

PROSE TO POETRY

or, DANCE TO THE MUSIC.

by Jerold Hamza

BILL AND I GO BACK FURTHER than either of us would like to admit. Our acquaintance began in the mid-1980s. He has a fishing lodge in northern Ontario; it's a great place to catch giant northern pike on a fly rod, and then pick up a few walleyes for shore lunch every day. I love Bill's place.

Bill always had de Havilland float planes—usually an Otter and a Beaver. Over my years of fishing with Bill, first at his lodge and later at his outpost camp, we would fly in. There was no other way. Scouting out locations for new outpost camps was as simple as flying and landing on unnamed lake

after unnamed lake and fishing off the plane's pontoons.

As we would fly to his place, you could see hundreds of lakes in all directions. I would ask Bill, "Did you fish there? Did you fish there?" The answer would be: No, he fished a very few of the lakes. He was looking for lakes only as locations for outpost camps, narrowing his field of interest. I, on the other hand, had to deal with the thought of all that water and the possibility that most of it had never seen a fisherman. I felt like a bum looking at a plate of cream puffs through a pastry store window. Years into our affiliation, I

finally wore him down. He would find that pristine spot and outfit a trip for me. He gave me his word.

One day in November, the phone rang and Bill was on the other end. He asked if I was serious about an outfitted wilderness trip. I told him I was. He let me know these kinds of things could run into money. "Everything runs into money," I said. It is one of the limiting factors of life. Time is the other. If you aren't running out of one you're running out of the other. If you're running out of both, you're screwed.

I asked him how much. He asked me: "How long are you looking to go for?" I

told him a week would work. Bill said, "I probably could get you in there for four or five US."

"Where, and four or five what?" I answered.

"Somewhere no one has ever fished before. You know all you have to do is show up, eh. The tent and everything will be there for you. That's grand. Come on."

There was a long pause. I'm sure the guy in the house next door could hear the wheels in my head turning. It was the chance of a lifetime. How do you put a price on that? Well, Bill just had and it was a steep one, in my world anyway. I told him to give me a few days to figure it out. Reality has screwed up many fine fantasies.

Of course, no one enjoys financial discord. I sat down and penciled it out. Sacrifices could be made (I think it's best if important things are acquired through struggle and sacrifice). I figured I could do it for \$4,000. A voice in my head said that I should try to chew him down. The smarter voice said that maybe I didn't want the guy outfitting me in the middle of nowhere to cut corners to find a profit margin. I called Bill back and told him I would do it for four thousand but it would have to be comfortable.

Bill and I moved on to the fishing. He told me he'd found a great fly-fishing place, maybe. Bill's stock in trade is not fly-fishing. It is walleyes. Over the years, he has picked up a couple of us "floaters"—types who go back and

forth between fishing methods. I am not sure how endearing a term that is but I am OK with it.

Bill told me he'd found this gravel bluff overlooking about three miles of a nameless stream between two nameless lakes. That he had landed his plane on one of the lakes last September and caught some nice brook trout at the mouth of the stream. The stream appeared to have a nice gravel bottom and would be good wading, he said. We talked about dates and came up with the first week in August. That far

no-way-out cohabitation for a week. I did a tent-camp hunting trip in Wyoming once. There were three of us. We got caught in the snowstorm from hell. In the end there was no hunting and only hard feelings. Years later no one talks yet. It was just too much forced time with the wrong blend of guys.

So that meant going alone. If things went bad, then I would be a victim of my own hand.

BILL AND I, OVER THE MONTHS, went over the camp outfit several times. In the end I was confident that we had the major points down. They spoke to safety and survival; the minor points were about style and comfort. What good is it if you survive a trip that you suffered through because you didn't sweat the details? If you can say anything about the brutal winters of upstate New York (where I live), it's that they give you the time to sweat the details.

