

CAVE RUN LAKE is calm and cold. Fog hovers over the distant hills like a translucent veil, but the water is rimmed by bold October color. Every tree smolders in its own hue.

Sarah Terry pulls her hood up against the morning chill as her stepfather Scott Salchli powers his fishing boat on plane. Normally he's taking out clients this time of year, helping them hunt the elusive muskellunge in the lake's deep waters. But today is only for Sarah, the 15-year-old girl who set the Kentucky fishing world on fire when she landed a 54-inch, 47-pound muskie a year ago.

It was the fish of a lifetime and a new state record. Terry became a star overnight.

She fielded requests for autographs, interviews, pictures taken as mothers handed her babies and then crowded in beside her. A photo of her holding the muskie with Salchli, who helped her net the fish, appeared on the cover of the 2009-10 Kentucky Fishing and Boating Guide. At the Kentucky State Fair she signed dozens of guides, the newly mounted fish hanging behind her like a giant sidekick.

"People were asking me to sign this, sign that," remembers Terry. "One guy came up to Scott and said, 'Sign this, net boy!'"

It was enough to go to any teenager's head. Except with Terry, it didn't.

Sitting with her back to the boat's bow, a few blond hairs escaping her hood as Salchli

speeds south from Alfrey's boat ramp to Zilpo point, Terry is as calm and relaxed as any high schooler out on the lake with family. Salchli settles the boat just off the point and Terry talks about how she loves crafts, cooking, sitting around the house and reading. She talks about her classes at Montgomery County High School. How excited she is to get to double up in science next year, preparing for a possible career as a fisheries biologist. She talks about Murray State University for college, but worries about leaving the lake so far behind. She fishes, she says, whenever she doesn't have too much homework.

Terry chooses a green Double Cowgirl with number 10 copper blades, an in-line

Miss MUSKIE

On the water with record angler Sarah Terry

By Hayley Lynch

spinner similar to the purple-skirted version that caught her record fish. She clips the lure onto the leader of an 8 1/2-foot medium-heavy rod spooled with 65-pound line. Tipping the heavy rig behind her and then snapping it towards the waiting water, she makes her first cast of the day.

THE HUNT BEGINS

"That's mine. He stole it from me," Terry says wryly, pointing to the sucker-colored Believer lure Salchli is getting ready to throw. "He'll go in my room and start going through my baits and lures."

The good-natured ribbing gives way for

a moment to serious business.

"Do you want me to do like a slow retrieve?" Terry asks as she reels in her own lure.

"Slow to moderate," Salchli replies. "Twenty feet from the boat. They're coming in deep."

The two are casting to milfoil, an aquatic plant loved by shad and muskie alike. After a few minutes of cast and retrieve, they throw in unison and watch as their lures land in the same splash of water.

"Great minds cast alike," says Terry, not missing a beat as she deftly switches her rod from right to left hand, bringing it back

under her elbow and thumbing the reel. She studies the water as she works the lure invisibly underneath, a green flash nearing the surface as it approaches the boat. Terry dips her rod tip into the water, turning it in a wide circle to the right, bringing it back toward her and then crossing it into another circle to the left.



HAYLEY LYNCH PHOTO

"One of the most important techniques in muskie fishing is a technique called the figure-eight," Salchli explains, adding with a grin: "That's what Sarah caught her little minnow on."

"It's like a fish in distress," says Terry, guiding the lure into another figure-eight pattern. She lifts her rod out of the water, switching it back to her right hand and casting again in one fluid motion. Water sprays from the lure onto Salchli as it sails back toward the lake.

"Hey, now!" Salchli protests. "I already took a shower this morning!"

Muskie anglers can do this all day. Cast, retrieve, figure-eight, cast, make fun of fishing partner, retrieve, figure-eight, cast again. And again. And again. According to anglers, the muskie is the fish of 10,000 casts. According to parents, the average teenager's attention span is quite a bit shorter. But Terry is anything but average.

"If we're just fishing for fun, I'll goof off," she admits. "I'll say, 'This is ESPN here – it's the last cast of the tournament. Let's see if they can get something!' We sing a lot."

Terry puts on a pair of polarized glasses as the first bright glints of sun emerge from the morning's steady cloud cover. Salchli teases her, calling them her Tom Cruise sunglasses. They look just like the ones Cruise wore in the movie "Top Gun," he insists.

"A lot of people have this stereotyped idea that fishing is all about just sitting out there with your pole in the water," Terry says, lobbing her lure again. "I just think it's a great hobby. I think the more girls that get into it, the better. Girls are just as good fishermen as guys are."

