

I didn't get a cake for my birthday this year.

I got a rainbow trout out of Sheboygan, and, as Steady Eddy says, a trout out of Sheboygan is not only better than a birthday cake, it's better than a birthday bratwurst.

It all came about because of Rep. Bob Kastenmeier.

Last May, the congressman attended the Dane County Conservation League's Awards & Recognition Banquet, and his ticket won one of the door prizes. It was a beauty: a Lake Michigan fishing trip for two with Captain Gary Schrimpf of AAA Charters out of Sheboygan.

Kastenmeier's home secretary, Otto Festge, says the congressman was like a little kid with anticipation. Actually, Otto was like a little kid, too, because he got to go along. They would find some time in their schedules and squeeze in the fishing trip. It would be yet another chapter in "The Adventures of Ole and Sven."

But the congressman just couldn't fit it into his schedule. Even the 4th of July break was taken up with town meetings in Waunakee, Mineral Point and Monroe. When he just had to cancel out, it was a singular honor to be asked by Otto to take his place. Then, when Otto had to cancel out, I asked Jim Amundson to take Otto's place. Jim said it was a singular honor.

On the telephone, Schrimpf said to bring a big cooler for the salmon because they had been running around 42 inches long.

Captain Gary, who sounded like he was always on the brink of breaking out in a chuckle, also said to bring along sunglasses for the glare on the lake and a warm jacket "just in case." I remembered the time Bob Resch and I fished coho from his Zodiac off Manitowoc, and the breezes had us hunkered down like survivors on a life raft.

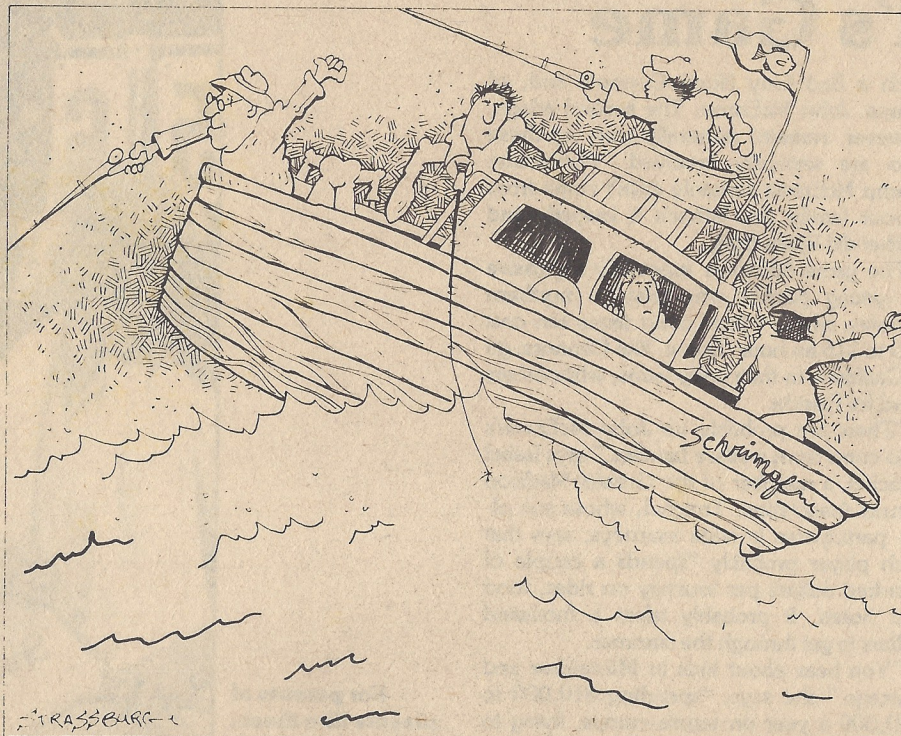
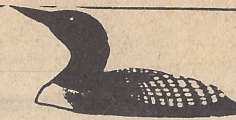
Captain Gary would meet us at The Wharf, at 733 South Franklin, right on the Sheboygan River, and said to "look for a 22-footer. White exterior. Blue interior. Looks like dolphin."

"The Schrimpf Boat," he said. Then he chuckled.

We drove up the next morning in Jim's wagon and just hung out with the waterfront for a spell. Gulls cruised the river

# North Country Notebook

George Vukelich



Art by Brian Strassburg.

beyond the charter boats tied up at dock-side. One captain was touching up his teakwood trim in the bright sunshine. He turned out to be Gary's partner in AAA Charters. His boat was bigger than Gary's and really had to "run with a party of five or six people to make it worthwhile financially."

It reminded me of a Packard I had once that guzzled gas with a thirst that wouldn't quit. Steady Eddy, who used to sell cars when he worked for a living, calls it the Big Kidney Syndrome.

Jim and I had a smoked trout for lunch at The Wharf, washed it down with a cold beer and were considering writing Hugo Willie a postcard when the Schrimpf Boat

showed up. Outriggers. Electric down-riggers. Blue carpeting. Cuddly cabin. A working boat, neat and trim as your dungarees.

I hadn't seen anything so shipshape since the Dunnage area aboard the Norman B. Ream, where the Immortal Bosun, Digger O'Dell, conducted little refresher courses in the Fine Art of Knot Tying, as befitted a *real sailor* who came out of the Navy and was now sharing his knowledge with landlubbers who came out of the Army, where most of us had a hard time tying our shoes.

"You name a boat The Ream," Steady observes, "and anything could happen."

Captain Gary is in his thirties but looks

younger; it's probably from being on the brink of the chuckle all the time. He has fished salmon on the big lake for 11 years, most of them as Mate to Old Professionals, learning the art. He's been a captain for four years.

"I love to fish," he confesses. "If I don't have a charter, I sometimes run out there alone."

We cleared the harbor, turned South and cranked up the 125-horse Johnson. The Schrimpf Boat tore down the coast, looking for 53-54° water. Looking for King and Coho salmon.

Captain Gary said more and more Madison-area people were chartering with him because AAA Charters had been at the Sports Show here. He also said that the Sheboygan fishery was catching on because of its variety—"not just Kings and Coho, but trout, too. Rainbow. Browns. And Lakers."

Off Terry Andrae State Park, Captain Gary throttled down to mere steerage way, rigged six rods for trolling, two high-lines from the outriggers, two from the downriggers, two on the dipsy divers—miniature otterboards that swung the Andy Reeker spoons far out on each side.

Gary said he preferred taking only two or three people at a time because everybody got in more fishing. Otherwise, it was like taking a number in a meat market and waiting your turn.

My turn came first, when the highline flew off the outrigger and Jim handed me the rod. I felt the fish in my upper arms, in my shoulders. A rainbow, seven-and-a-half pounds. Big trout elsewhere. Not here. Gary said a boat brought in a 28-pound King the other day and nobody bothered to get up and go look. He stuck it in the cooler, and, because it was my birthday trout, I did look in once.

Then it was Jim's turn, and he brought in a Coho.

And that's how the afternoon went. We took turns catching fish until we had eight "in the box" including Jim's magnificent King that fought for a full half-hour and weighed 15½ pounds.

On the run to the harbor, Captain Gary said it was too bad Bob Kastenmeier couldn't make it. Or Otto Festge. Or anyone else, I thought. Including Digger O'Dell.