

GROWING UP IN A WATER CULTURE

Michael Knapp

I grew up in Michigan, a state filled with lakes and rivers. Michigan is surrounded by four of the world-famous Great Lakes. My childhood leisure time activities usually had something to do with water.

I don't remember ever being too young for swimming. I was probably around eight years old when I could finally take off my lifejacket, but most of the kids I grew up with played in the lake from when we were babies. My grandparents little lake cottage was only about a fifteen minute bike ride from our home. Any time I wasn't in school or working on the farm, I could jump in the lake.

Boats were also an integral part of my childhood of water culture. My dad was, and still is, an avid fisherman. Sometimes our whole family fished together and other times Dad just took us three boys with him in the boat. I enjoyed fishing, but as an overactive little boy I would have rather jumped out of the boat into the inviting water for a swim. That, of course, was not permitted by my father because it would have scared the fish away. I didn't my fishing, but much preferred more active water activities.

Dad's little fishing boat wasn't powerful enough to pull water skiers, but one day he came up with the idea of making a "surf board" out of plywood. Grasping the rope handle, we would stand upright on the gray board while being towed across the lake behind the boat. This was fun for a while, but eventually my energy level demanded something with more thrill.

It was my twelfth birthday when my grandparents' neighbor invited me to water ski behind his speedboat. For my lesson, the neighbor's son stayed in the water with me. After getting up and falling back into the water countless times, I finally got the hang of it. A was immediately hooked on my new favorite sport, and before I turned fifteen I had already bought a second hand ski boat. Water skiing remained my favorite sport until I finally took up windsurfing. Eventually my summer water fun also included sailing, jet skiing, kayaking, and other water-culture activates.

Summer wasn't the only time water culture memories were created. Miniature spring and fall floods also provided water fun. The ground in one corner of our yard was especially low, which after a rather heavy rainstorm, flooded into a convenient swimming pond. Another "pond" was created in our field by a late fall rain. This one remained until the winter

freeze, providing the perfect neighborhood hockey rink. Spring and fall were also my father's favorite times for fishing from the boat because there were fewer speedboats on the lakes than in the summer.

Michigan's lakes were no less active in the winter. The frozen water not only provided a smooth surface for graceful ice skaters and speedy snowmobilers, it also gave my family countless hours of ice fishing. One particular winter stands out in my memory. Record low temperatures froze the lake ice so thick that people were driving pickup trucks on it. Our family joined the adventure. I don't remember how many fish we caught that day, but the warm hamburgers my mom cooked on the ice that day came as a refreshing relief from the freezing wind on our faces.

Whether it was a warm lunch to warm us up on the icy winter lakes or the cool relief of being in the water on a hot august afternoon, childhood memories of Michigan's water culture follows me all over the world today. I'm happy to be living in Beijing today, where I can take a walk along the river or swim in the Olympic Water Cube with my family, but I will never forget the privilege of growing up in a real water culture.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. "I finally got the hang of it" is used in paragraph in reference to learning to water ski. What does this phrase mean?
2. In your own words, explain why Michigan is called a water culture in this article.
3. Compare growing up in Michigan with growing up in your hometown.

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