

Rita is a remarkable lady

Chances are, if you're anything like me you have never given much thought to who ties the lures you use when your fishing.

I've used 'Catchmore' fishing lures for some time now. Mostly the walleye drift rigs, yanking them from the small package, attaching it to my line and dressing it with a big juicy nightcrawler. Of course only with thoughts of hooking and boat- ing a nice fish.

No, never have I given even a single thought as to who put that lure in the package. And at the time it really didn't matter much to me.

Diane Grapentin, one of the owners of Catchmore, (Grapentin Specialties) said to me recently, "I think I have a good story for you."

Always curious, I ask her to tell me.

"I have a wonderful person who ties my perch rigs for me, she's a special lady and I think you'll like her story," Diane goes on to say.

"We sell about 10,000 of her perch rigs a year. She's dependable, hard working and takes pride in her job," she explains.

The perch rig is sold under the name of 'Rita's Triple Slammer.' The namesake of the lure is Rita Purdon.

Now, 10,000 of anything is a lot. And I don't know if you have ever tied any lures before, but there are a lot of steps. It's not hard, but it's anything but easy. I tie a couple dozen walleye rigs each spring and that's enough for me.

Sometimes I'll mistakenly put the blades on upside-down, or the beads before the blades and or tie poor knots. Simply put, it's easier to just buy them.

Diane explained to me there are at least 18 steps to tying and packaging her perch rigs. You know, everything from tying a good knot, to measuring the leader length, to putting beads and spinner-blades on and so on and so on.



Rita with a perch rig named after her, Rita's Triple Slammer.

"Well, Rita is 90 years old and she has been working for us for nearly 20 years now," Diane tells me, waiting, of course, for my reaction.

"Excuse me..." I start to say, when Diane smiling from ear to ear, interrupts.

"Yes, I did say 90 years old. And she's one of my best. She's an inspiration and we just love her," she says.

At age 90 most people don't think of holding down a job. Most of her peers are, in many cases, struggling to merely get out of bed each day. Not to mention those who would rank as peers are few and far in between!

At 90, Rita Purdon works five hours a day packaging and tying fishing lures. She can complete the 18 steps and complete a dozen packaged lures in an hour.

I could waste an afternoon doing a half-dozen.

Rita is a soft spoken, affable lady. She is spry, humble and polite. A pure delight to interview.

"I'm very thankful for my health," Rita tells me as I sit with her at her kitchen table in a very tidy and neat apartment in Almont, Michigan, her supplies for tying lures within an arm's length from her.

Chances are, if you are a perch fisherman, you have used lures tied by Rita. "Rita's Triple Slammer" is sold at most bait shops and sporting good stores throughout Michigan.

"I'm not much for watching TV," Rita tells me.

Well, that is, unless the Detroit Tigers are being televised or there is a good Nascar race on.

She loves her Tigers and Nascar, and might even have a glass of wine while watching.

Longevity seems to run in the family, her sister, Helen turns 100 in July of this year.

Rita was born in 1918 in Hamtramck Township near Detroit. Her family had a farm on 7 Mile road, where they grew vegetables, and she was one of 12 children. She came down with scarlet fever as a



A close up of just one of 18 steps in tying the lure.

child and was not allowed to work in the fields, but was put in charge of cooking for the family, all 14 of them.

Rita cooks and bakes today, pies, cakes, entire meals for family gatherings. She's well known for her zucchini muffins.

"I like to stay busy," she tells me, "it helps make the time go by, so I stay busy doing something everyday."

"She still fixes the Sunday family dinners," mentions Donna, who also works with Grapentin Specialties, handling the Web site orders.

Rita's husband, Bob, passed away in 1991. He was a World War II veteran and salesman by trade. They met in 1941 on a blind date and married just few months later.

They have five children, four girls and one boy. Twin daughters, Donna and Debbie live near their

mom in Almont. Rita has 15 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren and 1 great-great-grandchild.

"I knew he was the one the minute I saw him," Rita tells me of her beloved husband.

"Bob left for the service in February of 1943 and didn't return until December 1945, it was a very long and hard time," she tells me.

"In those days you simply did what you had to do to get by," she explains.

Like many of the wives of the war time, Rita went to work in the plants around Detroit to aid in the war efforts. No complaining, she simply did what she must. In Rita's case, this meant going to work at the Chrysler Tank Arsenal at 12 Mile and Van Dyke. She was 23 years old and earned \$50 a month.

