



**Western Washington University Libraries
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Fly Fishing Oral History Program**

Darrel Martin

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This interview was conducted with Darrel Martin on March 17, 2008 at his home in Tacoma, Washington. The interviewers are Danny Beatty and Tamara Belts.

TB: I'm Tamara Belts and I'm here with Danny Beatty and Darrel Martin and we're [about] to do an oral history. [Mr. Martin] did just sign the Informed Consent Agreement and he knows he's being recorded. Danny will start with our first question.

DB: Ok, I'd like you to just start kind of back at the beginning. You were born in Wenatchee and then moved to Eatonville, which is not too far from here. . . You grew up in Eatonville. So why don't you start something of what you remember about fishing when you were a teenager and go on from there.

DM: Well, most of my fishing, actually took place after the service when I came back. My first rod, when I was quite young, was tubular steel -- an appalling rod.

DB: I totally understand that. That was mine, too.

DM: It was not very efficient. I caught some small fish in the creeks near Eatonville. However, I think my entry into fly fishing was through literature when I was young. The literature of fly fishing is really what made me go into it because, for some reason, the writing about fly fishing is different than any other sport. It's more literate, it's more intelligent, and it's just a better quality of writing. That's not to say there aren't some poor works out there. But on the whole, there's a fairly high level of writing, and I really was entranced by that. I'm from the Lefty Kreh, Dave Whitlock and Ernie Schwiebert generation. I was really influenced by Schwiebert's prose. At times it's ornate and rich, painting lovely pictures of fly fishing. It's really the books that got me into serious fly fishing.

TB: Did either of your parents fly fish?

DM: Yes and no. My surname was not Martin. My mother remarried. I'm actually one of the Mracheks from Wenatchee. My birth father had a very fine fly rod. I have a faded photograph of him sitting on the running boards of an old Ford in 1949 at Nason Creek in the Cascades. He has beside him a fly rod case and a rifle. I have been told that he had a quality rod, but I never saw it. I really didn't meet him or get to know him much until my late twenties. My brother and I were winter bow hunting in the Nason Creek area at Stevens Pass. We entered a tavern for a mulled wine. My brother introduced himself to the waitress who replied, —*Q*, your father's right down here in a cabin." We went down to meet him. I only fished with him once, however.

TB: So you just kind of fell into fly fishing, you weren't really influenced by [anyone].

DM: No, I was influenced more by books than people.

TB: Who introduced you to the books, then?

DM: Growing up in the country on this small farm, I found entertainment in books. My mother and Grandmother were great readers.

DB: So really your fly fishing got going after you'd served in the army. You served a year or so in Korea. Was this before you were in college?

DM: I attended Eatonville High School for a few months, and then decided to join the Army. Perhaps I was reading too much Hemingway. I was 17 years old, young and inexperienced. After basic and Advanced Infantry training I was sent to Korea as light-weapons Infantry. Although I had dropped out of school, what happened to me was ultimately good. After discharge, I attended Edison Technical School and the Cornish School in Seattle, completing my high school credits in two years. Then I went under the GI bill to the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma for a bachelor's degree and later the University of Washington for a master's. So, in many ways I was very fortunate.

DB: I understand what you're saying. So then after you came back from the service (and because of the readings from before), that got you motivated to really find out about fly fishing.

DM: I eventually learned enough to teach fly-tying and casting classes. Then I submitted an article, in the 1970's, about dragonfly patterns to *The Fly Fisherman* magazine. Fortunately, everything I sent in was accepted. Since then I have written nine books. I also have done art, photography and articles for several magazines. I am now a contributing editor for *Fly Rod & Reel*.

DB: Now, in your beginnings of fly fishing were you focused on fishing, or on learning about fly fishing?

DM: Learning. I think that I have a rather academic approach to fly fishing. Learning fly tying, casting, entomology and the other aspects of angling was far more important to me than landing fish. It still is.

DB: You focused on the learning part almost all the way through then.

DM: Yes. Anyone can catch fish. The point is to know and to learn.

DB: Ok, so in this learning process, did you have some mentors or people that were influential?

DM: Of course, I have fished and been friends with some great anglers, both here and abroad. Dave Whitlock has been a friend for a long time. We've corresponded and fished together. Nick Lyons has also been a life-long friend whose counsel and support I have always treasured. Quite early in the Sixties I made contacts with others anglers in England through the Fly Dresser's Guild. I have fished with Donald Downs, Taff Price, John Goddard, Oliver Edwards, Marc Petitjean, Luis Antunez of Spain, the late Edgar Pitzenbauer in Slovenia, and the late John Veniard in England. In fact, I have had a beat on the River Test and the Anton (the Fullerton waters in England) for over a decade. I have been very fortunate. They say that even God cannot get a day on the river Test. Because teachers have most summers free, I traveled extensively in Europe, angling and meeting people. I do have a rather strong European influence.

DB: So you weren't afraid to pick up the phone or write a letter to Dave Whitlock down in Oklahoma?

DM: Of course not. He is very personable. I eventually went down to Arkansas for Whitlock's program on the Whitlock-Vibert box, a trout propagation method. There's a Whitlock-Vibert box right there (pointing) on the shelf.

TB: I don't know what it is.

DM: Well, in the top first level, you place fertile trout eggs. Once they hatch, they drop below to the lower chamber and develop free from predation. Then they grow until they absorb their egg-sacks enough to pass

through the box slots into the water system. They actually incubate and grow in the water in which they will live.



DB: Did Whitlock have any influence on your writing?

DM: Well, I especially enjoyed his artwork and Dave wrote the *Foreword* for *Fly Tying Methods* (1987). His encouragement and influence has remained with me throughout the years. I have fished with him and he is a great friend. One time, I even made Dave a lamb-skin fly fishing vest. Once while vainly fishing a drift in the White River, Dave came down in my spot and immediately took a remarkably large brown with a bad eye. Evidently, I was casting to the wrong eye.

DB: You mentioned feathers: did you ever go to Whiting?

