



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

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There will be no May 2020 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. Until developments in the COVID-19 pandemic permit, physical meetings of the guild are suspended. As they become possible, we will inform guild members by e-mail when and how they will resume. Stay safe and be well.

Among the many fly-tying videos available online that you can consult in the meantime, be sure to view the video of Dave Brandt's presentation on the Dette Riffle Dun at the December 19, 2019, guild meeting—a reminder of better times: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrmT03oum-o>.

President's Message

By Joe Ceballos

This *Gazette* is the last issue of the newsletter before the guild usually takes a break from meetings until the fall, but nothing is usual this year, including when and how we can meet. It is my firmest hope and heartfelt wish that all of you and your families are well and expecting to fish sometime soon.

This *Gazette* also is the last one published by Bud Bynack, our esteemed editor. I have known Bud for many years now, and he is nothing short of the best person that someone can know. I want to thank him for all the years he has provided us with this superbly produced *Gazette*. This newsletter is the crown jewel of the guild and has been recognized as such by many. Longtime member Chuck Coronato will take over for Bud, and he is excellently qualified to continue on with it.

Tim Flagler, of Tightline Productions, has generously donated his time to voiceover and prepare a video version of our PowerPoint presentation of the story of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. This project was initiated by Paul Dolbec and has had the cooperation of several members, with substantial input from Dave Brandt. It is still going through further refinement and review. I hope it will be ready for presentation in September. With this project, Paul without a doubt has become our club historian. He has been doing extensive research in all things Catskill fly tying in relation to this project.

In my own home lockdown, I have been reading as much as I can on Catskills angling and fly-tying history, too, learning as much as possible so I can represent the club well and put forth suggestions for future topics.

On a sad note, as all must know, we have lost a legend who was synonymous with Catskill fly tying—our beloved Dave Brandt. I knew Dave for more than twenty years, and he will be sorely missed. Words will never express the sadness you and I feel. Dave also was a mentor to me as president. When appropriate, we will hold a special memorial and tribute to Dave in conjunction with the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum.

For now, I will be planning next year's meeting plans for speakers, tying demonstrations, and events, and I welcome any and all suggestions and input.

Stay safe and healthy.

Editor's Note: Changes **By Bud Bynack**

As Joe Ceballos says, this is my last issue as editor of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*. Chuck Coronato will be taking over as editor, although in fact, this issue and the previous issue have been edited collaboratively by both of us. I'll continue to contribute book reviews and other writing, if I have things that seem worth saying and if Chuck is interested in them. I'll be available if he wants advice, but I won't be looking over his shoulder—I'll just be watching as he takes the *Gazette* new places where it needs to go.

I'm doing this because I value the *Gazette*, and the guild, and the newsletter's service to its members, but for the past few years, I haven't been giving the *Gazette* the attention it deserves. It's been on automatic pilot—or rather, I have. It needs the energy of someone new to it, energy that inevitably will put new life into it and improve it. You've seen Chuck's writing in the *Gazette*. He is a careful writer and an attentive reader, which are the main things an editor needs to be. When I decided it was time to pass the torch, he was the first person I thought of, and I was relieved and delighted when he said yes.

I took over editing the *Gazette* from Allen Podell fifteen years ago, a period marked by this issue, and just as when an odometer turns over at some mystic number, that seemed like the time to make the change. As I've often said, I could publish only what people sent me, and over the years, too many members to mention have been generous in providing work that transmits their knowledge of the Catskill fly-tying tradition and their amazing skills. I also owe special thanks to the columnists I have counted on, issue after issue—Andy Brasko, “Catskill John” Bonasera, Ed Ostapczuk, and the many contributors to “Looking Back Upstream.” Every editor of a periodical needs content. I've been fortunate to have folks who contribute great content and who, I know, will continue to do so for Chuck.

There have been only three presidents of the guild over these fifteen years—Hank Rope, Jr., Dave Brandt, and Joe Ceballos. They've all been more than helpful and encouraging, but it's no secret that it's the guild's secretary who makes the organization run. Judie DV Smith did more than keep me on the straight and narrow when I was ignorant or when I screwed up, as I frequently have. She enabled me to publish work by the likes of Eric Leiser and other major authors, and she allowed me to publish things no one otherwise would have seen from the Darbee archives. Erin Phelan deserves combat pay for her service, and since then, one of the major accomplishments has been the transition to publishing and disseminating the *Gazette* electronically. In addition to all the many other things Nicole March has done to keep the guild going, she (along with Nick Mango) took that off my hands without anyone ever saying, “OK, boomer.”

Like many people, I joined the guild in order to try to improve my tying. Nevertheless (and this is on me), I'm no better than a fly-tying duffer today. That's not a humblebrag: too many people have seen my flies. Dave Brandt frequently told me that what he valued most about the flies I swapped was that I hadn't impaled the label on the hook, and they for sure never merited so much as an “I can fix this” from Ralph Graves. Still, I know immensely more by having been at the center of an organization whose members are indeed not just the custodians of that tradition, but tyers whose skills and taken-for-granted knowledge leave me



Bud Bynack

Photo: Chuck Coronato

in awe and from whom I have learned and will continue to learn so much. I've also made a whole lot of good friends. People seem to have liked what I've been able to contribute as an editor, and I've always been grateful for that.

This change has been in the works for awhile, but it is occurring at a time of many other changes that no one could have anticipated when I initiated it. Life for everyone has changed radically in a matter of weeks—changes that are going to continue. It's an uncertain time, but one thing I'm certain of is that I leave the *Gazette* in good hands.



Looking Back Upstream

Stocking Trout with Carl Iseman

By Chuck Coronato

Carl Iseman caught his first trout on a fly at the age of thirteen when a friendly fly fisher named George Begerman handed him his rod and showed young Carl how to cast. That trout, an eight-inch brookie, rose to a Fan-Wing Coachman. Ever since that memorable moment in 1943, Carl has been hooked on fly fishing. On March 25, 2020, Carl, now ninety years old, marked sixty-nine years of stocking trout. Pascack Brook, where his fly fishing began, is always on the list of streams that he stocks near the end of a busy day.

A week before the opening of trout season, I joined Carl at Kakiat Park in Rockland County, where we waited for the arrival of the stocking truck from New York State's Catskill Hatchery. With moody weather threatening rain, the park's occupants were limited to Carl, Donny Piller (president of the Hudson Valley Fly Fishers), myself, and a woman off in the distance who appeared to still be wearing pajamas and practicing t'ai chi while her pooch ran inside a fenced play area for dogs.

