This interview was conducted with Jerry McBride in July 12, 2012. The interviewer is Danny Beatty.

DB: I'm Danny Beatty at the Federation of Fly Fishers' Fair in Spokane, WA. The date is July 12, 2012. I'm here with Jerry McBride, and we're going to do an oral history of Jerry's fly fishing. So, Jerry, why don't you start at the beginning and tell about what your earliest remembrances of fly fishing and then move on through to the present.

JM: Okay, well, my father was a fly fisherman. He primarily fished small streams kind of in the style that was popular here in Eastern Washington and up into Idaho. He had a bamboo rod and an automatic reel that you wound up and fished with. Short line he fished two flies, a dropper fly and then one that trailed out behind, and he was very, very good at that.

Anyway, over periods of time, probably when I was 12 or 13, I started to show an interest in that area of fishing and got into some of his old stuff and learned from him and just kind of went from there. After I got out of college, moved to Wisconsin, there wasn't much fly fishing there, but I did do a little bit. And when we moved back to the Pacific Northwest, then I really started to really get involved with fly fishing. By then my father had learned a lot, kind of like Mark Twain—when I went away, he didn't know much; when I came back, he had learned a lot.

So anyway, I started fishing the local lakes here around Spokane. Spokane has a wealth of lakes in the area and some streams, mostly lakes though. And we were in those days primarily fishing with sinking lines, and we'd spend the whole day out there casting and stripping, casting and stripping. And some days we caught a lot of fish, some days we didn't. All the time we were looking, in the spring particularly, and we'd see all these little shucks on the water with little white dots, and we wondered, What are those? Well finally at some point, somebody pointed out to us that those were chironomids. So that was a whole new world for us.

We started fishing with floating lines and indicators and various chironomid patterns, and it was like magic. It was just amazing how much better the fishing was. Of course we were fishing with what the fish were eating, so anyway that was something that got us started. Somewhere in there, a friend of mine was looking in an Orvis catalog and he saw a fly for sale in there that looked kind of like a worm. It was called the atomic worm. So anyway, he kind of copied that, but he changed it a little bit, and he called his the bionic worm, which is basically like a little red worm, is what it looks like. It was just astounding how well that fly worked when we fished all the local lakes, plus down in Lenice, Merry, Nunnally, all those lakes. Everywhere we went, up in Canada, it just worked fabulously. Since then, there have been a lot of different versions that have been tried and so on, and for whatever reason, I don't know whether the fish got used to seeing it or what, but it doesn't seem to work as well as it used to.

DB: Did this fly copy what has been called a blood worm?

JM: Yes, yes. It was—

DB: How big are they?

JM: It's a size 12 bait hook, is what we used. It's called a Kahle hook, and it's kind of a curved hook made specifically for bait fishing but we adapted it to use for to tie flies on. It gave it that shape. We also kind of think, maybe, the fish think it's a small leach sometimes. It could appear also as a small leach.

DB: Was there an extension on the end of these at either end of this hook?

JM: Yes, there was. The way we tie it now is with marabou. Well, usually like burgundy or something marabou, the red body, and we've kind of evolved into a variety of kind of crazy things. We now put a fluorescent orange bead on the, right behind the eye. It doesn't really resemble anything in nature, but yet it is probably one of the best flies I've ever fished with.

DB: And this is all lake fishing.

JM: Correct, although I have used it in streams. In fact, I was kind of curious a few years ago. I was over on the—oh, I can't, I'm trying to think of the name of the river out there that flows into the Columbia, up in the Okanagan there. Anyway, I was kind of curious as to whether steelhead would take it, and they did. We fished it under an indicator—the Methow River.

DB: Oh.

JM: Anyway, I was surprised that the steelhead thought it was a great thing to grab.

DB: Do you think that this marabou added enough action to it to get their attention?

JM: I think so. It gives a little motion to it, which I think is good. But anyway, it's quite a fly. This longtime friend of mine, I've known him for over 50 years, Ron Pantzar's the guy who came up with it. Anyway, we've certainly done well with it over the years and all kinds of different versions of it, and so on.

DB: And you called that the bionic worm?

JM: Correct.

