

Sammy Awards 2008

“Saved by the Salmon”

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“What is Man that he should oppose himself to Nature?”

C.E.S. Wood

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Excerpt from "The Poet in the Desert" 1918

What is Man that he should oppose himself to Nature,

Or think to know her infinite perfection?

To one who stands upon the promontory of a star,

Are not the ants and bees as precious?

Their knowledge admirable?

Nature, wonderful in the infinity of her largeness;

The infinity of her smallness?

A clod of the field as mysterious as a star,

A grain of dust as marvelous as a mountain?

The trees, grasses, fruits and vari-colored flowers,

Man and all that is are from the dust,

Continually arising, feeding, expanding,

Continually returning to the source.

The weeds have the benignant care of the Mother

As perfectly as the wide-spreading oaks and lofty firs,

The children of men not any more her solicitude

Than the babies of the beetle

Which tenderly she feeds in their dark

And earthy lodgings.

She holds the suns lightly between her fingers,

Yet delights in atoms our eyes cannot see.

The ant-hill as dear to her as a city.

Yea, dearer, for the little folk know freedom.

Nature has established eternal conditions,

Leaving all free to seek life or death;

But the way of the transgressor is death.

Opening – Saved by the Salmon.

We are so very appreciative to be here today to honor this inspiring group of Sammy Award recipients. Thank you to John Tyler, the Commissioners and Joni McAnally for entrusting us with this keynote speech wherein we hope to offer a broad and inspirational context to the salmon recovery efforts that will soon be shared.

In anticipating this celebration, it occurred to us that in every story that you will hear about today, about people saving the salmon, there is an equally compelling and moving story about the salmon saving the people.

What are the people being saved from you ask? Well, let's take a look at our modern world. Today's social stream is filled with cell phones and ipods, iphones, itunes, emails, blackberries, text messaging, Nintendos, Xbox, t.v., and mountains of plastic toys. Kids used to camp out in tents by the river. Now many camp out on the sidewalk in front of Best Buy waiting for the midnight shipment of Wii's. We have hummers, stressed out soccer moms, overbooked children, 60 hour work weeks, dinners in the car, radically altered and injected foods, a gas addicted civilization, nature paved over by asphalt, and a majority population that is seriously depressed, diseased, and dependent.

In this world, the individual who lives a purposeful life centered around core values of health, happiness and a deep connection with nature seems to be a rare species. It is as if an overpowering social current of consumption and convenience has numbed our natural instincts and has led us into an eddy of personal stagnation. Society fills the purse yet starves the soul.

We suggest that in saving the salmon, we experience the salmon also saving us by presenting a migration route back to a more meaningful life.

When we dive into salmon recovery efforts, we find ourselves squarely confronting business as usual and challenging society's mindless transgressions against the environment. We step out of the social current, **reverse** our direction, and swim upstream against it. This is much like the journey of the salmon themselves who at a critical point in their life cycle reverse direction and struggle upstream against the strong currents to fulfill their instinctual purpose. In essence, we find ourselves swimming with the salmon we are protecting.

Theirs is not an easy journey, and neither is ours. Let us not forget that these salmon have inhabited the Great Columbia River Basin in some form for nearly five million years. Yet seemingly endless obstacles, ranging from dams to clear-cuts to hundreds of water-born toxins, make their survival a more remote possibility every year. And for the champions of these salmon, seemingly endless obstacles exist to convince us that protecting this species is a near impossibility, a futile effort in our legal, and economic system such as it is. But like the salmon, once we start the swim upstream, we don't turn back. They are pulled and we are pulled by nothing other than the future thread of life that hangs in the balance of our efforts. And in our journey we evolve and our human spirit is nourished.

When we turn our sights upstream with the salmon, amazing things seem to unfold around us; things that just don't present themselves in the materialistic, rushed, convenienced world of today. Maybe this is because when we swim upstream to protect the salmon, we move ourselves more and more into the world of nature, ecology and balance, the world from which our society tries to divorce us every day. We seek out lifestyle changes that allow us to be more engaged participants in this universe Nature created for us. Imagine for a moment the difference between commuting in bumper to bumper traffic on the freeway inhaling exhaust as opposed to biking to work on a path along the river in the fresh, crisp air, with early dawn lighting your way. Perhaps a fox crosses your path or you see a beaver chopping down a tree. These are experiences of literally two different worlds.

