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Annette Lilly [00:00:14] I have a, a lot of great memories. But I think my best memory about fly fishing was, one year, when I was probably in my late teens, in the fall, in Yellowstone Park, when the, um, brown, brown trout were spawning, and we would, it was cold, and it was almost winter fishing. And we went up on the Madison River in Yellowstone Park, to fish for spawning brown trout. A friend of mine and I, and when you stood in the water in your waders, you know, it got really frigid. And as usual, we fished quite a ways apart, you know, so we gave each other lots of room, you know, in the river to fish, and so it was very solitary. It was cold. It was quiet. There was snow on the ground. And I was fishing, and enjoying myself, and I don't even remember, honestly, how good the fishing was that day. But I finally had to get out on the bank, you know, to warm up. And it was during elk rutting season, so I was standing there, and I looked around, and there was a cow elk. Pretty, pretty darn close to where I was standing. And I knew it was rutting season, and I'm thinking, 'OK. This might not be good.' And sure enough, you know, pretty soon a bull elk came from the other angle, came kind of toward the cow elk, and I guess he thought I was threatening, because he bugled, right there. And it was just spectacular.

James Thull [00:02:02] I bet.

Annette Lilly [00:02:02] You know, the whole experience was... Fishing, was about fly fishing for me. It just never got any better than that. But I've had other, you know, experiences like that. That have made those times special. Not just when the fishing was absolutely spectacular. But it's more, for me, about, you know, who I'm with, you know. Whatever, however I'm connected to what's going on around me, in the environment, that makes the fishing a really excellent experience.

Annette Lilly [00:02:45] Well, as we talked about just a few minutes ago, the fact that fishing is such an old, old, old activity. And that, a collection like this has been able to chart the evolution of that activity, from something that is strictly subsistence and human survival oriented, and to see how it's become more and more sophisticated, in lots of different ways, and then, been able to be converted into a pastime, hobby, or sport. I really, I love that evolutionary saving of that history. Because it's such a big part of who we are, as a civilization. That, um, for us to understand, from way back when, the value of this resource that we've had, and all the people who've been involved in it, with its development. That have, and all the things they brought to the table, around this, with, you know, so many aspects. It's not just about fish. It's about so many, it's about technology, it's about environmentalism, it's about entomology, it's, you know, about camaraderie. And so I think that, that this collection, encompasses that.

James Thull [00:04:21] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:04:21] In more ways than, in more ways than people could ever imagine.

Annette Lilly [00:04:32] So as, uh, I grew up in West Yellowstone, Montana. Where my family owned a fly fishing business. And when you own a fly fishing business, where your whole family is involved. Which we were, my two older brothers and I, you never, ever have a day off together, it's impossible. There had to always be somebody in the shop, from the family, working. Facilitating things. So it was so rare we ever got days off. But we took, always took, one day off. Which was August 13th, which was my dad's birthday. And we always went to the Gallatin River, as a family, and fished in the afternoon, and then

had, my mother loved cooking over a campfire, and she would make steak, and rolls, and a green salad, and beans, for my dad's birthday dinner. And so it was one of the really rare times that we fished together, as a family. So I'd have to say the Gallatin River, is my most favorite. We thought it was our family river. And, um, and I knew so many places there.

James Thull [00:05:45] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:05:46] With, and it had so many memories. And when you grow up, grow up in a fly fishing family; your memory is all about every place you fished, who you fished with, probably what fly you fished with, how many fish you caught. And so, as we would drive down the Gallatin, back and forth between Bozeman and West Yellowstone, there was always that reminiscing. And so, I fished with so many people on the Gallatin, that would have to be my favorite stream, simply for that reason.

