

**Stories of Lac Gauvreau – Part 1**  
by  
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I bought my cottage at lac Gauvreau in 2010 – one year after the sale of our family cottage at lac Tremblant. Since then, I have canoed around lac Gauvreau many, many times. As the seasons unfolded, and I paddled round and round the lake, I noticed that I was finding it hard to get a sense of place. The story that always came to mind was that lac Gauvreau had faced environmental challenges. My own experience of growing up at lac Tremblant was so rich and varied that I thought –there must be something more to lac Gauvreau?!

I decided to find out what that was.

I spent the summer of 2013 canoeing around the lake and collecting people’s memories. Along the way, I met a friend, Susan Decelles, who helped me to collect many of the anecdotes. As a result, we are co-submitting these stories.

Thanks for sharing your memories. It’s been a wonderful experience. We hope that these tales will be as enjoyable to read as they were to collect.

Summer 2013 has ended, but we’re not done yet. Look for us arriving for a brief chat at your dockside next summer!

Cheers,  
Jennifer

Note: The stories retold below represent an “oral history”. As such, they derive from people’s memories. No attempt has been made to verify facts, check spellings, etc.!

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**Early Days and heritage**

- Before the lake was called Gauvreau, it was called Mary Kay.
- William Robertson had a farm near here. In winter, the farm girls would cut ice blocks from the lake for the ice house. In summer, the farm kids would come down to the lake and wade around in the water – they couldn’t swim. Robertson family members still live on the old farmstead, and elsewhere around the lake.
- I remember going to the icehouse near Bertrand Road to get ice for our cottage in the 1930s. Sawdust was put on top of the ice to prevent melting.
- Our cottage started as a fishing camp. The cottage book begins in 1928. The man who built the fishing camp was a surveyor. When he left for work out west, he gave the camp to Grace Roberts,

who was then a widow with three young children. Descendants of Grace Roberts still own lakefront properties, so the family has been on the lake for generations.

- There was no electricity in the early days. Trucks went around selling vegetables, meat, milk and bread to cottagers.
- Patrick Reid's father had lots of cows, and some of them drowned in the lake. We used to steal the corn that Mr. Reid grew for his cows!
- M. Patineaud's house, a log cabin, was brought over the ice to its present location on Chemin Pilon.
- We used to buy our ice at a house along the 366. The ice itself came from lac Gauvreau. We would set our beer out in a laundry tub and then cover it with ice and hay to keep it cool.
- In the old days, you could get incredibly good fresh cream in Masham!
- Unlike the cottage kids, we farm kids had to do chores all day. If we were lucky enough to know a cottage kid, we might go for a swim at the end of a working day. Or, more often than not, it was a rainy day – because those were our days off. Once in a while, a cottage kid would spend the day working on the farm, just to see what it was like. One day was usually enough.
- I went to the one-room school house –Mrs. Moore's school. We used to play with the goats across the street at recess. In winter, we went sliding in Riley's field. At school, the girls cleaned the chalkboards and swept with dust bane. The boys got water and kept the stove going. Younger classes sat at the front and older ones sat at the back. Not a great education for most of us, although there were some serious students. Mostly, the French and English families kept to themselves, although a few families would send their kids to school in the other language – to ensure their kids were bilingual. One of my favourite memories relates to times when there would be a quick thaw and freeze during the winter. We would go out on the stream behind Fred Prentice's place and skate between the trees. It was a perfect rink. We used to play Crack the Whip: everyone would line up and hold hands. The first person in line held onto a tree. The rest of us skated around as "the whip".
- I remember party lines on the phone and having to listen for our double ring!
- Nowadays, there are lots of businesses nearby. When we first came here, there were hardly any – just a dépanneur in Masham and a stand where you could buy French fries.
- Like many lakes in the area, lac Gauvreau went through an evolution from farming lots to cottage lots. I was born and raised in Rupert. My parents owned a farm on Mahon Lake. They didn't flog the cottage lots.
- When we first came to lac Gauvreau, many families lived in very humble homes. It's amazing to see the houses going up around the lake today – the lake has really changed over the years.
- Most of the lots in our area were sold to cottagers by a M. Hercule Byron.

### **The Gauvreau family**

- The Gauvreau family gave a lot of land to the church, which is how the priests came to be here. People used to do that kind of thing in those days. The church later sold the land.
- The Gauvreau family used to collect the mail for us. We would paddle over to their house in the evenings and pick up our mail!
- One of the Gauvreau relations still lives on Chemin Charlevoix. I think that may be the old Gauvreau farmstead.

