I was bitten by the big trout bug when I started on my fishing journey at age 5. I am 56 now. My first outing is still a very vivid memory. I was young and energetic.

My more recent outings, though, have been a little more labored due to my back problems. They are shorter outings, but I find time to get out every season.

I take lots of photos when I am out on a stream. Every so often I get a photo or two taken of me holding a trout. Every person who has taken a photo of me asks me why I don’t smile when I am holding a big trout? I’ve been thinking about that, too. I do smile. Maybe not for photos, but I smile a lot in the moments that lead up to landing the big fish. In fact, I catch myself smiling a lot when wandering the trout streams of Wisconsin. And I smile a lot when I look back and delve into my book of life, which is bookended by trout fishing seasons.

Early season trout fishing is cold and stark. The snow is typically deep and I wear out easier. The environment is not inviting like the lush greens of summer, but there is an allure to those days of frozen guides and numb fingers. The long winter has made me forget the gnats and mosquitoes of late September. My
heart yearns to brave the crisp cold days of Wisconsin’s early season. I like to be the first one to place a footstep in fresh snow on opening morning. It makes me feel like I am the first angler to ever set foot on that stream.

One of my biggest smiles came while fishing as the snow was coming down hard on one of those frigid openers. The snow was going down the back of my coat and I had a broad smile painted on my face. The solitude was deafening.

Spring arrives with great anticipation to my home waters. I don’t miss a beat and I am out there fishing and continuing my journey. The smells are amazing in spring. The ground melting has a unique scent. The trees are budding and the grasp of winter is being shed. That very first smell of a plum tree blooming triggers a smile for me. The smell is better than any expensive perfume. It makes me feel alive.

Early summer comes and with it the baby birds and the sounds of the streams sometimes swollen by the spring rains. The trees begin to change color. The leaves lining the streams are tipped with gold. I layer up to fish because the cold wind has whispered to me that winter will come quickly. I smile because I figure, if you are not smiling when casting a fly, then you need to lay your pole down and take up golf.

Last spring, when my very good friend was diagnosed with liver and colon cancer, despite the diagnosis, he remained upbeat and positive. I was bashful at first to talk to him about his illness; it made me feel so mortal and close to death myself.

But we did talk about it. He was candid about his condition but he also smiled a lot during our conversation.

His strength reminds me that I need to learn to smile more often. With early trout season approaching, I know I’ll get my chance.

Len Harris counts down to the opening of the early trout fishing season and blogs about his fishing excursions in “The stream of time” (http://lenharris.blogspot.com).