

# IN THE RIVER: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF DIALOGUE AND DIASPORA

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## ABSTRACT

*I give encouragement to David Nickell and the Between the Rivers community by offering an account of good relations between a government natural resource land management agency and local people: Canada's St. Lawrence Islands National Park and the people of the Thousand Islands, focusing on Grenadier Island. I speak from my perspective as a descendent of the former year-round community on Grenadier. I describe our diaspora, our heated disagreement with the St. Lawrence Islands National Park's 1970s expansion plans, and how the local community successfully engaged a dialogue that ended these plans. I recount what I term the double politics of dialogue, a "good-cop/bad-cop" approach used by the community, and its resulting providence of good relations. I conclude with the prospect of such providence for the people of Between the Rivers.*

## REFLEXIVE STATEMENT

*I consider it a great fortune that I can count David Nickell as a friend. In 2006, I stayed overnight at David's farm, walking the pastures, meeting the horses, picking tunes with his daughter, and drinking moonshine in the machine shop. He also took me to Between the Rivers, and it was a deeply affecting experience for what it taught me about heritage, decency, struggle, and commitment.*

**D**ad, which one is it?"

On a sandy promontory pointing south across the St. Lawrence River toward the United States lies the most wicked place I know. The Grenadier Island graveyard is a wild and windy spot, half-abandoned, a mile and a half off-shore, eternal home to perhaps a hundred-and-fifty souls, their graves marked out in lazy lines of eroding stone and rotting wood. The location scout for a horror movie could not ask for better. But that is not why I find it wicked.

"The family's stones are all over here," I call back to my son Sam.

He has gone to a section close to the water's edge, in part to escape the

mosquitoes and deer flies, which are murderous today. There is more breeze, and less insect life, at the shoreline. Sam comes over, pulling the fold-up hood out of the collar of his parka and putting it on, even though the day is becoming muggy and warm. Good idea. I put mine on too for some respite from the bugs.

"You're right. Here's Samuel Fish," says Sam.

Samuel Fish is Sam's six-greats grandfather, five-greats to me. His is the oldest headstone in the graveyard. He is buried here, alongside his wife Jemima, because their daughter—also Jemima—married Abel Root, the earliest known European settler of Grenadier, who started a farm in the middle of the island in 1803, or so one of his descendents claimed to a government land surveyor in 1873 (Smith 1993:178). Samuel and Jemima's daughter Jemima is also buried here, adjacent to Abel's grave.

**Figure 1: Backsides of Fish and Root family headstones, Grenadier Island Graveyard, 2007.**



The occupants of the graveyard are the only year-round residents on Grenadier today. At one time the live residents numbered over a hundred—114 in an 1871 census (Parks Canada 1990:4)—and probably never more than another 50 or so at the high point. The farms are all gone now, although some of the buildings remain, several converted into one of the 50 or so summer cottages that now cluster along the shore in a few locations. The old schoolhouse also still stands, disused since 1963. Most of the island, including the schoolhouse, is now part

of a Canadian national park. The border between the United States and Canada zig-zags through this wide section of the St. Lawrence, dodging through the roughly 1800 rocky islands that make up the forty-mile stretch known as the Thousand Islands. Grenadier lies on the Canadian side, and is one of the jewels of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park, which owns about 20 island and mainland properties and a bit over half of Grenadier's five-and-a-half-mile length, third-of-a-mile width, and 1200-acre area. In 2002, the United Nations designated the entire region as the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, a zone of granitic landscape that extends from the Thousand Islands well back onto the mainland and is home to many rare species and species at the fringes of their ranges. The Park is one of the key partners in managing the Reserve.

We, the descendents and former members of Grenadier's year-round community, love our park. In almost complete contrast to the on-going tragedy of the Between the Rivers community, described by David Nickell earlier in this issue (Nickell 2007), we find that government ownership and management has protected our heritage while also giving us access and control over it. In broad outlines, the people of Grenadier and Between the Rivers share strikingly similar historical conditions. Both were settled at government invitation by post-Revolutionary War families. Both were isolated by rivers, in one case an island community and in the other a virtual island community. Both had agricultural economies mixed with hunting, fishing, timber cutting, and a bit of quarrying. Both underwent a slow diaspora throughout the middle years of the twentieth century. Both have seen the national government come in to manage the unique natural resources of the area. And both, as I will come to, have had major conflicts with those governmental agencies. But the outcomes of these conditions could hardly be more different. As I say, we love our park—at least now.

At least now. I offer this account of how we have come to feel in the river of dialogue with government to help search for some remaining islands of hope for the people of Between the Rivers. Their past relations with the TVA and the Forest Service could have been much different, and their future relations with government agencies still can be. Maybe the story of Grenadier and the Thousand Islands can help point to that different future.

For the Grenadier graveyard is indeed yet a wicked place. Not wicked in the malevolent sense that word has come to take on almost exclusively. Rather, I mean wicked in some senses we have regrettably largely forgotten: as spirited and inhabited—or, as I would prefer, as inhabited by spirit. I experience the Grenadier graveyard as possessed by the presence of those who are not physically there, what I have elsewhere (Bell 1997) termed the "ghosts of place." I find these same ghosts possessing me, and thus myself possessing the place as well. These are my ghosts, and my son's ghosts, and I possess what they possess,

not necessarily in an exclusionary way but certainly in a deeply specific way. My forebears come from many places, and ultimately from Africa, like everyone else's—or even, more ultimately, from some primeval moment of electricity in a nutrient soup. But these are the most general formations of spirit. Without that specific embodiment in place, their force is intellectual, even humorous. There is no chill like I get standing in front of the gravestones of the Fishes and the Roots.

