



Woodswoman II: Beyond Black Bear Lake

Anne LaBastille

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Woodswoman II is the equally engrossing story of the author's decision to build a tiny cabin retreat fashioned after Thoreau's *Walden*, of her life with two German shepherds as companions, and of her renewed bond with nature. Originally published under the title *Beyond Black Bear Lake*. Over 200,000 copies of the *Woodswoman* series have been sold.

Woodswoman II: Beyond Black Bear Lake Details

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Maya says

I am kind of enamored with Anne Bastille's story, and in way this book was even better than Woodswoman 1.

Marty Hogan says

This second installment of the 'Woodswoman' trilogy is a step up in maturity for Dr. LaBastille. "Woodswoman" (one), dealt largely with the purchase of land and the building of a dream cabin on a remote lake. This book becomes more real, as Dr. LaBastille begins to have to worry about trespassing intruders, acid rain and the real threat that the government can pose in this unique environment. Determined not to let these new problems destroy her outlook or her life, Dr. LaBastille begins to build a second cabin - further into the wilderness. Encompassing both the new thrill of building a more isolated respite along with some friends, brings another insight into Anne LaBastille's life ten years later. Numerous elderly Adirondack guides become great friends, sharing their own stories of the wilderness. A new romance evolves and the author has to deal with the reality of having to deal with both worlds. This book speaks not only of the wilderness, but the grand people that make and keep it unique. Of course, Dr. LaBastille's dogs are always given star treatment and her love of these animals is heartfelt. More refined and a little less naive, this second 'woodswoman' book will break and warm your heart at the same time

Eric says

Not something I would choose to read, but the book was given to me by a friend. Ms LaBastille was remarkable in her lifestyle. Remote camp/cabins in the Adirondack wilderness. She wrote for National Geographic among other publications and had a PhD in ecology. An interesting account. I may go and find the first book in the series.

Zinta says

My last page read in Woodswoman: Living Alone in the Adirondack Wilderness, I immediately picked up Woodswoman II: Beyond Black Bear Lake. This hasn't been a story I've wanted to put down. Anne LaBastille's ongoing autobiography has followed lines too closely to my "retirement" plans north to upper Michigan for me to miss, and I have found inspiration, motivation, and quite a bit of education, and not a little forewarning in reading about her experiences as a woman living alone in the woods.

This second in a series does a quick recap of how LaBastille's adventure began. After a divorce, LaBastille decided to build her own cabin in the Adirondack wilderness, making her living as a freelance writer and ecologist. This book begins with her growing problem with intruders and overly ardent fans. With several books by now published, many articles, and an increasing number of academic lectures and speaking tours,

her need for solitude and seclusion is coming under (mostly) friendly attack. Fan mail comes by the bag full, phone calls await at a neighboring camp (LaBastille's cabin has no electricity and no phone line), and a stunning number of fans search her out in the woods, even though she has carefully avoided naming her exact location, using fictional names for landmarks and lakes. Some pursue her for years until tracking her down. LaBastille is horrified, and eventually forced into building a second, more remote cabin that she calls Thoreau II, crediting Henry David Thoreau of Walden Pond.

“What do such visitors and callers hope to find when they search out the Woodswoman? I still don’t know exactly, but I’m sure America is lonely. Americans are looking for identities. They want to attach themselves to authors, singers, actors, and TV stars. These searchers have fantasies. They need to sublimate to enrich their lives. They want to talk. Many are under the impression that I have nothing to do … They don’t know about the grueling self-discipline and constant juggling of time that being a freelance writer and ecological consultant entails … As I see it, the problem is one of boundaries—the delicate line between social contact and solitude. Some people respect privacy; others don’t. Europeans seem much more courteous about such matters than Americans. By my willingness to write about my life, I’ve created a two-edged sword. My readers nourish me through sales, yet they threaten to devour me with overattention.”

LaBastille struggles to be kind and accommodating, while preserving her lifestyle and juggling her work. Finally, she must retreat. Duplicating Thoreau’s cabin, she finds a spot much deeper into the woods, much more difficult to reach, requiring treks across land as well as water, and over a couple year’s time, builds a second, much smaller cabin. This one is only about 100 square feet (the original, called West of the Wind, is around 400 square feet), the size of a walk-in closet for some, but all that she requires. She still balances time between her two cabins, depending on obligations and needs.

