

## THE SUNRISE RIVER RACE

Bear Paulsen writes about love, loss, and going to the river again.

“Upstream slog or downstream sprint?” asked Dan.

I considered the options. How long had we been canoeing? Twenty minutes or half an hour. In low water the total downstream trip was over two hours, but we could shorten that by paddling fast. How long would upstream take? Hard to guess, though certainly well over an hour. Downstream was predictable, upstream was not. I took a deep breath and answered, “Downstream.”

The race was on. I paddled fast. The late summer river was bony, but not too shallow for a solo canoe.

I slid over sunken logs. I ferried through the tangled branches of silver maples and under their trunks. On rare straight stretches, I switched sides to maximize speed. I paddled with a purpose I’d never felt before on the Sunrise River.

I zipped by familiar places, registering them only as markers to be raced past. I dodged and slid over partially submerged logs to enter a ten-foot-wide channel made by the river cutting off an oxbow years before. Below the narrow channel, an eagle abandoned its perch. I didn’t watch it. My focus stayed on paddling. As I approached a left bend, four wild turkeys dropped like bombs from the trees. I didn’t pause to watch them either.

Lively water announced one of the two largest rapids on the river, a low class II. My cell phone rang amid the rocks and waves. I didn’t answer. I knew who it was and what she wanted. I needed to finish the race before I could be of any value to her. I paddled faster.

Dan followed as fast as he could. Often I waited for him to catch up. I’ve paddled the Sunrise dozens of times, but Dan had never been on it. I’d also never paddled with Dan - I silently willed him not to have trouble and to hurry.



We passed the Highway 9 Bridge. I smelled smoke from a backyard fire. The smell of grilled meat wafted over the river. Thankfully, I didn’t see anyone. I felt relieved not to see happy people.

We descended the other gentle class II rapid, a left turn marked by a geodesic dome house on the inside bend. Next, the high sand bank came into view. Dead trees clung upside down high on the bank; erosion had toppled them, but their roots still tethered them to their birthplace. The sand bank marks the beginning of the last series of small rapids and signals the takeout on the Sunrise River.

I hurried up the steep stairs to the parking lot, dragging the canoe. I never drag canoes over rough surfaces, but I was heedless of such concerns. I didn’t time the race. We paddled the river as fast as we could and, for me, that constituted success. As I prepared to load both canoes on my car, Dan offered to return later for his canoe. “I’ve got plenty

of time,” he said. I felt relieved to have one less thing delaying me.

We sped off. On the narrow two-lane straightaways we reached 80 mph. With a quick goodbye, I dropped Dan off at his car. Then I phoned to let her know I was coming.

A few days before the race, Dan had called and suggested we go paddling. We had planned to meet at my house at 4:00pm. We had two options: paddle on the St. Croix River or the Sunrise.

I called Dan at 3:00pm and asked if he could delay until 5:00pm. I was waiting for my mom to wake from a nap. I’d arrived at her assisted living facility an hour before. My only sibling, Wendy, had told me to come. Wendy had broken the bed when she climbed onto it to pull Mom into a more comfortable position. Wendy

and I chatted quietly while Mom slept restlessly on a diagonal uphill slope. Her legs were finally elevated above her heart, regularly recommended by her doctor and routinely disregarded by Mom.

Mom woke, groggy and weak. We helped her into her recliner. Wendy changed the gauze covering her swollen, oozing legs. I repaired the bed. I'm fortunate Wendy broke the bed, otherwise I wouldn't have seen Mom.

I arrived home at 5:30pm to Dan waiting for me. I advocated we paddle the Sunrise, the more intimate and exciting of the two rivers. I couldn't resist trying to fit the Sunrise into the remaining daylight.

Wendy called while we were driving to the river. She urged me not to paddle. Strong traits from both parents pressed me to paddle. My dad felt a relentless desire to fit the maximum amount of outdoor activity into any available space of time. Though Dad passed away over twenty years ago, I am still his son. Mom was known throughout her family for her innate and unyielding stubbornness. Mom didn't always listen well, and sometimes I don't either.

Over the past year, Wendy had more clearly seen the signs of Mom's deteriorating health. However, on this evening there seemed to be no reason for Wendy and me to both be by Mom's side. Dan and I would only be gone a few hours.

**A**nnie Dillard, in *Holy the Firm*, likens love to a live wire. I imagine a high-voltage wire strung between two people coursing with the current of love. When one person dies, the wire is severed. Then the wire jumps uncontrollably and sparks wildly, leaving 'grief everlasting.'

*My cell phone rang amid the rocks and waves. I didn't answer. I knew who it was and what she wanted.*

"COME." Wendy sadly commanded. "She stopped breathing." This sentence started the race. Every straightaway on the river I thought of Mom. The wire sparked through memories and sorrow. But, the race wasn't to reach Mom. Mom was dead. That wire

was severed. I couldn't do anything for Mom except mourn her loss. I raced to reach my only sibling. I could be

with Wendy - the only wire in my immediate family remaining uncut.

