

The Star

Fishing, to a lad

By AZNIR MALEK

The green waters of Kuala Tahan, Pahang seemed serene underneath the myriad wooden boats plying the river. On the opposite bank, a whitewashed staircase ascended to the Taman Negara base camp hidden behind hardwood trees. I was standing on the cobbled bank of the confluence waiting for the longboat to take me fishing up Sungai Keniam.

That was 18 years ago and, for a young angler, it was a thrilling time; the moody river covered by the giant neram trees and laced with thundering rapids and cheerful riffles, the powerful fishes like kelah, tengas and sebarau breaking off my fishing line at the slightest chance, and the electric shock that comes when you dive into the frigid water for your evening swim.

That first trip was my initiation into the wonderful world of jungle river fishing. And I have enjoyed every moment of it since.

Looking back, I realise that I have been fishing for a long time. I was four or five when I made my first fishing rod out of a length of stout bamboo. I pinched some of the sewing thread from mum's Singer machine. A hook was fashioned from a piece of wire from the broken garden fence. With this rudimentary tackle, I caught puyu from the channels beside the padi fields.

Fishing promotes bonding.

I spent my formative years at the canals, ponds and streams around Kangar, my hometown. Sungai Korok, the river near our house, was my second home. I knew every fishing hole, slippery bank and muddy flat on that stretch of the river. That was my quest for excellence in my sport.

There were other rewards too. I learned the meaning of peace and being at one with nature. Sitting there on the horizontal roots of a bankside raintree, I blended with the river and its foliage, sitting still as a rock. I saw kingfishers flying by, otters playing near their nest, and a haruan lunging at an unlucky frog. I certainly didn't need National Geographic.

I learned the meaning of expectancy and concentration. After casting my bait, I would focus on the float for long periods of time, waiting for that quiver signifying that a fish has come a-calling. My heart would palpitate, savouring what would happen when that float dips and disappears into the green depths, leading me to strike with the rod and feel the pulsing resistance of the fish.

In the end, I learned about patience and determination (they are the same thing, actually) is pursuing one's goal. Fishing is about overcoming self-imposed challenges and achieving an objective: landing a fish. It gave meaning to the activity.

And the reward of achievement, oh yes! The joy of seeing that fish landed on the bank and the thrill of holding it in my hands. I would promptly bring the fish home and put it in a large steel tub that served as my "aquarium". For days, I admired the fish until it died or got stolen by some cat. Later in life, I also learned the joy of releasing the fish back into the river after a couple of snapshots.

Yes, I learned that I am my own judge of my achievements. Only then is my joy genuine. Fishing is about achieving something on one's own terms, not others'.

But it's more than that. Twenty years down the river, I have clocked thousands of miles, read hun-

dreds of books, seen wondrous places, met interesting people and made lifelong friends. I have written a book and numerous magazine articles, produced two videos and made many public presentations about the sport. And yes, I have pitted wits against many awesome fish. Not bad for an activity misconstrued as 'boring'!

What started as a hobby became a sport and later a passion. Fishing complements other aspects of one's life. It's a safety valve for the stresses of city living. It's an opportunity to ponder life's workings or issues (especially when the fish are not biting!).

It's also a good way of assessing which friends are genuine or otherwise. The sport is an equaliser. You could be a high court judge, a corporate leader or a junior clerk, but those positions don't mean a thing by the river bank, for you are just Plain Joe to the other anglers.

In fishing, it doesn't take very long for others to see your true colours, and vice versa. And that's how it should be, rather than the pretense people go through during work or social rituals.

It was after becoming an accomplished angler (based on my own judgement, of course) that I came across a saying by Winston Churchill: You make a living from what you get, but make a life from what you give.

I have since become a believer in that. In essence, it's about giving something back. Fishing is such a beautiful thing, it's a crime to keep the knowledge, skills and attitude all to yourself.

Once in a while, some stranger would come up to me, telling how much my writing meant to him, or how it inspired him and his kids to pursue the sport. It puts a warm feeling in my chest. I get a vision of Mr Churchill smiling down at me.

Well, just a tiny one! W

How do I get started?

1) Go to a fishing shop. Chances are, there will be someone there willing to help you out. Most fishermen are friendly.

2) Get on to the Net. For starters, find this great website: Malaysia Fishing Net. The guys in the forum will help you. MFN is one of the most active fishing sites in the world. It gets up to 1.5 million hits a month.

3) E-mail us at aznirm@tnb.com.my or fishingmasters_mymy@yahoo.com, and we'll try our best to help you with tips and advice.

Reasons why people don't like fishing

Mosquitoes and leeches!

"It's too hot."

"I don't have the patience, having to wait for the fish to bite."

"It's too time consuming. I'm too busy."

"It looks too complicated."

Reasons why you should try fishing anyway

It's healthy. You get to be with nature. Green is good for the eyes.

You get good exercise – walking, trekking, paddling, swimming. It's your choice.

You learn from nature. You observe survival at work, and you learn about the need for conservation.

It's an opportunity for contemplation. Thinking out your life and its complexities.

You meet excellent company, regardless of creed or colour.

Many of the world's leaders are fishermen, so there must be something in it!

It's the perfect "detox". You forget life's worries for a while, unless you bring your boss along!

It's far better than switching to Discovery on Sunday, watching other people having a good time.

One day, your child may request that you bring him fishing, so you'd better be ready!

You can have quality time with the kids.