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Close Encounters

Liam Hemsworth on
his star-studded family,
human relationships
and saving the
Earth from aliens in
*Independence Day:
Resurgence*

By Adam Pitluk

Father and Son



FAMILY STYLE: Adam Pitluk (from left) and father Howard, and Johnny Morris and son John Paul

It's not time to make a change, but we went ahead and did it anyway. Maybe it's because we've witnessed enough misfortunes over the years — the kind everyone experiences on a long-enough timeline — that we inherently knew we should see each other more often. Or maybe we've finally reached that point on life's long-but-still-too-short timeline that we laid down our swords and reunited as a team; maybe it was just time it were time. Truth be told, I don't care why it happened. I'm just glad that it happened.

I moved away at 18. That was 21 years ago. I haven't spent more than a few days a year with my father since. We talk, but I'm a thousand miles away and on my sixth city. We FaceTime so he can see his granddaughters, but — how can I try to explain? — it's not the same as face-to-face, father-and-son closeness. I wanted to give my father a gift of sorts — one that I've worked hard to be able to provide for him 21 years after parting ways, and one that I hoped would change his life, like the ones highlighted on page 58. I don't know much about my father's likes and hobbies these days, but one remains as much a part of his identity as it was decades ago, and it is this: Howard Pitluk likes to golf.

I was invited to play in the Bass Pro Shops Legends of Golf Pro-Am tournament in Hollister, Missouri, just a skip of the stone from Branson. As a former Missouri resident, I know just how spectacularly beautiful Southwest Mo is this time of year. And I knew that my father would absolutely love an opportunity to meet and golf with all the legends he watched on television decade after decade. As an early Father's Day present, I gave up my spot so my father could play.

But I had another reason behind this trip, one that I didn't communicate to my father, and even if I did, I don't think he'd understand. It was a reason he'd have to experience personally. You see, Dad

taught me how to fish. Dad taught me how to golf. Dad used to take me on hikes in the woods behind my childhood house in Moreland Hills, Ohio, which is where I learned to appreciate the outdoors. Since I am a former Missouri resident, I know my contemporary Missouri history. And because I do, I couldn't pass up an opportunity to meet The Man himself, and if lucky, introduce my father to Bass Pro Shops founder (and the living embodiment of the great outdoors) Johnny Morris. After all, Johnny's lures have been a part of the Pitluks' bonding experiences for years. Dad and me meeting him would somehow bring our relationship full circle.

In 1971, Johnny was frustrated that he couldn't find any decent fishing tackle around his hometown of Springfield, Mo. So he rented a U-Haul and drove all over the area buying the best bass lures he could afford. Then he sold them out of his father's liquor store. With that, Bass Pro Shops was born, and Johnny has dedicated his life ever since to conservation, historic preservation and philanthropy. And he would be the host, albeit indirectly, of our long-overdue father/son bonding experience.

Dad and I checked into our cabin at the Big Cedar Lodge and immediately reconnected over coffee and untrammelled views of Table Rock Lake. It was a reconnection that strengthened as I watched him play golf with legend Peter Jacobsen on Day One at Buffalo Ridge, and with 18-time Champions Tour winner Mike Hill at the famous Top of the Rock par-3 course on Day Two. While Dad was playing, I briefly broke away for a rare one-on-one interview with Johnny Morris, a man who rarely does media. In true pioneer fashion, our interview happened over an off-road drive in his pickup truck. Right away, he asked which golfer I was paired with for the Pro-Am.

"Actually, I gave my spot to my father because playing in a Pro-Am was a lifelong dream of his."

"Oh, I heard about that!" Johnny said,

becoming animated as he did. "That's just fantastic. It reminds me a lot of me and my dad. I was very blessed that later in life, I was able to take him on these amazing fishing trips to places he'd always wanted to go. I'd like to meet your dad and spend some time with you two tonight."

And as you can see by the picture, that's exactly what happened. What made the evening particularly special was that two generations of fathers and sons, the Morris and Pitluk boys, did some good ol'-fashioned bonding — collectively and by family — in the shadow of the Ozark Mountains. It was a coming together not soon to be forgotten.

As for Dad, his team finished fourth in the Pro-Am. I asked if his strong finish put this among his favorite vacations.

"Among?" he asked, answering my question with a question, which has always been the same old story. Then something unexpected happened. "This is the best experience of my life. I've never had more fun, and I'm over the moon to have shared it with you." He was right, and I agree. The only negative of the trip was realizing that we wouldn't be together tomorrow, and the uncertainty of not knowing when the next tomorrow would be. The last thing I remember thinking was that this opened the door for more father-and-son trips. Now there's a way, and I know that I have to go away.

Happy Father's Day, America.

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