



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



This interview was conducted with Gilbert A. Nyerges on February 9, 2007 in Oak Harbor, Washington. The interviewers are Danny Beatty and Tamara Belts.

TB: How did you get started fly fishing?

GN: My earliest recollection of fishing was when I was about four years old. I fished often with my Dad who used a twenty foot cane pole (not a rod), and used primarily bait such as worms, doughballs, or minnows. He let me hold the pole often so I could experience the "bite," but for a four year old, I had my problems controlling that long a pole. We brought home everything that we caught for eating, as these were the days leading up to the Great Depression. I continued under his tutelage through my Elementary, Junior High, and High School days, but when I began College, I started becoming interested in this thing called "Fly Fishing." It began quite tentatively about 1940 and consisted mainly of my trying to duplicate grasshoppers, mayflies, and minnows to catch anything. I never even heard of anything like taking lessons in fly fishing until I moved to Seattle in January of 1943, but I did learn that an entirely different set of equipment was required for this kind of fishing.

TB: Where are you originally from?

GN: I was born, raised, and educated in Cleveland, Ohio. My fishing was confined to a few rivers that flowed into Lake Erie, and to Lake Erie itself, as our family spent all those early years vacationing for one or two weeks each year at my uncles cabin at Put-In-Bay on South Bass Island. When I left Cleveland and moved to Seattle, one of the first things I did was to go down to Warshal's on First Avenue to talk with them about this fly fishing thing, and to learn about some of the things I would need. I visited a pawn shop a few doors down and purchased an eight foot cane rod, an automatic reel with twenty-five yards of backing and a level line, plus about a half dozen snelled flies. Did I know that the outfit should be balanced? NO! I didn't even know what it meant. But I went out into the back yard of the place where I was living and started to practice casting. Needless to say, it was quite discouraging, but eventually I was able to put out consistent casts of up to about forty feet. It took me maybe two weeks of almost constant effort to do THIS!

My first trip was up the Foss Trail to Trout Lake near Skykomish. This was in mid April of 1943. Did I check on seasons, opening days, ice out, limits..... ?? NO! Didn't everybody in the Northwest fish all the time? I caught a bus at 9th Avenue carrying my sleeping bag, fishing gear, rain gear, and a back pack with 60 pounds of CANNED food and utensils to Skykomish, hitchhiked along Highway 2 to the trail head without a single ride, and proceeded up the trail to Trout Lake where I set up camp and fished until dark. It was a long hard trip, but I was young and fool hardy, but I did it! In the morning I left all my gear at Trout Lake and hiked up to Copper, Little Heart, and Big Heart Lakes. On the way in and out, I met only one person, and that was Bill Lohrer who had a fly fishing shop in the University District. That was the beginning of a long relationship with Bill.

But then as I started out to truly fly fish, it was on and off, because I used both flies, and started to fish for steelhead with lures and prawns in the winters. After a spell of that, I decided in about 1954 to concentrate on fly fishing only. Since then I haven't done any kind of bait fishing at all. During this period I used to bring home fish and smoke them so I could bring them in to work every Tuesday and have fun interrupting meetings with the call "the smoked fish are here!" That was fun for quite a number of years, but when I learned how to correctly release fish I gave up all of that, and from then on it was fly fishing and releasing for everything.

At this point I turned quite naturally to salt water. I started out with sea-run cutthroat, salmon, and steelhead locally. My first shot at exotic and far flung places was to the Ten Thousand Islands in Florida's Everglades for snook, barracuda, mackerel, and tarpon. I made a number of trips to Christmas Island for bonefish, to Loreto on the Baja Peninsula for dorado, Costa Rica for large tarpon and snook, New Zealand for large rainbow and brown trout, Belize for baby tarpon, and a number of other places on the Yucatan Peninsula for large tarpon. I also visited Alberta and Saskatchewan for great northern pike and walleyes, and many places in British Columbia for their excellent Kamloops fishing. Even though I didn't catch thousands or even hundreds of fish, each trip was a unique experience and I don't recall ever having been "skunked" on any of them. I was able to catch whatever I was after and 99% of the time they were caught with the flies that I tied. I very rarely bought any, but I copied many patterns.

DB: You came to Seattle in 1943; we did an interview with George McLeod, I wondered if you recall reading his Dad's column in the Seattle papers at that time?

GN: Yes, I remember well, both Ken and George McLeod. At one time they were both members of the The Washington Fly Fishing Club, and good buddies of Enos Bradner. Enos had a small book store on Capitol Hill which became quite a hangout for most of his old time fly fishing gang. Enos and Dawn Holbrook decided his place was too small for the growing number of gatherings, so they started out to form The Washington Fly Fishing Club. It was officially incorporated in 1939 with nine charter members -- Enos Bradner, Dawn Holbrook, Ken McLeod, Letcher Lambuth, Len Hunton, Marvin Brown, Firmin Flohr, Charles King, and Jack Litsey. Enos left his book store and became the outdoor editor for the *Seattle Times* some time in the late Forties. He had a wry sense of humor and he occasionally used his column for his benefit. His fly fishing column came out in the Sport pages of *The Times* every Thursday, and of course, it was avidly read by ALL fisherpersons. Enos liked to fish in relative quiet, but each week end after his column reports, the places he wanted to fish were always crowded and chaotic, so when he wanted to fish a particular place, he took extreme care to omit any reference to his spot in his column, and it worked wonders for quite a few years.

Unfortunately I never did visit his bookstore, but I became personally acquainted with him when I became a member of The Washington Fly Fishing Club in 1956. I did have many notable trips with him fishing quiet waters and hearing great stories about his trips with his cronies such as Ralph Wahl, Howard Gray, Wes Drain, Walt Johnson, Al Pratt, Roy Patrick, Al Knudson, Sandy Bacon, Frank Headrick, Letcher Lambuth, Tommy Brayshaw and many others. One of the more recent ones who joined the Club in 1965 is Steve Raymond, who I'm certain you will be interviewing soon. He was, as I was, introduced to fishing as a young boy by being tutored and mentored by his Dad, especially in British Columbia waters.

