

Chapter 1



Into the Wilderness

I

Boom. I bolt out of sleep into thick dark. *What was that?* I burrow into the warmth of two wool blankets and a comforter. *What was that sound?* Did a tree fall on our cabin? What else could it be? Maybe the corner of our tiny bedroom has broken off in the cold and is laying in a splintered heap in three feet of February snow. After a childhood in Buffalo, New York, I should be used to snow. But here it's been snowing for three days. On the first day, snow settled like a fluffy down coverlet on our roof. On the second day, snow coiled on tree branches like fat lazy snakes. By the third day, I felt completely cut off from the outer world.

And now, the sound of this boom has shaken me awake. Whatever it was, my husband, lying next to me, is still fast asleep. He doesn't seem concerned, so maybe I don't need to be either. I cannot be a wimp. I have to figure this out myself. Meanwhile, I fully expect to feel snowflakes land any minute and melt on my face.

I should get up, turn on the light, see what has happened. I begin to emerge from the covers and pause. *Damn, we don't have electricity.* Even after four months in this wilderness, I forget sometimes. Curling into a tight ball, I conserve the little warmth inside me. No hope of more sleep. Thinking, thinking. Why did I follow Jay Yardley here in the first place? I do love this man. I was intrigued by the idea of the adventure when I said "Yes I will marry you, Yes I will follow you anywhere." He was passionate, certain this was the right thing to do. And now our cabin is collapsing in the middle of the night and we probably won't be able to get out for days and days. *Why* is he still sleeping and here I am, eyes wide in the crystal black.

The cold and the dark send me to places deep inside that ask questions I don't allow in the daylight. *Really?* That part of me asks. *Am I up for this?* Even in daylight the situation is overwhelming. I can't stop thinking of the tour Jay took me on after we got here. I had to make him repeat how much land we have. One thousand acres. Bordering two lakes. I can't wrap my mind around what that means. One thousand acres of wilderness, trees, lakes, and rivers. I'm sure I'd get lost out there and never find my way home. There are some thirty-seven cabins and boathouses including an abandoned historic 1800s summer resort and a rustic summer camp—all in Jay's family for four generations. And a crumbling dam. And now we are responsible for it all.

The dark magnifies everything. How in god's name are we going to deal with thirty-seven buildings? Most are real houses, not cabins, some with five or six bedrooms. They have names like Maple and Birch and Fir. Jay has a vision, he is so sure of himself, but I cannot conceive of how we will possibly do all this. I'm willing to follow his lead, but I have to admit, in the middle of the tour, it took everything I had to not just stop and say I can't do this, I don't know how to do this.

At least I can now usually wash the glass chimneys for our kerosene lamps without smudging or breaking them so we can have light. And I was determined to figure out how to crank the gas generator to pump lake water up to a thousand-gallon tank on the hill above us. Without that water gravity feeding to our cabin through pipes buried below the frost line, we can't brush our teeth or flush the toilet. But no one warned me the roof would crack in the middle of the night. No one warned me how lonely it could be.

Our closest neighbors live a mile away, and we don't know them well. I have no one to talk to but Jay, and he is off working most of the day. We are eleven miles from any town. Who would want to live that far from anything? Just yesterday, on the walk down our half-mile driveway, for a moment I thought I saw my sister standing in the woods. I'd give anything to see her. Or anyone. I'm not used to having no one around at all. When Jay comes home for lunch after working with one building or another, I greet him at the door, lunch ready on the table. I don't want to miss a second of time with him, even if we often eat in silence. Jay is usually preoccupied with a bulldozer that broke down or a chainsaw that needs sharpening.

As I lie here, I think if I could keep the names of the cabins straight, repeat their names over and over, maybe I could go back to sleep. Maple, Birch, Fir, what are the others? . . . Maple, Birch . . . Finally, the warmth under my blankets soothes my racing mind. The scary questions, the doubts, and the bare-bones truth recede for at least a while, and eventually I go back to sleep.

A few hours later, daylight shines through our intact window, not streaming in from a gaping hole in the ceiling. Out the window, the clear blue sky looks brittle, as if I could break off a thin piece and crunch it exploding in a blue phosphorescence in my mouth. No snow covers our bed.

"What was that sound in the night?" I ask Jay.

"Ah! That's the ice on the lake cracking. It does that when it's really cold."

Okay, question answered. But the monologue of the night hangs in the cavern of my mind. *Do I really want to be here?* I'm twenty-four years old, married only a year and a half, living far from friends and family, homesick for the puppy pile of my four siblings and the neighborhood kids who gravitated to our apple orchard for kick-the-can. I never had to deal with long, silent days; dark, cold nights; getting lost on one thousand acres; or, for that matter, booming ice. I wonder if I can do this.

