

Lady of the Lake

When I moved back to Birmingham from Pensacola, I really missed living on the water and was thrilled to buy a cute cabin on Logan Martin Lake just across from the dam. Even though my power went out weekly and tourists swarmed my fishing holes, I was comfortable being the lady of the lake, drowning worms in the pond.

Stories floated around about the car-sized catfish lurking on the bottoms near the dam, but I never caught one. Instead, I paddled around in my metal canoe, exploring the shorelines and avoiding “the ugliest creature God made”, the muskrat.

Every evening I would laze on my deck, watching that creature swim from the shallow cove toward my dock. To this day I choose to believe that the only thing keeping him from exploring my back yard were the resident Copperheads and Water Moccasins sharing his cove. I have always said that it’s only God’s grace that kept me safe all those years.

In the south we say that we ‘cary’ someone to the store, and “tote” their groceries home. So every evening I would tote my compost bucket and fish heads out to the end of the dock, wondering just who would show up for a treat. Most evenings I fed the Perch and resident Ravens.

The resident Ravens were Gumbo and Ophelia. We were on good terms with clear boundaries. They refused to land on the dock but agreed to circle the shallow end of the cove until I tossed the fish heads to them. Gumbo was very polite, always allowing Ophelia to gather a head and fly off before he chanced getting his feet wet. I’d like to think their offspring still fly those blue skies over my lake.

I loved meandering around the country roads of back woods Alabama. I'd pack a lunch and just drive. Old barns, abandoned shacks swallowed up by kudzu, "the vine that are the south", and ill equipped rusty old gas stations selling pickled pig's feet and hard boiled eggs in gallow jars kept me entertained as I pressed the far souther reaches of Appalachia. Those low rolling hills are the oldest mountain range in the country, and don't cotton to any silliness from t he Yankees.

One day I had driven most of the morning and found myself a tad unsettled with the unfamiliarity of the landscape. I got hold of myself and recall saying to the rear view mirror "Gal, you're never lost...you're just not there yet".

Not a minute later I saw some well appointed brick buildings alongside a real parking lot and a nice sign. Civilization! Imagine my delight at reading that welcoming sign to reveal I had come upon Tuskegee Institute.

In 1881 Booker T. Washington established the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.

To this day I ha e no idea how I got there, but managed to find my way home again, using my usual method of intuitive figuring.

"This feels like the right road but if it isn't I trust it will lead me to it." Believe it or not, two years of not being there yet always brought me back to Treadwell Island, my cabin.

I guess I'm avoiding telling you about the awful two years. So here goes. I was playing keyboards in a local band called Chiara. We practiced too much and performed too little. The band laughed at my refusal to play the song "Cocaine", while I pickled myself with booze during rehearsals. I would then drive back from Pell City to my cabin, drunk as all get out with my head out the window yelling yeehaw at three A.M. Dumb. Just stupid. Those two years at the lake were my "awful time". I regain chugging wine, smoking pot and cigarettes and putting some cocaine up my nose. I was unaware that this was my first Saturn Return years. I ws

miserably unhappy because I intuited I needed to grow up but chose the dark path of stuffing my emotions and ignoring the spiritual truths banging at my door. Even today, one at a time, I sometimes wonder how I have maintained these last 31 years in the program. I suffered two difficult relapses in Olympia, but have remained clean since then.

One night I drove so. Drunk that I ran over a hill, through two fences and crashed into a third fence at the bottom of the hill. The steering wheel had cleanly knock out one of my front teeth. I was not wearing a seat belt. When I started screaming for help my neighbors rescued my and drove me back to my cabin. I called 911 and took a long ride to the University of Alabama hospital in Birmingham.

After I had called 911, I phoned my unsuspecting parents at 2:00am. When I woke up in the emergency room, two very scared loving faces stared down at my bloody self. The Policeman at the foot of my bed asked me if I had been drinking to which I replied no. This officer was about 50 or so and looked at me kindly but with wisdom born from years of ealing with too many idiots like myself.

“Little lady,” he began, “looks to me like you had yourself a bad night out there in Pell City. If I were to guess I’d say you drank more than your share. Now, I could either rest you fro being stupid and wrecking property or I could give you a DUI.”

He stopped a moment, put down his pen and pad to approach the hospital bed. He glanced at my parents faces, then back at me before walking closer to my head and whispering, “I think we’ve had enough for one night. Looks like you lost some teeth and will have a nice scar on you to remind you of this night. I sure hope you learned your lesson.”

The officer picked up his belongings and walked out of the room, leaving an embarrassed and hurting 29 year old to face her parents. Did this wreck do it for me? Of course not. After I healed up I convinced myself that I could still drink.

Another couple months passed before I began waking up at night with the shakes. Soon after that I wakened one hung over morning, headed onto the front deck with a breakfast joint and some hair of the dog when I saw a covered pot sitting in the middle of my driveway. What the hell? I hear my phone ringing so I stumbled back into the cabin to hear my friend Patty giggling on the other end.

“Girlfriend! Are you sore this morning? You were SO funny falling down that hill with your shorts down! Did you pee on your sandals? Bahahaha!” And then it call came back to me.

Patty had come over the evening before to help me clean the cabin. We started drinking and I made some lentil pilaf. Clearly, we made it into her car but the pilaf went AWOL. I looked down at my scraped up knees and actually still wore my shirts and top from yesterday. Damn! I looked like something the cat drug in.

That did it, scared the holy crap out of me. After hung up with the still the still - giggling Patty, I called my parents to ask when they were next going down to the beach house in Pensacola.

Dad said they were leaving the next morning and yes, I was more than welcome to join them.

My detox was self-planned and carefully arranged to remove all the crap from my system. Even during that two year awful period I was actually taking good care of the rest of me wit herbals, vitamins and nutrition. In Pensacola I lay on the beach, sweating profusely in. The August heat, guzzling water and repeating. “Drug free, drunk free, smoke free” probably thousands of times over a two week period.

I thought about my years leading up to those awful two, how I had never drunk alcohol, done drugs or even smoked. It was a mystery to me how I allowed myself to become so depressed and hopeless that the material world control my free will. Just awful. I came to the conclusion that I was a binge drinker and had fortunately not changed my neurology into alcoholism, so I had a relatively easy time letting it all go.

I attribute a healthy self esteem and benefitting from a health oriented family of origin as a foundation. At that time in my life I knew nothing about recovery. That would come later with my codependent recovery program in Olympia.