

***Vern and Gert Blomgren***  
***October/November 2010***

Married in Chicago, lived and worked in St Paul, built a cabin, then a home, and ended up on Rush Lake after retirement: this is a short history of Gert and Vern and some of their fond lake memories.

In 1943 while in radio school for the US Navy, Vern and Gert were married in Chicago. Not a big wedding, they had two witnesses for the ritual, both sailor friends of Vern. Or as Gert put it: "I had a sailor for a bride's maid."

They bought property from John Stimler in 1953. Stimler had purchased much of the land on the east side of Rush and divided it into 50 ft. lots. Vern and Gert, along with Gert's sister Norma, bought what they thought was a 100 ft. lot. But Stimler actually had sold them 2 fifties, so their lot on the east side of Rush lake now is fifty feet on the lake widening to 75 ft. by the road.

When Vern and Gert first started looking for property, Gert and sister Norma got together and decided to buy lake property jointly. They got out a Minnesota map, stuck a pin where they lived, made a circle and started looking. Their first visit was to North Branch, but the property owner wasn't there, so they drove west towards the Briggs Lake chain. They ended up in Clear Lake, and after getting directions, ended up at John Stimlers. "He showed us a couple of lots, one we couldn't afford, and bought this one for \$300. We made payments of \$50/year until paid off."

Where their garage is now was their cabin. According to Vern: "Built by 2 amateurs. Me and my brother-in-law Jerome Sandowski. We built it by hand using hand saws and hammers." When they would run out of nails, they would head to Cottonwood Beach for nails and inevitably stay for a couple of beers. "After a while the owner would have the beer delivery man set aside a case of beer for me, as long as I brought the empties back." For most of their early years on Rush Lake, Cottonwood Beach was the center of social life on the lakes.

They started building their house in 1981-82, first the lower level and then the upper. When it was finished in 1985, they moved to Rush Lake for good. Vern had retired in 1983 after 43 years in the tape division at 3M, Gert in 1985 from the Ramsey County Recorder's Office.

What was it like for Vern and Gert living on the lake in the mid fifties and on? "Lots of sand burrs. There was no electricity or gas, but we did have a kerosene stove and lamp." Among other things they did by kerosene lamp, they remember picking ticks off of their kids. Norma [Gert's sister] had the last property to the south of them, so their kids had a great play area all to themselves.

While they were building their cabin, they would drive up and back on Saturdays and then again on Sundays. Roads from Highway 10 were all gravel and washboardy. What is now 115<sup>th</sup> Ave was a rolling road, and their kids would beg them to drive faster and faster over the small hills to get that queasy feeling kids love so well. While the men were working on the cabin, Gert and her sister Norma would often go fishing. There was good fishing at the time [sunnies, crappies and bass], although they would have to come in to cook for the men at mealtimes.

Back then there were numerous frogs, and their dog would start hopping like a frog when they caught frogs in the grass and along the lakeshore. Their outdoor biffy was actually inside their boathouse, which is where their children would nap in their cribs.

Bit by bit they cleared out the sumac and other brush between their cabin and the lake. The water level would come up every spring, and then recede. Because their beach area was too mucky, they would take their kids over to the point across the lake below the nursing home,

anchor, and let the kids swim in the shallows. Another swimming destination was Cottonwood Beach.

One of Gert's earliest memories of lake living was sitting outside by the boathouse and cooking and enjoying the fresh air. "Actually, we just warmed up the meals we had cooked at home." Vern remembers trying to cut the grass with a rented push mower from Clear Lake, but not working. The grass was so long he had to use a scythe and a hand sickle to get it cut. They also remember having lake weeds, much more so than now.

On Briggs, down the way from the channel to Julia, they would often have pontoon parties with other lake residents: hook up, open the gates, move from pontoon to pontoon tasting all of the snacks, stop at Gene Johnson's for burgers [he always brought a grill and did the meat]. Gene and Vi Johnson were also known for providing live music when people around the lakes had parties.

Reflecting about the biggest changes they have seen, Vern said improved roads and the cleaner lakes with less weeds. Gert smiled and thought for a minute: "Appreciation of the way things look." Needing an explanation, she said: "Back then we saw work. Now we enjoy the beauty." She said it feels like being away from civilization a while: "Looking across from our home to the point between Rush and Briggs. There is a peacefulness, more a feeling of freedom."

If they were each granted a wish about the lakes, Vern would go for better control of the water level, and cleaner, clearer water. Gert would have their kids live closer to them.