

Steven Sockeye
Salmon

by

Chuck Fair

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Chuck Fair 1939--

1. Sockeye Salmon -- Columbia River -- Children -- Fiction.
2. Salmon Life Cycle -- Pacific Ocean -- Spawning.

Steven Sockeye Salmon

“Hi Button-bellies! I am Steven Sockeye. I am a salmon. Salmon are, pound for pound, the fastest swimming fish, the bravest fish, the most steady fish, the most sleek fish, and, if I must say, the smartest fish in water. We trace our beginnings to fossils found fifty million years ago. Simply put, tried and tested, salmon are the best. I am the best of the best. I am three months old.

“My parents, whom I never met, during late autumn, swam 900 miles up the Columbia River to the Snake River to the Salmon River to Saw tooth Creek near Sawtooth Lake in the mountains of Idaho. They swam from sea level, zero feet to 6800 feet high in the mountains. They had to be tough and determined to do that. Mom and dad are northern fish and are seldom seen south of Oregon. Only Sockeye children, such as I, grow up in a lake, in addition, to the stream I now swim in, because we need time to grow strong for our journey to the ocean.

“About six months ago, mom lay 5000 eggs in a redd which is a hole in the gravel she scoops out with her tail. Dad, recently turned bright red with a dark green head and a fierce hook jaw, swims over the eggs (me and my siblings that means my brothers and sisters) and fertilizes us with his milt. Mom covers us up with pebbles to hide us

from egg eaters. My beginning is accomplished without celebration, no jumping about, no tail slapping, not even gulping down a bug or two. Mom and dad just flop bellies up and float downstream. They are history. They live to be six years old as I intend to do.

“There buried in sixteen inches in the stream bottom they leave me, a tiny pink ball stuck together with other tiny pink balls, under the stream’s riffle, because I need cold and clean oxygenated water to grow healthy. Some of us eggs get eaten by birds and trout. Some of us get washed downstream never to hatch. Some of us float into shallow water and dry up. Only about two percent, one hundred, of us 5000 eggies will return here, so few of us that we are considered an endangered species. That’s scary--whooooo--if you’re a Sockeye egg. Most of the scary is downstream in this story, so we’ll keep that part for later. Right now, we are stuck together with sticky stuff and called a roe. All five thousand of us eggs are on top of each other. Imagine ten kids crammed in the back seat of your parent’s car. It’s the same here. Don’t touch me. Don’t talk to me. Don’t look at me. Just like you, Button-bellies, we have funny eggs who make faces, pesky eggs who tease each other and yapping eggs who never shut up.

“During the hard winter and under the ice in Idaho, I turn from an egg-head into an alevin, that’s a see-through, stick-like fish attached to a yoke, a feeding sack full of nutrients. These nutrients I suck up until they are gone. When I get about two inches long, the yolk sack disappears. Now I am a fry. I eat plankton (tiny animals and plants in the water), nymphs swimming around the rocks and my favorite--insect larva. Yum. Yum!

“I am a real cutie. I have a brown back with some red spots and five black upright bars on my sides called vertical lines. I don’t have ears like you mammals, but I feel the vibrations of sound with these lateral lines, which are my sensory pores. I got a great sense of smell, one hundred times more powerful than a dog, so as a hunter once I get your scent--Bye-bye Button-belly. That’s a joke, because salmon don’t eat mammals, mammals eat us

“I get my first taste of what fish life is like when I see a trout eat a fry. If that’s not bad enough I find out that water birds, snakes, everyone eats fry. Shuuush! I can’t talk loud because a trout cruises by looking for a tasty fry to eat. I wiggle my little body into the gravel, and we blend together, making me hard for him to see. Opps, there goes Bobby in one gulp. He didn’t wiggle fast enough. Whooo, there goes Barbara and Billy. They waggled when they should have wiggled. The trout cruises back over my hiding spot again, and I hold my breath silently still.

“Three fry are not enough for his big appetite, and I know why when his huge tail sweeps gravel off of me. I see he is a big Steelhead Trout, a sort of distant trout cousin to me, growing to about six or seven pounds. He is anadromous, pronounced a-nad-ra-mas), which means living in both fresh and salt water. That’s a big word. Remember, I told you I am smart. Steelhead Trout are soldier fish and great tail dancers, but they are not in the class of us Sockeye salmon. We are warrior fish and sky dancers. Anyway, these ocean going trout grow bigger than their fresh water rainbow and brown trout cousins do in the streams, because they eat better, feasting on the many tasty

goodies in the ocean.

“It seems everyone in these waters eat fry. But don’t worry about me, because I am clever and fast, more so than my brother and sister fry. It’s all about staying alive here, because everybody eats everybody. Mister Big Guy Trout suspects I’m in the gravel, but loses patience and swims off after more visible fry to gulp down.

“At the present time, we fry lie low in the gravel and watch pebbles bounce by until dusk, then we dart about exploring our part of the stream, thousands of us munching on insect goodies and just goofing off.

“Eventually, we grow to smolts, about six inches long. and our tails lengthen into a forked shape. Our bodies turn silver along our sides, replacing the black bars of fryhood. Scales develop on us. There are no adults living here, so we smolts do everything we want to do. Go without breakfast. Play all day. Listen to the sounds of bouncing pebbles. We eat so many ants our bellies bulge. We have no work to do except feed ourselves. Even if some adult could tell us to take naps, we could not because we don’t have eyelids. But we learn to lazily drift and stare at the moving water and daydream, which is a nice way to pass the warm afternoons. Our eyes are superior to Button-bellies like you, because we can see three hundred and forty degrees around us. And we use the water above us like a huge mirror to reflect the slightest movement of a hungry bird or bear. If something wants to grab me, the predator must do so in the space directly behind my head.

“Being a little smolt having thousands of siblings

has one big disadvantage, and that is little fish swim together. Wherever I swim, fish follow, bumping into me when I stop or turn, pushing in and mooching the food I find. It is impossible to be alone for a second.

“One advantage about being born with thousands of siblings is that there are always plenty of smolts to do what I like to do best, playing Aquasoc. That’s a game where we slap a round pebble with our tails up and down a playing field we mark out on a flat spot. We knock the pebble through the opposing team players and in between two rock markers to score a goal. I play halfback because I’m the quickest, fastest and certainly the most talented Aquasoc player. I’m also the longest player with a big forked tail. I sometimes speak with forked tail. Ha. Ha. Ha!

“Let me tell you a tail. Ha. Ha. Get it? Tale? This is a Aquasoc tale. The game’s score is tied two to two, with five seconds left to go in the game, and an opposing team’s player just fouled me in front of their goal. The referee lines the stone up for me to have a free tail slap. The opposing Sockeyes line up side to side, forming a blockade in front of me to protect their goal from the pebble. My plan is to tail-kick the pebble right at them and hope I can play the bounce that comes off their blockade and score a goal. I position myself at an angle to the goal for the tail slap. Then, I spot Jennifer in the corner of my eye. She floats off to the side where no opponent pays attention to her. They think she is only a girl. I coil my silver body until it is spring-like and prepare to slam the pebble. The opponents tense to knock down my tail slap shot. At the last mini-second, instead of banging the pebble into the opponents faces, I slide my tail under the pebble

and toss it over their heads in front of Jennifer. No smolt floats in front of her and their goal. She tail slaps the pebble into the goal, between the rocks, so hard it shatters two feet in the distance. We win. My team of smolts flip up and down--flipping out, ha, ha--ha!, and slap their tails on the water's surface. When they are done slapping their tails, they stare at me in disbelief, for no one ever thought to pass the pebble. Even in Aquasoc, Sockeyes seldom pass the pebble. We usually play hog the pebble.”



“A day later, there’s a hatch (bugs flying over the water) of mayflies swarming, and I stuff my face full. This is fun: As soon as the flying bugs hit the surface, I open my mouth, propel myself like a missile shot from a submarine, break the water’s surface and splash, and they are in my tummy by the time I belly-smack down on the water’s surface. I’m about to make another lunge at a tasty bug when the sun is hidden from my view. I drift in the shadow of what looks to be a huge red log. Only this log is singing, “*You must remember this, a kiss is still a kiss. As Time Goes By.*” And this log has a big green head, and big teeth and a hooked lower jaw. I need no more warning. I dart for the underside of the closest rock.

“Come on out kid. I’m not going to harm you. I couldn’t eat you if I wanted to, because I my stomach shrunk to the size of a bug’s head.” Each of his words--fierce cracks in the mountain tops when the sky is black--ripple through the water to where I hide. I force myself to peek at the fierce fish.

“Where are all the babes?”

“What’s babes,” I ask.

“Females. Fish that lay their eggs on the bottom of the stream. Babes are irresistible, gorgeous. Fan-tas-stick.”

“You mean girls? I got some sisters, but they are all hiding after seeing you.”

“You mean all the girls are tiny like you? I am talking about a woman the size of me. A full size dish. Something I can nuzzle without smashing. Where are they?”

I allow myself to drift farther from the rock and stare at him in puzzlement and answer, “I have never seen one.”

The smile on his big, green, hooked jaw drops to a frown, even his huge teeth sag.. “How old are you kid? No, do not tell me. I can tell from looking at you. You are a squirt, a smolt. I am late, aren’t I kid?”

“Late for what?”

“The spawning party. The finale. Milt madness. The big red fish sort of collapses on his tail. “All the eggs of my generation are hatched. I thought I could make up the time, thought I could shortcut a few obstacles and get here in time to spawn. Catch up with my siblings on the way upstream, but I did not.” If fish could cry tears this one

would at the moment.”

“It is okay, mister. You are still alive. The rest are gone, even our dad and mom.”

“Alive in the stream of squirts,” he moans. “Call me Snuzzle. That is what the other Sockeye Salmon did. The Great Silver Snuzzle, legend of the sea. That is me. Come out from behind that rock and let me look at you, kid.” I swim closer. “You are a good-looking boy. You could have been my boy, the best of the best.” He releases a mighty moan that whips a current of water across the stream’s floor. “I allowed myself a few distractions.” It seems distractions are disastrous for a salmon.

“What are distractions? What kind of disaster?”

“Distractions are doing things instead of what you’re supposed to do. Well I’m not sorry. I did what I did, because it seemed right at the time.” He rises off of his tail and seems to gain strength from his reasoning. “I’m an artist kid, and artists must chase their visions.”

“But your visions made you late for the spawning.”

“But they kept me alive. Everyone of my redd is gone but me.”

“You missed what you called ‘milt madness.’”

“I saw a big chunk of the world. I swam a different path. Did what I wanted to do. I wanted something more than just swimming around in the ocean and beefing up with muscle.”

“What did you do?”

I watch Snuzzle’s eyes grow sort of misty, see his great green head erect itself, so that he proudly floats parallel with the stream’s bottom. Whatever he thinks, I see he enjoys it at this moment. Snuzzle finally looks at me.

“Life here is dull compared to the great excitement of the ocean. Kid, the ocean is so big that you could swim forever and never find where the water ends. It is so deep in places that a fish could never reach the bottom before the water’s pressure squeezes him to a shadow. It is so strange that you could never imagine the kind of life that lives there.”

“What kind of life?”

“Fish with no eyes, but they light up brighter than the moon. Life that resembles plants waving back and forth on the ocean floor, teasing fish to eat them. Once a fish nibbles on them, they zap him with a poison, and the poor dumb fish floats into their tentacles, which turn him into tender food. Really gross stuff, little guy. There are great mammals in the sea, longer than the trees are high, who look like fish, but they must go to the surface to breath. They are so big you could not fit one into Sawtooth Lake.”

My mind could not imagine anything so big. The biggest thing I knew about was Sawtooth Lake. We will swim there after the bugs disappear here. I heard a smolt could swim all day in Sawtooth Lake and never find a shore because it is so big. Sawtooth Lake was said to be

dangerous with fierce, fast swimming smolt-eaters. And the ocean he talked about, not I, nor anyone I knew, had heard anything about the it, let alone how big it was.

Snozzle continues: “The sea floor spits fire kid, and its surface sends swells higher than the boulders lining this stream.”

“Fire? Swells? Wow! What are those things?” Snozzle ignores my questions, because he is too caught up in his memories of the ocean.

“I felt super-alive in those ocean waters.”

“But you are here now, and you are still alive.”

“So true.” He grins. “Maybe I’m immortal.”

“What’s that?”

“It means I’ll be here as long as there is water in the stream.”

“Jeez. Why are you the Great Silver Snozzle?”

“Check out this snout, kid.” He pushes forward his huge hooked jaw jutting under an enormous green head. “It’s a good question, though.” He seems really excited about answering it. “When I was your age, everything came easy to me. Fast swimming, darting under rocks, finding food. I mean I was good, the best of the best. The other kids practiced swimming up stream to build up their strength, jumped over boulders to improve their leaping and

tail danced to build up their bodies. They did this to prepare for the challenges of the ocean. No matter how much they practiced, they could never do any of it better than me. After a while, they started following me to learn how I performed better than they did. I turned my back on teaching them. I was more interested in myself than them. You look like a strong, smart kid, so I'll give you some advice. All this Sockeye Salmon business about developing yourself to survive in the ocean--marathon swimming and jumping over high rocks--is so much water bubbles. Just do what comes naturally. I did and look at me." He does a funny bouncing on his might tail and sings in his thunderous voice: *Doin' what come naturally.*

I did look at him. He was a mighty fish. And, a mighty old one.

