

Chapter 11

Endless Summer

It's the first day of summer, and none too late. It has been cold and rainy for a full three weeks, which makes it coincidental that the first day of summer falls on the first truly sunny day of June. This morning, the radio forecasts a high temperature of 24 degrees C, and already it's time to take off my sweatshirt.

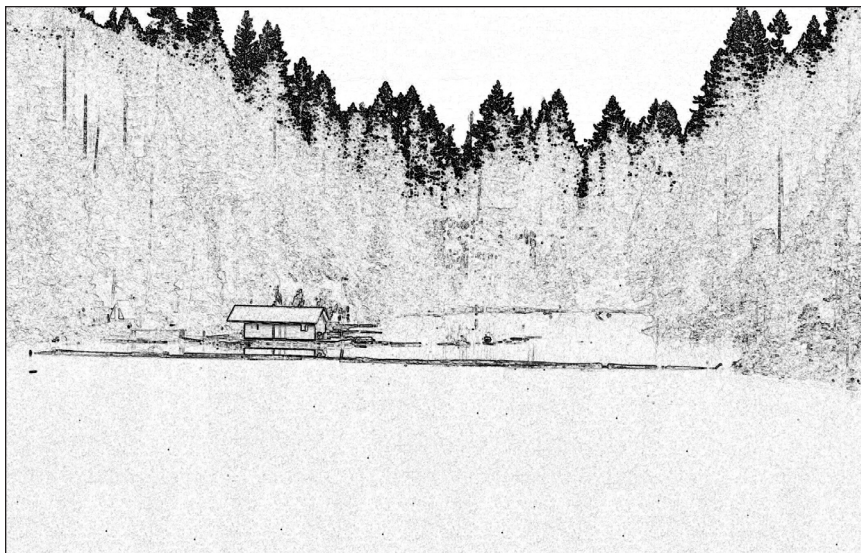
Yesterday, it cleared off in the late afternoon, and there was extensive blue sky. The DJ on the radio in the early evening told everyone to run outside and look at the moon. It is approaching full, and it's the first time we've been able to see it since new moon. He was right – it did look different sitting there in the clear, darkening sky.

But days are long (the longest today!), and after the moon rose last night, the sky clouded over quicker than I can ever remember anywhere in the past. I was in my kayak, paddling the narrows when the sudden clouding-over began at about 9 PM. I was headed home anyway, and it was a good thing, since the wind started to swirl just as I reached the dock. The grey clouds lowered and broiled, pushing downward in huge cumulus bunches. The grey was mixed with black now, and it was evident this was a significant instability in the local atmosphere. The air was thick with humidity, and the clouds appeared mammatus (normally associated with tornadoes), swirling downward in thrusts of grey bulges. Then the wind hit solidly, unable to establish a steady direction. Large droplets began to fall, and the sky opened suddenly for five minutes of heavy showers. Then, just as quickly as it began, the rain and wind stopped. By midnight, the moon was showing through the clouds again, cruising far south in its summer arc.

* * * * *

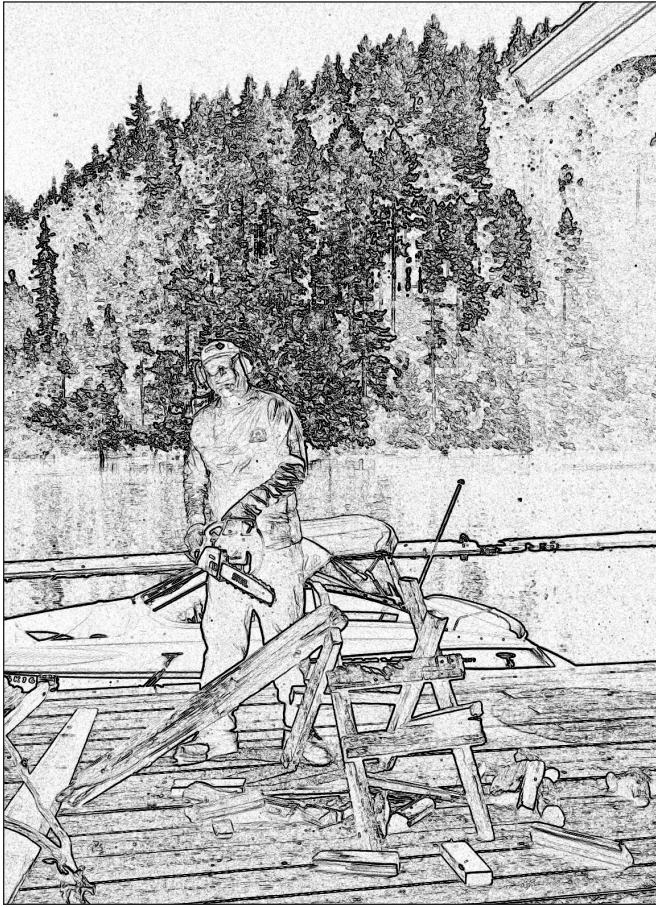
My mornings often begin with a trip around the float (doesn't take long), hauling in all of the wood that has drifted into my cabin area

