seasons in the a-bass

"Familiarity breeds contempt" - is that right? Am I remembering that old adage correctly, what with my fucking world-weary mind? Well, if so, I have to agree - mostly. Walking down the same path over and over and over again can get pretty damn boring - there are just no new sights to see, scents to smell, textures and flavors and wavelengths to taste and touch and hear. In neurological terms, phasic receptors dull at the non-stimulus of a continually repeated scene. Those receptors just get used to it, which results in stasis, stagnation, shit, depression. Let's extend the idea: familiarity kills.

And so them thar black basses, them spots, biggies, and smallies, have become a bit too familiar to me, a bit too rote - the novelty's died. Have nailed too many bass too many times during pre-spawn when they're staging just outside spawning areas, you know, the cuts, corners, and drop-offs adjacent to flats, flats with sand-grained substrate and smothered in wood and brush and boulders. Have hooked infinity post-spawn fish in similar areas during late spring and early summer. Have had the ol' plastic worm sucked in excessively when worked in macrophyte pockets in both ponds and slow-flowing streams during the bountiful buffet of summertime. Have socked it to those autumn-transition micropterids looking to get a quick last meal in the form of a crankbait or spoon before winter's lethargy finally hits home. And those winter bass - they too have little spark left with which to fire my engine. I effortlessly tempted plump smallies of Arrowhead to munch small tube jigs down deep during late winter; on a cold, blustery January day at Silverwood Reservoir, my achingly slow plastic worm did the job on Mr. Bigmouth; and Berryessa's spots, smallies, and biggies had no problem slurping my quiver of plastic lures during the calm, crisp December quiet.

Since novelty, the unknown, is such an important driver of why I fish, the point of bass fishing has simply dissipated - it's gone. The colors have faded, the embers have burned out into cold, grey ashes. Few reasons exist for why I should fish for bass. But like all relationships that've run their course, I feel I gotta condense and process and divulge and crystallize explicitly my knowledge of and connection to the spots and smallies and largies to really resolve and complete the relationship. So as the calendar year from January to December mirrors the cycle of a lifetime from birth to death, from the first kiss to the signing of divorce papers, here's the basses and I through the seasons.

WINTER

Though quirks unique to the three main bass species exist when the thermometer's at its minimum in lentic waters - for example, spots are more likely both to suspend and to occasionally venture shallower provided the weather's been stable - they all really behave pretty damn similar. Primarily, all three basses inhabit deeper water during winter. Don't believe me, knucklehead? Well, dig the fact that *both* spotted and largemouth bass dropped to deeper waters during January and February in an Alabaman reservoir, with the spots generally seven feet below the bigmouths (Hunter and Maceina 2008). Smallmouths in a gravel-pit lake moved to the deepest water available during late autumn and stayed there in winter, apparently cued by both falling water temperatures and macrophyte senescence (Savitz *et al.* 1993). Likewise, smallies in a Texan reservoir held in deeper water in winter than either adjoining season (Kraai *et al.* 1991).

Mr. Bigmouth in a lake in Canada slid to deeper water toward the tail end of autumn through winter (Hanson *et al.* 2007); similarly, though at a much more southerly latitude, the same critter exhibited a nearly identical pattern in a California reservoir (Fast 1993).

What *determines* how deep, however, is unknown. Frankly, no one, neither them scientist types nor them tackle-manufacturer-sponsored bass pros, has tried to answer *why* bass are at s*pecific* depths during winter. While I lack a statistically significant, highfalutin, academic answer, I've a sneaking suspicion of what determines bass depth in winter: light. Related to light's effects is the fact that bass are warm-water fish - metabolically, they simply can't perform the wild, chase-down-baitfish antics that your run-of-the-mill trout or salmon species can during winter's chill. Cold water makes bass lethargic, makes it laborious for 'em to really move around a whole bunch. Consequently, bass're vulnerable, and when animals are vulnerable, they want safety. Security. A place where things are predictable, where conditions won't be changing at the drop of a hat, the drop of a jig, or, most relevantly, the drop of a lot of rain or freezing-ass air.