"Just let life happen. Save yourself for the thrills of the ocean."

"Thrills? What kind of thrills could beat playing Aquasoc and bagging bugs?"

"You know that I am running out of time, so I don't want to waste it on the thrills of the big ocean."

"Oh." I sigh, disappointment covering my face. I see he gulps water faster through his gills as he struggles to get oxygen, because his old age makes it difficult for him to breath.

He studies me kindly. "Okay kid, one Great Silver Snuzzle adventure." He thinks about his words. "Well

maybe two adventures, one Great Silver Snozzle adventure is never enough.”

“First, do you know what it means to be an artist?”

“No.”

“An artist wants to go beyond normal things. An artist tries to do what never has been done before. That’s me.” I nod that I understand. “My siblings and I entered the ocean at the mouth of the Columbia River as you will one day. Anyway, the Sockeye Salmon that were left after the swim downstream fed in the ocean with ease. Soon we joined other redds. We gathered in bigger numbers, called a school, to protect ourselves from those creatures who would eat us. We took turns swimming on the safe inner circle and on the dangerous outer-circle of our school. Seals, tuna, and sharks and once in awhile dolphins would eat a few of us and swim off. Luck decided who survived on the inside and who was eaten on the outside.

“Then, this pod of five Killer Whales, huge black and white mammals who resembled fish, over fifty feet long swam over, under and on each side of us, blocking our escape from them.” They jibber-jabbered in ear piercing blasts to each other as they forced us closer and closer together, so they could eat Sockeye Salmon whenever they felt like it.”

The Snozzle blows bubbles from his gills. “These mammals were pretty smart. I knew that I must do something fast or I would be a goner. But what? If you stretched me out really long, then I measured four feet. The

Killer Whales were fifteen times bigger than me. They had a giant dorsal fin, which rose up ten feet high from their backs. They had a mouthful of pointed teeth, each tooth was half as long as you are. How could I stop giants like them? I would be just a gumdrop to them.”

“I don’t know, Mr. Snozzle. What did you do?”

“An artist studies the situation until he has explored every possibility. At first I tried to attack them, but hitting the bodies of those guys was like hitting the face of a dam.”

“Dam?”

“Just listen kid, keep your questions to yourself. Next, I tried to bite their tail fins. They just flipped me off. These killers had us, and I felt helpless to stop them. They even took turns going to the surface to gulp down a mouthful of oxygen while the others swallowed Sockeye Salmon.

“Remember I said an artist has to explore all possibilities. I did, and I discovered their weakness.”

“What?”

“I escaped from the packed school and swam behind the biggest whale. Then I darted in and slammed him hard on the white circle behind his right eye.”

“Wow!”

“My blow to his huge head was no more than a leaf

hitting the water, but this big black and white mammal lost his direction, took a nose dive and smacked into the ocean floor. With his right eye closed, he swam left, then right, swam back and forth, trying to find out what hit him. All of a sudden, all the mammals were swimming around, making these high-pitched, jibber-jabber sounds. In the meantime, thousands of Sockeyes escaped in every direction.”

I see the great red body of Snuzzle shaking with laughter. “Those Killer Whales never ran into anyone like me.” He laughs so deeply, he loses his breath, passes out and turns belly up with a large, silly grin on his face. I swim under him and search his face for a sign of life.

My presence revives him, and his great snuzzle twitches. “Flip me over kid, I don’t have much time left to finish the second story.”

I push my nose against his dorsal fin and use all my power to flip him right side up. I can’t budge him.

“Get the other Sockeye kids to help,” he orders me. “My end is near.”

“They won’t come out,” I reply. “They are afraid of you.”

“Show some imagination. Be a leader. Convince them. Hurry.”

“But I want to be a loner like you, not a leader.”

“Jeez kid, no need to nitpick words now,” he urges me, still floating upside down.

I find the other Sockeye Salmon buried in the gravel between two huge boulders. No matter what I say to them, they won't come out. The Great Silver Snuzzle begins to float downstream. I catch up with him and bite onto his tail fin and try to pull him back to our stream hangout. He's too big, and soon my effort tires me. Jennifer swims out and bites onto his tail. Together we slow down his drifting. Then Jennifer's friend, Diane, grabs a piece of his tail, then another Sockeye kid, then another until we grab every one of Snuzzle's fins. With one big, joint effort, we flip him upright.

“I appreciate your help, kids”. Snuzzle's words break in two as he has little energy to say them. “Here is a Great Silver Snuzzle story to pass on to all fish in the ocean once you get big enough to get there. After the first Killer Whale attack, we swam for five hundred miles from the Sea of Japan to the Arctic Sea for the Cold Seas Get-together. We were fish of habit, so we did not learn from the first Killer Whale attack and continued to swim in schools. Sockeye Salmon came from thousands of miles for the Get-together, gathering in great schools, making new friends and exchanging ideas from our different redds and just having a merry time before we returned to our birth places in the freshwater.

“We thought there was safety for us in such great numbers, because the large size of our school scared off most fish-eaters. But we never learned there is danger for such a big gathering of fish, and our school fell into the

Orcas, the Killer Whales' trap once again. This time, ten of the Killer Whales appeared around our school, which stretched out for a quarter of a mile.

“You little guys and gals remember that these mammals are able to talk to each other over great distances by sending out their high-pitched sounds. They are not like us Sockeyes who have to get close to be heard.

“As is the practice of these Killer Whales, they surrounded us and began to herd us into a tight circle, feeding on Sockeye Salmon whenever they felt like a snack. Compared to us Sockeye Salmon, Killer Whales move like they are swimming in mud, and they could never catch just one of us. But when they herd us tight, there is no room for a Sockeye Salmon to dart about. The Sockeye Salmon around me didn't understand this and allowed themselves to be eaten.

“I finally managed to squirt out from the squeezed-together Sockeyes. Killer Whales chose leaders like we did when we swam to the ocean, and the Killer Whales leader was a huge muscular mammal at least sixty-five feet long and wider than a footbridge crossing this stream that you live in.”

“What a footbridge,” my siblings asked together?

“Just listen and don't slow my story down with questions,” Snuzzle croaked. “I hit the leader behind his eye. He lost control of his movement and hit the ocean bottom. When he came back up to where we Sockeye Salmon were trapped, he had a breeding wound on his nose

from smacking the bottom. Smaller Tiger Sharks smelled the blood and circled him, but he gave them no notice. The power I saw in him scared me, but I forced myself to swim behind him, gaining speed until I shot through the water like a rocket.”

“What’s a rocket?”

“Shut up,” Snuzzle manages to shout with such force that a shock wave travels through the water and pushes all us smolts a foot away from him.

“I missed the spot behind his eye and hit his eye ball, bouncing back like I hit a trampoline. Don’t ask me what a trampoline is.” We didn’t ask, not wanting to be blown away again. “That Killer Whale leader let out a great high pitched howl. The next time I hit the soft spot behind the other eye. He staggered in the water, jibber-jabbering as he started to sink. His followers gathered around his sinking body, allowing us Sockeye Salmon to escape in many directions.

“The artist I knew myself to be, kept me from following the other Sockeyes, even though I felt the urge inside of me to return to our home in the freshwater. Every fish muscle in my body twitched in the direction of fresh water. I fought the urge and kept my eyes on the Killer Whale with the open wound. The Killer Whale regained his balance and stared at me. In fact, all of the mammals stared at me. The need to do what no Sockeye Salmon had done before gripped me.

“I propelled myself with more speed than I ever did

before and smashed the whale's open wound with such force that I became stuck in the wound. He howled with the rage of a hurricane, shaking his massive head, knocking his fellow whales aside until he flung me from him like a stone in slingshot.

“Don't even think about asking me what a slingshot is. Mammals are possessed by a thing called anger, which gets them into trouble. So big was this Killer Whale's anger that he ignored the escaping Sockeyes and whipped his great tail, propelling him after me like a freight train chasing a motorcycle. For days he and his pod followed my scent until I reached the sea where gigantic chunks of ice float. I grew bone tired, calling on every superior swimming skill a Sockeye Salmon has. But the Killer Whale and his followers gained on me. What they would do with me I didn't want to think about.”

Snuzzle starts to turn belly up again, only I keep him right side up by grabbing on to his pectoral fin. He moans, “here is some good information for you smolts to use when the time comes. Fish can survive in colder water than mammals. Once I found that out, I led them deeper and deeper into the icy sea. The leader was so angry at me for breaking up his feed and knocking him dizzy that he ignored the icy water in order to catch me. The icy water slowed my swimming to a crawl, and I thought I was a goner. Then their pursuit slowed to a drift, then a stop. I swam back and saw that the Killer Whales had frozen, all ten of them. They just floated, their icy eyes looking at nothing but the dark, cold depths of the sea.

“What an accomplishment. I had gone beyond what

any fish, let alone a Sockeye, had ever achieved. And there was not one Sockeye, even a King or Chum salmon or any ordinary fish to witness my accomplishment. Not even anyone to tell it too! Everyone of my generation had already entered fresh water when I returned to the spot where the Killer Whales began to chase me.”

The Great Silver Snuzzle pitches forward, then flops belly up. This time the current from his huge body takes me with him, turning me upside down. My siblings pull him back to an upright position. He continues his story. “Only I know what I accomplished kid. Only I know that I am a true artist.” He croaks the words directly to me.

“I will tell all the Sockeyes everywhere about you, Mr. Snuzzle.”

“You do that kid. Now I want you to fill me up with pebbles so that I will not float to the surface and the birds will not eat me. I want to bounce along the streams bottom until the current carries me back to the ocean.” With those words he stops breathing.

It takes all day and night for us smolts to stuff pebbles into the Great Silver Snuzzle’s stomach, because his throat has shrunk to the size of a straw. But we stuffed him full and watched him bounce off the bottom, upright and facing downstream like the mighty Great Silver Snuzzle he once was.



Steven Sockeye constantly thought of how he would become another Great Silver Snuzzle. In fact all he did was to daydream about how great he would be once he reached the ocean. He knew he was the best of the best, didn't the Snuzzle tell him so? He no longer had time to join the others in playing Aquasoc nor did he join them in their contests of racing, fast-turning and leaping. What need, he thought, I always win? I'll just lean back on my tail and save myself for the great ocean. I will equal the feats of the Great Silver Snuzzle. I will become a legend like him. All Sockeye Salmon will call me the Great Silver Steven.

One thing Steven Sockeye didn't give up was munching bugs. Late spring arrived and insect hatches were thick and everywhere, and Steven Sockeye ate until his overloaded stomach sank him to the gravel. While the others played and exercised, Steven Sockeye watched the pebbles and twigs bounce by as he thought of his future glory in the distant ocean.

The Sockeyes saw how self-centered Steven Sockeye became, how proud of himself he became. They avoided him, because they didn't understand him. So, he found himself alone all the time. Good, he thought, now I can think of more important things, like being a great Silver Steven.

Only Jennifer, his runt sister, floated around him. He thought of Jennifer as a pest. She was so tiny and didn't

resemble a real Sockeye Salmon like a boy did. She was--ugh!-- a girl. And to make matters worst, she kept looking at him with those big girl eyes. He told her to go away a dozen times, but she only drifted behind a rock and stole looks at him. When he ignored her, she tickled him under his pectoral fin with her tail. This drove him nuts, but for some unknown reason, he could not bring himself to flick her onto the nearby shore and be rid of her once and for all. He easily could have flicked her anywhere, because his diet of bugs make him twice Jennifer's size. Steven Sockeye was by far the longest salmon in this little section of the stream. He was also the heaviest, having grown a big belly with his diet of juicy bugs.

One sunny morning, he watches the pebbles bounce downstream and tries to ignore Jennifer. But she pesters him so much, he screams: "Stop bugging me."

"No." Jennifer answers.

"Stop it now."

"Okay." She smiles at him. Just as he relaxes, she bumps him again.

"Go away, Jennifer."

"Won't go away."

"You will." He starts to go after her.

"Won't." She sticks out her tongue at him.

“Will.”

“Won’t.”

“Ahhhhgggg.” He screams. “You are driving me crazy.”

“That’s not a drive. It’s a short walk.”

“Very funny, you little pest.”

“Big Belly Brother Brat!”

“I can’t take your pestering anymore. You win. I’ll give you six ants if you will just disappear. Vanish. Poof. Get me?”

“Okay, give me the ants”

He watches as Jennifer slowly, very, very slowly, eats the ants. An hour passes, and she still has four ants left to eat. He loses his patience. “Come on. I will be as old as the Great Silver Snuzzle before you eat the last ant.”

She takes another hour to eat the ants. Steven Sockeye waits for her to swim away. When she finally floats downstream, he returns to his daydreaming. He pictures himself pestering Killer Whales in the great ocean. He feels a sharp pain on his tail. He looks behind and sees that Jennifer has bit him there.

“You promised to go away. I gave you six ants to disappear.”

“I had my fins crossed, so my promise didn’t count.” Jennifer smiles, pleased at her trick. Steven Sockeye lunges after her to shake the six ants from her tummy, but before he reaches her a huge shadows appear overhead. He sees the other Sockeye Salmon scatter underneath the rocks and under the banks of the stream. He tries to follow them, dart for shelter, but he is too overweight, too sluggish to move as quickly as they do. His instincts tell him large birds fly overhead and will swoop down to grab him. He knows he is a goner, because he has allowed himself to grow too round while he daydreamed about glory in the ocean. Jennifer swims ahead of him, coaxing him to swim faster and follow her to the safety of the big rocks. Only as hard as he flicks his tail from side to side, it will not propel him forward fast enough to keep up with her. He can no longer turn on his speed when he wants it. He is too fat.

