



ATTENTION: © Copyright Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. All materials cited must be attributed to Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections.



This interview was conducted with Harry Lemire on November 4th, 2010 at his home in Bothell, Washington. The interviewers are Danny Beatty, Tamara Belts, and Steve Brocco.

TB: Today is Thursday, November 4th, 2010. I'm Tamara Belts and I'm here with Danny Beatty, Steve Brocco, and Harry Lemire.

HL: A good French name.

TB: Basically Danny will probably take over then. So go for it, Danny.

DB: Okay, thank you. Well we appreciate your allowing us to come down and do this interview. I would like to start at the beginning when you were a young person in Rhode Island learning to fly fish and how you got started. And some of the people, your parents or whoever was involved with helping you get started and bring that story line up to Wenatchee when you and your wife Marlene moved west.

HL: Okay. But let me say one thing first. I have a bio of myself that you can get practically all of this information from off a web site.

DB: But we want you to expand on it.

HL: Okay, well I started at a very early age. When I was about four years old, I had a brother, Raymond that took me fishing for the first time. But we weren't fly fishing then we were fishing with shrimp. And I remember getting up early in the morning and driving—you know, living in the city, everything is down some alley before you get out of town. So I remember driving down this alley and my brother jumping out of the car and going into a doorway and coming back out with a shoebox with the lid on it and handing it to me and said, "Here, you carry that but keep the lid on it." And it was full of these live shrimp and if you opened it up, the shrimp were going to jump out.

So anyway, we went fishing in a little town that was close by and we were fishing in between two lakes that were separated by a dam. At that time the dam was not flowing, it just had a water spot in the middle and then the lake above and a lake down below. So we were sitting on the concrete of this overflow on the lower part of the dam and we were throwing our bobbers with shrimp on them down below us. If I put two shrimp on my hook, I would catch a fish. The fish we were catching were white perch. But if I used only one shrimp, I wouldn't catch anything.

So I was catching all these fish and having a grand time, until, stumbling around I happened to fall in. I fell in the water that was in between these two dams. There was a Boy Scout camp close by and my older brother was a scout

master. He took me up to the Boy Scout camp and took all my clothes off and put me in a bed, in a cot, with blankets and all and I fell asleep there. That was my very first fishing experience. But I loved it and I can remember it. In the back of my mind I can draw it forward and go through it all over again. So from then on, whenever there was a chance to go fishing I would be right there.

It got to the point where my friends that I played around with would come fishing as well, but they never liked to fish as much as I did. So it got where we would jump on our bicycles and we would ride to the edge of town—now there'd be two or three of us going fishing. There was a lady's yard where she allowed us to leave our bicycles and then we would thumb a ride about four or five miles to this lake and then we'd all run around the edge of the lake with our bobbers and worms and stuff like that and start fishing. We did that for a while and it got to the point where my friends didn't want to fish as much as I did. So it was a matter of me riding my bike to the edge of town, putting it in the lady's yard and hitchhiking to different lakes and streams to fish, by myself. So this went on, plus the fact that once in a while my brother would take me fishing in the car and we'd go some exotic place.

He was a fly fisherman and he liked fly fishing and lures, because we'd fish for bass, so surface lures were a thing to catch fish with during that time. But what we would do was drift down the side of a lake, if the breeze was right, and then he would cast in toward shore and I would just drag a fly in back of the boat. The flies that I was using at that time were flies that were his flies. As they got beat up and well-used, he would pass them down to me. It got to the point where I was starting to borrow some of his good flies and he said, "Well we can't have too much of this" so I would have to start learning how to tie my own flies.

Well, at that time one of my friends was the younger brother of a professional fly-tier who tied for the hardware stores in town. So there was an opportunity to learn how to tie flies at that time. So say from the age of around eight years old I started tying flies. When I fished them by myself, with my brother, they were just fur and feathers tied to a hook and they didn't look like anything. But they caught fish, and that was the only thing that was important to me.

Going on from there, there were other lakes and other streams that were always a little bit further and further away. As I grew older, they became more accessible to me because I was able to go different places and hitchhike down different roads instead of the same place all the time. That went on until I joined the Air Force when I was about eighteen. When I was in the Air Force, there was no fishing at that time; we were too busy being soldiers or whatever. But I got married on Cape Cod to my wife Marlene, who was from Washington State, actually Wenatchee, Washington. After we got married her parents came out to visit us for the wedding and then after they went home and we got out of the service, I came back to Wenatchee just to visit before I settled down, where I had a job in upstate New York waiting for me.

DB: Would this be about the middle fifties?

HL: Yes 1956. We'd come out to visit and it was supposed to be for a month or so, there was no rush for getting back. While out here, we would take drives around Wenatchee and to the foothills of the Cascades and up by Chelan and stuff like that. We would see these deer and elk crossing the road, there'd be a lot of snow on the road and they were all looking for food. As the month progressed my father-in-law was going to introduce me to fishing in Washington State. And in that area, in Eastern Washington at that time, I don't know if they still have them or not, but there were winter lakes as well all of the summer lakes. The winter lakes were closed during the summer and of course the summer lakes were closed during the winter. So we went fishing. The first lake was Lake Jameson, over in Douglas County. I remember going there the first time and being a fly fishing fisherman, with the equipment that I brought with me and the flies that I brought with me from back east, my flies were all—*[phone ringing]*—excuse me.

