

Nov28

Swim

Posted on [November 28, 2016](#) by [cindyricksgers](#)
[Standard](#)



As a child growing up on Lake Nepessing, I couldn't swim. Brenda could, a little bit. Ted could dog-paddle. I couldn't even float. I could pretend to swim, by walking on my hands in knee-deep water while flopping my head from side-to-side and kicking up a froth with my feet. That was it. I loved the water, though. We spent quite a bit of time at the beach. We called it swimming, even when it wasn't. "If you get your work done," Mom would say, "maybe I'll let you take the kids swimming."

So, often, when our chores were done on hot summer days, we would gather our little brothers and sisters and walk them down to the Hill Top Campground. There was a little store there, and there were paddle boards for rent. Camp sites were visible up the hill. That was where the actual entrance to the swimming area was, off Hunt Road. I didn't know that until I was an adult. We took a different route.

As one fairly large group of children wearing bathing suits and carrying towels, we walked up the driveway, and crossed Hunt Road. Kitty-corner across the pavement was Lake Shore Drive, a dirt road that followed the lake. That's the way we went. On our right were cottages with back doors and garages facing the gravel road, while their main living spaces looked out over the water. On our left was a big, triangular field where daffodils grew wild in the springtime. Then the quonset hut with its curved, corrugated metal roof. Maxine, who tended bar at the Lake Inn, lived there. After her house was more field. The small cottages continued, one after another, on our right. At the end of the drive, a sharp turn went left and up a hill. Straight ahead was another hill. There was a house up there, where the Poole family lived. We turned to the right, where a short gravel road led to more small lakefront houses, and curved around, narrower. We took it to the end, then walked beside the one house, turned and made our way across three front lawns at the water's edge, then down a slight dirt path to the beach.

Sometimes we were noticed, and had to pay; other times we used the beach for free. We spread out towels and tested the water. We planned who would keep an eye on who. Every small child got a stern lecture: "DO NOT run/throw stones/throw sand/get your towel wet/splash/get lost/get hurt/misbehave in any way...OR YOU WILL NEVER GET TO COME TO THE BEACH AGAIN!" We were, after all, responsible...and the ones who would get in big trouble if anyone drowned.

Then we started making our way into the water. Everybody splashed. All of us went out too deep. There were drop-offs. There was seaweed. If you wandered over too far to the left, there was muck instead of sand on the bottom. There was sometimes broken glass. There were several near-drowning incidents every summer. Yet we all managed, somehow, to survive. When it was time to head for home, we sat all the little ones down in a row on the towels, and examined their feet for bloodsuckers. When we found them, we lit a match, blew it out, and touched the leech with the hot tip. It would draw its head out, so it could be picked off and thrown away. Then, we checked our own extremities. Finally, cooled off, tired, and – now – free of bloodsuckers, we made our way back home. That was "going swimming" when I was a child.