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Sabrina Beganny [00:00:11] See, so I grew up in a typical Maine life. My dad was a big fisherman and we had a bait shop growing up. So yeah, I remember him making fly rods and tying flies in the bait shop growing up. And I went everywhere with him. But, you know, I never think I fully enjoyed it. But I'm about, you know, being a part of it all. And so I was always around that way of life. Fishing, hunting, all that. And then, you know, I grew up and went, you know, high school, college. And and went away to the military. And I got injured in the military and had to come home. And I reunited with my high school sweetheart. His name is Billy. And he has family in a place called Grand Lake Stream, Maine, a really cute little fly fishing town. Beautiful stream where they fish for landlocked salmon and spring in the fall and stuff. So Billy always goes fly fishing. I would stay back and hang out with his aunt, hang out with the kids, and he'd be gone all day, you know? So how could he stand in that stream all day long? I'm getting bored. Like, wow. Why, you know? It just didn't make any sense to me. And one day we were on our way out. We're heading back home to Augusta, Maine. And you're like. He's like, can we just pull over just right before we leave? And he took his rod out because he just wanted to fish one last time. And it was it was. You know, the end of the day, right before the sun was setting. It was in October. Right. I think was the last week in the fishing season was open. And I was sitting on the bank with my kids. I have three kids and he's out there fishing. And then he came to shore and he said he said, get on my back. And I'm like, okay. You know? So he carried, I didn't have any waders on. He did. And he carried me out to this big rock in the middle of stream, one of his favorite spots that he's always on so I wouldn't get wet. And they put me on this rock. Handed me his rod and showed me a few basic casts. And, you know, it's just I don't know which is everything kind of aligned in that moment, like the sun was setting and it was fall. So obviously it's beautiful in Maine. And there was little rises, little rises all over the water, which was salmon, you know. So I made a few basic casts. And, you know, you feel that tug and then and just all the surroundings and just everything kind of just lined up bit and just something kind of like awakened in me and my father's passed and gone now. But for some reason in that moment, like memories of my childhood and my father and I get all teary when I talk about it came just came flooding back to me and I cry every time I talk about it. Just something just that's just something just kind of woke up, you know. And I'd been struggling for a few years. Well, I have issues with bone issues from the military, but I've just been in a car accident three years prior. So I got a head injury, you know, and TBI, you know, I felt very disconnected socially with even with my family. And it was really rough spot to be in. So I think that moment when I say, like I woke up cause I just kind of been on autopilot for a few years, ever since the head injury. And I just, you know, lost who I was or what I was supposed to be or do. So that was a really, really cool experience. And then fishing season was over, you know, and I'm like, wow. Like, how do I how do I keep that feeling alive? You know, like, so I am you know, fishing season was done. So anyways, I'm at Togus, which is the veteran hospital in Maine. That's one, I think, it's the oldest V.A. hospital in United States. And I was there for her appointment because I was there all the time. And I got in the elevator and there was a poster on the wall of the elevator for a project, Healing Waters fly-fishing. And there are never posters in the elevator and I've never seen one. And, you know, I think maybe sometimes we're just so busy we don't stop and kind of look around. You know, we're always just so busy getting where we need to go. But something that day just made me look up or maybe get on the elevator at that right moment and saw that poster about a program that was available for veterans. So I'm like. So that experience with my husband, it just happened. And I'm like, how am I gonna keep this feeling alive and how do you know what do I do? And then that poster shows up in the elevator at the hospital. So, you know.

James Thull [00:05:05] So that's how you got involved with Healing Waters.

