

Andrea Barthello

From: John Ritchie <ritchiejohn115@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, July 28, 2016 12:03 PM
To: Gillian Ruffa; Kath Roberts; sam Ritchie; Mike Ritchie (External); Rachel Ritchie; Alexander Ritchie
Cc: Bill Ritchie; Lynn Ritchie
Subject: Pocono Future

Gill, Kath, Sam, Mike, Rachel, Allie--

Bill and Lynn and I got talking over the past couple of weeks about the future of the Pocono house, and how it would be good to get you all thinking about this issue, and at some point, to get you all talking to each other. Nothing is about to happen, and there's no special urgency about this, but as they say, sooner than you think it will be later than you thought, so it's probably a good idea for you to begin to figure out what your feelings, questions, and concerns are.

It's easy, of course, to say "you should start talking about this," but given how rarely you're together, along with the fact that the Ritchies have a decades-long legacy and ability to avoid important conversations, I thought it might help to provide a brief summary of where we stand now, how we got here, and the kinds of questions or decisions that will at some point have to be faced.

During our lifetimes, ownership of the camp was split among the three McGee girls, Frances, Kay, and Jean, with Frances acting as the Member (more later). As they became older, they became very worried about passing ownership on to our generation, because they feared that they'd be passing on the potential for squabbles, difficulties, inequalities, and resentments. So they agreed that when one of them died, or one of them wanted out, they'd simply sell the house.

We persuaded Mom to rethink this and let us give it a shot at taking over, which she did, though we think this sadly caused a rift between her and Frances—who definitely wanted out, and I think felt aggrieved that the agreement hadn't been kept to. In any event, the practical problem was solved when Dennis bought out Frances, effectively giving the Ritchies a two thirds share, and Kay's family—which now consists of Kitty, Liza, Peter, and Kate, Sandy having died, and Mary having been bought out by their group—a one third share. We've maintained a policy of not being involved in how they split their ownership stake up, as long as they continue to pay their one third of expenses, which they certainly have. But, for example, we didn't have to approve or participate in Mary's being bought out.

What we really have is a leasehold for our two lots from the Pocono Lake Preserve, whose Members, collectively, own the entire Preserve. PLP requires that someone from each leasehold be a Member, approved by the Board, who's nominally responsible for all payments, dues, obligations. Beyond that, they don't care about, and in fact don't want to know about, what arrangements families make among themselves. So Dennis buying out Frances wasn't something that involved PLP at all.

Despite the McGee girls' fears, we think we've all done a remarkable job with our joint ownership, and have succeeded in something many, many other families around the lake haven't been able to. A number of camps have been sold because things just got too complicated, or because problems and bad feelings developed, or because some family member didn't come any more, and wanted money rather than part ownership of a camp, and selling became the only option.

Over the years, Bill, Lynn, and I have done a really good job cooperating, sharing, keeping things smooth with Kitty's group, and overseeing dramatic improvements, but we've had to work through occasional misunderstandings, disagreements, and differences of opinion which are inevitable when a group is trying to maintain a cherished place with a rich history, and established ways of doing things. In truth, our path was made immeasurably easier by the presence of, and legacy of, Dennis.

More than ten years ago, with the assistance of a guy named Chris Gadsden (lawyer and PLP member), we drew up a Family Agreement, signed by all owners, that specified ownership shares, and laid out basic agreements about how the place would be used, protocols for collecting money and paying bills, etc.

Most importantly, it defined the process to be used if any individual or family wants out. In essence, the person could see first if anyone within the individual family (for example, Kitty et al) wants to buy the person's share. If not, the share is offered to the larger group, though only people with "McGee Blood" could be buyers. If no one wants to buy the available share, the person who wanted to sell simply stops having to contribute to the camp's expenses. In other words, a sale cannot be forced. If the camp were eventually to be sold, anyone who has left the group would be compensated with the value of their share at the time of their leaving.

It would be a good idea for you all to read this Family Agreement, for it contains more details and specifics than I've included here. It also needs to be updated to reflect the current ownership percentages, which changed of course when Lynn, Bill, and I inherited Dennis's shares.

We often speculate about what plans Kitty, Liza, Peter, and Kate have, and how much longer they'll want to continue participating. When Allie asked Peter a couple of weeks ago whether they've discussed this, he said they hadn't. To all of us, I think, one of the central values of the place has been keeping families together, and maintaining a nearly hundred year McGee presence at Pocono Lake, so I, for one, hope that this unusually successful family arrangement can continue.

So what's ahead, though it may be a ways off, is in your hands. One of the advantages you have, in some ways, is that there are two of you in each family, which makes for a sort of built in balance when it comes to potential ownership, scheduling, sharing.

This note, as I said, is intended to get some sort of ball rolling, because eventually the ball is going to roll into the future, and our balls will have rolled off the court. Or just deflated. So ponder away, and discuss away.