

## Dave Whitlock

World-renowned fly fisherman whose talents include painting, illustrating, writing, photography, fly tying, and lecturing.

### Chapter 01 - 1:07

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Dave Whitlock is a world-renowned fly fisherman and contributor of many articles, photos, and illustrations to the world's top outdoor sports magazines. His first published piece was in *Field & Stream* in 1968.

He has written and illustrated six books—several of which are considered “bibles” by fly fishermen—and co-authored or contributed dozens of others.

Dave Whitlock is the best-known and most talented international figure in Oklahoma who is often not recognized in his home state of Oklahoma.

Dave resigned his position as a research chemist, pooled his talents in painting, illustrating, writing, photography, fly fishing, fly tying, and lecturing to embark on a new career as a full-time professional in the art of fly fishing.

He has been inducted into five halls of fame and was named by *Fly Fisherman Magazine* one of its “50 Most Influential Fly Fishers in the Last 5 Decades.”

Dave's wife Emily is an accomplished fly fisher and edits all of Dave's work. They live beside a trout stream in Welling, Oklahoma, which is where this interview took place... listen to Dave tell his story on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 02 - 6:28

#### Polio

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling and today's date is October 2, 2019.

Dave, would you state your full name, please?

**Dave Whitlock:** Dave Whitlock.

**JE:** You must have a middle name or something.

**DW:** No, it's just Dave, D-a-v-e Whitlock.

- JE:** From birth, that's the way you were named, Dave Whitlock?
- DW:** Yeah, yeah. My middle name is William but would never use it.
- JE:** All right.
- DW:** But if it makes you feel good, David William Whitlock.
- JE:** [laughing] Well, for oral history, I guess we're kind of weird about those kind of things.
- DW:** Yeah, that's okay, that's fine, fine.
- JE:** Your date of birth?
- DW:** Eleven/eleven/'thirty-four. November the 11th, 1934.
- JE:** So your present age?
- DW:** Is eighty-four and three quarters.
- JE:** You'll be eighty-five—
- DW:** In November.
- JE:** This November?
- DW:** Yeah, yeah.
- JE:** Where are we recording this interview?
- DW:** Well, in my favorite place to work and hang out and that's my art studio.
- JE:** Tell us in Oklahoma where—
- DW:** It's about—
- JE:** ...are we?
- DW:** It's about a mile from a big metropolitan area called Tail Oat, Oklahoma, which is about sixteen miles from Tahlequah.
- JE:** Right. You have a stream of water coming by here?
- DW:** Yeah, yeah. I actually live on John Nickel's ranch. We have an acreage here that we lease from John with our home and our studios on. In that particular acreage, we have a beautiful little trout stream that runs right by my door and it has beautiful rainbow trout in it.
- JE:** The name of the ranch is?
- DW:** Caney Creek Ranch.
- JE:** Caney Creek Ranch, right.
- DW:** Yeah. Caney Creek basically runs right through the center of it.
- JE:** Okay.
- DW:** And it's four thousand acres of ranch.
- JE:** Where were you born?
- DW:** I was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma.
- JE:** Your mother's name, maiden name, and where she came from?
- DW:** Evelyn Cornelius Smith. She came from Muskogee too.
- JE:** What kind of personality? What kind of person was she?
- DW:** Well, she was a good mother, but it was an effort to be around her.

**JE:** [laughing] Well, could that have been vice versa too?

**DW:** Well, yeah, it could have been very easily, but even people like Emily, my wonderful wife, had a hard time getting along with her; she's just a tough lady.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** You know?

**JE:** How about your father then? His—

**DW:** He was just the opposite, he was real easy going and very thoughtful. He wasn't self-centered at all.

**JE:** What was his name?

**DW:** His name was Joseph William Whitlock and he was also from Muskogee.

**JE:** So maybe your personality is more like your father?

**DW:** I hope so.

**JE:** What did they do for a living? What did your father do?

**DW:** Well, they got together in the Depression. Neither one of them had anything but a high school education. So my dad, for the most part of the time I knew him, was a construction welder. He went around the country welding up pipe lines, hydroelectric power dams, and that sort of thing. So he was gone about two-thirds of every month, working on different jobs.

And my mom, she was a housewife but, for a little while, she was a beautician in Muskogee.

**JE:** Since you went into fishing, which we'll get into in artwork—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...did they have any of those interests?

**DW:** Yes, they did. Both sides of the family, the Whitlocks and the Smiths were avid outdoorsmen. And they were avid outdoorsmen for two reasons: One, to feed themselves, because they everything that they caught or shot, but also they enjoyed it. You know, they really loved it too.

**JE:** Were they fishermen?

**DW:** Fishermen and hunters both.

**JE:** But the art that eventually showed in your life, did they show any of that?

**DW:** No, no, no. Not that I know of.

**JE:** At birth, you were born with a spinal—

**DW:** Yeah, well, I had a difficult birth and the birthing process damaged my spine. It created a weak back, basically, because it was almost fine. But for the most part, I've kind of gotten over that. By the time I was in my puberty years, I started outgrowing that.

**JE:** But—

**DW:** But there were—

**JE:** ...when you were six and seven years old, would it have been bothering you?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** Were you in bed a lot?

**DW:** The problem, it's really complicated but I'll try to make it as simple as possible. When I had that birth, it was difficult. And then sometime in the next two years I contracted rheumatic fever and polio. By the time I was five years old, I was suffering from all three, severely.

But they did not realize all of those things that happened to me simultaneously. So I spent a lot of time in Crippled Children's Hospital, then just trying to figure out what was really wrong with me.

**JE:** The Crippled Children's Hospital, where was that?

**DW:** Oklahoma City and St. Louis.

**JE:** This is at five years old?

**DW:** Yeah. Five to about eight years old.

**JE:** If you were battling all of that, what about your education?

**DW:** Well, I went to school, grade school and stuff, but I was in and out of the hospital. I wasn't incarcerated in the hospital all that time but I'd come and go.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** A week or two here, a week or two there.

**JE:** Do you recall how tough that had to be for—

**DW:** It was hell. It was hell, scared the hell out of me. First of all, it wasn't a pleasant place to be. And they weren't sensitive about me being alone or scared or what have you. I was in wards with twenty, thirty other kids that were just as unhappy. I really thought that my folks had abandoned me, you know?

**JE:** Sure.

**DW:** In fact, twice I ran away from the hospital. The best I could move, I actually got outside the hospital before they caught me.

**JE:** Ha! This went on for how long?

**DW:** Until I was about six years old. And then my mother started taking me to a chiropractor. And she did a lot for my mobility.

**JE:** Polio was a paralyzing disease—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...did that affect you? Did you get—

**DW:** Yeah, it did, on my right leg.

**JE:** Your right leg.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** You still have permanent...

**DW:** I have permanent disfigurement; my right leg is weaker and a little smaller than my left leg. But for the most part, as you saw this morning, I don't have a problem getting around.

**JE:** No, not at all.

- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** For young people listening, polio was a, a—
- DW:** Most of them probably don't even know what it was.
- JE:** No they don't, and they can look it up in Wikipedia.
- DW:** Yeah, yeah.
- JE:** But it was an infectious disease.
- DW:** Oh, it was horrible.
- JE:** And you could get it from someone else.
- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** I remember in North Dakota where I lived, the next door neighbor boy had it and we walked way around his house—
- DW:** Oh, yeah.
- JE:** ...to make sure we didn't get close to him.
- DW:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember during that epidemic kids wouldn't go to swimming pools and they were scared to go to school and everything. Because it was pretty rampant. It wasn't unusual for everybody to know a victim.
- JE:** But—
- DW:** The most horrible thing about it, far as I'm concerned, is a lot of people lost the ability to breathe. And they put them in an iron lung for the rest of their life.
- JE:** Yeah.
- DW:** Or till they died. The sooner the better on that deal.
- JE:** And so I guess despite your medical problems—
- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** ...you escaped all that.
- DW:** Yeah, yeah.
- JE:** With polio.
- DW:** Yeah, yeah.

## Chapter 03 - 7:05

### First Fly Rod

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**John Erling:** When did your interest in fly fishing begin? In this period of time?

**Dave Whitlock:** Well, as you asked earlier, my folks were avid outdoorsmen. They fished a lot. We used cane poles and bait-casting rods to catch fish. And on a pretty low level, you know, they were big sportsmen; they just were fishing locally.

I love to fish and they'd most always take me out. My granddad worked at night at the fire department. And when he'd come home in the morning, they'd go fishing till about sundown. Then he'd sleep and then go to work at the fire department.

So I got to go fishing almost all the time, if I wasn't in school.

**JE:** With both parents and grandparents?

**DW:** Yeah. I fished mostly with my grandparents, but one day, I was going through my granddad's outdoor books and stuff, and I came across an L.L.Bean catalog. I was looking through the pages of it and, all of a sudden, I saw this gorgeous fishing rod. Looked like it was made out of wood and it had red wraps on it and a beautiful handle. Next to it was a sheepskin folder with hooks with feathers on it. All I'd ever seen was wooden plugs or shrimp or worms or, you know, something like that.

