



Section 3: Don Pedro Island

In Little Gasparilla Sound, Muggy and the school of mullet feed. Today they are in the prop roots near a fishing area of Don Pedro Island State Park.

Muggy and the other mullet hear some splashing in the water. They see the feet and legs of a man and a boy as they wade into the water. Not far from them is a school of big mullet. Some of the fish jump from the water. When they fall back into the water, they make a slapping sound.

The two people stand still for a few minutes. Then the man twists as he throws a cast net. The net spreads over the water and makes an eight-foot circle. As it hits the water, the lead weights around the edges splash. Some mullet are trapped inside. Others get away before the net sinks to the bottom.

The man yanks the draw line of the net. Then he pulls the mullet through the mesh of the net and breaks the neck of each fish.

He tells the boy, "This is called 'choking' the mullet. It kills them so they can't escape. It also bleeds them, so the fillet will be white when we clean them."

Muggy watches.

"How come you don't catch mullet with a hook?" the boy asks.

The man works the net. "You can. But it takes a long time to catch as many as you can with a net. Besides, sometimes a mullet won't bite on a hook."

"Why not?" the boy asks.

The man says, "Mullet are different than most fish. They use some of the sand grains that they eat to help them grind their food. It works inside a special part of their body called a gizzard. Chickens and other birds have gizzards too."

The boy says, "Maybe that's why mullet jump! They think they can fly!"

The man laughs. "That reminds me of a story I once heard. Back in the 1920s, three fishermen were arrested for fishing for mullet out of season. In the courtroom, a biologist said that only birds have gizzards, and he said that mullet have gizzards. Then a lawyer said that if what the biologist said was true, then mullet are birds. The judge didn't believe the lawyer, but he found the fishermen not guilty."

Muggy and the school swim away.

