

# The Crick

By Allan Houston



**M**y wife Becky and I were in the mountains in early April as we began the long labor of dismantling the estate of two lifetimes. It is a sad thing and requires a certain kind of detachment, much the same as a doctor must employ in dealing with a multitude of patients, each with their own ailments, and the doctor with no emotional room for every one of them.

Becky is good at this - the "getting it done" aspects. Me, not so much. I slipped off fishing into one of mine and my Dad's old haunts.

The water was high and they were biting. Native rainbow usually dabble at a hook like someone on a serious diet picking stuff up and putting it back down on the buffet table. Rarely do they commit to a big old snarly mouthful.

Today, these fish were attacking like they were starving.

As often happens in high water my hook got caught under a rock. I snatched the pole this way and that, nearly doubling it as I increased the tension only ounces from the monofilament's breaking strength. Nothing, no give.

I studied the rocks and finally hopped over a slice of whitewater to get a better angle. I gave the thing another snap and the hook flipped out like a missile.

With the instant reflexes for which I am rarely noted, I whipped the pole back, instantaneously breaking my line when it snagged on a rhododendron. I stood in the foaming waters and after a few stupid moments realized the front half of my pole was gone.

Disappeared.

And, I mean that literally. Poof.

Zinged off into oblivion and not to be seen. This was bad.

Truly crestfallen, I looked upstream and heard the heavy water calling my name. There were some really good holes up there. I could imagine a line of trout with their chins propped on the rocks, waiting for me to toil on up and tempt them with my hook. It would take some time for this to be funny.

Now, with no new fishing opportunity to occupy me, some memories punched their way in. A month ago, sitting in the night and watching my Dad, there was a moment when everyone stood, suddenly, lifted by a communal impulse that this was the "it" of

passing away. I held Dad and whispered how much I loved him. I remembered that people who have near death experiences often report a sense of floating. I looked up to be sure he could see me saying it.

I sat on a big rock with my stub of a pole and remembered all of the good times we'd had in this stretch of water. Certainly, Heraclitus had it right. He was a Greek philosopher who said, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he is not the same man."

And, in this case it will not be with the same pole. And, while the philosophy still holds, this is not a river. To be precise, it is a "Crick." No one remembers how Creek became Crick for these middling streams, but I think the word

(Opposite) Allan Houston's dad sitting in his favorite spot on The Crick.  
(Right) Allan Houston recovers his dad's fishing pole from The Crick; a one in a million chance.

comes from an ancient Scotts-Irish, Mountain Clan tendency to make up words.

I sat beside "our" Crick and thought about how tickled Dad would have been at me losing my pole. Well, his pole, actually. For old-time sake, I took one of his poles. I had just lost the end off of my Dad's pole.

Maybe the Crick wanted a memento. Why not? They had a long history. It and my Dad remembered when this place was so lost no one ever came here except him and maybe a few others, bootleggers, sometimes, maybe. Dad had loved it, trodden it, lifted its bounty and had never taken its beauty for anything less than a miracle.

It was mighty welcome to its token after I nearly drowned trying to rummage around and get it back. It was a determined Crick.

A Crick can comfort a man. They run in the infinities of our experience, endless, changeless, and never the same. If you have a special one it can replace the drudge of life's butter churn with its silvering shoals, able to carry our mind, heart and probably our spirit into the mysteries of the next bend, hidden possibilities in the green-deep water, and adventure of a daunting stair-step roar.

It can make a man lift his head and say, "Thank-you." A man who has a Crick to love has found something important about himself.

I will be going back pretty soon. I will wonder about that pole, but have no real wish to find it. But, I would like to find the portal that would take me back to a time when the water ran lonely, when the laurel hid true mysteries and the trout were so wild they could trace their kin to the last of the glacier's run-off water. I would like to watch a young man work those waters and feel the glory of his youth. I would like to walk up to him, ask his name and ask to shake his hand and say, "Thank-you."

He would not know who I was. But he would remember it later. He would remember it because I would say it so he would. It would percolate up from the depths of my life's best realities.

I would say it so the Crick could hear and would always know how special this fellow was.

## Epilogue

Since I wrote the above I went back to the Crick. The water was high and this time roiled up enough I feared it had shut down those rainbows. But, even so, I was catching a few and figured to have a "mess." For those who do not know, a "mess" is anything above one. There is a little mess, meaning not enough for a good fry, or it is an outright lie to hide a



good spot. A big mess can also be a lie, in fact often is, but it infers something above three - or it can be a tacit and nonbinding hint at an inability to resist high-biting temptations.

About 100-feet below where I lost Dad's pole I once again got hung up in deep water. I eased the rod back and whatever it was came loose. I lifted something out; and the once in a million chance came with it. It was Dad's pole.

Maybe it was the Crick's way of letting me know we understood each other. And, to top it off I caught a mess. ■

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