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Justin Dugan [00:00:09] I think like a lot of young Australian males, my father took me fishing as a really young, young, young boy and I think fishing at an early age was more about pottering around on the beach while Dad fished and you know watching what he pulled in. And then I had a period through my mid teens, I guess, yeah, through my early teens sorry, and onward I didn't fish. Through most of my teens. And I picked it up again when I was probably about 21, I think? I had a passion for it when I was really young, and it sort of just went on hold. I put it on ice, I think, and I rediscovered it when I was about 21, and just rediscovered it in a big way. In a really big way, and took to, took to initially bait fishing for a year or two, and then continuing bait fishing, but then discovering lure fishing. And, and then, I think, a natural progression for quite a lot of fly fishers is to come from bait and lure, and then move on to fly, and that's what happened with me.

Justin Dugan [00:01:16] It's a bug that gets under your skin, and if you've got that, I think if you've got that gene, it just gets to you and you just love it. I think it's, it's the challenge within the sport. So you, I did so much with bait and lure fishing that what ended up happening was, I found the challenges became really, I guess, new and bolder with the fly rod. Just the casting alone, became really, really interesting, and, just the challenge of casting alone, was something that really took me to the sport. And, also, the first day I ever picked up a fly rod, I, I guess "accidentally" hooked to Mac Tuna and it, that reel was spitting hard, you know, there was, there was smoke pouring off that reel, and I didn't know what I was doing, and I landed this fish and I thought, 'this is the best thing I've ever done.' So, you know, you can get lucky like that. You know?

Justin Dugan [00:02:20] Gosh. Fly tiers? I mean, some of the classic old, old tiers who I used to, to follow their books and videos, your bass tiers like Dave Whitlock, and, and, you know, obviously, guys like Bob Popovic if you're into, into saltwater fly tying. I'm saltwater guy mainly, so they were, they were my... Kind of guys like that, and then now with social media I'm seeing some amazing ties. This guy called Drawn Lee who ties some of the most amazing flies I've ever seen. Now there's so many influences of people that probably don't even have a high profile name. Here in Australia, there's quite a lot of guys who... A guy called Mark Riggs, who taught me a lot from a local tackle store. Beautiful tier. Enrico Paglisi, I think most people know. Another, another wonderful US tier, or lives in the US anyhow, Enrico's flies really influenced me. A lot of movement, very big on translucency. And the same with Popovic, it's very much about translucency and really trying to imitate what, what triggers fish. So, yeah, they're couple of the, few of the tyers, being a saltwater guy, has had big influences for me.

Justin Dugan [00:03:41] I've done a reasonable amount, and I love it. I do love it. I just don't consider it an area where I have a large amount of expertise. I guess, because I have so many friends who are so good at it I feel I feel that it's it's not my, my area of expertise. But I am passionate about it, and, you know, I certainly know enough to get by and do quite well, and it's something I've nev- as my my friend Peter Moore says, I've never caught a bad fish yet. And it's the same for me, I totally agree with that. There's nothing I wouldn't want to chase.

Justin Dugan [00:04:16] I fished the Snake River with a friend, Paul Broun, and his wife Jean, who's also a guide. Paul had just retired actually. And that's why you love fly. You know, you asked me about fly fishing. There I am on the Snake River, chasing a species of fish, Cutthroat. I wouldn't have been there with a spin rod, or a, you know, I was there because I had a passion for fly fishing. And I met these amazing people and this incredible

environment and I think, I guess I wouldn't be here talking to you, if it wasn't for fly fishing you know? So you asked me about my passion for fly fishing and there you go. And the wonderful places you visit, you know, whether you're chasing Bonefish in New Caledonia, or Florida for Tarpon, or, there you go, the Snake River chasing Cutthroat Trout. And what a stunning place. So glad I got to experience that.

