

Person

This We Remember
Phelps

by Kenzie

Ozzie and Rachel Person

When was the last time *you* did the hokey pokey? When was the last time you did the hokey pokey in the water, to live music, with other adults? If you were part of the pontoon parties on Briggs Lake in the 70's you will remember the hokey pokey, as Rachel and Ozzie so fondly do.

Ozzie and Rachel Person were married in 1939, and while living in Brooklyn Center came to know about the Briggs Lake chain. In the 1950's Rachel's sister owned a cabin next to Jim Burns on Rush Lake, and convinced Rachel and Ozzie to buy the lot next to them. After building a basement, and enjoying Rush Lake for a few years, they sold it to Virgil Kilness, then owner of ABC Electric, and bought a small cabin on Speedboat Bay.

Ozzie and Rachel both water skied in those days, as did their whole family, and Rachel recounted a near miss with Officer Cook, who was doing water patrol duty on Rush Lake at the time. They were pulling daughter Darlene, and fortunately avoided an accident with Cook's boat. Rachel smiled and chuckled as she recalls that it was probably Cook's fault.

They left Rush Lake for Speedboat Bay in the early 60's because of better water quality on Briggs. They were two doors down from High Point Nursing Home, a "real cute cabin with 2 bedrooms, a bath and kitchen." While many of the others on Speedboat Bay had skiing boats, they were one of the first to also have a pontoon.

Because of occasional high water, and the threat of flooding, they bought a cabin on the NE shore of Briggs, two cabins down from Ozzie's brother Harry and his wife Marlene, who eventually sold their place to Don and Elaine Niesche. The 50 ft lot they bought had a cabin, which they used for several years. When Ozzie retired from Minnegasco, where he had worked his way to be a supervisor, they bought the empty 50 ft lot next to them and built their home in 1986. [Don Haus built their home, as he did Harry and Marlene's, and many others around the lakes]. Their garage sits on the site of their original cabin. Rachel worked a variety of part time jobs over the years, as well as being a full time stay-at-home mom: Donaldsons, Powers, and the Twin Cities Arsenal as an inspector during WWII.

What was it like for them living on the lakes? Rachel remembers the water being so clear they were able to see the bottom on Speed Boat Bay. They had some kind of early personal watercraft that had an outboard motor. Rachel laughed as she recounted watching Ozzie try to figure it out: "He was going around and around in circles until he got the hang of it." Although there were hardly any pontoons at that time, they enjoyed the one they bought from Madsens in Big Lake. Ozzie enjoyed fishing in the mornings and evenings, catching panfish, crappies and bass, but not a lot of walleyes. In addition to their pontoon and fishing, their whole family were skiers, including Rachel who last skied at age 70. [She is now 90 and Ozzie is 94].

Two of Rachel's fondest memories were their wiener roasts and the pontoon parties. Rachel was the organizer getting the wiener roasts started. They were small at first, by invitation, and held in their backyard around the fire pit. As the event grew in size, and the Palmer Park was completed, they moved the event to the park. The wiener roasts were a great deal of fun, and often included live music, sometimes by Gene and Vi Johnson [accordion and vocals], and sometimes Paul and Nova Kinney [vocals and portable piano].

The Persons fondly recall the pontoon parties held in the shallow waters of Briggs close to the reeds at the NE end of the lake, not too far from the channel to Julia. Everybody would bring food and their own beverage, tie up the pontoons in a long line, and hop from pontoon to pontoon. At one event they eventually got off the pontoons and did the hokey pokey to the live music, dancing in the shallow water and having a ball. Rachel provided a grainy photo of the water dancing as proof that it actually happened. Rachel, always the organizer, was instrumental in getting Karen Jones to get the pontoon "regatta" started again three years ago.

All in all the Person's have been on the lakes for over 60 years. Ozzie said "You can't beat the whole chain of lakes as a place for people to retire." As with many others who have a long history on the lakes, Rachel and Ozzie played a part in other people's decisions to buy property on the chain. Dayle and Jean Meyer lived across the street from them in Brooklyn Center, where the Person daughter babysat for the Meyers, who later decided to buy land on Cedar Point. Ozzie recalls "everybody being so friendly, helping each other out with pontoons and docks. People are more individual now and not so close. But our group was the most fun."

The biggest change the Persons have seen: "Cabins to homes." And if they had one wish: "We wish we still had our pontoon."