Wilderness Canoe Association
WCA
nastawgan

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The Team: Leanne Robinson, baby Emile, and the author

Up the Grandin River and down the Johnny Hoe River

Story and photos by Dwayne Wohlgemuth

Leanne and I ascend the Grandin River a hundred metres before we pull ashore. The current is fast and the water is too shallow to make a proper paddle stroke. Baby Emile is awake and breakfast was long ago, so we tie the boat and make lunch over a tiny fire amongst the thick leatherleaf, bog birch, black spruce, and Labrador tea. Behind the thickly vegetated shoreline lies a more sparsely forested peat bog dotted with unripe cloudberries. After lunch and a thorough soaking of the area around the fire, we untie the boat and begin wading upstream.

My spouse Leanne Robinson, our 1-year old son Emile, and I are on a 2-month, 1100 km canoe trip from the Tlicho community of Whati to Great Bear Lake via the Grandin and Johnny Hoe Rivers, and back south to Behchoko via the traditional Idaa Trail. We started on Lac La Martre, at Whati, on

June 29th. The only information we could find about the Grandin and Johnny Hoe rivers was what we could garner from maps and satellite images, and we were unable to locate anyone who had paddled either of them. Other experienced northern paddlers like John McInnes have considered this route in recent times, so that was slightly reassuring. We are both excited and apprehensive, especially given that this year we have our toddler along.

We follow the Grandin River upstream for 65 km and six days, paddling some and frequently wading. This is a warm, gravel river with frequent rapids separated by sections of steady current and small, shallow ponds. Eagles balance on the treetops above the rapids, trumpeter swans beat their wings on the water as they depart, and the choir of loons provides the background music. At one point, just as I hop out of the canoe, a duck hastily swims underwater right past my ankle, easily visible in the clear water. We watch for arctic grayling and try fishing a few rapids but without luck. So we fish in the few deeper sections of the river and eat northern pike.

Close to Lac Grandin there is a distinct turn in the river at a long narrow lake. We've been travelling north and now we turn west. The river has been adequately deep for canoe travel up to this point, but here the river trickles into the lake over a wide, braided boulder fan. We slowly meander upstream in the shallow water, picking our way around shallow gravel and boulders, albeit not without a scratch or two on the boat. At the top of the rapid the river again becomes narrow and swift, and a few hours later we reach Lac Grandin where we immediately find a small but glorious sand beach. The sun is hot, the water is glassy, and we take turns swimming while Emile timidly explores. This is the first campsite where he has a chance to move freely with tripping on a Labrador tea bush or a bog birch, and he's only been walking for two months.

The locals in Whati told us that the summer winds in this area are usually from the southeast, and this certainly holds true for our entire time from Whati to the Johnny Hoe River. We paddle the full 35 km of Lac Grandin's south shore in an easy day with a gentle but consistent ESE tail wind. The shoreline, though completely exposed to any north winds, is heavily vegetated and there are only a few tiny gravel beaches. Some stretches

Grandin River

of the lake's edge are shallow and dotted with exposed boulders, sometimes forcing us to paddle a few hundred metres from shore to avoid them. A few islands out in the lake appear to have large beaches on their south-facing, more battered shorelines.

At the end of the day the wind becomes stronger and we're forced to camp once more on peat bog at the west end of Lac Grandin, having decided at the last tiny gravel beach – when the wind was still reasonable – to make a few more kilometres. We wanted to be in position to exit Lac Grandin the next day without the possibility of being wind bound.

In Whati we heard about a winter route to Lac Taché, but it has a few long land sections and the route we chose based on satellite maps has more water and shorter portages, so we stick to our plan. We paddle a few hundred metres up a slow winding stream to a shallow lake, cross it, and then push and pull the canoe around the bends of another stream. The portaging begins where the stream becomes rocky, and this portage is relatively easy with only a few deadfalls to climb over.

We take four days to reach Tonggot Lake, slowed by our heavy two-month supply of food, diaper changes and laundry, blueberry picking, and a toddler that needs two uninterrupted naps each day. Sometimes we have to clear deadfall before portaging, but occasionally we walk through sparse forest dotted with blueberries and cloudberries. Only the blueberries are ripe. As we portage into Tonggot Lake we walk parallel to a stream, and when we spot a pond from the portage trail we question whether we could have waded part of the stream. But near the end of the portage I explore to find the stream again and instead find an unbelievably flat and defined freeway of grey rocks wide enough for three or four lanes of traffic. The stream trickles and gurgles amongst the rocks.

We had planned to camp on Tonggot Lake, but it is shallow and murky and in many spots we stir the silt with every paddle stroke. The shorelines are dense with vegetation, and we push on to reach Lac Taché. The stream from Tonggot to Taché is bigger, and though there are no marked rapids on the maps, we count six, four of which require hopping out of the canoe to wade around sweepers or shallows. At Lac Taché we paddle out to the more exposed islands and are excited to find a small rocky beach facing the heat of the evening sun.

The next day we relax, leave late in the morning, and stop for a long lunch and a swim on a SE facing sandy beach. On Lac Taché's western shore we are ecstatic to find a long sandy beach wide and flat enough at one end for the tent. We stop and stay put for two nights, enjoying swims, bug-free time in the hot sun, and time to write in our journals. It's our first day off in two weeks. Emile explores more and spends a lot of time picking the plentiful and attractive soapberries. We've been showing him all the edible berries, and soapberries are the only ones he doesn't like to eat. He brings them to me instead. He learns by copying us, and begins hanging clothes on the bushes and gathering small sticks to bring to the fire.

As we pack camp we are excited and apprehensive about the Johnny Hoe River. On topographic maps, the upper portion of the river is relatively straight and dotted with rapids. The lower portion appears as a winding, wide river which conjures thoughts of deep, slow-moving water, clay banks, and lazy floating lunches. Like a mini Mackenzie River I thought. But while researching the river, we couldn't find anyone who had paddled it. Google Earth boasted a single photo of the river, taken in winter from an airplane.

We'll be on the river for 250 km to reach Great Bear Lake. It initially flows west, southwest, and then northwards where it passes through Lac Sté Thérèse before reaching the McVicar Arm, the warmest and most southerly portion of Great Bear Lake.

The very top of the Johnny Hoe has small lakes separated by fast, narrow sections of river. These rapids between lakes aren't marked on the topographic maps, but we expect them, and they are easy and fun. We stop at the end of one rapid to fish and catch pickerel for dinner. During our second day on the river we leave the small lakes behind. The current is steady and the rapids are shallow and rocky. The maps become more reliable with most rapids properly marked. Blueberries are everywhere and perfectly ripe. Emile happily eats from the blueberry bushes while we cook and erect or take down the tent.

