

Heinemann

This I Remember *Chuck Heinemann, Big Elk Lake*

by Kenzie Phelps

You all know about Cedar Point, that small peninsula of land between Briggs and Rush. But did you know there is a Cedar Cove Addition? About the only place you will find the name is on a property deed. Chuck Heinemann lives in Cedar Cove Addition on Big Elk Lake, and his early memories of life on the lake takes us over dirt roads, through a cow pasture to a small 14 by 16 ft one room cabin.

Chuck's parents, Elwin [sometimes Al, sometimes El] and Marge, bought the property in 1946, and in 1948 built a 14 x 16 ft one room cabin. There was a rollaway for his parents and a cot for Chuck. Other amenities included a wood stove for heat, a Coleman stove for cooking and fresh water in a Red Wing crock. There was also an old ice box, still in Chuck's possession, which now stores his liquid assets. They had a pitcher pump that Chuck remembers having to soak the leather seal and prime each time they came to the cabin.

His parents paid \$200 for the lot, purchased from Alfred and Helen Goenner. It was pasture land along the southwest shore of Big Elk Lake, with very few other cabins around. His dad built the cabin with a hammer, hand saw, level, square and a few other hand tools, with lumber shipped from Pine River, mainly because it was cheap. There have been a number of additions over the years, the last being in 1970, with remodeling in 2010.

Chuck's mother Marge had three siblings who each purchased land and built cabins on the 3 adjacent lots to the north. Among other things this extended family shared was the outhouse, built with a fine linoleum toilet seat that Chuck remembers well: "We didn't spend much time there in the fall and spring because the seat was so cold."

Getting to their cabin was a trip through the cow pasture, unhooking the gate, driving through, and hooking it up again before arriving at the cabin. In addition to the pasture being part of their scenic drive, the kids would also play golf ["pasture pool"] in open spots. In the days before electricity they would buy an ice block in Big Lake, prop it on the open bumper of their 1936 Studebaker, and head for Big Elk Lake. Carrying it on the bumper prevented dripping inside the car, plus the block would melt just enough by the time they got to the cabin that it would be the right size for the ice box.

Chuck and his mom would spend most of the summer at the cabin, his dad remaining behind in the Cities for his letter carrier job. Because his dad went to work early and was off at 3:00 he would make a trip once or twice a week “up to the cabin.” Chuck remembers listening to the radio at night since there was no TV. There were only a couple of other kids his age. Too young to run a boat motor, they would take an aluminum flat bottom boat and row just about everywhere kids would want to go, including the inlet and outlet of the Elk River as well as Lillie Creek.

The Heinemanns did not have a boat at first, but Chuck had an uncle who did on Sugar Lake in Wright County. Off to Sugar Lake and trailer the boat back to Big Elk, each direction requiring a ferry boat ride across the Mississippi at Clearwater. Over the years Chuck recalls his family owning 10 different boats including a canoe, sailboat, I/O, pontoon, and a hand built speedboat.

Fish were plentiful: walleye, northern, bass, crappie and sunfish. Chuck's mother Marge had the biggest walleye catch recorded for Big Elk Lake at the time [8.8 lbs], but a funny thing happened when it got registered at the Elk Lake Resort: Chuck's dad's name was attached to the record. Chuck checked it out on an old log book that Tom Eilers still has: Al's name is still there.

Chuck remembers the lake not being as green as it is now, but acknowledges that it might be a “kid's memory.” In the 50's and 60's lake residents would treat the lake with copper sulfate. The process included a makeshift wooden frame across 10 – 12 boats, with men on the bows scooping copper sulfate into the lake while somebody else steered the flotilla around the lake. The group was called the Elk Lake Improvement Association at the time, later the Big Elk Lake Improvement Association.

With four related families all in a row on the lake it felt a lot like a family compound. Saturday nights and cards, with snacks late in the evening, were part of extended family life. Some of his fondest memories included spending time with his parents, enjoying the lake and related activities, and having friends up for the weekend. Being around family was special to Chuck: the lots were small and he could run freely between them. There was always something going on and somebody to talk to.

In the early years they had no car because dad was working in the cities. But Uncle George had a car, so George, his wife, Chuck's mom and Chuck would pack a picnic lunch and go for a

drive, find a nice picnic place and stop for lunch. Chuck remembers another of his uncles frequenting Bob's Bar in Clear Lake, half of which was owned by then Sherburne County Sheriff Chet Goenner, and ordering "3 in 1's.....three shots and a beer." The same uncle had a reputation for stashing a bottle by the light pole behind the cabin.

In the 80's after all of the early remodeling, Chuck's parents began spending more time in Florida. While back in Minnesota Marge had a serious fall down the stairs at the cabin and spent 2 months mending in a nursing home. She never came back to the cabin, and his dad didn't come up either. So Chuck, then wife Barbara and son Andy would use it. After Al died his mother gave the cabin to Chuck. After his mom died and he was divorced, Chuck moved to the lake full time, worked some from the lake, and retired in 2004.

Chuck identifies several big changes since his early years on the lake: Cabins to permanent homes, and the advent of structure and rules, which meant that unlike the early years, cabin and home owners could not do what they wanted with their property. He noted that at least on Big Elk Lake, there is not as much sense of belonging now as in his earlier years. As he pointed to the lake, he added: "And the stinky green algae hasn't changed a lot." His biggest wish: That the BLCA increases awareness of the importance of water quality, and continues its hard work improving it.

Chuck's story continues with another chapter. "After being a 'lake bachelor' for a number of years, I met Sue Golding (who shares my love of water). We've made a life together and now summer at Elk Lake and winter in the Florida Keys. I guess I'm following in my parents' footsteps finding a warm place to spend winters. I was fortunate to become active in the BLCA after retirement, and have been honored to serve on The Board and as the BLCA President. Both Sue and I believe that stewardship of our lake property is a very important responsibility."