The wire connecting me with Wendy carries unknowable current. We are close. The early losses of both parents and many other shared experiences have drawn us closer. The current in our wire continues to grow stronger every year, and for that I have boundless gratitude.

*Bear Paulsen is the General Manager of Northstar Canoes and is an honored friend of the shop.*



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## EVERY NEEDFUL THING

Darren Bush and building bridges, not walls.

“You need this, sweetie.”

Anyone who knows me or has been reading my writing knows I married well above my station. There aren’t many wives who will argue with a husband that he needs to go paddling while he comes up with excuses to work.

The first part of 2019 was stressful for me. I was doing double-duty, trying to get a new accounting firm up to speed, while dealing with a cold and rainy spring. Between that and another side gig, I was drained.

It was a few days before Father’s Day. My wife Stephanie suggested a short overnight solo trip, and offered to help me pack and drive the shuttle. If you didn’t believe me before, here’s proof that I married up.

We pulled together my gear and I put together my camp kitchen. If it were to be a short trip, I would cram as much good eating into it as I could. I have never been one for

abbreviated meals, believing firmly that if you can cook it at home, you can cook it on a sandbar. I loaded my portable table, 30"x 30", which I modified to sit about a foot off the ground. I needed this.

The truck was loaded, and right after church we took off for the river. We ran the shuttle, Stephanie kissed me and said “Be safe and have fun.” I watched her drive away until the car disappeared around the bend. I had everything I needed in a little 15-foot canoe.

Every needful thing. It’s a wonderful feeling to look ahead of you and see two packs and a kitchen box between your gunwales. You’re self-contained. There’s a freedom knowing that no matter what happens, you’re in good shape. If the power grid in the United States shut down, I wouldn’t know it unless I tried to use my cell phone. I had everything anyone would want.

In summer of 2018, a white van pulled into the shop, looking like it was ready for a road trip. There were bikes strapped on the back, an empty rack on top, and some serious Don’t Tread On Me bumper stickers.

*Nothing will change unless we change ourselves. So start there.*

A gentleman with a grey mop of hair and a week of scruffy beard emerged and walked to the door. He looked a bit disheveled, like he had been sleeping in his van for a week. I sauntered up and said hello. “I wanna buy a kayak. I’ve been waiting for three years and I’m going to get one,” he said.

So I did what I always do, I took him through the same Q&A to get things narrowed down and give options. He asked a lot of questions about what boat would be best for different rivers and lakes, including ones out west. “I’m traveling for a year, I want to see everything.” I looked for a wedding ring and saw one. I asked him what his wife thought about his walkabout.

He chuckled. “She is totally cool with this. She told me to do this right before she died. ‘You go,’ she said. ‘Do those things you’ve wanted to do.’” I asked how long ago it was. He told me she had been gone for about three months, and he finally felt like he was ready to follow her instructions.

Note the present tense. She IS totally cool with this. She was still there with him.

He told me how he had taken care of his wife at home for several years as she gradually got sicker, but he was able to keep her at home until the end. “No nursing home for her,” he said, with the conviction of a man who probably hadn’t slept through the night in two years. I looked him in the eye and said, “I’m so sorry.”

Then I reached out and embraced him, a perfect stranger. He squeezed me, patted my back and whispered, “Thank you.” He needed this too.

We continued going through the whole process; assessing his rack needs and getting him all geared up. Turns out he wanted two boats, one for flatwater and one for whitewater.

As he opened his car door, I saw a huge revolver on the passenger seat (later identified as Model 29 .44 Magnum) and I just smiled and said “I see you’re a Clint Eastwood fan.” He laughed, pulled it out right there in

the parking lot, flipped open the cylinder and dumped the shells into his hand and handed it to me. It was a beast. It felt weird in my hand. It felt weird standing in the parking lot of my shop holding a Make My Day sidearm.

The table was set. My vintage Coleman 502 was hissing at full throttle as I seared two little venison butterflies with Chicago steak seasoning. The garlic mashed potatoes were already done, the pot wrapped in my fleece to keep them warm as the evening cooled down. No bottles allowed, so I had my can of alcohol-free Old Milwaukee. A good aged cheddar and a crisp apple was dessert.

