

SKINNY-DIP

Sometimes the impulse is downright irresistible

By George Vukelich

THE lake is so tiny you can't find it on most maps. No road leads to it; you have to walk in from a fire lane in the forest. There isn't a cottage, a cabin, a shack or a beer can on the whole shore.

The only sign of humans for miles around is the water-filled flat-bottom boat, half-sunken and hidden away in the shallows under the sheltering branches of balsam.

The boat is wooden, a working relic of another era, as are the two grown-up little boys who have been hiding it here for years. One is the good priest and the other is the good doctor.

Indoors, they usually are to be found at the American Legion bar in the north country town not too far from here.

The bar is renowned for its bartender named Gene who sleeps in his Chicago Cubs cap; for its ancient cribbage board, worn and polished as the Old Man's hickory ax handle; and for its beer cooler where, once a week, The Good Old Boys get into their snowmobile suits and sorrel boots, sit themselves down on the full kegs and just stay that way, practicing for ice fishing.

The tiny little lake has no official name. Some of the old-timers used to call it Spring Lake. Others called it Gin Lake because it was so clear. None of those old-timers are around anymore. The good doctor and the good priest are about the only humans who even come to the lake these days, let alone know how to find it.

The good doctor, dependent upon his mood, has been known to refer to the tiny lake as either "The Bass Hole" or "The Little Chapel of The Big Bass."

"Well, Father," Doc will say in mixed company, "as The Seven-Foot Nun always used to say: 'A little time in the chapel will do wonders for your soul.'"

Father Himmelsbach always takes that as an inside joke, especially if it is said in the

presence of Illinois people who have bought lake property on the Chain of Lakes and have landscaped with plastic pink flamingos and castiron white-tailed deer.

The doctor and the priest have been visiting the little lake together since they were boys before "WW Two," as Gene puts it. Doc was not a *real* doctor then — Gene says that there is a question if he's a *real* doctor now — and Father Himmelsbach was an altar boy when all the responses were in Latin and nobody had ever heard of a "guitar mass."

Doc's grandpa had taken the two of them to the bass lake on the condition that they "cross their hearts and swear to die" if they ever told another living soul.

They never did — not even after Doc's grandpa died and they inherited, by default, the wooden flat-bottom, a set of wooden oars and a cement-filled paint can that grandpa used for an anchor.

When they were little, Doc and Father Himmelsbach learned to fish these bass with grandpa's cane poles, and they have preserved those poles with love and varnish as though they were the relics of a saint.

"Which," Father Himmelsbach, who

knows about such things, says, "indeed they are."

The cane poles are still rigged and ready to go and can be hauled out of their semi-retirement in Doc's garage on a moment's notice as indeed they have been when nostalgia has gotten the better of them. Then they tie the bundle of poles on top of Doc's old Chrysler fish-car with a red bandanna on the southern end to warn any traffic following of their oversize load.

"God," Doc always says when they do that, "I feel like we're hauling logs to the mill."

NOW they sat in the drifting flat-bottom, working the lily pads with their fly rods and poppers. Doc was raised on the fly rod because his father loved to fish trout, and Doc taught Father Himmelsbach how to use a fly rod on bass "instead of a derrick."

"Who else," Gene says at the Legion bar, "could convert a priest?"

The bass smashed the little poppers and fought furiously in "the lettuce fields," as Doc calls the slough. More than one fish wrapped itself around the ropelike lily-pad stems and broke itself off. Doc said he wanted only enough fillets to drop off for The

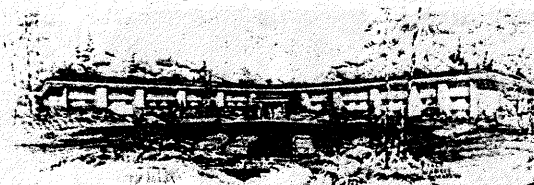
Continued



Gregg Klees

HERITAGE PLACE

Of Brookfield



RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Announces April & May special discounted rent on 900 sq. ft. 2 bedroom, 1½ bath apartments with completely equipped kitchen. Rent guaranteed for 12 months.

HERITAGE PLACE BOASTS:

- No Entrance Fees
- A Staff that cares and knows your name
- 24 hr. Security and Emergency Call System
- Affiliation with Woodland Health Center and A.M.S. Home Health service
- Tempting meals prepared daily in our own kitchen by CHEF TOM — optional
- Choose from Six apartment types
- Scheduled Transportation and Field Trips
- Heated underground parking available

Large enough for privacy — Small enough for friendship



Call for Personal Tour

782-1948

Mary Rogers — Marketing Director

17560 West North Avenue, Brookfield

**WE MAKE
WEIGHT LOSS
A FINAL
EVENT!!!**



Lose 20 lbs. by July 4th!

