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Tom Morgan [00:00:09] Well, I think they should start by getting set up with the right equipment. Well, maybe, or a shop, or somebody that they, know one can trust. You get him the right equipment to start with. I assume we're talking about fly fishing, which is what I know about. So, after getting the right equipment, and it doesn't have to be expensive. There's good equipment out there, these days, that's not expensive. But it should be a rod that works well, and if they have a knowledgeable dealer, or a friend, who can guide them into the right direction, that would be most helpful. After that, the thing that they definitely should learn, is how to cast. Casting, in the long run is not a very big part of fishing, but until you know how to cast, you can't do a good job of utilizing any equipment that you'd buy. So you should go to a school, or have somebody that really knows about casting, to teach you how to do it.

James Thull [00:01:51] There's a lot of printed material, videos, things like that out there, on casting. Is there anything in particular you recommend, or have found useful, or?

Tom Morgan [00:02:01] Well. The videos can be good. The problem with videos, is you can see how to do it but, they don't tell you what you're doing wrong.

James Thull [00:02:17] It's a one way flow of information.

Tom Morgan [00:02:19] And, and how to correct it. That's why getting somebody that really knows how to cast, and can identify what you're doing, and have it corrected, if you're not casting properly. I think that's essential.

Tom Morgan [00:02:45] Well, I thought quite a bit about that. While I don't specifically have a story, the fishing's meant a lot to me though, because it's given me something that I could do as an individual sport. It's given me something to do, that I love to do, and I've become very good at it. And it's providing hours and hours of enjoyment.

Tom Morgan [00:03:31] I think, somebody that's a good angler, somebody that knows about fishing on a level similar to me, and that's a good companion. There's two people that come to mind. One is Doug Newton. From Calgary. And the other is Gale House. From Walla Walla. We have, I've fished a lot with both of them on an individual basis. They're good companions on the stream, they're good fishermen. Doug and I used to have a great deal of fun. We would, um, he started out as a guiding client. Over the years we just became friends, spent a lot of time fishing together. Doug was an excellent fisherman, a good sport, and a good companion to visit with. And the thing I enjoyed by, with him, we would fish side-by-side, and go up a stream. And take turns fishing. Then we had a deal where, we called it, two blows or one fish. We took turns, and you'd either catch a fish or two blows, in other words, we'd miss two fish. Then it was the other guy's turn. So we had a lot of fun doing that. And Gale House, was, um, was kind of like a father to me. He was, um. Let's see, Gale's 95 now, I'm 73, so he was twenty two years older than me so, similar to a father. Well, we would, we fished together a lot. We didn't do the thing Doug and I did, but we would take turns. And it worked out. When it wasn't fair for the other guy. (unitelligible) but just a great companion. Very nice man, excellent fisherman. Well, those are the two most memorable for me.

Tom Morgan [00:06:23] Well, I've thought about that quite a bit, and the, um, you know, only really, extremely well known angler, that I spent quite a bit of time with, was Al McClane. He was the fishing editor for Field and Stream, for a number of years. And we

didn't fish together a lot, but we did fish together on the Madison, some. And he was just a wealth of great stories. He published the Wide Fisherman encyclopedia, and boy, he knew more about fishing than anybody I've ever met. And just a gentle man. And very willing to fish side-by-side with you. That was the, um, the most famous one in my mind, and the most knowledgeable.

Tom Morgan [00:07:47] Well really, my dad. And, I suppose, a little bit my mother. When we first moved to Montana from California, I was five. In 1946. And we used to go up in the mountains, around Ennis, tributaries of the Madison, fished for little cutthroat, rainbows, and rainbow-cutthroat hybrids, up in the mountain streams. And that's where my dad taught me to fish. At that time, we fished with bait. A little bit with worms, but mostly with grasshoppers that we'd catch and put, in well, at that time, were metal Prince Albert tobacco cans that we'd punch holes in so that the uh, grasshoppers could breath, and we used them for bait. I just remember very well, you had to be pretty sneaky to get up on the fish without them seeing you. You'd put a grasshopper in and they'd almost fight to get to it. Oh those were great memories.

James Thull [00:09:20] That's a great stor...

Tom Morgan [00:09:36] Well, he's the one that started me out fishing, and in later years we never fished together, he wasnt a fly fisherman and we kind of grew apart in that way, but he introduced me.

Tom Morgan [00:09:43] Well, I think it's just essential. To have it available to people. So that they have the opportunity to read historical items, or to look at items that you've collected from individuals. So that they can see the progression of angling tackle, and keep up with how the sport has changed, from earlier, eras until now. And how it changes as it goes forward, I just think having a resource, in one place, for people to go to and do research is just a great idea. I don't know much about how open it is to the public, or researchers, but I think it has a great potential. As a resource.

