

back cast



By Ron Wilson

When my flexible young son licked at the clump of mud stuck to the knee of his pants because he said it looked like chocolate, I knew I'd hooked another angler.

I knew because he'd repeatedly refused my offers of chips, jerky, sandwich, juice and whatever it is Little Debbie peddles to consumers because it would have involved taking his hands off his fishing rod. To Jack, 4, relinquishing his grip meant missing a fish or, worse yet, going home.

For all the action the fish were providing he should have dug into the cooler of goodies that sat in the same mud that caked his boots and pants. "Dad, why aren't we catching any fish?"

The experts tell you that one of the key ingredients to a fishing outing with a newbie is getting them into fish – be they bullheads, bluegills, doesn't matter. Unfortunately, this information is oftentimes lost on the fish.

We fished on a Sunday, just a few days after ice out, but our trip started days before. We talked about the fish we'd catch – rainbow trout and maybe a largemouth bass – and the name of the lake where we'd be doing it.

"Can you say Fish Creek Dam?" I asked.

"No ... that's a naughty word," he said.

"That's a different kind of dam, Jack," I said.

We gathered tackle boxes – some as small as a wallet with SpongeBob SquarePants stickers on them and one nearly big enough to bathe an infant in – from the garage and basement. Each was wiped clean with a wet rag, and then opened to reveal crankbaits, hooks, bobbers, plastic worms, lead weights, lures, jigs and a compilation of flotsam

from other fishing trips that should have been tossed in the garbage long ago.

To a 4 year old, it looked like treasure. Treasure to be moved from one box to the next, then dumped mostly into a pile to do it all over again. My task was to simply run interference so one of our bird dogs didn't step on a hook or eat any of the plastic worms. The only casualty was a monkey hand puppet that wedded with a treble hook when it was stuffed into a tackle box.

I would have been surprised if Jack hadn't wanted to sleep with his tackle boxes that night before our outing, or didn't eat his pancakes the next morning with a fishing rod leaning near the syrup. His sister and brother, 11 and 14, acted similarly at his age at the prospect of going fishing, camping or hunting. And, despite all that competes for their time nowadays, they still get jazzed when an outing is in the works. Yet, I can't help but wonder if we did enough of it – or do enough of it today as a family – so that this way of life is part of who they are.

In the end, we were all muddy from tramping along the thawing shoreline, casting night crawlers to fish that never did cooperate. It would be a race to be the

first in the shower when we got home, and a coin flip to decide who got to scrub the bird dogs.

In the end, we saw five turtles sunning themselves on the same rock, a muskrat cutting a V through the water, ducks and geese winging it overhead, and ring-necked roosters and snow white gulls competing to be the noisiest. Our only fish was a colorless, dead trout I found washed into shallow water. Even as I worked the fish to shore with a rod tip, I knew Jack wasn't going to buy my reasoning that maybe we didn't get skunked after all.



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