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This interview was conducted with R.P. Van Gytenbeek on September 7, 2009 at the office of the Federation of Fly Fishers in Livingston, Montana. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

**TB:** Today is Tuesday, September 7, 2009. I am Tamara Belts and I'm here with R. P. Van Gytenbeek and we are going to do an oral history. He did sign the Informed Consent Agreement. Our first question is: How did you first get started fly fishing and get into all of this?

**RPV:** Well my dad was a serious fisherman, although more attuned to sitting in the back of a 40-foot Bertram Sport Fisherman looking for marlin. But he was a fly fisherman, in the classic northeastern sense, the three-wet fly cast. My namesake, Uncle Pete, was a marvelous bass fisherman and not a bad trout fisherman. So I had these two sportsmen [as roll models] and it just stuck.

I think I was maybe five years old. My uncle had retired and he had a little farm in Wallkill, New York which is in the southeast part of the state. And my mother was stuck with taking care of me. We went down to catch some, I guess chubs or suckers or something in this little spring rivulet that came out of the farm and ran down toward the Wallkill River. Well I caught one that had spots on it. And I allowed to my mother that there must be something different, could I keep that and show it to my father. I practically was run over by my uncle and father when they saw this trout that I had caught. I think maybe that's when I realized that this whole trout thing must be important for some reason.

It was just the normal progression of fishing with bait and then fishing with a spinning rod and a casting rod and learning to fly fish as time went on. I just think it's the most fun way, the most challenging way. As Steve Raymond loves to say, —"I was a golfer I'd go play Pebble Beach for the challenge because it's the most difficult; that's why I fly fish, to me, it's the most satisfying and it's the most challenging." And certainly it is. There's so much history, as you well know, there's more written history on fly fishing than on any other sport in the world. So I came by it honestly.

In high school when we had a rain-out day for instance and I couldn't play baseball, two or three of my friends (we were looking for rain), we would go fishing. In college my wife and I, then girlfriend and later fiancé, actually had a lease in north Jersey and nobody believed that we went fishing. But we did. It's gone on for a long time and I'm seriously into it.

Summers we spent in the Adirondacks in a wonderful place called the Adirondack League Club which is inside the Old Blue Line. The club was there before Gifford Pinchot established the Adirondack Park and the Blue Line. So you've got this hundred-thousand acres of wilderness which is inside of more wilderness. And for young kids that are strong enough to hike and go find the beaver ponds and the streams, it was a great place to spend summers. Those were back in the days when you could only make \$599 in the summer time or you messed up your father's tax deduction. It didn't take too long to make \$599 and as soon as that was done and the Legion baseball season, or whatever baseball season was over, it was up to the Adirondacks to go fishing and hiking.

**TB:** I was fascinated that you majored in geology and architecture, went into business, and yet developed a real passion for the ecology and restoration of streams and waterways—I mean you’ve been on like every committee I think related to that.

**RPV:** Well I think if you get into a sport, you just get serious about it. Actually, you mentioned the geology; I wanted to be a geologist. And when I got out of the service, I went to all the logical oil companies and they all had found all the oil they wanted. You could go to Persia, which is the Middle East, or Creole wanted me to go to Venezuela. But I had a wife and a child at that point ... You know Creole said, “Well you go to Venezuela for 20 years, you can have 30 days of vacation each year and we’ll send your kids to the best school they can get into.” It was a pretty good offer. But all the [other] oil companies looked at me and said, “We’d like to have you in management training. But we just don’t need any more field geologists.” So that being the case, I just sort of fell into the furniture business through an alumnus in Denver who was helping me with my interviews with the oil companies and hard rock mining companies. Then I got into the contract furniture business and happily so at that point.

**TB:** Okay. So how did you become involved with Trout Unlimited?

**RPV:** I think, as a trout fisherman one of my friends said, —Gsh, you know, there’s a new fledgling organization called Trout Unlimited. We’re getting some chapters started here in Colorado.” They were friends of mine and I said, “Well that sounds like a good deal, worthwhile.” So I got involved. And they knew a pigeon when they saw one, so next I was chairman of the council, which was just beginning. When you get a certain number of chapters in a state you create a council. Then the council was asked to host the board of directors, I think it was in 1968. We took good care of them and saw that they got some fishing in and had a place to meet and so on and so forth. On Monday morning I was sitting at my desk and the phone rang, and it was Leigh Perkins from Orvis. He said, “What are you doing for lunch?” And I said, “Well, nothing special,” looking at the sandwich on my desk. He said, “Well some of us are at the Brown. We stayed after the meeting and we’d like to talk to you.” So that’s when they said, —hok, we’re trying to put this thing on the map and we thought maybe you’d like to go to work for us. (And [I’m] looking at Curt Gowdy, who I knew a little bit at the time, and was America’s sports announcer at that point). Curt said, “If we knew, we wouldn’t ask, so don’t ask. If you want to take the job, that’s it. Let’s put this thing on the map, we think it’s worthwhile.” That’s how one thing led to another and I ended up as Trout Unlimited’s first full time executive director, starting the first day of 1969.

**TB:** And you were hugely successful in that. I mean, the organization grew from 3800 to over 20,000 members. How did you facilitate that? Was it just the time the environment was becoming [a hot topic]?

**RPV:** I think that was part of it. You know, Rachel Carson had done her thing with the book, Silent Spring. There was a lot of talk about the seven sisters: Aldrin, Dieldren, DDT, etc. That was popular and it was about that time that the Cuyahoga River caught on fire in Cleveland, which was a huge poster-child for environmental problems. I think that was part of it.

As I’ve gone through this experience with the Federation, I think that one of the key differences is a board. I had a gold-plated, involved board of directors in Trout Unlimited. And that made a huge difference. They told me “We’ll pay you, number one, so that you don’t have to justify your salary. And secondly, if it’s legitimate you won’t want for money.” And we didn’t. I did what any good sales manager would do, I picked up my map and sat down and said, “Okay, in a perfect world, when we’re totally organized, where would we be?” We went state by state and did that. Then we began to go after people in a given town. We’d call up the local sports writer, if there was one and say, “Who do you know in town X who fishes?” And then we’d call the fish and game people and we’d call other fishermen until we had a list of folks that were fly fishermen in that town. Then we’d send them all a letter saying that: “I’m going to be at the Holiday Inn on a certain day, would you please meet with me. We want to talk about forming a Trout Unlimited chapter.” It was just simple, mechanical, and pretty soon I had some other people helping me and that’s how we put it together. That’s how we built it. You always tell people what you need, you need a project and you need a problem and some dedicated folks and if you’ve got those things you get it done.

You know, like the Corps of Engineers used to follow behind the next flood so that they could get a dam or some more riprap. We'd follow behind the Corps of Engineers because we knew there'd be a bunch of angry fishermen there somewhere, looking for a tool to help them save their fishing.

**TB:** That's good. Where did Trout Unlimited get all of their money to get started? How did they get organized originally?

**RPV:** They had a group of individuals who met—George Griffith is the one who gets the credit for being the founder. He has a house on the Au Sable River which is a very famous trout stream in the middle of Michigan. One of his friends was a gentleman by the name of Bill Mason who was then chairman of American Motors, that's back when American Motors was still a viable, good, going company. He and some other people, I believe there were 11 of them, met at George's house on the Au Sable and decided that they could do for trout and salmon what Ducks Unlimited was doing for wild fowl. That was the premise on which it was started. They had a pretty good group. And they quickly picked up some people with contacts and money. People like Leigh Perkins, for instance, of Orvis, and Martin Bovey, a famous wildlife photographer from Boston, Mose Teller (Otto Teller) from California, and Elliott Donnelly from R. R. Donnelly Printing Company, the largest printer in the world. So they had this nucleus and they all believed the same thing. For instance I saw Elliott Donnelly write a six-zero check and this was back in the early seventies. I mean they just put their money where their mouth was. Because they were a terrific group and they believed and we had an organization that made sense to people. It was simple and straightforward with a good message, we drew support.

I remember when Mose (Otto) Teller and I went to meet with Bing Crosby at lunch one day at the Pacific Union Club, a very nice club up on top of Nob Hill. We wanted to get Bing to join the board at T.U. We talked about who was on it and what we were doing. He said, "Gosh, I'd love to be a part of that." "Well, what can you do Mr. Crosby?" He said, "None of that Van Gytenbeek, it's Bing." I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "You'll get over that." He said, "Well I can run a fundraiser for you every year." And he said, "You know, I do a lot of interviews," (on radio basically at that time), "and I'll always mention Ducks Unlimited and Trout Unlimited. And for anything else -- ask me."

