



*Bruce*  
Cherney

## Fishing stories

### EDITOR'S COMMENT

The annual Fish Winnipeg Media Challenge provides a means of relaying the useful message to a rag-tag collection of print, radio and television media types that some children living in this city require a helping hand when it comes to enjoying the pleasures of fishing on a sunny summer afternoon.

I recall with fondness the many times during my childhood when I threw a fishing line off the pier in anticipation of landing the "big one." I quite literally threw in a "line," as my fishing equipment consisted of a length of green twine used to weave and mend commercial fishing nets and a large salvaged steel nut tied to act as a weight. The only real store-bought item was a hook, which cost mere pennies (collected by returning empty pop bottles) at the local hardware store.

The bait we used was minnows caught by dragging a bath towel through the water a few metres off the sandy beach. This process required two of us — one on each side of the towel. It was a tried-and-true method, since our towel invariably contained at least a few silvery minnows.

Once we had baited our hooks, it was time to cast the line into the water. The act of casting was a thrill unto itself, involving twirling the line a couple of times over the head and letting go at the appropriate time. A good cast would send our

makeshift fishing line tens of metres out into the water. In our youthful exuberance, the occasional accident occurred, such as inadvertently looping the line around the neck of someone standing nearby or tangling it in overhead hydro lines.

Today's professional anglers on television would probably cringe at our home-made equipment, preferring to discuss the merits of name brand rods, reels and lures, but I assure you we managed to catch our fair share of the lake's bounty. We called out to our companions whenever one of use landed a pickerel, sauger or silver bass. It was particularly delightful when we were lucky enough to sink our fish-twine lines into a school of tasty pickerel and were able to retrieve fish after fish in quick succession.

All this was made possible by childhood necessity and ingenuity, as well as being fortunate enough to live in a small town near a large body of water. In the urban setting of Winnipeg, there is also plenty of water and fish in the major rivers dissecting the city, but it's often inaccessible to less-fortunate youth. That's where Fish Winnipeg, a volunteer group supported by the city's Urban Angling Partnership, Fish Futures Inc. and the Complete Angler, as well as many private corporations, come into the equation. Through a series of programs, the organization provides education and outreach

programs that match children with rods and reels, and relate the pleasures of fishing in an urban environment.

I recall the great thrill I had as a young lad when I finally got my first genuine rod and reel. It wasn't the best equipment available, but I sure was proud of that rod and reel and every time I gazed at it I broke out into a smile.

Recalling my youth, I can easily imagine how proud today's youngsters are when they get their first rod and reel from Fish Winnipeg.

The media fishing challenge held in the morning is followed each year by a corporate challenge which raises nearly \$15,000 for the youth fishing programs that include purchasing rods and reels handed out every year to youngsters. Another program, Gear Up — Tackling the Future Fishing Program, co-ordinated by retired city worker Frank Soja, an avid fisher, collects donated fishing equipment, refurbishes it and shares it with others. According to the program brochure, each "simple donation will help gear up children, families, and those less fortunate with the equipment needed to get them started in fishing."

The website [www.fishfutures.net/gearup](http://www.fishfutures.net/gearup) has more information on the program and where to make an equipment donation, whether it's a fishing rod, reel, net or tackle box.

Using the equipment provided by the organization staffed by willing volunteers, today's youth can experience the pleasure I had fishing as a youngster as well as during the 14th annual media challenge. Fortunately, Winnipeg's two major rivers are filled with numerous fish species that I know through experience can be caught from the shoreline just as readily as when using a boat.

Last Tuesday morning, the WREN team of Peter Squire, Tom Derksen and myself, accompanied by our guide John

Brandon — the guides are all volunteers who provide their own boats and equipment for the challenge — only landed three fish. However, they were all channel cats with the result that we ended up in sixth place. It wasn't bad fishing for an extremely cold morning and in rain-swollen rivers plagued by strong currents.

The media challenge was won by the CJOB team headed by announcer Barry Burns. "We started off using fishing equipment for channels cats, but it wasn't working, so we went after the little fish," he said. They caught little fish in droves, netting a total of 62. Actually, the CJOB team ended up with more than half of the 117 fish caught by the media on Tuesday.

One pleasant surprise was the landing of a small sturgeon, a fish species that was nearly made extinct in Manitoba through overfishing. During the late 19th century, sturgeon were being caught in prodigious quantities. At one point, the oil-rich long-lived archaic fish was even being used to fuel and lubricate steamboat engines. It was brought to the brink of extinction by such frivolous activities. By 1875, Archbishop Taché wrote that the once-plentiful sturgeon in the Assiniboine and Red rivers had all but disappeared. So it's great news that sturgeon are again being caught and then released back in Winnipeg's waterways. The sturgeon are being helped by government-funded and volunteer-backed programs that restock the Winnipeg River with this "species at risk." The success of the program was made evident when co-worker Irene Williamson recently landed a metre-long sturgeon from the Winnipeg River, which, of course, she released back into the water unharmed.

Imagine the thrill a child using equipment from Fish Futures would have in landing one of these prehistoric fish that have survived from the time of dinosaurs.