



Return to Wake Robin: One Cabin in the Heyday of Northwoods Resorts

Marnie O. Mamminga

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Five generations of Marnie O. Mamminga's family have been rejuvenated by times together in Wisconsin's Northwoods. In a series of evocative remembrances accompanied by a treasure trove of vintage family photos, Mamminga takes us to Wake Robin, the cabin her grandparents built in 1929 on Big Spider Lake near Hayward, on land adjacent to Moody's Camp. Along the way she preserves the spirit and cultural heritage of a vanishing era, conveying the heart of a place and the community that gathered there.

Bookended by the close of the logging era and the 1970s shift to modern lake homes, condos, and Jet Skis, the 1920s to 1960s period covered in these essays represents the golden age of Northwoods camps and cabins—a time when retreats such as Wake Robin were the essence of simplicity. In *Return to Wake Robin*, Mamminga describes the familiar cadre of fishing guides casting their charm, the camaraderie and friendships among resort workers and vacationers, the call of the weekly square dance, the splash announcing a perfectly executed cannonball, the lodge as gathering place. By tracing the history of one resort and cabin, she recalls a time and experience that will resonate with anyone who spent their summers Up North—or wishes they had.

Return to Wake Robin: One Cabin in the Heyday of Northwoods Resorts Details

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Tracey says

3.5 stars to this book (if Goodreads allowed half stars). As someone who also grew up going to the Northwoods - albeit a few decades after the resort heyday - I was super excited to read this memoir. It was fun to read the author's stories and to see pictures from the 1950s and 60s. The only problem I had is that there was a lot of repetition from one essay to another (that said, this could easily be taken apart so people could read only an essay or two and still get it). I also wasn't a huge fan of the "florally" description. It got a little tiresome, although it's quite beautifully written. This is simply a personal preference and the fact that I read the book very quickly. Overall, a fun, nostalgic read that will be especially appreciated by those lucky enough to have spent time Up North in the glorious state of Wisconsin.

Carolyn says

Fabulous memoir of early days UP NORTH in Wisconsin, by a granddaughter of cabin builders in Hayward area with fine descriptions of nature at its best! If you love Northern Wisconsin, you'll love these memories! A refreshing read about real people enjoying life in the 40s, 50s, 60s up today!

Kristin says

A great read for anyone who spent vacations at "the lake," wherever that might be. Probably pretty darn boring for anyone else. Our lake is in Canada, and like the author's, it has welcomed 5 generations of our family and other families. I especially loved the chapters at the beginning and the end, where the author reflects on the quiet welcome of the lake and the passing of traditions from generation to generation. The stuff in the middle that was specific to her family's experience, was of less interest.

Judy says

This is a featured author of the Fox Cities Book Festival. She writes the story of a cabin lovingly called Wake Robin by her grandmother when it was built in the 1920's. I grew up going to a family cabin in northern Wisconsin, and although we didn't have a lake, we built our own family memories and had grand adventures. I am still sad that it was sold when I was still a kid; I would have loved my children to know about our 'shed.' Mammenga does a superb job with her text. I especially loved the chapter entitled "Heading Up North: A Journey in Five Acts." I laughed out loud and even read parts to my husband. I also was struck with the end of a chapter about the author's birthday being during their time spent at the cabin. She writes, "For a birthday is not really about us, but about the life we have been given and the people who have graced it." That is an amazing way to look at something that some people dread every year; it really just struck me as fabulous. This author will be in town in 2 days as part of the festival and I'm hoping to be there talking with her about our great Wisconsin Northwoods.

Kate says

I don't usually care for books that are this "nice," but this one kept me engaged. Not sure if it was the setting (Hayward) or mood (nostalgic) that got me, but I recommend giving it a try if you've ever had an enjoyable no-frills lake vacation.

Joanne says

I chose to read this book because I also grew up going 'Up North to the cabin'. I found many things that I could relate to and so many similarities between my time at the cabin and the authors. This is a special story and if you've spent anytime 'Up North', a book worth reading.

