

mccafferty-keith-2017-04-20.mp4

Kieth Mccafferty [00:00:10] Yeah. I'll preface that. You know as a writer I've tried to put it into words many times. You know what fishing means to me. And I remember something. When I was growing up my favorite fishing writer was Al McClane. And in one of his books he wrote something about a mountain is a fact. Trout is a moment of poetry that only the angler can see and so I'll start this if you don't mind. Just read you two paragraphs of something that I wrote trying to figure out what fishing means to me and then I'll tell you a story.

James Thull [00:00:47] Please do.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:00:48] So. This is a chapter called The Kiss of death. And this is from my fourth book Crazy Mountain Kiss.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:01:00] People fish for different reasons. They fish to shed the cataracts of age to relive the thrill. That was the dancing of a bobber as a sunfish snip the worm and that 30 years later is heartened by the rising trout to a may fly. They fish because of cast is a prayer for the believer and a hope for the heathen and the more Casts you make the more likely your prayer will be answered your hope be realized. And they fish because a fish is a miracle of nature. It fins as wondrous as the wings of a bird and because you can touch the one but not the other. Though he could not have expressed it if asked the question and there was no one around to ask along the stretch of the Madison he drove to the next morning. Sean Stranahan fished for where a series of moments the wings of caddis flies pulsed over the river like dust motes and shafts of sunlight one strandahans imitation vanished in a swirl that was one moment. Another came when the trout leapt and the third when the leader Tippet snapped. Stranahan and waded to the bank and sat down consoling himself with the thought that a fish lost. There's still a moment caught of a hollow feeling that as counterpoint to the elation upon netting the fish remains an essential touchstone of the sport where so he told himself the trout will make a philosopher out of you especially a big one. So in this series of mystery books I write.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:02:34] Angling allows me to write two or three little short fishing scenes a book and sometimes I write something like that trying to see what it means to me. So when you ask when you ask this question we know what story we start thinking well you know I should just see what comes to mind quickest and I can remember when I was much younger adult and I was sort of caught in that swirl of life after you get married and you have children in your life sort of almost spinning out of control. And it was fall and I drove up into Canada having never caught a steelhead before. He's not on fly and I drove two days to the Morice River which is a tributary of the great Bulkley River. And I was sick the entire drive up. I had a fever and I never stopped driving for two days until I got to the bank of that river and I didn't even know how to fish for steelhead. I didn't know you could swim a fly and catch a steelhead. All I knew was you could drop a fly down and maybe a fish would eat it and purple was a good color. So I had a purple fly and I just kept doing this with it and walking down the bank and I saw this huge silver boil and it's like Oh my God that's got to be a steelhead. And I didn't hook it but an hour later I hooked a big Steelhead and I caught it and I can remember you know thinking oh my gosh you know the great circle that that fish has made through the you know through the oceans to be able to come back and I'm able to see that far staring I can touch it if only for a moment. And it took me like completely out of myself. And so I made my camp right there on the on the river to a place called Buy Mark. And I could see it that night I could see the northern lights through the wall of the tent. And so I got out and I climbed on top of the hood of my truck

so I could see it better. And that was like this instant moment of wonder and calm. And to me that that sort of epitomized what fishing could do for you almost have sort of a healing way. And that was that was the first story that came to mind and then I thought well there's one other story which I think is important. Which is when I took my son Tom fishing for salmon on a little coastal river in Washington fishing with bait you know which is basically Roe. And I said I didn't know what I was doing I was a fly fishing. I think you do it like this and I flip the the spinning right and you flip that and flipped it in and it went by about a 35.

Kieth McCafferty [00:05:27] King ate it and jumped out of the water eight feet from the bank and I looked around to find Tom and he had backed up like 20 feet and he said he couldn't have been more than eight or nine years old. He said we're going to need a bigger rod. I'll never forget that. And then he he fished and he hooked a giant King Salmon himself. Two days later after fishing at least eight hours for it he lost it. But it's like well what a wonderful sort of moment a wonderful for a kid. And he still remembers. Anyway those are two of the things that came to mind when you ask. No. Yeah. Sure. My. I think there's something about that Bobber sort of dancing on the surface of the water whether you're fishing for perch or blue gill or any kind of some fish that does something to a young kid. So exciting. Did you see that little wiggle in the bobber. And as I told you I know I used to make my son get up at 5:00 in the morning to go bass fishing because if he could cast that rapala lure while there were still smoke on the water we could catch bass or Pike which were big fish by comparison. But that really didn't mean as much to him as fishing. Later in the day and just watching that dance. So you know you had a question later on. And how do we get younger people are the people involved. Well if I was gonna get kids involved that's certainly the way I want to do it. I wouldn't want to make them try to catch fish with the fly right at the beginning anyway.