The Route

Underground Stream

One afternoon I spot an Arctic greyling belly up below a rapid, and scoop it out of the water. We had seen them in the water but hadn't yet spent time fishing for them in the Johnny Hoe. The fish begins flapping, and I realize it must have just had a rocky ride down the rapid and ended upside down. I grip more tightly, and pull out my knife. This fish will make an easy dinner! No fishing line required.

During our third day on the Johnny Hoe we arrive at what appears to be the most challenging stretch of rapids. On the map it's a full kilometre of rapid line after rapid line, what we refer to as a zipper for its resemblance. We time this stretch for the late morning, when Emile is napping, so that we can focus on the river. We travel slowly, eddying out at every opportunity to scout from the boat. The shorelines have been tangles of willows and black spruce, and this stretch is no different. Scouting from shore would be difficult and slow. But the rapids are generally easy, the waves are small, and the challenge is to avoid rocks. Only at the very end of the kilometre does the river pinch and become deep with bigger standing waves. Emile is still sound asleep, but the very last standing wave is too big and a large splash comes over the bow. We forgot to tighten the cords on our home-sewn bow deck and water pours into the canoe between the deck and the gunnels, landing directly on top of Emile. He awakes with a loud wail just as we arrive at a calm pool and the confluence of another river. The sun is hot and the shoreline just below the rapid has some open grass-covered space, so we stop to change Emile's clothes, wash diapers, and eat lunch.

4 A.M. am sunrise on Great Bear Lake

Below the zipper the river changes, and we start referring to it as the lower Johnny Hoe. The banks are slightly higher and show signs of being scraped by ice during spring breakup. Between the river and the spruce forest lies a band of dense willow, bog birch, grass, and alder. The black spruce trees closest to the river have scars on the side of their trunks from the ice. There are occasional flat, grassy shores and exposed gravel bars, and potential camp sites become common. Rapids are less frequent and we relax in our thoughts, though the river remains shallow and we still need to avoid the odd rock. There is only one more significant stretch of rapids, but the river is wide and shallow and we pass through without incident.

The band of deciduous shrubs on either side of the river is excellent moose and bear habitat. In less than 24 hours we see four black bears, one of which approaches to within 5 metres of Leanne while she's erecting the tent. Leanne loudly alerts me of the bear in camp, since I am some 50 metres away in the bug tent with Emile. After Leanne's loud shout, the bear decides it's best to retreat and wastes no time. Two days later we pass by four bull moose in one day. I call

Gravel bar on the Johnny Hoe River

one, and tell Leanne to put her paddles in the air like moose antlers. After a cow call and then a few bull grunts, the moose walks into the river, turns upstream and begins walking towards us. We drift downstream towards the moose and I ponder how close we should approach. At ten metres I finally speak to the moose and tell him that it's time to go. He splashes away, stopping to look at us once more.

As we near Lac Ste Thérèse, the river remains clear but the valley becomes noticeably less deep, and the large rocks disappear and are replaced by fine boulders and gravel. Massive gravel bars provide space enough to camp a village. Flood plains appear, crisscrossed with bear, wolf, and moose tracks, and covered with short willow and aspen, wild strawberries, and wild rose. Bank erosion seems to be constant here; clusters of black spruce are leaning over the water as if paying their regards to the river.

The weather turns cold and cloudy with a strong west wind, and we realize we won't be able to paddle on Lac Ste Thérèse. We stop on a 500 metre long gravel bar just above the braided delta where the river enters the lake. It's still warm enough for a few bugs, so we stick to open ground and turn the canoe on its side as a wind shelter. The next morning the west wind is still howling, so we take the time to make fried bannock rolled in sugar and cinnamon. In the afternoon the wind subsides slightly so we pack and return to the water. *We learned afterwards from a friend of ours that snow had fallen at this time on Great Bear Lake!*

In the delta we lose the deep channel a couple times and become caught on shallow sand bars. The river here has changed since the map was made, and one tiny side channel shown on the map is now the main, wide channel. The water turns murky, and the shorelines are again choked with vegetation. We paddle onto Lac Ste Thérèse and turn downwind. We can see what looks like beaches on the east shoreline, so we enjoy the tailwind. Soon we leave the silty water behind and transition onto deep, clear water once more. We blow ashore on a sandy beach dotted with large willow and strewn with driftwood.

The next day we travel broadside to the waves and are almost stopped by the wind when we turn west to reach the river's exit. We disturb a moose just as

Emile in the bow

we arrive on the calm water of the river. This section of the Johnny Hoe is mostly slow and deep, and we spot only a couple potential campsites. We continue paddling and stop briefly to inspect a few long-abandoned cabins nestled in a grassy field bordered by forest and swamp. The wind is still from the west but is now calmer, and we eagerly paddle out onto the McVicar Arm of Great Bear Lake. We find a small beach on an island and stop for the night. There are a few charred logs from a fire, and boot prints are still obvious in the sand — the closest we've come to seeing a human in over three weeks.

We paddle one full day northeast on Great Bear with a light tailwind, and on the second day the wind is from the northeast and we're grounded before lunch. On the third day we awake before 3 am to have an early start. We're on the water before 4 am, and we have a beautiful trout in the boat by 6 am. But by 8am we're chilled to the bone so we stop for a fire and snacks. And by 11 am we're off the water again due to wind.

The shore here is still glacial till country and is dominated by low lying black spruce forest, boulders, and the odd sand and gravel beach. Sawed lumber driftwood on every beach recalls the mining history of Great Bear Lake in the 1930s when a sawmill operated on the McVicar Arm. The water is crystal clear and I often feel as though I'm floating on the clouds. I stare at the lake bottom passing by, and feel like we're in an airplane coming in to land when the bottom suddenly rises. The transparency of the water in Great Bear Lake has been measured to be as much as 30 metres.

We spend seven days on Great Bear Lake. There are a few stretches without any camping options, but beaches are relatively frequent and we always find great locations. Most of the afternoons we're windbound, and we enjoy time to cook bannock and fish, explore, read, write, and nap. On the Johnny Hoe the blueberries were ripe and soft, but here the season is delayed by the slow warming of Great Bear Lake and the berries are still green on one side. We use a rubber bullet on a wolf that creeps into camp one windbound afternoon, and gain an appreciation for a new way to deter creatures without allowing them to come close enough for bear spray. We soon pass our most northerly point of the trip just east of Gordon Point, and slowly turn towards the south. We're sad to leave Great Bear Lake and its delicious trout behind.

We spend a few days paddling and portaging through another route we know nothing about, from Great Bear Lake up a small stream to Tuchay Lake and then through a series of ponds to Hottah Lake. We bash through the forest on a few portages, and climb over deadfall in an old burn. A couple old winter portages provide relief from the thick forest, but twice I am fooled by the ground's appearance and fall waist deep in body-sucking goo with a barrel on my back. At Hottah Lake we come upon a mature forest of sparse white spruce, an amazingly level sandy forest floor, a beach, and many signs of past use. We are all smiles.

