

Florida is more than beautiful beaches and pretty girls. This short story book is about some of the wonderful adventures I have experienced here. Some of the stories are true. Some are not. I hope you enjoy them all.

Stories from Fantastic Florida

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Stories from Fantastic Florida

By Bob Bass

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1. Gator Hunt on the Suwannee

It all started on a dark Florida night in the town of Suwannee at the mouth of the river. I came there to visit my friend Bobby and was at his house there on the banks of the river when he suggested we go gator hunting. We knew it was against the law but there were so many gators along the river we didn't think one or two would be missed.

Bobby came from a long time cracker family of fishermen starting with his grandfather and father. He was just following tradition when he suggested we go gator hunting. Everything in and along the river had been declared fair game since pioneer days.

Bobby and his wife Arlene were raising their children the best way they could with Bobby fishing everyday in the gulf at the mouth of the river. They lived anywhere fish could be caught along the big bend of Florida. Fishing in those days was done with a "birddog rig" or mullet boat and long nets carried on the back on what was called a net table. I had been on several fishing expeditions when Bobby lived at Horseshoe Beach near Cross City where I was stationed on a USAF radar site.

Bobby and I also played in a rock band together and were good friends, almost like brothers sharing the nights we spent trying to make a little money entertaining and me trying to help him make a little money fishing.

Fishing was a very demeaning business to be in. One usually owed more money to the fish house you operated out of for gas, ice and sometimes a small loan from the owner to put a little food on the table then future catches of mullet would pay for. The mullet would only bring around 10 cents a pound back then and it took several great catches to break even. Anything could go wrong on a mullet boat from a broken prop while running in shallow water to bad weather.

Bobby and his family didn't have much to live on so I thought one or two small gators that could be sold for their hides and meat wouldn't be missed from the river and would surely help my friend with his finances.

At any rate, Bobby pulled a small plywood skiff from under his house and attached an antique outboard to the stern. We put lanterns on our heads like the coal miners used attached to small batteries and started the boat up the river. The night was darker than coal but gator eyes could be seen from great distances along the banks and in shallow water. I wasn't too worried because Bobby said he knew what he was doing.

Bob Bass

Shortly after we started our expedition Bobby stopped the boat and held his lantern on a glowing pair of eyes near the shore. I turned my light to the same pair of eyes and Bobby carefully aimed an ancient .22 rifle at the gator. Right after he shot, the gator churned around in the shallow water and we heard a boat start up just around a curve in the river ahead of us.

The boat sounded like it had a pair of big engines on the back and was soon coming around the bend in the river in our direction with a searchlight searching for us. One hundred horse outboards had just been developed back then and this boat had two of them.

Bobby threw the rifle in the water and frantically tried to get the old outboard started. It would only start up and then stop again. Meanwhile the boat with the big motors on the back kept the searchlight on us and raced in a large arch around our boat.

All at once, there was a large crash up on the bank and it got deadly quiet. Bobby had stopped trying to crank the boat and I just sat there wondering what was going on.

All at once a quiet voice came from up on the bank and asked, "Are you boys still there?" Bobby answered, "yeah".

"How about coming up here and giving us a hand?" Bobby pulled on the starter rope and the old outboard sprung into life as he answered, "You take us for a pair of dammed fools?"

We raced out into the river and made it quickly to Bobby's house. There we removed the motor from the boat, pushed it under the house and went inside for one of the best mullet dinners I have ever had.

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A Florida Gator on the river bank

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