Kieth McCafferty [00:07:14] Well I think it's a place of record. So it's it's interesting. It is largely in the historical sense. I think we can look back upon those papers and see what the world was like at that time and our values changed. And how our fisheries have changed and how our environment has changed. Not always thought well you know hunters and fishermen are the original storytellers. If you go back to the caves in Europe you know the rock art in the walls often involves hunting and fishing. Now I used to say well you know we were the fishermen were the first liars you know. I could always envision some cave man you know using blood or a charred stick to put a picture on the wall of him you know killing a grizzly bear with a spear or catching a great fish and his wife running around and around like that character in the Princess Bride miracle Max's wife saying liar liar. They thought well you know we don't have that anymore. We still do have pictograms but but now we have paper and and our history can be erased if we don't. If we don't keep track of it in the way that you do in it it can give people a sense of the world by just capturing the environment and the opportunities we had which may be drastically different years down the road and may shape their opinions of the world and what they can do to change it.

Kieth McCafferty [00:08:57] Well I wrote down generosity. No complaining a shared sense of wonder and adventure and no problem going the extra mile. I've always been drawn to the most difficult kinds of fishing and hunting. You know like I was the designated backpack elk Hunter writer for field and stream magazine became the dedicated steelhead fisherman because it was always the hardest things. So I enjoy being with like minded people that way but maybe say something. I think a lot of people don't don't talk about it. I think you know human beings are by nature very competitive and fishermen if anything are more so. And that's one reason and I don't think I'm immune from it. So I think there's one reason I really like to fish alone a lot of the time. So there's no distractions in that regard.

And what that ultimately means to me are the fishing companions I choose are the people who I would rather see catch a fish than me and that would include my son my daughter my brother and just really a few close friends and and the more important thing to me than even the fishing is who who do you want to sit around the fire with later. Because to me fishing and camping are what I do. And so to me the best my best companions are those I want to share the fire with maybe even more so than. My dad my dad was a locomotive engineer for the Pennsylvania Railroad train Steubenville Ohio and Appalachia basically. And he would take five five weeks each summer and we would drive to Northern Michigan not the upper peninsula but the northern part of the lower peninsula and camp on the Au Sable river and fish for trout and we fished in other rivers too. But that's really what holds my memories. Not without him. And he had no father anybody to guide him. He just became interested on its own. I have no idea. I was always interested. I think I would be as I was always interested in the outdoors. I was fascinated by snakes from a very young age from the age of four say three or four and snakes came to mean the world to me. And they taught me some things at first that taught me that adults don't know everything because I was at an age where people look up to adults as knowing stuff and although my father knew a little about snakes and was and did not persecute them he didn't know much. So in order to learn about snakes I had to teach myself how to read. So by the time I was four years old I was reading and by the time I enter kindergarten I can remember the the teacher being flabbergasted that I could not only read but I could I could write down the Latin names I could read and write and I could write down the Latin names of all two hundred thirty some snake species

Kieth Mccafferty [00:12:20] So to me the snake was always something that was hidden. You had to find it. It was a secret. And for me fishing has always been the same way. You've got that mirror of water and what's underneath it is a secret. And it's there for you to find if you're you know if you're willing to take the time to do it. Just before I came here I work at a coffee shop downtown and I was walking back to the galligator trail and it crosses little arms of Bozeman creek like three different places. Each one of those places has fish that I know individually. And how many hundreds of people go down that trail every day. I don't know if it's going to be three or four hundred and I have never once seen anybody look at the fish to the fish are my secret there. And I feel like it's good luck if I see them You know I know exactly where they are. I even go down and sneak down and put rocks in the river to make them better habitat. But nobody knows. They're like just a little secret anyway. For what it's worth I think trout fishing is a little bit the same. And I think that's why I ended up writing mystery books because that also was a sort of a search for the truth. And I have always been facinated by that aspect. Because I was a liar by nature. No fun. I was fascinated by snakes all my life. Caught snakes all over the world. In India once I can remember going inside a temple is supposed to be almost as old as the pyramids. And there was a big big about a ten foot Indian Python curled in there.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:14:05] And you know in any other place in the world I would have gone in and I would caught that snake and probably been bit and big pythons. They hurt when they bite and they got big hooked teeth but I would've done that just to get it out. And put it somewhere where it wouldn't come to harm. But because I was in India and there's such a reverence for life in many places I realized that that snake had nothing to fear from the people who would see it anyway. So when I was in school at Duke University in College I my professor and in herpetology could could have gotten me a job at the Smithsonian Institute. And I realized you know I'd be working with pickled snakes I'd be lucky to get into the field. And the truth was I wanted to be a writer not a herpetologist. I also one point thought I wanted to be a fisheries biologist because I loved fishing. And it's interesting the how just meeting one person or one more moment can change everything. I