[Pause in recording]

HL: Anyway, where was I? Oh, we were fishing on Jameson Lake and my father-in-law and his brother would fish with eggs, or whatever, and with bobbers. I walked around the edge of the lake and I was casting flies. The flies that I was using were flies that I used back home. But back home, the flies that you used, they were all in stocked ponds and the fish were all—oh if you caught a 14-inch brook trout or a rainbow or a brown, and that was a real good-sized fish. So the flies were all small and the leaders we used back there were all a half pound, three-quarter pound, one-pound test. Fishing in Jameson where the fish average 16-17 inches and using those light leaders, I soon began losing all my flies. So I had to step my leader up a few notches and I went to three-pound tips and I started keeping more flies and landing more fish. That was my first introduction to fishing in Washington.

But I learned while I was there, that the Wenatchee River and the Columbia River, which flowed right on the outside of town had salmon in it every fall and had steelhead in it, as well as resident trout. With that in mind, I figured, I have to make up my mind whether I want to go back east or stay here in Washington. When I stopped and considered that all the salmon and the steelhead came from Western Washington and its surrounding salt water, that I realized that actually, Seattle would be a good place to live. So I came over and I got a job at the Boeing Company and here we are.

DB: I'm sure your wife was on your side to stay.

HL: Oh yes, yes because she was from Wenatchee.

DB: So at this point, then, steelhead becomes your passion, or your main passion. So where did you catch your first steelhead? I'm sure you remember—

HL: Yes! Oh I remember that. Actually my first steelhead was taken out of the Columbia River at the mouth of the Wenatchee River. We used to go over there, oh at least every other weekend. And while we were there I would either be fishing—well at first, I was fishing the Columbia River at the mouth of the Wenatchee. And at that time the Rock Island—no Rocky Reach, anyway—the dam above Wenatchee wasn't in yet, so the water flowed differently. You could wade out into the Columbia at the mouth of the Wenatchee and cast for steelhead there. But you couldn't fish the Wenatchee River itself, it was closed then. So that's where I caught my first steelhead.

DB: And that fish would have been going up the Wenatchee.

HL: Well, probably. Or else it could have been a fish that was going up to the Methow. But one of the first times—just a little side story about the Columbia at the Wenatchee River. It was always pretty windy out there and I was out there one morning on a Thanksgiving weekend, it was cold and windy. I was casting to these steelhead and lo and behold, I made a back cast and when I came forward, the wind had drifted the fly right in back of me and I came and hooked myself in the head. Well, you had to wade out about a hundred yards into the Columbia; there was a sand spit there. You waded out to the end of that and then started fishing. Well I'm way out there and I got this hook caught in my head and I didn't want to go back in and I couldn't get it out—I pulled and I tugged and all I got was blood. So I figured I'd just cut the leader off and when I'm through fishing I'll go back in to town and have a doctor take it out. But you know that's when I came to find out that you can't fish with a fly stuck in your head. So I had to leave the river and go and have the hook taken out.

DB: Oh my. So through those early years of fishing, you continued to concentrate on the steelhead. Give us some information about the Westside then and your fishing here and what led up to developing the Grease Liner and the other flies that you have perfected.

HL: Okay, well the Westside. Once we moved to the Seattle area, we first lived down on Beach Drive at West Seattle and of course we were right on the water's edge of Puget Sound. I would fish for salmon, either rent a boat or

I eventually got my own little boat. And then, as well as the salmon fishing, the closest river I liked to fish at that time was the Green River. I had a friend who lived in Black Diamond, Washington, so I'd go out to Black Diamond and with him we'd go fish the Green River. I got to like the Green River so much, though I fished other rivers at that time, when it was time for us to make a move from the city, Seattle, I wanted to move out in the country somewhere so we decided to move to Black Diamond and the Green River would be right in my back yard. At that time, fishing the Green River as well as the Stillaguamish and the Skykomish and all these other local rivers, that's where I did the majority of my fishing.

In the fall of the year I could get off of work and fish at least an hour each day during the fall and I could just get off work, run down to the Green River, and start fishing. So that's where I did a lot of that during that time. As far as different flies—well you just sort of start out by using what's readily available, as far as patterns go. The flies that were popular during that time were chenille bodies and hair wings with a hackle—pretty simple flies. Then, like with anything else, you sort of get sick of fishing the same flies and you start trying to tie a fly that's going to work a little bit better. So just one thing leads to another and that's how these different flies were developed. Usually with a certain thing in mind with maybe an insect or something that the fish would be used to seeing and would take readily, rather than shy away from.

Then as far as flies like the Grease Liner and other dry flies that I developed, they were usually fished in the fall of the year when the insects would be on the water. The Grease Liner itself was developed for the Green River. At that time, probably still so, in the fall of the year they have a good October caddis hatch. Now the October caddis hatch on that river has sort of a burnt orange body. And it was a fly that was good-sized, when it was on the water, the fish know about it because they were struggling trying to get off. So the Grease Liner had a tail, a burnt orange body, legs, and it had a wing to keep it afloat. For fish in the Green River at that time, as well as any other river that I fished, the Wenatchee being the other main river and the Skykomish and the Stillaguamish as well, it was a fly that worked good in the fall of the year.

DB: The name, "Grease Liner" I take it, has to do with you wanted a line that floated.

HL: Yes, that's right.

DB: And so why don't you give us a little information about your transition from the old silk lines that were difficult to keep floating. Early lines were hard to keep floating and then finally, Scientific Angler's started putting out some good floating line. Give us a little transition on that.

