



Fishing Traditions

by Dudley Parr

It happens every year. The weeks and months of preparation and anticipation come to an end the first Saturday after April 11th, when the trout season opens. Thousands of anglers make their annual pilgrimages to their favorite waters to take part in the event. You could say it's a tradition.

Part of the border of Allegheny and Beaver counties is Big Sewickley Creek, a small tributary of the Ohio River, just north of Pittsburgh. For Frank Murawski of Ambridge, opening day is the culminating event in a year-long process of tending his stretch of the stream. What started out as a 2.5-acre gift from his wife, to "keep him out of trouble," has grown into a 20-year tradition. Frank and a small band of faithful helpers build temporary dams and

diverters for the spring fishing season and then take them down later in the summer. Frank also coordinates the volunteers to help WCO Jay Redman with preseason stockings. For Frank and his friends, it is about giving back, not just taking trout. Frank is always looking to share his tradition with others.

Certainly young Ryan McCough would like to be part of this tradition. Ryan, along with his dad, was one of

the volunteers who stocked the creek a few days before opening day. Ryan was rewarded with a large golden rainbow trout to put on his stringer. Judging by his enthusiastic account of the event, Ryan and his dad will be regulars for years to come.

There were plenty of other proud parents participating in the opening day tradition with their heirs. Not all of the children were young dependents living at home, either. Rich McEwen, Sr., a retired state trooper, and his son Rich McEwen, Jr., currently in the "family business," had quite a successful outing. In this day and age when it is sheik to blame our problems and vices on our parents, I think Rich Sr. would happily take the blame for his son's fishing habit.

Not all opening day traditions are just about fishing. Eric Bosch and his friends camped out overnight like fans waiting to buy tickets for a rock con-

photo:Dudley Parr

cert. They enjoyed a night out under the stars, a beautiful sunrise, and breakfast over an open fire. They caught some fish, too. The Richardson family's opening day ritual involves a circuit of creeks they visit with ample time allowed for sampling some pies and cold beverages.

At some point, most of us realize that fishing is more than just catching fish. It's about spending time outdoors, observing the natural world. It's about spending time with fishing buddies. It's about anticipating and preparing for opening day or the yearly trip. And it's about passing on the traditions to the next generation.

A label for our time is the "information age." The sheer volume of knowledge in society and the speed at which it is disseminated is incredible. There are books, videos, CD-ROMs, newsletters, and web sites with information on just about everything. However, fishing is a skill-based activity that is best learned experientially. No amount of book learning can make you cast accurately unless you go out and do it. Laptop computers are still a bit too bulky for streamside learning, and they don't react too well to water. For those of us who love fishing, it is our honor and our duty to pass it on to others. The best way to pass it on is person to person.

Fishing may be one of the oldest oral traditions, passed down from pre-history. Fishing hasn't always been passed along family lines. My grandparents were not anglers. My dad was introduced to fishing by the father of one of his childhood friends. They still fish together. My dad in turn has passed it along to me, my brother, and sisters. I don't remember the exact day I became an angler or any specific schooling in the art of catching fish. I do remember days spent wading in a stream where dad built diversers and I made random rock piles or looked at the things crawling on the rocks. The tradition that has grown from those early forays into the aquatic world is a yearly trip in pursuit of fish.

I wonder how Rich McEwen, Jr., and Ryan McCough became hooked on fishing. I'm even more curious about Frank Murawski's fishing history. I'll have to ask them when I see them this opening day. I guess that might become a tradition, too. ☐

First Steps in Fishing

Many adults can remember their first fishing trip. They can probably tell you who they went with, where they fished, and if they caught anything. But if you asked them how they got started in fishing, most would mention a particular person instead of the details about the trip. With much attention these days focused on trying to recruit more kids for fishing, let's not forget about what happens on those first few trips to the local lake, pond, or stream.

Too many times we adults have high expectations of what the results of the trip should be. We focus so much attention on the catch, the gear, and the techniques involved, we forget the fun and enjoyment kids have just being around the water. A fishing trip with kids can include many activities in addition to fishing.

Some general strategies I learned from my father I now use with my own kids. Here are a few tips that may be useful when just starting out with children:

- **To start, get them outdoors.** This sounds odd, but we must allow our children to discover that they can have fun without TV, computers, and malls.
- **Choose a site that offers a chance to explore, but still be safe.**
- **Be flexible.** If the kids want to go fishing when they first get there, assist them. If they don't, let them explore other options first (within reason).
- **Show them some other things to do in and around water that might be fun, and do it with them.** Examples include rolling rocks to look for critters

(kids especially like trying to catch crayfish), stone-skipping contests, and "boat" races with sticks/leaves (moving water).

- **When someone catches a fish, allow everyone to see and touch it before releasing it (if you're not going to keep it to eat).**

For some adults this advice is not new. Others may have to revise their plans of what the "goals" of the fishing trip should be. One simple solution is that there may not be any goals.

As my dad used to say to us, "Let's take a ride over to the lake, and we'll bring along our fishing rods in case we want to go fishing, too!"



A youngster receives a casting lesson from a parent at an open house at the Commission Linesville Fish Hatchery, Crawford County, this past March (see details about the event on page 60).