In which we spent a morning and afternoon with George Singleton, picking him up at his home in Decaturville, South Carolina. From there, we traveled to the Pickens County Flea Market, and explored the heaps of junk, searching for buried treasure, all the while listening to George's signature brand of sarcastic humor. After we bought fresh fruit, miniature cans of shaving cream, and even a hand grenade, we listened to a bluegrass jam session consisting of several very "country" folks, one of which was playing a washtub bass.

After a couple of hours, we decided we had found all of the bargains and hidden treasures there were to find, so we drove to downtown Greenville where we browsed a local bookstore (which happened to be sold out of George's new book) before lunch. At his insistence, George treated us to lunch at one of his favorite restaurants, the Island Jerk Jamaican BBQ and Grill where we ate curried everything. After the adventurous meal, we thanked George heartily before heading back to Spartanburg to prepare for our big road trip across the South.
How Pickens County Gives Me Material, Whether I Want It or Not
by George Singleton

The subject matter—the conflicts—in my short stories and novels took a turn on one particular humid summer day in 1994, inside a family-run convenience store in Dacusville, South Carolina. Up until this point I had been writing pretty much smart-ass first person narratives about a smart-ass character who knew more than anyone around him; all of the other republican-voting, ex-debutante, family-monied characters entered in and out of the stories as cardboard cutouts, showing up only long enough for the main character to harass or make fun of them. Sometimes, if I was lucky, I'd have a man playing a washtub bass sense enough to make the main character somewhat self-effacing so that the reader wouldn't hate him entirely. More often than not the conflict—before the summer of 1994—involved a misunderstood, woe-is-me protagonist who more or less allowed the action to take place ahead of the path he walked. This particular narrator didn't fight back, so to speak, or make connections, or spend nights awake fretting over resolutions.

I bought beer on a Saturday afternoon. The man in front, older than I, wore cutoff blue jean shorts. He didn't sport a shirt or shoes, and had his hair slicked back in a way that suggested a freak hailstorm couldn't dent it. He might've been about sixty pounds overweight, maybe eighty. I wasn't unused to standing behind such men in Dacusville (or Darlington, or Hodges, or Ware Shoals, or any other small South Carolina town where I stood in line with enough sense to buy booze on a Saturday, seeing as otherwise I would have to drive all the way to North Carolina should I run out Sunday morning). Outside were two gas pumps with four handles. A six-wheeled farm truck eased up pulling a horse trailer. Behind me, in a little, darkened, secluded room, a couple of Baptists hid away playing video poker. I held a twelve pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon in one hand, a twelve in the other. The man ahead of me—I've never been a scholar in the field of dermatology, but some of those moles and freckles appeared to have lives of their own—bellowed out, "What the hell kind of donkeys is this?"

I waited my turn, bought my beer, got the hell out of there, and drove straight back home to my typewriter.

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Here's what happened: Dacusville, up until 1990 or so, was a wide sweep of farmland and woods, halfway between Greenville and Easley. Everyone seemed to be named Looper, Latham, or Dacus. After crossing the Saluda River on Highway 183 there weren't too many visible abodes on either side of the asphalt, all the way to Pickens. The back roads—like Hester Store Road where I live—held about as many churches as they did houses or mobile homes. Then, as Greenville swelled like an already genetically-questionable dead gar fish on the berm, Dacusville began to show signs of life. Entire beautiful hardwood tracts got razed—revealing wonderful views of Table Rock, Paris Mountain, Caesar's Head—and in their place cropped up one of three things: subdivisions for single and doublewides, subdivisions for underpinned single and doublewides, and subdivisions with houses in the over-4000-square-feet range. There wasn't much in between. Dacusville went from an area of hardworking related families—people who didn't succumb to the cotton mills in nearby towns; people who raised cattle, horses, goats; tree farmers, country store merchants, farm equipment mechanics—who made good livings, to an unzoned crazy quilt of working poor laborers and wealthy white collar workers born not only outside of Dacusville, not only outside of South Carolina, but outside of the South altogether.

This is a gigantic generalization, of course, but when twenty-seventh generation locals collide with people who get nails in the front tires of their new BMWs and think nothing of buying four new tires instead of getting a plug, some squint-eyed, distrustful,
comments and actions take place. It’s all about the Old South being forced into the world of the New South, and nothing but “Conflict with a capital C” can emanate from such a misguided union.

