

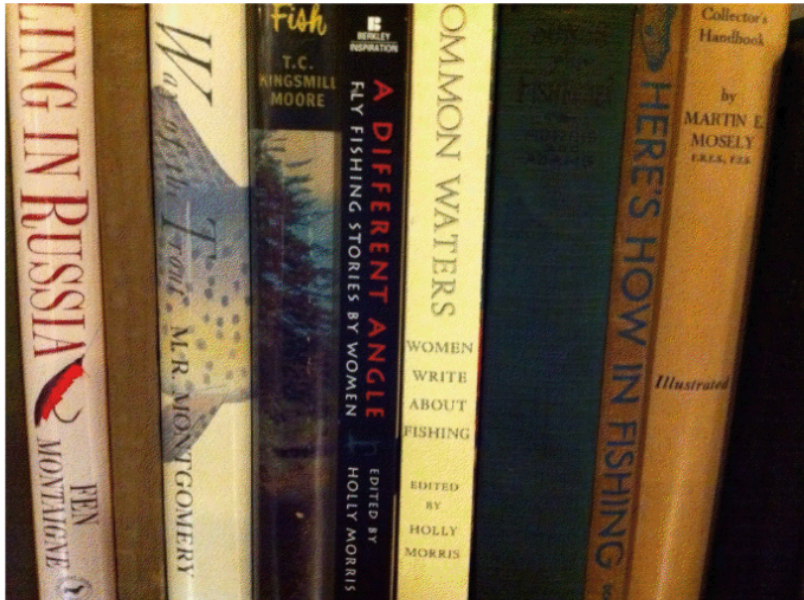
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Tuesday, October 02, 2012

## A Day to Remember

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## A Day to Remember

By Kathryn Maroun



Every once in a while, I have a day so special that it is truly a day to remember.

Beyond the toil of everyday chores and the day-to-day frustrations of trying to get my computer to work properly, something unexpectedly wonderful will happen. People do surprise me from time to time.

One such day to remember came early in 2012 when 50 other women and I were recognized for our significant contributions to the sport of fly fishing by the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, Vermont. The museum did something that had never been done before: It mounted a landmark exhibit, called *A Graceful Rise: Women in Fly Fishing Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. It was the first time I had been recognized for my work in the industry. I soon began to understand that the underreporting of women's contributions to the sport is not unique to me. I discussed the oversight with my fellow inductees at the museum's opening celebrations for the exhibit.

"Our great sport has left out most of the contributions by women in its rich and long history," was our sad conclusion.

How did this happen?

I decided that I had better look deeper into the history of our sport to see if I could learn where we went off the rails. After all, women have been fishing alongside men since the beginning — but you would never know it from browsing any number of fishing libraries.

Our major contributions in the disciplines of tying, art, literature, equipment development, conservation, film, competition, science, angling tourism, promotions and star power have been greatly undervalued and underreported. Instead, the sexualization of the female form is used to promote the sport (or sell products). Our other strengths, like the formidable skills and abilities we possess, are frequently ignored. There are exceptions to the rule.

Here is a link for a great overview article on sport and gender:


<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH1994/JSH2101/jsh2101b.pdf>

It helped to build a timeline in my mind as a first step to discovering how we are trying to rewrite history to better reflect voices that would otherwise be silenced by historians and men's angling groups.

Will this new history reflect kindly on organizations like the Anglers' Club of New York?

I think not.

The Anglers' Club is more than a hundred years old, and it's where the who's who in the fishing world come together regularly to tell fishing lies. But women leaders of our sport are notably excluded.

 Perhaps in the beginning, the Club was meant to be a place to meet people who share similar values, beliefs and love of fishing. Today, it may be more noted for who isn't part of the club than who is. The Club's purpose is strictly social, and an invitation to join the ranks means you must have been deemed worthy — and/or that you don't have a uterus. That is correct; even legends in our sport are not permitted membership based on their gender.

The Anglers' Club is a big reason why women are not recognized in our sport.

