

The Angler 2: Without Representation



Spring 2009

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Without Representation

a magazine for drinkers, thinkers, and idlers

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Angler Press
New York

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The Angler is published three times a year by Donovan Hall. Single issues are available for \$10. Subscriptions for \$25 (three issues); in Canada, \$30; other international, \$45. Checks should be made out to “Donovan Hall”. Subscriptions and correspondence to Donovan Hall at the address below or to theangler@donavanhall.net. Manuscripts sent by snail mail cannot be returned. Please correspond before submitting any material.

Editor & Publisher: Donovan Hall

Angler Press
4 Tamarack Road
Rocky Point, New York 11778

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Typeset on July 16, 2009.

angler.donavanhall.net

“...exposing the truth is like nudity, so stand up,
you’ve got to stand up.”

–from the song, “Stand Up,” by Hannah Wilke

... many people emerge from boredom feeling that they have accomplished nothing. But is accomplishment really the point of life? There is a strong argument that boredom – so often parodied as a glassy-eyed drooling state of nothingness – is an essential human emotion that underlies art, literature, philosophy, science, and even love.

–from “The Joy of Boredom” by Carolyn Y.
Johnson, *The Boston Globe*, March 9, 2008

Part III

Stories

Paring Down

by Justin C. Witt

Fly Fishing took him suddenly and with great ferocity at around the mid-point of his life. It was a confusing time at the end of a long series of losses for which he could make no accounting whatsoever, and one day seemingly without choosing to he wandered into The Fish Hawk on Bennett Street. What greeted him there was a cornucopia of sensibility that struck him like a homecoming to some place he had never even been. It was as though he had dreamed it all each night, and loved it, but then forgotten it each morning before he rose, only to remember it now while awake for the first time in his entire life. Everything he saw clicked into place in his mind and immediately it all seemed to make perfect sense.

The staff of the shop happily showed him what he would need to get started, and just as happily he opened his wallet as wide as it would go to pave the way to this newfound bliss. It started with a single rod and reel, some backing, and a line. The shop owner himself wound

the backing onto the reel and then helped in the selection of a few suitable leaders and a small box of flies. Waders too were procured, and a vest in which to put the various tiny but excruciatingly interesting little devices that presented themselves to him at the check out. "There", he thought as he loaded his new possessions into his car, "that's all I should need". He had no way of knowing that the avalanche had only just begun. Within a week he was back at the shop for more flies, more gadgets, some books, polarized sunglasses, and various little bottles of goo. The next month it was a three-weight rod, then an eight, and then a ten. Within three months he owned twelve different rods and twice as many reels. He bought and read every book he could find on the subject of fly fishing, sometimes reading in his bed until three in the morning, then getting up again at five to drive back to the water.

During this first year he became skilled as quickly as anyone, which is to say that it happened by fits and by starts, and really none too quickly at all. For a long time his casts were sloppy and formless; and then one day they weren't. He did not know what had changed. The line curled behind him in a tight loop and then came forward, dropping his fly more or less right where he wanted it at the end of a straightened leader. In the absence of a mentor he learned by trial and error which parts of streams and lakes held fish; each wriggling, sparkling, slime skinned gem he managed to haul in teaching his subconscious fish-hunting mind something new. He stored these bits and pieces of learning away without knowing where, and was himself surprised each time when they reappeared

to his conscious mind at just the right moment on the water.

Since he lived alone in this phase of life his employer was the first to make note of the change in his behavior. That first year when all of his vacation had been used he began to become inordinately prone to illness. When it got to the point that he didn't even call in any more the company was forced to take action. He was terminated, but if he noticed it was not apparent. When he never even showed up to clean out his desk one of the custodial staff was startled witless when she encountered the dried skin of a rabbit's face lying atop a pile of feathers alongside a strange metal clamping device in one of its drawers.

Anticipating that this trend of incomprehension might continue amongst the other institutional forces in his life he took preemptive measures. First he sold his home and most of his possessions, thoroughly and carefully outfitting himself to live and fish from his vehicle. Then, concerned that if his family's Christmas cards were returned to them they might begin to worry, he stopped by his brother's house in Iowa on his way out West. "Tell Mom I'll be fine, and that I will see her soon", he told the bewildered older version of his parent's genetic heritage. His brother said that he understood, then sat at his kitchen table and wept silently as he watched the taillights of the truck disappear.

The money lasted longer than he expected it to, keeping him in books, tobacco, and beer as he wandered from water to water along the road over those next few years. The road however, went on a lot farther than he had imagined. When he felt like he was done with the North-

American West he proceeded to fish his way South all the way to where it came to an abrupt end, in Ushuaia. There he sold the truck and boarded a freightliner headed for New Zealand.

Even when money became a problem he knew that he had barely scratched the surface of what was there to learn, and the one thing that continued to command him was the driving need to keep going. Having fished every single day since his departure, no matter where he was or in what conditions or for what fish, he had learned more than he had ever thought possible. When the reading had ceased to feel like it was teaching him anything he abandoned it, freeing up more hours for tying and for fishing. He experimented with patterns, and with presentations, and with timing, once passing an entire six month period fishing only at night, then sleeping through the days inside his tiny tent while listening with his sub-conscious mind to the sounds of millions of sheep cropping grass across the Kiwi pastures outside. He began to sell gear and work short odd-jobs between weeks in the bush, but many of these transactions did not go well and he became restless again. Something important, he felt, was still missing.

Waking up one morning on a wide, clear, South Island stream he decided it was time to refine his pursuit. He would adopt an increasingly minimalist approach, and would continue to pare things down until he arrived at only what was truly necessary. His hope was that in this way he would eventually root out not only what was indispensable to the catching of fish, but what was truly indispensable to the other thing too – the thing. Booking

passage to China with the absolute last of his kitty he resigned to start anew, and did.

Just before the treatments began he was found and taken into custody while standing naked on a rock in the middle of a wide, roiling stream in Eastern Mongolia, ten feet of fly line, nine feet of leader, and a #12 Royal Coachman tied to the end of his penis, attempting to roll-cast the fly into a current seam near the far bank which held a single, tiny, rising trout.



Justin C. Witt is a world wandering sporadically employed vagabond-reader, fly fisherman, beer drinker, and sometimes writer of short stories, poems, and novels.