II

I remember vividly how it all began. It was fifty years ago, the fall of 1965, my senior year at the University of Colorado. The moment I walked into Creative Writing 304, I noticed the tall guy with jet-black hair in a

Norwegian ski sweater. At six feet tall myself, I still had to look several inches up at him. I could stand straight and tall next to this man without reliving the awkwardness of seventh grade dancing school where I towered over every boy. The direct, intent, honest look from under his dark brows transfixed me. As if he could see exactly what I was all about. I wanted to know what he was thinking, what those eyes had seen, where he'd been.

Our first assignment was to write about something that meant a great deal to us. In class, Mr. Warner said, "Jay, let's hear yours."

Jay opened his folder. I have kept this folder, so I can still read his unique, half-cursive, half-print scrawl.

The mist had risen to the height of the mountains beyond the lake. Josh walked down the long winding dirt road. His nostrils closed slightly as he allowed the smell of the balsam fir to gather in his head. It was that Adirondack smell.

When I heard this, I sat up straighter, leaned forward. I knew that smell of balsam. His character, Josh, was returning home after three years in the service.

The family had always lived there through hunting, fishing, and sugaring seasons. Some had walked down that road and kept on going just as Josh had once done. Some came back to be buried with the rest near the river.

Place. The setup for this story had such a strong sense of place. I wanted to go there.

That same day in class, I read a story based on *my* place—my grandmother's island, two hundred miles north of the border in Ontario, Canada—the first place I felt connected to, where my bare feet knew every root, where each early morning my warm skin knew the shock of cool lake water, where my days were filled with parents, sisters and brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, and would-be boyfriends. The "old guard" faction—mainly my cousin Jerry and me, outfitted in blue jeans and moccasins—wanted to retain old ways and traditions, honor the natural setting, no phone or TV. We didn't even want electricity. Our enemy was my "conniving aunt" with tight dresses, high-heeled, fluffy-toed, sling-back shoes, frizzy Clairol-black, done-up hair, who wanted cocktail parties and the newest appliances.

After class, Jay asked me out to dinner. Over a T-bone steak and baked potatoes at Fred's Steak House, we talked about tradition and the essential timelessness of land. I told him about my childhood summers on Eagle Island. He told me of his summers in the Adirondack mountains in

northern New York and his long family history there, of his fascination with a place up a river, a place called the Bartlett Carry Club.

“The Bartlett Carry Club?” I asked. “Interesting name. Why is it called that?”

“It’s an old summer resort going back to the 1800s, not used any more, falling into ruins. It’s called Bartlett Carry because it’s a canoe carry between Middle and Upper Saranac Lakes. My great-grandfather was the first in our family to go there, in the 1800s. I spent a lot of summers there. Someday I’m going back. I want to take over the family property, restore all those abandoned houses, revive the Bartlett Carry Club. I know there are people who want to be in the woods by a lake, but comfortable, in a place where they can touch down, relax. This is the perfect place. I’ve been all over the world, but I’ve never seen anywhere as beautiful.” He ran long fingers through his black hair. “I have a movie I could show you.”

A turning point in my life, although I didn’t know it then. As I think about it now, many years later, that moment comes right back.

I sat on a straight-back chair waiting for the show to begin. The clicking whir of the 8mm projector broke the silence. Jay had invited me to his small mountain cabin outside Boulder, Colorado, to see this movie. The only light shot from the projector onto the dusty kitchen wall.

Then, instead of specks on the wall, a grainy black-and-white movie emerged. I leaned forward. Jay said “Okay, this is the beginning of the road going in to our family ‘camp,’ our summer home, on Middle Saranac Lake. The old name is Round Lake. I like that better.” I sat stock-still, engrossed in the slow-motion travel up a narrow dirt road, past white pines and maples, fern-covered rocks, and moss on either side.

I knew trees, ferns, and rocks like these on Eagle Island. Woods to run free in, canoes to tip over, twenty-two at the dining-room table, everyone talking at once. In the peace of Jay’s cabin, I dove into the images flickering on the wall. The eye of the camera escorted me around one sun-dappled bend after another. I wanted to watch forever.

Jay turned my world upside down. Before meeting him, I had planned to apply to the University of Michigan for a Master’s degree in children’s theater. Suddenly, I only wanted to be with him, do whatever he did, tell him my stories, and listen to his. He told me that at age seventeen, days after graduating from high school, he abandoned any obligation he had

felt to conform to his parents' upper-class lifestyle and philosophy. He didn't even apply to college. He grabbed his backpack and forty dollars and hitchhiked across the country. He worked for meals and a place to rest his head. A year later, at eighteen, he joined the Marine Corps and then a Special Forces Recon Unit in Viet Nam. After a bayonet in the back and stateside recovery, he spent the rest of his military service working for the U.S. government in Poland, Russia, and Spain. He even delivered a briefcase chained to his wrist to President Kennedy. Only after an honorable discharge from the Marine Corps did he go to college. By that time, he had been to thirty-six countries and lived and worked in several of them.

