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This interview was conducted with Jack Berryman on July 11, 2017, in the Special Collections Conference Room, Western Libraries in Bellingham, Washington. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

TB: Okay. Today's July 11, [2017] and my name is Tamara Belts, and I'm here with Jack Berryman, who was one of our [Heritage Resources] Distinguished Speakers today. We are going to do an oral history with him, our first question is: how did you get started fly fishing?

JB: I grew up in central Pennsylvania, and my best friend's father was a local pharmacist and was a fly fisherman. In Pennsylvania, the big thing was the opening day of trout season, or the opening day of buck season for deer hunting. He invited me to go fishing with he and his dad, and we got there and I had my spinning reel and rod, and he goes, no, no, we use flies. I was probably in Seventh grade, I think, 12 or 13. I said, well I've never fly fished before. He goes, well here, we have this extra rod, and it was a split bamboo rod. Now I know it was probably expensive but at the time I didn't. So I actually caught some trout on flies that very first day.

TB: Wow.

JB: Then, my friend, who was a year older than me he and his dad tied flies. They also had a little, like a little workbench in the basement where they tied flies, so I started experimenting with tying flies. So, that's when I started, but I didn't keep at it. I still fished for bass with plugs and spinners and a lot of time trout, but not fly fishing, so I never really stuck with it actually until I moved out here. Then I picked it back up again and started fishing for salmon and steelhead and cutthroat with flies, mainly because it was more of a challenge. I mean, it may sound self-serving, but it turned out that once I got into it I got pretty proficient at catching steelhead with sort of traditional gear, spin-and-gloves and corkies and things like that, and I wanted more of a challenge, so I started back fly fishing, tying flies again, then pretty much switched totally to fly fishing.

TB: Was there any person who helped you make that transition? Were you around some other people that kind of reminded you that, oh yes, I used to know how to fly fish, or something, or did you just decide to go back –

JB: I think it was mainly from the literature, you know, reading a lot of the books, reading *Salmon Trout Steelheader*, some of the fly fishing magazines. Bill McMillan, who was here today, did some pioneer writing, so did Art Lingren, you know, explaining how they caught steelhead on flies. I read their books and just started trying to do it myself, and remember very well the first steelhead I caught on a fly, where, when, the whole bit.

TB: What is it fly fishing that really attracts you? That it's difficult or more challenging?

JB: I think one of the things for me is the environment. I'm very environmentally conscious, conservation minded. A friend of mine had a cute saying, he says, *I like places where steelhead live*. They tend to be in remote places and hard to get to places. I seek more of the wild fish, so I don't like the scene where you go to a hatchery, everybody lines up there. I like to sort of explore other areas. I think fly fishing's quiet, there's some solitude there. I like doing a lot of that myself. I think there's a joy in doing something like tying a fly and then catching a fish on it. And the camaraderie with fly fishermen I really like. They invariably are really nice people, generous people, and so I like the people, I like the outdoors, I like the challenge of it. These are magnificent fish that we have here, I mean, my heavens. I caught a 21-inch brown trout in Pennsylvania and thought I was king. But here, you know, you catch a 21-lb trout really. They're just gorgeous fish too. I pretty much catch and release. I mean, I keep some hatchery fish, but. . . The conservation part, I think fly fishermen in general are much more conservation minded than other fishermen tend to be. So that's been a good relationship for me too, working with those kinds of people.



