

dad's legacy

Memories of cedar & steel

STORY & PHOTOS BY MICHAEL FURTMAN

The fire was white hot, and Dad was pumping a makeshift bellows while holding the end of the steel spring in the flame. I gripped the rest of the powerful spring in my hands to keep it from uncoiling, skin-ny teen arms trembling from exertion.

We were camped on a lake in northern Minnesota, dad stealing away a couple hours early on a Friday, so we could do a little fishing over the weekend. After making camp, we launched the 1946 Old Town boat, and dad went to fire up the old 1956 Mercury 6-horse.

And, that's when the starter recoil spring broke.

Back in camp, using the few tools he had along, he disassembled the starter assembly. The forged loop on the end of the spring had broken off. He stared at it for a while, then began to build a fire.

"What are you going to do, Dad?" I asked.

"I'm going to forge a new loop," he said, "but first I have to heat the spring." A sheet

metal worker all his life, he knew his way around steel.

And that's exactly what he did. After creating the loop, he tempered the steel in cool lake water, then reassembled the outboard under the hissing light of a Coleman lantern. The next morning, we putted out into the lake to catch some walleyes.

Nearly 50 years later, that same spring in that same outboard broke again. But this time, it was when I was starting the motor. With every tool I own, a new spring and downloaded schematics, it still took me multiple efforts over two days to fix it. And all the time I worked on the outboard, I marveled at my late dad's resourcefulness and skill, having done the same task himself in the woods, in near darkness, with few tools and no diagram.

Some things, I suppose, can be tossed out without remorse. But not my father's outboard. Nor his boat. A man of simple means and tastes, he bought well, kept those things well maintained and fixed them when they broke. He passed those

morals on to me.

And so, I have restored the cedar-plank-and-rib, canvas-covered Old Town and refurbished the Super Silent Six outboard. When on the water, I grin with pride. And why would I not? In that boat I caught my first fish. That old outboard pushed us through stands of wild rice to where I learned to hunt waterfowl and shot my first duck.

Yes, my father forged a new loop in that starter spring. He also forged, with that boat and motor, much of who I am, and he left me with memories of cedar and steel.

Now, when I tug that motor to life and when the boat slices swiftly through the water, I am often not the man driving the boat but have shifted back in time to be the boy in the bow, gazing toward the stern.

There, where my father sits, tiller in hand, smiling. **CL**

Based in the upper Midwest, Michael Furtman is an award-winning nature and wildlife photographer (michaelfurtman.com).

This boat, a 1946 Old Town with a 1956 Mercury 6-horse outboard motor, was passed down from father to son.

