

A silhouette of a person fishing on a boat at sunset. The person is on the left, holding a fishing rod that extends diagonally across the frame. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and purple, with the sun low on the horizon. The water is calm and reflects the colors of the sky. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

*New England Potpourri Fresh and
Saltwater Fishing*

Presented by Joe Welch,
lifelong resident of the
Merrimack Valley, as part of
the Fish On! Series. February
2010.

New England Potpourri Fresh and Salt Water Fishing

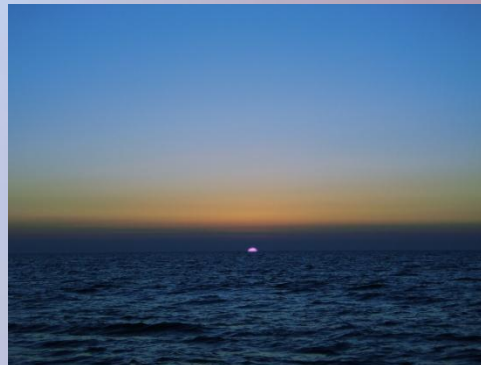
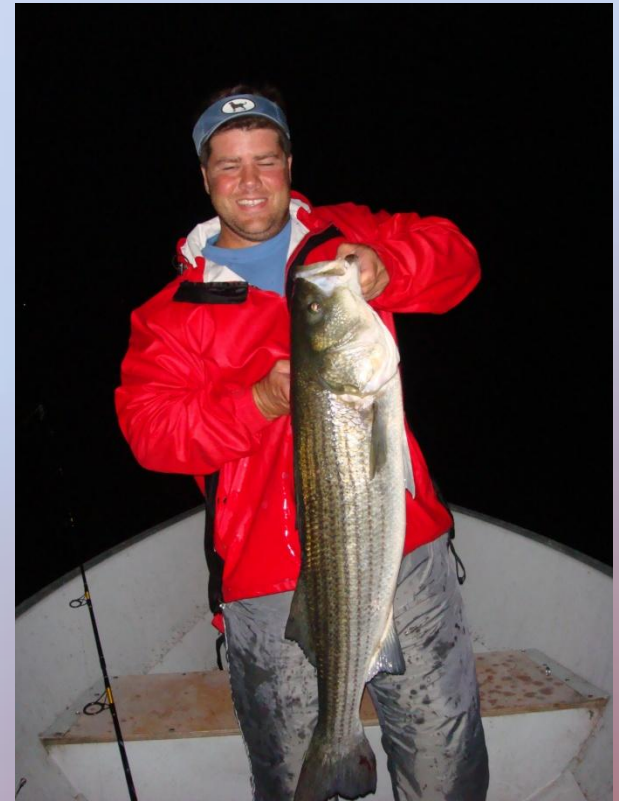
Tonight's Presentation: A
Chronological Look at a typical
fishing season in and around the
Merrimack Valley.

A). Early Spring: Trout (5 slides)

B). Late Spring: Shad and upriver
stripers (11 slides)

C). Early Summer: Bass on the
flats (18 slides)

D). Late Summer: Panfish and
offshore options (7 slides)



The Boat:

Joppa Hoppa I, a 14' Lund WC basic aluminum utility. I ran the boat first with a 9.9 hp four-stroke for two seasons and upgraded to a 25 hp two-stroke. The boat was really good for the flats most nights, but a little undersized in a small chop. I could easily remove the 25 and use a small electric motor for trout fishing.



Joppa Hoppa II is a 16' Lund WC-DLX. I use the same 25 hp motor. The boat is beefier and the flat floor and storage make fishing much more convenient. I still have the flexibility of running the boat in lakes and ponds with a small gas or electric motor.



Phase I: The Ice Melts



Target: Trout

Locations

- Plug's Pond in Haverhill (Lake Saltonstall)
- Round Pound in Haverhill (Lake Pentucket)
- Stiles Pond in Boxford
- Baldpate Pond in Boxford