DB: Bionic worm, hmm? And now there's the one that's in the Southwest that's got a something worm—

JM: San Juan worm.

DB: San Juan worm.

JM: And that's a very—

DB: Any similarities?

JM: Yes, there is, I think so, because there are—I think the San Juan worm is to imitate an aquatic worm. There are forms of worms that actually live in the water, and they call them aquatic worms. They're like an earthworm, and they actually live in the vegetation and so on, and I think that's what the San Juan worm was originally developed for. But it's on that same, very similar.

DB: And the San Juan is the river that started—

JM: Correct, in New Mexico—

DB: It is a river.

JM: Yes.

DB: Okay. And so, when was this transition to chironomid fishing? About when was that?

JM: That was in probably about 1980, somewhere in there.

DB: Okay. And that transition, you were catching just as big a fish with the smaller flies as you were with the bug imitations—

JM: Oh, yes, very much so.

DB: --bigger nymph imitations?

JM: Oh, yeah, very much so, and lots more fish. And if you look in Phil Rowley's book, he has like pie charts that show what the fish feed on different times of the year. And particularly in the spring, it's like 70-80% of what they eat is chironomids because they're readily available and they don't have to work at all to get them. They just swim around and eat those things. They don't have to chase them or anything.

DB: You were living in Spokane at this time.

JM: Correct.

DB: And working here, have you been here ever since that time?

JM: Ever since.

DB: And is that about the time you joined the Inland Empire Club?

JM: Yes, I joined that. I moved here in 1975, and that's when I joined the Inland Empire Fly Fishing.

DB: Who introduced you to the club?

JM: Mike Garofano, a guy that I worked with on my job. He was already a member and he invited me to it.

DB: Okay, and you were pretty involved with the club ever since, in some way or another.

JM: Yes, I have. I've worked my way through. I was on the board, and then worked my way through the chairs, and was president, and given several honors by the club, Fly Fisherman of the Year, and I don't remember the more recent one. It was—I don't remember the honor. That's kind of embarrassing—

DB: Anyway, you were well respected in the club—

JM: Yes.

DB: --in the Inland Empire Club. You mentioned in your—it was mentioned in a biography written by a Don Chinn. Tell us a little bit. Don was very involved in Oregon in the whole fly fishing organizational thing at one time, I think.

JM: Yes, and he was involved with the FFF.

DB: Has he died?

JM: Yes, he died a few years ago.

DB: Okay.

JM: Anyway, Don, his wife was having medical problems and so on, so he had to cut back on what he could do outside the home. So anyway, he talked to me about—asked me if I would be willing to take over for him with the FFF, for the Washington Council of the FFF, and he said, Oh, it's an easy job. All you have to do is go to a meeting every three months or so. I'm sure everybody's heard that story more than once. So anyway, I said, Okay. So anyway, I'm really glad that I did do it because I had the opportunity to meet many, many people within the state. And of course then I attended some of the conclaves and so on and had the opportunity to meet national and internationally known people in the fly fishing community. Anyway, at some point there I became the president of the Washington Council, and I was president for three years. And we put on several fly fishing shows at the Meydenbauer Center, and we did a couple of casting programs—

DB: That was at a golf course over—

JM: --at Gig Harbor, yes. Out of Gig Harbor. That was a lot of fun.

DB: And you had to do some traveling then to do all this.

JM: Oh, yes, and of course had people like Vernon Young and John Calhoun and a number of—Don Mills. All these people were very active at that time in the organization, and so there was no way I could've—I didn't even know what to do, let alone be able to do it, and those people basically put it all together.

DB: Tell us a little about, on these outings or trips to do the business, you were able to do some fly fishing, maybe?

JM: Not very much.

DB: Something new, no?

JM: Well, a little bit. One time when I was over at Gig Harbor, then I went out and fished for sea run cutthroat with Vernon Young. That was a wonderful trip, doing that.

DB: And that was a new experience of course.

JM: Oh, absolutely. I had never fished like that at all. In fact, I don't believe I'd ever fly fished in saltwater before, but it was kind of a revelation too. The sea run cutthroat surprisingly, were not a whole lot different than the west slope cutthroat that I've caught in various streams in Idaho and somewhere. It was—

DB: They just lived in a different environment, had the different life cycles and—

JM: And they look a—the sea runs don't have the big spots on them like the west slope have of course.