DM: Yes, I have been to Whiting Farms in Colorado. I always like to seek the sources for my research. The only requirements are free summers and a will to explore. When I wanted to find out about fly tying with Coq de Leon feathers, I went to Spain. When I wanted to know more about CDC (the cul-de-canard feathers), I went to the Alps in France and met people who were propagators of that feather. In fact, I introduced Dr. Tom Whiting to the Coq de Leon feathers. He imported some of the eggs and is now producing the Coq de Leon feathers.

DB: So these European clubs that you would go visit (they'd contact you or you would contact them) and they'd invite you over and you'd get a chance to go fishing in some wonderful places.

DM: Yes. This summer, I go to León in northern Spain. I have fished and done research in Spain, but not in the north. I have a good friend in Madrid, Luis Antunez. We have fished together in the Chilean Patagonia. Years ago he wanted to market his "wisted leaders" in the USA. I told him Americans would probably not want leaders with that name. He asked me to select a new name. After some thought, I told him to call them "furred leaders." Such leaders are now known throughout America as furred leaders. I also was the first to add the silver ring to a furred leader. I fished Slovenia for many years with another good friend, the late Edgar Pitzenbauer of Bavaria. Edgar used a special leader made from Amnesia monofilament with a small silver ring that accepted tippetts. I merely used Edgar's idea on the furred leader. I should also add that for over 40 some years I have fished with Ron Wilton, a water bailiff and keeper on the River Itchen in Hampshire, England. We even had a great trip to the Amazon together.

DB: Did you always have an interest in the art part of it? The illustrations, the—

DM: Very much, yes. I've drawn all my life. Even now I give my fly casting students an illustrated handout. Here is one I made for a recent fly casting class. I do a lot of drawings for tying and casting classes.

TB: And so you do all that yourself?

DM: Yes, I do all the artwork—all the artwork and photography in my books.

DB: So you do your own illustrations for all the books and things that you do, and this was something that was natural, that just came to you naturally?

DM: Yes, I've always drawn since grade school. But I have had formal art instruction, including watercolors and technical nature illustration, at the university level.

DB: In this paper you mentioned Redditch, the hook company.

DM: Yes.

DB: Are you associated with them professionally?

DM: They produced hook models that I designed, but then so has Daiichi. I visited the Redditch factory when Alan Bramley was manager many years ago.

DB: There's a man that lives in Anacortes named George McLeod who for years was their factory rep in the United States.

DM: Yes. In Seattle, Alec Jackson also sells some of the Redditch hooks. But O. Mustad has, in fact, bought the Redditch Company—the old Partridge Company.

TB: But you actually designed hooks.

DM: Yes. I'm sure that Alec designed hooks for them too.

Interruption [Mr. Martin went and got some examples of hooks]

DM: Here are some Martin Daiichi hooks, Daiichi 1222 and 1220. And here is my Partridge Connoisseur Series Smut Hook CS21.

TB: Very cool.

DB: So you also then have done designing in this area.

DM: Yes. I have designed several things including the original brass Dubbing Whirl (double and single hook models), the double-offset signature scissors marketed by Anvil Industries, a fly vest (Keeper Wear of England), and several tying tools that appear in my books.

TB: What motivates you to start designing your own hooks? Obviously there's some lapse in what someone else is providing, but

DM: No, I don't think so. A hook is remarkably simple yet complex. For example, if you widen the gap for a better hold then you decrease the gap's strength. If you lengthen the shank, you can delay gap failure—the gap opening under mechanical stress. I originally did hook design tests at Pacific Lutheran University with the late Dr. Sherman Nornes. We made the computer programs and equipment for testing hooks. The test results suggested a new paradigm, a more effective hook design. The results appear in *Micropatterns* (1994). I convinced Daiichi that they should make it. These are the hooks mentioned earlier. There are still improvements yet for the modern fly hook.

DB: You wrote about that in a foreword or in a part of a book about the metallurgy with a physics professor.

DM: I first worked with Dr. J. Stewart Lowther at the University of Puget Sound (my undergraduate school) on microscopy of tying materials and hook fractures. Some of these findings appear in *Fly-Tying Methods* (1985). For microscopy, you coat the sample with gold and then, in an electron microscope, you bombard it with electrons that create great magnification that shows structure. Later I worked with Dr. William G. Greenwood at PLU on hook metallurgy. The results of this appear in *The Fly Fisher's Craft* (2006).

TB: Was that part of it, the stress? To make a stronger hook?

DM: Yes, also there are certain things about a hook design that will make it stronger. For example: in this hook, the original idea was to make the shank tapered, so that it flexed when a fish fought. We found that hook stress first comes when the shank bends, then it travels to the hook bend. Allowing the shank to flex retards the stress given to the hook bend, pulling the gap open. We thought if we tapered the shank making it more elastic we could preserve the integrity of that gap longer while the stress was absorbed by the shank. These are little things, small things, but I've always found them interesting.

DB: Is that more important for this size hook (a size 18) then for an 8 or a 10?

DM: Yes, of course. You really need some security in the smaller hooks.

DB: Lee Wulff, one of his things was using small hooks on big fish. And, did you ever visit with him about theories on this?

DM: Oh yes, we talked several times. One time I met him in Montana to do an article on what he carried in his fly vest. I have also written about his hand tying and hook selection.

DB: Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

DM: Well, usually I would meet Lee Wulff or Dave Whitlock at the International FFF Conclaves. Then I would just sit down and talk to them. Lee Wulff was one of the first to use small hooks on salmon. He didn't have too much to say about the hooks themselves, although, there were some hooks that he favored and others he did not. Part of the problem with the small hook, is usually the lack of gap. You need sufficient gap to hold enough tissue to hang on to a fish. Years ago, many small hooks had a shallow gap. The key was to produce a small hook that had a large enough gap yet was strong. Because the wider you make the gap, the more leverage and consequently the more stress you place on the hook. For every good design element in a hook, there is a corresponding deficiency. So I just found hook designs fascinating. There is a saying that you can determine the progress of a civilization merely by its hook designs.