James Thull [00:06:26] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:06:26] Well, that would be my dad. Because my dad opened Bud Lilly's Trout Shop in 1952, and then I was born in 1954. So I was literally born into the sport. And I was the youngest child. I had two older brothers. So there was absolutely no discussion about whether we would all be involved in fly fishing. That was just the way it was. And, right from the start, when I was a little girl, like three, we would camp and go fishing, and I'd have to have my own little rod. And we didn't fly fish, of course, when we were little. We had little Zebco spinning rods, and we would stand out in the street, in West Yellowstone, with a little casting plug, you know, they had a little closed face spinning reel, you know, that we would practice casting and reeling. And we'd always get it in a mess. And my dad would have to come out of the shop, and untangle the mess that we'd created in the spinning reel. You know, so, [Laughs]. And then as we got older, I'm sure. This is going to be surprising. My dad, I'm sure taught me a lot, about fly fishing, but really, my older brothers and I, fished a lot when we were younger, because we grew up in a place where the rivers were so accessible. We could ride our bikes to the Mad- the Madison in the park, or the Madison, lower Madison, or the, um, some of the creeks in the area. And so, and then my brothers could drive, by the time I was, you know, in junior high. So we could drive to the Gallatin, or to the Fan Creek or, and so, as far as developing my fishing skills, it had to be my brothers. We would go, you know, and fish together. And hike together. And at that time not many f- there were no other girls that fished. Period. The only other people I knew that fished were boys my age.

James Thull [00:08:32] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:08:33] And I had a couple of really good guy friends. You know, in junior high and high school, that, we would fish, fished a lot. And by that time, my dad was really, just really wrapped up in the business. But I'm sure I fished with him a lot, and learned the basics. And, obviously, that was the thing that really dominated our conversation, was, was fishing. And it was just a deep thing in our life. It was our life.

James Thull [00:08:58] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:09:00] And, my father, early on, philosophy, was that fly fishing is a total experience. That was really his motto, or... Value, around fly fishing. That it was not just about catching a lot of big fish. That it was about being in the water, understanding the entomology, appreciating the mountains, you know the birds, the animals, all of that. Which is what brings you to the love of fly fishing.

James Thull [00:09:36] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:09:36] It was, you know, just to be out there. Connected to the environment by being, by fly fishing, was truly the passion. And why I love it. I just feel... So at home. So much myself, in a river like that. I don't even care if I catch any fish, anymore. It's, you know, it's just so refreshing, and revitalizing, and meditative, an experience, for me. Spiritual. There has to be.

James Thull [00:10:18] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:10:19] That's the word.

Annette Lilly [00:10:26] So, in 1973, there were no women that fished. So the husbands would go out with the guides, fish all day. The women would kind of hang around West Yellowstone. Which, did not have a whole bunch to do, but they stayed behind and watched, waited for the husbands. And. All the time I was growing up in the shop, which, I started working in the shop when I was 14 years old, and I would have come in, come into the shop, and I was really short, and really young, and they'd want to know about information about the fly fishing. And of course they obviously assumed that I knew absolutely nothing. And they were hesitant, you know, to really take my advice. And there was so, there was a lot of initial, um, stereotyping about women, in the sport. But because of that, and there was nobody, even by '73, fly fishing. We, my dad, actually decided to come up with a plan to teach women to fly fish. We called it, 'For Ladies Only.' And I was given the task to develop the program. Thing I quickly, quickly found out, is that you can be pretty expert in something, and be a very poor teacher.

James Thull [00:11:50] [Laughs].

Annette Lilly [00:11:51] Because a lot of what you learn, is ingrained in you as like, 'Everybody must know this,' it seems like second nature.

James Thull [00:11:58] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:11:59] So it was very challenging. That I had to learn to be a teacher, an effective teacher, and to understand people's learning abilities. And, I had to start at square one. And find out what people wanted to learn, what, how to in, uh, work into the, not just the mechanics of teaching somebody to fish, but that whole idea of developing an enjoyment for them.

James Thull [00:12:31] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:12:32] Because, at first, it's a difficult sport to learn. It takes practice for you to learn it, and to get good enough, to where you're catching fish, and getting the reward. So, when somebody was learning, I always felt like it was really important that you're providing them with a really positive experience, that would kind of keep them involved, and not discouraged, because they weren't catching fish, initially.

James Thull [00:12:54] Sure. Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:12:55] So that was also something that I, when I was dealing with women. They were interested. They loved the name of the wildflowers, and they loved the wildlife, and the birds. And we had a great lunch on the river, you know.

