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The Loop

THE JOURNAL OF FLY CASTING PROFESSIONALS



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Not So Much
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Cover photo courtesy of Caitlin Beshears

From the Editorial Director

When was the last time you thought about nothing?

Most of us reading this journal can recall sitting at the vise, spinning thread, and lashing feathers to hook-after-hook, then, during a coffee or bathroom break, a glance at the time indicates four hours have passed in a breath. Likewise, on the river, we wonder why the sun is already setting and the take-out is looming when it seems we were standing at the put-in rigging rods only a moment ago. Where was my mind wandering during these hours? I know that looking back I can't recall a single conscious thought.

My usual habit is constant discursive thinking, and I used to greatly undervalue these idle times as wasteful, static, and un conducive to growth; this is how Americans are conditioned to view rest after all. It wasn't until I came across the research from Baird et al. (2012) that I started to appreciate these sessions of thoughtlessness. Their research team stated that "engaging in an undemanding task during an incubation period led to substantial improvements

in performance on previously encountered problems... Engaging in simple external tasks that allow the mind to wander may facilitate creative problem solving" (p. 1117). At last! A research-backed excuse to allow our minds to be lazy!

Now, with this season of pandemic, political unrest, and the general demands of adulthood that we all have to face, these moments of idleness never come naturally as they used to. I have to go out and claim them; I have to carve out time to be idle to allow the mind to rest. We are fortunate enough to have the perfect activity to achieve this state of wandering.

So, in this season, boot up, spool up, tie on your confidence pattern, and spend a few hours thinking about nothing.

Brian DeLoach - Editorial Director

WANTED

We're calling for article ideas from all CICP members, all casting instructors, and all fly fishing photographers worldwide. Please email your ideas and photos to:

loop@flyfishersinternational.org



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A Better Roll Cast Tool

Jody Martin, CI

Of the 15 performance tasks currently required of a CI candidate, the roll casts (Tasks 9, 10, and 11) are not the most difficult. It is unusual for a candidate to fail on the basis of these tasks alone. However, confusion exists as to where and how those tasks should be demonstrated and practiced. Ideally, of course, the roll casts should be performed on water, as grass simply does not provide enough friction to serve as the anchor for the line, and other surfaces (gravel, asphalt, etc.) can damage the fly line. In an earlier article in *The Loop* (Dec. 2017 – Feb. 2018), readers were even told that “water will be required for both CI and MCI exams as of 3/1/18” (emphasis mine). But that requirement did not come to pass, and that statement was not corrected in any subsequent issues of *The Loop*, potentially leading to confusion among CI and MCI candidates as to how they should practice the roll cast and what the expectations would be.

When water is not available, which is true for the majority of testing venues, a tool to simulate the friction of water on the fly line is allowed and advised. But the type of tool is left up to the student. In the pages of the CI test itself, we read that “It is recommended that the roll casting tasks take place on water” and later “If water is unavailable, a tool may be used to simulate water tension.” Exactly what kind of tool is not given. In the more comprehensive CI Study Guide, it is recommended in the General Tips section that a “roll-cast anchor tool for grass” be included in a candidate’s practice kit. In the description of Task 9, the candidate is told to “Be sure to practice your roll casts on grass using one of the many different types of roll-cast

anchor tools in case water is not available during your test.” But, here, too, the “many different types of roll-cast anchor tools” are not described or referenced.

A quick web search using “roll cast anchor tool” or “roll cast tool” yields a variety of suggestions and photographs. Some instructors use a book, placing the (yarn) fly between the pages to simulate the friction of water on the line. Other suggestions include the similar use of a clipboard, a piece of Velcro® (which necessitates a fly also made of, or at least adhering to, Velcro®), a heavy towel, or even having an assistant stand on the tippet during the roll cast. Most of the proposed tools can be described as variations of a “grooved stick” model. This is usually a simple stick or dowel with one end sharpened to stick into the ground and with the other end modified by cutting a notch or groove into it. The groove allows the leader and fly to be placed into the end of the dowel prior to each cast. Simple, effective, cheap, and easy to make, these roll cast tools are a common component of the practice kits of CI students.

Variations on the grooved stick are common. One example is on the Sexyloops website (<http://www.sexyloops.com/2014.shtml?0716>), where instead of a wooden stick the plastic handle of a screwdriver is used, with different width grooves cut into the handle to accommodate different tippet diameters. The slotted screwdriver handle is also demonstrated by Mary Ann Dozer, CBOG in her video on roll casts: <https://flyfishingpursuits.org/zoom-video/roll-cast-tool/>

A Better Roll Cast Tool *continued ...*

Dozer's video also includes a variation of the grooved stick model for use on concrete or gravel (see below); this variation includes a relatively wide and heavy metal base that sits flat on the ground (avoiding the need to insert a tool into the ground), with a short section of PVC or other material extending upward, with a groove cut into it to allow placement of the leader and fly.

One obvious disadvantage to the grooved stick model is that the caster must reset the fly in the tool after each and every cast. That involves only a short walk of some 16 to 18 feet (and back), but it nevertheless causes a disruption in the momentum of the practice session. Executing 50 roll casts in a single session would necessitate walking a minimum of 800 feet from the casting position out to the roll cast anchor tool and back, bending over each time to replace the leader in the groove before walking back to the casting position. In a typical hour-long practice session, it is easy to see how much this would cut into the available practice time.

A tool that allows the caster to remain in position, rather than resetting the fly in the tool at the end of each cast, is obviously preferable. This can be achieved with grooved stick models by securing the fly onto the roll cast tool with a rubber band or piece of tape, as was shown in Dozer's video. This setup allows the roll cast to proceed to the point where the outgoing loop can be seen and evaluated, and it allows the caster to repeat the cast as often as needed without resetting the tippet into the tool after every cast. The problem now is that the leader is prevented from completely rolling out, so that distance, accuracy, and a straight layout of the leader and fly cannot be demonstrated. A better solution, in my opinion, is a Y-shaped device that funnels the fly line from the wide end of the Y to the narrow point where the two arms of the Y are joined. This device

lets the caster reposition the fly repeatedly by casting from the same spot and allowing the leader to drag through the Y until the fly hangs up in the crevice between the two arms. Such a device was illustrated by MCI Mike Heritage here: <http://vimeo.com/12642763>.

The downside to these Y-shaped devices is that the tool is rather wide, overly flexible, a little awkward, and it does not travel well. If a wire coat hanger (which was my choice) is used to make the Y, the ends can poke through your luggage or your car's interior upholstery. Yet another solution is shown in a brief description and photograph on the Sexyloops site (from June 2014) at the same link given above. This design features a serrated strip of plastic that the author (Bernd Ziesche) nailed to a piece of wood. Instead of a single (but wide) Y-shape, as offered by the Mike Heritage-type of tool, the serrated border provides a wide range of smaller "targets" for the caster. Each serration has a narrow groove at the bottom, and when the line is pulled back the tippet should stop at the knot that connects it to the fly. That tool is very similar to, and an early version of, the one I describe here. To construct such a tool all you will need is:

Materials:

- One 18-inch piece of 1 x 2 wood,
- Two shorter 14-inch pieces of 1 x 1 wood, and
- One sheet of heavy, clear plastic approximately 14 inches long, 5 inches high, and 2 mm in thickness.

Tools: Wood glue, heavy shears, sandpaper

The two thinner pieces of wood are glued onto the larger wooden base such that they have a narrow gap between them of approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (Figs 1, 2). This gap allows you to insert the plastic sheet between the two thinner top pieces of wood and then remove it when you are ready to break it down again.

A Better Roll Cast Tool *continued...*

The gap can even be tapered slightly from one side to the other such that the side where you insert the plastic is wider; this allows the plastic sheet to slide firmly into place. This gap is also what allows the tool to be taken apart for storage or transport, an advantage over the earlier model where the plastic was nailed to the wood and rendered immovable.

The key to the tool's success is in the nature of the serrated plastic sheet (Fig. 3). Too brittle a plastic will shatter when you attempt to cut it, so a "softer" plastic is better. A softer plastic will also allow you to use light sandpaper to remove any sharp edges that could

damage your line or leader. Too thin a plastic will allow too much flexibility, whereas too thick a plastic will be difficult to cut with the shears. It should be transparent to allow you to see the fly when you have pulled it into place. I used the top or sides of plastic bins that have been discarded and are sometimes available for free from grocery stores; you can see the Rubbermaid® logo in one of my accompanying photographs. You might want to experiment to find the type and thickness of plastic that works best for you and that is readily available and affordable. I would also hope that you use every effort to locate discarded plastic rather than purchase something new for this purpose.

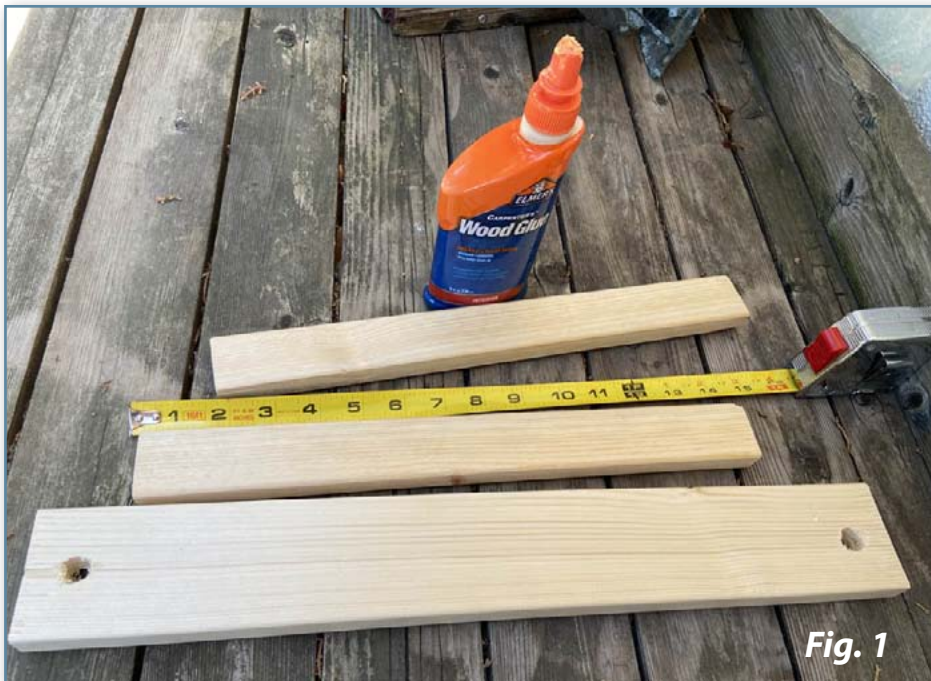


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

A Better Roll Cast Tool *continued...*

Use the heavy shears to cut wide serrations along the length of the plastic sheet, with the point of the V of each serration reaching down only a few inches so that you still have at least a 2-inch base of plastic (Fig. 3). At the bottom of each of the wide serrations, it is important to cut a narrower notch approximately 1/8 of an inch wide and about 1 inch deep (Fig. 4). It is this slot that stops the knot and fly at the end of your tippet and holds it in place during the first part of the roll cast (Fig. 5), releasing the fly once the line has moved past it in the forward direction toward the target.

The weight and relatively large surface area of the wooden base help keep the tool from moving on the grass or on any other flat surface.

You can drill a hole in either end of the wooden base for inserting a stake or other tool into the ground to further secure the tool in place, as seen in the figures, but I have not found it necessary to secure it other than by its own weight.

Advantages offered by this tool are several. First, and most importantly, it allows the caster to do repeated roll casts without having to reposition the fly after each cast, and each cast will extend to the full length of line that is out. The caster need not move his or her feet at all to accomplish 100 casts (or more) in a row. Second, it is inexpensive and requires few tools; the wood is cheap and most stores will even cut it to length for you, and the plastic (with luck) can



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

A Better Roll Cast Tool *continued ...*

be found in rubbish heaps. Third, it is lightweight (although all other roll cast anchor tools are even lighter). Fourth, it breaks down flat and travels easily. Fifth, it does not require being inserted into the ground (as the grooved sticks do), and so it can work on surfaces other than grass. In those rare cases where weather conditions mandate an indoor venue for the performance test, this is an important distinction. During my own exam, because of wind and rain in the forecast, there was a brief moment when it appeared that we might have to use an indoor basketball court for the performance tasks, where other roll cast tools (those needing to be inserted into the ground) would not have worked.



Fig. 5

I would have been in fairly good shape with mine. One potential problem with the tool is that the connection between fly line and leader will often hang up in the grooves when the line is retrieved, especially if a loop-to-loop connection is used instead of a nail knot. To avoid this problem, the caster should try to land the leader, rather than the heavier fly line, over the plastic serrations.

I have constructed only a few of these tools, and I am certain that improvements could be made. Instructors or candidates might wish to vary the width of the tool, the number and depth of the serrations, the type of plastic used, the width and stability of the base, or other parameters to personalize it to fit their needs. I would recommend that, whatever design the student prefers, he or she should make one early in their training and use it routinely to increase their level of comfort with the tool whenever demonstrating a roll cast on any surface other than water.

About the author:

Dr. Jody Martin, author of *The Spirituality of Fly Fishing*, is a marine biologist and Associate Vice President for Research at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. A member of Sierra Pacific Fly Fishers, he also hosts annual fly fishing retreats based on his book and has written for *TROUT* magazine, *Southwest Fly Fishing*, *Fly Fisherman*, *American Angler*, *Strung*, *American Fly Fishing*, and *California Fly Fisher*. He received his FFI Casting Instructor certification in 2020 and is the incoming Casting Lead for the Southwest Council of FFI.

