



Hooked

The big catch, near Beaver Creek, Colorado. Photo by Marc Barnwell.

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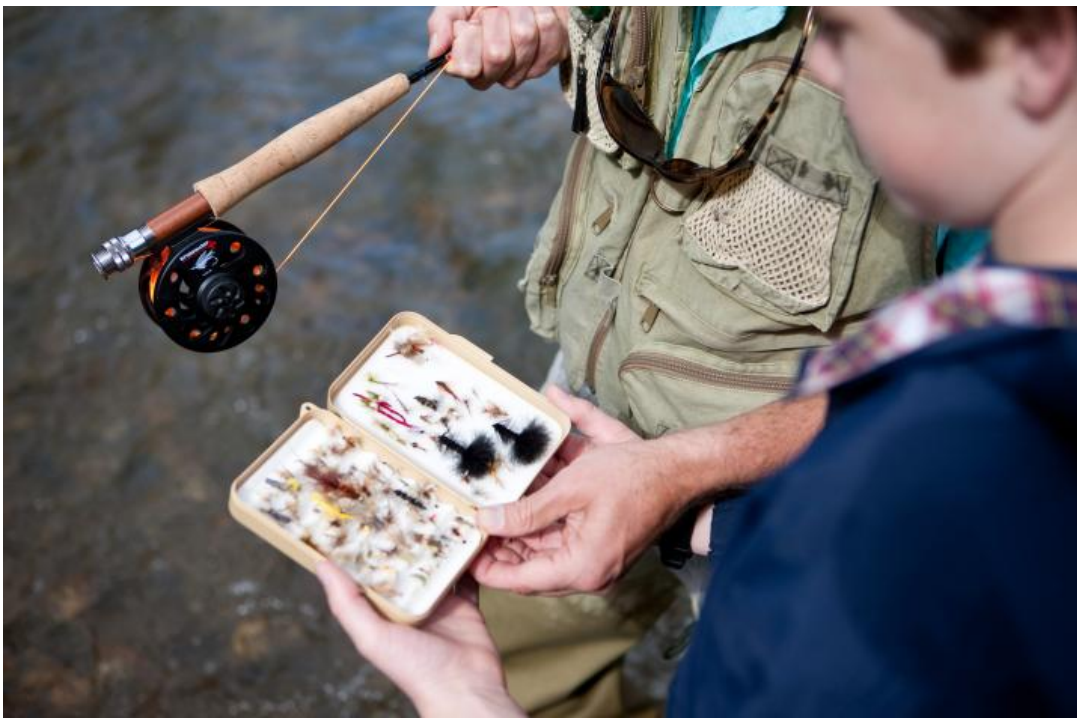
A multigenerational father-son fly fishing story.

His motion was effortless and beautiful. From the banks of the Snake River in Keystone, Colorado, I watched my father's cast, the one I've been trying to mimic since the age of five, land right next to a pristine pocket of water. Seconds later he was pulling a 14-inch rainbow trout out of the river.



The perfect cast. Near Breckenridge, Colorado. Photo by Leisa Gibson.

Landing a fish is a satisfying moment for any angler, but this one had to be especially gratifying for my dad. Not only did he present his bounty in front of his son, but he was also able to show the fish to his seven-month-old grandson, who stared at the rainbow-speckled specimen with equal parts puzzlement and something I'd like to interpret as excitement.



Life lessons. Near Keystone, Colorado.

This would be my son's introduction to the beautiful sport of fly fishing. It's only fitting, as my father also introduced me to the sport some 30-plus years ago. Since then, it's been a passion we have explored together around the globe, though Colorado's high country, with its alluring blend of gorgeous scenery and abundant fish—cutthroat trout, northern pike, and kokanee salmon, to

name a few favorites—holds a special place in my heart.

Fly fishing with my father has always provided rare and precious moments for us to escape the frenetic pace of the everyday world and simply get away together in the woods, in a canyon, or in the shelter of the mountains. We've shared many pursuits over the years—often relating to sports—but we've managed few bonding moments more meaningful than those that happen while casting on a river, where we can connect on a very basic level, free from the responsibilities and burdens of the daily grind. It's as if the sound of rushing water over the current-smoothed rocks drowns out the noise and distractions of the rest of the world.

While it's still a few years away, I look forward to sharing similar experiences with my own son in his home state of Colorado and on rivers and streams far beyond. Sure, because of all the reasons above. But also because the banks of a river were where my father passed along his most important life lessons. Unlike the times he taught me how to throw a baseball or shoot a basketball when he coached my youth sports teams, these lessons often emerged miles away from other anglers—and, well, others in general. They were opportunities for self-exploration, free from judgment or pressures.



I learned patience from hours of casting with nary a nibble from a fish. I learned attention to detail and precision from tying knots and selecting the right flies for each particular situation. And I learned to respect nature through principles like “catch and release” and “leave no trace.” These lessons of stewardship, this unspoken instruction to coexist in harmony with the earth, have given me a respect for all life forms. It’s this wisdom, channeled through my father, that has served me well as an angler and, more important, in other aspects of my life.

For three-plus decades, our shared passion for fly fishing has begotten contemplation and self-reflection for both my father and me. Our relationship has always been a meaningful one, but like most father-son pairs, we naturally engaged in a certain level of competition and balancing of one another’s differences. When I was a kid, my dad, of course, could throw a ball harder than me. He let me win games of H.O.R.S.E. and served up easy pitches for me to hit home runs. I continually



Wading in for the big one. Near Keystone, Colorado.

strived to best him, but strength, size, and experience dictated.



That moment. Near Breckenridge, Colorado. Photo by Leisa Gibson.

However, I vividly remember a day in Colorado's Vail Valley when I caught more than a dozen fish; my father only managed to land one. It was a pure win in my mind. That moment, along a scenic tributary near Vail, was the great equalizer in our relationship. It was the first of many more days on rivers and streams with fly rods in our hands, all of which nurtured a mutual respect for one another. Side by

side with my dad that day, I took a step beyond his shadow toward becoming my own accomplished person.

That spring day on the banks of the Snake River, three generations of Kasper men ogled a 14-inch rainbow trout. It was both the start of my own fly-fishing journey with my son and a new chapter in my fly-fishing odyssey with his grandfather. The inevitable day will arrive when my son out-fishes me on the banks of some Colorado stream. I can only hope he snags a few life lessons along the way.

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