



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



Volume 19, number 4

July 2016

The Annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Picnic will be held on Saturday, August 20, 2016, from noon to 4:00 P.M., at the Elsie and Harry Darbee and Matthew Vinciguerra Memorial Pavilion at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY.

Bring a dish to share (appetizer, main dish, salad, or dessert), and your own plates, silverware, and beverages. Guests are welcome. You must contact Judie with the number of people who are coming and what dish you're bringing to share. A few people wait to see what we need on the list. E-mail her at darbee1@juno.com or call (607) 498-6024 and leave a message.

There also most likely will be our annual casting contest, presided over by casting-game commissioner Gary Sweet. As in the past, bring a rod or two—cane, glass, or even graphite—so people can play with each other's toys.

Don't forget the fly swap. Bring two flies of the same pattern—one to trade, and one for the guild—in separate containers and labeled with your name, the name of the fly, the size of the hook, and the date tied.

Note that there is no guild meeting in July. The annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild dinner, usually held after the Rendezvous in April, will not be held this year. Look for it after the Rendezvous in 2017.

Coming Events

Summerfest, Angler's Market, and the Hardy Cup casting competition at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, August 6 and 7, 2016.

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Annual Picnic, August 20, 2016.

Partridge Fly Tying Day at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, sponsored by the Dette Fly Shop and Partridge of Redditch, September 19, 2016.



Looking Back Upstream



Of Proust and Pre By Chuck Coronato

It's called *involuntary memory*—being transported to another time and place by some antecedent, some event, that in and of itself shouldn't be significant, but opens the floodgates holding back the past. Author Marcel Proust claimed to experience this after a simple bite of a madeleine dipped in tea. I don't believe in the concept at all, even though I've experienced the phenomenon on many occasions, so it looks like I'll have to marshal all of my powers of denial one more time. Not that the memories are particularly painful—no need for explanations using anatomically correct dolls or anything—but these specific memories shaped who I am and were brought on by three words written on the sign next to the casting pond at one of the major fly-fishing shows.

Bob Seger's song "Night Moves," a nostalgic tale about teenage sexual exploits, opens with a line about being too tall and needing more pounds. Looking back, the opening of that song (not the sex parts, unfortunately) described me perfectly in high school, and it described all of my gangly teammates, distance runners on the track and cross-country team—everyone, of course, except the short guys—Christ, they were short *and* skinny. We were an abject mess, and while the sprinters and pole vaulters always got the girls, we got to go on a long, solitary run. We regularly ran the perimeter of the same practice fields used by the football team, in plain sight, but nobody noticed us . . . and we were grateful for our invisibility. You don't become a distance runner if you're not part loner, part masochist, part down the middle of your hairline in a part-it-on-the-side world. We didn't quite fit in, and we *definitely were not cool* . . . and that was an unforgivable condition, because cool is the currency that matters in high school.

Our best runner, a twelfth-grader named Ronnie, was the one exception to the rule. Ronnie was big-time into birds, which probably doesn't sound like the royal road to cool, but it worked in his case when he showed up at track meets with an actual falcon on his arm—tethered and muzzled—then stepped onto the track and set school records for the mile. I have no idea where he kept the bird while he was running, but that's the kind of not paying attention to details that typified all of my reasoning at that age and explains a lot of bad decisions. In one memorable race, Ronnie went to the starting line suffering from some kind of self-inflicted illness and was clearly in no condition to set any records. Any of us could have blown right past him . . . but we didn't . . . and since the other team lacked worthy milers, we all lined up behind our number-one guy and ran a slow-motion race, reminiscent of O. J. Simpson's white Bronco being chased by the police at a glacial pace. We just conceded the race to Ronnie and let him win with a time well over five minutes. The coaches couldn't figure out what had taken place, but everyone else knew the score. A pecking order existed, with immutable laws where the cool kids were at the front of the pack or got to ride the back of the bus whenever they wanted.

With teenage life being what it is, I was in search of belonging, for an identity, busy auditioning idols, and as embarrassingly clichéd as it is—I was looking for a hero. Steve Prefontaine was a hero right out of central casting long before actual movies were made about him. He was the best American distance runner, an Olympian, undefeated through college at any distance greater than a mile, rebellious and outspoken, a charismatic, brash, run-from-the-front-of-the-pack burner on the track. Girls thought that he was cute, guys wanted to down beers with him, and he achieved the kind of celebrity where he was simply referred to as "Pre." He was living a dream that I wanted to live, and I would have gladly traded places with him in a superconditioned heartbeat. In short, I wanted to live Steve Prefontaine's life. To be clear, I didn't just want to emulate him, I wanted *to be* Steve Prefontaine.

