

Friendship in Fernie

“Do you need help?”, asked the stranger. I was standing outside Fernie Central Reservations on a recent August night, the last light of the day quickly fading. “The lock box is empty. No key card inside”, I replied. Setting down his two shopping bags, the stranger could sense my confusion and anxiety. “Why not come over to my condo at 901 Fernie, relax, have a beer, and we’ll sort this out.” Tired from our nine hour drive, his invitation was as calming as the scent of Lupine carried on a spring breeze. An hour later, our key card arrived, hand delivered with an apology by the way, and we settled into our spacious, luxurious lodgings. It would turn out that Keith Liggett’s act of “random’ kindness was just the tip of the iceberg during our week long stay in Fernie.

Our party of three included my long time fly fishing partner Bob Aid and his son Tim. Besides being Tim’s birthday, I was on assignment to write an article for a stateside magazine about the unique strain of wild cutthroat that live in the Elk River and its tributaries.

Up early and eager to plan our day, Keith recommended coffee at Freshies. Our welcome from owner Kim Stokie was as warm as her freshly baked Morning Glory muffins. We could tell she was proud of her creations as she went into great detail explaining her daily array of delicious treats.

Fueled with caffeine and carbs, we drove a few blocks to meet Paul Samycia, owner of Elk River Guiding Company. In my twenty years of fly fishing and writing, I have never met a more knowledgeable and accommodating Outfitter. (Did you know he has a degree in Zoology from the University of British Columbia?) During our stay, Paul and his senior guide, Randy Dolighan, a registered professional biologist,

provided a wealth of information on the Elk River fisheries, ecosystems, science and management.

No doubt you've heard the phrase, "man cannot live by fly fishing alone". After 8 hours of casting and rowing on the river, you can acquire a darn big appetite. Following yet another of Keith's suggestions (he should work for Fernie Tourism) we stopped by Cincott Farms Organic Market, Coffee House and Café for a late dinner and were seated on the patio in back of the restaurant. Owner and Chef Scott Cincott proved to be gracious host, creating a wonderfully spiced shrimp jambalaya that was not even on the menu! Over dinner, Scott came out of the kitchen to share the history of his organic family farm and his approach to sustainable food. Again we were surprised by his personable interest in us and his rich storytelling.

We left his table completely satisfied and went to sleep dreaming of rising trout, jagged granite peaks and the genuine warm welcome we received from our gracious Canadian hosts. You can bet a Loonie we'll be back next year.

W. Michael Hamilton is a free lance writer living in Seattle, Washington.