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Neil Patterson [00:00:10] I'm a writing author and a journalist. And my background is in advertising, so I tend to write about, all my fishing writing is all about, the excitement of the places I fish, with flies that I, people I meet, flies that I've designed. But it's not too technical. It's tends to be, if I was to put myself aside someone I really admire, which is Nick Lyons. It's, it's, it's like a mix, in a way that, he enjoys a day on the river, fishing, more than just necessarily catching fish. And once when he fished with me on the river (unintelligible), he stayed with me, him and Mari stayed with me. He um, Mari said when he took, took, took, when I took him out fishing he said. Mary said, "Don't let him fall in." So I said, "Don't worry, Mari. I'll take good care of him." So everything went well all day. He didn't fall in. And then, right, right near the end of the evening, I said "Look, I've got to go back, Nick. Because I've got to get dinner ready, if you stay on, if you come back, and walk back," as I lived by the river, the river (unintelligible). The wilderness where I fish. I said, "If you just walk back, then everything will be ready. In half an hour, just half half an hour." So Nick came back, and he walked in the house. And he was absolutely covered, head to toe, with mud. And Mari went, "Neil, Neil, Neil, I told you not to let him fall in." And I said, "Well, I only left him for half an hour." And apparently he fished up the top of the river, where they'd done a bit of dredging, and there was some mud. And as Nick said, he said, "I, I walked onto the mud, and I just started to slip." And he said, "One minute I was watching the hatch from the trout's point of view. The next minute- from my point of view-the next minute I was watching from the, from the trout's." And in he went, straight under. So to this day, when he came in the back door, I've got a little, what I call a decontamination room, which is the place to hide your, place to hide your coat. He leant up against the wall, and I've got two bum prints, Nick's bum prints on the wall. And Nick'll, Nick'll support all of this story, because I think he's written about it, and when he went, I put a frame around it, and a bit of glass. And there it is, to this day. So fish, fishing for me is, notice I didn't talk about what fly he was using, or what time. That's what I love about fishing. It's the places it takes me to, takes me, it takes me to, and the people I meet. And that, for me, is, is the core of my fishing. But, of course, I write about fly tying, and, and I mean, I'm one of those people that, that even if, let's say trout no longer existed, and they didn't take flies, let's say they all they all went to net. You know, curries or Thai food, or something and didn't get interested in flies. I would still tie flies. Even though I didn't use them, because fly tying is as much part of my enjoyment of fishing, as using them.

Neil Patterson [00:03:25] I think it's, there's many things, as I get older, I realize that, actually, I'm still learning about fishing. And unless something very, very seriously, serious, happens to me. I will fish till the day I die. And on the day I die, I may even. That's the wonderful thing, as opposed to tennis, or something like that, it's something was all absorbing. And it's got so many facets to it, and you will always meet, you will always meet. Like I met you today, and I met Charles, and I met David, and, and everyone, the great community there is, which, which I love, more than anything else. The, the, the places it takes me to, is also tremendously important, because it can, I had a, I had a property out in, an, in, in Patagonia, in central Patagonia, which I just recently sold for lots of reasons. My wife, driving my wife crazy, right by the river. And it was certainly was sunny, so I go out, and I used to sit on the terrace, looking at the river, and I used to say, I say, "Do you know, I'm probably happiest here, not fishing. Just looking at the river, as I am fishing." And I think, I think if you can get, if you can get to be able to take that element of fishing, and also enjoy the actual fishing itself. Then it's, you're a lucky man. Because you've got, you've got something to keep you happy for the rest of your days.

James Thull [00:04:52] Was it, I think [Roderick] Haig Brown, who said, "Maybe fishing for me is just an excuse to be near rivers."

Neil Patterson [00:04:58] Oh, yes. It was something like that, yeah. He said some great things. Of course, he was an Englishman, came from, fished in Dorset, in Dorset.

