



Jill Grieve – Carrara Fiere 24 Gennaio 2016 – Italy

How fly fishing can be therapy for both body and mind

I am here today at the kind invitation of the Recreational Fisherman's Alliance to introduce you to a wonderful charity called Casting for Recovery.

Firstly, by way of introduction, my name is Jill Grieve and I work in London for a British fieldsports organisation called the Countryside Alliance. We have a membership of 100,000 and represent those members at Parliament, in the media and at European level on issues affecting the lifestyles and livelihoods of country people.

Much of this work involves the foxhunting debate, which in the UK always generates a huge amount of political heat. We also represent the interests of game shooting and conservation, especially regarding Britain's beautiful and unique grouse moors.

As well as defending rural interests, however, my role involves the promotion of rural interests. I run an award scheme – the Rural Oscars - which celebrate slow food, farming, rural business and traditional community values. It is also my great privilege to promote fly fishing and I administer Casting for Recovery for the Countryside Alliance. Casting for Recovery is without question our most positive project, because it brings together people from town and country alike and gives them the opportunity to enjoy our beautiful landscapes and the magical sport of flyfishing.

Casting for Recovery actually started out in the United States of America in 1996, so it is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. In the UK and Ireland it has been running since 2007, so we are quite well-established and growing every year. In the UK the programme was started by a lady called Sue Hunter who had had breast cancer on two separate occasions and had taken a friend's advice to try fly fishing. Initially sceptical, Sue then became passionate about fishing and in a few years was captain of the England Ladies Fly Fishing Team.

She heard about Casting for Recovery in the United States and she and her England team mate Sue Shaw then approached the Countryside Alliance for funding back in 2006. We wrote a cheque then and there, instantly appreciating what could be achieved. Sue and Sue ran the project alongside a committed team of volunteers until last year. Sue Hunter has now retired to Ireland – unsurprisingly to do more fishing – but is still a huge supporter of the project. Running Casting for Recovery on a voluntary basis alongside demanding full time jobs became too huge a commitment for Sue and Sue, so the Countryside Alliance stepped in to administer the project. Luckily we still have the support of that founding team. Sue Shaw is still able to offer advice and guidance as well as volunteer at a few retreats each year. In fact, the generosity of the angling community continues to be a cornerstone of Casting for Recovery. We have long been supported by Orvis, as well as the beautiful venues across the UK. Most importantly, the casting instructors and guides who give so much of their time and experience to make it all work are still on board. I



Jill Grieve – Carrara Fiere 24 Gennaio 2016 – Italy

am delighted that Sally and Tony Pizii are here today. Sally and Tony not only offer tuition and entomology expertise, their support and care for the ladies on retreat, many of them extremely vulnerable, makes a huge difference and really reinforces the case that fishing is good for both body and mind.

The programme also runs in Canada as well as in Australia and New Zealand and it is an extremely exciting prospect that Casting for Recovery has now been noticed here in Italy.

The statistics in the UK speak for themselves, and sadly most people know someone with breast cancer. More than 50,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year in the UK. That is one woman every 10 minutes. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the UK – 31% of cancers diagnosed in women are breast cancer.

The good news, however, is that treatments are improving all the time and the outlook is better now than it ever has been. But that hammer blow of a diagnosis is still something too many women have to cope with, and Casting for Recovery is something that we feel can help.

We have on staff medics from the Royal Marsden, a world leading cancer hospital in London, and they are extremely enthusiastic about the benefits Casting for Recovery can offer ladies in enabling them to take control and move forward.

What is Casting for Recovery?

Casting for Recovery is a brilliantly simple idea. It brings together women who currently have, or have had, breast cancer. We welcome them to a free retreat at a beautiful rural location where counselling and medical support are enhanced by fly fishing tuition. The aim is to help the ladies to move forward.