For David and his community, there is a similar chill of place in *Between the Rivers*—a deeply centering wickedness, in the sense of wickedness that I am appealing for. I know David at least feels that chill. I have stood by him at the site of the old Nickell homestead, admiring the flush of jonquils that give living notice of the family's former flower garden. I have looked into David's eyes as he took in that sensuous presence, and took strength from it.

Yet for David there is as well the presence of an un-centering wickedness, the wickedness of place denied, ghosts that cry out with David and his community for justice, the presence of wickedness in the conventional sense of—and the word does not seem to me inaccurate here—evilness. I have seen the presence of that devilment reflected in David's eyes too.

**I**n 1793, the swell of settlers in Canada seemed too slow and insufficiently English for John Graves Simcoe, then Lieutenant Governor of the newly created Province of Upper Canada, so-called for the upper drainage regions of the St. Lawrence, and now the southeastern portions of Ontario. So he released a proclamation inviting any remaining Loyalists from the United States who might prefer a more British politics, and some free land, to come across the border. Abel Root was one of these so-called "Late Loyalists," but evidently a particularly late one (still a family trait, I fear). We do not know the details, but 1803 finds him settling not on free land on the Ontario mainland but on Grenadier Island, on land then generally still considered to belong to First Nations peoples. Through a series of mishaps, misadventures, and misrepresentations—disease, warfare, broken promises, outright lies, and unfair deals—the Iroquois and Ojibwa inhabitants found themselves with the smallest potatoes of the new property-based agricultural economy. By the 1790s, the Canadian government felt itself entitled enough to the mainland terrains to give out free land patents to most any willing settler, having bought off the much diminished and disadvantaged Indians for tiny sums and with dodgy legal pretences—a familiar tragedy of colonialism. For example, the Canadian government settled the native claim to the mainland directly opposite the Thousand Islands by agreeing to provide free clothing to the family members of a local chief, one Chief Mynass, for their lifetimes (Bates 1994:16). But the

Thousand Islands themselves, which now can fetch half a million dollars for an acre or two, were then considered worthless; therefore there was no reason to organize the distribution of land patents to settlers.

**Figure 2: Sunrise over Grenadier Island, 2007.**



So late Late Loyalists like Abel Root organized affairs on their own. As fervent believers in property rights, and wary of having some other settler claim the same lands, they arranged token payments for long-term leases with local Indians from the islands, no doubt counting on the state eventually stepping in and validating their rights and granting them patents. That was not to be until the 1870s, though. Settlers on the islands responded by recourse of a complex and sometimes overlapping array of cheap devices to give themselves an argument to control the lands they cleared, developed, and claimed as in some sense their own. By 1850, one tally had it that the Iroquois had leased out 15 islands including Grenadier, usually for 99-year terms, for the grand total of 38 pounds, two shillings, and six pence a year (Bates 1994:21). But that was not the only lease agreement for Grenadier. In the 1870s a witness for one of the patent claims on a Grenadier farm testified that in the 1830s "I...did see Semuel Mallory...give to an Indian Chief a pair of Oxen as payment, or part payment for Grenadier Island [sic.]" (Bates 1994:63). A bit of cash to this one. A few supplies to that one. An animal or two to another one. No matter the basis of the claim, these were matters of little kindness.

Not that the settlers made out all that handsomely by their own standards. It was not an easy life. Woods to clear. Droughty and often rocky soil. Distant markets. Isolation. The special hazards presented by the River. All this and more led Grenadier resident William Hibbard in 1875 to write a letter of appeal for help from Parliament, in which he laid out their hardships:

Of such crops as we have to dispose of they can only be taken to such markets as can be reached in Boats, in Skiffs and Scows, having then to hire a carter to peddle it out or a man to watch your Boat while you lug it [the produce] about for sale—at a very great loss. Of course one can go to market or mill by choosing a fair wind or a calm and often with the risk of a squall or storm loosing all he has—But in Spring when the ice is rotten and breaking up and in the Autumn before the ice finally makes we at that season for weeks cannot get on or off the Islands. (Bates 1994: 69)

Some families did relatively well nonetheless, although that often entailed launching the younger generation off of the island. In the case of my own family, the launching off happened with the children of Abel Root's daughter Nancy. She married one of the few Grenadier Island farmers who was not a late Loyalist or a descendent of one, John Kincaid Thomson, whose father William had immigrated from Scotland in 1801 and eventually took up a farm on Grenadier, later passed on to John. None of Nancy and John's surviving children (one died at age 10 on the island) stayed on Grenadier. The boy, Alba, went west with the gold rush and eventually died in the Yukon territory at the age of 89. And the two girls married up. Mildred married a medical doctor (albeit one who practiced without an actual degree), and Isabel married Wilson Henry Westcott, a St. Lawrence steamboat captain, then a very prestigious job. The Westcotts were an old New England family that originated from one of the founders of Providence, Rhode Island, one Stukely Westcott. Stukely's descendents included an early governor of Rhode Island, and, most infamously, that governor's great-grandson, the Revolutionary War traitor Benedict Arnold. Good reason to be a late (or even an early) Loyalist. I am a fifth generation descendent of Isabel and Wilson, as well as a cousin of many other island families.