Steven Sockeye feels the air being squeezed out of his mouth and many piercing points of pain on both sides of his body. He finds himself being lifted out of the water. It is a terrible sensation. His mouth hangs open as he gasps for water-filled oxygen and finds none.

Steven Sockeye Salmon, unlike mammals, has special lungs to take the oxygen out of the water and release the water through the gills on his side. Steven Sockeye never thought about it, but if he did he would have found that water is two parts oxygen to one part hydrogen, containing over sixty-six percent oxygen. The air mammals breathe has only sixteen percent oxygen, so there is not enough oxygen out of the water to keep him alive for very

long.

His body grows tight with fear as he feels himself being carried high above his little stream, away from the only home he ever knew, clutched in the talons of a huge Bald Eagle. A second Bald Eagle carries Jennifer. Steven Sockeye sees her silly little girl eyes staring helplessly at him, no longer teasing him. Then he sees Jennifer going limp. He also feels himself growing very light-headed, his mouth stretches open as his lungs bulge from lack of oxygen.

In the distance, he sees a great body of water, which he guesses to be Sawtooth Lake where he and his siblings had planned to soon feed until they were strong enough to swim to the ocean. Then, from high above, he spots two smaller Red Hawks dive on the eagle holding Jennifer, trying to force the Bald Eagle to drop his sister so they can capture her. But the Bald Eagle beats them back with his long, mighty wings. Then the hawks turn on the eagle carrying Steven Sockeye, this time with the help of a third Red Hawk.

Steven Sockeye Salmon grows too weak to care about who--the eagles or the hawks--will eat him. Had he stayed conscious, he would have remembered from studying the sky above that the quicker hawks routinely prey on Bald Eagles who are better fish-catchers, but slower in the air. The hawks will dive at the Bald Eagle after she catches a fish, pestering the bird who is twice their size to drop her fish. When this happens, one of the hawks will catch it in mid-air. But sometimes the battle in the air is so rough, the hawk misses the falling fish. Even then, there is

always the chance they can retrieve the fish from the water before it sinks.

The faster flying hawks zoom in on the eagle holding Steven Sockeye, banging her on the head. She shifts Steven Sockeye from her talons to her beak, so she can use her talons to slash at the fast-flying hawks. Only before her beak can clamp tight on him, one Red Hawk hits the Bald Eagle flush on her head, knocking Steven Sockeye free, but not before the eagle's sharp-pointed beak rips a long gash along his side. The other hawks are too busy with the Bald Eagle to catch him in mid-air as he falls, and Steven Sockeye hits the water with a big splash. The talons of the pursuing hawks make a second, third and fourth splash directly behind him, but the swift birds fly from the water with empty talons. When Steven Sockeye hits the water head first, the force of his fall into the water pushes water through his gaping mouth into his lungs and out through his gills, feeding him precious oxygen to regain consciousness.

When hurt, a Sockeye's instinct is to dive for deep water. That is exactly what Steven Sockeye does; plunging deep until he touches the bottom and finds shelter under the rocks.

The experience of being plucked from the water by the huge Bald Eagle and the hawks air attack on the eagle and his fall to the water exhaust Steven Sockeye. The punctures in his body where the eagle grasped him and the gash in Steven Sockeye's side pain him, but he is still alive and breathing. Only, Steven Sockeye has a greater hurt in his mind, aching more than any wound can. It is the terrible memory of Jennifer being carried away by the other

Bald Eagle. It is knowing that he was responsible for her being a meal for the bird. He knows that had he not believed in the Great Silver Snuzzle, had he not daydreamed about being a legend, had he not become lazy and fat, Jennifer would still be teasing him in the stream, looking at him with her goofy girl eyes.

Steven Sockeye stops eating, even though it is summer at the Sawtooth Lake and bugs hatch from their eggs all around him. He doesn't seek a current in the lake, a place where the water is fresh and moving and full of oxygen, a place where he can watch food float by, the favorite pastime of all Sockeye Salmon.

He has lost his appetite because he feels he failed in his responsibility to keep Jennifer alive. Even if he didn't want her near him, this did not make his responsibility to her less. Steven Sockeye understands that because he is bigger, stronger and more gifted than Jennifer, there exists a responsibility for him to use his advantages to protect her. He failed Jennifer in doing that. He tried to be something--another Great Silver Snuzzle--that he could not be.

Steven Sockeye continues to avoid eating throughout the summer. His wounds heal, leaving a great scar along his left silver side where the Bald Eagle's beak had torn the flesh. Every time he thinks about Jennifer being carried away in the other eagle's talons, he wants to be gone just like Jennifer. To make himself gone, he exposes himself to the hungry birds and the many eaters of the lake. But try as hard as he can, they will not attack him, because they sense the sadness in him and do not want to eat him for fear they will become infected with it.

Then an urge comes over him, which keeps telling him to go to the ocean. He tries to ignore it, wanting to stay under his rock in Sawtooth Lake and not eat until he turns belly up and floats to the surface. But this urge to go to the ocean will not be defeated by his sadness. Like a swift stream it pulls at every part of him, forcing him to think of what lies ahead in the ocean. It comes alive in him, stronger than anything he has known in his young life, and orders him to prepare himself for the big swim to the ocean, reminding him that he is a Sockeye Salmon, not some slug attached to a rock.

As all Sockeye Salmon are born with an inner clock that tells them when it is time to swim downstream to the ocean, those from the same redd somehow know they must follow the most capable member through the many obstacles and dangers that block their way there. Steven Sockeye decides to be the most capable Sockeye Salmon, the one he has a chance to be and the one his siblings will want to follow. He needs to heal the sad memory of Jennifer's death that stays in his thoughts and hopes that helping other Sockeye Salmon will be the medicine. He believes there is only one way to show Jennifer how sorry he is for causing her to be eaten by the Bald Eagle. He will stand up to this bad time and find in it the best course of life for himself and his Sockeye Salmon siblings. Jennifer will live on in what he can give to his brothers and sisters.

Steven Sockeye's thoughts start to change from negative ones about how to stop living to positive ones that compel him to swim. He reminds himself that no Sockeye Salmon ever gets a second chance in a world filled with

hunters who wait for a fish to goof up so they can rush in and eat him. Not even the Great Silver Snozzle got a second chance. No Sockeye Salmon ever received such a clear message from life as Steven Sockeye receives now.

To be the most capable Sockeye Salmon, he tells himself, he must work very hard and work very smart. The Great Silver Snozzle gave him bad advice, but he also gave him the only knowledge of life beyond his birthplace. Steven Sockeye thinks once again about Snozzle slamming the Killer Whales, only this time he looks into Snozzle's act not for the glory it will bring him, but for the advantage it will give his sibling Sockeye Salmon.

Steven Sockeye starts slamming into the sides of the Rainbow Trout that swim in the lake. He does this day in and day out, from dawn to dusk, working so hard at it that his big stomach gets smaller. He also grows to be sixteen inches long, the size of the average Rainbow Trout he slams. The Rainbows are sort of green with sparkling red and blue stripes along their sides. These Rainbows swim very fast and Steven Sockeye at first seldom slams one, but after many tries he becomes faster and cleverer than they are. He attacks them when they day-dream or become careless during their feeding. He tries not to hurt the Rainbows, because they are not trying to hurt him, so at the last second, he will soften the force of his slam. Sockeye Salmon only hurt another species to eat them.

After a few months, the Rainbows, even the bigger Brown Trout who like to float in the shade under the lake's banks no longer offer a challenge to Steven Sockeye. He becomes too fast and too smart for them. Now, he turns his

attention to the much larger and much more dangerous Steelhead Trout who spawn and feed near Sawtooth Lake's drainage into the creek.

These Steelhead Trout are very wise, having lived in the ocean and swam the many rivers that flow there. Even though his time in the lake grows short, Steven Sockeye decides he must take the time to know these fish. They are the natural enemies of Sockeye Salmon, stalking them, eating their eggs and later the tiny fries. Once in awhile, if a smaller salmon becomes careless, they will sneak up from behind and with a sudden burst of speed, catch the unsuspecting fish's tail, then use their sharp teeth to down the fish in a few mighty gulps. When Steven Sockeye observes the Steelhead Trout, he sees that they save their energy by only chasing those fish whose size will provide more energy for them than the energy they use catching the fish. When not eating Sockeye Salmon the Steelhead prefer to lie in the flat water (water which looks still on top) near the current, feeding on the small life of the lake.

Steven Sockeye sees the Steelhead Trout are very muscular and athletic. Very often for no apparent reason they will tail walk. While he lies hidden in the gravel, he memorizes the Steelhead Trout's every move. He even learns their different way of talking to each other. He no longer believes himself to be the best of the best. He believes himself able to become the best of the best with smart and hard work toward that end. To do this, he feels he has to challenge the much larger and more experienced Steelhead Trout.

These big fish like to brag about how the Stick

Mammals put phony bugs on a thin line to lure them into biting the bugs, so the mammals that walk on two sticks can pull them from the water. The Steelhead Trout say, when caught by the phony bug, they fight the Stick-mammals longer and harder than any fish does, often breaking the line with a mighty jump out of the water. Steven Sockeye knows that Sockeye Salmon are old and weak when pulled to shore by the Stick-mammals, and the Steelhead Trout are strong when caught. So it is not a fair comparison.

Steven Sockeye lies in wait until he sees a Steelhead Trout feeding, then he smacks its tail, spinning the fish into the current like a log. Immediately, the other Steelhead Trout chase him. This is what Steven Sockeye wants, because they are faster, but he is smaller and quicker in his movements. He darts every which way until he exhausts them, learning that Sockeye Salmon have more stamina than Steelhead Trout, so can outlast them in a chase.

“Whooh! Hold on, Storyteller.” Steven Sockeye exclaims. “This word may be too big for the Button-bellies who read this story. I must inform you Button-bellies that stamina means energy to do something for a long time. In my case, darting very fast.”

At first, the Steelhead Trout chase him, but when they realize they only exhaust themselves trying to catch him, they lie low under the rocks, avoiding Steven Sockeye’s attacks on them. Steven Sockeye does not want the Steelhead Trout hiding under rocks all day long, because he no longer has a way to improve his swimming skills.

If the Steelhead are determined to hide, then Steven Sockeye cannot gain knowledge about his upcoming journey to the ocean, cannot learn about a dam, a bridge and the other things the Great Silver Snozzle mentioned in his tales of the ocean. And the only fish he knows who possess this knowledge are the Steelhead Trout. They go to the sea, come back to the Sawtooth Lake many times before they grow old and are gone.

Steven Sockeye has smashed the Steelhead so often that they will not feed as they normally do. Instead, they hide all day, lying low in the rocks, weary of his charges against them, whispering among themselves about the scarred Sockeye Salmon who will appear from no where, moving through the water faster than the swiftest current and bang them in their sides. So big is their fear of Steven Sockeye, the Steelhead Trout do not search for food and grow weak from not eating.

Steven Sockeye approaches their leader, a magnificent Steelhead Trout. From a distance, they size each other up, each looking for a weakness in the other that will give one an advantage over the other if a battle should take place.

Steven Sockeye sees that the Steelhead Trout leader is at least three and half feet long (he is less than two feet). The leader's multi-color sides sparkle from the sun's light cutting through the lake's water. The leader is a perfect fish, so perfect is his appearance that Steven Sockeye guesses that other Steelhead Trout groom and pamper him. This leader surrounds himself with older, wiser looking

Steelhead Trout, and on his outer circle younger, very fit and mean Steelhead Trout glare at Steven Sockeye.

He speaks to the leader in the fish's low rumbling sounds: "I come to trade with you."

The big Steelhead Trout laughs: "What does a squirt like you have to offer me?"

"I offer the Steelhead Trout that follow you, as their leader, a return to a normal life. I will stop slamming those who follow you."

"You don't scare me. You have not changed my life. I still eat the tastiest insects, the fattest Sockeye Salmon. My shelter remains the biggest and most secure. Lesser Steelhead Trout lower their heads when I swim by them."

"Then the other Steelhead Trout can return to normal. Don't you want the best for your following?"

The leader doesn't reply to Steven Sockeye's question. Instead he says, "swim closer so I can see you better."

Steven Sockeye replies that he will swim halfway, if the leader will also swim halfway without his guard. The groomed Steelhead Trout, seeing that he can't trap Steven Sockeye, agrees.

"What do you want from me, Scarside?"

Steven Sockeye hears for the first time the name the Steelhead Trout know him by. Scarside. He repeats the name to himself. He does not like the name, because it implies he is ugly and fearsome. He thinks of himself as a handsome and kind fish. Although, he reasons, if the name, Scarside alarms the Steelhead Trout, then I will use it to the best advantage. He answers: "I want to know what you know about the rivers and streams that you follow to get to the ocean and back, Mr. Steelhead Trout."

"First, you must address me as My Noble, Wise and Mighty John the Sixth." Steven Sockeye nods his head in agreement. "I have no fear of you, Scarside. So what if you scare my followers. They will get over it. You see the strong Steelhead Trout who surround me, they will eventually get you before you get me. However, if I give you what information you want, it will cost you fifty Sockeye Salmon from your redd paid to my dinner table."