HL: Okay, well in the beginning, like you say, the fly lines were hard to keep floating. Starting out with silk lines, you would have to have two of them. A lot of my fishing wasn't all day, it was either in the evenings or else in the mornings. If I fished in the mornings it was because I was working second shift and I could go to different rivers and fish. When you fish half a day, that's about the length of time your silk lines would stay afloat. If you were going to fish all day you would use one line for the morning and then another line for the afternoon or evening. That's how I got around with the floating lines at that time; then when they started developing floating lines, like you say Scientific Anglers were the first ones to produce good floating lines for us, along with a lot of other lines that they manufactured. It was just a thing when it came to winter fishing where you were trying to get the fly down to the fish because of the water temperatures and the fish not wanting to come to the surface to chase a bug. Using heavy hooks and sparsely tied flies on lines that were, in the beginning, they were old silk lines. You would take the finish off of them and then you would rub graphite into the braid. This is a messy business to begin with but after a while it was alright because you would rub the graphite into the braid of the line so much, then all of the graphite would be off of the surface, so the lines did sink.

But then along with Ken McLeod and his son George, who were at that time official field testers for Scientific Angler, [they] started producing wet cell lines, yes. I was a friend of Ken's because we belonged to the same club,

the Steelhead Trout Club of Washington. He used to give me lines that he got for field testing and we would get these sinking lines, which were a dark green and they were called wet cell lines. Basically what they were, they were like wet cell two. Then they went from wet cell one to high densities and stuff like that. He used to give me coils of these lines and then we'd cut them up into pieces, or lengths, to basically make wet tips. Then by that time they were, Scientific Angler was also into making dry lines that floated a lot better. So we would take these dry lines and we would cut ten or twenty feet, or fifteen feet off of the coils, splice it onto the floating lines and there we had a wet tip. This was good a lot of times of the year, and it was sort of the progression that we made into what we have today.

DB: As time went on, you explored and expanded your range of rivers. You went up to the Thompson and others. You also developed the Thompson Caddis.

HL: Oh yes.

DB: So talk a little bit about your expanding range of rivers.

HL: Well actually, I believe shortly after I got here we made the first trip to the Kispiox River. It was probably in about 1958. We went up to the Kispiox River and fished it for the first time then. Actually, if I remember correctly, we went up in the middle of October and it was always a touchy time to go up there because in the middle of October you're subject to rains and the rivers going out. But we managed to catch fish and it sort of became a yearly trek that we would make up there to that particular river. As far as the other rivers were concerned, like the Thompson, we would fish [them] on the way back from the Kispiox. And of course at that time there were a lot of people fishing the Thompson. But they were mostly gear fishermen that would use lead and bobbers and eggs and whatever. But what we found out was that the places that we liked to fish as fly fishermen, which would be shallower and more pocket water, the gear fishermen wouldn't fish there because they'd be hanging up all the time. So we more or less had our own water that each fisherman liked to fish. It wasn't until they started using floats where the problem began and we started overlapping. Then all of a sudden the fly fishermen don't like the float fishermen and the float fishermen don't like the fly fishermen.

DB: I'd like to just mention here, this was going to be one of my questions and since you brought it up—when you say float, do you mean fly at the bottom and a—

HL: No, not a fly, a lure, and usually bait, with a float on the top to keep it off the bottom.

DB: Right. Well I was going to ask you your opinion on the ones that are doing this float with a fly now, because I've heard some comments—

HL: Yes. Well actually, yes, there's—that's a very new thing that they're doing here. In the last several years, it seems like it all started in California. They'd come up here and they're using strike indicators with nymphs on the bottom. And the truth of the matter is they're very effective. But it just—it doesn't work when you have other fishermen on the river because they have to cast upstream and drift back down, where other fishermen are casting across and down, so you end up bumping into each other all the time.

DB: Well the reason I bring this up is—unfortunately Walt Johnson died before we started this interview thing--the last time I visited with him it was in the Stillaguamish there at Oso and as he said there were these Californians same as you, and they were using these floats and he was so upset with them. He said, in a small river like that, they just took over.

HL: Yes, well the thing is, like I say, it's too effective. Whenever something becomes too effective then it should be stopped because you get everybody trying to do something the traditional way for the aesthetics of it, for the

sportsman part of it. Then you get somebody coming along using something like eggs or shrimp or fishing nymphs upstream with an indicator. All of that is too easy or too deadly on the fish. All you do is, you end up sore mouthing a lot of fish. Even if you're going to be returning them you sore mouth a lot of fish, which spoils it for the other fishermen.

DB: And you've maintained this traditional approach to fishing, no matter what.

HL: Yes. That's why I like to fish a surface fly or a dry fly even over a wet fly because there's more, more feeling goes into it; you're trying to imitate an insect with either a natural drift or an insect that's on the water struggling to get off the water. You end up doing things with more aesthetics to it than actually just trying to catch fish.

DB: Okay. In your travels up into northern British Columbia and back to the Thompson, you used the word "we" did that happen to be the McLeods on any of those trips?

HL: Well they would be up there, particularly on the Kispiox or the Thompson River. But they weren't actually my closest fishing friends. They were friends and I was a good friend of Kens, and I considered him the steelhead's patron saint. But he was quite a bit older than me and I fished with the younger guys.

DB: Yes, even George is a little older. We did George's interview and he talked about the development of those fly lines. George lives just a little ways from where I do. We did talk about that, I just wondered if they were also members of the Steelhead Fly Fishers, which you were a member of.

HL: Uhm, no. They didn't belong to the Steelhead Fly Fishers; they belonged to the Steelhead Trout Club.

