

**Title:** “Lefty” Kreh re: Joe Brooks  
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Hi, this is Lefty Kreh, and I’m sitting on the bank of the Madison River and watched a man just catch a nineteen inch brown trout. This is one of the many rivers which Joe made famous and fished much of his life and spent every summer fishing this general area in Western Montana.

Joe was like a father to me, and one of the nicest people I’ve ever known. He not only taught me how to fish, \_\_\_ [inaudible] but he also taught me how to be a human being, and [was] one of the finest people I’ve ever known. Perhaps the most amazing thing that I ever knew about Joe Brooks was that he had an insatiable desire to fish, although he killed very few fish.

I remember one time that he was going through to Central America, and he called me and asked if I’d meet him at the airport for lunch. I did. I told him I was going bass fishing in the Everglades out of Miami at the time, that the bass were hitting very well, and he seemed all excited, and said, “Gee, I’ll be back in six days. How about going bass fishing?” I of course made the arrangements. The morning that we were supposed to go, why, I got up - it was raining like, well, buckets of water falling. I was sure that Joe wouldn’t want to go, but knowing Joe, I got in the car and got my gear, and went over to the airport. Standing on the curb, waving at me with his fly-rod case was Joe in the drenching rain. And I marveled at a man who had been fishing for five or six days in Central America for large, saltwater game fish, who could be so excited on the very next day about going out in the drenching rain to fish in the Everglades for bass that wouldn’t go over six or seven pounds. It just amazed me, and we fished for about six hours that day. We didn’t catch too many, we caught a few four-pounders, but Joe seemed to enjoy this fishing as well as anything, and we even went blue-gill fishing for a while, which was .... A man who can fish tarpon one day and blue-gills the next has to appreciate fishing, not just for... [recording cuts off]

Joe Brooks was a man responsible for introducing literally thousands upon thousands of young people to an organization called the Brotherhood of the Jungle Cock. He and Jane Hammond Brown and two other men sat in a rainy log cabin in Thurmont, Maryland, I

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think in 1936 – a long time ago, I know that – and they decided that, on this rainy day, they decided that there were too many young people that were not realizing how great the world of fishing was. They organized a thing called the Brotherhood of the Jungle Cock, which today has grown in a national organization, which a large chapter in Ohio, and the basic parent chapter in Maryland.

The Brotherhood of the Jungle Cock – each year, in order to attend the annual mid-May meeting in either Maryland or Ohio, you the adult must bring along a child and introduce them to fishing. You spend the three days with that young person, teaching them the art and mechanics of fishing and the love of the stream, and sportsmanship, and all the things that we like about the game. What’s amazing is that recently, this past year, I was at the Jungle Cock meeting, and I met some older people, who were there with their son. These people - these fathers - had at one time attended a Jungle Cock as a child. So you had a second generation of these people at the same organization over a period of years. So Joe had been responsible for even second generations of fisherman being introduced to the sport of fishing.

Another area where Joe Brooks has been extremely influential, of course, is in the salt water fishing area. Joe was really the man who put salt water fishing on the map. There were many people who fly-rodged in saltwater even before Joe was born. There were British fisherman in the 1860s that were fishing in saltwater, there were unrecognized people who had caught striped bass with bass flies and so on. But nobody really brought it to the attention of people and really got the wheels rolling on everybody joining the sport. Back in 1946, Joe Brooks caught a bone fish on a fly. He announced that he was going to do it, and he and a fellow named Allen Corsen, who was the, who was the Outdoors editor for the *Miami Herald*, went to Key Largo and deliberately caught the first bonefish. Now there are many people who have come to the front and said they caught bonefish before that. But nobody can prove that they deliberately did it. Joe went on day after day catching bonefish on a fly, and of course, this really started the exodus of people from out of the country to the Keys for light-tackle fishing. From bonefish, they began to recognize that they could catch tarpon, permit, and many other species of fish.

It’s not to say that Joe was the first to do any of these things. He merely was the first person to recognize the value of these things, and to bring them to the attention of people through his writings, his travels, his meeting with many people, introducing many other people to the sport. He was the one mostly responsible for people into saltwater fishing. He also pioneered – by pioneered I mean he was the one who went first – to many many of the places in Central and South America. He was the one who popularized much of the Central saltwater fishing. He also was probably the foremost person in getting striped bass fishing started in this country. Tom Loving introduced him to ‘em – a Maryland fisherman, who was many years older than Joe, who’d been fishing for many years, and Joe readily admitted this. Stan Gibbs, another man from New England had caught many many stripers on the fly rod. But they had not really exposed the public to it. Joe was exposed through Tom Loving, and in fact for many many years after that held the largest striped bass record on a fly – caught out of Coos Bay, Oregon – so he fished both coasts.

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Joe was a man who really got saltwater fly fishing started in this country. Many of the people in the Federation may wonder, what did Joe Brooks do for fly fisherman? Joe Brooks probably introduced more people to more different kinds of fly fishing than other human being ever in the sport. Joe was responsible for many many people knowing about all the new things that popped up, both in Central America, the East coast, the West coast, the West, Canada, saltwater, fresh water. Joe invented almost nothing. He really was not an innovator or a great technician. His greatest contribution to us – and it was certainly the best contribution and the most contributed by any man I know - is that he had such a fantastic personality, and he was such a great fisherman, that people were willing to open up to him new techniques that had developed in different parts of the world. And Joe, being a great fisherman, was able to adapt to these techniques and catch the fish. And where the great contribution came was that Joe made the world aware of these things. For example, he did not develop the techniques for taking terrestrials in the Eastern limestone streams, but what he did do was, by fishing with Vince Marinaro, and Charlie Fox and Ross Trimmer, he was able to take photographs and write stories that made people realize, “here is a great new fishing, with a totally new type of fly”. It’s best to remember that Joe did not invent the fly, did not invent the technique. What he did do was make the world aware that here was a new technique and a new whole world that most of us knew nothing about. Because of this, thousands and thousands of people today enjoy a fishing which [they] would not have enjoyed before.

Joe was not the first man to fish in Peru and Chile, but he was the first man to let the world know that there was fishing in Peru and Chile. Joe was not the first man to fish saltwater in Central American – still probably the greatest fly fishing frontier in the world. Joe was not the first man to fish in Africa, but it was Joe who was the man who came home and said, “use these flies, go to these camps, fish for these fish at these times of the year.” The rest of us followed him, learned, and began to appreciate what he knew. His greatest contribution in the field of angling was to find new techniques, find people with new and innovative ideas or new places to fish, go with them, write about their experiences and let the world know how to do the same thing themselves. Through Joe, we are all enjoying many things which probably would never have been known to us except by small local groups.

END OF RECORDING.