Techniques

From shore: power bait eggs in orange, yellow, chartreuse and pink

From boat: spinners and small metals, cast and trolled



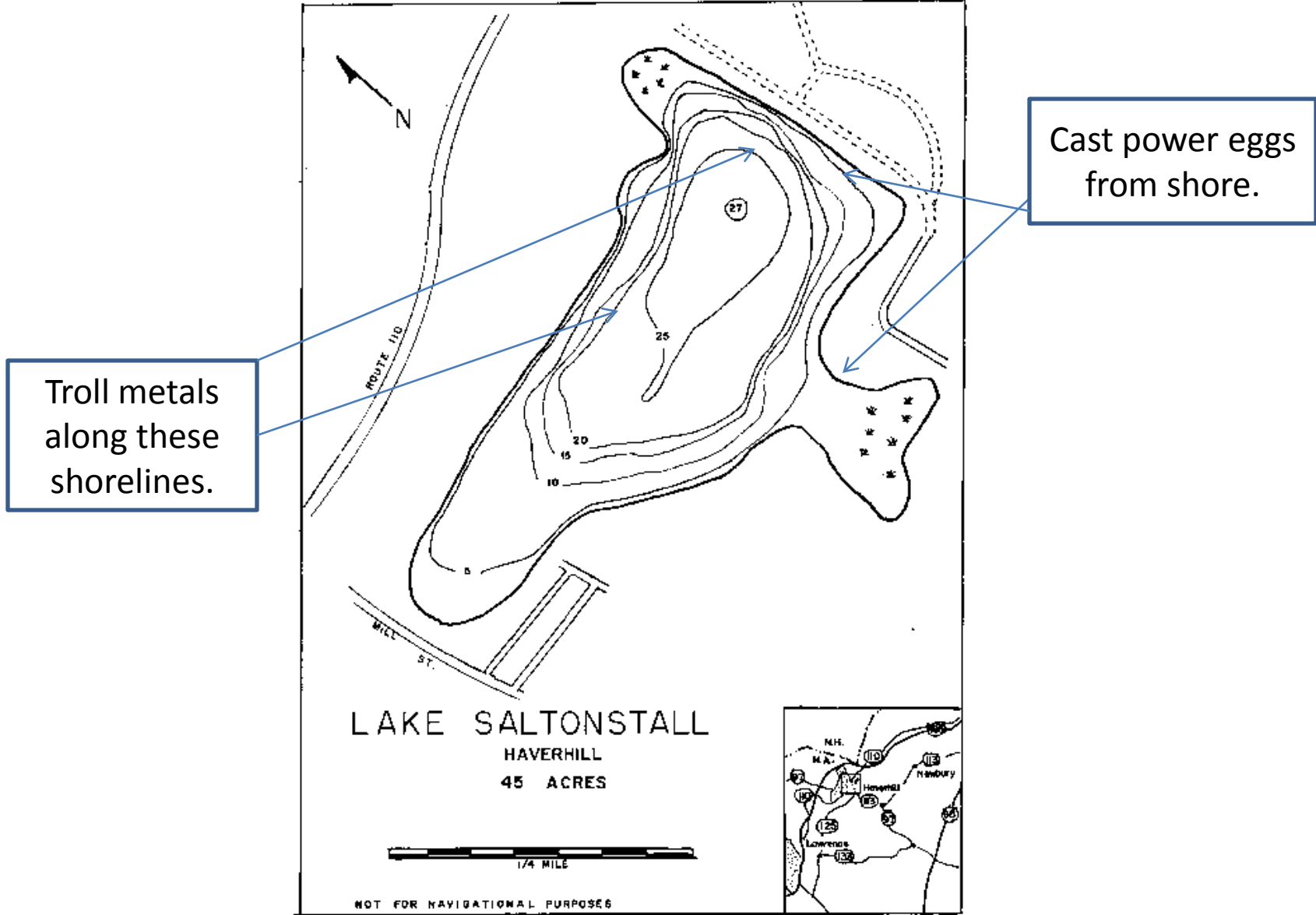
Typical trout rig with power eggs

Rig a $\frac{1}{4}$ oz or $\frac{1}{2}$ oz egg sinker, bead, swivel, then 2-3' leader to a small gold hook. Cast and let sit. Enjoy a coffee, a cigar, or a newspaper. Best bets: Plug Pond, Baldpate Pond

