

A View from the Bridge

■ Cherokee Paul McDonald

A fiction writer, memoirist, and journalist, Cherokee Paul McDonald was raised and schooled in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. In 1970, he returned home from a tour of duty in Vietnam and joined the Fort Lauderdale Police Department, where he rose to the rank of sergeant. In 1980, after receiving a degree in criminal science from Broward Community College, McDonald left the police department to become a writer. He worked a number of odd jobs before publishing his first book, *The Patch*, in 1986. In 1991, he published *Blue Truth*, a memoir. His novel, *Summer's Reason*, was released in 1994, and his most recent book, a memoir of the Vietnam War titled *Into the Green: A Reconnaissance by Fire*, was published in 2001.



"A View from the Bridge" was originally published in *Sunshine* magazine in 1990. As you read, notice how McDonald organizes his narrative. He tells us what the narrator and the boy are doing, but he also relies heavily on their dialogue to structure his story, which unfolds as the two talk. McDonald makes the story come alive by showing us, rather than by simply telling us, what happens.

Reflecting on What You Know

Make a list of your interests, focusing on those to which you devote a significant amount of time. Do you share any of these interests with people you know? What does a shared interest do for a relationship between two people?

I was coming up on the little bridge in the Rio Vista neighborhood of Fort Lauderdale, deepening my stride and my breathing to negotiate the slight incline without altering my pace. And then, as I neared the crest, I saw the kid. 1

He was a lumpy little guy with baggy shorts, a faded T-shirt and heavy sweat socks falling down over old sneakers. 2

Partially covering his shaggy blond hair was one of those blue 3
baseball caps with gold braid on the bill and a sailfish patch sewn
onto the peak. Covering his eyes and part of his face was a pair of
those stupid-looking '50s-style wrap-around sunglasses.

He was fumbling with a beat-up rod and reel, and he had a little 4
bait bucket by his feet. I puffed on by, glancing down into the empty
bucket as I passed.

"Hey mister! Would you help me, please?" 5

The shrill voice penetrated my jogger's concentration, and I was 6
determined to ignore it. But for some reason, I stopped.

With my hands on my hips and the sweat dripping from my nose 7
I asked, "What do you want, kid?"

"Would you please help me find my shrimp? It's my last one and I've 8
been getting bites and I know I can catch a fish if I can just find that
shrimp. He jumped outta my hand as I was getting him from the bucket."

Exasperated, I walked slowly back to the kid, and pointed. 9

"There's the damn shrimp by your left foot. You stopped me for 10
that?"

As I said it, the kid reached down and trapped the shrimp. 11

"Thanks a lot, mister," he said. 12

I watched as the kid dropped the baited hook down into the 13
canal. Then I turned to start back down the bridge.

That's when the kid let out a "Hey! Hey!" and the prettiest tar- 14
pon¹ I'd ever seen came almost six feet out of the water, twisting and
turning as he fell through the air.

"I got one!" the kid yelled as the fish hit the water with a loud 15
splash and took off down the canal.

I watched the line being burned off the reel at an alarming rate. 16
The kid's left hand held the crank while the extended fingers felt for
the drag setting.

"No, kid!" I shouted. "Leave the drag alone . . . just keep that 17
damn rod tip up!"

Then I glanced at the reel and saw there were just a few loops of 18
line left on the spool.

"Why don't you get yourself some decent equipment?" I said, but 19
before the kid could answer I saw the line go slack.

"Ohhh, I lost him," the kid said. I saw the flash of silver as the 20
fish turned.

¹*tarpon*: a large, silvery fish.

“Crank, kid, crank! You didn’t lose him. He’s coming back toward
you. Bring in the slack!” 21

The kid cranked like mad, and a beautiful grin spread across
his face. 22

“He’s heading in for the pilings,”² I said. “Keep him out of those
pilings!” 23

The kid played it perfectly. When the fish made its play for the
pilings, he kept just enough pressure on to force the fish out. When
the water exploded and the silver missile hurled into the air, the kid
kept the rod tip up and the line tight. 24

As the fish came to the surface and began a slow circle in the
middle of the canal, I said, “Whoeee, is that a nice fish or what?” 25

The kid didn’t say anything, so I said, “Okay, move to the edge
of the bridge and I’ll climb down to the seawall and pull him out.” 26

When I reached the seawall I pulled in the leader, leaving the fish
lying on its side in the water. 27

“How’s that?” I said. 28

“Hey, mister, tell me what it looks like.” 29

“Look down here and check him out,” I said. “He’s beautiful.” 30

But then I looked up into those stupid-looking sunglasses and it
hit me. The kid was blind. 31

“Could you tell me what he looks like, mister?” he said again. 32

“Well, he’s just under three, uh, he’s about as long as one of
your arms,” I said. “I’d guess he goes about 15, 20 pounds. He’s
mostly silver, but the silver is somehow made up of *all* the colors, if
you know what I mean.” I stopped. “Do you know what I mean by
colors?” 33

The kid nodded. 34

“Okay. He has all these big scales, like armor all over his body.
They’re silver too, and when he moves they sparkle. He has a strong
body and a large powerful tail. He has big round eyes, bigger than a
quarter, and a lower jaw that sticks out past the upper one and is very
tough. His belly is almost white and his back is a gunmetal gray.
When he jumped he came out of the water about six feet, and his
scales caught the sun and flashed it all over the place.” 35

By now the fish had righted itself, and I could see the bright-red
gills as the gill plates opened and closed. I explained this to the kid,
and then said, more to myself, “He’s a beauty.” 36

²*pilings*: support columns driven vertically into the ground or ocean floor.

"Can you get him off the hook?" the kid asked. "I don't want to 37
kill him."

I watched as the tarpon began to slowly swim away, tired but still 38
alive.

By the time I got back up to the top of the bridge the kid had his 39
line secured and his bait bucket in one hand.

He grinned and said, "Just in time. My mom drops me off here, 40
and she'll be back to pick me up any minute."

He used the back of one hand to wipe his nose. 41

"Thanks for helping me catch that tarpon," he said, "and fôr 42
helping me to see it."

I looked at him, shook my head, and said, "No, my friend, thank 43
you for letting *me* see that fish."

I took off, but before I got far the kid yelled again. 44

"Hey, mister!" 45

I stopped. 46

"Someday I'm gonna catch a sailfish and a blue marlin and a 47
giant tuna and *all* those big sportfish!"

As I looked into those sunglasses I knew he probably would. I 48
wished I could be there when it happened.

McDonald, Cherokee Paul. "A View from the Bridge." *Models for Writers*. Ed. Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz. Eleventh ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. 124-127. Print.