



PRESCRIPTION: GO FISHING

By: Frank J. Ross

Go FISHING," said the doctor, leaning one elbow on his desk and pointing a finger at me.

This was his answer to the rather plaintive appeal of a patient with a coronary artery disease (sclerosis) for some form of recreation and entertainment that wouldn't put him back in the hospital.

But I had never gone fishing in my life, and I always knew that I wasn't the kind of a guy who could sit for hours, or even half hours, in the same place and keep looking at the same scenery.

Yet, here was a heart specialist, a leader in his special field, telling me to go fishing.

Frankly, I felt let down.

"How come, Doctor?" I asked, "What's so good about fishing?"

"Well," he replied flatly, "in addition to living the calm and serene life that is necessary for you, it's the best medicine I can tell you about. Of all the things you can do, fishing will contribute to relaxed nerves and mental ease above and beyond any other activity. It, in fact, will bring about that complacent attitude you must develop in all the affairs of your life from now on."

"Think a guy who never tried it will get to like it?" I asked.

"You will, indeed. And you will feel so much better for it that you will be looking forward to fishing every season. One of the first things you must never do is to become angry or nervously upset. Fishing will help get you into the frame of mind which will make this gradually seem easy and in fact habitual."

Doctor Bill then told me about some of the results he has seen in his patients who have taken up fishing. He said that one patient who has been under his care for several years is now an expert fisherman. This man, in middle age suffers from hypertension (high blood pressure), a different affliction than my own but equally as devastating.

Doctor Bill said this man's blood pressure drops more than 30 points between March and November when it is fishing time in northern Ohio. When the season is over this patient's blood pressure begins to mount steadily, and by the end of the winter he is in precarious condition and strictly regimented.

Such is the relaxing effect of fishing. Unfortunately this man, whose name of course was not revealed to me, is unable to go to Florida in the wintertime because of his occupation.

"If he were," said Doc, "I'm confident we could add years to his life. However, he is still benefiting greatly by fishing during most of the year."

But even in fishing there are some "don'ts" for the cardiac patient, and Doc outlined these for me.

Don't row a boat. Get somebody else to do the rowing.

If you can't afford an outboard or a motorboat and are unable to get a partner along to row for you, fish from the shore.

Don't go in for wading in rubber boots and against the current of a stream.

So late last summer I bought a fishing rod, a reel, some line, and some lures. With my son, an enthusiastic fisherman, I went up to Vermilion, Ohio, and fished from the long stone pier at the mouth of the Vermilion River.

We weren't alone. There were a goodly number of men and a few women along the pier, basking in the warm sun and seemingly enjoying the beautiful blue of the wide sweep of Lake Erie before them.

Under the supervision of my son, I practiced casting for awhile. When I could get the line out a reasonably good distance, we baited up and sat down to fish.

The warmth of the sun was indeed relaxing and the beauty of the sailboats gliding out of the lagoon made a pretty picture. I settled down on the stone, hung my feet over the side and before I knew it or thought about it I was having a good time.

Not much later the cork bobber did a deep dip into the water. I jerked the rod and excitedly reeled in my first fish. It was a small white bass. But to me it looked just as big as a tarpon. That's one of the nice parts, I guess, about being a beginner.

Later on, feeling lazy and content, I pulled in another fish, which my son said was a sheepshead; I lost another white bass trying to pull him up the side of the pier. He just jumped off the hook.

Coming home I felt relaxed, happy, and a little bit sleepy.

"Believe it or not," I told my son, "This is just what Doc ordered."

Later, some friends, who found out I now liked to go fishing, invited me on a trip on a power boat. We fished around the Bass Islands in western Lake Erie. That was more of a big time affair than my first venture, and I caught a very nice walleye which up to that time I had always enjoyed eating but never thought of catching.

I managed to get in several more trips before winter set in, including one highly successful bass expedition. Reluctantly, I stored my tackle away to await the next season.

I told my friend Hank, about all this during the winter and he was very much interested.

"But suppose," he said, "just suppose you nail a six-pound bass this year. Remember the doctor said you mustn't get excited?"

"I guess that's another thing I'll have to learn to take in stride," I told Hank. "But after learning to drive a car through Cleveland traffic again without going nuts or having another heart attack, probably even that can be done. Besides, I don't know enough about it yet to feel that way about bass."

"Don't fret. You will," was Hank's sage advice. "And remember about getting excited."

I'm willing.

It seems to me that an important thing is to tell the millions of other heart sufferers that there is a form of sport and recreation that will not endanger them but actually will provide them with a tonic as well as a good time.

I've learned the answer, and one of the best prescriptions is - GO FISHING!