As we align ourselves more and more with nature, we come to appreciate our Earth as the most wondrous and priceless masterpiece of art. In this mindset, we would no more want to pave over a meadow than paint over the Mona Lisa. Suddenly the McMansions along the banks of the Columbia where the trees used to tower and the salmon used to spawn no longer seem enviable; why they are no more impressive than graffiti on the Statute of Liberty. Suddenly that perfectly mowed and manicured lawn doused with cancer causing pesticides is stifled, contrived and offensively toxic compared to the wild, organic meadow grass that dances with dandelions, clover and wildflowers. When we swim upstream, we find that instead of chasing society's definition of "beauty" we are attracted to beauty in the wild, and the manufactured aesthetics start appearing to be more like waste.

When we throw our energy in with the salmon we also find a community we never knew we had. People of all diversities come out of the woodwork to join the efforts. It is because when we champion the salmon, our candle of hope ignites the hero lingering within the hearts of others. As the people we come to know follow a common purpose and overcome obstacles together for the sake of the salmon, we naturally build deep friendships, a purposeful community, and a timeless legacy. A person can work forty years in a job and leave a million dollars to their grandchildren and yet never have that experience.

When we turn our reverence towards the salmon and all parts of Nature, we are also, inevitably and mysteriously, drawn into the deepest synchronicity and coincidence of life. Perhaps people join our effort at just the right moment. Perhaps funding comes through just in time to buy out a developer. Perhaps a scientific fact presents itself just when we need it. Serendipity is the friend who randomly shows up on our journey. We have come to believe that when presented with two paths, we should probably take the path of coincidence or synchronicity even if a rational assessment of payoffs might suggest the other path. It seems to us that leaps of faith always mark a visionary path.

In the bigger picture, saving the salmon saves ourselves as species.

It is sometimes said that there are two types of people: people *on* the Earth and people *of* the Earth. The people of the Earth understand that all species share one home and that all of our ecosystems and habitats are woven together under a perfect plan of Nature—a plan that dwarfs human understanding, a plan that should be respected in its entirety even if the best scientists of the world can't dissect it. And yet there is simplicity to Nature's arrangement. What the salmon need for their survival is exactly what we

need for our survival – food, water, shelter, and health. But the people *on* the Earth haven't learned that, and their arrogance is pulling us all towards global catastrophe. Global temperatures are rising. The coral reefs are dying. The rain forests are being cut down. There are over 200 large dead zones in the ocean. The waters are polluted and the world is toxic. It's not just the salmon, the polar bears, and the penguins at risk – it is also **our** survival, and **our children's** survival that is now directly at stake.

The irony is that our obsession with convenience today leads us directly to human suffering tomorrow. In order to stabilize the climate and protect our resources and all species, we desperately need the majority of people to turn course and start swimming upstream. If nearly every person cut their car trips in half, imagine how much cleaner our air would be. If nearly every person brought their own bottles and cups to take-out restaurants, think of how much plastic and contamination would be reduced. If most people bought organic produce or planted an organic garden and starved the chemical market, imagine how much cleaner our rivers would be and how cancer rates would fall.

Our Story.

Like all of you Sammy Award Recipients, we too, along with our siblings, have a story. It began, synchronistically, on this exact same day, May 15, in 2001. Our beloved father died that day, entrusting us with many acres of mostly undeveloped land on the Columbia River which had been in our family for seven generations. It was at his celebration of life ceremony, on May 20, that Guido Rahr, President of Wild Salmon Center, told us we had wild chum salmon spawning on our property. He suggested creating a salmon reserve.

Our family had a clear choice to make – whether to float downstream and do what most families would do –sell the land off to a developer for lots of money, **OR**, swim upstream, and try to conserve the salmon and the heritage. What did we do? We jumped into the Columbia River and headed East. What we learned through the journey was that you can never go wrong when you chose what you know in your heart to be right. We learned that you can take a leap of faith and as long as your purpose is grounded in the foundation of nature, you will achieve your purpose, and the legacy created with your family, friends and community is priceless and lasts forever, unlike material possessions depreciate over time. We learned that life has meaning that would pass us by if we clung to the present mainstream and to a life of comfort and convenience. We learned some of the most fundamental lessons in life. In that respect, we not only saved the salmon; the salmon saved us.

Closing Remarks.

We would like to close by saying that we are so honored to be here today to celebrate the courage of those of you who are leaders in this new direction and who are truly heroes to us and this community. We also want to affirm our everlasting gratitude to all of you in the audience who jumped in with our family in the unforgettable journey to preserve chum habitat at Wood’s Landing and Columbia Grove.

The words we offered today were inspired by our father, Erskine Biddle Wood, who taught us everything we needed to know to swim upstream. To him and his legacy, we dedicated our address. Thank you.

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