DAVE

DAVE MAGAZINE



BORN TO BE





photo by Steve Seinberg

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photo by Steve Seinberg

DAVE

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INTERIM EDITOR
Hank

CREATIVE DIRECTOR & DESIGN CHIEF
Hank

DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING
Samuel Bailey

MERCHANDISER
Scott Stevenson

MEDIA DIRECTOR
Alan Broyhill

CONTRIBUTORS:
Chase Pritchett
Lindsey Grossman
Jason Tucker
John St. John
Steve Seinberg
Alan Broyhill
Rand Harcz
John Smolko
Paul Puckett

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS:
David Grossman

CREATIVE DIRECTOR EMERITUS:
Steven Seinberg

COPY EDITOR:
Lindsey Grossman

OMBUDSMAN:
Shad Maclean

GENERAL INQUIRIES:
info@southernculture onthefly.com

ADVERTISING INFORMATION:
sam@southernculture onthefly.com

COVER IMAGE:
John Smolko

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Dear Reader,

This is the first special edition of SCOF ever published. It's here to serve as a tribute to our founding editor, David Grossman, who died April 3, 2026. He would have been 48 today. If you didn't know him, you might learn something reading these pages. If you did know him, hopefully you can get through this issue without crying (or laughing) too loud in the bathroom. Dave would not expect you to read this anywhere else.

We gathered photos of him, stories about him, and stories written by him to try to showcase a few of his many facets. I think you'll find that nobody says it better than Dave.

If at the end you're left wanting more, go back and read our archived issues. He was prolific, gut-bustingly funny, and right about so many important things.

One of my favorite things about Dave's writing is that he confronts himself constantly. In one of his letters, for example, when he meets a 21-year-old guide on the river who's never heard of him, he confesses his vanity and throws it to the wind. "I am now anonymous Dave," he says.

Believe it or not, being a celebrity wasn't important to him. Yes, part of his "thing" was being the least ignorable person in the room, but he cared more about being funny than being the center of attention. He didn't want to be the center of attention at all, actually. That dichotomy, I learned (from his wife), is what makes Dave Dave. If you were at iCast in 2017, and remember someone handing you a rubber chicken and demanding you choke it for the camera, that someone was Dave. You probably knew that.

But no celebrity was ever safe from criticism. Part of the reason he felt so comfortable on the edge of controversy was because he was the first person to admit when he was wrong, and often the first to punish himself. Building a brand on being "unapologetic" was not as important to him as building a community that made everyone feel like they belonged.

We're carrying Dave's torch, and trying to wrestle with his loss without remembering what he smelled like when literally wrestling with him. We invite you to help us wrestle (he was freaky strong) and we hope that if your story didn't make it in these pages, you're not hurt. Too many people loved David Grossman to fit them all in one issue, and that's everything that matters. Happy birthday, friend.

Love,

Hank



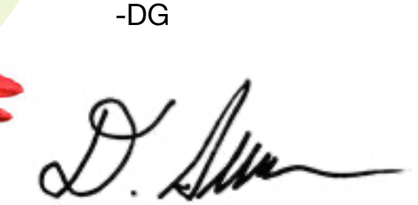
Letter from Dave (SCOF 36 - Summer 2020)

My life of excess has finally started to come full circle. I now imagine each of my vices waiting in a long line to take their respective turns kicking me in the dick. There's the 20 years of yellow American Spirits, the questionable chemical college experiences, but first in line apparently, is the beer and the meat. I'm not sure how much beer and meat you have to consume to get The Gout at 41, but apparently it's exactly the amount I consumed. What started off as a broken toe quickly took a left turn and ran squarely into a lifetime of very little will power towards the dark arts of barley and flesh. I was hobbled by my own awesomeness, and no amount of blaming the cow or the old red, white, and blue of a PBR can was gonna help me now. No, a round of steroids and a heavy anti-inflammatory did the trick a couple days later, but that's not the point. The point is my most excessful indulgence is still lurking somewhere out there in the tallgrass just waiting to strike like a junkyard dog ordered to sick balls.

What is this excess of excesses you ask? Why yes, yes it *is* fishing. I've indulged more in fishing than I've drank, smoked, eaten, or screwed by a long shot. I have fished far and wide as well as near and shallow. The hours I've spent tying, scouting, reading, and writing about fishing are the only ones that outnumber the hours actually spent fishing. I have ghosted family events, quit jobs, and slept in the dirt. None of these things can be considered anything but excessive when measured against what is socially acceptable by today's standards. If inpatient fishing rehabilitation centers existed, I would've cycled in and out most of my life with nothing but dozens of relapses to show for my friends' and family's best intentions. I'm a fishing crackhead, a fish head, or a crack fish (it's funny because it works both ways).

I have a pretty good handle on what the personal fallouts of fishing excess will be. Friendships, marriages, bankruptcy, dying alone on a river somewhere-these are things that have already been calculated into the equation. But so help me Lord, if I wind up with something called "tennis elbow," I am going to freak the fuck out.

-DG





HAIRKU (DOUBLE FEATURE)

A MONKEY TAKES AIM,
SHOOTING LAUGHTER IN THE SKY,
HE SOARS, STILL BRIGHTLY.

by chase pritchett





CIG IN THE CORNER,
A SULPHUR REACH LANDS SUBTLE,
DAQVID THE PEERLESS.

by alan broyhill

The Man with the Surly Monkey Tattoo

by Lindsey Grossman, ca. 2014

In case you're wondering, tattoo ointment in packaged form can look a hell of a lot like a tube of travel toothpaste. Luckily, I figured this out before it was too late. I can't say the same for the time I mistook pepper spray for a lighter. I had been planning a rare romantic evening for me and Dave, and was trying to light the candles with what I thought was a fancy lighter I found in one of our three junk drawers. Instead of coming home to a candlelit dinner, Dave came home to me coughing, crying, spitting and puking on the couch. It was awesome.

But back to the issue at hand, why is there tattoo ointment on our bathroom counter? For the tattoo Dave got unbeknownst to me while I was in Palm Springs with my college girlfriends, that's why.

"So, I got a tattoo," he tells me after the kids are in bed. At least he waited until the kids were in bed. This is not the first time I've come home from a trip to learn of new ink on my husband. The first time he made the announcement in front of fly fishing houseguests I'd just met, and our then five-year-old son. He was mere minutes off a seven-hour drive, and I was either very pregnant or with a newborn. So, you know, points for telling me in private this time.

"Is my lower lip trembling uncontrollably?" I asked him after a long silence. So much running through my head. Trying not to say things I can't take back.

