The Perfect Fly Fisherman

WHILE I SPENT HUNDREDS OF HOURS ALONE AT MY RESEARCH SITE ALONG THE COLORADO RIVER, MY IMAGINATION OFTEN DRIFTED AWAY FROM THE TASK AT HAND AND PLAYED GAMES WITH MY MIND. THE FEW PEOPLE I ENCOUNTERED WERE USUALLY FLY FISHERMEN, DRESSED . . . WELL, JUST AS YOU WOULD EXPECT TO SEE A FISHERMAN DRESSED. HOWEVER, ONE MAN'S ATTIRE AND FISHING TACKLE WERE TOO NEAT; TOO PERFECT. ALSO, THE FLY DANGLING FROM HIS LINE WAS WRONG FOR THE TIME OF YEAR. WHY WAS HE *REALLY* HERE? THAT IS THE GENESIS OF THIS STORY.

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THE PERFECT FLY FISHERMAN

a short story
by
Judith K. Berg

It was one of those early misty mornings when I prepared to set out for a trek along the Colorado River. I pulled on my blue jeans and buttoned my denim shirt while sipping warm coffee and eating cold toast. Opening the door to my abode, cold drizzle brushed my cheeks and clouds greeted my visual senses. Being a wildlife researcher, these pre-dawn excursions were a must; but, as I got older, they became more difficult. I headed out the door, climbed into my truck (Old Faithful), and drove to my study site on the river.

Still early in my research project, my principal activity was hiking along the headwaters of the Colorado River watershed searching for my research animal, the North American river otter, and any clues to its having been along my path. The otter, a state endangered species, is an elusive and mysterious animal. Maybe that is one of the reasons I chose to study them; I like to unravel mysteries.

I parked Old Faithful and stepped out into Nature's world.

A gray haze settled in over the River, which added to my challenge. A wild animal emerging from the fog adds intrigue to both itself and anyone in its vicinity. I pulled on some rain gear, grabbed my backpack, and headed down the banks to the River. Because much of my work was conducted in areas of a national park that were off-limits to most Park visitors, fishermen and researchers among the excepted, I encountered very few people.

Fog prevented me from seeing more than a few feet ahead, so I walked slowly and purposefully. I was always at risk to be the victim of well-camouflaged beaver-created holes alongside waterways in my study site. These holes – actually tunnels into the water – enable beavers to come up from deep water onto land to reach their food sources and building materials. Otters also use these holes to slip onto land for their terrestrial activities, then quietly slide back into the water. For this researcher, stepping into them occasionally produces outbursts of 'unmentionable' words.

It was so quiet and peaceful in these aquatic environments during early morning hours. The repulsive human-created world seemed distant and unimportant. Walking and searching for otter signs was my purpose, but *all* my senses were challenged by the mysteries of Nature.

My peaceful thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a fast-approaching fisherman. He was well-dressed; his clothes looked brand new – like they hadn't been worn before today. He looked too neat and too perfect for a seasoned fisherman. His

pole was flung against his shoulder – like a soldier carrying a rifle – with a fly dangling from his line.

"Good morning!" I said, which seemed to startle him.

He looked up at me, grumbled some words, and then continued on his walk. Because I rarely encounter another human on my treks, when it does happen, a brief mindless conversation is de rigueur. We are intruders in each other's space; neither of us is there to engage in much small talk.

After we passed each other, I turned to take another glance in his direction. He looked like a magazine ad for the 'well-dressed fisherman', including his shiny new waders. It wasn't his attire that interested me as much as his fishing gear. His pole looked correct, but the colorful dry fly was wrong for this time of year and these waters. My job taught me to be observant of such details, but maybe I was just being too critical.

I returned my thoughts to my reason for being here and continued my trek. A much-needed vacation break was fast approaching. I was very tired and really looking forward to a rest.

At day's end, I returned to Old Faithful, having seen neither otters nor otter signs. But, I did see a mysterious fisherman!

I drove back to Park Headquarters and told the rangers and a few friends about my fisherman encounter. People are concerned about me because I am a short, petite woman, and normally alone on my treks. I reassured everyone that he was preoccupied with only his own thoughts and not interested in me.

I said my farewells and returned to Denver that afternoon; I flew out with my husband that evening for a week of sand and surf on an island off the gulf coast of Florida .

* * *

After my vacation, I returned to my study site and immediately headed to Park headquarters.

