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Tom Alkire [00:00:10] Well I do I have a number of stories like that but I've thought of a couple of them in particular and I excerpted just a few minutes for one of these stories. It's a trout story called Small Waters.

Tom Alkire [00:00:33] See where it is now.

Tom Alkire [00:00:38] There we go. The story is Small Waters. Unlike a larger river, I could see the bottom almost everywhere.

Tom Alkire [00:00:47] Some dark waters beneath the undercut banks eluded my investigations but they were few. Elsewhere I could see the surface shimmer and the rocky bottom too. And I could see everything in between the rush of the snowmelt on his way to the sea and the silt. Cold current varnishing the underwater stones to a high gloss.

Tom Alkire [00:01:12] I continued fishing on downstream not thinking about anything except where to place the next cast. The intent angler. The intent angler's mind is as vacuous as a mind can be. The intent angler is totally absorbed in the task at hand and self-consciousness disappears altogether.

Tom Alkire [00:01:36] I drifted a pattern through a few ripples but they were too shallow to hold fish. The fish were in the deep dark spots if they were there at all. Ahead of me was an undercut bank and I approached it gingerly. Suddenly I tripped on an exposed tree root and the rocks clattered across one another.

Tom Alkire [00:02:00] I regained my balance. I felt like an elephant. I could not help being a large life form on this small water and the least that I could do was to move quietly. I flicked the fly toward the undercut bank. It landed on a blade of grass.

Tom Alkire [00:02:21] And slid off into the current. It slipped just under the surface film and then a moment later a fish struck. The hook held the fish turned out to be ten inches long. Where I landed a few minutes later. It had taken the small caddis emerger, a bubble concoction of my own making.

Tom Alkire [00:02:43] Maybe it had liked the iridescent sparkle of the Plastic Bubble suggestive of the trapped air bubble in a rising caddis pupa or so I thought.

Tom Alkire [00:02:55] I continued on. I waded wherever I wanted to go and cast wherever I wanted to go. Nothing was hidden from me. The river was transparent, my senses able to penetrate it into every way. I was in the belly of it and I couldn't tell if it had absorbed me or if I had it or if I had absorbed.

Tom Alkire [00:03:19] The stream contained me but the stream also was contained within me. I had absorbed its physicality and it was part of me, as much a part of me as I was as much as I was a part of it. There was no distance between the stream and I as there is on larger waters where depth and turbidity conspired to hide things from inquisitive anglers. It is difficult for a small stream to keep secrets. Mysteries are the province of the deep waters. Sea monsters come from the depths not shallows. I had only known this water since yesterday but already we were on a first name basis. Its current pushed against my legs as fish came to hand its caddis flies clouded the air prey for the bats swooping in for the evening kill.

James Thull [00:04:17] Lovely. Very nice.

Tom Alkire [00:04:19] Thank you.

James Thull [00:04:23] I like the part about the monsters come from the deep.

Tom Alkire [00:04:28] Well I do like the small waters and I like larger waters but they do differ as you well know.

James Thull [00:04:32] That is true.

Tom Alkire [00:04:34] Yeah. So. Hopefully that helps.

James Thull [00:04:40] No that's great.

Tom Alkire [00:04:41] I was back to some extent. What fishing means.

James Thull [00:04:45] Excellent. And did you say you have another one you want to read.

Tom Alkire [00:04:47] Yeah. OK. The other one is about steelhead fishing. Which is different and the water is bigger.

Tom Alkire [00:05:00] It's called The Big Tug. That's the story. And this is an excerpt of that. As I coached the fly closer into this sweet spot, I tightened up even though I was fishing and fishing is supposed to be relaxing. Still I was tense. I have been relaxed earlier the inviting blue green color of the water its white chop over the slick rocks, the darkness of its pools, the banks thick with willows and grasses, the bright sharp tumult sky. But now I was tight as a drum yearning hoping that I would connect with something wild. The contemplated man, the Isaac Walton type of man, had vanished and in its place was the alert man, expectant, ready to pounce. Then I saw the swirl out in front of me. I looked at my line to see if the swirl was related to where the line was. And before I could say affirmative I noticed that the line began to tighten. It was not an instant strike as are some strikes it was a slow take. Maybe a hesitant fish rubbing the fly along its jaw line. Wondering whether or not it should open its mouth and bite down on it. Another second and there was no mistake about it. The fish was fast to my line and it was tugging swirling on the surface splashing all over. Next I saw its rose red flank as it jumped out of the water. The drops in the air sparkling in the sunshine. The fish's silver body brilliant in a fall sky as only fall sky can be. If I had a heart monitor on me I'm sure that my pulse rate would have jumped too. I was there, totally aware, eyes wide open, mind laser concentrated no multitasking all aboard. Mind on the water I was there.