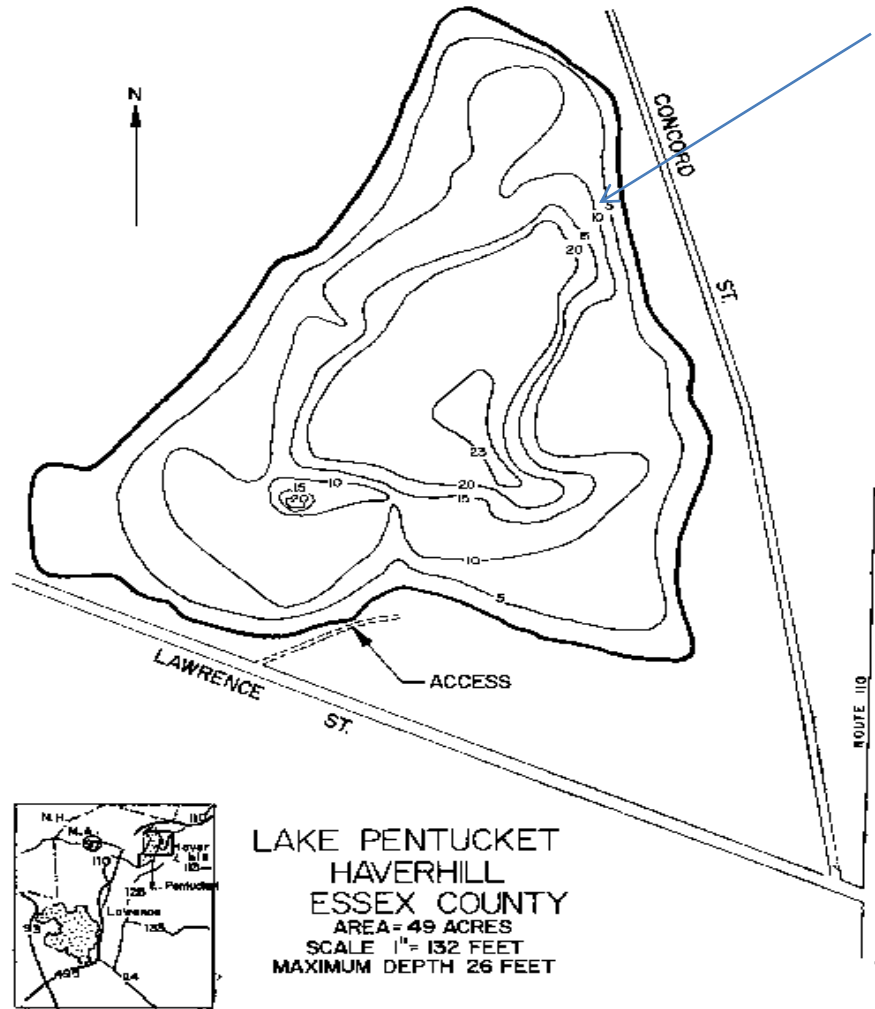


An assortment of metals for trout.

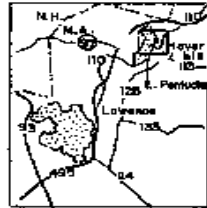
Some of my favorite trout lures for trolling and casting include the black Rooster tail with silver or gold blades, the bumblebee Rooster tail with gold blade , Kastmasters and Daredevils. Sizes vary but 1/8 oz spinners 1/4 oz metals work well with six pound test line.



<http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/habitat/maps/ponds/pdf/dfwsalto.pdf>



Cast power eggs from here.



LAKE PENTUCKET
 HAVERHILL
 ESSEX COUNTY
 AREA = 49 ACRES
 SCALE 1" = 132 FEET
 MAXIMUM DEPTH 26 FEET

http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/habitat/maps/ponds/pond_maps_nd.htm

Phase II: Game on!

Target: American Shad
(*Alosa sapidissima*)

Nicknames: Poor man's
Salmon, New England
Tarpon.

Locations

Merrimack River at Rocks
Village, North Andover,
and Lawrence.

Techniques

Casting from shore or
anchored boat with
special spoons and jigs.

Gear

Trout gear is fine; be sure
your reel has a solid
drag and can hold a
hundred yards of good
line.

Merrimack Shad: The Rig



May, 1986
Lawrence, MA

My biggest shad: The fish weighed in at seven pounds, nine ounces and was a National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame record for six pound test.

The hen took a small, 1/32 oz. red shad dart with a gold hook. In recent years, since 2004, spoons have out-fished darts for me.

Back in the mid and late 80's, the schools of shad and herring were so thick you could walk across the canals post-spawn.

Terminal rigs still include the double dart, the dart, bead and gold hook, and the weight and trailer.

The mill in the background no longer stands on the banks of the Merrimack.

