INSPIRED:

An island to get my head and heart around

[Received May 27th 2026; accepted August 30th 2026 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.305]

Laurie Brinklow

University of Prince Edward Island, Canada <brinklow@upei.ca>

ABSTRACT: Along with the other writers in this finale issue of *Shima*, I've been given a task: identify an island that has inspired my research in Island Studies, then discuss how this inspiration manifests in my work. We have also been asked to reflect on and analyse questions of inspiration and memory as raised in the Introduction in order to deepen our engagement with the question at hand. For me, a researcher who explores fundamental questions of 'islandness' using qualitative as well as arts-based methods (Brinklow, 2022) – primarily autoethnography and poetry – I found the best way to answer the question is through storytelling and poetry. Poetry allows me to combine imagery, most often grounded in these rich personal experiences, with the metaphorical – bringing meaning beyond the intellectual to the emotional level to reach what I hope might be transcendence. It is through autoethnography and poetry in this essay, then, that I grapple with those elements of my island that have inspired me.

KEYWORDS: islandness, Prince Edward Island, arts-based research method, poetry, home, belonging

When Philip Hayward suggested in his invitation to contribute to this issue that my inspirational island might be Prince Edward Island (PEI), on Canada's east coast (with which I am widely associated in the Island Studies community), of course I agreed. Although I have travelled to many islands and been inspired by landscapes and seascapes and the stories of Islanders the world over, I always end up back here. It's home. But in reflecting on the themes raised in the Introduction, is this truly the island that *inspired* me? Although I'm technically a 'come from away' – an ofttimes pejorative term bestowed on people who were not born on PEI – I am proud to call myself an Islander, having 'learned and earned my islandness' these past 43 years and counting. Most Islanders don't realise I am from away, despite my 'different' last name. The island I've identified is also known as Epekwitk, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people who have lived here for over 12,000 years. We are a small island province of 182,000 people (Government of PEI, 2026) nestled near the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and separated from our sister provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick by the Northumberland Strait. I am thus a settler researcher. I am based at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) in the capital city of Charlottetown where I chair the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) and coordinate the Master of Arts in Island Studies (MAIS) program.

Canada is a huge country: the second in the world at 9.98 million square kilometres and measuring 7,500 kilometres from west to east (Worldometers.info). I concur with Victor Suthren's (2009) novel observation that Canada is an island – but would take it further to call it an archipelago or even an aquapelagic assemblage (Hayward, 2012) with islands along the Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic coasts and through the Great Lakes in the middle, and its vast quantities of water and all the dynamic interplays between the environmental,

socioeconomic, and geopolitical that entails. And, like most large land masses, political and economic power is held in central Canada while the coastal islands are considered peripheral – with all the dynamics that entails, too.

Living on the 'periphery' as I do, I am almost ashamed to admit I was born in central mainland Canada, but my family had the good sense to move out to British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province on the Pacific coast, when I was five. We lived in Northern British Columbia where my dad had gotten a job and at Christmas my parents decided we would go to visit aunties and uncles in Port Alberni, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I remember the long drive on winding gravel roads through wilderness and dilapidated towns down to the coast and my first ferry ride on the old CN Rail ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo – the one that used to take trains across to the Island. My parents complained that it was the old boat – huge and lumbering and smelling like oil, with tracks running down the middle of the car deck that caught the tires on our car and made them squelch and my dad swear. I remember standing in the cafeteria line to get hot dogs and French fries and eating them at a table with an edge that kept our trays from sliding off onto the floor during the crossing. That first Christmas spent with cousins I'd never met before was magical.

In April 1964 my dad got a job in Port Alberni, so we left the north and moved to the Island partway through grade 1, an event I capture here in my poem.

