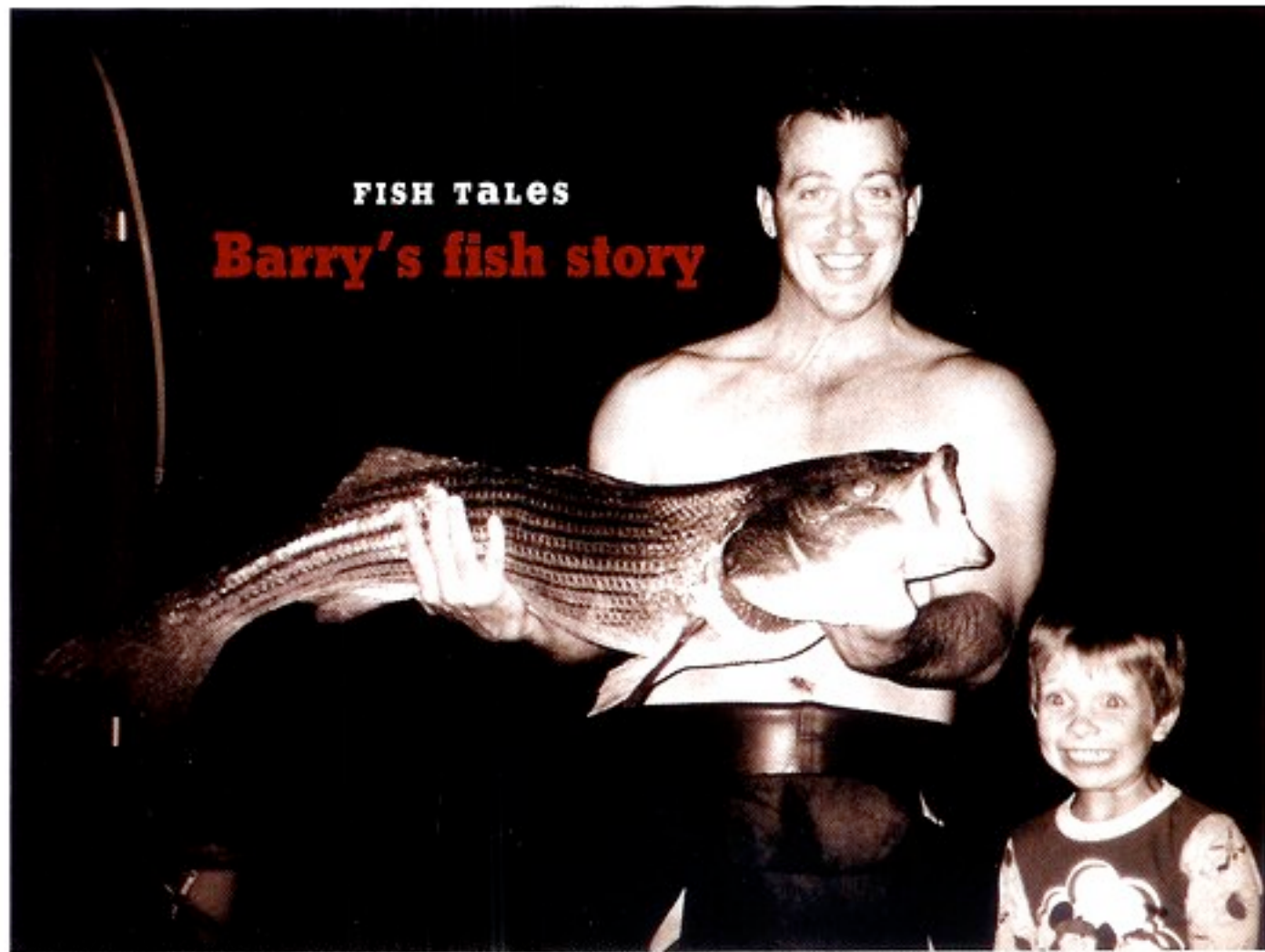


FISH TALES

Barry's fish story



Barry Stringfellow, the striper, and Ian MacCormack.

I'd come by red-eye from California to visit my girlfriend. Our improbable long-distance romance began in earnest the previous year, when I came to write a surf-fishing story for a regional magazine. I entered the Striped Bass and Bluefish Derby and fished every day and night for three weeks. I went out in every kind of weather the Vineyard can throw at you in October: howling northeast winds, horizontal rain, idyllic Indian summer days, and still, crisp nights when the sky is carpeted with stars. Several times expert guides took me to Squibnocket and Chappaquiddick. And except for a four-inch bluefish that hit my six-inch lure, I caught nothing.

But this trip was different. I'd only been on the Vineyard a few hours when I caught this forty-pound beauty.

This balmy late-September evening started with a trip to Dick's Bait and Tackle in Oak Bluffs. As I paid for my

six eels, I pondered entering the Derby again. But I reasoned, in twisted fisherman's logic, that my dismal results the year before were probably the result of avarice. And I wasn't crazy about the color of the hats. So I didn't enter.

After several welcome-back martinis with my girlfriend, I went to my fishing hole. It's not known as a hot spot. But it offers solitude. And I can walk to it or canoe to it, which on this night drastically reduced my chances of getting a DUI. I was probably off for a night of gazing at stars and drowning some eels, but in the back of every fisherman's mind wriggles the notion that at any point along the sixty-three miles of Vineyard shoreline, anything is possible.

"Catch a striped bass!" my girlfriend's son yelled as I ambled off into the quickly fading dusk.

I threw out my first eel, pinched the line on the rod, and watched the spec-

tacular nightly show at dusk, wondering how many shooting stars I'd count this evening. My record here is twelve.

Then, almost immediately, came a hard tug. Line flew off the reel like it was attached to Ahab's harpoon. Despite my excitement, I counted slowly to five, just like Paul Schultz taught me the previous year. Then I engaged the bail; the drag sang like a police siren. In twenty-five years of surf fishing, I've never encountered such power. Then I heard the enormous splash of a large fish angrily trying to shake a hook.

Twenty minutes of tug-of-war later, I grabbed the exhausted creature by the gill, in knee-deep water, and wrestled it to shore. Then came the hard part.

It's not easy to carry a forty-one pound striped bass, especially if you're walking along Beach Road, trying to hide your quarry from passing cars. If the word got out, the treasured solitude

of my spot would be history.

When I got back to my girlfriend's house, her involuntary shout of "Oh, my God!" roused her son from his bed. He was thrilled to see a fish that was longer than he was. And even more thrilled to see me open the fish's stomach (it's a boy thing) and find a large, whole blue crab.

Had I registered, I would have certainly placed in the Derby. But this picture is much more valuable to me than a gold pin and a shot at a boat I'd never use. The beaming smile of a five-year-old boy makes this picture priceless. I carry it in my day timer, and I will for the rest of my days.

Now this boy's Mom is my wife, he is my son, and we're a family. And every time I head off to my spot, he shouts, "Catch a striped bass!"

I hope someday I'll be shouting that to him. ♦

— BARRY STRINGFELLOW