



DAVE BRAGONIER
(Retired Cody Game Warden)

THE PARSONS' HEIRLOOM

One evening I was patrolling the Little Big Horn River in Sheridan County. As I approached a bend in the river, I saw a person jump up from a crouched position as if he had been hit in the rear with a bull whip. It seemed as if this action corresponded with his looking in my direction. He then scurried to a location nearby where a woman was preparing a picnic supper. A child and a dog were playing close by.

As I approached them, I asked, "How is the fishing?" as a game warden sometimes says when he approaches fishermen. "Oh," the man says, "we are not fishing. We are just enjoying the evening and are about to eat. Won't you join us?" He then introduced himself as the Reverend James Streeter of the Southern Baptist Church in Wyola, Montana. He also introduced me to his wife and son, and asked me again if I would like to join them for supper. I thanked him, but said that I had already eaten and I must get going.

I started down the river and arrived at the spot where the parson had jumped up. At that location, I found an ancient, split-bamboo fly pole and hand wind reel with the line in the water. I had just brought in the line with hook and worm attached when I heard a heavenly voice behind me say, "Well, it looks like I'm caught!" The preacher could see that he might lose the pole, and told me the pole had been handed down several generations.

The Reverend Streeter paid his fine, got his pole back, and went back to preaching, if not practicing, the Ten Commandments.

IN THE EYES OF THE LORD

I was patrolling the Tongue River just west of Dayton one afternoon when I observed two fishermen standing in mid-stream on the Adamson ranch. As I approached them, I saw that one was a middle-aged man and the other was a young woman. Both looked like they stepped right out of the Orvis catalog, decked out from head to toe in the latest fly fisherman attire. When I asked to see their fishing licenses, I was immediately advised in an indignant tone that he was the rector of the old Church of England, in Canada, and he didn't need a license! And neither did his daughter! Out of curiosity, I asked him if he needed to get permission to trespass on private property. He advised me that he could fish any place he wished in Canada, and assumed he could do the same in the United States.

When I told him he was in trouble if he actually did not have a license, he acted like he couldn't believe it. He could finally see that I was dead serious and then said that he didn't have any money to pay a fine. When I told him we were going to the courthouse to pay the bond, he suggested that I take his eighteen year old daughter with me and he would follow. Now this young lady was very comely, but I could see what the conniving father was willing to try to get out of his predicament.

As the man of God and I headed into town in my pickup, followed by the daughter in their vehicle, he repeated several times, "In the eyes of the Lord, I am not guilty." The judge saw otherwise.

THE WAYWARD PRIEST

While patrolling on horseback around Bridger Lake in the Teton Wilderness one summer day, I saw a fisherman on the south shore. As I approached him, he hastily beat a retreat into the nearby pines, dragging a stringer of trout with him. I soon caught up with him and got off my horse to check his fish and his license.

When I asked him for his license, he said, "I left it in my car at the trail head at Turpin Meadows," in a slightly Irish brogue. This happened to be about thirty miles on foot or horseback from our location. I then asked to see some sort of identification, and he said that he had none. I continued to press him for some I.D. and he found a gasoline credit card slip in his shirt pocket, which he handed to me. On the slip was the name, Father John O'Reilly, and the address, Salt Lake City. I then asked him if he was in fact a catholic priest. He assured me that he was indeed.

I observed that the man of the cloth hesitated when I asked him for the location of the agency where he had obtained his license. I knew immediately that there was good reason for this hesitation because everyone knows that priests don't lie. Even knowing this, I still reminded him there was a big difference between having a license and forgetting to bring it, and not having purchased a license at all. Somewhat apologetic, I asked him again, "Do you have a fishing license?" To this he said, "No," as he hung his head. I advised him that it wasn't nice to lie, to which he said, "I know, I know. I have been asking forgiveness!"