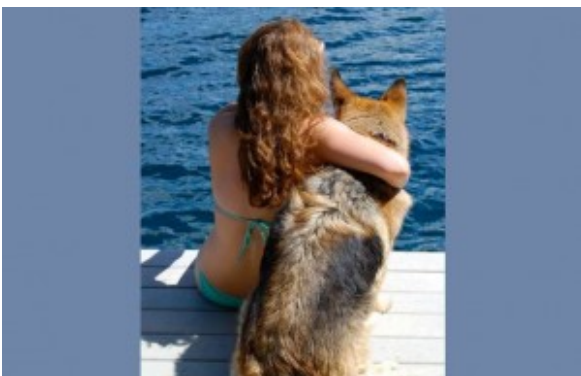


Lasting memories of Fallen Leaf Lake's magic

By Blair Scott

The two-mile, dirt road leading to the cabin transports me back to my carefree childhood. Every summer, for a long weekend, my family has driven up to Tahoe to relive the sweet, savory memories of past years. Winding through patches of dense pine trees and passing intermittent, bright green meadows, the familiar drive leads us to the cabin we outgrew many years ago, but continue to come back to each summer.

Our two German shepherds, Heidi and Chloe, squeezed into the back of our 1998 Ford Expedition next to a stack of four duffel bags and colorful beach towels, start to whine as we get closer to the cabin. As we pull up to the house, my eyes soak in the warm, brown, gingerbread color of its exterior and the sweetness of the delicately shingled roof. Its petite chimney peaks out the top – void of smoke since it is mid-July – and the graham cracker colored shutters frame the dusty windows on the front of the house.



Blair Scott and her dog
Chloe at Fallen Leaf Lake.

Photo/Provided

Opening the car doors, the warm summer air floods in, and my

nose breathes the fresh, familiar fragrance. Stepping out onto the pine-needle-covered dirt driveway, I open the trunk to release the impatient pups. Finally free, after five long hours of sitting in the car, they leap out of the back, rushing to sniff the familiar bushes, scattered with red berries that line the perimeter of the driveway.

The cabin sits atop wooden stilts, tucked into the dry, fire-hungry, California forest at the bottom of a steep hill. Inside, there is one king bed, a small kitchen with a wood burning stove and a closet-sized bathroom. In the middle of the room, a wooden ladder ascends to the attic, where my brother and I sleep. As a kid, I dreaded sleeping up there; it was filled with spider webs, dead bugs, dusty surfaces and old mattresses. But we had no choice. By the time we were nearing our 20s, we were simply too big for the attic; we had to duck when we walked, so our heads wouldn't hit the ceiling, and our feet dangled off the end of the mattresses. We had definitely outgrown the cabin, but we ignored the inevitable size problem so that we could spend one final, jobless, commitment-free, summer there as a family.

Taking our bags up with us into the attic, we crack the windows to release the trapped summer air, while trying to dodge the sheets of spider webs. I look out the window, past all of the trees, to see Fallen Leaf Lake for the first time. Peeking through the sea of intoxicatingly green treetops, I am beckoned by the water's enticing cobalt color.

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The sparkling blue light blinds me as I run toward the end of the dock. Leaping off the edge, I feel myself suspended in the air, vulnerable and helpless. Below me, the clear glassy water awaits my splash. Thoughts of my childhood rush through my head, of all 19, consecutive, summers we have come to the lake, of all the memories that have occurred in this exact spot. I prepare for the bone-numbing, heart-stopping chill of

the water that I am about to plunge into. I gasp. The sparkling elixir reviving my sunburned body as I enter the lake. Coming up for air as soon as I can, I struggle to catch my breath, looking back up at the dock, where the unofficial lifeguards, my dogs, peer over the edge to make sure I am OK.

The 60-degree water permeates my skin; I can actually feel my legs starting to go numb. The freezing lake is shocking, yet soothing. The first swim is always the best, but the temperature makes it impossible to stay in any longer so I rush toward the ladder to get out. My dogs greet me, wagging their tails in excited relief that I am finally out of the water.

Wrapping myself up in my favorite, faded, blue and green towel, I lie on the warm dock as my body thaws. Heidi and Chloe lie next to me, their eyes watching the bees that hover around us. If a bee flies too close to Heidi, she will swat at it with her paw and try to capture it in her mouth. An hour passes; I hear the distant sounds of motorboats swirling around the lake. Above me, the calm, blue canvas is streaked with delicate wisps of white clouds. There is a certain stillness that exists on the dock, and I cherish the peaceful surroundings.

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Beep beep, beep beep, beep beep. I can hear my dad's alarm going off from the attic. I roll over in bed to look out of the window toward the lake. Glass. No wind. The lake is still. Which means it's time to go. Every morning, my dad and I wake up hoping to go out in the boat to water ski, but only if the conditions are nearly perfect. This morning they are.

I get up and put on sweat pants and a sweat shirt over my bathing suit. I descend down the ladder, and my dad is waiting, ready to go. Much to their disappointment, the dogs have to stay at the cabin with my mom and brother while they

continue sleeping. The dogs will bark and whine the entire time we're gone. With me leading the way, my dad and I head down the steep hillside to the dock to meet Uncle Tom who brings his boat over from the other end of the lake. He's waiting for us when we get there; ready to take us out on the lake to claim the untouched water as our own. Leaving our flip-flops on the dock, we climb onto the boat.

The sun peaks over the snow-topped mountains that surround the lake as we zoom to the far end where the water is always the calmest. Leaving a thick white stream of boat wake behind us, the steady rumble of the boat's engine allows us to enjoy a conversation-less, calm morning boat ride. The cool wind whips through my hair, and my dad firmly holds his San Francisco Giants baseball hat onto his head.

I cherish this moment, knowing it will probably be one of the last morning boat rides we have, and one of the last summers we go up to the lake as a family before my brother and I enter adulthood. We may be growing up, but the memories I have from the lake will stay with me forever.