

LITTLE HAVEN

IN THE

WOODS

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LOUISE GREEN

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This is a work of creative nonfiction. The events are portrayed to the best of Louise Green's memory. While all the stories in this book are true, some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

*For my Gran,
Every day your love, strength and courage inspired me to
never stop pursuing my dreams
Thank you for being you*

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Foreword

“Why do you want to buy a piece of land?” I got asked this a lot and I often ask myself the same question.

It’s not that I don’t know the answer, but more so that there is no simple answer that captures the truth.

I desired a place of our own, with abundant space and unrestricted views. Freedom to choose who and what would be there. To have a garden that could expand, trees that could grow without restriction, trails, and paths, and unique outdoor spaces. Fewer boundaries and rules, a place of opportunity and potential. Freedom to wander, be quiet and breathe.

There have been so many unique, challenging, uncomfortable, and exhilarating moments in this adventure. This is my record of them. To remember the ups and downs and share them with you. Our story of finding our little haven in the woods and what we did with it. I hope it will inspire and encourage you. Your determination, tenacity, and perseverance dictate success, not external resources and knowledge.

Dave, my husband, and I were starting from very different perspectives. This project has taught us a lot about each other and ourselves. We sometimes went wrong, were lucky, made bad choices, were naïve, worked hard, and also made good choices. This is a story about raw land, our challenges in developing and building there, and what’s possible.

We found our place. We are very happy with what we achieved, what we built, and how it turned out. Is it perfect? Yes, and no. There’s always something to strive for, even when we love it. We achieved everything we wanted, but not in the ways we imagined we would. So jump in, read on, and let’s go on our adventure!

PART ONE



Chapter One: Got What it Takes

One of my favourite quotes is “*You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore*” by Christopher Columbus (or it may have been Andre Gide). This always inspires me! I interpret this as taking a leap of faith without knowing the outcome of achieving something worthwhile.

This is a story about frustration, challenges, and fear. Taking that leap. Dragging Dave along with me, and eventually achieving success, contentment, and living life with few regrets.

This isn’t a how-to book. Many times we had very little clue what we were doing, with few resources beyond Google, YouTube, and our determination.

I hope our story will inspire and motivate you to define your own “haven in the woods” and keep striving until you reach it. If there is one thing you take away from reading our story, it is that with the right mindset, you can achieve whatever you desire.

There is no secret formula or magic bullet. It’s about consistently taking action to get it. Be prepared to adapt,

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change direction, learn, and fail. How many times does a baby fall when learning to walk? Babies never give up because they can see everyone around them walking. They know it's possible, and they just keep trying until they can. It doesn't cross their mind to think their legs are not long enough, or I'm too young to walk, or no one is teaching me properly. They just keep trying.

Until the point where we started the search, the opportunities never seemed to be there. I didn't have the time; I wasn't with the right partner. There wasn't any land I could afford, and I always had a reason I couldn't have it.

I suppose I didn't want it enough to be prepared to change those things to make it happen. I didn't dare to jump into the unknown. This may be true of all the major changes we make. It is easy to blame other factors and create excuses for why we cannot have something. Yet if we look hard enough, there are always examples to prove exactly the opposite, success stories of people growing a business from nothing, survival stories against seemingly insurmountable odds, and many homesteaders who have their piece of land and living and building their dream. What made them successful? When others have failed. What did they have or do differently? They just kept trying and would not accept defeat. The only difference between success and failure is not giving up. Money, time, and intelligence are not the solution. By telling our story of how many mistakes we made and how much we didn't know, I hope to inspire you. If we can do this. It's possible for you to do this too.

I am constantly amazed when looking back at the series of events in my life that, at the time they occurred, they seemed random, unconnected, and just circumstantial. Years later, realizing if they had not happened in that order, it would be impossible to be doing what I am now. Is our whole life

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mapped out to follow a certain path that we have no real influence over? Is it luck or capitalizing on opportunities? Living in the moment with what you have around you.

Why is it so popular to want to escape from our daily lives? There are more and more TV shows, such as “Escape to the Country,” “Build Off-Grid,” and “Life Below Zero,” with huge followings. Why do we love them so much? We are tired of the rat race, of working for the man. Everything gets more and more expensive. How can we simplify our lives? To allow us to focus on what’s important. You hear it everywhere; we are all just so tired!

I started writing this about a year after the COVID-19 pandemic, which possibly sped up the trend. The pandemic allowed individuals to earn money without being limited to living nearby through remote work. COVID altered rules for many. It broke the system and sparked a search for a better way.

When I started thinking about where to begin writing this story, the real question became, ‘**When** did it all start?’ What made us decide to start looking for a remote homestead? I no longer wanted to accept my excuses that I couldn’t do it and started taking action toward achieving it.

Primarily in life, we are repeating tasks, thoughts, and actions that are familiar and habitual. There’s a certainty and sense of comfort in the familiar. But if you want different results, you have to do different things.

We did research and tried to learn and anticipate the steps required for every stage, from the purchase of land to understanding the well. In every case, without exception, the challenges we expected for each task ended up being more straightforward and went smoothly. There were always more delays and frustrations in parts of the projects we thought would be simple. What have we learned from this? We

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learned that it's important to research and prepare thoroughly before starting a project, but also be ready to handle unexpected situations as they arise.



Chapter Two: Searching

Dave was studying the road map intently. “There’s a gas station in Cherryville.” I peered over his shoulder, looking at the map with doubt. “Well, I guess we haven’t driven that way yet.” I replied with resignation. I felt disheartened.

