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This interview was conducted with Gordy Young on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1996. The interviewer is Charles V Ballard of the Washington Fly Fishing Club.

**CB:** Today is February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1996, and we're going to talk [to] Gordy Young [about] his experiences with the Washington Fly Fishing Club. So, Gordy, let's kind of start off with [a little of] your life story, if you could kind of shed some light on –

**GY:** Sure! Within a month I will be eighty-five years old. I was born on March 14, 1911 in West Seattle. I'm one of the few living people who were born in West Seattle that are still around! I grew up there as a child with my family; my father, my sister, and I, and mother. Dad was somewhat of an outdoors person but was more influenced perhaps by his brother-in-law, my uncle and his family, because my uncle came from New Zealand. He was a fly fisherman when he came to this country and so he introduced it to my father before I was old enough to go. By 1921, when I was ten years old, the two families drove our old touring cars and camp gear and went up into the Cle Elum River, up near the source of it, not too far from Hyas Lake, where there was an old prospector's cabin that was up for grabs. We occupied it for two weeks and many years afterwards for that period of time. On the Cle Elum River my father taught me to cast an old cane rod, that was one of his old ones and my uncle helped me too. But you know we didn't know anything about fly fishing compared to what you do today. Uncle Bill knew something about the selection of flies, the difference between wets and dries, that sort of thing. But after I got interested in this [(when I was a little older than ten)], I went down to buy flies before we went up to the river, [and] I'd go to the hardware store, where we had sporting equipment in those days. You bought baseball bats, hardware and fishing tackle in a hardware store.

**CB:** That's where you got the stuff?

**GY:** Yes.

**CB:** I'll be darned.

**GY:** And the flies they had for sale were all eastern patterns. I remember so proudly buying a Parmachene Bell, and the Silver Doctor, and they were on six-inch snells with a loop in them. Our leaders were cat-gut leaders that had three loops, one on the end and two for dropper flies. I actually didn't know any better, but the fish didn't either! The fish – they were small Eastern Brook Trout in the stream – but I could go down to the stream before mother had breakfast ready and catch enough fish for our whole family for breakfast.

**CB:** That's amazing.

**GY:** That was up in the Cle Elum River back in the early Twenties. I did give it up a little bit when I was in school at the university and father died (early in life). I got interested in it again after the family was started. The boys, the two sons, were growing up (in junior high) and my good friend in West Seattle, whom I knew so many years, Roger Dahl, Roger was a leading member of the West Seattle Sportsmen's Club. Now the West Seattle Sportsmen's Club was not a fly club, it was sports fishing. It was hunting and fishing both and they used salmon eggs and corn and Chummed and everything else, you know! But Roger was a fly fisherman, so he and I kind of hit it off together. Incidentally he was an executive down at the Sears here in Seattle, and he got the boys jobs in high school. We all loved Roger and his family, so we went fishing quite frequently. He had a boat and he saw to it that I knew where to get one too. So, the boys never started – well yes I guess they did fish a little while with bait, but it wasn't long before they were fishing with flies too. We'd go up to his summer home, which was up on Similk Bay, which is up there in Skagit Bay, you got right close to where Pass Lake is as you drive out to Anacortes. We'd go over and fish in Pass Lake. [It was] just a little short trip, we'd take our cars over with our boats on top and launch them in Pass Lake. Roger happened to know some of the fellows in the Washington Fly Fishing Club who once in awhile would be fishing in this same lake.



**CB:** And what year was that, about?

**GY:** That would be about, oh, 1956.

**CB:** Oh, okay.

**GY:** 1954, 1955, 1956, somewhere along in there, before the boys got out of high school. And I remember Howard Gray and Enos Bradner were friends of Roger's, because Roger was into the state sports council work and so forth, and they wanted Roger to join the club. But Roger was a teetotaler, and he noticed these guys up there imbibed a little bit and he didn't want to [get] mixed up with that. So he didn't join the Washington Fly Fishing Club but it wasn't long before I was interested enough to want to join. I'd met Holbrook up there too, and he was quite a recruiter for the club, he didn't care who he recruited, I guess that's why he got me!

