

BY AMY PETERSON

most memorable

The Old Men & The Me



When my husband, Mark, heard from his old fishing pal, Denny, that marlin fishing in East Cape, Mexico is "good and cheap," it was all Mark needed to turn our house into the Michigan Marlin Academy. Saltwater catalogs flooded the bathroom; how-to videotapes

arrived weekly and were watched repeatedly; the hours of 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Sunday morning were dedicated to saltwater fishing shows on TV. Dozens upon dozens of long and oddly shaped packages arrived bearing fishing poles, gigantic reels, and lures many times the size of the lures used on the average

fishing trip in Michigan. E-bay made a fortune.

I found Mark and Denny at the dining room table sipping coffee, comparing notes, looking through fishing catalogs, and discussing who had what for the upcoming trip. They showed each other their latest purchases and

shared the best with me to see if I was still excited about going with them. I told them it was all I could do to contain myself. "In fact, I want to get on with the trip, not only to catch a fish bigger than me, but to get my husband back. The one that talked about something besides marlin fishing?" They laughed, shook their heads and went back to chatting.

The plane ride to Mexico was like a Saturday afternoon chat, only at 29,000 feet, with the two men blabbing about whether the cooler they brought was large enough for all the fish we'd be catching. I was never so happy to land and get fishing in my life.

Our destination was Hotel Rancho Leonero, on the East Cape, Baja. We spent our first day aboard a panga with Juan. Juan put on one of our purple and silver teasers, a blue and red C&H lure, and a pink and blue Moldcraft chugger. Within an hour, a striped marlin hit one, then the next, then a third lure. Mark, Denny and I sat stunned and unable to move as Juan grabbed one rod and reeled, set that one back and grabbed another rod and reeled, set that one down to pitch a ballyhoo to the hungry marlin. The marlin hit the ballyhoo, Juan set the hook and handed the rod to Mark to begin wrestling the striped marlin of his dreams. For forty-five minutes, Mark grinned and reeled, standing tall as he fought the marlin in his new fighting belt and harness, succumbing to a chair only for the last fifteen minutes. While Denny cheered, I, the supporting wife, was so enthralled at the power of the marlin when it blasted into the air, so amazed at the flash of light blue on its pectoral fins under the water, so in awe of the sheer size of the beast next to the boat – I only got one photograph of Mark touching the bill of his fish before we released it to the sea.

The men exchanged high fives and patted each other on the back for the fine selection of lures they had brought, for the fishing poles and reels they had researched and purchased, and for the giant fish. They were deep
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into debate about how large Mark's marlin was when a dorado smacked a red teaser. It was Denny's turn, and as he reeled, the dorado flashed brilliant blue and lime green as it rose and fell, ran and rested. When the dorado was at the side of the boat, I was in awe of its electric colors, its size, its bony head. "Best of all," Denny said as the fish was dropped into the holding bin, "it's tasty."

An hour later, I was in a fight with a beautiful dorado flashing brilliant colors from the water. Nearby, another dorado flashed back, never leaving the side of the fish I was fighting. My fish was added to the holding tank with Denny's

Mark and Denny were debating whose dorado was larger when a marlin broke the water, smacked at a lure and enticed Denny into a twenty-five minute fight. This time, Mark and I were both prepared: the fight was videotaped, and when the marlin brought to the boat, it was photographed and released.

With that, our first day of fishing was

done. We raised our margaritas in celebration at the Rancho Leonaro lounge. Mark and I left to shower and when we returned we found Denny animated in conversation with four Americans, his arms stretched in an "it was this big" kind of gesture. When he joined us later, he said, "I've established our reputation as the Michigan Marlin Hunters."

I knew we were doomed.

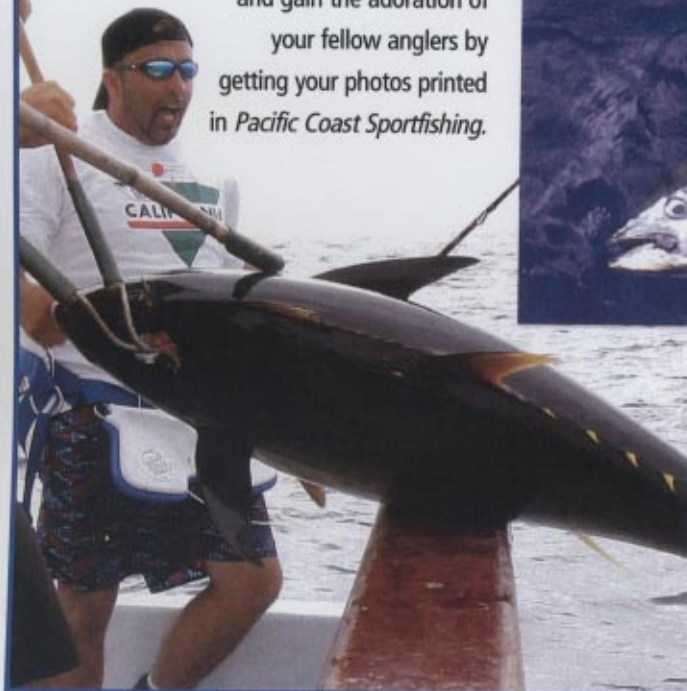
We spent the next two days on a twenty-foot cruiser in six-foot waves. After seven hours bobbing on the seas, our entire catch was one dorado for Mark. On the third and fourth days we fished for dorado and marlin, and, failing that, tuna and even roosters, all without success. When we reached shore, our guide, Hector, asked what we wanted to try to catch on our last day. Mark said, "We have only one day left to get Amy her marlin."

That's when it hit me – Mark and Denny, who had planned, studied, purchased and prepared for this trip like none other, spent their second, third and fourth days trolling the high seas so I could catch my first marlin.

All morning on our last day we waited for a marlin to strike. Morning turned into mid-day. It was hot with no wind. Even the men seemed to be holding their breath; it was the first time they had nothing to say. We had one hour left to fish and were talking about wrapping it up when a striped marlin hit first one bait, then another, then a third one before Hector pitched a bait and set the hook. For twenty minutes I wrestled a fish bigger than me. Hector brought my marlin into the cruiser for a quick photograph before releasing it to the sea.

I have been scuba diving for twenty-five years and freshwater fishing for longer, and I have never seen the flash of color like the dorado's, felt the power on the end of a line like my marlin, or stood next to fish as large and beautiful as the ones we caught in Baja. And I had never been asked to join two fishing pals who put so much into catching one particular fish. For me, it's not just what is caught on a fishing trip, but who's around to talk on and on about it for years afterwards. ■

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