

The Magnificent Fish

He was 11 years old and went fishing every chance he got from a dock at his family's cabin on an island in the middle of a New Hampshire lake. On the day before the bass season opened, he and his father were fishing early in the evening, catching some fish and perch with worms.



When his pole doubled over, he knew something huge was on the other end. His father watched with admiration as the boy skillfully worked the fish alongside the dock. Finally, he very gingerly lifted the exhausted fish from the water. It was the largest one he had ever seen, but it was a bass.

The boy and his father looked at the handsome fish, shining in the moonlight. The father lit a match and looked at his watch. It was 10 p.m., two hours before the season opened. He looked at the fish, then at the boy. "You'll have to put it back, Son," he said.

"Dad!" cried the boy.

"There will be another fish," said his father.

"Not as big as this one," the boy replied.

The boy looked around the lake. No other fishermen or boats were around in the moonlight. He looked again at his father. Even though no one had seen them, nor could anyone ever know what time he caught the fish, the boy could tell by the clarity of his father's voice that the decision was not negotiable. He slowly worked the hook out of the lip of the huge bass and lowered it into the black water.

That was more than 35 years ago. Today, the boy is a successful architect in New York City. His father's cabin is still there on an island in the middle of a New Hampshire lake. He takes his own son and daughters fishing from the same dock.

He was right that night long ago. He has never again caught such a magnificent fish as the one he landed that night fishing with his father.

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But he does see that same fish – again and again – every time he comes up against a question of ethics. For, as his father taught him, ethics are simple matters of right and wrong. It is only the practice of ethics that is difficult. Do we do right when no one is looking? Do we refuse to cut corners to get the design in on time?

We would if we were taught to put the fish back when we were young, for we would have learned the truth. We already know the difference between right and wrong; we feel it in our souls. But we must do the right thing, and be an example to others.

Like the little boy on the dock, they will never forget.

– Beecher Hunter