

OFF THE DOCK

WITH D. A. MANN

~ Goin' Country ~

There's something special *goin'* on when Johnny Cash passes you on a Jet Ski when you're drift fishing the Intracoastal. Patsy Cline passes you *goin'* the other direction an hour later. You had no idea you were fishing in the Grand Ole Opry Bay. Maybe I'll hook into a Waylon Jennings Trout; or a Willy Nelson Snook; or a Dolly Parton Pompano. I'm almost scarred to cast.

I've been in this Bay before many times over the past years. He's colorful, covered in tats, super long ponytail, and better speakers than most yachts. He's never in a hurry, always having fun, and, always well received. He'll cruise around Snake Island and meander past the Crow's Nest on the way to the Jetties. Fishermen will put down their rods, children will cover their ears, and the mothers will clap. People walking or sitting on the sand will wave and raise a fist in appreciation. The Miss Venice will blow her horn and the fishermen onboard will toast a beer. This dude is famous; and, no one has the slightest idea who he is. No one sees him launching at a boat ramp; no one sees him pull into a dock; and absolutely no one knows his name. He'll answer to Johnny if you can get close enough to engage him in conversation. His smile is more of a grin; and it becomes obvious that he's the one in charge and the thrill of his mission is contained. To others, he appears to be on a *mission* from God.

When I'm standing on the deck casting and I hear him coming, I start to smile. Most of the time when I'm on the water and someone is blaring music (especially Rap), I find it intrusive and irritating. It ruins the whole ambiance of being on the water in the first place; but, this

guy is special. He'll never engage in conversation or come too close for comfort when passing by. He's respectful of your space. His taste in music is unique and endearing to those upon the water that have an open mind. What he achieves when he's making his rounds is unity and what he's doing hurts no one. If you don't smile when he passes you by, then you are a moron. The water does not belong to you. It's a canvas for artists to use as they please and that is exactly what he is; and, that is exactly what he does. Being the exception to the rule is not an easy path to follow; but for those that know how to travel that road, the rewards are endless. He, whoever *he* is, is rich beyond his dreams.

So when you "Hear the freight train comin' it's rolling around the bend...", slow down and wave. You'll be a better person because of it.