

The “Real” Rainbow Fish Story

By Burt Noyes

Out in the countryside was a very large pond with all kinds of animals, fish, and plants. The smartest creatures were the fish, who had been there as long as anyone could remember.

Now most of the fish were pretty happy with the way things were. They swam around finding food to eat, going to school, talking about the weather, saying things like “Is it wet enough for you?”

Two fish that never seemed very happy though were Jimmy and Kyle.

What made them unhappy, very unhappy, was a fish named Bill. Bill was different from all the other fish because he had scales that were very different from everyone else’s. Bill’s scales were all kinds of flashy colors, orange, blue, red, purple, yellow, bright green, just about every color you could imagine. All the other fish, including Jimmy and Kyle, had gray scales, some lighter or darker. Jimmy and Kyle would see Bill go by with his bright scales and get very jealous and angry.

Jimmy and Kyle started talking about Bill’s bright colorful scales with all the other gray fish in the pond.

“Don’t you all think Bill should share his scales with everyone else?” they asked their friends.

Their friends like Jane and Karl hadn’t really thought about Bill’s bright scales before, but now that they looked at him and then looked at themselves, they started to get jealous too.

The four fish decided to talk to Bill about sharing his scales. One evening as the warm sun was setting on the edge of the pond, they saw Bill coming back from the south end of the pond.

Jimmy decided to start off the conversation. “Bill, we have noticed how bright and colorful your scales are, and we would like you to give us some of them. Then we’ll be colorful too and finally be happy.”

Bill floated gracefully as he thought about what they were asking. “Well,” he said, “I don’t think the scales would last very long once I give them to you. But I can tell you how you can get some colorful scales of your own”.

“All you have to do is go down to the south end of the pond and find some plants that look like little trumpets growing in the deeper water. After you eat the plants for a few weeks, you’ll start to get more color in your scales, and after a year, you’ll look like me, if not better. My father taught me about this, and his father taught him also.”

The four jealous fish listened to his story, but it sounded like a lot of work and they didn’t

want to wait for weeks, and certainly a year was too long. So they swam off together and tried to figure out a plan to get Bill's scales.

Kyle was listening to the other three when he saw Big Sam swim by. Big Sam was the biggest, ugliest, meanest fish in the pond. Everyone was afraid of him, and even though he was slow, he was very scary.

Kyle told the other three "Hey, let's get Big Sam to go over there and take Bill's scales and give them to us."

"Why would he help us?" Jane asked.

"Let's make him the king of the pond," said Karl. "We can tell him how nasty Bill is and that Bill stole all those scales from the other fish. Tell Big Sam that he would be doing a good thing by taking the scales from Bill and giving them equally to everyone else." Everyone thought the plan was great, and decided to talk to Big Sam as soon as possible.

Early the next morning, the four jealous fish, Jimmy, Kyle, Karl, and Jane, along with some of their not-so-bright friends, found Big Sam floating on his back sleeping like a log.

They woke Big Sam up and told him their plan to make him king. When they told him how Bill had stolen the scales from everyone else, which was a lie, and that Big Sam would be a hero if he could take Bill's scales and give them to everyone else, Big Sam readily agreed to be their king.

That evening, as the warm sun was setting on the edge of the pond, Bill came along as he usually does from the south end to go home. Big Sam and the jealous fish and their friends all swarmed around Bill, making Bill very afraid.

"I am now the King of the Pond," declared Big Sam. "My first act as the good king that I am is to take your bright scales and give them to the less fortunate fish in the pond. You have plenty of scales, and we will not take them all, but everyone deserves to have bright scales. And besides that, you don't deserve these scales, you stole them from the other fish."

Before Bill could say a word, Big Sam was ripping the scales from Bill's skin, leaving big colorless patches of gray like the other fish. The jealous fish cheered for Big Sam, who finally seemed to have found something he was good at.

When Big Sam finally finished taking Bill's scales, Bill silently slipped away while Big Sam turned to other fish.

Big Sam had thousands of bright colorful scales, and started to hand them out a few at a time to the other fish. "Isn't this great?" said Jimmy and Kyle to the others, as they put some of the colorful scales over their own gray scales. All the fish swam around looking at each other, admiring the new scales, and even happier now that Bill was not as beautiful as he used to be.

They all looked at Big Sam , and were surprised that instead of having a few scales like them, he had hundreds of the bright scales. When Big Sam saw them looking at all the scales he had kept to himself, he smirked “It’s good to be the king,” and swam off to his home.

