Buford and the Willamette Sturgeon

By G.I. WILSON

Buford is prepared to give another one of his fishing presentations at the Crossroads Merc and Feeds.

A crowd has gathered to experience another of Buford's breathtaking fishing adventures. These events are well publicized and always attract a crowd.

Buford has the means--a modern day Jed Clampett--to take trips they can only dream of. He has traveled all over the world on exciting fishing trips. He is a master story teller. He has that captivating ability to keep a group mesmerized.

Tillie, owner/manager, has mopped and polished the well-worn hardwood floors. Decks of playing cards and boxes of dominos have all been put away for the occasion.

Every available bench, apple crate, five-gallon bucket, and bale of hay have been taken.

The pungent aromas of fresh vegetables, fruits, grains and freshly ground coffee fill the air.

An old belt-driven ceiling fan struggles to keep the hot, humid air moving.

Tillie has filled a #3 wash tub with ice and RC Colas, and opened a fresh box of salted Planters peanuts. No treat, on a humid southwestern afternoon, quite so satisfying as salted Planters peanuts dumped into a bottle of cold RC.

Buford takes his place on his favorite stool. All conversation stops.

He clears his throat. "As ya'll know, I"ve been on another trip. Always wanted to catch one of them monster white sturgeon. Did my research, best place, O-re-gon's Willa-mette River.

"They say their words different than we do down here. But I say them like Curt Dowdy did, on the Wide World of Sports years ago. Good enough for old Curt, good enough for me.

"They don't even say salmon like we do. They say 'samen.'

"Told 'em I wanted to hire best captain on the river. And I did. Captain Don. He knows sturgeon. I think with his fancy e-lec-tronicks, he can dang near read a sturgeon's mind."

"Well we cruised around with him showing me all these fish on the screen. He pointed out smaller ones. Some were moving upriver. Showed me schools of four-to-six footers, then big ones, seven-to-nine feet, holding behind boulders the size of a Volkswagen.

"Then, he pointed out 'the car.' Said, 'Hook a big one, have to keep him away from that car. They get in there and break off.'

"I thought maybe he was pulling my leg, you know, a guide joke.

> "Told 'em I wanted to hire best captain on the river. And I did. Captain Don. He knows sturgeon. I think with his fancy e-lec-tronicks, he can dang near read a sturgeon's mind." — Buford

"Time to anchor up and fish. Captain has an anchor looks big enough to hold the Titanic. Then I begin to see how powerful this river is. I have never seen a river this powerful and swift."

"How swift was it?" Billy asks weakly, as afraid to interrupt.

"Well, we were anchored under a high bridge. The current would grab the shadow of the bridge and take it downriver 20-30 feet before turning it loose."

Dead silence. A peanut bounces off the wooden floor, sounds like a golf ball.

Tillie giggles.

A group exhale sends Planters wrappers flying across the room.

Buford has sucked them in again.

After the laughter subsides, Buford continues with new vigor.

"About that powerful current, we had to use 16 oz of lead to get our bait to the bottom and, it is only 20 feet deep.

"Talk about real bait. Captain opens up a cooler and pulls out a two-pound shad and uses the whole darned thing. Uses a 13/0 hook. Looks like a hay hook. He winds up that bait with all kind of hitches and weaves the hook through it.

"Captain casts the bait 25-30 yards downriver. 'You need a lot of line out so they can't detect any movement when you pick up the rod.'

"He explains how these are huge fish but very picky biters. 'They may fool around with the bait 5-10 minutes before they take it. Key is patience. Let them pull off 10-15 feet of line, swim away with it, then set the hook, hard.'

"It's my lucky day. Haven't finished my cup of coffee when the tip of that heavy rod begins to slowly dip down.

"I can see line slowly coming off the big reel. Soon the rod starts loading up and line buzzing off.

"Captain walks me through, 'Gently pick up the rod. We want him to take 20-25 yards of line. Flip the switch and engage the drive. Set the hook as hard as you can. Fish on.'

"Tell you boys, I'm hooked to a runaway missile. Line is smoking off that reel, and I'm hanging on with all my might."

'He's coming up. He's coming up,' Captain yells.'

"Hundred yards out this beautiful, historic monster blasts out of the water like a missile from a nuclear sub. Must have created a minor tsunami for the immediate area."

"Well, he takes off like the proverbial cat on a hot tin roof. Captain breaks loose from the anchor. We cover over a mile without slowing down, then makes a U-turn and head back upriver into that heavy current.

"I gain yards, he takes them back. We make it back to where we hooked up.

'He's headed for the car,' Captain Don hisses. 'You're gonna lose 'em.'

"Well, I dig in, bury the butt of the rod in my gut. That heavy rod buckles down almost to the water, vibrating and making a buzzing sound. Figure it could explode any minute."

"Danged monster keeps taking line as Captain Don maneuvers the boat trying to pull away from the car."

