

TEN & TWO

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TEN & TWO

PORTRAITS

The CATSKILLS

IN THIS AND MANY FUTURE ISSUES OF TEN AND TWO there is distinctive folio titled *Portrait*. This section of the magazine delivers a unique view into a person, a town, an area, a lifestyle or a niche. It does not suggest a detailed examination of the subject but a wider brush stroke into the realm of personalities, philosophies, destinations and general takes on the fly-fishing journey. *Portrait* includes a combination of quotes, random observations or quick thoughts chronicled in a notebook or recorder. Not complete stories but a series of ideas and reflections—when woven together and in context to the actual *portrait*—help define the subject. In a sense, each subject remains perpetually incomplete as a work in progress. Some of the people highlighted are famous. Some not. Some are long gone. Some just got started. But certainly they are all knitted into the fabric of the fly-fishing journey.

The *portrait* in this issue of TEN AND TWO provides a particular version and composite view of the Catskills at a single moment in time. *Enjoy the moment.*



ED VAN PUT

AH, THE REIGNING GODFATHER OF the Catskills. Author of “[The Beaverkill](#)” and “[Trout Fishing In The Catskills](#),” Van Put is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge and respect for the area. When it comes to Catskill academia, he’s the source you footnote at the bottom of the page. As he walks around Roscoe, New York, his presence is a combination of your favorite uncle, a wild eyed elf, and the final authority on the subject. Those who have opinions that differ from his concerning the nature and quality of the Catskill experience might also know him as stubborn as a dirt mule.

At the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) this was the guy who negotiated and slogged through all the governmental regulations, and personally oversaw the purchase of 52 miles of public fishing access on Catskill Rivers—every single bit of it for the public good, as opposed to the good of any private interest.

“We paid \$300-a-mile for public access in the old days,” he said. “Today the price is closer to \$50,000 for that same mile. People will be able to enjoy and experience the fruits of those labors forever. That is a great source of satisfaction to me. We did some good and it’s never going away.”

Since Ed retired, there is no one left who champions the public good in the same manner. Think about that the next time you park your car at a public fishing site. Despite being away from the working world these days, his mind still flows through those rivers he once worked to protect.

“My biggest fear for the Catskills now resides with the potential for flooding and the issues related to drilling for natural gas,” he said. “These issues will change the future of the area. When it comes to flooding, people can be foolish way too often. They build on the flood plane and then want us to protect them

“I have no problem with people keeping fish, but the rules would be different if I were in charge. You can keep all the fish you want, but you have to eat them on the riverbank. You can’t take any home with you. I like that idea.”

or change the natural path of the river to make way for them. Mother Nature doesn’t listen to them, and lots of times these people don’t listen period. It’s not that I didn’t think things would ultimately change. You would just think people would care and think about what they’re doing before they cut a swath through the countryside. Invoices have a way of coming due. I worry about that.”

As for the health of the fish, Ed has no concerns. He’s more worried about the disregard for streamside courtesy that was once so widespread on the water.

“Harry Darbee told me he never caught a 20-inch trout,” he said. “A 20-inch trout is commonplace now. In the old days at the Antrim Lodge, nobody was catching huge trout like what we have now. If I had one last stream to fish, I think I’d head to the East Branch of the Delaware. The fish have more room to move and they’re stronger. I just wish people would be more polite. The average angler is much less polite than they were years ago. I mean, hell, some of these guys can really cast and they’re good fishermen. Why can’t they be polite as well?”

Never short on interesting solutions to angling issues, Ed offered up yet

another unique opinion, this time regarding creel limits.

“I have no problem with people keeping fish, but the rules would be different if I were in charge,” he said. “You can keep all the fish you want, but you have to eat them on the riverbank. You can’t take any home with you. I like that idea. A rather nice compromise actually.”

I took a portrait of Ed on the river bank at the spot where it’s generally agreed the first dry fly was fished in the United States. In the image, Ed appears to me as an elegant man with a playful heart that’s firmly embedded in the Catskills. He seems a part of the landscape—just as it should be.

Ed Van Put is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge and respect for the area. When it comes to Catskill academia, he’s the source you footnote at the bottom of the page.

IF YOU HAPPEN INTO THE CATSKILLS by chance, step outside for a moment. Just say Art Lee's name out loud. The wind will begin to blow, the ground to shake. Art Lee is a seismic personality.

From the early '70s to the early '90s, an even-handed look at Art Lee suggests that he was pretty much the published face of Catskill fly fishing, as well as one of the world's acknowledged experts on Atlantic salmon. He's published four books on the sport, written countless articles, and generally held court out of his house in Roscoe, New York. Too, he's probably pissed off more people than you and I combined. That's the nature of lightning rods: They tend to work best in thunderstorms and tornadoes.

It's just that from the beginning he never much cared for diplomacy or being oblique. He spoke what he believed to be the truth and that's never all that popular a thing to do. His daily writing beat was the Catskills. He and Ed Van Put were it. Ed spent his days at the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC); Art was usually fishing.

