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*Bruce Ferguson*

This interview was conducted with Bruce Ferguson on March 20, 2007 in LaConner, Washington. The interviewers are Danny Beatty and Tamara Belts.

### Part I-Tying Flies

**TB:** [Today is March 20, 2007. My name is Tamara Belts] and I am down in La Conner with Bruce Ferguson and Danny Beatty. We're going to do an oral-video history [with Mr. Ferguson and will begin with his tying two of his signature flies].

**BF:** The fly I'm tying for you this afternoon is one that I created back in the early Seventies. It was part of an effort to figure out how to catch the abundant resident coho resulting from a new program that the Department of Fisheries started at that time. Among many, many other flies, I tried the Brooks' Blonde, which is a well-known fly used in the Florida Keys and elsewhere. It is an all white fly with a silver body. This worked fine, but the fish weren't getting hooked up very often. They were tugging at the wing of the fly, but they were striking short. So I just put that in the back of my mind.

A short time later, I was down in San Francisco at the Orvis Shop, and looked at some shad flies on display. There was one that had a chartreuse green collar on it—besides just a white hackle and a silver body. I thought...hmm...that's got to be the thing. That's going to pull their attention from the back of the fly, up to the front of the fly so that when they grab it, they're going to get hooked. That was kind of an "Aha!" experience because I went back home and got out my fly tying vise and tied up this thing. It worked like a charm, and I've been using it successfully ever since.

The original tie had a single long shank hook. As I progressed with perfecting this fly, I found out that many salmon were still striking short and I didn't see why that had to be. My good friend, Bill Nelson, showed me how to tie a stinger hook on the fly without any knots, which made it quite simple. I positioned the stinger hook, right at the back end of the wing. That pretty much took care of the short strikes. I did have a problem on certain days; the fish would grab the fly so hard that they'd be impaled with both hooks. I didn't want that, so I started carrying around wire cutters and would (depending if they were hitting the front hook or the rear hook) cut the other hook off, so they were only nailed on one. That seems to have worked very well. It's sort of heavy to carry the wire cutters around with you, so now I fix them up both ways in my box, and then use the one that is appropriate. If I really want to catch a fish for dinner, I leave both hooks on. Salmon rarely escape.

Of course, we have regulations in the State of Washington that require the use of barb-less hooks only, so we need to crimp the barbs down. I'm surprised the manufacturers of the hooks don't sell a lot more barb-less hooks, since they're used so widely (especially in the Northwest), and in marine waters elsewhere. Anyhow, it's no big deal to get out your needle nose pliers and crimp down those barbs. I like to sharpen the hooks, and nip down the barbs before I tie a fly. Then you know you haven't broken the hook off or bent it some crazy way. It's ready to go, and you don't have to worry about thinking of it when you're out there on the water and trying to tie your fly on the line.

First thing I do is invert the hook in the vise, and sharpen it; a couple of strokes underneath and a couple either side on top. Strike it against your thumbnail. If it sticks, it's sharp enough. Grab the needle nose pliers, and pinch down the barb. I think the State regulations say that it has to pass easily through your shirt, and back out again without getting snagged, in order to be legal. It's a lot easier to do this when you're in a nice warm room than it is out there in the cold salt water. The Ferguson's Green and Silver is a very simple fly, another reason I like it. The fish don't seem to mind and it takes a whole lot less time than a more complicated fly I learned to tie a long time ago. Styles have changed, and methods, but I haven't changed much. I'm happy doing this, because I tie flies for my own enjoyment, and I don't care what the latest thing is. But I'm always in awe when I go to one of the conclaves and watch people tie because they do such a marvelous job and they're so quick. I feel like I belong in the beginner's corner.

So, to start with, wrap the hook with black tying thread, then take a little bit of white hair, and make a tail. A head of the tail, tie in a piece of flat silver braid. Be sure to secure materials with lots of half hitches in, and the flies don't come apart. Tie it off about two thirds of the way up the hook. Now I'll get out a length of medium chartreuse chenille; this particular one is a newer version, a [crystal antron] material... has a little more sparkle to it. The whole idea is to attract the fish so the more sparkle the better. I take three or four turns of that in front of the silver braid, and then tie it off.

Now for the wing: I want it to extend up to about the tail, and that should normally be about an inch and a half. Don't ask me why an inch and a half, it's just that after catching thousands of fish, that seems to be the length they like the best. When the fish get bigger, towards maturity, I usually stretch it out to two inches. Now, pull the under fur out of the hair. We don't want any really extremely long tips out there either. Believe it or not, if you have one tip that's sitting way out there, the fish come over and nip right at that. You can feel them tugging, but then you'll never get a hook [in them]. You want the wing cocked up against that chenille body, so that it splays out, and sits up at an angle. Then when you pull it through the water, it pulls down. Then twitch it. That's additional incentive for them to grab it. A little pearl flashabou on top of the wing sets it off. This doesn't have to be real fancy, just make sure you have a little pulse in the wing, so it effectively moves in the water. If it's just dead (most of the copies of this I've see in the fly shops, have just a stiff wing, and nothing happens) there's no movement, and it doesn't work nearly as well.

I taught my grandson how to tie flies, and took him in to the Morning Hatch Fly Shoppe in Tacoma to have him properly instructed on doing a whip finish, because I never mastered it. He has a tool, and he just goes zip-zip and it's done. I do it manually. The result is the same, but it's so much faster. Put a little head cement on the finished fly. Because I'm so slow, you can tell I'd never make a living tying flies. Anyhow, that's the finished product...Ferguson's Green and Silver.

**TB:** Excellent!

**BF:** Guaranteed to catch coho.

**TB:** Alright.

**BF:** Now, let's try the other one. This one is a little more complicated...it shows you the stinger hook arrangement. Here're some tips on tying it. I'll put on a number four short shank hook. This one is sharp. It's one of the newer ones with a chemical point on it. It's just needle sharp so I can skip that hook sharpening. There is a mini-barb, so, it squeezes down a little easier. Tie down the black tying thread to the hook in the vise. Grab a section of thirteen pound mono leader material. It's quite stiff and you want it stiff. You want the diameter this comes in. It might say thirteen pounds, and it might say ten pounds, or even seventeen pounds. You look at the diameter, because that tells you how stiff it's going to be sitting out here, and also allows you to tie the fly. You have to get this mono through the eye of the hook—twice. This is what Bill Nelson showed me.

**TB:** So you're creating that double hook.

**BF:** Yes. I'm checking the barb. I just checked the point against my fingernail, and it's sharp, so I want to get that barb off. Here we use a short shank stainless hook for salt water, with up-turned eye on the hook. For some reason or other, manufactures have quit making these things with big enough eyes for my use. There's where the diameter comes in. Two ends of the mono have to go through the hook eye, on the backside, and then you just loop it over the hook shank and come up like that. There's no knot, just the loop. You just work it down with your fingers until it lays out pretty straight.

We're going to lay this on top of the front hook. There are no knots. Now since I want an inch and a half long wing (I don't trust my eyesight, because otherwise you sit down one day and it'll be an inch long, and the next day it'll be two inches long, there's no quality control); I always take a ruler and measure it, from the back of the eye. Wrap forward with the tying thread. Now we're going to just push the mono ends right straight down, through the eye of the front hook...no knots are involved. Wrap the tying thread forward, and bend the doubled mono back against the hook. There we have a stinger hook. No knots. I've never had one of these pull out. I don't care how big the fish. It just can't get enough leverage to pull it all the way back through the eye.



*Danny Beatty and Bruce Ferguson*

**DB:** Okay, Bruce. You've mentioned that you got this idea from Bill Nelson. We're hoping to do an interview with Bill Nelson in the future. Where or when did Bill start doing this? Do you have that information to include, how Bill got started?

**BF:** I have no idea how he got started.

**DB:** We'll have to get that from him.

**BF:** I would say, in your interview with him, that'd be a good question to ask him. I'd like to know myself. I suspect part of it had to do with the fact that he was a guide for a number of years, up at [April Point] Lodge, across from Campbell River, B.C., and as such, he had to tie up flies at night when he came in. I suspect this went a lot faster for him than having to mess around, tying knots in the leader. It also makes a much smoother finish on the fly. Anyway, I don't know, but it's one of the best things he ever showed me, and he showed me a lot.

**DB:** We'll remember that question.

**BF:** I know I passed it along to a lot of people, and they've all been quite grateful. Okay, we want to direct the fish's interest to where the hooks are. So, we're going to put an effective tail on this fly, so it goes out to the, just slightly past the bend in the trailer hook. You don't want too much, because you don't want to end up with a really bulky fly. You'll see that I've used the same thing on this bait fish imitation. It doesn't look very pretty, but it really doesn't need to be very pretty. It just needs to give you a little flash back here. Another thing—if the trail hook jabs you, it's sharp, and you know it instantly.