"How was your vacation?" I was greeted, followed immediately by "You will never guess what was found right after you left!"

Of course I didn't know, but the rangers promptly told me that a dead body was discovered several yards inland from the spot on the river where I ran into my fly fisherman. The time of death was estimated to be near the time of our encounter.

"The police are anxious to talk to you to get a description of the person you saw," the head ranger conveyed.

"Omigosh!" I thought to myself. *"What have I gotten myself into?"*

"I'm available anytime to tell them what little I remember," I said, once the shock wore off.

So, there was *something different about the fisherman, but not what I expected. He may have been a murder victim. He may have been the murderer! Maybe even I was a suspect!*

A ranger called the police to let them know I returned. They wanted to see me as soon as possible. I drove to the police station and gave them a description of what I remembered about the man.

"I didn't really study his face." I told them. "We just quickly passed each other in the morning mist."

But I gave them all the information I recalled. From our discussion and the crime-scene photographs, it was quickly apparent that the victim was not my fly fisherman.

The body had been taken to the Denver morgue, where he was matched to a missing persons report. He was identified as a lawyer who was new to the area and had opened a practice in Denver. He, too, was a fly fisherman, who recently bought a small cabin in Towering Pines, near the Park. Very little was known about him.

When the lawyer didn't return to his office after the weekend, and his secretary couldn't reach him on his cell phone or pager, she called the only number he gave her in case of emergency. It was that of his ex-wife, who now resided in Colorado Springs. Although the ex-wife seldom saw him, they stayed in touch by phone. She hadn't heard from him in three weeks. It was then that the secretary filed a missing persons report. Both the secretary and ex-wife made positive identifications.

The secretary was able to give very little information about her boss. She described him as a quiet, polite man who she couldn't imagine having an enemy in the world. His cases were typical, non-contentious divorce cases. The only people she saw come into the office were clients. He never talked about his life outside his work. Oh yes, she also had a confirmed alibi for that fatal day; she was at home with her family.

The ex-wife provided more information on the lawyer's background. He graduated from Yale Law School with a specialty in criminal law. They met in college and were married. Her husband held his first job as a prosecutor in the District Attorney's office in Lansing, Michigan for ten years. Then he decided to try his hand at criminal defense for another ten years. During this time they divorced and she eventually moved to Colorado. Two years after her move, her former husband moved to Denver to set up a practice as a divorce lawyer. Although she seldom saw him, when they talked by phone he never mentioned his cases or anyone he knew in Denver. She also had a confirmed alibi for that fateful day; she was at work early in the morning.

The Towering Pines police began checking out leads – which were almost nonexistent, except for my description of the fisherman.

"We would appreciate if you would return to Denver to look through books of police photos," one officer expressed. "You can also work with a sketch artist to develop a composite drawing of the fisherman."

"Yes, I can do that." I stated.

"Thanks," he responded. "We really appreciate your efforts in this matter."

I drove back to my cabin. Stepping out of my truck, it was distressingly quiet. I felt uncomfortably alone.

My husband and I bought this small cabin on three acres of lodgepole pine forest near Towering Pines to serve as a base for my research, as well as a family retreat from city bustle. We had no close neighbors; most of the surrounding land was uninhabited forest – uninhabited, that is, except for mule deer, elk, moose, squirrels and other fauna which were always welcome.

Winds picked up and clouds rolled in. Afternoon thunderstorms at this time of year are typical in the Rockies. I carried just a few necessary items into the house. I had packed for a week, but agreed to return to Denver to work with the police sketch artist in two days. My own detective work came first. Finding the murder scene shouldn't be too difficult since I remembered the location of my fly fisherman encounter.

Stepping into my cabin, shadows danced across the cabin walls as the sun darted in and out from behind the clouds. Soon the sun lost its battle and darkness took over. I typically enjoy my own company and look forward to solitude after a day in the field. Being in my cozy retreat during a thunderstorm, I felt safe and secure against the elements. This time it was different. Awareness of the circumstances of my situation began coming into closer focus. A dark shadow began creeping over my being holding me within its nightmarish clutches. If the fly fisherman was the murderer and I could identify him, then he could identify me, too. If, after meeting him on the River, he walked to my parked truck, he would have seen prominently displayed flyers for my river otter project. There were only two vehicles parked in the area. I really didn't take notice of the other one. I figured it belonged to a fisherman. I guess it *did*! A little detective work would have made it easy for him to trace me. Maybe he knew when I was returning to the Park after my vacation. Maybe he followed me to my cabin. Maybe ...

