



# Hooked On The Fly

Joe Fitzgerald

**The river carves its way through the Margaree Valley of Cape Breton and the only thing that keeps you from marveling at the beauty of the lush mountains is the screeching reel of Dr. Michael Arsenault, and the silvery torpedo intent on ripping every inch of line off it. The kingly fish leaps into the air with determined indignation, while the Halifax dentist invokes all his skill and experience to end the battle.**

Arsenault grew up in New Brunswick and jokes that he fished from the day he was born. His childhood summers were spent fishing lake trout. When he embarked on a professional career, however, fishing became a pursuit of the past. "I was in university for eleven years," he says, "and there wasn't much leisure time, even in the summer. It was just work, work, work." After finishing school, Arsenault bought a practice in Halifax and opened his own successful dental clinic, now in its thirteenth year. When his two children became old enough, Arsenault says he was inspired to get back on the water. "I didn't like the idea of kids today just focused on Nintendos and Gameboys," he says. "I remember my Dad always taking me out fishing and I wanted the opportunity to do that with my kids."

Arsenault's initial fishing outings in Nova Scotia were done around Halifax with spin casting gear, but it was a fateful trip with his fiancée, Sue, that reintroduced him to the charms of the fly. "I began salmon fishing in Nova Scotia about four years ago, hard-core," says Arsenault. "We took a trip to Margaree and were hooked. I had a rudimentary understanding of casting a fly and that just expanded with more and more trips. Margaree

was just a few hours out of town, so we worked hard all week and on Fridays, we were on the road. Then we just practiced and practiced and learned."

The difference between spin casting and fly fishing is in the gear and the technique. A spin casting setup consists of a mono filament line with a weight attached to the end, whether it is a lure or a baited hook. That weight is cast into the water. Fly fishing is a more delicate affair. Artificial flies are practically weightless, so it is the fly line itself that is weighted, usually coated with a plastic or polyurethane material. A mono filament leader or tippet is tied to the end of the fly line and the fly is tied to the tippet. The line is cast like a whip, over and over again to get the fly on or in the desired piece of water.

Graham Greene used to work in the commercial fish industry, buying and selling fish. One of his clients owned a share of a lodge on the legendary Miramichi River in New Brunswick and had invited him numerous times to go salmon fishing. "I told them I didn't know how to fly fish and if I want a salmon I'll go in the cooler and get one," says Greene.

"I finally agreed to go the fourth time I was invited, and got some instruction from a great guide up there who showed me how to cast on the lawn. My first morning fishing, I hooked two grilse (a salmon returning to fresh water after just one year at sea) and I was hooked. It's very addictive. By the time I left I had a rod bought from him and a vest, and when I got back I took a fly tying course." Greene now owns Fishing Fever on Agricola Street, the preeminent fly and tackle shop in Halifax.

Because Atlantic salmon are only allowed to be fished with fly fishing gear, many see it as the epitome of fly fishing in Nova Scotia. Although there are salmon runs around the province, some are more productive than others. "Our best salmon fishery is the north shore and Cape Breton," says Greene, "and that's a fall fishery. Of course there's the mighty Margaree, but there's all kinds of smaller rivers along the shore that produce well." Fly fishing is not limited to salmon, however. "You can fly fish for anything, whether it's trout, bass, chain pickerel, striped bass," says Greene. "Some areas you can only use a fly rod, so the fly rod guys might have a bit of an advantage."

Greene challenges the notion of fly fishing as an elite sport. "I think as long as you can get to the water you can fly fish," he says. "Older folks who may have arthritis in their shoulders can use a spey rod or two handed rod, which makes it easier to get line out on the water. I find women getting into it a lot now, and they tend to pick it up quicker because they don't try to muscle the line. A lot of folks in their thirties and forties who are just getting established are getting introduced to it through corporate retreats at lodges like I did."

Fly fishers tend to get in the water more than spin casters, and that proximity lends itself to a greater relationship with the water. Along with the challenge of fly casting, more anglers see fly fishing as an art and report a zen experience in the process. "Although there's always the potential of a fifty pounder, fly fishing or salmon fishing is about the fishing, not the catching," says Dr. Arsenault. "For me it's the total escape from work. When I'm fishing, I don't think about anything else. I'm not worried about Revenue Canada or staff issues or patients. I don't need an alarm clock, I'm up at dawn. Some people like to go to Vegas, or golf, but I find that when we go to Cape Breton, the cell phone gets turned off and you leave your troubles at the causeway. The whole weekend is based on fishing and family time. I just find it the most relaxing, tranquil, and peaceful."

For more information:

[www.novascotiafishing.com](http://www.novascotiafishing.com)

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