

LEMON CREEK JOURNAL

INSIGHTS & IMAGES OF LIFE ON THE LAST FRONTIER

LEMON CREEK CORRECTIONAL CENTER

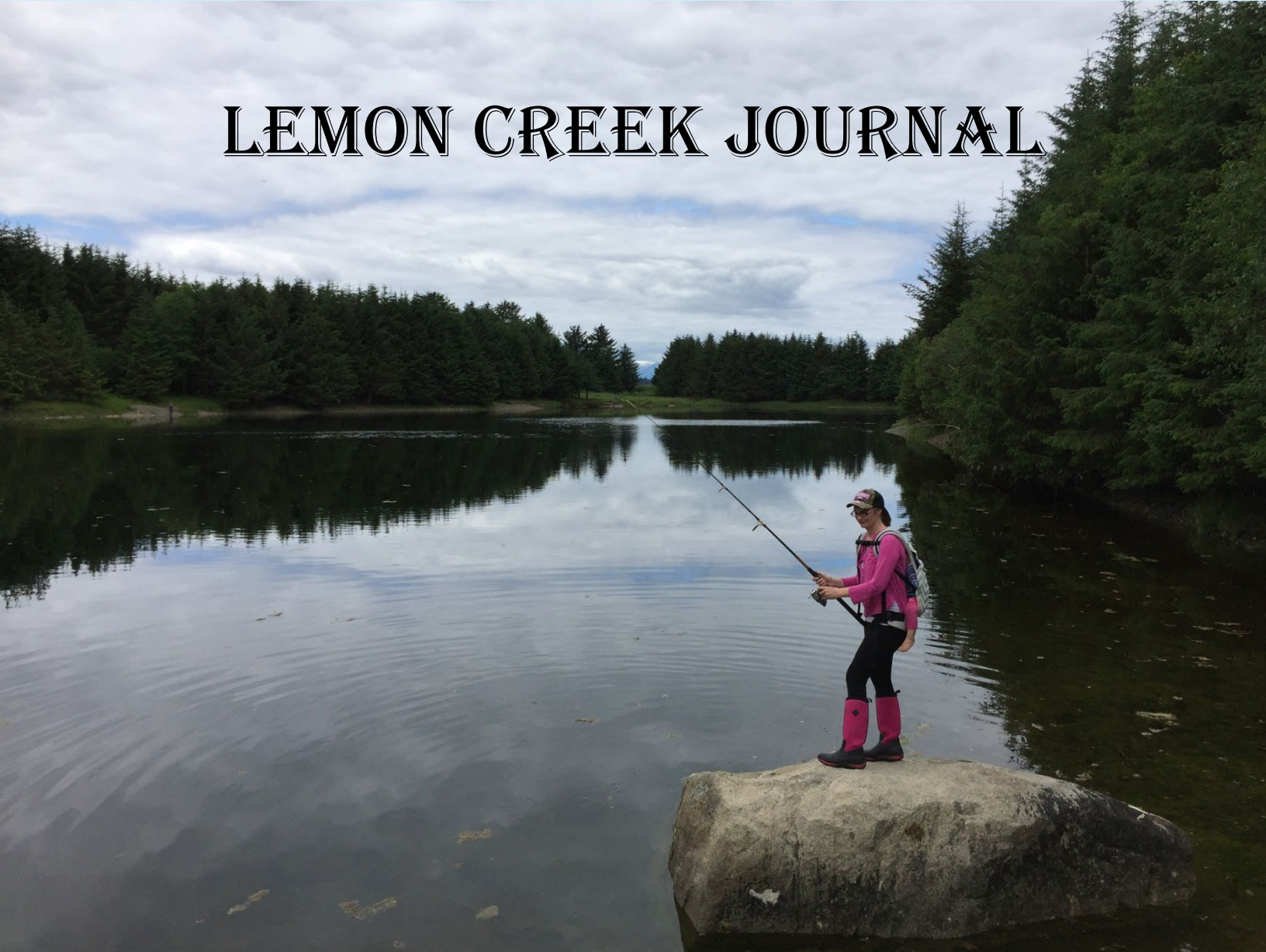
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VOLUME XXXI: STREAMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In This Issue

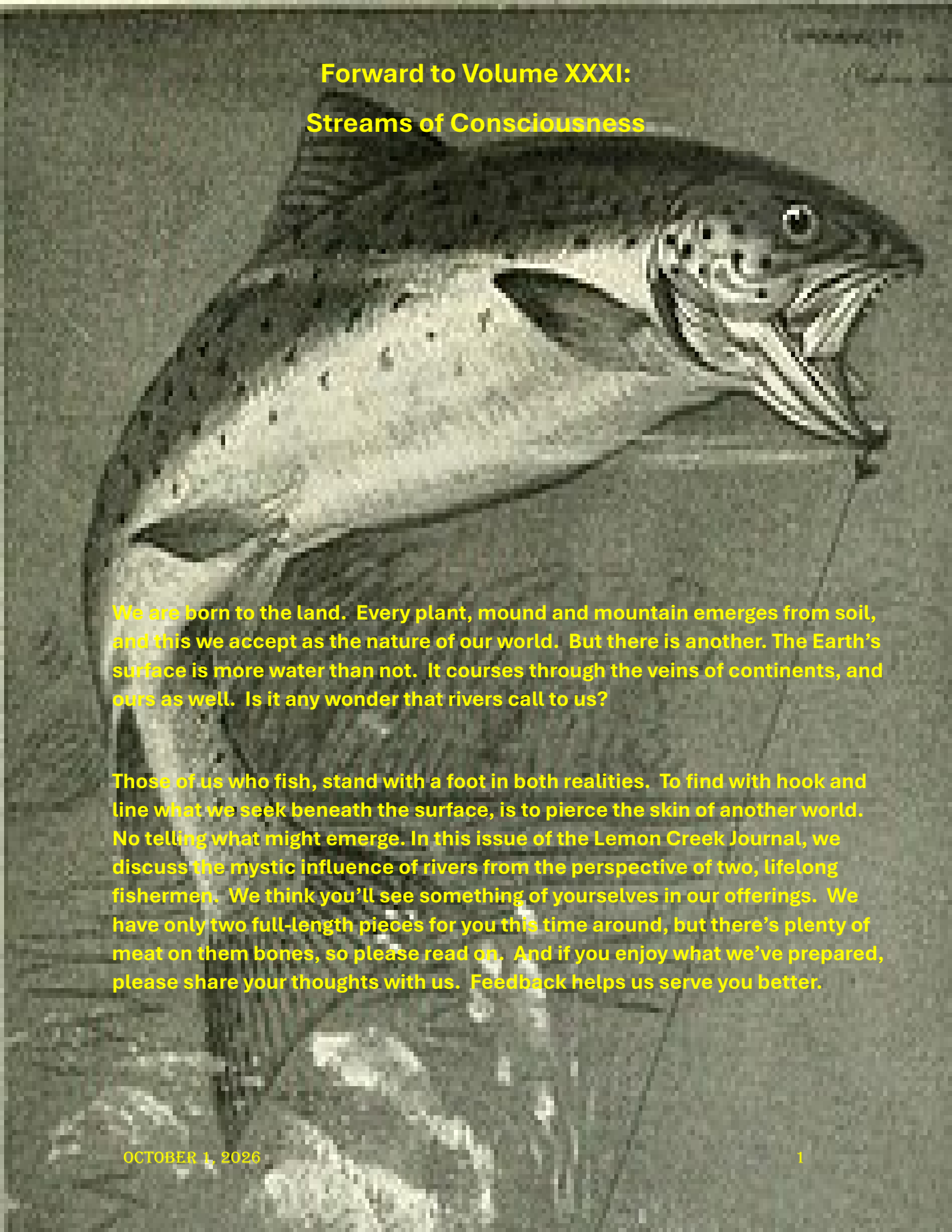
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To our readers:

