

A STORY ABOUT FROGS

(The story of this film is based on a real event which occurred during my childhood. In a sense, it is no more than an anecdote, yet it brings together many of the factors which surround the life of an eight-year-old boy - and I have remembered it to this day. I suggest it as a short-story film, probably a reel in length and with potential theatrical interest. It would be recounted by an adult voice, playing the part of the boy who is now grown up and retells the story with this new perspective.)

When I was a boy, one of the most exciting and important events of the year was when school finally finished, and we - the family - moved to our summer cottage at Blue Sea Lake. I lived in a large apartment in Ottawa, and as my parents were quite well-to-do, we had maids and expensive furniture. Everything was always in its place in that apartment, including me. I can't really recall that my room was ever allowed to be in a mess for more than an hour, and I was always clean behind the ears. My socks held firmly on my legs and my shoes shone.

So the prospect of moving to our summer cottage, where things were more rustic and easy-going, filled my heart with joy each spring. The cottage had been built by my grandfather, who loved life in the country, as did my father. Indeed, our family had been one of the first to settle as summer residents at Blue Sea. My mother had none of this love for camping. She had been brought up in the strict fear of small furry animals. But she had a taste for beautiful things, had been twice to Europe and was known as a charming hostess among diplomatic circles in Ottawa. For ten months of the year, she ran our apartment, hired the

maids, and spent much time bringing up my younger brother and myself, inculcating into us the intellectual and social disciplines characteristic of most children in our class of society.

But for two months of the year, the tables were turned. My mother's private hell was to go to Blue Sea Lake, and while she packed our things for the three-hour train trip, we looked forward to hunting and fishing, handling worms and freshly-caught fish, and tramping out into the woods in search of squirrels. My father adored fishing, and I had inherited his love, especially for black-mouth bass. ~~_____~~
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I had heard that small green frogs were particularly good bait for bass, but as there were almost no frogs at Blue Sea Lake, I had never had the opportunity of trying them out. One summer, I conceived the project of bringing some live frogs from Ottawa to Blue Sea - and that is how this story begins.

The day before we left, a Friday, I decided to go to Strathcona Park with my friend Hector, down by the river where frogs abounded. Hector had never fished in his life except in the shallow waters of the river. He was my best friend, although I remember strong parental disapproval - Hector was the son of the janitor of the apartment next to ours. Besides being my friend, he was also terrific at finding things I could never find in our apartment, like a burban bag to put the frogs in. He also had a pair of big rubber boots which would come in useful for the frog-catching. I was dressed as usual: a white shirt, tie, grey flannel trousers, black shoes. It wasn't hard to trick the maid who was supposed to keep an eye on me. By that time, I was eight years old and fairly independent, while the maid's main job was to look after my four-year-old brother. I said I was going to see the boy down the street, a fat egoistic child my parents

No, THE problem was what to do with the frogs. My mother was all for putting them into the ashcan. During the discussion, I went to get just one frog from the bag, to show how pretty it was. I held it in my hands, but mother wouldn't come within ten feet of it, so strong was her fear of it. I think it was father who got the idea of putting the frogs into the bath for the night, with enough water so that they wouldn't have a firm foothold to jump out. Over-riding any other objections, father brought the bag into the house, dumped the frogs in the bath, and closed the door for further safety. I went to sleep that night much faster than usual. Strong emotional situations either keep one awake or else they are so exhausting that you drop off as soon as your head hits the pillow.

Well, one will never know what exactly did happen, and who was responsible. All we suspect is that, during the night, someone went to the bathroom and forgot to close the door again. And we supposed that the leak in the plug of the bath had always been there but that we hadn't noticed it. Anyway, during the night the door was opened, the water did leak out, and the frogs had several hours of freedom to explore our apartment.

The next morning, when my mother woke up, she opened her eyes and gazed down the bed. There, on the little mound where her feet stuck up, on a lovely imported quilt, staring straight at her, was..... one frog. The frog just sat there, quite innocently, its two round eyes looking straight at my mother. It must have been for her one of those moments of uncontrolled terror such as I never hope to experience myself. The scream woke everyone up, and we all came rushing into her room, all except my younger brother, who had found a frog beside his slippers.

There began a massive hunt for frogs, first in my mother's bedroom, and then in all the other rooms. We found frogs under tables and on chairs, in the kitchen, in corners, along walls, in the umbrella rack, inside a

were always asking me to play with. When I was out of sight, I ducked behind a row of houses, made my way to the next street, met Hector at the appointed place and went off to Strathcona Park.

It must have been a good year for frogs, because I remember catching more than I had ever seen before in my life. They were small, bright green, and terrifically alive. You had to move fast to catch them, and Hector always seemed to catch more than I. The first few minutes, I took care not to wet my shoes, and to wipe my hands on the grass. But it wasn't long before, in the excitement of things, the shoes got a little wet, the shirt a little dirty. After that, it was sauve-qui-neut. It was a legendary haul: in all, we counted exactly one hundred frogs before we called it a day. At the bottom of the bag was a mass of gooey squirmy green things. We were both quite proud.

When I arrived back home, carefully going up the back way, it was the cook who first spotted me. Later, she recounted that she hadn't been sure who it was, exactly, because she had never seen me quite so dirty before. My shoes were soaking wet, my trousers full of mud, I had torn my shirt on a branch and if you looked closely, my hair was stiff with frog-goo. I don't recall the look on my mother's face, but I do recall being undressed in the kitchen, and bodily transported into a hot bath, where I was told to scrub, and scrub hard. The bag of frogs was deposited on the back porch, and I awaited, with trepidation, my father's return from work.

There was a heated discussion that evening. In my bathrobe, I watched and listened, and occasionally nodded whenever my father sided with me. The real problem was not that I had ruined my clothes, or disobeyed by not saying where I was going, or played with my friend Hector again.

couple of curboards, just about everywhere. The maid refused to touch them and threatened to quit. Father got on his knees and caught half of them; I caught the rest. We counted ninety-nine frogs, and put them back in the bath-tub. I was sure we had brought one hundred, but try as we might, that one hundredth frog never turned up. It might have been my mistake in arithmetic, or maybe it escaped from the apartment, but I'm pretty sure we didn't leave it behind when we finally closed the door and left for the station.

On the train, my father made me sit at the other end of the compartment with my frogs, as far away from mother as possible. I remember asking the conductor if I needed to pay extra fare because of the frogs. I showed him the bag; he peered inside and smiled at the gooey, green mess. No, he said, that was quite all right, no extra to pay. But he told me to make sure that the bag was closed tight, otherwise I would have to go into the baggage car.

So began my summer that year, as the train wound its way up the Gatineau valley.

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