



# Mick Thill's Gift to all of us who Fish

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**"I have long judged him the single best angler that I've ever fished with."**

— Doug Stange, Editor in Chief,

*A tribute to Mick Thill from some of the anglers and fishing industry people who knew him best.*

Mick Thill was born in Chicago but grew up, for the most part, in and around London, England. Not only did he assimilate into European culture, he excelled, becoming an accomplished soccer player and competitive fisherman from an early age.

He was gifted at European float fishing, winning competitive matches against men while he was still a boy. Beyond that, he had a creative streak that imagined refinements to ages-old fishing techniques and tools. Returning to his birth land to live much of his adult life, he found it teeming with possibilities in our seemingly endless waterways. Water, water everywhere, and nobody knew how many fish they could be catching by using modern floats crafted for American waters!

He feverishly made what he called modern American floats, and many of us at MidWest Outdoors and throughout the fishing industry ran into Mick because he made meetings commence in the same way he did everything: with a head-on torrent of enthusiasm that sometimes made him seem possessed.

He made things happen that others couldn't, because he joyfully trampled initial skepticism like an entire litter of puppies bowling over an open-armed child, then licking it into submission. He knew the angler you could become and was going to bend your ear whether you had time to listen or not.

Mick Thill changed our fishing for the better by making better tools and showing us how to use them. He left us to study his life's work and continue fishing with his floats when he passed away on Nov. 18 at his home in London, where he had returned to live with his sister and enjoy his later years.

To celebrate his contributions and one-of-a-kind character, we asked our friends who fished with him, wrote about him, and competed alongside him to tell us a story about how Mick Thill impacted them, both personally and professionally.

Here are their memories. Stitched together, they help us better understand and appreciate the passion and brilliance Mick happily and relentlessly gave to literally anyone who wanted it. Let's sit for a spell along the bank and study the water's reflection, to better see what he wanted to show us.

### **Dan Brozowski, *MidWest Outdoors* columnist**

My first encounter with Mick Thill was during one of the Chicagoland sport shows. I can still see him rummaging through a rather worn rucksack loaded with an unorganized mixture of loose floats, small ice-fishing rods, fishing line, plastic dinnerware, bagels and several cans of baked beans, which I later found out was Mick's normal sport show diet.

For the next hour or so with the open bean can in hand, I received a float-fishing tutorial that not only changed my success on the water, but altered my fishing from an enjoyable pastime to a pursuit of passion. Through Mick's mentoring, my float-fishing abilities skyrocketed, leading to a pro staff position with Lindy/Thill Gold Medal Floats, an invite to become a member of the 1994 U.S. team and fishing in competitions in England, to my writing focusing on bank fishing here in *MidWest Outdoors*.

While the accolades for Mick's success as a tackle innovator and medal-winning match fisherman (including induction into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame) are more than well deserved, the memory I cherish most is that we were friends.

### **Doug Stange, Editor in Chief, *In-Fisherman***

Mick believed he could teach the world to fish and he was willing to do so on a grand scale, or one angler at a time, as I saw the first afternoon I spent with him fishing for panfish on a local canal in May, 1986. He showed me his style of fishing

with a light pole, light line, and small float. A youngster fishing, and not catching, nearby with heavy tackle walked over to watch. In 10 minutes, Mick had the boy catching fish after fish. The boy was hooked and Mick was a happy man. One of the best “match anglers” of all time, in Europe or in North America, I have long judged him the single best angler that I’ve ever fished with.

## **Jeff ‘Kolo’ Kolodzinski, Brand Manager — Fishing, Johnson Outdoors**

Mick Thill’s angling passion knew no bounds. No match too tough, no odds too great, no lack of funding would prevent him from pursuing his dream of teaching America to fish. That unbridled passion sometimes ruffled feathers, but Mick’s heart was always in the right place. He was driven to teach people to fish!

By the Grace of God and the support of Mick Thill, I got my start in the fishing biz. Over the years, I traveled and fished with Mick in 7 World Championships and assorted other matches in Canada and the U.S. I will forever be grateful for Mick’s investment in America and in me.

Had Mick’s passion, knowledge and energy combined with the internet, his name and match fishing would be known from sea to shining sea.