The Lemon Creek Journal is a quarterly e-Publication of Lemon Creek Correctional Center, Juneau, Alaska. The Journal's mission is to inform, engage, and challenge Corrections professionals and the public to think critically about the challenges facing Alaska's correctional system. So that we can be more responsive to our readers, please share with us your impressions and suggestions by emailing the editor at

Daryl.webster@alaska.gov

Cover Photograph: Alaskan Madonna & Child casting at Fish Creek, near Juneau, Alaska



Forward to Volume XXXI: Streams of Consciousness

We are born to the land. Every plant, mound and mountain emerges from soil, and this we accept as the nature of our world. But there is another. The Earth's surface is more water than not. It courses through the veins of continents, and ours as well. Is it any wonder that rivers call to us?

Those of us who fish, stand with a foot in both realities. To find with hook and line what we seek beneath the surface, is to pierce the skin of another world. No telling what might emerge. In this issue of the Lemon Creek Journal, we discuss the mystic influence of rivers from the perspective of two, lifelong fishermen. We think you'll see something of yourselves in our offerings. We have only two full-length pieces for you this time around, but there's plenty of meat on them bones, so please read on. And if you enjoy what we've prepared, please share your thoughts with us. Feedback helps us serve you better.



The Seven Acre River

by

Superintendent Bob Cordle

In the spring of 1974, my parents scraped enough money together to purchase a small piece of river front property located just outside of Missoula Montana, in an area known as the Big Flat. The land was located at the end of a dirt road, tucked between a few decent sized working farms and ranches on its northwest side. On its southeast border flowed the magnificent Clark Fork River. We lived in an old trailer while dad, who worked as a police officer for the Missoula County Sheriff's Department, determinedly built our first home in his off time.

The Big Flat, was known for its nutrient rich soil and our family got busy planting oats and preparing a one-acre vegetable garden. Moving from Missoula out to the Big Flat was a dream come true for seven year old me. There were a couple of other small farms not too far away from ours, and as luck would have it both had kids around my age. Having other kids to play with wasn't the dreamy part of my dream come true. Before we moved out to the country the only time I got to go fishing was on camping trips. Now, I had daily access to one of Montana's premier wild rivers, and I was in little boy heaven.

On our property was a chokecherry tree-lined ravine that led right to one of the best fishing holes around, and unless I was doing chores, that was usually where one could find me. If I was quiet enough and moved like molasses while leaving the ravine for the river, I could usually see multiple trout holding their positions at the bottom of the hole. Canadian Geese were often present, and Ospreys and Bald Eagles would sometimes entertain me while I fished, as they dived in pursuit of their supper.

Rainbows were the most common catch, but reeling in the occasional Brown Trout or Cutthroat always made my day. Mom would sometimes need to remind me that only dad

and I enjoyed eating fish, which was my painful clue that I needed to release more than I was bringing home. As our small farm grew, my sister and I were assigned more and more chores, so I had to learn to split my fishing time with responsibility. Still, our parents made growing up fun. We hiked and camped often and worked side by side around the property and in the garden. There always seemed to be a lesson or two to be learned from most of our experiences together.



The following summer, we purchased a couple of calves to raise and eventually a horse that we named Betsy. A Morgan and American Paint Horse mix, she was beautiful, intelligent and loved interacting with people. Actually, we thought Betsy to be more like a faithful dog. She constantly followed us kids around everywhere and let us climb all over her. The previous owner had trained her to turn with leg guidance, a method sometimes referred to as “Steering.” When we took her off the property, we of course used a bridle, but if we rode her around the farm she didn’t need one. We simply climbed up, held onto her mane, and took off. Riding bareback as a child often led to many unintentional, awkward dismounts, a fancy way of saying I fell off quite a bit. Every time this occurred, Betsy would slow from her gallop and circle back around to pick me up. There were times that three or four of us kids would climb up on her all at once and take her into a gallop. Last one to fall off won. She willingly entertained us with this game for as long we could physically handle it.

She loved dill pickles, crackers, and cheese, but peanut butter and jam sandwiches were her all-time favorite. She would pretty much eat anything you put in front of her, including hot peppers. The previous owner had also taught her to come to the sound of a person’s whistle. It didn’t matter what type of whistle you let out, short, long, soft, or quiet, once she heard it, she would come running.

