Wildcats and Thrones

A writer muses on the history, wildlife and not infrequent surprises of Atlantic Canada

BY HARRY BRUCE

That for ever stony and wind-blown promontory, Signal Hill, that gigantic granite promontory of North Atlantic navigation bashing at the harbour mouth of St. John's, Nfld., is a National Historic Site. It was from here that Guglielmo Marconi received the world's first trans-Atlantic radio transmission in 1901. But the best reason to climb Signal Hill is simply to stand up there with the wind in your teeth and ears, the clouds tearing across the near sky, the little capital tumbling down the hill at your back, the seemingly tiny boats at rest by the dockside and the great, soothing fragrance of the sea enveloping you.

If you're here in the spring, you may see tens of thousands of brilliant little birds trying to supervise the southbound cruise of gannets and ice-cubes, and perhaps you'll notice that one of the vessels before you has altered course. It's coming bow-on now. Wait awhile. It will pass through the Narrows, right below your feet. Ships from Europe have been sliding through here for half a millennium. If you have the faintest knowledge of Canadian history, you can't stand atop Signal Hill without feeling something dawn on you -- a realization that this spot is intimately tied to this country's history. Signal Hill moves you. It shook me to my roots the first time I stood atop it.

A few hundred metres down the dark rocks of the hill there's a tiny harbour. Its entrance is a gate of ocean water you feel you could almost jump across. Quiet Vidi Village sits on the harbour's edge. It includes wooden houses that date from the early 1800s, and except for a decline in the town's fishing industry, the village hasn't changed all that much since they were built. Nearby, there's a small battery with a few cannons, and the whole aspect has the cozy charm of not quite the warm temperaments of certain West Indian coops.

I inspected the battery one afternoon when the wind blowing off the ocean was heavy with fog and icy rain. I thought I was alone. I took off my glasses, tried to dry them with my tie, put them back on, glanced at the wall of black, dripping rock behind the cannons, and there he was, not 10 metres from me, as still and cool as a statue -- a bustling noisy out. He looked at me as though I were a mouse worth dispatching. I had never seen a noisy owl outside a cage, and his mean, arrogant good looks told me once more why the Atlantic Coast of Canada shows me.

Atlantic Canada is a region not only of owls and cannons but of stags and cathedrals, otters and archives, racoons and libraries, coyotes and colleges, sea hawks and monuments, wildlife in the woods and thrones in the legislative chambers.

History and wildlife... St. Andrews, N.B., its defunct cannons pointing at the United States, wears its pre-British history as proudly as any redcoat saluting the Union Jack. But what have we here, shambling in its loose-jointed way into the heart of this supercivilized town, and then crossing the once misted harbour to the little wilderness on

Navy Island? A full-grown mouse. At least it's not a deer. Deer routinely pillage the vegetable gardens of the handsome colonial houses that bear plaques with the names of the United Empire Loyalists who occupied them generations ago.

Wildlife and history... When Americans visit the legislative buildings in Fredericton, a shocker confronts them. Hanging in a conspicuous place of honour in the Assembly Chamber is a portrait of a man they know as the devil incarnate, the very symbol of the vile French behaviour that caused the American Revolution: George III.

History and surprise... As the late Fredericton poet Aiden Norton once asked, "Where else could you meet the premier, the mayor, a poet and Stompin' Tom Cotter all walking arm in arm at 4 a.m., or drive past a wild black bear on the way to work and attend a reception for the Dalai Lama that same afternoon? That has actually happened in Fredericton, a city of almost surrealistic surprises."

This is a whole region of surprise. For three decades, I have been living in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and sipping over to Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, but the surprises keep right on making my eyes pop. Take the little whale, for example. With my two granddaughters, I was sailing my small yacht on Chedabucto Bay, N.S. Near the site of France's Fort St. Louis, which fell to the British in 1690, a beluga whale, not in a pod but all by itself, trundled along beside us, dived under the hull, and for
a good 10 minutes frolicked astern, ahead, to port and to starboard. It came so close the girls pasted its amiable head and stroked its spiky gray flanks. "Coo, Grosnezick. It feels like a Common chestnut."

The local museum, not two kilometres away, boasts cannons flanked from the ruins of the French fort. History, wildlife, surprise... The Maritimes and Newfoundland still have room for all three.

The history of this corner of Canada is full of pirates, privateers, waterfront rascals, battleship heroes, loyalist refugees, disastrous shipwrecks, burning apparitions on midnight horizons and master mariners who sailed home-built clipper ships around the world. French-English warfare, with aboriginal participation, was part of life here throughout the early colonial period. The American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War and the First and Second World Wars all helped shape the history of Atlantic Canada.

Charlottetown deserves its proud label "The Cradle of Confederation." And Nova Scotia was indeed the birthplace of responsible government in Britain's colonies. By 1812, "Muddy York," the future Toronto, was a crude frontier outpost with only about 700 settlers, but Halifax was already a cosmopolitan port with 10,000 residents, three newspapers, crowded theatres, a taste for balls, banquets, fireworks and parades, and a reputation as the home of beautiful, bejewelled and fashionably dressed women.

So the history is here. But the huge population that often blossoms in a region so rich in human history is not. Despite occasional boom times—and even "The Golden Age of Sail" was never as golden as some have painted it—the whole region, since time out of memory, has been languishing economically. Immigrants arriving by steamer at Halifax and Saint John, N.B., saw little of the Maritimes but the dark forests vanishing behind them as trains rushed them into central Canada and out to the Prairies. Almost as far as Minotaur and Newfoundland settlers were born, others moved to "the Boston states," Toronto or the West. In search of livelihoods they could not find "down home," and sometimes not even adventure, hundreds of thousands of the region's best, brightest and most restless moved in wave after wave after wave to New England and the heart of the continent.

The family of my father, Charles Bruce, whose male forebears had been famous fishermen-woodcutters at Port Shoreham, N.S., since the French Revolution, was a prime example of this migration. My father moved to Toronto as a newspaperman. His mother, Smith, and his oldest sister, Dora, a schoolteacher, moved to Edmonton. His sister Zoe settled with her American husband in Oklahoma and ended up in California. And his sister Carrie moved with her Nova Scotian husband to Detroit and ended up in Maryland. By 1934, not one Bruce remained at the Bruce homestead.

From an airplane, much of the Maritimes and Newfoundland often appears as though almost everyone else has fled the region, too. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick look like boring moss on a stone plain that barely emerges from the surrounding ocean. Even from the higher mountains—and the highest in New Brunswick is Mount Carleton, which rises little more than 800 metres above the sea—the views are long but far from spectacular. No cross-capped peaks here, and no mighty rivers that narrated ancient cities. Just the clean, chill wind and a low, undulating skyline. Newfoundland boasts real mountains and countless stringy lakes, but here, too, on high ground you feel you're on a plateau that grows nothing but trees and little else. The geological legacy of these provinces is mostly a farmer's hell.

