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Tom Wendelburg [00:00:10] [overlapping background chatter] Every time I go to the water, I'm humbled, I'm entranced, and I kid you not. I don't care if I'm going to a new piece of pond to fish for panfish, a trout stream I know, or anything in between. I'm humbled by the situation and I am humbled by the environment. I prefer to go after the fish with tackle a little bit lighter than ever recommended. And make a career out of doing that. And my history shows that and my publications, including my book, shows that, which is about that.using light tackle to catch bigger fish. So, it all is a situation that is something that creates a mental feedback for me. That is something I just expressed. And the story I told you about the water haunting me, that was brought out of me by the gentlemen [chuckles], and then he used it without my knowledge. It's something I said. So, even back then, when I was younger, you know, fifty years ago, I was always haunted by water. In that case, I told him the river, the stream water. Is what he said, "No! Just water." And he's right. It can be static water it doesn't have to be dynamic water. So, any one story really wouldn't-- wouldn't suffice unless I can come up with something at sometime because every time I go to the water, I feel this way, and I fish all the time here. And I fish for new species, in new areas and in new ways. Presently, I'm using dry flies I developed floating minnow patterns for the walleyed pikes in our rivers, our river eddies, which is something no one in the angling industry has ever captured, in all the years. That the walleye is more like the brook trout than the brown trout. If you get in its environment in the proper ways, flowing water, and this is something that you learn while you're doing it. Now, in many ways, I develop a lot of the things that are being done in trout fishing today, or at least related, many of these things to the higher-ups and the (unintelligible) in trout fishing. It's not that it wasn't known, but next man up type of thing, yeah, and a lot of innovation for me. So, what does it mean to me? It means to me a total commitment to what I'm doing. Doug Swisher, when he the foreword to my book said, we thank Tom for, you know, [indistiguishable] However, it has not gotten me any money. I'm not going to be rich or anything. And I just think along what I-- they have plenty of opportunities, and I usually back off from making big money, even though I guide for big money sometimes. I've gotten some big money from publications because I just have to keep within myself. When you see the water, the body of water, and you are intrigued by it. That's the best answer I can give you.

Tom Wendelburg [00:03:29] A long time ago, when I was just trying to get into the subject of writing about trout, I was introduced to a fellow named Ray White, who was then habitat leader for the Wisconsin Conservation Department, and he dropped some advanced information to me that wasn't public knowledge that it was soon to become the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources [laughs], so this is dinosaur stuff, history. But Ray made me aware of many of the conservation issues surrounding our trout streams and I went from there and interviewed many biologists and in my book, a fellow wrote the introduction of my book, Jeff Mayers. You know, said I wanted kind of an unofficial biologist, it was almost a biologist type of degree, and it's true. Mainly through my extensive interviews in later years, extending through many Montana biologists. Rod Markun and several others. Very knowledgeable people who helped me a lot. So, I learned many of the things that impinge on our trout streams. North Peter is the most [unintelligible] and others. Anyway, most of my involvement has been with things along the floodplain. And one of the best pieces of information that was ever passed my way, that I could pass on, is this: Good land management goes hand in hand with good water management. The two are interchangeable. And believe me, dealing with the people that live along our waterways and our floodplains, that is the one thing that has impressed them more than anything, that simple idea. OK, now we're talking the various pesticides, land managements, you know,