When you spend time with Carl, you're bound to hear good fly-fishing stories. In between draws of smoke from his pipe, he reminisced about fishing Kakiat Park when it was still a large, private orchard. The river that flows through this spot wasn't stocked at that time, but he could come here and be sure to catch his ten-fish limit of native brook trout. Many of Carl's fishing stories turn into descriptions of snake encounters. He and Indiana Jones would run neck and neck in telling troubling stories about snakes. Carl recounted an episode in this park in which he sat on a half-submerged log to enjoy a sandwich while the river glided past him. It was all very pleasant until a large rattlesnake (this park has its share of rattlers) joined him on the other end of the log. Carl had to leap into water that ran over the tops of his hip boots, and he sloshed his way out of the river. He reclined on a steep bank, and stretched out with his feet higher up the slope than his head, so gravity would drain the water from his boots. Carl said that when he returned his gaze to the river, he saw that snake still claiming the log and staring right back at him. Donny and I would have been treated to more stories, but the crew from the hatchery arrived, and it was time to get to the business at hand.

Fish culturist Michelle Poprawski was behind the wheel of a flatbed truck that supported six white tanks of aerated water, each tank crammed with trout. She had a wide smile and called out a loud "hello Carl" as she swung open the truck's door. She and Carl have completed many stockings in the past, and it was obvious that they were happy to see each other. In his role as the unofficial Rockland County receiver of fishes, Carl is sent a list of the anticipated stocking locations. With concerns such as present water conditions, obstructions from construction or roadwork, and new posting signs on private property, he provides local knowledge regarding the viability of the list's stocking spots. Carl and Michelle compared their lists on the hood of his gray SUV and conducted what appeared to be a type of friendly but intense negotiation, with Carl advocating for more fish in certain locations. As soon as they finalized the plan, Michelle and her crew tossed several netfuls of brown and rainbow trout into the Mahwah River at the park, and we all hurried toward our vehicles, anticipating the need

to maintain a tight schedule. Carl drove past me as I approached my car. He rolled down his window, took the pipe out of his mouth, and in his understated fashion said, “Isn’t this exciting? I just wet my pants.”



Photo: Chuck Coronato



Photo: Chuck Coronato

The rest of the morning and early afternoon became a series of stops, mainly at bridge locations, where Michelle and her crew sent trout flying through the air and into moving water. This year, due to the pandemic, only state personnel were allowed to handle the stocking buckets, but Carl got out of his vehicle at each stop to make sure that the fish were being distributed in the correct spots. Not wanting to interfere with this busy operation, I made plans with Carl to talk on the phone, and I got out of everyone’s way.

When you hear Carl tell stories about growing up, it seems that he was destined to become a fly fisher. In his youth, he lived in Pearl River, and he recalls how at the age of nine or ten he frequented a bicycle shop in Nyack where the well-known fly tyer and author Ray Bergman would pass time near the rear of the store—tying flies. As a result of those visits, young Carl received many of Bergman’s flies, and at the age of twelve, he bought a copy of Bergman’s angling classic, *Trout*.

Carl was fishing the Ramapo River in 1951 when he met Harry Frie. Mr. Frie, who at that time was Rockland County’s receiver of fishes, asked Carl if he’d like to lend a hand with the trout stocking. Carl agreed, and with the exception of his stint in the army from 1955 to 1957, Carl has continued to stock trout. Over the years, Carl has seen many changes in the area; population growth has degraded trout habitat, and more private land is posted. What bothers him the most is the loss of many good friends and fishing buddies who used to be regulars in the stocking crew. In particular, Carl spoke of his dear friend Mike Parisi, who Carl said “is now fishing the streams in heaven.”

Other changes in the way that fish are stocked seem to reflect the litigious nature of modern times and different attitudes regarding drinking. Carl recalls, “Back in the old days, we would bring six-packs of beer, pretzels, have plenty of food, and at the end of the day we’d take the hatchery-truck driver to a gin mill and buy him a beer and a roast beef sandwich. Now, we drink coffee and sign liability waivers.”

Carl raised his family in Nanuet and worked for twenty-six years as a heavy equipment mechanic for Orange and Rockland Utilities. Before that job, he had a successful business delivering bakery goods, but he gave up his delivery route because it took up a large chunk of his fishing time. Carl is thankful that his wife, Mary, is very understanding of his fishing habits. He brought fishing equipment on their honeymoon (I didn’t ask him if he used it), and she still sees him looking at every creek that he passes while he’s driving. As we spoke on the phone, he said, “I’m lucky. My wife worries about me

still doing this, but never tried to stop me.” In the background I heard Mary say, “He never would have listened to me anyway!”

Carl would have continued to tell stories from a bygone era of fly fishing—and I would have been thrilled to listen—but the battery in his phone was running low.

This season, in particular, in which we are being asked to fish locally, we’re appreciative of Carl and the other people who make sure that there are trout in streams that aren’t necessarily the most famous of New York’s waters. A few children are certain to have caught their first trout from waters that Carl Iseman faithfully helped to stock. When I brought up the Royal Coachman that he used in 1943, he corrected me and said, “It was just a Fan-Wing Coachman. It hadn’t become Royal yet.” And if anyone is questioning the lasting importance of teaching a youngster to fly fish, you should know that Carl still has that fly, seventy-seven years after George Begerman reached out and handed a young boy his rod.

Theodore Gordon’s Dual-Purpose Flies

By John Gubbins

According to Harry Darbee, Theodore Gordon, along with Herman Christian, Roy Steenrod, and Ed Hewitt, founded what became the Catskill school of fly tying. The dean of the school was of course Gordon himself, whose interest was dry flies. Gordon considered Christian and Steenrod his friends. Hewitt, he met once over dinner at the Liberty Hotel in 1914. As dean, Gordon adopted no course of study, issued no school rules, and administered no final exams. He had learned fly tying through reading and experimenting, and he expected his pupils would learn the same way. It was the trout that passed final judgment on his graduates, especially the old brown trout that survived feeding in public waters.

