

Summer in Muskoka: A Memoir of the Potts Family Cottage from 1962-1992

Maureen Potts

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This ode to the family cottage celebrates multi-generational family bonds with a comforting voice and often humorous nostalgia.

Among the crystalline lakes of Muskoka, Ontario, three generations of the Potts family built thirty years worth of memories, from 1962 to 1992. With a descriptive style and a humorous, often friendly voice, Maureen Potts, the second of five children, shares moments and memories—occasionally disorganized in their presentation—from her family's time in their beloved cottage in *Summer in Muskoka*.

When John and Madeline Potts stumbled upon a beautiful plot of land on the small island of Badgerow, the couple found what would ultimately serve as a cornerstone for their family. While the atmosphere of the Muskoka lake region slowly transformed into a popular vacation destination, and jobs and lives kept family members busy, year after year the Potts' children and grandchildren spent their summers on the island. The author captures the spirit of those summers through her accounts of boating adventures, cabin upgrades, and other family memories.

The book is divided into topic-oriented chapters about the initial story of the cottage and its origins, and eventual expansion of the property, summer pastimes, and more. Sprinkled throughout the chapters are anecdotes as well as background on the family's boating history, family dynamics, and more detailed accounts of what life was like in the bare-bones cottage.

Potts' family history is clearly filled with a plethora of tales, and she shares many with her readers. The variety of stories creates a full picture of life at the cottage and a feeling of a bygone era. Toward the end of the book, when Potts opens up about her mother, her underlying intention is clear; *Summer in Muskoka* is a homage to Potts' mother and the place she loved.

It's the breadth of the work and its organization that sometimes detracts from the overall vision. Accounts in one chapter feel as though they belong in another or in an entirely new section. The narrative moves quickly from one moment to the next and occasionally into unrelated subjects, creating a disjointed feeling. Some very similar stories are repeated in different parts of the book, an impediment to the book's progression and flow. While some readers may be deterred by the repetition, most will find that the pace keeps the story moving quickly through those problematic sections.

Despite its flaws, Potts' slightly rambling style feels authentic and, in many cases, charming. She offers a glimpse into the past and a comforting reminder of the strength of family bonds.

While a slightly narrower scope could have helped to create a stronger connection between the reader and family members, or perhaps allowed for the more evocative tales to be highlighted, *Summer in Muskoka* captures the essence of the Potts family summers and the beauty of the natural world. Potts' work commemorates a precious time in her family's history.

ALICIA SONDHI (October 8, 2013)

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