James Thull [00:13:09] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:13:09] So that was, that was really great. That was really fun. I went on, actually, after a while, to learn to also teach the men to fish. And this is a general, generalization, but I found out that women and men sometimes have different learning styles, because women; you would explain it, and they'd ask you questions, and, you know, this and that, and then they would be ready to start with execution. And then the men; were just more interested in picking up the rod, and just going ahead, and asking questions as they went along. So there was differences, you know, in how I, not everybody was that way, but how I had to learn how to teach to different learning styles, I would say. So, but women were, really it was great timing. It was kind of like, you know, the second wave of feminism. And so women were really becoming more and more involved in things that were considered primarily men's domains, at that point.

James Thull [00:14:11] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:14:12] And, so the timing was great, and there were a lot of women who were very interested, and really excited about it. And they liked doing it with other women, because there was that camaraderie.

James Thull [00:14:23] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:14:23] That was important to adding to the experience of the fishing.

James Thull [00:14:27] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:14:27] And, uh, I, so, yeah. Over time. The challenges were just in learning.... The progressions of how best to teach people.

James Thull [00:14:42] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:14:42] This sport. But it was, it was great. I mean, it opened up my world, because I had always been a woman who had not ever really had other women to fish with. So it really started to open up, to the world of women enjoying the sport. In a little different, from a little different viewpoint, maybe, than men.

Annette Lilly [00:15:11] Well, I think Joan Wulff was always the very first.

James Thull [00:15:14] OK.

Annette Lilly [00:15:15] Before me.

James Thull [00:15:16] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:15:16] I don't think there was really anybody else.

James Thull [00:15:20] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:15:20] That I knew personally. There were some tie, fly tyers that were quite famous.

James Thull [00:15:25] Oh yeah.

Annette Lilly [00:15:26] Women fly tyers.

James Thull [00:15:26] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:15:27] But, you know, that was kind of that, fine motor skill type of thing. But, as far as actually, actively, participating in fly fishing, I guess it would have to be Joan Wulff.

Annette Lilly [00:15:46] It was very exciting to take somebody who did not know anything about the sport. Couldn't, didn't know how to do it. To teach them just enough in, you know, during, throughout the day, that maybe they could actually catch a fish. And we always called it, we fly fished, with the fisherman, versus fly fishing as a guide, you fly fish with the fishermen. You don't fly fish with a rod.

James Thull [00:16:13] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:16:13] So you stand there, where you're able to, you know, assist that person, help them read the water, help them place that cast, help them watch the fly, you know. And so, when they would hook a fish, and they'd be so excited, that, that was the best. To be able to see somebody, you know, catch that first fish, or hook that first fish.

James Thull [00:16:33] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:16:33] And I remember, one of the first women I took, was a practice person. Who was, had been an old clients of ours for years. And the wife was interested in learning to fish, but she was not cr- extreme about it.

James Thull [00:16:50] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:16:50] And, uh, so I took her up, um, Biscuit Basin, in the park, in Yellowstone Park, and we put on a zug bug, and I taught her enough to fish, and she caught a fish. I think I was 10 times more excited than she was. It was, I was so excited, that she caught a fish! So we landed it, and we released it, and then she looks at me and she goes "That's great. Now we can just enjoy the rest of the day." [Laughter].

James Thull [00:17:19] Very nice.

Annette Lilly [00:17:22] And, you know, there was just, fly fishing is not predictable.

James Thull [00:17:27] Nope.

Annette Lilly [00:17:28] It changes day to day, hour to hour. And there was times that the fishing was just not good.

James Thull [00:17:35] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:17:35] It was impossible to catch a fish. And people who are new at fly fishing, don't necessarily understand that.

James Thull [00:17:42] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:17:42] And so, sometimes, it was just frustrating. Because I couldn't control everything.

James Thull [00:17:47] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:17:48] I couldn't control the, the experience all of the time, I did so much want to help people have a first good, positive, interaction with the sport.

James Thull [00:17:57] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:17:58] So that was frustrating.

