

The First Fishing Trip

Muizenberg, Western Cape

The smells of fishing. A rather bizarre heading. To some it would conjure a rather unpleasant fragrance of stale bait, engine oil and diesel fumes...the harbours, wharfs and piers... For some who know what I'm talking about it brings a sentimental journey into the carefree days of youth...of a child who accompanies a father a uncle or some peer who takes him on an adventure into a dimension of life that is never ending. Fishing is not about only about catching fish but is an introduction to a full spectrum of life. The environment where fish are found in the way they were created is perfect before man interfered and commercialized it. It was nature at it's purest.

My first recollection of fishing was when my father said he would take me and my brother fishing. I remember the first introduction well...the day before my dad prepared traces while my brother and I watched with great fascination. The trace to the hook, he demonstrated to us must be stronger than the trace to the sinker. Why we asked...his logical answer was; if you hook a fish and the sinker gets caught in the rocks, you don't want to lose the fish do you. That made perfect sense to our young minds as after all that was the purpose of fishing wasn't it? Well, indeed in this context it is but unbeknown to us at that time we would learn that there is far more to it than this.

We sat in hero-worship as we watched dad make up the traces. In our little minds we pictured the fish being caught and the thrill of bringing home to mummy to cook for us. Unbeknown to us this was an instinctive call in man...the hunter and the capturer to catch and eat those things created by God to survive...long before shops and supermarkets...it represented independence and self-sufficiency.

This has sadly changed over the years because of commercialization. Children today just eat what's put in front of them without taking a thought to its origins. They eat a tasty leg of lamb with gusto but if you reminded them that it was that cute wooly creature that they hugged on the animal farm that the school tour bus took the class to, they'd be horrified. As the populations of the world have grown, so we have been forced away from the roots of natural existence...we have lost touch or been disconnected.

Dad finally completed the preparation of the following days adventure...adventure it was to us as we had never done these ourselves. He told us that we were to go to bed early as we would have to wake up very early because that's the best time to catch fish. In our little minds this made sense to us because yes the fish must be hungry and wanting their breakfast after sleeping all night...in a child's uncomplicated logic and reasoning this all made good sense. Dad also said that the tide would be low the next day so we could cut red-bait from the rocks. Dassies (blacktail) and Hottentots love red-bait and those were the fish we were going to catch.

Christopher and I could hardly sleep that night...it was rather like the night before Christmas...the anticipation and excitement was that intense to us then.

That day we caught a few fish on the rocks at Baileys Cottage in Muizenberg...dad catching most of them but with his casting assistance we managed a few. Fish were in abundance in those days...they seemed to be biting the minute the bait settled down in the turbulent gullies which dad cast into. Mum cooked them for supper and never did fish taste so good.

These memories have stayed all these years, helped by the odours of the churned up surf (a very clean, sea weedy and distinct smell that the Western Cape waters have)...the pungent odour of fresh red-bait combined with the not unpleasant smell of freshly cleaned rock fish.

As years went by I slowly climbed the elevator to different types of fishing, more sophisticated and successful fishing...a lot of it I cannot remember but this day remains clearly in my memory. The day too has firmly engrained in my senses...the smells...the odours and the fragrances.