

Fish'n with Grandpa

I was privileged as a child to fish frequently with my Grandpa Carter and my Dad. When my Dad and Mom would take our family to visit my grandparents in Kirksville, Missouri, Grandpa, Dad, and I would almost always go fishing for a day during the visit.

Grandpa had an old 1935 Model A Ford we would go fishing in. We would get up very early in the morning before daylight to get an early start and have a hearty breakfast before leaving the house. I never could understand why we had to get up so early! But, Grandpa had his car loaded with fishing poles, tackle boxes, lunches, and bait and we'd hit the road before sun-up.

If we were going to fish a river for buffalo and catfish he'd make dough balls and dig worms. Sometimes we'd seine a creek on the way for minnows and crawdads. If we were going to fish for crappie in a lake we'd tow his flat-bottomed duck boat with a 10-horse motor.

Fishing for catfish on a river was always boring. You'd get rigged up, toss your line in the water, and wait for hours. Sometimes you wouldn't get a bite all day. But, I had to leave my line in the river for long periods of time or Grandpa would scold me for not having any patience.

I tried to model that advice with my grandsons, Spencer and Carter, at Santee Lake years later. When I told Spencer, he would never catch a fish if he didn't leave his line in the water, he replied, "Nah, that can't be right!"

One year we went fishing for crappie in Lancaster Lake in northeastern Missouri. It turned out to be a disaster. We baited our hooks with minnows and began to catch some nice-sized crappie once we found the depth where they were hanging out. Crappie tend to hide around old trees submerged underwater, so it was a challenge to catch them without getting your line hung up.

By noon we had a whole stringer full of one-pound fish and larger. We had just decided to call it a day, when I hooked one last fish. I pulled him in, unhooked

him from my line, and was in the process of transferring him to the stringer, when I lost my grip on the stringer, and the entire catch of fish sank into the lake.

I probably lost 20 pounds of fish in an instant. I've felt remorse for losing that stringer-full of fish my entire life, partly because of spoiling the day, partly for losing my Grandpa's stringer, and partly for causing the fish a horrible death fastened to the stringer on the bottom of the lake.

On another fishing trip we had a much happier experience. Grandpa took my Dad and me to Thousand Lakes State Park west of Kirksville during spawning season for carp. We fished from shore with rods and reels using dough balls on treble hooks.

The fish were biting hot and heavy all day. Sometimes we would catch two or three fish at a time with multiple hooks. And, these were one to three-pound fish. By mid-afternoon we had probably caught over two hundred fish. There's no limit on carp, they are considered trash fish. They are bottom feeders like catfish, but if caught in a freshwater lake, they taste great.

The fish we caught that day provided a special treat for us--they were filled with fish eggs because they were spawning! When we cleaned them that night Grandpa saved about 20 pounds of fish eggs to fry with the fish. The only downside to the day's outing was that it took my Grandpa and Dad until about two in the morning to clean, pack, and store over two hundred pounds of fish. I helped until about ten o'clock that night but was so tired I had to go to bed.

The next day we had one of the biggest fish fries I've ever seen. We ate fish until I couldn't stand another one. Carp from that trip tasted great, but they are a challenge to eat. They have dozens of fine bones which you can easily miss and get caught in your throat. So, if you go fishing for carp, be sure to fry them so they are crisp and eat carefully!