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Chuck Waterman [00:00:10] I was brought to the sport by my father. Both he and my grandfather fly fished avidly. My dad is now 81 and still gets out and fishes a bit. So he started me when I was, I think about 7 years old and started me with tying about a year, year and a half later. And I'm still doing it now and still love it.

Chuck Waterman [00:00:38] I think there's-- there's multiple levels to enjoying fly fishing. The first thing is, is being able to catch a fly. The second one is being able to catch a fly on a fly that you tied. The next level to me is being able to catch a fly on a fly that you came up with the pattern and then tied. And then the fourth, which I haven't gotten to yet and I'm almost afraid to think about trying, is building the rod and then to cast the fly and so on. I think that's-- that would be sort of the pinnacle. But I just-- I love the personal involvement and I love the creativity. I love the strategy of it.

Chuck Waterman [00:01:22] Oh, my goodness. There are so many. My dad has been a commercial tier on a part time basis now for over 40 years. Early mentors for me were Bill Hunter, who developed the HMH vise and-- and created some, uh-- it was a beautiful Atlantic salmon tier. I had a chance when I was younger to-- to have some time with Lefty Kreh. And over the past couple of years, I've gotten more involved with the classic and artistic salmon fly tiers on on more of a worldwide scale. And the talent and the friendship at that level is-- is just staggering. I've just really fallen in love with that-- with that group of people in that aspect of it.

Chuck Waterman [00:02:19] I'm actually, originally, from New Hampshire and-- and grew up back there. We fished-- We fished some rivers. We fished some small streams. We fished beaver ponds. A little bit of everything. And then came out to San Diego, originally, in 1979 and didn't realize what a diverse fishery San Diego was for fly rods. So I actually put my stuff away for a few years and then picked it up again. Really started picking up fishing again in the late 90s. Fishing both here, but we also decided to take my-- my trip-- or my dad on a trip, excuse me, to the Bahamas. He had always wanted to go bone fishing. So my wife and I took him to the Bahamas and that was my-- my wife's first exposure, actually second exposure, to fly fishing. She absolutely fell in love with it. And so the two of us have really been pretty active in it ever since.

Jim Thull [00:03:24] Excellent. That's excellent. Did you have any luck with the Bonefish?

Chuck Waterman [00:03:27] We did. We did. In fact, the-- Our first day out on a boat, Michelle wasn't feeling like she was quite ready to try it with a fly rod, so we took a took a spinning rod and some shrimp out for her and our guide pulled us off back at the edge of the flat, before we-- before we went on to start looking for fish. She made a few practice casts just to get a rhythm back and the first couple were kind of dodgy, but then she made a good-- a good cast. And so the guide says, Great, let's go ahead. Real back in. You're-- You're good to go. And she got the line about halfway in and hung up on the bottom and she was trying to get it loose, wouldn't come loose. And then the guide was coming down to break the line free. And all of a sudden the line just took off. It turned out it was a bonefish she was hooked on, not the bottom, so she-- she got her trial by fire out of the way in short order. And it was-- it was just-- we-- we still laugh at it when we-- when we remember back to that trip.

Chuck Waterman [00:04:35] I think that's a great observation. And yeah, I would agree. We've-- We've been lucky we've had a chance to-- to do some traveling. We've been up to

New Brunswick for Atlantic salmon. We've been trout fishing in New Zealand. We've been to the Bahamas a couple of times. Down to Mexico. And and so, yeah, I think part of-- part of the joy that we get out of these trips is doing some research ahead of time to find out what fisheries are there and-- and be able to learn and ask questions while you're there, because I think that just contributes to the whole-- the whole experience. And I think conservation has to be part of that, because in just in the-- in the years that I've been fishing here, I've seen changes between what we used to see 10, 12 years ago now and what we see now in terms of the numbers of fish and-- and the ebbs and flows that-- that happened with that. So conservation, I have no problem with people who want to go ahead and take a fish to keep and eat as long as-- as long as they're gonna get use out of the fish. But just to fill a bag with fish for the sake of filling a bag, I-- I have a harder time with that. But if somebody wants to take a yellowtail home, especially if it's a prolific breeding fish. Like out here, Dorado and yellowtail, they grow like crazy there. They're plentiful. That's great. But for some of our other species out here, Calico Bass, for example, they've got to be seven years old before they get to 12 inches long and reach sexual maturity. So when these party boats go out to the kelp beds and people just haul in everything overboard that they can possibly take.. It-- It's frustrating to see.

