

[Cue to Rod Serling, standing in a paved road.. .]

A family in Minnesota, USA. Reminiscing about a very real place to them, existing long ago but has long since been paved over into a mere road for suburban tract house residents to drive on, not having a single clue or sign of the beloved family cabin that once held cherished times. A specific site that eventually became a non-site. Or did it really exist at all? Other than only in, the dreamed up dimension of...

The Cabin

On the *loong* drive on Highway 55, turning on a smaller road away from the railroad tracks, passing old dilapidated barn houses, approaching the white garage where it *T's* with a road around the lake. Making a right, passing wooded lakeside cabins and houses to our left. An active farm on the right, and more open farm crops. Passing *Emily's* small convenience store to the wooded side on our left means we're really close now! Just about 70 yards ahead are those familiar signs on thick spiral concrete form posts like giant swizzle sticks, bearing the words with asymmetrical type that reads: **Pulaski Lake Shores**. Turning left onto where pavement is no more, but hard packed sandy dirt roads in a subdivision network of wooded country avenues. The main road passes a few larger homes with manicured lawns, uncharacteristic for the area of mostly cabins. On a main artery going at a decline, the dusty road with widely spaced quaint dusty cabins

with thick woods between them. Reaching the end of this road is a T around a swamp when sister Joni starts softly singing “*the cabin, the cabin, the cabin, the cabin*” while I join, as Dad turns the yellow Dodge left for only a few yards, slowing down, and there it is! Our family cabin, nestled into a few lots, quaint, dusty Minnesota cabin. Pink, contrasting the deep green woods surrounding. The familiar sight always warming to see, the destination meant that long drive of maybe just over an hour was done! *Whew* – what's a kid to do?

The driveway is the lawn on the side front area. Over the storm drain, next to an attractive boulder, where Dad is driving slowly into position. The doors to the car open, with the smell of road dust mingled with earthy forest. Mom exclaims something like “*We're here! Dean, help bring the groceries in.*” The firepit to the right, and the cabin front side door to the left. Dad has the key and opens the door, screen door first, then the door with the lock. Opening up, the creaking door sound, with the release of that specific not-unpleasant musty aroma of cabin interior after not being aired out for at least a month depending on the season. [this description fits late spring.] The place was kept clean, supervised by responsible parents. I load bags of groceries into the kitchen near the door. Mom opening windows, Dad turns the dial radio atop the bulbous antique refrigerator to WCCO-AM, for a baseball game. The power turned on, fuse box intact. Groceries unloaded, Mom makes us sandwiches, baloney on white bread with mustard and mayonnaise, with root beer. The sound of a Hamm's beer can being cracked open by Dad. It's still the pull tab era. It's the early seventies.

Since I'm starting this in the early 70s with Joni, here's her words :

“The boulder* upon arriving---I always remember purple irises

growing there. One year, there were some abandoned baby bunnies by the rock (were they really abandoned?). Loved catching tiny tree frogs behind the cabin and wandering around the yard. Digging earthworms for fishing, reading old comic books in the back bedroom, spaghetti o's for lunch (ewww! Loved it then though 😊). Dad relaxing by the fire with a Hamms. Mom would tell good stories or exchange jokes/silliness as we were drifting off to sleep. Oh—and I'd call The Country Kitchen [restaurant] the “crunchy kitchen”. Hillbilly cartoon kids with red hair advertised the place. I could never make the full hour long drive without getting car sick! The smell of pancakes and syrup was awful for me—I always went for just the cold cereal.

My best days of childhood were at the cabin!

Arriving at the cabin, Mom & Dad would usually start unpacking and tending to the cabin. Once settled, we were free to roam about! I recall starting off by climbing the boulder out front, then wandering around looking for tiny treefrogs and wild strawberries on the lot. Dean and I would sometimes be tasked with gathering sticks for the campfire, or we'd just go exploring---sneaking by the white house next door---often unoccupied. They had a white garden swing that I thought was the coolest! We used it from time to time, but I usually felt kind of guilty about it.” - Joni Hughes, 2024

*[*photos included at the end of this PDF.]*

Time to explain the where /what /how about this cabin. Near the small

town of Buffalo, Minnesota. We lived in South Minneapolis, and the drive wasn't that far away. The online directions have it just over an hour, but as kids that felt like a small eternity. We didn't know how to be patient passengers yet. But often along the way, we'd have breakfast at *Country Kitchen*, a restaurant chain in the Midwest, popular in the seventies. Eating out for breakfast with prizes for kids was a fun road treat. (thanks Dad!) and added an hour to get to the cabin. Back to Joni:

“I got carsick easily, so that 1 hour drive to the cabin felt much longer to me. We usually stopped for breakfast on the way, but I could never stand the smell of syrup at those places. I could usually only stomach a bowl of cold cereal. It was a relief to finally see Lake Pulaski in the distance, at which point Dean and I would start singing “*The cabin, The cabin*” song!”

Before I get carried away with trying to describe the history, it's time to go back to the sixties, and present the words of brother Grant...

