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Reed Howald [00:00:14] When we were real little, we'd catch grasshoppers and put them on and fish with our mother and not catch anything. Well my father caught a lot of fish on dry flies.

James Thull [00:00:30] So that kind of brought you into the world of fly fishing.

Reed Howald [00:00:38] I did some fishing on my father's shoulders. Casting and catching some fish. But eventually I caught a fish on a dry fly by myself. You have a nice collection. For people to look at. I think You're. Heading for going online. With. A lot of things which. Maybe more available. People in the future are going to wonder what things were like back in the 60s. Just like we wonder what it was like here in 1900. My father would have to be number one one. I learned on his shoulders, literally. I can't name a lot of others.

James Thull [00:02:37] Yeah so it seems like your dad was really the one that brought you in angling and fly fishing.

Reed Howald [00:02:41] And chemistry and math. All kinds of things.

James Thull [00:02:47] Served as kind of a real role model for you in many areas. And it sounds like your mom fished a bit too.

Reed Howald [00:02:53] Yes. She never cast as far as my dad did. I never did either for that matter. I still don't. She was good with a short rod and short cast and caught fish.

James Thull [00:03:29] So it's kind of a family affair, growing up almost.

Reed Howald [00:03:39] Yes. Of the three children. I'm the only one who was really a fly fisher.

Reed Howald [00:03:59] Yes. He grew up in Missouri and was a big fisherman. When he finished school. At the University of Pittsburgh and got a job at the Mellon Institute in Pennsylvania. He did his first fly fishing in Pennsylvania. A story he tells. Fishing with a dry fly and not catching anything. Talking to these other fishermen. And showing them his fly. They said he had to put a worm on it. On the hook. So. What he was learning from weren't really dry fly fishing men. Well. He was known to fishermen as Doc.

James Thull [00:05:17] As Doc?

Reed Howald [00:05:19] But his name is Arthur Mark Howald. Named after his Grandfather. And one of his sons is Arthur Mark Howald as well. He grew up in Missouri on Missouri ST. For his first PhD degree and his first job he was in Pennsylvania and there are some good trout streams there. He learned how to dry fly fish in Pennsylvania. Which is not easy dry fly fishing.

James Thull [00:06:23] I've never, I haven't finished much on the East Coast. Have you fished out there?

Reed Howald [00:06:27] A lot when I was young. I learned to fish in Pennsylvania. Then my father built a fishing cabin in Michigan. I helped build it. My brother helped build it. We fished there a lot.

James Thull [00:06:54] What rivers did you fish in Michigan?

Reed Howald [00:06:58] The two I know really well are the Cedar and the Middle Branch.

James Thull [00:07:03] Rainbows, Browns, brookies?

Reed Howald [00:07:09] Those streams have all three. But I am definitely a brown trout specialist.

James Thull [00:07:25] Yeah. Well they say they're the smartest of the fish.

Reed Howald [00:07:31] They certainly have associated with human beings for a much longer period of time.

Reed Howald [00:07:47] His invention of the glass fly rod revolutionized fly fishing.

James Thull [00:07:58] And so to be clear just just for posterity's sake here, your dad invented the first fiberglass fishing rod. He was the first one to develop it. He was the first one to patent it.

Reed Howald [00:08:09] He was the first one to make one and fish with it.

James Thull [00:08:12] And what company did he work with to develop that?

Reed Howald [00:08:15] Well he developed it working for the plastics company. That. He. That was made to exploit one of his inventions which was the urea formaldehyde molding compound. The Plascon company holds the patent on the glass. Because he was working for them as director of Research when he built the first one. But. When he had it built he wanted to try it out in the middle of the war, world War II. He had to have guides and apparel and so. He needed fittings and he got them from Shakespeare Company and that was the start of the relationship. And Shakespeare makes rods. But the first rods that they made were Howald process rods. They sold rods before and other people sold Shakespeare reels. But they were Shakespeare did not make any rods until the Howald process. And they built a separate plant in South Carolina to do that. He invented that just when they were wanting to go into rods.

James Thull [00:09:47] All that work and it seemed to be real good. Your dad had a pretty good relationship with Shakespeare over the years, then.

