

RIPPLES ON THE LAKE

By Joan Fewless Quigley

With bracketed notes by Jann McCormick

In 1936 one of my first memories of West Bay Road was the forest next to our house, with its very tall fir trees. I recall the shafts of sunlight shooting down onto the fir needle beds below the trees where the Lady Slippers grew. While walking through our many neighborhood woods in the springtime, everywhere you turned the Trilliums were blooming. [Trilliums are endangered and protected plants. Nature protects them as well, since they will die if dug up and re-planted.] The smell of dark brown humus was apparent. Many bracken ferns grew there, and made excellent fluffy roofs for the sapling framed houses that we children would build. The lake created a sense of coolness. You could hear the stirring of the fir trees in the evening breeze. It was always entertaining in the springtime to listen to the croaking frogs, and late in the summer, the song of the crickets.

On the west end of Lake Oswego there are a few bays with a few bridges, an island, and a park. The only discernible current in the water came down the canal from its connection to the Tualatin River.

In the summer, this was our world and we swam, fished, and went boating in every inch of the lake. In the late winter, when the water in the lake was drained [into the Willamette River], we mucked around in the slippery mud. Sometimes boots got sucked into that mud, and you had to leave them behind and run for the shore in bare feet, as fast as they would carry you.

Childhood in the Wildwood

Raymond Morris tells us, as a very young child in the late 30's and early 40's there were many fresh-water streams, and some swampy areas, in our neighborhood. Raymond said, "This is where all the lizards, snakes, and creepy-crawlers lived. There Were potato bugs under every rock, centipedes, millipedes, and snails." He recalls multitudes of butterflies, and I (Joan) remember especially the Giant Swallowtail. Together, Raymond and I picked up many a caterpillar and placed them gently in a fruit jar full of leaves and sticks. At night Raymond would stand around a yard light and watch the moths. He excitedly remembers the Crecopia Moth at 4 inches across. One day, he dragged his sister Marion off to a nearby fresh-water creek to see the 14-inch marbled salamanders. The list goes on: toads, tree frogs, red-legged frogs, and water snakes abound.

Raymond and I remember early West Bay with no retaining walls; only a few lawns running down to mud banks. The Western Red Terrapin Turtle would crawl out of the water to bask in the sun. Other bay front areas had cattails growing there where the raucous Red-Winged Blackbirds would play.

The waters in our area were home to Adam and Eve, two graceful white swans. [Those white swans were truly beautiful, but they would give you a lusty bite when your canoe got too close to them.]

If you decided to go into the main lake, toward Twin Points, there was a really big swamp that we called Bull-Frog Heaven. There were muskrats and beavers in there as well. Our fathers liked to go there on summer nights, carrying gigs and flash-

lights with which to catch bullfrogs. Our mothers would cook the legs, and they tasted like my grandma's fried chicken. Our fathers would save the rest of the frogs and use them as bass bait.

[One night, in about 1945, after a few drinks – or maybe several - two of the dads decided to get into a rowboat and go frogging. They were gone for a couple of hours. They returned to our house, and opened two gunny-sacks full of frogs. They all leapt out and started leaping through the house. One of the moms, afraid of the frogs, got up on the dining table and did a lot of shrieking. Joan and I (Jann) thought it was pretty neat to have frogs gamboling throughout the house; the female adults did not like it at all; the men thought it was funny. After awhile, the dads gathered the frogs one at a time, dispatched them humanely, and severed their legs. The legs were placed into a very large container of salt water, wherein they twitched for several hours. Later in the morning, the moms made a marinade, transferred the legs to that container, and then we had a frog-leg feed at dinner time.]

In the spring when the baby ducks on West Bay would hatch and hit the water, their numbers would diminish. My dad thought perhaps a carp or wayward bass was guilty. Every time there was an abandoned baby duck, we would capture it so that a predator would not. Each of us children would raise a box of ducklings, feeding them on corn mash, keeping them warm with a heat lamp. Their release was a sight to see! They would swim away, with just their necks sticking out of the water. [We learned that they needed to learn to preen their feathers and bring up their natural oil, so some of us would let them swim in the bathtub or the laundry sink a few times. They learned to work on their feathers, and then would swim well when we put them into the lake.]

