



---

# BLACKBERRY ISLAND

---

A Short Story About an Alternate 98040 Universe in 2020. You may smile reading this. Blame the Golden Pineapple.



AUGUST 26, 2020  
PAUL COLLIER SMITH  
98040

*Figure 2. Blackberry Island Central District*



## **12 Minutes West, 60 Minutes Around**

It was a bright blue-sky day. The water was flat. Warm now. Hot later.

As he rolled the kayak down the long steep access road, he noticed a group of fit women doing yoga; as one, they changed from Plank to Down Dog. “Lulu Lemon,” thought the Paddler, “why didn’t I buy that stock?”

The Paddler rolled his kayak to the stairs to the shore, pulled in the roller, picked up the boat and set the boat into the shallows. He stepped in, one foot at a time, set his arms and rotated his hips upward in a yoga bridge;

then downward as he moved his arms to the rear. He pushed off with the paddle, settled in and adjusted his personal floatation device.

As he paddled out, he came upon a flotilla of Canadian Geese paddling across the lake. A dozen were smaller and brown, juveniles, being escorted at each end by adult geese. "Must be a training run", the paddler thought. He decided to escort them across the lake, lest some watercraft run over them.

As he reached Seward Park the Paddler turned his kayak and gazed back at Blackberry Island. He could make out the difference from the center part and the ends.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's a migration had occurred.

Without a bridge to expand to the East, Seattle had instead expanded to the South. Columbia City, Rainier Valley and White Center were dominated by huge McMansions. Those who could not afford to live in Seattle moved east to Mercer Island for cheap digs with trees. Not the usual flavorless colorless protein powder, these folks were the salt of the earth. Real people. Real soul.

Sadly, however, the local mortgage lenders redlined Blackberry Island. The center of Blackberry Island from SE 53<sup>rd</sup> to SE 63<sup>rd</sup> became known as the Central District of the Island. Consequently, the homes built at that time were tiny 1,300 square foot California bungalows, on small lots. \$4000 in 1960. Some, on the water, \$1.8 million in 2020. 12,000 of the Island's 34,000 population lived there.

However, due to the open-minded color-amazed culture of the Island, these 12,000 were treated equally.

Blackberry Island's exceptional education system produced exceptional compute talent. Their children and grandchildren were the top programmers at Google Cloud and AWS.

The zone up the hill from the Brookbay Relay was a dense multi-cultural entertainment neighborhood. There was a small jazz club called the Baked Potato. Up the hill, a hole-in-the-wall rock-and-roll bar with a dance floor called Stumbleweeds. Up the hill from there a Country and Western bar with live music. Three Starbucks. One chocolate shop. Down the hill, a Cannabis shop. Live music and great views brought Seattle's rich hipsters to the Island on the Gondola at sunset, juicing the Island's sales tax base.

The Cannabis shop – actually a Superstore -- did about \$30 million a year in business, netting the King Country \$3 million in sales tax, with the city getting \$255,000 in proceeds. The Trader Joes on the north end did about the same.

Then the pandemic came. Most of the Central Business District closed. Fortunately for the City, the Cannabis shop and Trader Joes were Essential. Tax revenue actually increased.

President Johnson, in another master stroke, had instructed Treasury to use the newly created national CRM (Citizen Relationship Management) system to identify affected workers; and apply rescue capital quickly and appropriately with a simple SQL query. Those who needed it, got cash now. The same system helped to identify citizens in pandemic, tornado, hurricane and other Casualty events.

The Paddler turned south. There were blackberries at the east shore of Seward. He sampled a few. Yum. Perfect.

He made his way towards Jetski Beach and looked for a place to come ashore. Stray logs blocked the usual spots. Seattle Parks never seemed to deal with them.

A spot with some clear sand came to his starboard and he put into shore. He threw on his kayak roller and walked towards the other side of the Bailey Peninsula isthmus.

The pandemic, surprisingly, had more than a few silver linings. With less travel, fuel, restaurant and high-people-density Spectation entertainment costs, many found themselves with \$5,000 more to spend that year. Some were investing in the stock market.

Homeless BNB had just IPO'd: symbol HOBO. HOBO's ESG business model involved getting people with a spare room to house homeless people for a fee; in turn, HOBO was compensated by the State of Washington and various grants. Central District Islander's often paid their property tax with HOBO proceeds. HOBO's stock was up 10%.

At the north end of the isthmus the Paddler pulled off the roller and put the kayak in the water. He headed north on Andrews Bay, sticking close to the inside of the

pocket. Yachts were tied up together in a raft. A few fished at the pier at the north end.

He flashed back to the start of the presidency of Gary Johnson. What an amazing four years. For a change, everything was optimal. The usual executive blame game did not occur. The government became agile and functional.

Congress had changed the Anti-Trust law to create a non-government Single Payer Medical Reimbursement system in 2016. Insurers voluntarily merged into a single corporation given the financial incentives. A government board set the C-suite pay.

There was a lot of power in one. One formulary and negotiating power led to lower prescription drug prices. One system drastically reduced fraud. Providers were happy too: they were paid in less than 30 days and no longer required a back-office billing staff. Consequently, medical expenses experienced deflation for the first time in history. Costs decreased and enrollment soared. The C-suite and shareholders benefited handsomely.

The Paddler rounded the northeast end of Seward Park and noticed a cross that had been erected at the site of the recent drowning. “Relatively shallow there,” thought the Paddler. Did he hit his head?

The Paddler turned south towards the jumping tree. As he passed, the Paddler noticed someone had recently built a small jumping platform. A ski boat pulled up with four candidates. They ascended the jumping tree and waited their turn to step off. As he continued south, he splashed water over his microfiber shirt to cool down. It was going to be a warm evening. The Paddler’s mind wandered again as he drifted south for a bit.

President Johnson’s Energy Secretary was a Silicon Valley veteran with an amazing ability to kill two birds with one stone. Under his leadership, and with tax credits, the grid developed controllable local storage capacity. Essentially anyone who participated got a free Tesla house battery, which had the lowest cost per kilowatt hour.

When power load had to be diminished, the grid could automatically transition homes with local storage systems off the grid. And, when a tree off West Blackberry Way took out a power line during the annual



November windstorm, it switched to battery automatically. Thirty installations a day took place on Blackberry Island. Doubling every other month.

The Paddler reached the midpoint of Seward and began the 12-minute paddle back to Groveland Beach. Water was flat until the middle of the Lake where a few personal watercraft churned around and around. The temperature had climbed to 98 degrees according to his smartphone.

As he neared the gravel shore, the Paddler realized he had a problem. The Park was packed. Eventually he found a few feet of unclaimed gravel and pulled out his boat. He donned his mask.

The volleyball court was busy. Naked volleyball was fun to watch. Bystanders sipped a Truly on a straw disappearing into their facemasks.

Otherwise the grass was packed with naked families, wearing masks for the most part. Kids playing in the water. Making sandcastles. Mothers chatting up their

neighbors. Old men recalling their stories of working at Microsoft.

He apologized profusely as rolled his kayak through the melee and up the hill. More people were coming down. The Gondola's from Seattle were full and frequent.

As he reached the top, he surveyed the Parking Lot. Full, as he expected. "Those kids from Beaux Arts Village," he thought, "just coming to fight and cause trouble."

A car pulled out with 20 minutes left on the parking meter. Just as quickly another car came in. The driver texted \$10 to the meter for the 2-hour stay.

As the Paddler exited the parking lot, he spotted a car that was trying to park on the neighborhood streets. He warned that driver of the \$150 parking fine and suggested he find parking up on West Blackberry Way.