When dad first brought her home, he showed my sister and I how to care for her and then told us she was our responsibility. Bret, our younger brother was excused from the duties of caring for Betsy due to his special needs. I realized at a very young age that he was quite different from me and the other boys we spent time with. He often avoided eye contact and would not participate in any physical activities. He moved slowly and didn't like being touched unless he was the one to initiate it. He often experienced coordination issues. I sometimes didn't know how to play with him, but I found that if we were doing things that he enjoyed it made his day better.

Though my sister and I knew that caring for a horse would be a daily commitment, it never seemed like work to us. We ensured that her trough had plenty of fresh water, that she was fed twice a day, ridden, and brushed. We spent as much time with her as we could. She was loyal and we kids knew she loved us. Her affection for us was often shown by her placing her head up against our chests. We would scratch her forehead and cheeks while she made low nickering sounds. She was one of the gang and she knew it. Betsy would eventually become my first lesson in heartbreak.

My older sister and I usually got along well... okay, we occasionally got along. Underneath our front porch was an old rusty coffee can that we used to store worms and nightcrawlers for fishing. Dad made a rule to keep us from arguing and to prevent us from attacking each other. Whoever took the last worm or nightcrawler had to split it in half to share with the other. The gifted person was then responsible to go into the pasture to restock the supply of trout bait. By the way, did you know that every nightcrawler is a worm, but not every worm is a nightcrawler? Sorry, I digress, that has nothing to do with my story.

One spring day, I was at the river's edge, fishing and enjoying some alone time, when who should show up with fishing pole in hand but my bossy older sister. She knelt down and began manipulating the soil in the coffee can in search of bait. As she did so, I reeled in my line to check my hook and found that it had been stripped of bait. I waited impatiently for her to free up the can so that I could rebait my hook. Finally, she stood up holding an enormous nightcrawler and smiling said, "Guess what? I just took the last one and I am not going to share." An argument instantly ensued, but since dad wasn't at home and I couldn't quite beat her up yet, I decided to do something as unorthodox as anything a young fisherman had ever done. I stomped over to the opening of the ravine and plucked a long blade of green grass from its edge. I then walked back to where she was standing and carefully began weaving it onto the hook. She laughed out loud and said something creative about my lack of intelligence, but I paid her no mind, double checked my bobber and split shot, and did a soft sidearm cast out into the opening of the hole. As she continued to mock me, I sat there determined and watched the bobber slowly drift with the current. Suddenly the buoyant bobber bobbed and then bobbed again. Fish on! I was completely shocked but knew I had to land that trout. It would be the perfect revenge for her not sharing and I could hold this against her for the rest of her life. As I fought it to the surface I could see that it wasn't more than eight or nine inches, but I didn't care!

Once on land, I picked it up and held it out with pride. As I slowly removed the hook, a portion of the blade of grass could be seen protruding from its mouth. I deduced that my

sister was not happy as she quickly reeled in her line and was obviously preparing to vacate the scene. Turning around and storming off up the riverbank toward home, she loudly exclaimed, "Only you Bobby Cordle!" I was smiling ear to ear as she reached the top of the bank and went straight out of sight. I cockily thought to myself, *yeah, only me*, and instead of going to collect more fish bait I went and grabbed a second blade of grass. As I wove the elongated narrow leaf onto my hook I thought, *how easy this is, and the best part, I won't have to dig for fish bait ever again*.

For the next several hours I diligently tried to attract a fish with my phony green contraption. I stood back from the edge, keeping as still as possible, watching up to a half a dozen trout at a time slowly swaying their tails side to side pushing against the current. No matter where I placed my hook none of them showed any interest in taking my fake nonprotein-packed snack. I thought to myself that I must have caught the only vegetarian fish in the entire river.

It was getting late and I finally realized that I had wasted the rest of my day. Had I just taken the time to restock the can, I probably would have caught a few more. Catching that fish on a blade of grass was a one and done deal and I never tried it again. I also learned another valuable lesson that night when my sister shared the story with my mom and dad. As she did so it was with delight, not anger. It was one of the first times I realized that no matter how much we disagreed, fought and argued, we were going to be okay. That miraculous catch happened over fifty years ago, but every now and then, when she and I are visiting at my parents' home, I have to bring it up, because that is what a good little brother is supposed to do.

Several weeks after the infamous blade of grass incident, my young eyes were opened to a whole new world of fishing action. With my line in the water, dad appeared from the upper bank and made his way down to where I was standing. He looked around at the river rocks and said, "I thought you'd have half a dozen landed and cleaned by now." I would have told him I was ready to quit but knew better, as he would have put me to work in the garden. So, I simply said, "Nothing yet." He asked me to reel in my line, and he began turning over rocks as if he was looking for something he had lost. With my line in, I asked him what he was doing. He said he was going to help me fix my empty-handed problem. He then asked me to come to where he was standing. Pointing to the underside of a wet rock he said, "Do you see that? That is a hellgrammite." Puzzled, I asked something like, "What the heck is hebramfite?" He said, "A hellgrammite eventually turns into a dobsonfly, and fish love to eat them both." He reached for my line and ran the hook right behind its head. "Did you see how I did that?" I nodded. "Move your bobber a few feet up the line and then give it a try. Grasshoppers and crickets will do the job as well." I slid the bobber up some, while he climbed to the top of the bank and headed back to wherever he had come from. I gave it my best overhand cast and watched the bobber slowly float downstream. I repeated this several more times, but nothing took it and I decided to call it a day. Frustrated, I aggressively started reeling in my line when I felt a hard strike. With delight, I began working it in slowly so as not to lose it. I got my first good look at it as it drew close to the edge of the bank. It was big. Suddenly, it darted back out into the deeper water with authority, taking out more line than I had just reeled in. I hung on for everything I was

worth and when it finally stopped running I began to slowly reel again. This took some time and when it came into sight I could tell it was tired and I walked it up onto the shoreline.

