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How a Spider Catches Fish!

I was born at night, but not last night! Growing up at Port Maitland you had to learn early when someone was leading you on with a tall tale or giving it to you straight. When I was very young there was a fellow by the name of Archie MacDonald who lived near the lock at the Feeder Canal. Archie had been the County Warden in 1929, the youngest warden in the country at the time. If Archie had only one fault it was his friendship with Jack Daniels, Tom Collins, and Johnny Walker. Most everybody loved Archie and many old-timers have told me he would have gone far in politics if only he had kept more distance between himself, and his friends in the bottle. I remember my father and my uncles telling stories about Archie and the whoppers he would play on them when they were children visiting their cottage at Beckley Beach. Among the many stories Archie told was that he had a lollipop tree in a back field where he picked his annual supply of lollipops. The kids always wanted to see the tree but Archie would always have an excuse for not being able to show it to them.

Just up the road from Archie lived Harry Siddall, whom I am sure tried to continue where Archie left off after Archie's death in 1954. Harry and my father kept me going in a circle for a couple years looking for a left-handed tool kit. While helping my father one day I was trying to hit a nail and couldn't hit it to save my life. Dad had the answer! I was using the wrong hammer, he said, "you need a left-handed one and I know just where you can put your hands on not only a hammer, but an entire set of left-handed tools." He told me Harry Siddall had once been left-handed and changed over. If I asked Harry, he would sell me his old tools at a good price. Harry, like Archie came up with every excuse to avoid finding that tool kit. It was either in the shed and the shed was locked or if we were in the shed, he would tell me that he had loaned it to someone else for a couple of days.

Then there was Don Clark of Marshville. I must have been a stupid kid! He got me on the easiest city-slickers erratum of them all. The chocolate milk cow! Again my father acted as the instigator and Don took the reins and took them well. I guess it must be about five to six miles from Port Maitland to where Don and his family lived on the Feeder Canal just east of Hutchinson Road. I rode my bicycle from Port Maitland to Don's farm at least three or four times hoping to see his chocolate milk cow. One time I recall detouring on my way home from school at Stromness to Don's farm -a considerable distance out of my way, to see that confound cow. What is so embarrassing today is that his kids knew enough to keep the story going. "It was out in the back field or in the bush" they would tell me.

In my November column I told you about the spider catching a rock bass. "A rock bass was seen

swimming beneath the bridge behind Haney & Middaugh's Mill. As it rose to the surface, a large black spider suddenly dropped upon the fish, clinging to its back fin."

I have grown wiser since I let Archie, Harry, Don and my Father fool me with stories so poorly contrived that anyone with a half a brain knew them for what they were. What I wonder is did the reporter for the Reform Press ever meet my dad and his story telling chums? In a competing Dunnville paper, only four months before the spider and the bass story, the following account had been given.

"The physical powers of the Lycosidae, the popular running, ground, or wolf spider, are well illustrated by an instance recorded in the proceedings of the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia. The result, as reported, was achieved by pure strength and activity, without any of the mechanical advantages of snare.

Mr. Spring, while walking with a friend in the swampy wood, was attracted by the extraordinary movement of a large black spider in the middle of a ditch. Closer examination showed that the creature had caught a fish. She had fastened upon it with a deadly grip just on the forward side of the dorsal fin, and the poor fish was swimming round and round slowly, or twisting its body as if in pain.

The head of its black enemy was sometimes almost pulled under water, but the strength of the fish would not permit an entire submersion. It moved its fins as if exhausted, and often rested. Finally it swam under a floating leaf near the shore, and made a vain effort to dislodge the spider by scraping against the under side of the leaf.

The two had now closely approached the bank. Suddenly the long black legs of the spider emerged from the water, and the hinder ones reached out and fastened upon the irregularities of the sides of the ditch. The spider commenced tugging at his prize in order to land it. During an interval of six or eight minutes' the spider had drawn the fish out of the water: then both creatures had fallen in again, the banks being nearly perpendicular. There followed a great struggle, and the fish was hoisted head first more than half its length upon the land. It was very much exhausted, hardly making any movement, and was being slowly and steadily drawn up by the spider, who had evidently gained the victory."

It sounds very much like someone, named Mr. S. Haney, and his buddies had a good laugh at the expense of the Gazette reporter who failed to read the competitors paper.

I decided to contact the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia to see if they could add anything to this story. I looked them up on the internet and sure enough they are there with an excellent web-page, but no e-mail address available. Even though I am retired from Canada Post, I admit that placing a stamp on a letter seems like too much trouble now that I have been spoiled by cyber-mail. It is likely a good thing that there was no e-mail address, after all what was I going to ask them? Could this be a true story? Duh! Have I once more been fished in! Archie, Harry, Don and my Father would be laughing their sides off at my foolishness. But wait a minute, what if it were true, and I am destined to spend the rest of my life not knowing the truth because I am too vain to ask!

If you have items you wish written about or pictures you would be willing to loan, please drop me a note. Let me know how you feel about these articles.

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