

Submission to the Cohen Commission

Victoria

September 16, 2010

You will hear a variety of submissions tonight. I want to address you as a member of the public, as a visual artist and a writer/poet. Salmon are the core of our vitality here in British Columbia. The salmon's cycle of life and death are the underpinning of our complex web of life here on the Pacific coast. Salmon feed the bears and our great forests. They have fed First Nations people from time immemorial. They are the core on which many small coastal communities depend. I am not the one to speak of how to manage our fishery. Many others have the expertise for that. I make this submission to impress upon you that ordinary British Columbians care and we care deeply about the health of our salmon. WE WANT TO MAKE SURE OUR SALMON WILL FLOURISH LONG, LONG AFTER WE'RE GONE. We refuse to allow a repeat of the demise of the Atlantic Cod on this coast. Conservation of this resource must be our primary goal. The loss of wild salmon would have huge financial implications, but beyond that, the loss to our culture and the health of our communities would be a disaster beyond description.

I urge you to uphold the fisheries act, to apply the precautionary principle, and not to play dice with our salmon. I am appending of my two poems, one written after taking part in a salmon festival on the Horsefly River during the fall run, and the other one of a series of poems about God.

Thank you for your care and attention to this crucial issue.

Dorothy Field

Horsefly River: Salmon Run

Fossil hunting the sandstone riverbed, we split varves,
reveal carbon fish caught in stone.

Flesh fish suspend themselves in the quiet between rocks
and rapids. Catch their breath before the upstream pull.

One red sockeye leaps naked into September
stillness. Fins churn river's dark elbows, flip of fin, slap of tail.

*My parents remember when the river was red: a Chilcotin woman.
Not these thin runs.*

Sandhill cranes cry their way to dusky roosts above a grove
of aspens, green trembling gold under dense thunder clouds.

Above the river, a knot of horses grazing – appaloosas,
their rumps dusted ash, one head raised to sniff the wind.

Scarlet females spill their eggs in hollows carved in river gravel.
Rosy males wait. I want to wade in, slide my too pink skin against

scaly salmon bodies. Spent fish sink, ghost white food for eagles,
bears. The old year seeding the new.

The red-tinged river.

God is the Return

Think of sockeye swimming equatorial circles, bally-pelagic,
till they return to their bend in the river --

Horsefly Adams Fraser -- that elbow where their mothers dug
a pebbled cradle, their fathers spilled milt, back to offer their flesh

to bears and cedars, their bleached bodies decomposed in the shallows
or hung in salal and thimble-berry.

Think of the red-sided garter snake sliding into her den to sleep
Manitoba's winter night in a barely moving coil.

How the Irish setter flees thunder's apocalypse --
halfway across the county -- straggles back at dawn.

Think of this year's swallows back to nest under these eaves,
as spring and then fall themselves return.

How dreams return from an insistent other world to frighten us
or lift pain. How the ocean can't stay away
or the moon, or the owl from its hollow tree.

Bees in bee-lines to their hives, back legs
troves of golden pollen.

Think of the way we return to ourselves
after great dislocation and find ourselves waiting.