



THE LITERACY OFFICE OF NORTHLANDS
COLLEGE, CENTRAL REGION PRESENTS:

"SPORTS AND LEISURE
ACTIVITIES"
STORY FINALISTS
1998

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Stories

Winners

[To Catch a Dream](#)

by Kesia D. Newton of Stanley Mission

[The Five of Diamonds](#)

by Martin Sasek of Fond du Lac

[Daisy's Game](#)

by Susan Smallwood

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[The Best Things in Life are Free](#)

by Victoria Daigneault of Beauval

"Sports and Leisure Activities" Northern Adult Writing Contest 1998

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GRAND PRIZE WINNER:

To Catch a Dream

By Kesia D. Newton
Stanley Mission, Saskatchewan

COMMUNITY PRIZE WINNER

The Five of Diamonds

By Martin Sasek

Fond du Lac

COMMUNITY PRIZE WINNER

Daisy's Game

By Susan Smallwood

Air Ronge, Saskatchewan

COMMUNITY PRIZE WINNER

A Winter Journey

By Kevin Crosby

Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan

HONORABLE MENTION:

The Best Things In Life Are Free

By Victoria Daigneault

Beauval, Saskatchewan

"Sports and Leisure Activities"

Northern Adult Writing Contest 1998

These stories were a part of the 1998 Northern Adult Reading and Writing Challenge. The contest ran in conjunction with the Pahnkison Nuyeh ah Library System (PNLS) annual contest for school-aged children. I would like to thank Harriet Roy (Teacher/Librarian) and the staff of PNLS and the northern school/public libraries for making this first adult contest a success.

Contest Organizer:

Anita Daher

Writing Judges

La Ronge WildRice Writers Group

David Sealy, Gareth Cook, Mike Froese

Margurite Smith and Anita Daher

To Catch a Dream

Abbie cradled the puck on the inside curve of her stick and skated a tight turn around the Swedish defenceman. She drew the puck back and fired a wrist shot that soared over the goalie's shoulder and into the top corner of the net. The horn signaled to end the game. Team Canada's fans leapt to their feet and cheered. Abbie jumped and threw her arms into the air. A flurry of red and white jerseys bounded over the boards and raced towards her. The horn blared in Abbie's ears, muffling the noise of the crowd.

BUZZ! BUZZ!!!!

Fourteen year old Abbie Bird awoke with a start, her heart pounding. Then, realizing it was only a dream, she slumped back on her bed. Team Canada? . . . right! She thought, I don't even own a hockey stick. Moaning, she rolled over, tangling her raggedy quilt in her legs. Suddenly she remembered, 'it's Saturday'. She sprang out of bed, tripped on her quilt and stumbled into her nightstand. The collision caused her craft box, that was full of dream catcher beads, to tumble to the floor. "Oh great!," Abbie said with a groan. The colourful beads scattered all over the white tiled floor like confetti at a wedding.

Abbie ignored the mess and scrambled to pull on her baggy sweat pants. She grabbed her Montreal Canadiens hockey sweater out of the clothes hamper, yanked it over her head and dashed into the kitchen. Her Kohkom was at the counter spreading jam on a piece of bannock. She handed it to Abbie.

"Wow! She's pretty good," one boy said to Mark.

Mark stood there looking angry, but stunned. Then Abbie thought she noticed a small smile crack across his face. But she was not too concerned with his attitude anymore. She had a hockey game to focus on now. Abbie looked at her new hockey stick and smiled. Kohkom was right. She could do anything she wanted. Look out Team Canada, here I come!

The Five of Diamonds

By late September the leaves of gold had laid a blanket over this pristine and seemingly endless northern landscape. The vast expanse of nature that bounds in every direction compels us to reckon with the powers that cradle our very existence. I pondered for a moment, and with hint of sorrow, I considered those souls who by choice or by circumstance are withheld from this natural wonderment that surrounds us all. And as we slid over the summer ice towards the mouth of Grease Bay, I couldn't help but feel a sense of guilt, as our craft unsettled the glittering calm of that morning water. Yet there within the bay, far beneath the surface, lurked the monsters we sought. The northern sharks, those sultry predators of the deep whose sheer size can chill a novice heart, and inspire an angler's dreams. Athabaska is said to nurture the greatest inland fishing in all of Canada, and for we urbanites the adventure invoked a wondrous sense of freedom and excitement.

Our party of three were united together in a jovial spirit, but our characters were as diverse as the places we had come together from. Lance Malpas, a native of rural Alberta, outwardly concealed his adventurous spirit behind a distinctly conservative form. Ten years my senior, I was intrigued and often amused at how easily his personality and boyish tendencies contrasted the white collared -accountant style image that prevailed about him. Lance's true gift was his unique ability to describe any situation with the finesse and ease of a writer. His comical descriptions of past and present in a lofty, yet uncommon vocabulary, regularly made for interesting and amusing conversation; it helped pass the time as we traveled across the enormous Lake Athabaska.