DB: So, go ahead with some more after you retired—when did you retire?

JM: In 2000.

DB: And then, since that time, you probably have had a little more chance to do some fly fishing?

JM: Oh, yes, yes, very much so. I do a lot more—

DB: And have you gone on any trips and—

JM: Yes, yes, we go—there's a bunch of us go every year up to the Douglas Lake Ranch, usually in May, and again, that's a chironomid fishing time.

DB: What are the names of the lakes that--?

JM: Minnie and Stoney Lakes are on Douglas Lake Ranch, which is, I believe, either the largest or second largest cattle ranch on the North American continent. I don't know whether they're bigger than the King Ranch or not, but it's a huge, huge area. And anyway, they have a couple of—they have a lodge on Stoney Lake, and then they have a log home that they call Minnie Lake Ranch House that at one time was the ranch manager's home. Anyway, we stay there and fish both lakes.

DB: Any other lakes of that area that you've tried?

JM: Yes, yes, we recently went up to Dragon Lake. Just this year went to Dragon Lake, which was kind of an interesting experience. I had read a lot about it and always wanted to go, and it's like a 13-14 hour drive from Spokane. And the interesting part of it is that it's only like 4-5 miles out of Quesnel, so it's a residential lake. So you drive all these miles, and it seems a little strange to be fishing, because I live on Deer Lake, fishing on a residential lake with people mowing their lawns and their dogs barking and so on. But the fish are just, if you're lucky enough to catch one, are just huge, so that part of it was pretty good.

DB: You said that you had heard a lot about Dragon Lake, read it in magazines and so forth—

JM: Yes, in like Northwest—

DB: --publications out of British Columbia, maybe?

JM: No, primarily out of Northwest Fly Fisherman, or Fly Fishing, I guess. I subscribe to that.

DB: Oh, okay. That's an Amato company—

JM: No, no, it's Steve Probasco.

DB: Oh, okay.

JM: Anyway, it's his publication.

DB: Tell us—if you go back on Dragon Lake some years, and you're so interested in chironomid fishing, isn't there a connection with Dragon Lake and this chironomid fishing?

JM: Oh, absolutely, because they have—they're famous for their, what they call, bombers, the Canadians call the bombers, and I had never seen such huge chironomids in my life. And of course the adult phase of the chironomid

is called a midge, which is kind of a misnomer because these things fly by and they look like a crane fly or something flying by they're so huge. And when they're coming off, the fishing gets, can get very, very good, and you're catching fish, I don't know, I caught probably 6-7 pounders is as big as I got, but I saw a guy catch one over 10 lb. But it's—you got to be there at exactly the right time, and all the planets have to be aligned, and—

DB: Have you been there when that happened?

JM: For like two hours, out of an eight day trip.

DB: That is the way things can happen.

JM: Yes, well the Evergreen Fly Club, they consider that to be their lake; and I know a number of them that go up there for two months every year. And I don't know, I don't think I would want to do that.

DB: Okay; any lakes in between Spokane and Douglas Lake, near Merritt?

JM: Well let's see, Merritt…no, unfortunately I haven't—

DB: Pretty much it's—

JM: I've fished Corbett. I've fished it a number of times.

DB: Well that's kind of at the edge of—

JM: Right by Merritt, very close to Merritt.

DB: --same area.

JM: Yes. Well, I've been up and I've fished Roche. Unfortunately, the timing was not good. I think it's an excellent lake from all indications, but we just happened to be there when the fish were not in the mood to bite, unfortunately.

DB: And what's your favorite fishing area right within a circumference of Spokane that you'd just run out for a day?

JM: Oh, we fish—early season, some of the lakes open like first of March, and if the ice is off, we'll fish Amber Lake, which is just out of Cheney; Coffeepot Lake. I'm trying to think of any of the others. Those are probably the two main ones that we fish early. We'll go down into the basin there, and we'll fish Lenore and some of the others--Sometimes we go up and fish Omak Lake, and some of those.