Justin Dugan [00:05:10] So, Sydney Fly Fishing spawned from my passion with fly fishing. I, to cut a long story short, I worked as a musician for a long time, where I was working nights I had days free. I just fished all day and played music at night, slept in when I could in between. And I was on the water, fly fishing and catching fish all the time, and I met a guy who was running some fly fishing charters. He'd moved from chasing bass in the freshwater, and started to do a bunch on the salt. And I knew him for a few years, and when he came to looking at parting with the business to move out of Sydney. He thought I'd be a good person to offer the business to. So he offered me an opportunity to buy the business off him, and I was so passionate about the fishing, and also having so much time during the day, that I was sitting around just fishing, not doing other work. I thought, 'this could be really good. I could do this as a business.' Have a passion for people. I also spent a lot of time with my, I have another passion for wildlife, you know, and spend a lot of time in the national parks around Sydney and around the area. So the tourism side of things, and putting people on to fish, and, and I guess creating a package of work around that whole environment. The beauty, the natural beauty all that, I decided that was a really good thing to do, and here I am 20 years later and I'm just as passionate as I was when I started.

Justin Dugan [00:06:39] It's interesting you asked that. There's quite a lot of musicians who who are anglers. The skillset, maybe this a mind thing there? Maybe there's an attention to detail or maybe it's more a spiritual sort of thing. You know, music for, if you're passionate about music and I am, there is almost a spiritual component in music and I think the same thing with, with the fly fishing. It's, it's, it's it's a lot more. It's not a, it's not a black and white, ABC kind of thing. There's other dimensions within fly fishing, I think, that when people don't understand the passion or, I think that I mentioned before, lacking the gene, I guess there's, maybe they're lacking the spirit, and so. Yeah, fly fishing and music, I think maybe there's a spirit there that sort of intertwines? And I can't think of, the only physical jo- anonlyy physical thing I can think of is, I work as a drummer. And there are ways of holding a stick in drumming that actually have a correlation with how I cast with a fly rod, between fulcrum points and stuff, but that's as close as I can get to a physical side with with the music and fishing being.

Justin Dugan [00:07:57] I always talk about the difference between, in fly fishing, a caster and a hunter. So there are people who are really good and skilled casters, who put a lot of detail and technical detail into how they present a fly to a fish and so on. But then there's people who may not be so good at that, but they are wonderful hunters. And then there's people who are the combination of both who are both very skilled at the technical side of the sport, but understand how to hunt. And when I'm talking about hunt, not just to find fish but how to feed a fish. I can have 10 different people throw the same fly at the same fish, and maybe only one or two will get the result. The presenta- because they know how to tease, they know how to, how to put that, that fly in a way that will, will get the fish to eat so. The, the type of anglers you're looking for, I'd much prefer a hunter than a technician. If that makes sense.

Justin Dugan [00:09:00] The, most of the fish I chase are pelagic fish, so surface fish. And most the time we're looking to sight cast to schools of fish that are on top, or the fish

are visible. I think that's a big part of fly fishing for a lot of people. If you've got the choice of chasing fish that are visible, I think most people want to do that. So Yellowtail Kingfish would be the big species a lot of people want to catch in Sydney. They pull so hard. They're one of the dirtiest fighting fish on the planet. I know of no, no other fish that wants to rub a hook out of its mouth so, so violently. I mean, as soon as you hook them, they're looking for something to rub that hook out on. And, unfortunately for most anglers, when they do rub that hook out, you know, you often lose a fly line as well. They're also one of the most powerful fish in the ocean. So, yeah. They're definitely a fish that are really popular. All sorts of tuna species. Australian Salmon Amber Jack, Sampson Fish, a lot of the Trivalley style species that you find in Sydney. There's, there's about 50 species of fish we can catch in Sydney Harbour alone, on flies and lures and bait.