CONCAVITY? NOT SO MUCH.

By Aitor Coterón

A “concave rod tip path” during the casting stroke is what lies behind the problem; at least, that is the most popular explanation about the tailing loop issue. Being a simplified view it may work at a basic level, reality is a bit different though.

Short cast/short stroke, long cast/long stroke; a very popular expression that makes a lot of sense. To send our fly to the target we must impart some speed to the fly line. For that we apply force to the rod butt, accelerating it along a given length.

As when driving our car, to get a relatively low speed we only need to accelerate along a short distance; to get a higher speed we must accelerate along a longer distance. The same happens when casting a fly line: as our target gets farther away our casting stroke gets bigger, both in length and in angle. That is the case as well when throwing a ball at different distances. So the use of a variable length acceleration lane is somewhat ingrained in our brains as a natural motion.

By applying force to the butt the rod gets some flexion, and the higher the acceleration the bigger that flexion is. That results —when casting with the rod upright— in the rod tip moving downward in the vertical plane. That motion is a double-edged sword, though: on the one hand it is the main element of casting efficiency,



as it allows for a curving motion of the rod butt to turn into a — close to— straight one of the rod tip; but, on the other hand, if that downward motion isn't properly executed it causes problems, i.e. tailing loops.

Concavity? Not So Much. *continued ...*

That is the case on this demo of a tail due to a too narrow casting angle performed by Paul Arden. Notice that it shows a somewhat concave tip path —similar to the cross section of a bowl— as rod tip concave trajectories has been traditionally understood:



<https://vimeo.com/248846926>
Extremely narrow casting angle

So, how is it possible to sustain that concave, bowl shaped rod trajectories, aren't actually seen in the real world of tailing loops, as I suggested at the start of this article?

As stated before, increasing the casting stroke as we increase the casting distance is an intuitive response. But look at Paul's rod position when it gets straight at the end of the forward cast: it is very close to the vertical! I have never seen anybody stopping the rod so high in real casting; in fact what is common place is the opposite: too wide casting arcs resulting in big, rounded, inefficient loops.

In my experience ultra-narrow casting angles only occur in casting demos. I know instructors who claim they have had students showing tails due to excessively narrow casting angles, but I doubt that they were as extreme; and without an extremely small casting angle you can't get that bowl shaped trajectory of the tip during the whole stroke seen in many illustrations depicting taling loop causes. In my view, if super narrow casting angles belong to the demos realm only, so do concave tip paths.

So, how is the rod tip path that generates a tailing loop? Well, it normally is a small anomaly breaking the slightly convex line drawn by the rod tip during the stroke; something like a dent, with the rod tip going down and then up again, more a check mark than a bowl. The reason? A sudden peak in the force applied by the caster. There are a couple of causes for that, and one is... too narrow a casting angle! An extremely narrow angle makes impossible to avoid a tailing loop: we have to attain the line speed needed to get the fly to the target; if the available acceleration lane is too short the only solution is a very high acceleration, i.e. bigger force, so the rod tip is forced sharply downwards... and it can't help but draw that close to ideal concave path shown on the video above.

The following shows Paul demonstrating a tailing loop due to creep. Notice how a wider —although still purposefully decreased— casting angle fails in producing a bowl shaped tip path, making a sort of dent in the rod tip trajectory instead. Notice as well, how Paul not only decreases his casting angle at the start of the forward stroke —the creeping problem proper— but also at the end, stopping the rod earlier than in the previous cast. When you know how to accelerate properly it is difficult to do it badly even when creeping; by robbing yourself of part of the angle in front, you can tail more comfortably.

Concavity? Not So Much. *continued...*

But when showing tails due to creeping that is cheating, isn't it?



<https://vimeo.com/249707372>
Creeping... and a little bit of cheating

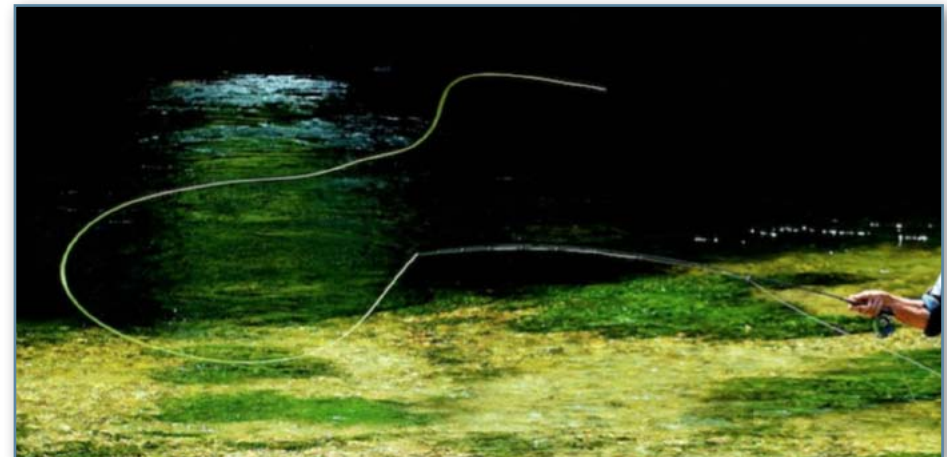
If casting angle width were the main source of tails, these would be much easier to solve.

However —after shooting and studying many slo-mo videos— what I see as the most common source of tailing loops is a faulty acceleration of the rod, an increase in the speed applied to the rod butt that isn't progressive enough; that means that, at some point, there is a sudden peak in force that drives the tip momentarily down. That produces a tailing loop whatever the width of the casting angle we are using.

Experimenting with tailing loops is always interesting. I am of the opinion that all of us have a preferred casting stroke that works for most of the usual fishing situations we face; so if you are accustomed to 9' long rods take a short one, let's say a 7'6", for a casting session.

Most probably you will cast tail after tail till you are able to adjust to the unfamiliar rod. Take the same cast to put your fly at the same distance and see how the same casting stroke doesn't work for all rod lengths. But this is stuff for another article.

The following picture shows the result of one of the first casts with a 7'6" rod after years of fishing with nine footers:



Final note:

Tailing loops have nothing to do with "overpowering": we can cast a good shaped loop with very different speeds, from slow to fast. For instance, when casting against the wind we have to "overpower" compared to the same cast in calm conditions, are we doomed to tail in that scenario?

It isn't about the amount of line speed; it is about how we get that speed.

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OBSERVATIONS ON TEACHING FLYCASTING

FOR THE FEDERATION OF FLY FISHERS

BY MEL KRIEGER

Forewords for the reprint by James Sommercorn, MCI, CBOG

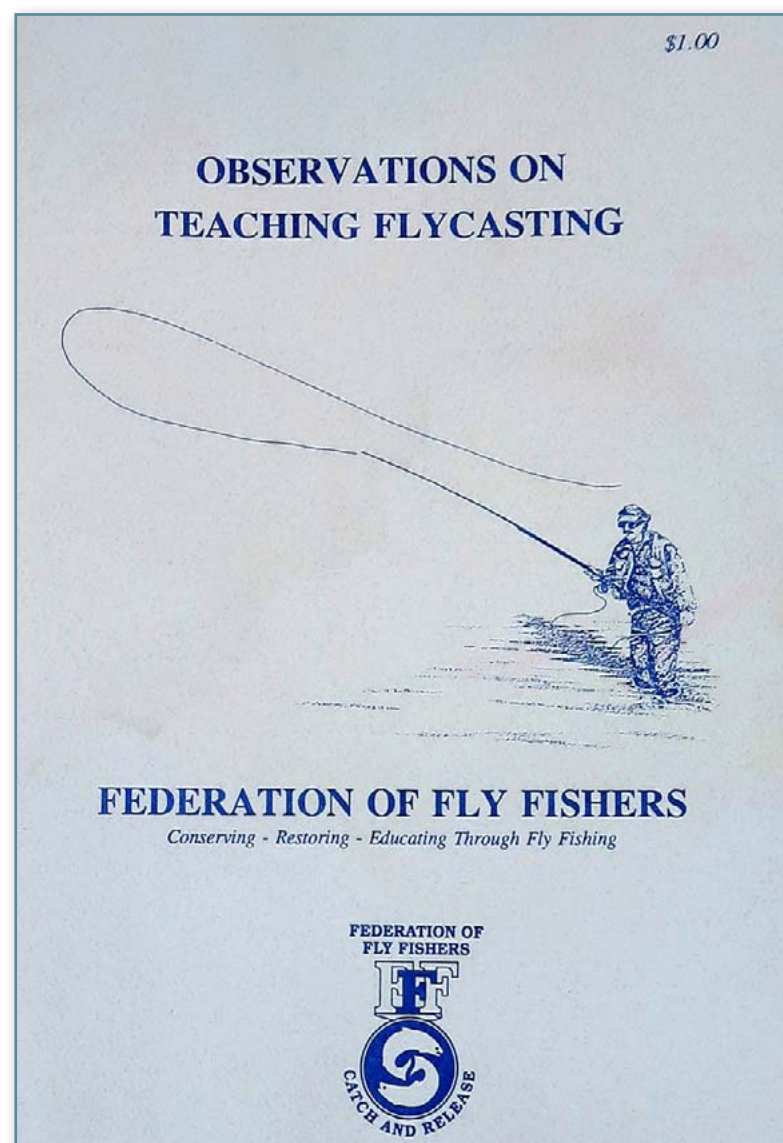
*Mel Krieger's booklet **Observations on Teaching Flycasting** was one of the early publications that captured principles of fly casting instruction that remain foundational to the Casting Instructor Certification Program. Unfortunately, the booklet is no longer available for purchase. Because of its foundational and historic importance to the CICP, I believe it should remain available for all—for content and for conveying Mel's enthusiasm (!!!!!). Because my copy of the booklet is a bit battered, I arranged to have it retyped in its original form*.*

These observations are not intended to be a comprehensive text on teaching, nor are they an analysis of casting a fly. They are simply broad theories of teachings and of people that have been pieced together from study, working with a wide variety of other casting instructors and my own teaching experiences. I sincerely hope that you will find something useful in these notes beyond the "let the rod do the work" instruction that most of us started with.

Mel Krieger

A sincere "thank you" to the many educators and casting instructors that contributed to this teaching manual, and especially to Judy Lehmborg, Dr. Al Kyte, Phil Krieger, Jim Watkins, Steve Rajeff and Dr. Dave Engerbretson.

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Observations On Teaching Flycasting *continued...*

OBSERVATIONS ON TEACHING FLYCASTING INTRODUCTION

A. Explain in detail the well-planned curriculum of the course (not forgetting to indicate the location of the toilets.)

B. Ask the student (or the class) to indicate previous experience. For example: How many of you are complete beginners? Previous flycasting instruction? Previous fishing experience? These types of questions are useful because:

1. The student immediately becomes a participant.
2. Knowledge of past experience levels will help you, the instructor, pinpoint your teaching.
3. The instructor can begin to remove much of the student - instructor tension and the student intimidation that most students feel in a learning situation.
 - a. **To beginners:** "This course is designed for you. We will explain every little detail beginning with something like – This is the handle of the fly rod. Rest assured that there will be no tests; that everyone here will pass this little course."
 - b. **To those of you with experience:** "This class, although grounded in basics, will address an extremely comprehensive fly casting program and additionally, we will work with you on an individual basis to help you reach new plateaus and/or solve previous casting problems."

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY

A. Present a completely honest picture of learning to flycast; how long it will take to be comfortable in most fishing situations and what is

involved in getting started. Be sure to include the slow learners as you describe the different learning curves. Every learner has their own pace and style of learning. Some students learn very quickly and then plateau, while others learn very slowly at first and then later make super leaps; that, essentially one learning curve is not better than another – only different!!

It can be devastating to a student to be told "anyone can learn to cast in 30 minutes," and then fail to do well after hours of practice. Something like "I'm just a complete klutz" or "I'll never be able to learn this" must go through their minds. Instill instead "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly at first."

B. Present a positive side of the degree of difficulty to the student. Casting a fly and flyfishing is a lifetime of reaching exciting new plateaus – of growing. While people reach their peak in games like tennis and golf at an early age and then decline, our sport offers continued growth for a lifetime. The beginnings may be a bit difficult, but then the climb becomes wonderful. A Zen saying goes "When you reach the top of the mountain – keep climbing!"

INSTRUCTION

A. Often instruction in flycasting comes in the form of "Do it the way I do" kind of statements. Some instructors use the pulpit of teaching to demonstrate their own expertise and to put themselves in the spotlight. Many of these instructors, without effective teaching and/or communication skills, and despite the best of intentions, actually impede learning. All too often over-instruction and inflexible, rigid communication followed by statements like "Notice how I---, It's easy---, Let me show you---" are the usual instruction modes.

Observations On Teaching Flycasting *continued...*

There are better approaches to this teacher-student drama!
The great teachers must aspire to:

1. Suppress their own ego.
2. Want the student to perform better than the instructor.
3. Be patient, trying hard to reach the slow learners. The excellent students commonly do well regardless of the quality of instruction.
4. Convince students that they alone have made the discoveries that allowed them to reach new plateaus in flycasting.
5. Balance critique with sufficient and justified praise.
 - a. Avoid the over-use of negative words like “terrible, poor, don’t, awful, no,” etc.
 - b. Avoid the word “but” as it completely negates everything that was said before. (“You’ve got it now. Your timing is perfect – **but** ---!!!!!!) Use the word “**and**” or “**now**” rather than “**but**.”
6. Avoid OVER-INSTRUCTION. Allow the student “alone time”, practice time without instruction – time to discover – to learn!!
 - a. Avoid lengthy demonstrations and explanations.
 - b. Present information in small chunks.
7. Notice the diversity in the ways people learn, and accordingly be flexible in instruction.
8. Listen carefully.
 - a. In order to notice unrealistic and often self-critical perspectives.
 - b. In order to question intelligently – leading the student to analyze and solve problems.
 - c. In order to honor the student as an individual.
9. Communicate to every student their unlimited potential, and

build their ego and confidence so they will be excited by the climb and want to go on.