Reed Howald [00:10:08] Wonderful relationship. I think they both profited greatly from it. In the course of his life. He hooked into roughly thirty-inch fish five times at least. He never landed. But the. Story I want to tell you was one of the first of those.

James Thull [00:10:35] Were these -?

Reed Howald [00:10:36] That he hooked in the Cedar River in Michigan.

James Thull [00:10:40] Are we talking Browns or rainbows?

Reed Howald [00:10:42] This was a brown. I think some of his could have been big rainbows. He hooked this brown in the Cedar River. A little further. Downstream from

where we used to fish. He played it perfectly. And he had that fish floating upside down beside me. And he took out his net and put the nose of the fish in the net and lifted it but the center of gravity of the fish was beyond the edge of the net. The fish fell off, snapped the leader and floated away. That net got thrown in the bushes and he'd never used a fishing net after that in his life.

James Thull [00:11:43] That's that's a hard story. What do you know what rod, what what gear he was using?

Reed Howald [00:11:51] That would have been a bamboo rod.

James Thull [00:11:52] And a dry fly?

Reed Howald [00:11:55] And a dry fly.

James Thull [00:11:56] Right. Any idea about approximately what year that would have been?

[00:12:05] Late 30s.

James Thull [00:12:06] 30s. So probably. 75 80 years ago we're talking? All right.

Reed Howald [00:12:28] With a family of. Fishermen, I think even my youngest sister held a rod some in her life. Father had a supply of bamboo rods. My sister and I. She was my closest playmate. All my growing up. After at least after I was five years old. So we went fishing together. And playing together. And one of the things we would do when we were fishing was. Decide to quit and go off in the woods a little while. Lay the rods down on the gravel bank and walk away. I stepped on some of them. So in the middle of a war with bamboo unavailable and there were no bamboo for sale, we depleted his supply. But he had his good broken bamboo rods. He said since he was working with glass fiber and plastic. I think they would build an airplane out of it. He said I wonder if that would work to repair. So. He. Tried that and it worked. That. Was. Essentially as good as. Said if glass fiber plastic does that well on this. I wonder what it would do on a whole rod. And he built, I don't think the first one he built was really any good. I know he built a lot of rods trying to get the action just the way he wanted it. I mean a lot. That's. Close to a hundred, I think.

James Thull [00:14:58] So he kind of went through and just.

Reed Howald [00:15:02] You can make a glass rod with any action you want. But most of them were either too stiff or too limber. The natural vibration period of fiberglass Rod is still important. On a bamboo rod, it's extremely important. On a graphite rod, you don't need to pick the weight of the line to match for the period of the rod. Because the rod doesn't have that much mass. But when they were gonna go into production. Shakespeare said we can't. Start selling until we've got a. Casting rod. Been fishing. And the line. My father went out and bought a Steel. Spinning Rod. Matched it in glass. The first one was the one that went into production.

James Thull [00:16:22] So the fly rod became, came before the spinning rod. But in order to market the one, he had to have the other.

Reed Howald [00:16:28] Yeah.

James Thull [00:16:28] I gotcha. OK. All right. Is there any other information that you'd like to share with us about your dad or about the development of the rod or about his impact. Before we move on to questions some questions for you about your your many years of fishing in Montana.

Reed Howald [00:17:03] I've been extremely fortunate because of. My father's relationship with Shakespeare. I have probably broken more rods in my life than anybody else in the world, because my father would repair broken rods and keep me supplied. He. Sent. A sample over one of the first graphite rods to me. I am a friend of. Fishing friend of my father and me both. Took that rod out in. Below zero weather. To see how it worked. And we're fishing from the bank on the East Gallatin River. We decided it worked OK. And reeled it in and found that there was about 2 grams of ice on the fly.

James Thull [00:18:19] Holy smokes.

Reed Howald [00:18:20] That rod put us, casting that real heavy fly. Okay.

James Thull [00:18:26] That's impressive.

Reed Howald [00:18:28] If you did that, bites on your pole.

James Thull [00:18:30] That's impressive. Yeah.

