

Trout are beautiful and precious resources:

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How did you start fly fishing?

The summer of my sixth year was the earliest I recall fishing with a fly rod. My father sent me to my grandparents in Idaho for the summer, which was the highlight of my year. We camped and fished along the Salmon River and its tributaries. My great-uncle was our guide on these trips, and he should certainly have won awards for his patience in teaching me the ways of angling with flies. I guess that I learned his love and respect for "nature" from those trips, such as limited kill fishing.

My grandfather was the source for my early fly fishing equipment. He gave me a Shakespeare fiberglass rod, automatic reel and level, semi-floating line — all traded for Raleigh

cigarette coupons. Unfortunately, most of those who saved them, like my grandfather, didn't survive smoking. At any rate, for years that first outfit was fishing for me — no one I knew did any other kind of angling — all fishing was fly fishing, and that really hasn't changed.

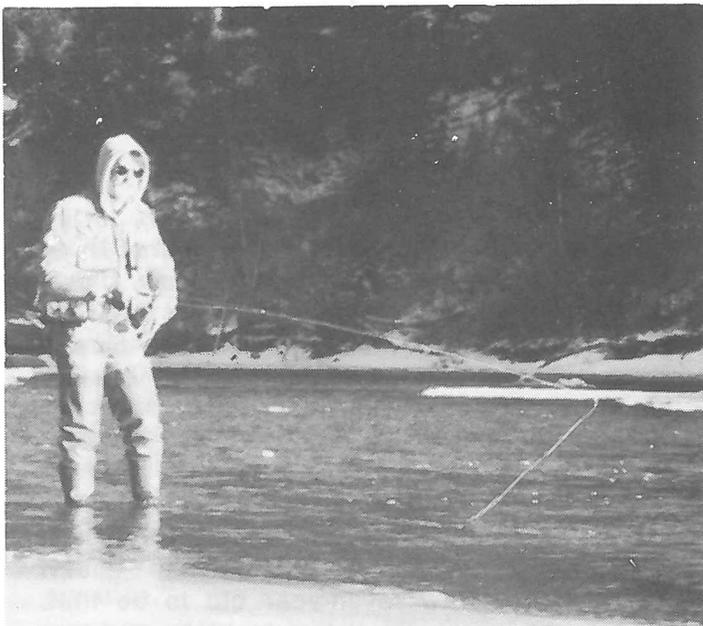
You mentioned limited kill fishing; how did that come about?

It was simply that my uncle only allowed us to keep what we could eat, usually one fish — but it wasn't easy for a seven-year old to do that, especially since I didn't live in Idaho and was trying to keep up with the native relatives in catching fish. I was possessed by the absurd and dangerous translation of social acceptance as

control of Nature or "limits" of dead fish, both curiously atavistic, vestigial traits. I can vividly recall one incident of that early choice — we had gone separate ways on one of the smaller tributaries of the Salmon and, alone with my borrowed wicker creel and overly heavyweight rod (an eight line, I think), I hooked a huge rainbow in a particularly deep pool with a renegade fly. Probably the only reason I landed the fish was the fact that I was using a level piece of monofilament at six or eight pound test, and, though deep, the pool had well-defined rock boundaries and small area — the fish had no place to run. I landed it and attempted to stuff the large trout, I suspect 25 or 30 inches, into my creel. I had to bend it almost in half to do it, and witnessing and pulsing gill covers and frantic attempts to breathe and escape — I released the fish. But I'll tell you that for a kid from the city it was an interminable and frightening decision. I felt good about putting the fish back, but apprehensive that my cousins would disbelieve my tale, which several fishless hours the following day at that spot probably confirmed. It wasn't until several years later that I realized that it was the right decision, no matter the disbelief. Pride in big, dead fish is a pornographic exhibitionism of underfed, neurotic personalities. But that early experience was valuable for me in two specific ways beyond this; trout are a beautiful, precious resource, not a slave for damaged egos; and angling is a private, quiet, personal world that might or might not mesh with any other.

You lived for several years in Europe. How's the fishing there?

Fishing in Europe is a different sort of fishing



"Catching trout is not the only reason to fish."

