

a changed man, changed for the worse. He was ungrateful to me even after all I had done for him, but seemed willing to accept my services once more. I became firm, saying, "Ernie, don't you realize you will never succeed in life if you remain such a weakling?" Ernie coughed and spat in the corner.

"The world's against me. I've tried, tried hard. I worked twenty hours a day and have been sick for months. Even Imogene and the children deserted me," he sobbed.

For a moment I almost became soft-hearted. My eyes penetrated his, which reflected the sorrows of a beaten man—a failure in society—yet a product of that society. Having made my resolution, I turned and slowly walked away, my steps echoing aimlessly along the dirty brown floor. Outside the sun was breaking on a new day.

## A Special Fishing Trip

Norman Wilkens

**T**HE roar of the motor as we sped through the night seemed to add to the excitement of the evening. With every turn of the wheels I was coming closer to an experience which I had dreamed about for many years. I was going fishing at Reelsfoot Lake, Tennessee.

We arrived at 5:00 a. m. I was ready to start fishing right there and then, but my dad said that we had better get some sleep first. I thought that I was wide awake, but it didn't take long for the bed to take its effect, even though my two bed partners sounded like busy sawmills.

At 7:30 we were up and ready to go. Our breakfast consisted of tomato juice and Vienna sausages. Who cares about eating when good fishing is at hand?

Each person had a guide to show him the best spots to fish and how to catch the big ones. A person really needs a guide down there because the lake is nothing more than a swamp flooded with water from the Mississippi. The guides were combination philosophers, fishermen, hunters, explorers, and politicians, not to mention experts on the American language. My guide's name was Paul. He was the only guide for miles with a college education, but I believe that he had forgotten everything that he had learned. His language was not much more than a drawl, and his clothes looked as if they hadn't been washed in years. But considering everything, it would have been very hard for me not to like him, for he was the type of man one likes at sight.

Bass fishing is the main sport at Reelsfoot, and Paul and I were throwing everything but the kitchen sink at those bass. We worked

every trick in the book to hook one of the big ones. Since the weather was warm and the fish would be deep, we used under-water baits. When it cooled off, surface baits were put into operation. We hit at the side of logs, under fallen trees (sometimes in them), in the lily pads, and along the shoreline, but still no luck. To say the least, I was beginning to feel that perhaps this lake was like all the rest, no bass. But every evening my dad and George would bring the limit and would laugh at me and my empty stringer. Although I always got my limit in the smaller fish, a one-pound bluegill doesn't compare very well against a six-pound bass.

We were going to stay only three days, and the time was almost gone. We had a few hours left, and we debated whether it would be wise to go out and try again. Of course, I was all for it. I still felt that there was a big one out in the lake with my name on it. Dad and George decided to give me one more. They were so positive that I wouldn't catch anything that they made me a little wager to back up their boasts. What else could I do but take them up on the bet and hope the bass was on my side?

We rowed the boat to a shady spot about a block from the cabin and fixed our lines. The water was very scummy from the algae which had formed during the summer, but it was a perfect feeding place for bass. I spotted a submerged log about twenty-five feet straight ahead and cast in that general direction. Something hit the plug, and I saw a splash a few feet to the left of the log. The pole began to dance like a yo-yo, and it bent over as if it were going to break. I took in slack, set the hook, and prepared for the battle.

The bass dived for the bottom and headed for the lily pads. I kept a tight line on him and slowly maneuvered him away from there. The algae were beginning to cake on the line to add to my difficulties. The bass darted from left to right, breaking surface now and then, trying to throw the plug, but no luck. This was one fish that wasn't going to get away.

I guess the scum was wearing him down as it was me, for very shortly the struggle wasn't as vicious as it had been. Then slowly I reeled him in. But just as I had him near the boat, he started all over again. Diving underneath the boat, he tried to get me snarled up in a stump. But that just wasn't to be, for finally the old bass gave up and we netted him.

It turned out to be a five-pounder and the biggest catch of the day. I took great pleasure in collecting the bet and throwing in a few remarks of my own for a change. My fishing companions were quite surprised, to say the least.