Jimmy Houston

INTERVIEW_TITLE

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Jimmy Houston is known for hosting his own television show, Jimmy Houston Outdoors, which is watched by 2 million people around the world. He was born on July 27th, 1944, was raised in Oklahoma City, and attended high school in Moore.

Jimmy moved with his family to Cookson, Oklahoma, near Lake Tenkiller, during his senior year of high school. His parents bought a resort there, where he became obsessed with fishing. Lake Tenkiller was the inspiration which made Jimmy the professional angler he is today.

Since winning The Oklahoma State Championship as a college senior in 1966, Jimmy Houston went on to win over a million dollars in bass tournaments. He has fished 15 Bassmaster Classics and won the B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year title. Jimmy has received honors from multiple organizations including induction into the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame.

The writer of many faith-based books, he has been on national television for over 46 years. The Jimmy Houston Outdoors show was ranked the #1 outdoors show on ESPN for 20 years. Listen to Jimmy talk about his early days of fishing, his introduction to tournament fishing, and his friendship with Toby Keith on the podcast and oral history website VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 8:50
Lake Tenkiller

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is April 2nd, 2024. So Jimmy, would you state your full name, please?

Jimmy Houston (JH): Jimmy Houston.

JE: All right, you don't have a middle name?

JH: Oh man, you need a formal name? I'll give you a formal name—Jimmy James Leroy Houston.

JE: All right, now we know that.

JH: You learned something already.

JE: I'm in Tulsa, Oklahoma, recording this in our recording studios of Voices of Oklahoma. Where are you, Jimmy?

JH: I'm at our ranch near Sulphur. We're located about 10 miles south of Sulphur, right in the middle of the Arbuckle Mountains.

JE: OK, great area. Your birth date?

JH: July 28, 1944. That's 1944, not 1844, John.

JE: Thank you for pointing that out. Your present age?

JH: Well, that would be 79 if I've got it ciphered up correctly. I keep ciphering and I can't believe it comes up to that, but that's what it comes up to every time.

JE: Because you don't feel 79, do you?

JH: Not yet.

JE: Where were you born?

JH: I was born in San Marcos, Texas. My dad was in the Air Force at that time—you know, 1944, of course, was during the war, and so my dad happened to be stationed in San Marcos, Texas.

JE: Then where did you grow up?

JH: I actually grew up around Moore, Oklahoma, the first 11 years of school. I went first grade through my junior year in high school at Moore, Oklahoma, and then my dad bought a resort down on Lake Tenkiller, and we moved down there between my junior and senior year in high school. I stayed there until we bought this ranch 21 years ago. So, I really only had a couple of places that I've lived at—Moore, Oklahoma, Lake Tenkiller, and then here in the Arbuckle Mountains. I guess that would be three, wouldn't it? Not a couple.

JE: All right, let's talk about your mother—your mother's name, maiden name, where she was born.

JH: My mother's name is Alberta, Alberta Patterson. She was born in Kansas, and I lost Mom when she was only 58 years old. She had a brain tumor, and it was a pretty bad situation. She was a great mom, a Sunday school teacher, great Christian woman, and it was a big, big deal back when my mom and dad bought that resort down on Lake Tenkiller, and I got to move to the lake. It obviously changed my life.

JE: Your father's name?

JH: My father's name was Jack Houston. He was a deacon at Crestline Baptist Church on the Oklahoma-Cleveland County line, what is now 89th Street in Oklahoma City. He actually quit his job as a CEO at LD Jones Food Company, which was a big wholesale food company in Oklahoma City. But he bought that resort, like I said, when I was a teenager, quit that job and moved to the lake. I can remember when Dad saw an advertisement in the newspaper—reading a newspaper in Oklahoma City—saw where Cookson General Store and cabins were for sale, and so Mom said, "We ought to go down and look at that. We could just buy that place." We'd gone to Tenkiller a lot on vacations, and so the following weekend we went to Tenkiller, looked at that, and made the deal to buy it. I was tickled to death, of course. I loved where we lived in Oklahoma City and Moore, Oklahoma, and obviously, all my friends were up there. But getting the opportunity to move to the lake and live on the lake was just absolutely—I'd always fished and hunted all my life since I could walk, so it was a big deal.

I remember, a couple of weeks later than that, sitting at the dinner table one evening. Of course, everyone had dinner together, families back in those days—that was what I guess every generation calls the "good old days," but those were. I can remember sitting there and my mom asking Dad, "Have you told LD Jones yet that you were quitting?" He said, "Yeah, as a matter of fact, I told him today." She said, "What did he say?" My heart just kind of stopped right then, because at 16 years old I'd never taken into consideration that it might not happen once Mom and Dad made the deal to buy that place. What about the fact they might continue working? Dad told her, he said, "He told me to name my price, and if I was going to leave that company, to name my price and he would pay it." My heart sunk when

I heard that. But then she asked, "What did you say?" And he said, "I told him we were buying that resort on Lake Tenkiller."

So, my dad—for the love of moving to the lake and starting that business—I suppose he had a lot of good reasons to start it, but had he just simply taken the additional money, maybe as much as doubling his salary, I would not have had that opportunity to move to that lake. Things seem to fall together during your lifetime properly, and God's got it all planned out.

JE: What was his personality like, your father?

JH: Oh, he had a great personality. He started with that company as a cookie salesman, driving a route truck, and I spent a lot of my summertime when I was very, very young on the truck with him. He had only a 7th grade education, so moving to that type of position was difficult, even in those days—pretty difficult to do without a high school education. He went through the 7th grade and dropped out of school to help support his family, like a lot of kids did back in those days, and then joined the Air Force when he was old enough. He worked his way up from that cookie salesman all the way up the ladder to running the company.

I remember LD Jones, the owner of that company—it was a large wholesale distributing company in Oklahoma City—got sick in some of the latter years Dad worked there, and he was actually bedridden. I suppose he probably had cancer—I don't really remember; I might not even have totally known back then. Dad would actually have meetings with him at his bedside, right by their warehouses and offices. Those meetings would be in a bedroom in his house. Dad was a deacon in our Baptist church, Crestline Baptist Church, a man of integrity, a bubbly personality, and really was pretty successful. We were not rich by any means, but we were what we called a prototype middle-class American family. We lived in a nice home in a nice neighborhood, and my mom worked her way up from a checker at Safeway Food Stores -- I think Humpty Dumpty -- into an office position there. She didn't have a college education, but she did have a high school education, but, of course, she quit that job as well.

They drove two cars, and back in those days bought a new car every three years -- trading it in on something new. I had a great, great childhood up to the point that we moved to Lake Tenkiller, and obviously a greater

childhood, I think, after we moved to Lake Tenkiller. I lived there until we bought this ranch back in 2003—21 years ago about right now, as a matter of fact. I think we closed on this ranch the first of April in 2003.

JE: OK then. We're going to talk about your faith later, but I know now where your faith came from, as your parents were involved in that Baptist church. But let's talk about—

JH: Oh, absolutely, John. Yeah, I've not ever known anything but church, you know, my entire life. And, I mean, we went to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Tuesday night prayer meetings. We had singings and revivals. Churches had a lot—you know, at least two or three revivals a year back in those days. You know, churches were different than they are nowadays, certainly. Everything's different now than it was in those days. But yeah, you know, I've never known anything but church.