“My memories of the times at Lake Pulaski were most vivid from around 1964, when I was 11 years old, until 1967, right after the release of Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band and the summer of love, for which I was just a few years too young. Craig can best recall how Mom ordered the LP for his birthday right after it was released a few days prior. With so many children, it amazes me how personal she was with each of us. Uncle Eddie, Grandma Marion’s brother-in-law, who lived in the same house with her and her husband, Mal, our step-grandfather, purchased the cabin without letting anyone know. Some of the walls were a little crooked and the story goes that the owner builder liked to tip the bottle, which caused this. I don’t have memories

of Uncle Eddie at the cabin, but we have a photo of Mal being there with Grandma, so that was true. I do have memories of Grandma staying there, however, and what great memories! Grandma was the kindest person, and that is where mom got her kindness. Never a harsh word, always compassionate, quiet and caring. You could take her into your trust. Eddie passed away in 1966 and Mal in 1967. I remember staying with Grandma at her home in Big Lake after Mal's passing. Apparently, they no longer stayed at the cabin in their last years and I don't know the circumstances of when it changed hands from Eddie to Grandma to Mom. Our first extended vacation at Lake Pulaski was in a rental cabin and Jill, Craig and I slept out on the porch when we could. Grandma was staying in the pink 'cabin' down the hill. We may have been there only a week, maybe two, and think it must have been around 1964, but it felt like an entire summer whenever it was. I think Joni still has all of Dad's ledgers in her garage and we could find out if we flipped the pages back in history: cabin rental \$xxx.xx from xx to xx. We had a straight shot down to the beach, which we took every day. Met a friend along the way, who had a tree house and we slept in it once. We stayed in the pink cabin in the following years, which eventually became Mom's. Those times were the summer highlights – escaping the city. We all slept in the same long room, a pull out bed, a cot, a couch, and Mom in the bedroom – Dad in there on the weekends. Dad couldn't stay during the week. It wasn't because of the commute, but because there was no water of any way for him to get ready for work. So – we were there the whole week without a car. Our days were without any structure (no sports practices, summer camp, whistles...unlike the kids today) and we created our own. After breakfast, most likely cereal, we hiked up the dusty road to the lake, in

the mornings to go fishing, later on to the beach. Craig and I first hunted for frogs and then cast them out on a line to catch bass from a dock. Anything we caught, we brought home for a meal. No catch and release for us. After we cleaned them up, Mom would cook them for us. Who needs a car to fetch groceries? ”

Grants additional notes *[Each bullet could evolve into its own story!]*

- digging the hole for the new outhouse (maybe not deep enough?)
- sleeping in the porch of the brown rental cabin - probably had water, a luxury
- sneaking out at night and wandering over to the drive-in movie theater
- catching frogs for bass bait
- filling up the bottom of a boat with sunfish
- Mom cooked anything we brought home and cleaned
- riding bicycles into Buffalo
- couldn't decide what to buy with my dime at the dime store and dad left me there and drove back to the cabin
- Heinrich taking on the German Shepherd - from below
- the spare key hanging on a nail under the cabin
- long walks to the beach
- the lake is flooded - the swing set and slide are under water at the beach
- swimming out to the floating dock
- the release of Sgt Pepper's [1967]

- Grant Gustafson, 2024.

Good historical account, placing the acquisition around when I was born, around 1964. Grandma must have been 65. Dad and Mom were in their forties. (Joni five years ahead.) Jill 7. Craig 9. Grant 11. Brian 16. Gary 18?

There are photos dated Oct '64, with Grant, Craig, Jill, (and me at probably not quite one year old) outside of a cabin that was described as that rental. So we could enjoy the lake and gatherings at Grandma's pink cabin. I was far too young to remember, but probably left impressions of natural, wooded summer in Minnesota vibes. Along with visiting Aunt Ellen, and Uncle Lenny and our cousins [the Frick's] out farther away, near St Cloud/Monticello, on Lake Briggs.

Grandma Marion lived in a small country house near the town of Big Lake. I remember visiting them until I was around five. We were from the city, but had rural connections through Mom's side; The Fricks and Lindgrens, out in rural areas of the same direction, who we'd visit in conjunction with cabin stays.

I'm going to place it around 1966-1967 when Grandma generously gave the cabin to our immediate family. I suspect that after Mal died around then, she didn't have as much use for it? while our big urban family could. Sheer speculation yet the theory makes sense.

For more memories from before my time, is this contribution from brother Gary... (who I don't recall seeing him there, only in one old photo)

“I remember a few earlier days connected with the Pulaski cabin - mostly during high school. There was no water, as Grant said, so Uncle Lenny and Dad decided to sink a well point to try to find some. I, and I think Roger, Brian & maybe Ron, did a lot of the pounding to sink the steel pipe with the well point attached. There may be a picture of that somewhere. No water found, of course. I'm sure the pipe is still in the ground since it would have been too much trouble to attempt to extract it. I remember staying at the

cabin a few days, but mostly I stayed home while the rest of you went there. Once you all left in the blue 1953 Buick Special, but came back about an hour later with the Buick barely functional. Several of the engine pistons had cracked off at the top. Still, the engine was running and able to get you home. Dad had me tear the engine apart and I rebuilt it with the help he got from the head mechanic at work. It ran and provided me with transportation until a harsh winter day in 1965. ” - Gary Gustafson, 2024

My Earliest Vivid Cabin Memory?

I have an early memory of being just old enough to start retaining memories – about 4 years old, of going there with mom and grandma, to find vandals smashed the long picture windows in front. Broken glass everywhere inside. They panicked some about keeping me safe from the shards, and spent the day cleaning it all up. Again my memory is hazy about the day details, but I suspect that dad drove, but had to go find some plywood and window replacements while mom and grandma cleared the hazardous broken glass. I do remember plywood over the gaping long windows opening for awhile. I don't know how long until it wasn't boarded up, but I really don't think the windows were smashed again. I think dad boarded those windows for a few years whenever we were away for long stretches. Probably autumn before winter, back in spring.

Impressions

My memory of the cabin firmed up after that incidental day. Now, I will attempt to dig deeper into more memory impressions.

