

I Remember

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, in my early years.



The Indian Point Ferry.

by John H. Vargo, Publisher

My earliest recollections are of Lake Meahagh filled with sea grass with open patches of clear water. In these patches was the fish that I was taught to catch by my father with popping bugs and jitterbugs. Large mouth bass and big sunfish. Around age four I caught my first 5 lb largemouth and that "hooked" me for life on fishing. Over the years lake Meahagh evolved into a muddy lake, many said because of the introduction of carp to the lake. This occurred as commercial fisherman hauling large seines on the riverside of the causeway threw live carp into the lake. This foraging

fish was all it took to reduce the seaweed and stir up a steady stream of mud that is there today. Even with the muddy water the large mouths survived.

During the spring it was nothing to tow a large bullfrog behind the rowboat, and watch a huge largemouth smash the frog as it passed over the bass's spawning bed. I could not get on the lake fast enough each day to see this happen and it stayed with me the rest of my life.

That was spring through my teens, but winter was when the thrills really started. My father had one of the few bow steering iceboats in the area. That

boat called "Wildcat", (tell you more about that in a moment) and the "Green Hornet", which was the traditional stern steering iceboat, became the center of my life during the winter. When I was around 11 years old my father would let me go down to the lake, uncover the iceboat, and put up the sails all by myself. The lake became huge in my eyes and the winds, never steady, always either too much or not enough, became the center of everything to me. When I was home or in school I would watch for wind movement on the branches of the hemlocks or at school, the flagpole. The slightest twitter and I was off to the lake to try out the iceboat. As I got older, access to my fathers home made wine made the nightly trips even more interesting. I would go out to the underground dugout that held all sorts of vegetables and other items that required a cool place to survive, get the rubber hose, conveniently resting near the wooden barrel of wine, fill a gallon jug and off to the lake we would go. If the TV antenna on the roof was howling with the wind we knew we were in for a fabulous night only made better by many swigs of home make wine from the used Fleischman's gin barrel.

(The wine would draw out the 180 proof gin still in the wooden barrel.) If it was deemed impossible to sail because of the wind, we would just pile everyone on the "Green Hornet" put a couple of big rocks on the out-board side of each runner and run with the wind to our favorite cove. There we'd build a big fire an breakout the wine! That is when ice boating became just about as thrilling as it would get to a 14 year old at 8 pm on a brutally cold and windy evening. The wine boasted our prowess to the point we could do no wrong. Everyone was game for a spin on the "Green Hornet". There aren't many people around that know this, but the original stern steering iceboat had a very nasty habit of spinning when the wind was too strong or the weight of the rocks and people on the boat were not enough to overcome the wind. When this happened

the wind would "flicker" the iceboat and send rocks, passengers and anything else, (sometimes the gallon jug of wine) flying in all directions. It happened all the time but we never minded it. We would all get up laughing, get back on the boat and do it again. That was the "Green Hornet". The "Wildcat" which was a one of the first bow steering iceboats was a different matter entirely. This boat, used under the same windy conditions, had a very nasty habit of not being able to be steered. I remember one time barreling down the lake with the usual crowd of suspects, including the wine bottle, when we all slid off the boat just before it went up and onto the causeway and

under the roadside cables, shearing off the mast. Again we all just laughed, put the pieces back on the boat and, with wine bottle retrieved, walked the mile back up the lake and home. What memories...

Then there were the summers. I hate weeding to this day. We always had a big garden. My mother canned everything. We ate very well during the winter war years because of my father and mother working the summer garden. Well they planted, we, my brother and I, weeded. The reward for weeding was being allowed to go fishing, or as we got older, to "Bubs Beach"

(where the trailer park is today) for swimming. If the weather was hot, there was sure to be a big truck at the beach with a bunch of people from New York City there, all enjoying the river. For the few of those still alive to remember what swimming in the river during those years was like it was best to do so at high tide as the current was strongest then, the coal dust collected in the tide lanes, along with various sizes of effluent, that could be kept from your face by the breast stroke. You could always tell who had a good time the night before by the condoms floating past your face.



Aunt Ethel with Bob on-left and John on right, Bob's Beach, Verplanck, NY, 1944