Tom Alkire [00:07:03] Knee deep in the river right there not over there or back there or there.

Tom Alkire [00:07:09] Over on the other side. But there. Yes isaac, I'm in the moment. Present tense. 100 percent. There. The contemplated fly fisherman, mellow and calm, had morphed into a thrill seeker. The adrenaline surging through my body.

Tom Alkire [00:07:27] It's cardiac output ballistic. And it was all because of the big tug. From the fishes point of view it was simply trying to get away from that damn sharp piece

of metal that was pulling against something. Or something or some something unseen. Maybe the fish had struck at the fly because it thought that it was a morsel of food or maybe it was just ornery and slapped at that little feathery son of a gun as it swung through the current. Or maybe it was bored and wanted to chase something small and bright. Maybe maybe maybe we'll never know because there are a thousand suppositions about why a fish bites down on little more than a metal hook, a few feathers, and a dab of fur.

Tom Alkire [00:08:20] Had I been catching fish all day long and the day before and the day before that I would not have had the same sensation that the hookup was exciting because many of us often spend hours upon hours of casting maybe days before they get into the Steelhead. So when do you get the big pull, you don't take it for granted.

Tom Alkire [00:08:43] Poof. Suddenly the line went slack. The bow in the cup and the rod straighten out. There is no splashing at the end of the line. Just the current flowing along just as it did yesterday and as it will tomorrow.

Tom Alkire [00:09:01] Whereas the moment before my mind and body were totally energized. Now there was nothing. The air didn't just leak out of the tire it was blown out.

Tom Alkire [00:09:20] Well. I just think it's an excellent idea. I didn't know much about it but I think it's a great idea and I hope it continues on. I think. Posterity it's important to get these things down both in videos and books and whatever because they'll disappear if somebody doesn't put it together like you and your group.

Tom Alkire [00:09:48] Well I don't think. To me there's not much of a rift. To me they're different fingers on the same hand. And I fish I mostly enjoy fishing fly fishing but I also fish for a lot of other things. Especially for steelhead.

Tom Alkire [00:10:09] In the winter. So I fish with sometimes even bait it depends on the conditions. Usually it's jigs and spinners with level line and spinning reels as well. Like I said I'd prefer the flies. I think fly fishing is more graceful and artful. I like the idea of the artificiality of flies, of trying to pretend that a fly is, feathers that are just feathers instead of a fly. So. Yeah I enjoy that a lot but I don't think that there's big rift to me.

Tom Alkire [00:11:00] Well my home water would be the Deschutes River. It's it's fairly close. It's about a two hour drive.

Tom Alkire [00:11:08] And I can fish trout and steelhead on this same water. I can fish on it at anytime during the year. And I've gone there for well gee over 30 years maybe close to 40 years. I've, I like the terrain. I like fishing. Wild fish generally speaking wild for the trout and a mix of wild and.

Tom Alkire [00:11:36] Hatchery with the Steelhead. The terrain is just stupendous. It's getting a little crowded now. It used to not be so crowded. I've enjoyed the camaraderie over the years with friends.

Tom Alkire [00:11:52] Family, my wife, my kids, my father. So. It's meant a lot to me.

Tom Alkire [00:12:06] Well I'm a little ambivalent on that. I think it's a confusing situation and depends on the place and the type of river and the type of fish. I think that when there's a, if there's a problem with that it's one thing such as I understand now with

brookies will interbreed with gold trout and the progeny will be sterile and so yeah. That's a problem. I'm not quite so sure and a lot of places with brown trout if they're a problem or not. Sometimes they seem to have their own little areas of habitat areas. The Browns seem to be a little more in some of the slightly warmer areas and rainbow a little colder and the bull trout even colder than that. So I'm not quite so sure but ambivalent about it. I think there's a place for it but I don't... Native fish is it is a great idea. You know around the world over millions of years there are changes. I mean we used to have no apples here the apples were originally in Turkey or somewhere like that and some I mean there is a migration of species. So. I don't think it's black and white.

Tom Alkire [00:13:25] Well my father would be part of it. He wasn't much of a.

Tom Alkire [00:13:28] He did some fly fishing but also fished other things. And then. A good friend of mine Bill Buckley who founded the Native Fish Society in Portland. And started fishing with him back in the late.

