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This interview was conducted with Gil Nyerges at his home in Langley, Washington. The interviewer is Chuck Ballard.

TB: If you want to tell us a little bit about you personally, where did you grow up? How did you get into fly fishing?

GN: Well I was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. There isn't much fly fishing as we would think of it, back there. But there was enough that I was able to put together a number of things that I call flies and fish for bass, perch, crappie, blue gills, and stuff like that. But primarily (with my dad who introduced me into fishing when I was three or four years old), it was the worms and bobber type of fishing around Lake Erie, Bass Islands. We spent all of our vacations there doing nothing but eating, sleeping, fishing, swimming. It was a good childhood. But the fly fishing didn't really come along until probably in the, oh, late-Thirties. [That's when] I started thinking about fly fishing, about the time Enos Bradner started the club.

CB: Really?

GN: Yes, because he had chartered it in 1939 and that's when I was back in Ohio but I was thinking fly fishing at the time. I didn't leave Cleveland until January 1943 and I haven't been back since.

CB: When you left Cleveland Gil, was that because of coming to work at Boeing?

GN: Yes, that's right. I graduated from Case School of Applied Science, and we went right from the campus right directly to Boeing.

CB: And so you joined Boeing in what year?

GN: January 1943.

CB: 1943, yes. And up until you retired, which was what year did you retire?

GN: I retired in 1984.

CB: So you were doing what kind of work then at that time at the company?

GN: I was working for the B-17 project (it was a little weenie), as the project liaison doing change order work, but it was working on the B-17. That was my first program.

CB: Really?

GN: Yes, and then from there just before the war ended in 1945, why I was on the C-97, I don't know if you remember that Chuck.

CB: Yes I do, yes I do.

GN: I was on that for a short period. Then in 1946, by that time Genevieve and I were married and we had Judy, our little girl, and we went back to Cleveland from 1946 to 1950 I was on the faculty of Case in the engineering department, teaching engineering drawing, descriptive geometry, surveying,

CB: Really, really.

GN: I was there until 1949 and then I got a job with the Panama railroad in the Canal Zone's own junior college as a one man engineering department. I taught all the courses in the engineering curriculum.

CB: That's fantastic.

GN: I was supposed to be there for two years but after one year we decided that wasn't where we wanted to be so I sent a note to Stan Lou, you remember Stan?

CB: Yes.

GN: He sent me a wire, "Come on back." So that's what we did. We went back in 1951.

CB: Wow. Now you joined the club in 1956?

GN: That's correct.

CB: And Don Sachs was your—

GN: Don Sachs was my sponsor.

CB: And then president in 1969 of the Washington Fly Fishing Club. You've also received some pretty prestigious awards, Gil. Like the—you were the Empty Creel recipient in 1972, Tommy Brayshaw Award in 1976 and then the latest was the Letcher Lambuth Award of course for your craftsmanship. And quite frankly, we're going to—at the end of this interview process here we're going to take a little walk around some of Gil's workshop, which is where we're filming by the way and look at some of the really incredible craftsmanship. I mean, he's got a really elaborate shop. This is the place he lives on Whidbey Island, they have a beautiful home and it's just terrific. I guess the next question Gil is, obviously your fame, as they say, is because of two patterns that the club and almost everyone in the Northwest is certainly familiar with and that's the Nyerges Nymph and the Gil's Monster. Can you tell us a little bit about how those flies came about?

GN: I know exactly how they came about. In 1952 the Nyerges Nymph was hatched, that was at Jameson Lake.

CB: Really?

GN: And that was—I was fishing Jameson Lake, I was the only boat on the lake, there was no one else there. And old Wade Powers was telling me to go up next to the cliffs where the weed beds were, and use my prowess trying to catch these fish. Well I was anchored in the weeds, I was fishing and I wasn't doing a thing, wasn't doing a thing. So I pulled up my anchor to move to a different spot and of course the anchor was filled with weeds and as I was clearing the weeds off I noticed that they were moving! They were alive! I looked and there were fresh water shrimp. And slowly the light bulb came on over my head: *this is what the fish must be eating*. So I went back to the car and I had some bits and pieces of stuff there. I found an old piece of wool that was kind of moss-colored wool, and I tied that onto a hook, used a little bit of brown hackle and I went back and I caught fish after fish.

