

My Particular Apogee

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The workweek has Wednesday, the moon gets full. The clock has noon, and summer has its solstice. Those points in their existence where they begin to return to what they were. A point where, by the very act of progressing, they regress, rejuvenate, and renew. The workweek, moon, clock, and summer have their peculiar apogees. I have my forties.

As a child, I became fascinated with the existence under the water's surface. I fished in my grandparents' pond, watched the sunnies construct and defend nests. I caught them with my trusty Zebco all summer long. I was so insistent that I had my picture taken with the "bigguns" that my Gramp claimed they came out of the water smiling. My sister and I would catch grasshoppers on the bank and throw them to the deeps to see if they could make it back to shore. I think only two ever did. The rest were sunnie chow.

My other grandparents, Dad's folks, had a summer cottage on a peat bog pond we glamorized into a "lake"; in title and thought, if not reality. Bluegills, bass, and pickerels were retrieved from that super-soft, orangish-brown, weedy water. I swam with my parents by day and felt the cottage reverberate with the voice of a chorus of thousands of bullfrogs at night.

Middle school saw my initiation into fish keeping. I caught the aquarium fever and there was no hope for me. If I wasn't watching my fish, I was trying to figure out a way to convince my parents to let me have another tank. Months' worth of my youth were spent observing my finny charges.

High school brought trout fishing-reading tiny streams' surfaces to know what they hid below and how to get my bait there. How to distinguish the tap, tap, tap of my split shot along the bottom from the bite of a brookie. Pools, riffles, slack spots behind rocks, undercut banks, and submerged tree limbs all provided wonderful opportunities to learn about, to learn with, the water and its denizens. I didn't realize how much I learned as I was busy remembering the Latin names of my aquarium inhabitants,

creating weekly feeding regimens for them, beginning to comprehend water chemistry basics, studying the latest fishing techniques, and joining aquatic organizations.

There are also poignant, now painful moments. Times of misguided well-meaning. Like the time I pulled at least a dozen brilliantly red-streaked, beautiful shiners from a trout stream's swift, cold pool; then after having admired their beauty put a knife through their gills so they wouldn't "compete" with the stocked trout.

College and the twenties brought beer by the gallon, women, internships and jobs far from home, globe hopping, two degrees, and one minor arrest. My horizons spread further than anything I could have dared dream up on the banks of Gramp's pond. Then the thirties hit and I was promoted to "grown up," in title and thought, if not reality. High responsibility jobs, mortgages, a wife better than I deserve, and three kids more beautiful than I could ever begin to articulate entered my world. So many, many blessings, but the types that also come with stresses, doubts, and the realization that I might not be able to keep promises I made to myself and others.

So here I am now, solidly planted in my forties, and thrilled to see a midpoint developing. To be sure, it's different, but I swim in a lake with my family again. I fish if I can, I'm chasing after fins with a dip net, and am on the lookout for ways to justify more aquariums. Every stream I pass or cross I try to "read," to visualize just what and who is down there. I'm relearning and reliving what I forgot I knew. And for reasons I can't explain life makes more sense, is more peaceful. I look forward to the progression backwards, while keeping a wiser eye and kinder heart out for the shiners in my trout streams. And thanking God that while I got to grow up, I get to un-grow, too. 🐟