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David Profumo [00:00:09] I was introduced to it at the age of five, so I had, I had what, I was very lucky. Because one of the things I feel we're missing in our generation, is the next generation of mentors, all types of reasons for that. the blandishments of the great indoors, all the things you'll be familiar with. And I think these are becoming global. But I was very lucky, had an elderly uncle. He'd been a fighter ace in the First World War. He was a great hero of mine. But he was already quite an elderly man, when I was a little boy. And so he'd long retired, he'd been shot down over Vimy Ridge, when he was age 18. He was in a dogfight with the Red Baron. He had M.C. and Bar (Military Cross and Ribbon Bar) before he was 20. And what he loved to do, to hunt, to shoot. We'd shoot, and to fish. And he didn't have a son. So, although, he was a sort of grandfatherly age, he took me under his wing, and introduced me to fishing, from the age of five. He had a very nice little private estate, up on the east coast of Scotland, in the Sutherland. It had it's own Little Spate River, that's a river you'd need a bit of water in before the salmon come up. He had a hill loch, some lakes, and a moor where, with pointers and setters with wild grass. And I've been blessed ever since, I owe him a great deal. And he caught my first salmon with me, when I was twelve, and I put my net under his last salmon when he was 90. And that forms a circuit, which I think you'll be very familiar with a lot of people, because there is that intense family historicity, and connection. For me, whenever I take out his old reel, or there's a wonderful hip flask that is capable of carrying three quarters of a bottle of hard spirits, and I had it out earlier this week, on a river, where I used to fish with him. And these things are a very important part of history, for me, anyway.

David Profumo [00:02:04] Well, I think he taught me to be what I call a possibilitarian, which is for me two things. One is to go fishing as often, and wherever you possibly can. And then you can decide if you want to specialize, or choose the type of fishing you want to do. And also, it meant to become just proficient enough, to make the most of every opportunity that you have. That the fish gives you. So, although, of course, we do it to relax, we also do it to concentrate, in a peculiar way. And that's, I think, what he taught me. And I aspired to please him when I was young. And I think that was probably the best lesson that I learned from him.

David Profumo [00:02:51] Well, there have definitely been changes, if I just talk about Britain, or my perception of it, although I have been very lucky, because I've had a sort of professional connection with fishing writing, I have traveled quite widely for some of our generation, I've been very lucky, had a lot overseas opportunities, and some of them, sort of the exploratory ones. But in terms of Britain, I think the thing that worries me most is, that we're missing out on the next generation of angler. You sometimes hear it heard, that there are three million anglers in the UK. First of all, I don't believe that's true. There may have been at one stage, but secondly, it's very hard to get the next generation, the five year olds, the eleven year olds, away from the attractions of indoors and to go and try it. And so I support, as best I can, a number of bodies, one of which is called Fishing for Schools, which is a wonderful charity, where they go in and they take people who might never have been out of an inner city, and just try it for a day, see what you like, you know? See how it is. And they have a very high repeat request rate. And I think that's one of these we're losing, is the next generation. And, and to have a mentor, and to have that continuity, and to have that connection with nature, and call it whatever you want, which we're losing. And it's not encouraged, politically, in the way which I would like it to be. I mean, Britain is becoming increasingly urbanised and secularized nation, it's a series of nations. And so anything we can do, to introduce people to what happens when you go away and spend a day, perhaps out of your comfort zone, has got to be, I think, the way

forward. We've also got, apart from an enormous population pressure, but that's common to most countries. We have a huge variety of angling experience, but it's a small place, geographically, and we've got problems with the environment, like everyone else has. We've got a lot of water extraction. We have less problem with dams than you probably do in the States. But the pollution issues, run off, agriculture, and so on. I mean, the future is not looking very positive, because there are, there don't seem to be any votes in angling, in the UK. There's also, I think it's not endorsed by schools, and councils, and teachers. And it's been politicized, in the way which you've seen it happen on continental Europe. The Green Party agenda, that you shouldn't be allowed to retain fish in a keep-net, which is what you have to do for competitions, for instance. You've either got to kill them, or put them straight back. That makes the competition scene impossible, for instance. And I fear for the future of angling. I have to say, I would I probably wouldn't write that down in one of my articles, because it's adding fuel to the fire, but it's not looking all that rosy.

