

It was July 1965, Toronto Ontario. As a new immigrant to Canada from Australia I was anxious to explore my new adopted home. An opportunity presented via a colleague who invited me for a weekend trip to his parent's hunting lodge at Camp Kemogaming, Northern Ontario. We left Toronto as dawn was breaking for the 400 mile drive to Capreol, Northern Ontario, arriving in plenty of time for the Canadian National mixed goods train bound for Armstrong on the Manitoba border.

There were only about thirty passengers on the train; Indians, guys on hunting and fishing weekends, even a few dogs. The train groaned through virgin forest that seemed to stretch forever. The only two towns, Westree and Gogama, were merely settlements around the railway line. Otherwise the other so-called stopping points were just places on the map where some of our fellow passengers jumped down off the train with their guns, fishing rods and backpacks. Lakes rolled by, dozens of them. I was beginning to appreciate how vast and uninhabited Northern Ontario was.

Our stop, Camp Kemogaming was just a clearing by the tracks. It had taken 2 1/2 hours to travel the 105 miles from Capreol. We were still six miles away from the camp but they knew we were coming and somebody soon turned up in a pickup truck to collect us. The lodge, when we got there, was right on the shores of a lake. There were a collection of cabins amidst the towering pine trees and a larger building that served as the main lodge and accommodation for Henry's parents.

There were a group of Americans at the lodge. Henry and I spent the rest of the day drinking beer on the dock and sometimes taking the canoes out for a paddle on the quiet waters. I remember thinking as I paddled across to the other side of the lake that this wilderness of lakes and forest stretched all the way to the arctic tundra. It was benign enough in early September but winter would come early to these latitudes and the lake would probably be frozen solid in just a few months. We were in what Canadians called 'Indian summer'; with the heat and humidity of summer behind us, it was regarded as the most pleasant time of the year.

That night I went to sleep in the cosy cabin to the sound of the wind stirring on the lake. I wondered what kind of wild animals were out there in the woods. Plenty of black bears, I'd been told, as well as moose. I snuggled into the rough woollen blankets and fell into a deep sleep.

The next day was cloudy with a biting chill in the air. It was an early foretaste of winter. Henry's Dad told me that they would only run the camp until early October, before closing it up for the winter. Although he didn't say it, I guessed he made enough money in the summer to allow him to put his feet up in his Toronto apartment through the winter.

The eastbound Sunday train wasn't coming through until near seven o'clock so we had the whole day which was pretty much a repeat of Saturday except with the water on the lake being choppy we didn't venture out in the canoes. In mid afternoon we watched as the float plane landed on the lake to take the Americans back over the border. Eventually it was time for us to depart, too. The truck took us back to the CN line where we had the experience of actually waving down the train as it approached. We saw it first about a mile away as a light in the distance. I wondered how the driver could see two awaiting passengers beside the tracks but as the train got closer it slowed and stopped and we were able to clamber aboard.

It was almost ten o'clock by the time we got back to Capreol which still left a four hundred mile drive back to Toronto. Even at Henry's driving speed, it was still five o'clock in the morning by the time I got back to the apartment. I fell into bed dog-tired but only dozed. I wasn't exactly in great shape when I got to the office three hours later.