By now Buford has totally immersed himself into the action, leaning forward and coming up in rod pumping motions, eyes bugged out, veins in his neck bulging, sweat dripping from his handsome stash.

His actions are so vivid, half the group is swaying back and forth with him.

"Feel him wiggle into that old car," Buford whispers, almost out of breath. "I feel the braided line sawing on metal.

"I wasn't going to give up that easy," Buford almost blasts out, with a firm grip on the imaginary rod.

"I dig my heels into the side of the boat, bury the butt of that rod in my crotch, and keep reefing.

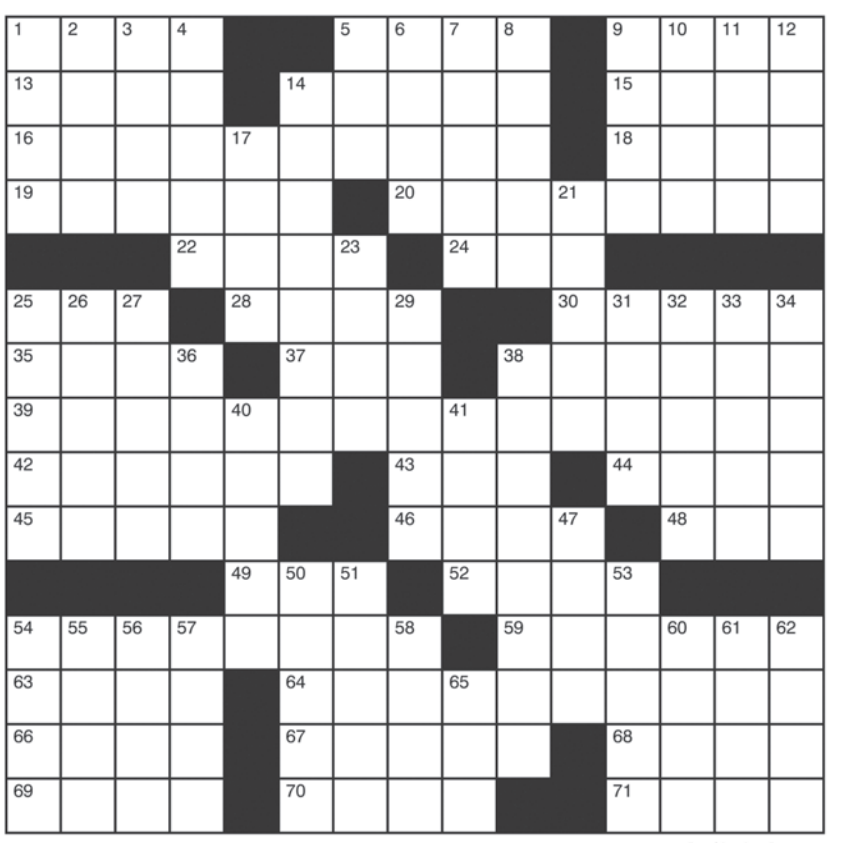
"He will saw the line on metal and break it,' Captain says, but I dig in that much harder. I gain two feet, then lose three."

Suddenly, Buford stops. Relaxes. Picks up his RC Cola, dumps in some peanuts, and takes a healthy swig.

"You know, boys, I still think I could have got him out of that car, but he rolled up the danged window."

crossword

Briefs



CREATORS NEWS SERVICE — By Charles Preston

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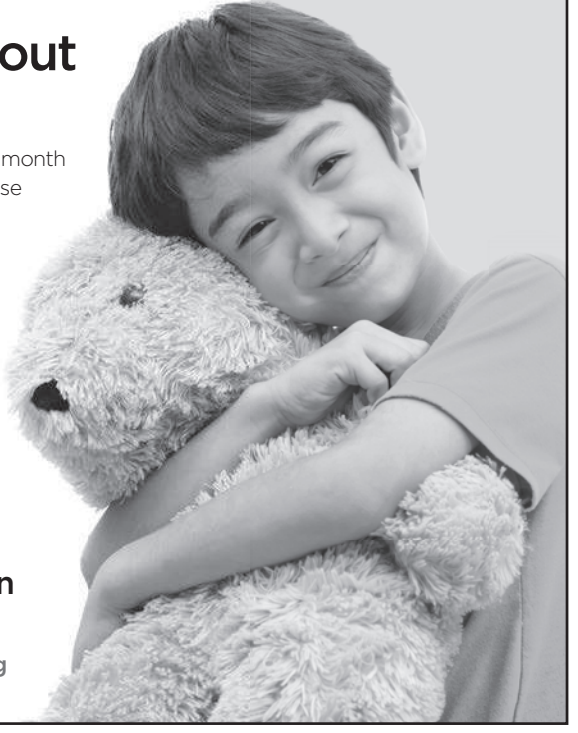

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