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Henry Hoffman [00:00:12] Well to me each time I go out is kind of an adventure. Like when I was driving up here and looking at [unintelligible maybe Coeur d'Alene?] Lake and watching the people out there in the lake I was thinking. all that deep water fishing. You know what's down there when you cast a fly or a lure out there you're not sure what you're going to catch in most instances where it's going to be a big lake trout or some scrap fish like whitefish or something. Who knows. So it's adventure. And. It gets you away from your regular routine. And so it's kind of like a fresh day doing something different. And. So that's what's always appealed to me. And said now on a fishing trip especially if we go on for a long distance you know we know what the weather going to be like or if the fish are still running the trip. I remember. It's 1959. After spent two years in the army. Not being able to fish very much when I was over in Germany and. So forth. I was reading a Field and Stream how they had fly fishing contests are the fishing contest the biggest steelhead was caught in the Kispiox River. So I plan on fishing up there for a month. So I drove 4100 miles round trip from where I live California up there. Slept in my car we took the backseat out, our friend was going to quit his job with me we decided not to so I went alone fished for a month and I read in the magazine that most of the big steelhead were caught in September so I fished from September 6 to October 6th but turned out, I found out when I got up there, that's when most big fish were reported across most of the people fishing. Most of the fish come in October and this was just kind of year whet up there caught a lot of silver salmon and Dolly varden trout and stuff but no Steelhead. Somebody caught a 28 pounder in August and nothing. No new running come in all through September. And. End up driving as far as I could. The gravel road through a farm field road and finally caught up to the last few Steelhead. Nobody gone that far but I did get twenty seven half pounder. And then nothing for several days and I headed home had to do some repairs on my car. They told me that Smithers--80 miles from where I just left--the steelhead are just come in and they're catching them up to twenty two pounds on flies, a couple a day after I left. My permit was only good till October 6. So I had to leave. I couldn't go back and fish but I did. And so it's the unknown. You know you think you're in a get good fishing from day one and maybe the fishing is the day after you left. So that's kind of the gamble. You never know when you leave a trip. And. The fact it's not a sure thing to me. It makes it the most interesting.

Henry Hoffman [00:03:47] Yeah. If you knew you were going to have good fishing every single time you wouldn't appreciate it. But the fact that you have these periods where it's not as good as you thought. And then the next time it's better than you thought was gonna be, to me that's part of the fascination of it is the unknown aspects of it.

Henry Hoffman [00:04:15] When I was growing up as a kid my dad had gone fishing in a couple of times fishing rockfish with just a bamboo cane pole.

James Thull [00:04:24] And where would have that been?

Henry Hoffman [00:04:27] That would have been about nineteen forty seven or eight and I didn't go fishing at that time I just went up to the ocean and made a few casts.

James Thull [00:04:36] Was that in California?

Henry Hoffman [00:04:37] That was California. Down by San Francisco, North San Francisco near Santa Rosa. In fact I grew up near Bodega Bay where the movie The Birds was made. And I started high school. My neighbors said we need something to do on the

