

Found a Kindred Spirit and Lover of Rivers

Recently, in reading the column, “The Seasonable Angler,” which has for several decades occupied the last pages of one of our finest outdoor publications, “Fly Fisherman Magazine,” I discovered a writer who may be next to succeed the departed Nick Lyons, whom I once thought irreplaceable. His name is Steve Ramirez, and his column in the Aug./Sept. issue is titled “The Art Of Letting Go.”

Ramirez, like Lyons, has the ability to turn what might have been a boring, fact-focused, how-to-do-it piece, into pure eloquence. Steve is lyrical in expressing his love of anything natural, especially life bordering the fine trout streams of northern New Mexico and elsewhere.

Reading this piece, I was amazed at how similar our childhoods were. Here is a sample, “When I was a boy, Nature was my reason for breathing. Now I’m in my 60’s, and Nature helps me continue to breathe. As a child I struggled with asthma...and a desperately shy nature that came from abuse at home and bullying at school. Songbirds, box turtles, and bluegills were always my best friends. Not much has changed, except my asthma is evolving. I have a newly discovered birth defect in my heart, the song birds are vanishing and I haven't seen a box turtle in decades. Nature, with a capital N still sustains me; I hope I can give something back. After all, love is a two-way proposition.”

It’s not often that I can read something, unless it’s scripture, that rivets my attention. I too grew up with asthma, back before they had inhalers. I too was shy, (not from abuse, but because we were poor). And I too learned to escape the discord of parental fights by seeking out the company of wild things, critters, birds, and magical secret spots to which I could take my sling shot or BB gun and steal away. Nature’s endless surprises enthralled me: the night music of migrating waterfowl, the melodious solos of meadowlarks, mourning doves, orioles and

warblers. The always amazing areal acrobatics of martins, swallows, swifts and nighthawks at twilight time.

At about age ten, I befriended the river, with its populations of intriguing fish under the water and all manner shore birds with their neighbors the mink, otter, muskrats and beavers dwelling in the banks and inlets.

But the rather drab quarry I began with—bullheads, suckers, and carp I caught on my worm-baited hand lines were no match for the radiant beauty of the sunfish and native stream trout trout Steve Ramirez writes about.

Here's another out-take from his last column: "As an angler and a naturalist, I can see that everything is changing: much is vanishing all around me way too quickly to be natural. It is so obviously a force of human nature that the rivers and aquifers are drying up, waters turning acid, and native bees and birds vanishing at an alarming rate. I love life and want to live. But I don't want to live in a world without morning songbirds, evening fireflies, or midday native trout. These are the things that make my life worth living."

The main thrust of Steve's article was that he'd discovered the deeper satisfaction of locating one trout in a nearly inaccessible spot, reaching it with what had to be a perfect presentation of the right fly, catching the fish and then letting it go. This in place of the earlier notion that catching one easily reachable fish after another marked of the successful angler.

Steve's conclusion is memorable: "My love of fishing reflects my love of life. It is wrapped in kindness and empathy as much as my clinch knot binds the fly to my leader. Love is always a key, never a cage. Love always finds a way to show compassion to the other and set them free. Like the water in the mountain stream, nothing of true value can be contained. It is timeless and ever changing. In angling as in life, the true magic is in the art of letting go." Unlike Steve

Ramirez, it has taken me till age 80 to go from chasing limits, to finally at eighty-five, keeping just a few to eat or give away.

I can perhaps share a recent discovery that has made a huge contribution to my happy retirement: Never take the doctor's assessment as gospel. Healings, even miraculous ones, happen. I have been healed of asthma, lung disease, irregular heartbeat, and ulcers and delivered from heavy smoking, problem drinking, over-eating and much more. How?

Steve had the answer all along, only a roll-cast away: love. Not lust but *agape* of the kind the great angler, Jesus, taught on The Sea of Galilee and the hill of Calvary. And here's the good part: His love is unconditional. You don't have to earn it. "Nothing can keep us from that love." (Romans 8:38-39.)

He created all things and without him, "nothing was made that was made." (See Col. 1:16, 17). He knows every thought you think (Ps. 139:4) and has forgiven our every sin, past, present and future. (Mk. 23:34)

When I finish this, I am going fishing. The Red River beckons, and there's bass to be caught and likely, let go.

Gene Pinkney 23-07-15- for The Daily News