

HISTORIC VIGNETTES OF SKELETON LAKE

by

Paul Temple

Editor's Note: *Paul Temple is one of the last survivors of the original group of "Norvoc¹" cottagers who settled on Skeleton Lake next to Wilson's Lodge. We asked him to share some of his memories with us.*

1 My First Memories

I am $87\frac{1}{2}$ now, and first saw Skeleton Lake in 1931 when I had just turned 7 years old. Since I have been asked to do this, I will tell the stories good and bad, without romanticizing, using real names as my memory serves me.

John Temple, my Dad, was head of the technical section of *Northern Vocational School* in Toronto. He founded and named *Norvoc Community Club*, consisting of about a dozen teachers from the school. He had been to Muskoka several times around 1900 when he was a boy. His parents took him on the train to Gravenhurst where they transferred to one of the many steam ships for the long trip to Skeleton Bay on Lake Rosseau. They stayed at Clements small lodge in a large Victorian house. He knew about Skeleton Lake because it was about 7 miles up the original road which still exists as a bush trail today. The trail ends at the east end of High Lake just beyond the last cottage on the Fish Hatchery Road as you skirt high lake. You can still find the logs set side by side to span swamps. The Fish

¹Northern Vocational School in Toronto

Hatchery road between here and the little bridge over the Skeleton River was part of the road to Rosseau.

My father's father, my grandfather, took him by horse team and buck board to fish for trout. He told of one time they had a huge sack of trout tied to the back of the wagon, and when they returned, they went to proudly display their catch, and the sack was empty. There was a hole in it.

Dad was very proud of his 1929 Essex Super Six 95 horsepower car. Hardly any of my friends had cars nor had been out of the city, although we all considered ourselves middle class. Dad built a camping trailer out of car wheels and an axle bought at a scrap yard, and Mom and Dad and four young kids and a dog started north in June of 1931. It was HOT—in the upper 90's, and of course no air conditioner in the car, but we felt very lucky because no houses had air conditioning, and many people had been sleeping on their back porches. The trip took 7 hours because Highway 11 was gravel much of the way and went through every village and town. Highway 4 north from Bracebridge was gravel, and went over and around the rock cliffs, not through them as it does today—better not drive after dark because of the dangerous curves. One just north of Peter Austin's was called the Devil's Elbow. Many cars had slipped on the gravel and crashed down the cliff.

We finally arrived at Raymond and started creeping along the three mile trail to the lake. Half way in was Greer's Hill. The car couldn't make it. We all had to get out. Dad backed up the car and made a run for it. The car made it in spite of the heavy trailer. (At later times we often had to go get Cecil Nutt to drag the car up the hill with his team of horses, but that was OK because the \$5 he charged

got him through the week.)

We finally saw the lake as we drove around the small hill that still exists today, and we finally found Wilson's Lodge. I'll never forget how elated we were after the rough trip. Through my Grandfather, my father had heard that Mr. (Dad) Wilson had lots for sale. "Dad" and "Ma" Wilson had a son Bill and a daughter May in their late teens. They ran a small lodge where a few adventuresome people visited. He was anxious to show Dad all the lots because he needed more business.

Let me tell you a little about Dad Wilson.

Dad Wilson was the most independent man I had ever met. He had done very well as a "Lumber Scaler". A lumber scaler estimated the number of board feet of lumber which could be harvested in a given acreage during the affluent period in the area when fortunes were made by the lumber barons who controlled parliament. They were allowed to "clear cut" on the land which was mostly Crown Land. They left the brush to dry out and lightning set these on fire. The resulting forest fires helped strip most of Muskoka down to the bare rocks. You can see this in photos taken in the early 1900's. Dad Wilson worked at being independent. He had dammed up the creek and made three ponds for speckled trout. He fed the trout by putting dead animals and fish in six quart baskets and hanging the basket over the pond with a branch. Maggots would appear, eat the meat and fall in the water to feed the fish. He had a pig sty out back and a root cellar built into the side of the hill full of vegetables and fruit preserves. He bought tea and flour in large sacks and Ma and May baked their own bread and desserts in a large shed behind the lodge. Not much baking was done in the lodge kitchen in the summer

because the large wood stove made the dining room too hot. Because of his independence they could be “snowed in” for long periods in the winter. They didn’t care. May and Bill would ski or snowshoe out to the country school in Raymond.

Mr. Wilson showed us the lots which ranged in price from \$75 to \$125. My parents chose a \$125 one located at the end of the trail because it had a sand beach which is uncommon on the lake. Talk about sand beaches, Wilson’s beach was about 50 feet of dry sand before one reached the water because the water was much lower in those days. In later years the dam at the Skeleton River was repaired and raised. Why was the dam built in the first place? I was told it was built by the logging interests to float logs through the Narrows to the mill and the highway.

Incidentally one can see the original deeds and prices in the Land Office on Dominion Street in Bracebridge. All one needs is the township and lot number available on a deed or a tax bill. For a fee one can have a copy of the original lot survey which shows a contour line recording the original natural lake level. It will never return to this, because only canoes could go through the narrows and many of the present docks and boathouses would be on dry land. I don’t remember how many days we camped on our future lot, but we ate many wonderful home cooked meals at Wilson’s. When we returned to Toronto, Dad lobbied all the teachers to go and look at this paradise. He told them they could stay at Wilson’s for \$15 per week including meals, but don’t forget the average teacher’s pay didn’t reach \$2000 per year in the middle of the Depression. Through the summer all the dozen lots were sold to teachers at the school, and the Norvoc Community Club was born in 1932.

2 Cecil Nutt

Skeleton Lake was a wilderness in 1930, not like the big Muskoka Lakes areas which were well populated. The big Muskoka Lakes are navigable for over 100 miles, so the lumber went south and food and materials went north to create an affluent period that lasted from the late 1800s until the 1920s. Luxury hotels followed the affluence until later on into depression years when mysterious “successful” fires starting in the middle of the night spelled the end of many. At the same time there were only about a half dozen cottages more or less and one camp on the whole of Skeleton Lake.

There were two reasons for this isolation. One reason was it was not part of a navigable chain of lakes and the terrain was very rough, and in most areas, is very difficult to build access. Also the surroundings are useless for farming. On Skeleton Lake it's rare that one doesn't have to drive over a ridge to get to the lake, except on the east side. Dad told me they thought the lake was formed by a meteor instead of glaciers. Of course few believed him until it was pretty much proven by geologists many years later.

Norvoc meetings were called and club articles and responsibilities were assigned. The format was similar to the present Skeleton Lake Association. I remember Dad took on the responsibility of water testing. In those days one could pick up sample bottles and mailing boxes from the Parliament Buildings in Toronto. One was cautioned to sterilize the bottles before filling them. They were mailed from Wilson's and the results were returned by mail. This service was free except for the stamps. He had tests every couple of weeks. What was interesting was the samples tested pure up to the middle

of August but then the fecal level went up to the point where it was wise to boil drinking water. There were hardly any people on the lake so it was theorized the warm rain caused run-off of animal and bird pollution. Who knows?

There was a mail committee. Each family, for a month, had the responsibility of picking up everyone's mail twice a week at Wilson's. Dad Wilson had been granted an official post office license. Two teenagers would sort the mail and deliver it, rain or shine. An awesome responsibility we were told. The association paid us 15 cents each per trip. Not bad. Enough for a couple of cones or matinees in Bracebridge.

We had no electricity for a few years. The nearest line was in Raymond, three miles away. Wilson's had an old Delco generator thumping away behind the cookhouse charging 12 volt batteries. Enough for a few lights, but most importantly for their new, precious, console radio in the living room that could pick up the A.M. radio signal from Toronto. The highlight of the week was the Saturday night hockey game broadcast by Foster Hewett. (I'll bet you are too young to remember *his* fame!)