— I don't mean a different species of fish; I mean there is a vastly different approach to fishing. In Europe, specifically France and Germany, there are few places that could be determined as National Forest — most fishable water is privately owned and individually managed — in other words, a farmer or landowner owns both the land and also any water that stands on or passes through his property, and within very general limits he may place his own restrictions on its use. A humorous example comes to mind. A friend and I obtained our necessary permits to fish — there are national, state, or province and local licenses to be gotten in advance; then one must get permission from a listed group of landowners who allow access. He will give the prospective angler a sometimes written but more often oral list of rules and regulations — all for a fee. Anyway, on this occasion, we were met with one of the clearest and richest trout spring creeks in Germany, and the landowner was a cordial man of perhaps fifty. He took us for a brief tour of the best stretches of water and read us a compendium of rules about his cattle and other farm animals. As we unpacked, full of anticipation, he left us with a final admonition: "...you may only use potatoes as bait." He ambled away without looking back. We were speechless. We had not prepared a single potato imitation.

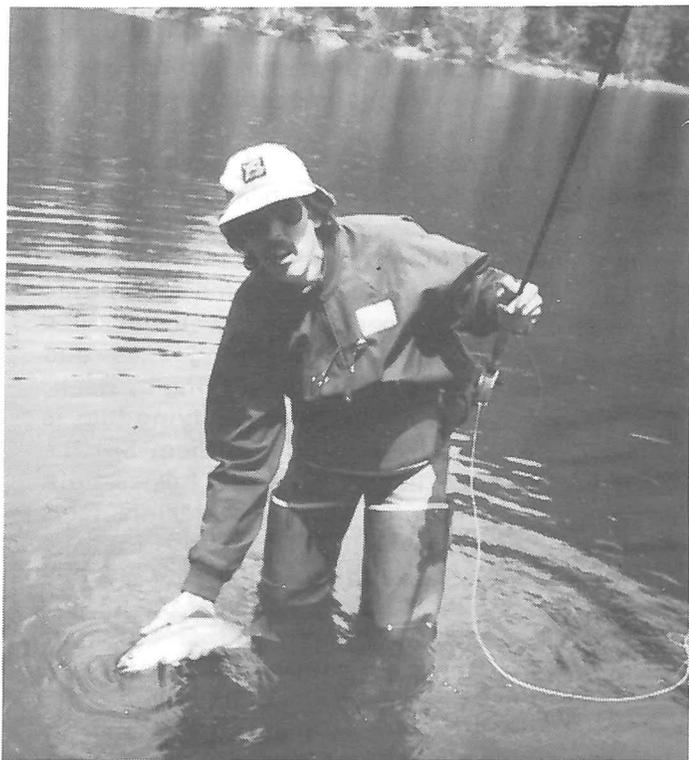
"Fly fishing is like the game of chess."

How did you get started with Straightline? How did you come up with the name?

Last question first. The name is a condensed view of our intent in business: to give people the proper information, simply and truthfully and to provide the best products in the industry for fair prices. There are other nuances of meaning, but that is the rub. Straightline had its genesis in 1975 when a fishing friend and I began to believe that a fulltime, well stocked, well informed store was needed in this community. Apparently we were correct, as we have travelled a distant road from our half-season, fishing-only shop to a year around outdoor sports specialty store; from one to fourteen employees.

What are you doing with bamboo rods?

I've been fascinated by bamboo as both a true craft and an efficient and aesthetic fishing tool for a long time. Since we've been in business, Ed and I have discovered a real demand for the minor and major repairs and restoration of old and not so old cane rods. Few people in the country and fewer shops do complete, quality work on them. Our orders have steadily increased from our first efforts. Repairs led to a natural interest in building cane rods from



“It is only casting technique; that is simple.”

scratch, which is complicated, but immensely satisfying, handiwork. The rods are all hand planed, .glued, straightened and varnished. We are not in that business, however, and never want to be, but restoration is our business.

