



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

A project, a personal challenge with many future returns.

Too long in the waiting, I had been putting off the task as I didn't know how difficult the trial would be. Into it by two months now, I don't understand my hesitancy; the rewards are beginning to show themselves.

Abused and neglected the once beautiful shell sat for too long in the elements, her vibrant red was now a sun scalded, weathered raw and undeterminable hue. Thwart-less and sprung, wooden ribs carefully set in 1972 were free to push outward causing a warped gunwale and off-centered appearance. Stored along a city lake during a summer of discontent, the craft was marred with engraved "KKKs", deep gouges through her veneer, cracked skeleton from a severe attack of boulders and hand woven cane seats decomposed and collapsed. My project had the potential to be a real money pit.

Dropped off years ago, the 15-foot Old Town wooden canoe was a gift from my brother who had originally picked the new watercraft up in Maine with my father. "Now that you live by a lake, you will use it more than me Jack," he said which was actually code for, *I don't have any space to store this ugly boat anymore and you do!*

Under my deck, decrepit, it sat in stasis collecting dirt, spider webs and leaves as I waited to do something-anything with it. As a superintendent I didn't have time to give the restoration justice and last year I was consumed with a new vocation. Such was my reasoning.

With no more excuses, eight weeks ago I racked it on top of the car, grabbed my father and adventured to North West Canoe for a bit of education. A grumpy passenger, my Dad was angry over the shape of this once valuable "woody". He was frustrated with my bro and disappointed his 85 years of age would deny him the opportunity to really help on the project. With one look at the canoe, Dennis sent us off to Urban



Canoe Restoration in Minneapolis as it was beyond his expertise.

“Come back when you need new seats and varnish,” he said as we left.

Phil at UC was equally quick with an assessment. Much to the delight of my father, we (I) would likely be able to restore the vessel (he could hardly wait)...with a lot of elbow grease (he would have nothing to do with)! Dad was happy about the prognosis and I very excited, however not looking forward to the effort ahead. Back to his shop we went with new vigor.

For the last several weeks my fingers have been worn raw hand sanding new seats, a thwart, the gunwales and many, many ribs, which provide the canoe its strength as well as resiliency. There are no tools on the market for taking down the aged finish and preparing the steam bent surfaces for several layers of new varnish. Therefore, I have lost my fingerprints first with 180 grit sandpaper, followed by 280 and then 400 between the coats of marine grade finish.

Besides a finely prepared surface, hand sanding provides time to think.

My mind did wander and eventually I landed upon a theme; perhaps it was the season that brought my thoughts to thankfulness.

To be who I am, where I am and when I am at this moment in history is of great comfort. Food is abundant, my house warm, aggression nonexistent and love readily available. I am healthy, educated, free from addiction, old enough to appreciate what opportunities I have and young enough to dream of more. My vocation is very satisfying and something I really enjoy doing. Although my senses are not what they used to be, I can still watch a flock of cardinals upon the feeders, hear distant thunder in the summer, smell fresh, cinnamon and sugary, baked caramel rolls, taste rich strong coffee and feel the smoothness of hand sanded cedar.

On occasion my father will watch me work as he takes a break from puttering at his desk. A great American Hero, I owe him more than he will ever appreciate; my freedom, independence, perspective, drive, humility, intelligence, common sense, retentiveness, humor and likely good looks. A hard man, he was and sometimes still is a real pain in the ass, one trait I temper on my

own. In general however, he is a good individual who I am thankful to have in my life. However I currently wish he could still sand.

Each layer of varnish removed and reapplied has taken me away to the sky blue Boundary Waters. Although this canoe would be my solo craft, I contemplate with happiness, fine memories of northern adventures with my children, wife and friends. I am thankful to be surrounded by incredible people who provide me with both tangible and abstract support. With contained excitement I look forward to the three “F”s associated with my BWCA; food, fish and of most importance, friendship.

Seats installed and interior complete, ribs re-formed and thwart in place, the vessel is taking shape. My imagination puts me over twenty feet of cool and clean water, the call of the loon keeping me company, my watchful eyes always looking for moose along the shoreline. With luck this year will offer a long solo trip, time to contemplate my lot in life and reconnect in-depth with my Higher Power.

I am infinitely appreciative for my spirituality. Having worshipped under

several roofs of different denominations, comfort comes easy to me as I give thanks for the many miracles in my life and pray for others to witness the wonders of faith. Non-theological, my ideology is very personal and based upon the experiences I have lived.

Who I am, where I am and when I am interrupt me as I contemplate re-surfacing the exterior of my watercraft. Sanding dust mixed with resin will heal the injuries and several coats of two-part, red tinted varnish will almost finish the project. Just a new name on the bow, of course I will keep in the tradition of my father and prefix her name with a “Mac’s” and suffix her name with an adjective beginning with the letter “F”.

Through the years there have been red canoes named Mac’s Fury, Mac’s Folly, Mac’s Favorite, Mac’s Fourth and Mac’s Farce (a sailboat!). In perspective I realize each name reflected a stage in my father’s life. Hmmm, I believe my craft will reflect my “now”...Mac’s Freedom.

My family and I wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and Wondrous New Year ahead.