

"IF FISH COULD SCREAM" (FORMERLY FATHERS & SONS) - DRAFT FIVE
By Rob Biesenbach

CAST

Pop - 60, gruff, no-nonsense, dominating, in-your-face

Dad - 37, quieter, serious, protective of his son

Andy - 8, sensitive like his father

(Pop, Dad and Andy fish silently along
a riverbank. Pop is drinking a beer.)

POP

Who the hell ever heard of fishing in the middle of the day?

(No response)

It's hotter-n-hell ...

(Dad refuses to engage)

We're not gonna catch a damn thing!

ANDY

We're not?

DAD

Of course we are, son. Pop? Could ya ...?

(Grudging silence for a moment)

POP

Still don't know why you dragged me out here.

DAD

You love to fish.

POP

Alone. I love to fish alone.

DAD

I thought it would be nice for all of us to fish together ...

POP

(Suspiciously) Uh-huh ...

(Andy is casting his line)

DAD

Don't you want to see your grandson catch a fish?

ANDY

Uh-oh! I'm caught in the tree again!

(Andy works to untangle line.)

POP

He's got to have his line in the water to catch something.

DAD

He likes to cast.

POP

Let me give ya a hand there, boy.

(Pop helps Andy untangle line)

Okay, you got this baited all wrong. See, what you wanna do is, you wanna run the hook up through the minnow's lower lip and then out the gill.

ANDY

That's not how Daddy does it ...

DAD

That's right, Pop. Andy and I hook them through the head.

POP

Well, that's just damned crazy. If you hook 'em through the head, you kill 'em! Everyone knows you do it through the lip - or the tail. See, Andy, that way the minnow is still alive and moving around underwater - that's what attracts the fish.

ANDY

Daddy says it's cruel.

POP

Cruel? Oh, for chrissakes, it's a goddamned minnow!

DAD

Pop? Please! Could you watch the language?

ANDY

But, Grandpa, the goddamned minnow -

DAD

Andy! Oh, that's just great - are you happy now, Pop?

ANDY

Sorry, Daddy. (Pause) Grandpa, Daddy says that if minnows could scream, there wouldn't be any fishermen at all ...

POP

Oh, brother ... listen Andy, a minnow's just a fish. It doesn't have any feelings. Hell, it barely has a brain. Now, you try it my way, and I guaran-damned-tee if there's a fish out there on this hot, godforsaken afternoon you'll get a bite.

ANDY

Daddy?

DAD

Fine. Go ahead, Andy, do it Pop's way.

(Pop hands Andy a minnow from a bucket.)

POP

Alright, here ya go ... do it just like I showed you, up through the lip ...

(As Andy starts to hook the minnow, Pop lets out a small "fish scream.")

AAAAAAUUUUUUUGGGGHHHHHH!!!! YA GOT MEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!

(Andy is startled and visibly shaken. Dad goes over to comfort him.)

DAD

Oh, way to go, Pop! It's all right, Andy.

POP

(Sympathetic) Good grief, I was just kiddin' ya, son. Listen, don't worry about the minnow - his sole purpose in life is to be eaten by other fish. We're just helping him along. Now let's see how ya did.

(Pop inspects Andy's hook.)

Hey, nice job. Real world class! Okay, see that shady spot up under the log? I bet there's a big ol' fat fish just waitin' there for his lunch to come along. See if you can drop your line right in there ...

(Helps Andy casts his line.)

... that's perfect! Now move yourself on down so you've got a direct angle ... and keep your line taut!

DAD

Not so close to the water, Andy.

POP

(Ignoring Dad) Keep goin', Andy ... yeah, that's the spot, right there.

Careful, Andy!

DAD

(Andy goes downstage)

Pop!

POP

Hey! You wanted to fish? We're fishin'!

DAD

Right.

POP

That's what we're here for, right? To fish?

DAD

Yes, yes ...

(Long pause. Pop continues to try to push Dad's buttons.)

POP

Keep your rod tip up - ya fish like a girl!

DAD

Fish like a - ??

(Dad bites his tongue. More silence as they fish)

POP

You know, if you ask me -

DAD

I didn't!

(A beat)

POP

Well, you're smothering the boy!

DAD

Not this again!

POP

He's too damned sensitive!

DAD

Pop, he's eight! (Pause) Look, I'm raising him my way, okay? It's not easy doing it alone!

POP

You think I don't know that!?

(Silence. They fish.)

POP

You're gonna turn him into one of those metrosexuals!

DAD

(Suppressing a smirk.) Metrosexual? Where did you pick that up?

POP

I'm just old, son, not stupid - I read things ...

(Pause)

DAD

(Shaking his head) Metrosexual ...

ANDY

I got a bite! I got a bite!

(They drop their lines to help Andy)

POP

Okay, Andy, get the slack out of the line!

DAD

Easy Andy, don't horse it!

POP

Thataway, you got 'em ... now reel him in!

ANDY

Wow, look at him!

DAD

Nice job, Andy. Now swing your line over and I'll unhook him for you.

POP

Let the boy do it - he's gotta learn sometime. Here, Andy, just grab him above the fin ... there ya go ... now work the hook out backwards ... that's it!

ANDY

Oh, boy, can I keep him, Daddy?

DAD

No, Andy, he's too small to keep.

POP

Nonsense, there's enough meat on him to cook up.

DAD

No, he's under the limit. We've got to throw him back.

ANDY

Aw, Daddy ...

DAD

(Exasperated) All right, look ... just ... put him in the pail for now.