He had his, I think it was his brother who was sort of his gatekeeper with whom I worked on schedules. Bing threw a fundraiser for us at the Beverly Hilton or Beverly Wilshire, I forget which. Here I am, I'm about thirty-one or thirty-two years old, and I go to this fundraiser. I walk into the hotel and you know everybody can't be nicer because I was obviously Mr. Crosby's guest. We had the dinner that night and everybody in Hollywood you could think of was there. I mean Fred MacMurray, John Wayne, and people like that.

Do you remember the name Chill Wills? He was the guy with the really high voice that was always in the Westerns, Roy Roger's, Hop along Cassidy, etc. I forget what it was; I guess when I stood up to speak, I said, "I wouldn't think of trying to tell a joke in front of this crowd." And he's way in the back somewhere with his high voice and said, "Nōoke, no money!" I never forget that. I said, "I remember a joke!" But I guess those guys all have their favorite charities and they all go to each other's charity functions and spend money and its: You scratch mine and I'll scratch yours type of thing. So Crosby was wonderfully helpful and having Curt Gowdy, whose American Sportsmen Show was at the zenith of its popularity, were huge assets. Those two were terrific from a media standpoint. I had Al Rockwell, of North American Rockwell, R.O. Anderson of Atlantic Ridgefield from the corporate world. It's just on down the line a terrific board of directors. They weren't just there; they knew what a director did. You go out and you tout the organization and you either get it or give it. They understood that. The difference between the two organizations: the Federation of Fly Fishers has done everything they could over the years to chase money away. It's really strange. I mean, the board just doesn't get the job done, that's the huge difference. There's a structural difference between the two as well.

**TB:** So was Trout Unlimited club-based or individual-based?

**RPV:** It's individual-based but there are chapters. For instance, the Elliot Bay chapter in Seattle, that's the downtown Seattle chapter if you live in Seattle. You're assigned there automatically. I think I might have gone to one meeting in all the years I lived in Seattle. Everybody's an individual member. That's the great flaw in the Federation. For instance a member of the Washington Fly Fishing Club, that sees the FFF logo on his newsletter says, "Well I guess we're doing everything we need to do with the Federation." But there is no way for this office to speak to that person because he doesn't get the magazine or newsletters or e-mails, and as a result has no idea what the Federation is doing and then sees no reason to be an individual member. It's just a bad structure. It was a real Sixties structure.

A few clubs, like the Washington Fly Fishing Club, had strong FFF supporters like Gordy Young. Gordy always stood up at the meeting for a 5-minute run down of what the Federation was doing. Well we're a very unusual club in that regard but we were one of the founding clubs of the Federation as well, now not a member of the Federation because of this stupid gender thing.

**TB:** So when you belong to like the Washington Fly Fishing Club, you're not automatically an individual member of the Federation?

**RPV:** No, absolutely not. And there's this barrier. You probably heard about that. The Federation's position at this point is they don't care as long as it doesn't say in the by-laws that they are either all women or all men.

**TB:** So the all-women's club can't join either.

**RPV:** They're in the same position. That's why, in part that there is a Northwest Women Fly Fishers was formed, which is a terrific club. But I think we're almost to the point where we'll get over that foolishness. I have a number of women-only clubs, and they just don't say so in their by-laws and if a man wants to join, that's fine. The Georgia Women's Fly Fishers is a terrific organization. The Fly Gals in Michigan is another one; huge clubs and they're really good. You know they may have a couple of husbands or something on the roles, but they're basically women's clubs, which is fine. The boys want to have a club, that's good; the girls want to have a club, that's good. As long as they're out doing something for the resource, that's what counts.

**TB:** I want to back up one thing just to make sure I get it on tape, because at Trout Unlimited, you were the first full-time executive director, correct?

**RPV:** That's right.

**TB:** Even though they started in 1958, they didn't have the first full time executive until what—1969.

**RPV:** The first day of 1969.

**TB:** Then what about the Federation? Where were you when the Federation first formed in like 1965? Where you a part of any of that?

**RPV:** I was, but not by plan. I happened to be in Aspen playing in a tennis tournament and the person I was staying with was also hosting Ernie Schweibert at the time. Schweibert was attending the Trout Unlimited meetings as was Phil Wright, our host. So I'm hearing about this, and being a fisherman I paid attention. It was the meeting that the fly fishers decided to break away and form the FFF. When Trout Unlimited said, "No, we're not going to promote a method, we're going to go with science." And you know, Lee Wulff and the others said, "Well, no, what we want is we're saying we know by god, that hook and release and fly fishing only is a better way." So that's when they agreed to break up. And the result of that was they then had their first conclave in Eugene that fall. So was I close to it? Yes. Did I know anything about it? Not really. I just listened to the two of them talk each night.

**TB:** Okay. You obviously must enjoy a lot of sports. You mentioned both baseball and tennis.

**RPV:** I played football and baseball, well I played all three—that's what you did in high school. In college I played football and baseball and I had an offered Yankee contract from the time I was a junior in high school. At that time, you didn't take it because you wanted to maintain your college eligibility to play football or baseball, whatever. And when I got out of the service, it was just you know: —~~W~~uld a, should a, could a," I don't know. I was in the service because my brother was in Korea and he said I ought to miss that, so I was in ROTC. By the time I got out of college, it was over. But I did my two years in the service and played ball. The Yankees asked me to come to spring training. It was before bonuses and you know with a child and a wife, you're going to go down and spend three years in the minors or something like that and starve to death. I just didn't think that was right. So I didn't do that, and I didn't go to Harvard, B-school where I also was told I would be accepted.

**TB:** So it looks to me in a way like Trout Unlimited, in one sense, launched you into your really being recognized or identified with fly fishing?

**RPV:** Yes, yes. Well with conservation more than—fly fishing but again, our whole thing was we'll go with the best available science, and most T.U. members are very hard-nosed about that.

**TB:** I was just getting at that your affiliations and organizations. It looks to me like you first served on a conservation related board in 1972, which was the board of directors for the American League of Anglers.

**RPV:** Right.

**TB:** Now could you tell me a little bit about that organization? I have not heard of that.

**RPV:** Ray Scott of the Bass Anglers Society was one of the founders. Mose Teller (it was Mose Teller's idea) and a gentleman by the name of Gardner Grant whose name may have come up in your discussions. He was a very active environmentalist with the Federation as well. Every time you throw money into one of those machines on the freeway to get through the toll gates back east there's a little *kaching* in Gardner's pocket, because it was his family that designed and made those machines. But anyway, you know there were a lot of us that said, —We've got to have some kind of a counter presence in Washington, because we're getting beaten to death by the various lobbies." So it was an attempt by most of the active organizations to create a lobby with our own lobbyists. It went on for a couple of years and basically we couldn't get the support from the fishing industry or from enough individuals to really make it viable, so we gave it up. I don't know how many years it lasted; it might have been three or four.

**TB:** And you first served, it would have been after you stepped down as executive director, you were on the board of directors of Trout Unlimited for a while.

**RPV:** Right.

**TB:** Any added experience there that—

**RPV:** No, it was a—T.U. went through its struggles during that period of time after I left, not because I left, but after I left. There was a bit of an east/west schism. One of the things that I had done was to get the Northwest Steelheaders to join T.U. When I started looking around and I began to organize in the northwest I ran into this Northwest Steelheaders Association and I said, —Oh god! 5000 people? Wow!" So I had open discussions with Larry Cassidy and Bill Luch and some of the other N.W.S. officers. The long and the short of it was we agreed that they should become part of Trout Unlimited. I then spent a whole summer up there going to each and every one of their 28 or 30 clubs to make presentations along with Cassidy and Luch. It was a fun summer, and they joined almost doubling the organization's membership.

They were a conservation group, but they were basically killers. They would rap them over the head, take them home and eat them. I've got this eastern group that tends to be very Orvis, if you will, and it was interesting. They got along well on the board, the individuals we got on the board had a great time together.

