

A Fine Line: Fisherman Keith Fraser

by Ann Thomas

For Keith Fraser a long life of advocacy for fish and wildlife began during his childhood years living next to San Anselmo Creek. The long-time proprietor of San Rafael's Loch Lomond Live Bait Shop, a founder of United Anglers and author of a book on sturgeon fishing, lived for six years on Agatha Court in the late 1940s and early 1950s and after school he would climb through a hole in the bridge at Saunders and go down to the creek to fish.

It was a time before Drake High School existed, when fruit orchards and a baseball field surrounded homes, when he could watch spawning steelhead and salmon thrashing in the water after a good rain, as they dug pits in which to lay their eggs.

"If you knew where the fishing holes were and used the right bait," he said, the fishing was good. He caught an occasional steelhead, which he almost always released. Normally his catch would be five to eight or nine inches but some of the fish would rival what anglers got in the Sierra Nevada.

Keith attended Red Hill School, then high school at Tam, switching to Drake for his sophomore year. He recalls that he "must have played a thousand sets of tennis at Red Hill" and was active in sports during his high school years

He was "brought up to be careful with fish," a practice which presaged a lifetime of advising sportsmen on a "catch and release" philosophy and fishing practices that protect and preserve the abundance of wildlife and fish. A former baseball coach at San Rafael High School, he opened the bait shop in 1970 and in that time has become renowned not only for angling expertise but also for the procession of sea birds that regularly visit his shop. These include herons, a great American egret and gulls, all attracted by the snacks that Keith generously dispenses from the bait tanks full of shiners and live perch.

He is concerned that "pollution, poaching and water export" have led to a decline in sports fisheries. Among the advice he gives is to keep waterways clean. "The enemy of fish in the creek is contaminants," he said. "People dump stuff all the time."

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Keith Fraser and Emma the egret both have had life-long interests in fish and fishing. Photo by Ann Thomas