

New In Town: A Salmon Story

By Shannon Romtvedt

Here's my written interpretation of a salmon's wild effort to cross a long stretch of shale, upstream, in shallow water: WHAP! WHAP WHAP WHAP WHAP WHAP!!! WHOOSH!

What a fish! I'm impressed with every one I see pass by. I even have video of a determined lass, haggard and breathless (or the fish equivalent), revving up for a strenuous bolt. Spring is an active season with seeds sprouting, foals and pups popping out all over, and people poking their heads out of doors to squint at the sun. Fall is fierce and affecting, a magnificence that carries a reminder to prepare. Trees are ablaze with color and dropping bounty on every bit of ground. My yard is brimming with maple leaves, twisting and bending to make room for more. I've wondered what it would be like to count them or rake them up. Exhausting, invigorating, perhaps futile.

I've had a lot more time to reflect on fish, leaves, seasons, and beauty now that I live in Vernonia. Or, more accurately, I've had a lot more time now that I live in a place with no television, internet, and a heaping dose of quiet. Though it took a few months to transition, I love the freedom. Advertisements are not flitting through my brain, I don't check e-mail or headlines for the heck of it, and I can concentrate better than ever. I get teased sometimes for my choice of activity in the absence of electronics. My husband and I often alternate games of Scrabble and ping pong in the evening. And I have been known to sip on a beer while creating Mad Libs from paragraphs out of a favorite novel.

I'm living a fantasy, that's what it feels like some days. It's wonderful. It gives me chills. While I linger over morning coffee, blue herons and the occasional eagle glide by my window in pursuit of their own breakfast. A deer leaps out of the brush and into the creek, bobbing downstream in a trackless getaway from an unseen enemy. Spiders weave glorious, intricate webs from tree to flower that glisten in first light.

I love Rock Creek because it's dynamic and musical and bursting with energy. It changes shape and

character with every season. And cutting out other distractions has given me more time to learn the sights and sounds of the water. I often lie in my rainbow hammock and rest my head in the direction of the water or stand by the bank to watch the creek flex and roll. Orange, red, and yellow leaves float down from branches while others drift by. The view from my backyard is magical, and very real, and sometimes frightening. It reminds me that the glimpses I find akin to fantasy all around me are the rawest, most expressive forms of life.

A friend told me recently that the water was here first, it does what it does. It was a statement I didn't care to hear at the time because it was in reference to erosion and the bank that forms the boundary of my property. Though the words grate on me, I find truth in them. The creek is as spirited as it is heartless. It scares me to live by on occasion, knowing what others have lost. But the water is also the reason I moved here. It's a risk to be here, but the benefits tip the scale with a thud.

If I wanted firm control over my surroundings, I would have moved next to a neighborhood pool with a certified lifeguard. I would meditate to nature cooing from camouflaged speakers while fish swim on a screensaver and in a bowl on the coffee table. But complete control is not possible for anyone and the type I've described is definitely not for me.

I have frustrating moments when I wish for conveniences I no longer have. Right now, I'm thinking how nice it would be to e-mail my column



from home. If I were truly in a fantasy, I could stick a copy in a bottle and let the creek take it to the editor along with a leaf or two and a branch. A determined salmon would watch it pass, wondering, with all her effort, when someone would get around to writing her story.

WHAP! WHAP WHAP WHAP WHAP WHAP!!! WHOOSH!

Birkenfeld
Store and Café

LIVE MUSIC!
7-10PM ALL DATES

SAT, 11/13 "THUNDER ALLEY" **ROCK N' ROLL**

No LIVE MUSIC Nov. 20 & 27
WISHING EVERYONE A HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

NEW WINTER HOURS COMING SOON

CAFÉ OPEN WED-SUN 9AM-4PM, SERVING BREAKFAST & LUNCH
DINNER ON MUSIC NIGHTS CLOSED MON-TUE

GROCERY & LIQUOR STORE MON-SAT 8AM-6PM, SUN 9AM-5PM
11139 HIGHWAY 202 (503) 755-2722

THE INK WELL

By Lynn Berry

By the time this issue of Vernonia's Voice hits the streets, votes will have been cast, elections will have been determined, and our democracy will be moving on. As I am writing, election day is a scant two days away, and those who will either retain, lose, or gain their seat in Congress is still unknown. Either way, the voices of these campaigns have spoken. Some will be satisfied with the outcome, and some will not.

Essentially, being exposed to unpopular viewpoints or viewpoints to which we disagree, helps us to practice democracy. Practicing tolerance and understanding of others' positions keeps us thinking critically and safeguards us from destructive group-think and mob-mentality. And, as most realize, true dialog contains shades of gray and the blending of perspectives. So, whether we disagree or agree with these voices, each has this liberty—the freedom of speech. Voice is American. Voice is crucial in a democracy. The freedom of speech creates a space where each one of us has the opportunity to critically think, and then act on the issues that directly effect ourselves, our community, our nation, and the world.

The submission this month, by Joan Gailic, exemplifies how political poetry creates a narrative for expressing this freedom. Poetry is and has been crucial to the development of our democracy. In fact, throughout our nation's history, especially during those times where our nation seemed divided, poetic voices were not only an essential part of this freedom, not only as reflections of American viewpoints, but

some would argue that these poetic voices helped to directly carve out American history. There are many examples of these poetic voices from Walt Whitman during the Civil War, to Alan Ginsberg during the 1950's and 1960's unrest, to contemporary poets like Caroyln Froche and Amiri Baraka. Freedoms strengthen the more we use them. The less we use these freedoms, the more they are in danger of fading away. To lose our freedoms, they don't have to be taken away, just unused. Poetry is Voice. Poetry is Freedom. Read it. Create it. Ink it. Express it.

In Joan Gailic's synopsis of her poem, "Back 'Em Up," the voice expresses support for the American troops during our current time in war. Gailic uses a conversational tone, direct lines, and a tight rhyme scheme to present the stark reality of duty in war, both for the soldier and for those who are left behind to wait anxiously for their return:

*Fighting's never easy,
Though at times it must be done,
Because freedoms never ever free
It has to be won
This war won't last forever
We'll rejoice when it ends
So back up your babies
Your family, your friends (11-18).*

For Gailic, the soldiers' sacrifice in war and their difficulties in returning to civilian life cry out to be understood, to be "honored and cherished" (10) by those who enjoy the freedom these soldiers have been called to defend:

*The challenges you'll face
On the day that you arrive
Will be difficult it's true
But I know that you'll survive
You have swum through the sea
You have walked over fire
You answered your countries call
And fulfilled its desires. (25-32).*

-----Joan Gailic

---**Writer's Idea:** Write about a political position on a issue in which you feel strongly, but experiment with writing that piece from the other viewpoint.

---**Writer's Tip:** Poetry does not have to be polite. With political poetry, the voice is usually strong, confident, and courageous. Try writing outside the boundaries by using a persona.

---Please send your original submissions to, (or if you would like a copy of any of the published poems in their entirety), InkwellVernonia@msn.com or by mail: PO Box 333 Vernonia, OR 97064. Please include your name and contact information. Write--Create--Express.

Lynn Berry holds an M.A. in English, specializing in feminist literature and literary criticism. She has spent several years teaching Literature, Composition, Poetry, Creative Writing, and Critical Thinking at various school districts and colleges, and occasionally provides writing workshops.