Neil Patterson [00:05:11] I have no idea. I've always fished, funny enough, I've got no relatives at all, that fish. I did have one uncle. Who was the meanest, meanest uncle. And he was a salmon fisherman. I'm Scottish, and certainly I spent I spent all my early days, up to the age of eight, in Scotland. And, I don't know what, I don't know what it was, we used to live near the River Don, in the center of Aberdeen. And I used to go down to the river, and watch the fishermen there netting the salmon. Nice to watch these silvery, silvery things, although I'm not a salmon fisherman, I have done a lot of salmon fishing, but I put, put myself in the trout category. I used to watch these silver things jumping around in the nets, and I'm just fascinated. My mother used to say, when we used to go to the market, to buy fish, I used to, I used to say to, say to my mother, I said, "Don't wrap them up." And I used to take, bring the fish back, holding the fish. How weird is that? But that's what my mother said, and she wasn't a liar. So, apparently, I used to do that. So I've always had fishing. I've always been mad, a mad fisherman. I didn't start fly fishing till I was about 10 years old. I used to coarse fish, which is. In England. That was fishing for chub and, and roach, and great gudgeon, and. With maggots. In the canals, 'cause we used to live by a canal. When we moved down from Aberdeen, and that was fishing, that was, that was fishing enough, but then the fascination of fly, fly fishing became, became, I don't quite know when it came, I can't remember a day, but I, it, it was more enthralling. And it was more, I'm, I'm a writer, but I'm also an artist. And I just found the fascination flies. I mean, I remember once, this guy, I can tell you, I can actually tell you when I first started to get really interested in fly fishing, was when I met, I met this, this guy in Wales. I remember it was in Wales. And we were, we were, staying in a caravan. And there was, there was a fishing pond, near, near us. And I remember going down, to seeing what he was doing, what he was fishing with. And I remember him opening his fly box. And all these things in the fly box, and I said, "Goodness! Those are fantastic!" I mean it was like the whole, he opened his, he's opened his the fly box out, and opened my eyes to, I want those! I was fascinated by all those flies. So it was actually the actual fly box opening up, that opened my mind to fly fishing. Wasn't catching fish, instead it was just, I want a box of those flies. Of course I got so many damn boxes of these flies, now you can't hardly get into the house, but, now. But that was the initial thing, I must have been ten or twelve years old. Then I, I got a rod from my uncle, my salmon fishing uncle, who never took me fishing. And he gave me a rod, because, because, um, I don't know how he gave it to me, he said, "Here have this, have a trout rod." I think he had a trout rod, because he wasn't a trout fisherman. He was a salmon fisherman. And you may not know, but in those days, in the '40s and '50s, that, the salmon fishing, salmon fishers, if they caught a trout it was, it was considered to be you, you killed it. Because they were not important, you wanted to catch a fish, which was a salmon. Trout just got in the way. Of the fishing for salmon. And so I think he got rid of his trout rod to me, and he gave it to me, of course, it was, couldn't give it to a better person. Because that was my first rod. I'll always remember that I'm, about twenty years later, twenty years, fifteen years later, when I actually was living by a river down south, on the river Kennett, where I still live now, I thought, my uncle was getting old, and I thought, 'Do you know something? He never invited me to go fishing, I'm going to invite him down to fish with me.' So he came down, and he lived in Bristol, came across from Bristol. He lived then. He came across, and I gave him a rod, and we went down to the river. The river Kennett. The "chalk stream." And, um, I was watching him casting for this trout, and he caught this trout, it was about two pounds. And what he did was, it was

amazing, where you would land a fish like this. He put his rod over his, over his shoulder like that, turned round, and walked the trout out the river. Because that's what they used to do, when there were salmon fishers, you have big, heavy rod, you catch a trout about two pounds, you just wanted to get in and get it out. So he just put his rod across his shoulder like that, and walked up bank, his trout's coming across the top of the water, like that. I said, "Good grief, I'm not asking you back again." So he did everything wrong. But. He did everything wrong, he gave me my first trout rod. So that was enough. But I've been fishing all my life. And I can't remember not fishing.