But there was a tension because they just approached their sport in a different manner. They're wonderful conservationists; that's what got it going in the beginning. Anyway, when Elliott died, Elliott Donnelly, who had been the second president I worked for, just Teller and Donnelly, in five years. He'd let it be known that he wanted me to have his seat on the board. So I remember coming to a board meeting here in Bozeman and I hadn't been following T.U. (Frankly, I'd been trying to make a living). And they were just hard at it, —Boy, you got to vote for me, you got to vote for—” —Guys, what's going on?” And it was just a bad situation of people choosing up sides. They got over it, and a gentleman, a friend of mine from Denver by the name of Mike Owen who became chairman, did a nifty job of getting everybody back on the same track. But it was just another board experience and it was comfortable because I'd been there for a long time. So I did a term and a half, I think, or two terms. I finished Elliott's term and did another term after that.

**TB:** What about the American Museum of Fly Fishing?

**RPV:** That was kind of one thing that you got on—Leigh sort of expected whoever was running T.U. to be a museum member. Because, you know, a lot of stuff—if you want to look at it from a business perspective—a lot of stuff was offered to T.U. and it was a place that we could send things. At that point, gosh, they were in just a ramshackle old building up there in Vermont, but they were beginning to collect a lot of good things. It was one of those things that was obligatory. Leigh Perkins is Orvis. His sons run it today, Leigh's still around, and the Museum is in a beautiful new building.

**TB:** It looked to me like you didn't get involved with the Federation until 1983. Can you talk about what the board was like? You worked with Danny, Danny was president in there.

**RPV:** That's when—yes, that's when I ran into Danny. The guy that was president in 1979 or 1980 was a gentleman by the name of Errol Champion, who was from Colorado originally. He was for a long time, among other things, the mayor of Juneau when he went to Alaska. But he had—what's that huge caterpillar dealership that's all over the northwest and Alaska? It's [N C Machinery] or something like that. Anyway, he was the manager in Alaska and got to be quite politically active. But before that, he called me up one day and he said, —Isten, you know about the Federation?” I said, —Yes, I know about the Federation.” He said, —Well we need some more horsepower. You're a fellow Coloradoan,” (because he was from Longmont originally), —How about getting on the board?” So I did that for a year and then they stuck me with being vice president of [membership]. Then the next year I was president for two years. Danny was very involved at that time, and always has been. He followed me as president. I met Marty—well I already knew Marty Seldon because Marty had been helping me at T.U. We had started something also; we started the started Wild Trout. That was great fun because Nat Reed was really a guy who—Nathaniel P. Reed, [Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, under Secretary [Rogers C.B.] Morton. I mean there are a million stories there.

**TB:** Let's not skip over that because that was right after you'd been on Trout Unlimited and you started out in 1974 so it seems like a pretty early kind of [effort].

**RPV:** Well it was something—a gentleman by the name of Frank Richardson, who's actually retired and spends his summers over on the golf course in Bozeman and two or three other people in the Denver area. He was running the Fish and Wildlife office in Colorado at the time. Charlie Lovell was with the Forest Service, and John Peters who was with the BLM. We all sat down and we kept saying you know we really need a science symposium on wild trout. So we had this idea and we kind of fleshed it out and Frank said I think I could sell that to [Assistant] Secretary Reed. He did and we had the first one up here at Mammoth [Hot Springs Hotel]. Because I was out of T.U. at the time the secretary sent the plane for me. Very nice! You know, roll out there to Stapleton [International Airport, Denver] and have a big twin pick you up. Very nice! The pilot gave Elizabeth and I a great fly over the park. Because it was the secretary's plane he could fly lower than you're supposed to. Oh it was just beautiful. And you know we've done Wild Trout ever since. In fact the next one's coming up next year.

It's been pretty darn successful. We bring people in from all over the country and the world, to talk about things that are new in science that relate to salmonids. Then the salmonid management public interface, which has been one of the most interesting parts of it, a back and forth between the managers and the users. We've been at either [Bozeman] or [Yellowstone] Park ever since. It's basically every five years.

We did get involved in a lot of stuff during those five years. The fights we got into were something else. I mean, the Teton Dam. I'm sure you've heard of the Teton Dam which broke.

**TB:** Okay, tell me more about that.

**RPV:** You've probably read *Cadillac Desert*, [by Marc Reisners (1986)] and all the different battles. During that period of time in the sixties, the Bureau of Reclamation, and to a lesser degree, the Corps, decided they're going to dam up every free flowing river they could to irrigate the West, or provide flood control. Put houses everywhere on the good soil and irrigate the West, whatever. So we fought dam after dam, and we were successful in some and not successful in others. But the Teton fight was one that was our baby where we happened to be the leaders. It was a beautiful river in a canyon in [south] eastern Idaho that flows into the Snake River. We ran drift boats down that thing and brought people out to raise money for the legal battles. And the long and short of that was, we lost.

Interestingly, the day before (what we had to do was to get Secretary Morton to sign off and say no you're [Bureau of Reclamation]) not going to build it), Nat Reed calls up and says, "Go ahead and pop the champagne boys, you won." (This is a whole group of us that had the euphemism "garden level" offices, in Denver, which means you can read the license plates of the cars outside). We were just ecstatic because we had fought this thing for about a year, flat out. And the next day it was, "Hate to tell you, but you got to put the cork back in the bottle." "Nah what happened?" He said the two senators got to Nixon through Haldeman and said, "You're going to lose this senate seat up here if you don't build it, you can't do this, you got to do it." So they went ahead and built the dam.

In the lawsuit, one of the things that we said was that there was a porous bed which would become liquefied in time and it would cause the dam to break. Well I am a geologist, not a very learned one, but I looked at that and you know, I had a lot of respect for the Bureau as somebody who could do their job right. I figured the bureau couldn't possibly have messed up the geology that badly. Well in truth, they did. The dam broke, killed nine people; it happened on a Sunday [June 5, 1976], which was lucky.

It's just interesting how that went. So then the media got on this story saying, "You know there's more to this story." People would call me or Larry Reno, our attorney. I'd asked [Secretary Morton], "What do you want me to do?" And he said, "Just stonewall it." And I said, "Okay, for you, for all the things you've done for us, you bet your life." And finally, there was one guy, and he was from *National Enquirer*, of all places. He had it put together. He had everything down and he called me up and I'd say, "I got nothing to say." And he'd say, "Well this is the way I see it." And I'd say, "Will that's really an interesting story." Finally he gets the last piece put in there and by that time, Secretary Morton was chairman of the Republican Party and it was an election year, I forget which year it was. And I realize now, probably why Morton did what he did, I called him up when he was in Buffalo, and I said, "Listen, this kid's got it all put together, he's got all the pieces, you want me to just continue to stonewall it?" And there was a pause and he says, "You know Van, why don't you just go ahead and tell him?" "Uh, sir." He said, "No, it's long enough and the story needs to come out." I said, "Okay!" And of course, I think at that time, he knew he was dying of cancer [1979], which nobody else knew. At any rate, we did. Then NPR up there in Boise took all of the stuff that the *Enquirer* had and made it legitimate because it was under their banner and they did a very good TV show which—it was an hour special and it went around the country and it was good. So that was one of the many fights.

Another one that was kind of fun: See the regional head of the Bureau of Reclamation, was actually my "Deep Throat," which was very interesting. He was a pal of mine; we ran rivers and fished together.

### ***Interruption***

So anyway, there was a thing called the Central Utah Project. And the Central Utah Project was going to dam up everything coming out of the Uinta Mountains. You name it and they had a dam planned, which was typical of the Bureau of Reclamation's long range planning. So I was over there at their offices in Salt Lake which are massive, with Don Andean, who was the head of fisheries for Utah. We're negotiating with Dave, trying to get water flows and things like that. At the end of the day he said to both of us, "Well is there anything we can do for you?" Don said, "You know Dave, I hate to even mention it because the fishery wouldn't be there if it wasn't for you. But as Flaming Gorge Reservoir fills, the water is getting colder and colder because it's a bottom draw. We're having to change everything in that river because bug life's dying and we've got colder water fish, like cutthroats in there now where we had brown trout before," etc. Dave said, "Well, hm." They throw up a big screen and it's a cross-section of the dam. I'm looking at this thing and they're talking about it, and I said, "I don't understand why you couldn't put a pipe down inside of that dam with louvers in it, and put it on top of the penstock," (which is this bottom draw, it's where you pull the water out of the reservoir and into the power turbines). "And you could dial anything in the reservoir." So Leo DeGuire (who is my great friend and enemy, he was head of power operations for the bureau and everything we did screwed up his life) says, "Van Gytenbeek, that is the dumbest of all the things I've ever heard you say! And that's a long litany of things!" But Dave's saying, "Well you know, I don't know." He's kind of stroking his chin and looking at it. The discussion kind of petered off and we all went home.

