

## herbst-edward-2017-06-26.mp4

**Edward Herbst** [00:00:13] Well perhaps I could begin at the beginning, as to how I got into fly fishing.

**James Thull** [00:00:18] That would be great.

**Edward Herbst** [00:00:19] I had always been interested in in in fishing generally, I think all young boys are, but I've been a spin fisherman and a bait fisherman and I had also been a hunter. In a very small way because I couldn't afford anything other than rough shooting.

**Edward Herbst** [00:00:39] And I had a 22 rifle. And. The parents of a friend who had a small holding where they grew oranges asked me if I could shoot some vervet monkeys which were raiding the orchards. And I agreed to that and I shot one of the monkeys and it screamed like a human being and. After that I also shot a hare which also screamed in that way. And that turned me off hunting. And then when I came to Capetown I got into fly fishing and what was a useful alternative for me in that regard, was that fly fishing allowed me to hunt. But it didn't necessitate the killing of the prey. And that, in a way, made it possibly in terms of in terms of my values and my ethics to somehow come to terms with the idea that I was of frightening. That that that I was possibly causing pain and consternation to a wild creature. And it was it was absolutely the the ideal alternative. Cape Town has a number of small very clear mountain streams, and I found in Cape Town a fraternity of Fly Fishers who were very much involved in that. I never got into damn fishing or saltwater fly fishing. I just focused entirely on on small stream fly fishing. And when Orvis brought out the first two weight, and then the one weight and then Sage brought out the naught weight I'd found my niche. It was a small fish. Ultralight fly rods. Fishing in beautiful surroundings which which which were very much comfort for the soul. And that was the essence of fly fishing for me and still is. I mean I acknowledge that there are people that are fanatical about Tarpon and bonefish and lots of people who are fanatical about carp and all the rest of it. But to me small stream fly fishing with with ultralight fly rods just ticked all the boxes for me. And we started developing our own grips and finishes and all that sort of thing in Cape Town. Working towards the ultimate small stream fly rod and the ultimate small stream fly reel and that that just made it all for me. Those surroundings. The element of of of hunting without killing. The delicacy of of the the miniscule rods what was called whisperer rods and the Australians call it tweet fishing. So that that was what made fly fishing so such an important element of my life and a form of escape. Something to constantly look forward to. And yeah it's just it's just just proved such a such as such a positive aspect of my life. And I think all of us in a primeval way, and certainly with women too, have that that that hunting instinct. And fly fishing small streams with ultra light fly rods brought it all together for me.

**James Thull** [00:04:41] That's great. About what year would it have been when you went and had the incident with the with the monkey.

**Edward Herbst** [00:04:48] We're going back 60 years 50 years. We were in this would have this would have been in the in the early 60s in the early 1960s, and I only started fly fishing when I wasn't aware of when I was in Pietermaritzburg where this happened. Was that Pietermaritzburg was very much the epicentre of the development of fly fishing in South Africa. You had people like Tom Sutcliffe, Hugh Huntley the fly fisherman South Africa's first exclusive fly fishing shop which had the Orvis enterprise, the Orvis franchise. They were all there but I wasn't aware of that. I only got into fly fishing when I came to

Capetown and found the cape piscatorial society which is very much at the heart of fly fishing in in in Cape Town. I just. My mom was widowed when I was very young and.

**Edward Herbst** [00:05:50] I don't know. I remember going to a bookshop and seeing a magazine I think it was called rod and gun. And there was an article there about one of the American presidents and how as as a child he had fished for catfish in America, and that just absolutely enthralled me. And I persuaded my mother to buy me this book this magazine. And and it just grew from there. And I was interested in hunting and I was also interested in fishing and so the American magazines like Outdoor Life, Sports and Field, Field and Stream were very much part of that growing interest. I mean Jack O'Connor all those people. And I think in in in a way through reading them it it shaped my ability with the language. And eventually I became a journalist, in a way I think through that. But my early fishing was was bait fishing and spin fishing for bass. And as I say it was only too late in life, unfortunately I was in my mid 30s when I started fly fishing and I I look at envy at the sons and daughters of Fly Fishers Who who start fly fishing just about from the cradle.