Jack Berryman, Bill McMillan, Art Lingren and Hugh Lewis

TB: Were you always into conservation, or was it because you observed a decline in the steelhead and fishery that made you –

JB: Yes, it was definitely that. Growing up, I think with most kids, you didn't think about it, you just went out and caught fish or whatever. I think moving to the northwest really, really awakened that in me, and there are a lot of conservation issues here too. I think in seeing the decline of steelhead and salmon and doing this kind of research that I was doing and realizing what used to be, what it was like, and saying, my heavens, where's it gone? What happened? What can we do to stop it? So that's when I got - I got involved in Trout Unlimited (TU) right away when I moved here, then I was the second president of the Wild Steelhead Coalition. I was one of the trustees when it was founded in 2000. And now I'm working with the Willapa Bay Advisory Group for the Washington Fish and Wildlife, trying to bring some conservation to Willapa Bay, where my other house is in southwest Washington. So yes, I think you're right. I mean, it was just this, where has it all gone, and not seeing much improvement. In having somewhat of an academic background, I started reading and reading and doing all the research in the science of fisheries. I realized that one of the big problems is hatcheries, what could we do about that? Then I got involved, of course, with clean water and all of those issues, and dams, and trying to make a difference I guess.

Jack W. Berryman Edited Transcript – July 11, 2017
Fly Fishing Collection

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TB: So as you mentioned, you came out here and took a position at the University of Washington in 1975, and then you started fishing again. Then in the 1980s, you spent your summers guiding up in Alaska –

JB: Yes, in the Kenai.

TB: How did you get –

JB: Well, it was a combination in that I had a graduate student at the University of Washington when I first got there, his name was Rich Kincaid, and he knew that I liked to fish, but I really had just moved here. I didn't know what I was doing. He was a great fisherman, grew up here, and he started asking if I wanted to go fishing with him. So I went salmon fishing, steelhead fishing with him, learned just a tremendous amount. Bought a boat, started fishing in Puget Sound, steelhead fishing, as I said. He was a junior high school teacher in Kirkland, where I lived, and had the summers off. At the time, I was on a 9-month contract, and he said, you know, I have this idea. I'm going to start a guiding service on the Kenai, where there's the world's largest salmon. And of course it was the combination of world's largest salmon that caught my attention and making some money because we were living on 9-month contract, and we're spreading it over 12, and I thought, hey if I could do this I can make some extra money. So I went up there with him, and we did it. It was a rough deal. We actually slept on the river in tents, Rich and I, and we pretty much invited friends and acquaintances. People would tell so-and-so, and it was just he and I with two 18-foot Lunds, 35-horse motors. We promised everybody a fish over 50 lbs – or their money back.

I only did it two years. I didn't do it a long time. But we never had to give any money back. The largest I got was 67 lbs. The largest I got for a guided client, a dentist from Issaquah, was 72 lbs. I did it for a straight month every summer, and it didn't take long for my wife and young daughter to realize this is probably not a good thing. (Laughter) Dad's gone for a month. So I stopped going up there. And like we were saying earlier, the Kenai changed, big time. People were there with big boats, and they had to pass all kinds of restrictions. The fish got smaller and smaller and smaller. It turned into a circus up there, and fights and, you know. I was there at a good time, and I've never been back since. But that's how that all happened. And of course, I got to fish too. (Laughter)

TB: Nice. Did your friend keep doing it? Rich?

JB: No, he stopped I think in another year.

TB: Okay.

JB: Sort of the same thing happened. He got burned out and had small children. And I don't know all the details but turned out to be not so much fun anymore, as we thought it was going to be.

TB: Plus work.

JB: Yes, and you're living in the mud, you know, shower every two weeks, and it was not fun, really.

TB: Do you want to talk a little bit more about how you in 1986 became a freelance writer and photographer?

JB: Yes, again, with my friend Rich, I caught this almost 18-lb steelhead down on the Elochoman River, and it was right at the Christmas holiday. He had off, I had off, you know, this chunk of time right in the heart of winter steelhead fishing. So I caught this big steelhead, and I thought, I'm going to actually try to write an article about it. I think it was called something like "Late Christmas Present," or something like that. It was between Christmas and New Year's. I sent it and a photo to Frank Amato, the editor of *Salmon Trout Steelheader*. He actually called me at my home and said, Jack, we got your article and we really like it, and we're going to publish it. After being in academics all my life, it wasn't the publishing thing, it was that Frank Amato (laughter) called me. I mean, this is the Bible, *Salmon Trout Steelheader*, and they're going to publish my article. I had articles in scholarly journals and books, and that was more meaningful to me. I thought, well, I really like to write and I like to fish. So I started a couple more articles and a couple more, and joined the Outdoor Writers Association and met Dave Vedder and Steve Probasco and some of these guys that had been writing a lot, and I said, well, heck I can do that. Then Dave Vedder introduced me to, what's his name, Rikk -- he was the editor and publisher of *British Columbia Sport Fishing* magazine -- Rikk Taylor.