The soil of Atlantic Canada tends to be shallow, stony, sandy, stony, acid, coarse, deeply leached, poorly drained, excessively drained, low in plant nutrients or lying on hills too steep for easy cultivation. The farmhouse at the Bruce homestead, now my summer home, sits on a southwards-sloping field bordered on the north by a highway, on the south and east by a rail line and on the west by crab apple trees that look as though some Bruce planted them in the time of Sir John A. Macdonald. Trees invade our field, rivers spread up from gullies that hold running streams.

The higher Bruce land, north of the highway, was once a hay field. Only 20 years ago, it still offered a view of Chedabucto Bay to our old-time neighbours, but we never went up there without vowing that this was where, one day, he'd build his house. But at that spot now, a black and green wall of trees blocks out the view of the bay. For all you can see of salt water, you could be in a Northern Ontario forest. Spruce and fir have gobbled up the hay field, and all along this shore, trees have reclaimed the fields of forgotten farms. The local population has shrunk drastically since my father was born at the homestead in 1906, and even now the retreat from the hard land of small farms continues across the region. The trees rush back to reclaim thousands of hectares that it took our forefathers generations to clear.

Here and there in my own damp forest, I find piles of rocks. They're the work of 19th-century Brices and their neighbours, men who tore the stones from the ground to create farmland. Those fellows had no gas-driven machines, and knowing what I do about the sheer hardiness of our little tree-threatened field, I respect their secret hopes of rocks with the same sort of reverence that overcomes visitors to Mayon ruins. How did the local pioneers ever remove enough stones so they could plough the land? The rocks of Port Shoreham don't just sit in the ground in finite numbers. They rise, in hordes, to replace the ones you've plucked. The rock piles in the woods are monuments to be awe at.

They are my private collection of history and surprise in the wilderness.

If you leave out Labron lake, which contains some of the world's most formidable and least populated territories, fewer than 2.4 million Maritimers and Newfoundlanders share a land as roughly the size of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. But the combined population of these states is 16 times greater than ours. Our population has never been big enough to obliterate the wilderness or define the
immensely intricate coastline. That coast is four times longer than the width of the whole continent.

Years go by without any human setting foot on great lengths of it, and one reason why so many wild creatures remain in these areas is that so many people did not. More than anywhere else in North America, Atlantic Canada offers human history and wildlife on the same plate.

This is true even in intensively cultivated Prince Edward Island. "The Garden of the Gulf" strikes most visitors as no wilder than an amiable backyard. Yet Charlottetown, a place of high art, theatre, historic stone buildings and a British-like interest in the gentle pleasures of raising flowers nearly, is but a 30-minute drive from seaside dunes that are the essence of wildness. They look as though they belong in mid-Sahara. The shaping of the province's whole north coast – the beaches, bluffs, shifting dunes and symmetrical spits – is the work not of farmers, gardeners or landscape artists, but of an ancient conspiracy of winds, tides, ice, ocean currents, river currents and tough grass and shrubs. The red sandstone of the cliffs may be 250 million years old, but the arrangement of beach and dune is always newer than this morning's sunrise. Just off this coast, sport fishermen have landed bluefin tuna weighing more than 500 kilograms.

Not five kilometres from the Brace Bowlhead, the French had a fort when New York City was a Dutch village, but white-capped deer still bound over our field, a dainty coyote explores it for prey, stick-legged herons fish the abandoned harbour, porcupines and raccoons slumber around in our forest, and at night, black bears leave their scar on our driveway. Hawks soar, foxes deck in foxes, and bobcats appear and disappear like ghosts. Our son wetly试探性地 asked if we could return to the Acadians on the northeast and eastern shores of New Brunswick, the good old boys at the harness-racing tracks of Prince Edward Island, the children who sell blueberries to tourists where the ocean rolls up to the highways of Nova Scotia, and everywhere else I've travelled in Atlantic Canada. This openness with strangers has historical precedent.

In the population was never known huge enough to crowd out the wild creatures, it has never known huge enough to crowd out our human virtue. A Torontonian I know stopped his car near a highway intersection in rural New Brunswick and asked a local man directions to St. John's and was flabbergasted to get this reply: "Well, you take the road on the right and follow it right down about 80 miles, and you come to St. John's. But I'll tell you, sir, it's only eight in the morrow. Why don't you come home with me now and have a hot cup of tea first and a spot of breakfast?" You find a rare helpfulness not only in the outskirts and boughs of Atlantic Canada, but in the cities as well. One June afternoon, I was wandering about old Saint John, N.B., with a guidebook. Three different men stopped to ask, most politely, if they could help me in any way. One escorted me to a historic building I wanted to visit. Two delivered short story lectures before ambling off on whatever their business was. A fourth stopped his shiny green Ford beside me at the foot of Prince William Street because I was taking notes at a plaque under a navigation light known as the Three Sisters Lamp, which is dedicated to local harbour pilots. The plaque commemorates the seventh-missed men of a pilot boat that a larger ship had sliced in half in 1957. The man rolled down his window and asked, "You want to know more about the monument?"

The offer was so unexpected I blurted, "No, no. I'm just writing down these names here.

"Well, one of them was J.V. Cunningham," he said. He was blocking traffic, but no one honked. "If you want to know more, his son works just up at the UNB [University of New Brunswick] campus. Ask for Jack Cunningham."

He drove off, leaving me to wonder what Maritimers must think when they visit Saint John and run into this unsolicited, unsolicited helpfulness. Do they suspect it's part of some city-wide-con game? The strangers I best remember meeting in Atlantic Canada have all exhibited a certain generosity of spirit, a natural kindness. I have run into such people among the Acadians on the northern and eastern shores of New Brunswick, the good old boys at the harness-racing tracks of Prince Edward Island, the children who sell blueberries to tourists where the ocean rolls up to the highways of Nova Scotia, and everywhere else I've travelled in Atlantic Canada. This openness with strangers has historical precedent. For generation after generation, a typical coastal town rarely saw anyone from anywhere else – often the only practical means of transportation was a seasonal ferry – and when visitors did arrive, the locals made the most hospitable of fuses over them. I think again of the owl and the cannon. Atlantic Canadians are products of both a sometimes brutal history and a sometimes brutal wilderness, and perhaps their character is proof that the wrong things get, the better some people behave towards friends and strangers alike.

Bald Eagles still glide above the Fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island. Once France's busiest port in North America, it's now one of the finest historic reconstructions on the continent. White-sided dolphins still cavort in the harbour of Halifax, which the British founded 233 years ago as their own formidable answer to the formidable Louisbourg. Foxes still prowl the sun-drenched dunes near the house where Lucy Maud Montgomery, nearly a century ago, within earshot of crashing surf, wrote Anne of Green Gables. As Atlantic salmon change up New Brunswick's Minatichi River to spawn exactly where they were born, they still pass Red Bank, a 5,000-year-old aboriginal settlement that claims to be the oldest village in Canada.

