

A Lake Of Lost and Found

Sometimes the lake giveth and sometimes the lake taketh away

Living alongside a lake is a give-and-take relationship. In my family's case, an unorthodox exchange has been in effect for at least two generations now, and the value of items traded has been on the rise in recent years.

Oh, we started out at the entry level like many others would, with the donation of a good fishing lure now and then. It's just part of the experience. But the lake will make a return from

time to time. I once watched a favorite lure slip away during a battle with a smallmouth bass on one end of the lake. Lost it when the line snapped, and that was that – or so I thought, until the next day, when my cousin Robert found the lure in ankle-deep water right in front of my place. No fish with that, of course, but that was all right with me. I appreciated the precision of the delivery.

As far as I know, that's the only precise return. Typically the flow goes one way, with my family at least, and I'm not sure why. It may have started in the 1960s with the prescription eyeglasses that slipped off of my uncle's nose and into the deep. Kerplunk. It continued with the unexpected snap of an anchor line on another fishing trip.

Just recently, I heard that Robert had broken all records: In the past few years, he's lost a rod, his own eyeglasses and two – yes, two – trolling motors.

How does one lose two trolling motors? This guy is no rookie to lakeside living. He knew how to swap out the spark plugs on a two-stroke outboard before he knew how to ride a bike. He's spent more hours trolling for walleye than the guy from the local rod-and-

reel shop. But, evidently, in each case the donation was made by the same mistake: When you power up the stronger outboard, it's always a good idea to pull the electric sidekick up completely so it doesn't get hit with the force of the water going by the hull. Yeah. Even a little 9.9 hp motor will produce that effect, and those little screw clamps are just not going to keep that Minn Kota high and dry. So, two of them remain at rest beneath Salem Lake, some 60 feet down.

I, on the other hand, have had better luck, particularly when I'm not at the lake. A few years ago, I had left my place all set up for the summer with all the outside stuff moored or lashed together. Massive rainfall brought the water up over our bank, which gave the lake an excuse to carry away a piece of my dock. Fully prepared to have written that lumber off for good, I was pleasantly surprised to get a call from one of my other cousins, who had discovered the lost dock section safe and sound in a distant corner of the lake. Another return with no harm done.

Last spring, Salem Lake



Photo by Tim Votapka



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NET MARKS THE SPOT – The author's son shows off the spot in the lake at their cabin where a favorite lure returned after taking a wild ride with a smallmouth bass.

swelled high above its banks due to record flooding. There were many reports of lost canoes and relocated picnic tables and lawn chairs throughout the Northeast. My own paddleboat, normally stored high and dry in the yard, got caught in the flood and drifted out from the yard only to come to rest behind my aunt's cottage (upstream, I may add), higher and drier than it had been before the flood. Go figure.

It's been an interesting phenomenon to observe – my luck for getting things back and Robert's penchant for losing things to the lake. All I know is I'm not about to push my luck anymore, which is why I've invested in a good roll of rope from the dollar store. Maybe I'll lend it to Robert, too. ■

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