Tom Morgan [00:11:05] Well in, I believe it was 1957, Howard kind of took me under his wing. He was, I was at the El Western motel, right in Ennis. And Howard and his wife and family stayed at the El Western, and also up at the Diamond J, at Jack Creek, a guest Ranch, a dude ranch, I guess you'd call it. But I first met him at the El Western, and we'd go fishing together. And if he didn't stay, he always got a hold of me when he came out. But in '57, we went over to Dillon to fish to Beaverhead. And Howard wanted me to go along with him, because he was in his 70s at that time, and wanted a companion. So I'd be with him, just in case something happened to him, although he was in good health. But Howard really taught me the intricacies of fly fishing. I'd been a spin fisherman before that, for many years, and knew a lot about reading water, and fishing with a lure, but Howard taught me about fly fishing. He had Leonard bamboo rods, and in those days, silk lines and gut leaders. But Howard taught me how to approach fish in a pool that were rising, when we fished the Beaverhead, in August. There were tricones on the river, lots of rising fish, so. Howard would show me how to approach them, and how to present the fly, catch the fish, land the fish. So, I just can't imagine what my life would be out, be without fishing. And he sure got me off to a good start.

Tom Morgan [00:13:50] Well, I recommend different rods, for different situations. And somebody approaching me to buy a rod, I first ask 'em what rods they already have, and in our case, and most of my life of helping people to select rods, they've been fishermen that already have a rod, but in a few cases beginners have asked me what to do, or what to

purchase, so. If it's a general all around rod, for trout fishing in a place like Montana, and actually most other places, I would recommend either a 5 weight or a 6 weight rod. That's an all around rod for them to start with. It doesn't have to be expensive, there's some good rods out there, and reel combinations, that aren't very expensive, but I think they need to be a little bit softer rod. Which is what I've always promoted. So, when they're learning to cast, they can feel the rod bend and give them feedback. As far as different costs in rods, people that are just beginning, I usually recommend that they start with something that's not too expensive so, until they kind of get the hang of it, to see if they're really going to like it. As far as a particular rod, it's a little bit hard to recommend one rod for all situations. Just because the situations vary so much.

Tom Morgan [00:16:14] Well, the attraction for flying fishing, for me, was the visual aspect of it, I would say, was most important. And I would fish wet flies and nymphs some, but my real love of fly fishing, has always been dry flies. And I think the reason is that, it's visual, you present the fly, float's down the water where you can see it, the fish comes up and takes it, and even if you don't catch the fish, or land the fish, that visual aspect of this sport, is just the very best for me. And I think that's, uh, well and plus, the people I've fished with, I guess they'd like (unintelligible) fisherman. I didn't view it that way, but it just well. There are so many different aspects of fly fishing. Becoming involved in the sport, and learning all the intricacies is a lot more interesting than just chucking a lure out. And there have been probably more books written on fly fishing, than just about any other sport. So that, and I read a lot of them. And the historical aspect, to me, has always been fulfilling.

Tom Morgan [00:18:04] Well, there was, as um, I think rods produced before, well the middle '70s or I guess as so far up as the '80s, in my view, had much better fishing action, than rods after that time. And the big difference was the material. Most rods, it started in the late '70s and on, were made by graphite. Or carbon fiber, it's also known as. And it's easier to make lighter rods. And rods that cast farther, and they tend to be stiffer than the rods of previous eras, and I think, people got off track with these different rods. They're just not as good of fishing rods, in my view. You can cast a lot of distance with them, but for most trout fishing, which I'm most familiar with, most of your fish are caught under 50 feet. If you're fishing farther than 50 feet, you don't have the accuracy, you don't have the timing. And graphite rods don't work, for the most part, very well, under 50 feet. Ours are an exception, you don't have to make stiff graphite rods, it just happens that most people, most companies do. But our graphite rods have a wonderful feel to 'em. Anglers that are knowledgeable, absolutely love them because, out on the trout stream, it's the rod that you need for effective fishing, they also play the fish better. So that's when they really started to change, was when graphite came along. So rods previous to 1970s, when they were fiberglass, or graphite or, I mean, bamboo, for the most part, not hundred percent, but for the most part, they were great fishing rods.

Tom Morgan [00:21:03] Well, that's a pretty sad story, in many regards. In my view, looking at the overall prospects, with anadromous fish on the ocean, Steelhead in particular, and Salmon. The, um, well the habitat loss has just been phenomenal. But with the places I've fished for Steelhead, they almost don't exist anymore. Due to overlogging, siltation, warmer waters are... A really big impact on a lot of the anadromous fisheries, are hatchery fish. The idea, in the early 1900s, was that they could do whatever they wanted to the habitat, and just replace the fish with hatchery fish. But it really doesn't work that way. Hatchery fish don't reproduce well, they don't strike for anglers as well, the populations generally are way down, so that part of it, pretty depressing, all up and down the West Coast. Lot of the runs have been lost, I think. Somebody said, there's like 4 or 5 percent of the places where Steelhead used to run, are gone. A lot of Steelhead in the Los

