

## Why?

I've been fishing and pondering waters, especially trout streams, for decades. Retired from a long and rewarding career in continuing education, I'm composing my next act at the intersection of fly fishing and lifelong learning, teaching the lessons of fly fishing and its contemplative literature for renewal, enlightenment, and transformation—personal, professional, and social.

There's an abundance of information about the technical aspects of fly fishing—how to cast, how to tie flies, how to build rods; how to do it. But my primary interest lies more in its contemplative dimension and literature—*why* we do it. Why is fly fishing a guide for deep reflection, meaningful living, rewarding work, and even moral direction for healing societal fractures and restoring common good? This inquiry grows out of many years of fishing, reflection, reading, and ultimately, believing that fly fishing can guide each of our life's journey and even offer hope for a divided humanity.

Asking *why?*—the higher calling for fly fishing—is nothing new. It's at the heart of treasured novels, short stories, memoirs, and essays composed by elegant writers: Norman Maclean, Nick Lyons, Ted Leeson, Roderick Haig-Brown, Thomas McGuane, Harry Middleton, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Traver, John Gierach, Chris Dombrowski, Steve Ramirez, Quinn Grover, and of course, David James Duncan, who posed the question in the title of his 1983 novel, *The River Why*. I'm sure you can add other writers to the list.

The *why?* of fly fishing also is a core mission of Trout Unlimited, Fly Fishers International, and Orvis, to mention a few of the larger enterprises, along with thousands of independent fishing clubs, all of which enlist strong conservation and education goals. The Spring 2022 edition of TU's *Trout Magazine* even features articles and testimonials dedicated to “What are you really fishing for?” And the *why?* of fly fishing is a driving force behind the tireless work of Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, The Mayfly Project, Rivers of Recovery, Reel Recovery, Casting for Recovery, and Fly Fishing Collaborative, all committed to service and healing. In short, there are plentiful and inspiring examples of the higher calling of fly fishing.

But the *why?* of fly fishing remains ambiguous and complex. There is no quick or easy answer. As Norman Maclean reminds us in *A River Runs Through It*: “How can a question be answered that asks a lifetime of questions?” I think we can all agree, however, that what matters most is that we continue asking. Whether philosophical or pragmatic, whether we're seeking enlightenment or recreation, solitude or companionship, respite from life's ordeals or engagement with our challenges, I believe we will continue to pose questions that lead to even more and deeper questions. We will continue fishing and pondering these waters, as Norman Maclean writes, “in the hope that a fish will rise.” More than ever, we need a little more hope, so let's revisit *why?*

*Why is the full experience of fly fishing, on the stream, reading, and reflection, a passage to deeper self-examination, especially as you navigate a personal or professional transition?*

*Why is fly fishing a toolkit for skill development and more rewarding work?*

*Why is fly fishing a catalyst for individual, organizational, and social renewal and change?*

*Why is fly fishing a pathway to greater common ground and a harbinger of hope?*

“How can a question be answered that asks a lifetime of questions?” We may never know, but hopefully, we will always ask “Why?”

Steve Ehrlich

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