

A Salmon's Story

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Everyone and everything has a story. As we flow through this life, our day-to-day experiences merely touch the very tip of that which is in close proximity to us, often leaving out the greater (and often incomprehensible) picture of everything we are connected to and apart of. I remember sitting in my Brooklyn apartment a few years back, a good distance from anything that could be considered remotely "natural," watching a brief news segment on the plight of the Pacific Salmon. "Salmon are in a crisis?" I wondered in shock. "I like to eat salmon. Who would have ever thought they were in trouble?" Like I said, I was far from free-flowing anadromous rivers or anything natural. The short blip failed to go into depth but mentioned one very alarming and memorable statistic: "In 40 years, there would be no more wild salmon if things continued as they were." "Wait a second?!" I continued to think. "In 40 years I will be 66, perhaps with children and grandchildren. Why would we not be able to enjoy what generations have been able to enjoy since the beginning of time? What does it say of our stewardship of the Earth when a once thriving and abundant population of a species so vital will cease to exist in a generation or two? What have we done that would deprive future generations of all species that rely on salmon from their existence?" The actual fact that it is even a possibility shows us that something is very, very wrong.

I would never have guessed that a few years later, I would have the opportunity to learn and play a part in the story of the Pacific Salmon. Between my three years as a city dweller and my short year and three months of environmental service to my home state through the California Conservation Corps, I learned from those who have entered my life the value of each individual's unique story. The refusal to learn another person's story serves as the ultimate divider and separator, a solid cinderblock wall that enables us to verbalize the concept of "us versus them." Understanding another person's story allows one to view the commonality in life that we all share. It allows one to connect, to relate, to feel compassion, and to act on that compassion. Understanding another species' story allows us to do the same. It also allows us to see how we as stewards of the environment can lend a helping hand. After all, we are the ones who possess that specified physical feature. Otherwise, the saying would be "to lend a helping fin." The fish have already done so for the entirety of their existence by keeping Mother Nature in balance.

Now it is our turn to try to understand their story after over a century and a half of abuse and misunderstanding. This is what the Watershed Stewards Project allows its members, each with their own unique background and story, to do. No doubt, any sizeable bookstore you go into carries an abundance of biographies and autobiographies on interesting personalities and historical figures. But does it carry the title "A Salmon's Story?" How would that book read? If I opened up the autobiography of a Coho salmon that lived five hundred years ago, I imagine it would start like this: "This land is made of rivers, the highway ancient and significant. For generations, as far as my mind can swim, my salmon have traveled that magnificent and flowing highway from headwaters to the bountiful ocean and back. I was part of an important cycle, as was my parents, as will my future fry. . ." What about the autobiography of a Coho today? How would it read? It is now our turn as Watershed Stewards to share that story.