Justin Dugan [00:10:12] So the early explorers nicknamed the Australian Salmon, called this fish a salmon. It's a type of Sea Perch, basically. And it's got dots on it. And the early explorers, when they first arrived in Sydney, thought, being from the motherland, being from Britain or the colony, they're used to seeing salmon. So they, they said they were a salmon they had dots on their back. They're nothing like a salmon. They're not a salmon at all. They're an incredible fighting fish. Wonderful fighting fish and they, they leap. They take flies really, really willingly. They love surface flies. You can sight fish them, they turn up in huge schools a bit like the Striper fishery in parts of the US. We get these big foaming masses of fish. They do exactly the same thing. And possibly one of the worst eating fish on the planet. They taste absolutely terrible. Which is good for them, because not many of them get kept. But they're, they are a very large part of the protein source for a lot of animals in our ecosystem. From seals to sharks, and the schools move up and down the coast, especially in the cooler water. They're not really warm water fish. So they love to move in these vast schools up and down the coast, and they, they do filter feed too. They have, they have gills set up with gill rakers where they can filter out krill, they can filter out small, much smaller bait than a lot of fish feed on, so they swim around with their mouths open. They'll eat big fish too. But they're very interesting fish actually, and sometimes they're really hard to hook, and other times they'll eat anything you throw at them.

[00:11:54] I've gone from being very very strict about pushing catch and release, and when I say strict I mean, I could never stop people if they wanted to keep a fish, but I would always encourage it 100% of the time, that, "ah we need to let these go." and then I thought to myself, 'Well. I'm keeping fish for myself when I go out fishing.' And then I thought, 'Well where are they getting their fish source from?' And I realized that the fish they were sourcing was most likely going to be coming from the markets where a troller, or, or a long line had caught it, way less sustainable practices were being done. So about fifteen years ago, I thought, 'No this is silly, I should be encouraging my clients to take home.' Just, you know, even just one fish? Just take home one fish to go and, and have a feed that night. Not talking about filling the freezer up, or anything like that. But, grab yourself a fresh feed. We have very sustainable fishery here. As long as it's not a species that was, you know, in trouble or you were keeping a big breeding fish that wasn't going to taste good or something. I encourage it totally.

James Thull [00:12:57] So you don't keep a lot of Australian Salmon I'm guessing?

Justin Dugan [00:13:00] You can make them into fish cakes. But then again, I can probably blend up my shoes, I got my my flip-flops on here, my thongs, I could probably blend those up and make them taste good too.

Justin Dugan [00:13:17] It depends if you're a half, glass half full or glass half empty person, but I'd say anybody who knew anything about the fisheries would say we're in damn fine shape. Excellent. Yeah there are, you can pick areas of, I mean this is a vast continent, I mean we're surrounded by so many incredible waterways and the sea all the way round, and lots of inland waterways and so on. And, I think if you look at the vast amount of water, and the amount of people, even in areas like Sydney. You know, worldwide Sydney, it's not a huge city, but still there's four and a half million people here. And we have one major harbour, and a couple of other little waterways around that are really good. But that's a lot of people. And the fishing has improved vastly in the last 30 years. It's got better, and better, and better. And there's some species we can do some more work with, but overall, I think Australia's fisheries management is world class. I mean incredible. And really, there's no species of fish that has ever been listed as threatened or endangered, to my knowledge. From recreational fishing in Australia. In terms of commercial fishing, there's been a few species that have been listed as threatened, where fisheries management stepped straight in and put bans on the commercial take of those fish, and the stocks bounced back very, very rapidly. And that was actually quite a long time ago, and I think they're a lot better at management now, they don't wait till fisheries collapse. They stop them from getting to that point. And one of those fish that springs to mind, is the Gem Fish. Which was a deepwater fish off the coast of, the East Coast of New South Wales here. That was fished very heavily, to the point where they collapsed the stock pretty significantly, and fisheries stepped in-- this is commercially. And they've bounced back in huge numbers. I don't think they'll ever let it get to that again. Some really good management here. We have a licence system here, in New South Wales, so I live in the state in New South Wales. They've introduced a licensing system where for me to fish, fresh or saltwater, I have to pay. All of that money, 100% that money, goes back into the fishery. So it goes back into environmental plans, such as habitat restoration, breeding, stock, restocking habitats such as offshore reefs, fish attracting devices, education programs, law enforcement those sort of things. So it's a wonderful program. We're all paying to protect our fishery.

