

FEATURES

Hugs as a measure of the little things we can do to change lives

Little kindnesses can frame people's experiences by **Al Fairfield**

I would like to first establish that most of my life I have never been considered a "Hugger." It just was never my style until I met a crowd of people where success could often be measured in the hugs shared. Now I look forward to sharing those with friends at the Door County Sea Kayak Symposium (DCSKS) every July.

This past spring I arrived at Canoeconia and about 100 feet into the atrium a woman I recognized from the DCSKS came running across the room and gave me a huge hug. She then proceeded to tell me that since the symposium she had bought a boat, joined a club, and taken paddling vacations. Then she shared with me that a small act of kindness on my part shaped her experience in a way that would prove to be transformative. I just happened to be the first one to come along

and I did what any other person passing by would have done; I helped her with her boat. After 10 years at the DCSKS it finally sunk in that it wasn't the vacation or adventure that really impacted people, it was so many little things people did that defined people's experiences.

As an instructor and student, small things like being helpful, patient, enthusiastic, and generous seem to be what people notice at the symposium. Most of these characteristics cost nothing but leave an indelible mark on those we interact with. How many of us have witnessed that first successful wet exit by someone who had their doubts about their ability to pull off that maneuver? We regularly hear cheers go up and we know that someone's paddling life just changed. We don't always recognize the small things that add up

to those moments, but it's great to be around people where that just seems to be the norm.

The paddlers I am fortunate to call friends do all these little things selflessly, and seemingly naturally. Maybe they believe in paying it forward, karma, or I'd like to believe they are just good people. It's contagious, and I'm a better person having shared their company. Now it only seems natural to follow their example and do those little things that quite frankly, feel good to do, and may be more meaningful than you might realize. Sometimes you learn that you made a difference, and that will touch you.

Here's hoping for more hugs in the future.

Al will be presenting this year. Read more about it on page 30.

A collage celebrating P&H's 50th anniversary. It features various images of kayakers in different environments: a red kayak on a rocky shore, a person in a blue kayak on a lake, and a yellow kayak on a river. The P&H logo is in the top left, and a circular '50' anniversary seal is in the top right.

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New Years (Day) resolutions

Starting the year off right – with a successful paddle. By **Jim Pippitt**

IN my youth, Mom and Dad hosted a few foreign exchange students for a year. Our families have remained close. In 2018 we got to see my Sardinian “sister” and her family for Christmas/New Year’s.

We were struggling with the question, “What do we get them for Christmas?” That tricky problem is even harder to solve when the gift has to fit in packed luggage and survive abuse by multiple airlines.

We realized the best gift might be “experiences” and planned accordingly. Many of the ‘Baga staff and others in the paddling community drag themselves and their boats out to Lake Columbia on New Years Day. Well, what could be more of an experience than that? Our guests weren’t likely to paddle on a coal-fired electrical plant’s cooling pond in their native land.



The day was cold, but not horrible. The wind was mild. Our huge canoe got all sorts of

looks from passersby on the road. One fellow kayaker waved me to a stop and asked if she could go home, get her boat, and join us. We said yes, naturally.

It was an outstanding success (we were mindful of the lessons in Darren’s article on page 76). Joe kept talking about how beautiful and strange the lake looked as the wisps of mist swirled about us. He relished the changes in temperature when we moved with and against the mild breeze. After we (successfully!) finished our short paddle around the edge of the lake Joe said, “You guys, thank you! I’ll remember this to the end of my days.” I will too. Not only was it so darn fun to put paddle to water in the middle of winter, I loved sharing the experience with my extended family. And I got a good start on one of my New Year’s resolutions: paddle more.

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Nocturnes with Uncle

A quiet reflection by **Darren Bush**

THERE'S something about paddling at night that is ineffable. If you don't do it, you can't understand it, but if you do, there's no need to explain it.

I've spent three decades looking for ways to squeeze in more paddle time while the ever-increasing demands on my time show no signs of slowing. The choices for me were simple: I could paddle less, or I could find new and creative times to paddle.

The early and obvious solution was to paddle more after dark. With young children in the house, it was a definite relationship-limiting maneuver to take off for a post-dinner paddle just as my wife was wrestling a toddler into his crib, swearing to break out the duct tape. It was better to wait until the crying stopped, then Stephanie would pull out her knitting, and I would be free to grab an hour on the pond down the street.

Paddling at night became more of a thing for me. I discovered that I saw fewer people at night, a perfect coincidence for a high-functioning introvert like me. I see more, even though it's dark, especially when the moon is new.