A few families did alright while staying on the island. The Senecals had the best farm by all accounts—200 acres of flat, stone-free ground—and made enough to sponsor a stained glass window when a new church was built in the nearby mainland village of Rockport. Abel Root's son Albert landed the job of keeper of the lighthouse at the upriver end of Grenadier, as well as title of Guardian of the Islands, one of the four men hired by the Canadian government to look out for the interests of the native folk who supposedly still owned the islands. For his services, he received a salary of \$250 a year, which was a decent

sum at the time, marginally enough to support a family on its own. He also got to live in the "government house," a fine story-and-half home built at government expense in 1866, and at the time the grandest home on the island. Plus he trapped and fished, in addition to maintaining a farm, a diversified strategy of income that many of the island farmers employed.

The growing tourist trade also provided some economic opportunities and brought considerable change to island life. Abel Root and other farmers often served as river guides for vacationers. Then in 1878, Joseph Senecal built a 27-bedroom hotel at the family's farm in the middle of Grenadier. Many of the guests, especially the better-heeled ones, came over from the U. S. side, which had lately become quite fashionable among the Gilded Age set. The Canadian side was generally quieter, and several of the families that visited the hotel went on to buy island properties in the area, where more could be had for less (Bates 1994). The island farmers increasingly found that they had a local market, at least in the summer, for vegetables, meat, and dairy, as well as for services like ice for ice-boxes and the construction and maintenance of the vacation cottages that began appearing, a few of which were themselves the size of small hotels.

In the late nineteenth century, social life on the island centered on two locations, sometimes at odds. Old Joe's Hotel (later called Angler's Inn) was, by itself, the central business district of the island. It was the post office, the restaurant, the bar (sometimes serving without a license), and the dance hall. Many a gay Saturday evening rang out with reels and squares, danced to the fiddle and the banjo, and to the hotel's old baby grand. Joseph Senecal's grandson Laurence later recalled that:

They used to dance a lot right on the big verandah [on the front of the hotel]. They had lanterns hanging around. They had square dances and round dances and two steps...[There was] a lot of people around who could play good music and they used to get together and make a band. Amie and Martin Root played banjo and violin. (Bates 1994:31)

For a more elevating time, the school house was the place to go. Here a traveling preacher would lead services on the occasional Sunday morning to the island's mostly Methodist faithful. The annual island Christmas program and party was held at the school. The island had a "literary society" for a while—debating such topics as "which is happier, married life or single life" (Bates 1994)—that likely met at the school. It served as the town hall as well. But there were also parties and dances at the school, albeit probably without alcohol's inducement to dance, at least during the many-decades debate over temperance that often divided the islanders and sometimes became bound up with other local tensions.

Albert Root, a Methodist and confirmed teetotaler after nearly drowning one night, blind drunk, really let Joseph Senecal have it during one hot moment in the island's temperance debate. It seems there was a dispute over how to run the school, and temperance came up. Albert wrote to the school superintendent that Joseph was operating at the hotel an "unlicensed French whiskey den" that had led to six drownings from "going from Senicals [sic] while in a state of intoxication" (Bates 1994:111). The description of this whiskey den as "French" was no doubt a reference to the fact that Joseph Senecal was a French Canadian Catholic; indeed, the Senecals were the only French Canadian family on Grenadier. The superintendent was no teetotaler, however, and wrote back that Senecal was "the most respected man on the island" and that the reason why he served alcohol without a license was simply because the local authorities had recently disallowed licenses—evidently sufficient reason for running an unlicensed establishment, as far as the superintendent was concerned (Bates 1994).

But these generally small and commonplace tensions over religion, heritage, alcohol, and likely local status over who was the "most respected" on the island did not keep Grenadier folk apart on the whole. At least looking back, the Islanders remember their lives together with an abiding fondness, as a few quotations taken from interviews in the late 1980s attest:

You'd say you were going to have a party and everyone congregated...People don't know what they're missing now. (Bates 1994:131)

...there wasn't a day go by that there wouldn't be somebody drop by. When somebody came there had to be a lunch, conversation, visiting. (Bates 1994:125)

We would organize skating parties when the ice first comes in the fall and there's no snow on it. We would collect wood all day so we could skate around [the fire] all night. (Bates 1994:131)

They also had threshing and wood cutting bees on the Island. It was reciprocal work. There was no money changed hands ever. The place you went to supplied the meal for the workmen. (Bates 1994:124)

I wish we could just run back the pages....It was a community....I would say it was ideal. Wouldn't you? Beautiful Thousand Islands. Lots of freedom. (Bates 1994:145-146)

It was the best place in the world to grow up because of the feeling of closeness with the people around you. Island people relate to other people better, somehow. (Bates 1994:146)



But as the twentieth century wore on, changing conditions wore out Grenadier Islanders' tolerance for the constraints of island life. Decisive was the emergence of high school as a standard for education. While the local school still seemed adequate for young children well into the twentieth century, older children had to be boarded off the island in winter to reliably attend a mainland high school. In 1950, the old school house was down to 10 pupils. In 1963, its last year of operation, it had only three. When it closed, all the remaining families with children moved ashore. As one island father at the time explained,

I had a choice. I could have stayed there and taken them back and forth but that's not that easy to do, to get a child that's six years old out of bed...and take them round Grenadier Island [several miles in a boat]. I moved to Rockport. (Bates 1994: 99)

**Figure 3: Grenadier Island school house, 2007.**



The increasing industrialization and commodification of agriculture also collapsed Grenadier's mixed farming economy. A skiff or scow load of butter and milk, once a mainstay of the island's cash-flow, did not fit into a trucked economy of industrial processors, distributors, and retailers. Had Grenadier been large enough to warrant a daily ferry that could handle a milk tanker truck, there might still be active farms on the island. (The vastly larger Wolfe Island at the

head of the St. Lawrence 30 miles upstream does have such a ferry, and as of the summer of 2007 still had 7 dairy farms and 13 other farms that provide at least one fulltime living [Knott 2007]). Selling boat-loads of vegetables to the cottagers, dock-to-dock, sufficed for a few, less income-oriented island farmers for a while. But that has been done with since about 1980 on Grenadier and since about 1990 on Tar Island, adjacent to Grenadier but closer to the mainland. All the farms are gone now. As June Hodge, the last person to live year-round on Grenadier, observed:

