

## ONE CLOSE CALL

### Angler Publishes 'Poor Boy' Shark Tale In National Magazine

BY ERIC CARLSON

When Bob Preston returned to New Jersey last summer after two weeks at Holden Beach, his fishing club buddies could scarcely believe the story he told about his adventures in the 12th annual Poor Boy Shark Tournament.

"Man, you gotta write that one down!" they said. So he did. After reading his harrowing account of nearly being killed while night-angling for sharks in the Cape Fear River, they were even more amazed and urged Preston to submit the story to a national fishing magazine.

So he did. "After a few months, I didn't hear anything, so I called and asked them to send it back," said Preston as he relaxed on the porch of his family's Holden Beach vacation home last week. "They said they couldn't do that. Because it was going to be published in the June issue!"

That's how Preston, who said he has "never written a thing" in his life and "barely passed English," became the unlikely author of the monthly "Fish Tales" article in "Sport Fishing" magazine's June 1994 issue.

It all started last summer, when Preston contacted the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries to get the latest fishing regulations. Included was a list of annual sport fishing tournaments. As an avid offshore angler who's been coming to Holden Beach for 20 years, Preston checked to see if there were any events scheduled here during his summer vacation.

When he found out about the annual shark fishing competition out of Shallotte Point, Preston called the tournament headquarters at Hughes Marina and was welcomed to join the crew on one of the boats. The rest, as they say, is "his" story:

"At the captain's meeting early Thursday morning, I met my skipper Vern," wrote Preston (who changed the names to protect the innocent). "He'd been fishing this tournament for seven years. His pal Hank, who'd trailed his boat over from Fayetteville, planned to fish next to us."

Preston goes on to tell of his bewildering introduction to shark fishing (Brunswick County style), including descriptions of Vern's boat—looking "like she needed lots of TLC" with no radio or Loran; the chum of choice—a 50-pound bag of Gravy Train dog food; the drag buoys—eight-gallon jugs attached to the line to help tire the shark out; and Vern's secret shark bait—a dead chicken.

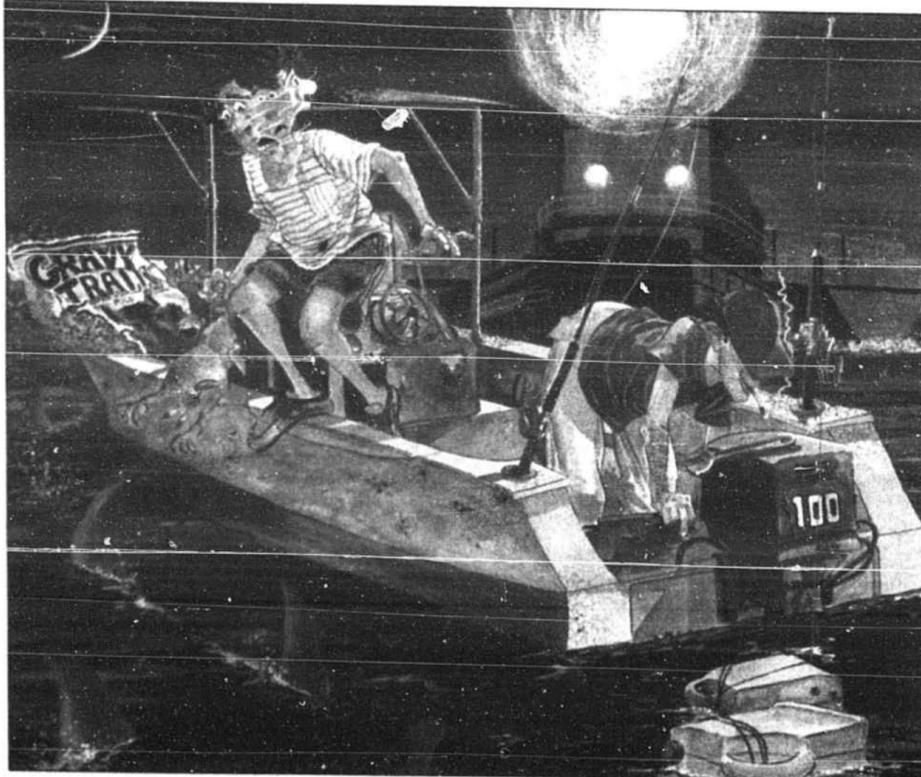
"One of my buddies fishin' this tournament would go 'round and pick up road kills for bait. Fished possum, 'coon, cats—you name it," Vern assured me."

After rocking and rolling offshore with no success (dragging anchor as bits of Vern's boat came apart beneath them) Preston wrote of being relieved to hear that they were heading toward calmer water in the mouth of the Cape Fear River, a favorite haunt for big sharks.

But as it turned out, the fun was just beginning. They dropped anchor at the edge of the big shipping channel, baited the lines, got the Gravy Train chum slick flowing and settled down to wait for a big strike.

Late that night, Preston recalled being awakened by Vern, who calmly remarked that he thought their boat might be drifting into the middle of the channel.

"His words weren't completely registering in my be-



ADRIFT AND WITHOUT POWER in the Cape Fear River shipping channel, Holden Beach vacationer Bob Preston contemplates jumping overboard during a night of fishing in last year's local Poor Boy Shark Tournament. He said illustrator Rick Martin captured the scene perfectly in a drawing that accompanied Preston's article about the experience, published this summer in "Sport Fishing" magazine.

fuddled brain when a long, piercing blast had me bolt upright," Preston wrote. "I struggled to see over the transom. Less than a mile up the channel, coming right towards us, was an ocean tug. Her three vertical white lights told me she was towing something and bearing down on us in a hurry."

