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Fly Fishing Oral History Program

Dellmer Coppock

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This interview was conducted with Dellmer Coppock, at his home in Spokane Valley, Washington. The interviewers are Tamara Belts and Jerry McBride.

TB: Today is Monday, March 25 (2013). My name is Tamara Belts, and I'm here with Dellmer Coppock and Jerry McBride, and we're going to do an oral history with Mr. Coppock about his fly fishing. So he just signed the Informed Consent Agreement. So our first question is always, how did you get started fly fishing?

DC: Well, I guess it was that I was fishing with my dad. He was mainly a troller. And I'd see these old guys standing up in boats and waving a rod around, catching fish. And the more and more that I'd go fishing with my dad and I'd see that, why I thought well I'll try that. Dad had a couple of old bamboo fly rods, so I tried that and I was able to catch a few fish. And then one thing led to another. I'm more or less a self-taught fly fisherman.

TB: Okay, well, and you kind of grew up in the Palouse, right?

DC: Yes, yes.

TB: Do you want to talk about what maybe fishing was like when you were young?

DC: In what way?

TB: Was everybody around you fly fishing?

DC: Well, living down there around Colfax and Pullman, there wasn't that much fishing. My first remembrance of fishing was on the South Palouse River, which almost dries up in the summertime now. There was a few, still native rainbow there, but mostly minnows and catfish. And then, of course, in that area, there were no real streams other than quite a ways to go to the Snake River or come north to the lakes, out around Cheney and that area. But once I halfway learned how to catch fish with a fly rod, that's about the way that I continued teaching myself, and finally got my own outfit, and went from there.

TB: Okay, okay. Well, you went on to become a really—you're very well known for your bamboo rod making and a lot of your other crafts. Can you talk a little bit about that?

DC: Ah, well, the bamboo rods… There was a gentleman by the name of Ring Torgerson, came to the Spokane Fly Fishing Club, that was the club that I belonged to at that time, and he had learned how to build bamboo rods from Dawn Holbrook, from around the Sound area, and he offered to teach some people how to build bamboo rods. Well,

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I guess he had offered that to the Inland Empire Club the year before. So I signed up, along with about 15 or 20 other people that thought, boy, this is really something. Well we had a couple of meetings, and he was able to get the bamboo for us and tell us what tools we needed and everything. So I started with that and one of my mentors was Harry Faggetter. He had built a rod with the instructions from Ring Torgerson. And so, him and I, we were friends, and so he kind of kept after me, and I started to build, and I had all kinds of trouble. But he kept after me, and I finally made my own rod. And then I thought that was great, that was the most beautiful rod I'd ever seen. Looking back now, it is the ugliest rod I've ever seen. But it would cast a line, so I thought, well guys that's not too bad, we'll try another one. Well after the second one I was hooked. I got some more books, seen how other people did it, used their ideas, added some of mine, and away I went. And I built rods very steadily for 15 years, and in that 15 years, I built somewhere above 65.

DC: And to this day, I probably have, oh, at least 75% of them. My walls are covered with them. Then after I went through that phase, there was other projects mixed in. I had a session of building landing nets, laminating them, and of course tying flies along with it and everything.

But then I didn't build any rods until 4 years ago. A couple friends of mine approached me about teaching them how to build bamboo rods. Well, I said, "Sure." And so we had a couple of weekend sessions, and one of them, the pupils, really took it to heart, and he is well on his way to being a good bamboo rod builder. So I feel like I've passed on what was taught to me.

Bamboo rod making has become a, how should I say it, not a fad, because it's more entrenched than that. Now, that is in as home builders, probably more than any other time in the history of bamboo rod making. There is bamboo rod builders' clubs and forums, and of course the Internet has opened up communication between the people. They have their shows and everything. I would just roughly say that probably throughout the United States, there're at least 200 or more that are just home rod builders. Some of them are in it as a vocation, avocation. Some of them are maybe just hobby builders like I was. That's the only way I wanted to do it. I didn't go into it with the idea of making a lot of money or anything by building bamboo rods. It was just the joy of building them and a hobby.

TB: Could you describe the process a little bit more?

DC: Well, the first thing is you have to acquire your bamboo. At the time that I was building, there was only one place in the United States that you could acquire what they call the Tonkin Cane, which is a misnomer. It doesn't come from the Tonkin province of China.

