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This interview was conducted with John Alevras on June 21, 2013, in the Special Collections Research Room, WWU Libraries in Bellingham, Washington. The interviewers are Tamara Belts and Larry Wasserman.

TB: Today is June 21, 2013. I'm here with John Alevras and Larry Wasserman and we're going to do an oral history.

And so our first question is: How did you get started fly fishing?

JA: I, like most fly fishermen, started fishing with my dad using worms for anything that would bite. When I was sixteen I was fishing the Paulinskill River in New Jersey. It was opening day and I was still fishing worms, but with a fly rod. Upriver from where I was fishing, I saw a fellow fly fishing. I was struck by the artistry of his casting. I fished a while longer then sat down and watched him. Slowly he came down to where I sat. I am sure it was obvious I was watching him so he came over, sat down next to me and began a conversation. I was so taken by what I had watched and heard it was the last day I ever fished bait or lures. From that point on I immersed myself in fly fishing.

TB: So, how did you get started tying flies? I have some pictures of your work here, you're on a couple of these pages. You have become a real artist in fly tying yourself, so how did that—

JA: The following Xmas my Uncle Bill gave me a beginner's fly tying kit. Unfortunately the kit did not have instructions or any pictures of flies so I struggled to get started. Fortunately our family lived in New Jersey close to New York City where there was an annual fly fishing exhibition. That winter my father took my brother and I to the show. I had only one objective that day, watch people tie flies. When we walked in to the coliseum I immediately noticed a booth where three gentlemen were tying flies. I sat down at that booth and at 6 PM that night, my father dragged me away. I had never left. I did not know it at the time, but I was watching and learning from three famous tiers: Ted Niemeyer, Charlie DeFeo, and Ken Bay. I think that it was obvious to them that I was an enthusiastic kid. I probably drove them crazy, but they were supportive and even had me come into the booth and tie a fly. I learned far more than basics and even left with eight or nine of their flies that became wonderful models to try and replicate. However, when I got home that night I quickly realized I did not have the tools, hooks or materials to tie their patterns so I did the best I could with what I had and began a slow, but endless process of accumulating needed tools and materials. I also acquired a few books on fly tying that spawned a passion for book collecting. Now that I am retired I still tie flies almost every day and when not at the vise I am searching for books to add to a very large collection.

TB: How do you get the inspiration for—I mean, they're beautiful, they're beyond the imitation of an insect.

JA: In trout fishing you tie flies to imitate the food fish feed upon: aquatic insects, minnows and terrestrial insects. If you are serious about tying flies you become extremely sensitive to these food forms, what they look like, their behavior and the tie fly patterns that best represent their traits.

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In the case of steelhead fishing I would argue that fly tying is much more of an art form. It is a creative craft of what can I do with fur and feathers to one, attract fish, but almost as important is what looks attractive and fishy to the angler.

The inspiration to tie effective, lovely flies, is a very personal thing. Tying beautiful flies is not difficult. It is a discipline more than a skill. Without the discipline it is almost impossible to tie flies admired by fish and fisherman.

TB: Okay. So what are some of your favorite places to fish? Well, there's two questions, also the way to fish? I read your articles in here, plus I've read your book, *Leaves from a Steelheader's Diary*. So I know you like to go to British Columbia, but are there other places?

JA: My passion for the last 30 years has been steelhead fishing. Without question, the place I enjoy fishing the most is Northern BC and the rivers of the Skeena system, up near Terrace and Smithers. I have not missed a steelhead season in 31 years and always fish for two or three weeks.

The rivers where steelhead exist is spectacular country. Anywhere there are steelhead rivers there is natural beauty. Steelhead fishing is physically challenging, but more important the fishing is difficult and unpredictable. I like such conditions. I am not an angler concerned with numbers of fish caught in a day or even the size of fish. I would rather spend two or three hours working one difficult fish and feel more reward in catching that fish than three or four in a day covering a lot of water. I have had the great fortune to fish a lot of wonderful trout country in the United States and British Isles, but have not found any that equals where steelhead rivers flow.