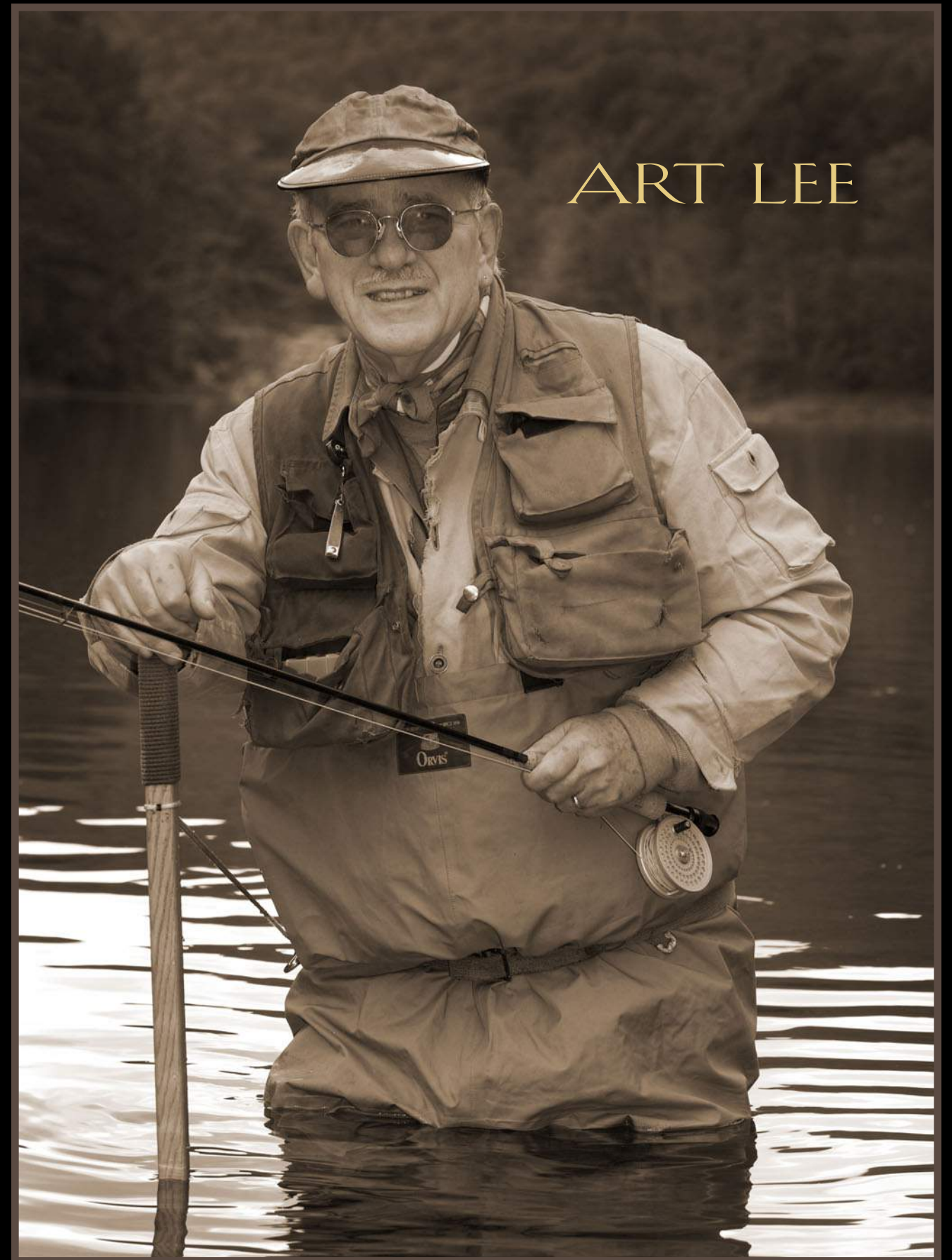
He began as the Outdoor Editor of the *Albany Times Union* in 1968. He knew Joe Brooks, Al McLane and Curt Gowdy personally. In the '70s and 80's, he was perhaps the major contributor to [Fly Fisherman](#), then the fly-fishing magazine of record and became their Editor at Large. Art also wrote for *Sports Illustrated*, *Sports Afield*, *National Geographic* and too many others to name. He posted more than one hundred columns for the [Atlantic Salmon Journal](#), and he guided Jimmy Carter.

You get the point. As a writer, he could distill experience to its essential points. It's much harder than it sounds.

With his wife and photographer, Kris, he maintained a perpetual open house. Artists, writers, actors, politicians, anglers and crazies of every stripe—with Kris never knowing who was coming to dinner or how many to cook for. He gathered a lively crowd about him and the evenings became events. He and Kris had more cats than Hemingway in Key West. Art invariably made an entrance, dressed to kill with a perfectly colored scarf and an Irish cap for an Irish dandy. He talked too loud and generally a bit over the edge. Not really polite. Brilliant, elegant, narcissistic to a fault and variously flawed, he left a wake that could take out beachfront property.

