

weinhold-joel-2017-02-24.mp4

Joel Weinhold [00:00:10] I do. I lived for many years in Pueblo. And so, did a lot of my backpacking and fishing in the Sangre de Christos. And there was a particular day that I took what was intending to be a part of the day off and figured I'd go fish for a few hours in the Sangre de Christos. And so I had driven up to Horseshoe Lake, which is up above Timberline, and really planned to fish for two or three hours. And two or three hours turned in to a few more and a few more and over the course of the day I had suns-- sunshine, snow, hail, sleet, fog, had a whole gamut of weather. And now, the light is more than just fading. It's nearly gone and I still find myself, saying to myself, Well just one more cast. Just one more cast and then I'll go. And-- And it occurred to myself as I'm saying to this-- to myself, Man you've got it bad. And it was just the experience of being there in the moment by myself in nature and, you know, there was plenty of other stuff to worry about and that was still going to be there when I got back. But for that time in that moment I was able to just be there fishing. I think that's a lot of what fishing means to me and what-- and what about fishing appeals to me, that I find, that I have heard from many other anglers, that they experience something very similar. That when they're fishing, despite whatever else may be going on in the world or in their or their lives, they're able to be in the moment during that moment. I think that's a wonderful experience.

Joel Weinhold [00:02:13] Well I-- I think it was Teddy Roosevelt who was instrumental in-- in setting up our park system and I think foundationally, for him, what was important about doing that was preserving for other Americans and for generations to come, much of the wild wonder and beauty of America and I think that's certainly what the parks are about and what they do a very good job of. It occurs to me also, and I think perhaps we'll get a chance to talk a little bit about that in a later question, but for many people it is increasingly challenging to feel a connection to nature because of our increasingly urban settings in which more and more of the population live. And so to have those areas that are and remain wild, essentially untouched or nearly untouched and yet accessible, I think is a tremendous benefit to us as a nation, to us as individuals, tremendous heritage that we leave for our kids and for future generations and is-- is therefore essential and crucial that we give some thought to how we protect and preserve and impart that to future generations.

Joel Weinhold [00:03:48] I think that's a really good question and my answer, which will seem, but is not, equivocating is, Yes and no. Here's what-- Or actually, my answer is no and yes. Here's what I mean. I don't think we have a greater responsibility in terms to protect simply because our livelihood is perhaps more directly connected to it. But I think we have a greater responsibility to communicate the importance and the value of-- of nature, of our wild areas, of our parks, etcetera. Because again, as we were talking moments ago, those who perhaps have a-- in their day to day, a stronger connection or a-- a more frequent connection to urban settings may not as readily recognize and appreciate the value of nature and of the opportunities to enjoy it. And also, of what it means for us as individuals and again, as a nation. Without going into too great of detail, the idea of the "frontier" has been a part of America and has been part of what has shaped America and what it means to be an American since before the founding of this nation. Since going back perhaps as far as Columbus or something like that. And I realize there were native peoples here even before that, but in terms of our American perception, we view it very much that way. That has begun to change. Perhaps just in the last generation or so. And so I think it's-- it's valuable to us as part of recognizing who we are to recognize where we as a people, as a nation, have come from. What has shaped that experience. And I think

the-- the wilderness, the wilds, have certainly shaped that experience in terms of-- of Americana. And-- and what the American experience has been.

Joel Weinhold [00:06:13] Well I do, but perhaps the reason for that might be different than when you asked that question of some other fly fisherman. The guy who taught me how to fly fish tied a-- and I don't know that-- I don't recall that he even had a name for it, but it was very similar to a mosquito. It was a gray and black fly and he used it frequently as a result. I used it frequently and have used it in a number of different settings and so, probably as much that emotional and and memory connection as anything. That would be the reason that that would be the one to fly if I could only choose one that I would take with me.