So at what depth, muhfugga, will them bass find that security they crave so desperately during winter? It's somewhere in deep water, true, but specifically in deep water *where the light gets really fucking low.* Well, why where the light's dim? Because where that light lowers is where the sun's influence - in other words, the temperature effects of sunlight - becomes negligible. While Momma Nature has the ability to give up several days of summer-like weather that'll warm up the *surface* of a reservoir a few degrees, which Mr. Bass would no doubt like, she has the same ability to dump a cold front down and cool that already cold water down a few notches, which Mr. Bass absolutely won't like. Additionally, bass don't want to be *so* low that they're in darkness because, while they may be moving like molasses, they're still *moving* and need to eat, and bass locate and capture prey primarily via sight. Consequently, if you use the ol' white-lure-disappearing trick - you know, drop a white lure down until you can't see it any longer, then multiply that depth by three to get the depth at which light reaches about one-percent surface illumination - you'll find that, in most cases during winter in your average California water-supply reservoir or lake, you'll be around 30 feet, plus or minus five feet or so.

But there's more to it than just getting the depth right, although reading the other conditions correctly stems from the idea that bass want security. So we've bass at a depth where they're pretty immune to temperature swings and yet have enough light to find prey; however, them bass still feel like sitting ducks if they're in the open, even though you may *think* they've nothing to fear in that deep water (they do - I've watched river otters munch bass profusely during winter at Berryessa). Now just about any good basser knows that bass like cover - this holds doubly true in winter when bass are lethargic and thus likely have a tough time swimming fast enough to escape a predator (especially a warm-blooded one). What kind of cover? Rock, baby, BIG fucking rock, big wood, BIG fucking wood, and lots of it, motherfucker.

But that's not all.

Even if you've found a mondo amount of rock down around that one-percent light level, you still may not have found a really stable place where those bass feel comfortable enough to sit and stay. If your luscious rockpile sits in the middle of a lake that gets a rippin' wind, yeah, you'll pull a fish or two off that rock, but that'll be about it. Simply, that lovely cover in open water is too exposed, so much so that a really gnarly gale can generate strong enough surface currents that create return currents down near the bottom - that bottom where your beautiful shale and granite and sandstone sit all prickly 'n' shit. And having to move to stay in position is something a wintertime bass simply reviles.

So go do the smart thing and find a bunch of rock or wood down deep where the light's low that's also *protected from flowing water*. A cove, away from any feeder streams that might really be running with wintertime rains, is a fine place to start.

So, you big, smelly, lazy fuck, finding wintertime bass is really just a three-variable equation: low-light depth + cover + protection from flow = bass. And that, you can believe me, is easily the biggest piece of the puzzle to master. The final part, that final yard, as they say in the gay football world, is having the right lure on at the right time to get them to munch it.

And this is the part where all those other fishing "writers" blow their time, mainly in a vain effort to shove as many tackle-company names and products into their narrative so that they can get their hands on the fucking ad money. It's understandable, if unforgivable. Take, for example, In Fisherman. While the information In Fisherman posits in their *books* is often sound, even if partially recycled, the verbiage infesting their *magazine* articles reads more like fucking multi-company fishing-tackle ads than articles about understanding, pursuing, and catching a given fish species. I can't tell you how many times they've basically stated, in myriad ways, that you have to own tons of lures to catch fish consistently within the pages of their mag. Never mind that they never mention that adding that many lures to an arsenal actually adds that many more variables to the equation, obscuring relationships among environments and fish catchability. Never mind that owning so many fucking lures in the first place serves as a crutch for not learning how to use a smaller selection of lures in a wider variety of ways and circumstances. Never mind that having so many fucking lures is inefficient and plain cumbersome to a shore-bound guy, rendering much of their text worthless for the average bankie. Never mind that the more lures you possess, the more time you spend picking through 'em and tying knots rather than using that time more effectively by reading the water and conditions and actually having a line in the fucking water.

