

## WAYPOINT

By Bruce Masterman

In spirit

When his father died, so did the dream  
of a fishing getaway. Or so he thought

The Cessna 185 taxied away from the dock, picked up speed along the water and lifted effortlessly into the bright blue northern Ontario sky. Soon it was out of sight. In a few seconds, even the drone of the motor was swallowed by the wilderness. Silence returned to the remote lake.

“Well, here we are,” my brother Rick said to nobody in particular.

“Yeah, we sure are,” I answered.

To anyone listening, our simple verbal exchange might have sounded rather lame. In truth, though, it held a much deeper meaning—neither of us could really believe we were indeed *\*here\**, miles away from civilization, standing on a dock as waves lapped against it.

Rick and I had dreamed of doing a trip like this together for more than 30 years. We’d talked about it, we’d agreed it would be fun, but we never got around to doing it. Several years ago, the plan expanded to include our dad, Robert, and Rick’s son, Dan. It would be an all-guys getaway to catch a few fish, tell some lies and try to bridge the gap created by busy lives and three provinces. But that’s as far as it ever went—talk.

Then, in 2003, Dad died in a car accident at the age of 82. One key member of our planned trip was gone, and it seemed destined never to happen. But both Rick and I underestimated the vision and determination of Dan, who, at age 24, knew more about motivation than Rick and I ever will.

Two summers ago, Dan and a friend had ventured to northern Ontario’s Devlin Lake, where they enjoyed almost non-stop action for walleye and pike. A photo of Dan with a 39-inch pike even graces the Web site of Wilderness Air, which runs the outpost at Devlin Lake as part of a string of fly-in fishing operations. What better place, he thought, for the elusive all-guys getaway?

And so it was that we found ourselves standing on the dock at Devlin Lake last August, finally on the fishing trip of our dreams. With the plane gone, we carried our gear up to the rustic but comfortable log cabin and unpacked. Then it was right down to the boat, with tackleboxes, rods, nets and lifejackets in tow.

Soon Dan was piloting us to one of his favourite fishing spots, about 10 minutes away. It was a relatively shallow area, with a white plastic buoy marking the location of a giant rock that had likely claimed a few propellers over the years.

We started off using bottom bouncers and spinners, baited with dead minnows. After about five minutes of drifting with the motor turned off, Dan got the first bite. “I’ve got one,” he announced. And he did—a nice chunky walleye. Soon, Rick and I were also watching our rods bounce under the weight of hefty fish.

For several exciting and entertaining minutes, it seemed as though at least one of us would have a nice walleye on. And every now and then someone would also catch a pike, just to liven things up. Then, when the action would start to slow down, we would just move to another spot and start all over again.

Before we knew it, it was late afternoon and our stomachs were telling us it had been a long time since lunch. We reeled in our lines and motored back to camp.

I volunteered to clean the few walleye we’d kept for supper, and pulled out Dad’s old filleting knife. I’d watched him clean hundreds of fish with that finely honed blade over the years, and I considered it an honour to have it with us. It just seemed so right to be using his favourite fish knife on this trip-of-a-lifetime—a trip he would have been on if only we’d done it sooner. And as I sliced off the fillets and removed the skin and cheeks from each of the walleye, it even felt as if Dad’s hand was guiding me.

In a way, he hadn’t missed the trip after all.

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