After the war ended, in 1946, I took my wife and four-month old daughter back to Cleveland where I joined the faculty of my alma mater, Case Institute of Applied Science, to teach in the Engineering Drawing Department, and to earn a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering. I was there for the four years it took me to complete my studies and went from there to Panama as a one-man staff teaching the Engineering Curriculum for the Canal Zone Junior College. In 1951, Boeing called and asked if I could come back and continue working on airplane design projects - which I did, and continued there until I retired in 1984.

DB: When did you start fishing in British Columbia?

GN: My first trip to Hihium Lake in British Columbia was July 4th, 1945. A two car group of eight of us went up there for a week. We left the University District about 7:00 AM on a Saturday morning and after a harrowing trip up the Fraser River Canyon, we reached Ashcroft about 9:00 PM. Today that same trip on the new highways (I-5 to Canada, the Caribou Highway to Hope, the new road through the Fraser Canyon to Cache Creek, and the new road from Cache Creek to Kamloops, to Deadman Creek) takes approximately seven to eight hours. The drive up the old Canyon road was something that flat landers like me from Ohio and others in our party from places like Minnesota, Kansas, Louisiana, and Georgia had never experienced. From Hope, British Columbia we started up the canyon -- it was a great canyon and a raging river. Much of the road was built on wooden platforms out over the river and there wasn't a straight stretch between Hope and Ashcroft. It was supposed to be a two lane road, but there were more places that had one-way traffic than those that had two, and we had to stop and decide quite a number of times how to pass when we met oncoming traffic, especially where there were no guard rails for the outer lane! Someone had to back up to a passing spot. Fortunately, there were a good number of them, but it was scary!

On that first trip, there was only one fishing camp on the lake, run by Bruce Cameron who operated The Circle W Ranch. There were nine log cabins situated around the lake, and we were transported by truck to the lake from the ranch, a distance of ten miles. The trip took a full four hours and there were two places that we had to get out of the truck while the driver navigated steep and rocky stretches. We brought in sleeping bags and all our food. We were towed to our cabins by the boatman and we fished without motors. On that trip, we were the only people there for the whole week! We had a wooden stick in each boat that measured exactly sixteen inches. If a fish was only that long or shorter, it was released, and in those days the limit was twelve fish per day over six inches (That's six!), with two days possession. The fish averaged two to three pounds. The largest Kamloops that I have ever caught was out of Hihium -- it was caught, measured and released using a Nyerges Nymph at slightly over 32 ½ inches -- it was a huge hook-nosed male, which has been estimated by equation to be about twelve pounds.

It was just a few years later that a group put in another camp called Sky High Fishing Camp -- it was just opposite The Circle W Home cabin. And a few years after that, the Ladowski family built a lodge and a few cabins at the west end of the lake. They made it a family place and brought in sofas, rugs, fireplaces and provided food. It wasn't too long after that, the Crown started offering to Canadians only, leases for private cabins. Now I'm pretty certain that there are close to forty private cabins around the lake with a few of them flying in their own float planes. I fished there from 1952 until 1982 without missing a year, and once in a while going up several times a season. During that time the road going in to the lake was modified and re-routed so that it now takes only about forty-five minutes to get into the lake. When it reached the point where on any fishing day I was able to stand up in my boat, look around and count fifty or more boats on the lake, I gave up!!

TB: Now you developed a fly, I think, for that lake? How did you come to develop it?

GN: When I returned to Seattle and the Boeing Company in 1951, I wanted to start fly fishing again, so I planned another July 4th trip back up to Hihium Lake in British Columbia. On this trip in 1952 I spent some time looking for rock specimens for one of the guys who was also a rock hound, and at the shore of the lake when I turned over a number of rocks in the water near the shore, I saw quite a few very large -- about 1 ½ to 2 inches long -- black, dragonfly nymphs. That evening when the day's catch was being cleaned and prepared for smoking, I again saw quite a few of those same nymphs, but this time they were all in the fish's stomachs! The Gil's Monster was created at Hihium Lake that evening. I took a number 6, 3x long, Mustad hook, put on a short pheasant rump tail and the whole body of medium black chenille. I noted that the nymphs I observed were not particularly bushy, so I wound on two turns (never more than three), of reddish-brown pheasant rump fibers that were as long as the body. The next morning I mooched past some weed beds and was completely surprised. After about three fish, I just let the boat drift and spent the rest of the day casting and stripping anywhere near weeds. I didn't name the fly, but when I came back from the trip and described my experience there, someone started to refer to it as Gil's Monster - and it has stuck. I've used it in many places with just slight variations to catch quite a variety of species, in both fresh and salt

water.

There is a fly that was originated about 1925 by Dr. Lloyd Day, a dentist in Quesnel, British Columbia, Canada. He originally called it The Monkey Faced Louise, but legend has it that he named it for a client who was one of his favorite fishing buddies, Colonel Thomas Carey, who popularized it in British Columbia, so he called it the Carey Special. It has become over the years, one of the most recognizable flies in British Columbia. The original I believe, was tied on a regular number 6, fly hook, (probably Mustad), with pheasant rump feather hackles for a tail, beaver pelt body, and a full hackle of two pheasant rump feathers, wound at the head using all the fibers possible and as long as the body plus half the tail -- in other words it was a very bushy looking fly.

DB: Why don't you tell the story of how you started going up to Eliguk Lake?