My Uncle Mark lost his sight just after his birth. Uncle became a gifted musician, and no doubt his absence of vision allowed his other senses to become more acute. Obviously, his sense of hearing was a phenomenon, and I'm sure that if he were properly trained, he could have listened to a V8 and tell you the fourth cylinder's rear exhaust valve was sticking.

When Uncle played one-night gigs, I was occasionally his roadie, driving the burnt-orange van full of keyboards and sound equipment. As we set up for a wedding reception one evening, Mark played a few

test chords on his Fender electric piano and frowned. Uh oh.

"It's out of tune." I couldn't tell, and I have a pretty good ear. Electric pianos are pretty reliable travelers, but the suspension on the van was a little industrial. Uncle was clearly in distress at those



notes that were one hertz out of whack. We didn't need a tuner, we had Uncle. He just sat there, leaning his head back a little, head cocked to one side, wearing big, dark, Ray Charles sunglasses, his hair a premature gray, me helping out with a little pair of needle-nose pliers, adjusting the tuning springs on the tone bars. "Flat...flat...almost...there, perfect." We did that 73 times, and it was perfect. I popped the cover back on, and he tested it with some George Shearing, pounding the left hand part.

Uncle had a tandem bicycle and was an excellent stoker, leaving me, a skinny pre-teen, to captain, thus demonstrating an undeserved level of trust—or just willful ignorance. He could tell where we were by the sounds of traffic, the siren from the hospital, the barking of a particular

dog, the echoes from a storm water culvert. Passing a park revealed squealing children, meaning we were five blocks from home. While Uncle was immersed in his world, I was watching for traffic and trying not to get us both killed. All that sound was just background noise to me.

Paddling on a warm, humid, windless night is almost disorienting. When the moon is not yet up, the ambient light is not sufficient to create a horizon, and the colors of the sky and water are so close that you feel like you're paddling in a sensory deprivation tank. It's like paddling on liquid obsidian, and if it were not for the sound of a car horn from across the lake, you could be anywhere in the Universe. In Spring, you can barely hear the car horn, the frogs are so loud. Herons croak, and occasional a Sandhill Crane will clatter a note.

Deprived of most of your sense of sight, night paddling becomes an extrasensory experience. Sound travels far over the water, and your ears can pick out a pair of owls hooting back and forth across the river a half mile away. You can catch the sound of water trickling into the river from a side stream you'd paddle right past in daylight.

Uncle could smell things we couldn't. Driving at night with the windows down, he'd remark about passing a honeysuckle bush. We smelled nothing. We'd whip around and search out of the massive back window of our old green car and sure enough, there was a honeysuckle.

It's amazing how many different scents there are around water. Water carries its cargo purely and without adulteration. Bogs and marshes are olfactory kaleidoscopes, full of earthy decay and sour decomposition. The smells of evening fill

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your sinuses and bounce around on your olfactory nerve, painting pictures your eyes can't see. There's a reason you smell a perfume four decades after high school and can't help but think of the girl you had a crush on. The olfactory nerve is the shortest direct line to your lizard brain.

As a professional musician, Uncle had a massive record collection. It was four shelves high and at least six feet wide, and if there were an order to them, I couldn't tell. We liked to play a game with Uncle. We'd pull a record out of his collection, hand it to him, and ask him what record it was.

"Columbia label..." That was the easy part, apparently. He ran his fingers around the edge of the cover, then pulling the record out, he'd run his fingers over

the center label. A few seconds would tick past. "Frank Sinatra. *Come Fly With Me.*"

And he was right. Time after time. We'd let him put it away. Exactly where we pulled it out.

"Even at night, I still close my eyes. Seeing the dark and seeing nothing aren't the same thing.."

The only thing I love more than canoes are canoe paddles, if you judge by my collection. Thirty or so canoe paddles hang in my garage, the house, my shack behind the house, and of course, in my office. A good twenty of them are daily users, and some of the ones in the house could be, if I wanted to. I have a few that will never touch water.

Whether I made them or someone else did, I shape all my own grips to fit my

Continued on pg. 68

AFTER THE SHOW:

Post-Canoecopia Details

The store is closed from Tuesday, March 7 through Thursday, March 14. We reopen Friday, March 15th.

Special orders really do take 6-10 weeks. We will either call, text, or send you an e-mail when your order arrives.

Test paddling usually starts mid-April, weather permitting. Check rutabaga.com for updates.

