1984 - Frank Johnson
by Dennis Bitton

True to the pattern, the 1984 winner of the Buz Buszek Memorial Fly Tying Award went to a man who has taught many others to tie, was actively engaged with FFF activities, has been innovative in his own tying and has demonstrated considerable talent tying flies. He's Frank Johnson who at that time was a resident of Missoula, Montana and now lives in Sheridan, Wyoming. Frank was partner in Streamside Anglers, in Missoula, at the time he won the award.

Frank tied at many FFF Conclaves and taught fly tying classes at the University of Montana. He estimates that he taught approximately 350 people during his classes at the university.

And there have been others, He and his business partner in Missoula, Richard Anderson, were friends in junior high school. They tie flies for local stores. That was back in Sheridan, Wyoming, where Frank and Richard spent some of their younger years. Next came the Army, college and separate careers. Then, as Frank explained, "After fiddling around for 15 years, we decided we wanted to do what we started out doing."

Some friends had moved from Wyoming to Missoula. Frank paid a visit, liked what he saw and figured the town could support a fly shop. They sold retail out of the shop, did some guiding on local streams and sold wholesale fly tying materials all over the country.

"I've always been impressed with the caliber of people in FFF and how comfortable everyone seems to feel at FFF functions," says Frank. "I think it's marvelous."

Frank says that fellow FFF tyers Darwin Atkin, Andy Puyans, George Grant and Boyd Aigner were influences in his attendance at Conclaves and with his growth as a fly tyer. In the years he tied at Conclaves he met dozens and dozens of tyers from all over the country and developed many close friendships. He says he corresponds with several of the tyers quite often. "I've learned more about tying flies by being here than I have my whole life," says Frank.

Although he admits to inventing the water walker pattern, he says he likes to tie all types of flies, from nymphs to Atlantic Salmon flies. He says he enjoys tying a Humpy as much as any pattern, simply because he likes the look of the fly when it's finished.

Concerning the Buszek Award, Frank says, "I guess I'm almost embarrassed to be joining the esteemed company of such well known fly tyers. I have a feeling that the existence of the award is somewhat of an incentive to new, innovative young tyers. Having the award is a real asset to the Federation. It demonstrates the importance of fly fishing."

Frank is of the opinion that there are two major types of tyers; those on a professional level who tie for money and the hobby/recreationalist. Amazingly, he considers himself a member of the second group.

He says he ties some flies every day, but just puts them in a pile and occasionally breaks a few out to ship to a friend. He says he tied for a living for a long time, and now that's behind him. He ties for enjoyment now, and to give some enjoyment to others. And that's typical of the man.