

## stranahan-chuck-2018-08-07.mp4

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:00:10] Well I started tying flies a few years before I actually fished. My godfather showed me some flies, I was fascinated by them, I wanted to make those things, and so I did. I took a feather pillow apart and took some feathers out, and I tied them to a fish hook that was my older brother's and showed my mom the fly that I had made, just like Paul. And thank God she didn't do her usual punitive shtick. She just said, "oh Charles that's so nice and next time you want feathers let's go see our neighbor Hazel, who has chickens and she'll give us some feathers." And so that encouraged me. If she had landed on it, life would be much different for me now. Because by the time I was 12 I was tying flies for two little shops and had tied flies for President Eisenhower, got a letter back from him and that was just more of a boost, more inspiration, more... um, you can't call it luck, it was something more than that. That got me started as a young man, tying flies. Then when I went to college, I started tying flies piecemeal and by the time I finished my degrees and my teaching credentials, I was tying flies for Orvis and whoever else would buy them and that's how I made a living, and then made fishin' money during the summer, during my teaching career. So it's been a lifelong thing from about age 8. And as I said, I didn't actually go fishing until I was 10. Living in the edge of a desert in southern California, there wasn't that much opportunity, but when my family moved to Shasta County, that was... I was in hog heaven, you couldn't ask for better fishing than I had right there, in the Pit River, Hat Creek, McCloud, upper Sacramento before they put the dams on it. It was some of the best fishing in the United States and I was, I was just overjoyed.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:02:30] Well as a kid, I was one of the ones who didn't quite fit in with the crowd. And I had trouble in school and um... not because I wasn't smart, but because I was bored and found other things to do, most of them mischievous. And some things came \*snaps\* "why doesn't everybody get this?" In writing and that sort of thing. Math, I would struggle with, I couldn't handle the discipline. And like a lot of kids, I was ADD, but nobody knew what it was then, I didn't get diagnosed until way too late for it to make a lot of difference. But yeah it's there, and when you talk to people who are ADD they'll tell you, "You know the creative stuff just flows." And there was that attraction for me. There was a kind of a solace, you might say, in that I could get away from a world that bothered me very much and just restore my soul on anything from a bluegill pond to an itty bitty trout stream. Wherever there were fish I fished for them. And it's more than just going out and capturing fish. It was being at one with the process. It's one thing to go out and go on a nature hike and say "gee wow, how beautiful, let's dig it" and to immerse yourself in it to the point where you forget who you are, almost. And that is what keeps me fishing, that's what I have to keep doing every now and then, at this stage in my life just to keep my sense of balance, you might say, so there's that. There's the aesthetic dimension, there's the natural world dimension, there's the physical engagement dimension, there's the emotional catharsis, relief, rejuvenation, restoration dimension. All of it. And some of it admittedly has to do with tying another fly on your line, putting it out there and seeing if you can get that fish to take it.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:04:51] I do.

**James Thull** [00:04:52] What fly was it and where was it?

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:04:53] It was a McGinty. And I saw some bees and wasps falling into the tail end of a little lake, Lake Fulmor, F-U-L-M-O-R, up on the way to Idyllwild, the area that just burned in Southern California. Beautiful little gem of a lake and I saw this trout coming up to eat it, I dangled the fly over and caught it. It was a nine inch hatchery

