



## Family, Friends, Faith, and Farming: the good "F" words. *by Roddy Dull*

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Well, summer finally made it and everyone is in the field. My article entitled "Field Work" should have been the article for the month but I thought it might just depress everyone because of the late start this year, so I will save that one until this fall. So what other childhood memories would work for this month's F words? FISHING! Yes, fishing.

There was a statewide tradition when I was young that drew hundreds to Southwest Wisconsin the first weekend in May every year - the opening day of Trout Fishing. Most of the creek banks were pastured in those days, so it was like walking on your lawn as you went from fishing hole to fishing hole looking for that big one. It was very seldom you did not catch a nice mess of trout because just a week or two before the season, the DNR would stock the stream with a new batch of brown trout. Those fish were just waiting to be caught by some nice young men with some freshly gathered night crawlers and a Zebco 202.

It was time for the annual opening weekend camp out by the creek. No one posted their land back then and even though we practiced common courtesy and asked permission, most of the fisherman just wandered up and down the banks fishing each and every hole on the entire creek. The camp out was a "kids only" event. No parents allowed. We considered ourselves big boys then at 11-12 years old and we could be safe along the creek bank alone. Seemed OK then, but I sure would never have left my kids or grandkids there alone. The rules were different, too. There was no catch and release, only the honor system. If the trout was too small then let him go. If the trout was just right ... well, then they went home to the frying pan.

I don't know if they even stock new trout anymore. With all of the catch and release they may not have to. In my eyes the sport seems to have become a rich man's sport or at the very least an adult sport. The fact that you can fish here but not there, keep on this side of the bridge and not the other, and only use artificial bait seems to have taken the fun out of it for the little guys.

Anyway, I want to share one very memorable story about an opening night camping trip. My mom or grandpa drove a friend and I to our campsite along the creek near the small community of Star Valley, Wisconsin about 3 miles from our family farm. We set up our tent on one side of the creek and just upstream on the other side, two older high school age boys, that we didn't know, were setting up their camp. We collected firewood, started a fire, and anxiously awaited the next morning to be the first ones to catch a nice trout. However, the boys on the other side of the stream found this to be a good time to break some rules by drinking some beer and being completely stupid. As darkness set in, the stupid two began dancing around the fire, yelling bully slang across the creek, swimming

naked, and really putting on a show. My friend, Mark, and I were actually kind of scared, but laughed quietly as we got an education in how not to act when we grew up. We were actually concerned for the two dummies that they might fall into their fire and get seriously hurt. The more drunk they got, the more wood they threw on their fire and the louder they got. We finally crawled in our tent and tried to pretend we weren't a little afraid until we finally fell asleep. At about 6:30am or so we woke up, crawled out of the tent, and stoked the fire to warm up. As we were eating what we had brought along from home for breakfast, the two on the other side of the creek also crawled out. They didn't seem quite so loud now. They both had just realized that all of their clothing was soaking wet after leaving it outside on the ground all night. They had no firewood as they foolishly burned it all up the night before and the funniest part was just about to happen. As the louder of the two was looking for his shoes, a loud yell rang out through the valley echoing from hill to hill. NOooooooo! MY SHOES! I burned up my shoes! It was very, very hard to keep from laughing right out loud as we were snuggled around our warm campfire. We had on our warm dry clothes and were getting ready to walk the creek in search of trout knowing that we would be doing so... in shoes. Ha Ha Ha!

***Roddy Datt***