

Fishing

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Mr. Toastmaster, fellow toastmasters. Tonight I would talk to you about fishing. Fishing and I go way back. I hope that you'll find an account of some of my fishing experiences entertaining and perhaps even useful.

I grew up in this great state of Texas, and, as every Texas fisherman knows, here, we fish for bass. Let me tell you how to fish for bass. You go out on a lake early in the morning and anchor near a place where you think there might be a fish. You then rig a line and a pole with some leader and a lure. You cast the lure out into the lake to the point where you think the fish are. As you cast, the lure describes a graceful arc across the water and lands with a satisfying plonk in the water. Savor this moment, because it's all downhill from here on.

You look down at your reel to find that the line has become snarled in a tangle more challenging than the Gordian knot. Alas, you are not allowed to use Alexander's solution to the problem. You cannot cut your line. You must take whatever time it takes to undo the snarl.

While you are working on the tangle, your lure sinks to the bottom of the lake where it is captured by a bush. You are tempted to simply cut the line, but this lure is a very special lure. It is carefully selected for this particular lake, indeed this particular spot at this particular time of day, and, of course to coordinate with the guide's hat. You must make every effort to retrieve it. You maneuver the boat over the bush, struggle mightily to free the lure, and, in the end, cut the line and start over with an inferior lure.

If you've been following me this far, you understand why I have never caught a bass in all my years of fishing, not one. Eventually, I turned to less challenging form of fishing, pan-fishing. Pan fishing is not fishing with a pan, but rather fishing for fish called "pan fish:" perch, crappie and bluegill. Pan fishing is a matter of putting a hook on a line and a worm on the hook, dropping the hook in the water, and waiting. Pan fishing has the advantage of not requiring casting. More importantly, you can sit by the water pan fishing for hours with nary a bite to interrupt your thoughts. If, like me, nothing is your favorite thing to do, pan fishing is for you.

Later in life I turned to trout fishing. This great nation is blessed with beautiful high mountain ranges criss-crossed by clear mountain streams. Every Summer,

the fish and game departments of the states where these mountains are found dump loads of rainbow trout into these stream where they can be fished out by fishermen.

Catching these trout is a matter of creeping (yes, creeping, because the fish can see you) up to the stream very quietly (because the fish can hear you), and dropping a hook and line, baited with a fish-egg or two, into the stream. Fish eggs work because the fish dumped into the stream have been fed on fish eggs and consider them a delicacy.

Real trout fisherman don't use fish eggs at all, because they are after native fish that eat insects. These fly fishermen use very small hooks to which bits of thread and feathers have been tied. These devices are called "flies." I suppose that's because, when the fishermen talk about them within hearing distance of the fish (remember, fish can hear) the fish will think that they're tasty insects. Fly fishermen wade right out in the middle of the streams and flick their lines back and forth so as to put the fly in just the right place. The hooks on the flies often don't have barbs. These hooks can be easily removed so that the fish who are dumb enough to bite them can be returned to the stream and so live to get caught again.

The great thing about trout fishing, with eggs or flies, is not catching the trout but walking the beautiful streams where they live.

Whether you fish to catch fish, do nothing, or walk streams, I would like to leave you with one piece of advice, given by my father after his long experience with me and my brother.

If you take a kid fishing, take him to a place where he will catch fish.