



KICKIN' BACK

SHIP SHAPE

# CAST AWAY

A TV icon remembers fishing with Dad

BY M.B. ROBERTS

"GINGER OR MARY ANN?"

Blame it on re-runs. *Gilligan's Island*, the TV sitcom that featured these two classic female characters, has been off the air for nearly 40 years, but guys still love to ask each other this question. The answer, it seems, is almost always: Mary Ann. Definitely Mary Ann.

Dawn Wells, the actress who played Mary Ann, laughs off the compliment of being singled out decades later — at age 68 — as an object of desire. "People aren't talking about me!" she says. "They just loved the character I played."

But what if guys knew that Wells has been an enthusiastic fly fisherman for most of her life? Those polls might just turn unanimous.

Dawn Wells was born in Reno, Nevada. When she was 9, her father began taking her on fishing trips to the Teton Mountains in Wyoming and Idaho. During the time they spent together on the river, they forged a close bond, and a love for fishing was passed from one generation to another.

"I remember sitting in the front of the boat, and I'd slap the water and the fish would disappear," Wells says. "But my father caught one every time he put the rod in! I'd get frustrated

and he'd say, 'There's more to fishing than catching.' And that's so true! It's about communication with nature and being out in the solitude. Fishing restores something in the soul, I think."

According to Wells, the lessons she learned on the water gave her more than just an impressive right-handed cast and an ability to select just the right fly from the tackle box. Learning to fish with her dad gave Wells confidence that she carries to this day.

"He always said I could do anything I set my mind to," Wells says. "I'd say, 'Daddy, I don't want to tie this,' and he'd say, 'Ah! You

can do that!' From the time I was a little girl I always thought I could do anything anybody else could do."

Although they dabbled in other types of angling — such as deep sea fishing — mostly father and daughter spent their time fly casting for rainbow trout on the Snake, Green and New Fork Rivers near Jackson Hole, Wyo.

"Fly fishing is an art," Wells says. "It's a challenge between you and the fish. To me, waiting for fish to swim by and bite your hook at the bottom of the water is really boring. Fly fishing is more challenging."

Although like most anglers today, Wells almost exclusively practices catch and release, in the '50s she and her father always fried up their catch on the banks of the river.

"We'd stop and cook the trout right after we caught them," she says. "We'd gut the fish on the stream and put the cast iron frying pan over the bonfire. And we used real butter! It was the best thing ever."

Wells' father, a real estate developer who once owned the Las Vegas Thunderbird Hotel, passed away in 1967, the same year *Gilligan's Island* went off the air. Wells spent the next 25 years acting in dozens of theater productions including the national touring company of "They're Playing Our Song," and TV shows including a stint as Alex Trebek's assistant on *High Rollers* and appearances on *Love Boat*, *ALF* and *Baywatch*.

Wells made little time to fish over the years until she took a trip back to Idaho in 1994. "I thought, why haven't I been back here?" she says. "This is the place my soul was restored as a kid. It's total tranquility."

So, Wells bought a ranch in Driggs, Idaho, where she runs Dawn Wells' Film Actors Boot Camp, a workshop for actors to learn practical tricks of the trade. Partially inspired by her return to the streams of Idaho, she produced and co-starred in a fishing show, *Dawn Wells' Reel Adventures*, that aired in Canada in 1997.

Although the show took her to exotic spots in Iceland, Scotland, and Canada, perhaps her favorite episode included a visit to the Teton where she fished with her dad.

"I love it here," she says. "There's nothing but quiet. And memories."

FOR MORE INFO on fly fishing in the Teton, contact Jackson Hole Central Reservations at (800) 544-3582 or [Jacksonhole.net](http://Jacksonhole.net).

For more on Dawn Wells' Film Actors Boot Camp, visit [dawnwells.com](http://dawnwells.com)

Tip: When fishing the Snake River tributaries of Pacific Creek, the Hoback or the Greys River for cut-throat, rainbow or brown trouts, try a blue wing olive fly.