

## Early October Blessings From the River

The first few colder nights have wrought some pleasant changes in the fishing on “The Mighty Red.” I was finally able to make my way down to one of the piers, and my first cast with a home-tied jig tipped with 2 inches of night crawler drew a lusty strike from, a battling, beautiful white bass, just like the ones I used to catch down at Hartford Beach in S. D.

I had 2 in. of water in my second 5 gal. bucket, so I live-welled Little Whitie in case I was into a school. Down at Hartford, if you caught one white bass, you might be lucky enough to get into a school and a feeding frenzy with a fish on every cast.

My second cast produced a second fish, and this one streaked down the stream for about 70 heart-stopping feet before I turned it side-ways so I could bring it in. It wasn't another white bass, but a fine golden redhorse sucker, with gleaming golden hued sides and bright red fins. This one was about 3 lbs., and was shaped exactly like the exotic bone fish, so cherished by anglers who fly-cast the Bahamian flats.

In the 50's I used to watch Curt Gowdy on “The American Sportsman” fight those “grey ghosts of the flats,” as they burned off seventy yards of backing at the first prick of the hook. I think a golden redhorse in two feet of water might do the same thing. I admired my fish's golden aura, then slipped her back into the Red.

Younger, I would have smoked it, but I am through with sucker smoking now; “essence of winter sleep” is on my nights,” and I didn't feel like boiling it, like Marlana Dietrich in “*Golden Earrings.*” Besides that, with an upper plate, detecting the bones (suckers have many,) is a problem.

My third cast brought a solid jolt, so I knew I was into a Pike. After their initial strike, most pike are good for three or four short runs, saving the last for the moment it sees the net, but I'd learned to hold the net down in the water and lead the fish over it. Trying to scoop a fish with your net is a good way to lose it.

My pike, because of its big head, should have weighed six lbs, but this one went only about four. He must have come over from the Ottertail, where the zebra muscles

have “meagerd” the plankton that fatten the pike’s forage. So Mr, Pike too, joined Goldie Redhorse, back in “The Mighty Red.” He would have raised cane in my bucket anyway, and since he wasn’t another white bass, I released Little Whitie too.

My fourth take was different, a kind of dead weight drag that at first I took for a weed, but setting the hook, I soon realized it was a “lowly waldo,” that’s what bass fishermen jokingly call the walleye, so cherished by all Norwegians and even a few Germans. I think that’s because their flesh is so unfishily delicious, it’s hard to ruin by over-cooking. But Willy Waldo, barely a pound, I also released.

A flock of gabbling Canadian geese, coming at me in easy gun range, reminded me that I’d been ignoring the birds, but the variety fishing really absorbed me. Before I quit, I also released a drum, a small catfish, and a carp. I caught no smallmouths or buffalo fish. Of course ‘you cant really fish in a buffalo herd.’

It was one of those great waking- up mornings that can bless any old man, with a river’s restoration. If the ugly world news has you singing the moody blues, go sit by “The Mighty Red.” It will “sooth your soul.” P.S. Louise Erdrich’s new novel, “The Mighty Red” just came out. It’s a winner!

Gene Pinkney for the Daily News 24-10-03-