

Is That All There Is?

By John 'Afishinado' King

I have a great summer job. I run 6 pak charters out of Avalon Harbor on Catalina Island in peak season. This job gives me a chance to fish under every imaginable set of circumstances and with all kinds of fisherfolk. I get the guys with hidden handheld GPS units tracking our fishing route so they can return and fish the same spots on their own boats. I get the foreign visitors who are fascinated with every aspect of the process from catching bait to filleting the fish. And, I get the families who are just looking to experience fishing. All bring something of interest for me to enjoy which makes the job all that much more fun.

One recent customer caused me to really stop and ask myself "Why do we fish?" She had chartered me for a half day out of Avalon. She said that she had succumbed to the pressure from her daughter and two young sons who were excited and ready to get to the fishing grounds. Even though the trip out of Avalon is the shortest run to the grounds in the world, these kids were hopping with the excitement of catching fish. Mom sat on the lounge of the bridge deck and thoroughly enjoyed the kids as they peppered me with questions. Clearly, the pressure was off of her and on me!

The fishing had been slow for a couple of days however I had some luck in having discovered a couple of spots that were producing good



Calico action if you could get a good bit of chum into the zone to get the bite going. The current was still running out of the West which gave me a good set up on the spot. I tossed out a few baits and gave my "no walking around the bait tank with rods and loose hooks" safety speech. Then I showed the kids and mom how to identify the type of bait in the tank (a mix of sardines, Spanish macs, anchovy and smelt) and how to bait them to make them as lively as possible on the hook. Since this group was fairly new to fishing, I cast the baits out and started to chum with some cut bait.

Calico Bass are still one of my favorite targets. They hit like freight trains and they require a bit of skill to catch although anybody can catch them on any given day. I have done this type of fishing long enough to sense when it is going to go off. With Calico there is a moment when you begin to sense that they are on the chew and you need to get on it with some chum and some good sticks to start 'em up. It did not take long to see the first good signs as each of the kids got bit but were not successful in

hooking a fish. This is not uncommon. The first few Calico bites are often hit and run affairs, as the smaller fish dart out and try to grab a quick meal. I have watched fish of all kinds miss their prey on many occasions. Sometimes I wonder how any of them get big.

When I feel it coming on I pick up the pace knowing that my own enthusiasm seems to work in favor of getting the bite to turn on. I reload and recast the baits and chop up some chum and try to help my customers get the feel for when to set the hook. There are so many different kinds of fisherfolk out there. It always reminds me of bowling. Go to any Bowling Alley and you will see some serious variations in the style of play. Fishing is the same, and the style variations on how to set a hook are often hilarious to watch. Mom was



laughing and referred to her son as Zorro. The other son was pulling the Frankenstein walk as he tried to bring in his slack by moving backwards during the hook set. The daughter clearly had the best

technique and sure enough was the first to hook a fish.

I knew it was going to get good and pretty soon all the kids were hooking up while I was releasing, rebaiting, casting and chumming to beat the band. I like the rush of this type of bit and I really enjoy it when my customers are fully into the process. Mom was having too much fun watching so I asked if she would like to give it a try. She wanted to do it all so I helped her select bait which she put on the hook. Fortunately she chose the spinning outfit, so I gave her the quick casting lesson and she tossed out her bait. It got mauled very quickly and set expertly set the hook with a very economical lift of the rod tip. I could see where her daughter had gotten her technique.

She fought the fish and brought him to the boat for a quick photo and a release.



The kids applauded and all was good in charterville. One was all that mom had wanted so she replaced the rod in the rack then turned and asked me in a very conspiratorial voice “Is that it?” I was not ready for this question and I was not sure at first that I had gotten the gist of what she really wanted to know. “Is that it,” she repeated, “is that the feeling that these kids and you get all worked up about?” “Well,” I answered, “there are all kinds of fish and fishing is different everyday, but yeah, you just got the full

experience.” “I guess that I just do not have the fishing gene,” she answered, “my husband was a fishing nut, just like these kids, but he died before he could teach them much about fishing. I want you to know that I am very thankful for my kids to get an experience like this.”

Whew, heavy stuff. Who ever said that fishing is just a silly past time really did not get it and will never get it. After many years of fishing and running charters I have come to the conclusion that there are really two types of people in the world, those that fish and those that do not. You cannot fake it. Fishing is either in us or it is not. Fishing either defines multiple special moments in our lives or it is simply irrelevant. There is very little middle ground. That is all there is to it, and for me, that is enough.

Capt. John runs Afishinado Charters out of Avalon and can be reached through his web site at www.afishinados.com.