We had planned this three-day Easter getaway to British Columbia, Canada, as a fact-finding trip to look for a parcel of land to buy. After hours of pouring over the website “realtor.ca” at property listings, our search for a small acreage had gotten wider and further away from our primary choice of the Nakusp area. We had been actively looking for a property for about four months. We set our hearts on the Nakusp area after several summer camping trips. The area met our criteria: a long gardening season, lots of backcountry roads, hot summers, earlier spring, and within a day’s drive from our current hometown of Canmore, Alberta. A 10-acre piece of land on Highway 6 caught our attention two weeks previously. I promptly emailed Nakusp realtor, Greg Hammond, expressing our interest and requested a property viewing. By the time he had gotten back to me, he said the land had multiple viewings, and someone was about to write an offer on it. There was also a run-down mobile home for

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sale in Edgewood, not exactly what we had in mind and undoubtedly outside of our budget, but I was keen to at least see something.

“Sorry, that too has multiple offers,” he paused. “There’s just not much around within your budget at the moment.”

I could tell he didn’t care at all. “We’ll come out anyway. There may be something else available by the time we arrive”, my optimism refusing to be quashed. The problem was that we were just too far away. He must have heard it a million times: people from out of the province looking to buy up any acreage, dream of building a cabin and escape. If we showed an intention by coming to stay in the area, maybe that would help, I reasoned internally. I was sure it would be worthwhile.

The slushy snow banks hadn’t melted yet, but it amazed us at how warm it felt when we arrived. I jumped out of the truck into puddles. The warm moist pacific air felt like a gentle breath after the dry, harsh, chilly air of Canmore. We had chosen this B&B because it was the closest accommodation to the 10-acre parcel, which I had hoped would still be available. They advertised the Sunbeam retreat as an off-grid experience, with no electricity, no running water, and an outhouse for a bathroom. It was heaven! Geraldine had the wood burner roaring and candles lit when we arrived in the late afternoon dusk. It was so cozy, shadows dancing on the log walls, fire crackling, with large windows that looked out onto the surrounding forest. Just what I hoped we would have one day, a beautiful cabin on our land. She showed us the outhouse and outdoor shower, and gave us a tour of the wood-heated sauna.

The one-room cabin with wall-to-wall windows gave a sense of being surrounded by the forest. A bookcase filled with titles on yoga, finding your purpose, and living in

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gratitude. It was the ideal place for a life transformation. A ladder provided access to the loft, which was equipped with a comfortable bed and fluffy down duvet, creating an ideal retreat to rest, relax and find purpose. The cabin, the sauna, the land surrounded by forest showed what was possible, but unfortunately, nothing was for sale. Or, more accurately, nothing within our budget that was for sale. If we had a few million to spend, then there were a lot more options. Even if we could have afforded that, it wasn't part of our goal, which was to buy something we could enjoy without needing to work 24-7 to pay for it.

My current level of dissatisfaction had nothing to do with where we were staying; it was so peaceful and calming. So here we were, staying in a beautiful B&B we found on Airbnb, with zero properties for sale to look at—no available internet connection to do any further research and intermittent cellphone service.

“OK, let's go then,” I said. “We need gas for the drive home tomorrow, and I guess it will be good to explore that direction.”

I held little hope of discovery. Highway 6 North headed up over the Monashee pass into Cherryville, Lumby, and onto Vernon. It was mostly crown land, and Cherryville was, even given my enthusiasm, just too far for us to realistically buy a property and travel to it regularly. Dave purposefully ignored my disappointment and kindly offered to drive. More often than not, I would have argued with him, but I didn't have the energy and slid into the passenger seat, dragging the map along and plugging in my dead cell phone. Some downsides to no electricity, I thought grumpily.

As we headed down the bumpy gravel road and back onto the highway, the sun peaked through the clouds, lightening my mood. Boy, it sure is pretty here. I couldn't help but feel

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lifted by the surroundings. The road bent sharply right and down, the vista opening up into the beautiful Inonoaklin Valley. I couldn't believe there were still piles of snow up by the B&B, yet here it felt like spring already. Green fields hugged the valley bottom, cows contentedly grazing in the warm sunshine.

We passed where we had judged the ten acres for sale to be on the left-hand side of the road. I looked longingly, hoping the deal might fall through. Ten acres was more than we wanted. What would we do with it all? I reasoned to myself to avoid disappointment. Dave hit the gas pedal as the road straightened out, and I glanced over at him, pondering the reason for the haste. I meant us to be looking for properties. We passed a small pull-in on the right with a stop sign. I glanced across and thought I saw a white sign hung in the tree set back from the road. It seemed oddly out of place. Was that a for sale sign? I was only half paying attention, and we had sped by before I could take notice.

We were soon going up and up, twisting and turning; the view over the guardrail led to giddy drop-offs to the rocks and the foaming river below. I got out the map to follow our progress as we wound our way up through the pass. Never a straight section, Dave was enjoying rally driving. I could imagine how it might be to drive in the winter and challenging for the snowplows to keep the road open.

"This is wild country," I said, looking across the valley and beyond. Nothing but trees, rock faces, and mountains stretching to the horizon—brilliant blue sky, a perfect backdrop for the acres and acres of forest.

Dave agreed. "There's not much in any direction from here. We are out in the middle of nowhere." The mountains, still capped with snow, differed greatly from those around

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Canmore, lower and more rounded than angular. They seemed more accessible.

A sign announced we had reached the summit at 3900 ft, and we began the winding descent into Cherryville.

“The word Monashee is from the Gaelic *monadh*, meaning mountain, and *sith*, pronounced shee, meaning peace.” Dave told me “Monashee, therefore, means mountain of peace.” It always amazed me how much he knew about geography and places.

“It does feel peaceful here somehow,” I said, enjoying being a passenger for a while, able to look around and appreciate the dramatic landscape. Given the twists and turns of the road, I was glad Dave was driving. I had shaken off my bad mood when we reached Cherryville and found our way to the gas station. We drove by a few appealing homesteads on the way into town and noticed one or two ‘for sale’ signs. Neither of us was sufficiently interested in their appearance to pursue more than a tertiary glance as we drove by. It was too far from our chosen target area.

