

K o n r a d S c h m i d t ' s " T h e T a i l E n d "

~~~~~

## T w o f o r t h e P r i c e o f O n e

*For more than two decades, I have collected, surveyed, and simply watched fish from Alaska to Florida. In all those years and all those places, I have had a few memorable experiences which really stand out. Some directly involve fish while others are encounters with wildlife and people.*

### **Man's Best Friend**

Duke was a lab-setter-retriever mix that I had for over 16 years. In his youth, he was my bird and rabbit dog, but in his twilight years, he became my constant collecting companion. Duke had this peculiar habit of retrieving rocks in lakes and streams. He never got enough of it and sometimes would wrestle 30-pound boulders onto shore.

Quite by accident, I turned his little quirk into an aid for collecting fish when I once noticed schools of fish fleeing his relentless rock rescues. In pools too big to seine alone, we would start at one end and drive fish to the other where they would concentrate at the base of a riffle. I would frequently give him an encouraging "Get 'em Duke!" Near the end of the pool, I would hold the net in the deepest water, which appeared to be the likely escape route, and then wave Duke ahead. All at once the school would make a dash for freedom downstream and I would begin splashing off to the side of the net, funneling fish into my waiting trap. Surprisingly, this mad method almost always worked.

One day, however, I thought Duke was goofing off. I never looked behind me because I was attempting to prevent a large school of fish from making a premature run. I was hoping Duke would finally get with it and plug the hole on his side of the pool. I thought he was at least 10 or 15 feet away when I felt a vice-like grip take hold of

my tennis shoe. The first thought that flashed through my head was that I had just stepped on the only true terror of the deep in Minnesota—SNAPPING TURTLE! I let out a muffled scream, jumped, and tripped over Duke.

He never was aware of all the commotion he caused and still had his head underwater, intently hunting for the rock that was, in fact, my foot.

### **Train Terror**

At a distance, I find the sound of an oncoming train rhythmic and soothing, the intermittent whistle blasts providing punctuation to an outdoor orchestra's performance. Along rivers, the sound becomes haunting as echoes reverberate for miles off the valley walls. But at close range, the experience is anything but pleasant.

In southeastern Minnesota, tributary streams enter the Mississippi River, which is also a major railroad route. When I'm collecting in these streams it seems a train is always coming, and usually at 50 to 60 miles per hour. It never fails that trains catch me either alongside or underneath the bridges, which are rarely more than eight feet above the stream.

Through these encounters, I have really come to fear and dread the peaking Doppler effect. The train gets closer and closer, louder and louder, and far beyond deafening. My hair stands on end, my skin begins to crawl, and I have an almost uncontrollable impulse to run and hide.

If I'm alongside the bridge, the engineer further assaults me with a long warning blast from his whistle. (At that instant, I would give anything to make him wear it.) And if I'm underneath, dust, gravel, corn, and pigeon poop rain down on me.

When the last car crosses the bridge, silence follows, bringing with it a welcomed peace.