

Andrew David remembers...

When the salmon were plenty



Salmon were abundant for fishermen casting nets into the Columbia River at Celilo falls before dams flooded traditional fishing areas.

by Marsha Shewczyk

The water on the Columbia River was rising, almost covering the scaffold where he fished. To save his nets which he spent most of his nights tying he swam through the swift current to his fishing spot. "I care more for my nets than I do myself," he interjected as he told the story.

Reflections on a life centered around fishing on the Columbia River bring many stories to mind. One story leads to another and another. And then the realization strikes that things will never be that way again. There is a sadness in that.

Born in 1902 in Spearfish, Washington, across from The Dalles, Andrew David learned fishing from his father, who learned it from his father and he, in turn, learned to fish from his father. The fishing was good near The Dalles at Celilo. David especially had a good fishing spot, inherited from his father.

After his father's death, David only 16 years of age, began fishing for his family on the island rock between Washington and Oregon.

David's great grandfather had established his fishing place on that island. David explains, "Walatipit organized this big island. There was no one there before."

Walatipit would take his new cedar canoe across the river from Washington to fish off the island. Eventually he moved his camp to the Oregon side. The water surrounding the island was swift and rough but he knew how to manage the boat to get there with his family, David adds.

Walatipit was killed and his son Pakiyasha took over the island. "They killed him, too," says David.

Then Johnny David followed Pakiyasha on the island. With his family he camped there in the summer and returned to Warm Springs

for the winter months.

In 1918 David began fishing the island alone, after his father's death. He had been fishing since he was five so he knew exactly how to do it.

After working with his father and learning for many years about the salmon David learned a set of values much different than children today. Giving thanks to the creator for the bounty was wealth in itself.

The salmon was used in ceremonies as well as daily food and for trading with other people for fruits and foods and items not found on the Columbia.

The construction of Bonneville Dam made great changes in the lifestyle of the Columbia fishermen. "We lost on it," David estimates. And then there was The Dalles dam, "Same thing again."

David lost his island on which his family fished for years. "The people voted for The Dalles dam," he says. They got \$4 million, the fishermen got nothing.

With every year the salmon count diminished. The fishing placed were gone. The days for the Indian fishermen to make a living were gone, also. Still, David thrives on those days when his life was fishing.

"Time when I was a fishermen," David relates, "You know when there was no dams. The salmon used to go as far as he could go up the river. They got a place to hatch farther up the river in them days."

"I seen lots of fish in my times. I know when the fish slacked. When they first build the dam in Bonneville dam. Never seen much salmon any more. Every year Slack—slack."

"Now I read in the papers how the salmon is moving farther up the river, now, passing dams. So, the way I look at it could not be any more better fish run like it used to be. Them dams are just like the water problem, just like a pool—warm water. Salmon

hardly wouldn't go up like it used to. When we had real natural fresh water in the Columbia River was a time there was a lot of salmon. Plenty salmon go up the river."

Reflecting upon the time when the river was used exclusively by the Indian, David says, "They say I want just your land, but the river and all the food in the river is yours. I'm not asking for that. That belongs to you." When signing the treaty these things were said, David had been told. Now he wonders, "I don't know then how the government and the state got hold of all that."

The diminishing fish runs do not affect only those who used to use the Columbia river for fishing. The children and grandchildren of those people also must pay the price of lost fishing sites and rights.

From the heart, David speaks, "It hurts me when I thinks like that. If I didn't had no children I wouldn't care. I got children and lot of grandchildren and that hurts."



Edna David (left) and Stella McKinley (right) dry salmon at Celilo.



Andrew David sits in his home at Dry Creek.