I grew up in the East. Almost all of my trout fishing involved the rivers of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. I was very fortunate to grow up in an area where there is a tremendously steep history in terms of the origins of fly fishing in the United States. In my youth I fished the Catskills Rivers.

In my late teens and early twenties I fished a lot in Pennsylvania. I focused on the spring creeks that offered the most technical, difficult form of trout fishing. I also fished the streams of the Adirondacks of New York because it represented an outlet to get away from angling pressure.

Probably the best trout fishing experience of my life was fishing in Ireland for almost a summer with a very close, inspirational friend, Sid Neff, an outstanding angler, fly tier, and individual that had the most influence on me becoming seriously involved in book collection. So much that when I went to Ireland, I came home with no clothes so I could fit fishing books into my suitcase. There were so many treasures available I could not walk away from.

In the late 1960's the quality of trout fishing in the east kept dwindling so in 1970 my wife, Barbara, and I moved to Colorado where an excellent job opportunity awaited and there was better fishing that put me close to Wyoming and Montana where I would spend six weeks a year fishing primarily the still waters of Wyoming and the rivers of Montana.

Then in 1982 I met a friend who invited me to go steelhead fishing on the Babine River in BC. It was a wonderful experience that transformed my passion from trout to steelhead. Thirty plus years later the lure of steelhead is stronger than ever.

TB: I have one question, going back actually, did your father ever convert to fly fishing?

JA: My father probably fly fished a total of two or three hours his entire life, even though my brother and I became totally committed to it. Our father was content to sit in a boat or on the bank of a lake fishing for trout, pickerel, perch or blue gills with bait. He just wanted a relaxing experience.

TB: Okay. And so, how did you get started then writing about it?

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JA: Well I think it was an offshoot of the book collecting. Since I was 18, I've been a serious collector of angling books. I am probably more passionate about books today than I ever have been. I have read so many wonderful books, many of which are old English volumes dating back to the 1700s. The encouragement of a number of people started me writing. I became close friends with one of the important book dealers in this country, Hank Siegel. He started the Anglers and Shooters Bookshelf. He encouraged me to write which led to the writing of magazine articles which I have done on and off for over 50 years. Once I retired in 1999 I had the desire to try and write a book. I had been taking notes for years as well as keeping diary accounts of my fishing for many years which provided the idea of writing a book based on the theme of a diary and thus *Leaves from a Steelheader's Diary*. After writing several chapters I sent them to magazine publishers like Paul Schmookler (*Art of Angling* journal) to determine if there was interest in what I was writing. Every piece was accepted and published.

Then I sent three chapters to Bob Arnold, a successful writer of several books on steelhead fishing. Bob was very positive, also very critical. He was an editor by profession and was not bashful about telling you what he liked and didn't like, which was really helpful. His encouragement is what really provided the incentive to complete the project. When I completed the writing I sent the manuscript to Frank Amato Publications. Frank immediately accepted the project.

TB: Wow!

JA: He had been fishing the Deschutes River, and during the day when he wasn't fishing, he was reading the manuscript. When he got back he called and said that he wanted the book.

TB: Oh excellent! I'm just curious do you keep a journal [regularly] or just when you were on your trips?

JA: The only diary accounts I've ever done have been related to fishing. When I was 18 years old I started keeping diary accounts. In those early years it was all about where I fished, how many fish caught and what I caught them on. Then I slowly matured, realized that there was so much more to fishing and broadened the scope of the daily logs.

I was incredibly lucky where I grew up and started fishing. The people I got exposed to were some of the most famous people in the world of angling. The person that influenced me the most was Vince Marinaro, who wrote *A Modern Dry-Fly Code* and *In the Ring of the Rise*. His book, *A Modern Dry-Fly Code*, I would argue is the most important of all American fishing books. I was fortunate to become a close friend, fish with him, and go to his home and to his basement where he built bamboo rods. He also had an impressive library. He was a very challenging, innovative fly fisherman that had a great influence on me. I loved the man.

I also had the opportunity to fish with Ernie Schwiebert, Charles Fox and other significant figures. I was not important. I happened to fish places where they fished, we became friends which led to invitations to fish with them. All successful writers, great anglers with tremendous experiences. Important, influential figures in my life.

