

Catskills Fishing Fever Forums: Art Flick

With Judd Weisberg, Wendy Neefus, John Hoeko, Bert Darrow, Dave Brandt and Tony Bonavist

Moderator: Bill Birns

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The Jerry Bartlett Angling Collection presents Catskills Fishing Fever Forums. Recorded live at the Phoenicia Library, Phoenicia, NY. April 16, 2016. Art Flick: Author, Fly Tyer & Conservationist. Made possible with funds from the Catskill Watershed Corporation in partnership with the New York City DEP. Recorded By Silver Hollow Audio.

[applause]

Beth Waterman: Thank you, thank you; welcome to the second of our four panel discussions, in celebration of our 20th anniversary of the Jerry Bartlett Memorial Angling Collection down the hall. We opened it on April 1, 1996. This is a real memorial to Jerry and fishing in the Catskills. And I want to introduce, before we go any further, Doris Bartlett. Doris and I were the movers behind the library collection. Today's format is basically going to be a conversation with our panelists and the audience. They will tell a little bit about their memories of Art Flick and their associations with Art Flick. And then the people in the audience are encouraged to pitch in, also. The format for today is, we have an "Art flick." That's actually a joke. We have a slide show that's taken by Wendy Neefus in 1974, of Art Flick fishing on the Schoharie. This is an opportunity for all of us to spend a little time on the creek with Art Flick, and I think it's a wonderful way to open our discussion today. We're going to show this film; it's short. And then the panel will take their places up at the head. And we'll begin the conversation. And then when the conversation is quiet, we will go down the hall for show-and-tell, because some people have brought rods and other displays that bear examination. I'm sure you'll be interested. Before I begin the slide show, I would just like to say that this event is made possible with funds from the Catskill Watershed Corporation in partnership with the New York City DEP. And we're very grateful to them for their support. This slide show, by the way, was donated by Wendy and will be available to check out of the library as soon as we get the linking information for it. So, keeping my fingers crossed, here we go!

03:10

Wendy Neefus film, "A Day of Fishing with Art Flick"

12:20

Bill Birns: Big round of applause for Wendy, please. **Wendy Neefus** was a friend of Art Flick, an active member of Trout Unlimited, a third generation professional

photographer in Hudson, NY. We here at the Jerry Bartlett have a couple of photos that Wendy took of Art in the angling parlor. You'll have to take a look at those when we finish. And one of those photos is on the brand new, somebody hold that up if you will, Dave, thank you, the brand new Roger, I'm going to mispronounce his name, Keckeissen, his new book on Art Flick, and that photo was taken by Wendy. Immediately to Wendy's left is **Judd Weisberg**, let's have a round of applause for Judd... Judd is a New York state licensed fly fishing guide and instructor. He shares his lifelong passion for fly fishing with those he comes in contact with. He instructs both streamside and from boats on the waters of the Catskills, bringing people closer to, and I love this phrase, the exquisite secret world of the wild trout. Judd creates flies and rods and nets for each situation where he fishes, whether locally or worldwide. He's a member of the International Game Fish Association, the American Museum of Fly Fishing, the Catskill Fly Fishing museum, the Delaware River Foundation, Trout Unlimited, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. And Judd joins forces with all those who believe in protecting and enhancing the habitat for wild creatures. Immediately to Judd's left is **Bert Darrow**. Bert is a nationally known fly fishing instructor and has been since 1979, teaching hundreds of students how to cast. I was one of those, taking a class down at SUNY Ulster a number of years ago. He's the author of Practical Fly Fishing, How to Cast and Fish Naturally. Bert currently serves as the president of Theodore Gordon Fly Fishers, the oldest fly fishing conservation organization in the state of New York. He's past president of the Catskill mountain chapter of Trout Unlimited. And he's on the board of the Catskill Fly Fishing museum and center down in Livingston Manor. If you haven't been down there, make sure you go. Bert has appeared in a number of television programs, including Citgo's In Search of Fly Water, on ESPN 2. He's been on Red Hawk Outdoors, on the Outdoor Network. ABC's Good Morning America; as well as spots on Fox News and PBS. If you turn on your TV you might just see Bert. Right next to Bert is **Dave Brandt**. Dave comes down to us from Oneonta. Let's have a round of applause for Dave, please. Dave's a licensed guide. He's taught at the Wulff School, owns two Dickerson rods that belonged to Art, which he's brought along; it will be part of our show-and-tell in the other room a little later. And Dave's bio is pretty impressive in terms of the people that he's fished with, and the people that he's studied with. Being close to the Catskills he was able to learn first-hand from fly tyers and fishers like Art Flick, like Harry and Elsie Darby, the Dettes, and Lee and Joan Wulff. So Dave's been around. To Dave's left is Fleischmanns' own **John Hoeko**. Let's have a round of applause for John. John was instrumental in the bringing about the, along with others, but John was right at the center in bringing about the 1976 legislation that regulated water release out of the Catskill rivers from New York City. He owns his own shop up in Fleischmanns. It's open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ... it's open Saturday and Sunday. It's called Fur, Feathers and Steel. And a great shop to visit right up the road, about 10 miles in Fleischmanns. And next to John is **Tony Bonavist**. Let's have a round of applause for Tony. With a bachelor's degree in aquatic biology from the University of Montana in 1965,

Tony went to work as a fisheries biologist for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and did that work for 26 years. He's taught at the Wulff School of Fly Fishing, he's taught at the Frost Valley YMCA. His work has appeared in Trout Magazine, in Fly Fisherman, in Gray's Sporting Journal, and along with Gayle he resides in West Hurley, and they share a boxer named Molly. So let's have a round of applause for our entire panel. And it makes sense for us to start today with Wendy, because we just watched Wendy's film. Wendy, what was your, as you think back on it now, over how many years, 40 years, right? What was your major impression, the major thing you gained, do you think, from spending that day with Art and knowing Art the way you did?

