

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Stripers are hunters. If you're sitting there on a calm day and you see the water start to get roiled, put on your polarized sunglasses. Because I'll bet you fifty cents that you'll see stripers herding baitfish to their doom.

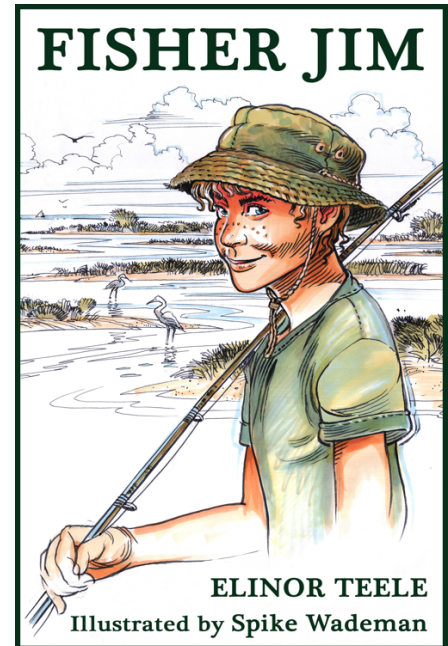
What they do is act like cowboys, pushing baitfish into smaller and smaller areas. Then, when they've got their victims corralled, they'll strike!

That's why I always look for stipples on the water. Granted, it's hard to sight stripers in windy conditions like the ones I was in, but I wasn't worried. Thanks to the gunk drifting down from its freshwater stream, the Jackpot was always a great place for baitfish.

I stuck a juicy hunk of herring on my hook, cast my line, and waited. Sure enough, within five minutes I had a hit. I pulled back...

And lost it immediately.

I mean, I've had sneezes that lasted longer.



About Fisher Jim

A Free eBook for Kids Ages 8-12
Written by Elinor Teele
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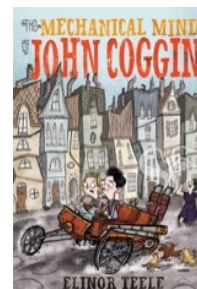
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But at least the fish were biting. So I threw out some chum to lure in the customers towards the boat, stuck another gob on my hook, and let my line in real slow. This time, I said to myself, don't get too eager. Make sure you've got one on before you bring it up.

Bam!

Nothing.

I cut the bait down to smaller bite-size pieces and tried again.

Bam!

Nothing.

I couldn't understand it. My technique was perfect. Not too loose, not too tight, just the right amount of give and take. It's like the stripers were playing chicken with me.

After an hour or so, I was getting frustrated. The sky over Maine was turning the color of Granddad's veins and the sea was starting to get pretty bumpy. I'd come halfway round the world to bring in a striper and it looked like I was going home with a big fat zero.

The afternoon really hit the skids when the inland jokers showed up on the rocks. I could tell in a nanosecond that this pair didn't know one end of a rod from another. One of them was wearing some kinda braided sandal that's not supposed to look like a flip-flop but actually does. The other had a windbreaker that cost more than Da's mortgage.

Granddad has this cheesy saying: "If you don't respect the fish, you can't expect the dish." It's kinda dorky, but it's as true as anything out there. Don't come fishing on Haul About Point if you're not willing to bend your knee to nature.


Still, I suppose I had the jokers to thank for one thing. Because it was while I was watching these guys futz around that I had my third in-spi-ration of the day.

You see, in all the excitement of the first hits, I'd forgotten one key point about striper fishing.

Hold 'til the second round.

Stripers are like heavyweight boxers. They want to stun you before they take you down. If you're a baitfish, they'll often smack you hard with their tails, circle round, and *then* come in for the kill.

So if you're fishing for stripers, you have to be patient. Wait for the second hit before you react. Then give it a go.



I could've kicked myself for being so stupid, but I didn't have time. I only had a few pieces of herring left. Best to stick my head down and focus on the task at hand.

So I dropped my line and waited. It's almost like I could sense the stripers circling round the hook, making up their minds. Seconds ticked by. Minutes.

While I was waiting there in eternity, I thought about Mom and how I was gonna pay for her plane ticket.

First, I pondered on getting some work. Mud usually had a few odd jobs kicking around, but it would take me thirty years to build up enough cash. By that time I'd be older than sin.

Then, I considered selling something valuable. I knew Granddad had a collection of china doll figures that Grandma had left him. They looked like creepy, bug-eyed fairies, but maybe someone would want them. People always pay big bucks for hideous things.

Finally, I realized I was being silly.

I didn't need to pay for Mom's ticket; I just needed to give her reason enough to get here on her own. It was like striper fishing. You stuck an in-duce-ment in the water and waited for the prize to come to you.

And I knew what the in-duce-ment would be.

Granddad always says that there are only two things in the world that move a mother: love and fear. I was holding onto love until the second round, with the beach and the sun and the talk about family.


But there was nothing to stop me from using fear.

It was so easy it was criminal. Once I knew where Mom was, I'd ask Stan to fake a doctor's call to tell her I was super-sick. You know, the kinda disease that gives you horrible fevers? Stan's pretty good at pronouncing those.

Mom would run screaming onto the plane and out onto the tarmac and over to the house. And on my bed would be a note from Da to Granddad—Stan's pretty good at faking handwriting, too:

"I've taken Jim for one last trip to Kramer's Beach."

After that, the rest was a doddle.



Course, I'd be the first to admit that there were a number of lo-gis-tics to work out. Like, how I was gonna know when Mom's plane had arrived. But I wasn't overly worried. My luck was bound to turn one of these days.

Bam!

I didn't even twitch.

Bam!

I yanked up the rod.

And I had a striper on the line! My reel started going ballistic as he started to run. I let the line spool for a bit, then I rammed on the brakes. Spool and brakes. Spool and brakes. I wanted that fish to be hangdog tired by the time I brought him in.

He must have been less than four feet from the boat when...

"Oh my god, look at the size of this mother!"

"You think that's big? Look at mine!"

I couldn't believe it. *Both* of those dumb-shoe inlanders were holding stripers in their hands!

And not just any stripers. Orcas. Blue Whales. I mean, these things were way over the legal limit. You think life is fair? Watch two jokers with no respect for fishing do a tap dance on your turf.

I was so distracted observing these twits hopping around and hollering that I committed what Da calls the cardinal sin of fishing. I didn't pay attention to my line.

It took less than three seconds for my fish to wriggle his jaw off the hook. Three seconds for my dreams of glory to go gurgling down the toilet.

Fate and the barbed wire fence. Since the day I was born.

Everything was turning into a huge pile of compost. The jokers from Podunk were whooping it up, the weather was foul, and the stripers appeared to be sprinting towards Nova Scotia. Even if I had wanted to stick around, I was completely out of bait.

Suddenly, I didn't want to fish anymore.

I wanted to go home.