Kathy says

Such a delightful reminiscence of days gone by in the heyday of northwoods resorts. I highly recommend this book for anyone who has ever loved the call of loons, the sparkling waters of northern lakes and the slam of a wood screen door. Cherish these memories of days long gone.

Lillian says

This is a charming book of remembrances of the authors summer home in Wake Robin near Hayward, Wisconsin. She mostly concentrates her memories on her own childhood and summers at Wake Robin. She also writes of her father's and grandparents summer times on Spider Lake, with a few references to her own children and grandchildren's summer trips "up North". She gives the background of her family, the founding and beginning visits of her grandparents, and her father and mother. What is most wonderful about this book are her descriptions of her 4 siblings' activities and the warmth, love and respect they have for each other, their parents, and their simple Wisconsin summers. It is an experience I envy and will never have but reading about it, written with such loving detail: packing the car, fishing, swimming across the lake, meals at the lodge, gave me such a real warm feeling of her experience; I could almost pretend her experiences were mine (if only!). This book took me away to a real place and time, a place and time devoid of angst, worry or fear, a place of good times and good feelings. LOVED it!

Denise says

This is a feel good nonfiction story that is told in vignettes about several generations of a family's stay in a Northwoods Resort. Each chapter is a different topic/detail of the resort! It makes you long for a simpler life and relish the time you spend 'away from it all'. Mammenga's writing is often poetic, tugging at your heart

strings along the way!

Jen says

I couldn't get to the Northwoods this July, but reading this made it feel as if I was making the trip :) Delightful stories told with a poignant voice. Loved this!

Quinn says

I'm not sure if I didn't connect with this book because I listened to it on a CD. I didn't care for the writing style and there was nothing I found endearing about the vignettes in this memoir. I suppose if you grew up going to north woods cottages every summer it would be more relatable to you.

Kimberly Croy says

A very sweet nonfiction book about vacationing in the north woods of Wisconsin. I really liked it at the beginning but felt it got a little long and wordy towards the end. But I loved the pictures of her family and all the short stories of the different generations who have shared the cabin.

Sherri says

A heartfelt recollection of a rustic lakeside cabin in Wisconsin that has become a summer touchstone for 5 generations of Mammenga's family. As a member of a family whose New Hampshire lakeside cabin has been a summer touchstone for 4 generations, I appreciated some of Mammenga's stories about lake life, and I absolutely empathized with the enduring love and nostalgia she has for Wake Robin.

However, Mammenga's decision to create a series of topical essays mean that certain characters revelations and anecdotes are repetitively presented in multiple essays, making the reading experience more tiresome than it needed to be. Also, I found the overall tone to be more idyllic than I prefer--maybe it's just the cynical New Englander in me.

Bee Draper says

An entertaining, heartfelt but not overly sentimental, memoir of one family's cabin history in the Hayward Lakes area of rural Wisconsin.

I have a cabin, myself, in rural Wisconsin, so I enjoy reading about cabins and cabin life. Others may not find it as entertaining, but I appreciated that the author made her experiences universally appealing by framing this memoir as a harkening to simpler days gone by...

Not a great piece of literature in the grand scheme of things, but it was an enjoyable, light read.

Diane Supinski says

Where to begin? Such charming and quaint stories lie within the pages of this book. Stories that tap old memories of loved ones who have since passed, along with friends and families one sees too infrequently. It reminds you of your youth, when the most important thing was putting on your bathing suit and running out to the lake for the day. Or the neighbor girl who would come calling "ding bell" to help kick off the day. Not to mention, traipsing through the woods in search of wild animals or simply a shortcut to the road. Marnie O Mamminga, captures all that lovers of the Northwoods hold deep within their soul and somehow puts into words what the allure and captivation is. Pretty heavy stuff for a series of tales about a resort and several generations of a family who love their cabin. Thank you to those that went before us. Resort and tavern owners Bill Walck and Joe Kash. Thanks to my grandfather for visiting his friends and finding the lovely Northwoods for his family and allowing us to pass that love on to others. Thanks to Marnie O Mamminga, for reminding me of all that goodness.