Now I refuse to name brands and to list a litany of lures because, quite simply, it really doesn't make much of a fucking difference. I'm only going to inculcate in your ass lures that (1) match the fucking forage of wintertime bass and (2) are appropriate to the habitat type and the metabolism of them freezin'-cold biggies and smallies and spotties. Now unfortunately, the scientific literature yields very little information on bass diets during winter, so basically all the forage stuff I'm tossing out for you derives from my own experience. That said, I've killed a fair number of winter bass, and, overwhelmingly, the foods in their tum-tums all had one thing in common - they were all benthic. Crawdads. Sculpins. Damselfly naiads. Shit, even midge pupae. Additionally, all these buggers blend in well with the bottom and either move very slowly and steadily or dart quickly and then stop. Also note that two prey items were insects - they're not very big. Finally, bass frequently contained a combination of these foods in 'em, so they weren't feeding selectively. Consequently, when you choose a lure it should do and be these things - match the bottom color, be moved slowly and darted and stopped, is relatively small, and *stays* on the bottom. Really, you only have two choices - natural-colored (e.g., smoke) plastic worms or jigs. Tie on a certain style of jig or worm you have confidence in, fish it slowly, and if it's a natural color and is pretty small (e.g., three- or four-inch plastic worms) and you put it in the right place, I have zero doubt that you're gonna get you a wintertime bass.

SPRING

Bloomin' wildflowers, green-grass hillsides, T-shirts, flip-flops, and the genesis of the brutal allergy season for yours truly - spring. And man, does most everything desire to fuck,

with all three bass species poppin' boners and wettin' hoo-hahs. The species spawn in sequence - smallies first, spots second, then biggies. For a low-elevation waterway such as Berryessa, the typical spawning peaks are early April, late April, and mid-May, respectively. A couple hundred miles to the south and 5,000 feet higher in Lake Arrowhead, spawning peaks are shifted later and compressed: smallies are bonin' most in late May, and biggies really get their groove on in mid-June.

Like your average basser, I keep my nose exquisitely tuned to the main spawning peaks but for a completely opposite reason: I want to *not* fish when the proportion of bass on beds is greatest. I mean, fuck, man, as long as you don't spook 'em, you can get a nesting bass to eat a goddamn empty Budweiser can or a spade-shaped shovel head or a crescent wrench - it's just bitch fishing, it's for clueless fucks that can't hack a little challenge. Too, fishing bedding bass is akin to clubbing a dude with a truncheon while he's bonin' his babe, or, in the case of hens holding just outside the beds, smackin' 'em upside the noggin just as they're doffing their dresses to hump. It's, well, just *fucked up*. It's none too wise from a conservation perspective, either. Shoving hooks into bedding bass can jack populations by reducing the ability of the male to keep the eggs aerated, by harming the male's ability to fend off egg/fry predators such as bluegill (Cooke and Suski 2005), and by simple nest abandonment after capture. *Fucked up*.

So I focus my spring bass-prowlin' on either side of the spawning peaks. Like a good scientist, I note both absolute temperatures and temperature trends to time my spring bassin'. For smallies, I'm in full-on pre-spawn mode as soon as the water temp hits 54°F until it reaches about 60°F, the latter of which roughly corresponds to spawning commencement in the literature (Graham and Orth 1986). Temperature ranges for spots are similar, although I won't get leery about hitting bedders until the water's 'bout 61, 62°F; these numbers correspond to when spots are shallowest and thus most likely on beds. Fifty-six°F has been THE key seductive, suggestive voice announcing pre-spawn biggie movements, and I'm comfortable pursuing bigmouthers until the mid-60s, after which I usually abandon for a month or so whatever waterway I've been working to let the bass do their thang.

But no matter how judiciously a stud may try to avoid the spawning *times*, waterways with more than one micropterid will host periods where one'll be fair game while the other species is busy grindin' and thus off limits. To actualize some ethics, I avoid spawning habitat as if it's a dirty fuckin' 7-11 hooker. And features defining spawning habitat? Flat bottom. Protected from wind and water flow. Fairly coarse-grained but still-cohesive substrate. Often, especially for smallies, on sun-soaked northern banks (Savitz *et al.* 1993). In short, where bass only have to do the absolute minimum to carve out their beds and keep 'em clean. I hook my lure to the keeper and just stroll on by the back ends of south-facing, sand-bottomed, wood/rock-studded, narrow reservoir coves that were once braided creeks.