Of course refrigerators were ice boxes that needed a 25 pound block a couple of times a week. And how to get milk? Dad went to see Cecil Nutt who owned a farm on the main road in Raymond. Cecil and Mrs. Nutt had four kids as I remember, a few cows and chickens and a "little bottom land". That wasn't bad except that they were destitute otherwise. I will spend some time on Cecil because he was typical of the local farmer.

They had been hit by a double disaster. The logging industry had

exhausted the supply of pine and the demand collapsed because of the Great Depression which started around 1930. Thousands of workers left the area, so there was no demand for their products. I have to this day never seen such object poverty. Their clothes were patched rags. There was no welfare or medical help. They provided their own security. Most of the younger people without land had one pair of worn shoes if any.

Cecil was elated to see Dad, and said “Yes” he could supply milk because Wilson’s was his only customer. He said he would find a source for ice blocks and could also bring eggs and Mrs. Nutt’s wonderful baked goods. He had a small old truck and would come in three times a week. We were at the end of the road, but he always came to us first because, I believe, he was thankful that dad had worked this out. We had first pick of the baked goods and vegetables. The rest of the teachers caught on fast. They would walk down to the end and wait for Cecil to come. First come, first served. I remember him as jovial and always nice to me as a young kid, but one day he came in the kitchen and he was crying. Disaster had struck! Dad said “Sit down and let’s *chew the fat*”, (Definition—*have a friendly conversation*). Cecil said he had received a letter from the government that said it would be illegal to sell milk that was not pasteurized. He could never afford the required equipment. Dad served him some beer, told him not to worry, and he would check it out. The next morning he went to Wilson’s and *rang up* the manager of Silverwood’s Dairy in Bracebridge and made an appointment for him and Cecil to meet there.

At the meeting they told Cecil that he could sign a contract and they would provide 5 gallon pails in front of the farm. Cecil could fill

them and they would leave off an agreed upon number of pasteurized milk in bottles, but the law said he had to chill the milk to 55 degrees immediately after milking so he would have to build a chiller. Inspectors would check this temperature without notice. Dad said Cecil would chill the milk. Later Dad and some of the young teachers helped Cecil build a large concrete box big enough for several cans in the barn fed by cold spring water. They mounted a thermometer to check it. There was room in the middle for a block of ice if it got too warm. The association lent him the money for the material. When Cecil wondered how he could pay it back Dad said "Raise the price 50%". The prevailing price had been 10 cents a quart so he raised it to 15 cents and paid back the loan early.

Notice I said "Ring him up". Nobody telephoned. You would ring them up by turning the crank on the phone which sent a charge that rang in about 10 houses. Each had a special ring. As I recall, Wilson's ring was three short and a long. One quick turn was a short and two quick turns was a long. Of course the rings went into all ten customers on the party and drove visitors nuts. The local people learned to ignore all but their own ring, but they might listen in on your conversation to find out the latest gossip. Next to the radio it was the best entertainment. It was called "hacking". Rupert Murdock's employees are in jail now for the same thing. How times change.

Cecil hauled gravel from Wilson's pit about a mile away with his wagon and team. Several Norvoc volunteers would spread it on our trail which was mud in rainy weather. He let me ride beside him and one day I asked him if I could drive the horses as they carried a heavy load. He said they didn't need driving, they knew the way. Then I

noticed the reins were loose and tied off, and Cecil was sipping on some strong refreshment. The horses stopped half way up the hill so I said “why dont you say Giddyup?” He said they know when they are tired and they will start on their own—they are smarter than I am. Sure enough in a few minutes the two horses agreed to continue without a word from Cecil. I found out later the horses could take him home after he had too much refreshment. Unfortunately I believe Dad inadvertently helped him on the way to becoming an alcoholic. To finish the story, years later WW2 came along, and Cecil became affluent very quickly. By this time he had a large truck and drove cattle to the slaughterhouse in Toronto and was paid handsomely. He would telephone me occasionally to have a drink with him in a downtown pub, when he should have been returning home.

Many of Cecils desendents live in the area. Let me tell you the Nutts were good, honest, hard working people who crawled out of poverty to provide for their family. I always thought it a shame the booze finally got him.

3 More About the Wilson’s

Much has been written about the Wilson’s, because the “outsiders” are fascinated with them. I believe it is because the four were stoic, independent and successful during the Great Depression. I will try to stick to stories that are first-hand and haven’t been told before.

I believe the American Indian culture was partially responsible for Wilson’s survival skills. I bet you didn’t know that “Ma” Wilson was half American Indian and was proud of it. She told all of us

in the family. I remember more than once when someone in the lodge became ill she would make an herbal medicine from her ancestor's recipe, and the patients were always satisfied. I'll bet the drug companies would love to know those formulas.

Dad Wilson was wise when he sold the twelve lots cheap in 1932. Twelve families came to watch their cottages being built and many of them and their friends stayed in the lodge. A quiet backwater was suddenly booming. Dad drew up plans for our cottage reminiscent of cottages built in northern England and Scotland in the 1800's. Bill was a rough carpenter, but advice was available about any trade because the teachers taught in a technical school that taught all the skilled trades. He trained crews that built many cottages. You can still see the original design in the Paisley, Temple and Johnson cottages, and in the ones built for his own rentals on Wilson's property in the bay east of the lodge. Bill and his crew built about half of the "Norvoc" cottages, then, since business was booming at the lodge he started building many cabins up the hill.

I got to know Bill well because he hired me to carry lumber and shingles for him and paid me .50 per hour— a good wage for a kid. He soon found out I could carry only three shingles at a time up the ladder and couldn't keep up with his nailing, so it would be more economical to go and get an 80 pound bundle himself. He laid me off. While I was working for him, he said he would like to build rental cottages on land his parents had give him but didn't have the money. I said "Why don't you use the land to get a bank loan?" He was insulted and said "I would never THINK of borrowing from a bank— someone might find out what I did". Maybe that attitude helped the four of them become millionaires. From other written sources you

can learn that Mr. Wilson loaned many local people money at 8% interest and took land as collateral. You probably know that when May died she left fortunes to local institutions.

One afternoon in the fall, Bill went out in the bush to hunt rabbits or partridges. After dark that evening he had not returned, and Mr Wilson was concerned he might be hurt and unable to walk. Only “Tenderfoots” became lost. He organized a search party that went out with lanterns and shotguns to look for him. Bill heard their shots and answered with his. And they finally met. Mr. Wilson laughed when he saw him unhurt and accused him of being lost. Bill was insulted and said “I was NOT lost—I just didn’t know where I was”. He had been tracking a deer and lost track of the time and knew he might stumble on a rock in the dark, so he would simply sleep under a pine tree and wait until dawn. Later I heard quite a few tease him about being lost, and he always answered “I was NOT lost, I just didn’t know where I was”. At the time I thought this was a dumb answer, but finally figured out it was profound and illustrated the attitude of the family.

To me, being “lost” denotes panic and hopelessness, whereas “just not knowing where you are” denotes calmness and an ability to decide what to do in any dire situation.

By the mid thirties Wilson’s was booming—90 to 100 people were at the lodge each summer sleeping in cabins on the hill, and even above the boathouse. May and her crew of hired teenagers were cooking 6 meals a day because the dining room needed two shifts to accommodate the large number. The meals were great, but didn’t cater to any special needs. *Take what you are served, and if you don’t like it don’t eat it* was the attitude to help keep prices low. May and

staff cleaned the rooms, changed the linens and Mrs. Wilson helped wash and iron all these. Mr. Wilson and Bill did the maintenance. Mrs. Wilson baked all the bread, and May baked the desserts, and last but not least Mrs. Wilson opened a small grocery store which she ran until she was in her 90's.

