



LARRY MILAM

SALMON FOR ALL

BY R. LEWIS RICHARDS

It is hard to think of a vast ocean or stand on its shore and give credibility to the idea that people with nets and hooks could ever eliminate whole species. Is it to our species credit that today over a dozen of our world's commercial fisheries are in serious decline or at the point of collapse?

About 25 years ago, I spent some nights laying out and retrieving nets on the Willapa Bay. Our fishing was only at night. In daylight the salmon we sought would simply swim around our snare. High-tech plastic webs now can work around the clock. I was doing some time as a "boat puller" that summer and didn't make much money. I did get to see some of the "industry" and the mentality behind it. For the most part, it's the same as on the farms or ranches, or in the woods or mines. Most everybody was there to just get their "bowl of rice." Bosses and owners always knowing they had a divine right to a bigger bowl than the rest of us. Many of the rest of us wanting that bigger bowl.

How could we know any better? Isn't this the way of it? We weren't taught in the '50s when I grew up that it could ever use up or run out. Tell me this, how did the native elders know this? We have the records of their words, begging the European invaders from the Atlantic across to the Pacific and Hawaii, "Don't do this thing to the human beings, their brother creatures, and these sacred lands." What was it that they were taught, or how could it be that they could know then, what is becoming plainer every day? Something very fundamental, wouldn't you say?

To my thinking, our only chance short of a planetary convulsion is to make an absolutely fundamental change. We must grasp what is real and desert what blinds us. And unless this message can find voice in popular or mass media, we're dead. How many lifeforms will we take down with us?

Sure, the mainstream environmentalists would like to paint a positive picture so we don't lose hope. But at what cost? Dr. Feelgood can't do anything for the future generations. He is

denial, and that is the antithesis of our cure. *We have only enough time for consciousness and cognizance.* We are not going to pull out this sinking submarine by shifting our fisheries, as has been seriously suggested, to "under-exploited species."

Please listen to me here, I've been in a sinking submarine, I know exactly what that's about. The Skipper tested the boat's limits, one power system failed, and we were going down fast. But we *didn't* sink because we were well trained within and about our environment. We did the right things at the right times without having to be told. Believe me, nobody did what they did to get their next paycheck.

At the instant when cognizance sets in, it's clear right then, without a thought, what is real. Only after we had saved our boat did we have the luxury of going back to the "pretend" games of our culturally made up world. So here we are, though we should be crew, we are passengers on *Submarine Earth* and no one knows how to blow the main ballasts, or if they do, they're not saying unless they get money up front.

If we don't learn to stop being jacked around about jobs and economics and face the urgent realities and educate and train ourselves to operate our actual planet within its limits, **kaput!!!** I don't necessarily want to render this all into sterile mechanical terms. This machine has a soul we all share. It's our minds that destroy the unity by elevating the unreal symbols above their proper station.

Surprisingly few people showed for the Skamokawa town meeting with our Congresswoman, Jolene Unsold. Those in attendance probably all thought I was nuts. Don't waste time wondering about that. By this world's standards, I'm "around the bend." If the old rule "It takes one to know one" applies, then aren't we all in the same fine kettle of fish.

Fish. Yeah, that was it. Most of what got talked about before I had to leave was fish. But it really wasn't fish. It was money. Now I want everybody to get this, so please pay attention. Fish are real, money is not. Fish are a direct manifestation of the Creator. Money is naught but an idea of the two-legged bird without feathers. You know, the one that creates God in his own image.

One thing I heard said was, we should protect young salmon from fish-eating birds, as if they were the problem. None would care if the birds ate squawfish. It's not the fish we want protected, it's the "moneyfish" and around here that's salmon. I've watched squabbles continue over the years as the blame has gone around for the troubles of the fishery. Out of anger and frustration our shores are covered with rotting seals and sealions.

Once upon a time seals, birds and people ate salmon. People lived in villages at the mouths of every river and stream. They communally built their boats and gear for the labor from local materials. They caught what they would need until the next

season. They found time to express themselves in highly refined art. Such is life when living in close relation to reality. A salmon was worth one salmon. Reality.

Now we serve a cruel master. One year, salmon is worth \$2.50 per arbitrary unit of weight, the next, 75 cents. Whether we are convinced that money is the only value, or even if we know better but still act that way, together we are running a program that is destroying the livability of this planet.

Today, some descendants of the native peoples have claimed original rights. At the same time, some, but not all, have accepted the conqueror's value system and have traded fish for dollars to buy 1,000 h.p. fishing boats, invisible plastic nets and waterfront homes. The problem is not even selfishness. There is nothing to blame but ignorance. If we were selfish and informed we'd enhance the health of all life forms on the planet and prosper in the balance. We'd best wake up. Elsewhere in the world the details may vary but the problems are much the same.

Unreal and arbitrary valuation of what is real and sacred drives the engine of destruction. It's worth money to a few of us to destroy spawning beds by stripping the hills of trees or ore. And so the hills are stripped. It's worth money to a few of us to pollute the streams with chemicals and cow manure. And so the streams are polluted. It's worth money to a few of us to annihilate natural predators. And so the natural predators are annihilated. It's worth money to most all of us to do the many things that will end this misguided world age. And so it will be ended.

R. Lewis Richards lives somewhere in the rainforest of southwest Washington. He earlier wrote *FEMA: Fact, Fancy or Failed Democracy* (December 1993) and *UFOs Are Us* (Jan/Feb 1994) for the Times Eagle.



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