**CB:** That's not good input, I don't think, I think he did a really good job.

**GY:** Well, he worked off a clipboard and asked questions after they got in the club. Anyway, he and Gray sponsored me, in about 1957-58, somewhere along in there. Pete Baird was president, and then Harry Bailey followed him, and before I became president I was invited as a guest to go over to Jameson Lake when we used to fish the north end of Jameson Lake as a club, go over there at that resort and stay overnight. I had a station wagon with a sleeping bag and a boat on top and I parked right next to Frank Headrick and his son Bob, and got to know them. Harry Bailey met me there as I came down, it was strange to me, I'd never been there before. He knew I was a guest, and he said, "Gordy" he says, "that little trailer over there is where I stay, and after you get set up there's a bottle of Early Times [(bourbon)] on the counter and you go over and help yourself to a drink." Now that was the kind of welcome you got when you went to the first outing of the fly fishing club that you'd been to and I thought that was real [nice] and I've always remembered it!

Well, that was a wonderful experience too; it was not long before I was member and working hard at it. In those days we met up in the Parlor A and Parlor B of the [Edmund Meany] Hotel, and Mrs. Olsen was the catering person in charge and she used to take care of us real well up there. We had a lot of fun in those

two parlors that were on the Mezzanine, they were blocked off and we [had] our own meeting without any interference.

Then I remember it wasn't long before I was second vice-president in charge of programs and I guess that must've been about 1958. Then the next year they chose me to be president. That was the year that Bradner came back from the first conclave of [fly fishermen], no I'm getting ahead of myself here, this would be about 1965, and in the Sixties we were up there in the hotel. Because Bradner came back from the first conclave in Eugene, where Lee Wulff and Ed Zern and, and Roderick Haig-Brown, and Dick Thompson, and a lot of these famous fly fishers got together with Bill Nelson, and Stan Walters of the McKenzie Fly Fishers, and Ralph Wahl, and they started the Federation of Fly Fishers in Eugene in 1965.

**CB:** Now did you go to that Gordy? Were you there?

**GY:** No I didn't get to go to that. I had to sell sugar for a living and that was in the spring and all the strawberries and fruit comes ripe at that time and I had to go out and call on my canners and freezers that bought bulk sugar, so I couldn't go down there. Bradner came home as the vice president and Gene Anderegg from New York was president. But Bradner's task was to find somebody who could share the [work on the] next conclave, and find a place for it and do everything – start from scratch! Well Bradner came into the lunch one day and we sat down, there was about fifteen of us I guess, we were all having a drink and having lunch, and Bradner brought this up, and he looked right across the table at me and says, "I think Gordy ought to be the guy that ought to head this thing up next year." So I couldn't back out very well, or I didn't; anyway I was [saddled with that]. I says, "Well I'll take it if I can get some help from right in this room, so we can meet once a week and, and know what's going on in our planning." So I got Dr. Nate Smith to be co-chairman with me, because he had a Watts line in his medical office, he could call all over the country.

**CB:** Well that was handy.

**GY:** It was the same thing today as a fax line or something, you know.

**CB:** Right, that helps a lot.

**GY:** Yes, it sure does. And so I got him and then Hank Beatty, who was a member of the club at that time and a very active fellow. He was the P.R. man and the sports information man for West Coast Airlines. They went all over the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain areas and featured skiing, fishing, hunting, places to go in their smaller airplanes – something like Horizon is today, or something of that sort. So, and he says, "Oh I know my way up Sun Valley," says, "I know the people over there and everything else." So I said, "Alright, you're in charge of finding a place for us."

He found us the most enjoyable place for a conclave over in Sun Valley at the Sun Valley Lodge and Inn over there, where everything was on the campus, the restaurants and the shops for the ladies to go spend their money in. Everything was right there; we had marvelous service from the staff. All I had to do was whistle and I got help all the time – projectors, more chairs, or whatever it was. Anyway we [mapped] out the conclave for 1969, it was in Sun Valley, over the Labor Day weekend. It was very well attended and it was the first big one we had that was planned.