Neil Patterson [00:09:52] The south of England water quality. I mean, in the south of England's it's a crowded area. You know, funny, if you take certain parts of the south of England, you can't see to, you can't see, you can't see a house anywhere. There's, there's lots of space between houses. But in the large, the large, the south are being large cities, have been popping up all over the place, and they've been extracting the water, and as you know, that we've got this unique system, in the south of England, and in east and western France, called the chalk stream system. Which is where the water or the aquifers filled up. The water doesn't hit the water, hit, the water doesn't hit the river straight away, it soaks into the chalk, into, into great big wells .which just bubble up into the river, to feed the river, so you. And my chalk stream, my chalk stream, very rarely find two inches, three inches of water. It never gets any higher than two inches, three inches. It's all, it's all generated, it's all worked up by these aquifers, which keep them, keep the rivers topped up. What's happening, of course, is all these other digging, digging of holes into the ground, and abstracting the water. So the biggest change I've seen, which is a worrying one, is just a lack of water now. The, our rivers haven't got the water. And they just, you may not have known, you may not know but, they're not building chalk streams anymore. And that's that's a problem. Part of the, on wilderness stream I've got, a lot of the streams were actually built by prisoners in the Napoleonic Wars. Two hundred years ago, and the English, instead of, the British, instead of locking their prisoners up, they put them into the fields, and dug out chalk streams. Because it used to be integrated, in, irrigating, irrigation system. Of all the fields, for the sheep farming. Because they used to put hatches in, raise the water, lower the water. Flood the fields in the winter. So that the grass would come up in the summer. So I always think that was great of them. That, that what we did with our prisoners was got them to dig chalk streams. But they're not doing that anymore. There's not enough water to, if you were to dig a new one now, there's not enough water to fill it up. So that's, that's the terrifying fact, of the biggest thing I've noticed, is the water levels on chalk streams in the south.

Neil Patterson [00:12:18] I don't want to sound like Trump but, you know, this this climate change. Is, is, is, is, is a worry. I think. This, this summer in the UK, we've had no rain. We've had, you know, unbelievably different temper- high temperatures. In fact, it's still, it's still now, outside, this is November, it's almost like it's 15 degrees. Which it should be 15, it should be 8, 8-9 degrees, at this time of year. It's still, it's still hot, and warm. And we haven't been having the rain. The climate change-whose ever fault it is. It is, is going to be a worry. Let me take you back. Let me take you up to Scotland. Because I don't just fish in down south, I also fish that in the Outer Hebrides, up in the northwest, far northwest of Scotland. And there, there. Their problem isn't the water, they're getting the water alright. Their problem is, with, with the rising sea, with it, as it, as, as the water in the Antarctica melts, then the more water there is, the problem is going to be there, is that the whole of their, whole of their islands, which are flat. Most people think of Scotland as hilly, but on the Outer Hebrides it's flat. And, and the water only he has to go up a couple of foot, and the whole thing's wiped out. So. It's not just the fishing, that's going to disappear. Where the sea trout going to go anyway? It's going to be a, whole communities are going to go.

So, yes, it's a. Climate. The climate change, is. Is a worry. And I don't think it's, I don't think it's just something that happens every year. I think it's, it's been, being over, over the, over the years it's getting worse and worse and worse, and more noticeable. And it's not just in the UK. I fish, I fish in Argentina, and I used to have, as I say, I had a property down there. And that's the same worry down there, all of a sudden, for some weird reason, it'll be it'll be they'll get incredible floods. And then, it's extremes of weather. That is, that cannot be, cannot be good for the environment.

