

AN EVENING ON HURRICANE POINT ¹

Everyone has that special place. It is a place that connects you with your soul and the very fiber of your being. It may remind you of the fundamentals in life such as home and family. Often it is a place that very few people know about. Perhaps it is a place of majestic beauty. It may be a large landscape with large majestic vistas or a small garden that is serene and peaceful. It is a place that when someone says to you think of a beautiful place, you think of this place. When someone asks me that question, one of those places that immediately jumps into my mind is Hurricane Point.

Hurricane Point is located on Sugar Island in the middle of the 1,000 Islands in the St. Lawrence River several miles west of the Route 81 bridge that crosses the river from the United States into Canada. The Island is owned by the American Canoe Association since 1886 and is available for use by its members. It is one of the few islands that is large enough that it is labeled on most maps of the area.

An evening on Hurricane Point is like a Broadway play that plays to its audience every night. Every night the same play unfolds in front of the audience, yet each individual performance is unique and quite different from the other performances. Each performance is breathtaking. "An Evening at Hurricane Point" is a play that is so fine that I could sit there every evening and watch the same play unfold in its majestic beauty in front of me while enjoying the variation provided by the individual players on the stage.

This evening I was trying out a new pair of binoculars. These binoculars were unique in that there is a compass incorporated into them for taking bearings. Just point, look and read the bearing. From a navigation perspective, this feature is very convenient. Also, they have a rating of 7x50. The seven refers to the magnification of the binoculars. Objects will appear seven times larger than normal. In terms of magnification, there are more powerful binoculars although these did their job quite well. The 50 refers to the brightness or the amount of light that the binoculars allow to enter the lenses. The higher the value, the more light that enters the binoculars. These binoculars were bright. It makes quite a difference at dusk when you can see things through the binoculars that you can't see with your naked eye. In a sense, they were one step short of night vision goggles.

Tonight, "An Evening on Hurricane Point" was a play like every other night. When I arrived for the first act of this play, the sun had not yet set over the horizon. It was still visible over Gananoque, Canada to the northwest of me. I placed my seat on the massive rock outcropping that was Hurricane Point and waited for the evening play to unfold in front of me. The view is to the west and the stage offers a wide panoramic view of the St. Lawrence River that literally opens up in front of the viewer. Using compass bearings, the view starts on the right out of the north with a bearing of 320 degrees. Then it spreads around in front of you so that you are looking directly west and up the St. Lawrence River. Next, the stage bends behind you to the southeast. At a compass bearing of 110 degrees Sugar Island again blocks the panoramic view. This stage has a spread of 210 degrees. Your arms spread out from side to side are 180 degrees. Spread them backwards until they begin to ache and you are probably approaching the 210 degree spread of this stage. Tonight's performance was breathtaking as usual. The first act of the evening play began to unfold in front of me.

The sun was beginning to set over Gananoque on the northwest portion of my stage at a bearing of 304 degrees. Looking through the binoculars, the two large tour ships were both nestled into their berths for

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the evening at a bearing of 292 degrees. These ships stand three decks high out of the water and introduce hundreds of visitors each day to the scenic beauty of the 1,000 Islands. Their approach is considerably different from mine. While I am stationary, they are mobile. Events unfold in front of me scene after scene as the evening progresses on the stage in front me. Constrained by time, tourists traveling on these boats seek to cram as much scenery as possible within the limited time provided by their tour. Neither approach is right or wrong. They are just different. Mine is a voyage of time and their's is a voyage of space. Emerging from around the point, a helicopter works its way up the river on a bearing of 280 degrees due west, right in front of my vision of the boats berthed for the evening in Gananoque. Perhaps the helicopter is providing tourists a glimpse of the 1,000 Islands or just taking a businessman home after a busy day of work.

As I scan across the horizon with my binoculars, eight sailboats were moored at a bearing of 260 degrees or almost due west of Hurricane Point. At 243 degrees is a large green channel marker that has the appearance of a small lighthouse. Closer inspection revealed that on top of the marker, was a small beacon. Either it didn't work or it was not yet dark enough to turn on the light. The marker reminded me of the navigational saying: red, right returning. When the voyager returns to his home port located on the sea, the red marker is always on the right side of the channel. It is there to guide the seafarer home. It is always a story of the boater returning to port and home.

A pontoon boat motored from left to right, directly in front of me. As quickly as it comes, it motors around Hurricane Point and it was off stage, on its way to a destination that is unknown to me.