Casting for Recovery is a medical project with fly fishing as part of a holistic treatment. The fly fishing, however, is the unique part that really captures the imagination and takes the project to another level, far beyond that of a cancer support group. Not only does the gentle movement help ladies post-surgery, especially since no strength is needed to be able to cast, but the chance to be in the open air with some time and space is invaluable. You will also know that, when concentrating on casting, your mind is full and you aren't thinking about anything else. This concentration helps ladies think about something other than their illness and is a welcome diversion.

Many of our participants come to us from busy family lives in the city and they never get a chance to relax or have any time to themselves. Needless to say most of them have also never tried fly fishing. I am not sure about how it is viewed in Italy but in

Jill Grieve – Carrara Fiere 24 Gennaio 2016 – Italy

the UK, fly fishing has always been regarded as more of a male past time. A lot of ladies come to us saying that their husbands fish but until they arrived at a retreat it had never occurred to them to try.

Once introduced to it, for many of the ladies, fishing becomes an escape. We are delighted to count international fly fishing team members who first started fishing because of Casting for Recovery – one has fished competitively for Ireland, one for Wales and one for England.

The retreats

The retreats take place over two and a half days, with fly fishing tuition, medical advice and counselling all playing their part in helping the ladies move forward from their illness. The finale of each retreat is a full morning's guided fly fishing where each lady has her own volunteer guide to help and support her efforts.

The changes in the ladies over the course of the retreat can be dramatic. Participants are at various points in their journey back to health, and with that in mind we make the experience as supportive as possible. It is extremely rewarding for us all to hear the shrieks and whoops of delight from the ladies as they fish. Some arrive thinking they would like to catch but then release the rainbow trout they have caught, but often, when they hook one, they decide they would like to take it home for dinner, often as proof to their husband that they have been successful! Either way is fine with us, and ladies are usually permitted to take two fish each. We are lucky in that our retreat venues stock their waters before we arrive to increase each lady's chance of catching a fish. That catch seems to encapsulate the experience for the participants.

Several of the venues we visit have been friends from the start, instantly understanding the value of the project and the therapeutic role fly fishing and the countryside can play. Running a Casting for Recovery retreat has very specific requirements. A venue needs accommodation and dining facilities for more than 20 people – the lady participants and the staff, all of whom are in residence for the entire retreat. It needs to have a fishing lake on site or very close by, and there needs to be space for casting practice as well as space for counselling and relaxation exercises. Also, on the final morning, we need a fishing guide for each of our ladies so that they can enjoy a full morning's guided fishing.

The retreats we visit include Kimbridge on the Test in Hampshire, a world famous fly fishing destination. We also visit Mount Falcon, a beautiful estate on the west coast of Ireland, and Forbes of Kingennie, near Dundee in Scotland. All of these places are beautiful, family run, relaxed, friendly, discreet and able to allow the ladies to take time out for themselves.

Jill Grieve – Carrara Fiere 24 Gennaio 2016 – Italy

We don't take more than 14 ladies on any one retreat so that each retreat can be intimate and enable friendships to be formed easily. Some ladies will be shy and find large groups daunting, especially considering the stress of diagnosis and treatment they have been through. Every member of the Casting for Recovery team is mindful of that fact and everything is done with the ladies in mind – we make it clear when they arrive that if they want to rest, if they want to miss a session or if they simply want to sit by the water and read, then that is ok. The retreat is for all for them.

Each retreat is staffed by a team of “pink ladies” (and some pink gentlemen) consisting of a medic, a counsellor and a team of qualified fly casting instructors who also take the ladies through entomology. The rhythm of the retreat is fishing, medical session, fishing, counselling session – using the fishing side as a balance and form of therapy and fun to settle the emotions that may have been stirred up in a group session.

The medical side of the retreat involves counselling, support and the latest advice, with booklets donated by a leading British Breast Cancer Charity, Breast Cancer Care. The booklets are entitled “Moving Forward” and that is very much what we try to help the ladies do. The medical and counselling team work together to lead the ladies in discussions including the physical changes breast cancer brings, the impact on relationships and work, ongoing lymphedema problems and, of course, the very real fear that the cancer may come back. We can't give any guarantees or promises but we are always positive, open and honest with the ladies and encourage them to seek one-on-one counselling if they feel it will help them.