Long before I ever knew about the steelhead that ascended its coastal rivers, Oregon seemed like a magical land. Most of my classmates were captivated by the perceived charms of California, but I dreamed of Oregon, because at that time, the town of Eugene was the epicenter of track and field under the guidance of legendary coach Bill Bowerman, cofounder of Nike, and Hayward Field contained the

track where Pre achieved fame—and by extension—where I would also run great races, since I was going to be Steve Prefontaine. The country seemed bigger back then, and the left coast was a long way from New Jersey, so when word got around that “my future self” and high-jump champion Dwight Stones were headlining a track clinic at Rutgers University, there was no force powerful enough to keep me from going. On a cold winter’s morning, I laced up my pair of Nike Cortez shoes, and, being too young to drive, I mooched a ride to the campus from a teammate’s father.

The big track clinic at Rutgers (very close to the location of the present-day Somerset fly-fishing show) drew an excited crowd. The atmosphere was similar to the moments of a rock concert just before the lights go down. He was there, looking rather small in person, but still unmistakably Pre. The completely unimportant person who introduced the two stars recited predictable blandishments, which were followed by instructional presentations from the icons themselves . . . and most importantly, a period of questions and answers. This was going to be my big opportunity to speak face to face, runner to runner, with my idol. The whole crowd, and especially Pre, would immediately recognize that the kid who was a Prefontaine doppelganger with the shaggy mane and startup facial hair was clearly a running insider who should be standing alongside the great champion. When he finally called on me and looked me straight in the eyes, my “brilliant” question consisted of asking whether he ran hills by landing on his heels, or on the balls of his feet. Admittedly, it was not the best question in the world, but you must remember that I was the same kid who had no idea what Ronnie did with the falcon. The question represented my maximum effort at that moment, and it hung in the air, far reaching and suspended for a very long time, the way a big cast waits for its loop to unfurl until it springs forward in a moment of great majesty. In my mind, the question showed knowledge of the finest details of the sport, inextricably connecting me with Mr. Prefontaine in a stride-by-stride moment—the conferment of my new status requiring only what would surely be Pre’s enthusiastic reply. After what seemed like an eternity, he finally answered my question with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders and a simple afterthought of, “on my toes, I guess,” while looking around the rest of the room as if to say, “Are there any *good* questions out there?” I was simply crushed. The air in the room instantly choked me—probably the result of the exhalation of everyone who was relieved that they didn’t ask *that question*.

After the clinic, I glimpsed Pre one last time as we were driving away. He was running a workout and gliding—just absolutely gliding—down a long road on the Busch Campus, instantly making it Pre’s road. It looked like he could run that road forever, but reality and eternity have a way of not mixing. Steve Prefontaine died late in the spring of that year, just hours after celebrating another win in a 5000 meters race, killed when his 1973 MGB convertible flipped and pinned him to the road after a single-vehicle crash against a rock on a sharp turn. The first person at the scene was unable to lift the car off the chest of a still-alive Pre, and the coolest runner of my generation died from traumatic asphyxiation with a reported blood alcohol level of .16. A spontaneous shrine formed at the big rock where Pre lost his life. “Pre’s Rock” is still a pilgrimage spot for the faithful and the curious, more than forty years after his death. Conspiracy theories abound about the true cause of the accident, with alleged cover-ups reaching the highest levels. Ardent admirers have trouble reconciling the idea that someone who seemed to border on the supernatural was also so mortal. His life had the story of a hero’s arc, and it seemed to demand a more heroic ending than too many beers and not wearing a seatbelt.

Pre’s death was a pivotal moment in my life. I had to come to grips with the fact that the life of the other person I wanted to be was destined to end early, and in wrestling that reality, had to decide if I wanted to actually live the life that I had. Making that choice gave me the impetus to reinvent myself, to be someone less likely to invest emotions in delusions, to better value my own life for what it was and learn to accept what it was not.