Sadly, it seems to be the way of the world that the cannons eventually destroy the owl, the cathedral corrupts the stag, and the suburb banishes the bear. But for the moment, I can't think of anywhere in North America that offers such an extraordinary combination of history, wilderness and surprise as these beautiful, tricky, oiled and populated provinces. And that's why I find them such a fascinating place in which to be alive.

The cover illustration and these accompanying this article are the work of students from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.
Eighteen-year-old Christopher Harriott has faced an uphill struggle in school. A shy boy lacking confidence, Harriott had to repeat grades in primary and secondary school and is 19 credits short of the 30 he needs to graduate from high school in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough. But his life now appears to be moving in a more hopeful direction.

Through a program called Change Your Future, designed to aid visible minority and aboriginal youth, Harriott has joined a group of grade 9 and 10 students who need special help. Under the guidance of Sophia Moseley, one of the program's counsellors, he is learning new work habits and has developed a more positive attitude towards his studies. He is also receiving tutoring in math, the subject that has been his chief stumbling block.

Harriott first heard of Change Your Future last October, when he was selected as a candidate by his school and met Moseley. It didn't take him long to decide to join the program. "I really had to change my life around," says Harriott, "and Ms. Moseley was giving me a chance to do this." His mother, Sonia Grandison, thinks Change Your Life has made a huge difference in her son's life. "Sophia has brought him a long way," she says. "She believes in him. And Christopher is working harder, because he knows more is expected of him."

The program that is changing Harriott's life is one of a dozen provided by the Learning Partnership, a not-for-profit organization formed in 1993 to channel widespread business support for public education into focused programs for schools. The programs range from Entrepreneurial Adventure, which enables students to participate in small-scale business ventures, to Words on Work, which brings successful professional women into schools to talk to students about education and life choices. Some Learning Partnership programs operate in schools, others beyond the classroom. Round Table on Technology, for example, brings together educators, business leaders and others outside the classroom to improve the use of technology in education, and through the Creative Arts Learning Partnership, grade 4, 5 and 6 teachers attend ballet, theatrical and musical workshops and performances so they can develop a wider understanding of the arts and therefore be better able to teach their students about them.

Since its inception, more than a million students have participated in Learning Partnership programs. But until now, Take Our Kids to Work, which enables grade 9 students to accompany a parent or adult to work for a day, has been the only program offered outside Ontario. This year, however, the organization will begin to introduce more of its programs across the country, launching Words on Work and Entrepreneurial Adventure in a number of provinces by the summer of 2003. "Our aim," says Veronica Lacey, president and chief executive officer of the Learning Partnership, "is to make our organization truly national."

Working with an annual budget of about $1 million, contributed by businesses and individuals, governments, school boards and community organizations, the Learning Partnership has as its underlying goal the bolstering of public education. "We want to help make a contribution to enriching the educational experience of all kids in Canada," says Lacey. "Our programs are aimed at helping schools to produce high-achieving people who will lead successful lives."

Last year, the Learning Partnership gained an added dimension when it merged with the Col-
Veronica Lacey, president and chief executive officer of the Learning Partnership, explains that the goal of the organization is to contribute to enriching the education of all kids in Canada.

LEGION OF WORK AND LEARNING, a not-for-profit organization that carries out research in public education and addresses policy issues. The merger, says Lacey, should help give more depth to the work of the Learning Partnership. "We see ourselves as championing vibrant public education," she says. "And our positions and programs need to be based on thoughtful research."

The Learning Partnership has won widespread support among educators and other Canadians concerned about the future of public education. John Evans, a former University of Toronto president who is now chairman of Toronto-based Tootal Corp., praises the organization for "striving to bring public attention to the importance of keeping publicly funded education a strong factor in our education system and trying, in a very positive way, to stimulate changes that will make the system better."

Imperial Oil has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Learning Partnership since 1993, when the company's chairman and chief executive officer, Robert Petronio, helped to develop its goals and operating principles. "I was delighted to get involved," says Petronio. "I've long believed the business sector should support efforts to enhance public education. Business needs a well-educated workforce. Education is so important to our country's future. Currently, Imperial's main link to the Learning Partnership is through Jim Levins, director of the company's safety, health and environment department and a member of the Learning Partnership's board of directors. "Much of the organization's focus is on areas like science, mathematics, technology and literacy," says Levins. "It's vital to develop students' interest in these subjects. Adequacy in these areas is key to the success of this country."

Vital, too, is making the connection between academics and the world of work. That's where Take Our Kids to Work comes in. A key goal of the program, notes Lacey, is "to get kids thinking about the careers they might pursue."

"We can teach kids how the skills we teach them in school will be valuable in later life," says Vic Huber, a career-program assistant at Maple Ridge Secondary School in the town of Maple Ridge, just outside Vancouver. "But it's not until they actually experience a real workplace that they truly understand." Huber has been involved in the program for the last three years and during that period has seen the participation rate at her school grow to around 60 percent of grade 9 students. At Maple Ridge, as at other high schools across the country, arrangements are often made so that students who cannot visit their own parents' workplaces can accompany other parents.

How do workplace visits affect students' ideas about their own careers? "Some kids come back say-
the approximately 10 firms then involved, and
nearby the same amount from the 17 participating
school boards (the scope had now expanded beyond
the city proper to embrace the greater Toronto
area). In the fall of 1993, the Learning Partnership
began operating, with Gordon Creasy, a former
vice-president of the University of Toronto, as
president and chief executive officer. "They said
they had ideas, but no programs," said Creasy.
"That's your job, they told me."

One of the first Learning Partnership programs
was Entrepreneurial Adventure, in which children
from kindergarten to grade 9 are given the oppor-
tunity to develop a business operation. In this
popular program, teachers and "business partners"
from participating companies help children as they
exercise literacy, mathematics and organizational
skills while gaining a sense of what the business
world is like.

Often, students use Entrepreneurial Adventure
to raise money for a worthy cause. At River Oaks
Public School in Oakville, Ont., just west of
Toronto, science teacher Sean Marks and manage-
ment consultant Sheryl Lubbock last year helped
group of 8 children to organize a project that involved
building more than two dozen wooden garden chais. The children found homes for the chairs and
raised about $550, which they donated to the school to help maintain the woodworking shop where the chairs were made. "It was interest-
ing and gratifying to see how the kids evolved," says
Lubbock. "They learned to start thinking in real
business terms about what they were doing. And
their excitement was a real gift to us."

In another Entrepreneurial Adventure, children
in teacher Brian Kellett's grade 5 class at Westacres
Public School in Mississauga, Ont., decided they
would raise money for Toronto's Hospital for Sick
Children by staging a student-teacher basketball
game. Even with the help of Kellett and Nicole Wells, a Bank of Montreal marketing manager, the
children had to face some of the tough realities of
the business world. "They wrote letters and
made telephone calls to local businesses soliciting
support," says Kellett. "That wasn't easy for
them, because people don't often take business proposals from 10- and 11-year-olds very seriously."