Here, now, we're on the relatively well-travelled water of the traditional Idaa Trail and we have plenty of information about the route and the portages. We still have nearly a month left in our trip but we feel like we're on the home stretch. The portages are well-cleared, the lakes are calmer, and we will soon visit the community of Gameti to buy more salt as our supply is dangerously low.

After 45 days without seeing a single soul, we arrive in Gameti. We tour the community, chat with folks in the street, watch the baby pigs that recently arrived, buy salt and chocolate, and continue on our journey. The portage trails are well cleared, and Emile walks a few of the easiest ones. Sunny summer weather holds for the remainder of our trip and we make good time, encouraged by smoke from a few nearby forest fires. On Bea Lake, parts of the southern shore have just burned, and smoke is rising

Emile walks the portage

from areas east, south and west of the lake. We wonder if we'll have to pass through the fire while heading south on the Marian. But after we leave the lake we see no more burned areas. There's a rapid near the bottom of the Marian that is well-known for fishing bears, and we are not disappointed. A black bear catches a whitefish 50 yards away while we float in the canoe. We finish the trip August 26 after 59 days without seeing any other people except for the short time spent in Gameti.

Logistics

Whati can be reached by charter aircraft or scheduled flights from Yellowknife. Air Tindi offers ten scheduled flights a week, and at the present moment the cost is $237 for a one-way flight. For anyone driving or flying to the NWT for a trip on the Grandin or Johnny Hoe Rivers, a folding canoe would be required to take the scheduled flight. Hard shell canoes can be rented in Yellowknife from Narwal Northern Adventures and from Overlander Sports, but these would require a charter.

Both Air Tindi and Ahmic Air in Yellowknife offer float plane charters capable of carrying canoes. Air Tindi currently has De Haviland Baby Caravans which are appropriate for teams of four with two nested canoes strapped on the outside, as well as Twin Otters which can carry canoes inside and are appropriate for larger teams. Ahmic Air has DHC-2 Beavers which are good for one or two people with the canoe mounted on the struts.

Both the Grandin and Johnny Hoe Rivers could be paddled in the downstream direction by flying into Lac Grandin or Lac Taché, respectively. The Grandin would be the least expensive of the two due to the shorter flight out from the bottom of the river. The section of the Grandin we paddled is only 65 km long and would be a short trip, but it could be a pleasant and less expensive ten to fourteen-day paddle if one returned all the way to Behchoko via the La Martre and Marian Rivers. The La Martre River has one three-kilometre portage around the La Martre falls just downstream of Whati, plus one more short portage around a rapid that many paddlers would probably run. The Marian River has two short portages. The Grandin River might be fun upstream of Lac Grandin but we didn't paddle this upper stretch and don't know what the river's like.

Moose on the Johnny Hoe River

The Grandin River and the upper portion of the Johnny Hoe River do not offer plentiful camping spots, and some stretches are quite unpleasant for camping. But there are locations, and knowing those locations could make the trip much more pleasant. I'd be happy to share more detailed info with those who are interested in a trip, and I can be found on Facebook or via our website www.mapsnwt.com.

Rapid on the Johnny Hoe River

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Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning "the way or route"

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal, *Nastawgan*, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

Articles Wanted – Seriously!

I remember reaching out to you this time last year, asking you to consider writing a story about your trip or wilderness experience – no matter how "big" or "small" it may seem to you. A year later, it's obvious that I didn't inspire you. In the meantime, due to lack of content and my personal circumstances, *Summer* journal was delayed. So delayed, in fact, that it bumped into the *Fall* journal. As a result, you now have a combo *Summer/Fall* issue in your hands. Recently, a bright spot appeared on my editorial horizon. A non-writer (imagine!) was willing to attempt the unimaginable – write "…a rather tame, boring story about first-ever 5-day solo canoe trip in Killarney". There you were, reaching out, far beyond your comfort zone, to an editor in need! Turns out it was a beautifully written story, witty and full of life and love for canoeing and outdoors. Look for it in the next issue. I know it will inspire you to write your story, way better than I ever could.

Events Calendar

3**2th Annual Wilderness and Canoe Symposium** will take place on 24th-25th February 2017 at Monarch Park Collegiate (1 Hanson Street, Toronto).
25th Paddlers Gathering will be held on 10th-12th March, 2017 at the Hulbert Outdoor Centre in Fairlee, Vermont

Symposium Update

Symposium marches on, inspired by George Luste's legacy and fueled by your continued interest. Online registration is open; see inside wrap for more details. We're looking for volunteers to help with research, documentation, social media, content digitization, book table and various other tasks. Let me know if you're able to host out-of-town speakers and participants.

Some of you may remember very animated and engaging presentation Jon Turn made in 2010, titled *"The Raven's Gift and Wilderness Spirituality"*. Jon is back again to share his story about the *"Journey into the Deep Wild: Crocodiles and Ice"*. Rebecca Ataman will tell us about *"My Journey to the North: Firth River",* and Katherine Wheatley will entertain us with her music on Saturday. Kim Sedore will talk to us about the wilderness therapy from an unclinical perspective *"Together, To-gather, To-Get-There"* and Jeff Wright will tell you everything you ever wanted to know but was afraid to ask about *"How to Make Love in a Canoe"*. Young Keewaydin paddler Nicole Howe will talk about the role the photography plays in her life, how it calms her down in anxious moments, how it captures the trip the best way it can, yet it doesn't give it true justice. Dave Greene will take us on the *"Lower North Shore Snowshoe Trip"*. Detailed program will be posted on the website as more speakers get confirmed.

Luste Lecture

Gwyneth Hoyle, a long time friend of both the Canadian Canoe Museum and WCA, helped us to celebrate George Luste's passions as an adventurer and bibliophile. George Luste's incredible donation of rare and historic books about canoes and the North have safely arrived at CCM.

Dispatch from the Fall Meeting

By Barbara Burton

A diverse group of 33 WCA adventurers, ranging from pre-teen to nonagenarian, gathered at Cedar Ridge Camp near Bancroft September 30 to October 2 to celebrate fall and our club. Thanks to Diane Lucas for organizing another fun weekend. The camp fed us well, and accommodations ranged from comfy cabins to bunk rooms in the lodge with a beautiful lake view. Fortunately the weather held and Saturday saw some of the group, guided by Beth Cornwall, head down the Snake Rapids on the Madawaska River. Many of us have never paddled it so low- but it was still a fun challenge. Others, led by Andrew Craig, enjoyed a lovely flatwater outing on Weslemkoon Lake.

