

My Life as a Transplanted Northern Mainer

Sixty-Year-Old Tomboy

You've heard of the movie *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*? Well, I'm The Sixty-Year-Old Tomboy. I'm a sixty-year-old woman, but at heart I'm still the tomboy I was as a child growing up in upstate New York.

I loved sports when I was a kid. I had a passion for the outdoors. My family lived in small, rural towns; opportunities for outdoor fun were abundant. I was delighted and intrigued whenever my friends and I had a chance to explore a river or forest we hadn't visited before. Climbing a hundred feet high in a tree was a glorious experience. Scrambling up and down a cliff was such fun! Hiking in the mountains on family vacations was a fantastic treat, as was traveling to new destinations with my mom, dad, and brother in the little cabin-cruiser boat my dad had built.

Winter was always my favorite season. Winter's extreme weather was and still is exciting and beautiful to me. I took ice-skating lessons when I was in grade school, and my friends and I always found places to skate near home. Sometimes just a big frozen puddle in a meadow was a fine skating rink for us. My friends and I spent many happy hours sledding and tobogganing; much time was devoted to building and maintaining sledding trails with elaborate systems of curves and jumps. I taught myself to ski, and as a teenager and young adult saving money for ski equipment and lift tickets was assigned high priority in my budget.

Then, starting in my early twenties, I traveled the country for about twelve years, pursuing my career. I lived in several states in the Southern US and in the Midwest. I felt like a fish out of water the whole time. I hated the hot weather. I missed the change of seasons. I longed for mountains and lakes and ice and snow.

In the mid 1980s, when the opportunity presented itself, I moved back to the Northeast. I chose Boston as my new home because I thought it would be relatively easy to find a job there – and it was.

In 1990 I married Sam (not his real name) and moved to a suburban community in central Massachusetts. It was nice, but I longed for mountains and quiet country ambience, and I missed the exciting winters I'd experienced as a child.

Sam and I always talked about building a home in the mountains in New England. After years of planning and preparation, we moved to Northern Maine in 2008. We rented a small apartment, bought 83 acres with two lovely meadows, a small tree farm, an orchard, and a mountain view. We started making plans to build our dream home.

I *immediately* felt very comfortable and connected to our surroundings! Mountains were everywhere! Winters were glorious and thrilling! Sam and I took long walks and hikes. With our Jeep in 4-wheel drive, we traveled miles and miles on narrow, bumpy, winding logging roads to explore remote and exciting destinations. We photographed moose and deer and ponds and mountains and lovely evergreen trees frosted with fresh snow.

I felt peace and contentment in my heart (except for the trouble in our marriage – more about this below). I knew I'd never leave Northern Maine come hell or high water.

Sadly, Sam and I separated two years after our move to Maine, and divorce proceedings began a few months after that. Brokenhearted, I couldn't bear to continue living in the town where Sam and I had been building our dream home (too many memories). I searched for a new place to live in Northern Maine and found a small and quaint house in a charming, tiny town about a hundred miles north of where Sam and I had lived. Crazy with grief and anguish over the breakup of our marriage, it was all I could do to pack up my things and move into my little house.

I did my best to settle into my new surroundings, but I was terrified and overwhelmed by the prospect of carving out a new life for myself at the age of sixty. Even though I'd successfully rebuilt my life twice before (the result of breakups with two other men in my life), this time I was really frightened by the life I now had to live. I knew I'd draw pleasure and spiritual strength from the beautiful location in which I was living; however, I thought I'd probably have a lonely and somewhat reclusive existence for the rest of my life.

It was late summer when I moved to this tiny town I now call Home, and right after I moved in I started taking lots of long walks. Indulging in the long walks satisfied my urge to explore the area, and my enjoyment of the beautiful surroundings helped to distract my mind from my troubles. Although I felt very stirred up and unsettled inside because my marriage was broken and I'd lost the love of my life, I forced myself to make an effort to get to know the new neighbors I met during my walks.

A wonderful thing happened during the next few months: I discovered a whole group of people (many of them women) that are as passionate as I am about our beautiful surroundings and about the extreme weather we have here!

People of all ages, many of them female, zip through the nearby fields and forests on ATVs (All-Terrain Vehicles) and snowmobiles (called "sleds" in this area). ATVing and sledding are obviously great fun! I haven't yet invested in an ATV or sled, but I hope to do so within a year or two.

I've gotten acquainted with my uphill neighbors (a nice couple who have restored the lovely old farmhouse where they live). They maintain a cross-country-ski trails on the beautiful 200-plus acres they own, and they've invited me to access the trails anytime I want. When I met the husband (I'll call him "Joe"), I found out he moved to this area a number of years ago from a location a few hundred miles to the south. I asked him why he decided to move here, and he told me "Because it's really cold here, and there aren't very many people." I said, "Me too!" I felt an instant kinship that warmed my heart.

Another couple that owns acreage in town has not only offered me access to the trails they maintain – the husband has also volunteered to give me a guided tour of a very pretty lake near their property.

And then there are my "walking friends": a group of women as passionate about the outdoors as I am. We walk two or three miles every morning, Monday through Friday. There are five of us, and we come from diverse backgrounds. One woman is in real estate. Another is a mom that home-schools three of her children and is working on her MSW. Another woman is a retired truck driver, and another is a photographer and retired librarian. And there's me. We love being outdoors. I guess we're all tomboys, kind of. We don't mind the cold weather – we dress for it. Talk of husbands and children and home decorating and health issues is intertwined with discussion of potential plans for cross-country skiing, curiosity about fresh animal tracks in the snow, and comments about the beauty of our surroundings. My

friendships with these women are immature at this point (I'm the new person in the group), but these relationships appear to hold great promise.

I feel like I've come full circle – I'm exercising my tomboy tendencies once again (as I did in my childhood years and teenage years). For example, I love exploring tiny trails that slink off into the trees; it's the kind of thing I enjoyed so much when I was a kid, and now I feel like a kid again! Plus, I'm fortunate enough to have found a group of like-minded women with whom I'm privileged to share the pleasure of a quasi-tomboy lifestyle.

I say: Power to all the middle-aged and geriatric tomboys in Northern Maine!