

# RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

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July 2015

I was driving back along I-70 after dropping friends off at the airport shuttle when I heard him speak. *You ought to go to the Rincon*. I was, at first, incredulous. The Rincon (true name undisclosed) is a wild and remote river and canyon that is one of our favorite wilderness fishing spots. It also holds one of the highest concentrations of mountain lions and black bears in the state, and is insanely difficult to get into.

“Really?” I replied. “The Rincon?”

*Yes*, came that quiet, confident reply from the One who always knows best, but who never forces his will upon us. Instead, he *invites*. What we do next changes everything.

Adventures begin, as Yvon Chouinard said, when everything falls apart. But that’s not quite true. Adventures always begin first with an invitation—something, or someone, calls to us. A photo of some distant land; a phone call from a friend; a desire bubbling up from the depths within. The story holds its breath waiting to see if we will respond in faith, if we will say “yes” to what seems at the moment a very unsettling proposal; certainly an inconvenient one. My morning plan was focused on stopping for a Chai, not looking for the high-stakes fishing the Rincon requires.

First comes the road into the trailhead. It is, as four wheel tracks go, horrible—infamously bad two years ago when last we ventured in, and the torrential rains of this spring only tore it further apart. Honestly, we should have brought a jeep, or an ATV. But we came in my F250, laughing out loud at the preposterous grade, boulders, and overall insanity as we jolted our way along in 4-low.

This is one of those places where if you break a tie rod or a ball joint, you are hosed. Cell service is 20 miles away and Lord knows what the cost of a wrecker would be to get pulled out. If they even could pull you out. It is the first of many reasons we love this place. Making it to the top feels like a triumph in itself, and joy was already surging as we rigged up for the next phase of the adventure—the descent, on foot, into the canyon and the river of promise.

There is no trail (thank God). You make your way down fifty-degree slopes by memory, following game trails when available, slipping, sliding, trying not to twist an ankle or take a fall palm-down into cactus. Typically this is when you cross what will be the first of many old lion kills, a wonderful reminder of the wildness of the place. Yes, we had a .45 and yes, we whooped and hollered our way into the canyon. The river was still running high with snowmelt, but clear, and oh so promising. Who knows the last time these wild trout have seen a fly? It felt like Christmas morning, with surprises here, there, all around waiting to be unwrapped. There in the mud were fresh lion tracks, an adult and a cub. As we fished our way upriver we could smell a rotting carcass maybe fifty yards behind us. I quoted aloud T.S. Eliot’s line, “The trowel in the hand and the gun rather loose in the holster,” substituting “rod” for trowel. Knowing you could die on the road, on the descent, now on the river by a large carnivore adds such sweet spice to the pursuit of these fish. This is not a day at Uncle Wiggly’s Fish Farm.

The surge of the cold flow against us, the thunder it makes in places of whitewater, the wildness of the steep canyon walls and knowing we were being watched somewhere by those yellow eyes added such drama to the unfolding story. What does this day hold? Pushing through overhanging bushes we came to a place where the water spills into a deep pool, and for a moment the severity of the canyon calmed and quieted; the sensation was palpable. Our shoulders relaxed; we took a deep breath. Here we caught our first wild rainbow, so vibrant and filled with fight. Then I hooked into a fish that would take our breath away.

The U-shaped bend in my rod was the first indication this was no ordinary trout; then we got a glimpse of him during the fight as he rolled in the pool. “This is right out of A River Runs Through It!” my partner yelled. We shouted with joy and wonder, all the while knowing he might break off any moment. When I brought him to hand I was laughing for the wonder of such a fish in such a small river. He was without question one of the biggest most beautiful fish I have ever caught, not just in Colorado but Alaska, Montana, Patagonia.

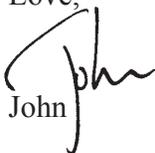
In order to move further up canyon, you need to leave the river and climb the now sixty or seventy-degree slopes of crumbling soil and shale. One fall here and you are three seconds to the bottom with a broken leg or worse. We used branches from a dead tree uphill like ice axes, digging in with each move to arrest our fall. Happiness was overflowing. Life is so much better the more fully you are living.

It wasn't the number of fish that made the day so wonderful; I have had bigger days in terms of numbers. It had to do with the effort to get there, and the skill to catch them, and their stunning beauty and size—wild browns next, four of them, big and strong and gorgeous with their bronze sides and bright red spots. Of course we went on—now in the river, now along the canyon walls—till we reached the last pool, deep and green and flowing hard. It yielded several wonderful fish, back to rainbows this time, with bright red sides. We couldn't keep the smiles off our faces if we tried.

We coaxed the truck out of the canyon, nearly breaking a shock mount on a rock I didn't see, and having arrived at the county highway immediately dove in the Colorado river to wash away the sweat and dust and anxiety. Though we showed up an hour late for dinner, our wives were not upset. They were joyful for the joy we had, and the elk burgers were fresh off the grill, to go with the pasta salad. We told stories into the evening, laughing, sharing photos, sharing the happiness.

It was a perfect day. And those just don't come along very often; they come by invitation only.

[This is an excerpt from an article in our July issue of And Sons Magazine – [andsonsmagazine.com](http://andsonsmagazine.com). Wanted to share the summer joy, and encourage you to listen for invitations.]

Love,  
  
John