I had grown up throwing snowballs in suburban Buffalo, surrounded by brothers and sisters, horses, dogs, cats, and the occasional rabbit; product of Miss Porter's girl's prep school, in New England. I was done with parties where I towered above everyone in the room and looked like Alice in Wonderland after she ate the wrong mushroom. I had loved acting on stage, from my kindergarten debut as Ceres, Roman goddess of agriculture, to a theater major in college. I had only traveled to Canada, and that was for family vacation. No wonder he fascinated me.

When Jay proposed marriage, a honeymoon to Alaska, and adventure, I accepted willingly to be his partner in all of it. Not just as a tagalong. Not just—*Okay, if you really want to do this*. Instead—*Yay! Let's hit the road and see what's up there!* A real adventure. The broader world intrigued me. I was curious to discover, especially after hearing Jay's stories of all the places he'd been and worked and lived. Alaska was a good beginning. Time to say goodbye to the culture I had grown up in where the man went to work and the woman stayed home to do the housekeeping. Time to claim the part of me that was adventuresome and willing to experiment. I had already started by moving into a small log cabin in the mountains outside Boulder which confirmed that traditional suburban life wasn't for me. Time for the next step.

A little over a year later, on May 12, 1967, in my parents' home, Jay and I exchanged rings and vows, including Kahlil Gibran . . . “When love beckons to you, follow him, though his ways are hard and steep.”¹ . . . “Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each of you be alone, even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.”²



Fran and Jay married May 12, 1967.

Family and friends threw rice and waved farewell. We hopped in our homemade camper and drove down the driveway, across Canada, and up the unpaved AlCan Highway to Alaska in search of a place to live. Jay was twenty-six, I was twenty-two. We rumbled north 1,519 miles from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Fairbanks, Alaska. Dall and Bighorn sheep perched on craggy rocks; moose grazed in bogs. After two months of driving on every Alaskan road, we had covered only a small fraction of the state. We hiked miles into the wilderness, skied on a summer snow field, and explored in our rubber raft. Finally, we decided it was just too remote to be our new home.

On to Plans B, C, and D: opening a craft shop in Park City, Utah; teaching at a small pre-high boarding school; working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. After those fell through, Plan E stuck. Jay would be a field representative for CARE-Medico in their mission to serve individuals and families in the poorest communities throughout the world. CARE assigned us to Tunisia. I had to consult an atlas to find out where that was.

In February 1968, we landed in the completely foreign time/culture/climate zone of North Africa. Jay's job was to verify with schools across Tunisia that they had received CARE supplies. Each day he headed out with Ferjani, his Tunisian driver. Meanwhile, I put on the obligatory mid-length skirt to wear in public, tucked a straw basket under one freckled arm, and walked to the market for eggs, bread, chicken, veggies. All the way there, I rehearsed how to say *Good Morning!* in Arabic and *La bes? La bes. How are you? I am fine.* I tried not to notice staring dark-haired, short women, their sefsaris covering everything but their faces, and men in hooded jebbas, all astonished by this fair stranger a head taller than most of them.

After months, the Tunisian CARE boss announced he was going to file away Jay's detailed reports suggesting black-market maneuvers, because they did not mesh with the pristine record of his office. That decision did not mesh with Jay's integrity.

One August afternoon, in the cool of our Tunisian house, protected from the searing North African sun, Jay leaned forward.

"What do you think?" he said. "We could go back, move up to the Adirondacks."

The recent death of Jay's grandmother, Harriet Jenkins Yardley, meant the family estate, begun by Jay's great-grandfather, would now be broken up. This estate included his treasured place in the mountains.

"We could live at the family camp. I could do everything I've been talking about at the Bartlett Carry Club. Right now those buildings are being subleased for medical student housing by a hospital called Will Rogers, but that doesn't have to continue. I want to renovate them so families can come like they used to—connect with nature, with wilderness. That's what really matters." He paused.

"I'd have to figure it out with Pop. What do you think?" I had no idea of the magnitude of his plan, but he was compelling. I would not miss my constant scratchy throat from trying to speak guttural Arabic or

the homesick feeling residing in my belly. We were both ready to leave North Africa.

“Okay!” I said. Time for the next chapter in our lives.

III

Our feet touched homeland soil for the first time in a year. I immediately settled into the familiar sound of English enveloping me. We visited my family in Buffalo, and, as I hugged my mom, my shoulders finally relaxed. Then we visited Jay’s family in Darien, Connecticut. Jay stiffened as we entered the chandeliered front hall. Before dinner, he took a deep breath and sought out his father. I wanted to be there too, even as a bystander. The butler passed drinks. His dad sat on an overstuffed chintz chair. Ice crackled against crystal. Jay did not sit. After a few polite exchanges, he jumped in.

“Pop, I don’t want any money as inheritance. I’ve saved from working overseas. There’s something I do want. Up north. The family land in the Adirondacks. We want to live there. Full time.” His father’s face showed nothing. He said nothing.

“I want to own the land and restore the Bartlett Carry Club and even the family camp.”

