



LARRY'S RABID RACCOON RAMPAGE

A long, long time ago, on a riverbank far, far away, a couple of very young fishermen were about to get an experience they'd never forget.... Well, one of them, anyway. You guessed it, Kevin and Larry, on their very first night fishing trip, when Larry was about 16, and Kevin was 10. Ol' Larry was pretty much full of himself, as I remember, what with him being so much older than me. But he'd never been fishing on the banks of Big Creek past dark, and neither had I. He was bound and determined that this was gonna be the night that we hooked old "Shag", the biggest catfish that lived in the creek up above the dam. And he was gonna be the big brother type that showed me how to do it! No one knew exactly how big Shag was, but everyone knew that he was at least 10 lbs, and to a 10 year old, that's a mighty big fish! He'd broken just about every fisherman's line in town, and it was rumored that his favorite hangout was a stretch of the creek that was about 8 ft deep, and just littered with sunken logs and trees. And of course, everyone knew that the only time that you even had a chance of hooking Ol' Shag was after dark, and usually sometime between 1 and 2 am. And you had to use chicken liver for bait, of course. That was a given.

It took a good month of begging and pleading for me to get mom and dad to let me go with Larry that night. We were all packed up with our fishing gear, (Zebco 202's) a couple of blankets, and a cooler with pop, hot dogs, buns, ketchup, ½ a bag of marshmallows, and our chicken liver. We walked thru the woods, down to our pre-determined camp site, and gathered up a bunch of wood for a fire. By 7:30 in the evening, we were officially ready! The night was beautiful, and we had a great fire going, and we were so excited that we couldn't hardly think straight! We were talking and getting just all kinds of bites, and doing a lot of yanking and getting snagged, and breaking lines and catching some little ones, and telling each other that it was just gonna be great after midnite when the big ones started coming out. Well, 11 o'clock came around, and we were starting to get a little tired, and the dark was getting really dark! And there were these strange noises coming from the woods that you just didn't seem to hear during the day! We threw some wood on the fire, and roasted some marshmallows, then got ready for the big ones that were sure to start biting.

We sat there, with our backs to the fire, facing the creek, staring very intently at the tips of our poles, just waiting for that little vibration, when all of a sudden, we heard a rustling in the bushes in back of us. I was too afraid to turn around, so I asked Larry, "What's that!?" "Nothing", was the answer. But the rustling got louder! I looked at Larry, and said: "There's some kind of animal back there! Are there wolves out here?!" "Proibly just a frog", Larry said. "Well, turn around and look!" I said. So he did. And here's this absolutely huge old racoon, snarling and growling, and pawing at his face, which of course was covered with our white marshmallows! Looked like he was foaming at the mouth, and had a big old case of rabies! Well, I'm here to tell you, we were both scared silly, but Larry just flat flipped out!!! I think he thought that Racoon was gonna eat him or something! He let out a scream, and without thinking, just turned around, and jumped right into the creek! Well, I was scared too, but I just hollered and waved my arms, and the racoon headed back into the woods. It took me almost 20 minutes to convince Larry that it was safe, and that he could get out of the creek! Then I helped him climb back up the bank, and it took most of the rest of the night to get him dried out! To this day he swears that all raccoons have rabies, and he is absolutely petrified of them!

TIME CHANGE! It's about 40 yrs later, and of all people, Larry is now president of the Greater Ozarks Master Bassers and Frog Giggling Club. Bubba was kicked out of office after a day on the lake when he apparently had too many beers, and tried to run down a water skier. Folks weren't too fond of Bubba anyway, and since Larry had put a rocket into Bubba's boat last 4th of July, he was unanimously elected. Which also meant that Larry was the one that had to be in charge of the annual Ozark Orphanage Bluegill fishing and camping trip! Larry tried every which way to get out of having to take about a dozen ten year olds down to the Finley river for an afternoon of Bluegill fishing, followed by a marshmallow and weenie roast, but nobody was willing to bail him out, and he just couldn't pass it off to anyone! I told him I'd help him tho, and that made him feel a little better, but not much. And leave it to Larry to get sneaky about the whole thing! He told me that as long as he was gonna have to baby sit this bunch of brats, er, orphans, that he was gonna have some fun! When it got dark, and the fire was high, he said he was gonna tell them about the time when a bear came out of the woods and tried to steal the fish that he was cooking, and he was gonna make it so scary that they'd most likely have to change pants when they got back to the orphanage! He said