Prior to that we met once at Jackson Hole, I should have included that prior to Sun Valley. But the Jackson Hole conclave was just kind of arranged by those guys from back east, Gene Anderegg, also Ed Strickland in Fresno was the treasurer. They organized that one but they said they couldn't do it, that's why Bradner came home and got me for the next one. I got a little mixed up there in my chronology. But anyway that was part of the deal. So, that was in 1969. This was put on by the Washington Fly Fishing Club-- this wasn't put on by a region, or a section of the country, that was the last conclave that was put on by a fly fishing club. The McKenzie Club had originated the first one in 1965 down in Eugene. Then, I don't remember who had the one in -- anyway the one at Jackson Hole. Anyway this one came along and after that they decided to go by councils. Because in 1969 Lew Bell was president from the Evergreen Club,



right north of us, and he inaugurated the idea that we can't operate with a president in New York and a secretary-treasurer in Fresno, and a treasurer somewhere. So we got together and he designated councils throughout the [United States].

*[both speaking over each other]*

**CB:** I see that's why they broke up.

**GY:** ...Northwest Council, and Southwest Council and Northeast and so forth. And after that a council put on a conclave.

**CB:** I see.

**GY:** Well that's kind of the start of the conclave, I don't know, you, you probably don't want to hear anymore about that. I kind of got started and I couldn't quite.

One time we stopped at Henry's Lake on the way home, that's just south of West Yellowstone there, in the southeast corner of Idaho. Four of us were there and having great fun in a cabin, and one time we were out fishing in the morning. I was with Bradner, and Gray and Wahl were in another boat. And we were fishing out [not] to far from where Gray and Wahl were fishing and we noticed that Gray was catching fish fairly regularly; these beautiful hybrids – Rainbow, and Eastern Brook Trout that are in Henry's Lake, beautiful fish. So we brought back a couple for the cook for lunch, but Gray kept catching fish after fish, and during the lunch [period] we were sitting around a table and Bradner always had a feud going with Gray anyway, they were both outdoor writers and they didn't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things, you know.

**CB:** They weren't the best of buddies, eh?

**GY:** Well they were in a way, but they still had a professional jealousy of each other. Bradner got up from the table and went outside the dining room [to] where the counter is where you register, the guests register. There's flies underneath there for sale, and you buy a license and that sort of stuff. And he say's to this guy that's running the place out there, "What in the world fly did this man buy, that's out there? He's catching fish after fish and he doesn't know a damn thing about fly fishing!" That's what he said about Gray! And everybody in the dining room is just laughing at him –

**CB:** That's great.

**GY:** Gray had out fished him you see, and he didn't like that.

**CB:** Bradner didn't like being out [fished] – that's interesting.

**GY:** No, no; particularly by Gray, who was an outdoor writer.

**CB:** Do they still have those hybrid fish in the lake?

**GY:** Yes, yes they do.

**CB:** They're a cross between Rainbow and ...Brook?

**GY:** No not Brook, I made that wrong. There are Brook in there; they're a cross between the Yellowstone Cutthroat and the Rainbow.

**CB:** Oh okay, okay. So for club history you were past president of the Washington Fly Fishing Club?

**GY:** Yes, yes, past president back there in the [1967] or so, along in there. After that I was always a volunteer chairman of something or other, worked on it for years, helped out with outdoor committees, and the nominating committees, and some other things. And was usually elected to some sort of an office so I've been on the board a good number of years. And for that reason I can sometimes bring up some things that are important when the history has to be straightened out as to which happened before something else.

**CB:** That's right.

**GY:** We had good times in Mexico, and after Jean and I retired we were friendly with Pat Kirkpatrick and his wife who ran the old Circle-W Ranch at [Hihium Lake] and in the winter time they got in the habit of going down there, they went down there before we did. Drove down with their Alaskan camper and we took ours and eventually joined them the next year, and went down several times. Camped right on the beach in the [Mar de Cortes] which is the inland sea in there in Mexico, and we weren't on the Pacific side, that's too stormy. But we were about halfway down or a little farther down the peninsula, halfway between [Loreto and La Paz]. We'd camp on the beach, we'd take our boats and our outboard motors, fly lines, and when the sea was fairly calm, like it would be down here at Alki Beach or Puget Sound or something without too many large waves or storm on anything, we'd go out fishing off – there were rocks about a mile off shore, big, big rock island out there, and we'd use lead core lines, they didn't have those extra sinking lines that they build today like 3M and Cortland do out of plastic. These were lead core, shooting head lines, and [we] used a large number four-oh hook, rig-eye hook, and tie orange flies on it, with an orange chenille body, a hot orange body with a [palmered] orange feather. And some saddle-hackles the same shade of color for the tail that would wiggle. And we'd cast them as far as we could, you don't have to worry about presentation because you're fishing about 70 feet deep. And let them sink down to the bottom and wiggle them around, and occasionally you'd latch on to a Yellow Tail, and those were fish! Boy, they, some of them got up as high as twenty pounds.