Another natural outgrowth of LaBastille’s life in the wilderness is her role in protecting it. Her education is in ecology (a PhD from Cornell University), and she becomes a board member of the Adirondack Park Agency, helping to regulate the goings on in the area. She watches with horror as the population around the lake grows, and with it, pollution, including noise pollution. Vehicles abound, on land and on water, and they all make a roar. Large boats toss her canoe in their wake. And all that pollution ends up in the air, too, where it becomes acid rain, coming back down to raise the pH-levels of the water and the soil. A valuable section of this book is devoted to explaining acid rain and its devastation. Lakes that appear pure are actually dead, as fish die out and plants no longer thrive. Not all of the book’s adventures take place in the Adirondacks, as LaBastille writes about trips abroad to expand her research, including a visit to the Baltic Sea. There, she learns what the Scandinavians understood long ago: acid rain is destroying even the most pristine areas, seemingly wilderness, but far from immune to the pollution produced by humankind.

Whereas this memoir begins as a love story between woman and wilderness, it now also becomes a wakeup call to its readers to be aware of what our more “civilized” lifestyles are doing to the earth that sustains us. As the author fights the good fight, she gains enemies around the lake among those who come for recreation and care little about the consequences. She finds the gas lines cut on her boat, and others threaten her. On the other hand, her efforts to protect the park from becoming a deposit area for nuclear waste are successful. One woman can indeed make a difference.

Career rising and gathering speed, LaBastille increasingly needs her time at the more remote of her two cabins. Her dog, Pitzi, is always beside her. Alas, life cycles conclude, and the death of her loyal friend is a moving chapter. Back to fun is her introduction to a new German Sheppard pup, Condor, and later, Condor’s offspring, Chekika.

Other risks of wilderness living arise, too. No more, possibly less, than they do living anywhere else.

LaBastille must deal with chemical burns to her eyes when she drops a bag of cement down too hard and raises a cloud of cement dust (this, however, leads to a pleasing and enduring romance with Doctor Mike, another independent type who is just as devoted to his medical work as she is to her ecological work). Or falling into a lake with a running chainsaw. Or new batteries, sold by mistake as the wrong size, giving out in the middle of a very dark forest, very far from home.

Along with the risks come human stories that are the same no matter where one lives: of relationships taking shape, of progressing age, and of the moment one has to say a final farewell to a dear old friend. Whether intending to or not, LaBastille makes a good argument for the individual's right to determine one's own death with dignity, rather than being kept indefinitely on life support. She cites her own worst nightmare as being afflicted by some progressive disease of mental deterioration, and one reads this wincing, as latest news seems to be that the author has succumbed to Alzheimer's disease.

So much more reason to live the life one chooses, fully, with gusto, holding nothing back. We only have this one, and to live it with courage, as this woodswoman does, surely makes sense in an ever more senseless world. When considering the roads not taken—of a life more conventional and traditional for contemporary women, of marriage, office career, and broods of children, LaBastille writes:

“Why do I continue to bumble through the woods at night on mushy snow? Carry impossible loads by backpack and canoe? Go for backcountry saunters rather than shopping mall sprees? Cut and split firewood instead of turning up a thermostat? Build a little cabin to write at instead of buying a condo to relax in?

Perhaps it's because the world around me seems to be so complex and materialistic. It's my small rebellion to keep myself in pioneerlike fitness, to promote creativity, and to maintain a sense of adventure in my life. It's also my desire to exist in tune with sound ecological and ethical principles—that is, ‘small is beautiful,’ and ‘simplicity is best.’”

And...

“Actually, I believe it would be much harder for a small-town woman to go to a city to pursue a career as a surgeon, TV anchorwoman, or stock analyst than to become a woodswoman. For me, the urban habitat and atmosphere would be far harder to deal with emotionally and much more dangerous physically than the wilderness ... as for marriage, I don't think it would work for me now. I've gradually had a 180-degree change of attitude toward matrimony. Much as I adore Mike, I enjoy being single. It feels right.”

LaBastille seems to have found her niche. As long as she has her pocket of privacy and peace, she writes, she can handle whatever life hands her. I look forward eagerly to reading *Woodswoman III*.

Diane says

This second book in the *Woodswoman* series is a charming one, although it has a more alarming tone about the environment than the first.

The book was first published in the 1980s, so there are several chapters about the acid rain problem. (It's curious how that phrase is never used in the popular press anymore --it's all about global warming now.)

LaBastille also has a chapter on nuclear winter, when there was a danger that the feds would store nuclear

waste in the Adirondacks. She goes through the usual NIMBY panic, but I agree that dropping radioactive garbage in a pristine wooded area is ludicrous. Luckily the plan was scuttled (at least as far as the book knows).

Aside from the grave ecological problems, there are delightful stories about her building a second cabin in the woods (modeled after Thoreau's at Walden Pond), her German shepherds and the daily adventures that come from living in the woods for 20 years.

I grabbed Woodswoman II after finishing Cormac McCarthy's nightmare-inducing "The Road." I wanted to read something calming, something that would take my mind far away from a doomsday scenario. LaBastille's book delivered that serenity and reminded me to get outdoors more. I'm already planning my next nature hike.

