The transcript that follows is of the audio portion of a videotaped interview conducted with Steve Raymond on September 27, 2002, along the banks of the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River in northwestern Washington State. The interviewer is Chuck Ballard of the Washington Fly Fishing Club. The interview is part of the Club's project to record its history through the recollections of its members.

The interview is the gift of Steve Raymond.

SR: Fly fishing is unique, fun, endless, and it allows you to use the resource without using it up. It has immeasurable depth, you never learn as much as there is to know about fly fishing, no matter how long you live or how much you do. I remember what Arnold Gingrich once said, "Fly fishing is the most fun you can have standing up."

I was born in Bellingham. My father was an Army officer so our family traveled a lot. I lived in a lot of different places. But we always maintained a family residence in Bellingham. I was lucky enough to spend enough time there to graduate from high school. And then I went on to the University of Washington and majored in journalism and was editor of the campus newspaper, and raised all kinds of journalistic hell while I was there. I also went through the Navy ROTC and was commissioned as an officer when I graduated and spent a couple of years aboard a carrier in the Pacific after I got out of college.

CB: How long ago and when did you become a member of the WFFC?

SR: Well, after my service in the Navy I came back to Seattle, went to work for the *Seattle Times* and resumed fishing, which had sort of been interrupted while I was in college and then the Navy. It was sort of a family tradition that we'd go up to Hihium Lake almost every year. At that time, Circle W Ranch up at Hihium was owned by Pat Kirkpatrick, who was a member of the Washington Fly Fishing Club. And it was Pat who had originally told me about the club.

He also told me that a couple of my *Times* colleagues were prominent members. Those were Enos Bradner and Alan Pratt. I was working as a reporter at the *Times,* covering King County Courthouse, so I hardly ever went near the main office, and I had never met either one of those guys. Bradner of course was the outdoor editor and he seemed sort of like God to me, you know, unapproachable to some young guy like me. So one day out of the blue, I called Al Pratt and introduced myself over the phone, said I heard about the club and that he was a member and that I was interested. So he invited me to a meeting and I showed up for the meeting and found out that Al was home sick but he had arranged for Bradner to be my host.

I ended up sitting at dinner with Bradner and Dawn Holbrook, which I thought was pretty lofty company. That was out at the old Edmund S. Meany Hotel in the University District where the club met then. I applied for membership and I think it was in the spring of 1965 that I became a member. I was elected ghillie, I guess in 1967, and then second vice president, first vice president, and then president in 1970.

CB: Anything you can think about during that tenure that was significant as president?

SR: Well, the year I was president, one of the things that I initiated was a review of the club by-laws, which were firmly out of date at that time. We went through the agonizing process of adopting a whole new set of by-laws. We also established a committee to look at the club finances to see if we were charging enough money in dues to pay for all of our programs.

I remember another highlight that year was we had a clinic for the public down at the old Aqua Theatre on Green Lake, and we had Lee and Joan Wulff come out and put on the clinic for us. That was the occasion where we had some anesthetized Donaldson trout that we held in the water offstage and Dick Thompson was down there in a wet suit. Lee Wulff cast offstage and Dick grabbed his fly and stuck it in the mouth of a 12-pound Donaldson trout and Lee Wulff started playing this enormous trout and the audience just went crazy. It was pretty hokey but it was also kind of spectacular.

CB: What was your participation in the Federation of Fly Fishers?

SR: Well, the same year I was president of the club, I was up fishing at Hihium in September of that year. In fact I remember I was playing a fish at the time, and Pat Kirkpatrick pulled alongside in his boat and said, "We just got a long-distance phone call down at the ranch from Bradner over at the Federation conclave in Sun Valley. And he said that Lew Bell of Everett has been elected president of the Federation and he wants you to be secretary." So I had to make a decision on the spot, and I was playing this fish, so I said, "Yes, I'll do it." And Pat took off and I landed the fish. I didn't know Lew very well at that time but during the year that he served as president and I served as secretary, we became very close friends. And we were close friends for as long as he lived afterward.

