

## So Many Memories...

One of my life's greatest pleasures has been having had a father who taught me to fish. Yes, some boys are self-taught, or learn fishing from a book or perhaps a well-intended uncle. But there is a special satisfaction in having your father there to encourage you when things don't go well... to coach you when you do things wrong... to untangle your snarled tackle... and, best of all, to be there to celebrate your triumphs when fortune finally smiles. It matters so much to have him by your side when you catch your first fish!

It is a truth universally acknowledged that if you want your son to like fishing, you must take him where he will catch fish. My father understood this well, and made it his business to see that, in the early learning years, I caught fish. But this remarkable man did not limit his efforts to my childhood: well into my adult years - and his senior years - he saw to it that I was continually introduced to the next level of this challenging sport.

I recall each of my early fishing triumphs in the most glorious technicolored detail. They are graven on my memory and I relive them on dark days. (Actually, there weren't that many successes in the early years). But I did not realize at the time the extent to which my father had planned and engineered these happy results.

Many of you, I know, are not fishermen, and are already saying to yourselves this is going to be a long evening. But I ask your indulgence, and hope that I can make this more interesting to non-anglers

than it may at first appear. For I will be writing more about a shaping lifetime of discovery, adventure and father-son relationships than about drowning worms.

Do you remember your first fish? Was your father there? Were you there when your children caught their first fish? If so, be thankful for the blessing. Let me tell you about my first fish

From the start, it was clear to me that “fishing” meant trout fishing with a flyrod. That’s the way my father fished, and we all followed his example. This was then - and ever will be - fishing in its purest, most challenging and rewarding form. While the novice may begin with a worm, he must graduate with all speed to the infinitely more refined art of fishing with the fly, and then the dry fly. This involves mastering casting with a flyrod, and learning how to read the water, find the fish, and present just the right fly to the fish in just the right way. And the reward is the most beautiful, wary, best fighting of fresh water fishes. It is the most delicate and challenging of all kinds of fishing. Thackeray said it all in his lines from a child’s alphabet:

T is for trout, most elegant of fishes  
When alive a beauty, but when dead, delicious!

### Phase 1: In The Beginning

But back to my first trout. From my earliest awareness, it was clear to me that my father was a dedicated fisherman: I well remember watching him gather his hipboots, flyrod and gear, put on his old fishing hat that was covered with years worth of old fishing licenses, and set out in his grey coupe, with

his flyrod extending out of the rolled-down window. The hat alone was a giveaway: a sure sign that he was off in pursuit of adventure. And I waited breathlessly for his return when he would tell me all about both his successes and disappointments. He was a splendid storyteller and he made it all sound so alive and adventurous. How I longed for the day he would take me with him!

And then that day finally came. I was seven years old. In those simpler times a beautiful stream flowed through the Greenspring Valley, north of Baltimore. A benevolent Maryland fisheries department stocked a stretch of it stiff with trout, and strictly limited all fishermen to twelve years of age or younger. Fathers were allowed on it to coach their sons (I never knew a girl who fished) but adults had to do their own fishing on other parts of the stream. And this was to be my introduction: my father invited me to join him for an April 15 Opening Day excursion. This was, by far, the greatest honor ever conferred on me at that tender age, and I was breathless with anticipation.

And it was an adventure, too. It meant getting up early while it was still dark, creeping noiselessly out of the house while everyone slept, and getting to the stream ahead of other anglers to claim the best water. My father had equipped me handsomely with an old split bamboo flyrod whose tip had been broken off six inches short in a car door, but was otherwise still an impressive piece of equipment. There was an old Pflueger reel, a well-worn flyline and a length of gut leader, a semicircular worm box that hung on my belt, my own small tackle box with a very modest assortment of hooks and old flies, and - greatest wonder of all - castoff hip boots that were

many sizes too large. I cut quite a sporting figure.

