

Hart

December 2009

Frank and Terry Hart

Fishing on Big Elk Lake is at the heart of many Frank and Terry Hart's memories. Whether it is actually fishing (Frank) or taking care of and cooking for all of those who came to fish and visit (Terry), the cabin on the east side of Big Elk Lake was the host of many fond memories.

Frank first started coming up to Big Elk Lake at age 14 when his grandfather John Salo bought a small cabin across the road from the lake. At 17 Frank would often hitchhike from his home in NE Minneapolis to the lake and back home again. While on leave when in the Air Force, Frank met Terry, and the year before they were married in 1955, they both started "coming up to the lake." Terry would stay in a small trailer next to the cabin, Frank in a tent behind the cabin. Terry's early fondness for cooking was evident then: she did all the cooking for Frank and his grandfather John.

In the late 40s Frank recalls there were no cabins on Rush Lake, only Peterson's farm. Because there were few "sunnies" in Big Elk, he and his brothers would go to Rush to fish for sunfish. "We had an old flat-bottom boat, and we would row across the lake to the point between Rush and Briggs (where Herkenoffs live now) and pitch a tent. Then we'd row over to Cottonwood Beach Resort and play the slot machines. But I never drank, just played the slots."

In 1960 Frank and Terry bought their own cabin, right on the lake. Owned by the Chemilewskis, the Harts wanted to buy a full 100 ft lot, but it wasn't to be. In those days, owners could split up a 100 ft lot if they pleased, so Harts only got a 50 ft lot. Their early amenities: The original cabin had no running water, just a sand point and a pump. "We had it made though, because ours was a *cabin pump*, located in the kitchen next to the sink!"

The Hart cabin soon became the focal point of a many summer activities. Opening fishing always drew a crowd, Terry remembering sometimes having 25–30 people sleeping at the cabin. And since they all had to eat, Terry would cook, which she loved doing. People would come and play cards and visit. And one of the biggest highlights was the weekly summer visit from Father Al, Terry's 1st cousin from California. Neighbors would look forward to the summer mass at the Hart cabin: Terry would scramble and round up wine from the neighbors, Father Al would provide the bread and they would celebrate mass. Because of the Finnish influence in the neighborhood, Saturday night became "sauna night."

It is obvious where son Craig [Rush] and daughter Linda [Briggs] got their fishing genes: Frank was constantly fishing. He celebrated 54 years of "opening fishing" on Big Elk Lake. Terry's recollection adds perspective: "He had a choice of fishing sun-up to sundown or stay in the cabin and take care of 5 kids. So what do you think he chose? In fact, when the kids were old enough, he bought them their own motor so they could bring him his lunch while he was still fishing." Another sure sign of the avid fisherman: Frank loves to show off his fishing trophies, all caught on Big Elk Lake.

Water quality in the 60s was not too different from that of today, with one exception: it's worse now. Water quality was good (but never clear) until mid June, then in July and August it would get green. But according to Terry: "Now we get this blue-green algae; thick, mucky, very stinky.....terrible."

The biggest changes Frank sees from the late 40s: "Year 'round people, the number of homes, and the number of people. It got so we knew almost as many people on the lakes as we did at home in Fridley."

When asked if they each had one wish for the lakes, Terry focused on the water, "Clean it up: whatever it would take to have clean water. Whether its is septic, animal runoff, whatever, I think people would pay whatever it takes to have clean water." Frank dittoed that, "I agree, plus have a dam so we could regulate the water level."