



Small Worlds Around Us

By Lynn M. Watkins

Wonders Why the Catfish Has Whiskers

The "whiskers" on a catfish's face are not there as a facial adornment. To him and his kind these so-called "whiskers" are necessary and serve the same purpose as do those real long hairs on a real cat's face, namely a means of getting around obstacles in the dark. Without his "whiskers" the catfish might as well be blindfolded.

He has a sensitive nose but he apparently doesn't trust it for he will bite on anything he can get his big mouth around; minnows, worms, cut-bait, a piece of red flannel, or a bunch of rubber bands.

Would Live Longer

After he gets his mouth over the bait he will hang on like a bulldog until his soft, scaleless body touches the boat bottom. And to make the actions of this character even more ridiculous, he will allow himself to bite on and be pulled into the boat even when no

hook is imbedded in the bait. These fish would reach several times their normal size and live many more years if they could only learn to keep their big mouths closed.

Of course, the true descendant of Izaak Walton would never be so indiscreet as to return to the dock with a string of bullheads. He would not consider them game fish in spite of the fact they make good eating.

Name Depends on Site

It took a good deal of imagination for that unknown person who first looked one of these bottom-feeding fish straight in the face and thought its facial resemblance to a cat justified the common name "catfish." Those people who do not relish the association of cat with something to eat prefer to call the fish "bullhead" or "horned pout." The catfish doesn't actually have whiskers but barbels, which are much thicker than

hairs, almost fleshy and act as "feeling organs."

Whether the little fellows are called horned pouts or catfish or bullheads depends a great deal on where they are found. All of them are shaped like a long drawn out drop of water with large heads, an enormous mouth and a low IQ rating.

So far no one has come up with a reasonable explanation why the catfish is equipped with the sharp, rigid spines that protrude at right angles from the blunt head. These spines have been the cause of much debate and no little profanity.

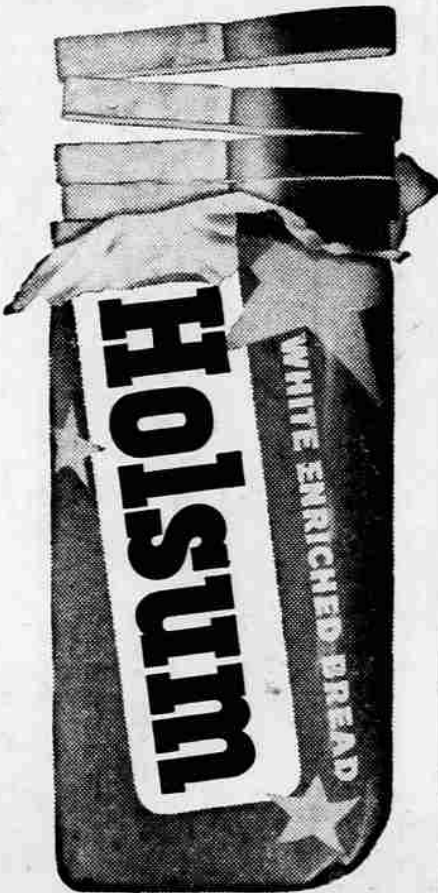
They may be for protection, for the catfish blunders along his muddy way completely oblivious of all outside influences; his whiskers twitching, his little pig-eyes seeing nothing and without a single thought in his head.

(Released by The Register and Tribune Syndicate, 1960)

PRISONER, SCRAPER GONE

Montgomery, Ala.—UPI—Officials at Kilby prison disclosed today that burglar Herbert Underwood escaped Monday night by driving from the prison on a huge road scraping machine owned by the state. Underwood was seen maneuvering the unwieldy machine along a downtown street but neither he nor the road scraper has been found.

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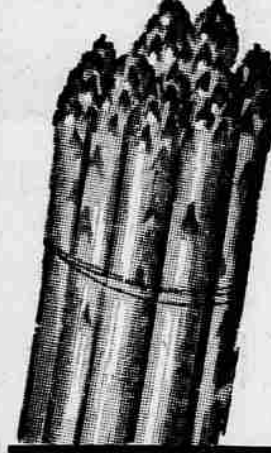
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