"Um, yes."

"Do I need a drink before I see it?"

"It's not that bad," he reasoned, as if you can rationalize an unplanned tattoo *in Florida.* (For some reason it seems all the worse to me that he had it done in Florida.)

I felt my body relax a notch or two and asked to see it. I so needed a drink first. Maybe seven. What he revealed to me was Surly Monkey — a brainchild of Dave's that serves as his magazine's mascot. It's creative, it's funny, but I don't think it belongs permanently on his torso (from hip to pit) holding a fly fishing rod and *giving the finger.* I reminded him that we have children who will see this when we go to the beach. And the pool. And on Shirtless Sundays. Which isn't a thing in our house, but now it never can be. *Thanks, Dave*.

And I was just thinking about how cute it was that while Dave was in Florida and I was in California, we were both searching for a white Speedo for him *at the same time.* Because that's what couples who've been together as long as we have do. We finish each other's sentences, look up at the sky across the country and wish upon the same star, and simultaneously shop for mankinis.

It just goes to show you: Just when you think everything's all hearts and white Speedos, a surly monkey has to come along and flip you off.

It has now been over six months since his passing, and there is not a day that it has not occurred to me that I will never be able to replace the relationship that Dave and I had. His friendship, his humor, his mind, were so unique and I was just lucky to be a part of it for 15 years. We had a mysterious connection and understanding that turned into an amazing creative collaboration and this somehow brought in a community of great people to share it with us. It turns out he taught me a lot for better or for worse. Our travels together were truly the epic memories that will stay with me forever. It all will. What I know is that none of this can ever be replicated. I miss him every day, and I will always love him like a brother.

ss.



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photo by John Smolko

David Grossman's Blue River Jurassic Park Dory First Descent

By John St. John

This is a story about David Grossman. An American original.

I met him way back in September of 2007, before iPhones were popular, when he drove up to Steamboat from Summit County to get one of our dories. I remember he had a hound dog with him riding shotgun. In our get-to-know-you minute he told me he was from North Carolina, and was getting into fly fishing after having been focused on climbing for most of his Colorado time. He said he was planning on moving back to North Carolina soon, and he looked forward to floating rivers back home in his new boat.

The first conversation went to script that he didn't have much experience rowing, and wanted to play it safe, and get one of our boats. This is a conversation path I was familiar with, and I was going through my part of the conversation agreeing to have his boat ready by the next weekend. That was the last normal conversation we ever had, and man did we have some conversations and long running text threads I will never forget.

Literally on his way out our shop door that afternoon, hound dog in tow, cigarette extinguished, he saw in our loft an oversized poofy swing back bench seat built for a pontoon boat, and asked if we could put that up front for him. One thing led to another, and within minutes after asking for the pontoon boat seat, he had said yes to my invitation on a dory first descent on the Blue River through Jurassic.

The put-in for the run is right behind



the Green Mountain Reservoir Dam, and requires lowering boats down a short, steep hill, and then pushing them a short distance to the river. The take-out for us was a 6-foot overhanging bluff over a small eddy. David excitedly told me he had the right climbing equipment to lower and pull his brand new boat, and our shop boat in and out of the river.

For those unfamiliar, the Jurassic stretch is roughly 14 miles of the Blue River in Colorado running along Highway 9 between Silverthorne and Kremmling. It is widely known for having big fat pellet-fed fish meticulously cultivated by a billionaire that owns both sides of the river for miles. The billionaire is a guy who we were told by credible sources had called the Sheriff on people floating the river just months before our run. My best source told me this is a guy not to be fucked with. To compound issues, we weren't real sure we would make it over all the river-wide pour-overs in the Ranch stretch. My rafting buddy said those would be bumpy. If we got hung up on one of the pour-overs, then we would be in the billionaire's crosshairs in a trespassing situation.

That fall day in the parking lot, I remember there was a lot to be excited about. Would we flip in the Canyon in some unknown rapid? Would we get hung up, or put a hole in one of our boats on one of the river-wide pour-overs? Would we be arrested? Would we catch a state record rainbow?

It's been a while, but this is the way I remember the run. The first major hurdle went smoothly. David expertly lowered our boats down the hill using one of his climbing ropes, and his gris-gris tool. We were all impressed. We weren't real sure how the



last 150 feet to the river was going to go once the boats were off belay. One of our war party, Chris Orwig, was a starting tackle for the University of Montana National Championship football team, and he made it look easy.

I rode in David's boat to act as an insurance policy, since he said he was just getting into rowing boats on rivers.

The river is fast in the canyon with a narrow channel with lots of exposed rocks. David rowed fine. He had Grossmanly undersold his skills. It was an instantly likeable trait.

We came out of the canyon into open rolling hills, and river-wide pour-overs. The first pour-over freaked us out, because it is literally river-wide, and made with massive, sharp boulders. The river was glass that day just above the drops, so you could infinitely position your boat for where you wanted to drop over the falls. We only hit hard on one of the drops, and it was the next to last one.

Once we got in the ranch water proper, a truck with two Stormtroopers followed us for hours, and took pictures of us as we went under their bridge.

It was wilder down there than we thought it would be. We pulled over once in an eddy to net a fish, and a collared cow elk came within inches of the boat. We saw heaps of eagles and ospreys, and we saw a medium-size bear on a hillside. We caught healthy fish, but no state records.

We got to the take-out in the twilight just before dark thirty. We were pretty damn happy with ourselves thinking we had come away from an epic day not that much worse from wear or tear. We had scouted the takeout when we ran shuttle, and thought it would be easier than the put-in. We were naive.

The plan was to rope a boat up and over the short bluff with a rope tied to the truck bumper. The main problem was the eddy was small and waist deep, and the back end of the boats would catch the downstream in the current once the front end was being lifted out of the river. It was really hard keeping the back end of the boat square in the deep eddy as she went up overhead. And the boat would be sideways by the time it got to the lip of the bluff.

David's brand new boat went up the bluff sideways, and slid left of where we wanted her to go. She quickly wedged against a tree while a truck was pulling her forward. The result was a lot of bad noise with the boat grinding against the tree in the dark, and a shadowy crease in the side wall mid-ship that was noticeable under headlights, but popped out the next day in the sunshine.

Nothing is like it used to be. There's more people everywhere than there was 20 years ago. Jurassic has a dozen or more 12-to 14-foot rafts in there on any given day when she is running. I hear the billionaire is not deploying his Stormtroopers as much. He's fighting battles on several fronts looking to lock out floaters to the river through old fashioned local politics, and repairing public relations in light of biologists' reports that his mutant pen-raised pellet-fed fish are infecting wild fish in the Blue and Colorado Rivers.