GN: Andy Hall from our Club happened to see an article in *B.C. Outdoors* written by free lance photographer, Don Robertson, who lives in 93 Mile House on the way to Williams Lake. Don was asked by Moe Schiller to visit his new Lodge that was opening up on Eliguk Lake, located about seventy miles North of Nimpo Lake, and perhaps write it up. Don was so impressed by what he found that he convinced the editor of the magazine to print it. On the basis of the article, Andy suggested that we go up there and try it out before the crowds found out about it! We organized a group of eight in two cars to make the trip. Again we had a memorable time not quite so bad as our Fraser Canyon experience, but bad in another way. The 180 mile road from Williams Lake to Nimpo Lake changed from partially paved into a gravel road as soon as we crossed the Fraser River and reached the plateau -- about fifteen miles. The rest of the way from there to Nimpo Lake it changed into what was a typical Canadian road at that time -- mud, ruts and rocks. We had to stop about half way to sleep in our cars and didn't get there until about noon the following day. The float plane ride to Eliguk Lake was made in a De Havilland Beaver which carried five passengers plus all the luggage, and a Cessna 185 which carried the other three. It was a twenty minute flight for the Cessna 185 and thirty minutes for the Beaver. It is certainly a much better way to get to the lake than to go in by horseback, hiking, or ATV. The ATV trail is horrible and does a good job of breaking them up. The McKenzie Trail is only a few hundred yards from the back door of the Lodge, but not recommended and very rarely done. After a very good and hearty lunch, we unpacked our gear, got settled into our cabins and assembled our fishing gear. Moe, the builder and owner of the lodge assigned us our boats and motors -- no oars, no anchors -- and when we asked him how we fish the lake, he said just put on a muddler minnow and troll around out in the middle of the lake. We spent most of the rest of the day trying to rig up rock anchors with very little rope and mooching around with our noisy motors with only a few fish boated -- a very unsatisfactory evening. The next day, however, we dredged up a quantity of rope, found only a few oars under some of the cabins, rigged up anchors and made our way out to explore the lake. The lake is about three and a half miles long and almost a mile at its widest. At the west end there was a very large patch of lily pads (now gone), right in the vicinity of where the inlet stream comes in, plus submerged weed beds all over the west end of the lake. Overall, it took us about two days to figure out the bottom topography and bottom structure until we were consistently hooking, playing, and releasing beautiful, bright Kamloops trout averaging about 2 pounds. We found from Moe, that this was a completely native lake never touched by anybody but the local Indians who fished it in the Fall for their winter's food supply -- and that, not very often.

The most important thing we realized was that these fish were extremely active all day -- one could look around the lake at any time of day and see DOZENS of fish in the air at one time. We never came up with a satisfactory reason for why the fish were jumping so high out of the water -- it was obvious that they were not really feeding but it became very obvious to us when they actually started to feed. The rest of the week we managed to cover quite a bit of the lake, but the end of the week arrived too soon, so when we settled our bill with Moe, we told him that we would not return unless he had good oars in all the boats and good anchors. He said that he wanted to make this a fly fishing camp, so he readily agreed to our suggestions. The following year when we went back, he was good for his promise and we had no further problems.

The best thing about the lake is that there are very few people. Since there are only three other structures on the lake, each having two boats, and ten boats for Eliguk, the most you can ever see on the lake at any time will be sixteen boats. In my twenty-five years of fishing there, only ONCE have I seen that many; it was only because that year we had a very large group (forty two) come in for an ALCOA weeklong conference. Fortunately, three of the smaller groups flew their own float planes in for the trip so that we had three planes available for flying nine people out each day to other lakes in the neighborhood where Moe had boats for their use. Since Moe leased the other cabins and boats for the week, all of the boats were full -- that's all there was on the lake!!

Other than the solitude, it's a lake that has never been stocked. Dick Thompson, a member of the Washington Fly Fishing Club and retired biologist who worked with the University of Washington and the [Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife], was with me on a number of trips and for a time tried to figure out where the fish came from. Since the inlet and outlet streams were full of hungry squawfish, (now officially called pike minnows), any spawning in the streams was generally taken care of by these predators, so Dick adopted the premise that since there were underwater springs to provide the running water, and the lava gravel bottom to provide the spawning beds, they were essentially shore spawners. Over the years I have also adopted that premise because I have found several areas where I catch many small (four to six inch) trout -- their "nurseries."

Also in the lakes favor, is the fact that there doesn't seem to be any winter kill because of the two main areas that have sixty to seventy foot depths. There is no algae bloom, however there is, during certain seasons, pine pollen that is blown from the trees and appears to be bloom, but isn't -- the water remains good for consumption below the surface pollen because it doesn't last long. The lake is extremely rich in aquatic food, especially freshwater shrimp, leeches, and many different kinds of nymphs that hatch from the mud and gravel bottom like chironomids, caddis, mayflies, dragonflies, midges, sedges, and occasionally ant swarms, but the lake elevation is too high to consistently count on ants and traveling sedges, but good for small cinnamon sedges. It is an excellent place to experiment and to try different fly patterns. It's a place where whether a fly pattern is good or ineffective shows up like day or night. In addition, in all the places that I have fished, I have found that this is the only body of water that the importance for long or accurate casting is not highly important. Sure, it's always nice to show off and put out a spectacular cast to a far-out feeding fish and get him, but there I have found that about 75% of my fish have been hooked within fifty to sixty feet of the boat. The rationale for this is all detail that I don't find interesting except for the fact that rank beginners are able to catch all the fish they can handle on their trip, and can come home feeling like experts and wondering why they hadn't started to go there years ago!

The only thing negative that might be said about its desirability is that some fishermen would like to catch and bring home a large number of fish to feed their family or give away to friends, and that is not to be done at Eliguk. The daily catch limit is four fish a day, and may be raised to five in 2009, and the possession limit is for two days, so it is not a place where one can bring home an abundance of fish. It is a place for truly recreational fisherman who like to release their fish and to angle with single barbless hooks on lures or flies. We at the camp, encourage all fisherpersons to each take home with them a possession limit of fish because it is essential to harvest SOME of them each year. Moe or his helper, clean all the fish [and] prepare them for the smoker, smoke them and vacuum pack them for the trip home.

DB: How about the big traveling sedges that Steve Raymond likes to write about around Kamloops?

GN: Traveling sedges are a very important part of our Northwest fly fishing experience. In many waters of the Northwest, especially in Canada, sedge hatches are followed religiously by a great number of fly fishers. The hatches typically start early in the Spring around Memorial Day and may last well into July. Their migrations are followed from one body of water to another until they run out. Temperature,



weather, lake elevations and sizes, all have an effect on their travel patterns. Hiium generally has good hatches each year, but not always! Eliguk does not -- they're relatively rare, but other well known lakes have consistent ones and have most of the characteristics to induce great hatches and are generally the most heavily fished. These are some of the ones with reasonable traveling sedge hatches that I have fished in the past, but certainly not the only ones nor the very best -- every sedge follower has his own list of favorites. Glimpse, Bridge, Stump, Tunkwa, Corbett, Courtney, Dragon, Sheridan, and Hatheume Lakes would all be on a number of favorite's lists.