had had applied to for a master's program in fisheries biology at the University of Michigan and I was accepted and I went to see the head of the department who wanted me to get started on the thesis right away and want me to go to Michigan's biological station up near Wellston which you might be familiar with but so you go across the street and talk to Mark Paddock because he's in charge of the Biological Station and he can maybe help you get started. So I went there and I talked to Mark Paddock and I sat down with somebody I'd never met before and after 15 minutes he said you don't want to be a fisheries biologist you know you want to be a writer you go across the street and meet Charles Eisendrath at the head of our master's degree in journalism department and he's an old time magazine bureau chief from London Buenos Aires several other places Paris and I met Charles and he accepted me as one of his master's students in journalism and I had to make a choice and I chose journalism and eventually traded that for for fiction became a liar I had always meant to be.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:16:40] Know in a sense that you're observant. You know it's like I always see the deer the elk passing down the highway that nobody else in the car sees because I'm looking for it near the end. I also pick up a lot of change from the streets because my eyes are always down on the feet because I look for snakes all my life. So I always find find stuff. But does that make me a better fisherman. I don't know. I've known a lot of really good fishermen and they seem to come from all walks of life. And I think you know I think you don't fact find your passion I think your passion finds you and that you can be a very good fisherman regardless of your circumstances. I do think that being a writer I maybe see the whole picture more because I write about the whole picture. And I did that for a living for a long time for Field and Stream and other magazines. I Always like Sparse Grey Hackle you know I wrote that book for fishing days angling nights or whatever. There's not a fish caught in the whole book. So I was sort of the master of writing a story for field and stream which nobody got a fish. Nobody shot an elk. So it was sort of a necessity for me to be able to write about all the other aspects to think and you know one way. So it's a goofy way to think about it.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:18:13] You know I just tell people it's like it was like riding around the world on a broom. Except the fly rod was my broom They were golden years a magazine writing not the early golden years of the 20s and 30s but later when I could write my ticket I could go anywhere in the world for 365 days a year if I wanted to. But I had children and so I soon became known as the person who wrote narratives about you know fishing with family and close friends. But I still did get to travel quite a bit. You know Alaska Central America Cuba. I was recently in Cuba on a story for assignment for a Field Stream for the cover story of the June issue last year. They just asked me to write about my reminisces in Michigan and to go back and visit there. But I think the greatest trip I ever took was to India where I know youve been to to fish for the great golden masher in the mountainous tributaries of the Ganges River. Specifically the Mother Kali where the great the great golden mahseer migrate up into the high Himalayas to the during the monsoon season to spawn and then come back down.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:19:31] So you fish for them in spring and fall. And my hero growing up my two heroes. One was Al McClane fishing editor at Field and Stream but the other was Jim Corbett who wrote Man-Eaters of Kumaon and other books about man eating tigers. I thought he lived the greatest life of adventure. Not only that he wrote about it and that was one of the places that he wrote about extensively was fishing for Golden mahseer where the Ladhiya River meets the Mahakali, and that's where he hunted several of his man eating tigers and I wanted to go there to report about to write about Jim Corbett to report about the status of the Tiger today in those areas because he was really the first

