



## FARGO FISHING

I've been up so late working on this thing that my mind is starting to wander! I was thinking back to the first time that Larry and I ever went fishing together..... It was in Fargo, North Dakota, over the 4th of July weekend. Hadn't known him all that long, and I was quite a bit younger. He was still old.

We lived on the Red river, and if you know anything at all about the Red River that borders N. Dakota and Minnesota, you'll know that it flows north to Canada, and it's swift, muddy all the time, and you can just about walk across the dumb thing on the backs of the catfish during the spring and summer. Course, we didn't know that at the time, cause we were both new to the area. Anyway, we took a hike down the river just to kind of check it out, and we found a really neat little place about a mile downstream that looked like it would be good fishing. And just as luck would have it, there in the willows was a branch with a line that had a hook tied to it that some kid had fixed up probably 10 yrs ago. You couldn't have broken that line with a truck, and the hook would have towed it! Well, this brought back all kinds of memories to Larry, so he grabbed it, and ran up in the woods and started frantically turning over logs to find a worm or something. Didn't take long, and he was baited up! We jumped down over the edge of the bank so that we could be right next to the river, and Larry flung the 15 ft or so of line that he had out into the water. He was having a ball hooking bluegills, but he couldn't get one to the bank, cause the hook was too big, and they couldn't really get it in their mouth. So he was just kind of squatting there letting them grab it and swim around with it, when all of a sudden, something grabbed the little bluegill that was swimming around with his bait, and dove to the bottom. Sure got Larry's attention! Mine too! Anyway, that old fish sat there for about 2 minutes, not even moving, then just turned and started swimming slowly downstream. There was no holding it, so Larry held the branch out with one hand, and started stumbling down the side of the river, trying to follow it, getting wet, tripping over brush, and slipping in the mud, when finally he came up to a clump of willows that he couldn't get around or thru. He was all tangled up in those willows, thrashing around and hollering, and all the while holding on to that branch with both hands. You could tell that this was one fight that Larry just wasn't gonna win, and sure enough, that old fish just gave a lunge, and poor old Larry's branch broke clean in two. We just watched that line with its little piece of stick attached, as it slowly went downstream and disappeared. Needless to say, we were pretty impressed! We spent the rest of the day talking about that....

So the following day, we got a gallon of Gallo Rose wine, and a bunch of night crawlers, a flashlight, poles and tackle boxes, and took off in the early afternoon when it was nice and sunny. It was a nice walk thru pretty brushy woods, and we got to our spot with no trouble at all. The river bank was about 6 ft above the river, but in one spot there was a little grassy beach-like place, right down at the water level that was just right for a couple of guys to sit and drink wine and catch fish, if they could, and we had high hopes! It was a hot, beautiful day, and we didn't expect to catch much during the heat of the day. And we didn't. So we drank most of the wine....

About 6 o'clock, I got a bite, and darned if I didn't catch a 6 lb channel cat! Now to someone who had never caught a fish over 5 lbs in his life, this was a big deal! I put him on the stringer, and Larry asked me why I was bleeding on my arm. I told him I didn't realize that I was, and this was when we discovered what the North Dakota state bird was. The Deerfly! Little black things that drew blood wherever they'd bite, and we didn't have any repellent of any kind. Then as the sun got closer to the horizon, we discovered what the Minnesota state bird was. The mosquito! I have never in my life seen mosquitos like that! Every now and then you'd see two or three of them trying to carry a small animal across the river! But the fishing was really picking up, and Larry caught a couple that were over 7 lbs, plus some big carp. As the sun reached the tree line, we were drinking wine, slapping bugs, bleeding profusely, yanking furiously on fishing lines and just having a good old time! In the next hour, we caught 12 more catfish that weighed from 6 to 15 lbs apiece! I had never seen fishing like that! Then Larry hooked a BIG one! A real big one! The river was so swift and deep that it would take us 10 minutes or maybe more to get a fish in if was good sized, and this one was bigger than anything we'd hooked up to this point. But he had good line, and after maybe 20 minutes it was pretty much right beneath us, but just swimming in place, not coming up at all. It was a half an hour later that he got that thing to the top, and that was when I learned that sheephead (drum) got as big as 23 lbs! It was a huge fish, and

totally worthless! He unhooked it, then held it up to look at in the light of the flashlight. The dumb thing gave a big flop, knocked the flashlight out of my hand, and landed back in the river.....

Well, we just figured it was time to go home. We could see fairly well, with all the stars being out, so we gathered up our stuff, and prepared to head home. That was when we realized that we had drank a gallon of wine, and we had a 6 ft vertical bank to somehow climb up, along with all of our gear, and a nylon rope stringer that probably had 120 lbs of catfish on it, and no flashlight. I'm here to tell you, that was an experience! But we made it up the bank, staggered into the woods, and promptly realized that the trees had now cut off all light from the heavens, and we were in pitch-blackness! You'd just have to imagine the 2 of us trying to walk on a 1 ft wide path, (when we could feel it), with a 120 lb stringer of fish flopping between us, half soused, falling into the gooseberry bushes, laughing uncontrollably, trying to keep our poles out of the brush, and hoping that we were going in the right direction!

Well, we got out, but we didn't realize what we looked like, till we walked in to my living room, proud as could be with our huge stringer of catfish. We'd lost our hats, had our hair full of brush, and clothes full of stickers, we were bleeding on our arms and faces, muddy from head to toe, and we stunk like dead fish and Red River mud and cheap wine! At that point in our lives, I think we defined the word "mess"! Larry looked like he'd been kidnapped and beaten up and left for dead!

My wife was kinda sorta mostly pretty understanding about the whole thing, but Larry's wife, when she came to, that is, was not amused! Anyway, that was the start of a beautiful friendship! It just doesn't get any better than that!!!! :)