We were disappointed not to be the first on the stream, and had to park a hundred yards down the road. I struggled in my oversized boots to keep up as we reached the stream and crossed the fence at a stile. We found a likely spot. Under my father's watchful eye I put a night crawler on the hook and dropped it in the water on about four feet of line. The current carried it a short way downstream. I was ready. Oh, how ready I was!

I can remember every detail of it all: the greenness of that April morning, the cheery burble of the water, the call of red winged blackbirds, and everywhere the smell of spring as I cautiously paid out more line, a bit at a time, and the worm carried downstream into a promising run.

And nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. Minutes passed. My father was by my side, anxiously coaching me. I let out more line. Still nothing. I let the worm drift into a promising pocket of water. Nothing. We checked the worm: still there and wiggling gamely. We changed locations. After about twenty minutes I began to realize that anticipation had outstripped reality - a lesson that all fishermen must learn. Enjoy the anticipation as much as you can, for too often it is all the reward you will get.

After half an hour my father could stand it no longer: he parked me under a big maple and left me while he went to the adult section of the stream. I could see him in the distance, casting a fly downstream. The sun rose in the sky, the morning grew warm, God was in his heaven, the stream sang a lullaby, I sat

back against the trunk of the maple, my line trailed in the water, and I slept.

The next thing I remember was a stout tug on my line! I snapped out of my slumber, gave a mighty heave, and lofted the fish well up into the branches overhead! It slithered down through the limbs and came to rest at just about eye level. I could scarcely believe my good fortune. My first trout, caught entirely on my own! The fish and I gazed at one another, eye to eye. He was a beauty.

I hailed my father. He came galloping over to the scene of my triumph. I could instantly tell from the expression on his face that all was not as it should be. He was doing his best not to laugh at my line's tortuous path down through the limbs of the tree, and at the twelve inch sucker that hung before me. It was not a trout, but a sucker: the coarsest of coarse fish. A sucker it might have been, but it was my sucker. My father lavished praise upon me. So did my mother in a dazed way when we burst into her bedroom, roused her from slumber, and I thrust my trophy in her face. My first fish may not have been a trout, and it may have been caught on a worm, but I was blooded! And I haven't looked back since!

My early forays astream were not very productive, and after a year or two the novelty and adventure began to wear thin. I needed more results! My father saw the need to do something about this, so we fished together on waters farther and farther from home. We fished in Western Maryland, on a stream that is now in the heart of Camp David and closed to the public. These were fine adventures but still, not a lot of fish. I was twelve by this time, and my father

was feeling the pressure of producing better results for me.

I had a friend named Dukie, a boy who was a natural fisherman, who tied his own flies, and worked on Saturdays for a local trout hatchery owned by a family friend. To my astonishment, my father conceived the idea that he might buy some fish from Dukie and stock the stream that ran through our farm. My father was not much given to extravagances, but beyond anything else that happened in my early fishing years this proved to be a life-shaping event. He gave me my own trout stream loaded with trout!

It was a beautiful, clear little stream that ran through a half mile of mature woods. There were deep holes, overhanging banks, and sunken logs throughout: ideal for trout. There was a pond through which the stream flowed, perfectly suited for the rankest beginner, with loads of room for unobstructed back casts. And further downstream there were two particularly challenging spots where the stream was dammed to form deep pools providing a head of water for hydraulic rams which pumped water up a long hill to our house on one side and our neighbor's on the other. These pools were too deep to see the bottom, but big and mysterious enough to hold significant fish. Concentrations of trout gathered at these three points.

But back to the morning the fish arrived. I barely slept the night before. My father, brothers and I were up at dawn. I ran ahead of them down the long hill to the pond where you could see the trout swimming around. Again, I was completely equipped with hand-me-down equipment... but now I had graduated to

flies rather than worms. And in my eagerness to be first at the pond, I stumbled, fell, and broke my bamboo rod right in the middle section. Unusable. Was ever there such a devastating crash of anticipation, since the beginning of time?