He has since died, a magnificent man. Yes, he said, I would love you to write for my magazine. And the nice thing about it is that there were all these places in British Columbia that wanted someone to come there and write an article, and I thought, well I can do that. He used to have these great dinners. He would invite sixteen outdoor writers and buy dinner, and then he would give assignments. He would go, Jack, I would like you to go to Harrison Lake. I would like you to go to Port Alberni. I would like you to go to Nootka Sound. Steve, I would like you to -- so these assignments. So I started writing a lot. I drove up to the airport in Vancouver a lot, and then took a little plane to a lodge, or a floatplane. Then my wife started to go because she was a photographer. She took a lot of the photographs, and I would write the articles, and a lot of them were published in *BC Sport Fishing*. So that just kept going. It was so much fun, it was easy. I did it in the summers. It was some extra money. There was nothing bad about it, you know. It was like a dream come true.

Then I started doing a lot of book reviews. They really -- the publishers of a lot of the magazines liked the fact that I had more of an academic background, so they had me doing book reviews on a regular basis for their fishing magazines. So I've never counted it. I've had to have done at least 200 book reviews for different magazines, mostly fishing books. So that turned out to be nice because I got all these review copies free, which expanded my library significantly. So that was all part of it. And I continued that. I still do some book reviews now. But I don't do the travel much anymore, anything like that. But it quickly turned into 293 things, articles, quicker than I expected. But I also forget that that was over a span, whatever the math is, of 20-some years, so.

TB: So you started I think you said in 2000 for the *Northwest Fly Fishing* --

JB: Mm-hmm.

TB: How did you either come up with your subject, or did somebody assign that, or you picked --

JB: No, I picked them all.

TB: Do you mind telling me a little bit more about that?

JB: Yes, that was fun. That was a major, major change, and that's how my book came about. Steve Probasco, whom I knew for a long time, was an outdoor writer that published a lot of articles, fly fishing books, lives down in Raymond, Washington, which is near where my other house is on Willapa Bay, about 12 miles away. And before I even bought that place, Steve and I were talking, and then he became the new editor -- no, it was right after I bought it, sorry. I think the magazine started in 1999, and I think my "Pioneers & Legends" column started in 2000. My wife and I bought the place down there in late 1998 or early 1999, so we were almost neighbors down there, and we started fishing together. When he became the editor of this new, beautiful, glossy magazine, *Northwest Fly Fishing*, he called me one day and he said, I know you like history, and fly fishermen like history, I want you to do a regular column. And I forgot, it may have been his idea, I don't think it was necessarily mine, and [one of us said] let's call it "Pioneers & Legends."

So to go to your question, I picked all the people. I had, again, from reading the literature and being interested in history, I knew pretty much off the top of my head who the pioneers and legends were. What I had to do was start doing the research, which is what I love to do anyhow. I sort of knew where to look and still knew about *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, so the tools that current people don't even remember or know about, and I started tracking down information, both manuscript information and printed stuff and photographs. I developed a good rapport with the fly fishing museum back in Vermont, and they had a great library and some indexes, and so I was just able to put [stuff] together. At any time, I was working on like 20 people.

TB: Okay, that's what I was wondering.

JB: Yes, so I would have these files of stuff, and when I felt like I was at a point where I could actually put something together, then I would tell them, Okay, my next one is going to be Ralph Wahl or whatever and that's how it worked. There was no real plan other than what I could find.