Justin Dugan [00:15:51] Look, I mean, you can go all the way back to the introduction of trout if you want to talk about, you know, invasives. Trout were introduced a long time ago in Australia, but they've obviously established in inland waterways wherever it's cool enough. I mean we do have alpine areas we've got snow and so on. They would have had a pretty bad effect on frogs and tadpoles and species like that. But there has been invasive species like the Redfin. Which have made their way into Australian waterways. But probably the biggest would be, the European Carp. And the European Carp has changed the landscape of inch, of inland waterways. We have vast river systems in Australia. Not the, not the huge wide rivers that a lot of Europe and The States are used to seeing but we have very long rivers that run for hundreds and thousands, some of thousands of miles. And some of those river systems in areas have turned very muddy from the Carp. But we do have, one benefit of the carp is, one of our favorite inland fish to chase the Murray Cod. And the Murray Cod, in inland areas of Australia, where Carp have basically established, which is a lot of them. The Cod eat them, and the Cod grow huge. I mean a couple 100 pounds is quite possible on a Murray Cod and much bigger than that too, in the past. So the Carp has been a real problem with removing a lot of smaller species, and destroying environments that would have held fish like trout in the past. And once you muddy the water up the trout move on, and a lot of freshwater species that were native to Australia were affected by Carp. But the Murray Cod has done quite well out of the Carp, because it doesn't matter how big a Carp is it's good food for big cod.

Justin Dugan [00:17:40] Good question. Taught a lot of children to fly cast, but I've usually done that at an age, because I'm a teacher and people bring the child to me, I've taught the children more at an age where they're going to benefit immediately. So for me as a teacher, most of the children are at least over 10. Normally, about 12, just or just touching their teens. But I imagine if the child is your own child, and you can sew into that over a long period of time, rather than just one hour and a half lesson or a couple of lessons, then I would imagine any age is good for children. That's a bit different. I guess I see things differently as a teacher to what I would as a parent. And I've got friends who've put little practice rods in their kids hands and they start slapping away. But I think, I think once a child reaches 10 or 11, the coordination side of fly casting and so on is, is probably going to be a lot easier. Pre-that, just give them an appreciation of what's going on and let them have a play with it, for sure. And then in terms of women and men, 100% always easier to teach a woman rather than a man. I think I did say to someone, that that's as long as they're not your partner. For some reason, I have a lot of wives come to me to learn because they can't learn off their husbands, or husbands bring their wives or vice versa, wives bring their husbands, because they can't teach each other. But definitely women have a much. In a general term, much better demeanor for fly, fly casting, because fly casting is definitely timing. It's got nothing to do with power, brute force. You're not throwing the fly. You're shaping a loop. And it's the loop that carries the fly, and you have to time that perfectly. You have to use a straight path, to all the things that you do in fly casting to, to create a beautiful loop are very easily achieved by a woman. That wants to listen, and doesn't try and overpower it. For some reason guys always, almost always, want to just muscle it. It's all muscle. It's just how we're built, you know?

Justin Dugan [00:19:51] I think, I think regardless of whatever side of the fence anyone sits on the issue of climate change, the climate is changing. There's definitely been a warming over the last century, in Australia. It's a minor one, it's, you know, it's not even two degrees. But that will have an impact. And it definitely has an impact on, on where things move, what happens, how things grow. And you know warmer waters, those sorts of things. I haven't personally noted it. I mean I'm, 46 years of age. If someone were to bring up the idea of tides and rising seas. I mean our, our tide gauge in Sydney Harbour is one of the oldest, most reliable in the world. And the tides have virtually not risen or fallen much of any significance over 100 years. Actually 140, 150 years I think that is? At Fort Denison? So in terms of that affecting things, I certainly haven't noticed anything in my short time on Earth. In terms of agricultural runoff, I think, because the idea of the climate change thing is much, it's a much slower process. But the impacts of agricultural runoff, stormwater runoff, that one storm can put more pollution into Sydney Harbour for a fish than than, you know, the next 50 or 60 years a temperature rise, is gonna do more damage than anything. I'd have to say though, we've probably improved that side of things in my local area, in Sydney, still a lot of room to go, but the harbour has got a lot cleaner in the last 30 years because of an understanding of, that sort of stormwater runoff, and so on. And they fixed a lot of it. Still, as I said, plenty of room to go. They've taken the sewage out, falls have gone out way offshore. They used to just have sewage, raw sewage, just pump out straight into the Sydney water offshore, and not offshore sorry, inshore. Right on the edge. And it would go to the beaches where people swim, if there was the wrong currents, or a storm or big seas. They fixed a lot of that, but agricultural runoff in urban, in non-urban areas, if you were to look at Australia as a whole especially the Queensland Coast. I would not be surprised at all if those coral bleaching events, and, and other events there's a lot of interplay with the amount of agriculture that is close to that coast and runoff of chemicals. Stripping the land bare to, to put in crops and having that wash out to sea. I think that's a much bigger impact than anything we're seeing here on any climate scale.

