

Sporting Legends of the Catskills

Saturday, October 14th, 2017, at the Phoenicia Library.

Part 2. History of Rainbow Lodge, Ed and Janette Kahil

Made possible with funds from the Catskill Watershed Corporation, in partnership with New York City DEP.

Beth: Many of you know that Doris Bartlett and I founded the collection in memory of her husband, Jerry. Jerry and Doris first came up to this part of the country, to the Catskills, from the city, in the early '70s. They came on a motorcycle. The motorcycle broke down outside Rainbow Lodge! Dick Kahil took them in, and they came back and stayed there numerous times, and in 1975, Dick Kahil sold them their house, where Jerry set up his fly fishing school and bed and breakfast. So there's a strong connection here to the Kahil family, as the Decker family, and so I'm very happy to have Janette and Ed come to tell us about the history of Rainbow Lodge, which is still located in Mt. Tremper, for those of you who don't know. It's no longer a public establishment, but it exists.

Ed has a scrapbook that his family has kept, and to make it possible for all of us to look at it, he scanned the images in so we can project them.

Ed: Thanks for having me. This is not what I do for a living, so bear with me.

But a little bit of background. My dad was an avid fisherman. Fished the Beaverkill and the Esopus, and after the war was over and my mom and dad were married, he said wouldn't it be nice if we could make a living around trout fishing. So he set his mind to do that, and he did it somewhat successfully, even though there were some lean winters. But it was a little bit of a struggle in the beginning, but I think it all paid off, and he'd be very happy, and my mom would too, to know that we're still talking about their lives, and, so I'm probably going to talk about my parents more than the lodge, because they were intertwined for 35 years.

This placemat that you see here was our placemat at the Rainbow Lodge, and I made about 20-some-odd copies yesterday. And you're all welcome to take one and copy it or whatever you want to do with it. But this was, when you sat and ate a meal, and we served three meals at the lodge every day, breakfast, lunch and dinner, this is what you ate on. And then that became scrap paper, and it was always folded over next to the telephone. Hopefully the phone would ring and someone would make a reservation to come and stay. So there were no computers, there's no internet, there's no email. So the phone rang, people made a reservation, it always went on the back. All the used placemats got used; nothing went in the garbage... you're welcome to come get them before you leave.

So anyway, somewhere along the line, this is how and where they got started. There was an old boarding house, hunting camp or fishing camp that was up for lease, so dad had been fishing over there on the Beaverkill or Willowemoc, and he got wind of this place; he says, let's do it. So in 1949, I guess there's the date right there, they opened up. The interesting thing was the American plan, if nobody knows what that is anymore, that's three meals a day, \$7.50; that includes a boat. There was a whole fleet of rowboats there, and guys would come, and they'd fish, and they'd take the rowboats out, and then when winter would hit, it was on the Swinging Bridge Reservoir [Town of Thompson, Sullivan County], and when winter would hit, they would go ice fishing. My dad, who was pretty athletic back in the day, would ice skate out on the lake, pulling a sleigh with bait, coffee, sandwiches, cigarettes--whatever you could sell-- whiskey, whatever it would take, he would pedal around there and hook up with some of the ice fishermen. But that place turned out to be, my mom said, the coldest place you could ever live. It was a drafty old farmhouse, so you couldn't keep it hot. And she wanted out of there. She was an English teacher by trade, and she says, stand by your man, that's as far as it goes. But he said, well, let's try, let's go to my beloved Esopus. So in 1951, he bought, or they bought together the boarding house which became the Rainbow Lodge, on Route 212. And they opened there on April 1st, in 1951.

Ed: This is my oldest brother, Rick. Dad and Mom. Our little puppy here whose name was Tippy. And so somewhere, I think, in 1950, right after this, my next brother was born, and I was the first one born here in Mt. Tremper.

So they came to Mt. Tremper, and they called the place...

This was the name of the place, that didn't last very long, and then it became the Rainbow Lodge. The interesting thing about this, this is a business card, you know, it has the phone number, Phoenicia, that's all you needed. You call the operator...

So shortly after that, it became, they renamed it the Rainbow Lodge...