The next morning, the fish of the pond went about their usual business. Jimmy saw Kyle swimming over his way when he noticed something was wrong with Kyle’s new scales.

“Your new scales are turning gray!” Jimmy shouted.

Kyle shouted back “Jimmy, your new scales are turning gray too!”

As the fish all came out to enjoy the day, they noticed that all the colorful scales were now gray, and that they all looked exactly like they did before they made Big Sam king. Even the hundreds of scales Big Sam had kept for himself were now gray and falling off.

They all were even more jealous and angry when they saw Bill swimming toward the south end of the pond with his patchy skin starting to turn bright and colorful again. And even more shocking than that, two other fish were following Bill to the south end of the pond.

This went on for several days. Each day, Bill and his two friends would come back from the south end of the pond, brighter and more colorful than the day before. Big Sam and the other fish were really angry now.

Big Sam caught them the next day, and took even more of their scales, giving some of them away to the other fish, but still keeping more of them for himself. For weeks this went on. Bill and his two friends kept having their scales taken, Big Sam got bigger and scarier, and the other fish would get a few scales once in a while, just to have them turn gray and fall off the next day.

Meanwhile, more fish were going to the south end of the pond and learning from Bill how to grow their own colorful scales. There were plenty of the trumpet-shaped plants for them to eat if they would just put forth some effort. The jealous fish were getting even more angry, calling them traitors, and demanding that Big Sam do something about the trend.

They told Big Sam that if all the fish got their own bright scales, then they wouldn’t need Big Sam to be king anymore. When Big Sam heard this, he was angry and started looking for a way to stop the colorful fish permanently.

The warm days in the pond had been growing longer and Jane noticed something unusual. The pond was getting lower!!!!

Now the pond wasn’t very much lower at all. In fact, it had lowered so little that nobody had noticed it but Jane, since she was always measuring the pond.

Jane told Jimmy and Kyle that day how the pond had recently lowered. Jimmy and Kyle had heard of the pond lowering and raising before, but they had never seen it personally. But an

idea came to them, an incredible, powerful, devious idea that would put an end to Bill and his friends and their colorful scales.

They called all the fish of the pond to a general meeting around the giant cat-tail plant. This was a very rare occasion, so all of the fish were interested in what was going on.

Jimmy opened the meeting. “We have found out some very alarming news. Jane discovered that the pond we live in is getting lower. Other fish have confirmed this fact. The pond is drying up and we have only one chance to stop it before we all end up dead!”

There was a huge gasp from the crowd. All the fish started yelling, talking, shouting, and crying. “What has caused this to happen?” they asked.

Jimmy slowly pointed his fin in the direction of Bill and his two almost fully-colored friends. “Ever since those three have been feeding at the south end of the pond, and getting more colorful, the pond has slowly been lowering. I propose that Big Sam be given the authority to stop them from going to the south end. Hopefully, we can stop the pond from drying up.”

The crowd heard a cough from the back of the crowd. It was Gerry, the oldest fish in the pond, and he asked for the opportunity to speak.

“I’ve lived in this pond for many seasons,” he said, “more than anyone here I suppose. I’ve seen the pond lower before, and I’ve seen it raise too. I suppose long after I die, the raising and lowering will still go on. I don’t see any evidence that Bill and his friends have caused this to happen, and I propose that they be left alone.”

The fish turned back to Jimmy. He shouted “This old fish is a Lowering denier, and anyone who denies this has to be silenced! Who will you believe, the old denier or Jane with her new scientific measuring stick?”

The crowd of fish roared in agreement, and passed a law giving Big Sam the power to stop Bill and his friends from going to the south end. They also passed a law stopping anyone from discussing the pond-lowering issue.

Bill and his friends did stop going to the south end of the pond. Slowly, their scales started to fade, turning paler and paler until they were as gray as the rest of the fish.

Jimmy and Kyle and the rest of the jealous fish were now very sad at their situation. They were still gray, just like before, but now they had Big Sam for a king, and he had gotten meaner and scarier. Not only did Big Sam not allow them to talk about the pond-lowering issue, they weren’t allowed to talk about anything, read anything, or do anything that Big Sam did not approve of.

The next spring, as the water warmed, and the snow on the banks of pond melted, the water did rise once again, just like the old fish Gerry had predicted. And all the gray fish swam around in misery, waiting for the day when Big Sam would finally float to the surface belly-up

one last and final time.