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.