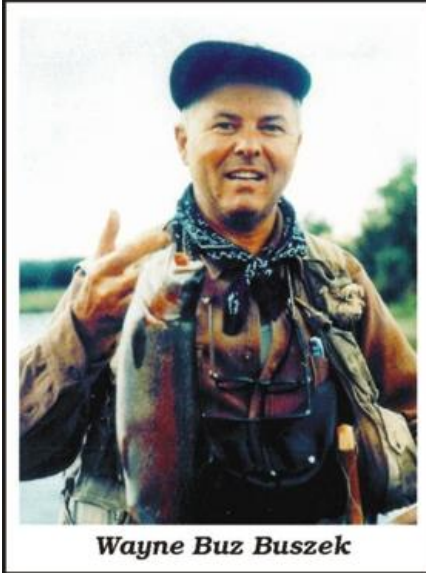


# When Buz Wuz the Word on Tying Flies



*Wayne Buz Buszek*

When I first spoke with Rosalie Buszek Powell about her father, I knew we were talking about a special man—a legendary man who turned fishing tackle into an art form. Wayne “Buz” Buszek (rhymes with music) loved nature, the Sierra and especially loved coaxing trout out of hiding with his special hand tied flies. He's been gone for many years, but his reputation as a master of hackle and feather lives on. Born in Porterville in 1912 and raised in Lindsay, Buz spent his summers as a teenager at his grandmother's beach cottage in Laguna. There he met an old surf fisherman named W. D. Bretherton, a retired U.S. Navy captain. The two became friends and this Navy man taught Buz how to fish and tie flies—skills that became a life-long passion for the Tulare County native.

As a young man Buz attended Woodbury Business College in Los Angeles, but the Great Depression forced him to leave before graduation. He worked in many odd jobs throughout California, both labor and clerical, and also as a bookkeeper for Exeter's Pogue family ranch. In 1933, he married Virginia Compton, and in

about 1936, began work at the Visalia post office.

Not surprisingly, during his non-work time he tied flies and fished. Oftentimes other anglers joined him on his trips and everyone enjoyed the success they had using Buz's custom made flies. He took great care in making his flies, using nothing but the best feathers, furs, hairs, threads and hooks. His craftsmanship became well-known.

Soon his flies became so popular he started selling them out of his rented house at 129 NW 3rd Ave in Visalia. The extra income helped support his family which included his wife Virginia and his daughters Rosalie and Judy.

In 1947, Buz and Virginia decided the tackle business could be profitable so he left the post office and opened Buz's Fly and Tackle Shop. He used the back bedroom of the family's home as his workspace. The entire family got involved with Virginia tying leaders, Rosalie tying woolly worms and Judy packaging the flies.

The business struggled for the first few years until a mail order catalog was eventually created and distributed. Then the business took off. In the 1950s, the company expanded its product line offering bulk fly tying materials. The sales of these materials at one time amounted to over 50% of gross company sales. In 1955, the couple built a house at 805 W. Tulare Ave, complete with office, fly tying room and oversized garage that served as a warehouse.

While managing his business, he continued to tie flies for his special customers, and wholesale orders were completed by employees. One of the fly tiers on his payroll was his good friend Don Lieb. Don had visited Buz's shop on NW 3rd Ave in the late 1940s and the two became good friends. "I learned to tie flies looking over his shoulder," Don said. According to Don, Buz

created a number of Buszek originals like the Kings River Caddis, Old Gray Mare, Flot-n-Fools, Buz's Shad Fly and probably the most popular, the Western Coachman.

As Buz was building his reputation as an expert fly tier and businessman, he continued to fish, provide guide services and even found time to serve on the board of directors for the Visalia Sportsman's Assoc, rising to the position of President in 1954. In addition, Buz wrote articles about fishing for the local newspaper and was featured in books and magazines. Despite business challenges from time to time, Buz's shop prospered.

In 1965, Buz quickly began to lose weight and his health began to decline. On Wednesday, May 26, 1965, the Visalia Times Delta shocked the community with the tragic news that Virginia had found Buz dead in his office that morning, the victim of suicide. According to the newspaper report, Virginia said that her husband had been despondent over failing health. The news saddened the family and the community. Memorial donations were directed to the Fly Fishing for Conservation Club. On Saturday, May 29th, Wayne Buz Buszek, age 53 was buried at the Visalia Cemetery.

Reflecting back on Buz's life, Don Lieb said, "He was just a nice fellow to know and I enjoyed being with him. He had many friends and never had a bad word to say about anyone."

Buz's youngest daughter, Judy Buszek O'Key has fond memories of her dad. The two would regularly go on fishing trips to the mountains together, but she acknowledged that he was not afraid to go on trips alone. In fact, she said he was a man that "needed solitude." But it was clear that Buz had a special relationship with Judy. In one of his early catalogs, Buz shared a comment with his customers, "Each year I try to plan a trip with my daughter Judith. She is a true sportsman joining me in fishing, hunting and the love of nature. We will be away Sept 1-10th."

Rosalie, Buz's oldest daughter also has good memories of her father. She called him “a man who loved words.” Although he was a great conversationalist when he wanted to be, he loved the written word. He was always reading a non-fiction book and on fishing outings he would document his trip using a journal. Like Judy, Rosalie also remembers how comfortable he was in the mountains by himself. Sometimes the family would drive him to a trailhead, drop him off with instructions to “pick him up at the other end,” she said. Even today when the Sierra Nevada mountains are clear, “I sometimes burst into tears thinking about my father and his love for the mountains,” Rosalie said.

After his death, Buz's Fly and Tackle Shop continued. Virginia and Mickey, Rosalie's husband, ran it for a number of years. Today the business no longer exists. Even though the shop and Buz are gone, the name Buz Buszek lives on in the memory of many people. A Google internet search of his name reveals many references to this man and the awards bearing his name.

Voices From Four Creeks Country appears in the Valley Voice in the first issue of each month. Terry can be reached at [histry@comcast.net](mailto:histry@comcast.net) or visit his blog at [www.visaliahistory.blogspot.com](http://www.visaliahistory.blogspot.com).

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