

## #45 – Ginger Payne - [Back to Book 3](#)

My husband, Chris, encouraged me to write a chapter for this book as well, since he only had 17 years at our beloved Belvedere before I started coming yearly over 50 years ago. Our courting years were most special at the Belvedere, while we ran Big Gang together from 1971-1975. Our last year as Gang leaders we were married and thus made great chaperones!

I first arrived at the Belvedere on Labor Day weekend in 1969. I immediately fell in love with the environs. It was a warm weekend, so Chris and I spent time at the beach. While at the beach, Mike Meyer was the first Belvedere person I met outside of Chris' family. He was warm and friendly, and I felt welcomed. Later that weekend, we found a jelly jar on the beach and Chris found some paper and a pencil in the lifeguard shack, so he put a note in the bottle stating his love for me and threw it out as far as he could into Lake Charlevoix. To our incredible surprise, 25 years later, we got a call out of the blue from Chris' mom. She asked, "Chris, did you ever put a note in a bottle at the beach?" Mike Meyer's son, Nicholas, and a friend were "digging to China" in the sand that day at the Belvedere beach and they dug up that very same bottle from deep in the sand. It still was intact. Amazing that Mike was the first person from the Belvedere I met in 1969, and that it was his son who dug up that bottle 25 years later! We had the jar with the note in the cottage for many years after that, but it disappeared during the cottage renovation in 2016. We hope it reappears once again someday. Maybe I need to ask Nick or his sister, Brooke to look for it!

The summer of 1970, I was invited to #45 to spend two weeks. Chris' parents were so very gracious in accepting me into their family from the very beginning. Jane and Ken Payne become true second parents to me, a relationship I have always cherished.

During my two weeks in July of 1970, it was "prime time" at the Belvedere. I had the opportunity to meet many people. Everyone seemed so friendly and welcoming. It was not until a couple years later that I realized I had been "under scrutiny". Good friends later informed me of this. I was so very thankful that I "passed"!

Our summers running Big Gang were glorious! Because of the lower size of the Gangs when we began leading, we combined the Boys' and Girls' Gangs and

formed Big Gang, which has continued to this day. Our days were so full of tennis, golf, swimming, sailing, archery, playing Capture the Flag in the lawn by the Casino, arts and crafts, dodge ball in the Casino and one or two overnights both July and August.

Our Gang kids will remember some crazy overnights, like when there was a deluge of rain all night in Grayling, where we had gone to purchase archery equipment from the Fred Baer Company for the Gangs. We camped in Hartwick Pines State Park, but had no tents. The girls ended up sleeping in the cars while the only shelter available to the boys were the restrooms! We finally bailed out before dawn and headed back to the Club, with stories to tell.

After another rainy overnight, Chris came up with the idea of stringing a big tarp over a line strung between several trees to keep us warm and dry. He fastened the corners by wrapping the tarp around tennis balls and holding them with shower curtain hooks. It was a wonderful improvement! On one such occasion, with the tarp already hung at a new campsite in the Jordon River Valley, we had settled down by the fire to tell ghost stories. We and the other older chaperones became a little alarmed by the noises of crackling dry leaves we heard coming toward us from outside our campsite. Without trying to alarm the kids, we climbed into our various vehicles, leaving Chris and John Fox and some of the braver kids on the hoods of our vehicles shining out big, bright flashlights at the oncoming noises and holding big sticks to use as clubs. Every time the flashlights and headlights went on, the noises stopped. When the lights went off, the noises started again. Bear in mind, we were in the middle of nowhere, so our imaginations were running wild. Long story short, our menacing intruders turned out to be a pair of toads travelling around the area leapfrog style on dry leaves. The sound was much louder than you might imagine. To a vivid imagination it sounded like an animal (possibly rabid!) jogging towards us! We laughed about that one for a long time!

I have such fond memories of those Gang summers. I fell in love with my Gang girls, as well as the boys. I've never let Susie Reese LeRoy forget about when our sailboat capsized and turtled after a line squall passed overhead, that she unknowingly sat on top of my head while I was trying to untangle the mainsheet wrapped around me underwater and get some air. She, of course, had no idea she

was sitting on my head, but I did have my life flash before my eyes for a moment. Those girls were my “first children”.

The years went by and our girls, Katie (Kat) and Kristy became Gang kids and enjoyed many of the wonderful times our Gang kids had experienced. Their leaders were special as well. Many of those summers, we spent many weeks at the Belvedere. Kristy’s son, Connor, experienced his first Gang summer in Tots Gang during the infamous summer of 2020 with the record high water and the COVID-19 epidemic. What a great job Pete Scholten and the Gang leaders did adapting to that challenging summer!

Chris and I experienced a sad hiatus of many years from prime time at the Belvedere, due to severe allergies to mold that I developed. We still tried to go every year at the end of the summer for Jane’s birthday, but often had to stay off the Belvedere due to the mold at #45.

It has been such a joy for us to be able to renovate #45 and rid the cottage of the sources of mold. Our last several summers there have been heavenly. Dear friendships have been rekindled and new friendships made. With Chris’ retirement, we now are spending almost half the year on the Belvedere. We feel like we have come back home!