

BUSTER BIRD: A CHARACTER AND A PERSON OF CHARACTER

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All living things are, for the most part, a product of their environment. If that be the case, Raquette Lake has to be an enviable place to have been raised or live. I know of no other community anywhere that has produced more people with character. My subject this week is a prime example.

Norton "Buster" Bird was born there in 1908, one of nine children. His father worked for that the railroad and he credits that fact for the quality of life they enjoyed in otherwise hard times.

Besides being a man of character, Buster also qualifies as a character, never one to be shy or reticent about taking a stand on what he believed was right; a trademark that was never dimmed by the rank or title of anyone advocating a course he thought was wrong.

Early years in Raquette led to whatever means were necessary to make a living. Most work was connected to the land in one way or another. Catching and selling whitefish at the Raquette Lake Supply for 30 cents a pound was an example.

Guiding and its many facets occupied most of Buster's early years. Bill Payne recalled the pressure he and the others in the party I endured if a racked buck was allowed to make it through the drive. Ten dollars a point was a lot of money to lose in those days.

A captain's license provided work operating the passenger launch for the Antler's and his own vessel, as well. Night watchman for the railroad, cutting ice, wood or the other myriad aspects of caretaking, rounded out the rest of the time.

One whole summer season, Arthur Summers Roach hired him to guide his two children and their young guests around.

An open camp some distance from the main camp was a popular rendezvous spot for Bus and the family chauffeur to entertain their dates. A sudden liking for the camp to overnight there put a damper on their activity and caused the chauffeur to complain. Bus assured him that if he secured the use of the camp's bear rug for one night, he would alleviate the situation.

When the group was ensconced for the night, Buster draped the rug over himself and went into a very convincing mean bear act. Not only did the occupants shun the place, but the family dog did as well. The children's guests turned out to be William Randolph Hearst's offspring, one of whom became Patty's father.

Bus was gone from the area briefly in the 30s and early 40s, working and honing many of the skills that enabled him to perfect the business for which he became well known. The float plane business was his stock in trade and son Don followed in his footsteps, operating the business to this day.

An abiding interest in community affairs led to five terms as Supervisor of the Town of Inlet during the era of the 60's. He became an out-spoken advocate for sportsmen's interests and the float plane operators, a passion he still harbors today in retirement.