By the time of Gordon’s death, the Catskill school had distinguished itself from the prominent tying schools of the day. The Scottish and Irish schools generally spent their time tying wet and salmon flies. Most British anglers fished wet flies downstream, but with the publication of his fly-fishing books, Frederic Halford, a wealthy British industrialist, attracted a small group of other wealthy British fly fishers to his school of “scientific angling.” Scientific anglers fished dry flies exclusively, because to Halford’s mind, dry-fly fishing was the only morally acceptable way to catch trout. Gordon read Halford’s books, took up dry-fly fishing, and became for several years a dry-fly purist and “the father of dry-fly fishing in America.”

However, limited success offering dry flies to Catskill trout cooled Gordon’s ardor, and an incident while fishing doused Gordon’s fervor altogether. It became a seminal moment in Gordon’s fly-tying education and led to a change in his manner of constructing dry flies. During the time Gordon was entertaining doubts about dry-fly fishing, he chanced on a run with three rising trout. He was fishing a cast of two flies: a high-floating dry fly of Halford’s design and a wet fly of his own design. Wading into the run with the three trout rising upstream, he false cast both flies. Both flies dried, and both flies floated. One after another, all three rising trout struck and were hooked, but not on Halford’s high-floating dry. Rather, they struck his floating wet fly.

Never accused of being quick on the uptake, I thought that there could be but one lesson to learn from Gordon’s conversion tale: he should ignore British dry-fly patterns and rely instead on flies of his own designs. But a deeper significance lay embedded in the tale. Gordon realized it, of course, but it escaped me for years. So with the conversion tale, I stored more of what I considered odd statements in Gordon’s writings about dry flies in the deep recesses of my memory.

In his late correspondence with G. E. M. Skues, the British angling author, Gordon related in passing the importance of tying dry flies that could double as wet flies. He had a receptive audience.

Skues was experimenting with fishing a single wet fly upstream to rising trout, first modifying traditional British wet flies and then later designing and fishing nymphs of his own design. Gordon noted these tactics, trying the British wet flies Skues advocated and then his nymphs, but in the end, Gordon drew back to strike out in a different direction. Skues pursued single-purpose fly designs. This course did not appeal to Gordon. He had success with flies constructed as dry flies, but that could both float and sink—dual-purpose flies, like his floating wet fly.

The conversion tale also spoke to the importance of the position of the dry fly relative to the water's surface. This was its deeper meaning. This was the meaning I was missing. Gordon experimented with varying the relationship of the dry fly to the surface of the stream. In so doing, he invented a new way to construct dry flies. In the conversion tale, his killing fly had been a wet fly that floated low in the water, mired in the surface film. Building on this fact, Gordon carried two types of dry flies: sparse ties and full ties. Gordon's lightly dressed flies were tied with a single hackle, the full with two hackles. His lightly dressed dry flies had a single wing. He wrote Skues, "I tie my flies usually dry fly fashion and they are very popular among my friends for fishing wet as well as dry. I do not split the wings if they are to be used wet, but they will cock and float as well as when split" (McDonald, p. 401). The presence of the single wing signals one of Gordon's dry flies that could just as easily be fished dry as wet. Most of the photographs illustrating Gordon's flies have a single wing and thus can be identified with confidence as samples of his lightly dressed dry flies (Francis, p. 171; Schullery, p. 118).

Gordon's two-hackled full version was designed for "rough streams" (McDonald, p. 455). Yet Gordon never lost sight of the fact that even his full-hackled dry flies could be fished wet. The full versions often sported a pair of wings like the flies we now think of as the traditional Catskill ties encouraged by Christian and Steenrod (Francis, p. 171). As Gordon explained, "In practice it is found that those flies kill well fished wet. It is easy to cut out some of the hackle if thought desirable" (McDonald, p. 396).

Gordon's full version generally sported skimpy wings. Toward the end of his life, Gordon mused frequently about the need for wings. Sometimes he tied full dries without wings. Where a pattern called for flight-feather wings, Gordon grudgingly added paired thin slips, more suggestive than imitative. For mallard and wood duck flank feather wings, he splayed thin slips or rolled them into thin columns. Hackle tips also suggested wings, and he originated their use for his full ties. Once, when the British angling magazine *The Fishing Gazette* ran an article attributing the origin of hackle-tip wings to a British fly tyer, Gordon challenged its premise, claiming the honor for himself. Gordon's defense rings true. His writings in the *Gazette* were self-effacing, generally avoiding controversy.

In Gordon's day, cock hackles were hardly as long as a little finger, good for four or five turns about the shaft of the hook, at most. Thus, a lightly hackled fly has little to raise itself out of the film. Experimenting with a lightly hackled fly, an angler will find it floats low in the water, mired in the film, closely duplicating Gordon's floating wet fly, whereas the full tie sits high above the film. The single hackle can be disturbed and be made to sink, thus turning it into a wet fly. In his last years, Gordon remarked to Skues, "I have seen a man hook and rise every feeding fish he tried. The fly was not dry and floating, but it certainly was not 'sunk'" (McDonald, p. 454). Gordon's new-style dry fly was what today we call an emerger.



Dark Quill Gordon, #14 Photo: Bud Bynack

Catching trout on floating wet flies happened often enough in Catskill history. Thaddeus Norris records one such incident. In his account, he and a friend were fishing the Willowemoc late in the season. Trout were rising in a pool below a dam. The river was low, and no water flowed over the dam. Norris offered them all manner of wet flies without success. His friend was fishing a cast of two wet flies. False casting the flies, a Grannom and a Jenny Spinner, they dried and floated briefly. “He would lay them so lightly on the glassy surface, that a brace of trout would take them at almost every cast, and before they sank, or were drawn away” (Norris, p. 333). Gordon was very familiar with this incident, having written a short article in 1892 for *The Fishing Gazette*. Gordon’s essay included Norris’s report in full to prove that American anglers dry-fly fished decades before Halford published his books. It certainly must have come to mind later when he reflected on his conversion event, for the stories are so similar. While Gordon changed, Norris remained unconverted, sticking with his wet flies.