wastes, runoffs that occur from whatever. Then, the next stage is devoted to uplands and then you get into things like diluting countrysides, diluting hillsides, clearcutting the forests, which became very big, you know, in Montana. And a great deal of work Dale Brook up in Missoula kind of spearheaded this, and then the national people caught on to this bigtime. So these are the things along the waterways, along with development for a dam including building of buildings and so forth. Anything that would change the natural situation that you have become accustomed to. Including the presence of a tree along the streamside. Don't get me into that one because we're going to be here all day. There's a fellow walking around today named Scott Stewart, he was my homeroom student when I taught high school in Brookfield Wisconsin. He has since become a well-known and highly respected fish manager in the state of Wisconsin. Now, Scott is also retired and I preached to Scott, and he's well aware of it, the value of a streamside tree and tree hole next to it. And the value of that tree hole [unintelligible] changeable thing because eventually, the tree topples. The root system in the hole remains for some years and the fish live there people have never learned to respect this simple situation and I observe these things in Montana, exactly as I am explaining it. And I've seen them be even more important along our low--low gradient spring creeks here in Wisconsin. With those streamside trees are on the move too soon. For the overhead volume and shade covers, they move too soon, then the partial canopies cover a thicketed area it can warm the water create accessible to the people on the streams to help so you are right. So once you get started on the value cover side tree either planted (unintelligible) as opposed to the streamside tree which eventually creates downpour and has to be dealt with or ignored is. Something to consider this takes some constant stewardshiptaking care of the tree fall. Surely. they provide wonderful cover horizontally across the stream and trout take up these spaces beautifully many other situations the trees contribute to siltification each situation is different it's all and you need stewardship that involves labor and the DNR is often (unintelligible) with manpower. and money and outfits like trout unlimited and other people have to be brought in to help remove tree fall. I know fishing buddies that paid farmers 20 bucks to bring their tractor in to haul away a giant pine that fell into the water. This sounds like a very perfunctory thing we talk about but believe me if there were any stewardship values along our Wisconsin trout streams they were able to maintain the manicuring of the stream that is the key to a lot of their productivity instead of hey just major new territory. So another one is of course management of the grasses do you have invasive species or do you have desirable grasses do you have tall grasses or do you have short grasses the value of grazing on streamside which is long been thought of as a problem. Once you actually get into it you'll learn about that I will Your little gradient streams such as our spring creeks and valleys here and in Montana the value of a short crop meadow along those stream edges is extremely valuable and for an old guy like myself prefer walking that and therefore it's about more (chatter) these environments where this is being done well there's grazing (chatter) I've seen this happen many of our streams when they're in there and they've got a short crop. Fishing is wonderful when they're taken away. the grasses allowed to grow tall and long and it narrows the stream it goes to H Each situation has to be dealt with along the way. So I'm getting a little effusive here a little because I wanted to get the information in In a matter of doing that just like Beaver. I've watched a beaver come up our Wisconsin Wisconsin trout streams from larger anterior waters which often flow to the main river a lot of our Beaver come up from those they burrow they live on the edges people don't know they are there after a while these same Beaver figure out things are cool. Now we're going to build Then people become aware of them I ignore these beavers. That have been there for two years thier architecture in some of the situations these beaver should be hired to do work but many top people talk removal . (chatter) conservation ideas and they or the DNR will or will not remove those beaver dams so its a

matter of what you want to do with your time and where you want to do it .. So that's another issue it creates flooding and dewatering so we can go on forever.

Tom Wendelburg [00:12:10] Well, the introduction of my book best explains it, with the name story. It's right in the introduction he wrote for the book. The foreword, he wrote the foreword to the book where we were on Armstrong Creek one day and there were only two guys catching any fish [unintelligible] Half the people in this room [unintelligible] OK? Now, eventually, I go downstream and this guy is really good, and I had been way upstream with the only two guys catching fish [unintelligible]. So I came in with my camera, and Doug explained it very well. How he remembered it after all those years so perfectly is beyond me. But essentially I photographed him catching fish, rainbow trout [unintelligible] and it got on the cover of Fly Fishing Magazine. As an afterthought, two or three days later he had left. I stayed there I was standing in the exact same spot where Doug was catching his fish, and I had alternately drifted my hackle dry fly my [unintelligible] over these fish, and my presentation was perfect in those days, it was perfect. They refuse and they took his no hackle dry flies, horrible, so they learn, they, fish selectivity. It's what it's about. So I was there, few days later, a couple days later, standing there eyeing up four big trout, [unintelligible] a fellow crosses this stream, comes very close to me. This is a very famous person, which I won't say his name, I didn't mention it then. I said, Pardon me, would you take a picture of me catching this fish? He said, Well, I'm going to the Yellowstone, I only have a minute or two I'll give you. I said, That's all it'll take me. Now, I was using the light K-hook dry fly the standard one that I was fishing [unintelligible] the other day. And it turned out these weren't rainbows, Doug caught rainbows, and he's fishing now were all browns in the same place. I knocked off all four in about, you know, as fast as I could, and they were pretty big, and one of those became a full-page, full-bleed, double spread picture of Tom [unintelligible] a big fish, you know, so, we're [unintelligible] fly fishing in a magazine.

Tom Wendelburg [00:14:38] It's called "Catching Big Fish on Light Fly Tackle."

Jim Thull [00:14:43] And, what other, what other stuff have you written? You've written for several other publications. I mean, you mention Frank Amato.

Tom Wendelburg [00:14:50] Well, I used to write for Salmon Trout Steelheader when I was just starting out. I did 14 pieces for Field and Stream. By last count, 28 for Fly Fishing Magazine. Three for Outdoor Life. There's a magazine called Fishing Facts, which is a no-bullshit, meat and potatoes, magazine. It's not fly fishing. I did 14 pieces for them because I've got a lot of background in fishing not just fly fishing, and they wouldn't even accept a freelance writer in those days. So then, it goes on and on. I mean, the list of places I published is just continual. Airlines Magazine, you name it, the longer we sit here you know, magazines in all of them, eventually.