DB: Oh. They're different?

HL: They're different clubs, yes.

DB: Oh, maybe you should explain that.

HL: Well Steelhead Fly Fishers started, you remember what year?

SB: Mid-Seventies or early Seventies

HL: Yes, early Seventies, something like that. Where the Steelhead Trout Club, I don't know when they started—they started, oh I don't know, in the Fifties. I'm not sure when. But when I joined it and belonged to it, it was in the late Fifties, early Sixties.

DB: So there were two different fly fishing groups that focused on steelhead?

HL: No, not fly fishing groups. There was only one that focused on Steelhead, and that's the Steelhead Fly Fishers.

DB: Oh, okay. Bob Strobel was a member of that. Bob was one of the people that came to Anacortes and helped get our club started in 1974.

TB: And that would be the one that Alec Jackson's in, isn't it?

HL: Yes, yes. Well Bob and I are both charter members of the Steelhead Fly Fishers. We were both instrumental in starting that club. Although Bob wanted to form a club and I didn't want to form a club. I said, well let's not form a

club, let's just get together once a month and have dinner and shoot the breeze. But the younger guys that were in the club, they wanted to have an official club.

DB: Okay. So you explained your initial learning how to tie flies and using a vise. Then you started tying flies without a vise after your wife had presented you with a Christmas present. Why don't you go ahead and lengthen that a bit.

HL: Yes, it was actually probably in 1990 or 1991, when she gave me that book by T.E. Price-Tannett. It was a book explaining how these full-dressed Atlantic salmon flies, which I always admired, were tied. The fascinating thing about them is that they tied them in their fingers without the use of a vise. This was before vises were invented and being a traditionalist, I thought that was fantastic. Somewhere I read about the English sports who would come from the city to fish a river in Scotland or Ireland or England and hire these ghillies to come and make sure they didn't fall in. Or when it came time to land the fish to get their feet wet instead of the fisherman and then supply the flies or whatever the sport needed. So I was reading where if the sport was in the river fishing, or even on the edge of the river fishing and he wasn't catching any fish, then the ghillie would be up in a hut.

A lot of the beats on those rivers have these huts because it's usually raining or misting or something like that. The ghillie would be up in this hut with the materials that he brought, that he had in his bag and he would be trying to tie on different colors for these flies and hopefully to give it to the sport to use and for the sport to catch a fish on it. If he caught a fish on that fly, that fly became *the* fly to use and of course, the ghillie would get a bigger tip because he supplied a fly that caught a fish for the sport. So taking all that into consideration and these poor guys, they didn't have good glasses, they didn't have good light. And if it was a rainy day, or something like that, they were really pressed to get this accomplished. So I thought that was pretty good and I figured that if they could do that under those conditions ...

[Pause in recording]

That's basically why I started tying those flies in hand like that, because all the instructions are there—the only thing that I had trouble with at first is holding my hands exactly like the instructions said to do all this. Then I realized, you're tying them in your hands, everybody's hands are a little bit different and everybody's going to do things a little bit different. So instead of holding it that way, hold it this way, whatever it takes. With that in mind I just went ahead and found it very practical to do and very possible. And you get better and better at it. Of course, I've been tying now for over twenty years, so I've had a lot of practice.

DB: Did you have any inspiration or any thoughts of people like Lee Wulff that tied—

HL: I did, yes. In fact, when I first read of him tying dry flies in his hands I thought that was pretty impressive. When I started doing that I started thinking about that so I tied some in my hand and I got down to a size fourteen or something like that in a Royal Coachman.

DB: To prepare myself for this interview, I sent Ted Rogowski a note and asked him about Lee Wulff tying and he sent me an answer yesterday about Lee's tying and why he did. Lee didn't know there was such a thing as a vise.

HL: Yes! Well see—

DB: He was up in Alaska and he was trying to earn some money and he could start tying these flies.

HL: Well you've got to remember, at one time, which wasn't very long ago, within a hundred years, that a lot of these things were happening. People were doing things with practically nothing compared to what they have now. So tying without a vise was a pretty common thing. But yet, when I look back and I read back into the history of fly

tying, I've got a little note there that I wrote the other day, that it was 1800 when Samuel Taylor first mentioned the use of a vise. 1800, that's quite a while ago. But when you look back at the other times that a vise is mentioned, you'll see from 1875 and on, they would use a vise very similar to this here, which was embedded into a solid table or something like that. They would put the hook in there and they would tie like that. So once a vise like this came out, which was actually a jeweler's vise, they started using it. You can see different shapes of them so actually they were just something to hold a hook.

DB: I'm a retired school teacher and forty or so years ago my friend and I decided to start an outdoor club at the school and we were going to teach the kids how to tie flies and we ordered a kit from Herter's and the vises were the simplest little things—

HL: That didn't hold very well.

DB: Yes and we were constantly getting a ballpeen hammer to hit the rivet to tighten them together. But those kids, this doesn't have anything to do with your interview, but those kids still—when I see them in Anacortes, they still talk about those flies they tied.

HL: Yes. Well, you know, very similar to that, the guys at the fly tying shows last year said they all chipped in so they could buy me this vise. Now can you imagine that thing trying to hold a hook?

DB: This part of it, on those we had, is very similar.

HL: Yes. This is just kind of a joke thing.

DB: Yes, it'll hold a hook.

HL: Yes, it will hold a hook, especially a small hook.

