

Fish Story – Part I

A story by Russ Sherwin, most of which is true. Copyright 2002

I caught a fish last week. It was my own damn fault, really. I had this line in the water with a hook on the end, and –duh! A fish grabbed it. See, last fall, as we were getting ready to take the boat down the Baja into Mexico, my son, Tom, gave me a fishing rod and reel that he had used years ago and was finished with. He said I might want to fish on the way down. In addition, we had purchased a new gas barbeque. Well, sure. I admit, I like the concept of fishing. It would be nice to catch your dinner, free, out of the ocean. But I only want to catch fish that I like to eat. Like Tuna, for example. Tuna are welcome on *Four Seasons*. No ugly fish, though. We don't eat or even touch ugly fish.

So it's been almost a year, and the pole has been strapped down on the upper deck all this time. I did buy a cedar plug, a cigar shaped thing with a hook on the end that is supposed to catch fish, and I tied it on the end of the line. I also bought a new spool of line and a plastic card with pictures of all the likely-to-catch fish on it. And we have spent almost 10 man-hours and over \$350 obtaining Mexican fishing licenses. Last week I decided it was time to try fishing.

We were traveling south out of Loreto in the San Jose Channel toward La Paz. There were several other boats traveling in the same direction. I called Universally Acknowledged Fishing Expert Steve on the sailing vessel *Blue Chablis* by radio, described this rig that I had inherited, and said, "How do I catch fish with this thing?" Steve said, "Just stream it out one or two boat lengths behind the boat and wait."

Well, dang! It wasn't five minutes until zzzzzzzing!!! Out went the line and there was something on it. I screamed "Slow Down!" to Captain Donna and began reeling it in. Whatever this was on the line felt more like an old sweatshirt than a fish. It didn't flop. As I reeled in more line, though, it started to swim back and forth behind the boat. Then it started going under the boat. The closer it got, the more energetic it got. I began to worry about how I was going to get it aboard. I added to the mental list of things that I needed to buy for future fishing expeditions: a net, gloves, and a gaff hook. Finally I could see a flash of silver. A fish, sure enough. I pulled it up on the swim step, then into the cockpit. At that moment the line parted and I quickly put my foot on the fish. I had neglected to put my new line on the reel. The old line looked fine to me.

Along with the cedar plug and the new line I didn't use, I had purchased a short aluminum baseball bat to kill fish with. Whanging a living creature with a bat is outside my psychological comfort zone. Donna had heard that spraying Vodka in their gills could kill them. We don't normally carry vodka in spray bottles, and the things we had that we could spray, like Windex, white engine enamel and WD-40, seemed inappropriate for killing fish, but we did have a bottle of rotgut Tequila that we refuse to drink. We marinated the fish, the deck and my shoes liberally with the Tequila. It only flopped harder, and seemed to smile a little. It appeared that the bat was the only way. I whanged it over the head, difficult to do without also taking a chunk out of the deck. The first hit was far too tentative. Maybe I should try it with my eyes open. That worked. After a few more flops, Mr. Fish was definitely *muerto*.

Now I owned a fish. I got back on the radio to Steve and said, “Well, that was sure easy.” He asked me what it looked like. “It’s tuna-shaped,” I said. “Wait a minute.” I got my plastic card and looked for a portrait of my fish. Nothing even close. I had caught something the plastic-card people didn’t know about. I ran to the galley and grabbed a can of tuna. I took it out to where the fish was and held up the can. Sure looked like tuna to me. “It’s a tuna!” I announced to Steve. “Just what I wanted. Thanks!” Steve was skeptical. “First tell me what it’s markings are,” he said. I went back out to the fish and examined the markings. “About 8 pounds, tuna-shaped, silver with black stripes down the sides,” I reported back. There was a sigh over the airwaves. “You have a Mexican Skipjack,” my mentor told me. “Inedible.”

What I had was a dead Mexican Skipjack, an open bottle of Tequila, a broken fishing line, and a cockpit that looked like Jeffrey Dahmer’s kitchen. And no dinner. I reluctantly consigned my \$350 inedible fish back to the briney deep and set about cleaning up the boat. A lot of effort for no dinner. But I’ll persevere. One of these days I’ll catch something that not only looks like a tuna but tastes like the ones inside the can.

The End