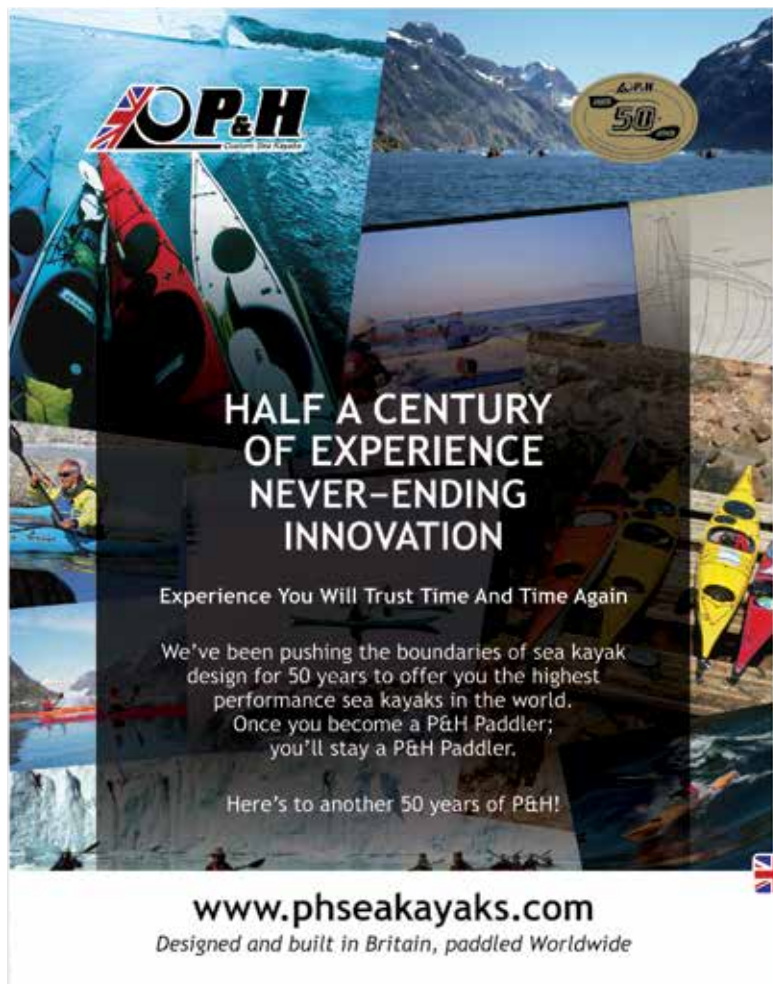
The wind was calm, and though the sunset was not spectacular,

it was beautiful. Sometimes the quasi-apocalyptic sunsets that burn themselves into your retinas aren't what you need. This sunset was subtle, just blues and purples. With the stove off, the only sounds were an occasional murmur of water and the croak of a Sandhill Crane. I needed this.



As we finished up, I just looked at this sweet old widower, left alone and ready to do a trip of a lifetime, after three years of caring for his wife of over 40 years. He was tired, and looked it. He was ready for some rest.

I shook his hand again, smiled, and embraced him a second time. "Safe travels, she'll be with you." He said "I know, and thanks again." I watched him drive away with his new toys, heading for somewhere out west.



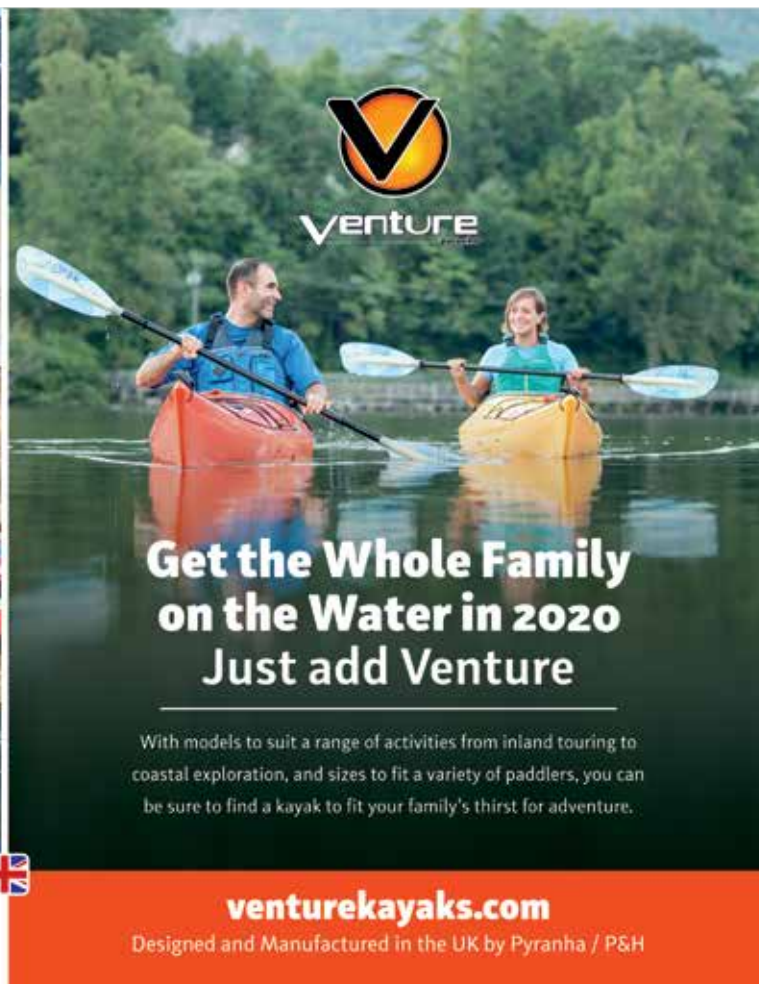
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This man and I probably have differences in our ideologies. I own a firearm (a small gauge shotgun for birding), but I'm not a big fan of handguns. By the likes of his bumper sticks and the hunk of metal on his passenger seat, it was clear that while I lean a little leftish, he leans a little rightish.

