



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

Cold rain beat down upon the taut roof and sides of

my tent sounding like Jiffy Pop popcorn attempting to escape it's foil cocoon. Wind whipped, the lake, 20 feet from my portable abode, was a flurry of foam and churning water. My first semi-solo trip to the BWCA wasn't starting quite as I had expected. Solo, as in I was spending the nights alone and semi, as in I was meeting a very good friend to fish for the better part of day two of the adventure. Alone, but not lonely I was cherishing my time in the lakes country.

My close buddy had recently moved to a primitive cabin on the north shore of Lake Superior, located spitting distance from the gitche-gumi, to take on a summer position in the resort area. Unfortunately for him, he left his heart shattered to pieces in the twin cities days before going north, as his long-term relationship had recently collapsed. No electricity, running water or even heat, he spent his time alone and very, very lonely working and thinking.

Considering his challenges, ours was to be an opportunity to reunite and share stories of broken dreams and unanswered questions with fishing as a distraction.

A lull in the torrent, I ventured out of my nylon cocoon, made chili mac and fresh broccoli for dinner, and then wet a line from the shore of my private island, in search of whatever would venture out on this soggy, gray late afternoon. Cast after cast, careful not to snag a tree, and soon I had landed a slab smallie, a 'hammer handle' and even a fair sized walleye. The sky, thick with racing and smoky colored cotton balls, gave me, for the briefest moment, a glimpse of sapphire blue and golden sunlight. A reminder that life, even in it's dreariest moments, has some brilliance to offer.

Up early the next day, oatmeal with coconut and craisens along with a side of fried spam, gave me the energy to paddle back to the canoe launch site and pick up my friend. The sky, thick as a tick with rain, held itself back until we were slow trolling far across the lake. Distant thunder sent us deep dipping to my campsite where a couple of cups of Joe,

some gorp and cigars settled us in for a round of guy talk to include the injustices of relationships.

Patient and empathetic, as I had worn a similar pair of shoes on more than one occasion, my attention was his as the story unfolded. “Out of no-where, complete surprise, taken aback, hurt, sad, alone and so very lonely,” he poured his soul out over the next couple of hours. With great appreciation for the trial he was putting himself through, I shared some insight as one who had travelled that self-sabotaged road several times before.

My divorce, my broken engagement, my battle to subdue the bottle and my sample of insanity, had all weighed in balance upon my ability to rely upon myself and my perception of a Higher Power to carry my banner when I felt alone and bordering upon defeat. When there appeared to be no hope, a tear in my mental fabric, utter confusion and incomprehensible ache, I had learned through experience what I

needed most was to take a step back and live my life one second at a time then one minute, followed by five or more. Focus on healing myself by myself, and stop playing the “what if” game. Learn to live with my idiosyncrasies one moment at a time and realize that truly I am a pretty decent guy and worthy of happiness.

“Soon, with practice, the pain will subside. New dreams will grow and replace the old ones. Above all be kind to yourself and develop a relationship with who you are so you will never again be alone and lonely,” I consoled.



A lull in the rain, we ventured

back on the water for an afternoon of less intense discussion, a lucky walleye hole and even a few laughs. Calmer, still moist, we had slayed some dragons and were at peace when we went our separate ways. Him back to his bachelor bunkhouse on the great lake, and me, a paddle of length, and a tent, which I hoped, was still dry.