**Edward Herbst** [00:07:34] Well as I sailed on the on the hunting side obviously, Jack O'Connor. He was the the the the shooting editor for Outdoor Life. And then people like Ray Bergman. And then subsequently once I started fly fishing, well there is a host of them. There's Dave Whitlock, Lefty Kreh, Gary Borger who came up to South Africa and we had the opportunity of meeting them. They were brought out here by FASAF which is the umbrella organization the Federation of South African Fly Fishers very much akin to Trout Unlimited in America. And so we had the opportunity of meeting them and I mean it was like a young soccer player being given the opportunity of meeting Renaldo. It was just it was just. And Joan Joan Joan Whitlock was Joan Joan Wulff was was was was in that crowd. And it was. And and Lee was there. And I always remember when she gave a casting demonstration.

**Edward Herbst** [00:08:41] And you know how is this woman not much bigger than a jockey. And I mean you know she was effortlessly throwing a full fly line and I mean all these big men you know built like Bond Gores were standing there just mouths agape at her thing. So all all the all the the great American writers outdoor writers in in the 60s were part of that formative process. The people who who as I say wrote for Outdoor Life, Sports and Field, and Field and Stream. Oh.

**Edward Herbst** [00:09:28] My goodness. There are so many of them. Strangely enough, and I say it with some reticence, I read how to books. I I, everything that comes onto the market I buy. I always felt that I needed all the help I could get. And so as as the books arrive on on on the on on the market so so I buy them. I suppose if if I were to select one person who had the most profound effect on me as as a as a fly fisher and somebody keen on fly fishing with would have to be Gary Borger. I mean he is the ultimate hard to exponent of it. You know you you buy his books and you really don't have to buy by any others. But Dave Whitlock, Lefty Kreh all the American all the American American anglers. I mean Whitlock Whitlock changed my life. I, our little rocky streams which are very rarely more than thigh deep. Everybody fish dry fly. But there were days when.

**Edward Herbst** [00:10:54] The fish simply weren't moving and I was told that under such extreme circumstances you you had to, you had to use the nymphs. I went to all the senior people in the Cape Piscatorial society who are known to be quite good nymph fishermen and I said well how does it work? And they said very simple, you just put this peasant tail nymph on and you you watch the tip of your fly line. And when it moves you strike. And I tried that and it simply didn't work. I mean the line tok never moved or certainly not so that

I could see it. And then I read Whitlock and his striped indicator ideas. And what he did was that he simply moved the strike indicator closer to the fly. So the tape was more easily signaled and I thought. No no I can do better than Whitlock. So what and he used to put a little piece of a bright red fly line on his leader. So I used some yellow string about a meter from the fly and I threaded the red bit of fly line onto that yellow string and then on either side of the fly the bit of fly line on I colored with with a black permanent marker. And I'll never forget. I mean it'll live with me as one of my most profound memories. There's a big deep pool on a stream above an hour and a half from Cape Town called "donker gat" which is Afrikaans for dark hole. And I figured well let's try. And I threw my new high tech strike indicator out and I was watching it and suddenly it slowed down and everything seemed to go into slow motion and it took a second or two to dawn on me that.

**Edward Herbst** [00:12:57] Perhaps it was a fish there. Perhaps this was what it was all about. And I struck and I had a trout on and that was my first trout caught on and off. Thank you Dave Whitlock. And I mean I never looked back. And after that I started working not so much with nymphs with something terrestrials.

**Edward Herbst** [00:13:22] Oh Schwiebert I have to talk about Schwiebert. Oh my goodness. I'm the most dogged collection of the book in my I've got hundreds of fly fishing books and fly tying books but the one which is probably the most dogged eared is Schwiebert's Trout. I mean it was all there. It was an encyclopedia Britannica of fly fishing.

**Edward Herbst** [00:13:43] You didn't need anything else. I mean he was he was just he was just. One hesitates to use the word genius but he was so multifaceted. I mean he was an artist. He was an historian. He was a writer and he wrote so beautifully. So Schwiebert very definitely there in my pantheon of of of of heroes. And Schwiebert and wrote one of his most beautiful chapters was about sunken sunken terrestrials. And whistles lacquered sunken ants and so I started using those to great effect because.

