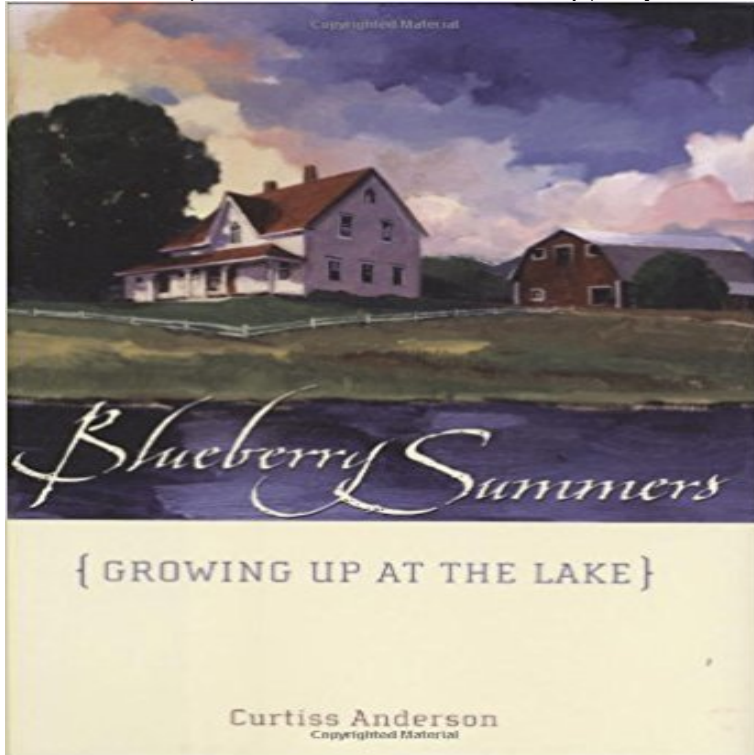


Blueberry Summers: Growing Up at the Lake



I would begin thinking about summer on our lake as early as Easter. Yes, it was our lake, not just the lake. In this classic story of a midwestern boyhood, Curtiss Anderson takes readers into the colorful lives of his robust Norwegian family and their wonderfully familiar summerscape in northern Minnesota: the lake place. Sweet childhood reminiscences comprise this coming-of-age memoir set in the poignant summers of the 1930s and 40s. Conversations on the porch with Dear Old Aunt Ingabord, a heavily accented relative from the Old Country. A budding romance and heartbreak with young Sarah, who lived across the lake. Wild blueberry picking behind Turnaround Island. Joyful tales devoted to cherished dogs he had outlived—old Shep and Mickey, Nebby, and feisty Bunny. And fond memories of Clara and Leigh, the loving couple who treated the budding writer as if he was their own child. Anderson revisits the notes and letters he scripted as a boy, originally recorded on his hand-me-down Underwood typewriter—his first foray into what would become a distinguished publishing career—to offer Blueberry Summers. Here, the nationally recognized magazine editor offers a funny and warm story of experiences that inspire the imagination. Curtiss Anderson is a writer and editorial consultant. He has enjoyed an illustrious career with Hearst Magazines and Better Homes and Gardens and as editor in chief of Ladies Home Journal. He lives in Tiburon,

California, with his wife, Anne. From the Wall Street Journal, Coming of Age at Lakeside, By ALLAN CARLSON June 7, 2008 My summers have almost always meant a trip to Minnesota lakes: for my first 15 years, to Leech Lake; for the 40-plus since, to Lake of the Woods or the Boundary Waters canoe country. The landscape is on the edge of the Canadian Shield, defined by rough granite outcrops, birch and pine trees, bogs, and lakes carved deep by the glaciers. Most of the lakes are connected by streams or old Indian portages. The year-long residents of this area are mostly the descendants of Swedes and Norwegians, with an occasional Dane or Finn providing diversity. The churches are mostly Lutheran. Remnants of the old languages survive in town festivals (Uff Da Burgers), cuisine (the formidable lutefisk) and backwoods bars where Skål! remains the favored salute. Returning each summer has been, for me, more than a homecoming. As my own son, standing on our favorite island in Lake of the Woods, put it at age 12: Here is the place where I come alive. In Blueberry Summers, a memoir, Curtiss Anderson also describes the transformation that occurred when I arrived at the lake. In satisfying detail, he narrates life in and about an old farmhouse on a northeastern Minnesota chain lake during the 1930s and early 1940s. Mr. Anderson, a former magazine editor and writer, has a novelist's flair for framing characters. There is Leigh Johnson, his father's best friend, who became more than a second father to the permanently towheaded boy. Leigh was a meticulous man who knew the lake country as well as any Indian

guide. A skilled fisherman, he remarked that God doesn't count the hours fishing. There is Clara, Leigh's wife, mistress of the kitchen, whose love of life took form in her potato salad, exquisite doughnuts and Blue Boy Pie (combining wild blueberries, raspberries and blackberries). Though young Curtiss never saw his own parents touch each other, Clara and Leigh were quite sexy in a cozy sort of way. There is Uncle Skoal, blond, handsome and scampish, who sported a wooden leg from a chain-saw accident. Commenting on Skoal's favorite pastimes, Aunt Dora concluded that women would finish in a dead heat with gin. There is Great Aunt Ingeborg, an ancient Norwegian who became young Curtiss's constant, endearing, and bewitching companion as he recuperated from an accident. She talked of her wayfaring husband, Nels, who had been an iron miner and a pilot on Lake Superior ore boats. And there are the Schumachers, a refugee family with 12 children that had fled the Nazis, settled in a ramshackle farm across the lake and protected a secret. This family grew, sewed, farmed, fished, trapped, or shot practically everything they ate or owned. Curtiss is drawn to Sarah, the eldest daughter, a horse-loving girl with exotic eyes and velvety black hair. This little book is full of diverting tales. During a canoe trip, Curtiss catches a 10-pound walleye, puts it on a stringer in the water and then loses this great prize to ravenous turtles. (My own 9-pound, 6-ounce walleye, hooked at Leech Lake when I was 5, suffered an equally tragic fate.) Curtiss and Skoal's illegal catch of a near-record 60-pound carp leads to white lies and notoriety.

Blueberry Summers has a dark side. Mr. Anderson explores his troubled relationship with his parents -- saying the word Dad, he confesses, doesn't come easy for me -- and he relates a disturbing incident on a dead lake that nearly took his life. The book ends with a tragedy. All the harmony and beauty -- and security -- I had always associated with the lake, he writes, was destroyed forever. And yet those qualities are also recovered in Blueberry Summer, an ably crafted, true-life coming-of-age tale. The book will delight anyone who has ever known the lake country of the Upper Midwest. More broadly, it will reward and please readers who have ever had in their childhoods a special summer place.

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