I knew I would have to rent a satellite phone. Some people embrace technology and this would be fun for them. I am not one of those people. I was pissed when I had to get my first cell phone. I became more pissed when it died and I purchased a Blackberry. When it died my daughter talked me into a smart phone. I am happy to announce that a slug propelled down the barrel of a Browning 12-gauge rendered that son-of-a-bitch harmless. I know it was a meaningless act of defiance. In fact, I went out the next day and replaced it. But it was therapeutic



ILLUSTRATED BY C.D. CLARKE



north, it would be like September in the States. I could already feel my fingertips starting to tingle.

There would be plenty of time to plan. Months to figure out everything. The biggest question would be whether to go alone or not. Spending a week with someone in the wilderness is something you really have to pray over. It is not like going to Las Vegas with some friends. When it gets to wearing thin, you can't feign fatigue and skulk up to your room. This is brutal tied-at-the-hip/

and made programming the new phone bearable.

As I was pondering the minor points of the trip, I knew I'd have to deal with downtime. What I mean is, the time between fishing and running away from bears. I could hit poor weather, and the evenings needed some filling. Over the years I have become something of a single-malt Scotch aficionado. A glass of fine Scotch and a good cigar are worthwhile pleasures, although I often forego the cigar these days for health reasons.

part of the technology I usually dislike. I had purchased an iPod a few years earlier. My musical tastes run toward the counterculture, and lately my music was showing up on the Internet and I could download it. Things like Glen Campbell and the Stone Temple Pilots playing Galveston. Is music as important to me as fly-fishing or hunting? I can't answer. I need it all. I spent a large portion of my life in the entertainment industry, and my family has deep roots there. My grandfather and father spent many

Then I thought of one of his lines: "Lord, what music hast thou provided for Thy saints in heaven, when Thou affordest bad men such music on earth!"

I decided I was going to do it. I was also going to bring a docking station and fill the wilderness air with sound new to it. There are some who would consider it a sin to break the peace and tranquility of the wilderness with a hot version of Iggy Pop's "The Passenger." That's OK—as I have established, I am indeed a sinner. With the worst of sins being at the top of the list, this would surely be near the bottom—right next to paying Suzy Orbacker 25 cents to see her underwear in the second grade. She promptly displayed them by opening the brown paper bag she had them in, then took my quarter.

The gods would forgive me. The bigger problem would be how to keep all these things powered. Like most of life's logistical problems, it was solved by throwing money at it. Bill would fly in a small generator when he set up camp. Portable electricity is another technology I do not mind.

I was now at the waiting stage. When you are young, the waiting stage is hard. As

you age it just lines up with the chronology of life. Then comes the packing stage. This usually takes place late in the waiting stage. Of course, if you have OCD like I do, it may take place several times throughout the waiting stage. Then there is the travel stage. If you do it right, the travel stage can be as good as the main trip. At least a fine *hors d'oeuvres* to the meal.

MY PORT OF CALL FOR THE floatplane to Bill's was just off the Trans-Canada Highway in the north of

the Superior region. This is one of my favorite road trips. And all along Route 11 are small businesses that create a blend of culture and flavor that is distinctly Canadian. I always try to take as much extra money as I can. I fill my car with useless gew-gaws and tchotchkes, as Christmas gifts. You can tell where you stand in my world by what you get from me at Christmas. If you get that coin purse made from the bear's scrotum with the Canadian maple leaf stamped on it, you should work on being a little nicer to me in the coming year.

Finally, I made it to Bill's place. Most of Bill's sentences finish with "eh," and I just love that. To top it off, he has this big, goofy grin. "Hey, Bill, I got you this hand-carved duck," I told him as I lightened my load by one item. He liked it and placed it right on his desk so as to cover a pile of paperwork. I think that helped him like it even more. We chatted for a while to catch up. He told me he wanted to get me to camp that afternoon. That some rain might come the next day. Weather in the north is what you can see. Past that, there is no real certainty.

