

# The Newsletter of The Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association

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May 2023



## From the vest of the President



As we come to the conclusion our spring season I want to thank all of you that helped make this last year a success. Beginning in September we successfully conducted each of our monthly membership meetings, Expo & Banquet, Beginner Fly Tying School, Beginner Freshwater Fly Fishing School, and our Fly Tying classes with students at the American School for the Deaf. We do have a fly tying event remaining and that will be held on the UCONN campus on June 10 where we will follow the University professors morning presentation on entomology with fly tying instruction for beginners. Without our membership's assistance with these programs they would cease to exist.

I am also very thankful for the number of members that have contributed to our partnership with FVTU by lending a hand with their Project Healing Waters Program. Don LaChance leads this program and does an outstanding job as he coordinates our Zoom Calls, Fly Tying instruction and our Fly Fishing outings with our Veterans. A few of the Veterans in the program enrolled in both our CFFA Fly Tying School and our Fly Fishing School and two of them, Sean & Marcos, manned a table and demonstrated their fly tying skills at our April Fly Tying Roundtable meeting. Speaking of the April roundtable meeting we had about 15 fly tiers sharing their techniques on various patterns. A few of them confessed it was their first time tying with an audience and they did a great job. We also had members demonstrating knot tying, sight

leaders and construction of strike indicators. Our May meeting will be held outside on the banks of Salmon River on May 13 and the details are in this issue.

On Saturday April 22nd we held our casting instruction at the P&F pond in East Hartford. Eighteen students showed up and ten CFFA members also showed up to help with the instruction. It was a perfect day for casting with little or no wind. CFFA member Ray Ramos, a certified FFI caster, did a fine demonstration with a thorough explanation of the fundamentals required to cast a fly line. I was very impressed with the progress each student made by the end of the class. Their next class takes them to the river. I am not sure that you will receive this issue before May 6 but if you do that is the day we take our students on the Willimantic TMA for their river instruction. We will meet at 8:30am in the west bound rest stop between Exit 70 and 69. Please attend this important class if you can. The class concludes around 12 noon. Pete Naples who coordinates all of our educational classes deserves the credit for another successful year so contact him if you plan to help.

Gary



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Our May meeting is on May 13th at the Salmon River at the picnic area below Rt. 16 Bridge this is the third annual event and is growing so come out and enjoy yourself and spend the day. Bring your own food and drink, Rick will light up a grill so you can bring something to cook also.

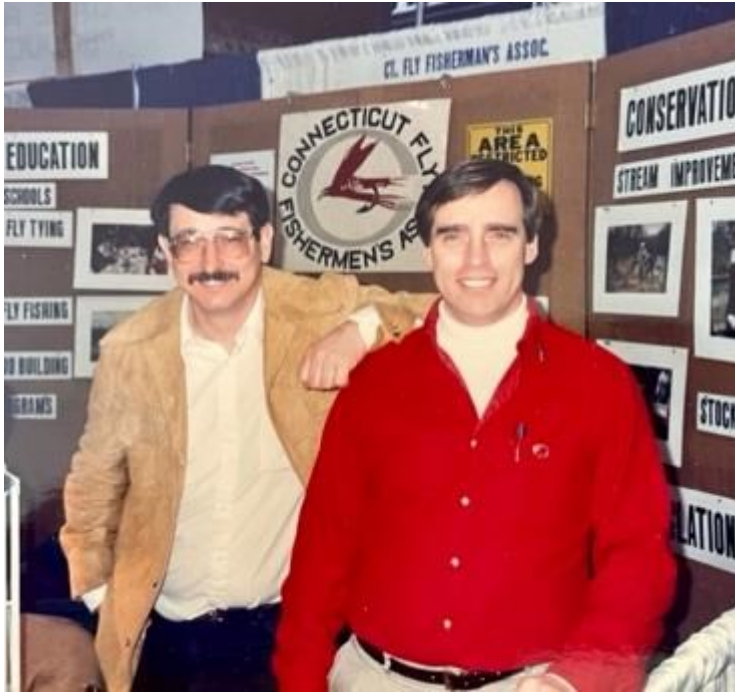


## My Life and Times with Gary LaFontaine

### *How a creative genius impacted the lives of fly fishers worldwide*

*By Ken Parkany*

**Gary J. LaFontaine, May 12, 1945 – January 4, 2002**



In this introduction to a series of articles, I want to start with Gary's tragic death and then rewind and share some details about Gary and his lifetime of fly fishing, along with some of the experiences Gary and I shared together.