**Edward Herbst** [00:14:29] In the streams there on Cape Town they quite narrow and they quite bushed in. So there's quite a lot of drop in there. And I started using sunken beetles and sunken ants and I think I very much pioneered that idea here that it didn't have to be a mayfly nymph imitation it could be a sunken beetle. Although that that came to me pretty much from from from the British idea because they were they were they were fishing coch-y-bonddus and that sort of thing as as as sunken terrestrials and the same sort of thing was happening in Australia. So so so so those were very much my my my formative influences.

**Edward Herbst** [00:15:22] That's like asking what are the values of museums generally. I mean they... they beyond calculating, really. They say you you won't understand the present will be able to to cope with a future unless you understand the past and museums are very much part of that. I mean I I've I know I know for example at the Catskill Museum and the American Museum of Fly Fishing. And I've always revered that sort of institution and and and and what they do because to me to be able to stand surrounded by the work of the pioneers is is, oh man. It gives you goose pimples! So I remember once I did they did some medieval Bibles in libraries in Cape Town. And as a television news reporter I did a news insert on some of those books and to to hold a book like that with it's vellum pages and it's beautiful art and to think that a thousand years ago, a monk in medieval England was was holding this book and making it I mean that that's awesome. That's awesome. And to know that that early material is safe somewhere. And is being added to. So that 100 years from now people can enjoy and appreciate and benefit from the fly fishing writing that is being done now. That's very comforting. The- one of my great

regrets is that I never got to fish the mountain streams of Natal. And there are many of them many many many which people are very rarely fished because they need a hike in of over an hour or two.

**Edward Herbst** [00:18:09] My favorite streams are one or two here in Cape Town or near Cape Town within an hour's drive of Cape Town. And then our own little version of Montana is the mountain escarpment in the Eastern Cape. Specifically centered around the town of Rhodes. And there are lots of lovely little streams up there and very demanding, shallow, clear.

**Edward Herbst** [00:18:41] Spooky fish require all of those hunting instincts. The stalking blending into the background. So my favorite streams would be those in Rhodes and those in Cape Town. I don't have one that stands out. They all stand out. Well that that's very much an individual and a subjective perception. There are people who are fanatically opposed to Trout. They described them as the equivalent of starlings and all the other things. Because of our colonial history, we have all sorts of things. We had starlings brought in. We had squirrels brought in by people Britishers who are homesick quite frankly. They just wanted to to to to to be surrounded by familiar things. And trout were brought in in some measure to provide to provide sport and to provide food. And I think also because of that homesickness thing and it was it was it was very very difficult initially until they found a method of using ice and moss on ships to keep the eggs alive until they got here. And the first two efforts were not successful and then eventually they got there was successfully bred Trout in Natal. And from there it spread. I I if one looks specifically at the diet of South Africans it is comprised in huge measure of foods which came here. When the first settlers arrived in Cape Town, they very quickly denuded the forests. And then eventually they started planting wattles and gums and all of those things which had a detrimental effect but which in terms of wattles provided the poles which were used in mining. So there are always spinoffs. There's a huge debate in South Africa at the moment about whether colonialism had any benefits. From my point of view particularly in terms of invasive species and one of the people that you talked to is Duncan Brown who wrote a book about this. I.

**Edward Herbst** [00:21:29] There there is no coherent body of evidence which shows that trouts have had a massively detrimental effect on indigenous species. Bass, yes. Because until in our experience until trout get to about a kilogram about two pounds they are insectivorous. Bass breed far more often than indigenous fish. So they've had a very detrimental effect. But South Africa is a hot arid country. Trout need cold high altitude water so geographically they're very very confined. Just a few a few high mountain areas. And we I see them specifically like a canary in the coal mine. If the Trout is there, the system is healthy. If they're gone then then you'd have you have problems. And my sense is that overwhelmingly they have they have been beneficial in environmental terms. That could be disputed by the people who who who want to return us to a sort of pristine Garden of Eden situation. But if one looks at the role in terms of, and Duncan Brown can can can speak more of evocatively on that, if one looks at the role just in terms of the benefits of property prices, where trout streams are, property prices are high. So that's being pushed up in terms of tourism, very few people come to South Africa for fly fishing. And I remember when Gary Borger and the FASAF guys came out here and we took them to one of our streams and they said well this is exactly what we've got 10 minutes from my home. But I said that's all we've got. And we value that that. So we don't know what was there a hundred years ago. And we just have to to to to to benefit from what we have. So my sense overwhelmingly is that the ecological impact of trout was minimal. We find indigenous minnows coexisting with trout in all our mountain