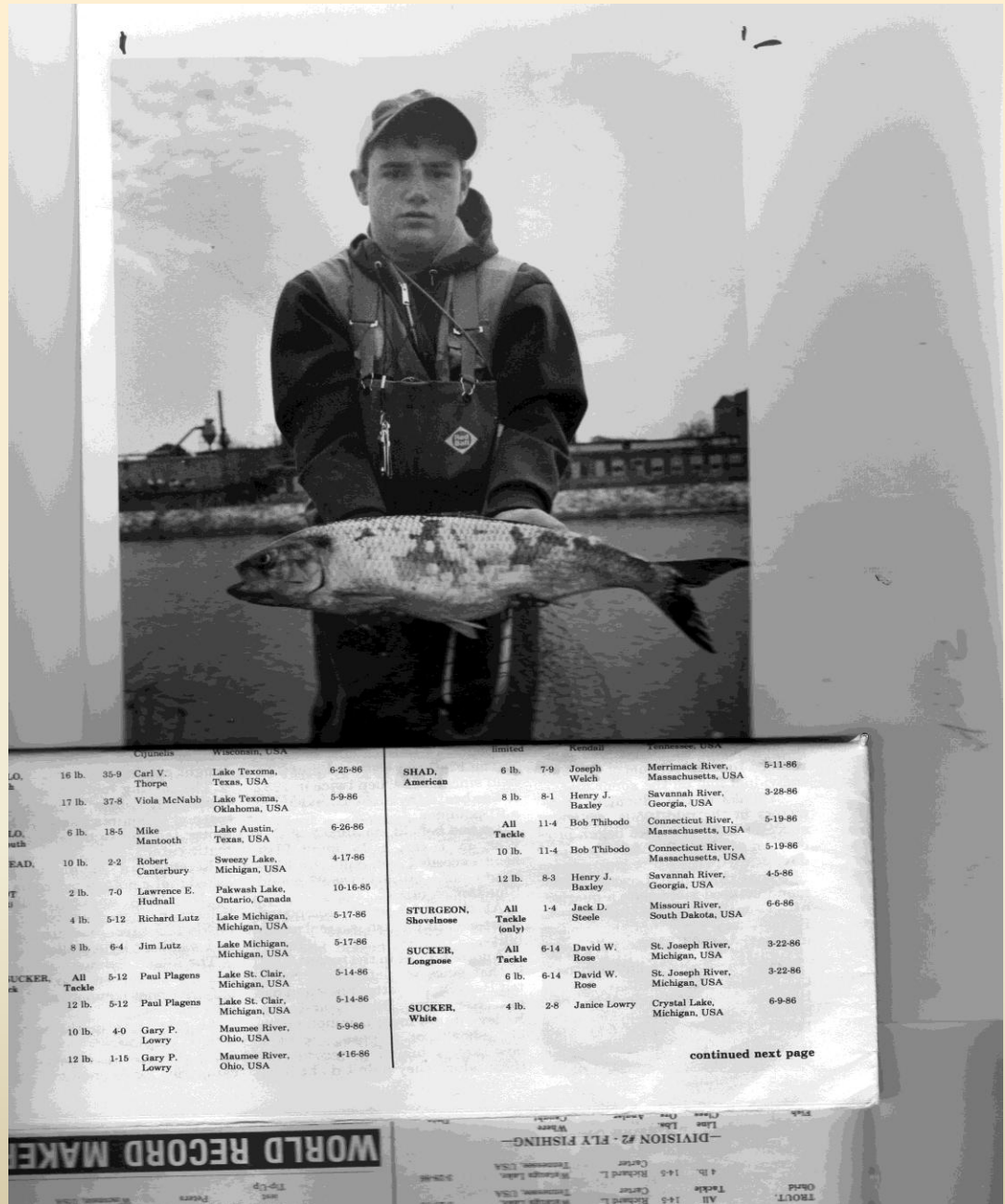


Photo courtesy of the Lawrence Eagle-Tribune

Lawrence, MA: Textile and Shad Capital of the Merrimack Valley

Billy Moriarty of Andover, MA ,fights a nice fish before dusk.



Bucky Law of Bradford, MA, fights a fish on a spring morning.



Lawrence, MA: Textile and Shad Capital of the Merrimack Valley

Bucky lands a nice jack.