And I said, "Granddad! What is this?"

And he said, "Dave, that's fly fishing." He said, "Not for us because that's a rich man's sport."

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** That was in the '40s. Now, fast-forward to 1980. And here was a handicapped kid, born there, and discovered fly fishing through the L.L.Bean catalog. And in 1980, I became the head of the L.L.Bean fly fishing product line.

**JE:** Isn't that amazing? Wow.

**DW:** And I built them a school and wrote them three books.

**JE:** That's wonderful.

**DW:** On fly fishing.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** I know it's completely crazy.

**JE:** Right, and we'll follow along on how you got there.

**DW:** Okay, all right.

**JE:** Didn't you talk your dad into buying a rod?

**DW:** Well, what happened was, I asked my folks for a rod, because I was really too young to go out and buy one myself. And they said, "No, they're too expensive and you don't need to learn that." They weren't negative about it; they just didn't see any reason for it.

But then on my ninth birthday, my dad bought me a used bamboo fly rod that he bought at a pawn shop. Let me tell you something—it was rough. You know, it was dog-legged and the wrappings were coming off it, the reel was rusty and the line was rotten, but I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen in my life.

**JE:** And that was a fly rod?

**DW:** It was a beautiful fly rod, good fly rod, yeah.

**JE:** Did you do anything to improve its—

**DW:** No, in fact, I probably was the demise of the eventual deterioration because I used it a lot and it was in bad shape, and so it started coming apart.

**JE:** Where were you fishing with that rod?

**DW:** Well, mostly initially, at Spaulding Park, which is about four blocks from my house.

**JE:** In Muskogee?

**DW:** Yeah. They had a little lake up there, maybe a three-acre lake, and I'd go up there and fish for bluegill.

**JE:** This is a nine-foot bamboo rod.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** That was pretty big for a kid.

**DW:** Oh, yeah—

**JE:** An—

**DW:** But I didn't know that.

**JE:** You probably could have caught fish on the back cast.

**DW:** I did. After I got a little older and a little bit more physical, my folks would take me someplace else to fish where the water was bigger. Because I couldn't cast very far I'd wade out to where I could get to the fish.

One place I remember is Taft Lake. There's a little reservoir over at Taft and I'd wade out to about bellybutton deep and I'd cast out where the bigger fish were. But like you suggested, sometimes I'd cast back and I'd actually hook a little fish behind me.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** And then it'd go over. And that was the demise of one of the tips. The fish would break the tip as I cut over.

**JE:** How long did you use this bamboo rod before you got another one?

**DW:** Probably until I was about twelve.

**JE:** And then what was the rod that you got?

**DW:** Well—

**JE:** How did you get that?

**DW:** Fiberglass had come out then and my folks bought me a solid fiberglass fly rod. There was store in Muskogee called Oklahoma Tire and Supply. And they—

**JE:** Otasco.

**DW:** Yeah. And they sold fly rods. This rod was about maybe twenty dollars.

**JE:** Well, they knew that you had a strong interest in it by now.

**DW:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** It wasn't a passing fancy at all.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. The funny thing was though, they viewed the fly rod as dangerous, and it was, because you're waving a hook back and forth through the air. So when I'd go fly fishing, they insisted that I kept my distance from them.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** And that meant I couldn't fish out of the boat with them. But I'd have to either wade or walk the bank.

**JE:** What kind of flies were you using early on?

**DW:** Well, the first ones, you know, a fly is something that imitates a fish food, it's not necessarily an insect. You know, it's a hook with feathers tied on it to make it look like something a fish would eat. And I found these little flies on a card in that same store. They were ten cents apiece. What they were was little Snelled wet flies, they were little trout flies. I bought three of them.

I went up to Spaulding Park to fish with those flies. First thing I did is I tried to tie them on the end of my fly line and I couldn't get them on there. In other words, there was no way to get that fly on that fly line because there's no leader.

**JE:** Umm (thoughtful sound).

**DW:** So I walked back home and when I walked by my grandmother's house she saw me. And she thought some kid had picked on me and run me off, because in those days, being crippled, I got harassed a lot.

**JE:** Hmm (distressed sound).

**DW:** So she came out, she said, "Dave, what's wrong?"

And I said, "Oh, Grandma, I bought these flies but I can't get them on the end of my line."

And she said, "Well, first of all, why would anybody need such a big old line?" Because it was as big as a pencil lead or bigger. You know how big a fly line is. She said, "Let's tie a smaller piece of line onto it." So she tied about a six-foot piece of my granddad's black braided casting line with a granny knot onto that fly line and that's what I fished with for several years as a leader. A black linen line.

**JE:** Isn't that great?

**DW:** Yeah, it was wonderful, and I thought it was cool. I didn't realize, you know, that I wasn't doing it right.

**JE:** Right. Did you ever go hunting for squirrel and all and use the fur for your flies?

**DW:** I started eventually, yeah. My grandmother, the one that tied the knot for me, she was a wonderful human being. You know, she was always focused on making me happy. And she bought me a Herter's Fly Tying Kit for my twelfth birthday.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DW:** It was not much but, again, like the rod, it was wonderful, I thought. And so I started tying some flies. There was a little manual, George Herter Fly Tying Manual in it. And with what little bit of instruction it gave me I was able to fashion some pretty crude flies.

Even before that though, when I'd go up to Spaulding Park and I would fish with a cane pole, when I'd run out of bait, sometimes I'd take some leaves or sticks or grass

and I'd wrap them on the hook. I'd dap it on the water and I'd catch some fish with it. I didn't know they were flies. I didn't have any bait but I made an artificial that looked like something a fish would hit.

**JE:** And you weren't thinking of making a fly—

**DW:** No, no, I didn't know that.

**JE:** ...you were just thinking you were creating bait.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. You have to get perspective, yes.

**JE:** That just shows you were born with it, obviously.

**DW:** Well, not too long ago, somebody asked me kind of a question like that. You know, "How did you get started and why did you get started?"

I believe I was born to do it.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DW:** Because so many things in my life just falling into place because of it.

**JE:** Yeah. There's a plan for us, isn't there?

**DW:** Oh, without a doubt.

## Chapter 04 - 4:26

### World Events

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**John Erling:** You have brothers or sisters?

**Dave Whitlock:** No, I was the only child. The birth problem rendered my mother unable to have other children.

**JE:** You went to elementary school in Muskogee?

**DW:** Yes.

**JE:** While this is all happening to you, early on, we have the Dust Bowl from 1930 to 1936.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** We have the Depression, 1929 to 1939.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** Is that affecting your family in any way?

**DW:** Not the Dust Bowl, that I know of, but the Depression did. My dad didn't have a steady job so he worked at a drugstore part of the time. And part of the time he helped my granddad do some mechanic work. My granddad on my mom's side was an auto mechanic.

**JE:** So they didn't ha—

**DW:** They didn't have much money, in fact, they often told me I was the only one of the three in the family that got fed that day.

**JE:** Wow.

**DW:** Yeah, that was tough times.

**JE:** These are lasting thoughts to you even today, aren't they?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** You were only seven years old December 4, 1941. Does that ring a bell for you?

**DW:** I remember it because we were driving in North Carolina—my dad had a job there working on Lake Cherokee—when it came over the radio that the Japanese had attacked us.

**JE:** For a young boy, that had to cause some worry or alarm?

**DW:** No, not really, I was too young for that, at that point. In fact, I looked at it as kind of exciting.

**JE:** But as you grow older and in the '50s, do you remember the fear of communism and all—

**DW:** Oh, that was awful. Yeah. A lot of us, when Russia started building atomic bombs, we were pretty well convinced there'd be a nuclear war.

**JE:** Yeah. Did you have tests in case there was a nuclear war? They had to get under your desk?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, pretty regularly, yeah.

**JE:** Tell us about what happened.

**DW:** Well, what we'd have to do, if the starter went off we'd have to get under a table or go in the bathroom, just almost like you would a tornado. In reality, that wouldn't be no good in a nuclear attack, you know, you didn't have a chance, you were dead. You just prolonged it a few weeks.

**JE:** Do you remember hearing presidents on the radio?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** Or early on—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...like Franklin Roosevelt?

**DW:** Some but not a lot.

**JE:** Harry Truman, Eisenhower?

**DW:** Yeah, Eisenhower. The one probably that I remember more than anybody else was after I became a young adult, and that was President Kennedy.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** I love that man, he was an incredible human being.

**JE:** So then the day he was assassinated in November of '63—

**DW:** Yeah. Yeah.

**JE:** ...you remember that day?

**DW:** Oh, yeah. I was driving on North Lewis Street in Tulsa on my lunch break when it happened.

**JE:** The feelings and the days afterward, how—

**DW:** Yeah, it was horrible.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** I don't think there was a person in this country, Republican or Democrat, that wasn't depressed over that.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** It was awful.

