

View From the Islands: May 2011

The Piano

By Bruce Fraser

I was repairing my wharf, hefting a twelve-foot two-by-four over my shoulder, paying no attention to the lake. You could do that in those days, before passing wakeboats could overturn a squatting Sumo wrestler. In fact, then you could rebuild your wharf once in thirty years instead of annually, but that's not what this story is about. I looked up casually to see a piano emerging out of Butler Bay. A piano? You would not normally expect a piano to float, let alone appear suspended on the waters of Shawnigan.

I limped for the binoculars, having dropped that two-by-four on my shin in my haste to clarify the mirage. It turned out that the piano was real and that it was contained in a small barge heading toward the islands. I fully expected to see Nat King Cole at the keyboard playing ragtime but instead it was Paul, hunching over a small outboard. It was a full size upright and it occupied the whole width of the barge. I had a brief thought about how Paul might have got the piano into that barge, but then I remembered that Butler Bay had a public access beach, not like today where someone has fenced it off for their own private uses.

As the musical barge drew closer I shouted, "Hey Paul, I didn't know you played!" He smiled rather grimly for some reason. It could be that he had begun to appreciate how difficult it might be to get that piano out of the barge. My laughter was brought up short by another very peculiar sight. His friend Gill was fast approaching in a car. Now remember, I was working on the wharf, it is mid-afternoon and not yet happy hour. Of course, it is perfectly normal for a piano-carrying barge with minimal freeboard to be accompanied by the lake's only amphicar with minimal freeboard. What else would you expect from those islanders? Now there was a target for a wakeboat!

Gill drove up onto the island and parked, while Paul beached the barge. I rowed over to watch, doing my best to appear impressed, not saying out loud those things that I could later regret. The two men stood shin deep in water looking at the piano. The shoreline accommodated the nose of the barge, but no more. The bobbing piano expanded before our eyes. Where was that Sumo when we needed him? Try lifting a 500 pound piano out of a boat that rises as you lift while standing in soft mud. We were three rapidly shortening men, further diminished by the prospect of playing Mozart in the rain for the rest of the summer.

It was then that an image arose in my mind, stimulated by the bark on my shin, now stinging from immersion in the lake. We could use a pair of two-by-fours and lift the piano like a sedan chair. With a fourth helper and two ten foot boards the lady of the lake was delivered to their cabin in regal style, high and dry, the scene only lacking the fawning eunuchs with the fans and the scantily clad nymphs with the flutes. I can still hear those first discordant melodies, before the arrival of the piano tuner, by amphicar, of course.

Bruce lives year round on Isla del Sol.