

OF BAMBOO & FLIES

MARC PAYNE

I would like to say that my adventure into tying flies was based upon a deep need to exercise the creativity of my sport; that I had visions of beautiful patterns dancing round my mind. It was actually due to an error in judgment. I fooled myself into thinking that it would save me a ton of money. Well, it didn't save me a cent, but it did give me the chance to create and engage in the natural progression of a passionate fly fishermen.

The first fly I tied was while on a weekend trip to the Hiwassee River. I and ten or so other Trout Bum wannabe's were gathered at a cabin in Reliance Tennessee. The dining table was covered with feathers, fur, and several vices that were being used with a fevered pitch. I watched from a distance as these guys created what writer and angler Thomas McGuane calls "bug puppets." Whipping out flies of various sizes and shapes, they spoke in the arcane language of some dark art. And the tools that were implements of the craft looked not unlike the instruments of eighteenth century medicine.

So, when one of the guys asked me if I tied my own flies, I answered honestly, but with a little fear of being ostracized for my lack of engagement. Then they told me they would teach me, a statement which held little hope in my mind of being even remotely successful. However, when you are a novice, and your teacher is about half the way through a bottle of Tennessee Sipping Whiskey, the playing field tends to level out a bit. In retrospect, the flies I tied looked nothing like they were supposed to, but neither did his. I would like to say that mine were bad because of ignorance, but perhaps his excuse would be the same.

The first fly I ever tied was supposed to be a Pheasant Tail Nymph. I still carry that fly in one of my many boxes, but have yet to use it. If the intent of the Pheasant Tail Nymph is to

imitate a deformed Dobson Fly...then I passed with flying colors. The body was thick and taperless, the thorax could have passed for a clown wig. And, the whip finish (after several tries) nearly covered the hook eye completely, but I did it. No pun intended, but I was hooked. The die was cast, and the next week I bought a modest fly tying kit. At the time I thought that everything that I would need

to ply my craft was contained within that cardboard box. It even came with a video of Lefty Kregh showing you the most productive patterns. Oh, how naive I was. The better my skills became, the more that I felt like I needed to buy. The Pandora's Box had been opened.

Now move forward a few years. My



fly tying had become something that was second nature. Then, the same buddy who taught me to tie sent me down a path that changed the sport for me forever. We met up one rainy summer morning to fish the Clinch River. After the usual pleasantries, he reached into the cab of his truck and came out with an aluminum rod tube. "This is what you will fish with today," he said with a sly smile. It

was a Heddon, an all American, Blue Collar, bamboo legend. The casting of that rod and the amazing play of the first trout hooked completely changed the way I would view fly fishing forever. I was not only enthralled, I was amazed.

My friend gave me the rod which was nothing short of a blessing, but as it is with most passions, I had to have another. I began searching eBay for

bamboo fly rods, particularly Heddon nine foot five weights. Being desirous of a classic bamboo fly rod with a budget that is focused around keeping four kids in food and clothing is a very disheartening thing because a good bamboo fly rod isn't cheap. One thing kept jumping out at me as I looked through the bamboo folks were selling online. There were some rods for sale that were fairly cheap. They weren't Heddons, or Grangers, but they were bamboo. This discovery led me to the conclusion that I could buy a beat up rod and rebuild it.

The first bamboo rod I bought was an old Montegue that I picked up for next to nothing. When it came in the mail, and I took a look at all its issues, I was somewhat discouraged. The guides were beat up with some missing altogether, the finish was chipped in spots, and the tip top had vanished at some point, so this thing was a mess. Another trip online found me searching for any resources available on rod restoration--and there were plenty. After printing off several tutorials on wrapping and refinishing, I laid down more money for the varnish, silk thread, and new guides. I still have that old rod and it humors me when I think about the fact that I spent more on the materials to restore the rod than I spent on buying the rod itself. It was far from perfect when I finished, but it was functional, which is really all you need.

From that first restore, I started buying the worn and wounded bamboo at an alarming rate, and with each restoration, my skills improved to the point that I began buying new blanks and putting everything together new. Most of the blanks I bought came from a rod builder in England. He would put some on sale or "for offer" as he called it, and I would snatch them up. The price was much more than my learning bamboo, but the end result was a new bamboo. I was working part time at a local fly shop at the time and through

bamboo for you



a casual conversation with a customer, I wound up selling one of my rods. Anytime your passion turns a dollar your way you can pretty much guarantee that you are going to be doing it for a long time.

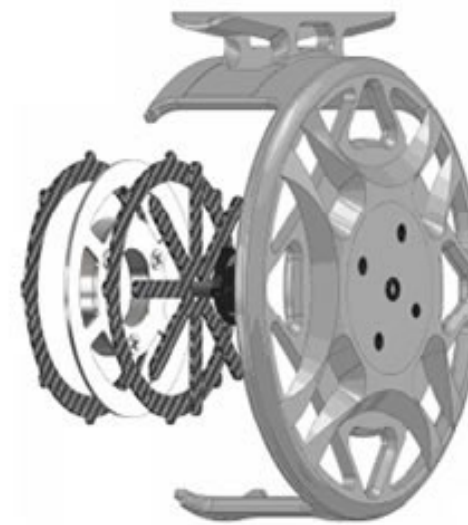
For the past five years I have been building my own rods and on average I will produce five or six in a twelve month period. Some are for customers, some are for me, but all of them are a real pleasure. Just like with tying flies, building a rod that is a functional tool for your sport is an amazing thing. The first time that I caught a trout on a fly I tied, with a rod I built, the whole gamut of the angling experience took on a whole new shine. To sit at the vice and whip out a multitude of flies that are a hundred times more than you will use in a year's time, or to build a bamboo rod just because I enjoy the process is nothing short of love, pure and simple.

I don't have the desire to tie flies commercially, and I do not kid myself into ever thinking that I could build rods full-time as a career. But,

perhaps in the grand scheme of things, it is good that I don't entertain these notions. To go from doing it because I love it and love the look on someone's face the first time they cast a rod I have built, to doing it because I have to is something that I, by choice, will leave alone. Passion, when met with creativity and craft, has their own reward, and I am okay with that. I sell enough new rods, and repair enough old ones to bring in some fishing money and I have the satisfaction of knowing that perhaps someone gleaned a little joy out of something I have done with my hands.



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