END OF SIDE A

DB: From what I've read and what I've heard you talk about, you're pretty much a traditionalist in fly fishing. You like bamboo rods and your flies that you like to use are all natural materials over—you don't use any of the newer, fancy—

HL: No, I don't like to use too much of that.

[Pause in recording]

DB: So I started to ask you about carrying through the traditional ways of fishing. Do you still fish with bamboo?

HL: Oh yes. Actually you'll see a lot of bamboo rods around, although there are a lot of glass rods too. But my favorite thing—I do a lot more trout fishing now than I used to. See that wooden reel up on the table?

TB: Oh right here.

HL: Yes, yes. Okay, there is a silk line, that wooden reel, and a cane rod, is what I love to fish dry flies with. It's really great. I mean when you get a fish to take your dry fly on that reel, it just sounds so, to me it sounds sweet. But it's quite different than—see I love it (listening to the sound of the reel).

TB: Now about how old is that?

HL: Well this is something from the 1800's. This is actually called a Nottingham Starback. There's the star back. See, listen. I mean you get a fish—I mean it really sounds good. That's what I like in the reel. I like a reel with a lot of sound to it.

DB: But what's the line?

HL: It's a silk line.

DB: Now that you mention it, are silk lines still available?

HL: Well actually, you can buy silk lines, in fact, it's a newer silk line, but I mean, I don't know how new it is—maybe ten to fifteen years old. But I've still got silk lines. You have to take care of them.

DB: Yes.

TB: You have to dry them, don't you?

HL: Yes, well, you shouldn't put them away wet. You have to dry them after you fish them. Then you have to keep them coated with wax and that's it. When you go to use them, you fish them for half a day. When they start to sink, you change lines and you fish something else or a different line. But between this here, silk line, wooden reel, and a wooden rod, you're getting right down to where it should be. I mean, that's really nice. I like that, a lot of aesthetics.

DB: Do you ever communicate with Darrel Martin about the actual wood rods that he makes? The ones that go way back and bamboo?

HL: Oh yes, yes. Yes, well he's pretty traditionalist himself, yes.

DB: Yes, he is. Well we've covered quite a few of the things here. We've already talked about the McLeods but when you got into the Steelhead group and started meeting different people. Some of the ones that are no longer with us, like Ralph Wahl and Walt Johnson, were those some of your—

HL: Enos Bradner, yes.

DB: Do you think of them as mentors or equals?

HL: Oh yes. No, they were mentors because they were a previous generation, before me. You always looked up to those guys and you always wished you would run into them every now and then. But it seemed like you never did. We all used to end up, sooner or later, down at Patrick's Fly Shop. And you'd go in there and he'd say, oh you should have been here yesterday, so-and-so was in—Sid Glasso, Wes Drain, Ralph Wahl, whatever. And you always, thought, I missed it, I would have liked to have talked to them?

When I first came out here, there were very few steelhead fly fishermen. You could count them all on two hands. You would hear about these guys but they'd be like a bunch of ghosts. You'd hear about them but you'd wonder if there really is such a guy. But you'd be fishing on the river and if there was another fly fisherman on the river and you heard about, you would try to go and talk with them. You had something in common, because there weren't very many fly fishermen around.

DB: Right. Ralph Wahl was focused a lot on the Skagit. Have you fished the Skagit?

HL: Yes, yes.

DB: One of your flies is the Skagit Dee. Was there something about the Skagit that you focused on, the materials for that?

HL: Well, no, it's just like I was saying before. When you use certain flies long enough, you'll get sick of them and you'll want to switch to something else.

DB: Oh, as you said before, right. And the Dee part—was from the River Dee?

HL: The River Dee, that's right. It's a style of fly.

DB: You're a friend of Peter McVey and he's also a traditionalist. Do you own any of his rods?

HL: Oh yes, I've got six or eight of them. In fact those two right over there are his rods.

DB: Okay. Well you've made some very nice trips with him do you want to give some anecdotes of them?

HL: Yes. Well actually the first time that Peter went to the Kispiox River, we talked him into coming up with us. This was probably in 1970. We had been friends; oh I've been friends with Peter now for almost fifty years. But anyway at that time he was still a chef, cooking at one place or another up at Merritt. We said, "Well Peter, you've got to come to the Kispiox with us." And he said, "Yes, well, I don't know. You know I go to the Dean River." He fishes the Dean River quite a bit and he had been cooking up there at that time. So he said, "Oh, I don't know. I go to the Dean River and I can't imagine any river being better than that." Well at that time, I didn't fish [the] Dean River yet. So we talked him into coming to the Kispiox one year.

He said, "Okay, I'll come up with you guys." There was going to be three of us. He said, "But I'm not coming up to be the cook!" "No, no, no, no problem," I said, "We're going to take turns cooking. You'll have your turn." So we get up there and the first night I'm going to cook first. So I get out the salad makings and I think we had some casserole that Marlene made. I start cutting up the salad and geez, he's watching me. And he said, "Oh, stop! Give me that dam knife; you're going to cut your fingers off!" And that was the end of our cooking. He was the cook from then on. Yes, so that was really good.

By the time the trip was over, we had to come down to the Bulkley River because the Kispiox went out. And on the Bulkley River there was slush-ice coming down the river and we had to cast in between the slush-ice. He didn't figure that was very good. So on the way home, he was saying, "Okay, [next year] you guys have got to come and fish the Dean River." He told us how great it was. And actually, the Dean River, at that time and for a long time after was the best steelhead river in the world. But it was hard to get to; you had to fly into it.