* * *

In 1998 I decided that I wanted to write some linked stories that involved the weekly flea markets in our area. I began with the immense Pickens County Flea Market, but also visited Smiley’s up in Fletcher, North Carolina; Tab’s somewhere halfway down Wade Hampton Boulevard; the White Horse Road Flea Market in Greenville; Sunny Slopes in Gaffney; and the Chesnee Flea Market. To write about these places I wanted to do more than walk around as a supposed buyer. I wanted to get behind a table and hawk some wares. Unfortunately—though I didn’t think so at the time—I had saved up a slew of Joe Camel products gained from sending in Camel Cash. I had Zippo lighters, highball glasses, Joe Camel can insulators, gift tins, ashtrays, T-shirts, key chains, salt and pepper shakers, and so on. I backed my car up to a table, set down what I didn’t know at the time were collectibles, and sold out directly. My net gain, after the $5 table rent, was about seventy-five bucks.

I didn’t know that the government would cause R.J. Reynolds to discontinue Joe Camel products seeing as they were too like cartoon characters or toys that children might want, which would—cause-and-effect—have them down at the local country store jonesing for cigarettes while men and women chaperoned llamas outside. So my first foray into flea market selling taught me a lesson, namely to read up on everything.

Understand that at right about this time all of those television programs like Antiques Roadshow began to air and spawn. People learned that their old mechanical banks were worth more money than their cars, et cetera. At about this same time my deceased father’s old vacant business got hit by a tornado, and I had to sell off a bunch of machinery for scrap. I also kept what tools I needed, and took the rest to the flea market. Here were my buyers, haggling: twenty-seventh generation Pickens County residents who still used hand saws, and nouveau riche people who wanted genuine, wooden-handled, rusted hand saws to decorate their bonus rooms. I had people tell me that a particular skiving knife was too rusty to be worth a dollar, and people tell me that it wasn’t rusted enough to be considered quaint.

And I listened to the real sellers around me. I’m not certain, but I think one guy tried to sell off a melted down Coke bottle as the Hope diamond. I watched a crying girl stand next to her father as he sold her pony. The flea market offered up nothing but desperate sellers with no hope trying to gain hope, or buyers with the hope of finding a genuine Dave the Slave jug leaving empty-handed and distraught. If regular air was conflict, this place offered a steam room.

I listened, learned, stole, and wrote.
An Interview with George Singleton
We Wish We’d Had

The group met George Singleton in Dacusville, SC (i.e. the middle of nowhere), just past Memory Lane and around the corner from Blackie the Pig and Molly the horse, and rescued him from ice-cracked trees and his own pack of wild dogs, including Hershey who carried a club in his mouth. George’s award-winning collection of face mugs and ceramic art by his partner Glenda miraculously remains intact despite waves of dogs washing constantly through the living room. After picking up George we proceeded to his favorite research site, the Pickens County Flea Market, where we wish the following interview had taken place.

So George, where do we find the good deals?
GS: Everybody to the right’s really desperate. That’s where I’d start. Don’t go under the covered tables. That stuff’s from Taiwan.

Where are the hand grenades?
GS: We’ll get to them, but first we have to pass the shotguns, the KKK medals, and the boxes of used toiletries.

Shotguns?
GS: SLED only checks the handguns, so go get yourself a good deal.

Where do we find relief from despair?
GS: That’s under the covered tables, but you have to haggle. It will cost you more than a hand grenade.

Have you heard of the mulungeons?
GS: I think they have a booth—it’s under cover. They sell bedpanjoes.

Is it easy to find comedy at the flea market?
GS: I don’t make anything up. I simply transcribe—the signals are sent from above, or below. Hanging out with these people makes me appreciate the biodiversity of the rural South.
Where’s the coffee?

Why would anyone call a novel Novel?
GS: It made sense at the time.

What are you going to call your next book?
GS: Drinking. Or Southern Hex. Or maybe The Hex of Southern Drinking.

Why don’t you call it Sequel?
GS: Why don’t you call yourself Smartass?

Why did you become a writer?
GS: To avoid housekeeping and to pay off old drinking debts.

Do you ever feel attracted to your face jugs?
GS: Shut your face.