None more than Vince, from the standpoint of fishing, but Sid Neff, was the greatest influence in getting me serious about book collecting. His book collection, today, may be the finest angling library in America. Just in terms of English books there are more than 2000 volume that includes four of the first five books written on angling. An interesting outgrowth of Sid's collecting is he has become a noted book binder.

He started restoring old books then he started to build cases and boxes for his books. He selected highly valued, collectible books and built elaborate goat-skin leather boxes. The books would sit in one side of the box, and on the other side are all kinds of provenance and association that applies to the author and book. His work became so significant that he has exhibited in all major museums in the eastern states. He has also produced several books on his bindings.

TB: I don't know how you can expand on that, but is there something else? I did an oral history with someone else, and he totally got into fly fishing because of the literature. I mean, the literature had so excited him, and you gave

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quite an elaborate answer, but I don't know if there's anything else that you can say about how writing and what you read, how that inspires you.

JA: It does inspire you. G. E. M. Skues was an English writer. His first book was written in 1910, called *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*. He was the inventor of the nymph. He subsequently wrote five more books. If I was to pick an author to illustrate inspiration, it was Skues, It was his inventive, inquiring mind and the way he fished that captured me. He was also an excellent writer that made you want to go out and practice fishing the way he did, which was technical.

Vince Marinaro would be the next angler/author in the chain. He was similar to Skues in terms of his fishing and inquiring, innovative mind. It is why he evolved the tying and use of miniscule flies, particularly the evolution of patterns imitating terrestrial insects.

It was that type of writer/angler that I found inspirational. In my youth I was interested in technical, how-to books, not good writers reflecting on their experiences of people, places and fish. I now enjoy these books which is reflected in why I wrote, "Leaves," a book of reflection.

TB: Then talk about some of the people you've known in the process of the work, and you've done a little bit about that, but also Paul Schmookler and Ingrid Sills, and maybe even Frank Amato, or others.

JA: I was aware of how great a fly tier Paul Schmookler was and admired his salmon flies. He wrote several outstanding books, *The Salmon Flies of Major John Popkin Traherne (1826-1901): their description and variations*. He then wrote *Rare and Unusual Fly Tying Materials: A Natural History* in two volumes which instantly became valued, collectible books. He next wrote *Forgotten Flies*, another gem. He and Ingrid Sills then started publishing a journal, *The Art of Angling*. I had the opportunity to contribute to this publication for three or four of his issues before the journal went defunct. I had several long phone calls with Paul, which meant you picked up the phone and you listened. It really wasn't conversation. He is a very interesting, opinionated and talented individual.

Vince Marinaro, Charlie Fox, Ernest Schwiebert and Ken Bay were most influential. Ken and I became friends. I was such an enthusiastic young kid that he took me under his wing. I would send him flies I tied, he would critique them, and send me back my fly and his version of the same pattern. It was a great learning experience. I have done this a lot over the years with other important fly tiers. Sometimes my ego got brutally bruised, but it was the best thing that could happen.

When Barbara and I came to the Northwest I had the opportunity to become a member of the Washington Steelhead Fly Fishers. There was inspiration in being associated with a group of steelhead fishermen, and particularly the history of the club and who some of the members were. People like Walt Johnson, Wes Drain, Syd Glasso, Harry Lemire, Jim Green. Anglers that were pioneers of fly fishing for steelhead. I did considerable research on the history of the club and with the assistance of Joe Brown and Alec Jackson published a book concerning the club that was for members only. I have had the good fortune to sit and have dinner with Harry Lemire, Alec Jackson, Larry Wasserman, who sits here today, and other fine individuals. It is a wonderful club and an honor to be associated with

I was the president of Trout Unlimited in Colorado and very involved in conservation efforts state-wide. It was a very positive experience in my life.

TB: And how about Van Egan? How'd you come to work with him on *A Guide to the Haig-Brown Fishing Tackle Collection*, and anything more about him?