TB: As a person who doesn't fly fish (I'm learning about it by doing these interviews), how do you approach a new lake? How do you fish it?

GN: The best way to start to fish an unknown lake is to put on a dark, medium sized fly and just mooch slowly around the lake close to any weed beds or drop offs that you can identify. Vary your speeds and your directions around the area. Every once in a while, put the oars down or turn off the motor, pick up your rod, aim the tip of the rod down toward the spot where the line enters the water and slowly strip in the line. All the time you are stripping in the line, keep looking all around you to see if you can spot some surface activity such as feeding fish which are not jumping, but just coming to the surface to grab a morsel and creating circles in the water -- slowly head for the area where you see the most rings. Also check the bird activity -- swallows or terns that are gathered together flying about and are dipping into the water after bugs. There are fish right below them. You can do this reconnaissance while using either a sinking or sink tip fly line. If you're fortunate to be close to feeding fish, cast your line close to them, but not over or into them -- you'll spook them every time! If you're relatively close to flocks of circling and dipping birds, make haste to try to get to them without scaring them away. This is probably the most exciting time of all, because the fish cast away almost all caution to get the most bugs before the birds get them all!

In the absence of these obvious clues, just keep on trolling around any place that you might suspect there would be the weeds or drop offs. Try to get into the habit of NEVER laying the rod down on the seat next to you while trolling unless the rod is fastened with a tether to some part of your body or clothing, or to some part of the boat. Saves a lot of grief when a hot strike takes your whole outfit overboard -- and it DOES happen. At Eliguk we have over a dozen outfits lying on the bottom of the lake rotting away amongst a lot of happy, laughing fish!!

DB: I think you like to fish Eastern Washington -- isn't that where you came up with the Nyerges Nymph?

GN: It was in the time period from 1952 to 1956 that I really started to branch out in my fly fishing. One day in 1952 while I was downtown on First Avenue, I saw some freshly caught rainbow trout being displayed on a bed of ice in the front of Warshal's. There were about a dozen of them and they were silvery bright and BIG! The sign simply stated that they were caught in Jameson Lake in the State of Washington -- no further details. I dropped in to ask them about this Jameson Lake and its fish. I succeeded in getting almost no help from anyone in the store -- no one knew anything, so at my earliest convenience I contacted Bill Lohrer. He also did not to know its location so I got hold of some detailed game department maps and looked it up -- it was there. I spent some time researching the place, and then decided to go there. The map showed an unimproved road going north from Highway 2 up the coulee and alongside the lake to its north end. That was where a fishing camp was located. I went, found the road and it was bad and dusty, strewn with lava rocks. Instead of running parallel all the way to the north end, it went about half way and dipped down into the lake. I could see about half a mile further at the base of the coulee wall the road coming up out of the lake. I had to go back to [Highway 2] and find my way to Mansfield which was north of the lake. At Mansfield I had to turn south to go in to the north end of the lake. To make a long story short, I wasted half my week end just to get to the lake, and then it was too late to fish that day. When I did get there I spent the rest of the day having supper with Wade Powers who, with his daughter and son-in-law, ran the place. They hauled into the site several old trailers which were rented out to fishermen -- they were old, small, but adequate, and they built themselves a nice cozy little restaurant. I learned that when Grand Coulee Dam was built in the Thirties, the water table came up in the whole Columbia Basin, and every low spot and marshy place became a pot hole, pond, or lake. That accounted for the road past the lake being inundated. But it also accounted for the alkalinity of the lake to be

diluted enough to allow the lake to support trout. When trout were planted, they grew fast and big with the unlimited food supply they had. The next morning I rented one of Wade's boats and went out fishing. I was the only person on the lake and he directed me to go across the lake very close to the coulee wall and anchor close to the weed beds that I would find there. I did that for some time with fly patterns I had with me and couldn't touch a fish, so I pulled up my anchor, which was very difficult because I was pulling up with it pounds and pounds of weeds. As I was cleaning off the weeds, I noticed a lot of movement in them. On closer observation, I saw thousands of freshwater shrimp ranging in size from about a quarter of an inch long to maybe three quarters long. As the light bulb went on in my head, I rowed back to my car and pulled out my fly tying case. I had some medium, moss green chenille and some brown hackle with long quill and short web-free hackles. I tied the materials on a size 10, 3x long Mustad hook -- chenille body with the brown hackle palmered over the body for about six turns -- like a wooly worm, but I then clipped all the hackle fibers off the top and sides very close to the body so that it had legs only on the bottom. I went back to where I was with a couple of them, anchored again and proceeded to have at least a strike or a fish on every cast until I lost both flies. I went back to the car for more. When I went to the Club with that story I had to show what I had been using. That's when it was referred to as the Nyerges Nymph, because I didn't name it. I've been using it for many years in many places with slight variations for many species.

An old friend of Wade Powers came up with his version of the Jameson freshwater shrimp. He was Walt Ribble, and I believe his version is the one familiarly called the Jameson Shrimp. I had the rare privilege of fishing with him several times on Jameson Lake, and like all real "Old Timers," he was a friendly, generous, gentleman. His version started out with the moss green chenille body, but he added the tips of a small bunch of long fibered deer body hair for the tail, the brown hackle, plus a small length of black thread at the tail. He wound on the body, palmered the hackle, and laid the long deer body fibers along the back for a shellback to the head. He then took the length of black thread that was still at the tail and wound about 6 turns over the shellback to the head to provide segmentation for the body, and finished off wrapping the head. It is a very effective fly for any body of water known to contain shrimp.

DB: What was this case that you're using made [from]?