James Thull [00:18:00] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:18:08] No, I don't have a favorite. I think they're all beautiful. They're all beautiful, in their own way. And they're all occupying an important spot, in the ecosystem. And, yes, I just, I do like trout though. I like trout very much, because that's what I grew up fishing for, and not so much salmon.

James Thull [00:18:37] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:18:37] And so I'm really limited, in how I've fished for other fish, in my life. To me, trout will always be fly fishing.

James Thull [00:18:43] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:18:45] No matter which species of trout. They're just all beautiful to me, you know.

James Thull [00:18:49] So you're not partial to cuts over brookies? Or

Annette Lilly [00:18:51] No, no. They are all gorgeous. Absolutely.

Annette Lilly [00:19:02] You know, over the years, I've seen a lot of positive changes in the fishing game. Montana Fish and Wildlife, uh life, and there were some real pioneers, early on. Dick Vincent, and some of those guys, who really understood the value of the resource. And were really committed to preserving it, and keeping it healthy. So, I really think, and I've been out of Montana for a lot of years, but even still, I just think that Montana Fish and Game, or whatever they're called now, has done really great work, as far as trying to keep it a public, healthy, accessible, trout population. Trout, available to the public. So, um, I have, I would like to give them a lot of credit. I think, um, you know, TU and FFF bring different perspectives to the sport. And TU has really been active, I think, in preserving public access, which has been the hardest thing for me to watch over the years, as some, all of the places I used to go, that are now cut off to me, and to the public, to access the fishing. And in Montana, the water, the stream, is public access, but actually getting across the land, into the stream, is the problem. And ever, there are just so many places that have been locked up.

James Thull [00:20:39] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:20:40] And I just, I'm glad that TU, and the Fish and Game, and, I don't know about FFF quite as much, but, you know, they kind of jumped in there pretty quickly, I thought. When they come to, started to recognize that happening. And trying to work out access issues with new owners, or farmers and ranchers, that they could convince that, you know, what they had on their property, with the river running through it, or a spring creek, or any other kind of creek, that it was a really valuable natural resource. That needed to be preserved. And they were able to start to create that momentum, for helping to conserve and preserve this really great natural resource that we have in Montana. Not just because it's right, but because it's also economical. We have our huge economy built on our natural resources of Fish and Game. So, that, that's been my perception. But, like I said, I've been gone from Montana for quite some time, and I do know that there's a movement to restore the only native species to the area, which is the West Slope cutthroat. Personally, I'm just not sure we can go backwards. That's just a personal feeling. And I like, and I understand that, brown and rainbow, and brookies, were all invasive species, and, but I just don't know if we can go backwards. It'll be interesting. Because I've gone to Fish and Game presentations where they're doing these pilot projects with, you know, eliminating the, um, all the other trout except the West Slope Cutthroat Trout. I'll be interested to see what the result of that is.

James Thull [00:22:40] Hm.

Annette Lilly [00:22:47] It's kind of a double edged sword. In the sense that, it's wonderful that so many people fly fish now. You know, it just exploded. In the days, when I was growing up, there was a lot of people, but there was a lot of river.

James Thull [00:23:02] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:23:02] So that meant, when you were in the river, you were solitary. And, when I come back now, to Montana, and fish, that's just a lot rarer. There's just a lot more people; in the rivers, in fly fish- and I'm glad for that, because they're out there, they're enjoying the resource, and all of that. But, from a selfish point of view, it's hard because-

James Thull [00:23:28] It's different.

Annette Lilly [00:23:28] It's different. It is different. But I've seen so many women; fishing together, fishing out of Mackenzie river boats, or rafts, with their children. It's a, you know, a family sport. That's another thing I've seen, used to not particularly be a family sport. I think it really helps people appreciate the environment, and the natural resources. To do the conservation. And pay attention to global warming, and how, you know, the climate change is affecting the environment, all the way around. I mean, I think that's really a valuable part of fly fishing, is that it really raise, raises people's awareness, because they value that now, where, they're not taking it for granted. They have a stake in it. And so now they're paying more attention to that type of thing. So, um, I think it's, it's excellent that more people are out in the rivers, enjoying it. In Montana. As for the future, there probably is just going to have to be more restrictions. I think a lot of, lot of people on the river put a lot of pressure on the fishing. And there's going to have to, unfortunately, be some sort of a management, probably. You know, the amount of pressure a river gets, in order to keep it healthy.