Jay paused, took a breath.

His whole life had led up to this moment. As a kid, he had to conform, play tennis at country clubs in perfect whites, polish his manners, and charm his parents’ friends. He had never felt comfortable with any of it. He had no intention of putting on a suit, commuting by train, working in an office. From the moment he left home at seventeen, he had been looking for a place to make his own mark. Now he had come full circle, back to the home of his ancestors, willing to face his father. I liked the idea of being back on home turf and moving to the Adirondacks. So I held my breath, too.

Jay looked hard at his dad. “I know Mom doesn’t care about being up there much, but it would mean you couldn’t come for hunting season anymore.” My heart thumped—What was his father thinking? Was he crushed to hear his son didn’t want him there? Was he secretly glad to relinquish responsibility for this land?

His face still showed no emotion. It rarely did. He raised his glass and took a sip. “Well, I think this is something we can talk about.”

For whatever reason, he soon agreed. The transfer of land took place and with that extraordinary gift and with Jay’s savings and mine, we made the leap. Thus began our adventure into the wilderness.

IV

We arrive on October 25, 1968. Now, as we drive up that road so familiar to me from the movie, I’m not watching a black-and-white slow motion picture on a Colorado kitchen wall. Instead, I am immersed in burnt umber, dark green, faded red and orange. Jay has informed me our cabin will not have electricity.

“But hey!” he cheerfully adds. “At least part of the cabin has a basement, so I think we might be warm in winter.” I do notice that by the time we turn off the main road, we have traveled eleven miles from the last sign of civilization.

We drive around another bend—more trees, moss, ferns. *How long is this road?*

“Oh wow, I recognize this from your movie!” I say this as much to brighten my spirits as anything.

“Okay, this road goes into the family camp. It’s about a half mile. It ends at Middle Saranac Lake.”

“But what about the Bartlett Carry Club?”

“Back at that last curve off the main road, you go right about a half mile on the gravel road and then across the river. We’ll go see it soon.”

I am completely confused, but I hear the excitement in his voice.

Finally the end of the dirt road, an opening in the trees, and there, perched on a hill looking out at a lake, squats a small brown cabin.

“Well, here we are,” says Jay. “This is the Guide House. It’s called that because it’s sort of winterized so the caretaker for the family camp lives here. Guess that’s us now.”

We climb out of the Land Rover. I look over at Jay and lock eyes with him. We both inhale and catch the unmistakable scent of balsam. I latch on to the familiar smell. Down the hill are many cabins, each sided with spruce bark.

“Look at that. How many buildings are there?”

“Oh, a bunch. But this is nothing compared to the Club. Wait ’til you see that.”

How long has this all been here? Who built it? When? Why here? What for? How? Light glints off water.

“And this is . . . which lake?”

“Round Lake was its name in the past. Most people call it Middle Saranac Lake now. I like calling it Round Lake and, once we have guests, I think we should refer to it that old-fashioned way.”

I agree. I like honoring the old ways whenever we can.

Jay points out to the lake.

“See Ship Island out there? The little one? Great picnic spot. And if you got in a boat and followed the shoreline to the left, you’d come to the river, go a half mile up that and you’d be at the Bartlett Carry Club.”

Great. Now I’m even more confused.

Late fall sun lies low in the sky. Jay says “Come on! I’ll give you a quick tour of the family camp. There are about ten buildings. That’s the Maid’s Cabin over there.”

“*Maid’s Cabin?*”

“Oh yeah, you wouldn’t believe the life back when Gramp and Granny Yardley came. Granny had a personal maid named Molly. And others too who did cooking and cleaning. They even had a chauffeur.”

Jay’s voice takes on a low tone, a note I’ve heard before when he’s talked about his family. Not only did his Granny have a maid and chauffeur, his parents did, too. As a kid, he had played often with Eddie, the chauffeur’s son. Jay would have much preferred living over the garage as Eddie did and not having a formal dinner every evening, served by the deferential butler.

“And this,” says Jay as he walks down the hill, “is the icehouse and woodshed.”

“Icehouse?” I can relate to this. “We have one of those on Eagle Island.”

“They cut huge blocks of ice every winter and stored them here with sawdust. Before they had electricity, the ice kept everything cool.”

I think about our having no electricity. Will we have to lug huge heavy blocks of ice up the hill to our cabin?

“How will *we* keep stuff cold?”

“We have a gas refrigerator.”

“Ah.” My shoulders relax.

“I slept in this cabin and my sister in that one.” He points to two small one-room cabins.

“And David stayed in the cabin right next to the Guide House.” David Rawle was Jay’s best friend growing up and came here for part of every summer.

“Where’d you go to the bathroom?”

“Over here.” He points to the biggest house in the enclave. “This one’s called Windsor. Built later than the rest, in the 1930s, it has an indoor bathroom.” We are now walking on raised wooden walkways connecting the small cabins.

“Why all these separate cabins?”

