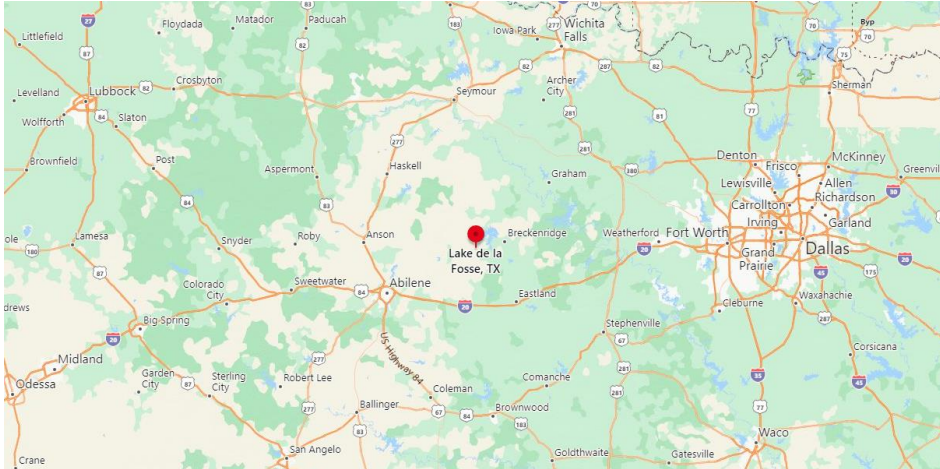


Fishing

I probably come from a long line of non-fishermen; at least I do not recall any family lore about Uncle Someone or Cousin Whatsit who caught championship bass, or who caught anything at all.

I must have been around ten or eleven years old when my family took a two weeks' vacation at Lake Delafoss (sp.?) in west Texas, or maybe it was in central Texas. At least I think it was two weeks.



My actual memory of the period starts with a visit with Jeanne, one of my mother's friends. I was intrigued with one of her bathrooms, which had black fixtures, all of which bore permanent chalky-white circles at water level. At first, I was both intrigued and appalled with what that water might do to my insides, if I drank it, or to my outsides, if I bathed in it. My concern about the water lasted only until we went down to their boathouse. There I became fascinated with the tame-looking sun perch which were clearly visible in the water in the gap between the dock and the row boat sides. They weren't more than six or eight inches long, but they were beautiful and plentiful and apparently tame. What fun they would be when we started fishing, I thought. I could hardly wait. But they were so small that I wondered whether we could keep any we caught. I'd never before been able to see fish swimming anywhere except in my small aquarium at home, but I was aware that there must be some kind of minimum requirement for keeping a fish one had caught. Jeanne hospitably told me that there was no minimum, except that ordained by the cook.

The fish looked tame, and proved to be easily hooked; but our cook/mother decreed that, while she cooked fish, she didn't clean them. When I wondered how to accomplish that feat and got my instructions, I asked how to take a fish off the hook and return it to the lake, and after I conquered my reluctance to bait the hook with the prescribed minnow, I decided that I could do that. And did, repeatedly, without exhaustion, for the duration of our stay, and prided myself on my conservation of lake fish.

I caught many fish during our stay and never kept one. They didn't really look that appetizing when they lay gasping on the dock. We enjoyed lake trout only when we dined out. The ones we ate were mercifully larger than the ones we caught, and someone else had the task of preparing them for the frying pan. I suppose this city girl should have been ashamed of her reluctance to get her hands dirty and smelly, but she wasn't.

I found many other amusements than fishing, but I never really tired of hooking my prey, which even included a sad-looking tire and a good-sized turtle. The tire I unhooked fearlessly and beached it, but the turtle I landed caused me to run screaming from the dock and ultimately to sacrifice part of my line and my hook to the poor turtle's mouth. I anguished about the turtle for some time, but eventually hardened my heart and almost forgot about it. We had other amusements at the lake. Riding in the slow-motion motorboat was one of them. I really wished it had more speed - a lot more speed - but my practical side decided that, if the speed had been available, my being able to operate the boat probably would not have been. I was sure that Mother would not have been enthusiastic about my water-skiing behind a high-speed boat. Better to watch the teenagers who whizzed past our dock, whooping and cheering as they tried to send their wake over our feet as we watched. They didn't often accomplish that feat, but I would have been thrilled if they had.

However, rowing our boat was something I could do, once I got the hang of sending it backward instead of forward, and I spent as much time as possible slowly propelling myself and my sister about the lake (we could swim, but Brother couldn't and was consequently land bound when I was at the oars.)

Our short time at the lake ended much too soon. I was reconciled to leaving because school was soon to begin. Not only did I enjoy school, but I had the added incentive of the prospect of telling about my summer vacation, a period of student exchange to which I'd never had so much to contribute before.

