

ST CROIX RIVER TRIP

By Jackie Schippers

Isaiah's fifth birthday present from his dad was the very best present he had ever received. Dad had promised him a St. Croix River fishing trip with his Uncle Pat. As long as he could remember, his best times were with his Dad, at his granny's summerhouse up North near the St. Croix River. His dad would take him to the river and they would sit on the bank and fish and talk. But today for the first time, he would go with Dad and Uncle Pat for a real canoe trip.

They had loaded up the car the night before, packing their fishing gear, life jackets, etc. The last thing they did before going to bed was to put the canoe on top of the car. The next morning, no one had to call Isaiah more than once. He jumped out of bed already dressed. Dad packed their lunch while he ate his usual breakfast of a bowl of sweet cereal.

The sun was still low in the sky and the evening chill was still in the air. Isaiah listened as Uncle Pat and his dad started talking about other river trips. He listened intently to everything they said. They laughed the whole way there at the funny things that happened. Parking the car at the end of the road, they unloaded and walked to the river. It was a good 400 yards to the river and it was tough going. But Isaiah never complained. He was a man now and was determined to let his father know how responsible he was. He carried the bait and fishing poles which was not easy with all the brush he had to go through. Dad and Uncle Pat made a couple of trips back and forth until the canoe was loaded and ready to go. By the time they pushed off the bank, Isaiah had his pole baited and dropped the hook into the water. He was so excited. The sun was just rising over the trees and he peered into the water. The sky was crystal blue with no clouds and with no wind; he could see the opposite shore reflected into the water, except where there were ripples from the rocks. They were floating over huge rocks and deep pools. This must be what the Indians felt many years ago, he thought to himself.

Hey Isaiah, this is the best, isn't it?" his Dad said.

“Sure is Pops.”

“Pete, are you sure Isaiah is old enough for this trip?” Uncle Pat asked.

“I’m not positive, but I hope he is,” his Dad teased.

“Pops, I am more than old enough. And I have been fishing on the lake all my life,” he replied.

The banter continued as they drifted down the river. Isaiah was a good fisherman and he was the one to get the first strike. It was a small fish and he let it go. The sun was high overhead when they came across a deep hole. Uncle Pat hooked into a very large rock bass. As he carefully lowered it back into the river, Pete said, “Looks like we might have hit on a good hole. What say we stop and eat our lunch here?”

Isaiah was very happy to stop. He was a hungry boy. “Pops, can I sit on that log while I eat?” he asked. A large pine had fallen into the river and as he settled into the crotch of a branch he bit into his sandwich. “Wow, salami and mustard,” he thought. “My favorite!” He stared up at the sky. It was so blue and beautiful with big fluffy white clouds drifting by. How he loved these woods, water and sky. When he grew up, he decided that this was where he would live. His dad, Pete, had bought him a .22 and taught him all the rules and how to shoot. He listened carefully and was an accurate shot. Among other things, Pete had told him that he had to eat everything he shot. So Isaiah was careful of how he aimed the gun.

However, just a few days after, he asked his dad if he could take his gun out and shoot some squirrels. His Dad said it was okay. Wow, the first time he would go out on his own. He was so excited but could not find a squirrel. Seeing a gold finch on a branch of an oak tree, he carefully aimed and shot. The bird dropped with not so much as a shudder. He picked up the bird and proudly ran in to show his Dad.

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“Isaiah, you know our rule, don’t you?”

Isaiah looked down at the little bird in his hand and then at the floor and quietly replied, “Yes, Pops.”

“What is it?”

“I have to eat everything I kill.”

“Well then, you better clean it. You can have it for supper.”

Isaiah was devastated. His mom loved the birds and had several bird feeders in the yard. She especially liked the gold finches. Respecting his Dad, he could not disobey. He cleaned the little bird and his dad cooked it for him. He was surprised that it tasted pretty good.

Too soon, the brothers decided to push on. “Come on, Isaiah. It’s time for us to go,” his Uncle Pat said.

“Can I stay here a while, and you can come and get me later?”

“Come on son, we fished the pond out of fish and besides it is getting late if we want to get to our car before dark.

“I want to stay here all night,” he answered.

“Okay,” said Pete, “but we are not coming back and you can not call us.”

“That’s okay,” the adventuresome boy answered.

So the brothers pushed off and started drifting down the river. “Watch,” Pete said softly, “He will soon call us back.”

Pat chuckled, Isaiah was the kind of son he always wanted. Some day...

A few more strokes of the paddle and they heard, “Pops, can you come back.”

“I told you so,” Pete said to Pat. They turned the canoe around and headed back.

As they grew near, they heard a little voice say, “Pops, can you leave me your knife?”

The men roared with laughter. He was tougher than they thought. Isaiah was very at much at home, alone in the woods!