



CENTER CONSOLE Angler

Conservation

BY RIP CUNNINGHAM

A CONSERVATION PROJECT FOR THE HUMAN SPIRIT.



Healing Waters

From time to time this column will reach outside the pure conservation arena, particularly when something strikes us as very worthwhile. This month's article goes outside those lines. However, it does show just how valuable our natural resources are and why we need to conserve them. Simply put, they have an incredible power to heal. Maybe we all know that subconsciously, but this unequivocally demonstrates it.

The time was 4 January 2005 and the place was the city of Mosul in Northern Iraq. A Platoon Leader with the 82nd Airborne Division and his gunner were cut down by the blast from a roadside Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The Platoon Leader was First Lieutenant Eivind O. Forseth. Forseth enlisted in the Army in 1993. While assigned to the 1st Armored Division, he did a 12-month tour in Bosnia-Herzegovina on Operation Joint Endeavor. The explosion from the IED shattered the bones in his right arm and lacerated the nerves. He was medivacked to Germany and then to Walter

Reed Army Medical Center. All the while he was told that everything would be all right, but Forseth soon realized that he had essentially lost the use of his right hand and would have only limited motion in his right elbow, not a good situation for someone who wanted to make a career in the Infantry. With most of the young men and women who are wounded, the immediate thought is how soon can they return to their units. But like many others, Forseth soon realized that he would not be returning to his unit and that his life was forever changed.

When I had the incredible experience of listening to this young man explain the emotional roller coaster he went through, I realized just how much our armed service personnel are sacrificing for our benefit. He talked about the depression and the anger experienced after realizing the full extent of his injuries. He openly wished that he had simply been killed on the battlefield. This period of time was his bottom.

While undergoing recovery therapy at Walter Reed, Forseth was asked if he wanted to go fly fishing by retired Navy Captain Ed Nicholson, a member of the Federation of Fly Fishers Mid-Atlantic Council. His immediate reaction was, "No, I don't want to go out there and make a fool of myself." However, Nicholson worked on him for a while and convinced him to give it a try.

Forseth had learned to fly fish with his father as a teenager in Montana, but this time it became an emotional and physical therapy that turned Forseth's life around and started his association with Project Healing Waters (PHW).

Soon thereafter, retired Army Chief Warrant Officer John Colburn asked him to join his fly tying classes. Forseth laughs when he explains, "Hell, most people with two hands can't tie a fly. How was I going to do it?" But with Colburn's positive support, he did.

Forseth is now the project coordinator for PHW, a collaborative effort of Trout Unlimited and the Federation of Fly Fishers, and has taken a leading role in its operations and activities. He credits PHW with being the catalyst that turned his life around and enabled him to overcome his disability.

While this project is currently focused on fresh water, there is no reason why it cannot be expanded to salt water as well. PHW teaches

our wounded service members the skills of fly fishing and fly tying as emotional, occupational and physical therapy. Although this program functions because of the dedication of FFF Councils and TU Chapters, it also needs funding so that the program can be expanded and can put together equipment and trips for these wounded service members.

In his closing comments about his experience, Forseth said, "We are being called 'Heroes', but we do not see ourselves that way. Our heroes are the service members who made the ultimate sacrifice. We are proud and happy to serve this country. Just don't abandon and forget us. We need your support." They are willing to sacrifice everything, and they don't ask a lot in return. Let's help them build a world class program that can serve our wounded veterans whether they served in Vietnam, Afghanistan or Iraq.

For those who want to support Project Healing Waters by contributing fishing trips or fishing tackle, contact Ed Nicholson at ednichol@comcast.net. For donations of fly tying materials or fly tying equipment, contact John Colburn at johnwcolburn@msn.com.

Monetary donations should be sent to the Federation of Fly Fishers, 215 E. Lewis St., Livingston, MT 59047. Make checks payable to FFF and write "Project Healing Waters" on the memo line.

