

Good Memories and Gridlock

by John Thurston

Last weekend Becky and I were visiting our daughter Gretta and our grandson in Dallas. Our other daughter Robin and her two daughters were with us as well. Saturday morning we all loaded up to go to our five year old grandsons soccer game. We were running late and found ourselves in the kind of traffic produced by thousands of soccer parents, on their way to the most important sporting event of the week. At one point, we sat in total gridlock, when a pickup, pulling a trailer-load of canoes, came into sight.

My daughter must have noticed the effect it had on me, because she said "What are you thinking, dad?" She knows very well where the sight of a canoe takes me. In fact, I think that she goes there too. I am transported to the tranquil beauty of a wilderness lake and that "mini mind trip" has a very calming effect on me. Just before the canoe sighting, I was thinking to myself, "how does an old Charlie Guide an avid outdoorsman find himself in so many traffic jams and other unpleasant urban situations." Just the day before I had been packed like a sardine into a very unpleasant commuter flight going to Dallas.

Actually, even though the conditions were horrible on that flight, it wasnt really so bad for me because I was busy pointing out the clouds to my two year old granddaughter and keeping track of all the rivers we crossed as we flew from South to North Texas. The guy ahead of me must have heard me describing or naming every lake, reservoir and river to my granddaughter. He started to ask about every town and city we saw. I have always loved maps and I guess it is second nature to keep track of where I am even on a plane. That uncomfortable time on the cramped plane was actually quite pleasant for me. You see, I wasnt really on the flight I was busy messing around with boats traveling the rivers and introducing my granddaughter to the clouds.



Like many old Charlie Guides, I find myself in an administrative job spending much of each day at a desk with a computer screen worrying about cash flow, liability, personnel problems and the struggle to keep a complex organization moving ahead. That was definitely not my lifes game plan was when I was a Charlie Guide long ago. Thats not what I dreamed about doing, as I paddled down a wilderness lake, in a Seliga, during those warm summer afternoons 35 years ago. However, paddling down a wilderness lake or sitting on the rocky edge of a Mackenzie Bay campsite, following a good fish dinner watching the loons play on a placid lake is exactly where I find myself whenever I need a little perspective. What I did 35 years ago is exactly what I do for a few blessed moments almost every day. I am grateful that I have those memories to go to, whenever I feel the need.

There are lots of positive outcomes that we can describe after a trip into Boundary Waters. There are skills learned, leadership experienced, good food, camaraderie and if we are doing it right, we are molding good character in some promising young people.

It was hard for me when we began to call our Charlie Guides, Interpreters. But, as I think back, that's exactly what the good ones were. They helped the crewmembers by introducing them to the beauty, the peacefulness, the history and the unaffected environment around them. Interpreters and old Charlie Guides help the crew member understand and really savor the experience. If we do our job as an interpreter, we also assist them in the collecting of genuine memories. . . and those memories once accumulated and stored in our conscientious can be played back later, when they need a little serenity or adventure in the more complex and urban world which will likely exist for most in the years to come. Good memories can make gridlock tolerable if not outright fun.