Guaranteed!

- Regular Normal Foods
- One-to-One Consultations
- Affordable Fees
- Easy, Safe, Effective

50% off all new programs.

Limited Time Offer

**Greenfield
281-8933**

**Brookfield
797-9666**



SKINNY-DIPPING

Widow Elvira on the way home.

The priest smiled. In all seasons, he has helped Doc fill the Widow Elvira's freezer with enough fish fillets, partridge and venison steaks to see her through another marriage, if she was so inclined. "And, of course," Father Himmelsbach has advised Doc on more than one provisioning trip, "she is so inclined."

"Inclined or reclined," Doc growls, "I am not about to marry again, and neither is she. We're just a couple of friends from the old days. God, on a date once, when I just came back from the Army, we started out for a movie and then just sat and talked and wound up skinny dipping."

"No wonder she married someone else," the priest said.

"You know, Joe," Doc said, "that's the funny part about growing old. Inside this ancient shell is that 21-year-old kid just rattling around in there like a beagle pup and, yet, here I am — *here we are* — like a couple of old geezers, hats down around our ears, shoes laced up tight. Hell! When was the last time either of us went skinny-dipping?"

THEY fished in silence for a long time. When they had enough, Father Himmelsbach rowed them into shore and, without a word, took off his shoes and his clothes and waded out into the lake. He dived, came up sputtering, then swam around while Doc started to fillet the bass. Doc always fillets the fish because, as he says, "Nobody else here went to med school."

The priest was huffing and puffing and sputtering out there and Doc kept up a running commentary as he cleaned the fish.

"Remember, Joe," he yelled, "hockey was your sport. You liked the water hard so you couldn't fall through it." And: "If you drown, can I do the last rites?" and "If you did this on Sunday,

Continued

The Peddler's Factory Authorized Sale Featuring Quality Wisconsin Built Furniture



COLONIAL STYLE GROUP

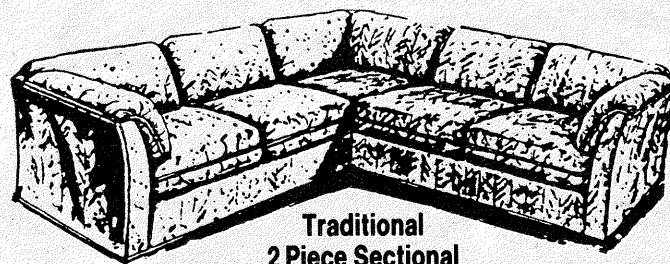
Includes: • Sofa • Loveseat • Chair

- Hardwood Frames
- Choice of Patterns
- Lifetime Frame Warranty

\$699

- Sleek and Stylish Looks
- Affordably Priced Quality Construction
- Hardwood Frame, Long Wearing Fabric
- Choice of Patterns

\$499



Traditional
2 Piece Sectional

**THE
PEDDLER**

10814 W. Janesville Rd.

Hwy. 24 (½ block west of Hwy. 100)

529-2151

Financing and Lay-Away Available

Open Mon., Thurs., Fri. 10-8:00; Tues., Wed. 10-5:30; Sat. 10-3; Sun. 1-3

LINENS LIMITED

Classic, Contemporary and Custom Linens
for the Dining Room, Bedroom and Bath



Gifts • Accessories • Sleepwear

Specialists in the laundering of table
linens and articles of fine fabric.

—Restoration Service Available—

Store:
333 W. Brown Deer Rd.
Bayside, WI 53217
(414) 351-9190

Laundry:
4411 N. Oakland Ave.
Shorewood, WI 53211
(414) 332-4434

THE PACKING HOUSE

PRIME RIB • STEAKS • RIBS • VEAL • FOWL • FRESH SEAFOOD

SUNDAY SPECIALS

- STEAMSHIP ROUND OF BEEF Au Jus
- BROILED COD ALMONDINE
- PORK LOIN ROAST WITH GRAVY
- BAKED CORNISH GAME HEN with Peach Glaze

\$795

Any of the above

All include: Soup or salad, choice of potato or wild rice mingle and vegetable..

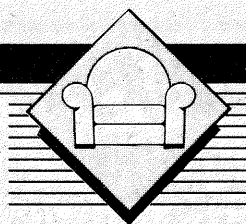
Serving 4-9

EVERY SUNDAY, WE WILL ROTATE AND SERVE TWO OF THE FOUR ENTREES ABOVE.

IT'S SUNDAY . . . TAKE SOMEONE TO DINNER . . .