Tom Wendelburg [00:15:43] No one knows that when I was a kid, I lived in Milwaukee, and we were a couple blocks from the Washington Park Lagoon, on 42nd street. There's no, no history of fishing in my entire family. When I was four, five years old, you know, the parents or my aunt, who lived with us would take me over to the park, I'd see water. That's all I knew about it, and I made my first fishing rod out of Tinker Toys, and put some liver on the end of a line and caught crayfish, and from then on, I was, it was years until I caught my first fish, somehow, I procured a little bamboo pole with some silk line and I had a fish hook on it, and I set it down on the shoreline, at the Washington Park Lagoon to mess with the little tackle box I put together. Eventually, I picked the rod up off the shoreline and a three and a half-inch bluegill on the end and that's still the biggest fish I've ever caught. I

went from there, I was five or six at the time, and by the time I was eight, I was tying my own flies and catching crappie at night, which is a pretty pointless advancement, I didn't trout fish until I was 13 years old and that was because a neighbor, his parents had a cabin on a trout stream in northern Wisconsin, and that's how I got into trout water. Before that, I could only go to the library and [unintelligible].

Tom Wendelburg [00:17:22] you know I had a fellow that wanted advanced copies of my book a few years ago. From this neck of the woods. I said I can't you're going to get it when everyone else gets it. He came back to me with . What's the prettiest trout you ever fished? I could not answer. I don't think any of them are pretty. In fact when I mentioned the West I criticized myself for not taking the time to look at the mountains because they are so valuable. Well, actually I remarked to get out of answering those questions. at one time or another they all seemed very attractive to me in one way, shape, or form, or another. Sure but in terms of actual natural beauty the only answer I could come up with was one my father made me aware of when he came to visit us when we were living in Montana and that's Rock Creek near Missoula to answer your question

Tom Wendelburg [00:18:24] Well we started out in Rock Creek and I taught fly casting and many of the precepts of fly casting a bit sophisticated by others. But I came up with many of your concepts including the tight loop cast. I just didn't call it that and other things I 100 percent teach it. And getting people into big fish on dry flies immediately because that was the nature of angling on fast water because the thing was not to drown them because Rock Creek flows so fast. So I enjoyed the teaching process naturally during my background as a high school teacher and university teacher also which was in journalism in English not fishing and coaching of course it's all an educational situation.

Jim Thull [00:19:13] Did being a teacher makes you a better guide.

Tom Wendelburg [00:19:15] 100 percent yes.

Tom Wendelburg [00:19:23] Women are better.

Jim Thull [00:19:25] That's why every guide I've ever asks says.

Tom Wendelburg [00:19:26] Really but I concluded this in the late 60s.

Jim Thull [00:19:30] They all single women. Will, listen where men will try and force it.

Tom Wendelburg [00:19:34] Extremely good there are very few people I fish with today. that are as good with a dry fly as my ex-wife. I always answer in retribution. She had a good teacher. She drive me nuts. We've go up the Beaverhead River and she used to say you know what you said in the last hour you said the water's too high the water to low its too windy its too calm its too overcast its too cloudy and a flood or other environmental things all of which know are extraneous and I get very hyper when I think about it she would commonly catch these huge brown trout on size 18 pale evening duns in the morning you know...she would drive me nuts

Tom Wendelburg [00:20:24] There were two that I viewed on the most. My hero was Joe Brooks who was considered the God of fly fishing. I'm probably one of the few if not only men alive that fished with Joe that's Not true but close did his wife Mary was extremely good all you had to do is tell Mary she was better than Joe. at basic dry fly fishing she'd

get very angry. a lot of the pictures I've had published in national publications were taken by Mary Brooks and other very famous people. (chatter) where we I lost track .

Jim Thull [00:21:07] I said What are some of your favorite angling authors.