Then, realizing his impending doom he began to thrash with such force that Lance could barely control him let alone pull him over the side into the boat. For a brief moment we watched Lance struggle, but then amidst the chaotic struggle we were horrified to see the five of diamonds dislodge, fly from his jaw and then finally the net. Realizing the beast could at any moment be lost, Lewis and I trampled into the water, to the net, and from the bottom we pushed desperately upwards. As Lance fell to his back we heard the wondrous sound of our catch thumping about the floor of the boat.

As we stood waist deep in the water, admiring the result of our combined efforts now resting peacefully across over half the length of the boat, Lewis turned to me and with a confusing little grin raised the most frustrating question imaginable at that very moment. "Whose wall is he going on anyway?"

With the proverbial knife, you could have cut the tension between us, and then in perfect unison the three of us pronounced, "MINE!"

Daisy's Game

The case family conference had gone as I expected. Daisy Flett's two daughters had given me a brief history of their mother's health. After Daisy's husband had died she began to decline. There were the usual signs and symptoms, and then the tragic diagnosis of Alzheimer's. It was typical of the other cases I had assisted in. The two daughters were grieving the loss of the mother they once knew; the Daisy Flett who had lived each day with zest and vigor beyond her 73 years. For a short time she was able to recognize her daughters, now the memories of her two daughters had been erased by Alzheimer's cruel purging of the mind. Perhaps the worst aspect of Alzheimer's is being known one day and a stranger the next.

I would work the first four 12 hour day shifts with Daisy in her apartment. The mundane, repetitive schedule of Daisy's life was posted on a laminated board by the fridge. The continuous monitoring and the unconnected, often incoherent words of Daisy's chatter were challenging. By 8 p.m., I was relieved to hear the tap at the door that signaled the arrival of the night shift worker.

Thursday was my last 12 hour shift before a three day weekend break. Daisy was napping and I had decided to clean off the shelves above the T.V. I moved everything off and piled it on the couch. A shoe box with a rubber band loosely around it slipped off the edge of the shelf and I grabbed its lid just before it fell. The contents of the box-- newspaper clippings, ribbons, and old black and white photos, littered the floor. I gathered them up and sat at the kitchen table to sort them out. Most of the photos were of a girls' basketball team. It was pretty easy to recognize Daisy in the front row on the steps of the Holy Mary Collegiate Institute. There she stood with the other white bloused girls in their dark gym bloomers. One of the girls sat alone, in front of the others, holding a basketball with "1943 Champs" written on it. The other photos of the team were all similar, with the young and strong Daisy, arm in arm with her teenaged companions. The newspaper clippings boasted the victories of Holy Mary Collegiate Girls Basketball Team and their star player Daisy Southgate.

As I expected, Daisy sat and stared during the whole game. I commented from time to time on the lousy passing of my sister's teammates and I did my sibling duty by clapping and cheering on each of the points they scored. The game ended with a 54 to 24 score. I waved at my sister as she and her teammates shook hands with the victors.

Just as I stood up to gather our coats and my purse, Daisy tugged at me to sit down again. "You know Pam, I'm embarrassed to say this, but your sister's team has a lot to learn about basketball."

"I used to play you know. Sometimes, when I'm drifting off to sleep, the sounds and smells come back to me. Shoes squeaking on a wooden gym floor, the ball being dribbled back and forth, and the musty smell of our school gym."

"And Pam?"

"Yes" I answered, unable to hide the shock from my voice.

"The light was red."

A Winter Journey

Winter, . . . an ominous word for some, A word that echoes with the chill of howling winds and driving snow. A word to strike terror in the souls of those who worship the sun. Those who now mourn its loss as daylight hours give way to darkness. Yes winter can be a time of fear and depression for those who do not embrace its offerings.

Winter . . . a joyful season filled with endless activity and fun. A word representing hour upon hour of bright and shining life. A time when we make the most of every minute we have and fill each day until it is near bursting with our joy and exuberance. Yes winter can be all of this and more for those brave souls who see the things it has to offer.

In the North its likely safest to say that winter is a combination of both points of view. In a second Winter can become the most fierce of warriors and attack us with all of its weapons. Winds can howl round our frost encrusted heads, snow and sleet can batter at our cloth encased bodies and cold can freeze our very bones. Yet winter can be much like the gentlest of lovers, offering us its gifts, entralling us with the beauty that it brings and capturing us with the games we play with it. A healthy respect and careful planning must be considered as part and parcel of each and every winter activity or otherwise we run the risk of awakening that fierce warrior.

Unlike Jeff these others had made the trip countless times and knew all of the dangers, hidden and otherwise that such a venture offered. Luckily they had found Jeff and taken him to the clinic for the help he needed. Indeed Jeff had been very fortunate that the men had come along before he had been stretched out on the ice for too long. Had they been longer he might very well have suffered from exposure and been in far worse shape than he was.

Once Jeff had been filled in on all that had happened he could only shake his head. The men and the accident had really opened his eyes. From the stories they had told him he was very lucky to be alive and had been about as stupid as possible. He had been extremely lucky and he knew it. From this point on he would not leave things to luck. He would plan carefully and make sure he traveled with someone who knew the area well. He knew the beauty that the North held and now he understood the danger as well. Never again would he forget the two faces of winter, the two faces of the North. He had had a brief encounter with the warrior and come out of it a wiser man.

