

Len's Stories

As told to Dolores Ullstrom over several interviews in September, 2018

During our first meeting it became clear, that Len Nadasdy loves to tell stories. He is not only good at storytelling, he has an interesting story to tell.

Len was born in Brookings, South Dakota; his father was buyer for a wool growers' co-op. The co-op eventually became the largest rural marketing organization in the country. At the time, raising sheep in Minnesota and surrounding states was a thriving business. In 1945 the Nadasdy family moved to Golden Valley. Len was sixteen years old. He cannot forget the year because of two memorable events. The first was Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945, which he celebrated in Brookings with a day off school. The second was Victory in Japan Day, Aug. 14, 1945 which he celebrated in his new home with merry makers in downtown Minneapolis. Golden Valley did not have a high school at the time, and so Len attended St. Louis Park High. His bus stop was located on Hwy 100, a long walk from home. His parents grew tired of driving him to and from the bus stop. So, his dad, Carl, brought him a slightly used 1947 Dodge car for \$700. Back then, cars were not common with teenagers and Len's was the only student car in the school parking lot! Carl Nadasdy eventually became Mayor of Golden Valley and served for twelve years.

In 1948, Len entered the Univ. of MN and majored in History and Political Science. He recalls that tuition and fees for one quarter was \$46. Early on, Len joined College Republicans. They shared an office with the College Democrats. One day he met an impressive student named Walter Mondale. It was clear to everyone that Walt had a bright future in politics. Len learned that he was a Republican at the tender age of six years. Someone had pinned a "Roosevelt for President" button on his shirt. Upon seeing it, his dad removed it and while explaining the political facts of life, replaced it with a "Landon for President" button.

A major life changing college experience for Len was suggesting, organizing and leading students at the "U" in a mock political convention, a relatively rare occurrence on college campuses. It was a successful event, and Len's name and fame spread within the National Republican Party.

ROTC (Reserved Officers' Training Corps) was mandatory for male freshman and sophomores at the "U". One hour ROTC classes were held three times a week at the armory on campus. On those days students were required to wear their military uniform to classes. The Korean War broke out in 1950. Len signed up for two more years of ROTC to delay being drafted until after graduation. After graduation and before he went to ROTC boot camp, Len was asked to come to Chicago and assist with the presidential nominating convention for Dwight Eisenhower. If you can get Len talking, he can fill you in on some interesting details. As a result of this effort, Len's reputation for political acumen took a giant leap forward. After boot camp at Fort Lee in Petersburg, Virginia, an experience he did not particularly enjoy, Len was sent to Fort Jay which is located on Governors Island in New York harbor. In spite of the heavy work load, Len liked his job as

Special Services and Public Information Officer. One of his responsibilities was to defend soldiers up for court martial. This, in spite of the fact, he had no legal training. Len liked the fact that Fort Jay had on its grounds structures built in the early 19th century. The British Governor lived in one of them, thus the island's name. Three structures were Civil War forts. All of this was gold to a history major fresh out of college.



Soon after arriving at Fort Jay, Len received an elaborate hand decorated invitation to Eisenhower's inauguration. Assuming he was not going to be allowed to go, he showed the imposing invitation to his commanding officer. There was no doubt in the officer's mind that Len must attend the event. In Washington DC, Len met up with friends, attended several events, and had a great time. Sixty-six years later, he proudly states that the invitation is still in his possession. Len is also proud to say that he has personally met five presidents, Eisenhower, Nixon, Gerald Ford, George H. W. Bush, and Lyndon Johnson.

Photo at left: Len with Ike in 1963, below with Richard Nixon

At this point I was curious. So I asked Len a question about his own political ambition. He has, he says, never had any interest in running for political office. However, he has never tired of working on political campaigns. In 1961 Len was elected chairman of the National Young Republicans for a two year term.



After serving two years in the Army, the Korean War was over. At 23 years of age, Len was discharged and looking for a job. He was asked to help out C. Elmer Anderson's gubernatorial campaign. His suggestion that Anderson travel the state in a helicopter was thought to be original and effective in spite of the fact that Anderson lost the election. Through the years Len continued to be politically active. He once entertained Governor Quie at his Lake Sarah home. Len worked as a newspaper ad salesman, in public relations at North Central Wool Marketing, and in various public relations jobs at General Mills. He was also a trade magazine editor, and President of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. For twelve years he served on the Minnesota Arts Board, including two years as chairman.

In 1967 Len bought his lot on Lake Sarah. He was living in Plymouth but wanted a lake place. It was hard to get a look at Lake Sarah itself because it was surrounded by farms and roads were few. He rented a boat at Shady Beach Resort and started looking. When he saw a beautiful sandy beach on a piece of property in the east basin owned by Madge Beamish, his search ended. He brought his dad to look the property over. After driving on a rough trail and walking in tall grass to get to the site, his dad asked him why he wanted to live in such a God forsaken place, no neighbors, no roads. After climbing the hill and looking down on the lake, he understood. He helped Len finance the \$10,000 cost of the lot. Three years later Len bought the lot next door for \$15,000. Howie and Madge Beamish had purchased the farm of Irene Klaers, widow of Frank around 1955.