Cold crept into my encasement, so I started a fire in the wood stove. I made some hot tea and sat where the stove's emerging warmth surrounded and protected me. My body began trembling, nevertheless, as my overactive imagination fashioned barely-credible scenarios about the fisherman and what could happen to me. I envisioned him as the dark figure chasing me during a recent nightmare that occurred just before I was told about the murder.

“It isn’t fair!” I yelled out to no one. “Please just let me do my research, not live in fear for my life.”

After getting that out of my system, my thoughts took on a more positive process. Maybe the fisherman was there just to learn to fly fish. Maybe he didn't want to appear to be naive in the face of his friends, so he was getting in some practice. Maybe….

A warm and cozy feeling took over my being. Shadows from the flickering flames formed multifarious shapes that danced in the darkened room. Winds howled like a pack of wolves asserting their dominance reinforced by thunderous applause. Hail began pounding the roof, resembling sounds of shattered dreams. The victim's dreams had been shattered. Perhaps mine would be shattered too! Again I began to tremble.

Suddenly, my thoughts were shaken into reality as lights from a vehicle coming up my driveway shone through the cabin window. I wasn’t expecting anyone. Its lights became blinding and its engine deafening as it closed the gap between the road and my cabin. I braced myself against the wall unable to move. When the vehicle finally stopped I thought I heard a door open. Then nothing for what seemed like an eternity but was probably less than a minute. Finally, the bright headlights disappeared as the vehicle turned around and snaked its way back down my long driveway. I parted the curtain and peeked out to see its tail-lights fade into the night. My body felt drained of life. Silence prevailed. I couldn’t even hear the sounds of the storm.

Finally, the shock wore off and life again entered my being. I found the energy to climb the steep ladder-like stairs to my bedroom loft. I thought I might be safer upstairs; in the dark, anyone not familiar with this staircase would have difficulty finding it and climbing it.

I snuggled within Mother Nature's cradle of down. Rain and hail tapped the roof like a busy woodpecker keeping time for the symphony of winds blowing through the pines. Periodic interruptions of lightning streaks cast dancing shadows with their night in the spotlight, matched tit for tat by Nature's kettle drums, whose heavy beat resounded through the forest.

Soon, quiet took over as the thunderstorm passed. It seemed peaceful again. I felt cleansed, like recent events had blown away with the winds. Sleep finally entered my exhausted being.

I awoke refreshed. Birds sang their morning greetings to the rising sun. Mother Nature's storm had passed; perhaps mine had passed too. I ate a quick breakfast, headed to my truck, and drove to Park Headquarters for a radio. They told me that I had to call in every half hour or they wouldn't allow me to go out to the field today. I agreed. I gave them an approximate location for my daily venture, which was away from the crime scene.

Driving into the park, I kept my eye on the rear-view mirror. A truck followed me in from the visitors' center; the driver, who I could not clearly see from the glare of

the morning sun, made no attempt to hide his presence. Was it the same vehicle that drove to my cabin the night before? Finally, he turned off into an employee-housing complex. It was sufficiently distant from my destination that I no longer considered he might actually be tracking me. I reached my jumping-off point, drove off-road, and parked out of view of mainstream tourists. It would take me longer to reach my destination from here, but not impossible.

Off I trekked, down along the River's shore, looking for otter signs. I remembered to check in with Park Headquarters every half hour, at their insistence.

Ah, some otter scat. This was always a good sign because their diet had become an important part of my research project. I collected it for future analysis and made notes about the date, time, and its location. Once again I felt like a researcher.

Today was Thursday; tomorrow I would return to Denver. It had been just two weeks since the murder. I am not superstitious, but it occurred on Friday the 13th. I made a vow to never again go into the field on that day!

I climbed over fallen trees, all the while watching for beaver holes. Many portions of this stretch of River were obstacle courses that even the best foot soldiers would find a challenge. I walked into the River when possible, but some areas were too deep for me. There's a strong flow at this time of year, and clear water can betray both its depth and force, as I discovered in the past. Hefting boots from step to step is work enough; filled with sloshing water is a lot less fun.

Drawing closer to the crime scene, I saw something shiny attached to a willow bush. A bird may have dropped it while flying over the area. Crows and ravens are particularly attracted to shiny objects. I reached over and grabbed it. It looked like a political campaign button. Only a few letters and colors remained; the rest were probably eroded away by the elements. It may have been there a long time, although it had not yet rusted. I stuck it into my pocket and forgot about it.