TB: Well I was thinking that too, in the end like in your book you've grouped them by states, so you came up to the Center (CPNWS) -- when you came up to the Center, did you research Ralph Wahl and Ralph Olson? Did you do them both at the same time?

JB: No. I did Wahl first. That's how I found out about Olson. I found out about Olson through Ralph Wahl's Shangri-la book. He has a chapter called, "The Judge and I" in there.

So I sort of knew about him but not too much, then that's when I started -- It was all those little leads, you know, and then, oh, I -- then I started a folder. I'm still old fashioned, I use file folders. I would start a folder for Judge Olson, and then I'd have another folder over there for Walt Johnson. And as you're into the stuff, I would find little tidbits of stuff, and that would lead me. I would just have enough to say, Aha, I bet I can find that! I can remember spending at least half days in the library at the UW in the stacks meticulously going through *Field & Stream* because I knew that there was an article in there in the early 1940s. So I'm going through every single one of them until that Ralph Wahl one in 1943. Those were good days when you came out of there saying, I did it! I found it! But I just cobbled them together from little pieces of information. Again, the challenge was doing the research, finding out more about it, about that person.

TB: So do you want to talk a little bit more about some of your conservation efforts? Because you did get the Tommy Brayshaw Award.

JB: Yes, I was really proud of that one, because Tommy Brayshaw's on the cover of my book. I knew all about his ethics and his friend Haig-Brown, and that British connection. And that award was primarily, totally, for my work with wild steelhead, and being [president of] the Wild Steelhead Coalition and on their board of trustees before that. We were the ones, just a couple of us, were the ones that got the regulations changed in the state. I did a lot of trips to Olympia, testifying. I, and Dick Burge, a retired fisheries biologist, actually visited almost all of the Department of Fish and Wildlife commissioners, personally, with data for each river, showing how the wild fish were declining. When we started that you were allowed to keep twenty wild steelhead a year. This is in 2000, 2001, 2002. Through our work, we were able to get that down to five. Then through a little more work, we got it down to two. Then eventually to one, and then a lot of rivers to zero. So it was only on a handful of rivers you could even think about keeping a wild steelhead. So the Brayshaw work came because of that kind of work.

TB: Cool. Do you want to talk about any of your other, I mean, are there some other things that you're really proud of in terms of your conservation work? You also belong to the Northshore Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

JB: Oh, yes, yes. I was president of that chapter for quite a while. I was real proud of that, not because of me but because of my wife, who also fishes. Their annual fundraising thing was a Trout Unlimited banquet. Some of the money went to the local chapter, and then some went to national TU. So chapters would have these all over the United States. When I first joined in the late 1970s, I would go to the meetings and so forth, and I told my wife, I said, Hey, they're having this banquet, let's go. So we went, and it was in the basement of a dingy place. It was just dark, it was dreary, it was -- even I didn't enjoy it (laughter). The meal was horrible. They just had some fishing things -- And my wife says, that really wasn't much fun, and I know I could -- I would like to put on a banquet. To make a long story short, she changed that thing. She became in charge of the banquet, and she worked on it all year.

She would go out in the morning and visit stores, art shops, ask them to donate things, and she was very, very good at it. She got a lot of stuff for free. By the time that she stopped doing it, we were getting 300 people at the biggest hotels in Lynnwood, and Chris Legeros, the TV guy from KIRO. She got him to be the MC. We were making thousands of dollars, to the point where she won the national award from Trout Unlimited, and the guy from Virginia, where TU headquarters is, came out to the banquet and presented her with this big plaque. She raised more money than anyone with these banquets, so that's what I'm most proud of. And the guys in the club just loved her. They would do anything for Elaine, you know. Well sure, I'll do that, you know. She just has this artist's vision, photography, art, design, and the place was beautiful, this gorgeous lay out and balloons and lights, and, you know, it was like a big festival. Our little chapter became the king of banquets. Other ones would come and see how we did things. She came up with fundraising ideas with decks of cards and little things and helium balloons that you bought and broke, so, that was fun. But it all went to conservation, back to your initial point. All the money we received was used in local conservation projects.