A brief history of the area: Hennepin County was organized in 1852, after which settlement began. The property on which Len's home sits, had been in three generations of the Klaers family. Joseph Klaers (1826-1904) emigrated from Germany and acquired it in 1857. His son Theodore (1859-1943) owned it next. His son Frank was the last Klaers to own the property. Theodore is the great-grandfather of Randy Klaers who currently owns the farm on the south side of Sarah. The road off Hwy 55 to the Beamish property is suitably named Klaers Drive. Howie, who intended to develop the lake shore also owned The Silver Dollar Salon east of Cty 19. To advertise his lake lots and to entice perspective customers, Howie had a 4'x8' sign erected on Hwy 55. On the sign, which stayed in place for several years, he named his development Pirates' Cove, a name which never took hold. Klaers Drive in its more primitive days was the "trail" Len and his dad drove down to see the property.

After the lake shore was developed, Howie began a second addition of development. This consisted of dredging a channel through a wet land thereby increasing the number of lots for sale with lake access. The drag line which dug the channel did so from a bit of land in the middle of the channel. That little piece of ground remains in place today and is called Todd Island, named in honor of Howie's youngest son. Residents say the island is a mini rookery used by geese, cranes and blue herons.

At the time, Beamishes were developing their land, there were few city ordinances to regulate development. Howie Beamish died of a heart attack in 1968. His family believes that the stress of development including a law suit with the channel excavator contributed to his early death.

In 1967, Lake Sarah Heights Drive was a gravel road interrupted by a wetland with a creek flowing through it. To this day the Loretto Post Office delivers mail on the east end and Rockford Post Office on the west. School children living on the Rockford side, but enrolled in Delano schools, had to wear boots to walk through the wet area on their way to their bus stop. The kids took off their boots and stashed them behind a tree. There the boots waited until the children returned from school. Some children would, on nice days, row across the lake to Shady Beach and catch the Delano bus from there. Neighbors eventually grew tired of this situation and saw no solution in sight. Bukowski and Beamish had come to an impasse over who would pay to complete the road. Neighbors decided to take matters into their own hands. One of them, employed at Tri-State, got his hands on a culvert. The group set about putting it in place. A flare of

tempers ensued and the Mayor of Independence, Harry Poole, was called. Seeing the importance of the road and frustrated by the feuding parties, he arranged to have the City of Independence complete the project. The newly completed road was adequate but just barely. In spring, it was deeply rutted and very muddy. Residents once again took matters into their own hands and originated a petition drive in which they agreed to cover the cost of improvements. In the early 1980's Lake Sarah Heights Drive was improved and blacktopped. It was the first city managed road in Independence to be blacktopped.

On Len's newly acquired property, there was a small shack (which still exists as the boat house named Camelot Landing) from which over the years, fishing boats were rented. This was typical. Farms with lake shore often had a cabin or two and a few boats to rent out. It is said that on summer Sunday mornings all rented boats were on the water by 6 a.m. Lake Sarah was a very popular and well known pan fish lake. Treats were also sold out of the shack. Because there was no electricity to the building, beverages were kept cold with ice purchased from the Mielke family who lived on the west end of the lake. Len heard but it's never been confirmed that one winter, in another shack on his property, a man's frozen body was found.



Over the next several years, Len himself worked on the design of his new home. In 1971 the house was built. It has an impressive 35 foot ceiling in the living room overlooking the lake. He got that design idea, he says, from sitting in the balcony of Mount Olivet Lutheran Church in Mpls. Some years later an addition was built on the house in order to increase living space for people who would, over the years, come to live with Len.



After spending a glorious afternoon at the lake, a friend suggested to Len that he call his place “Camelot”. The name stuck. Len has a welcoming style and loves giving opportunities to others, especially youth. Len has mentored several individuals. In fact, there are two young men who he took under his wing who now call him “Dad”. He put one of them through the U of MN. This man, who majored in Chemical Engineering, is currently a very successful business man in China. He gives Len all the credit for his success. A few years back I learned that Len hosted three local high schoolers, including my son-in-law, Joe Tabery, on a memorable vacation trip to Washington D.C.

With nostalgia, Len recalls the two resorts that were on the lake when he moved in, Wally’s and Shady Beach. The latter, as a convenience, sold gas for boats. He fondly remembers the many warm Saturday evenings when live music from Shady Beach serenaded everyone on the lake. The music was often from one of many wedding receptions held at the resort over the years.

In winter, many snowmobile trails stopped at Shady Beach Resort. As snowmobiles lined up outside, their owners were inside visiting and enjoying a beer. Len says the lake community was cordial and neighborly in those days. Neighbors spent time together. He remembers helping to host progressive dinners. He provided the hors d’oeuvre course and then jumped into his boat and headed for the house hosting the next course.

Len loves to travel the world. He has memories and, he says, too many photo albums, of the more than 130 countries he has visited around the globe.

Len has health problems now and has trouble getting around. He no longer drives. A recent planned trip to China had to be cancelled. Lee, one of his “sons”, has moved into the house to help out. He has made the house more accessible and safer for Len. It is once again his Camelot. Members of his lake Sarah community wish Len the very best. His dedicated service to the Lake Association including his most recent position as President of the LSIA (2008-2010) is greatly appreciated.



A few people have helped me with historical facts and I would like to thank them for their contributions to this piece. They are Jan Daly, Mayor Marvin Johnson, Gene Berthieaume, Jack Leddy, Todd Beamish, Brad Spencer and especially Brian VanBeusekom.

Dolores Ullstrom with Len Nadasdy in January 2019