



Thursdays with BMar



©John Field 2014 | First published by Sexyloops, Tuesday, 20 October 2015

When my family and I moved to Connecticut, I was anxious to learn all its fisheries and learn from the most accomplished local anglers and guides. Our home is located amidst four protected watersheds with trout, plus a boat launch on the Long Island Sound just minutes away. It's a little over an hour drive to the Farmington River's year-round tailwater fishery and the Housatonic River, a large freestone with trout, pike and smallmouth bass. From the Sound up to the first barrier miles upstream, it even has striped bass. The winter dry fly fishing on the Farmington River intrigued me the most though.

The Farmington has a winter/summer caddis that makes this possible. I read articles by Jeff Passante and Thomas Ames and decided to hire a guide to teach me about this hatch. I heard Bruce Marino, a fly designer with Pacific Fly Co. and Farmington River guide, was the one to fish with. Bruce was a collegiate soccer star, has owned an Italian restaurant, a printing company but his love is tying and fishing. He designs unique fresh and saltwater patterns and also ties commercially. He sells his flies under the name BMar Flies. BMar is most known for three flies, the BMar Wounded Baitfish, Hexagenia and his Norway Rat. Bruce is a protégé of the famous fly tier Poul Jorgensen.

I asked Bruce to guide me and tie batches of all the flies for the Farmington for me, so I could copy them. I asked him to take me fishing once a week on

Thursdays, when I didn't have to pick up the kids from school, and it was the quietest day on the river. After picking our first date, I met Bruce at a local fly shop and he gave me several plastic boxes full box of custom flies in sizes for the Farmington with an inventory. The flies Bruce gave me were the flies he uses. Since they take longer to tie, they are not exactly like the ones he ties for shops. They are a little more realistic.

The first morning we fished and before things got cranking, he showed me the river and the ample access points. While driving, we shared fishing stories and industry shoptalk. He was an old friend of Lefty Kreh and told me about a trip they took to Cuba years ago. He started my Farmington River tour. He showed me a spot he called Picnic Table you get to by walking from the parking lot of the Ovation Guitar factory. I later found out a lot of famous guitarists have used their guitars. Jimmy Page, Melissa Etheridge, Van Morrison, Freddie Mercury, John Lennon and many others. Bruce then showed me upper Ovation and Ovation Pool, Spare Tire, Boneyard, Church Pool, Halfords Run, Pipeline and on and on. I knew I had a lot of water and lots of hatches to look forward to.

After he showed me around, we went to the spot de jour and he brought me down a path along the river and stopped to see what was happening. We slowly fished and waded our way into the water didn't see any rising fish. It didn't stop me from catching a few trout on a beautiful golden stone nymph he tied. That day and almost every Thursday with Bruce, I caught some nice fish. We would generally fish nymphs or streamers in the morning before stopping for a picnic lunch prepared by his wife Rose. After lunch we'd switch tackle for the afternoon hatches and terrestrials and watch the hatches increase until the trout started noticing. Terrestrials like the flying ant and beetle are also important here during the warmest part of summer and early fall days. The trico, Needhami and morning caddis are the exception and can cause fish to rise en masse at the dawn's first glow.

I personally like his extended body parachute mayflies. He uses L & L Microfibbets for tailing the small sizes and tapered nylon paintbrush bristles for larger ones. He taught me to make the extended bodies by attaching the tails to a bodkin with thread, then twisting fur dubbing over it to make a realistic taper. Next, apply a little Flex-cement and let it dry. Slide the body off the bodkin and trim it a little to proper length at the thorax and attach it to the hook with thread. Attach your post and hackle stem, then you can dub on either side of the post to form a thorax, wrap and tie-off your hackle, whip

finish and cement the head. The fly's done.

In the winter, Bruce introduced me to the winter/summer caddis and winter dry fly fishing. We can fish best on days above freezing and when the shelf ice isn't too bad. Winter caddis are active from sunrise to about eleven o'clock in the morning. Sometimes midges are also present. The winter female caddis has no wings and runs across the surface to follow the winged males that crawl out of the water to mate. It's too cold for them to fly and we present their imitation with a dead drift. In winter, trout readily surface feed on both sexes but often exhibit a preference that changes by the minute for one or the other. In spring and summer, the females develop wings and fly. The female adult imitated by a foam-bodied fly called the Caddis Pupae, is usually tied on a size 22 hook and an angler will be most successful using 6x and lighter tippets. The most attractive presentation is imitating the female with a cast quartering downstream, so the fly skitters across the surface as it swings. I was taught to add small twitches while it swings but too much and the leader makes too much commotion and it'll scare the fish. It can also sink the fly. Many anglers use a 2 or 3-weight rod to help cushion the tippet on the strike, since the fly is swinging on a tight line.

Bruce guided me for four years and I learned a lot. Occasionally we'd end a good trip by discussing fishing and politics over a scotch and fine food. Once a year in fall he declared guide day when he'd take me fishing as his guest and he fished too. He likes the small fall blue-winged olives from size 22 all the way down to size 32! His blue eyes always had superb vision. I invited Bruce as a guest speaker to give a presentation on the Farmington to the NYC Chapter of Trout Unlimited, when I served as its president. My fellow members enjoyed it very much. All things must come to end.

There came a point when I could fish any weekday and stay for evening hatches and spinner falls, so I started fishing on my own according to the weather and bugs and not on a regular schedule. I was able to fish more successfully in this way but it took a lot of dues to know the river well enough. I still see Bruce at fly shows where he is a featured tier. The first time I went to The Art of the Angler Show where he was tying, he graciously left his booth and took a walk with me around the show introducing me to all his well-known fellow tiers. He would introduce me as, one of the "good guys", since I've been involved in conservation and kids' education.

Bruce also reintroduced me to Lefty Kreh at The Fly Fishing Show after a failed attempt I made twenty some years prior. Lefty was at ease with his old

friend Bruce and told us a string of jokes, as only Lefty can. Lefty said, “Did ya hear the one about the baby pocket possum GPS? Well this guy from New York went fishing with an old Cajun guide in the bayou of Louisiana and asked the guide, how are you going to navigate around and find you’re way back without signs or landmarks in this swamp? The guide replied in a thick Cajun accent, look here in my shirt pocket. This is a baby pocket possum GPS. After the day of fishing, the city slicker watched as the guide released the possum on land and waited. After a few minutes, they heard the screech of brakes and the guide pointed toward the sound and said, it’s that way back to the road.”