I’ve noticed that if children catch fish early in their lives, they usually like fishing. It seems like a basic notion, but I’ve seen enough situations when little ones are subjected to hours of “patience building” with adults who are well-meaning.

My oldest son is eleven now. He caught his first keeper striped a few years ago and he loves fishing. My eight year-old has had some success, but has never been in the “right place at the right time” to catch a big one. He doesn’t make a big deal of it, but I can tell he’d like to. I also know that he’d probably like fishing a bit more after catching a big one.

Recently, I was fishing a marshy shoreline on an incoming tide in a wide salt pond. The youngest boy and my wife were happily kayaking nearby when I had a strike and miss on my chunked squid. I called for her to kayak him over to me in case we had another. On the next cast, the fish struck again. I was using a rod better suited for snappers and mackerel fixed with 6-pound test and the fish screamed line off the reel as the rod tripled. I handed the rod to the 8 year-old and told him not to touch the line and to hold on as I shoved the kayak fishward. I yelled to my wife to follow the fish and began to laugh. I expected a quick but unsuccessful finish to what started as a wild fight.

I had explained to the boys the night before what catching a fish on kayak was like.

“Its like a Nantucket sleigh ride,” I told them, incorrectly expecting them to know what that meant. Their puzzled looks pushed me on.

“In the old days, the whalers in small boats would harpoon a whale and tie the line onto the bow of the boat and hold on for dear life. The ride would be fast and furious and sometimes the boat would be destroyed.”

As the little blue sit-on-top kayak took off, leaving a wake behind it, I continued to laugh at the site of the 43-pound boy holding on to the screaming reel as his mom paddled furiously to keep up as the big fish surfaced and thrashed about.

Time passed and the line didn’t snap. The fish didn’t wrap around a buoy or any of the numerous weedy rocks in the cove. The rod didn’t break or fly out of the little guy’s hands. My laughter stopped as my expectation rose. After about ten minutes, the kayak was about 300 yards away and my wife had begun paddling backward toward the marsh. In five minutes, they had maneuvered the boat to a spot where I could help land the fish.

As the late afternoon shadows began to hit the marsh, I slid my thumb into the bottom lip of the striped and lifted it to the boy, his face alight with wonder. 28 inches! A keeper!

I looked at him as he gazed down, smiling, at the line-sided monster.

“Do you want to eat it?” I asked.

“Nah,” he said, without hesitation “Let’s let it go for good fishing Karma.”

I had to laugh a little. I’m sure that I had mentioned to him before that sometimes it’s good to let one that you could keep go, just because. We made sure to take a couple of pictures for posterity.

We gently moved the fish forward through the cold water for about five minutes until it began to thrash about. We pushed it out from the marsh grasses into the deeper water, the powerful tail gave two good sweeps and the light green shadow was gone for good. The Nantucket Sleigh Ride had come in just the right place, at just the right time.