Speaking out early about what he detected as a threat to the habitat of the Catskills, he threw caution to the wind, caring first and foremost about the rivers. He used his perception of the truth to stand in the way of any perceived threat from any perceived source. Sticking to his guns cost him in the community. Today, he and Kris still live in the same house with fewer cats and fewer guests. The shadows are longer these days, and possibly a bit darker. Yet, as any who have known him well will tell you, Art Lee was really something to see. No matter the turbulence he raised in those valleys, the Catskills ultimately are the better for Art Lee being at his post.

ART LEE





THE WOMAN FLYFISHERS CLUB

FISHING CLUBS HAVE BEEN AROUND a long time on Catskill Rivers. A lot of history is tied up in those clubs. In January of 1932, Julie Fairchild, Frank Connell and Ashley Hewitt formed the Woman Flyfishers Club. It was a first of its kind in the Catskills. There were 33 founding members, all of whom grew up with fly fishing in their families. The men had clubs. With their first clubhouse on the Willowemoc in 1936, the women finally had their own. From the beginning, and to this day, the Woman Flyfishers Club has been held together by the common bond of fly fishing.

Carolyn Wilson is the current president. Recently, she and another member, Vicky Linville, took a moment to talk about the makeup of the current club.

“All of us are totally dedicated to the conservation and sport of fly fishing,” Wilson said. “When we get together, we don’t sit around talking about whom we know in Philadelphia, or who might be

doing what with whom. We’re way too busy fly fishing or talking about fly fishing.”

If a woman is looking for a knitting club or a place to gossip, this is not the club to join. These ladies are fishing, and they’re not fooling around. They appear to have a great time together.

The new clubhouse sits on the Beaverkill’s Mountain Pool, made famous by the likes of Sparse Grey Hackle and Irma Shein. In his book, *“Fishless Days, Angling Nights,”* Sparse writes about a guy who goes to the Mountain Pool and catches a huge trout on a loaf of bread soaked in scotch—one of the all-time great fishing stories. In the book *“Catskill Rivers,”* Mac Francis writes about Irma Shein—“The Widow of Mountain Pool”—who would invite anglers in for coffee and sometimes a little more, depending on the situation. To this day, details remain sketchy as to that “situation.”

“When we get together, we don’t sit around talking about whom we know in Philadelphia, or who might be doing what with whom. We’re way too busy fly fishing.”

A new member needs to be invited by another member, and sponsored by three, who will testify in writing as to the character of the sportswoman.

The current Women Flyfishers Club has a different kind of situation going on at their clubhouse. Their situation appears to be focused on nothing but fly fishing and having a great time. With 75 members from around the world (and a number in their 70s and 80s), the possibilities seem endless.

“We’re a private club,” Wilson said. “A new member needs to be invited by another member, and sponsored by three, who will testify in writing as to the character of the sportswoman. We’re a close-knit group and we want to know that all the members are compatible.”

In the old days (now long gone), new members had to bring “private water” along with them when they joined the club. Today, daughters often follow their mothers into the club and there are accomplished anglers as well as novices amongst the members.

“As a group, we’re extremely concerned about conservation issues,” Linville said. “The current situation with the potential for drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale is a tremendous worry for everyone in the Catskills. Hydrofracking has the potential to do serious damage. This is a fragile ecosystem. We need to be very cautious as we move forward.”

A small group of club members

recently gathered at the West Branch Angler for a Delaware River outing. Viewed from a distance, the group appeared to be your normal raucous group of road-tripping women. A closer view reveals a much larger force of nature: These ladies are going fly fishing. There’s no doubt about it.

DAVE BRANDT

JOAN WULFF ONCE SAID THAT DAVE Brandt is a trout wearing pants. That ought to do it. There's not much else to say.

Brandt joined the [Wulff School of Fly Fishing](#) in 1987 and is now a senior casting instructor. He's a cross between Buddy Holly and Theodore Roosevelt. His dog is named Peggy Sue. I think he'd prefer Holly to Roosevelt, but that's just a dog's guess.

An engineer by trade, he's a pool player by distraction and inclination.

"I wish I didn't love pool so much, because I've wasted a hell of a lot of time trying to figure it out," he said.

He played at the now-defunct Ames Billiard Academy where "The Hustler" was filmed. He walks a trout stream like Jackie Gleason's Minnesota Fats walked around a table full of stripes and solids. Everything is perfect. Thought out. Fluid grace. Save energy for when you need it. In the early morning hours when Paul Newman's character, Eddie Felson, was all worn out, washed up and exhausted from hours at the table, Fats would wash his hands, put on some cologne and a suit coat and say, "Fast Eddie, lets play some pool." That's Dave.

"I taught myself to fish," Brandt said. "Little brook trout on Evans Creek in the Catskills. I still love them. More fly fishermen should start with worms. It teaches you about drift and drag and tells you where the fish are."

He thinks like fish. He knows them.

"It's more about the fishing than the fish," he said. "The most important thing for a young fly fisherman to learn is how to be patient—how not to do something. The old timers had patience. They did more with less. If you learn to look and listen before you act, you will succeed."