I finally reached the crime scene, evidenced by flags attached to trees. It was several yards inland from the spot where I saw the fisherman. There were no ropes or signs to keep me out, so I entered to do my own investigation. Although not expecting to find anything, it would be fun to play detective.

The location was dense with lodgepole pines, where only occasional rays of sun ever hit the ground. It felt eerie as breezes whispered their knowledge of recent events through the towering pines. I listened. I tried to understand. A mule deer walked into the scene and we exchanged glances before it fled. How many species of fauna and flora had witnessed the bizarre events of that fateful day? Neither police nor lawyers will be able to question these witnesses. Too bad!

I found nothing.

Returning to the river, I sat down on its banks to reflect on recent events. For a brief period of time, peace and quiet surrounded me. Then my thoughts turned to the

human-created world. Why can't mankind become a positive part of this magnificent natural world instead of a negative? I rose and headed towards my truck while constantly looking over my shoulder. Now, instead of enjoying this beautiful world as had been the case in the past, I must watch for that dark shadow of a man. Even familiar sounds jolted me to attention. My thoughts turned to last night. Was it the murderer who drove to my cabin?

"Oh, will wildlife research ever again be my life's priority?" I cried out. Reaching 'Old Faithful', a light rain began to fall. Maybe Mother Nature was kissing my cheek with her answer. Maybe this whole ugly event would soon just fade into the distant past. Maybe....

I drove to Park Headquarters to leave my radio and let them know I would return next week. Then I drove to my cabin. While keeping the lights low, I prepared a sandwich. (I *love* sandwiches.) Just as I was ready to eat, there was a heavy pounding on the door. I grabbed a large knife from the kitchen counter and crept slowly forward.

"Sorry to bother you, but I'm the policeman you talked to yesterday," spoke a strong voice through the door.

I parted the front window curtain just enough to see a police car. Then I slowly opened the barrier that separated us.

"Sorry for intruding, but I forgot to give you the name of the contact person in Denver," he said. "You know, it isn't everyone who would get involved. I really appreciate it." Then he laughed. "Oh, by the way, be careful you don't stab yourself with that knife." We both laughed as I looked down at my shaking hand and saw the knife clutched in my fist.

"Oh, did you also come to my cabin last night?" I spoke in a trembling voice.

"No," he replied and then left the cabin.

Closing the door, I replaced the knife on the table. Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought about the night before. If it wasn't the policeman who came to my cabin than was it the murderer?

I sat down to try to eat my sandwich. Winds were howling and a heavy rain penetrated the darkened world. I thought, "Gee, even a murderer wouldn't come out on a night like this. Would he?"

Ok, up to bed to partake in a good book and remove my negative thoughts. Usually a short story mystery on a night like this was my prescription, but not this time. Instead I read some thought-provoking Native American Legends.

The next morning I awoke to Mother Nature's sunny disposition.

"It should be a good drive back to Denver," I mused.

The drive was uneventful. Nearing the city after being at peace in the mountains was always a culture shock. There were too many people and too much traffic. However, this time the mountains hadn't been so peaceful.

My mother had been house sitting with our dog, Shakeybear (he couldn't pronounce "Shakespeare"), and was surprised I returned so soon. I told a little white lie to not worry her. Shakeybear greeted me with wagging tail and wet kisses. He cared only that I was home; why was of no consequence to him. My mom left and we were alone. I sat on the sofa and told him what had happened. He looked at me with his head cocked, understanding expression and eyes filled with pity.

"It's OK, Mommy Dog!"

I laughed and I cried.

The policeman picked me up promptly at the designated time and we drove to downtown Denver. We entered the police station; its walls were lined with an array of undesirable-looking characters sitting on old wooden benches. Some faces showed pain, some anger, and some no expression at all. They were faces of shattered dreams. *Maybe even one of these people was the murderer?* I felt a dark shadow encase me as their cold glares penetrated my being. Because the victim had been a criminal lawyer, he could have been murdered by a disgruntled client or someone he prosecuted. *Did one of these people recognize me?* I felt uncomfortable as we walked past them in this elongated hall that appeared to have no ending.

At last, the officer walked me to a quiet room towards the rear of the station and introduced me to the case detective.

"Are you OK?" he asked as he handed me a glass of water.

