

mckinney-bear-2015-12-05.mp4

[00:00:10] I have a story about a particular fish. That'll work. OK. A story takes place on Flat Creek and the Elk Refuge in Jackson Hole Wyoming. You fished there on your knees you sneak up on the fish. It's. Fantastic. It's one of my favorite places on the whole earth to fish because you're not just going along casting you find a fish first then you fish to it. I've gone out there and spent six hours fishing to three fish. And it's just and they're cutthroat but they're not easy to catch. Anyway I was fishing to this one fish and I knew that he wasn't a very large fish. He was only about 12 inches. I knew that. But the little bugger he just refused everything I changed flies five or six times before I finally caught him and he ran around in that pool like a steelhead.

[00:01:26] Never seen a cutthroat do that before. I mean he did what. First time my line was in the water here and then he's over here just never seen a cut cutthroat do anything like that. And when I finally landed him I told him I said buddy I want to see you when you're about 18 inches to see what you'll do. And it's the challenge of catching a fish that's difficult to catch that I enjoy the most excellent.

[00:01:56] And now you you mentioned that's a cut. Yes. In my experience and then from what I've heard other people talk about cuts are typically not the most difficult fish to to all catch.

[00:02:08] No they're the right Brooke trout probably are the easiest I think. And then cutthroats do have a fondness for dry flies. I've caught a.

[00:02:20] Cut throat in Jackson Hole every month of the year on a dry fly while even down to 35 degrees in January. I've got a 16 inch cut throat on a matter Max. That's something. But like I said in flap Creek they get caught and released numerous times and they get very very sharp. Then they sit up it's a meadow stream and they sit up right on the edge of the bank underneath that undercuts and they come out into the feed Lane which is you know where the phone goes along.

[00:03:06] And they'll take whatever is coming along but you have you. It really helps to know what's going on. So about each band you can't just go to one band and see if something's going on. You have to cover more country than that because sometimes there won't be something going on in one bend in just two or three bends down the fish going crazy.

[00:03:32] So it isn't as much about the species as it is about the environment.

[00:03:36] I have only guided places pretty much where the predominant fish was cutthroat. And that's the easiest fish for people to learn on. I think by far and we pretty much always drive fly fish. If we nipped we would end up catching white fish.

[00:04:01] So we always used attractor patterns and I could eliminate probably in the 20 years that I guided. We probably never caught more than a dozen white fish by not using nymphs. And every time I put on a NIM my client would say after a horse. No I don't want to do this even if I'm not going to catch fish I want to do with a dry fly.

[00:04:38] Seeing someone catch their very first fish especially a woman. Women come with reasonable expectations. Men come with very high expectations.

[00:04:53] Just I think they think just because we have the plumbing that we have that we should be good at hunting and fishing and all outdoor endeavors. Fly fishing is definitely technique. And the women listen. There is not a guide on this earth that would say that they would rather teach a man than a woman. Women are taught to listen. They have reasonable expectations and they really appreciate it. Some more about finesse and strength. Absolutely. Joan Wolfe churches are very good example of that. Do you do you have any that stand out in that 20 year period where where it was special where you saw somebody catch one or were they all good.

[00:05:41] They were all good. I have one other memory. I did a lot of walking and trips and I always told the fly shop that I worked for. I said give me all the beginners I want. I specialize in teaching and that's what it gives me the most satisfaction. Taking someone who's never fly fish. Or fish at all and getting them into their first fish. And I had an older gentleman I was just. I think I was just he and I and we were fishing and other Meadow stream and I stayed with him. I believe till eight thirty that evening. Before he caught his first fish and this was an all day trip. But I stayed with him and we got to town and. I think I had a trip the next day and when I got done with that trip the next day. I came into the fly shop and the help. Told me that this guy had gone out on his own. And fished the next day after I was with him and he said You tell bear three rises three fish. That is really really. What I. Try to do. It.

[00:07:27] Is rare. I mean it's something that's. Like a Valhalla. Of fly fishing and that's to be greatly appreciated since fly fishing especially is the most written about sport by far by far. And just every little addition. Throws in somebody else's experiences in such.

[00:08:01] Even though fish hanging out in schools they don't always read books so they don't always do. But what people say they're supposed to do. This is true.

