

That special place

It's a little creek, 15 feet at its widest. Most people drive over it on their way to more spectacular destinations in the southwestern Alberta Rockies. Not me. This place is my four-season refuge, a source of peace, solitude and renewal.

I've visited the creek for almost 25 years, often with my wife and two daughters. We have camped beside it, shivering at night in the cool mountain air and waking to tawny deer slipping through the mist-shrouded meadow. We have hiked the streamside trails and adjoining ridges, and mountain biked the valley. We've skied beside the creek, and witnessed the power of spring runoff carving new channels in the valley floor. Two family dogs have frolicked in the meadow and paddled in the clear cool waters.

I've spent many special evenings on a wooden bench overlooking the valley, reading bedtime stories by headlamp to our little girls quietly curled up beside me. Later, my daughters learned to fly-fish here, casting for obliging eastern brook trout in its deep mysterious pools and rollicking riffles. And when the girls were 9 and 13, they spent a couple of late-spring days rescuing brook trout that had been stranded in isolated pools by receding floodwaters. They caught the trout by hand, then placed them in water-filled plastic bags and scampered over the rocks to release them in the main current.

Late one spring many years ago, I was upset after visiting a friend dying of cancer. I drove out of town, heading west. An hour later I was walking along my creek, thinking about my friend, his life and family. I stopped to stroke newly budded pussy willows, while the creek flowed strong and clear between snow-blanketed banks.

I stood there a long time, reflecting on special friends and special places, and how blessed we are to have both.

—Bruce Masterman