



Words:
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BACKING MY SKIFF DOWN a remote Georgia back-water ramp, I am forced to consider my shortcomings as a father. When my two sons have opted not to join me, I wonder—*Have I blown this?* Did I leave them behind too many times because I didn't want to deal with the attendant circus? Has my own selfishness quashed their interest? I fear the damage I've wrought.

Thirteen and nine, my boys have developed their own passions, leaning heavily toward the dusty fields and slick hardwoods of sports. They come by this honestly, having inherited raw athleticism and competitive ferocity from their mother, a former collegiate volleyball player. They are more interested in perfecting a fickle change-up or soft-touching a floater over the fingertips of a lunging linebacker than learning to work a seam of rising trout.

Of some comfort is the knowledge that I walked a similar path. My own father took me fishing even though I was only mildly interested. But those sporadic jaunts with my dad were seeds deeply seated, to be released in my 20s.

What followed was an urgent attempt to retrieve lost time. This meant disappearing into the wild expanse of the southern Appalachian Mountains for days at a time. It meant long drives. It meant a car that reeked of muddy two-tracks and sour waders. It meant a patient wife.

Years later, I found that parenthood meant things too. Mostly it meant choices, or at least an uneasy balancing of new and old priorities. The truth is, I

struggled with this and still do, but the other truth is that I have evolved into a proud father and try to be involved in all my boys do. Still, I can be something less than wholly committed. I am not above sneaking off for a few casts if given the opportunity. Maybe a few trout or bass between doubleheaders. A carp or two at halftime. In fact, give me a list of fields and gyms in north Georgia and I will connect each to water for you.

If, for example, you find yourself in the bleachers at the high school in LaFayette, I'll

tell you to check the quiet corner of City Lake that lies behind the north end zone beyond the chain-link. Pods of carp are nearly always tailing in the soft mud there. Dark soft hackles and nymphs will take them. Maybe.

The baseball fields in Calhoun are within minutes of Defoor Walters Lake. Poppers are dynamite for bass and bluegill during those spring games, but white streamers are the ticket during the midsummer grind of the regular season. Fall ball brings a switch to darker shades, olive and black, fished slowly with the patience of a hitter working the count.

A weekend tournament in Atlanta can mean a quick trip to the Chattahoochee for trout between pool play and bracket games. My advice to rookies is to allow extra time for driving to and from the river. Atlanta traffic can be a bitch.

At this stage of my life, these brief cast-and-dash sidebars can form the full extent of my fishing time for weeks and even months. The reality is my sons' lives are my life and I would not trade that for any number of hours on the water. In return, they only tease me a little about my obsessions and no longer roll their eyes when they find rod tubes mixed with the gym bags and composite bats in the backseat. We have discovered that common ground is not hard to find even if our interests don't always intersect. My theory is they will come back around to rivers and mountains as I did later in life. Or maybe they won't. I'm trying to be fine with it either way. ☞

«ABOVE»

After hours of searching a small spring-fed creek in western New York, Kevin Bruce spots a lone riser. Photo: Joe Janiak