But we went in there for the first time the next year. What the deal was, you would land in the bay at the mouth of the river. At that time, there was a logging camp there and this logging camp had a caretaker and the caretaker had a truck. Then there was also a road that went up alongside the Dean River, crossed the bridge, went up alongside up about to Twelve Mile that crossed the bridge again and it went up into the logging area. Well you could get a ride up to Twelve Mile, but then there was sort of a spur that went on the same side of the river. We could actually get up as far as Thirteen Mile before the road ended. So we pitched our camp there. We would get up in the morning, put the rubber raft in the river, and we would fish our way down to the lower camp. Then we would be able to get a ride back and forth each day. We'd float down, get a ride back up or whatever.

I remember the first time that year that we saw Peter on the river, he was with the head guide, that Dick Blewett, and we didn't know Dick. He had seen us coming down the river, three guys in this navy yellow surplus boat, and he

looked up and said, "What in the hell is this?" because no one had ever been there before except his people, his clients. All the sudden here are three guys in a yellow boat and that's not looking too good for the future. We were the beginning of the end, I guess.

DB: When did Peter take over the Corbett Lake Lodge and his interest there? Approximately how long ago?

HL: In the Seventies, late Seventies, I believe.

DB: I was thinking it must have been, the first time that I was ever at Corbett Lake, there was a little place to rent boats. But it wasn't much else.

HL: Yes, then after that they built the lodge and they built more cabins.

DB: Did you get into fishing the Kamloops, the lakes with the Kamloops rainbows with him?

HL: Yes, I fished with him. In fact, I met Peter up at Minnie Lake. At that time he was trying to repair a flume that came from Minnie Lake and he was trying to get the water to flow down into Stony Lake. And then fill that up as well as give the lake some fresh water for the fish to come up and spawn in between them. So yes, I helped him with that flume and then in a couple years they had a big storm and the flume broke up and that was the end of that.

DB: Blew it out.

HL: Yes, yes.

DB: But Douglas Lake Ranch, for instance, is a lodge or something right now at Minnie or Stony.

HL: Yes, they do.

DB: They charge a rod fee and so forth.

HL: Yes. When they first opened up operations things were real good. There were a lot of big fish both in Minnie and Stony. Peter helped supply a lot of the fish that were there. Then it got to the point in the last few years, the size of the fish went down.

DB: Any other of the lakes that you remember you liked?

HL: Well I fished most of the lakes up in that area and they were all good from time to time. Each lake sort of reaches a peak and it's real good at that peak and then it starts to come down. It has to do with the insect life, which is the food availability for the fish.

DB: Any other McVey stories? That one you gave us was good, we wanted to include that. Let's see... Over the last few years you've been one of the prominent tiers at these shows, these fly fishing shows. Eugene, well now it's at Albany, and over at Ellensburg and various places around. Would you like to comment about your tying at those and that kind of thing?

HL: Well it's kind of a fun thing because it's club participation for the Atlantic Salmon Fly Tier's Guild. We've got eight or ten guys.

SB: Oh I'd say it was like fifteen.

HL: Oh yes? Yes, when we go there, we'll drive down together, we'll stay in the same hotel, and we'll visit at night and everything. It's a very enjoyable thing, when you get down there; I was very hesitant at first because I'm kind of a shy guy to begin with. But you get down there and geez, there are so many people that are interested in what you're doing and they think it's the greatest thing in the world. When you have a lot of acceptance like that it makes things a lot better. So it's just a very enjoyable thing to do. They certainly get a lot of people there. I've always got eight, ten, or fifteen people in front of the table there watching. I try to choose flies even though they're full dress patterns, I choose easier ones, something I can get done within an hour. Because you can't expect people to stay very much longer than that to watch you finish one fly. If you can finish it within an hour they're usually willing to spend that whole time there.

DB: I understand also that you teach this method, is that right?

HL: No, not really. I mean, I have a kid next door that I've been teaching how to tie.

DB: But you don't do classes or anything.

HL: No, no.

DB: Have you ever—do you know Skip Hosfield in Eugene? He was one of the tiers at those shows and he had a stroke and he's no longer able. But just before he had the stroke, he tied a fly and he submitted it for competition. And he won some championship.

HL: Oh yes?

DB: Have you ever gotten involved with the international salmon—

HL: No, no. I was—I never did anything like that. It would be nice to do that, but it's like another ball game, although there are guys in our club that do that. Rocky Hammond; he's won a lot of awards and things like that. But I guess the main reason that I don't do anything like that is because there's no one else tying in hand like that. So I would be competing with people that don't tie like I do.

DB: Oh, you're right, you're right.

HL: I mean I could win first place in everything I submit if you have that—but I never have been very interested in competing like that.

DB: Steve Raymond relayed a story from years ago, from the fellow from Vancouver that had the Pacific International Exposition—

HL: Ed Rice.

DB: Ed Rice. It was one of his shows and you were at the Kingdome. You and Peter McVey, Bill Jollymore and Steve Raymond went for dinner. All these four people well known in fly tying and fly fishing circles, you were the one that the waiter remembered the most. Do you remember that story?

HL: Oh yes, yes.

DB: We'd like to get your version because we have Steve's but let's get your version of this young waiter.

HL: Yes, we went in there and we were going to be seated at the table and we all had our name tags on. He said, “Oh you’re Harry Lemire! Geez! I’ve been wanting to meet you and I heard a lot about you and have watched you tie flies.” This and that, he went on for about five minutes. I’m starting to get embarrassed with all this stuff he was saying. And I said, “Geez, with all of those compliments you ought to have something.” So I took off my shirt and gave him my shirt. It was the shirt that they gave us at the show and it had your name on it and it had all of this stuff—you know, you looked like a race car driver. I never liked those shirts anyways and I got a closet full of them. I’m always looking for a place to get rid of them. So I gave this guy this shirt and he was just beside himself. I wonder what ever became of that shirt.