fish. But a lot of... oh how shall I say, just euphoria for this kid who was about 11 or 12 years old at the time. And from there no lookin' back. My folks would take vacations up the Eastern backbone of the Sierras and I'd fish Lone Pine Creek. They'd turn me loose, let me hike up the switchbacks up into the Onion Valley section of that creek and I'd fish there alone by myself all day long and then come trudging out about the time they were worried about me and waiting in the old family Buick at the base of the trailhead. And my folks were very good about providing those kinds of opportunities and in all... went to, you know making that an important part of my life. And when I read an article by the fly-tyer Harry Darby, when I was about 14, 15, 16, in which he said, "fly tying is the only profession for which I give a continental damn." That resonated with me and I thought "I'm like that too". And despite the time that I spent going legit, going into teaching, school administration, at one time being a part of a school and putting together an educational program that won accolades, all of that sort of thing. When school got to be more than I could handle in California, with the passage of Prop 13 and affirmative action and the budgets went into the tank and administrative assignments went sideways, I got out. There was no career path upward for me as an Irish surname male, in that system. Now if I got a sex change operation and married a Mexican and was a Spanish surname female, I could probably have succeeded but I was not that dedicated.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:07:37] About this area? Um, the variety of habitat on the Bitterroot River, the fact that this is just a superb dry fly river. Um, take a look at the mountains, take a look at the surroundings here. Yes the missions are probably the most spectacular range in Montana, these are almost as nice. There might be rivers where you can catch bigger fish, but after you've done it repeatedly doing the same old thing, you really wind up in a position where you... while it was fun, it was great while you were doing it, you really haven't done anything you can feel particularly proud of. But if you go out here and work on a fish and take it, there is that satisfaction of having done that. You can do it here still in environs that are... that answer those basic needs that I feel as a human being. If I need to get completely away from everybody for a little while, I can grab one of my little old rods like a favorite seven foot Shakespeare Wonderod, an old glass rod, that my father gave me for high school graduation back in 1959. And I can go up one of these creeks far enough that I'm not going to see anybody. I'm in the largest wilderness area in the lower 48 and it's 10 minutes off of the highway. And I can catch beautiful, beautiful little native fish that might run from five, if I'm real lucky maybe 10, or if I'm in a beaver pond 12 or 14 inches. And the variety that we have here is enough, I think to satisfy any angler any serious trout fisherman. We're not that far away from some wonderful fishing up in the Blackfoot, where my wife and I go for a honeymoon or a uh, I should say anniversary float every year. The Clark Fork, Rock Creek is just right around the corner. But if I want to take off right now when we're finished talking here and there's enough sun in the sky, I can run just a 15 minutes from the shop and I can be on Skalkaho Creek. Or I can run down and fish the home water at Woodside crossing, below my home in Corvallis. Or I ca- on and on and on, I have a lot of choices; whatever fits my mood, whatever fits whatever I want to do, I have it right here. And this is one of the best dry fly fisheries you will find anywhere. The Bitterroot is, by and large in its main stem, a broad shallow floodplain river and the fish are always looking up and we have a wide variety of hatches here that you don't find in such abundance in most rivers in Montana. And hatches that are marginal or insignificant in other places are major events here. All of that and more. But I love this valley and it's uh, it's been challenging to make a living here because we're not on the way to anywhere. You have a winter in which the place just pretty much dries up and you need to be, how shall I say, Irish, hard-headed, that doesn't hurt, in order to persevere and sustain and make a successful living out of being a shop owner in this environment. But hey, it's what I do.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:11:29] Well we have the wonderful strain of the native westslope cutthroat here. And you can go from watershed to watershed, they'll be a little different, you can catch westslope cuts over in the Locksaw, just one ridge away and they'll look a little different than the fish we catch here; is that diet? Is that generations of genetic selection to adapt to a specific habitat? The answer to any question you might ask is probably yes. And you could crossbreed those fish. Sanctuary water, I think is an important thing in the National Park system and it's more important, I think, as it becomes a mindset, as it becomes a point of view regarding fishery management that we might take from that National Park setting. And then transplant, as it were, or ascribe to other places. For example here, as I said we have some wonderful of a beautiful strain of West Slope cutthroat. We also have bull trout. Bull trout are either a specie of concern or endangered or whatever, wherever you find them. Statewide you're not supposed to target them. About 25 years ago I would hear regular reports from the few anglers who fished the upper West Fork. But they're catchin' bull trout. Now with 1600 guided commercial trips on that water per year, I'm hearing very few reports of incidental catches of bull trout. The things that have changed are, number one, when Swisher and I started guiding out here we wouldn't see that many other people on the stream. But the use has ramped up logarithmically over the past 10, 15 years. A lot of that use has gone to the West Fork because it is a tail race fishery. It is more stable during hot years, dry years. And it is where a lodging concern and some outfitters who are not connected with the lodges have kind of focused their efforts. And taken one at a time, there's really nothing wrong with that, those resources are there to be fished and utilized and enjoyed. But when there's too much of it, and the people who are ramping the use up as they continue to work hard to build their businesses every year, do that as a cumulative effort it does impact the fishery. One impact it's had is this: most of the people that I know, who guide up there are good, fine, responsible human beings. There are a couple who, if there's wood in their way, a fallen tree that you can portage around, will cut it out for the sake of convenience and that kind of illegal removal of habitat wood from the waterway has an effect on the bull trout. Last spring, this spring I should say, Montana Outdoors magazine had an article and a cover photo of the Montana bull trout and the magazine said that cold water and woody debris are the two things the bull trout require for habitat. Well you take away the wood and watch, over time, and watch the number of incidental reporting some bull trout capture decline with the presence of the wood. We know as amateur managers of wildlife habitat, that when you do something in habitat management to benefit one species, take for example the work of Ducks Unlimited; the ducks benefit, the geese benefit, the swans benefit, the plovers and curlies benefit, all of the waterfowl collectively benefit. If we do something to benefit the bull trout on the Upper West Fork by re- not totally eliminating but reducing the amount of wood that's removed from the waterway, where it is taken out in such a way as to be damaging to the habitat, we know that the bull trout should respond favorably so should the cutthroats and the rainbows and the browns. You'll see bigger numbers of good fish up there. And right now, because it is a tail race, if you take one fish out another moves in from downstream, so the numbers stay inflated up there due to an artificial situation. And it has a negative effect on the river all the way down, because you have fewer of the larger, more hardy fish remaining in water that could sustain it. You know that that'll be carrying capacity because fish keep moving up, moving up, moving up. And so our recently formed West Fork Fishery Conservancy as is its aim, not going after the people who took the wood out who are thinking it's okay, nobody cares, nobody's going to do anything about it or who did it conscientiously because they thought it was a hazard or for whatever reason. You know, we're not interested in catching somebody after the fact or having this become a punitive thing. But we would like to see the people that are going to take wood out simply ask for a permit, through the Conservation District. The Conservation District, in turn, has resources that the average guy with a chainsaw doesn't. And collectively they can do a better job of