When looking for houses and property, there are certain intangible criteria that we rely upon, not just about the actual land or house, but also about the area. The feeling you get when you experience a place that ‘feels’ good, and the right place for you. It is astonishing when making such a huge life changing purchase that many times it comes back to feeling that it is the right place and the right time.

“I’ll drive back,” I offered, “so you can enjoy the view.” I had an idea to check out what I had thought was the sale sign I had seen on the way out, but did not want to seem foolish if it was nothing. We returned up and over the pass one more time, not knowing the road well; it was a challenging drive, hairpins left and right keeping me focused on the driving. I imagined having to drive this road every time I wanted to get

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to the city. That would be something very different to get used to, not having easy access to grocery stores, hardware stores, and supplies. Could we adapt to living here? Being self-sufficient, pre-planning, and being more organized would be necessary to live in a remote location. I thought it would be worth the inconvenience of the drive to have enough space and land to build a cabin and a garden as big as I wanted.

Back in the valley, as the road straightened out, I slowed, trying to remember where I had seen what I thought might be a sign.

Dave looked sideways at me. “What are you doing?”

“Well, I thought I saw something on the way out and just wanted to check it out.” I was still reluctant to say what I was hoping to see.

“What was it?”

As he asked, there on the left, I saw it! A tattered for sale sign perched crookedly high in a birch tree.



Chapter Three: First Impressions

I casually pulled into the gravel road and stopped the truck. “Um, well, I thought I saw a sign.” Pointing directly at the sign in the tree. “There it is.” We looked at each other.

“I don’t know” He was doubtful. “It looks pretty old,” and I had to agree that the sign looked like it had been there for years.

“You’re probably right, but I’m going to take a closer look” I couldn’t read it properly. The faded orange FOR SALE sign had a handwritten telephone number. There was small writing below that I couldn’t make out. I was curious about what they were selling. It might be just firewood or something.

The sign said five acres for sale with septic approval, water, and hydro. It was an Alberta phone number, which spurred me into action. This could be what we were looking for; maybe it was still for sale. But then again, no, it’s probably old, perhaps sold like everything else around here. It’s Easter Sunday, you can’t call today. Perhaps no one will answer... Thoughts whirled back and forth in my mind. Do it, don’t bother, do it!

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“I’m going to call it,” I stated deliberately. I looked at my phone, and amazingly, I had a cell signal at that spot. Mind made up, heart pounding, I dialed the number.

“Hello?” a female voice inquired. Oh, wow, someone answered. I could hardly believe it.

“Hi, this is Louise. I saw your for sale sign on the land in BC,” I hesitated, not wanting to hear her say sorry it sold. “Is it still for sale?” I asked slowly.

“Why, yes, it is,” she answered.

“Really?” I gave her another chance to confirm what I expected; it’s sold. “Oh wow,” now what? my mind raced... “We are right here by the sign now. Would it be OK if we take a look and walk around?” Conscious of us getting kicked off the Parson property we had looked at without permission before, I was keen to get permission this time.

“Yes, absolutely” She also gave us the price. She explained she knew little about it; she was selling it for her brother.

Dave was gesturing to me to put her on speakerphone so he could hear, but I was worried the call would drop the signal any moment, so I grimaced at him to be quiet. Then, wildly trying to quell the excitement and be as casual as I could, “OK then, we are interested. We will have a walk around and then give you a callback; thank you very much” We exchanged details and hung up.

I looked at Dave with difficulty, trying to stop the grin from splitting my face in two. I told him the price; he raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

“I know, right? That seems a reasonable price. She said we could have a walk around,” I said, taking his hand. “Come on, let’s go look.”

There was a faint, overgrown trail disappearing around a curve into the trees. Several fallen, rotting birch trunks lay

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broken across the path. Last year's brown ferns drooped under a pine, spruce, and cedar canopy. A faint smell of mushrooms wafted up as our boots crushed the brown grass. The trees, left to their own devices, had become thick and crowded, ranging from 15 to 40 feet tall. Growing wherever they wanted—interspersed with white birch standing proudly tall between the evergreens. The terrain was level, with no sign of any fences or markers to designate the boundaries.

I looked at Dave and shrugged.

“Where shall we go? Follow this path, I suppose,” I said to myself.

We were not sure if we were on the right land or not. We wandered slowly, following the indistinct trail, which disappeared around the bend away from the road. All we could hear was the drip of condensation from the trees; it was so still and so quiet. Several pockets of slushy snow still clung onto winter under the trees, but the ground was mainly bare and easy to walk.

We strolled, saying nothing, each lost in our thoughts. I turned around and walking backward, tried to gauge how far we had come; how big were five acres, anyway? I couldn't picture how big an area that was. After about 15 minutes of wandering, the trees thinned, and we came to a power line running perpendicular to our trail. There was a galvanized pipe sticking up out of the ground, covered with a white upturned bucket to our left.

Dave removed the bucket and peered down the pipe. “Do you think that's the well?”

“Could be.” I did not know what a well might look like. I had visions of a round stone wall with a little wooden roof over it and a handle to wind the bucket up and down. My early life growing up in the UK, I had never seen a modern drilled well to know what it would look like.

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He pointed up at the power lines overhead. “This must be where you’d get power for the land, too.”

We could see a row of fence posts in the distance, and we guessed the edge of the property must be here somewhere. This area was quite different from the densely packed trees we had walked through at first. It was quite open ground with rocky, sandy soil, thin patches of grass, and shrubs growing wildly.

“What do you think?” I asked Dave cautiously. I was already in love with it, had put in an offer to buy, had built a cabin, and moved here in my imagination. Nevertheless, I was curious to know what Dave was thinking. He tends to be much less likely to give in to emotion and more logical in thinking.