Chapter 3 – 9:50
Hunting and Fishing

John Erling (JE): Let's talk about fishing. When did that come into your life, and do you have any recollection of the first fish you caught?

Jimmy Houston (JH): You know, John, that question about the first fish is asked of just about everybody that bass fishes, you know, asked by some outdoor writer. Still to this day, I have no clue. I was probably first—a couple of years old or less. You know, my mom and dad were fishing on that Brazos River down there, south of Austin, Texas, around that San Marcos area when Mom was pregnant and I was born. I think she was eight-and-a-half months pregnant, fishing on that river down there with my dad. So, you know, I was exposed to fishing before I ever was exposed to daylight.

No, I don't—I remember lots and lots of really early fishing trips from when I was four, five, six years old that stick in my mind. Ironically, some of them are when I was ten, eleven, twelve years old, walking this Washita River down here, which runs within—it's not on my property, but the Washita River surrounds my property here, and it's within a quarter of a mile in a

couple, two or three places on my property, kind of goes around it. Walking that Washita River—and that's Washita in Oklahoma spelled with a W-A-S-H, as opposed to O-U-A-C-H, you know, it's a different river than they have in Arkansas.

I remember walking that river when I was eight, nine, ten, eleven years old with my dad and my two uncles and my granddad, catching channel cat out of that river during the summertime, through July and August, when the river was down really low and the catfish would gang up in little bit deeper pools. We'd walk from pool to pool to pool. And you know, things happen and come around a lot of times in a person's life; that river is right here beside my ranch right now.

That river—a lot of people don't know—is a famous river here in Oklahoma, this part of Oklahoma. It actually starts up in Texas, just above the Oklahoma border, up north of Sweetwater, Oklahoma. I've actually turkey hunted on the ranch where that river actually starts. It's pretty amazing. I thought it was a beautiful creek up there, and the Washita River down here in Oklahoma has gone through a lot of farmland and it's pretty muddy. There's a lot of catfish in it; it's a great catfish river. It runs into Lake Texoma, as a matter of fact.

But that river starts up there, and I told the owner while turkey hunting, "That's the prettiest creek I think I've ever seen." And he said, "That's not a creek, it's a river." Of course, that's in Texas. So I said, "Well, no disrespect, but in Oklahoma, we call those creeks, not rivers. They've got to be considerably larger."

He said, "That's the Washita River. It's actually a river. It starts here on this ranch."

I said, "Washita—W-A-S-H-I-T-A?"

He said, "Yeah."

I said, "You're not gonna believe this. I live right close to the Texas border, and that river runs right by my ranch, and it doesn't look anything like it does on your ranch up here."

He said, "Well, that's before it runs through all that farmland," which is the exact same thing the Mississippi River does. Up in Wisconsin and Minnesota, it's a beautiful clear-running stream, then it runs through all the farmland of the Midwest and runs down into the ocean as a dirty, murky or muddy river. So it's kind of ironic, that happening.

But that's my early recollections of fishing. I fished farm ponds all around where we lived. On the county line—south of the county line—there were no houses; that was fields and woods and ponds, and I could go in three of the four directions around my house there in South Oklahoma City on my bicycle and fish. I fished every piece of water around. I caught crawfish out of the -- crawdad we called them -- out of the creek and Lightning Creek that ran behind my house.

We lived on about, I think it was an acre of land. I think that division of houses was, you know, an acre of land, which is a pretty good-sized piece of property. Back then, it wasn't much property, but now people buy lots and divide acres around those cities.

So I fished and hunted as long as I could walk. No, I really don't have any recollections of my first fish. My dad and my two uncles, Gene and John, and my granddad—they fished catfish, they fished crappie. My dad was the best bass fisherman, one of the most accomplished bass fishermen of the bunch, but we fished for fish, and that's what I did growing up all my life. I think that probably helped give me a more rounded fishing education that's helped me in everything that's transpired, you know, for the past eighty years.

JE: So then it's obvious it consumed your life from the very beginning. Is that true?

JH: Pretty much, yeah. You know, I played sports in high school like everybody does—played basketball, football, baseball, and ran track. In those days, kids played everything. Now, whatever somebody's good at, it seems like they do their whole high school life playing basketball, football, or baseball, and we didn't do it that way. Our school years simply changed from one sport to another. But yeah, I fished pretty much every day growing up in those farm ponds and creeks and hunted rabbits and squirrels and quail, you know, in the woods and water, and dove.

I remember the first time my dad took me dove hunting was just down south of 89th Street, which is all full of houses now, but that was back there. I remember he gave me a .410 shotgun that his dad had given him—a single-shot, .410-gauge shotgun. I shot—I shot 53 shells out of that single-shot shotgun the first time he ever took me dove hunting and killed three doves. But, you know, he was teaching me how to shoot shotguns correctly, and I suddenly became very, very good at it.

I would walk with them with a BB gun when I was just, you know, six, seven, eight, nine years old, quail hunting. We had a lot of wild quail in Oklahoma and Kansas back in those days, and I would walk with my dad and my uncles behind the bird dogs quail hunting. The quail would get up and I'd shoot at them with a BB gun before I was even old enough to shoot a .22 rifle.

So yeah, fishing and hunting have definitely been in my DNA forever. And I believed I was hitting some of those quail I'd be shooting at that would fall, and I would think I'd hit it with that BB gun—and I probably did hit a few. As a matter of fact, I later actually killed some quail with a .22, not very often, but you know, when I'd be going hunting by myself. Of course, in reality, I think it's against the law to shoot at a quail with a .22—that's a shotgun game bird. But, you know, I didn't own a shotgun, only a .22 when I was young, until I got big enough to start shooting those doves. Then I carried that .410 shotgun.

The thing about a single-shot shotgun—my dad and my uncles all had automatic shotguns—I had a single-shot, break-over, .410-gauge shotgun. So it was a matter of—I had to learn how to shoot accurately because I only had one shot. And so, you know, that was part of my dad teaching me to shoot that shotgun correctly. When I got old enough to save up enough money to buy an automatic shotgun, I bought one because that was a dream, to buy one.

So yeah, I've hunted and fished all my life. I started bowhunting here in Oklahoma—deer hunting with a bow—when I was 16 years old. That goes back to deer seasons that most people can't remember. Our deer season was only four days—Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, Thanksgiving, and then that weekend. You were allowed one deer. One deer was all you

were allowed, and it was a buck deer—you were not allowed any does.

Now I read part of the new hunting license laws that were passed, and now you can kill six deer in Oklahoma with a bow. Of course, hunting licenses—I mean, just for a resident of Oklahoma, I think to kill those six deer, the license cost was a hundred and twenty-some-odd dollars. I think they've cut it down to about seventy or eighty dollars, but they basically raised the license prices in Oklahoma.

