

A Memory Too Good Not To Retell

By Owen Secoy

My son Michael growing up was an energetic, red haired lad very active as most young boys are. He loved team sports and all outdoor activities. Keeping him active and involved was a joy and a bit of a challenge.

One day, when Michael was seven years old, we were enjoying a little bank fishing on a nearby creek. I began sharing with him some of my childhood memories about wilderness canoe trips taken with my older brother. He hung on every word as I shared my fond memories of canoeing, camping and fishing lakes up north. I could see his seven year old brain muscles working trying to put images to the word pictures that I was sharing with him. Sure enough, the question came. "Dad, when are you going to take me fishing in the wilderness?"

What a great idea. I didn't tell him that that was exactly what I had had in mind for a long time. I managed to hide my obvious pleasure at the thought of getting to share a wilderness canoe trip with my son. I suggested that as soon as he learned to swim we would plan a trip. That didn't pose much of a problem for a creative seven year old. He easily talked his mother into finding a place for him to take swimming lessons. Swimming came as easy as a "walk in the park" for Michael. And true to my word, active canoe trip planning began with Michael interested in every little detail.

The next summer we outfitted ourselves with equipment mostly borrowed from my brother. Gear included tent, packs, sleeping gear, cooking utensils, 16' Grumman aluminum canoe, etc. With the route planned, gear assembled and permit in hand we headed north.

Michael's first trip would take us into one of the areas that I had been in as a youth and would give him an opportunity to experience some of the lakes, portages and forest that he had heard me share about. The route involved seven lakes, four portages and a couple of lift-overs to get us to a good smallmouth bass lake where we planned to basecamp. Michael proved his worth as "pack mule" even at the young age of eight. It took us about four and a half hours of paddling and portaging to get to our basecamp lake and soon had camp set up.

The weather was great and the smallie fishing was good. There isn't anything I know of that will get a kid hooked on fishing better than a day on a good smallmouth lake. The action was nonstop and a thrill for both of us. Smallie fishing is my favorite, but I got to thinking that since he was enjoying the smallmouth's tenacity so much he might enjoy the thrill of hooking and landing a northern pike.

The lake we were camped on did not have any northerns so one day we gathered our fishing gear and carried the canoe across a short portage to a large pond that I knew from previous trips held some good sized northerns.

I put a red and white Daredevil Spoon on Michael's line and paddled him round and round that pond trolling parallel the weed line. Nothing happened, not a single strike. That was

disappointing to say the least. Finding northerns and getting them to strike is usually not that difficult. So I changed strategy and moved the canoe out into deeper water. We cast out the lures, counted them down to get them deeper and then used a fast, steady retrieve.

On my first cast I had a good solid strike, fish on! Michael quickly reeled in his line and settled down to watch the show. It was a nice fish, in the 30" to 35" range that put together a number of long runs. This gave me a chance to explain to Michael some of the subtle differences in landing a northern compared to a smallie. Everything went according to plan until the northern, seemingly tiring, allowed me to bring him alongside the canoe. It was then that it dawned on me, "how dumb, I forgot to bring a landing net." Okay, not to worry but I didn't want to look foolish in front of my young spectator that was watching my every move.

I had landed numerous northerns without a landing net but never one of this size. I had seen other anglers simply (at least it looked simple) run their hand under the belly of a fish and lift it into the canoe. This plan seemed reasonable and doable so I shared my plan with my engrossed spectator.

The northern seemed sufficiently tired from long runs and line pressure and allowed me again to bring him alongside the canoe. As planned, I reached over the gunnel, down into the water and alongside the fish. The instant that I touched him that fish shot straight up in the air, at least three feet high, thrusting its huge head back and forth and came crashing down in the middle of the canoe.

The unexpected leap caught us completely by surprise. The fish was frantically thrashing around in the bottom of the canoe. Equipment, paddles, tackle boxes were all being knocked about in the bottom of an aluminum canoe, it made for quite a noisy and unsettling commotion.

I looked at Michael; his eyes were as big as saucers and riveted on the thrashing northern. He had one foot on the bottom of the canoe and one on the edge of his seat backing away and ready to abandon ship if that creature got any closer. I had to bite my cheek to stifle the belly laugh that was trying to get out.

By sliding down onto my knees and lying across the center thwart I was able to quickly grasp the northern, get a stringer through its lip and get it back in the water. With this accomplished, Michael settled back into his seat, his countenance returned and a big grin crossed his face.

We paddled to shore to take a few snapshots and then released the northern. He had earned his freedom and had provided us with a great memory. Back at camp watching and listening to Michael share the episode with the rest of the group was almost as exciting and fun as it had been to catch the northern.

It was sad, in one respect, that Michael had not been the one to hook and land that northern. On the other hand, if he had I don't think the retelling of the memory would be nearly as much fun as it is this way. It doesn't matter how many times I tell the story or

replay it in my mind, I still have that belly laugh well up, but no longer have to hold it in.

Some memories are too good not to retell. I am so thankful that we are blessed to have the ability to lock away memorable moments and to be able to retell, relive and enjoy them over and over again. Thank you Michael for being part of that one.

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