



Fantastic Free for All



by Jennifer Bilott

photos by the author

Who said “Nothing in Life is Free?” I know of something that is wonderful and free. Not just once, but twice a year. It’s Pennsylvania’s Fish-for-Free Days. There are currently two days a year that anyone, resident or non-resident of Pennsylvania, may legally fish for some of Pennsylvania’s bounty of fish without a fishing license. This program has been in place since 1984. Fish-for-Free Days are a perfect way to introduce someone young or not so young to the sport of fishing and to pass on knowledge and inspire new ambitions. In 2011, these days are held in both the spring and fall.

I have experienced the pleasure of mentoring a greenhorn or two during one of these opportune times. This year, the days fall on holidays, Memorial Day (May 30) and Labor Day (September 5). This is already a time when family and friends unite in celebration. So, why not include fishing together? Pennsylvania parks have wonderful facilities that can be used for picnics with access to water close by. I know from personal experience with out-of-state family visiting that we can take them fishing for the holiday. We enjoy taking these family members fishing, because our family has an opportunity to see our nieces and nephews share in our love of the outdoors. It’s a fun time for all and a learning experience. It’s great to connect with our nieces and nephews and pass down some of our fishing skills.

My husband and I took advantage of the Fish-for-Free Days to inspire our neighbor to reconnect with the sport of fishing and to introduce his children to it. Our neighbor is a young man with two young daughters and a lovely wife who all enjoy being outdoors. He has fond memories of fishing with his father when he was a young boy and into his teenage years. They spent many hours together fishing from his father’s 12-foot aluminum boat. When his father passed away, he lost interest, but he still talked about those times that were very special to him. So, my husband and I decided to invite him along on one of our many fishing adventures to try to reconnect his interest in fishing again. We geared up, shined up the boat and

headed north in pursuit of walleye on the spring Fish-for-Free Day. During our excursion, he was reminded of the fun and tradition that fishing can bring to him and his family. I could see a rush of excitement in his eyes when he reeled in his first fish of the day. We laughed, reminisced and caught a few walleyes. Now, he is back to being an avid angler and takes his daughters to the lake quite frequently. He is even considering purchasing a fishing boat. One like his dad had owned, so he can take his family fishing and create wonderful memories just like the ones he holds so dear.

Another example that demonstrates the efficiency of Fish-for-Free Days involves an elderly gentleman named Tom, who is a friend of mine. He used to fish as a boy but life got in the way as an adult, and he gave up on the sport. Now that he is retired and on a fixed income, he has a hard time justifying the expense. However, he has a 9-year-old grandson who wanted to try fishing. His grandson worked on him long enough, and Tom finally broke down. I told him about the days he could get into the field legally without a license, so he took advantage of the program. Tom’s grandson is now 13, Tom owns a boat, and they’re on the lake every chance they get.

Little things can make a big difference. The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission’s Fish-for-Free Days are an attempt to recruit new anglers. The more people who utilize our natural resources, the more money will be available to ensure that these resources are here for future generations.

Most avid anglers do not pay much attention to the cost of a fishing license. If you are like me, it amounts to merely pennies a day spread out over a year’s time. But, for those who don’t fish much or possibly never have fished at all, the cost of a license may be difficult to justify. The Fish-for-Free Days give these people an opportunity to test the water without spending money. Mark your calendars, invite a few friends, and let’s hope that the weather is good, the fish are hungry and everyone has a wonderful Fish-for-Free Day experience. ☐



Cabela's, along with supporting sponsors, is announcing "Wanna Go Fishing for Millions?"

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to win millions of dollars in cash and prizes by enjoying one of America's favorite pastimes – fishing.

Pennsylvania waters that have been stocked with prize-winning tagged fish will be announced by e-mail to contest registrants before the contest begins. The contest starts and the list of waters goes "public" on May 14 and concludes on July 14.

For more information and to register, visit

www.fishandboat.com/fishformillions.htm

Fish-For-Free Days



Your Fishing Holidays!

Send us your Fish-for-Free Day story.

Share your Pennsylvania angling experience with us at

www.fishandboat.com/fishstory.htm.

TAKE THE ANGLERS' LEGACY PLEDGE

Anglers' Legacy

Fish-for-Free Days are the perfect opportunity to take someone you know out on the water.

www.fishandboat.com