*End of Tape One, Side One*

**BF:** The silver braid on the forward hook is much shorter since you've got a much shorter hook this time.

**DB:** About how long after you did the single hook, on the Ferguson's Green and Silver, did you go to this double hook system?

**BF:** Might have been as long as ten years.

**TB:** Really.

**BF:** Yes, it was quite a while.

**DB:** Was it as a result of watching someone do the double hook?

**BF:** Yes, Bill Nelson.

**TB:** Isn't that unusual, to have a double hook in fly fishing, or am I wrong?

**BF:** No, I don't think so. For instance, for the traditional Atlantic salmon fishing in Europe, they frequently use a treble hook. Obviously on an insect imitation you can't put a double hook on it. You're going to sink the fly, especially a dry fly.

**TB:** For saltwater, then?

**BF:** For saltwater bait fish imitations, in particular, the tandem hook is really good—just for the reasons I described.

Use three or four turns of the chartreuse chenille; that's better. We're back on the wing again—getting those straggler hairs out. It doesn't seem like it would make a bit of difference, but it's amazing. We're just covering the trail hook now, with the white wing. As I said, you don't want too much of this stuff, you just want it translucent. You'll notice again that this is cocked up away from the body; should be a nice look, as you pull it through the water. I use these especially fine scissors, for just the hair. That'll just about do it. See this, that's the same fly; that shows you how that stinger's put on. I'll put some head cement on it, and you're good to go.

**DB:** How many species of fish have you caught on that particular fly?

**BF:** Chinook, coho, pinks and chum—so four.

**DB:** And cutthroat don't...

**BF:** Oh, cutthroat, yes, sure. And then I took these down in a smaller size, to Belize, and I caught bone-fish on them.

**DB:** That's what I was wondering, if you also used it for the other, warmer ocean species.

**BF:** That was more of a stunt than anything, just making sure that it had universal appeal.

**DB:** That's what I figured.

**BF:** But those will definitely catch fish.

**DB:** Excellent.

**BF:** I've tried all kinds of different flies over the years, and this still comes up as one of my absolute favorites—most productive. The fellows up in coastal British Columbia use this a lot also. Most of the fly shops carry it up there.

**TB:** What's it like when you see someone who has tied the fly and who really didn't do it right?

**BF:** Well, first of all, I shake my head, because they're missing the message. If the guy tying it is interested, I'll tell him what the difference is. No secrets, it just, really, really does enhance the fish-catching ability. Otherwise, the fly just looks dead in the water.

**TB:** Excellent.

**BF:** So, there's the fly-tying.

## Part II

**DB:** You said you grew up in the New York area. You grew up on Cape Cod. Did you ever fish up near Cape Cod?

**BF:** No, I've always wanted to go up there and fish for striped bass, but I haven't done that. The striped bass fishing techniques are very, very similar to the salmon techniques out here. In fact, when our book first came out, some of the highest praise came from the striped bass fishermen in New England. They were just all over it, because the patterns, equipment and techniques were so similar. Of course, I had the good sense to leave that part of the county and come out here, along with your friend, Mr. Ford.

**TB:** Did you know George McLeod?

**BF:** Just in passing.

**DB:** Well, I notice you have your fly-tying kit all covered. I suspect this has been on many trips with you.

**BF:** Yes, I acquired this box at the Oregon fly-tying conclave; [they] had an auction. A fellow's dad had made a couple (he had never even made one for his son), but I bought this and he was envious of it himself. He finally got one before his father died. I got this in 1992 and I attended most of those Oregon conclaves and the fly-tying events around the rest of the Northwest, as well. It was so handy to have this portable box, where you could kind of organize everything, and get it all into a small place. But it was so beautifully made, with inlaid wood, and beautiful handles, and all this, that I didn't want to scratch it, so my wife, was very nice, indeed, and had this cover made specially, so it wouldn't get damaged in transit. I've kept it on there ever since. It's a wonderful box. I just love it.

**TB:** It has two trays that are in there, then?

**BF:** It actually has three trays. I only brought two because the vice that I have doesn't fold down anymore than this, and I wanted to make sure everything fit in that I needed to take for this trip. Normally I would just stuff it full with everything.

**TB:** It's very nice.

**BF:** It's a classy deal.

**TB:** That's for sure. Then who made your table?

**BF:** Oh, the table, well, I'm left-handed, and there aren't very many left-handed tying vises, or tying tables, that are available commercially on the market. A fellow member of our Puget Sound Fly Fishing Club, made this specifically for me in the left-handed model, and once again, it has lasted many, many years.

**TB:** It's very nice. Any chance we could get a couple of those flies?

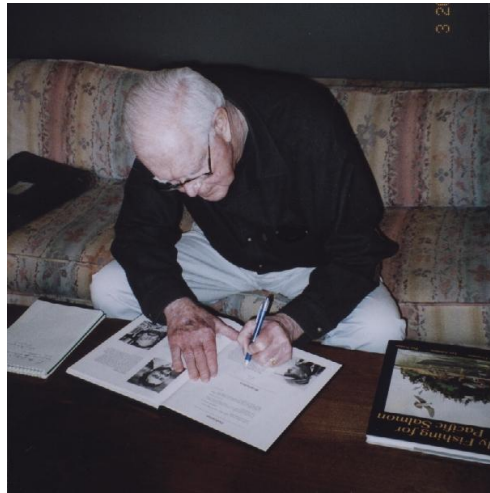
**BF:** Yes; I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

**TB:** People have been tying these and then they've been leaving us with the ones they tied, if you don't mind.

**BF:** I'll give you the ones that the cement is already dry on, the ones that I brought up with me. They're the same flies, identical. I can give you this one, too, if you'd like, the bait fish pattern, Ferguson's Herring Fly.

**TB:** [Great, thank you.].

**BF:** My favorite fly-tying shop is going out of business after twenty-five years, in Tacoma. The Morning Hatch Fly Shoppe, which has been a regional favorite. It's been there for twenty-five years, and they finally threw in the towel. I just bought this from them, but it's a close-out item.



*Bruce Ferguson*

### *End of Tape One, Side Two*

**TB:** How did you get started fly fishing? How did you particularly become interested in saltwater fly fishing and why does it attract you more than fresh-water fly fishing?

**BF:** I can tell that these are in-depth questions. You were nice enough to send them in advance so I had a chance to think back through a lot of things that I've long forgotten about, and check through my rather exhaustive files.

The answer to the first question on how I got started fly fishing, for some reason or another, I remember that. I was interested in fishing, period, like most young four- or five-year-old kids. We lived in New York State, and not too far from Long Island Sound. We would frequently go over to the beaches at night with a hand-line, and some kind of bait, throw it out there, with great hopes, and occasionally catch something. I was just hooked. My mother in particular encouraged me to do this stuff. I just loved it. As I got older, I fished more often and started fishing with a real bait-casting reel and rod that was available at the time—nothing very fancy.

Then I heard about fly fishing, and even though I'd never seen anybody do it, was just intrigued. I got a book from the library, though I don't recall which one it was. It described how to fly-cast step by step. We had a big level open space in the backyard, where I practiced. At that time in history, you were taught that to fly-cast properly, you should hold a book under your elbow, and be very precise in your actions, waving the rod between ten o'clock and two o'clock. That was the way everybody was supposed to learn to fly-cast. I worked on that forever, it seemed like, and I finally got so I could get out maybe twenty or thirty feet of line. I don't even remember what kind of rod I had to do this with, whether I borrowed it or not, but very soon after that I got hold of a copy of Ray Bergman's, *Trout*, which I still have in my library. It's very well-worn; the cover's all beaten up and weathered. It's been all over the country. It was a great inspiration to me. I thought, "Boy, this sounds like the real thing."

I started haunting the local fly shop. I was twelve years old. Fortunately the sales people in the fly shop were very generous with their time and showed me all about fly fishing equipment. I became fascinated with one particular fly rod, of course, and in due time, I saved up all my pennies and nickels and/or dimes, whatever I could scrounge, and bought it, which I still have, a bamboo seven and a half foot for a five weight. At that time, the line classification was an HEH designating a double taper. Subsequently I found

out that this [was] really a very nice rod. [It] was a knockoff of the Payne Rod. I just found this out four or five years ago from the man who bought the Payne Rod Company. So, armed with this rod, my mentors at the fly shop actually took me out fly fishing for trout, on the local trout streams, which were all stocked heavily in the spring, and rarely had any carryovers of any size. But it was a great delight to actually catch a fish on a fly, and that really got me started. I have been hooked ever since. I get just as hopped up now about getting a fish as I did then. Saltwater fly fishing came way, way later, after I moved out here to Washington.

