

Of Reverse Mentoring Fishing The Rips

by
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In 2005 I bought my first (and only) boat, a 22 foot center console with a 200 HP motor, and I had the R.I. Sign Co. design and affix the name, *Fly 'n Spear*. The name reflected what were then (and now) my two passions on the water: Fly fishing and breath hold spearfishing.

I also rented a furnished, seasonal apartment in Westerly, RI, a small, one bedroom affair above the garage of a private home owned by a lovely family. The apartment came with its own driveway



Fly 'n Spear

- a driveway that was long enough to accommodate my trailered boat or my F-250 diesel truck, but not both.

I had formally retired, but was continuing to work on a consultant basis to conclude a long-term project in Houston, and so I was able to leave the boat in my driveway and all my diving gear and fishing tackle in the apartment knowing that all was secure while I was away on business for what was typically two to three week stints.

I had been on boats most of my adult life, mostly dive boats targeting ship wrecks operating out of mid-Atlantic ports, or out of Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara during the near twenty years that my wife and I lived in L.A.

But I had never operated a boat larger than an eighteen foot rental skiff. I knew I needed help. I needed a mentor to show me the ropes. Think "mentor" and what comes to mind is an experienced senior willing to teach his youthful charge. My mentor was (and is) thirty-four years *younger* than me.

Ben: junior teaching the senior

I first met **Ben DeMario** in 1995 at Cove Edge Tackle on Watch Hill Road in Westerly. (The shop closed many years ago.) I had been coming up to the Watch Hill area from my Washington, DC home, to charter fly fishing guides. As with most guides, the ones I found wanted to start and finish early in the day. I wanted to sleep in and fish evenings and nights.

I asked Cove Edge's proprietor **John Prigmore** whether he could suggest anyone who would take me out to the reefs when I wanted to go, and John said, "Ask that kid out there."

I stepped out the door and saw a rather tall teenager weighing a hefty striper on the shop's scale. We introduced ourselves, and Ben agreed to take me out in his boat, which turned out to be a fourteen foot aluminum skiff.

We fished all over the area, evenings and nights, in that little boat, but Ben made me promise not to tell his parents that

we fished the reefs because going outside Little Narragansett Bay was supposed to be off limits.

And that was the beginning of a twenty-six year friendship. Over those years, Ben moved on to bigger and better boats, got his captain's license, joined RISAA, and now operates **Watch Hill Charters** using his twenty-four foot Pathfinder center console. I boast that I'm a much better spearfisherman than he (that's easy because Ben doesn't spearfish), but I freely admit that he is a far, far better fisherman than I.

When I bought my boat, I knew a lot about spearfishing, especially from the Rhode Island shore, and I knew enough about fly fishing to have achieved mediocrity, but I really didn't know diddle about operating my own boat, and particularly about operating in the challenging environment of the Watch Hill Reefs, Fishers Island and The Race.

Ben was a lifesaver for me. He taught me how to launch and retrieve the boat at the difficult public ramp in downtown Westerly, how to get on plane efficiently, and how to navigate around the reefs and rockpiles. He even entered twenty waypoints into my chartplotter marking his favorite fishing spots.

The best part, however, was that we got to fish together and enjoy each other's company. So, **reverse mentoring - senior learning from junior** - worked well for me.

Fishing the reefs

Now, about fishing the rips. Our local rips are formed by tidal currents flowing over piles of rubble left by the receding glacier ten- to fifteen thousand years ago. The reefs and rock piles borne of those rubble piles stretch from the east end of Fishers Island, NY, to the base of the Lighthouse at Watch Hill Point, RI, and the main structures bear the names Wicopeset Island, Catumb Rocks, Sugar Reef and Watch Hill Reef. There are also unmanned structures interspersed that create similar rips. Navigating and fishing these structures can be hazardous, especially during periods of strong tides and limited visibility. If you don't know these waters, hire an experienced local guide.

A ripline will appear when there is sufficient current flow over the reef. The sea surface will appear fairly calm or flat upcurrent of the reef, and a distinctive line of disturbed water, sometimes with waves two to even five or six feet high, will form just down current of the flat water.

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Ben DeMario with his children



Ken Cooper (L) with Ben DeMario (R) with 50 lb striper that was released