It's been twenty-one years since former Connecticut native and CFFA member, Gary LaFontaine, succumbed to ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease at the age of 56. It's been said that only the good die young. While I prefer NOT to believe in that cliché, we do know that Gary crammed much good - so much good for others - related to his passion for flyfishing in his short life. He literally impacted the entire fly tying and fly-fishing community worldwide before his untimely passing. His fly-tying innovations continue to do so today. Gary's labels include innovative fly tyer, award-winning writer, renowned entomologist, business owner, ardent environmentalist and masterful lecturer, to name a few. Except when we were joking around, our favorite labels for each other were simply friend.

Late in 2001, while Gary lay in a nursing home bed in Missoula, Montana, he agreed to be interviewed at the time by Craig Oberg, Professor of Microbiology and Department Chair of Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. In that interview, Gary enlightened Craig and those who later read his piece with his final thoughts about many subjects. One profound question Craig asked was: *"Right now you are battling ALS. How would you say all of your experience in fly fishing has helped you in facing this?"*

*"Fly fishing has given me a good life. I'm sure grateful that I lived my life and didn't wait Fifty years to retire. I didn't go out every day and work at a factory job that I hated, and then all of a sudden get ALS and regret living the life I led. I led the life I wanted to lead. I've known people who are not happy and don't have a form of recreation that is important to them. Therefore, I would say, if you want to think about being a fly fisherman, set your life priorities towards making fly fishing a very high priority in your life."*

My wife Linda and I spent our last moments with Gary during a weekend in December, 2001, weeks before he passed. We went out to dinner at his favorite steak restaurant in Missoula, thanks to daughter Heather's boyfriend at the time who was strong enough to lift Gary from his bed to a wheel chair. The five of us reminisced and laughed the evening away. The next day, friends of Gary's hosted a party at their home where we watched football on TV, joked, told I remember when...stories and laughed some more. Later, back at the nursing home we said our final goodbyes. Gary knew his time was running out. He had refused to have artificial breathing apparatus extend his life. Yet he admitted to me he had more to say, more to tell. Perhaps this is one way. Perhaps this is not just my story, but Gary's too.

I moved to Connecticut in June of 1967. In December, I read a news article that a newly formed group, the Connecticut Fly Fishermen's Association, was holding its first membership meeting in the cellar of a bank in Windsor, Connecticut in January 1968. Those interested in learning about fly fishing and fly tying were invited to attend. I looked forward to going. Once there, I was very encour-

aged by the organizers' purpose. The meeting place was small and overcrowded. One of the first guys I introduced myself to was Dr. Vincent Ringrose. He said he was appointed Conservation Committee Chairman. He gave his home address and invited me to his first meeting. Little did I know at the time that this event would change my life and set me on an unexpected path to meeting so many others who were either fly fishing novices like myself or experienced fly tyers and fly fishermen that would freely give of their time and talent to further other's interest in fly fishing. That's what CFFA was and fifty-five plus years later still is all about.

The first CFFA president, Ted Barbieri, and those who were among the leadership welcomed interested guys to become active. After serving on the Conservation Committee for a few years, I was asked to be Membership chairman. Membership was growing fast. It wasn't long before our roster was approaching 500 members statewide.

My most memorable moment as Membership Chairman was receiving an application from someone named Gary LaFontaine. I was puzzled. Couldn't be. The only Gary LaFontaine I'd read about was Rocky Mountain Field Editor of the newly published (1967) Fly Fisherman Magazine. Could this be the same guy? Well, I phoned him since he put his number on the application. Yep. Same guy. He said he was born and raised in Connecticut, but left for Montana to attend college. He met his mate, Ardyce, there and they both came to Connecticut to work and be near his mother who was very ill.

