

My Way

...from my blog some years ago

Christmas is approaching, and I am thinking of my father, who passed one year ago today. I had mentioned Dad in the essay 'Early Morning' which appeared in the July/August 2009 issue of Cabin Life. Dad was the cabin for many of us, for a cabin is not an inanimate object. It is the embodiment of all who seek strength and inspiration, renewal and fellowship there.

We gathered at the cabin to spread his ashes last summer.



My Old Man was never much for words. Strange for someone who once made his living as an editor. Or maybe not.

One afternoon, after the loons were done calling and the sun could be seen starting to fall across the lake, he turned to me as we were sitting by the fire outside the cabin with our drinks, gazing at our knees.

“Son, I don’t want anything fancy, but I want you to sing “My Way” when they spread my ashes out there.” And he looked up and out, over the dock at the lake. The request stung me.

In this same spot, campfire sing-alongs had first exposed my gift, which later had paid for a college education, thanks to some magical genetic combination from him and my mother. I had sung at countless weddings and funerals, but this was something I wasn’t sure I could do. I sipped my Canadian Whisky.

“OK, Pop.”

My father lived here, on the lake during the summer.

He had bought the land before there was even a road in; I was eight years old. I remember Dad pull-starting the Johnson six-horse and piloting us across the lake in his aluminum twelve footer from Montgomery Wards so we could see the lot. After landing and hacking our way through the cranberry and blueberry, Dad walked me in shore and stopped suddenly between two towering Norway Pines.

“Son, this is where our entrance will be.”

Later, he bought a cabin kit from the old Fish Building Supply in Madison and put it together with Gene Rankin, Judge Seering, Uncle Lloyd, and cousin Skeeter. I was too young to help at the time.

That was 44 years ago.

Wood, dirt, stone, nails, sweat; none of it would have mattered if it weren't for the people. So now the place was beyond a price.

Over the ensuing years, the lake had caressed skinny-dipping newlyweds, hosted deer camps, christened grandchildren. Now it awaited its next destiny. My father had given this family an enormous gift; this magical place that united us all.

Another slow pull of Canadian Club, and I looked at Dad. His hair was now gone, he could barely walk. Mom died when I was six, my step-mother when I was 30. Now Dad lived here at the lake, alone. I knew I would never dare change that, and I had just been given my marching orders.

Out on the lake a loon called to its mate, somehow obscured.

His way. My way.