He tied flies commercially for years and, in the recent past, did custom jobs for customers all over the world. His business card reads: Flies Tied While You Wait. You might wait six months, but you'll get them, and they're the real deal.

Brandt learned to tie Catskill flies from Art Flick and Elsie and Harry Darbee, and those lessons transcended fly fishing.

"Catskill flies are all about symmetry," he said.

Dave Brandt's life is symmetrical, classic, unchanging, old school. This guy fishes brook trout at Minipi Camps in Labrador and coats his dry flies with a mixture of kerosene and paraffin. That's old school and then some—something his old friend Lee Wulff used to do.

"I met Lee in '78 at the Darbee house," he said. "A dinner I'll never forget. Lee taught me that this fishing thing is just a big wonderful game that never ends."

Fly fishing or pool, Dave Brandt came to play and, for him, the game never ends.



JOHN CLARK (J.C.)



YOU CAN SEE THE URGENCY IN HIS eyes. It's there all day. He's searching. Still a little unsure. He knows enough to know he doesn't know anything and he wants to keep it that way 'til he's an old man and beyond. It keeps an edge on him that doesn't go away. He's looking for a path that never becomes completely clear—all this in the eyes of a 22-year-old Delaware River fishing guide. He's always hungry, and never quite sure.

Talking to J.C. while he's guiding you in a drift boat is a bit like talking to two people at once. One of those guys is listening and looking at you; the other guy is listening and looking at something else. There's this second level of consciousness that listens and watches the river, waiting for some subtle change in the texture of the moment signifying the presence of a fish. Because he's so young, all the urgency and chaos sits right on the surface as he guides. Right now he's a fish bum. His car is full of half-eaten sandwiches, bits of tossed out leader material and busted up soda cans. Nothing else exists but the fishing. When he becomes older, it will be much more subtle and organized, but for the moment, he's hard-wired for trout and it's all right there in his eyes. It's a thing of beauty.

"I want to go to law school sooner or later," he said. "I need to find a way to make some money and meet some women, and have at least part of my life be a little more sophisticated than a fish bum. But the passion for the fish will never go away. It's there for good."

While he can, and before he settles down into a life of bar exams and marital

vows, he's trying to take advantage of being a semi-free fishing guide, living in one of the premier trout destinations in the country.

"I love being in the Catskills with all the potential that's available," he said. "I've been fishing for 11 years, guiding for two, and I never want to know it all. I always think there's something new I can learn."

J.C. sits in an interesting spot. He's surrounded by the history of the Catskills and, in a sense, he carries the torch from the likes of Norris, Gordon, Flick, Darbee, Van Put, and that entire lineage from all those classic years. Still, it's not then. It's now. And when you see J.C. work, you get a sense of what's really going on.

"I just love watching someone get excited catching trout in my boat," he said. "I'm new at this, but it never gets old watching someone who really enjoys being out on the water. I have no use for clients who approach the fishing as an ego sport and take a measure of arrogance in the whole thing. I'll take a newcomer who is excited about the possibilities and willing to learn something new any day of the week. Sometimes I get as excited as they do when they catch a fish. I just love it. With those kind of people, I learn just as much as they do."

You get a sense that he knows this is what we have. Right now. Right this minute. These are the good old days, and we'd better be happy about it, and we'd better take them while we can. It won't get any better any time soon. J.C. knows.

You can see it in his eyes.



MIKE KIMBALL

A BUDDHIST MIGHT SUGGEST selflessness is everything. Mike Kimball has that aura about him; his presence a light breeze, a 1,000-watt smile. It's always about you, never him. Sooner or later you begin noticing—through a movement or comment, a gesture or thought—*“this guy knows a helluva lot more than he's showing.”* In the words of a friend of mine, “Mike's the supreme fish hawk.”

In his book “Outliers,” Malcolm Gladwell suggests that genius is really the sum of many, many hours of hard work. The number he came up with is 10,000. There are people who would suggest Kimball put in his 10,000 hours of fly fishing for trout before he was 25. Some might call it maniacal or obsessive. To him, it's simply his life.

In the '70s he cut his teeth on the LeTort in Pennsylvania—four days a week for maybe seven years. (You counting the

hours?) The LeTort processes some of the most difficult fly water in the world. Some fish he could not take unless he cast ahead of them in the act of rising or else they'd spook. A holding fish was simply impossible to catch. It had to be moving. Most of the fishing was done on his knees. For seven years. Guerilla warfare.

It's the same now. He fishes the West Branch of the Delaware four days a week—every day that it's fishable. For decades now. Behind his house he designed a casting course, similar to a putt-putt golf course, but this one set up for impossible casts: around corners, under branches, against walls, into coffee cans set at unlikely distances. He's spent hours on streams practicing casting under trees with a bit of yarn instead of a hook, so it won't catch in the trees. Ten-thousand hours.

This guys knows a lot more than he's showing. In the words of a friend of mine, “Mike's the supreme fish hawk.”