Bill told me he'd made a flag pole out of a jack pine. He gave me two flags, one green and one orange. He would fly over every day. If the green flag was flying, he would keep going. He had the big Bill grin on his face when he told me he wanted to show me something. I smiled too. I had an idea about what, but was not sure exactly. I followed him to the dock. I was right. There she was: Bill's new Otter. They are legendary planes, built in Canada (production ended in the late '60s), and critical to opening up the north country. For a Canadian boy they are part of the dream. Bill's new cream puff was a DHC-3 Vazair turbine Otter, white with butterscotch stripes, and a black streak down the middle. For those of you who don't know planes, just think of a '57 Bel Air built to the hilt. Buffed to a high gloss.

The only thing missing was a hot babe adjusting her makeup in the reflection.

"Hey, this is so sweet. Throw me the keys!"

"Yeah, right," Bill said.

Bill had a Beaver, too. Smaller than the Otter, it would be far more economical to fly me to my camp, but I noticed Bill had them loading up the Otter. I love times like this best, when something unpredictable and fun enters the story. You have to keep watching so you know when you are having the time of your life. I smiled at him. "You figure we need the Otter?"

"Yeah. You know, it doesn't matter how many times I tell you to pack light, eh? Just to show you what a good guy I am . . . no extra charge," he said while flashing his big smile.

"OK. I suppose we're gonna take the long way, too," I said and smiled back.

"Yup . . . no extra charge."

In a moment he was in the pilot's seat, and I got in next to him. Bill put the plane's nose into the wind and she lifted off the water like a dream. You could feel the pride float off Bill. I had known Bill long enough to know that this was indeed one of his dreams. A dream has to be hard enough that the outcome is never sure but not so hard that it can never be. This dream opened the door to the next dream. This plane, as beautiful as she was, could haul around 4,000 pounds. That can open a lot of doors in the north.

We flew to the Albany River, which flows northeast from northwest Ontario's Lake St. Joseph and empties into James Bay. It has many offshoots and has remained quite wild. The worst exploitation was as a canoe route for furriers in the 1700s. Several fishing lodges and outfitters use the system, but ultimately this amounts to very little pressure. Where Bill had me set up was far from anything. He told me that if this water had been fished before, it wasn't in the

lifetime of the fish currently living here. He also warned me that just because it was pristine didn't mean fish would rush to impale themselves upon my hook. That I could have bad days here, too.

I knew all this. There was more to the trip than just catching fish. To spend a week in virgin wilderness is something rare. To spend a week isolated and alone is uncommon. Most boys have at some point in their lives wondered about the life of a mountain man. I would not come close to that experience because I was outfitted, but I think I could at least feel the nuance. As the Otter approached the lake, I was wondering if I could stand myself for a week.

Bill circled the lake and dropped our altitude. The pontoons touched the water and the weight of the plane slowly lowered until she was floating. We taxied around until Bill jumped out and tied her to a bush. (Well, that's what you tie planes to in the wilderness.) We unloaded my gear and carried it to the camp, which was located about a quarter-mile from the lake. It stood on a bluff overlooking the stream, which was a good 30 or 40 yards across. The bluff stood about 100 feet high and you could tell at one time the stream flowed this way. It was a good spot for a camp and with a little breeze could provide some relief from the bugs. Bill and crew had done a nice job. There was a good, spacious tent with a cot and a lantern. Off on one side of the tent was a tarp, and under it was a table and a chair, the generator, a Coleman gas stove, a rack with cooking utensils, eating utensils and more lanterns. Bill showed me the strong box filled with provisions. It was a good 50 feet from camp and was padlocked. He gave me the key and smiled. "Don't lose this, eh?"

He was still smiling as we went down to the stream. There in front of a promising-looking pool was a homemade sign. It read "Jerry's Beat." I smiled, too. In my



ILLUSTRATED BY C.D. CLARKE

I would pack one fine Cuban. (Hey, this would be Canada; they are legal there). I like 25-year-old Glenlivet, but the price tag is too steep. I buy one bottle around the holidays and share small glasses with my favorite people. Glenlivet makes a beautiful 18-year-old, and that would do.

