

Lacey Gee's Gimp

This little-known fly is a modern classic. It's easy to tie, and the trout love it. What's not to like?

IF I ASKED WHAT YOU KNOW about Lefty Kreh or Bob Clouser, you could probably tell me each man's contribution to fly fishing without hesitation. On the other hand, if I asked what you know about Lacey Gee, your reaction probably would be something like, "Lacey who?" That's understandable, but as you'll see, there's an interesting connection among these three fellows.

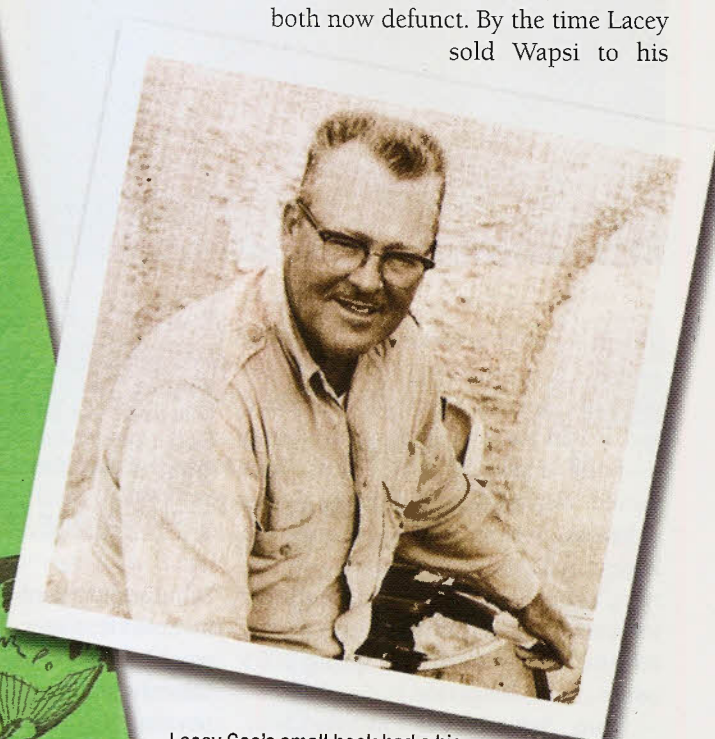
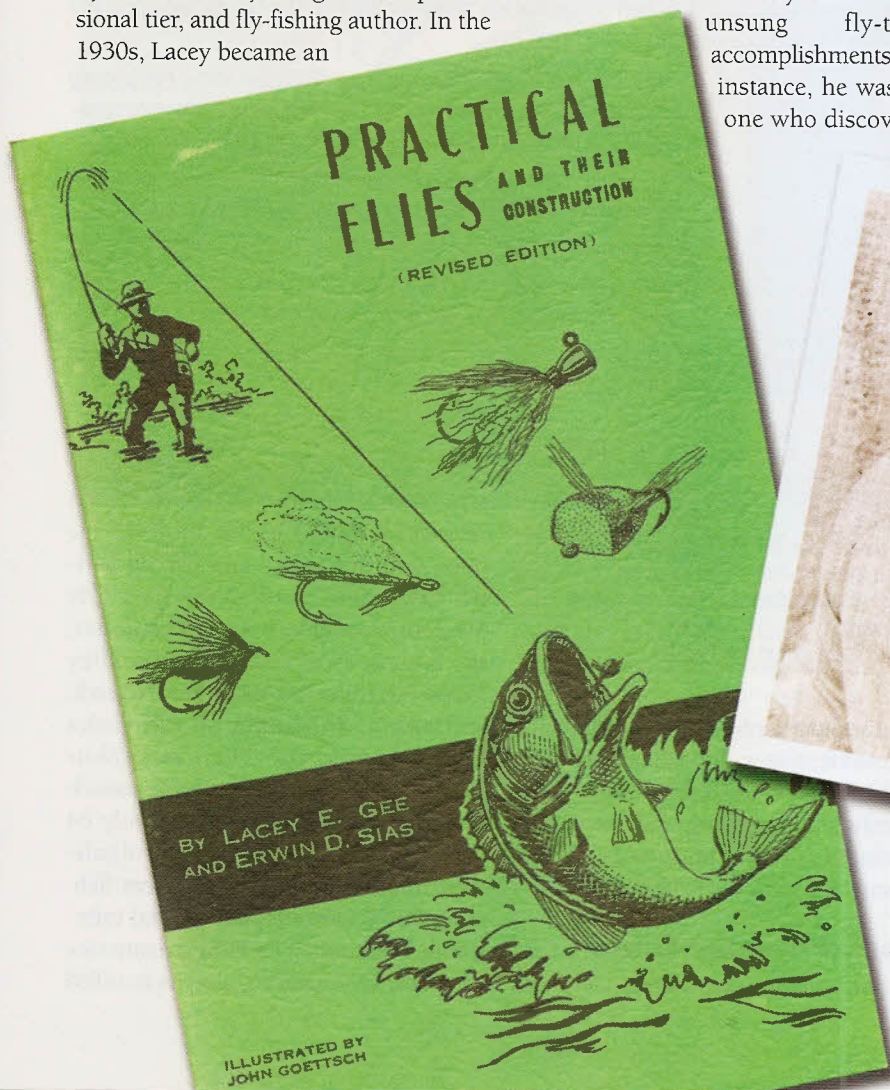
So, who was Lacey Gee? For starters, he was an Iowan who lived in a state that is better known for its corn, soybean, and hog production than for fly fishing. Lacey learned to tie flies as a young man in the early 1920s, and as an adult he became an accomplished fly fisherman, fly designer and professional tier, and fly-fishing author. In the 1930s, Lacey became an