TB: Vietnam, right?

DC: No, it comes from China— *[Editor's note: Tonkin Gulf region of the Guangdong Province]*.

TB: Okay.

DC: --but I can't remember the name of the province, but it is a certain species of bamboo that has the best qualities all around to be able to build a bamboo rod. They use it also in construction, like they do a lot of the other bamboo, there in China. But it was William Demarest, back in New York, he was the only importer of this Tonkin Cane. So I don't know where Ring got the bamboo, probably from Demarest, or whether he already had it, or maybe there was somebody had a stock over around Seattle. But it comes to the United States in bales of 25 culms, is what they call the piece of bamboo. They are 12 feet long. And so you can buy them either full length or cut in half from Demarest.

Then once you get the bamboo, there's any number of ways of conditioning it to get ready to start building the bamboo rods. I settled on what they call the flame treatment. I take a torch and I heat the bamboo, and it changes in color from a pale green to tan or even quite dark tan to light brown. The theory is that you're melting the lignin that holds the fibers together, and when it cools it holds them together tighter and everything.

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Bamboo is a giant grass. It's made up of just little slender parts, membranes, whatever you'd want to call it, but it resists bending. So you take the bamboo once you get it tempered, then you split it into pieces, to strips that are approximately 3/8" wide. Then you have to file down the nodes for each joint. It's just like joint grass. You file that down, and then you have to stagger the nodes. The nodes are where the fibers come together and then they go on to the next node. Those are usually spaced 12, 13 to 16 inches apart. So you lay out your strips 'til those are staggered, so no two are next to each other, because the nodes are real dense. They don't flex, or if they do flex, very little. Once you get that all laid out, you trim them to the length that you want your finished rod to be plus about 6 inches. That's so you'd be able to trim either end, to the required length.

Then the process is to get the strips straight. They come out terribly crooked sometimes. So again, you use heat. Bamboo is kind of like nature's plastic. When you heat it up, it gets flexible, so that you can heat it up and you can form it, hold it against the bends. When it cools it'll be straight. The nodes and clumps, you can press them in a vice. Once you get them straight, then your first challenge is to get that first 30 degree angle on it, because the strips in a six-sided rod is made up of six equilateral triangles in a cross section. You got to get that first angle correct before you can get the second angle correct. I learned that the hard way, with my first couple of rods.

But once you get that, then you-- My first rods were planed with just a little block plane, on what we call a V block. It's just a two-foot piece of wood that has different sizes and depth of just a V that had been machined or sawed into the block. That means that to build a rod to a pattern, you have to plane awhile and then measure, and plane awhile and measure, until you can get them all what you need. Since then, I built my own steel planing form, which is adjustable.

TB: Oh nice.

DC: So that you can at known distances of say five inches, you can make the cross section exactly what you want for that pattern of the rod. Once you get the thing set and you get the first angle on the strip, then you can place it in this steel planing form, and you can plane on the other side to start your V angle. And then you keep planing until you've just touched the steel form, that's your finished size.

Okay, if you're going to make a two-piece, two-tip fly rod, that means you've got to have 18 pieces. You have a butt section, you have a tip section. Once you get those all planed out, then what surprises people when they look at it, they look at how small the tip of this rod section is. It might only be 70 thousandths of an inch, but that means it's only 35 thousandths for half of that. 35 thousandths is quite small to be able to plane a strip of bamboo down, but it can be done. It can even be smaller. You get those all planed out, then it's time to glue them up.

We like to use waterproof glue. The old time rods were glued with just hide glue, furniture glue I think. That's the reason so many of them came apart when they got the wet. Of course they didn't have the glues then that we have now, that are two part glues, epoxy paste glues, several other glues that we have now. So you lay your strips out, put the V's up, just swipe on the glue with a brush, you roll them back together, you put them in a machine that binds them together, and as it's rolling it, it is also putting a cotton string around it to hold it. You wrap it one way; you wrap it the other way. You end up with these two strings that are spiraled down the rod in opposite directions. That's so you don't get a twist in it. Then you roll it on a flat surface; try to get all the kinks and bends out of it, as many as you can. You never get them all. Then you let the glue cure.