This is the front of the lodge. This is the original sign that was built by John Pike from Woodstock. I have that at home on my front porch. Later on that was replaced, and that one disappeared, and that's another long story how I retrieved that, but anyway, tulips in the front, maple trees in the front, and this is what you saw when you drove in. And Tippy the dog would come greet you as you arrived... a little cottage over here we had that we rented out. Janette and I stayed there when we were first married, and this is the little workshop in the back. The guest houses were on the other side of it, to the left...

That's one of the guest houses. We had two. One was like an old converted barn, which had been off to the right, there. This had six rooms in it, and a

lounge with a fireplace. And later on, in the '60s, there was a swimming pool put in the back, as the lodge became a little bit more family oriented, and it just wasn't the lodge, so to speak...

That's a winter scene. Smoke coming out of the chimney.

Janette: This was after the fire. The front section had burned.

Ed: Yeah, this is the lean months. The season was from April 1st, but in reality, fly fishermen don't arrive until Memorial Day, and by Labor Day, that's about it, and the season went until September 30th, not like it does now. Okay, the redesign of the lodge, this is my dad, this is the artist John Pike from Woodstock that did a lot of work there. The copper fish on it was freshly done. He pounded that out of a piece of copper. We still have it at home. This is one of my heirlooms. And that was probably the first drink with that on the wall, so...

That's the bar. Piece of driftwood from the reservoir. A lot of lures and stuff hanging from it. And that was a cozy little scene. And it had a cigarette machine in there. It had a mens' and a ladies' room, and it probably had about 6 or 8 stools there. Remember that one, Bob?

Bob: Yes, sir... best Shirley Temples in town.

Ed: This is the kitchen. This is dad with the chef's hat on, preparing dinner. Dinner was not a menu, a selection, it was just one choice. And if you didn't like meat, you ate potatoes. You didn't like potatoes, you ate peas. If not, you went hungry. So it was breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Three meals a day. And weekends were probably the busiest. Sometimes guys would stay for a week or two at a time, but it was mostly a weekend business. We have an inside picture of the lounge, right? ... No? ... Anyway, we had another interior shot of the finished thing, with the bear rug and all that stuff...

Okay, so now, when I was a kid, a typical season, like I say, started April 1st, and my dad would get a suitcase, and he would go up on 212 and catch the bus to New York City, and go to the sportsmen's shows. And there he would pass out business cards and brochures to try to get fishermen to come.

This is one of the sportsmen's shows; this lady is Elizabeth Gregg, fly tyer. Roger knows her... she was there as a featured guest. There were a lot of stories about her, but I can remember the guy saying that she could tie a 14 in her hand, she didn't even need a vice. That's how good she was. The gentleman, this is obviously my dad, and I can tell by the look on his face he's a little bit nervous. The gentleman in the middle, and family is excluded, does anybody, can anybody identify that gentleman in the middle? Who is it?

Audience: Mickey Mantle.

Ed: That's Mickey Mantle. So that's why he was so nervous. And he was the young center fielder for the New York Yankees, and we were big Yankee fans, and so this is, this is one of our favorite shots in the family. So... the interesting thing is that my dad, his military records say he was 6 foot tall. And he's taller than Mickey Mantle in that picture. And that's, you know, these sluggers today are 6' 8" right? These guys, they never lifted weights, and they hit home runs. I don't know what that's all about, but anyway, so he would go; try to drum up business, so that come April 1st, we had guests...

This is a picture of opening day at the Coldbrook bridge. It was shoulder to shoulder back in those days. A lot of guys went home with empty creels, but they had to get out there in the cold. You can see it was chilly that morning...

After the fishing season was off, hunting season would start. This is a picture of a couple successful hunters. And we had the same guys come back year after year. I could name all of them. And you know, most of the guests that we had were repeat, and we kind of became a big extended family...

