

THE BALLAD OF WILLIE

by John Johnson

There was a tadpole named Wally... tadpole? Wait, this is about Willie the Walleye, not some frog egg. Many people have not heard the whole story about how Willie would never have been able to obtain his seismic girth and length had he not had that beginning egg syndrome which all of us should be familiar with. It started with the laying of those millions of eggs. We know that the frogs must start croaking before they first begin spawning. That is where Wally comes into the story.

Willie's best friend was Wally, the Frog. Shortly after Willie's life hatched, Wally decided to jump into the deeper waters of the big lake, taking Willie with him. That's friendship. Encouraging and strengthening your friends.

Fish grow according to the size of their aquarium. Having started in the "Big Tank," Willie wasted no time. With Wally's protection, Willie reached the weight of ten pounds his first year. From there growth charts were blown away. Willie, after three years, had surpassed any recorded walleye in the state of Minnesota. He proceeded in five years to have the championship (girth) belt of the entire world.

Willie had a few close calls with pesky anglers in his early years. Both summer and winter fishermen had told of having hold of "the Big One". One crisp morning, two couples were trying their skill at down rigging when Willie thought he'd have some fun. This was in his lightweight era. He weighed a hundred fifty pounds that day, and four down riggers were yanked off the back of that launch.

The ice fishing experience has been talked about for years. Forty-nine fish houses had a "hit". Bobbers were slamming and houses began moving as Willie wove all those lines into a rope. As fishermen were bailing out of their shelters, the sight did have a majestic view, as they saw that dorsal fin break through the ice for miles. Willie ended up moving

so much ice it caused more terrain changes than the glaciers had done. Both five mile and sixteen mile reefs were formed that day.

Being so in tuned with his lake, when storms are about to hit Willie begins thrashing his mighty tail making the lake just rough enough to warn anglers it's time to head in.

Folks say that the deep holes of the lake are where he was able to hide for so long.

We who are locals know that every now and then when you hear Wally's descendents croaking, that they're not really croaking. They're telling the stories about how Willie liked to have fun, as they pass along the stories about how this huge walleye their grandpa Wally had for a best friend, still tricks those veteran fishermen into thinking they've got a snag! I've heard tell that he could outsell every sporting goods store in Minnesota with all his "trophies". He's collected more than poles and tackle in his fifty years. After all, what's going to pull in a twenty-four hundred pound Willie?