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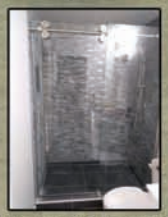

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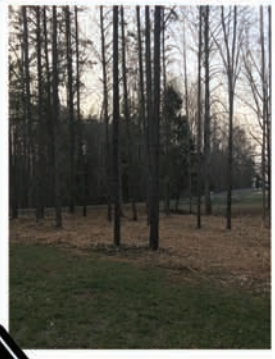

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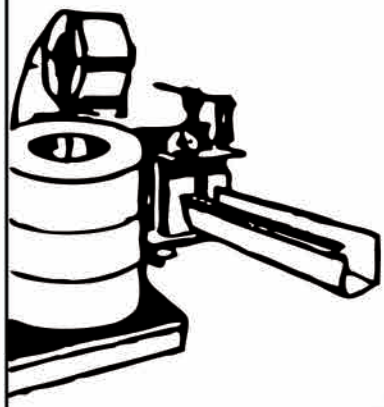

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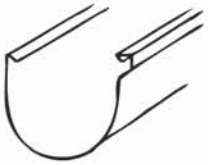

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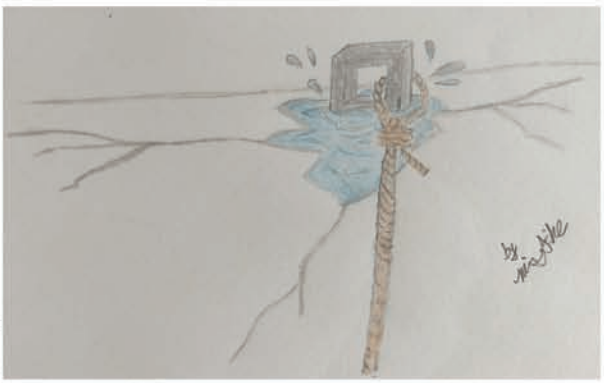

February can bring the worst or the best out of a countryboy. By February most countryboys that like to fish have gone just about stir crazy. The temperatures that tease us on warm days are like torture and there is only one fix for such a thing. You have to go fishing no matter how bad the fishing will be.

When I was a kid, my best friend and I were in such a fix one fine February day. Hunting season seemed like eons ago and we were sick of the cold, the ice and the snow too. We were even a bit sick of snow days from school. Can you imagine a kid actually almost wanting to go back to school vs be stuck in a winter wonderland? Well, that particular year that was us. The day we were out of school was due to remnants of ice on some backroads. The overnight temperature had dropped significantly causing a lot of the previous afternoon's melting to just freeze back up creating icy roads and horrible travel conditions. But, the daytime afternoon high temperature was forecast to be near 60 degrees! Break out the t-shirts and fishing rods!

We decided we were tired of sledding, building snow forts and having snowball wars. It was time to do something useful. We were going to the local swamp to fish and we did not care that we might not catch anything. We knew there were jackfish in the swamp and we knew they liked Rebel minnow imitations, Dare Devil red and white spoons and minnows. We could not get any minnows, but we had a few of the lures they liked.

The swamp was about a mile from our homes, so we put our rubber boots on, a few pairs of socks in a feeble attempt to stay warm, grabbed the lures and a rod, and set out for the solution to our crazed condition. Once we arrived at our normal summertime haunt, we found our situation was indeed dismal. The previous weeks of subfreezing temperatures had rendered our swamp water and open areas to a sheet of ice. As anyone might guess, the first thing we did was try to step on the ice. It cracked immediately. Apparently the heat of the sun working its way to springtime was also working on the ice in a most serious way. We heaved a big beaver gnawed log that we wrestled out from under the snow out onto the ice where it put a substantial crack in the ice and got wedged in the hole it created. We stood there and stewed about the predicament and decided that desperation called for drastic measures. We stashed our rods under a huge peeling sycamore tree and hurried back up the logging trail to the house. My buddy went his way to find a length of rope. I had the unfortunate task of finding a concrete block. You see where this is going right? Yep, we were so desperate that we lugged a concrete block (a small one but still rather heavy) back to the swamp. We traded off when our arms got sore and not once did we complain. All we could think about was catching a few fish.

Once at the swamp we tied the rope securely to the block and began heaving it out onto the ice. The idea worked! Ice was shattering everywhere. One time the block got stuck in the ice and we had to tug on it mightily to get it back, but we did. Unfortunately, we neglected to think about how we were terrifying the fish with all that noise and commotion. Apparently we did a great job of this as we never got one strike while casting our lines in the water lanes we created. However, we thought the situation through and the next day, which was a Saturday, we went down and retrieved our hidden block and rope and opened up the lanes that had frozen overnight. We did this in the morning and went exploring for a few hours before coming back and finding most of the lanes were still relatively ice free. We were able to make some nice casts, pull in some of the ice chunks and continue fishing. Guess what? We caught a few jackfish for our efforts! Mind you, we were pretty cold and our toes had no feeling in them, but who cares about toes when you are reeling in the first fish of the year and pulling them out from under the ice on the sides of the open water. The only real complaint we had was that several of our lures were lost when the fish either cut through our line with their teeth or the ice wore through the line and left us with a sad face and the need to replace the lure. Good thing we had a few spares with us!

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