

About 2000 words

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### LEAVE A KID HOME TODAY

~~How to introduce a child to fishing, using the  
pointer-pup principle of piscatorial psychology.~~

Don't tell me about teaching kids to fish -- I've already been told. The first thing is, you make it fun. Every article on the subject says so, and my research assistant clips all of them. She keeps me informed of other important titles too, such as "Parenting For the 'Nineties." The people who write these things think that parents are verbs and fishing is fun. ab  
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Real fishermen know that fun is now out of the question. The 'sixties were different; back then Bill Unterschlung smelled like catfish bait. He would sit under a shady tree, lean one elbow on his cooler, cast vintage chicken livers from a reel with the



click on, and look happy, probably because he was. Sometimes the shady tree was close enough to water that Bill would even catch a fish. Today, his cooler is connected to the electrical system of his bass boat. Its other systems are: an outboard as tall as he is, a trolling motor, the remote controls, a video terminal connected to underwater sensors, and some classified projects being tested for the stealth bomber. Bill has responsibilities, not fun. He could have been the perfect role-model for my son Scotty.

Unfortunately, Bill started wrong by coming to the house one day in his jump suit. Scotty, eight years old at the time, hid in the basement and would not come upstairs till the extraterrestrial had returned to its galaxy. I blamed the television programs that the child had been watching. It is true, however, that chartreuse jump suits were not conceived for people who pull as many bottles from the cooler as Bill Unterschlung.

With Bill out of the running, I had to make an effort to introduce the child to fishing myself, which was tricky. (By the time a boy is old enough to fish he looks on his parents as dangling participles.) Fortunately, there was a low-tech fishery in our neighborhood. Golden Pond is about one-eighth acre in area and eighteen inches in depth. A man scraped out the bed with a bulldozer on the same afternoon that the "Golden Pond Estates" sign went up. Every summer thereafter, the neighbors dumped in



all the pet fish that outgrew their bowls. Every August the pond became orange below, green on top. If Bill had run his outboard in there, he would have made goldfish-and-algae mousse. Every spring, just the same, the Fish & Game Department poured in a batch of sunfish.

One June day before the goldfish smifflicated the sunfish, I asked my son: "Hey, buddy, did you see those guys pouring fish in the pond?"

"In that?" Scotty asked.

"Yes. Delicious fish."

"Yuk," said Scotty.

Scotty thinks that everything is yuk except pizza and cherry pie and pheasants, and he's not too sure about pizza. Next day, though, he reported that he had seen two other kids fishing in the pond.

"Yeah," I said without looking up from the cherry pie. Notice my restraint.

Scotty asked for a rod of the kind that comes in a plastic bubble, complete with closed-face spinning reel, line, and lure -- the sort of outfit that non-fishing parents buy at the supermarket in hopes of getting get the child out of the house. I did not fall for that. Instead, I showed Scotty how to fasten used monofilament line to the end of a cane pole and knot on hooks from old flies. I did break down, however, and buy a new



red-and-white float in the smallest size. Kids are fascinated by floats.

Scotty asked for bread to use as bait. "Sunfish don't like bread," I told him. Then I showed him how to pick up worms while I spaded the garden. My tobacco tin had rusted out so we settled for a styrofoam cup to hold the bait. Scotty carried that, plus the bread. I walked with him to the pond. My research assistant had insisted that I go along. Some big kids had been throwing little kids' bikes in there lately, creating what she called a menace. (Bill Unterschlung would call it structure.) I showed Scotty how to thread on a worm, dangle it below the bobber, and swing it into the pond just beyond the metallic fuscia Raleigh. Then I watched the float in fascination. Scotty fidgeted. Nothing happened. After a long time -- maybe forty-five or fifty seconds -- Scotty hauled in his worm and crumbled up a slice of bread. He tossed the crumbs out on the water. What he knew, and I did not, is that the neighbors had been chumming Golden Pond with bread for their recently-released pet fish.

The surface did not boil around Scotty's bread because four-inch bluegills do not displace much water, but a couple of dozen of them can work up a respectable simmer. Don't ask me how fish that small ate wads of bread. Scotty caught three and put them in a plastic bag full of water. "I'm going to keep them for pets," he announced.



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Story will end here -  
per conv. w/ Maggie  
Nichols 5/23.

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"They'd die," I argued.

"No they won't. I'll give them lots of bread."

I offered a compromise, bearing in mind that Scotty had won the last argument. "I'll clean them and Mommy will make us a nice dinner with your fish."

"Yuk," said Scotty. So we had our first lesson in catch-and-release fishing right there. They don't make knives small enough to operate on Golden Pond's sunfish anyhow.

