

The Wishing Rock
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(Senior Fiction, Second Place Winner)

A simple life is one that is spent fishing. Sitting in a rowboat, on a quiet pond, listening to the birds and the rustle of autumn leaves as a breeze kicks up; so peaceful. I should have retired years ago.

Oh, there are other things to do besides fish, but none are so enjoyable. When I'm out on the pond, all by myself, I like to let my mind wander. Sometimes it wanders back to younger days, BR (before responsibilities). Sometimes it just wanders off on its own and I don't see it for days.

Now, you might wonder where this pond is, so you can go fishing too, but then I'd have to share, and *this pond ain't big enough for the two of us, pardner*. In fact, I'm not even sure if there *are* any fish in this pond.

But that doesn't matter as much as the solitude. I like being alone and listening to the sounds of nature. It gives me a chance to write: poetry, science fiction, short stories, alternative history, or as some like to call it, historical fiction.

I have one such piece I wrote several years ago: a short story about Robert E. Lee. Did you know he had a mistress? No? I didn't either, until I wrote about it.

This started as a challenge, on a poetry website I used to frequent, to write a poem about a particular picture, or what the picture brings to mind. Each week, someone would post a picture and those who choose to accept the challenge would write a poem about it. What is the person in the picture doing, or thinking, etc?

The picture in question was of a young lady dressed in a black bustier, reclining on a garden bench, surrounded by roses. To me, she looked a bit like a saloon girl from the Old West.

Well, the poem I wrote was a romantic piece about a Civil War era soldier, who met a young lady at a cotillion and, as he rode off into battle the next morning, he 'left her there amidst the guns and roses'.

On other outings, on the pond, my mind soared off into the cosmos, making several trips to Mars, as well as a few Earth orbiting habitats.

In the 1940s, B. F. Skinner, a behaviorist, wrote about an experimental society called Walden Two. My mind took many of the ideas from that book and put them into an orbital habitat, which I called Walden X. The X could be an extrapolation of the tenth Walden (in Roman numerals), or it could refer to the e(x)perimental nature of space travel, like the X-15 and SpaceX. But, as I mentioned, my mind likes to wander off, sometimes.

So, getting back to the pond, let me say, off to the western edge, there was a small dock, where I kept my boat tied up. It was just a simple rowboat: no motor. The pond wasn't big enough to tool around much, anyway. And besides, I hated disturbing the birds with the squeak of the oar pins in the oarlocks. A boat motor would have been far too disturbing. I usually just rowed out a short distance and then let the boat drift the rest of the way.

The other most prominent feature, of the pond, was the rock, or more precisely, a massive boulder. It was just about the right size if you wanted to play hide-and-go-seek with a herd of elephants, and sat at the western edge of the pond, next to the dock, partially in the water. Although, it's probably more accurate to say the dock sat close to the rock, as the rock was there first.

As time went by, I began calling it 'The Wishing Rock'. I would go down to the pond and check the boat for leaks (it wouldn't do to get out in the middle of the pond and have to swim back). Then,

before casting off, I would reach over and rub the rock and say, "I wish, I wish, I wish to catch a fish." Then, I'd pat the rock and set off for the middle of the pond, still wishing.

One day, when I was still a young man, I met the love of my life, although I didn't know it at the time. Since then, that lovely young lady has shown me the error in my thinking.

When I finally realized she was *the one*, I took her to the pond. She loved the spot, but not sitting in the boat for hours on end. She was more of the explorer type and wandered through the nearby woods.

On one particular visit to the pond, while I was in the boat and contemplating the life of a young Irish horse groomer, in a three part miniseries, she was preparing us a late-day picnic lunch... on top of the wishing rock!

"How in the hell did you get up there?" I shouted when I spotted her.

"On the far side, there are several good handholds and steps, of a sort. It was easy," she explained.

So, I rowed back in, tied up the boat to the dock, and circled around to the other side.

'Come to the dark side. We have fried chicken and potato salad,' I thought.

I quickly found the handholds and stepping spots and in just a few moments, joined her at the top of the rock. The view from up there was quite different from the one at water level.

For one thing, I could see the entire pond and the wide clearing through the woods on the eastern side. The pond was a bit more tear-drop shaped than I had realized, previously, with its tip pointing due east, through the clearing.

I knew, at that moment, that the wishing rock had come flying in at a very shallow angle, cutting a wide swath through the woods, until it came to rest in its current location. The pond is actually its crater, and there is a pretty good chance, like an iceberg, that there's a heck of a lot more of it underground than above.