David Profumo [00:05:48] I would think there must be a logical one, that is a difficult thing to demonstrate. But let's put it the other way, that unless you, I think you do have, a fairly early umbilical connection to it, it's sometimes difficult to conceive of what it is that we are losing, and what is being marred, inevitably by the big word "progress." So what worries me, for instance, is a large number of politicians who just have a pair of tie-up shoes. They wouldn't know how to walk through a muddy farmyard. And that didn't used to be the case. Farmers have a very difficult time here, and the majority of the world's population is living in cities. And so I think the earlier you can get to smell the, smell the burning leaves, or paddle in the water. Any of these things, which are familiar to us as anglers, but as walkers, as climbers, I mean, I think there's, there's there's quite a similarity between climbing and fishing, in lots of ways, in terms of the sort of interface with nature. But you need to be introduced to it. It's a hard thing. It's quite baffling, when you start off. You need someone to say, let's try it for a few hours, and it's amazing, you know, what a big take up rate there is.

David Profumo [00:07:03] Well, as I say, I think mostly, here, my, my worry would be about water extraction. Because the, the planning permissions, for what we call our home counties, mostly the south of England, stretching down to the south and to the west of London, going forward 30, 40 years, it's going to be an unbroken ribbon of development. And they all got washing machines, and everybody wants to wash their car, and have a front lawn, a yard and so on, and so forth. Where's the water coming from? The water companies are mostly privatized. They've been taken over by overseas hedge funds, and conglomerates, and so on. I mean, it seems to me, obviously you'll hear this from anyone. But, you know, clean water is the lifeblood of the planet. And I think it's going to become, for the next generation, or for my grandchildren, it's going to become a very precious commodity in places. We've taken it for granted, since human civilization began. There's one specific thing about cool water fisheries, in the U.K., which I think concerns our migratory salmon stocks. And this, again, will be familiar to, well, the problem is that you had, on any of the Atlantic seaboard rivers in North America, something is happening to salmon out at sea, and our management arrangements, which are in place in the U.K. because we have a lot of private ownership, are confused at best. But on the whole, our salmon rivers are still producing the maximum number of feasible number of smolts, that they can. Through, in river management, habitat management, and so on. But they're not coming back. I think your smolt recruitment in the some of the big rivers, is down from 12% to 4% or something, which is very drastic. So something's happening out in the oceans. I suspect it's a minute adjustment of oceanic currents. I don't know. I'm not a scientist, but something strange is happening. The whole predatory network has changed in, I think, the last sort of four or five years. And salmon numbers, which are very important to our

economy, in the distant rural parts of Britain. Britain has got some wilderness areas, still, amazingly. It's a big question mark over whether it's sustainable. And that, I don't, no man knows, what's happening out there. Despite a considerable amount of scientific money being put towards the research.

David Profumo [00:09:30] I was. I was being confusing. The water companies, I mean, the people who control the supply of water to domestic and commercial premises, as opposed to people who own the sporting rights to rivers and ponds and lakes. It's a bit of a myth, and is a Victorian myth, I think, that all the best, inverted commas, "All the best fishing in the UK, is owned by high net worth individuals and you can't get onto it." It's true of some places. It's the same if you went to the Restigouche. You know, we've got, we've certainly got a lot of places which are like that, but there's plenty of public access. But there isn't really free fishing in the UK, in the same way, there are a little bit in Scotland. But the law, the law is out, about whether there's free access. But there's plenty of places where you could go and have a lovely day, trout fishing, walking through the hills, and provided you've got permission from the landowner to be there, he's not going to charge you a lot of money. If you wanted to go to one of what formerly used to be the prime salmon beats, the equivalent of getting the Restigouche Salmon Club or going to, you know, Miramichi or something. You'd have to join a local association, or you'd have to buy the entitlement for the week, for yourself, through a letting agency, which, you know, obviously happens when you go abroad anywhere, they're outfitters and they're. But the majority of sporting rights for bird shooting, and for migratory fish stocks have historically been held in private hands. Well, it doesn't mean you can't get on them.