Yeah. Big, big concern to me. Even though we've improved a lot of things. Yeah, that's I think, that's the number one impact. Much more, much more tangible.

Justin Dugan [00:22:43] I love the outdoors. I just love being out there, I think it gives me an excuse to explore. It, it's, it's it's a new pathway every time I go out into the wilderness, or out, every time I go out into the ocean. It's like, I'm going down this new pathway in the forest, and I'm, it just gives me excuse to travel. Into all sorts of wonderful places or to go, even where I live, to go on a journey where the whole landscape changes constantly. The fish I were chasing, I was chasing yesterday could be in different place, different schools of fish, different animals to see on the way, if I'm fishing locally different people to wave at on the boat. The fresh air, the wildlife, the, the, the interaction with my buddies on the water. It's just a, it's a whole, it's a whole parallel universe to anything anyone else is doing in their office blocks, or in their, you know in their day-to-day jobs. Or, in their day-to-day recreation, I guess. It's just, it's a wonderful escape that involves fresh air. Beautiful parts of the world, or beautiful parts of Australia, and, and our city here in Sydney. And I can honestly say, a lot of what I see, most Australians will never see. People who don't fish just can't, they just can't appreciate what we see, and it's, I see parts of the city that Sydneysiders, most Sydneysiders will never see. Beautiful parts of the waterway, beautiful parts of the National Park. You can't even access them without water. Fishing takes me there.

Justin Dugan [00:24:27] Yeah. 100%. I agree. I agree totally. This has been a recent conversation for me, I mean. With friends and, and talking to a lot of people. I mean this is... To get youth involved in fishing, and fly fishing, and getting out there and being involved in this sport. I mean, versus what? An X-box? Or, you know? Sitting inside on Facebook, and it's just, it's just a wonderful way to give children or youth, a much broader appreciation of things beyond what most of their peers are doing. I mean, there's a real rut that society for children and youth are being caught in, at the moment. And I think passions, for kids, are really important. I don't think there's many, too much healthier than fishing, in terms of an appreciation for the environment too. We're often told that the anglers are, you know, "Oh, they're destroying the environment." I see completely the opposite. I see us as very much the, the gatekeepers, I guess. The people it matters to the most. I got more to lose if the environment, fishing environment is destroyed than I do from being part of it. I reckon, I honestly think teaching youth to be part of that and showing them to be part of that is a key. It's a huge key. They've got to have some ownership in it otherwise they won't care about it.

Justin Dugan [00:26:07] It's full of Aussies. That's why it's so good [laughs]. Diversity. Diversity. For people who are travelling in from, I mean from, from the States, let's use the States as an example, you get a chance to chase some familiar species, but mostly you're going, you're going to see environments and species that are not on offer anywhere in the world. And I mean, it's a huge country. But the diversity, diversity here of waterways and landscapes and opportunities is very big, and a lot of unexplored, a lot of unexplored water. I mean I just cannot even begin to imagine how much water hasn't really been fished in Australia, but there's a lot. It's a big, big wide and very remote country. So there's still frontiers here.

Justin Dugan [00:26:59] Just do it. The best advice I can have is, is what I said before about the youth, you know. Just, just, become part of it. Like, get some ownership on it, become part of, immerse yourself in, in all the parts of the world, all the different things you can do. Don't just stick to trout, don't just stick to one species of saltwater. Immerse

yourself in the whole experience and you'll go to a diversity of places, meet a diversity of people and you'll be enriched for it.