

Submitted by Will Johnson 9/23/2026

I was born and raised in Columbia, Missouri and grew up as a goose and deer hunter. I attended Yale, graduating in 1992 with a degree in history. After graduation, I took a teaching job in Kansas City. I met my wife, Christy, there and before we were married took the fool-hardy decision to go to work for her Dad. I now own and run the company I went to work for all those years ago.

Our first-born was a bird dog named Basie. I became a passionate quail hunter and hunted over Basie for fifteen years. During that time, we started a family – daughters Zara and Wynn are now in their 20's and are passionate anglers.

Late in Basie's life the quail got to be fewer and fewer and the coveys were so small I hated even to shoot into them. At the same time my interest in fly fishing was piqued when a cousin of Christy's surprised me with a bamboo rod he'd made.

With small children my fishing needed to be close to home, and I discovered Crane Creek in southern Missouri. It's one of the few streams in our part of the world with truly wild (though not native) trout. After some research and old-school letter writing, I got permission to fish on some private water along the creek. One day I was leaving a property and noticed a For Sale sign that was invisible from the road. Before I knew it, I'd bought 185 acres and two-thirds of a mile of Crane Creek.

Over several years my family had many adventures on the creek. Both my daughters caught their first trout there. During that time we completed several large riparian corridor restoration projects. I chronicled my adventures with family, fishing and bulldozers in a little memoir called "Crosscut Creek" which I published in 2019. I've also published fishing articles online and in print.

I'm a passionate collector of 20th century fly-fishing books. The collection is pushing three hundred volumes and focuses on narrative: memoir, history, fiction as well as books by and about women. A couple of the more notable books are a first edition of Hemingway's "In Our Time," (where "Big Two-Hearted River" appeared for the first time), Sturges' "Salmon Fishing on Cain River, New Brunswick," and Ethel Rose's obscure but wonderful "Trout Fishing in Normandy."

Beyond Crane Creek, I've fished rivers in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico. My girls both went to college in New England so I've fished a few streams in Vermont as well. Every winter I fish in Argentina and every spring the Driftless in Wisconsin. Saltwater fishing is a newer interest. In March of 2026, through no fault of my own, I landed my first permit on the Riviera Maya. My most recent adventure was on the Rufiji river in Tanzania, where I landed a tiger fish on a "fly" that resembled a styrofoam cooler with eyes.

My grandmother grew up on the once-great Northwest Miramichi River, so Atlantic Salmon fishing is a particular passion. I've fished in Labrador, on several of the better-known rivers on the south side of the Gaspé, as well as the Langa, Vididalsa and Hofralonsa rivers in Iceland.