

A staple of coastal life... whether you're a man in early retirement, or his grandchild, fishing is the perfect leisure activity for a resident of the sleepy coastal town, Wilmington, N.C.

On a temperate summer day, where the only noise heard above the soft lull of the mild waves was the delicate coo of the shorebird, there I was. A 21 year-old woman on a Saturday afternoon, on Johnny Mercer's Fishing Pier at Wrightsville Beach. I would describe more of my atmosphere, but it was hard to see past my now tangled mess of long hair whipping at my glasses, and sticking to my fingers which were now covered in a sort of opaque slime the bait worms were leaving behind. I blindly snatched at my crop-top which was blowing wildly in the wind; seeming to run away from me out of embarrassment. My fishing pole, now unattended, bee-lined for the spaces between the wood of the dock, making sure to hook my shorts on the way down. Among the salty seasoned fishermen, with their country club badminton bombshells on their arms, I looked like a dolphin pulling a dog sled.

My interest in fishing began in a bit of an unorthodox manner. It wasn't that I suddenly became interested in fishing out of nowhere, but rather, that I became fixated on licenses of all things. A friend of mine had recently become a licensed balloon vendor (still the coolest license I've come across), and I decided that day, that my time was being wasted if I wasn't getting licensed for something.

The issue was, a lot of licenses are costly to acquire, which is what ruled out the beekeeping license I had my eye on. On the other hand, some licenses were simply *too* easy to obtain, and ultimately fruitless. Through my 'research' across Reddit, I found that a fishing license hit a sweet spot, requiring me to go to the Wilmington DEQ building, but only shell out \$25 for an annual license. After being handed my license, I promptly began a photoshoot with it outside of the building.

I suffered severe imposter syndrome when I began the hobby. I had a faulty spincast rod from Walmart and Wiki-How level of knowledge on how to use it. I still hadn't gotten the memo about proper fishing attire; so while others donned long sleeved performance shirts and Hi-Tec marina sandals, the sun baked me in my short sleeved shirt as fishing hooks caught my bare feet.

I didn't know the names of any fish, aside from the '*exotic*' ones I would have to be in a boat with 25 years of experience to catch: swordfish, shark, bluefin tuna (and of course, the prized and renowned blue-gill, *ha ha*). In an attempt to *wow* the geriatrics at the pier, I studied a dusty book of fish species my late grandfather had left at our family beach house.

My mother got me a proper rod for my birthday, and I coaxed my older cousins who had been long disinterested in fishing to re-rig. I learned about fishing seasons, best times of day, and a myriad of techniques. Apparently, you're supposed to cut fish before using it as bait, instead of hooking a fresh catch in the side and sending it back out, *who knew*.

That August I returned to my college town, Boone, and began getting familiarized with its freshwater lakes. I even rubbed elbows with Devon McGuire, the game warden, during an interview about river species' populations post-hurricane Helene.

Conveniently, a close friend of mine, Kylie, happens to have passion for just about any outdoor activity you could imagine. She gathered a crew of girls from our sorority to buy folding chairs and begin fishing on the weekends. The day I sat beside the sisters of Alpha Omicron Pi in cheap folding chairs, dead noon on a slightly muggy Saturday, I knew I had truly achieved something otherwise unimaginable.

No trout stays fresh forever, all good things come to an end.

One afternoon, a boy our age walked by us fishing and asked to try casting my line. It was probably a predetermined issue bound to happen regardless of his appearance there, but a sour side of me believes that the moment my rod left my hands it was damned. He tried to cast my line; the lure flopped pathetically and the hook swung back towards him.

“You need to flip up the bail”. Kylie said with a smile.

“Right. This thing is weird though,” He then cast the line properly, and after hearing a strange noise he promptly reeled it back in, furrowing his eyebrows. He crouched down and began inspecting my rod like it was some sort of ancient artifact.

“You need to adjust your drag.” He said, and began fiddling with parts of the rod I had never given a thought to.

“Well it was fine a second ago-” and before I could finish he walked away with my rod towards a truck he had parked by the shore next to us.

Within the next hour the boy brought a toolbox and clocked in to some sort of unpaid repair shift for my rod. I wasn’t sure what the issue was prior to his inspection, but I know that when he left, my rod never worked again. I gave it to Kylie for the next break from school we had so she could try to work some magic on it, but unfortunately it seemed to be the one issue outside of her otherwise massive skillset.

I’ve gotten busy, and haven’t gotten around to getting a new rod, but I have faith that when I return to my family beach house, my grandfather’s book will relight my fire.

