

# The Last Great Place A Magnificent Life

By Michael Capuzzo

I was driving on Route 6, Teresa in the passenger seat, when her cell phone rang. The voice on the other end broke for an instant in static, as if fighting a great distance. And indeed it was. Slate Run, Pennsylvania, the tiny village along the trout-rich Slate Run in Lycoming County, lay but thirty miles south and west of Wellsboro. But the message came from the deepest heart of a dark, forested place, a rare remaining Eastern wilderness; from our remote, all-but-forgotten past. Dotty Webber, one of the last pioneers in fact and spirit and DNA, a last link to that time when America was new, was dead. She was nearly ninety years old.

Until her dying day, in the embrace of Bob Webber, her husband of fifty-one years, Dotty lived a magnificent life. She lived with Bob in the log cabin he built on top of a mountain, nearly half a mile above the waters of Slate Run. The small cabin had no electricity, plumbing, or running water, but thousands of books. The outhouse was a brisk walk away.

Heat came from the wood stove in the corner of the cozy, soot-darkened front room where Dotty curled with a book and a cat. The refrigerator was a clean, galvanized steel garbage can propped up on rocks; the north wind kept the meat cold (deer Bob shot, or chicken he bought at the grocery store when he hiked down from the mountain). Clean, cold spring water arrived in old plastic Clorox bottles that Bob balanced on a pole across his shoulders as he skied to the cold spring creek two miles away from home. Home and back again.

When night fell, as the kerosene lamp issued its comforting hiss from the farmhouse table, Dotty edged one of her favorite books into the waxy yellow light—Longfellow, Dickinson, Ruskin, Stevenson, the Bible. Dotty detested Robert Frost: too modern! “Don’t get her started on Robert Frost,” Bob warned me in December, 2006 when I first visited the couple. Dotty, with beautiful pure skin framed by snow-white hair, had a philosophy clear as the Slate Run. “The only thing I like about modern civilization is paper towels,” she told me. Later she added definitively, “I won’t read a novel if it has a car in it.”

Dotty came by her views honestly. She was the great great great granddaughter of Swiss miller Jacob Tomb, the first white settler of Slate Run in 1791. Jacob’s son, Phillip Tomb, was a trusted interpreter



Dotty and Bob as they appear on the cover of the January 2007 issue of *Mountain Home*.

See *Life* on page 10

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