

Your Survival Guy's Fishing Stories: From Key West to Newport

Dear Survivor,

One special night in Key West, dining at the fabulous Café Marquesa, I was told actor Michael Keaton was seated behind me. Turning around, I instantly recognized that he was, sidled my chair next to his, put my arm around his shoulders, ordered a round of drinks, and told him he was, hands down, my favorite Batman. Kidding. I'm Your Survival Guy, not The Joker, thank you. But, I will admit, leaving the Marquesa, we took a left on to Simonton Street to confirm the sighting. And as I casually glanced into the dining room, sure enough, there was Batman.



Fast forward two years now, and here I am looking out into the morning darkness of my backyard, snow on the ground, and it feels like 22 degrees outside. Tropical Key West this is not. But it's in times like these when I dream of fishing. It's when I'm freezing on a chairlift skiing that I think about [hot summer days on the Tom Sawyer fishing](#) Narragansett Bay off Newport, RI.

After that Key West trip, I spoke with my client, fishing extraordinaire Chris, and told him we stopped by the Angling Company in Key West to buy a birthday gift for our son. Without hesitation, Chris asked, "Was Nathaniel there?" "Whose Nathaniel," I asked. "He holds all kinds of Permit fly-fishing records. You need to check out Andy Mill's podcast with him. It's awesome. And while you're at it, watch the one on guide Steve Huff. He's the guide when it comes to tarpon," Chris said. And so, I did.

And then a serendipitous moment. It was a few months later, October 2020, in my Newport, RI office reading a book review in *The Wall Street Journal* by Richard Adams Carey: "What Susan Orlean accomplished for the strange, hermetic world of orchid hunting in her 1998 classic 'The Orchid Thief,' Monte Burke does for another strange, hermetic world in his wonderful *Lords of the Fly: Madness, Obsession, and the Hunt for the World-Record Tarpon*." I was hooked.

Burke, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Saban*, knows a thing or two about passion, whether it's for his *Crimson Tide* or, the subject of this book, tarpon fishing. But how do you describe it? How do you explain *how much* you like your football team? With your arms wide open, like you're showing how big the fish that got away was? Or, more to my point, how do I explain why I like fishing?

Here's a stab at it. I remember one particular family sailing trip when I was a kid. We were moored in Great Harbor, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, home to some of the best fishing in the region. And my dad, a sailor, not to be confused with a fisherman, said as we loaded the sailboat, "Do you really need all that fishing gear for this trip?" I did.

Because I'd get up before the rest of the boat, well before sunrise. I'd pull the 35-hp Evinrude awake, situate

my 14' Dell Quay (a British take on the Boston Whaler), the *Sandpiper*, cast the lines, and go fishing. I'd listen for pogies (baitfish) jumping away from the ravenous bluefish darting in and out of their schools and hope for opportunistic striped bass below. What could be more fun?

And the strike? Talk about exciting. The trick was in not setting the hook too early and pulling the bait out of the mouth (easier said than done in the heat of the moment), and then patiently fighting the monster fish back to the boat. Later, in the heat of the morning sun, covered with blood and with fish guts strewn about the *Sandpiper*, my dad looked at me and said how proud he was. Kidding. "Don't even think about boarding the sailboat until that mess is cleaned up," he said. "Fishing doesn't go with sailing." OK.

"This is a story of the obsessed, unhinged, and often brilliant dreamers who chase giant tarpon—a primeval fish with breathtaking glamour and ungodly strength. The thrill of hooking one on a fly rod is impossible to exaggerate, so you can believe every word from Monte Burke's funny, wistful, wonderful book. He's clearly as sick as the rest of us," writes Carl Hiaasen on the back cover.

In the book, you meet obsessed characters like financier Tom Evans and his guide Steve Huff. Remember him? You also learn that Huff has had enough. He's done guiding. Tucked away in Everglades City, Florida, he's more focused on catchin' these days than guidin'. I talked about the book with client Chris. He knew all the names. And then this happened.

"Hey, I called Steve Huff," Chris told me weeks later.

"I thought he retired," I said.

"I know, but I called him anyway, told him how much I like to fish and how incredible it would be to go fishing with him," Chris said. "I also followed up with a letter. We'll see what happens." Weeks pass by. And then, one September evening, there's a bite. My phone lights up with a four-word text from Chris. "November 15 Steve Huff." Damn! I thought. He's going fishing with the Nick Saban of guides.

And on the 16th, the day after their outing, Chris texted me the pictures below. And when we spoke, he said, "You know what the most incredible part about fishing with Steve Huff was?"

"What?" I asked.



“After we caught a fish, Steve said, ‘Thank you.’”

Sometimes catching big fish has nothing to do with a rod and reel.

And about that night at the Marquesa? “I distinctly remember the first tarpon I hooked. After about a half dozen leaps, I looked up at the end of my fly rod bent against the horizon and thought: ‘Good God, I’ve got a dinosaur on a stick!’ A tarpon is one of the greatest creatures in the sea. *Lords of the Fly* gets to the heart of why. You will love this book,” from Michael Keaton on *Lord of the Fly*. Who knew Batman liked to fish?

Survive and Thrive this Month.

Warm regards,

E.J.

E.J.

“Your Survival Guy”

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