

Best Fish Story Ever

I am not given to forwarding items and rarely do so, but this one is priceless. The author is a personal friend and gave me permission to send it to whomever I think might enjoy it. The family visited yesterday and we got a firsthand account of the saga, but this narrative is just as good as the in-person delivery.

Frenchy Sends With Warm Regards

Rods Worth Diving For

by Ryan Peterson
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“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4

The annual family trip to the canoe country wilderness this year included not only my wife, daughter and son as is the usual, but also my niece and nephew of similar tweenage vintage. We spent four days on an anonymous way-back-in-there lake fishing and swimming, eating and napping and all the while swatting mosquitoes and enjoying each other's company.

“Rain before seven, sun by eleven” is a piece of weather sagacity passed down through generations of my family and it proved to be roughly correct again on the third day of the trip as gentle thunderstorms kept us pinned down reading books and playing cribbage until after lunch. When the sun arrived it set about making up for lost time and the temperature soared as we set out to “the scene of the crime”, a mid-lake hump that rises out of forty feet of water to near nothing attracting fish of all sorts and therefore anglers hardy enough to make the trip.

In two separate canoes we thrashed the water with all manner of artificial fish food and achieved enough success to begin talking about returning to camp for a swim in the midafternoon. Then my son hooked and landed a fifteen-inch smallmouth in the front of my canoe just behind his sister who agreeably reeled in her lure and set the rod aside to clear the way for the fight. The fish, while a whopper in most places, was nothing special on that day and in that place so it was promptly unhooked and unceremoniously returned to the lake. At that same moment, a more substantial smallmouth rushed out of the depths and grabbed the lure attached to my daughter's pole and pulled the entire rig into the lake.

Through her shrieks and laughter it took me a long moment to realize what had even happened, but when I did the question leapt from my mouth, “Was it a St. Croix?”

“Yes! It was Mom's!” came the reply. St. Croix rods are advertised as “The Best Rods on Earth”. They are handmade right in our home state of Wisconsin and, while pricey, we have been working to convert our entire stock of fishing rods to St. Croix for the past few years. The rod and reel that had just been deep-sixed by that sea monster represented a significant amount of money - and it was Mom's.

There was a flash of hope when the fool fish leapt out of the water and nearly into our boat moments later. In the ensuing minutes the fish continued to jump - still hooked - but each time further from us as it headed

for deeper water. We gave pursuit. The uncommonly clear lake water fostered hope that we may be able to see the fish or rod, and make a bold recovery. All hands on deck were employed in vain attempts to cast their treble-hooked baits out in hope of snagging some part of the conglomeration.

We were in twelve to fifteen feet of water just at the point where one can no longer make out the bottom of the lake when I saw it. Just barely discernible was the bright cork grip of Momma's rod on the bed of the lake just below us. I scrambled to strip off my boots and most of my clothing while barking orders to keep visual contact and maintain our position to three stunned middle schoolers. I was too cautious, too slow. By the time I jumped out of the back of the giant canoe we had either drifted too far off or the rod had been pulled away. I didn't know which but it didn't really matter. It was gone.

I had seen it. There was hope. The boats spent the next half-hour executing intricate search and recovery patterns all over several acres of lake. I swam the surface wanting for a snorkel but diligently searching. It was hot - that special sweltering heat of a still July afternoon following rain. We had seen nothing to refresh our hope in over a half-hour. My wife and I looked at each other and decided to call it quits. I climbed back into the stern of the big canoe and we set a heading for camp. Then it jumped again. No one saw the fish but we all heard it and the splash was a beacon. Could that still be our fish? Why would a fish that big be leaping in the middle of the lake during the hottest part of the day? Go!

The children put their backs into the effort and we closed the sixty yards to the splash before the last of the ripples entirely died away. I ordered all paddles held steady as I stood in the stern of the canoe to better see through the surface glare. There was a long pregnant silence as we each strained to see anything. "There it is!" I gasped on my way overboard in an instant.

No delay this time. I hit the water, took a deep breath and dove immediately to the bottom in fifteen feet of water. I blew all of the air out of my lungs to aid in the sinking and opened my eyes wide searching for that cork grip. Just as the pain my eardrums had me thinking of turning back I saw the rod handle and it was slowly moving away from me. With a surge I pushed forward and closed my fingers in a death grip around the cork and then turned for the surface. The rod broke the surface first in a triumphant fist moments later. It was only then that I realized that the fish wasn't planning on giving it back without a fight.

Even after presumably towing around a rod for a half hour the fish started pulling off drag immediately when I reached the surface. Celebrations were cut off as I realized that there was still work to be done. I am a fairly strong swimmer but it didn't take me long to understand that I was not going to fight this bass with two hands on the rod while treading water with only my feet. This thought was punctuated when the big fish jumped and hit me square in the face in an attempt to skewer me with the treble hook holding its mouth and drag me down to Davy Jones' Locker. I recovered and quickly made my way to the canoe where I passed off the rod to my daughter to finish what she had started. Finding the rod now firmly in the grasp of the most stubborn member of our family, it did not take the fish long to yield and wave the white flag of surrender. It was netted to much fanfare and raucous celebration - certainly not in the wilderness way.

It was a heavy smallmouth bass every bit of eighteen inches. The rod still measures six and half feet. The story dwarfs both of them.

Here is the picture and video evidence of the dramatic conclusion to this fish story: [Rods Worth Diving For - YouTube](#)



A jubilant Ryan Peterson and family are all smiles after landing a trophy smallmouth, and more importantly, after retrieving Mom's cherished St. Croix rod!