CB: Amazing.

GN: And from that point on, why I patterned it after Walt Ribble's Jameson Shrimp, but his had a hard shell back.

CB: Oh, that's right.

GN: I didn't like the sharp outline, I wanted it fuzzy. So that's when I started using chenille and brown hackle. That was it.

CB: Now tell us about Gil's Monster, how did that happen?

GN: That was again 1952 because in 1945 before I left Seattle I fished Hihium and we were the only boat on the lake at the time.



CB: Wow.

GN: There were the same cabins there, the ones that Circle W ran. But there was no one in the cabins, we were the only ones, we were the only party. It was late in the Fall when we got there and we decided that we wouldn't keep anything less than sixteen inches. So we released a lot of fish. And at the time everybody was using pop gear and worms. Well I used pop gear and I didn't want to use worms.

CB: Ok, you all heard that -- pop gear.

GN: And I put a fly on, some kind—I don't even remember what kind of a fly it was. But I put a fly on the end of it and after losing the fly I was in the boat all alone, all I had was a bare hook. So I put the bare hook on it and kept catching fish. But it was no fun catching a fish at the end of that pop gear because you could never tell if you had a fish on.

CB: Right, right.

GN: So one evening I was on the shore of the lake turning over rocks and I found these great big dragonfly nymphs. And I decided I better have something like that so I had a large, long hook, it was probably a 4x hook. And I tied a lot of black wool, and lots of black stuff on it, made some legs and started using that. That was my first authentic fly of my own that I started catching fish on.

CB: Worked pretty good.

GN: and so it—before the end of the trip I was using brown hackle and large black chenille. And from that point on, why I've tied it in all sizes all the way down to number 16.

CB: So Gil, you have to tell me this, you know we all joke about this. I know that you've fished all over the world now, Christmas Island, down in Costa Rica and those kinds of places and I know you've used basically Gil's Monsters or Nyerges Nymphs on everything from **permin** to bone fish and everything else. So how many different flies do you really use compared to what we think [you use]? [We think] of you as only a two-fly person? What's the truth?

GN: Well I use about, maybe about half a dozen patterns.

CB: Oh, that's good.

GN: I use the Soft Body Carey an awful lot. I use the Little Green Nymph, it's just a nymph pattern and it has very little, it's about an eighth of an inch long hackle. I use Dawn Holbrook's [Needle Nymph fly], and of course the Monster and the Nymph. As for dries, I'll stick to either a Royal Wulff or a Royal Coachman.

CB: Right, right. In fact that brings up another question that I wanted to ask Gil about. I don't know how many of the club members or where this [started]—but Gil's helped us an awful lot at getting this access with really reasonable rates once a year at Eliguk Lake. And I wanted to ask you Gil, what's the story on Eliguk Lake? You know, we've been wondering what your connection is to it other than just acquaintance with Moe Schiller, but is there any hard connection? Are you invested in that? Or—

GN: No, no. No investment at all. The story behind that is—starts with Andy Hall. He read an article in a British Columbia magazine about a new place up in central British Columbia that is unknown and is just starting up. And he said, “Why don't we head up a group of guys and let's go up?” So guys like **Kirk Pruitt**, **Arty Sorenson**, Andy Hall, Andy Hall's brother-in-law, myself, and **Ron Bloomenthal**, George Martin. We decided, there were eight of us, went up in two cars, and we traveled that road from William's Lake to Nimpo Lake and that was a muddy, muddy pothole.

CB: Yes.

GN: It was a terrible road but we got up there. And we got up to the resort. It was built in 1979 and he started operating it as a resort in about 1981. We got up there in 1982. The guy, Moe Schiller, he wanted to make a fly fishing camp out of it and he didn't know very much about fly fishing. He gave us a boat and a motor, no oars, no anchor. And he said, “Go troll the Muddler Minnow around.” So we tried that and it wasn't too successful though we did catch a few fish. We just told them that when we come back next year, we wanted anchors, we wanted oars, and we wanted to be able to row. So we went up there in 1983 and he had everything ready for us. From that point on we started exploring the lake and catching fish.

CB: That's—

GN: No problem with it.

