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Joe Pehrson [00:00:10] I grew up in eastern Idaho. My earliest memories were hanging out on the lake bank with my dad. Who had five kids within seven years of each other so his freedom in life was turning us loose on the banks of a river or on the banks of the lake and reservoir where I would spend every weekend fishing. I became intrigued by the Bank of the river the border, body of water. Early on and then of course I got interested in fishing. So it's been part of my life from my earliest memories. But here's the story you're looking for. As long as I've lived in eastern Idaho. I had never been steelhead fishing until this fall. And I know guys would go out and chase the elusive steelhead trout for years before they even caught one and I was intrigued by what drew people to this experience. So I got to go fishing or steelhead fishing for the first time. And I realized those guys are serious about catching those fish. But what was really cool and really important to me was a sense of community and family aspect of what I saw around steelhead fishing on the Canyon of the main Salmon River. My little brother would be on a Friday afternoon. You'd hear the truck come rumbling down the canyon and hear the brakes stop and somebody would yell Jimmy and my little brother would look up and go running up and the next thing you know they're having beers and hugging and high fiving and chatting and he'd come back down to where us fishing this and who is that. He said. Bill. Bill from Twin Falls and I said Well who's Bill from Twin Falls. He says I have no idea. I know nothing about that guy except we meet up here every year, and we steelhead together and he's one of my best friends. I don't even know how to contact him. And I thought that that was such an absolutely quintessential fishing moment of life in the Rocky Mountains chasing the elusive Steelhead and I just, that inspired the work that you're seeing over in my booth, comes out of that weekend or that week that we spent camping up on the main Salmon chasing steelhead is just incredible. I thought back over a lifetime of hanging out on the river banks how cool that that was. And such the embodiment of the world of fish again in the Rocky Mountain West. Again I'm just fascinated by the trout. I have this notion in my head that if a body of water has a great fishery it has great water. And we all need great water. I call for our world to work the way it's supposed to. So if we do the simple thing of taking care of our fish were consequently taking care of our water and especially in the arid West around this part of the country we need to pay attention to good quality water and the correlation between fish and and the life blood of water. Is inescapable for me. I started carving several years ago. And I was working in advertising marketing of public relations and had been my whole career and I just friends would go drift boat fly fishing on South Fork. I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. I just love the idea of floating down the river and at the same time fishing was was a combination and it just absolutely lit me up and and so I started carving trout based on that experience. But as a side note when the economy blew up in 2009 as a middle aged advertising executive I found myself without a world so I couldn't find couldn't find a job in advertising or couldn't find a job anywhere. And so I started about making concrete statuary, believe it or not. And that led me back to going back to school where I became a classically trained sculptor. And. So I'd worked in all sorts of medium. But what's funny is I gravitated back to carving trout again as an art medium as an artistic expression. And it just it's it's it's seems to be just such a natural fit. My love of Idaho my love of the Rocky Mountains my love of free flowing rivers and the trout to live in is just a combination that really works for me. Honest to Pete it sounds almost cliché but the the wood tells me. I'll sit and walk around a log sometimes for a couple of weeks trying to figure out where to go with it and then just say OK it's like put the blade to it you know let's start seeing what happens is the piece that I call South Fork Trinity was just going to be one trout but as soon as I put that trout in the others just kind of started to scream and I always tell people it's pretty simple all you have to do is take away everything that doesn't look like a trout. I really was thinking about the fish we fish for on

the South Fork and that's the cutthroat, first and foremost, but the rainbow are in there now. Because now we're dealing with the rainbows and the cuts or the cutbow and then the German Brown.