I miss David. Whether it was the Blue River or the Vegas strip or creating SCOF, he floated and walked unafraid and full of wonder into the unknown. In fried chicken we trust. I love you, Brother.

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christopher pilkington

The Jet Boat Story

by John Smolko

It was one of those first false spring days of the year, a 65-degree sunny February day. The first signs of Old Man Winter loosening his grip, or at least it was forecast to be. After a long winter of guiding duck hunts and rambling around the country working YETI events, I had returned to the mountains of North Carolina. Dave called me a few days prior with an eye on the favorable forecast. He proposed heading over the mountain to Tennessee for a day of trouting on the South Holston in his Hog Island jet boat. I was in.

The day started out pretty normal. A cold but still morning with bluebird skies living up to the forecast. I met Dave at the bottom of the mountain he lived on, parked my truck, hopped in his and off we went up and over the mountains into Tennessee. We made the usual stop at a dingy gas station for American Spirit cigs and some PBR, then proceeded on to the boat ramp. When we got out of the truck to drop the boat into the river, we immediately knew something was off. The weather was warming up, but it was clear we'd be lucky if the temperature broke 55, and there was a cold, stiff, downstream breeze. Our ambitions of finding the first caddis of the year were shot, but we set off anyway.

The fishing was garbage. Obviously, dries were out of the question, but nothing else was working either. A total bust of a trip. We stuck it out for a few hours, but called it well before we had planned. The cold, wind, and fish had bested us today and it was time to tuck tail and go home.

Dave was a connoisseur of all types of vehicles. At this time, he was sporting a black F-250 7.3L Powerstroke diesel. With the boat in tow, the fuel pump decided the steepest hill on I-26 coming back into North Carolina was a fine place to quit working. Powerless, we dialed up a tow truck, and it wasn't long before one arrived. The truck that showed up to rescue us was a single cab rig without a flatbed and, since it was a Sunday, the driver was naturally out for a cruise in it with his old lady. This left us with the quandary of where the two of us were gonna sit and what would happen with the boat trailer. The tow driver thought about it for a minute and after considering that Dave's house was less than 10 miles away, he decided on an unconventional solution. A few minutes later we were on the way, Dave's truck being towed with us inside and the trailer still attached. The remaining PBRs went down easy on our ride home as we joked about the absurdity the day continued to provide.

Back in Dave's neighborhood, the tow driver dropped the trailer in a parking lot, then the truck at the mechanic shop up the street, and finally me at my truck. Dave and I hooked the boat to my truck and hauled it back up his mountain and parked it on a flat parking bench, just down the hill from its normal garage. About five days later, I got a call from Dave, "You're not gonna believe this, I just dropped the boat off the mountain." While attempting to move the boat back into the garage, Dave had forgotten to hook up the safety chains. Somehow, the trailer popped off the ball and went careening down the mountain, finally being stopped by a tree. The back corner of the Hog's transom was destroyed but miraculously, the motor, trailer, and oars remained unscathed.



The hull of the Hog Island jet was totaled, although a repair attempt was made and rumor has it that it's on the water somewhere still. Since the rest of the parts were still usable, Dave bought a stripped down aluminum hull off Marketplace with the intention of building it out into a rowable jet boat. The hull was intended to be a bowfishing setup, but was stripped bare and ready made for a drift style jet boat. About nine months later, no real progress had been made when I was riding with Dave to pick up a Land Cruiser he was buying off of a mutual friend. Along the ride, we were discussing the boat and Dave's lack of time to work on it. He then offered to sell it to me as he needed the space for other toys. I was in need of a new boat to guide out of and didn't have a ton of money. The price was fair and a few days later, I towed the boat to my house and began sorting through the array of parts.

The first step was to rebuild and replace the transom. Then I made the floor, ran wiring, and built in rod storage. The hardest step was to fabricate the mounts that would hold the oar towers. After three weeks of constant work, I had a working jet boat. Just in time to take it to Weldon for striper season. Over the years I would continue to tinker with it, reinforcing the transom, spraying the bottom with a protective coating and other little tweaks as I spent more time on it. It wasn't fast, but it ran skinny, rowed surprisingly well and could fish places too far away for drift boats, or too small for most jet boats. It was perfect.

In the years I owned it, the boat traveled all over the Southeast and flat out caught fish. Countless stripers, carp, smallmouth, largemouth, and even a few muskies all came over the gunnels. It served as a camera boat for a few SCOF articles and ended up in a YETI ad with

Dave on the bow. It helped pay the bills for many years and I'm forever grateful for having the opportunity to purchase it.

The boat still lives on in the Southeastern fly fishing family. A few years ago, I needed a bigger boat as my guiding and general boat needs had changed. I sold the boat to Capt. Will Paul and it now roams the shallow, sandy rivers of eastern North Carolina searching for bass of all varieties. I'm thrilled it's stayed in the family and Will has taken it to a new level with a repower and other improvements.

What started as an ambitious trip to catch a trout ended up being a classic Dave story, an important part of my career, and a piece of Southeastern fly fishing lore. Whenever I see the boat on the water or scroll back through old photos, I'm reminded of Dave and our many adventures. He looked out for me as he did many other guides and industry folk in our corner of the world. It's a fitting testament to his outstanding character that so many stories and extensions of him continue to live on in our community.





photo by John Smolko

photo by Steven Semberg

"I highly doubt anyone on their deathbed ever says they wished they had taken their fishing more seriously. More time spent with friends, more time spent outdoors, more fun; that's what people say right before you mercifully smother them with a pillow." - DG
(LFE SCOF 24 - Summer 2017)

All the Legends Are True

An Ode to the Late Dave Grossman

By Jason Tucker

David Grossman
October 24, 1978 - April 3, 2026

My friend and mentor, co-founder and former Editor of Southern Culture on the Fly, Dave Grossman, died unexpectedly on Friday, April 3, 2026. Here are a few inadequate words in his memory.

A few years back, Dave confided in me it was time to wrap up *Southern Culture on the Fly* (SCOF), the magazine he co-founded with renowned artist Steve Seinberg, after 10 years or so of publication. He wanted my help with a plan for their final year, in which we published stories so offensive and countercultural that he lost all his sponsors. This was not because he disrespected them – it was a gag, a grand prank, a way to end SCOF with a bang. I think it was out of respect for his sponsors that we didn't go through with it, and instead he sold it to a good bunch of guys who have kept the everyman ethos and Southern twang of *Southern Culture on the Fly* alive. But that was Dave. He wasn't weird, or a rebel. He was just himself, a man who singlehandedly made the world aware that fly fishing in the South not only existed, but with the aid of some gas station cuisine and roadside moonshine, is actually a lot of fun.

