



Patrick Webb

Joe Paliani, left, is the author of 'The Hounds of Heaven,' a book aimed at young readers about environmental activism. He named an important character for his wife of 33 years, Charlotte, right.

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'Decimated'

Paliani's published letters to the editor in local newspapers have expressed his passion for preserving the environment. In his novel, the plight of salmon on the fictional Keen river in Washington mirrors his fears for the Columbia and Snake rivers.

"It is the end for native salmon, with fish being decimated because of the dams," Paliani said. "The fish can't swim up to their natural habitats to mate and spawn." The Columbia River runs from British Columbia and used to be unimpeded, until dams set in place during the 1930s stopped migration patterns.

"Hydroelectricity is a wonderful thing — if the fish could bypass dams for migration," he said. Paliani believes that wind and solar power could replace hydroelectric plants. "It is a great interest of mine to save the salmon," he added.

Comfort

Paliani, 83, said his life has been a spiri-

tual journey. A troubled boyhood, one copied directly for his lead character, created a very strict Catholic young adult, who somewhat lapsed during his brief military service, then developed through much study to late adult contentment, believing all religions should be respected.

The portrayal of Jehovah's Witness characters in a positive light is one of Paliani's ways of expressing gratitude. While he is not a member of the faith, he cherishes the comfort they once brought during two health crises, many years apart.

As for the novel, action culminates in a hearing before a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers adjudication panel where passions are laid bare. Another federal agency plays an important role, and the power of prayer is supremely tested.

Torn

One element that makes the novel compelling is the character of the politically connected developer. Horace Rentford is no cookie-cutter evil carpetbagger

with deep pockets. Instead, he is scrupulously polite, often reasonable and almost charming. The situation is reminiscent of another North Coast encounter.

Astoria's 12 year controversy surrounding the use of liquified natural gas, which ended in 2016, perfectly characterized the manner in which a community could be torn between the temptation of promised

economic prosperity and environmental threats.

"Mr. Rentford is not a bad person," Paliani said. "He has billions of dollars to offer to these people who do need a job. He has plans for a hospital and more for the community, but it is going to destroy the lives of people that don't want their lives changed."

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