A fishing friend said, “I've seen him do things on a trout stream that were flat out impossible. Guides on the Henry's Fork would take him fishing on their days off, then literally diagram the trout he caught.”

“I study and I learn and I apply myself to the process,” he said. “If fish aren't rising where I'm fishing, I literally pretend to find a fish in a terrible lie and I practice casting over and over and over to that mythical fish. I miss a lot of fish. If I miss a fish, I will re-cast to the spot over and over again. A basketball player might shoot thousands and thousands of free throws before getting to the championship game. Fly fishermen do not tend to do that; I do. In business, I've got a thing about details—same thing with fishing dry flies.”

Given this level of self imposed difficulty, most people will simply say, “Screw this, I'm gonna go where I can catch fish.” Mike Kimball stays. And works it out. Another very well-respected fishing friend said, “I've seen him do things on a trout stream that were flat out impossible. Guides on the Henry's Fork in Idaho would take him fishing on their days off, then literally diagram the trout he caught.”

When asked to explain his approach, Mike said, “Honor your mistakes and learn from them. Refuse to let those mistakes alter your purpose. I could not find the solutions to many of my fishing-related issues in fly-fishing publications, so I had to find my own solutions. I sug-

gest you find your own as well.”

Yet for all his mastery, this unassuming man shuns publicity and never speaks out of line. Uninterested in self-promotion (this interview, a gift to me, was uncomfortable for him), he vastly prefers to fish by himself.

“There's a fish I'm working on now,” he said. “He's been pushing water around for some time. I've never seen him, but I know he's there. I glimpsed his tail tonight and I won't forget it. He's a truly grand fish. I know him.”

That he does.

JIM KRUL

AS THE DIRECTOR OF THE [Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum](#) in Livingston Manor, New York, Jim Krul is a marketing guy with a terminal fly-fishing disease. He keeps the past close by, and the future even closer. The mission of the museum is, in fact: “Preserve the past. Protect the present. Promote the future.” He sees to it.

Elsie Darbee was building the museum in 1977, and Jim was close by. He worked for Guinness for 10 years and then ran his own shop, English Angling Trappings. Then there were the fly-fishing television shows and travel hosting and such. In 2005, he took the gig at the museum and never looked back.

“In a nutshell, I spend my whole day looking for money,” he said. “Occasionally, I look after my children—wild brook trout on the fly.”

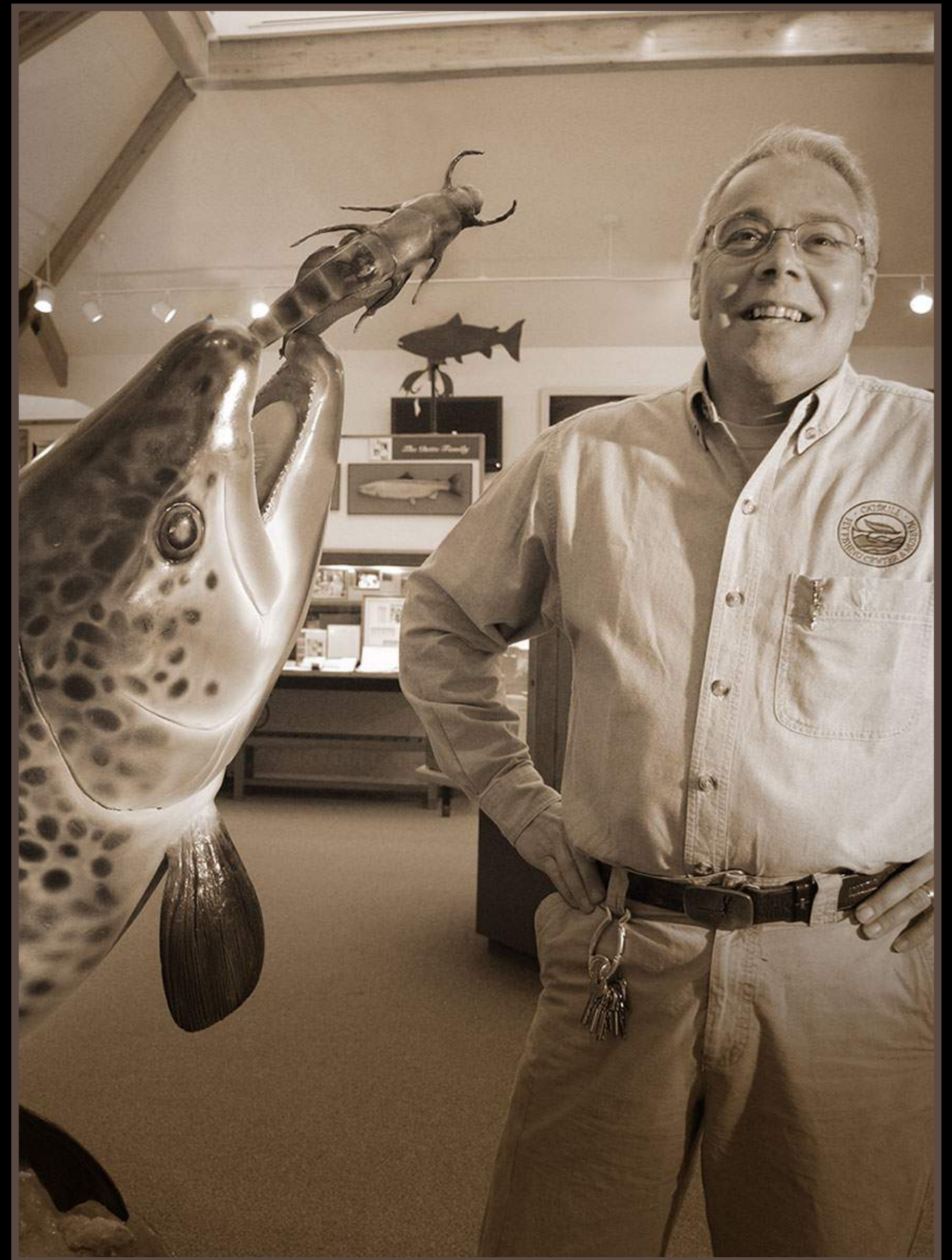
Ernie Schwiebert once said, “There are some museums that house dead things. The Catskill Fly Fishing Museum is alive and always changing.”