I would pack about 10 pounds of books. The problem with float planes is weight. You have a limit and that is it. Bill would have the camp all set before I got there; even so, I'd reach the 100-pound limit for personal equipment fast.

The last item I was toying with was

years promoting country music. Each had a hand in the development of the Country Music Awards. I remember as a boy wiping Loretta Lynn's lipstick from my cheek, Conway Twitty messing up my hair. I remember George Jones saying goodbye to my grandfather all choked up. George knew it would be the last time they would work together.

This little device made it reasonable to carry a lot of music in a very small space. I had been contemplating fishing this trip with it. I kept asking myself if Izaak Walton would fish with an iPod.

mind I was hoping this wasn't putting off the fishing gods. Fishermen are a superstitious bunch. I have a friend who won't get in a boat if there is tartar sauce present. Anyway, the sign made me a little nervous. I followed Bill back to the plane to see him off. He reminded me about the green and orange flags. Then he threw a package at me.

"What's this?" I said.

"Walleye fillets! I'll see you in a week. Have fun."

He smiled, climbed into the plane and put her nose into the wind. He took his beautiful Otter once around the lake and tipped his wing at me. I liked Bill. The walleye fillets would be a great dinner.

BY THE TIME I GOT UNPACKED AND had all my stuff situated, it was dinnertime. I decided I would have a walleye shore lunch. A true treat. Simply dredge the fillets in flour with salt and pepper. Then slice some potatoes and onions thin. I tried to recreate the traditional version, with a slightly more cardiac-friendly olive oil in the frying pan than the usual lard. It was a fine dinner. I was careful to clean everything up at the stream. There were plenty of black bears here. It would be great if we just kept a respectful distance.

After dinner, I took the time to make ready all the things I would need for the following day. I started with my fishing vest. It has become an old friend. It is the old-school kind, with lots of pockets and zippers and snaps; no Velcro. It was a good vest when I purchased it. Still is. After all these years the only thing wrong is that it has faded some, but so have I. I always change the pocket contents for the immediate trip. I loaded the leader I wanted, the bug dope, tippet spools, bug spray, sunscreen, hard candy, satellite phone, hemostats, the Cohiba, a lighter and my flask. I pulled out my old pair of Simms neoprene waders, full of patches. (I know

I am never going to be on the cover of any catalog. I like that.) I strung up a nice Winston 4-weight, quick and tough.

I put together a fly box with a lot of terrestrial patterns. It even included a few small mousies—flies tied like little mice. I'd always wanted to catch a brook trout on a mouse pattern. As I get older I find that how I catch fish rivals the act of catching fish. If you told me that I could catch 10 fish under the surface for every one I caught on top, I would probably fish that much harder with a dry fly.

The morning came and I rose with the sun. Sleeping comes with such struggle on the eve of a new outdoor experience. Often, morning is an act of mercy. So much more this morning.

Steel-cut oats make a fine breakfast. As I sat at the table, liking the way the warm oatmeal was feeling inside, next to me was my iPod. I was having a crisis of conscience of sorts. I knew I had decided I was going to fish with it. It was just doing it for the first time that was difficult. I've always considered the sounds and cadences of the natural world special. In that reverence I have kept my life very clean and separate.

I put the iPod in the docking station while I ate breakfast. All of a sudden Steely Dan's "Deacon Blues" was echoing across the stream. I am sure for the first time in the history of the ages a saxophone solo wafted across that little valley. Very cool. I decided I would wait to fish with the music. I made sense of it with the logic that the first day needed my undivided attention to figure out this new place. The reality was I was biding my time. Like deciding to have sex with someone for the first time; it is an emotional commitment.

