

What can an outdoor writer say about a fish that hasn't been written a thousand times already? Not much! Yet, I remain wanting. It's just hard to find the right stuff to read about Smallmouth bass fishing. Most everything in print is a little too plastic or it reads like it's about a regular ol' bass that's just been souped up some. A Smallmouth is not a Largemouth with afterburners! The writers just aren't getting it. Every month, though, I keep thumbing through the magazines for an article on Smallmouth that can get a good hook-set on me. I just won't move off the bottom for much anymore though. You read the same thing about big ol' Smallmouth, too. According to some writers Smallmouth with age are a lot like us, they tend to just sit and sulk in the dark once they get a little weight on their belly.

In my view though, the Smallmouth from our Ozark streams are in a league of their own. They have special abilities, qualities and talent. They need a little extra effort from a writer putting something out there published for public consumption.

So, I've decided to write a real good article about Smallmouth myself and do it right!

Well, for one, Smallmouth are tough to catch... uh, and good scrappers after they're hooked?

Truth is, it just takes a lot of expert writing, editing and such to do the little bugger's justice. Writing something up is going to be harder than I thought! The trouble is, after I get a good start on a sentence, I's dotted, T's crossed and all, I wind up saying to myself, "that's not even close". I've about come to the conclusion that the only way to do it right is to just go float-fishing again. Words can't take the place of having your fishing reel knocked plum out of your hands by a Smallmouth, anyway. A stream-bred Smallmouth isn't your regular, come-on-over-to-the-boat type of bass. At least not like the one's I keep seeing on TV being kissed for the camera. In fact, I'm not sure if there's not a little pit-bull dog and maybe some fightin' rooster somewhere way back in the blood line!

I grew up on a farm in the Ozarks with a lot of livestock and it seemed we always had an ornery cow or two that would rip through our pasture fences. Grass was usually better on the other side anyway so fence fixin' was a way of life on Saturday mornings. My brothers and I didn't like it much because it interfered with fishin', huntin', Saturday morning cartoons and doing nothing. Each of which were more fun than working. Dad never seemed to see it that way for some reason. He'd just say: "now get mad at that fence post!!!! Just spit on your hands, get a good grip on that mall handle and hit that post like you mean it"! I'm pretty sure Smallmouth dad's must be saying that same type of thing to their youngin's about fishing lures.

I used to wrestle with my brothers and the neighbor boys about the time I began to grow hair on my legs. One of the tricks in wrestling is to make the first move. Surprise is half the match and then you need to make a quick move to finish them off. I'm convinced, Smallmouth youngin's likely wrestle a lot, too.

About the time I got into high school I was pretty fast on my feet. I recall a race once where the whole baseball team lined up with a toe in the dirt, and in a good squat. Coach said "ready, set, go" and this little-bitty guy shot out of the pack and all I could see the rest of the race was his behind. And, the more we ran, the smaller his behind got, too! I just thought I was fast. We had another heat right after that race and there he was lined up to run again. I was holding my knees, staring at the ground and sucking wind so I didn't get in that race. Largemouth and Kentucky bass don't race much with Smallmouth, either.

I went out for the basketball team after that. I had practiced my set-shot some in the ball court up in the barnlot and I could drill it pretty good, even with dry cow manure on the ball. I never could jump though and that was my weakness on making the team. There was this little-bitty, fast guy on the startin' five though that had to be careful when he went for a rebound or he would bust his head on the bottom of the back-board. That's right, you guessed it, Smallmouth have that same type of problem with bushes hangin' over the water.

We four brothers hunted rabbits in the winter back then like they were candy eggs at Easter.

One of our farm neighbors had a pack of beagles and we claimed them as half-ours because they knew us so well. Mr. Pennington's only rule was to make sure we had all of his dogs back in the pen at the end of the day. One feisty male in the pack didn't like that rule, either. I could understand his reluctance because he reminded me of my youngest brother as it was obvious he was the last one in line on the feed sack. We'd manage to get the whole bunch of dogs back in the dog pen and this little beagle would be running circles and darting away from me standing at the pen door. The whole time I'd be coaxing, patting my knees and talking up all his good qualities. About the time I would reach for his collar, off he'd head back under a truck, or the porch, whatever he could get to that was just out of my reach. He'd be looking at me with one eye, tail wagging; but I knew he was plotting his next run even if I got into my "you better get over here and your mother's a no-account, too" tone of voice. There were a few times we just left him under the house it was so aggravating. I've done that same thing with Smallmouth that seem to be coming in and then they'll see a log or maybe a rock. I think that part's poor training and should be against the rules for both fish and dogs!

I took a fella from Kansas City on a guided trip on one of those little streams in North Arkansas. He's a fine gentleman, spends a lot of time at a computer keyboard and other kinds of hard labor. He told me that he loved to bass fish, had a nice bassboat; but had always wanted to go float-fishing for Smallmouth. We had been on the phone several times on all the real vital stuff for a guided trip; travel directions to low-water bridges, local motels, how many fishing reels, what type of lure scent, which insect repellent and FINALLY everything was set for the big trip: he was ready to tussle with a Smallmouth. We started out the first morning and I was in the process of astounding him with my extensive wilderness lore and was leaning toward getting on into my fishing prowess; but had held off a bit waiting until he had caught a fish or two.....timin' is important in the guidin' business. In the first shoal, a brownie darted out from under a log, slammed his spinner and cleared the water all in one rush. He lost hold of the reel handle for a second and then his ballcap went in the water; but he did finally manage to land the Smallmouth. He caught his breath, slung water out of his hat and exclaimed, "Dang, these Smallmouth are something, aren't they?" I took a picture and considered asking him if he wanted to pull over so I could show him some wrestling moves. I could see he already had a better grip on his reel handle though so I picked up from there and went into the part about my fishing prowess. By the end of our three days on the water, I think he might have gotten to where he was a little faster on his feet, too.

I've got the dictionary out now, looking up how to spell words like explosive, bombarded, slam-busted and as soon as I get 15 or 20 more big words that seem to go with Smallmouth bass and float-fishing, I'm going to finish that article.

But for now, I think I'll just grab a rod and go load the canoe... next month's magazines will likely be in the mail when I get back, anyway.