Happy late Fourth of July – the day I am putting this article together and hiding from the heat. This article is recycled because I wanted to show you the difference between fishing equipment then and now.

Today, most good rod and reels start at $100, not to mention accessories like line, tackle boxes and fishing lures. My fishing lures are the same – spinnerbaits, worms, topwater and crankbaits. The ’60s turned fishing into an obsession, not just a casual afternoon or weekend of plugging. “Fishing Widow” was a new name for the wife. Yes, we caught lots of bass and that got us “Hooked on Fishing.” Here’s the way it used to be:
Back in the late ’60s when bass fishing was hotter than a campfire skillet, fishing equipment was very simple. The best outfit, according to Harry Millican, local bass guru of that time, was shown to me in front of Al Cherry’s Cleaners one day.

It was a Shakespeare Sportcast Reel for $14.95 and a Heddon Pal Rod for about the same money. It was filled with 25 lb. G string – a nylon braided line you could tow a boat with and a black and yellow Bug-
Eye-Spinner made by local postal employee, Gene Andrews. That one lure sent more bass to the frying pan than any other during those days. This was before Tuffy Smotherman began to cross the bass eyes (when he set the hook) with Crème Worms. He broke two or three seats in his bass boat when he fished like this.

The pistol grip handle on 5 1⁄2 to 6 ft. long fiberglass fishing rods was perfect for casting. You talk about accuracy; if you couldn’t knock a bug off a lily pad with a Bug-Eye-Spinner bait, you couldn’t sit at the table with the rest of Hugo’s great anglers at Tyler’s Restaurant (now Angie’s Circus City Diner.) They met at Tyler’s every day for their coffee run.

Most fishing rods today are 6 1/2 to 7 ft. long. The longer the rod, the more water you can cover. Longer rods are popular with the flipping and pitching crowd. Just watch Billy Lampton pitching a worm or jig. He can thread a needle in the thickest of cover. This type of fishing overshadows casting a lure with short rods today.

If you’re in 20 to 40 ft. casting situations in tight cover, then a pistol grip 5 1⁄2 to 6 ft. rod will put you on target faster and more accurately than quick can get ready.

For me, I junked the long sticks several years ago. Today, I use two All-Star 5 1⁄2 ft. rods with a fast-tip action and a pistol grip fiberglass rod that Tuffy Smotherman made me 30 years ago. Two Quantum Accurist reels loaded with 14 lb. line was one of Mike Armes favorites. These rods are perfect topwater, spinnerbait and shallow-running crankbaits for chunking and winding in any type of water.

My underhand roll-cast is accurate and easy on my 70 year old shoulders. Believe me, you won't be sorry to try a pistol grip short rod for more accuracy. Many of today's top pros have already added it to their fishing arsenal.

- L. FRY