streams. They certainly haven't been eradicated. There's no evidence that trout have eradicated any single indigenous minnow species. So my sense is that the introduction has been overwhelmingly positive. And the environmental threat is unproven. Well a climate change, as I've said South Africa is a hot arid country with very very limited water supplies. So whether we'll still have trout in half a century from now. I got to tell you as a story which I think quite vividly illustrates this point. Tom Sutcliffe, who you will meet, he had a slide of a trout in water that was so clear that it looked as though it was hovering in midair. And this he said had been in a little tributary of a river called the Hex, the Witches River, and the tributary was called the amandel which is Afrikaans for almond. And that slide haunted me. I had to go to that place. And the question was how to get there because it was in a river valley which is overwhelmingly devoted to wine farming. And eventually through a friend.

**Edward Herbst** [00:26:03] I was given the name of a farmer who farmed in that valley. And I said, Tom we, I phoned the guy and he said you're welcome to come out and I'll take you to the almond tributary of the witch River; amandel tributary of the Hex. So we went and we had tea with him and he duly drove us down and he, there was a fence and a vineyard and he said on the other side of that vineyard is the tributary. We got there and there was just a dry watercourse, bone dry bone dry. And Tom looked at his his eyes got this size he says that's the rock that I took the photograph from. It was a huge rock about the size of a of a Whitney house or something like that. And we went down and we had a look and this little stream, which existed much higher up in the mountains, but where it had run through the vineyards it had been drained by irrigation. Nothing existed there anymore. And that is one of the threats that we have to it is agriculture and irrigation. The biggest the biggest threat we have is is mining. We we have a government which is becoming renowned for corruption. And mining licences are being granted to companies linked to politicians. Without them even remotely complying with the water regulations because mines are very very water demanding. And I think you're finding with fracking in the United States that that it can have a detrimental effect on on river populations. And so that's one of the biggest threats. The other threat is that it's it's a very politically loaded thing and I'm I'm a writer. I write about politics is that we don't really have in in Africa an ethos of preventative maintenance. In the northern hemisphere, if you didn't make provision for winter, you didn't survive. So preventative maintenance was very much part of the fabric of life. I think in the far more gentle climate of Africa that wasn't so important. And so what we are finding and I wrote an article about it recently, is that the wastewater treatment plants are simply collapsing. And what is happening is that that raw sewage is just being diverted straight into the nearest water course. So those are the threats pollution threats essentially, climate change there is nothing we can do about really any concrete and tangible way. But the fly fishing community as in the USA is very much alive to those threats, particularly the threats from pollution mining and all the rest of it. And they're very much an example that we aspire to follow and follow. So pollution in substantial measure mostly from mining. And I mean mines of coal mines are just been willy nilly. Springing up all over the all over the place. In South Africa, the prevailing ethos and value system is that whatever's in the ground belongs to the state. And that the state simply grants mining licenses and when they arrive on your farm to start exploring for uranium that's it. So said I think the major threat to to trout streams is is is mining. The second biggest threat by far substantial is invasive alien vegetation, most specifically black wattle. Crack Willow, *Salix × fragilis*, and eucalyptus. And the crack Willow is introduced in the 1920s in South Africa too in the hopes of starting a basket weaving industry. Just as wattle was introduced for the mining industry. And it just spread up our mountain water courses like a plague. And those that alien and invasive plant species like wattle and crack willow are playing a huge role in simply drawing up our mountain watercourses. We have a program called Working

for Water where poor people are paid to go into those mountain areas and to ring bark or to cut down those trees and I've been told by the working water people that literally within a day of them removing that alien vegetation, little dry watercourses the water starts flowing again. Because each of those eucalyptus trees or wattle trees is like a little windmill it's sucking water out of the ground. So alien vegetation, in small measure predatory fish like the bass but most specifically mining.