But when I embraced him, none of that ideology mattered. It was just two men, one comforting the other. I can't imagine, nor do I ever want to imagine losing my wife; it would probably destroy me. I saw hope in a man who could lose his wife and hit the road, finding himself again, grieving, biking, and now, paddling, guns and all.

I launched into the same quiet river the next morning, trying as hard as I could to not paddle. I wanted it to last longer, so I took an occasional stroke and mostly just ruddered down toward the landing.

There are too many things we have in common to let small things pull us apart. The world would have us think that it's a zero-sum game. No shades of grey. *We're right — they're wrong.* It has only gotten worse. Nothing

will change unless we change ourselves. So start there.

Let's put aside our petty differences, please. Let us embrace each other, because at the end of the day, we're all in this together.

In the summer of 2019, a well-groomed, grey-haired gentleman with a quick step and a bright smile bounced over the shop threshold and made a beeline for me. He stood a few feet away from me, his shoulders square to mine, head high, big grin. "Hey!" he said. "Remember me?"

It took me a moment. The transformation was complete. I laughed and we embraced again. Clearly, he was back in the saddle again, and we enjoyed a wonderful visit in the parking lot. Yes, he still missed his wife, but he was living every day, as she had asked him to. The kayaks on his van looked well-loved. He looked well-loved. He needed this, and I was blessed to be the one who helped him find it. Truth is, we all need this.

*Darren Bush is the owner of Rutabaga Paddlesports.*



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## I THOUGHT YOU REMEMBERED THAT

Jim Pippitt proves he's not much smarter than a 3-year-old child.

For years and years growing up, my gang of friends would go north to the Bois Brule. We said we were whitewatering, but we were really just banging in to rocks and laughing about it over the campfire later. As we grew in to Real Adulthood, we'd often get together, but never back at the Brule.

So last year we all decided to relive old times. It was a good time. The gang doesn't need more than 15 minutes before we're back in the groove, laughing and storytelling as before.

You know that experiment where someone will sit with a 3-year-old kid and put a teddy bear in a box and close it shut? Then the scientist asks the kid what's in the box? The kid gets it right, of course. Then they bring in another child and ask kid #1 what kid #2 thinks is in the box. Kid #1 answers "a teddy bear."

It's that problem of "of course you know what I know."

I had taken a few whitewater courses since then, and have been the photographer for over 100 classes at Rutabaga. I've seen a lot, and heard the same thing being taught multiple ways. It's awesome. I'm not the world's best paddler, but I'm actually getting pretty good at this. Thus, I wasn't at all worried about running the river at a higher-than-normal water level. We'd done it before and I could tell it was fine for me, so what's the worry? Well, my wife had more than a few reservations that I easily brushed aside. And then reality hit. (We're all fine at the end, no worries.) It seemed like every 4<sup>th</sup> time around a bend I saw eight overturned boats and people struggling to get themselves situated. I knew exactly how to talk them back in to their boats since I had seen it done so many



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times before. After a few quick instructions the flotilla was set aright again. We continued downstream until something happened and -ohmygoshwhathaveyoudonenow- there were boats overturned again. And again. And again.

Thanks to listening in on lots of classes I could see that some people were getting cold. Hypothermia was a bit away, but approaching. I got the group together, split up the problematic paddlers, left a few folks safely on the shore (rescued about an hour later!) and got us quickly to the takeout and made sure dry clothes were a priority.

I screwed up. I thought that everyone knew what I knew, or would have remembered their skills from 30 years ago. The Brule was its normal kindly self and did not punish anyone too harshly for my bad decision making, but it could have been much worse.

A few years ago I edited a piece for the Show Guide where someone talked about the difficulties in getting

new folks out paddling. The main thrust of that article was “since they’re new, you can’t assume they know anything.” I thought that was pretty self-evident, and from a distance, it was. It’s a lot different when you’re actually in the situation, wanting to relive the joys of the past with your best buds, and hoping to make three, maybe four runs on the river before the sun goes down.

First lesson: take a class (or two or five)! Paddling isn’t hard, but it’s not always obvious. There are so many little things that make it so much easier. Second lesson: don’t assume that other people know what you know, even if that might have been true some time ago. Third lesson: don’t let your desire for fulfilling a dream cloud the reality at hand. Fourth lesson: listen to wife. Hopefully I’ll remember all that next time.

*Jim wanted a license for his pet bee, Eric, but the man didn’t have the right form.*

*To hear another perspective on this kayaking experience, read his niece’s story on page 72*



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## PATTERNS OF PADDLING

Darren Bush and the joys of paddling traditions.