TB: Jack [Hutchinson] loves hooks.

DM: Yes, well a lot of anglers are into hooks. I worked extensively with John Betts of Denver on hook-making. He readily shared his knowledge of some of the forgotten skills required in hook making. When writing *Craft* I must have spent a month on the phone with John. And I visited him in Denver where we made hooks together. He is remarkably erudite on angling history. But you know that's what fly fishing is. It is a thinking sport. It's not just a catching sport. I'm always excited to talk about hooks and theories.

DB: You've taught a number of classes in fly-tying, etymology, fly casting and other aspects of fly fishing. In teaching these classes your philosophy then was to try to get the student to think above just catching fish, is that—?

DM: Of course, every teacher is often more concerned about the reason behind the act, than the act itself. That's not unique. Nearly everyone I know will do the same thing; including teaching environmental concerns.

DB: We hear this: first you want to catch a lot of fish, and then you want to catch the biggest fish, and finally you realize it's the process and the being out there that's important. I gather from what you're saying yours was more compacted.

DM: Yes; compressed. There certainly was a time when I wanted to catch a lot of fish and when I wanted to catch the largest fish. But I have caught a lot of fish in my day. I've caught enough fish that catching the fish is pleasant, but not essential. It's the ambience, the friends, the travel and nature. I've done a lot of fishing before, about a decade, in the Amazon, and there were places in the Amazon where the water would

be black. That was the black backs of fish. Just absolutely dense with fish; I've never seen such a accumulation of fish in one place. Anything you put in the water, something would grab it. By the time you pulled it to the boat, your fish would be half-eaten by something else. The food chain was one link long.

DB: Have you ever been challenged by a certain fish, that you would spend some time working out a new pattern or a new idea?

DM: There were many that required excellent casts, effective patterns and extended dedication. I have written about some of them. Certainly one comes to mind: the *Hydrocynus vittatus*, ~~the~~ "striped waterdog." This fish, the African tiger fish, is very powerful and aggressive. Taff Price of England and I were fishing for them in the upper Zambezi River. And the point is, when they hit the fly, they hit at high speed. They have a strong V-tail, making them very fast. They just jerk the rod out of your hand. And then the fight is very aerial, the cartilage around their mouth makes it very difficult to sink a hook into. They're fairly cannibalistic, so [when we first got down there] we tied up some large, eight-inch bait fish patterns. On my first strike, I pulled in a bare hook. The large teeth of a Tiger fish had stripped all the dressing clear off the hook. We were going through patterns rapidly because of that and we said we've got to do something to solve this problem. So we took the flies we had left and we soaked them in super-glue overnight. Because of that, we caught some lovely fish. These were heavy, aggressive fish that eat scraps left from Nile crocodiles. We've gone there a couple times to Zambia, on the upper Zambezi, to fish for them, and it truly is an experience and a half. They're a challenging fish.

DB: Are there any areas in Washington State that you might focus on for a certain reason, certain fish? Will you tell us where those might be? Or do those things you kind of keep to [yourself]?

DM: Surely, yes, Rocky Ford Creek. Everyone knows that we do have some quality waters in Washington State; the Yakima, Rocky Ford Creek, and some of the selective lakes in eastern Washington. I mean, those are areas that really slow an angler down and make him think, and those are certainly good places to learn.

DB: You want to tell us a little bit about how you approach some of those places?

DM: I don't know if I can. Like everyone else, you go there and see what insects are prevalent and try to match them. I guess I carry a huge number of patterns with me so I come fairly close to matching any hatch. I don't know if I have a particular technique beyond observation and experience. Nymphs, emergers and dry are all just part of the game. Any experienced angler uses all he has to solve problems and land fish. Having fished the English chalk streams with truly great anglers has certainly helped me to observe more and approach the water with various methods. But no matter how good you are, some fish are better fish than anglers are anglers.

End of Tape One, Side One

DM: I love to make things; I make my own hooks sometimes. I make my own "antique" ash loop rods, horsehair fly lines and other tackle. But I make other things too. I make things like this, and this (pulling some things together). You know I sew up these to carry fly-tying materials. And this is for cutting hair strips.

DB: This is the sort of thing we probably need to get a picture of.

TB: Well when we're done I'll take a picture of all of this.

DM: Be careful, it's very sharp. I make these.

TB: Is that like a wallet?

DM: This is made from lamb's skin for tying flies along the stream. I imported empty Wheatley shells for the container and had plastic pockets manufactured for the insides.

TB: Do you sell all these then?

DM: I used to. That's my dubbing whirl design. Here's a case to hold a traveling fly vise. Here's the hook bender. This is my double-offset —signature scissors" made by Anvil Industries. Put those in your hand like you're going to start tying a fly. See look at it, your hand is out of the way where you're cutting and you have complete visibility.

DB: That's very interesting.

DM: The finger loop crosses the finger at 90 degrees, so it's very comfortable. This double bend blade allows you to trim the hide off a fur strip held in a dubbing loop without dislodging anything while you trim. Because of the angular handle, it is very easy to pick up. I thought about it and wondered if it would actually work with a double-offset. So I called Anvil Industries, a major scissors company, and spoke with Don and Dave Vogel, the owners of Anvil. I knew them. So I asked, —Do you think that if I send you a picture, you could bend a pair of scissors and tell me whether or not it works?" So I did that, and they soon replied, —Yes, they do work. What are you doing with them?" And I told him, —Well, [it's] for fly-tying." Anvil now produces these double-bent —Signature Scissors."

TB: Excellent. So really, other than [that] you do fly-fish and you got interested through the literature a lot of your passion is really all in the design of stuff that facilitates it.

DM: Well, I love to make things. The field fly-tying kit I made many, many years ago. This has been used for decades, as you can see. These soft plastic pockets carry all your tying material. It was small enough to actually put into your vest and take with you and tie along the stream. I also had made some streamside fly tying vises made by a company in Seattle that does parts for Boeing.

