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2026 Robert Traver Fly-Fishing Writing Award

New Winner Announced

The John D. Voelker Foundation and the American Museum of Fly Fishing (AMFF) are pleased to announce a new winner of the 2026 Robert Traver Fly-Fishing Writing Award: **"The Goddess of Compassion, Holding Open the Door" by Steve Duda of Seattle, Washington.**

The previously announced winner was disqualified due to violation of our policy prohibiting AI-generated writing. We congratulate our most deserving winner and deeply regret the circumstances that led to the disqualification.

"The Goddess of Compassion, Holding Open the Door" is a refreshing personal contemplation on river rocks collected while fly fishing, told with humor, curiosity, and quiet lyricism. According to our judges, it embodies the Traver Award criteria by celebrating the joy of fly fishing, personal and philosophical experience, humor, and appreciation of the environs where trout are found.

"For me, fly fishing has always been a way into stories about places, people, history, and the things we only notice when we're out there—the stuff that helps us understand the world and,

maybe, become a little more human in it," Duda said. "To have this work recognized by the Traver Award means a great deal to me."

The winning entry earns a $2,500 prize and is available to read on the American Museum of Fly Fishing's website at amff.org/traver-winners-2026/ and the Voelker Foundation website at www.voelkerfoundation.com. The story will also be published in the Winter 2027 issue of the *American Fly Fisher*, the journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Steve Duda is the former editor of *The Flyfish Journal* and author of *River Songs: Moments of Wild Wonder in Fly Fishing*, winner of a Silver Independent Publisher Book Award, and a finalist for the Washington State Book Award, Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards, and Banff Mountain Book Competition. His next book, *We Only Arrive*, will be published by Mountaineers Books in fall 2027. His writing has appeared in *Rolling Stone, The Fretboard Journal, Seattle Weekly, San Francisco Bay Guardian,* and other publications. A founding editor of *Boise Weekly*, Duda is currently Head of Fish Tales at Patagonia and lives in Seattle.

The Traver Award judges also bestowed Honorable Mention recognition on **"The Big Bang Theory" by Tim Schulz** of Houghton, Michigan, which is available on the American Museum of Fly Fishing and Voelker Foundation websites. Honorable mention writers receive a $250 prize.

The 2026 competition drew a field of 77 stories and essays. Entries were judged anonymously, resulting in seven finalists. The other four finalists were:

"Falling Scales" by Genevieve Bentz, Bethesda, MD

"Hands and Fish" by Henry Hughes, Monmouth, OR

"Hatches of the Mind" by David Lynch, Concord, MA

"The Gorge" by Norm Richter, Lexington, MA

The Traver Award is named after Robert Traver, pen name of the late John D. Voelker, author of *Trout Madness, Trout Magic, Anatomy of a Fisherman*, the 1958 best seller *Anatomy of a Murder*, and the fine historical novel *Laughing Whitefish*. Judge Voelker also served on the Michigan Supreme Court as its 74th justice from 1956 to 1960. A collection of Voelker's finest "yarns" and observations about fishing was published posthumously in 2001 by Nick Lyons under the title *Traver on Fishing*.

A new anthology of Traver Award stories from 2008 through 2025 titled ***Trout Do Not Lie*** will be released November 3, 2026, by Stackpole Books/Globe Pequot. Two earlier anthologies of Traver Award winners, finalists, and other stories have been published: *In Hemingway's Meadow* (2009) and *Love Story of the Trout* (2010).

The Traver Award was created in 1994 to encourage and recognize "distinguished original stories or essays that embody the implicit love of fly-fishing, respect for the sport, and the natural world in which it takes place." The winning story or essay must demonstrate high literary values in one or more of these three categories:

—The joy of fly-fishing: personal and philosophic experience

—Ecology: knowledge and protection of the natural world

—Humor: piscatorial friendships and fun on the water

The Voelker Foundation and the American Museum of Fly Fishing joined forces in 2018 to administer the Traver Award and publish the winner in the AMFF journal. For more information, see www.voelkerfoundation.com and www.amff.org.

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