**Edward Herbst** [00:32:18] It speaks for itself that that's the nature of human beings. I mean who who cares about what's happening 100 years from now. You you care about the next generation you care about your children and and and your grandchildren. But for the rest you do what you have to do to survive and to prosper. And if that means setting up a coal mine and in a mountain catchment area, the incentive to do so is is is is quite strong. I mean one of the biggest threats obviously is population growth. And you're not going to curb that instinct. So say yes emphatically absolutely emphatically. What is comforting in a small ways is that due to the growth of mass communication and to simply the evolution of human beings towards the greater good. We are becoming increasingly aware of that through scientific research. But you're never going to, you know you're always be in combat with the profiteers. Emphatically. I mean that the shock troops of of of that movement and what I would say here without wishing to denigrate any of the other angling disciplines is that emphatically fly fisherman by far have taken the lead in raising the alarms about threats specifically to mountain catchment areas. Because that directly impacted on our love of of trout and fly fishing. And the Cape Piscatorial Society has has has done that emphatically. We we've raised the alarm again and again and myself as a media person I play this small but not insignificant role in making those issues parts of evening news bulletins.

**Edward Herbst** [00:34:48] I did a program for example on a television news insert on where farmers had bulldozed a section of a of a mountain stream, because what was happening was that in winter our flood season we're a Mediterranean climate. The water was coming down and damaging a weir so to to to dissipate that energy they simply flattened the river for about two miles upstream and just turned it into a broad sort of basin. And the water temperatures went up and I did a program on that. I did another program about, and this was in in the apartheid days in the days of the National Party, where they were going to put out a resort, a holiday resort, right at the top of the mountain catchment area and it was going to have Olympic swimming pools and and. The measures that they were going to put in place to get the sewage out of there were quite bizarre. A pipe that would go over the mountain and I did a program on that and it was halted right there. So I think I think fly fishers in South Africa are very much in the vanguard of alerting the general public to the threats which occur in mountain catchment areas. Emphatically emphatically. I mean as I said I I I don't read a lot of Geirach but I do read a lot of Schwiebert a lot of a lot of Gary Borger. And and that was was, that was what made me a better angler was reading about the techniques that that that that would make me catch more fish. Simply put I one of the people who came out here was with Karl Krivanec, one of the chicks who who wrote the first book on Chick Nymphing, and I hit he'd had it translated into into English not very well so I helped him rewrite that. And my role as somebody who read voraciously about new angling techniques was to pull all those threads together and to say in Australia they used blue wire instead of copper wire and as a consequence of that the efficacy of the nymph went up. And to bring that to the attention of of what was happening there. So to pull these little threads together put them into a coherent whole and say to South Africans this is a compendium of techniques or ideas which have proved successful elsewhere. So so I never saw it as research but I suppose in a way it was. I was I was voraciously reading how-to books and in and then passing that information onto to the

readers of the magazine that I edited and the magazines that I wrote for. Oh emphatically emphatically. In South Africa there's huge pressure to to to to change the demographics of fly fishing. There's nothing that bars, we we've never had in the Cape Piscatorial Society and we've never had a bar on people of color. Ever. Anybody who came along and paid his fee to join was welcome to participate in the programs that we had and and to to to to benefit from from what we provided in our administration of local streams.

**James Thull** [00:38:59] Was that even prior post pre-apartheid.

**Edward Herbst** [00:39:03] Yes one of our very significant politicians is a guy called, he's a business magnet as well, a guy called Cyril Ramaphosa. And he from quite early in his adult life became enamored of fly fishing. And when the African National Congress came to power in our change to a democratic universal franchise system, he phoned the Cape Piscatorial society. He asked his secretary to phone and the first question was do you bar black people. And we said no no not at all. Whether we do enough to encourage, we could always do more. But there are numerous programs. We have black fly fishing guides who who specifically benefited from programs that fly fishers put in place to to communicate those those ideals. And they now earn their living through initiatives which were specifically started within the fly fishing community to change those demographics for the better. I mean you have you have so many wonderful women fly fishers. Inspirational.

