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Islanders are saving idyllic community



Business-land as seen from an alternative community.

Story and Photos
By Lydia Pawlenko

Five York students, in their struggle to overcome eviction from their Toronto Island homes, are determined to preserve what they feel is a unique, closely-tied community - an endangered species in the face of today's metropolises. At times in the last term, a booth set up in Central Square brought the Islanders' audible city-wide cry for support, "Save Island Homes!" to York.

GLIDING SKIERS

It is January, and a few lone cross-country skiers glide across the barren parkland. The lagoons, now frozen, have become hockey rinks for groups of boys who have just come back from a league game in the city. The wooden weather-beaten homes convey a comfortable snugness; supplies of firewood neatly stacked in the yards, and lazy cats sunning among houseplants on windowsills.

Living in a place where there are no cars, no stores, no movie theatres, having to commute to the

city by ferry, and all the way to York University, would you say that it hasn't been easy to live here?

Chuck Coyle and James Fowley, two of the York students living on the Islands, responded laughing and shaking their heads.

NEIGHBOURS & SHARING

"We grew up unaware of having inconveniences. You adapt and learn to plan around them," explained James Fowley.

"It's inconveniences can be seen to be its virtue. Because we are isolated, we talk to our neighbours, we share things," added Chuck Coyle, a philosophy and English major.

Both students have lived on Algonquin Island all of their lives, and feel deeply rooted in their community.

"Most young people stay on the Islands. Society isn't as transitory over here, probably because people are satisfied with what they have. They like it," said James.

Commenting on the fact that many Island families have continued to live here through generations,

Chuck Coyle said, "Even if I don't live here all of my life, the people that I know are special, and it is always nice to have that to return to."

The 700 Islanders are ordinary people who work, study, shop, and argue with their neighbours, just like anybody else, but according to Chuck, they lead a more existentialist type of existence. "The atmosphere is more casual and relaxed. You tend to live more from day to day over here. The feeling can be described as laid back."

HOT ISSUE

The 'Island Home question' has been one of the most hotly contested issues at Metro Council in recent years. The debate on whether the homes should stay or make way for more parkland, probably dates back to 1867, when the City first received title for the land from the Crown. Since those first years, many



Year-round recreation at the islands. Mainlanders welcome.

divergent opinions on what would be developed or not developed have been expressed by the politicians and citizens of Toronto.

In 1957, more than 400 homes were

demolished on Centre Island and Hanlan's Point. Although Metro is legally entitled to evict the Islanders, it is questionable whether the debate over the fate of 200 remaining houses on Ward's and Algonquin Islands has been spurred by a real need for more parkland, for the greater good of Torontonians.

"Actually, it becomes crowded on Centre Island for only about five days a year, during the Mariposa Festival," Chuck Coyle said.

CHOSEN FEW

Metro Chairman Paul Godfrey, in his efforts to evict the Island residents, has referred to them as, "the chosen few." "I can see why they don't want to go. I'd love to live in a park, so would a lot of people," Godfrey has said.

Chuck and James argue that while the majority of Islanders are fairly well off, they do not consider



York student & Islander Chuck Cowley.

for example," said James Fowley.

Meanwhile, the leases of two of the three exclusive Island yacht clubs have been extended to the year 2001, this action justified on the grounds that they are non-profit and are devoted to recreational purposes. These clubs, with their strict rules to keep non-members out, occupy 33.96 acres of land in a public park. The Island homes take up 29 acres. Both the resident island community and the yacht clubs add a human element to the island parkland system, providing a safer and less desolate atmosphere.

With tremendous odds against them, the Islanders have managed to put up a strong fight, and are now increasingly hopeful, due to the intervention of the provincial government in the matter.

NATURAL COMMUNITY

Professor Gerald Walker of York's urban studies department explained the reasons for their success.

"The Islanders were able to stage such a strong and successful protest

against eviction because they are well interlinked. They are a natural community with natural boundaries," he said.

Professor Walker described the Island residents as, "a group of politically sophisticated, well-paid people that are used to winning. They belong to the mainstream - the middle and upper class Anglo Saxons. The sheer habit of success gives them the confidence to stage a successful protest."

Gerald Walker explained, "In a weak position, you have to find cleavages in the government and split them apart, as did the groups in the Pickering Airport and Spadina Expressway controversies. I have tremendous regard for their efforts. Appearing as a weak group, the Islanders have managed to divide the provincial group away from Metro. This is the only way that such groups can become powerful."