As people got old, they had to give up farming. There weren't a lot of people to help each other. After the School closed, the island went down hill. There's just tourists now. (Bates 1994:145)

**M**uch of what brings the tourists—other than the "summer people" who own cottages—is the St. Lawrence Islands National Park. Cottagers own most of the islands now. My immediate family owns two small ones entirely (although we do not have cottages on them and plan to keep them that way), about 30 acres on Tar Island (including one of that island's two remaining barns), and a small riverfront lot on Grenadier, shared by my mother and her brother. Other branches of my family own another four cottages on Tar. As well, the only remaining year-round residents on Tar, which is close enough to the mainland to get the kids to school except in the worst of weather, are cousins of mine. We all congregate in the area during the summer months and reconstitute the old community, as well as enjoy the splendors of the River. But one result is that if you are a boater there is no place to go other than to zoom up and down the River (although many boaters seem content enough to do that). The Park is the big draw, as well as the big protector of the islands against further development. Our little middle-class heaven of nature and family would be in far graver danger from relentless shoreline conversion without the Park. We all recognize that now.

Plus the Park has done a good job of celebrating and interpreting the region's cultural heritage. The source I have been quoting from so extensively is a remarkable report by Christina Bates, published by Parks Canada in 1994. I remember when she was doing the interviews for it, including several relatives of mine, and when she and other Park people came by and borrowed photographs out of family shoe boxes for the historical displays Parks Canada was putting up by the old school house. We were astonished at the great work they did and delighted when they returned a beautiful blow-up of an old picture my grandmother had of Jemima Root, nee Fish, Abel's wife. My mother still has it displayed in her cottage on the kitchen door, nailed into the wood.

**Figure 4: Jemima Root, nee Fish.**



But as I have indicated, our views of the Park have not always been so warm and hearty. In November of 1975, "the peaceful life-style treasured so long in this area was jolted by Parks Canada's announcement of plans to expand the St. Lawrence Islands National Park to include all of the Thousand Islands Area," explains *A Report to the People* (TIARA 1977), a five volume public response put out by the citizen's group that formed in reaction to Parks Canada's plans, the Thousand Islands Area Residents' Association, with its lovely acronym TIARA. At the time, Parks Canada had a considerable budget from the Canadian federal government to institute a system of wilderness parks (some \$500 million, one resident recalled for me). The national parks movement worldwide was then in resurgence, based on a no-people vision of the wild. This vision has since come into widespread critique for going back to a beginning that never was, for devaluing the present relations of local people to the land, and for the ideological contradictions of removing people in order to bring them back in as visitors and

of creating the wild through human political acts of boundary construction (Cronon 1995; Guha 1989; Peluso 1996). In Canada, the created wilderness model of the national park had already resulted in a huge controversy over the establishment of Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick in 1969, which entailed the removal of eight villages and 1500 residents, most notably the fiercely determined Jackie Vautour, who has to this date been able to retain his land (Telefilm Canada 2006; Wikipedia 2007). The Thousand Islands was to be one of the next prizes.

But Parks Canada had not counted on a group of local citizens both feisty and wily including, among others, Blu and Douglas Mackintosh. By 1981, the plan for park expansion had been quietly dropped. To find out how it all played out, in the summer of 2007 I caught up with Blu and Douglas, still going strong in their seventies, at their home on the mainland. Blu picked up the story first, as we sat outside on a second-floor deck, and explained TIARA's good-cop/bad-cop approach.

"I told you a little bit last night [on the phone] about how TIARA had two sides to it, this two-pronged approach," she began, pouring me a welcome lemonade. "One was the fighting side, which was the executive mainly. They were the ones who were going up to the minister's office....At the same time there was a study group, which absorbed the energy of the people, because you can only have a few people who are doing the fighting. People were worried and scared and angry. So this channeled their energies into something positive, which was to produce this study [the five volume *A Report to the People*—I think Douglas has copies of it—of the area. The social history, the biology, the botany. They [the five volumes] were amazing....And this gave us a lot of clout. They were widely praised, as this being the best citizen studies in North America at the time."

Douglas elaborated the point later in our conversation, "Parks Canada never knew if they were going to get punched on the nose or patted on the back. You see, they didn't know who they were dealing with all the time. They never could figure it out. They didn't find this out until the end. We never told them."

Plus Douglas had a flair for drama—and it helped that he played the bagpipes. "I think we got the right strategy going in the beginning. I found out that Parks Canada were going to have this meeting to make a little announcement to about, they thought, ten or twelve people. And I got the local MLA here..."

"Member of the Legislative Assembly, that's the provincial as opposed to the Federal [level]," Blu put in.

"...our local guy," Douglas continued, "who was very senior. I was working in Toronto, [and I got him] to order his parks manager to give [me] all the information I needed about what Parks Canada was planning, and what they'd done elsewhere. So I had lunch [with him], and it gave me the background, and

I used that to inform the press. And when Parks Canada came for that initial meeting, to gently tell us that they were going to take the whole area over, instead of 10 people, they had 300 angry people....And I went outside, got my bagpipes, and came in through a side door and drowned [them] out."