The next week I was in the office and Dave Crandall called up and said, "What are you doing for lunch?" And he said, "Meet me out at the tech center; I want to show you something." Well the Denver Tech Center, among other things, out there, they've got in a warehouse a working model of the whole upper Colorado River system. I mean, it's incredible. They had gone ahead and built this dam with a penstock on it and he said, "I think we can do it." We got it authorized rather quickly because we still had Morton and friends, back there in Washington.

Of course the old trick with the government, and with legislation, is your congressman says, "Well I got it authorized now, aren't I wonderful?" I said, "Yes, now what about funding it?" Of course there are many projects sitting around that are approved but not completed due to lack of funding; Elwha Dam is a perfect example of one that was [authorized] for demolition for years and years but still stands. So anyway, it was the same thing on this. We needed \$13 million to make this alteration, [and] we're not having any luck with funding.

Again the phone rings. It says: "First National Bank, Albuquerque, Mitigation," *Click*. What in the heck was that? I called a friend of mine who's a First National Bank president in Santa Fe and said, "Hey check this out for me, will you?" He called back in twenty minutes and said, "Van, there's \$13-\$14 million dollars in a mitigation fund that goes back to when the dam was authorized that's never been touched. These guys are just collecting interest on the money." So anyway, that's how we got it done.

It was fun because Elizabeth and I were invited to go up and see this installation. The contractor had saturation divers, because it was 360 feet, and the water was coming out at 31 degrees. These divers were from Alaska and based on a barge behind the dam. They were saturation diving with warm water being pumped into their suits as they welded the rails on the inside of the dam. Once they got that done, they took these enormous pipes and hooked them by the ends to the rails and started filling them with water. The pipes would slowly rise up vertically and then slide down the inside of the dam and attach. It was incredible to watch this whole operation, and it worked beautifully. Now BLM does all their dams that way.

**TB:** Excellent.

**RPV:** People say, "What's the best thing you ever did?" And that's probably it.

**TB:** How did you get involved in Florida Save our Sea Life program? You're credited as being a part of that. Does that ring a bell?



**RPV:** Well it was probably from the magazine.

**TB:** Well someone used it when you were appointed to the Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission? And that apparently was a little controversial just because—

**RPV:** Just a little bit! Just a little!

**TB:** I was hoping you would talk about that. One woman was really really excited about your appointment because of course you were a fly fisherman on—

**RPV:** Well the Save Our Sea Life—well there were a lot of different issues in Florida. And most of the saltwater issues seem to start in Florida. Just because there are more fly fishermen, there are more fishermen in Florida than anywhere else in the country. They've got a heck of a resource down there. So when we had the magazine, we got involved in a number of things, *Florida Sportsman*, which is the most successful and the biggest outdoor magazine in the United States. It's huge, it's two-hundred some pages of advertising and articles, and it's just Florida. Karl Wickstrom, who is the publisher is just one great conservationist; he's the one that got the net ban finally through in Florida. Once we got it through in Florida than other states have fallen in line. Not all of them yet. But that's where Save Our Sea Life was the name Karl had hung on the net ban.

**TB:** Maybe now before I ask about Washington State, I will fast forward this—

***End of Tape One, Side One***

**TB:** It took about a year for you to get approved [as a commissioner on the Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission.]

**RPV:** It did take that long. One of my cohorts, Bob Tuck, never did get approved. You can serve without being approved by the senate, which is kind of weird.

**TB:** Let's back up for a tad. How did you get your appointment? Locke appointed you. Did you know Locke?

**RPV:** I didn't know Locke but a lot of people suggested I apply. Steve Raymond had his hands in that. We had formed a group called the Wild Steelhead Coalition. It had some pretty interesting folks and there was a lot of horsepower in my club, the Washington Fly Fishing Club. A lot of people said you know, "You ought to run." And I said, "Fine, I think it would be fun. I'd love to be considered." So somehow I got considered. And no, I had never met Gary until—I guess I went in for an interview before he actually made the appointment. And I was really impressed because I knew he didn't know diddley-doo about fishing but boy was he on top of the major fishing issues. That man is a quick study. We had a good conversation and he went ahead and made the nomination.

Well, you know, all the commercial guys, the only thing they knew about me was all the editorials I'd written over the years for my magazine. So they did what I would have done, by god, they rallied the troops. There were organizations that came in to testify against me I never even heard of. But it did get through. And I'm trying to think, when I was in the car, headed back up to Seattle, I don't remember who was president of the senate at that time, but he was a Republican and he called and he said, "We'll get you through one of these days but you can serve; you don't have to be approved to serve. But we'll get you approved after a while." And in fact, that's what they did. And you know one of the things I'm really most proud of was when I was up for re-appointment and I didn't take it because I was moving out here all those commercial groups were going to support me. Which, you know was, I felt, a real compliment. They're just saying, "Hey this guy is fair and he's been even-handed from day one." We worked hard for our crabbers and some of the others—I mean some of the regulations were terribly unfair. The Washington Commission is unusual in that it regulates both—commercial and sport fishing. And that's very unusual. It was just a really good experience, I enjoyed it. And of course we had our one great hassle. The governor, when I told

him I couldn't be reappointed because I was moving out here, was reported to have said, —Will who's going to create controversy?"

**TB:** Well you have to tell me about that. I know one of your decisions up there was [related to] Forks? Trying to ban the—

**RPV:** Oh those people! That mayor—

**TB:** Can you tell me a little more about that?

**RPV:** Well it was kind of fun. We proposed—no kill for wild steelhead. Wild fish are declining and we don't even, in many cases, have any idea why. We know some of the reasons, but we don't know why. So I helped form the Wild Steelhead Coalition. Steelhead anglers are probably the most avid, devoted group of fishermen that I've ever run into. I mean they are dead serious about their sport and they really care about their fish, so they want to preserve these wild fish. For a long time there had been no definition between the limit of fish you could kill between wild and hatchery raised. So we'd gotten that through. You could only take one wild fish or wild fish had to go back. I forget exactly what it was. And we said we wanted to eliminate the kill of all wild fish period, end of report.

Well the mayor of Forks, prodded by some of her people out there. (She was a Seattle lady who hadn't lived there that long). They were going to go ahead and sue us. We said, —~~Fin~~, good, go ahead and sue us." It never got to that point. But she was convinced that if people couldn't kill steelhead, they wouldn't come out there and it would hurt the economy of Forks. We were able to go back and show, in the State of Washington, when Ellensburg people were very concerned about that back when the Yakima was turned into very restrictive regulations [that] actually the economy had improved. The people from Ellensburg came to tell us it had improved their economy. We had many examples of that back east, where tough regulations had gone on a river and it made it more popular and people were bringing more money.

**TB:** To clarify for me, who doesn't fly fish—it wasn't that you weren't disallowing any sort of fishing at all; it's that it would have been catch and release.

**RPV:** It was that we're not going to kill wild fish. We're trying to preserve the wild fish. Catch and release is fine, you can't tell who is biting. And winter steelhead, even with bait, because most fish are lip-hooked, that worked. You get ninety-some percent survival. Yes, that is what it was all about. It was just a matter can you kill everything you catch or not. And you know there was just no talking to the lady.

She was funny. We had a meeting one day, Will Roehl and myself (there were three of us commissioners and Will was the chair at that time), and the attorney and the mayor and a couple other people. There was just no talking to them. Statistics, examples, I mean it was just one of those things, you know, fine, throw your gloves on the ice and let's go ahead and do it. Now and then you get to that point in any discussion but it didn't go there. And what was it, six to eight months after I left, they had the Friday night massacre and the governor got rid of what I would consider to be the good guys on the commission for no other reason than that. I don't know what's happened specifically since then, as far as those regulations go. But she got rid of the two ladies. Lisa Pelly from Bainbridge Island who was a long time commissioner, was chair for a while, she was really good. Then we had another lady who was from Wazzu, and Hunter from over on the Wenatchee River and Bob Tuck from Yakima. I mean these were really good people, and she got them all and I'll be darned if I know why. Because when Governor Gregoire had been attorney general, she'd been really very supportive of the commission. We were all set to sue [over] the HoH and that's where she first showed her stripes.

You really could put full-time in on the commission. I mean you really could spend, if you could afford to and if you didn't need an income I mean you could put in full-time. There is that much going on for that commission. And you know its like, —What do I know about crabs?" So when it first started I had to get involved and read up on crabs and talk to people and go talk to some commercial crabbers and say, —What are your problems." It was just fascinating but there is just so much to do and so many things that we would

have liked to have been in that, we probably never will get into. I just thought that was a really good experience that commission.

