

Peterson

Alma Peterson
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There are few people who live on the Briggs Lake Chain, or who frequent these waters, who have not noticed the idle, handmade, shake-covered windmill on the southeast shore of Rush Lake. It sits just up and back from the brick home of Alma Peterson, lake resident since 1948. Her sweeping lawn spreads to the south and borders the public access. Those who know Alma probably also remember Alma's husband, Diner, who passed away in 1998.

Of the two of them, Diner had the longest history on the lake. He was born and raised (along with twin sister Dagmar) on the old homestead, next door to where Alma lives now. Diner's father, Aage, came directly from Denmark and homesteaded on the shores of what was to become Rush Lake. Grandpa Aage was a brick layer by trade, had his own kiln and made every brick on the homestead, including silo and out buildings. Diner's brother Clarence, who passed away in 2010, lived with his family on the homestead still occupied by his widow Lorraine.

Alma's history with Rush Lake begins in 1948 when she married Diner. They met while working at the same St. Cloud canning plant. Diner was the foreman and she worked on the line. He told her, "Slow down a bit because you're making it hard on the people down the line from you," and their relationship grew from there. Prior to their marriage Diner lived on the homestead up the hill. Diner, it turns out, could build about anything, including the aluminum trailer they lived in for the first couple of years of marriage, parked on the other side of the homestead.

After living in the Tuberson place across the field, they built their own home in 1960, the lovely brick house just beneath the windmill. Diner's grandfather Aage died shortly before they built their home, and grandma died in 1960, a date Alma always connects to their house building. Diner and his brother Clarence were going to go into farming together, but decided against it. After Alma and Diner built their home he started working for MnDOT, and she eventually went to work for Franklin Manufacturing in St. Cloud, wanting to be sure each of their children received a college education, which they all did.

Diner always had a project or two in the plans. He wanted to build an airplane, even though he wasn't a pilot. Alma said, "No way. I didn't want him crashing in some field." So he built the windmill instead, intending to generate his own electricity. He even made the first blades, but they were subsequently lost in a storm. With insurance money from the storm, he ordered new blades. But the wooden blades turned in the opposite direction, leading Diner to completely reconfigure and rewire his generator. Unfortunately storms again took the blades off their windmill. Now it serves as a familiar landmark on Rush Lake, as well as home to squirrels and a destination for pileated woodpeckers.

Diner was a very resourceful "jack of all trades." During the time their kids were in school, Dutch elm disease was taking its toll on local elms. Diner took advantage of the infestation, cut down his and his neighbor's elms, and made lumber for his windmill. He also took deadheads out of the Mississippi River and had them sawed for lumber. Alma proudly shows off the many pieces of furniture in her home that Diner made over the years.

Although Alma has lived over 60 years on Rush Lake, she said her family members were not heavy lake users. They had a speedboat and the girls all water skied. But according to Alma they

had very hard years early in their marriage. They worked hard to get ahead, always working well together.

Although Alma wasn't there at the time, she remembers Diner telling her about the Lilly Creek Dam being built, especially the pilings to anchor the dam. Prior to the dam, what now is Rush Lake was just a slough with Lilly Creek running through it. She remembers Rush Lake in the 1950s to be a good bass lake. Rush Lake was not highly used like it is now; now she just has a dock and pontoon. High water, however, is a vivid memory to Alma. During really high-water times they had water several feet deep in their garage. The whole area, including what is now the public access, was flooded. She remembers having to “get after” some of the men who would steer their fishing boats onto their yard while spearing carp.

One of Alma's fondest memories is her daughter Joannie's wedding, held on their lawn on a pleasant July afternoon. Diner making a cross for the chimney, and the outdoor fireplace became the alter with help from well-placed plywood. With rented canopies, chairs, candelabras, and all of the essentials for an outdoor wedding, they had a very memorable event, one that many of the attendees still talk about.

To the question about the biggest changes she has seen, Alma responded without hesitation, “The heavy development around the lakes, and with the public access on Rush, all of the people who use the access.” And if she had the power to make changes? “Do something to control the flooding, and eliminate the garbage that washes up on the shore.”