"Separate but equal" is a contradiction in terms and is contrary to modern-day sensibilities. Excluding any group because its members are "different" is hurtful and backward. It's funny because I thought the only thing women couldn't do today was vote.... Oh yeah, we righted that wrong back in the time of my great-great-grandparents.

Who are these male anglers who question the "clubbability" of highly accomplished women fly fishers? How do they explain away the harm that is done by singling out one group of people and denying them access to the same opportunities that they enjoy via membership in the Anglers' Club? What do these members tell their daughters when they are left behind and their younger brothers are accepted instead?

Perhaps it isn't just one group of people they are discriminating against. The 600 members of the Anglers' Club are from around the world, and the list of names is kept secret, so I can't cite demographics. Although I don't have access to the list, I do know for a fact that they have invited lesser sports to join their ranks.



Apparently, books at the Angler's Club (a few uteri sneaked in).

<http://manhattanusual.com/the-female-angle-and-the-anglers-club/>

## Country Outfitters



It was my hope that the Club would recognize a certain female fly-fishing megastar by awarding her an honorary membership to the Club before she passes away. Many clubs do this sort of thing. She shouldered so much discrimination over the course of her career. I thought this would be one way to take the poison out of the wound. I was taken aback when she told me about a painful example of this issue. A particular fishing magazine would not publish her articles unless her husband's name accompanied her own.

Many of her peers have been honored at the Club, and that is why I wanted her to take her rightful place alongside them. I started a petition to bring awareness to the issue, and within 24 hours it had 140 signatures of support. Because of politics, I couldn't name names and therefore changed the original petition and updated it, and have included it here for your consideration:

[Sport Angling Community: Let's start talking about the issue – Sign the Petition!](http://www.change.org/petitions/sport-angling-community-let-s-start-talking-about-the-issue#)

<http://www.change.org/petitions/sport-angling-community-let-s-start-talking-about-the-issue#>

Even so, it was online long enough to serve its purpose.

A gentleman member of the Anglers' Club announced that he would put the woman's name forward for membership. So August 1, 2012, is a day I will remember. People do surprise me from time to time.

If the bid succeeds, it will go a long way toward fixing the Anglers' Club's image problem as well as bring the club into the modern age. I also believe that this action would go contribute toward fixing the unfortunate reality of inequality in the sport.

As for my image ... well, this need to stop what I see as the schoolyard bully has made me a target for unwanted attacks, and makes me vulnerable to even more oppressive acts of gender discrimination. Just as upsetting is how so many of my peers ran for the hills rather than acting as a united front to bring about the change that is so desperately needed at this time. This is obviously very disappointing to me, on a number of levels, the least of which is that these people, who in my opinion are weak of character, will benefit most from a new open-door policy. More and more today, it seems that people are very quick to turn away when they see someone in need.

"Fish and I have a lot in common," as I like to say. "We can't keep our mouths shut." If I see a problem, I can't turn my back on it — it's against my nature. What I interpret as discrimination in this case has a little to do with fishing, but a lot more to do with how we treat each other. We shouldn't just accept things as they are and keep quiet. That's one problem with the world today: Not enough people go out of their own way to make things a little better for others. Technologies provide a vehicle for each of us to have a voice like never before. We are obligated to use this gift to bring about change and leave the world a little better than we found it.

Trying to do my part in some way, I started a support group called "Is anyone good enough for the Anglers' Club?" We gained more than 604 members in 24 hours — remarkable since that is a larger membership than the Anglers' Club itself. Very telling. This new group comprises members of like-minded people from around the world who share good energy and new ideas through powerful social media. Join us here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/386783714722076/>.

People will react in the same way they are treated, so it's not surprising to see the groundswell against the status quo of the "old boys club." People don't want to break the rules, but they do want to see a revision of outdated philosophies as they apply to the Anglers' Club practice of exclusion based on gender. I'm sure the members of the Club can feel that people are hurting by being excluded this way. I don't blame the members for going along with a bad practice. After all, some people can only understand what they've seen before, and if their ears are not open to hearing what we are trying to tell them, change can't happen.

