

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of stylized fish in various shades of gray. The fish are depicted in different sizes and orientations, some facing left and some right. They have simple, rounded bodies with internal line patterns representing scales or fins. The overall effect is a textured, aquatic-themed backdrop.

FLYFISHING

A PATHWAY TO WELLBEING

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to those seekers who are open to, and find value in, the wellbeing inherent in outdoor adventures.

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PREFACE

Co-authoring a book involves an occasional coin-toss to see who goes first... I (Kate) won.

During the Q&A portion of one of my first speaking gigs as a wellbeing coach, a woman raised her hand and asked, "How do we get what you have without going through what you have gone through?" She was referring to my healthy life perspective and balance gained after my cancer diagnosis that I had briefly shared about during my presentation. A few years prior I had been tasked with writing a two-page paper for my Master's program in which I was asked to respond to: *Think of a health hurdle you have been through. How might your story have been different if you had a holistic perspective at the time?* With the deadline looming, I sat down at my laptop and had an out of body experience. My fingers typed hastily, but I was completely unconscious of the words evolving on the screen. After the two pages were complete I went back to read what I had written only to discover that I had expressed that my cancer had come from my pattern of suppressing emotions along with a lack of self-awareness of my underlying stress or what my body was trying to tell me. The paper went on to read that a holistic perspective may have prevented my cancer because it would have given me more balance in my life and an ability to connect the dots between what was happening externally and how that was impacting me internally. I

had never consciously thought that before reading those words, yet it made complete sense.

That profound insight led me to bring attention to how often I operated in a sort of auto-pilot mode, simply going through the motions of my daily routine. I began to realize just how much valuable information I was ignoring from my own body on a regular basis and how harmful that was to my health and wellbeing. I began exploring modalities that could offer ways for me to slow down, quiet my busy mind, get in touch with sensations in my body, and create an instinctive space for reflection to help me grow beyond my habitual patterns and experience better balance. I found that flyfishing offers all of these benefits and more and continues to nurture my wellbeing each time I step into the water.

When Mark and I met for the first time to discuss the idea of collaborating, there was an immediate mutual energy to share our passions for flyfishing and wellbeing with those new to the sport in a way that would be educational and inspirational. In the first year of opening his flyfishing school in 2022, Mark shared with me that he and his instructor team witnessed over 160 students step into the water for the very first time and experience a range of transformations and responses including sheer joy to absolute pause. While it didn't surprise me to hear this, it certainly roused my enthusiasm for working together. Flyfishing has been referred to, at times, as the new yoga. Like yoga and meditation, flyfishing is an excellent practice to help achieve a state of relaxation and balance of mind, body, and spirit. It taps into healing that connects the mind and body in a way to help release what may be unconsciously keeping us stuck. This kind of healing is referred to as somatic healing.

No one has been spared from exposure to the mental health toll of COVID-19, social media, or the extreme pace of life whether it be on us, family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, children, or our communities as a whole. While we aren't claiming to be a substitute for appropriate mental health care and not all the ideas in this book are ground-breaking or original, we believe the way we have chosen to integrate them is unique and timely and offers an additional tool to find balance and wellbeing amidst life's hurdles.

That said, we wish to invite beginner flyfishers and professionals alike, to take a closer look at flyfishing through the framework of this book that outlines eight fundamental elements of flyfishing and overlays them with corresponding wellbeing analogies. With this framework, we hope to assist anglers to view fishing from a more holistic lens for greater overall benefit. And to the woman who asked me how to get what I have without going through what I did, I say, grab a fly rod and a friend and find a nice fishing hole! And then keep doing it!

"Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it." – Norman Maclean