Whether it’s the perspective of age or just inherent checks and balances in my present obsession, I don’t see the folly of idolatry repeated in fly fishing. We have the stories and accomplishments of anglers in the rich history of our sport and many experts in the present that we may admire, but they seem more accessible and not otherworldly. We don’t view their experiences from afar, but instead, we get to join them and partake in the communion of the waters as they do. I never ran on the track at

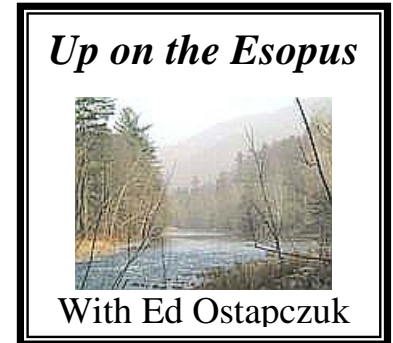
Hayward Field, but I've fished the same hallowed rivers as Gordon, LaBranche, Hewitt, and Wulff. I've never been to Pre's Rock, but I've stood on the large flat rock in Hendrickson's Pool on the Beaverkill and thought of the people, some famous and most not, whose footsteps have also crossed that stone. No matter how skilled the angler or how large the crowds that they draw at the shows, our venerated fly fishers may reach the level of legend . . . but I will elevate them no further. I've learned my lesson, and as I watch the arc of fly lines by the casting pond, the three admonishing words on the sign state it clearly: No Hero Casts.

The Sofa Pillow: An Eastern Version of a Western Classic

A primary Catskill Fly Tyers Guild focus is the history of old classic Catskill fly patterns. In this issue, however, I've wandered a little out of the Catskill region, as I've occasionally done before, discussing a classic Western dry-fly pattern worth remembering. The Sofa Pillow is a 1940s creation of Pat Barnes (1907–1997), a prominent West Yellowstone guide who owned the Waterborn Flies shop, later acquired by Bob Jacklin and renamed. Barnes also worked with Dan Bailey and Don Martinez, two other noted Western fly fishers.

Angling folklore reports that shop patrons from Texas requested a few large dries for the Salmon Fly hatch, and Barnes created this pattern. When the customers examined it, they thought it was as large as a sofa pillow, and thus it got its name. Renowned angling historian Paul Schullery, in *Cowboy Trout*, credits Barnes for being one of the first Western tyers to develop a classic big dry fly specifically intended for large stonefly hatches. I've also read that the Sofa Pillow was a basis for Jim Slattery's version of a classic stonefly pattern, the Stimulator. The Sofa Pillow continues to be a dandy dry fly that still seduces trout, often taken for a stonefly or small grasshopper. And tied for Eastern hatches, it seduces trout in the Catskills, not just in Montana.

I tie the Sofa Pillow "Catskill slim" and not "bushy Western," sometimes using blond elk hair for the tail, which provides greater visibility, durability, and floatability. Fishing small red dry flies in late August and early September is favorite pastime of mine. Red dries match the mood and color of the season. Plus, this particular silhouette matches that of little stoneflies, often the most prevalent aquatic insect found on headwater creeks.



Size 16 Sofa Pillow

Hook: Daiichi 1270, size 16

Thread: Black

Tail: Goose quill dyed red,
or blond elk hair

Body: Red floss

Wing: Gray squirrel

Hackle: Brown saddle



Two years ago, I caught an upper Neversink brook trout—pictured below—on a size 16 Sofa Pillow, and its photo graced the back cover of the April 2016 *Conservationist*, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s angling Web page announcing trout season’s 2016 opening day. It also was included on page 56 of a new DEC brochure, the *I [fish] NY Beginner’s Guide to Freshwater Fishing*. So there’s a solid Catskill connection for this classic Western pattern.



Kuttner’s Fly Shop

I knew this day would come, though I wished it wouldn’t. Frank would tell me how expensive it was to keep the door open, the cost to heat the space in winter and not really moving much product. Simply stated, today’s angler doesn’t seek out a fly shop like Frank’s place. You didn’t find the newest in graphite technology on his rod rack or beadhead nymphs piled in the small compartments where he stored his flies. There were no chest packs hanging from the walls, no fancy sunglasses case with mirror lenses in every conceivable color. The latest and greatest in fly fishing gear never went through Frank’s door.

I met Frank ten or so years ago. I had read of his legendary roosters and how he operated a fly shop on Beaverkill Road toward Lew Beach, just outside Livingston Manor. I didn’t know anyone who went there regularly, and thinking back, that’s probably the reason I never bothered to seek it out. When you’re a “destination angler,” even if your destination is the Catskills, you tend to be drawn to the flash and buzz of the popular shops. One spring during Bug Week, while talking in town to a guide friend I casually knew, he suggested I stop at Frank’s place, because Frank ties “the most beautiful dry flies, every one like a little jewel.”

I did stop at Kuttner’s Fly Shop, but it was later in that year. He was in his house, which is next to the shop, and with a smile, he asked if I needed anything. I explained how I was here on a recommendation, and he led me into the shop to talk. At first I was a little taken aback by the interior of the place, lacking as it did all the standard gear and flashy posters and signs. It looked more like a

lifetime of collected relics dating way back, the kind of things museums put behind glass cases to be seen and not touched.