Neil Patterson [00:14:31] One of them's called, Chalk Stream Fishing. Chalk Stream Chronicle. And this is all about me moving down to London, 40 years ago, and setting up a home by the River Kennett. On the wilderness. And it's all about, in fact it was, Nick wanted me to write the book. Because he thought as a man, right. Nick Lyons, wanted me to write the book. He inspired me to write. He said, "Go write the book Neil!" He said, "You live on the river." So I couldn't get it started. And he, he said, "Well the right way to start it is, do a January to, January to December. Do a calendar. January for, a living on the river. So I got going on that, started in the middle. And, and I just took the river, the river um, a year on the river. January meeting the people, talking about how, how to fish it. February, this, that, and the other. So I went through the whole season, and Nick published it in the States, and it was published over here, very successfully. So that book was, was all about me, a man living by the river. And, and the people I met. The flies I designed. The adventures I had. And just all the joys of living on a river because it was, what a lot of people would, I think I managed to capture what it was like living on it. People so go when it won't be like living on a river. I think I did capture it. So that was called, Chalk Stream Chronicle. My second book was called, Fly Fisher's Chronicle. And that was all. If Chalk Stream Chronicle was all about the home match, Fly Fisher's Chronicle was all about the away match. So it's all the other place I fished in. Iceland, Cuba, South America, France, um Norway, um, uh... Montana, Key Biscayne [unintelligible], for bonefish, for anything they catch on fly. So Mexico, probably left, left a load of places out. So it was all about different adventures I had. Same, same, exactly the same technique. It was. It was an idea I took from, from Vincent Maraino's book, In the Ring of the Rise. Where he had illustrations, illustrations in the margins. Well, I illustrated it with illustrations in the margins. So both books, if you were to put them together on a one on a same typeface. One's Chalk Stream, one's Fly Fisher's. So put them on side by side on the bookshelf, they look at, look, look like Volume 1, Volume 2. And inside was the same. My illustrated them all, same typeface. So one was about fishing around the world, one was the local stream. So that's my. I've written, also, a lot of, lot of parts of other people's books. Anthologies and stuff. I also have a regular column in Fly Fishing and Fly Tying magazine, which is called, "The Wild Trout's Wish List." And that's every time I introduce a fly, or, that I've designed, or someone else has designed, which I find interesting. Small short, short piece. 800, 900 words. Some regular thing. And I also write features. I wrote, I've just written about my favorite, my favorite trout. The one I'm most in love with, is the brook trout. And I've been, I've been chasing around, the brook trout was introduced in Argentina at the beginning of last century. And, and they were trying to find the place where the brook trout was most happy. Now if you find a place, where brook trout was more happy you so, soon know about it. Because, point number one: they're there. And point number two: they grow to enormous size. Because they're so happy. Anyway, I've been chasing around central Patagonia, trying to find the locations of the, of where these, um, brook trout are, and I just, I wrote an article. The recent, recent magazine about everything I found out about them, and how to fish for them, and, and. And, and and, yeah, the stories that go alongside them.

Neil Patterson [00:18:47] Fishing, I would say, there's more of an art form in, well, if you were to look, rivers if you were to watch the film, A River Runs Through It, and watch. What's his name.

James Thull [00:19:01] Norman McClean?

Neil Patterson [00:19:01] No. No not Norman McClean, the guy, the actor who did it.

James Thull [00:19:05] Oh, Brad Pitt.

Neil Patterson [00:19:06] Brad Pitt. There's a wonderful sequence, where, where, where he's fishing. And everything's in slow motion, I seemed to, they seem to be in slow motion. Where he's casting. And they look at their, just look at the guy fishing, and they say, there's something, something magical, there's something amazing about just watching him cast. That is an art form. Watching. That, for me, put a frame around that picture. And I think it, that, that.... Sort of suggests there's something super art, arty about this, rather than spin casting, or what have you. See there's there's a rhythm to it. There's a beauty in it, there's, uh, and that's what art is all about. But I think, as an artist, as I say, I do, I do, I'm, I am an artist. I'm not gonna say I'm a great artist, but I've illustrated books and stuff like that. I think the art, the most. Art is blossoms, fly, when you fly tie. That's, that's my art form. Is that, for me, is an art form. Flying, designing flies, getting the colors right, put wrapping, wrapping furs round. I always remember, there's a wonderful phrase, at the beginning of my book, introducing the magic of fly, fly tying. Is the, when Michelangelo. Michelangelo, they looked at this. His, his, his, his sculpture, his horse. And they asked him, "How did you ever manage to make that horse?" He said, "Well I just took a big block of marble, and I just chipped out all the bits that wasn't a horse." And it was, it was, it was, it was a magical thing. And I say the same, I, the same about fly tying. I take all the bits and pieces that nothing to do with a fly. And turn them into a fly. It's the fly. I just, I had, it all the stuff (laughter).