When I got into the stream, I realized what a fine job Bill had done in selecting my spot. There were many places where the bank had a gradual grade into the water. The gravel itself, anywhere from the size of cherry to a tangerine, was a dream to wade. Bits of

granite worn smooth over the millennia: some red, some white, some black, some an amalgamation. It had the effect of an Impressionist painting. I realized that all of this was no accident. Despite the fact that he didn't fly-fish, Bill had taken the time to figure out what I would need. It reminded me that good friendship involves work and selflessness. Then I thought about the hand-carved duck I put on Bill's desk. That's how it is.

With a blue sky overhead, fish were spooky. In a place where man never had an impact on the predator base, a day like this was high alert for a trout interested in survival. It turned out that the hardest part was the approach. If I could get a fly on the water without spooking the fish, something would eat it. Some casts produced fallfish (i.e., chub), others brook trout. In the end, both took flies off the surface, fought hard and provided good sport. I was pissed when the first fallfish came onto the gravel bank. Fly-fishing snobbery. You really have to think it through. I enjoyed each fish on the merits of the fight it gave me.

That said, it is hard to deny that brook trout are special. Early August in this part of the world was fall. The brook trout in my hands was telling that tale so clearly. He had a kype in his jaw and his flanks were a bright reddish-orange. This was why I had gone to so much trouble. Sadly, the fallfish were the ugly sisters. I just had to be respectful.

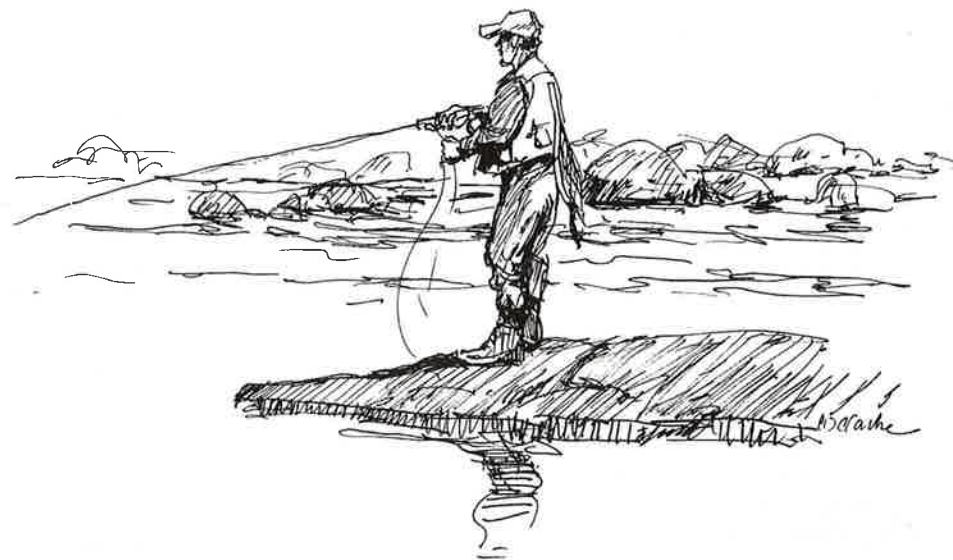
THE SECOND MORNING WAS similar to the first. A soaring high-pressure system was still in place, but I could see the mares' tails—cirrus uncinus clouds—in the sky. When they show up, you can be sure the weather will change within 24 hours. Fishermen have all sorts of theories when it comes to weather and its effects on the fishing. In my own meandering experience I have found a falling barometer good.

What does that mean? Nothing more than I prefer it. That I would fish the next day's falling barometer with more confidence. Sometimes it is our attitude that contributes more than anything to success. Why should fishing be different from other things in life? I also thought the steel-cut oats would do well with a handful of wild blueberries.