"My Noble, Wise and Mighty John the Sixth," the words stick in Steven Sockeye's throat, but he manages to spit them out in order to get what he needs. "I will train every Sockeye in my redd to slam Steelhead Trout as I do."

"So?"

"So, we will disturb your followers, your servants, your soldiers and your wise men to a point where no one feeds and no one spawns. When we transform your feudal society into chaos, your followers will scream for a new leader. One who will trade with me, so all Steelhead Trout can return to their normal life. To do this, they will overthrow your rule. For you there will be no more

grooming, no more fat insects, no more best palaces in which to live in.”

The Steelhead Trout leader thinks about Steven Sockeye’s words. His lifestyle makes him selfish, but not stupid. “If I do as you ask, will you take your redd directly to the ocean and not bother us again?”

“You have my word. I will go directly to the seas.”

“Then I will have my wise men give you knowledge about the steams, rivers and ocean.”



“Button-bellies, I give you a list of the things I learned from the Steelhead Trout. If you like my story, then you must use your dictionary, encyclopedia or computer to learn what I did. The words are turbine, spillway, trawler, gill net, nitrogen, and pollution. Thank you for taking this break in the story with me. There will be other breaks when I will give you what knowledge I have for free--no trades. Maybe, then you will give your knowledge to other Button-bellies who have less than you.

“I learn from the Steelhead Trout leader, My Noble, Wise and Mighty John the Sixth, that he got his leadership from his parents at birth and held onto it by paying for the best education and training his society of Steelhead Trout could give him. In order to do this, his forefathers before him gathered great storehouses of insects and shellfish by taking those foods from the weaker Steelhead Trout. His

family then used the extra food to pay other Steelhead Trout to work, fight and care for them. They built a society in which they paid soldiers to guard the rich feeding area where the lake drained into the stream and charged very large amount of insects and worms for the lesser Steelhead Trout to feed there. The more his family charged the poorer fish, the weaker they became, and the stronger John's forefathers became. It became a vicious cycle--the weak feeding the stronger who grew stronger as the weak grew weaker--that once established was impossible to break. His family eventually ruled over all Steelhead Trout in Sawtooth Lake.

“In Sockeye Salmon life, we have no such spoiled leaders. To us a spoiled leader is a fowl term. Ha! Ha! Ha! That's a joke Button-bellies. Fowl (foul) term. Get it? In our redd, the best Sockeye Salmon and the one most willing to lead and the most acceptable to others can lead. No one bows to a leader nor does anyone serve a leader. Anyway, if I am to be a leader, I must first find my siblings and secondly convince them to accept me as the one to take them to the ocean and back.



Steven Sockeye swims by many redds of Sockeye Salmon in search of his redd. All the Sockeye Salmon he sees now have grown from smolts to juveniles, from ten inches to between fourteen and eighteen inches. They are very active in their feeding, exercising and playing.

After a few day of searching, he finds his redd

resting in a shady spot near the headwaters of Sawtooth Lake as far from the Steelhead Trout as possible. He recognizes Jennifer's friend, Diane, as she swims among them. Then, he sees an old Aquasoc playmate, Danny, who he used to chase during games as a smolt. Then he sees Will, his friend talking to Logan, another friend. The two friends smile at him, but do not swim toward him. Steven Sockeye waves his pectoral fin at them, then he swims slowly into his old redd. Everyone talks about nothing else but going to the ocean where they will develop into the best of the best fish.

Steven Sockeye sees smaller, white Sockeye Salmon at a distance. They float out of the protection of the shade, separated from the main body of the redd. They lack the beautiful silver skin and dark blue backs that Sockeye Salmon juveniles have. They are a shade of ghostly white. He knows they want to join the main group, but are afraid they will be attacked by the redd if they do so--because they are different. He approaches the unprotected white Sockeye Salmon, but upon seeing him, they dart away. Steven Sockeye next spots an injured Sockeye Salmon hiding under a rock. The fish is missing a dorsal fin that probably was bitten off by some larger fish. No Sockeye wants to associate with such a disfigured fish. He next notices three female fish floating near the surface, totally exposed to any bird that wants to swoop down and grab them. Steven Sockeye sees the females are smaller, and weaker from not getting their share of the plentiful food. He pulls a few stoneflies from a rock and lets them drift toward the hungry females.

Steven Sockeye now enters the center of the redd,

the spot with the best shelter and nearest to the current carrying food. He sees that all the Sockeye Salmon in this place keep themselves well fed.

They stare at his scar, but do not remark on it. But he knows they recognize him for he recognizes everyone of them. Swimming in the middle of a group of twenty big and strong Sockeye Salmon is Thrasher, the fish who Steven Sockeye used to race before he met Snuzzle. Thrasher is as gifted a Sockeye Salmon as he is and now has grown as long as Steven Sockeye and heavier by a pound or two.

Thrasher and his friends surround Steven Sockeye. “You came back just in time to join us in our journey to the ocean. We have heard of your games with the Steelhead Trout. I want you to join my team leading the redd down the rivers to where we will find the ocean.”

Steven Sockeye does not answer Thrasher.

“I promise you that you will get the tastiest food and safest spots on the way there.”

“I intend to lead this redd to the ocean,” Steven Sockeye says as he tries to swim away, but Thrasher’s followers block his way.

“Then you must battle me.”

“As you wish, but only at a place where our entire redd can watch.”

“Done! When the moon makes the lake bright.”

Thrasher’s followers allow Steven Sockeye to swim away. Will and Logan hear of the upcoming battle and find Steven Sockeye where he swims among the redd, checking on the injured and the sick. He asks those capable of swimming to accompany him to the battle with Thrasher.

They tell Steven Sockeye, “we believe you can beat Thrasher. He’s a bully, and bullies always back down when they meet someone who stands up to them.”

Steven Sockeye smiles, showing his pleasure, because these members of his reed support him. He, Will and Logan and his small group of weak fish swim to where the moon lights the lake fifty feet off of the east shore. Here, the entire redd gathers for the battle, forming a large circle into which Steven Sockeye enters and finds Thrasher waiting for him. He has no dislike for Thrasher and has no doubt that in a battle, because of his quickness he can beat the larger Sockeye. He tells himself, Thrasher only does what all Sockeye Salmon do: use their size and strength to bully lesser fish. Steven Sockeye decides to show Thrasher and the other Sockeye Salmon a better way to live together.

The circle of Sockeye Salmon grows excited, waiting for the battle signal to be given, Thrasher swims toward Steven Sockeye, and a muttering of *Scarside* sounds around Steven Sockeye. Louder shouts of *Thrasher* drown out Steven Sockeye’s supporters, until the entire circle seems to cry *Thrasher*. Thrasher dives until his belly touches the lake bottom, then propels himself upward toward the surface. When he breaks clear of the water, he

soars five feet into the air. This is an unbelievable height for a juvenile Sockeye Salmon to reach. In the air, Thrasher fans his tail ten times and splashes loudly back into the water.

When Thrasher swims back into the circle, an awed silence awaits him, because the gathering can't believe the jump it saw. Steven Sockeye feels sure he can equal Thrasher's leap, but a bigger leap will not support his idea of what a leader ought to be. He swims to the middle of the circle and takes advantage of the silence by speaking to the gathering:

"I will not fight Thrasher, because I believe whoever leads us should lead from the strength of his or her ideas, not from the strength of his body."

"You are trying to cover up that you are afraid of Thrasher," a Sockeye Salmon shouts, and all of Thrasher's supporters laugh at Steven Sockeye.

"What is an idea, Scarside," a weak voice comes from a tiny colorless Sockeye Salmon who Steven Sockeye earlier encouraged to join him. The knowledge that a white, non-silver Sockeye Salmon could have the nerve to speak to a normal silver Sockeye Salmon further silences the gathering, because an inferior should know to stay silent. They now become curious about what Steven Sockeye's answer will be.

"I am Steven Sockeye to you, my brothers and sisters and to any fish who wants me as a friend. To those who think of me as an enemy or as food, I am Scarside.

That is my idea of what I am. So, little sister, an idea is a way of reacting to something.” He tells the redd about the eagle grabbing Jennifer because of his dreams of glory in the ocean and growing fat because he believed he did not have to improve himself. He then tells them about his pledge not to lose another Sockeye Salmon. He tells them about banging into the Steelhead Trout to gain the best swimming skills in order to lead them to the ocean.

He tells his redd he did not believe it was Jennifer’s fault that she was born small and a girl, just as it is not the fault of white Sockeyes to be born without silver skin. Even if they are the color of the moon, they are still Sockeye Salmon. At first, the gathering snickers at his tale of Jennifer, because they think Thrasher the best fish to lead them. Then Steven Sockeye tells them his idea that no Sockeye Salmon should be gone because they become sick or have an accident as long as there are other Sockeye Salmon to help them. He tells them that no Sockeye Salmon should fill his belly while others have no food, that no Sockeye Salmon should have shelter when the others are exposed to those who would eat them. He tells them Thrasher’s trip to the ocean will be fast for those Sockeye Salmon who can keep up with him. His trip to the ocean will be slow and safe, and all will make it. He finally tells them to listen to what Thrasher has to say and then vote for the leader they want.

Thrasher, feeling very sure of himself after his unbelievable leap in the air, swims in a small circle so all the Sockeye Salmon can see his big and mighty size. Then he beckons to his twenty followers to join him. When they swim to a spot behind him, he speaks: “I chose the twenty

strongest and most determine Sockeyes to get to the ocean. They and I will surely get there. So, all any Sockeye Salmon has to do is to follow me, and I will lead you through all the dangerous spots.”

“What if we can’t keep up with you?” a weak Sockeye asks.

“Then you will not make the ocean. If you can’t make the ocean, you surely won’t make the journey back up the rivers to here.”

“Do we white fish have to swim behind the main body, unprotected,” another asks? “No one wants you with the main body, because you are different.” Thrasher speaks to the white Sockeye Salmon as if he has just eaten a sour bug. “You have pale, ugly skin and should not be able to spawn a new redd of salmon who might turn out like you.” The white Sockeye Salmon draw back and gather apart from the gathering.

“Will you help us get to the ocean if we grow weak or sick?” an undersized girl Sockeye Salmon asks.

“If you can’t make the long swim to the ocean, who would want to spawn with you? No one! You would just slow us down, so it is best you be gone at the spot where you can no longer swim. Anyone who can’t keep up should be gone. That way only the strongest and the smartest Sockeye Salmon get to spawn.” A murmur of alarm goes off among the gathering of Sockeye Salmon. The weaker ones swim to the white ones. Then the sick and injured join the separated Sockeye Salmon. Even among the

normal Sockeyes, no one wants to be left behind. Until now, no one thought they could not make it. Now as they look upon Thrasher and his strong followers, they speak of the possibility of eating something bad or getting a fin bitten off by a bigger fish or even growing too tired to swim. One by one, they move to the outcast Sockeye Salmon who have been assured of Steven Sockeye's help, until most of the redd gathers there.

When the time to vote comes, Steven Sockeye's words, about everyone making the ocean together rather than just the strongest making it, echo in their heads. With the exception of a few Sockeye Salmon, they vote overwhelmingly for Steven Sockeye. He tells the gathering that he will be honored to lead them to the ocean. He also tells them, that he will lead them only as long as they think him the best fish to do so. They can vote for a new leader anytime they have a group that wants to do so. He asks a disappointed Thrasher to stay with the redd and use his courage and strength to help them make it to the ocean. But Thrasher, who is more impressed with the use of physical power than the use of an idea, answers, no. He takes his twenty followers and eighty others and swims to the point where Sawtooth Lake drains into the creek that leads to the Salmon, Snake and Columbia Rivers, beginning the journey to the ocean.



Steven Sockeye, true to his promise, feeds the weak, nurses the sick and injured until they reach acceptable strength and are ready to begin the swim to the ocean.

While the redd moves slowly down the Salmon River, the shy white Sockeye Salmon swim together, but with Steven Sockeye's encouragement, they eventually break apart and swim freely beside their siblings. After a few days, no Sockeye Salmon seems to mind the white Sockeyes' company.

Steven Sockeye finds advantages along with disadvantages in swimming in the thick of the redd. One advantage given him is the opportunity to watch his siblings develop into better fish in their many different ways. Since he succeeds in making everyone feel good about who they are, the Sockeyes have no fear of punishment from him if they make the wrong move or say the wrong thing. So they enjoy trying to be the best Sockeye Salmon they can be.

The male juveniles use their energy to playfully challenge each other as a way to find out where they will fit in during the redd's journey to the ocean. The female juveniles do the same, except they like quiet times using their thoughts rather than their strengths to find ways of getting along with each other. Steven Sockeye enjoys seeing his siblings grow up, but he finds the first disadvantage to such closeness when Ellen swims up to him and complains that the water they swim in is too cold. So the next day he leads the redd into the warmer water next to the shore. Ellen complains it is too warm. She next approaches him and says the insects she eats make her fat, so he must find low fat-ones for her to eat. He wants to tell her to go eat mud, but she has a following of six girls with her. And that is too many girls for Steven Sockeye to disregard.

