

## Reading the Water

A stroll through trout fishing's unofficial library

BY STEPHEN CAMELIO

NOT LONG AGO, I visited Montana State University's Trout and Salmonid Collection, which is filled with nearly 13,000 titles related to fish and fishing. As a writer and fisherman, I was in awe holding *De Romanis Piscibus*, a book published in 1531 that was the first to mention fishing in the New World. But as I wandered the aisles with curator and special collections librarian James Thull, it was the books related to my own history that truly called to me.

My fascination with fishing started as an 8-year-old when I went trolling in the Atlantic with family friend Brian Whelton and landed a bluefish nearly bigger than me. Two years later, for Christmas, I received *The Lore of Sportfishing*, an enormous hardcover coffee table book filled with diagrams and pictures of all kinds of fishing. At the time I would just flip through the pages—including the fly-casting and fly-tying sections—not really understanding the diagrams and, more often than not, copying the watercolor paintings and line drawings with my colored pencils.

As my fascination grew, I was given *Fishing the Big Three*, written by Ted Williams. As a New Englander and Red Sox fan from a family that spent most of its free time at the ballpark, the Splendid Splinter was my gateway drug to flyfishing. At the time I wasn't a big reader, so I'm sure my parents never expected the book would lead to a life-long obsession with a sport nobody in my family had heard of, let alone tried. And though I've still never fished for his big three—tarpon, Atlantic salmon or bonefish—Ted's on-the-water exploits pulled me into a life of flyfishing from the first time I cracked the spine.

My first fly rod came from L.L. Bean, complete with *The L.L. Bean Fly-Fishing Handbook*, by Dave Whitlock, which I found in the library's how-to section. I would place the paperback manual on the ground in my backyard with the "How to Fly Cast" section open at my feet. Then I'd proceed to tangle every attempted cast, or make a mess trying to follow the steps in the fly-tying section. What I learned most from that handbook is that I needed a mentor.

And not far away, I found one. In the library, I saw Vincent Mariano's *A Modern Dry Fly Code*, a higher-level instructional book given to me in high school by Tom Fujitani, my phys. ed

teacher and the school's no-nonsense football coach. He said if I read it, he'd take me out fishing on the Housatonic. I did read it, cover to cover, and—though most of it was over my head—one cool September day, Fujitani made good on his promise. Fishing the tail end of the white fly hatch, I was so in awe of his skill and wisdom that I didn't even tell him my waders were leaking.

At the end of shelf after shelf of fishing memoirs, I found *The Vermont River*, W.D. Wetherell's account of one year on one river, a book given to me as a Christmas gift by a Green Mountain girl I met in college. Each time I drove to her house I peered longingly out the car windows at the branches of the White River. I would dream of living close to where wild trout could be caught, and of writing about fishing for a living—both things that Wetherell's book showed me were possible.

Fittingly, the many versions of *A River Runs Through It* also caught my eye. I purchased my first copy as a gift for my father. At the time I'd never been west of Pittsburgh, but after reading it I became enamored with the West, and with rivers like the Madison, Blackfoot, and Yellowstone. My final project to earn a master's degree in English was based on the book, and I took to wearing suspenders like Paul and even got a fedora though I never wore it.

I never saw my father fish. He was a city kid from Boston, but I gave him the book to help explain my fascination

with flyfishing, as well as my love for a part of the country that neither of us had ever seen. He never said anything to me about the fishing in the book, but I knew the parts about a father teaching his sons the art of a sport was not lost on the man who coached nearly every baseball team I was ever on.

It was my wife who first showed me the West, taking me to fish the Madison, the Lamar, and the waters of Glacier National Park. She was the driving force behind us moving to Yellowstone. Not long before my dad succumbed to a ten-year battle with cancer he and my mother came to visit us in the Park. He was amazed by the scenery, and told me it was just like he imagined it when he read the book. As I churned out screenplays, my father asked me—much like Norman's father does in *A River Runs Through It*—if I was going to write a book. Maybe I will. And if I do, maybe it will end up back here, amongst all the ones that led me to the water in the first place.

For more information about the library or to set up a tour, visit: [lib.montana.edu/trout/](http://lib.montana.edu/trout/)

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