One of the problems we have here in Oklahoma, with more kids hunting and fishing, is pretty prohibitive costs in them learning. The one thing the new laws did is they considered a youth anything under 18, whether it was a resident or non-resident. That allows a lot of kids to go fishing and learn how to fish and hunt when they're younger without it being extra expensive because of the license fee. So I commend the wildlife department on that.

Also, a non-resident child can come in, and they can hunt and fish in Oklahoma—hunt for sure. I'm not positive if the new law covers fishing, I'm not sure.

JE: Yup.

Chapter 4 – 5:05
Toby Kieth

John Erling (JE): High school—where did you graduate from high school? What school?

Jimmy Houston (JH): I graduated from Tahlequah High School, but I only went there one year. I went to Moore those 11 years, and I, of course, would have graduated from Moore had my dad not bought that resort. But I went to Tahlequah for only one year.

Yeah, Toby Keith—my buddy Toby, who we lost about a month ago—Toby was fond of telling people that I was the most famous person ever from

Moore High School until he came along. It would get back to me, and Toby and I fished and hunted together quite a bit over the years. I would tell Toby—because they've got his name on the water tower; you drive down Interstate 35 as you drive through Oklahoma, it says, "The home of Toby Keith." It doesn't say, "The home of Jimmy Houston and Toby Keith."

But Toby was nineteen years younger than I am, and I told him, "Toby, my name was on that water tower before you were born." Of course, I had to climb up there and paint my name on it myself, you know, in John Deere green. But it's actually a different water tower than the one I had. Mine's not still there—it's a new water tower that was actually built after Toby went to high school there, as a matter of fact.

JE: So you and Toby would be considered pretty good friends, right?

JH: We were good friends, yes, we were. When I got that call at 2:30 in the morning—the phone rang, and I looked over there and saw the name, and I answered the phone, and they said, "We lost Toby a few minutes ago." Of course, he'd been battling—he battled that stomach cancer and cancer getting inside his body. He battled it for the last two or three years, and the last few days it just got increasingly worse. It's a really big loss. He was a great Oklahoman, a great person, a great individual. He did so much that people didn't know he did. And he was humble. As flamboyant a personality and flamboyant an entertainer as he was, he was really a very humble man.

JE: Your faith—did he share the same faith, and did you talk about faith issues with him?

JH: Yes, as a matter of fact, we did. I don't think that he probably—you know, his faith was strong, and I will not say what other people's faiths are. You know, that's between them and God. But when we first found out about that stomach cancer, and he went down to Houston and had basically a lot of his stomach removed—I think 80 percent or something, he told me—his first statement was, "I've got the Almighty riding shotgun. You can't get any better than that." He said that many, many times over that three years, and that's what he hung his hat on.

I've helped Toby with some of his foundation stuff. Originally, we started doing some stuff with him on a deal he started up there in Oklahoma City

called Allie's House, which is very much like Ronald McDonald House in Memphis that St. Jude uses. He started that because of a little girl named Allie—and I did not know the little girl—but that goes to his church there in Moore or Norman—I don't know which church he went to—and was in the Oklahoma City Children's Hospital up there. He started a place where the parents could stay and have free room and board and never had to worry about it, staying there while their kids were in the hospital with cancer in Oklahoma City.

That eventually worked into—I think the OK Kids Korral is what he calls his kids' foundation. That all started because of the little girl in his church. Over the years, we sold a few fishing trips with Toby and I that sold for a lot of money—between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars for folks to go fishing. We did one or two of those trips down here on our lake, on our ranch. I've got a 130-acre lake here. We did one or two of those trips here. The last one we did, we did over on Grand Lake.

Toby had bought him a couple of houses over on Grand Lake at Shangri-La, and that's where—he did that about back around the time that COVID started—and that's where he kind of quarantined. He said, "I'm quarantining on Grand Lake and fishing and cooking every day," is what he told me. And he spent a lot of time down there. Him and Trish really loved Grand Lake.

Toby's house was set up so he could go out of one gate of that gated community and be at his Ranger bass boat that he bought from me, or he could go out the other gate and be on the first tee at the golf course. Toby loved to play golf. Once he started playing golf, he sold out to it about as much as anybody. He actually bought his own golf course there in Moore-Norman, and he really played golf a lot and became a pretty good golfer.

Chapter 5 – 5:17
Distinguished Alum

John Erling (JE): What year did you graduate from high school?

Jimmy Houston (JH): I graduated in 1962, graduated from college in 1966. I'm old-school—we went to college four years, not five or six like they do now.

JE: So what college did you graduate from?

JH: I graduated from Northeastern at Tahlequah. And really, you know, that lake changed the course of my life dramatically, John. Living in Moore, I had always intended to go to Oklahoma University, and we have many, many close ties with Oklahoma University. Joe Castiglione, our athletic director, is a great, great friend of mine. I've been—you know, Barry Switzer, of course, I started taking him fishing back before he became head coach, and talked to Barry yesterday. He called me yesterday, as a matter of fact, while I was out on the lake with some friends.

We've got really close ties to OU. Now, of course, we're close to OU; we go to a lot of games and we go to Joe's suite. I had intended to go to Oklahoma University and then go on to Oklahoma University Law School when I graduated there. But moving to that lake changed all of that. I went to the closest college I could find, which was Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Northeastern is a great college. I won a Distinguished Alumnus Award there one year, probably the only fisherman that's won a Distinguished Alumnus Award there. I can't remember the year, but I got a plaque here on it. They only have one a year, and there's a lot of years Tahlequah's been there. I'm probably one of the few individuals that won that award who did not go to college on some kind of a scholarship or grant.

We worked our way through college—I pretty much worked my way through college. I tell people selling catfish—we did a lot of other things on the lake, but we did sell a lot of catfish too. We were guiding on the lake, we were teaching water ski lessons, we were scuba diving for recovery on the lake, and then I worked at my dad's resort besides all that. I got married when I was a sophomore. Chris worked all the way through college as well.

I did not go to law school, again, because of that lake. I still didn't want to move away from that lake. Also, the other deal on not going to OU law school was I was married and I had a child, and I was just tired of being broke. We weren't destitute broke—I mean, Chris and I both had jobs. We worked 60 hours a week when we went to college and worked for a dollar

an hour, but that's pretty good for a couple of college kids making $120 a week back in that period of time. So we got by, but we were broke all the time. It was a paycheck-to-paycheck type deal.

When I graduated, I told Chris, "I'm not going on to law school," and she was really surprised, and my parents were surprised, and all my friends and everything. I just said, "I've got to go to work. I've got to go make some money."

That was what I wanted to do from probably junior high on—was go to law school. I had no aspirations about becoming a lawyer other than I thought it was an honorable profession, which now I think it's not—as I've lived my life, I believe it's not. Also, to be crass about it, it was simply that those people made a lot of money. Doctors and lawyers—as you grow up as a kid—those are people who've got lots of money. I thought, well, it takes six or seven years to become a doctor, and I'm perhaps not smart enough to become a doctor—although I pretty much had a four-point all the way through high school, and in college ended up 3.6. Pretty much had a four-point the last two or three years, but the freshman year was bad. All of a sudden you're used to going to school every day, and then now you're going three hours a day, 16 hours a week. That's part-time education, that's all college is. Why kids take five and six years to go through nowadays is beyond me. You get a college education going to school 15 or 16 hours a week—golly.