At 230 degrees, two sailboats are moored for the evening. They were moored at the same location the evening before too. To the left of the sailboats on a bearing of 210 degrees are two cottages, two docks and one boat house crammed onto a small island. At the same bearing, a fisherman in what looks like a 20 foot white runabout ducks behind the island.

Moving toward the south, at 200 degrees there are two small rock outcroppings. At one time someone might have dwarfed the island by trying to put a cottage on the near rock outcropping. The distant outcropping has what looks like a lot of small white posts dotting it. Closer inspection revealed that these white posts are actually sea gulls roosting on the rock for the evening.

At 178 degrees is berthed at least three large sailboats in a cove that hides most of the boats. They were there every night that I was there, so I suspect that they were never moved. What looked like a house and not a cottage, along with a large boat house, dock and several out buildings is located toward the south at a bearing of 170 degrees. In addition, it had two flag poles, one with an American and the other with a Canadian flag flying picturesquely in the brisk breeze. Moving further into the southern portion of the stage, at 156 degrees is another cottage on a small island that looks as if it is on a separate island from the one next to it. It is difficult to tell from my perspective.

In a crack between two islands, a large red channel marker is just visible. It too looks like a small lighthouse and like its counterpart upriver, it helps to guide boaters back to port and to their homes. However, from my perspective it is barely visible. Also, the beacon that sits atop the marker is not turned on.

To the southwest, at 142 degrees are two cottages crammed onto a small island. At the end of the stage, at a bearing of 114 degrees are two small rock out croppings that according to some might also qualify as an island.

This was the stage that lay in front of me. The scenery was in place. Their relative positions identified. The audience, me, was seated on Hurricane Point and the evening was unfolding like a series of acts in a play. Next, I turned my focus to the rock upon which I was sitting. It was as if I had focused entirely on

the play in front of me and had forgotten about the audience. So, I turned around and looked at the audience. Barnacled covered, Hurricane Point is a large barren rock that has several small hews attempting to grow in the cracks of the boulder. However, it is clear that the harshness of the weather constantly wears down this vegetation until it dies or is pretty scrawny. The waves plow into Hurricane Point and deflect back up river creating a constant hodgepodge of waves going in both directions at once. The mosquitoes have not yet found me. Perhaps it is the stiff breeze blowing inland or perhaps it is not dark enough yet. The Sugar Islanders are in their cottages behind me chit chatting and playing cards. Although I am sure that they have seen this performance before, they have decided to miss it this evening. Every night the same play unfolds. A boat here or a boat there. They are all small blips on the radar screen of this large panorama in front of me. For a moment, there is silence. There are no sounds of boat motors. Several sea gulls cry in the distance. The water laps upon the rocks beneath me.

Now the sun is setting behind Gananoque. They are turning a bright orange. There is the constant lapping of the waves on the rocks below me. Yet the Sugar Islanders are in their cottages behind me chit chatting and playing cards. As the sun sets over Gananoque, the second act of this evening play begins to unfold as dusk begins to descend upon the landscape.

A sea gull cries out and the water laps against the rock strewn shore beneath my feet. The fisherman in the southwest on the bearing of 220 degrees ducks behind the island and eventually reemerges on the other side. Throughout the evening this fisherman will maneuver serendipitously in and out and around this island. Three sea gulls quietly fly overhead and fly up river toward the west. Then in the distance, they cry out too. The sun is behind the clouds over Gananoque, yet there still is light. My sea kayak is below me just out-of-sight. It is tied up securely for the evening. It is my means of transport to port and home. The water laps against the rock strewn shore. The fisherman is now circling in front of the island on a bearing of 210 degrees from me.

The river has a scalloped look to it with its small choppy waves. Almost due south, a boat on a bearing of 175 degrees is working it way home. A sign of the growing darkness, it has turned on its running lights. However, the red and green channel markers that look like small lighthouses have not yet turned on their beacons. Perhaps, it is not yet dark enough or maybe they won't turn them on tonight either.

Another boat works its way home. Its red light is visible on its bow. I hear its motor and then it too is gone.

Someone turned on the lights in the house at a bearing of 170 degrees. This is the house with the two flags flying picturesquely in the breeze. Also, they turn on a floodlight located in the peak of boathouse. Perhaps it is to help guide a boat home this evening or maybe they simply forgot to turn the light off. At this time, I am not sure.

