

Pirates Cove

I was grounded. A ten year old locked up in his room during summer just does not work. Ray and I were in big trouble. I had been grounded before, but never this long. I mean, a whole month! I blame the whole incident on Ray's parents. I had come to the conclusion that they were not the smartest parents in the world. I say this because for Ray's tenth birthday they gave him a pellet gun. We were ecstatic as we stared at the gleaming firearm fresh from the wrapping paper. Within three hours of our possession of that "toy" we were bored of shooting tin cans and soda bottles and we had decided to hunt something more monumental. The problem was, there's not a whole lot to hunt in our sound side development known as Pirates Cove. Ray and I marched along the small curving streets and narrow canals that ran in between the three story condos of this community until we found our quarry. Three streets over from ours there lived a lady named Mrs. Vicksburg who owned the fattest cat I have ever seen. It really weighed practically nothing but it had thick fur that puffed way out and it look really fat. Not only was it "fat," but it was also extremely mean. Ray and I could never walk past the house without it trying to attack us. So, naturally, we took advantage of this perfect chance to enact our revenge. I will never forget crouching in the bushes watching this extravagant beast amble around on her porch. The feline strutted, its gold-orange mane of fur shining in the sunlight. Ray lay prone in front of me taking careful aim. He squeezed the trigger and the animal became stiff and fell to the ground. We looked at each other in disbelief and then ran over to inspect our prey. As soon as we stood over the beast, the animal sprung his trap. With an orange flash he came to life. I felt razor sharp claws swipe across my shin and heard Ray yelp. With a reflex I lashed out with my other leg and sent the cat flying. The force of my blow sent the cat soaring across the yard

and into the canal next to her house with a gigantic splash. As soon as we heard the loud splash Ray and I bolted. Ray ran ahead of me holding his bloody arm as I limped behind.

“That damn cat!” Ray exclaimed breathlessly. We had picked up that kind of colorful vocabulary from the sailors down at the marina. We weren’t really sure what all the words meant but, in this case, I agreed with Ray. It was not until later that we realized, in our pain and confusion, we had left the gun in Mrs. Vicksburg’s yard. So she found out it was us and told our parents and now we were grounded.

I sat gazing longingly out across the shiny blue surface of the Pamlico Sound. I stared through the faint reflection of myself trying to make the time go faster. The reflection showed a tan, skinny ten year old boy with a mop of wavy brown hair hanging over his forehead. I flicked my head backward to get the hair away from my brow and focused my attention on a charter boat passing under the bridge. I had to get out and do something. The charter boat was freedom to me. Its teal colored bottom was one with the water as it slashed through the glassy surface. As I watched this beautiful scene a stick hit the window. I looked down into the street below and to my disbelief, Ray was in my yard. The kid truly was a master of deception. He pointed down the street to where my mom and his mom were deep in conversation in his yard and then waved frantically for me to come with him. I hurtled down the stairs and out of my house. I did not ask Ray how he had managed to distract our moms and get away from his house, all I cared about was that I was free. I found him in the bushes near my yard with all of our fishing gear. Ray and I had the most perfect fishing set up a kid could ask for. The fishing dock that looked out over the sound near our houses had a small floating section attached to it. This part sat lower than the rest of the dock and Ray and I could fish from it and not be seen by our parents. Using our “secret spot” we could fish as long as we wanted. We climbed down into our “fishing hole” and

cast out our lines. We sat with our feet in the water and prayed for a bite while we watched the world unfold around us. We watched the different charter boats come in and out of the marina, saw what they caught, and hoped for similar luck. On this particular day Ray caught a small Spot within the first few minutes but then everything slowed down. We sat there laughing about Mrs. Vicksburg's cat and discussing how we had been passing the time locked away in our houses. After enjoying ourselves for a long time I felt a gigantic tug on my fishing poll. I stopped mid-sentence as I stared wide eyed as my fishing bole bent double with the tip barely touching the top of the water.

