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SPORTS

The Old Man and his dog

By Luke Clayton

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I'm sure most of us that have spent many years enjoying the outdoors can think back upon someone we knew in our youth that helped get us started; someone that taught us to fish, hunt, camp or simply enjoy spending time in the outdoors. The little story you are about to read is mostly fictional but a wonderful old man I called "Papa" is who I'm thinking about as I write.

When I was 12 back in 1962, Papa was in his late eighties. He was born in the late 1800's and spent a lifetime in the outdoors. In his ranch house in southeast Texas were 36 mounted deer heads, all trophy bucks that he harvested with his old Damascus double barrel 10 gauge loaded with buckshot.

Papa hunted mostly on horseback back in those days, following a pack of deer dogs. I learned much about hunting... and life from Papa. It was a sad day for me back in the late seventies when Papa passed away. With his passing came the end of an era where men like him made their living working and playing hard in country that was still largely untamed.

The monitor beside the Old Man's hospital bed plotted a weak pulse. He was nearing the end of a long, long journey where he had experienced things that today are only read about in history books. Papa had worked on cattle drives and enjoyed many deer and quail hunts long before he owned an automobile. He had spent time logging timber in deep East Texas, snaking longleaf bull pine logs out of the woods via a team of stout mules.

Very faintly he heard the doctors visiting with nurses and his family, who had gathered at his bedside. But, more clearly, more vividly in his mind's eye, he heard another sound. It was the baying of his constant companion until recently, his loyal hunting dog, Tolar. Tolar had gone on to the happy hunting grounds where all good hunting dogs go the previous year but the Old Man always kept him close to his heart and in his thoughts, especially when he ventured out on an occasional hunting trip after the dogs passing. These trips were more walks in the woods than serious hunting trips. Things just weren't the same without his faithful hunting partner.

"Come in, Boy," called the Old Man as the big running hound was cruising the woods ahead, his nose to the ground for that tantalizing scent of squirrel. Tolar was the best squirrel dog the Old Man had ever hunted with and, together, the two had harvested the makings of many tasty meals of fried squirrel and gravy.

They were a team, the Old Man and his dog, each having the ability to read the mind of the other. Somewhere way, way back in the background, the Old Man could still hear the doctor and nurses talking, but, with each moment, Tolar's booming voice became more distinct.

Now the Old Man could actually smell the ripeness of the fall woods, feel the first hint of coolness in the October air. The hospital bed and concerned doctor, nurses and family were behind him. He and Tolar were again hunting together and the weakness that the Old Man had endured the past several months was gone. He felt as though he was in his twenties

again. He actually trotted a few steps in the direction of his baying dog, just to prove he could.

"Keep him bayed, old boy, I'm coming....I'm coming."

BIG BLUE CATFISH BITING AT TAWAKONI - The "trophy" season for catching big blue catfish is in the dead of winter. Fishing has been excellent at Lake Tawakoni for monster blue catfish since December but the past couple weeks has provided the best catching of the season. Twenty years ago, Tawakoni had plenty of channel and flathead catfish but the blues were just beginning to gain a foothold, thanks to an aggressive stocking program by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Back in those days, Tawakoni's most veteran catfish guide, David Hanson with Little D's Guide Service www.littledsguideservice.com booked a trophy catfish trip at Lake Lewisville with his Dad and another friend. Hanson says they caught a few double digit blues and he was hooked.

With a steadily growing blue catfish population on his home waters, Hanson made the commitment to learn how to catch the big fish in his home waters. It's a good bet that Hanson has logged in more days fishing Tawakoni for trophy blues than anyone currently plying these fertile waters. He has also put smiles on the faces of many clients when they landed the trophy catfish of their lives while fishing with him.

Just recently, Hanson's clients landed back-to-back monster blues, one weighing 60 pounds, the other a whopping 80 pounder. Fish in the 25- to 40-pound class are very common. If I had to choose one lake to go to catch a big blue, it would definitely be Lake Tawakoni. I caught my career biggest blue, a 51-pounder, while fishing with Hanson several years ago.



Lake Tawakoni guide David Hanson (in background) recently guided his clients to two catfish of a lifetime, one weighing 60 pounds, the biggest 80 pounds. *photo courtesy David Hanson*

Hanson's favorite bait when targeting big blues is fresh shad, the fresher the better. Six- to eight-ought circle hooks on a Santee Rig works best for Hanson. The Santee rig employs a small floater between the weight and hook. This keeps the bait bounding along just up from the bottom, making it easy for the big fish to grab it as it drifts by. Drift fishing is Hanson's favorite method of fishing. Through the years, he has learned the lake's most productive humps and ridges where the big ones like to hang out.

Hanson and I certainly aren't the only fishermen that consider Tawakoni the best trophy blue lake west of the Mississippi. Darrel VanVactor with Cabela's King Kat Catfish Tournament Trail, always reserves a spot on his tournament trail for good old T-Wok.

This year's tournament is slated for February 27. I'm expecting some monster blues to be brought to the weigh in. This tournament always draws some of the best catfish anglers from across the country. But, in a big fish tournament, anyone can win. It's a matter of being in the right place at the right time... with the right bait! For more information or to register to be a contestant, visit www.kingkatusa.com.

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