I was done with fishing a long time ago. I never caught anything, anyway, since my lifetime allotment was spent, so I gave it up. You see, I believe we’re all given a certain amount of fishing luck at birth.

Most of mine was used up on a single day when I was in first grade. My father took my brother and me to a small pond. We took three cane poles, some crickets, and ambitiously, two fish strings.

We sat close together on the dock, but my spot was the hot one. My brother caught a single fish, my dad caught one and I filled the two strings. I realize a first grader’s memory may not be entirely accurate after 35 years, but that’s my story. I was, it seemed, a natural and mighty fisherman.

What followed would be known in fishing circles as my Dark Days, if I were part of a fishing circle. With my lifetime allotment of fishing luck squandered in a southern Georgia pond in 1971, I have suffered through three and a half decades of not catching fish.

There were some close calls. I once pulled a flounder to the surface of South Carolina’s mighty May River. He shook me and broke the line to escape, apparently aware that my allotment was gone. My grandfather estimated its weight at 10 pounds. I exaggerated, probably, though I’m not sure if it was intended to make me feel better or worse.

In college, my roommate, a devoted fisherman, dragged me to many rivers and creeks. He once hooked a bass and paternally handed me the rod and reel so that I could feel the joy of landing a large mouth. I reeled the bass to the side of the boat, where it jumped out of the water, looked me in the eye and spit the hook in my general direction before disappearing forever. As my roommate tells it, the hook hit me in the chest, but he lies a lot. Fishermen do.

Mostly, I didn’t even try to fish after that until a few years ago. My son took an interest in fishing early on so I had to start again, despite myself, and I’m not proud to say that I didn’t try very hard on the first few outings. On the way home from the lake one day when he was 5, my son said, “Daddy, are we ever going to catch a fish?” I knew then that I had to put a hook on his line next time, even if it meant I was likely to be injured as a result (and I was). Next time I tied on the smallest hook and used pieces of a hunchy bun for bait. It was a day of victory for my son, as he pulled miniature bream from the water. The fish was so tiny that minnows were bullying them around, but it didn’t matter to my boy. He was thrilled.

I took my subordinate fishing skills to Alabama recently. Some fine folks associated with the United Special Sportsmen Alliance and a hunting/fishing lodge called Leavellwood provided a fishing trip for my son and eight other children with chronic illnesses. It was a weekend of children’s smiles.

A collection of very serious fishermen, some of them professionals, showed up to teach the kids how to use smart bait. They claimed at the outset that the weekend meant more to them than for the families they hosted. All of them said that, all of them, from the fishing guides to Leavellwood owners Pam and Trey Montgomery, to U.S.S.A’s founder, an enthusiastic force of goodwill named Brigid O’Donoghue.

At first, I kind of doubted that. It was hard to imagine anyone’s weekend topped my son’s. But at the end of the day, everyone gathered for a meal of farewell remarks, I believed them. As these men of the rivers and woods became sentimental, as a Sunday school teacher tearfully presented each child with an outdoorsman’s bible, it was clear that a weekend at Leavellwood was a gift for far more than the nine children it was meant to serve. Give U.S.S.A a look at www.childswish.com.

At Leavellwood, large mouth bass fight each other for the chance to jump on a hook. Even I caught, a three pounder, OK, maybe a two pounder.

My son, my first grade son, caught 22. He is sure that he is a natural and mighty fisherman. I don’t have the heart to tell him there’s a lifetime allotment on these things.