One day, in the mid thirties, Mr. Wilson knocked on the cottage door. It was very rare for him to visit, although Bill stopped by quite often. He said he wanted Dad's advice. He sat down in the living room, and I was on the porch behind the thin wall eaves-dropping. Little pitchers have big ears as Mom used to say. After the expected polite trivial conversation he said he had thirty-three thousand dollars worth of World War One Liberty Bonds that had come due a few years ago and were not gathering interest. In those days, bonds were paper kept in a safe place and the way to redeem them was to go to the bank. Think about it—in depression dollars that would be worth around a million. I heard Dad tell Mom later he advised him to buy more interest bearing bonds because he knew Mr. Wilson did not trust the stock market. Of course Dad was flattered—he knew he had graduated from a “City Slicker” to a respected “outsider”.

Years later I concluded there was a lot more going on than asking for financial advice. Why would Mr. Wilson mention the dollar amount of the bonds when the financial status of a rural family was a guarded secret? He could have simply said “I have some bonds” without telling the total—also a banker would have given the same advice. I believe he was revealing that he had more than the teachers' combined, and he was not a country hick as many fancy dressed “city people” believed—CULTURE CLASH

Mr. Wilson died in his 70's. He was injured on a hunting trip, refused

treatment, and died shortly later. My guess is he expected his body to heal itself without outside help.

Square dances were three times a week in the large hall behind the lodge (the same hall that burned down several years ago)— four squares at the same time. Bill “called” and May played the piano. Dad also could play Irish square dance music he had learned at Clements years before. Nobody cared if the piano was not in tune, or if they made a mistake as long as they didn’t miss a beat. The locals would get angry at the outsiders who knew nothing. This was serious business, so they would set up their own squares and we could learn from them. If we were lucky, P.J. Clark would show up. He was arguably the best fiddler in Muskoka, especially after a few shots of rye.

At intermission, Bill and a few of his local friends would disappear, and it was years before I found out where they went. Turns out they were hidden in the root house sipping on rye whisky or home made elderberry wine, and only a special few were invited. Bill died in his seventies. He had smoked heavily for most of his life. One day he went fishing with his friend Al Marshall, and dropped dead in the boat—a good way to go for him, but not so good for Al because he had to deal with it! Al’s desendents are active promoters of the lake today.

4 Women In Muskoka

Notice I said women IN Muskoka not women OF Muskoka. The wives who came to Muskoka for two months a year were a different

culture from the locals. Most of them had mixed feelings about being there with small children. They had cool and pure air in Muskoka and great views, but they had left behind many amenities they had in the city, such as stores that delivered groceries, hardware, clothing etc. All had either a gas stove or electric stove and central heating. For years, Norvoc had no power, so water had to be carried from the lake because most cottages were too high for a hand pump. They had wood stoves, Coleman lanterns oil lamps, oil heaters, mosquitoes, black flies, no effective lotions, and the backhouse 100 feet behind the cottage's.

Mother had to give up trying to wash six person's clothes and linens by hand and a washboard. They found a poor woman near Utterson who would do a week's laundry including ironing for fifty cents. Her name was Mainhood—At least the family had Mainhood's lake named after them. Mother hated bathing in the cold lake—remember—no running water, only hot water if you heated it in a kettle. I remember going once a week to Utterson to pick up the laundry, and on to Huntsville where there were several private homes with signs “HOT BATHS-TOWEL SUPPLIED-\$1.00” The boy's jobs were to carry wood, provide kindling, set the fire ready to light to cook breakfast. I could go on, but you get the idea that most women with kids would rather be in the city or staying at the lodge.

On the other hand, the local women were Canadian pioneers, because of their isolation, their poverty, and the bitter winters. It has been my opinion that northern countries generally turned out to be more prosperous than countries in the tropics because one had to plan ahead or die—survival of the fittest. For example, by November, one made sure there were at least five face cords of wood cut, split and

near the house. (Remember a cord is eight feet long and four feet, high.) It was the only source of heat, and if you ran out during a cold spell, it would be life threatening if you were snowed in, sick, and no telephone.

Dad told me he learned from his friends around Lake Rosseau to always keep the stoves and fireplaces set ready to light with at least a three day supply of wood nearby, because, who knows, you may become ill and too weak to go out and get it if a cold spell came. No statistics were gathered on how many froze to death because of poor planning, but the locals would tell you there were plenty—found frozen in their beds. The death certificate would probably read “Consumption”, or “Grippe”, or “Heart attack”. Of course, if the neighbors knew you needed help, and were not capable, they would rally to help—nothing would come from the Government. Also you would need months of food in the form of sacks of potatoes, flour, and sugar, and a root cellar full of vegetables, preserved fruits, smoked fish, dried meat—maybe home made beer and wine. One had to PLAN AHEAD, die, or be a burden on the neighbors.

There was a clear-cut division of labor. The women and girls would cook, look after the house, the chickens and the vegetable garden. They took pride in their secret recipes, and were reluctant to share them. It was impolite to ask for a recipe. The answer might be frank “I don’t share my recipes,” or maybe it would be given with a mistake in an ingredient so the result would not be as good as theirs. If a recipe were offered, it would be to a relative or close friend. The men did the plowing, tilling and harvesting. If they were lucky, they might kill a moose or deer and have fresh meat for all the neighbors, or catch some fish through a hole in the ice. Harvesting blocks of ice

and storing them in sawdust was a busy winter activity. The whole family did the milking, because it took time to milk a herd—at least the barn would be warm and it was togetherness. I tried milking a cow once. I missed the pail and it ran down my good pants into my shoe.

There was at least one woman bootlegger. She lived in a farmhouse across the road from the Raymond store. The house was torn down years ago, and you will see a horse farm there today. She was a widow with small children, and very poor. Neighbors would drop by to bring her vegetables, and make sure she was okay, and, of course, she would offer them a refreshment—and at times, a beer. They knew she couldn't afford it, so they would offer a contribution. This grew into a little pub she ran in her living room, always making sure the kids weren't around when it was open. Dad and some friends checked it out and said there was no other “Hanky Panky” going on and she would never serve someone if they had had too much. The incredible thing was, the beer distribution truck would come weekly and deliver cases of beer at the same wholesale price they were charging at the Brewer's Warehouse and pubs in Bracebridge and Huntsville. All the local officials and the local MP had to know about it—they all knew each other, but they chose to look the other way, knowing she had no other means of support. One day, the village drunk was walking out the driveway when he tripped over a rock, fell, broke his neck and died. There was a local outcry about this, especially by the “Teetotalers”, but several others got together and said he had come to the door drunk and she had refused to let him in. Things quieted down for a while, but finally they could see she could make it on her own selling baked goods, and the children were old enough to help out. An official came around and told her

she would be cited in court in 30 days, (My guess is they wanted to give her time to get rid of her inventory). She closed within thirty days They never cited her, and it is another example of how they supported each other. There is an exception to every law.

5 The Price of Strawberries

Dad and I were driving up the road north of Raymond when we saw a sign “Strawberries”. He parked by the side of the road and walked up the long driveway to buy some strawberries while I waited in the car. He took a long time to return with two quarts of strawberries. I said “Why did it take you so long to buy strawberries?” As I said previously Dad had spent many months with the locals when he was a boy, and knew a lot of their ways, even though he was an outsider. He said “You don’t just buy strawberries—that would be considered rude and abrupt—only a *City slicker* would do that!” A city slicker would drive up, say, “Hello, I’d like two quarts of strawberries”. “Yas—that’ll be forty cents eh?—I’ll gettem.”

I said “How did you do it?”, and he told me as we drove along—of course I’ll have to shorten it, but you’ll get the idea.

