

"My aunt is splashing water on him with her hands. Dad told her, 'Cut it out or I'll throw you overboard!' Well, she did it again. He jumped, grabbed her and threw her over. I can see it clearly. She went down like a rock and her big hat stayed on the water. She came up laughin' and beggin' Dad to let her back in the boat."

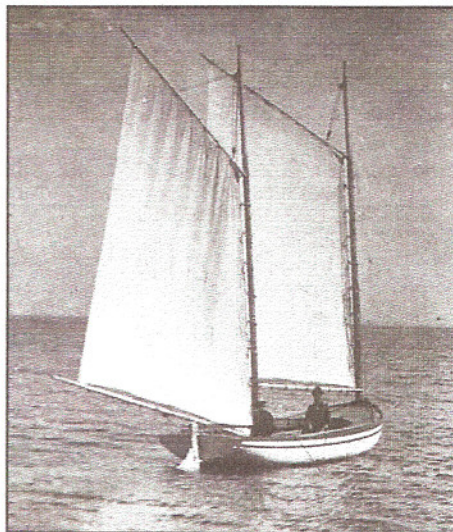
Tom was seven years old when his father was transferred to Two Harbors, MN. Two Harbors was an important shipping point for the Messabe and Iron Range railway. This was not a shipping season duty-station, but a 12-month residence for the family and their home for seven years. For the Singleton brothers, it was the time of their youth. It was here they were given the tag "Lighthouse Kids" by their schoolmates. It was here the four German-Irish boys often fought their way home from the schoolyard to the safety of fenced coal docks.

"They'd be waiting for us when we left the schoolyard. The Norwegians and Swedes didn't bother us much. But those Finlanders, they had a gang, and would hang around like a pack of wolves waiting for us. They'd chase us, and we'd run to beat heck. We'd get tired and stop. And Roy, he was the biggest, would knock the hell out of the first two, then we'd run again. When we got to the coal yard gate, the watchman would be waiting for us."

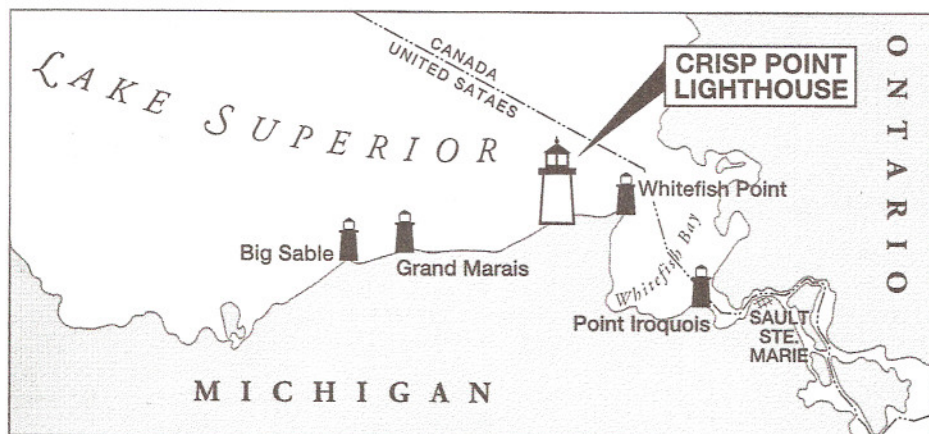
When the Singleton family moved from Two Harbors to Crisp Point, Joseph had the rank of Keeper, and the government gave them passage across [Lake] Superior in a freighter. "Captain" Singleton would remain at the station until his retirement to become the last light keeper.

Crisp Point was a remote lighthouse between the life-saving station at Vermilion Point and the Two Hearted River. The station was active during the shipping season: April to mid-December. The family spent the winters in Newberry. The 35-mile trip to town in a Model T took seven hours.

As Tom recalled, "You could barely make the trip. In the spring there was two or three feet of water in the road. We used to take rope, cross-cut saws and block and tackle." From December until May it was impossible to use any mode of transportation other than a dog team or snowshoes. It was "no winter wonderland," wrote a reporter for the *Newberry News*. "There, six months of the year, driving nor'easters from across the lake spend their full force against the unprotected shore and pile it with mountainous banks of ice and snow."



This gaff-rigged open ketch was the vessel used by the family to travel from Charity Island to Caseville Harbor, MI. Tom's dad threw aunt Johanna overboard from this vessel.



For 14-year-old Tom Singleton, it was a time of discovery and adventure. The family lived in a large brick duplex. Tom remembered, "Everything was slick and polished oak with big, sliding doors. Our folks wouldn't let us take a dog in house." The home had two big fireplaces, one on each side. The Singleton family lived on one side and there were two apartments on the other. The First Assistant lived downstairs and the Second, upstairs.

Electric service has never reached Crisp Point, and the residents continue to rely on oil lamps or generators. A Coast Guard phone line was eventually connected to the stations of Grand Marais, Crisp Point, Vermilion and Whitefish Point to Newberry and the SOO.

Canned milk was used for drinking and cooking. Meat other than venison was a rarity. "After the 4th of July, we'd eat venison," said Tom. "We'd shoot a small buck or a red doe..." As Tom recalled, "Everyone helped each other. When the Coast Guard at Vermilion went into town, they'd get our groceries." In the warm days of summer, Tom's mother would get together with the women of Vermilion and arrange family picnics on the beach.

The first summer at Crisp Point, Tom Singleton had his first offshore adventure. The Pearly Nolan family lived about a quarter-mile west of the lighthouse on the site of the Crisp Point Life-Saving Station. (Named after its first captain, Christopher Crisp, it began operation in 1876 and was inactive when the Singletons arrived in 1923). Nolan was assigned as the caretaker of the Coast Guard buildings and maintained the telephone lines.

Tom said, "He got blew out" with the Nolan kids when he took them fishing. He took the rowboat out to pull his hook-line. The line was 200 feet long and [we] had a hook every 20 feet. Reaching for the flag-buoy that marked the end, he dropped the oar.

Continued Tom, "He figured he could skull back and retrieve it, but a sudden summer storm blew the boat out." Several hours later they were picked up by the vessel *Clover* en route to Isle Royale to pick up "pinch-gas buoys." What did his Dad say? "Nothing. No matter how stormy it was, he'd say, 'Well, you goin' to get out there? Ain't going to catch any fish on shore.'"