George then got cussed out by a vendor for making a rude comment about his high prices. We headed back to the van carrying our tap jars of honey and glitter purses. After that, George took us to a Jamaican restaurant in downtown Greenville for lunch, and we continued to make up this interview.

George, what should we eat?
GS: Try the curried goat or the oxtail. But come over here. Pick up that can and drink some of this. [He picks up a can.] Now that, my friends, is crap. It tastes terrible and it’s very thick. It also causes you to grow hair in indescribable places.

So why did you decide to write a novel after so many years of writing short stories?
GS: I got longer.

Is that a sexual reference?
GS: No, it’s existential.

George, what advice do you have for budding young authors like us?
GS: Write, write, write, and read, read, read. Then read some more. Then go live at a flea market and eat expired Little Debbie cakes. They lube up the ole synapses. Then write some more. Oh, and buy an old hand grenade. It’ll protect you from the inevitable. It’ll also protect you from the crowds of beautiful males and females who’ll follow you when you become famous. Here, give me that check—I’m buying.

How to Collect Fishing Lures
by George Singleton

Move off of the family farm, go to a state university that offers a degree in textile management, get a job at a cotton mill that will eventually fail during the Reagan years, marry a woman who will go back to college later on in life then leave you for three states south, have one son named with only initials like—VO—and try to get him to understand the importance of moving out of the textile town, get fired so that the company no longer has to pay a pension, and spend too many days sending out resumes to other failing cotton mills that have no need for a forty-seven-year-old midlevel executive. Send your son off to college and wonder what he sees in literature, history, philosophy, art, and Eastern religions.

Try not to think about your lungs looking like kabobs of half-eaten cotton candy. Go to the unemployment office in your small South Carolina town and feel worthless, useless, lost, andemasculated. Spend time watching programs that have more to do with collectible treasures and less with world, domestic, regional, or local news. Watch infomercials into the night. Go to a bookstore where too many young people hang out without touching books, find the section of antique price guides and memorize the names, photographs, and prices of jigs, topwater plugs, spinners, spoons, minnow tubes, and frog harnesses. Decide to take a scuba-diving course that won’t cost more than one (1) unemployment check. Learn to
cook and eat macaroni and cheese, spaghetti, ziti, rice, and mashed potatoes. Remember the documentary you saw on carbo-loading. Invest what extra money you don’t have into forced shallow breathing (PSB) from the mill, invest only in goggles and snorkel.

Drive to the nearest man-made lake and walk it. Step off distances. Practice at home using a yardstick so that your steps equal thirty-six (36) inches with each pace. Take extensive notes as to where men older than you fish for largemouth bass. Make a map of the place. Point out points, coves, creek mouths, beaver dams, and where the men in boats-usually the men a level above you at the cotton mill, or their sons-drop anchor or troll.

Realize that just because an antique-price guide claims that a Clothes Pin Minnow goes for two to three hundred dollars ($200-$300) doesn’t mean that anyone in Forty-Five, South Carolina, might pay that much money for it at an antique show, flea market, or yard sale. Just because someone in New York, California, or Colorado might be willing to lay down two to three thousand dollars ($2,000-$3,000) for a Flying Helgramite Type IT, manufactured by the Harry Comstock Company out of Fulton, New York, in 1883 before being bought out by Pflueger Enterprise Manufacturing Company in Akron, Ohio, doesn’t mean that everyone will offer only five bucks ($5) for the thing in Atlanta, Charleston, Charlotte, or Raleigh.

Go to the closest bars, roadhouses, and bait shacks and talk to every human being possible. Pretend to be interested in how they caught their biggest bass. Secretly tally who used live bait, who used rubber worms, and who used lures that you want.

By this time, too, it should become apparent that you should no longer tell friends or relatives about your latest ambitions. They will insist that you go to the local psychologist and take a battery of examinations ranging from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) to the Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI), with everything in between—vocational-interest tests, career-interest inventories, the John Holland Self-Directed Search, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and a dexterity test that involves pegs, washers, and caps.

You’ve already withstood these tests one long afternoon instead of standing in line at the unemployment office.

Buy an underwater flashlight, a mesh cloth bag, and some needle-nosed pliers. Take the first dive somewhere near a cache of sunken Christmas trees. After you find your first Surface Tom, King Bee Wiggie Minnow, or Hell Diver, stick it in your bag and resurface. I don’t want to make any broad generalizations or cheap jokes, but you’ll be hooked.

