

February 15, 1988

Mr. Richard Parks  
Parks' Fly Shop  
Gardiner, MT

Dear Richard,

We've moved to Belgrade, or rather to the banks of Thompson's spring creek. Anna is liking it as much as I do, thank goodness. Nice place to live. (I think I saw it first while fishing the East Gallatin with your father back in the 'sixties.) We'd like to get you out here if you're ever in the neighborhood. And we'll stop by to see you when we get to Gardiner.

Meanwhile, I'm sending you an enclosure on which I'd welcome any comments you might have. I don't know many fly shops that have been in business for thirty years, and I think that's about when I started fishing with Mert.

Did you have a catalog back then? If so, I'd sure like to see a photocopy of the pages showing the flies you were selling.

Tom Pero has asked me to do a story on trends in flies 1959-1989. The idea is to run this in Trout as part of an issue on TU's thirtieth anniversary. The subject sounds like a good one to me: I was tying flies in the 1950's and have seen changes worth noting.

I'll be sending this kind of request to a few others -- very few, because I can't think of many who have been in the business for thirty years.

Thanks.

Yours,

Enclosed: questionnaire



# Park's Fly Shop



GARDINER  
MONTANA  
59030

March 12, 1988

Dear Datus

It was good to hear from you. Let me see if I can answer your questions on the business first:

1.) Total # of flies sold in the US? I don't know enough about the total market to do more than guess as we were always only a small part of it. John Bailey would be in a better position to estimate. My sense is that the total is now on the order of 10 times the 1959 total for numbers and since the average price of flies has at least tripled, the dollar value is up about 30 times. I am not including, then or now, the lowest end junk peddled by K-mart et. al.. 2.) The number of fly fishing specialty shops has at least doubled but I couldn't guess at the base number. The trend is clear though when you think that in West Yellowstone in 1959 there were really 2 fly shops and 2 other stores with a lot of tackle while now there are 6 fly shops. In Livingston there was one fly shop and a sporting goods store; now there are 3 fly shops and 2 sporting goods stores. In Bozeman there was a sporting goods store, no fly shops and there are now 3 fly shops and 2 sporting goods stores. 3.) Origin of flies; In 1959 most flies were produced locally with the exception of Bailey and Orvis. Orvis was contracting production to tyers all over the country. The other major wholesale sources that relied on domestic production like Weber and Hank Roberts were dead or dying. The off-shore production was mostly Taiwan and awful and restricted to the uncaring. Today the local tyer is stronger than ever, the Taiwanese production is still junk; and substantial quality off-shore production has been established in Kenya, Sri Lanka, Colombia and Singapore. While some domestic producers are up in arms about this I think it is mostly a result of market neccessity. The domestic producers do not have the capacity to meet today's demand and have a hard time delivering on time and on pattern. 4.) This is just a guess but I would think that the total number of amateur tiers in 1959 was probably less than 15000, the total number of professional tiers about 1000. Now there are at least 100000 amateur tyers, perhaps double that number. Professional or semi-professional tyers may have increased to 5000.

NORTH ENTRANCE TO YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK



One major indicator is the increase in demand for materials. Take grizzly hackle for instance, if it were not for thousands of amateur tyers, each of whom needed one or two grizzly necks, they wouldn't be nearly so expensive. The amateur needs materials but doesn't use them as efficiently as a production operation so more are just sitting in storage.

Might be  
unavailable.  
No incentive  
to produce.

Under your kinds of flies category: I can say that some people are still buying wet flies, but not as many. My largest selling wet is and has been various Wooly Worms which should properly be considered a nymph. We still do some business with classic wets such as the Royal Coachman, Black Gnat and Cow Dung. How that translates into the wet/dry question is a little harder to guess. I think, especially in the last few years, the trend has been for more people to fish with nymphs, less with streamers, more with dries and a lot less with classic wets. This is obscured by a massive increase in the total number of people fishing with flies and a subtle shift in terminology. The whole outbreak of interest in emergers confuses the issue, are these drys?, nymphs?, an new class? What about "soft-hackle wets", where do they fit? Many shops display all these designs with their nymphs. My own tendency is concern myself less with the dry/wet question and more with the kinds of questions you raised in your book - ie. what does the behavior of the fish tell me about what he wants and how do I use that to abuse his confidence? This bears on the "imitative" flies question as well. I think that the explicitly imitative patterns are a smaller portion of the total, having lost share to "impressionistic" patterns. The same can be said of the blatantly "fancy" patterns but to nowhere near the same degree. That too is subject to interpretation. I am calling the Coachman Trude, the fly I use the most and that we sell the largest number of, a "fancy" pattern, but I think of it as a caddis type and therefore "impressionistic".

fewer exact  
imitations

In terms of alternative designs. Ideas such as the no-hackles have definitely carved out a market niche in answering the special conditions for which they were designed. So have the "trude" type down hairwing dries as in Elk Caddis and the Trude itself. This idea of course was in the public domain but less used in the past than it is today. New streamer styles as in matukas, rabbit strip steamers, and wooly bugger type patterns have virtually wiped out the market for the classic streamer types, with the exception that the Muddler family remains strong. I think the soft-hackle wet flies have been pretty much submerged in the increasing interest in nymphs. How to handle nymphs? - you got me. Part of the problem is the matter of emergers. My sense is that old standbys such as the Hare's Ear and Pheasant Tail remain strong for the simple reason that they work. "Specifically imitative nymphs are less used than impressionistic ones because most of the time they work better." The exception are those times and places where what is happening is so disproportionately specific that an imitative nymph does better.

1)

2)

Streamers

quote



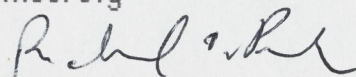
The interest in emergers and caddis have added to the range of nymph patterns more than they have reduced volume in the traditional patterns. The major innovative trend is in the expansion of interest in terrestrials, mostly executed in hair and other non-traditional materials such as pheasant body feathers. One major reason for inventiveness is the bleaching of the world's turkeys.

use dries

I really can't tell you anything about salmon and steelhead flies.

I want to apologize for the delay in responding. I have been up to my eyeballs in trying to keep track of my goof-ball neighbors and their massive building projects on the river bank. The EIS is finally out and it is a disaster. I would very much appreciate a chance to drop in on your creek someday so I will keep your invitation in mind. I couldn't find any copies of our 1959 era catalog but I can tell you that it featured mostly flies as described in Ray Bergman's *Trout* at about 25¢ each plus some shop specialties such as our Salmon Fly pattern and the Trude. As you may know my father got into the business after WW II as a side-line. We sent out our first catalog in 1948 or 49 I think. We moved to Gardiner and went into the shop full-time in 1953.

Sincerely



Richard C. Parks