> *Tidal Waves*
>
> In 1964 we lived in the hills of Northern British Columbia, far enough away from the tidal wave that filled the swimming pool of the Vancouver Island motel where we moved a month after with logs and black sea from a wave that began in Alaska and ended twelve hundred miles to the Pacific south.
>
> It was winter and I was six and I longed for summer and to swim in a pool just outside my front door, if only the motel owner would please clean it out. But instead it sat black, so I thought about that wave, how it had gone halfway to my aunt's house three miles from the ocean, *look, that's where it stopped, that tree right there,* and I dreamed of green mountain slopes, lush with trees that grew right up to the sky.
>
> All spring we picked golf balls for 50 cents a bucket with my mom after school and on Saturdays from the driving range behind the motel, the grass a flat green sponge. Then I got the measles and had to stay inside for two weeks with the curtains pulled, the fear of going blind if I looked knotted in my belly. And I'd shrink when I'd hear them talk through the walls, *Vancouver Island is going to sink, you know*....
>
> In June they cleaned out the pool and I swam in the new water maybe twice before we moved up-Island to another new job and the second time I remember I almost drowned when my hand slipped off the edge I couldn't touch the bottom water went up my nose all I could see was bubbles—
>
> For six weeks that summer we lived in another motel with no pool before the talk of Vancouver Island sinking made us leave for good. Or maybe it was just that my dad got a new job. And it just happened to be in a safe and high place where trees began and never ended. (Brinklow, 2012, p. 3)

It turns out that tsunamis have been a recurring theme in my island imaginary, but I'll return to that at the end. Let me continue with the story.

My dad was a construction worker, so his jobs were generally for a few months at a time. I remember going to three different schools in grades 1 and 2 in Port Alberni before we moved north to Prince Rupert on the mainland partway through grade 2. For the next several years we lived in small towns all over BC as he followed the work, but Vancouver Island was our anchor: when Dad didn't have another job to go to, we ended up back on the Island. It seemed to be the place to go when we ran out of options, where family took us in, no questions asked. I remember him breaking the speed limit to catch the ferry, but we'd always seem to miss it and have to wait for the next one. Memories of hot cars and crying kids as we waited in line for what seemed like hours. But rolling off the boat onto the Island was our reward, the smell of salt and creosote pilings and cedar trees, screeling seagulls, beached driftwood logs piled haphazardly on the shore, tidal pools teeming with baby crabs and starfish, sand between my toes and salt on my skin – memories of images and smells and sensations that evoke longing, comfort, belonging: "stimulus objects" that create an awareness that is "vivid and concrete" (Oleynick, Thrash, LeFlew et al., 2014, p. 1). I came to associate the Island – my physical geography of home – with family, with belonging, with safety and security.

We finally settled down in Prince George in central BC, where I attended high school. When Mr. Tedesco, my favourite math teacher, advised I go to University of Victoria for an Arts degree, I agreed. After all, it was the Island! Camping and clambakes on the beach under the stars with my cousins, visits to the islands off the Island, more racing for the ferry… After three years at the University of Victoria studying English and Creative Writing, I left to spend a summer in the Yukon. I fully intended to return to university in the fall, but that summer turned into three years: I fell in love, did my teaching training, and taught grade 6 for a year. In the fall of 1982 I went back to UVic to try and finish my Bachelor of Arts degree. When that spectacularly did not work out, my partner and I hightailed it to Ontario for an extended visit with his family trying to figure out what to do next. And so it was in June 1983 that I found myself, quite by accident, turning left instead of right on Toronto's Highway 401 to go visit more of his family in New Brunswick "since they're so close." After a couple of weeks, they told us to go visit PEI, "since you're so close." Thus, I found myself washed up on the shores of Prince Edward Island.

First story of arrival

Serendipity and warm winds blow me here a
western Canada nomad
looking for a place to set down roots

where land meets ocean meets sky
on an early evening in June
light otherworldly
sharpens edges like eel grass on
cliffs, lupins, dunes

I skim across a glassened strait
overwhelmed by this sense of home

from the inside out
the Island takes me in

Alternate story of arrival

I'm flotsam in the Strait
cast adrift
belly empty, lips sandpaper, heart in shreds
Prince Edward Island floats just ahead
red cliff teeth
sluice grass throat
back paddle frantic
but the tide is too strong
I succumb to its pull
am washed up naked on its
red-sand tongue
taken
from the outside in (Brinklow, 2012, p. 68)

I've often told the story of how I got off the ferry and said, "This is home," in hindsight an "instantaneous recognition" (Conkling, 2007, p. 191), hearkening back to "security, familiarity, and comfort" (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 1) – though it took many years to realise just which 'home' I was recognising. What was meant to be a week turned into 43 years… and counting. It was just like L.M. Montgomery described it in her books about Anne of Green Gables, my childhood heroine: soft undulating hills and homey patchwork fields, manicured lawns, saturated colours, diamonds dancing on the water all around…

Colouring in the lines

Born without the ocean at my feet,
this living at sea level scares me.