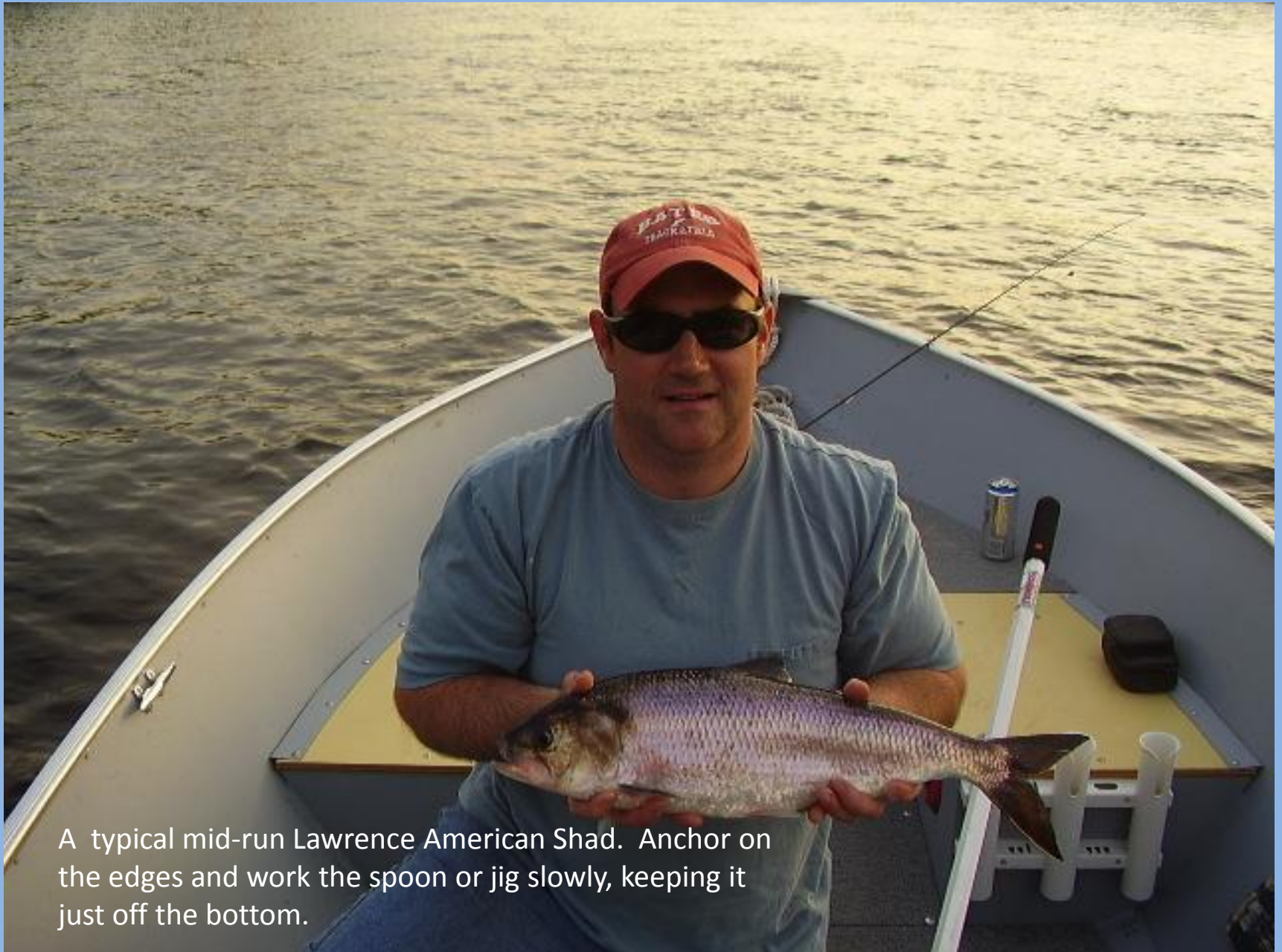


Joe with a nice hen.





A truly regal fish, the
poor man's salmon.



