

Me and Sid and Tom and John Yount

by David Ackley

My nearly lifelong, and closest friend, Sid Seamans, was like me a native of New Hampshire, who grew up in Franklin. When he came to UNH where we eventually met, he used to hunt with John Yount who describes him somewhere as this “driven” guy who hunted birds with a single barrel scarred up shotgun and could more than hold his own. Sid told me Yount taught him to dry-fly fish, but that a little overstates it since Sid had been raised by his older brother Dick, who was fisheries biologist for NH Fish and Game, and at catching fish on a fly without any fancy casting, was probably the best fishermen any of us ever knew. Sid called him “the magician,” and when he fished with a bunch of us and we were skunked Dick Always caught fish. So Sid taught me to fly fish second hand from Dick and Yount, and I got so I could so I could sometimes show him something.

Sid and I were going out on opening day, which used to be April first, fishing for landlocked salmon in this little river that ran out of Newfound Lake, about midway the length of the state, maybe twenty miles north of Franklin where Sid and Dick grew up, and a few miles from Alexandria, where Tom and Liz Williams built the cabin where they summered and he wrote his stories and novels.

The first time there, we got beat out because there was limited room on the river and when we arrived around 4:30, there were already shadowy figures standing in the water. The salmon were fresh, not fished over the whole winter long, and we watched the early risers take some nice fish, went away empty handed and filed it away for next year, when we got there at 3:30. I have to say for sheer thrill of fishing, nothing beats having a land-locked salmon of three or four pounds in small water, pirouette, tail walk or jump four feet above the surface just beyond arms reach. I mean, “Holy Shit!”

So the third year Sid and I did this we hit absolute pay dirt, I caught the biggest salmon of my life, a shade over five pounds, we both limited out with two apiece and we were done by six thirty just after sunrise. Afterwards we were standing back of Sid's old Volvo wagon with the tailgate up admiring these magnificent silvery fish, and these two dudes pulled up in the parking area a little way behind us. They were all geared up in Orvis stuff, rods, chest waders, Wheatley fly boxes... probably a thousand bucks worth of gear between them, One wore a stetson with flies in the hat band. Sid and me in hip boots with tire patching over the holes, him with his old Fenwick fiberglass rod me with my Scotty bamboo that I bought for fifty bucks at Lechmere's in Boston. At first glance they seemed well equipped dudes who'd arrived way late to the party.

But then one walked up for a closer look, a squinting guy with glasses, who I was stunned to see was Tom Williams. And he me, his student who when he knew me back at UNH evinced absolutely no knowledge of fly fishing, And behind him Yount his fellow writer, the dude in the stetson, both of them a bit hungover which seemed to account for the tardy start. I suppose Yount must have recognized his own student, Sid, so there we were the two students and the two teachers, checking each other out on the stream. where writing availeth not.. Yount never said a word, turned toward the dam in an absolute fury, waded dangerously across the spillway to the far side and flailed the water with perfect casts for about ten minutes, while Tom smiled, nodded and turned away.

By the time me and Sid took off our boots and packed up, they were gone. We just grinned at each other: The day had been nearly perfect even before that, and the only thing that could have made it better—running your masters off the river--had beautifully arrived, right on schedule.

