

35 Years Ago

BY IRENE HORNE, October 5, 2005

I never wanted a cottage

Back in 1969 I was busy raising 2 little boys and their baby sister. I would sit on my front porch and watch the neighbour across the street, line the boxes up in their carport on Friday afternoon, her husband would arrive home from work, back the car into the driveway and pack the car. Then on Sunday evening, the reverse action would take place.

No, no cottage life was not for me! I enjoyed the comforts of home. I had been to friends cottages over the past years. Hauling water, gathering firewood, outdoor privies. You've got to be kidding.

But, I married a huntin', fishin', kind of guy. A friend offered to rent us their cottage for a week that summer. Indoor plumbing, running water, very civilized. The boys could go fishing. Not bad!

The following summer, being pregnant with our 4th child,) I know, unimaginable in today's 2 child per household families) when a Sunday drive north to cottage country was suggest, I was all for it. I loved car trips. Then, it was an inexpensive days entertainment. It started slowly, stopping to look in real estate windows, 'cottage for sale' signs. Then a "why not just take a look" visit. I figured I'd just play along. At least we were enjoying all these wonderful little tourist towns. Eating out. Nothing was ever in our price range. I was safe.

Then we ran into our friends from the rental cottage, and guess what? The 'wee cottage' right next door to them was for sale. Come up next weekend and check it out. We'd make acceptable neighbours.

So, on a pleasant sunny Saturday we drove up to Steenburg Lake south road and checked out several cottages available. No decisions were made and I figured I was safe again.

The 'wee cottage' had not sold all summer and was off the market. Why not approach the owners and make an offer?

Our first Thanksgiving spent on Steenburg Lake was in October, 1970. "It's a good investment" my husband assured me. The 'wee cottage' was ours. Two bedrooms, a great room and a closet sized indoor toilet (No bath). That was all that was required because he just wanted somewhere to hang his hat and take the boys fishing. Fine with me, I would stay back with my 2 little girls in the comfort of our city home.

1971 arrived and we were anticipating this new concept of summer life. Our first visit was overwhelming. Not a lot of attention had been given to the property and it was rather intimidating the obvious work and inconveniences ahead of us. I had 2 in diapers and not disposable in those days. No hot water. Bunk beds, a single and a crib in the big bedroom (10x8) and a double bed and dresser in our room (8x8). Was I nuts?

Then we met the neighbours on the other side and life changed forever. A wonderful Irish couple whose 2 boys who'd outgrown vacationing with the parents very often. They welcomed us with open arms and warm hearts. I was the daughter they had lost in infancy with the same name. We played cards, we swam and boated, we worked, we laughed together. Our kids adored them. Our friendship was true and unwavering. When he died at age 61 I wanted to sell. I couldn't imagine fun on Steenburg Lake without him.

But by now the cottage was a huge part of all our family. Our boys loved even the work involved and helped wherever and whenever they could, selflessly, willingly. The girls too. It had been an agreement from the first that either everyone pitched in with all the chores or we'd sell.

It hadn't taken long after we established our life at the lake, that I was the one lining up the boxes for the weekends and then holidays at the lake. Actually looking forward to it. Let's face it. A family with 4 kids doesn't get invited anywhere too often so it was a good thing we had somewhere to go. In those days, kids didn't stay free when you traveled.

Naturally with 4 kids, and a dog, it wasn't long before a Bunkie had been built. Otherwise we could never invite friends up. And of course, a screened porch (I hate bugs). Eventually a new kitchen and bathroom (shower) was added with hot water a given. A new septic system a must. The 'wee cottage' had grown.

My husband was right 35 years ago about it being an investment. All we've done over the years is invest, invest, invest. But not just money. Time, life and interests, too.

As I reflect over the 35 years this coming Thanksgiving brings, I can't imagine life with Steenburg Lake. Our neighbours are all still the same. Five cottages in a row still enjoy the pleasures that cottage life has to offer. A history. The next generation are now visiting and what fun to see all the new little faces of the grandchildren as they befriend each other as our kids did before them. Not near as many in numbers and geographically challenged for visits.

We are now retired grandparents, and don't have to rely on just weekends or 2 week holidays. No dog. Our original neighbours are still close friends. Other friends have since bought on the lake. Our kids all played together and now all our grandchildren play together.

Life without Steenburg Lake? Never.