person in India to draw attention to the fact that tigers were disappearing and he probably did more than anybody except Indira Gandhi in saving the tiger in India. But you go there today the schoolchildren still sing songs in his names and put on plays and so I was able to do that and my wife kept encouraging me to go and I kept saying No I can't go its India. It's all changed. I'll be disappointed. And then you find out that it hasn't changed. It hasn't changed at all in 100 years. If anything there's fewer people living there because now so many people have left those high altitude villages to try to go to the big cities to find work because a television there might be one TV in a village and people will travel from 20 or 30 miles and they'll see that TV and they'll see Indians.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:21:08] Middle class and upper class who have money. Why can't I have that. And you can't tell them to would be better and better off being poor in the mountains than they are being poor in the slums of Delhi you can't blame it as a result a lot of those places where Jim Corbett was or very little changed today very little changed. Well my wife is a newspaper reporter and I was at one point a newspaper reporter myself. So I see it as a tragic loss. I do. I'm not I'm really not the person to ask that question. I don't know what the future holds. There will be alternative sources of news it may be better than some. What we're seeing today. I was never really suited to be a serious journalist. I was for a while. But you have to understand that you know as a writer I knew what I wanted to be when I was seven or eight years old. I was one of those lucky people. Who. You. Know. I wanted to be a writer and I not only wanted to be a writer I know exactly what kind of writer I want to be. I wanted to take Al McClane's job as a fishing editor of Field and Stream magazine. I used to collect his articles I still have them and still have them cut out boxes. And I was gonna do that. I was going to I had a dream I was going to meet Al McClane I was going to impress him I was going to marry his daughter he was about my age and a beautiful girl from the photographs. And I was going to take his job as fishing editor for field and stream.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:22:55] Oh how can I how can I impress Al McClane. Well he could do something that very few people could do. He could take a 90 foot fly like and cast the entire flight line without a rod just with his hands I only learned how to do it so I learned how to do that. I was one of a handful of people in this country if that who could cast 90 feet without a rod and. And I was actually set to meet Al Mclane. He was like at that point the editor emirates of Field and Stream and he didn't write a whole lot any more but he would spend his summers in Ennis little cabin by the river. And I had never met him but I had made his introduction through mail and on the phone because we were we both worked for a field and stream and it was supposed to meet him in June he died unexpectedly in December. And so I never I never met Al McClane I never impressed him. I never married his daughter. I never took his place as a fishing editor for field and stream but I came close. I wrote it in the end somewhere around fifteen hundred articles for Field and Stream magazine. I have one issue I have seven or eight articles and I think in February 2007 that all have my name on them. In fact when I when I started to write fiction novels I had to come up with the lead character's name. I used Sean Stranahan and because that was the nom de plume that I used to use because in the old days of Field and Stream and other magazines if you had more than one or two articles in the same issue they'd want you to write the third one under a pseudonym for Field and Stream. I could have as many as eight articles in one magazine so I could do that. So I had no problem finding a name for my character when I eventually became writing fiction. Well I got a lot of concerns.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:25:01] You know it concerns everybody has pollution you know stalemated politics I don't think we address the problems and where our government is so

reluctant to engage that we've changed a lot. I knew Jim Range Jim Range was Howard Baker's right hand man and Howard Baker had the ear of Richard Nixon and so Jim Range was a father clean water because he whispered in Howard Baker ear who whispered in Richard Nixon ear they got things done and they worked across the aisles to do that. And in our current political climate we just we just don't do that so it's very very concerning to me. I don't know what the answer is I think that the answer would be forced upon us and. We'll be too late. I don't really know. I mean I was forced into becoming a political person because I had an interest in the outdoors and what was happening what was happening to it. And I tried to incorporate that into my writing some sometimes without beating people over the head with it. Because the biggest problem we face so I don't I don't really have the answer to it. The answer of course is the real answer is to get our kids involved but that you know we face dwindling numbers as hunters and fishermen across this country. Just now they're you know we're going to women are going to be allowed to wear pink vests to go hunting instead of blaze orange as a way to get more women involved. And in fact we do have more women women involved than we used to. But it takes more than that and we live in an age when it's hard to get kids outside. It's hard you know it's hard to get and get kids out the front door to play football but it can't really get kids out the back door to go hunt snakes catch snakes or to go fishing in the streams. And so I sort of you know I sort of feel like we're we we sort of have to bring our kids into that because once we do they'll they'll see the value there. Hopefully so I don't feel it's all doom and gloom but it does concern me that so many young people today have no interest in what we do. I really don't know what the answer to that. Well let's. That legislation can be dismantled in every administration that comes in. Can. Where a lot of laws can change.