weekends. Let's go fishing. We didn't have any fishing gear. So my dad took a piece of board, a piece of one by four, and wrapped some Calcutta string around it and pyramid sinker and we tied some cheap bait hooks on there went out and bought some bait. And used them as the throw line. We just pull off so much line off this. Heave it out and off the jetty there in the sand flats. And then we caught a couple fish and got interested. So we bought a couple of bamboo cane rods for about two bucks a piece of taped wire guides on there and then got more interested and started buying a real fishing rods. And started fishing the jetties for rockfish. Bait. We learn like bait we used to take ghost shrimp out of the sand most everybody's buying cut bait from the bait store which was poor and we learned to fish that way and then. I started reading fishing magazines they didn't have fly fishing magazines so some it's like they have. Now there's Outdoor Life. Field and Stream, and anyway Field and Stream. Ted Trueblood had fly the month in there. This was back in the 50s. About nineteen fifty one fifty two I started reading these articles. And. I thought it would be interesting to catch fish on a fly I don't know any fly fishermen and it wasn't that popular equipment wasn't near as good then as it is now so it's not as easy to do fly lines and leaders and stuff with very poor quality in those days. So I got some bait hooks one day and my dad raised chickens and he sold eggs to a hatchery and so he had loose feathers laying around. So I actually believe Wulff ties flies holding his fingers. I didn't know anything about vises or anything. I held the hook in there and took my mother's sewing thread and pull off a couple of yards and tied the material on there. And. I used to hitch--I never had a car and I was 21 years old so I used to hitchhike in fact I used to hitchhike to school, that was safe used to get there before the school bus would hitchhike to the school and hitchhike home and hitchhike to go fishing. And I got a ride with a fly fisherman and I pinned about eight or nine flies on a piece of white paper. I showed him--they probably looked like a wounded seagull the way I tied them--and he said what kind of vise do you use. I said what, there is a vise for this? And he said Well next time I see you I'll give you one of my Herters catalogs. So next time I got a ride sure enough and he gave me a Herters catalog and I found out there was tools for tying. You don't have to hold a hook in your hand. You had bobbins to hold the thread and hackle pliers, I didn't know what they were. And so I started and then I met Grant King who had Grant King News and tackle in Guerneville which was 14 miles from the Russian River it was a good fly fishing stream for steelhead in the lower tidewater areas and the Shad came in the shad everybody caught their shad on flies and the first dozen or so fish I caught were Shad that I tied on my own flies. Grant King started having me tie flies for him and giving me fly tying tips. I start tying for Hinten and Sons which made spinners and sold flies. And I started selling them. And before I got drafted in the Army in 1957. In 1955 I read an article by Harry and Elsie Darby on how they raise their own chickens for their fly tying. And those days almost all the hackle that was available where you bought from herders or wherever was imported from India China or Philippines. It was never bred for fly tying. The quills were too thick at one end. Too thin the others on one end of hackle would twist and the other and tend to break off. And so I started breeding my own chickens after that, to get a more uniform quill, get the feathers longer and, and narrower, the barbs closer together and as I did that I also got more interested in fly fishing. Started doing trips to different places. That's how I got into the fly fishing.

Henry Hoffman [00:10:05] Early on I was reading about what fly patterns worked the best. And then you tie commercially you pretty much have to stick stay with a pattern they send you because of people buy them expect them to look that way but as you get more knowledgeable about insect life and minnows and crayfish what they look like and how they move in the water and the areas you or myself would specifically fish. I got interested and developed my own fly patterns. And the way I. Found the best to do that. I made a plexiglass fish tank. In fact tomorrow and the next day I'll be demonstrating that at the IFF

conclave here in Livingston. So I would. Like a lot of time afternoon like two o'clock to four or five o'clock fishing gets. Poor a lot of times so I'd be out my float to just work my way back to shore and I'll turn over driftwood or pull up weeds and look at the damselfly nymphs or whenever is there and see what color they are. And some time I've even taken my sandwich bag that I had my lunch in. Put it full of water and bring the insect home and put it in this tank. I have its 20 inches by 4 inches by about a foot high and have a light in one end so I can see weather the insect I prod him with a stick to get it to move or working on my own fly and make a little fly rod of a piece of Dolly piece of model for about so long and I work that fly and see how it rides in the water. If I wanted to ride point up where I have to have the weight. Like I found with a crayfish pattern I had. I wanted to be able to fish that right on the bottom and the eyes usually fish them. So they swim backwards the way the original does when they're spooked. They walk forward but they swim backwards. If I put the eyes down where they used to have them down where the. Walking the legs and swimmerettes come back this way. The fly couldn't. See which way he wanted to go. Kind want to twist this way and twist that way because the bend. The hook is this way and the feathers this way are bouyant. So I kept moving the weight back and even bent the hook U shape. And I finally put the eyes right by the eye of the hook and I found that had the leverage to turn it point up the way I wanted the fish and I put artificial eyes at the other end made out of plastic or that wouldn't affect the fly. And there I found like fishing and damselfly flies. I fish a lot of those in lakes. And. They have. Swimming nymph hook that goes like this and goes up like that sexy looking bend. If you weight those. If you weight them in the back they point up if you weight them in the front they ride point down. If you don't weight them. A lot of time if you twitch them. Cause the line to pull is a different line then line a penetration. It wants to twist and it can't decide which way it wants to go, point out or point down but if you're casting a fly out there 50 feet away you can't see how it's riding. But a foot away in this tank I'm working. I can see what's wrong. I then I adjust until I get it right. And then when I get a fly it. that Looks like it fishes good in the tank. Then I test it in a place I used to fish quite a bit in the way I do that I use. A dropper. Point fly is a fly that I. Proven as your standard flyer one that I fished I know that it is successful I put the new test past pattern up as a dropper and everything being equal the fish will usually take the point fly. Before it will take the dropper if the fish will swim past that point fly and grab that dropper fly the test pattern. Then I know I've got to fly at least that day is working better than a pattern that I've used before. And then when I find that out then I'll take point fly off and I'll use another one of that same new pattern and different size or different color and then test that. So I have this routine I do. And then I take a small treble hooks when I was working for him and sons used to tie feathered trepples sometimes for their spinner fly combinations. then after I left the Army moving up to Oregon and useful as travel so I found I can break off two of the points completely and then one I just break off the barb and make kind of little splinter out of that. And. That way I can change fly patterns any time I want to keep testing flies all day long without shortening my leader by having to cut out section of and tie with a lead or a dropper plus alot of time I to fish for big Lahontan cutthroat in Lenore Lake, [unintelligible] Lake in Washington. A lot of those fish running 20 or 30 inches. A long time a facial grab the point fly while he's swimming around other fish that might not ordinarily grab anything. It looks to them like this big fish is chasing that dropper and he'll grab up there and grab that one. If you're tired tied a blood knot like is traditionally is done and using your dropper after that spur there That's the weakest knot usually that will bmake you lose both fish and both flies but the way I do it. This little spreader I make a modified treble hooks. The weakest link is coming off of that and so I usually lose one fish to one fly and all I have to do is tie a new tippet or a new dropper onto the one that broke off the back fishing again. I have lost nothing and I haven't broken my leader. And anyway that's how I test and develop new fly patterns. And a book our club put out. I have twenty six of my my patterns in that its called Northwest

