

ONE: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Anna Marie, eight years old, dressed in a white T-shirt and faded denim bib overalls rolled up to her knees, stood in the middle of the cabin. Her short brown hair was cut Dutch Boy style; bangs and shingled in the back. She slowly brushed one leg against the other attempting to rub out irritating mosquito bites. Quick of movement and always chattering, for once Anna Marie was speechless. Wide-eyed, she surveyed the cardboard boxes and confusion surrounding her.

The cabin was cool and dimly lit from a single kerosene lamp. The feeble light cast finger-like yellow shadows around the newly built three-room cabin. Anna Marie was short. She attempted to reach for new dishes in the cupboards. She finally succeeded. The cabin smelled of fresh lumber, newly stained pine paneling, and supper warming on the Heatrola.

She was cold, chilled, as it was early spring. Cold too, from the excitement of this special day. This was all so strange, 1940, so long ago, yet so near when held close to her heart. A dream, a lifelong plan had slowly unfolded on the shore of beautiful Bear Island Lake near Ely, Minnesota. Many years of searching for the perfect spot for a small family resort finally had become a reality.

Supper ready, Anna Marie, her older sister, Jean, and their mother sat down to eat. The new silverware gleamed. So special to be the first ones to use it. Four small empty nail kegs propped up the table, which was still enclosed in a large uncrated cardboard box. The Skelgas cooking stove would be hooked up the following week. The simple food, hot dogs and beans, seemed like a feast even though they were lukewarm.

No one said much during supper, each quiet with her own thoughts. Mother was concerned that all the curtains would get hung, cabins cleaned, and the many chores done before the resort opened. One of the chores that caused Mother special concern was the installation of the Kohler light plant. The electricians had told her they needed more time. Would they be done before the June seventh opening? Jean wondered what it would be like to spend an entire summer away from her Duluth friends. Anna Marie was scared but excited. Would there be wild animals in the woods to hear and maybe see? Who would she play with? Could she bring toys from home and which ones?

Mother, Anna Marie, and Jean were tired from a long trip, one hundred miles north from Duluth. The Chevrolet car, Rosie, had been packed to the ceiling. Father would join them on the weekend. His job as a traveling coal salesman occupied his week. The awesome task of untangling lumber leftovers from useable salvage awaited him on the weekends. There were small scraps of sawed lumber, a few piles of longer boards, brown roof shingles, and lots of fresh sawdust. All this needed to be sorted, moved, and the area around each cabin raked.

Anna Marie liked walking barefoot through the new sawdust, especially if her feet were wet. The pale gold sawdust clung to her wet feet and packed between her toes. When she stamped her feet the sawdust flew in all directions.

Outside and across the calm, blue gray lake, an orange red sun was setting. Strange to really see a sunset, to watch it slowly slip behind the banks of clouds, leaving a rich multicolored afterglow and silence-silence interrupted by frogs singing to each other along the shore. Quietly waves lapped against the shoreline.

Mother quickly extinguished the kerosene lamp and they crawled into bed, the new sheets cool against their tired bodies. Slowly the dark night sky crept over the resort. Anna Marie nestled closer to her big sister. Outside there were strange night noises, twitterings, and mutterings of forest creatures as they settled down for the night.

Colonel, Jean's Boston terrier bulldog, positioned himself as guard and protector by the front door. He sighed and rested his head on his paws, eyes half open, yet alert. Finally, all was quiet as the adventure, the Journey Back of Beyond, began.