We met at the next meeting and there was instant chemistry between us. That initial chemistry led to a lifelong friendship, one that has left indelible moments and memories. My hope is that if you never knew Gary, you may gain an insight into his creativity that will enhance your moments a stream. If you knew and remember Gary, perhaps you will learn something new about one of the most incredible fly fishers to ever wade the streams and rivers on earth. What follows is Gary's story through my lens.

During our times together and apart, there were many

events that occurred that show different sides of Gary's character, his creativity and dogged determination. What follows are some highlights.

While Gary was living in Montana, we shared many letters and phone conversations. We entered into a monthly fly swap. His letters were so full of intriguing and innovative tips that he allowed me to write a monthly feature in *Lines & Leaders*, using excerpts from his letters. *Montana Missives – A Stream of Letters Containing Tales of Trout* ran for several years.

Gary invited me to come to Montana to fish with him. I excitedly took up his offer and my Uncle Steve Parkany joined us in mid-summer, 1973. Our angling "awedyssee" had many surprises. The first was upon our arrival at Missoula airport – no Gary. After fishing many streams and rivers during our stay, the trip ended with even more surprises, including one "trophy fish", caught by Gary.

After Gary published his first book, *Challenge of the Trout* (Mountain Press, 1976), I gifted a copy to Alfred W. Miller, aka Sparse Grey Hackle, the Dean of Angling authors. How that became an opportunity for me is an amazing story in itself. A unique series of events followed. The whereabouts of Sparse's copy of *Challenge* and of something I had made for Gary is still a mystery today.

In 1977, I again had to opportunity to fish with Gary in Wyoming. While attending the Federation of Flyfisher's (FFF) national convention in Jackson Hole. This was Gary's first entry to the big stage. He was one of the invited guest speakers, due to the publication and success of *Challenge*. One unexpected event involved Gary, several of his friends and me. That event was solved by something called Imodium.

A few years later, after the publication of his second book titled simply Caddisflies (Nick Lyons Books, 1981), Gary was invited to be guest speaker at CFFA's Annual Banquet held each February. In *Caddisflies*, Gary shared his creative talents, passionate stream research that included scuba gear for Caddis hatch observation and fly tying innovation. *Caddisflies* has become a classic as it was totally a unique contribution to angling literature. During the

next decade, more books and audio tapes followed; all award winning.

Not surprisingly, by 1990, at the age of 45, Gary was awarded the Arnold Gingrich Memorial Award for Lifetime Writing Achievements. No surprise either that Gary was invited to be the CFFA featured guest at the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1992. This was the year that CFFA began adding a full "EXPO" day of fly fishing and fly-tying activities that climaxed with the evening banquet. Gary's articles graced the pages of the The Flyfisher's Companion, that CFFA privately published as a tribute to its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And Gary, along with angling notables Nick Lyons and J. Edson Leonard, provided "hero quotes" on the back cover.

Gary, along with Stan Bradshaw and Stan's wife, formed Greycliff Publishing. More of Gary's published writing ensued. Sometime later, The Book Cellar Newsletter appeared, which highlighted among other things, Gary's unique sense of humor.

In the years preceding his ALS diagnosis, Gary, Mike Lawson and Jack Dennis traveled the world spreading their goodwill, fly tying and fly-fishing knowledge to novice and experienced anglers alike. He often sent me post cards from places he'd call "paradise".