I am used to thin air,
wraparound sky so close you
scrape it with your fingernail, jagged
peaks on the horizon my comfort zone, narrowing
my view.

My friend Libby sees a mountain
and is compelled to climb it,
just to see what's on the other side.
I see a mountain and I soar on the updraft
swoop on the down
til I'm smack in the middle
of the palm of the valley
where dawn takes longer to get to
and day is quicker to leave.

There the edges are blurred,
a not knowing

where your land ends and
mine begins.

Here, at sea level, it's pruned and edged
steadfast and bound by
the prairie of ocean,
limits constant, inevitable.

But it is only here, colouring in the lines
that bind me to this place
that my edges are defined.

I'm getting used to sleeping
with the roar of the ocean in my ears. (Brinklow, 2012, p. 65)

It was as if I had found what I was looking for without even knowing I was looking for it. Those lush green fields and rich red loam offered a place to set down roots. Here I could recreate my "landscape of memory" (Blunt & Dowling, p. 255) and make 'home'. It was as if, within that "defined" edge, I finally knew precisely where I was. Who I was would come later.

My writing and editing skills landed me a job with Ragweed Press, a publisher that produced books by and for Prince Edward Islanders. I became enmeshed in the Charlottetown arts scene. I wrote poetry, had two daughters, sang in choirs, made friends, got a dog, established a presence in the Canadian book publishing industry. My book publishing skills eventually brought me to the Institute of Island Studies in 1990, where I produced more books about Prince Edward Island but had the added opportunity to be part of a growing research program in Island Studies. Through Lessons from the Edge: The North Atlantic Islands Programme, I got to travel to Newfoundland, Cape Breton Island, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, the Isle of Man, and the Åland Islands and met researchers who were researching socioeconomic and governance policy and practice on small islands – with the idea that we would bring what we learned from similar island jurisdictions back to our Island. We hosted several international conferences where I would pick up delegates at the airport who wouldn't stop talking until I dropped them off again days later. Through it all I pondered what island identity meant, and why I – a 'come from away' – felt it so strongly, why I "like all converts, burn with a harder flame for island institutions and values than does the natal experience" (Putz, 1984, p. 26). Was I what Prince Edward Island historian David Weale has called a 'born-again islander'?

It wasn't until I was enrolled in my first Master of Arts in Island Studies class with Godfrey Baldacchino in 2003 that I figured out. It was an "AHA!" moment of monumental proportions, where I realized I'd been experiencing the island way of life my whole life: that coming and going to the Island – Vancouver Island – was my training. It explains why Prince Edward Island felt so familiar, so much like home: that "instantaneous recognition" Conkling (2007, p. 191) writes about. Like many of us island- and non-island dwellers doing Island Studies, I was doing Island Studies before I knew I was doing it – and long before it had a name. What we've come to call 'islandness' had imprinted on me. The Island left its mark on me when the clay was wet.

Thus, I ask: which island was it that allowed me to "surpass the ordinary constraints of willfully generated ideas" to take "a compelling approach motivation to transmit, actualize or express the new vision" (Oleynick, Thrash, LeFlew et al., 2014, p. 1)? What foundational

role did Vancouver Island play in my Island Studies trajectory? The lived experience of both these islands inspires my work, from the physical to the emotional/psychological to the societal. My MAIS thesis (Brinklow, 2007) looked at island identity in the fiction of two Atlantic Canadian writers: Cape Breton Island's Alistair MacLeod and Newfoundland's Wayne Johnston. I continued my quest through my PhD studies in Tasmania (Brinklow, 2015), where I interviewed artists and writers and musicians about how they represent islandness through their art, trying to get to the heart of why I loved my island so much.

Over the years, I've written articles and poems and book chapters and delivered keynotes and conference presentations and talks exploring variations on a theme: islandness (e.g., Royle & Brinklow, 2018; Brinklow, 2022; Foley et al., 2022). I've learned through my explorations that there are as many kinds of islandnesses as there are islands, yet a common thread persists: an intangible that we find so hard to define. I recently came across this long, unpublished poem I wrote in 2012 while I was trying to sort my thoughts. I find it no surprise that I'm still thinking many of these same thoughts. But which island was I thinking of when I wrote it?