The Best Things in Life are Free

Northern Saskatchewan is a blessing in disguise, with its many lakes, dirt roads, and plenty of trees, who wouldn't want to live in pure bliss? I found that out soon enough.

It was a bright, sunny summer morning. My watch alarm was beeping annoyingly loud at 8 am. It was time for my usual morning jog. I slipped on my sweatpants, T-shirt, and socks. I headed to the kitchen and right near the door I found my shoes. I put my shoes on and tied them tight enough so as not to injure my ankles.

I headed out into the fresh morning air to begin my jog. Ah! The air was so refreshing and crisp. I took the fresh air into my lung as I inhaled deeply. I loved the feeling of fresh air on a warm summer morning. Just before jogging I made sure to stretch to wake my muscles after an 8-hour rest. I felt stretched enough, therefore I proceeded to run.

Suddenly, I heard the prancing of something running behind me, so I turned quickly in fright. I was relieved to find my dog Kona running toward me. My face lit up with happiness to see my fluffy, white, Samoid Husky early in the morning. She leapt right into my arms and licked my face.

I welcomed Kona into my arms and gave her a friendly hug and kiss on top of her head. I greeted and played with her for awhile. She was sure ready for our morning jog and just as excited as I was. I gave Kona her name because Kona was white and Kona meant snow and well the rest is history.

"Teniki," Abbie thanked her grandmother in Cree. She paused to eat the bland bread her Kohkom forced on her every morning. Abbie washed the bannock down with a glass of icy cold milk and then ran to the hall closet. She found her brother's old hockey skates, flung them over her shoulder and bolted out the door.

In two minutes she was at her cousin's doorstep, "Hurry up. Lisa. Let's go! I want to be the first to carve my blades into the ice."

"O.K., O.K., calm down, Abbie. Winter lasts forever here you know," Lisa informed her.

"Yea! Isn't it great!" Abbie responded. She loved living in Northern Saskatchewan, especially in the winter. Abbie sucked in a deep breath of the crisp winter air. She gazed about. A fresh snow had fallen the day before and it now blanketed the forests that framed the lake. Today the sky was clear and the sun shone brightly causing the snow to sparkle like diamonds. Abbie walked silently beside Lisa listening to the crunch that their boots made on the snow.

Five minutes later the girls were heading down the steep hill to the lake. Abbie noticed that they weren't the first to arrive. "Oh, rats!" she complained, "Arthur is already here with that new kid, Mark."

"Mark's cute," Lisa added

Abbie bolted out of the store with her new hockey stick and headed straight to the lake. Mark and Arthur were there along with several other boys. Abbie sat down on a log to wrap some black tape onto the blade of her new stick. She paused to watch the boys. Each had a puck of their own and they were playing by themselves. She heard Mark's voice bellow out, "Hey, guys lets pick teams."

The boys met at the middle of the playing area and threw their hockey sticks onto the ice. Mark knelt down on his knees beside the pile. He began tossing the sticks - one at a time - first to his left and then to his right. When he finished Abbie noticed that one team was short a player. She skated over to the group and asked, "Can I join in?" Mark looked at Abbie's stick. "No girls allowed on my team," he stated.

"You can play on my team, Abbie," Arthur said. He grinned at her. One of the boys complained, "No way. Art! She's a girl!" "Come on guys," Arthur pleaded. "Abbie is good. Besides, we need an extra player to make the teams even."

The boys agreed to let Abbie play. Mark relented and dropped a black puck to the ice. He cushioned it against his stick. "Let's play!" Arthur shouted.

Abbie skated up to Mark and stopped, spraying snow at him. She swiped the puck from his stick and skated a tight turn around him. She stick handled down the ice and fired a wrist shot that sailed over the goalie's left shoulder and into the top corner of the net. As in her dream she could hear the crowd cheering for her, although it was only Arthur (and the rest of her team). "Way to go, Abbie!"

At the bow of our ship, sitting with his back to the wind, gazing into the distant horizon, was the second member of our crew. And not unlike the infamous Captain Bligh, he too would regularly shout orders at the men. "To the left," he would bellow at us with his arm straight as steel pointing toward the distant shoreline. "Prepare your tackle," he would announce and then spill into a lengthy lecture on the correct deployment of hooks and wire. Lewis Gillett, my neighbor and two years my junior had the advantage of a third season's experience living in this northern paradise, and believe me a day never passed that I wasn't reminded of this simple fact. Lewis was born and raised in Labrador, his eastern accent rarely surfacing except when his temper got the better of him. He was religiously schooled and schooled in religion. He never drank, never smoked and had a particular dislike for my love of rock and roll music. Nevertheless, our boyish immaturity often overcame social incongruity, and like a couple of kids meeting at a summer camp we often found time to play in the wilderness.

In the eyes of the other men I was no doubt as characteristically unique as they, and perhaps as well a bit of an oddity. In appearance I remain remarkably unrefined from my rebel years, and emotionally I still favor the gangly youth and their free spirited ways. Growing up in the suburbs of Metropolitan Toronto did not however leave me shy of the natural experience. As a child, and later with my wife and children, I would frequently explore the lakes and forests of Ontario. Naturally, now being in the heart of the real Canadian fishing experience delighted me to no end, and little doubt existed that the feeling was mutual among us.

