

WILLIE'S TALE

by Betty (Lombard) Michael

Many years ago, on a dark, stormy night at the bottom of Lake of the Woods, a mother walleye prepared to welcome a new family. It happened fast, and twenty new residents were born. Everyone was busy right away. Well, almost everyone. One small fish hid behind his mother, not wanting to play. No matter how she coaxed him, he was only content when he could swim around her. Then, when he tired, he would cuddle up to her and take a rest. Not even his brothers and sisters could get him away for a swim.

Days were very busy and soon it became time to move to the Rainy River, where the lessons would begin. The first lesson was to find a safe home. Mother Walleye soon found a very large tree with many branches, more than enough room for everyone and resting nicely on the sand with many rocks all around. Every day was spent learning new things. Eating and growing, especially the little one who was becoming larger than everyone else and already had to sleep outside the door of the tree.

Lesson two was about the curved shiny things hanging down in the water, but as Mother pointed out, this was just a trick to catch them. This was very scary to hear and sent them dashing back to the comfort of the tree where the former little fish would lay outside the door on guard. It was soon said by everyone, "You take care of our worries and our willies and we will call you Willie." It was a fine name. Mother Walleye gathered everyone around Willie since he no longer fit in their home (and besides they all felt so safe with him close by).

It was time to tell them what they must avoid at all times. Far above their home where the water was dry, lived walking trees. They were very odd, Mother said.

They walked about on their branches and made very strange noises. Willie should have been very afraid, but he wasn't and took every chance he got to swim up the river to Baudette to watch the large flat tree with the many talking trees on it going from shore to shore.

One day Willie noticed something was different. The talking trees were shouting. He could tell they were scared and the flat tree was sinking deeply into the water. Willie knew this wasn't right, so he swam under the flat tree and lifted it up. The tall trees were crying as he took them back to the shore. That's why the statue of Willie was built. He saved the town ferry. It's really a town secret. The town protects Willie and Willie guards the town.

And, sometimes visitors will hear a very large noise and say, "It's thundering," but the people of Baudette just look at each other, smiling, and say to themselves, "No, it's just Willie."