Traditions run deep in my family, mostly driven by my children, so when my daughter asked, “Babbo, are we going for our traditional post-Christmas trip on the Sugar River from Riverside Road to Paoli on Friday or Saturday?”, it’s not really a question so much as a statement. We agreed to launch on Friday.

Whitney, who is now over 30, started paddling her own solo canoe just before her fourth birthday, in a tiny canoe scaled perfectly to fit her size, so she developed her skills rapidly. For this trip, however, we’ll dust off the Prospector.

With Big Red on the truck, we drove southwest, loaded up with clothing and safety gear, wife/mamma providing shuttle. We slid the canoe down the grassy bank and helped each

other get in like we have done a hundred times before and started drifting. It’s probably not true, and I hope a physicist can tell me, but when the water is 32 degrees, it feels thicker—like slate-colored syrup. Not sure if it’s enough to measure, but it sure feels sluggish. Luckily, we weren’t in a hurry.



We talked. Easy conversations, but not idle banter. Whitney isn’t a person who talks unless she has something to say that’s worth hearing. To be honest, I don’t recall too many of the subjects of our talk, and that’s fine. I just remember that we talked. Sometimes. Or didn’t. It didn’t really matter. What a gift.

I’m blessed to have an adult daughter who not only loves me, but likes me. She’ll always be my little girl, but at the same time she’s my



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peer in so many ways—an old soul. She gives me advice (when asked for). She tells me when I'm doing a good thing. She tells me when to quiet my thoughts (and my mouth).

Our four-mile paddle was over too soon. By the time we were tied down, the already-running truck was blowing warm, for which our fingers and toes were thankful. We took a detour to the local creamery, sampling the best cheeses in the world, taking home a few pounds of the good stuff, since we often bond over chocolate and cheese. Pleasant Ridge Reserve and canoeing on the same trip approaches Nirvana. We nibbled, driving back roads through the most beautiful place in the world.

For a guy raised in the desert, I never knew life could spring forth with such spontaneity. Over a period of three decades, Wisconsin has seeped into my bones. Now I drive backroads instead of highways, breathing in air perfumed with sweet and sour silage. I see steam rising off the backs of cows in their barnyards, and redtail hawks

perched as sentinels on fence posts waiting for a careless rabbit. Turkeys flock to eat acorns under a huge oak, and a rusted old hayrake surrounded by timothy grass provides cover for a wary pheasant.

*I am in love with this place.*

My soul is filled with love for my daughter, born and raised in the state I adopted as a newlywed. Wherever she lives or will live, I'm certain some part of her will always belong to Wisconsin. That thought brings me yet more joy.

Someday I will be buried in the beautiful, rich earth left behind by the violence of glaciers two miles thick. I'll become part of the soil I love so much, returning some of the nutrients that it so graciously bestowed upon me. Maybe a few molecules of me will nourish grass on a hillside, which will be eaten by a beautiful dairy cow. She'll make that into some beautiful milk, which will be turned into some beautiful cheese. And some dad will take his daughter into the creamery, and sample some of that alchemy that is Pleasant Ridge Reserve.

And that, my friends, completes the cycle.

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## WHAT WATERSPORT MEANS TO ME

Sarah Schnell (age 16) on what it means to be forced to go outside.

Watersport has always been in my periphery, as far back as I can possibly recall. There were the sweltering summer days where my parents would drag toddler-me and my baby brother to a local, east-coast river, and we'd paddle into the mosquito-infested beyond, clutching our paddles and trying not to swallow bugs. When my family moved to Wisconsin, we made a point to go to the Bois Brule River every summer for some rest and relaxation. (Why is it always summer? Spring would be much more pleasant.) I used to clutch the gunwales and laugh as our canoe cut through the rapids, and hold my breath as we swung around 'S' curves.

More recently, during one of those summer-daze trips to the Brule River, I screamed as I rode down Little Joe all by myself. I wasn't screaming because I capsized. Rather, my little brother was making threats to tip me over, and I was protesting as loudly as my preteen lungs could.

When push comes to shove, I am the one shoving sports away from me and hiding in my room until it is safe to emerge. I hate football. I loathe basketball. I have zero use for soccer. Badminton and I will make eye contact on occasion, but it is a rare and tenuous link.

Watersport, on the other hand, is a unicorn among horses. The roar of the rapids or the subtle shush of waves under a paddle board is enough to coax me out of the house (or pop-up camper) to the nearest body of water.

Its siren song has brought me into harm's way more times than I can count. Take, for instance, my brother's eager jabs with his paddle, and my screeching flails as I tried to fend him off. Or take last year, when thirteen campers, myself among them, braved the Brule. Four hours later, on what should have been a forty-five minute run, everyone was back at camp. Ten of our thirteen had taken a dip into the

*Old Town*

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rushing river. Two boats had gotten stuck under trees. My brother showed signs of hypothermia for about thirty minutes, but after a lunch under a blanket in the sun he was fine.