At that point, it was the largest fish I had ever caught. I stood staring at it mesmerized, when without warning it found its energy again and began thrashing and flopping its way toward the river. Instinct kicked in and I jumped on it like a bull rider at the rodeo. I was terrified of losing it and sat on it until I felt it didn't have any fight left. I removed the hook and left my fishing pole right where it lay. Using both hands, I made it up to the oat field where I knew it couldn't get away from me. I was beyond ecstatic as I carried it toward the trailer. I remember yelling for my dad to come outside. I don't know who was more excited, him or me. That day I learned there was more to fish food than just worms.



Clark Fork River, Montana

It was the late summer of 1976, and I was nine years old. Like most little boys from my era, baseball was a favorite pastime. If I wasn't fishing I was hanging out in one of the neighboring pastures swinging a bat and throwing wild pitches that I always argued were strikes. About three miles away from our little farm was a trailer court that had a good handful of boys we went to school with. It was a natural division for creating two teams. The farm kids vs the trailer court boys. That is what we called ourselves. Long summer hours in the sun often led to quite a few extra innings. It was not uncommon for us to play for so long that when it was time to head home for dinner, the final scores were sometimes in the low hundreds. My friend's dad, who owned the pasture we played in once said to us, "Your scores appear to be more closely related to a pro basketball game rather than baseball."

This next lesson I learned and that I am about to share, isn't about baseball at all, but rather came about because we didn't have enough players to start a game that day. This day, I remember well because it was one of the most important life lessons I had ever learned as a child. Our usual group of seven per team came up very short that day. Most of the trailer court boys didn't show and it left us with only seven players total. One boy decided to go home and that dropped our numbers to six. I can still name the five that stayed by first and last name, but to protect their not so innocent youthful identities I probably shouldn't. With too few players to hold a game we decided that we were now old enough to have a good old-fashioned BB gun fight, and for some reason my family's farm was selected as the place to do it. All of us owned BB guns but not all of us had them with us. To make it fair, it was voted that those who didn't have one could use dirt clods. We divided into two teams, three against three, with both sides having access to two BB guns each.

The warfare lasted about fifteen minutes before a truce was called on the account that dirt clods and BB's pelting bare skin didn't feel so great. We were all shirtless at this point covered in dirt, sweat, red spots, and welts. Not knowing what to do next we went down the ravine and sat in the tall cool grass. While we were busy discussing where to go and what to do, I climbed up out of the ravine to sit on top of an enormous cottonwood tree that had recently toppled over. It was directly above the rest of the eight and nine year olds. The grass was tall enough that from the river all that could be seen was a little shirtless redhaired boy sitting up on the dead fall.

As we exchanged ideas of how to entertain ourselves next, a large yellow raft came around the bend. I wasn't paying it much attention, but one of the boys, who we all called Little Tony whispered, "I think that person in the middle of the raft is a lady and she isn't wearing a top." As the raft came closer to the bank I confirmed with horror that he was correct. Little Tony looked up from the seclusion of the grass and hissed, "This is your river, are you going to let her get away with that?" A challenge had been issued, and I knew I had to say something. Nervously I blurted out, "Hey lady, you need to put your shirt on." There were two men in the raft as well, who were both paddling. One was sitting in the front and the other in the back. The one in the rear of the raft looked up at me and said something that I didn't think adults could say to children. I was shocked and a little fearful. I could hear the boys below me whispering amongst themselves, and again Little Tony quietly spoke his mind. "Bobby, he can't call you those things. It ain't right! This is your river, what are you going to do about it?" Another challenge issued and I thought I must say something or face the consequences of being harassed by my buddies for being a coward. Without thought, I loudly demanded in my best angry voice that he clean up his language and paddle on away from my property. This sparked rage in the skinny shirtless man and he, and the guy in the front used their oars to turn the raft in my direction and began paddling toward the shore. As they did so, he laid out a line of obscenities the likes of which I had never heard, and while doing so notified me that he was coming ashore to inflict physical harm upon me. Now I was scared, and I could see by the look on his face that he intended to do just that.

As the raft prepared to make contact with the large rocks on the riverbank, I heard Little Tony exclaim loudly to the rest of the boys, "No one is laying a hand on Bobby!" and like a

scene from *The Lord of the Flies*, five small, sweaty, dirty, boys sprang from behind the tall grass, armed with sticks, BB guns, rocks, and dirt clods. The second most memorable moment of that day was the look on the now wide-eyed, filthy-mouthed aggressor as he and the other man tried to stop their forward motion by quickly paddling the raft in the opposite direction. To this day I am still uncertain which of us boys screamed, "GET EM!" but being caught up in the moment, I fired the first shot.

The skinny shirtless man screamed out loud as I watched the BB bounce off of his chest and into the water. From then on, pure chaos ensued as the six of us behaved like a tribe of tiny prehistoric mad men, desperately defending ourselves with all our might from a pack of vicious predators. Though we didn't know it, the half-dressed three-person crew knew they didn't stand a chance against us as they paddled wildly, trying to reach the center of the river where the current ran more swiftly. We knew from the screams of pain that we were having great success in defending ourselves, as they desperately tried to get as far away from us as possible. With their big yellow raft spinning out of control, we chased them from the top of the bank all the way to cottonwood trees of the back woods until they were finally out of range.

The last we saw of them they were rounding the next bend in the river, still paddling wildly. We screamed out warnings that if they ever came back we'd be waiting. Once they were completely out of sight the celebration was on. We began hooting and hollering victoriously, while jumping up and down hugging and high fiving one another. Then, the disastrous idea was launched. Little Tony, who thought the world of my father yelled, "Let's go tell your dad! He is going to be so proud of us!" In glorious joy, we ran across the fields, still shouting and cheering like heroes returning from battle, but our celebration would be short-lived.

Arriving at the garage, we found my dad working on a project. In our excitement we all tried telling the story at the same time, and it was loud. I remember dad taking a step forward and talking over us while smiling. "Calm down boys, I can't understand anything you are trying to say." We all fell quiet, and dad looking down at Little Tony asked, "Okay, what is all the excitement about?" I stood there proud, smiling with the rest of the gang, knowing dad was probably going to present me with some type of medal or maybe excuse me from a week's worth of chores after learning of our heroic deed in defending myself and our property. Little Tony began talking loud and fast as my father looked intently into his eyes. The next most memorable part of that day followed. "Mr. Cordle!" he exclaimed. "You would be so proud of Bobby. He shot that mean man right in the chest with his BB gun!" As he continued sharing our heroic deed, everything turned into slow motion, just like you see in the movies, as dad's smile slowly left his face and his eyes shifted from Little Tony's to mine. I had seen that look only once or twice before, given to my sister, and knew that I was done for.