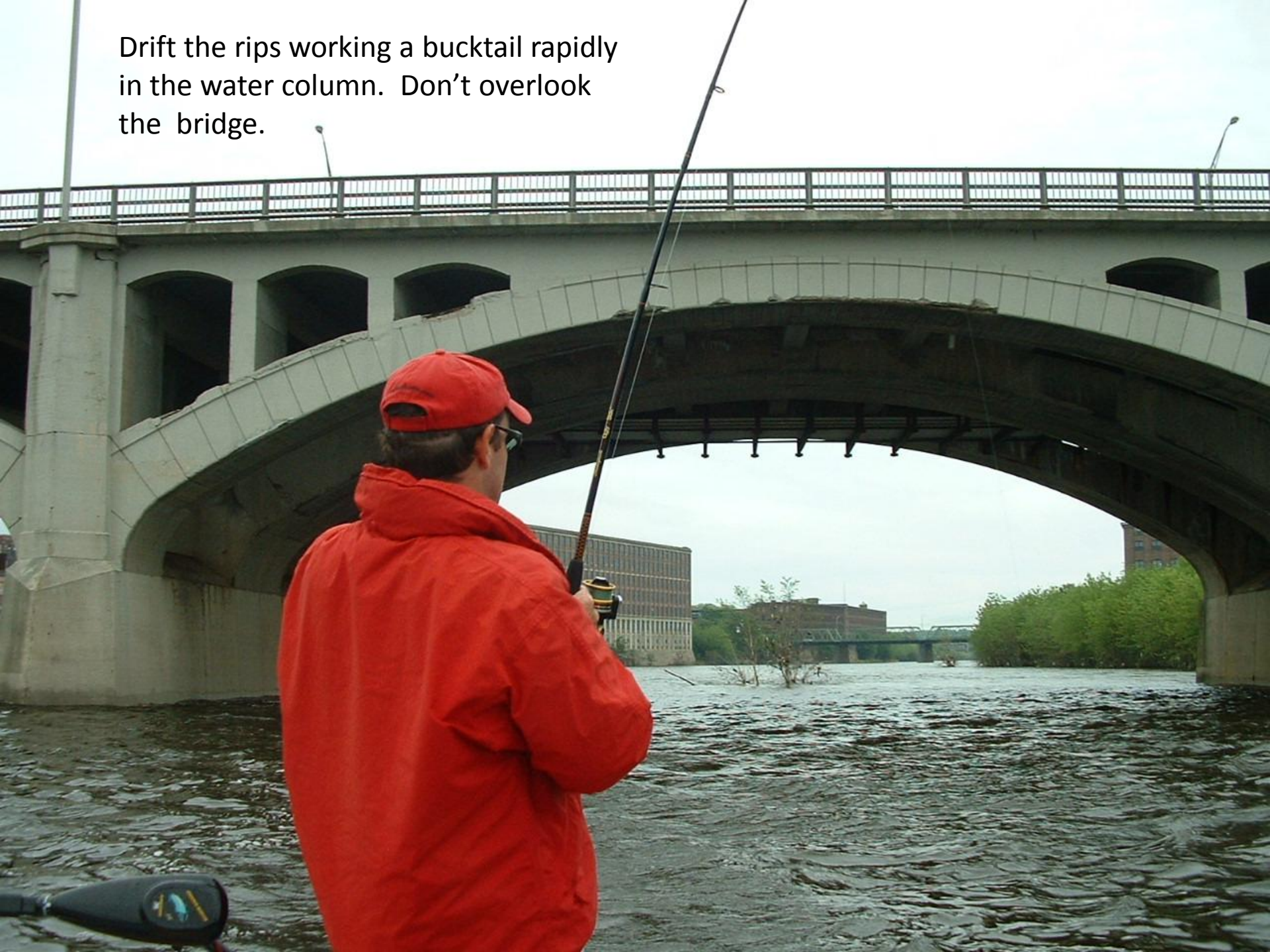
A typical mid-run Lawrence American Shad. Anchor on the edges and work the spoon or jig slowly, keeping it just off the bottom.



Sunset over the river

The sun set, the shad fishing slowed, and the stripers boiled, but no stripers that night.

Drift the rips working a bucktail rapidly in the water column. Don't overlook the bridge.



I hope these fish
come back in full
force this year.



A Potpourri?

Photo by Bob Jowett



Joe with a striper that took a bucktail.

Photo by Joe Welch



A white perch that took a shad spoon. Sea run?