If you bought a roof rack at the show we can install it at Rutabaga later. We're normally busiest on the weekends, so if you can come midweek your wait may be shorter.

It helps to call before you come to pick up your boat so we can get it ready for you. Giving us 1-2 days notice is ideal. 608-223-9300



The advertisement features a large photo of a man in a kayak holding a large fish. To the right, there are smaller images of a kayak from above and a side view. Text on the right side reads: "PROVEN, HANDS-FREE FORWARD TO REVERSE", "propel pedal drive", "FOLLOW US ON:" with social media icons, and "MADE IN U.S.A." with an American flag. At the bottom, the "NATIVE WATERCRAFT" logo is on the left, the "TITAN SERIES propel" logo is on the right, and the website "WWW.NATIVEWATERCRAFT.COM" is centered.

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hand. Rasps, scrapers, and sandpaper allow me to create the shape that works best for me. Hand me a paddle grip with my eyes closed, and I can tell you exactly which paddle it is. I can tell you who made it, what wood it is made of, and probably the approximate time I procured it. It's nothing like Uncle's seven hundred records, but it does show my familiarity with my primary tools. Paddles are more personal to me than canoes.

I never realized I learned how to see like this from Uncle. No wonder I close my

eyes and float, two hours after sundown, in the middle of a lake a mile across. I want to see things like Uncle saw them. Even at night, I still close my eyes. Seeing the dark and seeing nothing aren't the same thing.

Uncle had four senses, but I think the combination and interplay among the four allowed him to experience the world in a different, perhaps richer way. Not that I would willingly give up my eyesight, but living with a person who saw the world so differently was a cause for contemplation.

I still paddle at night. The kids have long been fledged and gently pushed from the nest, returning occasionally to do laundry, so I don't strictly need to paddle at night anymore. But if I want to really see, sometimes I have to go when I can't see anything.

When he's not out paddling or running Rutabaga, Darren Bush pines for the day when it is socially acceptable to use moose calls in public places.

THANK YOU

Canocopias are nothing like the old Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney films, where all you need to do is be at the barn at 7:00 when the dancing starts and the rest takes care of itself. No, they're real *work*, though they be a work of love and craft. I'd like to take a moment to thank those who make Canoeocopia happen.

First, a huge thank you to our vendors and all of the exhibitors. The show is what it is thanks to their commitment of time, money, and staff. Thank you to our speakers who add such richness to the experience. I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the entire AEC staff as well. No matter what last-minute wrench we throw into their works, they smile, write a change order, and get it done.

Canoeocopia has always been a Rutabaga presentation that leans heavily on our former staff. Thanks, guys. I truly love seeing you every year. (See "Farewell" on page 52)

I need to call out the buyers, Ethan, Dan, Tadhg, and Kate. Without them the hall and the store would be empty. Thanks to Drew for keeping the warehouse in shape. Thanks to Tucker, Dana and Holly as they grow into new responsibilities at the show and shop. Thanks to the full-time staff of Connie, Jon, Shannon, and Richard, whose institutional knowledge and customer focus is priceless. Thanks to my IT guys, Joel and Jim, for keeping us running smoothly and efficiently.

When you come to the Show, you're seeing the results of hundreds of hours of work. Special thanks to Amelia and Kate who organized all of the exhibitors, helped edit this Show Guide, and found time to contribute to the floor plan. They had some big boots to fill and it looks like they're fitting them well.

Lastly, thanks to *you* dear reader, friend, and customer. You're the reason this gets to happen year after year. —DB



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Dry Suits 101

Darren Bush thinks that drysuits are superior to most other forms of protection

WHY a drysuit? Well, first let's answer the question: *what* is a dry suit?

A drysuit is the ultimate protection from cold water immersion. It consists of a waterproof material and seals around your hands and head. Your feet are usually encased in socks of a durable waterproof material. The only parts of your body that are exposed to water are your head and hands which can be protected with gloves and other headgear. You enter through a long waterproof zipper. Once zipped inside, you'll stay dry. Hence the name. Here's why I love them:

Control over level of insulation. A dry suit itself has as much insulation value as a nylon jacket; that is to say, very little. It's what you put underneath that gives

you warmth. If the water is relatively warm, a simple base layer and a light fleece would probably do. If it's colder, maybe a few thicker layers are needed. You can vary the weight of your socks depending on how cold your feet get.

Comfort. Dressing in some base layers and fleece is much more comfortable than anything that is wet next to the skin. In fact, you can peel off your drysuit and walk into a grocery store or pub and no one would give you a second look.

