

Weekend Lake Erie trip turns into wind-whipped ordeal for reporter

Editor's note: Senior reporter Terri Howell was late for work on Monday, but she had a very good excuse. She and her husband and four others had to brave wind-whipped waters in Lake Erie to return from Long Point. Her story follows.

by Terri Howell
There was no doubt about it, the winds had shifted, the waves were crashing to shore and at least for the night, we were stranded on the top of Long Point.

At first we resigned ourselves to the fact, even though it meant missing work the next morning which was Monday. However, when radio reports confirmed our fear that the strong winds and five foot waves on the lake might hang on for a few days, quiet resignation turned to fear. A simple weather report from an unfamiliar voice far away turned everyone's jovial mood, sombre. Nerves were on edge and people began reacting in ways I had never seen before.

Long Point is a 20-mile long spit of sand, shallow pools and scrub growth, stretching out almost to the middle of Lake Erie. There is no road, since in places the waves have cut large slits through the point making it impassable on foot or

by car. Nine of us travelled in two aluminum boats with outboards. Four stopped halfway at the break-water cabin where they spent the weekend. The rest of us travelled the remaining eleven miles to the tip of the point.

The purpose of our visit, my husband's and mine, was to visit our friends Sandy and David who were stationed on the tip of the point. David, our boat driver, is the warden of the Long Point Bird Observatory. He is spending the summer keeping tabs on the birds that land on the point, trapping and banding them for the observatory. He and Sandy live in a small cottage with no electricity or running water. This was to be our home for the weekend as well.

We arrived on Saturday afternoon. The boat ride to get to the tip of Long Point took an hour and a half, and it was cold. For the next few hours David and Sandy showed us how to trap and band birds as well as record their wing length, age and sex. It was fascinating and the afternoon soon disappeared into evening.

When we awoke on Sunday morning at 6 a.m. the sun was shining and from the cottage the day looked warm and

friendly. On my way to the backhouse I checked the lake on the south side of the tip. It was calm. I put any fears of being stranded out of my head.

We spent the morning walking, wading through pools and climbing to the top of sand dunes. The mood was carefree. The boys did front flips off the top of the dunes landing in an avalanche of sand halfway down. By noon we had stripped off most of our outerwear to enjoy the warmth of the sun.

We walked for close to four hours before returning to the cottage. After lunch we all went a variety of ways anxious to enjoy the beauty of the point in solitude.

It was about five when we congregated again. My husband and I and the other bird watcher that had come to the tip packed up our gear to get ready to leave.

David came into the cottage then with a grim look on his face and we knew that the winds which had been steadily increasing meant we might be stranded.

The weather report on the radio confirmed this. "There is a small craft warning on Lake Erie. The winds are gusting at about 30 miles per hour and the waves are three to five feet high. The winds are coming from

the north-north west." David called the four fellows at the breakwater cabin 11 miles away. Yarmo, the assistant

warden there, said no one was leaving, it was too dangerous.

"We'll get up early in the morning David and

try to tackle the lake then. If we can't maybe they'll have to walk out taking their clothes off to wade through the cuts," he

said. Kim and I exchanged glances. David apologized as though the quick change in the weather was his fault. However, like children that learn they can't go to school the next day, Kim and I soon resigned ourselves to the fact that at least for the night, we were stranded on Long Point.

Our carefree attitude spread to the rest and for the remaining hours of daylight we all went fishing in the pools. My dog, who had come with us, swam for two solid hours totally enjoying the

fact that we had to stay. At dinner time David announced that he would wake us at 5:30 a.m. daylight saving time, when the chances of the lake being calm would be good. We agreed and since that meant 4:30 a.m. eastern standard time, the time we were used to, we were in bed around 10 p.m.

The howling of the wind and the crashing of the waves kept Kim and I awake for a long time, I admit we were both concerned that we might be stranded longer than just the night. Kim was doubly concerned since

Monday was the first day of his new job and he was going to miss it.

At 5:30 we woke to the crackle of the radio. David informed the main land that we were leaving. Next he radioed Yarmo, who has a small 14 foot boat.

"How does it look at the tip?" Yarmo asked.

"Not bad on the south side."

"Can you take the three volunteers I have here in your boat? It's still too rough here for me to

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A more calm moment

On Sunday morning the fact that we might be stranded on Long Point was the farthest thing from our minds.

Here, Kim looks out on the lake with his binoculars. At that point it was still calm. Staff photo

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Midland teacher remembers S.S. 13

There were 74 students in John J. Robin's first school at Carlyon, near S.S. 13, North Orillia. "I had to put them three in a seat," he recalls. "In the nice weather, I'd send some of them out to sit under the maple trees. But 74 youngsters, was an awful lot, so I told the ones in fourth book (Grade VIII) that if they worked hard, and completed their assignments, I'd give them the job of teaching a class. They worked their heads off!"

The school inspector was impressed, and told J.J. Robins: "If you can organize this bunch, you can do anything."

John Robins taught for three years, and then entered University College at the University of Toronto. In 1919 he came to Midland High School with his B.A. and the task of teaching science and boys phys ed.

In 1923, he was appointed principal of MHS. "I believe I was the youngest principal in the province at the time." He remained as principal until his retirement in 1956, when Midland High School became Parkview Public School and the new Midland Penetanguishene Secondary School opened in Ingram's sugar bush.

In his years as principal "J.J." (as he's affectionately known by hundreds of his ex-students) saw three additions put on the High School. The teaching staff grew from 7 to 18.

Today, John Robins is well into his eighties. Handsome, alert and articulate, he says, "I enjoyed excellent health for the first eighty years."

He and his wife will celebrate their sixtieth wedding anniversary next September. She was his childhood sweetheart.

"We both went to Eady Public School together."

The family tradition of teaching carries on. His daughter Joan was a phys ed teacher, and his grandson is also a teacher.

J.J. Robins is affectionately remembered by hundreds of graduates of Midland High School and it's easy to see why. When you ask J.J. to recount some of the mischievous things young people got up to between 1919 and 1956, he just smiles.

"I have a very convenient memory," he says. "I just don't remember any of the unpleasant things. But I can tell you this - I loved teaching."



MIDLAND HIGH SCHOOL 1923-24

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