Early memory of the tornado that nearly wiped us out! I was about 4, and probably soon after that broken windows cleanup day. Tornado season starts around late spring? I only have vague memory of mom guarding me, huddled near a minor cubbyhole in the bedroom closet. But that must have been during a different storm, sister Jill recalls :

“During the tornado we were not in the closet, we were down on the floor by the front wall corner with the wicker chaise pulled on its side. I remember the excitement and how the cabin shook. ”

- Jill Keller, 2024

It was only mom, Craig, Jill, and me. Dad would leave us there for a few days while he had to go to work, returning on the weekend. This was one of those weeks. Memory of distress, and afterwards, possibly the next morning, of looking out a back window to see fallen trees and a skunk wandering the yard. This was my first sight of a skunk! Though I'm not sure if it was the next day or weeks following, but the parents deemed it safe enough for Craig and Jill to climb fallen tree limbs on the back side of the lot next to the small swamp. There are pictures of this. The landscape was altered by the tornado, clearing parts over the swamp, and the lot across the road from the swamp was now more open. Apparently the tornado whipped its way just about one lot over! We were lucky, and no damage to the cabin itself, just branches on the roof, and the trees down out back on the next swampy lot. Wow! Not sure how long before the fallen trees were professionally removed, but they were out in disarray for awhile after that storm. I never experienced another tornado there, but vividly recall the storm and tornado watch announcements on the radio. The sky would get darker yellow, clouds bunched in strange cottonball formations,

with dad turning up his battery powered radio to AM weather stations, emitting static and distorted news alerts sounds. Eerie, yet best to get information!

AM radio sounds. One of the most associated with the cabin is the old **CBS news sounder**. It's a really strange synthesized jingle, played early before a newscast on WCCO. Dad would have the old *General Electric* Bakelite plastic dial radio on top of the fridge on early in the mornings. As I was still waking up, and I was never a morning person, might hear that in half groggy consciousness, still on a cot, or the foldout sofa, and sometimes even the bedroom. This would be with the aroma of bacon on the cast iron griddle. There was an antique propane gas stove. Mingled with the sound of family activities, moving chairs, laughing, chatting, half-hearing "*is Dean awake yet?*" while I was always the last up. Sometimes they would shake me up. I remember dad in good spirits waking me up in the bedroom, smiling away, probably saying something like "*wake up, Dean! rise and shine!*"

Water

There is a spring on Highway 55 next to active railroad tracks not far from the turnoff road. And there was a water pump nearer to the lake. Craig wrote this about water.

“Drinking, bathing and cleaning water was essential and it had to be kept on hand. The vessel for the day was the gallon jugs kept under the dry sink. Left to us from the Grandparents these were glass with a metal top, usually a Coca-Cola or A&W aged and worn label affixed to the front. Later on Mom was able to secure both 5 and 10 gallon metal milk cans from our neighbor Dean Maxell who

worked for a dairy. Water was obtained in various ways.

There was a public well on the drive into town where we would stop for our water supply. This was on Hwy 55 right at the curve on the edge of town. The water was running constantly and the water was fresh.

Another well was nearer the lake. Sometimes we would pull the wagon down there for a fill. I think Jill said it had a high mineral content.

In an attempt to alleviate our water issue the Uncles got together and tried to reach an underground supply on our property. I can assume they worked the entire weekend for this with the elder cousins chipping in the hard labor.

In downtown Buffalo there was a dairy where we could refill the large milk cans.” - Craig Gustafson, 2024

I remember both water sources, but we mostly hit Dickinson Spring, between Buffalo and Rockford mentioned above. Still running and it's artesian! It had a grove of trees around it back then, and a low stone ledge around its perimeter, like a shrine to the water source. The train tracks were only a few yards over. I was thrilled when the trains roared past, the sound of the clickety-clack rhythms, and the whistle! Tons of metal and wood, sometimes the train engineer would wave, and we always exchanged waves. As kids this was a blast! I liked going there. Dad would have us load the big empty glass jugs in the trunk of the car., and off to the spring we'd go! About 20 minutes away, pull in the parking lot, sometimes we had to wait our turn as others did the same. Filling the jugs went fast, the water power is strong roaring out of that pipe! Load back into the trunk around a

dozen heavy jugs full of water. Often detoured downtown Buffalo for provisions, and an occasional sundae at the local Bridgemans, then back to unload the full water jugs into the tiny sink room off to the side of the kitchen. Our water supply for the next few days. Also at times gathering from the local pump.

From Jill :

“about getting spring water from the rusty piped spring. Always smelled of iron, but wonder now how much lead was ingested from there. Hmmm, maybe that’s why grandma preferred to wash with the rainwater.”

Heinrich

The family dachshund from as early as I remember until I was around 7, disappeared one water run to Dickinson Springs. It took awhile back at the cabin for this to register. I think Mom noticed first, calling for Heinrich to not showing up. Turns out nobody remembered bringing him from the springs, so it was determined that he wandered out of sight when there, and we left without him! This was a panic, and going back for a search was no trace. Fortunately he had a tag with our number, and that meant no contact at the cabin, and before answering machines at home. I don't know how long it took, but some kindly locals took the pup in, eventually contacting us. The next drive out to the cabin, picked up from the local home, Heinrich was safe and sound! Maybe gone for a week?

Grant has this to add about Heinrich at the cabin:

“There was a large German shepherd, who lived up the hill and often wandered down. We were not used to such big dogs, so a

little intimidating. Not for Heinrich, though. He went underneath the Shepherd, nipped him on his private part, and it went howling back up the hill. He was no match for our ground level badger dog.”

“Dad told me the story about Heinrich being lost at Dickenson Spring that is worth retelling, though I was not there and you all have a more vivid memory. When dad went to fetch Heinrich from the family that housed him for a week, he took out a \$20 bill from his wallet and extended it to the large farmer woman. Before he could put it back, she snatched it up and quickly deposited it between her breasts. So I was told.”

