



Model Behavior Karen Graham

LONG BEFORE IT BECAME FASHIONABLE in the late 20th Century, supermodel Karen Graham picked up a fly rod. Good thing she did. Because after shooting a record 20 covers of *Vogue* magazine from 1970 to 1975 and becoming one of most sought-after faces in the world, she found a second career as a fishing guide/instructor and co-host of ESPN's *In Search of Fly Water*. Graham, who now fishes purely for her own enjoyment, spoke to *FR&R* about her fishing life, including the pleasure and pressure of being a fly-fishing pro.

Have you always fished?

I grew up in the Deep South so we didn't have trout but we did have bluegills and bass. My father loved to fish, but I didn't have a great interest in plastic-worm fishing. I'm more visual. Then, when I was in my early 20s, my brother gave me a fly rod. I read the directions that came with it and went out in my dad's boat for these little bluegills and bass and I had more fun. And I was catching more fish than my dad.

When did you find trout?

When I went back to New York to work (in modeling) I realized I wanted to learn about trout fishing. That's when I went

up to the Catskills and found out about the history of fly-fishing in America, the techniques of fly-fishing and just fell in love with fly-fishing for trout.

The Catskills were your training ground?

I lived in Manhattan because I was a model but after 10 years I gave up my apartment and lived all the time up in the mountains. I was close to the Esopus; that's where I learned to fish for trout, learned entomology and casting technique. Of course, I fished all the famous trout streams—Beaverkill, Willowemoc, Neversink and East Branch. The Catskills are also where my friend Bert Darrow taught me the intricacies and the finesse of the sport.

And then you two opened a fly-fishing school.

I met Bert at Trout Unlimited and Bert decided he wanted to open a fishing school. And I had met Joan Wulff and admired everything she did on the Beaverkill so we started a fly-fishing school up by the Esopus. I really did it more of an avocation because I was retiring from modeling and the next thing I knew it became a really successful little school.

Is that when that well-known photo of you in your fly-fishing gear was taken?

I had been under contract with Estée Lauder for 18 years and then they called me back to do a line of skincare products around 1999. So I was ready to get back in the evening gowns and be photographed but they said, We just want you doing what you do today. So they came up and photographed me fly-fishing and ran it as an international ad.

Fly fishermen everywhere must have loved that.

In the photo I was wearing my New York guide pin and it piqued the interest of the fly-fishing world. I got a phone call from a production company that was putting together a show for ESPN and I was accepted as the show's co-host. I think I probably learned more about fly-fishing than I ever dreamed. I was working with outstanding guides all over the world—Tierra del Fuego, New Zealand or Iceland or wherever. I thought one exciting career was enough and then I found out I had a second one.

So why fly-fishing?

I didn't become a passionate fly fisher till I discovered trout; it's so involved, that made it fascinating. Everywhere I went there was a different twist—a different nymph, a different cast. Every river was a like a new challenge. Plus, this all happened at the end of my modeling career and I was too young to do nothing. I just went up to my place in the Catskills, and that's when I realized how much I love standing in a river. That's where I found my peace and found myself.

Where would you go if you had one day to fish?

I'd go back to very special place at the headwaters of the North Platte River in Wyoming. I use to live there and I know where the spawning beds are, where the eagles' nests are and where to look for mountain-lion tracks. It's the whole river, not just the fish. It's just a divine place because it was my place and it was remote and I was all alone. ✦