**JE:** Yeah. We haven't followed your artwork here.

**DW:** Th—

**JE:** That also's happening to you when you're very young.

**DW:** Yeah, yes, yes it was.

**JE:** Six, seven, eight.

**DW:** Very young, yeah. Yeah.

**JE:** Tell us then what was going on with your art.

**DW:** Of course, going to school, you get a little bit of art in what we called an art class. You know, thirty, forty minutes of drawing or painting. And I loved that—from the first grade on through I had some exposure doing that. But when I got to maybe about seven years old or so I started wanting to do that outside the art class. Paper was kind of scarce in those days, so quite often I would take a chalk or a Crayola or something, and I would do pictures on things like tabletops or desktops or sidewalks or textbooks. And I got in a lot of trouble doing that, believe me.

I used to tell people that, "I get paid for what I used to get a spanking for when I was a kid."

**JE:** Right. You know, the famed artist Charles Banks Wilson—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** He did scenarios in the state capitol.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** He says he would draw under the table—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** When he was five years old.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** So his mother wouldn't see where he was drawing.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. One of the neatest things though is that I have a creativity that I kind of relate to my grandmother beginning it, in that when I was pretty crippled up and I couldn't get out and play sports and stuff, she would spend afternoons with me. We'd get a tablet, she would make a line on that tablet and then she'd say, "Now you make that into something. It might look like a snake or a bird."

And then I'd do it for her.

**JE:** Wow.

**DW:** And we'd do that for all afternoon, week after week. I loved doing that and that taught me how to see form when there wasn't a lot of form.

**JE:** Your imagination was really growing then.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** And this was your grandmother again?

**DW:** Yeah, my grandmother, yeah, on my Whitlock side.

**JE:** Isn't that amazing?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** What a special person she was.

**DW:** Yes she was, yeah. Listen, grandmothers are special people.

**JE:** [laughs]

**DW:** Your parents are too. But grandparents have the time to devote to let you be yourself.

## Chapter 05 - 7:12

### Teacher Disliked Dave

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**John Erling:** Then you're in junior high school. And then high school.

**Dave Whitlock:** Yeah.

**JE:** Are you doing artwork then into high school?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Most of the artwork I did in high school, I had an art teacher that did not like me. She didn't believe in what I wanted to do. And I didn't like her because she didn't believe in what I wanted to do. But I wanted to do nature, wildlife. And she wanted me to do basically abstract stuff. She said, "A camera can do what you want to do. You'll never make anything of yourself as an artist if you just reproduce nature."

She was wrong there, for me.

**JE:** Did you have to conform to what she wanted?

**DW:** Yeah, I did have to, to make my grades, yeah.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** Of course I did, yeah.

**JE:** You di—

**DW:** In fact, I won a national art award with a picture that she encouraged me to do and it was a garbage can in a back yard with garbage coming out of it. And I did get some nature in it. I put a blackbird or a crow sitting on the side picking at the garbage.

**JE:** [laughing] So you kind of showed her, didn't you?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah. Put a little bit of nature into it.

**JE:** [laughing] That's great. You graduated from Muskogee High School?

**DW:** Yes, yes I did.

**JE:** In what year?

**DW:** Nineteen fifty-two, I think it was.

**JE:** All right. So then what's happening after high school?

**DW:** Well, I went to Northeastern State College.

**JE:** In Tahlequah.

**DW:** Yeah. That was thirty miles away. None of my folks ever had anything but a high school education and some of them didn't even have that. So my opportunity to go to college was pretty special. What I'd done is I'd saved money and I had about nine hundred dollars saved in the bank.

**JE:** Okay, where are you getting this money to save?

**DW:** Delivering papers, doing chores, I was raising some pigeons and I'd sell those pigeons. I'd do anything for a buck. Gather mistletoe around Christmas.

I had a friend, his name was Avis Gode and he was a good tree climber. Because of my handicap I couldn't climb good. We'd go out on our bicycles around Muskogee in November. He'd climb up a tree and cut the mistletoe and throw it down to me. We would take it to the local feed stores and they would buy it from us for ten cents a pound. And they'd sell it.

I always saved a certain amount of that money for my schooling. Or for fishing tackle.

My good, good lesson, John, my folks never gave me money for things I wanted for pleasure. They said, "If you want that, you earn it." And I wish all parents would do that with their kids today. Rather than just hand them a new car or hand them a fishing rod, say, "You need to earn that." That's the best lesson I think my folks ever gave me.

**JE:** That's a great lesson. So you're in Tahlequah, but your family moved from Muskogee, didn't they?

**DW:** No. My dad died in Muskogee.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** And my mother, after he died, married another man and they moved to Texas and eventually to California.

**JE:** But you go to Northeastern.

**DW:** Yeah. I wanted to major in art and journalism. My folks, even though I was paying for it, said, "No." That artists and journalists were the first to starve in the Depression. Said, "You get something you can earn a living at." They suggested it and I was thinking about looking into being a doctor or dentist. And Northeastern had a really good premed and pre dental school.

So I went there thinking that I was going to be a doctor. They had a program at Northeastern at the time that if you made 3.8 to a 4. average the first, I think it was, sixty hours, it was like the first two and a half years, you could apply at OU Med School. And

I had almost a 4. average. But my advisor didn't realize that I had not taken calculus. So when I enrolled in the third course of physics I made a D in it. Because I could not work the problems, I didn't have calculus.

So they gave me, at the university, it was like a standby thing, alternate, it was called, and if I made that grade up then I could get into the university, if there was an opening. But there never was an opening. I made it up, I made a B in the course with, you might say, handmade calculus.

**JE:** That was altering your future life—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...because you couldn't get in, you were on standby. And they said, "We don't have room for you."

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** What if they had accepted you? Do you think you would have gone to be a doctor?

**DW:** I don't think I could have afforded it. I don't think we were realistic about that, whenever I got on it. You know, they may have been able to borrow some money or work real hard to do it but I don't really think that I could have afforded it.

**JE:** But you got to move on to what you really wanted—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** ...to do in the first place anyway.

**DW:** Well, eventually, yeah. Then I went ahead and graduated with degrees in chemistry, physics, and biology. Had a BS in all three. And I went to work in Tulsa at a petroleum production research center for twelve years as a researcher.

**JE:** What company was that with?

**DW:** Standard Oil of New Jersey and Carter Oil Company.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** And I got married when I got right out of college. That's when I began to try to develop my art talent and my writing talents. Because I started doing it on my own.

**JE:** And you're fishing too?

**DW:** Every time I got a chance.

**JE:** Where would you go fishing then if you were living in—

**DW:** Well, mostly just within thirty, forty miles. I had an old car at that time. My dad had reconditioned a '38 Dodge. If it didn't have a flat I'd get to the fishing area. I'd fish on the Grand River and Fort Gibson Lake was built at that time and Greenleaf Lake. And just local ponds.

**JE:** All right. How long were you with Standard Oil?

**DW:** For about seven years. They moved me to Houston. By that time, I had a couple children and I did not want to raise my children in a big city. So we moved back to Bartlesville, because there was a job open there in government research. I was working in classified

research, and unless I got a release from them, another competitor company couldn't hire me.

And so I went to work for the government for three years.

**JE:** Okay, when was it you were in Montana at Armstrong Spring Creek?

**DW:** Okay, that happened the year I was a senior in high school. My mom drove up to see my dad, who was working in Bismarck, North Dakota, and I drove up with her, because I could drive at that time. And I knew about trout and I knew about how good they were for fly fishing. You know, I'd kept up with it reading articles and what have you, but I only caught a few trout in Missouri, as a young teenager.

On the way back home, I talked my mom into stopping by a trout stream to fish. Well, we stopped but didn't have very much luck fly fishing. So I started bait fishing with grasshoppers and I caught a bunch of trout. So I stopped by a place in Livingston, Montana, called Dan Bailey's Fly Shop.

We went in and told Dan that I'd been catching all these big fish on grasshoppers. He said, "Well, you know, Dave, when you fly fish we have a grasshopper imitation." He gave me three of them. And he sent me to the creek you just mentioned and I caught some really nice trout on a grasshopper fly.

**JE:** Didn't you also, you bought a facemask and fins?

**DW:** Yeah, but that was several years later. Because I fell in love with Montana on that trip. And so when I later had the job at the research, I started driving up there and fishing on my vacation every year for over thirty years.

**JE:** And where in Montana?

**DW:** Mostly around Yellowstone Park. If you drew about a hundred-mile circle around Yellowstone Park, that was mostly where I spent the time.

**JE:** Okay. This summer we were in Big Fork and Kalispell, Montana.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** You were probably not that area.

**DW:** No, no, no, no.

## Chapter 06 - 5:20

### Subsurface Art

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**John Erling:** So I'm going to bring you back to this experience where you were able to actually look in the water at the fish.