TB: Yes.

DB: Is this also your design?

DM: Yes, that's my design, the Dubbing Whirl. There are two types: the single and double hook. I prefer the single hook whirl. A lot of companies now produce variations on this.

DB: They're now on the market and this originated right here.

DM: Yes, right here.

DB: Wow, I didn't realize that.

DM: Matter of fact there a lot of things that originated here.

DB: Do they give you credit for all this?

Telephone Interruption

DM: Yes, at first, some companies, such as The Thompson Vise Company, did give me credit. As you may know, fly fishing is a highly competitive industry often based on imitation with origins getting lost along the way. These are also made in England now.

DB: Well I've seen these in the catalog and that's why I asked if they give you credit for them.

DM: Yes, now many companies have taken this idea and gone with it. It was too simple an idea for royalties or patents.

TB: How did you get started writing? I mean you've written quite a few books, that was the natural extension of—

DM: Well English majors are probably the worst writers of all. We tend to demand too much from language.

TB: I don't know, I was looking at your book and I thought it was written very nicely.

DM: Well, you know I'm too self conscious about my language and I think English majors are—I mean there are variable ways to write a sentence. You sit there for hours wondering, "What is the most effective way to express this idea?" I'm a very slow writer actually. I rewrite and rewrite and rewrite, usually five drafts with minor rewrites. After that I begin to feel that it's getting close. One of my bibles is Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. Although first printed in the mid 30's it is a brilliant little book for all writers. All my academic work in rhetoric comes into my writing. To write simply and clearly is difficult. Good writing takes effort but it should appear effortless. I always write for an audience of one: me. But every writer wants readers. The last book took seven years and a lifetime.

TB: Oh wow, is that the one that came out in 2006, *The Fly Fisher's Craft*?

DM: Yes. The first picture [here in the *Craft* book] is a fishing hut on the River Test. These are eel traps. They pick up the migrating eel. Smoked eel on dry bread is tasty. This is Hampshire, a lovely shire in southern England.

DB: Now this is a spot where the gillie would be?

DM: Yes, but remember that a gillie is your helping hand on the water. They usually do everything they can to make it a good day on the water. However, they are really more a companion than servant. Their extensive knowledge of flora, fauna and angling make interesting days.

TB: I'm amazed that you could do that in seven years because you had to be researching that for a lifetime.

DM: That's true, much research and work went into it.

TB: What drove you to—I was fascinated that you really went back to the beginning of time almost in terms of figuring out what they used to—

DM: Oh, well let me show you. Let me show you what made me do that: books.

TB: Oh my goodness.

DM: I love old books. And here are some. This one for example, not exactly in the best binding, is Blacker's, *The Art of Fly-Making*, (1855). It is often regarded as one of the most beautiful books ever written on fly tying. And one reason, of course, is the artwork. You see things like this.

TB: Oh wow.

DM: These are hand done.

TB: Oh that's why [it varies] because I've heard that the plates can be different in different editions.

DM: Yes. .

TB: There are like 37 different versions of the 1855.

DM: Yes, that's fairly true. And look at his tying procedures, all hand-painted. I mean, things like this really do inspire you to go back to some of the early works. Here is an 1706 book.

TB: Oh wow.

DM: Yes. *The Angler's Sure Guide* by Robert Howlett, dated 1706. Just absolutely lovely.

TB: Oh wow.

DM: Here's *The Angler's Museum* [1790] by Thomas Shirley with an engraving of John Kirby of hook-bend fame. Here's *The Gentleman Angler* [1736]. All these books have brilliant information. Here, for example, is Frederic Halford's first edition of *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them*, one of the original books on the dry fly. We do have some engravings here, again, hand-painted. I was never wealthy enough, though, to afford all the books I've wanted.

DB: Oh, look at the detail on that.

DM: And, here's the second Hawkins' edition of Izaak Walton's *The Complete Angler* [1766]. This is a rare book that has extensive footnote material added. Reading such books really does make you want to go back in time and see how it was done then. Many of these writers were absolutely brilliant. One of the brilliant writers was [Colonel] Robert Venables. His *The Experienced Angler* [In this 1827 reprint of the original 1662 edition] is remarkable in its hook and fly-tying analyses.

DB: Yes, now a question I'm curious about. When you were in England, fishing with these clubs that have held this water for centuries I guess, is that true?

DM: Yes, very true. Clubs, Syndicates or Corporations often hold the best waters. The oldest club is The Houghton Fishing Club on the River Test in Stockbridge. Although I have never fished the fabled Houghton waters; my beats were on the Fullerton waters of the Test.

DB: And were these waters the same with similar situations that had been carried from all those years.

DM: Oh, absolutely. I mean a lot of people that I fished with wore sport jackets and ties.

TB: Really? Still?

DM: Not so much now, of course. I can remember Colonel John French at High Bridge. We would walk along the banks until we saw a fish coming up to feed. He would only cast upstream to a visible, rising trout. His fly never went across or down stream. That is old school, very traditional, and I just really fell in love with it. In fact, my first up-stream nymphing was done there at High Bridge. Now, on some waters, nymphing may be allowed only in August. Some waters still ban it. Remember, these waters are as clear as gin and twice the cost."

DB: Traditions that have held since these books were written.

DM: Some, yes. Anyway, this print in the Hawkins' edition is believed to be the first engraving we have of fly tying.

TB: Oh really?

DB: Who made the rules (for the club waters)? I guess that's what I'm asking.

DM: Most rules were made by tradition, the clubs, the riparian owners and the local water authority. I think the rules probably came from various sources. For over 10 years, I had a beat on the River Test in Southern England where many of those traditions are still in place. I fished England just about every year, since the Sixties. I should add that the cost of chalk stream fishing in England still makes it a restricted sport.

DB: I started to ask you a bit ago do you ever travel just to see places, not that you can have them, but just to see. Have you done that sort of thing? Like a fly fishing museum? Or have you gone to these places?