**CB:** Wow.

**GY:** Only some of them. I lost those, it got that high or if Pat connected with one that was that high well I figured if I got one that was ten I was doing real well.

**CB:** That's exciting, yes.

**GY:** And I'd bring it home and we couldn't eat it all so we shared it with the native fishermen and the fishing families there that didn't have any way of getting those kind of fish. So we made lots of friends with the fishing families there. But you know that type of fishing that I learned there, on Baja was really taught to me by Harry Kime, an old timer from the Los Angeles area in the Federation and a friend of Jim Eriser and some of the others [who] made their name in the Federation. He was down there at the sportsman's lodge in Loreto, and I knew he was there so I went up and visited him several times and he took me out in his boat with his Mexican guide, Emmanuel. Well Emmanuel was one of his best friends and knew how to fish for these, he knew where to go and, and everything about it. Harry got me my first Yellow Tail, I've got pictures of that and I'll never forget it! That was really something; those fish really surge and go.

**CB:** Yes.

**GY:** Now, we did that for several years, it's a wonderful time to spend down there in Mexico! In the winter time we went down right after Thanksgiving and stayed through Christmas and came back home just before Easter because you don't want to get caught down there during Carnival and Holy Week, it's too exciting, I mean, you don't know whether you're going to get out of it or not.

**CB:** Yes.

**GY:** But anyway it was a great, great period in our lives. There was fly fishing too, it wasn't bait fishing it was fly fishing, it was different type.

We traveled in our Alaskan camper for twenty-six years and drove over 174,000 miles – recreation miles.

**CB:** Wow, that's a lot.

**GY:** That's a lot, yes it is. Three different times we drove back east after attending a Federation conclave. We'd continue on east and I'll just mention a few places that I got a big thrill out of fishing. Back in upstate New York, because we're new and we're friendly with Lee and Joan Wulff, we spent time in their home and they took us fishing on their favorite spots. They lived right on the Beaverkill and we went fishing in the Beaverkill, which is a classic place to fish.



**CB:** Wow, that's it!

**GY:** We also fished in Florida a little bit. Only, incidentally I didn't go out in any charter boats or anything, but my brother-in-law, and sister lived in a house, it was on a canal in Maples, Florida. I had my boat on top of the camper so once in awhile I'd take it off and launch it in his front yard, go out in the canal, and fish. I remember one time I was out there with nothing, not a soul around, it was in the middle of the week, it wasn't a very sunny day, so people were inside. I was just practice casting out there, I had a big [Carey Special] on or something like that I think, and I was casting but nothing surfacing so I was fishing underwater, and all of a sudden I got a real strong strike and this big fish on. I had fun playing it, it was [reeling] it was jumping, and in no time people came out from all there houses all around and, through their Florida rooms, you know the screened room that's always outside their [main house]. They never saw a guy catch a fish in the canal in front of their place before, particularly on a fly! I had a good time that time too.

**CB:** What was it? What kind of fish was it?

**GY:** It was a Snook.

**CB:** Oh okay, okay.

**GY:** Snook, yes, it was good eating, too.

**CB:** Really? They're edible?

**GY:** Oh yes, they're really good eating, you bet you they are. People fish for them as a game fish in parts of Florida, yes they do. It's really alright. Then, of course we spent some time in the Yellowstone area and we fished the Gallatin. We fished the Gallatin with Lee and Joan Wulff one time, Lee is just like any one of us that was a fly fisherman. He fell in and got thoroughly soaked and we had to bring him out and put some hot bourbon in him and take him back home and get him warmed up. I fished the Yellowstone frequently with Jean; we loved that area just below Buffalo Ford, and some above Buffalo Ford, on the Yellowstone. We'd get out there early in the morning, we'd camp at Fishing Bridge and drive up there and get a spot in the river, because you could anchor yourself in the river and then people kept coming around because the guides bring their dudes in from West Yellowstone and places and all planning to fish.