17:30

Wendy: Oh, boy. Like I said in the DVD, I was just a student at that point in time. I was 27 years old, just read his book, tying flies, and he just gave me a whole perspective of what the sport was all about. It kind of came to be, I was a newly elected director on the Catskill Mountain chapter. And Ed Ostapczuk was the president at that time. And knowing that I was a photographer, he asked me if I would be willing to photograph Art Flick. Now, I don't know if you knew Art Flick, but he's kind of a shy guy, humble. And I wasn't sure I wanted to approach him. So I said, Ed, if you approach Art, you know, I'd be honored to photograph him. So he said, I'll try to open the door for you, and we'll see what we can come up with. So Ed Ostapczuk talked to Art, and I figured, I'll probably get one shot at this deal. I probably won't get another visit. So that's why I got my brother and my father to go with me, and we shot a lot of kodachrome that day. And it was pretty cool to not just realize that he was a fisherman, but a real conservationist.

Bill: I see Dave nodding your head over there on the conservationist angle. Dave, could you follow; let's follow that up about Art as a guy. How many people knew Art here in the room? So let's start with that. Art as a guy. Art as a person. Art as the conservationist and fisherman.

18:55

Dave: I think I was impressed a lot with the conservation aspect. And the neat thing about Art, he wasn't shy about whatever it is he was a proponent of, or about to propose, he was pretty adamant. And he usually had all of his homework done, and he was well on top of whatever it was, and it was, it was kind of neat. He was one of the early guys that I had met that you could figure for coming up with something that ought to be done, and then making sure it is done. And he was very much that way. And when I first went to see him, it was really about fly tying. And I was a little younger, Wendy, than you were when you first met him. And, but we were fly tyers. And one of my main regrets was, later we'll have a few little stories, but, and it's true of the early meetings with Harry

and all the fly tyers, we went there to learn about tying, to share stories, sometimes to eat and/or drink. But we didn't need his flies. We were fly tyers. What did we need them for? And I keep kicking myself today for not having enough of them. But he was just a wonderful guy; Lita was the same way. I kept up a Christmas card swap with Lita, until the last one I got back from Bill. And she was 99 years old at that point. And if she'd have lived a few more weeks, she'd have made 100. Just a wonderful gal. They came up to Oneonta to have dinner when my kids were shorter than this table. And Lita always had cookies, if they were with me, down at the house. He was just a great guy. But conservation was first.

Bill: How about that idea that, when Art got an idea in his head, he went forward with it; he was... does someone want to address that? I saw you nodding when that came up, Johnny.

21:00

John: Well, he certainly did. We used to, he used to write me when he wintered at Denson Beach in Florida. And one time he wasn't so sure, before Catskill Waters, the problems we were having, New York State council of TU, I don't know who was the head of it at the time, but I was trying to be more aggressive with the city of New York. And apparently the council chairman wanted to do a little more negotiations. So Art told me, kind of, well, maybe we ought to wait up a little bit, and that's the only time I saw Art. ever experience him not really be more forthcoming in anything. But later on, he became a director of Catskill Waters, and certainly a real positive force, you know, in our efforts.

Bill: You know, here's a guy who died 30-something years ago, Art, and yet, here we are gathered, so many, to remember him and to talk about him. That memory is still alive up on Route 23, is it, Bert? Can you talk about the recent efforts to kind of keep Art's name alive?

22:15

Bert: Well, one of the things our TU chapter did was we want to have Art remembered. Lita did, Bill did, Junie [Art, Junior] did. And so anyway, our chapter came up with an idea of placing a boulder on Route 23. And on the boulder put a plaque, and tell, you know, what Art had done. When I talked to Art and Bill, Art was, you know, he would never say much about hunting around fishing folks. It was always about fishing. I understand that. But I understand from his son Bill, he was really a better bird hunter than fisherman. And, which was, which I didn't know, but anyway, he was. And Art thought that he would always be remembered as a great fisherman, author, whatever. And fly tyer. But he really wanted to be remembered as a conservationist, because that was where his heart was. So anyway, back in 1986, we got together, figured out

what we were going to do, and when we leave here we'll walk down the hall; we wanted to do a few things in Art's memory; one was to place a boulder with a plaque on it up on Route 23, which we did do. We also wanted to have a scholarship at Ulster County Community College. And we needed to raise a lot of money to do it. So we had this idea to create a shadowbox, which you'll all get to see. And the shadowbox, along with a few other things, made it possible to have a raffle. And I think this raffle, in not too many months, raised somewhere around 21- or \$22,000, which was tremendous, back, you know, 30 years ago, right? But we had people from all over the country, even outside the country that knew of Art and knew, you know, what he had done. And so, what we did was we got this money in, we had a plaque made up, and it was placed up there, we had an event up there, a dedication ceremony for it, and it was very, it went very well. In this book; does anybody here have this book at all? ... This is, it's an excellent book [Art Flick, by Roger Keckeissen], it really is; I found out some things about Art that I didn't know before I read it. And it reminds me of many things that I did know; both about Art and his wife Lita. Okay? But it's very good. In the back of the book, there's a picture... of Lita; you can see this boulder's still there. You can see this, on this along Schoharie Creek. Wendy, what's the name of the pool up there... Mosquito Point pool. And just so you know, here's what the plaque says: Dedicated conservationist and sportsman. Art loved the Schoharie. Here he helped establish the first "fish-for-fun" area in New York State and secured many miles of public fishing rights. Here he conducted the research for his Streamside Guide to Naturals and their Imitations, which introduced generations of fly fisherman to the joys of imitating trout-stream insects. Here we honor a great but humble man who was a source of good will and inspiration to us all." And it was placed there in 1966 by Catskill Mountain chapter Trout Unlimited and Friends. And it's still there today. You can see it. It's a great spot to fish on the river. Is that where you did the slide show? ... just below that, right? ...