Chuck Waterman [00:06:31] I think just-- I think from a-- from a pure conservation point, I don't see fish being as plentiful maybe as they were. And this is fairly localized because, for me, when I fish locally, I tend to go to the same two or three areas down to San Diego Bay or out to the kelp beds. Some of it-- San Diego is is very subject to things like El Nino's and La Nina's and the-- and the impacts that those weather conditions bring. But it does seem to me-- I know long before I ever started fishing here, they used to have a fairly robust albacore fishery here and we don't see those very often anymore. I, you know, every now and then I'll hear of somebody getting one, but-- but I don't think the numbers there are anywhere near as prevalent as they used to be. That's not to say the fishing's not bad here, but I just-- I don't think the numbers are what they used to be.

Chuck Waterman [00:07:43] The climate change aspect, I think, is something that has to be considered. I don't know as much about the climate change from a purely scientific standpoint. Steve Piper, whom I understand you've already met with, Steve is-- Steve was a, you know, a Nobel candidate with his-- a lot of his research on the environment climate. And so he's going to be far more eloquent and speak to that far better than I can. I think from a cultural perspective, the conservation things, those are the things that we can address from a human standpoint. And I think those can go those can go a fair amount of the way. But then there's also there are some things that in other areas, not necessarily geographically located in San Diego, but in other parts of the country, for example. We also have a house over in the over on the Gulf side of Florida, where over the last few years they've had major issues with red tide and the release of high levels of chemicals coming off of Lake Okeechobee and what that is, what that is doing to the fisheries and the waterways. Their people are getting sick just from standing on the-- on the-- on the shore and breathing in the air that's coming up. And I think the problem there is-- is multi-fold some of it is commercial industries doing whatever it takes to make a buck and ignoring the environment. But then I've also talked with other people that have said that the Department of Fisheries can also play a bigger role in terms of its recovery. So for all of these wild algae blooms and everything that they've had that have impacted those areas, it's my understanding that the counts of mullet that used to be around 20, 30 years ago were two to three times what they are in the local area. Now, when you consider that a mullet apparently eats its entire body weight in algae every single day, if the mullet populations were restored so that they could be there and help keep some of that algae under control, then the-- the effects might not be as devastating.

So I think it's the combination of the ability for conservation to play a role as well as the state and federal governments really need to crack down on the companies and environments and industries that have-- that have jeopardized the natural resource.

Jim Thull [00:10:49] Fisheries management, to me, is always tough because I feel as though it should be clear. You should be basing it on what's on the best-- best-- best-- best for the species, best for preserving, best for keeping them. But there's always that fine line with commercial-- with angling that you have to walk.

Chuck Waterman [00:11:08] Yeah.

Jim Thull [00:11:09] Yeah, I think that makes it difficult.

Chuck Waterman [00:11:10] I agree. I think-- I think people tend to take drastic swings of the pendulum when when things start to swing one way. We don't necessarily go back to look to say, OK, what-- what was the true environment like when things were good? But it's like, How do we maximize the exact opposite reaction? And so you have these huge swings, which I don't know that those are necessarily any better than having things off in the-- in the-- to the point where they were in the first place.

Jim Thull [00:11:43] Sure.

Chuck Waterman [00:11:44] I think it's that taking a concerted look and saying, OK, you know, let's have a three, four, five year plan. Let's not say that we're going to fix this in three months. I don't think those are good solutions. I think... you know, to be able to-- to be able to take the long view approach, you know, as an example, talked about, you know, some of the-- well, actually, we haven't talked about it yet, the Marine Life Protection Act, which really hits the coast, the entire West Coast. But but southern California, there are drastic impacts where they have just completely shut down zones of fishing. And I think they've kind of missed the mark because what they've done is they have gone in and said, In these areas, you shall not fish at all because we need to let-- we need to let the fish repopulate. I think that was a mistake. I think what they could have done instead is created no take zones. So have it as zero limit fishery, which would introduce more people to the concept and the idea of catch and release fishing. I understand that maybe from a budget standpoint it's not feasible because you can't necessarily have-- They may not have enough Fish and Wildlife agents to be able to be on the water and sort of monitor, OK, Who's-- Who's out on the water in this area? And go and check on them and say, OK. Just making sure you don't have anything on the boat. You're not taking anything in. But it seems to me like to go from a swing of you can put anything in a bag that you haul over the rail to: Now, you can't you can't even wet a line in here for for any purpose. Again, too broad a pendulum swing. Find-- Find a-- find a common ground that makes sense and try to-- try to bring that-- that education factor in.