The pre-spawn/post-spawn habitat, however, totally has the green light. And man, points with cover just outside spawning bays are the most ridiculous for bass, especially smallies and biggies, although nearly any cover - a boulder, a log - in water shallower than wintertime depths can house a good fish or two. Now the "point" need not be the typical finger of land sticking out further into the water than adjacent banks - it only needs to *function* like a point. For example, islands can be thought of points that just come up *vertically* rather than *horizontally*. In Arrowhead during my youth, docks and the shade they cast frequently held springtime fish. Associated with inhabiting shallower water during spring, pre- and post-spawn bass are frequently more abundant on less steeply sloped points than during winter, although cold fronts during pre-spawn can push bass down into deeper water (Graham and Orth 1986).

The beauty about spring is that bass are aggressive - pre-spawn fish are beefing up for both the rigors of spawning and the spawning fast, and post-spawn fish chow like mad to replace body mass lost during the non-feeding fornicating. Food abundance, whether small sunfish or crawdads or shad, is lower in spring than in summer or autumn, so bass aren't very picky about lure color or wanting a specific imitation. However, pre-spawn fish, by dint of inhabiting cooler water than post-spawners, generally require slower presentations for consistent success; the same plastic worms that bang winter bass also do fine during pre-spawn, but tube jigs, which can be worked faster, are more efficient. Once the water hits 60°F, I start busting out plugs and crankin', mainly for spots and biggies since smallies are usually bedding at those temperatures; nevertheless, the tube jig remains the staple. The opposite occurs in the warmer post-spawn waters - I crank up a storm and toss topwater, too, and rarely pull out a plastic lure unless the fish are either being bombarded by bass fishermen or the light is really bright.

SUMMER

Summer, ah, California summer, all hot and sweaty and yellow and achingly bright and brutal. Similarly, the hellish heat of summer is the most difficult time of the year to catch good bass consistently. Part of it is that fucking micro-bass are like the plague, attacking anything and everything they can put their little, overactive mouths on and basically out-competing their parents for your lures. Part of it is that adult bass, lazy in general already, get even fucking lazier in summer when food is ridiculously abundant - for example, stream-dwelling smallmouths in Missouri sauntered around their little home range a fair amount but never ventured far from their own one-block (er, boulder) neighborhood (Todd and Rabeni 1989). Hunter and Maceina (2008) found largemouth movement rates highest in summer, and Ahrenstorff *et al.* (2009) discovered that the more wood cover you threw at 'em, the more they inhabited it. Thus summertime biggies are more likely to find and call home any sexy log or weed patch and, with the latter most abundant in summer, so appear more scattered than in other seasons. End result? You gotta sift through more water to gain a decent creel. Finally, with the huge food density, it seems that during the day bass will opportunistically slurp big numbers of crawdads and fish within a really short time window, rendering the typical dawn/dusk bites more erratic.

Still, several reliable patterns persist through the tremendous variability summer throws a bass hunter's way.

Man, Putah Creek when I first moved to Davis in 2002 was a sweet little quasi-wild waterway surrounded by a human-crushed landscape. Rare was the occasion when I dropped down to really accessible locations and saw another loathsome human. Consequently, I never felt the need to constrain myself to certain times to avoid humanity and so get that atavistic, primal rush when chasing fish. Ten years later, however, the creek had blossomed into a waterway's version of a goddamn mall - hordes, fucking HORDES, of tackle-logo-festooned, bass-pro-aping, fucking thoughtless bass automatons mirroring the stupid fucking bullshit they saw on television shows. Despite the wretched bass-fisherman infestation the creek had accrued, there was one saving grace - come nightfall, all the bass guys would disappear, would vanish, would get slurped back into the technology-dominated, human-structured pseudo-reality from which they were manufactured. Conversely, that was just when I'd immerse myself in the creek to bang some bass with the ol' buzzbait.

And bang 'em I did, although this pattern - night bass on topwater - was not unique to lower Putah Creek. I did the same damn thing in shallow, veg-laden waters when living in San