I lived in Longview working for the Weyerhaeuser Company. I got into sea run cutthroat fishing in fresh water, off the Columbia River, the Kalama and all the little streams that are up and down there—Abernathy Creek, Mill Creek and Lewis River—quite a bunch of them. They were very good at that time. This was before the Cowlitz River dams went in, and I thought that it was just a wonderful fishery. Then I did a little steelhead fishing, making up a rod from a kit.

Subsequently I was transferred by Weyerhaeuser down to Columbus, Mississippi, to set up a forestry operation in preparation for a pulp mill down there. This was a strange part of the world for me, but three hundred miles south were some of the best beaches that I've ever seen—white, absolutely white sandy beaches. And, more important, the Gulf Stream swept in pretty close by. You could take a charter boat out, just a short distance, I mean, it would've been fifteen minutes from the dock, and you were in the Gulf Stream. Rather a unique situation. I had brought down my equipment from Longview, Washington, had some steelhead flies, and picked up some Stu Apte tarpon flies in bright colors. I went out just to see what we could catch. They had king mackerel and bonito; false albacore, I think they call them now. These things were pretty strong fish to get on the fly rod. Very, very fast and ran like crazy. The only reels that we had at that time were the Pflueger Medalists. The biggest Pflueger Medalist was a fourteen ninety-eight and a half model, which was a wide arbor reel, one of the first ones, I think. And of course it had practically no drag at all. But we went down during the spring and summer months, probably four or five times a year. I would go out on the charter boats and got some friends interested in doing the same thing, and that was what really solidly hooked me on salt water fly fishing. This would have been in the late Fifties.

At first I was trolling these flies, and then I was casting them. These big waves of bonito would come through; you could see them a mile away on the water. They were just gorging themselves on bait. You cast your fly out there. The leaders I had were totally inadequate for the job. I think that the fish just hit the fly and snapped it off. I cut it back to where I had a butt section of a leader about three feet, instead of nine feet long. It was probably thirty pound test, twenty or thirty pound test. I just barely could tie a fly on it at that. I finally got those fish to hit, and they were so strong, the screws just flew right out of the reel. Just, boom! The reel was gone! So I stocked up on these reels. We put glue on the screws, to hold them in place. I took a cotton work glove, cut the fingers off, so I could palm the reel handle. It would just spin around in your hand. There wasn't any control at all—none at all. All of the reels were like that. There wasn't enough braking system in the drag to do anything at all. These fish were so fast they'd just burn out the reels. By putting your palm over the handle you could slow it down. It bent the handle in, not laying it flat. Instead of ending up with a round handle, you ended up with a flat side on the handle from rubbing on the canvas [cloth]. It would bend it, and you'd just hang on for dear life. The palm of your hand would be black and blue for a week!

I was in very, very good shape then. I was in my early thirties, and those fish were so strong. I caught three bonito in a row, weighed about eleven pounds apiece (I just lived for this fishing!). I had to quit, I couldn't even lift my arms. We figured that those Pflueger Medalist reels would last about three trips and that was it—just had to throw them away, there was nothing left to them.

That's how I really got hooked on saltwater fly fishing. Needless to say, they're so much stronger in those waters than the salmon and steelhead are up here there's no comparison really. But when I moved up here, in 1962, I got seriously hooked on what was available in Puget Sound and it wasn't too much later that the resident coho program was started in the Department of Fisheries by a fellow named Frank [Haw]. He and Ray Buckley figured out how to make them reside in the Sound, rather than go out to the ocean. We had a

great fishery as a result of that for about ten years—just outstanding. The center of it was right in front of my house in Hale Pass. So I had lots of chance to experiment with them.

There were fish all over the place, but I couldn't catch them, didn't know anything about it, and just kept experimenting. The green and silver fly I just tied was the result of a lot of experimenting, because when we first started, people said that you could not catch them on a fly—just couldn't do it. Then they said, —Well, it's a stunt. You got one, but you can't do it again.” My reply was, —Oh, yes, I can. Want to come out?” —Oh, no, I don't want to bother, don't want to waste my time.” Well, now it's a very, very popular fishery.

But somebody had to get in there and figure out how to do it. You also had to have an ample supply of fish to practice on and experiment with. So that's really what started me on the salt water salmon fly fishing. It was just so fascinating because so many people had figured out fresh water fly fishing so long ago. In my mind there really wasn't a whole lot left to learn, a lot of fine tuning, but nothing basic. Besides, it was getting awfully crowded. I was brought up in New York State. When we went trout fishing, people were shoulder to shoulder on the streams, and it was all over with in about two weeks. That didn't appeal to me at all, and there was all this marvelous open salt water, and nobody was on it fly fishing. That was really what intrigued me and got me going on it.

**DB:** Were you aware at that time, in 1962, when you came back up here, of the type of fishery they called buck-tailing? Where they trolled the fly? As I understand it you were casting a fly.

**BF:** Yes.

**DB:** And these other fishers were trolling a fly. Were you aware of that type?

**BF:** Not when I first started, but within a year or so, I was very much aware of the buck-tailing. Technically, it's not fly fishing, but it's very enjoyable. I've done some of that, in fact I believe it was shortly after I came up here, there was a pretty well developed buck-tailing fishery out of Neah Bay, and Sekiu. A fellow named Harold Van Riper, was a fishing guide up there, actually built a boat specifically for buck-tailing. With a flat stern you got a lot of wave action coming off the stern, and then you could have three or four rods that you would hold out there in the wash, for the primarily coho salmon. That was always very effective, no question about it.

**DB:** But you wanted to focus on actually casting to the fish?

**BF:** Yes, absolutely. It was part of that, and part of the challenge. I guess I always wanted to take research results, biology revelations, and translate it into something a layman could use and understand. When I started on this mission, fly fishers didn't have the slightest idea of what salmon ate. People didn't fly fish for them. The biologists knew. But there was this huge gap in communication between this incestuous group of biologists, if you will (and marine biology was not nearly as popular then as it is now, by a long shot). Nobody even bothered to open up the fish they caught to see what they were eating. The fly fishers just didn't do it. And a lot of them still don't do it. You wouldn't think of going trout fishing in the fresh water without finding out what the fish was eating, whether it was with a stomach pump or whether you kept one for dinner, and opened him up—that's a must. None of that had been translated into saltwater at all.

So when I started looking, really looking at it, I mean, you cut them open and —Yes, okay, here's the herring and here's a sand lance, [and] a smelt of some sort”—any of that stuff. That was all kind of new. Everybody knew they eat herring, and that was about it. It was kind of strange, and then as far as zooplankton was concerned, nobody had the faintest idea that the bulk of the diet for a lot of the salmon was these little tiny zooplankton. They didn't know what they were, didn't know what their names were, and couldn't pronounce the names after you told them. You'd have to write it down on a piece of paper and say, —No, this is what a euphausiid is, this is how you spell it.”



There was the strangest period of time after we started doing this identification. People would write us from all over the place with these strange looking comments put down on paper on what these fish were eating. It was so distorted in the spelling you couldn't figure out what they were talking about. It was kind of funny. But to me that was very rewarding, to make that bridge between the biology and the fly fishing. I've just taken a great deal of pleasure in being a part of that, and doing that. Right now, today, I would much rather catch salmon, whatever the species, on zooplankton flies, than I would on bait fish flies, just because it's so nice. You have a critter out there, that's so small, and you'll be out off Neah Bay, up the Swiftsure bank, miles and miles and miles from shore, and here's hundreds of salmon up on the surface, feeding on the euphausiids. There are the seabirds diving and humpback whales feeding on these things—all this stuff miles from shore. Then to be able to take your fly and pitch it out there in front of them and have them grab it—there's just something wonderful about it. That's a round about way to answer your question.

**DB:** But that's what we wanted to hear.

**TB:** That's right, that's right. I think you kind of answered the next question about why fly fishing attracts you. How is it that fly fishing might have changed you?

**BF:** I don't think it has. I think it's been building on a fulfillment of who I am. I've always been interested in the natural world and fascinated with it, in fact. It's just a way of doing more of it. Most of the time you don't need excuses, [you] just want to enjoy it. I started off as a little kid turning over rocks to see what's underneath, and I still like doing that.

**TB:** Excellent. Describe a typical day or perfect day fishing. What's your favorite way to fish? What's your favorite place to fish? How does it feel to take a fish? How does it feel at the end of the day? It's a long question.

**BF:** Wow. Yes, it is. I need to get these in the sequence that you asked me. Well, a typical day on the open ocean is rarely nice and calm. You have huge swells, breaking waves, and the last time we were up there, with a couple of friends of mine, it finally got so rough—the waves were cresting at ten feet, and we were in a twenty-four foot boat. We had to call it quits after getting about a third of the way out to where we needed to go to go fishing. It was just incredible. I rarely get seasick, but I was sick as a dog, throwing up and everything. That kind of takes the fun out of it.