We were treated to two presentations on Saturday evening. Bruce Bellaire spoke about an arctic Horton River canoe trip this past summer, and Terry Brayman from New York state shared a story about a trip down the Missinaibi River. Weather held once again on Sunday, after an overnight downpour. How lucky was that! Camp staff guided us on a wonderful hike thru the Mazinaw trail system to a rock bluff where the colours of the valley were just starting to peak through the mist. A few solo paddlers headed over to play at Palmer Rapids.

Some folks enjoyed the lounging by the fireplace with a book or a game. There was something for everyone. Consider coming next year!

The Return

by Greg Went

Spending hours in the Winnipeg airport. I'm waiting for the buddies who are driving up with the canoes and gear.

There is time here to anticipate, to contemplate, to worry about what I have left behind. My wife who has endured so patiently this passion I have for wild country. The company of my sons who are growing so rapidly. The unending list of things to do back at home in the city.

The sacrifices are hard, but I need to be in wild country. To immerse myself in it yearly. To verify to myself that it is still there. To see it through my eyes without man's signs on it, through my nose without man's exhaust covering it, through my touch without man's heavy boots trampling it.

I wish I could contain this need I have for wild country. It grows more consuming with every passing year. I think my underlying philosophy must be that the days spent in wilderness canoeing are a bonus. They do not count against your life span. It's the only explanation that makes sense why I need so much of it.

Going back to the wilderness annually is also homecoming to me. Over the years I have left a lot of me in the wilderness. I go back to visit and to see how I am doing.

In Defence of Arthur Moffatt

By Allan Jacobs

On 14 September 1955, Arthur Moffatt died of hypothermia after his canoe capsized in rapids on the Dubawnt River. Those rapids had not been scouted, for a reason that I describe below.

Incorrect accusations regarding the cause of his death were made over a period of 55 years. As I document in the blog *In Defence of Arthur Moffatt*, main text at http://defence-arthurmoffatt.ca/2016/08/19/main/, the Moffatt party did not *lose sense of reality*, did not take *holidays on more than half the days of the trip*, was not *a group of novices*, did not run the fatal rapids *in desperate haste*; neither did it take *an ultimate chance. Lack of food* did not contribute to his demise; neither did lack of *proper equipment* or *lack of a planned itinerary*. Game did not grow *scarce*; caribou were not *long gone*.

What then was the cause of his death?

He died because he had followed J B Tyrrell's advice regarding rapids. That advice that had proved correct in the previous eight weeks on the Dubawnt River (otherwise he would not have followed it), but it failed him that day, in the rapids above Marjorie Lake.

Outers 50th Year Reunion: An Image of a Canoeing Community for the Future

Story by Zabe MacEachren

What is your image of a paddling community? Have you experienced a sense of community with friends and family on a canoe trip? Or is your image a result of your imagination and envisioning rendezvous scenes after reading about voyageur culture in a history text? Perhaps you sense community yearly while attending the Wilderness Canoe Symposium, minus the river and paddles in hand.

A classmate's question to me in the late 1980's set me on a quest to find and be a part of an ideal image of community. We were in Arizona, walking up to the top of a Hopi Natives mesa home to watch the elaborate and rhythmic Kachina dancers perform their ancient springtime rituals. These ceremonial dances were elaborate, almost hypnotizing dances. He told me that traditionally, before the rugged road we were walking on allowed vehicles, the Hopi people of all ages would line the trail, passing beautiful hand-woven baskets full of corn from one to another. This act was their means of transporting the harvest from their fields below to the safety of their adobe homes high on the mesa top. "Can you imagine a more ideal image of community?" my friend asked. And because I couldn't, his question has stayed with me and set me forth to find one. Ultimately I seek an image from the Northwoods where I feel most at home and can fulfill my avid love of canoeing.

Bill Peruniak, Atikokan High School Principal 1958-1967

Before I had heard my friend's question, I could have told you about the times I had experienced close-knit groups. There were camps and family picnics. I had even been privileged to participate in *Rendezvous Fort William*, a two-month canoe trip from Lachine, Quebec to Thunder Bay. During this trip, thirty Outdoor Recreation students interpreted the life of fur trade voyageurs at small towns and parks along the traditional fur trade route. I can recall conversations with seniors about how the sight of our three large canoes and Voyageur outfits brought back memories of their own grandparents describing voyageur life to them.

I had many opportunities to dance the traditional paddle dance with people who came to see our performances. But something was missing from these wonderful scenes. They were still different from the vision of community I obtained that day walking up to the Hopi settlement. Was it that my paddling buddies were all of the same age? Or that the people we met, performed for, and danced with would never be met again? What I was after seemed to have criteria: multigenerational, some familiarity with the others involved, a celebration of work, a seasonal occurrence, a ritual quality, and a clear connection to a natural place. For decades I wondered if I would ever find and experience such a strong image of community in my lifetime. The answer turned out to be yes. In 2015 I attended the Atikokan High School Outers Fifty Year Reunion.

The Scene

Hundreds of people waited at the landing on the edge of a lake adjacent to beautiful Quetico Park. They were or had been citizens of the small northwestern Ontario town of Atikokan, which advertises itself as the canoeing capital of Canada. There were grand-

parents in lawn chairs, parents holding favourite pizzas and homemade desserts, little siblings playing on the shoreline. Everyone was abuzz as they looked off down the lake for the incoming brigade of this year's graduates of the Outers program. Many came yearly to this landing site to participate in this event. Most held memories of their own year in Outers, when they too had waited in a canoe for the correct time to begin paddling the final homestretch into the shore and outstretched arms of their own family and community of friends. Everyone was eager to hear accounts of this year's recent adventures and compare them to their own experiences in this outdoor program.

"Here they come!" someone hollered. Conversations seemed to stop suddenly. It was as if the quiet tone would help everyone focus their gaze towards the incoming canoes. My own conversations, as a visiting researcher, were cut short as every attendee concentrated on recognizing the faces of the paddlers. As a newcomer it was fascinating to watch the crowd, and then hear their cheers, applause, and hollering out of individual names as eye contact was made. There was an amazing connection between this crowd and the five or six paddlers in each of the twenty-foot canoes. The intensity grew as the paddlers drew nearer the shore. Soon teens were hopping out of canoes and splashing up to the outstretched arms of parents. It was amazing to see youths embracing and giving such exuberant hugs to each other and to their older generation. Happy tears started flowing and everyone was abuzz sharing stories of what had happened on their trip. "How was the solo?" "Did you tip?" "Any animal sightings?" After about forty-five minutes of gorging on favourite food treats, the canoes were hauled up and people slowly started departing to head back to town. I followed this dispersing crowd and met up with participants, trip leaders, past and present Outers' directors, the current principal and alumni to try and fully understand what I had just witnessed. As this was the fifty-year reunion of the Outers program, there were other events to follow. This yearly landing event was just the beginning of the celebrations.