Diego ages ago - little Chamber's Pond spit up fat fuckin' biggies to seven pounds, I nailed several nice largemouths in Rabbit Pond in the cool darkness, and, shit, I even remember raising a few nice biggies in Arrowhead with the buzz. Key, however, is *when* and *where*. With the exception of channel catfish and lake trout, I really don't give a shit about moon phase with one additional exception: summertime topwater biggies. In the course of my nighttime adventures, of which there've been many at this stage of the game, the brighter the moon, the more the blow-ups. McMahon and Holanov (1995) actually backs up this personal experience: their biggies saw and fed effectively at light levels down to the full-moon level, below which feeding success trailed off dramatically. That's the when - focus on full-moon nights if desiring efficient topwater action. Converse to the usual cover-focused casting during the day, nighttime buzzin' will bag biggies in areas you'd never expect to get 'em in during the day - open water. Apparently, biggies leave the confines of their veggy daytime lairs and roam in open water under the cover of darkness, similar to what Todd and Rabeni (1989) documented for smallies. The end result is that the nighttime approach has to change from the daytime approach: you gotta cover more water, and you gotta cover water you'd confidently ignore during the day. Few lures are more suited to such conditions than the Buzz given its effectiveness when reeled quickly, not to mention its fucking obnoxious noise is easier to track for both bass and human at night.

But most people, myself included, can only indulge in so much nighttime huntin' before it harms their moods and rhythms and sense of perspective. I liken it to a graveyard shift I worked in my early 20s, which, had I continued in that soul-robbing job, I'd've blasted my head off with a sawed-off 12-gauge or sizzled some poor sucka with a gasoline water cannon and a Bic lighter. Thus while generally more work than a midnight buzz walk - casts have to be more precise, presentations have to be methodical, lure choice needs to be more carefully contemplated - daytime's the major time when most bassin' occurs. Thank the fuck Christ biggies and smallies and spotties are primarily diurnal critters, with at least the former two especially exhibiting activity peaks at dawn and dusk (Hanson *et al.* 2007, Demers *et al.* 1996, Todd and Rabeni 1989). Nevertheless, even the mid-day, dog days of summer can usually garner a bass with an achingly slow, slow, fucking sloth-like retrieve.

Especially those fuckin' veg-point-lovin' biggies, which are among the easiest summertime bass to lure. At Otay, down at Putah Creek, in the Delta, in Arrowhead, fuck, man, even mildly sloped banks in Berryessa that'd grow lush Eurasion milfoil, wherever a waterway is ringed with macrophytes of some sort, the points, whether a point *into* the veg (*i.e.*, a corner) or a point *out* into water, so often promise a nice biggie or two for a well-shook worm. Interestingly, no studies I've run across have looked at bass abundance in relation to nuances in macrophyte structure. However, one paper noted that biggies associated with unique depths within habitats - in other words, a depression or hump (Wheeler and Allen 2003). The points within a macrophyte line are nearly always the result of such local depth changes. Veg-point biggies seem to be more willing biters than their brethren running in rock, probably because the cluttered macrophyte world limits their visual detection range and thus compromises any selective feeding. Similar behavior found in wood-dense lakes bolsters this interpretation (Ahrenstorff *et al.* 2009). Regardless, the end result is that a well-placed plastic worm or brush-guard-equipped jig - and those are the most effective lures, in part due to their weedlessness (although plugs can get 'em, especially during dusk) - worked gently, with love and compassion, because bass *still* are fucking lazy, will sooner or later find a big-mouthed fiend stuck to it.

But in California where the water-supply reservoir and its huge annual water-elevation fluctuations rule the waterway world, veg is too often too sparse and too thin and too rare to be

even worth giving a nanosecond glance. Still, no matter where they reside, black bass - especially smallies and biggies - always relate to cover. In the bathtub-ringed veg-lackin' reservoirs, this cover takes two forms: wood and rock. But it ain't just any stick pokin' up out of the water that'll draw a nice biggie; rare is the smallmouth that'll be found hunting randomly over myriad rock sizes. In both cover types, bigger's better. The nastier the wood, the larger the diameter the trunks, the greater the chance a nice-sized largemouth'll be resident. It really helps, too, if the wood is laying horizontally since, in that orientation, bass can have low light nearly all day, a low light similar to dawn and dusk when they're most active. Still-water smallies want the biggest fuckin' boulders they can find, similar to their habitat preference in streams (Todd and Rabeni 1989), although they'll glom onto monster wood like biggies (Hubert and Lackey 1980). Typically, the ideal areas, especially in mid-elevation Sierra reservoirs where the major prey is signal crayfish (a crawdad that doesn't burrow like red swamp crayfish), is the big-ass riprap covering the dam faces - perfect hunting/resting habitat for smallies, and ideal habitat for crawdads. Generally, however, the deeper wood/rock is better than shallower cover since both species tend to inhabit greater depths than in the adjacent seasons (Hunter and Maceina 2008, Kraai *et al.* 1991). Given that the main foods in such snaggy situations are crawdads and sunfish (Wheeler and Allen 2003, Weidel *et al.* 2000, Schramm and Maceina 1986), then, again, weedless, earthy-colored plastic worms and jigs are the ideal lures.