My perfect day would be—first of all, the weather: I like calm, with a little ruffle on the water so I can hopefully stand up in the boat and cast. It's much more pleasant if you're not getting all bruised and beat up on the boat. It can take you a week to get over it physically. Obviously, in my case, the most enjoyment comes from finding situations where fish are feeding on zooplankton on the surface. Now we're talking about a perfect day—then to be able to catch one or two salmon! They are still not easy to catch that way; you have to know what you're doing. You have to develop flies, which I've done for a number of different situations, and you've got to be persistent. It can be ten times as easy to take a big bait fish fly, and catch fish. No trouble, no sweat at all, but the pleasure for me comes from figuring out this other stuff. If I can have that kind of a day, it's perfect. Within the last couple of weeks, this happened. Down where I live, the euphausiids were swarming; the coho were feeding on them, right on the surface. I was fishing from shore, as a matter of fact, in my waders. I laid my fly out in front of them, and they grabbed it. That's absolutely perfect!

I like to fish either alone or with one, what I call, ~~tr~~ "trusted fishing friend." I have a number of them that I've been fishing with for up to thirty years on a regular basis, and it's just great. We both know how to do that kind of fishing now, so there's no fooling around. I love fishing in a [small] boat if I have oars on it, so I can maneuver it in place. Not suitable for lots of situations, but you're asking me what I like to do and that's what I like to do. You catch a couple of fish and that's great. I prefer to catch versus not catching.

**DB:** I had a question: You started out near Gig Harbor, learning about fishing, casting to salmon.

**BF:** Yes.

**DB:** How long was the transition between that place, that type of fishing, and actually going out to Neah Bay and those more rugged areas? Was it right away, or was there some time lapse?

**BF:** Quite a little time lapse. I was only very, very occasionally getting out to places like Neah Bay. Actually, I'd say the bulk of it was after we had finished our book [*Fly Fishing for Pacific Salmon*]. I had some challenges left there that I really wanted to get after. Mainly how to catch all those species of salmon on a cast fly, and when I talk about all the species and catching them, I'm not talking about fish that are off the river mouths where they've quit feeding. I'm talking about actively feeding salmon, out in their element, doing their thing, and just eating what they normally eat. Not about getting them excited off a river mouth or the coast, where they take something when they're all bunched up with an attractor fly, which is what most of the salt water salmon fishers are doing, now. Bill Nelson is a great proponent of this, of the feeding salmon. Most of the really serious guys make a big distinction between the two, because it's easy to catch them when they're milling off of the mouth of the creek, and it's sometimes very, very difficult, depending on the feeding habits of the various species, to catch them while they're feeding in salt water. So to answer your question, we published this book in 1985; I'd say very shortly after that, I got really serious about trying to catch all five species on a cast fly, feeding.

I brought along this picture, which shows the successful conclusion of my search. That is the fly and that is a feeding chum salmon. I had to go all the way to the little island of Langara, which is on the extreme north end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, northern British Columbia, to intercept them out in that open ocean feeding situation. I made the trip specifically to catch that fish and there he is. I commemorated the occasion by getting my friend Les Johnson to take the picture. Anyhow, that became a real challenge to me to go after all salmon species.

Sockeye is probably the hardest of all species to catch—since they feed almost exclusively on zooplankton. [They] move very fast when they're coming out of the Bering Sea, and the open reaches of the Pacific. They're homing in, coming towards the spawning grounds, traveling about thirty miles a day. You have to be on your toes to know when they're going to be in your area and just be lucky to be there at the same time. The main runs come down past Vancouver Island, where they split between the east and the west sides; the bulk of them usually migrated on the west side, where it's open ocean conditions. It's so rough you can't stand up in the boat. The east side, where the bulk of the commercial net fishery takes place, offers much smoother waters where fly fishing is a viable option.

### *End of Tape Two, Side One*

**BF:** We fished from Port McNeil, northeastern Vancouver Island, south. In all, I believe, we spent ten years in the quest for sockeye on a cast fly.

**TB:** Now, why do you think they're so much harder?

**BF:** Because they don't bite!

**DB:** About what year was that? When you first caught a sockeye on the water, on the salt?

**BF:** 1993.

**DB:** Did you have any record of anyone else casting to a sockeye prior to that?

**BF:** Yes; I think that the big problem for me was that—I had previously tried to catch them off the Locks, north of Seattle, where the sockeye run up the Cedar River. Anyway, I tried it there off the mouth of the river, while they were still feeding, and was not successful. Tried it off Barkley Sound, Port Alberni, on the west side of Vancouver Island; was not successful there either. My son-in-law lived in Sydney, B.C., just north of Victoria, at that time. I taught him how to fly fish, so—I had to call in my chips. I put him to

work figuring out where these sockeye were coming down on Vancouver Island, the thickest and most dependably. We ended up at Telegraph Cove, in a small boat, in all kinds of weather. Finally we were successful, not very often. We got a few between us, but that was it. It was great.

**DB:** Did you learn anything between the attempt at Ballard, and that attempt at [Telegraph Cove]? Did you change your tactics any between those, where you weren't successful, to where you were?

**BF:** Oh, yes, we kept trying all the time, all different techniques; from trying to fish right on the surface, to finding out how deep they traveled. Primarily we wanted to find out where they concentrated and how deep. I found out through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, with their highly developed data on sockeye run timing. I just hounded them and they sent me all this material—Lordy! Each different run travels at a different depth, so you had to know what the run timing was, when they came through, which ones, and then, certainly, the [runs] that were more likely to bite than others.

**DB:** I see. So for this entire time, you were learning things.

**BF:** Absolutely; learning things all the time. We were not the only ones trying for sockeye. A number of people—I think most of those had been caught in British Columbia, and in Alaskan waters—if you could find protected areas that you could get out to where they were still feeding. It was always an expedition thing. We were spending a week, two weeks, and three weeks at a time doing this. This was not a casual thing to take on—we were just out there all the time—chasing the Holy Grail. We got a few, but Bill Nelson has caught a lot more than I have. He was living up there, on Quadra Island, so the runs came by his door.

**DB:** So, over all, the sockeye was the biggest challenge, then, of the five species?

**BF:** Yes. This one, the chum, was the biggest for me, because it was the only one I had left, that I hadn't caught.

**DB:** The chum was the last one that you caught on a cast fly?

**BF:** Yes, right.

**DB:** Interesting.

**BF:** Yes. I knew they came out of the open ocean and past the Queen Charlottes. The way I figured it, the farthest I can get away from the spawning stream, the more aggressively they're going to be feeding. Once they've started on their migration, feeding tapers. So that was the grand strategy for all this. Most of the time when they're traveling way offshore you don't have a chance at them. You know, fly casting, you've got to be standing up in a boat, casting. If it's bouncing around like crazy, the wind's blowing like crazy, and pouring down rain, it's pretty hard to do.

**DB:** And this is the fly you caught [it with]?

**BF:** That's *the* fly. Yes. That is a Waslick Sea Bait; this is a full-bodied bait fish imitation, with anchovy colors in it.

**TB:** Weren't the fisheries people really excited to have somebody interested in their research?

**BF:** Very. Interestingly, in Nanaimo, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island, there's the Research Station for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I was always bugging them and a lot of those guys were fly fishers, so we were always communicating. They were very, very happy to work with me on that—any of it. I ended up getting the test fishery results for commercial fishery. I could call them each day and find out, where the sockeye were that day. Where, and how many did they catch in their test net, and all that

information? We tried to correlate all of this to get a better idea of where and when they were most likely to hit a fly.

**TB:** Now, did you have any trouble getting off work, to go do this, then, when the fish were supposed to be just right?

**BF:** Well, you see, now that's a very good question, and it comes to the heart of the fly fishing—serious fly fishing in salt water for me, and a lot of the other things I do. I left the Weyerhaeuser Company after 19 years with them, following their normal routine and their schedule. When I left them I went into my own forestry consulting business, and then I had more time to schedule what I was doing. That made it a whole lot easier for me to pursue the salmon. Then by the time I was sixty years old—I'm now 81—I was fully retired. That gave me all kinds of time to schedule these trips. Without that, no way you could do it. Not from down here. If you lived up there in B.C., that's different. It'd be like me going out in front of my house, in Gig Harbor, and fishing the resident coho, which I can do for an hour at a time, if I need to. I can wait until I see the fish in the water, and go out and catch them.

But for me to go up into northern British Columbia, that's an expedition. You've got to plan a date, a year ahead of time. You're not sure if the runs are going to be good, or bad, or when they're actually going to be there. It's awfully easy to go up on one of those trips and find the salmon have been there and gone. There's nothing there. So then you have to schedule another year, and other time, and go up again. That's expensive, too. It's fun. I just had a driving passion to catch all five species, so I wanted to do it.

