. There was a horserace track between our place and his where he used to jog his horses. There was an old bog that they used to wash the horses in and I was warned to never go there because it was a place of death. But in the winters, right by the bog, there was a larger pond that would freeze over and my brothers and I could go there and skate and play hockey. When I got older and more restless, in my teens, the winters were less fun because I wasn’t so interested in playing outside. It seemed like it was greyer then, the snow less intrinsically fun. But I never remember particularly minding the cold, or complaining about it. That was just the way it was, and you could always dress warmly if you wanted to.

But being exposed to the grey skies for long periods of time in the middle of the country was tough sometimes. I never even realized it then but in retrospect I didn’t like it very much. When the sky is blue, it’s fine, but when the countryside is grey and the snowy ground melds into a grey sky, and time slows down, one had to turn inwards in order to find happiness.

I was lucky because I had five brothers, all very close in age, and they formed my tight-knit society. Our nearest neighbors seemed impossibly far away. I would never walk that far to visit. A trip to my grandparents or to the farm was the limit of my wanderings. All in all it was wonderful and magic. We entertained ourselves and everything seemed to make perfect sense. We had a large fireplace made of Island sandstone and we could sit on the warm stones at

“...a deep connection between my Island and the depths of space.”

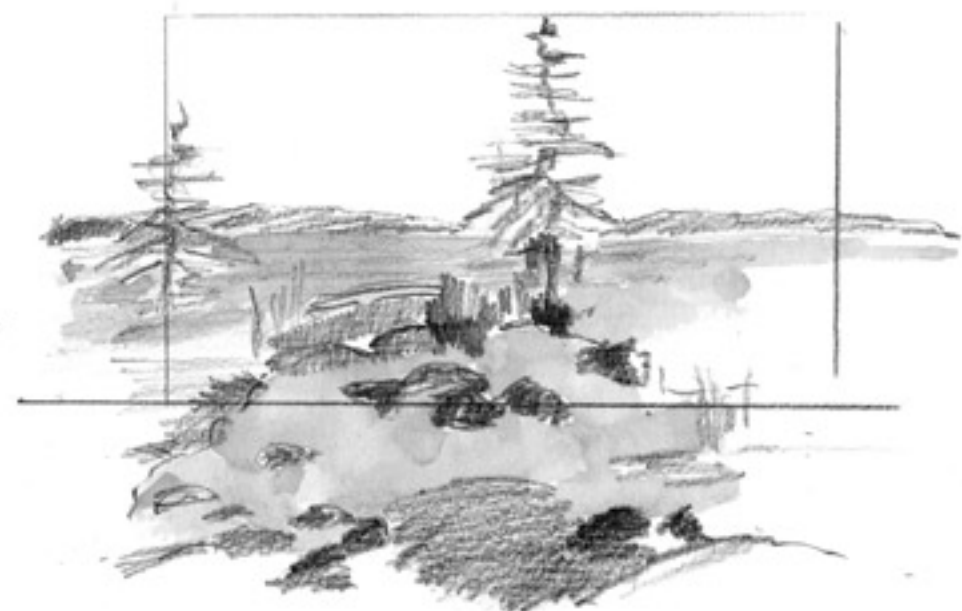
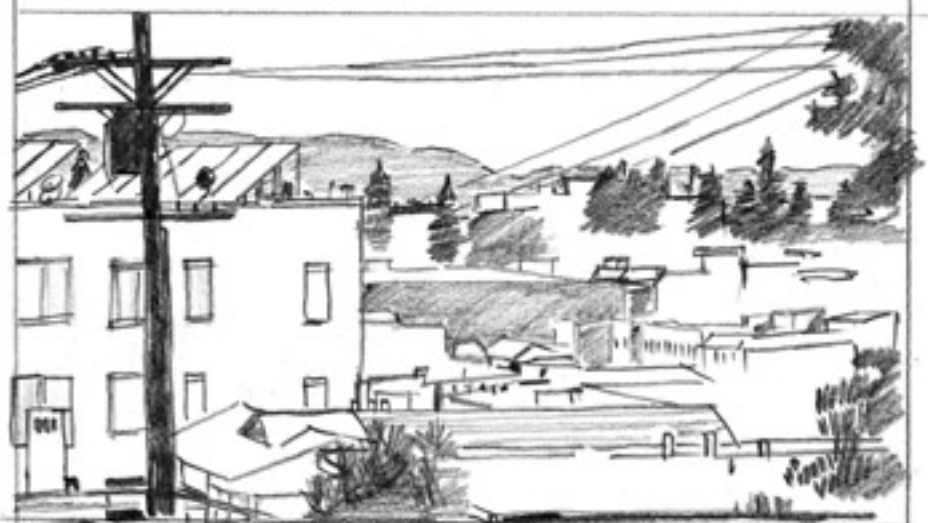


