



# Catching A Dream

by Capt. Tom Bailas

Sometimes things in life are definitely in the hands of the man up above. We travel to the Florida Keys every year in June to do some fun fishing with our families and friends. This year we rented a beautiful home in Tavernier on the bay. Our first two weeks had both my wife's family and my family come to visit. The fishing was steady, catching Mahi and some tuna. We also caught a huge beautiful sailfish that was released. Our next fishing guests arrived and it was a family chosen by the Catch-A-Dream Foundation. (catchadream.org) Gavin, who is 11, his little sister, mother, and father came to fish with us for three days, accompanied by a trained Catch-A-Dream Volunteer Host named Adam.



Catch-A-Dream Foundation provides children with life threatening illnesses the opportunity to go on a hunting or fishing adventure of a lifetime with all expenses paid by the Foundation. We did a meet and greet to go over the plans for the fishing trip. They all have high hopes of Gavin catching his very first Mahi.

My wife Trisha and I have the boat ready and we take off. As we cut through Tavernier Creek I can see there are several thunderstorms starting to build offshore. We will have limited time today to get some nice fish and get back in safely. I see an opening in the sky and head that way to search for birds and some weed lines. We ran about 12 miles and I started to see some bird action and 3 huge patches of weeds. I had my wife steer the boat as I put out the spread of lines with lures and the fresh ballyhoo.



We immediately hook a 12-lb. bull Mahi and Gavin now has a nice fish in the boat. We snap a few pictures and put the lines back out in hopes of another bite. The next pass around the spot we get a small mahi and this is where it gets very interesting and exciting. As we were reeling in the fish the storms are starting to build around us even more and it starts to rain. Out of nowhere Gavin yells "Look at that BIG fish in the water". It was a huge bull Mahi, estimated around 60 lbs., swimming behind the boat. I grabbed a spinning rod and tried to toss a bait to it and it just swam off. After seeing that fish we were all so excited and just had to try and make another pass around this area. We were hoping to get it to bite one of the lures.

I quickly put out the ballyhoo lines and one got weeds on it immediately, so I reeled it in fast. As I was letting it back out the line came tight and I could see the head of a huge Mahi pushing water towards the bait. Five seconds later we had a huge fish on! Gavin quickly grabbed the rod and after a few jumps we have the huge cow Mahi boat-side. I anxiously gaffed the fish, but it flew off the gaff and back into the water. As everyone aboard went dead silent, my wife says out loud "Tom, it's going to be ok", and then she said, "Oh please God let this fish come back to us". It did, the fish made a few more jumps and Gavin was able to get the fish back to the boat and this time I got it into the boat. We all were hugging and high fiving with excitement and could not believe the size of this trophy fish which measured 65" long. After some quick pictures we headed safely back to shore.

Fishing in the Keys every year on vacation, I have never seen anyone catch a cow Mahi of this length. There is not a doubt in any of our minds that day, God was in control and gave Gavin the strength and will to get this fish of a lifetime!

This was an experience of a lifetime for all of us. Gavin is a wonderful child that is full of life, regardless of his illnesses and obstacles he is facing. We are truly humbled to be able to share our passion for fishing with these kids and their families. Catch-A-Dream Foundation is an amazing nonprofit organization that provides these deserving kids and their families a trip of a lifetime with all expenses paid. Trisha and I are truly blessed to be able to be a part of the "Vision" of this organization.

*Isaiah 40:31 NIV*

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on their wings like eagles: they will run and not grow weary: they will walk and not go faint.



Happy Fishing!! Captain Tom & Trisha Bailas WWW.TNTFISHINGCHARTERS.COM or Facebook @TNTFISHINGCHARTERSVENICE