during the night. Hole in the Wall is exceptionally calm most nights, and driftwood slides in, accumulating in the still water. There is no tide on even the largest fresh water lakes, but there are tidal-like forces here that I never completely understand. Maybe it's caused by changes in the gates at the dam, 10 miles south (down-lake) from here. Or it could just be the natural flow from the Head (20 miles farther up the lake) to the dam. I'm sure the slightest breeze also has something to with the currents, but the flow is not unlike changing tidal currents, just more difficult to predict. Usually, the flow is inwards at night and outward during the day. So I make the early morning driftwood trek around the cabin to prepare for seasons ahead when a wood fire will be needed.



Everyone tries to keep the lake clean, but occasionally junk appears among the driftwood. Included are objects that got away from somebody. Yesterday morning, what looked like a small white wheel and tire floated into the natural swimming pool behind the cabin. In cases like this, I usually ignore the object, and it disappears on its own to clutter someone else's area. But later in the day, I saw the white object again near the kayak dock. This time it was a bit closer, and I immediately noticed it was not a wheel rim and tire but a large white plastic dog dish, floating right-side-up. And there was brown stuff in the bowl. Yes, poor Fido lost his dog dish overboard from his

floating cabin during a recent wind, and his favorite dog chow was a victim of the incident. Now my attitude changed. I immediately welcomed the dish aboard, discarded the somewhat aged food, and refilled the bowl with fresh water, awaiting Bro's next visit.



Later today, I plan to crank up my chainsaw for the first time in months. I brought it down from the shed this morning, with the goal of cutting up some of the bigger driftwood so it can be stored in piles. The smaller stuff usually needs attention too, since I store it in bins for kindling. But first, it must be dried. That's a simple process. After a few days on the deck (at least on sunny days), even the most waterlogged wood is ready to burn. I call it "baking" the wood in the sun, so there are always piles of wood stacked everywhere on

the deck getting baked. I haul it out of the water wherever I find it, and there it sits for weeks (maybe months) until the chainsaw is buzzing again. If it rains, no harm is done. The wood simply bakes again the next sunny day.

As most people know, a chainsaw in my hands is a sight to behold. Everybody gives me plenty of space when I crank it up. The good news is no one is here today but me, plus usually I can't get the dang thing started anyway. I'm a master at flooding the carburetor all to heck.

Today there is an all-day Beach Boys Endless Summer blast on satellite radio, celebrating the first day of the new season. I grew up with the Beach Boys, and I had forgotten how varied their music is. It is now blaring at full volume – no one else is in the Hole today.

I climb the hill to the outhouse and listen to the blasting music from there. Satellite radio isn't licensed yet in Canada (soon), but my U.S. receiver pulls down the signal just fine. The XM geostationary satellites (officially named "Rock" and "Roll") are low in the sky here, and my antenna barely catches them through a gap in the trees to the south. The slightest obstacle interrupts the signal, so I'm lucky to be on the very edge of coverage. Otherwise I'd have to convince John to top a few trees for me. Neither he nor the forestry folks would take kindly to that.

Satellite radio and telephone technology make a big difference in my comfort level. Satellite phone coverage is fickle, since sky coverage is minimal in the Hole, with granite walls to the north and east, and high trees to the south and west. But I usually receive enough satellites to allow a conversation, sometimes brief, before it dies. Additionally, it gives me a good excuse not to make a lot of phone calls and to receive almost none, since electrical power is from solar panels or (when needed) a small emergency gas generator.

I pulled my floating garden in early this morning and harvested the kind of crop that is a good supplement to my meals. Strawberries, potatoes, and onions are particularly successful this year, although I also cut some asparagus today. Of course, I have no idea how to cook asparagus, but it looked almost store-size, so I couldn't resist.