Fishing and Fly Tying Guide by the Rainland Fly Casters and was, I put quite a bit of my information in that book. So. Anyway that's by testing new fly patterns and to me that's what makes fly tying interesting you can do that kind of thing. You can stick to the standards or you get inventive and try new things and see if you compete with the standard patterns with something you produce. And. So a little bit of science involved in that. You can you know study insect and aquatic life and. Copy that. And use your own ingenuity to create something new.

Henry Hoffman [00:17:45] My Chickabou damsel fly this one. Chickabou. It's a new product. I developed after raising rifle hackles for 20 years and so start using the body feathers and I started fishing at lakes a lot more and less on streams and I got older I started having knee and hip problems so it's hard to wade streams for more than a day or two or fish on a float tube and go for a week or 10 days or so on a trip. And it. Feels good. After that many days as I did what I started and there is not current in the lake so you have to have material that can be activated just by the slightest twitch or even just sinking some of the time the Chickabou which is. Named for Tom Whiting and I came up for a chicken marabou traditional Marabou came from the marabou stork in Africa. And then they started using Turkey marabou. And to replace that chicken marabou it's great for you for your smaller nymphs and flies and very very soft. And. Make damsel flies and alot of streamer patterns and our nymphs with that. And. So my triple damsel one of my favorites because the damsels live in lakes year round they just change sizes as they go through a hatch and then new younger smaller ones come about. Also I have I call a Chickabou special which is flank feathers off the side of the rooster, based on this marabou and some of those and also the thigh is what I call knee hackle which is way down just before the shank starts. little hackle it's kind of like head and neck Hackle and I use that they use a stiffer tip part soft tackle part for fish and streams and then for lakes I use the base part wrap and I get a hackle. Or marabou hackle collar and it's kind of like Fido plume. It's very very soft. Couple of turns on that. And typically I use a glass bead head. Sort of fishing intermediate clear line the fly will travel with that same depth. And notice insects wading through the weed beds and stuff scare. And they go swimming. They go like this to stop and go like that. They don't drop on the paws like you have a weighted bead head it's to plunge somewhat. when you pause So I like the nymph about same specific gravity or a imitation of it as the water so it stays like that. And the other stream I fish on the bottom imitates a sculpins or crayfish well then I weight them with dumbbell eyes to the right pointing up. And then. I pass them across the bottom. And. They don't hang up. On the retrieve. Plus they almost never hook a fish in a tongue or a gills so I hook right in point up so that's an advantage. I especially learned that fishing for chum salmon in Oregon. You'll see a big whole school of fish in shallow water. And you swing the fly and you're trying to swing in front of a fish. And if you guessed wrong and misses his head and swings over his back you'll be hooking him in the dorsal fin or something or in the tail hook. Point up it will slide right over the top of the fish and slide in front of the next fish behind it. Then you get a fish will grab it. So instead of foul looking at fish an illegal hookup you'll get a legally hook fish because you didn't foul hook the first fish. So that's another advantage of having hooks the right point up I've seen quite a bit of change in. The flows of streams and lakes like Omak Lake in Washington where I fish three streams and ran into a little bit of water where the fish would try to get up to spawn. Most the time they couldn't but at least there was some water in the last few years I fished out those streams have been completely dry there's just a gravel stream bed where where they used to be water flowing. So I think climate change is a real thing and. The weather is getting warmer and drier in most areas. And. So quite a change there. Fishing attitudes. There's a lot of change. I was growing up pretty much everybody kept the fish they caught. Everybody was interested in catching the most fish they could catch it could catch and keeping the limit. And now especially since a lot of