Hunting season would usually end around Thanksgiving, our Thanksgiving meals was always with hunters. We had a big table, and ... we always had deer hunters for Thanksgiving. And then they, my mom and dad said, well, what are we going to do about winter money? By now there's at least 3 or 4 of us, and another one on the way, so my grandmother had a pretty good fruitcake recipe. So they said, why don't we start making fruitcakes, and selling them? So that's what they did. And some people like fruitcake, and some people don't. You're either pregnant or you're not. So they started mass-producing... not mass-producing them, but cooking; you can see the cooling racks in the background, the big commercial oven, and they got up to a point where they were making about a thousand a year, and shipping them. We had UPS trucks and companies would buy them and give them away for Christmas with a bottle of booze or whatever. And it was pretty successful. This is what... this is what the tins look like. So this was basically from Thanksgiving to Christmas. Everything was fruitcakes in my house. And when we were little kids, this big, they'd be cooling overnight on these big tables, and we would sneak up there, and we'd take a nut or a cherry off the top. Boy, I'll bet that didn't help the presentation any. But they were all wrapped, nicely boxed up, shipped everywhere. And now my oldest brother, Rick, who you saw in the first picture, has started, now that he's retired and has a little time on his hands, he started recreating them and giving them away to family and friends, and I think he made about 100 last year in his home kitchen... that's part of the tradition.

Audience: Same tins?

Ed: No. These, you have to buy, like, thousands at a time to have them printed. So he just buys generic tins at Wal-Mart or something. Yeah. But every once in a while, someone will come through with one of these... they found them in their garage with nuts and bolts in it. They're around. Or buttons, yeah. That's a 3-pound one, and there was also a smaller one, 2-pounder...

So, alright, well, I guess that's what it would like from beginning to end. So once the fruitcakes were done, he'd button it up for the winter, and he waited for April 1st for more people to come, hopefully.

Okay, and now I have a bunch of photos of some of the people that used to frequent the lodge. These two gentlemen, I don't know their names. If anyone recognizes that face, there. Do you know?

Audience: Preston Jennings.

Ed: Is that? That's what my brother says, and I didn't think... the one on the left with the glasses, right? So that's ... I didn't want to say, because I wasn't for sure, but thank you for clarifying that. Rick will be glad to know that he was right on that one.

Beth: This is a picture of Preston Jennings, just in case you get in an argument with your brother. I think your brother's right.

Ed: Okay, I believe you. Thank you...

This fellow here was at the lodge a lot, but as I say, I was little, so I don't remember, but I think I have a picture of him later with a nice brown trout...

Beth: They look pretty serious.

Ed: Yeah!

Okay, so that gentleman tying a fly, is that Preston Jennings? This looks like a fly tying lesson to me. This is my dad, me, and this is a guest by the name of Alan Duretsky, that was there a lot. He was a good fisherman. But there's some kind of a lesson being made here. So I don't know if that's Preston Jennings or not. Can you tell?

Audience: Roy Steenrod, if he was still alive?

Ed: Who's that?

Audience: Roy Steenrod...

Ed: Anyway, as long as we're on Preston Jennings, I do have one of these nymphs that he tied, that they used to call, some of them used to call the Esopus nymph. I'll pass that around, so that's one of the originals that I found in my father's stuff...

This guy was there a lot, and his name was Laughton Carver. We called him Pappy. He would come for a week or two at a time, and he would never shave while he was there. And someone somewhere along the line thought that he looked like a character, so they shot that picture. One of the pools here is called Pappy's Pool. On the placemat. But next shot...

Someone put that on the cover of Field and Stream, that picture, and I'm not sure of the date, because the date is cut off.

Some of you guys might recognize this guy. This guy is Floyd Smith. This is Ray's brother. This is from an article in one of the papers. It's cut off down here, but it says Floyd Smith of Phoenicia. He was a character, and he used to hang out at the lodge quite a bit. I kind of thought he was pretty cool when I was a little kid. He was always smoking and drinking beer, and he had about three teeth. And he would cuss! My mom would say, don't you go near him. Sons of bitches, they ain't bitin'! That's the way he would talk, you know. So that was Ray's brother. And he'd fish all summer long. Yup...

So we had many others that stayed at the lodge that I don't have pictures of. But ... back it up ... I just want to take a couple minutes to talk about some of the others. There was a guy that coached third base for the New York Yankees by the name of Frank Rossetti. He would come up, usually on a Sunday evening if they had a Monday off; fish; maybe a Thursday, if he had a Thursday off. He was a frequent fisherman...

