

PLEASANTLY SITUATED: *Warner Lake contributes to magical childhood*

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Rice

"Good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life."

– MARK TWAIN, NOTEBOOK

Long before hiking trails and picnic shelters, the small lake and surrounding acres we have come to know as Warner has always been blessed with a lush landscape and robust ecological habitat.

Draining into Plum Creek, its waters meandered east to merge with the Mississippi River. Once the western part of the Father of Waters opened for settlement in the 1850s, settlers migrated west from the eastern part of the United States and Canada. George E. Warner was one such pioneer. A native of Quebec, Canada, he arrived in Minnesota in 1857.

He and his family lived and farmed this fertile land for more than 40 years and named the picturesque lake after him. Many years later, the Warner Lake I knew provided a perfect landscape for this imaginative child. Shortly after my sister Becky was born, our family moved to what was called the Abeln farm for the family of George and Anna Vesper Abeln, who owned the land for many years afterward. Here I enjoyed the sacraments of summer days.

The large yard provided a rich playground. White apple blossoms in spring and red fruit in fall canopied the front lawn where my brother and I played tag. Pink and white flowers burst from the plum and pear trees in the backyard. The yellow barn walls provided a prop for me to throw a softball near the peak of the roof and catch it with my brother's mitt. The side lawn sprawled out far enough for a game of softball. When friends or relatives came for a friendly meal-centered get-together, Dad, under the duress of Mother, who was tired of hearing kids ask when dinner was going to be ready, hollered "Batter Up!" as he stood on the mound and wound up for his slow pitch. We played, we hollered, we laughed until Mom

shouted, "Dinner's on!" Tall pines bordering our yellow-stucco house formed a playhouse where I dragged my dolls. Here I also pinned a lace curtain to my head, clumped together a bridal bouquet of clover and dandelions, and marched to "Here Comes the Bride." Out front, while Dad steadied the back of my bike, I learned to ride on the driveway that circled tiger lilies and bridal wreath.

Hardly a day went by that I didn't wander through the pasture to Plum Creek to see what was going on. While wading in the shallow, murky water below the rickety footbridge or building sandcastles on the sandy soil with my sister, beavers swam to their dens. On the east side of the bridge, carp wagged their golden tails as they escaped their artificial traps to make their way through the green waters toward the Mississippi. After reading the Little House books, I wondered if my Plum Creek, like Laura Ingalls's, had a dugout. I wandered the bluffs, searching for depressions to feed my imagination. Boldly, I pretended I could spot a black panther as Pa did in Little House in the Big Woods, yet I



Frank-Stupnik has fond memories of her time on the farm. She would toss and field softballs off the peak of the yellow barn with her brother's baseball mitt.