

Victoria Park Beach - Past and Present

Bookends of My Life Journey

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I am an island with water as a connector surrounding my circle of life. As I walk my ever expanding beach it is the water of my experiences that breathes life into who I am.

For the first 12 years of my life cycle

I lived on Brighton Road and on North River Road close to Charlottetown's Victoria Park. My lake was Government Pond. My mind danced with the boats in the harbour, cars driving on the ice and Dead Man's Pond.



I close my eyes now and see the harbour full of sails, rough waves and water smooth as glass, ice in the deep winter, ice cakes in the early spring, me sitting on the guns looking out at the horizon beyond the harbour's entrance playing endless hours with my friends on water and in the trees and dreaming.

In my childhood years, there was the boardwalk at the shore, part boards part clay, with a long, long fence from one end of the Park to the other. I jumped the boulders of sandstone along the shore line. I watched the seagulls flying, floating and diving into the water. I climbed on weathered beach houses no longer used and watched the water flood Brighton Road when the tide was especially high.

The shores of Victoria Park have become **an important part of my elderhood** linking who I am to who I was. The park for me is now a place for wellness. It is a place of peace where I can review my circle of life to both celebrate and feel sorrow. When I go somewhere, be it to a local store or Summerside I often end the trip by a visit to the park. I park my car and allow the waves of my life journey to wash over me.

Memories of my Early Years



Experiences of my Elderhood



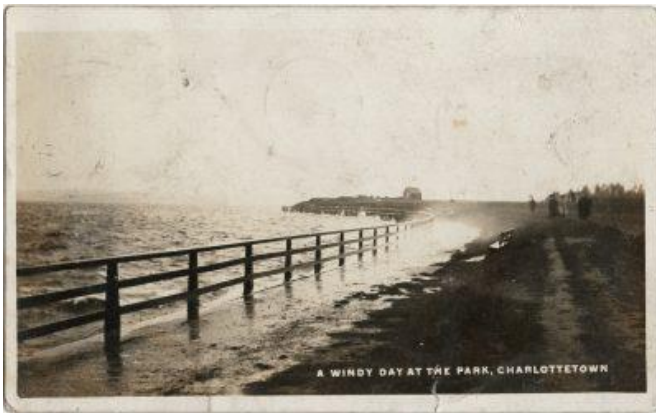
Gov't Pond ran from the beach to Brighten Road and was fed by an exposed stream that began in Spring Park and ran through the city. Flocks of water fowl rested there on their journey south



Most of Government Pond now is a parking lot. A small pond remains BUT... memories of skating on the pond and watching water from the pond rush to the harbour remain.



The 1940's and 1950's saw changes to the Victoria Park beach/walkway. Shore banks were fortified, roads paved, swimming ended. Standing on the fence, waves enveloping you, a trip to remember



The past fifty years or so has seen significant enhancements to the boardwalk. What is particularly pleasing is how improvements have reflected the timeless nature of the Park.



In my childhood the cannons were a favorite place to play. We became soldiers, We loaded the cannons and fired as imaginary villains threatened our homes and way of life



Accurate modifications have taken place . Cannons have been situated as they were originally. Signage explains different historic facts relating to the need for protection of young Charlottetown.



Sitting at the base of the lighthouse as its light slowly turned was a recipe for creating stories as we became fishermen, sailors, explorers and pirates. Diving or being pushed into the water only fueled the excitement our personal marine playground offered.



Like many lighthouses surrounding PEI, decisions were made to dismantle the buildings, most of whom did not require lighthouse keepers. The Brighton lighthouse was destined for elimination but was saved when a group of citizens formed a "Save the Lighthouse" advocacy organization.

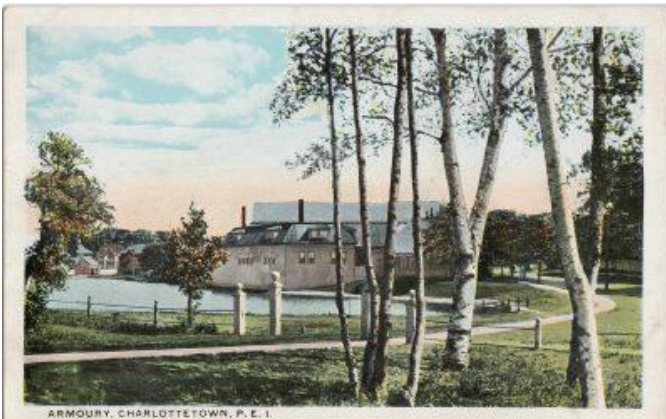


Urban school bus service was unheard of during my childhood. For my first four school years the morning, noon and the end of the school day at Queen Square School meant a long walk to and from home which often meant a trip through Victoria Park beginning at the corner of Rochford and Kent St. My journey through the Park began as I passed West Kent School home of the cities protestant children. Next door was the PEI Regiment headquarters followed by Government Pond then Fanningbank home of the Lt. Governor.

The Jones Building, one of three major government buildings is located on the former site of the PEI Regiment. Across the street is Beconsfield home of the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation. A centerpiece of Prince Edward Island heritage is Fanningbank the formidable home of the province's Lt. Governor. Victoria Park was once part of the property that was established in 1789 by Governor Edmund Fanning as a 100-acre parcel for the use of the colonial administrator for St. John's Island (renamed Prince Edward Island in 1799).



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Seventy five years ago Victoria Park was nature's playground. Trees to climb or hide behind, small trails to race through were perfect havens to play tag, catch me if you can, cowboys and Indians and numerous games associated with sea or fresh water. Imagine a pond in the middle of the park called Deadman's Pond and ferns so large they hid little people. Then there was the rally point at the veranda of the tennis courts building

Groomed ball fields, a swimming pool, a wading pool, a state of the art playground, a skatepark. well kept trails, several kilometers of boardwalk a temporary wharf, a fast food restaurant, multiple benches to sit on and always, the water. These and other amenities are part of the Park today.



What has not changed over the past seventy eight years, are Victoria Park's sunsets and sunrises. I sit on a bench along the boardwalk overlooking the water and recall the sun slowly dipping below the horizon or rising to expose the outline of the harbour. And, I remember those special times when the fog obscures the distance or the rain stops to reveal the beauty of a rainbow stretching from one end of the Park to the other. To me, it is a testament to the wisdom of generations past and present, who refused overtures from those who recognized the potential of the park for profit..