The next day, Steven Sockeye finds Ellen some old, scrawny midges without fat. She says they taste like brown grass. He then asks Ellen to take charge of the redd's diet and assigns the six girls to be her helpers in finding low-fat and tasty bugs for anyone who wants them. Ellen demands payment of two tender worms a day for her new job. Steven Sockeye then asks Logan, who loves to explore the water to find her worms. Logan agrees happily. Ellen seems happy with the arrangement. Steven Sockeye hopes this will end the matter, but suspects Ellen will make more demands upon him in the future.

Will next informs him that their pace is too fast for the weaker Sockeye Salmon to maintain, so Steven Sockeye agrees to slow down the redd's movement to enable the weak to keep pace. He then asks Will to take charge of caring for the sick and injured. Will smiles broadly over getting the responsibility.

Dina, a female two-thirds Steven Sockeye's size, bumps his scarred side one day. He flinches at the pain coming from the wound not quite healed. He notices she looks very angry. Four other females accompany Dina and surround him. He wonders, what now?

"We females are tired of being treated like weak Sockeye Salmon, tired of being treated like we can't take care of ourselves. And I am tired of looking at your ugly tail as we swim behind you and see you give all the difficult jobs to your male pals."

"But", Steven Sockeye tries to explain that he

doesn't think females would want to do the hard work.

“Shut up, before I knock you on you tail,” Dina commands him. Steven Sockeye holds back the grin he feels forming on his face at the idea of this smaller Sockeye Salmon threatening him. “We females are not asking for special treatment, because we are not some breakable toy that you have to protect. We want a chance to show what we can do to help the redd. We feel we are just as capable of leading this redd as you and your male pals are.” Steven Sockeye keeps quite, curious about what else she will say.

“You believe that just because you are bigger than we are, you are better qualified to lead us. Bigger is not smarter. So now you know how we feel.”

“What do you want me to do, Dina?” He notices Dina is so angry that she doesn't even hear his question.

“You think you're tough don't you Scarside. You mess with me and you will find out what tough really is. I'll rip both you pectoral fins off and ram them down your big mouth. If you don't give us a chance, I will change you into a plural.”

Steven Sockeye, speechless by Dina's shooting of words at him, manages to ask: “plural?”

“When I get done with you, your name will be Scarsides with a big S on the end, because I'll tear another scar on your good side.”

Steven Sockeye sees that in spite of her threats

directed at him, Dina only talks tough to keep up her nerve. He notices that her tail twitches nervously and thinks she doesn't really mean to hurt him. He decides to give her what she asks for instead of forcing her to back up her threat. "Would tomorrow be soon enough for you and your friends to take a turn leading the redd?"

Dina pushes out her lower jaw in a last effort to look tough and nods a yes. She bumps him as she swims away, but he sees she smiles with pleasure.

The Sockeye Salmon form a society now, each one doing his or her part to get the redd safely to the ocean, because they see that by taking an active role in the journey the redd will be successful. They don't work from fear of Steven Sockeye like the Steelhead Trout did for My Noble, Wise and Mighty John the Sixth or from fear of being left behind like they would have if they followed Thrasher. They follow him, because they know they will be helped if the need for help ever comes.

Will, who although smaller than Steven Sockeye, makes up for his size with enthusiastic efforts to help his siblings and takes turns with Dina leading the redd to the ocean. Logan, who is almost the same size as Steven Sockeye, prefers to explore ahead, and when he finds something unusual swims back and informs the redd. John prefers to push small rocks and pebbles together and build shelters and small traps to catch food floating downstream during the rest periods. Steven Sockeye finds John very intelligent and also devoted to the redd. And now with Dina, he feels satisfied that he will have at least four Sockeye Salmon who can lead the redd if some accident

disables him.

He learns from watching My Noble, Wise and Mighty John the Sixth how he does not want to lead the redd. Instead of John's way, he will lead by teaching these four Sockeye Salmon to be leaders. When they improve their skills as they try to become leaders, the improvements can only force him to further sharpen his own skills to be the best one to lead.

Kitty likes to slap her tail against the rock and make sounds that are pleasant for the others to listen to in the late hours of the day. She also bounces on her tail to the slapping sounds she makes. And this is pleasant for the Sockeye Salmon to hear and watch.

“Button-bellies, the most difficult time I had was the one that gave the other Sockeye Salmon the most enjoyment. Here's another word for you: satire (sa-tire). For you Button-bellies who refuse to use a dictionary, it means to imitate someone or something in a make-believe and funny way.”

Ron was very shy when I first met him, because he was white and skinny. But once the redd accepted him as one of them, he found he had a talent to make them laugh by satirizing other Sockeye Salmon. One day, Ron waits until the daylight appears over the river and the Sockeye Salmon still rest under the rocks and relates past events to the redd in a very funny way. He pretends he is me swimming bullet-fast in front of the Steelhead Trout, then he pretends he is the Steelhead Trout floating belly up, having fainted from being afraid of me with my ugly

scarred side. Ron makes himself twisted and very ugly as he plays me. This hurts me a lot even though I know he makes my ugliness bigger than it is just to get laughs from the redd, and because I still remember when I was the best looking Sockeye Salmon of us all. As much as I want to I don't stop him, because the other Sockeye Salmon laugh a lot at his imitation of me.

Ron imitates me as being scared when Dina approached me and shows me trying to hide under some dead tree limbs and peeping out to see if she is still there. He imitates Dina as very un-girl like, very tough like Thrasher. The Sockeye Salmon (all except Dina) laugh so hard they can barely keep themselves submerged. In his funny, half-truth way, Ron keeps the Sockeye Salmon informed about my leadership--the good and bad decisions I make. He brings the redd closer together by making them laugh. I swallow my hurt, because Ron also contributes to the good of the redd.

The first few days of the journey for the redd are an easy drift down the Salmon River, moving tail-first and feeding on the numerous underwater bugs called nymphs who prefer the cold headwaters of the river. The fear of the unknown journey that first appeared in the Sockeye Salmon's eyes is replaced by confidence as they swim out of the Salmon River draining into the Snake River where they come upon their first obstacle, a dam across the river.

Steven Sockeye leads his siblings into the water held back by the dam. This water before the damn is as wide across as Sawtooth Lake is at its longest expanse. So Steven Sockeye swims back into the redd and explains to

his siblings what his plans are. He tells them they face the Eagle Nest Dam on the Snake River. He swims in front of the redd and dives to the bottom, then with a burst of speed propels himself upward until he breaks the water's surface and soars eight feet into the air. He feels fear gripping him as he leaves the water and becomes exposed to the danger of being without water in order to examine the dam blocking the redd's route to the ocean. He remembers how helpless he was out of water, how hard it became for him to breath when the eagle held him.

The sun's brightness, without the water to dull it, hurts his eyes, but he manages to see the cement barrier, thirty feet thick and twenty feet high, blocking the river's flow. He next sees strange creatures, ones he never saw before, moving on top of the barrier. They are huge and move on long, upright sticks. He sees eyes located in front of their heads as they stare at him. He recognizes them as the Stick-mammals the Steelhead Trout told him to always avoid, because these mammals rule the world out of the water. They are the most dangerous of all, because they catch fish for the fun of it and seldom for food to eat. He also recalls that the Steelhead Trout told him to avoid the deep center of the river when approaching the dam. Because, by the time he hears the spinning sounds of the turbines that make a thing called electricity in the center of the dam, it will be too late to escape being sucked into the turbine's blades.

So, he searches for where the current moves near the edge of the river and spots the flow on the shady side of the bank. He leads his siblings there, fifteen feet off shore and makes a few more exploratory leaps to fully understand

how to safely cross this dam.

When he gathers all the Sockeye Salmon about him, he sees Ron imitating his leaps in a funny and flattering way. His jump of eight feet into the air beats Thrasher's by three feet. Those Sockeye Salmon nearest to him admire the jump and quickly spread the word of the unimaginable jump throughout the redd. The juveniles have never seen anyone stay out of the water that long. Steven Sockeye stays silent and allows his siblings to laugh at Ron's exaggeration of him jumping so high that he runs out of oxygen and faints, then finds himself drifting into the turbines, yelling for someone to save him only to faint again. He believes it is good to have the Sockeye Salmon happy and strong in spirit, rather than fearful of the dam. He disregards his accomplishment, because he wants to think about how best to get through the dam.

“This barrier that blocks the river's flow is our first challenge on our way to the ocean. The spillway where I am about to lead you, the water runs over the dam's top faster than any of us have ever felt. So fast, I believe, that we cannot control our direction. So fast, that only the strongest swimmers can make it though to the other side without injury from the churning water.

“When you chose me, you chose a Sockeye Salmon who promised to get everyone to the ocean and back without losing one member. To do that here, I have chosen this plan: we will form ourselves in the shape of a giant Sockeye Salmon with the strongest siblings at the head, and forming the outside skin of this big fish. The less strong and those recovering from sickness and injuries will swim

in the inner space of the body. Just as our bodies' skin and scales protect our inner parts, so will the strongest Sockeye Salmon protect the less strong.

“Those who are the strongest know who you are. You may suffer injuries by hitting the rocks or by the force of the water shooting through the dam's spillway and hitting the surface below. You can choose to go through on your own and not risk injury, and I won't hold it against you. If this is your choice then swim past me now and enter the current to the other side of the dam.” Steven Sockeye waits for any one Sockeye Salmon to move alone, but not one member of the redd moves.

“Good. Now whatever force opposes us, we must hold together our giant Sockeye Salmon shape, nose to tail, side to side, dorsal fin to anal fin.”

Dina insists upon her female following and herself becoming the outside skin on the giant fish now made of almost five hundred juveniles. Steven Sockeye fills the foremost nose position with Will and Logan tight on his sides. Next Dina and her females form the head behind them. The rest of the Sockeye Salmon find their positions, those of the protector and protected. The result of this formation is a Sockeye Salmon that measures forty feet long and ten feet high and five feet wide. Steven Sockeye leads them into the swift current and thinks who can stop such a fish as we make?

As big and as solid as they are, it takes the swift current longer to propel them through the spillway and over the dam. But eventually the force of the rushing river

shoots them through the opening at blinding speed. Everything in front of Steven Sockeye becomes a blur. The force of the water pushing against him tears open his mouth, and his skin feels as if it will peel from his head. But he holds the nose position, and so do all the Sockeye Salmon hold their positions. They plunge twenty feet to the river below on the other side of the dam and rush down stream beneath the river's surface.

Steven Sockeye swims around the juveniles who still hold the fish shape and sees strong Sockeye Salmon dazed from the battering they took going through the spillway. But they are happy about their success. Everyone cheers as he approaches them, for he has not lost one Sockeye Salmon, even the weakest of the weak made it. For the rest of the day, the redd drifts lazily down the Snake River and happily munching juicy bugs.

“I have not forgotten you Button-bellies. Let me take a moment to describe what we did getting through the spillway. Remember that I wanted to be another Great Silver Snuzzle and to win fame and the admiration of all Sockeye Salmon. In all respect to Snuzzle, probably the greatest artist of all Sockeye time, our accomplishment today with everyone taking part in it gave me more satisfaction than I could ever hope to get from being another Great Silver Snuzzle.”



Logan, who loved to explore, searches for worms to pay Ellen for taking charge of the redd's diet and also to

stop bugging me. Bug me. Get it? Ha. Ha. Ha! Ellen, who feels all female Sockeye Salmon should look their best, begins an aerobics class for the more energetic Sockeye Salmon. As I watch the Sockeye Salmon dancing up and down in the aerobics class, exercising to make themselves fit, I wonder, what next?

Logan swims quickly to Steven Sockeye and says he found Thrasher and what is left of his following, looking very ill and tired. He relates that only twenty Sockeye Salmon remain from the one hundred that left the redd with Thrasher.

Steven Sockeye leaves Dina in charge of the drifting redd, and with Will and Logan, swims to the shore where a small stream feeds into the Snake River. Here, Thrasher and his group take shelter in a rocky area close to the stream's current. The stream's flow of water should have carried plenty of oxygen, but Steven Sockeye feels himself struggling to breath properly. He glances at Will who also has difficulty breathing. Here the water should be cool from the mountain snows, instead the water feels uncomfortably hot. The three of them fight the urge to turn around and commit themselves to reaching Thrasher and the twenty Sockeye Salmon. The bodies of thirteen Sockeye Salmon float on the surface overhead. They are recently gone. Steven Sockeye sees the surviving Sockeye Salmon are bruised and sick. So sick, that they cannot move out of the oxygen-poor water from where they lie on the gravel, gasping for more oxygen. Thrasher floats next to where the muddy stream water clouds the river's clear water, scanning the murky water for more danger.

His face shows many cuts and his body turns black where it has been bruised. He barely notices Steven Sockeye or if he does notice him, prefers not to talk to him. Steven Sockeye knows he has to get the injured Sockeye Salmon out of the foul water or they will all be gone shortly like the ones floating on the surface overhead. Back in Sawtooth Lake, the Steelhead Trout had warned him about the places on the Snake and Columbia Rivers where Stick-mammals cut down trees and build roads, and the dirt normally held back by the cut-down trees is carried by the snowmelt to the river, where it fouls the water as it does here.

Steven Sockeye does not know that the reason it is so hard to breathe is because the excess tiny animal and plant life in the runoff use the oxygen in the water and reduce the amount that the Sockeye Salmon can take into their lungs. This excess runoff of tiny life also raises the temperature of the water, making it uncomfortable for the Sockeye Salmon to stay there. Scientists call this reaction, furunculosis. To make matter worse, the very fine dirt suspended in the water damages the gills of the Sockeye Salmon as they swallow and release the water.