Dark Quill Gordon, #14 Photo: Bud Bynack

George La Branche reported a second incident where a floating wet fly caught rising trout. At the time, following in his father’s footsteps, La Branche was a wet-fly angler. One Catskill summer, he was fishing the pool formed by the junction of Willowemoc Creek and Mongaup Creek. Late in the afternoon, he found four or five trout regularly feeding on the surface. He tried for them with wet flies, but without success. La Branche was a reader of the *Fishing Gazette*, and he had retained an article entitled “Casting to Rising Fish.” That night, he reviewed the article, searching for a solution to his problem (La Branche, p. 5). The article recommended dry flies. La Branche had none. Also, the article advised using flies that closely imitate the natural. La Branche had nothing close to the natural. So he “doctored” a few wet flies “by tying the wings forward so that they stood at

right angles to the body” (La Branche, p. 6). He was most worried about ensuring his wet flies floated. The article recommended paraffin-oil floatant, but again he had none. The doctored wet fly he chose was a Queen of the Waters, which did not resemble the natural in any way.

La Branche’s account is well written and bears repeating in his own words: “I waded boldly into a position some forty feet below and to the right of the pool. My first cast amazed me. The fly alighted as gently as a natural insect upon the surface, and, watching it as it floated down to the spot where a fish had been rising, I saw it disappear, a little bubble being left in its place. Instinctively I struck, and to my astonishment found I was fast to a solid fish that leaped clear of the water” (La Branche, pp. 6–7). It was a twelve-inch rainbow trout. La Branche kept at it: “Four fine fish fell to my rod that evening, all within half an hour, and the fly was taken on the first cast every time” (La Branche, p. 7).

La Branche slowly converted to dry flies. He fished both wet and floating wet flies for several years, then Halford’s books appeared to complete his conversion. Afterward, he fished nothing but dry flies, adapting them to



Light Gordon, #16

Photo: Bud Bynack

the Catskills' swift-flowing mountain streams. He ordered, and Gordon tied for him, high-floating dry flies. La Branche believed Gordon was the best fly tyer of his day. Later in life, as with Gordon, La Branche's ardor cooled. By that time, Gordon was dead, the Catskill school of fly tying was flourishing, and La Branche's Pink Lady pattern had become part of its repertoire.

Of these three reports of anglers catching rising trout with floating wet flies, Gordon showed the most penetrating perception and the more nimble intellect. Norris went on with his wet flies. La Branche became a dry-fly purist. Gordon took a different path. He invented a dual-purpose dry fly, a more than novel concept for his day, when scientific anglers openly warred with wet-fly proponents. Found nowhere in the literature of the period, Gordon's dual-purpose dry fly resulted from his extraordinary powers of invention. He analyzed his experiences from the ground up with an open mind. The proof: Norris and La Branche left books. Gordon left a living tradition, a school of fly tyers.

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John Gubbins is the author of *The American Fly Fishing Experience: Theodore Gordon, His Lost Flies and Last Sentiments* (Brule River Press, 2019). The flies illustrating this article were tied by him.



Early Season and COVID-19

With every season's end, most times even before it ends, I'm already planning for the next one. As the end of the season is winding down and you realize the streams will

close soon, it's natural to think ahead to next year. Who could have known there wouldn't be a next year?

This COVID-19 situation has been surreal, to say the least. I can't speak for all towns and counties, but where I live in Pennsylvania, a hundred and fifty miles from the Catskills, we are in a lockdown. "Stay at home," they blast from news shows and radio stations. Nonessential travel will be met with fines, and if they catch you driving anywhere other than to the grocery store or the hospital, watch out. I even carry with me a letter stating I'm an "essential worker," should the law tail me to see where I'm headed.

I am in every regard doing what I feel is best, as far as contact with people is concerned, and I even implemented new procedures at work to eliminate contact with customers, both for their safety and for ours.

I have been watching on social media where guys are getting out, catching trout, and enjoying the outdoors, even with this pandemic lurking all around us, and for that I'm glad. It's hard to watch at times, though, knowing I'm what feels like a million miles away and unable to do the same, but this will end someday, and I still have my backup hobby, tying flies.

And tying flies I am. I'm going through thread and hooks at a pace I never have before. I have been making a variety of different patterns, and I even devoted a whole Saturday to cleaning, rearranging, and streamlining my tying room to speed up the search for materials, something I previously spent way too much time doing. Instead of the six hours I would spend traveling back and forth from Pennsylvania to New York, I am utilizing the newfound time to grade and sort materials and attach feathers to hooks. It's not like standing in moving water, but it's better than a lot of things.

This also has been a good opportunity to read and reread my growing library of classic fishing and Catskills history books. I recently purchased an Art Lee book that I'm really enjoying, and it's fun to read his words while I can picture him at some of the Catskill Museum events and Two-Headed Trout Dinners he would attend.

The one thing I haven't started is preparing gear for the season. In my immediate area, we are still trying to "flatten the curve," and as sad as it sounds, this isn't going away soon. I figure I have plenty of time to get the hardware ready when the time comes, and by then, I will have enough flies to carry me into the 2025 season opener. By then, I hope we can all move around the way we used to.

Stay safe, stay well, and I hope to see everyone on the water and in the fly shops sooner, rather than later.

Dave Brandt and the Minonipi Wulff

There are probably more than a few interesting stories to be spun about Dave Brandt (1944–2020). What follows is the little that I knew of him. We first met in the early 1970s at New York State Council of Trout Unlimited meetings. Dave attended those gatherings with the council's secretary at the time, Roger Barr. Both men were members of the Upper Susquehanna Chapter, before that chapter took on Brandt's name, and I was there for the Catskill Mountains Chapter. Dave was quite the character, and I recall him at the meetings selling Metz necks from the back of his truck, which had a Metz sign. Accordingly, some of us referred to Dave as "Mr. Metz."

As we both drifted away from those meetings, our paths would cross only occasionally. I recall that he, Roger Barr, and another partner owned a house in dire need of repair along Hendrickson's Pool on the Beaverkill. The house has since been demolished, but the property might still belong to Dave's estate. For the most part, I'd run into Dave on a regular basis only once a year, tying flies at the Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, and there was always a crowd around his table. I recall two cards that sat in front of him: "Free flies tomorrow" and "Used wood duck, half price." Obviously, tomorrow never came for those free flies, but the card still stood in place the next day.

I'd bump into Dave on the East Branch of the Delaware, waving at him from a distance, or see him at the few guild meetings that I attended or Fly Fest at the museum. When Dave was president of the guild, he would occasionally contact me, asking if I'd research and write an article on a particular fly—a challenge that I gladly took on. This column is about Dave's Minonipi Wulff, in his memory. Fortunately, while attending those shows, I purchased a copy of *Traditional Catskill Dry Flies with Dave Brandt*, from which some of this material is taken. And fortunately for me, I can watch this DVD whenever I choose, seeing my old friend and hearing his voice again, providing much-valued instruction.

Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

The DVD's back cover notes the following: Dave Brandt—pen name Brooks Gordon—was a founding member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and was involved with Trout Unlimited, the Federation of Fly Fishers, United Fly Tyers, and the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. In 2017, he was inducted into CFFCM as a Catskill Legend, a fact not noted on the DVD. He tied flies commercially and worked as an instructor with the Wulff School of Fly Fishing for over twenty years.

Dave's DVD includes detailed tying demos for the following dry flies: Quill Gordon, Red Quill—his signature fly—Light Hendrickson, American March Brown, Pale Evening Dun, and the Minonipi Wulff, his creation. Along the way, I also tried purchasing traditional Catskill dry flies from Dave, but he refused to sell them to me. Instead, he traded his creations for some of mine in return, getting the short end of that stick. I ended up mounting the six aforementioned flies, plus a Sulfur Dun and Blue-Winged Olive, all tied by Dave in the true Catskill tradition. The fly pictured in this article was tied by Dave Brandt and resides in a shadow box covered with glass, through which the photo was taken.

Readers desiring to know specifics on how to tie the Minonipi Wulff should watch his DVD, but allow me to make some comments about this pattern. Dave began fishing Coopers' Minipi Lodge in Labrador for giant brook trout in 1981. He even did some guiding for the lodge. He developed this Wulff pattern to imitate two different large mayflies that appeared while he was there. Dave noted that the pattern didn't represent either mayfly specifically, but was close enough to both that it worked well. He called his pattern a "one size fits all." Before naming the dry fly, Dave requested Lee Wulff's approval to be associated with the Wulff dry-fly series. A few tips made in the DVD include: don't stack the hair wings, preen them by hand, and let the fish, not other tyers, judge the fly. He tied the pattern for durability. I think one common pursuit Dave Brandt and I both had were brook trout, although Dave's Labrador brookies were in the six-to-eight-pound range, while my Catskill fish tend to be six to eight inches long.

Minonipi Wulff

Hook: Daiichi 2421 or Partridge 01 Wilson, size 8 to 12

Thread: Danville 6/0 brown/olive prewaxed

Wing: Natural or dyed light brown calf tail

Tail: Straight woodchuck tail hair

Body: Dubbed beaver dyed brown/olive

Hackle: Medium dun and grizzly hackle feathers



One closing comment: I relish Catskill trout fishing history and keep copies of articles that I come across on this topic. The Spring 2003 issue of *Fish and Fly* featured an article written by Walter Hodges titled "The New Catskills." It's a fifteen-page picture story of thirteen noted Catskill fly tyers/anglers. The first one mentioned is Dave Brandt, who has since gone on to join the likes of Floyd Franke, Ralph Graves, Poul Jorgensen, Art Lee, and Roger Menard, all included in that article. R.I.P.

Fishing With The Blues

By Dave Plummer

Don't be short a few Blue Quills in sizes 16 to 20 anytime from April through October. The autumn naturals are paler in body color than the purplish *Paraleptophlebia* mayflies that we see in the spring, toward the evening or on lowering days, but the Blue Quill frequently fills the bill as a Blue-Winged Olive imitation throughout the year. During Hendrickson time, the Blue Quills are often interspersed in the same hatch, and while I'm wondering why the trout aren't taking my Hendrickson, they are actually locking in on the smaller fly, thus beguiling many a trout fisher.

One of my favorite artificials, and the simplest to tie, is the little Blue Quill Emerger in sizes 16 to 20—I call it the “Simpleton” Emerger. You can tie it in minutes with just its basic elements or take a little more time by embellishing it with underwings, overwings, or parachute hackle. Any of those variations work to make a half-submerged fly that can be fished in the same spirit as a traditional dry. When fishing this fly, though, you need to wear your glasses, on a tether, of course, and learn to follow the fly in the air before it lands, because all you will see is the wing post riding above the body like a tiny submarine periscope. A wee bit of floatant on the wing is all that is needed. If you lose sight of the wing on the water, be prepared to lift the rod if there is a bulge or a head feeding anywhere near where you think the fly ought to be.

My first encounter with this piece of fluff and sharp wire came in early May 2003 on one of the branches of the Delaware River. I'd read an article where the author described his blend of dubbing colors for various emerger bodies. For the Blue Quill “Simpleton” Emerger, I put a blend of furs together with a brown shuck and the fur from a naturally gray snowshoe rabbit foot for a wing. That day, I netted nine browns, some over fourteen inches long, with one eighteen inches. There were two takes that headed for Hancock, and after the second, I never saw fish nor fly again. I have to say that I happened to have been in the right place, at the right time, with the right fly and the right presentation without half trying or the knowledge thereof. When it happens, thank God, *cuz it doesn't happen often enough.*

My latest experience was during the first week of May last year in Willowemoc Creek. I walked into the water at 11:00 A.M., and the first thing that I saw was a hefty fish feeding on the opposite bank. Tiny wings riding the current said, “Blue Quills.” I clinched on a size 16, tossed it slightly above him, and he made a refusing pass. Not wishing to show it to him again, I changed to a size 20 of the same pattern, but with a slanted, fine deer-hair underwing. He grabbed it on the second cast—a gorgeous wild brown over eighteen inches long.

Always a mystery: who really knows what the trout thinks it sees at any given time?

Blue Quill “Simpleton” Emerger

Hook: Standard dry fly, size 16 to 20 (option: TMC 2487)

Thread: Brown

Wing: Tuft of dun-colored snowshoe rabbit heel fur

Tail: Smoky brown Antron shuck about half the body length

Body and thorax: Blend of brown and tan dubbing

with a touch of red fur. I like dyed beaver.

You may wish to embellish this with a dun hackle, tied parachute style, or with a fine deer-hair underwing, tied slant—or both.

Go Fish! You'll be anything but blue.