"Sure," I replied, although my expression betrayed my apprehension and undoubtedly prompted his question.

"Your cooperation in the matter at hand is really appreciated. Not everyone is willing to get involved," he said.

"Gee, I recently heard these same words," I thought to myself. *"Maybe I made a mistake to get involved!"* No, the fear of an unknown vehicle coming to my cabin or of a figure lurking in the forest's shadows by the river would always haunt me unless he was caught.

There were several books on the table, through which I began tediously looking. After awhile, the photos all began to look alike. I wondered why these people were in these books. *What happened in their lives to turn them into criminals? With what had their blank tablets been filled to make them strike out at the world? Was it nature or was it nurture?*

I didn't recognize anyone from the photos.

“I saw so little of the face of the average-looking man in the fly-fishing suit,” I reiterated.

The police sketch artist entered the room and began drawing as I talked. When he asked me the color of the fisherman’s eyes, I realized I hadn't seen them. The fisherman was wearing reflector sun glasses!

“That was strange,” I suddenly contemplated, *“because it was cloudy, drizzly and foggy.”* It would also make him harder to identify.

I *did* see brown hair sticking out from under his hat. I estimated him to be in his mid 40's. When the artist finished, the drawing looked like my fly fisherman. It also looked like half the male population in their 40's with dark hair!

The drawing would be distributed to sporting goods and outfitting stores extending from Denver to Towering Pines. Because the fisherman’s attire and equipment looked so new and so expensive, it was likely he recently patronized one of them.

When it was time for me to be driven home I asked my driver if we could leave by a back exit. If one of the bench people was the murderer, I didn't want to be followed.

"No problem," he said and led me out the rear entrance.

I settled into the comfort of our home. My husband was out of town on business, but would return this evening. Shakeybear came to my rescue with his happy demeanor. I hugged him as stress-filled tears flowed. Will it ever be over?

Putting a frozen pizza in the oven, pouring a glass of wine, and turning on the television to an old movie was my prescription for a good diversion. (I *love* old movies!) I also drew the drapes. Eating pizza, sipping the grapes, and watching ‘Casa Blanca’ made the darkness surrounding me go away. My special companion, Shakeybear, was my protector.

My husband arrived home during the movie; we finished watching it together. Now I felt safe. Tomorrow we would discuss the events of my world.

Tomorrow morning arrived, which was a good sign. I recounted the previous day’s events to my husband. We agreed I couldn't live my life in constant fear of what might happen.

“We must proceed with our lives,” he stated before putting Shakeybear in his harness for their walk.

I sifted through the mail, recycling most of it. This was an election year and candidates were already sending out literature and solicitations for contributions.

Candidates' volunteers also came to the door, their faces locked into faux smiles as they recited their spiels.

One volunteer, working for a state senate candidate, handed me a flyer and a campaign button.

"Hot off the press this week," he said. "It was a good thing the candidate went to the distributor to check the proofs. The original button had two letters switched in his name. The candidate kept the proof – the only one such button in existence – to be framed after he was elected as a joke."

I thanked him and closed the door. While looking at my acquisitions, my body began trembling uncontrollably. My legs turned to jelly. I slouched down next to the door. Somehow, I gathered enough strength to climb the stairs to our bedroom. From a pocket of my jeans worn on my last research trek, I pulled out the weather-worn campaign button found near the crime scene. Enough of the image remained to tell me it was the same candidate.

"So what?" I thought. *"There must be several hundred of these buttons!"*

But, this particular button had the two letters switched on it! I looked at the candidate's picture on the flyer. It looked like my perfect fly fisherman!

When my husband came back from his walk, one look at me told him something was very wrong. After telling him my discovery, I called the detective in Denver. He arrived at our house an hour later. I described everything that just happened to him. He didn't seem surprised, but he looked disappointed. The candidate was very popular. He liked him. I told him that he could have just been an innocent fisherman, and, like I, at the wrong place at the wrong time. Then he confided what he knew.

After the victim's picture appeared in the paper, several people called in with potential leads. This wasn't unusual. One person had been seated with the lawyer at a $500-a-plate-dinner fundraiser for the candidate. From this information, everyone else seated at the same table was then contacted. No one admitted knowing the lawyer. They all had alibis for that fateful day. Even the candidate denied knowing him. When asked about him, he just laughed and said the food couldn't have been *that* bad. The dinner was just two days prior to the murder. He had an alibi. That Thursday he spent the day and early evening at his campaign headquarters. Then he went home, dined with his family, and worked well into the night. He fell asleep on a sofa in his den – not an unusual occurrence – and awoke the next morning after his family left the house. After he ate breakfast, he drove back to campaign headquarters.

