

With bait, in the morning stillness

ONE day this week, I went fishing before work. For the past three years, the same trio from this newspaper has entered the Fish Winnipeg Media/Corporate Challenge, starting at The Forks.

Two years ago, Paul McKie, Gord Preece and I finished in second place in the catch-measure-and-release contest, but more often than not, our team places near the bottom of the media rankings. We've learned to bear the shame with good humour.

By 6 a.m., we are on the water with our guide, and it's a beautiful place to be. (That is, when it isn't pouring rain like last year.) I look at the city in a different way from the water. In fact, it hardly seems like a city at all.

In the stillness, we watch the tips of our rods, waiting for signs of a nibble. We talk about the fish we do catch, and the ones we aren't catching. For the past three years, I have caught more fish than the men. We all know it's down to luck, but it's still fun to tease.

In the afternoon — a more civilized time of the day — the corporate challenge takes place, raising money for the City of Winnipeg Youth/Youth at Risk angling programs.

So far, 1,000 kids have been given an introduction to fishing that many would never have had the chance to enjoy. Each youth receives a rod and reel, too.

On the way to the parking lot, I



Linda Rosborough

thought about the year I got my own first fishing equipment. There is something about fishing, I think, that invites nostalgia.

That year, my father ordered a big starter fishing kit for me and my siblings. To me, it seemed an overwhelming array of stuff — junior-size rods and cheap reels, weights and bobs and bright, spinning lures and small plastic tackle boxes. None of it was expensive, but it seemed that way to me then.

Some of that gear is still around, having lasted about 25 years. There are now occasions when I can't recall my own phone number, but I remember vividly the photo of me with the first fish I ever caught with that rod.

I was fortunate enough to spend a lot of time growing up at the family cottage

in the Kawartha region of southern Ontario.

Our cottage is on a smaller, land-locked lake, so the fishing was not spectacular. But, still, the possibility was always there.

My cousin took me fishing early one morning, a wet, miserable day. I don't think we caught anything, but she is the one who taught me how to thread a worm on the hook so that it won't fall off while casting.

A few doors down, another cottager and family friend spent a lot of time fishing Four Mile Lake. Manitoba-born Grant Sylvester was a successful author and businessman who co-founded Money Concepts Canada

Ltd. When he died in 1999, I remembered a man in a pale-coloured windbreaker, sitting in an aluminum boat on the lake for hours with his line in the water.

Mr. Sylvester used to pay the kids along the shore for catching frogs. A nickel a frog — maybe it was more — seemed like a pretty good deal. They were easy to catch and collect, and my neighbour was happy to exchange a handful of coins for little frogs.

If I thought too much about it, it made me sad for the frogs, so I tried not to think of them on the end of a hook.

At the point when his boathouse was nearly overrun with frogs getting loose from big white pails, Mr. Sylvester had to gently say thanks, that he had enough frogs for a while.

As teens, my friend and I would sometimes go out on the water in the evenings with her older brother, bringing along fishing rods and the tackle box. We spent more time giggling and manufacturing silly names and personalities for the lures, much to her brother's annoyance.

It wasn't really about fishing at all, but when I think about rods, tackle and fishing, I remember those times, too.

Earlier this spring, I interviewed a father and son who have made an innovative business by marketing North America-wide fishing tournaments. They use the Internet to market the events and sign up anglers, but the business was inspired by the grandfather of the family, a man who fostered a lifelong love of angling in his children and grandchildren.

Their entrepreneurship is interesting enough, but their passion for fishing, and their memories of family outings and traditions, were very touching. Just hearing them talk made me want to look in the basement for my own rod.

I'm really not an angler. I don't know much about fish habitat, species or bait. I can bait my own hook, but have no desire to keep or clean any fish. Since my catches have mostly consisted of tiny sunfish and rock bass, I have no proper fish stories.

I do, however, have some pretty nice fishing stories.

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