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Monster Bonefish in Grand Bahama

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Editor-in-Chief of Guy Harvey Magazine, Fred Garth, caught this 11.2 pound bonefish off the West End of Grand Bahama on January 6, 2013, while fly fishing out of the Old Bahama Bay club with fishing guide Tommy Rolle, who is the son of legendary guide Bonefish Folley. (Enjoy 'Bonefish Folley's' song by Phil Stubbs whilst reading Fred's blog to take you into a Caribbean islands mindset - click video below.)

My idea was brilliant - a quick little vacation to the islands. I figured there's no better Christmas present for my wife and two teenage daughters than full body suntans. Is there? Jewelry you say? How about a string of pearls in the form of the Bahamian archipelago? My family bought into my plan so we packed up a few swimsuits, the snorkeling gear and coconut oil and set our sights on [Old Bahama Bay](#) at the West End of Grand Bahamas.



Old Bahama Bay recently joined the ranks of the [Guy Harvey family of resorts](#) so it's kinda sorta part of my job to make sure everything is up to snuff. The girls covered the three S's of any tropical jaunt - shopping, sunbathing and swimming - while I, the ever-dedicated journalist, evaluated the fishing, cuisine and adult beverages. It's a grueling occupation but somehow I have survived.

As a hopelessly devoted fisherman, I've covered a few hot spots in the Bahamas. Problem is, it's like Star Trek's final frontier - way too much territory, way too little time and countless alien critters to hook up with. Unfazed, I rang up Capt. Tommy Rolle, the son of legendary guiding when he was 11 and while I won't reveal his age, we'll just say he's approximately 49. Tommy knows the water of Grand Bahama's West End like it's his backyard because, well, it is his backyard. He launches his boat about 40 feet from his house and the fishing begins five minutes from there.

His dad, who passed at age 91 last August, was the Bahamas foremost fishing ambassador. The Old Bahama Bay restaurant (which is under remodeling) bears his name, a popular song speaks of him and during his lifetime he fished with dignitaries and celebs such as Curt Gowdy, Lana Turner, Ernest Hemingway, Martin Luther King and Richard Nixon. And Tommy was stuck with me.

The mangrove swamps and flats on the north side of the West End stretch as far as the eye can see. It's seemingly endless but it took Tommy all of about 10 minutes to put me on the first bonefish. I pride myself in being a proficient fly fisherman and, on my home turf in Florida, I'm fairly accomplished. I even brag occasionally. But, for some reason, maybe it was the wind, maybe it was my nerves being around Tommy, maybe it was the massive size of the shadowy bonefish Tommy put me on, maybe it was just the sound of my heart pounded against my ribcage...whatever it was...I really sucked at casting the fly.

At first Tommy was encouraging and gracious. After I missed the sixth or seventh bone he just kind of giggled at me - in a nice way, of course. Finally, after two hours of sucking and a few casting pointers from Tommy, I actually presented the fly nicely and hooked into a "small" seven-pounder. Soon after that I battled a massive 11+ pounder that worked me over so hard, it took two Advils to stop my back from twitching that evening.



After four hours of amazing fishing, my heart finally slowed to a normal pace and we made our way back to Tommy's place. It's a true blessing to be able to fish with such knowledgeable and super-friendly people like Tommy and to make new friends. The serenity of being on the flats in pristine, clear water is a religious experience for me. And, in between sight fishing and adrenaline-charged, epic fish battles, we shared stories of our lives and families. We talked of philosophy and we marveled at the sheer beauty of nature that surrounded us. Here, in the remoteness of the West End, life's pace is slow and the area has not been dragged into the high-churn of mass tourism. It's the kind of place I'd come to write a book and fish and kiss goodbye to stress.

As we cruised back in, Tommy showed me his collection of unique flies that he ties himself but just smiled and said "no" when I asked if I could take a photo. He also politely declined when I tried to buy a few. He did say he'd let me see his tying station and I'm on my way there later today. I'm bringing my wallet and camera just in case he changes his mind.



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