

“My fishing experience with Michael on the Wyong River”

- he was five years old.

By Peter Motte

Michael's Fishing Lesson

It was Friday afternoon, and I had just picked up Michael from his school. He would stay with us until he was picked up by his parents 1.5hrs later. I always tried to vary our after-school activity and today fishing was on the agenda.

Michael was new to fishing; he had only had one lesson previously. So today would be a long afternoon for both of us. His lesson today would be on our own jetty. It was a good sound jetty but not notable for the fish it helped catch. In fact, keen fishermen that I am, I had never caught any fish that were of legal size from the jetty. By the time I had collected the rod and bait for Michael, half an hour had passed. Only 1 hour to go.

Michael's lesson started slowly as he was having trouble casting the line. After a while Michael was handling the rod and line better so we put bait on the hook to see if we could tempt a fish to bite. I could see that this was going to be a long afternoon. After a while attending to Michael's fishing needs, like untangling the line, etc I realised that time was slipping by and thought that it would be more interesting for me to fish as well.

I thought that while I was here, I would put bait on my line and see if there is anything worthwhile in the river. Michael was occupied trying to catch small fish so I baited my line and threw it into the river, not expecting any fish would be interested in my bait. I placed the rod against my seat and forgot about it for five seconds when the rod jerked violently and a large fish took the bait and made the reel scream. I was in a state of shock, what was going on? The reel was losing line fast and unless I did something quickly, I would lose the fish. Suddenly my fishing instinct asserted itself and I began to “play” the fish which was a large powerful bream. Years of fishing experience came to my aid - I had the bream under control and was able to land it on the jetty. What a fish! Probably the largest bream I have ever caught. Michael, who had been watching, was amazed at all the action and strange language I was using. The bream had been fighting for its life and was now lying quietly on the jetty.

I said to Michael “This is for dinner tonight”. Michael said, “You have to throw it back Grandad”, tears welling in his eyes. I looked at him and said “No, Michael this is not like the little ones you catch. We will have this one for dinner tonight”. Michael started to cry in earnest, and I did not know what to do. I could see Michael was getting more upset and I unhooked the fish and threw it back in the river much against my instincts. We sat in silence for a while the river lapping gently against the jetty. Michael stopped crying after a few minutes, and I started breathing normally again.

After having a rest with Michael I looked at the rod which only needed baiting again. Knowing only too well that fish like the bream I returned to the water are very rare these days, I thought baiting that line could not do any harm and the odds of catching another fish of a good size were remote, to say the least. Having convinced myself that the odds of catching a big fish were slim, I re-baited and cast the line into the river. I set the reel on automatic and once again placed the rod against the seat and sat down to let the trauma of the day wash through my system. However, if I thought I could have time for recuperation from my previous ordeal, the peace of the afternoon was shattered by the scream of the reel as a powerful fish took the bait.

I could not believe what was happening. Here I was with another big fish on the line. How will Michael behave this time? I started to “play” the fish which I discovered was a large flathead, one of my favourite eating fish. A thought registered in my fevered, busy brain. I am the adult here, I will keep this fish if I’m lucky enough to land it. I don’t know what Michael was thinking, but all I could think was that I wanted to catch that fish. I said to Michael “We won’t be throwing this one back in, Michael”. It was a flathead and bigger than the bream I had thrown back. So, ignoring sniffing sounds of Michael crying the fisherman in me took over and proceeded to land a very large flathead. Saying as I did so, “We; are not going to throw this one back, Michael”. However, I did not count on Michael resuming crying and saying, “It’s got to go back, Grandad, it’s got to go back”. I looked at him and he was in quite an emotional state. I wondered if it would cause Michael any psychological harm if I kept the fish, so I threw it back into the water.

As I watched the flathead disappear beneath the ripples; I realised that fishing was never really about the catch. It was about patience, respect and the quiet lessons of nature - and sometimes, it takes a child to remind you of that. In that moment, I felt God’s hand in the river, teaching me humility in the purest way.