JA: I met Van Egan thanks to Garry Stewart, a fishing friend from Victoria, BC. He knew Van quite well and took me up to meet him at his home on the Campbell River. And the first time I went up for whatever reason, we just had a fantastic day together. We sat and talked and ultimately started drinking some Jamesons (Irish Whiskey) and had

more fun as the day went on. Van was a wonderful personality. I have all of his books and have read them all numerous times.

I got exposed to Van's writing thanks to Bob Arnold. Bob sent me a copy of Van's *Rivers on My Mind*, which I think is Van's best book. I then wrote to Van and ordered his other books. When I ultimately met him his wife, Maxine, had passed away and he was having health issues which prevented him from fishing. But, he loved to talk fishing, books and Roderick Haig-Brown who was a neighbor and friend. Van was very conversational so you could just sit for hours and enjoy conversation. Van had a nice library which also contributed to our conversations. The evening of the first visit we went out to dinner and he asked us to come back. Garry and I were thrilled and returned several times.

Before the first visit Garry had given me a simple little manuscript of an inventory Van had done of Haig-Brown's fishing tackle. Haig-Brown's wife had asked Van to do the inventory after his death in 1976. I looked at this simple document and said to Garry, "My gosh, there is a fanatic group of Haig-Brown collectors that want anything and everything associated with the man. Why don't we produce a limited edition book of what Van had done." I took my copy of the manuscript back to Van with ideas on producing a book. At first he scoffed at the idea and said, "John, there's no interest whatsoever in this. It is just a listing of rods and reels, and stuff."

I kept going back at him because I was convinced we had something very marketable and of interest to people. Within hours Van became supportive and enthused with the idea and we began further design thoughts, an updated introduction by Van and art ideas. I had talked to an artist, Pat George from Victoria, who was excited about the project and doing drawings for the book. When Van heard this the project could not move fast enough. In a week I received a revised introduction from Van.

So with the help of Pat George's beautiful artwork and his son who was very skilled in computer layout, we designed the book. I then worked with a printer and binder to produce a limited edition of 60 copies. Before it was printed, I had orders for 39 books.

A lot of that had to do with Art Lingren for selling the book. Van had told Art what we were doing, and I got a call from Art, told him the details and he began talking to friends. In a short time frame 39 copies were sold and financial risk eliminated. By the time the book was bound it was sold out and there was a waiting list. I promised every buyer there would be no additional copies which everyone appreciated.

The sad moment in the entire project was Van's death the day I received the books. He saw the final layout with art, was thrilled, but never the book.

There was a memorial for Van at his house. I brought four copies of the book, gave two copies to Van's daughter and showed the book to guests. Everyone was excited. Art Lingren has copy number two of every one of Van Egan's books, so I gave him copy two.

The project was a very rewarding experience, but Van's death a huge disappointment. He was so excited to see his simple little manuscript turned into a lovely proof that would be his last book.

TB: Did he know he was going to pass away? We do have a copy of the book, but is it signed?

JA: No; the plan was that I, Van, and Pat were all to sign each of the 60 copies. I called Valerie Haig-Brown and asked if she would do a eulogy for Van. She gladly did it. Then I got a wonderful picture of Van and had a professional foldout produced that was inserted into each book, acknowledging Van.

The people that got the book loved what had been done because he was so well liked with many friends. He was respected, not only as an excellent writer, but as a good fisherman and great guy. I understand why he had such a depth of friends. The day of his memorial was a special experience. Van's house was about 40 feet from the Campbell River with a back yard looking down on the river. The back yard was completely full of people. They

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were from everywhere. Many people from the Totem Fly Club in Vancouver, BC. He was revered by the club membership and the people of Campbell River. I miss him.

TB: Yes. And then, you [mentioned] Trout Unlimited. My question is, if you have been active in the organizational structure of fly fishing, how did you get started in that and what had been some of the issues or projects that you have been involved in?

JA: When I was a young man fishing in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania I became very involved in the Theodore Gordon Anglers. Even though I was not a board member I attended their board meetings. They were a strong conservation organization. I learned a lot from a group of professional people on how to deal with conservation issues. I took that with me to Colorado, trying to apply some of what I learned.