[00:08:16] I have to play. Okay. Go ahead. One is on flap Creek. All right. Refuge. It is open from August 1st to October 30 first. And that's the reason being that first off that's an Elk Refuge. But it's also a waterfowl refuge. So they wait until August the 1st to open that stream to fishing for the waterfowl. So usually the fish are fairly. Fairly easy to catch the first day but after the first day or two they get really sharp. Especially the older fish eggs. Oh OK. We're back in that routine. Although they don't. They're not supposed to be able to think but they have tremendous instincts. They've evolved with tremendous instincts. You would swear that they do think and try and out with them is really the fun part of it. And the other spot. Is a small mountain stream in western New Mexico. And that was where we would go. To.

[00:09:29] Fish.

[00:09:32] I had to go my family and I had to go one hundred and eighty miles to get to this little town to catch a trout. That was as close as I was to trout. So our summer vacations were taken and we had this motel. With kitchen nets. And we would go and spend four or five days or a week. And the owner of the.

[00:10:01] Motel. We became fast friends with him and he would take us over to the hatchery pond ever hatchery there in Glenwood New Mexico and the water that goes through that hatchery upstream from there is the stream that I. I. Is my favorite spot on the earth. It's a deep deep canyon like you'd say a box canyon and.

[00:10:31] Every pool. It's a course of riffle pool configuration but the pools almost always have a drop into them. So there's a little waterfall every 20 30 feet something like that. Maybe a little farther apart sometimes closer. And every little pool is just full of fish. And that's part of where I started my fly fishing. I had fished prior to that using bait and.

[00:11:09] So first time I went there after learning how to cast I think I managed to catch like 3 or 4 fish. I just you know I could cast a little bit but I didn't have it as far as I'm concerned. Casting is a separate thing just about from fishing. You need to learn how to cast first. Weight and spend some time practicing so that you can get your fly where you want to put it. Because a fish in a stream doesn't typically move very far. They wait under a foam line that's like a cafeteria line and they wait and the largest fish get the best spot. They chase every other fish out of there. They get the best spot and they sit under that foam or just under or behind Iraq or anything that breaks the current. I just bought for a fish especially a cut throat. And they'll come out I say. I've always said that they were going to go catch the fish. That are on the couch. It's like the fish are watching a football game and your couch is backed up to the kitchen. And so when they see something coming they either come up to it or they move out to intercept it and it's like reaching back. To the kitchen to get a handful of chips or whatever and still being close to the couch and continuing to watch what's coming along. Yes. Because.

[00:13:16] It is about fishing. The rift comes mostly from. The fact that using bait. For most people. Usually ends up killing the fish. And we as fly fishermen tend to be conservatives conservationists.

[00:13:40] And we would like to be of a catch and release the fish lures and flies pretty much have a real close to the same amount of mortality hooking mortality but bait is almost 50 percent. I have met one or two really good bait fishermen and I mean these guys were good and they could set the hook. And virtually every time catch the fish in the mouth. Instead of down into the gills or partially down the gullet and they could release their fish would no harm. So I mean how can I I don't have a problem with that but it's still more fun. The ultimate to me would be to build your own Rod design your for own fly. Tie your own fly and catch a nice fish with it.

[00:14:47] Well I have to thank my father. He wasn't a great fisherman by any means. But he at least exposed me to fishing and hunting and I am the only one of. A family of. Probably ten at least 10 grandchildren. Who.

[00:15:10] Has anything to do with fishing or hunting. And if it weren't for those summer vacations I would have never been exposed to that. And I've lived my life that way. So.

[00:15:28] I worked packing in hunting camps and taking summer pack trips and being a fly fishing guide for 20 years. And I would have missed all.

[00:15:44] My life would have been greatly different. And I've really enjoyed my life.

[00:15:55] Well I've already pretty much stated that. Yeah. Is the cut throat. Because since I'd love to teach it's my absolute passion to take someone who's never caught a fish and in one day get them into hopefully several fish by using the skills that I teach them and they learn and are able to. To some extent duplicate. And the fish. The fish is the judge fish doesn't come up your line and see if you have all this equipment. What kind of waders you have what kind of Rod you have. What kind of clothing you have on the fish. The judge. You can have it not you know you can have just a simple kit there you know with just

regular clothes on or you can have all the equipment in the world but if you don't know how to do it. For the most part you're not gonna catch any fish. Yes cutthroats because they are somewhat easier to catch. One thing about cutthroats too though they tend to live in beautiful places. It's true as all trout do for the most part. I've only lived in the Rocky Mountains. And I've only fished the Rocky Mountain. I have not been anywhere out of the states or even to the east coast or the Midwest or to California or to anywhere else but I've spent my entire life in the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico travelling through Colorado living in Wyoming and now Montana. So. The one thing. That bothers me the most yet as lefty Cray says. The best thing for a stream is lots of friends and there's a lot to be said for that. But I grew up fishing that little mountain stream and virtually every day that I fish that stream. I was all by myself and I treasured. Being alone. And just having the experience. You know. Last time I fished the out for. We were floating and just from where we were I looked upstream look downstream and I counted 14 boats. That just takes a lot of it. The whole experience out of it to me when I was a guide I would stay sometimes at the put in for hours. I would let every other guide go let them rush.