"I've often been asked (mostly by Yankees and Californians, no offense to either) why I would want to start a fly fishing magazine about the South. My response has always been, "Because that's where I fish."- Dave Grossman, from the first issue of SCOF

The second nicest thing Dave Grossman ever did for me was drop anchor, stand up, take the rod out of my hands, took 10 minutes to re-rig it, and get me fishing again. I had burned nearly a half-mile of our float fishless on the South Holston River, and Dave wasn't having it. From that point forward, I caught fish about as quickly as I could unhook, release, and get my flies back in the water.

The nicest thing Dave Grossman ever did for me was publish my writing in *Southern Culture on the Fly.* Over a period of several years, he ran 8-10 pieces I wrote, often with very little editing. I have come to terms with the fact that I will never be the next Hemingway or Harrison, but to have one person who appreciates your writing and gives you the encouragement you need to keep going is priceless.

SCOF in ways was a countercultural statement to the more staid fly fishing media out there. Where the more polished magazines catered to the anglers chasing high-end destinations, exotic fish, and expensive rods, the ethos of SCOF very deliberately cultivated by Dave was dedicated to the rest of us – the bums – the guys, gals, and guides, with patched leaky waders, and mud in the bottom of our boats. You were infinitely more likely to read about stockers, Southern bass, mud-lining for carp, or waking up with your waders still on to go back out after a long night around the campfire as you were to read about a fancy bonefish resort or northwest steelhead. As a working-class fly angler, it felt good to not just be acknowledged, but celebrated.

Because of this ethos, Dave let me be free as a writer. Dave gleefully published my strangest, most off-beat work. In what I regard as the pinnacle of my writing career thus far, Dave published a piece I titled "The Book of Taunts," in which anglers and fish engage in medieval-style pre-battle taunting of each other. I wrote it as five chapters that I intended to be dribbled out over the course of several issues, and because it was so off-the-wall, he could kill it if it wasn't very popular. Instead, he published the entire 6,000-word piece graced by the artistry of Steve Seinberg. It took up half the issue. It was that willingness to be weird and take chances that set Dave apart and made *Southern Culture on the Fly* special.

The first time I met Dave was at a fly tying night at a rather large local brewery taphouse in Asheville. The place was packed with a couple hundred eager anglers, men and women, mostly young, a testament to his ability to bring people together. I was there to talk to Dave about my writing for SCOF. He had already published a couple of my pieces, but we had never met. We talked for a bit, then I mentioned I had to get on the road to head back home. He perked up immediately. "You're going to drive all the way back to Georgia tonight? No man. Have a couple beers and stay at my place. You're not going back." And that's what happened. I met a bunch of nice people, had a good time, then Dave showed me to a spare bedroom in his basement. He was just a good, kind, generous, and hospitable person.

I don't want to overstate my relationship to Dave, but I do wish to emphasize what it meant. We fished together 4-5 times, and I stayed with him most of those times. His wife, Lindsey, was always welcoming and friendly, but I doubt she could pick me out of a line-up. Dave introduced me to one of his best friends who lives a few miles from me, and my friendship with Mike Farfour, a local Athens restaurateur, has been one of the highlights of living here. There is an army of people who were better friends with Dave, who knew him better than I did.

But Dave was a gravitational force that pulled people in, a galaxy he maintained with wit, charm, and affability. I don't think he ever got enough credit as a writer. He was excellent. He was also a respected fishing guide, a capable fly tyer, a loving husband and father, and of all things, a home builder.

"It's hard to believe that if you ask anyone else about Southern fly fishing you get a puzzled look followed by: 'There's fly fishing in the South?' For too long all the good stories and all the pretty pictures have been about other places. These far-flung destinations are great in their own right, but by nature are out of most of our reaches. Let me be the first to say the grass is not always greener, and the grass in your own backyard is the greenest on the block." -Dave Grossman

So Dave, I bid you adieu. Thank you for the time, wisdom, and floatant you shared, for the days we spent on the water, and thank you for making us appreciate the ordinary, the things in our backyard, the beauty and wildness that surrounds us all. Best of all, thank you for reminding us of the joys of some cold fried chicken, a warm PBR, and the sound of oars digging in a swift mountain current, while the sound of your gravelly voice echoes off the canyon walls.

Shine on my friend. . .

originally published on Jason's blog - *Fontinalis Rising* April 6th, 2026

Goalposts

by Scott Stevenson

I thought for many years I was cool because Dave would always invite me to sit with him next to the SCOF cooler at events and chug beers. He had a knack for making you feel special. And make no mistake about it, he was the cool one. But he was like that with everyone. You had his undivided attention when he conversed with you. Until you didn't and he was off making someone else laugh. Most every time I saw him he would ask me to write something for the magazine. I never felt like I had the chops. Still don't, if I am being totally honest. I wrote for a blog back in the day called *Buster Wants to Fish*. It was a group of fishy dudes across the country and they all had serious writing chops. A couple of them were authors and editors for fly fishing magazines. And there was me. No idea how I got in the club, but Dave was a fan of the blog and by my association he held me in some regard. I should have written for him. Huge regret. Here I am now writing about him in SCOF. Damn.

We bonded over gear. Usually, it was talk of fly rods or drift boats. He would have rather talked about shotguns his last few years, but he was always up for boat talk. He could have written a book on drift boats. Dave had bought damn near every drift boat ever made and kept extensive notes in his head. He convinced me to buy a South Fork Skiff, and my 2027 goal is to get one. He was planning on restoring one himself in the future. Our talks or texts usually led into Land Cruisers. I had sold mine years ago and very much regretted it, even though the tranny blew out two days after I let it go. That isn't a cheap fix. Dave bought Land Cruisers like most folks buy blue jeans, about every couple years. We were doing a good job of keeping in touch when he purchased his last one, the Troopy. I was constantly asking for updates, and he was so excited about it. When I heard the news of his passing, I immediately started going through our texts and one particular text stopped me in my tracks. It was about the Troopy. I hope he (and Lindsey) is cool with me sharing:



"Why wait for some bullshit arbitrary goal post"

This made me laugh and cry at the same time. I had been eye banging the 8'6" 7 weight Air 2 Max on Winston's website for some time. It was one of the few models I didn't already own and I immediately ordered one. Fuck those goalposts. We are all there already. Tomorrow is not promised to anyone. And at age 51 I think about that one a lot. So, I picked the phone up and called my buddy up at Winston.