The island drive

You stand on the mainland. Sometimes you can see the island; sometimes you can't. Maybe it's too far, but you still know in your head that it's there. Maybe it plays peekaboo in the mist (now you see it, now you don't). And when your eye blinks, and the mist clears, there's always the possibility that it'll be gone.

Sometimes it's a place you've never been. But you know you want to cross to it someday. When you have enough money. When you have enough time. When your ship comes in. When you're certain.

Drawn irresistibly: isla-mania.

*

An island, by its geographical separateness from the mainland, is a place apart, not part of the whole – it's its own whole. It's something you're not. It has allure. It's mysterious. It's exotic. It's the "other."

An island is a metaphor. For that split-off part of yourself: the ego, the self, set against the backdrop of the infinite ocean. With feet planted firmly on the island you feel physically and psychically safe, cocooned. If it's small enough, your mind can encompass it, you can get your head and arms and heart around it. You can rest easy knowing you're tucked in for the night – especially when the ferry's tied up.

An island is defined by the edge. Your energy won't bleed away. Bounded, yet porous, permeable. You're in that littoral zone, that liminal space, that ecotone, toes in the sand between dune and sea, looking out across a vast expanse to another edge: the horizon. Sea meets sky, sky meets universe. Circles within circles. You're at the centre. A blip in the cosmos. How insignificant. Yet. How huge.

An island is that "blunt place… where excuses stop." Close to the elements, life's distilled to the basics. Life: oxygen, water, shelter, heat, food, laughter, tears. Free the clutter. Time to go inside: the outward journey mirrors the inward journey.

Before the final crossing.

*

Island water. Because an island is physically surrounded by water, there's an energy that comes from currents and tides. The water has more oxygen there, nourishes sea and birdlife. The water washes, cleanses, polishes, erodes. Because your body is 90% water and you come from the sea, you answer to water, to tides. The sound of water in your ears. The pull of the tides in your blood. It is almost as if the longing to go back is in your DNA.

Island sky. The particular quality of island light, reflecting off the water. Picture you inside a dome, surrounded in clear three-dimensional blue. Or on an island encircled by ice. Shrouded in clean three-dimensional white. Or on island at night: your island a tiny boat bobbing in a sea of stars.

Island smell. Salt brine nips. Salt spray coats.

Island taste. The tingle of the tip of your tongue on your arm – those little white flakes that dry between the freckle and the sun-bleached hair.

Island sound. Water laps. Wind howls. Always the wind. See how saucy the marram grass is, answering. See how elegant the spruce trees, bowing down.

*

Geologic: you're close to when the world got made. Not much between your feet and the bones laid bare.

Temporal: time slips. You're on island time.

Emotional: you're vulnerable. Control is gone. The mask is gone. Stripped, you can only be you.

Psychologic: you're in a bounded space. The shore is your edge. You walk past the edge, the skin of the sea won't hold you.

Psychic: you're connected. You figure out how, the skin of the sea will hold you. It is your road: can take you anywhere.

Societal: you're hugged tight in a kinship web, where your character has more currency than your personality. You're an em-dash in the island's storyline.

Spiritual: you're in what the Celts called a "thin place," where the veil between earth and heaven is thinnest. With the land laid bare, with you unmasked, with the sky unveiled, you have a direct line to the cosmos. You're

> part of it, and it is part of you. The further from the mainland, the further from the mainstream.
>
> *
>
> If, as Yi-Fu Tuan (1971, p. 181) says, "geography is the mirror for man", an observation further described by Relph (1976, p. 4), "reflecting and revealing human nature and seeking order and meaning in the experiences that we have of the world," then islands are a mirror with an emphatic frame.
>
> And if place is important as the ground in which we plant ourselves, with firmness and conviction, orienting ourselves to the world, then it follows that the smaller the place the more solid it is in relation to our consciousness. And thus the bounded entity of a small island, where you can *see* with your eyes just *where* you are, and what your limits are, might give you a better perspective on the world – simple ground instead of complex, wholeness instead of fragments.
>
> *
>
> And when the island's where you're from. And when it's imprinted on you, and you on it. And when it's in your bones. It's home.

