

A Shark Story  
By Walt Reeves

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There's a bumper sticker that says that the worse day of fishing is better than the best day of work. I guess that is mostly true, but one particular day of fishing for my buddy John, was not much better than any worse day at work could ever be.

It happened on a weekday in the dead of winter out at Horseshoe Kelp, a popular fishing spot just off the coast of San Pedro, California. It was a cool morning, gloomy, and the water was very calm. There were only two half-day fishing boats there when we got there and we watched them for a while to see if anyone was catching any fish. We didn't see much action, so we decided to just sit back and fish the bottom.

After about two hours and two fish, we were pretty bored. John went up on the flying bridge just to look around and saw a shark circling the boats. He tossed a couple of dead anchovies as far as he could toward the shark and it quickly turned toward the splashes. John came down the ladder and reeled in his line. He put a big jig on the light line and said something about having some fun with the shark.

The shark was much closer to the boat now and was cruising back and forth looking for something to eat. John readied his rig and with a mighty effort, cast the jig out to the shark. Again, as soon as it splashed into the water, the shark turned and headed for the sound. We waited as the shark's fin neared and then disappeared. John said, "He's going after it".

Suddenly John's rod bent and the line began to be taken from the reel. The shark had his jig. John waited for about a half a minute, then jerked back on the rod, setting the hook. The shark, took off with a burst of speed, stripping the line from John's reel. John tightened the drag and began to put pressure on the shark, but it wasn't slowing much.

All at once, the line slacked and John began to reel-in line fast. "The shark is coming back to the boat!" he said. For me, that wasn't real good news. I don't much like sharks and would have preferred that John had found a snail, squid, or mackerel to play with. The shark's fin appeared again behind the boat and about a hundred feet away. John kept reeling and the shark kept coming to the boat.

"You got a gaff?" he asked.

“A *gaff!*” I was amazed that he wanted to bring the shark aboard.  
“No, I don’t have a gaff, only a net.”

“Aw, a net’s no good.”

“Well, I guess you’ll just have to cut him loose then,” I offered.

I think John was tiring of the game with the Shark a few minutes later and he decided that he would just try to pull out the jig or break his line, saving as much of it as he could by reeling the tiring shark up close to the boat. The shark was offering very little resistance to being steered to the boat and when it was alongside, we could see that it was pretty small, perhaps five feet long, and not very lively.

“Looks sick;” said John. “I’ll just pull my jig out or break the line.”

He pulled up on the rod and it bent into an inverted U shape. The line didn’t break, but the shark’s head was raised by the pulling. John put more pressure on, but the line held, and, the shark was raised out of the water.

“I’ll see if I can get him aboard” said John.

“What for?” I really didn’t want a live shark in the cockpit.

“I can club him unconscious and get my jig out of his mouth. I can see the end of it.”

“Hell, John, I’ll buy you a new jig if you leave him in the water!”

I guess he didn’t hear or had decided it would be some sort of challenge to extract a jig from a live shark’s jaws.

“Stand back!” He had the shark, now barely moving, up to the rail.

I suddenly had a thought. “John, I don’t have anything aboard to club him with!”

Too late. The shark was swung over the rail and flopped down on the deck. The moment John relaxed the pressure on the line, the shark went bananas! It thrashed and flipped and rolled and bounced like a berserk basketball with teeth - big teeth - snapping at anything and everything.

“Whack the damn thing,” yelled John. “I don’t have a whacker, I told you!”

Finally, something good came from all of the shark’s panicked flailing. The jig came out.

Now all we had was a big, old, sick shark spitting blood all over my deck and trying to bite us. It had crushed the ice chest that we had for fish that we caught, but so far that was the only damage.

Then John took my boathook in hand and began to plummet the fish about the head with it. All that seemed to do was infuriate it more. I grabbed a dock line that had been coiled on deck and made a loop sliding it over the shark’s tail. I told John that maybe the two of us could lift the shark with the line by his tail and fling him overboard.

A quick trial of that idea showed that there wasn't enough room for both of us to manage it. We took another dock line and again, I was able to get it around his tail. John got up on the deck on one side of the boat and I was on the deck on the other side, and at the count of three, we were going to raise the shark and let it go off the boat, over the transom. Good plan.

On "three" we heaved the shark up off the cockpit deck, swung it over the transom, and my line slipped off.

The shark spun toward John and as it went over the side, it tore into John's left leg with its teeth. Blood went flying, the shark went flying and John went flying over the side with the shark. I became somewhat concerned for John's safety at this point; so I leaped to the swim-step only to collide with John as he shot out of the water, back aboard the boat.

I told him that it just wasn't smart to go into shark-infested waters while bleeding.

The wounds were not life threatening, but we went back to the marina and made a trip to the local hospital's emergency room anyway. So, we ended up losing a dock line, and an ice chest, and he had to pay a hospital bill, but...we saved his jig.