good fly fishing periodicals come out, people are really getting into catch and release. And I was influenced a lot by watching Lee Wulff on American Sportsman when I was growing up. Saying fish were too valuable to only catch once. So he was always releasing the fish he caught on the ABC programs that I used to watch. And so that has really taken hold. And. I wish more of the Fish and Wildlife people are [unintelligible] pay a little more attention out there. They're trying to please everybody. Because there's a lot of people who are not into fly fishing. They want to fish with bait and keep their fish. So. But like in Oregon there are several places now where they do have catch and release. Lakes. Limit the number of fish that can be kept. So there has been some improvements along those lines.

Henry Hoffman [00:24:04] I like Dave Hughes quite a bit. the first book he wrote I found interesting, Anglers Astoria. and in fact I read it on an airplane trip to back east to a fly fishing show back there and and I've enjoyed his work ever since. Traveled to some interesting places and has an interesting way of writing. That's one of my most recent ones. When I first started learning to fly tie fly. Herters Angling. Fly back in 1954 anyway. His book on tackle and fly making it I found interesting that he has talked about how hooks are designed and how they penetrate. I've done experiments with that take a piece of fishing line and hooking it into a potato and pulling on it and see how the side bend puts the pressure on the side of the hook instead on the point roll point takes a shallow bite because it starts in then follows the point takes a piece out of the potato instead of penetrating deep. So a straight line pull gives you the most pressure on the point. That's why fly hooks are temperate Is basically a straight line with your line of pull and there's no side bends curvy or right angles to them. So I learned a lot from that.

Henry Hoffman [00:26:01] Yeah we'll get some access they weren't normally have. And gives people information that they can get and spread to others and keep other people interested in our sport.

Henry Hoffman [00:26:25] Well instead of trying to be self-taught like I was. Which could be kind of discouraging, try to find a fly club in your area and join their fly club and because they typically have guest speakers who show you where to fish, what flies use. How to tie the flies. A lot of times in a club they'll demonstrate tying the flies and then they have club outings. You can go with other fishermen who are more experienced than you yourself are and have some companionship. I think that would be a good start.

Henry Hoffman [00:27:15] It's called The Rainland Fly Casters. It's called that because Astoria has--like I saw on the news one time it was voted that had the poorest weather in the United states because least sunny days. So anyway Rainland Fly Casters. Dave Hughes and myself and about 600 people. We started the club in 1981. And so we meet once a month and we. And we have a program. We have guest speakers but about once every three months we have "tie with a master," which could be any one of us in a club that has a skill they want to share. And we bring materials and hooks and anybody wants to bring their vice and tying equipment with them they can tie right along with us. We have a closed circuit screen and they can watch us tie a tie fly and then tie it again in the second time we go through it they tie along with us and so they learn some fly tying skills from that. Our club put out its own book, it came out in 2003. Northwest Fly Tying, Northwest Fly Fishing and Tying Guide is what it's called. [unintelligible] Amato publications.

James Thull [00:28:38] Amato is that what you said?

Henry Hoffman [00:28:39] Yeah, Amato in Portland is the one that produced the book.

