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| Volume 16, number 3 | <i>Twentieth Anniversary</i> | June 2013 |
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The June Meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, June 15, 2013, at 1:00 P.M. at the Education Building of the Catskill Fly Fisher Center and Museum, Old Route 17, in Livingston Manor, NY.

The June meeting is a tyers' free-for-all. Bring your vise, tools, and materials for your favorite patterns or what you need to tie for that evening's hatches. Kibitz with others and be kibitzed with in return about flies, techniques, materials, and the 2013 fishing season. Join other members of the guild in the time-honored tradition of tying flies and telling lies.

The Fly Tyers Rendezvous

The 2013 Fly Tyers Rendezvous brought numerous tyers and spectators to the Rockland House on Saturday, April 20. If you missed it, you missed hanging out with these guys.



Don Bastian



Ralph Graves

The guild collected \$184.00 in raffle proceeds and book sales, \$373 from a silent auction, and \$181.00 in memberships, renewals, patches.

—*Judie DV Smith*

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild at the Pennsylvania Fly Fishing Museum Heritage Day

The guild will have a table at the Pennsylvania Fly Fishing Museum Heritage Day on June 15, 2013 at the Meadow and Picnic Pavilion at Allenberry Resorts, in Boiling

Springs. Over sixty vendors and exhibitors will be present, plus speakers, and demonstrations, and more. If you'd like to join Allen Landheer, Bruce Corwin, Elmer Hopper, and Jessica Lettich in representing the Catskill tradition at Heritage Day, contact Allen at superflytyer@gmail.com or (570) 269-1617.

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild at the Anglers Market

Many thanks to Elmer Hopper for tying at the guild table at the Anglers Market in Roscoe on May 25, 2013. We did well considering the weather. The Chamber will sponsor another one next year, same time.

—Judie DV Smith

Ed Sens, the Forgotten Catskill Fly Tyer: Part 1

Ed Sens—who was he, anyway?
In *How to Take Trout on Wet Flies and Nymphs* ([1952]1974), noted outdoor writer Ray Ovington called Ed Sens “one of the most successful nymph fishermen in the United States” (p. 81). Later, in *The Trout and the Fly* (1977), Ovington called Sens “my mentor, responsible for many of the patterns featured in my various books, a meticulous German who tied to match his personality” (p. 25). In the same book, he goes on to credit Sens (and himself) with extending the “great work” of Preston Jennings and Art Flick (p. 66). Both editions of *How to Take Trout on Wet Flies and Nymphs* provide detailed nymph patterns developed by Sens for all the great Catskill hatches. By 1969, when *Tactics on Trout* was published, Ovington had modified some of the Sens’s patterns into “Ovington versions,” even though he still referred to Ed Sens as a “fly-tyer extraordinaire” (p. 315). These Ovington works all recall the author’s fond association with Ed Sens.

Ray Ovington was not the only angling author to sing high praises of Ed Sens. In *Challenge of the Trout* (1976), Gary LaFontaine declared, “The initial attempt at specific imitation of the caddis pupal form was an innovation of Edward Sens less than twenty-five years ago. These simulations of two Eastern species, *Rhyacophila lobifera* and *Psilotreta frontalis*, were listed by Ray Ovington” (p. 110). Then, in *Caddisflies* (1981), LaFontaine wrote that Sens was a fly tyer for Jim Deren’s Angler’s Roost In New York City and created “one of the best known of these early pupa imitations,” calling Sens “a serious student of entomology” (p. 102). Leonard Wright, Jr., shared these feelings when he remarked, “Yet the Ed Sens pupal imitations represent one of the few American attempts to deal seriously with caddis flies in any form” (*Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect*, 1972, p. 21).

Sens is mentioned honorably in Gary Borger’s *A Guide to Food Organisms of the Trout* (1980, p. 89) and *Designing Trout Flies* (1991, p. 82). And recently, Rick Hafele, in *Nymph Fishing Rivers and Streams* (2006) wrote, “Ovington was a close friend of Ed Sens, an important fly tier and angler in the Catskills. Sens developed a set of nymph patterns designed to complement each of the best-known dry-fly patterns of the area. He also developed effective nymph-fishing techniques” (p. 4).