None of this crazy idea to look for the land had been Dave’s idea; how was he feeling now? It was not just pictured on a real estate website; we were there in person on land for sale. This was an actual place. Would the reality be too much?

To me, this place felt different, a much better prospect than anything we had looked at before. It would be much easier to build on, with no steep gradients to worry about, had a pleasant mixture of trees, and the ferns reminded me of woodlands growing in England.

He looked around, taking time to think about his answer. “It’s flat, level ground, much better than those other places we looked at in Nakusp. The trees are smaller, too; that birch would make great firewood.”

Well, he’s not saying anything negative yet. This is a good sign, I thought. I could hardly stop myself from skipping back to the truck with excitement. My hands out stretched brushing the ferns and caressing the leaves as we headed back. We stumbled upon a clearing with a pile of logs stacked against a tree, and a circle of stones from an old campfire.

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Dave went to look at the woodpile. “Someone must have camped here, but quite a while ago, it looks like.”

“It makes a nice camp spot,” I walked over to join him, looking around. “We could build a cozy cabin here.”

It was far enough from the road to be private, and the trail seemed to end at the clearing. I glanced at Dave and wondered what he thought of my cabin suggestion. He nodded thoughtfully, which I took to be a good sign. I so wanted him to like it and see the possibilities.

“I think it’s way better than anything we’ve seen before. The price is fantastic too. OK, it’s got nothing on it yet, but there’s a power line, a well, and good access to the road.” All systems go as far as I was concerned. I could hardly contain my excitement.

Dave, with a rare burst of impulsiveness, jumped in. “Let’s get some more details from Sarah and go from there. I don’t think we can lose, based on the prices of others we’ve seen around here and the Nakusp area.”

We were excited. It felt like we had finally found the perfect property that ticked all the boxes and had potential. We wanted to move quickly but feared the unknowns.

We already had the experience of the high demand for properties, but were also cognisant that this was a private sale. What did we need to do? Or need to find out? What if we were making a big mistake? We are both naturally adventurous people. But this was an enormous commitment together in a venture we were uncertain how to realize.

It filled our minds and conversation on the short ride back to the B&B. We phoned Sarah back to let her know we were extremely interested and wanted to see the deeds or any information she had on the lot boundaries, etc. We needed time to think, to allow ourselves to consider and explore the pros and cons. Dave lit the wood stove in the sauna. It was

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getting dark by the time it was hot enough, as we tiptoed in our towels down the short path in the chilly night air to the sauna. I collected snow to melt for steam.

The snow hissed as it hit the rocks heated on the stove, sending clouds of steam swirling in the small cedar room. As we sat in the glow of candlelight, cedar-scented steamy heat, the fire popped and crackled; we passed excited ideas back and forth. I was imagining what we could do there, growing a garden, having a cabin of our own, a sauna, an outdoor kitchen, so many ideas. Would we go for solar panels, or hook up to hydro? Did the well have water in it?

“So, are we going to go for it? Shall we put in an offer? As long as it looks good?” I felt we had already decided and wanted to get confirmation from Dave.

He nodded agreement. “Yes, I want to.” This was it; an old for-sale sign had turned into a genuine opportunity. We were going for it. It felt as though life had taken a gigantic step in a new direction. We had a hard time sleeping because we were so excited.



Chapter Four: The Offer

Sarah had emailed us the only document she had on the property overnight. Sarah surprised me, as she didn't seem prepared with official documents for selling the land. It turned out it was quite a lot more complicated. The ownership of the land belonged to her deceased brother. Sarah had never visited it and knew nothing much about it. She was getting probate sorted out and assured us she had everything in place. She was warm, friendly, and thrilled we had called.

“You have made my day!” she said. We were en route to the ferry and only had a cell signal for a brief time. Not wanting to seem too eager, we left it that we would take a little more time to decide and get back to her. Now we had a huge dilemma. Should we speculate on a plot of land we had limited information about on the back of a brief walk around and short telephone call?

Neither of us had purchased property without a realtor before, and it felt very much outside our comfort zone. But given how difficult it was to find anything and the months we had been looking, did we want to pass up this potential opportunity? We were under pressure to act fast, so we made

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a gut decision. Not something we were that comfortable with, but we were more worried about losing out.

We needed professional advice. During the 7-hour drive home, we spoke to two lawyers, and they referred us three times to find someone local who could help us. We stuffed our heads full of knowledge about BC property law, land titles, probate, and grant of administration at every step. But we couldn't stop now; with our path chosen we were determined to make this place ours.

We called Sarah, holding the phone between us on loudspeaker to make the offer. Dave and I hoping she had not already received another offer from someone else. We lowballed on our first offer, reasoning that we could always go higher. However, Sarah was firm on the price, and we could tell instantly by her voice that there would be no negotiation. With no hesitation, I looked at Dave, and he nodded, "OK, Sarah, fair enough. We will pay the full asking price. We have a lawyer and will write up a formal offer to you within the day."

It was done; we had found a place and made an offer that was verbally accepted. It just seemed so unreal, within two days, how different a position we were in. This was our biggest commitment made together, and that meant a lot to me, a solid foundation, security, and a dream hopefully about to come true.

But what a roller coaster, there were still so many unknowns, we had to get financing, we were unsure of the situation with probate, and the deeds for the land. Our lawyer said it could take three months because it is an estate sale. If all went well, we would be back on our land by the summer! I felt like this was all a dream.

As we had agreed price, Sarah and I opted to use the same lawyer for the sale. Sarah needed help with the administration

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of the estate; it all seemed straightforward. We emailed the signed offer to purchase to Sarah. Our lawyer was cautious about the timescale for completion, but hopefully, it would be ours within three months. Even with delays, we might have the last of the summer to get started.