10. Grow.

B. I believe the essence, the real secret of learning flycasting lies almost completely in the very able hands of the student and that the necessary ingredients are persistence and patience; that the principle role of the instructor is essentially directional and most of all – encouragement!!! I strongly believe the first requisite in teaching flycasting is to communicate just that to the student. Confronted with the usual photo cliché of a large fish and grinning fisher, a recent convert to our sport once wisely observed – “The fisher takes far too much credit for his/her catch. It is, in fact, the fish that makes the decision to take the fly.”

It is, dear friends, the student who teaches her or him self to cast a fly.

- *The quintessence of learning is doing.*
- *The quintessence of teaching is inspiration.*



Observations On Teaching Flycasting *continued...*

At some point the learner should understand that ultimately, beyond the simple classroom mechanics of flycasting, they must stand alone, and that the joy of self-discovery is the real essence of learning. That concept can only be communicated when people develop genuine trust in one another. It may well be that the only word that comes close to describing the ideal student-teacher relationship is “love.”

COMMUNICATION

A. Senses: The corridors of communication

1. Visual – Seeing.
2. Auditory – Hearing.
3. Kinesthetic – Feeling.

B. Although all students learn through all of the senses, there is often a huge variance in emphasis. For instance, while one student may learn primarily by seeing (and hear almost none of your words), others learn almost exclusively by feeling or hearing. Start with these tenets of teaching that utilize all of the senses.

1. Demonstration – visual – by instructor.
2. Explanation – auditory – by instructor – critical to those I like to call “the engineers” – people that must know why!!
3. Execution – kinesthetic – by student – essential to all learners and often the only way to teach those we can call “the poets”- people that learn by feeling and doing.
4. Analysis and Adjustment – auditory, visual and kinesthetic – by instructor and student.

C. Change. Although repetition can be a useful practice in learning flycasting, beware of repeating the same unsuccessful exercise over and over and over again in hopes that the results will change. In other circles this has been described as lunacy. It certainly is a negative in learning and teaching.

1. **Students** – If the results continue to be poor – Change! Making the same cast over and over again is poor practice. The student must do something, anything different.
2. **Instructors** – If the results are poor, if somehow you are not getting your message through to your student – Change! Try communicating through different senses – offer another message – take a break. Do something, anything different. Good instruction requires more than a single teaching methodology.

D. Honor the student’s individuality. Rigidity in instruction is, by definition, limiting; all people learn differently.

1. Different learning curves require understanding and patience from both the instructor and the student.
2. Match appropriate communication levels with the student’s personality. An insecure student who is obviously frightened must be gently led to new discoveries, while a “type A” aggressive personality may require challenging and/or strong commands.
3. Notice the student who somehow avoids practice. He commonly is either fiddling with his equipment or does his damndest to engage you in conversation. Generally these people are hesitant to perform in front of you (the instructor) } and must be led or commanded to practice.

Observations On Teaching Flycasting *continued...*

4. Attempt to analyze a student's casts from a distance (perhaps when you are with another student). Learners are often intimidated when the instructor is at their side.
5. Do not make a hasty analysis after watching just one or two casts as developing flycasters are usually erratic. A much more accurate judgement can be made after watching several casts.

SUBSTANCE AND STYLE

As our sport grows, the number of instructors and their teachings continue to expand and become more and more diverse. The wide variety of styles often appear contradictory to the neophyte, creating confusion instead of clarification, inhibiting learning rather than enhancing it. A sideways glance at the game of golf might evidence that point. Defining "substance", that part of flycasting that is fundamental, and individual "styles" that vary widely between instructors, can be extremely important to the learner. It will clear up previous and possibly contradictory instruction they may have received, and prepare them for future help that will undoubtedly come from guides, friends, shops, books, videos, etc. A clear understanding will also direct students to an acceptable amount of latitude in developing their own style.

Despite a rather fuzzy line that presently exists between substance and style it will be helpful to communicate at least some of these distinctions. A few are listed below:

A. Substance (Fundamentals):

- Timing between back and forward casts.
- Loading the rod.

- Straight line path of back and forward casts.
- Basic loop shapes.
- Mechanics of the various casts (Roll Casts, Belgian Cast, etc.)
- Mechanics of the various loop shapes ("Good loops are formed by a straight line path of the rod tip." "The tip of the rod must unload beneath the following fly line to prevent tailing loops etc.")
- Mechanics of the presentation casts (slack line casts, reach casts, straight line casts etc.)

B. Style:

- Form, including grip, hand and foot position, etc.
- Description of the application of power in fly casting.
- Description and utility of the single and double haul.
- Directives and methods used to achieve various loop forms.

CONCLUSION

"If you're very fortunate, you will understand that the complex and profound path towards teaching mastery gets two miles farther away for every mile you travel."

The best of luck.

Mel Krieger

** Thank you to M.L. MacDonald for production assistance.*

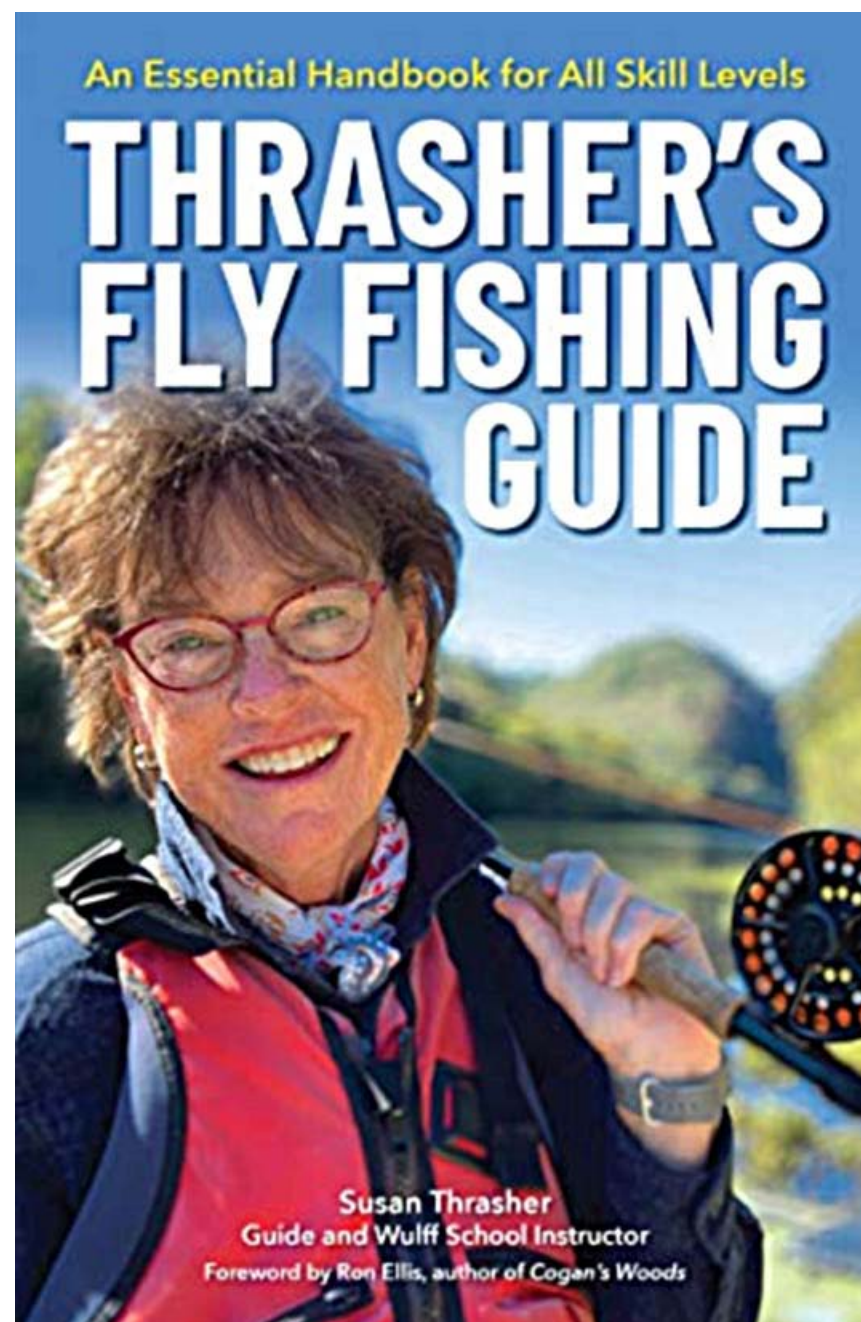
Susan Thrasher's New Book: A Primer on Life, Sisterhood, and Angling

with Brian DeLoach - MCI
Editorial Director of The Loop

Introductory books on fly fishing constitute a flooded market. These beginner guides serve the novice well in covering the nuts-and-bolts needed to get you fishing and fishing quickly. They are celebrated for brevity and plain speech however, in seeking to reduce the sport solely to skill essentials, the crucial ethos or spirit of this grand tradition is often neglected. This is why ST's Fly Fishing Guide is a welcome addition to angling literature.

One may assume, from the modern manuals, that this is a solitary sport, and indeed there is time for quiet contemplation on a gentle stream, and if this is all you seek then this book is not for you. But this has not been my experience; the river has been anything but lonely, and after reading Thrasher's book, I found that it has not been her experience either; for us and many anglers like us, this sport has been about relationships—the social aspect of fly fishing. All I can say is that it was the fish that drew me in, but it was the people who made me stay. Likewise, for Thrasher's book, the allure of a quick primer might sell it, but it is her stories about the people in her life that will keep you reading.

Thrasher understands and affirms a social ethos of fly fishing without irony. The very practical how-tos of the sport are present and accounted for, but these tips and techniques are incased in the story of her journey and deep sisterhood with the compassionate, brave, and sometimes zany Music City Fly Gals of Nashville, Tennessee.



Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

If you want a beginner's primer, it's all here, but it is different and essential because it informs a beginning angler's mind and heart to understand and appreciate the sport—not just perform the motions.

Susan's book is a welcome addition both for beginning fly fishers or even the advanced angler looking to remind him or herself what this sport is really about: drawing close to others and maybe catching a fish.

After reading her book, I called her in Nashville, and we spoke for nearly two hours about her book and about fishing. What follows is the transcript of our interview:

BD: *My name is Brian DeLoach (BD). I'm the editorial director at The Loop. My guest today is Susan Thrasher (ST), a guide out of Nashville and Wulff School instructor. Yes, that is the Joan and Lee Wulff school up in New England. Welcome.*

ST: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

BD: *So, I read your book, and you were kind enough to give me a signed copy with good penmanship too.*

ST: Happy to do that for sure.

BD: *reads: "To Brian, here's to mostly takes and limited refusals. Fish on." Oh, if that ain't the truth. What a great way to begin. So, I started reading your book. I'm going to post my review online wherever it's available. I'm not going to read it to you on here now. I'll let you read that later. But the general sense that I got from your book is that we are flush*

with technical beginner's guides. In the past 20-25 years, maybe even 30, since the movie came out...and everybody knows what movie I'm talking about...we are flush with beginner's primers and nuts-and-bolts guides. I've found that the problem with most of these guides is that we are self-conscious when we talk about instructing the beginning angler about the ethos of the sport. And ethos not just in terms of practicing sustainable and humane angling habits, but also in terms of—we will prattle on about knots and modulus and tapers for hours. But we start to get a little self-conscious when we talk about the beauty of the sport and the relational aspect of the sport.

And so, to see you interweave these vignettes and these stories of these intense relationships, this intense sisterhood that you have with the Music City Fly Gals is really refreshing. Once a beginner reads your book, they're going to come away with not only an understanding of the mechanics, a cast or two, the nuts-and-bolts of the sport, but they're also going to come away with a strong understanding that this sport truly is about relationships. It's not just this contemplative solitude that it has been sold as for years. And I was wondering if you'd like to speak on that.

ST: That's exactly the mark I was trying to hit. And so, that makes me very happy to know that's the case. That means I did my job. Absolutely.

BD: *Well, there we go then. Are you ready to get into this book?*

ST: I'm ready. Yes.

BD: *Alright. So, I'd like to just go through it chronologically, and talk about what really impacted me and see if you'd like to comment further.*

ST: Sure.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

BD: *First off, here's for the guides, and I am still really looking forward to scheduling a trip with you out on the Caney Fork. We're going to get it when you get back from your trip. Now, where are you headed?*

ST: Here just in the next couple weeks I'm heading out to Wyoming.

BD: *Where are you going to fish out there?*

ST: We're going to fish on the Shoshone. Some people call it the Shoshone. But we'll fish out there and then we'll be near Cody. And then go into Yellowstone. And then we're also going to fish on the Snake while we take a day trip over towards Jackson Hole.

BD: *Yeah, you're hitting all the major spots. I've never been out there myself, but my father definitely has. Fantastic. Well, take lots of pictures. Real quick, your social media handle on Instagram, would you say it for the crowd?*

ST: Sure. It's just @southernbrookies.

BD: *And Susan is posting some primo content out there on Instagram. We'll also include her handle on this article and you all can give her a follow after you read. Okay, so on page 42 in chapter 4, you start talking about courtesy. And I think this is a good place to start. And specifically, you talk about most times the trip rate...when you purchase a guide, the trip rate doesn't include gratuity. Now, I'm sure in your life as a guide... how many years have you been guiding?*

ST: Oh, since 2004.