After that year I served a couple of years on the Federation executive committee as a director and then they asked me to take over editorship of the Federation magazine, *The Flyfisher,* which had never been able to achieve its goal of regular quarterly publication, and was also struggling financially. So we moved it, lock stock and barrel, from New York to Seattle and I became the editor for the next five years. And we were able to get it on a regular quarterly publication schedule and get the budget under control.

That was a lot of hard work but it was an interesting experience too because it put me in touch with people all over world, really, and a lot of them pretty famous fly fishers who wrote. During that same period that I was editor of *The Flyfisher,* I was elected a director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, which is located back in Manchester, Vermont. Much to my surprise I was elected its first western vice president and my job was to try to drum up interest in the museum out here. I was able to locate a few artifacts that were sent back and donated to the museum. Some of them were on display the last time I was there, so that was gratifying.

CB: How did you get started in the writing of your books?

SR: I learned to fly fish from my dad, who was an ardent fly fisherman, but he'd suffered a pretty severe leg injury as a young man so he couldn't wade rivers. His favorite fishing was in the Kamloops trout lakes up in British Columbia and that's where he took me for the first time at the age of five. So when I became an adult and was on my own, I sort of naturally gravitated back to those lakes and did most of my fishing there. That was probably in the late sixties. I wanted to learn more about the Kamloops trout, and was somewhat amazed to find out that there was virtually nothing in the public print about them. So I started doing some research and discovered that they'd probably been studied more thoroughly than just about any other subspecies of trout that you can name and I started gathering all this information from scientific publications.

Somewhere along the line it occurred to me that it would be selfish just to hold on to that. And that led to the idea of a book and so my first book was *Kamloops: An Angler's Study of the Kamloops Trout*, and that was published in 1971. [It] has gone through two complete revised editions since then, but that's what got

me started. I've written six other books since then, all of them quite different. Some of them tend to be more philosophy, I suppose, than practical fishing. But some of them are practical how-to books as well. There was another one called *The Estuary Flyfisher*, which—it's really the first book that kind of chronicled the fly fishing for sea-run cutthroat and salmon and steelhead in the estuaries of Puget Sound and British Columbia and the Northwest. Then I wrote the text for *Backcasts*, the history of the fly club, its first 50 years.

My other books, *The Year of the Angler*, *The Year of the Trout*, *Steelhead Country*, and *Rivers of the Heart,* are more contemplative in nature. I guess in those, what I've been trying to do is help people who fish see things that they might not have seen otherwise or think about fishing in ways they might not have thought about otherwise. And also I've been very fortunate in the time that I've lived in knowing some of the real pioneers of Northwest fly fishing and I've tried to collect some of their wisdom and pass it on through the pages of my books.

CB: How many fly patterns could you say you've attributed specifically to? That you had created, I'll call it.

SR: Well, I don't know, half a dozen, maybe. Probably the two flies that are best known are the Golden Shrimp, which I developed up in B.C. as an imitation of the freshwater scuds in the lakes up there-and the Cutthroat Candy, which was probably the first dry fly used for sea-run cutthroat out in Puget Sound. That was sort of patterned after the Salmon Candy series that Lloyd Frese developed out at Hosmer Lake. I borrowed some of his ideas and part of the name, too. Of course Lloyd was an associate member of our club for many years.

More recently, on this river, I've come up with a fly pattern I call a Judge Boldt, which is a dry-fly pattern designed to be fished with a riffle hitch. I call it the Judge Boldt because, you know some people say Judge Boldt took away all of our fish and I take all of my fish, or practically all my fish, on this fly, so it seemed like a good name.

CB: This river has a real significance to the club and obviously to you, and that's why we're here. So what can you tell us about the history of this river, the North Fork of the Stilly?

SR: Well, when the club was founded back in 1939, one of its first objectives was to try to get some water made fly-fishing-only. It went after both Pass Lake and this river and the South Fork of the Skykomish. And it was successful at two out of three of those, Pass Lake and the North Fork of the Stillaguamish. I believe the North Fork was the first steelhead river ever designated fly-fishing-only. That came only after a lot of hard work, a really concentrated campaign by the fly club members and there weren't that many of them in those days. Letcher Lambuth was the person who really orchestrated that campaign.