With our knowledge of how hot the real estate market was, Dave and I were still nervous about getting a signed agreement from Sarah. Sealing the deal would allow us to relax a little. We seemed to be the only ones with any sense of urgency; it was frustrating. We wanted to move on and make plans but were so scared to tempt fate by assuming it was all going to work out. We felt vulnerable without a realtor, as there was no legal protection for the sale. Sarah, when we spoke to her, seemed genuinely nice, but we didn't know her or her circumstances at all. We were not sure how much we could trust the deal being completed.



Chapter Five: The Long Wait

A week later, still nothing back from Sarah... what was happening? How long did it take to sign the acceptance of the offer? I was panicking; what had happened? Did she have another offer? Had she changed her mind? Every worse scenario I could imagine had come true in my mind. A week felt like a month.

I was reluctant to keep phoning her every day. Maybe it was upsetting for her, but I eventually gave in and called. She had been having problems getting a witness for the acceptance, and her internet and cell service were spotty at home. They all seemed such normal reasons compared to the imaginary disasters my mind had created. What a relief! She was still keen to sell; so far it was still going to be ours.

Dave and I were also working on our financing and learning it would take more work to secure the money than we had expected. Although we had 50% of the purchase price in cash, banks were not in the habit of arranging traditional mortgages for raw land, with no house built on it. The acreage being in a different province also added extra complications. After a lot of discussions, meetings, and research, we chose a local credit union with less restrictive lending criteria.

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We were looking at construction mortgages, loans, and traditional mortgages. The number of options and criteria to comply with was overwhelming. We had not dealt with borrowing for many years, and neither of us was familiar with the latest financing rules. We were unaware how limiting it was to only have the land as collateral, even with 50% of the purchase price down. Everything would pend on an appraisal of the land value.

Two weeks later, we finally received the signed acceptance of the offer back from Sarah. It had taken three weeks to get the approval. We felt relieved because we had a legally binding agreement, albeit pending getting our financing and completing probate.

We arranged the land appraisal with a local company, and yet again we were nervously waiting and relying on others, hoping feverishly for a favourable report. Never had I felt in such a vulnerable position where our dreams were in the hands of others. Trying to remain calm and realistic, hoping yet keeping everything in perspective. There would be other opportunities if this didn't pan out, it would be because there was a better opportunity waiting. Everything happens for a reason. I kept promising myself.

We had already dealt with a similar situation just a few months previously. For a few months in November of the year before (Nov 2020), I had been scanning the Realtor website and [propertyguys.com](https://www.propertyguys.com), looking for small parcels of land or run-down cabins for sale. Since my divorce and sale of the family home many years before, I felt insecure owning no property and seeing prices constantly rising; I wanted to invest the money I had and create some security. Dave and I had been together for several years, and while he owned his own home, which we lived in, it wasn't the same as if we owned something together. I hoped for us to have a joint

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investment not just as an asset but as a shared dream and something we could build and have together.

Few properties were available, and the pandemic made it difficult to travel and make appointments to see anything. I had spotted a cute-looking place near Parson, BC. It was two acres with an old run-down cabin. One Sunday in late November, we headed that way for a drive and take a look. We pulled up and plodded through the snow to the ramshackle building. I cupped my hands to peer in through the dirty windows and saw somebody had left in a hurry. There was garbage littered across the floor and beer cans on the kitchen counter. But my mind was already seeing how we could clean it up. A large willow tree at the front shaded the porch, with a sweeping meadow gently sloping toward the road. The Bugaboo mountain range framed views across the Columbia River wetlands in the distance. The only thing I tried not to notice was the road noise; I didn't want to acknowledge any negatives.

Dave was quiet during our walk around. Even when prompted, he wasn't keen to give much comment. Which I knew was a sign he wasn't that enamoured with the place. I was a little disappointed myself as I wanted to fall in love with it and have that 'feeling' that it was the right place. It just didn't feel that way, however much I wanted it to.

A few weeks later, we were still talking about it. I was online with my family in the UK and looked up the listing to send them a link so they could look at it. After several minutes, I gave up; I just couldn't seem to find it. The listing was gone; it had either sold or been taken off the market. Initially, I felt disappointed because although we had taken no active steps to buy it immediately; I had planned to revisit it in the future. As it hadn't been completely perfect, it wasn't too big a deal to let go of it. So, we went back to searching.

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The land near Edgewood was what we had been waiting for and would be a far different story if we lost out on it now. It already felt like we had much more time and energy invested in securing it.



Chapter Six: Now What?

A week after the appraiser visited the land, we received a copy of the appraisal; it was good news. To get financing approval, we needed to match or exceed the offer price, but it was great to find out that the land was appraised for a higher value than our sale price. Not by a huge amount, but enough to solidify our decision.

At the beginning of May, we heard from Sarah that, unfortunately; she was still slogging through the probate estate situation, and the documents needed to be resealed in the BC courts. Given the pandemic and many public buildings closed, the backlog of cases would mean more delays.

By June, we could waive the finance condition, so now we had everything in place from our side. But we had missed the deadline to waive our conditions on the finance. It was worrisome that we were out of contract and Sarah could accept another offer. After all, the sale sign was still up in the tree. Maybe someone else would call her with a better higher offer.

Another month had gone by, and yet again, I had a tough time getting hold of Sarah, and I felt for sure she was avoiding us because she had found another buyer. Why hadn't we

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taken down the for sale sign when we were there before? Maybe we could go out there again and remove it. Thoughts plagued my sleepless nights.

We asked to amend the contract and extend the close date to keep everything legitimate and help with our stress levels. With the amended contract sent, if Sarah could just sign and get it back to us, we could feel more relaxed that we had a legal contract again.

