

I'm confused

by Jim Brady

I thought I was doing the right thing. After fifty plus years of fly fishing, I frankly have accumulated a lot of stuff. So I started to pare down the amount of stuff I carried on stream and was feeling pretty good about it. I reduced cramming nine or ten medium to large fly boxes in a high capacity vest to just two or three slim boxes in a minimalist vest. I cut back on the amount of spare leaders, leader material and am down to just one container of floatant. And then the annual tide of tackle catalogs jammed my mailbox.

Fly fishermen don't look like they used to. People in the catalogs hang stuff around their necks, presumably because it's out in the open and easy to find. I don't like things hanging off me or my vest. They make all kinds of jingle-jangle noises. When I sit on a rock listening to the river, I don't hear any naturally produced jingle-jangle noises, only birds calling their partners and the current splashing downstream. The only thing in nature that looks remotely like all that stuff dangling off someone's chest is the bright breast of an exotic male bird that strayed from the Amazon basin. But I must face facts, I am woefully out of fashion. Nowadays I'm supposed to wear a kind of noose, 'er lanyard, around my neck on which are strung tippet spools, forceps, clippers and even dry fly floatant, which hangs in its own swinging holder. Nooses make me nervous. I thought that's what pockets were for.

I am so far behind the times my spools of spare tippet material are stored in pockets made for spools of spare tippet material. I even have small pockets designated for floatant and a hook hone. My forceps are simply clamped to the inside of my vest to prevent reflecting bright flashes of light back to the fish. I know, I should switch my bright gold-plated forceps for a stealthy matte black pair. More to the point, the guy who actually bought my forceps should have selected less a obtrusive model, they were easy for me to find on the bottom of Helton Creek.

I store my fly boxes in actual pockets in an actual vest (in truth, I have two but I don't want to admit it). I searched high and low for the model vest I now rely on and realize the only place I am liable to find it is in The Museum of American Flyfishing. These days vests are outnumbered by packs. Not packs of cigarettes or packs of dogs but chest packs, belly packs, back packs, guide packs, waist packs and over-the-shoulder packs, aka sling-packs. Many have water bottle holders and few come with an empty flask for liquid solace when the fish don't cooperate (cerveza pack?!!, it's true!). I stick a water bottle in my pants pocket.

Reels these days are relegating my single action model to the ash heap of yesteryear. Everything now has a large arbor spool to enable the angler to reel faster than saltwater speedsters. I guess my problem lies in not having seen any saltwater speedsters in western Carolina lately. Even my backing is out of date. It's just a simple, green dacron braid that tests out at twenty pounds, a weight I have little hope of dealing with any time soon. Bright orange and fluorescent chartreuse backing are still just pipe dreams. My choice of lines hasn't changed

much over the years but their availability and cost sure have. I prefer old (yikes, there's that telling word) double taper lines lacking compound tapers; their old timey cost didn't even concern me when I was a student. Buying a fly line now seems like choosing fishing over eating.

I might as well admit it but I can't even find my rod in the catalogs. I used a wonderful Powell three piece four weight for many years until I lost one of the sections; must have had a senior moment. I tried to replace the section but found it went out of production around 1999, the year I bought it. I decided I would make its replacement and picked out an IM7 blank which is only about five graphite generations ago. It's an eight foot, four piece four weight that is light in the hand and feels great to the touch but that may be due to the grip I made to match my own hand. I put large guides on it so it casts easily. I even added measurement marks on the butt section so I can quickly measure the hordes of fourteen inch trout I hope to haul in with it. I might even be ahead of the curve on this one.

By the time I paged through the last catalog, I felt I should give lectures on the way fly fishing used to be. Before bells and whistles, when catalogs featured just one type of Hare's ear nymph. Soak your leader so you can stretch out the kinks, tie on a fly and catch a fish. At least that's how I recall it. Perhaps I'm not so much confused as finally focusing on the right stuff, which is no small feat awash in today's proliferation of all things fly fishing. Maybe I just know how to wade quietly and study the currents. I'll check cob webs and sieve the water to see what's on the menu and tie on a reasonable imitation. With luck I'll throw enough slack into the cast to trick the fish to into striking before drag rears its ugly head. I'll take the fish's picture and slip him back into the river. Then I'll straighten up, marvel at the blue sky and puffy white clouds, dry and fluff my fly and go back to fishing. Funny, the catalogs don't talk about the sky or how good the current feels pushing against your legs. Those copywriters should get out more.