Up on the Esopus



However, no one praised the influence of Ed Sens on the Catskill fly-fishing scene more than Ernest Schwiebert. In *The Masters on the Nymph* (1979), edited by J. Michael Migel and Leonard M. Wright, Jr., Schwiebert wrote, “Sens was another solitary genius who fished the Catskills, and his work resulted in a superb series of nymphs keyed to our better-known mayfly patterns. His nymphs trace their lineage almost directly to Skues and are perhaps the most popular series available” (p. 31).

I first encountered the name of this forgotten fly tyer back in the mid-1960s when I read Schwiebert’s *Matching the Hatch*. The author gave full credit to Ed Sens for two caddis pupae he listed in this book, but decades would elapse before I would read much more about Sens in any detail. Once again it was Schwiebert, in *Nymphs, Volume I* (2007, pp. 83–87) who provided the most information available about this fly fisher in any single source. Here I learned his father, “Pop Sens,” purchased a large farm along the upper Neversink in the vicinity of Claryville, where Ed befriended Herm Christian, Edward R. Hewitt, and other notable Neversink fly fishers. According to Schwiebert, Sens became quite a proficient night angler, catching many large brown trout on his Giant Stone Fly. (The Giant Stone Fly will be covered in Part 2 of this article).

Schwiebert declared that “innovations introduced by Sens did not stop with the popular mayfly hatches” and that “he must also be celebrated for his revolutionary imitations of emerging sedge pupae. . . . Sens was clearly ahead of his time” (p. 86). But perhaps the highest compliment Schwiebert paid this fly fisher was that regarding Ovington’s use of what he learned from Sens in *How to Take Trout on Wets Flies and Nymphs*, “the knowledgeable reader is left to wonder what a wonderfully original manuscript might have been written had Sens understood the potential of his theories and fieldwork, and had elected to prepare the book himself” (p. 87).

In the next issue of the *Gazette*, I’ll discuss how and why a Catskill fly tyer such as Ed Sens can end up forgotten by the modern angling masses. For now, give this praise of Ed Sens’s entomological knowledge and tying skills, let’s discuss two of his signature patterns, the Green Caddis Pupa and Dark Caddis Pupa. His Green Caddis Pupa is a forerunner of many modern caddis patterns and an important fly for the genus *Rhyacophila*, commonly known as the Green Sedge.

The angling literature provides some conflicting information on the dressing of these two flies, with Ovington and A. J. McClane in one camp and Ernest Schwiebert in another. Since my introduction to Sens was through Schwiebert, I’ve chosen to give his dressing, but with a nod to McClane, who stressed the importance of “translucency,” an emphasis that might have given an important impetus to Gary LaFontaine in the years to follow. I’ve modified Schwiebert’s dressing to include a floss underbody with a picked-out, dubbed translucent overbody as described by Ovington. And, perhaps in keeping with the spirit of these flies, for the Green Caddis, I used a mix of LaFontaine olive Sparkle Yarn and Touch Dubbing. One fly was tied on a traditional Mustad 9671 hook, the other on a piece of iron that was not available to this forgotten tyer, a curved Mustad 37160.

Dark Caddis Pupa

Hook: Size 14 Mustad 9671
Thread: Black

Green Caddis Pupa

Hook: Size 14 Mustad 37160
Thread: Black

Abdomen: Gray floss underbody,
underbody,

gray rabbit, picked out
picked out

Thorax: Brown seal dubbing

Legs: Dark brown partridge, tied long
along body

Wing case: Thin mallard primary, tied alongside
alongside

Abdomen: Apple-green floss

olive sparkle yarn/touch dub mix,

Thorax: Brown seal dubbing

Legs: Long gray mallard fibers, tied

Wing case: thin mallard primary, tied



The *Gazette*'s August issue will discuss Ed Sens in greater detail, along with his Giant Stone Fly, a large wet-fly pattern useful in night fishing for trout.



