Don't get trapped by your own, inaccurate tales. Here's how to make fishing stories sound true.

Fishing Excuses for 2011: *Are You Ready?*

Story By Joe McFarland • Illustration By Richard J. McFarland

November is the traditional month for well-prepared fishermen to gather with relatives and credible witnesses and begin laying the verbal groundwork to support next year's believable fishing stories. Those enviable anglers are the great ones who report amazing success almost every time they go fishing—and people believe them. They are masters. And you can be one of them.

By next spring, the calculated statements you make this month can be cited as irrefutable facts. Simply follow the examples described ahead, and your 2011 fishing stories will bear the stamp of verifiable evidence. With today's instant fact-checking and widespread electronic surveillance, fishermen often struggle to convince audiences of their alleged accomplishments. The fact is, most non-fishermen say they do not believe any of the fishing stories they hear today. Fortunately, a smart group of America's fishermen manage to get the job done. Here's how:

As you sit down together with relatives this holiday season, do not forget the most memorable conversation should always include a well-planned dose of seemingly random observations and announcements related to fishing. These seemingly ordinary statements can be cited next year as facts. Once seated at the table, wait for your opportunity. Try to blend the announcement into casual conversation. Make it sound spontaneous. For example, when your favorite aunt hands a gravy boat to you, you should thank her in the following manner:

"Why Aunt Viola, this gravy boat reminds me of my fishing boat where I keep my new fish scale," you should say, scanning the table carefully, making eye contact with all of your relatives. You should speak in a casual and totally unrehearsed style, loud enough for all witnesses to hear. If there are electronic recording devices present, suggest an impromptu family video as you speak. "I must say, that expensive fish scale I bought sure cost a fortune. But that's the price one must pay to own an absolutely perfect fish scale that is verified as legitimate and is incapable of a false reading."

Afterward you should quickly change the subject to avoid unwelcome suspicion. Suddenly raise your glass for a toast.

"This broccoli casserole is worth a toast!" you should praise your spouse. "It's like that new walleye lure I've heard about, the one that has neutral buoyancy. I hear people using it catch huge walleye on every cast."

After taking a bite of the casserole, you should add, as if it just popped into your head, "You know, I think I'll try out that new lure next April 9 on the Kankakee River and see if the lure really is as good as this casserole. Yes. April 9. I'll have to remember to use that new lure on the Kankakee River April 9."

These memorable details you'll be able to invoke next year as supporting evidence when you tell your fish story.

"It happened! I caught a huge walleye on every cast!!" you can shout into

the phone while standing in an empty Kankakee parking lot next April 9. "I must say, I was skeptical when I compared this lure to your broccoli casserole last Thanksgiving. But what just happened is all the evidence I need. Well, I think I can release these huge fish now without taking any pictures. There can be no doubt about the effectiveness of this lure."

Remember, a good fish story relies upon established facts. And the window of opportunity to establish this crucial, circumstantial evidence closes soon. So make this holiday season the perfect time to establish that strong groundwork of facts you'll be able to cite in next year's fishing stories. Whenever possible, add memorable, distinctive analogies people will recall. Coach witnesses if necessary.

"This crispy turkey skin is like hooking a 4-pound crappie at Chain O'Lakes State Park next June 11," you can announce amid the confused stares of relatives. "You know, I should drive over to that crappie hotspot I heard about next June 11 and see if I can catch a 4-pound crappie that's as memorable as this crispy turkey skin."

People will remember strange statements like that, especially if there's an awkward silence afterward. In the spring, after those verbal memories of Thanksgiving become established history, you should carefully invoke them to add to your fish stories—but use them sparingly. Restraint is essential. Build believability. Incorporate historical evidence only when necessary into next year's outlandish claims. Conserve your supply for the entire 2011 fishing season.

Once in a while next year, especially after claiming incredible success the day prior, intentionally admit you did not catch fish that day.

"Hoo-boy! I took a beating out there today," you can announce while strolling into your living room, shaking your head. "I guess a guy can't catch a 4-pound crappie every day. Not like yesterday." Such humble admissions reduce skepticism and build sympathetic credibility. Know that the best fishing stories of 2011 will be told by fishermen who occasionally acknowledge failure.

They're also the fishermen who knew how to work the Thanksgiving table in 2010.

On rare occasions, you will actually catch fish next year. Your behavior afterward is critically important. Do not act overly astonished or brag excessively. Do not post images of yourself holding a 6-inch northern pike on Facebook. For those regular occasions when you do not catch fish, your references should be well-rehearsed to appear spontaneous.

"Can you believe it?" you should rush through the front door next August while holding a frayed piece of rope, with a bit of water splashed on your face. "Those giant catfish on the Big Muddy River really are as big as my appetite was last Thanksgiving dinner! Remember? I said, 'Any catfish as big as my appetite will break a rope.' Here. I wrote it down on this piece of paper. I had everybody at the table sign and date it. See? There's your name. What a totally amazing coincidence. I guess you just can't argue with facts like these."