



—Press Connection photo by Brent Nicastro

A soft summer sunset forms the backdrop for this fisherman on the Yahara River.

A good spot, even if they aren't hitting

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In the sunswept early afternoon, only herring gulls occupied the breakwater guarding the entrance to the Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal and they fled my approach in billowy, leisurely flights and resettled themselves further out, across open water, at the base of a harbor light.

Beyond them the great inland seas called Lake Michigan rose and fell, its pulse that of a lightly sleeping animal.

In the protected channel, the heaving waters swirled and eddied with possibilities.

I flung out the blue-and-silver Clio spoon and let it settle into the mysteries.

For a half-hour, I told myself I was fishing, but what I was really doing was being a boy again north of the Point Beach, alone for the first times with the big waters and the far-ranging wind and the gulls who kept track of all the deaths on these beaches.

I closed my eyes and I was 12 again. For a wild moment I wanted to go barefoot on the concrete but the gulls had whitewashed it with their droppings and the 12-year-old got overruled.

When I opened my eyes there was a young man walking out to me, slowly, holding a spinning rod and oversized net. The rod had a blue-and-silver Clio clipped to it. His eyes had a sad look, a hurt look.

He asked if they were hitting and

I said no and he started fishing a little ways out.

"Good spot when they're hitting," he called. "Even when they're not, still a good spot."

He knew what he was doing. He worked the spoon like a baitfish. After a while, he sat right down on the edge of breakwater, his legs dangling over the drop and whipped the rod without a care.

I really can't do that anymore. I don't exactly cast from the middle. But I tense and stiffen a little around the edges of things.

We fished for another half-hour and then he got himself up. Not quickly or easily. More like an older body. A tired body. He stood next to me and I noticed his eyes again. A lot of Vietnam vets have those eyes.

"Doctor let me out today," he said. "I told him I *had* to go fishing."

I got the feeling he wanted to talk. Probably because I was out there fishing. And probably because I was out there with grey hair. And probably because I was the only one out there.

"Clio's the best for the big rainbows," he said as I kept casting. "Blue-and-silver."

He said he was in the hospital because he had an accident last December at the Manitowoc shipyard.

"I fell 30 feet," he said matter-of-

factly." I was on a scaffold and when I moved the paint pot, the scaffold broke."

I remembered working in the great cavernous holds of the ore and I shivered in the sunlight.

"I don't remember anything about the first month," he said. He said he had many operations and was facing more because a rib was pressing against his heart. He said he didn't

want any more operations because he was in pain a lot and he was afraid of dying now.

"I wanted to go to college," he said, "I just wanted some easy money."

I asked his name and he said: Herbie Houle, from Sturgeon Bay.

I asked his age and he said: Nineteen.

Later, after I walked off the breakwater, I looked back and he was sitting again, fishing intently, his legs dangling over the edge as though he didn't have a fear in this world.