

Fishing Story

By Billy Rutter

Walking alongside the river, rod in hand, I am reminded both why I hate fishing and charmed by the allure of it. It's funny how relevant fishing is to the day-to-day complications of life. I've never been much of a fisherman. The woes of wasting the day chasing hidden aquatic creatures and untangling fishing line from trees, weeds, and occasionally removing a metal barb from my flesh seem to chase away any interest each time I try my hand at it. One thing good I have to say about it is that it is sure nice to be in an ears distance of the water flowing over the stones that seem to have been tossed in the way by the mountains that overlook the winding canyon.

Hopping from log to hollow log, some of my fondest childhood memories replay in my mind. I learned so many things about the world on those weekend fishing trips and random excursions to the lake. Not about the fast-paced, traffic ridden world speeding by on the overpass above, but the peaceful, unexplored world of mystery hiding beneath unturned stones and inside the earthy burrows scattered along the riverbank. Watching the spiders scuttle to safety in fear of the giant foot that could squash their brains out brought memories of marching through the tall grass at the lakes edge hoping a snake wouldn't bite my toes off, or that a bear wouldn't mistake me for its lunch. There were so many new and odd creatures to discover and adventures to have. What happened to those days?

I pushed my way through the brush and spring saplings to a small clearing in search of the perfect fishing hole, whatever and wherever that was, and it occurred to me, those days didn't change...I changed.

It's been a while since I've spoken to my father. With my heart set and my hopes high on hooking something I could bring home to eat, or at least use to cook up an exaggerated fishing tale with, my thoughts turned to him... something I have avoided lately. For that moment in time I felt a connection with him that was free of the routine guilt trip and inadequacies that often occlude my conscience. A familiar dialogue replayed in my mind as it had done practically every time I have ever gone fishing. In a subdued, but hopeful tone I asked him to please just help me catch one fish, just one is all I'd ask, though I secretly hoped for more; I mean, after all, if I am going to spend all day untangling fishing line and hooking myself I should want it to be as exciting as possible, right?

I heard a voice that I hadn't heard for some time, the voice of the child within me, almost begging God to place a fish at the end of my hook. It was a tender, yet somber moment. A solemn reminder of the

many nights I spent on my knees hoping he was listening. I have heard the same voice over the years pleading for forgiveness, for love, and for help. In my innocence I prayed for his hand to guide me to my love, to mend my broken heart, and to lift me above the weaknesses that seemingly dammed my ability to progress further in relationships that I had invested so much in and so desperately, and perhaps naively wanted to last. Again I felt the disappointment. Somewhat annoyed with myself for repeating the childish soliloquy I silenced the boy and peered into his widened eyes. It was then that I realized that this child is still just learning.

With every broken heart and every tear I've cried I have learned valuable, though at times numbing, nevertheless, important lessons that have made me a strong person and prepared me for the challenges that lie ahead. I've learned to identify and avoid the snakes in the grass, to be alert and have compassion for others who might get squashed along the way, and most importantly to laugh and enjoy the little wonders and the giant footed people in my life. Isn't that what life is all about?

I may not catch any fish today, but I found again, if for only an instant, a part of myself that has been tucked away for far too long and for few good reasons.

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