Chuck Waterman [00:14:01] It's vital. I think there's-- ...and I will shade this maybe more towards the fly-fishing side than the conventional side. I think we are still combating the old myth that fly fishers are a bunch of old white guys who want to hoard their secret fishing spots and not share what they know. And if there are guys who are doing that, that's the culture change that needs to first relax and change before we're gonna be able to provide impact to any of the others. Here in San Diego, there are two fly fishing clubs. I'm a member of both of them. And I think it's absolutely fantastic that we're seeing more and more women and younger people getting involved in the clubs and that the, quote unquote, "old-- "old-- "old guard" are welcoming them in and trying to, you know, find

opportunities to help out. So I'm seeing them getting involved in fishing. I'm seeing them get involved in fly time. And, you know, this-- this has also been said. I'm not the first one to say it by any stretch, Lefty Kreh was saying it 35, 40 years ago. If you put one woman in a class of eight guys taking a fly casting class, the woman is going to be the rock star at the end of the class. It's the same thing with tying. For reasons that we don't need to go into. It's a sport that really suits them. If the interest suits them and I think part of having that interest suit them is letting them know that it's-- it's OK and they're welcome to be a part of it. That's-- that's something that the rest of us have to do.

Chuck Waterman [00:15:57] I like the being out there and the solitude with nature. You can be out there-- You can be on a fishing trip with yourself and one other person, yourself and five other people going on a road trip or a trip with, you know, twenty five people on a club trip or something like that. But essentially, for the time that you're on the water, unless you're in a boat, when you get to the water, you're in your own space. It's contemplative. You-- but your mind is always working. You know, you're taking a look at the environment around you. But to me, yeah, it sounds-- it sounds trite, but that's my church. You know, you've-- you've got all of this beautiful environment and there aren't many ugly areas where you would go to fish. Almost every place you go, it's gonna be beautiful. So you've got that. There's the challenge of it. You know, there's-- I always kind of thought that fishing sort of missed the mark. They should be they should be marketing fishing as the ultimate the ultimate reality sport. Because when you go out and fish, the fish doesn't care whether you're brand new to the game or whether you've been doing it for 60 years. Their life is on the line. They're not going to-- they're not going to offer any sort of concession to you just because you're new at it or you're having a bad day. So there's that-- there's sort of that baseline there that if you go out and you do have a good day on the water, you're learning, you're figuring out how to do things right. So the gratification of it is-- is that much better. By the same token, you have control over the life or death of that fish. So, you know, it's really kind of up to you with-- with how you treat the fish and and-- and-- and the choices that you make when you-- when you do catch a fish.

Jim Thull [00:18:05] Bud [Lilly] used to say something similar to me. He'd be like, The fish doesn't know whether you're out as \$10 or thousand, you know.

Chuck Waterman [00:18:13] Exactly.

Jim Thull [00:18:13] So, you know, it doesn't have to be an expense to get into it.

Chuck Waterman [00:18:16] No! Yep. Yep. I mean, you know, if you can if you can go to a gear swap or something like that and just do what it takes to get into it. The toys are fun, but-- but that's not-- that's not the important part. You know, the important part is just getting out there and taking part.

Jim Thull [00:18:39] Yeah I mean, I personally I have rods that I've had since I was a teenager in Wisconsin-- spinnig rods.

Chuck Waterman [00:18:46] Mmhmm.

Jim Thull [00:18:46] But they'll still catch fish. [chuckles]

Chuck Waterman [00:18:48] Absolutely! Absolutely. And so that-- and I think that's-- part of it is, you can have-- there-- there may be a sentimental value...

Jim Thull [00:18:59] Sure!