managing that stream, get the wood out that is hazardous, as a log jam that occurs in an old abandoned bridge pillar every couple of years, that was a bad scene this year. I don't know if anybody has taken it out yet, I don't know if they've done it legally or illegally, but the manager for that part of the river for the Conservation District says "we could get a piece of equipment down there during low water, remove the wood and then remove the old bridge pillar, restore the pool to what it was before the bridge went in and make better habitat out of it by getting rid of the hazard." And a guy who goes up there and just takes the law into his own hands doesn't do that. He doesn't have the crane and the backhoe that would lift the bridge pillar out. We're trying to do those things to make it better for all users. And we're doing that too, with barbless hooks. There is no barbless hook regulation anywhere in this valley, and we're not asking for the whole thing, but we would like to see a single hook, barbless, artificial reg for the West Fork. Where the young of the year fish are not returning at the rate that they should, and where we know from studies done in other places, that the young fish will suffer up to a 43 percent greater mortality being hooked and released on barbed hooks than they do barbless. And because the young fish up there given the pressure that they endure, are being caught again and again and again, their chances of survival are going down. 12 inch rainbows, according to the department's own surveys, instead of continuing to move up as a statistical number are flatlining. They're not declining yet, and they won't, because you can get the continued influx from the lower river but the lower river will suffer until we get that one under control. And when we do, if we're successful in the things that we'd like to see, there's always going to be a new problem to deal with and if we if it gets to the point where we are successful in that little piece of stream, we can then transfer what we've learned there perhaps to other streams if they have a similar problem, here's what worked on the West Fork. We can get that word out. And I wish that people like Bud Lilly were around to partake in this effort. You know if he were still around I'd have been on the horn to him a while ago, "Hey Bud, this is Chuck, let me tell you what's going on." And we'd have had a conversation about it. As is there are people, notably Craig Matthews, that I'd like to talk to about this. He's been through similar things on the Madison and I'd like to enlist his support for what we're attempting to do here.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:21:04] Oh absolutely. Absolutely. It's... how shall I say, I do. I care very deeply for what happens up there, and it's not just a pecuniary thing if you know, because, how shall I say, my youngest son caught his first trout on a fly up there. I'm writing a novel now. And part of what he wanted to do was, as a young man, on a hallmark, ten day odyssey with his father, was to return to the West Fork and fish. He was 19, he was pretty effectively, in a move I didn't anticipate, removed from my life when he was 6. I saw him for a few days some summers and he always wanted to fish. And when we had the opportunity, when he got done with a stint at a large guest ranch in Montana, to jump in my old truck throw the old camping gear into it. He had only been camping with me once when he was 5 and he wanted to do that again and so I said "well let's just do it." So I had a few days for he and I to rebond, to rebuild our relationship for him, hopefully, to leave with the things that he needed to move himself forward. It all centered on our fishing. And the final chapter is about our experience on the West Fork, where it began for him. And to tell you the truth I'm a little reluctant to, if I get that book completed, to submit it for publication until the problems up there have been addressed and solved as I wouldn't want to create a rush on that little gem of a river that, with no regulation. Nothing.... that, you know there is a committee formed to examine recreational use and it will take that committee of 16 people several years to jostle anything into place. What we see in the meantime is who's minding the store, who's taken care of the fishery. Who is doing something to preserve the habitat that the whole system rests upon. It all goes together in