I was beginning to pattern the fishing here and it was good. Most of the trout were 10 to 12 inches. Every now and then a bigger fish of 20 to 22 inches would take the fly. I was fishing a size 12 Jay-Dave's Hopper. It was fishing very well and for the most part attracted more brook trout than fallfish. I was working my way downstream to a meadow filled with wild blueberry bushes. I had a small Tupperware in my vest for the express purpose of scoring some fresh fruit for the next day's oatmeal.

Fishing the hopper along the far bank just below some overhanging dry grasses made my mind drift to some of Hemingway's Nick Adams stories. Some say that "Big Two-Hearted River" is devoid of plot. I just cannot agree with that. When Nick finally speaks, "Go on, hopper. Fly away somewhere," he is summing up his desire—and the American desire—to just get away. It is in us and at our core. During the Great Depression, men would ride the rails. Then we would run away and join the circus. In my time it was attractions like following the Grateful Dead. More recently, standing in an unnamed stream disconnected from the tensions of the hard society we have created. It is good for the soul.

I fished to the blueberry meadow. It had a wonderful smell. The cool nights were fixing the fructose in the berries. At first I was eating every berry I picked, but eventually started to drop some into my Tupperware. I was enjoying the experience to the point that I was oblivious to almost everything around me. My



container was nearly full when I heard the heavy snap of a large stick breaking. My head shot up in the direction of the noise. Perhaps 100 feet away was a black bear boar doing what I was doing. It was a real primal moment. The hair on the back of your neck stands and your fight-or-flight instinct starts to percolate. Your mind searches its database for the appropriate ideas. Then you have to decide which are the right ones. Intelligence is really two things: The ability to remember things you have learned correctly and the judgment of when to use what you recall. Evolution is when something eats the individual who chooses wrong. I remembered reading that running in this instance would be the wrong move. I also knew from fishing in Alaska that it would be a good idea to let the bear know I was there. Gathering up all my bear knowledge and applying it led me to stand up and wave my arms and shout, "Hey, you blueberry eating son-of-a-bitch, I am here with you!"

At that point the bear stood up. I am not sure if he wanted to take a better look at me or if he took offense at being called a blueberry eating son-of-a-bitch. I stood tall and held my arms up and out to my sides to look as big as I could. I imagine being a bit over six feet tall and 260 pounds didn't hurt, but at the moment I felt very small. I kept talking loudly at him and he kept standing and trying to

get my wind. Eventually he must have, as he lowered and ran the other way. It may have been the first time he'd ever scented man. I am not sure if I handled it right. It probably didn't hurt that there were plenty of berries for both of us.

The bear scare aside, the rest of the afternoon was a fine one. After a while I was even able to put the encounter in perspective and like it. That evening after dinner I was reading, and listening to my iPod with the volume cranked. You could hear the harmonies of XTC's "The Ballad of Peter Pumpkinhead" echo for a long way. In the night it inspired accompaniment. Wolves began to howl. I laughed out loud, put down my book and listened. It was not hard to feel that they were singing along with the music.

The next morning—gray, with a damp mist in the air—proved that the fortune told by the mares' tails was true. The oatmeal would feel extra good, both for the blueberries and the way it would stick to my ribs. With the music still fresh in my head from the night before, I decided today would be the day I broke with my long tradition. I removed the iPod from the dock and positioned it in a top pocket in my vest.

As I approached my stream—it had no name and therefore had become mine—I noticed a hatch. I thought I recognized the big meaty bugs but I had to catch one to be sure. It was a Green

Drake! If fly-fishing has a holy grail, this is it. The fish seem to relish these bugs. Their size makes them a protein jackpot, but there is something more. They must be delicious. I have always wanted to ask those folks who eat bugs how Green Drakes stack up. But we don't travel in the same circles.

I tied on a big, delicious-looking Green Drake pattern, put the buds in my ears and turned on the music. Joseph Arthur's "In the Sun" was the first song I fished to. During the refrain, "May God's love be with you," a nice, fat brook trout smacked my fly. Next came "We're Not Kids Anymore," a live version by Loretta Lynn and Ernest Tubb. The music on my iPod is eclectic and reflects me well. I am guessing everyone's is like that. At some point a study will determine that your psychological profile can be arrived at from an examination of your iPod.

