



page 80: [top] Picnic shelters and crowd on Bowen Island, 1935  
 [middle] Playground and races at Bowen Island 1935  
 [bottom] At the merry-go-round, 1909  
 page 81: [top] Cottages, 1935  
 [middle] Crowded pier, 1910  
 [bottom] Lawn bowling, 1935

image credits

BOWEN ISLAND, about three-and-a-half miles wide by seven-and-a-half miles long, is part of the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. It has long been a popular vacation spot for people wanting to leave the city in the summer. For the first half of the twentieth century, life on Bowen was dominated by a resort operated first by the Terminal Steamship Company and later by the Union Steamship Company. In the 1940s and 1950s, the island was also home to an artist's colony called Lieben. Summer camps for families were very popular during this time, featuring organized outdoor activities for both children and adults.

## Island Idyll

ANN TIPLADY

WE USED TO THROW ROCKS at the windows, listening for the satisfying crash of glass or the disappointingly dull thud as a poorly aimed rock hit a cabin wall. But now the windows were all gone, and there was precious little to be found in the derelict cabins. Everything was light green in the shade of the young maples growing up all around. In rare open spots where the sun shone to the ground, salmonberry bushes grew so densely that they brushed the sides of any vehicle coming through. In places, the dirt roads were little more than thin parallel tracks kept open by the occasional car or truck.

We were summer people on Bowen Island, our families staying in the Pepto-Bismol-pink cabins called the Orchard. A mixed-age group of kids, we swam, fished, played baseball, and

roamed far and wide, often going to the falls past the old cabins.

It wasn't much of a waterfall; the water cascaded down a rocky jumble about four feet tall, but decades before it had been developed as part of the walking paths around the Union Steamship hotel, long since burned down. There was a flat area by the falls with a surrounding rock wall on which you could sit. You could imagine young lovers there in the 1930s, with the moon reflecting on the water of the lagoon. We were there in daytime, watching the water striders on the little pool below the falls as they zoomed around, their feet dimpling the water surface.

One day, with no more windows to break, idle curiosity had us exploring the old cabins. Finding nothing else, we dragged a toilet into the road. Huffing and puffing, we set it exactly in the middle,

between the tracks, looking just so. It was a pleasing effect: the sun shining through a gap in the trees made the toilet glow. We went on our way, happily picturing Cy, the Union Steamship foreman, bombing along in his old truck, coming around a curve to find a toilet.

Next time, it was gone. Not simply moved, but gone. Obviously, we needed to do more. The empty cabins were creepy, moldering away in the damp shade, but reassuring each other, we explored further and hit gold. We found an old metal bedframe. A double bed. Perfect! Hauling the tall head-frame, the foot-frame, and the metal bedspring into the middle of the road, we'd barely finished putting it together when we heard a vehicle approaching. "Someone's coming!" We scattered, diving into the bushes. A vehicle skidded to a stop. A truck door slammed. A man was muttering and cursing. We held our breaths.



Although the rare car came through, the most likely person to drive through here would be Cy, in his old pickup. He always drove fast, so a loud rattling announced his approach wherever he went.

He was a foreman of some kind, overseeing the few remaining Union Steamship workers. Decades before, the Union Steamship had run a ferry bringing people to the island, to the Gatsby-esque hotel with its pool and clay tennis courts, baseball fields, picnic grounds, and dozens of guest

cottages. The hotel was long gone, but the pool and tennis courts remained, and our Orchard cottages, but the other cottages had been left to rot.

The workers we knew were Louie and Lyle. Short, solid, and balding, Louie sprayed the clay tennis courts in the evenings, using an old canvas firefighters' hose to shoot water high in the air, spraying back and forth across the courts and in our direction when the boys cheekily razzed him while dancing out of reach. Lyle was the skinny man who good naturedly dug the new septic pit for our cabin, disappearing into a rectangular hole he dug with a hand shovel. He fascinated and horrified us by spitting tobacco juice into the dust, standing in the road swapping stories with our dad.

We were never surprised to encounter Cy, he seemed to be everywhere, as we engaged in cat-and-mouse games with him. We gently bent the rules, climbing onto roofs or over a fence, swimming in the bright green water of the pool before it was cleaned and opened for the season. "I dare you to open your eyes underwater!" We'd hear a truck door slam. "Someone's here!" Had he just happened along, or had someone called him? "Cy, kids are in the pool again." He must have laughed as we ran.

He arrived at the Orchard cabins occasionally, driving his beat-up royal-blue pickup truck with rattling abandon on the loose rocks of the road behind our place. He'd crunch to a halt, ease himself out, and prepare to visit. Our

dad obliged; at the right time of day he might even offer a beer. When not trespassing, we weren't afraid, so we'd hang around for the entertainment.

One time he careened into our dooryard, pulling up uncomfortably close to the back steps. As he climbed out of his truck, our dog, Susie, advanced on him in full cry. A lab-shepherd cross, she was tall enough that when he reached out to her his whole hand disappeared down her throat. In a swift split-second he'd retracted his hand, saying, "that's all right," wiping dog slime all over his filthy blue work pants. Susie looked confused, as though asking, "What just happened here?" The novelty of Cy putting his hand down the dog's throat stuck with us kids. For years we reminded each other, asking, "Remember when Cy shoved his hand down Susie's throat?!?"



From behind the bushes we could see the blue of Cy's truck. We listened as, cursing and mumbling, he took the bed apart, flinging the pieces into the bushes. We couldn't have planned it better. Back in his truck, he rushed on his way, stones shooting out from under spinning tires. "It was Cy!" Of course it was; who else would be driving through there? Thrilled, we emerged from hiding, and fetching the pieces of bed from the bushes, we reassembled it exactly where it had been. ●