Lance, now standing just to my left along the shore, raised his arm and pointing down to the water whispered in awe, "There - there it is!" Even Lewis was silent as we three stood there admiring this sleek and majestic predator, now thrashing its head from side to side desperately trying to free the lure lodged in its jowl. And like the young Hooper spotting Jaws from the deck of the Orca, Lewis gasped, it's a thirty pounder!" "Thirty-five" I returned, humorously trying to re-enact the scene of the film now dancing about my consciousness. Yet without a further word, we knew in an instant that among us we had never before seen one this big. His camouflage of green painted with spots of white complimented his size and predatory prowess. His icy and emotionless stare piercing the realm of water and air instinctively invoked in us a sense of caution: the moment was sheer excitement.

"Lance, get the net," I pressed his shoulder with my free hand breaking his intensive stare. "It's at the back of the boat, by the motor, hurry." With the stern floating near parallel to the beast, now broadside and curiously idling as if he were planning his next move, I suggested we lure him towards the boat, and net him there. "Yeah, better than trying to tackle him on the rocks" Lewis agreed. Lance overhearing our discussion drove the net down beneath the surface holding it steady as Lewis and I cautiously eased the line towards him. As if he were suddenly unaware of the capture looming before him, our friend simply slid into the net, which could barely contain his entire mass.

Daisy woke from her nap and wandered into the kitchen wearing a green winter coat she had taken from her bedroom closet. "Gotta go now and get some bread from Berkley's."

"Daisy, we've got lots of bread in the freezer"

I turned around while still in the chair and opened the ice-box, pointing out the three frozen loaves. She picked up a photo from the table.

"These girls must be cold with those silly shorts on."

"Daisy, this is a picture of you and your basketball team. I didn't know you were a famous basketball player!" She dropped the photo and shuffled back to her bedroom.

"I'm going to put that baby back into its bed now." She took the china doll from the vanity and gently tucked it under the pink silk comforter of her bed. She patted the doll's head with her gnarled hands and then kissed its cheek, leaving it wet and glistening. I stood in the doorway and watched her, holding the photos and clippings in my hand.

On my weekend break I decided to ask permission for Daisy to come to one of my younger sister's high school basketball games. I would have to take her in the agency van and I would have to get permission slips from Daisy's daughters. My sister was mortified that I was thinking of bringing one of my clients to her game. I suggested to her that I might be mortified at her lack of basketball skills. The coach must have been feeling particularly generous on the day he chose my uncoordinated sister for the team.

The O.K. was given for Daisy and I to attend the game. I didn't really have any expectations. She would most likely sit and stare at the walls. And within a short time she would start to rock back and forth. If she got really tired she would start rubbing her hands together and tell me that she could hear the baby crying. Then we would slip quietly out the gym door for home.

Monday night was game night. I convinced Daisy that the 'baby' would be better off at home in bed. I made sure the Agency van was parked close to the front door of the apartment building. I had talked to Daisy all day about the basketball game at Morgan Hill High School that evening. I told her about my uncoordinated sister, Julie, and her teammates. As usual, Daisy responded to each of my comments with some totally unrelated natter, making me wonder why I even bothered to say anything at all. As we drove I listened to Daisy's ramblings. My right arm shot out instinctively, for Daisy, as I braked abruptly. I had not seen the car run the light until it was almost too late. The remainder of our drive was in silence, broken only by my quiet cursing of bad drivers and red lights. Once at the gym, we positioned ourselves in the middle row of the bleachers by the door.

Here in our community many people enjoy taking their snowmobiles out into the countryside far away from the confines of their homes and workplaces. A brisk drive through the crisp clean air serves to clear the head and allows time for quiet reflection away from any interruptions. A person can forget their daily responsibilities, trials and tribulations and simply enjoy being. Unfortunately just being is not always enough. This is the story of one man who found this truth to be a costly lesson.

Jeff had been living in Fond du Lac for about 5 months and prided himself on how well he had adapted to the changes. Having lived in large cities like Toronto and Vancouver he really had no clear reference point as to what life in the small Northern community would be like. Despite this he felt that he had made the transition quite well. Jeff would often look back at his arrival and laugh at how he must have appeared to onlookers who saw him when he stepped off the Athabaska flight for the first time.

It had been early September when he had hopped off the plane and onto the barren sand covered runway. Awaiting him were several children on four wheelers and an intimidating looking clerk at the airline office. Jeff had been inundated with questions from the children, Who was he? Why was he here? Did he know the Principal? Did he have kids? And on and on. He hadn't really known what to make of it at all. Things didn't get any clearer for him when he was dropped off at the empty teacherage the Band had arranged for him to stay in.

Nature completely occupied all of Jeff's senses at the moment. His lungs filled with the sharp clean air of a northern morning. Vibrant green peeked out from under the porcelain coverlet of snow drawing Jeff's eyes to follow the shoreline. His heart beat and his mind danced with pleasure as he roared across the open expanse of brilliant ice. It was good to be alive, to be away from the sounds and pressures of the cities. It was good to be here, in the North away from all of that hustle and bustle that sucked the life from a person's soul. Here you could feel and think without distraction. Nothing could have pleased Jeff more at that time than the way he was feeling.