My father was seriously annoyed and showed zero sympathy: One of the earliest lessons had been never to run with a flyrod. I suffered the purgatory of watching my brothers catch fish after fish while I sat dolefully on the bank until he finally took pity on me and let me use his rod. But I have never, ever run with a flyrod in my hand since that day.

The summer that followed was a pure idyll. I pursued every one of those hundred trout relentlessly, until I could find no more. (No catch and release for me in those days!) As the summer wore on the fish grew more wary and I had to develop my stream-smarts and technique to catch them. It was a terrific learning experience with the trout setting the bar ever higher and higher. My father certainly got a splendid return on his investment in those hundred fish. They taught me lessons that I use to this day. They changed my life.

Another early adventure with my father, complete with lesson learned. It was summertime, and we were cruising the back roads of Washington County, Maine, looking for trout and not having much luck. We came across a county crew repairing the road. My father got out of the car and asked them where we might find some fishing. This seemed utter folly to me: who in the world - if they knew of a good spot - would tell a stranger about it! But they told us about a very small stream that flowed under the road we were

on, and counseled us to follow it upstream, a long way up a mountainside, through a moose marsh, to its source at a hidden beaver pond.

We followed their directions, which involved a horrendous hour long slog up a mountainside through bog, leeches and clouds of blackflies... but at the end we found the beaver dam and it was absolutely loaded with wild brooktrout. We caught fish on every cast until we grew weary of it! Then we ate a sandwich, rested a while and caught more. It was the mother lode of native trout. We were back the following summer and it was just as wonderful as ever. There were lessons learned: never hesitate to ask the locals. And there are beaver ponds out there, stuffed with fish, for those determined to look for them! But you have to believe in them: the good ones are hidden and remote, and you must be willing to suffer through an arduous search to find them. A lesson that reaches far beyond the world of trout fishing.

## Phase 2: Out On My Own

And now, a transition in my growth as a fisherman. The years passed, I reached man's estate, left home, and more and more, I was fishing on my own or with schoolboy friends. There was a memorable summer when I taught fishing at a boy's summer camp on Lake Otsego, near Cooperstown. This was a genuinely good gig: I was being paid to do what I loved most. I shamelessly focused my time and attention on the boys who showed the greatest aptitude and were the most fun to be with.

There came the annual Parents Day when eager

fathers and mothers descended upon the camp to visit their sons. The Director of the camp, a very gruff man, was anxious to have the camp and everything in it look its best. Few camps boasted a fishing counselor, and he felt it was a classy ornament in his staff, so I was put on display to a group of fathers. The Director ordered me to take a handful of these openly skeptical men down to the water and “show them something, anything,” he said.

Desperate for an idea, I took a rod to the water’s edge to demonstrate my casting skill (I was pretty good in those days). And on my first long cast out into the lake, I hooked a really beautiful fish, (God knows what it was doing there, in the very spot where a hundred boys swam every day!). Somehow managing to contain my amazement, I played it well, and brought it to the net before a gaggle of astonished fathers plus a growing crowd of onlookers. It weighed just over three pounds: a big fish. I assured the fathers that this happened all the time.

Two of the fathers asked if we might skip the evening family barbecue and go fishing together. I cheerfully agreed, and they both caught fish in the dusk. They immediately reenrolled their sons at the camp for the following summer, and spread the word of the fishing counselor to anyone who would listen. For a day or two I was treated like a star quarterback. The Director, who was a very tight man with his dollars, gave me a bonus on the spot! I sniffed the sweet smell of success, and I remember it well. Best of all, the Old Boy Network kicked into gear and word reached my father in Baltimore. He wrote me a congratulatory note. I have it, and a photo of the fish,

to this day. There have been other big fish in my career but this remains one of my most memorable triumphs.

