

Testament of a Fisherman

By John Voelker

aka Robert Traver (1903-1991)

As compiled by Bill Carnazzo, 2012

John Voelker was a judge in the state of Michigan. He was also a lyrical writer, and a lifelong intrepid angler—mostly fly fishing during his younger years, and then exclusively so in his middle and older ages. His classic book, *Trout Madness* (St. Martin's Press, 1960), written under his pen name, *Robert Traver*, is a masterpiece that chronicles many of his angling experiences. He wrote with dignity, humility, humor, and insightfulness, in a manner bereft of the pride, self-promotion and egotism that unfortunately characterize much of the current fly fishing literature.

One of his best-known pieces is actually only a short paragraph—a philosophical, captivating statement of his reasons for fishing. I read this piece many years ago and have never forgotten it. At times I find myself reciting snippets of it as I prowl around on one stream or another in the canyons where I live. Anglers who care about more than mere “numbers” or “size” will understand. Others either won't, or decline to spend the time to do so. ~ Bill Carnazzo

The Testament of a Fisherman

Robert Traver 1964, (Judge John Voelker 1903-91)

I fish because I love to;

Because I love the environs where trout are found, which are invariably beautiful, and hate the environs where crowds of people are found, which are invariably ugly;

Because of all the television commercials, cocktail parties, and assorted social posturing I thus escape;

Because, in a world where most men seem to spend their lives doing things they hate, my fishing is at once an endless source of delight and an act of small rebellion;

Because trout do not lie or cheat and cannot be bought or bribed or impressed by power, but respond only to quietude and humility and endless patience;

Because I suspect that men are going along this way for the last time, and I for one don't want to waste the trip; because mercifully there are no telephones on trout waters;

Because only in the woods can I find solitude without loneliness;

Because bourbon out of an old tin cup always tastes better out there;

Because maybe one day I will catch a mermaid;

And, finally, not because I regard fishing as being so terribly important but because I suspect that so many of the other concerns of men are equally unimportant – and not nearly so much fun.