

Standing in the ice-cold early April stream, I cast into the rolling riffles where the torrent of the tiny spillway spreads out below the diminutive dam. It takes a matter of seconds for the hook, baited with a sack of salmon eggs, to be swept out to the far end of the spillway, and then retrieved. Nothing this time; I check my bait and cast again, slightly closer to the dam than the last cast. In what should be the middle of the short drift, the line ceases to move with the current, and slides oddly towards the calm eddy along the fringe of the spillway. I rip my rod back, and instantly its tip doubles over, nearly causing me to lose my balance in the swift current. The fish, by instinct runs at full force down stream, passing within feet of me standing at the bottom of the spillway, the flood-state of the creek clears all obstructions from the fish's flight. By the time I can get out of the middle of the stream, and start running through the shallows, the fish is already 50 yards down stream. Attempting to run down the stream bank is quite difficult. The shore is thick with impenetrable brush, leaving the shallows, which are strewn with a slew of algae-covered boulders and snags. It is only a matter of a 20-yard run before I trip over a log, into the ankle-deep water and mud. As I struggle to get up, the fish continues its run, now 100 yards downstream. In seconds, it rounds a bend and the line snaps as it catches on a submerged boulder. There is no choice but to pick up, head back to the spillway, bait a new hook, and start over. This is the nature of Michigan steelhead fishing. The steelhead is a pumped-up rainbow trout that spends most of its life in the Great Lakes. The huge amount of biomass, i.e. food, in the Lakes makes these fish much larger and stronger than normal rainbows; they can jump four feet into the air and are known, when hooked, for "runs" down stream, often breaking an angler's line. They are probably the most challenging fish to catch in Michigan.

In fishing, many find a calming, meditative state, allowing one to think and turn his or her world over with the womb-like calm of the water enveloping them. Though I recognize and enjoy this aspect of fishing, it is not the primary motivating force that compels me to pull on my waders and struggle through the currents. I find fishing to be a highly competitive and perfection-related sport. I feel that recently, I have taken my angling philosophy, and applied it to my studies and future goals, with wildly successful results.

I grew up on a pond, and in childhood spent many a summer or winter day over water, catching largemouth bass and bluegill. A veteran to freshwater angling knows well that largemouth bass and bluegill fishing not the most challenging form of the sport, just as high school in a small town and introductory (remedial) college Biology, Chemistry, and Economics are not the most harrowing academic challenges. As I grew older, I lost interest in fishing the pond, and since this was all the fishing I did, I lost interest in it altogether; very similarly to my falling-out with academics in high school and early college.

I experienced an angling renaissance during the summer after my sophomore year. For the first time, I stayed up at school, took classes, and worked as a parking attendant. The boredom of a sleepy college town in the summer drove me to the shallow, bicycle-filled Red Cedar River on campus. In these waters, retrieving your lure without it getting stuck on a shopping bag, submerged bike, or downed tree is a supreme challenge, let alone catching a fish. Fishing the rivers in harder conditions, for more elusive species posed a challenge, which drove me to make more and more trips to the river. Peers I brought out were quickly driven away, irritated by mosquito bites and bitter over lost lures and stubbed toes. I however kept coming out and soon had learned the techniques and sweet spots necessary to catch impressive numbers of small-mouth bass. The more time I spent working the river, the more rewards the river would present to me. After more weeks I had found a couple holes where I could catch highly desirable and line-shy walleyes; and in the mid-fall, I found that king salmon ran in significant numbers from Lake Michigan into the Red Cedar. The amount of patience, determination and resilience required to successfully fish for more challenging species is surprising; often, I will find myself fishless, thinking “just one more try, go around this bed and try those deep rocks...” These “one more tries” lasted for hours. As I spent more and more time searching for the perfection of river angling, I found many of the attributes required to be a successful fisherman bleeding into my personal life and studies. I read and reread texts, probing for deep pools of meaning, and worked late into the nights, giving just “one more try” to catch necessary knowledge swimming invisibly in my notes. As a college yearbook photographer, I would be tenacious in calling and recalling the directors of student organizations, explaining the free publicity available to them in the yearbook:

with time and technique I always caught their photographs, just as I did eventually catch a steelhead.

The abrupt change in attitude towards my undergraduate education and activities was highly analogous to the Fishing Renaissance. I excelled in my summer and fall classes. I reapplied to be a photography intern for the Red Cedar Log Annual yearbook, only this year, my attendance was impeccable, and I took every extra assignment my part-time job and classes would afford me. In the spring I got a 3.86 semester GPA, and made the Dean's list for the first time in my college career. This was not the result of easier courses either; I was taking tough classes in Geographic Information Systems (complex data and imagery management programs), the capstone course for Environmental Studies majors, and 400-level environmental law and policy classes. Just before finals week of spring semester, I caught my first steelhead; it was 28 inches long and the most impressive and beautiful fish I have ever caught.

Applying for internships, I had to tease out the most of my sparse qualifications, just as I had to tease the tangles out of my open-faced reel after a botched cast. The internship application process is also similar to fishing in that you cast a resume into the river, and once you have enticed the fish, you have to use utmost finesse as you play through the interview, and if you keep your cool, you may just net a great opportunity. In the summer of 2005, my efforts paid off. I was chosen to work as a field technician for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, contributing to an invasive species biocontrol project in Southeastern New Mexico, which has proved to be an enlightening, stimulating, and fun experience.

I began to relish the challenge, stimulation, and rewards of higher education, and most importantly, decided to continue into graduate school. My interest in law school is derived from a couple environmental policy classes I took last year. My instructors in these courses challenged and encouraged my interest in policy and law. Employing the lessons learned on the river, I have once again searched and worked for the larger catch. Next semester, I will be interning for one of my adjunct instructors in the Michigan Senate Majority Policy Office, assisting in the creation of sound environmental policy.

As a law student, I will continually strive for greater challenges and improvement with a patient angler's tenacity. No matter how far I may be away from the Red Cedar or

the trout stream, I will never lose the lessons it has taught me, and I am certain these same lessons will serve me well as a law student.