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Doug and brother Ron in the doorway of their cottage.

The Boat

By DOUGLAS BREWSTER

As a young boy of 11, I got my first job delivering for a drug store during my lunchtime at school. I was paid 40¢ an hour, for one hour a day, five days a week. Growing up with a cottage on Georgian Bay, my goal was to purchase a boat. When I had accumulated the funds needed, I started looking at different models. My father, being involved with metal fabrication and inspection, recommended an aluminum 12-foot fishing boat with a welded construction. He commented, "That model would last a life time." I am now 71 years old and that boat is still going strong.

I continued my delivery job and worked on saving for a motor. When I had saved enough, I purchased a 6 horsepower Mercury motor. Now I could travel!

The boat cost me \$200 and the motor \$175. My first venture, besides running along the shoreline, was travelling up the Nottawasaga River. The mouth of the river was about six miles from our cottage on Woodland Beach.

My big dream was to cross the bay to the enormous grain elevator that stared back at me on every clear day.

One morning when it was nice and calm, I went to my favourite fishing spot, near the rocky point. Before I could drop a line in the water, I hit a rock and broke the propeller. Sitting there stranded, I looked through the still, clear water and saw a very large anchor lying amongst the rocks. I tried to lay out the landmarks so that I could find the spot again. I would be back!

After getting the motor repaired, I decided it was time to fulfil my dream. With a full tank of gas, a chocolate bar, two oars, a bailing can and a life jacket, I set out on my quest.

It is quite an experience to be all by yourself, in a 12-foot open boat in the middle of Georgian Bay. It is scary! I was a determined kid and continued on my way, knowing if I made it I would have to collect some rocks to prove to my father that I had reached my goal.

With my gaze fixed on the grain elevator, I continued on, the structure getting bigger as I approached.

Finally! I reached my destination. I pulled into the harbour and gazed at the structure. Rewarding myself, I ate the chocolate bar and collected my treasure — rocks of proof. It then slowly dawned on me that I needed to return home. I hoped that the wind would not increase, and headed out of the harbour. Now where do I head? The horizon all looked the same to me. There was no GPS in those days. I thought as I got closer to the far shore, I would start to recognize the landscape.

It seemed I would never reach my return destination. There was no landmark to guide me on my way. Onwards I travelled, lifting and shaking the gas can every few minutes, trying to estimate how far it would carry me.

I then noticed the tree cut of the main road, past Quinn's store, up past Whitfield's Pharmacy and the Ship-A-Hoy in Woodland Beach. Now things were good, I had a target and the winds cooperated. Just then the motor made some strange noises — clunking and banging — and then stopped. Now it was up to the oars and a 16-year-old to make it the rest of the way home (five to seven miles).

Sitting on the beach later with open blisters and callouses, I decided maybe that dream of mine had been a bit too aggressive.

Apparently on my many trips up the Nottawasaga River I had collected fishing line around my propeller shaft that destroyed my bottom end seal, which in turn destroyed the gears and housing during my long journey. Now with no motor, worn out hands and life's many callings, I never got back to the big anchor.

Speaking with historians, the anchor could have been from the H.M.S Nancy, which had apparently tucked into this part of the bay during bad weather in 1814. When Americans fired at them from a cliff top, they left in a hurry for the Nottawasaga River and maybe left the anchor behind. To my knowledge, no one has ever retrieved it.

Due to my age, and Canada's 150th anniversary, I felt I should share my story.

Douglas Brewster and his family spent many summers on Woodland Beach. Photo credit: Ron Brewster.

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