That feeling of elation disappeared within seconds as Jeff felt himself catapulted through the air. Crashing to the ice he felt as though a giant fist had hammered his body against the cold unyielding iron of a blacksmith's anvil. Then blackness and nothing.

Later, Jeff awoke to the sound of voices. He was in a hospital bed and felt as though every bone in his body was broken. In fact only his leg had been broken when he hit the rock on the lake. Jeff had been so caught up in the beauty that surrounded him that he had not been looking ahead as he should have been. He had lain unconscious on the ice and was found by a party of men who were also on their way to Uranium City.

I started to run again. The sun continued to shine, although the clouds in the sky threatened rain. Oh well, I thought, I didn't mind a nice rainfall once in awhile. It felt so good to be active and outdoors, especially to enjoy the quietness. The sun felt warm on my bare arms and face. I was breathing heavily now from the jog, and Kona just kept right on running with me. Kona ran in and out of the bushes, freely and curiously.

During my runs I often wondered if a bear would come out of the bushes and eat me up. Of course the thought would leave my mind as quickly as it entered because I didn't want to scare myself. As I jogged, I took in the beauty of the northern forest and all it had to offer.

After about twenty minutes of running, I decided to turn around and head home. Almost home, it began to rain, as I thought it would. One by one huge droplet of rain fell to the ground all around me, and on me. It felt great as the rain splashed onto my hot, sticky skin. Kona didn't seem to mind, she kept right on running and playing. "The rain began to fall harder and faster, but I made it home in time.

When I got in, I immediately got out of my wet clothes and went to get a towel. I took the towel and dried off as much as I could. I decided to light my fire place and boil some water for tea. I sliced up some fresh bannock to have with my tea. I quickly turned my head, because I heard a scraping sound on my door. I slowly walked over to my window on the door and looked down to find Kona all soaked and wet on the front porch. I was so glad to see her and not a bear or even worse a skunk.

Abbie groaned and put on her skates. Soon she was whizzing across the lake. She loved the swishing sound her sharp edges made as they sliced into the ice. Swish, swish, swish. Abbie soared gracefully over to Lisa. She stopped and glanced over at the boys. They were playing "I wish I had my own hockey stick," she mumbled.

"Not me," Lisa said as she twirled around on her figure skates. "Great! Here comes trouble," Abbie said. Arthur and Mark were skating towards them at top speed. Mark headed straight at Abbie. She had to lurch backwards to avoid getting run over. Mark stopped sharply, spraying snow on her legs. He looked down at her feet and asked, "Hey, what are you doing wearing boys skates?"

Abbie glared at him, "These aren't boys skates. . . they're hockey skates!"

"Well, then, where's your hockey stick?" he asked. Abbie's temper flared, "If I had a hockey stick I could out score you any day!"

Just then Abbie noticed Arthur nudging Mark. Mark ignored his friend and continued to tease, "Yea, right! Girls can't play hockey!"

Arthur nudged Mark again. "What is it, Art?" Mark asked, appearing annoyed with his friend. "Well, I've seen Abbie play hockey before. She's pretty good you know," Arthur said as he kicked at a crack in the ice. "And," he added, "My dad and I watched the Canadian women's hockey team play on TV last night. They're pretty good too. They're even going to the Olympics." "Shut up, Art!"

Ten minutes later Abbie tromped up the wooden steps and into the house. The instant heat from the wood stove warmed her cheeks, but not her spirits. She peered into the living room and noticed that she didn't need to relay her message. Kohkom was already busy beading moccasins. Abbie entered the room and sunk down into the soft chair. She dangled her feet over the worn arm rest and told Kohkom what had happened at the lake earlier.

Kohkom kept working on her heading and spoke, "You can do anything you want, Abbie. If you want to buy a hockey stick you must think of a way to make money. But, first, you go and clean up your messy room."

Abbie plodded into her room. How can I make money? I'm only fourteen! Abbie picked up her quilt and made her bed. Then she sat down on the floor and started picking up the scattered dream catcher beads. Dream catcher beads, "That's it!" Abbie thought. I can make dream catchers and see if Mr. Mack will buy them to sell at his store! Abbie Bird! You are smart!

Abbie spent the rest of the weekend and every day after school the next week making dream catchers. On Saturday morning she got up early and went to the Northern Store to see Mr. Mack. He was impressed with Abbie's dream catchers and bought them all.

Our commonality was then in fact our profession. We were elementary and secondary teachers working with Dene children in Fond du Lac. And although teaching is a demanding profession, it was not only the students who were caught occasionally gazing out classroom windows and dreaming of fishing the day away. An adventurous although unlikely trio indeed, yet bound by our aspirations of landing a trophy Northern Pike, we had set off in a borrowed vessel in search of fishy treasure.

As we breached the mouth of Grease Bay I was immediately impressed by the majestic cliffs that bordered the eastern shoreline. Towering nearly eighty feet straight up they easily shadowed the morning sun as we pulled along side to probe the depths beneath them.