Over their heads, Steven Sockeye see birds of prey circling and swooping down to tear off pieces of the gone juveniles. He watches another gone sibling float to the top. Thrasher, ill and confused, chose the worst possible place to rest, because in addition to the soil runoff, fertilizers called phosphorus and potassium which farmers use to enrich their fields flow into the muddy stream, slowly poisoning Thrasher's following.

“Go away, Scarside. No one wants you here.” Thrasher mumbles so faint that Steven Sockeye has to swim very close to hear him.

“Thrasher, you and your followers have to leave this poisoned water or you will all be gone. That is the best way.”

“The best way for us or best for you? Get out of here Scarside, or I will knock you senseless.”

“You couldn’t push a bug away. You’re so beat up you can barely move.”

“I took my following through the turbines because I didn’t want to slow down and look for a safer passage. I was wrong, and eighty juveniles died for my mistake.”

“And twenty still live and depend upon you to keep them alive.”

“Take them with you and leave me alone.”

“So you can be gone?”

“Yes.”

“Making a mistake is not the worst thing a Sockeye Salmon can do.”

“Easy for you to say. A Sockeye Salmon who never made a mistake as big as I did when I led my brothers through the turbines.”

“I also made a big mistake once,” Steven Sockeye reminds Thrasher about Jennifer being carried off by the eagle because of his inattention. His mention of Jennifer jolts Thrasher from his misery, and the larger fish begins to listen to him.

“No, making a mistake is not the worst thing a Sockeye Salmon can do, because very few of us can avoid making one. The worst thing a Sockeye Salmon can do is to let the mistake defeat him or her. We must learn from our mistakes to do better the next time. A mistake can teach us to be more fit Sockeye Salmon and to better go on with our lives.”

Thrasher allows himself to float from the rocky stream bottom as some of his old energy returns to him. “How can I go on with my life?”

“Join us and help me get those left of your followers and the redd to the ocean and back again to our birthplace.”

“You would let me help after what I have done?”

“We need your strength and courage.”

“I don’t have any strength left.”

“It will return if we leave this poisoned place now.”

Thrasher bobs his head in agreement. They escort him and the surviving Sockeye Salmon to the fresh flow of the Snake River.



For the next few days, the entire redd drifts slowly, so that Thrasher and his followers can recover from their awful plunge through the turbines and their later poisoning from the logging and farming pollutions. When Thrasher grows stronger, he tells the Sockeye Salmon how at the Eagles Nest Dam they rushed through a large pipe called a penstock from the up-river side of the dam. They shot through it at gunshot speed and hit the blades of a huge water wheel spun by the rushing water. Thrasher and his followers were banged against the metal blades until the turbine made a full turn and spat them into the frothing water below. Most of Thrasher's group never made it through the turbines in that one horrific turn. Trapped, they spun and spun in the big wheels, which constantly banged them against the metal sides. Those who did make it out alive were too injured to swim and found themselves trapped in the churning water, which created a high level of poisonous nitrogen. They felt very much like a deep-sea diver does when he gets the bends from rising to the surface too fast. The nitrogen attacked their bodies, so that they lost consciousness. Thrasher pushed the unconscious fish to the nearby muddy stream where Steven Sockeye found them.

At the town of Pasco, Washington where the Snake River flows into the mighty Columbia River, the redd moves closer to their goal of reaching the ocean, now a few hundred miles away. Steven Sockeye makes many exploratory leaps from the water and sees a river so wide

that he can't see either shore. To him, the Columbia is more than a river, it resembles an endless lake flowing to the ocean. The Columbia River provides the redd with more than enough bugs, worms and other creepy crawly things to eat, and eventually the twenty injured Sockeye Salmon regain their strengths and blend in with the redd, making their total number exactly five hundred and one. They are all that is left from the five thousand eggs deposited in the Sawtooth Creek by their parents.

Some of the females join Dina's group of assertive Sockeye Salmon, some join Ellen's group of playful Sockeye Salmon. Some Sockeye Salmon work with Will caring for the injured and sick. Others explore the river with Logan. Steven Sockeye thinks the important thing is that everyone works together for the big adventure in the ocean.

Thrasher loses his head-strong desire to get to the ocean at any cost and becomes a caring leader, taking extra time to help those less gifted than himself. He no longer believes in survival of the strongest, but in survival of all.

In the next six weeks, the redd swims into the Chief Joseph, Priest Rapids, Rock Island, Wanapum and Rocky Reach Dams using their gigantic Sockeye Salmon shape to get through the spillways. They get banged around on the big John Day Dam, but not one of the five hundred and one falls behind.

Almost all of the Sockeye Salmon eating the rich and plentiful diet of the river grow to two feet in length, growing stronger as they near adult life. They swim fast

past the Stick-mammal settlement known as Portland because of the poisonous runoff from the sewage and marine diesel fuel flowing into the river, passing the city without anyone getting sick and then swimming the last hundred miles to the ocean.



“Button-bellies we are now at the great mouth of the Columbia River where it flows into the Pacific Ocean. All around my siblings and me, other Sockeye Salmon redds speed toward the scent of salt water. These redds are anxious to begin the second phase of their lives. Please remember that all us Sockeye Salmon are still teenagers. In the saltwater we expect to grow big and strong, into adulthood.

The advantage of letting everyone be themselves and doing almost anything they want to do becomes very clear to me when one such advantage saves the lives of many in the redd. Logan, exploring far ahead of the redd to find worms for Ellen, spots hundreds of huge, fat and furry mammal monsters stuffing themselves on juvenile Sockeye Salmon from other redds who swim ahead of us into the area where the river’s fresh water meets the ocean’s salt water.

Logan says, “these monsters swim up behind the Sockeye Salmon and swallow them whole. When they eat their full of Sockeye Salmon, they catch others to carry to the rocks lining the shores of the coastline to eat later.”

I instruct our redd to swim back up stream and hide until we can find a way past these furry monsters who seem able to eat Sockeye Salmon at any time they want. Then I take a scouting party ahead to the mouth of the river. We are all scared of what we will run into as Thrasher and Will swim to the right, close to the bottom and hide behind rocks to see the mammal monsters. Logan and I reconnoiter to the left. Dina, Ellen and John cautiously swim in the middle toward the ocean. For three days we hide and watch these big teeth, furry monsters catch the ocean bound Sockeye Salmon with ease and eat them until they grow so heavy they can barely move. Then they fall fast asleep on the shoreline rocks or just float, dozing in the water. Unfortunately for Sockeye Salmon, the monsters take turns sleeping and feeding on the ocean bound redds, so we can not sneak by them.

I decide to call a meeting of everyone to understand what we saw and to get ideas about how to get past the monsters. Those of us who want to lead--Will, Logan, Dina, Ellen, Thrasher--fill the inner circle. John, who at most times likes to stay by himself and think (about what we seldom know) also joins the inner circle. Anyone who wants to speak his mind can join the inner circle at anytime. The remainder of the redd circle us, close enough so that everyone can hear what is being said.

I look as far out into the gathering as I can see. The faces of my siblings show concern over the mammal monsters. We have come a long way from Sawtooth Creek and, even in spite of the monsters in the river's mouth, I feel confident we can overcome any obstacle.

I speak to everyone: "we are here to decide how to

get by the fat, furry monsters who want to eat us.”

Ron, the jokester, says, “maybe we could have a campfire like the stick people do. We could stare into the fire and try to solve our problems like they do.” Everyone laughs at the idea of a campfire under the water.

“Very funny,” I comment, laughing too. For the moment, Ron’s joke helps us all forget the very real chance of being eaten by the furry mammals. I continue, “what do we know about these monsters that can tell us how to swim by them?”

Logan speaks first: “They have a large round head with big eyes to see even in the most cloudy and dark water. Their eyes glow red like a demon’s when they lie on the rocks and sun themselves.”

“They have those long stiff, strings around their mouths which they move back and forth to sense movement in the murky water,” Will adds. “I have seen them find Sockeye Salmon where no fish can see and then swallow the poor fish before they can move.”

“Those long, stiff strings are call vibrissas,” John adds to Will’s description.

“Speak in simple Sockeyese, because the Buttonbellies are following what we say,” I say to John.

John then adds, “those strings are also call whiskers.”

Dina, not to be ignored, continues the description: “I watched these monsters, Steven Sockeye, and they have powerful huge flippers on their rears. They move these flippers up and down in big strokes to swim very fast. And they have little paddle-like arms that they steer their bodies with. They can swim and turn just as fast as we can. They also use these paddles to help them crawl on the water’s bottom.”

She continues, “I’m afraid we will lose some Sockeye Salmon getting past them. We must tell ourselves that there will be acceptable losses.”

I look around me at some of my siblings nodding their agreement. It is as if some of them agree to be gone.

“Never have we faced an enemy with so many advantages. They have speed, quick turning, and they are smart enough to work together to catch us,” Logan speaks. He seems to support Dina’s idea of acceptable losses.

“There has to be a way through them. We must continue to search for a way through them,” I plead.

“Steven Sockeye, let me speak,” Thrasher says. “I believed in acceptable losses, when I led one hundred Sockeye Salmon through the turbines and lost eighty. Now after rejoining this redd, I learned that one loss is one too many to be acceptable. I am with you, all of us must find a way past these monsters.”

In spite of pending challenge, Steven Sockeye smiles to himself, because he is proud his leadership

showed Thrasher how to change into a new kind of Sockeye Salmon leader. After hearing Thrasher speak, everyone in the gathering turns against acceptable losses` and for a five hundred and one total survival.

“We need a diversion,” John pipes out.

Steven Sockeye gazes at John, drawing a blank over a word he has not heard before. “Give us a break, John. Go stare at a rock and keep the big words to yourself.” An impatient Sockeye Salmon shouts from the outer circle.

Steven Sockeye, not wanting to sound dumb, replies, “John, remember the Button-bellies may not understand big words.”

“There are no smaller words, Steven Sockeye. A diversion is a trick to get the monsters attention on something else besides us, so we can slip by them.”

“I knew that!” Ellen pipes in.

“Have you got a diversion, John?” Now it was John’s turn to draw a blank. He had no diversion.

“Let us continue to examine what we found out when we observed the monsters in the mouth of the river.” I attempt to get everyone’s attention back to the threat we face.

“They have super hearing, so good that if we brush even a rock, they will find us.”

“The mammal monsters are called *Phoca vitulina richardsi*,” John volunteers to the redd.

“John, go somewhere and stick your tail in the mud,” Dina shouts at him.

“John, please speak simple Sockeyese.”

“Okay, if you insist. The Button-bellies call them Harbor Seals.”

“I know you Button-bellies think these fat, furry mammals with their big eyes and whiskers are really cute. You giggle when you see them sit up in their banana style way and slap their flippers together. But to us, Sockeye Salmon, they are the worst of fish-eating monsters.”

John continues, “they weigh between two hundred and twenty and three hundred and thirty pounds and are five to six feet long. They can dive to the deepest part of this river and stay under water between ten and twenty minutes. Then, they must breath air out of the water like all mammals must.”

“Let’s examine their breathing, maybe we can find a way to keep them under water longer,” I suggest.

“Maybe if we swim fast and deep, they will run out of oxygen chasing us,” Will says.

“I’m afraid they are too smart to fall for a trick like that. They will chase us in relays. One group chasing while the other groups go to the surface to breath,” John

adds.

I see in the many faces of the redd turning to uncertainty. “We will find the diversion as John suggested,” I say to encourage them.

Everyone falls silent, for no one has any idea how to trick the Harbor Seals. Finally, Dina says, “I will swim among the Harbor Seals and draw their attention away from the redd as you slip past them.”

“No. I will do that,” Thrasher shouts at Dina.

“No, I thought of it first,” Dina shouts back.

“I am the fastest swimmer,” Thrasher argues.

“That is merely the opinion of a male,” Dina counters.

I watch the two Sockeye Salmon stare at each other, neither willing to give in to the other, and then I see that they really like each other in a way no juvenile male ever showed to a juvenile female and vice versa. The attraction they have for each other puzzles me, but I cannot think about it now. I rule against their offers. “There are too many Harbor Seals. One would catch you, and the others would come after us.”

“What then,” Logan asks?

“Steven Sockeye, I’ve been quiet until now,” Ellen speaks softly.

“And what a pleasure it has been,” Dina comments to her.

“Well, you certainly said enough for both of us,” Ellen replies.

I see the two females glare at each other as if they are about to bang heads. It would be a battle of the opposites, because their lifestyles are completely at odd ends, and they don't want to understand the other's different way of life. Ellen likes comfort and goodies. Dina likes to rough it and wouldn't eat a goodie if it jumped in her mouth.

“Go somewhere and polish your fins, that's all you are good for,” Dina fires another nasty remark at Ellen.

“You go somewhere and pull the tail feathers off a stork.”

I sigh, disliking this part of being a leader that must settle the bickering of others. “Dina, we agreed to hear what everyone says.”

“Even her?”

“Yes.” I sign again. “Even her.”

Ellen, pleased that she can talk uninterrupted, says: “I was taking a mud bath. A girl has to keep her complexion sparkling, even during dangerous times like this. I looked up and saw the monsters swimming over me.