Perhaps a number of you can identify with my story. I have an older brother and a younger brother; my dad would take them fishing but not me because I'm a girl. Can you tell that being excluded because of my gender still hurts my feelings, even today? I didn't view myself as different; I simply saw myself as the middle child. Why do so many mothers give away their daughters' pride by allowing these false lessons of power and status to be taught? It is like breaking an elephant with chains. Horrible thing to watch and do nothing.

Here is what I posted on Facebook in reaction to how the issue made me feel.

"PLEASE JOIN THE NEW group called 'Is anyone here good enough for the Anglers' Club?' support group.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/386783714722076/>

My name is Kathryn and I'm not good enough for the Anglers' Club. I have all the skills to make me look like an angler, and I even talk like an angler, but at the end of the day I'm not 'clubbable' because of my uterus, vagina and breasts. No clubbability unless I have a sex change. I don't belong to any women's clubs, and I don't belong to any men's clubs. I just fish. So join me here and share fishing and friendship."



Friends of mine who saw this post thought that perhaps my Facebook account had been hacked. This type of post is not in keeping with my character. It's a little lowbrow. Its purpose was to shock by breaking this issue down into the most basic of terms. Sex. That's what we are really talking about here, isn't it? What is it about the mere mention of the words uterus, vagina and breasts that makes people uncomfortable? These are only words that name anatomical features of the female body. Nothing inappropriate about them. The Vagina Monologues was popular and well attended.

People have a natural drive to feel connected to one another and to be included. I guess I'm still looking for that, since I'm not included based on gender. It won't be fixed by landing a world-record blue cat, which I did. It will only be fixed by creating awareness of the problem through efforts like this. Change is a healthy part of life and inevitable. I do find some solace in this, however:

"To go fishing is the chance to wash one's soul with pure air, with the rush of the brook, or with the shimmer of sun on blue water. It brings meekness and inspiration from the decency of nature, charity toward tackle-makers, patience toward fish, a mockery of profits and egos, a quieting of hate, a rejoicing that you do not have to decide a darned thing until next week. And it is discipline in the equality of men — for all men are equal before fish."

— Herbert Hoover

Ninety-eight percent of the feedback I'm getting from anglers on this issue is positive and at times quite funny. Bill said, "I suspect the Anglers' Club (never been there) is mostly a group of stuffy, self-congratulatory, old white guys (OWGs) who take themselves far too seriously, and seriously overlook women's contributions to their sport and their lives." One woman said to me that she burned her bra long ago and we are OK today. This when I had the barbecue lighter in hand, but I used it to burn this guy's post:

Randy said, "I guarantee you can fish a heckuva lot better than me but I do run well with the pack!"

Don't put your lighter away yet, ladies. More disturbing to me than the last post is knowing that so many women gave up their power/voice years ago and have simply lost hope. Deb said, "They won't change ... at least not until our parents' generation is all dead.

Laynie said:

"[Women] can give birth to these men ... but not be allowed to fish alongside them ... they can raise their offspring ... yet not sit beside them at a club event. ... if these men did not have women doing the things for them to keep their homes and lives running they would not have time for such idle pursuits as spending time in anglers' clubs...."

I believe the message to young girls who want to participate in this sport is that they can do anything they want to do, but when some people reach out a hand to them, it is only to slap them on the way past. I for one am tired of being red-faced.

It's time to elevate our rich fly-fishing history and make it even richer by remembering that we are all equal in the eyes of fish and children.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqdtzJvliMk>

Tight lines and quick releases! Thank you to all the people who invite me to fish with them. It means the world to me.

Note:

One of the members of the Anglers' Club was quoted in a New York neighborhood paper as saying that he is "drawn to fly fishing's peace and naturalism." Well, I guess he is talking about Father Nature. They want to take credit for that, too.



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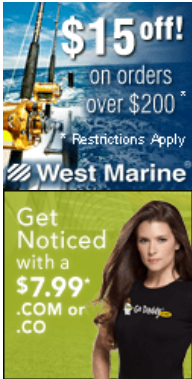
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