

SO WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT FISHING?

By Fauzia Simjee McClure

In celebration of fishing season opening just a couple of months ago, I thought it fitting to write about, what else, but fishing! Quite frankly, I didn't know anything about fishing until I met my husband, Robert. The only fish I ever ate were the ones straight out of the supermarket, and most of those were typically the previously frozen sort! No one in my family ever went fishing, though we all enjoyed eating fish tremendously. Growing up, my mom prepared fried fish almost every Friday. She served it with her perfectly cooked aromatic, saffron-laced basmati rice and hearty lentil and squash stew. My sisters and I were responsible for peeling the potatoes which were thinly sliced, spiced, pan-fried, and complemented the special Friday meal...I can taste it all right now!

I remember the very first time I went out fishing with my husband. As a matter of fact, it was also the very first time I went out camping, built a bonfire, roasted marshmallows and then some! I was raised in Scarborough, a suburb of Toronto, in Ontario, Canada and was pretty much a city slicker in my life before meeting Robert. There were a few exceptions including a 3-day school exchange trip, when I was 13 years old, to a dairy farm in Lansdowne, Ontario, Canada, and going with my best friend and her family to their very rustic cabin in the woods, also up in Canada, when I was 16. I truly enjoyed these out-of-city experiences and still think of them quite often. I kind of wonder if taking me on a camping and fishing trip, especially at the very outset of our courting, almost 24 years ago, was my husband's test to see if I was a keeper!?! Would I survive the experiences of the good old outdoors? We camped at Upper Twin Lakes, one of my husband's most favorite campgrounds since his early childhood. Here, I discovered the fish are as beautiful as the surrounding views and scenery. Robert had his fishing license, rod, bait (wet flies, worms, and flashers), fishing net, hook remover, and we were heading out at the crack of dawn on a rented 14-foot aluminum boat. Robert insisted that this was the best time to fish as it would be very calm and quiet. Well, he was right! There was no one else out there except us, and of course, the fish! It was the middle of August, with sunny and very warm days. Yet, at 5 am, it was bone-chilling cold on the lake. You could still see snow at the higher elevations of the mountains, especially atop the peaks and crags. I was quite relieved that Robert brought along the small Coleman camp stove so we could have our hot tea and egg burritos out on the boat. Believe me, breakfast never tasted so good! I was well prepared as I had heeded my husband's advice and had plenty of layers to keep me warm including a big fleece blanket wrapped around me, at least twice! You could only see my eyes-- I looked like a desert Bedouin!

It was peaceful and serene on the water, still quite dark with just a hint of the morning light coming through the tall pines and aspens surrounding the lake. All I could hear was the sound of the motor as the boat trolled towards the north-west section on Upper Twin Lake, one of my husband's favorite spots to fish on this particular lake. Robert's eyes gazed towards the tip of his pole. He seemed oblivious to anything else. What really amazed me was his attention...it was remarkable with his gaze so keenly fixed. It was as if nothing else existed except just him, his pole, and his fishing line in the water, all connected in perfect harmony. His energy and zest for fishing seemed to radiate right through his pole into the water, where it was beckoning and luring the fish towards his bait like a bull lured by the matador's red cloth. Unbeknownst to me, perhaps there was some kind of telepathy involved in doing this! I remember from that very first fishing experience with my husband that there was something extremely special between a fisherman and his fish, or, at least, between Robert and his fish.

It was my husband's undivided attention, his stance and way of being in the boat, as if there was some extrasensory psychic communication between him and his fish. He was totally connected to the fish,

thinking like the fish, perhaps, even transforming himself into the likeness of a fish. Sound crazy? Maybe, but maybe not! Think about something that you are totally passionate about and how you relish in that. How do you behave? How do you think? How do you act? Who or what do you become in the process? What I found quite fascinating was that even before Robert reeled in his fish, he could tell the species of the fish..."it's a brown!" He knows this just by the feel of the fight through his fishing rod; by watching the way the pole tips; by the movements the fish displays in the water once it is hooked; and, by how the fish swims with the hook, making certain geometric-like patterns in the water. When Robert and I go out fishing, we really enjoy making bets before we actually reel in the fish. And so often, Robert is dead on in regards to the catch he has on line; a big fish, small fish, species of fish--cokeny, rainbow, whatever! And once he has the fish in his net, his way of handling the fish is another remarkable feat to observe. His gentleness in removing the hook, then kissing the fish and sending him out again--if he thinks it's just not big enough or just way too pretty to keep! That reminds me, did I mention his secret to making the bait really appetizing for the fish? It's by giving the worm a good luck kiss before hooking it! You ought to give this a try sometime, it really works!

Almost anyone can catch fish. Even me, then, a brand new beginner, could catch fish. Well, at least I did eventually, thanks to my husband's patient and gentle coaching. But, to fish, I mean to embrace fishing with passion is something totally different. It really isn't about how many fish you can catch and joyfully show off to yourself or your friends. It's not about limiting out! It's not about catching the biggest fish and it's not even about the meals you'll prepare with your catch (although I must admit, that's what I salivate and drool over). It's about the pure love of FISHING! It is undoubtedly a sport of passion! It is an art of its own! I've never quite experienced or observed any other sport that captures a person so intently. Over the years, I've watched my husband fish on countless occasions. Watching him fish is like watching a scientist on the verge of discovering something phenomenal, watching an artist paint his last brush stroke before completing his finest work, watching a runner take her last few steps before crossing the finish line. It's that expression of sheer awe, with heart racing and pounding so loud, it could be heard by others, that feeling of blood rushing to one's face giving it a pinkish-red glow, that's what FISHING is all about!

There are people from many walks of life who engage in fishing, catching all kinds and sizes of fish and enjoying their time in this truly wonderful sport. And then, there are few folks out there, like my husband, who, when fishing, are doing amazing artwork, having magical experiences, and making remarkable memories. When Robert is fishing, his eyes reflect pure satisfaction and joy...true love! So many folks relish in the number of fish they catch without much regard to how they actually catch and acquire their fish. They may not pay much attention to the process, the journey, and instead be focused solely on the outcome. I believe that if we paid more attention to the process and the journey, we would experience fishing in a way that we've never experienced before and find the true answer to "so what's so great about fishing?"