Then it's time to get rid of the string, the glue. You scrape all the outer surface of the bamboo that you left on, and then you sand it, and then you polish it with steel wool. And then, after you have the section of it polished down, then you have to fit the ferrules. The best quality ferrules are of course made of nickel silver. Then the next thing after that, I like to put the finish on it. And then once that is all sealed in and everything, then I'll go ahead and put the tip top on it, put the handle, the reel seat. Before I put the guides on, then I go back over the finish that I put on it, polish it down with steel wool, then put the final finish on it and make sure that that's as flaw free as I can. Once that has all cured out and everything, then it's time to put the guides on it, and it's just a matter of wrapping the guides on. When you get that done your rod is done.

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TB: So based on the numbers you talked about earlier, you must do about 3 or 4 a year during that 15 year period when you were really making them, right?

DC: Yes.

TB: And do you have more than one going at once? I mean, do you have them at different stages in the process, or did you just do one complete one and then come back—

DC: Usually yes, but there was one time that I started and finished five rods, all the same size, same weight and everything. The only difference was the wrapping that I put the guides on, and of course the reel seats. But I built five of them. Like one rod I'd take it so far in one stage, I'd take the next one up to that point, and then move on to the next one. I build the rods of course in stages. Like I described, you have your certain stages. And advice to anybody that wants to do it, of course I guess it holds true in about anything you want to do, if it is built in stages, you want to make sure that the stage you're on is completed as well and as good as possible before you go to the next one because if you don't, you're constantly fighting what you didn't fix in the first place.

TB: You also mentioned Dawn Holbrook?

DC: Yes.

TB: So you met him and studied with him then, right? He was the one—

DC: Pardon me?

TB: You met him and studied with him?

DC: Oh, yes. I met him at one of the fly fishing shows there in Seattle, and then I met him again at one of the club meetings that I attended over there, yes.

TB: Could you just tell me a little bit more. I mean, he's a name that I've heard a lot, but he was long gone before I ever got involved in this. It's sometimes nice to get somebody else's remembrances of somebody like that.

DC: I don't know all that much, except that he and an engineer by the name of Andy Hall, that worked for Boeing, they got together. And I don't know whether Dawn had built any rods before that or not, but between Dawn Holbrook and Andy Hall, they put together a small workbook. That was my first instruction book. We got that reprinted by Ring Torgerson, getting permission for us to copy if we gave him acknowledgement that they had put this all together. But I understand that Dawn built a number of rods. I don't know if he ever really did go into it as a real commercial venture. I imagine he maybe charged his friends if he built a rod for them or maybe gave him away, I don't know. But that's about all that I really know about Dawn Holbrook. I have searched on the Internet, and I haven't really found that much about him.

TB: Okay, that's all good. And you also then have become quite a craftsman of canoes, right? You're a canoe builder?

DC: Yes, I built a cedar strip canoe, yes.

TB: Could you talk a little bit more about that?

DC: Man, that was really a project. A friend of mine had built one, and it was a beautiful craft, and I thought, gosh, that looks interesting. Well, he still had the forms and all that, and he said, "Well, here, you can take them home with you if you want to." So I brought them home and sat them up, and I looked at them. And I asked him how he went about getting his strips. He says, "Oh, I just went down and bought a bunch of cedar boards." And I said, "Well, my experience with cedar boards, most of them have got a lot of knots in them." "Well, you cut those out and

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you scarf the joints and put them together. That way you can get a full strip." Well, the more I thought about that and everything that sounded like a lot of work. So I started shopping for cedar boards, and I found that I could find absolutely clear cedar siding boards that would work. So I proceeded to just saw up a lot of big boards into little tiny strips. And I started putting the canoe together, following the instructions and whatnot.

It just didn't seem to work right. After that, I just couldn't seem to make the strips lay where I wanted them to. So I asked Lowell, "How do you do this?" So he came over and he looked at what I was doing, and he says, "Well, you got to do this and do that," so I continued. I finally got all the strips on. You glue them edge to edge and then the work really starts. You have to sand that all down or plane it down so it's smooth and even, got the right curves to it. But I kept working at it. It took me probably close to a year, not working steady but off and on. Then I covered it of course with the fiberglass and the resin.

It was a beautiful craft, but it wasn't for me. The first time I took it out, it was like me trying to sit on top of a log. It was such a small, tippy little thing. I've had canoes in the past, aluminum canoes, that I could stand up in and fish, but it wasn't for me. I ended up selling it.

