

Sometimes, everything comes together in the strangest of ways. People, places and events tie themselves together in a mix of fate and fortune, and this is one of those stories.

It was 1966 when twelve year old Ken Poskitt sat in Mike Rippingale's grade six class at Willow Point Elementary School in Campbell River, BC. Mr. Rippingale was a teacher, a fisherman and a story teller. In fact, every Friday he would read from a book, or tell the tale of one adventure or another as the students ate their lunches.

Ken was the class keener. Infinitely bright and outspoken, if not a bit misunderstood by his peers, he listened intently. Stories like 'The Iliad' and 'The Odyssey' by Homer are forefront in his memory, as well as tales of grand fish being caught on Pacific Ocean waters, and one very special story, that would stick with him for more than 40 years into the future.

"One time... I paddled a row boat from here to Alaska." Mr. Rippingale recounted, compelling his students with a journey that lead him through wild waters to the cold North West. At this point, Ken had already decided that one day he, too, would be a fishing guide, at the very place his teacher guided: our very own Painter's Lodge.

Mike began guiding in 1956 at 20 years old. He became head guide in '64 and, like so many others in the fishing industry, held his winter job as a teacher. There is a photo in the lodge still today of Mike, on the day he guided Hollywood Legend Glenn Ford, and his son Peter during their visit to Campbell River. It was 1968, and on this day their fishing trip was shadowed by a film crew. Aboard that film crew's boat was none other than a now 14-year-old Ken Poskitt.

It was only a year later that Ken was hired as a guide at Painter's Lodge.

Ken loved the water, he loved a challenge, and after a few years, he discovered he loved another sport also: distance running. In 1971, after three years guiding, Ken had to choose which path to pursue, and at that time, distance running won out. He quit guiding, albeit sadly, and went on to represent Canada as an international track and field runner, and when the time came for another change, he began studying neuroradiology in Victoria, BC. Ken had a drive to surpass his own goals. He was endurance minded and over the course of his young life, he went from fishing guide, to professional athlete to successful physician. But even years later, he never forgot the story his teacher told him in grade six.

Fast forward to today. 80 year old Mike Rippingale is looking severe as he recounts the day he got the phone call.

"Hi Mike, do you remember me? It's Ken Poskitt, from your grade six class! I'm rowing a boat to Alaska!" Ken announced.

Of course, Mike remembered him instantly, but with confusion could only ask, "What the hell are ya doing that for?"

"I'm going just like you did, like you told us about in class!" Ken explained, fully unprepared for what he would hear next.

"But Ken, that was just a story, I never actually went to Alaska! Are you crazy?"

It's a moment they both laugh about now, but Ken's mind was made up, and just as he had planned, he set off from Victoria on the morning of May 16th, 2016. It was an adventure fifty years in the making.

Now, the lodge around us has changed immensely. The memories Mike made as a guide at Painter's Lodge have become faded photos on the walls, for guests to peruse at their leisure. Mike and Ken haven't seen each other since those years they guided here, but they reminisce as clearly as though it was yesterday.

Mike still remembers Ken correcting him in class, and oftentimes being right. He remembers asking Ken's parents to let him push their son further in class, which they agreed to, and he remembers the wild potential he saw in Ken, even at that young age. Years later, as we sit in the Fireside Lounge of Painter's Main Lodge, Mike affirms while sipping his dry gin martini: 'I was right, of course.'

Ken plans to land in Ketchikan, Alaska sometime around mid-June. "If I'm successful, I need good conditions. If I need a survival suit, I'm doing something wrong, so I didn't bring one. I have lifejackets and blankets, of course, but for the most part I'm being cautious and I'm in no hurry." He went on to explain his dream of finding a cruise ship that would take him and his row boat home, but of course he's got alternate plans if that doesn't work out, because 'no, I'm not rowing home.' He stated with a laugh.

Ken was shy to make the point of the story about himself, feeling strongly that Mike Rippingale deserved the credit. He did, however, explain that unlike so many endeavors he's taken on in the past, this one was not about destination. 'The real goal in this journey is about taking my time,' he clarified, 'the challenge is appreciating every moment along the way, that's what I'm trying to teach myself.'

And even though Mike never did make it to Alaska, Ken found a way to bring him along anyways, in a boat called Rippingale.