





Back in the early 1950s, Big Cypress Seminole Reservation was still undisturbed wilderness. Many water birds were abundant: curlews, iron heads, blue herons, diver ducks, mallards, different types of egrets. Turkeys and deer were plentiful.

The season's change would bring in the rains, which cause the Everglades to have flowing water like a huge and wide river. It flowed south into the Gulf of Mexico.

When the rains came and started flowing, my love for fishing developed.

In the cypress heads were deer, alligator and cattle trails. Water flowing in these trails made it convenient for fish to swim from one cypress pond to another. These trails were only ankle, or less than knee, deep.

While walking on a trail one day, I noticed a wake coming a short distance away toward me. It frightened me a little, so I climbed upon a cypress knee and waited to see what it was. To my relief it was three or four gar fish passing by. Other times it would be a school of young bass or a mudfish (bow fin). From that time on, I would chase the fish with spears or gigs or machetes. We always seemed to have fish on the fire every day.

As this rainy season passed, the water would dry up only to be found in the cypress ponds. Fish could not travel so they always ended up in these ponds by the thousands.

The people at the village would make nets to scoop out what they needed, or gig them. If we were lucky, the pond could hold water for a while to keep the fish alive.

As the ponds dried up totally, we would fish in the nearby lakes and canals along the roads going to Immokalee or Clewiston. Several weekends I was dropped off along one of these roads to catch fish while the others went to town to do our weekly shopping.

By the time the folks returned, I had caught over 100 fish. It was so much fun! I did this for a while - what I thought was fun - until one day I realized I was the one cleaning all these fish! Sometimes I had to fry them. It was a familiar story: no one wants to clean or fry the fish.

But they would eat the fish without a problem.

Realizing this, when I was dropped off to catch fish, I just caught what I thought was enough. Less than 20 fish. When I was asked, "Why so few fish?" I would simply say, "I think I caught them all last time."

The other thing I realized after all these years, the folks did not want me to go to town with them, for whatever reason, so I was dropped off to fish.

Today I enjoy fishing, but I only catch enough to eat, or go to the fish market where it is already cleaned. LOL.

*Sho-naa-bish.*

*James E. Billie is Chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.*

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