After about an hour, something wonderful began to happen. Things began to sync up. The marvelous hatch, the music and my casting. I was standing there in the middle of nowhere casting in rhythm to the music. Shaking my head and my ass, putting down cast after beautiful cast.

I was aligning with the music and the nature of it all. Miles Davis was blowing hard in a fine version of "Time After Time" when a giant female brook trout crushed my fly. As Miles' horn was reaching a crescendo I was looking at my reel spinning into its backing. The sound of line coming off my reel sounded like Miles hitting a high note. I smiled as I finally turned the fish. As I beached the beauty I noticed she was fat with spawn, and must have been an easy three pounds. John Prine and Iris DeMent were singing "In Spite of Ourselves" in my ear at this point. I noticed time had slipped by. I had fished my way down to where my stream poured into my lake. The drake hatch was waning a bit and I felt like this might be the time

and place to tie on the mouse fly.

I took the music out of my ears for a minute. I needed to assess things. I tied on the light-tan mouse. I was on the north side of the stream. There was a bit of a drop off as the stream met the lake. Experience tells us big fish wait here for food to come to them. I tested the knot I'd tied, put the music back on and found the rhythm right where I'd left off. An especially hot, live version of the Grateful Dead's "Bertha" came on. It is a song that can really get me dancing. I was there in the northern Canadian woods shaking my booty for all it was worth. I was free and feeling like it. Even when the mouse got smacked I kept dancing. Big brook trout. Heck, he ate a mammal. A different song would come on and the groove would rise and ebb but never quit. Big brook trout were there feeling something on the same wavelength. The food was moving and they needed to beef up for the long, hard northern winter.

THE FISHING AT THAT SPOT WAS crazy. I had just released another three-pound trout when I lost my first mouse in a tree. It happens. This mouse had been getting pretty ragged anyway. I had one more, but it was a bit bigger. I was a little miffed at myself. I always get that way when I run low or out of the hot fly. But these were mouse patterns I'd packed on a whim. Who uses mouse flies outside of Alaska? Anyway, here I was with a big mouse. It was late in the day, I had caught plenty of big fish, and I was happy.

As I listened to the iPod, one of my favorite songs came on. It is an unlikely collaboration between Lyle Lovett and Al Green, a tune called "Funny How Time Slips Away." It was written by Willie Nelson, but this performance is smoking soul. I was enjoying it and casting, casting and grooving, and bam. Reality snapped in without warning. My rod

was pointing straight to the east; line was churning off the reel. The human brain is an amazing device, capable of making thousands of calculations all at once. Mine was doing them all. I was into the backing and the fish was not slowing down. I was going to have to cross the stream. I pulled out the iPod and set it on the ground, tightened the safety belt around my waist, and the one at my chest. What the hell was it? I knew it wasn't a brook trout. It was something that eats brook trout.

As I walked into the water I felt the bottom drop away. I stuck my rod arm high and tried to catch the breath the cold water took from me.

I managed to reach the other bank and the fish had slowed. I gained back line and applied pressure again. This went on for the better part of an hour. Finally we met. Tired and finning was the biggest northern pike I had ever seen. It was well over 40 inches long. I set my rod next to her and marked her length with a pencil. She was thick across the back. I was guessing she had to approach 30 pounds. Why not? She probably made her living sitting there eating fat, three-pound brook trout. Nothing was going to bother her. She was the apex predator in that water: *Esox lucius*, hungry wolf. She belonged there, and I revived her and let her go.

I thought about the hungry wolf. That made me think about how nice it would be to have a baked brook trout for supper. I worked my way back to where I'd left my iPod, crossing at a shallower spot. I picked up my iPod and restored my set up. I tied on a Green Drake pattern and was back in business. It did not take long to catch a fat trout. I decided that would be dinner and that was enough. I sat on a rock and drew out my flask and took a long sip of the Scotch.