We also had Arnold Gingrich, who was the publisher of Esquire magazine. He would come, and he was there a lot. Like I say, I was pretty little. And he would bring his friends. The one friend that he brought a lot was the illustrator, John Growth. He did all the illustrations for the placemat. It's little cartoons around the ... and he did that, just, my dad said, you know, having coffee, just scribble out another cartoon; before you know it, they came up with this placemat. He also did this sketch, which is an original that I have in my home. And there's a fly fisherman with a cigarette. And anyway, on the back of that picture, there was talk about Esquire magazine and a certain article, so, a few months back, we decided we were going to see if we could get a copy of that magazine. So sure enough, on eBay, we found one. And I can pass this around. But a copy ... that's a different one. We have several of these [vignette illustrations] that were in here. But most of the illustrations in here are from John Groth. I think he was an employee [of Esquire magazine] and also a good fishing buddy with Arnold Gingrich. And anyway, this is the same, this lower left-hand corner is the same

one. And that's the original one. I just thought I'd bring that and show; you can pass that around.

We also had Jonathan Winters stay at the lodge. I would say that had to be '66, '67, '68. We didn't have television. He came with some other guys, one of the guys introduced him to dad. This is Jonathan Winters, and we didn't have TV, we didn't know Jonathan Winters from the man in the moon, right? So dad always had a little tradition at the end of dinner, that he would come out of the kitchen with a coffee pot, to refill, and he'd feel obligated to tell some kind of story, or some kind of joke. And sometimes they went on a long time, and sometimes they didn't. But my mom got tired of hearing the same jokes over and over. But, I've got one that I can tell you, that I have to sit down to do...

There's three men on a park bench. One on the one end is doing this [pantomimes spin fishing]. The one in the middle is doing this [pantomimes reading a newspaper]. And the one on the other end is doing this [pantomimes fly fishing]. Well, this went on for quite a while, until lunch hour, and people are walking by, and it created a little bit of attention. Look at that guy on the end, fly fishing, the one on the other end, spin fishing. The one in the middle, reading the paper. Well, a crowd gathered, people were all backed up on the sidewalk. Someone hailed a cop, and the cop goes over there, and he looks at this, what's going on, and he taps the guy on the shoulder, the guy reading the newspaper, he taps him on the shoulder. He says, you think you can get your buddies outta here? Oh, okay officer! [Pantomimes putting the paper down, and paddling away].

So anyway, dad told that joke many times. About two or three weeks later, some of the guests come to the lodge. Hey Dick! Jonathan Winters told your joke the other night on his standup show or something. So Jonathan Winters stole the joke... so talk about royalties, right?

Benny Goodman stayed there. I don't have pictures or memories of him. But that's ... we have a guest register that one of my brothers has, that probably would shed a little more light on some of the famous people. And we had Jerry Bartlett! Jerry Bartlett came in the early '70s. I wasn't around much when he was there, because I was off in college. And we even let Doris sleep there a couple of nights. Like I told Beth, when you're around Doris, you always take on her sense of humor... turned out to be a dear friend. She called, apologized [for not being here today], my 80th birthday, my nephews are having me down on the beach, and I'll see you when I get back.

Okay, so the next segment is about the rock star. Your dad, Larry Decker. I loved when Larry Decker came around, because as soon as he saw me, he would say "hooptagotchie!" And for the life of me, and I hadn't hear that until 19 years ago, when Bob saw me, he says, hooptagotchie! For the life of me, I don't

know what that means, but that's what he nicknamed me. And I couldn't wait for him to get there, because he was just a wonderful [guy], just great. And like I say, I was little, and so I googled that name, and I don't have any idea. Does anybody know what hooptagotchie was, please tell me, it'll make my day.

Anyway, this is a picture of Larry at the lodge, with some nice looking brown trout. And a fishing buddy. Does anybody know who that would be? Is that the creel you were talking about? You still have that big one?

Joy: Oh, yeah, we have the rod, the creel...

Ed: Did you notice they took down Hoffman Diner, did you come that way? About a month ago... That's Larry with that wrinkly old brown trout. That probably had the handcuff on that one. That's the first I heard of the handcuff story. That's a good one.