TB: And that was the only one?

DC: That was it. That was enough.

TB: Yes, yes. So, well, you received the Fly Fisherman of the Year Award. So why don't you tell me a little bit about what that was based on, the kinds of things that you did that led to that. I think you're a very dedicated, passionate guy.

DC: Well, I tell you, that was the most surprising time I've ever had in a club setting. I was absolutely at a loss for words. I'd say my close to lifelong passion for fly fishing, probably led to it; maybe because of not just the fly fishing but because of my interest in all that goes with the fly fishing, all the stuff that is connected with it. I'm not a real student of the history of fly fishing, but I have acquired quite a bit of knowledge on my own, my own experiences, and listening to other people, reading about it and all of that.

There is one other award that I received, the Letcher Lambuth Award. That probably is the best award that I could ever have got. Excuse me for tearing up, it's just-- To be named along with the prior recipients of that award is a real honor. Some of the greatest names in fly fishing, especially in the northwest, were chosen to receive that award. Letcher Lambuth, I have his book, and reading his book, he was a real knowledgeable person in things, such that if a person would read the book how he approached fly fishing in his studies, he would learn a lot. He was a rod builder too.

TB: Bamboo too.

DC: Yes. And how he stayed dedicated late in life when he became unable to actively fly fish because of his, I believe it was macular degeneration is what got him. But, yes, I feel blessed in being recognized for the different things throughout my career of fly fishing.

TB: Well you received several other awards too: the Conservation Award, a Founders' Award, and you were elected president of your club in 1984 and 1985. So why don't you tell me first about the Conservation Award?

DC: Well, you're talking now about the Spokane Fly Fishers. That was the first club that I joined.

TB: Is that what the Founders' Award is for too? Were you one of the founders of that club?

DC: I was, yes.

TB: Okay.

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DC: I was not the very first because my name is not on the constitution and bylaws and the articles of incorporation and everything else, but I attended the very first formal, public meeting that they had. And at that time, they had real grandiose ideas of how they were going to make the club grow. Their basic principles were great. It was a family club. I had for a long time, and then I lost it, membership number 28. Of course at a new club, they wanted to award their members for dedication to the fly fishing and for helping the club grow and do certain things and all that.

The Conservation Award, if I remember correctly, oh this is going back quite a ways. A lot of our lakes around at that time were being designated say “quality waters” or “catch and release,” and like that. And they wanted to be able to let the general public know that that was the rules and regulations at that certain lake. So our club came up with the idea that we would make some signs. Well at that time, I had access to an awful lot of scrap redwood lumber. So I, with my woodworking skills I guess and everything, in a moment of weakness I volunteered to make the signs. So, they said, “Okay, any cost, why we’ll reimburse you.” So I proceeded to make the signs. I made the signs for, I believe it was three lakes, Dry Falls, Ridley, and McDowell. And I guess because I volunteered and then I followed through on that, why they decided for that year I would get the Conservation Award.

TB: So tell me a little bit more about the founding of the Spokane Fly Fishers, and they’ve been a very educational focused group, I think, that Jerry’s kind of told me.

JM: At least I think that’s one of their high points is their fly fishing school.

TB: So could you tell me about that?

DC: Oh, yes. Well, as a new club, it was open to the public, and so there was an awful lot of, say, curious people. Fly fishing, yes, guys, that sounds nice and everything. Something new, different, let’s see what it’s about. So we had an awful influx of members the first three or four years. Well there was a lot of them that really didn’t know that much about fly fishing. So, they started a school, which they would have every year, and they would have instructors, either from the club, or sometimes they would have an outsider come in and instruct these pupils of all of the aspects of fly fishing. Not just the fishing alone, but they had courses in management of the water and knot tying and anything that you could think of that would be connected with the sport of fly fishing: identification of insects, where they are found, why they are of interest to fly fishermen, like that. It was a club founded to include all family members. They would organize outings, and some of them were just a day outing, some were overnight outings, and some were extended outings. They had good programs that were family oriented.