David Profumo [00:11:01] I think they're very important. We still have, and it's something I try and fight against a bit in Britain, but we still have this distinction, which is from the 1848 Freshwater Fisheries Act, or something, a long time ago, between what are called game fish and coarse fish. And you call the latter trash fish, sometimes. Suckers, and carp, and these sort of things. It was based on a rather spurious distinction, between what was good on the table, and what wasn't. Although coarse fish include carp and pike, you know, and grayling, all of which are valued, you know, in other places. But that distinction has meant that the angling clubs have tended to specialize in, you might have a trout angling club, you might have a club that just wanted to fish for roach in canals, and so on and so forth. But traditionally since, sort of the period between the two world wars, they have had enormous numbers of members. And again, everybody knows that Britain's historically thought to be riddled with a class system. There was a working class, cult following, for coarse fishing. Which was readily available, and they had nice prizes in matches, and the fish were put back, and people looked after it, because that was what they're going to do again next Saturday. And now those numbers are declining. And so the vote, the vote that, in Westminster, the politicians aware of, from all types of angling background, is getting smaller. And therefore, although the role is still potentially very important, I fear that the safety in numbers may be slipping away from us.

David Profumo [00:12:41] I can a little. It's, it's, a little bit like the New York Anglers Club. And indeed, a number of clubs around the world. It exists for social purposes. It does not own or control any fishing of its own, which is a little unusual, for a fishing club, it's a social club. It's been going for over 100 years. A number of the founding names will be familiar to the sort, of those who read, and follow high Victorian literature. It's got a burgeoning membership, so it's probably unrepresentative of the angling world in Britain as a whole. They stage one or two nice special events, and it's quite an expensive thing to go to, and to enjoy, it's quite high end, but it's relaxing. There's a good. It's meant to be [unintelligible] in spirit, in the brethren of the angler. It is, unfortunately in my view, still an all male club.

But there we are. Most of the girls I met don't really want to go to the angling clubs, anyway. They'd rather go somewhere else. It has a very good library, and a very good privately held collection, to which a lot of members donate things in their wills and so on. And it is open to nonmembers, readers, scholars, and those interested in the history of fishing, mostly in the UK. And as such, it has some charitable status, and I think it's a force for good. But it certainly, you wouldn't be taking the temperature of British angling by going in there for the day.

David Profumo [00:14:16] Well, I'm hired for my writing, rather than my professional angling, I suppose, but before, I published my first article as a teenager, and then so I was a, I was at university, what you call professor, I was a lecturer in the English department at King's College in the Strand here, where I was doing my doctoral work, and began as a freelance writer. The thing I thought I knew something about, rather than early 18th century verse satire, was fishing. And I got a job on the Daily Telegraph, which is a big circulation, fixed read title here. When I was in my late 20s, I had 10 years there, and I got to, so this was in the 1980s, and there were a lot of fishing opportunities opening up, and largely through firms like Frontiers, and so on and so forth. And it was pre-Internet. So the best way of getting advertorial was, to get someone to go out there, enjoy their week, and report back, and give them a page with a photograph. So I went all over the place. I've been very, very lucky. I was in another newspaper called the Daily Express, and now I work for Country Life magazine, and I have a monthly column there. And I write travel features and things as well. I do other writing, but the thing I'm passionate about is fishing, because it's everywhere. And to me, it's sort of everything, really. And I've been very lucky. I have fished in 40 different countries, and that's counting the states as one country.