Angler's Cove: Crossroads of New York City's Fly-Fishing Culture, Part 2

As a young man, guild member Merrill Katz was lucky enough to find himself working at a fly shop in Manhattan—Angler's Cove—frequented by most of the major figures in East Coast fly fishing and angling literature. In an ongoing series of conversations, I'm asking him to recall what the angling scene was like in New York in the mid-twentieth century and some of the people he encountered at the Cove.

Bud: So tell me about meeting Nick Lyons.

Merrill: Nick Lyons was a regular visitor at the Cove. I first met him there in 1965, and we chatted often about playing basketball in Brooklyn (pretty much any kid who grew up in Brooklyn, as we did, played some basketball) and of course about fishing. I wish I could remember the exact nature of those conversations. I know we talked about innovations in tackle, new fly lines, flies, and of course angling literature.

He was a professor of English at Hunter College and was already busy as the executive editor of Crown Press on Park Avenue. Nick has a quiet demeanor and is an individual who does not like being in the limelight. He always made light of his fishing ability. But as Lefty Kreh once wrote, “Nick Lyons tells everyone how poorly he fishes, which is a damned lie. Nick is a great trout fisherman.”

Bud: You’ve got quite an angling library, and I gather that Lyons helped you (and the rest of us) get started collecting angling books.

Merrill: Nick was always kind to me during my years at the Cove and beyond. Whenever Crown published a new title, Dr. Lyons found a way to get me a copy. Nick’s publishing efforts restored seminal works and provided the fly-fishing public with a lot of practical information about the sport, filling an information void that existed back then. Art Flick’s *Streamside Guide To Naturals and Their Imitations* (1969) was the first fishing title that Nick republished through Crown, followed by *Fisherman’s Bounty*, a collection of some of the finest writing and fishing lore. These were followed by Vincent Marinaro’s *A Modern Dry Fly Code*, Preston Jennings’s *A Book of Trout Flies*, and *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly and Fishing the Flymph*, by James Leisenring and Vern Hidy, just to mention a few. There were also new titles: *Selective Trout*, by Doug Swisher and Carl Richards, and *Fishless Days and Angling Nights*, by Sparse Gray Hackle. Lyons continued to publish and edit books after the Cove was gone and continued to teach at Hunter College. The number of titles that he has had a hand in is mind-boggling.

Bud: Did you ever discuss what kind of fishing Lyons preferred?

Merrill: During Nick’s periodic visits to the Cove, I found that he fished when the opportunity presented itself. When one considers his teaching schedule and his publishing schedule, it’s difficult to imagine that he was able to fish at all. I know that he fished the Catskills, perhaps the Delaware and maybe streams in the Croton watershed. Nick has always been fond of the Madison, and he had the opportunity to do some difficult spring creek fishing with the late Herb Wellington.

Nick loves the Hendrickson hatch. In fact, as I was writing this, I thought it would be nice to send along some flies for the impending season. I sent him some yarn-wing duns in place of the standard Catskill pattern. It is sometimes useful to show the trout something that they haven’t seen.

Nick also wrote a column for *Fly Fisherman* magazine for almost thirty years, and I wasn’t alone in missing them when he stopped writing them. Nick Lyons has been referred to as a “national treasure,” and I am fortunate to be counted among Nick’s friends. When Nick wrote *Fishing Widows*, I purchased a copy and had Nick inscribe it to my wife. He wrote: “For Jody. Don’t let Merrill make you a sad fishing widow.” Nick recently celebrated his eightieth birthday and I have enjoyed a priceless relationship with him over a period of 47 years.





The Dette Coffin Fly

Mayfly season is here. It seemed as if winter would never end, but aside from the occasional cold day, the bugs are flying. Just the other day, I heard from a reliable source that the Drakes are out. Green Drakes, our biggest mayfly, have a way of bringing even the casual angler off the couch to the stream. Hummingbird-sized mayflies do something to a fly fisher. It could be the name, because “Drake” sounds so royal, so important. “What did you catch him on?” says one angler. “Green Drake emerger,” proudly boasts the other.

