



Robin Catchlove, 2010

Robyn Catchlove *Somewhere Down A Crazy River*

A non-fiction book about a remarkable woman's spirited life of catching love, fish and wisdom.



This is a fascinating autobiography of a most unusual woman, Robin Catchlove. Born and bred in the suburbs of Adelaide in the 1950-1960's, it was apparent from an early age she was never going to live a conventional life.

From her earliest memories, she was driven to find something more from life than what she'd grown up to find in sleepy, comfortable, suburban Adelaide. In her early 20's, Robyn walked away from a passionless marriage and lit out to far north Queensland

Starting again in Cairns, she met up with and subsequently fell in love with the man – Les Coles – who was to dominate her next life.

She and Les decided to build their own commercial fishing boat and break free from the bonds of conventional society to embrace the life of the roving, commercial barra fisherman.

Back in the 1970's fishing was not nearly as regulated as it is today. All that was required was a good boat, a willingness to live in the boondocks, and a very strong constitution to handle the amount of booze, grass ("Kuranda Green") and the robust lifestyle of the predominantly male world of the north Qld or Gulf fishing fraternity.

Robyn Catchlove was just about the only white woman in this male dominated FNQ commercial fishing world, bounded as it was by Cooktown in the south, Thursday Island in the north and down to Normanton in the far south-east of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

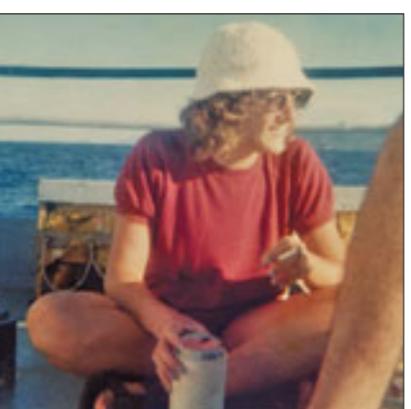
In her book, Catchlove takes the reader on a remarkable journey.

Doubtless many will find some concern with their naiveté and inexperience, but at the same time, one has to admire their willingness to learn, and more importantly, their ability to learn on the trot. And learn they did. They had to embrace the whole world of coastal navigation (there was no GPS in the 1970s, let alone the internet) all the skills and techniques of the professional or commercial fisherman, not to mention the skills necessary to build one of the first fibreglass fishing boats in the Top End of Australia, as well become expert diesel mechanics, refrigeration specialists and survivalists in the ultimate sense of the word.

This was an incredibly rugged environment for men, let alone a pretty



They built *Jean King* together, and it proved to be a tough, seaworthy fishing boat they lived on for years.



young woman.

Probably the best parts of the book are those where Robyn recalls the earliest days. It really was a bountiful paradise and they were able to exploit a not inconsiderable reward, and yes, accepting the conditions were incredibly hard, it must also be acknowledged they were able to access the unfettered bounty of Nature's wondrous supplies of the big silver fish that was to become one of Australia's great exports, the fabled barramundi.

This is a time when commercial fishermen whilst 'licensed' (with a \$30 annual fee) lived through an unwritten code of conduct shared between the fishermen through coded wireless messages and a universal disrespect, not to say hatred, of anybody in a uniform or any suggestion of the word 'authority'.

Commercial fishermen and sportsfishermen who have experienced the raw beauty of the Cape York rivers, lagoons, creeks and drains will relish many passages of the book because Robyn brings to life an era that most of us will never know, and only suspected, really existed. As she writes:

"It was pre-Buddha, a paradise from ancient times, a David Attenborough spectacular. The plentiful water kingdom was ripe with sharks: grey nurses, tigers, saws, shovel-noses, hammerheads plus mud crabs, dolphins, pygmy whales, barramundi, prawns, oysters, dugong, rays, king and blue salmon, queen fish and mangrove jacks, to name just a few. In the middle earth, the roaming population teemed with kangaroos, wallabies, brumbies, cattle, pigs, snakes and dingoes (probably a few giraffe melded in with the dabbled trees too).

As below, so above: the skies were a potpourri of jabirus, brolgas, Torres Strait pigeons, ducks, swans, geese, bats, sea eagles, shags, and flocks of bitchy pelican to cite just a few.

What one species calls poisonous another species uses to heal with, so everything has its reason for being on the planet, including the less desirable characters from the poisonous realm also trying to complete their life purpose: box