Fishing guide gives the reel lake story

Looking for a fishing guide?
Here are some questions to help an objective source:
• Does the guide arrive on time, ready to go?
• Does the guide have a cheerful, positive attitude?
• Is the guide enthusiastic, but not full of wild promises?
• Does the guide know fishing and stay up to date with trends?
• Does the guide watch the Weather Channel?
• Does the guide know what spots are most productive?
• What time of day is best?
• Does the guide market his/her business, but not aggressively?
• What do you buy bait in stores?

Frank, on the other hand, lives to help clients catch fish. His business is a well-known source for catching striped bass. Dark stripes running from behind the gills to the base of the tail. The largest one taken from the Butte, in 1992, weighed 54.5 pounds.

Frank says, “Every day I’m going for that record.” Ninety-nine percent of the time, the guide’s roses are better than yours.

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STILL SCREAMING, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

And sometimes clients turn on you. A month or so after Bradshaw hired Frank, Bradshaw appeared on Jay Leno. "He badmouthed me," says Frank, who happened to be watching. "So I didn't know anything. Called me 'some pro guy.' Called Elephant Butte 'Lake Tor C.'"

So what did Frank do? "I laughed. I took it in a kindly way. I really tried hard for him. As far as him telling me that, well, you know, he's a celebrity. Frank, on the other hand, lives to help clients catch stripers. What's a stripes look like? Streamlined, pear-shaped body. They run running from behind the gills to base of the tail. The largest one taken from the Butte, in 1969, weighed 54.5 pounds. Says Frank: "Everyday I'm going for that record."

Ninety-nine point nine percent of the people who call Frank want him to take them striped fishing. No cachet, white bass, walleye, largemouth or crappie. "I'm a striped guy," says Frank. "It's in my blood. I can't get rid of it. If some guy pulls in a striped, it's the biggest thrill for me. Now, that's hard for other fishermen to figure out. They wonder why I'm not fishing. People say I get more interested than they do. It's true. After all these years, they haven't hit one, Bradshaw came to the Butte with his father a little more than a year ago and hired Frank because Bradshaw, well, Bradshaw had asked around for the best guide. His daddy caught a "stripers," says Frank, adding that Torrey had bad luck. "I don't think he'll do it again."

That happens, says Frank. The Butte is not some go-fish pond at a trade school fair. This is a real river, a real stream with a real scene. And if you're really catching them until the

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- Does the guide know fishing areas or spots that are up to date with trends?
- Does the guide watch the Weather Channel?
- Does the guide know what spots are most productive?
- What time of day is best?
- Does the guide market his/her business, but not over it?

Frank keeps a depth finder aboard his 24-foot center console fishing boat. The finder shows rides and humps and drops off. "On those edges is where the striped fish like to hang," Frank says. "About 35 feet."

When clients peer into Frank's depth finder, they often say, "I don't see any fish in there." Oh, they're there, Frank will say. They're there.

Finding his place in the great outdoors

Francisco Vilorio was born in Santa Clara, Cuba, 51 years ago. He fled that country in 1963 with his mother and two sisters. His father, a physician, came along later. "We left everything." Frank remembers. "We didn't speak a word of English." His father, Francisco Sr. managed to land an internship in El Paso, at R.E. Thompson General Hospital, but he had to start all over, says Frank. "He made it work. He practiced in El Paso for 35 years."

When Frank was a boy, his father took him to the Butte, where they fished for smallmouth bass from the shore. That was Frank's fish - until stripers came along. Like Santiago, Hemingway's Cuban angler in "The Old Man and the Sea," Frank knows that some of life's greatest things are worth waiting for.

After graduating from University of Texas in 1981 with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1984, Frank entered medical school at the University Autonoma, in Juarez. That's what his father wanted. He practiced medicine for three years, then quit. "It wasn't in my heart," Frank says. "I wanted to be outside." It took time, but Francisco Sr. finally understood.

Putting away his strophne, Frank headed straight for the Butte, where at the time 10 guides worked. Frank started at the bottom. He yearned to be an apprentice to the legendary Buddy Humphries, but wasn't chosen. That hurt, but he's no morals. "I had to learn on the job and earn my keep. I had to learn on the back streets, all by myself."

Today, he is the best known guide on the Lake. Other guides, even some from out of state, call him for advice. He freely gives it.

For the record, a long ago, Steve Brewster, a guide from Oklahoma, drove 700 miles to sit at Frank's feet. "Works hard for you. Stripped bass fishing, very professional," says Brewster.

"I've never met anyone so dedicated," says Albuquerque businessman Ron Campon, once a Frank client, now a good friend. "He brees fishing and he's so generous."

Vacations for Frank, and his wife, Crystal, who lives in El Paso, often mean a fishing trip. Any type of fishing but ice. He's been to Alaska, Mexico, the Amazon. More than anything. Frank loves to see kids fish. When Frank was a kid, he saw a boy in Fulfes, Texas, take a trip out of a canal for his first fish. "When he pulled it up, the boy was shouting. That's what happens with kids. Love to see them.

Not long ago an orphanage asked Frank to take some kids out. He did it gratis. On his refrigerator is a drawing done by one of the young anglers. The boy caught a crappie, remembers Frank. The drawing says, "To Mr. Frank from Daniel. The handwriting is shaky."

FRANK VILORIO'S BREADED, DEEP-FRIED STRIPED BASS

(One 20-pound stripers feeds 4 to 5 people)

Fillet fish, removing red meat and cutting white meat into nugget-size chunks, each 2 to 2 1/2 inches.

Place chunks in buttermilk. Let soak in refrigerator 3 hours.

Place chunks in a gallon size baggie with batter mix, or breading. Shake bag vigorously, then remove chunks from bag and place them on plate in refrigerator for 1 hour, so breading will stick.

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Serve pieces.
Are the stripers biting today? A good person to ask is Frank Viorio.