DB: Okay, that’s the story that Steve wrote. He said they took a picture of you with the young fellow.

HL: Yes, yes. Probably did.

DB: Okay. Well Harry, Steve, does anything come to mind [that we’ve missed]?

SB: I wonder could we ask Harry about his helping develop rods with—Jimmy Green and with Sage.

DB: Oh okay, good.

HL: Oh yes, well those spey rods, I wish that would never have happened. Because now-a-days there are so many fishermen out there, fly fishermen, and it’s because of these rods. It makes casting a lot easier where they can get distance a lot easier. I mean the rods are fifteen or sixteen feet long and they’re throwing these heavy lines that are designed for long distance casting.

What happened at the beginning of that was reading about the history of fly fishing; you can’t help but read about the spey casting and the spey rods that they used. Those rods were developed on the River Spey and that style of casting, which is completely different than a single-handed casting style.

Through reading these books, I was reading about a rod called a Grant’s Vibration. Well there was a man at that time in England by the name of George Grant that in casting competitions, he’d cast like something—like a hundred and forty feet with this Grant’s Vibration rod. This Grant’s Vibration rod, from what I understood, was maybe a twenty foot rod but the tapper would reverse at the butt section. So that when you cast it, the whole rod bent, right from the grip, so you put the whole rod into play. When you cast it you get this tremendous distance and so I heard about that.

Then Peter and I went over to England and Scotland one year with our wives and I said to myself, “I’m going to find out about this Grant’s Vibration.” So we’re looking around there and we knew of this rod building shop, sort of like Sage over there. We stopped and went in and talked to the designer of some of their rods. I asked them about the Grant’s Vibration. And he said, “Yes, we’re trying to develop one,” he said, “but the field tester keeps on breaking them.”

Well that’s understandable because when you get the rod bending at the butt, that’s a lot of pressure and the focal point is clear down at the bottom end of the rod. They were using fiberglass and Kevlar for their material. Well Kevlar, from what I know about the rods and materials that we’re using over here at Sage, has no compression strength. So every time they did that they would break a rod. He showed us one of the prototypes that [they] had there. Geez, I looked it all over and I’m pretty good with measurements so I kind of eyeballed important areas of the rod. When we left there I wrote them down on a piece of paper. And when we came back home I was with Jimmy Green up on the Skagit River and I was telling him about this. He said, “I bet you we’ve got enough material around here that we could make up something like that.”

At that time, he lived over on [Quilcene]. So the next weekend when he came up, he brought a bunch of stuff up there and we put it all together and we got this—oh a fifteen foot rod that had the reverse taper to it. It was a lot like the Grant's Vibration. We started casting it, and boy, it really worked good. But I was afraid of it, and I said, "Jimmy, if I keep on doing this, I'm going to break this rod." He said, "Don't worry! You aren't going to break it, that's pretty tough stuff." And at that time, it was like graphite 3-0 or whatever it was that they were using. I said, "Okay," and I continued on and sure enough, I broke the rod. So I thought to myself, "Well, good, I broke the rod. Now that proves my point and he'll make it stronger." And so they went on to make it stronger and they came up with a rod, and I've got one here now. It's got the reverse taper to it, but it's so awkward and so different that they didn't want to manufacture it because it would be too different. So they never did anything with it.

But anyway, Peter and I came back with the measurements for all that and we made up the rod. And from that, we started fooling around more and more with different tapers of rods and different materials, and started what became the beginning of the spey rods population in this country. Now, you look at—they use the spey rods, actually, all over the world. We just sort of woke up the uh

SB: Sleeping giant.

HL: Yes, that's right.

DB: On top of that, I'm not a steelhead fisher, but I understand that there are even special rods for the Skagit River that they call the Skagit Spey.

HL: Oh yes! Well that's right. It isn't rods for the Skagit River, but what you hear is a Skagit type of line, the Skagit taper is what they call it. If you go to Trey Combs' book on fly fishing you'll see all the dimensions for the Skagit taper. So I developed that line long before we even started fishing spey rods or that Skagit taper. Actually what it amounted to is that it's a twenty foot line, from a weight-forward part of a size eleven line, you take twenty feet of that and then you splice it onto a running line and what you have is a line that you're going to pick up and pitch this weight. The weight of the size eleven and the running line, which is real light, when you go to cast it, you're actually flexing the rod and pitching this weight. That's what the Skagit taper is.

DB: And you were doing that way back when you and Ken McLeod were splicing lines together.

HL: Absolutely, that's right. At that time, we'd be using what we called shooting heads. So a Skagit taper is nothing but a shooting head attached to a floating level line. And when we were doing that way back when with Ken McLeod, we were doing it with monofilament and I was also impregnating Dacron with wax so that it would float on the top. Then you would pick up this twenty-foot head and you would false cast it once and you would shoot it and boy, you were just pitching this weight again. All of the line would come out of the stripping basket and once it hit the water then you could keep on mending this light running line. Like even if it was Dacron and it would float, you could mend it right to the head and then guide it right down the river.

DB: Do you have any other stories about Jim Green? That brought me to another question—you went to England with McVey, I assume you went fishing over there.