"Hey, could you add some personalization on a rod I just bought?"

"Sure. What do you want on it?"







"Anything less than blood is bullshit"

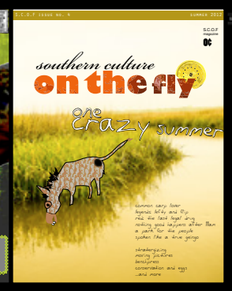
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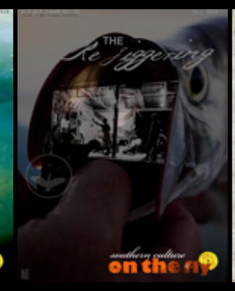




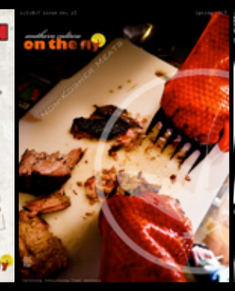














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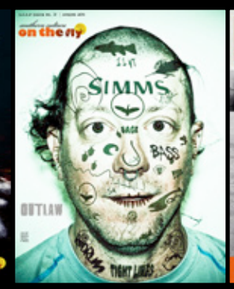






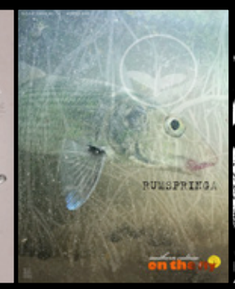








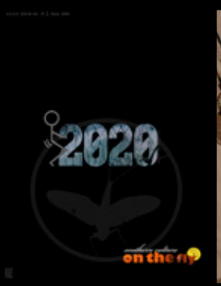


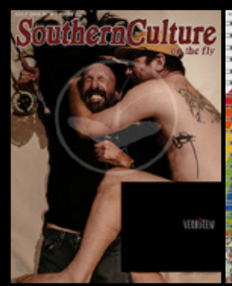




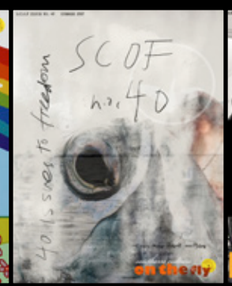


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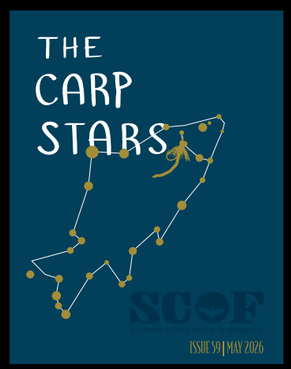
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MAGAZINE

SOUTHERN CULTURE ON THE FLY





photo by Rand Harcz



photo by Rand Harcz



photo by Rand Harcz







photos by Lindsey Grossman

THE TAILING

By David Grossman
Photos: Steve Seinberg





Traveling abroad in the off-season for saltwater fishing is an edge that cuts both ways.

Most lodges offer discounts making one of these trips actually doable with the proper scrimping and saving. On the other hand, nothing in life is free. In this case that 20 percent discount might cost you a higher likelihood of crap weather, or a skeleton staff who's not as excited to see you as you are them. None of this really bothers me. Weather is part of the game we play no matter what time of year it's played. I also don't need nor enjoy anyone doting on me. Decent food on a plate, hot water in the shower, and sheets on the bed is all I require. A simple man with way-above-average intelligence, that's me. So with a few extra bucks in my pocket and mediocre expectations of permit in my heart, I was off to the Yucatan.



Walking into the enormous palapa at the lodge was a study in awkward silence. There was a bar, a kitchen, a dinner table with thirty chairs, and not a soul to be seen. Have you ever been to a place so quiet that when you talk outloud your own voice seems jarring? The manager's footsteps coming up the stairs finally broke the silence. He seemed almost startled to see us, further driving home the prior awkwardness. He was brown-skinned and Mr. Clean bald. He immediately took an interest in my traveling companion, Steve. Almost as if they had met previously. He showed us to our room, let us know we were the only guests at the lodge, and informed us when dinner would be. Our encounter was as short as it was strained. I could have been mistaken, but during our brief conversation I picked up on a sense of what can only be described as pity tinged by guilt.



My sleep that night was fitful. It could have been the newness of laying my head on an unfamiliar pillow or the impending deadlines to get words to paper. At those early moments I couldn't help thinking that I might benefit from this ghost town of a lodge, robbing me of the social distractions I crave when a deadline is on the horizon.







The next morning, my previous night's misgivings behind me, Steve and I wandered through the mangrove tunnels to meet our guide at the lodge's dock. Upon arrival, I was surprised to find not one, but two guides standing next to each other welcoming us. They were dressed identically and were both saying something in Spanish in unison. It was hard to make out at first, but as we drew closer I could make it out:

"Hola Steve. Ven a jugar con nosotros. Ven a jugar con nosotro Stve. Por Siempre y siempre y siempre".





"Steve swore he didn't know what was going on, but unlike his mouth his face never lied."



Weird. How did they know Steve? Why were they talking at the same time? What does “ven a jugar” mean? These questions were not answered until later, or even at all. The whole thing started to seem like a joke that everyone was in on but me. Steve swore he didn’t know what was going on, but unlike his mouth, his face never lied. Something was awry but fish would have to be caught if any writing was to be done. Steve was first on the bow and pulled a small permit within the first few feet of the first flat. As I made way to the sharp end of the boat, the clouds converged and the winds began to rip. Along with the clouds and the wind, my anger began to rise to a level equal to the swells now crashing over the bow.






TOWNIE
sage







The clouds did not part nor did the wind die that day. I managed to eek out a couple of nice bonefish, but no permit to hand. Back at the lodge our solitary existence continued. Silence followed us all over the property. The only face I saw was Steve's. He didn't gloat about his permit externally, but internally he was taking great joy from rubbing my face in it. After dinner, I adjourned to the lounge to write about my feelings. I poured my soul onto the page. With a sense of accomplishment, I grabbed my margarita from the side table. When I turned my eyes back to the page the only thing that was written was, "All bonefish and no permit makes Dave an angry boy." Page after page after page of that same line. I knew I didn't write it but there it was, like the ravings of a lunatic.

