

## 1992 Annual Banquet



**Gary LaFontaine** said he always knew he wanted to spend his life fishing. That's why he chose the University of Montana back in 1963.

"I could have gone to college somewhere in the middle of a big city, or I could have gone to the University of Montana which has the Clark's Fork flowing right by the campus," he said.

"I never took a class between 1 and 4 o'clock because there was always a Baetis hatch on the river," he said. "After fishing the hatch we'd go to the 4 o'clock class, take our waders off and lean our rods in the corner and the instructor would take the first 10 minutes of the class asking us about the fishing."

LaFontaine's degree is in behavioral psychology and his thesis work was studying trout when they feed selectively.

"When trout feed selectively it is a very simple stimulus response pattern," he said. "Food is the stimulus and the response is the rise. They get locked into a target and they want it to look exactly like that insect and anything that doesn't is ignored. That is not intelligence, it is simply rote repetition."

Much of his thesis work was done in scuba gear at the bottom of a hole watching trout rise. That work led to the book *Caddisflies* and launched his writing career.

The key to his caddis patterns is the DuPont material called Antron. When Dupont engineers were working on the product they were very helpful to Gary.

"DuPont was incredible," he said. "They had four to five of their top engineers talking to a fly fisherman. When they told me they only sold Antron by the carload, I said I'd drive down and they said 'We mean by the train carload.' But they sent me a lot of it."

Currently fly tyers can buy skeins of yarn at discount department stores under the brand names of Dazzleair and Jewel Tones. Gary says, "Don't ask for Sparkle Yarn, that's just a name I made up and don't look for Antron, you won't find it. And don't look for these brands in fancy yarn shops. They don't carry it."

Other books LaFontaine has written include "The Dry Fly, New Angles" published in 1990 and "Trout Flies, Proven Patterns" published in 1993. All three books received the United Fly Tyers' Fly Fishing Book of the Year award. He also writes a regular column for Trout Magazine, the Trout Unlimited journal.



His latest book is "Trout Flies, Proven Patterns" which is part of a trilogy. The next book, entitled "Trout Methods, Proven Presentations" will be out in the fall of 1997. The third will be entitled, "Trout Waters, Proven Places."

"When you are a writer, the hardest part of the book is the title and when you have the title, the rest is easy," LaFontaine said, laughing.

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## UPDATE

### **Fishing Expert LaFontaine, 56, Dies (Jan. 4, 2002)**

DEER LODGE, Mont. (AP) - Gary LaFontaine, an author and publisher whose books about flyfishing are standards in the field, has died of complications from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease. He is survived by his daughter Heather LaFontaine-Ellison and her husband Patrick Ellison.

He was born and raised in Hartford, Conn., and graduated from the University of Montana. An avid fisherman, LaFontaine turned his passions into a business, producing a series of books about flyfishing techniques and tying flies, and selling a line of fly patterns. Gary LaFontaine published more than 100 articles on fly fishing in more than a dozen different national and regional publications. He authored five books and coauthored many more including the just-released books *Fly Fishing the Yellowstone* (with Bob Jacklin) and *Fly Fishing the Madison* (with Craig Mathews). Before he died he was working on a book on Blue-winged Olives.

Among his books were "*Caddisflies*," "*The Dry Fly*," "*Trout Flies: Proven Patterns*" and "*The Dry Fly: New Angles*."

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### **"One Nine-Inch Rainbow"— A Last Conversation with Gary LaFontaine**

The Evergreen Care Center in Missoula, Montana, was like most nursing homes, pleasant but a little depressing. Gary's room was at the end of one hall; a computer rested on a table along with pictures of Gary and friends with big trout on famous rivers. Even in a state of rapidly declining health, Gary welcomed an opportunity to be interviewed. Propped up in his wheelchair, unable to move, barely able to lift his head, his voice

struggled to give voice to his thoughts. Yet, Gary was still his gracious self—funny and thoughtful. The interview lasted three hours with Gary slowly articulating his thoughts on writing, fishing, and a life well spent.

Four years ago Gary LaFontaine visited Weber State University. He was doing what he loved most, sharing the joys of fly fishing with young people. It was just his nature to give of himself. Award-winning writer and fly fishing innovator, renowned entomologist and ardent environmentalist, Gary LaFontaine delivered a masterful lecture on the science and joys of fly fishing. Later that semester he met the Weber State University Honors class at Little Hole on the Green River below Flaming Gorge Dam. Even then he was suffering the debilitation of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Walking with difficulty, arms hanging limply at his sides, his voice was still strong and his mind clear. No one standing on the shore that overcast spring morning will forget the two hours that were spent being instructed on the finer points of fly presentation by Gary as his good friend, [Jack Dennis](#), stood hip deep in the water demonstrating each technique. Gary leaned against a large rock for the two hours, sharing techniques and tales, and patiently answering every question. Even Peter Matthiessen, invited author, listened intently to the fishing master, acknowledging later to Gary how much he enjoyed the fly fishing instruction. That evening Gary took time to talk to each student, finding out about their day on the water and offering advice for the next day of fishing. It was a herculean effort for someone who could not get out of the car without assistance.

It seems that fly fishing organizations nearly ran out of awards for Gary LaFontaine. Gary's first book, *Challenge of the Trout*, was a main selection of the Field and Stream Book Club in 1976. Gary's second book, *Caddisflies*, won the 1981 United Fly Tyers Book of the Year Award and was named one of the finest fly fishing books of the past 30 years in Trout magazine. This book has become one of the most enduring classics in modern fly fishing lore. *The Dry Fly: New Angles* won the 1990 United Fly Tyers Book of the Year Award, the 1991 Arnold Gingrich Memorial Award, and was listed by Tight Line as one of their Top Ten Fly Fishing books for the decade of 1990-2000. Gary followed these two books with Trout Flies: Proven Patterns winner of the 1993 Book of the Year Award. United Fly Tyers, a national fly fishing organization, carefully reads and evaluates every fly fishing book published during the year. Their Book of the Year Award is presented annually to "the fly fishing book that makes an outstanding addition to the body of literature in our sport." His last book, *Fly Fishing the Mountain Lakes*, was to start his new Summer of Discovery Series, but, unfortunately, the series was never finished. Gary authored hundreds of articles in outdoor magazines, narrated countless videos, ran a publishing house, and even wrote the Book Mailer, a cult quarterly fly fishing newsletter. In 2001, Gary received the Roderick Haig-Brown Award from the Federation of Fly Fishers for lifetime contributions to angling literature, joining such noteworthy authors as Thomas McGuane, John Gierach and Nick Lyons.

Gary lived the life we all want, totally immersed in what he loved and with the innate ability to share that life with all his friends. Gary finally succumbed to ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) on January 4, 2002, in Missoula, Montana.