CB: It's a wonderful place. How about saltwater fishing, I know you've kind of done a lot of that in most recent years. What do you use—what patterns do you use for those fish?

GN: Well, I've used the Nyerges Nymph down in Christmas Island and it was my best fly.

CB: Isn't that amazing?

GN: And I used it in Loredo for Dorado; that was my best fly.

CB: How big did you tie them?

GN: Well I tie them on a number one or one up hook. And I used the same materials, used moss green chenille or crystal chenille and brown hackle, the same way.

CB: That's great.

GN: I did catch some small baby carp down in Holbox, on both the Monster and the Nymph. Again, tied them on the larger hooks but they both worked. So why not?

CB: Yes, that's right. Well one another thing I wanted to talk a little to Gil about is [in] recent years he's contributed a tremendous amount of beautiful water color renderings combined with flies, usually pictures of places that the club has gone to, Hosmer and other places. How did you get into this art business Gil? I

mean, you obviously have a little background in your engineering drawing field, but how did that all get started?

GN: Oh, I've always had interest in reproducing things on paper. I started when I was in grade school. I had a history of art in my family from way back. I don't call this art, I mean anybody can do it, it's just a matter of you have to want to do it and if you want to do it, you can do it.

CB: I happen to disagree with what he's saying folks because if you take a look around and if you've ever been fortunate enough to have won in a raffle prize or gotten a gift of some of his renderings, they are superb. As a matter of fact, as I said earlier, we're going to pick the camera up here in a little bit and take a look at what he's working on right now for the Christmas party for the year 2000. It's just incredible work, the detail, it's almost like a photograph and even though Gil claims that it's no big deal, it really is a big deal. I just can't say enough about it, also the contributions that you've made to the various auctions.

GN: Well it's just another hobby, it's something I like to do and I like to see my works on display because I know that I did them and if people like them, fine, that's what counts.

CB: They're terrific, they really are. I know that coming up here to Whidbey today, I had a tour of the house and there's fly plates all over the place. He really has got a fantastic place, you know, to see all this stuff. So I guess I would ask you [if] maybe you'd give us a little bit of club history. We went over kind of the awards that you've received Gil but any particular experiences in the club that come to mind that you'd want to share for posterity, as they say?

GN: Well, joining the club, I've never stopped joining the club. Don Sachs got me into it, I don't know how we got together but he got me into it. And I decided that that's the club I wanted to belong to. [I] met an awful lot of good people, a lot of guys like **Younglove**, Don Ives, Dawn Holbrook, and Enos Bradner and Frank Headrick, Sandy Bacon, those are all names that all the old-timers know about. Gordy Young and I joined the same year. We both joined in 1956 and we grew up together in the club, so to speak.

CB: That's great.

GN: And of course Elliot Klosterman, he was an old timer then too; Walt Johnson, I'm glad to have Walt still around.

CB: Right, I agree.

GN: You can talk with him.

CB: Yes, that's really terrific. I guess you know, as Gil has gone through that list of names, one of the things that really is disturbing when you think about how few of those people are still around. I know Walt is and Elliot I think still is with us.

GN: And so is Frank.

CB: Frank?

GN: Frank [Headrick] is still with us.

CB: Boy, that's fantastic.

GN: Yes; Earl George, he's still around.

CB: Yes, that's right. And Earl usually comes to Christmas parties.

GN: Sure.

CB: You know I just can't say enough about Gil and your contribution to the club, all the art and the flies and the experiences. It's just been a pleasure to have known you, as they say. I feel really privileged to do these interviews. I guess in that respect, Gil, I'd ask is there any particular legacy or something you'd like to say about what you'd like to see the club continue to do or to do differently?

GN: Well I think the most important thing is for the club to concentrate on getting younger members in it. Because the old members, they're going to die off, we are, that's what's going to happen to us. And the club is important enough that it should keep going and the only way you can do that is to keep getting young blood in there. We're getting some newer members, we're getting some active newer members but they're not as young as I'd like to see. Well one of the things that might help is if we could somehow talk the older members, the old-timers, like Walt, like Frank to come fairly regularly to meetings so that the younger guys can meet them. They're the guys behind the club to begin with. Elliot Klosterman, he should show up. I wish to heck he would.

