

VOWA/Bass Pro High School 3rd Place Winner

The “Reel” Thing

While many young people favor sitting on a couch exercising their thumbs while playing virtual simulators, nothing measures up to the “reel” thing. Imagine straining to lift a 16-pound bowling ball at the end of a fishing line. It would be hard enough to lift something of this weight and size, but imagine if it were thrashing and rolling around and you were attempting to catch it. This was a challenge that I had to face when I was only eight years old.

As the first glimpse of light flickered through my bedroom window, I arose with apprehension as I was anticipating a long, arduous journey. After a hardy breakfast, I gathered my gear: a tackle box, St. Croix Premier panfish rod, 2000 size Shimano spinning reel, and eight pound SPIDERWIRE braid. From looking at the tackle, I selected several small lure types, since I was intending to catch only a few small fish.

My father and I climbed into the car and began our customary trip to our favorite spot, Portage Lakes. I was wondering if this day would be any different from others. I recalled previous experiences when I had multiple break offs, hordes of pestering mosquitoes, and other fishermen invading my personal spot.

We arrived at the lake around 6 o'clock a.m. After parking the car and removing our tackle (my dad likes to fish, but by himself) we trekked the narrow dirt path to the lake, briars tearing at our pants legs as we went. Soon I found the perfect spot, an embankment parallel to a brush and weed line. I assembled my tackle and started to fish.

After a few hours, the heat became blistering, my mouth felt parched, and my head throbbed. By the late afternoon, I had only caught one black crappie, one green sunfish, one warmouth, and one rockbass. I was very disappointed. Furthermore, everything wrong occurred: the high wind created pesky wind knots, “bird nests,” and big bows in my line; the relentless current kept pushing my jigs into the fray; and finally the sun’s heat caused the fish to seek cover in weeds.

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I kept going until an hour before sunset. Seconds after my decision to leave, a massive jerk nearly took the reel from my hand. I set the hook and realized immediate tension. “Fish on!” I said to myself.

The drag screeched off like a terrified cat, until I noticed my line capacity had reached the backing (the small amount of line on the interior of the spool connecting to the main line). In my own world, I fought the fish for several minutes until I noticed a congregation starting to form around me.

I realized that my rod was bent at what seemed like an impossible arc. A girl standing next to her father yelled, “Daddy, his fishing rod is going to snap!”

This caught the attention of an older man who had several lures stuck in his floppy hat. He asked me, “What ya got on the end of that line, sonny?”

Wanting to remain focused on the situation itself, I gave a quick reply, “It’s probably a bass. I was using a minnow imitation lure.”

The man folded his arms and grunted. By now about a dozen people surrounded me, curious to see what a small boy could pull from the lake. After a half hour of battling the fish, a few people around me volunteered to take over, for I was showing obvious strain.

Finally, after forty-five minutes of reeling in—an inch at a time—I saw the fish start to emerge from the water. By this time my father had arrived, net in hand, ready to assist. We landed the fish together and a cheer went up from everyone around us. The catfish was not the largest ever taken from the lake, but at 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds, it was a personal record I have not yet broken to this day.