expert P-9 combat biplane pilot for the Army Air Corps, and later trained transport glider pilots for the invasion of Europe during World War II. For a time he was a professional golfer, and he continued to play golf into his 80s; even though he was burdened with a portable oxygen tank, Lacey consistently outplayed other golfers half his age. But throughout his life, his real passion was fly tying and fishing.

Lacey had many unsung fly-tying accomplishments. For instance, he was the one who discovered

that marabou feathers from common domestic turkeys—the kind we eat at Thanksgiving—are a great substitute for illegal African stork marabou. This discovery resulted in the strung marabou you'll find in any fly shop today. In my opinion, however, his greatest accomplishment was founding the Wapsi Fly Company.

Lacey started the company in 1945 on the banks of the Wapsipinicon River in Independence, Iowa. After almost three decades, the company had grown to become the third-largest fly-tying materials dealer in the country behind Herter's and Universal Vise, which are both now defunct. By the time Lacey sold Wapsi to his



Lacey Gee's small book had a big impact on beginning tiers in the late 1950s and 60s. It contains the recipe for the Gimp.

TYING THE GIMP



1 Wrap a substantial thread base on the hook shank. Tie on a bunch of hen hackle fibers for the tail. The tail should equal the length of the hook.

2 Tie a piece of wool yarn to the base of the tail. Wrap the yarn up the hook to form a tapered body. The body should end about one-eighth inch from the hook eye. Tie off and cut the excess yarn.

3 Tie on two after-shaft feathers for the wing. Place one feather on top of the other, with the tips extending to the middle of the tail.

4 Tie on a dun hackle. Wrap the feather to form a sparse wet-fly hackle collar. Tie off and clip the surplus hackle. Wrap a neat head and snip the thread. Coat the head with a drop of cement.

5 The body on this Gimp is tied with dubbing. It gives the fly a shaggy, buggy appearance.

friend Tom Schmuecker in 1973, the company was producing 15,000 flies per week for several wholesale accounts, and it had a growing business selling fly-tying materials. In 1978, Tom moved Wapsi Fly to Mountain Home, Arkansas, where it has become the largest wholesale distributor of fly-tying materials in the world. (To learn more about Tom and Wapsi Fly, check out the Spring 2002 and Spring 2005 issues of this magazine.)

Tom Schmuecker, by the way, invented lead dumbbell eyes, another fly-tying staple. That's the connection linking Gee, Clouser, and Kreh. If Lacey hadn't sold Wapsi to Tom, then

Lacey Gee's Gimp

Hook: Mustad 3906B, sizes 14 to 10.
Thread: Black 8/0 (72 denier).
Tail: Natural dun hen hackle fibers.
Body: Gray Uni-Yarn or dubbing.
Wing: Amherst pheasant tippet after-shaft feathers.
Collar: Natural dun hen hackle.