Dad continued to listen as Little Tony incriminated the whole gang. He eventually raised his hand out toward the group and asked him to stop talking. All the boys were just now seeing what I already had. The change in his countenance could not be mistaken for anything but disappointment and anger. Dad took a moment and then calmly said, "Boys, what you just

did was extremely dangerous and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You can't throw things like rocks and sticks or shoot people with BB guns. All of you boys are now going to go home and tell your parents what you did here today. When I see them next, I am going to ask them if you did." All stood silent, hoping that he did not mean what he just said, but they knew better. "Go home now" he said quietly. The boys left the garage and immediately started running across our front lawn toward the ditch bank, abandoning me to face the wrath of dad. Oh, how I longed to run away with them. As he stood staring down at me I tried to explain my actions, but it was of no use. He told me to put my BB gun in the corner of the garage and go to my room. After what seemed like forever, he eventually came in and talked to me about the danger of shooting someone's eye out and reminded me of the gun safety rules that I was given when I received the BB gun as a present. He also reminded me that for the first year I owned it, I wasn't allowed to use it unless an adult was present. He said, "I trusted you and I chose wrong." It bothered me terribly that I had violated his trust. He went on, "That BB gun will remain in the garage for a minimum of one year. If I see it has been moved, I am going to break it in half and throw it in the trash." When he finished talking there were of course more forms of punishment forthcoming, but there is no need to go into details. I will just say lesson learned.

This incident took place in late August, just a week before school started. On the first day of the third grade I met up with my best friend Jeff, who I hadn't seen all summer. I told him I couldn't hang out any time soon because I was grounded for the unforeseeable future. He then said, "Oh, man! You won't believe this but last week Glen and I were down at the Maclay Bridge fishing when some weirdos in a raft floated by. One of them was a lady and she wasn't wearing a shirt!" I looked at him, pausing for a moment and then hanging my head said, "Yeah... we met."

In 1980 my parents started entertaining the idea of selling our little farm to buy a bigger one near the town of Stevensville. I was now thirteen and had become obsessed with playing sports, so much so that even my love of fishing was placed on hold. Entering my seventh grade year I intended to participate in all the sports programs the city and school had to offer, and I did just that. I was so busy that I sometimes had to be reminded that farm chores came first. My sister was a senior in high school and was also preoccupied with extracurricular activities, while holding down a job at the local Tasty Freeze. Both of us began spending less and less time with Betsy. We made sure she was fed and watered but had all but stopped riding her. Dad of course noticed this and tried to steer us back into spending more time with her. For me, guilt kicked in and I did better for a while, but it didn't last long and I had to be reminded again and again.

At one point dad asked me if I still wanted her and I weakly tried to defend my lack of time spent with her as not being as bad as he thought. I told him that once summer came back around I would ride her more. Not having accepted my excuses he simply said, "It is not fair to Betsy. She is being neglected. She longs for attention and affection, and she just isn't getting it anymore. If the lack of quality time spent with her continues we are going to need to sell her to someone who will provide for her what she needs." I was horrified at the very thought of this, but after a few days decided that dad was bluffing, and come summer she and I would reconnect.

One dark night after catching a ride home from basketball practice I walked down our driveway toward the house and noticed Betsy wasn't in her pasture. I froze, staring at the open gate in disbelief and knew she was gone. I went into the house and nervously asked dad if he sold her, though I already knew the answer. He assured me she went to a good family who had several other horses, but it was painful for me to hear.

The school year flew by, and mid-summer found my parents again contemplating selling and moving down to the Bitterroot Valley. Over the last seven years, we had transformed our once-bare property into a beautiful farm. I knew it would sell quickly if they were serious about listing it. Not more than a month later it sold for \$79,000.00 and my brother and I were told that we would be starting the next school year in some small town we had never been to.

About a week before it was time to pack up the house, I went for a very long bike ride through the countryside to enjoy the Big Flat one last time. I rode past friends' homes and through wooded areas where I played as a child. I pushed on, riding farther than I ever had. On the return trip home, I saw a patch of cottonwoods that held a secluded pond where my mom used to take us ice skating as small children. As I looked further up the valley, I saw a herd of about ten horses off in the distance, grazing close to a fenceline and I brought the ten speed to an abrupt stop. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and quietly whispered, "Betsy?"

I whistled but received no response. I whistled louder, and in a moment saw her head jerk up while looking in my direction. She trotted around the other horses and paused for a moment, then broke into a full run. I dropped my bike onto the grass and stood up against the barbed wire fence. As she drew closer, she began to whinny and I broke down crying. Coming to a stop, she put her head over the top strand of wire and pressed it into my chest. I laid my head on hers and scratched her cheeks while she nickered softly. I hadn't seen her in over eight months and stayed with her as long as I could, rubbing and scratching her forehead and neck. It was going to be dark soon and I still had a long ride home. I had to leave. As I walked away from the fence, she began whinnying loudly while tossing her head up and down. I couldn't take it. I ran back to her and threw my arms around her neck. She leaned hard into the barbed wire while breathing heavily through her nostrils. I stayed as long as I could but finally had to go. As I mounted my bike and peddled up the road, she trotted alongside of me until the intersecting fenceline stopped her progress. She continued to whinny as I peddled out of sight, never to see her again. I remained emotional all the way home and had to take a moment before going into the house. I knew that I had broken her heart twice and I felt crushed.

The following week we began hauling truck load after truck load from the Big Flat down to the little town of Stevensville where I would start my eight grade year. The night before we were to turn the keys over to the new owners, I stayed down at the river until darkness took hold and I could no longer see. I was overwhelmed with emotion and memories of great family times, running around the farm with Bret, hanging out with Betsy, and landing trout on the banks of the river that was no more than a hundred yards from our back door.

In April of this year, I sent the following text message to my parents.