Assorted memories before 1940

At the age of 5, my parents, Olga and Earl Fewless, decided it was time for me to learn how to swim. I donned my new orange kapok life preserver (kapok was used at the time for stuffing pillows and mattresses). I swam with that thing on every day. It never had a chance to dry out. At the end of that summer, my dad threw my life-jacket into the bay without me in it, and to my surprise, it sank. From that day on I knew I could swim without it.

Margie Niesen has early memories of walking to Lake Grove Park on hot summer days, with her mother Ida, and her sister and brother. They all came down from Twin Fir Road on a path, or from Reese Road on a trail. The choice of which path to take depended on whether or not there was a train stopped on the track Which ran across the paths. The park, at that time, had only one main dock that extended straight out from the shore. Both a low and a high diving board existed, as did the cement dressing rooms and food shack.

Raymond has memories of his grandfather walking with him over a bridge, past a large spring-fed pond with bull frogs in it, over another bridge, and then seeing a "giant digging machine" (a steam shovel). They watched the operator lower the huge bucket to the ground, then scoop up earth and rock, making way for a new road-bed That was to become South Shore Blvd.

Behind that road cut, deep in the dark fir tree forest, was a Boy Scout camp. As a young child it was an adventure to hike there.

Another road memory is that the WPA (Works Progress Administration) dug West Bay Road so deep you could only see the truck tops. Our fathers, Earl Fewless and Marion Morris, went to Oregon City (County Seat of Clackamas County) and complained. The WPA then had to return and back-fill. That's why much of that road is on a hill.

Other Memories

Lake Grove was an inexpensive area. In the early 30's you could buy a lot on West Bay for \$500.00, and build your house on it, like Lydia and Ray Wilcox did. Lots not directly on the lake were \$100.00. In the early 40's, "House for Rent" signs were frequently seen. One day, Jan Gibbs and her friend were visiting in the area while their husbands were out of town. They noticed two cottages side by side on Graef Circle. They convinced their husbands that it was a great area to raise their families, plus they could still be close neighbors, as well. The next week, both families moved from East Moreland to Lake Grove, each paying rent at about \$50.00 per month for their charming homes. Jan and Ernie stayed 20 years in the Lake Grove area, raising their four children. Their daughter, Dana, now lives in a nearby condo.

[My parents, Lloyd and Jeston McCormick, bought a house on West Bay for \$6,000.00. The former owners had lost a son; he drowned in the lake right in back of the house. I lived in that house from 1942 through 1951 – my parents lived there until 1958. They sold it for nearly \$30,000.00. It was sold again in 2006 for more than \$500,000.00 !!! It was not that great or large of a house – but it was okay. It is interesting to note that at the time my parents bought their house, anybody living in lake-front property had to belong to the Lake Corporation, and pay dues each year. One of the documents they had to sign gave permission to the Corporation to approve (or disapprove) any exterior remodeling to the residences. Another document was an agreement by the property buyer that he would never sell the property to a "colored person" or an "Oriental person." Of course, that would be an illegal contract at the present time, which is as it should be. All you have to do to buy property there now is be able to pay for it!]

We girl friends all lived in snug little houses. A few of them were built with our fathers' own hands. Three of those houses stand today, just as their dads built them: the Neisen house, built in 1928, the Woodcock house, built in 1932, and the Gibbs house, built in 1948.

In the late 30's a friendly man named John went rattling around West Bay in his farm-type delivery truck, selling fresh fruit and vegetables. He might as well have been the Good Humor Man, for the effect he had on the neighborhood kids! For the remainder of our provisions, we shopped at Marston's Grocery Store. That building stands today on Bryant Road by the railway crossing. They now offer used furniture and "antiques".

