

Wicklund

***Jim and Linda Wicklund, Big Elk Lake
July 2010***

Many people around the lakes have fond memories of their lake experiences: parties, picnics, family, boating. Here is one who remembers the *quiet*. More about that in a moment.

Jim Wicklund first came to the Briggs Lake Chain in 1957 when he was working as a correctional officer in St Cloud at Graystone University [MN Correctional Facility, St Cloud]. He first settled on the west side of Briggs, and then later purchased 203 feet of lakeshore just south of the old Guilyard farm, where his brother built a cabin and he built a year-round home.

After a divorce and a 3-year absence, he returned to the Briggs Lake Chain, this time buying property on the south side of Big Elk, where he and Linda currently take up residence 5 months of the year. Nothing available on Briggs, he landed on Big Elk, and liked it, and stayed because of the walleye fishing.

Early on while living on Briggs there was excellent fishing: northern, bass, crappie, pan fish, walleye, and solid weeds in front of their home. They used to drag an old bed spring with cement blocks to cut through the weeds, plus they had a rule: "If you go in swimming, you have to pull out some weeds." A rule of thumb for lakeshore owners at the time was that it was okay to take out weeds, but only enough to create a swimming area. Lakeshore owners understood that weeds were necessary for good fish habitat.

Jim was the consummate fisherman, enjoying all kinds of fishing. Briggs Lake used to produce some good-sized northerns. Over the years the northern population dwindled, in part because of non-lake people who came to the lake, often more than once a day, and speared the big northerns through the ice. While on Briggs, he used to call the kids in from swimming by ringing the old bell he got free from Earl Coyle in Clear Lake. It turned out to be the old Clear Lake Fire Bell. Jim held on to the bell for many years, before finding the perfect home for it in 2009: he graciously donated it to the new Palmer Township Fire Station.

When Jim returned to the lakes and found property on Big Elk in 1977, the walleye fishing was very good. Now, according to Jim, fishing is "mediocre at best." He suspects the herbicides and pesticides from farms upstream coming into Big Elk by way of the Elk River have negatively affected the walleye fishing.

Back in Jim's early days there were only dirt roads. Winter travel was a bit of a challenge for those, like Jim, who were year-round residents. There were times when he could make it to work but not make the return trip, and he would end up staying at the officer's dormitory at the St Cloud prison. One time, around the mid 60's, it was 4 days before he could make his way home from St Cloud after a nasty winter blizzard. But despite the travel challenges, one of Jim's earliest memories was the quiet of the winter: very little noise, few distractions, very quiet.

One of his more exciting memories was the tornado of July 27, 1967. "As we were eating dinner my daughter noticed a funny cloud coming right at us. We lived on the bayou at the time and quickly left our house because we had no basement. We ended up in one of the trapshooting buildings just a short distance away at the Lakes Chain Sportsmen's Club: 22 people and 2 dogs. The funnel came directly over the north end of Big Elk." Fortunately they all survived, although the tornado killed one motorist on Highway 10 and one on 25. It was a slow-moving tornado, staying on the ground for a long time. Jim says he wouldn't sit through another but take off and drive away from it at right angles.

One of Jim's biggest accomplishments was founding the Lakes Chain Sportsmen Club in 1962. It was a very active club, at one time having over 200 members [at \$1 per person membership]. Among other things the club had trap shoots, ice fishing contests, did conservation work, held a fox hunt, helped get the lakes stocked with walleyes, and seined carp from Rice Creek behind the Harold Mix property.

Unfortunately, the club dissolved several years later.

Reflecting on earlier times: when the Elk River water was clear and cleaner, one of the favorite spots for the Wicklunds was Turtle Beach, where the Elk River flows into Big Elk Lake. He and his family would picnic, swim, and fish at the inlet. According to Linda: “The perfect spot to relax and enjoy the summer.” The biggest changes Jim has seen since 1957: the number of year-round residences and road improvements. And his one wish, if he could make it happen: “Clean water. Get the fishing back to what it was when I got to Big Elk in 1977.”

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