The children forged ahead, negotiating a $300
start-up loan from the school council, arranging for
the use of gymnasium space at a nearby high school and an appearance by the Toronto Raptors basket-
ball club's Dance Pak. The teachers, with a decided
height advantage, won the game. But the children
were winners as well: after expenses and paying back
the school council, they were able to give more than
$1,000 to the hospital.

"It was very much like a real entrepreneurial pro-
ject," says Wells. "The children came up with a
money-making idea, got financial backing for it, cre-
ated a marketing plan and sold their product."

Another of the Learning Partnership programs
embodies elements of science, mathematics and
with a dose of entrepreneurship thrown in. Known as I (Investigate! Invent! Innovate!), the program for children in grades 7
and 8 is backed by Imperial, which is contributing
$100,000 annually over a three-year period to help
run it. Imperial's Jim Levens helped Learning Part-
nership officials develop I, along with Fred Rechid,
one of several Imperial retirees who work as
volunteers with the organization. The program is
designed to give children a competitive edge in the
world of the 21st century. "We're trying to do it
by 1," says Ron Ballentine, a science and technol-
yogy coordinator for the Halton District School
Board west of Toronto, "so to encourage and pro-
 mote creative thinking because creative thinking
is a highly valued life and employment skill."

Students participating in I are asked to come
up with an invention and make a working model
of it. The invention has to be something people
might actually buy and use, so the children have to
think about advertising and marketing their prod-
uct. First of all, says Pay Trumble, a teacher at
Oakville's Abbes Lane School, students in I are
taught about the creative thinking that can spawn
innovation. After that, she says, "the big thing is
for them to come up with their own invention -
something that is needed in the world."

Although I is currently in its first year, similar
principles were at work in a forerunner program
called the Invention Convention, aimed at chil-
dren in grades 4, 5 and 6. Elisabeth Cuvimeline, a
science and mathematics teacher at Cardinal Leger
Catholic School on the outskirts of Toronto, is
participating in I this year and was involved in the
Invention Convention several years ago. She mar-
vels at the concepts students came up with. "One
girl had an idea for an improved toothbrush," she
recalls. "And another student invented a device
like a car wash for washing dogs." The program,
she says, "is exciting for all students, not just the
stronger ones."

The climate came that spring when children from
Toronto-area schools displayed their ideas in the
concourse of a downtown office building: "It was
the icing on the cake," says Cuvimeline. "The
children were just so proud of themselves." And
helping children to feel better about themselves,
while enriching educational opportunities in the
public schools, is what the Learning Partnership
is all about. Notes Charlie Friedsticker: "All we're
trying to do is help youngsters - if we can do that,
we're all winners."
Kate Frame
Royal housekeeper and conservator

Kate Frame doesn’t practice what she preaches. By day, she is one of the world’s top conservators, responsible for the preservation of an irreplaceable collection of art and antiques. However, at home in her 1920s art deco apartment in central London, the Canadian breaks all the rules. She so seriously abides by her professional life, employing quick and easy decorating techniques that are an anathema to her profession. “I do the worst work at home,” she confesses. “But it looks great, and it’s fast. I know what can happen to that unstable varnish in 10 years or what’s going to happen to that fabric I tucked on with glue, but since I don’t want to keep my things for ever, I don’t really care.”

Here is an undeniable contradiction between professional and personal style. Professionally, Frame’s official title is head of conservation housekeeping for the Historic Royal Palaces, an agency set up to care for the Queen’s palaces and treasures. As such, Frame is responsible for the daily care and preservation of all paintings, mosaics, sculptures, furniture, ceramics, glassware and tapestries at the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace, Kensington Palace, and the Banqueting House.

As we wander the courtyards of Hampton Court, Frame points out a number of sandblasted “I asked a Historic Royal Palaces curator if there was any documentation pertaining to the sandblasting, expecting there’d be records of recent conservation work,” she comments. The curator told Frame she did indeed have some documentation, and produced a copy of a handwritten letter from William III, with instructions for the purchase of the sandblaster and its installation at Hampton Court. The sandblasts are one small part of a collection that comprises more than 5,000 objects that are on display in several hundred rooms and are visited by millions of people each year. It is the damage that can result from the dust, moisture and dirt brought unwittingly into the palaces by visitors that is a prime concern for Frame and her colleagues.

More than 90 percent of the items on display are the property of the Queen. While Frame hasn’t met the monarch — and doesn’t expect to — she does have regular meetings with the Royal Collection Trust Surveyors, the experts who advise the Queen on her collections. “Essentially,” explains Frame, “everything here is in trust to Historic Royal Palaces to preserve.”

Frame is very aware of the fact that every action triggers a reaction, whether it’s the wear and tear caused by people walking on floors and carpets or damage caused by oils deposited on doors and walls as a result of people’s touching them. The kilns of dust that visitors shed collectively from shoes and clothing constitute one of her biggest challenges. In outlining the complexities of dealing with the dust, she explains that, after consulting with experts, she and her staff have determined that one of the best ways to remove dust from paintings, giltwood and other delicate surfaces is with a small brush made from the tummy hair of a certain breed of German goat. “We need to minimize the erosion that results from cleaning,” she explains. “Many of the objects are hundreds of years old and need to be dusted daily. We have to select the method that will be the safest.”

Minimizing the damage from cleaning also extends to sturdier objects like brass doorknobs. “We could polish them every day, but we’d have no brass knobs left after a few hundred years, so we just do a light wiping, degreasing and waxing. We try to avoid polishing as much as possible.” Five days a week, four staff members generally spend up to four hours each day gently wiping down the thousands of doorknobs.

While the measures Frame and her staff employ may seem extreme, it’s this attention to detail and long-term vision that landed the Canadian one of the world’s top conservation positions. Prior to caring for royal treasures, Frame was head of conservation for Heritage Toronto, and as such was responsible for 75,000 artifacts in 17 buildings.

Standing on a marble landing of the Queen’s Staircase at Hampton Court, Frame seems like the doyenne of a great house as she explains that her next challenge will be to stabilize the tanner’s Weld muntins that cover the ceiling above the staircase.

The path that led Frame to her office at Hampton Court began at the University of British Columbia, where she took fine arts and art history. Later, she spent a year studying French at the Sorbonne in Paris. While there, she took an art history course at the Louvre, where she visited the painting restoration studio. It was then that she realized she might be able to have a career that allowed her to make use of her background in art. “So I then went on this mad campaign to find out how I could get to the point where I could be sitting in a place like the Louvre, working on pieces of art.”

Her campaign led her to England, where she enrolled in the University of London’s prestigious Institute of Archaeology, taking a “science-based object conservation degree course.”

What really stood out about Frame when she was interviewed for the job, says Dr. Edward Impye, curator of Historic Royal Palaces and Frame’s boss, was her determination. “She’s incredibly determined and very good at putting her point of view forward.”

Impye explains. “She is one of those people who we say leads from the front.”