The second thing that occurred to me was the lack of low-lying vegetation surrounding the pond and rock, for about fifteen-to-twenty meters out and the slight rise to the land in that same area. I was aware that as I approached the pond, I had to climb over a low hill. But I never noticed that it completely ringed the pond.

After sharing this revelation with my lady, we sat up there for, what seemed like an hour, marveling at the wondrous find. Then we ate our late afternoon lunch, spent another hour or so making love, and since it was getting close to dusk, went skinny-dipping. From the top of the rock, we both took a leap of faith (that the water was deep enough: it was.). Did I mention this spot is very secluded, besides being on private property?

What we didn't take into consideration, before we leapt, was that one of us would have to climb back up, onto the rock, naked, in the dark, to retrieve our clothes and the picnic basket. We laughed about that all the way back to the house.

A few days later, while at the pond alone, I rowed out to the middle and lowered a weighted line over the side. I was curious to see just how deep the crater might be. The line dropped down, down, down. Finally, the line went slack and I knew the weights had hit bottom.

I pulled the slack out of the line and took hold of it at the waterline. At that point, I pulled it up

enough to tie a knot at that location, then pulled the rest of the line back into the boat.

Once I was back at the dock, I paced off six feet between a couple of posts (knowing that my shoes are exactly twelve inches in length) and began running the line around the two posts. Given that the posts are four-by-fours, I figured this would give me a rough measure of about four meters per turn.

By this crude method, I came up with a depth of approximately eighteen meters, or roughly fifty-nine feet.

'If there are any fish in here, I've been fishin' way too shallow,' I thought.

A few days later, I contacted the local community college and was put in touch with one of the instructors in the geology department. Without going into too much detail about the location, I managed to borrow a Geiger-counter.

Since my theory was that this rock came from outer space, I wanted to know if it was radioactive, or not. My sci-fi mind was worried that I might be endangering my health or, perhaps, start catching fish with three eyes and able to speak multiple languages. To my relief, it wasn't.

So, here was the dilemma: I could make a big announcement about finding a previously unknown meteorite and become famous or, since it did not appear to be dangerous, I could keep quiet, and keep the pond and the wishing rock all to myself.

When I returned the Geiger-counter to the college, the instructor had a lot of questions. I thought about what I should or shouldn't say. I smiled, as I thought about all the joy I'd found in the solitude of the pond. It was a no-brainer.

I said, "I thought I might have found a meteorite, but it was just an oddly shaped rock."

"Oh," he replied as his face fell into a frown. "Well, better luck next time."

"Yeah, thanks," I said. "There goes my shot at fame and glory."

"Hey, not everyone can be a Eugene Shoemaker," he offered.

I remembered the name as one of the men who had recently discovered the 'String of Pearls', the comet that broke up and collided with Jupiter: Comet Shoemaker-Levy.

"Yeah, I guess you're right. Thanks again for the use of the equipment."

So, these days, now that I'm retired, I still like to go out to the pond and the wishing rock. I still write and have published five books, to date, with three or four other manuscripts on the back burner. Some are just ideas, a few chapters deep, but are showing potential.

Oh, the young lady from all those years ago? Yes, I married her and we had thirty-seven wonderful years, until she passed, three year ago. And although I called it The Wishing Rock, she used to call it 'The Passion Stone' aka The Big F'ing Rock, in remembrance of that day we made love on top of it. I miss her.

Occasionally, a few of the grandkids come out to the pond and take turns climbing the wishing rock, or rowing the boat. But most of the time, I still have the pond all to myself. I get out there early in the morning, check the hull for leaks and rub the wishing rock. Maybe today, I'll catch a fish.

The End

As I mentioned earlier in the story, I often write short stories that are based on, or inspired by, poems that I had previously written, using the poem as an outline. This story is no exception. The original poem, 'The Wishing Rock' was written on July 26th, 2012 and was published in G. R. Grover & Son's Anthology under the pen name, Londo. I have added it below, because one of my favorite quotes is *'Write for the pleasure of writing, but share it for the pleasure of others.'*

The Wishing Rock

The leaves in autumn's sunny light
Colors of flames burning bright
Reflected in the pond so still
'Come' it calls. I say, "I will."

I'll take a break from daily grind
Loose the tensions in my mind
Wander back to days gone by
When youth was mine, with spirits high

Back when days were spent alone
Down at the pond, a quiet zone
The small rowboat tied to the dock
Beside the giant wishing rock

Each day before I'd board the boat
I'd check the hull, made sure she'd float
Then rub the rock and make a wish
That today, I just might catch a fish

- Londo