Tom Wendelburg [00:21:10] Al MacLane fishing editor emeritus now deceased of Field and Stream After that, a fellow named Charlie Waterman hes gone spent his summers in Livingston.and when I was out there all the time he'd stop by any old time. A fellow named Ray Hurley a famous guide down there. He'd say Charlie wants to be a trout writer like you Tom. Charlie was already a famous writer he wants to be a trout writer like you are (chatter) so apparently, I had status then thats what I'm getting at. guiding So one day Armstrong after the floods several floods there I caught his huge rainbow. Took me almost a quarter mile down I lifted it out of the water and I saw a fellow below me. I said Sir would you take a picture of my fish. Yeah yeah. Wait a minute. And I said in the meantime I'm going to run it back up to where I hooked it and release it there. So it doesn't have to swim all the way by itself. So I get all the way back up there and he kept it in the water where I took the place. Eventually, this fellow came back upstream and it was Charlie he was out checking duck, duck hunting situations so I knew Charlie I was having breakfast with him and Dan Bailey and Charlie wrote phenomenal common sense material we wrote a piece called once, once called what are the trout doing today. Oh, it is so common sense. It's just stuck in my mind I did not keep a copy of it. Maybe I can get my hands on the magazine. I think I will stand out like Charlie wrote down to earth stuff and I had more dealings with him later. Also, I like Charlie Waterman's stuff. But when it come to Trout writing you know he just did that last. But I mention the name because you asked other names that I read easily the greatest of all in terms of writing ability and expression is Ernie Schwiebert. I'm going to give you some inside dope. I was fishing the Big Hole River near Wisdom Montana. a wide river I was screwing it up real good I was fishing across and down with a fly. That is known today as a simulator. It's just an old Dan Bailey Elk Hair Caddis. I changed it a lot. added deer hair made the presentation better. Blah blah blah. I never received a penny from this fly. I really developed it and so forth and so on I sold two dozen to Joe Brooks and we went on and on he went about it he told people about it. So these kinds of flys had always been used in Montana. They go by many names and many styles I called it bat wings wings lay back over the hook this deer wing is very good and matched the stone fly on Rockridge and its so good for everything else including grasshoppers so. That day I was catching rainbows. quite. Well, and a fellow came up with one along one of the walkways. and I recognized. He said What's going on. And I said well oh I got my fly screwed up. The leaders hooked around the fly's coming off at a right angle. in other words the leaders now coming straight off the hookeye anymore. its around the hook shank but I am fishing down across the bank and bringing it back up and the fish are taking diving caddis's laying eggs so the hair wings that I am using wet even though its a dry fly is working just well for imitating that apparently and I am catching fish he says all right I said sort of like a riffle hitch. he says I don't know what a riffle hitch is Well if you tell that remark to enough people you'll find out that I was totally forgotten and the riffle hitch became very famous.

Tom Wendelburg [00:25:38] everything first of all the people are wonderful and that's not just a remark. I was treated like a king I don't know why people introduced me to private water I have no idea although I can think of some of the backround situations it was just. a thing how I got into some of this stuff. It's very interesting it wasn't necessarily the standard route but at every inquiry, I'd make I'd run into something positive. For example, I go into a town and say where can I catch a little shuteye along the river I'm tired of driving. I want to go by the water. you just drive down here there's a little turnout looks crappy down there

you can park along the river there. I get there do I want to sleep no I do need to sleep I look at the river. The river looks lousy but I know the Clark Fork river and what it's like and its wild in nature so what do I do an Hour and a half later the wife takes a picture of a three-pounder. I had and about a dozen other big ones . Then I say we still should sleep a little bit before we go on to our destination OK. You know everything I did came out positive and I can give tons of examples.

Tom Wendelburg [00:27:16] I know them as people I never fished with them specifically. No, I can't answer that.

Jim Thull [00:27:23] Did Dan and Buddy have good advice, good anglers.

Tom Wendelburg [00:27:26] Excellent a plus and for some reason, they took the shine to me and at one point in my, time with Dan Bailey of course I was a wholesale customer of his Armstrong was in danger of being lost to public fishing I was able to make. Phone call establish a national article calling for public support for donations of all things and it appears in Fly Fishing magazine before I ever fished the stream. You know a conversation help piece that doesn't hurt those kinds of impressions. So at one point his main manager came and said no one in 35 years got to Dan Bailey like you did. In. I didn't try to get at Dan Bailey fascinated he had been circulating among his fly tires which was you don't go near that famous. Room. He eventually made me go and learn from them. Oh, one good story there EveyIn could do to do mother hatches just beautifully this was one of several trips I had to stop in Livingston I was doing my (unintelligible).

Jim Thull [00:28:45] Who is EveyIn?

Tom Wendelburg [00:28:50] one of the fly tyers. I said everyone I bet nobody can tie a size 18 Hoovis Bug which is sort of a fancy potted little dry fly which has a humpty and hackle and its pretty hard to tie there in bigger sizes 10, 12, 8, 6's. I bet no one could do an 18 that small she instantly did two of them perfectly I took them with me I came back to Wisconsin shortly when I came out to Black Earth Creek. Within three days after getting back from Montana I found a big trout rising in a very difficult situation I greased my fly line and had it hang on the water below me on the overhanging trees I snapped the cast smartly upstream. in a perfect curved cast which are hard to do normally. So this one came up above the water on a greased line I snapped it around in a perfect positive curved cast so fly comes down ahead of your leader and line, it's hard to do to be critical that fish was also hanging around here it comes little size Hoovis Bug 18 the fish was on small baetis may flies with presentations like that you can often score so it was a very big brown and was published in quite a few places and it was on the first size 18 Hoovis Bug I ever know of being tied now whether or not that was the first size 18 Hoovis Bug ever tied we don't know and we don't care. So miniaturizing something to that point with a difficult pattern so I want even smaller. I've been through that stage just to answer your question.

