

Back to my roots

By Virginia Foley

After celebrating her 50th birthday, the author hears the natural world beckoning and envisions the woman she hopes to become.

I've recently turned that "new-age" age of 50, and with this epiphany I'm feeling a back-to-the-earth pull, a return to basics, eager for a simpler life, simpler times. I'm revving up for some life changes, which may include a return to my roots; my gray roots! Dragging this head of mine back and forth to the hairdresser's every three weeks is becoming quite tiresome. I was only 14-years-old when the first signs of bristly gray strands began to emerge, and within a couple of years I was camouflaging them with chemicals. Maybe now is the time to uncover the truth, reveal the mature growth under my chestnut tresses, unleash the real me. The inspiration for this transformation was triggered in part by a trip to the northwoods of Wisconsin.

To celebrate my birthday, I spent a weekend cross-country skiing in the north, returning with sore muscles, some great photos and a fresh, new outlook on life. In the serenity of the forest, I blazed new trails on virgin snow; traced wolves'

tracks that led into dark, dense bush and, closing my eyes, looked upward, catching fluffy snowflakes that melted on my tongue. I drank tea out of stone mugs, my hands and cheeks warmed by the steaming liquid. I was energized by the crisp air, the open spaces; calmed by the crackling fires, the twinkling moonlight. And I thought a lot about the future, about the threshold over which I'm nearly ready to leap.

I have a vision of the woman I would like to become. Her hair is long and white but streaked with the golden-brown remnants of younger days. Thin braids at each side join in the back, keeping tendrils from falling around her face. Her body is lithe, fit and strong, capable of chopping firewood, lugging it from the back-40 into the log cabin she calls home. She loads the wood stove, chops a variety of root vegetables, parsnips, celeriac, carrots and potatoes, mixes them with the beans and lentils she's

soaked all night, and cooks up a fine stew. The aroma, fragrant with the mixture of fresh herbs that grow from clay pots in every window, fills the cabin on this frosty winter day. She sits with her hands cupped around a pottery mug and sips jasmine tea while gazing out across freshly fallen snow. Grabbing a book that lies strewn below the overloaded shelves, she settles in for a good read while lunch bubbles on the stove and freshly baked bread sits waiting on the kitchen table, set for two.

Her partner soon joins her. He's been composing at his antique piano all morning and is a little closer to completing his symphony. Leaning down to kiss her, his white beard scratches her ruddy cheek. He selects a bottle of red Burgundy from the wine rack, deftly uncorks it and pours the vintage into two glasses, bringing one to her. After a rustic meal of stew and whole grain bread, they layer up, strap on their cross-country skis and head out into the woods, into the wilderness.



Foley, skiing in Minocqua.

is the woman I'd like to grow into, the soul who lives off the land; commensurate with nature. I have always dreamed of living in a log house and I saw plenty of them on my weekend in the North; snow-covered cabins with smoke billowing out of their chimneys. I long to be part of the stock crowd that gathers around

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at local coffee shops, sipping herbal teas and sharing stories. I admire the woman who gave me a ski lesson. She was my age, with weathered skin, long hair and a quiet sense of self-confidence. I long to mix with the flannel-shirt-wearing crowd in dining rooms, who sported deep laugh lines. Through the haze of my gray roots can be the catalyst that leads me back, back to the earth; back to my roots. I think the natural world is calling me; I can hear the gentle voice of its voice. I'm ready to turn the next chapter. ❄️

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