During those post-depression days, there were many tramps (hoboes) who would come down from the nearby railroad tracks. They would knock on our doors and ask for work and food. Our mothers weren't frightened by them – it was just part of living by the tracks. [One time the man who knocked on our door and asked for work and food said he had been a clown with the circus. He cut some wood for our fireplace and he did some gymnastic-type "tricks" for my sister, Judy, and me. He

was very pleasant, and he returned a few times. My parents were always a soft touch with regard to the hoboes and the squatters. When we lived at Rockwood, before moving to Lake Grove, we had acreage, and frequently families would stop at our place and put up a little shack and live there for awhile. If they had children, I would play with them. There was one girl whose name was Delores. I was playing at her "house" one afternoon, when her dad came outside with a washtub. He emptied it on the ground, away from us (the contents were red) and buried it in the soil. Delores said, "I guess my mom had another miscarriage." Of course, at 6 or 7 years old, I did not know what that meant, but I knew it was something sad. My father would give the squatters some work – he would pay them for picking up rocks in the soil. He would also take sacks of food to them. Sometimes, in the winter-time, their little houses would burn, and then they would leave. It was a very sad and difficult time.]

The train crossing on Marston's Hill (Bryant Road) was frequently blocked when a steam engine stopped at the water tank to fill its boilers. We would just climb over, or crawl under the flat cars. We had no idea about danger. Marston's Hill was even more exciting in the winter, if it snowed enough to whiz down the hill on our sleds.

During one very cold winter in the late 30's, Raymond's father built a traditional Eskimo ice-block igloo in their front yard. Sometimes the winter would be cold enough that the lake, in West Bay and Blue Heron Bay would freeze. We would throw rocks onto the ice and if the rocks didn't fall through into the water, we would wait until some brave person would try the ice to see if we could skate on it. We sometimes could, but of course, the surface was never smooth, because there would be so many rocks on it! Toward the center of the bay, of course, there would be no rocks because we couldn't throw that far. [I fell through the ice one morning when I was out there very early. Nobody else was skating yet, so I was on my own. I had to break ice in front of me and get to the shore and then climb out. I then had to walk home – in ice skates – for a distance of about half a mile. I lived.]

In 1949 the lake froze all the way to Oswego, except for a very small open spot near Jantzen Island. Raymond and Donald Smith skated all the way, and the next day they rode their bikes all the way to Oswego. [Our lake, Lake Oswego, in Oregon, is about 4 1/2 miles long, by about 1 mile wide at the widest point. The people who owned Jantzen Knitting Mills had a very fine house on an island close to the Oswego end of the lake.]

Fish Stories

Dana Gibbs' mother was an excellent bass fisher-person. She cast her line from her home dock that was close to the "Old" Mr. Bates property next to West Bay Bridge. (Incidentally, Elizabeth Bates turned that property into a garden showplace. One of the most beautiful on the lake.)

In 1944, Billie's parents, Scoop and Bill Adams, tore down an existing cabin-type house on Summit Drive, and completely rebuilt it into a cozy home for their little family. This was probably one of the weekend cabins on the lake that was left over from the 1920's. Billie remembers such good outdoor times "playin' with the Perrin Boys" in the close-by freshwater creek.

West Bay bridge divided the shallow, muddy bay that harbored carp and catfish from the deeper and cooler waters of the main lake. This made conditions just right for

crawfish off the dock of our girlfriend, Judy Woodcock. Those armor-suited critters made giggly girls very careful to avoid its two front pincers.

The fishing under the bridge couldn't be beat. Looking like trolls under the bridge, fishermen would reel in perch, blue gill, and crappie. On top of that bridge there were neighborhood gymnast-types who liked to walk and balance on its elevated wooden guard rail. That's where I met my best friend, Dana Gibbs, at the beginning of the third grade.

Now for the last fish story: In the 1930's, Raymond's dad believed that the palisades part of the main lake was gouged out by a glacier, and probably was very, very deep. He even felt that a sturgeon could possibly be in there. Then a rather folkloric event occurred. Forty years later in the vicinity of the Lake Grove park, a very dead sturgeon of 300 pounds (6 feet long) appeared. [Since it was dead, it couldn't tell anybody where it had been.]