Bill: So Art really wanted to be remembered as a conservationist. Let's remember him a bit as a conservationist. Tony, what were some of his contributions?

26:15

Tony: Let me give you a little tiny bit of history here... I met Art informally ... first of all, some Flick flies, you may just want to pass them around and look at them. I met Art informally in 1961 when I was just getting out of high school. And I bought his little book. And throughout my life as a fisherman, as an instructor and as a biologist, I've used this and I've recommended it to everybody, because you could do a lot worse than learning what's in this. There's a lot more technologically written books today about mayflies and all of that business, but that's a whole other story. If you know what's in here, and you're fishing in the Catskills, you've got everything that you really need. Anyway, I formally met Art I

don't know when. Frank Mele and I went up to visit him one time for dinner, because he wanted me to do a slide series. He was going to Michigan to do something for TU out there. And he was going to meet Robert Traver and fish with him. So it might have been then. It might have been also when we got involved with the Prattsville pump storage project, which I got involved in when I found out that the power authority was proposing to build this project up on the Schoharie reservoir. And then I went out and did a series and met Art, I think, at the TU meeting in Kingston, probably. So either I met him up in West Kill, or I met him at TU, and he was really involved in that whole procedure; and so was TU and TGF (Theodore Gordon Flyfishers) and a whole bunch of other things. Unlike the water releases, which some of you people heard me talk about a few weeks ago, this thing went on for 10 years. It started in, the application was in '77. It finally died in 1987 when FERC [Federal Regulatory Energy Commission] denied the license, because the DEC wouldn't issue a water quality ... okay, so that's what I knew about Art. I didn't fish with Art, I didn't know him as a fisherman, I knew him as a person; I knew him as a conservationist; and I knew him as a pretty tough guy sometimes. I also knew his wife a lot better than him, afterwards, because some of you don't know that Art had a stroke, and I don't exactly know when that was, but it was sometime in the 80s, maybe '82 or '81, or 80-something. And they had moved from West Kill down to Kingston, I guess because of the maintenance of the property and the size of it all. Lita asked me to take her to visit Art up at Sunnyside in Schenectady, where he was in rehab for his stroke treatment. So I drove her every day to the DEC headquarters in Albany, where I worked, and some other person met her there, and she did that religiously until he came home. Subsequently, in '85 he passed away. In between all of that, or just slightly after that—I'm giving you a family thing here, more than anything else, because it might be of interest to some people—he had a son that was a regional forester in, where the hell was it, Avon, one of the regional offices; he died; he had a stroke also. And he committed suicide. So here's Lita now with no one around here except some grandchildren and stuff, so... she had another son, Bill Flick, who worked for Cornell, did brook trout research up there. He moved to Paradise Valley in Livingston, Montana. Lita ultimately went out to live with him; not with him, but near him, because she was so independent that she wouldn't live with him. Paradise Valley is a ways from Livingston; I don't know exactly how far. And she had an apartment there. Bert and I went out. In 2001 we got delightedly involved with 9/11 and ended up in Michigan for a couple of days. But ultimately made it to West Yellowstone; and our way back we stopped to visit Lita. And she had ordered all this food from a deli for us and did all of that. And we went back in 2002 and saw her again. That's the year I think she passed away at 99. I was a lot closer to her than I was to Art, because I spent a lot more time with her. And then before she went out, she had a dear friend, I guess they were nurses together down in Kingston or somewhere, Virginia Schoonmaker. Virginia had a house down on the Rondout. Lita and I and Frank Mele would go down and have dinner with these ladies and sometimes Lita would invite Frank and I down to her house in Kingston and

make hasenpfeffer for us. And when we would go in, she would say, she called us “you boys.” You boys come on in, we’re having a martini and cheese and crackers before we have supper.” That’s my involvement with their life. It was more as a personal involvement, not as a fishing friend, really, as a conservationist.

Bill: You did mention that sometimes Art could be a tough guy when it came to conservation and the issues he cared about. Would anyone like to address that? Somebody like to talk about that...

31:15

Wendy: He wouldn’t sugarcoat it; he’d tell you just the way it was and how he felt about it. He was kind of a cantankerous guy in his way. But we all loved him. Nobody held that against him.

Bill: Now Judd, you spent your summers in Lexington from a very young age. What kind of memories can you share with us about Art and the Schoharie?