The Fire Pit

With a circle of logs to sit on (the first round I suspect were cut from the tornado damaged trees.) Perhaps my fondest memories are enjoying fires, tending to it, cooking over it, and the long ritual gazing into the flames and embers, fascinated by the shape shifting forms and the mystery of this substance called fire, with such transformative qualities. Creative and destructive to simultaneous extremes. From Craig :

The Tent, Property Line and Miniature Golf.

“Our cabin property was only one lot. We all like the location since there were no adjacent cabins nearby, just woods. I think it started out with the car parking off to the side and one of the first chores was to open up the cabin, organize and then mow the lawn. It was nice to clear a path for Dad and see his surprise when he drove back for the weekend.

So if it was nice, wouldn't it be nice to have a cleared space for a

fire pit? Well once we got that old gasoline lawn mower out our property line grew and grew. It became a nice grass covered fairly flat area, perfect for the large family tent, daytime comic book reading and napping after a swim. It opened up the whole area for summer games like badminton and miniature golf. Pretty sure we took over the whole lot next door. Dad tried to buy this property once but the owner did not want to sell.”

I was very young when dad got me involved in the pit preparation, possibly 1969? I helped move found rocks we gathered from the vicinity, in average about 10 inches diameter. Dad had a plan of two layers of these rocks, first a deeper circle after digging a foot deep hole, around two feet wide in circumference. Then another circle of rocks above ground level, secure enough to straddle the grill on to, and form a perimeter. Well structured for being solid and deep enough for embers and ashes to stay put. This was Dad being kind of a scout master! Then logs to sit on, some doubled or tripled up, for stability. [eventually taller folks figured it out, to stand the thicker logs on end to sit on, not squatting low.]

Preparing the firepit became an annual spring time task. After all the ashes of summer fires filled it with autumn leaves, the winter thaw left a soggy mess, to shovel out and rearrange the rocks. I liked participating! I loved the element of fire appreciated this way, with family, and it cooked such yummy suppers! I remember the best ever grilled corn on the cob, burgers, hot dogs, potatoes, and occasional fresh fish catch of the day. Followed by nightfall, watching the fire, talking about whatever moved the moment, mesmerized. Fireflies making a light show in the woods across the road. The crackling popping sounds, with sparks moving upwards, dissipating into the

blackness above... A ritual. A natural meditation. [Later on in California, I heard this referred to as cave dwellers tv!] A Universal and ancient form of natural social and elemental connection. I felt somehow that this would never end, and that we were sanctifying the earth in that spot.

[we know how that ends. The lots and cabin, forest, wiped out – paved over. I think knowing this serves to make the memories stronger.]

Early impression of passing trains

It feels like an early dream, but I think was real. I remember a stop with family in the car, it might have been near Buffalo or Rockford alongside train tracks, I don't know where exactly or why we stopped there, but there was a big gravel pile that Craig and I clambered up, with parents probably concerned. The strangeness that struck me was the loud train sound so near it was frightening to my young mind, never exposed that closely before to such a phantom-like howling train sound. Alarming, and a deep memory impression.

The distant sound of trains at night were definitely haunting. Going to sleep in the cabin or in a tent, the sound traveling from at least three miles away was distinctively drifty and dreamy.

The Lake

From Craig:

“We did not have a boat. So for a few summers when we went to the beach we could swim out to the diving dock and just wane for a chance to be on a speedboat on the lake. How cool would that be? Well one summer Dad came through and I think through Sears he got us an aluminum fishing boat and motor*. That was a fun

escape for a while, we could take it out for fishing and also cruise around the perimeter. Lake Pulaski was locally known for it's clear water and I can remember Grandma and her proud statements attesting to that.

Fishing from Docks

Since the cabin lay inland a few city blocks away we did not have a fishing dock. We just brought our pole and tackle to the lake and used any random unused dock. It did not matter if there were people around, no one seemed to care if a young teen was fishing. Small sunfish was the usual catch, they were so small but Mom was glad to fry them up for us.”

[the small motor boat was acquired around 1979-80]*

We always walked to the beach, on the dusty roads with no sidewalks, this was the country after all. I think it must have been a third of one mile away? Not far, but seemed so as a digit. On the walk, passing what felt like haunted cabins, untended; among some more manicured homes lived in year round, mostly nearer to the lake. One small tidy house near the cattail pond had a small sign out front that read, *My Blue Heaven, Mollie and Me*. Sounding like an older generation sentiment, probably a retirement house for an elderly couple. Passing the cattail pond directly before arriving at the beach parking lot. The beach was wonderful, swimming, dock, floating dock, swing set, boat and fishing docks, freshwater from spring fed Lake . We had flippers and goggles I took a liking for. Other families would be there too, yet I never quite got to socializing much with anyone much there, only occasionally briefly. All summer we went swimming every day we could until the lake was crowded with lake plants, called the "dog days." I never

understood that title? Mid august was the cutoff point, clearing up in September if it wasn't too cold to swim. We could usually handle it. From Joni:

“Summer weekends always included time at the Lake Pulaski beach. The walk was fun and felt long when I was young. There were a few creepy abandoned houses on the way and I remember Jill or Craig saying that there was a witch living in one or something. Haha! It was neat to pass by the cattail pond for a quick explore back then. We’d usually stop to look for tadpoles and frogs. Great! I enjoyed that part more than the beach myself.”

At this juncture I'm going on with a hefty list anecdotal memories...

- Grandma Marion eating *clovers* from the lawn.
- *Fireflies, Turtles, Frogs*. In a lot near the lake in the 60s, rare scaly little *lizard* sightings.
- Fishing from docks, catching *croppies* and *sunfish*, scaling. Seeing fish still alive in a bucket, feeling a sense of sympathy towards them.
- *Mosquitoes, ticks, poison oak* were to be avoided. ***Mosquitoes*** were unavoidable. The chemical smell of *Off* brand repellent on our skin.
- *June Bugs* bouncing into the windows and screens, all night long.
- *Ferns, Lilies, Jack-in-the-Pulpit* plants mom liked to plant along the cabin edges, with our help.
- Giant *Earthworms*, buzzing *Cicadas*. The swamp, with sounds of croaking *frogs* at night.
- Dusty roads, rowdy teen drivers speeding.

