



Just one bonefish

In 1994, I lost my Dad and I wrote this as a tribute to him. Dad's true passion was fishing. He traveled the world over for game fish, but his favorite was the elusive bonefish. These speed demons live in mere inches of water along the flats of the Florida Keys and are capable of speeds over 40mph when hooked. They are a fly fisherman's dream but very difficult to catch. I hope you enjoy this piece as I present it as a tribute to dads everywhere. And Dad, I still miss you everyday, but know that you and I will hit the flats together again and chase the bonefish.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

the outdoors. They spent weekends and vacations together fishing. The two of them fished all over the States and took many trips to Canada. The boy learned from the man by watching and mimicking the man's every move. That chosen corporate path led them to Florida. It was there that the man became obsessed with bonefishing. Together they poled every flat in the Florida Keys, chasing this elusive fish. They caught tarpon, permit, snook and reds, but that bonefish continued to elude the man. The man often shared his dream of retiring and moving to the Keys to the boy. As time passed, the boy grew and learned the other responsibilities of life. The boy had married the love of his life and together, they added a boy and a girl to their family. As fate would have it, the boy, who had become a world-class angler, had to choose a path not of the fishing world. That path prevented him from spending as much time fishing with the man as he wanted.

The man announced, at his 60th birthday, that he was going to retire. He was going to fulfill his dream, and move to the Keys. There he would spend his time chasing that elusive bonefish. Then, from a routine check-up, the man heard those dreaded words, the C word, the big casino, cancer. It was diagnosed as inoperable and terminal. Suddenly, all that mattered in life changed. The man's life was structured around radiation and chemotherapy treatments. All else in life lost its priority. Possessions and money no longer had any significance. Flats fishing for bonefish was about the only outside activity that the man enjoyed anymore. Nowadays, he relied on the boy to take him. The pace was much slower and the days on the water, shorter. But no matter, the boy was always there for him. As on countless trips before, the bonefish continued to elude the man. They would pass his bait only to take the boy's. Sometimes he would



Poling the flats for a bonefish (foreground) in the Florida Keys. A lone bonefish makes his way across a flat. (Photos courtesy of Actioncraft Boats)

hook-up, only to see the line break or the hooks pull. This troubled the boy deeply but the man was not bothered. He always said that what was important was that they were out there together. The boy never understood this. The cancer took a death-grip on the man and it was obvious that there was no turning back. All treatments were discontinued so the man could slip away in peace. Then, one morning, the man actually felt well enough for a flats trip. The boy was there to take him but it was a fisherman's weather nightmare. The wind blew hard among angry looking clouds. Still, they went. The boy, on his perch poling the skiff, caught sight of a lone bonefish tailing against the tidal current. He told the man where to cast, and the man laid a bait perfectly in front of the fish. The fish pounced on it, and the fight was on. The battle lasted 15 minutes and it was touch and go, the whole time. The boy was not sure who would give out first, the fish or the man. The man won and a beautiful 7-pound bonefish was in the net. After a brief encounter between the man and his prize, the bonefish was gently released. The two watched the fish swim away, back into the shadows

of time. The trip ended there, as the man had nothing left in him. Two days later, the final chapter in the man's life was written, and he left this world. The boy now stood alone. It was many months before the boy would go back to the familiar flats. He just could not bear to go it alone, without the man on the bow. Eventually, the boy returned, but it was something he dreaded doing. Things were different now, as my own boy stood on the bow of the boat, where his grandfather had stood for so long. Suddenly, I had become the man, the elder at all the family gatherings. I did realize at that time that I had not lost my dad, as he was still here, living on in me. I accepted the torch from him and now I am the man, teaching my boy. Some day, my boy will be the man, and take his boy, as life goes on. This gift of understanding was what my dad wanted me to receive, and I did. Thanks dad, and until we meet again, tight lines. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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