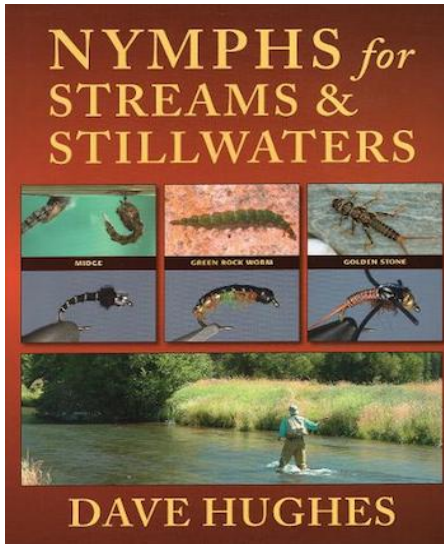
Photo: Dave Plummer

Book Review:

Nymphs for Streams and Stillwaters

By Dave Hughes. Published by Stackpole Books, 2020; \$29.95 softbound.

Nymphs for Streams and Stillwaters, by Dave Hughes, is one of several books that Stackpole is releasing in paperback editions, titles that were previously available only hardbound. Here's the thing: *it's a book by Dave Hughes*. If you don't have it in your angling library, buy it.



That's really all you need to know, but as a diligent reviewer, I will explain the premise behind what I just said and describe the book. The premise is that anything by Dave Hughes is worth owning, reading, and rereading. Over a career that has produced twenty-six books, by my count on Amazon, covering every aspect of coldwater fly fishing, he has consistently produced works of simple, but elegant prose characterized by common sense so well expressed that it sometimes rises to the level of wisdom.

That is the case with *Nymphs for Streams and Stillwaters*, originally published in hardback in 2009 at \$59.95. It's divided into four parts, the final three covering searching nymphs for moving waters, imitative nymphs for moving waters, and nymphs for still waters, but the fundamental outlook is established in the first part and reflected in its title: "The Way Nymphing Shapes Itself." It shapes itself, as does any aspect of fishing with the long rod, via the experience of the angler. Here, that's Hughes himself, but on the basis of his experience, a larger process emerges, made concrete throughout this book by the numerous stories that Hughes tells.

Angling shapes itself by a process of expansion and contraction, systole and diastole, beginning and ending and beginning. The story that initiates *Nymphs for Streams and Stillwaters* turns on the way that flies that don't work eventually drive out ones that do from anyone's fly boxes, necessitating a new beginning: "I start each season with a few nymphs in my box that I know will work, a larger scattering of flies that I hope will work," and a majority of flies "that have failed to work at all, and therefore accumulate because they never get tied to tippets and lost." So he begins again, buying a new box, partly filling it only with proven patterns in the sizes and colors appropriate for the waters he fishes, but leaving room for the flies from new waters, new materials, new inspirations at the vise, however goofy and ineffective these may prove, because beginning again is beginning to repeat the process, including whatever personal idiosyncrasies will shape the next phase. As you work through the book, he says, you, too, should begin with a new box for each of these three kinds of nymph.

As seems obligatory in every tying book, there are chapters on basic tools, materials, and techniques, including one you seldom see on putting together a portable kit for on-the-road tying. The meat of the book, however, consists of the many proven patterns presented in each of the three parts, with step-by-step tying directions and discussions of the most effective ways to fish them, written in Hughes's lucid prose, and step-by-step photos and other photographs reproduced to Stackpole's high standards. Each part also ends with a summary of what an effective new nymph box for that style of fly might contain and conclusions about tying and fishing searching, imitative, and stillwater nymphs.

What unites all these particulars thematically are basic commonsense principles that are embodied in the angling stories that Hughes tells and explicitly emphasized from time to time—principles that tend to get lost as we keep looking for the perfect fly to fish in any and every circumstance.

The first is simplicity. We all get caught up in the possibilities of elaborating a fly in the vise, but flies that catch the attention of fish tend to be a lot simpler than flies that catch the fancy of anglers. That means that searching nymphs for the most part are all you need to do the job, and you need imitative nymphs only when the abundance and/or large-scale availability of a particular bug at emergence makes something more imitative necessary.

The other principle is a respect for your own experience, which means tying and fishing the flies best adapted to the waters you fish. Just going with what has always worked is fine, up to a point—it is part of the same human nature that will eventually lead you to accumulate a lot of weird and ineffective flies. However, actually doing stream samples, collecting specimens of the food your trout are eating, and adapting what you tie to what you find expands your experiential base and makes catching fish more likely. It's the way your nymphing will shape itself.

As I began by saying, such commonsense principles embodied in lucid prose are hallmarks of Dave Hughes's books. That's why like his others, *Nymphs for Streams and Stillwaters* is worth owning.
—Bud Bynack

Obituaries

David S. Brandt, seventy-five, passed away on March 26, 2020, at home, with his loving wife, Barbara, by his side.

He was born on August 2, 1944, in Oneonta and graduated from Oneonta High School with the Class of 1962. While in high school, he sported the popular ducktail haircut, which he continued throughout his life. He sang in a doo-wop group, played trumpet in the school band, and was delighted to have the opportunity to play the grand piano at Carnegie Hall. Later in life, he was honored to blow trumpet with Louis Armstrong. He enjoyed big band and jazz music and sat at the piano, effortlessly noodling chords and creating beautiful music.

David worked in construction and was involved in the building of the Gilboa Dam. He then worked for many years as a tool and die designer at Bendix in Sidney, where his designs resulted in many patents for the company.

David was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed hunting, but also caring for and feeding the animals that came into his backyard. However, his true passion was dry-fly fishing in the East and West Branches of the Delaware River, other rivers in the Catskills, and in the Adirondacks. He had a wealth of fly-fishing knowledge and had a collection of fly-fishing books, rods, and reels from some of the most esteemed and respected writers and makers in the world.

David enjoyed sharing his passion with others, teaching at the renowned Wulff School of Fly Fishing in Livingston Manor for more than thirty years. He was also a guide and taught fly fishing in Labrador, Canada. He loved traveling across the country and around the world to participate in fly-fishing shows, and he was instrumental in establishing the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum in Livingston Manor. David appeared in many magazines, books, and fly-tying instructional videos and most recently was featured in the Catskill fly-fishing documentary *Land of Little Rivers*. He was inducted into the Fly Fishing Hall of Fame as one of the Catskill Legends. He was the inventor of the Dave Brandt Tied and True Hackle Gauge.

David was also a bit of a pool shark. As a young person, he was known to hitchhike to New York City to watch what he called "The Big Sticks." He refereed pool tournaments, his last being in January of this year at Turning Stone Casino.