“A lot of Adirondack camps do this. Fire is a big deal with so many wooden structures, and the nearest fire department is eleven miles away. If there’s a fire in one cabin, it hopefully means it won’t spread to the others, so everything might not be lost. Something to consider when you’re heating with wood and using kerosene lamps.”

Jay has walked on.



Sleeping Cabins at family camp on Middle Saranac Lake, ca. 1960.

“Just a few more. Here’s the kitchen cabin and right next door is the dining room cabin.”

“Huh.” I say. “How did they keep food warm getting from one to the other?”

Jay has opened the dining room cabin door. “You’ve got to see the inside.” We walk in, enveloped in warm, late-afternoon light reflecting off wood-paneled walls. Twigs and white birch bark decorate the table and sideboards. An enormous wooden bowl sits on the table. Water laps against the shore just down the hill.

I have questions, but before I can ask, Jay heads out the door and says “And one more—my grandparents’ cabin—well, it used to be. They haven’t come for a long time. Gramp died a little over ten years ago, and you know Granny Yardley died this summer.”

“Gramp is Farnham Yardley, right?” I say, trying to get the family history straight.

“Yup.”

“And Granny Yardley is Harriet Jenkins Yardley.”

“Right. They stayed here in the first cabin my great-grandfather built.” Jay sees me searching for the name. “Alfred Blunt Jenkins, Harriet’s father, the one who came in the late 1800s.”

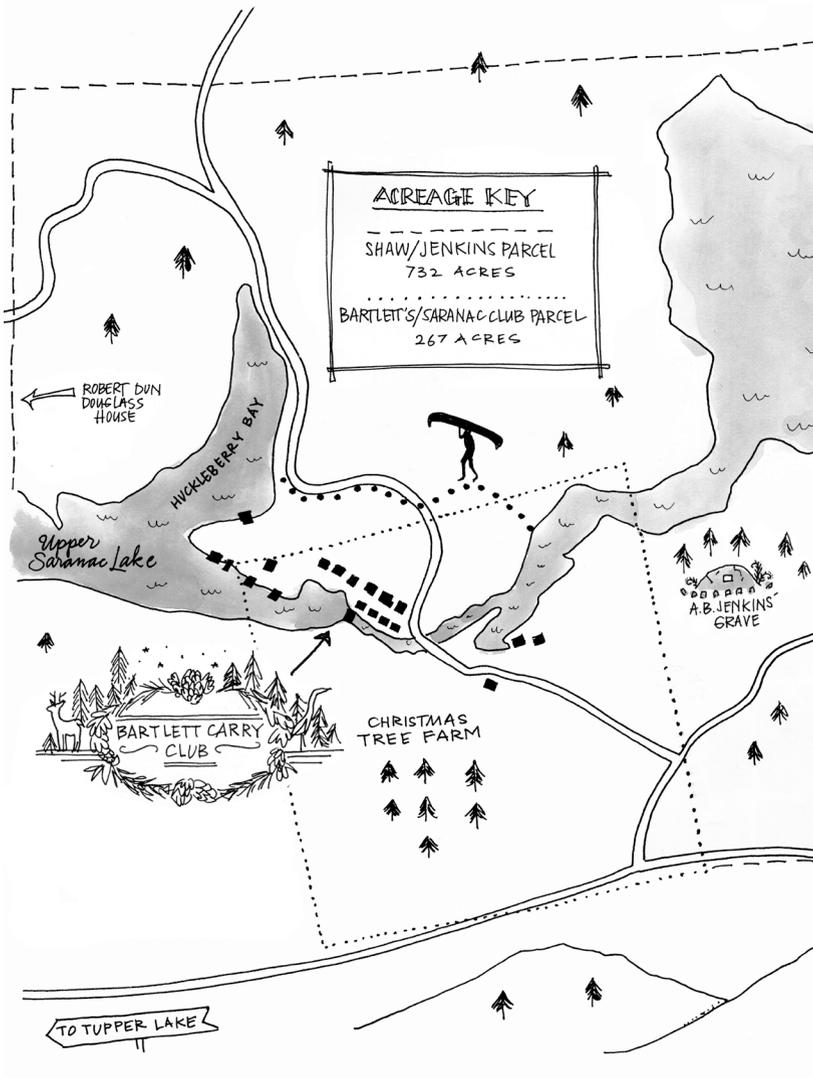
I pause at the door. “Look at this.” A tarnished brass four-inch-long dragonfly is fastened at eye level. It looks about as out-of-place as I feel right now. Do dragonflies even live here? I make an attempt at humor. “It looks like it might have gotten lost and ended up on this door.”

“Oh, right,” Jay says. “The door knocker. We should save that.”