CALL FOR RESERVATIONS

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| SOUTH (Airport) 900 E. Layton 483-5054 | RACINE Highway 20 886-9866 | NORTHWEST 76th and Good Hope 353-5544 |
|---|--|---|



SOMETIMES,
THE BEST ADS
FOR FURNITURE STORES
AREN'T WRITTEN
BY FURNITURE STORES:

*"Thank you for your patience,
understanding and kindness.
The furniture and rug are just
beautiful!"* — Cudahy

Steinhafele

BRINGS QUALITY HOME TO YOU

Quoted from unsolicited mail.
Three convenient locations

SKINNY-DIPPING

you could collect a lot of money. This is better than Bingo!"

When Doc finished with the fillets, he had to pull up the boat and load the car by himself because Father Himmelsbach still was trying to dry off in the late afternoon sun, now dipping below the pines. The priest was shivering, but he wasn't wheezing too badly.

"I should have brought a towel," he said.

"All you guys think God will provide," Doc said. "So you go off the deep end. Next time, we'll bring a couple."

"Well," the priest said, "when was the last time you went skinny dipping?"

"I think," Doc said, "I better sharpen up the fillet knives. If you don't get that hernia taken care of, you're going to need a creel to carry it around in."

When they stopped by at The Widow Elvira's, she just went on and on about the bass fillets and how "professional" they always looked. She put them in the freezer next to the venison steaks, which were equally "professional" looking. Then she took out two cans of lemonade because she knew that Gene wouldn't be caught dead serving lemonade at his precious American Legion bar — even if someone asked for it, which wasn't likely.

When they settled in around her kitchen table, she noticed that Father Himmelsbach's hair was wet.

"My," she said, "it looks as though he fell in."

"It does look that way," Doc said. "Doesn't it?"

"I didn't fall," Father Himmelsbach said. "I was pushed."

Doc raised his lemonade and they drank to that.

George Vukelich of Madison is author of the *North Country Notebook*, published last year. If you want to submit a fictional piece to *WISCONSIN*, send it to Fiction Network, P.O. Box 5651, San Francisco, Calif. 94101.

techline

studio
furniture and cabinetry systems

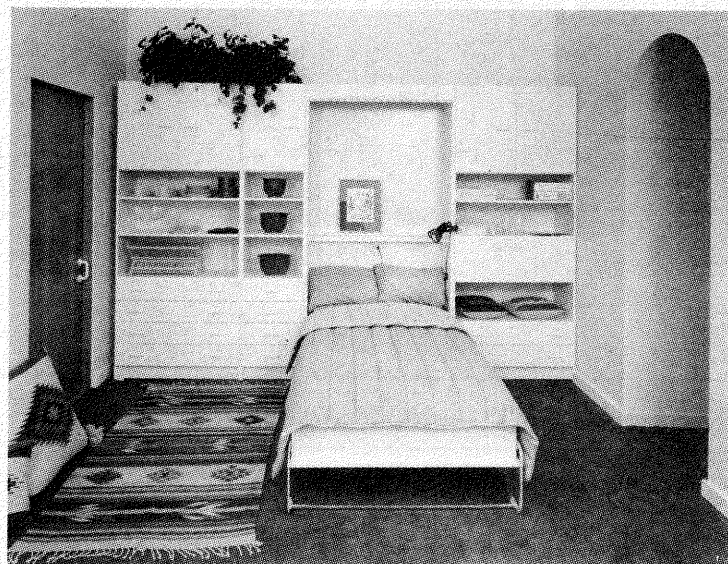
techline is at home

techline systems offer an exciting contemporary addition to your home. techline beds, dressers, desks, wall systems, kitchens and bathrooms are at home in every room.

Call for our complete catalog or visit one of our showrooms for some personalized design services.

milwaukee
414 **783-4933**
3585 north 124th st/brookfield

madison
608 **238-6868**
6333 w. university ave/middleton



techline is made in Wisconsin and . . .
techline is at home

M/F 10-5/Sat. 10-4/Sun. 12-4

SEARS
portrait studio

WE CAPTURE SMILES WORTH SHARING!

21-piece portrait package

A 10x13 Wall Portrait
plus 2-8x10s, 3-5x7s*
and 15 wallets
YOUR CHOICE of a
traditional, nursery,
spring, or fall background

21⁹⁵

includes \$2.00 deposit

THROUGH SATURDAY ONLY!
GOOD THROUGH MAY 7

Sears photographers put a personal touch into every portrait. They have the training, experience, and patience to capture that special look . . . for portraits you'll be proud to share! **Also available: Instant Color Passport Photos and Copy & Restoration.**

No appointment necessary. Use your Sears Credit Card or Discover Card! Adults & families welcome. Each additional person \$2.00 in addition to the package price. Poses our selection. White and Black Backgrounds, Double Feature and other Special Effects Portraits not available in advertised package. *Approximate size

Studio hours: Sun.: Store hours (where store is open);
Mon.-Sat.: Store opening until one hour prior to closing.



There's more for your life at
SEARS