James Thull [00:25:03] Mm.

Annette Lilly [00:25:03] And maybe that, and that is going on in certain areas, in certain ways. But if, you know, the trend continues with people fishing. I'm certain congested areas, really heavily, then, you know, I'm afraid that that will have to happen.

Annette Lilly [00:25:30] You know, so many great wildlife encounters. That you would never, ever have, otherwise, I think. To get to drive through Yellowstone Park, and to see the elk from the side of the road, is not nearly as much as standing in the river, having an elk bugle at you.

James Thull [00:25:47] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:25:48] And, you know, there were so many encounters like that. With, um, eagles, and swans, and elk, and bison, and deer, and squirrels, and marmots, and, you know, I think that was, it was the wildlife, that made it really unusual.

James Thull [00:26:11] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:26:17] I would say, first of all, you don't have to buy every single piece of equipment advertised. Because, the rod, the reel, and the line, is the most important thing. All the rest of it's kind of fluff. To definitely have somebody show you the mechanics of casting. Get some sort of instruction, because I think it's really hard to understand how to fly fish. Not only the mechanics of it, but how, where the fish are in the stream, and how they hold, and what they eat on, basic, basic, basic stuff. Which, I think that, if you don't have the basics, it can just be totally frustrating.

James Thull [00:27:00] Mhm.

Annette Lilly [00:27:02] To go with somebody who's not so intense that it's not a fun experience. You know, make sure that somebody, whoever you're going with to teach you, is going to make it a fun, positive experience, because there's some frustration involved with it.

James Thull [00:27:17] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:27:17] It's kind of a sport like tennis or skiing, that knowing that, you know, you've got to put in some time on the water, and build experience. To get good enough, to kind of enjoy some success at it. And that's the realistic expectation. But keeping it fun, and enjoyable, and staying involved with all those elements of the wildlife, and the flowers, and the lunch, and the companionship, to enhance the experience, you know, instead of just focusing on catching many fish or big fish, but to have somebody that you're fishing with that enjoys all of those elements as well. So that you're having a really positive experience.

Annette Lilly [00:28:05] Somebody who shares my same, uh, values about the experience. Um, that likes, loves the water, loves the mountains, loves the animals. Is not intent on just standing there, casting a thousand times to catch a fish. You know, that there's intermittent-cies throughout the day, where you share how much fun the experience has been together. Or you're able to point out, "Oh my gosh there's a moose with a calf over there."

James Thull [00:28:41] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:28:42] Somebody who is kind of tuned in to what you're tuned into. And, um, but, there's never going to be anybody who exactly matches my style. My husband is always a 'one more cast' kind of a guy. So I'm a little more patient waiting for him, and letting him enjoy his, that aspect of it, for him, as well. But,, definitely somebody who gets a lot of enjoyment from eating a baloney sandwich on the, you know, on the bank of the river.

James Thull [00:29:18] Do you get to fish with your brothers much, anymore?

Annette Lilly [00:29:23] Um, I haven't fished with my brothers, my brother Mike, much. But my brother Greg--until he moved to Southern California this year--we fished a lot together. And Mike and I fished early on as kids, and then as we got to be more adults, Greg and I became, fished a lot more together. So, yeah. I fished with my brother. And my husband, when he married me, he was a fly fisherman. But I like to say, he was not a technical fly fisherman. And, of course, once he found out, the, uh, impact, or, I'm trying to think of the word, of having married into a fishing family.

James Thull [00:30:10] Sure.

Annette Lilly [00:30:10] He got, he was very nervous at first, but he was a great student. And he, great learning student, and actually went so far, to take a couple of my brother Greg's "How to fish like a guide" week long courses, so he could really learn the finer techniques as he went along, and everything. So, uh, my husband became my, really greatest fly fishing partner.