Impye says Frame’s role involves a large measure of diplomacy. Not only does she need to preserve the collections and inspire 430 people to adopt new procedures, she also has to deal with many layers of bureaucracy. This, Frame admits, turned out to be more complicated than she’d imagined. “I didn’t appreciate the complexities that result from there being so many parties with an interest in a collection of national importance,” she admits.

Standing on a marble landing of the Queen’s Staircase at Hampton Court, Frame seems like the doyenne of a great house

The challenge of dealing with the various parties reinforces Impye’s belief that to do Frame’s job successfully, one must be both very tough and very charming. Frame’s “great charm and absolutely steady determination is a combination that is very helpful,” he states. In other words, she’s the iron fist in the velvet glove.

For all the worries of her job and the long hours, there are, says Frame, fascinating rewards. Ten evenings a year, for example, she locks herself in the Tower of London with the crown jeweller. While he and his staff remove the treasures from their display cases to examine and clean them (only he, his staff and the sovereign are allowed to touch them), Frame, who is on hand largely to provide advice, squeezes up into some very narrow cases to clean them, check dust and pollution monitors, and ensure that the environment is optimal for the preservation of the jewells.

 Says Frame with a laugh: “It’s certainly worth doing a few very late nights to work with the crown jewels.” — Allan Lynch
Delivering Value and Choice

In his final essay as chairman of Imperial Oil, Robert Peterson takes a look at the growing role of open and competitive markets in the Canadian petroleum industry.

As I look back on more than four decades in the petroleum industry, I'm struck mainly by two things—how quickly the time has passed and how many things have changed.

The way people carry out their jobs has been almost totally transformed—and not just in our industry, of course. When I joined Imperial Oil in 1960, if you wanted to make copies of a document, you used either carbon paper or a Geostar machine, which you cranked by hand. Imperial, being technologically advanced, had entered the computer age. Its one computer, an IBM 705, occupied half a floor of the company's then new head office building in Toronto. The computer's central processing unit was powered by thousands of vacuum tubes and generated so much heat that the machine had to be water-cooled and watched around the clock by five employees. Despite its size and weight, that massive machine had only a tiny fraction of the memory and processing power of the computer that sits inconspicuously at the side of my desk today.

The past 40 years have also seen exciting changes specific to the Canadian petroleum industry. The 1960s were years of extraordinary growth in demand
for both crude oil and natural gas. The 1970s were a
time of turmoil, with massive increases in world oil
prices, OPEC, embargoes, line-ups at gas pumps in
the United States, and unprecedented conflict
between Ottawa and the western provinces over the
division of revenues from crude oil and natural
gas production. The 1980s saw the start of a major
consolidation of the retail gasoline industry, which
continues to this day, with thousands of smaller
service stations disappearing from neighbourhoods
across the country and being replaced by fewer, larger
outlets offering a much broader range of goods and
services. And throughout the entire 40-year period,
there have been major breakthroughs in the develop-
ment of commercial production from the massive
oil-sands deposits of Alberta and from Canada’s fron-
tier areas.
One change that I have found particularly
encouraging is the growing role of open and com-
petitive markets in the Canadian petroleum industry.
This represents a significant shift from the highly
regulated markets that prevailed for much of the
20th century.
Why has Regulation been such a pervasive element
in energy markets? I think there are three main rea-
sons. The first is security. Security in general is, after
all, the reason societies formed in the first place.
People gave up part of their freedom and income to
live in groups under some sort of leadership largely for
the greater measure of security the arrangement
offered. The leadership—whatever it was called and
however it was constituted—could afford to do things
beyond the scope of any one individual, such as build-
ing a wall around the city just in case that wall fell on
the horizon turned out to be a hostile raider.
In a large, sparsely populated and often cold
country like ours, products such as crude oil and
natural gas, which supply energy for heat and trans-
portation, have understandably been viewed as
necessities. Canadian governments have responded
to this view by introducing regulations intended to
ensure that adequate supplies would be available.
One of the first such regulations was the federal
Electricity and Fluid Exportation Act of 1907, which
sets limits on the amount of hydroelectric power that
could be exported.
The second major reason for intervention in
 crude oil and natural gas markets is to provide
stability (or at least the appearance of stability),
something that both producers and consumers often
crave. Even in the early days of the Canadian petro-
leum industry, which started with James Miller
William’s 1857 discovery near Oil Springs in south-
western Ontario, prices were wildly unstab-
le. From $8.75 a barrel in 1860, the price of crude oil plunged to 75
cents a barrel in 1862, follow-
ing a rash of new supply from the recently discovered oil-
fields of Pennsylvania. By 1865, crude oil was back up to $11 a barrel. But
after another state of
discoveries, the price fell to 50 cents a barrel the following year.
That’s a very difficult environment in which to conduct business.
In an effort to correct this
price instability, various
government bodies and product groups have, since
the early days of the petro-
leum industry, undertaken
to manage production, cre-
aturing either low stable prices
that would increase producer revenues
(which OPEC has been attempting to do with vary-
ing degrees of success since its founding in 1961).
The final reason for regulation in energy markets
was the apparent efficient use of capital. And here
I’m thinking in particular of markets for natural gas.
In the early days of the North American petro-
leum industry, natural gas was not a welcome dis-
covery. Petroleum explorers would often refer to a
gas discovery as a “dry hole.” Unless the discovery
was near a centre of population and could therefore
be easily used (as was the case in Medicine Hat,
Alberta, where the streets were illuminated by gaslight
from the early years of the last century), the discov-
er was of no commercial value. Delivering natural
gas to consumers requires a great deal of infrastruc-
ture (trunk pipelines, compressor stations, feeder
pipelines and so on). That infrastructure costs a lot
of money, particularly because most of the natural
gas has been found in the western part of North
America, while most of the consumers live in the
Free trade is delivering benefits in
terms of lower consumer prices
and a more productive economy

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sectors were reasonably easy to predict. However, it appears that free trade, despite the rhetoric at the time, is delivering benefits in terms of lower consumer prices and a more productive economy. A recent study by Statistics Canada indicates that Canadian manufacturing industries are becoming much more specialized than they were before the advent of free trade. We have certainly seen this trend in our company. Prior to the free trade agreements, Imperial's polyethylene plant in Sarnia, Ont., produced many different grades of plastic resin in small batches to serve a fragmented Canadian market. With the advent of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, tariffs on imports and exports of polyethylene resin were dropped, and our Sarnia plant could concentrate on longer production runs of lower resin for much larger customers in nearby areas of the United States. Productivity improved, and our plant, following a series of relatively inexpensive expansions, has emerged as one of the lowest-cost producers of polyethylene in North America. This type of productivity improvement not only makes our company and the Canadian economy much stronger and more competitive, but is also the only basis for real growth in income over the long term.

Despite these recent affirmations of the benefits of open and competitive markets, I suspect there will continue to be a constant tug in our society between those who believe that we need more rules and intervention and those who believe that greater freedom is the path to follow. And even those of us who are staunch boosters of open markets understand they have characteristics that trouble a number of people.

For example, one of the hallmarks of open markets is the choice they make. Immigration and travel have made it an increasingly diverse and discriminating group of consumers who demand the value and choice that only open markets can deliver.