31:35

Judd: Well, actually, this is the second one of these little green books that I saw today. Did anybody else bring that with them? This is where I started becoming fascinated with fly fishing. And my family had a summer camp for kids up there. I was fishing with lures, worms, minnows, everything. But one day I took a little walk downstream, I was about 12 years old, to the place where the West Kill joins the Schoharie. And there was a fantastic hatch going on there of, actually, they were brown drakes. And I had been studying the flies in Streamside Guide, and I decided to try to tie this one in the middle called grey fox variant. And it was a little sloppy and a little bit overdressed. But there were no wings on it, so the wings weren’t like, cocked off to one side. It was a fishing fly. I went down to that junction pool, made a cast, and I got a tremendous fish. I landed it, and in those days, you brought it home if it was a big fish. It was hook ‘em and cook ‘em in those days. And I had a wicker creel; I was so excited; I was going to bring this back and my grandmother said she would cook it for me if I cleaned it. She didn’t want to have to clean it. So I cleaned it. And it didn’t fit in the wicker basket. The tail stuck out the back end. And I’m walking from the junction pool down Route 42 to where I live, which is right at the Lexington bridge. And I see this car pulling up behind me; and the window is rolled down; and this guy says, “Hey, where’d you get that fish?” I said, I just caught it up the road. He said, you know, what did you get it on, a worm? I said, no, no, I – I didn’t know who he was – I had this little book; this is the book by the way; this is the edition that I had; you can see all the stains on it. And I looked at this book by Art Flick and there was this fly called the grey fox variant in there, and I tried to tie it. And I could tell he was just barely holding himself together from laughing. And he said,

I see. And so he said, can I have a look at that fish? And he goes, wow! What a fish! And he said, you really got him on a grey fox variant? And I said, yeah! He said, well, how do you do? I'm Art Flick. And I almost fell off my pins. It was the beginning of my trajectory towards becoming a devoted fly fisherman. Because when you can do this, catch this kind of a fish with that fly, it bears further study, does it not? And yet I still didn't give up early season fishing with bait. So in the book, there are not only dry flies, which he cherished, and became totally specialized in, because it's the most fun; it's also the thing that we all love to see is that fish come up to the surface, in all its glory, and take a fly. But he has, on this page, a variety of other fish food imitations. And most of them, many of them come to the Schoharie and West Kill system, which I call a system, the, you know, it's a feeder stream, that little West Kill. It is a glorious little stream in and of itself. It's been beaten to crap many, many times, by many, many storms. But still, the big fish take refuge up there. And when it gets too warm for them. And my life as a fly fisherman never ventured very much further without constantly referring back to this page, which are all the mayflies, which he loved. The mayfly population has declined somewhat on the Schoharie, due to environmental things. But we all love these little things. They're little magic creatures, little magic creatures. They won't bite you, so you can pick them up in your hand, and look at them with adoration. I've looked at the front page, colored plates thing, and I have a little pencil check next to each fly after I tied it. And so I knew, I had the whole collection, but I made them myself, sometimes pretty close; and then Art and I became friends. So when he, when he dedicated this to me, he said, for Judd Weisberg, one of my fishing neighbors, with warm regards. And ... he was instrumental in passing along the passion. And when we relate that to conservation, he was instrumental in getting a lot of people to fish. He wasn't hiding out, you know, the treasures. He knew that the more friends that a stream has, the more it's going to survive well; it's going to be protected. And that was why he shared his knowledge in this book. He took a lot of time off of fishing for the first edition, to do this.

Bill: In fact, his biography taught me that he spent three years just studying the insects before he actually got back to fishing eventually. So I want to talk about that, or ask you guys about that, because recently the John Burroughs Association down in New York City gave their annual award for the best nature writing book to a gal named Sharman Apt Russell. And she wrote this book about being a citizen scientist. I'd lived in the mountains for a long time, so I'd never hear of that term before. But she made the point that a citizen scientist, and these are people who are kind of brought by academic professional scientists to do the counting work and the data collection work and the taking the pictures kind of work; she made the point in her acceptance speech that the citizen scientist of the 21st century is kind of the naturalist of the 19th that Burroughs was. Can we talk a little bit about Art Flick as really kind of a citizen scientist, because he did do a rather extensive study on the mayfly that might not have been done otherwise. Anybody wants to address that, his contribution

to, he was kind of a self-educated, what is it, entomologist, is that the right word?

39:15

Tony: Yeah, it's aquatic entomology, and I don't know who was the first person in the United States to deal with this. There's a book called Trout Flies by, what's his name, Preston Jennings. I think that precluded the Flick book. And he did a fair amount of research on stuff. And that's a pretty comprehensive book. And it's not that well known. He's not that well known. He was also a local guy, lived in Woodstock. And Frank knew him quite well. So I think maybe for the Catskill region, that might be, other than, well, now we're getting into a whole other area now; you've got to go back to the first guy that really started dealing with this before Jennings was Theodore Gordon. That was at the turn of the century. And he was a, I don't know if he was a banker or what he was, but he came from Manhattan; he got some type of a lung ailment, and he ended up moving to the Neversink valley. And he started to correspond with a guy over in England, Halford – Frederick Halford – to compare the fly patterns that they were using in the Test river valley and the Itchen valley, to our mayflies over here in the Catskills. So that was the beginning of that. And then I think we had Jennings, and I think Art came along. But what Art did that the other guys didn't do is that he consolidated everything. And one of the things that happens in fly fishing, especially today with all the technology that we have and everything else, is we have a tendency to embellish everything. And we have finer leaders, and we have more kinds of patterns, and we have more detail about aquatic insects. And what's happened, in my view, is that they've made this a lot more complicated than it needs to be. And if you go back, again as I reiterate now, as I mention at the beginning, if you know about Art's book, you'll find out pretty much everything you need to know about Catskill fly fishing. Not that there isn't stuff that you want to know maybe later on, but he condensed it all. And I teach quite a few fishing schools yet, and I always use this as my major recommendation, as compared to Schwiebert and 15 other guys that have done stuff. But this is not complicated and it's concise. So Art was a pioneer here, even though he had to give up his fly rod for a couple of days and go out and play in the water.