## **Phil Piscitello, *MidWest Outdoors* columnist**

I met Mick Thill in the mid 1980s. I was attending a two-day open-house seminar at Petersen Marine in Arlington Heights, Illinois. They had a huge tent set up and an impressive seminar lineup with the likes of Babe Winkelman, Joe Bucher, Spence Petros, and local pros like Tom Mazur, and Don Prescott.

Also, there was a gentleman on the roster by the name of Mick Thill. He was talking about a deadly float-fishing system brought back from England. He introduced me to match fishing and high-tech poles used in the technique. We hit it off from the beginning, and I purchased some floats he had with him.

Over the years I got into guiding and tournament fishing. Mick was excited to

teach me his various float-fishing techniques that would improve my success, and gave me a copy of his three float-fishing videos, which he autographed--I will keep them forever.

Mick would host these amazing “fishing” dinner parties at his house in Skokie (he was a great cook as well). It was at these parties that I got to meet the likes of Walt Matan, Dan Ferris, Mark Strand, Tom Mazur, and members of the Chicago Bank Anglers Club. I would usually be the last one to leave, as my thirst for knowledge was great.

We would go out to dinner from time to time at one of Mick’s favorite restaurants in Evanston, Davis Street Fish Market. We struck a great barter arrangement: I would maintain his vehicles in exchange for a bunch of his Gold Medal floats.

Before Mick went back to England he was designing a new series of floats. I was fortunate enough to get a set before he left.

I was devastated to hear of his recent passing. He was a legend in the art of float fishing, a great instructor, and a great friend. I write about and use his floats to this day.

## **Pat Burmeister, World Ice-fishing individual Gold Medalist**

I met Mick Thill in 1988 when he was Founder and Captain of the first-ever USA Junior Match Fishing team. I fished with Mick in two Junior World Championships, one adult Championship, and three times in the World Ice-fishing Championships.

Mick was the brainchild behind forming a match fishing team for the United States. I remember Mick as an avid angler who had a great passion for sharing his knowledge with others and was a natural teacher of the sport he loved. He would take time to talk fishing with anyone who would listen.

Mick taught me many tricks about finesse fishing with floats. I have many fond memories of my time with Mick, but one of the most interesting was at the World

Championships in Bulgaria--I remember him storing all the team's Euro Larva (25 pounds of maggots) in our hotel room bathtub!

## **Jerry Gibbs, Fishing Editor Emeritus, Outdoor Life**

I met my presumed daughter-in-law in our house basement while tending a cooler of bait leeches FedExed in by Mick Thill. The young lady left shrieking. Mick arrived the next day and off we went on another adventure and another story that would bear the stamp of what I'd been calling "Michael's Magic." Mick took America's simplest form of fishing and brought it to a new level of sophistication using skills he'd honed to championship level in match fishing competition across the UK. He turned our passive bait-and-bobber game into sport stamped by presentations that make aggressive-finesse no contradiction.

Mick taught countless kids and long-time anglers how to catch more fish—economically and easily. Our trips ranged from Midwestern ice to pressured multi-species New England lakes to the saltwater Florida flats. He was a wizard of adaptability in all cases and could leave the Energizer Bunny eating dust. Mick loved people and loved to talk, but not simply about fishing. He was well grounded on international travel, history, and food, the latter of which could make him euphoric both in discussion and in the eating. He was one of a kind--a funny, talented guy who is not going to be replaced.

## **Ken Schultz, Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Famer and author**

I was very impressed with Mick, his knowledge, his fishing skills and his enthusiasm for sport fishing, and I enjoyed talking with him. I've met a lot of passionate anglers, but Mick was at the top of the passion scale, and a consummate promoter and teacher. I'm sure I exasperated him by arguing that many of the Euro techniques for catching shy-biting fish were not going to take a major hold in North America until our fish became as educated as European species and until we had a less diverse pool of species and waters to fish from. He would say, "yeah, but this works," and I would say, "yeah, but most of our fish are

more aggressive than yours and so far we can catch them without having to be as refined.” Nevertheless, he opened our eyes and broadened our angling perspective, which itself is quite a legacy.