Angeles river, in 1924, and now it's a cement canyon. Far as around Montana, I think the fisheries are still quite viable, and people see the value of the resource, and they've done quite a bit to protect it. There's still challenges on some of the streams, with loss of water due to irrigation. But the biggest problem here, too, is the number of people. So the, but there's still a lot of fish in most the rivers, like the Madison. But the, there's so many fishermen, that it's no longer the sport that it used to be, in terms of, getting away from people. Seems like to me, a lot of the anglers, they think a lot of people around, can't be good fishing. But that's not necessarily the case, theres' still, more generally, places in Montana where you can get away from people, and have a nice angling experience. For me, that's what angling was always really about. Was, not having a lot of people around me. Going out by myself, or with a friend or two, and enjoying this sport at a leisurely pace. I think there is a risk of that disappearing, which would be too bad. I was really, really lucky. I know there were previous times, when fishing in Montana would have been better than I experienced, but, boy. I've experienced some really great fisheries, with virtually nobody around. When I first started fishing at Gallatin Valley, for example, it never even crossed our mind that we would see another fisherman. Same way on the Beaverhead, and on the Missouri, except down around Wolf Creek, there were anglers fishing around the dam. But I wouldn't see 10 fly fisherman a year, now it's almost wall-to-wall boats. So the risk is that the resource will just become overused. And I don't know what the solution is, it's uh, I was a guide myself, I know the value of guides being able to fish on the river, but they shouldn't own them. I think in the future, that the number of guide may have to be limited. More like on the Beaverhead and Big Hole. They can't guide on the weekends. So that locals have an opportunity to enjoy the sport, without a lot of competition. Because to me, angling is more of a solitary sport. Than one with a lot of people around.

Tom Morgan [00:27:17] Well if it was a dry fly that's easy.

James Thull [00:27:21] Ok.

Tom Morgan [00:27:21] The Royal Wulff.

James Thull [00:27:24] The Royal Wulff?

Tom Morgan [00:27:24] In various sizes. There are other flies that are better at certain times, but day in and day out, on a variety of waters, from New Zealand, to Montana, Argentina, Ol' Royal Wulff's hard to beat.

James Thull [00:27:47] Excellent.

Tom Morgan [00:27:48] For a rod that, that's a little more variable, because of, the condition, but generally speaking, for trout fishing, in a general way, an 8 1/2 or 9 foot, for 5 or 6 weight line, would cover, probably, a bigger variety of situations. Than any other rod, as far as trout fishing goes. For wet flies, if you're gonna impart movement to the fly, good ol' black girdle bug's pretty hard to beat. Or a muddler minnow, is also a great all around little fly that works about, anywhere you can grease it up, and its like a grasshopper. Or you can fish it as a wet fly, like a streamer, and it attracts fish that way.

Tom Morgan [00:29:00] Well, a number of things. Probably the biggest is the huge variety of waters we have, all around the state, there's mountain streams that are not very big, but you have great solitude with them. The fish you catch aren't very big. But some of them have never seen a fisherman, so that's kind of a special spot, or they've seen very few. There is bigger streams, what are called spring creeks, there's a lot of those, in Montana,

that provide a wonderful fishery. Particular for dry flies, or smaller nymphs. Then there's medium size, small and large rivers. That go from a rough and tumble Madison, to quiet streams like the Missouri. There's a huge variety of ponds and lakes, that have great fishing. So we have it all. That's why Montana is such a popular destination, for fishing.

Tom Morgan [00:30:45] Well, like a President said, I think, "Never met a fish I didn't like."

James Thull [00:30:58] Excellent.

Tom Morgan [00:30:58] But my favorite would have to be Brown Trout. If I had to pick one, with Rainbow second. The brown trout are my favorite, because I think they're harder to catch. They're more selective than either rainbows, or brook trout, or cutthroat trout. But in Montana, they tend to grow bigger than the other species. They feed a lot of the surface, for a dry fly fisherman they're, uh, readily available, to catch that way, so they would have to be my favorite.

Tom Morgan [00:32:05] Oh, well. Oh, one time, Dan Bailey didn't have much hair. And what he had was pretty short, so. When I had the tackle shop in Ennis, I got a short haircut and if anyone bothered to ask me why, I said I wanted to look like Dan Bailey. Dan and I fished together quite a few times, he was just a gentle, wonderful man. We had a great time together.

James Thull [00:32:50] Wonderful. Bud said you guys have been laughing about that for 40 years.

Tom Morgan [00:32:54] We have. And the story I liked about Bud, when I first got the tackle business, we went down to Idaho Falls, to Fanning Sporting Goods, where you could buy things wholesale. Bud and I were there, and the representative from Eagle Claw Hooks was there, and his display had a little size 32 hook. Which was really minuscule, as you can imagine. The guy said, "Well, we did this just to show people how small we can make a hook. But," He said, "They really aren't useful for anything. But I'll tell ya what, let me hook it in your lower lip and see if you follow me." I've never forgotten.