The fishing back in those days was pretty wonderful. Deer Creek lies just about a half mile upstream. And there was a big native run of summer steelhead that came up here and spawned in Deer Creek. That was the reason that so many members of the fly club came up here to fish. If you went a day without hooking at least one steelhead~~,~~ in those days, that was pretty unusual.

Of course a lot of famous fishermen fished up here and a lot of famous fly patterns were developed here. The steelhead run that comes up here now usually peaks in about the first two weeks of July and some years there's kind of a steady influx of fish after that and maybe a secondary peak in September. In some years there's not, I think maybe this is one of the latter years. The kings come early, stay late. We get chum, we get the pinks, even a few run-of-the-river sockeye. There used to be a big native run of coho, which is almost gone because of all the logging and damage that's been done to Deer Creek where they mostly spawn. But there's some evidence that those are starting to come back. So, yes, this is a river of abundance, or at least it used to be, with all those different species in it. Of course it's got Dolly Varden in it too.

CB: The Deer Creek slide has contributed a lot to the siltation of the river and probably done a lot of damage for habitat. Is that stabilized?

SR: Yes, the Deer Creek slide is actually from DeForest Creek, which is a tributary of Deer Creek. -It came in 1984, which incidentally was the same year that we put Bradner's ashes in the river right out here. It's not very funny but one of the local jokes is the river wasn't clean for years afterwards. But that was because of the slide up there. It was huge, I mean, it just sent oceans of silt down the river for a three-year period steadily. And during that time there was virtually no fishing down here. If I wanted to fish I had to go upstream or go somewhere else. It filled in the river tremendously and raised the bed probably at least three feet, maybe four. So the river since has not been able to carry the same volume of water it once did. When it floods, it floods worse than it ever did before.

CB: Was the slide attributed to logging practice, or was it just a natural slide, as near as you can tell?

SR: Well, if you were a logger, of course, logging had nothing to do with it. If you weren't a logger, of course, logging was responsible. You know it's hard to pin the blame specifically on something like that in the sense that it's hard to go to court and prove that cutting down so many trees in a given area caused that slide. But I think the evidence is pretty clear that that's what happened. And it wasn't just in that one place; Deer Creek itself had been severely logged all the way down to the bank in many areas. If there was a bright side to that DeForest Creek slide, it suddenly made people realize what a terrible problem we had up there. The state and the Forest Service and the commercial timberland owners all declared a moratorium on logging in that area to give the stream a chance to recover.

There was a fairly concerted effort of restoration which did a lot of good and improved the habitat. Deer Creek is probably slowly coming back, but I doubt if it will ever be the same beautiful, pristine stream it was originally. The Stillaguamish Indian -Tribe has achieved federal recognition in the past few years and they've been fairly vigilant for the river and its tributaries, including Deer Creek, trying to make sure that nothing untoward happens and keep an eye on poachers~~,~~--there's still a lot of poaching goes on up in this country~~,~~--and generally looking out for the fish. I think their impact has been more beneficial than otherwise.

Right at the end of World War II there was a farmer who owned all this property along the river who subdivided it into lots and seven members of the fly club bought adjoining lots up here and most built cabins on them. From upstream, down, let's see, the members were Ralph Wahl, Gus Middleton, Ken Onimous, Enos Bradner and Sandy Bacon; Frank Headrick, Walt Johnson, and Wes Drain. Then Al Knudson, who belonged to the Everett Club, had a piece of property just below Wes Drain's. So at that time we had seven adjoining lots owned by fly club members and now I'm the only one who still owns one. I bought my place from Sandy Bacon and Enos Bradner in 1976.

It has kind of an interesting history because when it came up for sale Bradner was out covering the atomic bomb test at Bikini Atoll for the *Seattle Times* and Frank Headrick somehow got word to him that the property was for sale and asked if he wanted Frank to conclude the sale for him and Bradner did. Sandy Bacon played in that equation somehow and the two of them ended up owning the place. They built a wooden deck with a trap door in the bottom and a hole underneath were they used to cache their food and supplies. They would come up here and pitch a tent on the deck and stay in the tent and fish the river.