**Dave Whitlock:** Okay.

**JE:** Tell us about that.

**DW:** Well, the Yellowstone River ran through Livingston, Montana, and it was a great river to catch a big trout in. So I would quite often during that eight or ten days of fishing, fish that river. And one of the guide friends that I'd made friends with told me about the Spring Creek fishing there. So he took me over there. It was just crystal clear and you could see all these trout in there. I've never seen anything like it.

And so the next year, I bought a facemask and I went into the water because I was interested in painting trout, live trout in their environment. When I went under, I discovered another planet. You know, when you go under the water in a clear river and see the vegetation and the light and the bubbles and the fish and everything moving in that flow, rather than as we see everything in air, it's like another world.

The minute I saw that, I said, "That's what I want to paint. I want to show people that other world." So 80 percent of my art is evolved around subsurface art. Because it's just incredible.

**JE:** Hmm (pleased sound). That just turned the light bulb on there. And how old were you when that happened?

**DW:** Probably twenty-one, twenty-two years old, maybe twenty-three.

**JE:** You lived in Arkansas.

**DW:** Yeah. How I got there, you know, I told you I started kind of working on becoming a better fly fisherman and artist, what have you. While I was living in Tulsa and Bartlesville at the research centers, I started doing little programs on fly fishing. You know, getting better and better at it. And I started selling some flies I was tying.

When I moved to Bartlesville, I started actually making quite a bit of money by moonlighting. So what I was doing is on weekends, on vacations, I was earning money with fly fishing. Finally, it got to the point where it looked pretty good, you know, I was developing a reputation.

And my wife said, "Well, if you want to just do that for a year or two, you know, I'll continue working at my job and keep the cash flow going."

And so that's what we did. When I was thirty-four years old, I left my research job and I became Dave Whitlock. You know, before that I was just somebody else.

**JE:** You were trying to become Dave Whitlock.

**DW:** Yeah. The next thing is, I realized where I was living was a handicap because I was living too far away from the market.

**JE:** In Bartlesville?

**DW:** Yeah. At that time, 90 percent of money to be earned was earned in fly fishing for trout. Nowadays, because of my influence in other people, people fish all kinds of fish with a fly rod. The closest good trout fishing or good environment that I could live in to do that work was Arkansas. You know, up around Mountain Home.

So when I was around thirty-six, we moved up there. By that time, I was pretty well earning my living full time on it.

**JE:** Oh—

**DW:** I lived there for forty years.

**JE:** But in Oklahoma, fly fishing was certainly not a very popular way to fish.

**DW:** Not when I was a child. It was like being in the Sahara Desert looking for water, you know.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** That was one of the things that was so crazy is that Dave Whitlock, born in Oklahoma, or the Sahara Desert, became the best swimmer in the world. Well, that's the same thing; as I became one of the most prominent fly fishermen in the world, being born in Oklahoma, it just didn't add up, other than kind of like we said before—I was born to do it. I had all the strikes against me to do that.

**JE:** Yeah, but eventually you did move to Arkansas.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** And trout.

**DW:** Yeah. But I took those skills with me, you know.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** I didn't get them in Arkansas. I had already developed those skills on my own.

**JE:** But in Oklahoma, we don't naturally have trout.

**DW:** No, there's actually no natural trout streams in Oklahoma. Now when I moved to Bartlesville, I started a fly fishing club. And it's called Green Country Fly Fishers. Its members were fly fishermen from the Bartlesville and the Tulsa area. We had about fifty members.

The reason I started that club, the main reason, was to create a natural trout stream in Oklahoma. Because I'd fallen in love with trout.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** So that's what we did. Over by Locust Grove there is a beautiful spring creek that was cold enough for trout. We got permission from the state to stock it with trout. We stocked it with trout and they started reproducing and that's another story of how we stocked it. What we did there changed the world of trout.

But we stocked it, we got natural reproduction, and then we wanted the state to declare it a trout stream, which was regulations.

They said, "Okay, we'll consider that." And they had three public hearings. One in Tahlequah, one in Locust Grove, and one at the capital, to see if there was any objections to anybody about it. And we had to publicize the stream, at that point.

They turned us down. They did not declare it a trout stream but everybody knew about it. So the locals and fishermen from everywhere came there and wiped it out.

**JE:** Well, why did they turn you down?

**DW:** They said that it was too insignificant to devote the time and energy of a game warden to patrol it.

**JE:** How big was this stream?

**DW:** It's twenty-three miles long. But it's small, you know. At its biggest, it's about the size of the Bearing Fork.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** So anyway—

**JE:** But they came and fished.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then you weren't able to—

**DW:** No, we lost the stream. But—

## Chapter 07 - 4:05

### Creating a Trout Stream

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**Dave Whitlock:** ...the way we hatched the trout eggs in the stream created a method that's used all over the world today. I knew about trout but I didn't know how to grow trout or anything, and so I talked to a fishery biologist that was a cold water fishery biologist, and he said, "Dave, if you want to create a trout stream, the best way you can do it is not put adult fish in, out of hatchery, but hatch eggs in the stream." He said, "Then they develop their natural survival ability from day one. But if you put a hatchery fish in there, the chances of survival are not good."

So we found a source of trout eggs. And then there was a small trout incubator that was being sold in France that some of the fly-fishing clubs in the East were using to hatch trout eggs. We bought a hundred of those and hatched eggs in our stream. We had great luck and I became kind of a Johnny Appleseed of that method, because it was wonderful. But it didn't work everywhere. It only worked in the very most pristine water.

To make it really useful we wanted it to work everywhere trout could live. So I redesigned the box and Phillips Petroleum Company made me a mold and we sell it now all over the world.

**John Erling:** What's that called?

**DW:** It's called the Whitlock-Vibert Box. Vibert is the name of the head of the French fishery that developed the initial box. And then the Whitlock came on because I improved it. With information and the patent we got, we named it the Whitlock-Vibert Box.

**JE:** Did that get sold nationwide, worldwide?

**DW:** Yes, it's made by Phillips. They don't charge us anything for the box. And the Federation of Fly Fishermen, who distributes the box and the information and how to use it, sells it to people who want to start it at a dollar apiece. You know, to support the program.

**JE:** Did you gain financially from that?

**DW:** No, no, I didn't want anything.

**JE:** That's a box that hatches eggs?

**DW:** Yes. It hatches eggs and then what I did was made it hatch eggs better. But also there's two stages to incubation of trout: The egg hatching, but once they hatch, they're not able to eat or swim. So they have to spend about two or three weeks absorbing their yolk sac to grow into a three-foot swimming trout. Well, they lay in the gravel helpless and a lot of them are destroyed.

So I figured out a method where when they hatch, they laid and stayed in the box until they could protect themselves.

**JE:** So when we give you these titles Fly Fisherman, Artist, Inventor should be given your name too.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, just a second. I want to show you something.

**JE:** All right.

**DW:** This is what I'm talking about.

**JE:** Oh.

**DW:** You put five hundred trout eggs in here. You close this up and the trout eggs have been fertilized, you know. And you put this under the gravel where the trout would spawn, because they bury their eggs. These eggs hatch, and then when they hatch, they fall through these slots down to here. And they lay there until they change shape. And when they change shape they swim back up through here.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** So they're protected from all fish and predacious insects. Phillips, I gave them the idea and their research department designed this box from what I wanted it to do. It's flat, it folds up, and it's reusable.

**JE:** Wow. You are an inventor. The magazine that you're showing me there is *Trout* magazine.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** This hatchery box, I'll call it—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** ...was a feature in *Trout* magazine.

**DW:** Yeah, I write a regular column for *Trout* magazine, which is the leading trout magazine. This is an issue that I did on the Whitlock-Vibert Box. It basically tells what it is, what it's for, and how to use it, and how to get in contact with information to start a program.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). “What will that cover up there? I’ll take a picture.” You write a lot for that magazine.

**DW:** I have a regular column in it. Anyway, it’s used all over the world.

**JE:** You created a trout stream right here on the ranch.

**DW:** Yes I did, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** Using this box.

**DW:** No, not that box. We initially just stocked it with our tame trout because it’s not inducive, this particularly stream’s bottom, to hatching trout eggs.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** There’s no gravel underneath, it’s just all bedrock.

## Chapter 08 - 2:21

### Grand Slam of Fishing

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**John Erling:** All right, I’m bringing you up to about you were thirty-five years old.

**Dave Whitlock:** Yeah.

**JE:** You said that you had a grand slam of fishing. You caught seventeen varieties of fish in one day on the Illinois River.

**DW:** I don’t remember telling anybody that but I probably did, okay, okay.

**JE:** I know everything that’s in your mind.

**DW:** Okay, all right.

**JE:** Can you tell us about that experience?

**DW:** Sure, sure, okay. I had kind of a goal to show how versatile fly fishing was. And maybe also how special the Illinois River was. The water below Tenkiller Dam and the water above Tenkiller Dam is called the Illinois River. One day, I caught seventeen different varieties on flies below and above the dam. They were small-mouth bass and large-mouth bass, spotted bass, and bluegill and green sunfish, carp and car and trout, stripers, and hybrid stripers and buffalo, I can go on and on.