Value. Yes, dry suits are more costly than wetsuits, but they are incredibly versatile. Our experience is that paddlers with dry suits can extend their paddling seasons in both Spring and Fall. It cuts the "cost per use" of your gear down because you're

out there more. (One little-known fact is that the patent on Gore-Tex expired. This means that the new fabrics have helped drive the prices down with no functional difference in the waterproofness or durability.)

It doubles as the ultimate rainwear.

The weather *never* goes as planned. Imagine paddling in pouring rain and being bone dry. You get to camp, towel off your head, put on a cap and you're toasty. It's a weird feeling but a good one. You're impermeable.

Stop by any of our drysuit manufacturers and try one on. You'll be surprised at how comfortable they are. Safe, comfortable, warm and dry—what's not to love?



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Climate Change on the Kickapoo

Big changes seen by paddler **Scott Hackel**

TWO years ago my wife and I planned a trip in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve for our family. We were to spend a weekend on the river with our daughters, and some friends. Our kids were just 5 and 7 at the time, but we had hooked them on paddling at an early age, mostly on the lakes around Madison. Now they were psyched for some time on this river! After looking forward to it for a couple months the week of the trip came: we got the boats ready, the route agreed upon, and the meals planned.



Credit: Scott Hackel

As the trip approached, southern Wisconsin was hit with several torrential rainstorms. The Kickapoo River flooded its banks and kept rising... To the point where even the outfitters had all closed up due to unsafe conditions. There wasn't a single boat on the river after that in the summer of 2017. It was a bummer of a paddling season.

All of this would be unremarkable if that major flood in 2017 were a once in a century, or even once in a decade occurrence. But the Kickapoo had flooded disastrously in 2007 as well, in such historic fashion that many homes and businesses that had been near the river for many years had to rebuild on higher ground. Then it flooded again the following year (2008), creating an even higher watermark.

After a few years of more normal precipitation, floodwaters rose again in 2016. This meant that our ill-fated trip in 2017 marked the fourth time in eleven years where that same river saw "historic" flood levels.



Credit: Clayton County Register

With a recent increase of extreme weather in our country, there have been more discussions of climate change and its impacts on such events—so is that at play in this story? Science conducted by both international bodies and local University of Wisconsin climate scientists finds that although there are other drivers and variability at play, climate change is a statistically significant driver of these flood events in Wisconsin, especially considering the number of times this has occurred recently¹. These statistics suggest we can expect more such major rain events in the upper Midwest going forward, as the state will generally become wetter. Such major storms will increase in frequency by about 30%.

Continues next page

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Local climate change will also lead to both more heat waves and more toxic algae blooms, so our outdoors will perhaps never feel quite the same. But for paddlers, there may be a silver lining in that we'll have somewhat longer summers, and earlier springs. For example, days of ice cover on Madison area lakes is decreasing by 3-4 days per decade². It is in the opposing season, winter, where recreational opportunities will be hit even harder: skiing of all kinds, snowmobiling, and even hunting will grow more difficult.

However, there is hope enough for taking meaningful action to save our recreational heritage. Many are taking aggressive action, from scientists to businessmen to entrepreneurs, and even a few politicians. It will take a tremendous effort akin to one of the largest shifts our society has ever undertaken, but there is enough reason for hope that we should all be acting. For example, wind and solar energy are now cheaper than coal and gas³. A second example: deforestation is being reversed in many parts of the world – by 60% in the tropical rainforest islands of Asia⁴.

But these still represent small initial steps; to scale these up we will all need to play a part. We can take the simple steps of installing efficient LEDs and appliances everywhere (and shutting these devices off). We can

continue to be advocates for our forests, both locally and in the tropics. We can each try to opt for eating non-meat options once in a while. But possibly most important is to communicate about climate change in any way possible. Include the topic in conversations with both friends and acquaintances; let them know it's important to us. Relate it to recreation if that helps. Bring it up with those who represent us locally and nationally too; they need

to hear more about this need. But above all else, vote for those who believe in climate change and will include it responsibly in their politics, because above all else this is a policy issue. And that recommendation is now often possible regardless of which party you favor, as some Republicans are now coming forward in sponsorship of pending carbon legislation⁵.

Granted, in the end we're just talking about recreational pursuits. For our band

of paddlers in 2017, we simply diverted the trip and settled for a weekend at Governor Dodge State Park for some camping. The detour itself was fun, and we did get in a little paddling on the lakes in that area. In Wisconsin we have this luxury of options and alternatives for adapting to what climate change throws at us. Those in most other regions may not be so lucky, as the impacts of climate change affect not only recreation but also livelihoods and homes in coastal or drought-prone areas.

