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Hooked on Fishing

by Cheryl MacDonald

Every year when the Spring Fishing Show opens, my husband, Dan, and his friend, Tom, will be among the thousands that stream through the doors. Dan's a devoted angler. Tom's more of a hunter, but he's put in his share of fishing time. They're both comfortable in woods or on water.

Dan grew up in suburban Montreal, Tom in Burlington. But now that we live in the country, and Tom and his family live in a small town, they seem to have forgotten everything they knew about urban life. The first time they went to Mississauga for the fishing show, they got lost. So how do two sportsmen find their way around a metropolis? Ask for directions? Look for an obvious landmark, like maybe the airport towers? Nope. They looked for a stream, pulled the car over, noted which way the current was running, and headed south.

Another time, they decided to go shopping at this great fishing-supply store. They'd saved up their money and pored over the catalogue for weeks. So off they went, and maybe two hours later, I get a collect call from Dan. He's in a phone booth in Burlington. "We've looked all over, and we can't find that street," he says. "Check the address on the catalogue for me, will ya?" The store was in Milton.

Dan doesn't eat much of the fish he catches. He doesn't even keep most of them, so some exotic chemical brew isn't responsible for his odd behaviour. But television fishing shows might be a major factor.

I know Dan's been overexposed to them. In fact, I've been overexposed to them. I can name more fishing-show hosts than top recording stars. In the U.S., there are guys like Babe Winkelman and Bill Dance. Here in Canada, there's Italo and Hank, and a fellow named Darryl (who's as interested in shore lunches as catching fish), and then there's Bob Izumi.

He's the most intriguing. His surname is Japanese, but with a first name like Bob and a brother called Wayne,

his Canadian roots are probably as deep as mine. So why does he talk like John Wayne? One of these days, I swear, he's going to say, "Now look here walleye, listen and listen tight ..." as he prepares for a showdown with a fish.

Teachers of techniques, gurus of gear, these fellows make fishing look easy. They've got sleek boats, spiffy outfits, and top-of-the-line equipment. They get to travel to swell places and catch fish. Once you've spent a few hours watching them pull magnificent specimens out of the waves, and have seen the sun sparkling off shiny scales, you're hooked. You want to do it too.

I know why. Anglers are hypnotized by the combined sparkle of sun, waves, scales, and lures. Their eyes glaze over and their critical faculties switch off. They're lost in visions of catching the big one. Next thing you know, they've invested their life's savings in a boat or a week's vacation at a remote lodge with an unpronounceable name. Even if cooler heads prevail, the visions persist. And they're reinforced every time they see a fishing show or walk past a display of lures at Canadian Tire.

It happens to my husband. He gets this strange look in his eyes when he sees lures. Then he starts to pick them off the rack – shiny spoons with stripes, plump plugs that look like sunfish, creepy critters that resemble jujubes. He can hardly wait to try them. And if the weather's uncooperative, he spends hours examining them, with the same far-away look in his eyes. But as soon as conditions are right, he's off.

I knew he was hooked on fishing the afternoon he walked out on a homemade turkey dinner, muttering something about the lake calling him. But I never realized how badly he was hooked until I asked him which he preferred, fishing or sex.

He had to think about it.