

The Waterman Camp (1968-2016)



In 1968, the year Anne graduated from high school, her father bought a camp on Lake Damariscotta in Jefferson, Maine. Anne always griped that they waited until she was going off to college to do this, but, over the years, she has probably gotten more use of the property than anyone else in her family.

The Waterman camp is located about .5 miles north of the Nobleboro/Jefferson town line in Jefferson. The Jefferson location was a particular inconvenience in the days of land telephone lines, because the family lived in Waldoboro which was served by a different phone company than Jefferson, so calls between the house in Waldoboro and the camp in Jefferson were long distance.

The Waterman camp is located in a small, protected cove, created by a small peninsula and a small, uninhabited island. The island is a good spot to pick huckleberries in summer. At our shoreline the water depth increases gradually from a few inches to 8-10 feet off the dock, depending upon the year. Some years there is more shallow water at shoreline, depending upon the amount of water in the lake. This shallow shore made the camp ideal for bathing when our children were small and not water-trained.

One winter, early in his ownership, Anne's father had a load of sand dumped down on the ice at the edge of the shoreline to create a small sandy beach. Such dumping would not be permitted today, when owners of lakefront property are forbidden by the state to make any changes to the shoreline, but as with the septic system, those were different days. Over the years a lot of that sand has been drawn into the lake and what sand that remains is covered by lots of small rocks and pebbles.

I have never seen the lake in winter, but Anne's brothers have snowshoed on the frozen lake more than once and people to ice fish on the lake.

The day after Anne's father looked at the property, the real estate agent called to tell him that the owner was taking it off the market to sell to someone in the family, but the agent apparently fibbed and said that he already had a contract and a deposit, which prodded Anne's father to prove the agent right and make a deposit.

The camp is located about a half mile down Lakeshore Park Rd., a private dirt road just off East Pond Road. The road is maintained by an informal association of the owners of camps along the road. At the top of the road they post a sign with all the names of the owners, but the first time Anne's father saw the name Waterman on one of those signs he got out of his car,

removed the sign and hung it on some antlers over the door from the front porch into the cabin, where no outsiders could see it. It is still hangs there today, 54 years later. When Anne inherited the camp, the association hung up a Sienkewicz sign. We did not object.

The camp was built by a man named Day who owned a saw mill and used his own lumber to construct the building. Originally there was an outhouse in an outside shed but by the time the Waterman family bought the camp, there was indoor plumbing and a septic system. The lot is so small that the town would probably not permit a septic system today, but those were different and simpler times. The outhouse was still in the shed in 1968 but became a storeroom over the Waterman years.

From the camp road, there is a long, steep dirt driveway down to the cabin. In early years, there was always a challenge to maneuver cars around in the tight parking area, but, over the years, several trees have been felled to make parking easier.

I will now describe the cabin as it was when Anne's parents purchased it and so it remained with a few minor changes, for the many years they owned it. The camp is a two-story building. It is not winterized and the walls are open with visible wiring. There are no ceilings on either floor, just the beams and flooring or roofing. The front, of course, faces the lake, and there is a dormer on the second floor on this side to provide light and views of the lake from the second story bedrooms. We have always felt fortunate that the camp is located on the east side of the lake because we have seen many magnificent sunsets over the years. I am sure that the sunrises are just as spectacular, but I doubt we would have seen very many of them.

From the parking area, a door leads into the kitchen, which contained a 1940's vintage refrigerator and a propane stove on the west wall. On the south wall there was a sink built into a counter with a number of wooden cabinets. The sink had running water pumped up from the lake. There was no hot water so we had to boil water on the stove to wash dishes. There was also a wooden shelf unit with work space on top.

On the north kitchen wall there a passageway led into a dining room. There was a pine picnic table in the dining room and a triangular niche built into the SE corner for tableware. On one wall was a map of Lake Damariscotta.