I learned early on that for me, the ocean is my well: a metaphor for creativity. The edge is where I do my best thinking. Walking the beach, the sand is a slate wiped clean twice a day, where starting over is not only possible but necessary. Hypnotizing waves and pebbles and shells and starfish sharpened through the lens of water bring clarity – like the act of writing a poem. I think of liminal spaces as thin places, where you can connect to deep truths on the inside to the spiritual on the outside, to the horizon, and beyond – and if I'm lucky, it lands on the page. An annual assignment for the students of my 'Islandness' class is 'A Walk on the Edge', in winter. The results, captured in prose, poetry, photos, video, song, art – are truly magical and inspirational.[1]

And then there's time. Island time. Meaning a slower pace of life or that feeling that you've stepped back in time. Epekwitk is emblematic of deep time. Geologist John Calder (2018) calls PEI/Epekwitk "the island at the centre of the world" as the study of plate tectonics puts the island at the centre of Pangea. 'Iron Rock' on Pitawelkek, an island in Malpeque Bay, is of sacred significance to the Mi'kmaq: the igneous intrusion found on this island was once molten magma that pushed its way to the surface when Pangea tore apart (Calder, pp. 18-19). I like to think that maybe this is the reason for that immediate attraction I felt, or the *genius loci* people experience on this Island, that "pre-rational, primordial, deep-in-the-marrow embodiment that incites rootedness and a seeming unparalleled yearning for home" (Brinklow, 2015, p. iv). Island time, indeed.

In writing about its creation, Calder calls Prince Edward Island 'Yo Yo' island (2018, p. 71): it started out 10,000 years ago as an island, then 8,000 years ago it became attached to the mainland when the glaciers melted and the Strait rebounded. About 5-6,000 years ago it became an island once again when the sea rose. Now sea level rise threatens inundation, conceivably making it three or four islands in my grandchildren's lifetime before submerging

[1] https://projects.upei.ca/mais/a-walk-on-the-edge/

it completely (Brinklow, 2026). The ephemeral nature of the Island makes this place all the more precious.

Water may be the geographically defining feature of my island, but weather, too, is part of islandness. Wind is a constant, but then there's salt spray, fog, ice fog, ice smoke, hurricanes, monsoons, typhoons, storm surges, rain, freezing rain, snow, sleet, blizzards, ice storms, fire storms. Businesswoman Zita Cobb from Fogo Island, Newfoundland –with a tinge of pride in her voice – talks about how author and former CBC host and commentator the late Rex Murphy says, "In Newfoundland we don't get weather systems, we get random torment" (Brinklow, 2012, p. 76). Or, on many islands, you can see this on a t-shirt: "if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes." Weather serves as a binding force for Islanders: it's a constant thread in the Islander story.

Another is staying/leaving. When I was doing my PhD research in Tasmania, I would ask my participants, "When did you first become aware that you lived on an island?" They would invariably say, "That's a good question," ponder for a beat or two, then say, "When I had to leave." For many it happened in childhood, with sporting events or going to the mainland on an end-of-year class trip or on vacation, but for others it didn't happen until much later. For some, it was their escape. From the shackles of the all-seeing eye, where everyone knows your business, and who you are and where you fit was preordained before you were born, based on your last name. But all of them recognized that it was the crossing to and from the island over water that defined their definition and understanding of islandness. Thus, "when I had to leave" made total sense. Getting off and on an island is what sets us apart from other places; it is fundamental to the island experience.

But the term 'islandness' encompasses more than geographic separation: it speaks to a metaphysical identity rooted in perceived remoteness, community cohesion, and cultural uniqueness. It defines us, from our psychological makeup to how our societies are structured, from the cost of living and doing business to how we learn to make do with what we have in a limited geographical space. And islandness is not a static condition, but a dynamic interplay between geography and experience. I guess I should look back with a sense of gratitude for all those times spent cooped up in a hot car, fighting with my brother and listening to my sister cry and my parents argue, waiting for the ferry.

