

Key West Tarpon

by Jill Christensen

We were fishing the flat waters off Key West, Florida. The mangrove swamps were the only thing darker than the sky. Occasionally the shifting clouds allowed a glimpse of stars or a high-flying aircraft. I heard a few other boats go by, a shrimper returning home late, a yacht lit up like Christmas, and a couple of feisty, noisy little tug boats.

My companion smoothly laid his line in the water using a shiny new silver Ambassador 5000C. Something hit at once. Ever generous with such things, he quickly handed me his rig and said, "Land this tarpon." I happily ditched my temperamental spinner.



I'm not sure how he knew, but my friend exclaimed, "He's gonna shake his head now!" and sure enough, though I could see nothing, I felt the magnificent silver fish leap from the water and do just that. Then, BAM, it hit the water again and took off. I found myself clutching the rig for dear life. The tarpon zigged and zagged, each time turning violently before heading in a new direction. I focused on managing the tension on the line, reeling like crazy when the tarpon turned back toward me, then letting him run when he turned.

We kept this up for 45 minutes before the tarpon finally tired enough for me to guide it to the boat. My companion scooped it up with the net and lifted it into the boat. We freed it from the net and I held it up for the photo you see here.

Just before the flash blinded me, I heard my companion say, "This tarpon is just right for your wall!"

Nearly four hundred dollars and several months later, I had to agree.

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