**DB:** Do you want to say any more about the work you did in the State of Washington with Frank [Haw] and the biologists with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife? You did work with them in terms of that resident coho program.

**BF:** Right. First of all, it was a great revelation that I had the fish out there once again. The recreational fishing in Puget Sound had really fallen to a low, low ebb I think, about 1964. They were bound and determined to restore that fishery, and came up with this technique of holding the hatchery fish, holding them in saltwater net-pens, for an additional several months before they released them into the saltwater, or if they were in saltwater pens, just holding them in the pens before release. This, I don't want to say disoriented them, but it removed the desire for them to migrate immediately out of Puget Sound, and up to the more fertile northern waters. And so they stayed here.

Historically, there had always been a component of the native fish here that did stay put. It provided not only a recreational fishery, but even a commercial fishery, for the resident salmon. They were able to turn that around, and just had exceptional fishing here for about ten years, and the rest is history. This is not nearly as good anymore, for whatever reasons. My own theories on that have been that they were so happy with the success of the program, they continued to pump out more and more fish on what I think is a rather fixed food supply, primarily the zooplankton. I think as the people population has grown around Puget Sound, we have more and more basic pollution, the run off from parking lots—the industrial plants—the housing developments and the septic tanks—all that stuff, I think is cumulatively, effectively [damaging] Puget Sound. I think as a result we don't have the carrying capacity for a whole lot of fish out there, not on a year round basis. Unfortunately, that has not really been seriously addressed to this point. I have been fussing at them about that for probably twenty-five years.

**TB:** So, who are some of the greats that you fished with?

**BF:** Well, I have never really sought out ~~–greats~~ to go fishing with.

**TB:** Well, who do you consider the ~~–greats~~ that you have fished with?

**DB:** He's now one of them.

**TB:** Yes, you're one. Well, Bill Nelson has to be, he's been a really contributing guy.

**BF:** Bill Nelson is I'd say the number one influence on me and one of the nicest guys I've ever met, besides. Without the search for this fishing experience, I never would have met him, and that would have been a great loss from my standpoint.

**DB:** Well, did you communicate, say, with a Lefty Kreh type, during this time you were trying to understand fly fishing for saltwater species?

**BF:** Well, if we're talking about Bill Nelson, he was—I wanted to track anybody that knew anything about this sport. I actually met him up at a meeting of the Washington Fly Fishing Club, cornered him and talked to him. Then subsequent to that, I went up to April Point Lodge in B.C. there, and went out fishing with him, on a couple of occasions. Then we started sharing all this information, back and forth, over the years.

**DB:** I'd like to take the word ~~—greats~~ out of there, and just include ~~—others~~ that were experimenting," people like Barry Thornton up on Vancouver Island. Did you communicate with people like that, that were involved with trying to learn more about the saltwater fishing?

**BF:** Yes, I did. I think primarily in British Columbia, again, they had more fish—that's how you'd get to that one, real fast. They had had more of a chance to cast to fish, because there were more fish. Barry Thornton was one who was doing some experimenting. One who was, I thought, a greater source of information was a fellow named David Hurn. He's since passed away, but he did a lot of experimenting and I had the pleasure of taking him fishing down here—actually out in the shipping lanes, off Seattle; very good for resident coho. We went out there in terribly cold weather. That guy was so stout—I meant not physically, but—

**TB:** Tough.

**BF:** Tough. I'm all bundled up in everything I can get on. It's so cold out there my hands are freezing. I'm going nuts. He shows up in a heavy wool shirt. Period! That's it. He just kind of shook the rain off like a dog coming out of the water—just an unbelievably stout constitution and a very good fisherman. Bill Nelson probably gave me more information over a long, long period of time, than anybody else. And he still does today. We're just in constant touch with each other.

On well known fishermen, I'd say Mel Krieger was one. This is not saltwater fly fishing, this would be fresh water. But I went to at least one of his casting schools, so I could learn how to cast a lot farther than I was. Initially I did it for tarpon fishing, but I also took it for this fishery out here, because a long cast is kind of essential. He was running trips, and my brother and I went with him. He led a bunch of us down to Tierra del Fuego in Argentina. We went down to fish the sea run brown trout. Traditionally the wind [blows] like crazy, in fact we held our waders up in the air and they went out straight, like a wind sock at the airport.

Mel was used to fishing down there, in that wind, and his casting was worth watching. We weren't faring too well. You got out on the Rio Grande River, which is a pretty good size—I wanted to get to a hole over on the far side of the river. I'm a left-handed fisherman, and the wind was blowing my fly line into me on my false cast. Of course we're using pretty good sized flies, and putting all we had into the cast, but the fly was just whistling past my ear. I just couldn't cut the distance. Mel's watching me and I said, ~~—Can't~~ you do something about this? What can you tell me that'll keep this line straightened out so that I can get across the river?" He says, ~~—Well~~, why don't you just try turning around? Cast over your shoulder." I did and felt pretty stupid; it had never occurred to me. I ended up catching a nice twelve pound brown trout. We kept it. The custom at that point was to give your host a fish for dinner, so we took this trout, or I took it [to the Estancia there, and gave it to our host]. It was a great experience. That episode has always stuck in my mind—there's always a simple way to do things. And you need friends that have been there to tell them to you.

**TB:** So how did you get involved in organizing a saltwater fly fishing symposium?

**BF:** Well, I had to look this one up, as a matter of fact, in my files. Fortunately I still had them—two thick files. Anyhow, I think the real start of it, and I'm not sure I wrote it down correctly; these were just pencil notes that I have, but there was a meeting of the then Northwest Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers. During the course of one of the meetings, this was in October 1985, it was suggested we have a saltwater seminar as a fundraiser to help get the newly formed Saltwater Committee of the Federation started with a little bit of financial backing. We'd take the proceeds and apply, I think there was a ratio—half to the Saltwater Committee, and then the other half would go to the Washington Council, the FFF sub-council, and the rest would, to the extent that they brought in the sales and did the work, [be shared with the other] sub-councils. At that meeting, I volunteered to put on the program and arrange for the facilities, and Dave Round, of the Washington Fly Fishing Club, volunteered to do the publicity and the sales.

In March of the following year, 1986, we actually put this thing together and made it happen. It turned out to be a great success. It was a huge amount of work—way more than any of us expected. But we were able to do a couple things. One was, I think, most important (I don't even know whether we made money, I could never find any information on that), but I think we were able to tie together a lot of people in the Northwest Council that had knowledge of this fishery, and that didn't necessarily know one another very well. We established contacts, really lasting contacts, with a lot of fly fishers that were part of the Federation. We had a lot of speakers at this symposium, and I think that was one of the most important developments out of that. The other thing was that we had on-the-water casting lessons, over fish, while there were still a whole lot of fishing right out in front of my house at Hale Pass. I've forgotten how many people there were, but the water was covered with boats and there were quite a number of fish caught. A lot of people surprised me with where they would come from. They had heard about it and they wanted to do this. They went out there, and they had a great, great time doing it. I think that the side benefits were as good as the direct benefits.

**DB:** Well, it's nice that you still have those files, it really is.

**BF:** Yes. Well, you had mentioned, last night, that you'd like to get a hold of the program sheet. It so happens, since I've just been through my files I have these things available, so blow a whistle and I'll bring it to you or send it to you.

**TB:** How about some of your other work on policy committees, both locally and regionally?

**BF:** Well, there were a couple that jump to mind that were time intensive. (You have to remember, I'm about fully retired at this point, so I could do this stuff. Without those circumstances, I couldn't). Because of unraveling the how-to of the saltwater salmon fly fishing, I really got interested in the conservation of the fish, and not from the traditional extreme point of view of the—as I call the—environmentalists. But more as a shorter term practical solution to a lot of the problems that we had, which—a whole lot had to do with allocation of who would get the fish. [This] led me into advisory committees with the State Department of Fisheries, which subsequently led me to become a delegate to the U.S. - Canada Salmon Treaty negotiations. That took a full year of my time—no ifs, ands or buts—I didn't do anything except that. But I need to back up a little bit.

### *End of Tape Two, Side Two*

**BF:** Throughout all of this, the Federation of Fly Fishers has been a very big part of my life. Like a lot of people, you get to a certain point of life and you want to put something back into the resource other than just going out there and catching fish. I became interested through the Washington Department of Fisheries, and my contacts with them, of the need to do something basically about the catching of fish, and the ridiculousness of some of it—and see if I could do anything about it personally. I talked to Marty Seldon, who was at that time the vice president of conservation for the FFF. I told him I wanted to do this and said I would like to represent the FFF, use their name. Because of the various organizations [whose meetings] I'd attended, the Federation, their ideals and style of doing things suited my personality and

objectives better than anybody else. He said, –Good.” He decided to call me the Marine Resources Committee. I was a committee of one. So, wherever I testified I subsequently used the Federation as my sponsor. That worked out very well.