GN: I got an old business machine from a friend of mine who was in the business. I discarded the machine, gutted the case, put in partitions and a small folding shelf that I can clamp my vise to when I'm away from a table or bench. I found a number of plastic boxes uniform in size for storing small quantities of materials, built partitions in the lid for storing a selection of hooks and spools, and kept one large section for storing oversized items. This case was put together in 1954 making it over 54 years old, and still going strong, but of course it IS showing its age. It has been on almost all of my fishing trips, and more than a few times saved me the inconvenience of not being able to tie up a fly on the spur of the moment that caused the need for the fly.

I started out tying my flies with the basic Thompson A fixed body vise, a spool of thread, a pair of sharp pointed scissors, and standard hackle pliers. Over the years I have settled on a kit consisting of a vise with a rotatable head and vertical shaft with height adjustments, an automatic bobbin that retracts the thread as the bobbin is raised, a good pair of SHARP pointed scissors, a wire grabber for hackle plier, dubbing needle for various tasks, a hair stacker, and a whip finisher. With these tools in my case, a few materials suited to the type of fishing I plan to do on any trip, and a good selection of hooks, I'm generally equipped to go. On an extended trip for more than one or two days, I also add a kit of small tools (including lubricants and cleaners) for rod and reel repairs.

I've tied flies on lake shores, river banks, truck tail-gates, on my lap in moving cars, on my lap on cross country flights to faraway places, at many sport shows, and mainly in my own room at home! There is no end to the creativity one can muster when tying flies!

TB: A little bit ago you mentioned Ed Sierer -- Who was he?

GN: Ed Sierer had a half-hour outdoor sports show on Channel 5 for a number of years and covered anything hunting or fishing. Washington Fly Fishing Club member Eliot Klosterman and I became acquainted with him and learned that he had never been to the Queen Charlotte Islands in BC. Eliot and I had made about four September tent camping trips on the shore of the Tlell River on Graham Island in the Queen Charlottes fly fishing for Coho salmon. Ed got Channel 5 to stake us to a ten day trip to make a half-hour movie for his program. He put together a beautiful film which was shown at various intervals over a period of two years or so. When he left Seattle and moved to Alaska, I thought that I had better call Channel 5 to see if I could obtain all the film that Ed shot for this show -- movie film in those days. "Oh we destroyed those when Ed left!!!" There were about three hours of film that never made it into the TV show -- and we missed it!!

I did a number of shows for The Outdoor News Network which all showed on TNN out of Tennessee. We had programs in Costa Rica, Yucatan, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Northern California, and I do have films of most of the shows.

DB: What business were you in, Gil, before you retired?

GN: I worked for the Boeing Company as an aeronautical engineer from 1943 to 1946 on B-17 and C-97 airplanes. From 1951 to 1954 I helped set up both the indoctrination school for new-hire engineers, and a school for engineering draftsmen. In 1954 I was assigned to Preliminary Design where my job was simply to design airplanes to match specs that the Defense Department sent across our desks. When our company received a request for proposal for some aircraft requirements from the customer, a management team was formed in our Military Division. That management team would start forming the group that would come up with the proposal. Usually, the first part of the group would be made up a few of us whose job would be to dream up any vehicle that we thought would satisfy as many of the requirements as possible. In this stage of the game, there were some wild and weird configurations, most of which were too heavy, too impractical, impossible, simply not cost effective, or simply put, just wild dreams. But while we worked to come up with something, the team grew and eventually everything led up to a reasonable proposal that the whole team worked on and was submitted to the Defense Department for their analysis. They put up this data against other competing aircraft companies or conglomerates and awarded contracts to the group with the best proposal. In short, for the last thirty years of my stay with the Boeing Company I was perhaps one of their LEAST productive engineers ever. I worked on almost every losing proposal that came into our Division, But I DID work on some very interesting projects. In the latter part of the Seventies, and early Eighties, three of my designs were built and flew. I retired in 1984 fulfilled, happy, and ready to plunge into fly fishing -- which I did!

DB: Do you have any stories about, or background on stream fishing? Can you give us some comments on that?

GN: I used to regularly fish the Snoqualmie, Skykomish, Skagit, and not too often, the Stillaguamish Rivers. I had an old fishing partner about my Dad's age who was from Switzerland. His name was Charlie Schroter. He took up fly fishing at a very late time in his life, and really relished it. I always had a great time with his Swiss accent. He was a retired dentist and University of Washington professor in the dental school. Every Friday night about 7 PM, our telephone would ring, and upon answering it, he would ALWAYS say "Vat time, Gil?". He would never ask where or IF we were going, just when. We would always head for one of our rivers for some steelhead or salmon. The first steelhead that I ever caught on a fly was in the Snoqualmie just above the Tolt River, and Charlie's was on the Skagit.

The story about my first one on a fly is this. Charlie had brought his movie camera with him and he recorded the whole episode -- playing, landing, recording my catch on the punch card, and taking care of the fish. I cleaned everything up and resumed my casting for another. In a few minutes a game protector strolled up, "I see you're fly fishing -- may I see your punch card?" I hauled it back out and handed it to him. "How come you didn't punch your card? I'm afraid I have to write you out a ticket!" I thought about it for about ten seconds, so I said "Are you going to

be a real bad guy and spoil my accomplishment of catching my first steelhead on a fly just because I got excited and signed the card but forgot to punch it?" He thought about ten seconds and said, "No, I'm not going to do that, but it should be done, because you have to punch it as soon as you catch it!" I was lucky that he was one of the good ones.

