

Ecklund

This We Remember, Tim and Cheryl Ecklund, Briggs Lake

by Kenzie Phelps

The Ecklund's story starts with a promise made to Tim's parents in 1954 when they bought property on Speedboat Bay. Purchased in the middle of the winter, Mr. Odegaard promised the Ecklunds a sandy beach beneath all that snow and ice. [Ever hear that one before?] Fortunately for the Ecklunds, Mr. Odegaard was right and their story takes off from there. There was, come spring, a nice, natural sandy beach right outside their cabin. Tim was six at the time.

The original cabin had four exterior walls with no interior walls, and for the first couple of years Tim's dad hung a canvas tarp to divide the bedroom from the other living area. Eventually he put up sliding curtains to slide back and forth, depending on the time of day. In typical cabin fashion it had a hand pump on the sink and a "2 holer" out back.

According to Tim, in the late 60s early 70s there were 18 cabins in the bay, and all had speedboats: thus the name Speedboat Bay. As a result there was a lot of skiing traffic. "You always had to be careful because there might be two or three boats with skiers coming in or going out at a time."

About 1957 the Ecklunds started coming up to the lakes from Minneapolis for the entire summer. His dad had figured out a great work schedule: there for a couple of days, then back to Minneapolis, then back to Briggs. Tim, his two sisters and a cousin, made up his primary summer group.

In his younger years Tim had about every pet imaginable [for Central Minnesota]: skunk, raccoon, woodchuck [ornery], chipmunk, flying squirrel, grey squirrel. His favorite, however, was Jimmer, his pet crow. Tim wrapped his bike handlebars with some type of fabric, to which Jimmer would hold on, and off they would go, often times with the crow's wings out to stabilize his ride. As you might imagine, Tim wanted to be a vet when he grew up.

Their summer activities were typical for summer at the lake: lots of skiing, swimming, and fishing. His mom said absolutely no TV: they had to find or make their own entertainment. One of their activities was diving off the County 16 bridge into the bayou, which at the time was 24 feet deep. From how we experience the bayou today that doesn't seem possible. However, according to the story at the time, somebody who lived on the bayou had an ice damn to break up, and the method he used [dynamite] caused great amounts of silt, dirt and other debris to flow out into the bayou and settle where the little island is now, creating the shallow area by the current bridge.

Close by, at the intersection of county roads 16 and 6 was *Stan and Anns*, an early form of convenience store: gas [2 pumps] bread, ice cream and other necessities. Tim's uncle would often stop on Sundays to buy his Sunday paper. Tim remembers carrying 2 five gallon gas cans up from the bayou and back to the boat, a steep haul for a young boy.

Tim served in the Air Force from 1967 to 1971, part of which was in Thailand working on radar jamming systems. After getting out of the service, and getting a “Dear John” letter, Tim's sister asked him to go out with a group for the evening. It was the “I have a friend” date, March 1971. After that Cheryl, his blind date, would often already have a date by the time Tim called. But according to Cheryl, Tim played the “Its just my luck!” or “Poor me!” card, and with some persistence they got together and married in 1972. While dating Tim and Cheryl spent just about every weekend at Briggs Lake. After having their children, however, Cheryl's diabetes and failing kidneys would keep her at home in Minneapolis, too sick to travel to Speed Boat Bay.

Tim's dad died in 1971, nine days before his scheduled release from the Air Force. In New York at the time, the Air Force refused to give him an early release, so he traveled to Minnesota for the funeral, then back to New York for the last three days of his military career. In 1993 Tim and his brother gutted the cabin, remodeled and winterized: rewiring, cabinets, sheet rocking, plumbing, insulating. Then in 1996 his mother signed over the cabin to Tim and Cheryl. Tim and Cheryl tore down the cabin in 2003 and built their present home.

Cheryl's early memories: Cottonwood Beach. If she and Tim weren't there for the live music, they could hear it very clearly across the water. Tim added: “You could tell when it was 1:00 AM: we could hear the car tires screeching and people leaving for other places.” Vi and Gene Johnson often played at Cottonwood Beach, as well as the Big Elk Lake Resort. Tim and Cheryl got to know the musical Johnson's because they often hung out with the Johnson's two sons, Bart and Bruce.

The fondest memory for Tim involved his cousin living with them for the whole summer. In those days parents didn't have to worry so much about where their kids were or what they were doing. He, his sisters and cousin, would take two canoes and tents, paddle to Lillie Creek on Rush Lake, portage around the dam, and paddle into Big Elk Lake. From there they might go upstream or downstream, camp for the night, and return home the next day.

Turtle Bay, the area on the channel between Briggs and Julia, was often a destination for Tim and his adventurers. They caught 50 turtles one day, took them home and numbered each one with red fingernail polish. They took them back, released them in Turtle Bay, and the next day tried to find how many were still there.

Tim used to catch frogs in a marshy wetland on the northeast side of Julia. One day while fishing for bass in the same area he noticed a dump truck bringing in fill. Chuck Schmaedeke, long time resident in the pink cottage with the ski jump, had purchased the low wet area and was hauling in fill, one truckload at a time, something not possible today. Cary and Diane Becker purchased the land and cabin and now have a summer home there.

Water quality back then? At age 9 or 10 Tim remembers being able to see the bottom of Briggs at just about any location on the lake. There was lake vegetation, but “weeds” were not a problem. Cheryl enjoyed, as she still does now, listening to the birds and lake waves, and cruising the lakes. She would especially like her grandchildren to have the same lake experiences she and Tim did, with the same clear and clean water.

The biggest change Tim sees is “cabins to lake homes.” Talking about the old cabins triggered a memory of his dad, Verle, complaining that the people in the brick home on Rush Lake with the windmill paid lower property taxes than they did. Although Tim did not know it at the time, the difference was because the brick house was homesteaded, and their cabin was not.

If Tim had one wish it would be to get the water quality back to where it was in the 50s and 60s, and restore the fishing to what it used to be. Cheryl dittoed that, and added her wish for clean water for those who like to swim and play in the water.