

Remembering Bruce Weir



Recently Stillwater lost an elder at age 88, a friend and neighbor Bruce Weir. Back In 2009 I wrote about Bruce and his family of Stillwater, as follows.

The Weir family of Stillwater settled near the top of a two-mile stillwater on the St. Mary's River, which gives the community its name. Roderick and Mae Weir had three daughters, Nettie, Jane and Martha, and sons John, Hoise, Lockie, Bertie, Dan and Bruce.

Bruce (Bruce to his friends) and his late brother Lockie guided visiting anglers for many of the "good ole' days" on the river and nearby lakes. As I write this, Bruce, now 84 years old, still occasionally takes a friend fishing or hunting if he's feeling up to an outdoor adventure. Bruce, wife Ruby, and dog Suzie share their piece of heaven near ours. They are wonderful neighbors. Six years ago their son Eddie and wife Cheryl built a retirement home nearby, returning to the sacred Weir homestead. They also have a daughter, Helene, in Calgary, AB.

Bruce and Lockie built many boats in their day, mostly St. Mary's River punts and heavy wooden lake boats (too heavy to be stolen). Their river punts followed the Tom Ross punt design, but added features like a keel. Their lifetime of farming, logging and guiding taught the Weir brothers to work smart rather than hard. I was amazed to see the ease with which Bruce transported these heavy craft, using small rollers made from logs or pipes, and large rollers made from oil drums. A roller here, a lever there, and it's done! His simple methods actually make our newer, mechanized ways seem awkward, inefficient, and obsolete!

I once asked Bruce to share some of the secrets he learned during his many years of dry fly fishing for salmon. He said, "Well there's not much to it. You just float the dry fly over the salmon and he rises and takes it! That's about it." Then he told me of a dry fly moment when his cast landed on a partially submerged rock instead of beside the rock. "No matter, the fish rolled up and grabbed it right off the rock!"

In 2004 I spent a remarkable day helping Bruce and Ralph O'Brien cut and store a big pile of softwood "slabs" that had been unceremoniously dumped in



Bruce's backyard. Bruce assembled a makeshift mill from old parts including an antique 1-cylinder gasoline engine that ran as smoothly as silk. We also employed the services of a wild, noisy and cranky old red "lake truck" with the label "Trout City Express" painted on its doors. It was retired from its lake road duties a few years ago and now rests sulking in the pasture. The Express sputtered, lunched and blasted its way around the yard, shrouded by a heavy cloud of grey smoke.



It was a remarkable performance, like none I've ever seen, but it got the job done in its own distinctive manner, just like its owner always does.

At noon we were treated to a great dinner by Ruby, including a slice of her wonderful "war cake", a meal in itself, for dessert. So it was with renewed energy and high spirits, not fatigue, that we headed back to the woodpile.

I look back on it as a grand day, one of the very finest I've ever experienced, like stepping back into the past, before my time, with a true master for a guide. Bruce orchestrated and directed the project beautifully, much like Charles Mingus commandeered his high-spirited and unruly jazz ensembles, constantly



prodding, scheming, barking orders and improvising so as to keep things going forward smoothly without missing a beat.

By day's end the woodshed was full, the Express was full to bursting, and the woodpile was no more. Even its night crawlers, sow bugs, slugs and a tiny garter snake had left to search for a new home in the sunset.

So long, Brucie.

Bill Carpan, Stillwater NS