my mind. That has as much to do with what I do here as tying more brindle shoots or caddis variants or other flies.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:24:01] To put it simply all of them. But then you have to kind of bifurcate. There are things about which you can do something immediately, feet on the ground, in today's battle that may not have a lot to do with the long term strategy of the conflict. That's what the West Fork Fishery Conservancy is about. We want to do something on that little stream. Identify the problems first of all, then address them in order and we'll stay with the business of habitat restoration and conservation until that's taken care of. Then we'll address the need for barbless hooks. Then will something else come up that demands our attention? Will the committee have done something meaningful to moderate the amount of commercial use and to give the wade-fishing, citizen angler a place to enjoy what was once a pristine experience up there, in which you didn't have to hold your back cast and wait for another boat to come by before you laid your line down again? It's not always that way and I can hear people come into this shop, James, who will tell me "oh I went out and fished and so and so, and we only saw a couple of boats go by." I'll hear other people come back, "you realize I was up there for an hour and a half and I saw 14 boats. I didn't have time to fish. By the time the 14th went by the fishing was done, I just got out of there." I don't want to hear reports like that and I don't think that people who come here want to have experiences like that. Ultimately I think the quality of experience for all users has to be maintained. And if that means that we do something there like we did on the Smith or that we did on other rivers, the Big Hole, where you limit the amount of commercial use. Then what do the commercial users do? Charge more money. If you're paying five bills up there now for another boat in the uh... in the daisy chain, even if you're a hardware clerk from Omaha, Nebraska and you're saving your money because you want to take your dad fishing. And the tariff is up to \$6.50 instead of \$5, you've done a one third jump. And that's the going price, thank you. You're gonna save your money and do it for the people in the lodge. Gosh, if you have people who are betting ten thousand dollars on a ten foot putt out at the stock farm, they're not going to hesitate to pay \$6.50 instead of \$5 for day up there. And I think that the people who have built a business up there are understandably anxious, "oh my God, what'll happen to my business if we have to cut back?" Well this is the way the market works. And I think it'd work well. That would, if it were to occur, leave a little more room for the wade fishing, citizen angler like my son Matt when he comes home. I'd like to see all of it. I'd like to see a good healthy head of native westslope cutthroats and rainbows and browns in this river. I'd like to see water enough down river to sustain them. We're looking at less and less and less water every year. These side streams get diverted for agriculture in an unregulated, willy nilly, unplanned growth of rural suburban housing, that profits the people who prop up a county commission and has refused to do anything about a growth plan. You poke a whole bunch of straws, a few here and a few here and a few here and a few here, into the aquifer and you suck it dry. Yeah you're going to have less water down, you know, downstream 30 miles north, than you have upstream 50 miles from the downstream site. It's happening right now. Releasing more water from Painted Rocks isn't the answer because there isn't any more water there to be released. And it's all contracted and it's being very well managed. Good cooperative relationships between FWP, the DNRC, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the anglers. We're in dialogue, we make that good program happen. Trout Unlimited buys water, delivers it to the ranchers, uses the river for transport and that tends to moderate the flows. There will have to be some changes here in order to save the river. The river, in the meantime is the lifeblood of the valley. The river provides... last figures I saw are three or four years old, at that point twenty two million fresh dollars coming into the valley due to the river. People come here to fish, buy lodging, buy hats, flies at fly shops. My only regret is that I don't have a bigger