Kieth McCafferty [00:28:18] You know so I don't really know how to answer that. I mean obviously we have to get more involved but we are dwindling numbers of our own participants. And sometimes it might takes something drastic to shake people up and then we have to hope we still have time to do something. Well it is very important you know I grew up in a in an age of secrets when you wanted to keep the best fishing places to yourselves and you know everything. Was a secret now. It's sort of the opposite. You have to you have to talk openly about places because you have to. The threat to them. You have to bring that to the fore so that people understand what we're facing. I don't really know the answer I'm not really that political person or I wasn't until I got married and married a very political person. Well my favorite far and away was Al McClane who is the fishing editor of field and stream for many many years. I wanted to marry his daughter become his son in law and take his job Field and Stream and I never did. But I came close in the sense that I ended up having a long long career at field and Stream and still write for them. So he meant more. You know I think that people who mean something to you when you're a teenager or when you're young are more important than the people you read when you're older. And for me that person was Al McClane and there were other people of that generation like or even somebody like Ernest Schwiebert who today I think you know sometimes I think well it's prose is very overblown this and that the other but that really doesn't matter. What matters is what importance it had for you when you were sort of in development yourself as a fisherman or just as a person so far and away. Al McClane was the most great influence on my life. The truth is I don't read all a lot of stuff that has a lot to do with fishing or hunting. I like people who talk about it sort of an incidental way you know Ernest Hemingway's big two hearted River. He didn't write about fishing. He wrote about fishing as you know. I didn't know that what he was writing about was the war. All I knew it was a good fishing story. And so I liked that you know and you know I became a writer myself and in a way that sort of substitutes for it. And you know I'm not I don't know. The truth is I have a hard time reading anymore. I have sort of a reading disability and I can read out loud to my wife at night but I can do very little reading on my own straight

through. I'm one of those people I take a book and I open it at random and read a sentence or two and then pages Just read a sentence or two. And you know after four or five days I've read the whole book. You can't find a sentence I haven't read that I haven't read him in any particular order and they don't make any sense. So reading short pieces like magazine articles was always important to me because I could get through them. So I did.

Kieth McCafferty [00:31:58] I did a lot of reading about fishing when I was younger. And like I said Al McClane was my boyhood hero. He's the guy I wanted to emulate. What has changed everything has changed. I don't think people who fish for it. Well we're talking about salmonoids know how good they have in a sense. You know I'm one of those people who grew up where every time you step in the river here your wader tore up better. We have much better gear but you know fishing itself is is undergone great changes. You know I grew up as a trout fisherman and a fisherman for small mouth bass and in the creeks of Ohio and West Virginia and a lot of the places I fish are. Not as productive today or people act as if they are but if you lived in that time they aren't we live in a time where there's great threat to our to our to our fisheries and our and our fishing habitats. And I think the fishing itself has changed it's become much more competitive in nature and with a reliance on numbers. And I think though a lot of the things that made fishing wonderful were this was the sense of discovery about it all. You know I think a lot of that is lost today. The average length of our vacations has shrunk and we're an acquisitive society and people want immediate results. So they hire guides to do all the fishing for them and they end and they make the cast and they strike the trout. That's about it. You know I grew up in an age where all the things that lead up to that were the most important parts of it to me and that's still there.

Kieth McCafferty [00:34:04] You can still find it. But you know it's changed something. Sometimes I want to go back to the old ways. That's why people often travel overseas to find sort of untouched fishing paradises which are in short supply these days. Unless you have money and I never had any money and I never wanted to you know I always wanted to be a sort of a part of the proletariat of fishing. Well. I think it is important for the future. I may have written some down on this I do not know. I don't know what we can do. It's hard to get kids outdoors today. I think we can get kids out the front door but we can't keep kids out the back door. And it hard to get kids to go bowling to do anything except look at their look at machines or have ear buds and work with their fingers. I remember ran into Tony Galanos not all that long ago, well I didn't run into him but I saw him. Was a kid I went to college with who is a doctor at Duke University Medical Center and I used to go to Duke University in North Carolina and he said the biggest change since my time is that nobody looks at each other anymore. All they do is look at their devices and we certainly see that with our children today. So I'm sort of the school. Well we can drive them kicking and screaming into it when they're young and hope that the pursuit itself will make an impression on them. Because if you give kids a choice a lot of kids these days have other things that are the priorities in their life rather than being outdoors. That's just the way the world has become manacled to our to our instruments.

Kieth McCafferty [00:36:20] And I don't know the answer better than anybody else does. I do think if you take take a kid to a stream he will learn to fish you know learn how to drink. And so I think that that's what we have to do. And that's what I've tried doing. It's harder to have also because the the opportunity. We have fewer opportunities. It used to be. Kid came home from school at 5 o'clock or 4 o'clock. You know it's time to go out to the river and fish. Today there school activities and also the privatization of the resources is a big deal. When I first moved to Montana thirty five years ago I could knock on almost any don't