The third act begins. The distant lights of Gananoque are not as bright as expected. However, there is still a lot of ambient light present. The clouds over the city are now turning a dull orange as if someone was dimming the lights. To the southeast, a fisherman casts his line into the water at a bearing of 130 degrees. As he maneuvered the boat and came about, the red running light on the bow of his boat changed to the green.

I noticed that the cottage at a bearing of 128 degrees has now turned on its indoor lights. My focus returns to the rock where I am sitting. I still hear the water lapping on the rocks below me. The breeze is blowing past me. With the growing darkness, the breeze now has a chill to it. It is quiet again except for the lapping of the water on the rocks.

On the southeast portion of the stage, the fisherman at the 130 degree bearing is now working his way towards me. I notice that his boat is about 20 feet in length. An inboard, it is cream white in color. It is

gliding effortlessly through the water and it seems to make no sound. It is too fast for a trolling motor. Yet it is so quiet that I can readily hear the lapping of the water against its hull and I can almost hear the splash made by the metal lure hitting the water with each cast. I am intrigued.

I left my watch in my other pants. I wondered what time it is? Who cares. It was getting darker. The mast light on one of the sail boats that is moored at 230 degrees is now turned on to warn other boats of its location. The other sailboat is not so considerate or perhaps it is unaware of its ethical responsibility. The beacon on the green channel marker that looks like a lighthouse is now shining in the evening sky. I turn and look at the red channel marker. Its beacon is shining too. The signs are present everywhere that the evening is quickly giving way to the night.

A mosquito bite. They have finally found me. Perhaps, it is again that time of the evening when they feast. I put on my paddling jacket made from heavy nylon and challenged them to bite through it. I was successful. Unfortunately, they find other places on my body to bite.

A small outboard boat powers its way from my right around Hurricane Point and then heads toward the southwest on a bearing of 230 degrees. It hull planes across the water at full speed and then the boat operator stops his boat suddenly. He circles it for a while at a trolling speed as if looking for something. He even stops for several minutes. Then as quickly as he came, he left. At full throttle, he powers the craft back the way it came, around Hurricane Point and out-of-sight. Although I was intrigued and curious as to what he is doing, I will never know what he was actually doing.

It is now dark, yet there is light. I can see things in the landscape, yet I need a flashlight to read my writing. The islands are now merged together to form a thin ribbon between the wide expanse of the sky and the vast river that lies beneath it. Act four of this play is now beginning.

The lights that comprise Gananoque are now brighter in the nightscape and they are as prominent as I envisioned them. The radio tower behind the city on a bearing of 306 degrees has three red lights on it. The top two blink on and off; the lower light remains on constantly. How odd. I had never noticed this before. The orange clouds over Gananoque are now very dull. It is as if someone just dimmed the evening lights to the point that they are almost turned off.

It is now dark. It is the last act of this play tonight. There are three elements visible in the night light, the river, the ribbon of land, and the vast sky. To the west, there is now a large whitish halo in the sky. Normally, this halo is formed by the collective ambient light of the buildings, street lights and other lights found in a city as it radiates upward into the night sky. I suspect that it is the city of Kingston. I am surprised, because it was not present a half an hour ago. It waited to appear until the last act when the evening had finally turned to night.

The fisherman on the southeast portion of the stage at the 130 degree bearing has again disappeared. Perhaps he returned to his cottage. I scanned the area looking for another cottage light that was just turned on. I see none. He has disappeared and I know not where. He does not reappear. Where he went remains a mystery.

Finally, a powerboat comes around the point. It is full of the sounds of young people. There is a lot of loud talk and people calling out to other people on the shore. Their voices easily carry over the sound of the boat's motor. As it moves from right to left on the stage, the red running light on its bow and white light on the stern reveal its steady movement toward the boathouse. Much like the large green and red channel markers, the floodlight on the boathouse now serves as a beacon to help guide these travelers home. People call out to the boat from the boathouse and the calls are returned from the boat. The boat slows in the water. As they throttle back the motor, it goes from a high pitch sound down to the low pitch of an idle or trolling speed. The boat makes the characteristic swosh as it reenters the water and as the

stern wave catches up to the boat and pushes the it forward for several more feet. The boat docks. The talking subsides. The floodlight is turned off and there is darkness at the boathouse. Once again I hear the lapping of the water on the rocks beneath me. It is always a story of the boater returning to port and home. The curtain goes down on another evening play at Hurricane Point.