**JE:** Yeah, the list there should be reminded, these are varieties, not seventeen fish, but seventeen varieties—

**DW:** Species of fish.

**JE:** ...of fish that you caught on that day.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** That is a grand slam.

**DW:** I caught almost all of them on the same fly.

**JE:** Really?

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** You know, in Oklahoma, bass fishing—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...is really, really big.

**DW:** Yes it is, yeah. Because it's really, really good here.

**JE:** Yeah, because this climate is right for them. So you have your bass fishermen, who would never think about fly fishing.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And vice versa, right?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah. To some extent, yeah.

**JE:** Don't they say that bass fish are really smart?

**DW:** Yeah, they are.

**JE:** What about trout? Are they considered smart?

**DW:** I would say that if they're wild they're both about equal.

**JE:** Oh, really?

**DW:** Yeah. The smartest fish that we have that swims in Oklahoma or the world is the common carp. They have the highest intelligence of any other fish in freshwater.

**JE:** We have a place on Grand Lake—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...and my son and grandson—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** ...go down there and the carp, they're huge.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Big carp.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** And they're ugly and not for good eating.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And they're the smartest?

**DW:** Well, I don't think they're ugly, personally.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** But sometimes, sometimes if you're looking for certain physical characteristics, they don't have spots or they're not shaped like a bass. But I have so much respect for them in their lifestyle and how they can survive and how smart they are. To catch a carp on an artificial fly requires a higher plateau of skill than any bass or any trout that ever swims.

**JE:** Really?

**DW:** Yeah, they're very, very smart fish.

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**Chapter 09 - 6:27****A Good Friend**

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**John Erling:** Somewhere in this time, we bring in John Nicel.

**Dave Whitlock:** Yeah.

**JE:** Did you and John know each other back in elementary school?

**DW:** Oh, yeah. I met John when I was in the sixth grade. Had a mutual friend called Avis Gode. Avis still lives in Muskogee. We were buddies. We hung out together and fished together and hunted together. And he met John. John had just moved into the neighborhood and John voiced an interest in learning how to hunt and fish. He said, "Well, I got just the person for you, John." And he introduced John to me when we were in the sixth grade.

And then we went on to know each other in the seventh grade at Alice Robertson High School. Over those years, we became very, very best friends.

**JE:** Then you went your separate ways.

**DW:** Yeah, because John started his married life while he was still in high school, so he went to work after he got out of high school to earn a living for his family. And I had the opportunity of going to college. So I went one direction and he went the other.

But when he went to work, he started developing the Greenleaf Nursery System. As you know, he became a very prominent man in that system.

I saw him from time to time as I was traveling. I'd see him on an airplane, not in Muskogee, but we just crossed paths. I couldn't believe how much he had changed, you know, he had become a really cool, cool Southern gentleman.

Then one day while I was living in Arkansas, I want to say about fifteen years ago now, got a phone call, it was from his wife.

**JE:** Julie?

**DW:** Julie, yes.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** She asked Emily, my wife, if she could reserve a day or two of fishing as a gift certificate for a friend of theirs. We said okay because we have a little program where people will want me to give them private instruction or be with me for whatever reason, it's called "A Day with Dave." So she bought two of those for his Christmas, for the gentleman's Christmas.

Well, about two weeks before Christmas, I get a call from John. He said, "Dave, this is John Nickel. Do you remember me?"

And I said, "God, yeah, John, I still love you, you know, we're still buddies."

And he said, "Well, we bought a gift certificate for a friend of ours because he said before he died he wanted to spend a day fly fishing with you." His name is Dennis

Carpenter. And he said, "But Dennis just died. Would it be okay if I came up and fished for you for that day?"

I said, "Lord o'mercy, yeah," because I was thrilled to see him again. In fact, I got goose bumps just thinking about it right now.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**DW:** Anyway, John, we bonded immediately, because you know yourself, he is a wonderful, wonderful human being.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** I'm a little older than him but I want to grow up to be just like him.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** Anyway, ever since then we've been developing our current relationship.

**JE:** He founded the Greenleaf Nursery and then he got into the wine business.

**DW:** And Far Niente Wine Company in Napa.

**JE:** And then he gave much of the ranch to the John T. Nickel Family Nature and Wildlife Preserve.

**DW:** Not this ranch here, but he gave seventeen thousand acres. There was a ranch on that seventeen thousand, to the Nature Preserve.

**JE:** So that's near here?

**DW:** Yeah, it's about fifteen miles, as the crow flies, from here.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** It's all along the Illinois River.

**JE:** Don't you think both of you kind of became successful maybe? [laughing]

**DW:** Yeah, oh God, yeah.

**JE:** Just think, when you go back here now, Dennis died, maybe John would have bought another one anyway.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** But it was Julie who actually—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...brought you guys together again.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** And then you're here, you've leased part of the land—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** ...for what you're doing.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Another sign—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** ...that something good was happening—

**DW:** Oh, it had to happen, yeah. You know, in fact, John brought us here and showed us his ranch and he was showing me this little stream here. And he said, “Dennis always wanted to stock it with trout but we never thought they’d survive here.”

And I said, “Well, they won’t like this, but we can enhance it so that they will. Because that’s one of my other jobs for, usually private owners, but sometimes state agencies, I enhance streams, make them be more productive by improving the environment.

**JE:** For trout?

**DW:** For trout mostly, yeah, but bass too.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** It’s just like anything else, you can make an area more productive for a species—

**JE:** Sure.

**DW:** ...by improving the environment. So he said, “Well, if you’ll do that, just tell me what you need.”

Within the year, we had turned the habitat here into a trout stream.

**JE:** Hmm (pleased sound).

**DW:** Didn’t have to do much but we had to do some things.

**JE:** That’s great.

**DW:** But the crazy thing is that I now live in Dennis’s house. He’s the man that wanted to fly fish with me but he perished before I could meet him.

**JE:** Oh, and the house, of course, is right up the way.

**DW:** That was Dennis’s house, yes.

**JE:** That was just a little bit ago.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Wow, oooh. [laughing]

**DW:** I know, that’s, that’s pretty crazy.

**JE:** So you are creating flies and selling flies too right in this time period.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I was inventing flies and they were becoming very popular. I was making them myself and having a few friends make them.

A fellow by the name of Dennis Black, who was a native of Umpqua, Oregon, came to me one day and asked me if I would consider having them mass produced in a third world nation. And he gave me a royalty form.

So we began to do that and he started manufacturing them in India and in Thailand. So I don’t really sell flies, other than collector flies, anymore myself. I still make a lot, but I make them for you and me and to fish with, as well as if somebody wants one for a collector thing.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**DW:** Because I’m well-known for maybe forty or fifty different flies.

**JE:** Okay. But have you created all the flies that you could possibly create?

**DW:** Oh Lord, no, no.

**JE:** Do some new ideas still come to you on how to—

**DW:** John, it's as natural for me to do that as it for me to eat an apple. You know?

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** I mean, that's just my makeup.

**JE:** So you're always thinking, *How can I outwit the trout?*

**DW:** Yeah, now the thinking part goes like this: *There's some water there. What lives there to fish? What does that fish eat? And it eats a snail or it eats a leech or it eats a crawfish.*

To me, creating a fly is a matter of seeing what food that a fish is eating, and creating an artificial that looks like that. So every time I find out a fish is eating a certain thing, to me it's just like making a little sculpture of that food for them, but putting a hook in it. And it's really easy and fun to do.

**JE:** I think you've created about, what, three hundred original flies?

**DW:** Yes, easily that many, yeah.

**JE:** There could be that many different—

**DW:** That have actually been commercialized or sold, yeah.

**JE:** And you could still probably create another—

**DW:** As many as you need.

## Chapter 10 - 10:57

### John Visits Dave

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**John Nickel:** Hey.

**Dave Whitlock:** Hey, just in time.

**John Erling:** Hello, John. We were just talking about you.

**DW:** How you doing, bud?

**JE:** Good to see you.

**JN:** You too.

**DW:** It's beautiful, what is it?

**JE:** Look who joined us here, just came in the door. For two—

**DW:** You know you're always welcome here so just come on in.

**JE:** [laughing]

**JN:** Thank you.

**JE:** Of course you're talking about John Nickel.

**DW:** Yes.

**JE:** John T. Nickel.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** I've interviewed him for *Voices of Oklahoma*.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** How did you guys meet?

**DW:** Well, first of all, we're best friends. We met in grade school and actually become friends in junior high school. Alice Robertson Junior High School.

**JN:** That's correct. And we had a mutual friend that had the same kind of interest that Dave and I did. He moved over onto the side of town Dave was living on, and I didn't know Dave. But this guy and I were real tight. So he said, "I've met somebody that I want you to meet."