My best story about river fishing is the day Charlie and I went to the Skykomish near Monroe. We arrived about noon and stood on the bank looking down at about twenty fishermen lined up along this beautiful run casting their lures, bobbers, and bait into the riffle. "Vell, where do ve fish?" I said "Why don't you go up to the head-end, and I'll go down to the tail-end. As we parted, I noted that the last guy in the line was coincidentally the only fly fisherman! I asked if he minded my fishing below him. "No, fine, go ahead. We've been here all morning and haven't seen a thing!" So I went a reasonable distance below him, waded out and stripped out as much line as I wanted to cast (The following is Bible-Thumping, witnessed by twenty, TRUTH!!), and put out my first cast. As I'm picking up my slack, the line swings in the current and as it straightens out I feel this little tick-tick-tick like a small trout is ticking at my fly -- I raised the rod and a large steelhead came out of the water. Charlie was watching from afar, and when he saw the fish come out, he put his gear down and came running to help me land it -- it was twelve pounds. Charlie started walking back to his spot while I signed and punched my card. I waded back out into the water, stripped out my line, made my cast, picked up the slack, and watched as the line drifted and straightened out. Again I felt that little tick-tick-tick and raised my rod -- it was a fourteen pounder!! Two casts -- two fish!! Poor Charlie had just picked up his rod when he saw what happened, so he started running back again to help. I was through fishing for that day, so I told him that I would watch him and the rest of them while he fished for his limit. He said, "Like HELL -- "Vet go home r-r-right NOW!!" The poor guy just above me said, "And we haven't seen a fish all morning!!" There was a lot of booing and hooting!!

This sort of thing can happen to ANYBODY. I was on the Snoqualmie at the same spot where I almost got my ticket, when a guy stopped and asked if I minded if he put out a few casts with his spoon. Of course I told him to go right ahead, so he got above me, cast out his large brass spoon which drifted down and swung around until it was right in front of me about five feet from where I was standing --- BANG! -- It jumped right in front of me, eye high! It was a fourteen pounder! So anybody can have a lucky day. I don't think I can expect to see another one like the one I had.

I was at a sport show in Yakima about ten years ago manning the booth for Eliguk Lake Lodge chatting with some of the "locals." It was around the 1st of March and they were telling me about the fishing in the Yakima from Rosa Dam up to Ellensburg. They told me all about the fishing at mile so-and-so, and mile so-and-so, and added -- "Wherever you can reach the water." I tried the latter information. I stopped at about five places ("Wherever I could reach the water"), and each place that I stopped I caught from one to three fish. Up to this day I had never caught a fish in this river over eighteen inches. That day, I caught, measured and released, among my catch, three fish that were twenty inches or slightly over! The rest of them were fourteen to sixteen -- a pretty good day. It was a Monday, the water was just right, and I never saw [another] soul fishing -- just a lot of motorists passing by and honking their horns while I had fish on. Another exceptional day!!

I have floated just about every stretch of the Yakima from Cle Elum to Rosa Dam over the years and I've had my best luck getting out of the boat and fishing off the gravel bars rather than "boondoggling" -- drifting in the boat with the fly floating down the river.

DB: As you drove to the lakes of British Columbia, did you ever stop to fish the Thompson or other Canadian streams?

GN: I did fish the Thompson several times with Charlie and Pat Kirkpatrick, the former owner and operator of The Circle W ranch at Hihium. While we, most of the time experienced some action in the form of strikes, the only one who had success was Charlie -- he managed to land a beautiful fourteen pounder. Pat and I had fish on, but suffered the ignominy of breaking them off! We fished the Thompson in the vicinity of Spences Bridge from the mouth of

the Nicola River and downriver for about three miles. In addition, we also caught Kamloops trout to about two pounds.

One of our younger members in the Club, Tim Bohlin, has been fishing it regularly - and still does. His success rate is a LOT higher than ours was!

DB: Did you ever fish with Ed Foss, Al Pratt, and Steve Raymond.....? Do you like that sort of fishing as well as your lake fishing?

GN: Absolutely! I like to go to the Olympic or Key Peninsulas, to Penrose Point or Joemma State Parks for saltwater fishing for sea-run cutthroat from the shore, from a float tube, or with someone from their small boat. This fishing is best from around the first of October until February or March, or until it gets too cold or miserable to fish.

You start out blind casting until you spot a roll or a group of feeding fish. If nothing shows, just keep on moving along the shore keeping your fly fairly close to shore. If a rise is spotted and it's out of casting range, just keep moving toward it. They will generally hang around without moving very far, and if you manage to get close to the rises, very often they will hit. A successful sea-run fisherman is a hunter -- hunting for rises or schools of baitfish -- they're right under the bait. Small streamer flies stripped usually rather rapidly are quite successful. Floating, sink-tip, or full sinking lines are used depending upon a variety of conditions.

Our Club had an informal prize called the Goofus Award originated and designed solely by Al Pratt. This award was bestowed each year at the Christmas party. The winner of this prize was the unfortunate member who executed the dumbest, bumbled mess during the year -- judged by Alan. The year was around 1975 or so when Alan, himself, got into trouble and got that year's award -- judged by a panel of his peers. He was on the Olympic Peninsula near Belfair fishing for sea-runs out of his little pram near shore. After he was through, he decided to row in to shore from where he was. When he got in to shallow water he stepped out to wade in to shore pulling his pram. He hadn't checked the bottom and he immediately sank to his knees in MUCK. He couldn't wade -- he couldn't get back into the boat -- he couldn't pull the boat. He finally got on his hands and knees and crawled to shore pulling the boat plus a LOT of mud while his buddies stood there on shore taking pictures and hooting! That was Al Pratt. He was an Ad Lib story teller. Once he established a theme for one of his stories, he went on in his inimitable slow drawl -- always thinking while talking, embellishing everything he just said. He sat there developing his story while everyone else was having stomach pains from laughing so much and so hard -- he had a mind like a steel trap -- every time it snapped -- more pains!!

Ed Foss and Grant Putnam were a grand duo for fishing cutthroat and rainbow trout in lakes south of the Seattle area. In fact, they were together at Tanwax Lake when Grant died of a heart attack while casting to a rising trout. Their haunts were Kapowsin, Tanwax, and Ohop Lakes. Late in the Fall was their best time, casting to large cruising feeders. I fished with them a number of times and learned a lot about their habits and methods. They're all gone now, but their legacy lingers in the waters of Tanwax where Ed and Grant's ashes have been spread. Ed and Grant's widow, Millie, eventually married and continued with their fishing exploits until Ed's untimely death.

This trio fished quite regularly in Oregon at Crane Prairie, Wickiup, Davis and Hosmer Lakes.

