

# MY JOURNEY— A Fly Fishing Story from First Cast to Finding Community and Giving Back

by *Stephanie Sheridan*

**M**y fly fishing journey began in March 2020 as a frigid weekend getaway to Spring Creek, Centre County, with my husband. On Friday night, we saw a screening of “Live The Stream.” The way Joe Humphreys described moving water resonated deeply. I was suddenly intrigued with fly fishing even before making my first cast. The next day, wearing my husband’s hand-me-down fishing attire and using his back-up rod and reel, I made my first cast at Fisherman’s Paradise, Centre County. I didn’t tie a single knot or catch a fish, but I found bliss along Spring Creek’s famous banks.

My passion grew after our first outing. In my free time, I practiced casting in the yard or explored local streams to test my improving skills. In July 2020, I received my first fly rod for my birthday. My first trout was caught on a fly later that summer—a 12-inch Rainbow Trout on a San Juan Worm. Unfortunately, through the fall, my everyday responsibilities replaced my available leisure time, but fly fishing was never far from mind.

January 2021 was a turning point, but I can’t really explain how or why. I decided fly fishing was important to my mental health and well-being, and I made it a priority. I spent hours reading articles, watching videos, and practicing knots during the cold winter months, dreaming of spring fishing. I saw a Facebook post from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) for a Women’s Intro to Fly Fishing Program and signed up. I learned a great deal in the online portion and eagerly anticipated the on-the-water instruction to be held in May on Spring Creek.

The hatches in Pennsylvania are epic. In my first year, I managed to fish many of them on world class streams. In the early spring, Grannom hatches led me to Neshannock Creek, where I caught my first trout on a dry fly. Then, I ventured to Penns Creek, Centre County, which challenged me to become a better angler. I spent all day chasing Brown Trout, and just when I was ready to give up, I was rewarded with a beautiful Brown Trout in the net.

In May, I returned to Spring Creek for the on-the-water portion of the Women’s Intro to Fly Fishing Program and witnessed a beautiful Sulphur hatch. I didn’t catch a fish, but I built amazing relationships with fellow female anglers and PFBC staff. Later that month, my husband and I were back at Penns Creek for the infamous Green Drake hatch, and in June (on my 30th wedding anniversary), I spent an idyllic day on the water with the love of my life, fishing the Brood X Cicada hatch on the Frankstown Branch Juniata River.



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The rest of the summer was spent finding cool water and learning how to fish with terrestrials—the Parachute Ant was particularly successful. Late fall led me to a new area of the state and a new passion—fishing for steelhead on Lake Erie tributaries.

The PFBC’s Women’s Intro to Steelhead Fishing Program was one of the highlights of my year! My first hookup with a steelhead was exhilarating but short-lived as the fish tore downstream and broke off. I hooked into five steelhead that day and landed the last one. Every second of that day is burned into my memory, and I once again formed meaningful bonds with the instructors.

While 2021 was a year of firsts (taking my first solo fishing adventures, assisting the PFBC with trout stocking on local streams, and catching fish on flies that I tied), 2022 was a year of involvement.

In 2022, I became an active and enthusiastic member of the fly fishing community. I began to give back to the sport that has given me so much. After attending Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited’s (PATU’s) and PFBC’s Women’s Leadership Conference, I became a PFBC Fishing Skills Instructor (FSI), joined the PATU’s Women, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, then joined my local Trout Unlimited (TU) Chapter (Ken Sink TU). I even assisted PFBC and other FSIs with Women’s Intro to Fly Fishing Programs in Clearfield County. Once my TU chapter learned of my passion to teach and connect others to Pennsylvania waterways through fly fishing, they elected me as a board member. I am excited to continue this journey with new friends, partnerships, and the opportunity to share the beauty of Pennsylvania’s waters with others.

When I began my journey, it was all about the fish, but over time, I’ve realized that this sport is so much more. It has taken me on adventures I never dreamed of and showed me some of the most beautiful places in Pennsylvania. It introduced me to amazing people who share my love for the sport and has enriched my relationship with my husband with our shared passion for all things “on the fly.” Most of all, it has made me a better person by giving me the self-confidence, sense of belonging, and inner peace that I’ve searched for all my life. What the future holds for any of us is uncertain, but I know my future will include time in the water with a fly rod in hand. ☐