



Bill Banaszewski

Lured In

A trout fisherman is born by Ed Bang

As a young child in the Bronx during the early 1930s, outdoor recreation was often limited to playing in the streets. Though trout fishing in the Catskills was becoming all the rage among well-to-do sportsmen from New York City, fishing was not something I thought about, let alone tried. But that changed when I began to spend holidays and summers at my grandparents' 48-acre farm in East Chatham.

Nestled in the Taconic foothills, the farm was the perfect playground for a curious boy. I soon discovered and explored just about every brook, stream or rivulet within walking distance of the house. The waters were full of horned dace (creek chub), a forage fish that rarely exceeds six inches in length. You can imagine the thrill I had as an eight-year-old boy yanking three- to four-inch fish out of the brook after spending hours on my belly, peering at the fish through gaps in the rough, wooden timbers of the wagon bridge that spanned the stream. My dear, patient Grandma always rolled her eyes when I triumphantly presented the catch of the day.

I often had fishing buddies, assorted cousins or friends from the city that came up to enjoy the fresh air. For fishing gear, we made our own out of materials found on the land.

Our fishing poles consisted of the straightest six-foot-long wild cherry saplings that Grandpa could find. Using his handy (and very sharp) pocketknife, Grandpa would transform them into things of beauty.

Line for the rods was another matter. Monofilament had yet to be discovered, so we'd use the least bulky of Grandma's kitchen string. Thank the Lord for snelled hooks, tied to eight or nine inches of line, which were readily available at Slattery's General Store.

Grandpa greatly influenced my early attempts at fishing. He cautioned that a careful approach to the brook was best, but in our haste to be first to the bridge, we would tread too firmly, simply to be rewarded by a V-shaped wake heading for the nearest cover. Only after harnessing our childish enthusiasm and creeping the last ten or fifteen feet, were we able to grab glimpses of the true trophies in the stream, the wily and elusive brook trout.

To catch these speckled beauties I needed to update my homemade equipment. Though it was nearly 70 years ago, I clearly remember purchasing that first fly rod—a three-piece split-bamboo rod that cost twelve dollars, a princely sum to a child in those days. A Pflueger Progress fly reel,

some oiled fly line, an aluminum leader box, and some catgut leaders completed the basic outfit. Now I was ready to do some serious fishing.

While I enjoyed fishing with my cousins and friends, most were not as enthusiastic as I was about the sport. Enter Charlie Morris, son of the new owner of nearby Tinger Farm. The two of us spent hours visiting the many local spring-fed brooks known to contain native brook trout. Our favorite was Tinger's Brook, which housed decent-sized brookies. I can't tell you how many times we fished together and caught nothing, but then came the day when the dry spell was broken and I became a lifelong trout fishing addict.

The day started out like every other fishing day. With rods already strung and hooks carefully hidden by fat garden worms, Charlie and I carefully walked the streambanks, dropping our baits into any place that looked deep enough to hold trout. At first we had no luck, but then we noticed a small, almost hidden runoff to the right of the main channel. Ten feet upstream was a circular pool, ten or eleven feet across, and ringed with watercress. The water was crystal clear. With no more anticipation than I'd had the previous ten times that day, I lowered a worm into the middle of the pool. As soon as the worm disappeared below the water's surface, a mighty brook trout sped out from the shelter of the watercress, seized the baited hook, and immediately tried to regain the weedy den from which he'd come. A reflexive yank on the rod, and I had the first of my trout treasures flipping on the bank.

Measuring the fish to make sure it was legal, Charlie and I couldn't help but admire the light-blue-surrounded red spots

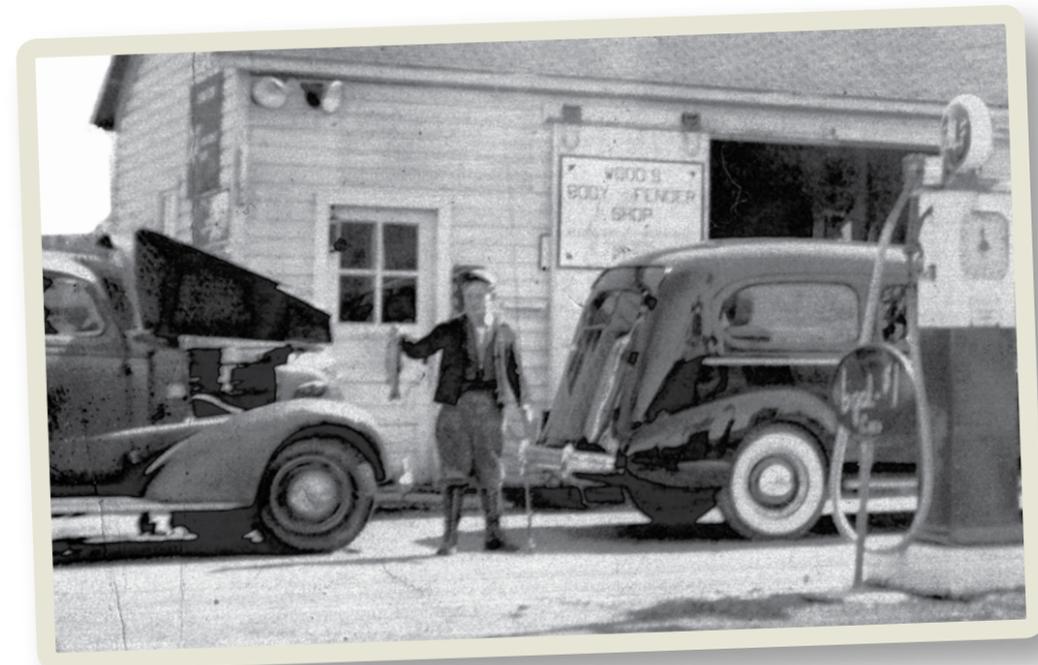
on the sides of our quarry. It was a special moment, made even better by the anticipation of a fine fish dinner.

Funny how I can't remember as vividly the landing of my second, third and fourth trout, but I know that the thrill never lessened. With each outing, I became more adept at approaching the brook, and more proficient at catching fish. This led to many multi-fish days, and one of my first lessons in conservation.

Arriving home one early afternoon with four or five fish on an improvised stringer, Grandpa asked if I'd left any fish in the stream. You see, in the mid-1930s, the idea of leaving a few for the next time wasn't really thought about, and an even harder concept for a kid to embrace after spending so much time and effort to catch the fish in the first place. But the question made me stop and think and soon I found myself releasing my catch more often than not.

When I was in high school, I caught my first really big trout, a sixteen-inch rainbow. Mike Tinger was nearby with his camera to capture me with my trophy. While I've caught and recorded my share of trophies since then, Mike's picture is still one of my favorites because it reminds me of how I got hooked on fishing, and developed a lifelong interest in conservation.

An avid outdoorsman, 82-year-old **Ed Bang** spent many years fishing and hunting on the acreage he and wife Jeri owned in Orange County. Ed continues to enjoy trout fishing, setting aside time to throw a line in Beer Kill and Sandberg creeks during his yearly northern visit from Florida.



The author, Ed Bang, holding up his prized rainbow trout in April 1941.