They would have their special meetings that the club members would all pitch in on and everything. We, along with a couple other clubs, sponsored some workshops that were down in the basin. It was a club that had a need and a place. It has of course because of the, I think, my own opinion, maybe I’m wrong, but because of the fly fishing school, they have a big influx of curious people that would like to learn how to fly fish. They come and they join the club, they maybe attend for a year or two, and then they decide, well, the club life isn’t for me but I’ve learned a little bit of how to fly fish, and then they go their way. That happens to a lot of different organizations. But the Spokane Fly Fishers has always been able to keep a core group that progresses through the years to keep the club strong and going. They have a very strong program in conservation. They have their fundraisers and everything, and they end up at the end of the year flat broke so they have to go out and raise funds for the next year. They have sponsored a lot of conservation projects around the area.

TB: Were you involved in the Federation of Fly Fishers?

DC: I’m a life member, yes. I have been for 25 years—

TB: So you were not a part of the originating body or the first meetings that they had, back in the Sixties, I think?

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DC: I wasn't involved then, no. I know of the history of it and everything, but no, that was before anybody recognized that I was trying to be a fly fisherman.

TB: That's okay. Let's see, well, why don't you talk a little bit more about some of your conservation efforts, and especially the issue with Bailey Lake.

DC: Oh, yes. That was quite a project. Oh boy, where would I start? Oh my.

JM: It reminds me of, you know, they talk about what a boat is. It's a hole in the water that you put money into.

DC: Yes.

JM: Well, that kind of describes our project at Bailey Lake.

DC: Hardy Kruse, his favorite lake was Bailey Lake. If you couldn't find him in the store, you'd go to Bailey Lake and chances are that's where he was. He had the idea that there was a hole in the bottom of the lake. Okay, if there's a hole in the bottom of the lake, we can plug that up, because the water level would fluctuate so drastic. When the water level was up, you had a lot of food producing areas, the fish would grow, and sustain a lot of fish, and oh there was some beautiful fish in Bailey Lake. But then all of a sudden, you'd have a dry year, and the water would drain out, and all you'd have is almost a small mud puddle.

So he started to research different ways to be able to plug a hole in the bottom of a lake. And I guess the first thing was that he tried some bentonite, or something like that. It was a powder that once it got wet it would expand, and if you could get it in the right place at the right time, it would expand and plug the hole. Well, I wasn't in on that, but I guess it didn't work, because they went to Plan B.

He went up there and he finally found where he thought the hole was. This is in the summertime. And I don't know where he got the idea that the best time of the year to try to patch that thing was in the wintertime. There was ice on the water, other than we had a platform over where the hole was supposed to be. So he gets a crew together and we all go up there and it was a real operation. We had a concrete mixer. We had bags of concrete. We had snowmobiles to transport it down the lake and chainsaws to cut holes in the ice, and he enlisted his son and a couple of his son's buddies that were skin divers, and he, some way or another, convinced them that, yes, you can go down in that ice cold water.

He got this pipe, big, big piece of PVC pipe with handles on it that could go right down where the hole was, and we could pour concrete in this pipe and it would go down there and plug that hole. Well, Hardy's other son, Steve, his duty was to keep as much hot water on hand as possible. We had two camp stoves set up there and great big kettles on there. Well, the routine was, the divers would pull back their hood, they'd pour a kettle full of hot water down inside, and then down in the ice cold water they'd go. Make sure we had a rope fastened around them so we could pull them back where they could find the hole, and they'd stay down there for, oh, maybe five, ten minutes, and they'd come up just froze to death, and the first order of business was to pull back that hood and pour some more hot water inside that wetsuit.

It kept Steve busy heating water. Can you imagine heating ice cold water up to where it was even lukewarm, and the temperature was probably only about in the mid-30s. But we put I don't know how many yards of concrete down in that hole. Well, lo and behold, it seemed to work for three or four years. But I understand now that it still fluctuates and everything. It was originally a manmade lake or man-enhanced lake I should stay. It has a dam down in the valley there. That was really something. Hardy was a real, what would you say, dreamer.

JM: Well, he was also a bull in a china closet. He was a huge man, big man, and his idea was if something wasn't happening, you'd get a bigger hammer or push harder. There wasn't any stepping back and going, let's see here, what are we doing and why is this not working.

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I guess one of my favorite parts of the story is the cat, you know, they had the snow cat. Well, I'm not supposed to be doing this— Tell her about the Washington Water Power snow cat that we just about bought.