Scotty got in a couple of summers on the pond before his warm-water career was interrupted by our move to the mountains. They have a different system for naming fishing holes out here in the Rockies: Dry Crick, for example, is full of water and the water is full of trout, all of which got there by swimming. The problem is that the trout are not fond of bread and Scotty knows better than to expect any useful advice from me. Oliver Lang, however, is authoritative. He looks like an earthling and dresses like one except when wearing his fishing vest. Stream fishermen have to carry their gear instead of being carried by it, which helps to account for Oliver's ascetic figure. There is no room in his vest for coolers or systems or, for that matter, money. There is plenty of room for Oliver. He stops fishing once a week to eat dinner, usually at my house.

Oliver's sport is immaculately conceived; no one accuses him of having had fun at any time. He speaks in tongues -- Latin,



mostly. You can imagine Scotty's reaction when he first heard things like Tricorythodes, graphite matrix, and modulus of flexibility. He was fascinated. I tried to discourage him, of course. When Oliver talked about eighteen-inch trout, I pointed out that even smaller, real-life fish must be reached by wading through deep water on slippery rocks while slapping mosquitoes. I conceded, however, that trout fishing is an adventure. With luck you can even meet threatened species like grizzly bears and rattlesnakes.

My research assistant agreed, for once, that some kinds of fishing are not suitable for children. I don't think she was aware that this was the right thing to say; no one before me (modesty aside) had grasped the principles of modern piscatorial psychology. Scotty thought that maybe he'd like to go fishing.

"When the weather warms up we might try it," I said, "if I get enough time."

Scotty wanted to go right away.

Let me interrupt the narrative here to admit that, though I am the first to provide useful guidance for post-Freudian child-rearing, I did not work out the theory. My pup did. What do you do when you want to get a young pointer enthusiastic about quail? Do you hand him one? No. You plant it in the grass and wait for him to find it. His point will be tentative. Then you hold the pup on a check-cord. Your research assistant walks in where the



bird is hiding and kicks the grass for a long time, as if quail were hard to get, but worth every bit of the trouble. You don't let the pup in to help. He, of course, decides that the bird smells better than he thought at first, and he starts to pull against the rope. It holds him back. When the quail finally flushes, you drag the pup off in the opposite direction. After a few such sessions he will charge through briars to find those terrific-smelling birds. When he eventually gets a chance to retrieve one, he will not say yuk.

Maybe I should have kept the check-cord on Scotty longer. We went up to a little brook-trout stream, swollen in the spring thaw, and I showed him where to dunk his worm. That's how I learned to catch trout a couple of years ago -- well, several -- and it was so much fun that I was looking for an excuse to do it again. I kept saying that little trout are delicious and Scotty kept putting them back, until the last pool. Where the stream battered a boulder and eddied around, Scotty hooked something too big to dangle from the tip of a cane pole. The trout pulled. Scotty pulled. I was not sure which would tire first. The fish did, finally, and I netted it for Scotty. It was a big rainbow that had run upstream to spawn.

"We should put this one back," I said.

"Let's take him home for dinner," Scotty said.

I put the trout back. (Remember the pointer-pup principle.)



We took the rest of the worms home and kept them in the refrigerator till my research assistant found them, but Scotty didn't ask to go bait-fishing again. He wanted to tie flies. I told him that he was too young, but he pestered me till I let him use my old vise and some chicken feathers. The first few attempts were heavy on creativity and light on discipline; most of them incorporated hair from the pup. One day, though, Scotty announced that he had made a Drunella grandis. He had heard Oliver using that kind of naughty language and looked it up to see what it meant. Instead of sneaking the unabridged dictionary like kids of an earlier generation, though, Scotty had pirated one of my books on mayfly hatches.

I figured that it would be safe to take the kid out dry-fly fishing because he had never learned how to cast: too boring. He preferred to sew little pockets for fly-boxes in an old hunting-vest of mine that he had saved from the garbage man. He had a whole filing system before he caught his first trout on a fly. When we got to the creek, he just waded in and wiggled the rod back and forth in the way he thought the big folks did it. The fly stayed about fifteen feet above his head, motionless, while the line swirled in furious loops underneath. The behavior of Drunella grandis must have done violence to one of more of Newton's laws. When the action stopped, however, the fly fell in front of the angler some of the time, and there are streams in



Montana where trout do not ask much more than that. Scotty ate one of his own fish that evening.

A few weeks later, Oliver was giving Scotty IOU's for his size 16 parachute inermis duns, so his fly-tying must have improved. I wouldn't have wanted to pronounce a fly like that, let alone tie it, when I was eleven years old. Fortunately, Scotty seems to be in no danger of having fun; his brow is wrinkled whether he's tying flies or fishing with them.

Authorities on child behavior will please take note of the research revealed here, with special attention to the pointer-pup principle of piscatorial psychology. Obsolete concepts will no longer be tolerated. If any writer continues to confuse fishing and fun, my research assistant will straighten him/her out.



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All photos are of  
author's son  
Scotty, fishing or  
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Montana.