

THIS WORLD of OURS

By Bob Harwood

Island Reflections



Islands have defined each stage of a journey I began on Lulu Island on Canada's west coast. Richmond, now a city of 200,000, was a different, dyke protected, rural world then. By bike I delivered newspapers and telephone books or rode a mile to the post office for the mail. We ferried to Vancouver Island or through the Gulf Islands to my aunt and uncle's scenic 27 acres on Saturna. Four time zones away my Scottish forebears settled on Prince Edward Island in 1775.

In the 1960's I spent three memorable years in the British Isles, based in London but residing in the countryside. Business and family travels took me to every corner of the realm and to endless treasures across the channel. Islands also play strategic roles. The Romans invaded Britain 2000 years ago, William the Conqueror, a 1000 years ago. But for the Channel Islands during World War II, Britain has otherwise been secure behind its channel moat. In 1963 I sat in the House of Commons as Prime Minister Macmillan first proposed Britain move from behind that channel moat to share in an evolving European Union.

When my wife and I were busy with demanding careers, vacations were shorter, perhaps to the Barbados, Jamaica, the Bahamas or other Caribbean Islands. During our two decades of extended winters in inland upland Mexico we often traveled abroad during the shoulder season of each year. Every corner of the British Isles was probed in depth. We watched Princess Diana's funeral on BBC from the Isle of Skye. We have seen much of Europe on river cruises, our hotel moving with us through changing vistas interspersed with experiences on board and on shore.

We entered Canada's Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence one memorable day at dawn. We have cruised on most of Europe's great rivers, on Egypt's Nile and China's Yangtze. We have visited islands en route such as Malta, Corsica and Sardinia in the Mediterranean recalling that on nearby Elba Island Napoleon was imprisoned. Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 27 years on Robben Island before becoming Prime Minister and ending apartheid in South Africa. Darwin gave birth to his transforming theory of evolution in the Galapago Islands. In each era imperial supremacy has relied heavily on naval supremacy and distant island bases.

We spent this March on the very special island of Bermuda. It was there in 1963 that my daughter learned to ride a bicycle. Barbara and I honeymooned there 34 years ago and have returned on special occasions to relish once more its physical and historic charms. This year we had an apartment in St. George's, the oldest English town in the New World. Bermuda, discovered in 1505, has been strategically important throughout its history, a way point for America bound settlers and the slave trade, a key military base in times of war. A sophisticated global insurance center today, Bermuda's charms are truly unique. Its modest area contains an endless array of bays and inlets connected by narrow strips of land or delicate bridges. Its climate is mild. Crystal clear waters show off its pristine beaches while ever darker hues of blue and aquamarine lift the eye to the horizon. March was indeed a month to remember.

In July I return full circle to Lulu Island where my journey began 85 years ago. Biannually the Harwood clan gathers for a reunion of 40 or more, many of whom still live nearby. I delight in seeing the baton being passed to future generations on a wide range of values, interests, and skills, on their commitments to education and careers. I am an islander born and bred.