- There is a book on the Gauvreau family in the local history section of the library. The first generation Gauvreau in Sainte-Cecile-de-Masham, Wenceslas Gauvreau, married Mary Berton.
- The Gauvreau family no longer has much by way of lake access. Just a small bit of land along the creek with the waterfall.

### **The Priests**

- A few years back, we bought our long-time neighbour's property. The property has many levels or terraces built into it, with pathways and beautiful stonework – all done by the priests. The priests had a cook-house on the property. The cook-house was later made into a garden. We restored the cook-house garden, which was overgrown. There is also an altar – although it has deteriorated – and a natural spring. We think that the priests may have gotten their drinking water from the spring.
- The priests had a retreat house on Chemin Charlevoix. Monseigneur Charlevoix used to live on that road. There is a cross – Saint-Anne's Cross – nearby.
- On the feast of Saint-Anne, we used to come down to the dock with our blankets to watch the priests go by. They would go around the lake in a procession of row boats – long boats with at least two sets of oars – and they would sing songs. The people around the lake would sing out their own folk songs –like "Après de ma blonde" or "Allouëtte" – and the priests would join in!
- On the night of the feast of Saint-Anne, the priests would light a bonfire on the small rock outcropping beside Isle Saint-Anne.
- The priests had a diving platform over in Bay Saint-Anne. They would dive off wearing long black pants, without tops on. They didn't like to be watched.
- Priests of some sort used to live on the island many years ago. They would go out in their canoes at night and chant. It was such a peaceful sound!
- Once there was a fire on the island – everyone went out in their boats with buckets – acting as a fire brigade of sorts.
- The priests used to walk around the island saying their prayers at Stations of the Cross that were set up along the trail.
- There was a chapel or altar of some sort on the island and Mass was held there in the summer months. People would go to Mass by boat. We used to go over to the island to picnic.
- The large rock that juts out on the southwest side of the Island used to have "Sainte-Anne" painted on it. There was an altar on the island, where mass took place on Sundays. People tied up their boats at the rock, and used the steps leading up from the rock.
- As far as we know, the island was never the emplacement for a church, per se. Rather, it appears as if it served as the sort of contemplative retreat from the retreat house which formerly stood on the shores at Baie Sainte-Anne. Run by the Oblates, I think, so that may be a source of info.
- People remember evening prayer-type processions on barges – complete with candles and pump organ— over to the island as late as the early 50s.
- As a kid, we used to regularly walk around the path that circumnavigated the island shore.
- It takes about 20-30 minutes to walk the island trail. We went there before the island was sold.

- Some guests who visited at the “turret place” remembered the priests as quite a presence on the lake –a bit intimidating from their perspective– out in their boats, dressed in their robes and singing songs!
- We think that Monseigneur Charlevoix had some sort of connection to the wars in Europe, because when he died, he went to the National Defense medical centre. Also, we have a photo of him receiving a military award. When father Charlevoix died, they sold some of his things. We bought a beautiful ornate antique table that we think came from Italy. It is very unique.
- The Rédemptoristes originated as Italian missionaries devoted to labouring among the neglected country people near Naples.
- The fathers built Villa Saint-Gérard on lac Gauvreau in 1919. It was a large, plain white house. Saint-Gérard is the patron saint of unborn children. He is connected with the Virgin Mary and Saint-Anne.
- Saint-Alphonse was also a figure associated with the Rédemptoristes. There is a Baie Saint-Alphonse on the lake.
- Rédemptoriste fathers looked at my house three times before it was sold a few years back!

### **Generations at the cottage**

- Spending summers on Gauvreau Lake as a child made for perfect, childhood memories. Now my kids get to do the same thing. I hope they look back on their summers with the same fond memories I had here.
- Two other sets of relatives used to have cottages on Gauvreau Lake. It was so much fun boating to each other’s cottages to visit!
- I love how cottages have been passed down from generation to generation.
- My partner and his family have been coming here for about 30 years. My dad, who is from Brazil, came to visit us at Gauvreau Lake. He had never been on a lake before. When he got into the canoe, he wouldn’t listen to our instructions. Of course, we ended up capsizing! The good thing was that my dad lost his fear of water.
- Our family has been coming to the campground for 25 years - three generations now.
- The campground lets people launch their boats and treats its neighbours with respect.
- We started out renting from the Reid family, and we bought our cottage about three years ago. This is our first family cottage. It means a lot to me because my dad and I have worked on the cottage together and because I am a co-owner.
- When grandma died in 1961, our mothers flipped to see who would get the lot and who would get the cottage. In the end, it worked out that everyone was happy with what they got!
- I have been coming to this lake for about 46 years. Initially, my parents rented a cottage. Our neighbours were Mr. Hogg and his second wife, Mary Josh. They had 3 sons –stepsons for Mary. Mary was a home economics teacher and she taught me how to cook. She used to joke that I was her first born. We got our own land when two nearby properties became available. There were two families that wanted them and we drew lots to see who would get which one. Our family ended up with the one we wanted! Mr. Crevier sold us the lots.
- My daughter’s friend lives in a cottage that her dad built. Her family has owned land around the lake for over a hundred years.