DM: Oh, yes. On my last trip to Slovenia, I went to a Dormouse Museum. Slovenes use dormouse tails and fur in some of their fly patterns. The fur is oily and the fur floats well. It makes excellent dry as well as wet patterns. The dormouse—an old world rodent between mouse and squirrel—is edible. There are Romans recipes for preparing dormouse dishes. I have gone on many discovery trips. One was to John Constable [the English painter] country to find the scenes that inspired his paintings. My interest in Anglo-Saxon led me to the site of the battle of Maldon in England. Other trips such as this became fodder for my teaching career.

Perhaps one of my strangest trips was to Macedonia in search of a lost river. Dr. Bozedar Voljc, a Slovene angling friend, and I went to find the Astraeus, a river mentioned in about 200 AD by Claudius Aelianus. He described “spotted fish” being caught with nine foot rods and horsehair lines by Macedonians. The lake name does appear on several ancient maps, but not in the location given by Aelianus. When I wrote about this, I called the lake location “a pile of perhaps.” He also mentioned an ambiguous insect, the Hipporus, and a pattern tied with two wax-colored hackles and red wool. No matter, we got our fill of goat meat.

DB: Of all these places that you’ve been to see these things, is there one that stands out more than others?

DM: You mean the places where I fish?

DB: No, I’m thinking in terms of what Tamara and her group’s doing up at Western. They’re trying to develop a fly fishing heritage place with books and so forth. They’ve already acquired seven hundred and some titles. Is there a place you’ve been?

DM: Well one of the great little places I think is the Fly Fisher’s Club of London. And there’s a museum there. One time I went with Donald Downs—the author, poet and angling illustrator—to the club. We had to wear dress jackets and ties. The club had an historic collection, including the claimed wicker creel used by Walton.

Sometimes, Colonel John French invited me to share his beat on the Test. I would go over to England and we’d go fishing together. Once [I] went out in his garage for some reason, and he had this linen trout sack with a strap on it. It was a trout bag that looked familiar to me. I asked, “John, where’d you get that?” He replied, “Well it’s not mine; I’m just keeping it for a few weeks.” And he added, “You know what it is?” I said, “No, but it looks familiar.” He said “Well, that is Skues’ trout bag.” If you look at a Skues photograph, you see that ubiquitous linen bag hanging on his side. It seems like there is history everywhere in England.

As a matter of fact, on the wall there are several small framed pieces. These are Roman, medieval and Anglo-Saxon artifacts collected from my waters in England. The river keeper, Mike Crate, sometimes finds a few and keeps them for me. Here [on a shelf] are old ginger bottles, ale bottles and jugs that he found in the waters. I fished the Fullerton section of the Test. And it’s on that map up there. It included the charming Anton River that goes into the Test at the Mayfly Pub, a very famous area in fly fishing. I fished that for many, many years.

TB: Do you ever feel disappointed that you live here, I mean do you feel such a pull to Europe that—

DM: Oh yes; actually I do in a way. There are things I really love about America; there are some things I don't particularly love about America. And the same is true with foreign countries. But I enjoy going to a country in which English is not spoken. I think that's a lovely challenge.

TB: Well, I was just somehow thinking that you have so much identity with all the English background of the fly fishing.

DM: And English literature. In Advanced Placement classes, I taught the *Battle of Maldon* in the original Anglo-Saxon and some Chaucer in Middle English. I have a strong interest in English literature and the English language.

TB: Right, so going there in the summer was enough of a fix to last you for nine months.

DM: Yes, for a few months. But you know I'm getting older and it's more difficult to do these kinds of trips. I used to run off to South Africa or southern Chile [Coyhaique, Patagonia] for a month. That's a long way from here.

DB: Have you found any other countries that have as much tradition as England?

DM: Yes, actually Spain goes farther back than England. Recent research has revealed interesting works, such as *The Manuscrito de Astorga* [by Juan de Bergara]. There are several other earlier manuscripts, earlier than the *Treatyse* [1496]. Part of my graduate work was in Anglo-Saxon [Early English] and Middle English. I love some of the old writings. And even in *The [Fly-Fisher's] Craft* book, I was working with an earlier copy of *The Treatyse*, one prior to 1496. Up there [on the wall] I have an original medieval illuminated page from the *Book of Hours*, dating at the 1400s. I also have some other medieval pages not displayed.

DB: Have you done any of [the] history or historical things back in the Catskills? Or, our own United States history of fly fishing.

DM: I have not. I have done a little with the Catskills patterns of [Ted] Niemeyer and a few other of the Catskill tiers. Paul Schullery, a friend, has already done such fine work in *American Fly Fishing: A History* [1987]. However, I have fished the Rockies through the years and have written about early Montana patterns. I still consider myself a Westerner.

DB: Do you have any thoughts or suggestions maybe of our history here just in the Northwest, in terms of how we could progress, or how the college could progress on developing this history, do you have any thoughts?

DM: Well, yes, I think the Northwest could establish a small fly fishing museum that collects our area history. This could include some of the Amerindian lures as well as fly patterns. We have nationally important people here, such as Enos Bradner, the author of *Northwest Angling* [1950] and Trey Combs, author of *Steelhead Fly Fishing* and other books. We have some important anglers here.

DB: Give us your insight on what would be good for us.

DM: It'd be good to include early fly rods, fly cases, reels and such. This could be merely displayed in hall cases or small rooms. It would be great to have a working library with original manuscripts and letters. I would also include film interviews and photographs by Ralph Wahl. It could be a center for research and discovery. I would also include as much information as possible about the all the West, Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho and other states. The "complete angler" needs a complete museum.

DB: Well, Wahl's pictures are up there [at WWU] .

DM: Right, yes. Some years ago I went up and met him at his home. He gave me a print, originally presented to his wife, of an angler with a steelhead. He was a nice person and a dedicated angler. So, collect not only the books, manuscripts, photographs and videos, but also some of their tackle and patterns. Such things become more important as time passes.

