

To my Dad on Father's Day

by Dave Greenlee

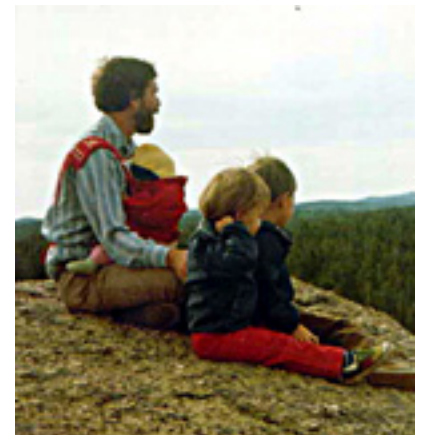


I was eleven years old when my father first took me on a canoe trip to the Quetico. Dad learned about the wilderness experience as a scoutmaster and advisor on canoe trips through the Sommers Canoe Base near Ely, Minnesota. His colorful stories about canoe trips in the Quetico had planted the seeds in my head. Whatever expectations I had as a young boy were far surpassed by the actual experiences of paddling, portaging, and living in the woods. Forty years and dozens of canoe trips later, I am still infatuated by the experience.

After a couple canoe trips with my family, I hit the trail as a scout on an adventurous trip through the canoe Base. When I was old enough, I applied for a job. I worked on base staff for one summer, and then I was trained as a guide. Guiding meant I was allowed to share my experiences with five or six crews each summer. The ten day trips we took were hard work, demanding but very rewarding. We learned to develop a special attitude that allowed us to enjoy both the good times and the bad. Along the way there was a canoe trip to Hudson Bay, the forming of lifelong friendships, and many quiet moments in the woods. I've been a 'Charlie Guide' ever since. I know that my life has been greatly affected and forever changed by these experiences that began in my childhood.

When my own children were still in diapers, we began an annual pilgrimage to the northwoods. I now realize that they nurture their own seeds. As they chase their dreams and work through the confusing passages of childhood and young adulthood, each has memories of quality times we have spent together. I think they know more about themselves as a result of these wilderness experiences. Tad, Chet, and Meghan are about as different as three people can be, but each feels a quiet pride in their ability to function in the woods. The pride that they feel may give them strength that they can draw from in the future.

The experience is deeply personal. I recall a time when my own feelings were private and I made no attempt to voice them. I feared that to express them would somehow change and cheapen their meaning, so I tried to write them down. While my writing skills sometimes failed, I enjoyed the writings of others. Sig Olson's books have captured the feelings for me on many occasions. Other writings have also triggered memories and feelings for me. In fact, it happened just the other day.



It is early on a Saturday morning. I have picked up the latest issue of the Boundary Waters Journal, and read an article by Bob Cary. Bob lives just down the lake from the Base, and he has written a humorous account of winters in the northwoods that I find nostalgic and entertaining. Scanning the rest of the magazine, my eye is drawn to the picture of a fellow paddling a canoe laden with gear. He is obviously on a wilderness trip. Near the man is the sleeping form of a toddler cuddled up contentedly amongst the packs. I recall some fond memories of Meghan as a toddler, sleeping for hours at a time as the canoe gently rocked her to sleep.

As I read the caption, the tears well up in my eyes. It reads, "Someday, your kids will wake up and realize that a love for the outdoors is the most precious thing you can give them." Suddenly I realize that I am the kid and I am the one who has just wakened. I have wakened to the realization that my father has given me a most precious gift - a love for the outdoors. It is my fervent hope that I have passed that gift to my children.

Happy Father's Day, Dad.

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