And here I need to spiel a bit about lures. So many fucking bass guys that mar my vision throw the biggest fuckin' plastic flippin' lures or mondo frogs or huge spoons or buzzbaits without the slightest consideration of prey size or prey-size selectivity any bass might display. No, these little-dick, fucking competitive, TV facsimiles just want that big, balloon-gutted biggie to one-up their buddies. But, for just a nice-sized adult bass, say a two-pounder, the gorilla lures are just too damn big to birth numbers of fish. I sensed that smaller-than-normal lures garnered more decent-sized bass way back when I was a teenager and found that I never had to veer from ultralight tackle and worms and jigs running four and two inches, respectively. Science backs this up. Schramm and Maceina (1986) found the average prey size of crawdad-munchin' 16-inch biggies was about two-and-a-half inches. The most energy gained per that spent by 15-inch biggies and smallies inhabiting aquaria occurred when consuming minnows measuring four and three inches long, respectively (Winemiller and Taylor 1987). Further, average prey size of biggies in the wild was frequently lower than the prey size yielding the most energy in lab settings, especially for crawdads (Hoyle and Keast 1987), which are *the* major food of bass in most waterways. So put down the rope-strength braid, the broomstick baitcaster, and the monster Brush Hog - you'll do better with a smaller stick, smaller lures, and more fucking *sense*.

AUTUMN

Quiet - the sere quiet, the hushed breeze, the prickly sting of cool air, the stately gilded tinge of autumn. It's my favorite season, the season of recoil, of dying, and, appropriately, of the vacation and vacating of bass fishermen from so many waterways. It's remarkable, the dearth of bassholes come autumn, which may be due to their being typical fucking Americans: kids, wife, dog, ugly tract house and oversize truck, all wanting recreation in summer for the coming work-school doldrums of autumn.

And ironic, given that after Labor Day, once water temperatures start dropping consistently, the straining, arduous bassin' of summer slides into the almost effortless bounty of aggressive smallies, spots, and biggies autumn gifts before the doom of winter.

It's elegance.

Key to autumn is that all three species return to shallower waters and are fuckin' *mad*, man (Hunter and Maceina 2008, Kraai *et al.* 1991); spotted bass are an especially welcome lure visitor since they're often so deep during summer as to be out of range of simple shore guys such as I. Like the other seasons, all three species are usually around cover - big fuckin' rock is a common home for 'em in reservoirs, with smallies really adoring rock along a sharp contour break (Hubert and Lackey 1980). Smallies and spots move around more during autumn than in summer (Hunter and Maceina 2008, Hubert and Lackey 1980), which is consistent with eating more frequently and fattening up for the lean winter months. This heightened foraging in shallower water in deep reservoirs is particularly noteworthy because, like spring, you can once again get a smallie or spot to eat a topwater lure. Nevertheless, where pelagic prey fishes such as threadfin shad and wakasagi predominate, the efficiency of topwater plugs pales in comparison to below-surface lures that imitate the little, silvery fishes - small spoons and two-inch black-pearl tube jigs.

Biggies, whether in reservoirs or lakes, will also be shoved up against shallow-water cover (Woodward and Noble 1997), although, in waterways where they co-occur with one or either of the other two species, biggies tend to be lazier and less inclined to chase shad or wakasagi. Instead, they're frequently still stuck on crawdads and similar slow-moving prey, so much so that a Sammy or Pointer or shad-imitating plastic lure will pull few largemouth while crawdad-colored plastic worms can be damn near criminal given how many biggies they tempt. Partially because they inhabit more fecund waters lacking rock than smallies or spots, autumn biggies will often relate to vegetation irregularities or wood just as in summer but shallower.

