

Fishing Testimony by Katherine Penner: June 16, 2019

Fishing has been a significant part of my life for as long as I can remember. Today I will share some memories, as well as the ways fishing connects me to family, nature and God. This is a topic that resonates strongly with me and I feel like I could never properly sum up how much fishing means to me.

I have many memories that are tied to fishing with family members. I received a small fishing rod and tackle box as a present from my uncles when I was quite young and was excited for them to take me fishing. As I grew up, I spent many enjoyable moments with my Grandpa Penner, my uncles and my Dad at the dugout they had trout in. This was an impactful way I built relationships with these important people in my life. Fishing was the activity I most associated with my Grandpa Penner and now that he has passed away, I think about him whenever I catch a fish, hoping he'd be proud of my skills.

Another memory is of spending a Sunday afternoon at the river with my family. We went down to the river to a spot that was good to have a picnic and roasted hotdogs. After lunch my brother and I tried fishing with my Grandpa Braun. Although I don't recall catching anything that day, I remember his enthusiasm for spending time with us and I was excited to be spending the day fishing with him.

Fishing has been an important activity for 3 generations of my family and had been a link between many important aspects of my life.

More recently, my dad and I have resurrected a longstanding tradition of heading up North to Otter Rapids on May long weekend to camp and fish. It is a tradition that my dad, his brothers, and many others continued for numerous years but stopped a while ago for whatever

reason. The past 3 years of rebuilding that tradition has been one of the most significant ways for me to deepen my relationship with my dad, my love for nature, and my closeness to God. I look forward to the trip every year and I'm happy to be spending time with my dad, doing something that we are both very passionate about. Hearing stories about the trips he had in the past as well as making new memories is something that I really enjoy.

The intensity and intentionality of the 4 day fishing trip has allowed many possibilities for me to sit in a space of peace and contemplation and to feel truly rejuvenated. I believe that factors such as the beauty of the scenery, the near isolation of the place, the time to be alone with my thoughts, and the joy of God's creation help me to have a time of healing and to draw nearer to God. To me, fishing is a form of worship and it feels like a true period of Sabbath. At the end of the trip, I leave feeling refreshed and in touch with my thoughts and the earth.

It is hard to explain the feeling I experience while fishing and it is harder to describe exactly how I feel God through those experiences. Fishing brings out many qualities in me that allow me to feel more at peace. I am forced to be patient and to focus my thoughts on one task instead of many. There are none of the normal distractions from daily life to burden me with my usual anxieties. The day proceeds at the pace that it chooses, and I have no choice but to slow down. This causes my mind to drift to thoughts that are normally buried, and I find myself in an entirely different mental space. I am filled with awe and appreciation for the creation around me. Standing knee deep in the water, watching the rolling rapids rush past me several feet away, feeling the cool water contrast the warmth of the sun, causes a feeling of pure admiration for the power held in nature. The water flowing over each rock creates an unbelievable piece of art and the roaring sound drowns out any of my worries. The rhythm of the water calms me as I wait patiently, casting and reeling, hopeful to feel a tug that isn't my line caught on a rock. Climbing

over fallen logs to reach the ideal fishing spot on a mossy rock is captivating, yet uncapturable in a photo. The scenery is breathtakingly picturesque and yet no photo could truly do God's work justice. The joy of catching fish after fish shows me the playful nature of God, wishing for us to enjoy ourselves in this life. Holding a fish and examining the beauty of its scales and sharp dorsal fins reminds me that if God put so much thought, care and creativity into every Walleye, then the same care is also given to me. I am filled with love for every detail I take note of and I wish that I could be as perceptive of so many wonderful things every day, and not get caught up in my many worries, which God has already accounted for. Thinking of all these things and more brings many of my favourite hymns to mind and I can't help but hum them to myself. While eating freshly fried fish, that was swimming in the water less than an hour earlier I reflect on the ways God provides for me in everything I do. After a long and tiring day nothing has ever tasted better to me and I am truly thankful for what I have been given.

It seems that while spending time on a fishing trip I am aware of things that are always around me, but the change of pace makes me more alert to notice them. Fishing at Otter Rapids is a thin space in my life where God feels so near to me. Spending that time each year helps me to hold onto those feelings at other times when God feels much farther away, and it is easier for me to feel hopelessly anxious and to despair. Fishing keeps me in touch with God's presence in my life and that is why it is such a meaningful activity to me.