The bagpipe incident is still widely remembered. I heard the story from several people when I started asking about the history of Parks Canada's failed effort to acquire most of the Canadian section of the Thousand Islands. (The two largest Canadian Islands, Howe and Wolfe, were excluded from the plan.) I never asked Douglas what tune he played. But he and Blu surely seemed to have the right set of pipes. By that I mean that they quickly found themselves to be nodal people, positioned at the point of interconnection of an unusual array of social networks. They were not born in the area, but had come to start up a marine contracting business in the mid-1960s. At the time, the Canadian government was putting through Highway 401, now Canada's main thoroughfare, just a few miles back from the St. Lawrence. The highway needed sand and gravel, and being people not without means—Douglas has a degree from Oxford—they acquired a quarry on Grenadier, which had long been mined for its high quality substrate. It was not an auspicious beginning for two environmental activists, and they later sold the business so Douglas could go to law school and join the Canadian bar, eventually taking a position as a government lawyer in Toronto. But Douglas's years as a marine contractor meant that they became part of the traditional economy of the region and got to know a huge number of people up and down the river in a way that upper middle class incomers to a rural amenity area almost never can achieve. They had credibility both because of their background and despite it.

So Douglas was asked to become the founding president of TIARA, taking charge of the executive side of the "two-pronged" approach, while Blu with her considerable skills in writing and surveying became the central energy of the study group which produced *A Report to the People* based on over \$50,000 in private donations (TIARA 2006). Douglas's government connections in Toronto produced some additional dividends when, out of the blue, the newly elected left-wing mayor of Toronto, John Sewell, called to invite him for lunch. "Mayor Blue Jeans" was an avid environmentalist who rode his bicycle to work, as well as a leading advocate for gay rights, and is still an active and well-known personality in Toronto politics today. He had read about the controversy over the Thousand Islands and wanted to give Douglas some pointers on how to run a successful campaign. "I had no idea how politics worked," Douglas told me, and he took Sewell's advice to heart, including tips like always show up for meetings with your whole committee, never just one or two representatives; always do your research thoroughly so you know the subject matter better than the

government officials do; and present the officials and politicians with surveys of local public opinion because that's where the votes are.

"The strength of TIARA has always been that it has always founded its policies on surveys of the people," Douglas explained, reflecting on what he learned from Sewell.

"All the people, not just its members," Blu added.

And they brought in outside professionals to bolster their case, again drawing on Douglas's connections outside of the Thousand Islands region. "The other thing we did was to get a really first class lawyer, who I knew very well because I'd been through Osgoode with him," Douglas told me, referring to Osgoode Hall Law School at York University in Toronto, generally regarded as one of Canada's best. "And then we advertised for a planner. And unknown to our township, our planner wrote the first official plan for the Thousand Islands area."

What happened was the local government had been quietly working on its own official plan, in response to the controversy. "And they were going to put one in off the shelf, worth fifty bucks," Douglas related while passing me the cheese and cracker plate. Off the shelf is right; it didn't even mention the existence of the Thousand Islands. "There was a huge uproar," Douglas said, and TIARA persuaded the provincial government to institute a "special policy area" procedure that superceded the local government's efforts. TIARA's planner wrote up a plan for the policy area that very much included the Thousand Islands, "took it to the engineer who had been hired, and they said 'this is exactly what we want.' They put the whole thing in, and nobody knew that TIARA had written the first official plan. That was a very, very major strategic move."

By this point, TIARA had both the local government and the federal government on the run, with the provincial government caught in between, not knowing which way to turn.

"What was the official pulling of the plug?" I wanted to know.

"Well, the last thing that happened, Minister Warren Allmand, who was an honest guy, wanted to get to the bottom of it," Douglas replied. Warren Allmand was then the Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, which at that time included the administration of Parks Canada. Allmand later went on to become a major human rights advocate and now serves as President of the World Federalist Movement, which works to strengthen the United Nations, and teaches international human rights at McGill. He is, in fact, a world-renowned honest guy.

"He phoned me up and said I could bring two or three people and he wanted to have a meeting with us." Honest guy or not, Douglas had gotten advice before about this kind of move. "And I said, 'no, it's the whole committee or none,' just like John Sewell had said. So we all went up, and he said to me, 'Why have you

been so against Parks Canada?' And I said, 'it's the way you've behaved.' And he said, 'well, give me an instance.' ....And I said, 'well, for instance, at Kouchibouguac.' "

Kouchibouguac, recall, is the wilderness park in New Brunswick that Parks Canada set up in the face of concerted resistance by the displaced local population, especially Jackie Vautour.

"And he said, 'well, I think our relations are now very good at Kouchibouguac.' By then they'd taken the whole park over and were sort of becoming reconciled with Jackie Vautour, who had all these guns and was going to shoot them all. And I said, 'well, why was your park's building burned down then?' And he said, 'not as far as I know.' And I said, 'well, I've got the clipping here.' "

Evidently, that very week, the incensed locals at Kouchibouguac had actually set fire to one of the park's buildings. But news from the bottom is often slow to reach the top.

"And I gave him the clipping, and he looked at it, and he read it. I didn't say anything. And he turned to his ADM," meaning the Assistant Deputy Minister, "and he said, 'is this true?' And the ADM said, 'well, there was some indication of arson.'"

There was more than a hint of sarcasm in his voice as Douglas mimicked the ADM. Now he looked me straight in the eyes, raising his fist, fore-finger extended, in emphasis.

"And I said, 'now [this is] exactly what I'm saying. You are getting filtered information. And I want your permission to come directly to you without going through the filter.' And he said, 'granted.' And you know, that was the end of the problem."