"What the —," I adjusted the drag on my fishing poll to keep it from breaking and the sound that was emitted as the line flew out of the reel muffled Ray's last word. I tightened the drag so that the fish would not get too far away but something had changed. Ray and I looked at each other with confused looks. Suddenly we had the sensation that we were moving. With a glance behind me I found that we had separated from the rest of the dock and were being pulled, floating dock and all, out into the sound.

"What!? What is going on? What happened to the rope," I almost yelled. Ray reached down and picked up the rope that had kept us tied to the dock.

"It must've been cut by the barnacles," he concluded as the severed rope splashed back into the water. "Well, I guess we just have to swim back to shore."

"What about this fish, we can't just pass this one up," I reasoned as I strained to hold the rod upright.

"True," Ray said thinking for a second "anyways, this could be an adventure." Our conversation stopped as a shadow passed over us. We had passed under the bridge that connected our barrier island home to the mainland. The towering structure of concrete and metal

loomed over us. Its massiveness seemed to warn us that we were taking on a task too big for us but we, being ten years old, did not pick up the hint.

I had never felt a fish this powerful. I made slow and steady progress cranking the reel but it was beginning to take a toll on me. Ray and I took turns reeling while the other one lay sweating on the moving dock, trying to regain some strength. We lost track of time or any sense of where we were as we were pulled by this mammoth of a fish. We forgot about how we were grounded and supposed to be in our rooms, forgot about our family, our life, our world. All that mattered was for us to land this fish.

“Holy...,” Ray exclaimed in disbelief. I was sprawled over the dock and sat up quickly to see what was wrong. I stared down into the mysterious green water and saw, shining below the surface, what had been pulling us. A monster of a fish with a long body turned sideways revealing brilliant strips streaking down its side and a gigantic eye that gazed up us. For this split second I stood in awe of this majestic sight but then the fish turned downward into the dark deep. Ray was flung onto his stomach by this force and I lunged to grab him to keep him from going overboard. We both got into a sitting position and began to work together reeling in this massive fish.

“Did you see the size of that thing!?!” Ray said breathlessly.

“Yeah! Striped bass... I didn’t know... big ones... came into... this sound.” That was all I could manage in reply as the fish was taking all of my energy. We pulled with everything we had until the gigantic swimming creature was right up next to us. We could see his massive body swimming alongside our “vessel.” I let go of the rod and in one sweeping motion grabbed the net and splashed it into the water. I hit the floor of the dock, twisted, and tried to rip the net upwards. Somehow I managed to roll the fish up onto the side our dock and Ray and I collapsed.

The fish barely fit into the net and had sunk half the dock below the water. We struggled up to our knees and stared at the shining scales covering the slick body of the biggest Stripped Bass I had ever seen. It stared back at us, seemingly paralyzed as it gleamed in the sun. Suddenly, the fish lurched. It flopped up into the air and swung its gigantic tale into Ray's straightened arm. Ray had been sitting on his knees and leaning on his left arm. I heard a snap and Ray screamed as he came crashing down on his back. I dove on top of the fish to keep it from flopping back into the water and stared at Ray as he rolled around in pain. His arm was broken. It was horrible; I could see blood running freely from his elbow and what had to be a bone jutting out at an angle. I sat there, holding the fish down thinking about what I should do. I had to help Ray, but if I got off the fish it would surely get away. Even though this was the most incredible fish I had ever seen, I had to help my friend. I let go of the fish and stumbled over to help Ray.

The splash of the fish flopping back into the water did not bother me as I helped Ray to a sitting position. I noticed a boat had spotted us and was heading over. The sun was setting behind it and created a sense of majesty in the moment. As the water sparkled around the drifting dock I couldn't help but smile as I thought about what they were going to say when they saw two kids on a fishing dock floating out in the middle of the channel.

Ray saw me smiling and through his pain said "Yep, this is going to make one great fish story." We began to laugh. One of us had a broken arm and we had just let the fish of our dreams get away, but we laughed anyway. I caught sight of the bridge over my right shoulder and realized, it wasn't as big as I had thought before. I mean, nothing too big for some ten year olds. Life was life, and for us, all that mattered was the adventure.