David Profumo [00:15:44] I, I think. Yes, you can. And this distinction been made before, of course, that the fishing literature can be divided into something that's written by anglers, and something that's written by writers who like to fish. And so I think we dignify it sometimes, by calling it literature, saying, maybe it's just fishing writing. But it seems to me that it is capable of rising above the mainstream, and becoming something else. And with peculiar regularity, in the last 300 years, there have been some outstanding writers who've written about fishing, but who are well-known for other things, particularly poets, I'm thinking of, because you've got, I mean anyone from Robert Lowell to, you know, Dickens, used to fish, a little bit, out here. And I amuse myself by making a list of, I'm sure Shakespeare was a mad keen angler, and his works are riddled with references that only really a fisherman could know about. But I think the phrase I sometimes use is, I think they share a gene, and there's something to do with concentration. I think it's something to do with precision, exercising options, and obviously a keenness of observation. But one of my, one of the people who inspired me most, during my time as a writer, was our late poet laureate Ted Hughes, who was, who wrote very deeply about fishing. And his unpublished fishing diaries, which are in the British Museum reading room, or the British Library system, on call, have almost daily entries. He, and Sylvia Plath loved fishing, as well. And I know somebody who's writing a book, just about him, and the relevance of fish and fishing, he's an academic, to his work, which has never really been done. But I knew him a bit, I fished with him, I talked to him about fishing. And for him, it was part of this commingling of the natural world, with all its beautiful mysteries, and it's spirituality, and the things that we can never know. And it's the way of casting the line, and composing a line, could, fancifully, not for everybody, but they could have something in common. That probing, it's that treasure seeking. It's almost like a, almost like a seance, you know. Is there anybody there, you know? Is there, that line I'm looking for? Sometimes there is, sometimes there isn't. But I think it's not a coincidence, that there's this overlap in the Venn diagram, certainly.

James Thull [00:18:17] Like a good cast, you, you know the line when you see it?

David Profumo [00:18:21] Well, I wish, but yes, I think you can. I think you can. And I think also you can, you know, there is a sort of, I know it's a little bit fanciful and most people, perhaps, don't think about it when they go fishing, but there is some aesthetic pleasure to be had, from making a few good casts, a few unique, I mean, we can remember them, you know, not saying that is an art. You know, some people, Walton thought it was, but it's more than a craft, fishing--and, and I don't just mean fly fishing--in some people's hands. And I'm sure some people have a real deep affinity for it. Others like myself, have just got to work hard.

David Profumo [00:19:07] Well, I find it simultaneously relaxing and sharpening. And it's, it's a time when I can, and I fish, you know, I try to have a rod in hand 100 days a year, if I possibly can. So I do a lot of fishing. I'm very, very lucky. It gets me away from other things. But I don't believe, you know, there's this argument that is escapism. And so what I call civilians, which are non-anglers, you know, you can't explain that is not escapist, in the sense that, do you think other diversions are? It is, if anything is, it's getting closer to something, rather than away from something. Nobody knows what that is. It's different for everyone. It's a protean activity. It appeals to all types, and estates of people. You can do it from a little kid until, I hope, extreme old age. And everybody brings something to it. And everyone takes away something slightly different, from it. But it's. I think it's quite an emotional, spiritual business. And I think that's why it's almost quite exhausting. A lot going on. Just because you're not catching a fish, doesn't mean you're doing nothing. And if I was told I've got one week left in life, I mean, I'm sure you're the same, I would spend it fishing. I might take my kids along, but I would spend it fishing. Because, most of the happy hours I've had in life, have been with rod in hand.

David Profumo [00:20:35] I'll tell you a quick one. So I was, I was out fishing on an exploratory trip to the river Umba, in the 1980s, in the Kola Peninsula, in Russia. Where we were fishing where no Western anglers had been before, dropped off a helicopter. And the helicopter came back a week later. And I was fishing at about 3:00 in the morning, during what they call the white nights. You know, when you could read a newspaper and even almost tie a fly, only it doesn't get dark. I'm on my own, big river, the Umba, and I heard singing. On the wind. And we must have been a hundred kilometers away from the nearest human settlement. And there were female voices. I couldn't make out what it was at all. And it wasn't scary. But after about 20 minutes of it, I thought, "Maybe I don't quite fit here." Then I reeled up, which is most unlike me, before the end of the session, and I went back upstream. And this rather a roughly spoken man from Yorkshire, who was I fishing with. And I said, "I think I'll go back to the camp." He said, "Why is that?" And I said, "I dunno." He said, "Oh, you heard it too, did you?" And these were ancestral women's voices from way, way past, from the migratory Sami peoples who'd been netting, I'm sure there, at this particular time of year. And their voices stating that the people had gone. And I was pleased to hear it, but I was also pleased to go back and have my duty free.