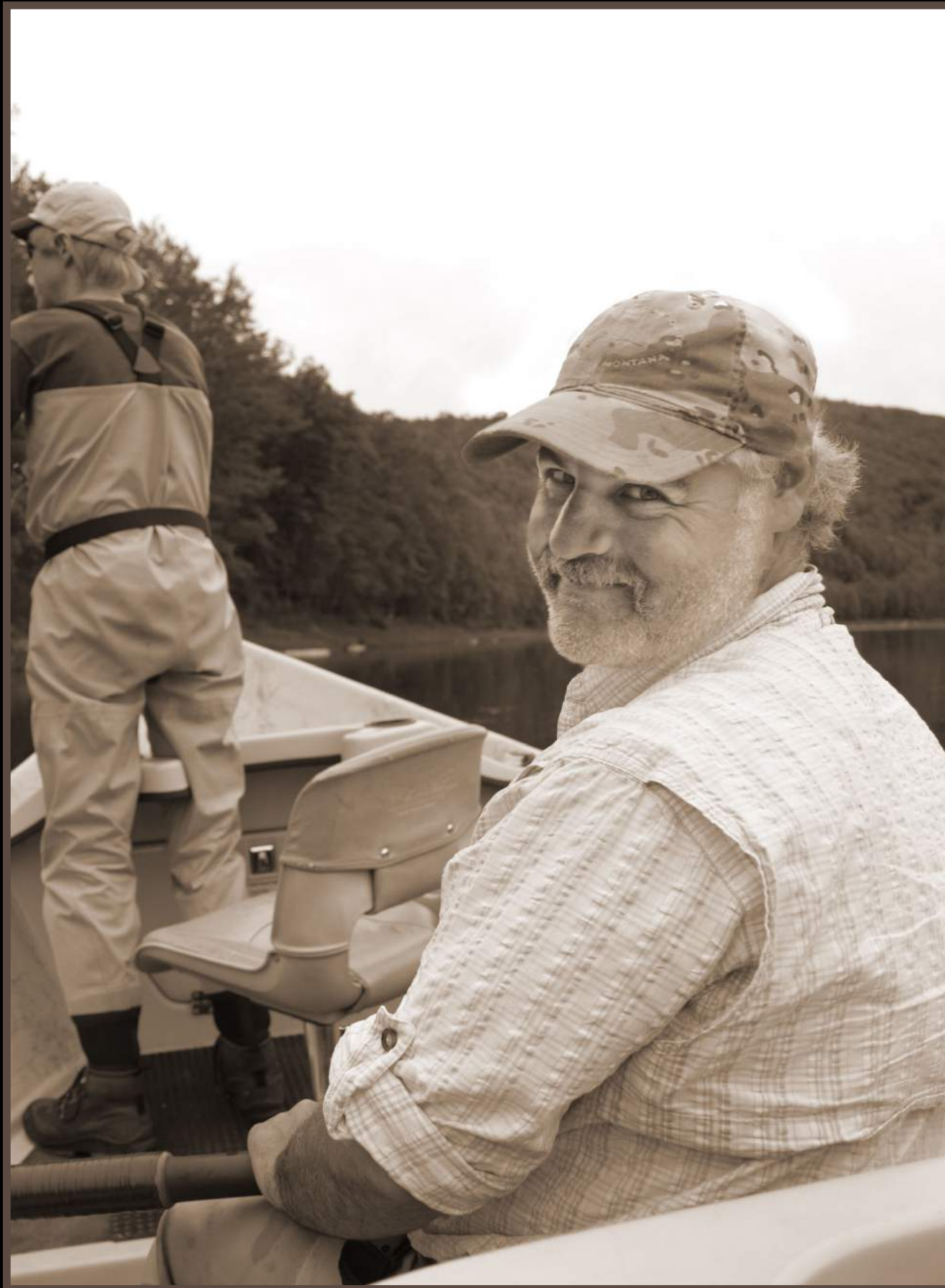
And it’s true. They have classes and lectures; guest fly-tiers and rod makers; kids running around learning to respect the fish; clubs and meetings; conclaves and videos; books and art; history and ecology programs; outreach programs and education programs; and on top of it all, Krul is a funny guy running at full speed all the time.