“Mornin—nice day eh?”

“Yas—but we could sure use some rain—the corn’s a little dry.”

“Nice place you have here”

“Yas—we try. My two sons are cleanin the barn now, and the daughter’s over there tendin the flowers.”

“I smell something real good coming from the kitchen.”

“Yas—Ma is bak’in apple pies. She won a contest over at the fair in Ullswater last year!”

“I’m from the Norvoc group over at Skeleton Lake—we are looking for a good source for baked goods.”

“Yas—I hear youse is good people eh?”

“ I noticed your strawberry sign.”

“Yas—pickem meeself this mornin and they’s fresh.”

“What does a quart of strawberries bring these days.”

“Waal, I heerd Cecil Nutt was gittin 40 cents a quart last week.”

“Cecil provides us with ice and milk.”

“Yas—he has a few nice cows.”

“Cecil told me his crop of strawberries was better than expected, so prices might ease a bit.”

“Yas—mine are pretty good too!—Telya whatill do— I’ll lettem go for 25 cents a quart since youse buyin two, and because I here that Norvoc people are good people.”

“Fine—Thanks, here’s fifty cents and I’ll sure tell them about your wife’s pies!”

Dad said “The city slicker paid full price for the berries, but I bought them for 50% less. I found a good source for apple pies, and he found

some new customers”.

I had to admit it was worth the extra 15 minutes. Twenty-five cents a quart—Cheap strawberries!—Think again. The fifty cent coin Dad gave him was one half ounce of 90% silver. Silver today is about \$40 an ounce—Expensive strawberries!

6 STORYTELLING

Many times Dad and I were alone at the cottage. Mother and my sisters were not interested in going up in the spring after the cottage had been vacant for eight months. Anyone with a cottage knows there will probably be mouse nests to clean up, eight months of insects, a water system frozen, maybe a burst can of soup you forgot in the fall, possibly a refrigerator full of mold because the door was left shut—or a log across the road, a porcupine chewed a wire, or the telephone line is down—I’m sure you have experienced a few of these. We always made sure we arrived in the daytime to take care of such possibilities.

Remember I told you about Clements little lodge on Skeleton Bay, Lake Rosseau?—large Victorian frame house long since burned down. Dad had spent many summers there as a boy. As you go northwest from Bent River, the highway skirts the shore of Lake Rosseau. (Recall where the public docks are located?) That was Clements on your right where there is a group of cottages. On your left is where the photo of my grandfather, father and a Fullerton in a canoe was taken about 1905. It hangs in the cottage today. The main road was behind, on top of the cliff that goes down into the water. In the

30s, the cliff was blasted back and the highway built across Clements beautiful sand beach, separating her land from the lake by a highway.

Dad & I were opening the cottage when one of the Fullertons came by from Rosseau to invite us to Mrs. Clements 90th birthday party. We were invited to stay overnight because they didn't want him returning after having a few beers. I was about 12 at the time and too young to drive. The party was planned exactly the same as it would have been around 1900. An age range from babies to those in their 90s. The children were outside at picnic benches, and the adults were inside. The meal was a many course feast reminiscent of meals served during harvest time. After the meal came the entertainment. Take yourself back to the 1900s-no radio or outside form of entertainment. The status symbol was a piano. There was a violin, mouth organ or guitar stashed away, or visitors brought their own.

After pianists, singers and fiddle players had entertained, they had the feature of the evening—storytellers. I Googled Storytelling and Wikipedia assures me that the art is still alive. Just a few years back, wife Louise and I were driving through Tennessee, and came across a fair. We decided to check it out and stay an hour or so. There was a national story telling contest with several tents. And we were entertained by many presentations, and spent the rest of the day there.

Let me continue about the storytellers at Clements. Two of them got up to tell the story of Skeleton Lake I could tell it was directed at me, because of my young age, and they knew I was from there—also, I'm sure the others had already heard it, but they would not be bored, because the presentation was different each time. I'll tell the story as I remember it:

Most of us know how Skeleton Lake got its name, but for the sake of a few unfamiliar with it, let me give you the short version.

Before the Europeans arrived, an Indian tribe was camped on the lake but knew they had to migrate immediately because the local supply of game had disappeared. A young boy was very ill, and not capable of travel. His mother said she would never abandon him. The tribe had to move or starve so they left them with whatever supplies they could and moved out, leaving the two to die together. Years later a survey crew camped by the lake discovered the skeletons beside each other. The local Indians had heard the story but not discovered the location. They declared the sight Hallowed ground, and knew their spirits would visit often. My son Blake was told recently that the skeletons were found on what is now Ed Olsens property on the south side of the narrows. Blake Temples cottage is on the north side. It is a place for animals to cross, and we have seen several deer, moose, and bear cross hereHappy Hunting Ground but heed the NO HUNTING” sign on the Temple property—buy your meat at A &P. Ill tell you more about pioneers Greers and Olsens later. Thats a summary of the story you have heard, but the following, just a few people have heard:

A few years after the survey camp, came a lumbering camp. Many tents and a cook-house were set up on the site. The local tribe visited, and asked them to relocate the camp because it was on hallowed ground, and the spirits of their ancestors would return angry. Of course, the loggers just laughed and continued their poker game.

The camp cook was Chinese, and known to be very superstitious, so they planned secretly to play a practical joke on him—remember, the major entertainments were card playing and practical jokes.

Two of them built a life-size skeleton out of silver birch branches. They mounted a pulley on the branch of a tree overlooking the water, and with an attached fishing line, they lowered the skeleton into the water. Others were to lure the cook down to the water, and at midnight, the two hidden in the bushes would let out a howl, and raise the skeleton out of the water. They lured the cook down to the water, telling him he would see a friendly spirit in the horizon at midnight.

At midnight there was a horrible scream, not a howl, and out of the water rose, not the skeleton, but an Indian chief in full battle dress brandishing a tomahawk, and wading out of the water towards them. They fled back to the camp in a panic.

The next day was Sunday, when it was traditional to have a late brunch. A minister showed up in a horse and buggy to perform a service before breakfast. It was discovered that the two who were hidden to pull up the skeleton had not returned, so a group went out to look for them. They were found in the bushes, apparently asleep. It took a while to wake them up, and they said they couldnt remember anything. The skeleton still was underneath the water.

The cook quit—he left after brunch with the minister—probably figured he had some sort of protection from the spirits. After he left, one of the loggers said he had looked in the window of the cookhouse on the way to brunch, and saw the cook and the flunky standing up and pissing in the cauldron of soup. The other loggers were angry, and said WHY DIDNT YOU TELL US THEY PISSED IN THE SOUP? He answered that he didnt want to cause a ruckus while the minister was there, and besides, everyone agreed that the soup had tasted real good!

The next day the supervisors went to the tribe and asked them to call off the angry spirits and the loggers would pay them to help move the camp off hallowed ground. They agreed and the camp was moved. The moral to the story is, play a practical joke on anyone except the cook. I told you I would only tell you first-hand stories, but I asked the storytellers if the story was true. They said Of course but they may have had their fingers crossed. I told Mr. Wilson, and he said he had heard it was true, but maybe his fingers were crossed also!

Before leaving Clements, Ill tell you about some medical practices of the day. Of course there were no doctors or dentists for miles, and no money to pay them. It was home remedies or nothing.

A popular way to remove a bad tooth was to tie a strong fish line around the tooth. The patient was seated in a chair and the other end of the line was tied to an open door knob, making sure the line wasnt quite long enough to reach the closed door. The patient would close the eyes, and someone would suddenly slam the door shut and hopefully the tooth would be pulled out. A dish of home-made ice cream would be available to help slow the bleeding. This was an improvement over loosening the tooth with a small cold chisel and tapping from a hammer, then prying it out with a pair of pliers. There were no medicines to deaden the pain except a mush or tea made from the leaves of willow trees which the Indians had used for years. The drug companies finally caught on and called it aspirin.

