



Jack Masters

By David Stalnaker

Jack Masters' earliest career was as an Educator in the Michigan school system. However, during his teaching and coaching tenure in the 1950's he also founded Jack's Lures, a fly lure manufacturing company. In 1963 he co-founded and published a regional outdoor publication called Southern Michigan Outdoors along with a partner, Carl Krause, who was the printing expert. And later, in the early 1970's along with Carl, Jack started E Z Action Products, a full scale lure manufacturing company that made and merchandised a multi-item lure line.

Jack was born in Toledo, Ohio in 1924, and along with his parents and siblings, endured the Great Depression like most at that time. During that period, Jack's father was in retail merchandising, which apparently didn't settle that well with Jack as he never followed in his father's footsteps, but he did learn his father's hard work ethics. In a time when a high school diploma was quite an achievement, Jack went on to earn both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, and over the years completed most of the curriculum for a PHD. Jack followed his career desires into education and became a teacher, coach, counselor and principal in the Michigan school system during the early 1950's and for many years thereafter.

In the late 1940's Jack met Mary Cummings, his wife to be. After just a few married years, Mary and Jack became the parents of three children, Jack, Lisa and Michelle. Jack (Junior) still lives in Battle Creek, and Lisa and Michelle both live in Texas. Jack not only credits Mary for being a loving wife for well over fifty years, but said she was always a great personal help to him in all his business ventures as well. He emphasized that Mary

booted him out the door to work every day whether it was during his career as an educator, his moonlighting work at Jack's Lures, at Michigan Outdoors, or at E Z Action Products. Jack and Mary happily retired from the cold Michigan winters to the warmer Florida climate in 1988 where they both still enjoy their Florida life style.

Though Jack answered his calling as an educator early on, we still became the beneficiaries of his lure designs and manufacturing talents, because as he said, "It was hard to support a family, put food on the table, and buy stock on a starting salary of \$2,800 a year," so he moonlighted by starting Jack's Lures, where he tied and sold flies after school hours in surrounding counties. Fly tying was something he had learned as a hobby in 1946, and yet in just a few years, Jack was tying and selling them commercially.

By 1957 Jack and the family had moved from Hillsdale, Michigan, to Battle Creek, still employed as an educator and still tying and selling flies in his off-hours. Luckily for us, his design, the fly rod Froggy, had been seen and coveted by Clyde Sinclair, founder and longtime president of the Paw Paw Bait Company. Mr. Sinclair called Jack and met with him to discuss his flies, especially the Froggy, and the ability of Jack's Lures to supply the Paw Paw Bait Company. The meeting obviously went well as Jack's Lures agreed to supply Paw Paw 100% of its production of flies, which included the soon to be highly successful Paw Paw Fly Rod Wotta Frog Popper with the now easily recognized rubber legs.

A large article in the Battle Creek Enquirer on Sunday, September 18, 1960, pictures Jack and one of his workers with some of the thousands of baits that were made and sold to Paw Paw each week. These baits not only included fly rod frog popper lures, but also, roaches, ants, crayfish, "glitter belt" worms, lizards, lead head jigs, etc. Paw Paw then sold these baits all over the US to customers who included retailers such as Sears & Roebuck and Abercrombie & Fitch. The manufacturing relationship between Jack's Lures and Paw Paw Bait Company lasted until the final days of Paw Paw.

In 1961, Jack was honored to see his invention, the Fly Rod Wotta Frog pictured in the June 12, issue of Newsweek Magazine in the Spotlight on

Business Section. His lure was featured directly alongside of the now highly collected Heddon Sonic, and the also well-known Fred Arbogast Hula Popper. Also in the early 1960's, in the highest form of flattery, the Japanese "knockoff artists" copied the fly rod Froggy and marketed cheaper reproductions of it to discount houses and to liquidator companies in the US. Thus, we have now learned from Jack that all the Paw Paw Fly Rod Froggys which have been found that are anything other than his original splatter finish, are simply knockoffs and are not Paw Paw baits.

Another highly successful Paw Paw lure which Jack designed and invented was the Paw Paw Weedless Wow, also called the Weedless Wotta Frog. It too had the easily, and well recognized rubber legs molded by Jack's company. In July 1963, Jack along with Carl Krause, founded Southern Michigan Outdoors, later renamed Michigan Outdoors, which was a publication dedicated to bringing the news of fishing, hunting, boating, camping and more, to sportsmen who loved the outdoor life of southern Michigan. The premier issue of this publication features a rarely seen ad by Paw Paw Bait Company showing the Weedless Wotta Frog.

In 1971, still enthralled with the tackle industry, Jack and his printing partner, Carl Krause, founded the E Z Action Products company. Their "claim to fame" lure, the Swim Jig, a stiff competitor to the also popular Erie Dearie, along with dozens of their other salmon, walleye and bass lures was marketed to dozens of states in the US and to six or seven foreign countries including Japan. In the heyday of Kmart, thousands of dozens of E Z Action lures hit their shelves, which was before Kmart suffered under Walmart's pressure. By mid-winter in 1988 Jack had enjoyed a long and successful career in the field of education, but he had also enjoyed success in the tackle field where he designed, made, marketed and sold, thousands upon thousands of lures worldwide.

Ready for retirement, he sold the E Z Action lure company and as Jack tells it, "I stuck my snow shovel in the snow bank, said Rust in Peace, and never looked back".

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