If market forces are allowed to prevail, I see no reason why crude oil and natural gas, which now supply more than 60 percent of the total energy consumed in this country, should not continue to be major contributors to Canadian energy supply. Fuels made from crude oil delivered concentrated energy, which makes them the logical choice as a source of transportation energy and virtually inseparable for air travel. Natural gas is an excellent source of clean-burning energy. Both these commodities provide the raw material for thousands of useful and essential chemical products.

In closing (as it’s customary to say in this publication), I would like to state how confident I am about the future of the Canadian petroleum industry. During the past four decades, the industry has made some amazing strides. Back in the 1960s, because of market constraints, about one-half of this country’s capacity for producing crude oil was not being used. That made it very difficult for smaller companies to enter the industry and, in fact, there was really very little incentive for them to do so. Now, largely as a result of the deregulation of North American energy markets that has occurred since the mid-1980s, the Canadian oil patch has become a bastion of hundreds of smaller companies pursuing a diverse range of ideas to develop resources for tomorrow.

Another major breakthrough for our industry during the past 40 years has been the development of commercial production from the oil sands of Alberta. There are now dozens of commercial ventures (ranging from the largest earth-moving operation on the planet to small companies with just a few horizontally drilled wells), tapping a huge resource that could provide this country with affordable hydrocarbon energy for generations to come.

Imperial, I’m proud to say, has played a pivotal role in the development of the oil sands. A predecessor of mine, Jack Armstrong, was instrumental in breaking the lag jam that enabled the Syncrude oil-sands project, in which Imperial is still the largest single participant, to pro-
Winnie’s Statue
Winnipeg, Manitoba

If there were a prize for Canada’s most unlikely statue, I sometimes think it would have to be awarded to Winnie-the-Bear at Winnipeg’s Assiniboine Park Zoo. Created by the late William Fenn, the near-life-size bronze sculpture depicts a startled military officer, in full First World War uniform, holding a swirling bear cub by its haunches. Man and bear are gazing steadily into each other’s eyes, looking for all the world as if they’re waiting for some unseen orchestra to strike up a waltz. A quaint, family-friendly tableau, I thought, when I came upon the statue a few years ago.

The story behind it is equally quaint. Shortly after the outbreak of war in 1914, Lieutenant Harry Colebourn, a 27-year-old British-born veterinary surgeon living in Winnipeg, who had volunteered for the Canadian Expeditionary Force, found himself on an eastbound train from Winnipeg to Val Cartier, Que., on route to Europe. When the train stopped in the remote Northern Ontario community of White River, Colebourn, prompted perhaps by his lifelong love of animals, bought a female black bear cub from the hunter who had killed its mother. He named her Winnie after his adopted hometown. Winnie subsequently accompanied her master to England, becoming the pet of the veterans of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade. But when Colebourn was sent to France in December 1914, he left the orphan bear in the care of the London Zoo, where she soon became a popular attraction.

Enter the celebrated English writer A.A. Milne and his equally celebrated offspring, Christopher Robin. The pair made a number of father-and-son visits to the zoo, and there Christopher Robin fell in love with Winnie. Thus inspired (so the story goes), A.A. Milne penned his now famous Winnie-the-Pooh books.

The real Winnie died at the London Zoo in 1934, at the ripe old age of 20. More than half a century later, in 1992, on the suggestion of Harry Colebourn’s son, the statue of the soldier and his bear was installed at the Winnipeg zoo and dedicated “to the children of the world.”

With its homage to a distinctively “high English” brand of nursery whimsy, it can seem a very odd sculpture indeed to come across in such a robustly multicultural and brazenly matter-of-fact prairie city as Winnipeg, which, whenever I visit, seems to have gained in ambition and gravitas. Even early in its 139-year history (it was incorporated as a city in 1877), despite a population of less than 2,000, it liked to refer to itself in such Chamber of Commerce terms as the “Gateway to the West” and the “Bulwark of the Dominion.” But the booms were not unwarranted. Strategically located just west of the Canadian Shield, at the eastern margin of the Prairies, the city was a natural funnel for the nation’s westward thrust, including that of the transcontinental railway. midway between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, at the confluence of two major rivers, Winnipeg was to become a major industrial and financial centre, the nexus of the western grain trade and a magnet for European immigrants, who were to leave a strong imprint on both the city and the province of Manitoba (among these immigrants was a large contingent of Icelanders, who developed a fishery on nearby Lake Winnipeg).

Perhaps because of its relative isolation, Winnipeg, whose population is now 681,000, developed its own strong cultural life, pioneering a major Canadian ballet company and supporting two universities, a symphony orchestra, galleries, museums, theatre and an important writing community.

But consider, also, the city’s engaging and varied architecture: the onion domes of the Ukrainian Catholic churches, the synagogues, the striking modernistic Winnipeg Art Gallery, the grand limestone legislative building with its golden boy statue perched atop its dome, and the shopping centres and high-rise office buildings.

Above all, Winnipeg is a hospitable place, one that is reputed for its friendliness. “The vast prairie countryside inspires an openness that has become part of Winnipeg’s character,” wrote Barbara Cameron in the New York Times. “Licence plates say, with our exaggeration, ‘Friendly Manitoba.’”

So perhaps it’s not all that surprising that a Winnipegger should have made room in his heart for an orphaned cub or that the city itself should have made room for a statue of the famous Canadian bear. A word of warning, though. Don’t make the mistake of referring to the bear in the statue as Winnie-the-Pooh. Disney has a lock on the copyright. “We have to be very careful,” says a zoo official. It’s “Winnie-the-Bear,” please.—Wynne Thomas

Modern office buildings rise behind Winnipeg’s Manitoba Legislative Building.
Two Villages, One Town

Known as Kinngait to the Inuit and Whapmagoostui to the Cree, this town on the shore of Hudson Bay is the only community in Canada where the country's two First Peoples live side by side.

BY MARCO PFEIFF

IN

The small wooden church not far from the shore of Hudson Bay, an enthusiastic choir and congregation belt out the Inuit/Inuvialuktun hymns while two seal-skin collection baskets are passed among the pews. At 6:34 a.m. and cloaked in a long white robe, the Reverend Tom Martin cuts an imposing figure as he strides down the aisle at the end of the service to shake hands with his departing parishioners.

The church empties, the bell tolls, and Martin returns to the altar, where a new choir is taking up its position at the front of the church. "Crew change," he says cheerfully as the church fills again, this time with Cree worshippers. Moments later, they too are singing the familiar hymns, but this time in Cree.

Every Sunday morning, Martin holds a marathon three services—Inuktitut, Cree and English—at St. Edmund's Anglican church in.