“At the most basic of levels, we rock and roll here,” he said. “That’s what I’m talking about.”

With each guest tier, with each new outreach program, and each meeting, Krul understands where the real focus should be: the future. Without anyone to keep the angling pastime alive, decades of tradition and history and knowledge will go to waste. With Twitter and Facebook and iPods and Xboxes to compete with, Krul’s mission sometimes seems daunting, but he’s just the guy to take the challenge head-on.

“I look at what’s left and I know we’ve got a lot of work to do,” he said. “We lost a generation. All the guys from the golden age of fly fishing are fading. For a long while, people backed off on being outside and fly fishing. Heroes are tougher to come by right now. The only old classic Catskill fly tiers left really are Mary Dette Clark and Frank Kuttner. There are certainly great tiers and new folks coming on, and people want to live a healthy lifestyle and be outside, but we lost a generation. We’ve gotta connect with the kids. We need to show them the paths that opened up with fly-fishing. We need to give them a chance to be bigger than life.”





JOHN MILLER

“I STARTED FLY FISHING WHEN I was about 7 years old. Woodstock, New York, area. I taught myself—trial and error and books. Jack Smith took me under his wing and taught me a lot. In 1989, I started guiding part-time, full-time in 1995. Full tilt since then.”

John, who guides the Delaware system, has that sort of cocky edge to him that guides often carry about, but there’s a grace to it born of knowledge, patience and an ease with the environment. He has a presence that suggests he’s a teacher. What you see is what you appear to get.

“There are fewer fish than there were 15 years ago, but they’re bigger. I have a personal relationship with these fish. I work over them every day, year after year. You simply need to put in the time, friend to friend. As you get to know them, they get smarter and just a little farther away. Patience is the key here.”

People skills are a big deal in this business. Different clients every day, different agendas and expectations. As J.J. Cale sang in “Anyway the Wind Blows”: “Some like this, some like that, some don’t know where it’s at.”

How the hell do guides do this? The ones that succeed don’t burn out. So many expectations. Everyone says, “I just love being out on the water.” Really? I wonder. Keeping the energy and the

focus? That’s a full-time job.

“I actually think the clients have gotten better over the years,” he said. “The river treats all of us the same. It has a way of evening out. There are no experts in this boat. We’re all learning and we all need to be willing to look at things from a different perspective than our own—including myself. If a client just wants nothing but fish, fish and more fish I give them to another guide. I’m looking for people who want to bring up their game at the risk of losing once in a while. I’ve got no guarantees to hand out to anyone.”

Like most of the guides who spend their lives and make their living on the Delaware, John sees the river for what it is: a delicate and complex gift that he’s merely been lucky enough to have received.

“If I had one last day to fly fish, I’d be on the Main Stem of the Delaware,” he said. “Every single time I come down here, I’m rolling the dice. The bugs may not show down here and there simply is no guarantee, but the river here is beyond beautiful. It’s expansive and grand and epic in its proportion. It’s a big river. It engulfs you with its expanse—Mother Nature at her best. Throwing us curveballs and making us work.”



THE FLY-TIERS: MIKE VALLA, MARY DETTE CLARK AND JOE FOX

MARY DETTE CLARK, ALONG WITH her parents, Walt and Winnie Dette, helped write the original book on Catskill flies. She's the last of her kind. Joe Fox is Mary's grandson and he appears to be taking the reigns of the family business: [Dette Trout Flies](#). MikeValla took up the Catskill style and made it his own with his book, "[Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies](#)." The three good friends sat down together at the old Dette house and talked about their personal vision of the business and the style:

Mary Dette Clark: "I started tying when I was 23 and just married. My dad made me a portable tying table and I started professionally with my parents at 25. I really never got into the fishing part of it. It was all about the tying for me. My dad never cared that he was famous. It was business to him. The fame just sort of

followed my parents around. They became bigger than life. To them, it was simply a business they worked hard at. I feel exactly the same. It's a business."

Joe Fox: "I started coming here as a kid in the summer. I watched grandma Dette tie flies and I learned pretty fast."

MDC: "I remember the first time Joe said, 'How do you tie such and such?' He picked it up so quickly. All he had to do was watch it tied a couple of times and he knew."

JF: "I think what makes a good fly-tier is how they look at their flies. Good fly-tiers look at their flies differently. Not just as a means of catching a fish. They're never satisfied. You can always find a fault with a fly. There's no such thing as a perfect fly."

Good fly-tiers look at their flies differently. Not just as a means of caching fish. They're never satisfied. You can always find a fault with a fly. There's no such thing as a perfect fly.

