

The Bait Shop

Leo and me run a bait shop
down on the dock by the brewery
on weekends. It's a great spot
just up river from the diner
and marked by a gas
torch in back of the wash house
that catches the eye from every
slough off the east channel.
We sell crawlers, minnows
and hellgrammites, cigarettes
and chicken livers.
We're open year round but do
most of our business in summer,
spend the time playing
cribbage under an old canvass
tent that blocks the sun
on hot days. Damn thing leaks
if you touch it when it rains,
lets snow melt on the yellow
card table in the spring.
Dock won't hold a refrigerator,
too weak, the gray lumber
worn out from holdin' us and our
old oak chairs. So we keep
bait in coolers the carp shop
made last spring.
Scrap insulation lined around
a tin bed sitting deep between
its plywood corners.
The boys that clean the lauter
tubs get done at 4am and hit
the water with as much
bait and beer as they can carry.
They yell, "Put it on the tab!"
trolling out to the river
and Leo always gives it to 'em.
I get the money later, tell ol Leo
they stiffed us. He never
asks for it, and I don't say nothin'
else. Someday we'll run
the shop full time, buy tanks
for the minnows and new lumber
for the dock. Come retirement
I'm gonna buy me a boat
and hitch it up to that old elm
up the bank, gonna
listen to the wash house hum,
the gas torch behind
me cracks like a flag in the wind.

Tim Trapp