BD: *I'm sure there's been a few times where a client didn't know a tip was part of the whole exchange.*

ST: That's right.

BD: *Yeah. And it's not a rude thing. They just didn't know.*

BD: *So, to our listeners out there, PSA for you. In the US, most times the trip rate doesn't include gratuity. Reads "It's common to tip 15-20% if you are happy with the service. There are a number of great articles online regarding guide gratuity. I recommend doing a little research and coming up with your own standard for rewarding a guide. Keep in mind, if the fish aren't biting on a particular day, it is not the fault of the guide. The hard work goes in regardless of the number of fish brought to the net. In fact, slow bite days are very, very hardworking days. Don't be fooled into thinking that a guide is getting rich off of you. Once you take out the cost of gas, a good lunch, the shuttle payment, leaders, tippet and flies, the guide walks away with much less than you would expect. For most guides, it isn't the money that brings us back. It's the passion for fly fishing. The time meeting new friends and a day spent on the water that is the true paycheck."*

ST: Yes. Amen.

BD: *When I think of my first days with a guide and I think about how many flies I lost...*

ST: Yeah.

BD: *I'm so ashamed I didn't tip him more. But yeah, we'll start there. Anything else to add on the tipping and gratuity?*

ST: Well, I think as a guide you pretty much have to go in and just know right away not everybody understands or even knows that's

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

the case. So, you can't get upset or mad or disappointed. Sometimes that just happens. And when you think about the tipping piece of the 15-20%, you know, if you had a good day, you have to keep in mind a good day doesn't mean bagging a bunch of fish.

You have to think because there are days when you aren't going to catch anything. You just get skunked.

ST: And more than anything in the world, the guide wants you to catch fish. You know, I want more than anything people to catch fish. And when they don't, I feel worse than the people in the boat. There's a lot of pressure that goes into guiding when you're taking that kind of investment from people. So, a good guide is going to...if the fishing is bad, they're going to teach you. They're going to give you some ideas about your casting. They're going to give you some ideas about different techniques. Maybe you've never tried to swing a wet fly. Or drift a dry fly. You know, that's the perfect opportunity. So, if you think at the end of the day "I didn't catch any fish but did I learn how to do a reach cast?" I learned what that even means. Go through your mind. What did I actually learn and take away from this? Then ask yourself was it a good day? If you didn't learn anything then, yeah, then you gotta wonder... Or if there were things about the guide that just didn't seem like...I mean, let's face it. There are some people out there maybe that have been guiding too long and just don't enjoy it anymore. And that comes through.

BD: Yes, it does. And often times those tough days or skunked days where you work on technique truly are the days where you can get better as well even though the fish aren't biting. Some days when the fish are just, you know, there's just magic days where you can put anything out there and not bother to mend your line and the fish just take it anyway, but does that really make you better as an angler?

I don't know. So, have you ever fished on the Clinch over here close to Townsend, Tennessee?

ST: Only one time. I actually did a casting class out there, but it has been years ago. And I've been wanting to get out there, so I've got to do it.

BD: *It's a great trophy stream. However, I almost said Grinch because that's its nickname. When the Clinch pays out, it pays out in dividends. You can catch trophy browns in the two-foot marker, not a problem, so long as you're fishing in the evening and early mornings. But it can be a Grinch and not give up any fish. And I was out there with my uncle maybe six years ago. We were working on our CI certifications during that time. We got out there and we realized about three hours in, it was too hot, it was going to be a Grinch day. So, we started working on our casting. And just like you said, it was a great day because we got better. We kind of accepted this isn't a skunk day. We've got a cooler full of ice-cold beer. We've got some nice sandwiches. We're going to practice casting and we're going to enjoy being out here.*

ST: Yes.

BD: *That attitude, kind of acceptance. I kind of wonder if a little bit of karma wasn't at stake. Because then the generator clicked on and my uncle hooked into a 23-inch male brown. It turned out to be a good day after all.*

ST: Yes. It's all about mindset, you know? And the way you approach the day. I definitely try my very best to set realistic expectations with folks. And then when things turn around and it's better than what you expected, then it just makes everybody happy.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

BD: *How specifically do you go into managing client expectations?*

ST: Well, first off, I always tell people, you know, we're going on a day of fishing, not catching.

BD: *An Important distinction.*

ST: It could be a catching day, but we're starting out as a fishing day. I try to tell folks, you know, there are many times when I'll go out myself and get skunked. And as a guide, you just have to go over and over and over and just try to dial it in and figure it out.

ST: Sometimes it works for folks, and sometimes it doesn't. But, you know, I tell folks that right up front. Things have been fishing well lately, but things can change on a dime. But we're going to do everything possible that we can do. We're going to have a good lunch, and I'm going to teach you some things hopefully as well. That's just basically the way I lay things out. And I haven't really found...in all of my years guiding, I don't know that I have ever had a time when somebody has told me, "Hey, I was really disappointed in the way the day turned out."

And really enjoy teaching and just helping to improve people's technique. One of the best ways you can do that is with your cast. And then also, helping people to have different arrows in their quiver is what I like to say. The more that I can show people that, to me the better a day that it is. So, if I can switch from guiding if it's a bad day to doing what I really, truly love, I think that's a plus on both sides.

BD: *And we're definitely going to talk about some casting here at the end. I want to know some of that insider Wulff School instructor information because I've been struggling with some clients myself lately.*

and I'm looking for some new tricks. In reading your book, I've also found that not only are you and I into some of the same things, we also own some of the same gear and books. We'll get into a little of that later. But in chapter eight when you start talking about not all fly lines are alike, very important for a beginner to learn. I didn't know what a taper was until years after I started fly fishing. Always a good thing to include. And recommending Bruce Richards' book, Modern Fly Lines, part of Lefty's Little Library of Fly Fishing series. Do you actually own a copy?

ST: I have two.

BD: *You have two copies of Modern Fly Lines...*

ST: Yes. I got one that actually I had Bruce Richards send to me and bought from him. And then I happened to find the whole Lefty Library on eBay just by chance and fortune, and I bought the whole thing for I won't even tell you how much because it will make you sick.

BD: *No, I know. I know how much Modern Fly Lines is going for online, and it is sick. Bruce, if you're reading or listening to this interview, I know you will, please find a way to release an updated version. We need this information. It's good information and we're groaning for it.*

ST: Yeah, I was really, really fortunate to find it. I can tell you that I have read through Richards' little book, many, many, many times. And a lot of it is in preparation for the fly line lecture that I've given a number of times at the Wulff School. And I find if you're an instructor yourself or someone picked that book up and, wow, this is way too much information. Do I really need to know that much about fly lines? But, you know, really, the more that you know about your gear and about a sport, the better a fisherman that you're going to become.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

BD: For sure.

ST: The more that you know about it, it just translates directly into more fish.

BD: And I've found in Richards' book, his discussion of compound tapers and the relationship between wind resistance and the bleeding of the energy of the cast, just fantastic. And I'd love to know if the rules have changed.

BD: Or at least an expert describing what is happening right now in fly lines. Especially with the textured fly lines and the new slickness additives etc. I mean it's been 25 years right? But that's another conversation for another day. I was just tickled to understand that **Modern Fly Lines** had made such an impact on you because it definitely made an impact on me. I remember taking a loaned copy to a physics teacher and being like "explain this formula in practical terms"

ST: Ah, very good, very good. Well, like-minded.

BD: For sure. And speaking of which, I saw that you are a gear junkie and you like Hardy.

ST: I do. Yes, I do.

BD: Alright. Should we talk about the Ultralite reel or the Zenith rod and how Hardy needs to bring it back immediately?

ST: Oh, there's absolutely no question. Honestly, I fell in love. I found it or I saw it for the first time at one of our Music City Fly Girls outings. Alice Restal's husband had bought her the reel.

And when I very first laid eyes on it, I said, "I have to have this reel." And I looked it up and I was shocked at the price point.

BD: I know they're a cheap price.

ST: And I was like, no kidding? I can get it for that? Such a great reel. Such a great price. It's lightweight. I bought several. I can do that and justify it because I have a fly-fishing school, so I keep telling myself I need that extra rod, I need that extra reel.

BD: It turns into a collection real quick. That English spoke style—so good. I've got the Ultralite, I think it's the DDD and I put it on my Helios 3F and it's just magnificent. And at the Fly Fishing Expo two years ago down in Atlanta, I took it and had it professionally cleaned and it just spins like a top even after six or seven years. fantastic. And the Hardy SINTRIX Zenith! you mention it in chapter eight, and I think it's the finest 7-weight that's ever been built and maybe in 5-weight too. The fact that it's discontinued is just a tragedy. Diving into this book and seeing you give a shoutout to the Zenith, of all rods out there right now, giving a shoutout to the Zenith and the DDD. I had a Zenith. My father had a Zenith. My uncle has a Zenith. We all have the Hardy reels. Seeing your preference, of all the rods and reels on the market made me think "I need to hang out with this person." Sometimes the preferred action of a rod corresponds to personality.

ST: I'll tell you what I learned about that rod. I was at the Wulff School one summer, it's been several years ago now, or one Spring, and we have a lot of rods that we let the students test out all through the class.

BD: Right.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

ST: And so, I just happened to pick one up as I was taking it out to the pond just to get the line out on the water. I was casting it out. I was like, what is this? I really like this rod. And I went in to Joan's son, Doug Cummings, a great guy, wonderful friend—and just asked, "Where did we get this?" And he goes, "Yeah, the Hardy... I brought it over and thought we'd add it to our lineup." I said, "I absolutely love this rod." and I asked him "where in the world did we get this rod?" and he said, "Oh, yeah, the Hardy folks sent it to us to add to our lineup." And I said, "I have to have one." It is just as smooth as butter. So, as soon as I could, I got one. Yeah, I loved it. I absolutely loved it. And still do. I use it quite a bit.

BD: *Just the best. I've only thrown it in 5 and 7, but I would throw only those two rods for the rest of my life if I could. Unfortunately, we've broken ours. The new Hardy's are pretty good too. The Wraith and the... not the SINTRIX, but the...*

ST: Zephrus?

BD: *Yeah, the Wraith and the Zephrus are pretty good rods. I've thrown a Zephrus 5 and it's a very good dry fly rod. And the Wraith is just a rocket.*

ST: Yes. How about the little 2-weight fiberglass? I really enjoy that one.

BD: *Here's a confession. I have never thrown a fiberglass rod. I'm seeing them advertised by all the major manufacturers, but I have not thrown one yet.*

ST: It just has a different feel. I enjoy it. I pick them up every now and

then. But that little 2-weight Hardy, I got it for Christmas one year from my parents, and on small creeks it's a fun little rod to fish.

BD: *I'll have to check that out. I need to at least throw a fiberglass rod. The people who are swearing by them are swearing by them hard. Even Meredith McCord is really into them. So, there's two recommendations. I'll have to get into that. Okay. So, I want to talk about your time at the Wulff School. You say they offered you an internship. Can you talk a little bit more about how that happened? I mean, how did you get involved with this, arguably the most well-known school of fly fishing in the country or at least the most storied?*

ST: Well, when I first started out fishing—I had only been fishing maybe a couple of years—and I ran into a fellow out on the Middle Provo River out near Salt Lake City. A little town called Heber City, Utah. And he actually told me. He said, "You gotta look up two people. Lori-Ann Murphy and Joan Wulff." And I did. I looked them both up. But I went through the casting school and loved it so much that I went through the instructor school right after that. And I remember telling Joan that I really wanted to start my own guide business. That's why I was there. And I wanted to have a school and instruct and teach casting because I loved it so much. And eventually, leave my engineering career. And she said, "No, don't leave your engineering career. Absolutely teach, but don't leave your career." And so, soon after that, I had already gone through the instructor school. And Floyd Franke was the director at the time. We talked and I told him, "Gosh, I really want to do more casting and instruction when I get home." Anyway, they sent me a letter and just said, you know, you seem to really enjoy it and being here. We would love to have you. If you would like to come back and teach with us in the spring, we would love to have you as an intern and try you out.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

So, I did just that. And then soon after, they invited me, I guess they decided I was a good fit. So, they invited me to come back and stay. So, I've been going back now, this would have been my 15th year. Unfortunately, we had to cancel all of the schools because of the virus. But yeah, that's basically how that...I was just in the right place at the right time. Very fortunate and blessed no doubt.

BD: *Wow. So, you get to work alongside Sheila Hassan quite a bit, right?*

ST: Oh, you know, Sheila... I've said this so many times to people. When you're at the school and you work with the various instructors—because we've all been there for so long, so many years, 12-15 years all of us together—it's like we're just a little family. So, when we come together in the Spring, that's really the only times that we see each other. And it's like a little family reunion. You know?

BD: *Oh, that's great.*

ST: After class we're up late at night chit-chatting.

BD: *Doing casting-geek stuff. I love it when MCIs specifically CBOGs get together and start debating late into the evening.*

BD: *Yeah, I had the pleasure of interviewing Mrs. Hassan a couple of years ago when we did the pay versus free article for The Loop under David Lambert and Eric Cook. She was just amazing. Just amazing. Knew her stuff.*

ST: Oh, she does. And you know, she's an MCI. You talk about somebody that...I mean, when you take over as a director of the Wulff

School, think of the mantle that's put upon you and the pressure that has to go along with that knowing that you are taking over for someone that is arguably one of the best instructors throughout fly fishing history. Truly. And you're stepping into those shoes. Honestly, I don't know of anybody that I have ever met in my whole fishing career that could have stepped into it like Sheila did as gracefully and as patiently. Sheila wants to do it perfectly and to do it the Wulff way. And she does it. She gets high praise from Joan, let me tell you. So, I just can't say enough about Sheila, and I think you already know that. But let me just say from somebody that has witnessed it for all these years, they just don't make them like Sheila anymore.