Since leaving Colorado I have not been involved in conservation other than contributing to causes. The organization I have enjoyed the most and been most associated with has been the Washington Steelhead Flyfishers over the last 13 - 14 years. Just a wonderful group of guys with a very simple agenda; meet once a month for dinner, enjoy each other's company and share experiences related to steelhead fishing. I know when Barbara and I move away from Washington I will really miss the group and especially Alec Jackson.

Before every meeting I would go to Alec's house. We would just talk for 2 or 3 hours. Most of the conversation was about steelhead angling of the past and particularly the people of the past, the Syd Glassos and Harry Lemires and Wes Drains. Those were meaningful experiences for me, and I believe for Alec as well, because many of the people we talked about are gone. On several occasions Alec got choked up. It reflected how meaningful it was for him to talk about Glasso and others.

TB: Okay. What are some of the things that you are most proud of in regards to your fly fishing that we haven't talked about? I don't know, do you do rod building, or are there other kinds of things that you do?

JA: I guess I'm proud of my fly tying. I love it and I love to give flies away. I give away hundreds to friends every year and have storage boxes of flies I need to give away. Hopefully anglers appreciate the flies.

I built rods for several years, but never got into bamboo. I just enjoy fishing. There's no great achievements in terms of my fishing.

If I was to pick one fish or experience that was most important in my life it would be a steelhead caught on the Kispiox River. I savor the the difficult aspects of fishing. There was a day when I hooked and lost a steelhead on a dry fly. When I retrieved the fly there was a scale on the point of the hook so I knew I had briefly foul hooked the fish. I went back to that spot the next day, made a few casts and brought up what I am sure was the same fish of the previous day. He boiled at the fly and did not take it. I continued fishing for that fish for the next hour and 50 minutes. I kept changing flies and presentations until the fish came up and took the original fly I started with a quiet, subtle rise form that suggested a 10" inch trout. About 20 minutes later I landed a buck that weighed about 24 pounds. Why I stayed over that fish so long I will never know for sure. I think it simply was the challenge.

The day before, I had caught a 30 pound fish on a dry fly and thought nothing would ever top that experience. It was a spectacular fish that I fished for about 40 minutes. I changed flies six times, brought the fish up four times and finally put on a big dry fly that he came to and ate. I thought there is no way that this could ever be topped yet the fish the next day that required an hour and 50 minutes was a far more satisfying experience.

I've only fished Alaska once and do not think I will ever return because fishing is too easy. There is no challenge. There is something special about working hard to catch fish.

TB: Well can you tell me – I'm just assuming that your preference is to dry fly fish, but could you tell me if you said you prefer, or what —

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JA: My preference is not dry fly fishing, but dry-line fishing. I love to fish a dry-line with either dry or small wet flies just under the surface. I particularly like to fish really small flies. Over the last four five, six years I have been experimenting with minuscule flies, number 10's, 12's, and 14-flies, which in the world of steelhead fishing is really small. Small flies have been successfully fished for Atlantic salmon fishing for years, but not for steelhead. Why not? So I started tying very small, trout-type flies, fished on light leaders and consistently caught steelhead, some over 20 pounds. I've had many experiences fishing behind other anglers that did not catch fish then with my very small flies I would succeed. Some of these situations have been very convincing, especially when it happens behind excellent anglers and occurs repetitively. I plan on doing a lot more research on the use of flies. I relate back to Vince Marinaro and the use of terrestrial fly patterns. Nobody fished ant, beetle, and leaf hopper flies until he researched, experimented and proved how productive they could be.

I am convinced that I have caught more fish than I might have otherwise caught because of the experiments with tiny flies, plan to do more research and write about it.

TB: Okay. What are some of the things that you think are important about fly fishing that we haven't talked about, thoughts on the future of fly fishing, etc.?