Then he laughed and said that no one could verify that particular morning because he gave everyone time off. Hey, it was Friday the 13th, so he figured a few hours off would be a nice gesture. That was all the detective knew at this time. Mine was the only lead so far. The District Attorney would talk with me Monday morning. At this point in time, the candidate appeared to be innocent.

Monday morning came too quickly. Again, I was picked up and driven to the prosecutor's office.

"The campaign button distributor corroborated the volunteer's story," the D.A. said.

They learned further that a sporting goods store in the fashionable Cherry Creek area sold the fly fishing outfit to the candidate. He wanted it for campaign pictures to attract sporting enthusiasts. He admitted to the clerk that he didn't know a thing about fly fishing. This information still didn't make him a murderer.

But, there was more evidence. A button was missing from the jacket that the candidate wanted to buy. The store's tailor sewed on a replacement for him. It was a special one from a shipment the store had just received with their insignia on them. He thought it would be good publicity for the store when the candidate was photographed. The tailor didn't notice at the time that there was an error on these new buttons. It was discovered after the candidate left the store. They let it go since it was minor. The other buttons were returned to the distributor. Only one such button ever left the store.

When the victim was found in the mountains it was apparent there had been a struggle. He had fallen next to a tree. Clutched in his hand was the button he pulled off the candidate's jacket as he fell.

The District Attorney called the candidate. He told him it was important to talk to him as soon as possible. Arrangements were made to meet with the candidate at his headquarters. At this point the candidate must have known it was game over. He slowly lifted his eyes to a frame on the wall behind his desk that read "The wrong campaign button but the right candidate." There was no button.

When the District Attorney and two police detectives arrived at campaign headquarters, they were taken to the candidate's office. The scene they confronted was not what they expected. The candidate was slumped over his desk, a silenced revolver in his hand. He was dead.

Three envelopes were left on his desk: one addressed to the District Attorney; one addressed to his staff and volunteers; one addressed to his family. Scribbled on a pad of paper beside his phone was the name and number of the sporting goods store in Cherry Creek. In his closet hung the fishing jacket with the missing button.

A thorough investigation left no doubt that it was a suicide. When the store in Cherry Creek was contacted, they said they called the candidate that morning. They told him about the button on his jacket. They wanted to replace it with a corrected one. They were going to pick it up. The candidate told them not to bother. He would take care of it.

The letter to the District Attorney explained what happened. He knew the lawyer many years ago but hadn't seen him again until he showed up at the candidate's fundraiser. The lawyer was the only person that knew a dark secret about the candidate.

He threatened to expose him. It would ruin the candidate's political career. The two agreed to meet early that Friday morning in the mountains away from mainstream Denver. The candidate saw the lawyer's car parked along side the road. He drove beyond and parked where I saw his car. The candidate figured blackmail would be on the lawyer's mind, but that it would be worth it. They met. They argued. They fought. The lawyer hit his head on a tree and fell down. Before he could get back up the candidate found a rock and just started hitting him until he knew he was dead. The candidate had not gone to the meeting with the intention of killing the lawyer. It just happened. He figured that no one could ever connect him to the lawyer. He thought it was over. He didn't know about the button on his jacket being unique. He didn't know he had dropped the campaign button. But, now it was *really* over. He didn't want to fight it. His career was finished. His family would be humiliated. He felt that ending his own life was the only thing left for him to do.

The letter to his staff and volunteers thanked them for hard work and support and that he was sorry for letting them down. The content of the letter to his family was never shared.

The major news story the next day was that the leading state senatorial candidate was found dead from an apparent suicide. There were no other details available.

I felt both sadness and relief. Many lives had been changed from my sighting of the perfect fly fisherman. There were many shattered dreams, but the candidate had committed the worst crime; he took the life of another human being. Now, his deep dark secret died with the only two people who knew what it was. Maybe that is the way it should be.

My name had been kept out of the episode. Very few people knew of my involvement. Very few people knew what I saw and what I found. That is the way it should be. My nightmare had ended.

It was now time to return to my research project. There was still much otter research to be done. However, one thing was for sure. I would never again look at a fly fisherman without remembering that fateful Friday the 13th. In fact, I may never again look at another fly fisherman.