

Director's Message

A fishing story



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here was this young boy, maybe four or five years old, who relished the transition of reaching an age when he could join his dad on adventures.

It so happened his dad liked to fish. The boy learned first hand about the bond that develops when a kid gets to go fishing with his dad.

One of the most exciting days in his young life was when he caught his first fish – a northern pike on a trolling lure on a lake in northern Minnesota. Back at the camp that night, the boy could hardly contain his excitement as he watched his father clean the pike and prepare it for supper. The boy didn't know, back then, that pike are extremely bony fish, and cleaning them was difficult... and eating them without swallowing bones was even more difficult. The boy's family always kept a loaf of bread handy to help dislodge any stuck bones, and it usually worked.

Anyway, the meal that night was one the boy would remember always as one of the finest he would ever experience. He had helped feed the family, and that made him feel very special – like Dad.

A short time later, the boy and his family packed up and moved to Florida. The youngster didn't know what to expect life to be like in his new home, so he somberly said goodbye to the familiar pine trees and fishing lakes and prepared to wade into the unknown world ahead.

Ormond Beach turned out to be not bad at all, the boy found out when the family settled there. He was amazed not only to see pine trees but water everywhere – for fishing. The first order of business was to make new friends, but to resume fishing also was a high priority.

School was out for the summer. The boy had plenty of sunny days for fishing adventures, but his dad had to make a living, and there was little time for fishing.

The boy took his predicament to his mom and asked, "Will you take me fishing?"

Although his mom wasn't quite up to a full-scale fishing excursion, she came up with the great idea of taking the boy and his siblings to the bridge over the Halifax River (actually a saltwater lagoon) and letting them fish off the bridge. The boy, his brothers and sister and a few friends baited their hooks with shrimp and fished from that bridge for many hours that day and the days that followed. Back then, the world was a safer place. It was OK for Mom to just drop the kids off and pick them up hours later. Parents probably shouldn't do that today.

The kids brought home a whole bucketful of fish that very first time out. They were so proud and excited when Mom came back to pick them up. The kids knew they were putting food on the table with their catch.

Well, that night they feasted on a smorgasbord of pinfish and grunts – "the shellcrackers of saltwater" – which Dad had to figure out how to clean. They were absolutely great and fed the whole family.

As the year went by, the boy and his friends started learning how to catch such magnificent table fare as trout, redfish, sheepshead and snook, and he never stopped fishing.

As you might suspect, that boy was me. I am forever grateful that my dad took me fishing, and my mom rose to the challenge and figured out how to take us fishing while managing a household of kids and their friends. Those days were, for me, the beginning of building character, learning the excitement of competition, appreciating fish and wildlife and developing a passion for the outdoors.

When your kids ask you to "take me fishing," the rewards are great when you find a way to do it. Better yet, don't wait to be asked. Just take a kid fishing – a nephew, a niece or a friend's kid. The kid will appreciate you, and the outdoors will be a big part of the rest of his life.

P.S. I clean and cook my own fish now.