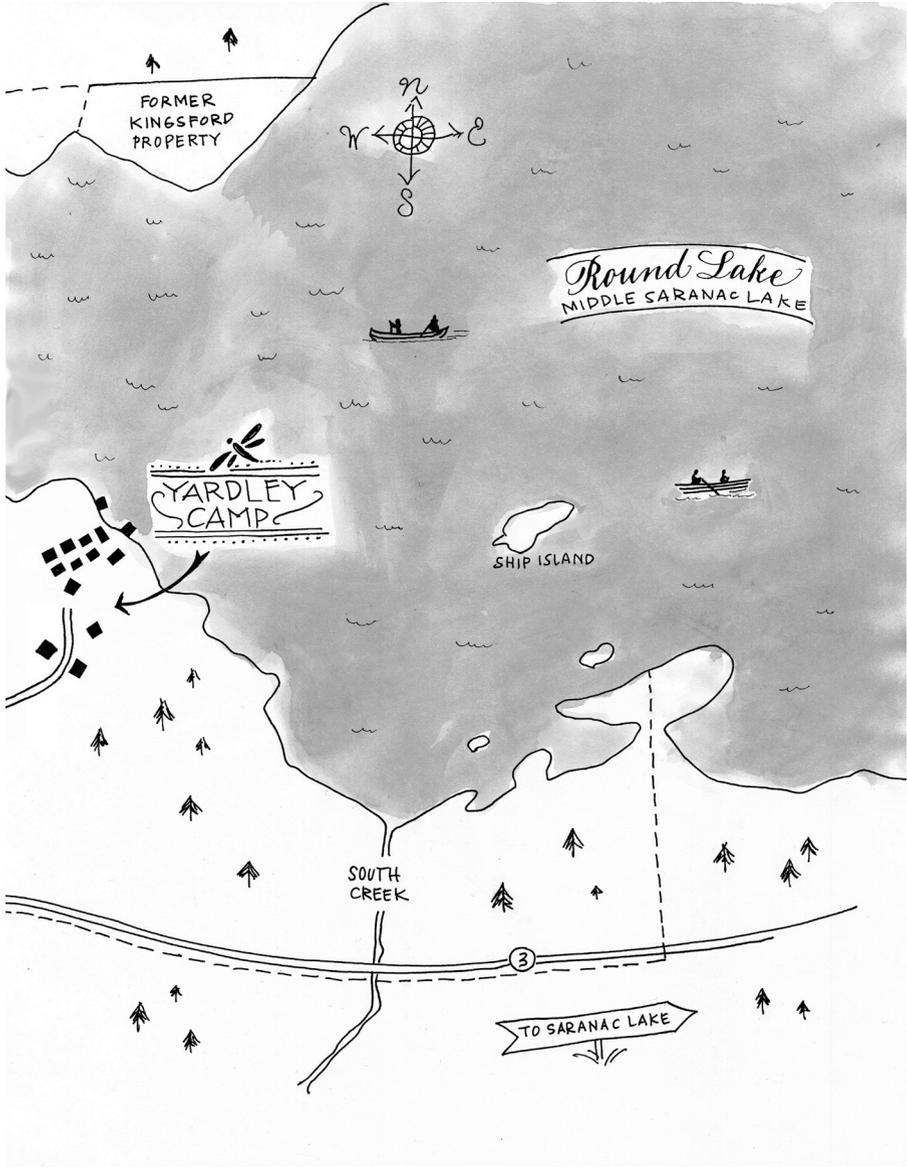
I love this cabin. It reminds me of the one my mom and dad stay in on Eagle Island. Cozy living room with light reflecting off wooden wainscoted walls; a fireplace, a small bedroom, even a bathroom. I especially love the covered porch with several rustic chairs, including a rocking chair, a perfect spot to sit and watch light play on water.

Jay breaks in on my musings. “And then there are the boathouses and docks, but let’s save those. We’d better get back uphill and unpack the Rover before it gets dark.”

One morning a few days later, Jay scrapes the last of his scrambled eggs and bacon from his plate and says, “Okay! I think we’re settled in enough. Let’s conduct a reconnaissance mission to the Bartlett Carry Club



Map 2. Bartlett Carry Club and Yardley Camp 1968, by Gail Brill.



and take stock of what we have to do.” We need to get going. Winter will come soon, sooner even than we know.

As I scrub plates, Jay sticks his pipe in the corner of his mouth and spreads a map on his large desk.

“Okay, take a look at this. Here we are on Round Lake.”

“You mean Middle Saranac Lake?” I am still confused.

“Yup. Same thing. Round Lake . . .”

He puts a large dot on a point that juts out into a smallish lake.

“And this is our property line around the one thousand acres.” Jay runs his finger around the edge of a patchwork of boundary lines.

“Why are there two pieces?”

“It’s a combination of the 267 acres Virgil Bartlett had at the beginning, and the 732 acres Gramp bought in 1903.”

“How big is Round Lake anyway?” I ask.

“About two or three miles long, one mile wide.” Jay begins to draw an imaginary line.