TB: Awesome. Let's see. Is there anything else? Did you develop any signature flies?

JB: No. I'm really a novice. Again, my wife and I were at a lodge up in Katmai, Alaska, and after the first day, we went back and changed clothes and walked over to this common area, everyone's there having a glass of wine and cocktails. Next to it is three or four guys were sitting there tying flies. My wife stood there and watched and watched, and she looked at me and she goes, I can do that. She never tied, just watched, I can do that. She grew up sewing, made her own clothes, and made our daughter's

clothes. She sat down and just started tying flies. So now, I see a fly in a book and I'll say, could you tie that for me?

TB: Nice.

JB: Yes, I can do that. On our barstools down at our other house at Willapa Bay, she has painted flies, hand painted these beautiful flies on there. So I don't do anything -- I don't build rods, I don't really tie flies. I like to fly fish, but.

TB: Well, you do the research piece.

JB: And I do the research part, yes.

TB: Well do you have any thoughts about the future of fly fishing?

JB: It's hard to say. I mean, I think it's sort of a generational thing. I think most of the people I'm seeing that are really active tend to be older people, which I don't think is good. You know, what I think is that more of these fly fishing clubs need to do more to attract younger people, and more women especially, and younger children. I mean, everybody can fly fish. And I think that would make a big difference. I mean it's been too long where fly fishing is seen as an old boys' school. Someone mentioned here, I mean, when I was in the Washington Fly Fishing Club, you had to wear a coat and tie to the meetings, and you had formal dinners, and stuff like that. It's such a great sport, and I guess what I'm getting at is that generally what you find in history is that those that want to protect something have a vested interest in it. So if you have a vested interest in fishing for steelhead, you definitely want clean water, you want, you know, dam litigation, you want certain things to protect that. So I think we need to do a better job of attracting people and educating younger people, especially, about the environment, the air, the water, and that type of thing.

TB: What are some of your favorite places to fish? Are you a destination fly fisherman?

JB: That's a good question. I'm not. I was a little bit, going back to earlier when I was writing for *BC Sport Fishing*, because I had an assignment to go to X, and I enjoyed it. A lot of the trips I went on were free, paid by the magazine or whatever, so that was obviously nice. But it was also a time in my career that I was eager to travel. The older I get, the less eager I am to travel. I don't care where it is, I don't want to go there. I have friends that are much older than me that travel all year. I just don't like to. Besides, I have this beautiful home on Willapa Bay, which is 150 miles away, and I have seven acres and 250-feet of waterfront and no neighbors. The older I get, the more tranquility I seek. So my favorite fishing places are where no one else is. I would rather not catch anything and have a nice, quiet time exploring and finding new places and things than go with a line up of people and maybe catch a fish. Even when I was younger I didn't like that. I did it because that's all I knew. But as I got older, I realized that I'm not having fun doing this. So even though on a lot of the steelhead rivers when they were still good, near Seattle, the Skykomish, the Snoqualmie, which were close to my house, I would go and I would see this group of cars all parked, and they're all in this area. I would start and just go the opposite direction. An old guy told me one time, he says, that's what you need to do. Those fish all have to go by here too. So that's what I've always done since. I'll just keep going away from everybody, I've found so many good spots that way. Now with boats and river rafts and canoes, I have all those, that's what I see. I just get away from everybody and try to find new places.

TB: Now, are you a hiker at all? Do you like to go to the high lakes or anything like that?

JB: No, I haven't done it. I would like to, but I just didn't know enough about it to do it. If someone were to take me, I would do it, but I don't trust myself so much if you need GPS. [I don't want to] fall anymore either -- I used to fish a lot by myself, and now I still like it but sometimes I worry about falling. I've had some really bad ankle sprains in rivers and had to crawl home or out to my truck. So the older I get, I tend to think more about those things.

