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**My Instinct**

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My home is in Davison, Michigan where I was raised my whole life. Both of my parents attended Cedarville University. My father majored in Psychology and my mother majored in Nursing. I have one younger brother who is currently in his senior year of high school. I have one cat named Spanky (named after the character on The Little Rascals) and he is one of the most loveable cats I have ever had. No, he is not evil as some would say. We also have chickens and honeybees. As you will be able to tell, I LOVE fishing and will always love it.

My Instinct

They call me. The dense, swampy depths harbor the silent voices. In perfect timing, the sun arises to greet the whispers of the fog. The warmth of its peachy hue draws me in. The coolness of the air reminds me, not everything has awoken to this day. I stand on the dock as it tells me, “Get in and go” with its creaking. The semi-submerged vessel bobs in the shallows as I board. My excitement grows as the engine joins in the voices with its roar. We hunt, my family and I, for the creatures of the deep. For many, this hunt may come as a rudimentary hobby filled with meaningless tasks to gain such little reward. But for me, it comes as a history, shaping pieces of my lifestyle and legacy. One must learn to hear and understand the silent voices to enhance this art. My family and I have all acquired understanding of these quiet clues throughout our lives. But the process by which I came to comprehend the silence, also known as the instinctual ability to fish, held its beginnings in fear.
My unwavering affection for fishing began in a forgotten memory captured in time. In the photo, I hear my father’s voice as he smiles. The aroma of semi-swampy muck coupled with Wonder Bread comes back to me. I wear pigtails, pink shorts below a white tank top with floral print, and white socks buried inside blue sneakers. In my hand, I clutch a petite white fishing rod attached to a bright blue push-button reel. On the end of my line, one sees my latest and greatest catch, a bluegill swinging out of the water. But before this moment freezes in the photo, my protector kneels on my great-grandmother’s dock next to me. He will soon show me the basics of understanding my fear, listening to my instinct, and loving the water and all within its dominion.

My father begins teaching me what exactly the water withholds by pointing out the foundation of sand and gravel and the spindly vegetation emerging from the foundation. All the sudden my heart stops. Something prehistoric looking (to the 2-year-old observer) lumbers by, but it is within the water’s realm! How can something breathe without effort underwater where there is no breath provided? At this point, my father explains to me that sand and seaweed do not dwell alone. The creature I saw was a fish, a bluegill to be more specific. But, I had seen fish in story books and they looked nothing like this one. Why wasn’t it orange with sparkly scales and flowy fins? Again, my dad told me fish must blend with their surroundings and swim fast. That’s why they’re darker and have shorter fins. My interest sparked in that moment and I would soon dive into this mysterious world of bizarre looking fish and how to lure them in for the taking.

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After my father explains a few more characteristics about fish, I notice the bread in his hand and wonder what it’s for. I see him tear the bread, ball it up, then toss it into the water. As soon as it hits the water a swarm of bluegill attack the small doughy spheres. I am utterly impressed at how quickly they reacted. My father hands me a piece of bread and I do the same. I tear a small piece, ball it up, and toss it into the frenzy time and time again until my piece vanishes. Asking my father for another piece, I notice something in his other hand. The white rod with blue reel. Then, he asks me if I want to catch one of the fish and I think of the impossibility. He takes a piece of bread, spits on it, and forms it around the hook. Next, he draws back the rod, presses the button on the reel, and plops it out into the water. The line becomes tight and I see the rod tremble and up out of the water comes a fish on the end of the line!

Of course, I become impatient to have my hand at this “catching of fish”. Clumsily I handle the rod and instead of gracefully plopping the bread and hook into the shallows, it crashes onto the surface of the water and does not sink as before. My dad points out that I need to push the button on the reel to let out the line. I try again, only this time following instruction and it works! The line casts out and begins its descent. On its way down, I see a fish swoop up the hook and I feel the rod shake and I stand there not knowing what to do. I had a fish on the end of my line but, I didn’t know how to get it in! I called to my dad for help and he grabbed the rod and told me to grab the handle coming from the side of the reel and to crank it forward. The fish was coming closer as I battled (reminder, I was two years old so a bluegill was a fight).
All the sudden, the rod fell still and the fight was over, but I had not won.

After this battle, my dad reassured me that all was well, just next time I need to yank the rod a little to do what he said was “setting the hook”. Fish do not always hook themselves well, therefore the fisher must do some work and plunge the hook into the side of the fish’s mouth by pulling on the line with the rod. This ensures the barb of the hook is “set” or pulled through the fish’s lip so they have a lesser chance of escaping. So, with determination, I put more bread on the hook, cast my line out a little way, and let the fish do its job of biting. I then yanked on the rod just as my father had instructed and low and behold the fish stayed on for the entire battle until I hoisted it up out of the water. My first catch! I was so excited, yet afraid of what was on the end of my line. It was flopping around and thrashing, but my dad reached out and held the fish to remove the hook. He informed me that fish have spiny bones in the fins on their back that can poke predators. My father showed me how to slide the fins down so I wouldn’t get hurt, but I was too afraid to handle the creature and still am to this day.

As I have grown, my practical ability to distinguish the best bait for the day and what type of fish to target has improved. For example, when trolling for walleye, we use crawler harnesses or body baits. Trolling involves pulling lures behind a slow-moving boat, usually anywhere from two to four rods with lines on each side held in rod holders. This allows the bait to appear more realistic, since it is “swimming” behind the boat, and to cover more area than simply anchoring and casting. This year it seemed like the walleye really craved the pinks and purples. When it comes to
smallmouth bass fishing, I usually choose a nightcrawler on a hook with a sinker to avoid the rocks more easily. A sinker slips in and out of the rocks, since it has a ball shape, whereas a hook can more readily catch a rock rather than a fish. The smallmouth prefer the “meaty and bloody” head of the worm rather than the tail. My father usually casts out a tube to draw in the fish and the rest of my family plop our hooks and crawlers over the side to catch them. Largemouth bass, on the other hand, seem to enjoy a nice tube or plastic twirl tail worm if the water has a ripple or wave to it. A tube is a plastic lure with a tubular head connected to plastic skirting. But, if the water refuses to ripple and remains dead calm I gravitate for a surface lure and watch the action happen. I give the lure a yank and a twitch, then reel a bit, repeat. SPLASH! A fish attacks the lure! I wait a split second to ensure the lure is in the fish’s mouth, then I set the hook. The fight is on and I am the victor.

Fast forward about fifteen or so years and one will find me setting lines for walleye trolling and steering the boat over a waypoint on our GPS. These tasks I would not have learned if it had not been for the “First Catch”. These days, I am drawn to a spot in the water, I cast to it and capture the fish that hid under the surface.