- Our cottage was once one of the nicer properties on the lake. Now it needs to be torn down. For the past few years, it's been difficult for our family, because our dad loved this place so much. Happily, we intend to rebuild – and our plans for the house and property have been inspired by a desire to build the cottage that my dad always dreamed of.
- The original part of my cottage was built in 1936 – according to a M. Robinson, the son of the original owner, who now lives in Hull. However, the first deed for the cottage dates to 1952.
- The cottage that I bought had been in another family for 60 years. I'm glad to say that the former owner and her sisters still visit me here. Also, a brother-in-law has overseen renovations on the property, so the family still has a real connection to the cottage.
- When we first came here, there was no road to the house. In winter, we brought the kids here on toboggans.
- Our family has been coming to our family cottage on Chemin Joy for about 70 years.
- My parents bought our chalet in the 1960s. When my father died in 1998, he left the cottage to me. After my father died, I lived in the cottage, year-round, until 2010.
- The lakeside community is really a series of smaller communities that have grown out of road associations and bays. It tends to be the same people, year after year, who take responsibility for managing the roads and the environment!

#### **Childhood memories and friends**

- I smoked my first cigarette, at 14 years old, on Robertson Road. It was night time and my friend encouraged me to do it, as she had done it many times. Afterwards I went home to my cottage, talked to my mom, and went to bed – all without chewing gum or doing anything to hide the smoke smell. My mom must have known, but never said anything!
- I loved having during-the-school-year friends and summer cottage friends. I loved having a bedroom in my cottage and one at home; I thought I was so lucky having 2 bedrooms! And I was!
- When I was a kid, there were six cottages that all had kids close to my age, and we hung out all summer. We swam together, had bonfires together, tried to sneak alcohol together, played board games at each other's cottages, etc. Not everyone keeps in touch with each other, but I'm sure that a few times a year we all think of each other and the fun times we spent together at the lake.
- Swimming, waterskiing, tubing, kayaking and jumping on the trampoline!
- The lake is so beautiful. It's the perfect size! It's become a home away from home. My girlfriend and I love being able to share this place with our friends.
- Growing up, we had lots of cottage friends in the area. Some of them are still living here, which is a comfort to me.
- When I was young, there were lots of fireworks to celebrate the Saint-Jean holiday!
- My nephew and his brother once found an old wooden boat abandoned on the lake. They "stole" their father's engine, put it on the boat and went for a ride to the campground. The boat sank and they almost drowned! Later, we found the sunken boat, brought it back up from the bottom of the lake, and got the "stolen" engine back.

### **Summer love**

- Years ago, I moved to Gauvreau from Manhattan, at the end of November. It was a HUGE shock!! My boyfriend and I had been long-distance dating for over a year and it was getting expensive. We knew someone had to move, and I decided that it would be me. I was homesick for noise, crowds of people, cars, taxis, getting takeout food at any hour of the day and subways. However if I hadn't stuck it out, my then-boyfriend wouldn't have become my now-husband and I wouldn't have my wonderful children!
- Our sister married our cottage-neighbour's brother.
- I read in an article that the castle house was built by a husband for his wife – simply because the wife had always wanted to live in a castle. How romantic!
- There used to be a hotel in Masham where they held dances. I went there once and danced with a cute guy. He was so drunk that he fell down. That was my first and last dance in Masham!

### **The environment**

- As a kid, I remember washing and conditioning my hair in the lake!! That was years ago before we all became environmentally friendly.
- When the island went up for sale, we were worried about some contractor coming in and building condos or lots of cottages. Thank goodness that didn't happen!
- We'll always remember the good old outhouses! I remember that sometime in the 1950s there was a caterpillar infestation. We had to put towels over our heads as we ran out to the outhouse so we didn't get covered in them!
- There have been so many studies on the lake. More emphasis and money for restorative efforts on the waterfront would be better than more studies and letter-writing!
- Many of the properties on our road had garbage buried right into the lots, including larger items like fridges and stoves. Sometimes people threw bigger items right into the lake.
- The two cottages that burned down on our road were simply plowed into the lake.
- In the 70's, some people would set washing machines up along the shore. There would be an intake pipe from the lake and an output pipe directly back into the lake!
- The municipality changed Parent Creek from a natural winding stream, which slows the flow of water, into a straight line. This is bad because the water flows too quickly into the lake from the farmlands above. The reason this was done was to settle a property dispute. Now the government refuses to fix the problem or even allow us to fix it, citing (new) regulations that prevent the altering of watercourses. This is ironic and unfair.
- The campground has worked hard to comply with everything they have been asked to do. It's clean here. They moved the road, moved the trailers, and installed flush toilets and septic tanks (which they empty on a regular basis).
- Once, we caught an engine while out fishing!