get permission to fish today that's much much much rare occurrence. So you have kids in a city like Bozeman and they come home from school and you have to drive always to find fishing or to find hunting or to do anything. And so our opportunities have shrunk in that regard. And I don't think that they will come back. So I think you have to work harder at it. But it's important because they are voices of the future. You know they will enact our laws in the future but the ultimate answering but I really don't have any answer except to drag him out to the river and hope the river can work its magic.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:37:56] Absolutely. People used to say well you know I cut snakes and I should never have taken them out of their environment. And I always release snakes back into our environment. Well you take you know kids and they you know a lot of you know Catch and Release fishermen or you never kill a fish you never do this and that but I think that if you if you get somebody interested in something regardless of how that is even if it ends up doing damage to a very tiny piece of the resource like killing a fish that otherwise would have lived. But those are the kind of people you want to see impacting our laws in the future to me. So. So you want to you know lead your kids to water and then you want to teach them all the ethical things about fishing. But if a few fish accidentally die that's a very small price to pay to lose the entire resource. If we don't get those kids interested at an age where it makes an impression on. Well I think we need to. I mean we've talked about that but we need to not have our we live in a very acquisitive society the average length of our vacations have shrunk and shrunk and we're a species that has become more impatient and more reward oriented. And to me it's important for kids to understand that it's all the rest of the experience that really counts. And you know catching the trout is necessary but it's sort of the end result of a long process. And that's what you really find yourself involved in. And I hope they understand that and they they aren't just taken out where people hand them a rod and tell them where to fish. To me it's like I've always been I've always believed in the sort of do it yourself kind of philosophy. Here I am you know 30 year long Editor at Field and Stream and I had many many opportunities to fish all over the world with all kinds of people.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:40:37] But I prefer to do everything myself. I would rather catch one fish by myself than ten where somebody else tells me to cast and I think that's an important concept to pass along to our children so they can become immersed in the whole experience and not just the end result. That's my opinion and I think it's better better for those kids that way. But you know our society has changed like that. And that's one thing that's not for the better. And I've had the opportunity to fish with guys all over the world and it's been invaluable experience. But the ability for a kid to walk out the back door and go fishing on his own and learn things on his own. That's the most valuable. Yeah well for me. I've already mentioned it a little bit. But it's snakes were what got me involved in the outdoors. The mystery of how they lived. The mystery of how how misunderstood they were. It was like finding gold to find a snake under a rock and it was sort of the same the same thing with with fishing. My father led me to the water but nobody can really force you to fish or force you to become interested. You. You either are you aren't and I was lucky that I was and later you know when I became a fishing rider I also tell people I was very lucky because I grew up in a time when I was actually a way you could make a living. There are very few pursuits you know or passions that people have that they can turn into a natural living. But fishing was an exception. Not so much anymore. But you know during the age where I grew up.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:42:57] I've got some really cool snakes. The Blue Racer 200 miles out of his range. My first massasauga rattlesnake or massaga rattlesnake in Michigan definitely ranks up there. I showed you a picture of a black garter snake that completely