Joel Weinhold [00:07:05] I do. And I appreciate that preface because I'm not going to tell you exactly where it is. But in connection with the individual that I've just mentioned, he was about my dad's age and taught me to fly fish more than 30 years ago. And this was a favorite place of his and had gone there with him many times. And there is a certain amount of-- of Jeep road involved in getting there and a significant amount of backpacking involved in getting there. So, reasonably isolated. I mean, certainly not totally inaccessible but, you know, you don't just drive up and park in the paved parking lot to-- to get there, be there either. And so, been there a number of times with him. His name was Chuck. And then a number of times with my buddies as I was a late teen and-- and into my twenties something etcetera. And then, as I got older, been there a number of times with my kids and taken them there as well. So a lot of-- a lot of very good memories and experiences that particular body of water. Here in the state and in the Sangre de Christos. And that's why, because of all of the memories connected with that particular body of water. Not necessarily the biggest fish I've ever caught there, which probably just anybody that fishes high mountain lakes in Colorado would say, Yeah probably not the biggest fish you've ever got has come from that setting. But, similar to the experience I was describing earlier, have had many of those kinds of days and those kinds of experiences at that particular place.

Joel Weinhold [00:09:15] I think there's three different ways to answer that question. One is a-- answer the question with a question. Well, it depends on what you want fly fishing to be. So in one sense, when you ask, How important is it for the sport, in many ways fly fishing is, not that it's the only thing that is that way, but fly fishing is a very solo kind of sport. If nobody in the world ever fly fishes again I'll still get to fly fish and I'll still enjoy fly fishing. So in that sense, perhaps not as important, in that one sense. But in another sense, I think it's tremendously important. That... I was going to use-- I was going to use the word joy, but I think I w-- I'm searching for an even deeper word than that. That I have experienced, that probably most fly fisher people have experienced. In order for that to be shared with others and for others to continue to experience that, I think it becomes very important. Third way in which I answer that question is, as we clearly see, despite the fact that we are older white guys, as we see the demographic of our nation changing, the reality is that if there are going to be others who prize and therefore protect what is necessary and what is special about fly fishing and about the places that we fly fish, it's going to need to involve others besides simply old white guys who say this is important. And perhaps if a fourth answer is just the enjoyment, again not-- not personal fun, but a deeper satisfaction. Just the enjoyment of knowing that there are others who appreciate what you appreciate. Well, in that regard, I think it's wonderful that one of the fastest growing demographics in fly fishing right now is women. I think it's wonderful. And I think, as in so many areas, I think that there's a lot of benefit that women can bring to the sport. You know, just like there was much benefit that women's suffrage brought to America when they got the vote. Just like there was much benefit that businesses and business in

general gained as, in the 50s and 60s and 70s, more and more women entered the workforce. I think for fly fishing as well. There's some real advantages and benefit as more women get into the sport. Same thing in terms of minorities. So that it-- it becomes less and less and becomes perceived less and less as a sport just for old white guys.

Joel Weinhold [00:12:37] I think-- I think one answer is, Yes. I think that's certainly been part of it. I think, perhaps, also just in terms of-- of culturally and cultural experience, probably, prior to the current generation or the part of the last couple generations, probably most fly fishers learned how to fly fish from their dad or that kind of thing. You know, the person who taught me wasn't my dad, but he was a guy my dad's age. And it was-- it was that same kind of experience. My sense is that more and more people today are experiencing fly fishing or being invited to-- into the experience of fly fishing by people other than simply their dad or something like that. And so, as that has changed, I think that has widened the perspective where I think there is some truth to the-- to the perception that previously, it was somewhat a sport of privilege. And it is also the case that it takes a couple dollars to get the equipment to do it. You know, in-- in that sense, perhaps somewhat similar to skiing, which is also tremendously big here in Colorado, and yet it costs a couple dollars to ski. By the time you get equipment and you pay for lift tickets and transportation since most people don't live in the ski communities, whether that's from the Denver metro area or elsewhere. And so I'm talking about even for Coloradans, much less for those who come for a ski vacation. But even for Coloradans it takes a few dollars to ski, typically. In a similar fashion, it does take a little money to-- to obtain the equipment and get into the sport. Now, I think because of that, there are certain organizations that are making a real effort to try to make fly fishing accessible even to those who might not be-- who might be somewhat more disadvantaged economically. And I think, again, the wider we can extend or spread the scope of those who experience fly fishing, I think that's that's valuable that's all to the good.