Schmuecker probably wouldn't have invented lead eyes. Bob Clouser, in turn, wouldn't have created the Clouser Deep Minnow, and Lefty wouldn't have written that the Clouser Minnow is the best streamer he has ever fished.

Discovering the Gimp

My introduction to Lacey Gee was

through his book *Practical Flies and Their Construction*, published in 1955 and revised in 1966. Lacey coauthored the book with his friend and fishing partner Erwin Sias, editor of the *Sioux City Journal*. According to Tom Schmuecker, the thousands of fly-tying kits sold by Wapsi Fly, Universal Vise, Jann's Netcraft, and others at that time all included a copy of *Practical Flies and Their Construction*. This little volume, which is no longer in print, contains only 64 pages, but it's packed with lots of relevant information and some great fishing tales. It also contains several interesting fly patterns, including many Gee originals. One pattern, a nymph called

the Gimp, is particularly fascinating.

In *Practical Flies and Their Construction*, Lacey wrote that the Gimp is not difficult to tie. The major problem, he said, was securing the proper feathers for the wings. He recommended using after-shaft feathers taken from the tippets of an Amherst pheasant. At the base of the tippet quill, you'll find a small fluffy feather; this is the after-shaft feather. In addition to the after-shaft feather wing, other components of Gee's Gimp include a tail of natural dun hackle fibers, a gray wool body, and a couple of turns of dun hackle for a collar. Lacey also instructed us to use natural dun if at all possible or, failing that, hackle dyed dark dun. The hackle for a wet fly should always come from a hen neck, Lacey wrote, because the fibers are much softer than those on a rooster feather, and they have more action under the water.

The Gimp was so unique that the

flies because he had to fill an order for 140 dozen Gimps for a large fly-fishing supplier. In the decades that followed, Lacey's nymph fell into obscurity until Dick Stewart and Farrow Allen reintroduced the Gimp to the fly-tying community in their landmark pattern book, *Flies for Trout*, which was published in 1993.

Tying Tips

In his article in *Outdoor Life*, Sias extolled the virtues of the Gimp but said very little about its construction or how to fish it; Myhre's article in *Fly Fisherman* gave a much more detailed description of how to tie and fish the fly. He suggested wrapping lead wire on the hook to help the fly sink, and that dubbing or peacock herl are good substitutes for the standard wool body. He also touted the Gimp as a great bluegill and crappie lure.

I like to tie my Gimps with a body



The Gimp is a simple fly requiring only a few materials. You'll find everything you need at your local fly shop.

November 1950 issue of *Outdoor Life* contained a feature article about the fly. This article, written by Erwin Sias, was titled "They Go for the Gimp." Twenty years later, in April 1970, Larry Myhre, a reporter at the *Sioux City Journal* and fishing companion of both Sias and Gee, published an article in the fledgling *Fly Fisherman* magazine titled "Tying the Gimp Nymph." A few weeks after the article appeared, Myhre received a call from Lacey. Gee said that he had to stop production of all other

made from gray squirrel dubbing to give the fly a buggier look. I sometimes fish the Gimp like an ordinary nymph, but I usually prefer using an down-and-across-stream wet-fly swing.

The Gimp is so easy to tie, you really must add it to your fly box. And the next time you're on your favorite stream, the trout just might "Go for the Gimp."

Ward Bean is a regular contributor to our magazine. He lives in Iowa.

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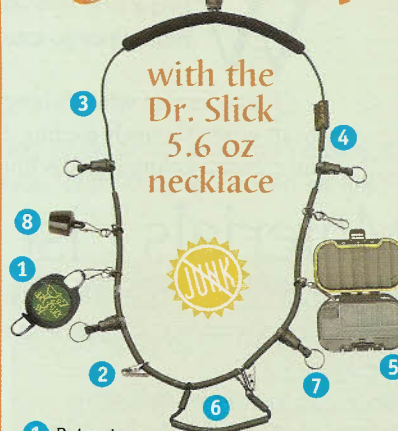


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