[00:19:08] And I would stop at the first riffle where I knew there was fish and a lot of times before we ever left side or the put in. We'd have five fish to the boat to hand. And a really big deal is to get that back when I was guiding two hundred fifty three hundred dollar fish. Or now it's five fifty six hundred dollars. At first fish is is that expensive. And then each one you catch after that it's you know you divide it. And it's not as expensive but you really need to get you know at least have them have the chance to catch a fish. So. And.

[00:19:55] I do see some improvement in the game and fish. Opening up some access points improving them. Boat ramps. Very much so. As a population we become more aware of of. Pollution.

[00:20:17] So we're becoming aware of things but we may be loving some things to death. So it's a catch 22 there. Sure. I think.

[00:20:40] Along with this the science as we increase our knowledge of science and fisheries and in streams and such. I think that will. Be more guarded over the end and the realization of the economic value of fishing. To an area such as Bozeman. It's it's it would be astronomical by the time you take the money that the guides make and the services and what they need to supply and for what they do. And you have a multiple factor and one time. I believe. That. I read a study. Out of university Wyoming that said that fishing pretty much fly fishing was worth 30 million dollars to Jackson Hole. Wow. Yes. And realizing that and preserving that is very very important because cutthroat interbreed with other fish. And there's it there's a possibility of having less and less cut pure cutthroat all the time. And it may come to a point where. A cutthroat is more rare than these other fish and therefore more prized hopefully.

[00:22:18] But I see I see good things.

[00:22:23] Do you think that that's the key to preservationist is stressing the economic impact and value of fisheries. Well sure doesn't hurt. Sure. I mean that is an astronomical figure. Yeah it is.

[00:22:34] Yeah that's and very impressive. It probably is about the same here possibly even more because of the number of rivers that are around here. I thought about this a long. And. I would take and you have to I think every a young person than I think of just anyone. If I had a young person.

[00:23:14] And probably just about probably anyone the first thing I do is walk them to hopefully a stream. Lakes are fine. In fact you find bigger fish in lakes because they don't have to fight the current. But. I would have them sit on a rock. Sit on the beach the bank that whatever. Look into the water and just watch it for a while. And then I'd have them close their eyes. And listen. Really listen and then take deep breaths to smell. The smell of a stream. And debt in varmint.

[00:24:10] And probably you know give the advice that it's not always about catching fish. It's appreciating where you are being able to do what you're doing. And hopefully there's a general progression as a fisherman starts and gets better and better. Most beginners tend to want to catch all the fish they can. Then they want to catch the biggest fish they can. Some people never get past that which is sad.

[00:24:45] And the third step a level is you're just glad to be fishing Sure. And that brings the most joy and the most peace and what to me. Fishing is all about. With the exception of outsmarting those certain particular fish. Sure. That's what I would do. Sounds weird but I've always been good.

[00:25:13] You know lay on the grass and let the sun beat on you. But just listen absorb where you are. I've heard other people talk about similar similar ideas like that and it seems to me what you're saying and what other people have said is.

[00:25:32] Part of being a good angler is paying attention to detail and what's going on around you what's going on around the river what's going on around around the stream the water the weather etc.

[00:25:44] Well what I tell my clients is they're no longer just people when they're fishing. They're predators. And you have to learn science the world of the fish. You have to learn the insects. You don't have to. But you know if you really want to enjoy it the overall experience and what I tell them is that you have to think like a fish and act like a bug.

[00:26:12] It's a good way to put it. Yeah.