BD: *Wow. That's high praise. That is high praise. But you're right. I mean, the mantle of Joan and Lee Wulff is a heavy one. And those are huge wading boots to fill, but I think Mrs. Hassan can nail it. So, I want to talk about an interesting tip that you have here. I'm thinking how else I could apply this. In chapter 10, you have a section devoted to creating a thumbprint on the cork. What is the purpose of this?*

ST: Well, you know, Joan actually worked with Winston. I don't know, they may do this by a special order. But she had the Joan signature grip. In the school, we talk about when you're holding the rod the heel of your hand is on top of the rod. Your fingers gently wrap around. Your thumb is slightly flexed. It just makes it easier sometimes when you can feel that groove where your thumb is just going to sit. Kind of like in a hollowed-out, indented area of the cork. So, Winston actually made rod grips that were a little bit more slender in size to fit a smaller hand and then had that thumbprint.

ST: ... I have one of those rods here at the school and people love that rod because they always know exactly where their thumb goes.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

It's like you can feel the push with your thumb and the pulling back with your fingers when you cast. And so, having that little thumb groove like that, to me it's just a real help in guiding that cast through to the power snap.

BD: *So, the students...so, with the groove, the students immediately know how to grip. They know where their thumb goes.*

ST: Oh, there's no question. Yes. It's obvious.

BD: *Do you find this helpful in maintaining ideal tracking?*

ST: I think a little bit. But mostly, it's just a feel in your hand. It's so comfortable. But it does remind you to push with that thumb and to pull that rod butt right up against your wrist. That part of it as well as comfort.

BD: *The closest thing I've seen to this was being mentored by some competition casters up in Kentucky with a couple of ACA events—I saw... first off, everything is custom. All of their grips are wrapped in tennis tape.*

BD: *And then they actually have pieces of plastic put into the grip itself to jamb their thumbs into it. But it's only for extreme distance casting and 45- or 50-foot shooting heads. It's obscene. I've never thought about putting the indentation in there to help out with feel and subtlety when I've only seen it used for power.*

ST: I show in the book just how you can create that little groove yourself. I've actually carved that into a couple of my rods just by putting a little shoe polish on your thumb just to make a thumbprint right at the position where you typically grip the rod. And then just

put a little sandpaper around a coffee cup. That roundness, just kind of carving out the thumbprint that you've made—you can go as deep as you want to with it—it just really makes a big difference.

BD: *Right. So, before I move on to the next chapter, about the power snap, There's a lot of controversy around the power-snap technique, but it's also a storied technique. How do you teach your students the power-snap? Unless it's a trade secret.*

ST: Oh, there's no trade secret. It's really as you are coming forward, it's more of a hand—I teach it just like Joan does—most as a hand rotation. It's not just a quick, hard snap because too much power, as you know, with too much of a snap is going to cause a tailing loop. But if you do it smoothly...in fact, we show it where it's like walking through from your little finger to your ring finger to your middle finger to your index finger and just rolling your wrist over. Almost like you are using a pointed can opener like you are opening some tomato juice. That's usually what I tell people. Just pretend like you've got a can opener in your hand.

BD: *I'm doing it now. Hang on, let me visualize it. Okay.*

ST: Opening a can of juice....

BD: *Pinky, ring, middle...*

ST: Index! And then push with the thumb. You follow it through right with the thumb. It's just that little rotation with your hand. Sometimes I'll tell people it's like a slow paintbrush splatter. If you think about splattering a line of paint slowly against the wall, you have to give it a little bit of a snap, but you aren't going to snap it so hard that you cause a tailing loop.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

So, it's kind of a slow-motion splatter. I don't know if that makes sense.

BD: *I'm trying to visualize it, and it's working. One tool in the bag of tricks for sure. So, another thing I love about the book is that we've got a bit of lore here. I am embarrassed to say that I did not know this: Can you tell us about the origins of the X system? So, newbies look at the X system that we have for tippet and it doesn't make any sense. 5X, 4X, what does any of this mean? Can you tell us a little bit about the lore of the X system for how we designate our tippet diameters?*

ST: Sure. Again, I read this story—it was an article that was posted up at the Wulff School—and loved it and did a little bit more research on it myself. Back before they had manufactured tapered leaders, folks used silk gut. It was the gut silk stands from a silkworm. If you open up the silkworm, you'll find that there are two silk glands inside the worm. If you pull on each one of the glands it will unravel just like pulling a piece of thread or a piece of yarn from a sweater. You know, it just starts to unravel. The same thing happens with the silk gland and it comes apart into one single strand. And so, they would leave it out to dry and then they would pull each of those strands. Let's say they're tying up five strands of silk and they wanted it to be a tapered leader. Then they would take one strand and pull it through what they called an extruder which just was a little round...you know, a bullet with like a diamond cutter.

ST: You stuck it through the hole, pulled it through and one time through was 1X. If you wanted it thinner, you pulled it through the second time 2X. If you wanted it even thinner than that, you pulled it through three times 3X. Well, that measuring system, it just stuck. So, three times through is 3X. Five times through is 5X. So, when I ask my students "okay, knowing that, which one of these tippet sizes is

thinner? 3X or 7X?" And everybody always says seven because you pull it through seven times. So, it's kind of a memory aid. I always tell that and show it. I think it sticks in people's minds when you do it that way—telling a story.

BD: *I love this. I read this and I thought, you know, I've practiced Bimini Twist knots until I was blue in the face and my fingers bled. You would think I would have known that. Nope. This is just a great bit of lore. I love it so much. And our sport is so full little things like this. I thought that was a wonderful addition to your book there. And since we're talking about tippet, let's talk about knots. Top five knots?*

ST: Surgeon's knot for sure. I mean, you gotta know the surgeon's knot. You've got to know a loop to loop connection. That's not really a knot, but it's a connector. You've got to know the nail knot just in case your loop comes off the end of your fly line.

BD: *Right.*

ST: You absolutely have to know a perfection loop because what if it comes off and then you have to tie another loop somewhere. So, you need the perfection loop. And you need the improved clinch knot. To me, those are the ones that you really need to know.

BD: *For you personally, if you were really looking to maximize your hook ups and maybe spend a little bit more time on your knots, would you still stick with the improved clinch?*

ST: Yes, I would.

ST: The other knot that we teach at the Wulff School is Joan's clinch.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

What she does is after she sticks the tippet through the eye of the hook, she immediately ties a knot in the end of the tippet. Just a plain old overhand knot. And then does a clinch knot. Not an improved, but just a clinch knot. Then that knot kind of jams up against and keeps it from coming loose. So, if I was going to change anything from the improved clinch, it might be Joan's clinch. But nope, those are the knots that I've always used. I really haven't gone much farther into any of the others. I know that there's a bunch of others that are out there. But that has been basically my go-to knot.

BD: *Another thing about your book is that it is written from a female perspective. And I think that's absolutely critical. Because the chapter you devote, chapter 14-When Nature Calls, let's just go ahead and get into it. It's important. We need to give a shout out to these companies. I hope they're doing really well. I'm sure they are. We teach a class here at Lee and my God, I've been thinking about it. We've been teaching this class at Lee University for 7-8 years now. MCI, Tom Rueping helped us get it started and Eric Cook. I don't think we ever went over, "Hey, what do you do when nature calls?" Because we're a bunch of oblivious dudes who take it for granted out on the stream. Would you care to talk about that and give some companies a shout out real quick? I think that's really important for our female audience.*

ST: Oh, well, a lot of times you can't...I mean, guys have it nice. You can just turn around...

BD: *I know, it's terribly unfair.*

ST: ...and go anywhere. But for women trying to enjoy the outdoors, I mean, you gotta drop your drawers. It's not always that convenient if you don't have a tree to squat behind.

The Shewee and pStyle, it actually serves as just kind of like a little cup that you can pee through. While still standing up and not having to squat. Not to get into way too much detail, but it does make it a whole lot easier.

BD: *Well, especially on a drift boat. When we're talking about logistical issues, these are things that need to be considered. Especially when you are getting a co-ed float trip organized. So, real quick, I want to give a shout out to these companies who are catering to female customers for this very reason. The first which I think is just--what a great name—the Shewee from <https://www.shewee.com/> What a great name... And second, we've got pStyle which you mentioned, from <https://www.thepstyle.com/> Great companies. Definitely need to patronize them.*

ST: Did you even know those existed?

BD: *Look, I'm doing my best over here...*

ST: (laughs) See what we have to go through sometimes. I thought readers would get a kick out of that too. There you go.

BD: *For sure. On chapter 15, "Playing and Landing Fish," I want you to talk about the demonstration. You know the one I'm talking about. You risked a lot on that one. That could have gone South quick.*

ST: Oh boy. That was a nerve-wrecking time. Yeah. So, Lee Wulff, that was his lecture, the Playing and Landing Fish, and after he passed away Dave Brandt who sadly we lost this year. Dave passed away. Such a wonderful instructor. But Dave took a trip to go to Labrador. So, one of the other Wulff instructors was asked to step in and do that lecture.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

ST: So, Sheila called me, and she said, "Hey, Dave's going to be in Labrador fishing. We don't have a lesson plan. Dave has always done it. We don't have a video tape of it. We have nothing. Would you step in and take it on?" And my heart was pounding, and the insides were saying, "NO, don't do it!" And I heard coming out of me, "Sure, I'll be happy to do that." Fortunately, I had Floyd Franke's book on playing and landing fish. I read through that and remembered some of the things from the lecture. We did have a lesson plan, but not anything in great detail. But anyway, I remember practicing and practicing. And when I say practicing, not just sitting and thinking through my mind what am I going to say.

BD: Right.

ST: I mean actually live, you know, demonstrations, the whole thing from start to finish, 45 minutes. I would just go through the entire thing over and over and over. Before the class, while I was still in Nashville, while I was on the plane getting there. I mean, I'd just talk it through. Well, when I got there, it's the last class of the whole school. So, it's not like it's the first one when you get there. But I'm thinking the whole time, Friday night, now Saturday night...

BD: Now, describe to our readers exactly what you were expected to do on-demand. It's a tall order.

ST: So, you're giving the lecture to the entire school that's there, 20-some students. And Joan came over during, I guess it was Saturday afternoon. She said, "Oh, I heard that you're giving the playing and the landing the fish lecture..." And I was. I had to demonstrate the process of hooking the fish and some of the myths behind always having to keep your rod tip up or always having to have a tight line and just going through some of the things that you

can do maybe that you haven't always heard and how things aren't going to go south if you do something a little different. But then at the end, we walk the students over to the pond and make a cast and hope that a fish comes up and takes your fly. And then you show how to hook it and then how to land and release it properly. And it just so happened on this particular day that I was super blessed because the lecture went well and then...

BD: Let me interrupt you to interject with your prayer. You write in chapter 15, "I remember praying, Lord [this is on page 137] Lord, let there be one dumb trout that falls for my fly on that first cast."

ST: I seriously prayed that. Let me tell you, that's no lie. That's not a fish story, but I cast it out there and it was amazing. This fish just came right up, just like it was scripted, and sipped in the fly—because it was a dry fly—I hooped it and brought it over, released it and the students clapped.

BD: Are you still lecturing throughout this entire process?

ST: Oh, yes.

BD: Oh, my God.

ST: And then I remember Joan saying at the end, she walked over and she's like, "Good job." And for her, you know, it was just like two words. But for me, it was like a huge relief.

BD: Yeah, Joan Wulff just claps you on the back and says, "Good job." That doesn't happen every day.

ST: Yeah.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

BD: *I can't imagine.*

ST: Woo, just to have that done.

BD: *I'm green with envy.*

ST: That was a stressful moment.

BD: *In terms of...we talk a lot about separating between ego and inspiring confidence in our students. Let me tell you something. If I'm a student...shoot, if I'm just watching you fish now, and you are running a lecture and you're running your lecture while hooking a fish on top water, landing it and releasing it...I will do whatever you tell me to do. It's obvious the instructor knows what she's doing.*

ST: Well, I've had students afterwards come up and say, "Wow, no pressure there."

BD: *Yeah, exactly. Exactly. But I mean, seriously, I understand it. Because the confidence that you have instilled in your students at that point, wow.*

ST: Yeah. Let's just say it definitely was a highlight of my teaching career and I'm glad to have that one behind me.

BD: Yeah. So, for our next section I want to take to a, you know, maybe a not-so-happy place. Your dearly departed friend, Nikki, her presence truly is...her presence is interweaved throughout this text.

ST: Yes.