I was duly appointed to this delegation on the recreational side of the negotiations on the U.S. - Canada Salmon Treaty. I took a lot of baloney from these guys as you could imagine—purse seiners and gill-netters and so forth. –Fly fishing, huh?” –What are you doing here?” Seriously, it was a great experience. Bill Wilkerson was the director of Fisheries and head of our delegation from Washington. They did a very good job of representing us. But as we found out, the commercial fishery is so strong that the recreational side was just barely acknowledged in the whole process. I think that was in 1985, that this treaty was signed, and I spent the year 1984 in preparation at committee meetings and so forth. It was a big disappointment, but a revelation that it was this well-stacked in favor of the commercial fishing industry. Let’s see, we’re about twenty years later now [and] we still have not seriously come to grips with the fundamentals on this fishery.

We have the new negotiations starting in 2008, so there will be another shot at it. I’m always hopeful, but I wouldn’t want to hazard a guess that that’s going to be a final solution. The basic problem, of course, is that the fish migrate. They don’t respect any political boundaries. Alaska’s up here in the top end, nobody’s catching their fish. They’re catching everybody else’s fish. They don’t care. They have a very, very strong fishery and, I think, pretty well managed resource, but when it comes to the harvest, on the end that they’re migrating through, to British Columbia, it’s like, –Hot dog, let’s get all we can get!” Then British Columbia in turn says, –Well, you guys are going to do that, we’re going to catch your fish. You’re all part of the United States.” Well, we’re not, not in fisheries issues; we might as well be three different countries.

I think there’s been some real progress along these lines. Basically what everyone needs to understand is who’s producing these particular fish, which runs, and make sure that as closely as we can manage it biologically, that the country of origin gets to take the fish that they originated. I think if that is ever really settled without seriously encroaching on the other provinces/states, the salmon would be a whole lot better off. It’s just as evident as night and day if you look at the fisheries. Alaska did back off, in the last round of negotiations. All of a sudden, British Columbia knew what they were doing on the Washington and Oregon fish, and they agreed, as part of the re-negotiations, to back off an equivalent amount. All of a sudden, we had all kinds of fish down here. It’s just that simple—there are no shots to the moon or anything. It’s just getting people to get together and doing something logical, for their own benefit. I guess that’s the kind of compelling interest I have in approaching conservation from that aspect.

I think the habitat is extremely important. I talked about the food supply here in Puget Sound, for instance, but most of the environmental organizations are hopped up about fixing the river banks and all that sort of thing. Well, that’s great, I have no problem with that, except that that’s extremely expensive, and it takes a long time to get results. If you hold on to it once you’ve done that, I think, yes, you’re going to have a vastly improved production facility, and we can back off a lot on the hatchery production. But when we have this other stuff staring us in the face, I think we can get a much bigger return on our investment in a much shorter time, if that makes any sense to you. It’s just my philosophy on it.

**TB:** That’s what we’re here to hear!

**BF:** Oh, I want to mention one other thing that is more under control than the salmon migrating, and that’s sea run cutthroat. They’ve always been very near and dear to my heart ever since I first moved out here. We have people population increases. We had very liberal harvest regulations. As a result, the population of the sea run cutthroat dropped off dramatically, until they were really just remnants of what they had been, I think, particularly in Puget Sound—south and central Puget Sound. I spent a whole lot of time, easily twenty years, trying to get that turned around. The fly fishing clubs were a driving force in this thing. Different ones of us have testified over the years in front of the then Game Commission, lots of times in department hearings and so forth. We finally came up with the idea of a sea run cutthroat

coalition. We decided we couldn't do this all by ourselves as fly fishers. We better have the rest of the recreational community in there. So we tied up with the Washington State Sportsmen's Council and Trout Unlimited, and then later on with Washington Trout.

But the Federation and the fly clubs were always the main backbone in this. I mean this took twenty years. But going from a standing start we just chipped away, chipped away, testified, and put an awful lot of work into it. Gradually, we'd get an ear maybe, somebody new would be named on the state Game Commission. They'd listen. The department itself, like any bureaucracy, didn't want to change very fast or very much. But we kept getting things done and I'd say in that long time frame, we got the size limit increased from eight inches to fourteen inches, which allowed the first spawning of the females, to bulk up the population. We got catch and release only regulations in all marine waters of the state, and we're now reaping the benefits of that, in a big way. We achieved the adipose fin clipping of all hatchery produced sea runs. The hatchery program, down on the Columbia River, just about eliminated all of the wild fish, because they didn't know which were which, as a basis for setting the regulations. I have my fingers crossed that we got that in time. But the whole idea of the fin clipping is to allow for the release of the wild fish with harvest only of hatchery production. I don't think there's anything else to say. It certainly changed some attitudes in the department.

We had what we called "parking lot diplomacy". We would have evening meetings with the Department of Game, and the recreational fishermen in the coalition. We always had a Game commissioner sit in to referee. We would argue out all these points, and then take a recess and maybe go out, physically out in the parking lot, at night, and hold a caucus, and get agreement on the fine points of what we wanted to do, then walk back in, and have a united front. This actually worked.

**DB:** Bruce organized that.

**BF:** I was very happy to have been a significant part of this—all the way. In fact it's one of the best things that have happened. And it's all confined to one state, so you don't have all this other garbage to work with. It does show, very clearly, that if you take the time to find out really what's going on with the biology, what's wrong with the system, what it's going to take to fix it, do it, and keep hounding on that, you can do it. You can accomplish it. I think that's the best example I know of, of anything that's going on.

Another item in the accomplishments of the sea-run cutthroat coalition was to reduce the daily bag limit from eight fish to two fish in most of the anadromous streams in Western Washington. And as a corollary, kind of a fun observation of this, I brought up the current issue of the regulations. Those of us who have been involved in sea-run cutthroat management think they're pretty important, and we want them to be named and identified as important. None of that happens in the regulations today. It never has. The sea-run cutthroat represents the bulk of the anadromous fish population, after allowing for steelhead and salmon, in the Western spawning rivers. Like 90%, I would guess. There was no mention in the regulations of sea-run cutthroat trout—none! I had to look this up myself the other day. It says trout—trout. They've got this big umbrella. Now steelhead are treated separately. They're named all over the place. Sea-run cutthroat trout are not. They're just swept under the umbrella of trout. So none of the achievements that I mentioned to you in here, of the sea-run cutthroat coalition—nothing is identified—nothing. They are current regulations and they are all just for trout. Now, you have bull trout, Dolly Varden, very small populations. There's no press on sea-runs and that's the main stay.

**DB:** Are you telling us that the coalition still has work to do?

**BF:** Yes, I think so. One is nitpicking; the other is to protect what we've accomplished. Certainly anybody in the central and south sound (I don't know about up here in north Puget Sound) who's been fishing in the last half dozen years has noticed the increase and improvement in the sea-run cutthroat fishery. It's because of these changes specifically—no question. Before the new regulations, you rarely caught one over about eight or ten inches long for a long period of time, probably fifteen years. You now



get a full age distribution on them; if the regulations were changed back to the –good old days” that would disappear in one year.

As long as I’m in this vein, and I know it’s another question, but a lot of the members in the clubs sign on as being interested in conservation. They don’t very often succeed. I was thinking about that, and the real reason is they go at it as if they want it on their resume or something. It takes a whole lot of really focused dedication and persistence to make anything happen in the kind of system that we have. We have state agencies that are responsible for the fish resource; they don’t always get it right. If you want to change it, you don’t do that overnight. They have to get used to seeing you. You have to get self-appointed to various committees. You have to show up for the committees. You have to do the work. You have to have rational arguments, be sure of your information. You have to be willing to get up there and testify. Go down, if necessary, and haunt the legislature, in due time. You can’t do this with a one or two year commitment. You have to take the time. The ones who have been really successful at it have spent decades doing this. The legislators and the agencies really need to get to know you as an individual. Then you can have some influence. Just mouthing off, and disappearing a year or two later, that doesn’t do anything – at least from my experience.

**DB:** I’m going to comment on that. Bruce was the person that did the legwork, did the phone calling, and did the contacts with all these people. Then he’d call in the members of the clubs to come down and make comments. I’ll never forget the time in Aberdeen when you were working on the sea-run cutthroat program. Ralph Wahl came down and he had all these notes from the 1930s of the fish he caught. Remember that?