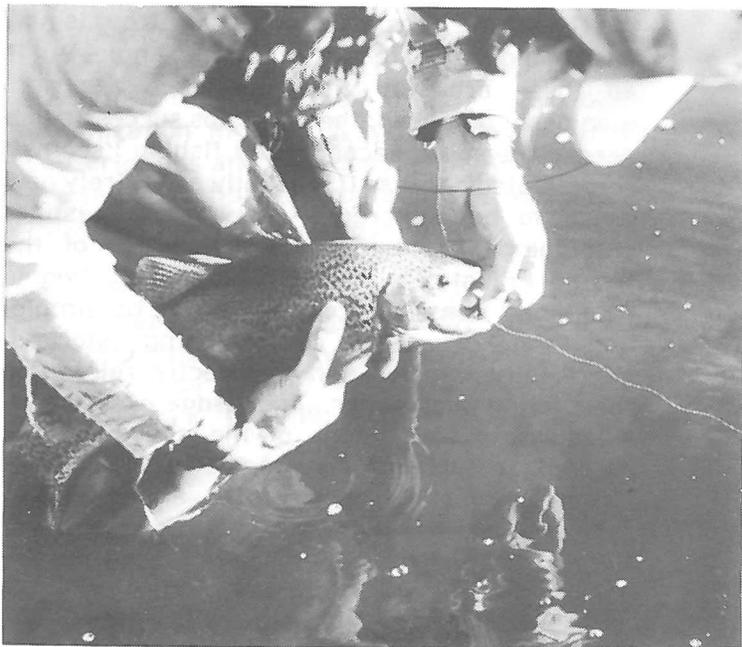
Since we're on the subject of rods, what determines a good one, materials? cost?

That is a loaded question, of course, and requires careful response. The simple answer is to say that whatever works for the angler and pleases him or her should be sufficient reason to purchase a rod. That is true, but there are many factors involved which complicate the picture — line weight, length, fishing needs, and the most difficult of all, the ability of the angler to use the equipment — a good caster can cast a broom stick, but a poor caster will have trouble with even the finest rod. The prospective fisherman is faced with a sea of choices, fiberglass, graphite, boron, composites of these, and bamboo, in multitudinous lengths, line weights, cosmetics, handle styles, and brand names. The only requirement should be — can it do what you want it to do within your budget? Is it guaranteed against manufacturing defects? Can it be repaired easily and quickly? Rods normally break or get broken in use or in transport, not in the closet. Typically, they break in these conditions more due to abuse or negligence than from defects, but that depends on the product. But it is important to know, particularly in the case of so-called “custom” rods, whether the

wrapper will fix a broken tip, a crushed guide, or off-spline section, or will he be out of town or further? That is a risk which should be compensated for usually by a lower price tag. The best advice, indeed, is to buy a brand name product from an established company.

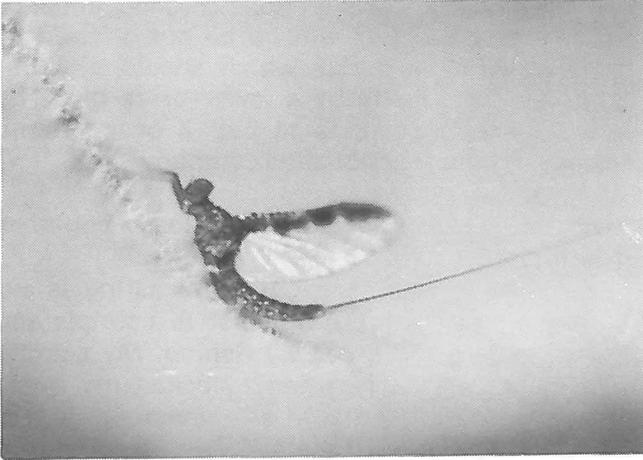
If casting is so important, how does a beginner get started?

You are, of course, right that casting is extremely important, but it is also is a simple and pleasurable ancillary to fly fishing. My casting interest began early when I hooked my uncle with a wildly flung line at age seven, but it was not until I opened the store and discovered a retail need to educate people to safely enjoy the sport, and the pleasures of a well-tuned fly line. I seriously began to analyze the casting stroke when an alleged “expert” spent several hours confusing and misinforming an audience at a “clinic” at which I was an observer. After lengthy discussions with Andre Puyans, Ernest Schwiebert, Ralph Kanz and others, Ed and I used photography and film (thanks to my talented wife Christy) to extrapolate an easily taught, easily learned casting style which, to date, I've not seen better. Its basis is a tournament casting stroke with some alterations that



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we discovered through hours of casting analyses and photographs. It is the only casting technique that is simple and, if done with practice and some attention, flawless. But practice is the key — like free throws or driving golf balls. If an angler wishes to practice his casting while fishing, then he will inevitably end up practicing his casting instead of fishing.



