“One, two, three!” Dad and Uncle John hoisted the cooler filled with waters, sub sandwiches, and night crawlers into the rocking, unsteady boat. I could see my breath against the crisp morning air as I clutched the three fishing poles and tackle box.

Passing all the remaining gear on board, I untied the rope at the bow of the boat. In one less than graceful leap I pushed the boat off from the dock and hopped on board as the engine sputtered to life.

Our boat slid across the top of the undisturbed lake, creating expanding ripples and waves behind us. I asked my uncle exactly where we were headed for our day of fishing. Any spot on the lake looked fine to me and I was anxious to start reeling them in. “I have a feeling,” he said. “Past those lily pads on the left is where they’ll be.”

The engine roar was replaced with the sound of early morning birds as we dropped anchor, baited our hooks, and waited for the magic to happen. “I have a feeling you’re going to need to get the net ready for me,” my uncle called, smirking, to my dad. They were always competing about everything, and sometimes it drove me nuts. Grandma always said a little sibling rivalry never hurt any pair of brothers. I love my grandma, but I think they got their competitiveness from her.

I just know that I always ended up on fishing trips as the mediator. If I weren’t there, the two adults on this trip probably would never get off the boat and come home at night. They might go hours without eating or talking. Catching the biggest fish bestowed the glory of bragging rights for the next year in our family. Trust me, it was a big deal.

As wannabe expert fishermen, dad and Uncle John were always having “feelings” about where the prize winning fish would be. Sometimes, however, all you do is a lot of sitting. Watch the bobber in the water, slowly reel in the line, check the worm’s status, and recast the line out. Repeat.

As the sun scooted higher in the sky and began to awaken more animals in the air, I decided it was time for a break from staring at the water. Wedging my pole
between the cooler and the driver’s seat I dug around for food from the cooler and offered sandwiches to the others.

“Sorry, can’t stop now. I’m getting quite a few nibbles on this side of the boat.” I spun around and offered the same sustenance to my dad. “I have a feeling this competition is going to be wrapped up in the next few minutes. No time for food now!”

As I popped the last bite of turkey and cheese into my mouth I heard simultaneous shouts. Both dad and Uncle John had hooked fish at the same time and were struggling to control their catch, poles bending at sharp angles toward the water. I stood ready with the net to assist, running back and forth between the two of them like I was running over hot coals.

When all was said and done, Uncle John’s fish came in at 19 inches long. Dad’s measured 19.5. The gold painted and plastic dollar store trophy belonged to dad for another year. Finally time to go home, we released the two fish back into the lake.

Dad fired up the engine and the water behind the boat gurgled. Squinting in the setting sun, I faced the direction of the shore. “Let’s go, dad!” I called back. I wanted to get back and show mom the coveted family trophy. I turned around to a puzzled look on dad’s face.

“I have a feeling we are not moving,” Uncle John said, still bitter from his defeat. “The engine’s on. Did you forget how to drive a boat?” For the next thirty minutes, the two of them tried turning off and restarting the engine. Uncle John spent time seeing if there was something caught in the motor blades underwater. Nothing was really making sense, considering we could hear the engine working.

Just then, my fishing pole began sliding down the side of the boat. I dove to the left to catch it, my foot becoming entangled in a pile of rope. “There’s a fish hooked on there!” dad yelled out in astonishment. I guess leaving my pole propped up by the cooler was a good fishing technique, after all.

Reeling the fish in took major muscle power. Uncle John measured as I held the squirming fish up in the air. Twenty-two inches long!

Both stared at me in awe. “I have a feeling, you guys, that someone forgot we are anchored to the bottom of the lake right now,” I said, untangling the anchor rope from my leg. “And, I have a feeling that trophy belongs to me!”