During Conclave '88 in Livingston, Montana, the 19th recipient of the prestigious Buz Buszek Memorial Fly Tying Award named. He was Bing Lempke, of Idaho Falls, Idaho. It was a popular choice. Bing had tied at International Conclaves for several years, and his skill and wit were engaging.

Bing liked to tie extended body patterns. He'll tie them on hooks so small that most people find it hard to believe it's possible. He's also a great devotee of tying realistic looking patterns, with the emphasis being on what the sees, not what it looks like to the human eye.

All this skill and attitude has a background. Let's investigate it together. Bing was born January 3, 1917 in St. Cloud, Minnesota. His real name was Cyril, but he picked up the nickname "Blink" at an early age. One of his nephews consistently mispronounced the nickname, and it became Bing. The new nickname stuck.

Bing learned to fish in Minnesota (with worms and maggots) but his fly fishing career got started when the family moved to eastern Idaho in 1928. Bing spent his teenage years fishing eastern Idaho waters, in the early '30s. Take it from an Idaho resident who knows (my father), those were good years. Bing fished with flies (Potts patterns mainly) simply because it was an effective way to catch fish.

In 1937, Bing moved to California. He worked for Southern California Gas, got married, served a hitch in the Merchant Marine during World War II and returned to Idaho in 1946. That's when he started tying flies.

"I worked at a sporting goods store in Salmon." recalled Bing. "I traded a salmon rod with a fellow for some fly tying gear, I'd started fishing Gaines dry flies because they took fish so well. I'd fish them until they were falling apart. Then I'd take them home, take them apart very carefully and tie flies to match the ones I was taking part. That's how I learned to tie. I taught myself."

By the mid 50's Bing was into fly tying a little more, and settling down to employment as a pipefitter. He spent over 40 years of his life working as a pipefitter and plumber, and he was constantly getting more and more detailed with his fly tying. There's nothing real complicated about Bing's approach, he simply is always looking for a better imitation. Over the years, he's become very effective. Fly fishermen all over the world know about Bing's extended body Green Drakes, hopper patterns and his #28 and #32 mayfly imitations.

Much of Bing's popularity stems from Henry's Fork, and the fact that his patterns work so well there. Bing spent the better part of his summers on the Henry's Fork, but not all of it. He especially enjoyed fall outings on Henry's Lake, but any piece of water within 200 miles of Idaho Falls was fair game for Bing, his wife Dorothy and his sons Brant and Chris.

Asked why he thought he was such a popular fly tyer, Bing thought a second and said, "I guess it's because I do things differently than most people. I was always looking for an easier way to tie. Some people say I put on wings and hackles differently than most people. Other people come along and say, 'Hey, that's the way I do it too,' or 'that would work for me.' I guess I've helped them."

That's an understatement. Bing has always been willing to help a novice. He has taught fly tying classes for over 20 years. He has invented tools to help him with his extended body patterns. He's invented different techniques for some of his patterns (take a look at his hopper for example). He developed a compelling interest in entomology and can talk Latin with the most rabid professional or amateur entomologist available. He supported innumerable fund raising events associated with FFF and other conservation minded organizations. He's tied and given away thousands of flies as stream-side gifts, gestures of support and teaching aids.

Like all the Buszek winners before him, Bing Lempke was something special. He was a good fly tyer, a good teacher and a good human being. Those who called him friend consider themselves
fortunate.