**TB:** Okay, back up a bit and tell me a little about how you started your magazine, I think, in 1994, *Fly Fishing in Saltwater*. How did you start doing that?

**RPV:** Stupidity. Well there's no other reason for it. We had closed our company and were sort of looking around for something to do. We were looking at two Herman Miller dealerships in Florida and staying with some friends of ours who were in the radio business down there. One was a member of the Angler's Club—Miami Angler's Club, used to meet in the Al Capone's old house on Biscayne Island, wonderful old club. His name was Joel Day and Joel said, "Van, could you spend a half a day with a young guy who's starting a magazine on saltwater fly fishing and he doesn't know anything about business and he could use a little help." I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to." So I met with Scott Fine and Scott basically had been bloodied to the point where he wanted out. So one thing led to another and I said, "Okay, I'll buy the business." He owed everybody in the world. So I got a hold of all the different creditors and made peace with all of them. So now it looked like it was going well so Scott decided he didn't really want to sell it.

Well it also turned out that Bob Teufel [of Rodale Press], a big company and Bob's the president and a dead serious fly fisherman. He was influencing Scott and Scott thought, "Oh I can get a better price from Teufel." But I didn't know that at the time. So finally we had said, "We're going to go ahead." I had a sales manager and she was going to get the booth. We're going to go to the San Mateo Show and announce the fact that we're going to take over this magazine. Anyway, he balked.

I'm halfway down I-5 and I remember sitting there at the pull-off by the Umpqua and calling Lefty. Lefty Kreh was just pushing the heck out of this. "Oh we got to do this. Van, we'll all help you, as will your friends and mine. You know, Flip Pallot, Lefty, and Dan Blanton and Steve Raymond, we're all going to help [make] this magazine successful because we need a saltwater fly fishing magazine." So we'd said okay, we're going to do it. And at this point, I had just been called and told that they refused to give us the booth and they're going to sell the magazine to somebody else they think. So I called Lefty and I said, "Lefty, I don't need this, you know, I just really don't need this." And he said, "Well, why don't we start our own magazine? We'll just do it ourselves and everybody will help you!" So being a pigeon, I did that. I stopped at the Umpqua Company, the fly tying company and they were the first ones that knew we were going to do a magazine. I went down and Scott Fine tried to cause trouble at the San Mateo Show. And Ed Rice, who was the impresario and an old friend, kept me posted and finally told Scott to bag it; he'd never get inside a Rice Show, etc. And I hope you've done Ed Rice. If you haven't, you need to and he's sick. You need to see him.

**TB:** And where does he live?

**RPV:** In Vancouver, Washington. Ed was the guy who started the International Sportsmen's Shows. He was the one that made all of those shows partly fly fishing shows on the West coast. He's like Chuck Furimski was back east. Ed knows lots of history. He's a wonderful guy.

Anyway, we went ahead and said we're going to have a magazine on newsstands in June and it was now, I don't know, March I suppose. And, you know, my wife and I know nothing. She's a very brilliant lady and everything but we knew nothing about publishing. But Steve said he'd help so that gave me a little bit of confidence. We got back to Seattle and talked to some of my design company friends and advertising friends from the furniture business. We said, "We really need somebody who's really good with a Mac and with Photoshop and all the things that relate to publishing." So they suggested somebody who turned out to be absolutely incredible, her name is Laura Davis. This was the lady who spent two years in Norway learning all about the old mechanics of printing and typesetting with woodblock and had a degree in graphic design. I mean she was just terrific.

I'll tell you a story about her. Steve and I—Steve was very helpful. We were doing an article on the Ocean Bonita or one of the many tuna families. They all look about the same; I mean they're very hard to tell

apart. So we got this thing all put together and the writing and everything. And we gave Laura the pictures we wanted in the article and she's laying it out. And she comes to us and she said, "I think—"

### *Interruption*

**RPV:** Laura said, "I think this is not a—" (I don't know what it was), "It's not an Ocean Bonita, it's a black fin tuna." Steve and I are looking at each other and thinking, *you got to be kidding me*. So you know, being polite fellows, we said, "Oh really?" Well we got out the book and she's right!

She would read the articles and look at the pictures, and the nuances of the design in that magazine were just terrific. And between her and my wife, who's a designer and interior architect, and a few other things, I mean they really did a job, from the first issue on. We did get it out in June of that year as promised. Friends in the business jumped in and we had pretty good advertising from day one. But I learned a lot of things about it. One thing you never do is have a one magazine publishing company; that is just suicide, that's really stupid. But we got the magazine, interestingly, to the point where it broke even but at that point we didn't have the money to continue to front it because you front months and months at a time. So we sold it to World Publishing, who has done a nice job with it. I stayed on as publisher for three years, I think that was the deal; good association with those folks. They're a very good company. Like I said, it's a very popular magazine.

Our competitor, Bob Teufel, of course, bought the rights to Fine's magazine and we ended up fighting with him a little bit, but we beat them. They disappeared and they're no longer on the market. So it is *The saltwater fly fishing magazine*. It was a good experience. It was very interesting.

**TB:** Cool. What about—you also were on a TV show and I think Les Johnson was on the TV show with you, right?

**RPV:** Yes, yes.

**TB:** Will you tell us a little bit about that: how that got started?

**RPV:** Well again, go back to Washington Fly Fishing Club, of which Les and I are both members and Bill Kuper who has now been designing games. But at that point he was doing television and he was the producer for the Sonics and he is also a serious fisherman. He said to Les and I one night at the club, "You guys ought to do a show. We need a fly fishing show up here in the Northwest." That was when Prime Sports had their eight or nine different companies around the country (they were all bought by Fox). Prime Sports Northwest was who Bill was working for. He said, "Let's try it." So we went out and did a pilot and everybody liked the pilot, so away we went. Les and I made a couple of deals with them, we said we want to be able to talk conservation and if the fishing is lousy, we want to say it's lousy and we'll show that it's poor. And if we do something stupid, we want to show that too. We want it to be real and they agreed.

I guess probably the epitome of that was we were up in Alaska, fishing for steelhead in the spring in the small streams. And anyway, I hooked a big steelhead and in the process managed to tear my waders and had this epic battle and finally caught the fish, and so on. Les is over on the bank carping the whole time, giving me bad advice. I, of course, got soaked and the owner of the place was just dying ten deaths because he knew I was going to die and it was going to ruin his whole business. So one day I was standing on a corner downtown [(Seattle)], where we lived downtown, and some guy says, "You ever get those waders fixed?" I'd never seen him in my life. I'd often get comments like that.

Les and I had a good time because he's fun to kid with. I always did the throws, you know, the throws to an advertisement. And one day Kup says, and Rocco Macoron, who was the other photographer (now he's Boeing PR). They said, "Hey Van, let's tell Les he's got to do it." So I said, "Great! Let's do that!" So we were fishing for small-mouth [bass] on the Umpqua and they said, "Es, Van's voice is not coming through today." or some such bologna, "So you do the throw." "Huh!" he does the whole high voice, "Huh, whoa,

whoa, I can't do that!" Twenty-seven takes! Twenty-seven takes! Oh gosh. So we had fun, I mean it was good fun.

Then when Fox bought it they wanted us to do 26 shows and we said, "You know, we all have jobs we don't have time to do 26 shows." So we agreed to disagree at the end of that season, which was just as well because I was coming out here anyway. But it was fun, and all we got out of it was—I guess they did pay us a little bit—but basically what we got out of it was good fishing trips with friends and had a lot of fun. Les was a wonderful partner. It was probably more popular than it should have been because it was on the Mariner's station. And of course the Mariner's announcers were always pushing the show. "Don't forget, we're not on Monday night but tune in and catch Les and Van with Fly Fishing Northwest." So we had this ongoing advertisement that we never could have paid for. It was fun.

**TB:** Cool.

**RPV:** Les has all those things.

**TB:** He does have all those tapes?

**RPV:** Yes, he's got all the tapes and I've got a set but I've got to reproduce them. Bill Kuper would probably be—Kup's probably the easiest one. His phone numbers and everything are in the Washington Fly Fishing [Club directory]—or I could give it to you.  
[Here's Kup's information....I think his new company is called SCREENLIFE...And I know Les has a set and I've got a set.]