Joel Weinhold [00:15:29] Well... I have found that there are a number of components in what makes a fishing trip or fishing experience enjoyable and valuable. And only some of those are the particular location. But if we separate those others out and we talk just about location at this point, someday I'd love to fish Patagonia and I would very much like to have the chance to go to New Zealand and fish there. And I'd say that especially because more and more of our customers, here at Denver Outfitters, are coming from New Zealand. And we're getting increasing amounts of interest and, ultimately, customers from there. And I know it's a very popular and prized fly fishing destination so, someday, I hope that becomes possible for me to do that as well.

Joel Weinhold [00:16:43] Well you mentioned Trout Unlimited. And we are frequently contacted by various chapters of Trout Unlimited. There's also the-- I've got a letter right here on my desk and was talking with the conservation director there just yesterday from the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers association. I think they do very good work. I think there are a number of others. And I think... that my perception of, kind of the historical arc, if you will, of those organizations is that as the general awareness of the importance and value of-- older term was, "conservationism," probably a more contemporary term is, "environmentalism," but I think, in either case, we're talking about the same kinds of things. For many years, to go back to what we talked about a little bit ago, for many years the-- the frontier perspective of America made it such that as a result there wasn't a recognition of the need to care for nature. Nature was something to be conquered as opposed to something to be stewarded. But I think that has changed in the last couple generations. And so more and more there is a recognition of our need and responsibility to do that because if we don't, it's not going to be available for future generations not-- not far hence.

And so, with that recognition, I think more and more people realize that there is some responsibility that we have if A: we want to continue to enjoy this ourselves. If B: we want our kids and grandchildr-- and grandkids to be able to enjoy this and C, just in terms of in the world that we all live in, if we want it to continue to be a-- an enjoyable and inviting and nourishing place to live, we need to take care of it. And so that's why I think a number of those groups have-- have continued to be able to attract members who also recognize that this is one of the ways in which we can give back and give back to fill in the blank. But part of how we give back to others is by caring for the environment in which we all live.

Joel Weinhold [00:19:53] Well I think that's a key one. Yeah it's probably more like 40 plus years actually, now that I think about it. But-- so one of the differences is [child starts crying in background], of the generation of the guy who taught me how to fish, it was-- and I'll just mention if you're hearing a little background noise that's partly because here at Denver Outfitters, we're raising the next generation of anglers and of engineers to continue to design and implement products for the outdoors. So that might be what you're hearing in the background. But of the generation of the-- of Chuck who taught me how to fly fish, I think it was pretty typical often to have a perspective of nature as virtually inexhaustible. So if someone went and caught 40 fish. Well, you know, what's 40 fish? But obviously, you multiply that times X number of anglers and there are a lot more anglers today than there were, you know, when he was a kid. That becomes a-- a more selfish and a less foresightful, if I can coin that term, way to look about the natural habitat and the availability of-- of fish to enjoy. It's also the case that, more and more, fly fishing has become, not for all anglers but for increasing numbers of anglers, is a catch and release sport and part of the reason I think behind that is the recognition of wanting to continue to enhance that opportunity for other anglers as well. So that's a way in which things have changed. Just that perspective. Another way in which I think it's changed is, in terms of my personal experience, is the issue of solitude. Part of much of what draws me to fly fishing is the solitude that I can enjoy. And it's a little harder to find that nowadays than it was 40 years ago because there's just more people. There's certainly more people here in Colorado. And in some ways, perhaps some of the, at least forest if not wilderness areas, are all the more accessible to greater numbers of people. And so it can be a little bit harder to find that solitude experience that, for me, is a significant part of the whole experience of fly fishing.