So here's today's dichotomy – the Beach Boys are blasting away, singing about California surfing and fast cars. Neither is meaningful here. The swells on the nearby Strait of Georgia can be large, especially when the wind is from the southeast, but there are no shallow beaches to produce breaking surf: “If everybody had an ocean, across the USA, then everybody'd be surfin', like Californ-i-ae.”

And the only main road through town doesn't go very far. You see few southern California cars here: “Gotta be cool now. Powershift, here we go.” The tourists pass through as they race for the ferry: “Pedal to the floor. Hear his two quads drink.”

As I write this paragraph, a floatplane cruises up the narrows (directly off my front porch) about 100 feet above the water. He's destined northbound for the Head, probably to drop off logging managers. Like clockwork, I'll expect him buzzing past southbound in another half hour. Sometimes I wave, and he'll rock the wings, if he's looking this way.

The rest of the logging crew shuttles up to the Head at about 6 AM each weekday in an armada of fast and hefty workboats. Sometimes I'm awakened by the gentle rocking of the cabin, when the wakes from the crummy boats reach the float about eight minutes after they pass. It's a barely-noticeable movement that I usually sleep through. It's only the big storms and Lookie-Loos in speedboats within the Hole that really disrupt the float.

I haven't seen any boats in the Hole for days, except for Jess, when he arrived at his float cabin across the bay from me yesterday. He likes to hold conversations on the water. For example, yesterday Jess came into my breakwater with a friend who has purchased a powerful new boat. I noticed that Jess was doing all of the driving, undoubtedly because it's a very nice boat. Although I invited them aboard, they floated about five feet off my deck while we talked for a half hour. Too much work to leave the boat.

When it came time to leave, I asked Jess to give me a demo of the new 175 horse two-stroke. Since the boat is only 18 feet in length, that's plenty of power to cause quite an acceleration from a standing start (two-strokes are known for that). Right off my breakwater entrance, the bow came up high and fast, and the boat dug

a deep hole in the water as it accelerated, generating a wake that rocked my float for several minutes afterwards. As they sped away, I watched the owner-passenger holding on for dear life.

The days here just evaporate, partly because any project involving a float cabin is a major project. Just getting stuff to and from the cabin is a project in itself. A few days ago, I offered to help John bring some construction material to his float cabin. John is a true beachcomber and accumulates tons of stuff at all three of his family's cabins. Cabin Number 1 is his normal storage destination. Once construction material gets to his cabin, it stays there until used for something or dragged back to civilization or sometimes dropped (by mistake, of course) into the bowels of the fjord-like lake.

For this particular transport project, we had to load about a dozen sheets of metal roofing into John's truck. It was second-hand material that one of his neighbors was trying to get rid of. Everyone knows John is a collector of everything, so the offers come to him from far and wide.

After struggling to get the roofing material into his truck, we had to drive to the marina, drag the roofing down the dock to his boat and load it. Of course, his boat was already crowded with other stuff, so it took awhile to make room for the metal sheets. When we were done, the sheets of metal were sticking out each side of the rear of the boat by about five feet. Getting out of the marina was a trick in itself.

At John's Number 1 cabin, we unloaded the sheets and then hauled them across a footbridge to shore and then up a steep slope. With so much stored at his cabin, little room remains for more. But you can always climb a bit farther up the slope, so we did so carefully. It's a slippery granite gradient, but we finally got all of the metal sheets in position.

The question, of course, is: What is John going to do with the roofing material? So far, there is no real use, but he's thinking about building a roof over his new sawmill. Of course, he doesn't have the sawmill yet. But he's still thinking about it.

Tomorrow, a similarly involved project is on my schedule. I need to transport my kayak to the marina for mounting on my car-top

racks so that I can use it in the ocean. The car is there, the racks are already installed (another John design), but the kayak is here. Towing a kayak is a very slow process, and it rides unstable in-tow if there are any waves at all. So I'm going to try pulling the kayak out of the water tonight and cradling it across the back of the Bayliner for more efficient transport. It's a 22-foot kayak, and the Bayliner's width is only eight feet. Then it goes on top of a 1987 compact Ford Tempo. Use your imagination – it looks a lot like a big yellow banana on a soda cracker.

There's still 12 hours of Beach Boys music to go. ("Catch a wave, and you're sitting on top of the world.") The summer is new, and it won't be endless, but today it seems that way.