DC: Hardy enlisted another friend that lived in that area. He worked for--at that time it was the Washington Water Power. Well, these outlying areas evidently they were quite lax in how they policed their use of their equipment. I know of two or three other times that some heavy equipment was used. But anyway, he got this guy with a big snow cat to use as a machine to transport people and equipment and supplies and everything. We started down along the lake and Cliff got down to the lake, and so he got out, he tested the ice. He thought it was solid enough, and he says, I'll keep one track on dry land. Well, it started to slip, and the next thing you know, why it was just about half submerged.

JM: This is, you know, probably a $100,000 piece of equipment.

DC: So we just shut her off and stopped, and the darn thing kind of kept slipping a little bit, and we kept hoping it wouldn't go any further, and it kept going a little more, and finally it stopped. Well, it didn't have the winch on it in the right place. The winch was on the front, and he needed to go backwards. So, they went and got another piece of equipment to rescue the snow cat, if I remember correctly. We finally got it back on dry land, and that's where it stayed. We did the rest of it by snowmobile or our own strength of pulling sleds and all of that.

But, Hardy, he could really organize things. It didn't always work out right, but he could organize things.

TB: Well this is just shifting gears a little bit, but to someone who's not really familiar with fly fishing or with a lot of the efforts that go into the preservation or the creation of a better fishery, you were involved in things like fish clipping and fish planting. Could you tell us when you clip a fin, what's that really all about? I think it's to keep track of the hatchery fish, right, so you know which ones are hatchery fish and which ones are not? Could you talk about that a little bit? People don't always know what that is.

DC: Okay, years ago, there was a process of how they sterilize a fish. There were two processes. One was from pressure and the other was from heat. And I can't remember—Gary Thorgaard, from WSU, he was a biologist, a professor. He experimented with both types, and he finally settled on the heat method. I am not familiar for sure about how it is actually done other than I understand it's just as the second or third cell begins to form on a fertilized egg, they put it in a water bath of a certain temperature for so long. That arrests the formation for a long enough time that it does away with one of the chromosomes. So then that makes that fish sterile. Then they are hatched.

Then when they're hatched in the hatchery, they get up to a certain point. In order to study them and know whether they are sterile fish when they are planted along with the normal planting, we would clip the adipose fin, or sometimes the pectoral fin. And they'd take the fish, anesthetized them with some chemical, I don't know just what it is, but they put them in that and it just puts them to sleep. And whenever they have their fin clipping, why, everybody gets around down at the hatchery, and you've got your little sharp scissors, and you start clipping the fins. They're absolutely dormant, you might say, in your hand. You throw them back in the trough there and in short time they come back to life and they swim around, it heals up, and that way you have a marker so that when anybody catches that fish, they can just look real close.

That's used quite a bit throughout the whole fishing industry now, not only just for trout, but steelhead, salmon and all of that. With the steelhead, if it's missing an adipose fin, why, that means it's a hatchery fish, and with the regulations they usually let you keep a hatchery fish, but they won't let you keep a wild fish.

TB: Ah, okay.

DC: And it's just a way of marking the fish so that they can have a control, whether it's a sterile fish. The idea is, a sterile fish, when they're in fresh water, they reach maturity, they try to spawn, but the rainbow will only spawn in moving water. And so that means that they have to reabsorb the eggs, then they'll, in the male fish, and that inhibits their growth, where if they don't ever become fertile, they never have to go through that stress. The theory is then

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they will just continue to grow and grow and grow until they die of old age or they get caught. So that means that they, through that process, they hope to be able to grow bigger fish and everything.

TB: So could you tell me a little bit more about fly fishing experiences in general? What are some of your adventures just fly fishing? What you enjoyed? What kind of fishing you like to do the most?

DC: Oh, well, okay. Of course, I grew up mainly fishing lakes. And I had some good outings and everything. In our area here we have a lot of lakes within a hundred mile area radius. But my probably first love and still, I like moving water. I prefer the streams, whether they're little spring creeks in the mountains or whether they're some of the big, big rivers. I just think that with moving water, my theory has always been, you can be standing in the water or on the shore and fishing, you can take two steps either direction, and it's an all different ballgame. You have to cast differently or something like that. Everything is changing. You have to adjust your approach, your presentation, like that, where in a lake a lot of it is just chuck and chance. Of course you can maybe use some past knowledge of what caught fish at that certain time at that lake and everything, but in moving water, it's just always changing, and there's so many different types of moving water. You'll fish sometimes little foam lines and eddies. Other times you fish the main current, on the surface, midway down or try to dredge the bottom, just so many different ways to approach fly fishing in moving waters.

