

Gone, Gone, Gone Fishing!

By Duane Plank

Time to mix it up a little bit as we move towards the red-hot month of August. And a note to the throngs of column fans. There is a good chance that I will be on vacation for a bit next month, so you may not see all the brilliance that is Plank one week. But don't fret. I haven't missed an issue in the nearly two years that I have been fortunate enough to write for this fine publication. Everyone deserves a little R and R, right?

The plan is to head north to the Eastern Sierras and do a little fishing and lounging for five days. We'll end up parking the vehicle at a place called French Camp, which is about 25 or so miles up Highway 365 past the garden city of Bishop.

We used to make the trip every year and spend a week at the campground and surrounding environs. Think I started going about 10 years ago. Fishing, hiking, snoozing and reconnecting. Some of the more adventurous folks in the group would go ride a mountain bike down the side of one on the Mammoth Mountains. Tried that one year, fell off the trail bike about a dozen times, but lived to tell the tale. Wasn't the well-conditioned athlete that I am now.

One year I went on a horseback ride down one of the meandering trails. Didn't fall off of the horse, but did get a bit saddle-sore. Tried to get out of the horse excursion cuz you were required to wear jeans on the ride, and not only didn't I bring any jeans on the trip--I didn't even own a pair!

So I tried to wimp out, but someone helpfully suggested that I could borrow another guy's jeans. Great. Just what I wanna do... borrow someone else's jeans, and then fall from a slow-moving horse. Survived that ordeal and now I am the proud owner of a couple of pair of *Old Navy* jeans. But I think that they make me look fat.

We also headed a few miles north to something called a hot creek. Swirling springs in the middle of the desert. Hot sun and hotter water. Smelled of sulfur. But some of the folks in our party hadn't showered in a while, so a dip in any kind of water was welcome. Even if we did get burned on the feet, the buns and the back.

But the main event on the trip is the fishing tourney, which usually seems to be won by Brother Chris. Probably cuz he is the best fisherman. My kid, Phillip, won the prestigious trophy one year, which was pretty cool. About seven years ago. Kid was leading the tourney the final Friday afternoon, but had to sweat out the arrival of the rest of the anglers late in the day, hoping that they didn't return with a trout bigger than his approximately 13-incher.

They didn't, he won, and the excitement was palpable. Celebrated that night with a trip-ending fish fry, which I am sure was awesome. Or I think it was. Long time ago; the memory is a tad bit foggy.

First year that I traversed to Rock Creek, couldn't even figure out how to get my line in the water. Hadn't fished in about 20 years or so, and was a bit sketchy on the details. Like how to tie a hook on the line, how to cast, and a few small details like that. But I went to the Rock Creek Lake a couple of times with my dad and brother, and had a great time. Or as great a time as you can have while fishing, if you can't bait your hook or cast your line into the lake. Or figure out how to untangle your line once you get hooked on the rocks.

But I got to spend some time with the old man, who was a darn good fisherman in his time. Used to catch perch off of the MB pier with Pops back in the day, or occasionally take the drive down to the Malibu pier and

See Fishing, page 20

Frankly Plank

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Up way too early on a Sunday morning, watching The Open Championship, curious to see if old Tom Watson, 59-years young, can hang on to his one-stroke third round lead and incredibly win the revered tournament seven weeks before the codger turns 60. Very similar to my day about a year ago, when I also cut short my very necessary beauty sleep on a Sunday morning to get up and, somewhat bleary-eyed, watch 53-year-old Greg Norman fritter away his 54-hole lead.

The old man Watson just birdied 11 to tie Lee Westwood and some guy named Goggin for the lead at three under. Now Watson is staring at an eight-foot putt on the 72nd hole to win the whole shooting match. And he pushed it to the right. Decelerated. Hit it with his purse. Sheesh. I was nervous watching the old guy miss. On to the four-hole playoff, which as you know by now didn't turn out to well for Watson, who went in the tank, handing over the Claret Jug to Stewart Cink.

Later in the afternoon, headed out to the fine city of Lomita to help coach the Little League kids in game two of the Sectional All-star tourney. We had our butts handed to us by the team from Torrance in game one, 10-1. So we needed to regroup in the double elimination tourney and fight our way back through the loser's bracket of the four-team gathering. Which we did, cruising to a 13-0 win. We played Westchester in another elimination game on Tuesday and then would have had to beat Torrance on Wednesday and Thursday to advance.

Don't know what is going to happen over the course of the next 70 games or so, but I sense a second half collapse by the Dodgers. Which of course, would make me very sad, being the Dodgers self-proclaimed numero uno fan in Mayberry. Well, maybe *Dodger Girl*, *NASCAR Guy* and *RJ the Golfer* would

disagree with that, but I'll stick to my guns.

Anyway, Los Dodgers' starting pitching is pretty thin, and the fact that the residents of Mannywood seem to be suffering from a case of selective amnesia in regards to their selfish "hero" is a tad bit galling.

Was watching the MLB home run-hitting contest on the day prior to the All-Star game and started to nod off. Does it have to be a three-hour deal? Remember last year when that Hamilton dude from Texas hit a ton of homers in the first round? ESPN went gaga over his back story: an ex-druggie does well. Or better than well.

Which is great, I guess. Glorify a guy who was a chronic substance abuser, who somehow overcame his self-imposed demons, cuz screwing up his life was his choice, and knocks a bunch of "possibly" juiced-up pelotas into the bleachers of soon-to-be closed Yankee Stadium.

Just a thought, but how about fawning over and over-promoting a good guy? Maybe the best player in the bigs, Albert Pujols?

Glancing at the tube, the lovely Erin Andrews is interviewing one of the contestants, quizzing him about how difficult it is compete in this home run-hitting deal. The guy is one of the nondescript sluggers who landed in the tourney. Getting paid millions to play a kid's game. Stand there and swing a bat. Hit a round ball with a roundish bat. Yes, I know it ain't an easy thing to do. What a life! Good for him.

Cripes, two-and-a-half hours into the HR contest and guys are still swinging for the fences. It's getting near sleepy time for this guy. Happens when you are old, I guess. Prince Fielder won the derby. Nice name, Prince. Remember, fans that I almost met Ms. Andrews when the kid and I attended the LL World Series in Williamsport, Pa.,

See Frankly, page 20

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310.606.8000 | BankManhattan.com
2141 Rosecrans Avenue, Suite 1160
El Segundo, California 90245