Joy: We have the vest, but we don't have the hat. We don't have his hat...

Bob: He and Uncle Warren and Uncle Ted, when they all got together in the winter, they would make their equipment, so they made their own creels. That net is handmade. Right? And the handle has fly line wrapped around it, and then varnished, with a little hook on the end.

Ed: That's a big net right there. Not too many guys fish the stream with a net that size...

This is Jimmy Deren; he wrote an article for one of the New York Papers... that's Jimmy Deren, Larry Decker. And there's that trout...

[audience conversation]

This is an article about the trout in one of the papers. This is written by Jimmy Deren. We can read that. I mean, it pretty much echoes the way you told the story, Bob. And ...

"He creeled a 20-inch brown and lost a huge rainbow when the hook pulled out..." Can you read from back there? ...

[conversation about the article]

This story that Bob told was pretty much everything that I heard, so I don't think this has been exaggerated much, this story...

This is Outdoor Life, they're still talking about that trout in April, 1969. So that was 14 years after it was caught, and they were still writing articles about it. And

as far as I know there hasn't been one in the stream, anything like that since, right, Roger...

Joy: And we contacted Albany, and the DEC records. It looks like Larry's trout is still...

Ed: Well, there was a big one down at the chimney hole, but that doesn't count...

Joy: So pop still holds the record.

Bob: Born and bred in the stream.

Ed: Yeah, you can tell by the color, that was a reservoir fish...

That's Larry. That's Larry's hat...

I remember we had that trout mounted on the wall for a while. Alright, so we all had to get in on the act [laughter] ... so if you notice that sign, it used to be out by Route 212, was in the back there, that was advertising. So this is my brother, Artie. He was born in 1950, and I was born in 1952. So I was not quite 3 years old. And that got me hooked on big trout. All the attention...

[conversation on the 'old days' without TV]

I have some more trout shots or whatever to show you, and then I think we can probably wrap it up. This is my dad on his beloved Esopus...

Bob: Mr. Kahil loved to fish.

Ed: This is just a limit of 10 brown trout someone caught. Makes a nice still life, as they say.

Beth: Can you just say about the origin of the Catskill Mountain chapter of Trout Unlimited?

Ed: Yes. I remember sometime in the '60s, probably, I'm going to say '67 to '68, somewhere around there, there were no Trout Unlimited chapters in New York state yet. So the original one was the Catskill Mountain chapter, the way I remember it. And they met at the Rainbow Lodge. And that went on. Their first meeting was at the Rainbow Lodge. And I was, by then I was interested in fishing, and the daily creel limit was 10. So I thought that meant, now we can catch all the trout we want. Unlimited. Right? But anyway, they met there for probably a year or two, and then they moved on to Kingston or wherever they ended up going. But that's where it started. It started at the lodge.

Joy: You don't catch ten in a day now?

Ed: If I can! ...

Alright, this is Larry Decker's rig. This is not Old Bess. It's another trout. Because he caught trout. It wasn't an accident that he caught that big one. This is a picture of that rig. If you see that split shot, there were two minnows on there. Remember it that way, Bob?

Bob: Two separate leaders...

Ed: Yup. And there's that reel. So this was significant enough for someone to want to take a picture of it. I found that in a scrapbook... and that [corroborates] everything that you said...

[conversation about the picture]

Okay, this is one of the gentlemen from a prior photo that I don't know the name. But that's a nice brown trout there. And it's, this is Arnold Gingrich's Jaguar in the background. My brother pointed that out. And this convertible I think belonged to this gentleman. But like I say, that's ... late '50s, those cars.

We've got a few more here...

Joy: Did your mom fish?

Ed: No. She didn't fish...

Joy: It was like a male-dominated thing up here.

Beth: His mother had too much to do.

Janette: Three meals a day, sheets, towels, they only had a couple other ladies in from the area working at the lodge. But it was a lot of work and raising 4 sons.

