**Steve Vegoe - Ron K’s Palmered Cricket**

A new job brought me to Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1981. Suddenly, I was no longer in lake country. I was in trout stream country. Ninety miles east from Saint Paul, Minnesota where I had been living brought a huge change in geology. Where Minnesota is filled with lakes, that’s not the case in western Wisconsin. It’s dairy country with spring creeks, and those small streams hold native brook trout and stocked browns. Better yet, the streams are home to mayflies.

However, I was not then and never had been a fly fisherman. I was a walleye fisherman. I grew up on a big lake out on the prairie in Lake Wobegon, Minnesota and had only caught a few brook trout in a local stream you could easily step across from bank to bank. And those brookies were all caught on worms and fried in butter.

During that first summer in western Wisconsin I met a lot of people while playing golf, including Dr. Skip Van Gordon, who asked if I fly fished. “No,” I said, “but I have always wanted to.” Skip volunteered to teach me. He took me to Elk Creek, twenty minutes west of Eau Claire and loaned me a fly rod and reel and stood next to me to teach me to cast to the brown trout that were rising to caddis flies against the bank. That’s all it took. When I caught my first brown on an elk hair caddis, like that small trout, I was hooked.

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That same summer I learned about a fly fishing clinic weekend hosted by Gary Borger in northern Wisconsin, just two hours north of Eau Claire. I registered and Gary and his teenage son, Jason taught me about fly fishing for trout. Indeed, Jason Borger, probably fourteen at the time, took me from a novice to a “pretty good” fly caster in two days. I still cast a fly rod the way Jason Borger taught me to cast in the summer of 1981.

Skip Van Gordon introduced me to a bunch of fly fishermen and I joined TU and became actively involved in the local chapter, which owned a small log cabin on Elk Creek. That small stream, smaller than Clarks Creek, became my go-to stream. If I was not playing golf I was teaching myself to fly fish to rising brown trout in the evening on Elk Creek. It helped a lot that I was single and unattached.

I did not then tie flies (and still don’t). Like now, I was then dependent on the kindness of friends (and strangers) for my trout flies. I paid for many but mostly I begged for flies (still do, in fact), and my friends were happy to help. Thirty-plus years ago, those friends in western Wisconsin were exceptional fly tiers, as are my friends in the Doc Fritchey chapter.

My main supplier was Ron Koscichek (and that’s an approximation of how to spell his last name). Ron K. was a renowned bamboo rod builder, a superb fly fisherman, and an extraordinary tier. He gave and sold me dozens of what he called his “palmered cricket,” and I mostly fished those when I was not using elk hair caddis flies. When I was getting ready to move to Lebanon County in 1987, Ron K. told me all I had to do to get more flies was to mail him a check and he would put his palmered crickets (size 14 to 20) in the mail to me, and I did that for four or five years. Those thirty-year-old flies are still in my fly boxes and still catching fish. I think I have a lifetime supply of those tiny fish catchers.

Although he invented this fly and named it in the late 70s, Ron K’s palmered cricket is really a Griffith's Gnat. Side by side, Ron K’s fly is almost identical to the legendary Griffith’s Gnat. (For a closeup look at this renowned fly, see the article on George Griffith, one of the founders of *Trout Unlimited*, in the summer issue of *Trout Magazine*.)

My favorite memory of using My Favorite Fly was one spring evening on the Fox River in Northeastern Wisconsin. Four of us, including Ron K., were sitting on the bank watching for rising trout when a fish started to rise about forty yards straight out from us. Ron K. looked at me and said, “Your turn, rookie. Go get him.” I asked what to use and he smiled and said, “Your favorite fly.” I slowly worked my way into casting range, which then with my limited casting ability was not all that far and put Ron’ K’s palmered cricket in front of that rising brown trout. He took it on the first presentation and I landed him in front my three new best fishing friends. Thirty plus years later and I remember that evening like it was yesterday.