the exact spot. I laid on my back and looked up at the Milky Way. On the Island on summer nights, the wind blows the clouds away and many nights are perfectly clear. I looked up and saw the Milky Way so clearly. I could really feel it. It was totally, completely real to me. I felt this deep sense of mystery, this strange deep sensation that I was connected to the stars. My back felt safe resting on the warm green grass. That moment was the most spiritual moment of my life, and it involved a feeling of a deep connection between my Island and the depth of Space.

I feel very, very far away from my roots. My memories are hard to access and often create a painful stirring, a deep longing for a home I can no longer return to. For that reason I don’t try to recreate it. I live in the most densely populated neighborhood in the United States, a poor area just west of downtown Los Angeles filled with Salvadoreans and other Central and South Americans. I am the gringo who can never share the local customs. I speak Spanish sometimes but it doesn’t really provide a connection. The racial divisions in Los Angeles are so deep that it is futile to try to assimilate. Even slight differences in the shade of the skin preclude genuine membership in groups. But I understand this and back on the Island it was very much the same. There, even identical white people, were not allowed to be called “Islanders” unless they were born there. If you weren’t, no matter how long you stayed, you would never be considered an Islander, you were an “F-A” (From Away). You were from the Mainland, and somehow that made you inferior. But my memories make me humble and appreciative of others, just as they make me feel isolated. I am the consummate “nice guy” and have been told that many times. But not “nice” like the typical annoyingly polite Canadian I once was.

Only very rarely do I say hi to strangers. But if I do talk to someone I always make time to listen to them and to try to make them feel better about everything, the whole strange, graffiti covered, garbage strewn world. I feel like I can only affect a few people in the world and unlike on PEI, where those people were chosen for me, in LA my interactions are random, like tumbling dice. It’s hard to find meaning in it all, but if I can make a few people a little bit happier, then I have honored my family and my roots. I tell Beatriz at the laundromat that her hair looks wonderful, even when it doesn’t. I tell the girl at the Big Six market that she will be rewarded for supporting her relatives in El Salvador, and that she should be strong, and that I am proud of her for being strong. She has deep blue eyes and she stares deeply like she has seen the whole world pass through her gate. But it is hard to be like this. Last summer I had a raging black man walk past me on the street, he was breathing like an angry bull with his fists clenched. I had never seen him before. He turned and spit at me as he passed. There are many angry people like him, lost people. It’s unclear to me that an infinite flow of kindness could save them. But perhaps it could.

-as told by Peter Willis



its base. During frequent winter storms, when the power would go out for days on end, we would all congregate there, at night, in sleeping bags on the carpet.

Our community consisted mostly of potato farmers, just like us. There were other people who had pigs and cattle but most everybody had something to do with potato farming. When we had school variety shows there would always be somebody doing Scottish tap dancing, and somebody doing Highland dancing on crossed swords. It was never called “Scottish” or “English” or anything, it was just what we did, and what people always did.

There were old churches almost everywhere, but they never seemed very important to me. Some of them were abandoned and in high school we would sometimes break in and just play around inside. We wouldn’t vandalize anything but it was fun to just be there in a place where you weren’t supposed to be.

My sense of spirituality was derived more from a connection to the land and the sea and the sky. Being cooped up inside a building didn’t seem very spiritual. In the summer, after a long cold winter, when it became warm and the red Earth was visible again, with the lush green grass and trees under a blue sky, the place was like heaven, the place we had been waiting to enter all winter long.

We were surrounded by potato fields in every direction. I could walk out on bare feet and pull up a plant, and bring some inside and put them in a pot and cook them. I loved potatoes and still do.