Tom Wendelburg [00:30:52] That's all there is to it. I have friends including the guy I fish with most often and this is not Walleye and Bass which we used to do more than we do now. If we had to use a fly. that Someone else tied it might make us not use it. That's probably our attitude. Yeah. You know it's just that attitude and that attitude came across a long long time ago. now if someone gave me a fly to use it we're better than my flies. I'd have to think 10 times about this. And this is quite the attitude isn't it. Someone hands you a better baseball bat and tells you its a better baseball bat. Al you asked the question so I just gave you my response

Tom Wendelburg [00:31:48] Well, I've been through so many different things. This at one time, I was fishing the upper Madison river in Yellowstone. And there was a guy upstream from me Who eventually came downstream he worked for Orvis Company. Tom Middleberg in those days you know and all that stuff using one of there new graphite fly rods. And I had my sturdy glass rod that Doug had sent me when he was the director of fly fishing at Berkley. And I said I don't know how. Anybody can hook fish on these fancy new stiff rides. I was watching the graphite. Well, now it's time to change. I mean graphite is the ultimate material. I also saw Charlie Waterman's hands the day he posted a picture of that big rainbow. I was telling you about. He was Checking out his line situation with his fly rod by the way. OK no Rod makes a presentation as delicate on a dry fly as does good quality bamboo. you can state it. That's true. So I've been through so many different rods and basically, I just use graphite these days but I've used bamboo of all sorts and all kinds. One of my favorites remains a five foot 1 1/2 pound bamboo fly rod which you really have to be in to fly fishing to even consider using. And I have used it on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River at Rock creek where you ~~shouldnt be considering stuff that small~~. So forth and so and glass good quality glass is fine

Tom Wendelburg [00:33:42] Well, the waters are low gradient, basically worn out. What I'm talking about our Spring Creek waters. There's some pretty fast waters and what in Wisconsin here and there. But if you take a flatlander and introduce him to the Madison. Quake Lake or Rock Creek You know and so on it's going to be a shock. anyway, you consider it to the feet and the wading abilities at the same time even the Beaverhead River which is more like the Wisconsin stream in many parts looks like a Wisconsin stream in many parts has a stronger gradient when you're playing a big fish on light tackle in the Beaverhead oh God, that current is a little stronger then you'd have in the same size Wisconsin stream. so you have a better push of water. out in Montana. You asked me places I would like to Fish.

Jim Thull [00:34:36] I didn't know if there's anything on your list.

Tom Wendelburg [00:34:42] No.

Jim Thull [00:34:42] Like I always wanted to get to Spain or whatever.

Tom Wendelburg [00:34:45] I can tell you one of the best place for Pacific Bonito is off a tricky Dick's house in San Clemente on the Pacific. I got tired of catching Bonito. On the one trip I had up there and that was only because your talking you've got to cover our fly fishing . We ran a karate studio. We were offered to fish for Bonito with flies. Would you like to go? Yeah yeah yeah yeah. So I rigged up two flies and on the first cast I caught a 21 pound Bonito . So, that's as far the longest I been away but everybody I know and their brothers has fished in New Zealand Argentina and Tiera Del Fuego. So yeah I might want to do that. go to Tiera Del Fuego there's a fellow in the room here with me and we have talked about it.

Tom Wendelburg [00:35:38] Aquatic or terrestrial?

Jim Thull [00:35:41] Both.

Tom Wendelburg [00:35:41] Oh, I don't know. Yeah, you're very lucky you do not have Mike Miller sitting here with the Wisconsin DNR remember that name if you want to (unintelligible) I tell you what. So far all the scares and all the threats to everything from the New Zealand Mud Snail to a lot of the ephemeral foliage to me is not created a situation

now you'd have to talk to someone much more versed in this than myself. I know there has been lots of things that have past history recently, for example, the whirling disease scare came out of Montana big time how is that? Has that stabilized? Gone away. so a lot of these things where ever they ever had effect you'd have to talk to someone much more qualified than myself to answer that but I would say it's all been pretty ephemeral. So you got the grass carp and so forth. Asian carp were coming in. We'll see.