



What a weekend this was. A dream of a dream of a dream. A smile on the face of God. On the long string of jewels this summer, this was the quintessential blue-green orb, the "priuy Perle wythouten spotte...." On days like these the prophets rise from the sands. Venus ascends from the waves. The moments burst the spirit's sleep. Rarely has the honeyed air coursed more alluringly over our headlands and sea.

Today Senior Lifeguard John Rippey and I cruised the beach and simply savored our special coastsideshingle scoured of sand by this summer's tides. The old AM truck radio crooned Fifties tunes, Lonnie Mack's surf guitar single "Memphis" and Eddie Cochran's "Summer Time Blues." We watched the Surfers, the lads of summer ("Needle Freaks" my buddy Knox calls them) working the shore break south of Haystack Rock. The dark specks on the water looked like flies on rows of old green Coke bottles. Twenty-seven of them on Sunday afternoon, a local record I'd warrant, sliding to the eternal rhythms, riding on top of the world on a day of days. Small clean peaks shadowed and glistened, shattered and faceted, streaking mazy swor^l and rips on the oiled surface.

"Is this a fine day, or what?" John asked me.

I had to concur. I logged this in as a treasure. Something to exhume from the cellar of memories this winter like a jar of peach preserves. I netted the moments like a fall garden spider, wove strands of sensibility around them, and stored them inside.

This weekend has been a festival of horizons, a visual circus, a kaleidoscopic swoon of colors, shapes, and sounds. Its paired sunrises and sets made my heart laugh and cry at the same time.

The old voices were in the air, the plaint of wild geese and ravens on the wing.

Wild bands of horsetail clouds nickered above the green coastal mountains, a cirrus dance in strophe and antistrophe across the heavens. At night the ice clouds shape-shifted into star rivers in the Milky Way.

I hope you were immersed in its spell. We are truly blessed in this place. Let us never lose sight of that fact.

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I want to take the pain to heart
and feel it move
like possibility, the idea
of change, through things
seen and unseen...

Kathleen Norris



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From The Lower Left Corner
Victoria Stoppello

No surprise

I'm not surprised that there are still people calling for the removal of the four Snake River dams. Some of us just aren't gamblers; we don't want to take the chance that Idaho salmon could go extinct. Some of us don't have faith that man's technology will outdo nature's ability to produce fish. Some of us distinguish between some watersheds' healthy salmon runs and other runs from Idaho that are not. Some of us see this as a political situation with well-funded, centrally organized economic interests (namely corporate agribusiness irrigators and navigation outfits) pitted against relatively decentralized, independent small business people (the fishing industry) and environmentalists (many of whom don't get a dime for their activism). Of course, the tribes' cultural and spiritual values regarding salmon don't put money in many people's pockets either, so the political machinery ignores them too. But the most telling argument for removing the Lower Snake dams, some of us believe, is that there are alternatives which don't risk extinction. Barging isn't the only way to get wheat from the inland producers: there's rail. It will take some investment, but so would habitat improvement, better use of hatcheries, and better management of the lower Columbia fisheries. Irrigators face a similar problem. They can continue irrigating, but if the Lower Snake dams are removed, they will have to move their pumping stations lower in the river at considerable expense. This would be poetic justice for the irrigators, roughly half of whom have failed to install and maintain fish screens (costing \$2.50 each) on their pumping stations, according to studies by both Washington and Oregon. One aspect of the argument, however, could be that barge companies and irrigators are used to using the Columbia for free or close to it. Investing in improving rail lines or pumping stations is likely to be a private endeavor, while fisheries management and maintaining the dams and hatcheries are public investments. However, the silliest argument about keeping the four Lower Snake dams is that we need the power. Those dams produce about 5% of the Bonneville Power Administration supply. We can make up 5% of our energy budget easily via conservation, while creating jobs at the same time. Here's our own example: We reduced our electricity use in our 1895 house by two-thirds using the following conservation measures: insulating the floors, ceilings and walls; replacing the windows with double-pane sashes; installing a solar batch water heater; using more efficient equipment like compact fluorescent and the world's most efficient refrigerator, which uses only half a kilowatt per day. The PUD has weatherization support programs and a rebate for solar water heaters, so people don't have to finance these projects all alone. I'll say it again: We not only saved the 5% of electricity generated by the Snake River dams, we saved 67%. The reason we did this was partly economics and partly sentiment. My dad, my grandfather, and my great-great uncle were all commercial fishermen from the port of Ilwaco. It seemed a needless shame to be living in a historic salmon fishing town and not have salmon when there was something that could be done. Being frugal has always been part of my family's way of life. Being frugal with electricity in order to help salmon makes sense. Scaring people with the threat of brownouts is the one hook to keep the average person believing we need those dams. Here's the real fear: If we take down a few relatively inconsequential dams on the Lower Snake River, people's thoughts will turn to the dams on the Columbia's main stem. Perhaps they should. We know the biggest salmon were the ones that spawned above Grand Coulee. I heard recently that at the time there was a plan to build three smaller dams, which would have generated the same amount of power as Grand Coulee, but could have been circumnavigated by the migrating fish but big egos demanded we build the world's biggest dam instead. Another dam was built down river just for the aluminum industry, which pays less per kilowatt hour than households do. Yet the U.S. aluminum industry still isn't competitive on world markets, even with this giant subsidy. Then there's the social, cultural, and spiritual desecration involved in flooding Celilo Falls. We've made some mistakes; at least we can correct some of the smaller ones. You bet some of us are still calling for the removal of the four Lower Snake dams.

Victoria Stoppello is a writer living in Ilwaco at the lower left corner of Washington State.

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