“We can get to the Club by boat, too. We could canoe from here, around this point to the Saranac River, then go about a half mile ’til the rapids start. That’s where Virgil Bartlett first came.” Virgil Bartlett. His name keeps coming up.

I lean in over the map to see where Jay is pointing.

“Okay, here’s how Virgil Bartlett used to get here. He took a boat from the village of Saranac Lake, six miles across Lower Saranac, through Round Lake—Middle Saranac—and then up this river until they had to stop because of the rapids. That’s why there’s a canoe carry to go overland to Upper Saranac Lake. I’m sure Native Americans used this, but it wasn’t ’til Virgil Bartlett came that it was called Bartlett Carry. And that’s where we’re going today because this is where the Bartlett Carry Club is.”

“Are we paddling or going by road?”

“Let’s take the Land Rover.”

That’s fine with me on this chilly early November morning. We drive down the familiar half-mile dirt road lined with hemlocks and pines, turn right on the gravel town road.

After another half mile of driving, I ask, “This is still the property?”

“Yup. And it goes on for several more miles after this.”

Miles? Wow.

Jay slows down.

“See the barn?”

I can’t miss it. The weathered, three-story structure has solidly staked its claim along a big stretch on the left side of the road.

“It’s huge! How old is it?”

“I think about 1898, and it looks in pretty good shape. Might be a good place to store stuff like furniture and boats ’til we figure out where we want everything.”

I flash back to crawling with my sisters through our barn hayloft hunting for newborn kittens. I turn to Jay. “Hey, maybe someday, we can have some animals in there.”

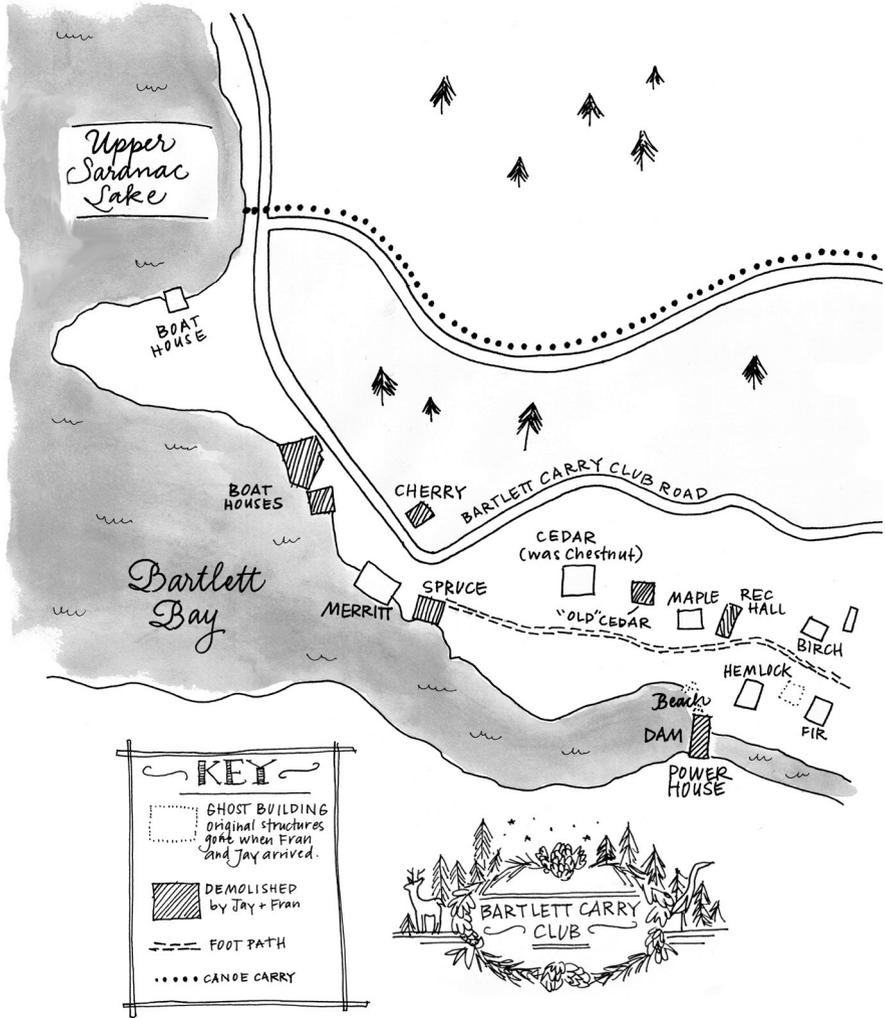
Just across from the barn stands a two-story frame house where one of our two employees, Al Tyrol, lives with his wife and two teenage sons. Before we arrived, Al was caretaker for both the Club and the family camp for fifteen years. He seems to be having trouble adjusting to our arrival. Before, his job was easy, no one looking over his shoulder, rarely anyone coming to camp. Now, each morning at eight, Jay has a list of jobs for him.