But I tell people that God saved me from being a lawyer, and my friends tell people God saved us from him being a lawyer. That's probably true. I have two degrees because I picked to go into law school. One is I've got a degree in economics, and I've got another in political science. Quite likely I would have ended up being a politician, so God had better plans for me.

I would have made a lot more money being a lawyer, I'm sure, and really made a lot of money probably being a politician, but I probably would have had far fewer friends, and I sure wouldn't have had as much fun as I've had. So, God knew what He was doing when He kept me out of law school.

Chapter 6 – 5:20
Always Worked

John Erling (JE): So then after you leave Northeastern, when do you really start making money to support your family?

Jimmy Houston (JH): Well, my daughter was born when I was a sophomore in college, so I started making money—I was making money to support my family at that time. I mean, we were making money—like I said, Chris and I both worked 60, 70 hours a week when I was in college. We did a lot of different things, and I didn't even know what the terminology was at that time—probably learned it in some of those economic courses—but, you know, I was an entrepreneur as a high school kid and as a college kid. We did about everything you could do around the lake to make money.

My dad had a resort, so I could work there as many hours as I wanted to a week, but I could also go do other things. Like I said, we tell people we paid our way through college catching catfish and selling them. I sold catfish for a dollar a pound dressed when I was in college. I sold them for fifty cents a pound on the hoof, live catfish. And I guided—you could guide back in those days for fifty or seventy-five dollars a day, which fifty dollars a day was like a week's work. So I guided when I was in college.

I scuba-dived—I learned to scuba dive just because guys could put those tanks on and make thirty-five or forty dollars in one dive. They'd go down and make a dive and find something or tie some cables to the dead-man barrels on the bottom of the lake, and you could make thirty or forty or fifty dollars. Again, it took thirty or forty hours normally to make that kind of money.

I water-skied—back then, we had water ski tournaments on Lake Tenkiller, so I learned to jump, I learned to trick-ski, and got really, really good with the slalom. Then I started—I would give water ski lessons, teaching people how to water ski and teaching them how to jump, or teach them trick-skiing or stuff like that. I just did whatever was available to do on that lake to make money.

I did that when I was in Oklahoma City, too. I sold Christmas cards every

year at Christmas and would make three hundred to four hundred dollars, which was a lot of money to a ten or eleven-year-old kid. I sold Cloverine Salve—I don't know if you're old enough, John, to remember Cloverine Salve, but that was another deal you'd go around and sell in the neighborhood, and Christmas cards—you could make a pretty good little bunch of money with Christmas cards.

I started working at a chicken farm when I was twelve or thirteen years old up in Oklahoma City. The guy raised chickens in cages and had thousands of eggs every day that I would gather and candle and wash and put in cartons. I don't eat eggs today because of that. I hate eggs, I hate chickens. I eat lots of chicken, but we had those chickens in cages. We actually ended up changing all those over and putting them in nests, still in those big buildings, but they were nesting in nests, and then you had to gather eggs—you had to fight the chickens for them.

I've always worked and always made money and saved money. I saved money to buy a vehicle when I was sixteen years old. I'll be eighty years old in July, and I still work fifty, sixty-hour weeks. I mean, I probably will always work. I don't know that I'll ever quit working. The one thing that would probably cause me to quit working and go ahead and retire is Chris being sick and still not being able to walk since she had that stroke three years ago. I spend an awful lot of my time taking care of her, and I probably should be spending all of my time taking care of her. That's a real challenge in my mind right now—I don't really want to retire, but I might just because of that.

Again, we have several people that make their living because of that television show. We've sent several kids through college because of that television show—my kids and grandkids and our employees' kids and grandkids. Like I said, God's got a lot of plans for everything. Who would have ever thought that some kid who just fished and hunted all the time would end up being responsible for or having a business that would be sending other people's kids through college?

Pat Turner, who runs our production company in Tulsa, he's got four kids, and he sent three of them through college—one at OU, one at OSU, and one at Northeastern. The other was at Texas Tech and ended up leaving

college and getting a job. They've all got good jobs, and he's got grandkids now, and that television show's done all that.

Again, God plans all that out correctly. I remember my dad telling me when I was in college, "Son, if you don't quit fishing so much, you're gonna grow up and be a bum." And he was right—I did grow up to be a bum, but it's worked out pretty well. So anyway.

Chapter 7 – 6:25
Tournament Fishing

John Erling (JE): When were you introduced to tournament fishing?

Jimmy Houston (JH): I was introduced to tournament fishing—and something that probably really, sure enough, changed my life—in 1966 when I was a senior in college. They had the World Series of Sport Fishing. Both of those times were before B.A.S.S. in 1967, but the World Series of Sport Fishing was the first really national tournament. That's what Virgil Ward won, that's what Joe Krieger won—Tulsa legends in fishing. Glenn Andrews, Glenn Cossey, Roy Martin, the greatest fishermen in the country at that time were fishing the World Series of Sport Fishing, they called it Hy Peskin. You qualified for that by being a state champion—that's how you got to go fish the tournament. Well, the tournament that year was on Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma. It was this close to my house, and I was the Oklahoma state champion, so I got to go and fish it and represent Oklahoma in 1966.

But back in 1962, the finals were on Lake Tenkiller. The format they had that year—they fished one day on Grand Lake, one day on Fort Gibson, and three days on Lake Tenkiller. Lake Tenkiller was the most important part of it. Those guys came over there and they stayed at my dad's resort, and they hired me to watch their boats at night. They would pull their boats up on the bank at night and park them, and I'd sleep in my pickup truck down there guarding their boats, watching their boats to keep anybody from stealing anything off their boats. Most of them had boats like mine—they were aluminum boats. We didn't have Ranger bass boats and stuff; those didn't come until 1967 or 1968 when Ranger started. So, those guys were all

staying at my resort, and I got to be good friends with Joe Krieger and Virgil Ward and Glenn Andrews, Glenn Cossey, and those guys.

They asked me to go fishing—I'd get out of school in the afternoon, and they'd ask me to go fishing. Usually, I would go to work, but I told Dad, "These guys want me to go fishing with them." I didn't know it at the time, but I was showing them all the places where I caught fish. I knew Lake Tenkiller like the back of my hand. Well, they were showing me how good they could cast, all these different techniques they could use, and how to work lures and all this. I thought, "My gosh, these guys are amazing. I need to learn how to throw like that—I need to learn these things that they know." And that put the seed of tournaments in me right there, I'm sure.

Virgil Ward won that tournament. Virgil, from that tournament on, was a very close friend of mine. I took him to Brazil on a peacock bass fishing trip in his later years before he died. I took Joe Krieger down to Brazil on a peacock bass fishing trip before he died. Those guys were the greatest fishermen in the world. It'd be like right now some 18-year-old kid spending three weeks' time fishing with Kevin VanDam one day, Roland Martin one day, Bill Dance one day, Hank Parker one day—I mean, that's what it'd be like. I was fishing with those guys, and I was learning so much that I didn't know. And I was simply showing them the best places to catch fish, so it was beneficial for everybody.