From here, TIARA returned to good cop mode, standing back while the air escaped from Parks Canada's proposal. "We didn't press the thing," Douglas explained, "because we didn't want to put them into a position where they have to lose face. And if they had suddenly said, 'well, we've given up,' they would have lost face. So it was allowed to gently wither."

Blu brought up a light dinner on a tray from the kitchen and laid it out on the table on the deck for the two of them and me and my mom, who was along for the interview. We were squeezing the interview in before heading out to a board meeting of TIARA that night in the office of the Biosphere Reserve. TIARA is still going strong, and my mother and I serve on the board of directors, although Blu and Douglas have stepped down, moving on to other local involvements. On the agenda for the board meeting was organizing TIARA's annual meeting, which for the first time was to be held at a facility of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park. TIARA and the Park now find themselves agreeing on just about everything and work increasingly closely together. We reflected on the change

over dinner. How the Park brought in historians who, in my mother's words, "were actually interested in the people of the area." How one of those historians was a local person, and even a descendent of Abel Root. How the Park hired another local person, Bud Andress, also a descendent of Abel Root, to be the Park's naturalist.

As Douglas summarized it after dinner, while going over the copy of *A Report to the People* that he dug up for me from a box in the garage, "They've changed completely. And they didn't lose face doing it. That was the main thing. Not to lambaste them. You drive them right back to the beginning if you made one little thing where they lose face. You can tell them they're lying, if they are. You don't have to press it. You just make the point. And they say 'we didn't,' and they drop the point. And you let them. If people drop the point, they're lying. [But it's OK], it's done."

My driving was not its sharpest as I spun up the gravel to the St. Lawrence Islands National Park headquarters to meet with Gordon Giffin, the Park Superintendent. I had not been on shore and behind a steering wheel in over a week, plus I was a bit late, having gone to the wrong place at first—I had never been to the headquarters before. Gord was waiting for me outside the rambling one-story building and waved me over. We had not met, but I guess it was obvious who I was. Gord, I quickly and happily discovered, is an amiable man who looks like the first baseman on your neighborhood softball team. It was a nice gesture to be waiting outside for me rather than having me go through the secretary at the front desk inside.

Before we headed inside, Gord took me over to another rambling building to meet Bud Andress, who was standing outside with a park employee whom I did not recognize at first. I think Gord was not aware Bud and I are cousins—we had only just figured that out ourselves the previous week, in fact—or even that we knew each other. Besides, the real draw was what the other employee, a new park naturalist, Marie-Andrée Carrière, had in her hands. Then I recognized her.

"The turtle lady!" I exclaimed, when I saw the live little stinkpot turtle she was holding, marked with a bit of yellow paint on the shell for tracking.

"That's me, I guess," she replied with a laugh. "And you're the bicycle boat guy."

Marie-Andrée has been monitoring the rare turtles that shelter just off Tar and Grenadier and in nearby waters. The previous summer she pulled up in a boat in front of our cottage, looking for stinkpot turtles and northern map turtles. Curious, I had paddled out in my grandfather's homemade bicycle boat, an improbable contraption put together from an old bike, two long pontoons, and a



paddle wheel in the back. (You don't forget the bicycle boat.) She described the study as our boats drifted along and asked me about where we regularly saw turtles sunning and laying eggs. This morning, a year later, she handed me a color print-out of her new map of their sheltering spots, including where the turtles hibernate underneath the winter ice. In turns out that one of the main areas is just offshore of Tar. Marie-Andrée asked me to help let local landowners know, to prevent dredging or other disturbance. Yes, this is our kind of park now, and I think Gord wanted to make sure I knew it.

Gord took me into his modest office and sat down together with me at the conference table, not behind his desk. I began by asking him about his philosophy for managing the park.

"We have to consider everything on a landscape level," he replied. "People are part of the landscape. And the basic formula that we try to emphasize with people is that a continued quality of life is dependent upon a healthy ecosystem as well as a sustainable economy. And that's the basis for our programming, through a variety of means, like your chat [just now] with Marie-Andrée."

Gord believes that a central task of the Park is to gather data on the ecological status of the local landscape, through the work of the naturalists and in partnership with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, especially the Biosphere Reserve. "We're working in partnership with the Biosphere [Reserve] in developing something called the community atlas. So once you have the GIS database you can manipulate it. So if you're working toward, I don't know, working toward development thresholds, you have a basis for advice to municipalities, or private landowners, or commercial developers who might have an environmental conscience. So you can guide development.... Because you're not going to win this battle without public support. So that's the philosophy."

The contrast with the autocratic model of park management in the 1970s was both stark and refreshing. I tried to steer the conversation to that change.

"Now, as you know, I'm quite interested in the whole history of the change in the Park's attitudes since the 1970s," I began. "...Now that was probably well before your time here."

"I've only been here six years, but I've been in Parks Canada forever."

"So you remember the 1970s."

"Oh yes. I was engaged with a lot of the clean-up issues relating to the Kouchibouguac National Park, and the fall-out from a number of previous park expansion activities, prior to the mid-seventies. So I'm quite familiar with what went on here and in a number of other locations."

Gord's first take on this time, still early in the interview, was unsurprisingly protective of Parks Canada.

"When you have an expression of public outcry, and it's repeated, as a

government institution, or as government generally, if you're going to be relevant, you should be listening," he told me, in deliberate tones. "And be aware. And government was."

He also fell back on a bureaucratic response when I pushed him on the subject of how to handle conflict with the public. Gord had been talking about the importance of government serving the public good and reflected that "the public good is a difficult and really interesting thing to try to ascertain."

I pounced, maybe a bit too strongly for this early in the conversation.

