**My Favorite Fly – The Clouser Crayfish by Dr. Kent Crawford**

This story starts over 50 years ago in North Carolina. My father grew up on a farm in Ashe County, which is the northwestern-most county in the State with Tennessee to the west and Virginia to the north. There was a small stream, Obids Creek, running through the family farm and the stream had a few native brook trout.

When Dad started taking me trout fishing, I was a teenager. One of the places we would fish was Obids Creek.

Two Clouser Crayfish flies, one right side up and one upside down.

A close up of a bug

Description generated with high confidence

Occasionally, we would catch a few, usually on live bait or on artificial lures. The hot lures seemed to be a wobble lure called the Helin Flatfish and in-line spinners like a Mepps. We would save these fish for the table and of course, that involved cleaning the catch, a job for me. I would routinely dissect the gut to see what the trout had been eating. Frequently, the stomach would contain a crayfish.

Fast forward to 1988. My spouse landed a job on the faculty at Penn State Harrisburg and I transferred to the Harrisburg office of the USGS. You can imagine that our move to central Pennsylvania was not entirely circumstantial because this area is known for its quality trout fishing.

We bought a home in Derry Township which is next door to the Middletown/Royalton area . . . and who lives in Royalton but Bob Clouser, famous smallmouth bass fisherman, guide, fly shop owner, and fly inventor.

I knew of Bob Clouser’s reputation and had heard of the Clouser Deep Minnow and the Clouser Crayfish patterns. Occasionally, I would go over to the Clouser Fly Shop in Royalton to stock up on flies, browse, and chat with the legend himself, Bob Clouser. Visiting the Clouser Fly Shop was like a trip to Mecca. Bob was (and still is) a very personable fellow who would gladly share his knowledge with whoever would listen. And I was taken by the flies he tied – especially the Clouser Crayfish.

The crayfish pattern that Bob Clouser invented was made to entice smallmouth bass. Lots of fishing articles point out that a staple of the smallmouth bass diet is crayfish. But, I figured these things should work for trout as well, especially given my experience with trout stomach contents as a teenager. So, I purchased a few Clouser Crayfish and tried them out on Pennsylvania trout streams.

Admittedly, I don’t catch a lot of trout. But it seemed that I caught more trout on the Clouser Crayfish than on any other fly in my arsenal. And, in general, the trout on the Clouser Crayfish were larger than the normal trout I was catching. So, I began to gain confidence in the fly and to use it more often. Essentially, it became “My Favorite Fly.”

Let’s take a look at the fly to see why it might be effective. First of all, it looks like a crayfish. Note the pincers and the antenna on the Clouser imitation. Also note the palmered hackle which provides a good representation of the walking legs. Second, the fly is heavily weighted. Did you ever see a crayfish on the surface? No. They are bottom dwellers. That’s where they live and that’s where they stay. I think the weight on the artificial is one key to its success. The fly uses furry foam for the body and this material soaks up water and retains it, making it heavier still. Third, the fly is larger than your typical trout fly. I use the crayfish in size 10 and 8. And you know the old adage: “Big fly = big fish.”

The fly is not simple to tie; there are many steps. Tying instructions can be found on line. Just search for “how to tie the Clouser crayfish.” So, give it a try and good luck.