

The Great North Arrow



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Born to Howard and Beverly Dobbs one stormy February day 58 years ago, I never quite fit in with my family.

My grandmother, Mae Bain, lost her husband, Ed, in 1935 when my mother was an infant and never remarried. It was only natural for my parents to live with my grandmother in the big old farmhouse that had been the home of our heritage since my great grandfather, James R Bain, built it for his growing family in the 1880's.

My grandmother bought the farm from her father-in-law for a dollar with the promise she'd never remarry, thus keeping the land in the Bain name. After marrying, my folks had three children in three years. I'm sure they thought their family was complete, but low and behold, along came me, 11 years later.

My siblings were so close in age that as long as they were together, they could do just about anything. By the time I was old enough to tag along, they were gone on their own. I was very much a second family.

I think I can attribute my creativity to days filled with imaginary games by myself, and although I was quite lonely at times, I feel I had a wonderful childhood.

Our farm consists of 300 acres of land nestled along the shore of a tiny lake James named 'Bain', after himself. My days were filled with playing with the barn kittens, running in the hayfields and exploring.

My grandfather Ed built 2 small fishing cabins across Bain Lake in the early 1930's. Seeing the potential for income, Mae, a woman before her time, had 3 more cabins built on the north side of the lake after WW2. One of the cabins Ed built was moved by bulldozer over the ice to the main camp in the late '60's. My father built one cabin in the '70's and we moved a small house to the camp in the '80's for use as a cabin as well.

Summertime, for me, meant a new set of playmates every week. It didn't matter, boy or girl, as long as you could run and play outside, you were my new best friend. Boys seemed to be more fun than girls though; I had no interest in playing with stupid dolls, preferring the boys' no-nonsense 'lets-run-around-and-play-games' attitude. Plus, I could boss the boys around more!

I lived a very sheltered life, and I guess it shouldn't have been too much of a surprise when I found myself pregnant at 18. My plan of going to college for 'Hotel/Restaurant/Resort Management' in the fall, turned to getting married and motherhood by the summer.

We went on to build a home on the lake my husband grew up on and had 2 more kids, but we were too young and dumb to know what a relationship was supposed to be.

By the time our children were grown, we were living back at the farm, trying to help my mom, widowed when she was only 62. Our marriage had deteriorated to the point of intolerance. With the gift of an unexpected inheritance from a great aunt, and the support of my neighbour Larry, who'd become my best friend, I left my husband.

For 15 years I had worked at a local grocery store, but the owners retired and I needed to find employment. I began a 'Jane of All Trades' business, doing everything from painting, cleaning, ice-rink superintendent, drywalling and lawn care to caring for 2 wheelchair-bound individuals. Still struggling to pay the bills, Larry asked me to work for his construction business on days I had no clients. It was then I began to forge a friendship that would ultimately change my life.

It was the support I received from Larry that gave me the strength to obtain a divorce, growing closer to him everyday.

It wasn't long before we realized our true feelings for each other, turning both our lives upside-down in the process. We'd 'shacked-up' by the fall and I felt like I'd won the lottery. Though I still have deep rooted anxiety, my little life has made a complete turnaround, I don't recognise the old me anymore. My biggest regret is how long I stayed in that toxic marriage, dragging my children down with me. But you can't go back, only forward.

And forward I've moved; at the age of 50 I screwed-up enough courage to ask my mother for the

camp. Shockingly she agreed, making me the 3rd generation woman to run Bain Lake Camp. I wish I'd gone to 'proper' school to help me know how to run a camp. Instead, I've adopted more of a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants strategy, fueled by a long line of entrepreneurs and fierce pride of heritage, the 'school-of-life' is getting me by. With the advice from my mother, Larry's business savvy and skill, and pure stubbornness, the camp is operating pretty damn well. Although it's been a tremendous amount of work, with Larry by my side, there ain't nothing we can't tackle!

We lost mom in 2022. I didn't have nearly enough time to pick her brain about how to run this place, but I'm grateful we had the time we did, and she had the chance to watch her land flourish once again.

My daughter lives in the old farmhouse with her two children. My oldest son has built a home for his family on a piece of land we severed for him, and just opened his brand-new small engine repair shop last week! My youngest son took over my husband's construction business and he's booking work for next year already. The skills he learned from working for Larry since a teenager, made him able to tackle any job, and he hopes to build on this land as well.

How fantastic is it that all my children and all five of my grandchildren live on the land their great, great grandfather settled so long ago?

The second half of my life is more than I ever dared to dream of; ten years ago, I walked away from a marriage of 30 years, with nothing to my name but a third-hand car. The gift of land from mom, a business I'm determined to make succeed, and a home no one can ever take from me that Larry and I built, I feel so incredibly grateful.

In the 'off-season', (November to April), I spend my time puttering about our home we built in 2020, the same year we married and moved, twice! The spring and summers are filled from dawn to dusk with every little detail running a busy tourist camp entails.

Birdwatching off our deck, canoeing and dabbling with writing tales for the GNA are my favourite pastimes and I'm getting back into quilting as well. A friend helped arrange for me to show many of my photos at the WKP Kennedy Building Gallery in North Bay in 2022, and I've sold a few framed pieces. But that's not why I love photography; as long as I'm outside snapping scenes of the land of my ancestors, I am happy.

I'm active with our local business association, annual Santa Parade and work to promote tourism in our region. I also try to keep our community in the loop by administering our local Community News Facebook page. Larry and I have begun to travel too, escaping in the fall when camp quiets down, exploring our beautiful Canada.

With two replaced knees, I don't run over the hayfields anymore, but just knowing those fields are still in the Bain family makes me immensely proud.

Perhaps, if we're very lucky, my grandchildren will one day carry on, taking over the stewardship of this land James R Bain dedicated his life serving.