And then I finished college, moved out into the great world, and soon I married. So began the wonderful new experience of fishing with my wife. She knew nothing about fishing but was eager to learn, and proved to be exceptionally skilled. And this, of course, led to the great joy of sharing my love of fishing with our children, with whom I tried hard to follow my father's example.

We fished wherever we could, but mostly in the Adirondack Mountains. This is one of the most beautiful forested areas in the eastern United States. In the 1800's it was the inspiration of the term "the North Woods." It is the largest park in the lower 48, and the home of mountain lakes, ponds, rivers and streams beyond reckoning. Many of these are home to a pleasing variety of trout (particularly, the incomparable brook trout) which proved to be an irresistible attraction to my family, and the learning place for my children to develop their fishing skills. And, once again, it was my father who made possible our introduction to this forest wonderland of fishing adventure.

We have vacationed in the Adirondacks every summer for more than forty years, and much of that time has been spent with a flyrod in hand. My father was often there, fishing with us. Most of my family are now accomplished fishermen, or in the case of grandchildren, on the way to becoming one.

For many of these summers we rented an old and

very rustic “camp” on an extremely remote lake: in the fullness of time, we were able to buy this wonderful property and it has been ever since the place where the clan gathers every summer. It is the home of a particularly important family trophy: a large silver loving cup originally given to my parents on their marriage, but known today as the Granddad Cup (in honor of my father). It is awarded each year to that member of the family with the “most notable angling accomplishment of the year.” This does not necessarily mean having caught the most or the biggest fish: it has also been awarded for praiseworthy acts of streamside gallantry and even for the composition by a four year old granddaughter of a fishing song! From an early age, all of the children and grandchildren have yearned for this recognition, and all have won the Granddad Cup at least once. A fitting tribute to the man responsible for the family tradition.

### Phase 3: My Father’s Final Lesson

During these years my father continued to be a driving force in shaping our fishing destiny, and he introduced me - and then our grandsons - to the very highest level of the marvelous world of fly fishing. One of his greatest lessons was still to come. For those who are committed to catching trout on a fly, there is a whole further world of angling adventure in store. This is the Atlantic Salmon, the grandest of all fish.

A word of explanation is necessary. For the fly fisherman, the Atlantic salmon is the ultimate challenge. Compared to trout, the Atlantic salmon is far bigger, harder to find, more challenging to take

on a fly, and the most truly dramatic fighter of all. In the world of freshwater fly fishing, Atlantic salmon are the Big Time... not for young fishermen... and are found only in faraway Northern rivers flowing into the North Atlantic. They are not to be confused with the several kinds of Pacific salmon: they are an infinitely more challenging quarry.

Fishing for Atlantic salmon is an adventure requiring days to reach remote rivers in Canada, Iceland, Norway, Scotland and Russia, in the summer months timed precisely to coincide with their annual arrival from the sea and journey upstream into fresh water to spawn.

My father fished for them every year: the whole family was well aware of his annual trips. It was, we knew, the high point of his year. If the fishing was good, in those days the Railway Express would deliver wooden boxes containing enormous, beautiful silver fish packed in snow, still fresh and highly edible when they reached Baltimore. I was thirty years old and utterly unprepared when he first asked me to join him. A whole new world of fishing adventure was opening before me. Our first trip together was to the St. Jean river on the tip of the Gaspé peninsula. And there I learned one of the great realities of Atlantic Salmon fishing: these are migratory fish and some of the time they just are not there when you are there. On our first trip, neither my father nor I saw a single salmon in a whole week. What a letdown!

But all fishermen must learn to deal with disappointment, and especially in fishing for Atlantic salmon, where it is frequently encountered. I was to learn a life lesson of exceptional importance in

seeing how my father handled his dashed expectations.

You travel far and spend a substantial sum pursuing Atlantic salmon, and not infrequently you find poor fishing, or none at all. That is the way of it: some years you are there too early for the migration, and some you are there too late. Sometimes the water is too high and sometimes too low. But some years conditions are right and you connect with this amazing fish that was named by the Romans, who discovered them in the British Isles, *salmo salar*, or “the leaper:” there is nothing to compare with their aerial acrobatics, once hooked. It is the highest level of angling reward. So you keep risking disappointment and coming back. The reward is worth the risk!