**BF:** Right, yes, I do.

**DB:** All of a sudden the Game Commission they kind of got up and they started to listen. And, you know, it made a difference. But he had this material right there. I mean, he’s reading from his notes that he took while he was on the stream. But those were the things, and Bruce was the glue that brought all this stuff together, and got these people there to do it. That’s what I know!

**BF:** That particular meeting you’re talking about was really what triggered the reformation on sea-run cutthroat. That was the beginning. A fellow named Larry Cassidy was chairman of the commission at that time.

**DB:** Some people are now calling those the –good old’ days,” for the Federation.

**BF:** Well, when you get it to work and you keep working at it, then it’s always a success. But you have to get focused and you have to decide what you want to do and then stick with it. Pick out the stuff where you think you can really accomplish something. Don’t just wave your arms around—what I call counting the rosary beads on what the latest environmental issue is. That is a very, very important message, I think—extremely so.

Whatever few people are out there that have the time available to do all this, need to be able to drop things and go to a meeting at eleven o’clock in the morning during the week, then go back the same night, even though they have to drive sixty miles to get to the meeting place; you have to have that ability. There are people out there, a whole lot of fly fishers, who are getting gray-haired and they’re retired. They could do it. One added qualification...you’ve got to have the stomach for politics, too.

**TB:** Excellent. So, you’ve written this book with Les Johnson and Pat Trotter. How did you happen to decide to do that, and what is it like to write about fly fishing? And I also think you should tell us about the other two authors.

**BF:** Well, I can tell you a little bit about that. I should go back just a second, and say I just love the saltwater fly fishing so much I wanted to pass it on to as many people as I could get to listen to me, so they would try it and enjoy it. I’ve been able to go around to a lot of different clubs in the region and the State of Washington, to present slide shows and that sort of thing. The book was an outcome, really, of that. Pat

Trotter interviewed me for, I think it was, a two-part series for *Fly Fisherman* magazine. Couldn't tell you the year, but probably about 1975, 1976, something like that, maybe a little later than that. Anyway, I went through some of this stuff with him. Obviously, he talked to other people too and came up with a very interesting couple of articles, I thought. He and I were talking about it later, and I think it was my idea, but I couldn't be sure, it was just in conversation. I said, "You know, there's so much data available now, and I'm sure there's enough interest, so instead of one guy going around to give a program, why don't we do a book? Then we can get the word out. If people want to do something with it, they can." I don't think anybody ever thought that they were going to make any money writing the book. So that's kind of how it got started.

To tell you the truth, I can't even tell you when Les got involved in it. I'd been fishing with him some before. He was a very knowledgeable saltwater and freshwater fly fisherman, for salmon. He's a writer. We started working on this thing and, unfortunately, I am not a writer. I'm really not. I just have a message to get across, and I don't know how to do it very well. There were a lot of re-writes on chapters. All kinds of stuff to re-do just to get familiar with the publishing process and to make it fairly interesting reading. We agreed that certain people do certain chapters. For instance, Pat Trotter did the history, and the flies section, that was his original assignment. Les did freshwater fishing. These things overlapped of course. I did the biology stuff, did the stuff that I know about it, saltwater techniques and, obviously, Les put in a lot on the saltwater techniques, but it was my primary responsibility. The fish politics and the future prospects and that stuff, I took care of that because that's what I knew about. It only took us eight years to do. That's the punch line!

As I pointed out, it was nice to see that in the Northeast they picked up on this book and related it to striper fishing. I thought that was great. Apparently there were some good sales in Europe. You know, a book like this does not sell a million copies. I couldn't even tell you how many books were sold. But I'm thinking we ordered twenty thousand, something like that—which is pretty good for that kind of a book. It's so specialized, so specific. It did cause people to call up and say, "Hey, on such-and-such a page, you said do this and you fish in the surf, and certain times of the year, this kind of fly—and I just phoned in to tell you; it works!" That was the whole deal. That was very rewarding. We had any number of calls of that sort. People in British Columbia were all over the book.

**DB:** I agree that fly fishers that live along the coast, in the Puget Sound area, would read the book and they'd think, "Well, maybe I can do it." They'd go out and try it and it might work, and then they'd get more involved with it. It brought about a lot more saltwater fly fishers over the years.

**BF:** Huge, huge change. It went from something you couldn't do—it's just a stunt—to something that was readily available as the techniques became available. It's just an accepted thing now. It's very satisfying and gratifying in that respect. Now we're on the second edition, which is due out this year, with the same title: *Fly Fishing for Pacific Salmon II*. The manuscript is at the publisher's. We're working on captions on photos, and I've got a section in the appendix that the publisher's got some work to do on. After that it should go to press, so, we're right down to the lick log. I suspect, by fall of this year it should be out. And by the latest, I'd say by the end of the year. You know how long it is from 1985 to 2007? That's how long we've been working on digging out new information.

**TB:** Twenty-two years. You've really been gathering the information the whole time?

**BF:** Oh, yes. I've got steno pads full of notes on every trip that I took—how to catch these salmon. The actual writing hasn't been over that whole period. The actual writing, from the notes and from new experiences, pulling it together, has taken about four years. It's still a lot. A lot of the same ground is covered, but the amount of information is going to be remarkably expanded from what's in here on saltwater techniques.

**DB:** Who's publishing it this time?

**BF:** Same one; Frank Amato Publications.

**TB:** How about telling us about your Silver King Award?

**BF:** I should actually hand this back to Danny. I think he had more to do with it than anyone else. He's not saying anything.

**DB:** Okay.

**BF:** The Saltwater Committee was formed in the Federation, actually the formation of the committee was kind of my idea, and Brooks Baldwin from Texas, was co-chair. We sat down [at] the conclave in West Yellowstone, Montana, and corralled all the people we knew. Lefty Kreh gave us some really good advice, and several others volunteered their help. We set out with the very ambitious program of forming a saltwater committee in every council. This just didn't happen. So we pulled in our horns, so to speak. But the committee has survived and there's a Warm Water Committee in the Federation as well. And I'm very, very pleased to see the Florida council get started because they've been so strong in the saltwater fly fishing arena.

*End of Tape Three, Side One*

**BF:** Anyhow, they decided to have a periodic award (Silver King Award). I was surprised, absolutely surprised, to be the third one who received this. The first one was Lefty Kreh. The second was Dan Blanton, from San Francisco. He's well known for his fly fishing on striped bass in the San Francisco area, and he's a writer, as well. Anyhow, the award says, *for extraordinary contributions to the sport of saltwater fly fishing over an extended period of time.*" This was in 1996. I wasn't able to attend the ceremony, but was very honored to receive it. My excuse for not attending the ceremony was that I was actually fly fishing out of Telegraph Cove with my son-in-law and three grandsons. I taught all of them to fly cast and catch salmon in saltwater—every single one of them. We'd been booked for a year in advance and I could've done something if I thought about this earlier, but...

**DB:** You know who some of the people are that wrote the recommendations for you?

**BF:** Yes, I believe that I asked you about it.

**DB:** Frank Haw was one.

**BF:** Frank Haw.

**DB:** He was one of the ones. And—

**BF:** There were three guys from the Department of Fisheries. Ah, shoot.

**DB:** The director was one, wasn't he? Well, did you ever receive any of the copies?

**BF:** I never received any of the copies, but I did receive a list of those who had written letters for me, and I sent each one of them a letter as a result of that. I made specific inquiries so that I would know who my friends were. My friends were in high places. That was a very great honor to receive.

**DB:** I guess if it must be known, he's accusing me of starting it and I did.

**BF:** Yes.

**TB:** And you have some other awards?

**BF:** Well, I have another one here that I am particularly fond of. This was given to me at a surprise 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party at the joint meeting of the Puget Sound Fly Fishers and the South Sound Fly Fishers, which are basically my home clubs. They presented me with this plaque. It says, *–Recognized, Puget Sound Fly Fishers and South Sound Fly Fishers recognize and commend Bruce M. Ferguson for outstanding and devoted efforts to improve resident salmon and wild cutthroat fishing in Puget Sound, and for his generous contributions to fly angling through his writings, presentations and fly patterns, July 14, 2005;*” signed by the presidents of each of the clubs.

**TB:** Very nice.

**BF:** Again, totally unexpected.

### ***Break***

**BF:** Okay, I want to go back just a little bit on the awards, and on one of the most recent ones that was, again, very surprising, was that I was named, among a number of others, as one of the Living Legends for the Federation. I was acknowledged in Idaho Falls, at the International Conclave of the Federation. Again, I suspect that this guy had a lot to do with it.