Sometimes, when the frustrations of life can be a bit more than I want to deal with, I make myself slow down and take a moment to close my eyes and reflect back to my childhood days out on the Big Flat.

I can still smell whiffs of hay hovering in the warm summer air, and the sweet honey-like fragrance from the buds on the cottonwood trees, as Bret and I explored the ravine and riverbanks with no worries in the world. Well, the only daily worry we had was if we were going to have beets as our vegetable for dinner.

I vividly remember Bret and I lying on our backs in the thick clover, staring up at the enormous cumulus clouds hanging softly against the baby blue sky, while using our imaginations to identify animals and dinosaurs among their fluffy shapes. I can still hear his boyish laughter intertwined in our silly conversations.

As I continue to age, quiet and inner peace is what I yearn for most in life. I used to feel guilty at times for feeling that way, but not anymore.

I have always been drawn to running waters. Rivers, creeks, streams, and brooks provide for me a calming effect that I can directly trace back to the Clark Fork.

When I am deep in memory, back on our little seven acre river, I am most assuredly at home. Unlike my friends, I never wanted to grow up.

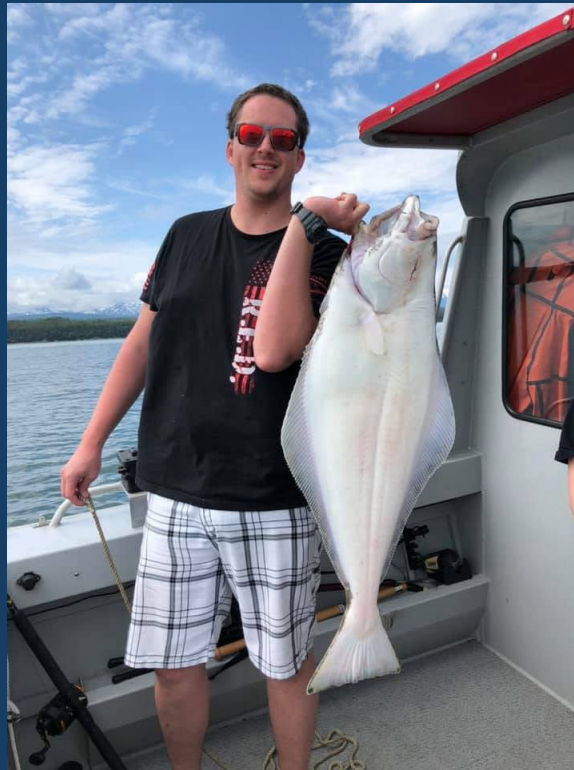
Thank you for being the best mom and dad any little boy could have ever had.



Clark Fork River Photograph by Paul Hermans, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
[File:Belfry \(Montana\) Clark Fork Yellowstone River 12-9-2014 9-06-26.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

LEMON CREEK CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Employee of the Quarter – SSgt. Jeremy Finlayson



SSgt. Jeremy Finlayson, known to his many friends as “Fin,” or “Finny,” began his career with Lemon Creek Correctional Center on April 11, 2013. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant in 2015. In addition to serving as a Shift Supervisor, Fin is a Glock, Ruger, and Colt Armorer. He earned certification in Time & Accounting, SORT Team Leader, and is a designated ICE Warrant Service Officer. He is also a Life Saving Award winner.

SSgt. Finlayson is Lemon Creek’s Go-To guy for every crisis from tactical situations to wonky computer issues. He ALWAYS shows up and never asks for anything in return. Known for his strong leadership and prolific work ethic, he has built his shift into a superior team. Lemon Creek Correctional Center is proud to honor SSgt. Finlayson as Employee of the Quarter.



THE GORGE

By

Daryl Webster

My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him all good things – trout as well as eternal salvation – come from grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.

- Norman Maclean, A River Runs Through It

Were it possible to glimpse Heaven, to hear and smell and feel it with heart still beating, best to do it by a river's edge on a warm day, lulled by water whispers, casting to sleek shadows beneath the restless surface. My father taught me, and I learned well, that the very *act* of fishing is nearly sacramental, even if nothing takes the bait. Were God to visit Earth off the clock, He would certainly do it somewhere high in the mountains, on the bank of a cold, clear stream, fishing rod in hand and a baited hook swirling into an eddy behind a half-sunk boulder. If He caught nothing at all, it would be enough, but being God, He would likely hook into an enormous trout and know for certain that it was one of the most inspiring things He ever created.

When I was young, growing up in California's San Joaquin Valley, my father and I fished together nearly every weekend. Words were optional. We used them sparingly. Ours wasn't a flawless relationship, but when it came to fishing, we were straight as a string. Come Saturday, we loaded the family Ford and trekked into the Sierra Nevada mountains over unpaved Forest Service roads. Like as not, Dad let me drive. That I was too young for a driver's license was a mere technicality. And even at the age of 8 or so, when we stopped at a likely spot, he handed me a fishing rod and a revolver to match the one strapped to his belt, then one of us headed upstream and the other down, rock-hopping to fish every pool we came to until we met back at the truck before dark.

Fishing for trout with ultralight gear was our game. Every Sierra mountain stream big enough to wet a pebble held small, feisty Rainbow trout, named for the vivid color of their flanks. In the crystalline water, you seldom catch the fish you see. Trout are feral and clever, stalking them is akin to hunting. If you read the water, you know where they'll likely be, hovering in pools, hiding behind rocks and logs, waiting to ambush prey swept down by the current. You creep up on them, keeping a low profile because if you can see them, they can see you, and they know what you're about.

The Holy Grail of California trout fishing was the German Brown, nearly extinct in Sierra streams for one reason or another. I sought them like buried treasure, dreaming of undiscovered creeks where I might one day find hidden survivors.

At day's end, over cold sodas on the tailgate, Dad talked of fishing in the Sierras back in the 1940's and 50's, when fish were big and plentiful and people were comparatively few. His were tales of the high country, filled with violent summer storms, lightning sizzling into the treetops, sheltering from rain in abandoned line shacks, perilous river crossings. And casting for trout. I knew the stories were true, not just because I believed in him with all my heart, but because at one time or another, I experienced them myself. Nearly a lifetime later, at the oddest moments I still smell hints of dust and resin, carried on sun-warmed winds as we bumped along jeep trails through stands of cedar and pine. This was my boyhood.