I know the dangers of watersport, more so after last year. A refreshing dunk in the river after bumping into a rock pales in comparison to getting stranded on shore, without a boat or a paddle.

Last year was terrifying. Boats were flipping everywhere. Uncle Jim was rescuing more than paddling. I felt a dread creeping over me. It was a new and unsettling feeling.

But all was not lost! Everyone is/ was okay! Our boats made it out, too, albeit with some new dents. We didn't

even lose a paddle, although I think someone lost their shoe briefly.

I am who I am today thanks to watersports. For instance, I love the thrill of adventure, even if 'adventure' is the same river I see every year. I am by nature wary of anything that can hurt me. I am humbled by seeing that there are real dangers out there, but I'm comforted in knowing there are also ways to manage that risk.

I suppose this is a cautionary tale about loving water and all that it holds. It might seem fun and playful on the surface as you rip across rocky beds and feel the spray on your face, but know that all is not happy-go-lucky. Every rose has its thorn, as they say. (Do they still say that?)

In any case, be careful. Be willing to be taught. Also have fun and get out there anyway! Don't do anything stupid, and take pictures of your adventures and turn them into something to show off. That's what I've done, for the most part, and I think I turned out okay.

Happy paddling, and safe travels!

*Sarah is the niece of the Show Guide's editor, Jim Pippitt. Jim's take on that run can be found on page 68. Sarah's interests (other than water-sports) include podcasts, pierogies, and painting.*



Sarah Schnell



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## MY FIRST WATER COLORS TRIP

Pam Ottelien reflects on her first staff paddle, and her *first paddle ever*.

To say I was nervous is an understatement because I had very little experience canoeing and it was my first Water Colors trip. Water Colors is Rutabaga's annual employee two-day canoe trip and this was the 2<sup>nd</sup> year paddling the Kickapoo River, camping at Wildcat Mountain in Ontario, WI, with dinner at the Driftless Café in Viroqua. Of course, being a new employee, I wanted to be a good sport and participate at least for one of the days.

My drive to Wildcat Mountain Camp site was amazing—it was a beautiful sunny mid-October day in Wisconsin and when I hit the Baraboo Bluffs, the fall colors were breathtaking. I remember thinking to myself on my way through the Bluffs that this drive was well worth it.



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© Anthony Arable "Great Turtle kayak tours"

Our plan was to meet at the Wildcat Mountain Camp site and from there situate vehicles and canoes at the beginning of our trip at Bridge One and at Bridge Five for our take-out. While waiting at the put-in, Jon, a very experienced paddler, started showing me the basics. Part of the basics was how to get in and out of the canoe... which I tried, and broke my seat. Hmmm I thought but Jon was very gracious and just called to the rest of the group to exchange the canoe. Of course, this added to my nervousness but the group returned with another canoe and off we went. Yes, I was super careful how I sat down in the boat and didn't get out until the end of our trip. I may have prayed a bit too.

I am so grateful to the expert paddlers I was with—fellow employees who made me feel very safe and comfortable. I absolutely loved the trip and am totally committed to learning more about paddling. I have always loved the outdoors which is no surprise since I grew up on a dairy farm in a small town in central Wisconsin. Since moving to the city I have enjoyed gardening, hiking and just about any land sport that lets me be outside. But, I had never ventured to water activities such as paddling. I see now that I have been missing a lot. Being on the water was not only calming, but showed me how beautiful Wisconsin is from a different vantage point. I'm so looking forward to taking classes offered at Rutabaga and want to start as early as the weather allows in the spring of 2020.

I can't end this adventure without talking about the absolutely

wonderful dinner we were treated to at the Driftless Café. It is so worth the drive—the place is charming, and the food is amazing. The owner, who is now hosting the PBS series Wisconsin Foodie, grew up in the area. His knowledge and use of the area's food resources is a great education in itself, and another example of how lucky we are in Wisconsin.

*Rutabaga is so lucky to have Pam Ottelien as our new accountant. When she's not workin' the numbahz, Pam likes to search the web for cooks making traditional meals with atypical pasta shapes.*

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## COOLER THAN BEY?

Rutabaga's youth instructor Katya Ouchakof gets the compliment of the summer.

What was a highlight of last summer, you ask? Being told by a middle school girl that I am cooler than Beyoncé!

Let me explain. I've been an instructor with Rutabaga Outdoor Programs (ROP) since 2009. Many of our students are part of outreach programs, which means they come from community centers that bring their participants once a week all summer long. (*The Josh Kestelman Scholarship Fund dollars at work. See page 4 —Ed.*)

Outreach groups tend to bring a lot of kids who are unfamiliar with paddlesports. One of the goals of working with them is just to get them comfortable on the water. After all, Madison was built on an isthmus! We want kids who grow up here to be comfortable and safe both on and in the water.