### **Wildlife and animals**

- When I was around 16 years old, I found a turtle near the beach. In those days, there was a biology professor living on Chemin Gervais. He estimated that the turtle was about 100 years old. Amazingly, the turtle was also preparing to give birth!

- Last summer, my brother caught a 47-inch musky in lac Gauvreau. His picture, along with the musky, was featured in an American publication called *Musky Hunter*. I like to fish for musky too. Musky are more active when the water is warm and are said to be almost twice as active during the full moon.
- My sister was cooking French fries when a hungry mother bear scratched her claw at the kitchen window screen. Her two cubs were next door at our nephew's house. Our quick-thinking nephew distracted the mother bear while my sister ran outside to save her cat!
- Once, we went fishing all night for catfish (mudpout?).
- There used to be lots of cows pasturing near the lake. One summer, one of the cows must have drowned in the lake. We could see a distinctive cow skull and bones lying along the bottom of the lake.
- My husband saved a little kitten from up a tree. The cat was being barked at by dogs. It's 17 years later –and we still have the cat!
- When the lake level gets too high, the loons' nests on the North side of the island get waterlogged and reproduction fails. To prevent this from happening, we built special rafts for the loons to nest in, and got permission to place them on the island's North shore. We did this twice, but both times, the rafts were torn apart. The people who did this didn't understand what the rafts were or why they had been put there. It was very discouraging.
- Lac Gauvreau is a haven of peace. A lake where the majority of people respect nature. We love to see the turtles in Mystery Bay and watch the loons and geese.
- I love to watch the blue herons fishing on my beach in the early morning.
- This weekend, we're having a fishing tournament at the campground. Catch and release. If the fish dies, it doesn't count. I caught a 3.3 pound large-mouth bass. So far, the biggest fish has been a 4.2 pound large-mouth bass.
- The lake is a lot cleaner than it used to be. The kids caught some speckled trout in the Parent Creek this spring.

### **Winter at lac Gauvreau**

- While the lake often brings back memories of summer, there is nothing like walking to the island (instead of swimming! ) in the middle of a winter's night, under the moonlight, when it is as bright as day. I have even witnessed an *aurora borealis*!
- Winter at Lake Gauvreau was challenging in the early weeks of 1998 – a.k.a. the Ice Storm. I remember spending a week without power– and treacherous, ice-covered roads.
- One of my early memories of lac Gauvreau was cross country skiing around the lake during my first winter. I thought that I was all alone out on the lake, when, lo and behold, I came upon a massive two-rink skating party, complete with dozens of guests, a bonfire, food, and plenty of good cheer! I thought – how cool is this? It turned out to be an annual charitable event, to boot.
- To get to my place in winter, I have to shovel a very long walkway from the end of the plowed road to my front door. It's definitely worth it –I love the peace and quiet of the lake in winter.

### **Cherished memories and traditions new and old**

- Swimming to the island and back is something I have to do every summer!

- I remember having to swim board games out to our raft, and playing those games during beautiful summer afternoons with friends and family. And, of course, since I was the youngest of the group, I was sent back for the beer refills. I had to swim the bottles out to the raft!
- One of my favourite memories is of having supper on the deck, driving to Ottawa to perform a small part in the festival opera (with Mario Bernardi conducting), and then driving back to the lake in time to watch the sun go down.
- This summer, we had our first “street party” – a community BBQ – on Chemin Powers.
- What’s my story? I’ve been down here repairing the dock for days, in the hot sun, while everyone else is enjoying themselves!
- As children, we came to the lake from May 24th until Labour Day, every year.
- When we came here in the 60s, there was a procession of boats in late September or early October. The procession marked the end of the summer and the closing of cottages.
- I love to watch the mist burn off the lake as the sun rises in the morning.
- I always smile when I think of all the smores we’ve eaten over the years at bonfires!
- The lake is more peaceful today in comparison with 15-20 years ago. There are fewer boats and there is less noise. There are more kayaks and canoes and the lake is cleaner now than it was back then.
- Coming here represents calmness for me. There is so much noise in the city!
- For me, the perfect end to the day is to go out in my canoe, to lie back, and to watch the stars and moon.