**TB:** That would be cool if we could get a copy of it. I don't know what the copyright would be, but that would be cool.

**RPV:** I think there are 13 or 15, I forget which.

**TB:** Then for a brief period of time before you came out here you were involved in the—is it SeaDoc?

**RPV:** The SeaDoc Society, yes.

**TB:** Anything you want to see about this year of work?

**RPV:** SeaDoc, no, it was just interesting. Just to see what they're trying to do which is coordinate some of the environmental efforts up there in the San Juan's. It's a good idea. The guy they had up there, Dr. Joe [Gaydos], a young scientist, is a vet. Everyone from UC-Davis is a vet I think. Anyway, the coordination was going along pretty well and I think they had some pretty good backers in some of the local foundations and residents.

The whale situation was interesting. That was the year when they decided that it was the sonics for the communication for the submarines that was driving some of these whales up on the beach. The problem was trying to prove it. It was interesting: the stone walling by the Feds and the information that Dr. Joe Gaydos and some of the other scientists in the area were doing. So you know it was an interesting thing to be involved in. It was just one of many.

**TB:** So then in 2004 you came to the Federation. We have talked a little about that, are there some other things you would like to say about that experience?

**RPV:** Well, it's been interesting. When I was president of the board (now its called chairman, then they called it president), for two years in the early Eighties, I didn't know that much about it. But because of Gardner and some of the other people who helped me it was okay. I liked the people and had been on the board the year before. They always had their meetings at some nice place and the Federation would pay for it. Well I stopped that, and I said, "We'll have our board meetings on the phone, thank you."

At my first meeting as president, Keith Groty, he's the operating vice-president for Michigan State University, and Keith was the treasurer. He said, "Van, we got a problem." And I said, "What's that?" And he said, "We don't have any money." I said, "What you do you mean we don't have any money?" He says, "We don't have *any* money." I said, "Well have we got a balance sheet?" And he said, "I'm putting it on the computer for you right now." What had happened was the people that had been running the organization for the years prior had treated all of these special accounts as though they were part of the pot. So we had all sorts of ear-marked accounts which were barren. So rather than spend the two years, that we had hoped to do, to build the Federation, we spent the two years re-populating the exchequer, especially these ear-marked memorial accounts. I was pretty mouthy about the structure of the Federation and saying, "I don't think it's going to work the way it's set up." I was biased because of my T.U. experience, but you know, T.U. works.

So when the guys came to me and I was sort of working with SeaDoc, they said, "Look, if we did all the things that you complained about, if we made these changes, would you come back and give it a try?" And being the classic dummy that you see that I am, I went ahead and said "Yes, I'll do it." At that time the board of the directors was something like, I think it was 64. Sixty-four!

There were three from each council and some of the councils were effectively defunk. Those people came to a board meeting and they were there basically to protect their turf and get whatever there was to get, whether it was ego or positions or money or what. I mean, that just doesn't work. So I had to knock that down to twenty, I think, and have a national staff and have the organization run by the staff as opposed to being run by the board. Anyway, all those things were done, not without a great deal of blood in the water, but they did get it done, as they promised. And I came over here.

We had an office in Bozeman and they had the Discovery Center over here which didn't make any sense so I combined those. Then we proceeded to try to build the organization and it was coming along fairly well. But the flaw, the Achilles heel, of the Federation is the way it's structured. As I keep saying and I'm not talking out of school because I've said this in public. It was a good Sixties idea. We'll have all these clubs around the country and they'll all work together for the common good and they'll share and so on.

But one of the problems was T.U. because most of the Federators were people who were also either close to T.U. or were members of T.U.. So they started expecting to have the same kind of services from the Federation that they got from Trout Unlimited. Well, you know, T.U. today has a \$22 million dollar budget, and we haven't hit a million yet.

The FFF had already begun to create what they call charter clubs. The charter club's no different than a T.U. chapter. Everybody in the club is a member of the national organization and there are now about fifty of those. The other flaw that the Federation's not been able to overcome is having a board of directors who understood what the heck a board's job was: which is to show the flag, to promote the Federation, to be a national director that is, to see the organization as a national thing, and to either to find or give money. They've had a proclivity forever of driving money away and they've done it again. I brought on half a dozen very strong individuals who would have fit nicely into T.U. Well for one, David James, he's a venture capitalist; his brother's a Wall-Streeter who is the head of T.U.'s fundraising group. I thought, "Well, boy, a little brotherly competition here; we'll get this to work." And they came and they watched and they listened to our board meetings and said, "I've got better things to do with my time." And we've got a whole group of really good folks who did that. It's extremely frustrating.

Then a lot of the board thinks that they should be micromanagers as opposed to going out and doing things. I had a retreat type of meeting with a very good facilitator, very good board trainer, a couple months ago. Well they thought she was wonderful and she did a fine job. The next day they're right back to doing things the way they've been doing. That's really discouraging, you know, really discouraging. So I've had enough, I'm out of here and I don't know what they're going to do. I really don't.

There was a time—you ought to know this too—there was a time when I was running T.U. that again Frank Richardson and Gardner and the rest of them said, —You know, we really ought to get the two organizations back together, it’s really silly, you know, there’s this crossover.” I said, —Great, that really makes sense.” So the Federation voted to do it. And I talked to Elliot and Elliot thought it was a wonderful idea, —Can you get the Federation?” I said, —Well, probably, we’ve got some crossover directors, I bet we can.” And the two of us really didn’t give it as much thought as we should have. So when it came to a vote at a board meeting and the Federation had already agreed, Elliott and I lost by a vote. We had no idea, how in some of the older directors, the original directors, how deep the schism was. They just weren’t going to have it which is a shame because it would have made a lot of sense to have them together.

**TB:** So T.U. rejected.

**RPV:** T.U. rejected, which nobody could believe. That’s in the —now it can be told” category.

**TB:** Okay, is there anything, when we talk about the organizational structure and things that you’ve been involved in, that we haven’t talked about?

**RPV:** I don’t think so. You didn’t say anything about ROMCOE but ROMCOE’s not really fishing. ROMCOE is a fascinating organization. It’s the Rocky Mountain Center on the Environment, a very big deal in Denver and Colorado. You remember Attica? Remember the big, the huge riots in Attica? The prison riots—

**TB:** Yes.

**RPV:** Then later that’s where they caught all the mafia guys having a meeting and so on. The person who negotiated Attica was on our staff. We had 27 people. What ROMCOE did was try to gain consensus on projects that you knew were going to be environmentally sensitive, before it came to litigation. At one point Governor Lang even said, —You guys are so good, let’s see if you can get the east slope/west slope to agree on water.” And we did.

It was just a wonderful organization, we had a good board. It was basically Colorado-based, I mean there was work we did all over the Rockies, but the people were primarily from Colorado, the supporters and board members. When we threw a fundraiser we were able to get Secretary Morton to be the speaker. It was pretty well respected for what it was. Then after I left, I think our director went to work for the Packard Foundation. It slowly was assimilated by other groups. But it was a good experience and it was a doggone good organization.

We had a thing called COSC, which most states have: it’s the Colorado Open Space Council. It was a coming together of thirty-odd outdoor organizations which we put together in Colorado so we could try to go to the legislature together. We had some rules, like if you disagree you’re not going to disagree publicly and things like that. It was quite good. Then we realized we needed something more and that’s how ROMCOE was created. We had some good, good conservationists.

I mean the guy—I want to tell you the story about that book too—Ed Hilliard was the president of the Wilderness Society Board at the time. My next door neighbor also owned Redfield Gun Sight Company. He was just an example—we have a lot of people like Ed in Colorado. When you got into good, solid environmentalism, you had some really great support.

But I’ve got to tell you the story about *The Way of a Trout*. I had just gotten the job and they’d sent what little they had from the office in Michigan out and my next door neighbor had given us an office at Redfield. I hired a young lady who had worked for me on a planning commission as my secretary. So of course when the so-called 4300 or 3800, whatever it was, members were delivered their—remember the old addressograph multigraph plates, metal plates? They’re like dog tags.

**TB:** Oh yes, yes.

**RPV:** That's how you kept addresses then. Well actually, the shipping company broke the box. So we've got, for argument's sake, 4,000 of these things and there was nothing you could do but spread them out on the floor and start to put them into categories alphabetically by state etc. So we're heavy into this for four or five days after I started with T.U. The phone rings and it's some guy who says, —You know I've got a movie and I'd really like you to see it. I think it relates, I think it's something your organization can [use], *blah, blah, blah.*” I said, —That will be fine, thank you very much. Please send it to the following address and I'll take a look at it.”