Natalie says

A great sequel to Woodswoman I. However, I sobbed regarding her story about Pitzi. It was one of the hardest things I've had to read (very hard if you're an animal lover).

You also get a little back story on acid rain. However, it could use an appendix on the information, for I would imagine that MUCH has changed regarding this field of study, especially in the European countries that she discusses.

I'm not finished with it yet, but will be soon.

Shelby Lynne says

3.5 stars. A delightful little glimpse into a life I wish I were brave enough to lead.

Sheila Lowe says

Enjoyed more of Anne LaBastille. Her insight to solitude and life with a new pup . She was a woman ahead of her time . Would of loved to have met her .

Joanne says

Fascinating! Perhaps a bit better written than the first installment (I thought the first chapter on that one leaves the reader in the dark) or maybe it's just that I already knew enough about her to jump right into the continued story. But as with finishing the first book, I'm instantly wanting the next installment.

The discussions about acid rain and nuclear waste was an interesting look into the early days of those topics and makes me think about climate change now. I was initially blown away (and appalled on her behalf) at the level of reader response to the first book. It makes me think about public discourse and the cost of success. You may not be trying to be famous, you may just be trying to write for a living, but who knows what kind of attention one's public work can bring!

For me the draw is about Anne's lifestyle. Her story about where and how to live is about fierce strength and self knowledge. It's about charting your own course and living a peaceful and authentic life even if it's not the easy path. If you're like most of her readers and seeking to live closer to nature this book will continually beckon to you.

Nancy says

If you are a bit paranoid and want to think that at least you are safer in the city than in the country, perhaps you will enjoy this book. Ms. LaBastille nearly blows away a fan who comes to visit with one of the several loaded guns she keeps around the house. I was hoping to find a book by someone who had integrated herself with nature. Unfortunately with her dogs and guns, she seemed to spend all her time fighting her edge-of-wilderness surroundings.

If you are looking for a book about a woman who enjoys a rustic country life, try Dear Mad'm instead.

Christine says

Equally satisfying read as "Woodswoman 1". Deserves more than 5 stars. A great read for nature lovers and everybody who wants to find out what kind of problems women have to face when they decide to live in a log cabin in the Adirondacks wilderness. Very recommendable!!!

Joe Geronimo says

I love Anne's writing and I feel I am living vicariously through her. I truly enjoyed this book.

Xzs says

The second volume in the Woodswoman series did not disappoint! LaBastille's life story is fascinating, empowering and heartbreakingly real. I imagine many, if not most, readers of this autobiographical series are left yearning to experience a "simpler" life living in a wilderness cabin. Yes, upon reading her work, I'm half tempted to pack it up and move to a cabin in the woods. Although I don't think I have the fortitude, gumption or will to rough it alone! LaBastille is a true hero, and not just for women and environmentalists. I'm so glad I stumbled upon her books - they've earned a spot on my shelf of favorites. These books deserve more attention and praise.

Jen says

Another fantastic book by the woodswoman! This volume continues her story, and chronicles the building of her tiny cabin retreat at Lilypad Lake. This quote stood out to me: "There are two ways to go through life and to attain your destination. You can waffle along like a beautiful dreamer or fly straight, high, and hard. Both methods have their share of dangers and pitfalls. But of the two, I choose the latter." That, to me, sums up this woman perfectly.

Hannah says

Beyond Black Bear Lake, the second in the "Woodswoman" trilogy, finds author Anne LaBastille somewhat plagued by the success of her first book. Her little cabin on the shores of Black Bear Lake in the Adirondack mountains is now being visited by fans of her book; some friendly, some intrusive, and all not personally invited by Anne. An extremely private person, Anne views these intrusions to her property and work as rude and exasperating. In a duel desire to find peace and to emulate Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond, Anne ranges even further afield into her property and builds a smaller cabin on Lilypad Lake. With the help of friends, Anne's new haven, christened Thoreau II, is everything she loves and needs.

Beyond Black Bear Lake further explores Anne's philosophy of life and addresses such concerns as acid rain, nuclear waste disposal, military flyover zones, and other environmental causes close to Anne's heart. But it is her personal stories that really make this another engaging outing for the reader, as Anne talks about her 2 German shepherd "children", her new love interest, her efforts to build Thoreau II, and some old-timers she considered not only mentors, but good friends.

Filled with dozens of black and white photographs, this book is laced with bitter-sweet observations and dry humor from Anne. She's unapologetic about her beliefs, somewhat acerbic, but always "real". I don't know if I would have actually liked Anne (as she seems very stand-offish and blunt), but I do know that I admire her and what she stands for: personal freedom and independence and going against the tide.

Another keeper in my bookshelf, and I look forward to reading her final book in the trilogy: *Woodswoman III: Book Three of the Woodswoman's Adventures*
