

A Day You Drem About

by JOHN WOLF



Why is it that some of the best fisherman I know are also some of the hardest working people I know? There's a saying that with hard work, you make your own luck and fishing is sometimes a lot about luck. My brother used to tell me that fishing luck was dependent on how much "time on water" you put in. Sooner or later, if you are out there, your investment of time pays off.

A few weeks ago, a friend of my father called me. Hal is one of a small group of men who consider my dad a close friend and a mentor of sorts. Hal and my dad spent their careers working outdoors with their hands. They appreciate the value of hard work. They like getting things done.

They also both love fishing. Hal asked if I'd join him during a small neighborhood fishing tournament in September. The tournament is a friendly one, but I know Hal was looking to defend his "title" from last year. I gladly said yes, knowing that my 14-foot Whaler would be a rough ride in Block Island Sound chasing stripers most days in September. He said I could bring my 10 year-old son who was looking forward to the trip.

We met Hal at the small marina in the back of the salt pond. I hadn't been on this pond since my earliest days of fishing saltwater, more than 30 years ago. The day was expected to be clear and windy, but we were met at the dock by a ribbon of thick fog holding back the sun's first rays. Hal's 17-foot Key West moved quickly through the calm of the pond. As we travelled, duckblinds and small

marsh islands I remembered from boyhood appeared out of the mist. We made our way up the snake-like breachway channel. It was the same channel I remember rowing up as a boy with my brothers. Looking into the clear water brought back a flood of memories about my first summers in Rhode Island.

As we approached the end of the Breachway, Hal gave two blasts on the horn to give the shore fisherman on the end a heads up that we were coming through.

Block Island Sound was calm, but not still. Several bigger swells greeted the bow as we moved with the outgoing tide. In the low morning light, we saw signs of fish immediately. Terns and gulls were easy to spot moving back and forth and hitting the water after baitfish.

We rigged to troll an umbrella rig right away. My son had never seen one and was full of questions. As Hal guided the

wire out of the spool we saw the first fish break water in front of the boat.

It's hard to describe to non-fishing people what it feels like in the minutes between when you realize that you are in "fishy" water and when you can get your first line in the water. It's a little like a mix between Christmas morning and a first date: You don't want to screw it up, but you want to get things going so fast that your hands sometimes begin to shake.

That's the situation we were in. Once the line got down and my son was assigned to watch the pole for action, it took about 2 minutes before it doubled over and Hal began cranking back, showing the boy how to spool the reel correctly. The fish was heavy. When the rig got close to the boat, we all realized we

had a keeper. I pulled the net up and we slapped high fives immediately. The 35-incher was a great way to start our day. We had no idea how good it would get.

For the next hour, we picked up short stripers every few minutes. My son had his turn cranking the wire and testing his "fish muscles" on a 9-pound chopper bluefish. As we moved east following birds, the nature of the surface splashes changed. The swirls and small splashes turned to loud "pops" and higher white plumes. It seemed like fish of a different class were moving in.

As we trolled into the next group of fish, I saw a big splash to port and threw a casting plug. As the plug gained momentum with the combined trolling and reeling speed, a good fish smashed it, nearly ripping the rod from my hands. Line

peeled off the reel and the rod tripled. The fight was a good one and we landed a 37-incher. For the next hour, we picked up several more keeper-sized fish. My son landed the last one as big fish smashed the surface around the boat.

We were tired and due back for the contest weigh-in. For the first time in my life, I broke my dad's old fishing rule: "Never leave biting fish." For us, on this day, enough was enough.

"This is the kind of day you dream about," Hal said as we headed in to port.

We would regale my dad with the full story later. I could envision him, sitting in his living room chair, with a fire burning, listening carefully to every piece of the story my son gave him. It was good to have things come together like that.

Fishing with my son, in a tournament, on the boat of my dad's good friend, the day was the kind you dream about.