- The neighboring cabin foliage obscured early on. Surrounding lots of wilderness, giving us privacy.
- 1960s Friends of Grant? Down the next road over and near the cattail pond, a tall gray house?
- *The Outhouse*. One year it had to be moved over by a few yards, to fill the old pit underneath. Grant helped with that major task! It remained pink until I painted it around 1976.
- *Super 8* films, fall and winter. They are still around! Should be professionally digitized!
- *Owls* one early evening, hanging out in the trees at dusk on the swamp side. Mom was thrilled to see them.
- *Beer cans* in the ground for golfing, lasting there for years.
- Grant rode his red 10-speed bicycle around there, I remember We passed by him while in car on main road!
- Wandering areas off limits, climbing over barbed wire fences into private cow pastures. Mainly with Craig.
- Power with propane for the stove, with one electric power line to the cabin and using old electric fuses.
- The big old musty canvas *tent*, family sized, bought in the fifties? We'd set it up for weeks at a time, with newspapers laid beneath.
- *Dark skies*, very few streetlights. Every car passing stood out far before passing. Engine sound followed by headlight glow, roaring past, then receding.
- The food: *donuts*, *bacon*, *Elf brand pop*, *Hawaiian punch*/sweetened *juice* in large cans, requiring can punchers; *baloney sandwiches*, *Hot dogs* cooking on the fire on sticks, *burgers* and *corn-on-the-cob* on the fire grill suspended on rocks, *fish* we caught, roasting *marshmallows*.

- Raking dead grass in Spring. Mowing the bumpy lawn all summer. Raking leaves in the Fall. Walking on hard snow as kids, something that adults couldn't do.
- Emily in her convenience store, *Emily's*. A very kindly old woman. Getting snacks, *Mr Freezes*, *push-ups*, *potato chips*, *pretzels/potato chips (old Dutch)*... probably closed by 1975? Jill writes :
“And Emily’s was on the left side of the road if we were venturing to the cabin. I always think of potato chips when I recall that shop.”

Pink no more

Painting the cabin golden hue, 1972-3? A beautiful Goldenrod type Yellow. Great choice of color, Mom must have picked. Everyone got involved, getting it done fast. I helped, using flat sponge brushes on the walls of fluted wooden shingles. I remember Craig leaving the few small silver primed panels up in a hard to reach spot on the swamp side of the cabin. The Outhouse remained pink for a few more years, until I was given the task to paint it to match the cabin around 1976.

The mid 70s featured several trips to the cabin, with all the good activities mentioned continuing. I remember reading old comic books and *Mad* magazines for hours on lazy summer days. Visits from Mom's family, Grandma Marion was there often, Aunt Ellen and Uncle Lenny, cousins Roger, Ron and Debbie, Uncle Sonny , Aunt Vi and cousin Robin. Picnicking outside on nice days.

Fun family weekend

One particular weekend, possibly 1976? Of a memorable fun family gathering, larger than usual, with Brian, Renee, Jill, Craig there along with parents, Joni and I. We were having a great time around the fire, mom and dad were pleased but stayed in the cabin, while we planned to camp in the big tent. (probably Joni to bed earlier inside.) We had a big campfire cookout feast! Brian was particularly animated. The fire kept strong as we fed it for hours into the night with saved firewood. We were **loud!** Parents seemed to enjoy our raucous energy from a distance. Now I can imagine their pride, having generated such a fun gang of kids having a grand time of it. Such harmony flourished at the cabin.

Afterwards, we went to the beach for a night swim, my first! Returning we fit in the old canvas tent. Great times!

Teenage years. My interests started to change. 13 years old in 1976, I briefly got caught up with the beer can collecting trend of the time. I found the entire *Pulaski Lake Shores* area to be a rich source of them. A lakeside getaway zone featured drinking beers in the fifties, then tossing them anywhere during that era. I found vintage cans, intact enough to clean and save. I spotted some conetop *Cold Spring* cans in the forest at the next road up from cabin. Scavenging, I ended up with several others, *Glueks*, *Grain Belt*, etc. I felt I did the region a cleanup favor and served my collecting obsession. I actually still have some of the best finds from there. Some words from Craig:

The Beer Cans and Dean

“Dean would go scavenger hunting these back areas of the edge of the Pulaski Lake Shores Association and ended up with quite a

collection of rare beer cans. Of note were the many early cone-top* cans which are quite collectible.”

*[*A cone top (also called a cap-sealed can, cone-top, or conetop) is a type of can, especially a type of beverage can, introduced in 1935. Cone tops were designed in response to flat top beer cans as a hybrid between beer bottle and flat top can. Cone tops were especially attractive to smaller breweries which did not have the capital necessary to buy new canning machinery; cone tops could be filled on standard bottling equipment. Because they were typically made with steel, beverage cans faded out during the metal shortages of World War II. They were continued after the war, but fell out of use in 1960.]*

Mini-bikes. I bought a homemade one at home from neighbor Steve Labahn. He was outgrowing it both physically and socially, a few years older than I. At 14 years old, was thrilled! Minneapolis meant avoiding police interventions. Around the cabin was free reign! As long as I wore a professional helmet, Mom and Dad allowed it. Great! So I had a different perspective of those dusty roads now that I could zoom around on them at something like probably a maximum speed of 15 mph. (I briefly had a second one, purchased from a fellow student in the small engines class at Ramsey junior high.) I enjoyed that hobby into turning 15, then promptly lost interest, pawning them off to another slightly younger kid.