Tom Alkire [00:13:44] Well the late 70s and really got to know more about fly fishing. He was very important to me for that. So the combination of him and my father really was the beginning. My father grew up in Montana and Missoula and he and his father and brother were fly fishermen. So it's been a long, long journey. Well I looked at that.

Tom Alkire [00:14:19] Question that's an interesting question. I would say both. Yeah. Both ways. Yeah.

Tom Alkire [00:14:33] I'm still searching for that one. OK. After about 50 different magazine articles and two books I'm still trying to get it right with that one.

Tom Alkire [00:14:42] As far as the other other people with the issue of sustenance or not I would. My thought is that we've been hard wired with being predators for a long long time. Hundreds of thousands of years and only a very small fraction of our human existence has involved agriculture and so-called civilization. So I think it's we're hard wired that's why we hunt for fish we hunt for deer we hunt those things because it's within us. I think it's analogous would be to a cat. A cat doesn't have to these domestic cats don't have to do anything all they have to do is lay around and they get fed. But as soon as a mouse comes along a bird comes along, they're on it. And it's maybe they eat it. Maybe they don't. It's hardwired and I think that's the way the best and I think we have a sustenance. And you and I one way I think someone who's poor in Vietnam or Burma whenever, they need fish for their dinner it's a different substance but it's different types. For the same thing.

Tom Alkire [00:16:03] Oh my favorite's Steelhead. I mean I love trout too. And this summer spring and the summer I fish for trout and I like all the trout.

Tom Alkire [00:16:16] Cutthroat, Rainbow, brown trout they're all great.

Tom Alkire [00:16:20] But there's nothing quite like steelhead to me. I think just the fact that those fish are in anadromous just kind of amazed me that one day there in Idaho or eastern Oregon and a few months before they're out of the Gulf of Alaska eating herring and squid and they can migrate that is just amazing. And there are also such a wonderful game fish they like to jump there. They're fairly close up to the surface oftentimes compared to salmon. They spread out in a river unlike salmon which tend to congregate in

certain areas and so do the salmon fishermen unfortunately. So yeah I'm I'm a lover of steelhead.

Tom Alkire [00:17:14] Oh that's a good question. I've been a founder of Native Fish Society. For a long time and before that a founder of Oregon Trout.

Tom Alkire [00:17:25] And I think Oregon Trout is no longer there.

Tom Alkire [00:17:28] It's morphed into Native Fish Society is doing a great idea. There's a lot of other groups out there too but as far as pinpointing wild fish, I think Native Fish Society is doing a great job. I think there has to be other a lot of other groups as well because for different purposes for different groups. And I don't know which I Trout Unlimited is certainly a good place. Fly Fishing Federation is fine. I'm not so sure that.

Tom Alkire [00:18:04] We need to really pinpoint on fly fishing. Sometimes when you come to conservation I think as long as there's not bait involved I think that conservation part of it for sport angling is can be spin spinners or whatever as long as it's not bait, and because you can always release fish pretty easily whether it's lure or fly. But as far as other groups, I'm sure there's a lot of local ones that I don't know about. Nationally I'd say Trout Unlimited and Fly Fishing Federation.

James Thull [00:18:46] Can you tell us a little about it about . Was it the Native Fish Society.

Tom Alkire [00:18:50] Headquartered out of Portland. Small staff. And the basic thrust is to target and protect and fish that are native.

Tom Alkire [00:19:09] Such as with steelhead rainbow trout. Any that are bull trout. And so far it has been effective in some ways by trying to help with the Endangered Species Act litigation. Which the Native Fish Society and others have put reality on the map and the Columbia River Basin which years ago it was basically a situation that was the decision makers were the bundle of power the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation and now the National Marine Service is on board too because of the kind of litigation that we've put together. The.

Tom Alkire [00:19:59] Endangered Species Act. Native Fish Society has helped doing that and I think has done a great job.

Tom Alkire [00:20:11] Good and bad right.

James Thull [00:20:12] Yeah.

Tom Alkire [00:20:13] One of the good is the one I just mentioned that I think we now have on the Columbia River for example we have spills. Every spring you'll go down through the river around McNary, John Day, Bonneville and open the water will be spilled as being and it cost a lot of money to do that. If they and it's done so they can migrate the salmon and steelhead. In that case generally taking juvenile fish down. Getting a current so you get down through the reservoirs all the way to to the ocean. Before we didn't have that at all with the residual themselves and didn't go to the ocean. So that's been very helpful and that's been good. I think there's been good also with the.

Tom Alkire [00:21:05] So many fishermen now understand what a wild fish is and they won't or don't want to kill one.