DB: With your interest in English history, and English fishing, were you acquainted with Haig-Brown and his background?

DM: I only met Haig-Brown once. [I] always admired his work, such a gentle and perceptive writer. Like most Northwesterners, I admire Haig-Brown's clear and clean prose. He's a superb writer who reminds me a little of the English writer, Arthur Ransome.

DM: [Taking something from the table] Do you know what Amadou is?

TB: I don't

DM: Many years ago, [Frederic M.] Halford and [George E.M.] Skues and other early anglers used it. It is a fungus that grows in Europe. It was originally used in early surgery to absorb fluids. It's highly absorbent. I get some sheets and I sew them on elk hide pads for dry flies. You merely place your soggy fly between the pads and squeeze. It sucks out the water, creating a dry fly.

TB: Oh, so it's dry again.

DM: Yes, and this has been used since the early 1900s.

TB: How do you spell that? What's that called?

DM: Amadou. Well actually, you'll find it in [*The Fly Fisher's Illustrated Dictionary*]. You'll notice I can never leave things alone. There are a hundred things I wrote to my publishers and said, these should be included in the next edition of [*The Fly-Fisher's*] *Craft*. Some of these you'll see at the back of your book, I put a *Corrigendum* -- a correction sheet, in it. Every book, of course, doesn't have that. Very few books have that, actually. That's why the book has a yellow dot on the spine. It means this book has the correction. This book was rushed to press before it was thoroughly done. It is said that no book is without error.

TB: Well I would like to know a little bit more about how you got started writing about fly fishing? You obviously wrote a column for *Fly, Rod, and Reel*, and—

DM: I first started writing in 1975 for *The Fly Fisherman*. They liked it. And you know, a publisher's accepting something is always encouragement. Everything I sent in seemed to be accepted. Then *Rod & Reel* (now *Fly Rod & Reel* magazine) phoned and said, —“Would you like to do a column?” So for a long time, I was the fly-tying editor for *Fly Rod & Reel*. But eventually it became too demanding, finding original materials. Perhaps I was too critical about my topics and my writing. So now I'm doing a wider range of topics. I'm still a contributing editor to *Fly Rod & Reel* magazine, but it's a lot more fun now in many ways, because I pick my topics and do the things that I want to do and how I want to do them. I just sent in a thing on floatants, their history and use, to *Fly Rod & Reel*. I am now working on a dry hackle article.

TB: So how do you keep yourself current? Do you do a lot of the research yourself, or do people send you a lot of stuff wanting to get you to endorse a certain thing?

DM: People, yes. I'm very, very fortunate. People often send me things and ask my opinion. Some companies like Sage, Simms and Patagonia have been very supportive throughout the years.

DB: Did any of your students ever pick up your interest in fly fishing or book writing?

DM: Yes. Well, not writing that I know of. For about 29 years, I taught fencing at Federal Way High School, and one of my students who just got out of the service became a certified fencing instructor. Once I took my fencing class to competition and they did very, very well. So it's always good that students do carry on. I have been, through the years, a mentor for a few English teachers.

DB: Did you happen to have a fly tying vise in the back of your classroom?

DM: No, not really. Although I did have students show me some things about fly tying, which I thought was good.

DB: You ever see any of them after they've grown up, and they've become adults and talk to you about any of that?

DM: No, not too much.

DB: I'm very fortunate I guess living in a small town, because I sure get a lot of that.

TB: So did you get as into fencing as you got into fly fishing? I mean, I just kind of picture you as a person who really gets into all the literature behind it and all the changes in technology.

DM: Yes, I have. I must have over a dozen books here on fencing. A lot of them are up in there.

TB: So you really get at what's really behind it.

DM: Yes, this morning my wife said, —You're about the only person I know who really gets lost in something.” And I really do. I'm back here when I'm writing. With some of these old books, I'm in a different century and world entirely and I absolutely love it. The modern age is gone.

TB: What is that?

DM: That is for making horse hair fly line. You dangle the horse hair here, spin this, and with a weight here, you move a cork up to the hooks as it makes a furred horsehair fly line. Originally they made fly lines out of horsehair. And I wondered if I could actually take some of these forgotten skills from my antique books and go back in history and make my line, rod and hooks. *The Fly Fisher's Craft* contains such a journey back in time.

TB: So you devised a machine by which you could do it, not seeing how they did it.

DM: Yes. Well they actually give you a picture. There's a picture of this machine inside of *The Complete Angler*. And here is a loop rod. That's one rod section. There's the handle. And these things are connected together with these leather straps. This horsehair loop at the tip is what gives it the name, —lop rod.” So you make a long horse hair fly line, and you connect it to this loop. You put a fly on the end and you go along the stream, you drop the fly in the water and hopefully fish come up. Well I wanted to see whether or not this actually worked. So I made my own hooks based on the antique directions. I have presented seminars on antique tying, making hooks, making loop rods and making horsehair fly lines. I have done this at various clubs and several times at the Federation of Fly Fisher Conclaves.

End of Tape One, Side Two

DM: [On catching fish with this —antique” tackle]. . . I have a friend, Ron Wilton, a water keeper on the Itchen. I have known him for about 45 years or more. We went out on the Itchen where there were large fish; I mean they're remarkably large trout. He took a net, and I flipped a fly on the water. A fish, cruising

along the bank, came up and took it. Well, there's no way to let out or take in line with a loop rod. If the fish wants to go, it's gone. With only about 25 feet of hair line, something must give. But I was able to hang on to the fish long enough for Ron to put the net under it. As he lifted the net, it broke. The aluminum handle broke under the weight, but he had the fish. Well, what I had caught was a 14-lb. brown trout on antique gear—a handmade hook, loop rod and horsehair line. I was as surprised as the fish. After a photograph, the fish was released back to the water. A swirl and tail flip expressed his exasperation. It was an interesting thing to see what early tackle and methods can do. The antique directions worked. I used only a spoke shave and a plane to make the loop rod. And a small propane stove tempered my hook wire. For me, it was a remarkable journey into our angling past.