It's the history and the passion and tradition that drives me. Recreating classic patterns. It's an incredible history. I feel an obligation to it.

Mike Valla: "I took a bus up here. Used my lunch money to do it. I read an article on the charmed circle of the Catskills in 'Outdoor Life' and I just walked off the bus in Roscoe. I saw the Trout Flies sign on the house and ran over. Winnie Dette took me in, gave me a few trout flies and piece of pie. I was 15 years old. I caught some trout that same day. Walt Dette gave me \$5 so I could eat on the bus trip home. I spent it on fly tying material. Figured I could eat later. Tying has been in my blood ever since. I started tying professionally in 1967."

JF: "You can look at Catskill flies from many different directions. Everybody did it differently. My family looked at it one way, Art Flick looked at it another, and the Darbees had their version. My family wasn't trying to be artists; they did it to supplement their income. Walt said, 'I tie for meat and potatoes.'"

MDC: "There is only one way to tie a fly. It's the way my parents tied a fly. If I only had one fly I could tie for the rest of my life, it would be a Quill Gordon or a Coffin Fly."

MV: "I tie for the passion of it. I don't tie commercially at all. I just enjoy the process. The book started a while back as an exploration of the Catskill school of

fly tying. It just went from there to an exploration of what constitutes a Catskill dry fly and it did not settle the issue at all. It rather depends on the tier and the time as to what constitutes a Catskill fly. The same fly-tier might change from year to year."

JF: "I think there's an important separation between the fishing and the tying. The reality is that you don't need much of a fly to catch a fish."

MDC: "Joe's flies have changed because he's a fisherman. I'm a classic tier, a straight line from A to B. They expect that out of me. Joe is a fisherman tier and the line is not quite so straight."

MV: "It's the history and the passion and the tradition that drives me. Recreating classic patterns—some lost. Looking back at the craft of it. It's an incredible history. I feel an obligation to it."

JF: "I'll always enjoy tying Catskill flies, but I don't sense a responsibility to carry on a tradition at all. Traditions change. People want traditions to stay the same and they don't. They adapt to the economic climate and are reborn as something new. I love and respect my family history, but my name is Joe."

JUST FOR FUN, LET'S SAY WE'RE lucky enough to live to be 93 years old. What do you suppose we'd be doing tonight besides resting our collective behinds on a comfortable something or other and watching some sort of rerun on television?

At the time of this writing, Sy Rosenthal is 93, and there's a better-than-even shot he'll be fly fishing on the Delaware River this evening, watching big browns sip hatching mayflies. Then he'll have dinner in the bar with his buddies and spin tales of a life beyond measure, a life beyond reasonable expectation, a life lived to the fullest with a lot of damn fish released and accounted for. He'll be fishing. You can count on it. Paul "Bear" Bryant died soon after retiring from coaching at Alabama. In like manner, Sy Rosenthal can't live without fly fishing, so he won't.

When asked what the secret is living to 93 and still be fishing, he simply replied: "More fishing. It will keep you alive."

Somewhere, somehow, all of this had to have a beginning, and Rosenthal can pinpoint just where it all began. Thing is, it's not too far from where he is today.

"Thirteen years old—fishing for trout with a fly rod and a worm," he said. "Sears rod for \$1.50 and a reel for 65 cents. Someone had lost a fly in a tree. I took it off, put it on my line and immediately caught a fish. Right now I can take you to the exact tree where I found that fly. That was 80 years ago. I've never stopped. Never will!"

He started coming to the Beaverkill in the '50s. He'd drive up on Friday and hit the evening hatch. Prior to the

Delaware he stayed a lot at the Antrim.

"I knew all those guys," he said. "The famous ones, I knew them. They've been dead for a while and my memory's shot. I don't remember their names."

Sure, he's traveled and experienced waters far from home, but something draws him back to the Catskills, a place that continually surprises him.

"I've been all over the world from Labrador to Tasmania," he said. "Fished every piece of water in between. My favorite of them all? Right here: The Delaware. My favorite fly? A Rusty Spinner. No fish biting? Put on a Rusty Spinner. My biggest fish here was last year. I was 92. Five pound brown on a 0-weight. Took me 30 years to do it, but I get just as much pleasure out of a 10-inch brook trout, mind you. It's the experience I'm after. Not the fish. Let me tell you about fishing with Ted Williams. It's a journey, baby. Not a destination. I'm a dry-fly man. That's fishing."

Though advancing in age and experience, the one thing Sy Rosenthal doesn't lack is youthful exuberance. And what advice might youngsters glean from a man so well-versed in fly fishing?

"I've been a lot of places and made a lot of friends out on the water," he said. "A lot of decent people make this journey—a lot of friendships. Most of them are dead. Not a lot of people fly fishing when they're 93. I go with guides in boats cause I don't wade so well any more. I've had a lot of fun. I certainly didn't do it to be a bad-ass fisherman. I did it for the fun; I suggest you do the same, young fella." ©