Chuck Waterman [00:19:00] ...to, you know, I've got an old Fenwick fiberglass rod that used to be my grandfather's and-- and I've also got bamboo rods that used to be my grandfather's. And on a on a trip that we made up to the Missoula area, you know, took a day, and went out with-- with those rods, and I put on one of his old Pflueger medalist reels, and-- and, you know, and just cast it and just picked up, you know, these-- these little cut bows-- or no. I'm sorry. They weren't cut bows. They were just cut throat. But I don't think a single fish was over nine inches long. But I had-- I had such a blast fishing that day just because of that that sentimentality aspect. So it's-- it's all in when you make it.

Jim Thull [00:19:58] You know, of course, the fish doesn't have to be big to have fun catching 'em.

Chuck Waterman [00:20:02] Oh, yeah! No. Ab-- Absolutely! It's, you know, seeing the rise and being able to-- being able to think about, OK, How do I want to approach this and being able to execute it? And frankly, I think it's probably more fun if they come up and they turn away once or twice, because then, you know it's not just a fish that's just going to gobble the first thing that comes past it, you're gonna have to do some things right. And so that just increases the satisfaction level.

Chuck Waterman [00:20:40] I think it's-- I think it's absolutely vital. Because one of the things that may not necessarily be an initial attractant for somebody when they just get into fishing, tradition may not necessarily mean something at first. You know, at first, it's usually, you know, Hey, How many catch-- fish did you catch that day? But then sooner or later, you start getting embedded into the tradition of it. And-- and what it means to-- to find a species that, you know, maybe isn't all that common, but is a-- but is endemic to that particular piece of water. So to have that preservation and to have people who are going to the efforts to-- to preserve watersheds or waterways for-- for specific species of fish that are native to that area and helping-- helping rebuild that. I haven't gotten involved in it myself, but-- but God, I have so much respect for the-- for the people who do go out and go to the effort of getting that done.

Chuck Waterman [00:21:55] I'm more familiar with-- with Golden Fly-- Golden State Flycasters. And, so they do go out, and one of the things that they've been working with is Cal Trout to understand and hopefully restore some of the Southern California-- Believe it or not, there used to be steelhead freely running in-- in northern San Diego County and-- and s-- then areas east of there. And there are still some around, but there are a lot of the-- the waterways have gotten choked off and-- and some of the pools have dried up, but there are still some there and they're-- and they're trying to find out, from a genetic perspective, What is there? How do we preserve what's there? And then, What can be done in the way of grants, etc. to try to restore some of those waterways so that, you know, is it-- is it viable for those steelhead to be saved? And so, yeah, they-- I want to say it's probably on an every other month basis-- they go out and they do fin clipping trips and-- and take fish counts and-- and do a multitude of things. So, yeah, I think that's great.

Chuck Waterman [00:23:30] Oof! I don't know that I'm of a-- I don't know that I'm of a pers-- position to be able to give adv-- you know, that sort of thing. Other other than just-- My-- My feeling is, is if you find somebody who who even shows an inkling of interest towards it, don't take him by the scruff of the neck and throw them in the water, but make yourself available to helping them understand what's there and what you love about it. If you, you know, if there's a young person out there who's never had a chance to-- to get

out on the water and you know of a great place to go, you know, talk to their folks, you know, take them and their folks and show them a piece of water where, You know what? You can you can walk up to the edge of this lake or pond or the beach or the surf and without a lot of investment, you can have fun going out there and catching fish. I thought a little bit about it after you had first contacted me and, you know, cultural-- culturally, generations are different and their approaches are different, so I think everybody is going to-- different generations are going to enjoy fishing for different reasons and the approaches that they take may certainly be different. But I would just I would encourage everybody to at least take a little bit of time and understand that historical perspective and where the sport came from and, you know, understand that a lot of those people now who are 60, 70 years, 80 years old, have a lot to offer. And I think a lot of those people are-- tend to-- tend to maybe be a little bit reticent about reaching out because they just feel like they're going to kind of get waved off. The respect thing is it is a two way street. I think older people need to respect the fact that young people catch on quickly and-- and can-- can learn. But by the same token, have those younger folks realize that those older folks have something to offer and sitting down and spending some time with somebody you might not otherwise talk to is probably a really good thing.