chunk of that 22 million. I'd like just [chin-tinge] more than I'm getting, but I see nothing wrong with people coming here, because as Lee Wolfe said "a river without friends is a river in trouble." And I think we have enough friends for that West Fork that we can make some changes there that will be significant, and make them in time to resurrect the fishery. It's so much easier to conserve than restore. And this river is kind of on the downhill slope of that cusp. The people who are up there every day see it every bit as clearly as the frog in the gradually heated water sees it. We need to stand back and take a longer view. But those are the things that concern me now. Sanctuary water, yes I'd like to see sanctuary water upstream on the West Fork. From the dam on down, when you've got high water rolling through there and salmon flies galore. Yeah that's a good time to take a float trip up there but when the flows are down to the point where you can't get a boat and a wading angler on the same stretch of water without having to try everybody's sense of sportsman-like courtesy and that sort of thing. Time on just a little, say, six or seven mile stretch, get it off. That's when the wood that was maybe just a little bump in the stream is going to be a look-over or a sweeper as the river level lowers. Good habitat wood, bad to float through. Leave it there. If it's a hazard during the time that the rafters are up there, remove it. Get it out of there before somebody gets killed. But do it according to the protocol that is already in place through the Conservation District and utilize their resources to do a better job of it. We'd like to see that. See that habitat and that sanctuary habitat preserved. We don't know yet, what we'd have up there for trout fishing unless we allow that to re-establish itself and we don't know yet what we'd have for a return for young fish until we get a single hook barbless reg up there. Put those two things in place and we have not yet seen the potential for what the West Fork could give us.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:32:28] Weather patterns... uh, yeah you see changes. I go back to... was it- let's go back a little ways, let's go back to the Dust Bowl. You know, that was pretty ugly and that was in the '30s. And yeah, in the places where dust was piled up to the second story level in those farmhouses in Oklahoma and people had to get out um, you had a unique situation in that the farmers continued to dig in and dig in and dig in and turn the soil and um...

**James Thull** [00:33:08] Because that was pretty much a man-made catastrophe right?

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:33:12] Well it was, yeah. And you know, if we look at it and say that the droughts caused the Dust Bowl, we're looking at it through the wrong set of lenses, the Dust Bowl caused the drought. Here, in this, you know, global warming has been going on for a long time, it's only in the recent age of computer modelling that we've been able to track it. And one of the factors that gets left out is sunspots. And I've been looking at this for a long time before anybody was mentioning global warming and we see it in our history as anglers. You go back to the 1890s, 1880s, 1870s. Look at the bear stat paintings of Yosemite Valley. You're looking at oak trees and a few pines and trickles of rivers, okay. 70 years after that you're looking at a few oaks and a robust pine tree population. More water in the rivers and more attention being given to dry fly fishing. Because you're seeing abundant hatches sufficient to get the fish to feed up on top. 70 years later we're at the bottom end of that cycle, and coming out of it a little, and where you are at the ends of these cycles they get a little bumpy. You can look at the record, you know, cut down a tree up here, you're looking at about one hundred years because it takes a hundred years for a saw log to mature here and then they'll start to ponk out. Go to California and cut down a tree that's about like this, like I used to have on my property in Fall River, two or three hundred years old. You see the rings that are narrow, close together, rings that are half an inch apart, rings that are close together. It's going to be some variance, but one 70 year cycle you're looking at sunspots and their activity, and that relates to climate change. Is