I then rifled through my pockets until I found the baggie that held the Cohiba

and the lighter. There are two types of Cohibas. The first can be sold in America, but they are made in the Dominican Republic to circumvent ancient political issues. They taste like they have been made to circumvent ancient political issues. The second are authentic Cuban products, the official stogies of the head honcho of cigarland, Fidel Castro. They undergo an extra fermentation process with top-quality Cuban leaf, and it is heaven. Cuban Cohibas are legal fare in Canada and that is what was in my baggie. So there I was, an American of Italian and Lebanese descent in the Canadian wilderness drinking Scottish whiskey while smoking a Cuban cigar listening to an iPod made in China. It took roughly three million years of evolution for this day to happen.

I eventually worked back to camp. There are good days afield and there are great ones. This day was the latter. I replayed part of it while I made the nice but simple baked-trout dinner. I had one of those astronaut apple-fritter desserts, and it was pretty darned good. I had changed my clothes, but the chill was still inside me from my unscheduled swim. In my heart I was looking forward to the fire. As the dusk was deepening, there was some clearing, a hint of promise for some moon. I had the iPod in the dock again. I lit the fire. It was easier to take sips of the Scotch. Between the heat of the fire and the whiskey, my muscles started to let go. Doc Watson came on the iPod with a soulful rendition of "Summertime." I re-lit the cigar I had saved. One of the books I had taken with me was a collection of Poe. He has these thoughts about music applied to life: "Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definitiveness." In thinking that

through for some time, I realized that on this day I was a poet fisherman. I liked that.

The rest of the trip saw heavy rains. I spent most of my time reading in the tent. Things do often come in balance, of course. In the rain, I could sort out some of what had happened. I came to the water's edge for solace and I now had the option to fish with

music. I liked the added dimension. As I was waiting to hear the drone of the Otter in the distance, I felt the need to fix the sign Bill had placed by the water's edge. It now reads: "Jerry's Beat Goes On."

Jerry Hamza's first book, also titled *Prose to Poetry*, will be released in the fall of 2015 by Skyhorse Publishing.

About the Author



We all develop filters through which we view the world. One of my earliest was formed at a military Catholic school, where God and guns took center stage at the height of the Vietnam War. Then came the counterculture, and then catchy rock 'n roll lyrics. Finally a work ethic arose, stemming from a family memory formed around the scarcity of the Great Depression. These form the view from which I tell my stories.

The next decades had me getting myself into positions to live an outdoor life. The first big decision was choosing Hartwick College, in Oneonta, New York, located a short drive from all of the finest fishing in the Catskills. It even gave me the great opportunity to occasionally hunt down and bother Lee Wulff. Shortly after college, I spent three decades working with family in the management of legendary stand-up comedian George Carlin. I traveled everywhere he went, and George worked very hard. Many years saw us on the road in excess of 200 days a year. This translated into covering every inch of North America, fishing and hunting along the way.

After George's passing I was elected president of the Cat Fanciers Association (the cat equivalent to the American Kennel Club), which led to world travel. This gave me the opportunity to fly-fish and hunt every continent except Antarctica. Experiences in the job and enjoying the outdoors induced me to become a storyteller to share the more fun bits of life. After a hard struggle with cancer, I decided to start another career. I combined two things I love: The experiences that happen in the pursuit of time afield, and storytelling.

I hope my stories touch on the human condition. I would like my stories to remind people that we live in a vast and beautiful real world. That a virtual life steeped in an electronic universe is void of meaning and value. From the bedtime tale to the fireside myth to the very American short story, storytellers help us think and rediscover ourselves over and over again. It is in that rich tradition that at the tender age of 50 I have embarked upon a career as a storyteller. —Jerry Hamza