"[So] What do you do as an institution if your view is that the public misunderstands what its good is? For example, with ecologic relationships. Right?"

"Well—" Gord began.

But I was on a roll. "What happens if the majority of people actually don't care about ecology?" I continued, over-talking him. "So, well, then we as a park need to respond to how the public sees its good, and we don't care about ecology either! Or do we say, no, our role is to look beyond the public? And how do you balance those things?"

It wasn't exactly textbook interview strategy, and it definitely flustered Gord's normal eloquence.

"Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, I, it's, it's, it's a question of balance," he eventually came to, finding a momentary foothold on the phrase I had suggested. It was not really the answer he wanted, though, as it could still open him up to a charge of whimsy, or worse.

Then his brows unfurrowed. "All government policy is established in the National Parks Act. And our mandate and our commitment is in this document," he said, more calmly now, reaching for the folder of materials he had prepared for me—a folder emblazoned with the title *Sharing Your Views* and, this being Canadian government, *Faites-nous part de vos idées*.

He leafed through until he found it. "The Parks Canada Charter. That's the expression of who we are and what we do and why." Gord pointed to the first section under "Our Commitments" where the Charter (Parks Canada 2002) reads "*To protect, as a first priority, the natural and cultural heritage of our special places and ensure that they remain healthy and whole.*" My eye also lit on the section that describes Parks Canada's "role" as "partners" with Canada's "diverse cultures."

"Now, if the government changes the policy," Gord concluded, leaning back once again, "well of course, then we need to change into something else."

But later on he gave a less rosy reading of government actions as a bit more than, oh, you don't want your land expropriated? Got it. Thanks for letting us know. Don't agree with what we're doing? Okay. But it's just what's in our Charter.

"What you saw happen here was largely a product of an era where we [Parks Canada] were on a mission, and it is for the greater good. And the punishment that was delivered was an education. And it was muchly deserved. The social environment of Canada was changing. People's consciousness of their rights and government's need to be more receptive to public views [was also changing]. So dear Blu and Douglas initiated this process, rightfully so."

I thought I'd try a more direct approach again, as we were getting along well and Gord was proving tolerant and open. So I presented a challenging scenario.

"Well, one could say that what was going on in the 1970s is that Parks Canada said 'our goal is to maintain the ecological integrity of Canada and the regions where we have our parks. Therefore the thing to do is to buy the whole business up.' "

Gord chuckled softly at what I was springing at him this time.

"So we don't have to mess around with this landowner who is dredging in the middle of a map turtle hibernation site,' " I continued, still speaking as if I were Parks Canada. "That's the way to maintain ecological integrity—to get the people out of it.' "

Gord paused, several long seconds, at this one, gathering his thoughts.

"You have to accept that people are part of the landscape," he began, his voice quiet and serious. "And the basic purpose behind a national park is for the benefit, use, enjoyment, education, and awareness of people," Gord continued, closely quoting the second line of the Canada National Parks Act of 2000, which states that "The national parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment" (Canadian Department of Justice 2007).

And Gord went on to observe that "parks generally that are operated to the exclusion of people are not successful. You have no affinity or value expressed by regional and local residents. So you have things like enforcement issues."

He elaborated this perspective towards the end of our interview, and I'll just let him say it.

"If my role as a park superintendent is to manage a landscape—and this is where we get back to some of the departures from traditional philosophies of conservation—[I have to recognize that] there's no such thing as a landscape that's pristine. It's been occupied and used by people forever, or ever since the ice retreated. So the fact that a national park exists is an expression of value—that the land is sacred. First Nations' values would tell us that the land is sacred. We understand that you can't manage a landscape without understanding its role historically, even prehistorically, to [the] present. So the cultural fabric is part of the landscape, and is part of the ecology....A national park is an expression of our present cultural values. But the landscape is also the product of thousands of years of use."

Our kind of park, and our kind of park superintendent.

Would that the people of Between the Rivers could have the same. Here, in conclusion, I would like to speculate—and I cannot in honesty call these thoughts more than that—on why they do not and how they might.

David finds that the cause of the shocking treatment of the Between the Rivers community lies mainly in the Weberian rationalism of the state, imposing generic models from on high. What I think the story of the collapse of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park's expansion plans shows is the political character of what the state counts as rational. Weberian rationalism, then, is the expression of politics as much as it is itself politics. The political challenge is how to become part of the dialogue that constitutes the rational, while at the same time resisting rationalism's consequences for effected peoples.

This *double politics* is what I think Blu and Douglas's good-cop/bad-cop strategy was so effective at. They enabled the people of Grenadier and the other Canadian Thousand Islands to engage and hold a place in the dialogue of governmental rationalism, ultimately helping change the operating philosophy used by park superintendents like Gord Giffin—a philosophy now written into the Parks Canada Charter (which was established at the direction of the Parks Canada Agency Act of 1998, section 16) and associated policies of Parks Canada that superintendents like Gord can point to when confronted by awkward questions. Gord pointed there in earnest, I am convinced. Perhaps other Parks Canada superintendents may fall back on such policy documents not in earnest. I have no evidence that they do or do not, as I have not interviewed them. But the content of those documents do shape and constrain the actions of park managers. And therein can lie a benefit of Weberian rationalism—depending on the content of that rationalism.