First-time participants have often never held a paddle or been in any kind of boat before. They sometimes have questions about sharks or alligators in the water. They almost never put up a fuss when we tell them to get their lifejackets on. By the end of the first session, most of these kids are comfortable with the boats and the gear and splashing one another. By the middle

of the summer, many actually prefer to tip and swim to cool off for a while rather than stay in their boats! (ROP instructors once kept a tally of who did the most T-rescues all summer... there was no contest, the full-time person who worked primarily with outreach groups was always the runaway winner!)

Returning participants from outreach programs are old pros. Their fear has been replaced with self-confidence, and they help teach the first-timers. They know the games that we play, and they remember the destinations we paddle to when we take a trip out of the pond behind the store. Returning students know that when their boat is going in circles, there's a way to fix it—and they know whether they are the one causing the problem or not. This is where we found ourselves last summer.

One of the returning participants was in a canoe with two other people from her community center. While the rest of the group was paddling out of the pond for a day trip, this canoe couldn't figure out how to avoid bumping into the shore. I was the "sweep" boat so I was bringing up the rear. The returning student kept yelling at the other people in her boat—she was sitting

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in the middle and had no control over what was happening. Needless to say, her anger didn't help the other folks improve their paddle skills. Finally, she declared that she would not stay in that boat any longer. Could she come into my boat?

I certainly didn't want an angry middle schooler in my canoe... but I had noticed that she was right. If her paddle partners had followed her instructions, they would have been doing much better. I figured it couldn't hurt the situation to switch things up. I left my solo canoe on the lawn and this girl and I brought down a tandem for us to share.

Without the stress of someone yelling at them, her former canoe partners did much better. And our boat? This girl was a really great canoeist. She knew what she was doing, and she calmed right down once she was sitting in my bow. We talked about the community center and school, and the books she liked to read. It was a completely lovely day, after the initial tension had been relieved. She didn't even mind being the sweep boat and following the others who were zig-zagging—all she wanted was to be acknowledged as a competent paddler, by another competent paddler.

When we got to the park where we were ending our day, this girl started being sassy to the leaders from the community center in a way where you know she loves them, but is kind of annoyed with them. She told them that she didn't like any of them. They weren't cool. As the only other adult within earshot, I asked her, "Oh? What about me?" She gave me a once-over and proclaimed: "You are cooler than Beyoncé." Then she skipped over to the community center van and was gone.

I hold no illusions that I can attain anything close to Bey's level of coolness! But this girl taught me something important. Whether on the water or anywhere else, most kids just want to be seen and heard. When they feel respected and safe, they can be their best selves. Even when your interaction is limited to a couple of afternoons in a summer, you can make a difference in the life of a kid—and they can do the same to you. Maybe she's the one who's cooler than Beyoncé.

I'm looking forward to teaching with ROP again in 2020, and for as many summers as I possibly can, to keep encountering such amazing kids!



*Katya has been an instructor for Rutabaga Outdoor Programs for quite a while. She also is in charge of our shipping and receiving. She de-stresses by playing in the Speed-hymno-thrasher band, "Radical Reformers"*

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## NOVA CRAFT TURNS 50

Congratulations on a half-century of making beautiful canoes.



Small, family businesses face daily uphill battles. Half fail before five years, and only 12% make it 25 years. When a business makes it to half a century, it's a cause for celebration. This is especially true for paddlesports, since most modern canoe makers started in their garages and backyard sheds. Ken Fisher was one of them.

Fifty years ago, the Canadian entrepreneur began making canoes in a garage in Glanworth, Ontario, a few miles south of London. Ken made fiberglass canoes, most notably the venerable Prospector; the canoe that put Nova Craft on the map. From its birth as a Chestnut wood and canvas canoe, the Prospector has been the workhorse of Canadians for almost a century.



In the late 80s, Tim Miller and Pat Malloy took over the business, added innovative new materials and technologies, but they stuck with tried-and-true traditional designs. Their catalog is dominated by early 20th century

Chestnut Canoe Company designs that are amazing, but too heavy for the average paddler. Their creativity solved the weight problem.

In 2014, Nova Craft did the unthinkable: they threw a canoe off a five-story building, paddled it home successfully, and Tuff Stuff was born.

This was another pivotal moment: turning out canoes made from a virtually indestructible material that are lightweight. Much has changed in 50 years, but what hasn't changed is their passion. Here's to 50 more, at least.

A Bay to Remember....