Tom Alkire [00:21:15] Say "Oh it's wild" and I've heard people say the big fishermen and all the others will say the same thing. They you know 30 years ago we didn't have that. People want what is an anadromous fish mean most people that know what that is. You always put it in the gunny sack. And now people are aware of that. And I think that's been very helpful. You know. I think from the bad side of it access is a big problem at least in our area. I'm not sure in other areas but just getting to get a fish, being able to go down to the river and fish is sometimes especially in urban areas is very difficult. Some states have done that better than others Oregon has not done a great job with that. I think Montana has done a better job, in Washington. Here for example the Clackamas River goes right by Portland screened for salmon and steelhead and it's almost impossible to get a place to be able to fish. There's a couple of parks you can go but most of it you can't. So a lot of people just have to have boats is the only way they go through that. Well I think we need to get better access. I think we also need to do whatever we can to encourage younger people because we're not getting that many younger people fishing as they used to. And the fish and game people are well aware of that because the license fees have gone down even though the population has gone up. I'm not quite sure what to do about it but there's too many kids spending time on screens and not out on this.

Tom Alkire [00:22:59] River. So well those would be two good bad.

Tom Alkire [00:23:12] Oh those are good questions.

Tom Alkire [00:23:14] As far as the younger kids I always thought that the game department fish and game department should have free license up to age of 18. I think that would help. I think it would be worthwhile. I think now it's like up to 12 years old or 14 or something like that. I think they should have free license all the way up to 18. It's hard to know what else to do with so many other recreational activities for kids now. Not only computers but there's rock climbing and a million other things on kayaking and paddle boarding and when we were young we didn't have a lot of those things. I don't know.

Tom Alkire [00:24:06] Quite what you do about that.

Tom Alkire [00:24:08] One thing is that you don't really need to have a lot of fancy gear. It can be fairly straightforward. I think I should be around. Now as far as that you mentioned that the diversity of ethnic groups. I have notice at least in the Portland area quite a few both Mexicans and Asians that are fishing more than there used to be 20 years ago. And I think that's a good thing and it's just probably because the population is more diversified now too. But. I was going to just reflect the way the population is.

Tom Alkire [00:24:50] I don't know if there is anything you can do one way or the other.

James Thull [00:24:55] And then you had mentioned access to one of the issues. I grew up in Wisconsin and I live in Montana now and both places it's a high watermark. So you can walk any waterway up the high watermark. There's no private property right. Yeah.

James Thull [00:25:10] Is that not the case in Oregon.

Tom Alkire [00:25:13] That's the way in Oregon but how do you get if you're on a boat. That's fine.

Tom Alkire [00:25:17] Because then you can get out and wade up to the hype. But how do you get down to the high water line.

James Thull [00:25:25] So that's it that the actual access to the water. being kind of blocked.

Tom Alkire [00:25:30] But what's happening more and more often I've seen it all the time is the outfitters will buy up the leases for the ranches. And so the gate is locked. And you can't go down there and even if you couldn't go down there you can't you're not supposed to fish there because an outfitter has leased that particular area I know on the John Day River it's that way right now and a couple of places when I fish there in the place we're kind of crowded together some of us and a small area. But there's a couple of large areas where you can access but it's all leased. And that those cases usually an outfitter will pay whatever it was ten thousand dollars or whatever for a rancher and tie up the area. So if you want to spend three dollars a day or something like that you can get on the water. We're seeing more and more of that and a lot of that in the Coast Range and a lot of it all over.

Tom Alkire [00:26:29] And I think that's a problem.

James Thull [00:26:31] So you could actually lease the water is it just access here.

Tom Alkire [00:26:35] You're leasing the banks above.

James Thull [00:26:38] So as long as you have a boat you can access .

Tom Alkire [00:26:41] Well you know a lot of cases you're not going to be able to use a boat. So.

Tom Alkire [00:26:48] That's the problem.

James Thull [00:26:49] And then I wanted to ask you you talked about it like that the the waterways for for migrating for migrating fish and some of the improvements. How much does he feel are driven by the economic factor and how much I know in places like Wyoming and Montana and there's a lot of places that have fishing and angling has a huge economic impact on the area. Do you think that's one of the main driving forces behind these improvements or is it just general awareness that we want to preserve these species.

Tom Alkire [00:27:20] Well I think that both of them. And the third as well as with the least in the amorous areas around the Columbia River basin and the coastal rivers. It's also an economic boost because salmon is probably the only endangered species that also economically viable most endangered species whether it's.