Joel Weinhold [00:23:10] Well in one sense, I think you say all of those potentially, are concerns. I think, in many ways, our environment is as clean or cleaner than it was 40 or 50 years ago, despite of the increase in population. And I think that's, again, part of that increased awareness that has come about. On the other hand, even with that increased awareness, as a result of increase in population, that does put pressures on-- on especially-- on the-- the more natural or wild areas. And so some-- some ongoing discussions need to be had and choices need to be made in terms of whether it's-- or how best to continue to protect and preserve those areas. And, you know, I am not of the, "protect it all and never have any development" perspective because I think A: development is necessary and B: I'm generally a pretty big free market guy. I feel that people ought to be able to do what they want with their own property. And yet, I think privatization is one of those issues that creates some real challenges for the habitat. And so, I think those are our questions that society needs to... to wrestle with and to come to some conclusions on, in terms of, How do we, on the one hand, protect private property rights? And yet, on the other hand, recognize the national heritage that has been and, presumably, that we want to continue to impart to all Americans. Regardless of whether they're landowners or not and regardless of whether they own that parti-- that particular piece of land or not. Those are not easy questions to gain agreement on. But I think there

are crucial questions to be dealt with so that there can continue to be the opportunity and the habitat for years and generations to come.

Joel Weinhold [00:25:51] You know I thought about that. And I'm far from an expert angler so I'm sure there would be many who could give more specific and helpful technical pieces of advice. But one of the things that I would say, as someone who has been fishing for 40 plus years, is: I think one of the most important things is to enjoy all of it. If-- If you fish with the perspective that the primary goal and objective of fishing is to catch fish, I think you miss out on an awful lot of the whole experience. But if instead, if you can-- if you can embrace enjoying all of it, embracing the times you're fishing when the weather's terrible and it's raining on you and it's cold and-- and-- and you're shaken so much you can hardly tie your fly. And yet, it's an enjoyable experience. If you can embrace that. If you can embrace the days when you fish and you get skunked, you don't catch any. If you can embrace all of it. I think that makes-- I think it makes the entire experience, and perhaps your perspective on life as well, much more enjoyable.

Joel Weinhold [00:27:23] I think, for me, what makes for a good fishing partner would be someone who's both a good conversationalist and a good listener and who knows how to be quiet. Someone who can share in my triumphs and emphasize in my disappointments. And someone who, in addition to all that, someone who knows how to let the river come to him. I think that makes for pretty good fishing companion.

Joel Weinhold [00:28:00] Well, it occurs to me when I mentioned a little earlier as we were speaking, the the sport of skiing as an analogy to fly fishing. I think in a-- in another way, that is also a good analogy in that there's been a tremendous growth in the number of skiers in Colorado, in the last forty five years, just as there have been growth in the number of fly fishers. And one can lament that. The joke used to be, perhaps still has been, that most people in Colorado feel that, Now that I'm here, we should shut the door and not let anybody else in. Well the reality is, one of the wonderful things about America is that we have the freedom to go where we want to go. And, you know, I've often said to people, as they have lamented the increase in population here in Colorado, I've had to say, Can you blame them? I mean, why would you not want to live in Colorado? So I understand that there is a tremendous draw a tremendous attraction. And so, with that, I think the more that we can do to A: encourage the sport. And I think, you know, the sport is valuable on many levels. But one that comes to mind for me is, certainly people identify and many lament the seeming increase in isolation by people because of our electronic gadgets. Well, if you can-- now again, it occurs to me, I'm kind of implying that father-son thing, but I don't think that's the only context in which it needs to take place. But if you can encourage people, oftentimes, the people you're encouraging happen to be your children. But in any case, if you can encourage people to unplug and turn off and spend some time focused with each other and focused on nature, I think that's good for all of us. Even if it means there's gonna be a few more people on the river than there used to be.