

Inspirations

by_Sean Barfoot

I am not a fish nor do I pretend to be an expert on their behaviour but I, like many of you, have spent much of my life studying their habits through pursuing them in an act called fishing. To be quite honest, in some periods of my life you wouldn't be too far off if you called my pursuit an obsession. However, I like to refer to my ongoing pursuit for fin flippers as a passion. My heart just wouldn't beat right unless I was on a river.



That's what I told Ma and Pa anyway. They had a hard time believing but it got me off the hook when I was late for dinner! Spending countless days on the riverbank, I came to admire these gilled creatures for the qualities they embody. Spending another summer at Tree River brought me that much closer to understanding, respecting and admiring the char for their strength, determination, perseverance and commitment as they fight their way up this obstacle - ridden river to spawn. Spending the summer at Tree River also brought me closer to knowing many of our guests and for this I am grateful.

Like the char, two guests in particular stand out in my mind as being admirable for the obstacles they face on a day to day basis. Dan Sissler and Al Jenkins are exceptional people. I had the pleasure of guiding Dan and Al during their stay at Tree River this summer. Dan lost his eye sight in 1953 at the age of 24 while serving in the US Air Force and since that day he has had two glass eyes. The challenges this man faces on a regular bases are extraordinary. Despite losing his dominant sense, Dan pursued his education and became a Professor of Agricultural Economics at Cornell University. After retiring, Dan spent eleven years as Chair of Helen Keller International which is an organization that combats blindness and malnutrition in the world's most impoverished countries. Dan's has accomplished so much in his life despite having no eyesight. Thanks for the stories and the good times Dan! You are truly and inspiration.

Al Jenkins lost his arm in 1990 after being hit by a drunk driver. But that didn't stop him from pursuing his craze for fishing. Our adventures began in Cabin #1 when I knocked on the door to see if he was ready to head out on the river. "Come in" Al said rather frantically. I opened the door to a somber mood as one of the cables on Al's prosthetic arm had snapped, making the arm utterly useless. "You need two arms to catch a fish" he said "right now I only have one". After some jerry rigging in the Tree River shop we managed to make it functional with some fancy wiring and the help of the handyman's secret weapon -duct tape.

"Lets rock and roll!" Al shouted. Our spirits regained, we headed up the east side of the river in pursuit of a char-something Al has been dreaming about all his life. Now, as all of you know with river fishing, your lure has to be just off the bottom to be catching fish. We have a saying on the Tree "if you're not losing lures, you won't catch a char". With all this finessing, catching a char is a difficult task for an able bodied person, let alone one with a jerry-rigged prosthetic arm. Cast after cast, reel after reel, lure after lure, Al pursued with confidence hoping to hook an esteemed Tree River char. Hours past like minutes but still no strikes. Then WAM! A bolt of silver shot three/four feet into the air. Al had hooked into a dandy and the expression on his face was priceless. "This fish is going to beat me up" he said as the char screamed out line. The fish turned, and being a



charging char headed straight back to Al. That's when things took a turn for the worst. With unequivocal volition the char bolted back into the fast water pulling Al's prosthetic arm right out of its socket. Thank goodness for the back strap or it would have been long gone! I was quick to help Al reattach his arm to his shoulder and after a few more valiant efforts on behalf of the char; Al finally landed it on the bank. He was elated. Way to go Al! Now, I can honestly say that Tree River char are so strong I've seen them pull a man's arm off!