that a factor? Certainly. Is that an immutable factor? Yes. Man caused pollution? An old geologist, used to fish with him, who told me that when Helens went off, it put more particulate matter into the air than human civilization did from the time that we started raising dust on the roads with wheels. Interesting. Pollution, I'm not in favor of it. We're living now with the effects of industrial pollutants, solvents in the air that land here and deform the jaws of undulates who eat grass right up here. We have a lady here who's devoted a lifetime of study to that. You can pooh pooh her studies or you can get into it and look and see that she's on to something. We're supposed to be good stewards. Yeah, we're the do- biologically we're the dominant species, we have enlarged frontal lobes and opposable thumbs and we can store our experience through the use and recording of language. We can invent all sorts of neat and cool stuff like cameras and Dyna-King fly tying vices and all of this kind of stuff. But we haven't been able to take collective responsibility for the way we treat the environment that we live in. Can we extract coal here without making a mess of things? We probably can if we think our way through it. Can we burn it without producing what my father grew up with as a little boy in Erie, Pennsylvania? Probably so. Do we have to send coal miners to an early death at age 45 from black lung, the way we did my Scotch-Irish forebearers who happen to live in Appalachia and whose music I still listen to? Yeah, we probably can. We're just not doing it. We're not doing a good job of it. What can we do to affect that? We can vote. We can do these things and effectively, I think, as a collective thing we can be misled and we have been. We don't have to look too far to see how many people have deceived us to make a buck off of touting environmental issues or you can take care of what you understand here at home. For me right now it's not this whole watershed, it's one simple little piece of flowage on the West Fork. Can I, in the time I have left in my hourglass, make a difference there? Well the people on the West Fork Fishery Conservancy steering committee; we think we can and we want to. Why? Because it's the right thing to do. For Matt, for his kids when he has them, for the outfitters who are up there now. You can drive off the hood of your car or you can look down the road and say "what's ahead?" If we continue on the same course, where will it end up? We can do it the right way or any multitude of wrong ways and we're not interested in, y'know, browbeating people, we're not interested in getting into verbal wars with the people who... y'know for whatever reason don't see it our way. We are interested in getting enough information out there to educate them and to work a cooperative relationship between the agencies who do listen to responsible citizen input and the citizen users and between the agencies themselves. We can be the catalysts that make that happen and we're doing it and it makes me happy.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:39:24] OK here's one piece, this is a Dyna-King vice. I love it. I got it so I could turn any angle when we're in the shows, if they've got a camera in front or looking over your shoulder. If I wanted to show the flaired wing on a fly I can go like that, if I want to show you with the under body looks like I could, I can go like that. I don't use it as a rotary too much. I can go like that faster than I can spin the wheel on a rotary. That's just me. There are rotary vices; back when I started the penultimate fly tying vice was a Thompson A. And I don't know how many sets of jaws I went through on mine, I've lost count. Eventually, one time, I put a hook in a vice, clamped down and the whole thing, just like the one hoss shay, the callit and everything except the jaw and the cam just \*crystallizing noises\* crystallized, and fell off the vice. And I laughed about it and went out and got what was the top vice at that time, a clamp jaw Regal. Ok and now I have this one. We've gone from the Thompson A, as about the only thing we had out there as a good vice, to so many that any tyer can make a good choice. You don't have to drop three bills as I did for this one. You can get a good vice for not a whole lot of money and you can get into it. The equipment that we have is superb. One thing I did that I played around with was a dubbing tool. This is one of Cal Byrd's old dubbing tools. You notice the angles on

