

Straight TALK

by *John A. Arway*

*Executive Director
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission*

Evolution of an Angler

Many of us began our angling careers at a young age casting a bobber with an earthworm dangling from a hook connected to a primitive, by today's standards, bait casting rod and reel. Most likely, we were sitting on a boat dock or shoreline somewhere in a peaceful setting being advised by our mentor, father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, aunt or uncle, friend or neighbor, about how to bait our hook, cast our line, evaluate the bite, set the hook and reel in our catch after the feel of the tug. This simple formula dramatically changed my life and the lives of many of us. It turned a simple experience into a passion that hooked us on fishing for a lifetime. However, over that lifetime, we have evolved into a much different angler than who we were when we began our journey as a young child. Evolution is a process that involves a gradual change. For most of us, we have become better anglers as we have evolved, because we have spent the time honing our skills, changing tactics and equipment, learning from each other and sometimes being humbled by the fish that are often our teachers.

There was a time when all I wanted to do was catch as many fish as I could as fast as I could catch them. It didn't matter what fish species, Bluegills, perch, crappies, trout, suckers, it was all about the challenge of catching as many fish as I could. My friends and I would have competitions to see who could catch the most fish. One time, my uncle offered to pay me 5 cents for every Bluegill I would bring back to camp since they would become the evening meal. I took the challenge and returned with a stringer of Bluegills that were so heavy that I had to stop many times to take breaks before reaching camp. There were 50 Bluegills on the stringer that I delivered to my surprised uncle, and they made a delicious supper. He reluctantly paid me the \$2.50 that he promised; however, he never challenged me again, but I really didn't need that incentive to continue to fish.

My evolution as an angler has taken many twists and turns along the way. I remember sitting on the banks of the



*Executive
Director
John A.
Arway with
his grandson
Xander.*

Photo: Jimmy Biggers

Youghiogheny River next to my father and uncles fishing for Channel Catfish and Common Carp. As Henry David Thoreau once said, "Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after."

Then, I turned my attention away from warmwater fish to trout since I grew up in the Laurel Highlands. The Commission stocked many of the streams that we fished with trout for recreational anglers since many could not support sustainable wild trout fisheries on their own. I fished with bait and graduated to spinners and often kept a limit from time to time to eat for supper. After that, I went to graduate school in Tennessee where I chose fisheries as a profession and came back to Pennsylvania to work for the Commission. I settled into northcentral Pennsylvania and learned to quickly appreciate the value and beauty of wild trout. I set aside my spinning rods for a moment in time and learned to fly fish, another step in the evolutionary process. Although I thoroughly enjoyed fishing my newly discovered limestone creeks of central Pennsylvania, I still had the urge to broaden my fishing horizons. So, I occasionally traveled to fish the open waters of Lake Erie for Walleyes and Yellow Perch, and other stocked and wild trout waters throughout Pennsylvania. I also took trips to the east to fish for American Shad on the Delaware River and would stop to enjoy the mighty Susquehanna River on the way home from meetings in Harrisburg by sampling the exceptional Smallmouth Bass fishing that it provided. Izaak Walton once wrote, "Rivers and the inhabitants of the watery elements are

EVOLUTION OF AN ANGLER

Illustration - Ted Walker



made for wise men to contemplate and for fools to pass by without consideration.”

I continue to expand my horizons by fishing new waters and trying new techniques. Some anglers evolve from bait fishing to spinners to lures to flies to tenkara to even cutting off the bend of the hook to just feel the thrill of the strike. It really doesn't matter where you may be on the evolutionary chain, the joy of fishing should be to continue to feel the excitement and thrill that we felt when we hooked up with our first fish.

I believe that the future of fishing depends on each and every one of us who have a passion to fish. It is our duty as sportsmen to pass the feel of the tug along to future generations much like our mentors did for us. The National Center for Fathering, a group dedicated to simply helping fathers be better dads, did a national survey of fathers and found that fishing was the number one memory of fathers who were asked what was the “One Great Thing My Dad Did for Me.” Please take advantage of the opportunities that we are providing to get a child involved in fishing. Both of you will benefit, and it is a gift that truly will last a lifetime.

Herbert Hoover described it best when he wrote, “To go fishing is the chance to wash one's soul with pure air, with the rush of the brook, or with the shimmer of the sun on blue water. It brings meekness and inspiration from the decency of nature, charity toward tackle makers, patience towards fish, a mockery of profits and egos, a quieting of hate, a rejoicing of that you do not have to decide a darned thing until next week. And it is discipline in the equality of men, for all men are equal before fish.”

See you on the water.

Your Director,
><(John{(^>



The mission of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

Executive Director John A. Arway's grandson Xander enjoys fishing with his mother, Caitlyn. His brother Leif is in the baby carrier beside his mother.

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photo - John A. Arway