

C.E.S. Wood Film Premiere

Portland, Oregon

February 7, 2008

*Remarks by Mary Christina Wood  
Great grand-daughter of C.E.S. Wood*

My family is honored to be here today and we want to thank Larry Cotton and John de Graaf so much for their reflective portrayal of C.E.S. Wood. I was asked to speak as to the legacy of C.E.S. Wood. His greatest legacy to our family is perhaps also his greatest civic legacy.

In our family, he left us with a feeling of purpose and place – a spiritual outlook deeply connected to both our ancestors and our descendants. C.E.S. wrote in best in Poet in the Desert: “Between the two immensities, under the infinite arch, death seems only a deeper note in the eternal song.” When you have this outlook, you view your own life as a strand in a family legacy that originates long before your time on Earth and will endure long after your time on Earth. When we live in the presence of our ancestors, we live for our descendants. Their rightful expectation becomes our obligation.

On both a family level and a civic level, C.E.S. was a true progenitor of generational obligation. He believed – and we believe – that Nature is an endowment that should be protected for future generations. When I brought my 9-year old, Sage, to testify in front of the Oregon State Legislature last year against a development that would fill the quiet Metolius Basin with 3,000 homes, we read the words of C.E.S. Wood written on the banks of the Metolius in 1921 when he was about 70 years old:

*I Charles Erskine Scott Wood,  
Make now my last sure will and testament  
For those grandchildren who share with me this solitude  
And whom I must too shortly leave.  
To Erskine,  
I give all trout in the Metolius. . .  
I give him mornings on the river-bank,  
Song of the river when the new sun shines. . .  
And the solemn discourse of the pines  
At evening when the melting shadows fall  
And Peace sits on the bank with folded wings'  
The birds all [offering] a good-night call,  
And deep in dusk a yellow warbler sings,  
The river is for his delight.*

The intergenerational spirit that is imbued in the poetry of C.E.S. Wood springs from the heart of all Humanity. But our society has suppressed it. It is as if many people live life in a one dimensional way, living for the moment, seeking mainly leisure and luxury and wealth. Some parents wonder why their children seem so lost and unfocused. Long ago, C.E.S. crafted words put on Portland's Skidmore Fountain: "Good citizens are the riches of a city." But society today is raising children to be consumers, not citizens. My twin, Becky, who is here tonight, spoke last month to a group of fourth graders in Boise. She talked about the friendship between the Wood Family and the Nez Perce as a

manifestation of intergenerational spirit. The teachers were teary-eyed and the children were wondrous. Our society is yearning for deeper purpose.

When the C.E.S. Wood descendants gave the Gift Stallion to Red Thunder in trust for the Nez Perce people, we were putting to rest a regret that had lingered since the time that C.E.S. Wood's offer of a gift went unconsummated. If a family has any legacy in its culture, the passing of lifetimes makes such regrets even stronger, not weaker. The Nez Perce understand this. To them it was perfectly natural that our family would consummate the offer of a gift after such a long time. Horace Axtell said to my father and me: "Giving this stallion will be a great relief to your family." And so it was. Our grandfather's greatest regret turned into our generation's greatest fulfillment.

We are honored to have with us tonight the breeder of the stallion. I was the family member charged with the task of finding the perfect Gift Stallion. After a search that literally spanned the globe, our family traveled up to Colville and presented Red Thunder with dozens of choices of finalist stallions. In fact, we sat up past 1:00 in the morning in Red Thunder's living room with the Nez Perce watching horse videos. Red Thunder saw the gift stallion in Zip's Wild Man -- and no other horse. I saw this coming, as I knew from my exhaustive search that this was literally the finest Appaloosa stallion on the face of the earth. I got the feeling that, for Red Thunder, it was not just the beauty of the stallion or his bloodline; it also seemed a spiritual choice.

But there was one problem. That stallion was the not for sale. It was the *only* one not for sale. You see, this was Lynn Walk's prize stallion, and his future as a breeder pulsed through the blood of that animal. Knowing this full well, I had included the video at the last minute anyway with reckless abandon. I had convinced Lynn to send me a

video of his horse without explaining to him why I wanted the stallion. So, sitting on Red Thunder's couch with my Dad and Tash and siblings and cousins watching videos at 1:00 in the morning just three weeks before the ceremony, I had a haunting vision of 100 years from now our great grandchildren going back to Red Thunder's descendants and saying – "200 years ago an offer of a gift was made, and 100 years ago it was nearly fulfilled but for want of a stallion. We have come back again."

After we returned from that Colville trip, I called this gracious breeder and asked if I could just please send him some materials explaining the purpose for which my family needed a stallion. Three weeks later, at the ceremony in the Wallowa mountains, when Lynn Walk stood with his wife and children behind him and handed over the reins of his beloved animal to the Nez Perce, we knew – true legacy pulls the heart towards honor no matter how much time has passed.

The Wallowa Band of Nez Perce Indians never gave up title to their beloved homeland, but white settlers swarmed into the Wallowa Valley anyway. As Joseph's father was dying, he held his son's hand in his and told Joseph never to sell the grave of his parents. Joseph promised he never would. Only time will tell which generation will have the privilege of bringing peace to this unfulfilled promise, but C.E.S. Wood's words giving lasting hope of that day coming, and when it does, it will be a big relief to our society.