Sabrina Beganny [00:05:07] And then I went to my eventually I went to my first meeting. It took me awhile to go to my first meeting. You know, I was a younger veteran, female. Not the typical population at the V.A. that I go to. You know, usually it's older or, you know. Or was I gonna fit in? Do I belong? You know, I you know, I don't. I'm not combat related. I was just wasn't sure. So. So I'd get up enough nerve to go and then I wouldn't go and then I, you know. So it took me quite a while to finally go. And when I did, I walked into that first meeting and then everybody was there to shake my hand and welcome me. And none of them had any idea how much it took for me to actually walk in that door, because, you know, I'd been going through a lot. But best thing I ever did. I know a lot of people began mentoring me as a participant in the program, and then so I started learning a lot and I started learning the benefits of what fly-fishing does for you. And I've got to see as a participant what it's done for everybody else, because I was around other veterans all the time and I could see their lives changing. And I feel like I have like a natural teaching ability anyways. I always want to, in everything I do. I'm always the type to just want to share that with somebody else, you know? And so an opportunity opportunity came up a year ago where they needed a program leader for the Augusta, Maine, program. And I didn't really plan on being a program leader. You know, I didn't plan on taking on that role or anything like that. And but I also care a lot about the program. And I didn't want anything to happen to that chapter. So or for it to go away, because I know so many people count on it. Veterans, anyway. So I became program leader. And I find being program leader and being in a volunteer role just as therapeutic as being a participant in the program. So that's kind of how I just kind of fell into the volunteer spot after being a participant and. Well, I mean, being a female, you know, I see. Especially now. I mean, I don't remember ever seeing like growing up a lot of female anglers. You know, he's typical, like, you know, fishing with family and stuff. But nobody like, you know. You know, you never saw them in the stores picking out flies or, you know, coming into our bait shop. And I never saw a female come into our bait shop to buy a fly rod or get bait or anything like that. You know? But now when I'm out, I mean, it's it's I think it's, you know, to still work to be done. But I see a lot more female in these in the sport, which is pretty cool. And as far as changes maybe and women being accepted in stuff, and it takes a lot for I mean, it's kind of intimidating. It was intimidating for me to, you know, kind of step into the role. And now even more so, I've become an ambassador for the program. So I go and speak about the program to others and things like that. And, you know, I still get really nervous. You know, about, you know, being being female and people aren't going to take me seriously and whatnot. So I think I think that the female thing is a big one that's been changing, which is pretty great. You know, I see all these like groups being organized in my state and all over in social media. Women coming together and even companies, clothing companies, you know, sporting goods companies really jumping on board. So it's a really cool thing. You know?

Sabrina Beganny [00:09:21] Women, I think. Well, here's the struggle we have, so I want more women in Project Healing Waters. Right. I think as veterans there's like a certain you know, so it's not easy. I think we just need to make, I think the more that women get into it, like I think in Maine, for instance, for my group, I think if if I went and spoke to them or I made myself available or I, you know, I I put myself out there. I think more women would be more apt to come if maybe I organized a women's only fly tying meeting or whether it be just for everybody or whether it be for for veterans, because there is a certain veteran population of women who might have military sexual trauma and things like that. So and they're there. But there are more behind the scenes.

James Thull [00:10:14] Sure, absolutely.

Sabrina Beganny [00:10:14] For instance, like I was looking at fly tying equipment on Craigslist. You know, I was looking for, you know. So there was this woman selling all of this fly tying stuff. And I contacted her because I'm always looking for materials for the program. So I'll email. I'll say, you know, if and when, you know, you sell off all your materials, if you have anything left over that you'd like to donate to Project Healing Waters, you know? Please let me know. And she e-mailed me, right? She's like, actually I just want to donate all of it to project Healing Waters. Right. So that's incredibly sweet and so kind. And so to finish my story about to finish my story about the fly tying equipment. OK. So I go and I meet this woman and she has like a trunk full of all this stuff. She's probably like in her 30s and she's like, this is all my mother's fly tying material, which I don't know, something really like. I wanted to hear more. I wanted to hear her mom's story. And so I guess she said, like I said, well, your mom was a fly fisher, you know? Yes. That's so great. Like no, she's like, my mom did all the fly tying and my dad did the fishing. You know, so. But she was this amazing fly tyer. And so I got all this stuff back at home, I was organizing it to bring to the program meetings and stuff. And it was journals and her own. You know, and descriptions of the flies that she created. And almost like a diary of flies. What worked for her husband you know, now I just feel so honored to be able to have all that. And it coming from a woman was just I don't know, it's kind of, you know, things meant to be just, I don't know know, I just feel so it's just so great that I was able to gather her mom has Alzheimer's, you know, so she's kind of in and out, you know, but, um. You know, I said I'd love to send pictures of us using her materials and stuff, tying and stuff. She's like, oh, my mom would love that. So I've been sending pictures, you know, to show her mother. But. But, you know, it's just so cool. Yeah. Really, really special thing to have. But that goes, you know, so I think like I was saying women have always been involved behind the scenes. Right. Right. So, yes, that's just one cool experience that it. I really never thought I'd be where I am. You know, traveling and talking about fly fishing and what it can bring to your life. Like when I first started in the program, you know, I was fly fishing to escape something in my life, you know, whether it be pain or, you know, or just just some sort of something to just kind of put aside everything. And you hear that a lot. Oh, just it makes me forget everything. I can just kind of put everything aside, you know. But and that was how it was for me in the beginning. But now, like, I was kind of evaluating, like what your question just was. But now, instead of fly fishing to escape something in my life, I feel like I'm fly fishing to live my life. So it's it's been empowering for me. It's helped me get in touch with myself and with nature and being outside, which is important. And I've seen how it's just really changed people's lives, especially veterans. But anybody really anybody who's you know, but because of the population that I volunteer with and stuff, you know, you see these men who, you know, have just been sitting on their recliner, you know, drinking themselves to death because they're having a hard time socially because of, you know, things that they've had to deal with in the military and and whatnot. You know, and then they come and join the group. And it's so hard for them to to speak in, you know, about things there. But, you know, all's you have to do is just get them talk about that fish they caught or where they used to fish as a boy or girl or, you know, and once that dialog kind of starts, it's like something's opening up in them. And I'm seeing like men that wouldn't leave their house that are out all the time and going fishing together. It's really cool. And notice I'm saying, guys, OK, there's more women. This needs to happen for more women because we carry a lot of stuff, especially moms, you know, wives and everything. So but I've just seen it. It's just life changing. I was on a trip a couple of years back, a drift-boat trip and in Greenville, Maine. And I had the pleasure of. So the guide was in the middle of the boat. And I had the pleasure of fishing with another veteran. His name