BD: *Tell me a little bit about Nikki.*

ST: So, I met Nikki, she had been to one of the fly fishing club meetings in Nashville and had been on my guide trip that I had given as an auction item. I didn't know her. But she and her friend, Cindy Dennim showed up on the Caney Fork ready for a day of fishing. It was a blistering hot August day and instead of having hot coffee for them, I had two iced coffees that were in the cooler just waiting for them. So, they showed up walking down the ramp and I gave it to them. And Nikki, I'll never forget, she said, "I knew I was gonna like you." So, we just immediately...you know, you meet people and as soon as you meet them you know you're going to be instant friends. That's just the way that it was with both of them. And as we started going down stream, we both just started talking about fly fishing clubs and that we liked our co-ed clubs that we belonged to, but wouldn't it be fun to have an all-women's club that you could go traveling and not have to worry about bunking up and sharing a bed or whatever. It's just a different dynamic. At that point, we just decided we are going to start a club together. Anyway, that was in August and October 15, 2007 we had, just a couple months later, we had our very first meeting. She put some messages out to friends. I did too. And we had 15 show up. We just decided we're just going to make this club happen. We'll have monthly meetings. We also wanted to give back a little bit. We can talk about this later, but the club decided we wanted to have some kind of a volunteer project that ended up being Casting for Recovery. But along the way, our friendship just grew. We enjoyed fishing together. We enjoyed just hanging out. Nikki was an amazing, amazing person. She was the business manager for Waylon Jennings, and knew so many people in the music industry. She just did a lot. In her mind, if she had something that she visualized wanting to do, she just did it. She was so inspired by the Russian women pilots during the World War and decided, you know, I want to know more about these Russian women.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

And by the way, I think I might like to fly a flight pattern that they did. So, she learned to speak Russian. She ended up at the Flight House to try to get permission to fly to Russia with her friend, Rhonda Miles, in a little plane. And then when she got over here, I mean, they were treated like rock stars. So, they were there for this whole ceremony celebrating the Night Witches. The whole story is in the book. But anyway, just amazing. If she could dream it and want to do it, she just did it and made it happen. That was just the kind of person that she was. But she was the co-founder with me for the Music City Fly Girls, and we went on many, many a trip together with the Fly Girls and meetings.

But she developed pancreatic cancer. And it was right at the time when I started my school and had the business and everything just really humming along. She had bought this neat café that was a restored hardware store. She turned it into a café with live music. Her brother, Mike, did the barbeque and she made this incredible whiskey bread pudding. And people came from all over to eat at her little café. Things were just going along so well. And then the pancreatic cancer hit. But she was a fighter. She lasted three years. And as her carrot for getting through a few rounds of chemo, she would have our Music City Fly Girl trips in mind. She had just come off chemo one year and flew out to Seattle and did a train trip, Amtrak trip, back to Whitefish, Montana. And then also did a trip out to Glenwood Springs to fish there in Colorado. So, we had almost three years with her as she battled through pancreatic cancer. We ended up losing her after that, but she is forever in the Music City Fly Girls' hearts and minds. There's not a week or a day that goes by that something doesn't remind me of her. She would be so proud of what our Music City Fly Girls are doing. We're up to 70 members now.

BD: *Let's go ahead and plug some contact information, if you don't mind. Can we plug some contact information for Music City Fly Girls?*

ST: Yes. Just go to the website <http://www.musiccityflygirls.com/> You can read everything about them. But anyway, just a lot of information about Nikki. But, you know, she deserves that kind of shoutout for sure.

BD: *Absolutely. Everything reminds you of her. Would that be your white feather?*

ST: Yes, exactly, yes. And people have to read the book to know what "white feather" means.

BD: *People will have to read the book to find out about the white feather, but I felt that deeply. So, in the middle of your book, you provide some full-color images of some beautiful flies. I'm so glad that you led with the Adams fly. So, I'm kind of a young guy, but I fish with some salty old dogs who are sort of paradoxically really into the new and latest patterns, but I always keep a range of Adams. During a sulfur hatch or a blue wing hatch or isonychia, any old hatch, you throw the Adams out there in the right size and things are probably going to work out. We've gotten away from it with all of this new stuff, but I think that the Adams in various sizes needs to be a staple in every angler's box. And I'm so glad that you led with that in your suggested fly patterns.*

ST: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. And people ask me this all the time. It's so confusing. You go into the fly shops and you just don't know what flies to get. There is such a selection. I always tell people just pick up classic flies.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

Because if you have a hare's ear, a bead head pheasant tail, a Griffith's gnat, and a dry fly Adams, and maybe a couple of woolly buggers. Make sure you have those. You can travel all around the country and you're going to catch fish.

BD: *Oh, absolutely. I did some work with...well, I didn't do some work with, they coached me actually, with Teen USA Fly Fishing team. And talking with their tyers and their coaches, their tyer during that time tied a bang-up Frenchie. He said, "It will catch fish anywhere in the world." Now, I'm not going to give too much more away in terms of the flies here. You'll have to buy the book to look at some of these other patterns. But let me tell you, she's got one, two, three...there are 12 patterns listed here. And I couldn't agree more. These 12 patterns will take you anywhere in the world in terms of trout fishing. We don't need to get lost out in the weeds trying out these new boutique patterns. If students would focus more on presentation and correct drift and less on the fly, I think they would have more hook ups. What say you, guide?*

ST: I completely agree. I was telling somebody actually just today that it doesn't necessarily mean you've got to have the exact color or anything, but if you get it down where the fish is feeding and you have just the right drift, meaning it looks natural, the fish are most likely going to eat it. You know? They're just going to eat it. If it looks buggy, they're most likely going to eat it.

BD: *Speaking of eats, chapter 20, "Setting the Hook" when you speak on this, it hit home for me. "For some odd reason", you say on page 183, "if you happen to look around for a moment at the scenery or lift your hand to scratch your nose, that is the exact moment the indicator will disappear. Ask any fly fisher about this and they will tell you it's true. It's*

like the fish know you have been distracted and that's the exact time they will strike, so pay attention." Now, I'm sure in another language out there there's a word for this or a phrase for this. We don't have it. But in fly fishing, it is a thing.

ST: It is.

BD: *And you've given voice to this thing because every time, like you're turning away from your indicator to eat a chip. The strangest thing that I've seen a person doing while their indicator was in the water was applying sunscreen to their legs with their fly rod in the water and there was a take and they missed the fish.*

ST: That's almost as bad as my Funyuns episode in the book.

BD: *It's ridiculous. But it's so true. Every angler who has been in this game for a while will tell you this: you look away for a minute and that bobber goes under.*

ST: Yep. It's true. It happened today on the guided trip. I was like, there it is. And he was like, "Oh, my gosh. I just looked at that bird.

ST: That's all!" And I said, "That's in the book. I talk about that in the book."

BD: *Yep. And it is. It's right here, page 183. When you talk about the dry fly...so, when you talk about fishing top water flies where you literally had to wait three seconds before setting the hook, are you talking about hopper fishing? Or are you talking about something else?*

ST: We were fishing hoppers, yes.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

BD: So, what is your thinking on that? On the White River, or other areas where hopper fishing is really popular, that is definitely the case. The "God-save-the-queen" timing... I mean, it is a long, slow take. Is it just bigger fish taking longer to turn their heads? What do you think?

ST: I don't know. To me, it has to do... or what I have found, this may not be everybody's experience, but for me it happens to be by location. You really have to wait if you're out on the White River in Arkansas, definitely. But I'm telling you, here on the Cane, if I'm fishing a terrestrial, if I don't set that hook the second that that fish comes up and takes it, it's gone.

BD: Interesting.

ST: And this can be a huge terrestrial. I mean, like a size 4 or size 6. What I consider really big.

BD: Yeah, size 4 is a big old hook. Are we talking standard J hooks or are we talking about like B10S wide gaps?

ST: Just a big wide-gap hook.

BD: Okay.

ST: And I'm telling you, if you don't set that hook just boom, right away, then the fish is gone, but if I were to set it that quick on the White River, I would miss the fish. So, I don't know. I think you maybe just have to ask the guide when you're fishing. Out here, if somebody from out West came and they waited for a while, they would not be able to set the hook if they waited that kind of time fishing on the Caney with terrestrials

BD: Well, there you have it folks. If you're listening and you have the answer, write to *The Loop*, loop@flyfishersinternational.org, and let's get this one settled: what's up with the extreme variation in hook-set times with terrestrial patterns?

ST: Yes, I would like to know the answer to that.

BD: Yeah, me too. What you said about the Caney is crazy. So, let's talk about your trip. Speaking of the White River, your time out at Dally's fly shop. Tell us that little story about the vice.

ST: So, yeah, every time when we go, the Music City Fly Girls, our one stop that we have to make because we get our licenses there too, but we all like to shop so we always like to make it there before the store closes. They'd probably even stay open for us, I would guess. Sheryl Mustain has gone there many, many years and they know her well. She has some special pull. But we had stopped on this one particular time and they had a case where they kept some items that were on consignment and that people were just trying to sell. I walked by and I saw this unbelievable vice. It was just beautiful. It looked like a work of art. I was like, wow, is that a vice? And I looked at it. It was almost like a machined airplane-looking type of a thing. I loved it and I kept going back and looking at it again. Well, one of the Fly Girls, Susan Henderson, saw me looking at it. Sometimes, you know... well, it started several years ago,

ST: ... but the Fly Girls at Christmas time will chip in and get me a little present just to show appreciation for leading the group and all of that. They're just as sweet as can be.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

And this particular year at our annual Christmas party, somebody came out...and I can't remember if it was Susan or Noni had just said, "You know, we just want to say thank you for all that you do for us, and we have something special for you." And honestly, I mean, I could have just fallen over because they had bought that vice for me. It is absolutely gorgeous. And it was very, very touching. In fact, I'm getting a little teary just even talking about it right now.

BD: *And a shoutout to Dally's Ozark Fly Fisher in Cotter, Arkansas. We have spent a lot of money and time there. And since we're on the subject of the White River, a big shoutout to Rising River Guides. My boy, Matt Millner and Jeremy Gilmer if you're planning on stopping by the White River, definitely give Rising River Guides and Matt Millner a phone call. He will put you on some trout. Check out @risingriverguides and @dead_drifter_ or their website at <http://www.risingriverguides.com/>*

ST: I can't remember what page it's on, but on one of those pages I actually say my all-time favorite guide of all times is Matt Millner.

BD: *You are kidding me! You are kidding me! Hardy Zenith fly rods, the Ultralite fly reels, and our favorite guide is Matt Millner. What's happening? I have got to get out to Nashville. We have got to hit the Caney.*

ST: In fact, I wore my Rising River Guide hat today on my own Southern Brookie Guide trip.

BD: *Anyway, cool. Matt, if you're reading or listening, we love you, man. You and Ellie Spinnelli are kicking butt out there. We'll see you soon. Alright. So, about checking your flies. You mention in chapter 22 about improving hook ups. You say, "Check flies often*

to be sure they haven't snapped off." What do you find is the biggest contributor to a client losing his or her fly?

ST: I guess a couple of things. If you're rushing your cast, meaning that you don't let your line straighten all the way out behind you. If you go back and then immediately come forward, I mean, that's gonna snap off a fly faster than anything. But probably more often than not, where we lose flies is someone, especially if I'm in the drift boat or even wade trips, they'll get hung up on something. And they'll either give it a really hard pull or just tug it and break it off. What I tell folks, and if you haven't tried this, if anybody is listening, you gotta give it a shot. You're going to save so many flies. If you get caught, first off, just completely relax the line and give it some slack. And don't pull on it because you're just going to set it even deeper into whatever it's in. But if you will walk upstream of where your fly went in, get perpendicular right to it so you're straight in line with your fly, and you point your rod tip directly at your fly and then gently just pull straight back, your fly, 9 times out of 10, is going to come out. In fact, I use that as a really good lesson for people. I'll tell them, "Do you see how when you straighten your rod and point it right at your fly, then it comes out so easily?" Yes, they say. I say, "That's exactly what will happen if you drop your rod tip and you point your rod right at the fish and you don't keep a bend in it. If you point it straight at the fish that fly is going to pop right out of its mouth just like it's popping out of that obstruction." So, anyway, that's where I find most of the flies are lost, just because of that. Not trying to get your fly retrieved using the correct method.

BD: *This a great book for beginners, but there is some intermediate information in here in terms of a technical nature when you talk about how the fish are feeding in chapter 25.*

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

BD: *So, the rookie's response whenever we see any surface activity is to immediately switch to a dry fly. However, you break the actual take on the surface into five different takes. Could you talk about it? I don't want to give too much away, but could you talk about that for a minute?*

ST: *A lot of times I'll see that, and I was like that too when I very first started. I would immediately put on a dry fly. And what's happening really is the fish most times instead of coming up to the surface and taking dries, typically, they're just taking the emerging nymphs or pupae that are coming up and feeding just underneath the surface. So, number one, you can put on a wet fly and just soft hackle. Or even shorten up your little dropper. If you're fishing a dry, go ahead and put on either a very short piece of tippet, drop it off the bend of your hook and see maybe if they'll take it as an emerger, or with either a nymph or a pupae or put on a wet fly even following behind your dry fly. Because 9 times out of 10 they'll take the dropper or the trailer over even the top water. I've just seen that happening.*

BD: *Yeah. Covering all of your bases when you do that dry dropper stuff. The type of dropper is critical. You guys will have to purchase the book to read kind of the in-depth knowing how the fish are feeding in chapter 25. This is absolutely critical information for a student to know. I kind of want to bring it back a little bit to the FFI wheelhouse. When you say... you're actually talking about kids. When I was reading your book and you say... when you're talking about young kids, "when they're ready it's a good idea to have someone other than a parent lead the instruction. It's important to have patience. And believe me, a kid will look around while you're talking, pick their nose, change the subject, etc., etc." I'm reading this and the only thing that I'm thinking is my gosh, this is so applicable to spouses as well. This actually happened with my dad. He's a CI out of Cleveland and he heads up the program at Lee University now.*

But my mom has been wanting to learn. He calls me up and he's like, "Hey, I need you to teach mom to fly fish. We're going to go up to the park. I need you to do a couple hours of casting instruction." I was like, "Man, why can't you do it?" He goes, "Son, trust me. This is going to result in two angry people not speaking to each other." And I've seen that a lot, and I thought that was just a great bit of advice. So, not only does it apply for kids, someone other than a parent instructing the kids, if you are married, get an instructor for your spouse. That criticism... you don't want to be riding home after that criticism. It will be taken differently. Bring in an outside instructor.