James Thull [00:20:54] Is the art of a fly, is the beauty of a fly, is that what drew you to it, you think? You know, talked about opening that fly box...

Neil Patterson [00:21:03] Well, there's a wonderful book, called The, The Art, but I actually got my, couple of my, my flies in it. It is called, The Art of The Dry Fly. It's a book of, where they had asked all these fly tyers, from all around the world, I think a lot of Americans were there, um, in it, and they had to present a fly, and write about the fly that had done. And I'm in that book, and I can't remember what it's called. The Art of the Dry, it's The Art of The Trout Fly, I think it's called.

James Thull [00:21:25] I think it is.

Neil Patterson [00:21:26] Yeah. You must must, must know, it's a very, very popular book. It was made in many editions. And it's. Yeah. That's, that, when you look through it, and look at the flies, you can. It's like looking, it's like looking into a catalog, in an art gallery. I mean, some of those flies. Particularly a [unintelligible] who spot that, -the non fly fishermen spot that, before fly fisherman spot it. That's the interesting thing, if I show them that book, they're fascinated by, rather like I was saying. Opening that fly box, I want to fly fish. Looking at, looking at all these pieces of art, works of art, in your hand. And so you, at the show, what do you do now? I'm a fly tyer, tie flies, and here's some. They look at and go, "Wow, I'll be good. That's amazing." They could have been looking at a book on plates of, works of art. They appreciate the same way. They look at the, their fascinated by, "How

did you do that? How did you tie that? How did you paint that? What is it?" It's fascinating. I think that's. But funny enough, it's, it's often appreciated more by non-fishermen. They would be the people that would say it's an art form, rather than, sometimes, cause there's more, so the more practical side of that, they just look at the flies, is that going to catch a fish or not?

Neil Patterson [00:22:44] My challenge in fly tying, is to make it as simple, and as economical as possible. I'm not. I mean, I'm taking away, take away bits, rather than add things. My, my challenge the fly tying, is to, is to, is to get it all the representational things on a, on a hook. But, but be able to take away, take away the bits you don't need. And. And I have, I have theory with, particularly with trout fishing, particularly in river trout fishing. Is that the the less you give a trout to argue with the fly, the better it will be. So you, you know, you, you've, you put too many things where they can find fault with, they're not going to take it. So it's a matter of minimizing things down to, right down to the giving them nothing to argue about. You see it, say "ah!" And they take it. They don't say, "hey, you got one leg too many. What's that funny thing hanging off there. Such things sticking up there." It's just got to be able to find that, that, the minimum you can put onto a hook, got the more you put in the hook, the more there is to argue and find fault with. So I strive, I think all my all my write, my writing and my, my column and stuff, is keep it simple, keep it simple. It only takes one hump to turn a horse into a camel.