Editor of St. Edmund's Anglican church, Tom Martin holds services in Inuktitut, Cree and English.
a northern Quebec community with four names. The minority French and English, each numbering about 150, call their home Poste-de-la-Baleine and Great Whale River respectively. To the 650 Inuit residents, it is Kuujjuaq ("Koo-jooy-oo-ku"—little great river), while the 700 Cree call this northernmost outpost of the Cree nation Whapamagootoo ("Whap-mag-oo-tou"—place where the whales are). It is the only settlement in Canada where the two First Peoples live side by side.

I am heading towards the town in a bright yellow Air Inuit Twin Otter, passing over a mosaic of potholed lakes that dapple the gently rolling tundra. It is a wild and majestic landscape of barren granite and scattered forests of spruce, whose height at this fringe of the tree line is rarely more than 1.5 metres. On the point of land where the Great Whale River empties into Hudson Bay, the pilot circles above a cluster of homes and then touches down on a gravel airstrip from which airport workers must sometimes chase herds of caribou before planes can land.

As I set off on foot to tour the town, my private haul of mosquitoes eke out one of the all-terrain vehicles—the North's summer family vehicle—that stir up billows of dust as they drive along the community's grid of unpaved streets. Beyond this grid, only tracks leading to hunting grounds pierce the wilderness; the nearest road to the South begins 200 kilometres away in Chisasibi, Que. The wind blows almost constantly, a blessing during the bug-filled summer, but wicked during the eight months of hard winter.

Like many northern settlements, the town's greatest attraction is its natural setting and community spirit; it has few frills. There are two basic hotels, two bars and a diner called Lucie's. The hub of the community is the Northern Store, which stocks everything from scooters to camping stoves. There is also the Inuit-run Great Whale River Co-op and Sandy's Corner Store, where kids hang out, shooting "What's your name?" or "horizontal!" to passers-by. Shipping is expensive to transport goods to the North, prices are double or triple what they are in the South. Two litres of milk, for example, costs about $5.30, and a 3.6-litre bag of bleach will set you back nearly $15.

Most goods are flown in, but heavy items like pick-up trucks and building materials arrive by ship in the summer.

The town has a skating arena, where hockey is played year-round (in the summer, the ice is removed and roller hockey played), a gymnasium and a softball field, which was set up on the outskirts of town by a couple of young police officers

keen to give teenagers an outlet for their energy in the summer. There's also a much-loved golf course, a scarily swift rolling lawn parallel to the beach. Locals point out with a chuckle that even the greens are a hazard: the plywood sheets placed beneath the artificial turf to prevent it from falling between the holes.

Freighter canoes, which have square sterns so that outboard motors can be mounted on them, are neatly propped in front yards. Since it's late summer when I visit the town, some of the Cree backpacks have sprouted tarpuses, where both Canada geese and raw geese from the fall hunt will be slow-roasted over fires.

Hunting is such an important part of life here that the school year starts early (in mid-August) to allow students to take time off later to participate in the hunts.

The hunting traditions of the Cree and Inuit take them in opposite directions. The Cree hunt inland, fish in lakes, and regard the sea as merely a highway. The Inuit, though they also hunt caribou, generally see the ocean as their border and most often head onto Hudson Bay for sea fish, seal and, occasionally, beluga, which they cut into strips and dry on racks outside their homes.

It was beluga that historically brought the Inuit to this spot every year for the Cree, it was a summer gathering place. In the early 1800s, the Hudson's Bay Company set up a trading post here, and for a time, Cree and Inuit hunted belugas together to trade the oil for supplies. When the whales headed south for the winter, the Cree would wait for them, and when the beluga started the return trip downstream, the Cree would light a beacon to signal the Inuit to drop their nets across the river mouth. Thus trapped, the creatures were easily harpooned.

I walk past a caribou herd drifting over a balcony railing and, swallowing my southern "etiquette," enter the Nachachegou home without knocking. "Ugh, here, if someone knocks, we know it's a white person," laughs Elisabeth Nachachegou, the daughter of Cree elders Maggie and Andrew Nachachegou, who sit at the kitchen table. Their peaceful faces lined by a life spent outdoors, the elders reminisce in Cree about the early 1950s, when the present town site was just a field of tents and tippees, the early permanent buildings being the church, the RCMP office and the Hudson's Bay store. "Then the Americans came and built a runway," says 67-year-old Maggie through her daughter, referring to the construction of the Mid-Canada Line, a Cold War network of military sites designed to detect enemy aircraft. "Our settlement was on one side of the runway, but the school was on the other. A military crossing guard led the children across." Maggie and Andrew spend seven months of the year on the land with the encouragement of the Cree Hunters and Trappers Income Security Program, which pays a quarterly stipend to eligible band members (those who practice hunting and trapping as a way of life). Andrew, 76, still makes his own snowshoes, sets trap lines, hunts, and parrots his

five-metre canoe to set fishing nets. His bounty is shared with the community.

The signing, in 1975, of the first modern land claims settlement agreement to have a major impact on the development of this community. The agreement resulted in the creation of Nunavik, a home-land for the Inuit of northern Quebec that includes 14 coastal communities, of which Kuujjuaq is the southernmost (the boundary actually lies south of the town), and the establishment of rights to substantial land south of Nunavik for the Cree. Despite the fact that the town is in Nunavik, the
Cree control their own section of town. The result of this dual proprietorship is that the Cree and Inuit sections are administered separately, and each group has built its own facilities. Two villages have sprung up in one town.

As I walk down the community's main street, Tom Martin pulls alongside on his all-terrain vehicle, waving his trademark wooden toque. "Hop on," he says cheerfully. "I'll take you on the official tour." We turn down a residential street. "This part of town is Cree," he says. "And in the South, houses have basements, piped-in running water and a sewage system." A little while later, we reach a row of homes with brightly painted siding. "These are Inuit homes," my guide informs me. "And like Inuit houses farther north, where there is permafrost, they have no basements or underground plumbing. Trucks deliver water and cart away sewage." Inuit streets are patrolled by the Inuit Kativik Regional Police, and Cree streets by the Whapmagoostui Band Police. But their cooperation between the Inuit and Cree, Martin tells me with a smile. "When the Whapmagoostui Band Police have a crackdown on all-terrain vehicles, for example, everyone detours through the Inuit streets."

The community also has two daycare centres, two municipal offices, two community centres and two schools (each running from kindergarten to the end of high school), and is served by two airlines. There is, however, only one minister, 64-year-old Martin, a gentle giant respected by just about everyone, who baptizes babies, marries people, ordains colts, and, as justice of the peace, signs search warrants. When someone dies, it is Martin who travels from home to home to inform relatives of the death before it is announced over the radio stations. And in the town's original church, a steel structure that was built in England and shipped here in 1882 from its first home in Little Whale River, 100 kilometres to the north, Martin lays out the dead — Inuit, Cree and otherwise.

For the most part, however, the older church serves as a museum. A Cree canoe is propped on a wooden post, a seal skin drum, a wall and various other artefacts that speak of the history of the town and its two aboriginal groups are displayed on benches and shelves.

When Tom and his wife, Marion, came north to live in 1984, they left a comfortable life in Toronto for a challenging one in the country's biggest Arctic diocese, which encompasses the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and northern Quebec.