So it came in and I'm working on these files and about three or four days later Jim Wilkie, who made the movie calls up and said, —Well, what do you think of my movie?” I said, —Well I'm embarrassed to say, sir, that I haven't looked at it. We've got a multitude of problems,” etc., etc., and I'm fumbling around. So I went downstairs and borrowed a projector, it was on 16mm film. Here is *The Way of a Trout* and I'm thinking, —Oh my gosh.” So I get back on the phone and I'm just eating crow like crazy. He's letting me wallow in my own juice. And he says, —Well, I understand. And I'm glad you like it because I made it for you.” I said, —What do you mean?” He said, —I made it for T.U. I think it's something ...” I said, —It is marvelous.” Then he said, —The rights are yours; I'll send you everything you need.”

Every school library in the country, seemingly, bought [that movie]. It was amazing. It got all sorts of recognition. It was the prime source of income for T.U. for quite a while. People still like the movie. It's a neat movie. Then that was the genesis of the book.

I was back in New York at the—I can't think of the name of the group. But it's a ladies' group of fishermen. Julia Fairchild of Fairchild Aircraft, which during WWII and before was one of the country's major aircraft producers. Anyway, that was her family and she had a group of well-heeled ladies and an international fly fishing group. They paid my way back and any time I could go back to New York I did because I could see my parents. Anyway, I was at the New York Yacht Club giving a T.U. spiel and one of the people there was Ed Burlingame who was the head of Lippincott. He came up afterward, he said, —You've got to take that, what you've just done, and it has to be a book.”

I said, —Ed, listen, I [directed] an experimental thesis rather than write one so I could graduate. I hate to write. I really don't like writing.” And he said, —Well you write columns.” And I said, —Well yes, but that's different.” One thing led to another and of course, you [get sucked in] and away you go. So I said, —Yes, I'll do it.” Then it didn't get done, didn't get done. Finally I ended up going to a ranch over here on the Boulder River and getting it done on time. And you know it sold out, which was just because it was T.U. But it was kind of fun.

It did a lot. It was one more person doing something for T.U., through no fault of my own, [he (James Wilkie)] came and helped us. We had so many people like that. T.U. was the right organization at the right time and it has lived on, and it has lived on well and it has a very easy-to-explain mission. It's something that people can be involved in at all different levels. It has everything you need for a conservation group, I mean it really does. That's why it's prospered so well. We've been lucky after that one go around back in the Seventies. It's been a solid, together organization, if they've had any problems, you don't know about it.

**TB:** So why don't we talk a little bit about how fly fishing is meaningful to you. You've obviously fished with a lot of really cool people. Do you have any good stories about that?

**RPV:** It's more like—we did a book recently, I've got two or three with Schweibert. We also did a book, or articles, on Lefty, *All The Best: Celebrating Lefty Kreh*. Have you seen that book? Flip Pallot put it together. 25 of us wrote about an experience [with Lefty Kreh]. It's a beautiful book. It's a coffee table book. It's really quite nice. It's probably sitting around here somewhere, maybe it's at home. Anyway, it's just a classic.



When I was president of the Federation we had our annual meeting up at West Yellowstone. It was a typical, hot summer evening. The place was just packed and Lefty was the prime speaker. As the dinner goes on there's this empty seat next to me. And people are getting really nervous, you know, about where's Lefty. It was the year before I was president, I was vice-president, but I was responsible for the program. On the way in I had seen Lefty doing what you would always find Lefty doing. He'd found a bunch of neighborhood kids or city kids and he'd got down on one knee and he's teaching them how to fly cast. This was two hours earlier. Finally the president, Errol Champion said, "Van, where's Lefty?" And I said, "Well, I got a hunch where I can find him." So I left. And sure enough he's still out there at the side of the building and he's got twenty kids from town and they're learning how to fly cast. And I said, "Lefty you've got to speak in about 5 minutes, if you want anything to eat at all you better get in here." But that's just typical Lefty. He's just always going to do something for someone else

I'll tell you a couple Schweibert stories. Ernie was probably our best writer at that time. He was a Princeton-educated architect, very active in the design of the Air Academy and of the Dallas airport and so on and so forth. But well known to fly fishers for the fantastic books he did like *Nymphs* and *Trout*.

We had Ernie come out to speak at the T.U. fundraiser in Denver in the spring. At that time there was a huge ranch in South Park up behind Pike's Peak called the McDaniel Cattle Company. Well a group of us had got our hands on that when Cap McDaniel was selling it to a grazing association. So we had five-hundred thousand acres with miles of streams and the fishing was just phenomenal. One of the deals was we'd always take **helper** to go fishing. So Ernie was going to go up with us after he'd spoken.

Charlie Meyers, a long time writer for the *[Denver] Post* was with us and other local notables. It was a typical spring day in South Park. The wind blew, and it was cold and there was an old clapboard bar and restaurant in a little town called Hartsel which did nothing but serve the ranch on US Highway 24. By two o'clock everybody had been driven off the river. They're all in there having hamburgers and drinking more than they should. I was sitting with Ernie and a couple of other people. And some loud drunks were gaiting Ernie, "Oh Schweibert, you're such a big deal! You've written books," and blah, blah, blah, "I don't think you're any good!" You know, one of those obnoxious drunks. People are trying to shut him up, but other than hitting him over the head with a beer bottle, they weren't going to shut this guy up.

So we're sort of ignoring him and I hear Ernie say, "Well if somebody's got a rod and some boots, why don't I do this?" The guy had kept saying, "Well if you're so good, why don't you catch the big trout down below the bridge." He had asked me earlier if there was a [big trout down there]. I said, "Yes, we tried to catch that darn fish all last summer and couldn't." He's a brown, about 22 inches; he's a beautiful damn fish. So I thought he was just asking a question. So then I hear Ernie say "Well if you've got boots and a rod, we'll do it." And he turns to me and gives me a cocktail napkin and he says, "Sketch the pool for me."

Well the highway was here and the bar and everything was here and this is a US highway. And the stream went down about a 100, 150 feet, hit a hill, made a left 90-degree turn. So picture the wind's blowing its spitting snow and rain. And here are 25 or 30 drunks in various stages standing in a half-moon on the highway, blocking it. Ernie is struggling over the fence. He throws one cast at a little obstruction and catches an 18-inch rainbow. And then he's ready to fish the pool.

I had gone down below where I could kind of watch all this and Charlie Meyers, the photographer/writer was there with me. Ernie makes one cast to kind of measure it and the second cast is right on the money and doesn't he hook that fish. So he catches the fish, we get a picture of it which on Monday was in color in the *Denver Post*. It was just the biggest flush in the world. I mean he was crazy to have done that, but he did a job.

A couple years later we took the last trip down through the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Which was incredible, the people who got me into drift boating to start with, would say you've pushed the drift boat about as far as you can push it. It's really hair-raising but the fishing was spectacular. We were doing a movie, a TV movie, *The Last Trip Down the Gunnison*, and Ernie came along, as the star fisherman.

The reservoir above had turned over; the fishing was not as good as it had been. Schweibert has this huge ego, I mean enormous ego. A friend of mine was rowing him, I had my wife in the boat and as the host I was the chase boat. So I pulled up next to those guys just above the first campsite, we camped out two nights on the river. And I said, "Jim, how's he doing?" We kidded each other about tight jaws and he just gave me this [look]. "Ernie, how's it going?" And he said, "Gd, ...". I said, "Well, the water's turned over, it's not quite what we expected. It's really tough, huh?" I said you know, "It'll get better." Well my wife had caught a fish in the pool above and I have a bad habit of whooping every time someone in my boat hooks a fish. The canyon went like this and across like that, you know, it was kind of pool to pool. So while we were talking a little bit, and holding the boats beside each other, I look down the stream and I'd seen another fish rise. So I said, "You mind if I hit the end of the pool on the way down I got to get to the camp site?" So Elizabeth catches a fish there. We slide into the next pool they can still see us and she catches another fish. Ernie gets nothing. The next day by noon, Ernie is still doing nothing. And—

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

**RPV:** So at any rate, by noon time we're all sitting around having the classic lunch with wine and cheese and sandwiches and so on. There was this cherubic youngster who was the sound man for the television group. (We put him up to this). Ernie's there and sort of pontificating, the kid comes up to Schweibert and says, "Mr. Schweibert will you be catching some fish this afternoon or shall we take pictures of Mr. Day?" And we're all just chewing holes in our lip. Ernie, when he came up here to be the speaker three years ago, 5 months before he died one of the first things he said to me when he came to the office, he said, "I still remember you guys setting me up on that trip!" He was fun.

