

Lucius Woods Memories, Part 1: Early Years.

A flood of wonderful memories comes to mind as I think of Lucius Woods State Park, now a Douglas County park in Solon Springs, WI. Some of these remembrances are from pictures or discussions with older family members. Most are my own memories from direct personal experiences in the park for nearly six decades.

My mother's side, the Favell and Gates families, came to Superior in the 1880s and 1890s. They recreated at and eventually owned property or lived in Solon Springs (*White Birch* until 1896), first visiting here around 1891. Some based here from 1902 to 1918 and 1950 to present, so we have many shared family stories that include what is now Lucius Woods. (I now represent the third generation of my family, since the mid 1800s, to retire, build, and live here with my family members in my sixth decade of life.)

The stories summarized below are faithful and accurate, although I reserve the right to tweak dates as I learn more. This is an attempt to preserve the essence of some of our family's early Lucius Woods memories. In brief, and in approximate chronological order, a few of these include:

In 1897, my aunt and uncle, Mabelle and Clough Gates, are pictured biking on what seems now to be Lake Street, the north park border. We also have a circa 1904 picture of them skating on clear, open lake ice near what has become the park's beach and picnic area. In both cases, they are dressed in their long, formal finery from the period. People sure seemed to dress up more then. We have photos of such period activities in many seasons.

In the summer of 1914, and other times, my mother, Madeline, then age 3, often played and swam at the beach with her dad and mom, my grandparents, Ernest and Inga Favell. The photos of them are so interesting. They stayed at my great grandparents', Thomas and Angela Favell, then new home, Piney Ridge, on the main street, now Lake Street, in Solon Springs. As mentioned, the park still adjoins this street on its northeastern border.

The swimming pictures mentioned above show a wood-frame water slide coursing down from the shore into the shallow water of the beach. It looks like fun. I wonder if it became a toboggan slide in the winter? Wish I could ask.

My mother danced with local Ojibwa people at powwows near what is now Lucius Woods in the summer of 1914, and at other times. We still have her 3-4-year-old, little girl's fringed dancing dresses and moccasins stored at home, plus pictures of some events of those early Solon Springs days with First Nations friends.

In early years, the Waterbury family apparently owned the nearby creek area and forest in what is now the park. The creek, now Park Creek, was called Waterbury Creek then. One day, circa 1910, while fishing surreptitiously from the stream bank, my grandfather, "Doc" Favell caught a sizeable trout (German Brown, I think he said?). He was not supposed to be fishing on the Waterbury private property, and hid the quickly-unhooked, wildly-flopping trout in his shirt so he could carry on a friendly chat with Mrs. Waterbury, who had just then come by on her daily stroll down the creek-side trail.

In 1936, Grandpa Favell painted a pastel chalk picture, "No Fishing", to commemorate his catch. Only our family knew what had really happened that day on the creek years before!

The painting still hangs in the Solon Springs Historical Society Museum, and can be viewed by anyone visiting the living room of the old log home there.

For as long as I can remember, my parents and grandfather referred to the Lucius Woods creek trail, with its towering Norway and White Pines, as “The Land of Giants”. They also said it was a magical place where elves and gnomes likely lived and watched us, as we enjoyed the quiet, ancient beauty of that cool, moist stream valley.

Today, whenever we walk those paths among our giant elders growing there, I still feel the same sense of majesty and reverent awe I did as a young boy on those trails nearly sixty years ago. This precious bit of paradise, I trust, will always be here in Solon Springs at Lucius Woods, where nature and imaginations thrive unbounded by time.

Lucius Woods Memories, Part 2.

Some places remain special to us all our lives. Part 1 of this series recounted a few of my family's stories from early days of Lucius Woods Park in Solon Springs. The memories I shared were "second-hand" from pictures and family tales passed on since the 1880s. This part is set in the 1950s-60s, and covers some of my boyhood experiences and stories. My many first-hand Lucius Woods memories include:

-- While walking barefoot on gravel roads in the park in 1954, I felt something on my four-year-old leg. I looked down, and saw a small striped snake wrapped around my ankle. I just pulled it off, no big deal. Maybe that's why they are called "garter snakes".

-- In those years, my family often tent camped in the park. When I was about eight, we had a strong hailstorm one hot July day. As we peered out of our tent after the storm, it seemed as if deep snow had fallen all around, with white, gleaming contoured banks many inches high. The campground-covering hail "smoked" water vapor throughout the park. All of us camp kids rushed out of our tents, reveling in the snow-white ice piles in humid mid July.