## **Dan Basore, *MidWest Outdoors* columnist**

When Mick Thill arrived in the Chicago area, our first impression was, “here’s a unique fisherman with a foreign way of fishing that makes us want to learn more.” Over the years his long rods, keep nets and especially his bobbers, that he referred to as floats, became more familiar to we who fished, worked at sport shows, conducted kids fishing programs and were part of the outdoor media.

Soon we found ourselves trading old “dumb” bobbers for ones Thill introduced us to. No kids we hosted for fishing sessions were, or are, allowed to approach the water until they witness a demonstration of his smart bobbers versus the dumb ones most use.

Children and adults were shown how a small 1/16-ounce jig with a wax worm or soft plastic paired with an easily-adjustable Thill float actually provides information that leads to catching fish. If the bait is on the bottom or resting on underwater weeds, the Thill float lays flat on the water. If a fish bites while swimming up, this smart bobber lies on its side, indicating fish on!

In 1999, Lindy-Little Joe acquired Thill Fishing Tackle. Then in 2008, PRADCO, which collects tackle companies like I collect old tackle, purchased Lindy, Little Joe and Thill. Jon Thelen, Brand Manager for PRADCO, shared that independent reviewers state that ‘Thill’ is far and away the most recognized balsa float brand, by both consumers and the fishing industry. From big chain stores to independent tackle shops, Thill products are top sellers.

This past summer, PRADCO opened a new production facility in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The company still uses high-quality balsa and is committed to using American labor, which is popular with customers and has the bonus of maintaining quality. The company does an impressive job of shipping and

servicing customers, which is helping to continue building loyalty and growth.

All that to say this: Mick Thill will be remembered for a long, long time.

### **Johnny Wilkins, Longtime *MidWest Outdoors* contributor**

Describing Mick Thill is simple and as complex as the man himself. I met him at a sports show near Chicago, and in short order he changed my fishing and thereby my life. I watched him change fishing into catching for a lot of people.

He was both odd and cool. At that show where I met him, Mick waved a 40-foot pole across the aisle (well down the entire row of booths and over the heads of everyone in them). A couple months later, in March, he invited me to fish a local pond and I landed 6 fish over 4 pounds, one after another, with his help. He said, “impressive; usually they lose one or two.”

He invited me to fish a local tourney, at which I won my section following his advice and using his gear. Over the years, I traveled with him to Canada, Portugal, Japan, Belgium, Italy, and other destinations, fishing for My Captain on Team USA.

He was a genius with a float and live bait, and he forever changed my fishing.

### **Dan Galusha, *MidWest Outdoors* columnist**

Mick Thill and I became acquainted after publication of an article I wrote in 1982 for *MidWest Outdoors* about him and Team USA. He called from London to thank me, and tell me that it was the first positive article written in the U.S. about his sport of competition fishing with floats.

The call went on for more than two hours, and was followed by many more until he arrived in 1986. At that time I helped him make contacts within the fishing industry, including the people at *MidWest Outdoors*. During that same trip to America, we went fishing at a lake in Colchester, Illinois, where he caught what he said were the largest green sunfish he had ever caught anywhere in the world.

He took photos of the fish for an article he was writing for publications in England and Europe.

The enthusiasm and level of energy Mick showed about his “modern-day float fishing” was unbelievable. I would see aisles at sport shows completely blocked by people trying to speak to him after he presented a seminar. Better yet, anyone who wanted to talk to him was treated as if he had known them all his life, and he would make sure that the seed of his ideas for the sport were firmly planted in every person he met.

One story that many people don't know about him is that in the '80s he was voted by a French women's magazine as the best-looking fisherman in Europe. A full-page photo of Mick graced the article. This upset some of the Frenchmen. In fact, during a competition some of the members of the French team were heard whistling (a sign of disapproval) at Mick.

No matter what came his way, he was the same person I met on the first day. I've lost a good friend, and the fishing community has lost one of its strongest supporters and ambassadors.

*Do you want to learn more about pioneers of recreational fishing? Check out the February issue of MidWest Outdoors, available the first full week of February at the [newsstand](#) or by subscribing on our [website](#).*



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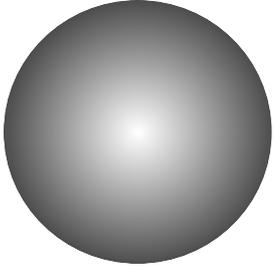
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