Go buy a johnboat immediately.

You’ll need the boat in order to go out past dusk—using the flashlight—and drop heavy objects into the water where you know men and women fish. Cement blocks work well, as do long bent pieces of rebar, old front fenders, spools of barbed wire, and certain cement statuaries (lawn jockeys). Leave these in place for at least two months before visiting the scene. What I’m saying is, be a patient farmer—harvest, sow, reharvest. If you have searched all of the likely lost, snagged, and badly knotted fishing lure regions of a particular lake, then go to another lake, map it out, talk to locals, and so on. Allow Lake Number One (#1) to repopulate itself with the bait you will find later.

Remember: Scuba diving is not an inexpensive mode of transportation. It’s better to take two or three trips down for a hundred lures than a hundred trips for a hundred lures. For those who’ve retained Pink Lung and chosen simple snorkeling, no one knows for sure about the Bends, really.

Now that you have a good collection of rare vintage fishing lures in various stages of wear, think about presentation. Stick them haphazardly in a shadowbox. Attach them to mesh bags similar to the one you use while on a pilgrimage. Gently stick them into the yardstick you own if that yardstick has some kind of maritime theme, viz., Shady Grady’s Bait ‘n’ Tackle—We’ll Give You Worms; or Gene’s Marina—All Size Slips. Either clean the lures until they look-unused and put them in a fake original box, or dirty them up more so.

There are people out there with large vacation houses who will buy the latter option. It might not be bad to purchase a few bobs, run them over with a car, then reglue them nearly together. The vacation-house people will buy anything to give themselves a sense of doing something dangerous and near- tragic when they grew up.

As did your wife three states away.

If you choose to sell off duplicates—and you will—and if a day comes when you feel a full-lunged breath release from your body for the first time since losing the job, maybe send your ex-wife a cheap Ball Bearing Spinner, plus a note saying that y’all’s son is well, and that signs of panic and danger diminish with each new morning. By this time she’ll know about your irrational hobby. Write, in detail, complete lies about snapping turtles, gar, water moccasins, a big sale of Wilcox Wiggles and the women who bought them.

Or get in the johnboat, turn off all lights, ride as fast as possible until you hit an exposed stump, and sink.

Set your alarm clock for 4:00 in the morning on Saturdays and Sundays if you live within a half-hour of a flea market. Otherwise set it accordingly. Make a Thermos of coffee the previous night. Sleep in your clothes if at all possible. In the winter, wear a watch cap. In warmer weather wear a sleeveless shirt and pants with at least one pocketful of case quarters only.

Buy a goofball cap that reads I COLLECT FISHING LURES on the front. Don’t wear a goofball cap that reads I COLLECT FISHING LURES on the front. Take along a flashlight and a bag that isn’t mesh or plastic. The people selling good old lures at a flea market see you coming with the hat, they’ll jack the price about four (4) to ten (10) times what they originally wanted. There’s been documentation. If they see a bag that they think contains lures, they’ll at least double the original asking price. You have only quarters because if someone’s asking, say, two dollars ($2) for a lure.
automatically say, “Will you take a quarter for it?”

Let’s say y’all dicker until it gets to a dollar, a fair price for a Rhodes Wooden Minnow seeing as it books between fifty ($50) and seventy-five dollars ($75). Then say you forgot to take your quarters, and pull out a twenty-dollar bill. The seller might be likely to either, (A) not sell you the lure; or (B) kill you.

Nevertheless, do not take a loaded pistol with you, especially if someone plans to tag along.

I’ll explain this later. Go alone whenever possible, of course.

Now. Get to the flea market and focus on lures. Take out the flashlight—it’ll still be dark when you arrive—and shine it on tables. Stray from people who sell figurines, baby clothes, pit bull puppies, rebuilt lawn mowers, action figures, fast-food restaurant toys and giveaways, Pez dispensers, yellowware, socks and underwear, baseball cards, chickens/rabbits/goats, heart pine furniture, shot glasses, phonograph equipment, Rottweiler puppies, used books, VCRs, computers, advertising yardsticks, and hippie decals.

