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Report from Fletcher's Cove - June 1, 2010

It's striper season in D.C. Since May 16th, an angler has been allowed to keep two 18-inch or longer striped bass per day, one of which may be over 28 inches. Now, bear in mind, the fish themselves swim to a different tune than humans. A "legal size" time frame is just an overlay on nature's timing. Don't be confused... many stripers were caught and (hopefully) released before mid May. There are still some legal size fish around Fletcher's, so if you want to have a chance to catch one, fish before the water gets too hot in July.

Becky and Mike Crowder are an angling couple who regularly have success finding a big striper or two, plus some tub-size catfish. We always enjoy their visits and as you can see from these mid-May photos, their teamwork really paid off. That's Becky with a 32-pound striper and a 42-pound catfish, both released to fight again.

If you are planning on fishing at some other location and need bait or tackle, don't forget that Fletcher's is really the only in-town tackle shop. Our small size dictates that the selection is kept to the basics, but if you need hooks, sinkers, bobbers, worms, bass lures or some light to medium spinning combos, then we may well have what you want. D.C. fishing permits also can be purchased through the summer and early fall.

Memorial Day

It's easy to be cynical in this day and age, just read the paper or watch the news. Who would have thought the phrase "fill'er-up" would apply to the Gulf of Mexico? Or that we would have to take off our shoes, not to enter a Japanese restaurant, but to board a plane? But when one takes a moment to think about what this country's ideals stand for, then the picture changes. Cynicism can disappear. To paraphrase a line from President Reagan in 1984, 'it's always morning in America'. Each new day we have the freedom and opportunity to strive for those core ideals. It is that bright morning of idealism that our brave servicemen and women fight and sometimes die for in our nation's conflicts. Those who gave their very lives, we honor on Memorial Day.

Memorial Day is about those who died in combat. That is its proper focus. But not all wounds of war manifest themselves immediately.

I want to tell you a little about a Navy veteran who was dear to the Fletcher's family and who recently passed away from complications of cancer. John Murto was a true hero. He wasn't blasted by bullets or shrapnel, he was blasted repeatedly in Vietnam by Agent Orange, a more insidious weapon of modern war. John was a mate on a fuel supply ship, plying the rivers of South Vietnam. To protect the ship from attack, Agent Orange was sprayed along the rivers to de-foliate the shoreline. If you were on that ship, there was no escaping that mist from above.

This happened before I knew John. My memory of him is from the 1970s and '80s when we worked together at Fletcher's. I will always remember John for his kindness and happy attitude in spite of the health troubles that followed him home from Southeast Asia. He never seemed bitter... only happy to be an American boy from the "small-town neighborhood" of Palisades, above the boathouse. John grew up in a big Catholic family where hard work was second nature, and that showed at Fletcher's. He was always enthusiastic and ready to help. A good mentor to a younger employee! Once, John jumped into a Fletcher boat, fired up the outboard and raced up the Potomac



Becky with a 42 pound catfish
(fish released)



Becky Crowder with a 32 pound striped bass
(fish was released)

to rescue a capsized canoeist from the rapids at Little Falls.

To give you a window on John's character and his abiding love, think of this: John volunteered for a second tour of duty in Vietnam to prevent his younger brother from being drafted into combat. That's a deep river.

Medals are awarded for valor and service in war, and these symbols surely deserve our respect. But there are no Purple Hearts for the more mysterious, slow-motion wounds and mental trauma our service people suffer. So it is up to us to remember and respect these things too.

John moved on from Fletcher's to a long career at the Library of Congress. He leaves the love of his life, Ellie, and a beautiful daughter, Sara.

John Murto played a big part in making Fletcher's Boathouse the "people-place" it has always been. Thank you, John... you will always be remembered.

Dan



Three River-Rats at Fletcher's, Fall, 2004.
John Murto (on left), Ray Fletcher and Frank Troiano

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