DB: Now, about the time that you got involved with the Inland Empire Fly Club, there was a group over here that was sterilizing trout with the theory that they would not go through the spawning system and they'd grow larger, and would you talk a bit about your club's involvement and who did it, and I suspect you were involved to a point, but maybe not the surgical part.

JM: Right, I was involved only in kind of the toting and lugging part of it. This doctor, Al Stier, who was a local pathologist who belonged to our club, kind of pulled this together, and there had been a lot of speculation in that area, what would happen if you could keep trout, rainbow trout, from going through their sexual maturation at three years old? And because there are some, they basically are like a naturally caused, like a mule, they do not—they're kind of an oddity of nature that live to be much older and do not go through the sexual maturation. So they thought

maybe on a large scale you could do this and have all these huge fish and so on. So they started out by surgically removing the gonads, basically, and sewing them back up. Well we had a lot of them die as a result of the surgery.

We did have a local lake that was owned by one of the members of our club, and we were able to put the-- It was privately owned, so we could put the fish in there and not have to worry about any outside interference with the fish. Then we monitored them and going up and caught fish and measured and so on, and it was not very, I'd say, practical, but it did give some idea that it was a possibility.

And we—the club sponsored research work by Dr. Gary Thorgaard out of WSU, and he came up with a method that he sterilized eggs and made the fish so you'd end up with sterile fish. Then later on, there was a process developed with high pressure. And then coupled with that was treating the eggs so that they actually produced. They would take female adult fish and they were able to treat them so that they would actually produce sperm, so then you would take that sperm from them and fertilize eggs from a regular female. So if you remember your biology, with two X's you don't get any Y's, so he ended with all female. And then they would sterilize eggs, so you ended up with all female, sterile fish. Now the reason for that was that even though you sterilized the male eggs, when they get to three years they still go through the sexual maturation process. They're sterile but they go through the process and die at three years. So this way—and this is what is produced by Trout Lodge Hatchery, is all sterile female eggs, or female fish. And this is what they're, for example, what they're growing down on Rufus Woods, commercially.

DB: What's the term for those fish, triploid, triploids. And that all sort of started with the—

JM: I think so, yes, it did.

DB: --Inland Empire Club, to begin with the idea and moving on to Washington State University, and then finally to a commercial operation.

JM: Yes. And of course about that same time, Brian Chan, in B.C, was heavily involved in that, and they were doing the same thing in Canada, in B.C.

DB: There was coordination between these--?

JM: Some, some, and they take it one step further, is they work with wild fish. They gather their eggs. They trap fish from various streams and so on, female fish, and gather eggs from wild fish, so they have less of a concern about inbreeding, as opposed to continuing to work with the same fish over the years.

DB: So the focus of this was to get a put and take kind of fish that would grow bigger than the normal—

JM: And would live longer.

DB: --live longer.

JM: Now as with many things, the reality is it didn't live up to our hopes. We, our fly club, bought triploids from Trout Lodge Hatchery and planted them in Amber Lake for six years. And the new fishery biologist that took it over had some concern as to what triploids were doing in there, so he set up gill nets and caught fish. And mind you, we'd been planting these fish for six years. He caught fish with his gill net. The oldest fish he found was three years old. So the rigors, just the day to day rigors of life, were causing a mortality that didn't have anything to do with sexual maturation.

DB: So, did the size change?

JM: No.

DB: So it wouldn't have mattered then for those.

DB: Three years old, they're going to be a certain size either way.

JM: --and because of the trials and tribulations of life out in the wild, they died, for either a bird catches them or some kind of disease or whatever. Now Brian Chan has had better success. He's got fish actually that are 10 years old. You know, they can take scale samples, and it's like little tree rings, they can look at the age, and he's got fish that are 10 years old, and much larger of course.

DB: So, do you have a theory as to why some trout are mature at three years old and after sexual maturity they die, and these trout you're catching at Dragon Lake that were 6 lb., 7 lb., that are probably a little older—

JM: I'm not too sure—

DB: --to have lived—

JM: I'm not sure that they are older. I think it's the matter of—

DB: Oh, they did grow that much.

JM: --the food base, I think, is what it is.

DB: Oh.

JM: I think. I don't know, I mean—

DB: Okay.