Right on the counter were two Hardy Featherweights and a fly-fishing club button from the Beaverkill-Willowemoc Rod and Gun Club dated 1952. Various trinkets of years well before I was even born were scattered everywhere, almost in a haphazard way, as if they were nothing at all. There was a small rod rack off to the side, and among the six or seven rods, there was a long tube, obviously for a two-piecer, that he showed me held a mint Fenwick, 8-foot 6-weight that he figured was never fished. He carefully assembled it and let me wave it while he educated me on its action, why it would be used for a certain kind of fishing.

I asked him about the flies—did he have any that he tied for sale? He showed me his tying area, and on the green paper next to the vise were a dozen or so Kattermans that he said were for a club on the upper Beaverkill. There they were . . . little jewels, just as my friend told me: each one exactly like the other, perfect as human hands could make them.

He showed me a net, not a new net, but something a meat fisherman would use to ensure that when a trout was in there, it was never coming out. He picked up stuff I had never seen before, gut leaders in wax paper, snelled wet flies, never used and in perfect condition. There was a mounted brown trout on the wall, around twenty inches and lean as a bean pole. A “river trout,” Frank stated, lean because it lived its life in fast water. It was skin mount done the old way—Frank’s way, I assumed, because he didn’t seem to adhere to any new way.

As time went by, I would visit Frank more often. Sometimes he wouldn’t be at the shop, and I would just ask his lovely wife to tell him I stopped by. But when I was really lucky he would be in, and I would get a whole new fix of how things were in the old days. I never noticed much traffic coming and going. It seemed like most of the folks that stopped there were like me, just come to visit and say hello.

Things really got interesting when I got up the nerve to bring some flies to him for his opinion. He warned me early on that he would be honest, so I wrapped up six of the most painstakingly tied Catskill dry flies I had ever done and walked them through that door for a hard lesson on proportions and sparseness.

I will always remember how he picked each one up by the eye so he wouldn’t disturb the hackle or wings. He lifted it above his head, turning it in the light, not saying a word, and after he felt certain that he had given every one a good look, he let me have it. The wings are too long, the tail should be splayed out a little. “Did you cheat on that Red Quill body by building the taper with thread, or is that the natural taper of the quill?” I told him it was the quill that had the taper, then I thought he would tell me he was going to take it apart and check! Instead he said this: “You tie a nice fly boy . . . just work on the proportions and bring some back again.”

I don’t ever tie a Catskill dry fly without thinking about Frank. I can hear his voice in my head when I set wings or clip hackle fibers for the tail. It’s the kind of thing that makes me try harder with each new fly.

Kuttner’s is closed—it was in the cards. Fortunately, Frank is in good health, and I am sure he will still be as he always was, happy to have a friend over to talk about the way things were. I will be sure to visit every trip up to the Catskills, as I have been doing for years. And I will continue to bring half a dozen dries for him to critique.



Book Review

Chasing Shadows: Tying Flies for the Toughest Fish and Strategies for Fishing Them
By Rich Strolis. Published by Headwaters Books/Stackpole, 2016; \$29.95 hardbound.

Roll cast and double haul, who has the toughest fish of all? If you fish any of the major trout streams in the Northeast, from the East and West Branches of the Delaware to the spring creeks of Pennsylvania, you probably think they do. Rare is the well-known stream throughout the East that doesn't get relentless angling pressure and whose trout haven't seen it all, been there, done that, and got the T-shirt that says "Are you kidding me?"

A pretty good case for the dubious-distinction "Toughest Fish Award," however, could be made for Rich Strolis's home stream, where he guided for many years and where he developed the flies presented in *Chasing Shadows*: the Farmington River in Connecticut.

The tailwater, located north of Hartford about halfway between New York City and Boston and open (and fished) all year round, may well be the principal blue-ribbon trout stream for anglers in the immense megalopolis that is the northern portion of the Northeast Corridor. The fish see a lot of flies.

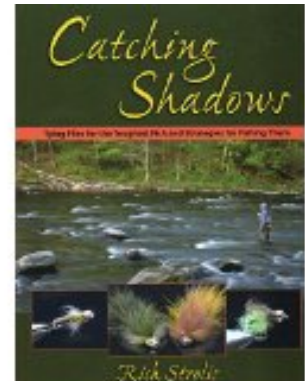
So what works on the Farmington and on the other waters where Strolis has guided, should work other, including the famous rivers of the Catskills, where Strolis also has guided, and so should the strategies for fishing them that the rest of Strolis's subtitle promises. That last part is important, because for the most part, these are "guide flies"—simple flies, quick and easy to tie, designed to trigger strikes—and how and why they were developed is all of a piece with how they should be fished.

