

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

Fly Fishing with Dad

by Emily Selleck

My father always wore a fedora and a bow tie when he fished the Ausable—or any river, for that matter. He carried a wicker creel and a wooden net, and his bamboo rods—a Payne, a Hardy, and a Leonard, had been handed down to him by his father.

When I was ten, Dad took me to Beaver Meadow Pond on the East Branch of the Ausable to teach me how to fish for browns. I watched him cast, counting out loud on the back cast, “One...” and holding it for “two, three...” and “four” on the forecast. I swear nothing moved but his forearm from the elbow, back and forward, from 10 o’clock to 2 o’clock. The fly landed perfectly, exactly where he wanted it, without a ripple, then sunk slowly to where a brown trout was waiting. A swirl of gin-clear water, a brief tussle, and the trout was artfully scooped out. Now, it was my turn. “Think like a trout,” he said; that was his only advice.

I took the rod and looked out over the still water.

“Think like a trout. Count One, Two, Three, and Four,” ran through my mind as I tried to emulate the man standing by my side. On the count of “Four,” I cast forward with such vigor my feet slipped out from under me, and, to my great chagrin, I found myself underwater.

“Well, that’s the right idea,” my father said, as he pulled me up on shore. “Try again.”

On my next attempt, I kept my feet, but my line landed in a heap, causing the water to break apart in noisy ripples. There were many more attempts that day, and almost all had their inglorious moments. I was sure the fish were laughing. But I was as certain as my father was patient that eventually, I would land one.

*Now, it was my turn.
“Think like a trout,”
he said; that was
his only advice.*

Long shadows of late afternoon had spread across the pond when at last I hooked a brown. My heart was

pounding. I was so afraid it would get off the hook that I waded in to try to net it, forgetting that I must “Keep the tip up” as my father was calling out to me. Waist deep in water, and with the rod being all of nine feet long, that was no easy matter. But I did it! And soon the fish was in my net.

“Were you thinking like a trout?” my father asked as we walked back to the cottage.

“I was thinking I want dinner,” I answered.

“Well, that’s the right idea,” he replied.

Emily Selleck’s essay was a winner in DEC’s Great Stories from the Great Outdoors contest. To view other winning entries, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/69643.html



Dad fishing the Ausable in 1954.