



The School of Fish

by Duane Ryks

Take a kid fishing.

"Your bobber is down. Start reeling. Hold your rod up. There you go. Nice fish." Remember those words? I do. As a young boy my dad took me fishing. I looked forward to those times, which fortunately, were quite often for me. My dad loved to fish. Even when he had a buddy or relative that he was going with, he would often include me. He started a love of fishing in me that has lasted a lifetime. I have four brothers who are avid anglers. Is it just in our blood, or something else?

It was the time we got to spend with our dad that was as important as the activity. My dad was a pretty good fisherman. His passion for the sport rubbed off on us. He invested in good fishing equipment and a safe boat. Dad seemed to always know where the fish were biting, how deep, and on what bait. He took us fishing for walleyes, his favorite pursuit. I remember my first big walleye, where I caught it, what I was using, and what the weather was like. I was shaking when dad got that fish in the landing net. I was forever hooked.

There are lessons to be learned from the story I have just shared. First, obviously, you need to make time to spend with your children. No children? Mentor someone else's child. There are many agencies that will connect you. The local YMCA is a good place to start.

Second, make fishing exciting and fun. Most people think that the best way to get kids hooked on fishing

is to start simple. Take them panfishing. Action keeps their attention. Crappies, sunfish, perch, and bullheads are usually the first target. However, usually it takes a big fish to get kids hooked for life. I often encourage parents to bring their kids along on guide trips. I want them to experience catching walleyes and bass.

How young is too young? If they can manipulate a video game control, they can master a rod and reel. Last season, the largest walleye caught from my boat was by a 6-1/2 year old boy. Each year I have dozens of young anglers that catch big fish—fish that



6-1/2 year-old Bennett Wirth, right, caught this 28-inch walleye while fishing with his dad Tyler and North Country Fishing Guide, Duane Ryks on Green Lake.

they will remember.

It is okay to start kids with a simple-to-use bait casting, closed-face reel, combination. However, I like to move them up to a spinning reel and rod as soon as possible. Why? They get to use what the adults use. Kids notice things like that. Most kids can master a spinning reel in no time. And, don't just

search garage sales for some one else's throw away. Buy good equipment that will work properly. Nothing is more frustrating to a child than a bail that doesn't close or line that won't spool off the reel.

Make sure that kids have a comfortable life vest that fits properly. In Minnesota, they need to have it on at all times. Wear your life vest while fishing with your children. That way they will see that it is okay to keep it on. Bring snacks and beverages. And, don't forget the pee jug.

Find out where the fish are biting. Get all the information you can. Bait shop owners will be a great help if they know you are taking the next generation of customers.

Keep your first trips fairly short. Kids tire of almost

any activity sooner than adults. Don't be afraid to take them fishing for bass, walleyes, or pike. I have often taken young kids bass fishing with plastic worms and had them catching fish immediately. Young anglers love casting and retrieving.

And of course, consider hiring a fishing guide. Hiring a guide will ensure that you will probably catch some fish. The guide will show you how to set up your equipment properly, locate fish, hook and land them. A good guide will often have a camera ready for those memorable moments. I go out of my way to accommodate and entertain kids in the boat. Most of the time I let the youngsters reel in the fish I hook to let them feel the excitement. Check out the photos on my website: www.ifishmn.com for proof.

Take your dad fishing.

Take your dad fishing . . . today. As a young boy growing up I loved to fish with my dad, Gordon. He wasn't necessarily the best fisherman on the lake, but he was responsible for instilling in me a love for fishing that has been a part of my life ever since. My dad is still alive, but he is no longer able to fish by himself. Without me making an effort, he wouldn't get to enjoy this wonderful experience.

These days, Dad needs help getting in the boat. He may even need help baiting his hook, tying lines,

and cleaning weeds off. Just like I did many years ago. Now it is my turn to ensure that he has a great experience. Dad can't stand and cast, trolling works best for him now. He still loves the tug of a fish on the end of his line. It is a joy for me to watch the pleasure fishing brings to him.

Maybe your dad is no longer alive? Take someone else's dad. We have an organization in Minnesota called Let's Go Fishing with Seniors. Thanks to groups of volunteers, thousands of seniors get to go out on the water in safe pontoons to once again enjoy the great outdoors. To get more information, go to www.lgfws.com.