

Clearwater Fly Casters

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Joy for the fly-fishing experience is his legacy to a partner and to a community who'll always remember the man for ...

Simply Being Bill

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Craig Lannigan

As we fish, so do we live! Not long ago people fished for sustenance. Fish was a dietary staple of some cultures. Our society has developed fishing into a sophistication, if that's what you want to call it, where we fish for therapy, the fun, the excitement and the fellowship.

You never really appreciate what you have until it's gone. I think that's true.

Just think of the steelhead and the salmon. I remember stories my uncles told me about the time anglers caught many large salmon in the Salmon River. The River of No Return has a completely different connotation for me now.

We can appreciate the return of the cutthroat to Kelly Creek and the Lochsa, but do we take enough time to fully appreciate the fellowship, the time we spend with those we care for, or do we take it for granted?

While taking his noon swim Feb. 12 at Washington State University where he worked, Bill Alspach died of a heart attack. Bill was not only my fishing partner, he was one of my best friends. I'll never forget our afternoon drives up the Snake River just to watch the wildlife, the river too high and muddy to fish.

We had a comfort with our friendship. It was assumed that either one of us could fish

as long as we wanted. The other, when tired or needing a nap, could head back to the truck and never push to go home.

There were times those last casts took an hour or more.

Bill always made fly-fishing simple. He enjoyed what the river would give him and did not expect anything else. He carried only a small box of steelhead flies when he fished his favorite runs on the Clearwater.

Never would he neglect greeting a newcomer to the river. He would often spend more time talking about fly-fishing than fishing, well almost.

There were no secrets with Bill; he would freely share his expertise, and he was an expert. You only needed one fly to catch a steelhead. That one fly was usually his creation, the "beats me."

As for casting, there were few that could match him. "Don't work so hard, let the rod do it," Bill would say. His grace and fluid motion were unmistakable.

The thing I will miss most will be the tailgate discussions after a long day on the river. We would at times sit for an hour or more talking about the one that got away, or turn to admire the one that didn't.

We would watch the stars or the moon come up over the ridge, knowing our wives

were wondering where we were. Sometimes we would talk about how lucky we were to live near such a beautiful river.

I think Bill loved Kelly Creek the most. Tie all the flies you want for Kelly Creek, but make sure you have a humpy and a prince nymph.

We would hike up and down, moving from riffle to riffle, pool to pool, in search for the glory hole where you could catch a fish on every cast. Bill would find it first. Many times I would round a bend and stop to watch as Bill played a fish. If he got a big one up that refused his presentation, he would tie on a prince nymph and soon entice it to strike.

Many of us have caught some mighty fine memories with Bill; now it's time to release him to fish more beautiful stream.

Here's to a fine man, gentleman and a lover of fly-fishing. My thoughts are with him and his family. Next fall, if you are fishing the Clearwater or Snake for steelhead and wondering what fly to use, ask Bill. You know he'll say, "beats me."