

The Sound of Waves Against Wood

I remember standing at the front of College Camp as a girl, looking out at the lake.

The pier stretched forward like an invitation.

Wood warmed by the sun.

Water tapping rhythmically against its posts.

The sound of waves against wood — steady, faithful, unconcerned with the future.

I didn't know then that I was building a map inside my body.

From the pier I would walk the path.

Past cabins and trees.

Up the driveway from the lake.

Onto the street.

Toward my Gramps and Aunt Donna's house.

The same house I live in now.

As a child, it was simple.

Camp was communal.

A little rough around the edges.

Belonging came through shared experience — through laughter, scraped knees, dock talks,
and the easy intimacy of summer air.

Identity formed in group energy.

You found yourself by immersion.

College Camp wasn't a brand.

It was a lived corridor.

Years later, I sit at my desk reading emails about that same land.

Development agreements.

Engineering reports.

Conservation easements.

Condo-hotel filings.

Municipal impact.

The Preserve, they call it now.

Structured.

Marketed.

Positioned.

Curated belonging.

Promises of harmony — engineered.

As a journalist, I read the documents carefully.

Tax structures.

Service demands.

Zoning language.

Governance implications.

Long-term ripple effects for the village.

My training tells me to analyze systems.

My responsibility is to report clearly.

To separate memory from fact.

To remain steady.

But something unexpected happened while I was writing.

My throat tightened.

My chest felt heavy.

It wasn't political.

It wasn't opposition.

It wasn't nostalgia for nostalgia's sake.

It was grief.

Grief for the sound of waves against wood.

Grief for the barefoot version of myself who believed the pier would always be there.

Grief for the way land can shift from memory site to revenue model.

And yet — I am not anti-development.

Communities evolve.

Land changes form.

Time moves.

What I began to understand, sitting with both the filings and the feelings, is that belonging is not about resisting change.

It is about relationship.

To truly know a community is not only to be seen there.

It is to understand its unwritten rules.

To know which issues carry generational weight.

To sit in long meetings when the topic is not glamorous.
To recognize who built what — and who paid the price.
To care about how decisions ripple outward.

Belonging is not scale.
It is accountability.

You can have historical ties to a place and still not understand how it breathes today.
And you can arrive later in life and become deeply woven through listening, service, and attention.

College Camp was immersion.
The Preserve is structure.
Me — now — is authorship.

As I finish the article, I realize something I could not have known as a child standing at the edge of that pier.

Belonging to a community is not about visibility.
It is not about claiming space.
It is not about nostalgia.

It is about staying long enough to feel both love and loss.
To understand the past and still report on the present.
To hold memory without weaponizing it.
To allow change — and still ask careful questions.

It is about being accountable to the land that formed you.

The waves still come in.
Even when the shoreline shifts.

And perhaps this is what community asks of us —
not simply to inherit it,
but to define what it means to belong to it.