[00:26:21] This one here is easy. Most young guys are what I call ego testicle. They like to brag they jam around they sometimes cut off people. And it's. Human nature. But they just they go around bragging. I would never go around especially on the street when a boat. We would come by a boat or a boat would come past us. I would tell my clients if they ask how we're doing. Just tell them we're catching a few even if we're having a hundred fish day. I mean which is virtually impossible but I'd say we've got. 20 or 30 fish and we're just doing really good because if I if we say how good we're doing. And he may have somebody that's not capable of doing it physically. Some people just cannot do it. There's not many but some people just can't. And I guarantee you someday the tables will be turned. And I'll be the one in the barrel with the person that just can't do it. And so that that's very ill mannered and that would be one of the first things I would tell a young guy and be humble and think of your clients.

[00:28:10] It's their day. They are paying you. To kind of take them on this western Disneyland ride on the river. It's good work. And I want them to have the best experience that they can have. I would start out each trip. Guides have to be psychologist just like hairdressers. And you need to figure out what what the people want. Well I just cut to the chase and I said What do you expect. To gain from today. Sure. And so that I can begin to

plan my day accordingly. Instead of spending all day trying to figure things out. It was a great deal of help. So then we could all work towards this same goal.

[00:29:14] The earliest. Well I'm not going to say the earliest. A child usually. By the age of 10. Has the physical capabilities necessary. But the most important thing is the desire. I have I have had clients all the way from five.

[00:29:40] To 85. And man it's a it's so much fun to get a five year old into a fish and it as it was that eighty five year old term they just got to want it though. Yeah. If if there's such a person a kid that really really wants to do this. I've taken and taught.

[00:30:08] Children as young as eight to be doing this on their own. And they've been the ones who have the desire. They will go to any length to get done what they need to do. And so 10 generally 10 to 12 but if they really want to do it they can to hand the rod they can do different things. We can adapt. And like I said eight year olds can catch fish. Now men versus women we've men also think and when they show up this time they should just automatically be able to do this. And that's really really sad because men don't listen. I had one guy that I had a couple that I took they were from around Atlanta. And. At the fly shop. One of the most important things in fly fishing is polarized glasses. President helps us see the fly as well as once you get your eye trained see the fish coming to take your fly. And we would pretty much insist that people would buy polarized glasses. Well we had some for like ten or twelve dollars. It wasn't a big ticket item and. This guy he spent all day long.

[00:31:48] Taking his sunglasses off putting them back on. And I don't know if he even caught a fish while his wife. Was with me. And she caught at least 10 fish.

[00:32:02] Man just don't listen. They're hard headed.

[00:32:09] And women are so so much better. Yeah I've heard other guys that lead same tall women. I've never or rarely I think I can only think of one tall woman that I taught that could not cast pretty well. Those long muscles or strong muscles. Round and tall women. Although Here's Joan again. Desire.

[00:32:42] Mostly. It all starts with desire time as everything does. What about a good partner. It's someone who doesn't judge you. I had probably. Only one really good fishing partner because I'm bi tend to be a lone wolf. But. I found the guy in Jackson Hole and we just really hit it off. And he was actually a little better fisherman than I. I love to teach fishing more than I actually do like to fish. Given the choice any day I would rather teach someone to fish than to go fish myself. I've caught lots of fish chirp. I've had great experiences but someone who doesn't judge you is willing to go r and d r and d we would make so many. Research and Development trips you know if you don't pay your dues you're not going to catch fish any new place you go. It's pretty rare that you go to a place a new place and you just really do well. Unless you've already fished a place that's very similar to that. But like going over to Henry Ford from Jackson Hole I knew one guy that went over there and spent six weeks. Fishing. That guy learned how to fish that stream of gas. Holy smokes. Could he face. Yes. You must pay your dues. Because and that's another thing that clients need to get through their head just because they pay. I had a little plastic sign with sticky on the back and it that I put on the glove box door and it said money doesn't buy fish. And they would read that when they got in the truck. Oh okay. Just because they paid me doesn't mean that they're gonna be able to do it. I will take them to the to a place where. We will see fish and have chances but it's up to them. Or if it's a

young kid I mean I can't tell you how many times I've hooked a fish and then handed them the rod and they always say that they caught it.

[00:35:29] Which is great. You know that just gets them enthused. Sure. And that's what you do a lot of time for younger kids or women. I do that to me if they had an experience that I want them to feel. That wife on the other hand.

[00:35:52] I love the West. I wouldn't live anywhere else. But the Rocky Mountains. Absolutely not. The beauty the ruggedness the sense of adventure. Just looking over you know going over the next hill you know I have to go very far to see a different view. All I have to do is go over the next field. When people get so burned out of civilization I'll have to do is change our location a little bit and they get a whole new view. And that's that's so easy to do in the Rockies. It's just spectacular.