

Canadian Pinholes

By

Brandon Lee Fair

Virginia Tech University

god4life@vt.edu

(540) 292-5230

Biography

My name is Brandon Fair and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit my story to the Virginia Outdoor Writing Contest. I am currently a sophomore at Virginia Tech University, and a Fisheries Science major in the College of Natural Resources. In the future I plan to pursue a career as a freshwater fish biologist either in the U.S. or in another country.

I am extremely interested in any aspect of the outdoors, especially aquatic ecosystems, and enjoy hiking, camping, and exploring nature as well. In addition to my love for nature, I am involved in several Christian organizations on campus, and lead a freshmen bible study in my dorm. Playing the guitar, sports, and spending time with family and friends are some of the many other hobbies that I enjoy. This was the perfect opportunity for me to write about something that I truly love and that has shaped my decision to pursue a career in the outdoors.

Canadian Pinholes

The steady hum of our loaded-down Ford Explorer went silent as we came to a stop by a small cabin on the shore of Lake Opeongo. Excited chatter filled the air as our Boy Scout troop jockeyed for position in the line forming to rent canoes. I was getting butterflies again, the same butterflies that riddled my stomach every time I faced a new challenge. Tall tree shadows danced as we waited for what seemed like forever, fantasizing about what we would see, catch, and discover. A long wait and a few dollars later we were grabbing worn canoes and racing for the crystal clear water. My mind was glued to how smoothly our paddles broke through the glassy surface; I could already taste the oil-battered Northern Pike that surely swam beneath.

The first thing I noticed was that I was out of shape. My muscles were screaming for relief as my dad and I slipped across the endless expanse of blue. Faintly on the horizon, land poked up like distant mountains. This must have been how Columbus felt when he spotted America for the first time. Clouds were beginning to thicken and darken as we finally made landfall, stepping out of our canoes like conquerors onto foreign soil. Picking the closest spot to make camp, I barely pulled my tent out of its bag before the heavens split in half. Mini water bombs began to hit our campsite and we all scattered, jumping and dodging trying to find shelter. Thunder shook our small island throughout the night, but the source of my sleepless night was found in the ghostly shadows dancing across the ceiling of

our tent whenever lightning lit up the sky. I curled up in my sleeping bag and waited for morning to arrive.

Silky fog, sizzling bacon, and the call of a distant loon crashed head on into my senses when I emerged from our drenched tent. There's nothing like a beautiful view and a hearty meal to restore any dashed hopes after an infrequent deluge. Leaving our island behind I thought to myself, if only every morning could start out like this. It wasn't very long before we were truly in the wilderness, and I began to welcome the lack of houses, businesses, and cars. An array of animals, including moose, black bears, and deer, stared inquisitively from the safety of the shore wondering what these strange new creatures were and what we wanted there. I whispered back from the front seat, "we just want the memories, something to hold on to." Rounding one final peninsula, we stumbled upon our next destination - a small cluster of islands settled in a sheltered cove. Being still early in the day, we relaxed by casting some lines out and exploring our new home away from home. Miniature islands covered in blueberries and evergreen forests were everywhere, and my friends and I wasted no time collecting its bounty. There would be fish and blueberry cobbler tonight.

The sun was getting low in the sky, and we headed back to our campsite to begin preparations for our banquet. Occupying myself with the strenuous task of cleaning the day's catch, I was completely oblivious to the scene unfolding behind me. My dad tapped me on the shoulder and turning my head, all I could do was freeze. I could hear my heart beat, a chill scurried its way down my spine, and I

unknowingly let the knife slip from my grasp. During my busyness, the sky had turned into an ocean of fire. The most brilliant orange we had ever seen filled the entire expanse and the lake was like glass, reflecting every color and detail with perfect precision. Jolting out of my shocked state, I grabbed for my camera; I could not miss this moment. My dad snapped a shot of my silhouette leaning back with a fishing pole like I had just hooked the big one. I jokingly commented that maybe one day the picture would make its way into an outdoor magazine.

The sky was filled with all colors of the spectrum; red, yellow, pink, purple, and finally black, as the sun waved goodbye to us as we sat eating our meals by the water. Just when I thought the show was over, tiny pinholes began to appear as if someone was shining a light on a black canvas and poking holes in it with a needle. Ten, fifty, hundreds, thousands of pin pricks dotted the sky, and I found myself actually gazing upon the Milky Way, more beautiful than any of my science books could ever depict. It filled my eyes, and if not for my father telling me that I should come inside and get some rest, I would have fallen asleep right there. Lightly standing to my feet, I took my time heading back to the tent, not wanting to leave this once and a lifetime experience. I never wanted it to end. The events of this night were a reminder of what sparks my love for the outdoors. It's not just the recreational activities, time with friends, or wildlife sighted, but also the indescribable beauty that constantly waits under every rock, around every tree, and over every mountain.