Look for tables filled with fishing rods, cigar boxes, used tools, guns, and tackle boxes. Look for tables filled with a mixture of everything. Shine your light on wrinkled men who might be selling off their oxygen tanks, flippers, masks, needle-nosed pliers, and whatnot; men who’ve given up altogether on the fishing-lure collectible craze because they didn’t map out lakes, talk to old men, plot strategy, sink cement blocks, and everything else detailed in Part One of “How to Collect Fishing Lures.”

When you come across a table or display of everything from Gee-Wiz Frogs to Arrowhead Weedless Plugs, keep your beam on them for exactly one nanosecond (one-billionth of a second). Pretend that you have no interest in the fine Celluloid Minnow or the Jersey Expert. Look over at the AK-47 on the table, or the Zebco rod, ball-peen hammer, and socket-wrench sets. Feign disinterest, is what I’m saying. Go, “Oh, man, I ain’t seen one them since I grew hair south,” or something.

Say a personal mantra that the man doesn’t know what he owns. Over and over in your head say, “Quarter-quarter-quarter-quarter,” and so on.

Here’s the worst scenario: he says, “Yeah, the T.N.T. number six-nine-hundred was real popular. It’s going for upwards of seventy-five dollars on the market, but I’m only asking thirty for it.”

Flea market walking sticks

Do not walk away. Don’t nod in agreement. Don’t shake your head sideways, either. Slowly direct your flashlight’s beam into the man’s face and, using all common sense and knowledge of the human condition, measure how desperate he is. Don’t blurt out, “Will you take a quarter for it?” Maybe say, “I’ll check back with you later,” or “Good luck,” or “It’s supposed to be a nice, sunny day.”

After you have picked through all the tables—if this particular flea market has indoor booths and outdoor tables you need only concern yourself with the tables—go back to your pickup truck, turn on the overhead light, and read through the Garage/Yard Sale section of the Classifieds. Circle the ones that’ll be near your drive home. Also, look under Antiques and see if anyone sells a large quantity of vintage lures at rock-bottom prices, which won’t be there. But you have to look, seeing as you’ve gotten to the point of obsession.

Drive slowly past the front yards of strangers and make educated guesses as to whether they’ll have any lures. The formula is about the same as the flea market—if you see an inordinate amount of baby clothes heaped up on card tables, drive on. If you see a table saw and leaf blower, stop. Yard-sale lures run cheapest, but after factoring in gasoline and wear and tear on the pickup truck it might end up about the same as the sixty-two-and-a-half-cent ($0.62) average you keep at the flea markets.

It’s now seven-thirty or eight o’clock in the morning. Stop and get a six-pack of beer. Carry what lures you nearly stole and catalog them immediately. Write down name, price
you paid, and what the particular lure books for.

Open the first can of beer. Change the truck’s oil. Cut the grass. Rearrange all of your lures in alphabetical order, followed by price, followed by oldest to latest model. Watch one of those fishing programs on the same channel that showed infomercials back when you didn’t know what to do after becoming unemployed. Give your dogs a bath.

At exactly noon drive back to the flea market and find the man who wanted thirty bucks for the T.N.T. #6900. He’ll be sitting on the tailgate, probably staring at the ground. Go ahead and say, “I’ll give you five dollars for this lure.” He’ll get offended but eventually sell it, seeing as it’s exactly what it cost him to rent the table. If you want, on the drive back home, tally up what you bought and what you spent—nineteen lures for seven-sixty ($7.60) and one for five bucks ($5). That comes to $12.60 for twenty vintage lures. It comes to sixty-three cents on average, I promise.

Finally, the reason you’re alone and without a pistol is because a friend, son, spouse, or significant other is always apt to walk ahead of you, find a cheap and rare lure, hold it up and yell, “Hey, here’s what you’ve been looking for!”—which—will cause the seller to jack the price times fifty. Then you’ll have to shoot your passenger.

Prisoners can’t keep lure collections in their cells, what with the barbed hooks. So that means more for you. As always, you want more.

~ 3 ~

There will be days when you find no lures beneath the surface of natural lakes, man-made lakes, farm ponds, or slow-moving murky rivers. No one at flea markets in a tri-state area will have any on display. A traveling antique roadshow might come through the area and nobody there will have a single common lure, much less overpriced Paw Paw Spoon Belly Wobbler Minnows, Paw Paw Spinnered Plunkers, and Paw Paw Sucker Minnows. You will wonder if your chosen field of expertise has bottomed out. You will think back to the supply-and-demand lecture you heard years earlier in college. If the drought turns into a month, you’ll find yourself seeking a palm reader. On a good day she’ll tell you all about how long some scientists dedicate themselves to a specific disease, virus, or birth defect without giving up hope. On bad days she’ll laugh at you and say, “Fishing lures? You collect fishing lures? Good God, man, get a life—there are three million homeless people in America.”