is Marshall. Older gentleman. He had been in rehab like probably like in his 80s. And he'd been in and out a lot of medical issues and just kind of lost his sense of self. Didn't feel like a like a man anymore. Just, you know, just. Or just a strong human being. And he was sitting on that boat and just this peace that was coming over him, it was half the time he didn't even want to fish, he just wanted to sit there and just take it all in. And you just you could just see him just kind of like, oh, you know, wake up a bit. And so we got back to shore and we're talking to him. And he just tears filled his eyes and he's like he's like, you know, he's like the doctors had me on all this medicine and this medicine and these therapies and these series like this is like the best I've felt in so long. Like ever. You know, this is the best therapy there is. You know, so it's not just about the fish. I think it just makes you be more mindful in your in your life. And I don't know, it's just so it's just it's just not about fishing. Just me. It's just so much more than I know people like I tell people that I you know, I fly fishing and it's definitely oh, you fly fish. But it's just it's not I can't it's hard to explain sometimes, but I don't know. There's just something about it. It's just the whole experience, you know. So it just it's hard to put into words, you know? I don't know. It's just it seems so weird. Like all fly fishing, like, saved my life. It's true, though. It's just a.. And like I said, you and I were talking earlier how all these connections, you know, like, I'm in Maine. You're in Montana. You know, and and we have this connection and like from everywhere. It's just like this big community. And and, you know, I feel like I have a voice again because I get to share all these things about fly fishing with everyone. And like, I have a purpose again. And like, I feel connected.

Sabrina Beganny [00:17:25] I worry about that especially I fish in a little town called Grand Lake Stream, Maine. And there's this big upheaval about, well, we haven't there's a fish hatchery there where they raise salmon and whatnot. And there's just so much controversy. And then this little town over here doesn't want to control the dam anymore. They want to take the dam out or they just want to, and you know it. And so these mills, they didn't want to control anymore. So the federal government had no. The federal government took over for good I guess. Or whatever. Yeah. So it's just all this stuff going on. You know, and then at like 2:00 in the morning, the government sent some guy out to remove the fish ladder, you know, like. So there wouldn't be townspeople with pitchforks or something like that. But I mean, this town is depend... It's their livelihood. Fly fishing is their livelihood. So it's hard for me to understand, like, what the right thing to do is for for for the fish. So it's been a little confusing to me. It's like who has the right answers and what's the truth, you know? So is the fish hatchery, you know, is that the appropriate thing to do when you're seeing other states where they just removed all that and they just let things happen naturally and and it's naturally grown again? You know, so it's all been, the whole, what the future looks like for fish is very confusing to me because I know know it's hard to it's been so many trains of thought on it. So I don't know what to believe. Like in Grand Lake Stream, is the fish ladder changing things. So all the guides there, like, you know, the bass are gonna come in, they're going to eat all the salmon and there aren't going to be any more salmon. And you know, now that, you know, no one's going to want to come fish in Grand Lake Stream anymore. And that's the end of Grand Lake Stream, you know, because that's pretty much what the town is made of. Just all like lodges and things like that. So I worry a lot. You know, these small little towns that, you know, they, you know, having the fish there and healthy fish. But yet then there's like, should you just let things happen naturally, remove the fish ladder? And I don't know if it's the right thing is so. And obviously that, you know, there's the whole conservation like pollution and like handling fish and there's all that stuff that comes in play, too. But, um, but that's the biggest thing that's I've had to deal with. And my experiences with it is the laws and rules and regulations. And and I conservation is very important to me. But I think the government and all the politics of it are making it a very confusing thing on what the right thing to do is

for me anyway. And I want that. I want Grand Lake Stream to be there when my kids are older, you know, and I'm sure that happens all over the world, you know. So it's it's just so confusing for me. Yeah, but what the right thing to do is, you know, and then what the best thing is for the fish, you know? So that's what I'm dealing with currently.

