

Island

Reflections

Tales from the 1000 Islands



A Thousand Islands... A Thousand Stories.

Read some of the best of the thousand tales in Island Reflections.
Here's a preview of just a few:

Honey Bee Island

A magical retreat for an illusionist and his wife
from California.



By Heart

Boldt Castle is getting a glamorous makeover on Heart
Island, where North America's most romantic un-lived-in castle
is becoming a popular destination for weddings.

The Summer People of Sagastaweka

Visit the island in the Admiralty Group of the Thousand
Islands near Gananoque of Susie W. Smith, author of the
First Summer People The Thousand Islands 1650-1910.



Fairyland Island

A private island in New York state near Heart Island of grand
estates and Fairyland ruins and Broomstick Castle where folklore
has it an "invalid" little girl miraculously recovered in the 1800s.

Honey Bee It's Magic

Honey Bee Island, Ontario

It can be said every island has its magic. But not every island has its own magician.

Honey Bee Island is the summer home of professional magician and illusionist Michael Laprade and his wife Janice of California. "This is what we refer to as our driveway," says Michael, steering his boat through the narrow passage of the U.S./Canada border on the St. Lawrence River by the Thousand Islands Bridge near Ivy Lea known as the International Rift. "Right now, you're on the Canadian side and I'm on the American side," Michael says to me as I take in the scenery from the passenger's seat.

Only a few minutes later we're pulling up to a dock with a canary yellow surfboard bench. There's a Honey Bee Island sign and a century-old cottage with a screened porch on the top of a small hill.

"Swimming here is like being in an aquarium," he says, pointing to the clear water that circles the Canadian island.

Michael, a Montreal native and retired prison counselor, discovered the Thousand Islands when he returned to Canada in 2000 for his grandfather's 100th birthday.

"I didn't have a clue what the Thousand Islands were until I was 50 years old."

But the place soon cast a spell over the magician and his wife, Janice. He remembered first catching a glimpse of Boldt Castle on Heart Island in a magazine story on a flight to Paris three



years earlier that captured his imagination.

Michael first started moonlighting in magic when he wasn't working at the California Men's Colony, a prison in San Luis Obispo, California. He met Janice, a dental hygienist, and she became one of his stage assistants. Now retired, the couple summer in the Thousand Islands. They winter in Brittany, France in another historic house they've renovated. Both are offered as rentals when they are not in residence.

The couple was having cocktails at the Gananoque Inn during their trip nine years ago when Janice picked up a real estate guide. They came across an advertisement for Honey Bee Island and made an appointment to see the property. "As soon as we saw the island, we said 'We're in big trouble.' We fell in love."

The object of their affection was long-neglected. The property's heirs had vacated the log cabin for over two decades. Mice nestled

in mattresses while dirty pots and pans remained in the kitchen.

The couple bought the island in September 2000 but did not get the submarine cable installed for power and phone until June 2002. They started spending summers there in 2004 when Michael retired.

The renovation was a labor of love for the California couple. They transformed the cabin into an upscale retreat getting rid of yellow and turquoise walls in the process. "People will say to me 'You're Honey Bee,'" says Janice with a laugh. "And I'll say 'I'm Honey Bee but he's Honey Do.'"

They added distinct touches to the cabin with a pink granite fireplace, including a brass honey bee knocker, deerskin curtains and naturally, a piece of Houdini's mansion. Michael went to the vacant Houdini property when it burned down in the Hollywood Hills many years ago and picked up some foundation fragments from the chimney for posterity.



In suspense on Wizard Island, Oregon

The couple has brought the historic property into this century. Now "it's a WiFi Island," says Janice proudly.

The first person the couple became acquainted with in the nearby area was the operator of the local landfill as they dumped boat loads of debris.

But their dream island – which celebrated its 100th anniversary as a private island this year – quickly took shape. They lovingly renovated the 134-year-old cabin, which was transplanted to the island from the mainland years after the Crown sold the property to private buyers.

They love its seasons and retreat to their cabin in spring, summer and autumn. "In California, fall is a date on our calendar," said Michael. "We love fall. This is where we want to be."

"This really is the heart of the heart of the Thousand Islands," said Janice.

Michael, who performed at the private club for magicians called the Magic Castle of Hollywood, loves the tranquility of what he fondly calls "the Bee."

An illusionist with the company Starfire Productions, Michael took two years to get his pyrotechnic special effects license to incorporate fire into his act.

He levitated people and even did so for a publicity shot on another island – Wizard Island in Oregon. "It's not a trick. It's real magic," Michael says of his craft including pocket magic using coins and string in a pinch on the island to demonstrate the point. "You can almost suspend reality for a few seconds... there's artistry behind it."

Michael recently entertained at a Thousand Islands tribute concert by the Toronto folk band Great Lake Swimmers in Brockville who entertained aboard the deck of the Fair Jeanne tall ship to celebrate government funding for Brockville's Maritime Discovery Centre. But he spends most of the summer enjoying the simple magic of Honey Bee Island with Janice, family and friends.

The couple now enjoys their Thousand Islands retreat, a labour of love that all started with a glimpse of Heart Island on a tourism brochure.

"Island people see opportunities and possibilities where other people see obstacles," says Janice. "In this area, there's story after story after story."

Honey Bee Island's magical transformation in the "heart of the heart" of the Thousand Islands is one of them.

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