



FLY-FISHING & Family Time

On a fishing trip, I couldn't help but reflect on the short life cycle of the caddis fly. Somehow I felt drawn toward a new life cycle of my own.

By Dennis S. Dahl

Two weeks before the 43rd anniversary of our temple sealing, my wife unexpectedly passed away. A few days later, I was going through her desk and found a little card addressed to me. I flipped it open. The words were in her strong, flowery handwriting, indicating that she had written them quite some time ago: "Congratulations to the world's greatest fisherman. Only the truly great give up what they love for the benefit of others. Thank you! Love forever and always, me."

A wave of astonishment and surprise flooded over me. I remembered one of our Friday afternoons many summers ago. I was knee-deep in my favorite spot on the Madison River in Montana, USA. Water gurgled around my legs and pressed on my waders, the pea gravel shifted under my boots, and my arm worked the fly rod in rhythmic sweeps. I noticed that the earliest caddis flies were just starting to emerge and dance on the surface of the water.

Pausing for a moment to change fishing flies, I looked downstream and saw my wife sitting on the grassy bank of the river. I hoped she was enjoying herself as much as I was during our time out here together in the fresh air, far away from the business and home and children and

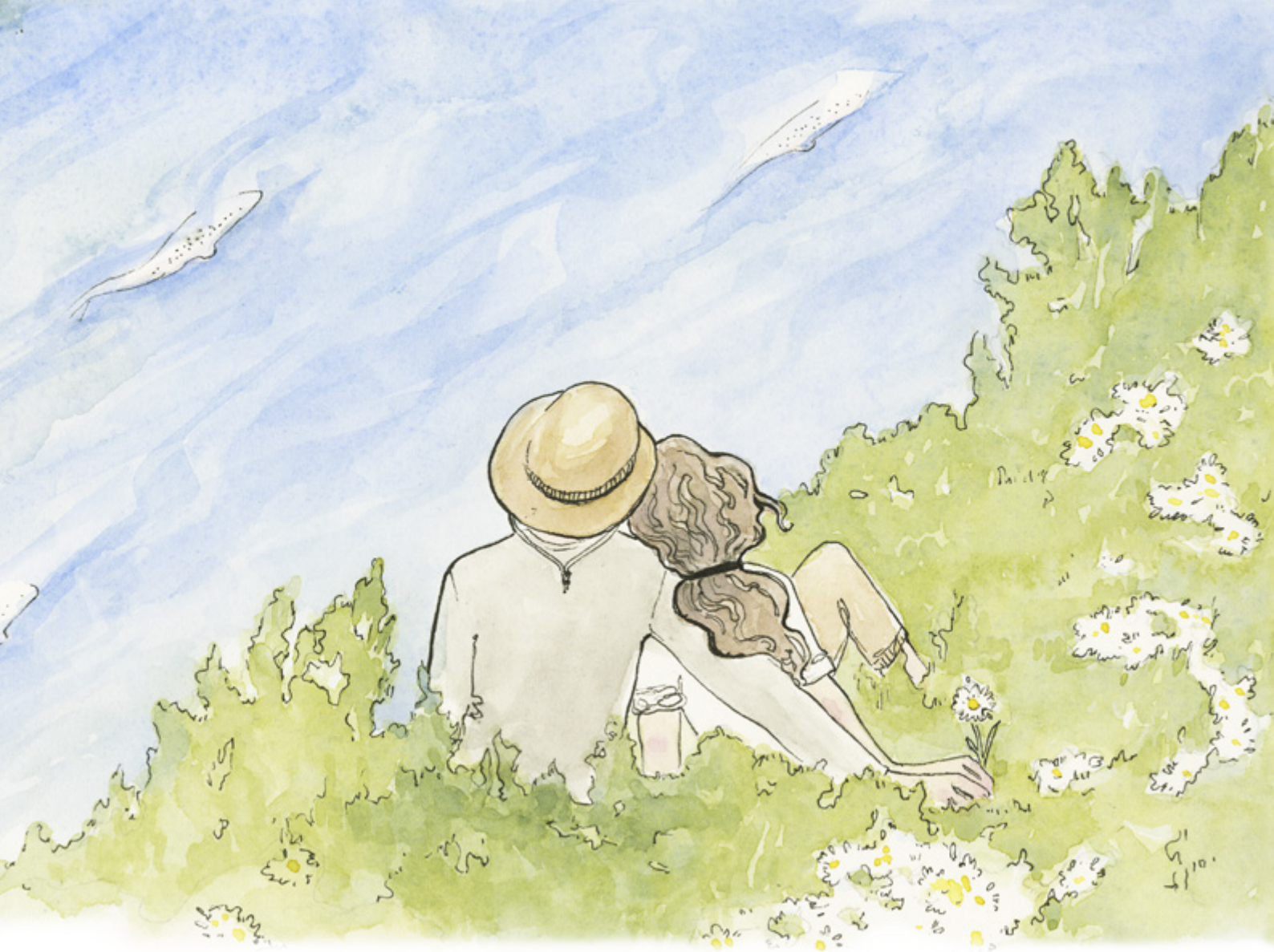
Church callings that otherwise took up our time. In fact, it was because of these pressures that we had reserved every Friday to spend time together.

Together?

As I stripped out some line and turned back toward the fish, I couldn't help but reflect on the short life cycle of the caddis fly. Somehow I felt drawn toward a new life cycle of my own.

After the children were off to school the next Friday, I reached into my closet for my fishing gear but left the waders on the peg. That day I learned about my wife's new flower press. The next Friday I left my fishing vest behind, and I learned the names of several new birds from her. After that, I left all of my gear at home and began a journey with my wife into the natural world of flora and fauna that went far beyond caddis flies and trout. Eventually I began to see glimpses of life through her eyes, feminine and tender and strong all at the same time.

Over the years she taught me the names of dozens of wildflowers, identified over 300 different birds, and collected countless rock samples. She had an infectious way of finding joy and beauty everywhere, of seeing colors and



light and goodness, of hearing laughter in the breeze. She taught me the wonder of poetry, and I even memorized some of my favorite poems. We hiked, rode our horses, and stopped at every antique store and tourist trap we encountered. Sometimes we drove all day, exploring a new road. Sometimes we sat in a meadow or on a ridge-top until the sunset. Our Fridays together evolved into weeklong trips to the Oregon coast or the deserts of the southwestern United States.

I had long ago given up any notion of nobility in the sacrifice of my fly-fishing rod. Eventually I came to understand that I had simply traded a few trout for a vibrant and new dimension of life. Even during the past several years, when severe back problems and asthma had prevented my wife from going outside, we still took short drives to see the bird migrations or the change of the seasons, ever mindful to keep our Fridays together.

Over the years my family, especially my sons, have puzzled about why I quit fishing. They still invite me to go fishing with them often. Usually I pass. When I do go, it is just to get outside for a few hours or be with my grandchildren. I lose interest in the fishing quickly and try my best to show them what I had overlooked, run past, or shoved aside for so long, to help them see beyond the fishing, to help them understand the gifts my wife has given me.

I folded the card, the words becoming blurry through my tears. How I missed her! She had never said a word to me in all these years about my giving up fly-fishing, and yet here it was in my hands, a thank-you delivered to me from beyond the grave. She still surprised me, and I forced a weak smile when I plainly heard her clear voice saying, "Don't forget to take time and smell the flowers." ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.