

Mid-Coast Members Rescue Great Blue Heron

By G.B. Heron, as told to Rolf & Penny Hong, Texas Master Naturalists



I like Rockport. I've lived here all my life and enjoy the water, the wetlands, and the protections afforded along the shores that spread out almost everywhere I look. I have hundreds of distant cousins in this same area stretching from Holiday Beach to Ingleside. I am, you know, one of the great blue herons with whom you humans share these shores. I was born not too many years ago near the Spanish Dagger on our island in the middle of Little Bay—in what your maps call the "ski basin." Year after year, without exception, I have lived and fished the waters of Little Bay, Canoe Lake, and the shores up toward the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. I have learned infinite patience. I have spent hours standing still in the shallows waiting for just the right second to use my lightning-fast beak to spear my dinner. I know enough to stay away from fishermen (although they are hard to

resist when they are cleaning their catch), speeding boats, power lines, and water skiers.

So the other day there I was, gliding peacefully toward one of my favorite landing places on a quiet, green spot along Canoe Lake where I spend many of my more contemplative and culinary hours. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, I was grabbed by an unseen hand and forced into the water with a splash. Now don't get me wrong—we blue herons can swim in deep water and can even pull ourselves free from water's grasp. But, we don't especially like that as much as our friends the pelicans. You see, we prefer to stand around in shallower waters no deeper than our beaks can reach.

So what do I do? I try flying out. But nooooo; another sudden splash when a second unseen hand slaps me back into almost the same spot. I am in deep water and too close to the bulkhead.

Surveying my predicament, I discover to my dismay that I am entwined in not one fishing line

but in two—almost invisible, completely outfitted with sinkers, savage hooks, and live bait. I can't flap my wings hard enough to break their bonds and the harder I flap, the more entangled I become.

That, by itself, would have been bad enough—when along the bulkhead I spot a stalking, miniature panther, staring at me through two emerald eyes and twitching a long, furry tail. I know, from some deep, instinctive part of my brain, that cats of any variety do not mix well with bound and tied birds of any feather.

Unable to flee, my instincts told me to protect myself at all costs. So I struck, fast as lightning, at a point midway between the green eyes of the small panther. Realizing that dinner could be found easier somewhere else, the panther withdrew.

But now I felt a tightening throughout my very being, my body (and, I should add, my spirit) becoming increasingly restrained. The monofilament lines began binding me, pulling me tighter and tighter, dragging me helplessly through the water toward the bulkhead.

Suddenly a net enshrouded my head, neck, and upper part of my body—holding me firmly against the bulkhead. I could barely move and my ability to throw my lightning-fast spear was lost to me.

It was only then that I noticed two of you humans—one carrying scissors and the other handling the fishing net. Now don't get me wrong; I've lived around humans all my life and as two-legged species go, they are not an entirely disagreeable lot. But the proximity of these two was daunting, to say the least. The humans started their chirpings. "Pull that tighter... Watch those hooks... Keep an eye on that beak! Closer, so I can reach that other line." Then a snip, a snip, and another snip— "Hey! Watch it, fellow. That last snip took one of my feathers."

Suddenly I was floating free. Except for losing that one small feather, everything felt pretty good. My wings worked, my neck worked, and my feet worked. Together the humans lifted me free of the water and into the air. Like Gulliver freed at last from his bonds, I flew up and up and on to my favorite secluded green place where I could recover and count my blessings.

And what blessings are those? What have I learned that I will have to teach my kids, who also like living around the waters of Rockport?

Well, I will tell them that times aren't like they used to be before invisible monofilament fishing lines became so strong and so popular. And I'll caution them, "Be careful where you fish and where you fly—just because you don't see humans attending their lines, never, never assume there are no fishing lines lying around just waiting to reach out and grab you."