Hopefully, people will come to realize that the novelty of manicured lawns, flower beds and candy floss stands cannot compete with the real rarity of a community that works.

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Rock criticism alive & well in Vanier

By Elliott Lefko

First off, let me tell you that to Robert Bowman, rock is more than just music.

"Rock and roll at its finest, as once articulated in a song by Rod Stewart can make you sing, dance, do anything. It is a total liberating force. I can think of nothing in the world more cathartic than rock and roll at its absolute peak. Whether it's Dylan, Stones, Pistols, whoever. It's something that happens. It's like a life force. I treat rock and roll almost like a religion; which is the same way that Peter Townshend and Patti Smith think of it. I think it's as important as that."

Robert Bowman is a twenty-two year old, currently in residence at Vanier. Presently, Bowman is doing his graduate degree in Ethnomusicology (The study of music in its cultural context). He is taking three courses, one a theory and methods course, a second dealing with the influence of Asian music on 20th century Western art music and the last one, a jazz studies course.

SIXTIES SAPLING

Like many saplings of the sixties, Bowman owes a lot to those four lads from Liverpool. At seven years, an older brother's girlfriend turned him onto the Beatles. He was hooked immediately. Before the end of the year he had become a Beatlemania, growing his hair longer and buying all the available

records. "From their I went to the Stones, Dylan, old blues and jazz and now classical music. Along the way I picked up on a thousand different rock and roll people. I now have over 2,300 albums."

Bowman's journalistic apprenticeship began one fateful day at a Doors concert. Waiting in line to use the telephone he ran into a photographer who worked for Beetle magazine (At the time Canada's leading rock music journal). The fifteen year old so impressed the photographer with his knowledge that four days later at an Atomic Rooster concert at Massey Hall he was given his chance to write. Beginning with reviews of Frank Zappa's film, 200 Motels, he soon progressed to interviews with the like of Pink Floyd, Emerson Lake and Palmer, Jeff Beck etc. "I've seen approximately 800 to 900 shows since 1969."

Bowman believes that rock can be therapeutic. He elaborates on that point.

ROCK IDEALIST

"One of my friends who used to be into rock and roll, and isn't anymore, sometimes wonders whether she should be, because she doesn't get any new ideas anymore. Rock and roll used to give her new ideas all the time. I pointed out to her that the thing rock and roll gave her, at least in the Sixties, was the idea that new ideas were good. It gave her an acceptance and



Gary Hershorn

Vanier rock critic Robert Bowman

awareness of being open to new ideas.

"The reason I'm not racist, the reason I don't think I'm sexist, the reason I believe in all the things I believe in politically, the reason I believe in socialism, everything I believe in, basically, comes out of the rock and roll experience. And yet at the same time it is meant to be fun."

One of the things that attracted

Bowman to York was its incredibly varied music program which included World music and Ethnomusicology.

"Unfortunately the World music program is currently in danger. Trichy Shankar is a music professor at York who does a whole Indian number. However he may be axed, although there is a petition against it. It's complicated. He's been on a visiting professorship for seven

years. They can't keep renewing it but they can't give a full professorship because cutbacks won't allow it."

Bowman continues: "Two of the most enlightened people I've met are Steve Blum and Bob Witmer of the York music department. Witmer is doing his PHD dissertation on Reggae. He also knows a lot about Sub-Saharan African music."

Bowman feels that Blum and

Witmer understand that rock and roll is valid in and of itself and there's no reason to apologize for it and no reason why it couldn't be studied at a university level.

DYLANOLOGY

With that, one of Bowman's waxing ambitions is to teach a college tutorial on Dylanology. It's been taught as a full-time upper year course before in the United States at the universities of Buffalo, New York and UCLA. He'd like to look at Dylan sociologically, linguistically and musicologically. Having over eighty Dylan albums plus numerous tapes Bowman obviously could prepare a really good, sound academic course dealing with Dylan in multifarious ways.

Looking to the future, Bowman has to decide on a thesis very shortly. He hopes to write it on a rock figure like a Patti Smith or a Keith Richards. He feels there has been a "dearth of intelligently or intellectually written material on rock and roll that treats it properly."

Bowman leaves us with one final quote.

"There's a reason why I listen to Baroque music, Anthony Braxton, Captain Beefheart and the Rolling Stones in the same afternoon and I'll listen to Tibetan Gong music that evening. There seems to be something to be gained from all of those. I think it's really sad that people limit themselves and cut themselves off."

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