TB: So is that why you like it -- that it's always different and you're having to think all the time about what's the best way to approach what you're doing?

DC: I guess you could draw the parallel, yes. Then of course fly fishing in general, throughout the year you have to approach it in different ways. A lot of it is acquired knowledge that makes for a successful fly fisherman. You can read books and talk to other people and everything. You can acquire knowledge there, but to me anyway, it's mainly been a hands-on deal. You have to experience it, then try and remember what worked, what didn't work, and try to find a better way to do it. I've never been a real competitive fly fisherman. Some of my friends are. Oh, man, they just got to catch the biggest, the most, and everything else, but I guess I kind of subscribe to the term that fly fishing is the gentle sport.

TB: Nice, nice. What about, I noticed over here that you made the shadow boxes that are used for the Ed Wolfe Memorial Awards?

DC: Oh, yes. It seems like I never come up with the ideas, but I end up helping carry them out. Yes, Don Shin was the instigator of that. And I don't know how he knew or heard that I was able to make shadow boxes or something. But anyway, he called me and he says, I've got an idea of having an award and this and that and the other, and I'd like you to come up and see what I've got. So I went up to his place. He had already laid out a pretty good format, and he says, I'd like for you to make a frame of some kind to have this, and it would be an award for our club. It's not an annual award or anything. It's just whenever somebody maybe comes up that is deserving of this award. It might be a person that has been in the shadows or something like that, but he still attends meetings, he still helps out here and there and everything. So I said, Yes, I'll put together a frame, so I did.

Then the next year, or a couple years later, why they wanted to award another one, and so I made another one. At that time, I thought, well, gosh, as long as I'm making one I might as well make two or three frames, so I went ahead and made up the frames and everything. I don't remember now or how many times it has been awarded and how many is current, but I have recycled a couple of them. There are members that received it that passed on, and so we'd get that back and we just recycle it, put new name plates on it.

TB: Okay. I also noticed around here, you have quite a few shadow boxes of flies too. Now are any of these yours, or are these all ones by other fly fishermen that you admire?

DC: Oh, some of them are flies that I have tied. Some are old, original flies that my father had. Some of them I have just accumulated in different places. At fly shows or something like that, you can stand and watch a tier tie a

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fly, and usually he'll give it to you, stuck in his card or something. Well, I had accumulated a lot of those through the years, so I framed those up.

I belong to a listserv mail list that is known as FF@. It comes out of the University of Kentucky. It was started at about the same time that the Internet—well, I guess it was even before the Internet because they only had the listserv, before the Internet. And we have people on that, that post quite regularly from all over the world, United States, Canada, Africa, two or three countries in Europe. They have periodically what they call fly swaps. A person will name a type of fly or maybe for some occasion or something, and so they will volunteer to be what we call the swap-meister. The idea is, you name your fly, the swap-meister runs the swap. He can name how many people will participate. So if there is a dozen tiers, that means that if you tie 12 flies, each of them tie 12 of their flies, they send it to the swap-meister. The swap-meister then in turn takes one of the tier's fly and puts it in each of the other tier's box, so that you get one of each of all the other tier's flies, and then he sends them back to you.

The first one that I participated in was the year 2000. It was the caddis. There were a hundred tiers. That meant that I had to tie 100 of the same flies. That meant that everybody else had to tie 100 of the same flies. We sent our flies in, the swap-meister put a stipulation that we had to include $10 with our flies. The idea was that he would then buy fly boxes, and he would mount these flies in the fly boxes and send it back to you. I have that box framed in a shadow box, 100 different type of caddis. Another swap that we had was what they called the dragons and damsels. That meant that you could choose either a dragonfly imitation or a damselfly imitation. I think there were about 24 or 25 in that. I have that framed.

A very well-known fly fisherman, Syl Nemes, passed away 3 or 4 years ago, something like that. Somebody says, I think we ought to have a fly swap to commemorate Syl, soft hackles. Well, Syl Nemes was a student of the soft hackle fly. That was one of the original types of flies, is what we call the soft hackle fly. But his main interest was in what we call the North Country fly, from England. He published 4 or 5 books. So, we proceeded to have a Syl Nemes fly swap. Well, I tied up a soft hackle fly and sent it to the swap-meister, and they sent them back. Well, I framed that up.