For dialogue should not be seen as some happy realm beyond power and interest. Rather, dialogue is a social situation in which the participants find the ability to respond to each other and to have those responses, and the social conditions they reflect, taken into consideration by each other (Bell 2001). Such a social situation is not a gift to be found in a Christmas stocking. Blu and Douglas used the power of their credibility and associated networks to gain a hearing from the unwilling. But once engaged in the dialogue, they had the wisdom to take the conditions of the unwilling into consideration. They gained the face to speak, and did so without gainsaying the face of others. Douglas's emphasis on the importance of face for government officials, based no doubt on his own experiences as a government lawyer, reflected his sensitivity to the interests and social conditions of the bureaucrat, trying to hold down a job, a

career, and family and community ties. Without face there can be no dialogue, willing or unwilling. And without power, in its many and often perverse forms, there can be no face.



**Figure 5: Cleat and rope on a Grenadier Island dock, 2007.**

Now, years on, the St. Lawrence Islands National Park positively needs public engagement. Fees, I learned from Gord, are only about 15 percent of the Park's annual budget, and the rates of individual fees are set in Ottawa. It's not a place where he can grow the budget much. The other 85 percent comes from the feelings of good will Canadians locally and nationally, as expressed through their elected officials, feel for their parks. Plus St. Lawrence Islands National Park's landholdings are unusually disconnected, and there remains little chance of public support to unite them through the kind of massive expansion proposed in the 1970s. So it seems that Parks Canada sent an old hand at public engagement, experienced in the "clean up" of Kouchibouguac and elsewhere, as Gord explained, to come and get public process going in the Thousand Islands region. It helps a lot that this old hand gives ample evidence of actually believing in public process.

We do not love absolutely everything about the Park, I should note. I wish the Park took better care of the school house and other historic structures on Grenadier, for one. But I recognize budgets do have limits, and I would not trade a greater focus on user fees for new roofs. More importantly, I wish the Park

were much more aggressive about strategic land purchases in the islands, and I lament that several key properties have come on the market in the past decade and not gone to the Park. Here I recognize that TIARA was, in a way, too successful, and the Park remains very cautious about any expansion. And I really resent the name of the Park. The phrase "St. Lawrence Islands" has no historical roots that I am aware of and is today found nowhere except as the name of the Park. The name of the area, for 400 years, has been the Thousand Islands or Les Milles Îles. And before that (and for some people still), the name was Manitouana, meaning "garden of the Great Spirit." The current name of the Park is an affront to heritage. But Gord, I recently learned, recognizes this and has been quietly sounding people out about starting a public conversation on a possible name change. (Manitouana National Park—I like the sound of it.)

So it really is our kind of park and superintendent that emerged from the double politics of dialogue. But also it is important to recognize the angels of dialogue that are perhaps as necessary as they are unpredictable. The providence of having a nodal and talented couple like Blu and Douglas. Of having an honest guy in a powerful position. Of contextual resonances to draw upon, like Kouchibouguac. Of thinking to bring a newspaper clipping to a meeting. But these are angels that Blu and Douglas provided with a space of welcome, a providence for providence.

Have the people of Between the Rivers strategically erred in some way in their own efforts to shape such providence? I am not in a position to say. Certainly they have faced challenges to a double politics that the people of Grenadier and the Thousand Islands did not. To begin with, I have not heard tell of nodal people who parallel Blu and Douglas, although perhaps David himself, as a professor at the local college, may come the closest. Plus the U. S. Forest Service and the TVA, the agencies that the Between the Rivers people have had to contend with, are quite different organizations than a national parks service or ministry. Both have deep organizational obligations to capital and industry, written into statute, the TVA as a for-profit entity on its own and the Forest Service as providing the timber industry, and increasingly the recreational industry, with acres of trees for their various forms of harvesting. For such institutional rationalities, local public relations are more something to be managed, not as much something to be positively sought as a basis for program direction and support. Plus the TVA used its shocking powers of eminent domain to put together an unusually cohesive property with little in the way of the private in-holdings and jagged boundaries characteristic of most public lands, giving them little structural need to negotiate with local peoples.

Which is all pretty gloomy. But there remains potential to change the current rationality. Part of the disappointment the people of Between the Rivers have experienced with their new landlord, the Forest Service, is that the property was

finally transferred away from the TVA in the fall of 1999, little more than a year before the Bush Administration came in with its authoritarianism, its obeisance to industry, and its vision of market-based government that demands agencies to increasingly fund themselves through user fees. So the Forest Service has established fee-based travesties of heritage like "The Homeplace" and the "Elk and Bison Prairie," and has seen the Between the Rivers people as impediments to, rather than resources for, the rationality—if we may dignify it as such—currently coming out of Washington. Conditions, and Weberian rationalities, may be very different in 2009, at least we may hope.

Rationalities may also be more slowly shifting as the next generation of Forest Service managers make their way up the ranks. Public participation is the watchword many professors today teach by in graduate programs for future natural resource managers. I know because I teach in such a program myself, and participation is on everyone's lips, it seems. Plus the natural resource journals are jammed with discussions of the issues of participation, with a similar plethora of terms to describe it—participatory management, co-management, community-based management, deliberative environmentalism, community forestry, participatory rural appraisal, participatory action research, and more (cf. Bryan 2004; Hurley and Walker 2004; Lane 2001; Lee 2007; Parkins and Mitchell 2005; Weber 2000; Swart 2003). And we are busy assigning this literature to our students. Thus, the "departures from traditional philosophies of conservation" that Gord describes should soon spread well beyond the national parks agencies, and indeed in much of the Forest Service already have done so (Wang et al. 2002; Frenzt et al. 2000). Given half a chance by a different administration, I am of good and I think not unreasonable hope that the people of Between the Rivers will encounter a far more sympathetic double politics.

So I close what I hope has been encouragement for David and his community. The wicked spirit of place is a fragile aliveness, a tender flame on the wick of memory, ever threatened by the winds of politics. Keep it burning.

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