

No Conflict No Story

One of the things that I like about hunting and fishing with a group of friends is how a trip, camp, or even hike opens the door to a lot of talk among the campers. Almost any topic can enter the discussions, the laughs, and the story-telling that is an integral part of the experience. This “camp talk” is another reason why we keep these traditions alive in our lives—in spite of the negative trends and issues that constantly threaten to push us away from our guns and fishing rods.

Talk around the camp is full of possibilities. One type of camp talk involves unsolvable puzzles that are fun to ponder: such as whether roast duck is better than barbequed grouse, whether ice-fishing in -30° is sane or not, whether Paris Hilton wears underwear, what is the best deer gun or the best trout rod/reel combo, etc.

Another kind of camp talk involves politics. Given the actions of our recent governments, this kind of talk is typically venomous, but it is also therapeutic. If we didn't have a chance to vent the steam every-so-often, we might go insane and become vegetarians, for example. We may decide to move to Vancouver if we hit the absolute bottom.

Next are the stories that get told about past hunting and fishing adventures. The beauty and excitement of the experience is carried in the language so that we can see, feel, taste, smell, hear it. These stories of man/woman and nature have a billion variations that reverberate from the dawn of humankind to the present.

Maybe that's how language developed: the hunter/fisher needing to tell his/her stories. Caveman A says to Caveman B, “Grunt, GRUNT-GRUNT, grunt, grunt, GRunt.” Which translates into “You wouldn't believe the size of the jackfish I almost caught today—let's have swig of this glogg, and I'll tell you all about it.” Meanwhile, cavewoman interrupts and says, “Grunt, gruntgruntgrunt, GRUNT!!!” which translates into, “You smell awful, go wash yourself before you sit on that rock, I've been cleaning the cave all morning and would like it to say clean for at least a few more hours.”

Caveman A who understands that his powers of language are no match for Cavewoman, simply says, “grunt.” Translation: “Yes dear.” And he gets back into the story he was telling to caveman B.

Sometimes I wonder what is better: the living experience or the story that comes out of the experience? Unlike the momentary passage of the living experience, the story drawn from the experience can go on forever.

There are many types of stories. For example, there is a whole subset of stories involving bears. When this topic comes up around the campfire, cave, shop, garage, etc., every camp guy and gal has at least one story to tell about bruises. How much poorer would we

Albertans be if we didn't have any more bears left? That thought hurts! Anyway, I know as long as we have them around, they will be the stuff of legendary stories: stories that make you move in a little closer to the fire, breathe a little faster, and sometimes feel lucky to be alive.

Another series of stories involves Sasquatch. Although not nearly as prolific as bear stories, sasquatch stories have a way of staying with us and being passed from fire pit to fire pit: like a friend of a friend knows someone who heard the story from another guy who used to hunt and fish around Grande Cache about ten years ago.

What fisherman/woman doesn't have a story about a monster jackfish branded in his/her memory? There is something about that fish that is not easy to explain. Maybe it's just their size, ugliness, and incredible power? If I lived on the coast, I would likely have more salmon stories, but here in Alberta, there is no fish to compare with the jackfish when it comes to camp stories.

These stories may explain why we go out into the woods, lakes, and rivers in the first place. We are not going out there strictly to have a good time: relax, lay around, do nothing but look around. We outdoorsmen and women get out there to live a story and every story must have conflict.

We set ourselves up challenges, endurances, place ourselves in dangerous conditions, live closely to the edges of life and death—and we love it. How could it be otherwise? If we wanted to relax, we'd book a trip to Hawaii and sit on the beach all day drinking triple zombies. And when we'd return, the only story we'd have to tell is that it was "good...and I got sunburned twice.