On their west walls both the kitchen and the dining room had separate passageways into the living room which ran the full width of the house. In the northeast corner of the living room was a Franklin stove. On the east wall next to the stove hung a deer head. On the west wall of the living room was a door leading onto a screened-in porch. There were also two sets of windows on this wall. There was a picnic table on the screened in porch, which we preferred to use for family meals instead of the table in the dining room in good weather, because of the view out onto the lake.

The screened-in porch led onto an open deck where we grilled, for many years, on a charcoal-burned hibachi but eventually moved to a propane-burning grill.

In the south east corner of the living room a stairway led to the second floor. There was no railing on this staircase until the summer of 2001 when Anne was recuperating from a broken leg and needed help climbing the stairs. Until this railing was added, it was possible to close off the upper floor with a trap door to conserve heat from the Franklin stove in cold weather.

There were two bedrooms on the second floor, facing the lake (on the dormer side), both with double beds. While a wall separated these bedrooms from the rest of the upstairs, there was an open space between the top of this wall and the roof. Little privacy! Another deer head hung on this wall. The east side of the second floor was divided by a wall into two sleeping areas, one with two single beds and another with a single bed and a 50's vintage baby crib which was rarely used by the Watermen over the years. There was no dormer on this side of the building, so the living space lacked lot of headroom as the roof sloped down.

There was a bathroom in the south east corner, again with walls open at the top, and a window over the staircase. The original owner had placed a claw-footed porcelain bathtub in the sloping part of this bathroom but there was no plumbing. so the tub was never used for bathing. In Waterman days it was a place to hang clothes to dry.

Anne's father smugly liked to think of the camp a bribe to ensure that his Sienkewicz grandchildren came to spend the summer in Maine. This bribe worked for many years. I think there were only summers we did not spend the summer at the camp. In 1983 we had just returned from a sabbatical in Scotland. Anne was pregnant with Richard and the pregnancy was a difficult one, so we spent that summer at home in Mt. Rainier, Maryland. In 1992 we were on our way to live in Florence, Italy for year, so we only made a short visit to Maine before leaving the country in July. Those were the only summers, I think, we didn't summer at the camp.

The "bribe," however, worked both ways, Anne and I were able to cope without hot water while it is just the two of us, but once the children came along, that became more and more difficult. Eventually we told Anne's father that life would be much more comfortable at the camp if there were hot water. A hot water tank, we paid for it, but gladly, was quickly installed.

Then there was the winter that the propane tank, full of gas, was stolen. We decided to use the theft as an excuse to replace the propane stove, which was, by that time, probably thirty-five or forty years old, with a new electric stove. In the long run those thieves probably did us a favor because we not only then had the benefit of a fancy new stove but also, over the years, have saved significant money by not having to pay for propane in addition to electricity.

Around 2013 or so, during a big storm in the fall, the upper portion of a tree somehow managed to fall straight down through the roof and through the bed our son Richard traditionally slept in, through the floor and onto the picnic table in the dining room. (It was lucky no one was sleeping in the bed at the time or sitting in the dining room.) The limb had to be removed, the roof repaired, and the hole in the floor patched. The mattress and frame were both a loss, but the actual wooden bedframe somehow survived intact. But the mattress and

frame had to be replaced. Since the mattress was, by that time, more than forty years old, we couldn't complain. The table, fortunately, was repairable.

Anne's brother Carl, for years, left his canoe at the camp but rarely used it. There is an amusing story about that canoe. Shortly after Anne and I were married in 1972, she decided to buy canoes for both Jack and Carl from LL Beans. But she didn't buy us a canoe, she said, because she was afraid that we would let our children go out in the canoe and something might happen. So she sent us the money instead. Anne's mother always did have a vivid imagination, but at the time I wondered whether she actually gave us the money because she thought that, as impoverished grad students at the time, we needed money more than we needed a canoe. But when we got the check, we decided to use the money to purchase for Anne a lifetime subscription to the *National Geographic Magazine*. (That subscription cost almost exactly what a canoe would have cost.) So, over the years, we have gotten more than our money's worth from that subscription. No wonder that the magazine no longer offers such lifetime subscriptions. And since Carl kept his canoe at the camp, we still had use of a canoe.