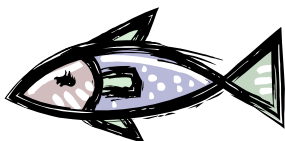


# Piranha Bait!

I don't remember exactly how long ago I realized I had piranhas in my head. But that insight made a lot of things clear—like the nasty little voices that tore into me whenever I believed I'd failed. I'd always just thought I hated myself, but this made much more sense: I was piranha bait!



For example:

- When I was threatened with success, the piranhas would step in, telling me my dreams weren't worth it—or I wasn't worth it—and pouring my time into things that weren't important to me.
- If I lost a romantic relationship, they'd start whispering lies, telling me I was ALL ALONE and UNLOVABLE.
- If I thought someone had insulted me, the piranhas would weave a web of words around the insult, trapping it in my head, where it bounced around, growing larger and more absolute every time it hit the wall.
- And if I made a mistake—particularly a mistake that hurt someone else—they'd swarm on me in a feeding frenzy.

These piranhas could be vicious. Vicious fishes. I knew I'd never treat anybody the way the piranhas treated me.

But I would, of course, and I did: They were **my** piranhas.

For a while I thought the piranhas were the voice of my conscience, swooping in for the kill after I'd messed up—or the voice of reason, protecting me from getting my hopes up for no reason. But they weren't.

No matter how good my intentions were, I found out that I couldn't be consistently kind, respectful, or reliable as long as I was busy dodging piranhas. Under the piranhas' spell, I messed up more and had much worse luck. The piranhas weren't there to protect me, or to make me a better person.

At one point I decided to do something symbolic to exorcise those pesky little piranhas. I bought a bag of fish-shaped crackers and decided to spill them out on the kitchen floor and dance on them in high heels, smashing their little cracker fish heads against the tiles. But when I opened the bag, they looked so cute that I felt sorry for them, and I realized I couldn't brutalize them. So I ate them.

I even thought about finding some way to get a really mean cat into my head, so it could eat the piranhas. But when I had a cat in the past, it peed on everything and stared at me a lot. I figured that might be worse than the piranhas.



Another thing the piranhas did: They seemed to push me into hanging out with people who said the same kinds of things they did, as if they had piranhas coming out of their mouths. It felt like being around these people made my own piranhas shut up for a while, but I think it only drowned them out. So sometimes I tried to stay away from people completely, thinking that **people** were my problem. But then the piranhas would get louder. It was worse when I was tired or under a lot of stress—which was most of the time.

Having piranhas inside my head also made me want to escape the pain of living, in any way I could. Of course, the things I did to try to escape only brought me more pain—and more piranhas!

At some point I started noticing that a lot of other people seemed to have piranhas in their heads too. Their piranhas might not always say the same things mine did, and they weren't always triggered by the same things, but their feeding patterns were very much the same.

I decided it might be a good idea to study these piranhas and map out their territory, in case that might help us avoid them, get rid of them, shut them up or—at the very least—understand them.

So that's what we're going to do in this little booklet. We're going to take a quick look at the basic nature of the Brain Piranha—its needs, its tastes, and its feeding patterns.

To do that, we'll also have to look at the environment in which the piranha lives and feeds—the brain. But instead of the usual model of the human brain (brain stem, limbic system, cerebral cortex, yada yada), I've come up with another model of the brain, based on my own observations.

Then I'll offer some suggestions for staying out of the jaws of the piranhas. These are things I've learned from other people, from books, and from trial and error. All the things I'll suggest have been suggested and used by many, many people before me—often with a lot of success.

This booklet has a few short chapters:

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I'll confess one thing up front: The title of this booklet—How to Get the Piranhas Out of Your Head—may be a little ambitious.

I don't know if the piranhas ever really die or go away, but they definitely get slower, and their appetite shrinks. And when you're about to be a meal for a bunch of piranhas, every bite counts.

So if you're game (no pun intended), let's go for a swim!