

Two Whoppers

by Garret Evans

At the end of all the Xmas hullabaloo, Harriet and I were making our way along the nearby little river Cam. There'd been lots of showers, and the water was up some, but still beautifully clear.

The spaniel was suspicious of the cows gathering round, and woofed at them under her breath. Shortly, sitting in the grass by the 'Trout Rising under the Bushes Pool', we just watched the stream running by, Harriet on the left, the pretty little Hardy's 6'3" rod on the right. There was a small, red scissors-knife combination and a couple of Wheatley fly boxes on the grass as well.

We'd come over the fence at a neatly made white stile, and there were masses of marsh marigolds, clover and all manner of wild flowers. It was all very like Devon or Somerset again.

We soon had a plump, beautifully marked trout on a wet fly, a Mrs Simpson special, bought at the little fishing shop at van Tonder's tyre place at the bottom of the hill in the South African town of Harrismith. There on the river we also gathered up a couple of fallen willow branches for kindling, as the nights here are sometimes still chilly.

My son had flown out that morning to return to his platoon near Pearl Harbour. We'd had some good fishing together. Walking quietly along I thought of the two whoppers over the past few days. There'd been the trip to Lake Coleridge, with all the dramatic cloud in the mountains. We'd waded out from the streams at the top to cast wet flies for the big trout and salmon there. Along those streams were fabulous masses of lupins in varying shades of purple and red. And there were speckled tern's eggs among the pebbles and lichens. We had several good trout, one of them around five pounds.

There was some rain during the night. We slept comfortably in the SUV with the lulling sounds of rain on the roof, and the flowing streams, and we fished the rise at dawn.

A few days later, at the top of the Cam, there was a big trout feeding steadily on terrestrials that floated by; he rejected my Grey Duster type. Changing quickly to a Cicada, I watched him nibble at it half-heartedly as it floated over him. Changing again to a small ginger fly, I noticed my hands were trembling. He took this one solidly, and fought like mad for some while on the little Hardy's rod, with the bright yellow line hissing through the water.

So a few days later still, walking back down along the Cam to the stile with Harriet, one could reflect on two fine whoppers over the past few days. A pheasant made off along the fence. A brown hare stood up from the grass to watch us pass.

Editor's note: This essay forms part of Huckleberry Days, a collation of Garret Evans' work which will be published by Echoing Green Press in March next year. Evans was for many years a Professor of Literature at the University of the North in Qwa Qwa near Harrismith. He now lives in South Island, New Zealand.