

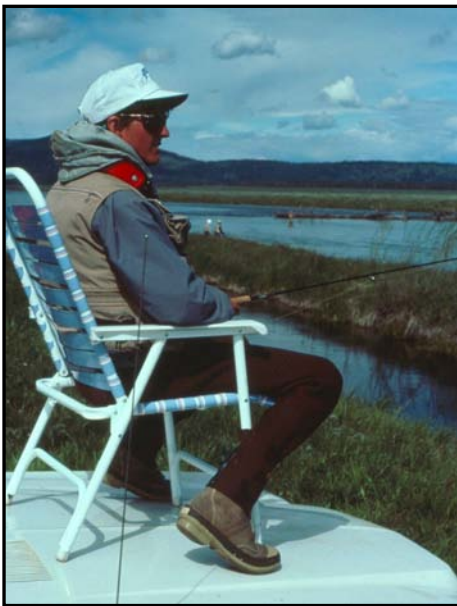
Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

Where did all those years go so quickly?

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Jeff scans the Henry's Fork for huge rising rainbows from the hood of his beloved Dodge Aspen, "1987".

It was 1987, and little did the 21-year-old wheeling into Jackson aboard his venerable Dodge Aspen, realize that the coming years could click away in such an instant.

"Basically all I had was a brown 7 1/2-foot Cortland fly rod, the 1976 Aspen, and owed \$5,000 in college loans," remembers Jeff Currier, when he landed his first real day job as a fishing department employee for the Jack Dennis Outdoor Shop.

This week – or on May 28, to be exact – Currier celebrated his 20th anniversary at JD's. He exudes the same boyish look and curious enthusiasm that he brought along to share the floor with Scott Sanchez and Jack himself. A current review of Jeff's extensive achievements in

literature, family, artwork and travel are nothing less than impressive.

"Here's a perspective in 'fishing department' terms to how long ago that really was," Jeff explained recently. "During my first week, as we were stocking the bins with that summer's order of trout flies, Scott (Sanchez) remarked, 'Hey, here's a neat new fly. It's called a Parachute Adams!' And Boots Allen regularly stocked our refrigerator with fishing worms, which the shop hasn't carried in forever. So it's been a real while ago," Jeff chuckles.

Despite having grown up in the Northeast, Currier's love affair with the outdoors was deeply influenced by his four years at Northland College, a small liberal arts school perched on Lake Superior's Chequamegon Bay in Ashland, Wisconsin. Jeff still would rather freeze while ice fishing than anything else he's discovered in his travels to 40 other countries and while landing more than 175 different fish species with a fly rod.

Possibly the mental toughness developed from continued bouts with frigid environments and frozen water is what propelled Jeff to something no other American with a fishing rod has accomplished. In 2003, he achieved a third-place bronze medal during the World Championships of Fly Fishing in Spain.

Being the first and only American to ever medal in this world fishing venue may have been no more challenging than many of his other stunts, which included fighting off bandits in Africa, riding around on elephants and camels, exploring the jungles of Panama, floating across giant foreign lakes in reed boats, fooling India's mercurial mahsheer, fooling a variety of huge carp species on fly, irritating a rambunctious snakehead into slaughtering a popping bug, tormenting jumbo lemon sharks until they pulverize his foam poppers, horsing a 12-pound gray snapper that devoured a popping bug from the security of a mangrove root snag and running down numerous speedy bonefish that challenged his 2-weight rod in Belize.

The challenge of fishing – both the beauty and the mystery of the quarry and the surroundings – seem to intrigue Jeff the most. He has the detailed eye of an artist, which began as a youngster as he became interested in taxidermy. During college, his outdoor and recreation studies included documenting and preserving mounts of animals and fish in the classroom. Even after beginning his minimum-wage fly shop job in Jackson, he continued working with taxidermist Norris Brown in the evenings.

An organized minimalist, Jeff Currier can explore Nepal or Peru's Inca Trail and live comfortably for weeks out of a carry-on bag. He'll tote less fly tackle to Turkey than most of us lug to the Snake for an afternoon. He appears motivated by an interest in people, travel and new challenges. One of the main reasons he's stayed at Jack Dennis Outdoors for so long is because his large family of friends, all of whom are former employees, continues to grow.

“I’m still in touch with 90 percent of the former fishing department employees,” he reports.

