

Wally

The Discerning Diner

By Steven Stuckey



Long ago and far away lived a fish named Wally. Wally loved to eat, but not just anything. He was picky about his food. If the herring was too salty, he sent it back to the chef. If the clams were too soft, he set them aside. He gained the reputation for being a discerning diner, a connoisseur of seafood delights. Because he was such a big fella, he ate a lot, which made him a favorite customer of all the undersea restaurants. One visit by Wally the Whale could earn an obscure café a five-star Michelin rating overnight.

One stormy winter, Wally swam the length of the Mediterranean Sea. By the time he reached the island of Crete, he was hungry—REALLY HUNGRY! He saw a sign advertising a small bistro called Tony's Tavern located in a seaweed forest just past the coral reef. He decided to check it out.





Tony was not only the owner of the bistro; he was also the chef hoping to make it big some day in the culinary world. Each morning he visited the fish market to search for the most unusual delicacies in all the sea. He then took them back to his watery kitchen and sautéed them in spices from distant lands. Tony loved to experiment crafting sauces with combinations no one had ever thought of before. His gastronomical creations were always a surprise.

Tony said to Wally, “Sir Wally, I am thrilled to have you visit my humble establishment. Let me cook you the most wonderful meal you have ever tasted. May I suggest that we begin your feast with an appetizer I call **Sawyer’s Sardines**. These cute little fellows will tickle your pallet. They are from the cool waters of the Pacific Northwest. You can’t get enough of these guys.”

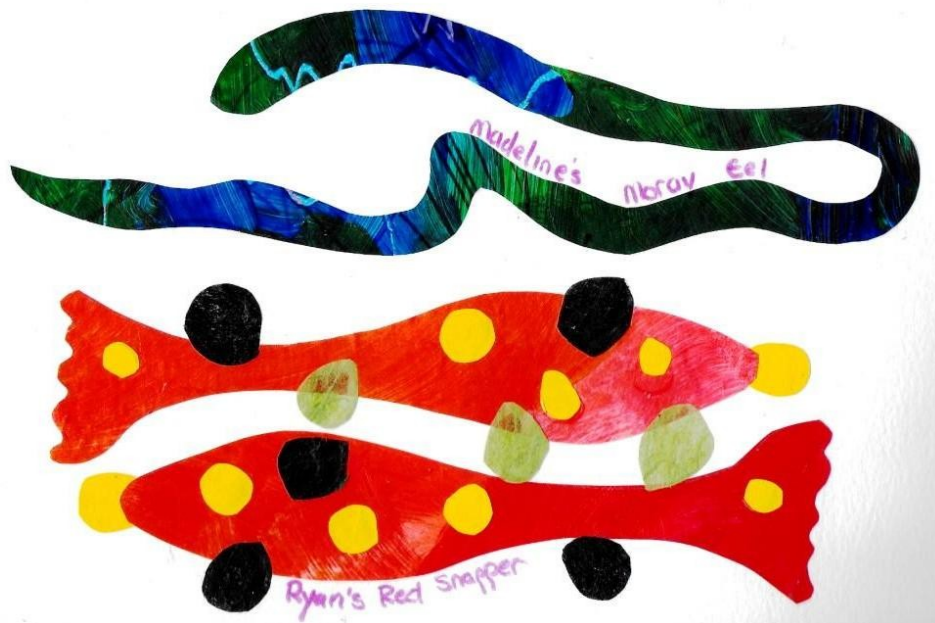
A short time later Tony returned with a platter of **Sawyer's Sardines** and set them on the table. Wally grabbed them one at a time with his flippers and dropped them down his throat. With each one, the smile on his face grew bigger. "O they are delightful," said Wally. "In fact, I think I will have another platter of those tiny guys."



After Wally had finished the first course, Tony returned and said, “For your second course, I want to offer you another appetizer that I call, **Miles’ Mollusks** on a bed of seaweed. Like the sardines, they are small but they pack a lot of punch. I think you’re going to like them.” Off Tony went to the kitchen. When he returned a while later with the dish, Wally licked his lips in anticipation.

One by one he slowly put the mollusks in his mouth to savor them. Finally, Wally said, “Chef Tony, these are delicious. They make me want to get up and swim fast or maybe draw a picture.”





"I'm glad you like them, Sir. They were just the warm up. I would now like to offer you two side dishes that I call **Ryan's Red Snapper** and **Madeline's Moray Eel**. Ryan's Red Snapper comes stuffed with cheese and Greek olives. Madeline's Moray Eel is a long slender beauty. Some people say that both dishes make you smarter. I can't guarantee those results but I think you will enjoy them more if you eat them slowly and quietly."

So, Wally did. Chef Tony returned to present his creations of Ryan's Red Snapper and Madeline's Moray Eel. Wally lingered over each bite allowing the delectable flavors to wash over his taste buds. In fact, Wally took so long to eat his food that Tony wondered if he were full, but Wally said, "No." He was just getting started. However, he asked to play a board game while they waited for the next course. Tony said, "Certainly!" So, they did.

A long while later Tony returned with the main course for the evening—a bouillabaisse of **Halley's Halibut** and **Sadie's Salmon** in a spicy Indian curry sauce. Tony said, "Sir Wally, I have pulled out all the stops with this dish. The fish I have used are among the most loved in all the world. I have added exotic hot spices to bring out all the rich flavors. When you eat it, you may want to eat fast and drink lots of water."