JA: I'm optimistic about the future of fly fishing and especially steelhead. It is easy to have reason for doom and gloom about future opportunities and yet I think because things have gotten so grim an outstanding conservation ethic will emerge. The realization of what we have lost and continue to lose has taken hold. Projects like the removal of the Elwha Dams, enhanced logging practices and conservation efforts of the tribes are going to bring reward. It may be hard to see them today because we may still be on a downward curve, but the curve is going to turn positive just as it has done with Atlantic salmon and trout fishing. There will continue to be a stream of threats (fish farms, pipe lines), but there are a lot of skilled people turning hope into action, far more than in the past. Fifty or so years ago there were no Trout Unlimited, Atlantic Salmon Fund or Atlantic Salmon Federations, little or no skilled know-how to challenge "progress." Fortunately this has changed.

TB: Any other thoughts? We haven't talked about the evolution of the equipment?

JA: I am a person that likes to fish old and used more than I like to fish the latest and greatest. The technology advances in fishing are impressive, particularly in terms of fly lines. I believe the advancements in fly lines whether for still waters, salt water or steelhead fishing have enhanced fisherman's opportunities for success far more than rods or reels.

I would argue a fly rod is a fly rod and a fishing reel a simplistic mechanism. The new ones are works of art, in some cases extremely expensive, but not making a difference in the quality of the fishing experience or how many fish we are catching. Fly lines are making a difference. Leader and hook making technology have also made significant contributions. I look at flies that I tied in the 1960s and 1970s and wonder how I ever hooked and landed fish compared to the beauty and sharpness of hooks today.

I am not one that gets excited about equipment. It's a dilemma for me all the time. When I see or want a new rod or reel the question always arises; spend the money on equipment or a book? The answer is almost always, a book.

TB: Very good. You've lived in several places. You have talked a little bit about it, but how was fishing different in the different regions that you have called home?

JA: As I mentioned before, the East had beautiful rivers, just too many fishermen. The great salmon fishing of the East is exclusive, expensive, and difficult to participate in unlike our steelhead fishing in the West that is readily accessible for most anglers to enjoy.

Fishing in Colorado has become very crowded because many of the places where excellent trout streams are, now are close to ski areas and resorts. Thirty plus years ago while living in Colorado, I stopped fishing streams and rivers

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and began fishing still water, where I could be away from fishing pressure and the shadows of condos. It became a challenging new way of trout fishing.

In British Columbia it is getting hard to find solitude because it represents our last outpost for wild steelhead.

I enjoy steelhead the most, but would say the technical fishing on spring creeks to be a close second. I had the good fortune to fish the chalk streams in Ireland with Sid Neff. He lived in Ireland, knew the rivers, how to get access and shared my interest in challenging fishing. It was a wonderful experience.

TB: Could you explain that a little bit more. Because I think people over here, at least me, find that different. So people own the water, they own a stretch of land or something? Or else you said syndicates and lots of people go buy up sections?

JA: Many of the waters are owned or syndicated and unavailable to the general public. The Test, Kennet and Itchen are famous chalk streams. Because there is limited access and the waters are well managed the quality of fishing is still, in many cases, as good as it was a hundred years ago.

If I look back and say, if I had to do it over, what fishing do I wish I could have done more of, the answer would be the chalk streams of the British Isles. It was not because I caught 20 trout a day or fish were five or six pounds. It was catching four or five fish and flawless presentations.

TB: Have you done other kinds of destination fishing?

JA: Very little. I was to Alaska once for King salmon fishing on the Kanektok River. I would catch two or three big Kings then give the rod to the guide, sit and watch him fish. I just didn't need to catch 10 or more of these giants a day. They were great fish, but easy to catch.

I went to the Florida Keys back when I was a teenager. I did not have the money to do anything but fish with a trout rod and walk the flats to catch some bonefish and barracuda. I hooked a giant tarpon, probably 150 pounds on a little 8-weight trout rod. The fight did not last long, but it was quite an experience. There is no desire to go back.

I did a little stripe bass fishing near Martha's Vineyard. It was unbelievable. You could catch a bass every third or fourth cast. It just was not exciting.

I guess you could call my primary destination fishing would be British Columbia. Besides annual trips to the Skeena Rivers I enjoy Vancouver Island. Some beautiful, wild rivers that not many people know about. A place I do not talk about.

TB: Anything else that I haven't asked you that you think is important that we haven't covered?