Bill: You had a follow-up, you had a thought about that, huh? Do you have a thought you wanted to add?

41:45

Wendy: I'm not sure. I think Theodore was on Wall Street?

Tony: He might have been...

Wendy: The disease he had was TB if I'm not mistaken.

Tony: It could have been, yeah. He's buried down there in Manhattan...

Wendy: Could I just regress back to the slide show, please, for just a second? I remember I called Art after about three weeks after I had photographed him, after editing the slides and pulling which ones I wanted to use and which I didn't. Came up with a narration on the whole slideshow. I called him up and said I've got a slideshow I want to show you. Can we come over sometime? So he said, yeah, I've got a better idea. Why don't you come over for dinner? So my friend Bob Dyer and I, my fishing buddy at the time, were invited for dinner. So we went over and showed Art and Lita the slideshow, and he accepted it, gave us the thumbs-up, go ahead. We had a beautiful dinner that Lita had made, I'll never forget the strawberry rhubarb pie she made. She was quite a cook, right? Oh, God, unbelievable. So anyway, the chapter, the Catskill mountain chapter, rented this slideshow out for \$20 a pop, plus we had a retainer, security retainer, I think it went out for 24 times at \$20 a piece. So that raised some money for our chapter, right Bert?

Bert: Yeah, oh, it absolutely did.

Wendy: And around 1990 it became dormant for a long time; it just sat there as a slideshow, I didn't do anything with it, and I got thinking, man, maybe I should update this thing and make a DVD out of it. Which I did. The chapter I'm now a member of, Columbia-Greene chapter, put the money up to get this thing made into a DVD, and I do have copies for sale for \$10 a piece if anyone would want one.

Bill: Great. Bert, did you have a thought – one of the things I find fascinating is the idea of the fisherman and fly tyer connected to the particular stream. You know, Ray Smith on the Esopus. Art Flick on the Schoharie. Somebody want to address that whole thing of Art's connection to the river? Yes, Dave.

44:00

Dave: The Schoharie was definitely his river, but along the lines of what Tony was talking about, what is kind of neat, and we didn't realize how much time it saved us until looking back at it, but all the effort that Art made on behalf of people fishing the Schoharie, we came to know, benefited everybody in the northeast. And another nice thing, but it's a fun thing to note the differences between the Schoharie and other rivers, because what he really did for us, probably any river around that's really a good trout river and of a size of the Schenevus, probably has 30 or 40 species of mayflies, that's a wild guess. But what he did for us is he taught us those 6 or 8 or 10 that are important, because they're there in quantity, the fish are well aware of them, so you should become

well aware. And he didn't waste any time with all the other ones that a lot of us thought we had to know about. I remember like you say, we wanted to learn how to speak Latin. And then they reclassified things. I was brought up with the Quill Gordon being *Iron fraudator* and just got smart enough that I thought I could talk with people like Ernie. And they reclassified things. And I was distraught, because I had to go back to little olive thing and a kind of medium-sized brown thing. And I was just relearning, and found out about *Epeorus pluralis* instead of *Iron fraudator*, and they reclassified again! And now I was beside myself, until, and Art would have appreciated this, it became such that they could use DNA to really know which mayflies were kissing cousins with which mayflies. So it involved; oh, wait a minute, this one really belongs over in this group; and these two here, they should be over here; and so once I knew that it was DNA, I was happy once again and didn't feel too bad. But Art did the major work toward making it easy for all of us. That was a big deal.

Bill: Bert, and then Judd.

46:20

Bert: Just to go along with what Dave is saying, what Tony said, I had purchased Art's book, and I had read it. And it was tremendous, because it simplified everything. I think it was 10 flies, it was easy. The pictures were easy to understand. You could learn how to even tie the flies right. And then that went to the back of my mind; I was out on the Esopus creek. And I went there with the flies, you know, that I thought I needed. And well, the fly that I needed, I didn't have. So right away I went back home, right? And tied maybe a dozen of these flies; need just a couple or three. And then what I found out is there's one other part of this fly thing is that fly's only out one or two days out of the year. So what Art did is not only did he come up with 10 flies that are there in numbers, but they're there in time. Not just a day; not two days; but usually two weeks, or more. So that's what really simplified things for us, to know that these flies would be out for a good period of time, and you could count on that happening every year, not just by the day, but like the Quill Gordon, what time of day you'd expect to see them out on the river at what temperature. You know? So then I said, well, I should have a thermometer along with me. And he was absolutely right, you know? Go measure the water temperature and find out if you're wasting your time. If the water's too cold or too warm, you're not going to have fly hatches, or the fish aren't going to be working. So that book was phenomenal to me, and I went back and re-read it numerous times. And another thing: I first went to a TU meeting, and I had read the book, now I'd read it a couple, three times, it was in the mid-70s, and as a matter of fact I think it was right after Wendy made the slide show. And so I went to the TU meeting, and you know, I knew about Art Flick, but I didn't know where he really lived, or I'd never fished on the Schoharie at all, and so I walked in, and then Art Flick was there. And I thought he was there, like, as a guest or something, you know,

coming maybe to speak or something like that. And my first take on the guy when I saw him was, this guy looks like an ex-Marine. You know, with a crew cut. And he was kind of stern, but he was very friendly, very forthright, you know, and actually very easy to talk to. He really was. But you knew what was on his mind. But when I saw him, I said, wow, this guy looks tough, you know. But in actuality he was really a very good person.

