

Throwing Stones

Darren Shell

Mother always told me, “You shouldn’t throw stones...you’ll break something!” And she was right. ‘Course, I was never much of an aim. I don’t suppose my lack of ability and accuracy helped, but lately I’ve had a slight change in my thinking process when it comes to the tossing of rocks. It seems I’ve met a *rock-solid* family here on Dale Hollow. And we might all learn a thing or two from this bunch. We just have to think beyond what we most consider as the “norm”.

My story starts with the low water. As most of us lake-lovers know, our beautiful lake has dropped its level to a staggeringly shallow depth. In this inevitable process, most of us boat dock boys have found ourselves shuffling slips and moving docks to new and unheard-of locations. We all have dirt and mud where our lavish blanket of clear water once provided ample depth for our many boats. It was at this low water level where I saw something I hadn’t noticed before.

On one of my recent dock-moving walks along shore, I noticed something that made me smile. What I saw not only made me smile...it made me laugh out loud. Still smiling, a tear slid down my nose, as a whole lot of recent memories started flowing through my head. It went something like this...

A few years ago, a family moved their houseboat to my marina. Chris and Anita brought their houseboat and their two children, Lance and Morgan, to our slips and quickly became fast friends with nearly everyone on their dock. It is wonderful how the pastime of house boating brings a family together and somehow keeps them together. It is a fantastic means of relaxation that seems to draw families and friends near. It provides a rich and rewarding connection to nature that few other pastimes can present. This family has drawn from that energy and has taken it to yet another level.

This family, in many ways, is special. Like many other families in the area, they love the lake. I mean...they LOVE it. They make every attempt to “make the lake” every warm weekend in summer. Kudos to them! But it is difficult for this family to enjoy the lake like the most of us. They have one obstacle that sometimes presents a problem. They have one difficulty that is both challenging...and rewarding at the same time. The Robinson’s son, Lance has autism. At age 13, Lance is strong and healthy, and very much in tune with life. And although he has his rough days, Lance spends many hours on our shores, enjoying himself in one of the few ways he knows how.

Lance throws rocks.

He doesn’t just toss a few stones into the lake. He throws rocks...and he throws them nearly all day. He’ll take a break from his pitching to eat lunch, or perhaps enjoy a reward of Skittles and Mt. Dew from the marina. But then, it’s back to the serious lake

business of throwing rocks. From the early wee morning hours, to the post-dark times of late evening...Lance throws rocks. Little ones...small ones...ones good for skipping. They are all worthy of a nice splash. And those splashes happen often and constant.

Even though this boating family chooses to spend most of their time out in one of Dale Hollow's great coves, they sometimes spend a few evenings here in the Willow Grove hollow. And that's just fine. Lance can walk the shore...in complete view of his family...and do what he does best. He throws rocks. He will walk the shore between his dock and the main ship store and toss stones into the lake, loving that exciting splash of water. There just must be something in that splash...that's all I can say. The full length of that stretch of shore has been fully covered by Lance...in his ever-increasing joy of throwing rocks. We have often joked... "Maybe we need to have a load of rocks dumped there for him...Lance is running out of "Good" rocks!" His enthusiastic joy of tossing stones has touched us all. Lance doesn't always acknowledge us when we chat playfully with him about his passion for tossing rocks, but his enthusiasm is contagious. We are all inspired by this family's perseverance, and Lance's passion for this lake he loves. It has been a release for the family as a whole. It is definitely difficult for this family to "boat" under this special condition, but they have pressed forward with a grace and love of *Family*. And I think we could all use a good dose of that.

So, quite frankly, this is what I wanted to share with you lake-loving folks out there. Willow Grove has set out on a mission. We have a job to do before the lake rises. It seems that the upper portion of the banks of my hollow are hopelessly devoid of rocks. There is just nothing left to throw. The lower levels have COUNTLESS volumes of "thrown" rocks resting on its lower muddy shores. They're all over the place! I'm not kidding, folks. I had no idea of the true volume of Lance's endeavors, until that one dock-moving day after the lake level dropped and I saw what remained from years of rock-throwing fun enjoyed by Lance. That was the day when I smiled and laughed and reflected upon this special Lake-Family. Thousands of rocks now lie on this one hundred yard stretch of bank between Lance's dock and the Skittle-getting-place-marina. The low water table has revealed years of Lance's work.

So here's my challenge. There's only one Lance...but hundreds of us. What if...what if...we put them all back? I'm talking about tons of rocks. Thousands of stones. I mean rock after rock after rock...all right there on shore. What do you say...let's throw them all back. Why not toss a few stones up hill? Mom always told me not to throw stones...but this might be an exception to the rule!

Lance lives his life in a place where all can see him. He is under our constant gaze. His boating family is always on a vigilant watch as he paces the shoreline. One could definitely say that Lance lives in a glass house. But despite the old adage...I think perhaps...our friend, Lance, *should* always throw stones...and I'll be standing here willing to throw them back.~