Then in the late 1960's or around 1970, Sandy moved away to Portland and kind of left Bradner in charge of things. But long before that, the cabin that's there now was raised on the wooden deck and Charlie Bradner, who was Bradner's nephew, did most of the work building the cabin. When it flooded, Frank Headrick put it on jacks and raised it up to try to keep it from flooding again, which turned out to be in vain. (You can see on the back of the door where they reported the level of the various floods, this was the worst one.)
In 1976, I bought it from Bradner and Bacon and I've tried to keep it pretty much just as it was then, because I sort of regard it as a historical shrine. And I think if Bradner were here today he'd know where

everything is. But it's been my getaway for many years now and I love the place and I love the river and I've got lots of good memories up here.

Bradner became almost like a second father to me. Once I got to know him, we fished together an awful lot. I learned an immeasurable amount from him, not just about fly fishing but about the whole history of outdoor sports in Washington State, because he was a walking encyclopedia, he talked incessantly. We were very close right up until the time of his death.

Yet Al Pratt, who was my sponsor, became another very close friend and we fished together an awful lot. Of course he was a genius at comedy; he was probably the funniest man I've ever known. After he passed away I had the honor and pleasure of pulling together the unfinished book manuscript that he was working on and editing it and seeing it published. *Pardon My Backcast* was the name of it.

Letcher Lambuth was another very close friend until his death. I spent countless hours down in his basement workshop learning how he made his spiral bamboo rods and practically everything else that he fished with. We talked about books and we talked about fishing techniques and he was another man who was extremely learned in the ways of fly fishing. He shared many of his secrets with me and I've tried to incorporate some of those in my books. After he passed away, I was able to edit his unpublished book manuscript and see its publication too, which I felt was another privilege.

Ralph Wahl, who owned a place right up the river here, was kind of my steelhead fishing mentor. He taught me more about steelhead fly fishing than anybody else. He went to high school with my mother and father in Bellingham. I can remember as a small boy going into his department store in Bellingham and seeing him there. But of course I never really knew him until I got to become a member of the fly club.

Ed Foss was another very close friend of mine in the club. He's the one that introduced me to Hosmer Lake and also to sea-run cutthroat fishing. I can't think of a bigger debt that I owe anybody than for something like that. He was a wonderful friend.

There used to be a member of our club, Dr. Nate Smith, who was a very well-known pediatrician. When my son Randy was born, I was talking to Nate and I said, "Nate, what can I do to assure that my son grows up to be a fly fisher?" and he said, "There's absolutely nothing you can do, it's either in the genes or it isn't. And if he's got the right genes, he'll be a fly fisherman." I guess Randy got the right genes because he loves it, I think he's going to love it more all the time. He complains a lot about not being able fish as much as he'd like but then I think we all went through that stage.

CB: What has the club meant to you as a member, Steve?

SR: Well, let me put it this way: When I was in college I belonged to a fraternity and I made a lot of very close friends. And for the thirty-seven years I've been a member of the fly club, it's been my fraternity. I feel that these men are my brothers and they enrich my life immeasurably. I don't know what I would have done without them.

Fly fishing doesn't come free of charge; if you enjoy the sport you also have a responsibility to care for it and to work to preserve its ethics and traditions and the resources on which it depends. Even more in the future than in the past it's going to require tremendous investment of time and effort and sweat and tears and money and just about everything we have to give.

I don't think our generation or the ones who preceded it did a particularly good job of caring for things, and that makes it even tougher now for the people who come after us. They're going to have to work hard to assure that there's always some good fishing. I hope they will do that not only for their own sakes, but for their children and their grandchildren.

But I also hope that they remember the club is a wonderful institution and its traditions are worth keeping because they provide a thread of continuity that goes all the way back to the beginning and extends right up to the present, and I hope they will keep them. And I hope they have as much fun as I did.