

## Joe Thome on Pine Island

It was 1962 and Joe Thome was in Panos Lounge in Evergreen Park, on the south side of Chicago, bitching and moaning about his taxes being raised on a lot he owned on Pine Island. "What am I paying damn taxes for? I ain't got no roads, ain't got no lights, ain't got no garbage, ain't got no school! I ain't payin' no more taxes, they can keep their damn property!"

Joe had bought the 50x200 foot Pine Island lot for \$100 just a year after Ne-na-mik-ka-ta was platted in 1914, and he paid another \$100 to have a two-room cabin built on it. He was a retired Chicago cop who never owned a car, and he'd developed a routine over the years: in early May he would cadge a ride from Chicago up to Glenwood Lodge and the mailboat would take him out to his dock, bringing with him some potatoes, flour, and whatever supplies he was willing to carry. Over the spring and summer he fished and grew vegetables, probably did some hunting and trapping for extra protein, and traded food with his neighbors. The closest cabin a hundred yards to the east had been built the same year as Joe's by Margaret Hankee, who some years later was living there year-round. Margaret died in a hunting accident in 1939, but her sister Julia Clark stayed on into the 50's, and by the 60's it had passed to their great-nephew Bob Hankee. The farther cabin was built in the 1920's by Edward Muraske (whose wife was Margaret's niece), and by the 1970's it was his son Dick Muraske who was regularly spending time there,

Joe kept a dish of water on his back porch, and when he got up one October morning and found a skim of ice on the top of it, he knew it was time to go. He would close up the cabin and ride the mailboat back to Glenwood, then make his way to Miami where he hopped a boat to Havana and spent the winter in Cuba. In the spring he would reverse the process: he'd find a ride back up to Chicago and Lake Vermilion in time for fishing opener, and the cycle would continue. But by 1962 Joe was into his eighties -- maybe getting a bit old for all that travelling -- and Castro had put an end to his winters in Cuba a few years earlier. And he was seriously ticked off about the taxes.

Roz Schonauer (my future father-in-law) was an Evergreen Park native, at various times a truck driver, cop, saloon keeper, streets commissioner, volunteer fireman and pipe fitter. He was a regular at Panos Lounge, and Joe was the uncle of Bill Murray, a drinking buddy of his. Roz was an avid fisherman; and although he'd never been to Lake Vermilion, he'd heard Bill's stories for years about his uncle Joe's summers at his cabin, the lake, and its fishing. He told Joe, "Don't let them take the property for taxes, I'll buy it from you." Joe replied, "You want it? It's yours!" "No", said Roz, "you've got to let me pay for it". So Joe tells him, "Go to the drugstore and pick up a quit claim deed, we'll sign it, you can give me fifty bucks and it's yours!" So Rozzie bought the place sight unseen for \$50 (and, as it turned out, some back taxes). He wasn't so prompt about filing his deed with the county land office, but that's another story.

When Roz and his wife Vern came up to look at their new property the next summer, they found a cabin filled from floor to ceiling with crates and trunks, with only a narrow path through the center of the first room and into the second. They would open a trunk and find it filled with cardboard boxes. Inside the boxes were brown paper packets tied with string. And inside the packets would be...a collection of pen nibs. (Anyone

remember pen nibs?) Another trunk would contain boxes filled with packets filled with brand new straight razors...and so on. It seems Joe was something of a hoarder.

Roz and his buddies would regularly brave the twelve hour drive from Evergreen Park to Glenwood Lodge and boat out to Pine Island for a few days of fishing and drinking. It was never so clear which of the two was the main draw, but they were pretty good at both. The guys decided early on that they needed to clear some floor space to make more sleeping room, so they dug a big pit in the nearby woods and buried all the stuff from inside the cabin: every single one of the boxes and crates, an oil-burning stove, and anything else they considered expendable. (That pit might make for an interesting excavation one day.) And at some point the wall was taken down to create a single-room.

Roz and Vern invited Jan to join them on their visits to the lake...what teenager wouldn't jump at the chance of spending time with her parents in a one-room cabin on an island with no electricity, no plumbing, no roads, no shops? Jan decided she'd rather stay home with her new driver's license, and she never saw the place until some years later when she was in college. By the late 1970's Vern had died, and Rozzie had retired and was spending his summers on Pine Island. He became part of a close-knit community held together by CB radio: his handle was "Golden Shackle", a compliment he had earned in his career as a pipe fitter. He fished, he baked breads and cakes which he shared with his friends and neighbors (including Bob Hanke and Dick Muraske, Bill and Doug Overland, Tom Weber, Irv Stoddard, Harry and Helen Jorgensen, and Dale and Maxine Wissler on Rice Bay), and he played host to some of his old buddies who would come up from Chicago to visit. Then sometime in October he would feel a chill in the air and decide it was time to close up and drive back to Evergreen Park. There he'd spend some time with his son Russ and his family, and other friends and relatives, and by early November he would be on the road to southern California to park his 27-foot Dodge Travco motor home in our driveway and spend the winter with us and (not too long afterwards) his grandchildren. Then sometime in late March we would see him in the kitchen, coffee mug in hand, pacing impatiently back and forth, and we knew he was hearing the ice crack and the fish rise on the lake. Soon we would all head out for a few days' of camping in the desert; then we would return home, and Rozzie would continue on to Evergreen Park and the lake in time for fishing opener. He had adopted Joe's routine.

Rozzie's been gone for eighteen years now, and Jan and I have been spending a good part of our summers on the island since we both retired. As Rozzie did, we drive here cross-country and stop to visit friends and relatives along the way. Our closest neighbors include Mike and Bill Muraske and Kathy Kaminsky, the grandchildren and grand-niece and -nephews of Joe's original neighbors; and we keep in touch with the more distant ones, including a number of Rozzie's old friends, by cell phone instead of by CB radio. We're now following Roz's routine as he had followed Joe's; we feel the same draw in the spring to get up here that he did when we watched him pacing in our kitchen. We're celebrating the cabin's 100th birthday this summer, and we often thank Rozzie and Joe when we're on the dock, watching the sun set with our Manhattans in hand.