HL: Well, no. Actually, we were with our wives and it wasn't a fishing trip. Although we were in the tavern one day having a beer, I guess we were having dinner. We were talking to the bartender or the innkeeper, and we were right alongside of the River Tweed in Scotland I guess. We were talking about, "Yes, we're fishermen from North America," and "How's the fishing been?" and after talking to him a bit. He said, "Well are you gentlemen interested in fishing the river?" "Oh yes, we'd love to but we didn't bring anything." We didn't have any rods or boots or anything like that. And he said, "Oh, that's not a problem. I'll set you up." He said so-and-so is coming in who owns a beat on the river and I'm sure that he'll fix you up with all the equipment that you'll need to fish this river. Then

he came in and he sat down and we started talking with him and he said, “Yes, come and fish the river.” So the talk got around to this Grant’s Vibration again. And he said, “Oh, I’ve got one. You want to use it? You can use it in the morning.” I thought to myself, “Gee, the answer to a dream.” But what happened, the next morning when we woke up, the river was out. It was raining all night so we never did get to fish that. So there was an opportunity that didn’t quite make it.

DB: Did you ever do any fishing trips with Peter where you actually went to a destination kind of place?

HL: Oh yes. We went salmon fishing in the Maritime Provinces a couple times and actually I fished for salmon back there on the Miramichi River. That was when Hurricane Bertha came through so there was no fishing there. Well we did get to fish about a day and a half and then it got stormy and that was the end of it. Then I fished the Margaree River a couple of times. Those rivers back there, they’re very crowded. When you go to fish somewhere, there will usually be a parking lot, you’ll park your car and then you’ll walk down the trail. There will be a log or a bench or something like that and there’ll be a bunch of people sitting on it. So you get in line and then as the people go through, your turn comes and then you’ll go through. But the funny thing about these salmon, there can be forty salmon in the pool, forty people go through and they won’t touch anything. But the forty-first person, a fish will come up and grab his fly.

We’d came into the dining room one night toward the end of the trip. The people at a table next to us, or a couple tables away, were having a party, raising hell and laughing, and everything. I said to the waitress, “What they have a birthday party over there or something?” And she said, “No, one of them caught a fish today.” So I figured if you catch a fish; you’ve got to have a party, that’s how important it was.

DB: Well kind of to wind it up I wondered if you have any information or something you’d like to tell people starting out fly fishing, some things you’ve learned as you approach the river or as you approach an area of the river to fish, maybe some things that you look for that you think will make your day productive.

HL: Well I think that the only thing I would say about that is that stealthiness is the key. The fish can hear, see, and feel you coming. So you want to come very quietly; and not too much movement, not too much splashing around, and gentle wading. I would try to imitate insects that are on the river, that live on the river, and the fish are used to seeing; fish in a way that would fool a fish. Usually it would be, in the case of a caddis fly, it would be a fly hitting the water and then skating across it. Then try to get a reaction out of the fish that—sort of the same kind of reaction that if you were sitting at a table and you saw a spider walking across the table, what would you do? Well you’d probably look at that and then you’d get a napkin, pick it up, and go throw it in the toilet. But what would you do if he was running across the table? [*Smack*] You know, that’s what you’d do. That’s what you’re trying to get out of a fish, the quick reaction, the killer instinct.

DB: Okay. Do you have anything?

TB: Well maybe, this is a big new thing. Healing Waters, you want to tell us a little bit about your involvement in that?

HL: Actually, yes. I made three DVDs on tying salmon flies and steelhead dry flies and all the proceeds that came from that I sent to Healing Waters. Now these are guys that are over there fighting for us and they come back with their limbs gone and blind and suffering from all kinds of things that need a lot of help to bring back. I figured there’s no better place for the proceeds for selling those DVDs then to go to them. I sold several dozen of those and proceeds went to Healing Waters.

TB: Okay. I saw that you have a lot of equipment over here, camera and—

HL: Yes, well what that is—when I tie a fly, let's see I've got a lot of them up there. I usually take a picture of them and then put the fly away, because sooner or later that fly is going to be given away and I want to have a record of it. So I've got a lot of that. That's what that camera is for. I just mount the fly right on this peg and then take a picture of it.

DB: You do most of the mounting, don't you Steve?

SB: I've done some. Yes, I've done some fly mounting.

HL: Yes, he's done some. He does the best—he's the best in the west.

DB: Yes, I know.

SB: That reminds me, I need a fly. I'm supposed to pick one up today for Healing Waters, from you.

HL: Oh, well it isn't tied yet. I mean he just called me yesterday.

SB: Oh, he said it would be ready.

HL: Well I could probably get one.

DB: I have three of your plates hanging in our house.

SB: Oh yes?

DB: Yes, at least three.

HL: Sure.

DB: I have a Ralph Wahl plate, and an Ed Foss plate.

SB: No kidding? Wow.

DB: Yes. And another one I don't know—but he tied all of those Wulff type flies. I don't even know him, I should. But my favorite is the Ed Foss one because he was my buddy.

SB: He was a character, he was.

HL: Well in this thing that you're doing—what are you going to have? Are you going to have a display of stuff or some kind of a history? I know you're going to have a lot of it on tape.

TB: Do you want me to show you our website?

HL: Yes.

TB: Okay, are we kind of done?

HL: Well the only thing I was going to ask was when I got your brochure, you mentioned that you could use some flies or whatever—you know, memorabilia, from me. Well I have a lot of things that I could give you but I was wondering if you have a place to keep it.

TB: Right, well we can even do that—right now I'll show you our website. Thank you!