We met and we had so much in common that we just immediately became friends. I was fishing all the time but I was fishing rod and reel, not fly fishing. But Dave had already taken up fly fishing. I'd heard of it but I never had done it. And he taught me how to do it when I was twelve years old.

**DW:** Yeah, but, John, that wasn't much teaching because I knew very little about fly fishing other than the fact that I owned a fly rod. Bless his heart, he didn't get much teaching at that point.

**JN:** The other thing he did for me that I'll never forget, he took me in to where he ties flies, and he bought me a little fly tying vice—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JN:** ...and taught me how to tie flies. And I thought that was pretty special.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JN:** Now once I learned how to do that, Dave and I were partners at chasing chickens and guineas, trying to get feathers off of them.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** Well, in those days in Muskogee, everybody had chickens or cows in their back yard. Remember that, John?

**JN:** Yeah, right.

**DW:** So we'd walk the alleys because there was always alleys. You know, each block had an alley going down it.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** We'd walk along and watch for these chickens or guineas. We'd spot them, we'd come back that night and get them out of the coop and pull some feathers off them.

**JN:** [laughing]

**DW:** And then put them back in the pen.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** It's a wonder we hadn't gotten shot.

**JN:** For the burglars...

**DW:** It's a wonder we hadn't gotten shot.

**JN:** Oh, I know.

**JE:** Then you did eventually go your own way.

**DW:** Oh, yeah.

**JN:** After high school we didn't see each other for, I bet, oh, he went one way and I went the other.

**DW:** The other. Remember, I saw you on an airplane a time or two?

**JN:** Yeah, I did see him on an airplane a couple of times.

**DW:** All I could think of, *Boy, you grew up to be a good looking guy.*

**JN:** Well, Dave's always been exaggerating about me. [all laughing]

**JE:** All right.

**JN:** Anyway, thank you, Dave.

**JE:** There's a story here, those of you who are listening, why are we all sitting here on the same property in this ranch? John, you tell us how you reconnected with Dave.

**JN:** Dave was living over on the White River in Arkansas at Mountain Home. And he was teaching fly fishing, which he had decided to make his life's work about. Once in a while, I would see an ad in a magazine or a paper or something that said, "Day with Dave."

My wife saw that and showed it to me and I said, "Well, I know Dave Whitlock pretty well. But I haven't seen him in a long time."

So she bought me a "Day with Dave." Actually, she bought me two days with Dave. I went over, reconnected, and I don't know how many years that was after we graduated from high school but it had to be, what, thirty-five years?

**DW:** Yeah, more like forty.

**JN:** Maybe forty years.

**DW:** About forty years.

**JN:** Yeah. So we reconnected and just took up right where we left off.

**DW:** Yeah. We're not chasing chickens anymore, we buy the feathers now. [all laughing]

**JN:** Yeah, there has been a little change there.

**JE:** Right, all right. So then you're in Arkansas.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Then your life, of course, takes off for you—

**JN:** Yes.

**JE:** ...with the Greenleaf Nursery.

**JN:** Yeah, and that's where I went when Dave went to Northeastern. Actually, I don't know if Dave told you but he was a chemist and worked for an oil company in Bartlesville.

**JE:** Right. You established Greenleaf Nursery.

**JN:** Yes.

**JE:** Then there was a favorite place you used to come down here and look at.

**JN:** Yes, I had wandered across the country on gravel roads in my pickup one day, when I needed to get away from the nursery.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JN:** I was maybe in my mid-twenties and I came up over a hill and I saw a place that just rattled me. And I said, "If I could ever own a place like that, that would be my earth home."

**DW:** Yeah.

**JN:** Well, it took me a long time before I got to do that but I kept track of it. I was in California or Colorado, maybe both, at the time. Found out that it was for sale. And so I packed my bag and came back to Oklahoma and bought the place.

**JE:** Yeah. You had Greenleaf Nursery that made you enormously successful.

**JN:** Yeah.

**JE:** Then your brother asked you to come out to California to join him in the wine business, which—

**JN:** Correct.

**JE:** ...you knew nothing about, I believe.

**JN:** Nothing about it. Neither did he. But—

**JE:** Right.

**JN:** ...he got fascinated with it so he went over to the University of California in Davis, which is probably *the* winemaking and viticultural school in maybe the world. And he didn't go for a degree, he went to learn. So he commuted from San Francisco, where his home was at that time, back and forth. And he got enough knowledge that he decided to make a barrel of wine at his house.

Turned out real good. He won a bronze medal on it at the county fair and he said, "Well, I'm on my way. I'm going to start making wine commercially." So he called me and he said, "I want you to join me in this wine business."

And that's when I told him, I said, "I don't know anything about wine."

**DW:** Boy, it turned out though, didn't it?

**JN:** It worked out.

**DW:** God!

**JE:** And what name did he choose for it?

**JN:** Well, we were going to call it Nob Hill Sellers because the house where he was living was on Nob Hill in San Francisco. We had a label designed and we were going to make it

Nob Hill Sellers. We had actually made this first wine that we made together in Sausalito in a rented warehouse space.

But we looked at each other one day and said, “Now that we have the old building called Far Niente, why don’t we name it Far Niente?”

So at that time, we junked the original label, created a new label, and we were on our way. And then our first wine, as luck would have it, came out as a big hit and we got a lot of free press about it. It’s been successful ever since.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** Really successful. It sells the great wines of the country.

**JE:** Well, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, you can say, “Far Niente” to any of them—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...everybody knows that is a class wine.

**DW:** Yes.

**JN:** And that was the idea, is to make a world class wine. It was my brother, Gill’s, baby. The nursery was my baby, but we were each involved with each other in the business together.

**JE:** And then, unfortunately, he died, and some of this you’ve talked about in your interview for [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

**JN:** Yes.

**JE:** You did come back and you bought all of this acreage.

**JN:** Yes.

**JE:** How much did you buy?

**JN:** I think there was about twenty-five hundred acres when I came back to, uh, capture the place that I had long desired to own.

**JE:** That had to be a thrill when that—

**JN:** It was a big thrill.

**JE:** And on closing day, huh? That was yours.

**JN:** It was great.

**JE:** But then you weren’t satisfied with just that acreage.

**JN:** No.

**JE:** There was more, there was as far as the eye could see, right?

**JN:** That’s correct, yeah. It’s another one of my dream pieces of property. I love land and I love property and I love the beauty of nature. So this other piece of land also came up for sale the same year. And I was fortunate enough to get both of those pieces of land the same year. One of which I have given to the Nature Conservancy as a wildlife and nature preserve.

And the other one, is where my ranch home is today.

**JE:** Yeah, and the name of the preserve is?

**JN:** It's called the J. T. Nickel Family Nature and Wildlife Preserve.

**JE:** And what a donation that is. How many thousands of acres is that?

**JN:** I think it was fourteen thousand when I gave it to them.

**DW:** It's more than that now, isn't it, John?

**JN:** It's more than that now. They have added to it. I think it's up to about seventeen thousand.

**JE:** That's a great story. And then you were able to entice Dave.

**JN:** Yeah. Well, when I bought into the ranch here, the one that I first told you about was the one I wanted all that time. It was a long time before I ever got it, but it was on my mind and I kept track of what was happening with it.

And then when I finally bought in, I bought into half partnership with the man who also was involved in the ranch, but he had fallen on bad times. So he had to sell. And he wanted to remain partners.

Well, I agreed to that except I didn't want to be a partner with anybody in my home place, but the rest of the ranch and the cattle and the equipment, that was okay.

So anyway, he and I formed a partnership called Caney Creek Ranch. We ranched it for a number of years. And then Dennis, my partner, died. He had four sons in California, and it wound up what Dennis had left them, they sold to me. And so now I had the whole ranch. And I had a beautiful home that Dennis lived in that I wasn't sure what I was going to do with, other than I really thought a lot of it and I didn't want to sell it.

That's when I had reconnected with Dave, and I invited he and his wife over to spend the night in the place. I didn't tell him I had an ulterior motive, but they loved it. And thank goodness they did, because they're still here and it's just far, far superior to what it was when they moved here.

**JE:** How long has that been now?

**JN:** I think it's about twelve years now.

**DW:** Yeah, twelve years.

**JE:** What a great story that is.

**DW:** It seems like about twelve days, it's gone so wonderfully fast.

**JE:** [laughing] And then that's when you created a trout stream you talked about.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And John had that in his head too.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** He wanted to have it done.

**JN:** It was Dave's idea to do it. And I said, "Well, yeah, that's perfect, let's do it."

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** It took us about a year to get it completed. We just took a cattle watering stream and turned it into a beautiful twelve-waterfall landscape with trout in it. It's just so pretty to walk along and be on.

