

Sewall

Larry and Jean Sewall, Lake Julia August 2010

What do 3C Cigars, family legacy, and a serene setting have in common? As you cruise the upper lakes and enter the channel going southwest from Julia to Briggs, the quiet and somewhat secluded Sewall property on the left connects all three. Located on the quiet and undeveloped southwest end of Lake Julia, Jean and Larry Sewall's memories and legacy go back a long ways.

Back in 1934 Jean's grandfather Nels Nelson bought most of the property on the south end of Julia, building their cabin in 1935. "I remember hearing when I was young and coming to the cabin that this was the 3rd or 4th cabin on Julia," recalls Jean. In 1936 Nels also built what they now refer to as the "cigar house." Nels was a cigar maker in the Twin Cities, making 3C Cigars. When he semi-retired, he brought his cigar making to Lake Julia and continued making cigars in the "cigar house." Jean remembers at times helping out, taking the crumpled-up tobacco leaves and smoothing them out before her grandfather would make them into cigars.

Jean's grandparents died about 6 months apart in late 1962 and early 1963. Jean's mother, LaVerne Vanderhyde, inherited the cabin and property. After LaVerne died in 1977, her father, Harold, did not choose to keep the property, so Jean purchased it in 1981. Jean recalls her first pets were turtles (each with names) that she would catch when visiting Grandpa Nels and Grandma Emma. Jean would take the rowboat around the point and into the channel and catch her prized turtles, which eventually would return with her to her home the Cities.

Jean recalls her parents and grandparents taking their boat through the channel and into Briggs Lake to a place called Kenny and Kate's. Located on the north end of Briggs, Kenny and Kate's looked like a family home, but they had made their living room into a bar complete with bar stools, tables, bar, back bar and pin ball machines. And if they needed a can of soup or some other staple, they would head to Stan and Anne's on the corner of County Roads 6 and 16, a home that also served as an early "convenience store."

One of the things Larry and Jean remember, and miss, is Cottonwood Beach: a place to go, a place to get together. They remember that for all practical purposes there were no age limits for drinking beer. "All you had to do was know the bartender's name and you could get a beer," recalls Jean. "My girlfriend and I would sometimes paddle our canoe over to have a beer."

Larry first came to Lake Julia as Jean's guest, and fell in love with both Jean and Lake Julia (although there is some good natured teasing between them about which he loved the most). At the time there were no large cabins or big homes. Larry remembers at night looking around the lake and seeing the many small incandescent yard lights glowing in the dark...." sort of like a Norman Rockwell painting." Larry recalls taking family boat rides around lakes, and how serene it was. "We were often the only ones on the lake." Other times, Larry could be seen water skiing, or teaching others how to ski. From the sounds of it, it seems that Julia has been a "water-skiing lake" for many years.

Prior to 1952 to get to the property they had to drive on a low lakeshore road along the southwest shore (more like a one lane driveway). When Nels first sold some of his land he made sure the road was built on the south side of the hill where it is now. However, if you look closely along the shore, you can still see the flat outline of the old road.

Jean recalls that "not much has changed" about the weeds on the south end of the lake. Her

parents and grandparents called them June weeds: "Here in June and gone in July. Sometimes they were awful and very thick." Harold built Jean a floating raft, but because of the weeds, she had to put it in and take it out when using it. When Jean and her friend (Lois Larson) took out the raft, they would put it in closer to the channel so they could check on who was coming through. Mostly, Jean said, they were looking for boys.

Now the property is part of their family legacy. They have hosted weddings, reunions, wedding anniversaries, and other events in addition to just enjoying their little "slice of heaven." Larry and Jean have owned it for 29 years; her grandparents and parents beginning in 1934. They are both firmly committed to keeping it in the family for several more generations.

When asked about the biggest changes they have experienced, Jean answered with a big smile, "We got older." Other changes they see are all of the big homes and the use of the lakes. Early on there was no freeway, only Highway 52, so it took a while to get to Julia. "It felt like we were up north," said Larry. Now the lakes are used so much more, not just by the residents, but also by non-lake residents who don't seem to have the same sense of ownership and responsibility as lake residents.

If they could have one wish to improve the lakes, they both would have clearer water and fewer weeds. In the early years even with the weeds, they recalled seeing the lake bottom and fish swimming in the weeds.

People often wonder why the southwest shore of Lake Julia has not been developed. One reason, according to Jean, is that one person owned the property for close to 20 years (Nels Nelson). "Grandpa Nels didn't sell off 50 foot lots. He sold it in bigger chunks." Today the better part of the southwest end of Lake Julia (the undeveloped part) is owned by a property owner who resides elsewhere on Lake Julia and currently is not planning to develop or sell anytime in the near future.