Tale of a Great White Fish

By Maggie de Vries. Greystone Books, Douglas & McIntyre

come. For most of their long existence sturgeon have
their own eggs. Adults before returning to their spawning ground to lay
never reach adulthood. The fry that survive mature into
small water creatures to grow. Fry are also especially
into a fry. As a fry she must eat thousands of other
in the Fraser River. She matures into a larva and then
“Big Fish,” was a small and defenceless egg hatched
by a fisherman, but fortunately she was freed by some
try are one of the greatest perils. Big Fish was hooked
on the shores of the lake. When the story closes, almost
er River and many sturgeon died and were washed up
home because the lake she was living in was drained.
Finally the reader is led to the hot dry summer of
2004 and the devastating fire, the Lonesome Lake Fire
which was well reported to the Canadian public as one
of many fires in a hot dry summer, but to people of
that remote region, a disaster which shaped their envi-
ronment for years to come. The reader is invited to travel with Czajkowski through the fear and uncertain-
ty of watching gathering smoke and distressing news
from various watchers in neighbouring valleys. We are
inspired to evacuate with her to safer areas, but with-
out any assurance that home or lifestyle could be pre-
served. Czajkowski leads us along her tale with inter-
esting anecdotes and humorous stories about her dogs,
friends, and people who come to visit her. She is an
engaging story-teller and keeps the reader’s attention
for hours or just a few minutes at a time as the book
is filled with short stories, portions of her diary and
longer accounts of specific incidents.
The story builds in an entertaining way through her
history of building the cabins, receiving visitors, includ-
ing facts about making one’s life in the wilderness at
the same time maintaining connections firmly planted
in the outside world. The fire is the high point of the
book and gets the reader to the excitement of living her
experience of the fear, doubt, loneliness and response
of care for her own animals and the natural dwellers of
her wilderness world. The reader enters into the story
with her and can live the excitement she feels. In our
sheltered world, our decisions are not always the same
as the author’s but she puts her concern and care for
her environment in front of the reader and shows us a
different world to enjoy for a little while then look
forward, like her globe-trotting visitors, to the next
visit we might have with her.

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YOUNG NATURALISTS

Tale of a Great White Fish

By Maggie de Vries. Greystone Books, Douglas & McIntyre
Publishing Group, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
34 pages. $12.95.
The book Tale of a Great White Fish follows the
story of a giant white sturgeon. Through its long life,
the sturgeon overcomes many obstacles in its battle to
survive and reproduce. The story deals with the inter-
action between sturgeons and people, along the way
providing the reader with a wealth of information and
insight into the natural history of the sturgeon.
The story starts in 1828, when the sturgeon, named
“Big Fish,” was a small and defenceless egg hatched
in the Fraser River. She matures into a larva and then
into a fry. As a fry she must eat thousands of other
small water creatures to grow. Fry are also especially
vulnerable to predators, and most of the young fry
never reach adulthood. The fry that survive mature into
adults before returning to their spawning ground to lay
their own eggs.
There are many dangers that the sturgeon must over-
come. For most of their long existence sturgeon have
been around since the time of the dinosaurs, the threats
have been natural: predators, natural calamities and
disease. Today, human fishermen and the caviar indus-
try are one of the greatest perils. Big Fish was hooked
by a fisherman, but fortunately she was freed by some
young boys and was able to escape. During the Hells
Gate Slide in 1913 many migrating sturgeon were
killed. Big Fish survived, but she was forced to find a
new place to spawn. Later, Big Fish had to find a new
home because the lake she was living in was drained.
Later still, an unknown disease swept through the Fras-
er River and many sturgeon died and were washed up
on the shores of the lake. When the story closes, almost
a hundred years later, Big Fish is still surviving, but
continues to face many challenges.
Scientists study sturgeons to help them survive. They
keep track of their weight and size, and try to stop over-
fishing. There are now laws which prevent the fishing
of these magnificent animals.
The book is written as a story and at the end there is
a useful list of sturgeon facts, a labelled diagram of a
White Sturgeon, a glossary, and a letter from Rick Hansen, a famous Canadian para-athlete. Rick Hansen is the chairman of the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society. The drawings by Renné Benoit are done in watercolours and they provide a magnificent glimpse into the beautiful and dangerous world of the great White Sturgeon.

The book is very informative. In it, the reader will learn a great deal about the White Sturgeon’s environment and behavior and appearance. The Sturgeon Facts and a glossary at the back of the book provide a very useful summary, and is well presented.

The book is aimed at a child’s reading level. Older readers would find this book less interesting; however, it provides a basic insight into the world of a great white fish and is nicely illustrated. This book is recommended for any child with an interest in the outdoors and in nature.

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