High school student making 22-foot canoe

The Program

The Outers program began in 1965 under the support of then principal, Bill Peruniak. He was a visionary and looking for a means to engage youth in activities that would keep them in school. At this time students frequently dropped out to work in the readily available jobs in the mines and in forest industries. Initially some teachers scouted out a variety of alternative programs seeking relevant curriculum ideas that might appeal to their students. The nearby Ely Outward Bound School offered some interesting activities, so it was arranged for a larger group of teachers to visit the site. They returned with many ideas that could be adapted into their own program.

Much credit for the success of Outers is due to Bill Peruniak's leadership style. He insisted the program be directed by teachers and not by him-

On the portage trail

Ontario team paddling across the country as a part of Expo '67, with Bill Peruniak as a captain

self. He also insisted that all teachers at the school support the program even if they were not engaged in any of the planned weekend snowshoe and canoeing trips. Everyone needed to support the teachers and participants involved in Outers. Support could occur by covering for teachers during exams, or by integrating some of their own course work into helping students plan meals or use math to improve their navigational skills. In the early years the fleet of large canoes was all made using wood from the forest behind the school and built under the shop teacher's guidance. Four decades later, after large synthetic canoes were purchased to retire the old heavy fleet, the same school cooperation existed as evident in fundraising and work party efforts. The result was directed towards construction of a large Outers building complete with storage and classroom space. Such commitment by a whole school to support an Outers program is extraordinary to hear about today, and its long-standing success is due to Bill Peruniak's insistence that participants, from Outers to teachers and school board directors, all be involved in making decisions. The tenet of impelling a person into the decision-making component of an activity was Bill's understanding of experiential learning. As happens on a canoe trip, everyone had to pull their own weight.

Portaging the large canoe using different technique

The Outers program has changed over time to keep up with safety protocol and school curriculum, but key tenets have stayed the same. In the autumn the program involves weekend paddling challenges to become familiar with the large canoes as usually there is little time in the spring after the lake ice has gone before the twenty-plus-day canoe trip begins. Winter activities involve snowshoeing and shelter making and additional weekend commitments for overnight trips. Brigades are established early in the fall and designated responsibilities, such as leader, navigator, equipment organizer, and cook, are help throughout the year by the same individual. The men and women are kept in separate brigades throughout all the challenges offered. When asked about this gendered aspect of the program, both participants and teachers supported it. I was told "it works." and "each group gets to the same spot in the end, but is allowed to go about it differently." After hearing so many people in support of the gendered grouping I was left exploring the idea of the way some cultures have gendered ceremonies which mark and serve the developmental aspects of youth. This final long canoe trip seemed to be Atikokan's rite of passage for youth, and all the adults knew it because they too had experienced its transformational qualities in

their own youth.

Another long-standing tradition of Outers is the solo. Students are limited to very basic supplies like a roll of plastic, their sleeping bag, a can for boiling water, a few bouillon cubes to ease their hunger if they don't fish or can't catch anything from shore and for the past few decades "solo letters." These letters are from their parents and friends and written to them specifically to read during their solo. For three days they will be isolated on a piece of shoreline with nothing but the sounds of nature and their own thoughts for company. This solo time for youth may be harder to endure than in past years, due to the increased daily use of devices and social media. Perhaps this solo experience in nature is what today's youth need most of all to counter our culture's information technology engagement . The Outers' ability to retain this practice over the decades serves to demonstrate the power of solo time for a person to learn to prioritize important aspects of their life. The enthusiastic hugs with which young Outers met their family at the landing, likely results partially from the reflection upon family and community that solo time in nature offers. Many of the waiting parents spoke of the power of their own solo experience when, decades earlier, they were in Outers.

Community Building Activities

The 2015 Outers Fifty-Year Reunion also saw other activities reflecting the significance of this program's ability to build community. A drive into town was met with a large mural on the local donut shop window stating "Welcome Outers." The town's grocery store displayed a large map with each night's planned camp locations for both the male and female brigades. The fundraising golf tournament was sold out. It was designed so people played each hole with a special initiative to have them recall various aspects of the Outers program. Teeing off might involve wearing snowshoes or placing a pack on a back. Some holes required a navigational challenge like hitting the ball through a five inch high mini solo tarp before the sinking it in the hole.

All-women students preparing to hoist the canoe

Putting with the paddle

Outers approaching the landing beach on the 50th Anniversary

As a non-golfer I found myself wanting to take up the sport and join the camaraderie.

The Outers banquet involved just under a thousand people. Many past directors and participants in the early years of the program spoke of the challenges, and how their particular year had persevered. One of the Outers in the first year of the program gave an emotional speech expressing how this program did indeed keep him in school and how much better he knew his life was because of it. He had been so inspired by the Outers programs that after graduating he found himself working for a local outfitter and eventually establishing his own career as a canoe outfitter. A Grade Nine student explained how his class had written to the Prime Minister, explained the local event, and received a signed congratulatory letter in response. Throughout the night, speakers kept announcing the number of families with three generations of Outers present and the final total announced was seven. It was amazing to see how an outdoor program for youth could leave such an impression on a community.

I knew that the existence of Quetico Park, classic canoe tripping country, so close to Atikokan seemed to play a key role in the program's success. I wondered what were the other components that nourished a sense of community? Two stories of support for this program stand out for their role in building and reflecting the sense of community the Outers program has established. First was hearing about the way the local newspaper wrote articles about residents by including the term *Outers*, and the year they participated, behind their name. It was as if the credential of having been in Outers was as important as any other degree, title or distinction acknowledged behind a person's name.

The second story involves the Atikokan school board amalgamation with the Fort Frances Rainy River School Board. Hundreds of concerned people came to the meeting and clearly stated in a unified voice that the amalgamation would only occur if the Outers program remained. I discovered that board support for Outers is still very strong. Two days after the 50th Reunion event, when I had driven three hours to Fort Frances, I was approached at a donut shop parking lot by a senior board official. I had been pointed out to him as a researcher from Queen's University covering the Outers event. He wanted me to know that the school board was trying to establish similar outdoor-based programs like Outers at their other high schools. They had just finished purchasing a fleet of canoes and recognized the powerful influence this program held in educating youth. They were doing their best to spread the success of the program beyond the Atikokan community.

Last strokes before hugging friends and family

Bill Peruniak's Sense of Community

Credit for the sense of community developed when Outers was established in 1965 also needs to be recognized in the other initiatives its founder, Bill Peruniak, undertook. I like to think it was Bill's understanding of community and history that inspired them. Bill was an avid outdoorsman and entered Queen's University at the age of 16 to study history. Perhaps it was his knowledge of the camaraderie of the Northwest Companies fur trade voyageurs that led him to rekindle so many programs that were based upon travelling by canoe.