We had been confident in our credit scores and financial stability when we started looking for land. Certain we could borrow as much as we needed for whatever dream property we could find. However, the reality was more sobering and forced us to have some hard conversations. We had used all our cash plus borrowed money to buy the land, which left us wondering what we would do next.

I had made it a long-term goal of mine to own some property for security in the future. But I did not want to be obligated to a large mortgage payment that would force me to work all the time in order to afford it and never have time off to enjoy it. With no buildings or facilities, what would we do with the land once we finally owned it? If we eventually built a home there, how would we afford it? If we were to borrow more money, could we get approval for increased borrowing? It seemed unlikely. Even if we borrowed more, the repayments would be so high that we'd never be able to take time off work to go there. I much preferred the idea of developing what we could over several years without borrowing and paying for things as we saved, doing most of the work ourselves. Dave strongly opposed the suggestion, arguing that we lacked the knowledge to do the work ourselves. That we would not have enough money to buy materials, and it would be far better to get more long-term finance for any home building.

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We went back and forth; I hated the idea of borrowing and wanted to do the work ourselves, and he didn't want to do the work and wanted to pay someone else. Neither of us was right or wrong. We just had very different ideas. It was a moot point, as we didn't even own the land yet.

We had the trailer, and that would have to suffice for now. Staying in the trailer would give us time to work out what to do, pending the eventual purchase.

Given the slow pace of the purchase, it hadn't slowed my enthusiasm in planning what would happen next once we finalized the sale.

I am often in awe of circumstances that are revealed to you months or years after the original event happens. We were 'persuaded' to buy a travel trailer in January, six months previously, long before we had even heard of the Inonoaklin Valley. This had arisen because of a family member of mine (Jason) being thrown into taking early retirement. He had not planned this and wanted to sell his travel trailer to downsize. Dave and I were (and still are) avid tent campers, so we had never really considered getting a trailer.

We were happy with our tent, had all the gear, and felt having a trailer was kind of cheating and not 'true' camping! Jason was persuasive and in need of help, so we relented. Given our initial reluctance, we ended up admitting there were benefits to extending our camping season with the trailer. It was quite luxurious having a fridge, microwave, toilet, and shower!

Fast forward to our potential land purchase, and having the trailer now became a key part of our planning. We hoped to stay in the travel trailer on the land during the summer. While we worked on agreeing on a more permanent accommodation solution.

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In our previous visits to the area, we had noticed some odd structures. At first, we had thought they were just poor construction or lazy builders, but then we learned better. Many trailers had either a steep roofed pole barn built around the trailer or a frame on top of the trailer, giving the usually flat-topped trailer a peaked roof. Two words—snow load! These strange-looking structures had an important function. They kept the heavy wet snow off the roof. They can get up to 11 feet of snow in the valley. Building code requires roofs to be designed to carry 95 lbs per square foot. I was concerned about leaving the trailer for several months without visiting over the winter, with no protection against heavy snow. It was essential for us to build some type of structure to protect the trailer.

Back to the internet and our friend Google. As usual, once you start searching for things, as if by magic, Google comes up with useful suggestions. That can be helpful; at this point it seemed opportune (perhaps later, we would change our mind—hindsight is a wonderful thing). We started researching storage sheds and buildings. Well, perhaps I should say I started researching. Dave was preaching patience and waiting until we owned the land. Wise man. “Anyway, fortune favours the brave,” I thought. We chose a Quonset-style steel building kit because of our inexperience in building and construction. This would be ideal to overwinter the trailer and later function as a workshop/garage. With complete installation instructions, it seemed like it would be simple to put up. Just like a big Meccano set, I thought. The company had a sale on a “make us an offer” deal. I made an offer, and we got a great deal on a steel building that would certainly hold up to the snow load and be big enough to store our trailer. The delivery date was for approximately August, which seemed ideal given the timeline to complete the buying of the

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acreage, which we hoped would be soon. We had made our first big purchase and had a place to keep our trailer secure over the winter. All we now needed was the land to build it on.



Chapter Seven: No Progress

Another three weeks, and still no amendment signed by Sarah. Stress levels rose again; it felt like a true roller coaster. Then unexpectedly, we got an email, saying that she didn't know what was happening, and the lawyer seemed to keep asking for the same documents. For us, at least it meant she was still wanting to sell us the property and gave us some peace of mind. Dave and I are literal people and feel much better having the paperwork in order.

But, the pressing matter of the steel building we had ordered, the delivery date, was now causing us to worry. We were in the middle of June already; what if we hadn't closed the deal by the time it was due to be delivered? Could we delay delivery, or find somewhere else to store it? Perhaps it had not been such a good idea to buy at the point I did. It had been an impulse buy in some respects.

The months were ticking by faster than we would have liked. We had hoped, even though unrealistic, that we might get some of the summer on the property. Unfortunately, that was rapidly fading away. We had no inkling at that time if we would ever own it.

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Summer in BC raised another issue that we had previously not paid much attention to: forest fires. Apart from the nuisance and annoyance of smoke shrouding the mountains and clogging our lungs for weeks at a time. This year it was to play a much larger role, just as we seemed to be closer to completing the sale. In addition, a couple of wildfires were being watched in the locality of our land.

Fairly typical for lightning strikes to start wildfires, especially in recent years, but we had never had so much of a personal stake before. The fires were growing and suddenly out of control, but still far away from the land. I had reached out to some friends in the area, and they didn't seem too concerned at that point. Yet as the days of waiting for progress on the land sale ticked by, the fires grew and were steadily getting closer to the land. We stayed in touch on Facebook and watched with horror as the inferno swallowed up cabins and homesteads.