Salchli nods, throwing his own rig again, this time in a different direction from Terry's. "Sarah can go out and fish with anyone," he agrees. As he retrieves the lure, he begins to sing: "Highway to the danger zone..."

SARAH TERRY POINT

"Hey Sarah, I just wanted to know if I could borrow some eyeliner!" calls a man from an approaching boat.

"Sorry!" Terry replies. "I left mine at home."

Terry smiles, explaining that the man is muskie guide Lance Seator. "He's one of our family's best friends," she says. "He was



DAVE BAKER PHOTO

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in Ashland when I caught the fish. I was freaking out and I had to tell somebody. So I just started texting people. I thought, the kids at my school, they'll just be like, 'Great, you caught a fish.' So I called Lance."

Seator was so excited that he beat Terry and Salchli to the local Food Lion, where the fish bottomed out the scales.

"There's not much business at the Morehead Food Lion on a Sunday night," Salchli says. "But the parking lot was full."

The crowd followed Terry to the town's Southern States, a store with feed scales that could handle the huge fish. "I had an entourage. It was crazy," remembers Terry. "They kept saying, 'Sarah, you don't know what you've done.'"

Terry makes one last cast as Salchli gets the boat ready to switch fishing locations. It's a short trip around Zilpo point, uplake toward the Clay Lick area.

"Are we coming up on my spot?" Terry asks, her back to the wind again as Salchli steers the boat.

"Yes, we are," he answers.

The boat approaches the Clay Lick boat-in campground, near the place where Terry caught the state record muskie. "This is Sarah Cove, Sarah Lane," Terry says with a smile. "This is where the big fish was brought up from the depths."

Salchli explains that around town, the spot is known only by its reference to Terry and her fish. It had no other name prior to the November 2, 2008 record catch. "That's pretty much what everyone calls it now – Sarah Terry Cove or Sarah Terry Point," he said. "There used to be a series of slough ponds here, made when the old river channel flooded."

The boat slows and Terry gets ready to cast, clipping a purple Double Cowgirl to her leader. Speckled with silver strands and fitted with number 10 gold blades, it's just like her record-catching lure.

"We were about to go in, and I said let's cast for a while," Terry remembers of the day she caught the fish, as she casts her lure to the same spot. Salchli had a fishing trip cancellation and had taken his wife Mary Kay, Terry and his other daughter Carli out on the water. "I said, 'Come on, 20 more casts,' and Mom said five," Terry remembers. "I think we compromised at like 15."

"And then all hell broke loose," Salchli adds.

Sarah Terry with the mount of her record 54-inch muskie.

"I was speechless when I saw the fish," says Terry. "I was figure-eighting just like this and I saw the side of the fish up against the boat and I was like, 'Oh!' Mom asked what happened, and I couldn't answer her."

The fish made a 20- to 30-foot run, Salchli says, but then came right in to Terry.

"We had no intention of keeping this fish – but there was really nothing we could do," he says.

"One of the treble hooks was lodged in its gullet. We put it in the water and it kept going belly up, belly up. That's when we made the decision to go ahead and get it weighed."

Raised on the ethic of catch-and-release, Terry had been upset. "She said, 'We never keep the fish!'" Salchli remembers.

Soon, however, the excitement of the day replaced her concern. Fred Howes, northeastern district fishery biologist with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, met Terry and the crowd at Southern States to certify the catch. He later recalled her exhilaration.

"She was almost in shock," he said. "I don't think she realized until her stepdad told her, 'You have the state record.' As it went on, her zeal and zest for it grew."

"It was so great to see somebody, especially a girl, get that excited. I have two daughters, so I'm biased," Howes added. "As we get older, we have a tendency to say, 'Oh yeah, that's a big fish.' But to see that excitement is great."

Later, a taxidermist would find the remains of a 30-inch carp inside the huge fish. After its run at the State Fair, the muskie would find its home inside a custom-made glass coffee table, the first thing visitors see at the family's home.

