

# MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

Last summer, just when the loons were practicing their opera scales and the pontoon boats were waking up from winter naps, something *unexpected* arrived on the shore of Rushford Lake. He didn't splash in. He didn't swim. He didn't even ripple the water. He simply... appeared.

Standing proudly at the edge of the trees was a mysterious, coppery fellow made entirely of plumbing pipes, elbows, bolts, and fittings. Two antennae poked from his head like TV rabbit ears searching for better reception. His round metal belly gleamed in the sunlight. His arms looked ready for a hug—or possibly to fix your leaky faucet.

The locals named him immediately: Rusty of Rushford. No committee. No vote. It just felt right.

## The Legend Begins

Now, everyone knows Rushford Lake was created in 1928 when a creek was dammed, quietly tucking two small towns beneath the water like forgotten socks under a bed. Old foundations, roads, and maybe even a barber shop or two still rest down there, minding their own business. So when Rusty showed up, folks began whispering. “Maybe he floated up from one of the old towns,” said Dan at the hardware store. “Could be a plumber who never finished his shift,” said Martha. “My cousin says he’s a robot,” added Timmy, who once claimed he saw Bigfoot at Walmart. The most popular theory? Rusty had finally crawled out of the submerged past— assembled from abandoned pipes, spare fittings, and a stubborn sense of purpose. After nearly a century underwater, he had decided: *Enough is enough. Time to see daylight.*

## Rusty Settles In

Rusty didn't cause trouble. He didn't roar. He didn't chase boats. He didn't abduct coolers. Mostly, he just... stood there. Watching. Some mornings he seemed to face the sunrise. Other days, he stared thoughtfully at passing kayaks, as if judging their paddling technique. Kids waved. Dogs barked. Tourists took selfies. Rusty never moved. But somehow, everyone felt like he noticed. People began talking to him. “Morning, Rusty!” “Nice weather today buddy.” “Don't let the jet skis get you down.” One woman swore he leaned slightly to the left during a thunderstorm, “like he was nervous.” No one could prove it. But no one doubted it either.

## His Summer Job

By July, Rusty had become unofficial staff. Lifeguard morale booster, shoreline mascot, emergency conversation starter. When fishing was slow, anglers blamed Rusty. “When he's facing north, the bass won't bite.” When the weather was good, they credited him. “Rusty's in a good mood today.” Someone even put a small life jacket near his feet once. Just in case.

## Secrets of the Deep

Late one August evening, old Harold—who had lived by the lake since radios had knobs—claimed he heard... whispering. From the water. “Sounded like pipes clanking,” he said. “Like someone assembling himself.” After that, people started watching the lake more closely at night. On calm evenings, when the moon turned the water silver, you could almost imagine shadows moving below. Old streets. Old porches. Old plumbing systems... rearranging themselves. Maybe Rusty wasn't alone. Maybe he was the scout.

## The Disappearance

Then came October. Leaves turned. Geese packed their bags. Camp chairs folded themselves back into garages. One chilly morning, a kayak paddled past Rusty's usual spot. And stopped. Rusty was gone. No footprints. No drag marks. No farewell note. Just an empty patch of ground. People searched. They checked the woods. They checked the water. They even checked Facebook Marketplace. Nothing. Rusty had vanished as quietly as he arrived.

## Where Did He Go?

The theories multiplied: He went back underwater for winter. He joined a traveling robot circus. He returned to the lost towns to “check the pipes.” He got tired of being photographed without his permission. My favorite theory? Rusty only comes up when the lake needs him. When the past and present need a little reminding that they're connected by more than just water. By pipes. By stories. By imagination.

## Epilogue

Some evenings, when the sun is low and the water is perfectly still, folks swear they see something shiny beneath the surface. A round shape. A glint of copper. Two antennae catching moonlight. And somewhere, deep below Rushford Lake, Rusty may be standing watch—waiting patiently for next summer. After all... Every good lake deserves a guardian made of plumbing.