After Bill left Atikokan, he captained the Ontario crew of the North canoe that raced from Rocky Mountain House to Montreal as part of Expo 1967 celebration. In his canoe was his teenage son Jeff, and together they held the title of oldest and youngest racing

members. It may have been this event that allowed Bill to recognize the power and beauty of paddling a large canoe on an extended trip, and the teamwork required to move them. It was during this time he also fell in love with what was known as the Centennial Shift. This shift was a maneuver done when the six members in a 24-foot canoe, seated on their alternating sides, simultaneously slid in unison across their canoe seat after every twenty strokes, so they could paddle on alternating sides and relieve muscle stress. As experienced canoeists will understand, this action required cooperation to perform smoothly and prevent capsizing, and it was done hundreds of times a day when paddling.

After Expo 1967, Bill took up the administrative position of Associate Dean of the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. He used his administrative influence to hire a faculty to establish an Outdoor and Experiential Education program at Queen's that would hold similar innovative qualities to the Outers program and demonstrate the educational benefits of outdoor education. Bob Pieh, who was the Voyageur Outward Bound instructor from Ely, Minnesota, filled this position and later during one of his sabbatical years returned to northwestern Ontario and established an Ontario based Outward Bound program that used canoes for their trips.

When Bill Peruniak left his administrative position at Queen's he established one more program that reflected the use of the canoe in establishing a sense of community. Bill ran what became known as River Seminars for thirty years. Using large 24-foot canoes Bill took graduate students and other adults down the French River on educational experiences that aided each participant in deepening their own connection with place, history and the role of citizenship. Planned trip experiences varied, but typically included an initial visit to the 'heart rock.' This was a large boulder that made a distinct heartbeat sound when rocked. Other planned activities included providing quotes to each participant and then expecting them to engage in further reading (from the li-

Whole community is at the landing to greet the Outers

School mural inspired by the Outers program

One of the original canoes built in the school workshop

brary brought in the canoes) before they later led their own afternoon presentation. Drumming, singing, learning guno (gunwale) salutes were also typical occurrences. Sometimes honourary ceremonies were conducted for specific individual's accomplishments, while everyone received a brooch Bill had specially made with an ancient Mayan symbol on it that appeared similar to a canoe and translated as *we succeed*.

Today's River Seminars

There is a movement gaining momentum in academic programs related to outdoor education to hold 'conferences' on canoe trips instead of at centers in large urban areas. I have participated in two of these *ecopedagogy* gatherings and led discussions around a campfire instead of in front of lecture podiums. At these river gatherings the origin of the *floating colloquium* idea is shared as having stemmed from events in Norway. Having heard and interviewed so many Outers and some River Seminars participants, I do my best to share the accounts of this little acknowledged trail blazer, Bill Peruniak. The reason his name is seldom mentioned is probably due to his leadership style of impelling others into making decisions and leading while on trip. Although a student of history, Bill seems to have played a pivotal role in the establishment of some of the longest running canoe-based educational programs in Canada. First through the high school program Outers, then by his captaining of a canoe for Expo, followed by his key administrative support for the establishment of Queen's University Outdoor and Experiential Education program and finally through his own river seminars promoting adult education.

When Bill was working as an educator the notion of experiential education was in its early stages and emphasized reflection after an experience as a way to comprehend and learn from key components of the activity. Bill must have recognized how a canoe trip provides a temporary system in which to build community and that by offering a person the experiences of many canoe trips, they will lean towards encouraging a sense of community in other aspects of their life as well. Historically canoe trips were a necessary means to travel. Today canoe trips can serve as recreational experience that offer a powerful education in developing character and community building at any age.

Canadian Communities Come 2017

As Canada is looking forward to celebrating 150 years as a nation in 2017, I am wondering how I will be spending this day. Will I choose to mark the event in a canoe? Will I be participating with others and creating an image of community? Times ahead are exciting and I think it is also appropriate to address our collective paddling history by glancing back to get a sense of how we should proceed forward. Way to go, Bill Peruniak, for setting the course. And congratulations, Outers, for clarifying a vision of community and canoeing worth emulating. You both have provided inspiration for what to look forward to as proud Canadians paddling into the future.

Nothing Happened

By Gary Storr

En route to Storm Haven

Almost there

Cave Point from Storm Haven

"Do a feel-good story," Dan urged, ignoring my protests.

"I don't know how," I said. "Nothing happened." In Canoeing Legends' parlance this read: Nothing had careened wildly off the rails and caused horrific disfigurement to everyone involved. (Our paddling group humbly calls itself 'the Canoeing Legends.' That we are legends is irrefutable — it's painted on our trailer.)

Dan was driving and Emily had put her head down on a pack in the back seat. She was gazing out the windshield between us. We were on our way home from a late February camp at the northern edge of the Bruce peninsula in Ontario. A mild winter had ensured a safe haul along the snowmobile trail from Cyprus Lake to the Storm Haven cutoff: at this late date the trails were not yet open to snowmobile traffic. Our only concern going in was whether or not there would be enough snow left for the return trip — it was a long way to carry three toboggan-loads of gear.

The original plan had hurtled into oblivion with self-destructive aplomb. My nephew Drew and I had hoped for a re-do of a previous winter camp that had not gone well for us. We had failed to summit Silver Peak in Killarney Provincial Park for the third straight time three years earlier. After viewing summit photos taken by one of the group who had made it, I was inspired to try again. (I had mentioned to Drew that I still wanted a winter photo of us together at the top and Drew had nodded. "I want that picture too," he'd said.) All I needed now were a few stubborn men.

"Pick me!" Emily beseeched from school. "I can be a stubborn man!" We chose dates coinciding with Emily's reading week and a handful of crew signed on. (God knows why, in view of our record.) Then it happened—a couch potato mishap. I was left with a broken metatarsal and torn ligaments. It was mid-November. I would be spending my winter in an aircast on crutches. It didn't even make a good story. Crestfallen, I backed out.

After two months of dedicated restraint and physio, I tested my foot on snowshoes. It went pleasingly well. With tentative hope, I contacted Drew. Was it too late to reinstate the Silver Peak trip, I wondered? Alas, it was. The others had moved on to other projects. Then Dan suggested Storm Haven. It was short, easy, and a wise choice since my enthusiasm for Silver Peak no doubt exceeded my capability. I contacted Emily and she was gung-ho. Okay, I smiled. I was going camping.

