

Kurt Ullrich, Telegraph Herald

LAKE DELHI, Iowa - On July 4, 1954, 20-year-old Jean and her 18-year-old boyfriend Mike, both of Dubuque, enjoyed a perfect summer day at Wild Freddy's, an idyllic spot with a pristine beach on the shores of a man-made, 450-acre lake called Lake Delhi. Soon, they married, became Mr. and Mrs. Vance, and purchased property for a small summer place near Freddy's in what was then called Clair View Acres. More than a half-century later Jean, 77, and Mike, 75, are still there, a little older, still very much in love, and vocal, energetic proponents of replacing the 1920s-era Lake Delhi dam. On July 24, 2010, torrential rains caused the dam to fail, sending millions of gallons of water cascading downstream, effectively, and quickly emptying the lake. A body of water once churning with pleasure boats, fishing boats, canoes, inner tubes, and people, always people, is now a rather pathetic Maquoketa River, a river that, on the best of days, looks as if one could simply wade across it. What were once boat docks have taken on the appearance of skeletal remains of ancient dinosaurs, still preserved, hanging from the edges of overgrown hillsides overlooking the water. For the property owners and residents who live there, either year-round or in summer, there is no question that the dam needs to be rebuilt, however, like most things in life, there is a huge cost. "If we don't get any help from anybody, I don't know what's going to happen," lamented Jean, a petit woman who willingly plays the part of a human time machine and tour guide. "We've raised \$1.2 million, but we need to raise \$2.5 million to get any help." A month after the dam broke, the Federal Emergency Management Agency turned down a request for help. Just last month Gov. Terry Branstad, vetoed language in a bill that would have made \$5 million available to rebuild the dam, saying that such a promise of money was premature without a study being undertaken first. The state did approve \$350,000 for a study, and the FEMA ruling is on appeal. Jean walked through the tall grass of a yard upon which sits a cozy cabin right out of a magazine, knotty pine paneling visible through a screened porch. "Fred and Dorothy Thomas built this cabin in 1949," she said, moving quickly toward what used to be the banks of the river. "People hardly bother to come back to do their grass or anything, because there is no fishing, no boating. There's no swimming, no tubing. There's just nothing." These days Clair View Acres is called, simply, Freddy's Beach. After Freddy and Dorothy built their cabin, they established a recreational spot just around a bend of the lake, complete with a shower building, a little store with all the essentials in life, like candy and soda pop, and a beach, complete with a swimming dock, sand volleyball courts and a trampoline. For children out in the world, perhaps feeling it for the first time, Freddy's Beach was heaven. "Fred had a fun place for everybody in the world," Jean said, smiling broadly at the thought. "We played checkers in the store when we weren't swimming. My son bought the table with the board painted on it when Freddy's closed." Mike's memories of Freddy's Beach are a touchstone of comfort to him. "We used to have campfires every night," he said, painting a picture of a time when firelight danced in reflection on the lake, "And we'd all, maybe 20 of us who lived out here, sit around and solve the world's problems. At one time this was the busiest body of water in Iowa." There is no sound off a lake now: no boat motors, no children laughing, no summer dogs yapping at their masters from a

beach. These days the loudest sounds belong to choruses of cicadas and, at night, tree frogs. Jean may have said it best. "It's such a mess and, no, it's not much of a river." Freddy's Beach on a midsummer afternoon was once a good thing. Above the penny candy containers on the counter in Freddy Thomas' store he once displayed photos of life on his beach. Maybe you're the tall brunette with the Miss America smile, waving a small American flag, the one Freddy gave you when you joined the other girls on the Bikini Walk some long-ago Fourth of July. Or perhaps that was you sitting on the beach, away from mom and dad, your arms behind you, palms in the sand, feeling beautiful, adult. Or maybe that photo near the door is you, disproving Whitman's thoughts on loss, wearing wraparounds while jumping on a trampoline, hoping the girls notice, power boats blurry in the background.