

Holy Mackerel!

Most fishermen hope to catch that one trophy fish in their lifetime. I went to Florida last summer hoping to catch a trophy fish after my uncle promised that we'd catch fish bigger than me. A trophy fish is more than just self pride; it can put your face on the cover of fishing magazines. I'm a decent angler having caught some nice size fish, but never a big one.

Early one morning, my cousin, Nathan, and I got the boat ready for a long day of fishing. Rods and tackle were easy to load, since Uncle Bill always had everything set out and ready to go. Bait was the worst part, usually smelling like it had been sitting in the sun for days. Today would be a good day of fishing; I had a feeling. We started the rough 7 mile trip to the reef after deciding to fish for yellow-tail snapper. They live near reefs where the water is so clear you can see many beautiful, colorful fish.

Once at the reef, Bill told everybody what to do. Nathan and I got the rods and bait ready. Friends, John and Cameron, were to get the chum bag, as Bill anchored the boat. John and Cameron had difficulty with their task since the chum bag was still sitting on the dock. Quickly, Bill and I improvised making a chum bag out of a trash bag with a fillet knife.

Finally, Nathan and I fished with shrimp on the back of the boat, John and Cameron were on the sides fishing and Bill was overseeing. Snappers instantly started biting and the boat as filling up with fish. We brought in fish until our arms tired from reeling.

John hooked a huge snapper and Bill instructed him to, "pull up, reel down". The drag clicked as more line was pulled out, until, suddenly nothing. John reeled the fish to the side of boat, looking for a whopper. Instead, all that was left of the fish was its head; a barracuda was swimming behind the boat enjoying the luxury of not having to search for food but eating our fish as we hooked them on our lines.

"We'll stop this!" Bill said.

He set up a rod with a ballyhoo, and ran the line on the outrigger off the side of the boat. We waited for the barracuda to take the bait. The fishing slowed; then it stopped. Nathan fell asleep and Cameron took a break. I was watching the sea life around the reef. It was quiet, except for sounds of waves slapping the side of the boat. Nathan's occasional snore, and the lone call of a frigate.

Suddenly, a loud "pop" of line being pulled from the outrigger rang out. The hissing of line followed, and grew louder, waking up Nathan and startling me.

Bill shouted "Alex get up here." "NOW"!

I rushed to grab the rod, started reeling and heard Bill say "Lift up your arms. Put the fighting belt on him."

Nathan struggled to put the belt on me. Everyone was guessing what was on the end of the line. I kept reeling and fighting whatever was hidden below the surface. After 25 minutes, I finally got it to the boat.

Bill said "Damn, that's the biggest Spanish mackerel I have ever seen. Alex, keep its head in the water."

Exhausted, I obeyed and Bill leaned over the side of the boat and gaffed it.

The fish was huge for a mackerel, weighing about 14 pounds instead of the usual 2 pounds. Bill said it might be the world-record Spanish mackerel, but no one really believed him. Catching record fish was a rarity that none of us had experienced, so we put it in the cooler and headed home.

That evening we grilled our days catch, including the mackerel, and enjoyed a great meal. It was the best fish I'd ever eaten. Later, we Googled and found the record mackerel was 13 pounds, 6 ounces. Oh, no!! I had caught a world record mackerel and no one would ever know. A record fish must be weighed and measured immediately, and we didn't do that.

I wouldn't be recognized for my record fish with magazine covers or record books. At first, I was upset, but realized my family and I knew it was a world record. That's what mattered.

I thought to myself, "I guess I had caught that one trophy fish.....Boy, he was good!"