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## Life Stories



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### **Your Foot Is Bigger**

by Debbie McNaughton

My summers were spent at our family cottage on Sebago Lake, in Maine. Since the age of three, I'd taken to the water like the shiners that thrived in this main source for the nearby city of Portland.

At five, my favorite beach toy had been a red whale with circle eyes and a wide smile. We were the best of buddies and floated on the incoming waves every day, staying close to shore. A flowered beach pail and shovel helped my Dad and I create sand castles. Boulders along the beach were my diving boards into the shallow water.



Life was carefree back then. Dad would commute back and forth midweek and mother ran the household of four children in his stay.

I was a tom boy and imagined myself an explorer. I'd walk down the dirt paths beside the blanket of ferns and gaze up at the streaks of sunlight breaking through the canopy of tall white pines. I'd observe the red squirrels as they raced over thick branches, playing tag with each other, and I'd visualize them as monkeys in the rainforest.

Our heat source in the kitchen was an old kerosene stove. We kept the oil in a black barrel at the end of the woods. My father tied a rope to this container for me, and I'd slide on top of it, then ride the wind over the western plains on my pretend pony.



I was brave and fearless until I found my Achilles heel... spiders... I hated them! Maine had the largest monsters I'd ever seen. They were the size of half dollars with legs as long as a crab.

These goons of my summer bliss were drawn to me like a magnet, searching me out to terrify me. They built webs on the steps leading down to the beach. As I passed the fly catch of the day I'd imagine the buzzing sounds were pleas for help.

At the boat house, the spiders hung out in groups in the corners, like thugs ready to pounce on my head as I ran by with my body all scrunched down. I'd wade to the granite mica rocks, three feet from shore, where several spiders lay in wait for me there, too. Why didn't they fry in the hot sun? How did they get out there... on spider boats?

I recall my seventh summer, on a dog day afternoon, when my mother asked me to pick blueberries for a pie she wanted to bake. Driven by the desire for a sweet dessert I'd ventured into the blueberry patch brandishing a pint container. The clusters of fruit were huge, each bush just ripe for picking.

With only a quarter cup left to fill, something had touched my hand. It was a hairy leg! The pint flew high in the air and I'd yelled words I'd only heard my brothers whisper. I'm sure the little bugger feasted for days on the berries that had hit the dirt at my feet.

Our cottage had two bedrooms, each with an entrance into a small bathroom. My Dad was a master plumber, but I could never figure out why he hadn't enlarged this room for our family of six. Then early one morning, I pulled back the shower curtain, turned on the faucets and stepped inside the stall. Lathered with soap, I'd tossed my head back to rinse my hair.

As I'd wiped the water from my face I'd found myself staring into the eyes of the black dare devil who'd just bungee jumped from the ceiling. My elbow had hit the side of the metal coffin and echoed back with a clang. The vinyl curtain had clung to my leg as I'd tried to escape.

I'd screamed like a banshee and flew into my parents' bedroom. It became clear to me that Dad could never plumb under this house because he'd be eaten alive by the spiders!

My parents eventually calmed me down then shared some golden words of wisdom: "Debbie, fear no spider. Remember that your feet are bigger than they are so, just swat and squish them!"

Were they kidding? Did they not read Charlotte's Web?

Spiders hatched by the hundreds. You can't kill them all! But I knew I had to be a brave little trooper if I was going to enjoy my summers on Sebago Lake. I had more adventures ahead of me, and there was no way Miss Muffet's foes would rule my summer days again.

Eventually, I realized that my parents were right. By age twelve, my foot had grown to a size ten, and the brown and black juices of my arched nemesis often colored the bottom of my summer sneakers.

Photographs courtesy of Debbie McNaughton



Debbie McNaughton is a writer of short stories drawn from everyday life. She is a Member in Letters of the [National League of American Pen Women](#) and a member of [Cape Cod Writer's Center](#).

Debbie is a regular contributing writer to **CapeWomenOnline** and has also been published in **Seeing the Everyday** magazine.

Debbie and her daughter have lived on Cape Cod for 10 years. They collect mermaids, listen to loud rock music and dream of owning a red corvette.

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