CB: Yes, sharing that start-up knowledge, that would be really good, I agree. That would be good. I know for a while when Enos was still with us, we had kind of a heritage opening to the meeting. Maybe we could try to re-instill that where we would have them stand up and tell a little story about some of the past as a way of just carrying on the tradition, so that's something that we could certainly try to entertain.

GN: Well the old timers that are still around, we should make use of. We should try to get them to meetings and so that younger guys can talk to them and see what it was all about back then.

CB: That's really good.

GN: I feel real strongly about that.

CB: Well I think maybe we're going to break at this time and take a look around at some of Gil's stuff here, unless you've got some other things you'd like to add Gil, it's really been a pleasure to have this opportunity and I think this is just terrific that we've been afforded the opportunity to have you with us, as they say.

GIL'S WORKSHOP

CB: We're going to take a look now at Gil's workshop I've been zooming in and out here as you can see; you're sitting next to your tying bench right now.

GN: Yes. This is where I tie all my flies right here. I spend a lot of time here.

CB: How much time would you say you spend out here on an average day?

GN: Average day when my wife doesn't have something for me to do, I probably spend all day.

CB: That's fantastic.

GN: Six to eight hours anyway.

CB: That's great.

GN: Just puttering around, doing things that I like to do.

CB: That's terrific.

GN: Doesn't have to be done.

CB: We're going to take a look here now at Gil's tying, in fact he's going to tie us a fly here it looks like.

GN: No, I don't think I'll tie a fly.

CB: Oh he's not, ok. But I want you all to notice this vice, this is an original. What is that, a Price, Gil? Thompson A?

GN: Thompson—one of the—it's not an A; it's a B or a C or something. But I think it's an old Thompson vice. But it's a good one, it's adequate.

CB: And you can see he's been at it here, look at this. He's got all his materials out there.

GN: Well this shop is a mess, but it's the kind of mess I like, I can take bits and pieces.

CB: Ok, well you can see behind Gil's head here he's got all kinds of fly shaboo and things hiding behind. Now look at these jars full of materials, I'm trying to get back far enough here where you can see all this stuff, this is incredible if you look at the amount of materials he's got here. This obviously is a well-supplied shop. And now we're going to take you over to his easel here. As you can see, this is a photograph of Hosmer Lake.

GN: Elliot Klosterman took this photograph, many years ago, at least 25-30 years ago at Hosmer Lake. I'd like to know who these guys are. They're all fly club members and I'd like to know who they were.

CB: Looks like you can almost tell who the guys are there. This is a photo and there's someone way in the background there. And here is the art work that Gil is doing for the Christmas party that is just superb, I mean its so realistic, I mean even with this camera it's beginning to look like the real thing, zooming in this is an incredible reproduction of that photo. And this is, as I said, this is going to be part of one of Gil's pieces of art for the 2000 Christmas party. And you see this is the unfinished portion here, but look at the level of detail, I mean look at that tree, I mean that is just incredible work Gil. Now here's the secret of how he does it too, we'll move over here and I'll show the—he uses lots of little brushes, you can see that. And lots of colored pencils which are technically water color pencils, is that what those are called?

GN: Water color pencils, yes. Some airbrush, and water color pencils and brushes, everything -- multimedia.

CB: Multimedia, that's great. But you can see that the rest of the shop is totally equipped, obviously Gil is a craftsman and everything else he does besides the fly tying and the art. You can see up there in the corner, that little airplane right there was one of his big projects [that] he worked on at the Boeing Company it's what was called the Compass Cope, is that what is called?

GN: Yes..

CB: Which is a remote pilotless vehicle I guess is what they are technically called. This is some more of his fly tying material; he's got what looks like a regular store here. If you can see there a couple of really beautiful fly plates here. I'm not sure if these are this year's Christmas ones or what these are Gil, are these--?

GN: No, this one represents the flies that we tied during my fly-tying classes.

CB: Oh really?

GN: I just finished one last night.

CB: Well that's beautiful.

GN: And we tied thirty different patterns and that one over there is just variations on the Monster.

CB: Yes, this is terrific. This is terrific. As you can see these fly plates that Gil does are just beautiful, you can't say enough about his craftsmanship. I'm really dually impressed, what a guy as they say.