"Five of diamonds, that's what you need here boys, just the five of diamonds" rolled the lofty command down from the bow. "I thought maybe I'd try my favorite jointed rapalla" I humbly replied. With a gentle roll of his eyes, and a nearly pompous grin, Lewis assured me that, "in this lake the five of diamonds is the lure of choice for any species lurking below, it's all you need, trust me." I paused with an empty glare, my favorite lure dangling in my grasp not knowing exactly where I wanted to stick it, and then with a casual shrug I bowed to the captain's experience and grudgingly placed a five of diamonds carefully onto the leader. Just as I was muttering, "five of diamonds - yeah right," a sudden shriek from Lewis signaled the first strike of the day!

"Lewis, I'm gonna have to let go." Now nearly neck deep in the water I couldn't help but laugh out loud as it suddenly occurred to me how ridiculous the situation had become. "No wait," Lewis shouted, and in desperation he quickly made his way into the lake. Now bordering on obsessive, he tossed his glasses to Lance still beached on the shore and then dove beneath the surface to rescue the line fleeing from my grip. When he finally surfaced I realized that the tension had freed and now the two of us had control of the line. "If he runs hard I'll release the line to you, just like the reel, it will stall him." "Yeah OK, but start pulling him up; I've got to get out of this water." As we started to pull we began to realize that the war was turning in our favour. Now the cold-blooded machine was tiring, and it felt like we were dragging an old log up from the very bottom.

Managing to finally clear the water, the line now beginning to pile at our feet indicated that in moments, whatever it was, was about to appear. Even a child staring down at his presents on Christmas morning could not surely feel the anticipation I knew at that very moment. To lose it now would be the unthinkable. Even just to see it would somehow be acceptable terms of peace between us. But to never know what it was, or how big it was, I feared would let an endless sense of wonder fester in the very depths of my soul. OK perhaps I was becoming a little over dramatic, after all it's just a fish isn't it, or is it?

Once there the flood of children began. Pounding on the doors and walls, faces pressed against the window, and all of them wanting to visit him. Nothing had prepared him for that. In the beginning he'd panicked, stayed in the house, double locked his doors and pulled the drapes tightly closed. Silly of him he now knew, since then he'd learned how to handle that hurdle and felt at home with his visitors. Since then Jeff had been very much involved with the kids and the community in general. He'd eaten bannock and caribou for the first time, tried to play hand games and even hunted with some members of the community. He certainly had grown and adjusted in the short time he'd been in Fond du Lac.

Today was going to be a big day for Jeff. For the first time he was going to take his snow mobile and make the trip the Uranium City. He was excited by the prospect of making the journey on his own. He'd been over several times but always in the company of others and was eager to show them that he'd been paying attention. Jeff knew how to make the trip without anyone's help and was determined to show everyone.

Earlier this morning he'd called Environment Canada to get the latest weather projections. They were calling for lows of -25, highs of -20 and windchill of 1700. All in all not a bad day for travel. Jeff had also checked his thermometer on the house when he had stepped outside that morning. It read -18 and the skies above were so clear he could see the early morning stars as though they were painted on a ceiling mere inches above his head.

Jeff jumped on his machine and began his trek. As he blasted over the frozen road and headed toward the airport he quietly chuckled to himself. He was sure that if his friends from back East could see him they wouldn't believe their eyes. Jeff had never been an outdoorsman by any stretch of the imagination. Back home he had considered a walk to the corner store to be a major adventure. It was certain no one would have ever envisioned him bundled in a parka heading off on a snowmobile. A city bus maybe. But a snowmobile? No way.

The snowmobile's shrill engine sound cut through the morning stillness as Jeff passed the airport and headed toward MacKenzie. He knew that many people preferred out on the lake from the town point but this was the route that he knew best. Jeff felt completely free riding along on his machine, wind whistling past as he kicked up a fine spray of loose snow. Nature in all her glory surrounded him from all sides, from the sparkling snow reflecting the first hints of the sun's golden rays as it peeked above the horizon, to the gently swaying trees ranked like quiet sentinels along the road.

As Jeff passed the radio tower his snowmobile sputtered and jerked under him. He pulled over to the side and gunned the engine several times. The machine settled back into a steady pace and he resumed his trip. At one point he thought that perhaps he should turn back and see if his spark plugs needed cleaning or if something more was wrong. Since the engine had settled down though he dismissed the thought and continued on his way. Soon the frozen expanse of the lake rumbled under the skis of Jeff's machine and he gave no more thought to the engine or sparkplugs.

I made Kona shake herself off before I would let her in. I warmed some milk, and took out some of Kona's favorite Adog biscuits, while she went to her blanket in front of the fireplace. I was feeling a bit chilled by then and took Kona her snack. My tea and bannock were ready, and I took my snack and put it on the table in front of my loveseat. I ate my snack and looked over to see Kona asleep.

The rain continued to fall, lightly now, but it didn't look like it would let up soon. I reached over and grabbed the romance novel that I borrowed from the library, just yesterday. I read for a short while and I too was fast asleep. This was ten times better than a crowded theatre.

Arthur turned red in the face. Abbie felt sorry for him. This new kid Mark was a big pain. She made a snap decision that it was time to leave and grabbed Lisa, "Come on, let's get out of here."