-- Lucius Woods had a distinct summer smell in those days. The array was a complex combination of wood smoke from campfires, along with odors of the damp, sealed logs of the beach changing house, picnic pavilion, and benches, all made from big local pines. The smells of pinesap from cut branches, smoke, mold, tent mildew, suntan lotion, rubber air mattresses, camp cooking, and, of course, bug repellent all filled the air. Sniffing the summer air there now still recalls, for me, those days of family fun fifty-plus years ago.

-- It was exciting entering the individual knotty-pine-paneled changing stalls at the beach changing house to hurriedly get ready for swimming adventures. Shouts of kids playing in the water made me rush; I could never move fast enough to get out and have fun with them. I thought the round door latch that rotated to say "open/occupied" on each personal stall in the changing room was interesting. How many times I forgot my towel, t-shirt, diving mask, or fins in a stall where I changed, and had to come back later in the day to get them. They were always still there. Nothing disappeared. Diving for clams in the beach area was serious work then for a 10-year-old kid.

-- The log changing house and restrooms at the beach seemed damp and dark, with many crevices and cracks. Large wolf spiders lurked in the cool corners, and amazed me. They were making a living, in that protected environment, on the smaller critters that happened through their well-cloistered territory. They were so interesting, never scary.

-- My dad, Vic, often kept a galvanized milking pail of hot water on our fire when we camped at Lucius Woods in those years. He and my mom cooked peeled ears of

sweet corn in it. Salt and butter were kept handy on the picnic table nearby. We ate fresh corn whenever we wanted. We'd pour out some of the hot water for washing dishes or hands throughout the day, adding more water to the bucket from the hand pump located in the middle of the campground. We tended our small fire carefully, keeping it going safely all day and night, especially in wet weather. We could not afford a gas camp stove then.

Lucius Woods remains one of the most magical, wonder-full places in the world; a comforting refuge around which so much of my life has revolved. I'll tell you about more Park memories in Part 3.

Lucius Woods Memories, Part 3.

Life moves on. Mine did. Childhood days at Solon Springs passed into teenage years. I got busy with other important things in life; Lucius Woods became a less-frequented but still much-cherished escape. Some of my sharper Lucius Woods memories from the 1960s are:

-- Over the Memorial Day weekend of 1960, we camped in the park and saw William Proxmire kick off his campaign for US Senate in Wisconsin. He spoke to the crowd from the top of the hill in what is now the concert area. No PA system was used; he just spoke loudly. We stood down below the hill on the large open lawn and heard him just fine. I was a highly impressed ten-year old. My folks were impressed too, and voted for him. From that time on, we followed Senator Proxmire's career, especially appreciating his "Golden Fleece" awards for wasted government spending.

-- Making pancakes in the huge open fireplaces in the picnic pavilion was work -- and fun. Dad and mom did most of cooking and preparations for years; I did more of it as I grew and progressed in Scouting. At that time, the large log picnic pavilion on the lake bank had glass windows that swung open, ornate chandelier lighting, and large fireplaces for all to use. We especially liked the fireplace at the south end of the building, with inside and outside access to it. You can still see where the outside access was on the south end of the pavilion. Our big camp skillet fit into the open-fire cooking area, and, inside or outside, we could make gigantic, thick pancakes a foot or more in diameter. With real homemade maple syrup and butter, we could feed a group of eager, ravenous campers.

-- In the pavilion fireplace, we'd cook up the bacon first, then the eggs, then the pancakes, all in our same pan. The bacon grease kept everything from sticking. The aroma of it all, with wood smoke, was wonderful in that enclosed space. As a boy and teen, and an often-resolute Lucius Woods tent camper with the family, I spent many gloomy, rainy, cold days playing and hanging out within the pleasant refuge of that solid log building. Other kids and families from camp and village would come in to cook or play. It got loud in there.

-- My parents, sister, and I, sometimes with other camp or village families, spent many of our summer days there playing games, reading, sleeping on the tables, cooking, whittling, and just killing time until a storm stopped, or until we got warmed up from an often cold, damp night in our tents. It was boring and tediously awful then, but I'd relive it in a moment if given the chance. Walking into that log pavilion now brings back so many thoughts of those days and people, and the comfort we all knew there.

--The swimming area had roped-off beginner and advanced areas then, with a metal-barrel/wood-deck raft anchored out deeper. We swam and dove off that raft all day. A mark of courage among us 10-13 year olds was to dive to the bottom, then search for and bring up rocks, without using the diving board. Our days sped by on that raft. I was always hungry.