Big mayflies require big patterns, and we all love to lash a size 6 hook in the vise and pack cigar-sized diameters of deer hair for a wing. The Green Drakes offer the only occasion when you can fish a dry fly in any conditions, light or dark, and see it easily without squinting your eyes. They are virtual 10-meter America’s Cup yachts, compared with all the other Catskill mayflies, and we love them.

Maybe even more exciting is a Green Drake spinner fall. More commonly called the Coffin Fly, these mayflies are strikingly beautiful, with waxy white bodies and a little smattering of black markings. I have seen them on rainy nights dipping over water-slick roads in Roscoe, confused as to where the stream is. When you pick one up, it’s almost surreal how large they are.

This giant among normal bugs has been imitated in hundreds of ways. One of the most popular ones, at least in the southern tier of the Catskills, is certainly the Coffin Fly as first tied by Walt Dette. The story, as told by Art Lee in “From the Grave to the Cradle,” has always been a favorite of mine.

This episode of angling history commences early one morning in June 1932 when Ted Townsend, a game warden from outside New York City, approached Walt Dette at the old Riverview Inn with a fly scooped off the surface of the Beaverkill the previous evening. Could Walter, Ted wanted to know, tie a suitable imitation? In his twenties then, Walt regarded the fly, a prodigious white spinner with wings etched with black veins, and suggested that they retire to the Dettles’ tying room to see what could be done. . . .

Ted Townsend . . . spent a lot of time at the inn. He grabbed his usual chair and sidled up behind Walt’s tying table. He would have to break away shortly, he told Walt, to go to a funeral.

After considerable experimentation, the new fly emerged. It had black hackle-tip wings, lemon wood duck tail, a sleek body of cream seal’s fur, and ample badger hackle.

There was something curiously unsettling about the pattern, something sensed, rather than seen.

Dette tied some of these flies for Townsend. As Lee tells the story, “Townsend received the flies in a small cardboard box, the inside of which was gray, the shade of a cloud masking the moon. Townsend lifted the lid, peered inside the box, and looked up at Walt. He didn’t smile. Walt glanced into the box, thinking perhaps something was wrong. The flies lay there, waxy pale and still. It took Walt but an instant to understand.” Although that was the origin of the name, “It will never be established for certain which of the two in the moments to follow was first to commit the name Coffin Fly to the permanent record of American fly fishing.”

One problem when imitating these large mayflies is that the sheer size of the fly is a deterrent to the floating ability of any pattern. Many have combated this by using an

extended body to achieve the size without the bulk and weight of a larger hook. I still use the old Dette pattern, but I imagine that if I spent more time on the Catskill tailwaters, this fly wouldn't garner the attention that a newer-style fly would. I like a variation of the upright and divided wing, which still retains some of the classic look of the old fly, but is modernized just enough to sit on the surface, much like a spent spinner does.

Dette Coffin Fly

Hook: 3X-long light-wire dry-fly hook

Wing: Teal flank, tied spent

Tail: Three peccary fibers, tied split

Body" White polypropylene

Thorax: Black dubbing

Hackle: Badger



Clipping the bottom hackle almost flush gives the fly a slightly more realistic look.

Book Review

Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier: The Way to Rapid Improvement

By Jim Cramer. Published by No Nonsense Fly Fishing Guidebooks, 2013; \$27.95 softbound.

“Try thinking,” the professor wrote on my physics midterm exam when I was a freshman in college. He was right. I had done OK in science and math in high school simply by recognizing that a problem was of a certain kind (a genre, really) and applying the method I’d been taught to solve that kind of problem. However, that was just a sophisticated version of rote learning—a swell way to ace standardized tests, but not actually what should be called “thinking.” I nearly flunked the college freshman physics course because nobody had taught me how scientists actually go about thinking.