Both the global impacts and our local recreational heritage are worth fighting for. My hope is that the same outdoor Wisconsin adventures that my kids and I are having – in summer and winter – will still be readily available to *their* children. It's that hope that drives me to talk with as many people as I can about taking action on climate change.

Scott has enthusiasm for spreading the news about climate change action, but ironically his children (who would stand to benefit the most) sometimes give him grief for being a bit TOO enthusiastic when it comes to the thermostat.



Credit: Scott Hackel



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1 Wisconsin's Changing Climate: Impacts and Adaptation. 2011. Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts. Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, Wisconsin. Chapter 1

2 History of Freezing and Thawing of Lake Mendota. Wisconsin State Climatology Office. UW-Madison Atmospheric and Oceanic Science website. 2018.

3 Levelized Cost of Energy. Lazard. 2018.

4 World Resources Institute, <https://www.ecowatch.com/indonesia-deforestation-2595918463.html>

5 Bipartisan carbon fee bill introduced in House: <https://citizensclimatelobby.org/carbon-fee-bill/>

FreeStyle Techniques & Regular Paddlers

FreeStyle paddling techniques are great for just paddling says **Bruce Kemp**

MY first exposure to FreeStyle was a short demonstration of what I later learned is called “Interpretive FreeStyle”, which involves paddling a choreographed routine to music. I was thoroughly smitten, astonished even, at the complete control the paddlers had over their boats. I stood there, stunned at the nearly imperceptible ways they were using their blades and bodies to bring about dramatic responses from the canoe. To be honest, I wasn’t particularly interested in the music and “dance” facet of this activity, though it was fun to watch, but I sure did want to learn how to handle a canoe like that. It was the skill level, the utter at-homeness in the boat that caught my attention.

I soon took some FreeStyle paddling lessons and learned about these advanced paddling techniques. I found out just how useful the techniques I had been learning were as I paddled a gently-moving creek, then on rivers that were moving more quickly, then in small riffles and larger rapids. With time and practice, FreeStyle became part of my paddling vocabulary, and I’ve found that in a given situation I just *respond*, without thinking about it consciously at all.

At one end of the “Interpretive FreeStyle” spectrum, folks experiment with various maneuvers to see just how far one can take them, what ways they can make the canoe behave, and how smooth they can make it all look, while paddling a rehearsed routine to music—sort of like figure skating, with the advantage that falling hurts a lot less. These folks are exploring, and pushing against the boundaries of just what a paddler and canoe can do together.

However, most people who learn these techniques never do, nor do they ever intend to, try the Interpretive side. They just want to learn to paddle better, have less muscular pain at the end of the day, and become a better partner with their boat. The techniques learned in trying to perfect those more dramatic moves work equally well in real life, and FreeStylers use them all the time.

All paddling instruction is ultimately about boat control, and FreeStyle is one of several paths to that goal. Yes, some of us dabble a bit in Interpretive FreeStyle—it’s a whole lot of fun! I encourage you to give it a try. Pushing the limits—both yours and the canoe’s—is about the best learning tool there is.

“FreeStyle became part of my paddling vocabulary, and I’ve found I just respond, without thinking about it consciously.”

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Being ready for change

Sometimes stuff happens. What happens next is up to you says **John Van Barriger**

CANOECOPIA'S theme of "transformation" this year is an apt one. Whether it's the simple transformation of muscles after a workout paddle, or the more spiritual transformation that occurs while canoeing, kayaking, or SUPing in the wilderness, paddling really is a transformative activity.

That transformation came home to me in ways I never could have imagined in 2013. That year, my friend Mark Johnson and I embarked on a two-week paddling trip down the Teslin and Yukon Rivers in northwest Canada. The rivers were just coming off flood stage when we decided to take a side channel in the hopes of seeing more wildlife.

Side channels can be risky propositions. While you'll find more solitude, there are also fewer people around should something go wrong...like when my rudder unexpectedly



All photos credit: Mark Johnson

fell off, flopping from its cables behind the kayak like a snagged salmon. After using bits and pieces from both of our emergency kits – and cutting out some hardware from the kayak seat with our Leathermen multi-tools – we were on our way again. Note to self: Beef up the emergency kit!