Bill: Judd.

48:58

Judd: Well, he boiled down not only to the most important flies that we have close by here in these streams, but the style of tying could be used by altering the sizes to imitate other mayflies, and presentation became the most important part of the whole game. I noticed in watching Wendy's presentation there that Art was fishing upstream, and he was working his way up, rather than down. And so many, so many people don't realize that being stealthy is what counts, and also he made a point of the size being very, very important. It might be a little off in color, but if the size is right, then it will take a fish. The variant, grey fox variant is my favorite; if someone said to you, what's your favorite fly, I'd have to say the grey fox variant. Not only because it started me really seriously becoming a fly fisherman, but it catches fish! And the reason it does is it creates the impression of life. And that's what we do with fly tying. We are creating through feathers, fur, steel, synthetics which are now very interesting to work with, that don't require killing something, to simulate the life of the insect, or the minnow, or the terrestrial critter that we're trying to offer to the fish. It's a decoy. It's a very artful decoy. And Art was very interested, in terms of the artistry part, we went down to the city to see a show of the most phenomenal framed flies. We drove down, it was Bill Kushner. And there were flies from all over the world. And Art was totally fascinated by the salmon flies. He loved everything to do with flies. Not only what he did, but how it related to the global issue of flies as an art form and as a useful tool to catch fish, both.

Bill: Thank you. So Johnny, you and Judd and Art took a trip out West one time, didn't you do some fishing? Want to tell us about that trip?

51:50

John: A little background first. I met Art at Catskill Mountain chapter TU meeting, and got to know him a little bit. In fact, I think Judd and myself and Art used to carpool down to the meetings. And then ended up, we got dinner at the Kingston Tea Garden before the meetings. Remember that, Judd?

Judd: Oh, yeah! You remember everything.

John: Anyway, so I got to know Art quite well, and Judd of course knew him years before I did. And so we organized a trip out west, to the Yellowstone country. We drove out and we were staying in Livingston, I think. And we had breakfast one morning at the Railroad café ... and we had a date with Charlie Brooks on the Madison. And so ... and I'm going to leave out the story ...

Judd: The trip out there, just to give this some context, was done in my 1972 Scout, International Scout. I had bought that car new. It wasn't new when we got back. We drove, and we switched off, and when we stopped; he was so excited, it was like a kid on Christmas morning, to go out to meet some of the people we were going to be meeting. And I'll toss the ball back to you. But anyway, any time spent in the bathroom was time away from fishing. So he would knock on the door and say, come on, Weisberg! Let's go! You're wasting my fishing time.

John: When Art was aggravated his voice raised a few octaves, because he had a really gravelly, raspy voice. And he'd say, "you're cutting into my fishing time!" You know. So anyway, we got on the road. So we're going to meet Charlie Brooks, and his friend Bob Holmes, who's a college professor from California or something. And he's going to teach us his method of nymph fishing for big browns on the Madison. So Art's anxious to get there, and he was driving, and we would split time between driving and who shared what seat. I was sitting in the front seat with Art behind the wheel, and Judd was in the backseat. So it was a 2-lane road going through the, I think we went through Yellowstone to get to the Madison to meet these guys, and so Art goes out to pass, here comes a huge RV coming the other way. And Judd's in the backseat, and Judd goes, "wo!" and he starts down, and by some miracle, by some miracle Art cut back in and we avoided a head-on collision. So that was one story.

54:55

Judd: There were so many great times, but the main thing that was interesting was he wanted to see Charlie Brooks, and he also wanted to see Joe Brooks's widow who was someone he wanted to meet and fish with.

Bill: Give us a little background on Charlie and Joe Brooks.

Judd: Charlie wrote several really important books on nymph fishing. And his nymphs were not pretty, but boy, they would catch fish. And they were full rounds. They didn't have a back, a top or a bottom. Because he, it was his belief that as they rolled around, if the fish saw the underside, it would think it was a fake. Well, he may be right; we all might be right.

John: It was his method of fishing, though, Judd, that imparted that roll.

Judd: Yeah, he made sure that the fly got down to where the fish was in the water column. That was the chief, you know, idea there. And it was a wonderful experience going fishing with Charlie and Art, and we also had dinner over at Charlie Brooks's ... and Bob Holmes was a phenomenal, it was the first time that I'd ever encountered the Madison. And we were catching, and at that time there was still lots of rainbows in there. And we were fishing with a fly which I love dearly which you never see, hardly ever see offered for sale anymore, it's called a black wooly worm. And it's a simple fly, and if you fish it deep, it's going to get hung up, and you're going to lose it. So it only takes 10 minutes or less, or maybe three minutes to tie one. So you're fishing in the right place with lots of weight on the inside. We used to weight them with, they're no longer legal to even buy it, but it looked like a little matchbook, and it had strips of lead in it, and you'll peel one off, and you'd wrap it on the hook, and then you'd tie the fly over that. So the fly would go down... right to the bottom. And so he, we all got introduced to the western fishing, and we took a marvelous float trip together on the Yellowstone. And we got introduced to a lot of different things. But what Art loved was broken water and pocket water. That was his favorite kind of water. When we went to the spring creeks, he said, no, this is too much trouble. I want to go fishing where I like to fish. So Johnny and I were totally crazed about fishing Armstrong Spring Creek, where the fish are this long, and they're feeding on things about this big. About that big. And the thing is choked with weeds, so the moment you get one on, you can't use anything but a very, very fine leader, the fish dive into that watercress, and you're done. Unless you want to jump in there and go after them. I did that, and I almost got hypothermia, because the water is so cold. And the fish ran out the other end and broke off anyway.