Despite his being such an accomplished angler as well as a true people-person, it is interesting to note that after offering casting lessons and leading some walk-in trips for the shop, Jeff never pursued being a full-time fishing guide.

“After taking some backcountry guide trips, it became obvious that I needed complete days off, both from clients and work,” Jeff explains. “In 1989, I completed 225 days of fishing – a personal record for me,” he proudly proclaims. The next year he was named manager of the fishing department.

Focused and clever, Jeff stays ahead of the curve. He’s always planning his next international trip, inspecting magazines, the Internet and sport shows for the latest gear to stock on JD shelves and staying up with trends and the current buzz in the fly fishing industry.

One telling aspect of the frugal Currier lifestyle involves the venerable Dodge Aspen, the cute but aging sticker-coated rust bucket that propelled Currier through life for many years.

“A lot of people used to laugh at that car, and I’ll admit it looked pretty silly, all rusted out. But it became sort of our trademark and appeared in a lot of magazine ads for tackle companies. And it’s the only reason Yvonne (aka Granny) and I were able to afford our first house in Victor by 1993. We got married in 1991, and since college I never had to worry about a car payment. All that went into the house fund,” Jeff explains.

Sadly, due to electrical problems the venerable Aspen was banned from both Idaho and Wyoming roads in 1997. State troopers decided enough was enough when they repeatedly had to pull over the couple driving the outfit with no headlights. Two flashlights duct-taped to the fenders didn’t satisfy the cops patrolling Teton Pass, so the Aspen permanently retired to the yard in Victor.

The Curriers now sport around in a midsize Ford Explorer SUV that has a growing sticker collection but no rust and a few million miles less than the previous ride.

Many of us secretly wonder how Jeff manages the endless array of international fishing and

travel adventures. One trip that took him to Central America I know was charged to his “shop account” at the store and repaid later.

But it’s usually income from an entrepreneurial spirit that keeps the Currier treks charging ahead aboard overloaded buses bulging with chickens and goats, lumpy camels, antiquated boats with coughing outboard motors that haven’t been serviced in 40 years and other MacGuiver-like transportation.

Jeff has written and illustrated two books about freshwater and saltwater fishing. He creates beautiful original artwork, giclee prints and a very nifty gamefish art cup and mug collection, all of which are for sale on his Web site (www.jeffcurrier.com) as well as in the store and attached art gallery.

During the winter he presents programs for fly clubs and sports shows and also contributes articles to outdoor magazines. His latest profit center involves the nifty Casper-based Cliff Outdoors, which produces giant yellow fly haulers known as the Bugger Beast and Bugger Beast Jr. fly boxes to which Jeff adds his handsome original trout paintings or any other sea creature from an oarfish to a tiger shark. With artwork, this guy is truly a human highlight.

The most notable aspect of the 20-year Currier run in Jackson is Mrs. C., whose real name is Yvonne but is internationally known as Granny. Granny is from Brooklyn and somehow ended up at Northland College, where she met the ice fishing madman. Since then, she has been dragged, blown, shoved and pounded through adventures that would have rendered Superman helpless. But somehow she survives with her adorable grin (although a big load of tears has saved them on several occasions) and trim figure intact.

Some of the adventures Granny has survived are harrowing. Although one might conclude there are no conditions too tough for Granny, Jeff says a recent stomach attack during the Nile perch expedition on Egypt’s sprawling Lake Nasser, put his dear wife on the ropes like Sugar Ray did to Carmen Basilio. Yet miraculously she bounced back.

If you’re curious about this delightful nickname for such a precious young woman, harken back to 1991 when they were married and hosted the lonesome souls in the fishing department for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners.

“Man, these holiday meals are just like I remember from my grandmother’s house,” the attendees would remark. “Anyone who can cook food like that has to be a grandmother,” they added. So in the Currier family kitchen, the Granny era was born.

To celebrate the Currier 20th anniversary, Jeff will be handling the introduction and casting demonstrations at the annual Jack Dennis Outdoor Shop one-day fly fishing clinic on Saturday at the South Park Elk Feed Grounds.

Few people have accumulated the reservoir of international knowledge, fishing skills and artistic achievement that Jeff Currier has, and mastered so much in a short period of time. Twenty years at the Currier pace is a lifetime for the rest of us.

Paul Bruun writes weekly on his adventures and misadventures in the great outdoors.