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Time to read, to reflect, to be

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Reader comments: Bonnie Gonyer of Fife Lake said, "You wrote about the need for a quiet place to rediscover who you are. I started doing just that 6 years ago. I just bailed on my husband and children for one week to a cabin in the UP, near Curtis. I wanted to see what I would do when I could do whatever I wanted. It was the most incredible feeling of freedom I have had since I was 10. Your article could have been written by me."

Because it belongs only to me, nobody else can understand my longing to spend a few weeks in a secluded place that challenges me with no modern distractions or conveniences.

An ad for the spot I've been searching for would read:

"Remote cabin, one room, with none of the comforts of home. No TV, VCR, DVD or AC. No microwave or dishwasher. No carpeting. Pump and carry water. Privy a few steps away. No neighbors within earshot or eye scan. Far from all conveniences. Not far from water to stare at and swim in."

My husband said, "So go camping."

But just as he would love two weeks to paddle a small boat through weedy swamps, like he did as a boy, I want a roof over my head, a very small one. I want four frame walls with old nails in them. I want a cast-iron pan and heavy metal spoons hanging on those nails, and I want to fry potatoes and onions in that pan, perhaps on an old wood cook stove.

I want a couple windows that look out on woods and sky. I want a plank floor I can sweep clean in two minutes with a straw broom.

I want a small table at which to write. All I expect to do at this place is read, write, roam and reflect.

I will bring my own candles and pillow.

A long-sought dream

I created this cabin in my imagination decades ago when, as a young girl, I sometimes had trouble falling asleep. I would close my eyes tight and walk toward my cabin, always surrounded by snow on a deep-winter afternoon. Smoke would curl from its stone chimney. I'd open its door to a narrow bed covered by a thick colorful quilt.

At its table would wait a mug of hot tea and an open notebook.

And I would sleep.

Henry David Thoreau spent two of the best years of his life in a cabin a mere 10 feet by 15 feet (plus an outhouse.). Every so often he carried all its furniture outside, and swept it of dirt and dead insects. That image, of cleaning up your life so easily, has stayed with me.

The world demands so much of us, to follow the rules for mothers and wives, fathers and sons, to stop at red lights and rev up again when the light turns green, to smile and nod and say please and thank you.

How do any of us find a place where we can shrug off our costumes and look again at our naked selves?

Even if we manage to squeeze out the time, and scrape up the money, no Internet site promises to reconstitute our freeze-dried dreams, the ones we turn to when we get lost in our crowded closets.

The beauty of stillness

I want to go to this place because I'm curious who I would be and what I would do if I had nothing to do but be.

I would burn for fuel only wood and my own body fat. Probably, I would hum and talk to myself. I would wait for water to warm for my morning shampoo. I would wait for rain to lighten up before I hike through the weeds to the outhouse.

I would sit still to see what flies into my mind, or what flies out of it, when nothing demands its attention or provokes a response, when it's all by itself in the woods.