Virgil Ward won that tournament and started his very successful show called Championship Fishing because he won the championship that year. I've got pictures of Virgil with that trophy, I've got pictures with Joe Krieger. I haven't seen them in years, but I've still got a couple of 8x10s—they're black-and-white pictures, too, by the way.

Glenn Andrews, who is maybe the greatest bass fisherman of all time—he's the one responsible for all of Bill Dance's success—he won that tournament at Eufaula, Oklahoma. He's ninety-some-odd years old now. I saw him and visited with him last year, and he said, "That was really something. Yeah, I caught ten little old bass about twelve, thirteen inches long every day."

I said, "You caught them on a purple Texas-rig plastic worm."

He said, "Holy cow, you remember that all the way back?"

That was when Johnny Morris had the billion-dollar tournament two years ago now, about this time of year. Glenn said, "You remember what I caught those fish on?"

I said, "I remember—I could tell you where you caught those fish if you told us the truth at the weigh-in."

He said, "Holy cow." Then he said, "I remember you at that tournament. You were pretty flamboyant."

He's a real laid-back guy—maybe the greatest bass fisherman of all time. He caught fish off the bank, out in the middle, when nobody had any way to tell how deep it was or anything. He taught Bill Dance how to do that. All the early tournaments Bill fished, Glenn Andrews marked the maps for him. Bill is a great fisherman, but he learned—we all learned—from experience on the water. It's a very difficult teacher and a hard teacher, but it's a good teacher because you really learn. We learned how to fish different lakes; we learned how to fish muddy water and clear water.

One of the things that helped me on the national stage was Oklahoma has a lot of water. We have a lot of lakes, and we have a lot of different types of lakes. Grand Lake's totally different than Keystone; Keystone's totally different than Tenkiller, and Broken Bow, Eufaula, and just on and on. We learned how to fish giant lakes—we had several hundred-thousand-plus-acre lakes. Tenkiller's not one of them, you know—it's twenty, twenty-one thousand acres, something like that, which is still a big lake. We've got mountain lakes, we've got flat lakes, we've got clear lakes, we've got muddy lakes. We've got all kinds of things for fishing. That's why we've got a lot of great national tournament fishermen from Oklahoma—because you can learn a diversity of bass fishing right here in this great state. Is this a great state or what, you know.

Chapter 8 – 17:20
Don Butler

John Erling (JE): You've been a big part of Bass Anglers Sportsman Society—B.A.S.S.—from the beginning, and it's been supported by many Oklahomans, including yourself. Talk about Don Butler, Bob Cobb, and Ray Scott. Tell us about those people.

Jimmy Houston (JH): Well, all those individuals—of course, the only one we have left of those is Bob. Bob wrote for the Tulsa Tribune back when the Tulsa Tribune had a full page every Thursday or Friday—I think it might have been Friday. Either Thursday or Friday, the Tulsa Tribune had a full page about the outdoors, about hunting and fishing, and Bob, of course, wrote those articles.

Bob Cobb wrote the first article ever written about me for the Tulsa paper, and he did it when I was 16 or 17 years old. He called down there at my dad's resort and got me on the phone. He told me who he was—I didn't believe him at first, because, you know, Bob Cobb was a local celebrity, just like you are, John. I mean, big deal—wrote for the Tulsa Tribune, just like John Erling or Gary G. But anyway, he called me and said, "I want to do a story about you fishing."

I said, "Are you kidding me? Is this really Bob Cobb?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "You want to do a story on me?"

He said, "Yeah, I want to write an article on you."

I said, "For the newspaper?"

He said, "Yeah."

I couldn't believe it—I was so shocked. He said, "I've heard you can catch a hundred white bass at night on Lake Tenkiller under a lantern, a Coleman lantern. Is that true?"

I said, "No, sir, it's not—I can catch two hundred."

He said, "Well, I want to do that and write a story about night fishing on Lake Tenkiller."

I said, "By the way, we'll catch a limit of crappie at the same time, too."

So he came down and wrote an article about night fishing on Lake Tenkiller, and that's where I met Bob Cobb. We've been friends ever since. He was at the Classic this week—I did not see him because I only got to work the Bassmaster Classic one day. I worked Saturday in West Virginia and Thursday and Friday in South Carolina, so I was only at the Classic one day. But I know Bob was there; I heard people talking about him.

I met Ray Scott at my dad's store with Don Butler. I knew Don Butler, of course, Okiebug. But I met Ray Scott before he started B.A.S.S. Don Butler brought him down there to Lake Tenkiller to meet my dad. I remember Ray coming in there—just a big smile, flamboyant, salesman-type personality—and they were talking about the tournament he was going to have on Beaver Lake. Ray said, "You gotta go fish that tournament—it's gonna be the biggest thing ever."

And of course, I was fishing tournaments. That was ’68, I think, maybe ’67 when he came there. I'd been fishing tournaments already. I'd fished Project Sports tournaments and a couple of national tournaments, but mostly local tournaments—whatever tournaments we had. I remember Ray Scott telling my dad, giving his big sales pitch about this tournament organization called Bass Anglers Sportsman Society—that Homer Circle had made that acronym. I remember him telling how great it was going to be, and he's gonna have this big magazine, and there'd be a lot of members.

My dad said, "What does it cost to join that organization?"

Ray said, "Ten dollars a year."

I remember my dad turned around to the cash register—we had the cash register where you push the button and you pulled the lever, and it made a

dinging sound, and the door flew open. He reached over and hit that cash register and pulled that lever down. That door flew open, and he got a ten-dollar bill out of there. He said, "Sign me up."

Don Butler, of course, is the first lifetime member of B.A.S.S. My dad was not a lifetime member of B.A.S.S., but Ray sold him a membership in B.A.S.S. before there even was a B.A.S.S. And now that I think back on it, I don't remember if he gave him a receipt or anything, but, you know, there was really no such thing other than in Ray's mind. He might have just made it up on the spot for that ten-dollar bill. But my dad bought a membership in it.

Don Butler—I did not fish that first tournament, and I don't have many regrets in my life, but that's definitely one. I would have liked to fish that first tournament because I fished the second or third one they had on Eufaula, Alabama, in 1968. I think that Beaver Lake must have been in '67.

I didn't have the $125. I just could not—I mean, there's no way I could pay it. And so I did not fish that tournament. But then, the following year when they had their second tournament at either Lake Eufaula, Alabama, or Smith Lake, Alabama, and then the other one was the third tournament—I just never looked to see which was which—but the second or third tournament is when I went.

When I got out of college, instead of going to Oklahoma University Law School, I opened an insurance agency and started that from scratch, and then I learned what being poor was really all about. I mean, we were making that $60 or $70 a week just like we were when I was working for a dollar an hour. But it ended up being very successful, and we sold that since I got going fishing full-time.

But I was selling insurance—I started selling insurance when I graduated from college, so that was two years later, '68, and I still didn't have any money. But I went to Tulsa to deliver an insurance policy—a life insurance policy I'd sold to a young man up there in Tulsa—and I went by Don Butler's house. I called over there, and I asked him what he's doing. He said, "Well, we're making baits and loading up, getting ready to go to Eufaula, Alabama, tomorrow."