By this time we had a small portable Panasonic TV, but it didn't take over. Let's hear from Joni again, with a few topics that overlap :

“Evenings were my favorite. Marshmallow’s toasted a perfect golden brown. Mom’s favorite way! I didn’t like chocolate as a kid, so it was a marshmallow and graham cracker for me. Settling in for the night was great because we’d talk once the lights were out. Mom would sometimes tell a story, or a silly joke. The tiny

b&w tv came along once in a while. I think I recall *The Creature of the Black Lagoon* being played on that thing!”

“There is a lot more to share so I’ll just list a few more minor things that I remember from the cabin here:

- **We all remember the cabin being pink---then painted yellow!**
- **Stinky outhouse**
- **Tinny tasting Spaghetti-o’s**
- **Pink and Blue plastic Donald Duck cups with permanent straws attached**
- **Mom’s Toulouse Lautrec copy painting---now at Jesse’s!**
- **Sip of Dad’s Hamm’s beer**
- **Elf Pop, Old Dutch Potato Chips, Hyrdox or Oreo cookies**
- **Dried butterflies in the front window**
- **White wicker chaise lounge**
- **3 owls, perched high in the trees**
- **Digging for earthworms**
- **Big green Army tent when we had larger gathering’s**
- **The sound of the slamming screen door**
- **June bugs**
- **Mosquitos and bug spray (ew)**
- **The time flying ants took over inside! Mom shoo'd me away. That was freaky!”**

The 80s, into the final years

I might be wrong, but I think it was 1979 or 1980 was when Dad bought the

boat. Cool! A small aluminum with outboard motor, enough room for three people max. The boat would be left on the ground, locked near the dock, with the motor stored in the cabin. I was interested in exploring the lake! One late summer with Craig for a few days, we took the boat around for a few good hours. Exploring much wider perspectives of Lake Pulaski as a whole. Big fun! Otherwise I only had the beach near the cabin as the reference point.

Enjoying the time at the cabin, Craig drove us in his yellow open hooded Jeep. Later Craigs friends Kirk and Leslye joined. They gave me a separate ride home, and we got *baked* with joints expertly rolled by them – the consummate stoners. With some of the thickest reefer smoke in their car that I've ever experienced!

Changes, inevitable changes

Something happened to lessen our seclusion that I didn't like at all. The neighboring lots became cleared and mowed regularly in the 80s. It used to be wilderness, blocking more of the road, and now the lights of the ranch house on top of the slope was visible at night. I now can only remember that quality of view, not the woods that existed there before. (A sign of changes that lay ahead, beyond what fortunately most of us never eventually experienced. The paved over cabin grounds.) The lot across the road sold, with plans to build a house there. A driveway was plowed, but fortunately building never commenced while we still had the cabin.

Another change were the lack of green frogs that used to croak from the swamp at night for years. I don't know why they vanished. I hadn't seen one of those beauties since the 70s. I did see the smaller tan colored tree frogs, that I'd move from the lawn before mowing!

By the eighties was going less with parents, by that time they were more focused on California trips. I was more independently minded by then, as a teenage pothead in 1979-81. Present for the annual cabin chores, raking, airing out, fireplace prep, etc. I forgot who hauled it (Brian? Craig? With my help?) but around the early eighties was when the old stereo console was brought there from the basement at home. Only a few albums went with; Craigs original mono *Sgt Peppers*, *Bears Choice* by the Grateful Dead, Jethro Tull *This Was*, are all I remember. Possibly the *Man of La Mancha* soundtrack that Mom was fond of. Records didn't get played there much.

1981

The annual Spring cleaning, with few '81 summer trips. One with my high school girlfriend Lisa. she drove, for a single day trip by ourselves, after we snuck the key! A nice visit, my first without family. We even took the boat out for a spin across the lake.

A late summer trip with Craig, in his open Jeep. We scavenged for sparse amounts of firewood, taking from a neighbors cabin pile a few cabins up the slope and one road over. We did not know better enough to refurbish their supply. Duh! Just enjoyed our campfire without thinking twice. I think that was autumn's cleanup, including getting the boat secure and motor empty of gasoline and in the cabin until the following Spring.

Youthful Folly; Memorial Day weekend 1982

I had wanted to have a good cabin time with friends, and parents wanted the cabin painted afresh, since it had been a decade since the last time painted that nice goldenrod hue. I don't know how the conclusion to ask my

friends to help, but I asked and they agreed.

Craig drove, with good friend from high school (and family friend, and on to this day) Jamie, my then bandmate guitarist Jason Englehardt. (and later high school and Nicollet Island acquaintance Jon Selin figured out the bus there or hitched a ride, surprising us!) Craig was great, buying us a case of beer! (I was 18. Legal drinking age was 19 in Minnesota.) He left us there for the 3 days Memorial day weekend, to enjoy the lake, campfires, and to paint the cabin. Friends were great to help, but possibly gullible; especially me, who talked them into it in the first place. We went diligently at it, but took longer than I predicted. They were great, but I felt a bit guilty for dragging them into this task, like an unintentional modern day Tom Sawyer (no, not the song by *Rush*.)

We did have a really nice time. Painting went good if a bit long that day. Spinning the same albums over and over. Good food, beer, swimming, campfires. But after running out of firewood, I think evening #2 at my suggestion taking wood later from the same pile up a number of lots that Craig and I took from the previous year. Again I didn't even register this as theft, the wood seemed old and neglected. We carried armloads of wood down the road before sunset, stupidly. Someone out walking spotted this and reported to the local sheriff. Who showed up a few hours later, ruining our nice evening around the fire. At first I thought it was the alcohol, or noise? Duh! Firewood theft! Citations given, our spirits sank. Especially younger Jon, who I didn't know yet, was on probation for drug busts. He was worried. I felt terrible as the guilty leader of this folly.