They like to lie close together when they sun themselves on the rocks. But when they swim out to hunt for Sockeye Salmon, they guard the space around them. I saw two of them get into a fight, because one monster accidentally touched the other one. The monster being touch went nuts and barked like a dog and slapped his flippers against the surface. He got so angry, he bit the other monster. Now they both barked and slapped the water and flashed their big teeth at each other. I spent the rest of the afternoon watching the other monsters, and every time they touched in the water--WAM, BAM, SLAM-- a big fight broke out. I thought that really strange, because I'm a real touchy girl. I don't mind getting close to other salmon. But these Harbor Seals can't stand to be brushed by another one when they are hunting."

Everyone in the inner circle--myself included--grins at Ellen. She gives us our diversion. The gathering once again appreciates my leadership, because I insisted that everyone get a chance to speak, even Ellen.

The redd waits for a moonless night and forms a tight, long line of Sockeye Salmon, swimming silently toward the ocean side to side, four abreast. No Sockeye Salmon utters a sound, barely moving their fins. Above the long line of Sockeye Salmon, Dina and Thrasher and I float until we see the outlines of seals hunting overhead, taking turns diving into the dark water and emerging with their catch from the other redds. I silently float up next to a Harbor Seal and slap him in the side with my tail. The seal growls at the seal swimming next to him. I slap him again with my tail. This time the seal slaps the water furiously with his flippers. Dina slaps the other seal with her tail.

The two seals bark at each other, banging the water until the surface around them churns with bubbles. Thrasher slaps another close by seal, and she barks at the other two. Will and Logan slap two seals who have stopped to watch the three angry seals. Those two jump into the middle of the other seals' fight. All the seals in the river's mouth gather to watch the fight, because all mammals we Sockeye Salmon learn, love to watch a fight. They will stop eating, playing or even sleeping to watch a fight. They will even fight to watch a fight. I drift to where a really big Harbor Seal watches the fight and bite him on his big, furry, salmon-filled belly.

It takes only one bite to make the seal go crazy with anger. He snorts, he jumps in the air. Then he bites as many seals as he can reach. Soon, all the Harbor Seals jump about biting any seal in sight. It matter little to me, as I lead the redd into the ocean past the Harbor Seals, that the fight lasted so long and involved so many Harbor Seals, that they will talk about it for years to come as they sun themselves on the shoreline and scratch their heads, wondering who started the Great Harbor Seal Fight.

Our five hundred and one Sockeye Salmon siblings get the first sense of the ocean when they taste the heavy salt content of the water. The salt water of the ocean contains more than enough oxygen for us Sockeyes to breath. I make many exploratory leaps into the air where the Columbia River meets the ocean, but the thick fog makes it impossible to see anything but the swells of the water. I use all my senses--feel, smell, sight, taste and one you Button-bellies don't possess--the reading of magnetic currents between the earth's north and south poles--to

remember this spot for the redd's reentry into the river. So for now, I say goodbye to the fresh water life of my childhood.



Immediately, the redd enjoys the rich strong body-building foods such as fish larvae, plankton, sea weed and, of course, countless types of small fish. Like the survivors of the other Sockeye Salmon redds, and my siblings and I follow the ocean's current north to the Aleutian Islands into the Bering Sea. Here, we feast on the rich plant and animal life near the shorelines of Saint Matthew and Saint Lawrence Islands.

Over many months, they grow from juveniles to full size adults. The females average thirty inches long and six pounds heavy; the males average thirty-six inches long and weigh eight pounds. I grow longer to four feet and weights about ten pounds. Thrasher also measures four feet, but he is much heavier at thirteen pounds of solid muscle.

“Okay, Button-bellies, I’m talking to you again. We Sockeye Salmon are part of a food chain that goes from the smallest plankton, who eats tiny particles in the ocean, to the small fish who eat the plankton, to us Sockeye Salmon, who eat the small fish, to large fish such as sharks, who eat us, to large mammals such as Harbor Seals, Dolphins and Killer Whales who eat the large fish and just about everything else. At the top of the food chain are you Button-bellies who eat anyone you choose to eat.”

“We of the food chain underneath you eat each other for food so that we can stay alive. We don’t feel bad for those we eat nor do we hate those who try to eat us. We attack others because we are hungry or need to defend ourselves from being eaten. Then we only use such force that is necessary, such as I used on the Steelhead Trout and Harbor Seals. You Button-bellies have no one to eat you, except for a very rare shark or tiger. You attack others due to a thing you call anger. We Sockeye Salmon don’t possess anger. We never, never hurt just to feel good.”

We salmon agree among ourselves that anyone can be what they want as long as it does not harm the redd. This agreement leads to some strange and hard to understand behavior, such as Ron who constantly follows me in order to make fun of me in front of huge Sockeye Salmon audiences, including salmon from other redds. And there is the behavior of Ellen who teaches aerobic classes during our rest periods. She hires Kitty and her group of Sockeye Salmon to slap their tails against the ocean bottom and shout together making a noise she calls music. Kitty does this to entertain the Sockeye Salmon while they exercise.

Logan continues to be a lone scout, swimming ahead and behind and reporting to us about what food and dangers he finds. Dina pushes heavy objects around every time we take a break, building up her muscles, so that one day she can swim faster and jump higher than anyone in the redd. Thrasher remains the strongest because of his superior size.

What seems strange to us in the redd is that even

though they argue all the time, Dina and Thrasher always swim near each other. What attraction can they possibly have for each other? I continue to wonder.

Will gives up his rest time to feed the sick fish special plants and plankton he discovers that will make them well. John, the strangest of us all, likes to find objects and make them into things that can make our lives nicer. Instead of eating the sea kelp that grows next to the shoreline, he will twist pieces of it into a sleeve-like coat and then slip into it. He fits himself into the sea-kelp so that only his head and tail stick out at the ends. Saying the kelp will keep him warm, he dives to the coldest, darkest depths of the ocean, then comes back with tales about the huge mountain ranges growing from the ocean floor. He describes the deep trenches where the ocean floor splits apart. We listen in wonder as he tells us about the volcanoes that spit lava out, boiling the nearby water. His stories so interest our explorer, Logan, that he asks John to make him a sleeve for warmth and also dives to the bottom.

Logan comes back from the ocean's bottom and tells us of fish with no eyes, with bodies that glow in the dark. It is nice to know about such things, but no one else in the redd wants to visit the ocean bottom.

When we swam through the mouth of the Columbia River to the ocean, John suggested we beat two branches together to distract the Harbor Seals. We didn't use his suggestion because the Sockeye Salmon who beat the branches would have been eaten by the furry monsters once they were discovered. The latest silly idea John has is to carry a flat stone, the size of his head, in his mouth. He

carries this stone everywhere we swim in the ocean, and at night he will rub it against another stone until it has a sharp edge. We Sockeye Salmon chuckle until our sides hurt watching John swimming low and slow with the stone in his mouth.

What happens next to John becomes the strangest happening so far. Ellen, who never does anything for anyone unless it makes her a profit without much effort, starts carrying a stone and swimming with John. John, who never smiled no matter how funny the joke he heard, grins every time Ellen is near him, which is all the time. We Sockeye Salmon do not understand this attraction between the pair, John grinning like a clown and Ellen barely able to move with the big stone in her mouth. Their attraction makes me happy, because now with the stone in her mouth, Ellen can not pester me for things to make her feel good.

I began to suspect that maybe there is some dangerous mineral in the ocean food we eat, because the same strange thing that took hold of Dina and Thrasher now takes hold of Ellen and John. The females and males are as opposite from each other as they can be, yet they are drawn to each other. Did this strange attraction only attack opposites I wonder? Or will it some day attack all of us, myself included?

As I mentioned before, we swim close to the island shelves (that part of the island that slopes to the ocean floor) in the Bering Sea where the currents whip the tiny sea life around in the water enabling us to feed on them. Sometimes the water becomes so thick with sea and plant life that swallowing the water is like sipping a rich soup.

So all Sockeye Salmon gather here to put on muscle. The birds from North America and North Asia know we feed here and also gather to feast on us if we are stupid enough to swim too close to the surface. My redd learns to protect itself against the four hundred and fifty different types of birds flying overhead and looking for a fish dinner.

But, we can't protect ourselves against the Stick-mammals. They also come here in huge, floating things they call boats. The Steelhead Trout, My Noble, Wise and Mighty John the Sixth, gave me no warning about them. Perhaps, because he never knew about them, for no fish, seal or even a dolphin once caught ever escaped from the Stick-mammals and their boats.

These Stick-mammals use a thing called a gill net, which they drop in the ocean and trail behind their boats for thousands of feet, snagging every marine life before it. No fish or mammal escapes this awful gill net, because it has strings tied together, so that the strings make tiny open squares, which are too small for any Sockeye Salmon to swim through. The Stick-mammals sneak up in their boats and drop their nets on us without warning. The Steelhead Trout told me how angry the Stick-mammals get when someone attacks them without warning. They think sneak attacks against themselves are mean and bad. So why do they sneak attack us?

I puzzle over their attack on us, because there is no way the few Stick-mammals on the boat can eat all of us. I can't give the puzzle too much thought, because I am busy trying to escape the gill net which traps my redd and thousands of other salmon and fish. We feel ourselves

being dragged through the water along with other redds, fish of every type including sharks and even the very smart and fast Dolphins. No matter how hard we struggle to break free of the strings holding us, we cannot do it. We feel ourselves being pulled toward the surface where we know that once out of the water we will all be gone, because we will not be able to breathe. The Sea Lions and Dolphins, who are mammals like you Button-bellies, are beginning to be gone, because they cannot breathe under the water surface and cannot get above water for oxygen. Fear freezes on our faces, as we Sockeye Salmon know there is nothing we can do to free ourselves from the force bunching us together against the back of the net. We feel ourselves being slowly pulled from the water to the boat.

I think to myself, that I failed as a leader. That I have taken my redd so far from their birthplace only to meet an end in this mean Stick-mammal trap.

“Button-bellies, I look around at my brothers and sisters, remembering all their different faces and different attitudes, making my last memory of life a good one. I spot Dina and Thrasher pushing against the net with all their combined might, fighting the net right to the moment they will leave the water. Next I observe Ellen and John still holding their big, silly stones in their mouths. I remember when I once watched them cut sea kelp into small pieces to divide among the redd; at another time I watched them cut twigs into equal lengths to build a shelter to protect our extra sea kelp. Then a way to escape the net strikes me like a wave smacks the shoreline: if Ellen and John can cut sea kelp and twigs by rubbing the stones sharp edges together, then they might be able to cut the tough strings of the gill

net that traps us.

Around us, other boats lift nets full of fish and mammals out of the water. The water thrashes with panic from the terrified fish. I see the water above us getting very bright, and I know we only have a few minutes before we reach our end on the boat. I push and flop my way to Ellen and John and scream for them to cut the net with the sharp stones they carry. My plan gives them hope for survival, and they move to the strings of the net. There are about fifty Sockeye Salmon between us and the strings. Thrasher, Dina and the other strong Sockeye Salmon join us, and together we force a path through the jam-packed fish for Ellen and John to reach the net. Above us, both ends of the net had been drawn together, as some force pulls us from the water. Ellen and John rub the stones against the strings while Logan, Will and I pull on the strings, holding them tight. It seems to take forever for the first string to snap, but it does. Then we cut a second, third and fourth string. My redd pours through the hole in the gill net. Once on the other side, we pull on the opening so that it will open wider for the bigger fish to escape. All the Stick-mammals pull out of the water is a net with the gone Seal Lions and Dolphins, mammals who suffocated underwater.

My redd and I leave the lazy, rich feeding shelves of the islands' shallow water for the depths of the ocean to escape the Stick-mammals' gill nets. Other Sockeye Salmon redds follow us as does schools of non-salmon fish who escaped through the hole in the net. I do not discourage these followers, because it is our wish to share what food and protection we can with any fish who seeks them. In the darker, deeper waters of the Bering Sea other

salmon who have suffered many losses getting to the ocean and once here lost many of their members to the large fish and mammals, hear that our redd has not lost one member. They swim from hundreds of miles to find us, so they can become part of our school. In the next three months not one day passes without a redd of Sockeye Salmon or school of Herring, Sea Trout, Smelt, Cod, Perch, Flounder and even the killer Pike joining us.

So many fish join our redd that our numbers swell to over five hundred thousand. All of us know that the advantage of such big numbers is that we scare off most solitary fish, even Sharks, who want to eat us. We also know the disadvantage is that our huge school is so big that we draw attention wherever we swim. In order to draw less attention, I ask Thrasher to form many huge Sockeye Salmon formations from our numbers, like the ones we made when we swam through the dams' spillways. He forms twenty twenty-five foot long Sockeyes which now scares off the Walrus, Sea Lions, Seals and the ever-dangerous Dolphins. So for four years, we feed safely in the cool, deep Baltic Sea.



My body changes. My silver sides turn bright red, my head turns a dark green. My lower jaw grows long and hooks upward. My teeth grow long and sharp. I begin to look exactly the way I remember the Great Silver Snozzle. I notice that the other male Sockeye Salmon change as I do. The females do not turn as bright red as we males do, nor do their jaws hook upward. They merely get heavier and

rounder. I now experience the feeling that overtook Thrasher and Dina, John and Ellen and can not keep my eyes off the females. This strange urge to stare at girls distracts me and the other leaders from looking after the safety of our huge school of mixed fish. We don't notice that the surface above us grows dark as a pod of twenty Killer Whales with six of their calves find us off the coast of Asia. They drop down and encircle us before we can flee from them.

