

DAD'S Hula Popper and the BIG BASS

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #79 —

Dad was a reasonably serious fisherman, from my perspective – mostly for food, not sport. In our area of Missouri many of the larger ponds and lakes were stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill and channel cat. I have vague memories of some of the stories dad told about big fish he had caught, either with hook and line or his bare hands; but this is a story I tell about him.

His only fishing rod was an old bait casting outfit, with 40# test braided line that would haul in just about anything, including big snapping turtles and tree limbs. Dad's strategy was to 'horse them in', once the hook was set; and with the 40# test line, he could do just that.

One year Mom gave him a Johnson's spin-cast reel for Father's Day. This new outfit had lightweight monofilament line (6 or 10# test), with an adjustable drag;

and would throw a small artificial lure (like a Hula Popper) clear across a small pond. In the summer, dad worked six days a week at a rock quarry; but summer days were long and sometimes my

brother Jerry and I talked dad into taking us fishing after work. There was a nice five acre lake just a half mile north of home and we could be in the jon boat just five minutes after leaving the house. Dad had his new Johnson fishing outfit, but we boys just had willow poles and fishing worms.

On the south side of the lake, dad hooked a very big bass. He had rowed the boat into position, cast his Hula Popper just outside the weeds and began popping it as he reeled



The Hula Popper floats and after the bass shook it out of his mouth, the wind would drift it to the edge of the lake.



This old Bronson 1500 Meteor bait casting reel (back) is similar to the one dad had used for years, before mom gave him a new-fangled Johnson spin-cast outfit.

it in. The big bass slammed it and dad commenced to pull; unfortunately he hadn't learned how to use lightweight monofilament line and a drag -- so the big bass broke his line in just a few seconds.

The next day, Jerry and I were walking the water's edge and found the Hula Popper – as the bass had shook it clear. We

proudly presented it to dad that evening and begged him

"The big bass slammed it..."

to have another try at the big bass. It was déjà vu; same place, same bass, same Hula Popper, same broken line. Dad hooked and lost that fish three times, before it got smart or developed a sore mouth.



Larry Potterfield

The Big Lake
Potterfield Family Farm
Marion County, Missouri
Summer, 1962



This isn't the actual fish, because dad never got it in the boat; this one's probably a bit larger than the one that got away -- 9 pounds 14 ounces, taken from Falcon Lake, Texas in 1985.