The fly fishing side of the retreat

The casting instruction starts at the very beginning. Soon after they arrive on retreat, just after the obligatory cup of tea, the ladies are given a casting demonstration, usually by Sally or sometimes our host, on the lawn. This demonstration does two things – it brings the ladies together in a lighthearted way to help settle any anxiety they may be feeling about the unfamiliar environment, while also familiarising them with the action of casting, helping them visualise what they will be doing the next day. We then kit them out with waterproof trousers and jacket, a vest, hat and a reel bag, the contents of which are explained to them. It is always a great moment as the ladies try on their kit for the first time as it helps them feel like fisherwomen, and for many of them this is so removed from their reality that they find it hilarious and can't resist a selfie or two.

The next day ladies are shown how to put together a fly rod, reel and line and are taken through a simple bit of knot tying. They tie a piece of wool to their line so that they can start to practice casting on grass. The ladies are then split into groups of three or four and taken through the roll cast, practising, asking questions and getting the feel of the action. There are two practice sessions on the Saturday, helping the ladies not only enjoy the process and improve their technique, but also to look

Jill Grieve – Carrara Fiere 24 Gennaio 2016 – Italy

forward to their morning on the water on the Sunday, fishing for real. To show them how to respond to a take, one instructor takes a rod while another pretends to be a fish on the end of the line, being played and running around for the ladies' amusement. The ladies also have a session of entomology, with the casting instructors pond dipping for bugs and putting them into jars so that the ladies can see first-hand what trout eat and how the fishing flies mimic real insect life.

On the Sunday morning the volunteer guides bring an extra dimension to the retreat with their kindness, enthusiasm and passion for fishing. Many of the guides are male and most know someone who has been affected by breast cancer, so are extremely empathetic. The casting team briefs them and reminds them to help and support their ladies, not to take over, however tempted they may be, and to be encouraging of their efforts, which they always are. The laughter and cheering on that final morning as ladies catch their first fish, often in challenging weather conditions, brings the whole retreat together. In fact, asking them to stop and come in for lunch is usually the most difficult task as they just want to carry on fishing.

What never fails to amaze me is the power that fly fishing has. Many of the ladies arrive on retreat feeling nervous and not quite sure what they have signed up to. They leave feeling that they have gained a new skill and new friends and been through a transformative process that will help them move forward. They also laugh a lot, and that in itself is its own kind of therapy too.

As fishermen and women I am sure you will empathise with the role fishing plays in reducing stress and anxiety. You will also understand the fellowship that fly fishing brings. The ladies go from being strangers to being friends within 48 hours and it is a relief for many of them to form friendships around something beyond their breast cancer – the positive experience of fly fishing provides that.

What next?

You have a sport which you are passionate about and you have a beautiful country, so why not share it and develop Casting for Recovery in Italy?

When I told Casting for Recovery in America that I had been invited to speak to you today they were enthusiastic. After 20 years of hard work they now operate in every state and support thousands of women each year. They are thrilled to think that their simple idea could take root over here and would be happy to speak to you about how to do it. Similarly we would be delighted to help you.

We have found that we have had to adapt the programme slightly from the American blueprint to reflect the British reserved attitude and it pays to be mindful of the culture we are operating in, so while the course I have outlined works well for us, it may be that you would need to adapt it for women in Italy. The important services that the



Jill Grieve – Carrara Fiere 24 Gennaio 2016 – Italy

Casting for Recovery brand should always offer are support for women with breast cancer and the introduction to fly fishing in a beautiful setting.

The European Parliament confirms that breast cancer is the leading cause of death in European women aged 35 to 59, so it is sadly true that there are no shortage of ladies who could benefit from what the Casting for Recovery model can offer.

What is very clear is that Casting for Recovery is a magical form of therapy. From the ladies who have had breast cancer to the volunteers who give so much time to the programme, it is a positive force and we are delighted to introduce it to you today.