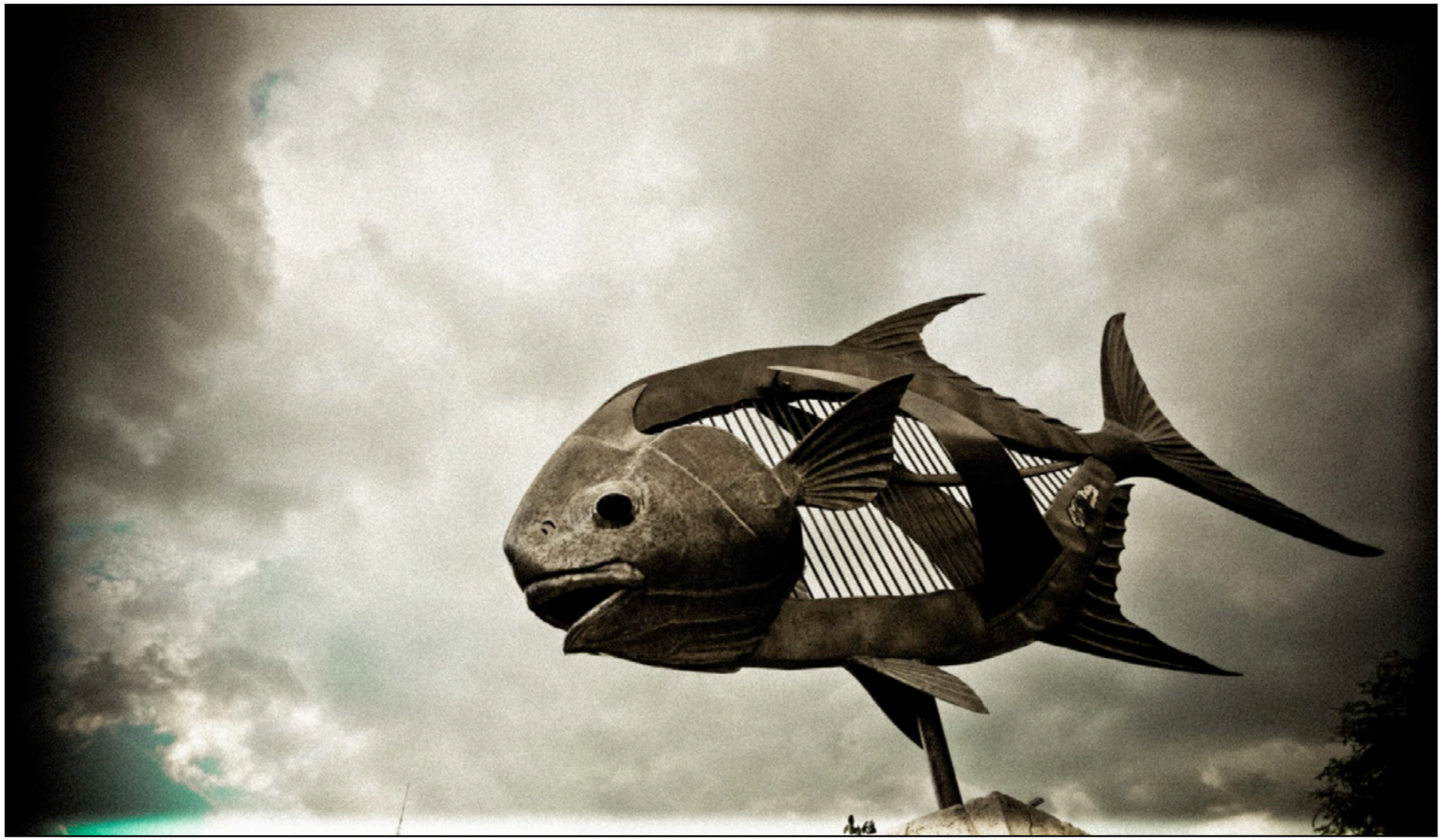


When I turned my eyes back to the page the only thing that was written was, "All bonefish and no permit makes Dave an angry boy".









While my rational mind spun, my gut screamed it was Steve, or maybe that weird manager. Feeling the slightest bit discombobulated by this latest Stevian betrayal, I decided the only thing left to do was to confront him in a calm, reasonable manner.

I grabbed the machete by the shed and made my way to our room. I planned to ask Steve to join me for a beachside fire. The machete was to cut firewood. Obviously. But once Steve saw me he really started freaking out. I could see him through the window running around the room frantically with a wet pant leg, screaming something or other about not wanting to die. I tried to open the door but that rascal Steve had chained it shut. I was barely able to squeeze my head through the door and say, “It’s me, Dave.” I told him if he didn’t calm down I’d have to hack the chain lock off with my machete.

Well this did nothing to ease his mania, so that's exactly what I did. I hacked that chain with a single mighty hack. I burst through the door trying to tackle Steve so I could hug him tightly like an autistic child in the throes of a tantrum. Sadly Steve is not only wiry but slippery, like a watermelon covered in Crisco. He was able to squeeze past me and make his way into the mangrove jungle behind the lodge. I gave chase using the machete to hack my path all the while screaming, "Here comes Dave," thinking the childlike language might soothe him. It did not. The last time I saw him, he was getting into the manager's car, painting the jungle red with taillights bound for Tulum.

The next day I took the shuttle van back to Cancun with no permit, no Steve, and a burning desire to fish the prime season next time.







photo by Rand Harcz



photo by Rand Harcz



NO.35 | SPRING 2021

Black Caddis and Ether Dreams

By David Grossman
Photos: David Grossman and Knox Campbell



This black caddis hatch has become the proverbial popcorn husk stuck behind my editorial molar. Every year I insert into the edit plan, and every year I am asked, “Why do you even bother?” This year, I no longer have an answer.

If you’re not familiar with the black caddis hatch on the Watauga River in East Tennessee, then you must not be from ‘round here. The hatch has the biggest bugs the tailwaters see, in numbers that cover the water with clumsily fluttering size 12 wings. Every fish in the river knows it’s happening and RSVPs to the party well ahead of time. Brown trout not seen during bankers’ hours lazily chase caddis across the surface in broad daylight for all to see. Fish that you fool will often regurgitate caddis from the swollen gullets as if your boat was an Uber ride on a Saturday night in any major city in the world. At least that’s the way it’s neatly assembled, packaged, and sold by every guide service within a hundred miles. It’s not the guide's fault though, because that’s the way it’s talked about by every person who's ever experienced exactly the right day amidst it.





