

Square Knots and Ivory Soap

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It barely seems like more than a summer or two has passed since I was tagging along behind my dad and learning; sometimes against my will, the secrets and intricacies of a trout fisherman.

One of my most humiliating but most important lessons came along the banks of the Weber river (Northern Utah) in the beginning of my eighth summer, and after losing my third hook to my third planter trout.

Losing my temper with that last hook; as fisherman seldom do, I threw my brand new seven dollar Zebco fishing combination fiercely to the ground and began stomping on it. At the same time my tongue; not wanting to be left out, began casting out a few choice lashings of it's own. I'm still trying to convince my good mother that these "choice lashings" were imprinted directly on my genes during dad's old navy days but she isn't buying it.

As the dust began to settle, the sickening realization of what I had just said became painfully evident. Looking quickly around I found my mother searching frantically through our gear for a bar of soap.

Dad, who was also standing nearby, must have known what was about to happen. After glancing at dear old mom, he looked at me with a sad and sincerely sympathetic look which belied his knowledge and belief that I might possibly never live to see my ninth summer.

Mom, who had by now found the soap, was coming towards me with a very strange look on her face. It is difficult to describe the exact look, as I have only seen it a couple dozen times in my short 35 years, but to illustrate the severity of my situation, I feel I must try.

First, her hair which was normally long and flowing was standing straight up. And though she is normally only 5' 6" tall, I am quite certain without having taken the time to measure, that at this particular time there was a full 7' 4" between the ground and the top of her hair. Her eyes were bulging completely out of her head and operating independently of each other. The veins in her neck and face were also bulging out of her reddish-green glowing flesh and pulsing rapidly. I'm also pretty sure that her fingernails had grown several inches and were sharply pointed but by this time I was on my knees praying for divine intervention and can't be certain.

Luckily dad, who until now had just been standing nervously by, came to his senses and my rescue just as I felt those alien talons closing on my throat. An act intended to cut off my air supply and force me to open my tightly sealed mouth to receive the soap.

To this day I do not know what magical phrase or spell he used to exorcise this horrible demon from my mother's body but it worked. She reluctantly released her death grip from my neck and slithered off towards the camper as her hair fell slowly back down on her shoulders.

Dad was obviously unnerved by the whole thing and seemed mysteriously like he had witnessed firsthand the demonic possession of my mother on more than one other occasion. I didn't dare ask.

After retreating to a relatively safe zone a few hundred thousand yards away from the camper, we began to discuss the cause of my tantrum and near doom that fateful day. Through some intense interrogation I soon learned; between dad's frequent loud bursts of gut wrenching laughter, that a square knot is not the proper way to tie on a fishing hook.

Several hours later we finally felt confident enough to sneak back into camp and try to salvage the tangled pile of trash which only this morning was a shiny new fishing pole, not to mention seven weeks of my allowance.

The pole was not salvageable but with some patience, a stiff willow and some black electrical tape, dad ingeniously fashioned an amazingly workable substitute out of the remnants of my Zebco. At least I knew how to tie on a fish hook and even caught a couple of trout before sundown. I still had to eat soap but mom was a little calmer while I did it.

The lesson I learned that day which was so valuable and serves me even to this day, is *never take the women folk fishing. But if you have to anyway, then genes or no genes, be extremely careful about using any choice tongue lashings when things don't go right.

One thing I didn't learn was the magical spell dad used on mom. This I will regret forever as dad is now gone and my wife is beginning more and more of late to take on that same demonic sneer my mother had whenever those old Navy genes get to acting up.

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