JA: The last thing I would say is to compliment you and the university on what you have done with Special Collections and the library of books you are building. The audio library is a wonderful concept. I applaud the university for the investment that has and is being made. Someday I hope at least part of my book collection will come this way.

TB: Oh, terrific!

JA: I face a dilemma. Do I put my collection back in circulation for others to share and enjoy or donate it to Western Washington University, where it will not get the exposure that it would by selling. If I sell the books it would be through auction.

TB: Do you by any chance know the Gallups? [Joan and Vernon] Gallup had a huge collection. They were from Montana, I think?

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JA: Montana.

TB: Yes, a huge collection of books that they donated to WSU. [Editor's note: 15,000 rare books related to angling and outdoor sports valued at \$1.8 million, announced August 30, 2011]

JA: Yes, I was aware. One of the interesting things I learned from Gary Estabrook, a book dealer in Vancouver, Washington is that one of the reasons he amassed an enormous collection was he did not just collect a book, but every version of the book that came out, especially any variants. He had many copies of the same book.

Bob Evans from Campbell River has a huge collection of Haig-Brown. He has every edition of every book that Haig-Brown wrote as well as every periodical he contributed to. One of Haig-Brown's books, *Alison's fishing birds*, came out in several editions. Bob has wood carvings of each bird in the book in his den. In his library everything is displayed. It's very impressive. Bob was the first person to order the *Haig-Brown Fishing Tackle book*. Van Egan told Bob of our plans to do the book and he said, "Please make sure I'm first on the list." He was.

TB: Terrific!

Well, is there anything we haven't asked him that you know that we should have talked about?

LW: I'll ask a question or two. John, do you think there's a common trait or character flaw that binds passionate steelhead fishermen and trout fishermen?

JA: Yes, if I look at some of the great anglers I have been fortunate to know I would say they are generally not social, very focused with limited interests. Some writers and fly tiers are not fishermen. They simply focus on what they do. I also believe they generally have inquiring minds, almost investigative in nature.

Some of our greatest fly tiers are not even fisherman.

TB: Even today?

JA: Oh yes, It is the artistry of the craft of tying beautiful flies. There are passionate fishing book collectors who do not fish. I would say I am the odd ball in terms of the passion to tie flies, collect books and fish. People have said to me, many times, "John, why don't you get a life? If you are not reading a book you are searching for one. If you are not tying a fly you are fishing one." I love my life, have no interest or incentive to divert from it. I'm never bored. But, I cannot think of anything I would rather be doing than spending time with my wife.

LW: Let me try another one. You know we often pine for the good old days, and sometimes we say that today is the good old days. When we look at maybe what the future brings and we think back at the gentility of Syd Glasso and his predecessors, what sort of gives you enthusiasm about the new generation of fisher, if anything? We've got some young members in the club, with energies directed maybe in different places, or do you have any thoughts about the new generation of fishermen?

JA: That is a good question. I worry about that. I sense that the young angler of today is seeking too much instant gratification. They do not seem to be interested in the history of the sport, the pioneers responsible for the evolution of the sport. I am concerned that many are not conservation conscious, not wanting to give back to our dwindling resource. Hopefully projects like the Elwha dam removals become a stimulus. There is no question that interest in book collecting has dwindled.

I think the fly tiers of today are brilliant. I also believe saltwater fly fishing has brought great innovation to the art.

Lots of enthusiastic, excellent young anglers with a good conservation ethic from the standpoint of catch and release, but not enough of what can I do to help the fisheries.

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LW: Let me follow it up and say, what advice would you have for a 20-year-old kid moving to the Northwest that wants to take his steelhead fishing seriously? When you think back on your history and what you've learned, not a go here and use this fly, but some advice for him to consider if he was, wanted to get serious about it.

JA: I believe number one is, fish. You simply have to be riverside, experiencing all the conditions of the rivers and weather, experiencing the good runs and the bad runs, being exposed to the other anglers. If I was serious about learning, I would want to fish where I knew there are good anglers and watch how they approach the sport, whether it's casting a fly, wading the river, how they present the fly, what fly are they using, and why? Today the river is low and clear and it is sunny. Tomorrow it is high and dirty and that small little Blue Charm fly that caught fish yesterday is useless today. You have to be on the river and fish a lot. Join clubs where there is a base of experience, guys that fish a lot and experience and knowledge are shared.