Two days later we paddled into a 47,000-acre wildfire, which was burning down to the river as we floated by. Search-and-Rescue waved us on, then began picking up paddlers farther behind us. We had just scraped by, and watched in awe at the coordinated efforts of firefighters on the ground, helicopters in the air, and police on the nearby roads and campgrounds as they worked to contain the fire and prevent injuries and fatalities. I will never forget the efforts of the first responders, nor the eerie quiet of paddling the rest of the day in choking, heavy smoke. We were fortunate, and these were intense but painless lessons from 477 miles of wilderness paddling.

That wouldn't be the case after I returned home in the autumn, however, and attempted



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A map of the central United States showing the Midwest. Red lines connect four major cities to Rock Island, Illinois. The distances are: Minneapolis to Rock Island (360 miles), Madison to Rock Island (151 miles), Des Moines to Rock Island (171 miles), and Chicago to Rock Island (182 miles). Rock Island is marked with a yellow star.

RIVERACTION.ORG/FLOATZILLA

a solo paddle on the more sedate Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. At the trip's midpoint, 47 miles in (and literally one-tenth of the distance of my Yukon trip), I ran aground on a sandbar. After wading the kayak back to deeper water, I started to slide down into the cockpit. But the boat twisted in the current, I lost my balance, and my knee gave out – snapping sideways with a loud and sickening POP!

I didn't know it then, but I had completely severed my ACL and mangled much of the rest of the knee. I pulled out the first-aid kit, wrapped my knee, and tried to "walk it off" on the sandbar. But it gave out again as I tried to re-enter the kayak a second time, pitching me headlong into the cold water. I crawled back to the sandbar and made the dreaded emergency phone call home. My trip was over. It would require a painful surgery and long winter of physical therapy before I could move reliably again.

I learned a lot in the summer of 2013. There are things for which you can reasonably plan (such as mechanical failure), and things you cannot (a huge wildland fire or a freak accident/serious injury). But with preparation, the right equipment, and the right mindset you can minimize the effects of each.

Indeed, each of these events transformed how I approach paddling and what I now carry with me every time I hit the water or trail.

And these events further transformed me as well. My wife Jan and I formed The Outdoor Kind, LLC, in order to support first responders – as well as to conduct educational outreach to prevent wildfires and other emergencies. We now travel North America and speak at everything from school classrooms and scouting groups to public events and paddling shows, proudly including Canoeconia. In fact, you can stop by our booth in the lobby to pick up a handout on the contents of the "Oh Sh!t Emergency Kit" and upgraded first-aid kit we take with us each and every time we play in the great outdoors.

Transformation comes in many forms, with both short- and long-term effects. Here's hoping you have a safe (and pain-free!)



transformative paddling season!

John Van Barriger is the founder of The Outdoor Kind, LLC, and a correspondent for Paddling Adventures Radio. He has injured himself while hiking, camping, backpacking, bicycling,

motorcycling, paddling, and scuba diving on five continents. (Editor's Note: He hopes to bag all seven continents and hurt himself in South America and Antarctica soon.) Check out John's Beyond Band Aids tips on page 79.

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Tragedy on Lake Superior

Looking at actions to prevent further tragedies by **Darren Bush**

LAST summer a family of five loaded onto a 13 ½ foot kayak and headed out for a paddle off Big Bay on the east side of Madeline Island. Lake Superior is big, cold, and unforgiving. In this case it claimed the lives of a father and three of his children. His wife survived, and one can only imagine her heartbreak. They were on an undersized kayak, suitable for two people and maybe one more passenger, and unsuitable for big lakes. They were wearing lifejackets, which is laudable.

They were attempting to cross two miles of open water when their kayak capsized. They struggled to get the kayak upright. The father attempted to swim to shore with his children, but thunderstorms reduced visibility to less than a hundred yards, hampering rescue efforts. The mother tried to send 911 texts, but phone service was poor and the texts were received five hours after they were sent.

Talking about accidents like this is tricky. I'm not here to judge *people* for making poor decisions. Blaming people rather than examining behavior allows us to distance ourselves from the incident, usually patting ourselves on the back. Don't be the smug person—who has made countless other errors that he was lucky enough to walk away from—and say “I'd never do that.” I believe examining actions is beneficial to preventing further casualties.

Kayaking is not inherently dangerous. But like many other activities, it can be unforgiving. This accident happened due to inexperience paddling in cold water, from foul weather (that was forecast), from overloading their craft, and from not understanding the precarious situation they would face should one little thing go wrong.

