

Connor's Pond

by Carl N. Bohlin

...And their bodies were never found."

The pennies were plunked into the water, one, two, three... They tumbled over and over and over, washed clean and sinking fast. Hank watched as they fell deeper and deeper until they were out of sight. A single tear was beginning to freeze on his pale cheek. He sniffed deeply the cold December air and thought to himself who would be next. Who would Conner's pond devour this year? For it was 1987, and so far there had been no reports of missing children or anyone from Bristol for that matter. It seemed like a lottery in Bristol for those who remembered the headlines. To have twenty years of peace the pond needed to be fed and fed and fed...

By mid-December the Conner's pond had finally frozen over. Usually it was frozen by late November. Evidently, this year's winter was a little milder than those of the past. Bristol was a ski resort town that thrived during the colder months of the year. Without low temperatures there would be no snow, and with no snow there would be no tourism, and without tourism Bristol would be in a world of hurt. It would become depressed as it had back in '47 when one of the warmest winters on record provided only three weeks of snowfall. And it wasn't spread out. It came in one big dump and melted away in one big rush. 1947's heat wave wasn't the only reason Bristol was depressed, however.

The ice on the pond was approximately a foot thick in most spots, but several signs were posted around it warning skaters to be extra cautious and never to skate alone. It was no joke. There had been incidents in the past where people had drowned due to skating on the thin ice of Conner's pond.

Old man Simpson, who had lived in Bristol all his life had some very personal ties to Conner's pond. He didn't get around much anymore, but his memory was still as sharp as it was nearly 60 years ago. He was trusted and respected throughout the small community, yet he mainly kept to himself nowadays. Back in the early to mid 40's he was quite an athlete, winning medals in down-hill skiing and speed skating.

His personal ties to the pond began back in '47 when he lost a brother in an accident. He apparently drowned in the icy depths of Conner's pond when he was walking home from school. It was slightly dark out because of the season and deciding to take a short-cut across the pond would turn out to be the last decision he'd ever make. His tracks were followed in the snow and matched the pair that Hank had on. Old man's real name was Hank...Hank Simpson. When he and his brother were boys and needed shoes, their mother would buy the boys the same brand of sneakers from the same store. They were pretty much the same age, Scotty being two years younger. Hank was 17 at the time, Scotty — 15. His tracks ended at the middle of the pond where there was a patch of cracked thin ice. It had been shattered and the fragments were slowly freezing over the next morning when the Simpsons were out looking for Scotty. He was alone when he fell in because there weren't any other tracks. His body was never found...

Although it seemed his brother was dead, Hank always believed he was in a better place. Skating was always a sport that drew the two brothers closer together. In fact, the bond was so great that Hank vowed never to skate again. It was a tragedy that changed Hank's whole outlook on life. The world was turning rotten, it seemed. The days of a care-free winter-wonderland were being replaced by commercial capitalism. The town lived for it, and so did the rest of the country. Hank could find nothing but sadness in life. It depressed him to see that the times had changed. But some things never changed. The pond was still there and it still scared the old man. It was the one thing Simpson did not trust.

That was a long time ago, and hardly anyone remembered it...except the Simpsons, of course. Hank turned his frustrations into energy by working on his skiing. He excelled at it.

But there were other instances that took place on Conner's pond. In 1967 there was another mysterious drowning accident. The headline of the Bristol Gazette read as follows: "Conner's Pond drowning victims lost...bodies never found. Police suspect foul play." Flipping through his scrapbook, Hank Simpson ran back through time. This was the second time the pond had struck the community.

It was the summer of '67, and there was a drinking party going on at a nearby barn-bash. Two young kids somewhere around 18 or 19 decided to go for a late night swim over at the Conner's pond. A small raft was floating in the middle of the water. It was made out of two-by-fours and 4 large oil drums. Joe remembered the raft while watching a bonfire coming out of the drum outside the barn. He asked Lisa if she would join him. Lisa trusted Joe and agreed to take him up on his offer for the swim.

The two of them walked over the field and into the next acre to find the pond. Joe enticed Lisa into taking her clothes off for the swim by taking his own off and jumping in. She was a little drunk at the time and proceeded to follow Joe's example. Needless to say, nothing physical happened between them except for some innocent kissing and hugging underneath the raft. Although nothing ever happened between them, something did happen to them. Their clothes were found near some shrubs the next day by a group of kids who were coming to the pond to go swimming. Neither Joe nor Lisa were heard from again. The police dragged the pond three times, but still without any sign of the couple.

On the opposite page of his photo album was a picture of his brother Scotty, along with an older clipping from 1947: "Simpson boy lost in the icy depths of Conner's Pond." Time was the only healer that ever helped Bristol. People grew up, or moved away. Generations came and went. Stories and rumors floated around but never really amounted to much. The only real historian on the subject was Old Man Simpson, and he didn't appreciate being bothered by the memory of his lost brother or by the tragedy of the missing swimmers. Hank slammed the scrapbook shut and stood up. Scotty's birthday was coming up in a few days and it would be that time again for Hank to go to the pond and rope the pennies in.

He'd been throwing in a penny for Scotty every year for the past forty years. The two kids from the 60's had been part of the ritual for the past twenty. Since nobody's body was ever recovered, this was one of the only ways that Hank would brave the ice of the pond and walk out to the middle where he would cut a hole as if to ice-fish. He would then drop the pennies into the hole. The first penny, for Scotty, was dated 1947 D. The other two were dated 1967 S. They were for Joe and Lisa.