Jamie remembers the sheriff saying this: “*Ah hear y'all ain't too choosy bout youze gets ya faarewood.*” (I doubt he sounded that southern, but the stereotypical country sheriff vibe probably gave that impression!)

By the end of summer was our court date. Dad drove us three, Jason, Jamie and I, while poor Jon had to suffer some other legal hurdles as a minor on probation. Jamie recalls: *“We all wore suits and long hair to the Buffalo courthouse. I don't know if this is a manufactured memory, but I thought some kid on the street asked, “Are you guys a band?””*

The local court had us three pay \$55 each. Pleading guilty, because we were. It was never on our permanent records, just a small slap-on-the-hands, drop-in-a-bucket penance of a lesson learned. Still, if I had my wits and sense of moral justice together, I would have worked hard to pay those guys off. We didn't have incomes that recession year, so \$55 was a pain back then for teenagers. It was entirely my fault and shortsightedness. Plus they helped paint the cabin, to no compensation other than that getaway!

I never heard from Jon Selin again. Lost touch with Jason by summer 1983. Jamie laughs about it.

Still I hope they had a good trip, good cabin time. Beer, fire, swimming, enjoying Grateful Dead albums and the old mono Sgt Peppers on the old stereo console. Good times with friends.

1983

Spring cleaning in early May '83. Jill's then husband Mitch drove, with their son Casey along for a day trip. With a new kind of hunting expedition brought to our attention by Chef Mitch: **Morel mushrooms!** The cabin area was a fecund source for these gourmet delicacies! We wandered with bags filled rapidly, found within just a few hundred yards radius in the surrounding woods. This was a blast! Some were actually too large, rejected by our mycologist Mitch, who knew his Morels when they're too tough. Cleaned a batch and had a feast back in the cabin, as chef Mitch sautéed

them in butter on the old propane stove. With more than enough to bring home. Delicious! Except when hard to clean, annoying to bite sand particles. The only setback. That was a season of Morel-mania, thanks to the enthusiastic Mitch!

Memorial Day weekend 1983. A fine trip, more relaxed, this time with our own firewood, and not laboriously painting the cabin. With different friends; Joe Ryan (bassist for a few bands I was in, a really sweet guy, who sadly died around 2010) and high school friend Joe Kernan, and Jamie again? A much better holiday weekend! Swimming (days and nights), cookouts, beer, drawing, reading, campfire gazing. I think Mitch drove, with late May Morels in mind? A really nice cabin time.

Solo trip

Midsummer, I went alone for the first time, with the family wire-haired dachshund and my best pal Schneider for a whole week! [I think Dad dropped me off?] Excellent trip, one of the best, the most personal time I've had there, with intention of warming up for my first full-time semester at MCAD coming up in September! I brought art supplies and painted an abstract, (derivative and used too much white paint, resulting in pastel colors. Still an accomplishment, plus Mom liked it.) I brought my cassette tapes (deck connected to the stereo console), Books! reading about art history and techniques. The small Panasonic TV purely for Saturday Doctor Who. And my new Raleigh bicycle (that Dad bought me as a bonus for painting the house for months!) This was an intellectually and spiritually fulfilling trip, feeding my mind with more academic pursuit, and artistic technique development than I had ever concentrated energy into one week

before. And with Schneider who really appreciated it too! With all the good cabin stuff involved, the firepit, the nature. It was a personal highlight of my cabin experiences!

Less frequent visits due to college, California and European summers.

July '84, back in Minnesota from California for over a week for the family reunion, and Moms birthday on the 17th.

A family cabin day was planned for nephew Kims 10th birthday. I joined Grant visiting from Germany with his kids Kim and Jennifer for an overnight cabin stay. A lovely time, and I think the first time Grant had been there since the 60s! He brought a nylon string guitar and sounded wonderful drifting off to sleep as he improvised outside.

The following day was what must have been the final large family gathering there. I don't remember much, but if it happened then it must have included Gary, who really hadn't been there in decades! (?) A fun picnic with birthday cake, lawn chairs and enjoyable times in a family reunion scenario of good visiting.

Grant remembers:

“July '84. it was Kim's 10th birthday that we all celebrated, July 22. We put the type of candles on the cake that don't blow out and he tried and tried unsuccessfully until he laughed and understood. Lots of fun!”

We can't place the exact year, but sometime between 1983-85 are these recollections from Jamie:

“I recall being up there at a different time with Mitch. He taught me to play Kottke's Crow River Waltz and I still play it today. That

was the first tune I ever played in an open tuning. I think that was also the trip where Mitch "shopped" in a farmers field for corn that he made for dinner that night."

"Here's another example related to your cabin. I remember that your dad once asked you to take a meter reading, and instead of just giving him the number, you actually sketched the meter. I remember seeing that sketch, but I don't recall if I was actually there or just saw the drawing back in Mpls."

Jill and Mitch live there for awhile

It must have been between 1984-85? I don't think I went much more when Jill, Mitch and Casey stayed there. I believe one time in the Spring of '85? ['84 I was in California, then Europe for the summers of 1985-86.]

1986

Springtime, airing out and checking up time. I went with good MCAD friend Anthony, with his then sweetheart Denise and their baby Issa for what was a really nice springtime day trip.

The Haunted House

Remember how this story began with that country road from highway 55, and around halfway was an extremely dilapidated shell of a small house which always felt spooky to see since as early as I can remember. Old gnarled gray wooden siding, twisted weathered frame structure, and probably the feature that lends to its spookiness the most were its dark windowless windows giving the eerie effect of it being an empty oversized phantom skull! At least to a child's imagination.