Suggesting that Vern might want to start the engine, Preston said he grabbed the anchor rode and "started hauling line for all I was worth." His anxiety increased as he heard the distinctive clicking sound of a starter attached to a dead battery. With the barge bearing down on them from 150 feet away, Preston watched Vern attach an auxiliary battery.

"Just then he turned the key," Preston wrote. "At the click-click-click, Vern scratched his head and said, 'Doggone. I guess this one's dead, too.'"

"By now I had one foot on the gunwale and was ready to swim for it," Preston recalled. "Then I remembered that we were one of several boats in the channel which

had been calling sharks all night with dog food, pig's blood and chunks of fish—not to mention that chicken.

"As I tried to decide which would be the least unpleasant way to die, I noted the barge had turned ever so slightly. I waited, unable to breathe or move, as the enormous steel wall pounded by our little boat so close I could have almost reached out and touched it."

Needless to say, Preston lived to tell the tale (and even got it published). He remembers getting dropped off in Holden Beach that morning and going out on a pontoon boat with friends later in the day. As they enjoyed the leisurely cruise up the waterway he recalls seeing Vern's boat motoring toward the Cape Fear, ready for another night of shark fishing.

It was nine months later before Preston's article in "Sport Fishing" hit the news stands. He said the editors left his story pretty much intact, although they embellished the language a bit to make it more folksy. But what amazed Preston was the artwork, drawn by the

magazine's staff illustrator Rick Martin.

"When I saw it, I couldn't believe it," Preston said. "He captured the whole situation perfectly. I thought to myself that this man had to have been with us!"

Winding up his latest visit to the Brunswick Isles last week, Preston said he just retired from a career with the New Jersey State Treasury Department and is "hoping to be a Holden Beach resident within a few years. While on vacation, Preston said he "can't go a day" without fishing from the beach and also likes clamming and offshore angling too.

"I don't think I want to be a writer. That's not my forte," he said. "I'd rather go fishing."

A resident of Indian Mills, N.J., Preston keeps a 27-foot sport fishing boat at Toms River and likes to go wreck fish fishing for sea bass, trout and other varieties. In good weather, he often travels offshore for tuna and yes, even shark.

"I'm no stranger to shark fishing," he said. "We just have a different way of doing it."

Preston said he has taken a lot of ribbing about the article from his fishing buddies back home in Indian Mills. He often hears friends hollering from another boat, "You got any chickens on board?" But he admits that Gravy Train is beginning to catch on up north.

"Hey, whatever catches fish, right?" he said. "It's a whole lot cheaper than a bag of chum!"



RELAXING ON THE PORCH of his family's Holden Beach vacation home, Bob Preston of Indian Mills, N.J., displays the national fishing magazine containing an article he wrote about fishing in the annual Poor Boy Shark Tournament out of Shallotte Point last summer.



AS BIRDS SUCH as this green-backed heron live out their lives in our midst, they don't seek our approval or seem to care what value we assign to them.

## We Don't Take Bows!

BY BILL FAVER

Several years ago an interesting little book for children was published with the title "Clams Can't Sing."

The theme explored in the book is that because clams can't sing like some of the assembled group, they must just sit and listen. As the story develops, the clams do put together a "song" and surprise the group! When their song is applauded and the audience demands more, the clams respond is "We don't take bows!"

This storybook answer can remind us we ought not to expect human-like responses from creatures which are not human. They have their own responses and contributions and ways of living.

We often try to define their lives based on our

judgements and values. We assess their performances based on our understandings of what they do.

Perhaps we need to try seeing them for what they are—living organisms with a reason and a right to share life on this planet. Perhaps we should overcome the temptation of assigning a value to them based on how useful they may be to us.

It may be humbling for us to realize that birds and worms and thousands of other creatures do not need human beings in order to survive. In fact, they would probably survive much longer without us and our interference in their lives.

One of the best ways to learn appreciation of other life forms is to see them in their own environment doing their own thing! They aren't asking for approval or playing to us as they live, reproduce, and die. And, as they live out their functions of life, they don't take bows!

## Heart Walk Planned For October 1

Walkers throughout Brunswick County will put on their favorite walking shoes Saturday, Oct. 1, to raise money for the Brunswick County Division of the American Heart Association.

The walk will begin and end at Shallotte Middle School on the morning of Oct. 1.

Participants in the Heart Walk collect donations from friends and co-workers to raise money to fund cardiovascular research. Cardiovascular disease and stroke are North Carolina's number-one killer, accounting for 43 percent of all deaths.

*"Walking can help people get physically fit and condition their hearts and lungs."*

—Judy Seaboldt

The non-competitive, just-for-fun event is expected to draw participants of all ages. American Heart Walk is a national event sponsored by Lederle Laboratories and is held in communities throughout the

country.

Judy Seaboldt, event chairman, said funds raised through American Heart Association walk pledges and donations will support the association research, public and professional education and community service programs.

"We are trying to spread the word that walking can help people get physically fit and condition their hearts and lungs," Seaboldt said. "It is an activity the entire family can enjoy."

For more information about participating in the walk, call Seaboldt at NationsBank, 579-3550.

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