The rain held off until we reached Storm Haven. We had tucked rainsuits into our toboggans and in spite of the forecast, we were able to set up camp and start supper before the first drops fell. Emily and Dan pitched their tents on the platforms provided to avoid waking up shivering in a rain-fed river. I was parked on a bit of high ground near Emily's platform in case she had equipment issues during the night.

Dan Bell and Emily Stitt

The view from Cave Point Lookout

We retired early to our tents. It was pointless to stand out on the Niagara Escarpment in a weather system that had settled in for the night. Rain fell steadily upon us. Wind howled over the cliff melting snow in the treetops and waves crashed onto the rocks below. Wet gobs of snow dropped on our tent flies. I lay in my sleeping bag and listened, waiting expectantly for that single, miniscule drop of water to wend its way along a tent pole, to pass through fibre and seam, eventually to land with a refreshing, maddening burst on my forehead. Sometime in the night Emily unzipped her tent and crawled out. She had fastened an extra tarp over her fly and a corner had come loose; it was flapping in the wind. Her headlight beam darted through the darkness until the repair was made, and then she crawled back in. In the morning she exclaimed how toasty she'd been; she'd slept like a log. She made no mention of the night-time disturbance.

The daughter of a friend, Emily had been daytripping with the Legends for years. On her first overnight canoe trip as a teenager, I had been her paddling partner. At the first portage she expressed a desire to carry the canoe. I showed her how and off she went. At the end of the portage she petitioned to paddle stern. Bemused, I asked if she knew the J-stroke. Yes, she asserted, she had learned it at camp. Feeling a bit ridiculous, I stepped into the bow. She steered us across the lake straight as an arrow.

A fine drizzle continued into morning. Overnight the landscape had been reduced to a soggy stew of slush and rainwater. We looked up and down the trail—exposed dolomite was everywhere. We shrugged and decided that was a problem for tomorrow. Today we were hiking to Halfway Dump where I had camped illegally a few years before, the result of a perceived bear threat at High Dump.

Dan and I walked down to the beach to fill our pots and water bottles. We left the exhausted student to sleep in until the breakfast bell. The surf rolled in too high to scoop water but Dan had come prepared. He calmly tied a rope to the attached lid of a Nalgene bottle and tossed it out over the waves. Until now, I hadn't noticed the rope. At first the bottle bobbed, but then as the swells carried it back it began to sink. When it was submerged, Dan reeled it in. I grabbed the bottle and filled each vessel, one by one, cast after cast, until we were done. Fishing for water—a truly creative concept.

After breakfast we scrubbed the pots with mittfuls of crusty snow and kicked wet crud over the mess. A winter kitchen gets ugly fast. By now the rain had stopped so we filled our day packs and headed east along the escarpment. Before long we found ourselves crouched on the trail examining a bit of scat here, some animal tracks there. Breaking apart a bit of excreta with a stick, we found it to be laced with fur. Too small for a coyote, we surmised it was left by a member of the weasel family—perhaps a pine marten. Further along, an intersection was formed by a wide scrape in the snow that ran perpendicular to the

Breaking camp

Breakfast Bell

Preparing to depart

trail: paw prints, a deep gouge between them and a tail drag. Dan determined that a porcupine had passed by here.

Occasionally the trail led us out onto promontories that overlooked Georgian Bay. From them we could gaze east or west to distant limestone beaches. Outward and to the west lay Bear's Rump and Flowerpot islands. The views were tremendous at any time of year but for me, they were exceptional in winter. Perhaps it was the solitude, the sense of bigness that occurred when the crowd was left behind.

From the Cave Point lookout, the beach at Halfway Dump was visible. Emily and Dan both knew of my experience backpacking alone from the Head of Trails to High Dump. I had cursed Parks Canada for not warning me along the way that I would be mauled by a black bear if I chose to camp at High Dump. I had returned to Halfway Dump exhausted, dehydrated and in darkness. Later, Emily and her mother had accomplished the same hike easily. The bear warning signs were still in place at High Dump but Emily and Helga had disregarded them. They'd had a pleasant stay and returned without incident.

Returning to Cyprus Lake

I was incredulous: "I almost bought the farm and you two just did it?" Emily attempted to soften the blow. "At one point the bushes were rustling and we waited for half an hour. We were afraid to go past—we thought it was a bear. It was at least half an hour," she assured me.

We walked down to the beach and I found the place under a clump of evergreens where I had pitched my tent. It seemed different somehow, in winter, in daylight. After lunch we returned to camp.

In winter every undertaking required a pinch of patience and a dash more time. It was important not to bite off more than we could chew. Going down to the beach for water, preparing supper, enjoying each other's lies over a dram of the Captain—these activities took us into darkness...and to an early bed.

In the morning I lugged an armload of dry bags to the edge of the snowpack and dumped them there. Emily had gone down to the beach to photograph Dan casting for water. After we'd moved our gear to the new, further-along trailhead we loaded the toboggans and began the trek back to Cyprus Lake. Whenever a patch of limestone stymied us, Emily simply stuck out her foot and kicked snow across the trail. Occasionally we stopped, ostensibly to watch flocks of chickadees swarm in the branches, but in reality, to regroup. Only twice did we have to carry the toboggans, once double-teaming them over a stretch of bedrock and again, to ford a meltwater pond.

At the group campground we abandoned our gear and strolled up the path to visit Indian Head Cove and the Grotto. A solitary nuthatch foraged on a tree trunk, creeping up, then down, then sideways for the seeds and bugs it had cached under the bark. A black-backed woodpecker, a female, flitted from tree to tree, alighting with wings outstretched to reveal the bold barred pattern on her sides. She twisted off bits of bark in her quest for nourishment. Behind me I heard a yelp and turned to see Emily jump back from a cedar and laugh. She had peeled back a piece of bark to see what was on the menu and a large spider had fallen at her feet.

We returned to our toboggans and towed them the remaining distance to the car. The Grotto had been busy with picnickers and the parking lot was full. The weekend, for me, was losing its magic. We loaded the trailer and headed for home. Emily had to return to class.

These days, in my advancing state of befuddlement, I find it advantageous to surround myself with intelligent, competent individuals—it increases my chances of survival. Emily is one of them. In her emails she addresses me variously as 'father,' 'friend,' and 'legend.' She signs off as 'little legend.' I glanced back over my shoulder; she was asleep. I realized then that by insisting nothing had happened, I couldn't have been further off the mark. Emily and Dan had opened my eyes to a world I might have missed.

Something happened after all.

Indian Head Cove

The view from Cave Point Lookout

12 Storm Haven

Fishing for water, Step 1) baiting the hook

Step 2) the cast...

Step 3) reeling in the catch

Erika's Tale – A Success Story for the WCS and the Ayalik Fund

By David F. Pelly

Erika - carrying canoe, while the boys walk empty-handed!

