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## INSIDE **THE 2012 “OPINION” ISSUE**

All Fishing is Good Fishing/Simms Sells Direct/  
Conservation for Profit/An Eye on Access/  
The Client is Not Always Right/Industry Beefs  
(Served Rare)/Who's Growing the Sport?/And  
Much More

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# All Fishing is Good Fishing

Written by Jennifer Pullinger

**My grandfather was an angler, although he would probably simply call himself a “fisherman.” Every summer, for as far back as I can remember, he would gather friends and family - his friend Sparkplug, his brother-in-law George, his sister Betty, and others - and head to the Outer Banks to fish for striper, spot, bluefish, puppy drum, and sea trout. If you needed to find him at any given hour, the first place you would want to look is near the shore, where he could be seen sitting on a bucket, waiting patiently, or when the fish were biting - reeling in a flounder or croaker.**

For more than 25 years, both in the spring and fall, he and my grandmother would pack up the truck and make the 600-mile round trip from their home in Central Virginia to Cape Hatteras. The family would stay in a wind- and salt-weathered cottage - bunk beds lining the walls, sand ground into the carpet, and that distinctive “salty fish” smell wafting through air. My grandfather stopped making the drive only when his knees became too frail to withstand walking in the sand or hiking over the mini-dunes to the ocean-side. I know he missed those getaways.

I never asked my grandfather why he enjoyed fishing so much. Perhaps it allowed him the time to clear his head and think of nothing but breathing in the salt air - a good old-fashioned remedy for anything that ails you. It was probably also the “sport” itself - his competitive drive to want to catch the biggest fish. Even though he couldn’t make it to the beach anymore, there were plenty of local rivers and lakes where he could reel in some catfish, bass, crappie, bream, and carp to get his “fishing fix.” I know he preferred the saltwater action though, but if I had asked him pointedly what kind of fishing he preferred, I am sure he would have said: “All fishing is good fishing.”

Whether you are a freshwater, saltwater, or fly fisherman or woman, there are many reasons to believe that “all fishing is good fishing.” Fishing in general is considered a “gateway” activity - for young people especially - to lifelong participation in outdoor activities, which in our cushy, overly techno-driven, “air-conditioned” modern culture, is a good thing for our collective physical health. Will we remember those times when we sat on the couch and watched some mindless television show with our parents and grandparents? Nope. Getting outside, fishing with friends and family, lead to real memories and health benefits that no virtual home video game can replicate.

Call me nostalgic, but I believe fishing is a way for our mobile phone-distracted, “too-wired” population to get back to its roots. Should fishing be a “movement,” much like the “slow food” movement, where the message is slow down, protect local resources, and “fish mindfully”? In many ways, it already is. Fishing provides the opportunity for us to decelerate the oft-hurried pace of life, look around, and appreciate na-

ture and all that this earth provides. No matter your preference - fresh, salt, fly - you get the benefits. It’s what makes “all fishing good fishing.”

Naturally, conservation is integral to the act of fishing. As anglers, we owe it to the environment and to ourselves to not just take from fishing, but to give something back. We do that when we purchase a fishing license or fishing tackle or equipment. Funds from excise taxes on rods, reels, tackle boxes, and other accessories go back to state fish habitat preservation and aquatic resource conservation programs so future generations of recreational anglers can continue to fish from healthy and abundant streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans.

2012 actually represents an important year for that effort - it’s the 75th anniversary of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR). According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, WSFR has contributed more than \$14 billion towards fish and wildlife conservation and restoration programs since it was put in place in 1937.

If you have ever had the chance to stand in a babbling brook or have the surf rush up against your legs while fishing, you know why people love the sport. “The more people that get involved in fishing, the more people will get involved in conservation and protecting our resources,” says Brian Trow, owner of Mossy Creek Fly Fishing in Harrisonburg, Virginia. “Someone who has never stood in a stream before is not necessarily going to care about the future of a stream or pollution or that sort of thing. Without people going out and enjoying watersheds, the Chesapeake Bay, or the ocean, people tend to care less about them.”

The barriers to entry are also low for those new to fishing. “Yes, you can

spend a whole bunch on boats and things but it can also be as simple as you choose to make,” says Greg Martel, Deputy Director of the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries Bureau of Wildlife Resources. “It can begin with a simple inexpensive rod with bobbers and bait or you can get as involved as you want.” Much like my upbringing, it was my father and grandfather who taught my brother and me how to fish. Interestingly, however, women are one of the largest growing segments in fishing today, Martel says.

“I grew up in the Midwest, in the upper Peninsula of Michigan. We had a cottage by the river, and that’s basically how I started with my father,” says Sean Dailey, General Manager of Cutthroat Anglers, a fly shop and guide service in Silverthorne, Colorado. “He’d want to take me out every week and we’d go up to the cottage and go fishing. It’s just big in the culture of where I grew up. Everyone fished. Everyone hunted,” Dailey says, adding, “It just seemed like the right thing to do.”

Growing up, it was part of my “family culture” too. Fishing, quite simply, is as all-American as apple pie, and, dare I say, baseball. It’s just a great way to spend time with friends and family, and reconnect with the outdoors and our natural resources. It’s that legacy of appreciation for the water and fishing that my grandfather left his family. It likely affected my brother’s educational and career choices; he is a biologist with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries.

Today, when I think of my grandfather, I envision him with a fishing pole in hand. When he passed a few years ago, my grandmother even requested that the image of an angler with a fishing pole be engraved on his headstone. Fortunately for his children and grandchildren, he left a lasting trail of memories that only make me wistful for the slow pace of my youth. 