Like most things we build up in the most hopeful corners of our minds, it rarely lives up the billing we've given it. Predicting the right caddis day on the Watauga is like trying to grab water out of the river with your hand. Variables of generation schedules, spring weather patterns, available days, and solid caddis intelligence must all align at the exact right moment like some sort of Davinci Code fishing puzzle for the thing to happen right. You'll line up two or three and the others will rotate farther away. You go chasing those and they'll change the generation. It's a constant mindfuck only made worse by the always ticking clock in your head letting you know that Mother's Day is just around the corner and the end is nigh. What's worse than this anxious monthlong torture? When you wrangle all the elements of time and space into their respective slots and you find yourself on the river—the right flows, sun on your cheek, and bugs in your teeth—the fucking fish don't eat them. Or they eat sulfurs.

I've experienced all of this firsthand over the last couple decades. But every once in awhile, like once every four or five years, it's as good as everybody says it is. Pure euphoria in a tidy eight-hour float. It really is as good as fishing for trout can possibly be anywhere. I don't like describing fishing in sexual terms as I find it to be crass, so let's just say there have been days I have fallen out of the boat into a blubbering heap on the takeout ramp and cried. Actually I wailed like a mother who had lost a child. But these were wails of pure fishing titillation and release. When it's good, it's the best.









This single-A batting average nature of this hatch is conveniently glossed over in the tales of spring caddis and Tennessee trout. I can no longer play this game with the river gods. This is my caddis story. You are reading it right now. Tomorrow I will go, with two of the fishiest people I know, and try to fill these pages with the pictures of engorged trout and the black caddis on the tip of everyone's tongue. I heard they were all over my buddy's boat two days ago, but either way, this is it. No more reserved editorial slots for this hatch. I will cast off my Trichoptera shackles and live the rest of my life free of this infernal hatch. Unless it's good tomorrow. I hope it's going to be good. I think it'll be good. I bet it's going to be really good.

Epilogue: While the fishing was fair to good, none of these pictures have any black caddis in them. We missed it again. Lucky for us, May sulfurs on Tennessee tailwaters rarely disappoint. I would like to thank my friends Rand and Knox for letting me row them all day, while netting all their fish and taking pictures of the good ones. Thanks fellas, that was swell.





NO.30 | WINTER 2019

ISLAND OF THE DAMNED

By David Grossman
Photos: Steve Seinberg and Rand Harcz



Looking back on the totality of what happened, I should've seen everything going off the tracks long before the whole thing actually derailed. There are always signposts you blow by on your way to wherever the hell it is you wind up. One of them would have been the forecast of cloudy days with north winds. Another would've been the whole case of the wrong beer bought mistakenly. Even with bad weather and undrinkable beer, I have never seen such rapid devolvement of a recreational situation. Little did we all know, when we beached the boats on the island, one of us wouldn't be leaving.

The plan was beautiful in its simplicity: Head down to Florida and escape winter's cold shoulder. We'd meet some friends who live down there, claim an island in the lagoon, and enjoy a few days on easy street. When one occupies an island for multiple days, certain rules must be followed: Flats must be close, the beer store must be close, and anyone else must be far away. Other than that the general rules of a civil society apply. At least that was my belief before I reached the island.





There were eight of us. Four from the mountains: Galen, Rand, Brian and I, and four from the beach: Noah, Josh, Steve, and Big Dave. After the boats were unloaded and our backs broken by the weight of booze, poultry, and pork, we spent the rest of the evening in the throes of revelry as if we were really conquerors or pirates taking an island by force (not by 60 horses, as was the actual situation). Our sleep was deep, and filled with hope for the days to come.

Late that night, a strong storm roiled our camp and soaked everything not under cover. When we awoke, the rain had passed leaving only the foul odor of mildew in its wake. That mildew pervaded everything in a way that may have been more than natural, but less than supernatural.

"When we awoke, the rain had passed leaving only the foul odor of mildew in its wake. That mildew pervaded everything in a way that may have been more than natural, but less than supernatural."









The fish were hard to find that first day, and when we did occasionally find a specimen, they avoided us moving as fast as possible out of our sight. It was almost like they could smell the mildew of doom on us. We reeked of it. We motored, poled, and scanned for hours with nothing to show for it. Pulling back into the island that night, the mood was still positive, but I could tell the beach folk were just on the edge of hedging. I've seen this whole scenario play out before. People are commenting on how awesome it is, "just to be out," and how the barbecue is "extra moist" when enjoyed around the campfire. When everyone on a fishing trip is talking about anything but the fishing, you know where things are heading.









"I tried to restore balance to the island with reason and more whisky."



The next day was much as the first—searching, losing, more searching, and finally despair. The emotional state around the fire the second night was unmistakably more somber than the first. The weight of the fishing pressed down on all of us and made each man around the fire feel as if he was a powerless boy again. Nothing to be done and no ability to change fate. At some point in the evening, things started getting really weird. A level of distrust had been building between the mountain tribe and the beach clan. Mountain folk are distrustful by nature, and beach people tend to talk about how good things are all










the times when you're not there. Rounds of whiskey, four beer can chickens, various holistic and medicinal berries, herbs, and fungus foraged from the island were consumed and the flames grew. I'm not sure the precise moment the levee broke, but what at first was just under the surface suddenly erupted all over us, like a Mt. Vesuvius of indignities. Threats were flying as freely as the shirts off the beach clan's backs. As the only bridge between the two parties, I tried to restore balance to the island with reason and more whisky. Both sides were quiet until the whisky was poured, and it looked as if things would hold for the night. This turned out not to be the case.





"The pressure of no fish and tribal warfare must have been too much for the young lad. We tried to coax him out with various carrots of bacon, beer and the like."

I wasn't sure who lit Rand's tent on fire in the middle of the night, until the next morning when I saw him scurrying through the woods in what was left of his board shorts fashioned into a sort of crude loin cloth. Damndest thing I ever saw. Rand was always the good-natured one, never a mean thing to say and always quick with his infectious giggle. I guess the nicest ones always break the hardest. The pressure of no fish and tribal warfare must have been too much for the young lad. We tried to coax him out with various carrots of bacon, beer, and the like. But it soon became apparent that island Rand was not a benevolent marine creature. It started with defecation of the boat hatches, and urine-soaked flies in boxes. The beach clan were the first to abandon ship, or island so to speak. We really had no expectations that they would be of any use. You know, beach people. I heard they went north and caught fish...typical. It was now down to the three of us to somehow bring Rand back from way over the edge. We spent the next 12 hours in what can only be called a chess match of jungle warfare.