Dad told of another time when he had a severe sore throat, one of the local women said his tonsils were infected, but she could cure it. She told him to open his mouth wide and she placed a spoon of syrup in the back of his mouth. It stung so badly that he couldnt talk for a day or so, then everything was fine. He found out she had used

horse liniment! Years later, in Toronto, he went to the doctor with a sore throat and the doctor said “I see you have no tonsils, because they have been cauterized, and the doctor did a fine job.

7 A SHALLOW WELL NEAR THE LAKE

As I said, we had no power for several years. —The cottage was too high to hand-pump water, so it had to be carried by pails. Dad Wilson had no power, but he had located the lodge beside a spring. He built three earth dams above the lodge so he had running water through a gravity system. Most farmers had shallow (or dug) wells, but near the lake was rock. Wilsons said Dad could never dig a well because of rocks, but Dad wanted to try. He made a divining rod out of a coat hanger. Can you imagine a man with a Bachelor of Science degree and a Bachelor of Pedagogy degree believing in a divining rod? The locals had shown him how to use it—you hold your hands in a special way with palm up and balance the rod. He came to a spot beside the cottage where the rod dipped down, and decided to dig. He hired Jordy Noble, the head of a very poor family who lived off the highway. (Noble descendants still live in the area.)

The local procedure was to build a square crib. They used tamarack for some reason unknown to me. (Doesnt rot?) The crib sunk as one dug and was extended as the well deepened. This prevented cave-ins and served as a lining when the well was finished. Earth was removed by pails, a rope & pulley operated by a person above. You can imagine how dangerous this was—If a full pail dropped there was little room to get out of the way.

Once Jordy worked into the evening, and Dad went out and said Dont you know how late it is? Of course he didnt because he couldnt afford a watch. Dad went into town and bought him a \$3 Ingersoll pocket watch. He was very pleased, because this represented about 6 hours labor!

The well was down about 17 feet and dry. Dad told Jordy and his helper to give up. Jordy agreed but said there is big boulder in the corner he wanted to get out. He removed the boulder, and water rushed in so fast he had to scramble up the ladder immediately—So we had our well. The first few feet had to be lined with concrete to keep out surface water, and the family had to line up and take turns pumping it out with the hand pump until the water came clear. He mailed a sample to Toronto and the water tested pure.

Next we put a 55 gallon drum up above the cottage in a large tree, and ran a water line into the kitchen & bath. I remember threading all the black pipe by hand, but we had running water—IF we pumped it up by hand every morning! The water was spring water and very cold. Strangers used to come to the door and ask if they could have a gallon. Bottled water wasnt available then.

When power became available water was pumped from the lake. Shallow wells must be kept flowing. The procedure each spring would be to treat it with chlorine and pump it dry three times. Its obvious that water standing unused for several months is not going to stay pure.

8 THE PORCUPINE VS MR. NEAL

Most of us know what pesky critters porcupine can be. Blake Temple's cottage above the narrows on the north side is especially vulnerable, because it is open underneath, and not built for year-around living. Many of us have heard the scratch-scratch-scratch at night. We have had plywood siding, and doors damaged. They love vacant and overgrown property. Years ago there were many more than today. Did you know that, at one time, it was against the law to shoot a porcupine?. During the limbering bonanza, it was common for people to become lost in the bush—Porkies were numerous. They travel slowly, so one can keep up with them at walking speed. If lost, and starving, it was easy to kill them with a club or rock. Everyone carried a knife and matches, so this source of food could save your life. It is an untrue myth that they “Throw their quills. But if you are walking behind them, stay away about five feet, because they can suddenly stop, take a quick step back, and lash out with their large tails full of quills. Many a dog has been killed or seriously injured by getting a face-full, including our dog who spent quite a while at the vets in Bracebridge.

Mr. Neal, and family, of the Norvoc group owned the cottage next to Cassans on the east side. Notice I refer to all of them as Mister, because I was about eight years old, and most of them in their late 20s or 30s. Remember that Northern Vocational school had just opened. Dad was in his mid forties, and among the older ones because he had spent 10 years in industry before starting a teaching career. Most had rarely been out of the city,, and the only wild animals they would have seen were in a zoo.

One night we were preparing for bed when we heard a gun shot nearby. This was almost unheard of because it was against the law to discharge a firearm after sunset or in populated areas. We ran out and heard shouting and saw flashlights at Neals, and saw Mr. Neal lying on the ground with group trying to help him.

A porcupine had been bothering them for several nights, so he had gotten up and chased him out from under the cottage. The porcupine climbed a tree beside the cottage. The big problem was Mr. Neal had a pistol and climbed the tree after the porcupine. He lost his footing—fell to the ground—the gun went off and shot him through the arm. The good news is, when they took him to Bracebridge Hospital they determined he was not hurt seriously although it came close to being a disaster. Poor Mr. Neal took a lot of ridicule for having a pistol, and discharging it after sunset in a populated area. Neither the police nor warden charged him because, I believe, he had suffered enough with the wound and the ridicule. Do you suppose Mr. Neals grandchildren know this story?

9 ALL ALONE WITH NO TELEPHONE

The organization Norvoc only lasted about 10 years. During World War II it disintegrated as an organization. Recall that the war started in 1939 for the British Empire. We were losing to Hitler, and desperately trying to build up a war machine. Teachers were joining the military or working in essential industries during the summer. Dad was appointed head of the War Emergency Training for the Province of Ontario because of his work in industry and his technical school experience. He was responsible for finding skilled workers needed in

industry . It was a single source similar to an employment agency where they could find skilled trades. This kept him busy 10 hours a day with not much time for cottage life. Also, gas was strictly rationed,, production of passenger cars was suspended. Tires were not available, so treads were glued to old tires—traveling over 40 miles per hour ran the risk of these peeling off. I was 15 years old at the time—too young to work in industry, so Dad shipped my bicycle up to the cottage by freight train to Utterson. He trusted me alone at the cottage. I remember when he gave me the combination, and said. Leave things as good or better than you found them. I was very proud to have the responsibility. He left a 12 guage shot gun, a .22 rifle and bullets.. Talking about the shot gun, I had been out in the boat with him a few years before, and he asked me if Id like to fire it. Of course I said yes, but the kick shot me backward off the seat and I ended up on the floor of the boat. I hated that gun, but got proficient with the rifle, which was in many respects more dangerous. He had a 16 ft, mahogany boat with a 3 H.P. Johnson outboard. Only the two of us knew how to start that motor. If the motor didnt like you, it wouldnt start for you. I had the use of a 9 ft boat, hand made from marine plywood, and wood ribs. In the early 30s, this was a novelty because they had just started manufacturing cars with roofs strong enough to carry a boat. Dad taught Engineering Drawing, so was able to draw up detailed plans for this boat. He submitted the plans and photo of the finished boat to Field & Stream magazine, and it was published. (The money helped build the boathouse). To me, what is amazing is that after seventy-five years, the plans and instructions are still available on the internet-Google Car Top Boats—J.B. Temple, Little Giant.

He was more afraid of fire than anything. He said Were living inside a

box of matches. He always took the Coleman gas lamp and Coleman gas stove tank outside to fill them. One rule was to never get a can of gas within 20 ft, of the cottage because a gallon of gas properly mixed with air has the power of sixty pounds of dynamite!