Tom Alkire [00:27:44] Spotted Owl or whatever has no economic value. Whereas salmon obviously do the same million millions of dollars worth of fish. So I think there's a good reason to get those salmon up there. Economically as well as with the sport recreation. In some areas it is very threatening and that's what the Native Fish Society has been doing all these years is is trying to protect and enhance the the native fish because they're being.

Tom Alkire [00:28:24] In many cases having problems with a hatchery fish. And it depends on the river every river is different. But in some of the areas they need to, I would think I think other people would agree to either reduce or eliminate some of our hatchery fish and allow the natives to come in there. I think that.

Tom Alkire [00:28:48] The goal of all this of salmon as well as the trout to me is not to catch and release. That's just a means to the end. The goal is a sustainable fishery. That's what we want. After that we can sustain that and being able to maybe kill a fish now there or whatever. And have it be all right because the river is able to do what it can do.

Tom Alkire [00:29:18] Well habitat is always a problem but I think it's not, at least in many areas it's doing OK. I still think access is a big problem. Even think water is a big problem and we're not going to have fish if we don't have water in it particularly with the climate change. And in the West where problems of drought. I think we have to pay close attention to water. It's integral obviously to it if you don't have water in the water you're not going to have any fish there. So I think that's that's a major threat. As far as regulations for sport fishing, I would say bait is a big problem. I think in many cases I'm in lakes it's fine. I don't see where there's a problem in most lakes. But if if you have a situation where you have threatened or.

Tom Alkire [00:30:09] Are problematic fish on a river.

Tom Alkire [00:30:13] I think people should think twice about putting bait on because it's hard to do to catch and release bait as we all know. And. My feeling personally would be that we don't like treble hooks either. I think if you have single hooks whether lures or flies without bait and barbless, I think you can release fish in many cases pretty darn good. But I think bait it's it's not that way.

Tom Alkire [00:30:52] To a youngster. Well don't worry about all the gear so much. You see so much of that in advertisements and stuff they have to have. You know. Especially one right off the bat. I think, you have minimal level of gear. And have fun. I think that's that's a lot of it. I think. It's important also that the.

Tom Alkire [00:31:16] Younger person whether it's a youngster or maybe an adult getting into it is to eventually learn to discover their own fishing and not have the guide to it. And I've seen that over and over and I'm sure we all have.

Tom Alkire [00:31:28] Where the guide will row the drift boat. I have a drift boat and I know. My guide will draw will row the boat and the.

Tom Alkire [00:31:40] The client doesn't have to wade in many cases. You don't have to cast very well. And and so and who is actually catching the fish is it, is it the client or is it the guide? And I think. It's me. Maybe you get to learn some of that information but believe me the first time that the young person actually fishes is able to catch people a fish just on their own they're going to feel a lot better.

Tom Alkire [00:32:20] Oh that's a good question.

Tom Alkire [00:32:25] Read a lot. write alot

Tom Alkire [00:32:32] Obviously probably in that case going to want to go fishing. So you fish quite a bit and it's important to do that. Use a journal so you have at least the facts of different.

Tom Alkire [00:32:47] Fishing trips.

Tom Alkire [00:32:50] Just pay close attention to good writing. We have a good talk about a whole other subject on.

Tom Alkire [00:32:57] How to write things.

Tom Alkire [00:33:03] Outdoor writing is not much different than regular writing.

Tom Alkire [00:33:08] You have to have clear thinking is the first thing you're thinking. Clear Writing starts with clear thinking. And the usual type of good introduction and good body and narrative and conclusion and and and really clean up your copy. Over and over and over. If you read it treat yourself. Keep it nice and clean. If you're going to go try to find a editor and get some submissions you have to have that stuff clean. And I think that's more important always has been. Norman Maclean The would be your Montana. It would it be the River Runs Through It. I think that's just has always been stupendous. Haig-Brown his work has always been very good.

Tom Alkire [00:34:14] I like back in the old days.

Tom Alkire [00:34:17] Ted True Blood was a very good columnist for for many years.

Tom Alkire [00:34:25] Who else would I like. Well I'm a big Izaak Walton fan. In fact one of my books I have a whole chapter on Izaak Walton. You have to kind of go through the language because it's four hundred years earlier.

Tom Alkire [00:34:39] His humor and mirth about it this is just so great. So I always like his stuff. Hemingway some of his stuff is good. For fishing related in some McGuanes stuff I like a lot. He's done a very good job. Well there's a lot of them out there. I mean Dave's stuff. Dave Hughes. So yes those would be some of the ones that I like. Well.

Tom Alkire [00:35:29] Humor again is important. I think it's.

Tom Alkire [00:35:33] Humor in conversations. Good conversation good humor someone very reliable confident. I think that really helps alot.