One of his favorite pastimes was heading to the Black Oak Tavern on a Friday afternoon, no matter the weather. He enjoyed nothing more than to reminisce with many of his old friends, a few new friends, and sometimes his son, sitting back and enjoying a Newcastle Brown Ale with them all.

David is survived by his wife, Barbara (Neill) Brandt; son, David M. Brandt; grandsons Tucker and Austin Brandt; daughter, Deborah (Patrick) Prendergast; granddaughter, Rebecca (Shane) Lanahan; grandson, P. J. Prendergast; the mother of his children, Cheryl (Wart) Newton; stepchildren David Michael (Dee) Palombo, Terry A. (Dave) Dundon, and Karen K. (Ralph) Bidwell and their families; siblings William Wells, John Wells, J. R. Wells, and Robert Wells; as well as many nieces, nephews and longtime close friends and acquaintances too many to list.

He was predeceased by his mother, Adelaide (Escher) Wells and stepfather John Wells; father, George Brandt; brother, Geoffrey Brandt; sister, Marilyn Ruth Gerowe; and beloved granddaughter, Sarah Rosaleen Prendergast.

Two celebrations of David's life are being planned, one locally in Oneonta and the other at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum in Livingston Manor. Dates for both celebrations are to be determined.

Donations in David's memory may be sent to the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, P.O. Box 1295, Livingston Manor, NY 12758, www.cffcm.com.

Dave Brandt **By Bob Mead**

About thirty-three years, ago I got a phone call from Dave in early March to ask me if I would tie during the day at his TU banquet and donate one of my realistic praying mantis dioramas for their auction that night, the last Saturday in April. He said he would have a room and a banquet ticket waiting for me.

I was writing a column for the original *Fly Tyer* magazine at the time and had gained some notice for my realistic flies. I told him that he could count on it, but to please call me early that week and remind me.

The weeks flew by, and he called the Monday evening before the April 29 banquet. When I picked up the phone, the first words I heard were, "Well, did you remember?" The voice was unmistakable. I chuckled and told him that for probably the first time in my life I remembered something that was set up a couple of months before. This time it was Dave who laughed. He said he had a lot of calls to make and would see me Saturday.

I no sooner hung up when the phone rang again. It was my mother. "Hi Bobby," she said, "You got anything special lined up for this Saturday?"

"Well yeah, I'm demo tying flies at the Oneonta TU banquet during the day before the dinner, then staying overnight."

"Oh, is Grace going with you?"

"No, she isn't. She knows how late these things run when I get talking fishing and tying with my friends."

She started to say something else when her doorbell rang and instead said, "I'll call back later, think it's the paper boy collecting."

Two minutes later the phone rang again, and thinking it was my mother calling back, I picked it up, saying, "That was quick."

But it was my sister.

"Oh, hi sis, thought it was mom calling back."

Just then Grace returned from some shopping, while at the same time my sister asked the same question my mother had asked.

"You and Grace doing anything special this Saturday?"

Thinking that was a little *Twilight Zone*-ish, I said again, “I’m going to Oneonta Saturday morning to demo fly tying before the banquet and staying overnight, and no, Grace isn’t going.”

I thought the bedroom door down the hall closed a little louder than usual—OK, quite a bit louder than usual.

“What’s going on, sis?”

“You know what day that is, don’t you brother?”

“Yeah,” I answered, “April 29. Oneonta TU’s conservation banquet and fundraiser.”

“You better look inside your ring!”

“Huh?” I took off my wedding ring, the only ring I wear, and looked at it. Other than a little wear, the white gold looked fine.

“Look at the date, you idiot” she about screamed, “It’s your twenty-fifth wedding anniversary!”

I called Dave back and told him Saturday was my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

He said, “Oh, so you aren’t coming?”

“No, I’m coming. I’ll need an extra banquet ticket for Grace.”

“No problem—see you there”

I walked down to the bedroom and told my wife, “Hey, ‘we’re’ going to Oneonta this weekend for Dave’s TU banquet and stay overnight. I’m tying during the day and you can relax in the room, maybe read a book, or come in to see the tyers and presentations. We will celebrate twenty-five years together!”

There was just a hint of a grin, but I could see it wasn’t what she had hoped for as a celebration.

The day came, she stayed in the room, and after tying all day, I went back to the room to get dressed for dinner. I just finished putting my sport jacket on when there was a knock on the door. Grace answered it.

There stood Dave and a half dozen others, who all began singing—to the tune of the “Happy Birthday” melody—“Happy anniversary to you!” Dave was carrying a silver tray on which stood a bottle of champagne and two glasses. They sang the song twice, shouted “Happy twenty-fifth anniversary,” then left.

Grace stood there in shock. To say that she instantly had a complete change of heart as to what she had thought of most of my fly-fishing and tying buddies over the years is to put it mildly. It was a total and wonderful surprise to me, too, and I later thanked him several times. It sure made my life easier

Over the decades, I have seen the many facets of Dave: The precise tying, casting, and fishing techniques and how clearly and articulately he demonstrated to whomever was watching, especially if a youngster. I saw his often stubborn single-mindedness, his love of family, friends, and whatever subject he was into, and finally his infectious laugh and his always sincere smile. Well, almost always.

We were at a poorly attended show during a monster snowstorm. More than two feet of the white stuff had closed the Massachusetts Turnpike. A few brave souls attended that Sunday, and one fellow stood in front of our table, at first admiring both of our flies, but then he seemed to be trying to impress us with three statements he made just before moving on. The first statement was something we agreed with him on, as had thousands of anglers throughout the last century, and we agreed with the second statement. Then he said something as he stepped back to move on that we both smiled at. As soon as he was down the aisle a ways, Dave and I looked at each other and in unison said, “Well, two out of three ain’t bad” and had a good laugh over it.



Card with two signature flies—Red Quills

Photo: Mike Valla

Dave Brandt: He Gave a Damn **By Nicole March**

As we learned about the untimely passing of our friend and mentor Dave Brandt, we found some comfort in knowing that all of us seem to have a “Dave story” to share. Many of them are funny, filled with knowledge, Newcastle Brown Ales, fly-tying lessons, and laughter, but in the end, all of them seem to have one thing in common—each story seems to have had a profound influence on our lives, and you didn’t need to know Dave Brandt on a personal level to have experienced the ripple of his teachings somewhere down the line.

I had been tying flies for less than a year when I first met him, and while at the time I had no idea who Dave Brandt was, one thing was for certain: speaking to him that day would turn out to have an enormous impact on my journey behind the vise.

