

Janet's World

I owned the original “Pocket Fisherman,” one of Ron Popeil’s early inventions advertised on television with gusto in the 1970s. It really did transform amateur fishing into a more spur-of-the-moment activity, especially for kids.

No longer did I have to convince my Dad to put down his *New York Times* and spend an hour untangling the lines of the big poles stored in the basement. Now I could grab my own Pocket Fisherman and spend an hour untangling its line myself. But this was only because I kept it under my bed with my Fun Flowers molds, Colorforms and Click-Clacks.

Ronco’s Pocket Fisherman infomercial was compelling. I was convinced that the product would make me a better fisherwoman, though the ad mostly featured guys in hats reeling in poster-perfect fish. At one point, the voiceover proclaimed, “Want to make a boy happy?” I was not dissuaded by this gender-specific marketing. I wanted a Pocket Fisherman, so I asked for one for my birthday. And I got one.

I got one! I got one!

It’s the cry of the angler the world over. Yet I declined to join my father and older brother on their lengthy waits for a bite on lakefronts, piers or charter boats. Fishing at my local Loft’s Pond was all I wanted, and the best type of sport fishing, ever. A two-minute walk from the house, you could comfortably lounge on the shore, provided you didn’t mind a little duck-doo. Invariably, somebody from the neighborhood showed up to keep you company. Weeping Willows provided a canopy of shade, and a wad of white bread was the bait of choice. You always caught something and you couldn’t eat what you caught—mostly carp and if I’m not mistaken, goldfish—so everyone ended up happy at the end of the day.

I think the best parts of fishing for me were the anticipation of the catch and the camaraderie of the group on the expedition. I discovered later that serious fishing is more of a solitary activity, unless you count the mosquitoes. Like golf, it’s not for the chatty. I think it’s more suited to a contemplative personality, and I just didn’t have the patience to stand around and catch nothing.

So it makes sense that my best fishing story isn’t mine at all—it’s my older brother’s. On vacation at Fire Island, we rode our bikes to the ocean one night to do some

surfcasting. I brought my pocket fisherman. But that evening there were hundreds of tiny, shiny silver fish washing up on the shoreline, so I spent my time running along the water's edge, tossing back the ones who flipped too far up on the beach to be caught by the next wave.

Suddenly my brother got a bite. The tip of his fishing pole bowed incongruously to the surface of the water; he waded deeper into the ocean so it wouldn't snap.

It was a big one.

And I know it's fantastical, but he reeled in the hugest bluefish we had ever seen. Its head alone was too big for the catch bucket. It glistened in the moonlight like a large, wet bluefish. It was bigger than Argentina. I screamed.

"Get Dad!" my brother yelled, "GET DAD!" I ran and hopped on the bike, pedaling madly toward the beach house, all the while yelling at the top of my lungs, "My brother caught a HUGE BLUEFISH!"

Thanks to my first successful PR campaign, the shore was lined with fishermen hauling in big blues by the time my family arrived.

My brother didn't catch another fish that night, and a part of him was probably disappointed. And maybe a little annoyed, because I had let the entire island in what might have been the fishing night of the century and his one big catch.

Luckily I just caught that fish again for his fiftieth birthday, right here.

To contact Janet or hear podcasts, visit <http://www.janetgilbert.net>.