Neil Patterson [00:24:09] That's the second thing I would say, which I've noticed. Because there was a thing here in the '60s which was called the Stillwater Revolution. In the UK. Where all of a sudden, all these ponds were dug out, stocked for trout. And a whole generation of people who had never dreamt of fly fishing before, would throw a fly, and they'd take a fish, because we'll stock fish, but it created a huge interest. And it was, it was a revolution. A fishing revolution. That revolution has died down now, for all sorts of reasons. Because the economy, because they haven't been able to, the prices now have gone up. And the interest has gone down. My worry is climate change. But also, that there's not enough young people, taking an interest. It's, it is and it's not just, it's not just me at the age of 67. This is 20 years ago. I was, when I fished my river, the Kennett, for the first time back in 1975. I was 22 years old. And it took me 25 years. I was still the youngest person on the stream. I think it might be even more than that, because I've been fishing it for 45 years. Yeah, I think there's probably more than that. It's almost 30 years before I was, I was still the youngest person on the beat. I mean extraordinary. I was the age of 45, 50. 45. I was 35, 40. I was about 35, or 40. And I was still the youngest person on the stream. No, there's no new blood coming in at all. And it's still, there is now, there's one or two popping through, but not an awful lot. It's people that, you know, people of my age are now. Been coming into retirement and going fishing. So it has. Fishing isn't, has lost its youth base. In the UK. Yeah. I'd say so. So are in fly fishing has. All sorts of other things. Lots of things have changed. I used to collect fishing books. There's no. No, no longer a fish, there's no longer a market. I mean, I used to think my, my library of fishing books, for example, was, was my retirement. I've got, I've got books. I've got books signed by Frederic Halfa, and I've got books by, some signed by [unintelligible]. I've got some really valuable books, they've got no value, now. Well maybe those might, to, to a collector. But my first editions, now. People aren't buying them. And I was talking to John, and Judith Head, before they, before they packed up their business in Salisbury. They said that people now are wanting, don't want to read about this, they prefer to spend their money going fishing. Or on other things. So the actual, the actual, people are still writing books, really good books, but... The people haven't got the same, same, the value of, the value of books has diminished an awful lot. The financial value, value of books has dropped. And people aren't, just aren't buying books anymore, just aren't buying it. I think

it's lots of reasons for it, the Internet, and whatever. You probably know the reasons better than I do. But people are still writing them, and some really good books are still popping up but. It's, it's the, the readership market, I think is ending. I mean, I mean my books. If you, if you sell 5,000, 6,000 copies of, it's done well, you know, in the UK.

Neil Patterson [00:27:41] (Laughter) Now that is a question I'd like to have known before the interview, because I have a thought. It's so difficult. Ah, what do I like..Well, funny enough, here we go; I like, I'll tell you what. Somebody, somebody asked me the other day, about what, what am I as a writer. And I said, "Well I'm not a. I don't write books. I'm a columnist." And I'm not a great reader of, of, of books from beginning to end. But what I do like, are, are columns. And I, my whole style is a columnist. I'm a copywriter, so I don't write a lot of big long bits of copy anyway. That's my trade. I was a, a copywriter. And so I like columns. So two of my, two of my favorite writers right now, write books, but I like their columns. And I'm not just saying this because they're two of my friends. One is Charles, uh, Wilson who's a fantastic writer. And I love reading him. And David Profumo who has a, a columnist, too. And I enjoy his, his books too. [Roderick] Haig-Brown. Absolutely. Um, I used to like Lynn Wright. Because he was a copywriter in New York. He was a New York advertising man, and I used to like his style of writing, because I recognize it, it's a style that I had when I write, wrote copy too. And. I think that's. I, I, come back in 10 minutes, I'll have to think about it. I have such a, such a broad spectrum.

James Thull [00:29:21] No, no, no. And I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

Neil Patterson [00:29:23] You put me on the spot.

James Thull [00:29:25] All right, sorry. (Laughter).

Neil Patterson [00:29:33] Don't expect to find it easy. Um, and know that when you do start, that it's like rabies. Fishing is like rabies. Once bitten, there's no cure for it. But you've got to make sure that whatever you do, on your first trip, that you catch a fish. It doesn't matter how you catch it. You go and catch a fish, first of all, and that. You'll soon know if you're going to be interested. Because a lot of people just take it up and, A River Runs Through it, which I mentioned earlier on, started a whole generation of yuppies going out with rods, and think, loving, loving the whole concept of fly fishing. I wonder how many of those people that did it then, or started then, are still fishing now. It's, it's know that you, you're, you're going to be. Knowing, knowing that you're going to be starting on a life, on a life, a journey of a lifetime. Where you know that you're probably still learning about fishing, 50 years later on, like myself. I'm still learning about, I've been fishing for almost 50 years. I'm still, got the same fascination with learning and picking up new things. And now I guess I'll do that till the day I die.