Embers falling, everyone pitching in to hose down and patrol for hot spots. Surely BC fire crews would be there soon. But there were so many wildfires in BC that there just wasn't enough capacity to deal with every fire burning. Priority had to go to those closest to communities. They issued voluntary evacuation orders, which seemed unnecessary, as the fires were still quite distant. But then we realized it wasn't so much the proximity to the land, but that escape routes and roads were affected and hampering fire fighting efforts.

Then it became a mandatory evacuation, including the area surrounding "our" land, as we felt it was. Even if we had officially bought the land, we would not have been able to get there now because of the road and area closures. We feared the fire would leave nothing except ashes when we could travel there. We knew our worries were small compared to

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others, yet we still watched the wildfire maps and monitored the Facebook community. What a community it was, organizing, pulling together, and showing the world what a small village can do. It made us even more determined to become part of it.

Meanwhile, we could only wait to hope for the, so far, elusive closing date. Would we still want the land if it was nothing but bare earth? If all the trees were gone? We thought so, but it was not something we could even contemplate. Trees will regrow.

Later that month, Sarah asked the lawyer for an update on the resealing; this was encouraging and gave us hope she was now picking up the pressure on the lawyer. But then, as we were becoming used to one step forward and two backward, we found out they were still waiting on documents from the Alberta courts. How long was that going to take? Almost the next day, the credit union that was financing our purchase told us that the close date would be the end of August. And that we might need to reapply for financing as the mortgage application had expired. We found this out from the credit union and not our lawyer. It was looking increasingly like it would never happen, and now what would we do about the building delivery?

We had heard nothing from the steel building company yet, so we hoped that there would be delays on that too. A later delivery would give us a chance to finalize the purchase of the land first.

After much waiting, emails and phone calls, the lawyer had documents ready for Sarah to sign and the process advanced.

At the beginning of August, I decided to ask Sarah if we could store the building on the land, even though the purchase was not complete. If she agreed, it would save us from

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worrying about the delivery. In the meantime, of us dealing with courts and lawyers, there was some good news about the wildfire situation. People could finally return to their homes; the evacuation order was over. The fire was still burning but being held by the fire breaks.



Chapter Eight: Taking Another Look

We knew we would have to be on-site to take delivery of the steel building if Sarah would allow us to store it on the land ahead of the purchase completion. We asked Sarah if we could camp on the land when the steel building arrived, so we could pay the driver and decide where to store it. None of that would be possible without being there. The next challenge was already on our mind. The building weighed 2400lbs and was on a pallet; how were we going to get it off the delivery truck? With no equipment or local knowledge.

On August 18, they notified us they would load the steel building on August 25. But we still needed consent from Sarah to store the building there. It was getting very tense. It felt like we were slowly being crushed between progress and needing agreement. Yet again, our close date had lapsed, and we were out of contract! With more at stake than ever, there was still no word from the BC courts to indicate they had accepted the documents. At last, the lawyer got hold of Sarah, and she gave verbal consent we could stay on the land and store the steel building. We quickly made a plan to drive out with our trailer, stopping in Nakusp to sign documents and pay the balance for the purchase.

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On August 24, we were on our way; the trailer hitched up, heading towards Golden. The sun was shining, and it was a beautiful fall day. It was with mixed feelings; we were almost at our goal, and it felt like it was so close to happening, yet it was still not ours yet. We were cognisant of being respectful and not taking advantage that we must just stay there making no changes, as it wasn't ours yet.

While on our way toward Rogers Pass from Golden, we received a call from the trucking company to confirm delivery arrangements. "Yes, we have everything organized for receiving the delivery and have the bank draft" I was excited to let them know we were ready.

"So, the truck should arrive with you on September 3rd," the delivery company confirmed. I looked at Dave, confused; it was only August 24th.

"September 3rd? We thought it was being delivered tomorrow." I was confused. How did we get the dates so wrong?

"We loaded it on the truck in Ontario on August 24, and it takes about 5-6 days to get to you," she explained patiently.

"Oh" feeling very stupid, I realized my mistake. In my excitement, I had heard "being delivered" on August 25, not loaded in Ontario. So unless our truck driver has wings, we would be very early!

"OK, thank you. So it will arrive on September 3rd?" I wanted to be sure we had the correct date.

"What do we do now?" I turned to Dave. We were now driving to receive a building that wasn't arriving for another six days. We couldn't afford to stay that long and be away from work commitments. Thinking rapidly, ever conscious we were driving further away with every minute, we had to make a quick decision. Carry on or turn back? We tossed the options back and forth for a few minutes. It was so

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disappointing to think we would not be going to the land and the workshop would not be arriving as we expected. But if we carried on, we would run out of time and have to return home before they delivered the workshop.

I switched on the indicator, and we turned off the highway, completing a U-turn. We didn't have enough time to reflect on what had happened before we headed home. One minute we are excitedly driving to see what we hope is our new land. The next heading home, feeling stupid for getting the delivery wrong. Perhaps it was an omen and sent to teach us a valuable lesson. Do not assume things will turn out right. Silence filled the truck as we wound our way back through the Kicking Horse Pass out of Golden. This was a very different outcome from how this day was supposed to have turned out.

My mind racing, always looking for solutions, as we passed Field, I really, really did not want to go home like this.

“Let's spend the night at Takkakaw Falls Campground,” I said. “It just seems too disappointing to go directly home. Let's spend the night there and then head home tomorrow.”

“OK, good idea,” Dave said. Just in time, as we got close to the turnoff for the campground. We needed some time to process what had happened and the change in direction. My mistake highlighted how absolutely sure of arrangements we needed to be. This was not just a small project, but had lots of moving parts, people, and organization. It was scary to think we could have got there and not realized the mistake. Were we ready to take on this project if we could get this simple part wrong?