ST: *If you want them to keep fishing with you, that's the best way to approach it.*

BD: *And you also mention getting started. Getting people started on fly fishing and catching bluegill. I think that's great too. Because they are aggressive. You can catch a ton of them. And I think trout... you know, especially for young kids as you mention in chapter 30, beginning on trout might not be the most appropriate way to get started.*

ST: *It's tough. It's tough fishing for them. I think all you need to do is build your confidence. If you can really build your confidence level... I mean, honestly, there was a point in my career when I go out to fish, in my mind, I know I'm going to catch fish. I know it's just going to happen. But it took a lot of time going out on the water to have that kind of confidence, you know, that's it's going to work. And if you convince new people right from the beginning and do it on fish, it will be a little bit easier catch than... it spills over. Because I think part of it, I think fishing-confidence-wise, you're going to pay a whole lot more attention if you're fishing with somebody, having a fish that you know is going to take the hook when you cast it out there,*

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

the more that you can catch, the more opportunities that you have of feeling the tug, knowing what to watch for, whether they're taking the popper, whether they're taking a nymph under a strike indicator, the more practice that you have with that then when you get out and you're starting to fish for trout, then it's just going to become second nature. Building that confidence with people on bluegill. To me, I think that's critical.

BD: *Absolutely. I think that's a great place to start. So, in chapter 30, you devote an entire chapter for Casting for Recovery. I love that there is a service component to what you are doing and what your club is doing. So, this is kind of close to my heart because my mother is a breast cancer survivor. And in our last issue of The Loop, Paul Brown wrote extensively about Casting for Recovery in the UK. This is a very important aspect of fly fishing. And this truly encapsulates what all this is about. There's healing. There is community. There is sisterhood. And I'd love for you to talk just a little bit about you and your clubs' work for Casting for Recovery.*

ST: Well, just in the second year that we had the Music City Fly Girls we all had agreed that we wanted to do some kind of a volunteer effort. And it just so happened Trout Unlimited along with Wanda Taylor were looking at starting a chapter of Casting for Recovery retreat area here in the middle Tennessee area. We already had one near Gatlinburg and the Townsend area. So, anyway, we volunteered to help out with that one. And it was perfect for us because here we had women that fly fish that really wanted to get involved. They were more than willing to have us jump right in and help. And then that turned into actually taking it over, which they were more than happy for us to do that. We have 14 participants that are selected at

random through the national office. And then we have 11 full-time volunteers that are on staff throughout the entire retreat. And then we have the 14 guides that come in on the grand finale on Sunday to actually fish with each of the participants. And we have people on a waiting list that want to be one of the 11 that are there throughout the entire weekend. And David Berry from Southeastern Fly, he leads up all of our guides...you know, gathers those guides together, and always has a waiting list of people. I think we get as much, if not more, out of it than the women themselves. And I've said it before but it's worth saying again, of all of the fly fishing things I do, I think my involvement in Casting for Recovery is probably the thing that I'm the most proud of. Because it truly is giving back some hope and inspiration and a fun time. I mean, when you hear someone that is surviving and working through such a diagnosis to be able to say "I wasn't a cancer patient today. I was a fly fisherman. And cancer didn't even cross my mind." Then you know that you have been part of really helping somebody. That's what it has been about for us.

BD: *That is so powerful. I believe that in almost all cases, I believe that everything that we do in this life, whatever discipline we are involved in, whatever sport or leisure, I believe that there is a space an opportunity for service. You have definitely found that space with what I'm beginning to understand after reading your book; for you, this isn't just a career. This is a vocation.*

BD: *So, on your chapter 33-"The Missing Chapter, Casting..." why the missing chapter?*

ST: Well, you know, I really struggled with that. My passion is casting. I love casting.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued...*

But as I thought through having a chapter that just talked through specifics on how to do a roll cast, a basic cast or even a double haul, I thought through. You know, Joan has just a fabulous book with diagrams and with all of the little intricacies of what you do with your hands, with your elbow, with your shoulder, with all the movements of the arm. And then Sheila has a fabulous book about casting techniques as well. I didn't feel that, number one, that it needed to be redone again.

BD: *Right.*

ST: And I also am a real believer that hands-on teaching is what a student needs. I mean, you can watch YouTube videos. You can read books. But the thing that's really going to help you to improve is having some hands-on instruction and then having someone to videotape and critique the things that they see that you are doing correctly and then some of the challenging things that you still need to work on. And for me, just to have a chapter that talks about the casts that you need to know and gives some references, and, you know, I do talk a little bit about casting, but I don't go into great detail of every step of what you need. I think there are other resources that could do it in great depth.

BD: *I understand that. That was a very humble choice. That being said...*

ST: I hope people will come visit. I'm hoping people will come visit me in person to get the casting chapter in person.

BD: *Yeah. You can't substitute the gains you can make from a qualified, certified instructor. But that being said, in this missing chapter, there is*

one thing that really stuck out to me. And I'm going to use this from now on.

ST: *Okay.*

BD: *Regarding the cast, you write "Stop like you mean it." That hard positive stop cannot be overemphasized. Absolutely critical.*

ST: It's the most important part of the cast. To me, it's the absolute most important part. And it changed the way I cast and teach. I think that finally was ingrained in my mind and I started to do it. That's when my casting improved by leaps and bounds. And I think what people have to remember is it's not a powerful stop, but it's a crisp stop. And there's a difference between crisp and abrupt and powerful and hard. It has to be like you're stopping on a dime, but that's different than stopping like you're pounding a hammer. You know?

BD: *Yes.*

ST: Only having someone's hand...if you have someone's hand on your casting hand while you're casting and they can show you that crispness, it's just not something you can describe. But if you feel it with an instructor doing that, and that's one of the things I learned from Joan. Having that hand to hand contact with your instructors so that you can feel the stop, that knowledge can be transferred into your student that way. Now, right now with the Corona, maybe we can't do it. But soon, very soon.

BD: *We have found that when it comes to acceleration, ... with some of the research that The Loop has done in the past few years, we have found that in terms of acceleration, that hands-on or*

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

tactile or kinesthetic approach is effective in that regard. Even from a personal standpoint, I still really do believe in the hands-on approach as it applies to acceleration in the stop. You can't impart that. When I was studying for my MCI, my mentor, Tom Rueping, everything else was explained either visually or audibly, but when it came to acceleration and the stop and demonstrating casting faults, he grabbed my wrist—and I always thought, this is a no-no—but he grabbed my wrist and it clicked. It's experiential. It's hard to explain. You have to feel it. I think we over-emphasize the tactile in everything else, but when it comes to acceleration, if anything, we don't emphasize it enough.

BD: *Speaking of that, in closing, I would like for you to speak just a little bit on your personal CCI journey.*

ST: Okay.

BD: *How did you fall into that?*

ST: After I had gone through the Wulff School, you know, I just felt like I was so fortunate to be there, but I wanted in my own mind to feel like I really want to deserve being here. That it's not just by chance. I want to do everything possible to make myself worthy of being here at the Wulff School as an instructor. And for me, that meant taking that next step in getting that caster certification.

BD: *Right.*

ST: Because I felt like I knew Joan was a believer in FFI and I just felt like that would add to what we were giving to the students that were there and coming through. It's an investment to go through the school. And then for my own business, I wanted to show my clients

that it's not something I was just doing as a hobby. That this was a true passion, and I was so passionate about it that I wanted to have the certification that it took to be legitimate as an instructor. And so, I went through the...I'll tell you the very first time that I took the casting instruction or casting test, I did fine with the written portion. This was in Atlanta. And I really didn't...I thought, well, I've been to the Wulff School. I know how to cast. But I didn't really go through the preparation that was really needed. I mean, I studied. I got all the book part of it. But for doing the performance piece of it I didn't have all of the steps involved that I really needed. And so, the tester, he was like, "you know, you are a good caster, but as far as being able to explain everything to a student, I really think it still needs some work. And we aren't going to pass you this first go around." I was devastated. Oh my gosh.

BD: *Yeah. That is a devastating process. Everyone listening to this podcast knows how many—it's never months—how many years this takes. And that is a devastating process—failing. And you know what, Susan? And you probably know this now. It's not just a devastating process for you. It is devastating as a tester to tell that to a candidate. I'm in the EDP process, and it hurts to tell a candidate "not yet."*

ST: Oh, yes, right.

BD: *We want you to pass so bad. We want to have a good test.*

ST: Well, I can tell you, the drive from Atlanta back to Nashville, I mean, I had a few tears on the drive back. I just couldn't believe it. I called a really good friend of mine. He's passed away now, but he would love this story. I called him up and I'm like, "I did not pass the test." I said, "I am so devastated.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

I can't believe it." And so, I had to drive right past Winchester where he lived, and he said, "You know what? I'm going to call my friend, Don Johnson, that's an FFI instructor. He went through the same thing. I want you to talk to him." So, I did. And it was almost like grief counseling. Don said, "You know, I want you to come here because you're going to take that again." And he told me of a place to go through Tom White. He said, "Go there for the week. He's going to spend some time and you're going to go through some classes. You're basically going to have some instruction that's going to really help you." I'll credit Don with the one that told me about the stop. A lightbulb went off when he showed that to me. And then of course, from that point on, I mean, I studied. I'm an engineer by trade. I have my certification in professional registration as an engineer. Studying is something I knew how to do. I was used to that process. And it was a hard process passing those engineering exams to get my license, especially in California.

ST: I was excited, I'm telling you, and nervous about studying for that exam. So, I spent the week down in Marathon and went through the school. And then when it came testing day, I was going to do it. I mean, I was going to make it happen. Yeah. So, I ended up passing. And the last one, I had to make that last long cast and the tester said, "That's it. You passed." I just started crying. He looked down at his feet kind of uncomfortable. And he goes, "It's okay. I've seen grown men cry." But I was so happy.

BD: *Before a test. That's a strange, frantic time. You're in really good company. I can't remember if I cried on my MCI. My wife was there.*

She could tell you. It was all a blur. People outside of this cadre, if you will it takes years to prepare for this. This isn't a hobby. This is something else.

You can't know what it means until you've put the time in. Well, I'm so glad. I'm just so glad that you pursued that. How many months or years would you say that the entire process took from when I decided I wanted to take it to when I got the patch?

ST: Probably I would say three years.

BD: *Yeah, that sounds about right. So, is there anything else that I haven't covered after reading your book that you would like to speak on before we sign off?*

ST: Well, I guess if there's anybody out there that's listening and wondering, "hm, you know I've been a fly fisherman for a long time. I don't think I need this book. You know, I really did not write this book specifically for women. I did not write this book specifically for beginners. Or even specifically for fly fishermen. There were so many things...the approach that I tried to take was to tell with each instructional chapter, was to do the how-to and wrap it in a story. Because I believe that you can learn better through the story. And so, anyway, that's what I was trying to do. Learning through a story. So, even if you aren't a fly fisherman, I would like to think that some of the stories will catch your attention. If you are an advanced angler, I really think that there are some things in there--as you are teaching your buddy to fish--maybe there are some things you can pick up on. I mean, we can all understand about the etiquette chapter and things we should or shouldn't be doing on the water.

BD: Yes.

ST: And not everybody knows all about line densities and different line weights or floating lines and sinking lines.

Susan Thrasher's New Book *continued ...*

You know, some of the more technical aspects of the book. So, I really think that no matter what level of fly fisher you are, you can actually pick the book up and learn something and enjoy it. So, I guess that would be my shameless plug for it.

BD: Well, you beat me to it. Where exactly can we purchase your book?

ST: The easiest way is to go on Amazon and just order it that way. If you want a book that is signed and personalized, I could actually send one to you. And you can just purchase it through me @ southernbrookies on IG. Or you can go to some of the local fly shops. I know here in Nashville they definitely are carrying them over at Fly South and Cumberland Transit and I believe the Orvis store is going to start carrying them. Here is a direct link: <https://www.amazon.com/Thrashers-Fly-Fishing-Guide-Essential/dp/1634042441>

BD: Excellent.

ST: So, yeah. Probably the best way though, if you want it really quickly, Amazon is going to be the best.

BD: And your website is?

ST: <http://southernbrookies.com/>

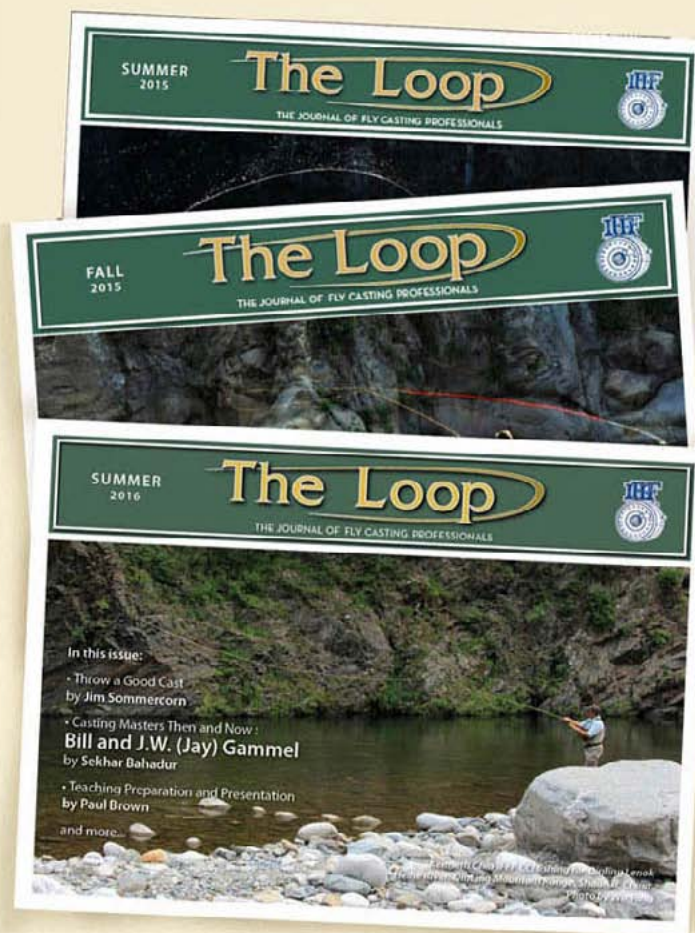
BD: Susan, I can't thank you enough for taking the time to speak with me today. It has been an honor and a pleasure.

