

Valley Angler

A River Runs Through It

by Bill Thompson

“In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing.” So begins probably one of the most read and best loved stories ever written on the sport of fly fishing. I am, of course referring to Norman MacLean’s novella *A River Runs Through It*. Even if you have never read the book you are no doubt familiar with the movie directed by Robert Redford. It is said that the movie was responsible for introducing thousands of YUPPIES to the sport of fly fishing. Just after the movie was released the fly fishing industry had a sudden upswing that has never been seen since. Most of us fly tackle dealers are still praying for a sequel.

It is often said that baseball and fly fishing are the only two sports that have produced great literature. Beginning with Walton’s *Complete Angler* countless great books have been written on fly fishing. Not being much of a baseball fan the only good piece of baseball writing I am acquainted with is *The Natural* by Bernard Malamud. I was first introduced to this excellent novel when I was a freshman in college. It is probably no coincident that Robert Redford played the roll of the hero, Roy Hobbs, in the movie version of this book.

Recently one of my favorite customers, Nate Hill, came in the shop to ask if he could borrow a few fly tying vices for a project was working on. I have known Nate ever since he first stopped in the shop several years ago. At the time he was a student at the University of New Hampshire. Nate was a member of the schools Outdoor Club and was on a skiing trip with the club. Aside from being an avid skier and hiker he was a dedicated fly fisher. Between his junior and senior year of college he had a summer job working as a fly fishing instructor for the Federation of Fly Fishers in Livingston, Montana. Needless to say we hit it off right from the start.

Nate graduated from UNH two years ago and has spent the last year as an intern at Nobel High School in North Berwick, Maine. As luck would have it the teacher he interned with, Josh Gould, teaches a segment of his English class on the book *A River Runs Through It*. My first thought, when I first heard this, was where was this guy when I was in high school. As part of the course work the students are taught to fly fish and spend a few days at the Maine Conservation School Camp as a final examine.

The fly tying vices, that Nate asked to borrow, were to use to teach the students fly tying. Along with the vices I threw in some assorted materials to tie Wooly Buggers to go with the vices and Tom Jutras, of Mountain Road Fly Shop also came up with some vices and materials to tie Elk Hair Caddis.

Nate stopped by Monday to return the vices and showed me some photos of his students. There were two that were my favorites. One showed a grinning kid seated at his vice with a freshly tied Wooly Bugger. Nate told me that this kid passed up the nightly campfire in order to continue tying flies. The other picture that I liked was the same kid, with the same grin, with his

first brook trout which he had just caught on the Woolly Bugger he had tied the night before.

There were some great photos of some very eager young lady fly fishers as well. I am willing to bet that the girls were the better casters.

Well, of course I am pre-Digest, but I can't think of a better way to teach English. Aside from the fact that fly fishing "runs through it" *A River Runs Through It* is a true classic of literature with a message far beyond fly fishing. Mr. Gould and Nate should be commended for going the extra mile to teach their students.

By the way Nate is applying to teach at Kennett next year so if anyone who is part of the hiring process happens to read this let me say that he has my highest recommendation. Maybe someday down the road some eager young boy or girl will stop in the shop and say that; "I have just read the greatest book about fly fishing and I thought I would like to give it a try". Or another great scenario might be; "I just read the greatest book about fly fishing are there any other books like that you could recommend?". Either way I would be a happy man.

See you on the river.