

In a cabin on a lake there is a picture in a frame of a little bald toddler wearing Saltwater Sandals. She's standing on a dock with her fingers in her mouth. The lake is surrounded by lush green firs—not a cloud in the sky. I see this picture every summer when I return to the same lake. The toddler seems to say to me, "This is my lake. I belong here." The woman who once was that toddler is my mother. Her grandparents and great-grandparents bought a piece of land here before she was born and framed up a duplex cabin in one weekend in 1967. In 2012, my mom bought the beat-up old cabin next door. When my great-grandmother passed away in 2013, her cabin went to my grandpa. Since then, two of my uncles have bought cabins on the same street. And every summer, we make the 2000-mile journey to be there with my extended family for six weeks or more.

This quiet lake is where I learned to swim and kayak. It's where I learned about the Andromeda Galaxy and that female eagles are larger than males. Every summer, we see cormorants, beavers, trout, and deer. At the lake, my mom has taught me the difference between cedar, Douglas fir, hemlock, and cypress. She taught me which berries to eat (huckleberry, Oregon grape and salal) and which ones to stay away from (red elderberry, nightshade, snowberry). Last year, my grandpa found dozens of cattails and taught us how to dip them in kerosene and light them like mini tiki torches. It was at this lake that I contracted and recovered from COVID-19. It was here that I learned that my grandpa had prostate cancer and it was here that we recovered from his death in June of 2021. These cabins, this lake—they have magical healing properties. It is where I want to go when I need to feel real and whole. It is where I have felt the most love and learned the most about myself. It is where I have watched my cousins make the choices that have brought them joy and regret. It is where I have watched hard work turn into beauty and peace.

The lake is where my uncle spins tales about Bigfoot and who he might really be. The lake is also home to a one-ton "magic rock" which now sits just below the surface on the north end. For a long time, I believed my mom when she told me and my cousins that the rock was in a different place when she was little—that it moves around when it gets bored of a certain spot. When we stand on the magic rock, it looks like we're walking on water. Every summer, we spy shooting stars, bats in search of bugs at dusk, and hear the hoots of owls. It is here that I read *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *Little Women*.

A few years ago, my grandpa took the small old sloop out on the lake and was gone for longer than he should have been. One of my cousins, who was looking for him with binoculars, saw that the sloop had overturned and that my grandpa was holding onto the bow, all but submerged. My cousin yelled, "Grandpa's in trouble!" And not a minute later, there were kayaks, SUPs, paddleboats, and canoes off to the rescue like a slow-motion great race. We asked him how long he had been in the water and if he had a plan to save himself when we finally reached him. He responded that he knew someone would see him and come. I have thought about this repeatedly. He knew that someone would see him and come.

Every year, we take the same hike up into the Olympic Mountains along beautiful rapids that feed a huge reservoir. As I walk, I recognize the same nurse logs, roots, the massive rocks, and

winding tree trunks. The aroma of the moss and sap fill my lungs as I breathe fresh emerald air. The browns, greens, and blues soothe my worries with each step. When we plunge into the icy pools under the suspension bridge or dive off “party rock” into the reservoir, I can feel tension and stress wash away. With every year’s hike, I learn to be braver and dive off higher spots into the water. I help my younger cousins climb the rope ladder and make their first dive.

The lake is so quiet, almost eerily so, except for on the 4th of July, when it is so loud, that you can’t hear yourself think. The fireworks are a pyrotechnicians dream. One of the neighbors has a flamethrower! The M-80s that go off sporadically through the day make your heart skip a beat. Two years ago, my uncle put 1000 firecrackers in a truck bed and lit them off all at once. During the day, we always play a game that my great-grandparents invented called *Andy-I-Over* which involves two teams throwing a ball over the cabin, switching sides, and tagging the other team, dodgeball-style.

This last summer without my grandpa at the lake was hard. We kept expecting him to walk around the corner or see him attaching cleats to a dock or repairing the rope swing. It’s sad to see his stash of Dr. Pepper and Hershey bars in the shed fridge. I can see his touches everywhere. He showed his love to us by making the lake a peaceful, lovely place. He kept the grass green and the dock sliver-free. He made sure that everyone had a lifejacket and a place to sleep. Most of all, he provided a place for me to learn and grow, to heal and recover from hard times. Generations of love have been manifested at this lake. And even though I sometimes experience sadness when I am here, I can say, like my mother did, this is my lake and I belong here.