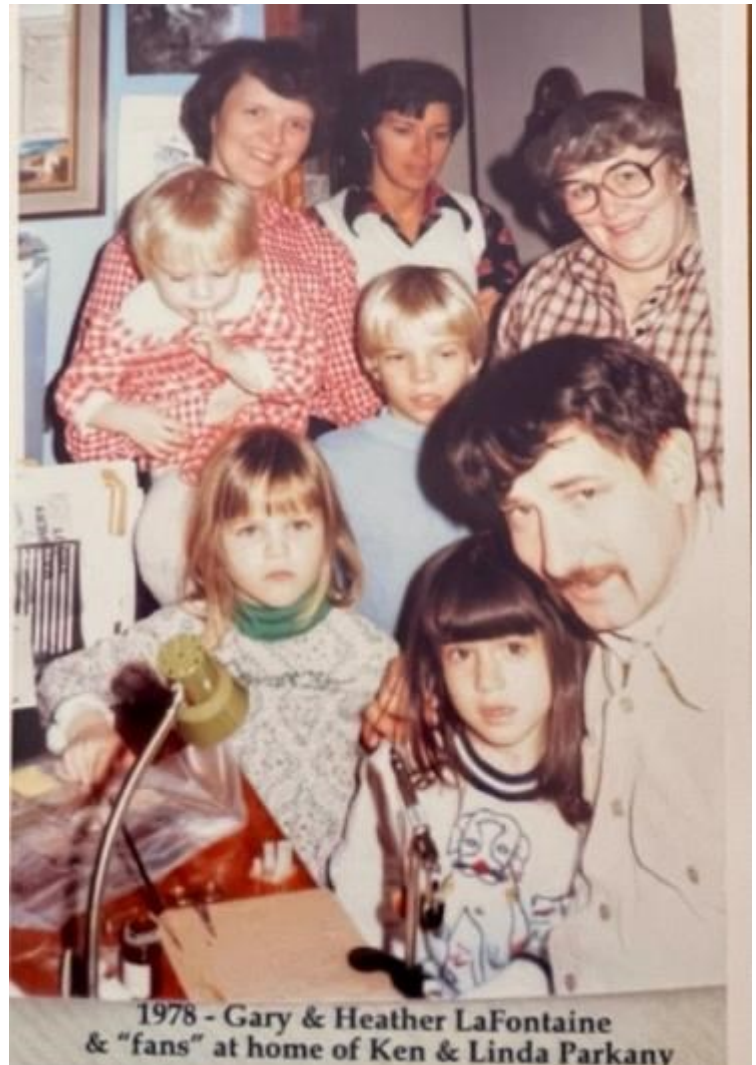
What was most telling about his character of determination, Gary demonstrated after he was diagnosed with ALS. He still accepted invitations to be a featured guest at the Hartford Sportsmen's Show. As was his choice even before his diagnosis, he would stay at our home. Now, unable to lift even a glass of water, Linda, my wife, provided straws in his drinks. And guess who did his fly-casting and fly-tying demos at the show? I was not excited about that and feared I would surely damage his reputation.

In 2004, CFFA nominated Gary to be entered, posthumously, into the Catskill Fly Fishing Museum's Hall of Fame. Little did I know that I would be accepting that award on his behalf. His daughter Heather had just given birth to her first baby and asked that I do the honors. Every time we, either with my wife or my son and grandson, visit the museum and do a selfie with Gary's name-

plate in the background, tears follow. Even though Gary and I were separated by so many miles all those years, our lives were uniquely woven together like a carefully tied fly pattern.

I've touched upon several events in Gary's life, that I believe are worth expanding upon as CFFA continues to acknowledge each year, one of Fly Fishing's greatest contributor's, one of our own: Gary J. LaFontaine.

Ken Parkany is a Life Member of CFFA, founding Director of CFFA's Fly Fishing School and Past President. In 1992, he compiled and edited The Flyfisher's Companion, privately published by CFFA.



**Ken Parkany will be at Salmon River on May 13 this will be our May Meeting. Rick Liegl has organized this event once again for us. Most of us stay all day for the fly tying fishing as well as a grill going. So let your spouses know you will be gone for the day and join us and bring some food and drink Rick is happy to cook anything you bring!**

C.F.F.A Tribute to Gary Lafontaine.

