

## My Piece of Heaven

Sandra Walters

Most of our everyday lives are filled with ups and downs. 1999 was definitely a year of more downs than ups for me. I found myself facing the death of my fifteen year marriage and didn't know where I was headed much less where life would take me and my three boys.

While perusing the internet one day I happened upon a conversation with one spectacular individual. Everything this man said gave me new meaning and clarity to my life. I held on to every word that he typed and we wrote daily for months.

Although we talked about anything and everything, I noticed one topic was reoccurring; Quetico. I had never heard of Quetico before and although my grandfather brought me up as a fisherman, I had never spent the night in the wilderness or even gone camping for that matter. Sensing my need for a complete overhaul in my life, this incredible man, who is now my husband, decided a trip to Quetico would be the perfect adventure to show me the importance of life.

A trip was planned for June of 2000. I was unfamiliar with every aspect of planning, territory, and expectations and I suppose that is why Bucky handled all the details with great vigor. He had been traveling to Quetico since 1974 and knew the ins and outs like the back of his hand. I would be traveling with the best and I knew it the moment we loaded our van. Every detail was taken care of. I was to sit back and enjoy the ride and that is exactly what I did!

Our twenty-two hour drive brought new sights and experiences to me as I sat perched at the edge of my seat. My most treasured memory of my ride was that of the huge Bull Moose that stood majestically on the side of the road. Frantically I scrambled for my camera to capture the moment on film. Quickly however he darted up into the north woods territory leaving me with only the snickers of my husband as he was witnessing my adventure as it was unfolding.

Our arrival in Atikokan was just as exciting as the many hours that passed before it. My husband spoke frequently and passionately about our outfitter, Canoe Canada, and they certainly didn't disappoint me. We all sat down and listened to Jim tell us the hot spots for fishing and where great campsites would be found. Glancing over to my husband I couldn't help but smile as I knew that the love of my life was sharing his passion with me and I couldn't wait to hit the water and get started.

Our canoes were put in at Batchewaung where I manned the front while my husband and guide took the back. Complete trust was given to this man as I knew that no harm could come to me as long as he was in charge. Gently we shoved off shore and my life altering experience was about to begin.

Bucky and I made it effortlessly across Batchewaung. To an experienced traveler of Quetico, our canoe would have appeared to hold two experienced travelers and not just one. I seemed to be holding my own.

At the end of the lake lay my next and most difficult task. Bucky tried to explain to me the whole "Portage" thing and to be quite honest, I certainly didn't understand how difficult it could be. He carefully made sure that the large food pack was positioned just right on my back before rolling our canoe up to his shoulders. He led the way while I was left to follow. The weight of the pack was torture to my shoulders, the previous rains left the path muddy, and I was unsure if I was going to make it. Each new step brought a new challenge and by now my guide, Bucky, was out of site. Balancing the pack on my shoulders and stopping frequently to rest, I came upon a marshy area that required great caution in passing. Carefully and gingerly I made my way through the muck only to find at the very next obstacle myself sliding down a hill with my pack still attached to my back. To tell you that I picked myself up, brushed myself off, and continued on would be a lie. I sat down and did what I believe most normal people in that type of situation would do and that was to cry. Obviously my tears were heard by no one making the need for my sympathy cry obsolete. It was at that moment that I realized that I had to get up and move on.

The rest of the portage seemed uneventful however my back by now was tied in one giant knot. The backpack that was so carefully positioned on my back had now slid down below my waist and along with it came my pants. I was so glad that Bucky wasn't there to see me fall apart or to see that Quetico was seeing more of me. I wanted desperately to be perfect and make no mistakes, but Bucky knew that everything that was happening was making me stronger each day.

At the end of the portage we once again put our canoes in the water. No sooner did we take a few strokes of our paddles when Bucky told me to put my fishing pole together. He knew that all of my experience with fishing couldn't compare to the strike from a Northern Pike or the thrill of pulling a huge Walleye from the depths of the crystal clear waters. I believe that his excitement in watching me was greater than the thrill he could ever get from catching his own fish. (Okay, maybe that's stretching it a little bit!)

We began to troll across the lake. Paddling seemed to be effortless. As we crossed, the first fish was attached to Bucky's line. It was a large Northern Pike and was my first look at this incredible species. I couldn't wait for the next one to be mine.

Pickerel Narrows appeared to be the prime fishing location for me. Taking all the knowledge that I had gained from my grandfather, I threw my Rappalla in and under a downed tree. Knowing that this was the spot, a large fish, the biggest I had ever caught, took hold of my line and off he went. Our canoe seemed to move from side to side as the fight was on. My eagerness, excitement, and overall giddiness for this experience were witnessed by all. The Northern Pike that I was now wrestling was the biggest of the whole trip. Glancing over to my husband, a smile spread across his face as he knew the thrill of the catch and he had just shared it with me.

My adventures and accomplishments in Quetico were never ending. Each new day and each new experience brought growth, strength, and admiration for my husband. I entered Quetico broken and lost, not knowing what life had in store for me. Leaving Quetico I found a person that I didn't know existed and a person that could accomplish anything. I was lucky not only to have the experience of traveling to Quetico, but more importantly I was lucky to have my husband

introduce me to what I call my piece of heaven and I love him that much more for allowing me into this incredible place.

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