Abbie was upset. Girls can so play hockey, she muttered to herself. She wished she could prove Mark wrong. All she needed was a hockey stick. She knew that Mark's dad had a good job working in the gold mine. Mark probably owns three hockey sticks! she thought.

Lisa interrupted her thoughts, "Hey, Abbie, let's go over to the Northern Store." Abbie nodded. She trudged silently alongside her cousin as they followed a packed snowmobile trail to the store. Once inside, Abbie went directly to the sporting department. She grabbed a hockey stick out of a bucket and pressed it to the floor, testing its flexibility. This is the one, she thought.

Click, click, click. Abbie turned and saw Mr. Mack, the store manager, pricing new stock. Instantly she had an idea, "Mr. Mack, do you need any help in the store?"

Mr. Mack shook his head, "Sorry, Abbie, business is slow. Maybe during the Christmas rush." Abbie bowed her head. She needed money now! "By the way, Abbie," Mr. Mack continued, "tell your Kohkom I need more moccasins to sell this winter."

"O.K.," Abbie said. She put the hockey stick back into the bucket and met up with Lisa at the checkout. Lisa asked her, "Want to go to the youth center and hang out?" "No thanks," Abbie muttered, "I'm going home."

Now, fishing gents are a team, savvy hunters in it together for the long haul, all for one and one for all; In true honesty though, deep down, it hurts like hell watching the other guy bring in the big one. Oh sure, outwardly you're cheering him on, but if his line broke just as he's reeling it in, you know it probably wouldn't spoil your dinner.

But Lance who was somewhat inexperienced listened with genuine interest while Lewis gave running commentary of his technique as he battled this mighty opponent from the depths. "It's all in the drag guys, you gotta have the setting just right, but watch the slack, keep your line tight or the hook will pop right out." Then he paused in silence for a brief moment before excitedly exclaiming, "she's got some weight boys - she's got some weight - here she comes." As I stretched intensely over the boat's edge to catch a glimpse of the master's game, I couldn't help but toss a sneering grin in Lewis's direction as his modest little fish broke the surface. His expression teetered on the edge of humility, then slipping just a little from his mount, he made comment of the strong undercurrent that clearly must have affected the feel of the fish.

"Pass it back here," I hurriedly insisted, "it's a couple of feet anyway." With the reluctance of a small child relinquishing the last bowl of ice cream he managed to toss the rod into my lap; and as fortune would have it those few feet bought us the time we needed to reach the shore. Lance managing a foot hold on some rocks just beneath the water secured himself as Lewis jumped to the ground and pulled the boat to stop. As I reeled from the stern I realized in an instant with utter horror that the line had snagged. "The line is caught on something, I can't free it Lewis." "It's probably the fish." "No it's not," Lance whimpered nearly in tears from sheer exhaustion and frustration as he tried to pull himself onto the shore. "What is it then?" I curiously questioned. "The line is wound around my ankle, on the skin too and really tight. Stop pulling it's killing me!" "I'm not pulling" I insisted. "It's the fish that's pulling Lance" Lewis added. As I jumped to the shore Lewis fell to his knees at Lance's feet and tried quickly to free the line.

"It's knotted tight, and it's breaking the skin." "Just cut it hurry," Lance winced his words out in obvious pain. "But we'll lose the fish." "Were gonna lose my foot, cut it" Lance demanded. "Here," as I threw my knife for Lewis to free our wounded friend, I ran to grasp the line extending from Lance to the quest for glory still deep below. Then as Lance shrieked with relief, I realized that the line now wrapped around my hand leading down to the monster was not a pleasing situation in the least. The force of this fish tightening on my hand was incredible especially given the amount of time he had already been hooked. "Lewis, get me a stick or something that I can wrap the line around." At that point my worthy opponent launched a mighty dive, and the force so quickly drove the line into my skin that I was pressed chest deep into the water to relieve the tension.

One thing Jeff never tired of was the beauty of the North. No matter how long a person lived here Jeff was sure nature would always have some special beauty left in store to stun and amaze. For Jeff nothing did it like the Northern Lights and the crystal clear velvet nights when stars hung like silver drops of light above his head. These were things that could not have a value placed on them and Jeff prized each moment he could live in such surroundings.

It seemed to Jeff that all was as it should be. He took a quick mental inventory of the items he'd packed for his one hour trip. Knife, matches, 5 gallons of extra gas, two sandwiches, a thermos of coffee, and of course his warm parka, mitts and boots. He paused for a moment as he completed the list. It seemed as though there was something else he had intended to include but for the life of him he could not recall just what it was. In any case there wasn't time to worry about it now. If it was important Jeff was sure he would remember it soon.

Everything was packed on the snowmobile and it had been warming up for the last 10 minutes or so. Sometimes Jeff had a little trouble getting it started . Everyone assured him it was nothing to worry about. That it was just the way things worked when they had the extreme temperatures to deal with. In any case Jeff didn't feel bothered by this, after all what were the chances of things going wrong when he was using a well traveled trail and only had an hour long trip ahead of him? Even if he did break down he was sure someone would be along before too long.

