



MEMBERS OF THE CHARLESTON ANGLER REEL WOMEN:
FRONT ROW: Starr Nolan, Caroline Rhodes, Caroline Hassell
BACK ROW: Dawn Johnson, Catherine Rhea

girls gone wild

by starr nolan

"Fly fishing is really the perfect sport for women. For so many hundreds, no thousands of years, we have been told how to act, who we are and should be, and just plan molded into what we are not... In our acceptance of this, we have often lost our ability to use our instincts, make decisions, and feel a part of the natural world. Fly fishing is the perfect activity to reconnect with all the natural, wonderful, wildish instinctive qualities that make up a true woman."

Dorothy Schramm

When I was a little girl, I ran in a boy pack. I played with the guys because they roamed the neighborhood, climbed trees, rode bikes until after dark in the warm summer evenings.

And they would spend hours wading the creek that meandered through all of our back yards. We were all fascinated by the creatures that lived in the water—especially the crawdads that would emerge from under a rock in fighting stance with claws raised.

At age nine I was thrilled to actually find another girl in the neighborhood who loved to play those same boy games.

One day we discovered an old fishing rod in the basement and decided to go on a fishing trip. Armed with the rod and a container of freshly dug earthworms, we followed the creek to where it spilled into a small lake. There was amazement and huge excitement when we actually hooked a small bluegill... then another. We marched home with our catch and announced to my Mother that we were going to

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learn to fly fish (the gentle upper body work out that comes with fly casting is really good physical therapy for women recovering from surgery) but, like lots of women's activities, the retreats provide much more. Letters from the wonderful, courageous women who have participated in the CFR program describe it better than I ever could: "Thank you for helping me get my life back." "Words cannot express my heartfelt thanks for such a caring, loving weekend." "I am writing to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the most amazing 48 hours. I really had no idea what to expect, other than I'd learn a little

about fly fishing and have a great time with other women with breast cancer. Well, was I ever clueless. Aside from my wedding and giving birth to two babies, this was the most amazing 48 hours and it was not just about the fishing. This was so much more, so intense in your honest desire to make each one of us feel special and important. It was so easy to share our feelings in a comfortable, safe, tissue-filled environment. All my gratitude and love." If the CFR staff wrote thank yous to the participants, they would sound much the same.

I'm immersed in fly fishing. I get to spend full days exploring beautiful

build a campfire and cook our fish, and amazingly enough she agreed to help. After that, we went on several more fishing expeditions—and my first girls' fishing club was formed.



As the years rolled by, I fished here and there—with my aunt and uncle on the lake, with my Dad at the beach, always catching fish when everybody else pulled in an empty hook—and I was told almost every time that I had "the luck."

I eventually found a *serious* career as a therapist—helping people explore their internal landscapes with the same curiosity and excitement that I'd taken to the stream as a child. I frequently encouraged my clients to take up activities that gave them a sense of joy, a feeling of accomplishment, a connection to the natural world, the opportunity to explore and appreciate life, the chance to be curious, hopeful. Then I discovered fly fishing, a sport that turns out to incorporate all of those things. I decided to take my own advice.

I was thrilled to find that I could both fish and spend the entire day wading the stream—looking under rocks, thinking like a fish. I learned fly fishing from the boys and once again was pleasantly surprised to find out that there were also many women who were experts: Joan Wulff, who started winning casting competitions against men 40 years ago; Cornelia "fly rod" Crosby, the first female fishing and hunting guide in the state of Maine, who wrote a syndicated column on fly fishing; a fly fishing nun, Dame Juliana Berners, who actually wrote the first treatise on fly fishing in the early 17th century.



Many of the women in my "pack" devote much of their time, energy and spirit (not to mention financial support) to helping other women as volunteer staff for a wonderful program called *Casting for Recovery* which offers free weekend retreats for breast cancer survivors. CFR participants

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trout streams.

I get to fish with people from all over the world (this year I've guided folks from Zambia and Bavaria on our beautiful WNC streams); I get to fish all over the world for all kinds of fish (I've caught Atlantic salmon, Pacific salmon, steelhead, bonefish and tarpon on a fly rod and met some really neat people in my travels to Alaska, Newfoundland and Exuma). So now I'm fishing, teaching, learning, growing, meeting really great women and men who are passionate about fly fishing and enthusiastic about life.

I really do have "the luck."

Starr Nolan is co-owner and guide, *Brookside Guides* [brooksideguides.com] She is also a Retreat Leader and Coordinator for *Casting for Recovery NC/SC/GA and KY* [castingforrecovery.org]

She is a fly fishing instructor at John C. Campbell Folk School, Starr is President of the Land O'Sky Chapter of Trout Unlimited and an instructor at Rivercourse, the TU fly fishing and conservation camp for kids. Starr is also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and maintains a part time private psychotherapy practice.

Starr lives in Asheville with her partner, Trish, their only dog Daisy, and four really moody cats Skeeter, Maxine, Abigail and Amelia.