Reed Howald [00:18:43] Well, there's definitely more fish here than there were in Pennsylvania. Also makes a difference to fishing how educated the fish are. I have educated essentially all the brown trout in rocky creek near my house. If I catch a 15 or 16 inch brown. I'm fairly sure I caught that fish before. Yeah. But. There are other streams. Again. When we first moved here in the sixties, 1963. So I was doing a lot of fishing in 64 and 65.

James Thull [00:19:56] Do you have a favorite river?

Reed Howald [00:20:06] Ben Hard Creek is my all time favorite. But I haven't fished in years.

James Thull [00:20:12] What was it, Ben?

Reed Howald [00:20:16] Ben Hard, at Lesley's place.

James Thull [00:20:26] Oh, okay. Ben Hard Creek.

Reed Howald [00:20:28] Wonderful story. Fishing the east Gallatin. Right there by the road where this creek comes into it. You could see fish rising up there. I caught one one of the first times that I fished past that point. Ben Hard, which is back on the ranch and that, no hope to. Find. And I. Have caught grayling where ben Hard Creek runs into the East Gallatin.

James Thull [00:21:09] Wow. Grayling are beautiful fish.

Reed Howald [00:21:11] They are. And that pool had quite a few grayling. I caught two myself.

Reed Howald [00:21:27] A light, short graphite rod.

James Thull [00:21:31] Do you have kind of an all purpose fly?

Reed Howald [00:21:33] Absolutely. The RAH special. My initials.

James Thull [00:21:42] Okay.

Reed Howald [00:21:46] A subset of the RAH special is the AMA special, which is the RAH special with. A particular shade of orange yarn.

James Thull [00:21:55] All right. Is that something you tie yourself?

Reed Howald [00:22:02] I tie all my own flies. My father tied all of his own. So. I developed the RAH special. He tried it and then started tying his own. So the ones he tied are a little different than the ones I tied. Basically a wet fly hook. So you've got a strong hook of a reasonable size and then the yarn extends beyond the bottom of the fish so you have a big fly. A big fly with lots of hackle and that's the essence of it.

James Thull [00:22:50] Have you tried to match it to any particular hatch or is it just kind of a?

Reed Howald [00:22:56] When I first tied them I tried to make it into a grasshopper by putting grasshopper wings on it. That's a great fly too but it's not worth the extra effort. When you have. A grasshopper fly. It looks like a grasshopper. When you jerk it and it flies through the air it's the action. Makes you see they can see grasshopper. I don't think trout are that selective. I think. All. This business of flies is about fishing and not trout. And of course. When there's. Nothing out but little rainbows. They'll just grab the tail end of that fly and not get the hook so you can't hook them. So. You got to use the smaller fly sometimes. And sometimes you catch a big fish on the smaller fly. But they had to develop that fly for a basic reason. A light, long shank hook. Is excellent. If it's made. With. The right. iron. Steel. There are not enough fish hooks made. To make a modern batch of steel. For fish hooks.

James Thull [00:24:53] I see. I didn't know that.

Reed Howald [00:24:55] So. In the. 20s and 30s you could get long shank hooks that would actually catch a big fish. But the best hooks my father could find. You tie your fly on it. Catch all kinds of fish you finally get a big fish. The hook bends or breaks. Depending on whether the iron is too, which side it's off on. The big flies are great for attracting big fish. But I'm giving up on this losing all the big fish because the hook breaks.

Reed Howald [00:25:56] Brown Trout. Because they're smarter. And you have to be a good fisherman to catch an educated brown trout.

James Thull [00:26:18] So you find it more challenging to catch Browns, you think?

Reed Howald [00:26:38] Well the portion of Rocky Creek that I fish is a brown and rainbow spawning ground so there's lots and lots of rainbows. There's a fair number of small browns. The biggest size of rainbow that there's any quantity of is thirteen inches. There's a couple fifteen inches, occasionally, in that stretch of stream. But they go downstream as they get bigger. The only resident big fish are the browns. And because

they pick their. Spots. I couldn't know where the big fish are. And they're still there. Even after. I will keep a brown trout. Occasionally. The larger ones. My policy is always put the little browns back. Catch them again later. But. That means nobody else that they know. What to look for.

James Thull [00:28:22] Sure.

