

Tanning bed days

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By JOHN L. SLOAN

Before I started hurting in every joint, I loved a tanning bed day for a little fishing on Percy Priest or Center Hill or Dale Hollow. It wasn't too bad on Old Hickory, either.

You know the kind of day I mean; a day that makes you want to spend a half-hour at Sun Tan Village soaking up some serotonin and easing the ache in your aging joints. You want drizzle and a temperature that is several degrees below comfortable. It is the kind of day when the clouds hang just feet over the bow of the boat. You have to keep wiping your glasses to get the fog or drizzle off. You are often tempted to pull up the hood on your rain suit but that bothers your vision. Intermittently the sun comes out and cooks you just enough to tease you.

The lure you throw may vary. On the clear water lakes it might be a jig-type thing, tube lure or fly and rind or something like that. Maybe it is a shad imitating jerk-bait. Could even be a spinner bait or a worm.

On those tanning bed days, the fish should be shallow-10 feet of water or less. They should be looking for a mud or mud rock bank, some place the water has a little color and some crawfish or other forage food. Those are the places you throw lures that look as though they have been in a tanning bed. They have a lot of brown burnt orange color. If the shad are holding back in the weeds or last year's grass, the jerk bait right close can be deadly. So can a spinner bait.

It was day such as that when Mark Campbell and I went to old Hickory. I wasn't really excited about going. Truth is I would have preferred being in one of warm beds at Sun Tan Village, listening music and baking my bones.

Then I hit the first fish. She nailed a spinner bait and maybe weighed three pounds. Two casts later a four plus hit it. We hadn't even started the big motor. It was a great day. By lunchtime or maybe 1:30, we had caught about a dozen good bass anchored by an easy, eight-pound sow,

Mark caught on a shallow-running jerk bait. It was a nasty day, a tanning bed day. And the fishing was great. Mark, took advantage of a short break in the weather to shed his rain jacket. He quickly caught a big bass and a stripe on two casts. While at it, his shirt got all wet.

The wind was a little more eager than I would like. Dave Durham had even gone to his expensive rain suit. I think I had on a black garbage bag with holes cut for the arms. We were back in a cove on Center Hill where the wind wasn't quite so bad. We were catching fish. A lot of fish. A few stripe were even mixed in.

The key was a baby bass colored, 3 1/2 inch, tube lure called a Gitzit. That's what they wanted. I wanted a tanning bed and maybe a tot of something with kick. It did stop drizzling long enough for me to get out of the garbage bag and catch a nice smallie on the shallow running jerk bait. I figure we had over a dozen smallmouth to our credit after a couple hours. We headed for the dock.

It was horrible. When we cleared the mouth of the cove, we saw the main lake. It was solid whitecaps and roiling water. The wind hit us from the left side and it was like an episode of Most Dangerous Catch; the kind of day when everybody gets in the rain gear. Waves broke over the bow, the side and the stern. I hugged the shoreline all the way back so we would at least have a chance of swimming to the rocks. The bilge pump ran the whole way. I sure would have gladly traded my bass boat for a tanning bed.

However, the afternoon was good. It was even fun except for the short snow/sleet/hail storm. We caught smallmouth and spotted bass like mad before and after the squall. Dave even caught a nice stripe.

Then the sun came out. It came hot and bright, just like a tanning bed. And the fish quit. I mean they shut down. We went from plethora to nothing in seconds.

I guess bass just don't like tanning beds. I do. I may just go get in one now. My joints could use the heat in case I decide to go fishing tomorrow.

John L. Sloan is an award-winning outdoor writer, former rodeo cowboy and longtime story-teller. His columns appear every Wednesday in the print edition of *The Wilson Post*

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