During the summers, my parents owned a campground on the south shore of the island and every night we would have a bonfire, either on the beach, or just up from the beach at my grandfather’s cottage. He would tell us stories of fighting Germans in World War II, and being trapped behind enemy lines, driving from place to place on his motorcycle alone, in the dead of night, with messages for the Allied Forces. He would ride with his head down, between the handlebars, because the Germans put out razor-sharp trip wires to cut off your head as you sped along on your bike. We would roast hot dogs on sticks we would get from the woods. I had so many brothers and the place was so big, I could sometimes just go off on my own and nobody would notice.

I remember one particular night, lying by myself on the grass. I remember

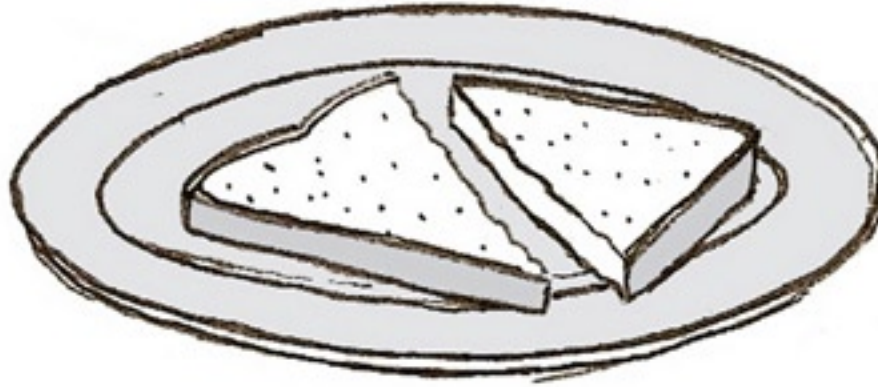
I moved to PEI when I was 10. My father had been working in Europe and my two sisters and I were born there. When my father was about 40 he and my mother moved us to a farm on PEI. My father's family was from the Island. He was born in Summerside, and he had spent part of his childhood on the Island, and all of his summers, into his teenage years, working on his grandfather's farm near Alberton. When we moved, it was to a farm very close to the old family farm, which my father's father had bought in the 50's and which had been farmed sporadically thereafter by him, and by my father and his brothers.

When we moved there it was home to an eccentric collection of animals (two buffalo, some deer, a mink and a fox, among others) and exotic fowl, including a peacock and Great Horned Owl that lived in the loft of the barn. We moved there in the summer, in early June. Coming from a childhood spent in European cities it was an enormous change, and that first summer was pretty great. This was the early 70's - the final days of the mixed farm - and we took in hay in small bales, and my sisters and I learned to drive the old John Deere tractor that pulled the hay wagon. That would have been the first physical labor I had done in my life.

I remember those long, long days of summer, the long shadows, the softness of everything. There was a pond we swam in, usually at the end of the day, and the quarter mile dirt road that led to it was smooth and flat with a single hummock of grass running down the centre between the tire tracks. I remember walking that road with my sisters and the neighbor kids, carrying our towels.

Those kids were much different than we were. Most of them were named Lewis - they were all brothers and sisters and cousins - and they lived on the Lewis road. They had all known each other all their lives. None of them had ever moved - moved from house to house, city to city, country to country, the way my sisters and I. Most of them had probably never left the Island. They spoke differently than we did and used words I'd never heard. "Son a whore" was a favored expression, which I misunderstood as 'son of a horse'. After foot race, they'd say "I raced ya", meaning 'I beat you'. That first summer, that was the only society I was really aware of - those kids, and a few friends of my parents who came to visit us on the farm.

When I started school in the fall, things got a little harder. The school I went to was small - about 180 students between grades 6 and 12. I was not only 'from away', but I also had an accent, thanks to the several earlier years



I'd spent in England. The first day of school I got in a fight before I was even off the school bus. I didn't really feel like I was 'from' anywhere. But I did feel like I belonged on the farm, on our land, on the beach below our house.

I could see the intense and comforting social and familial web that many of my friends were part of, but I wasn't really a part of it. My father died on the Island 12 years ago. I went back to the Island in his final days, and appreciated that web then in a way that I had not as a boy. Neighbors arrived at our house unbidden, with food. The nurses in the small community hospital where my father spent his last days were great - they knew who he was, they knew who we were.

I miss the ferry. Taking the ferry was an enforced decompression, a necessary submission to a slower schedule, and one that depended to some degree on the weather and the water. The ride was usually only an hour, but the effect was enormous - you were unmistakably going to another, slower place.