Reed Howald [00:28:30] One nice thing about dry fly fishing and looking through rises. You can sometimes find that out. It was. Very frustrating for me to fish the Firehole River. When I was. In my 20s. I'm not an expert fisherman. To see where there are a bunch of. Big Fish rising. And. So you fly in there. Get. A. Strike. With bunch of good size fish feeding, I tended to try to hit the bottom and that there was no use at all. It. Was quite a while before I learned that. You've got to fish for the top one. You got to cast way above the whole bunch and they'll float it down. You can sometimes learn where the fish are just by the rises. But that's something. That the fish can learn too. Biggest change in the Gallatin Valley. I think the number of fish in this stream is about the same since the early sixties. But the number of. Surface rises that you see is much less. You could just walk up to the stream sometimes and the fish would be rising all over the place. You don't see that anymore because there's fishing pressure now that there wasn't then. And I talked about Ben Hard Creek. There's a pool on that stream. Is called frustration point. Because any time in the summer and sometimes in the winter you see rising fish there. You can. Keep fishing that pool changing flies drawing the line. Not put them down. They'll keep rising. What they've learned in that particular pool that when there's a fisherman there. Then they can tell. Don't try anything new. You can still feed on what you've been feeding on. But don't try anything else. The. Only way to catch fish in that pool is to rest it and sneak up and get your fly in there.

James Thull [00:32:10] You can't take them by surprise.

Reed Howald [00:32:10] Yes. One way. There is one way to do it. It's pay fishing. Also. It's quite different. You couldn't. Now if it weren't pay fishing rest the pool. Because some other. Fishermen come along and fish then. And. But you can rest the pool by putting Tom Hart there. He would fish it. He is quiet and still. It would be rested. Then I could come. By and feel my fly. And raise one.

Reed Howald [00:33:11] We have certainly spread. Brown trout around the world. Here in they're European fish. They're all over the United States. And New Zealand. South America has some too. They're everywhere. It's worthwhile going to New Zealand. South America. Could find brown trout that haven't been fished. Over. A lot and aren't quite as educated as the US ones are or the European ones are. And it's. Wonderful. To find a. Gate on the way to the stream that says fishermen welcome. Rather than keep out.

James Thull [00:34:17] Yeah.

Reed Howald [00:34:17] So I've been to New Zealand twice in my life and hope to go once more.

James Thull [00:34:26] How was the fishing?

Reed Howald [00:34:26] Great.

James Thull [00:34:28] Browns mainly, rainbows?

Reed Howald [00:34:32] Well, I tell you I'd catch an occasional rainbow but.

James Thull [00:34:39] Mainly Browns?

Reed Howald [00:34:40] What I catch is browns close to any stream.

James Thull [00:34:44] Yeah and I don't believe there are any native trout to New Zealand correct?

Reed Howald [00:34:52] No.

James Thull [00:34:54] They're all invasive. They're all planted, right?

Reed Howald [00:34:56] Rainbows and Browns and the salmon. People who settled there wanted to fish for.

James Thull [00:35:11] Yeah.

James Thull [00:35:12] Well I've always said the reason why we have trout all over is because wherever the British went they brought trout. So and so you know you go to South Africa you go there's a uh in the Himalayas you name it and there is trout because the British stocked them. And so in and for the most part there's wild species. Yeah I mean they're they're self producing now. They're still invasive but they're self producing. So there's still wild fish. All right. Yeah. I've never fished New Zealand, but.

Reed Howald [00:35:45] I think there will always be brown trout. You may not. Be able to catch. Large cutthroats anywhere in the world in another 20 years. They may all be caught out. You could catch very large brook trout in all the great lakes during which. When the white man first came. You don't. catch many of them now. That's where it's headed with the brown trout. They'll be big brown trout wherever there are brown trout.

Reed Howald [00:37:11] They had to. They grew up with. Fishing pressure. Generation after generation thousands and thousands of years.

James Thull [00:37:34] So they've learned to fear man.

Reed Howald [00:37:43] Probably brook trout and rainbows and cutthroats. Inherently as smart. But they haven't. Had their brains directed into how to avoid people. Over generations.