Traps were set, fluids were flung, and the three of us came to know what true horror looks like: a quarter-acre island in the middle of the Indian River Lagoon. I won’t recount the atrocities that Rand committed that day upon us, but the sheer brutality of the affair still leaves me screaming in the nights. We weren’t proud of ourselves but we had to leave Rand on the island. The five-minute ride back to the boat ramp was silent save the drone of the motor. But in that silence we all knew leaving Rand scurrying about the island was the only choice. What he had become could not be released on the rest of you. I know some will find leaving Rand in that state unacceptable in their eyes. All I can say is that their eyes didn’t see what we saw.



Word has it some locals have been hearing strange things on the island since we left, and a few have even claimed of spotting what they referred to as a “skunk ape” skulking about the island. As I write these words describing this horrid affair, I know this tale sounds too tall to believe. But this is the story of the island of the damned exactly as I remember it. (And Rand’s still on the island. He texts. A lot.)


BUSCH
LIGHT






Raymarine

The Back Page

Find your child. Not the one you left at the mall or forgot to pick up at soccer practice. No, I'm referring to the one who lives deep down in your gut. You know the one. The one who made you poop in your buddy's tent on that camping trip that one time. Or the one who makes you slap yourself in the face with a Snickers bar as if it was a giant chocolate penis, just for a laugh. These childlike antics are as important to my fishing as the fishing itself.

I have become somewhat of a split personality. I go about most of my days in a 37-year-old way. I pay my bills, I interact with people in a professional manner, and I try to teach my kids not to be douchebags. All very normal, all very responsible.

That is, until I fish. I drink, I smoke, I cuss. And on more than one occasion, I've donned a Sasquatch costume.

I feel like my crazy side and my "normal" side are complementary, in a healthy, divergent sort of way. I am a better person with both sides happy, co-mingling. The crazy side makes the normal side more tolerable on a daily basis, and the normal side keeps me out of jail.

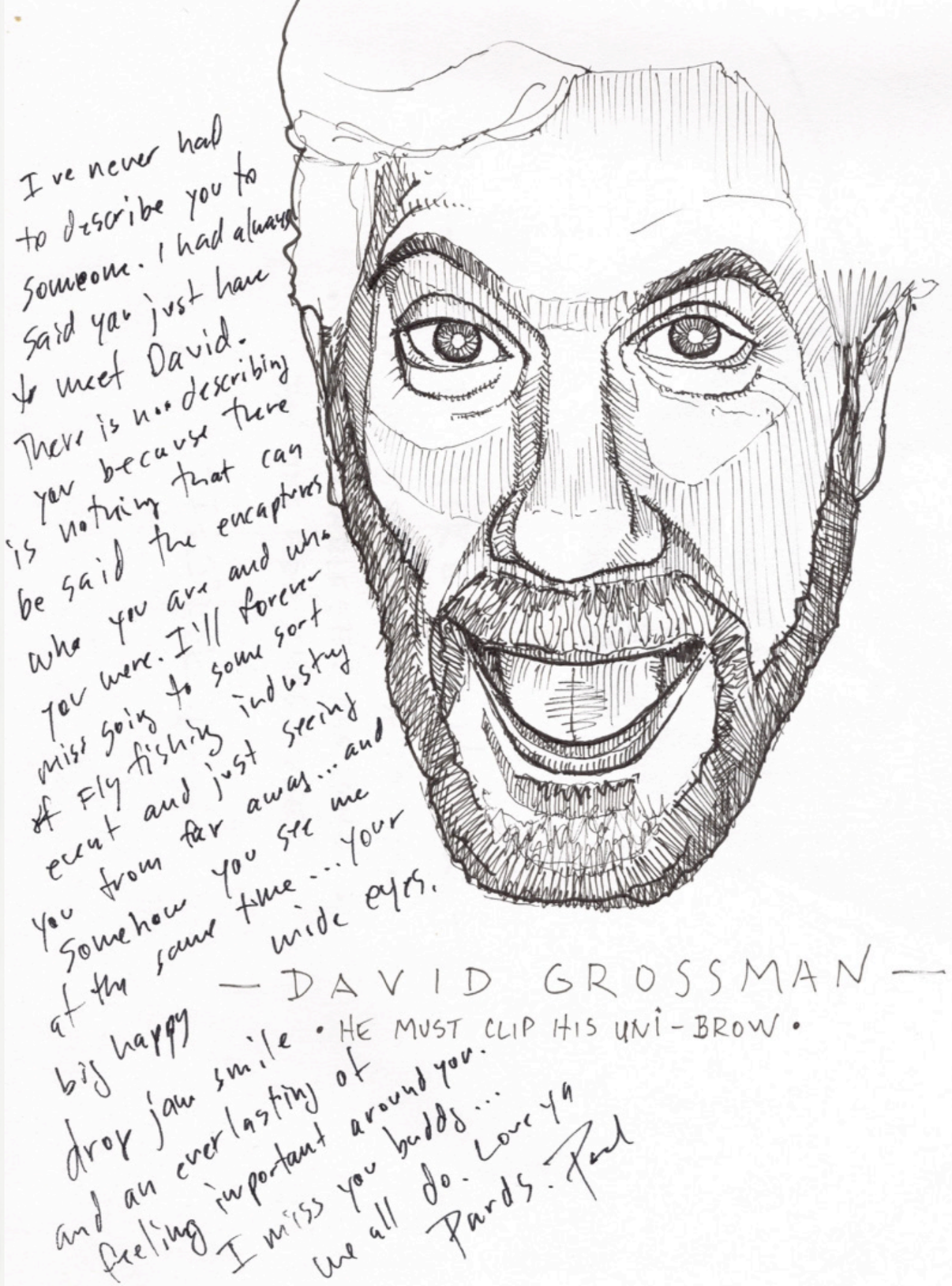
Jail sucks. The food sucks. The mattresses suck. And waking up next to a real criminal (not a fun criminal) is the worst of all. If you've ever fished with me, you know that I am a walking yard sale. I lose keys, phones, and wallets on a regular basis. "Dammit Dave" is not only a soon-to-be copyrighted catch phrase, it is my friends' fishing trip mantra (when they're foolish enough to include me). The illusion: these incidents plague me due to drunkenness, laziness, or just plain dumbassery.

The truth: these things happen because once I am fishing, the normal stuff just doesn't matter anymore; I'm free of those societal burdens. I'll find a locksmith, I'll call the bank, my wife, or the phone company, but not until the fishing is done and I have milked every last ounce of joy out of it.

I am not a young man anymore, but with every trip ventured, I feel more like me, and less like someone I never wanted to grow up to be. It is now very evident to me that every mile traveled in pursuit of fish is one mile less on the road to mental apathy.

-Dave

Letter from the Editor,
SCOF 18 - Winter 2016




Raymarine