we'd hook a string to some branches, and when he got to the scary part, he wanted me to start pulling on it so the kids would think there was a bear in the bushes!

Personally, I thought that was going a little too far, so I called in a favor of mine from a friend that worked for Bass Pro as a taxidermist. I asked him if he had any standing raccoons that he could make look pretty fierce....Turns out he had a really big one, maybe 45-50 lbs, that was standing on his two hind feet, and had a great big old snarl on his face! The day before the camping trip, I took that stuffed coon, and put some white packing foam around his mouth, so that it looked kinda drippy like, and put him up in the tree that all the kids were going to be sitting under when Larry told his stupid story. Then I put some 80 lb test black braided line around its neck, and practiced lowering it so that it would come down right in front of the rock that I knew Larry would be sitting on when he told his tale.

The next day I picked up the kids, and they were more excited than a bunch of bees in a blender! I got em' all together, and I told em' I was gonna play a little joke on Larry around the campfire that night, and I told em' not to get excited when they saw a raccoon coming down out of the tree during story time that night, And I told em' if they could keep this a really good secret, I'd give each and every one of them 5 bucks! Talk about buying silence!

Well, we had a simply wonderful day! No one caught ol' "shag" of course, but Larry and I kept ourselves busy baiting up hooks, tying on new ones, getting hooked, and unhooking fish, and untangling line. Everyone caught lots and lots of bluegills, and a couple of the kids caught some uneducated bass that weighed about a pound or so. Boy, you talk about excited!!! Well, the sun started getting lower in the trees, and the kids started wondering when we were gonna eat. We were all ready for those weenies! Everyone helped to gather wood, and we built a big old fire, and those kids ate more weenies and marshmallows than I thought was humanly possible! And after everyone was done eating, ol' Larry sat on his rock with his back to the river, facing the fire. Then he told the kids to gather round the fire, so they wouldn't be afraid of the dark, and then gave me a big ol' wink. I went off to one side and sat on a rock where I could reach my string. All the kids sat down around the fire. You could hear the leaves rustling, and after an appropriate silence, Larry told them in a real low whisper that he was going to tell them about the "Scariest campin' trip that he ever took", and he started in on his goofy old story.

Well, right before he got to the part about the bear that almost ate him, I just sort of tossed a fist sized rock over my head and into the river behind him. It really made a great splash, and Larry just naturally looked around to see what was up. That's when I let the "rabid" raccoon down right about at Larry's eye level. Larry said: "Must have been a carp or something", and turned back to the fire. It's realllly hard to describe how big Larry's eyes got when he realized that there was a foaming at the mouth, hydrophobic monster he-coon right smack in front of his face! He gave out a horrendous scream and tried to stand up and turn around at the same time, but when he did, he tripped over the rock he was sitting on, and ended up on all fours! Then he started shrieking and scrabbling to get away from the raccoon! He just went right over the little 4 ft drop down to the river, and even when he hit the water, you could tell that his main concern was to put distance between him and that coon! Water was up to his chest deep, when he realized that me and the kids were laughing so hard that we couldn't breathe! He started back toward the bank, and I started up the tree and went for the top!

Finally, when I could stop laughing, I yelled down to the kids: "Didn't I tell you that uncle Larry would make this the best fishing trip ever?" Well, they all started cheering and clapping, and Larry looked at all those happy faces, and then looked up at me, and then back at the kids, and then said: "Just wait till you see what happens next year!" That's when I saw this sly look out of the corner of his eye.....



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