It might cross your mind that idiotic dictum that goes, “Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day; teach him how to fish and he’ll eat for a lifetime.” If this occurs as a soothsayer tries to make sense out of the lines in your palm, remember this one: “Find yourself a lure and you got the beginning of a collection; carve yourself a lure and chances are some moron from New York City will think of you as a primitive artist and want to represent your work.”

Okay. It is my belief that you won’t find lures for extended periods of time because your body tells you that it needs a rest from either A) staying under water too long; or B) because you’re about to lose your temper at a flea market and thus get shot by a seller without a sense of humor or patience. It is at these times that you need to go find an old-fashioned dollar store, a five-and-dime, a Woolworth’s if they’re still in operation. Buy a bag of wooden clothespins. Buy some plastic eyeballs at a hobby-and-craft shop, and eyelets. Buy red, yellow, and green enamel car-model paint and a thin, cheap brush. Go get some three-pronged trebles at the nearest three-pronged treble outlet.

Because you own a pickup truck and have been in textile management most of your life, you will have a nice folding knife. Thin the midsections of each clothespin, between the head and the two line grippers. Whittle away. Paint the things differently, so it doesn’t come across as assembly-line work. Make spirals and polka dots. Paint racing stripes down the legs and think up cool names like JumpaToad, JumpaFrog, JumpaSkink, JumpaMander, JumpaCricket, JumpaHopper, JumpaMinnow, JumpaMouse, JumpaBlowfly, JumpaShiner, JumpaWobbler, and Junipa-Wigwag-Humdingerm-Smacker. Break off some of the legs of every other lure so you can add “Junior” to the title.

With your needle-nosed pliers, open up the treble hooks, insert the free end into an eyelet, close the circle back up, and screw the eyelet into the clothespin’s end. Always screw last.

It is too hard to paint the lure afterwards. To make an authentic homemade primitive lure might cost as much as a dime (10¢). You have two options: either go to the flea market and try to sell them for fifty bucks ($50) each, in hopes of selling one or two to men who also collect fishing lures and haven’t been able to find any of late, or for two dollars ($2) apiece, in hopes of selling the entire lot in one sweltering summer day out on the jockey lot.

I’ve done both. Because you know about men and women with a pocketful of case
quarters, it's easier to wait out for wealthy people traveling from elsewhere who think they've found a regular idiot-savant craftsman.

I'm not sure, but I think it's how Bill Gates and every televangelist got started. No matter what, do not think about your life prior to collecting and selling fishing lures. Forget that your ex-wife gave up on her wrong-headed singing or acting career and is about to marry a cattle-and-citrus tycoon down in Florida. Forget that your son writes folk songs about check dams, culverts, and the silt of humanity when he's not making a hundred grand a year getting hired out as an anti-PR idea man. Don't remind yourself that the neighbors are about to start up some kind of homeowners' association and they'll write a letter about your yard presently, seeing as when you came home from flea markets as outlined in "How to Collect Fishing Lures," Part 2, you never cut the grass.

Remember the hum and drone of the spinning room, before the government lifted sanctions, tariffs, taxes, and whatnot on Southeast Asian countries. Smell the linseed oil barely solid on wooden loom-room floors, and the older doffers, weavers, and spinners who spoke of textile-league summer baseball games as reverently as they spoke of their mothers and friends without fingers.

Think about how you don't want to be remembered merely as a human being who crunched numbers and yelled at workers for not getting yarn and cotton thread perfect.

Understand that there's something magical in a fishing lure—between two-and-a-quarter inches and five inches long, single, double, or triple-trebled, reversible metal discs and wings, with or without bucktail, propellers, belly weights, joints, week guards, head plates, side-hook hangers, and nickel finish. Revel in the mystery of how such a device could, without pheromone or promise, attract descendants of the first living creatures worth noticing.

Admire the notion of symbiosis. Think of how the lost, snagged, sunken lure needs you as much as you need the lost, snagged, sunken lure. On good days, think of yourself as a lure of some type, only half-human.