

MEMORIES . . . FAMILY, NATURE AND FLY FISHING

As I grow older and look back more frequently at my life, the one thing that never fails to bring a smile to my face is the memories I have of sharing the outdoors with the people that are the closest to me. I was so fortunate that my dad loved the mountains and streams and included me since I was old enough to walk. He passed on a legacy that has given me a lifetime of joy with the connection with nature that I would never had had if it wasn't for him.

I realized soon after having my own son that I not only had the opportunity, but the responsibility to instill the same love of hunting and fishing that has given me those memories that I cherish most. As I found out quickly, the ultimate joy was in the sharing and mentoring, and watching as my young protégé developed his skills and love for the life that has brought me such pleasure. I understood why my Dad seemed to be so much more excited than I when I would bring in an 8" trout.

How fortunate I am again to be able to now relive those experiences with my grandsons. In August of this year a close friend, Pat Patterson, put out a general invitation to all of his fishing buddies to join him on fly fishing trip to Fernie, BC, in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. I can't begin to describe the beauty and majesty of this country. It's comparable to the Jackson Hole area in Wyoming but without the crowds of people. Pat has fly fished all over the world and had visited Fernie the previous year. He described his experience as possibly the best day of fishing in his life.

We have been taking our grandchildren camping in California for a week in June since the oldest, Evan, was 3. This past year Evan, now 14, was unable to go due to a summer school class he had to take before entering high school in the fall. As a way to make up for his disappointment and as his birthday present, I decided to take him to Fernie with the rest of the group. My son, Greg, found the time and joined us with my youngest grandson, Rhys. There are several world class fisheries within an hour of Fernie. The most popular and accessible is the Elk River which flows through the middle of town. It is known for its football sized Cuts and the number of Dolly Varden, also known as "Bull Trout" that hit double digit figures.

Probably the most productive and ultimately the least expensive way to fish a new area is to go with a guide the first day. When you only have a few days, having a guide greatly enhances your opportunity for success.

The first morning we met the rest of the group, sixteen in all. Pat suggested a \$2 wager for the largest fish of the day and we all scattered in different directions. Evan and I paired off and floated the Elk with Johnny, a very competent local guide that was especially helpful to Evan. Even after 60 years of fishing I still learn something new when I go with a guide. Greg and Rhys went with John, a great guy, somewhere around my age, to walk and wade the upper Elk, 10 miles above town. This is Rhys' first year of fly fishing on his own. Up until then I would hook fish and hand the pole off to him. He caught his first trout on a fly on his own earlier this year on our camping trip.

A cold front had come through on the day we arrived and dropped about an inch of rain putting the fish down. The normal hatches of green drakes and caddis were nowhere to be found on the Elk. Evan and I fished hard for a total of 15 fish for the day. John took Greg and Rhys to a stretch of beautiful water that a client of his had hooked and released 40 fish three days before. All Cuts going between 14 and 22 inches. Fat, heavy fish that readily rose to a Hopper or Elk Hair Caddis.

Greg was also having a slow day. He was fishing a promising looking riffle with no action when Rhys, fishing downstream 50 feet, yelled that there was a big fish following his Woolly Bugger. Greg and John passed it off as a 16 inch Cut seen through 9 year old eyes. That was until his next cast of about 15 feet brought a strike that almost ripped the rod out of his hand. He was standing in about two feet of water and the fish immediately screamed out 50 yards of line. Between John's coaching and his Dad holding on to him so he wouldn't topple over, Rhys brought the 10 lb. Bull Trout to the net. It was truly one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences for all three of them.

That evening Pat hosted a wonderful dinner for the group. It was all hoots, hollers when the \$30 prize was handed to the top fisherman of the day. I know that the pride and, somewhat embarrassment, he was feeling was nowhere close to the pride that was busting my buttons. It was questionable as to whether the fish meant more to him at that moment or the \$30 that he held tight in his fist. When he is my age I know what the answer will be.

The Memories.

Gary Daniels

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