Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader

**Survival 101: My newfound respect Mother Nature**

My wife got me this little "Pocket Guide to Outdoor Survival" by Ron Cordes and Stan Bradshaw. Wish I had this earlier, so I would be more prepared for living in the Northwoods. It is a different lifestyle altogether.

Being a city boy all my life, there were streetlights everywhere I went, and wild animals could only be seen at the zoo. Here, I see flocks of wild turkey roaming through our backyard; and I almost ran into deer and raccoons a few times. Where are they from? Just jumping out of the woods playing the game "Dare you to hit me"?

I was driving to Iowa to attend my niece’s graduation a few months ago. A long drive indeed — five hours each way, ugh. Yes, I am learning, you have to prepare to drive an hour or more to places if you live here in the Northwoods. Had to drink a lot of tea to keep me awake.

On my way home back to St. Croix Falls, while driving nonchalantly, listening to my classical station, I heard a “boom” all of a sudden; and then I noticed that my windshield was totally shattered, even the rearview mirror had fallen off. Not knowing what actually happened, I kept driving for another good half a mile. Then all of a sudden, it dawned on me, “Oh my Lord, I’ve been hit by some UFO."

I pulled the car over, turned my emergency blinkers on, and stepped out of the car, trying to investigate just what had happened. The feathers that were stuck on the windshield indicated it must have been a bird, a really huge bird indeed. Kind folks stopped by and asked me if I needed any help. I had no idea what to do except to call 911.

Fortunately enough, there was a patrolman closed by, and he was there in less than 10 minutes. He examined the windshield and exclaimed that I was indeed hit by a low-flying wild turkey. A turkey? The one we gathered around at Thanksgiving table? What was it doing flying around and hitting my windshield?

Then the officer told me that it must have been a bird that weighed 50 pounds or more, judging on the impact (so, it could have fed a party or 25 or more). The whole windshield did cave in, and thank goodness, it didn’t break, or I would have been a goner. So, after paying $3,000 to repair the damage, I am on my way to becoming a country boy.

All that reminded me of my first encounter with Mother Nature. And how I wish I had the pocketbook then.

We live on a small lake near St. Croix Falls and bought a canoe right after we moved in. Darryl, my brother-in-law, helped us build a dock that could harbor the canoe on the lakeshore. I have to tell this story.

Darryl was with the Army for years. We first met when he just returned from a deployment in Afghanistan. Of course, we invited him to join our Sunday family dinner. I don’t remember what I made that evening, maybe some beef stew? Anyway, he took one bite and then he looked me straight in the eye, and said, “Peter, will you marry me?”

Our whole family (including his future wife), laughed. But knowing that he had been eating the Army packaged meals for years, anything would taste good. But he liked my beef stew. A great relationship had begun.

Darryl was an engineer in the Army, and his job was to “make things work." If a tank or jeep got blown up, how to make them work again? Or, better yet, how to get rid of them before the enemy got their hands on them? Not having any experience in building a dock or pier, he created one for us.

His family came over one day, and he got piles of wood planks from Menards and was busy sawing and hammering away. By using a couple of pickle barrels as floaters, Darryl built a floating dock that could harbor the canoe, all in a day’s work. It was so easy to get in and out of the canoe with the dock that he built. My wife and I went out a few times, and that was so pleasant. But that’s when trouble begins.

One early evening, while my wife was still at work, I thought I could just go out and have a canoe ride on my own. Or better yet, maybe a little fishing; and have some fresh pan-fried lake fish to surprise her when she got home.

The windsock on the dock was waving fiercely and even the lake was having white caps. But I thought to myself, "This is a small lake, and the deepest end is only 8’ deep, what can it do to me?" And off I paddled, with two of my fishing poles and a can of fresh-dug worms from our garden.

It was easy to paddle out, as the current was just carrying me. I settled my two fishing poles on the slot at the edge of the canoe and was just thinking that a good time had just begun. Then a “whoosh," one of my fishing poles was blown into the water. I thought it was a bad omen and was trying to paddle back to my dock, but the canoe would not move. The undercurrent was so strong that no matter how hard I paddled, the canoe wouldn’t budge. And the worst part, it was getting dark, and I could barely see my dock.

I saw my landmark, the two tall pine trees next to the dock, and was paddling there with all my might. However, the canoe refused to go where I wanted. I had to back paddle to move forward. Talk about confusing. And finally, I was carried to the edge of some point that looked like my landmark. But no, it wasn’t. At least I was smart enough to pull the canoe off the water and try to walk to dry land. But then it got dark, really fast.

While I managed to push the canoe into the tall weeds (or whatever they call it), I was stuck on my end. I couldn’t move forward as the path was blocked by bushes with thorns. And I was stepping in muck that would suck me in every time I made a move.

“Why this, Lord?” I told myself, “I thought the Northwoods was going to be fun.” And it was totally dark. I couldn’t see my fingers in front of my face. Fear sank in, finally. “Am I going to spend the night here, feeding the northern pikes?” I have heard about their sharp teeth.

Wouldn’t dare to move an inch, I held on for what seemed like hours. Cold, bleeding and filled with fear; oh, what fun living in the Northwoods. A thousand questions of "why, why, why" ran through my mind.

Then out from nowhere, a tiny light came from a distance. And that was my wife with her flashlight, searching for me. If that was not true love. Or maybe she was looking for me to make her dinner? Anyway, she heard me and saved me. Hence, I carry her “Pocket Guide to Outdoor Survival” every place I go now.

Survival 101, and respect Mother Nature.