

The Healing Post

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By JOHN L. SLOAN Sometimes there is healing power in just a drop or two of water. Add fish, good company, warm sunshine and expand that drop to a three-acre pond and you may have a healing pond.

Breakfast is full of laughter, chatter and about as many diets and ways to eat as you could imagine. There are purees, cereals, eggs, milkshakes and knives, forks and feeding tubes. Everywhere are smiles. I could feel the warmth when I walked into the dining room.

I grabbed my coffee and eggs and slid into a table in the corner. I intended to sit alone and observe. Forget that. The booming voice didn't go with the skinny, bald man with what appeared to be a permanent smile.

"What do they call you?" He offered, shoving a frail hand at me. "I'm Bob. I'm a preacher but don't hold that against me. Are you one of the guides?"

I smiled and introduced myself and allowed that I suppose in lack of better work, I was indeed a guide for that day. We immediately fell into the conversation of fishermen and in that course, I asked what his capabilities were. "I can do just about anything as long as I take it slow and don't get tired and remember to take my meds."

You see, except for spouses or partners, all of the dozen people gathered for a day or two of fishing were terminally ill. I have heard that most of them are now gone. They had come to fish in the Healing Pond and enjoy each other for a day or so. They would fish and sit in the warm, spring sun and discuss the merits of various medicines and doctors.

They laughed a lot.

The healing pond is a carefully managed, five-acre impoundment. It is fertilized and the grass and weeds are killed and the fish are fed and managed for optimum growth. The pond contains two species of bluegill-the big, Georgia hybrids, often reaching near two pounds and redear or as we call them, shellcrackers. There are also bass and a few catfish. The banks are mowed and spaced regularly around the pond are feeders that also serve as fishing platforms. Roads circle the banks and golf carts provide easy transportation.

After breakfast we gather for instructions and a direct admonition from “Preacher” to “...by God have fun, plenty of it and don’t overdue it.” Bob and his wife piled into my golf cart and I quickly checked the inventory. Rods, plenty of spare hooks, floats and weights, two big cricket buckets, a stringer and an ice chest with snacks and cold water.

We hit the bank as the sun made it just warm enough to produce a comfortable, May morning. Birds were everywhere and across the pond, in the pines, a turkey gobbled his head off. It did not take long for me to see I was not going to be a babysitter. Bob and his wife grabbed two of my rods and had the hooks baited before I could shut the golf cart off. Within seconds, I also learned I would not be needed to take the fish off. In fact, I may have just been in the way. I set up Bob’s chair and got out of the way.

Around the pond, I could see the fishing was good. A few of the anglers wanted to keep fish to take home and that was fine. The pond could use a little thinning out. One team of fishermen averaged about 50 fish in the morning and again in the afternoon. They only kept the big ones, the ones you could barely span with a hand.

The morning session was scheduled for two hours however, that was not carved in stone. We were nearing that mark when Bob quietly said, “How long have you been sick and what do you have?” I took a deep breath and tried to explain that we did not really know exactly what was wrong with me but that I had been sick for almost two years. At that time, I had no idea I would be back in the hospital in two months.

Bob nodded his gleaming, bald head and said, “You’ll be fine. You are going to be just fine.” His wife smiled and nodded and the fishing began to slow so we loaded up and headed back for a nap and lunch.

Late that afternoon, fish cleaned and iced, we all gathered on the big, back porch and watched the sun sink behind the pines.

The conversation was punctuated by laughs and exclamations at some fishing lie or the thick smell of the flowers or the scent of frying fish.

I learned a while back about the passing of Bob. I sent his wife several pictures I took that day and have come to think he was right. I am going to be just fine.

After all, I have been to the healing pond.

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