

I LOVE WHERE FISH LIVE



BY MICHAEL BROHM

I'm standing knee-deep in the Yellowstone River. Wind-driven rain is coming down at a steep angle, pelting me on the back. Looking downstream, I see along the riverbank a group of bison, standing like me, with their haunches into the wind, their woolen heads lowered close to the ground. I wonder, do they mind the rain? Do they like the rain, that puts down the dust and cools the day? Or, do they even care, having lived every day in the weather?

I like standing in the river, in the rain.

Back at camp I think about how fishing has been part of my life. Early memories of fishing with my grandfather come to mind. I must be 5 or 6. I'm following him along a path through tall weeds. We've just climbed down the side of the flood wall, built after the devastating 1937 flood of the Ohio River. We walk on the flat flood plain, through acres of Queen Anne's Lace carrying our tackle boxes, sandwiches, heavy metal thermos bottles and cartons of fat red worms. Sometimes we'd stop by the ice house/ bait shop and buy minnows, carried to the river in a special galvanized bucket. I have my Zebco rod & reel, his reel a green Johnson Century. I called him Bamp, which rhymes with Gramp... the name my parents thought I should call my grandfather. His tackle box is huge, crammed with treble-hooked wooden lures, heavy sinkers, split shot, floats and pliers to rig it all together. The river's edge was sandy, the current swift. We'd try various fishing technique...redworms on the bottom for channel cats, buffalo, gar. Or, quickly reeling wobbling lures towards the bank for bass, skip jack or perch. On hot, quiet days Bamp would rig a float above a sinker above a red worm and I'd catch blue gill. Fifty years later I still have his reel and tackle box.



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as the sun moves across the sky.**

Fishing doesn't always involve fish. What I've found from my half-century of fishing is this: I love where fish live.

I flash back to a day, drifting in a canoe on a fog-enveloped lake in Algonquin Provincial Park in Canada, my line as deep as I can get it, looking for big lake

trout, loons calling, echoing from lake to lake.

Hiking above the tree line in the Wind River Range in Wyoming, I come across trout in gin-clear lakes. I read that these fish had been carried to these lakes generations ago in water filled baskets on the backs of horses. The fish are too smart for me. I sit on a big rock and watch as the sun moves across the sky.

There's an afternoon of chasing the receding tide and a school of Dolly Varden on the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska. Later, I fish for salmon with flash flies I've tied back home in my living room, walking the river, dodging other "anglers", who, this time happen to be Kodiak Grizzlies.

Driving to the headwaters of the Missouri River, trout are rising all around me.

For three days I change flies and attitude but don't land a single fish. Gosh, what a beautiful place.

I'm driven in an old Russian military vehicle across the meters-thick ice one February on the Kama River, just west of the Ural Mountains. I'm with six former Russian army officers who, I can tell by their whispering and body language, are determined to show this amerikanski how ice fishing is done in Russia. What they don't know is that I know where the fish live. Much to their amazement, I pull fish after fish from the hole in the ice, throwing them flash frozen onto the ice. I never did find out the name of the fish I was catching.

Now, in my life, I've settled into an annual pilgrimage to the Yellowstone, Madison, Fire Hole, Lamar, Snake and other glorious rivers of the American West.

Rod in hand, standing in the cold current, looking for swirls, bumps and bugs that might announce a trout, I sometimes forget to look up at the beauty surrounding me. The pressures of daily life quickly fade. I'm singular in my efforts.

I love where fish live.

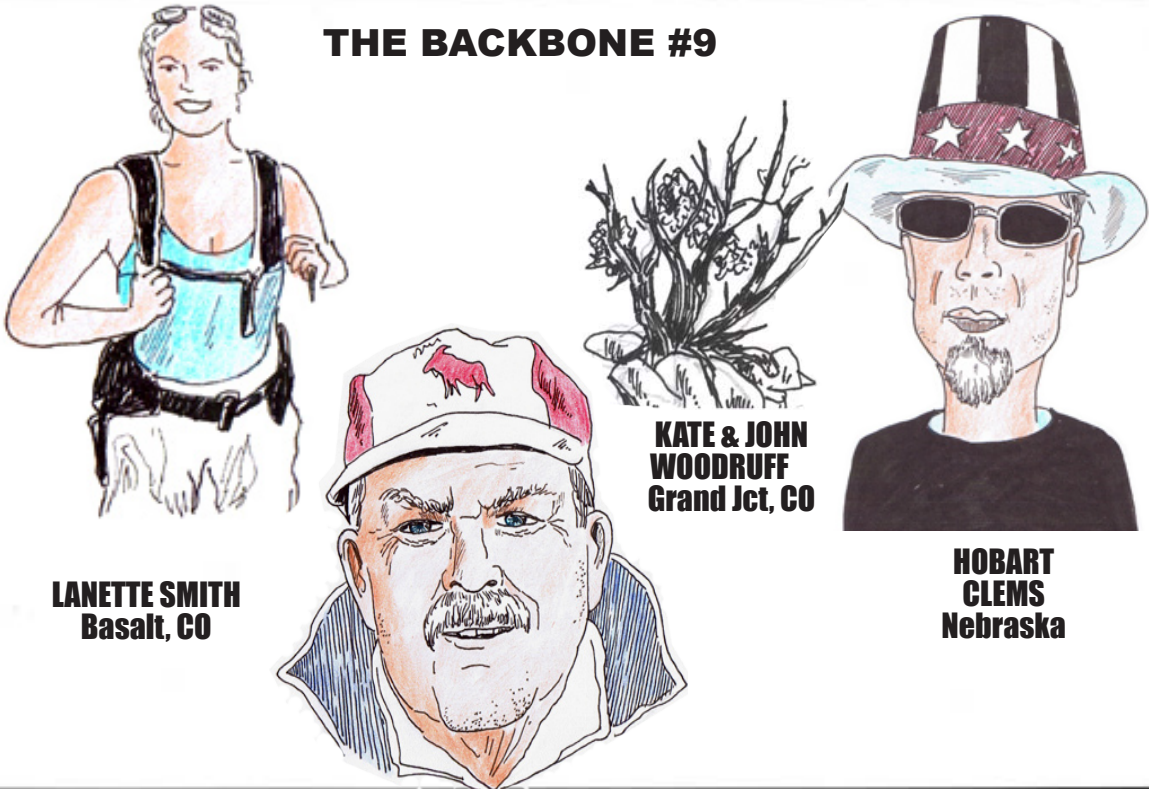
*MICHAEL BROHM is a brilliant photographer, a gifted writer, a regular contributor to THE ZEPHYR and one of my oldest and dearest friends.
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