“Tying flies and imitating the trout’s menu is gratifying by itself.”

Fly fishing seems more complicated than just casting. In addition to your casting clinics, what can a beginner do to learn enough to be successful?

Well, first of all, “success” is relative. If enjoying fly fishing is predicated on catching many fish or only big fish, then that is a different kind of success than just getting outside, deriving pleasure from being out and from the variety of the fly fishing experience. Catching trout is not, and should not be, the only reason to angle. But if all these areas of the experience are harmoniously balanced, then perhaps success has a deeper meaning. Secondly, fly fishing “seems” complicated because it is usually an entirely new world to be explored — equipment, casting, entomology, fly tying, the fascination of the trout’s lifestyle and environment. People frequently consider trout fishing to be simple, and the “success” in catching stocked, genetically inferior fish is directly related to their living near water...knowledge by osmosis. Needless to say, “none of the above” is the correct response. As master-angler-author Ernest Schwiebert once told an angler with a similar question on the complications of trout, “Fly fishing is like the game of chess — it can be simple or extremely complex...” The point, of course, is that the sport has endless mystery and unexplored labyrinths if one looks. No one knows everything about trout fishing...in fact, the more one discovers, the greater the vastness of the pool in which one looks. There is, however, a solution to this apparent dilemma — fishing schools, with classroom and on water lessons, with people like Schwiebert, Puyans, or Whitlock for those desiring advanced studies or the multitudes of instructional workshops held by us and other local Pro Shops for those starting out. Schools can eliminate or at least modify years of fumbling and frustration.

I took fly tying classes from you several years ago, and it helped me a great deal in other areas of fly fishing. Is fly tying a necessary part of fly fishing?

No, it isn’t necessary, but it does deserve comment. What fly tying does primarily is teach careful observance of detail both as a craft and as an angler. There is a direct relationship between keen observance and catching fish, as there is between properly fished well tied flies and poorly tied ones. Also, tying flies and imitating the trout’s menu is gratifying by itself. The economic rewards are there as tying flies is often less expensive than buying them but the addiction of tying is such that one has to tie a great deal to defray the costs of materials, tools and the extraordinary array of gizmos that the industry offers. In addition, tying flies usually means that one must have a notion of the insects and bait fish on which trout feed. Entomology then becomes another mini-discipline for the angler. Ultimately, one does not have to tie flies or know trout insects to fish — it is merely another facet of the game. Remember, with the proper fundamentals, fly tying is a fairly simple craft. To tie effective patterns requires effective instruction, and, of course, practice. We offer seven five week courses from Basic Tying, through Dry Flies, Nymphs, Streamers, and the more elusive Hollow Hair and Salmon Fly courses and beyond. The classes are limited in size and we utilize, when necessary for repetitive detail, video segments we produced. Of course, our Fishing Schools also offer video instruction and playback to enhance the “on water” portions of the classes.

You fished in Alaska this past Fall, and you have fished many different areas. Are they better fishing than that found locally?

No, flatly. Few areas compare in the variety, beauty, and accessibility of our fisheries. This area has fishable water through much of the year, a rarity in other locales, and the still water angling here is superb. However, other areas, while not “better,” whatever that means, are certainly different. Alaska, in addition to its famous Salmon fisheries, offers Arctic and Lemon Char, which we don’t have, and big Rainbows, which we do have. Wyoming, New Mexico, and California all have well known hatches, impoundments, and steelhead and saltwater fly fishing, respectively, though none has more variety of water types, more beauty, and more accessibility than we do. Idaho is the closest parallel with Northwest Colorado in these attributes, but lacks our remarkable weather. But I enjoy travelling because of these differences, not because they furnish “better” fly fishing.