I said, "Golly, wow, that's something."

He said, "Why don't you come over and visit?" So I went over to Don Butler's house. Him and Jerry Rhoton—who's dead now; I spent several days with Jerry Rhoton before he died, and he lived in Norman, Oklahoma. He's the guy that made the Little Tubby lure. Storm Manufacturing made it—he developed and invented that lure, and Storm Manufacturing made it there. Gary Storm—the Storm Brothers there in Norman.

Anyway, I went over there, and Don kept talking about, "Why don't you come go with us?"

I said, "I don't have any money, Don. I can't afford to drive down there and take my boat. I can't afford the hotel room," which was like six or seven dollars a night. "I can't afford $125 for sure—that's the world."

Don Butler said, "You can ride down there with Jerry and me. Just go as a non-boater."

I said, "Well, I don't have $125."

He said, "Just don't worry about that."

To this day, I don't know who paid that $125. Don Butler went to his grave saying that he didn't pay the $125. Ray Scott went to his grave saying he never waived anyone's entry fee, ever, in B.A.S.S.—let alone some 22-year-old kid from Oklahoma. But I didn't pay the entry fee, so either Ray Scott waived it or Don Butler paid it or whatever, I don't know. Maybe Don Butler gave him fifty dollars and Ray waived seventy-five. I don't know. Neither one ever told me. That’s a deal they went to their graves with.

Kind of like Forrest Wood says I bought my first Ranger boat in 1969. It was a ’69 model—I agree—but I bought the boat in the fall of 1968. I always told people I bought my first Ranger boat in ’68. Nina Wood told me—she said, "Jimmy, I know which one of y'all are right."

I said, "Well, who is it?"

She said, "I won't tell either one of you." So that's another mystery in my life that I will not find out until I get to heaven. Did I really buy that boat in ’68, or did I buy it in ’69? Was Forrest right, or was I right? And who paid that entry fee—or was it, you know, it could have been a combination of both. In later years, it popped into my mind—well, maybe Don Butler paid part of it and Ray Scott waived the rest of it. Ray Scott needed a warm body more than he needed another $125. He needed people.

Don asked me, "Can you afford the hotel room down there?"

I said, "How much is it, Don?"

He said, "Well, we're staying—six dollars a night."

I said, "Well, I don't know."

I went home that night, got back home about 11 or 12 o'clock, started pulling out rods and reels and stuff, getting ready. Chris said, "What are you doing?"

I said, "I'm going to Eufaula, Alabama, with Jerry and Don."

She said, "For what?"

I said, "I'm gonna fish that tournament, that B.A.S.S. tournament."

She said, "We don't have $125 we could spare, Jimmy."

I said, "Don said not to worry about it. All we gotta do is—I gotta meet them on Interstate 40. They're gonna pick me up down there by Checotah, Oklahoma, and I get to go to the tournament with them."

I went to the tournament, and ironically, the fishing was incredible out in the middle of the lake—nobody knew how to do that. That's how I learned how to fish on Lake Tenkiller—fishing out in the middle of the lake. So I had a bunch of fish that I found out in the middle of the lake. I practiced the first day of practice with Ray Scott. He took me out in his boat to practice, and he showed me two or three places to fish out there in the middle of

the lake. We caught a couple, two or three big bass. As it turned out, I found a couple of places way better than his places, but once he showed me where those fish were—I mean, that was totally legal, of course; back in those days there were no rules.

He showed me, and I borrowed a boat, went out, and found a bunch of fish. Fifteen-bass limit—the first day I caught eleven bass that weighed 52 pounds and something—I had so many ounces. I didn't catch the limit; I was four fish short of the limit, but I got the lead in the tournament with 52 or 56 pounds—I don't remember which—but I had an 8-10, an 8-14, and a 9-3. I remember that. Those were the biggest bass I'd ever caught in my life. I caught three—I got my line broke three times that I know were over five pounds.

But that was my introduction into B.A.S.S. I'd never fished a multiple-day tournament before—we fished single-day tournaments here in Oklahoma. The second day I only caught 28 pounds. I had a lot of boats come in on my water—they saw me out there, pretty recognizable with the stupid hair—and that third day, I ended up finishing sixth place.

I can remember Tom Mann—Ray Scott took me down to Tom Mann's worm plant there, and Tom gave me some Jelly Worms. It's the first time anybody ever gave me anything free for fishing. I'd won some stuff in those tournaments, but nobody ever gave me anything. I caught them on a watermelon-colored Jelly Worm with a red tail—a Mann's Jelly Worm.

I remember Tom Mann couldn't fish that lake because he guided on that lake, so he was running around in a boat visiting with everybody. I remember him coming up by me and saying, "Bill Dance is whackin' 'em down there. He's culling five-pounders."

I said, "Really? I ain't worried about Bill Dance. He's so far down in the standings 'cause he ain't caught nothing the first two days. I'm not worried about Bill Dance; I'm worried about myself."

Bill Dance moved from nothing to seventh place in that tournament. He's got a picture in some of his books or stuff—I don't think I have one—but of him sitting on an ice chest with that big string of fish, all these big four-,

five-, six-pound fish, and me standing there looking at the fish. He didn't beat me, because I said I wasn't worried about Bill Dance; he's so far behind me he can't catch up. But he almost did.

But that's how I got introduced to B.A.S.S., and Bob Cobb, you know, writing that article when I was 16 years old. I visited with Bob at Ray Scott's memorial down in Birmingham, and I shared that story with somebody standing there about it. He said, "You and Bob must have known each other a long time."

I said, "Well, we've known each other since I was 16 years old," and I was telling that story about him. Bob said, "I tell that story just a little bit different, Jimmy, but you're pretty close to correct on it." So, I don't know, maybe I don't remember it quite like he does. But he was the one who wrote the first thing ever written about me and fishing, and I thought it was like the greatest thing in the world—my name in the Tulsa Tribune newspaper, wow—and a picture with all these big white bass.

They were a lot of fun to catch. You'd catch them thirty feet deep, so just imagine how limber the rods were back in those days. What we would call a medium-light right now, that was the rods everybody was fishing with. Either that or a broomstick, you know. But early on, we didn't have those heavy rods; every rod we had was limber. Fishing with Zebco reels—I remember when my dad got the first Zebco reel, like the first week or so when Zebco came out with them in Tulsa. The push-button was on top. I'm sure you've seen those—I don't know if you ever fished with one—but they had a little place where you put your thumb, and that little deal was spinning around in there, and you'd put your thumb on that to stop it.

I can remember my dad and my two uncles and my granddad—and I think my granddad might have bought that reel, I don't know—but I know we went out behind my granddad's house here in Oklahoma City. He had an outhouse back there about, you know, a hundred yards or seventy-five yards. It was a long way back, it seemed like, but you know they put outhouses way back behind the house because they didn't smell good. I remember them trying to cast all the way to that outhouse. They'd take that Zebco—I don't know if it was a Zebco 33 back then, but it was a Zebco something, the first Zebco—and they were trying to cast all the way to that

outhouse. Many of them, they were aiming at that outhouse, and they couldn't get to it. And I was just dying, saying, "Let me throw it, let me throw it, let me throw it," and well, they all had to take turns and take turns again. Finally, they said, "Here, throw it. You probably can't even throw it."