My father took me on annual excursions to rivers throughout Quebec, New Brunswick, Labrador, Newfoundland, and Iceland. Some years were wonderful and some a disaster. But over the course of these adventures together, my relationship with my father underwent a gradual but profoundly important change.

During my formative years my father was gone from home for prolonged periods of time: first in World War II and then in his CIA years. When he came home I saw the return of a stern authority figure: an image of my father that persisted throughout my early years. But fly fishing is a great equalizer: I saw how my father handled success when he landed a fine fish... how he was humbled when a fish scorned his offerings... how he dealt with disappointment when a leaping salmon tore free in a spectacular aerial

leap... how he coped with frustration when his carefully laid arrangements fell through, or - worst of all - when we traveled all that way and encountered a no salmon year.

Gone was the stern disciplinarian and formidable authority figure of my youth... and in his place I discovered a friend who I had never really known before: a companion with whom I shared adventure, success and failure, joy and sorrow. Thirty years of my life had passed before I really began to know and appreciate this man, and learned to enjoy his company. I got to know him and he got to know me. And I have fishing to thank for this life affirming epiphany.

Some years he invited friends to join us, and I saw up close the easy camaraderie that existed between them. As my father brought me into the world of his friendships, I felt a wonderful new pleasure at being accepted as a peer by these older men whom I so much admired.

And then my two sons - both fine trout anglers - reached an age for salmon and my father invited them to join us on our trips: first the elder, and next the younger. What a satisfaction it was to be there watching as his grandsons began to share all those adventures and to discover the life lessons I had learned though fishing with this man!

There came the year when my younger son Fred was asked on his first salmon trip, and sure enough, it was a no salmon year: they just had not yet come into the river from the sea. This was all the more

distressing because it was increasingly apparent to me that it was the last year my aging father would be able to make the trip.

I remember so clearly the last morning of the last day of that trip. I had given up, after a week of fruitless casting to an empty river, and sat on a high grassy bank looking down into the gin clear water of the St. Jean river where my father, Fred, and their two guides were anchored in a Gaspé canoe just above a bridge... casting into a deep pool against all hope for the last hour of the last day of the trip.

I do not make a practice of praying for selfish favors, but the situation seemed to me fraught with genuine need. My father so much wanted his grandson to go home having caught a salmon, and I did too. I silently spoke these words, "Lord, if you can spare just one fish for this old man and his grandson, please Lord, send one now." And BAM! That quickly, a salmon appeared from nowhere in that empty river, grabbed the fly, and was in the air for a spectacular leap. It was the first fish we had seen all week. Fred played it well and proudly brought it to the net. The ritual photographs were taken. Everyone was so thankful, so relieved. These things make a believer out of you. What a way to end a trip. It was Fred's first salmon and, as it turned out, my father's last. Though we did not realize it at the time, it was a true passing of the torch.

In the following years, there came a new succession of annual salmon fishing trips - not with my father, who was now confined to an armchair in his Maryland home, but with a different cast of characters: my sons and a motley assortment of hard core angling

companions: about a dozen of us, in all. Many of these were lifetime friends from my youth: we had fished together since we were boys on the same Maryland streams where I caught my first “trout.” Now, we pursued Atlantic salmon in rivers all across Maritime Canada: in the Gaspé peninsula, on Anticosti island, and rivers rising in Labrador, flowing south to the north shore of the St. Lawrence. Reaching these faraway rivers was itself an annual adventure, often involving bush plane flights deep into the Canadian wilderness. This was high adventure, indeed, even in the occasional “no fish years.” But what a satisfaction it was to share these adventures with my sons, as my father had with me. And to watch my sons earn their place in the esteem of my lifetime fishing friends.