**CB:** I see.

**GY:** - so you better be there to get a place early. But uh, those beautiful Yellowstone Cutthroat, when you do get them they're just wonderful! And we had a great time fishing in the Yellowstone area. And I told you about Henry's Lake so...

**CB:** Yes. How about patterns, Gordy? What are some of your favorite patterns and did you do a lot of tying? I know you and Jean used to tie.

**GY:** Well, we tied more then than we do now. I find I'm getting a little clumsy with some of the finer patterns; I don't get down below fourteens anymore. Yes I have some favorite patterns, but of course, that depends on where you're fishing. The patterns for, oh [my] favorite lake of course today is [Chopaka], and Boyd [Aigner's] Chopaka May is still a favorite of course; a number fourteen or sixteen Adams also does very well up there. I love to fish in the mornings before the fish are active on the surface with a damsel neophyte fly. I tie one out of olive green [marabou] and ostrich herls and [I've] also used the Nyerges Nymph; if you're fishing nymphs, those flies, along with two or three others. I had also a pheasant tail nymph that I tie, that's quite similar to a Mayfly nymph.

**CB:** Oh, small? Yes.

**GY:** That's just fishing surface film, up close to the weeds where the fish are. It's quite effective when they aren't rising to the hatching flies. So in Lenore Lake, every time I go there seems the amount of success I have is on a different fly, so I can't have any real favorite pattern there.

We used to go of course fish Pass Lake when it was more popular for catching fish than it is now. Back in the early days of the club we had a special lake that we worked with the game department on. It was up in behind Cherry Creek, you go up Duvall Road go up Cherry Creek up in the Weyerhaeuser country up there. And it was called ... [I] forget it?

**CB:** It wasn't Drunken Charlie was it?

**GY:** No. No, I don't know, I guess my eighty-five year old memory is not working right now.

### ***Interruption***

**GY:** Letcher Lambuth was a good friend of one of the fellows on the Weyerhaeuser Board, the Board of Director's of Weyerhaeuser. Letcher knew all the land improvers and developers around because that's what his business was – real estate. And [at] the lunch meeting one day, we were talking and Letcher was there and we were talking about this lake, this Hannan Lake and the game department had offered it to us if we could find a way to help them feed with artificial food some fish that they were going to put in and experiment with and so forth, and everybody says, "Well, yes, but how the heck do we get on the lake, it's Weyerhaeuser property?" This fellow spoke up, he says, "I'll see to that." And in no time there was a public access on Hannan Lake.

**CB:** Is that right?

### ***Interruption***

**GY:** [Order of the Lapis Lazuli] Award is given occasionally by the Federation to a person who has done outstanding work, and I mean outstanding, it just isn't oh, a couple years or so but it's over a long period of time, and it's only voted on by the Board of Directors, not by the Awards Committee. And I felt honored to receive it in 1989, along with other members that preceded me, like Lee Wulff, and Gene Anderegg, and Jimmy Eriser and, well I can't recall ...

**CB:** All in all though that really, you know [we really respect] you as the person that really helped make the club because I think of the kind of personality that you have, and the way people are treated when they come into the club, and getting them interested in things is, has paid great dividends to the club, over time.

**GY:** Well thank you for the compliment, Chuck. I still enjoy doing it when I'm there, and I see somebody new coming in the door, I run right over there and say hello to him, letting him know he's welcome.

**CB:** Well, anything else you want to say to the group?

**GY:** No, well I'll say this, as my years get older and it gets a little harder for me to get in and out of a skiff and I can't wade the rivers anymore with any degree of activity, that I want to fade out gradually, but I don't want to cause anybody any trouble, so one of these days I'll just have to be an observer and not a fisherman. But I've got two sons and three grandsons that are interested in it, so I've got a place to dispose of a good share of my gear!

***End of Interview***