TB: Safety.

JB: Yes, my wife worries more about it, so I tend to go with another person now. But yes I've heard a lot about high lakes and the hiking and knew some people that did, but I've never done it myself. I would like it though.

TB: So are there any other things that you think about are important about fly fishing that I haven't asked you?

JB: Wow. One thing that I think of right away, looking at the Harry Lemire thing that we talked about is how artistic fly tyers really are and the talent that they have. I am just a klutz with my hands that way. And I think that the art of tying flies is not appreciated by most people. I've watched a lot of fly tyers and some of those things are very intricate and they involve many, 20+ steps and involve very rare feathers and furs. I'm drawing a blank, the guy I wrote about in my book that started to do the framing of the flies and everything. I know him too this guy was down in Oregon -- William B. Cushner (1914-1992).

He started to do it in the 1950s in the shadow boxes, featuring some of the fly tyers on the east coast. I think that's one thing and the other thing is how difficult good fly-casting is. That's another art, that these guys that are throwing a hundred feet and very accurate, it just takes so much skill and coordination, and people don't understand, it's not a power move. It's not how strong you are it's how coordinated you are. Some of the best fly fishermen I've seen are casters, like Leon Chandler, who was for years vice president of Cortland Fly Line in New York, I fished with him a few times. He was in his 70s, and it was just poetry. You know, I would just sit and watch, just effortless, and that line would just shoot out there, and this beautiful green line going out over the water. I mean, it was just magical. I think that people don't appreciate these finer things in fly fishing. People that don't fish, especially, think we just go sit there and maybe catch one, maybe not. They don't understand how unique it is, I guess, that you're casting the line not the fly.

So I think those two things come to mind.

TB: Okay. Is there anything else I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about?

JB: Oh my. I don't know. (Laughter) I am getting, sort of losing my voice, but this has been a very fun day. Yes, I think we've covered a lot of the stuff.

TB: Have you thought about how you've been active in the organizational structure of fly fishing by being part of clubs. Any other thoughts about that? I mean, you've also said that people need to be getting more younger people involved, but do you have anything else about where you see that fitting into fly fishing or --

JB: I think clubs in general are disappearing. I think it's a cultural shift. So that's one thing. Again, I look at clubs, call them what you want, it's a group of like-minded people, period. I go to certain conferences because the people that go there do what I do. So I think those things are necessary. I think we all need to interact with people that are doing the same things, have the same likes, to learn from, to further that along. Again, I think it's just a cultural thing. I'm just not in touch with a lot of the younger people anymore. But I think it's the junior high age, the high school age, I'm glad that you have a fly fishing class here at Western that is who we need to get to. Because invariably a lot of people like it when they're introduced to it. Again, especially families and women and children and, you know, the great thing is that you can do it alone, you can do it with a family, you can do it in groups, and it gets you out.

My other -- I have another role in the American College of Sports Medicine, where I am their historian, and I have done my academic road work on the history of physical activity and health. We're an inactive society (laughter), you know. Fly fishing would be a wonderful thing because people aren't necessarily going to go to gyms, they're not going to jog, or whatever, but they'll go outside and be physically active. So I see it as a thing that can be a very healthy thing for people, physically and mentally. A good friend of mine was a professor in psychiatry at the UW School of Medicine, and I would see him all the time. Where I saw him was at the gym. He pointed one day, he says, Jack, you know why I'm here, don't you? I said, No. He pointed to his head, and he's a psychiatrist. So just the research now is very clear about physical activity, especially outdoor physical activity and how good it is for you. I think that's a boat that we're missing here as far as promoting fly fishing as an activity, a recreation, if you will.

TB: Good. Well anything else you want to say?

JB: No. This is just after my lecture, and I had a great time here and love what you're doing here, and surrounded with Ralph Wahl photographs. I just want to stay the rest of the day. (Laughter). So thank you. It was nice being here and meeting you as well.

TB: Great. Well thank you very much.

End of transcript