this one are radically different. You spin this one and you have to come up to here and if you turn just that far, your loop will come back to here and possibly slip off the point. Cal, as I told you when we were eating tacos, was my fly tying mentor. He went through a lot of development to get this one. And this is just a takeoff on Cal's tool but much improved. And I, I'd almost have to sit and do a fly tying demo to show you what the differences are, but you have these cottage industry efforts that are available because of the interest in fly tying. I see that interest falling off as people are more \*imitates using a phone\* doing this and hitting send and that sort of thing. But I find with young people, with kids you sit him down with feathers and thread and wrap it around the ooh, wow, needle, I'm talking 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 year olds they love it and they've been raised doing this \*using phones\*, okay. So I think right now I'm seeing fly tying having peaked and then kind of dropped off a little. The tools we have are far superior to what we used to have. Genetic hackle. I wish we had more variety. Tom Whiting has raised some wonderful stuff. And there are other growers out there who, in a market which he controlled, were not able to stick around. Guys like Hugh Spencer, who is growing beautiful saddle hackles with which I could tie size 8 and 10 flies. The Whiting hackles that I have up here to tie size 8s and 10s, not going to happen. What do we do for golden stones, green drakes, hoppers, those sorts of patterns? Well we go to foam, so the materials are evolving. While we have smaller dry fly hackle is better than any we've ever had, we're missing on this stuff for the large dry flies. Then I should use some of the old fluttering stone salmon flies on the top of a Bud Lily catalog. We still tie that stuff, I wound up with a stash and stuff that's 40 years old that we can still pull out and tie with and we can make those old timey flies available to our anglers and, in turn, available of the trout. They still haven't learned that they shouldn't eat feathers and elk hair. But every now and then they'll eat that stuff in preference to SpongeBob SquarePants made out of foam, you know. So we're looking at then, with the synthetic materials a ton of difference between what we had and when I got into it and what we have now. Some of the synthetic fabrics, sixty years ago we're not even in existence. Others were in their infancy, but as I look around this bench I see rayon, nylon, antron, all sorts of stuff, natural and natural and synthetic mixed. I picked up- interesting, I picked up this: UV, a Doug Swisher dubbing. I'm using a lot of Doug stuff now. And here I am, I'm 77 years old and a couple years ago I started playing with this stuff, I'm learning, it's expanding, it's exploding. We learn that fish do see into the ultraviolet spectrum. We have three color detecting cones in our eyes. They have a fourth. Trout have a 4th for detecting UV. The aquatic insects have UV reflective materials that come from UV reflecting proteins that they develop. And the glue, take this, the glue that a caddis fly uses to glue the chunks of rock or stick together in its case is a UV reflective protein. So if you're a trout, you see this rock, that just looks like it's got some gravel on it and we've seen trout do this haven't we? They'll go around, nose this one off, come over here, nose this one off. How do they know that these stones that are disguised to look exactly like the rocks that they're on are food and eat them. It, in effect, glows in the dark for them, cuz they can see it. How much is too much UV? How much should be there and in what insect? Oh, UV, let's make everything UV, I don't think that's the answer, you catch fewer fish if you do that than if you try to find out where it occurs naturally and use it judiciously. And so I'm doing that now and we didn't have UV dyes that were effective just a few years ago. So the explosion in synthetic materials? I'll take it. I wish we still had things like \*shh\* seal, so I stashed a lot. Polar bear, I got some of that too but uh, and some of that came from Cal's estate, I don't go out looking for it now, we have a lot of synthetics that will get just about the same job done. And we have some that fall short, some places where the old natural materials work better. Interestingly enough the places where they do work better, nobody's found a substitute yet for elk hair, deer hair, stuff like that, hackle. And we have, particularly for the smaller flies, an abundance of the natural stuff we need. The hooks now are better overall. And that didn't happen until there was a market demand. Everything we make flies out of as it were,