"Scotty, my brother, what happened to you," the Old Man said as the breath steamed from his lips. "What is it about this cursed pond that sucks people up every 20 years? Where do they go? What becomes of them? Damn this pond!!!" he shouted out. His voice was carried away and was dropped off somewhere else. Nobody heard it, or so it seemed. Old Man Simpson was not afraid. He felt safe being there, for he understood somehow that the pond needed three this time and that he would not be taken, alone.

"Hey Old Man! Whatcha doin? Did you catch anything yet? Yeah...we want to fish too." The voices from behind startled Hank and made his heart skip a beat. Hot air steamed out from his lungs. His mouth was wide open as he fell to his knees. "Hey are you all right?" Two young kids — a boy and a girl — ran to the aid of the old man. He began to wave his hands madly in the air.

"Go back! get away..." the words could barely leave his lips. The children did not hear him and finally reached out to touch the old man. It was too late, the ice began to crack and terror began to fill their young and innocent eyes. "The ice is breaking!! Quick! Run! The ice is breaking!!" As the words began to sink into their tiny little heads, the ice had given way and the three of them began to feel the cold water soaking into their clothing. Their bodies were now submerged under the water level of Conner's pond.

The whole time Hank felt as if he were re-living his brother's death. The freezing chill that the water gave, the pain in his chest expanding, and the pity for the two small children was great. As they approached the bottom of the pond it was like they were falling in slow-motion from an airplane. Their arms were suspended by the water and air bubbles were beginning to escape from their mouths. Their hair waved upwardly as they descended deeper. The strange thing was that it was not getting darker as they sank, but lighter. The pressure on Hank's head began to hurt and he was not sure if it was pure hallucination or actual fact at this point. What did it matter, they were drowning and would all be dead soon.

The water was cold and they were now sinking deeper and deeper at an uncontrollable rate. It was as if something were pulling them through the depths of the pond. Unknowingly, they were nearing another surface that appeared to be on the bottom of the Conner's pond. It was still unclear to Hank now, but the pond seemed to have a small opening on the muddy bottom like an open window in which the water from Conner's pond was being sucked out through. Suddenly, the three of them were also sucked through the window and the warmth of the fresh, new water was a relief from the icy depths of the first pond. They all could see the reflections of palm trees and bright sunshine through the clearing water. Finally they were pushed out as if they were dolphins, jumping with their powerful tails. They landed back in the water in what appeared to be another world. They were breathing. They were alive. It was warm.

The threesome swam their way to the shore of the pond and dried themselves in the sunshine. A man approached them from the woods.

"Welcome to the new world, my friends. You have all been chosen. You are fresh. You are reborn. Welcome to paradise. Welcome my brother, Henry..."

Hank stood up. The sand was sticking to his clothes. "Scotty? Is it really you? This cannot be true. I've dreamt of this. I've dreamt of dying and seeing you again. Are we...?"

"Dead?...No, not exactly. You've simply passed through...passed through another dimension. It's quite comfortable, though. I think you'll find it very nice in fact. Please, follow me. There are others I'd like for you all to meet," Scotty explained.

The immigrants marched down the shoreline following Hank's brother. They staggered with almost every step. It was quiet and peaceful. The gentle tide could be heard as it washed the shore's pathway for the three newcomers.

"Henry, I've been waiting for this day for a very long time, yet all along I knew it would happen. It was inevitable. In fact, it would have even been you back in '47. We were always a lot alike, Henry. This world needs people like you and I. Once you've been here long enough, you'll know when it's time to check the ponds for those from the other world," Scotty.

"But we don't want to be here!!" demanded the young girl.

"You have been chosen. Please consider yourselves lucky to have this opportunity," replied Scotty.

"NO!!!" the other one screamed. He began to run back to the pond, trying to jump back in. He was in hysterics. Henry watched as his brother ran after him. He caught up to him in the 3-foot range and brought him ashore. They all walked to the dry sand and sat down. Henry stood back to listen. Scotty explained to everyone the idea behind the new world. The young boy was still breathing hard.

"Look, you cannot go back! The window only opens every 20 years." Scotty looked them all in the eye.

"He's right boys," Hank nodded to Scotty. "The pond took Scotty when he was 15, and it took two more in 1967. It's 1987 now and the three of us are here. It now waits for four more, but not until 2007. It's a curse that we have no control over." said Hank.

But it was not a curse, as Scotty explained. The new world was just like the old world. It had blue skies and warm breezes. It had plenty of food and existed in peace and harmony. It was neither heaven nor hell. It was another dimension — the only differences being that there were no deceitful governments, no tainted religions, no rent to pay, and no wars to fight...only paradise to enjoy. They had all been reborn and would soon be learning the pure trust which acted as law in the new world.

They were led to a beautiful village near the edge of the woods where many people were seen wandering about and working on their land. They were welcomed by Joe and Lisa. Hank was still in shock. He gasped as he shook their hands. The six of them then proceeded up a path to find the statue. Ahead in a circular clearing stood a great, white, marble statue of a dove. On the base of the statue was an engraved message which read, "World peace, in a world where pure trust in the goodness of mankind is given in the hearts of all, for the pond will not accept those who will abide. The windows will shut down on the non-trusted."

"Scotty, what does all of this mean?" asked Hank.

"It simply means that we have all been called for. We are here to start again what had, unfortunately, become an unsafe and unhealthy world. It starts now. It starts here. Ours is not the only pond. There are others with windows just the same. We love it here and would not want to go back for anything. We trust you will feel the same way in 2007. By then you will feel honored to be here and not in a world which no longer exists.