I wont forget the day I was walking to Wilsons and saw smoke and fire above the trees. There were two cottages which were owned , as I recall ,by Wilsons relatives. They were beside the road and had front porches about 10 feet high overlooking the water. The one closest to what later became Marshalls was completely obscured by flames about 50 feet high. There were many people with dozens of buckets lined up from the shallow water near the boathouse passing pails along a linea bucket brigade. There was no hope of saving the cottage, but some had climbed ladders to the neighboring cottage roof, and had blankets on the roof which they were soaking with water. The blankets were steaming, it was so hot, but theres no doubt they saved that cottage. There was a lady lying on a coat on the ground with several comforting her.

The ladys son had been in the kitchen cooking with a Coleman gasoline stove, and it had run out of gas. Instead of disconnecting the small tank to fill it outside, he brought in a gallon can of gas, and as he was filling the stove, some spilt on the hot burner and caught fire, He dropped the open can and just made it out the back door when the whole kitchen exploded. His mother had been sitting on the front porch ten feet up. The only way to escape was to jump over the rail. Later it was determined that she had broken her leg, but was otherwise okay. In less than half an hour the cottage was gone,— only a few bent pipes were visible, and smoking ashes that took days to cool off. A few days later, I walked down there and there were

several volunteers with screening, sifting the ashes. The lady had left her diamond ring in the bedroom , and they were sifting through the ashes looking for it. They said the gold would be gone, but the diamond would withstand the heat. I dont believe they found it, but at least, the two of them survived.

Continuing about fire, Mr Sheldrick and his two sons built a beautiful log cottage, stripping long logs about a foot in diameter. He taught carpentry and cabinet making, so the structure was world- class, It stood for quite a number of years four cottages from us. It caught fire when no one was there. Everything burned except the logs which were charred black. The story I heard was they had left to go to Toronto, and had mistakenly left an electric heater operating and it had started the fire.

There are several extinguishers in our cottage. One time, grease caught fire sin the kitchen, and if it hadnt been extinguished immediately, I'm convinced the cottage wouldnt be there now.

10 PROUD AND PREJUDICED

To get you in the mood for this first hand story about prejudice at Skeleton Lake, Ill quote a verse from Tom Lehrers song National Brotherhood Week:

OH, THE PROTESTANTS HATE THE CATHOLICS, AND THE CATHOLICS HATE THE PROTESTANTS AND THE HINDUS HATE THE MUSLIMS AND EVERYBODY HATES THE JEWS.

Back in what some call The Good Old Days that werent so good as far

as prejudice is concerned. We were very tribal 75 years ago—still are, although it has improved. For example, Toronto, as you know, had a protestant majority and Montreal & Quebec a catholic majority. Each group misunderstood, and mistrusted the other. Forgive me for generalizing, but most had one thing in common. They hated the Jews. I remember they were confined to buying real estate in only two areas. They were barred from most clubs. I saw many signs on beaches along Lake Ontario that said GENTILES ONLY.

Muskoka had been populated by mostly Irish immigrants. The problem was the Irish imported their homeland problems. The catholic Irish distrusted the protestant Irish. Around the Muskoka area much was dominated by the protestant Orange Lodge. At that time, Orangemens Day, July 12 would be marred by fights between Catholics and Orangemen, and, of course, the same on March 17, St. Patricks day. Having been raised a catholic, I can still remember what was probably the first dirty joke I heard, and the Catholics would dig it up every Orangemens Day—Lets see if I can Remember It: A catholic says to his catholic friend. “The Orangemens Day parade is coming up—. Is the leader of the Orange Hall going to head the parade again on the beautiful white stallion? “Yes, but its not a stallion, its a MARE.

“No it isntI KNOW its a stallion because at the parade last year, I heard the Catholics yelling ‘LOOK AT THE BIG PRICK ON THE WHITE HORSE!’”

But, they did have one thing in common—their prejudice against Jews, and thats the story:

Many Norvoc people were afraid the Jews would take over and reduce

their property values. They were paranoid that the property beyond them would be sold to Jews, and they would try to use their road as access. In all fairness they wouldnt want a public road for anybody, because they might not contribute to the upkeep. The only way to keep the road private was to close it off 24 hours per year, and send a letter to Port Carling attesting that this was done. Believe it or not,, in the early 30s a gate was built near what is now the entrance to the Troy Cove store, and for one day, it was closed. Flyers were sent out to park your car on Wilsons side if you wanted to use it.. It was only a few years that this was done. Lets jump ahead to around 1960 for the conclusion to the story.. As I told you, WW 2 had put an end to the Norvoc organization. Many cottages had been sold and the new cottagers did not know each other. Before 1960 there was a Camp Winnebago on the site of what is now Camp Ramah. A group outing in canoes would often go to Wilson's store.

The cottage above Troy Cove Marina commands a view of the whole bay. (The cottage was torn down years ago, and a new owner built a year-around home.) The original owner, Mr. Briggs, was looking over the bay and saw canoes coming from the new Camp Ramah. He hurried down to Wilsons, talked to Ma Wilson (Mays mother), She walked down to the beach, and when they tried to land, she said they were not welcome. They didnt argue, and paddled away. They could have argued because it was ceded by Wilsons as public access when the government built the large dock years ago costing thousands of dollars.

My sister was at Wilsons and witnessed this. When she told Dad at the cottage, he was furious. He went down and had a discussion with Mrs. Wilson, but I dont know the results of it. I dont believe

Mrs. Wilson cared one way or the other, but it was good business to go along with the majority—just like the attitude in the deep south during segregation. Dad was still able to drive his hand-made mahogany boat with the small motor, so the next day he asked me to go with him to Ramah. It took about an hour to get there. They were polite, but distant. Dad told them where our beach was, and they would be welcome. A few weeks later a few canoes visited, but I believe it was just a polite return visit—they never came back.

So—Things have improved from what some call The good old days and as Tom Lehrer concludes:

STAND UP AND SHAKE THE HAND OF SOMEONE YOU CANT
STAND YOU CAN TOLERATE HIM IF YOU TRY

11 THE INSLEY'S

Wilsons sold a large frontage next to Norvoc to the Insley's...who were from Coldwater, just west of Orillia. It was during W.W.11 and Art and his father were working many hours a week in essential industry. I understand Art was a machinist and his father a toolmaker—a highly skilled trade making tools for machines in industry. They built a cottage by what is now the boat ramp, and Mrs. Insley, (Arts mother), Mary,(his wife) and 2 little kids stayed at the cottage. Art and his father would drive up Saturday after work for the weekend He had a new mercury V-8 which was my most favorite car. By the time I could afford to buy it, they had stopped making them My first impression of Art, Mary and Mrs. Insley was they were outgoing, fun, and liked teen-agers, Most older people didnt.

We were always welcome around the cottage, even though they had no teenagers they had two little children whom they called Sonny and Sister.

Sonny is now known as Art , has a cottage on the lake, and is an active supporter of it. Sorry, young Art, in spite of being an expert water skier and a good tennis player, you will always be Sonny to me, because that's how you were introduced to me when you were about a year old. The teens hung around their cottage because they understood our humor. They would tolerate the occasional dirty joke, but would not tolerate any under age drinking or smoking. I remember Mary had the biggest outboard engine on the lake—a forty horsepower Johnson four cylinder—no electric starter—one pulled a rope wound around the flywheel, and it may start if you had the strength to pull it. One day Mary said she wanted to take Ma for a ride, and would I go with them and start the motor. (Art and Mr. Insley were at work near Orillia.) Of course, I agreed, and pulled that rope until I was exhausted, then Mary gave it one pull and it started immediately. She knew a bit about motors, so I was just used to prime the motor for her. She turned it up to full power, It scared me to death because the boat was small, but Mrs. Insley just sat there enjoying the scenery. Later, they had the Marina building built, and did much of the work themselves. The marina was strongly built so there was no doubt that it would support a dance hall above—Insleys Marina, snack bar and bakery were opened and they built several rental cottages.