JM: --you read about these super salmon or Frankenstein fish and so on, they grow, you know, 30 lb. in three years and so on.

DB: Yes, well, those are kind of out of the way. But what was interesting when you started this project is it really got quite a bit of publicity.

JM: Yes, it did.

DB: And it did spread. Is there still any, ongoing research with this?

JM: Well, I don't know about that, but Trout Lodge Hatchery is basically—almost everything they produce is sterile, sterile female, and it's commercially viable for them because, like they say, if you want to buy a fish over about 12 inches from them, they tell you it's going to be sterile. Because if they sold you a fish that was not sterile, it could very easily go into spawning mode, turn dark, and if you just got done buying these fish, you would be not a very happy customer.

DB: I see.

JM: So this way, the fish stay bright and—

DB: That's the commercial part of it then.

JM: Well that and of course Rufus Woods, they're raising these fish up to about 7 lb. and butchering them commercially.

DB: Oh, that's another commercial part, raising trout for commercial sale.

JM: Yes, if you go to the meat market—

DB: That's a whole different—

JM: --yes, the meat market, it'll say steelhead. Well, they do have a steelhead somewhere back in their history.

DB: We're moving really far away from the fishing part of it.

JM: Exactly.

DB: Well what's interesting, I guess, is that Inland Empire kind of got that started with some fellows that had the ability to do some surgical work on it.

JM: Well that and the work we sponsored probably even more so with Dr. Thorgaard.

DB: Do you fish the streams here?

JM: Yes, I fish primarily the St. Joe and the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene over in Idaho.

DB: And those are your favorites?

JM: Yes, yes, probably the St. Joe—well, I like both of them but probably the St. Joe. It doesn't get much better than that because it's dry fly fishing and—well, sometimes it can get busy, but most of the time you can go over there and it's a very beautiful place to be and—

DB: Have you seen it in the last years, since you've had a chance to expand your range of fishing, improvement in any of the places where you like to trout fish?

JM: Well, both the North Fork and the St. Joe went to catch and release, probably 20 years ago, and it was just amazing the change in like one year of catch and release. There were so many fish in there you just couldn't hardly believe. I mean, it was just amazing.

DB: And still of a decent size?

JM: Well, yes, and of course over—after about three years or so, then there started to be some really nice size cutthroat, 16, 17 inch cutthroat, which is considering they have such a short growing period there, that is a huge cutthroat for a west slope cutthroat. And it is still very good. There's an awful lot of pressure on it, fishing pressure, but since it's all catch and release, most of those fish, and people are learning how to treat the fish properly when they do release it. And the other thing is they've expanded the catch and release area on, like now, both rivers are all the way from where they start out clear to where they go into the Lake Coeur d'Alene.

DB: You've mentioned two types of cutthroat that I've picked up on, the west slope and the sea run. There are other cutthroats. Have you caught any of--?

JM: I've caught some Yellowstone cutthroat.

DB: Okay.

JM: I fished the North Fork of the Tongue River in Wyoming, and it actually has both. I assume, I don't know which was planted, probably the Yellowstone but maybe not. Anyway, I was able to catch both, but I never have done the grand slam thing. A number of our people have done that. They've gone and caught the, I think there's, within like the Yellowstone area, there's three or four different kinds of cutthroat.

DB: Oh, okay.

JM: But they're in different drainages.

DB: Oh. Cutthroat are a special trout.

JM: They're a beautiful fish, and I guess what I like about them is that their take on a dry fly is, at times anyway, so subtle you can't hardly—you don't even realize, and you have no idea what size fish. All you see is they come up and just barely sip that fly, and in fact sometimes, like, if you're fishing with a real small ant with maybe a little indicator on it so you can see it, it just winks out. You're not sure whether you're eyes are working properly or-- You look out there and all of a sudden it just winks out. You pick up the rod and there's a fish, and it could be a 17-incher or it could be a 6-incher. You never know. But they're a fabulous dry fly fish. I mean, you can catch them other ways, but if you have the opportunity to dry fly fish for them, that's the only way to go in my mind.

DB: Have you fished for any other type of fish than trout?

JM: Yes, I fish for, I actually fish right off my dock at Deer Lake and catch, which I keep and eat, perch and bass, crappies, all on flies.