Like most incidents like this, it's not one huge flawed decision; it's often a collection of small

ones that stack up and build until you realize you're in over your head. What can you do to keep yourself from getting in over your head?

Take a class. Remember you don't know what you don't know. Classes are a great way to stretch your knowledge in a structured, risk-limited situation.

Proper paddling clothing. Sure, it's an investment, but the poor folks who die every year from hypothermia would no doubt pay a hundred times the price of paddle clothing once they find themselves in a dangerous situation. Invest in yourself.

Know your equipment. Not every kayak is suitable for every environment. If you're not sure, ask your local paddling club or shop.

Prepare to bail out. I always paddle with a bail out bag full of dry clothing and other emergency gear. It doesn't guarantee safety, but it can keep your situation from going from *just uncomfortable* to *dangerous*.

Paddle with others who share your level of preparation. There's always one person (or more) who say “Come on, let's just do it!” Be prepared to cancel a trip if that's what the situation calls for. Plan inertia is a dangerous thing.

Use the most important piece of gear you have. It's between your ears, and it may need to be trained to predict the worst-case situations and have solutions for them. Think about: the weather, emergency take-out points, letting somebody know where you're going. These are just a few things to consider. (Again, see point 1. Take a class.)

I do not want to read about you or your family and friends in sad article on my newsfeed. I'd rather hear about your amazing trip to a fantastic place, even if that place is in your own backyard. This was a horrible tragedy, and the only thing that would make it worse would be to not learn from it and others like it.

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Have you ever wanted to wear the coveted yellow hat?

Thoughts on making the change from student to instructor by **Lenore Sobota**

HAVE you ever thought about what it would be like to be a kayak instructor, perhaps even wear the coveted yellow cap at Rutabaga's Door County Sea Kayak Symposium? I'm here to tell you it's both easier and harder than you can imagine.

For many, dialing in their skills at an instructor level and recognizing that people are watching what you do at all times is the hard part. For others, that's easy compared to the challenge of teaching others to do what you do. Then, there is the mental challenge of believing in yourself as you make the transition from student to instructor. Fortunately, fellow instructors showed me the same sort of



patience and encouragement as an instructor that they had shown me when I was a student.

John Browning, an instructor trainer and chair of the ACA Coastal Kayak Committee, emphasizes, "It takes more to being an instructor than simply being a good paddler." An instructor has to have "the technical expertise to effectively model the stroke and maneuvers" and also have "the ability to observe the performance of others and provide them with accurate feedback to improve their performance."

But that's not all. Instructor John Chase says, "One of the most important qualities is empathy. You need to be able to meet people where they are, understand their fear of the unknown or feeling that



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FEATURES

Continued from pg. 77

they might look foolish and make them feel comfortable and open to learning.”

I couldn't help nodding my head in agreement with Chase's observation. There are people for whom kayaking comes easy, people who face down waves as if they were a ripple, people who can make their boat dance. I'm not one of those people.

My first kayak lesson was in a nice warm pool with not one but two instructors next to me for my first “wet exit” – getting out of an upside-down boat. Everything went without a hitch, yet I immediately went to the side of the pool to think over what I'd gotten myself into. At that moment, if someone had told me I'd be an instructor some day, I would've laughed at the absurdity of such an idea.

However, those fears—which I haven't forgotten—help make me a good instructor. They bolster my ability to have the empathy to which Chase refers. I don't have to imagine my students' fears; I've lived them. I get my greatest satisfaction from seeing students move beyond what they think they can't do. As instructor Andrea Knepper says, “Anyone who paddles more than a few times is going to come up with something that terrifies them, whether it's a wet exit on a calm lake or being in crazy surf.”

To Knepper, “the most important characteristic in a coach or instructor is curiosity and flexibility.” Every student is different and you have to teach them in a way that works for them, she said. “You have to be curious to find that out about your student and be flexible” in how you teach.

Similarly, another instructor, Lyn Stone says, “the ability to let the participant lead

“If someone had told me I'd be an instructor some day, I would've laughed at the absurdity of such an idea”

the learning, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach” is among the keys to being a good instructor. In fact, one of the things Stone likes best is “affecting changes that

build confidence and the ability to not need the instructor/coach.” When a student has that “ah-ha” moment when everything clicks, “the excitement is electric,” says Chase.

Becoming an instructor changes you. It gives you a different perspective and different



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FEATURES

responsibilities beyond just teaching. “When things get rough, instructors need to have the good judgment and ability to keep everyone safe,” says Browning. “This involves being on a constant watch for deteriorating conditions and getting to safety before it hits the fan.”

