

Angel of the Au Sable

By: Tom Deschaine



Calvin “Rusty” Gates, Jr. (1955-2009) was born the son of a Michigan music teacher. In 1970, his parents Calvin (Cal) and Mary Gates, purchased a lodge from the Borchert family with their retirement money. The now called Gates Lodge was originally called the Canoe Inn. It is located on the south bank of the Au Sable River, 8 miles east of Grayling, on the “Holy Waters.”

Rusty’s career on the river began in his teens with responsibilities around the lodge. Also, while in his teens he began guiding and tying flies. His father, an accomplished fly fisherman, in his own right, taught Rusty the art of fly fishing and instilled in him the deep respect he’s always had for the river and the fish.

When ‘Cal’ Sr. finally retired in the early 80s Rusty and his wife Julie were running the lodge full time. The premier lodge, situated on the banks of the river has 14 fully equipped units, a pro shop, professional guide service and a full restaurant, serving 3 meals a day.

Rusty was a professional fly tier, a guide with 30+ years of experience, a proficient fisherman and an author. He was considered by many as the guardian angel of the Au Sable River watershed. A title he righteously earned.

He was the founder and president of the Anglers of the Au Sable. This environmental conservation organization that was founded in 1987 and boast of a membership in excess of 900. Rusty was the epicenter of their many accomplishments which include the establishment of a ‘no-kill,’ flies only regulation for the Holy Waters. They’ve stopped oil and gas drilling along the Mason Tract and stopped the pumping of contaminated water into the Au Sable. The organization also conducts water monitoring projects and river clean up projects. They’ve raised thousands of dollars for stream improvement projects. Their constantly monitoring the activities of Camp Grayling and are fighting for better easement regulations on the river.

Rusty was nationally recognized conservationist. To that end he was honored in 1995 by Fly Rod & Reel Magazine being given the “Angler of the Year” Award. In 2009 he was honored by receiving the Michigan Environmental Council’s, “Petoskey Prize for Environmental Leadership” award.

Rusty’s recent publication of *Seasons on the Au Sable* reflects his deep love and passion for the river and all it has to offer. If you’ve ever fished the Au Sable, reserve a place on your bookshelf for this love story.

Calvin “Rusty” Gates passed away December 19, 2009. He was truly an environmental icon and steward of the mighty Au Sable. He will be deeply missed by his family and many friends.