Driving past this haunting mystery house, I shared my impressions with Tony, who instantly suggested what I'd never considered – to check it out up close! So he turned his VW van around and we got out to explore! It was a good experience to examine and find our way into this decrepit, romanticized ruin. Fascinating yet demystifying. It was a hazardous mess, open to the elements for who knows how many decades. (There are photos of this I need to find.)

It was a nice day at the old cabin, and we all enjoyed the getaway. At one point we tried checking out the lake, which had recent record breaking rises, jeopardizing waterfront property. (The beach was underwater and off limits.) Fortunately all was well with the cabin, and I believe must have been my second to last trip there.

It's days in our grasp were numbered.

The final trip

Then the big changes occurred; parents selling the cabin to retire in California! Uprooted. I went out for a final visit with Craig, September '86. Not for enjoying but purely for taking things back for the estate sale, and few things that we might want to keep. Including the old blue chest for my stuff moving permanently to California. A melancholic *don't-look-back* style visit. The Cabin sold to an appreciative retired couple I never met, just heard about from our parents. Oh but I did look back, in the nights darkness feeling like that sanctuary of memories was being betrayed somehow. However, couldn't reverse the motion set to move on. So I wasn't too heartbroken, just heavy hearted for awhile. Being with Craig helped, always something to laugh about!

Conclusions

The lessons of inevitable impermanence are inherent in this story. Things never stay the same. The cabin was important in my upbringing – especially lucky for urbanites to have. I was experiencing selfish tendencies when bemoaning any encroachment on our little sanctum. Yet it's going to happen. Entropy can't be evaded for long. Others with more power will take over around you. People multiply and need space. Spaces get filled, alter the land, change reforms, and so forth, ad infinitum.

Years passed, without much thought of the beloved cabin. *Another times forgotten space*, (Robert Hunter lyric) as I experienced new San Francisco horizons.

In 2000 was a fine return visit to Minnesota with Dad! Returning to the MN state fair, party at Craig and Karens in Minneapolis, and a drive out to see Aunt Ellen at Briggs Lake. With Joni, my ex Alisa, Dad and I, driving out to her house for a very nice (final) visit. Heading past Buffalo on I-55, Craig suggested not to bother with returning to see the cabin. It's gone! And will only be depressing.

We did spot the old artesian spring by the railroad tracks! *Dickenson Spring*, out in the open with signs indicating it. We had to stop, enjoying returning several years later! Less secluded with trees now. The pipe with water chugging out water the same as before. It turns out to be an important free local artesian source.

Now an older email from Craig :

Sunday, October 27, 2013, 02:49:32 PM CDT

Subject: The Cabin.

“I ended up at Lake Pulaski today - it was a trip into the Twilight Zone. It was really really hard to get my bearings since the roads have been altered so much. The Cabin is gone and the road it was on no longer goes to the lake. Many dead ends and redone homes. Wish you were there to see it with me. I did end up at the beach, which is now all cattails. I did locate the cabin we rented one summer in 64 that is in the photos. Also the well we stopped at on Highway 55.”

Very strange place by the sounds of it.

Since knowing our beloved Lake Pulaski cabin is truly gone, (and the surrounding lots) it only exists in our minds, and old photos and home movies, that I have frequent dreams of the place. In this way *only* it's still intact, with emphasis because it's so *gone* perhaps?

More From Jill :

“My memories mirror many that You all have mentioned, but mostly I remember it smelling musty and the spiders in the outhouse. Grandma warning us every time not to run over the well in the back yard (attempted well, wasn't it?).

Also heating the place with space heaters, wow was that stupid. I liked the back sink even though it ran into a bucket. Still, the red checked curtain (?) gave it a homey feel.

Wish I had that gas stove now. Those work the best.

The chaise ended up with us in WA. Gave it to Lauren when she moved out and her roommates mother put it in the backyard during the rains. Bye bye chaise. . .ah well.”

And from Joni,

“My favorite childhood memories are summer and fall weekends at the cabin. We didn’t travel much, so those weekends were like mini vacations! Being out in nature, no Sunday school, junk food that we never had at home---what’s not to love?! Dad would usually be sporting his quilted brown full zip jacket---which usually meant relaxation time. Mom would get right to tidying up when we arrived, then spend more time gardening or relaxing on a lawn chair.”

“Most of my memories of those weekends included Mom, Dad & Dean--sometimes Jill, with Craig, Brian & Renee showing up on occasion. We also had nice family gatherings there with Grandma, Frank and the Fricks!”

[Cue back to Rod Serling, but not in 2024, but in the year 2067.]

“Picture a middle aged man, reflecting deeply into his long lost past growing up near Lake Pulaski, Minnesota, USA. Now his memories of youth in the first quarter of the 21st century have become more vivid since the family moved away, and the neighborhood that once upon a time flourished with suburban homes, has been turned into a state park overrun with wilderness.... ”

**~ Dean Gustafson, March 2024,
with help from Craig, Joni, Jill, Gary and Grant (and Jamie!)**

[Editors note. I wrote this using a Tobii Dynavox, eye tracking technology computer. If anyone is reading this in 2024 and beyond, this essay was entirely written by human beings, with no help from AI, ChatGPT, or anything not authentically from actual experiences expressed here.]

A few photos



*earliest known photo of the cabin? 1964.
(standing) Mal, Grandma holding Dean, Brian, Mom.*

*(seated) Jill, Craig, Grant, Gary, Ron Frick.
Dad must have taken the picture.*



*Pink no more. The goldenrod yellow cabin. Mid or late 1970s.
Looks like Joni sitting near the steps.*



Joni and Dad at the firepit circle. Looking like 1969-70



*This has to be included. Joni on the boulder out front. A professional looking pic!
This must taken by Mom. 1971-72?
Notice how lush the greenery was back then. And you can almost still see where 'The
Andersons' was written across the stone.*