Ed: We had one lady that would come at noon and work until 5:00. Five days a week. She was off on Wednesdays. Her name was Kathleen Riseley, Jody Hoyt's great-aunt, if anybody's keeping track. Just a wonderful woman. They moved her house to where the Emerson is. She worked there every day. When dad arrived, in Mt. Tremper, he went to the post office to open up a mailbox, asked the postmaster, do you know any people looking for part-time work? And she showed up and never left. And the day that mom and dad sold the lodge, in 1986, they were driving to the retirement home in Virginia, and she died, while they were driving south. She was there every day. She was like a grandmother

to us. And then we always had one high school girl who would wait tables in the summer. Jan Hoyt was one of them. We had Christine McCarthy. It was always a local girl from our generation. But that was it. Otherwise, it was us. And mom and dad. And we learned how to wash dishes at a young age. Anyway, this is what he liked to do, and always wanted to get a picture... the pictures always, he wanted to get them in front of the sign. There was always a little pattern here.

That's the still life, which is, it's a medalist reel. You guys probably all have them. And I don't know who caught that, but someone thought it was worthy of that photo, so I figured...

Janette: Didn't Joe Munster take this picture?

Ed: Possibly. Joe Munster started out as a guest, as did Doris Bartlett. Joe was, he would bring his sports car club. He had a little Triumph sports car, and his Bay Ridge sports car club, and they would come, and they would occupy the lodge for a weekend at a time, once or twice a year. And then later on, when dad got a real estate license, he sold Joe his house up on the Esopus.

Okay, that's yours truly, I had to throw that in there! Those are a couple of spawning rainbows, and that's in the Little Beaverkill creek right out in front of the lodge. And I got hooked on trout because of Larry Decker [laughter]...

I still have the same rod and reel. I use it. Same net. Ray Smith built that net. That's the handmade one with the windings with the used fly line, yup, yup. I think I've got one more here... two more.

That's probably teenage years. The sign has changed. This is a new sign that replaced the other one that I have at home now. That car is a 1963 or 4, so that's got to be right about there, so I was probably 15 or 16 in that picture. With a lot of hair.

Joy: Did anybody ever steal the Rainbow Lodge sign?

Ed: No.

Okay, this is my childhood friend, Jake Baumann, who still lives here in Phoenicia, and he was probably, I think he was driving at the time, so he was 16 or 17 years old, and this was the first big trout that I remember out of the Ashokan reservoir. We used to go down to the reservoir, we used to catch bass all the time, occasionally a trout, but this is a 10-pounder. And this was on the wall at the Sportsman's for years. This was mounted. So he stopped by to show us this trout. And he was a heck of a fisherman. There's a lot of local guys in my generation that caught rainbows like the ones in the picture. I wasn't the only one. Joey Bush. There's guys around here that are really good. And Harvey

German, who's deceased, he used to get them. Lionel Herron. All the feeder streams these rainbows, and that's kind of one of the things that I always talk to Ed Ostapchuk about is what happened to the rainbows. So about two Aprils ago, I went up in my old haunts up past the lodge, and I was able to catch two pretty nice ones. And I shared a photo with Ed. But we don't have the rainbow run like we used to. And I don't really know why. But it's pretty much a brown trout fishery at this point.

Joy: He got fish on his shirt?

Ed: No, I think that's kind of a paisley thing, because we're all rock stars in the '60s, you know? But, yeah, that's Jake. He could catch trout. But he caught that trolling with a flat fish, in his rowboat on the reservoir. And now it's fairly common. Not every day you're going to catch one, but there's big brown trout down there, and I've got 4 boats down there...

I have a watercolor there that John Pike did that I brought. That's part of the show-and-tell. We have the other things. I encourage you to take one of these, and if there's not enough, make copies at Staples, they're like, a buck, or whatever, so it's easy. And I just wanted to thank you for letting me do this. And I know how proud my mom and dad would be to know that we're still talking about it, and their life's work. [applause].

Audience: [Cliff Schwark] from Poughkeepsie, one of the original founders of the Catskill Mountain chapter, talks about fishing in Woodland Valley and Silver Hollow; guiding with Hank Rope. Some of the first TU meetings were held at Rainbow Lodge. Mentions some of the founding members, incl. Art Flick, etc.

Audience conversation – Ed's dad is in Hudler cemetery [Mt. Tremper]

Thank you for having me. Mom and dad thank you too!

[End]