is better than it has been ever, with the exception of things like the English all cock hooks and that sort of thing. But they weren't chemically sharpened, back in the day. And if you tick one of those hooks on a piece of grass behind you on your back cast, get back the old mechanical stuff and sharpen your hook. Still got to do that, you still have to be a good fisherman. And the existence of all of these materials and all of this stuff to make just a, you know, just a cornucopia of new flies... how many of them are actually an improvement? How many of them are there to fill the catalogs of the importers? You know, I get a little cynical at that point and even though the imported flies now are better than they ever have been, I think we can do a better job here. Sitting behind the vice building them one at a time. Maybe they all may not look exactly alike, just given the variance in the materials that we're able to procure for a particular fly that we're tying, but when they go into the box I have confidence that that's a better fly than you can order from a factory and that's what's kept me in business all these years.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:48:28] Yeah, get into it. For fly tyers, you look at a little fly, "Oh my gosh I could never do that." Oh yes you can. Start at the beginning. Take a course. YouTube. Tons of good information. Some of it, I wish I could get in there and revise I'd like to see all the flies wrapped with a thread base and then be cemented. And I'd like to see some things where techniques, the Cal and a few other people, Cal, Darwin Atkins, others have left with me, I'd like to pass on I guess that means I'm gonna have to get with the program and you know do some YouTubing and get my stuff out there so that if some young whippersnapper about 45 or 50 years old wants to get into it, they can copy it. I just encourage people to get into it. It's a... It scratches the fishing itch through the winter. You know, much better than surfing the net does. It gets you connected to something that's elemental and real. And I like that idea. The fishing: we have made tremendous strides in every aspect of tackle production. I think the most significant is leader. I can take Rene Harrop's wonderful stuff, trout hunter leaders and his new tippet material, put it together the break strength on that stuff, if you tie a regular fishing knot, much less a overhand that they said test it with is just flat unreal. So out of all of it, even though we have all these nano, great, new fibers for rods and lines that'll float a sixteenth of an inch off the water and you know all of this stuff and you know reels that are manufactured to tighter specifications than things that we send up in outer space even though we have all of that and tackle. The biggest improvement I think has been in the material we use for leader, which in turn enables us to effectively fish smaller flies and bigger flies and all of that. And I can fish those... my new flies, my old flies, whatever, on an old hardy reel and a bamboo rod and I'll give myself a modern fly line instead of oil silk, it's less trouble to keep track of, but if I had to go back to the leader material that was available when I first opened this shop 30 years ago or 30 years before that, I would be wailing about it. But with modern leader materials I think that is the greatest advance we've had and there have been advances all over the board, but the fact that you've got, you know, IM 8 or IM 9 or IM... off wherever else, graphite, is not as important as taper. And the action that you can impart to a rod through the taper. You have some fine, fine, fly rods now that you can get for, say under 300 dollars, you don't have to spend over nine hundred to get a good one. When I first started if you wanted a good rod you were gonna shell out for it and if, and on down from there, your choices were fewer. A man might buy one good fly rod in his lifetime. Do you own only one good fly rod?

**James Thull** [00:52:17] Me?

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:52:18] Yeah.

**James Thull** [00:52:18] I don't even own that good of a fly rod.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:52:22] I bet the rods that you have now if you bought within the last ten years, Jim, are better rods than the equivalent dollars would have bought 20, 30 years ago. The flip is that if it was a good rod 30 years ago it's still a good rod, you know. Might be a little, "oh this one's too slow", but wait a minute, I'm fishin' the franco spinner fall, down below the Stevensville bridge and this old, floppy, slow rod, when I come up, arcs into this strike and I've got a fish on, instead of "whoops I missed" or "whoops I broke one off". There's a place for all of it. But I've seen a lot of those changes and I think the fundamentals haven't changed. I think that there is more good tackle available to the average angler and a curious onlooker, who thinks he might like to try it, now for less money. You can get into it. Yeah you do have to make a financial commitment but you don't need to break the bank to become a fly fisherman. You can get good stuff and the key, I think, is to not throw good money after bad. Go get some good instruction. There's stuff available on YouTube, but watching, even a Steve Rajeff video is not the same as having some old hand who's been at it for a while and is a certified casting instructor stand at your shoulder and tell you how far back to bring your back cast, or not to go like that, to go like that instead when you're driving it forward. Get good instruction. And you can get in for it without breaking the bank. And if a salesman in a fly shop tries to tell you how much more you need to spend play bobblehead, and thank him, and wander on out and go somewhere else. You don't need to be taken advantage of.

**James Thull** [00:54:25] Excellent. Well thanks so much for agreeing to sit and do this interview for us and we appreciate you contributing to the Angling Oral History Project.

**Chuck Stranahan** [00:54:34] Well thank you so much, I feel as if we've not even begun to touch some of this stuff that would be there just in terms of the people I've known, what I've learned from them. The things that we see as anglers who have been on the inside of the game and over my lifetime having watched it develop into this modern age. Having, say, gone into Bud Lily's shop in 1973 and gotten acquainted with Bud, uh... met Greg at the same time, he was just a younger man than I back then, and to know the people who have made this sport and who have been able to partake with them of what they had leave with me to fill my reservoir. That, the relationship with those people I think is the thing that's the most gratifying for me as a commercial entity and this wonderful, wonderful pasttime sport that we enjoy.