

**In Search of the Group of Seven
and Explorer David Thompson**

- June 4-12, 2013



Loooong on my bucket list has been to experience Georgian Bay on Ontario's Lake Huron for two reasons. One is because this was the major focus of the Group of Seven, that iconic group of painters who between 1920-33 artistically defined the Canadian experience with our wilderness, here exemplified by Frederick Varley's 1921 *Stormy Weather*.



The other is because of the incredible rock formations in the Pre-Cambrian Shield.





The Dragon Lady and I had the pleasure of being dropped into the middle of both, guests of artist Candy "Bow Buba" Wilson at the summer home - living museum - her wealthy grandfather built a century ago on a prime point. The family still has several paintings from their association with the Group so long ago. "They'd just give them away then, to friends," BB said. Unfortunately, none were at the cabin.



The view from the veranda. The whole time I was here the worm stuck in my ear was Percy Faith's 1960 *A Summer Place* from the movie of the same name. Wandering about the grounds and woods I kept a watch out that I didn't trip over Troy Donahue knocking up Sandra Dee. Well, that and rattlesnakes, a frequent point of conversation, though we didn't see any. Thank gawd. A couple of water snakes yes.





The property is incredible, as is her hospitality. We had rabbit stew the first night. The service was century old polished silver and china.



See what I mean about a living museum? Man, was this vintage tub comfortable.



Candy's a fellow member of The Explorers Club and was a chopper pilot - the "Chopper Chick with the steely blue eyes" the media coined her to her chagrin - in the north. Although arguably most famous for her abstracts, her landscapes also draw important notice, like this one on the wall. She's my favorite abstract artist - and I love good abstracts, visual jazz. You can see her stuff at <http://www.ateliernorth.com/>



The Bow Buba got her river name a few years ago when she was my bow on the Churchill River below the Reindeer River Confluence. Because she used to wear a blue babushka like my Ukrainian buba, or grandmother, she naturally became the Bow Buba. We're seen here shooting rapids. She was a great partner, though she'd never canoed, just kayaked. Like her Olympian father, she's a major jock and caught on immediately, intuitively.



Neighbours include retired Premier Bill Davis. He didn't do badly.



And, just around the corner in Go Home Bay, the cabin of the late Greg Clark, though you have to be of a certain well wrinkled age to remember his light humour in the old *Star Weekly* back in the '50s and early '60s. He was first here as a boy in 1899, and then for the next sixty years. Many of his stories of the outdoors were placed right here.



But I said this was the heart of Group of Seven country, right? This is where the boys used to hang, just around the corner from BB's.



We went in search of the Group. Besides this and another cedar strip dingy, Admiral BB has a fleet of three cedar strip and canvas canoes in mint condition, and a turn of the last century inboard right out of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.



We didn't have to go far to find one of them at Pine Island.



A.Y. Jackson painted *Night, Pine Island* in 1924.





We walked around the entire island which the Bow Buba has been coming to since she was a little girl. I don't want to say how long that's been, but you can still see her tiny footprints where they made impressions in the then still warm, soft granite. The light this day was flat, dammit, and doesn't capture the incredible beauty of the rocks. It's like walking on a fabulous work of abstract art - it's no wonder that a major abstract artist like Candy springs from here, though when I questioned her she didn't seem aware of the obvious influence. The rock work makes it the most beautiful rock island I've been on. Thanks again BB. What a joy it was.



The rest of our short time in Ontario was so brief we had no time for visiting other friends, most unfortunately. One day was spent at the Ontario Archives researching original David Thompson Journals for upcoming expeditions. I can't reproduce images of my research discoveries yet, until I obtain permission, and even this shot of Thompson's famous 1814 Great Map comes from another source. The original is enormous, at least four feet high.



And the other two days was with family - Gene (Su's brother) and Judie Hattori (can you believe we were in the same class Grade 2-10?), daughter Marci and her precocious twins Abby and Ella. Gene's one of Canada's top photogs, having been official photog to the Queen on five visits to Saskatchewan and for producing (amongst other photo books) the definitive coffee table slab on the Governor-General's mansion, *Rideau Hall*, which is given to visiting dignitaries. But then he's Japanese and all Japanese, of course, are born with tiny little cameras in hand.



We'll wrap with Canada's most iconic image - Tom Thompson's *The Pine Tree* of 1917.