**DB:** I think Buck Goodrich had more to do with that one.

**BF:** Really?

**DB:** Buck Goodrich. He was the chairman of that Conclave; that was a wonderful Conclave.

**BF:** Yes, it was.

**DB:** I wish they’d go back to that place; it’s so nice.

**BF:** Yes, that was, it was beautiful, absolutely beautiful.

**TB:** You sort of talked about this—any thoughts on the future of fly fishing? The future of saltwater fly fishing?

**BF:** I guess when you get to be old enough you always get asked that question. First of all, I think the sport has grown exponentially. It has gone from practically nothing to— you can hardly pick up a paper, a magazine [and not see an] article—fly fishing never used to be mentioned in the press at large. Now it’s referred to in ads, general clothing ads as the thing to do. It’s taken on a world of its own, fly fishing has. And saltwater fly fishing, I think, has grown probably several times as fast as fresh water fishing—just because there wasn’t much coverage before in terms of finding out how to [saltwater] fly fish. Whereas I started out teaching myself in the backyard, along with a lot of other people my age, [now] you can’t visit a fly shop without picking up a brochure on a seminar some place or other to learn how to do whatever is currently in vogue in fly fishing.

I sent my youngest son to a saltwater seminar, if you will; a how-to thing for four days in the Florida Keys. Many *–legends of the saltwater southern sport,*” did the instruction, taught the casting, and the whole works. He didn’t know [sic] about saltwater casting. He graduated from the seminar and can now cast way better than I can—in four days! There’s just such a process in place now for putting these things on that it doesn’t make it any difference what you’re after—sailfish or bonefish. Specialized courses in how to do all this stuff, in short order, a concentrated dose. They’re not all that expensive, either. If you’re really serious about it, it’s like the difference between teaching yourself how to play golf and taking golf lessons. It’s the same thing with tennis. I think fly fishing has matured enough that all this stuff is readily available. Now there are all kinds of lodges around the world that’ll take your money and show you a good time. And of course equipment, *Lordy*, the equipment changes have been just staggering. And again I think especially so on saltwater.

Years ago, nobody would ever have thought of picking up a fly rod to go after marlin, sailfish, bluefish tuna, and fish like that. The equipment just wasn't available that would handle it. Now, I don't think there's a species of fish that swims that you can't catch on a fly. Somebody's got the stuff that will stand up to that kind of treatment. For example, just a simple matter of corrosion in equipment; when I started in this, there was no stainless steel, this and that. There wasn't any graphite. Fiberglass was just getting started. Prior to that time it was all bamboo, or solid steel and hollow steel rods of different kinds. There was just nothing that would stand up to the saltwater environment. You couldn't take a fine bamboo trout rod and go out on saltwater and get something that's going to peel three hundred yards of backing off your reel. You would've either broken the rod, which I've seen happen a number of times, or put such a [set it in] that it was never useful again—so all that stuff has come to pass over the years that I've lived through.

We used to have gut leaders—you had to soak them overnight so they were useable the next day. You have to be as old as I am to remember that kind of stuff. All of that changed about the end of World War II, and nylon came in and all of a sudden all kinds of things were possible. Hooks, they've gone from just a few different patterns and styles, to endless. Everything's endless now, if anything, it's gone way too far; there are too many choices—way too many choices.

I think that fly fishing is going to continue as long as there's fish around to catch. We've already talked about conservation goals that need to be accomplished. We need to be aware of that, and work at it. I think that fly fishers in general had better stop looking at fly fishing as kind of a push-button gratification sport and look at the total picture. They have to get directly involved to see what's going on with their favorite fish—and do something about it. Individuals need to get in there and do it. The numbers of people who supported me—politicians always listen to that. The individual fly fishers have to commit to doing that as a part of the game. It can't be just be—take, take, take. And at the seminars, I think one of the major, major problems is that, in both freshwater and saltwater, with the increased numbers of fly fishers, in all of these seminars...nobody's taking the time to talk about the ethics, and the courtesies that are involved in making it such a wonderful sport. The new people coming into it just go buy a rod then get out on the water and catch fish. They really don't have a handle on proper behavior and I think that's been a huge omission due to the rapid development of our sport. You can turn it from a grand experience to just an absolute turn-off. I think anybody that's been fly fishing recently can relate to that directly.

**TB:** We heard that in another interview, actually, Mr. Nyerges.

**BF:** It's like learning how to drive a car. There are certain rules and regulations that are required and certain others that are just courtesies of the road, and you have to learn both. I think, in my mind, that fly fishing used to be conducted with much more courtesy than it is now.

**TB:** Do you have any insight into why that might be happening? Is it because of all the, not just the numbers, but because they all just go rent a guide to take them out, and the guide doesn't feel the responsibility to teach them that, or do you have any explanations as to why?

**BF:** That's a good question. Getting back to putting the nickel in the slot for the experience, having a guide does that for you. You meet him at the boat ramp, you jump in. He usually provides a lunch. You go for the day. He might even provide the rod and the reel, the whole works. You just go out and catch fish. That's the whole name of the game. There's rarely any conversation other than about how to catch fish—certainly not about how to relate to the other fishermen. It's more impersonal from that standpoint, if you're using a guide.

If you've ever fly fished for tarpon down in the Florida Keys (I haven't done that for, oh, probably, seven or eight years now just because I can't stand up in the bow of the boat anymore due to balance loss), but those guides were just as bad with each other. They had a pecking order that they decided was it and [if] somebody got out of line, whether they were a guide or not [they were in trouble]. A guide goes out there, and decides in the morning, that this is his spot, and finds somebody else is there in his place. He just stops the boat and chews the other guy out. That behavior was rampant down there. It takes all the fun out of the

day's experience. I think the impersonality of having a guide is one thing; the other is just their sheer arrogance. You get more and more people trying to do the same thing in a limited amount of space. These guys make their living out of it, and that's their excuse, but it's not a good enough excuse.

If you're going to have this sport, it ought to be fun, first of all. I think things that people have found to work so that a number of people can share the same water in some way, and not get into each other's hair, I think that's very valuable. Saltwater I think is becoming particularly bad in that respect just because it's new. In fresh water, the pecking order is pretty well spelled out when you go steelhead fishing. Usually someone will take a guy aside and talk to him if he's doing something that's not regulation; obviously he doesn't mean to, he just doesn't know. But there are gentlemanly ways to do things to make everybody have a good time. You have to get enough perspective so that you can see that, and maybe it takes age to do that. But the instruction a new fly fisher receives at the beginning, ought to include that in a big way. If you can cover the whole realm of saltwater fly fishing in four days in a fancy school, you can certainly take an hour or two to tell people the proper way to conduct themselves. So they really have an appreciation of what they're doing.

**TB:** Well, I do know that we're running out of tape here, so...

**BF:** Yes, yes you are! I told you, I talk slowly.

**TB:** No, its great stuff, I just want to make sure—what are some last things you want to make sure we get on the tape?

*Break*

**BF:** Danny, you're pointing at me as if I had done all this by myself.

**BD:** Well, no, but you've been the catalyst.

**BF:** Yes, I think that's it. I've been maybe like the fly paper for the flies. I've tried to collect all the information from all the sources I could. From people that have gone before me and know a whole lot more about it than I do. I tried to assemble that and consolidate it in some fashion that makes sense for other people to learn about it and to bring a focus on different aspects of it. We've been talking about a lot of that for this interview. I think I've had the fun and the pleasure of being in that capacity. I know there's lots other people coming along, and people have gone before me who have enjoyed doing the same thing. I've been lucky at this particular time in history to have played a role in it.

*Break*

**BF:** One thing I hadn't touched on at all, is part of the ethics situation, and I really [fuss] all the time over this one. A lot of us, as individuals, have spent hours, days, months, years, finding what rock to stand on, what tide rip, on what tide, on what time of day, just how to do these things. We've simplified it for ourselves. There's a fast growing cadre of people who think that is common knowledge and if it isn't, it should be, as fast as they can make it. There's a regular web throughout the country, I suspect throughout the world, telling about who caught what fish standing on what rock in what location, and get your butt out here because they're really biting—that kind of stuff. I've got a lot of good friends, I won't even name them that are in the writing business, and I hate them for it. Absolutely hate them for it. I'll take them out, privately, and show them a spot that it's taken me years to find, and the next thing I know, it's in the newspaper! And I think that, again, gets back to ethics. That's a real part of it. If anyone's into sea-run cutthroat, they know how precious those bits of wisdom are and normally you wouldn't tell your aged grandmother or your mother where they were. And then you'll take a friend, so-called friend out, and help him, so he'll enjoy it. Instead of that he's got to feel important and blow this out all over the world, and then it's gone. They want it easy and quick.

**DB:** Yes, it doesn't just fall in your hands. You have to put a little thinking in; you have to put a little work in. I think that's what you were talking about. Put a little effort, and do something.

**BF:** Yes! And then, when somebody helps you with it, respect that information that you've received. Treat it in a courteous fashion. That doesn't mean broadcasting on the internet to make yourself important.

**TB:** That's right. Well, thank you very much. We really appreciate this.