DB: Did you know Errol Champion?

GN: Yes, I knew him when he was here as a member of our Club, and met with him several times in Juneau, Alaska. Any time any of us could travel up to Juneau to fish, we'd manage to have lunch or dinner with him. I understand that when he first went up there he became an Alderman in Juneau for several terms, and after he left that position he became involved in some sort of Disposal enterprise. While he was up there he was involved quite heavily with The Federation of Fly Fishers and was eventually elected President as you were too.

DB: How about Lake Lenice?

GN: Quite a few years back in the late Sixties at our annual Christmas party, Cliff Millenbach from the Game Department asked me if I had tried Lake Lenice yet. After I replied that I had never heard of it, or knew where it was. He explained that the Department kept checking the alkalinity of its water, and finally decided that it had reached an acceptable level for planting. He divulged that they had planted it in the Spring of 1967 with 25,800 rainbow fingerlings and didn't say anything about it. He explained to me where it was and asked if I would go and try it and report back to him my assessment of it. My first trip was in the Spring of 1968. I was told to drive across the railroad tracks and head for the lake being careful to avoid soft sandy spots and to park off the road where the car couldn't be seen from the road. I was able to drive all the way to the bluff and park my car in a good spot. These were the days when the water level was well below where it is now, and it was possible to walk completely around the lake without getting my feet wet -- no water flowing in and none flowing out. Every place I stopped to cast, I caught at least half a dozen fish. They were short fish -- ten to twelve inches long, but they were about five inches deep, FAT, and STRONG! They hit hard and and ran fast -- and jumped! Tiny heads and big bodies like footballs. I had never seen rainbows like that. I had the lake all to myself for a season without seeing ONE person fishing -- only one group of two duck hunters in the Fall, and even though I scared their ducks away, they watched in amazement as I released one fish after another. I had to tell them that I was test fishing for the Game Department -- I don't know if they believed me!!

I had a good report for Cliff that next Monday. After I gave him my fantastic report, he said to me "Why don't you keep it a secret for the rest of the season and we'll open it for next season?" I was good to my word and said nothing, and he was good for his. I fished it to the end of May, which he told me would be the closing date of a split season, if it were open, and the opening date for the Fall season would be September 15th. He wanted another report for the rest of the year. That Fall in September I witnessed a tremendous growth in the fish over the summer. I was releasing MANY fish from two to two and a half pounds. It was first listed in the Regulation book in 1969 and that opened the gates and it spread like wildfire. I took Enos Bradner with me that Spring and he admitted very freely that he had never seen anything like it.

TB: Could you talk a little bit about your involvement with the Washington Fly Fishing Club and some of their conservation efforts?

GN: In 1942, the Columbia Basin Reclamation Project reached full operation with the completion of Grand Coulee Dam, and the Columbia River behind the dam began its relentless climb to the top of the spillway. This resulted in a substantial rise in the water table throughout the Basin. All the marshy places and low spots began filling with water -- low spots became ponds, ponds became lakes, existing lakes became deeper and alkalinity decreased. These waters became extremely rich in food quantity and quality, spawning all manner of aquatic life and supporting accompanying terrestrial life. All that was needed was to introduce fish. In those days, there was a little more budget for the game departments to do the introducing -- which they did in as rapid order as practical. In the Forties and early Fifties there were many tales of prodigious fish being caught in many of these new and newly stocked waters. The fishing in those days was exciting because almost anyone could find new untapped waters with a little effort. However, there was something disturbing. Fish were planted in the Spring as two to three inch fingerlings that could reach up to a fat ten to twelve inches by late Fall. The following Fall they could reach sixteen to eighteen inches, and the third year twenty two to twenty four inches. The problem being that about 35% of Game Department fish will reach spawning maturity and die after the first year. Of those that survive, about 65% will reach the same point by the following year, and for the third year, there will be very few survivors, and a four year old fish is a rarity. This is before angling kill is considered. In this same time period, some states were experimenting with "fishing for fun" programs and by the early Sixties Washington was introducing "Quality Waters" fishing, but Game Department fish were not providing "Quality Fish" in any quantity. So a proposal was made by the Washington Department of Game, and the Washington Cooperative Fishery Unit at the University of Washington, assisted by the Washington

Fly Fishing Club, to look for and acquire a strain of rainbow trout that has a three to four year spawning maturation to allow for a longer growing span. Lake Lenice was chosen for this study because of its high nutrient water.

The first attempt was to try to obtain from Canada the eggs and milt from their Gerrard strain of Kamloops trout which has a known life before spawning of six to seven years, but Canada would not agree. They did however agree to let us experiment with their Pennask strain which has a life of three to four years before spawning'. The Game Department received the eggs at their hatchery, fertilized them with Pennask milt, raised them to planting age and with the clubs assistance planted 5000 of them in the lake in October of 1969. The lake was closed the first part of 1970 to allow for orientation. When the lake opened in the Fall, the Club was there assisting in a creel check. In that opening day's check, there was reported to be only one Canadian fish caught. Later that Fall, I decided to snoop around. We weren't aware of the fact that the Reclamation Bureau had deflected some irrigation water into the lake at its upper or eastern end to provide more and moving water. I hiked upstream around the bend and saw a wide spot in the stream with slow moving water and when I made my first cast, a fish grabbed it and immediately came completely out of the water like Canadian fish do. I don't know how many fish I hooked, but they were all Kamloops. They had all migrated upstream. The local farmers and field helpers got wind of this and since it was a stream not affected by the lake closures, they caught all the fish by any means they could including over limit catches for food. The Bureau put in a fish barrier and made another plant of 10,175 in November of 1970. The 1971 creel check was a lot more satisfactory with many Pennask fish taken. Now here's the odd conclusion to this story. At all the creel checks after this point, it was found that the Pennask fish were reaching spawning maturity at the same rate as the Washington fish were. We took them from their home watershed to an alien one for them, and they apparently converted to it. The conclusion is that one does not fool around with Mother Nature. This program terminated at five years with a reasonable result, but no definitive solution to the original problem. However, the last nine or ten years in the labs, other experimentation in fish genetics has resulted in rainbows called triploids which are sterile. These do not spawn, but grow rapidly if planted in rich lakes and seem to be satisfying the requirements sought for in the earlier trials. Almost all of the "quality" lakes are now being stocked with them

Complete reports can be made available from the Washington Cooperative Fishery Unit at the University of Washington.