**JE:** I know how grateful both of you are for many things. You're both now about eighty-five. You still have your health, and you talked about how grateful you are because not everybody at eighty-five can do the things you two guys are doing.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JN:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then, I didn't mention this, the fact that you have a friendship that's gone back all these years and it's still vibrant and alive—

**DW:** Yeah, oh, yeah.

**JE:** And it's not distant but gets closer all the time, probably.

**JN:** Probably does, yes.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JN:** Definitely does.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** We're blessed to have each other.

**JE:** Yeah, that's great, I'm envious of both of you, I really am.

**JN:** Yeah.

**JE:** Well, John, thanks for popping in here.

**JN:** You bet, John.

**JE:** We're going to continue talking with Mr. Dave and I'm glad that you could be part of this. It's almost funny, we're asking him to come in on his ranch?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** [laughing]

**JN:** But it's okay. This is Dave's part of my ranch.

**JE:** Right. All right, it's very good.

**JN:** All right.

**JE:** You can stay but you probably want to go outside.

**JN:** I'm going out.

**JE:** You're going outside? And then I'll catch up with you.

**JN:** Okay.

**JE:** Thank you, John.

**JN:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Yeah, that was fun.

**DW:** Oh, perfect.

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**Chapter 11 - 2:12**  
**Fishing below the Dam**

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**John Erling:** You've had some interesting things and experiences that have happened to you.

**Dave Whitlock:** Yeah.

**JE:** One time you were fishing below the dam and something began to happen. The tide was coming in.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And was rising and you had to make a run for it.

**DW:** Well, that's pretty common. You know, when we fish below these dams and the water starts coming up, if you don't get out, it washes you away. For about forty years, I lived on the White River below Bull Shoals Dam. It goes from a foot to twelve feet in about twenty to thirty minutes. When they turn the generators on. If you're out there wading, you're swimming within fifteen minutes or so. And it'll drown you if you're not really careful.

**JE:** You don't use a boat?

**DW:** No, you use a boat too, yeah. All a boat is, it gives you a platform to cast off of, to a fish you can't wade to.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** We were talking earlier about Grand Lake. Heck, I know some place that there's some bass. We'll just motor up there and off the top of the boat we just cast to the bank, off the boat to catch the bass, with fly rods rather than lures.

**JE:** And you can fly fish for any variety of fish?

**DW:** Yes. The word "fly" is kind of a misnomer, because initially when it first was created the motivation was to imitate a flying insect that trout eat. So they're called a "fishing with your fly." When they made these little invitations.

But today, the word "fly" has stuck, you know, it's named fly fishing. But fly fishing is a matter of casting a single-hook lure that has feathers and hair on it, not with its weight but with the line's weight through the air to catch fish. So essentially, it imitates anything from a small insect to an eight- or ten-inch bait fish. You can catch anything from a small trout to a tarpon or a marlin on it.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** In saltwater.

**JE:** Many of them like to live deeper into the water—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** ...and they don't come to the surface that much.

**DW:** Yeah, but the flies are weighted and our lines are weighted, so a lot of times you get right down to them.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** I regularly, on Tenkiller, build shelves of fish twenty to thirty feet deep to catch a fish.

**JE:** Oh? With a fly?

**DW:** Because the line that you cast it with, instead of it floating, it sinks. It pulls the fly down.

**JE:** Okay.

**DW:** You need to go fly fishing with me some time.

**JE:** It sounds that way, yes, I do.

## Chapter 12 - 4:50

### *Field & Stream*

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**John Erling:** Your first published piece was in *Field & Stream*.

**Dave Whitlock:** *Field & Stream*.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** In 1956.

**JE:** 'Fifty-six. What was it about?

**DW:** It was about fishing on the White River in Arkansas. The name of it was "The River That Has Everything."

**JE:** Did you just send it to them?

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Out of the clear blue sky?

**DW:** Yeah, I wanted to be a writer but I didn't have an opportunity to learn writing in school. So I started writing a lot of letters to different people, and it just got easier and easier. Finally one day, I decided to write a feature article for a magazine. And I asked my wife, "Joanne," I said, "Where do you think I ought to send this?"

And she said, "Send it to the best magazine there is, first." And that was *Field & Stream* at that time.

I sent it and they bought it.

**JE:** What a thrill.

**DW:** Yeah, I couldn't believe it.

**JE:** And then you went on—

**DW:** I couldn't believe it.

**JE:** And then you went on and did many things with *Field & Stream*.

**DW:** Yeah. And I was at one time, the field editor. But the thing is that I've never had, to any magazine I've submitted a picture to, they've turned it down. I became friends with the

editor of *Field & Stream* a number of years later. His name was Jim Baseline. And I asked Jim, I said, “Jim, why in the world did you buy that article that I wrote?”

And he said, “Well, the article wasn’t very good but you had good pictures and it was a good subject.” And he said, “That’s what I’m for, the editor,” he said, “I made your writing readable.”

**JE:** [laughing] Well, you’ve gone on to publish many books and you—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...contribute in many fly fishing publications.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** *Fly Fisherman* magazine—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** *American Angler*.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** *Trout, In-Fishermen*, and, of course, *Field & Stream*.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then you’ve written *Dave Whitlock’s Guide to Aquatic Trout Food*.

**DW:** Yes.

**JE:** The *L.L.Bean Fly Fishing Handbook*, the *L.L.Bean Bass Fly Fishing Handbook*.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And *Imitating and Fishing Natural Fish Foods*.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And I probably—

**DW:** And then my new one, which is *Artful Profiles of Trout, Salmon, and Char*.

**JE:** Yes, and I have it right behind me and I want you to—

**DW:** Yeah, that’s good.

**JE:** ...autograph it for me before I leave. So we add this to your title too, writer.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** You’re a writer as well.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** So many talents. Just a little bit about trout.

**DW:** It’s a freshwater fish. It has to live in average water temperatures between 45 and 65. Now bass lives in water temperatures from about 65 to 80. Those are the ideal temperatures.

**JE:** Would you say that trout is one of the most beautiful fish out there?

**DW:** There’s no question about it, yeah.

**JE:** So many different colors.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** That you capture through your art.

- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** You've just shown me one that you just finished.
- DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- JE:** And you do that with these colored pencils—
- DW:** Colored pencils.
- JE:** ...that are sitting on this table.
- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** And—
- DW:** I also use acrylics and watercolor and oil. But I prefer to use the colored pencils because it suits my style. I like to put a lot of small details into my work. And what's really there when you look at the subject.
- JE:** So then when you put your hand in the water and you're holding one of those trout—
- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** ...it's got to be a thrill for you, even today.
- DW:** Oh, yeah.
- JE:** Because you see all those colors. There are many varieties, some are naturally grown.
- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** And then there are others.
- DW:** Well, in North America, native fish are rainbows and cutthroat and brook trout. Brown trout has been imported from Europe and they're becoming a very popular fish. And so when you go out fishing, the trout rivers here in Arkansas and Okla—and out West, you catch all four species.
- JE:** Would Colorado be one of the capitals of trout?
- DW:** Yes. Yeah, the Rocky Mountains because they're high and it's that more northern climate. Those streams stay cold all the time there.
- JE:** Yeah. But you can look at a fish and see whether it came from nature or from a hatchery.
- DW:** Oh, yeah, yeah.
- JE:** Or is a hybrid.
- DW:** Yeah.
- JE:** And you can ID their sex even?
- DW:** Yeah. You know, everything has physical characteristics. When a fish is raised in an enclosure it does not have the look or the coloration it needs to survive in the wild. So when you look at a fish you can tell by the shape of its fins and its color whether it's been pen-raised or wild.
- JE:** They change color during spawning, I believe.
- DW:** Usually they get brighter in color to attract each other, yes.
- JE:** So by looking a fish in the eye you can tell a lot?

**DW:** Yes, yes.

**JE:** What?

**DW:** Well, first of all, as an artist, the first thing if you're going to paint or draw something that looks alive you have to start with the eye. Because every person that looks at that, the first thing they look at to see what it is, it's the eye. And the eye has to have that life and the personality in it. If you don't capture that first, you fail at your task.

So a fish's eye, when you first catch it, has a wild, excited, or scared look to it. If you retain it very long, it starts to fatigue. And just like if you're really feeling bad, it starts to fade. And when it starts to die, it dilates.

So when you catch a fish, a lot of times, if you keep it out of the water too long, its eyes begin to dilate. That means it's dying.

## Chapter 13 – 6:22

### Jimmy Carter

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**John Erling:** So tying flies has changed over the years.

**Dave Whitlock:** Yes. Initially, they imitated just a few aquatic insects that lived in England and Europe. Those same general insects lived here, so when this country was settled people brought fly fishing to this country. Gradually over the years, because we have so much more diversified fish populations here, fly fishermen wanted to catch them, they began to design different looking flies to catch them. Instead of maybe it looking like an insect, maybe a crawfish. Or a little snake or a mouse.

So gradually the designs of flies changed to imitate a wider variety of sizes, shapes, and colors.

