

Happy 30th Birthday Brushy Land

By Brad Stone, Thanksgiving 2008

We meet here again to share a moment in time together. Each gathering in this wilderness is unique, but the one today is particularly meaningful. For today we also celebrate the 30th birthday of our friend who has the funny first name of “Brushy” and the odd last name of “Land”. Perhaps more poignantly, we celebrate a 30 year-old decision by my father; a decision that has added so much to so many lives.

Geologists will tell you that the land you see before you has been here for millennia. All that sugary sand beneath your feet was created by the gentle lapping of shallow seas during the early Cretaceous Period. Drip water on a person’s forehead for a few days and you will break him; drip water on a boulder for a few million years and you’ll break that too. Many of these magnificent trees were here doing their thing before I ever laid eyes upon them and before my ears heard the music of their rustling leaves. But I’m only human, so my notion of the “true” birth date for this land is admittedly biased. November 21st, 1978. That’s when a 39 year-old man with a large heart and even larger foresight adopted these 230 some-odd acres. *That’s* when Brushy Land was born.

Dad may not have known the exact details of how this land would affect him and the others who would grace it with their presence, but he foresaw the possibilities. Foreseeing possibilities is what he does best – and he’s damn good at a lot of things. I’m guessing that he figured it would be in these deep woods that life-long memories would be made, ideas sculpted & polished, friendships strengthened, abilities honed. And so it was. It was under these towering loblollies and sweet gums that so many of us learned the art of motorcycle maintenance, how to build unique & inviting structures, and that if you can’t have a heck of a lot of fun during the *process* then you’re missing out.

It was in concert with the soothing hum of Coleman lanterns and crackling campfires that badly needed pats on the back were given, good-hearted jabs administered, and pain-relieving hugs doled out. This land has seen it all: awkward first motorcycle rides and awkward first kisses. Cries of laughter and cries of loss. Tears that weren’t absorbed by another’s shoulder would meet their end on a worn-out cedar plank or a newborn blade of winter rye; rotting one and invigorating the other. Giving character to both.

Rarely would this land see an axe to grind, but there would be innumerable buried hatchets. Few furrowed brows, but countless serene expressions. Not many arguments, but lots of lovely discussions on everything from the distance to the nearest galaxy to why my pee steams when it hits the frost-covered ground. From the sublime, to the only slightly less sublime.

This place brings out the best in us. And I think that’s self-sustaining now. Those who have visited here before effortlessly reflect back on fond experiences in these woods. And newcomers can’t help but to become infected by the warm feelings this place fosters. Resistance is futile - you couldn’t have a bad time here even if you tried.

So please join me in applauding this land and the man who shared it with us.