Henry Hoffman [00:28:51] I started out with birds that had been bred for fly tying. And I was living in California. Nineteen fifty five I read this article by Harry Nelson Darby. Like I said before about producing own hackle and noticed in the back of these outdoor magazines, Murray McMurray Hatchery had ads in there along with some other companies that sell birds for people who like to raise their own for entering fairs and stuff. And so I used to get baby chicks flown out to me and I'd raise I just get the cockles best fly tie hackle is off the roosters so I get those that raised them up and at about 11 months of age I would kill them and skin out the necks and get them saddle hackles from them. And. Then after I got the army 1959 I stay in California another year and then my folks bought a place in Oregon and I moved up to Oregon while they were getting their one in California sold. And I got back in the commercial fly tying and pretty soon I used up all the hackle I raised in California. And, about nineteen sixty four, grizzly hackle in particular became hard to get. There wasn't anybody raising barred rock chickens for production. Everything was going to white chickens and so white feathers was available. Grizzly wasn't. And so I went to pacific International Livestock exposition in Portland. Which is just a big fair and I saw bantam barred rocks. I didn't even know there was such a thing. So I raised the big birds in California and it cost me as much to raise those as I can get herders, what was called triple-A rated necklace the three dollars and 90 cents. That was the best quality and it's costing me that or more to raise to feed the big birds. I thought well these birds are one fourth size and have somewhat smaller feathers. So the first birds I saw in 1964 are really small and pretty which like hen feather they had a heavy hardly any web I mean web free feathers on all of them. So I went back 1965 to a barred rock rooster and a hen. And this had a little better gloss too may still be considered wet fly by today's quality standard. In those days any feather that didn't have over 30 percent webbing it was considered dry fly quality. And so for five dollars I bought that hen and the rooster and I got close to 50 offspring from that, half roosters and half hens. But that made all that offspring brothers and sisters and chickens would take a lot of inbreeding and not that much. So I called Murray McMurray up and see if I could get some bantam hard rock chicks to flown out to me. He said well. Bantams are too small, they'll freeze on the airplane. They can't keep each other warm. So for seven dollars and fifty cents apiece I had sight unseen (unintelligible) by railway express, two roosters and four hens. And I got some offspring from those and I crossed those with the ones I brought to Portland to offset the inbreeding and I got four more roosters from them and one of them feathers twisted from one end to the other that was out and one was too small so used two of those four. At the time, if I had known at the time that this was gonna become a business and just not some from my own needs I would have spent the money driven back to Webster City Iowa where these came from he said instead of 7,50 I'll pay you triple that, which you made about twenty two dollars. Let me pick my own go through a sort through them get the best. And after that I never told anybody where I got my stock, I always said Well I went. Far and wide finding these birds and never said where you know. Because I didn't want people that live close to Webster City say, well if he got it from Murray McMurray I'll go to McMurray and they could high-grade the birds and got better stock than I started with so I was kept this secret and it wasn't until I sold the business to Tom Whiting in nineteen eighty nine I finally disclosed. where I actually got these birds for him. And by that time they was so much improved that it wouldn't matter if anybody went tto Webster City Iowa Murray McMurray because these birds were so much superior by this time. These other Birds were just common stock by then.

Henry Hoffman [00:34:01] Oh I first started out knowing I had like 80 to 100 or 200 birds a year for the first three years. I'd take them out in the woods and just dump the bodies. And let the wild animals eat the carcasses. I got bigger production got into thousands that

became too labor intensive and I learned I worked in California I worked at a poultry hatchery there for about a year and a half. They used to take a dead chickens and feed them to some pigs this guy had just for that purpose. So I started buying weaner pigs eight weeks of age in October. So over time I started killing the chickens in November. From then on we just feed the carcasses to the pigs and then we'd eat one pig, would give one the pig to my folks and then we'd sell the other meat for a dollar and a quarter pound to people we knew. And so that was a good way that utilized the chickens and get something out of it. It was less labor. And we'd save about 60 to 90 hens ourselves because they were more tender. The chicken you buy for frying in the stores is six to nine weeks old. These are nine to 13 months old. So you just can't throw the meat in the frying pan to be tender. But we said we'd make soup chickens out of a few of the hens.

Henry Hoffman [00:35:29] The biggest change I can see firsthand is I started out selling the feathers. People just wanted the dry fly hackle and some them even use dry fly hackle on nymphs. And first hen necks, I could sell it all with the barred rock hen necks for 50 cents a piece because they've used the tips for wings and adams flies. And now I see hen necks going for twenty to twenty five dollars a piece. That's more than they used to get for the rooster necks. In fact, when I first started the quality was so poor I got three dollars apiece for the rooster necks and seventy five cents for all the saddle hackle that was loose on the roosters. In fact as far as I know I'm the first one to start selling the saddle hackles on the skin as they got more feathers and longer more dry fly and I started selling them dry fly saddle hackle on the skids. And then the body feathers like talked about before. Chickabou specials and Damsel hens and stuff, selling a lot of breast feathers. and thigh patches with the knee hackle and stuff for subsurface. Because as most people know a fish feed 90 percent of the time subsurface. So there's a big need for hackle that will move really nicely under the surface. And so there's been a shift towards wet fly materials.

Henry Hoffman [00:37:28] Now just just keep up your interest in the sport that. So many young people are into their handheld computerized thing. They should take a little bit of time away from that. Enjoy nature and get out the streams and lakes and oceans and look around and enjoy the wildlife we we have and not everything is on handheld devices. Go get some exercise, enjoy nature.