

Steve  
WILLEY



MATT HANEY/DN

# Angling for fish

## Bait for the sport of 'kings': underwear

Ever since I allowed my dad to write a column about his favorite Christmas memory, he has hounded me weekly for another chance to be in print.

I tried to explain that it was a one-shot deal, but I quickly conceded defeat when he threatened to cut me off financially.

My father's monthly financial "support" consists of \$1.37 in food stamps and a limited edition "The Rescuers Down Under" coin, which my father claims will be worth "billions one day." And of course, as the sole owner of every single coin ever produced, he's "sitting prettier than a puppy with 12 peters."

Now, my dad has long laid a claim to the title of "The World's Greatest Fisherman." Having fished numerous times with the old man, I must admit he does have an amazing ability to obtain fish.

But despite his productivity, he has trouble getting recognized as a professional by any of the angling societies. Perhaps the main reason he has been purposely ignored stems from an incident occurring on June 18, 1953, during a BASS MASTER'S tournament.

Dad easily won the event, catching 50 more pounds of fish than his closest opponent. But when he was asked how he arrived at such fantastic results, my dad responded in what would prove to be a career-ending way.

"See, ya'll don't know how to do it." Dad told the soon-to-be astonished crowd. "Whatcha gotta do is throw you underwear in the lake; next thing you know them fishes will come turning their bellies up — then all you do is pick them suckers out of the water, jus' like you was picking strawberries."

As you can no doubt see, I'm a little apprehensive about letting Dad speak his mind; it tends to be embarrassing. But I don't even think Dad could corrupt something as pure as fishing. So without further adieu ...

"I just plain love to fish. If a body would come up to me today and ask me what I would lop off my tongue for, I'd say, 'fishing.' My boy, Steve, he likes to fish too. I used to take him fishing with me when he was just a little shit.

"I didn't take him because he was



a good fisherboy. Naw, I always took Steve on account of how much I used to enjoy watching his mama whup-up on him for coming home so muddy. I'll never forget what he used to always scream.

"Whhawww! Mama, you killing me! Don't you know daddy's been throwing me in the mud all along? Whhaaww! How you think I get mud in my nose by just playin'?"

"Goddamn that was funny! He was squalling like a drunk mule that fell down an elevator shaft. Anyway, Steve tells me now that he catches fish way up there in Nebraska, but I know better. The only thing that boy's ever caught with a fishing hook is my eyelid.

"That's what makes me think that Steve ain't really my boy. If he was, he'd of got some of my talent. For real, there ain't a fish in all these United States that I can't catch — at least when I'm sober. For some reason, I just can't catch no fish if I been drinking.

"Why shoot, I remember one time, me and my old hound dog Dixie split us a case of Schlitz on the way to the fishing hole. We was two sheets to the wind by the time we got there. Ol' Dixie was so drunk that she'd try and bark but the only thing that come out was the Johnny Cash song, "The Man in Black." I wasn't no better. I spent six hours fishing before I realized I was casting onto the highway.

"Them were golden times, though. I don't drink no more when I fish. I don't need to — on account of I was born to fish.

"Steve's gran'mama will tell you that when I was birthed, not only did I come out sideways, but I had a tackle box with me too. Sad thing is, that was her second most painful birth. My brother Donny come out riding a John Deere.

"Now, you're probably saying, 'Well, Mr. Willey, if you so good at fishing, why ain't I ever seen you on one of them TV shows?' The answer is easy. See, I won't resort to the

trickery them fishing stars do. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? All them TV fishermen got scuba people swimming under their boats and hooking the fish.

"Know how I know? Well, I used to be one of them suckers for Roland Martin back in the '70s. See, it was my job to swim underwater, catch the fish and then tug on the line when I had 'em hooked.

"One tug meant that I meant that I had a big one on the line and the fisherman was supposed to hoop and holler like crazy. Two tugs meant it was a baby and three tugs meant that I have somehow gotten myself involved in one helluva altercation with an alligator and they bess go to a commercial before my arms float up without me.

"And that's what's got me so cotton-picking mad at them pro-fishermen. They fish for fun, but for me, it was for survival.

"When Steve was just a fat, little baby, I had to make for sure that he had fish in his bottle everyday. If the fish ain't biting, I can't go home. I gotta feed my boy! Hell, I remember one time, I fished from sunup till 10:30 at night without so much as a nibble.

"Then it dawned on me: I ALWAYS KEEP A NUDIE PHOTO OF WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT IN MY WALLET FOR THEM SPECIAL OCCASIONS! So I tried it and lo and behold, my boy got to eat a 14-pound carp for supper. It would have made McGuyver slap his mama.

"Now I know this here paper ain't gonna prove I'm the best fisherman there is. All I can do is extend an invitation. So next time you're in Mississippi, look me up and I'll show you. But don't bring no cool beer or I might mistake you for a trophy bass and get you mounted. Or worse yet, maybe my hound, Dixie, will mount you. Heh-heh.

"See boy, I told you I wasn't going to embarrass nobody. You was worried for nothin'."

(Author's note: Once again, I stand corrected by my father. I am again found in the crushing grip of his intelligence.)

Willey is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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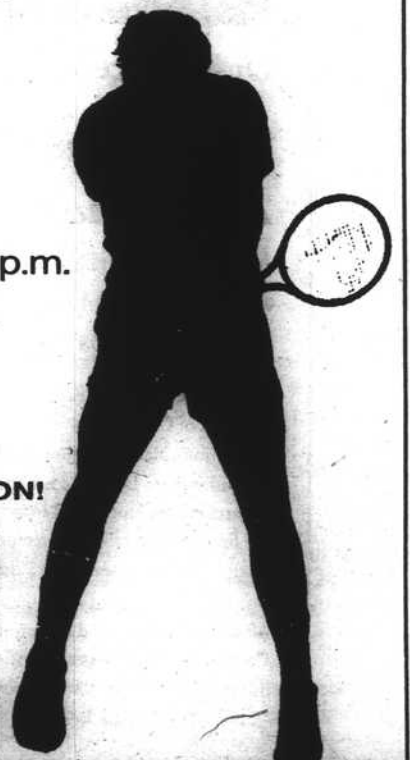
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