

# Back Trails

## Perspectives on People and Nature

### Fishing With Grandma

by Linda Greenow

Grandma always said that her molasses cookie recipe was her claim to fame. Everyone raved about her cookies and nobody else could make them quite like she could. But looking back to my childhood, I think that Grandma's love of fishing and her willingness to share it with others left a much deeper legacy than her cookies, as delicious as they were.

### I have always believed that we learn many things as children that resurface later to enrich our lives.

My grandmother was raised a city girl and went to work at a young age in Rochester. Marrying my grandfather must have brought her many new experiences. He was raised on a farm near Canandaigua, and loved hunting, fishing, and gardening. Of those pastimes, fishing was the one that my grandmother embraced most enthusiastically. Although she passed away several years ago, I often wonder if she was naturally enthusiastic about fishing before she met my grandfather, or if she learned to like it for his sake.

From an early age, I remember Grandma passing on this family tradition to others. When I was a toddler, my family annually rented a camp to devote two glorious weeks to fishing the St. Lawrence River. I don't remember much about these trips, but I've been told that at four years old, I had my own fishing pole and could catch bass with the best of them.

In the late 1950s, my grandfather retired and my grandparents bought a small cottage on Lake Ontario.

The cottage had a dock with a sturdy bench, a small motorboat, and a cellar that stored a treasure trove of rods and fishing gear. Although Grandma liked to keep busy, she would occasionally go out to her "thinking bench" and contemplate the scenery. Perhaps it was her chance to relax during a busy day, enjoy a little solitude, or think through a problem. Not burdened by such responsibilities, my younger sister and I fished from the dock, catching sunfish and perch.

On the dock, the basics that we practiced were simple. We weren't supposed to talk, because our voices would make the fishing line vibrate and scare away the fish. We disdained floats, which we called bobbers, regarding them as suitable only for novices and babies. If we caught a fish, an adult had to take it off the hook. We were allowed to bait our own hooks, but usually persuaded Grandma to do that messy task. She was always nearby keeping an eye on us, but encouraged us to do as much as we could on our own.

The responsibilities that went with fishing made us a little squeamish. As Grandma had survived the Great Depression, she wouldn't consider paying for bait. Instead, she taught us how to catch night-crawlers. As we had little success, we conserved our supply by cutting each worm into pieces. We also helped Grandma clean fish, handing her paper towels and newspapers as needed. All that fish-cleaning must have made an impression. Decades

later, when I lived in Peru and could buy only whole fish, I reconstructed how Grandma cleaned bass and did a rough imitation myself.

On special days, Grandpa took all of us out in the motorboat. This was much more exciting than fishing from the dock, as we might catch bass or a bullhead! Grandma frequently admonished us to sit down, be quiet, and stop scaring the fish. We would usually spend an hour or more this way, but I didn't feel that being still was a hardship. Although this might be more difficult for many kids today, for us, sitting quietly to fish was a highlight of the summer.

I have always believed that we learn many things as children that resurface later to enrich our lives. I keep Grandma's cookie recipe in my recipe box, although I seldom try to imitate her famed baking. But appreciating the outdoors and the many joys of nature—these are with me every day, thanks to fishing with Grandma.



The author at about age 2, fishing near Cape Vincent in the early 1950s. Taken by her grandmother, Erma Greenow.

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