**JE:** There are famous fishermen, Jimmy Carter—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** . . . President Jimmy Carter.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** He was a fly fisherman, wasn't he?

**DW:** Yes he was. A really dedicated and very good fly fisherman.

**JE:** Did you ever meet him?

**DW:** I love that man. I've illustrated two of his books.

**JE:** Oh, really?

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** So you did meet him?

**DW:** Yeah. Yeah—

**JE:** What kind of person was he to be around?

**DW:** The best. He made you feel so important when you were in a room with him. It was never about him.

You know, I mentioned earlier about my mother, it always had to be about her. When you were with Carter, he made you feel so special it was unbelievable.

**JE:** Hmm (appreciative sound).

**DW:** I love that man.

**JE:** So you were back and forth many times, I suppose?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** To illustrate his book.

**DW:** We fished together and I've given him fly fishing lessons. What a gem of a human being.

**JE:** Another famous person was John Atherton.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** From Minnesota.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** He was the founding father of American fly fishermen. True?

**DW:** No, not necessarily, but he was one of the pioneers, yeah.

**JE:** Okay, so who else would have been a pioneer?

**DW:** Well, probably the one that's best known is Theodore Gordon. He's called the Father of American Dry Fly Fishing. He primarily popularized trout fishing in the East.

**JE:** Okay, but John Atherton was also an artist.

**DW:** He was popular and well-known but he was not responsible for the popularity of fly fishing like Theodore Gordon.

**JE:** President Eisenhower was a fisherman.

**DW:** Yes, yes he was. A fly fisherman.

**JE:** And Sandra Day O'Connor was an avid fly angler.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** She was on the Supreme Court, of course.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** So they're big names but not as big as the name of Dave Whitlock.

**DW:** Well, I wouldn't say that. You know, earlier before lunch we were talking a little bit about the role that fly fishermen play in our environment. Most people who are attracted to fly fishing usually love nature. In fact, they're very interested or fascinated with environment. Or once they start fly fishing, to get better, that knowledge makes them better.

So almost without exception, fly fishermen fish for the fun of it rather than the food. They're very proactive in preserving or improving the environment, and almost none of them kill fish. They fish with a barbless hook and they release those fish.

**JE:** Yeah. Did you ever eat a trout?

**DW:** Oh, yeah. But that was when I was younger.

**JE:** Right.

**DW:** And once in a while we're landing when it dies, we make keep it to eat. But we never kill one.

**JE:** In your house, you have an aquarium of fish that are natural to Oklahoma.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** Tell us about some of them that are in there. And you pick them up, right out here in—

**DW:** Yeah. Well, we have about 150-gallon aquarium in our doorway where we come in. It's landscaped like an Oklahoma stream. It's got the rocks and the vegetation that came from the local streams around here. And we have it stocked with the fish that live here. Mostly sunfish, maybe there's a little catfish, and we have little green turtles living in it.

**JE:** That's such a great idea.

**DW:** They're beautiful.

**JE:** You have a great source right out your door here.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I told you, if you want to stock your aquarium like that, I'll provide you some stock.

**JE:** I've been interested in tropical fish since I was about seven or eight years old and I have an aquarium now.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** But we're going to set up a bigger one. I might come back and get some fish.

**DW:** No, no, it may not be a good evaluation, but to me, these fish here have a lot more personality than tropical fish. You know, they really do, I mean, you can see it in them, the way they act.

**JE:** More inquisitive maybe?

**DW:** They recognize you and the way they're aggressive and the way they interact with each other, they tend to have a lot more communicative skills.

**JE:** Maybe we've interested a person who's listening to this, and they say, "You know what, why not try fly fishing?"

I was going to ask you what should they do? I know what they should do.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** They should contact Dave Whitlock.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And you have classes too, don't you?

**DW:** Yeah, yeah. I used to do three-day schools with eight to ten people for about ten years in Arkansas. And those were wonderful. But they gradually got more hectic and we wanted to live.

So when we moved here on John's place I decided to dedicate myself to art and private lessons. Just like yesterday and the day before, we had a pediatrician and his wife, who's a pharmacist, spent two days learning how to fly fisher. When they left, they were so in love with fly fishing it was amazed, you know. They were the perfect role models for it.

But if someone is interested in it, they could either just purchase that book *L.L.Bean Fly Fishing Book* if they want to self-educate themselves. But even better, if they live particularly in this area, it's just to book us for a day or two.

**JE:** You can either Google Dave Whitlock or go right to your website—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...which is Dave Whitlock.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** And you get all the particulars there.

**DW:** And I and my wife teach it, so if the wife or girlfriend or ladies want to come, she just does a remarkable job putting them at ease.

**JE:** She was a fisherwoman—

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...when you met her.

**DW:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** In Arkansas.

**DW:** She's a good looking one.

**JE:** Yes she is. I've just shared a nice lunch with her.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** But the two of you met and she was already a fisherwoman and—

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** And an environmentalist.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** So you didn't have to talk her into this at all.

**DW:** No, no, no, we're soul mates.

**JE:** Right, you just introduced the fly fishing to her.

**DW:** Yeah. You know, John, I met—

**JE:** And now you're partners.

**DW:** ...her at a high impact aerobic class. She was about thirty to thirty-two at the time. She used to come down to the class and tell fish stories. And she's sometimes gone by herself. And I used to ask myself, *Why doesn't she have somebody to fish with her?*

Well, I solved that problem.

**JE:** [laughing]

**DW:** So we, we've been married thirty years and we fish together.

**JE:** She's partners with you in your artwork.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And your—

**DW:** She's my business manager.

**JE:** ...and your classes.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And your business manager, so—

**DW:** And teaches with me.

**JE:** ...there's something else that was meant to be as well.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** All right, describe a setting for me here—

## Chapter 14 - 3:11

### Artwork

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**John Erling:** Imagine yourself by a trout stream. Tell us what you're feeling and what you're seeing.

**Dave Whitlock:** Well, first of all, you know, all streams that flow have certain shapes and forms and beads. So the first thing I do is look at the physical structure of the stream, consider where the stream is, is it a trout stream or a bass stream? You know, what have you? And I decide the species in there. I walk up and I look to see what food lives there. And normally it may be crawfish or minnows or insects or all of them.

And then I've sometimes watched to see if I could see the fish feeding on certain forms. Because they don't always just feed on everything all the time. Sometimes it involves actually sampling what lives in the stream. And when I find that out, I choose flies that imitate that food form to catch the fish.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** It's wonderful.

**JE:** You still get excited about it after all these years.

**DW:** Oh, Lord, yeah. It's never, never two days alike.

**JE:** But I believe your artwork comes above fly fishing right now. You love your artwork so much.

**DW:** You know, that's my favorite pastime and profession. I like it even better than fishing because, to me, it has a great parallel to fishing because I'm using painting or drawing fishing subjects. And to do that you have to be a good fisherman, so to speak.

And when I go fishing, I have that memory but I don't have really any other physical thing to show for it because we don't kill fish. Or mount fish or what have. But whatever. I finish a painting, I have this endearing memory on paper or on canvas.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DW:** Of everything that happened that day.

**JE:** Yeah. Have you ever taken your pencils and so forth right down there at the stream?

**DW:** Not often, no.

**JE:** No.

**DW:** It's not an environment that does that well.

**JE:** No. Well, as you look back and as we've been able to sense in your story here, you've lived a storybook life, haven't you?

**DW:** Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. You know, I had a really rough start and there were times I thought, *Why is God being so mean to me?* But you know what he did? If you're a faithful person, you realize that that was a test. That gave me the temper to live my life a better way.

Just like I was telling you, my folks made me work for things. All of that develops my character. It allowed me to get this far in life so successfully.

**JE:** And it helped you to concentrate a lot on your artwork at that time.

**DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** Because you couldn't do a lot.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And fly fishing and all.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** So there was a reason for it, I'm sure.

**DW:** Yeah, yes there is.

**JE:** Very good, well, I really thank you for the time you spent.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And thank you for lunch.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** How would you like to be remembered?

**DW:** Well, you know that's interesting, I get that question from time to time. First of all, just a good person, like John Nickel. You know, John has just been such a good person to everybody and I'd just like for people to like me, you know?

And then, next thing is, maybe because I've helped them become happier people because they learned to fly fish from me.

**JE:** Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, you're easy to like.

**DW:** Thank you.

**JE:** And we've known each other for about three hours here now.

**DW:** Yeah.

**JE:** And that beautiful smile you have. Again, thank you, Dave, I've enjoyed it a lot.

**DW:** Well, I've enjoyed being with you too, John. Come back and we'll do some fishing together or at least catch you some fish to put in your aquarium.

**JE:** All right. I'll do that.

**DW:** Thank you so much.

**JE:** Thank you.

**DW:** Bye.

**JE:** Bye [laughing].

## Chapter 15 - 0:33

### Conclusion

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**Announcer:** This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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