

Humans are drawn to our home ? the water

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What is it that draws us to the water so?

The water and lapping of the waves against the dock, or a boat skin, is soothing, almost medicinal. Some say it's even maternal. But really, we all came from the water ? the water of Mother Earth and the water that was our prenatal incubator.

Science has debated our beginnings for some time. It was once thought that we ?grew??from simple amino acids that formed in the primordial soup, millions of years ago. More cently, scientists believe that geochemical gradients across microscopic natural caverns at hydrothermal vents generated lipids, proteins and nucleotides, which may have given rise to the first true cells.

Either way, the conditions had to be perfect when these substances formed and merged, kick-starting the first molecular building blocks of life.

Did God's hand sweep over this blue-green ball and summon the powers of creation? Or did the Big Bang set in motion the wonderfully random and surprisingly perfect conditions and ingredients for life to form in the third planet from our sun? Either way, it's all very fantastic.

Many of us are drawn to our very humble beginnings. Geneticists argue that our DNA?can actually ?remember??things from our distant ancestors.

Roughly 71% of our planet's surface is covered in water. Interestingly, roughly 60% of our bodies are water. We are perhaps more amphibian than dry land mammal. Odd that we evolved suited to the land, and not the water.

Water means life. Our early civilizations tended to locate near water whenever possible, for necessity. It enabled organized society, agriculture, fishing, trade, commerce and travel for exploration.

Fast-forward a few thousand years and our love affair with water has grown exponentially. We pay premium prices for waterfront condos, ocean views and lakeside lots.

Many of us head up north to any one of Ontario's 250,000 fresh-water lakes, many of which were formed in the last ice age some 12,000 years ago.

We boat, fish and light fires as our ancestors did. But we didn't start enjoying s'mores until 1927 when clever Girl Guides came up with this treat. They are also credited with ?inventing??roasted marshmallows at the same time.

While our water is almost as old as the planet, the concept of cottaging is relatively new.

Originally meaning a humble abode for farm help, cottages in our sense of the word really took off in the 1960s and ?70s, growing in both size and luxury. Most are a bit more elaborate than the quaint cabin in the woods or the lake.

The water calls, and we have responded in kind.

In Ontario, the most popular destination is the Muskoka region, known for its many lakes and forests. Muskoka is even referred to as ?cottage country? and greets more than 2.1 million visitors annually.

This year, add a few more to that number.

A three-person canoe served as our primary mode of recreation during our week-long adventure in Muskoka, on Fawn Lake near

Bracebridge. I overcame the unsteadiness of a canoe and we all became accustomed to this ancient vehicle that served our ancestors well. I did of course, provide my daughters with laughter as they watched their dad exiting this craft. With one foot on the dock and one in the boat, I quickly did the splits, and landed, butt-first into the lake. I regained my composure quickly, noting not everyone can pull this off in such a fine manner!

The kids loved the experience. A family friend had never been in a canoe and he really enjoyed this peaceful escape.

Our yellow Labs, webbed feet and all, are made for the water. They don't even know what draws them ? they simply dart in the explore. Our youngest of the two has a fascination with birds and the local water fowl provided a lot of entertainment.

Just looking out at the water, whether it's a pond, lake, stream or ocean, is relaxing. This picture-perfect image enters our brain and immediately washes our troubles away.

When the oars dip into and out of the water, stress vanishes into those water droplets.

When the campfire crackles and glows, you're mesmerized by the embers and your mind is clear.

You're tired at the end of the day and you feel good.

Even though we had our electronic devices with us, I remained unplugged from the world. I didn't read a newspaper or watch the TV. War could have broken out and I'd be unaware, going on my merry way to the lake to feed the ducks.

I tried not to think about work at all.

As we drove along the winding country roads that cut through the area, I saw tracts of land and wooded areas that would make for perfect retreats. As I looked into the thick woods in remote areas, I knew I could build a cabin in those woods and no one would ever know I was there. I'd be a reclusive Robin Crusoe.

As I witnessed sunsets over the lake, I felt many things. I embraced the beauty of nature, the power of it all, and felt small. But at the same time I felt at home, one with those same natural forces that created our species.

I was home again.