

Winter 2014

Queen of the Reef

Allen Seymour

*[Allen Seymour is a local in San Clemente and Capistrano Valley, known for his stories of surfing and surfers, lifeguarding and fishing. He and I talked recently at a program presented by world famous big wave-rider Greg Long at the Historic Cottage at San Clemente State Beach. I asked him if he'd write a piece for the **South Swell** and Allen said he'd think about it. Not long afterwards, I found the following tale in my email in-box. Perfect. As a docent in the Visitor Center, it's always nice to have a piece of history or legend to share about the critters on display. I've got a good one now. ED]*



On a very still 4th of July morning in 1991 while slow trolling a motor oil colored Scrounger lure near Killer Capo Reef, I suddenly had a strong hit, then nothing. Being near the underwater wreckage of the old Capistrano Beach Pier (just passed the end of Doheny's South Day-Use area), I thought perhaps my line was maybe tangled up on an old piling.

On board the boat with me that day was legendary surfer John Waters. Besides growing up surfing Corona del Mar and Killer Dana (now the harbor) in the pre-WWII days, John was quite a fisherman and the inventor of the Scrounger lure. He quickly said, "Allen, toss the reel into free spool, slowly count to 60, then reel in as fast as you can!" At the count of 60, I felt another big tug on the line, then the unmistakable weight of a big fish coming straight up to the surface. It was a huge female Calico bass that had taken the lure on my line, run for a cave, then relaxed. John's technique had jerked its head out of the cave in the direction of our boat allowing me to reel her in.

When I realized this was the biggest Calico (Kelp) Bass I had ever seen in all the years I'd been fishing, we gunned the motor of the boat and rushed back into Dana Point Harbor to Jon's Fish Market to weigh my fish in. It was a pretty exciting ride back into the harbor; as any angler knows when s/he has a big catch to brag about, one that needs no exaggeration in the telling.

My son Gavin and his buddy were both on board with us, both boys were juniors at San Clemente High School. When we got the fish to Jon's and looked at the scale, my son's friend exclaimed, "Wow! 10.4 lbs! You should get it mounted!"

"No," I replied, "I'm invited to a 4th of July BBQ at Jim Kempton's home tonight and I am going to throw it on the grill." I knew seeing such a fish on his "barbie" would be a hit for Jim and the gang.

"No way!" he argued, "Stuff it! Every time someone walks into your home and asks Gavin if he caught it, he'll have to say, 'No, my dad did.'" Such rationalization is hard to ignore. He convinced me and we had it stuffed.

Years later I found out the fish was a 27-year-old female. In retrospect, I should have thrown her back; she was probably the Queen of the reef. Then I thought, "Well since I can't throw her back, why not donate her so generations of kids could appreciate this beautiful fish." I believed then, as I do now, that there was no better place than the Doheny Interpretive Center to achieve this goal. Check her out, she is on the wall.

Aloha,