mechanistic form of the Garter of the terrestrial garter snake that lives in the Missouri River drainage and was first reported by Meriwether Lewis and journals of Lewis and Clark. Of course all the banded king snakes and scarlet king snake California king snake Arizona Kings snake are so beautiful. The great black rat snakes the pilot black snakes. Those were great trophies of my youth. You know to find one it's sort of like a badge of honor to be bitten by one. I've been bitten by thousands. Thousands and thousands. Now I very seldom let a snake bite me because I don't want to injure their teeth and I know how to pick up on I can pick up almost any snake in the world in a way so don't bite me including a cobra. Although I used to work with venomous snakes and the Cobras were when they were the one that in Cobra I worked with. I was scared because that face just looks like evil I was scared of him. Although in fact I was handling the cobra is a lot safer than handling a rattlesnake. I never had a bite you regret a bite from a venomous snake. I have been lucky I was struck once on a pants cuff by a copperhead, northern Copperhead and it did not penetrate the skin and I was lucky in that regard because I handled hundreds and hundreds of venomous snakes in the course of my life and used to work with them and I just don't anymore. I do. I will move them out of the you know try to get them somewhere so they are not smashed on the road but I don't actively play with them. One reason is this has nothing to do with fisheries but the cost of treatment for a snakebite is exorbitant and as a result of the direct deregulation of our hospitals so that if you are bitten by a rattlesnake and you go to Billings for treatment or you go to Bozeman for treatment or you go to great falls for treatment in this equal distance between the cities where do you go. You go to Billings because the the average treatment so many viles of antivenom so long stay is about forty five thousand dollars in Bozeman is about seventy five thousand dollars in Great Falls is one hundred thousand dollars the same treatment. That's because of the deregulation and the hospitals can charge whatever they want for a valid antivenom which costs them about two thousand two hundred fifty dollars which is nothing compared to what they can charge you don't have much to do with fishing except for the fact that I've run into an awful lot of snakes while fishing including pythons. Rattlesnakes all. Well my favorite fish to fish for our big Wild Pacific Steelhead. I think they have the greatest combination of difficult to catch power fighting man. Know the magnificence of the surroundings jumping you know. And they also have that indefinable quality of the great migratory anadromous fishes that have gone to sea and come back and have that sort of strength of the sea and in that mystery about them but next to them brown trout. Because that's what I grew up fishing for in Michigan small mouth bass because that's what I grew up fishing for in Ohio and you know the great golden masher that we talked about in the I read somewhere and I had to write something about Ernest Hemingway. You know he had that great quote. He said something about for me heaven on earth is are two barrera seats at the bullfights in Pamplona, a river I can see I can fish and nobody else is allowed to get on a town you know a house in the city for my wife in an apartment with nine floors for all nine of my mistress. You wrote that in a letter. Scott Fitzgerald he was talking about Spain. And he used to think well you know you can you can keep the bullfight tickets and really not made for that kind of having nine mistresses. And you can get rid of the erotic River because it's not much of a trout stream. But for me it's like well you know when the greatest fishing experience of my life was fishing I was going to mass here in India and now would be sleeping in that tent you know with the fog over the river and hearing leopard coughing at night. And then walking through the trail before dawn where you know there's a tiger woods you can see the tracks and then fishing for those great masher in that a beautiful river. And that's you know to me that would be heaven on earth. But in another sense the river doesn't really matter because you know every year every year for more than 30 years I've gotten together with my three best friends. So the four of us go camping for four nights on a river in Montana every year now for 30 years and I don't think we've missed more than a couple of years and all those years and we'll be doing it again this

year. And lately we've been camping on up a rock creek or will float to big hole River and camp on the banks and the BLM land. But you know what's important to me is reuniting with those people sitting on the riverbank in the river and the trout that bring us there.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:49:26] But that's not it isn't that's not the reason we go and I think as you get older a lot of fishermen are like that. You know it's the experience all around it not the fly in the water so much that it comes to mean the most. So for me that's what I treasure. It's that third night because you know urban people and urban people you know it takes a while to adjust to sort of living in nature. And that third night is always the best night for us fishing and sitting around the fire and cooking you know because we don't we don't yet have to go anywhere. But we've finally relaxed into the routine. So you know that's the most valuable part of my year fishing is to be with those three friends of mine and do that every year. In a way that the river is irrelevant as long as the Camping's good. And there's the. And there's the chance of catching a fish. You got to have the chance anyway. I would like to say yes but I think we have to realize that most people in this day would prefer to catch Brown or rainbow trout which are introduced species than they would brook trout or cutthroat trout. So I think some people have that aesthetic where they they really you know they like the idea of catching native West Slope cutthroats or native Yellowstone cutthroat. But as far as challenging fish to catch that it's hard when you catch it and that is beautiful. It's hard to beat rainbow trout which are introduced. It's hard to beat brown trout which are more difficult to catch which are also introduced so you know. And also we don't fish them out. We fish out cutthroats. So if you catch much in Brook trout we sometimes look on with the distain because in our lakes they stunt and whenever you go back east and Brook Brook trout are revered so I think sometimes we get on our high horse and talk about native species and turning our rivers back into rivers where we catch native species.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:51:50] But I think the majority of trout fishermen you have to take that with a grain of salt. They're planning happy catching these introduced species and calling them wild trout which they are at this point. Because they save us from our worst impulses the impulses of man is to destroy or alter his resource to his own tastes I think. And they serve as a great you know. Sort of a resevoir. For our native species. And that is that is placed on a higher plane of importance than simply catching fish. You know they protect us from our worst instincts I think which is to exploit the natural resources. And I think that's a big problem to a lot of talk today about the power of the party in power. You know in our heart of dark heart of hearts wanting to turn public lands back into private hands. You know I'm inclined to say because of the memories because I sort of grew up there in many many different ways. I can't call it a river of firsts. You know first kiss first this first that one of my long lost loves was there but. But that's not to discount the fishing because because of the way you fished and you fished at night and you fish during the big Hexagenia limbata mayfly hatch if you could catch it that night and so you had these great trout rising at night.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:53:51] And so it was something that engaged your senses in a way that no other fishing has. Because we're human beings are visual We are visual animals. Ninety five percent of our stimuli really in a way come through our eyes. And when your eyes are taken away from them you live by your sense of touch feel scent hearing and all those come to play when you're fishing at night trout. You know you you cast by the feel of the rod loading on unloading and by the sign sound of the line. You hear the trout rise. You can't see them. You're trying to fish a dry fly over something you can only hear and there's sort of a magic to it. Sort of a scariness to know man. Man is the smallest in the nighttime.