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American Canoe Association	Good To-Go	North Country Trail Association	Snowtrekker Tents
Apostle Islands Kayaking	H3O	North Water	Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Aqua-Bound	Hala Gear	Northeast Iowa Whitewater	Spirit of the Wilderness
Astral Designs	Halfpint Naturals	Northeastern Minnesotans For Wilderness	St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
B&E's Trees	Harken	Northern Lakes Canoe Base Alumni Association	Stohlquist WaterWare
Badger Paddles	Hayward Lakes Visitors & Convention Bureau	Northern Tier High Adventure Programs	Swift Canoe & Kayak
Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel	Helle	Northstar Canoes	SylvanSport
Beaver Dam Lake	Hidden Valleys	Nova Craft Canoe	TCTeardrops
Bemused Design & Photography	Hults Bruk	NRS	TEAMSurvivor Madison
Bending Branches	Hurricane Kayaks	Ocean Kayak	Therm-a-Rest
BoardSafe Docks	Ice Age Trail Alliance	Old Mustache Canoe Paddles	Thule
Boardworks SUP	Icebreaker	Old Scout Outdoor Products	Torqueedo
Boundary Waters Journal	International Crane Foundation	Old Town Canoe & Kayak	Trailtopia
Branch's Seine River Lodge Outfitters	Iron County Economic Chamber Alliance	Original Bug Shirt Company, The	Trek and Trail
Cache Lake Camping Foods	Ironman Wisconsin	Outdoor Kind, The	Turf / The Kayak Cart
Callie Rohr Foundation	Isle Royale National Park	Outdoor Research	ugo wear
Camp Kooch-i-ching and Ogichi Daa Kwe	Jackson Adventures	Outreef Engineering	Umingmaq Paddle Touring Center
Camp Manito-wish YMCA	Jefferson County Parks	P&H Kayaks	Uncle Ducky Outdoors
Canadian Canine	Johnson Creek Historical Society	Packsack Canoe Trips & Log Cabins	United States Coast Guard Auxiliary
Cedar Falls Tourism & Visitors Bureau	KEEN	PackTowl	Upper Sugar River Watershed Association
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest	Kickapoo Coffee	Pacuare Outdoor Center	Venture Kayaks
Chesapeake Light Craft	Kokopelli Outdoor	Paddle-Buddy	Vernon County & Kickapoo Valley Reserve
Chicago Adventure Therapy	La Crosse County Convention & Visitors Bureau	Paddling	Vistabule Teardrop Trailers
Chota Outdoor Gear	Lake Chippewa Flowage Resort Association	Pakayak	Voyageur North
Citizens' Climate Lobby	Level Six	Perception	Voyageur Wilderness Programme
City of Richland Center	Lightweights	Peshtigo River Outdoor Learning Center	Voyageurs Outdoor Gear
Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River	Line Cutterz	Platypus	Wabakimi Canoeing & Fishing Outfitters
Current Designs Kayaks	Liquid Logic Kayaks	Prairie State Canoeists	Waupaca Area Convention & Visitor Bureau
Dagger Kayaks	LOON Paddle Company	Pyranha	Wausau Kayak/Canoe Corporation
Delta Kayaks	Lyme Support Network	Qajaq USA	Wenonah Canoe
DNR Natural Heritage Conservation Program	Mad City Paddlers	Red Lake Outfitters	Werner Paddles
Door County Sea Kayak Symposium	Mad River Canoe	Redbudsuds	Whitecap Kayak
Eagles Nest Outfitters (ENO)	Madawaska Kanu Centre	Redman Realty Group	Wilderness Inquiry
Explore Northwest Florida	Malone Auto Racks	Remackel Trailers	Wilderness Ironworks
EZ Dock of the Midwest	Manitowoc Area Visitor & Convention Bureau	River Action	Wilderness Systems
EZ Recreational Racks	Maquoketa Area Chamber of Commerce	River Alliance of Wisconsin	Willamette Riverkeeper
Falcon Sails	Mercer Area Chamber of Commerce	Rock Art in Watercolors	Williams and Hall Outfitters
Fox Valley Performance Paddlers	Merrimack Canoe	Rockwood Lodge and Outfitters	Winneshiek County Development
FreeStyle Canoe Committee	Midwest River Expeditions	Rutabaga Outdoor Programs	Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum
Friends of Plum and Pilot Islands	Midwestern Solutions	Sage Marine	Wisconsin DNR
Friends of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore	Minnesota Teardrop Trailers	Sanborn Canoe	Wisconsin Historical Society
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		Seven Treasures	
		ShelterBox USA	
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# 'baga staff

Rutabaga's 2020 Hardcore Core Staff:

**Back Row:** Steve Schmaling, Katya Ouchakof, Pam Ottelien, Darren Bush, Dan Bowers, Joel O'Neill, Connie Lane. **Middle Row:** Drew Whitenack, Tucker Moore, Aaron Turner, Amelia Goetz, Dana Griepentrog. **Front Row:** Jim Pippitt, Jon Long, Lucas Olson. **Not Shown:** Kris Larson, Max Gietzen



## CANOECOPIA Information in Brief

**What** World's Largest Paddlesport Expo. Filled with canoes, kayaks, SUP, paddle gear, speakers, exhibitors, and the coolest visitors from all over the world.

**When** March 13: 4-9 pm  
March 14: 9-6 pm  
March 15: 10-5 pm

**Where** Exhibition Hall at the Alliant Energy Center. Map on pg. 5  
1919 Alliant Energy Center Way,  
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