

View from the Islands: April 2011

By Bruce Fraser

Winter Morning On the Lake

Most of what happens around the lake is immediately evident to an islander living out there in the middle. The ducks and geese hiding in the reeds squabble all night long, worried about our resident mink or discussing how they might avoid being feasted on by the Long Island Eagle come daybreak. The crew of male red-winged blackbirds hangs noisily around the bird feeder shouting their impatience with the keeper of the seed, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the females for the nesting season. The Osprey dives for an unwary bass cruising the surface waters. Commuters begin their day around five in the morning, grumpily tail-gating their way to the Malahat, reminding us all that a living has to be made, a car length is worth a life and that Jen's café on the hill better have the brew bubbling.

I hear voices on the lake. Shawnigan rowers, bulbous in parkas, soon flash past in perfect unison, while their mentors serenade the lake with bullhorns full of encouragement and the cox's beat the time. It is not yet summer, so the earlybird water skiers are still powdering their wet suits in anticipation and the cabins around the lake are mostly in dark communion with their mould spores. Rain pounding on the steel roof and a brisk southeaster roaring in the trees completes the morning soundscape out here on the islands. Well, almost completes it, as there is also the symphonic contribution of the loggers in the Shawnigan hills, where feller-bunchers perform insolent dances in the growing clear cut.

The night winds from the south deliver human artifacts to the islands. A derelict wharf, a ruined surfboard, an awkwardly deflated air mattress and an assortment of children's beach toys arrive looking for sanctuary. There is a mostly submerged boat, reminiscent of the African Queen's last voyage, accompanied by an entourage of beer cans, plastic bottles and one lone soccer ball. To my horror there is also a sewage slick, contributed by high water over a septic field. There used to be just reeds. Send in the reeds!

When the wind is from the north, ice rings the island, frost gathers on the wharf and a drift of fine snow slithers under the back door of the cabin. I intend fix that, one of these days. A quick blaze in the stove, ignited by the coals of the banked fire of last evening followed by a hasty brew of fresh ground coffee work to dispel the shivers. Out there on the dock, a quick binocular check of the lights in shoreline houses, and wisps of rising wood smoke assure me that all is well with our neighbours as the day begins.