

# Gallagher

**Erma Gallagher, April 2010**

At 91 [going on 92], unable to drive herself around because of a broken hip, Erma Gallagher has lost some of her freedom and independence. Most likely, however, it is only temporary. Soon she will once again be seen peering over the steering wheel as she gets out and about. It will take more than a hip fracture to keep her down. And that independent spirit permeates her lake memories.

It was 1948. Erma and husband Bob Sr. were living in Minneapolis at the time, and like so many others, looking for lake property. They answered a newspaper ad, and soon after purchased from John Stimmller [who owned most of the east side of Rush Lake] two 50 foot lots for \$500. At the time only two or three other lots had been sold.

They built first what Erma now calls the “little house” when Bob Sr came home from the service, using some scavenged wood from an old chicken barn. At the time there was no running water, no electricity....nothing except a dirt road. The “little house” was then a boat house.

Next they built a cottage where their current home is. Since there was no electricity they did all the sawing and pounding by hand. Also about that time Bob Sr, on his fishing trips up north with buddies, brought home small fir trees, many of which are now the beautiful mature trees you see around her home. “They were nice,” said “Erma, “but we had to water the darn things by hand, bringing up water from the lake.”

During the early years , as more people bought lots from Stimmller, the men went back to the cities during the week, while the women and kids would stay all week. This led to many social gatherings for those still at the lake: adult parties, teen parties, coffee time, etc. At one point the sheriff responded to a loud noise complaint, but when he and his deputy found out it was an adult party they stayed on and observed.

Their cottage never really got done, they just kept adding on. Bob Sr would tell Erma they would build a home next year, but it didn't happen, and he died in 1971. In 1980 when Erma was 62, she told her family that they either build a year round home, or they will stay in the cities. Home construction started soon after.

When they bought the land in 1948 Rush Lake was in good condition. However, in the early to mid fifties weeds started growing and pretty much clogged the lake. According to Erma the same thing happened on Julia, and their friends Stan and Margaret Smith would have to pull weeds to create a channel through the weeds to get out onto the lake. The Gallaghers, like other Rush Lake folks, spent a lot of time pulling weeds and building. One lake resident wanted only fishing boats on Rush. Erma laughed, saying: “He would be quite upset if he were alive now with Bob Jr's slalom course on the lake.”

Erma remembers having summer visitors, who always seemed to come at mealtime. One time a family visited with 5 kids and showed up at lunch time. “I had it. Bob and the other man went fishing. The wife ended up in the hammock. I was left with 9 kids and had to cook a meal. So I made a rule: when you come you bring one whole meal for **everyone**. They didn't come anymore.”

One of Erma's early memories is of the lake women pooling their energy. Two women would take several family's laundry to St Cloud, and on returning would pick up pastries at a local bakery. Then they would eat the pastries and sort clothes, and eventually each family would go their way and hang out the wash.

People were much friendlier and neighborly back then, Erma recalls. One of her fondest memories is of their Saturday night parties. One Saturday night she and Bob Sr were headed to the Rysgaards, he riding a bike and she on the handlebars. Stan and Margaret Smith were also going to the same party, drove by, and convinced Erma it was in her best interest to ride with them in the car. At one time most all of the neighbors did their own fireworks on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. When fireworks became illegal, they still did them. One 4th the sheriff came to stop the fireworks. “The word spread quickly down the beach and we all held off,” Erma said, “but as soon as the sheriff was gone we all started in again.”

The biggest change Erma sees since coming to the lake in 1948: “all of the lake cottages are gone.” And her advice for lake residents: “Join the lake association. Membership costs very little. I can't see why more people don't join. They want all of the benefits without being a member.”