From the day I’d started tying flies, most of my information came from books. I had always been a voracious reader. To this day, you can find me surrounded by endless stacks of those “paper-made” resources, with scraps of frayed notes sticking out from the tops of closed pages and others strewn about my tying bench, the most important ones held down by an unfinished cup of coffee, festively decorated with the most recent shade of dubbing floating in it.

At the time I met him, I was completely unaware of just how huge the fly-tying community is or that there even was such a thing. In the thirty-plus years I had spent fishing with my father, the extent of the “community” was the two of us in a boat, fishing for bass, and I loved every minute of it.

But as I started tying flies, I became more obsessed with fishing than I had ever been before, and I began doing so in more ways than I even knew existed. This newfound addiction to fur and feathers on a hook seemed to add a missing piece to my life.

While solitude and my introverted ways will always be something that I need in order to function in society, I came to find that by staying in that mindset all the time, I was missing out on quite a bit of in-person knowledge that I hadn't known existed. So when I heard there was going to be a tying event at a local fly shop, there was no way I could pass up the chance to sit down and ask all of my questions to a handful of fly tyers for the first time.

Show time! I arrived early to the event and barged through the back door to the fly shop. Coffee and notebook in hand, I eyed the rows and rows of material on the walls as I made a mental note to shop from my list on the way out. My subconscious ran through the Rolodex of questions I planned to rattle off to anyone who would listen, and as I turned the corner into the event room, I stopped.

I was early—early enough to be the first one there.

The room was all set up and waiting for the day's festivities—work lamps plugged into outlets, tables draped with white tablecloths. Just as I was getting ready to turn around, I noticed someone behind one of the tables. I hadn't noticed him at first, because he was sitting in a chair, bent to the side, and reaching into a bag. Only a head of meticulously combed gray hair could be made out until he sat up and opened a small plastic box. It looked to be a box with sorted hackle feathers, and one by one, he began taking them out and laying them on the table.

I wasn't sure what to do at that point, and feeling like an intruder in the empty room, I began slowly backing out of the doorway. That's when he spotted me.

“Good morning. Here for the show?”

“I, uh, yes.”

“In that case, come on over while I get set up. I'm Dave. You do much fly tying?”

I froze. Tying was all I had been doing since I first heard about it, and while I had a million questions running through my head, I couldn't think of a single response to that one simple inquiry. Honestly, I'd be lying if I said I remembered what I answered him with.

What I do remember, and what I will never forget, is what came next. He began asking about how I'd gotten into fly tying and what books I'd been reading. He told me about his massive home library and recommended another handful of titles to add to my list. He asked what I knew about dry flies, and I told him, “Honestly, not much at all.” Laughing, he told me, “We're going to have to fix that.”

He started talking about the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and what their message is in regard to preservation, history, and education. He told me he was the president of this organization, which met in the Catskills, an organization in which years later, I would be asked to take over as secretary.

As he began explaining what the materials were that he would be using for the day's demonstration, spectators filtered into the shop, pleasantries were exchanged, and the event was underway. Throughout the day, people would come and go, the tyers would tie, then stop and grab some food, then chat with people passing by and tie some more. This meant there was plenty of time for me to listen to others ask their questions and have a chance to ask my own.

But when the fly-tying portion of the show started to wind down and people made their way out to cast some rods, I stood nervously in the doorway with my notebook. He must have seen the panic attack looming all over my face, because he smiled and said, “Uh oh, looks like someone's got a few of those questions for me that we talked about earlier. Well, bring 'em on over, and let's see what you've got there.”

I took a seat across from him and started to open up my notebook, but he held up a hand to stop me and said, “Jeez kid, from the size of that paper stack it's safe to say I might need one of these first.”

He took a Newcastle from a small cooler under his table, and we both laughed as I scanned page after page of chicken scratch trying to figure out where to start.

“Well? What have you got for me?”

“I’m not sure—there’s too many. I don’t know where to start.”

He said, “Well you can’t get to the last one if you don’t start with the first one.”

So I did, and do you know what happened next?

He gave a damn.

Plain and simple, and because I don’t know how else to word it; there it is.

Dave was one of the first people I’d ever spoken to who genuinely gave a damn about my interest in fly tying, and as someone new to the art of tying and so full of enthusiasm, it was just what I needed to experience.

Knowing my time was limited, I carefully picked different questions from those dog-eared pages, and one by one, he answered them as best he could, pausing between answers to let me finish writing down his responses and his book recommendations on specific topics.

Every so often he’d look at me over the top of his wire-rimmed glasses and laugh, asking, “Is that all you’ve got? Let’s have another!”

He asked if I had brought any of the flies I had been tying, and when I showed him the box, he studied them carefully, picked a few of them up, and gave them a once-over as I quietly asked what I could improve on.

As the hour went on, he demonstrated a few techniques I had struggled with and even let me try them myself on his vise, all the while giving me pointers as I went along. I couldn’t believe it—a complete stranger seemed to be having just as much fun teaching as I was having fun learning.

And to this day, that genuine enthusiasm and willingness to listen to my questions while never once making me feel stupid or uneducated plays a huge part in lighting an even bigger fire under me.

Dave, as many of us in this community do, enjoyed teaching and volunteering his time with countless organizations, and I share this with you not only to tell my own personal “Dave story,” but to remind you that it doesn’t take much to push someone in the right direction when it comes to pursuing a new interest.

The reason I say you didn’t have to know him on a personal level to feel the impact of his teachings is because everything we learn, we pass on to others. If you have taken something away from my teachings, a tutorial, or a show, you are partially learning from him, as well as from the countless other people I have met on my journey. I incorporate pieces of their knowledge into my own tying and pass it on to someone else.

And as many of us spend this pandemic-mandated quarantine to tie our flies, sort our gear, and dream of getting back to the rivers, take a moment to reflect on where you are in your journey and the people and places that have encouraged and inspired you along the way.

Then, in the future, when some sort of normalcy makes its way back into our fly-tying communities, try to make it a point to pass your own enthusiasm for this art form on to someone else, either through a friendly conversation or by volunteering with one of the many organizations out there, just as Dave and so many others have done along the way. You never know how inspirational a little bit of your time might prove to be.



Photo: Nicole March




Photo: Mike Valla



Photo: Bud Bynack



Photo: Courtesy of a guild member

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