Sabrina Beganny [00:20:32] Even in just the short span of the few years that I've been fishing, I've seen water not getting cold when it normally is getting cold. And, you know, fishing not even being good until after fishing season ends and things like that. And so and obviously I feel like even when I was little, there were way more fish like, for instance, I think you were talking about smelts earlier with a gentleman, right? I remember going smelting with my father. Right. Buckets of smelts like buckets and buckets like ridiculous amount. And now I have friends that go smelting and then I'm like all bring me some smelts smelts remind me of my father. And they're like I only got like five. You know, things are changing. And, you know, is it about climate change? And again. And then. But I just we just you know, the weather and, you know, there's a big petition trying to be signed to extend fishing season in Grand Lake because fishing, the salmon aren't even running until later on now. Rememberance, you know, in springtime, fishing, it's different. It is. It is different. And it's real, you know. The weather patterns, it's it's all real, you know. So I've definitely seen the effects of it for sure. And how it's changed.

Sabrina Beganny [00:21:50] Definitely, like, like I'm you know, last year they wanted to get more cold water into the fish hatchery, right? So at the dam. So they got all this equipment, all these big machines at the dam. Grand Lake's this cute little town, you know, [unintelligible]. And they dug this big underground trench all the way out to the middle of West Grand Lake, this huge lake, because they wanted to pipe in more cold water to the hatchery. Right. And I mean, I understood they're trying to get more cold water in there. So I noticed obviously when I was fishing during that time last year, the water was like gin clear there. Absolutely beautiful. And then 10 minutes later, just...silt coming down, you know, coating the rocks, and all I can think about was like all these insects and, you know, all these terrestrials in there. The the natural lifespan of them and the hatching, it's all going to be affected by all this digging and stuff that they're trying to do. You know, it's like, did that really need to happen? Do they really need to do that? You know, so that was that was frustrating to see. And it it worried me. It was, you know, so. Yeah. So but, you know, before being an angler, I really wouldn't have thought twice about it, you know. But being in there and it really bothered me. I was, you know, being worried about the insects and how the fish are going to feed or, you know, how it's going to affect them, you know? So, yeah, that's a big deal. Very much, yeah, like I definitely support, you know, it's very important to support all of these organizations. I mean, nothing's ever going to change if we don't have. You know, use our voice, you know. And the more everybody, like everybody thinks it's only, you know, they know what's what's one voice, you know, what's one person gonna change as far as like voting or things like that? It's so important, but especially on the local level. Big time. Big time. And and, you know. And we had like this senator come out and like he wanted to like, you know, help support, you know, the whole fish ladder thing and like and like like he really cared about, like, you know, but like, he wasn't really there to. He just is there for to get his picture taken, you know? And it is really sad. You know, I remember him like this politician grabbing my daughter and telling his manager take a picture of my daughter holding this big sign that says Save the Salmon, you know, and all this guy cared about was getting his picture taken with my daughter to make himself look good. But he never did anything to help. And that was so frustrating. You know, that this gentleman just, um, you know, he didn't really care so we need people that really care in office, you know, and sometimes it's hard to figure out the ones who really do. But I'm a strong advocate for all the fish conservation. So.

Sabrina Beganny [00:25:05] Yeah, I just. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. You know, it's like. And especially with the younger generation, it's so important to me. So I'm going for my Maine Guides license soon, right? And I'm here at this guid school right now, but I'm doing it to get women veterans. But children, you know, so in Grand Lake Stream, lot of families come in. The dads will just go out fishing. Right. And those kids will just like go to the store and sit on Wi-Fi. You know, it's. I want to, like pull little workshops for the kids, you know, fly fishing workshops or, you know, even even a girls one or boys one. And then everybody, when you're just all the different things. So everybody will feel like they have a place and then everybody can come together at some point. But, um, but the children and their future generation, you got get them outside. I have three kids, you know, and they're learning to fly fish this year. And it's so important, you know, with all the electronics and things like that, social media and stuff today. As long as we use social media for the good. And just, you know, talk about all these things and we just all need to get outside more. So hopefully in the future, you know, we look back that a light bulb will turn on and, you know, we'll get back to being out there. So.