Saturday May 13, 2023 - 9:00am to 3:00pm

Salmon River, Colchester Connecticut, Gulf Road, Picnic Area

Join us for the 3rd Annual Tribute to Gary Lafontaine

This event is in honor of Connecticut's most influential fly tier, long time CFFA member, Gary Lafontaine. Gary's books revolutionized sub surface Fly fishing. Sadly Gary's life was cut short due to A.L.S. Fly tiers are welcome to bring a chair, folding table, vice and materials to tie flies. The theme of the day is Caddis patterns but any and all flies can be tied.

9:00am Fly Tying - This is an informal gathering of fly tiers. Everyone is responsible for their own table and materials.

11:00am We will give Gary's friends time to say a few words about Gary's influence on fly fishing.

-Fishing is available on the river all day.

Everyone is responsible for their own food and beverages. Grills are available. \*\*\*If raining we will not tie flies, but will still gather and fish.



### Paul's FLY OF THE MONTH

#### Tubs Indispensable

**Hook:** Mustad 3906B Size #12 or #14 or Wet Fly Hook of choice.

**Thread:** Danville 6/0 Yellow.

**Tail:** Blue Dun Hackle Fibers.

**Rib:** Fine Gold or Copper Wire.

**Body:** Yellow Floss.

**Thorax:** Pink Rabbit Dubbing

**Hackle/Collar:** Blue Dun Hen Hackle.

Tying instructions and video on how to tie this fly can also be found at <http://tightlinesflyfishing.blogspot.com/> . If you have any questions about this fly or would like to submit a Fly of The Month I can be reached at [pdinice@frontier.com](mailto:pdinice@frontier.com) .



A Good Day On the River – Friday, April 28, 2023.

By Carl Ochnio

What constitutes a good day on the river? One day earlier this week, I may have put 15 fish into my net. If you asked me how I did, I may have smiled, said pretty good and had told you it was fun day

I was out on the river this morning. After yesterday's rainstorm, the river flow was up, slightly stained and cold. I tempered my expectations and had already begun to justify a bad day with well it was just "good to be out."

It was Friday and angling pressure was up and despite the flow, I made the decision to take a hike down the drainage to find some space. As I walked the river bed, I was surprised to see other anglers occupying some of my favorite runs. So, I kept moving.

Finally, after hiking and wading across the stream I reached a pool I call the Aquarium and thankfully it was open. The water was rushing through it at a pretty quick pace, but there wasn't a soul in sight, so I waded in. I fished that run hard for about 45 minutes, making a few passes through from the tail to its head and nothing.

Within the Aquarium, there is one section I refer to as the Slot. In the Slot there is another short section I call the Tub. The Tub is a slight depression, that at most flows you would never notice and only find it if you happened to step into it. Then you would have hoped you had your wader belt secured tight around your waist.

Over the past few years, The Tub has given up some pretty sizeable fish. Should fish have a pecking order, this would always serve as the prime holding spot reserved for a fish called Moby.

I made a few casts through The Tub and no takes. Increasingly it was beginning to feel like one of those days. I decided that with the higher flow, it might be a good idea to try lengthening my tippet and tie on a heavier point fly to get depth and slow the drift of my stonefly nymph.

After a few casts with the new rig, I felt the tug. Seeing the bend in my rod, I knew it was a heftier fish. At this point I was glad that with the heavier flow, I had switched to 5x tippet as I have dropped a couple of large fish this spring when using 6x.

I quickly made an effort to maneuver the fish upstream and pulled it out of the heavier current and then into the net.

It was the largest fish brought to the net of this young season. What made it remarkable, is that for its size, it already was developing a kype on its jaw. What is a kype? A kype is a name for the hook shape on the lower jaw of some fish. Generally, trout and salmon will develop kypes during spawning periods. male trout use kypes as weapons. During spawning season, their kypes enable them to nip and bite at other male fish to keep them away from the females. It can be an indication that the fish has probably survived for a long time.



After releasing the fish, I headed back upstream and passed a number of open pools. I could have stopped and dredged some nymphs through them, but I kept walking back to my SUV to head home.

If you asked me how I did this day, I would have smiled and said I had fun, got one and was done.

Sometimes one is all it takes.



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The Newsletter of The Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association

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