For some, escaping to an island is a way to get away from timetables and schedules, to take control of their lives, but then they find that they're bound by different kinds of schedules: those of the tides, or bird and fish migration patterns – or the ferry. So, imagine people's reactions when the topic of bridging islands comes up, be it a physical bridge, a tunnel, causeway, or even a fibre optic cable or an airport (like on St. Helena) (Brinklow & Jennings, 2014). For some islanders, it's a lifeline. Finally, an end to the tyranny of ferry timetables and waiting in line for the next boat. For others, it's a psychological disruption, something that has breached the natural order of things. Like the 12.9-km Confederation Bridge joining mainland Canada to my home province of Prince Edward Island. Note that I said Canada was joining us – not the other way round – part of 'the island at the centre of the world' discourse. The decision was controversial, of course, dividing families and communities – but, then again, what isn't on an island? The names of the two opposing camps tell it all: 'Friends of the Island' and 'Islanders for a Better Tomorrow.' The 1988 plebiscite was close: 60-40 in favour of building a fixed link. The conversation was a defining moment in the Island's history as was construction itself. The billion-dollar bridge opened in May 1997. I vowed not to cross it – unless I won the Atlantic poetry competition which was held every winter and

the bridge was the only way to get to the mainland. In the winter of 1998, I got word that I came first. There was no waffling. I had to swallow my convictions and take the bridge.

And then there's the question: do islanders still feel like islanders when their island has been peninsularised (Brinklow, 2026 forthcoming)? Is Prince Edward Island now "Prince Edward-used-to-be-an-Island"? From a poem I wrote in 1997 entitled *Less of an Island:*

> This morning on the news
> they called Prince Edward Island
> less of an island.
>
> No longer will the Florida snowbirds,
> coming home to roost in the spring,
> get ferry panic, start calculating which boat they'll catch
> in North Carolina.

Island living is all about boundedness and connectedness, borders and gates. Yes, islands are spaces bounded by water. Like Pete Hay (2013, p. 209) has written, islandness "must have to do with the element of the sea" – or just plain water in the case of lake islands and river islands. But Epeli Hau'ofa's writings put this in perspective: the ocean has always been a road, one that connects islands and islanders around the globe. It reminds me of a character from another of my poems called "Deep Space": the fisherman from Newfoundland, another of our sister islands on the Atlantic coast, who says, "Time to go to Spain and get some salt" (Brinklow, 2022, pp. 23-25). Just a 4,000-kilometre sail… But those roads go beyond the physical: we are connected more now than ever before: by ocean waves, airwaves, political waves…

In my islandness class, I talk about learning and earning your islandness. There's no guidebook. Rather, you have to learn it by listening and observing, trying to figure out where you might fit, then you earn it by giving back. It may be singing in a choir, volunteering at the food bank, trading parenting tips at daycare or seeing the same faces at endless school and band concerts, hanging out at the dog park, serving food at a local fundraiser, picking up garbage with the Women's Institute every spring, writing your way into the story. You know you belong when your choir brings you a peace lily when your dad dies, or your friends have a fundraising yard sale when your ex is suing you for custody of your child. You know you belong when a blizzard or a hurricane comes calling and everyone is out on the street shovelling snow or cleaning up branches and they come over to help without being asked. And you go to them.

I like to say that islandness is our superpower. The power comes from being nimble, being able to adapt quickly to changing landscapes or to try something new without risking everything. It comes from the power of close-knit social relations and from caring for one another through the informal economy. It comes from fostering a culture of reciprocity with the land and the surrounding seas. In doing so, cultural cringe becomes cultural confidence as we work with other islands and mainlands to create dynamic, just, and caring societies.

I often wonder what would have happened if I had stayed in British Columbia. I like to think I may have ended up doing island studies on Vancouver Island, maybe attended that first Islands of the World conference in 1986 in Victoria and headed to Tasmania in 1988 instead of 2010. I like to think I'd still be passing on my passion for and love of islands to my students who leave our program saying their value systems have changed.

And I realise I have never gotten over my fear of tsunamis, surfacing as it does in a dream I had of Prince Edward Island:

In my dream

I'm on top of Tea Hill
breath-holding
gravity-defying
place
where stomach flips
holds
and lands

and I'm on my way down again
to see Northumberland Strait
a fuzzy bathmat
at the base of the hill
blue shimmers through the miasma
of an August noon

my daughters are with me
eight and four, young enough
to wear
(without complaint)
the matching dresses
I've sewn for them, cotton print
lacy cuffs and collars
Victorian dolls tumbling through
daisies, Indian paintbrush, clover

eyes random
follow them bend
to pick a strawberry, careen
to catch a butterfly, snag
something in my
peripheral vision

slow motion turn
and the water's gone

past Governor's Island,
Squaw Point, Earnscliffe, Point Prim,
red snakes the shore,
bones of boat ribs
lumps of sandstone
fish flop in clear focus
though they're miles away

if I don't wake up first
I know what's going to happen next
because it always does:

we're in the car
racing, racing
for Strathgartney
second-highest point of land
with the North River causeway
at sea level to cross
and even if we make it
I know we don't have a chance in hell
at four hundred and fifty feet

when all that water
comes rushing back in

Yet, I persist. The Island persists. For now.