Most memorable of all were special trips to fish the Ponoï river on the Kola peninsula: on the north coast of the Russian arctic. This is the best salmon river in the world, as well as one of the most remote - accessible only by aging military helicopters out of Murmansk and far across the Russian tundra. But oh, my, what glorious fishing! There are no “no salmon” years on the Ponoï. In a good year you might catch as many salmon in a week on the Ponoï as in a lifetime of fishing in Canada.

But, wonderful as it is, salmon fishing is for most of us at best a one-week a year annual adventure. For the rest of the year, fly fishing for trout in the Adirondacks remains the staple of our angling.

Phase 4: Golden Years

Of all these fond memories, a place of honor is reserved for my wife - my very favorite fishing companion, and one of the finest anglers I know.

Retirement has been, for the two of us, a golden time to take really wonderful fishing trips together to faraway destinations we had only dreamed of. Together we have fished gorgeous Andean rivers in Chile and Argentina, revisited Russia's Ponoï, explored rivers in New Zealand. For my fiftieth birthday my father gave us our introduction to the incredible fishing in Alaska. On many of these excursions we have been joined by fishing couples drawn from among our dearest lifetime friends, who have added enormously to the joy - and memories - of these adventures.

All of these trips (hopefully there will be more) have been wonderful, but the Patagonian rivers which flow out of the Andes in western Argentina have been special. This is big, breathtakingly empty and beautiful country, utterly unspoiled, filled with wildlife and laced with rivers literally teeming with big trout. The estancias are tens of thousands of hectares with miles upon miles of prime rivers, and are owned by descendants of the French families who first claimed and settled this wild land in the late 1800's. Today, many take fishermen into their elegant homes. The accommodations are as superb as the fishing. Truly, every prospect pleases!

## The Camaraderie

Fishing has been for me the glue that has held together friendships that began as long ago as the 1940s and have lasted ever since. And the circle of

companions has grown through the years as new friends who share this love are welcomed to the brotherhood. And, of course, my sons: It was so deeply satisfying to watch as new friendships formed between my sons and these men who have been my friends for a lifetime.

It is a wonderful thing, this companionship among fishermen. Fishing is good by yourself, but it is far better with friends. The people you fish with add so much to the value of the experience. They heighten your anticipation, they admire your fishing tackle (or at least say they do), they share your joy in your successes, they console you in your disappointments, their successes give you just as much satisfaction as your own, they join you in reliving shared memories

Each year, there is a reunion in our Adirondack camp of these lifetime fishing friends (the same crew that loyally assembled for annual salmon trips). Known to our families as "the Gentlemen's Weekend," it is a high time of all male companionship, fueled with plenty of bourbon, thick steaks with real mashed potatoes and lots of butter, and chocolate pies: all the forbidden pleasures. The cast of characters includes friends I have fished with for sixty years, as well as my sons. There is endless telling of jokes, with favorites from years past retold every year, and getting funnier each time. There are reminiscences of trips and times past ...and - of course - hours spent together fishing. More frequently now, there are fond memories of friends no longer with us at the Gentlemen's Weekends. Even with these sadnesses, it is still almost too good to be true.

Looking back on it all, I so clearly see my father as the founder of these happy feasts. Because it all began with his patient teaching so many years ago... his life changing gift of that first streamful of trout... his making possible those wonderful trips of discovery to rivers and lakes farther and ever farther from home... and the lessons he taught me along the way: I believe in lost beaver ponds as fervently as ever, and am always ready to drop everything and search for them.

I cherish these memories. I am so grateful for the lifetime of fishing pleasures, adventures and friendships which I have been privileged to share with my children, just as my father did with me. There has been so much more than just a tug on a line. As I wrote this paper, it occurred to me, after all these years, that I never properly thanked my father for his gift of fishing, and all the joys that have come with it. I think I probably didn't really need to: he could tell. But I wish I had, all the same.

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