One of Dad's stories captured my attention like no other. In the foothills above Pine Flat Reservoir, a sketchy dirt road followed the course of the Kings River upstream, ending abruptly at the foot of a steep bluff. What lay beyond was a mystery. The Kings plunged down from the high Sierra snowpack into Kings Canyon, one of the deepest gorges in the country, filling the base of the narrow chasm wall to wall. There was no way to walk or boat upstream from road's end. None. And the lack of any sustained riverbank for many miles made it nearly impossible to hike down from the river's upper reaches. In my imaginings, an Amazonian Basin lay between those canyon walls, complete with lost tribes and ancient temples. One thing I knew for sure, if Brown Trout thrived anywhere, they would be there. And they would be as long as my arm.



Image 1: Peering into the gorge near Windy Gulch Cascade

As Dad told it, he once met someone who knew someone, who many years before had entered the canyon upriver during a year of profound drought, when depleted snowfields lowered the water level enough to traverse the canyon. There, he hiked riverbanks revealed but once in a generation and caught giant trout that had never seen a lure. The very thought of it set me on fire.

In my nineteenth year, severe drought returned to California. The lowlands broiled under triple-digit heat, the high country lay bare of snow, and lakes and rivers shallowed, revealing seldom-seen banks and submerged ruins. I hinted to my dad and older brother that this might be our year to tackle the canyon. Dad, then in his 50's and just three years past heart surgery, was instantly hooked. My brother was less enthusiastic. Vietnam had left him wounded in more ways than one, and a boyhood friend had disappeared a few years earlier while solo hiking the Yosemite backcountry. He was ... skeptical.

"You're gonna get yourselves drowned or snakebit," he warned in his raspy, smoker's voice. "I'll just come along to bury you."

So, preparations began. We estimated the hike at 15 miles and figured to be in and out in three days, leaving plenty of time to fish along the way. We stocked up on freeze-dried food, gear, and lures. The only thing we didn't take, and this sounds as stupid as it probably was, was a map. After all, we were heading into a gorge with one entrance and one exit. Who needed directions?

The momentous day arrived, when we stood atop Yucca Point, peering down at the river, 1,400 feet below. Like a Jules Verne novel come to life, an unknown fisherman's legend lured us to this moment. Would we follow his footsteps to the center of the earth? We answered with our feet, down a switchback goat path, to the bank of the Kings. Even diminished by drought, the river was lovely but deceptive, icy cold, clear, and swift. There, we confronted an obstacle that would either end our trip before it started or launch us past the point of no return, a near vertical cliff face that plunged straight into the water. No way to climb over it and the jutting rock hid what lay beyond. Hearing no rapids ahead, we lashed together a crude, driftwood raft, just buoyant enough to carry our gear.

Diving into the current to swim alongside the raft was like pushing through a forcefield. Common sense pressed us back. An irresistible urge drove us forward. And just like that, we were swimming, around the obstructing cliff to a small beach downstream. Wading ashore, we stood for a moment, looking back the way we had come. The powerful current, the unscalable wall. No turning back.

For two days, we hiked downstream on slivers of shoreline, twin cliffs looming above us like a giant straddling the watercourse. In a narrow wilderness of stone, we saw no game bigger than a squirrel. But the ever-traveling river was bigger than life. Its constant, white-noise

whisper carried rumors of rapids below and rose to a roar of crashing water when it tumbled. The shoreline never lasted long before vanishing into a cliff wall.



Image 2: My father & brother at the point of no return

Much of the time we were able to scramble up steep mountainsides without the benefit of climbing gear and over the top of whatever blocked our path. But when no other option presented itself, into the water we went on makeshift rafts.

Hard days made for enchanted evenings. With a limitless supply of driftwood, we built bonfires and feasted around them like primitives in a time of plenty. In the gently waning light, bats darted about, chasing insects that floated and dipped over the water. Occasionally, an unlucky bug would touch the surface, only to be murdered with an abrupt splash by a hungry trout. Come full darkness, stars filled the slash of sky above us, eavesdropping on our stories and playful insults. Of all men, I idolized my father and brother without ever fully understanding them, but I'd never felt such a connection between us. Together, we dreamed and dared come to this place. In those firelit moments, we shared a kinship always remembered but never quite recaptured, an upright father, a half-wild eldest son, and a boy unformed. That would have to suffice.

We were primarily small-stream trout fishermen, our shared passion. On the Kings, the pools were wide and deep. Eddies rested between powerful currents, and we plied them with line and lure at every chance. Trout after trout hit our lures with a muscular tug or a smashing surface strike, churning through the depths and jumping clean out of the water. And they were beefy, much bigger than the pan-sized specimens we were used to catching.

Rainbows every one. Cleaned, spiced, and baked in foil in the campfire, they tasted better than fine.

Our third morning dawned with optimism that would not survive the sunset. The going was slow, as my dad began to tire. We were constantly in and out of the water or clawing our way up and down steep mountainsides, never dry and with sand caking our boots and working its way into waistbands and socks, chafing like sandpaper. The constant detours seemed novel at first, like explorers slashing our way through the wilderness, but the endless scrambling, raft-building and swimming around blind corners was more than we bargained for. We were using up time without gaining much ground. Not yet out of my teens, I was heedless of deadlines and chock full of young immortality, but my dad and brother were beginning to worry and the tension was palpable. They realized, as I did not, that we were gambling, with poor odds, against an injury that could strand us in the canyon with no way to call for help. People back home were expecting us that night and time was getting away from us. Without a map or any identifiable landmarks, we had no clear idea how far we had come or how far we had yet to go. We rounded each riverbend expecting to recognize familiar territory, only to see more of the same. Their concerns became very real to me before the day ended.



