



John Dickey – Ready with Rod & Reel

All photos © Diann Turner

# JOHN DICKEY:

## Community Man, Avid Angler, Farmer & Tradesman

By Diann Turner

A circular sign in a sports magazine recently caught my attention – “Trout and bass have had a restful few months. Unfortunately for them, so have you!”

I immediately thought of John Dickey, a well-known Mallorytown gentleman, who just might be spotted fishing on Charleston Lake, enjoying the fine art of angling and enjoying the beauty of the outdoors.

Charleston Lake is a Canadian Shield jewel with steep shorelines and extremely deep waters. Lake trout, pike and bass lurk in the depths. For John Dickey, Charleston Lake is just north of ordinary life, miles from everyday humdrum, and provides some of the best fishing Ontario has to offer. For over forty years, John and his family rented a cottage on Charleston Lake from Cecil Alguire, who owned a string of rustic cottages. Sadly, they’ve been replaced by a monster house today. Picture a boat load of kids so laden it is riding on the water line! John taught them all that conditions

must be right, which meant air and water temperatures, and the emergence of food for fish, must all collide to launch the season. He led by example and kids became knowledgeable about minnows, frogs, worms, lures, untangling fishing lines, tackle and figuring out how to turn a follower into a biter! They picked up that adding a piece of worm, or a frog (caught in the marshy areas of Caintown) might result in a big one, reducing the amount of lost catches among the trophies! He was an expert at cleaning fish as well and the innards were tossed over the hill for the raccoons to enjoy. That sweet spot of the outdoor season opening in summer was not completely obliterated in winter. John went ice fishing on various local waters, as well as west on the Bay of Quinte. When the crisp, shorter days of fall arrived, hunting gear came out and John tramped through wooded areas in search of deer.

John has been beating around this old planet for eighty-seven years. He was born

June 2, 1932 in a Caintown farmhouse which stands beside a Jones Creek tributary. He has spent his whole life here. His father, Blaine Dickey, was of Irish descent. Blaine married a teacher, Mary Piercy, and they had two children, Jean and John. When John was born, his Dad and Uncles Wilfred and Raymond “worked amicably together farming chickens, pigs, cows, horses and anything with four legs,” said John. The brothers shared machinery and had “Dickey Brothers” painted on their truck. Income was sparse, so Blaine and Wilfred acquired factory jobs in Rochester and Buffalo, New York. They also went out west on harvest excursions when steam tractors prevailed. Wilfred joined the army and fought in World War I but eventually came back to Caintown and purchased a farm. Young John followed these men everywhere and learned much from their example. They weren’t afraid to box his ears when he needed a trimming, but there was always a wonderful balance

of love, wit, humour and happy times. He attended Caintown Public School and Athens District High School, but a love for the outdoors superseded learning. For most of his life however, he self taught by being a voracious reader.

John considers himself blessed by this heritage. An action man, who loves animals, he thrived in the insouciant family atmosphere and adopted the attitude that hard work and drive are the only way to live. When he was big enough to carry a pail of water, chores were assigned. "I couldn't wait to milk the cows," he said. Some of Leeds County's finest dairy herds originated in Caintown and the cheese factory flourished for years. "I wouldn't trade all this for anything I have seen since," said John. "Life was interesting all the time." The men cut logs in winter, made maple syrup in spring, and when the ice was out in local creeks, they set muskrat traps. "I helped Dad trap for years," said John, "and remember, this country was built on the fur trade." Interestingly, they took their furs to Crosby, Ontario and the Hudson's Bay Company would purchase them. One year, they made enough to purchase a new farm truck. Large gardens were planted, and the half acre of strawberries was harvested and sold. Blaine was a beekeeper and sixty beehives produced golden honey to sell. Sweet corn was sold as far away as Kingston. Above all else, the family was piscatory and fishing was a huge priority! John kept things this way his whole life long. His sons, Mark and David, keep the fishing legacy very much alive today.

Anyone who was lucky enough to hang out with the Dickey family got a fair crack with a fishing pole! John's nephews have wonderful memories of spring nights when a small punt made its way through Leeder's Creek (which drains into Charleston Lake). The boat was loaded with kids; one at the helm dangling a gas lantern ahead to lead the way. Safety was not an issue, or so it seemed. Loons called, bullfrogs croaked, black flies' bit, and everyone hopped out at Bullfrog Bend! They set up lanterns, baited long bamboo poles with worms and began fishing for bullheads. A roaring fire was built and blackened hot dogs became supper. Memories were carved that would last an entire lifetime and then be passed to the next generation.

There are many established ways of life that John faithfully carried out in his own days that began in early childhood. He inherited the gift of loving kindness and demonstrated a Fred Rogers approach

toward everyone in the community; no one would say he was not a good neighbour. A man of integrity, malevolence and dependability, he somehow wove the faith of his fathers into every conversation. He was never given to self-importance. He made everyone feel special and had a descriptive moniker for all around him. He helped the down and out and was ready at any moment to jump into a crisis and save the day. He married Mary Agnes Doyle on May 1, 1954, which means they just celebrated sixty-five years of marriage. They raised seven children whose memories are rich. The children grew up in Raymond Dickey's home. Today they have nine grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. Two of their children have passed away. John does not have a ledger of regrets; for over thirty years he worked as a welder and plumber for Public Works and Brockville Psychiatric Hospital. He farmed beef cattle throughout the years and still operates a thriving maple syrup business.

He states that "he wishes he had the pep he used to have and that they should make aging illegal." He would be the first person to stand up and say he is very thankful to God for the life he has lived and all he has enjoyed. Being an avid reader, he asserts that "when books became beepers (computers) the whole world turned upside down."

A portrait of his idyllic childhood, as well as a family raised in between 1955 and 1972, would certainly validate that statement!

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John Dickey and son Dave



John and Dave Dickey heading out for bass!



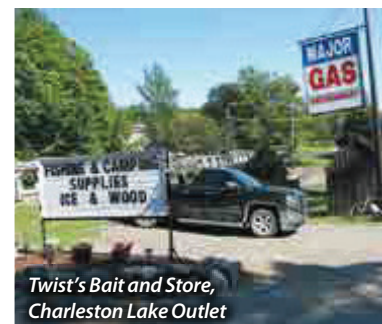
Fishing Off the Charleston Lake Outlet Dam



John Dickey and Children at Charleston Lake, Circa 1964



Leeder's Creek and Johnny's Rock at Charleston Lake



Twist's Bait and Store, Charleston Lake Outlet