TB: Very cool.

DM: Well it's enjoyable doing things like this, taking a look at history and how history works.

DB: This horsehair that you're weaving to make the line, each strand of horse hair is about how long?

DM: Oh about... Where is my horsehair?

DB: Is it off the mane or the tail?

DM: It's off the tail.

DB: So they're maybe a couple of feet, three feet long?

DM: No, you get usually around twenty, twenty-five inches or so. [finding some horsehair] But, it's tapered, and because of that, the finer end can be quite brittle or tender so you have to cut off some. After the lengths, called snoods, are furled together, water knots connect them. Then the knot ends are wrapped. It's remarkably strong when furled together and nearly transparent when in water. It has some interesting attributes; it has some elasticity when wet. So it really is quite possible to catch large fish on horsehair line. These old books explain how to make fly line. And I thought, —~~Ac~~ people really doing this? I mean, can it be done?" So I set about it, it took me about three years to get everything right -- even learned how to make some of my own hooks according to some of the old books. So it was just an interesting little adventure.

DB: Have you ever demonstrated that to a group?

DM: Oh yes, I've done that. The last three years I've done it at the Federation of Fly Fisher Conclaves and some clubs. I'll be doing it again this summer in at Conclave in Whitefish, Montana, demonstrating how to make your own hooks, lines and loop rods. There are other people across America too, who are interested in this and who are making horsehair fly lines.

DB: In some of these things that people do for many, many years, they develop a group of other people that get together, do you have a group?

DM: Yes. I have a friend in Texas who really goes about now demonstrating how all this works and he'll be helping me in Montana this summer. It's surprising how many people are really into the history of angling.

DB: Bamboo fly rods have made a real comeback with people who are making them in their basement or garage.

DM: Well, in terms of design and function, this loop rod is about 1740. As mentioned earlier, Claudius Aelianus described a similar rod and fly line in the 3rd century AD.

DB: When it's all put together?

DM: Here is a picture [in an early book] of anglers using loop rods.

DB: You're going back one level behind the bamboo, right?

DM: Yes. Oh yes, this is the very beginning of fly fishing. See, there's a loop rod.

TB: Wow. That was probably almost the first.

DM: Yes, well, Aelianus records that the Macedonians used 6-foot loop rods and horsehair fly lines to catch ~~spotted~~ fish." It's the first record we have of fly fishing.

DB: Is this part you put on here to protect the tip?

DM: It protects the tip, right, yes. Matter of fact, this is a splice, I have a splice bamboo rod which is a little like this that I got many, many years ago in England. These are hardwood protectors for it. Where's the other piece? Here... See how it goes. Notice this is varnished, but this is not varnished. This is unvarnished so that the leather holds well.

TB: Oh, because if it were varnished, it'd be too slippery.

DM: Yes, it'd be too slippery. Even this is important. It also depends on where you get your leather from the animal. For example, the leather from the back of the animals will not stretch as much, and you need a little stretch because stretch makes a tight connection.

DB: Now is this the one, the very rod you used?

DM: No, actually, the rod I caught is in the fishing hut hanging up with a sign beneath it claiming its deeds. Ron Wilton, the river keeper, wanted it.

DB: You don't worry about a set or anything?

DM: Oh, a set is not important here. In fact, the loop rod does not have to be straight. Only the grain has to be straight, not the rod. A straight grain makes it strong.

TB: Oh, now you've got it all put together. I thought it'd be so great getting you to do that.

DB: *[English-Czech and Czech-English] Dictionary of Fishing.*

DM: Yes; Milan Pohunek and I did this book. It's a book for anglers who are going to the Republic of Czech or for Czech anglers going to other countries. Yes, I'm part Czech. Of course with a birth name like Mrachek, you have to be Czech.

TB: You're obviously a very professional photographer, too.

DM: What do I have here? Oh, this is a [photo of a] fly pattern underwater, showing the bubble created by floatant. The bubble imitates the gas beneath the exuvia of an emerging insect. Yes, I love and do a lot of photography.

Interruption [took some photos]

DM: This [In reference to the loop rod's splicing strap] is an awfully long strap, isn't it? But you know, the old writers argued about what material to use. I always thought that was interesting.

DB: That's very interesting, my gosh. The way that they fish is called dapping.

DM: Well yes, dapping. But you can do other forms of fishing besides dapping with it. You can actually cast this. It's not a roll cast, because the fly is delivered with a sweeping, circular cast. You do not want to disturb or slap the water.

DB: Would you say this is the beginning of spey casting?

DM: Well, it's the beginning of casting, actually, all types of casting. The spey cast is merely a change-of-direction roll cast, isn't it?

DB: You mentioned Rocky Ford as one of the premier streams in Washington.

DM: Yes, it really is.

DB: My granddaughter's boyfriend was over there last month. They fish this way by sneaking up and flipping the fly over, it's almost like dapping.

DM: Yes.

TB: You're obviously the great angler historian. You've written regular columns for *Fly Rod & Reel* and other angling magazines. What are some other things that you've done that we might not realize that you've done? We want know [all that] Darrel Martin [has contributed to fly fishing].

DM: Well, I think you have this; you have my printed "piscatorial vita." It has a list of a lot of the publications that I've done, for German and French and Swedish, and--

TB: How did you get into all those languages and—?

DM: By meeting people, and their asking me, "Can you do something for us?" Matter of fact, for several years I did a column in an English magazine, called "From the Other Bank." America was the "other bank." I wrote about the American angling scene. So there are quite a few things there.