Becoming an instructor is a beginning not an ending. You may be a teacher but you should remain a student. Learn from the instructors with whom you teach. Continue to take classes – formally or informally. And learn from your students, too. Then, as Yoda tells Luke Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi*, “Pass on what you have learned.”

Lenore Sobota has been an ACA Level 2 kayak instructor since 2010 and has taught at Rutabaga’s Door County Sea Kayak Symposium since 2011. Though she is willing to have fun tonight, she does not wish to Wang Chung tonight.

BEYOND BAND-AIDS: EASY ADDITIONS TO YOUR FIRST AID KIT BY JOHN E. VAN BARRIGER

Picking up a first-aid kit for your outdoor adventures is a must – as is a high-quality dry bag to keep it waterproof. You can add the following items to help you and your paddling companions in a wide variety of situations:

- Veterinary horse wrap. It’s the same as physical therapists tape—at a fraction of the cost.
- Saline solution. Sterile and invaluable should someone have eye problems.
- Corticosteroid Creme and Benadryl. Important should you discover you are allergic to something in a new environment. But use only per directions, as Benadryl can induce sleepiness.
- Sunscreen and lip balm.
- Aloe Vera gel or burn gel. Important if there are problems with campfire or stove, or you forget the point above.
- Polysporin Ointment and Liquid Bandage. Cleanse wound well before using either.
- Pepto-Bismol and Imodium. Big water + diarrhea = No fun.
- “Tick Key” tick remover. In the age of Lyme Disease, this is absolutely critical. Also, discuss with your physician the possibility of adding an antibiotic to your personal kit.
- Moleskin. Many first-aid kits include this, but I add sheets for issues with wet feet or long portages.
- Sam Splint. Easy to carry, invaluable for a serious injury.
- And don’t forget to add your own prescription medications should you take any!



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Eagles Nest Outfitters (ENO)	Minocqua Area Chamber	ShelterBox USA	Wolfman Triathlon
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PARTING WORDS

Paddling transforms friendships

Tucker Moore talks about conversations on the water

PIRATE Day, it only happens once a year. Some years it happens in middle of the summer, some years we will wait until the ice that forms on the banks of the Yahara can scratch the boat as our gloved hands push our paddles through the nearly frozen water. For the last 10 years, my best friend and I have celebrated our friendship by packing up food and supplies (often fireworks) and spending a day together in a canoe. It began as a joke, an excuse to lean in to Pirate voices (YARRRR) for a day, but has now been woven into the fabric of our friendship and stands as one of the more important days of the year.

There is something about the gentle roll of the boat on the water that fosters both amazing conversation and quiet introspection. Anyone who's paddled before has felt it; the boat gives you permission to fill the often stressed spaces in your head with a clarity that only open air and rolling waves can afford. It is in this space that Dylan and I have found our emotional connection from discussing the joys and sorrows of each year. The laughs come easier—the loud kind that get you shushed in a restaurant. The tears come easier too, or rather the honesty that is followed by the tears. The canoe becomes both vessel and harbor, giving us a safe space to explore with greater care the issues that build up and become cloudy and parceled on land.

I am a big proponent of living with intention. It has become an idea that I try my best to both preach and practice as I have gotten a little older and the tiniest bit wiser. But one of the most beautiful things about Mother Nature is how indifferent she can be to the intentions of humans. She can show you what she wants, take you where she wants, she was here before us and will

be here long after we are gone. I am never more thankful about that indifference than when I think about Pirate Day. Ten years ago Dylan and I “intended” on spending an afternoon on the water yelling about plank walking and poop decks, but what has been given to us by the water, the wind, the paddle, and gunwale has been something much bigger than a day of laughs and something we did not intend or plan for.

I am deeply comforted knowing that natural world around me will continue to offer me surprises, testing or changing my intentions as I make my way through this world.



Tucker Moore

Years at Rutabaga: 1

What got you paddling: Growing up on N. Thornton in Madison I was lucky enough to have the Yahara River in my front yard. Family paddles were a regular event, but it wasn't until I was a camper at Camp Manito-Wish YMCA that I found my love for the outdoors.

Favorite part of Rutabaga: Getting folks on the water. And the amazing staff.

Longest trip: Two weeks on Isle Royale.

Sand strategies: A wish and a prayer.

Favorite boat: Gimme a big orange Grumman.

Favorite place to paddle: Boulder Lake babyyyyyy. Break out the oars!



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