MUSKIE FEVER

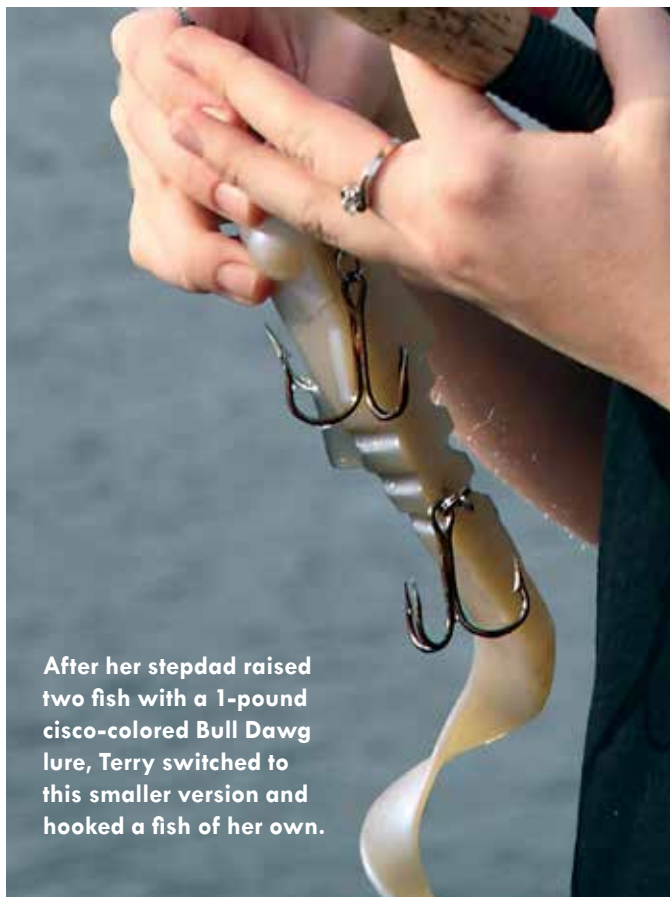
Eight hours into the day, Terry starts

making deals.

"Come on, fish," she coos to the dark green water, steadily retrieving her lure. "I'll hook you and land you quick. I'll take out the hook and I'll put you right back in the water. Doesn't that sound good?"

With the lure a few feet from the boat, she begins a figure-eight. "I'll make you famous," she promises. "We'll take a picture of you and you'll be in a magazine. Come on, fish."

Despite the enticing offer, her lure produces the same results she and Salchli have gotten all day: thick ropes of milfoil, pulled dripping from the lake's stained water. It's time for a change.



After her stepdad raised two fish with a 1-pound cisco-colored Bull Dawg lure, Terry switched to this smaller version and hooked a fish of her own.

HAYLEY LYNCH PHOTO

Terry eyes a cisco-colored 1-pound Bull Dawg Salchli has just lifted from among the boat's many lures. This lure, he says, is what you go to when nothing else is working.

"Watch," Terry says dryly. "You'll hook a fish on the first cast."

The massive lure flies through the air like a great blue-gray brick. It hits the water with the *smack!* of a cannonball. Seconds later, Salchli sets the hook.

"Oh! Oh my gosh!" Terry shouts as

Salchli reels, lifts his rod, reels again. But soon the fish throws the lure. Salchli's streak continues a few minutes later, this time as the lure nears the boat. A long, silver-sided muskellunge furtively follows the Bull Dawg underwater.

"Keep figure-eighting!" Terry yells, leaning in to watch the 50-inch class fish. Salchli concentrates on the lure, drawing the figure-eight with his rod again and again as he tries to tempt the muskie. But the fish swims away. He lifts the lure, fishless, from the water. Planting the rod on the boat's floor like a staff, he puts a hand on his hip and looks down, shaking his head.

"That was a hog! That was a tank and a half!" Terry shouts. "That was a sweet fish! How could you let that fish go?"

"Stop it, Sarah," Salchli says. "You're making it worse."

He picks up the Bull Dawg and shows it to Terry. She bends the huge soft-plastic lure, exposing jagged teeth marks where the first fish had taken it.

"We've gone weeks without catching a fish, and still kept coming," she says. "It's that good when you catch one. It's better than any roller coaster you can ride. It's a rush. We call it muskie fever."

A few minutes later, Terry raises a fish of her own, the muskie hooked for just a moment before it tosses the lure and the thrill ends. This kind of encouragement can keep a muskie angler going until nightfall. Terry and Salchli will fish until they can't see any longer, and the next morning they will fish again, this time at an all-day tournament. Next week, they'll repeat the cycle.

This is what catching a state record muskellunge takes. Hours, hundreds of them, spent casting to nothing but milfoil, reeling in empty lure after empty lure and casting again, machine-like, until there is no light left to fish by. Days like today, with nothing to show for her efforts but a sore arm and back, added up year upon year until Sarah Terry did what no one else had done in a decade. Now this teenage girl, with one of Kentucky's most coveted state fishing records behind her, just keeps casting. ■