Joe Pehrson [00:05:51] There really is to me. I was lucky enough to get that done at the Museum of Natural History down at Idaho State. They did an exhibit recently featuring native trout. And I did three pieces for that for that exhibit and it was really fun to see because of the German Brown isn't a native species but the Steelhead are, the rainbow are, and the cutthroat are. You know there's to me there's nothing like like I said leaning off the front of the driftboat fishing the bank on the South Fork and hitting a nice big cut. That's that's a great moment. And I guess I think about that when I start carving those fish. Nice big German Brown. I have good friends that like to go on the South Fork and fish those big spawning German browns in the late fall seeing those monster trout. I've never been able to get out and do that but I've painted them I've seen them a lot. It's just, it intrigues me and mystifies me and inspires me. You know I grew up in one in the early days fishing on the rain-- the reservoirs. The irrigation reservoirs down in southeast Idaho down in the southern corner of Idaho, South Bend County and stuff like there was not till I came to Idaho Falls in 1980 that I started getting into the river fishing. It's exploded. Lot of good people doing a really cool sport. And you know with that comes some concerns. And I'm going to take this opportunity to do a shout out about the people at the Bureau of Land Management that run Cona Valley or run the the South Fork fishery up at Cona Valley. So I think they do a terrific job. I mean look at the number of people that they manage to. Put down that river and still maintain some sort of fishery integrity. They don't get many shout outs oftentimes I think people tend to rag on our government partners with the way they manage certain resources. But I've seen the people up at that BLM access do a great job. I've recently floated the middle fork of Salmon River with some folks that worked for Idaho Fish and Game. So I got eight days spent with Fish and Game people talking about you know, the job they do and the commitment that these people have keeping our fisheries running the way they're supposed to go back with. We have good fisheries we have good water. And I just think those people are kind of sometimes unsung heroes for the job they get out and doing to maintain this because if it wasn't for them with the explosion in popularity, lord what would happen to our fisheries. All of my awareness came around about in the 60s and eastern Idaho. And I can tell you here in the 21st century it's a much different place. Lots more people. And oftentimes I think just lots more people make a really difficult to maintain what was. But you know. What are we going to do. I mean you have to either manage but you can't fight it. You can't tell people that want to go fish the South Fork that they can't because they have every right to do it as much as me who's been around for all of these years. So you have to find sensible solutions to do it. I'm concerned about the dams. I think they disrupt the natural flow of ecosystems. At the same time you know I sure like eating those like Idaho potato french fries all that water's coming from the dams that are storing it. So I think we have our dams again. We can fight them and maybe we can fight the new ones that are coming but we sure need to make it a point to manage the ones that we do have and make sure we're looking at a broad focus of what's going on with them. But dams you know. They started simulating a flood experiment out of the Palisade resevoir down South Fork. And I think that's made a big difference on making sure that that ecosystem stays pure and clean and as good as it can. So I think there's some real innovation going on in the management of our resources. I get concerned that, you know, I don't want to get political on you here but dude if we don't, If we don't spend the money managing these resources the overwhelming overcrowding and desire to be part of it will ruin it. And so you know how do we maintain the funding levels you need to do progressive management, maintain the resource. Or do we sit back and just let people overrun it and kill it. A lot of boats go down the South Fork in the season.

And the last time I was down it still looked in pretty good shape. So if somebody is working real hard to do it and you know what I think the community. The community that I see it certainly in eastern Idaho. The fly fishing community the fishing community. They seem to have start taking ownership of it and all the people I've ever floated with or fished with who were all out there taking care of business you know making sure they weren't polluting. But. You know. So I think they sure, sure have some accolades in this whole process. But I'm concerned about what's going to happen to it all. It's it's. It's not my Idaho anymore that I remember growing up. But I think if we all come together, as a community and pay attention to it we can still keep it pretty damn good.

Joe Pehrson [00:11:46] Yeah. Down the Middle Fork a couple of years ago. And they said the Middle Fork drainage is one that's going to be impacted by climate change absolutely. Because the fires came, wiped out the existing or the current ecosystem. And they say it's not coming back. And again working with BLM, or floating with BLM and fishing. They pointed out that, this is not gonna go back to where it was or how it was but we're literally going to have to get used to in some cases those old growth forests aren't going to come back. Because the climate's just changed a couple degrees. You know, the subtlety of what's happening with climate change is incredible everybody's looking up, it's only a couple degrees. But, you know. I read an interesting piece and I think it was by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition two years ago was in one of their annual reports and it talked about not necessarily the climate changing. But what about man's impact, changing the climate. Cutting down the steppe sagebrush and plowing it changes the way the snowpack stays because now you're dealing with brown, bare earth instead of the lighter sagebrush steppe earth. That changes the environment, that changes the climate. Temperature change based on man's impact of paving and concrete, changes aspects of climate change without looking at it necessarily globally. But what about the impacts that we're doing right here. And so I always thought that that was a real interesting focus on climate change. It's beyond the big debate. It's on the everyday debate. The collection of data. How can you say that, New York, the, New York City has different temperatures now than it did 200 years ago simply because of man's impact on the ground. So there are lots of aspects to climate change that we need to be aware of beyond whether or not carbon is changing the temperature. I think that it is. But there's still other aspects to climate change that we need to think about too the impact zones around rivers changes the runoff of the snowpack. Sediments into the, into the river change in building a dam and having a consistent flow when the ecosystem demands a floodplain to take it back to the natural ways. So there's lots of ways to look at climate change and I'm real concerned. But the big impact for me was seeing it up in the, up in the Salmon drainage and some are from the forest fires and knowing that those types of forest aren't coming back. Those pines are gone and, and deciduous trees are coming in and it's going to change and they impact on animals, wildlife the whole nine yards.

