

TEXAS HILL COUNTRY OUTDOORS



THE BIG *Two Hearted Me*

BY STEVE RAMIREZ

The morning was cool, damp, and not yet fully awake as I stepped up to the river. A slight fog held just above the water. The grass bent soft and wet beneath my footsteps and the gray skinned, ancient, Cyprus trees stood there, watching, waiting, for something to happen. I stood there too; my fly rod in hand, watching, waiting, for something to happen. And it did.

I don't know why it is that some of my best days on the river have begun with waking alone, truly alone, in the darkness, with that deep empty feeling that fills you up inside; that hollow aloneness that you cannot shake free of; so you stand in the river, facing upstream, with the water rushing down upon you as if it could somehow fill the hollow emptiness; and somehow, it always does. This was such a morning. I stood there, without even casting and with no trout rising, and as the water rushed passed me, I knew it was washing my burdens behind me; swirling downstream like so many autumn leaves.

There is a great deal about living that trout can teach us. They teach us how to keep swimming even in a steady current. Trout know that if they stop swimming they cease to be trout and begin to become debris, floating without purpose, wherever the current may take them. Trout know that if they keep swimming, facing into the current, perhaps in the eddy of a stone; all that they need to truly live will eventually come to them. I learn a great deal from trout.

The river began to sparkle, shafts of morning sunlight coming through the tree limbs, fog returning home, and it is then that I see the first rings appear upon the water, like raindrops upside down; the trout are rising. A hitchhiker rests upon my hand; tiny mayflies, looking for love- aren't we all. How perfect they are; each one born of the river and then bursting into the air: living, loving, and dying, only to return to the river; going home, just like me.

I begin to false cast. My line slides back and forth through the air. I look back over my shoulder and see the loop hanging, too perfect to be my

fault, and then it straightens and I send it forward toward the water. I can see the rainbow as he waits behind the stone. He rises to the naturals, sipping them from the surface. My imitation which is made of bits of feather, fur, and thread drifts toward him. He turns, considers, and rejects it. Too smart for me; he knows the difference. I cast again.

Fly fishing for trout is more about the fishing than the catching. If I was worried about catching trout I would use bait or spinners or dynamite. But, bait seems like cheating, and spinners seem like hardware, and dynamite makes a mess of the river and scares away the birds. So I tie flies that cause me to be close to the river, and learn how the trout live and what they like to eat. Fly fishing makes you live through the trout's eyes. Like him, you live in the water, and learn of the currents, and reach up into the air, to grasp that which sustains you. Fly fishing connects you, to his world and your own.

Trout are not native to my beloved Texas Hill Country, but like the Apache, the Comanche, the Conquistadors, and me, we have called it home. In the end, we are all just passing through. Here in the Texas hills, Texas Parks and Wildlife stock rainbow trout into the Frio, South Llano, Blanco, and Guadalupe rivers each year during the colder months of December and January. The Guadalupe Chapter of Trout Unlimited stocks rainbows and brown trout in select, members' only, sections of the Guadalupe. In the Texas summer the water gets too hot for most trout to live and breed, although there is some belief that a sustainable population lives in the cold waters below the Canyon Lake Dam. The truth is, the trout think its home; and so do I.

Not all of my best days of trout fishing have been in the Texas hills, and that's ok too. There was a time when I was visiting my mother back when she lived along the edge of the Alleghany Mountains in south central Pennsylvania. It was Thanksgiving morning and freezing cold and dark outside as I slipped out of the house

while everyone slept. As I drove through the twisting snow dusted roads, the sun began to rise; I couldn't help but smile as I turned off the pavement along the shores of the famed Yellow Breeches River. On any other day, the river would be full of fly fishermen politely jockeying for position. But today was Thanksgiving, and all of the "sane" people were either at home asleep or sitting under a warm blanket watching the parade on Television. I on the other hand found myself standing in a freezing cold river, snow falling, ice forming in the guides of my rod, and rainbow trout that seemed to like what was on the end of my line. It was a perfect day.

And, this brings me back to Texas. Our home is a land of subtle beauty. Our rivers sometimes live just above the stone; skinny water where dinosaurs once roamed. Other times, our rivers seem to be made of stone; shyly waiting for the rain. When the rains come our rivers demand respect. They are the kind of rivers that put cows in the trees and roll Buicks like cord wood. That is the magic of a Texas Hill Country river. Like life, it is ever changing, always creating a new self... always connected to the past. And, each winter the trout rise like shadows mixed with memories. They wait, patient and understanding that what will be will be; and that all that is true is this moment...everything else is an illusion.

And, so I stand in the river casting back and forth trying to lose that feeling of alone. It is then that he rises and takes my offering. I raise my rod and all at once I am no longer alone. I am connected to his powerful runs... facing into the current. Silver line connects us, both fighting to live; two beating hearts. He comes to my net. I hold him gently, rocking him back and forth in the cold rushing water. "Gain your strength dear warrior." Am I speaking to him, or to me? With a kick of his tail he returns to the river...and I go with him. X

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