Bill: I'm wondering if Charlie Brooks was as excited about fishing with Art Flick as Art was fishing with Charlie Brooks, I imagine. Kind of, East meets West. Yes, Dave.

58:45

Dave: A little funny one about his enthusiasm. He discovered finally the Delaware and some of that fishing. I still fish at a place that we call Flick's Pool, because it was a spot that he loved. But...

Bill: On the Delaware?

Dave: Yes, on a ... branch of the Delaware [laughter]... They were going one night, he and a couple friends of Tony's, was Del Bedinotti and Bill Dorato. And they spent as much time in the car looking for rising fish, as they did fishing. And they didn't see much. And Willie and Del were talking about even though they weren't going to have any fishing night, it still might be a great evening for spinner fishing. And Art just clammed up. And they didn't really know what was going on. Del and Willie were talking back and forth, and Art wouldn't have any

of it and wouldn't speak to them for about a half an hour, and it finally just happened to come about, and in fact this was a little anecdote that I wrote up and sent it to Roger to be included in the book, and Roger had a heart attack and didn't get to put it all together, and the anecdote never made it. But it finally came out that Bill was talking about mayfly spinners, the egg layers coming back to the stream. And Art thought briefly that they were talking about having to resort to using hardware. And he wouldn't speak, he didn't speak for about a half an hour. I thought that was great!

Bill: Bert? ...

01:11:40

Bert: Oh, actually, this totally change of topic, but here it is. A few times – Art was always very helpful to me in the chapter, our TU chapter. And we developed a great rapport over a number of years. And once in a while we'd exchange letters and phone calls, whatever. And did a couple of things. One was, and Wendy will remember this, he and I co-chaired New York State Trout Forum in Kingston, 1979. And we had to come up, we had to set the whole thing up, it was a dinner, two days of having all top name people come in or whatever. And so I'm a young person at this time, and Wendy and I are about the same age, actually, and it's like, do we really know these people? But anyway, I said, I'd try and take this on. And what happened was, I did take it on. But the way I did it was through Art. What I could do was call Art up and say, you know, we want to get John Merwin here, you know, to speak, right? And what he would do is he would make an initial phone call, and then I would follow up with a letter. But he was the introductory person. And he knew so many people. One of the places I found that out was one time I drove he and Lita down to Theodore Gordon Flyfishers annual day. It was a whole-day affair down in Scarsdale. And again, I'm like a kid, right? And went down with Art, and we had some funny things happen on the way down. But once we got down there, Art walked around, you know, and he said I could go around with him, right? And he introduced me to people that, you know, Michael Fong... numerous people. Writers. Fishermen. That's I think I met Lee Wulff originally, and Joan Wulff. Len Wright. We just walked around. Everybody knew and adored the man. You know, because of who he was, what he did. Also, again, for conservation. Art was also a member of Theodore Gordon Flyfishers. And that's, that was his thing, conservation. But it came out down there.

Beth: Bill, I just wanted to see if our panel could tell us some of the conservation efforts, the details about what he did on the Schoharie... you know, we're talking about him as a conservationist, but I'd just like to get, for the recording, some of the contributions.

01:03:17

Dave: Most people don't realize this, because we, I shouldn't say we take it for granted, but we have what we call catch-and-release or no-kill sections of river. On the Beaverkill we have it. I know we have it on the Willowemoc, okay. And the first section of no-kill in New York state was on the Schoharie. And Art did that, and he basically did that singlehandedly in Albany; went up there and lobbied for it, okay, and got it done. It didn't last forever. But that was I think what really opened the door for no-kill in New York state. His hard work.

Beth: Did someone say something about the barrier dam?

Judd: The barrier dam was put in to keep the warm water fish from coming up from Schoharie reservoir, particularly those nasty small-mouth bass that love to eat little trout. Well, to me, it was a noble effort. It kept the walleyes down there, because they don't like to go up over falls. The bass, during high water, went "yee-haw!" And they just shot upstream, and they will lay one million eggs to one trout egg. I mean, they're all, unfortunately, all throughout the Schoharie, but it was a tremendous effort. And what it does to this very day is it adds a whole lot of oxygenation to a section of river that needs it badly. And trout do live in it, along with the bass. It is a two-story fishery. The warm water layer has bass, and depending on the season, there are, there's a mix of trout and bass all up and down the river from there all the way up to Mosquito Point, and even all the way up past Hunter Mountain, I've seen little bass.

Bill: A product of the reservoir?

Judd: That's because those damn things are so prolific, and they know how to go into the bushes and back out again in high water, and they just keep going, and they found ways...

Bill: But the bass weren't there when it was a wild river, before it was...

Judd: I don't know that for a fact. I don't know whether they were there, they were always in there.

Dave: They fish a lot of bass and walleyes below the dam, of course, and everywhere between there and the Mohawk. Lots of them.