We rumble over a wooden bridge. I roll down the window. The sound of rapids rushes in with chill November air. Just on the other side of the bridge, we pause, look to our right at an overgrown field, yellowing grasses, an abandoned tennis court. Jay leans forward, looks beyond me out the window. “Remember the picture we found of the old Sportsmen’s Home?”

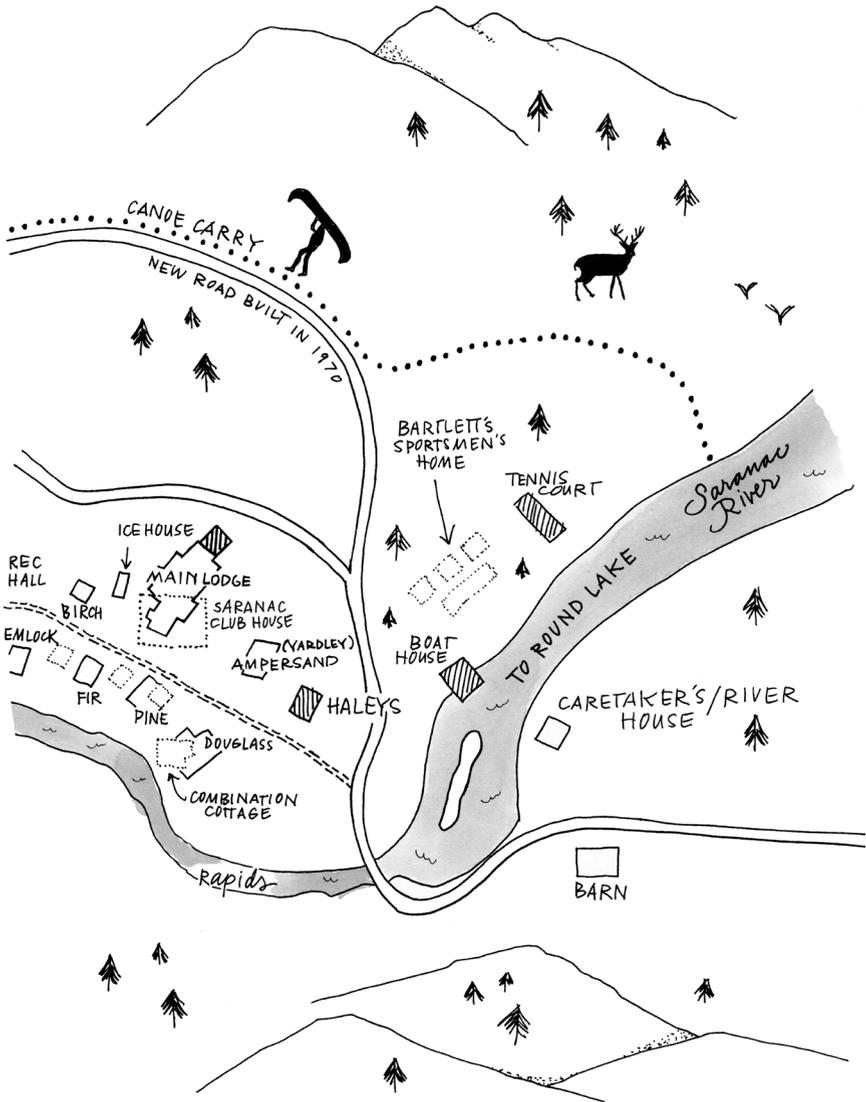
I do remember. Within days of arriving, we discovered several wooden crates filled with old photographs, documents, and maps that go back over 100 years; among them, sepia photographs of Virgil Bartlett and his wife, Caroline, and fragile black-and-white photos of several ramshackle wooden buildings on the shore of a river.

“This is where Virgil Bartlett built his Sportsmen’s Home, right in this field.”

Jay gets out. I open my door. The shoosh of rapids fills my ears. I try to imagine this field with the old wooden buildings I saw in the photo. Virgil and Caroline must have heard this same rushing water. I take a minute to inhale familiar late fall smells—dried grasses, earth, and cool air. A silvery vee of geese undulates southward in the pale November sky.



Map 3. Bartlett Carry Club detail, by Gail Brill.





Main Lodge pre-1970.

“What did they do here? What was the Sportsmen’s Home?”

“A place for people to stay in the woods, to hunt and fish. A little like what we’re going to do.”

I turn around, look up the hill and point to two houses. “Were those part of what Bartlett built? They look a lot newer than the picture we saw.”

Jay laughs. “Nope. That’s part of the present day Bartlett Carry Club, such as it still is. That one on the right is Yardley Cottage, the one Granny Yardley built in the 1920s.”

“Wait! Your grandmother?”

“Right. Harriet Jenkins Yardley.”

“Why did she need a house here when she had the family summer camp down on Middle Saranac?”

“That’s something I never figured out.” Jay shrugs. “Maybe she just needed to get away from everything.”

A mile down the road?

“And the one on the left is called Douglass. Built about the same time for the Douglass family.”