

A HIDDEN TREASURE

by
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[Assignment: Describe a place for which you hold significant emotions. It could be a place you have been to only once or one you visit regularly.]

Across the midwest hundreds of lake homes and summer resorts offer a tranquil and secluded opportunity to get away from the busy and hectic lifestyles of the suburbs. Large, commercial resorts and serene, one-room log cabins offer a different yet meaningful variety of relaxation. Shady Shores in northern Wisconsin is one such place. This quaint rustic summertime location offers a beautiful budding sunset, the cry of loons, unexplored treasures, new opportunities, yet most importantly, long-lasting memories. Along the shade-filled lake shore of the crystal-clear Long Lake lies Shady Shores, a place I will never forget.

Within a day's drive from Chicago, Shady Shores offers an oasis from everyday life. Passing through Madison, Stevens Point, and Wausau, at last the intersection of U.S. 45 in Three Lakes, Wisconsin, approaches. Fifteen miles ahead lies Eagle River and the Nicolet National Forest. Driving through the unincorporated and undiscovered Three Lakes, the plain whitewashed, unadorned model-like Forest Community Church marks the turn. The worn, coarse Long Island road is bordered by pastures filled with content, friendly horses feeding during the day and unexpected deer at night. Finally, the curving road finds itself amidst the thick, lush vegetation of the north woods. Ahead, the road narrows, becoming a densely worn, gravel path.

To the left, a buttonhole in the forest provides the needed sun for a well-tended vegetable garden. It is surrounded by tall, deer-proof, chicken wire attached to weathered old posts made from fallen trees of years past. Tall cornstalks, mixed with lettuce, and other homegrown treats provide a colorful sight and tempting tastes. Further ahead lies the picture-perfect cottage of the Gelhars, the caring and devoted owners of forty-two years. Here, a key, along with a warm plate of chocolate chip cookies, awaits vacationers as they check in for a week of vacation. Planters filled with colorfully, spicy-scented geraniums fill the window planters, as age-old ivy envelops the hand-painted army green exterior of the Cape Cod.

Situated on a peaceful peninsula, the cool crisp wind off the lake softly scatters leaves and the smell of log-burning fireplaces to its visitors. Dispersed amidst the giant oak, maple, birch and pine trees sprout the wood-sided homes of Shady Shores. Nestled between two weather-beaten white docks sits a small beach filled with inner tubes, a relaxing place to sit, and a village of sand creations along the water. To the side of the beach, a small yet practical boathouse is filled to the rafters with soft, orange life preservers along with water and rock-beaten wooden

paddles. Across the Long Lake harbor lies the vastness of swaying trees, lily-pad-covered shore lines, and the occasional splash of a northern pike in search of a snack.

A little further down the homemade road of long-lasting tire tracks is the cottage Tara, our home for the week. Gradually the road vanishes into the pine-needle-and-leaf-covered grounds of a simple, square-framed cabin covered in a soft, worn yellow, pine siding. Moss covered wooden shingles help to keep the low pines and birch trees from coming too close. A few steps away lies a picnic table for sharing meals, a fire grate for roasting marshmallows, and a rickety swinging bench, perfect for viewing the night's constellations, sunsets or the shuffle of content animals in the abutting woods.

Tara, the last of six buildings is nestled peacefully and comfortably into the side of a soft, developing hill. Down a short, worn path, the beautiful refreshing waterfront waits to be explored. A narrow, wood-planked dock holds a basic oarboat with a small outboard motor attached. Inside, the worn, white paint shows the many experiences it has traveled, along with safety cushions, a homemade anchor created out of a coffee can, and a few lured-up fishing rods waiting to be cast. A soft sand beach is interrupted only by the occasional water-worn rock, or wind-blown cotton of a nearby cottonwood. Branches of neighboring trees dip their branches into the clear and fresh-scented waters. A few feet above, a screen porch rests suspended over the softly lapping waves.

A screen door with old rusty and squeaky hinges opens into the inside of Tara. Inside, a large room plays the role of a kitchen, bedroom, dining room, and family room combined. Covered in lightly stained pine paneling, the structural beams can be seen amidst the antique-like possessions of the room. A simple kitchen consists of glass-paned cabinets displaying an assortment of miscellaneous dinnerware of various colors and styles. The cabinets and an old gas stove provide the needed supplies to cook a hot home-cooked meal. A simple fireplace created from lake rocks helps to heat the room with a flickering, warm, pine-scented flame. Along the last two walls, twin and double beds are covered with soft, fuzzy, colorful, hand-knit blankets insuring a comfortable and relaxing night's sleep. The far end of the room offers a bookshelf filled with hundreds of dusty classics, like *Tom Sawyer* to explore. From the center of the rafter-filled ceiling hangs a single clear light bulb, illuminating the round wooden dinner and game table below. A window-filled wall opens into a magnificent screened-in porch for sleeping. Four twin beds with springs drooping from age occupy this long narrow space. Outside, the lapping of waves, the call of the loons, and the whistling of trees can be heard.

Tara at Shady Shores is an experience I will never forget. It is an undiscovered treasure amidst the oaks and pines of north woods Wisconsin. For six years this family-run resort provided a much needed oasis from the hectic life in a Chicago suburb. In the summer of 1991, a large and devastating storm ripped through the Great Lakes area of Wisconsin, with Shady Shores located helplessly in its path. Extensive damage to beach front property and the old wooden structures prompted the Gelhar family to close Shady Shores that summer for the first time in

65 years. My memories will always remain intact. A new summer offers the opportunity to begin at yet another north woods place where memories can blossom once again. Shady Shores, however, with its beauty, peacefulness, and significance will never be forgotten.

THE GREENHOUSE EXPERIENCE

by
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[Assignment: Describe a place for which you feel significant emotions. It could be a place you have been to only once or one you visit regularly.]

When I was sixteen years old I decided that I needed a job. My parents, like many, were relieved that I felt this way. The expressions of generosity in their faces when I asked for money became less evident as time passed. I was not at all thrilled about the hamburger joint or gas station scene. Fortunately, my dad had heard that the Red Barn Greenhouse was in need of a few more workers, so I decided to save myself from grease and gas, and took the job. Despite the sometimes strenuous work, it was a good job, and not just because of money in the bank. It helped me to cherish all the little blessings in life.

The Red Barn Greenhouse is a privately owned business located in southwestern Michigan. It is a small business but big enough to advertise on billboards along country highways. When I first saw the billboard I felt a sense of pride and said to my friend as we drove past it, "Hey, that's where I work!" It is a picture of a bright red barn with three pink impatiens peeping out of its one circular window. The same design is painted on a sign near the entrance of the greenhouse parking lot, two plant delivery trucks, and the green vander aprons. The words "Red Barn Greenhouse" in their respective colors are written on the barn, and smaller bold letters boast "Perennials and Hardy Mums, Centreville, Michigan, owners: Bill and Janice Butcher." It looked just like their business card, but many times larger.

Last summer I drove a clumsy red delivery truck to the enormous flea market in Shipshewana, Indiana with an Amish woman named Joanna. Three of the six greenhouse workers were Amish women in their early twenties. They were always interested in what I did for fun and even though our lifestyles differed, we had a lot in common. Dating and eating were often topics for discussion. Joanna and I both love to travel,