



New Year's at the Lake

by William Stewart
Middle Eau Claire Lake

Winter arrived Halloween morning this year in Barnes with about nine inches of snow by mid-day. I decided I didn't need to plow, just hit the four-wheel drive button before heading up the hill. I chuckle almost every time I do that so effortlessly while recalling my pride in Dad "letting me" crawl around in the snow "locking the hubs" on his late 50's Jeep pickup. Winter, I'm in the minority here I know, is still fun. But I recall when it wasn't so easy and an adventure.

Christmas in the 60's at home in Spooner was great: gifts, food, Grandma. But New Year's at the lake was my favorite. The trek in was the first adventure. The cabin was – still is – off River Road, about a half-mile south of Lake Road. We had a station wagon and a Jeep pickup. Typically, we'd park the station wagon at the Cabin Store and Dad would shuttle us either to the end of River Road or to the end of our quarter-mile driveway, depending on the snow. From there we'd walk in, pulling a toboggan. How my mother managed the supplies and logistics I cannot fathom or recall.

We would arrive mid-day and Dad would light the kerosene space heater on the first trip. It would ignite with a great woof and belch of smoke and start to chase the bone-chilling cold from the main room. Next came a fire (and a lot of smoke from a cold chimney) in the fireplace. We were allowed to warm up a bit before the next shuttle, but it was usually warmer walking outside than standing by the fire. By the end of the next trip, there was some warmth. By the third night, some of that warmth had crept to the two bedrooms.

We had Army surplus down mummy bags that kept us reasonably snug. However, Mom insisted on a change into pajamas and the transition was – well-- part of the adventure, as she explained it.

We did not start the plumbing. But since we'd only moved the plumbing indoors around 1955, the outhouse was in good working order. We brought a milk can of water from Spooner for drinking. Washing and cooking water came out of the lake, through the ice and up the long hill, one bucket at a time. As I proudly presented my mother with a bucket of lake water, she praised the result, while gently suggesting I avoid so many twigs and dried leaves the next trip.

In the summer, Dad would make pancakes (my favorite) only on Saturday, but in the

winter had them every morning. Lunch would be macaroni and cheese (my favorite) or venison chili (my favorite). Then for supper, maybe a pot roast (my favorite) or meat loaf (my favorite). Mom's was classic mid-century comfort food which I indiscriminately adored, except for the occasional can of spinach or brussel sprouts. The great thing about winter at the lake was that she only packed our favorites in on the toboggan.

Burning a brush pile was one day's entertainment. Dad had an enormous frying pan--about two feet across-- with an old snow shovel shaft for its handle. He would dump various things in it: canned baked beans, bacon, eggs, hamburger, hotdogs: not all at once and not stirred together. He would just periodically ask, "who wants a fried egg?" Or he'd announce "some hotdogs are ready and so are the beans."

These various entrees were served on buns or paper plates through the day, all seasoned with the flyash of the fire. It is hard to know if this was his strategy, but it kept his help close at hand to serve the day's lunch at random intervals.

On at least one afternoon we would walk across the ice to Boulder Lodge to see Babe Desrosier. I'd get a Coke, which was a rare treat. Babe and Dad would play cribbage, dealing the kids in at an early age. I wish I'd paid better attention to their stories. There was one that involved Chan Hall, who started Boulder Lodge, being chased off the end of his dock by a bear, that had us rolling with laughter.

That time of year, walking home, it was dark. And magical. A light in the Boulder Lodge window provided the only illumination. It was moonless, clear, cold and dark. Actually and truly dark, without the intrusion of security lights, yard lights. The Milky Way was a glittering sash across the black velvet sky giving just enough light to follow our tracks home.

Another night, northern lights lit our way home. They reminded me of the ribbon candy I'd found in my sock Christmas morning, a traditional gift that I liked not one bit. But stretched across the sky it was awesome. I remember being amazed that this display was utterly silent. In the decades since, I've not had the good fortune to see its equal.



Stewart Family Christmas Photo, Middle Eau Claire Lake, 1960.

L to R: Bill and Babe Stewart, Barbara (Buzzy, home from Milwaukee School of Nursing), Sarah (Sari, senior year at Spooner), Kathy (5th grade), Billy (1st

grade and the writer of this recollection). Bill Stewart is holding Buff, a yellow lab who was a terrific bird dog. Sari holds the black lab puppy Speedy.

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Upcoming Webinars - Save the dates!

Zach Stewart from the Douglas County Surface Waters Program will host two free webinars early next year. Covering topics of local interest, each will include ~30 minutes of presentation, plus time for questions. We invite you to join.

1. **Thursday, January 25th 6:30-7:30 PM.** Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) webinar for FOECLA/Barnes! Join for an overview of current AIS prevention work in our area, emerging AIS threats, and discussion of what it means for the Eau Claire Chain of Lakes. Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/wsx-wxaj-pus>
2. **Thursday, February 15th 6:00-7:00 PM.** STOP SPINY webinar! Invasive Spiny Waterfleas are an unwelcome addition to our surface waters. They can disrupt lake food webs and harm the Walleye fishery. To learn more, join for a free webinar about the science of invasive spiny waterfleas, and how the STOP SPINY campaign is helping protect NW WI lakes. Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/sor-zwcq-mbh>

Mission: To protect, preserve, and improve the environmental and aesthetic qualities of the Eau Claire Lakes Area watershed including the lakes, rivers, shorelands, wetlands, forests and attendant wildlife resources.

BAYFIELD AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES, WI

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