At any rate the first fish in the boat fueled our excitement, and it wasn't long before a second, third and fourth were pulled from the water. Fishing on Lake Athabaska is a truly an angler's dream come true. Nowhere in Canada are the fish so plentiful and the potential for size so great. And so needless to say the morning was spent catching Pike, Trout, Walleye, and with a nearly equal share for all aboard. Yet later as we searched the shore scanning for a spot to lunch, I couldn't help but wonder if the trophy, the catch of catches, the monster pike would somehow find us. For it is the one single conversational piece proudly displayed that lets a fisherman tell and retell the details of the battle for all who come to visit. And although the day was nearly half gone, I kept an anxious hope for what might await us that afternoon.

The shore lunch was marvelous, and to Lewis' credit a fine job of filleting, a difficult art to say the least. The trout turned to a golden brown as Lance basted it gently with the lemon, butter and herbs it was cooking in. The crackle of the fire, the smell of the fish gently frying in the pan amidst the glory of a golden fall day was an experience not soon to be forgotten. And after a short rest along the waters edge we ventured once again onto the bay. It was then, all of a sudden, was going to happen; something it seemed was definitely in the air.

Considerably weighted down with water, the likelihood of drawing Lance into the boat without capsizing our fragile twelve-foot aluminum vessel dancing about the pool of swirling currents was becoming questionable. "Just hang onto him while I lift the anchor and drive to shore," I desperately insisted. "Okay, hurry he's heavy" Lewis broke with a slight chuckle between his words as the crisis had eased and was becoming somewhat humorous. The anchor weighed without complication and in a moment we were trolling towards the shore with Lance firmly in tow.

"You all right Lance?" I yelled intending to increase our speed a little. "Yeah but I'm really. . ." "Hey pass me your rod," Lewis interrupted. "You might lose it!" Straining, Lance managed to raise his right arm with the rod clenched in his fist so tightly that his knuckles were nearly as white as the clouds smiling above us.

With his free hand Lewis skillfully attempted to tighten down the drag that was steadily winding out and nearing its end on the spool. "The line is almost out, turn back towards the falls I need some room." "Turn back!" I shouted in disbelief. "He's going to drown!" Lewis then peered over the edge and questioned Lance somewhat hopefully. "Lance buddy can ya swim it from here? At that point I actually had to smile, I couldn't believe he would really abandon him and head back to the pool to reel in the poor man's fish.

Within minutes we had made our way down a narrow channel that juxtaposed the bay near its northern tip. "There's a water fall or a river rushing nearby," Lance whispered slightly above the drone of the engine almost idling behind us. In the explorers in some forgotten past we eagerly pressed onward. Then, rounding a nest of pines jutting from the shoreline, the beauty of white water pounding into the channel over a plethora of boulders and fallen trees had wondrously been exposed. As we neared, the sheer force of swirling currents that twisted and turned our tiny vessel were impressive, and perhaps even a little intimidating. No match for the enormous weight of water churning beneath us, I inconspicuously eased on my life jacket that had been cushioning me for the better part of the morning.

"Here's the spot - they'll be feeding here - drop anchor Lance," our self appointed captain announced with an obvious quiver of excitement luminating in his voice. In a moment the anchor took hold and our craft gracefully danced about the currents. Lance had made his way to the bow, Lewis was positioned mid ship and I directly astern. Then like the calm before the storm a silence fell, and for a minute it seemed as if we were the only three souls on the earth.

"Oh my God I've got something really big!" Lance could barely contain his excitement. Like someone nervously checking the winning numbers on a jackpot lottery ticket he shakily wrestled with his reel, desperately trying to control the obvious force pulling far beneath the surface. "Not too hard, release, release." Lewis' voice nervously grew louder. "Your going to snap the rod, turn the drag, turn the drag!" Lance, nearing a state of utter panic, struggled to free the tension so that the creature could run and tire, but the rod was straining, nearly bent right around to the reel.

"Your going to lose it man," Lewis shouted with an air of desperation as personal competition gave way to the excitement of the moment. Then suddenly the boat jerked quickly as a rushing current pressed our side, and Lance focused intently on his line began to teeter precariously atop the bow seat he was standing on. For what seemed like minutes he tried desperately to regain his balance. Back and forth and from side to side he swayed, and then unbelievably it happened; Lance toppled over the bow of the boat headfirst into the water.

Lewis and I scrambled in a desperate panic to the front, leaned over the edge with our arms extended for rescue, but he wasn't there - nowhere! Shock enveloped our consciousness, and our ability to rationalize waned before the unbelievable circumstance. "He's under the current", I stuttered. "I'll dive in." "No you'll be pulled under too" Lewis frantically insisted. Then as quick as he was gone he emerged from beneath the surface and with his first breath of air he gasped, 'Give me hand will ya!'"

Denying a devilish urge to applaud I quickly grasped his jacket and began to heave. You can't imagine my relief to see him, really. But even more difficult to imagine was that as we pulled him up from the chilling water and the near tragedy below, he incredibly still had that rod clenched in his fist with the lunker tugging as hard as ever below. And the irony of it all was that his plunge to the water must have released the drag on his reel; it was working perfectly.