And that's something that I've never found anywhere else. When I first came to Montana I couldn't believe that people fished in the daytime. Not seriously thought. Well that's ridiculous you can't catch a big fish unless you fish at night. That's true in Michigan. It's not true out here. But I knew it wasn't because I'd read about fishing out here but still when I saw people fishing in the middle of the day what fools they are. What do they expect to catch except maybe once in about six or seven inch fish. Oh you know so that in that regard nothing's ever compared to those formative years you know growing up in the night as well as the day in Michigan.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:55:39] For the reason the fishing is special is real simple. We have the only really good stream access law of any state in the West. I think you know it's like when he was my why and why was it fishing really better in Montana than it is in Wyoming. Well I'll say yes it is because Wyoming may have great fishing but it's entirely privately owned. If you drift a boat you're not allowed to step out of it. You're not allowed to pee off the side you know. So I think that just that's one in that one simple regard. The fact that we have a stream access law that for the most part is applied although we got a lot of people from outside the state moving in and developing holding holdings of land on rivers and trying to bypass that we have to be vigilant war you have to fight because this is not a right. It's a privilege they have to have that something they work very hard to do. That alone makes Montana the greatest state in the West to fish are the great state in the Rocky Mountains. The fact that we can fish it means everything. It's changed a lot in the years I've been here. You know there's a lot more pressure on the resource. There's a lot more privatization of the resource there may be even effects of global climate change that I see I don't know. I can't know for sure. Let's get something Jim Range used to say we talked about Jim Range you really our father of you know the Clean Water Act. Yes he used to say you know he was an old Southern lawyer. I don't know weather this climate change really is happening more people are making it happen. But I do know how our game and fish is changing and we should be addressing that regardless of the cause. You know the difference to you know basically differences between winter and summer ranges for various species of grouse you no other birds and for fishing as well but we're always in a constant you know. We live in a changing world and whether it's natural or political. And you know a lot of our great fisheries we've we've altered them. We've made them. You know the Missouri is the greatest trout fishing river we have in our state and that's only because it's cold water released from the dam. If we were to fish the natural reserve the Missouri River we would be fishing for warm water species. Now I find it interesting that when Lewis and Clark went up they were catching native cutthroat trout along the way and a river that today might very well be a warm water river. So I think there have been a lot of changes like the.

Kieth Mccafferty [00:58:55] Yeah I think so. I don't really know the answer to that question but I know it's the first thing that comes to mind when I think about fishing in other states. The first thing you run up against are wishy washy stream access laws. I have the best gray areas and nobody knows the real answer to and there is no sense of ownership or you know the resource or caretaking of the the resource so it's it's I think the most valuable thing we have in Montana is our stream access law that allows us access to to our rivers. Well I want to try to I see us as we've become a country of impatience and acquisition and instant gratification and a reliance on other people to do everything for us including our fishing where it today seems like the height of the experience for many people is to hire somebody to really do the fishing for them. And so for me very young anglers what I would stress more and more over is do you know that the fishing is you know all the rest of the things concerned with fishing are the important parts. And I I tried to write that in a way. This last thing did you. Did you read what I wrote about Michigan.

James Thull [01:00:42] I did. Yes.

Kieth Mccafferty [01:00:43] Well it's interesting that they gave me that opportunity to do that. And I wrote something at the which I was thinking about it just sort of fell out was just like one sentence. And this is what I wanted to try to pass along to people and I'll read it if you don't mind it's just.

James Thull [01:00:57] Please do.

Kieth Mccafferty [01:00:57] Like five lines

Kieth Mccafferty [01:01:00] And this is near the end of that piece. It is good to have places to fish where a river's currency is countered by the flashing coins of his trout where length and weight can be assigned a denomination. But what about a river whose value cannot be calculated by arithmetic. If you catch a hundred dollars worth of trout in one river and another yields but a few coppers which is of the greater value and I know in my life the rivers that are the greater value are not the ones that were the most productive fishing it's. And that's what I know. To me that's what I'd like to pass on to the people.