WANTED

We're calling for article ideas from all CICP members, all casting instructors, and all fly fishing photographers worldwide.

Please email your ideas and photos to:

loop@flyfishersinternational.org





Flats Fishing in Tennessee

The South Holston River or “SoHo” as it is affectionately called, is one of the greatest dry fly destinations in the United States. It can get somewhat crowded though, and in the hottest days of Summer with the trout going dormant and the hatches becoming more sporadic, turning to bass and poppers on eight weights is often the only way to scratch that top-water itch. During this trout hiatus, we turn to the The Holston River, the Soho’s big brother which flows from the Blue Ridge Mountains and stretches 274 miles across Virginia into Tennessee. It ends at the convergence of the French Broad (an excellent bass fishery as well) to form the Tennessee River. The Holston is one of the best kept secrets in the state, and the guides at 3-Rivers Anglers in Knoxville, Tennessee have developed a system of sight-fishing for bass that is the closest thing to saltwater flats fishing you’ll encounter outside the Florida Keys. Not only is this the absolute best time I’ve had on the water in years, this is an excellent way to keep the saltwater game sharp for less travel time and a whole lot less cash. In the Spring, the upper section of the Holston Proper, near Knoxville,

is home to aggressive, football-sized rainbow trout that will chase a streamer in the middle of the day due to lack of pressure. You can make a full day out of chasing these healthy rainbows and never get to the bass, but if you go, you must reserve at least half a day for the bass experience and have Captain Gillespie of 3-Rivers or one of his capable guides motor you downstream to the flats.

When it’s time to bass fish, tuck the five-weight into the rod-well and pull out a seven or eight weight. Though the classic, stealth bomber in chartreuse works well when blind casting towards the bank, and the Clouser Minnow is as deadly here as in any other river, to get the full effect of the Holston, tie on a size six Flymen Double Barrell Popper, in black. It’s like a regular popper but has two recesses in the mouth instead of one; this design creates a more violent surface disturbance when stripped. Though typically reserved for streamers, Captain Gillespie swears by the loop-knot for this fly, insisting that it makes the fly “chug harder.” 2x tippet is the order of the day on a

Flat Fishing in Tennessee *continued ...*

longer-than-average-leader. Where the store-bought bass leaders run a stubby six feet, this setup is more reminiscent of trout leader running nine feet or more.

When the guide finally switches from the jet to the quiet trolling motor as we approach the flats, you'll be thankful for those few extra feet of leader because the water is gin-clear. Your casting game must be dialed in. You have to be able to deliver the fly to at minimum fifty feet effectively. As the wake resides, you'll begin to see shadows of hulking Ictiobus also called Buffalo fish. They root around in nearly every section of the Holston River and are completely indifferent to flies. You won't be too concerned with the Buffalo fish if you've brought a fly rod. However, if you are a bow fishing archer, this area is a paradise.

Captain Gillespie, a reformed professor of Anthropology, pilots the trolling motor standing atop a platform looking for tailing carp in the midst of all these Buffalo. Massive carp root around in the flats sometimes embedded within a school of Buffalo, and though you won't be targeting them per se, (unless you want to) these brutes play a critical role in the style of bass fishing 3-Rivers has perfected. You're up on the bow, fly in hand, sixty feet of shooting line looped loosely into a basket, suddenly Captain Gillespie whispers, "50 ft. 11 o'clock" You look and see the profile of a golden carp foraging on the bottom in maybe two feet of water. You pull off your best saltwater quick cast and Gillespie always rasps, "drop it right right there" one cast before your intended layout; always take the loop that gets there fast over the one that gets there pretty. The popper smacks down and sometimes he says "leave it" and sometimes he says "twitch it" the carp remains indifferent, because that's what carp do, but then you see it: a shadow moves from somewhere in the vicinity of the carp and

approaches the noise. A sizable bass flushed from his camouflaged position moving to investigate the noise. It pauses under your fly floating in the crystal-clear water and sometimes Gillespie will say "chug it once" and sometimes he'll say "leave it" and you have to do everything in you to not touch that fly, but if you can resist the urge to move it, I promise: it will be the most vicious, satisfying take of any bass anywhere.

Make sure your drag is set to where you want it. These things fight hard.

Why are we casting to the carp to catch a bass? What does a carp have to do with bass fishing? Captain Gillespie has a theory: he believes that in this river, the carp and the bass have formed a symbiotic relationship where the bass hangs around and gorges on any food source that the carp dislodges while it is rooting. We target the carp, to flush out the bass; it emerges and smashes the fly. I don't know if this framework is backed by science, but I know that this technique is producing huge fish.

Who would have thought flats fishing (or the next-best thing) would be available in a land-locked state in the Southeastern United States?

The SoHo is truly a great river and worthy of its reputation, but for a truly different fly-fishing experience, drive just a little further down to Knoxville, Tennessee and give 3-Rivers Anglers a call at (865) 200-5271 and book a trip. You can find them at 5113 Kingston Pike, Knoxville, TN 37919. They've got a nice selection of gear, flies, and fly-tying materials too. See their website at www.3riversangler.com and definitely look them up on Instagram: [@3riversangler](https://www.instagram.com/3riversangler)

Enjoy the Journey?

Brian DeLoach - MCI

The sphere of powerlifting is a highly niche and guru-centric world. Disciples of various gyms and leaders in the sport rage against each other both at sanctioned competitions and in online forums where their highly technical methods and jargon run on for thousands of pages. Having a foot in both worlds of fly fishing and powerlifting, it didn't take long to observe the similarities in thinking between these two disciplines (at least online!). As beginners in both realms, we arrive with an assumption of linear progress; what we learn after a few months though, is that the progress is anything but linear: in weight-training the athlete must contend with injuries, recovery, the mysteries of the nervous system, and the unpredictable nature of the human body. This all leads to many ups and downs, times of perceived stagnation, followed by infrequent periods of growth till the whole charted trend appears anything but linear or consistent despite the consistency of our training. As a student of fly casting, we too learn that the eventual, upward trend is made up of years of peaks and valleys. As foreign movements are introduced, and the brain struggles to develop fresh neural pathways, or we simply bring fatigue from work or performance anxiety which hinders our practice, we come to a point time and again where it seems we are in a state of arrested development. And show me the caster who hasn't at least once thought of quitting when first practicing off-shoulder reach-mends.

When the discovery of the non-linear path towards mastery becomes apparent and the student recognizes that he or she is not making the

anticipated, continuous performance advances, or in power-lifting when the "novice gains" begin to taper off, frustration sets in, and then it happens: maybe confused for what to say, the well-meaning master/mentor says to the student "Hey, learn to enjoy the journey."

If you have been on the path to a black belt, a PGA instructor certification, a strength goal, the CI, MCI, or any uncommon benchmark that takes years decades even to attain, then you have probably heard this axiom from one of the gatekeepers of your discipline: "Enjoy the Journey." However, I believe it is time to reevaluate our use of this common phrase.

I've heard it myself. Regrettably, I've said it myself. Maybe I didn't know what else to say. But I can assure you: if my powerlifting programmer, a highly credentialed man of great knowledge and, of course, DEVASTATING strength, said this to me in a moment of failure, of which in this discipline there are many, I would find another programmer.

This single line, this throw-away line, lacks the critical precision we are known for as FFI instructors. As we shift to increasing standardization and specific rubrics for performance, "enjoy the journey" isn't the platitude the student needs anymore. Even if it is true, in spirit, there is a better, more constructive way to communicate what we mean, because in the FFI, we may indeed be a gaggle of eccentrics, but we are a precise gaggle of eccentrics.

Enjoy The Journey? *continued ...*

Most of us have been to the point where a student is fulfilling the tasks required (usually on the CCI exam) but the loops lacks a certain cleanliness and consistency. You know that the way to improve this is only through repetition which takes time; when the hours have not been committed to the task, it is apparent in the demo. But instead of saying “enjoy the journey” when you know it is time that is required, try instead: “Your false casting lacks consistency, the loops vary in size and/or speed [show them on video]. You need to come to a place where your basic cast is consistent in size and/or speed, and you need more reps to achieve this.” This gives the student a focus to achieve purposeful practice. Perhaps sometimes the performance is up-to-par, but the knowledge is lagging; this is the time to direct the student to specific literature on the suggested reading list in the study guide. “Enjoy the Journey” provides no point of focus or no target for one’s energy; it merely says “someday.” And if the goal of this phrase is code for telling the candidate not to be stressed—forget it; only complete preparation can minimize the stress of a candidate.

Secondly, envision the type of person who chooses to pursue a terminal certification in any discipline. Are they the type of person who benefits from hearing “Enjoy the Journey”? These are people who are continuously trying to improve; they are achievement-minded and must know where exactly to target their self-improvement. Saying “Enjoy the Journey” is as likely to arouse suspicion as to get the student to actually enjoy the journey, for by giving non-specific goals it can give the impression that the gatekeeper is providing a shifting or nebulous benchmark to delay progression thereby keeping the gate small and privileging the instructor’s position. The student may perceive that the instructor wishes to keep the student in a subordinate position for longer than is necessary.

Perhaps, sometimes, this perception is correct, even unknowingly; I worked hard and long on my instructor certification. As for all of us, the certification took years of preparation, and even as I write this I wince at the confession: I would have to judiciously control my own pride if one of my students was demonstrating proficiency in half the time I took to prepare. This situation would challenge my commitment to professionalism. It is unsavory to say, but whether a student or instructor, half of this discipline is about managing one’s ego.

There is a certain joy in the journey; I believe this too, but I also believe this realization is for our students to discover on their own. In the moment of futility that our pupils will inevitably experience, let us choose our words carefully. For me, knowing the type of people who choose this path, I will no longer tell them to enjoy the journey. I will seek to be more precise in my language and ensure the advice I give to my students is always constructive and provides clear performance objectives. Focusing on the journey is all fine and good, but let’s not ever lose sight of the goal (This applies double if the student is compensating me).

To the Journey—Enjoyable or otherwise

Brian DeLoach, MCI

NEW REGISTERED INSTRUCTORS

Newly Certified Instructors listed according to test date.

First Name	Last Name	City	Region	Country	Certification	Test Date
Bill	Morrison	Pineville	LA	United States	CI	06/03/2020
Cheryl	O'Neill	Pleasant Hill	CA	United States	CI	11/09/2020
Jody	Martin	Thousand Oaks	CA	United States	CI	05/03/2020
Malik	Mazbouri	Berne	BE	Switzerland	CI	22/08/2020
Ron	Ridgeway	Eureka	MT	United States	CI	05/03/2020
Joe	Sugura	Portland	OR	United States	CI	07/03/2020
Thi	Nguyen	Houston	TX	United States	CI	06/03/2020
Alan	King	Bryan	TX	United States	CI	05/03/2020
Stephen	Weaver	Gause	TX	United States	CI	05/03/2020
Jeffrey	Graham	Lebanon	OR	United States	CI	07/03/2020
Sekhar	Bahadur	London	Kensington & Chelsea	United Kingdom	THCI	20/09/2020
George	Sylvestre	Weston	ME	United States	CI	27/09/2020

For incoming test date and other CICP events information, please visit:
<http://flyfishersinternational.org/Casting/CalendarofEvents/tabid/616/Default.aspx>

The Editorial Team



Brian DeLoach, MCI, Editorial Director. Brian is a high school teacher and adjunct professor of English at Lee University where he also serves as an instructor for their fly fishing program. In addition to *The Loop*, his work has appeared in American Angler Magazine, Denver Outfitters, various political publications, and multiple peer-reviewed journals.



Mac Brown, MCI, is the owner of Mac Brown Fly Fish and Fly Fishing Guide School in Bryson City, NC. He is the author of Casting Angles and contributor to numerous magazine articles. Mac will serve as a technical advisor for *The Loop*. He enjoys adventure travel with his family when not teaching fly fishing techniques.



Peter Morse, MCI, is a professional Australian fly fisherman of many years who fishes in all waters for all species without prejudice. He is the author of countless magazine stories and 3 books, as well being a television presenter and script writer.



Bruce Richards, MCI, Montana, USA, designed many great lines for Scientific Anglers and wrote the seminal work, Modern Fly Lines. He is a former chair of CBOG and was instrumental in the development of the Casting Instructors' Certification Program (CICP).



Paul Brown, MCI, TH-MCI & L-1 Examiner, England. Paul is also a member of the UK's Game Angling Instructors' Association (GAIA) and holds the Advanced Professional Game Angling Instructors' qualification (APGAI) in both double-handed and single-handed and is also a qualified GAIA Mentor and Assessor. Paul is a published author of children's books, he also has 30 years media experience with some of the best ad agencies in England.



Bintoro Tedjosiswoyo is a **CI & TH-MCI** who lives in Melbourne, Australia. Bintoro is a commercial graphic designer and illustrator, he is *The Loop* graphic design editor and illustrator.

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