**Edward Herbst** [00:40:36] Women fly fishes in the United States. We have them here. You will meet Charlotte Burkett one of these who sees these very strongly advocated, and we are finding that through competition fly fishing more women are coming in. Too little too late and not enough being done. But but the spirit is willing. We trace our origins to 1906 when we had a different name. And all of that changed just after World War 2, when a British guy called AC Harrison came to South Africa. And he by profession was a typewriter repairer. That he started the Cape Piscatorial Society and got premises in Cape Town offices which he would use to do his typewriter repair. But at the same time he started doing research on trout species and all the rest of it. He was eventually given an honorary doctorate by the University of Cape Town. And he laid the foundation for the Cape Piscatorial Society. He started its magazine, the Skater, which initially came out three times a year and then eventually once a year because it just became too expensive to produce. And I sort of took that over shortly after he died. But he was the singular role in starting an organization which catered for fly fishers, not just for Club for for society members or club members but for visiting anglers as well. And we were given administrative control of the trout streams because what we were finding was that very often you'd get to the stream and there'd be spin fishers and all of that. So we had a meeting with the local government environmental conservation organisation which was called Cape Nature Conservation in those days. We had a meeting with all the the angling disciplines and the carp fishermen and they used to have a thing called freshwater forum and once a quarter the anglers from all disciplines would get together and talk about mutual concerns. And at one of those meetings we asked whether the traditional fly fishing streams could be confined to fly fishing because the guys who fished for bass or the guys who fished for catfish they had hundreds of dams hundreds of kilometres of water and we just had a few kilometres of trout streams and that was agreed to. So the Cape Piscatorial Society took over the administration of the local trout streams. And you you join and you buy a season ticket and then you book a beat. More or less secure in the knowledge that when you go there you will have two or three kilometres of water which will be confined to your use for that for that day. And that's the role we play. We we we do all sorts of things in in promoting fly fishing. We have a very strong youth group which participates in

particularly in competition fly fishing. We have regular meetings of what we call the vice squad which is where the top fly tyers in Cape Town.

**Edward Herbst** [00:44:49] Come along and tie their flies and everybody watches. So the Cape Piscatorial Society plays a hugely positive role and has for decades almost half a century. Played a positive role in promoting fly fishing, assisting fly fishers in Cape Town including visiting fly fishers. We have a website, and anybody visiting Cape Town would be well advised to go onto that website to meet local members of the fraternity and and they'll find that they're very much part of the Brotherhood which would be very happy to assist them when they come here. I don't know that we that we have.

**Edward Herbst** [00:45:50] Anything that other countries don't have. Americans are just blessed with such an extraordinary variety of fly fishing. We have a similar variety because most of the species that American fly fishers. Well certainly not bone fish or tarpon or anything like that. But certainly we have good middling average saltwater fly fishing. We have mountain streams we have bass so we have most of the species here that Americans are familiar with. And while it not might not might not be on a par with some of the blue ribbon streams that are famous in America, they're what we have and what we tried to conserve and they certainly give us much pleasure I'm sure as Americans find it in their home waters. (Africans).

**Edward Herbst** [00:46:49] As i say I think much like people in other British colonies like Australia and New Zealand although we based much of our early angling efforts a century ago on the British experience on Hardy on Salmon flies, on.

**Edward Herbst** [00:48:33] The way the British at the time were fishing. We have, just as the Poles and the Czechs have, evolved our own systems to cater for our own local needs and in a way I think we've in small measure pushed the boundaries particularly in terms of of technique and tackle. And evolved those techniques to the general benefit of of of angling. So it's all part of a very rich tapestry which is specifically in Europe goes back back hundreds of years. And I don't think we're any different from Giuliano Burners or Isaac Walton. We're just in in fly fishing terms we're just products of our time. But I think part of a very gentle pastime and one which which which which is in haunts humankind's evolution.

**James Thull** [00:49:46] And that's wonderful. Thanks so much and thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I love the painting behind you there.

**Edward Herbst** [00:49:52] There's another one over there.

**Edward Herbst** [00:49:56] That sort of tells you a little bit about our little little mountain streams that was taken from a photograph. A friend of mine painted that. Yeah. It uh it tells you very much about what our little mountain streams are. Very shallow very clear very rocky. And ya, yeah.