TB: Do you ever find yourself in any big philosophical differences with anyone? Like Skues and Halford? They had a big disagreement between the wet and dry fly or whatever, is there anything—

DM: That's an interesting question because it's a question that been around for a long time. Skues is certainly easier to read and is more entertaining and he's more natural than Halford was, but Halford was remarkably perceptive and what he did was really a breakthrough in fly fishing. He didn't invent the dry fly of course, but what he did was to codify, particularly the small mayflies, and list patterns in his book. He was very concerned about color. He wanted to make certain the color was correct in a pattern. He drew attention to important things along the way. Halford wrote that all forms of fly fishing are good at certain times and under certain conditions. The more you know, the better you are. He believed that you shouldn't be just dry fly. Although he does overstate his case with the dry fly at times, his later comments seem to nullify dry fly upstream only. Like Halford, I enjoy dry upstream the most. I think the majority of these early anglers were remarkably sane with a balanced perspective. We may have a tendency to over-interpret what they're writing at times.

DM: That is an APGAI badge on my vest, Advanced Professional Game Angling Instructor. I was the first American to achieve that in England. It is an English organization in which they test casters and fly tyers to certify them. My certificate is up there. Note the image of a casting fish wearing a mortar-board. That design came from Donald Downs. The organization is now AAPGAI, Association of . . .

DB: You've obviously had the support of your family through this whole endeavor and that's been pretty nice.

DM: Yes, my wife has always been very supportive. I could never have done half of what I have done without her support.

DB: You want to comment on that?

DM: That's a good point, because most people don't recognize that. On some of the trips I've gone alone, because of cost, time and circumstances. Having a wife that supports you to really pursue your passion is remarkably important and Sandra has certainly done that. Sandra and I have done a lot of traveling together, such as Greece and Europe many times. But she has always encouraged and supported my travels. My son Michael and daughter Michelle have also traveled with us. Now, of course, they are older and have their own lives. Michael has fished with me a couple of times on the chalk streams of England. He is a superb angler. Michelle, a legal secretary, is married with three children and lives in Bellevue.

DB: Sometimes they enjoy going with you, sometimes not necessarily.

DM: Well, my wife has never wanted to go to the Amazon with me. I sometimes returned with nefarious insect bites. Taff Price, an English angling writer, often went with me. We have gone to Lithuania, Spain, Slovenia, South Africa, Zambia and the Amazon. In our trips, he has suffered a broken rib and an impact cataract in the left eye due to a bead-head fly. Some of the trips have been difficult with heavy rains, mud and temperatures over 120 degrees. Places like South Africa, Patagonia and Christmas Island are far from home and hearth.

TB: Your son has gone with you?

DM: Yes. He has gone to England, and he's fished on the Test and the Itchen. He has a degree in biology from Western Washington University and now works in fishing retail.

TB: That's what I thought, he must have a—

DM: Yes, not only do we fish together but we also teach casting and fishing classes. So yes, he is very much part of it.

TB: Is he as captivated by the ancients as you?

DM: No, he isn't. He is an excellent caster and remarkably knowledgeable about stream ecology. He has guided in Alaska and worked as a gillie in England. The books are important to me, but not to everyone. In time, Michael may be interested in these books. Once I called The University of Puget Sound library and told them that —I have some angling books. When I pass away would you like them?" And they said, —Will no, we really don't collect angling books." And I said —Will some of these books are from the 1700's." They said —N, no, that's ok."

TB: What about your manuscripts? Are they going to take your manuscripts?

DM: No. And I still have many of my original writings in manuscript form. And letters, some of the controversies, the publishing arguments over what should be or not be in my books. I even have some of my original artwork that appeared in several books. I also have personal letters from Dave Whitlock, Lee Wulff, Nick Lyons and other major writers. I have a lot of that information.

TB: What are you going to do with that?

DM: I have no idea yet.

TB: I mean if you're ever looking for a home, Western -- that would be—

DM: I may consider that.

TB: I'm sure we would welcome them; well, I mean we have Steve Raymond's manuscripts. They are our first ones.

DM: Is that right?

TB: I want you to have it go where you want it to go, but if don't find another home we would be very happy to have them.

DM: Well that should be considered.

TB: And that's the great stuff, the back and forth kind of stuff—

DM: Yes, and I have a lot of personal letters from Whitlock over the years, which is really interesting to both of us.

TB: Very cool. Now is there anything we haven't touched on that we should make sure we get on tape?

DM: Well, I don't think I've done anything really intelligent here.

TB: I just find it fascinating.

DM: You do have a lot of the things about me on my angling vita I gave you.

TB: So what's your favorite [fly]? Do you have a specific signature fly that you're famous for?

DM: Oh, I don't know. Here are some patterns in these fly holders.

TB: Right here?

DM: Yes, could you take them down? These are some patterns which I have written about over the years. Here's one that I always like doing, the woven Dragonfly Nymph.

TB: Oh wow. Boy that looks real. Doesn't that just—

DM: And here's an Extended Body Mayfly and a Quill Fan Wing. Oh, here, here's a little *Tricorythodes*, one of our smallest mayflies. This is a spinner. This one is an emerging *Chironomid*.

TB: That's almost impossible to tie, isn't it? I only took one fly-tying class and I was amazed at the agility of some tyers.

DM: This is Frederic Halford's method of mounting quill wings on a small dun, a very early winging method. And here's a little CDC Caddis and a Corixa [a water beetle]. The glass bead in the belly imitates the glistening air bubble that attracts fish. Here's a pattern with horsehair.

DB: Oh, a snelled.

DM: Yes. The hair is mounted beneath the hook shank.

DB: Is this a modern hook?

DM: No, that's a 1940's hook.

DB: So you found some of these old hooks?

DM: Oh, I have quite a collection of antique ones, along with several antique reels and tying vises.

DB: Oh you do?

DM: I even have Roman hooks.

TB: Wow; now is that hard to find?

DM: No, not really. But finding the right size you want, yes. Most antique hooks are really quite large.

DB: There's no eye on the hook; snelled is the proper term isn't it?

DM: Yes, the line is mounted beneath the hook shank just with silk. This was called "arming" the hook.

DM: Just with the tying silk.

TB: Wow. I get it.

DM: Well, let's do something truly English. Would you like some tea and biscuits?

TB: Sure.

End of Recording



Darrel Martin and Danny Beatty