As I set off to tour the town, my private halo of mosquitoes echoes the drone of all-terrain vehicles.

They loved the North, and a two-year posting stretched into five. A first child was born and then a second. The five years ended; the family stayed on. The children grew up visiting Cree hunting camps and fishing with Inuit friends. Martin has been charged by caribou; he has administered the Eucharist in tepees along trap lines and has been in a float plane that nearly crashed on route to a remote community. Although life may not always be "comfortable," it is, he says, endlessly interesting and satisfying. "It's so much more here than I could in the South," explains the minister, who can't see himself ever leaving the region. "I think we have problems adjusting to the more structured southern life style."

Dr. Tinh Duong feels the same way. "I love the cultural diversity, friendliness and challenge here," says the town's only doctor. Although a single medical building serves both Cree and Inuit patients, there are separate clinics and nurses for each group (those who are neither Cree nor Inuit take their pick). "Turn right if you're Cree, left if you're Inuit," explains Tinh, who arrived in Inuvik from his native Vietnam in 1975 and, in the spirit of adventure and professional interest, made his way to the North in 1978. He has treated everything from gout to wounds suffered in hunting injuries, but rarely sees fur bite. "People here know how to live with the cold," he tells me. Though the clinic is modern in many ways in the South, Tinh must send the more difficult cases to Val-d'Or, Que., or Montreal. "We don't have the facilities or the staff to deal with complicated cases," he says.

As well, every pregnant woman must leave to give birth. "Cree women go to a hospital in Val-d'Or or Chambly — their choice," he explains. "Inuit women go to a midwifery clinic in Puvirnituq [Que.], more than 500 kilometres north of town." This is one of the hard realities of the North. "It's very often traumatic for the women to give birth so far from their families," says Tinh. Having the close-knit community is also hard on young people, who must head south for postsecondary education.

It's a late afternoon at the bar in the Queen's Hotel. Apart from the wolf pelt, Inuit sealskin kamiks boots and traditional Cree costume that decorate the pine-panelled walls, it could be any sports bar in Montreal. Here, too, the various groups come together. Here, four languages can often be heard at once. A couple of teachers chat in English as they work on a laptop computer in one corner, while a group of men chat in Cree in another corner. Inuktitut can be heard at a table by the window, where six Inuit are playing gin rummy, while two middle-aged men talk in French with Michel Daguerre, who runs the hotel.

In the late 1980s, Daguerre worked at Nunavut, an Inuit-run hunting lodge 200 kilometres east of here, during the hunting season, returning to his home in Hull, Que., in between. But he missed the north where he was back home. And then he became manager to manage the hotel and bar in Kunnguitak (which is owned by the same group that owns Nunavut Lodge) presented itself. Daguerre took it, moving north permanently. "Northern communities are so close-knit," he comments, "and with two flights a day to Montreal, I can get hugs nearly as fresh here as in almost any place in the South."

Larry Hubert, one of two captains of the Kativik Regional Police Force, is off duty. After planking himself on a bar stool, Hubert, who was born in Newfoundland and raised in Ontario, talks about how he came to live in the town. In 1986, after graduating in marketing from Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ont., he joined the Jackie's Bay Company's management training program and travelled the North buying fish. In 1991, he became a district manager for the Inuit-
Students in the town are now taught exclusively in Cree or Inuktitut until grade 3.

I had not heard of Thetis Island, B.C., until last year. This tiny piece of land off the east coast of Vancouver Island is one of the lesser-known Gulf Islands. Its scenery, lovely light, and its layout is in that typical West Coast way, so no more remarkable than that of any of its neighbors. And there is no particularly special cultural or heritage site on the island. It's simply the place where I spent a wonderful family weekend in 1870.

It was my aunt's 70th birthday and she decided that she wanted to celebrate it by gathering her family together on the West Coast, where she lives.

From across the country and from Germany we assembled at the small Vancouver Island town of Comox, where the 22 of us (my aunt and her sister, my aunt's four children, this niece and our families) boarded the ferry for the short trip to Thetis.

It's hard to imagine a more exquisite journey. Behind us, cloaked in a soft, afternoon mist, the mountains of Vancouver Island rose and scattered about were several of the Gulf Islands — Salt spring, Kuper and, of course, Thetis. The sky was clear, the sea gentle. As the ferry made its way across the water, we older members of the group watched the shyness of our young children — ages seven to 18 — evaporate as they crowded together near the bow of the boat to watch some seals playing on a rocky outcrop. They were embarking on a communal adventure, and their unadulterated excitement was evident.

Thetis Island was first mapped in the 1850s after Captain Augustus Kuper of the British frigate HMS Thetis happened upon it while patrolling the east coast of Vancouver Island. Settlers began arriving at the island in the 1870s, but none of these early settlers made permanent homes on Thetis and a number died, defeated by the harsh conditions of the day. One, the tale goes, died of exposure on the beach after swimming several kilometers to the island from his overturned boat and then being dragged unconscious to shore by his faithful dog.

Towards the end of the 1860s, another wave of settlers came to Thetis, establishing farms on the island. Passed from one generation to another, several of these remain in the same families today.

At one of these farms that we stayed in, four cottages nestled together in a grove overlooking the sea. In the evening, the children would gravitate to one cottage, where they played games (spoons and poker), the older ones looking after the younger ones, while the adults gathered around the woodstove in another, catching up, remembering and laughing as we looked out of the picture window across the sea to the twinkling lights of Vancouver Island. Before bed, we would make our way down to the beach to watch the multitude of tiny lights (phosphorescence) dancing in the water.

During the day, we made meals together, explored the island and went for rejuvenating walks along the beach. We saw otters playing on a dock at a nearby marina, seals hunting for their midday meal a little way offshore, and bald eagles soaring majestically across the clear sky. The children fed apples to the farm pony, played hide-and-seek among the rocks and ran along the beach, climbed along arbata boughs that hang out over the sea — and fell into the water. It was delightful. This band of cousins, some virtually strangers to one another before the weekend, came together as a family.

On the evening of my aunt's birthday, we dined in the gracious old farmhouse nearby and afterwards gathered in its elegant living room to watch a video we'd pieced together from various old home movies and videos. I saw at 21; my cousins as young children living in the Bahamas; childhood get-togethers in England and later Canada, where we all came to live; weddings; our children as babies, growing up and now and then coming together with one part of the family or another. It was wonderful to watch the children watching the video, seeing themselves together on the screen and realizing that they had a shared history.

At the end of the evening, after we'd had cake and toasted my aunt with champagne, she rose to say a few words. "Let's not wait till I'm 80 to do this again," she said. "Let's start planning now and get together in three or four years." It need not be on the West Coast, she suggested.

Next time we could gather closer to someone else's home — perhaps on Prince Edward Island or the Magdalen Islands. This prospect made our putting at the end of the weekend more palatable. It was as if my aunt had set a new course for us all, reminding us that we were part of a larger family unit and that we always would be. — Sarah Landry