(Andy puts fish in pail and watches it. Dad & Pop resume fishing.)

ANDY

Daddy? Will there be fish like this in California?

POP

California?

DAD

Um ... there are fish everywhere, Andy.

POP

What's in California?

ANDY

Daddy's new job.

POP

Your what?

DAD

Nothing's decided. I had a job interview, is all. Andy, why don't you go get some fresh water for the fish?

(Andy picks up a bucket and goes downstage. Silence a moment as Pop shakes his head.)

POP

I knew something was up ...

DAD

Look, Pop, it's just preliminary at this point ...

POP

Preliminary my ass! You wouldn't be prepping Andy for a move across the country if it was "preliminary."

DAD

So what if I am?

POP

I know what this is about - Denise is out there.

DAD

And?

POP

Geez, you can't go chasin' after her!

DAD

It's been three years - it's worth a try.

POP

And you think bringing him out there is just gonna ... what? Trigger some maternal instinct in her all of a sudden?

DAD

It sounds like she's got her life together.

(Pop's surprised to hear this, shoots Dad a look.)

We've ... been talking.

POP

Oh yeah, she's always been good at the talking - not so good at the "doing" ...

DAD

It's gonna be ...

DAD

Different this time.

POP

Different this time?

DAD

We'll see.

POP

It's pointless.

DAD

A boy needs his mother.

POP

Bullshit! You got along just fine!

DAD

You think?

POP

Oh, here we go! Tell me again about your rotten childhood and your broken home and all the neglect you suffered!

DAD

It could have been better!

POP

And it could have been a helluva lot worse!

DAD

Either way, it's going to be different for Andy!

(Pause)

What is it about the men in this family and our capacity to drive women away?

(Pop, who's been drinking a beer, burps)

Asked and answered.

(Andy burps, then laughs)

That's terrific. (Pause) Pop, don't you miss Mom?

POP

Ah, geez ...

DAD

I do.

POP

Boy, you people really like talking about your feelings ...

DAD

It's important ...

POP

It's NOT important! How you "feel" about something doesn't make a damn bit of difference. Not everything has to be analyzed and labeled and categorized, you know. Some things just are.

DAD

It's that simple, huh?

POP

It is what it is ... I've spent more years without her than with her.

DAD

So you don't regret -

POP

NO! I don't! I don't regret anything. I didn't have that luxury - I was too busy raising you, making a living, providing for you ... (pause) Move on, son. Get on with your life.

DAD

That's what I'm doing.

POP

No, you're not, you're going backwards!

DAD

I'm doing what's best for Andy!

POP

What's best for Andy is not to be let down again!

DAD

POP, I'M AN ADULT - YOU CAN'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!

POP

WELL, FINE, I'M NOT GOING!

DAD

GOOD! YOU'RE NOT INVITED!

(They stare in silence. Andy approaches.)

ANDY

I'm ready to catch another.

(Pause, no response)

Dad?

DAD

Yeah, okay, Andy.

POP

Sure, Andy ... I want to re-rig your line first - why don't you go into my tackle box. There should be a new package of hooks in there.

(Andy goes to tackle box. They fish in silence a moment.)

DAD

Look, Pop, you and Denise never got along. It would ... complicate things ...

(Silence)

Pop, I have to do this.

POP

Like mother, like son I guess.

DAD

What's that supposed to mean?

POP

You inherited the "leaving" gene.

DAD

That's not fair!

POP

Denise, too. You're all the same.

DAD

OH YEAH? TELL ME, POP, WHAT'S THE COMMON DENOMINATOR IN ALL THIS? IS IT ANDY? IS IT ME? I DON'T THINK SO! WHO'S THE ONE WHO'S LEFT BEHIND? WHO'S THE ONE EVERYBODY'S RUNNING AWAY FROM?

(Pause)

Oh, gosh, Pop, I didn't mean that.

POP

Sure ya did.

DAD

No, I'm sorry, I ... look, things may not work out in California. I probably won't even get this job. And the housing market out there -

(Andy approaches. He's found an old photo in Pop's tackle box.)

ANDY

Grandpa, who's this?

(Pop moves to grab photo)

POP

That's nothing.

(Dad takes it, looks at it)

DAD

That's a picture of your grandma, Andy. My mom.

ANDY

Oh ... I don't know her.

(Pause)

POP

It's an old tackle box ...

DAD

What happened to moving on?

POP

Probably haven't been in there in 30 years ...

DAD

Uh-huh ...

POP

Let's ... let's get you rigged up here, Andy ...

(Pop goes to work with Andy on his line)

Now we're gonna catch you a really big fish.

ANDY

Good, Charlie needs company.

POP

Charlie?

ANDY

That's what I named my fish.

DAD

Andy, it's not a good idea to get too attached to a fish you're going to eat ...

POP

Well, you know ... about that ... as I look at him again, Andy, he is kinda small.

ANDY

But not too small?

POP

Actually, yeah, I think he is. We oughta throw 'em back.

ANDY

But, Pop, you said -

POP

Your Dad was right, Andy - if you kept him, you wouldn't be a good fisherman. You wanna be a good fisherman, don't you?

ANDY

I guess ...

DAD

Go on, son, there'll be other fish ... bigger fish.

ANDY

(Pause) In California?

(Dad looks to Pop for approval)

DAD

Yeah.

(As Andy goes to put fish back, Dad and Pop return to fishing.)

POP

Get your damned rod tip up, willya?