Fly tyers are a lot like I was back then. We learn there are certain kinds of problems (getting materials to stay on top of the hook, for example), and we learn established ways to deal with them. If we learn new techniques, it’s because they’re handed down by others—we just apply them. And if we veer into “creative” thinking, it usually involves dreaming up some new fly that, as it usually turns out, is a version of a fly someone else already has thought up. Most fly tyers just apply established protocols to well-defined problems—problems that have been defined for them by others.

Years later, as a professor myself, albeit in a discipline about as far from physics as you can get, I finally understood what my old physics professor had meant and why he was tempted to write such a comment. The comment itself bothered me, and still does: it was his job to teach me *how* to think like a physicist, and that hadn’t happened. But faced with the same issue in my own discipline, I realized how challenging an undertaking it is to try to teach someone how to “try thinking.”

That challenge is what Jim Cramer takes on in *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier*. When trying to meet it myself, I realized there are two possible ways to go. In *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier*, Jim Cramer follows both of them.

The first and most important way is to make a distinction between “rules” and “principles.” That’s my claim, not Cramer’s. However, he tacitly employs it throughout the book.

“Rules” are what every student *wants* to learn: “How should I do this?” they ask. If it’s been done before, there will be an answer for that. It can be communicated, learned, tested for, validated by the imprimatur of authority, and perpetuated in that manner. One of the many pressures that teachers face is the understandable, but pernicious insistence by students that they be told the “how” of things—to be told how to follow the rules.

“Principles,” by contrast, are what every student *needs* to learn: the general ways in which things work—the energies and resistances of things and of people that underlie the way in which this “this,” whatever it may be, comes into being as a problem or issue and therefore the ways in which it can and can’t be dealt with. Principles involve what is going on and why, and when posed as questions, those words—“What?” and “Why?”—lead to knowledge of the conditions that help determine possible answers to any simply instrumental questions—to the “How?” questions.

“You will see these simple questions repeated in different forms throughout this book,” Cramer writes. “Regardless of how you ask these questions, if you take the time to ask *and* answer them, your tying will improve and you will be on your way to becoming a thinking fly tier.”

The important thing here is that unlike the answers to “How should I do this?” there are no predetermined answers to the “What?” and “Why?” questions. They’re open-ended. They lead to surprising places. They lead to insights. They lead to what is called “thinking.”

In *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier*, the distinction between rules and principles appears as the contrast between “habit” and “critical thinking.” Cramer writes: “Habit is simply the repetition of doing the same thing over and over in the same manner,” and “because habit allows us to tie without thought, it is the enemy of critical thinking, and without critical thinking our tying will not improve. Even those habits that you consider to be good habits,” he writes, “should be reviewed occasionally” and subjected to critical thought.

This is not necessarily a comfortable process. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, more radically, “The terror of reform is the discovery that we must cast away our virtues, or what we have always esteemed such, into the same pit that has consumed our grosser vices.”

However, the benefits of critical thinking, of seeking to understand and apply principles, rather than to learn rules, make the whole process worthwhile, and most of *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier* consists of examples of the kind of insights that becoming a thinking fly tier can yield.

That’s the second way to encourage thought: perform the process of critical thinking as an ethical example, hoping that it’s the process itself and the sorts of results that it yields, not just the specific results themselves, that others will focus on and emulate.

Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier just sparkles with interesting ideas. In the chapter on hackling wet flies, for example, Cramer analyzes what goes on in the hackling process in terms of the physical properties of feathers and hooks. Nothing is more common for a tyer than having hackles go kablooey in some way—splaying out, slanting the wrong way, just getting out of control. Cramer figures out why and what to do about it. He’s got some great ideas about parachute hackling, too. And in an amazing chapter on adding weight to flies, he measures the actual weight and analyzes the relative effectiveness of beads, eyes, cones, and lead wire. It’s always been a mystery how much weight actually gets added to

a fly using these various methods, and now it's not. That chapter alone is worth the price of the book.