Phase III: Moving Downriver

Marc Hamel with a bucktail striper



Joe with his biggest fish on a jig



Spring Flats Fishing



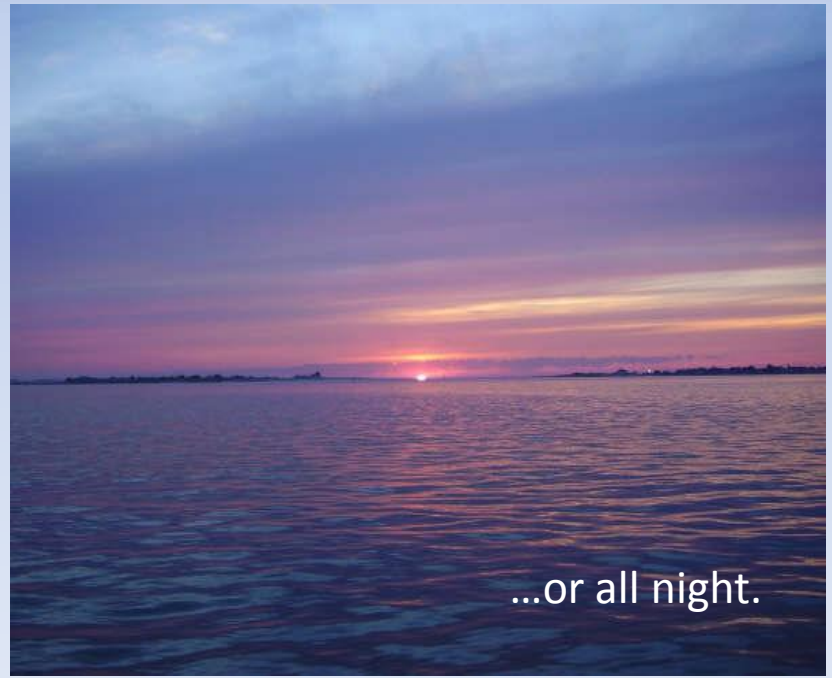
This fat, 36" spring striper took a white bucktail jig and porkrind strip. The fish was harvested and had a belly full of small green crabs. Half-Tide Rocks, Merrimack River, Spring '07



The Mouth of the River

Dead low tide, Memorial Day, 2009. We fished the flats hard for three hours without a look. The bass were schooled up in the mouth. The flats disappointed many anglers in 2009.

One of the bonuses of fishing
in the morning...



...or all night.

Fishing Joppa

Joppa during the day

I fish the last two hours of the outgoing tide, from Half-Tide Rocks (Gangway Rocks) to the mussel beds.

Bucktail jigs

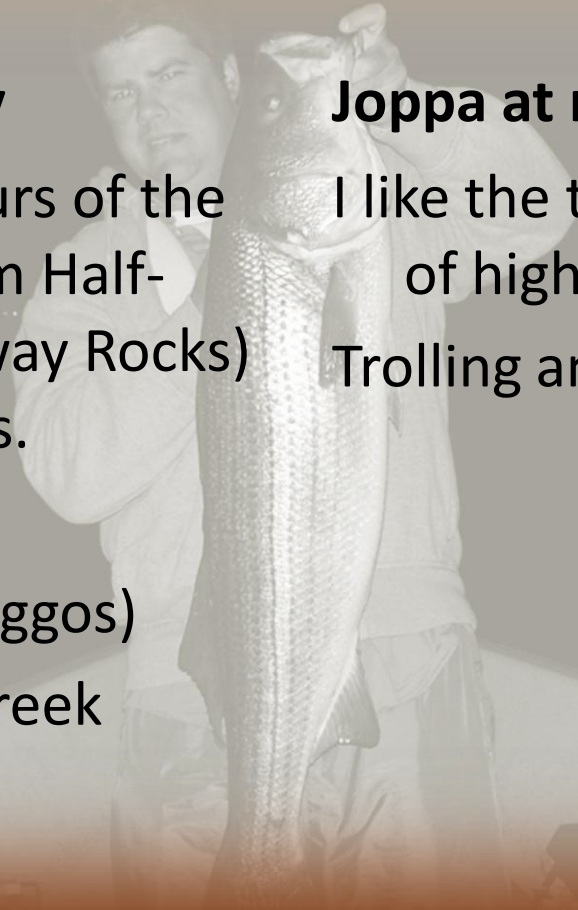
Plastics (9" White Sluggos)

Top-Water (Atoms, Creek chubs)

Joppa at night

I like the two hours either side of high tide.

Trolling and casting eels.



To fish eels:

- 1). A bait bucket
- 2). A bag of ice
- 3). A green scrub pad
- 4). Eels will keep in a bucket of cool water for a couple of days; I usually release any unused eels at the end of the night.