DB: And you tie the flies to those and it's just different.

JM: Yes, yes, I use—

DB: Deer hair flies I suppose?

JM: No, no, actually they're kind of like a little wooly bugger, but something that maybe I should mention that I've developed what they call a balanced fly. People for a long time tried to figure out a way to get their fly to be horizontal in the water when you're fishing it under an indicator. And anyway, I came up with this idea to put a tungsten bead on a straight pin and then lash it to the hook and have the bead beyond the eye of the hook. So it's like a teeter totter, so it balances, and then put it on a loop knot. So, because you stop and think about the majority of your aquatic insects travel horizontally in the water. Of course your chironomids are an exception because they come up. But anyway, that's been very successful. I wrote up an article that was published in the *Fly Tyer* magazine in 2005, and it's been written up in the—it was fly of the month for the Federation of Fly Fishers on their web site. And Phil Rowley has taken up the fly. He seems to think it's a good pattern and has written it up in several of his books and on his video.

DB: And this developed as the result of fishing at your home?

JM: No, just thinking, because I'm a mechanical engineer, so I think about stuff like that. And people had bought, like, these little jig hooks with the little piece of lead on them and so on, and they were in the right neighborhood, but even the jig hook like that doesn't hang, doesn't sit exactly horizontally.

DB: You wanted your nymphs to travel in the right orientation?

JM: Yes, if you're fishing like with a sinking line or whatever and you're stripping, it travels in a horizontal, but as soon as you stop the thing's going to hang down. And so, since we do so much fishing under indicators, there's a natural thing—I mean, one of the biggest in my mind, evolution. When we start chironomid fishing, then we start fishing wooly buggers and all kinds of other nymphs and stuff under an indicator, and then we go into these *balanced* flies, and it's like a whole other world of--

Now there's some people that kind of look down on that type of fishing because they call it fishing with bobbers. All I can tell you is, particularly in cold weather like in the spring or late in the fall when the fish kind of slow down a little bit, you can fish that as slow as you want and you can have it at the right depth and you can fish it like that forever, and it's very, very effective. Of course now you've probably noticed a lot of the people are fishing that way for steelhead and so on. Again, that's a big, some people think if you don't throw it out there and swing it and so on that it's a real travesty.

DB: Have you fished much for steelhead?

JM: Some. I fished the Grande Ronde; I've caught a number of fish on the Grande Ronde, fly fishing.

DB: The Inland Empire Club, that's almost a home water—

JM: Yes, we have a number of members in our club that when they go down there—

DB: --that go there quite regularly.

JM: --they'll stay; they'll stay down on the Grande Ronde for a month or more. I don't know, it's a little—a little less than gratifying for me, because you might make a trip and be down there for three or four days and hook one fish or maybe not any. To me, I'd just as soon have a little more action I guess.

DB: Okay. What is that, a 5 to 6 hour drive from here, or less?

JM: No, it's about—to be up on the Grande Ronde, probably 3 ½ - 4 hours.

DB: Oh, okay. It's too far for a day trip, but—

JM: I've done it in a day, but it makes for a long day.

DB: Yes, yes, but it's more of an overnight—

JM: Right, and there are of course some nice places to camp down there and so on.

DB: Do you have anything else that comes to mind, with your years of experience, your involvement with organizations, with fly fishing?

JM: Well, I would just say that I've been pretty active, but I've gotten way more, which I think most people will tell you. I got way more out of it than I ever put in, many times over. And I certainly wouldn't trade the opportunity to meet many, many, wonderful people that have just an incredible amount of knowledge. I think back, one of the conclaves, I just happened to be sitting next to Joan Wulff, and I sat there and had a one-on-one conversation for a half hour with her; nobody else around or anything. And I've done the same thing with Jack Dennis. They're wonderful people.

DB: The friendships that you've developed.

JM: Yes, the people, particularly the people in the Washington Council.

DB: Sure.

JM: And it's been wonderful, and I'm very happy that I put the effort in that I did.

DB: So looking back, you thank Don Chinn for giving you a little prod.

JM: Absolutely, I certainly do.

DB: Okay. Well, I appreciate your time. If that's it, we'll end the oral history.

End of recording