As I recall Mrs. Insley was from Birmingham, England, and proud of her Cockney accent. She was a Story Teller of the old school, and many would visit the snack bar to buy the best fish and chips in

North America—(-wrapped in newspaper, of course, to keep them warm and to absorb the grease)—but the real reason many came was to hear Mrs. Insley tell a story, mostly about ghosts and gremlins because she was superstitious I never found out what she really believed.

By this time, the Wilsons were aging, and square dances were rarely held, so Insleys started getting bands, and having dances for another generation.

I am short, but I believe Art was shorter, however, somewhere he had learned to handle himself in a fight—I believe Sonny was old enough to remember the motorcycle gang that came in, roaring up and down the road—they set up camp along the road to Raymond, and intimidated those who tried to come to the snack bar—plus a lot of booze Art didnt tolerate. I was old enough to help him out, but didn't,— nor did anyone else. I suggested to Art that he call the O.P.P., but said no, this was his problem,. One day he told the gang the lunch room was closed to them. The adjacent cottagers witnessed what happened next. The leader challenged Art and attacked him. Art was more skilled, dodged around and lured him out to the dock and threw him in the lake—of course with heavy wet clothes, the leader could do nothing. None of the other cyclists ganged up on Art—I guess they also have ethics. Art yelled I have a mob organized to dump your bikes in the lake if you come tomorrow. (Of course he didnt—we wouldnt go near the place.) The gang broke camp the next morning and never returned.

I havent said much about Arts father (Sonny's grandfather). He was a different personality than the other three—thoughtful, and quiet. He and the family were burdened a long time with a medical problem

he had, and he died long before Mrs. Insley. As Art grew older, he admitted to me he was losing it—but he laughed about it—One day he told me he turned on the thruway at Utterson, and wondered why all the cars were coming at him on the wrong side of the road, and it took his best driving skills to avoid them. The O.P.P stopped him and told him he was going south on the north bound lanes!

As you know Sister (Sonnys sister) and her husband Mike Wayne took over the marina, and it was sold years later to Nancy and Sandy who started Troy Cove Marina.

I wrote in detail about Insleys, because I talked about the old days and pioneers. Insleys were an example of modern pioneers. One of the definitions of pioneer in my dictionary is “A person who leads the way in any enterprise”. They certainly fit that definition because they had the guts to come to a new country, work many hours a week in industry, build their dream on weekends, and stick together for a common goal. They were not educated in the arts, but were educated in survival and common sense. They carved out a good life for themselves and the family. Luckily, Art and Mary lived long enough to enjoy retirement in Arizona in a world- class recreational vehicle, helped their kids obtain an education higher than theirs. The American dream, wouldnt you agree?

12 FISHERMEN & FISH

I never enjoyed fishing much—unless I could catch one right away which was rare—I may have gone out alone once, but I cant remember when. Dad Wilson, Bill Wilson, Bud Temple, were avid fishermen

and my best friend Chally—He tried to teach me how to fly cast, with his expensive split bamboo fly rod, but gave up when I lost a hand made fly high up in a tree behind me—BUT I know where the lake trout are supposed to be because I found out early from Mr Wilson. When I was a young teen-ager, he told me if I rowed him around in his rowboat while he trolled, he would show me some secret shoals where the trout hung out. He hated outboard motors, and didnt have a trolling rod. He had about 300 ft of copper line wound around a board that had a V notch on each end, and when he caught one it would be hand over hand haul-in until the copper seemed to be a hopeless tangle in the bottom of the boat, but if it was not disturbed it could be fed out again perfectly—if disturbed by a foot, or a caught fish, it would be almost hopeless to untangle. He showed me the shaols and the deep spots—All the locals know that the land is just as rough under the water as above—there are shear drops of a hundred feet hidden under the water, and the trout lurk down at a depth where they like the temperature—The problem is to find the depth which depends on the time of year. If you catch one and make another pass at the same depth, theres a good chance you will catch another. Many of the younger generation think the fishing was much better 80 years ago, but it wasnt—if you didnt know the depths and get to the right place, you could fish for a year and catch nothing, except for a few days in the spring, when they come to shallow water to spawn, and you are lucky enough to be out there then.

Did you ever row a boat for a couple of hours pulling 150 feet of copper line?

I soon found out that the information I was getting wasnt worth the

effort, especially when one day he caught four, but didnt give me one . As explained before, he was a product of his environment, and they used to say he was so tight he would squeeze a quarter until the king screamed GOD SAVE THE KING—(yes, there was a king on the coin in those days, not a queen.)

Years later I went out with my avid friend Chally, but I enjoyed the scenery, and at times secretly hoped he would'nt catch something and disturb the peace and quiet. We would take a few sandwiches to keep the beer bottles from rattling—against the law now, but it was hard to get in trouble with a 5 bhp motor—TRUE STORY COMING UP:

My brother Bud was an avid fisherman, and one day at his cottage Chally and I said we were going trolling. It was noon in August, and I quote him directly(He was talking out of the side of his mouth.)

“You dizzy buggers will never catch anything in the middle of the day in August”—but away we went to the northwest side of the lake—Chally's lure was the old reliable Williams Wobbler and he had about two hundred feet of steel line out in around 90 feet of water.(it is necessary to get down near the bottom, and, of course, if too low, you get snagged on a rock)... Chally said “Im stuck”. This was common, so the procedure was to shut the motor off (the little motor had no reverse—I would simply row back over the line while he reeled in to loosen the hook). It was a calm day, and we noticed that the boat was being pulled backwards! It had to be a large fish to do that! It took Chally about 10 minutes to get it up to the boat, and luckily, our net was large and we landed it—We returned to my brothers cottage and casually walked in the door—it was close to nine pounds. Amusing to us was the fact that he didnt congratulate

us—he was pissed off. There was a family picture of the two of us and the fish, but maybe he tore it up!

Bass fishing was usually boring in Skeleton Lake, although occasionally it was great fishing at the Secret shallow shoal off the Hogsback (not secret any more). My kind of fishing is to get the limit in less than an hour, and leave before the beer and sandwiches are gone and before your butt is so sore you cant stand up. My avid friend would stay until dark or a rainstorm. One day I remember was on High Lake. Years ago when the Fish Hatchery was operating, I got some secret inside information from my nephew Jim who lives on Skeleton Lake Road 2. He told me confidentially that the fish hatchery had brought in many large rainbow trout to spawn in the ponds. After spawning, they would be removed—usually to the Skeleton River, but this time they had taken many secretly to High Lake. Another fishing enthusiast friend of mine was visiting the cottage for the first time along with Chally, so we took a canoe over there and had our limit very quickly—Two of us would be trying to land a couple of them at the same time.. Harold, the visiting friend was not getting any younger, and because of this he had to urinate (Pee, Water the lily etc.), and had brought along a bottle for this eventuality. The problem was he had on Plus Four pants—you are too young to remember them—they were the golf uniform of the 1920s—flared out at the hips, and reaching to below the knees—practical for the bush, but the problem was they didnt have a fly, so he had to lower his pants to take care of his business. While his pants were lowered, Chally flipped a large rainbow trout into his pants—claiming, of course,, it was an accident The joke was on Chally and me, because the canoe almost tipped over during the resulting scramble and spilled our only two remaining refreshments—time to go home!

There are (were?) white fish in Skeleton lake but were hard to catch on a hook and line—Dad Wilson and Bill used to net them off the point of their bay before the game warden started enforcing the law. In the 30s, Mr Wilson used his influence to have the lake stocked with Landlocked Salmon. They are in Lake Ontario, and a few fresh water lakes in the north-east—of course, it would not be done today. They never reproduced, but the original stock kept growing larger. Brother Bud and I caught a couple when we were teen-agers in Beamans Bay in May that weighed around 6 pounds. The last one I heard that was caught weighed over 20 pounds...Pickerel?—lots of large ones I hear, but thats all I know.