Eel Rig

I use a quality ball-bearing swivel (Sampo or Spro) with a three to four foot leader of 20 pound monofilament. Fluorocarbon is fine but expensive and I think unnecessary. I use 14 - 17 pound test mono as the main line and I snell my hooks to the leader. I've never lost a fish to a broken line.

Aaron, Shaun and Jesse with their first fish.





Early Summer 2008.
One of several fish near 40" taken near the sailboats.



Bob's hefty 42"; one of several fish near or over 40" that night.



July 2008
Pat's first twenty pounder.

Summer 2007
Billy's thirty pounder.



July 2008
Joe's thirty pounder.



How not to take a picture. A chunky fish from late in the 07 season.



Bigger boats work, too; be subtle. Drifting and casting eels can be deadly.





Don Jalbert of P.I. Surfcasters with a nice legal fish. Summer 2009

The last 39" of 2007.



Don with a chunky night
time flats striper.





The biggest fish of '09. Notice the rainsuit. The weather effected typical spring and summer patterns . The smaller fish weren't there, and lots of big fish stayed offshore .



A Stellwagen Slob.
The fish was covered in sea
lice and quickly released; it
weighed over forty pounds.



What to do during the day?

Panfish at Stiles, bass or pickeral at Chadwick, or...

Phase IV: TUNA!

“Football” Bluefin Tuna

Billy Moriarty got me hooked – literally. After hearing story after story and popping Dramamine like tic-tacs (the joke was I always carried a Pez dispenser), I fought a fish for over an hour anyway on the NWC of Stellwagen in October 2008. We hooked up on an X-rap and Shimano Spheros and a Tsunami rod. I lost the fish.



Photos courtesy of FLA email.



Two days later, Billy was back at it. This time...

He sealed the deal.



What did I learn?

1). Everything has to be in place. If there is a weak link somewhere, the fish will find it. In my very short experience with these fish, Murphy's Law is simple: If something can go wrong it will. And even when things are right, these fish make things go wrong.

2). Put the screws to the fish early and hard. Let the fish burn himself on the first run and then never let up. When I lost my first fish in October 2007, I played not to lose the fish rather than to get him in the boat. A year later, I had a fish boatside in a little more than a half-hour.

3). Check your knots, your line, your leader, your reels, your rods, your hooks, your drag, everything. When you're done, recheck it. And don't forget the Dramamine.







What I really learned...

- 1). The Shimano Stella is an incredible reel and FLA makes great custom rods.
- 2). Don't ever try to palm the spool on the fish's first run.
- 3). Up to date intel is probably the most underrated piece of chasing these fish for the recreational fisherman.
- 4). If you want to harvest the fish, have a great harpoon guy on board.
- 5). Bill melted the drag of an older Spheros this year. Don't be undergunned!
- 6). If you're patient, you can get great deals on eBay.
- 7). When the seals are the flats, the bass are probably gone.



July 2009. Special thanks
to Bob Jowett.

New England Potpourri

During the 2009 fishing season, I caught rainbow trout, crappie, sunfish, largemouth bass, pickeral, shad, white perch, striped bass, bluefish, pollock, cod, cusk, wolfish, hake, cunner, and mackeral. And since my childhood, the Merrimack Valley and its surrounding fishery has also given me smallmouth bass, catfish, eels, turtles, carp, brown trout, suckers, yellow perch, chub, and one Atlantic Salmon. Looking back at my experiences as an angler, I'm forever grateful to my father who planted a seed that has taken root. I have to thank my wife for her tolerance. And I'm happy my kids like to look at fishing pictures.



Take advantage of the great opportunities we have available to us. Let's manage our resources effectively. Good luck in 2010. You'll never know what you'll catch!

Acknowledgements

Thanks To:

Billy Moriarty, Bob Jowett, Bucky Law, Don Jalbert, Marc Hamel, Jesse Leal, Shaun O'Brien, and Aaron Crear, whose images appear here and who helped me shape this presentation. A special thanks to Bob Jowett for allowing me to use some of his photos and for giving me my first tuna; Bob has forgotten more than I'll ever know.

Emily and Andover's Memorial Hall Library.

The boys at First Light Anglers in Rowley. They've never not answered a question. Firstlightangers.com

My family, for letting me pursue a passion that truly helps me feel connected to the world.

My mom and dad, whose lives taught richness through simple lessons.

And to Skip, for his input, his support, and his pure love of fishing. Northcoastangler.com.