I don't know what will ever happen to all these things that I have put together, but a lot of the flies are things that I think should be kept, not just given away, thrown away or something like that. There's history there. So for that reason, I figure well, we'll put them in a frame, at least they'll all be in one place, and they'll be sealed. The moths won't be able to get to them. Not only the individual fly is a work of art, but I hope that by framing them, it enhances it as a piece of art. I have, as you can see, my walls are covered with photos and fly boxes and everything else, and I have probably three times that much down in the basement, stored away.

But fly fishing has been a very enjoyable part of my life. It has been a relaxing part of my life. And I have pursued it in a lot of different ways. Once I was introduced to the alpine region, just straight close in north Idaho, and I was aware of all those little alpine lakes that's up there, for a period of probably 10-15 years I spent a lot of time backpacking into those lakes, fishing. When I first started doing it, there was not many trails, or if there were trails they had been neglected and everything. So you had to kind of dead reckon it to get to them. You could see evidence around the lakes of some use but not all that much.

But as time went on, more and more people thought of it. I could see the degradation, actually in a period of say 15-20 years to some of the wonderful areas up there. If a trail was improved, maybe the roads was improved, people could get a little closer. But they have done a lot of work up there though to educate the people of how to treat the area kinder. The last time that I went backpacking, it's been about 15 years ago now, that would make me—yes, about 15 years ago, I hiked into the very first, I don't know the lake that I hiked into, and I could see how they had actually put up a sign, "Don't use the same camp spot." Move out to the end of the timber and don't disturb it as much or any more than you need to. And I could see that some of the growth was coming back around the lake like that, and I don't know how long they had been pushing that approach.

Yes, I've done a fair amount of backpacking to get to where there was fishing. Those days are gone now though.

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TB: You sort of mentioned some of the changes that you saw in the environment with your fly fishing. Have you seen—well, I know you have to have seen changes in the equipment and its evolution? Do you have any reflection on any of the changes, good, bad, or indifferent? And in the future, how you see the future of fly fishing?

DC: Well, the equipment by and large there has been made great improvements. It has, I think, opened up fly fishing to more people. Of course, we get back to this whole thing--it was the movie that made the fly fishing grow. But, I think the equipment has helped the average fisherman become more proficient in fishing. A lot of the equipment is more forgiving than what it used to be. Not just your fly fishing equipment, but all of the other that goes with it. Your watercrafts—sure, a lot of them still use these regular old boats, but an individual fly fisherman because of the pontoon boats and all of that line of equipment has made more water more accessible to more fishermen. I also think that as, kind of a peeve of mine is that the tackle designers and engineers just keep stretching the envelope and stretching the envelope. To me it's worthless, because some of the equipment that they have designed, there's such a small percentage of fishermen can actually get the ultimate out of the equipment. But that's what makes the world go around, always newer and better.

I don't know what else I could add to that. Is there anything else?

TB: My next question is just, what are some things that you are most proud of or that we haven't talked about that really reflect your time with fly fishing? And Jerry may have some ideas too that I don't know about to ask.

DC: Well, let's see. Fly fishing has brought about some great, great friendships, camaraderie, because they're both interested in the same things. It's just that, I don't know, it's been the only thing throughout my life, it seems like, that I have continued with throughout. I've had lots of other flare ups of an interest in this and interest in that, and at that time I thought, man, this is what I want to do the rest of my life. It seemed like I always come back to fly fishing as my gentle sport and relaxation, enjoyment. There's just something about the whole game of fly fishing, how much you want to participate in it or how little. If all you want to do is have decent equipment and catch lots of fish or keep fish now and then or whatnot, fine. But there is so many aspects of fly fishing that you can investigate and try to get knowledge of, that I don't think really exists in any other outdoor sport. Most other outdoor sports that I can think of, they have one aim, that's to get a final result, and that's it. Where with fly fishing, it's connected, yet it's a different phase of the fly fishing, learning to read the water, identify insects, how to use your equipment in a little different way maybe, or something like that. There're just so many aspects of fly fishing that I don't think any one person would ever master all of them, but it's fun to try.

TB: Cool. Can you think of something we didn't ask him?

JM: Boy, I can't think of anything, at the moment anyway.

The End

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