

Chapter 12 - Lake Sweetwater

When some friends of ours moved from Indianapolis to Brown County, Indiana in 1990, we (or rather I) fell in love with Lake Sweetwater. It is an area unlike anything you imagine for this flat state -- beautiful hills somewhat like the small foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in central Pennsylvania where we once lived. Brown County State Park was just a few miles to the south. Nashville, the county seat, was just a few miles to the southwest. Columbus was only 40 minutes away and Bloomington only 55 minutes. And best of all, Lake Sweetwater was only 60 minutes away from our home in Indianapolis.

After looking at twenty-one available lake houses, we (again I) found the perfect lake house. It was a two story frame and stone house built in 1965, right on the water's edge. It could accommodate lots of people. It had a two-bay boat house, a double garage. It was beyond our price range, but isn't everything you really want? So we offered the seller \$150,000 which he countered by adding the sales commission to that figure. He had been trying to sell it for three years, beginning at \$325,000 and was down to \$275,000 when we made our offer. So, after cashing in our mutual funds and using some money from the sale of my mother's house, we purchased the lake house and moved mother into it (my father had died a few years before).

We spent another \$50,000 over the next five years remodeling the house. When we were almost done (had one picnic counter top to do yet), a new dorm-sized refrigerator that was in the boat house for live bait malfunctioned, caught on fire and burned the whole place to the ground. Mother, who was living there full time, saw "a little fire" through the downstairs kitchen window that looked across the breeze way into the boat house door. She called the fire department and within five minutes a deputy sheriff, who also took the call, was there and ordered her out. She said, "Oh it's nothing, just a little fire." He physically took her by the arm and ushered her out of the house, up the steps to the garage area and as they turned back to look, an explosion erupted from the boat house and immediately raced through the house. The pictures that neighbors took from across the cove are horrific!

What to do? This place had become a weekend getaway for us, our kids and little grandkids. After much crying, figuring and contemplating, we sat down with our insurance adjuster and was relieved to find we had an actual replacement cost policy. In fact, he said if we would sign a contract with a particular company that they knew well and trusted, they would rebuild the place on a "time and material" basis. After thinking about that for a whole five seconds, I said "OK, let's do it." I turned to the contractor, who was also part of this conversation and asked if I, as a building contractor could do part of the work. He said he would hire me as a subcontractor and we could do any and all that we wanted. So, other than the demolition, concrete and masonry work, insulation and drywall, and the roofing shingles, Read Builders Inc. rebuilt the house. It was great getting paid to rebuild our own house, especially since the final tally came in at \$675,000 (including contents, boats, etc.)

Mother got an apartment back in Indianapolis, never returning to the lake house. When Darlene retired in 1999 we moved into the house and I commuted every day to Indy. We had rented, then sold our house to one of our employees, so was able to continue using the shop for the business. Then in 2007 our employee moved to Kentucky, so we put the lake house up for sale, repurchased our old house and moved back to Indy, continuing where we left off some years before. The lake house provided our extended family much pleasure. The grandkids grew up, the grandparents grew older, the lake chores grew tiring. Everything has its season. Move on!