

# HOW I GOT TO WHERE I AM TODAY



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I was taken fishing at an early age by my folks. By age six I had natural history books. I had Guppies and also American Eel elvers from a local creek on Long island. High school biology? Good! My favorite stuff. Roanoke College for four years. Entered as a Biology major, partly because I'm pretty good with foreign languages. Therefore the biological nomenclature came pretty easy. Virginia Tech two years. Didn't want to leave the area. I had a girlfriend at Roanoke College, a half hour away. So I went up to Virginia Tech. When that relationship ended, my education soared at Virginia Tech. In the Masters program, I hadn't quite finished my thesis at the time I visited the Smithsonian to speak with Dr. Ernest Lachner, who became my mentor. He was studying the same group, the *Nocomis* chubs that I had studied at Virginia Tech. He mentioned almost offhandedly that there was a job next door in the Ichthyological Laboratory working with Bruce Collette and Dan Cohen. I said that would be a good thing for the next year. After leaving Roanoke College I still wanted to be a fisheries biologist, a trout biologist. At Virginia Tech I was assigned a thesis on counting and measuring a ton of minnows. I couldn't get into it but I finally did when I got to the *Nocomis* chubs because it was a multifaceted study of species biogeographic questions, hybridization, reproductive behavior, and diversity. Now I was becoming a taxonomist, an academic, and ichthyologist. I took that job at the Smithsonian to help decide my path before I went for my PhD at Cornell University. Working at the Smithsonian, the staff, people coming in from all over the USA and from England and New Zealand. I was able to talk with them all. I got to work with Ernie Lachner on chubs, so I decided I wasn't going to do fisheries work. Three of the people at the Smithsonian had gotten their doctorates under Dr. Edward Raney at Cornell. Raney came down to get some specimens x-rayed. I went to a couple of parties, got to know him a bit, so I went to Cornell and survived. I left before my 800-page thesis was complete, and also I had already spent two years working on *Nocomis* chubs.

This essay is an excerpt of "If Suckers Could Fly," a talk Bob gave at the Virginia NANFA Convention in 2011, and was edited by Bob himself.

Not suckers, right? They weren't in the picture. I was at a meeting my last year at Cornell giving a paper on minnows and there was a notice on the message board saying "Bob Jenkins, call Harry Holloway" who was the Roanoke College Biology Department Chair. So I called. He said "I thought you might be at the meeting and we're looking for a vertebrate zoologist and we thought you might know of someone looking for a job." I said "Yeah. Me." So that's the way that worked out. I was hired on the spot, didn't have to give a seminar. So I again went to Roanoke College. The last place I thought I would return to because when I was a student there, they only had 2.5 faculty members with no time for research. I enjoyed doing research on fishes, particularly in the upper Roanoke Valley, while a student at Virginia Tech. So I went to Roanoke. Later I went to Virginia Commonwealth for two years in the late 70s. I was looking for a graduate program. But I missed the mountains, friends, trout, cool waters, so I returned to Roanoke College. And I never looked back. I was there a long time. I live two blocks from the school. Since "retirement" in 2007, I have a home office and a desk in one of Steve Powers' labs, where I haul out suckers.