I was discovering Rita was one of those special ladies. Always willing and able to meet most any challenge.

Perhaps this short story which was published in Chrysler Magazine in 1944 will be further testimony to Rita.

Crane Girl Rita Purdon handles the "Heavy Stuff"

Every morning Rita Purdon kisses her nine-month-old son good-bye and leaving him in the safekeeping of her sister, catches her ride to the Chrysler Tank Arsenal.

Once there she climbs the steel rungs of the ladder that takes her far up over the clank and clatter of the tank assembly lines and the roar of machinery. She lets herself down through the small hatch that is the entrance to the cab of a forty-ton crane.

Setting herself in the seat before a row of levers and buttons, she becomes a crane operator - mover of the "Heavy Stuff."

Rita has only been on the job for two months but already she handles that overhead giant with the finesse of a veteran. In response to a signal she rolls away down the line, picks up a tank turret, carries it back, stops on the dot and lowers it gently as a feather into place on a tank. Then away again to lift a completed



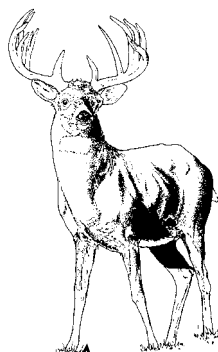
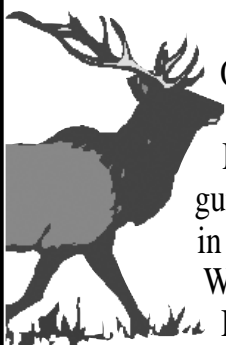
Rita puts the finishing touch on one of her perch rigs she hand ties, she makes 10,000 lures a year at age 90.

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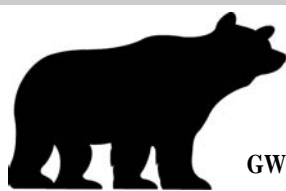
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Rita with her daughters, Debbie (L) and Donna (R) with her friend and employer, Diane Grapentin.

(Below) Here Rita measures the length of the perch rig on a well worn yard stick.



Rita's Triple Slammer: from page 28

tank and deposit it deftly upon a waiting railroad flatcar.

Rita accepts the responsibility of her job cheerfully. She is doing her part. Each tank that she deposits on those waiting flatcars brings closer the day when her family will be reunited. That day when her husband will come back from the war.

She bought her \$100 War Bond during the Third War Bond Drive. Bought it cheerfully even though it meant giving up that new winter coat she wanted.

Rita Purdon is fighting this war in every way she can. Fighting to bring back safely a husband and a brother. There is nothing her government can ask of her of which she will say "Too Much."

Perhaps you can see why Diane calls Rita inspirational.

In Rita's lifetime she has seen

women get the right to vote, Lindbergh cross the Atlantic, lived and contributed to a World War victory, watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon and saw the terrors of 9-11.

Oh, and by the way, if all this isn't enough to inspire most anyone her life touches, Rita also makes beautiful handcrafted angel pendants for cancer survivors distributed in hospitals in her spare time.

That is when she's not tying lures, baking, watching the Tigers, doing puzzles or Suduko, and walking on her treadmill.

Diane sums up our interview with one last comment, "In all the time, and all the perch rigs Rita has made, I have never had one returned because it was not tied correctly! Not a single one, ever!"

Rita is a remarkable lady.

Grapentin's a wholesaler with a retailer's heart

Grapentin Specialties, (Catchmore) is a family business, headquartered in Imlay City, Michigan. Jeff and Diane Grapentin started the company 25 years ago. The centerpiece of their company was making sinkers, as their business grew they continued to add more products.

Grapentin Specialties, a wholesale company, sells to 300 plus retail outlets from Washington (state), to New York and from Texas to Michigan. They are also sold at Cabela's, Gander Mountain, Walmart and local bait and sports shops. Grapentin's has shipped to every state at some time in the last 25 years and offers nearly 3,000 items in their 200 page catalog. The family company now employs four full time employees and has over 25 sub-contractors who help them fill the orders.

"We still are known for our sinker business, but we offer everything from crawler harnesses to perch rigs," Diane explained.

Known as 'Catchmore' on the shelves they special in custom orders and their company sees that as one of their key reasons for success.

"We like to say we are a wholesaler with a retailer's heart," she concluded.

For more information on Grapentin Specialties or to order from their product line visit them online at: www.grapentin.com