

SHARKS IN THE AU GRES RIVER

Having just seen Jaws at the tender age of 3 yrs old, the last place I wanted to be was on the water, but given that I'd been on boats since I was just a few weeks old, Dad wasn't sympathetic ... he had a boat, the weather was nice, and we were up at the cottage... get over it, kid. Even though the boys had returned to college and were not available to go fishing with us, Dad was sure he could handle it on his own, with his girls, Mom and me, in tow. So out we go, on a beautiful, albeit windy, fall day on the Au Gres River, heading out into Saginaw Bay. The River was packed with boats because the salmon were running that time of year. It was supposed to be a casual cruise, with Dad throwing out a few lines because, well, you never know. Shortly after Dad had deployed his lines, we get a hit. And it's no ordinary hit, this was a big salmon, taking out line and forcing him to run around the deck of our Penn Yan as fast as he could. Who was driving? Well, I was a bit young for first mate, so Mom took over. Mind you, Mom NEVER drove the boat, let alone on a day with a fish on the line. But, there we were, and I was a bit young for the chair. Dad was screaming directions at Mom as he ran around that boat fighting that fish: "Throttle up, turn it right, Evelyn, NO RIGHT! Turn it! That's too much! You're gonna hit the rocks! Watch the boats!" Needless to say, she got more and more flustered and her driving didn't improve as she had to fight the wind and her tendency to oversteer. It got so loud and entertaining that we drew a crowd along the banks: boat all over that River, Dad reeling and running around, and me chasing behind him wondering what the heck he had on that line that warranted such a fuss. After a good 20+ min fight, Dad landed that salmon -- and she was a beauty -- right around 30 lbs. But as soon as I saw how big it was, I took off into the cabin screaming, "SHARK! SHARK!! SHARK!!!" We headed back into the marina after that episode, with Dad vowing never again to take just us ladies out for a solo fishing trip. We enjoyed smoked salmon & salmon steaks from that fish for months. Perhaps that day paved the path for my future career as a biologist because Dad never wanted me to wrongly identify a fish again.



EARTH CRUISER ESSAY

In the 7th grade I rode my bicycle to Conway Junior High each day with my best friend, Yvonne. We both had 10-speeds but wanted beach cruiser bikes. And we didn't want just any old beach cruiser... we wanted Jamis Earth Cruisers like all the older "cool kids" were riding. Like so many kids, I thought I could just tell my parents this was what I wanted for Christmas, and voila, there it would sit under the tree for me on Christmas morning. This wasn't the case with my dad, someone who came from such humble beginnings. Dad never wanted us to experience the financial struggles he had growing up, but he was quick to put on the brakes at the first sign that we were taking anything he had provided to us for granted. So, rather than just going to buy me that bike, Dad said I should write an essay outlining the 10 most important reasons that I needed an Earth Cruiser before he would consider my request. Wow... 10 reasons... seemed like a lot, particularly because I already had my 10-speed; I knew that this was no ordinary burden of evidence to convince my dad. So, there I sat in my room, pen and paper in hand to come up with a variety of justifications, from the improved safety of pedal breaks (vs. those on the 10-speed that were ineffective in Florida's monsoon rains), to the superior traction of wide and knobby Earth Cruiser tires as my daily ride took me through areas littered with construction zone debris. The next morning I delivered my essay entitled "Ten Reasons Why I Need an Earth Cruiser" to Dad who said (in his most business-like tone) he would carefully review it and get back to me. A few days later Dad told me that he would be picking me up from school to drive up to Orange Cycle Works where I would be allowed to pick out my Christmas gift, a new Earth Cruiser. I was ecstatic, but most of all because I had passed Dad's test. We had a blast at the bike shop together. The new bike was great, but most of all because Dad made me analyze the reasons I needed it. Dad helped me see that fulfilling materialistic wants alone won't provide happiness: think about how something will improve your life and evaluate whether you really need it – that's the lesson I took away from Christmas that year and a principle I still live by to this day.

DISCIPLINE BY WORDS

Dad was one of the best writers I knew. From an early age he instilled in me the importance of effective communication skills, in both spoken and written forms. Dad's love of crossword puzzles and other word games put us all to shame; he had a special mastery of the English language. He also taught me the importance of being economical in my use of words: no need to be verbose to get a point across.

So maybe it's not a surprise that Dad's best form of disciplining me was by words alone. He never laid a hand on me for punishment. His "lashings with a wet noodle" came in the form of uttering six words that did the trick of keeping my behavior in-line: *I am so disappointed in you*. He would say that, and I would get a pit in my stomach, the physical sensation of knowing that I had really screwed up and damaged our relationship. When I disappointed Dad, he took it hard, sometimes feeling sick for days. Call it parenting by guilt, but it was much more effective on me than yelling, hitting, or grounding would have been. It must have worked because there weren't too many occasions when I heard those dreaded words from him. Dad would save this statement for the "fork in the road" events my brother, Brad, discussed in his eulogy. I had a few of those in my childhood and teenage years, when Dad recognized I was steering off course. A good "talking-to" by any of the three dominant male figures in my life (Dad and my two big brothers, Brad and Gordie) would usually do the trick of setting me back straight. The best antidote to Dad's punishing statement came in the form of another six words that thankfully I heard more often: *I am so proud of you*.

WEDDING THUNDER

I have never been one for wearing heels. But for my wedding, I thought it was time to kick off the Birkenstocks and make an exception. Dad picked out a lovely venue for the ceremony and reception, right nearby here at Cypress Grove Park, an old citrus plantation on Lake Jessamine. I'd been to the plantation house a few times and walked the grounds. The plan was for me to walk down the stairs and meet Dad who would walk me through the pergola to Steve. All sounds so easy. Well, somehow I didn't factor in wearing heels. And it was a stormy day with threatening skies. I stepped out to walk down those stairs, looking at a sea of people, and I wasn't sure how I was going to make it without falling, not to mention the stairs were damp. Take it slow... breath... it's not that far. No sooner had I reached the bottom of the stairs, there was a loud rumble of thunder. My eyes grew big with anxiety, but then dad grabbed my arm and reassured me, "Aw, don't worry about that, Robie. That's not thunder; I just hired God's drummers for the day."