I'm from Epekwitk, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, known to the rest of the world as Prince Edward Island. But deep in my heart lies Nuu-chah-nulth, known to the rest of the world as Vancouver Island.

REFERENCES

Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2022). *Home*. Taylor & Francis.

Brinklow. L. (1997). Less of an island. In Griffin-Farish, D. (Ed.) *The communication bridge: An anthology of Prince Edward Island writing* (pp. 84-58). Alberton/Summerside, PEI: Malpak Arts Council/Crescent Isle Publishers.

Brinklow, L. (2007). The circumscribed geography of home: Island identity in the fiction of Wayne Johnston and Alistair MacLeod. Unpublished thesis, Master of Arts in Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island.

Brinklow, L. (2012). *Here for the music.* Acorn Press.

Brinklow, L. (2015). Artists and the articulation of islandness, sense of place, and story in Newfoundland and Tasmania. Unpublished PhD thesis, Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies, School of Land and Food, University of Tasmania.

Brinklow, L. (2021). *My island's the house I sleep in at night*. Island Studies Press.

Brinklow, L. (2022). Studying islandness through the language of art. *Geographical Research, 61(*2), special section edited by E. Stratford, G. Baldacchino, & E. McMahon. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-5871.12534

Brinklow, L. (2024). The phenomenology of the crossing. In Brinklow, L. & Jennings, A. (Eds.)*The bridge effect: Critical reflections in the age of technological solutionism* (pp. 1-21). Charlottetown: Island Studies Press.

Brinklow, L. (2026). PEI artists do climate change: Sharing traditional knowledge through the language of art. In Brinklow, L., Martens, Mitchell, A.J. & Mijts, E. (Eds.) *Turning the tide: Climate change, social change, and islandness* (pp. 2-21). Island Studies Press.

Brinklow, L., Dennis, A. & Royle, S. (forthcoming, 2026). 'Prince Edward used-to-be-an-island': (Re)Affirming an island consciousness. In Baldacchino , G. (Ed.) *Peninsulas: A geography of almost islands*. London: Routledge.

Brinklow, L. & Jennings, A. (2024). *The bridge effect: Critical reflections in the age of technological solutionism*. Charlottetown: Island Studies Press.

Conkling, P. (2007). On islanders and islandness. *Geographical Review* 97 (2): 191–201.

Foley, A., Brinklow, L., Corbett, J. et al. (2023). Understanding "Islandness," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 113*(8), 1–18.

Government of Prince Edward Island (2026). *PEI Population Quarterly,* June 17. https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/finance-and-affordability/pei-population-report-quarterly

Hay, P. (2013). What the sea portends. *Island Studies Journal*, *8*(2): 209-232.

Hayward, P. (2012). Aquapelagos and aquapelagic assemblages. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 6 (1): 1–11.

Oleynick V.C., Thrash, T.M., LeFew, M.C. et al. (2014). The scientific study of inspiration in the creative process: challenges and opportunities. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience 8*.

https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/humanneuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2014.0436

Putz, G. (1984). On islanders. *Holding ground: The best of the Island Journal*, 1984-2004. Island Institute, 28-31.

Relph, E. (1977). *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion.

Royle, S., & Brinklow, L. (2018). Islands: Definitions and typologies, in Baldacchino, G. (Ed.) *Routledge international handbook of island studies* (pp. 3-20). Routledge.

Suthren, V. (2009). *The Island of Canada. How three oceans shaped our nation*. Dundurn Press.

Tuan, Y-F. (1971). Geography, phenomenology, and the study of human nature. *The Canadian Geographer, 15*(3): 181-92.

Weale, D. (1992). *Them times*. Island Studies Press.

Worldometer (n.d.). Prince Edward Island. https://www.worldometers.info/geography/largest-countries-in-the-world/