When my Dad and his brothers were kids and making the drive from Ottawa to the Island every spring, they thought that the ferry was the only place in the world that one could get 'triangle toast'. They were disappointed when their mother revealed to them that any square slice of bread could be cut into this exotic shape.

I left the Island at 18 to go to University and lived most of the time thereafter in towns and cities. This year, at 45, I bought a house in Hamilton. The neighborhood I live in is rough and very working class and urban, but it reminds me of living in PEI more than anywhere else I've lived - in the way that I feel immersed in a community to whom some of the things that are very important to me - books and art for instance - have no value, no place. For the first time in my life, I have my own garden. Planting it is bringing back memories of my parents' labors. In the fall I made green tomato chutney and preserved it in jars. Boiling the jars in preparation for the chutney was both strangely familiar. I'd watched my mother do it many times in those Island years - and completely new and clumsy - I'd never actually done it myself.

My mother still lives on the farm and every year I visit, sometimes twice. I like going there. Some years, if I go at Christmas, I'll walk up to the woods and cut a tree.

-as told by Ker Wells

My strongest memories of the ferry involve the long waits you often had to endure in summertime and the long crossings through the ice in the winter. Sometimes the 45-minute sailing would take over 4 hours. I remember once looking out the window of the boat and seeing a red fox running over the ice ahead of us.

The bridge opened two years after I stopped spending summers on the Island, so it wasn't part of my Island-life reality. My family was part of the 40%+ of Islanders who opposed the construction of the bridge. We were against it more for practical reasons (cost of construction, long-term viability, environmental impact) rather than for more romantic notions of what it might do to the "Island way of life."

I once hitchhiked from PEI to Halifax. I wasn't able to find a ride on the boat and so wound up walking well over 20 km until I got picked up. In that span of time, several boatloads of cars zipped past me. No one wanted to stop when they drove off the boat; it was always a race to get to the front of the line and get clear of the traffic. Similarly, if you were running late for the boat, it was more than a little tempting to speed like hell to catch it, so you wouldn't get stuck waiting for the next one.

Milton Acorn, perhaps the most significant poet to come out of Prince Edward Island, wrote:

*Since I'm Island-born home's as precise
as if a mumbly old carpenter,
shoulder-straps crossed wrong,
laid it out, refigured
to the last three-eighths of shingle.*

In the spirit of that profoundly true and beautiful observation, I'd say that I didn't so much grow up on the Island as on 150 acres of fields, woods and stream, 2.5 km down a dirt road (once known locally as the Old Princetown Road, now officially designated the Hazel Grove Road) off Highway 2, where it bends between Hunter River and Fredericton in Central Queen's County. The property was half of a farm my father bought with his brother, who raised his four kids in the old farmhouse up the hill from the house in the valley my father built.



Even by Island standards, the place I grew up was extraordinarily bucolic, the sort of landscape burned into the subconscious of our species from the time of our early development in the Pleistocene. My younger brother and I had extraordinary freedom there and absolutely nothing to fear, either in terms of the perils of a city (traffic, strangers, etc.) or in terms of the perils of "wilderness" (wild predators, getting lost, extreme weather/natural disasters, etc.). This was absolutely marvelous for young children, though I see this only in retrospect. For us, growing up, it was simply normal. As an adult, however, that place and time is to me the seedbed of myth from which has sprung much of my poetry.

It became, for me, less marvelous the older I got, as I became more curious about what the off-Island world—heck, even Charlottetown—had to offer. I came to find it isolating and limiting and left home at fifteen to attend a private high school in Ottawa.

While we lived on farmland, we didn't farm it ourselves. My uncle and aunt kept some livestock including cows, horses, pigs, chicken, geese. My mother gardened, kept bees and churned butter from my uncle's cows and we ate eggs from his hens. We rented out our fields to a dairy farmer/neighbor, so farming was certainly something I was routinely aware of, but somewhat peripherally. I had no sense of it, really, as a community thing, since, as I said, we didn't mix much with our community. I would say I was more apart from than a part of a community, something I first started to sense as I started school with kids from suburban Charlottetown.

I currently live in the North End of Halifax, now, as urban a place as there is in the Maritimes. I can't say that my life here borrows much from my childhood. I don't grow vegetables. I spend very little time in the country, though I do visit my parents fairly regularly. Memories have been critical to many poems I've written and published. If I've taken anything from my formative years, it's perhaps a sense of the importance of self-sufficiency.

-as told by Zach Wells