And of the seasons, autumn bass are my aesthetic favorite. I'm a rarity in the fishermen society in that my ideal fish isn't the biggest fuckin' behemoth that haunts a waterway - trophy-sized fish have never appealed to me. Instead, my perfect fish is, no matter the species, an average-sized adult that's clean, man, that lacks parasites, that has full, perfectly curved fins without fin-ray splits, that's tubby from eating well but still streamlined, that still reflects the potential to swim fast and effortlessly. It's akin to the most attractive woman to me: slim but voluptuous, with hips, with tits and ass well-formed and curvaceous, glowing, flowing hair, silky-smooth skin. Conversely, the giant bass most fishermen salivate over are just obese, couch-potato monstrosities to me, unattractive, unhealthy. For the micropterid basses, it's those fish that're 14-16 inches that just seem so, so *right* to me. While my average adult bass is always within that size range regardless the season, it's the autumn bass that are most vibrant. Winter and spring bass can look a bit haggard from the concomitant lean dinner table; summer bass are often thin and adorned with fucked-up fins from the rigors of spawning. But autumn bass, autumn bass have had a full summer to chow and heal and fill out - *voluptuous*, they are.

Put another way: autumn bass are, from a psychotic perspective, the most *romantic*.

DENOUMENT

By 2008, given my intimate relationship with the basses, plus the fact that I'd gotten a fresh college degree, a hot new girlfriend, *and* a remarkably well-paying job, I became totally burnt out on the black basses. They were just no longer stimulating to me anymore, plus the fact that the aspects of bass fishing - $70,000 bass boats, endless bass tournaments, fucking B.A.S.S., an infinity of bass-devoted lures - simply didn't jive with my evolving atavistic paradigm of how to pursue fish. Given the new grounding provided by a steady income and steady sex, I felt

ready to tackle new aspects of that there fishy world. White bass in Nacimiento. Yellow perch up at Irongate Reservoir. Channel cats in Berry. Lakers in the Sierra. Carp, suckers, squawfish, stripers, and, come summer of 2011, chum, silver, and pink salmon up in Alaska. Lots of new fishes, new experiences, kept my mind far away from ol' Biggie and his two smaller-mouthed brethren.

But sometimes, when you lose a big chunk of your foundation, when 75 percent of the floor falls out from beneath your feet, when you get thrown out into the crashing waves and abyssal troughs of the world's myriad tides, that familiarity, that road that's been walked down so many times before to where only the packed-down dirt remains in its path, can be comforting, can provide a life ring to give some stability while everything else swirls in a desultory haze.

I had a big chunk of the floor fall out from under me in 2012 when my girlfriend of five-plus years told me that it was over, finished, kaput, *adios*. I was set adrift in a cold, black sea, randomly drifting and drowning under the weight and pain of uncontrollable emotions. However, I found something floating nearby that helped to buoy me up a bit, just a tad, just enough to keep me waking in the morning and functioning in the uncaring fucking world - wintertime bass. Those cold-water, lethargic, overgrown sunfishes provided me a bit of an anchor in that newly unpredictable future, a bit of grounding, a beacon holding me steady while everything else in my life changed one way or another.

That bass and their pursuit were the only predictable things in the early months of a single life ironically gave them novelty - everything else was a chaotic blur. Nevertheless, once the ground beneath my feet had stabilized and I could see the world clearly again, bass had again become stale, overdone. Chasing bass after I acquired a new home and new daily rhythms and a new job just seemed, for the second time, trite, boring. Familiarity bred contempt.

But I'm no longer a young man. Gone are the days when I could stuff my fucking face with fat cheeseburgers and a big basket of grease-drippin' fries and still have a trim, physically capable body. No longer can I slug down a few forties each night and expect to perform well at work, at play, fuck, man, *at life*. I can't just pull a few more hours of physical work and somehow still keep the belly's spare tire from inflating to megaton-sized proportions while sustaining myself on fast food. And so as a healthier alternative for my middle-aged body, the importance of bass as food has risen inverse to their importance for fishing glory.

Thus it'd be bullshit for me to claim that my bass-fishing career is over - I still may need 'em as both food and, if my world gets tossed into the ether again, as a stable connection to Nature. But the relationship, my relationship as a fish Romanticist with the micropterid basses, is *complete*.

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