

All Those Beautiful Summer Days

A Short Story

By: Mark Rendon

You know that place between sleep and awake? The place where you are totally aware of the world going on around you and the place where miracles come true, the place where the magic of youth and memories of days gone but never forgotten lives eternal? As a child, I seemed to live in that magic place all the time. Many young boys that learn to love and appreciate the beauty of fishing and all the wonder the oceans have to offer us are mainly influenced by very positive male role models. Be it their fathers, grandfathers... What have you. Well for me it was a wonderful woman who showed me how to appreciate the joy of a well-planned fishing trip. She would make sure the tackle box was fully stocked with leaders and hooks, a good assortment of weights and a cork or two. The breakfast that was neatly packed in a separate cooler as well as the lunch that would fill in the back end of the exciting day still yet to come that filled me with an anticipation I can't even put into words. The VW beetle would be packed the night before and an excited 5 year old boy would go to bed with dreams of a monster to fight on the end of his twelve pound line barely able to close his eyes. Grandma started me early, well the other grandchildren know her as grandma, people call her Mrs. Willoughby, and I have always called her NANA. Right away everyone knew, especially me that she loved and paid more attention to me than most others. She filled my entire world with love and kindness putting me on a pedestal so high I would have to look down to see heaven. She would be up and dressed out in her big hat all the while able to get my hyper behind ready for our weekly fishing trip. My Grandmother had a remarkable way of explaining things; she started me off with an open faced Penn bait caster with a 7 foot rod. The rod was pretty heavy for a little guy but she would tie a weight on it and we would have my casting lessons in the yard almost every day till I mastered the cast without backlash. She had a real knack for picking us out a good spot, comfort played a part for sure, but the location always produced a good catch and helped in the progression of my lessons. For me it was just the thrill of the catch, so it was immediately easy to see that I had a natural passion for fishing and the more I saw, the more I wanted to learn. Even as a youngster I never wanted to keep and kill the fish. It felt to me that the fish and I had a pretty good trade off, He would thrill me with a good fight and I would spare his life by gently trying to remove the hook and getting them back into the water. Everyone I suppose though, as time progresses, starts to break away from the instruction of their mentor and gradually a student starts to become the teacher. I believe in every young man's life a transformation begins to manifest and a boy becomes a man opening up a whole new world of beauty to enjoy. Unfortunately Grandmas fishing trips eventually came to a halt as age and father time made it too difficult for her to make the trip. I of course soldiered on as she knew I would absorb every detail of the conditions, lure selection, current changes, always learning and constantly developing my skills and a fisherman blossomed into an angler. It's funny though as I always rush to share my fishing tales with her like a child and it seemed she would live in my excitement almost projecting herself in that moment of a huge strike on my top water by a dedicated nine pound trout or envision the smells and sounds as I would do my best to describe them to her. I would always reference old fishing holes we would frequent in my youth so she could project herself there trying to

emphasize on every detail. At times I could see that my stories would transport her back to fun days and fun times as the memories would begin to flow so thick that she would have to brush them away from her eyes. On a cold January morning, she died. All of her family was there in her last moments, but she and I shared one last special day together just prior to her passing that will remain locked in my heart and soul forever. Her words were golden to me more than usual that day as we shared stories and remember when, She knew, you see that I would have the hardest of times with what was soon to come. I didn't realize it at the time but you see, she did as I said before, have a remarkable way of explaining things to me. I feel and hear her in a different way these days in the the sounds of the bay we love so much, that little trickle of my live well or when the sun begins to crest above the horizon, touching my face, I feel the hand of God himself and the whisper of her voice in the wind. I think of the beauty and miracle of it all and feel so blessed to have been given such a gift. I live now on the very bay she and I shared our adventures on. I rush down my canal these days to share my fishing story with my best friend and wife. She listens to my blundering and emotional explanations accompanied with hand signals but always with the same patience and interest as my grandmother did. Always with a curiously sweet smile on her face as she sees her now old husband becomes the little boy that she heard so many stories about. She supports my passion and desire to always be on the water. At times she has to reign me back a bit as with every man we tend to forget those honey dos more than often. She watches me prepare the night before I fish, meticulously checking everything and preloading my boat in the boat lift. She's usually up before me and makes me a coffee and breakfast and packs a neat lunch because she knows I'll be gone some time. Sound familiar? It would appear even as an older man I cant get out the door without the help of a wonderful woman. I see a lot of the kindness in a woman and a person when I look at my sweet wife and the semblance between she and my grandmother as powerful female influences in my life and I cant help but be astonished that one man could be so blessed in one lifetime. Remember to learn to appreciate all the good in this world, Its always there, you just have to look close sometimes. For me, I can always find that old magic just by taking a long breath and remembering how a boy grew to be the man he is. Share yourself with people, give your hope, desire and knowledge freely to your children and grandchildren. Share the true joys of the outdoors with them as no day fishing is a bad day as long as your together and free. May all your days be full of fun moments that will become as a part of you as all those summer days became the biggest part of who I am. I'm alive, I'm free, I'm loved. Who could ask for more?