Joe Pehrson [00:14:39] Oh I think it does I you know, listen man, the fishers keep me honest. OK. I give him the old well, it's my artist interpretation and they're saying yeah but you gill pattern's all wrong. Your, your mandible doesn't cut like that. Yeah, it does make me a better artist because the guys and gals that are into it, they, they know what they're chasing, right. And when I represent it, if I'm not representing it right they don't let me get away with it even if I claim artist, artist mandate. So no that, that's lighthearted but it's partially true. So I have to study the fish I need to know what they're going to be feeding. Give you an example. Stone fly hatch around here, boy, folks go a little bit, the eyes glaze over when the hatch is on you know and they're hitting. So I did a piece called Hatch and I had steel and bronze. And I wanted to learn how to do a stone fly. So as I researched stone fly so I could sculpt my own stone fly, my little brother says you know you could just

go buy those down at the angler shop, but I learned how to carve a stone fly and mold and make a stone fly. Course, that taught me how to, taught me about the etymology, entomology and I understand float patterns and how they come up. So now all the sudden. Yeah it does it helps me because I understand the science. I wish it just flowed out of me and it was perfect. Most artists will tell you they do a whole bunch of research before they start doing credible wildlife art. Yeah and that makes me a better fisher. My problem is I spend too much time creating the art not enough time chasing the arts, or chasing fish. Yeah.

James Thull [00:16:33] That's great.

Joe Pehrson [00:16:34] This kind of sprung out of the fact that I couldn't go fish and so I was going to at least carve something or make something when I couldn't be fishing when I wanted to. So that kind of works, it works. It's a big world out there full of some incredibly talented people. So big that I have a hard time getting around it sometimes. So I've fallen into, local artists, artists that come a generation or two before me. And one of the most important artists for me is a local woman named Marilyn Hanson. She grew up on the foothills, 50s and 60s, out east of Idaho Falls. And she taught me. I spent some time mentoring, or not mentoring but, working with Marilyn. And, she taught me to look at the subject matter as a living being. And then making sure that you could bring that into the piece you were trying to create. She ended up being a really, she, she paints horses better than anybody I've ever seen. But she has a way of bringing her sculptures to life. And I was really interested in studying sculpture with Marilyn. And, she really, really inspired me and had a big impact. A painter that I just love is another local artist named Roy Reynolds. Roy's done some stuff I really like the, the work he did during the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. He's done some mountain men and he's done some work on Sacajawea's son. And I remember that inspired me a lot. Well I think, fishing in Idaho is special probably for the same reason fishing in Montana is special or, fishing anywhere around the world especially. You're out on that body of water. You're figuring out how to interact with another species in a way that... You need to think like a fish so you understand that fish. For me it's just being in the great outdoors. You know Idaho's in my blood. Six generations maybe seven generations of Pehrsons have lived in eastern Idaho. And, uh, to me it is part of who I am. But it's part of me. Something about floating down a river. And feeling the rhythm of life. The book's *Herman, Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse. He talked about you can hear the sounds of life and the flow of the river because the river is life. And that stuck with me for the years and so being on a bank of naturally flowing or waving body of water is, is a connection to the earth that I can't escape.

Joe Pehrson [00:20:02] I've got this notion like I said that I call it trout marks the spot. If your trout, if your fishery's good, your water's good and water is life. I've said it before earlier but I'll say it again. We need to take care of our water and that starts with taking care of the creatures that live in it. You know I was listening to one last story I need to talk about.

James Thull [00:20:25] Please, please, do.

Joe Pehrson [00:20:26] I was listening to public radio last night and they were talking about, uh, an entomologist was talking about his relationship with giant crickets. And he was talking to his mentor about it because he damaged one of these crickets and it exhibited a behavior that didn't make any sense. And he talked about not putting your experience on another creature. Because then that conveyed an ownership, it was on a program called Radiolab, if you ever listen to Radiolab, it was incredible. He said

sometimes you just need to let that creature be itself without putting your imprint on top of it. And that really rings true for me when it comes to fishing and understanding fishing. Is let that trout be the trout. Then you'll have better luck catching that trout.