

Gone Fishin'

Outside has always been my happy place, whether I'm listening to music or sitting in solitude, the outdoors has always brought me peace of mind. No wonder I've so thoroughly enjoyed fishing with my grandfather, who we affectionately call Gege, through the years. We've gone several times now, but I vividly remember the first time he and I went fishing together nearly eight years ago. I could have only been seven or eight at the time.

It was a forty minute drive to a friend of a friend's pond over roads thirty years past their prime, littered with potholes and riddled with cracks from years of use. I swear even the worms, writhing through the dark and the dirt in the bait bucket, complained about the drive. Every time we've gone fishing, it's been on private property, because Gege was, and still is, too stubborn, too cheap, or both, to buy a proper fishing license. Not that I cared much about where we went: fishing was, and still is, something we do together. That is all that mattered, or matters.

After a short drive down a dusty dirt road we came upon a small pond situated in front of a mid-sized white house which looked like it had stepped out of an advert from the 1800s. Trees must have been allergic to the soil around the pond, because there wasn't a sliver of shade in a ten mile radius. And in the middle of summer in central Virginia? It was boiling hot, the pond must have been at a low simmer.

Our fishing poles were from a past era; in fact, the only reason we got the idea to go was because we found a couple of old poles while cleaning out the basement.

We spent thirty, probably longer, minutes untangling the rusty, old poles under the scorching sun. Finally, they relented and allowed themselves to be untangled. Next up were the worms. I could hardly wait... Baiting a hook is definitely the worst part of fishing. I was not eager to touch the worms' slimy skin with my bare fingers, much less puncture their squishy bodies with a sharp hook while blood oozed out.

The second worst part of fishing? Bugs. I hate bugs. I hate strings that look like bugs. I hate creepy crawlies, and even furry animals can make fear bubble in my chest. Me? Touching a worm? It's not going to happen, my dear old granddaddy had a different idea, "Come here Michaela, hold this while I look for a knife." Nope. I'm not holding a worm, it's slimy, it's dirty, it's weird, I just don't want to.

"C'mon, sugar, it ain't that bad." It looked pretty bad. Especially for the worm. But I always loved being

called by my nickname, still do, even if it has no bearing in my actual name. So, I relented.

“Fine.” I’ll touch the repulsive little creature and, you know what? It wasn’t so bad, but don’t tell my Gege I said that. So, I held the worm while he sliced it in half with a box cutter, because we couldn’t find the knife.

Eventually, finally, we got to cast our lines into the murky water. The pond we were standing before wasn’t much in the way of size, or clarity. Roughly half the surface had been overtaken by lily pads and green water foliage, (the only green thing in sight) while the other half was made up of a dark, silty water. We, by which I mean my granddad, did eventually manage to get our lines in the water. I, on the other hand, was not so successful. Despite standing in a place with less vegetation than the Arabian Desert, I still managed to snag my line. I hooked a handful of dead grass. What an incredible first start. After a few, okay several, attempts (and an impromptu coaching lesson on how to release the line correctly) I managed to get the hook and the bobbin into the water.

It was a great day. I mean, I caught some dead grass and then some pond vegetation; I’d like to see a professional do better.

Throughout the day we got a few tugs and pulls on the line here and there, and my granddad even managed to reel two or three fish in. I was not so fortunate.

After a couple boiling hours, something snagged my line and it wasn’t a lily pad! I reeled it in and there was a fish on the other end--a real, live fish! Now, since this tale is about eight years old, the fish has naturally grown to the size of the Empire State Building. But, if I must be truthful, the poor ole’ thing was maybe ten inches long and half as wide. If Gege’s fish knowledge is to be trusted, it’s known as a ‘Crappie.’ I was beyond elated. I had caught a fish that could not technically be classified as a fishstick!

Was I going to touch this prehistoric looking creature? Not a chance! I conquered the worm and that was enough for me in one day. The fish didn’t know boundaries, though, because as I stood there for the obligatory “just-take-it-I’m-dying-inside” photo, the little sucker slapped me with his tail. I got fish slapped, and it hurt, too! In its defense, if someone hooked me through the mouth and reeled me out of bed on a Saturday morning, I’d be pretty dang annoyed as well. Despite the stinging pain in my cheek, the day was still great--better than great: I had gotten to spend the whole day with my Gege and that was the most important part to me. Even though I’ve been raised by my grandparents, and I love my grandad, we’ve never had much of a

chance to do activities together. Turns out the interests of sixty year old men and teenage girls don't overlap much. (Although, I will say, I can use a power drill better than most sixteen year old girls.)

For sixteen years, outside has been my place of solitude, a place to get away from whatever is going wrong. Whether through fishing, playing tennis, or doing absolutely nothing at all, being outside gives me peace--and I'll always remember the first time I went fishing, not because I got physically assaulted by a fish or came dangerously close to heat stroke, but because I made memories with my Gege and that is more priceless to me than any ten-foot fish I could have caught.

Gege and I have gone fishin' several times since, always on private property because he, "isn't paying for a fishing license," and it's not the activity which makes it so important, but the memories I will still have twenty, thirty years from now. I will forever cherish being able to take a trip down memory lane, one likely littered with potholes and cracks, to the first time I went fishing with my beloved Gege.