Image 3: The author in the Kings River Canyon

As we climbed to the top of an especially rugged outcrop, one of several we topped that day, we encountered a chute in the rockface shaped like a half-pipe, steep and slick, ending in a 20 foot drop to riverbank boulders below. My brother helped my dad across, but when my turn came, I lost my footing and commenced an uncontrolled slide down the chute. Just before plunging over the edge, I caught an overhanging branch and arrested my

fall. I laughed it off, but it was sobering, even to me. That night, after a tortuous day of slogging, we camped in sight of our previous night's camp, barely 200 yards away.



Image 4: Steep walls & mystic water

As Day Four progressed, the prospects of making it home by evening seemed remote. It was all more of the same, swimming and climbing, rinse and repeat, but as we swam around yet another blind bend, we ran into white water. Our raft disintegrated and we spent desperate moments retrieving packs before the current swept them away and struggled getting them and ourselves to shore. Taking stock, we were crushed to discover that we had lost nearly all our remaining food and fishing tackle. We huddled there, chilled and dispirited. Evening was at hand, our first night of getting by on short rations. Worse yet, we were a full day overdue and wheels would be turning to discover what had become of us.

Behind us, the beach formed an unusually large alcove with a small, shadowy thicket tucked into one corner. A promising campsite. And there, we came upon a mystery. Just inside the tree line, neatly stacked like an offering to river gods, lay a trove of abandoned gear. An old pack, brittle fishing rods, a rusted cook pot, and clothing. Weathered by the elements, they had been there for years, without explanation or note. Just a pile of necessities left behind by someone not unlike us, but clearly well beyond the first tug of fear. The deserted cache smelled of desperation.

After stringing up my hammock and hanging clothes to dry, I sought refuge in what I knew best. Mine was the only rod that survived the rapids and the swivel and spinner on the line were the last we had. Success meant supper. Foul and snap the line on a rock and.....not so much. I put all that aside. I'd been casting since I was a tadpole, the motions as familiar as breathing. Read the water, find the eddies, imagine retrieving the lure into the trout's ambush, whip the rod and catapult the lure. A perfect cast, and it only took three.

The hit wasn't spectacular. But it was massive. I might have mistaken it for a snagged tree limb until it *moved*. I set the hook and the fight was on. I could see every inch of my line, stretched taut from the tip of my rod, now bent into a near-perfect "U," to a moving point in the water as the fish ran with the current and began stripping line from my reel with a tortured "zzzzz" sound. On a light rod with 8 pound test line, you don't horse a big fish to shore, you ride him like a bronc, holding tight and letting him tire, hoping he doesn't snap the line or shake the hook. I eased up on the brake and let him strip away, but I made him work for it. He broke the surface time after time, furiously shaking his head. But finally, the line stopped running out and I began reeling it back. After what seemed like an hour, but was likely just minutes, I pulled him from the water and held him with reverence.

He was probably a 5 pound fish. No world record, but by far the largest trout I'd ever caught. That wasn't the detail that mattered. His was a rich, deep, golden hue, with reddish spots mingling with darker black, jaw underslung and lined with sharp teeth. I hadn't just landed a fish, I'd caught a dream. Sleek and slippery and utterly priceless, I beheld my German Brown.

He would easily feed the three of us. I removed the now-destroyed spinner from his jaw, lowered him gently into the water, and watched him swim away.

As Day Five dawned we scrounged breakfast from our remaining packets of dehydrated tomato soup, mixed with a handful of beef jerky and pocket lint. Uninspired as meals go, but pretty darned good on an empty stomach. It would be our only meal of the day. Just then, a small plane flew overhead, following the course of the river. We figured it for a private craft and made no effort to catch the pilot's eye. Unbeknownst to us, we were listed overdue the previous evening. The plane overflew in search of us and the pilot reported seeing what appeared to be human remains submerged in the river.

Later that morning we caught a break, when rounding a bend, we recognized the landscape. Within the hour, we gratefully threw our gear into our truck and headed down the road. On the way, we ran into a Sheriff's Search & Rescue caravan making its way upriver to begin searching for us. We sheepishly introduced ourselves and hurried away.

So many years have passed. I didn't know I had them in me. I'm ten years older than my father was then, and at the time he seemed ancient. He's long gone now, and my brother's adventuring days are pretty much behind him. Here in Alaska, I've caught bigger fish in

more remote rivers. But I've never quested through another place so true to its mystique as to merit a blank space on a map, with the label, "*Here there be dragons.*" Were it even possible, I'd never go back. We're meant to walk some dreamscapes only once. For all I know, condominiums now line the canyon walls and a McDonalds franchise occupies the abandoned cache beach. I think not. I'm content to remember the gorge as it always was, morning mist drifting across the face of the waters, rapids roaring without audience, and bottomless pools filled with mythical fish.



Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of those rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters.

- Norman Maclean, A River Runs Through It

Image 1: Photo by Krzysztof Ziarnik, Kenraiz, courtesy of Wikimedia Images
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kings_River_in_Kings_Canyon_kz01.jpg

Image 4: Photo by Matthew Dillon, courtesy of Wikimedia Images
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Brown Trout Image by Timothy Knepp, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, courtesy of Wikimedia Images

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December 12, 2026

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In-Service Training

Ready When It Counts: Preparing for Cell Extractions

SSgt. Gary Locke

LCCC Training Sergeant

I've had several officers ask me about cell extraction training. That got me thinking about how easy it is to say, "We'll deal with it if it happens." The reality, however, is that when something does happen, you may not have much time to think things through. That is why we are including information about cell extractions in this edition of the Lemon Creek Journal. Additional Cell Extraction training will soon be available in Acadis. Shift Supervisors are strongly encouraged to get their teams together for some very important practice. In the meantime, please see the Mandatory Training Module below.

Thank you and stay safe!

SSgt. Locke

Mandatory Training:

The following Training Module is MANDATORY and should be completed and submitted no later than October 31.

Re-read Policy 1207.01, then access a computer and follow this route to access the Mandatory Training Module:

G-Drive/Everyone/Training Folder/Mandatory Journal Training

- Select "IRT- Cell Extractions," and complete the PowerPoint training module.
- Print out and complete the Cell Extraction quiz in this folder. Once you complete the quiz and place it in the Training Box, you will receive credit for one hour of annual training.

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We look forward to working with you.