But you know most of the time I fish with just friends. And my wife's a very good fly fisher, so we fish together. We got into drift boats because of the Northwest Steelheader experience, that's the summer I learned to get involved with drift boats. I brought the first two drift boats back to Colorado and we used to lie a lot about what they were. Because Colorado is very restrictive as far as access goes. Here (Montana) you've got access to the high water mark, anything below that is riparian rights, like the east. Colorado was Western Water Law which means you've got to get it declared navigable before you can even float. So anyway, we saw those boats and decided this was really the way to go.

I remember one day we had two boats behind us and we stopped at a little place called State Bridge on the Colorado River, it's near Vail. The classic old boy comes out, you know, with the coveralls and the suspenders. He's putting gas in the car; this is when they still did that. He looks at the boat, and I know he's going to ask questions, and he says, "Where you going fishing with that boat, boy?" And I said, "Well we're going to float the river here." "You going to take that boat on the river here?" "Yes." "Ever done that before?" "Well, yes." "Okay."

We go and spot the cars and dump the boats in upstream. We came to a place where there was a pretty good rapid. And you look up to the highway and sure enough here's the old boy and a couple of his buddies in his pickup truck and they're waiting for us to die, they know we're going to die in this rapid, right. So we pop right through it of course. When we got finished, that day, they're there at the take out point. He said, "So where'd you get that boat?" "Well, you know, I got it from my dad," I said, "It's a Newfoundland dory I think. I brought it out from back east."

We got away with that fib for about two years and didn't tell anybody. Then somebody wrote it up in a sport fishing magazine and of course drift boats have become incredibly popular. They're a wonderful way to float the river and see nature. I mean it's amazing what you can drift up next to as far as a deer or a bear or something like that. When you're floating on the water, they just don't seem to register. It's very interesting. It's a nice way to get around.

**TB:** Well is there anything I haven't asked you that—

**RPV:** Gosh, not that I can really think of. I guess the one thing would be the saltwater, maybe. The interesting thing, my dad had gotten some strange sickness to the point where—he was a merchant in New York, the B. Altman Company, in high management—the owner made him take at least two weeks off in the winter. —You get out of here. Go to Florida or go wherever you want to [do].” So from the time I was pretty small, we went to Florida every winter, all during the war and so on. But as much as we fished in the Adirondacks and everywhere else with a fly rod, as I was growing up and got a little older, we never took a fly rod to Florida. That was spinning rods, boat rods, casting rods. I had done very little saltwater fly fishing until I got involved in T.U.

Then Billy Pate, one of the early famous saltwater fly fishers, [who] was the head of the finance committee, said, —You’ve got to come down, we have to map out our finance plan for this year.” He lived in Islamorada, in the Keys. So we went down and he said, —Ad in the afternoon, we’re going fishing.” And I said, —Wow, great.” And he said, —Have you ever fished for tarpon?” I said, —Well I’ve caught them on a spinning rod and a boat rod, but never [on a fly].” He said, —Will today you’re going to get one on a fly rod.” And I said, —Okay.”

I’ve always fished with quite small rods because of being an eastern fisherman. So we stake out on a bank, Buchanan Bank is a famous spot for tarpon. And he said, —Will they’ll be coming up on the right Van and just throw a fly out in front of them when they get close and then just strip it back.” So pretty soon here come these behemoth tarpon, they’re just huge. And I throw out maybe the worst cast I’ve ever made in my life and I’m not a great caster. It was the one where you’ve got two loops on the water and the fly lands in the middle. That stupid tarpon comes up and takes it. Somehow he gets himself hooked because I don’t think I even struck, he must have hooked himself. So I catch the tarpon that Billy said was a 118 pounds, he had one of those scales you lift up with two hands and—so that was my first experience with, I guess you’d say, modern saltwater fly fishing.

Later when we went to Florida with Elizabeth and the family we’d fish there with fly rods. Then of course as soon as we got to Seattle with the sea-run cutthroat and everything else, we were thoroughly into it. But then when we started the magazine, of course, we did a lot of it, bone-fish, stripes, and so on and so forth.

I sent my daughter to get an article on the first black marlin fly fishing only tournament in Australia. She went with Billy Pate and Cam Sigler from our part of the world and others. She called up after the tournament and I said, —How’d it go, babe?” —Oh it was great, Dad.” —Good, you got some good pictures; you got a story?” She said, —Oh yeah, really good.” And I could hear something and I said, —Ad? And who is he?” She’d gone through a couple of engagements by that time. And she said, —Well I would like to stay a few more days,” And I said, —Fine, do what you like.” So we have an Australian son-in-law who’s a great guy. He was captain of the marlin boat that she was on. They live in San Francisco these days.

But we get back and get a chance to do some fishing in Australia every couple of years and it is absolutely marvelous. I mean the wildlife—there’s a place called the [Cape] York Peninsula. If you look at a map of Australia, you notice that there’s this big appendage that sticks up on the east coast way up toward New Guinea. And way up at the end of that is a little town called Bamaga. If you’re a World War II buff, you’ll remember that it played a part in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Anyway, you get up there and you get on a mother ship and go back down the west coast of the [Cape] York Peninsula which is all aboriginal or national park, one or the other. Go a 150 or 160 miles and never see a light, never see anything. Then for a week you work your way back, estuary to estuary and fish both out in the ocean and up the estuaries with the crocodiles and all the birds and everything, it’s just a magnificent experience.

You know Jose Wejbe’s Spanish Fly is probably the best known television show these days. Flip Pallot’s Walker’s Cay Chronicles was, and he’s starting a new show now. But we’ve done trips with Jose often for ESPN. That’s been good fun and both those guys are great to be with, they’re wonderful fisherman and they’ve got great crews. A crew can be a real pain in the neck, but they have good cameramen, good sound people, you never know they’re around but they get it done. On that particular trip, they shot film all day long and then after dinner you throw it up on the screen in this big boat and do the rough edit, which is kind of fun. Everybody gets a lot of heat, of course.

**TB:** So did you successfully transfer your love of fly fishing to all your family?

**RPV:** Yes, they all fly fish. Richard, number one son, he got a degree in fisheries at Humboldt. [He] guided for Bob Jacklin up here when he was in school, it was his summer job. Now he lives in Jackson because he's a ski racer, a fisherman and he's an architect and land planner today and been there for, I don't know, 20 years I guess. Number two is a deputy superintendent of schools for 34,000 kids in Denver. He's a pretty good fisherman and the grandkids fly fish too. We got them on that program early.

And Kate's just darn good. She and Randall, Randall's my Aussie son-in-law, they just got back from Cancun and have been fishing tarpon down there. It was white sharks before that, a couple weekends before they did television down in San Diego.

She's a banker and he works for REI and REI encourages their people to be involved in the sport, so that's a great deal for Randall because he's totally involved in it. And so is Kate.

They've got a little company on the side called Australian American Fishing Connections. They book fishing trips in Australia. They've got this Coral Sea offering which is an unbelievable trip. Between the East Coast of Australia and New Caledonia there is an uplift and there's little dinky atolls here and there, totally uninhabited. And their client's got a huge eighty-some foot mother ship out there, a marlin boat and half a dozen. It's expensive and they book that. It is their exclusive booking. So it's been good to them and a nice additional bit of income. So they've got their fingers seriously in fishing as well.

**TB:** This is going to seem like a really off-the-wall question, but is there any connection between architecture and fly fishing? I mean: Schweibert, Hosfield, you, your son--?

**RPV:** You see a lot of them, I mean, I don't know. I'll tell you where there is a connection that is demonstrable, and that is between dentists and fly tiers. That is because they are into minutiae and they're good at it. I remember when we were mailing for the magazine, just trying to get subscriptions. We got the national dentist list and it was terrific, it was really terrific. But I think architects—when you think about how many architects build they're own models, it's a requirement of course coming through school. So I wouldn't be surprised. I certainly know a lot of architects that are involved in fly fishing so that's a guess, but the dentists, absolutely.

**TB:** Very cool. Anything else?

**RPV:** No, I think we've kind of covered half the world there.

**TB:** No this is really terrific. Well thank you very much!

**RPV:** Thank you. I'm flattered and I appreciate it.