"I've found love and peace on this trip. On my solo night I learned that there are good days and bad days, and you just have to look up and be a prouder person than who you were yesterday." So said Erika, a 16-year-old Inuk from Cambridge Bay, at the end of her two-week Outward Bound canoe trip in Algonquin Park last summer. Really, for those who made her participation possible, could you imagine any more gratifying words?

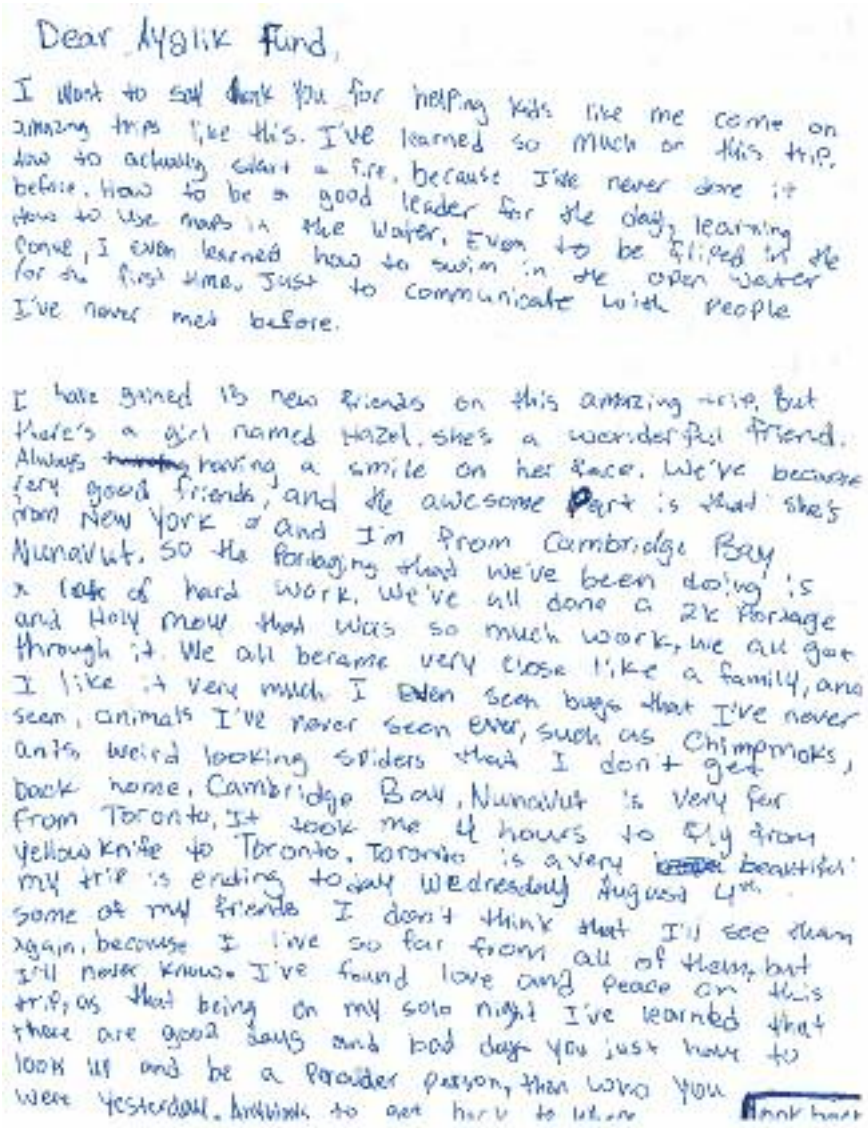
Before last year's Wilderness & Canoe Symposium, I said to our faithful organizer-in-chief, Aleks Gusev, that it seemed likely the crowd at the WCS gathering would – more than most – understand the value that wilderness experience can offer youth. This comment was made in anticipation of giving a short talk about the Ayalik Fund, a foundation established in my late son's memory. The foundation provides access and funding for Inuit youths who would otherwise not have such opportunities, giving them a chance to build self-esteem and confidence, through challenging outdoor adventure, meeting other young Canadians and social-cultural exploration. If anything, I understated the prospect. That day we raised more than enough money to send one young person from Nunavut on an Outward Bound expedition, and in due course Erika was chosen by her community as someone who fit the criteria and stood to benefit from the experience. They were right. It was clearly a life-changing experience for her, as you can see by reading the letter she wrote to the Ayalik Fund after the trip.

In addition to Erika, the Ayalik Fund sent eight other youths on confidence-building adventures this past summer. The foundation is growing, and with donors' continuing support we will grow even more, and more Inuit youths will have what for them are unimaginable opportunities. You can read more about these youths and their experiences at the website:
www.AyalikFund.ca

They have also climbed to the top of the Mackenzie Mountains, paddled

Tout le gang: Erika, green shirt; Annie, black ha

on Great Slave Lake, hiked in the Rocky Mountains, explored Clayoquot Sound by sea-kayak, and met other young Canadians from across the country, broadening their horizons and giving each one of them the feeling that they too belong. It has the potential to change lives. And now, thanks to so many of you, Erika is contemplating what her next adventure will be.



Dear Aglik Fund,

I want to say thank you for helping kids like me come on amazing trips like this. I've learned so much on this trip, how to actually start a fire, because I've never done it before. How to be a good leader for the day, learning how to use maps in the water. Even to be flipped in the canoe, I even learned how to swim in the open water for the first time. Just to communicate with people I've never met before.

I have gained 15 new friends on this amazing trip, but there's a girl named Hazel, she's a wonderful friend. Always ~~having~~ having a smile on her face. We've become very good friends, and the awesome part is that she's from New York and I'm from Cambridge Bay Nunavut. So the portaging that we've been doing is a lot of hard work. We've all done a 2k Portage and Holy moly that was so much work, we all got through it. We all became very close like a family, and I like it very much I even seen bugs that I've never seen, animals I've never seen ever, such as Chipmunks, ants weird looking spiders that I don't get back home, Cambridge Bay, Nunavut is very far from Toronto, It took me 4 hours to fly from Yellowknife to Toronto. Toronto is very ~~beautiful~~ beautiful my trip is ending today Wednesday August 4th some of my friends I don't think that I'll see them again, because I live so far from all of them, but I'll never know. I've found love and peace on this trip, as that being on my solo night I've learned that there are good days and bad days you just have to look up and be a broader person, than who you were yesterday. Learning to get here to where

I was I haven't be lazy as much or atleast not as much as I used to be, but being out here kept me going for a week + 2 days. my love for the nature will always be with me because I've never experienced such beauty before, seeing the lakes and open water has been the best.

All I want to say is that I've had a wonderful time with the Outward bound crew and I've been blessed with meeting all sorts of new people.
So here's a Big Thank you, for helping me come out on this trip.

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