I pushed that button, and I almost hit that outhouse. I think they were all trying to hit the outhouse—I don't know if I hit it or not—but that was my first introduction to that Zebco reel, the Zebco 33. So, yeah, I remember all that early stuff.

JE: Yeah, I just have to put in a word here about these people. I actually met Don Butler. We have a place on Grand Lake. I've had it now for over 30 years, and I had several occasions to be around Don. I just remember what a nice guy he was—very talkative and just a comfortable man to be around. I just wanted to throw that in—that I actually met Don Butler.

JH: Oh yeah, he was a great man, and a great man for fishing—won the Bassmaster Classic. I've got a picture of Don and I hanging on my wall here at the ranch, as a matter of fact, not too long before he died. Of course, he had Okiebug; he had the Okiebug shows up there in Tulsa, which I worked every year that he had them, with some of the pioneers of this game like Nick Creme and Cotton Cordell, Bill Norman, Jim Bagley—all those guys would come up there for that Okiebug show out at the fairgrounds.

He developed a lure late in his life that he called me and told me he thought would be the best lure to ever hit the market. He said, "I want to come down there to Tenkiller, and you and I go fishing—I want to show you how great this lure is." It was like February, and I said, "Don, we can't hardly catch one here now. It's so hard and cold." But he brought it down—it was a spinnerbait, kind of a rocker-head spinnerbait. I think I caught two fish on it. It wasn't a magic bait, but he was real proud of that bait. I've still got a few of them, as a matter of fact.

But yeah, Don Butler had a whole lot to do with bass fishing nationally, and also a big thing here in Oklahoma. That Tulsa Bass Club—they claim to be the first bass club in the United States. Now, Austin Bass Club claims the same thing down in Austin, Texas. And then, of course, the Tulsa Bass Belles were actually, without a doubt—nobody claims different—the Tulsa Bass Belles were the first women's bass club in the nation. Chris actually

belonged to that bass club because she knew a lot of the girls that started it. Joe Krieger's daughter, Jennie, was one of them, and Linda Bradshaw, who's still alive. Chris would go to Tulsa for the Bass Belles' club meeting twice a month, and they fished tournaments all around Oklahoma, just like the men's clubs did.

Chapter 9 – 9:13
Kissing a Fish

John Erling (JE): I gotta ask you—you became famous for kissing a fish. How did that come about?

Jimmy Houston (JH): It really did, you know. We still get fish pictures—we have something on our Facebook, we've got over 600,000 people on our Facebook page—and we have a deal on there for people to send pictures in, and half of them are kissing fish still. I actually got a picture from Vladimir Putin one time of him kissing a fish, and I don't know Vladimir Putin. I've not had any kind of meetings with him of any kind. I'm not close to Vladimir Putin on anything, but I know that he did kiss a fish. He sent me a picture of that. But I don't know when it started. It's kind of like I have no idea when I caught my first fish.

When I started in television—or in tournaments—I might have started doing that in tournaments. I really didn't know that I was doing it; people started telling me I was doing it. In tournaments, sometimes you catch a fish toward the end of the day that you know might win that tournament, or might get you a check—you know, a fish that really, really helps. I might have started it in tournaments because of that.

The other thing: in the early days of doing television shows, there was no such thing as wireless microphones. I was hardwired to a big recording deck—a big three-quarter-inch recording deck. I was wired to that with those big long, round connectors, about as round as a quarter, that connect together and go to a microphone. I ran that down my shirt, down my pants leg, and it went back to the back of the boat and hooked up to that receiver. It was like being chained, being in prison hooked up to that

thing.

For years, we did fishing shows where we had an open, a middle, and a close. Now, as years went by, we closed them differently, because we had a lot of great ways we could close a show rather than a formal close. But it might be that at the end of some of those days—and we liked to close on a good quality fish, maybe a four- or five-pounder or bigger, but at least a three-pounder or so, a little bigger than the quality you've been catching all day—it could have been that on some of those days, when I was trying so hard to catch that last fish to close that show, we had everything but a close to the show. I'd finally catch that fish, and it might be five minutes before we didn't have enough light to shoot, and I'd kiss that fish and turn it loose, and that'd be the close of the show. That's probably how it got started, but I wish I could claim that it was a brilliant economic idea. But I don't know—I really don't know. It has become a trademark, that and this goofy hair, but fortunately I still got some of it left, you know?

JE: You've been blonde all your life, haven't you?

JH: I have, yeah, I have. I was actually white-headed when I was a kid. There's little pictures of me when I was a kid, and it was cotton-top. They called me "Cotton Top" a lot when I was a kid. As I got seven, eight, nine years old, it started getting blond, but the little pictures, four or five years old, it's white. White as it can be—I don't know why.

JE: What's the smartest fish that you've fished for?

JH: The smartest fish? I don't think fish are smart. I don't think fish are smart at all. They have God-given instincts. To be smart, you have to be able to reason—they can't reason. Now, they can understand if something different happens in their environment, like all week long they haven't seen any boats running around the lake or people water-skiing, and then it gets to the weekend and there's a hundred boats out there—that changes their environment. Deer don't think; they change when everybody gets running around on four-wheelers in the woods and shooting guns and driving nails in trees and all that kind of stuff. But I don't think they're smart. They don't have the ability to reason things out. They have God-given instincts, that's all.

JE: But isn't there one fish that's more difficult to catch than another fish?

JH: Well, you know, there probably is, but again, over the years, the fishing industry has figured out how to catch just about every species of fish pretty doggone good. To me, trout have always been more difficult to fish for. I was told by several people that fishermen smell bad to rainbow trout, but I've been places where they were pretty easy to catch too. I think a bass probably is as challenging as any fish there is to catch because of the fact that there's so many people after them. Their whole process of life is built around weather changes, water changes, time of the year, and the type of water they live in. Those four criteria affect everything they do, and that makes them really challenging. Maybe a lot of other species of fish are not affected quite that much by all those elements. But bass, everything he does is affected by those four things, so they may be the most challenging.

But I fish for all kinds of fish, and bass might be more challenging, but that might be because of the tournament situations. We just think they're more challenging because we couldn't figure out how to catch them.

JE: Would there be a biggest fish you ever caught, or had the biggest struggle with?

JH: Yeah, you know, now they call that a PB in today's world—personal best—in the bass fishing world in particular. But I've caught really large saltwater fish, obviously. I've caught large sharks. I caught a goliath grouper that weighed 383 pounds, fishing with Roland Martin. Bill Dance was supposed to go with us that day but didn't because he wanted to shoot some commercials, so I've let him hear about that 383-pound fish many, many times over the years. He could've been there and might've caught it instead of me, but I doubt it—I probably still would've caught it.