The principal job of a guide is to cause his or her clients to catch fish. It always is difficult to explain to people who don't pursue trout with a fly rod that there is more to it than that—so much more that for many, actually catching a lot of fish recedes into a matrix of several other reasons why they value the sport, from the beauty of the streams to the adrenaline rush when a fish grabs a fly. But it is no secret that if you really want to catch fish on a fly—and it *is* nice to do so, from time to time, isn't it?—nymphing is the way to go. Consequently, a lot of the patterns offered here as guide flies are nymphs, and the strategies for fishing them revolve around the current technical state of the art in nymphing techniques: indicator nymphing and "European" nymphing—not just the "Czech" version, but the "French" style that uses a "sighter" of coiled mono as a strike indicator.

Strolis does offer a few dry flies, although one of them is inspired by a tiny caddisfly that hatches on the Farmington and that the trout there perversely gobble, and another — perhaps the most interesting, called the Shucked Up Emerger — is a "damp" pattern tied on a Klinkhåmer hook. What makes that fly interesting are the techniques Strolis uses for the body, building an underbody of tying thread the color of the emerging insect, then an abdomen of the same synthetic material that he uses for the emerger's shuck, winding it so the underbody shows through and finishing off the nymphal case with several turns of brown ostrich herl to add movement to the emerger before completing the fly with a wing of snowshoe rabbit, hen-hackle legs, and a dubbed head. It is unbelievably buggy,

The creative use of synthetics in this pattern is the hallmark of all of Strolis's flies. Synthetics tend to wick up water via capillary action, which can make them lousy materials for dry flies, but they are great choices for nymphs and streamers, both of which are Strolis's real focus here.

The nymphs are state-of-the-art designs, all exemplifying Strolis's motto "Less is more," as befits guide flies. Almost all these flies employ really interesting materials whose very existence was news to me, such as Synthetic Quill Body, which, like a stripped peacock quill, has a ridge on one side and which can change color depending on the color of the thread underbody. If, like me, you're a sucker for new materials, the book is worthwhile just for information about them and for inspiration from the creative ways that Strolis handles them.



Where this all comes together is at the conclusion of the book, in the patterns for which Strolis is best known: his streamers. The tone of the preceding sections is dutiful: in them, he's the hardworking guide, getting his clients into fish, explaining the genesis of the effective patterns he's using, and teaching the most effective techniques for fishing them. But when he starts talking about streamers, the dutiful guide is replaced by the angling enthusiast. "We are in a bit of a Renaissance in the world of streamer fishing," he declares, citing innovations in rods, lines, techniques, materials, and fly design, and as it did as during the Renaissance itself, the excitement of being on the cutting edge of innovation shows. Simply put, Strolis digs fishing big streamers for big fish, and his enthusiasm for that pursuit is revealed both in his prose and in the exuberance of his fly designs.

These big streamers, many of them articulated, are constructed with creatively used synthetics and innovations such as Fish Skulls. The flies are intended for huge trout and pike, but I can also see light bulbs go on above the heads of bass flyrodders, as well as and striper anglers and saltwater fly fishers, as they see what Strolis is doing with streamer design. Being an effective fly fisher on heavily pressured waters using excellent technique is all well and good, but when it comes right down to it, as Rich Strolis knows, it's all about the grab.

—Bud Bynack

∞ For Sale ∞

EB & HA Darbee, Fly Patterns and Prices, List No. 2 (catalogue)

14 pages, 3½" x 9", approx. 1950. \$20.

Catskill Flytier, by Harry Darbee, dust jacket only—like new. \$5.

Judie DV Smith. E-mail darbee1@juno.com.



Scott A4 5-weight 9-foot fly rod.

Fished a few times for just one season. \$200.

Bud Bynack, budbynack@verizon.net or 915-961-3521

Harry Darbee's Recipe for Insect Preservative

1 part glycerin
1 part white vinegar
8 parts alcohol

—*Courtesy of Judie DV Smith*

When you sit down to tie a fly, you take a seat at a very large, very old table. As you go through the magazines, books, and videos—taking and ignoring advice, learning tricks and shortcuts, discerning and taking sides in old debates, then picking and choosing a pattern, a style, eventually even an aesthetic stance—you participate in a long, complicated, and apparently endless conversation over those and many other matters. You join not merely a club, but a guild.

—Paul Schullery, *Cowboy Trout*



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, budbynack@verizon.net or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.