TB: Is there anything else that you think is important about your experience and your contributions to fly fishing that I haven't asked you? Do you have any comments about how fly fishing has changed since you got into it?

GN: I don't feel as if I've contributed anything. I show off my "artwork" because I'm able to and want to. I'm not an artist -- it's not my mission in life, but I do like to express my views through displays. I'd like to slow the pace down -- there are too many people who want to 'join the throng' because fly fishing IS a growing recreational activity. We fly fishers are victims of our own excesses. We promote the activity, have all kinds of classes, clubs, conclaves, and urge people to become fly fishers, and we are starting to suffer. So we have to have more of the same to teach the newcomers the tactics, methods, etiquettes, regulations, and increased conservation methods employed in our recreation. We are shifting more time to enjoying educating the newcomers rather than being able to enjoy doing it ourselves. And if we don't make these adjustments we will be over-run with newcomers who know very little about the nuances, but still want to "fly fish;" our days of the kind of solitude that we have known, and the good fishing that we have had are being numbered and diminishing. I don't think that I am the only person in the world who thinks this way. Everyone probably knows a few. After the showing of the movie, *A river runs through it*, there was a tremendous spike in participants who wanted to jump on the band wagon. The spike not only did not diminish, it is still growing. I know that your Club conducts all kinds of tying, casting, and fishing classes and you sometimes may wonder why-- ours does too. And so do almost all the Clubs that I associate with. I personally, ordinarily conduct two classes per year in fly tying during two weeks each Fall and Spring with fly casting instructions on the week ends -- all part of the problem. I would like to tell you about an incident that illustrates what I mean.

When I was at Eliguk Lake some years back, Moe's good friend John Blackwell, who owns and operates Moose

Lake Lodge about sixteen miles north, called him and asked if he could come over and pick me up for a couple of days as he had a group of six New York City customers who wanted to fly fish for a week and who said that they were fully equipped, but might need some assistance. They were coming in on a charter flight and were due in about three hours. John hopped into his float plane to come over and pick me up. By the time I packed my gear for the two days, John was there to get me, and by the time I got all settled in to my lodgings and got my gear ready we had only about an hour to wait before lunch and the time they were due. They arrived -- an older man, his middle aged son, and his grandson, plus three of his business associates. I sent them up to the Lodge for lunch while I examined their gear and what they brought with them. I couldn't believe their gear -- Bamboo rods, the most expensive reels, vests, waders, flies, nets, hats, fly boxes, all with the price tags still on them -- never been used!! As they finished their lunches, one by two they came down to the dock and demanded to be set up to go out fishing. I conducted a 'class' on the dock in setting up their rods and reels -- I next started to conduct a 'class' in casting a fly -- "Do you have to 'cast' a fly? Don't you just put it out there in the water where a fish is?" -- "No, you've got to get it out away from where you are and strip it in - like this" -- a short cast out, and stripping it in I hook a LARGE squawfish. I bring it up to the dock and release it -- pandemonium breaks loose! "How come you let it go? That's what we came up here for!!" "No, you came up here to catch trout -- this was a scrap fish" "What's a scrap fish, it looked pretty big to me?" "Those are the kinds that you don't want! Now I'll put out a few more casts to show you the motions for getting your lines out." Unfortunately, during this demonstration, I hooked into a large rainbow and pulled it to the dock. John's son was there with his net -- we netted and measured it at a full twenty four inches, and released it. I was at fault for having a fly on, I should have replaced it with a hunk of yarn, but the damage was done -- those guys spent most of the next three days fishing off the dock for squawfish and that one rainbow, until John's son convinced them to go out in the boats. One of them did catch that rainbow off the dock and killed it.

For quite a few years, I prowled central Washington potholes in the Columbia Basin and the Desert Wildlife Area. There were many lakes and ponds that appeared because of the rise in the water table caused by Grand Coulee Dam. As the Game Department gets stocking money they go ahead and schedule many waters that they keep their eyes on for stocking or rehabilitation. If the water is satisfactory after testing, stocking will be the activity. If the water has been very popular and productive in the past but has gotten full of scrap fish, a complete rehab will be undertaken. This involves poisoning to remove the scrap fish that have infected it, letting it lie fallow for a year, and then restocking it. Lakes can be stocked each season depending upon infestation, drastic changes in salinity or alkalinity, winter kill, summer kill, farm pollution, or chemical spills. Some lakes that become subject to any one of these factors may not be saved, but if the water remains in good condition restocking can be done season after season. Our Club and many others in the State volunteer routinely to assist the Game Department in these activities. Many of these waters are not listed in the fishing regulations. This does not mean that there are no fish in them -- many times I have come upon a small body of water, beat my way through the cattails and reeds ringing the lake and end up vainly casting to no fish! Other times I have done the same thing and found a few Bonanzas -- three to five pound fish!!! I experienced just that when some lakes were unknown, like The Caliche Lakes off I-90, the Royal Potholes, some ponds in The Desert Wildlife Area, the ponds below O'Sullivan Dam, the Vantage Seeps. I used to keep most of these to myself, but over the years, I'd develop a guilty conscience and take a couple of friends in with me, and usually after a time that would be the end of my secrets. That needn't be the end of these possibilities because the Game Department still stocks waters, they still clean out their tanks, and there will still be the odd fish in many unknown waters, so I would encourage the younger whippersnappers who have the gumption and stamina to try new things to explore and discover!

Unfortunately, the State of Washington doesn't have any NATIVE waters that I know of -- even in British Columbia they are getting very scarce. So much of our fishing is dependant upon stocking programs. The only place that I know of fairly close that has native waters is Eliguk Lake. I plan on being there for the first three weeks in June as usual. Come join me. Fly fisher persons get preferential treatment!!