Transportation Tales

...And a railroad track runs through it... Margie Neisen tells us that in the late 1920's her parents, Ida and George, used to catch a commuter-type train from Lake Grove to Oswego or Portland. Raymond says it was called "The Red Electric." Dana tells us that one of the stations was at the top of the trail that comes down from Reese Road.

The time was mid World War II, when gas rationing was in effect. An allowable amount was 3 1/2 gallons per week. We just remember walking everywhere – that is until we were old enough to take the blue bus [Oregon Motor Stages] to Oswego [or even all the way to Portland]. [During the War, our parents would always give service-men a ride when they saw them hitch-hiking or waiting for the bus. Actually, almost anybody who was walking or waiting for a bus was offered a ride. The trains running past carried service men, and when we saw a troop train, we would always wave at the men. I don't think that we children realized that many of them would not come home. Dana's mom used to run out of her house and wave at them, and they would often shout, "Goodbye, Mom" to her.]

The Lake Theater in Oswego beckoned with Esther Williams movies and other 1945 assorted attractions and many of us young people would go to the movies on Sunday afternoons.

The girlfriends "on the other side of the tracks" lived within easy walking distance of the Lake Oswego Hunt Club. It was always fun to go there and see the horses. Margie remembers a warning from her mom not to go into the mine that existed in Iron Mountain close to the Hunt Club location. Raymond recalls driving cars up to the spot on top where the air raid watch tower was located, and then walking over the side to access the mine portal. "Later, on it was blasted shut," he said.

A safer event was the exciting race to find the most eggs at the Hunt Club's annual Easter Egg Hunt.

All the while we girls were doing so much walking, the boys rode their bikes everywhere for miles. In the summer times, they left their bikes at home and came to visit our waterfront homes in their 5- or 10- hp motor boats.

Lake Grove Park and Lake Grove School

The park was the summer hub of Lake Grove. It has a long history as a pleasant destination. Rosemary Wilcox told me a story about how her father, Ray and a friend, in the early 1920's would walk his grandmother's cows from her farm on the Clackamas/Multnomah County line to the Lake Grove Park Site. Joan's Aunt Lillian, in the late 1920's rode her horse, "Beauty," down from Bull Mountain in Tigard to the Lake Grove Park. She says she had a hamburger at the food shack there. Lillian is 91 years old now.

A couple of years before WWII was over and we girls became pre-teens, we spent a lot of time at the park in the summer. [Those of us who lived on the lake could swim off our back yards, but it was more fun to go to the park and swim with friends.] Constructive time involved earning our Junior Lifesaving Badge. The rest of the time we were there just to swim, strut our stuff, and talk to the boys. In 1943 through 1946 the polio epidemic hit. No more gathering at the park to swim and no more going to the crowded movie theater in Oswego. Needless to say, our social lives were definitely curtailed. That was nothing compared to the deep sadness we felt for the families who were affected by the epidemic in our Lake Grove area.

[Frequently, a classmate would be absent for a few weeks, then return with braces on their legs and crutches for walking. Some of our classmates families suffered the death of a sibling. As an adult, I lived in the town of Oswego, on a street where there were five houses with iron lungs in the front windows. There were generators on the front lawns, and if the electricity went out in the area, the volunteer firemen would arrive at assigned locations, and pump the generators by hand until electricity was restored. My child, on her way home from kindergarten, came in and told me, "There's a lady up the street who lives in a dryer!" The Lake Oswego-Lake Grove area, in 1945, had the highest per capita incidence of polio of any other locale in the world. Thank God for Dr. Jonas Salk!]

In eighth grade, our area acquired two new girl friends: Ginger and Carol. One had a horse, and both were good looking. That year, we girl friends all played softball and volley ball against other Clackamas County schools, and the biggest deal of all was experiencing AIR RAID DRILL practice at school. The alarm went off, we all lined up and walked away from our school, in an organized hurry to assigned homes. Our route was across Boones Ferry Road and into the woods on a dirt path to Douglas Circle.

After graduation from Lake Grove Grade School, Ginger and Judy not only became life guards, but all of us landed on either a local or high school swim team.

We are all still girl friends who enjoy getting together for birthdays and reminiscing, but we rarely go swimming together any more!