

Photographic memory

When snapshots of our outdoor conquests don't even begin to tell the whole story

THEY say a picture is worth a thousand words. Well, I'm here to dispel that notion, at least when it comes to outdoorsmen. In fact, the opposite is true. To us, a picture is a prompt, calling instead for a thousand words of elaboration. Because behind the smiling faces there's always a bigger story to be told, challenging us to recall, explain and—of course—creatively retell the events of the day the photo was taken.

I got to thinking about this recently while shuffling through some of my old pictures, trophy shots of impressive displays of wildlife flanked by triumphantly smiling sportsmen. The poses were meant to serve as quick historical records of some great days afield, but on their own there's not much to tell. Paint them with the right words, however, and spirits will soar in fits of laughter along the trail of bombastic embellishment.

One of my favourite photos, shown here, is from B.C.'s Comox Valley, circa 1968. A cute little five-year-old kid, accompanied by his eight-year-old brother, is posing with a couple of coho salmon. The boys seem pleased with themselves, although the younger one has an odd facial expression. What the picture doesn't capture is the fact that my little brother was reeling from sensory overload; he just couldn't stop thinking about what we'd witnessed only a few hours earlier.

It all started at the boat ramp, where we slid Grandpa's little aluminum boat into the water. After clamping on the six-horse Johnson, we were off, bravely chugging out to our fishing grounds with Grandpa. In the distance was Hornby Island, which was a very, shall we say, free-spirited place in 1967.

Then it happened. Half-way to the bell buoy we were intercepted by a Hornby-bound boatload of stark-naked revellers with pure exhibitionism on their minds. For two little kids, this was eye-popping stuff, and we spent much of the rest of the day staring off in the direction of the island, wondering just what kind of shenanigans went on over there. It was our first big fishing story, and it



wasn't even about the fish. Which brings me back to my point that pictures never tell the whole story.

Sometimes with fishing photos, the backstory is, in fact, just about the fish. Another one of my old pictures, for example, reminds me of the time a friend and I visited a privately stocked rainbow trout lake near Merritt, B.C. Although it looks as if we're smiling in the photos, we're actually sporting looks of greedy embarrassment.

You see, after we'd already caught plenty of fish and used up our worms, the trout were still circling. So we decided to give them a sampling of our sad-sack assortment of lures. Hours of continuous carnage later, the ravenous fish just kept on biting, leading us to determine that Nicola Valley rainbows were stupid and would hit anything. Eventually, we tired of our angling prowess and called it a day, departing with an obscene number of trout and many pictures as a reminder of our embarrassment of riches.

Not that you always need a photograph to remember a great story from time spent

outdoors, but they do make for great souvenirs. And sometimes they can be worth a few hundred words on their own—or at least a few laughs. That hit home one time when I didn't have a camera on hand.

I was on a salmon expedition off the West Coast near Tofino with a buddy and his 70-year-old father, who, at the end of the day, tossed out an old crab trap only to catch a rather large octopus. Usually, an octopus can escape from a crab trap, but this particular cephalopod failed to recognize the gravity of the situation on its way to the boat.

Suffice it to say, watching an older gentleman wrestle an octopus is a side-splitting event. I highly recommend it. It would certainly do well on pay-per-view TV. While no photo could have adequately recorded the hilarity of the encounter, a picture of the exact moment the octopus seemed to have the upper, um, tentacle, sure would have made for a nice keepsake.

Still, no photo can replace the story that led up to it, trust me on this. Any self-respecting angler attempting to recreate a legendary moment needs nothing more than words, words...and more worms. ♦

Long-time angler Gordon Morrison lives in New Westminster, B.C. He's the tall kid in the photo.

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