There's more: a new technique that Cramer calls "thatching" — attaching bunches of material in the manner of a thatched roof to form the body of a fly. There's a "hook rant" about the ways in which the designations of hook sizes don't really tell you what you need to know about them. There's a chapter on what he calls "fast food flies," quickly tied nymphs using a couple of pieces of marabou that accomplish for subsurface flies what Harry Darbee, another thinking fly tyer, accomplished for dries with his Two-Feather Fly. And there are little *lagniappes* in the form of sidebar "Fly Notions" that suggest a whole raft of interesting ideas, such as using organza tape for nymph gills.

There's a lot more than that, actually. I could go on, but to do so would misrepresent the emphasis of the book. In fact, although Cramer flushes ideas from the underbrush of fly-tying traditions like a bird dog flushes quail, the appeal such ideas points to the tension between these two ways to encourage people to "try thinking": the more dazzling the results, the more likely they will get in the way of asking the kinds of questions that produced them. The natural interest in "How?" can detract from the focus on "What?" and "Why?" You certainly can buy this book for the results of Jim Cramer's critical thinking, but you should buy it because it encourages you to think for yourself.

Jim Cramer is a retired engineer who used to work at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, where the "principal responsibility is ensuring the safety, security, and reliability of the nation's nuclear weapons through the application of advanced science, engineering, and technology," as the Wikipedia entry for it puts it, and the habits of thought that he advocates here are particularly characteristic of an engineer's approach to materials and their applications. Actually, many of the best fly tyers I know have a background in engineering and mechanics. (They also tend to be left-handed, but that's just weird.) At fly-tying demonstrations and angling shows, they can and will tell you exactly why they make every move they make when tying a particular fly, why they use the materials they use, and why they put *this* wrap right *there*. Jim Cramer wants you to aspire to be like them: "Once you seriously become a thinking fly tyer, you should be able to explain to a student or even another more advanced tyer why you perform a tying step the way that you do. You should be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of alternate approaches." The way you arrive at that point is by striving to be able to make those same explanations to yourself.

In the acknowledgments of the book, I'm thanked in embarrassingly profuse terms, having been involved at a very early stage in the shaping of the manuscript, but as an editor, I don't have to like the material on which I work — my job is just to try to make it better. Obviously, I like this book a lot, but I like it because I now try thinking every time I sit down at the vise. I like it because it's made me a better fly tyer.

—Bud Bynack

Obituaries

Alan R. "Doc" Fried, of Livingston Manor, passed away on Wednesday, May 29, 2013 in his home, surrounded by his family. He was eighty-seven. He was born in Astoria, NY, on May 18, 1926, on the kitchen table to the late Alexander and Ruth W. Horak Fried. He spent his childhood summers at the family farm on Shandelelee. Alan Fried proudly served our country during World War II in the U.S. Navy. In 1956, upon completion of medical school, he settled in Livingston Manor to serve as the community doctor and raise his family. Alan R. Fried was a strong supporter and activist for the environment and community health and one of the moving forces behind the creation of the Catskill Fly

Fishing Center and Museum. Jim Krul, executive director of the museum, said, "He left us with a great devotion, love, and legacy for the Catskill Fly Fishing Center. working alongside Elsie Darbee from its infancy, he continued on to fulfill her dream for a fly-fishing center for the entire fly-fishing community. He was our champion." A gathering to celebrate the life of Doc Fried will be held at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center later this summer and will be announced.

Robert E. Rumpf passed away Friday, May 17, 2013, at his home in Deposit, NY. He was seventy. Born in Lebanon, NY, on August 8, 1942, he was the son of the late James and Agnes Rumpf. He owned and operated poultry farms in the Fredericksburg area for thirty-eight years. He was an avid fly fisher and was a certified Federation of Fly Fishers casting instructor. He operated two businesses from his home, The Fly and the Pen and Catskill Rivers Fly Casters. He is survived by his wife of thirty-four years, Rosalie, one daughter, Jessica Marrero, and her husband, Ova, of Lebanon, five stepchildren, five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.



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