I am the exception when it comes to the books, but I would encourage young anglers to read, read. It causes you to reflect and think on the river.

We are rarely alone on waters today, so you will have opportunities to experience good and bad angling. It does not take long, even for a new angler, to start picking up and realizing what a good fisherman looks like. It is like when I was that kid on the Paulinskill River and sat down with that fly fisherman. I could not get enough of what he had to offer. I was taken by the artistry of what he was doing, almost embarrassed by my approach. He was willing to share as most good anglers will do. Right then and there I was committed.

LW: That was a good answer, not hire the Orvis three-day school. Good answer. That's all I got.

TB: Okay, well thank you! This has been terrific, terrific. It was really awesome.

JA: Thank you.

LW: I enjoyed it. Thank you, John.

TB: Yes, it was a great interview, great interview.

Additional comments:

TB: I was just curious, do you know Lory Watkins? Did you ever meet him?

JA: No

TB: I will show you his books. He was here last summer for Steve Raymond's talk. He was an avid book collector, devoted. He passed away in April and donated about 300 of his books to us. He had about 700 or more but we are trying not to take duplicates. But his books, if he went to the place where the author was, he might have taken a picture of the author doing a book signing or something similar, and tucked that inside. If he had any related correspondence with anyone, he's tucked it inside. If he went to any fly show where the person was and they tied a fly, he's tucked that inside, which makes every book really unique. If anybody was ever going to study book collecting, this is what they're like, it's his life, all these different kinds of exchanges.

JA: My library looks like that. Every letter that I ever received from Schwiebert, Marinaro or Siegel and others are in their books.

Bill Kindler and I were talking about that driving here this morning. Association with some books is far more meaningful than the book.

TB: Oh, yes. You probably know a Judy Bowman.

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JA: Judith Bowman has lots of my money. She is retired as a book dealer. She was an outstanding dealer with a significant personal collection. She lived near New York City and had a very high level clientele. Her husband was a member of the Anglers Club of New York which represented an important base of customers. Much of the significance of her and Jim's personal collection was just what you were describing, books with incredible association, books of Edward Ringwood Hewitt and George M. LeBranche with letters going back and forth with other famous angling personalities like Eugene Connett.

As a result of the two recent donations, you have added significant quality to the library.

TB: Yes, we're getting quite a bit, but I would especially like some really old English ones. We have some Skues and Halford but I know there are others.

JA: I have the first editions of all of Halford and Skues' books and many other important old English volumes.

TB: It was interesting too when you were talking earlier in the interview about somebody else who got into doing the book binding. Was that the Sid Neff?

JA: Sid Neff.

TB: Because, we did an oral history with Alec Jackson, and Alec got into making paper, and it's like the next extension, one passion takes you into another.

JA: Alec had a very significant collection, all of which were related to Atlantic salmon fishing. I cannot remember the famous book binder in England. He sent some important volumes to him for restoration.

TB: Was there a Black?

JA: Blacker.

Blacker wrote, *The Art of Angling* (later editions had different titles), a very famous important book, particularly for salmon fishing collectors. He did have his copy rebound by the binder in England. Alec made a study of the Blacker books. Literally every copy of the book and later editions had differences. There were variances from book to book. There's three editions, 1840, 1843, 1865. Alec was very schooled about the Blacker books and wrote an article for the *American Fly Fisher*, the journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

TB: We must have it then, we do get that journal, *The American Fly Fisher*.

JA: That's something I have a complete collection of. An important publication every historian should have.

TB: We get a lot Interlibrary Loan requests for articles from that.

JA: I can believe that.

TB: Yes, we are missing actually a couple issues, but we have most of it. I think we're missing –

JA: It's an outstanding publication, but like every ongoing publication it goes through cycles of excellent content and then years when it was not especially good. Editors make a difference.

TB: This is terrific. Let me show you the Lory Watkins books now.

End of recording

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