Wally took his first bite of the gumbo, smiled and said, "This is excellent!" He quickly took a second bite, then a third, and a fourth. His eyes started to tear. With his sixth bite his face turned red. By the tenth bite, steam was coming out of his gills and he could no longer speak. But with a big smile on his face and the thumbs of his flippers pointed up, he whispered, "WOW! What a dish!" He then swam in a big circle five times and swallowed a swimming pool of water as he swam. After about thirty minutes, he finally returned to the table and said, "Chef Tony, what's for dessert?"





“Sir, I can hardly believe our good fortune. Moments ago, the fish market called to say they just received a very rare specimen from the world above the sea. They call this delicacy, ‘**Jonah from Joppa.**’ The guys at the market tell me that this dish is best eaten whole. I have added a garnish of sliced sea cucumbers brushed with anchovy oil and hint of sweet anemones. Are you ready to give it a try?”

“I’m ready Chef. Serve it up.” Moments later Chef Tony delivered a large platter holding a strange creature with a fuzzy face. Wally took one look, grabbed the creature by the feet, and swallowed Jonah from Joppa whole. He then sat at the table for a few moments to savor the flavors and then said, “Now that is unusual. I can feel my dessert wiggling and giggling inside of me. A short while later Chef Tony returned with the check and two after dinner mints. Wally thanked him for the dining experience and promised to file a report with the Kelp Culinary Magazine in a few days. Then off he swam.

The following morning Wally woke after a restless night of sleep feeling a little sad. He was normally such a happy-go-lucky fish that the sadness caught him by surprise. He then noticed that his tummy was feeling upset. Wally thought to himself, "In situations like this, it sometimes helps me to dive to deeper waters." So, he did.

Down, down, down he swam to the roots of the undersea mountain shrouded in cold darkness. But as he descended, a strange thing happened. He started to hear a voice inside of him. First it was barely a whimper. Then it became a cry. By the time he reached the bottom, the voice was screaming. "What is going on?" thought Wally. "This noise could drive me crazy! I can hardly hear myself think. I wonder if I ate something that disagreed with me. I need to talk to Tony to find out what was in last night's dinner."





So, Wally returned to Tony’s Tavern. As he swam, the voice inside alternated between crying, singing, laughing, and praying, to crying again. And with each swish of his tale, he felt increasingly nauseous.

“Tony, what was in last night’s dinner? I woke this morning not feeling well at all.”

“Sir Wally, I don’t know what to say. The dishes I served you are tried and true favorites of all the sea creatures who live in these parts. I have made **Sawyer’s Sardines, Miles’ Mollusks, Ryan’s Red Snapper, Madeline’s Moray Eel, Hailey’s Halibut, and Sadie’s Salmon** many times before and there has never been a problem. The only new item on the menu was the Jonah-from-Joppa dessert. I suggest you drink a bottle of Pepto Abysmal to help calm your stomach.” So, Tony did.

On the third day, Wally woke again after very little sleep, feeling worse than before. The noises from inside his belly were getting louder and louder. "I think I am going to throw-up," thought Wally! "Whatever the Jonah-from-Joppa dessert is, it does not belong in the ocean and most certainly, it does not belong in my stomach."

So, Wally swam to the surface of the sea. He then vomited Jonah-from Joppa as close to dry land as possible. The last thing he heard before he slipped below the surface of the deep was the voice of his dessert shouting, "Thank you Yahweh! Thank you, Yahweh!" over and over again. Meanwhile, the creatures on the dry land rubbed their eyes and pointed in amazement.

The next day, Wally the Whale woke feeling much better. He then wrote his review of his meal at Tony's Tavern and said following:





“Located in the seaweed forest with a lovely view of the coral reef, is Tony’s Tavern. Tony, who is both owner and chef, aims to please. The evening started off well with two appetizers called **Sawyer’s Sardines** and **Miles’ Mollusks** on a Bed of Seaweed. Those two lovely creations raised my expectations of what was to come. Two delectable side dishes followed. **Ryan’s Red Snapper** and **Madeline’s Moray Eel** are the best I have had in all my travels. Then there was the mouth-watering main course—a bouillabaisse of **Hailey’s Halibut and Sadie’s Salmon** in a Spicy Indian Curry Sauce. Wow, what a dish! It took my breath away. If you can find the recipes for any of the first six, you will not be disappointed.

The dessert, however, was a cooking disaster. In my opinion, the **Jonah-from-Joppa** creation should be banned from the undersea world as it gave me the worse stomachache I have ever had. AVOID THIS DISH! I give Tony’s Tavern a ranking of one star. Were it not for the dessert, it would easily have received four stars.”

These days you can still find Tony cooking in the kitchen of his little bistro by the seaweed forest. Though the restaurant never received the fame Tony was hoping for, he did successfully publish a cookbook of his tried and true recipes. Look for it on Amazon.com. The book is called :

My Most Loved Grand Creations



Dedicated to my Grandchildren:

Hailey Donner

Ryan Donner

Madeline Isch

Sadie Isch

Miles Isch

Sawyer Stuckey

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