Bill: Does anybody in the audience have a thought or a story they want to add about Art? Anybody every hunt with Art? We haven't done any hunting stories. No? Yes, Judd.

01:06:08

Judd: I went out hunting for white rabbits with him one time. And he had this

little beagle, it was a black – I don't think it was a purebred but maybe it was purebred – and we didn't get any, but we had a great time. I think Art shot at one and missed, and I shot at one and missed, but that little black dog, you couldn't get it back. Once it was on a trail, until that rabbit went into the hole or you got it, and then he'd bring it back to you, or he'd say, over here you dummies!

Bill: Yeah, Tony.

01:06:47

Tony: Was there a trip with Art and Frank Mele... because Frank went out there with somebody... because I was going to say, that could have been a tricky situation.

Bill: We're going to break up in a few minutes to go into our show-and-tell section where we get to see some of the items that people have brought, including the fishing rods that you brought, that you mentioned earlier at the door. But I did want to say, I'm an old school teacher, so for me, one of the things that's real interesting about Art is that in his biography it says that, you know, he had a 10th grade education, yet he sort of got, you know, a masters degree at the university of the Schoharie Creek. And you know, became not only a biologist, but a, you know, political scientist, and all sorts of other areas. Would anybody like to talk a little bit about Art, this kind of self-made man, which seems to me to be part of his character. Yes.

01:07:45

Dave: Yeah, this is just in his personality, like I say, when I first met him. I think what Art did, and almost everything Art did, and if you again, get to read this book, Art tried to do everything very well. And he educated himself in doing that, whether it was fly tying, catching fish, hunting, conservation. Whatever it was, Art didn't take it lackadaisically. He did it, and he had to do it perfectly, which was really good. And I just want to go back to one other thing. Conservation-wise. When Wendy and I did this TU forum in 1979, Art was very much in favor of helping out for that for a big reason, that was a large revenue producer, and the money for that was going to be used, and did get used, for fighting Prattsville, which would have had a big impact on the Schoharie reservoir, okay, and the river. So he was, he was very much, again, in conservation.

Bill: And as an old English teacher I can point out that it's not only got all the information, but it's very well written. The guy could write. Yeah, it's very well written. Yes.

Bert: It's well-written enough so that when it, as it was coming out originally, in fact he told me he sat, they had a dinner with Ray Camp, and once Ray had finally convinced him to do it at all, he told Art not to be disappointed if it only sold maybe 3,000 copies, because it's not like Clancy writing *The Hunt for Red October*. It's really writing for a much smaller fraternity than we used to think. Fly fisherman. And yet it probably has sold close to a quarter of a million by now, still in print. It's been in print ever since, and it proved, it reads so easily and offers so much information that you have to have it. And it's still available, actually quite affordably. So that was a, to me that was a testament to how well-written it was and how readable it was.

Bill: Any... yes sir.

01:09:53

[Audience]: I was just going to say that I think the other thing that comes out of that book, especially because it started my fishing up here, '75 I think, is that fact that he was able for 3 years to not fish. Every time I walk out there, I say, how did this guy do this, because I'm a biologist by trade. I can't stop, sit there and watch the river...

Tony: But you've got to keep in mind that he probably had a rod out there once in a while.

Dave: But it was more than just stopping fishing. That was a revenue producer for the inn. Okay, when he stopped that, he took money away from the inn; he stopped guiding. And that was the real big thing.

[Audience]: I think we have to remember what that did for us, as well as did to him.

Dave: Well, he did, the earliest of that he spent an awful long time helping with someone else's book that wasn't going to be any revenue, even for him. The Jennings book that Tony mentioned. He did an awful lot of collecting for that, which is a part of the reason, only a small part I think, why he was reluctant for so long to bring out his *Streamside Guide*. Because he thought it might conflict with something that he'd helped an older friend do. So we're lucky that the *Guide* did in fact come out. We're all lucky for that.

Bill: Last month we got a chance to celebrate and thank Frank Mele and the whole water release with New York City victory. This time, Art Flick and the Prattsville dam victory. So, you know, there's a lot of people to be thankful for, for the Catskill rivers that we still have. Anybody on the panel have an urge to say one final thing before we retire to the next room?

Wendy: I think there's a lot of press over the years on Schoharie Creek. And I think Art kind of planned it that way, to take the pressure off his beloved West Kill [laughter], where he lived on the banks of, and you never see any print in here about the West Kill.

John: One last, short, funny story. On the same trip that Judd, Art and I made out West ... down the Yellowstone, and Art was so OCD about his fishing that he wanted to do everything right, as Bert said. All he wanted was a 4-pound brown trout, which entitles you to have a "wall-fish" they call it, on Dan Bailey's fly shop wall. So the fishing was slow, and our guide, who was Donnie Williams, short, rugged Montana cowboy, whatever, he beats the boat, and so Art and I and Judd waited it out. And lo-and-behold Art hooks his fish. It turned out, and he's bringing the fish in, and he's so excited, Judd and I thought he was going to have a heart attack.

Judd: I started running, I started running upstream.

John: So anyway, Judd takes his picture, I'm standing next to Art, and Art's grinning like a little kid with the fish, and they qualify it to be a wall fish, and then they put the picture in the Catskill Fly Fishing Museum with his fly fishing setup, the picture, minus me. They cropped me out. [Laughter]

Bill: Well, let's thank our panel and give them a round of applause, and ... let's retire to the next room and see some of the artifacts. Thank you all very much for coming.