-- As an older teen, in 1966 or so, I camped with some high school friends at Lucius Woods. Science fiction fans, all, we thought we could be authors and brought our typewriters. We each determined to use our park retreat to write something significant we could sell to a magazine. None of us did. But we had fun swimming, lazing around camp, and combining random opened cans of food into one-pot meals we heated over our fire, doing as little work as possible. It was a hot, dry, beautiful week, and we mostly just basked in the sun and did

little else. When I told a visitor I was the main cook of group, one of my geek friends said “No, not really. You just open the cans.” It was true, but we didn’t starve.

In the early 1970s, Debbi and I found each other. In a few years, our other great loves, sons Adam and Seth, followed, and we all shared often in the treasures of Lucius Woods. Part 4 will cover some Lucius Woods “memory snapshots” of our more recent family times there.

Lucius Woods Memories, Part 4.

Our family's Lucius Woods adventures began in the 1880s-1890s, continuing through today. Previous parts of my series recounted some earlier park memories. To conclude, here are a few of our more-recent-memory snapshots:

- In the early 1970s, my folks, Madeline and Victor King, and I talked fully as we often walked among the large trees on Park Creek trails during difficult family and national events. The ancient trees, along with peaceful sun-dappled creek waters, comforted us and provided thick-green forest insulation from a world of troubles then in those tumultuous war and impeachment years.
- In the winter of 1976-1977, Debbi and I skied the park trails and snow-covered lake with our small, new puppy, Punkin, an orange/white Sheltie-mix. We carried her in Debbi's warm jacket hood, perhaps a canine precursor to the "snugglie" packs we soon would be using with our own little guys.
- With our infant and toddler Superior sons in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we day-hiked the park trails in summer and fall. Younger son, Seth, at age 2 or so, would stop, try to block our way, and say "Carry me, carry me..." until we did. Older son Adam got us playing "Pooh Sticks" at each bridge, something we still do today.
- In winter, we marveled at the marshmallow world of snow-frosted forest and icy streams around us, and hiked or skied on the frozen lake often. In summer, we'd camp, swim, and hike in the park, as we relaxed on so many hot days and nights in the lush piney coolness surrounding us.
- As a growing young family in the 1980s-1990s, we swam at the beach and dived from the raft with friends. It helped our young boys become strong swimmers. We often canoed to the beach from farther down the lake. The guys learned to paddle well, and experimented with swamping and righting our canoes safely in the shallows near the park beach.
- With all our water fun, swimming, diving, and canoeing, we often got "duck itch" from parasites in the water. We learned to use the hose at the beach house to spray off the mites before they could penetrate to the *really* itchy stage -- most of the time.
- My folks walked with their grandsons in the park, passing on stories and thoughts of tall trees and trails in the "Land of Giants". Each time we visited the park, we eagerly checked on "The Captain", the giant old White Pine near the first bridge. We were saddened when it broke in a storm and died. We walk near it still.
- In 1982, a friend contracted Lyme disease from a tick bite she apparently got in the park woods. This young mom developed severe complications. It was the first we knew much about Lyme disease, and a reminder that bug repellent and tick checks are good ideas much of the year.
- Around 1991, Seth and I missed our Cub Scout pack's official Webelos father-and-son campout, so we had our own at Lucius Woods. We still talk about that special adventure when we hike or bike by "our" campsite in the park. Also, somewhere

around that time, we realized the word “camper” had changed. It no longer just meant a person; a camper had also become a thing, a vehicle.

- We often visited the park bateau shelter on the hill to see the traditional bateau (“boat” in French) housed there. Adam enjoyed it as a big “model”. Later we heard it got moved to the Fairlawn Museum in Superior due to vandalism.
- Work, family, and distance occupied our time over the next many years. We finally saw our first Lucius Woods Performing Arts Center concert in late summer, 1997, an excellent Celtic group. *Wow!* We have been eager concert regulars since 2002.
- We are volunteer helpers for the park segment of the 4,000-plus mile North Country Scenic Trail. We also take monthly data on Park Creek as part of the statewide UWEX Water Action Volunteer stream monitoring research program. It is our privilege, indeed our local destiny, to be stewards for this special place. We are honored to work on behalf of the trails, creek, and woods we love.

Our family’s Lucius Woods memories have spanned a hundred years and more -- and the story goes on. Debbi and I have hiked in the park on a thousand silent, sacred mornings, and will hike at least a thousand more with our boys and their families, we trust. We have daily seen the changing stars, sky, sunrises, and birds, and have watched the lake ice come and go for many years. What a place to grow older, starting each of our days with our giant elders, the Norway and White Pines who have already outlived us several times. We are pleased to share a small role in the continuing natural and human history of Lucius Woods.

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