Freshwater dorado, golden dorado, I caught a 52-pounder, which is near the world record. A bass—the biggest I've caught, only 13-1, and that was a long time ago. One of the fish that I was proud of for a long, long time—probably still am—I caught a 46-pound striper below the dam at Eufaula, back when it was like the third-largest striper. It was either 46 or 45, I don't remember exactly what it weighed, but it was the third-largest striper ever caught in Oklahoma at that time, really close to the Oklahoma state record. What I liked so much about that is I had a lot of friends that were just pure striper fishermen, and they fished below those dams, and they fished at Texoma and Keystone and places where you got 'em, and

none of them ever caught one that big. And that killed them when I caught it that big.

I caught a 46-pound channel cat, which is a line-class world record, at Lake Irvine in California. I was just out at Irvine, California, last Wednesday night opening up the new Bass Pro store—emceeing that opening—and we had several people who remembered when I caught that fish out there.

I caught a 107-pound wahoo one time—the only wahoo I've ever caught. I knew it was a big fish, but I didn't know if they got a hundred pounds or five hundred pounds or whatever. Everybody in the boat just went crazy because it was so big. I said, "Is that a really big one for that species?" They said, "Sixty pounds is a big one for that species." I said, "Holy cow!" That's the only one I've ever caught, you know, so I'm definitely not a saltwater expert. You gotta have a little luck involved in fishing, as you know, but your skill will override luck, and it'll override it in saltwater even if you don't have much knowledge. You use the knowledge of the people you're with, and then you use your skill to actually get the fish to bite and into the boat.

JE: Right. I would imagine some fishermen listening would want me to ask this question.

Chapter 10 – 4:12
Advice

John Erling (JE): We have many young people listening to our stories. What advice do you give to young people coming out of high school, college, and going on into life? What would be your advice to them?

Jimmy Houston (JH): Well, I think in order to be successful, the simplest and easiest way is you do have to have a close relationship with God. The Bible is full of things like the word "prosper." The Bible is full of tremendously wealthy people, as well, but the biggest people in the Bible—the biggest names mentioned—are people, you know, just take Moses, take Abraham, and all the kings that were wealthy kings. King Solomon at that time was the richest man—maybe richer than any of the richest men in the world

now, we don't know. But definitely, you have to have a strong, firm foundation in faith.

If I went on to college, I would recommend degrees in things that really mean something—degrees around economics, degrees around business, degrees around speaking. One thing I recommend to people when they're young is to acquire property of some sort. Whatever you have an opportunity to buy that you can afford to pay for over ten years, twenty years, thirty years—I don't care, it doesn't matter. Property, whether it's a convenience store that went out of business on the corner, or it's a ten-acre piece of land, or a house, or whatever—buy property. Buy property, buy buildings, land. They're always too expensive when you buy them, and when you sell them, you always say, "Well, I can't believe that." You can't believe that your house that you paid $10,000 for, you're selling for a hundred—or houses that you pay a hundred for, you can sell right now for $300,000 or $400,000—or property that you bought for $500 an acre that's worth $6,000 an acre, and on and on and on—or a vacant lot you bought in the city for $9,000 that now sells for $150,000.

Acquire property. Acquire real estate of some sort—whether it's got buildings on it or not, important or unimportant, it doesn't really matter—and continue to do that throughout your lifetime. It's one of the greatest wealth creators. We at one time owned six boat stores. We sold the last one, and we've been out of that boat business now—we still have one, our original one on Lake Tenkiller. My son Jamie operates it. It's now also a boat dealership and a Kawasaki dealership. We sell a lot of Kawasaki four-wheelers and Mules and stuff. But a boat dealership that we owned in Rogers, Arkansas—we had it leased out for the last four or five years, and we just finally sold that about a year and a half ago. I sold it and carried a twenty-year note on it. I won't even say on here what kind of money we made off of that, but it's amazing.

It doesn't matter—you can go back and look at something your great-granddad bought. Maybe here in Oklahoma, maybe it was in the Land Rush and they got that land for just being there first and staking out a few acres—what that acreage is worth today. You look back at your dad's house, your granddad's house, or whatever. It's just like—we have people living around here in Murray County, Oklahoma, that are living on their

homestead that their granddad had, and their granddad might have bought it for $20 an acre. I know people in Texas—and Oklahoma—that bought land during the Depression for ten, fifteen, twenty cents an acre. Think about those things. That's the biggest advice I'd give you: get an education that's really worth something.

I took all the speech and communication classes I could get when I was in high school and college. Kids nowadays do not know how to communicate with each other eye-to-eye. As technologically advanced as business is today, the best business you can do is still looking that person in the eye, shaking hands with them, and negotiating. Still is today. So much business now is done through emails and texts.

Chapter 11 – 3:10
How to Be Remembered

John Erling (JE): How would you like to be remembered?

Jimmy Houston (JH): Oh, I don't know—just probably as a good person. We've tried to develop all the integrity we can in our business relationships and personal relationships forever. I'd just like to really be remembered as a good Christian man, and I'm gonna be in heaven with a lot of other good Christian men and women.

JE: Well, Jimmy, I sure enjoyed this, and I really thank you for contributing your story to Voices of Oklahoma, where everybody listens to them, and they'll certainly enjoy hearing you. So thank you, Jimmy. I appreciate and admire you very much.

JH: John, I appreciate what you've done forever, and I appreciate what you're doing with Voices of Oklahoma. That's remarkable. When you told me about it the other day, I thought, "Well, that is something." As I look back in the history of bass fishing, I think about so much of that is lost and can't come back—the things that I lived through, and people like Roland and Bill lived through, from day one. To have that, like you did—all of the great, great people we've had from Oklahoma, from all different walks of life—and to have that for somebody to listen to fifty or a hundred years

from now, and then listen to it right now—I mean, things right now—that is amazing.

One of the great things about Oklahoma, being a small state, is most all of the celebrities know each other, so we get touched by greatness as we live our life here. I can remember telling a buddy of mine—he was having some problem of some kind up in Michigan—I said, "Why don't you just talk to the governor about that? Did you talk to your governor about that?"

He said, "What?"

I said, "Why don't you talk to your governor? He can help you on that."

He said, "Talk to the governor of Michigan?"

I said, "Well, yeah."

He said, "Jimmy, I can't talk to the governor!"

I said, "You can't talk to your governor?"

He said, "Well, of course not!"

I said, "Well, here in Oklahoma, I've known all of our governors for years." Then I started realizing that anytime you have a function of some sort here in Oklahoma, all of the important people are there. Like several of the things we did after the Murrah bombing, you know, and so you meet football coaches, you meet athletic directors, you meet congressmen, you meet governors—on and on and on. Anybody with any kind of celebrity status in Oklahoma has met just about everybody. Just like you said, you knew Don Butler. Because we live in a small state.

There's a deal on television, one of the news stations says, "Is This a Great State or What?" Those are some of the most interesting things you could watch on local television—you know, "Is This a Great State or What?" Even if it's a small state, making it small makes it greater, I think personally, because of just what I said. But to keep that for posterity—it's a big deal, John. I appreciate you doing it.

JE: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you so much, Jimmy—appreciate it.

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