13 WATER GATE

(Ill keep this short because only a few in the family will be interested.) Look up on your right (north side) as you enter the narrows and you will see a structure away up. Thats the Paul & Louise Temple family cottage. Those of you who are familiar with noisy outboard motors know that when you try to talk over the motor, your voice can be heard a half mile away A few years ago, I was on the porch high up watching the boats go through the narrows when I heard one person shout over his motor THERES AN OLD MAN LIVES UP THERE, HE BUILT THE COTTAGE BY HIMSELF AND IT TOOK SEVEN YEARS. Well, as Henry Ford said History Is Bunk The family built the cottage and it only took 5 years. Louise came up with the floor plan and octagon shaped living room and I calculated the floor and snow loads and sized the beams and girders. Back in 1974 the lot became available and wife Louise was unusual for

a city woman—her lifelong ambition was to own a lake-front cottage. She had inherited money from her family and It would be sufficient if we did most of the work ourselves. We camped on the property for a couple of summers, then bought a travel trailer to live in while sons Blake, David and, nephew Pat, worked during their summers off from college. The unusual part of the project was it was built totally without power. The massive posts, beams and girders were sawn by hand because the Hydro would not supply power until the structure was finished, and I was too cheap to buy a generator.

Luckily we still came under the Rural Electrification Act, and the Hydro eventually supplied a transformer for our single cottage—I will never complain about a power bill, because I hate to think what this transformer on the pole above us cost.

The septic system was the most difficult part of the project. Russ Hammel carved a chunk out of the hill with his bulldozer and brought in 40 truckloads of sand and gravel.

Louise and Anne provided gourmet meals under pioneer conditions, but the best news was it provided family togetherness that would be hard to duplicate and illustrates my previous definition of Pioneer—“Persons who lead the way in any enterprise During construction the place was full of mice. One morning, daughter Anne was doing the dishes. I heard a scream—ran out to the kitchen—she had taken the dishcloth out of the water to wring it out, but it was not a dishcloth she was wringing out—it was a drowned mouse! No wonder she was glad to get back to the tranquility of New York City.

On the bright side, all of us with cottages know it is family bonding time. Many times four generations would be around the table or

playing a game in the living room—We cant put a price tag on that can we?

14 HITLER WAS RIGHT!! ??

A few years after WW2, a restaurant was opened near the Lake by a women. I wont say exactly where, because I dont want to hurt her or her relatives if they are still alive. It was a good restaurant, and many of the locals patronized it until many found her husband drunk by noon more than once. Louise , I and son Blake personally witnessed this. He wasnt a happy drunk, but argumentative, and several times muttered that Hitler was right. I wont tell you his name, but maybe nephew Jim Temple, or son Blake will.—Ill give you a hint—His father had been a fighter ace in the German Air Force in WW1, and was shot down by William (Billy) Bishop—Canadas most famous air ace. He survived the crash, and some years later moved from Germany and took advantage of the freedom in Muskoka.

I digress to tell you why rural areas like Muskoka suffered much higher losses in WW2 than urban areas. When WW2 started for Canada in 1939, there were only about 16 million people in the whole country—think about it— an area larger than the United States contained only a population of about twice the size of New York City, Another mind boggling statistic is that 110,000 Canadians were killed and hundreds of thousands injured. (if you compare that percentage of the population to todays United States, it would be over two million).

The rural, areas like Muskoka suffered a much higher percentage of casualties because they joined the armed forces not only because of

patriotism, but because of poverty, and also the lesser educated would be drafted, whereas the higher educated or skilled workers living in urban areas were more likely to receive a draft deferment if they were necessary to work in manufacturing of war equipment.

The locals boycotted the restaurant, because many of their friends and relatives had been killed. Eventually, the unfortunate lady had to close the restaurant.. A short time later, the Hitler Was Right person was working on a building construction job, and a heavy beam fell from above and killed him. There was an investigation, and it was ruled that it had been an accident, although there were others who whispered otherwise, but no-one will know for sure.

Anyway, its history.

15 THE BAD OLD DAYS AND THE GOOD NEW ONES

We are tempted to think how wonderful pioneers were, but there is a dark side. With my Irish background, the dark side is easy to find. Much of the population didnt know the meaning of the word environment let alone how to spell it. Some thought nothing about disposing of trash in the lake—maybe an old stove or bedspring—even garbage— with the excuse it would feed the fish. Many were transient workers, so who cares about the lake—their attitude was that the lake was so deep that a little trash , a few bed springs and old tires didnt matter. Wilson’s were an exception because they carved a dump out of a gravel pit they owned. Most people couldnt afford to hire a truck to dispose of trash.

Road construction crews and loggers would often go Fishing They

would take half a stick of dynamite, light the fuse, and throw it in the lake. The shock killed the fish (including the minnows and the undersized), and they floated to the surface. Bill Wilson told my brother Bud that he had done this. Some used gill nets.

The bays near the mills were covered shore to shore with log booms. When I first saw Beemans Bay, it was full of logs. Loggers could and did walk across the bay on logs. The bark on the logs polluted the water and killed the fish.

Not many remember that Bill Wilson started a mink farm, and some of the teachers invested in it. He had cages stretching a couple of hundred feet where some of the cottages are today. Mink are vicious little creatures—they could easily bite off a finger.. One night, an intellectual bleeding heart staying at the lodge sneaked out and opened all the cages and the mink escaped. Bill never found out who did it, but he was clever—he put lots of food in the cages,. left the doors open, and most of them returned. I guess they liked the food better than their freedom. The investment in this enterprise was a disaster. Mink dont like noise and confusion, and the cages were right behind the dance hall. When they are agitated, they eat their young, and the young were Bills profit.

Today, I call them the good new days because dedicated persons have spent much of their time and talent to preserve the lake. Ill mention just a few year-around residents as examples.

Nancy & Sandy of Troy Cove Marina completely renovated the property, adding beautiful landscaping—rare for a marina. Of course this increases the value of everyones property.

Ed Olsen has about 140 acres on the south side of the narrows across from us that's been in his family for many years. He doesn't cut timber—he harvests it, and his forest is in better shape than ever. He is active in lobbying for preservation of the lake and protection of wild life. The Greer family and relatives, our neighbors on the north side just before you enter the narrows have owned many acres since pioneer days. They also harvest timber responsibly and are involved in local charity activities.

Of course I can only mention a few dedicated people like Mike Head, the Marshall's, Sonny Insley, the Hoppers, the late Gordon Johnson, and Bud Temple etc.

Because of persons like this, the lake is in many respects better than it was 75 years ago when there were few residents. Who was it that said "The poor will always be with us"? He could have added that the Robber Barons will always be with us. I started by observing how the Lumber Barons grabbed control of parliament in pioneer days, and granted themselves permission to clear cut and leave the north looking like the surface of the moon. Today it's Business Barons who are always surfacing to line their pockets—they are like ground hogs—chase them in one hole and they come out another one.

The good news is that people like Jeff Crocker, President of the Skeleton Lake Association and his dedicated followers have stepped up to continue the fight.

This was not written as a history—It is intended to pass along recollections of a city person exposed at an early age to a rural, poor, pioneer culture. We have been retired in Mexico for 20 years. When we arrived, I'm sure we were regarded by many Mexicans as Gringos

or Yanquis, but we found that the same principals of relating to a different culture apply. My Spanish is not great, but good enough for them if Ill speak it, and I believe we have graduated to Extranjeros sympaticos (Pleasant foreigners)—better than City slickers and almost as good as Respected outsiders, eh?