It turned out to be a blessing that we did not get all the way there. After setting up the trailer at the campground, we discovered we were out of propane. We had only just filled the two tanks, so we knew something was wrong for this to happen. One pigtail (the hose connecting the propane tank to

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the trailer) was old and had perished, causing a leak. So, with hindsight, it worked out after all. If we had travelled to Edgewood and discovered we had no propane and needed to repair the pigtail, it would have been impossible to stay there. After all, we needed propane to run the fridge, heat water, and cook. For our one-night camping, we managed by just drinking beer, but an entire week in Edgewood would have been more challenging.



Chapter Nine: Finally on Our Way

On September 1st, we set off again with our trailer in tow for our second endeavour to visit the land. We had rearranged our meeting with the lawyer in Nakusp to sign the mortgage and purchase documents. So much was unknown, and we still had no idea how long probate and the courts would take. But it seemed more likely, and the fear of not getting to buy the land was gradually fading.

Being replaced by the new challenges regarding the steel workshop and building in an unknown, relatively remote area. If we needed something, Canadian Tire was an hour and a half away, not just around the corner as we were used to. To prepare for the trip, I had been writing so many lists to ensure we had everything we would need.

We had recently purchased a solar panel and a new battery for the trailer. “boondocking” was an unknown term and an unfamiliar experience for us. I had come across the word boondocking in my research; it means to camp in an RV or trailer with no access to water, sewer, or electrical hookups. Would the trailer fridge work on propane? How would we get the steel building pallet off the truck? How long would the

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battery power last? Would the solar panel give us enough charge?

We were growing excited despite the unknowns. With the realization that we were actually on our way to what we hoped would end up being our land. It was six months since we had been there, and summer was almost over. Would it still look as we remembered it? The ferns that had been brown and dead over the winter, would they still be green or had already started browning again? Would the trail we followed on our first trip have become overgrown?

The journey felt like it was taking forever. We wanted to measure and mark out the boundaries of the five acres, as there were no fences or markers at all that we remembered. So, we could have a sense of how big the area was and start thinking about where we would build our cabin and gardens. We didn't know if we had any neighbours or how they may feel about having new people close by.

After a brief stop in Nakusp, we had everything signed and sealed and were on the last leg. The trip from Canmore to the land takes about six hours of driving. It's 500km, goes over Rogers Pass, requires us to take two ferries, and change time zones. However, it is a beautiful drive and never gets dull; the mountains are always changing and look stunning at all times of the year.

It was mid-afternoon as we rolled off the Needles ferry, calm and sunny, lower Arrow Lake smooth as a mirror, reflecting the brilliant blue sky. The road winds up over the low mountain range flanking the lake and then drops steeply into the Inonoaklin Valley. The road then straightens out across green fields, and there it was, the little turnout on the right. We pulled up on the gravel.



Chapter Ten: The Land

We took in the view, while sitting in the truck, of what we hoped would soon be our land. The birch trunks we had pulled across the entrance back in March were still there. Several new small green saplings were eagerly growing in the middle of the trail. It looked so much more overgrown; I was wondering how we would get the trailer in without some serious pruning.

Eager to explore, I jumped out of the truck. “Come on, let’s take a look.”

“Wow, look at how much has grown,” Dave said as he waded into the trail. The ferns were hip-deep, crowding the open areas between the trees.

“Listen to that,” I said.

“What? I don’t hear anything.”

“Exactly.” That was one thing I loved about this place. Even with direct access off the highway, there was little road noise most of the time. We were about 15 minutes’ drive from the ferry. Meaning the only noise was a brief rush of traffic every 30 minutes and then very few cars until the next dash for the ferry.

“Shall we take a walk and see where we want to park the trailer?” we were keen to get set up. It seemed sensible to

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scope out the area on foot first, as we could not remember what the trail was like if it was suitable to drive on, or how far it went. I was reluctant to pull the trailer in and get stuck somewhere without turning around. We were pretty sure we would need to reverse the trailer, so it was not blocking the exit for the truck.

Dave looked at the entrance. “We’ll need to trim down these shrubs.”

He pointed to the recent growth that threatened to overgrow the rough track winding into the property.

I nodded, walking on. The driveway, if you could call it that, veered right at first and then looped gradually left, giving an effective screen from the road very quickly. It headed in an easterly direction, towards the rear of the property. A quick scan of the ground, I could see it was mixed fine gravel and seemed almost like someone had built it as a driveway in the past. Reasonably level and free from ruts and potholes. It would be a perfect surface to drive in with no additional work required. As we rounded the curve, the driveway straightened, and the trees thinned into a beautiful sunny spot filled with ferns.

“How about parking here to start with? It’s far enough, so it shelters us from the road. It’s nice and level, and we’ve got some sun.” I said to Dave.

“Looks perfect. There’s a tree fallen across the trail farther up, so this is probably a good starting point.”

We headed back; I was eager to get the trailer in position. Reversing the trailer was my job, as Dave wasn’t much practiced at it. I didn’t mind, but I would be glad when it was in place. As we stepped out to the gravel, a pickup truck pulled in beside us.

“Do you have permission to be on this land?” a grizzled, bearded man asked. Not overly friendly, but neither rude.

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Dave answered, “Yes, we do,” and explained the details of our buying it. So, it introduced us to our first neighbour Matthew (Mat) Hauser, who owned the five acres to the right of us. We felt quite reassured that someone was looking out and checking on who was coming and going. He introduced his grandson, daughter, and son-in-law, who were with him. We were welcome to use his driveway to access the back of our property, as he had a much more developed drive. He didn’t live there, but rented a place off a side road behind our place and was planning to build a house and move in at some point in the future.

Just as Mat was going, another vehicle stopped, and we met our second set of neighbours within ten minutes of arriving. Brett lived on their 5-acre farm, just to the left of us, with his wife and family, three little girls. Keen to get the trailer parked up, we vowed to catch up and get to know them over the next few days as Brett was rushing to get to the store in Edgewood before it closed

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