Reed Howald [00:38:15] Of course. But there's enough streams in Canada Alaska that would still be great. My father's caught trout in the Cuyahoga River in Ohio. Not the part that. Was. You could set on fire. But. Further upstream. There were still brown big brown trout living there in 1970. And. We do an awful lot of fishing in Ohio.

James Thull [00:39:18] All right.

Reed Howald [00:39:18] In the stream. Coming from. Limestone cave.

James Thull [00:39:31] Kept the water cool?

Reed Howald [00:39:35] And there was a. We had to try out all those glass rods, fiber rods and Cast right so. Got a membership in a. Place where you paid for the fish you caught. And we did a lot of fishing there. Just testing rods.

James Thull [00:39:57] Sure.

Reed Howald [00:39:58] All year long.

James Thull [00:40:02] Right.

Reed Howald [00:40:05] Wouldn't take much global warming to. Lose the few streams that are cold enough for trout in Ohio. Probably the Upper Peninsula in Michigan is going to be OK for the rest of this century.

James Thull [00:40:25] Yeah with Lake Superior there it's deep enough to keep the water cold. I'd agree with you there. I think that one of the things that people overlook. For the most part trout and salmon are pretty sensitive and a few degrees difference in temp water temperature can mean a world of difference. And I mean it could mean the difference between having and not having trout in that water essentially. And so we'll see what's coming down the pike. But all right.

Reed Howald [00:41:04] Let me tell you about the. Last. Fishing trip that Harlan and I did on the Jefferson River.

James Thull [00:41:20] Excellent.

Reed Howald [00:41:20] When I moved here the Jefferson River was full of. Rising. Whitefish. The road went right along the river. You couldn't drive it without seeing rising fish and most of them were white fish. That stream declined. Too much water taken out. Too warm. The guide we had. Years and years when there were no whitefish in there. But. That stream is coming back because there's an agreemtn. They're not taking as much irrigation water out of it. It's. Kept a little bit cooler in the summer. Fishing is coming back there, wonderfully. This guy knew where the rainbows were and we caught a lot of fish there. We came up to one pool. Where he said he'd seen a lot of fish the last time he fished it. Rising. We knew it was good water and there wasn't the rising fish the day we were there. But I put my fly out there on the surface and left it there as long as I could. Well the boat's moving. And a fish came up for it and I didn't get it, didn't hook it. But the guide said That. Looked like. A. Classic good time. That's the kind of rise it was. And that scared, all rises scare me. But. That one impressed the main guide. And. We did catch. Harlan caught a White Fish. We caught a lot of rainbows. That one came up with some deadly big brown. And I caught a cutthroat.

James Thull [00:43:48] That's what I heard, yeah. That's wonderful.

Reed Howald [00:43:50] No stripe on it at all. Well we figure it must have come from down the Madison on the way up to Jefferson. Cherry Creek.

Reed Howald [00:44:18] Don't give up on dry flies. If you face your dry fly right. And the water is clear so that the fish can see it. And it doesn't have to be a terribly clear. I. caught some nice fish on dry flies with murky water. It gets really muddy. But when it's really muddy. There's no use fishing wet flies either. So I'll stick with the dry fly. That will give you the thrill of the fish coming up for it.

James Thull [00:44:52] So it's worth the effort.

Reed Howald [00:44:59] It's worth it. It gives you what you want in fish.

James Thull [00:45:03] Well Reed is there anything that you'd like to add any any other anecdotes for for future anglers that you'd like to pass on?

Reed Howald [00:45:12] Well. Stick with the graphite rod. You can't beat that. Polyvinyl chloride lines are not very good. They have to have plasticizer to be flexible enough to use. They lose plasticizer. So you cannot put grease on a polyvinyl chloridge line. Plasticizer will dissolve in the grease, it comes off and you lose the plasticizer. The rod gets brittle and breaks. You can still use a line with a lot of breaks in it. Because. Been. Nylon Inside will still hold it together. It's. Matt. May's. Linseed Oil lines work. Much better. But. You could make a polyvinyl chloride line one pass. The process for making a good. Linseed Oil line takes Months and months and months. So nobody will do it and they'll tell you that these lines float but you can't put something on it to make a fly. Somewhere. Somebody's got to solve that.