“Keep in mind, Button-bellies that these Killer Whales measure thirty to fifty feet in length, compared to our current formations of twenty-five feet in length fish. So we look like a feast for them once they herd us together. But, we have a different idea. As the leaders and I earlier planned, we wait until the huge black and white mammals surround us on all sides. We know they will not attack right away. Instead, they will push us tighter and tighter together to completely trap us and eat us leisurely like you Button-bellies eat a submarine sandwich. Ha. Ha. Ha! Get it? As planned, the twenty twenty-five feet formations do not resist the Killer Whales.

I know from the tale of the Great Silver Snuzzle that Killer Whales practice cooperative hunting. When they can't find Sockeye Salmon, they herd Baby Beluga whales the way they now surround us. My Wise, Noble and Mighty John the Sixth told me how tricky these mammals can be. So you see, it pays to listen to everyone; you will never know when a fish's information will become useful.

I recall the Snozzles's tale of a seal sitting on a floating chunk of ice laughing at a Killer Whale who is

trying to eat it. The seal thought itself safe from the whale, because the whale could not leave the water and grab him on the ice. To the seal's short-lived surprise, the huge mammal jumped high into the air and made such a big splash when he landed on the water that his wave tipped the floating piece of ice. The seal slid off into the mouth of another whale who waited nearby. These same seals also hid in shoreline caves at low tide. The caves were too small for the Killer Whales to get at them. So the whales waited until the high tide flooded the caves and forced the seals to swim out in order to get air--at that time, they ate them.

The Killer Whales surrounding us appear as the most dangerous fish-eaters we have faced. John gives us another big word to chew on, one which describes our plan; *con-tin-gen-cy*. It means a second plan to use if the first one fails to succeed.

Since our twenty, twenty-five feet in length fish shapes do not scare off the Killer Whales, we put our contingency plan into action. We form one gigantic Sockeye Salmon shape, two hundred feet long. Every fish, male and female, weak and strong, from Asia or North America find their spot. Our size becomes almost four times as big as the biggest Killer Whale. This scares the pod of twenty, and they swim to a distance. They are too surprised by our quick change to know that we are all size and no bite. We do however have a huge tail that when it snaps could damage them. But tail blows alone will not be enough to drive them away. We can only hope to bluff them into swimming away. I hold my position right on the very nose tip of the giant Sockeye Salmon shape.

The pod of Killer Whales and our fish-shape stare at each other, waiting for the other to make a move. Before it grows dark above, a large eighty-foot long Killer Whale swims toward us from the pod. His dorsal fin looms so high that I cannot see the top of it. I hear an amazed fish whisper that it must rise fifteen feet high.

A chorus of low rumbling praise comes from the pod of Killer Whales behind the biggest one: “Fish of the sea tremble before Zuss, the Warrior God of All Gods. Know you that no fish, no mammal dare swim before him. No fish can escape his fury. Give way to the lord of the sea world, world, world, world.” The last word echoes in the water.

I guess the Killer Whale’s weight to be thirty tons. Like all of his kind, white oval patches mark the area behind his eyes. The same spot where the Great Silver Snuzzle hit the giants that threatened him in a lifetime before mine. This Killer Whale’s paddle-shaped flippers measure twice my length. Not wanting to frighten them more, I don’t tell my siblings that these giants live for sixty to ninety years. We only live for six years, so I know they own much more experience in battle than we do, living long enough to pass this battle experience on to their calves, who do the same for the next generation of their calves and so on and so on. We have no such generational luxury as we are gone after one lifetime and never see our children. I can see no way in which we can defend ourselves against them if our bluff fails.

The Killer Whales are not only tricky, they are very

smart. So I am very much on my guard when the big Killer Whale begins to talk to us.

“I am called, Zuss, the Warrior God of the Water.” His deep voice becomes the cracking of glaciers breaking apart to my ears. I hold myself from cringing back into the formation. The Killer Whale’s size appears so large to me that I can’t see anything but his mouthful of sharp teeth. The Killer Whale studies us for the longest time, trying to find out what kind of Sockeye Salmon he faces. I am relieved that not one of our school of very different fish breaks from formation to escape this scary giant.

“I have heard of the clever Sockeye Salmon who thinks it is fun to bang Killer Whales behind their eyes. But he measured only a few feet, not nearly as long as you are.” He speaks to us as if we are one Sockeye Salmon. He studies us once more, searching for a weakness. I sense he becomes suspicious as he moves his mighty paddle-like flippers to keep himself in place. His flippers stir enough sand on the ocean floor to cause a large Pike under me to sneeze.

Zuss grins, revealing a mouth full of big conical teeth. “You are many fish making up a gigantic one. The Great Silver Snuzzle could never think of doing that. Who are you? Could you be the one who tricked the boat Button-bellies? Are you somewhere in this gigantic formation that pretends to be a fish?” He questions us in his strange rumbling sound.

Our bluff fails. He knows we are just a big shape trying to scare him off, so there exists no reason for me not

to reply.

“Everyone here is clever enough to bang you and your pod behind the eyes a thousand times a thousand,” I reply in his strange rumbling language.

Zuss roars with laughter at my words. “I knew you were not the Great Silver Snuzzle. He grew old and gone. Good riddance, for he was a pain in the neck.”

“Pain in the eye, you mean,” I remind him.

“The loss of one Sockeye Salmon is no big deal. There are so many of you.”

“One Sockeye Salmon is as important to us as one Killer Whale is to you.”

“From the way you speak, I know you are the Sockeye Salmon who all fish follow, because you protect any fish who joins you no matter what kind and color they are. You are a different fish than I have ever known.” He then swims back and forth in front of us. “I am the strongest of the strong. The fiercest of the fierce. When you are gone, I will still rule the ocean as I did before you appeared. You can be gone now if I choose to swallow you.”

It was my turn to laugh, and I did as I made one last attempt to scare him. “Those fish who join me will choose a new leader in my place and ram you as the dolphin rams the shark.”

Zuss thinks about what I said for a long time, because he does not seem sure he and his pod can beat us in a battle. Then he replies, “meet me in single battle if you have the courage. If you beat me, all of you can safely swim away.”

“And if I lose?”

“What do you care? You will be gone.”

“And if I lose?” I repeat my question as my only purpose in battling him would be to save as much of my redd and the schools of fish that joined us as I can.

“You give us ten percent of your school for our meal.”

I expected him to demand more fish. Then I remember what I learned from the Steelhead Trout: mammals have huge egos and always need to prove they are the best at what they do. I guess he thought that by beating me in battle, his name will become even more fearsome than it is now. That is why he baited me with a low ten percent demand instead of asking for more of us to eat.

“I agree. I will battle you after one darkness ends and the new light begins above us.”

Zuss grins with joy and nods his giant head in agreement. We fish forming the head watch him swim back to his pod and tell them of tomorrow’s battle. We listen to them jibber jabber and laugh at the prospect of me

battling him. I hear one Killer Whale say, “it would be like a child’s tricycle battling a big rig truck.”



“Why did you agree to such a bad bargain?” Will demands of me. “How can you win against such a huge creature? And when you lose, who decides who shall be in the ten percent to be eaten that you promised to the Killer Whales?”

I don’t answer Will, instead I direct the huge formation to swim out of eyesight of the Killer Whales. The other fish in the formation express their concern over the bargain and are very frightened about who will be part of the ten percent given to the Killer Whales. No fish or Sockeye Salmon thinks I can win the proposed fight with Zuss. This feeling of losing and being gone tomorrow makes me feel very alone and sad.

I force myself to address the large school of fish: “The mammal will most likely destroy me tomorrow.” A loud groan of fear sounds from the fish still in formation. “I agree to battle Zuss, because the Killer Whales are too many for us to escape uneaten, and all of us will be gone if they decide to attack us. This is what I think we must do, because mammals do not always keep their word. If I should win tomorrow, there is no guarantee that the pod of Killer Whales will let us safely swim away.”

“There is no guarantee that they will only take ten percent of us when you lose,” a fish shouts from

somewhere near the middle of the formation.

“That is true. So this is what we must do. During the battle tomorrow, when all the Killer Whales are busy watching, Will and Logan will lead as many of you to safety as possible. You will escape by leaving the middle of our giant Sockeye Salmon formation. That way the formation will appear to stay the same to the Killer Whales even though it will be empty on the inside. If the mammal defeats me, Dina and Thrasher will lead the remainder of this giant formation to ram the whales. You must not give up one fish without fighting back. Do not panic and try to escape. That is what they want you to do. Only if you fight together do you have a chance to survive.”

“No, Steven Sockeye, I will fight in your place. Only you can lead us in that type of battle.” Thrasher pleads with me. Then one fish after the other, my friends and siblings, say, “no Steven Sockeye. I will fight in your place.” My heart swells with joy that so many of my redd and this unusual gathering of different fish favor me enough to give up their lives.

“No, that will not work, because Zuss will not fight anyone but me. I will keep him busy long enough for many of you as possible to escape.”

“But you will be gone,” Ellen speaks sadly to me. It gives me more pleasure to know she actually thinks of my well being without being paid a worm to do so.

“It is true that after tomorrow I will be gone.” Sadness chokes my words.



When the light of the new day appears above, I feel terribly unhappy that after today I will no longer be with my siblings and my new fish friends--the little silver herring, the funny and flat flounders with eyes on one side of their bodies, the combative pike and the rest of the different fish.

The time to say goodbye comes, so I slowly swim around the giant Sockeye Salmon formation. I look upon Logan the explorer and upon Will the healer. Next to them Thrasher the strong holds his position. On his other side Dina the demanding looks very determined. John the inventor still holds the stone in his mouth. Ellen the fun fish also holds a stone.

“Goodbye my friends,” I whisper. Then I stop before a skinny, white Sockeye Salmon who our redd fed and kept afloat all the way from Sawtooth Creek. She still appears weak and sickly. She gives me a nice smile of encouragement, and her smile makes everything I tried to do for her worthwhile. Near the tail of the formation, I spot the male Sockeye Salmon whose tail fin a Steelhead Trout bit off in the Salmon River. We taught him to swim without a tail fin. I feel more pride for having played a part in keeping my siblings alive than I do in our victories over the Harbor Seals and the gill nets of the Stick-mammals.

As I swim full circle around the formation, I realize how much I will miss them.

in my head. Then shouting comes from the inner part of the formation until my name sounds throughout the water.

Scarside...eeee...eeeeee—roars behind me as I go forth. My battle name grows so loud, the water vibrates around me. Then “**Scaaaar...siiiiiide...eee...eee**” smashes what words Zuss speaks to me.

Zuss holds his position ten feet in front of me. He feels the force of **Scarr...sssiddd...dee** reach him. We both listened to

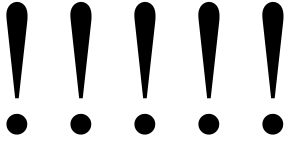
Scarside thunder through the water.

Scarside!

Scarside!

Scarside! ! !

Scarside



explodes everywhere around us. Zuss and I trade looks of amazement over the water being whipped into foam as the formation beat their tails and sound my name.

The support of so many fish gives me hope that I can win over Zuss. “I’m ready to battle,” I shout as I swim back and forth in front of him, finding my confidence and feeling myself capable to battle the huge mammal.

“So many shout your warrior name,” he whispers to me, not able to take his gaze off the fish shouting my name.

“They shout the name fate gave me.” I answer boldly.

“I believe you don’t need fate with so many on your side.” For the first time, I notice doubt instead of menace showing in his massive eyes. Alarmed by the noisy display of the school, he still does not look at me.

“I do not understand this power behind you. I will not battle you today, Scarside.” With those words, Zuss turns and swims off.

He orders his pod of twenty Killer Whales and calves to follow him, and they disappear into the far darkness of the ocean. I believe the five hundred thousand fish shouting my warrior name scared him off. The school sees the departure and begins cheering. Because of their unity, they won a great victory today, a victory that no individual Sockeye Salmon, the Great Silver Snuzzle or myself could have won.



Near the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska, our giant school of many different fish breaks up. The many Sockeye Salmon redds, ours too, swim toward their rivers in Asia, Alaska, Canada and the coasts of Washington and Oregon.

The different fish who joined us for protection return to their lives smarter for living with us. Our redd learns that a fish can have strong allies if he treats them with kindness, instead of meanness.

Now, only my siblings and I remain of the giant school. We float off the mouth of the Columbia River, tasting salt water for the last time. We no longer have a desire to eat, because our throats and stomachs begin to shrink, and food no longer seems tasty.

We see many other schools of Sockeyes and Chum and Sockeye salmon entering the Columbia river, swimming toward one of the many streams that feed into the Columbia, Snake and Salmon Rivers, some streams are far, far away. Other streams wait nearby for their returning residents.

Our redd votes to celebrate our victory over the Killer Whales before we take on the very hard task of swimming against the currents for the next three months. My siblings think of me as the hero of what they now call the Great Steven Sockeye Scare. I think of them as the real heroes, because they did not run from the giant Killer Whales when they knew they could be swallowed by the hundreds.

The redd asks Ron, our jokester to entertain us. Of course, I am his main subject to make fun of. He floats in front of the redd holding themselves in a horseshoe shape around him so everyone can hear what he says. “How do you make a Killer Whale disappear?” He answers his question: “Show him a picture of Scarside.” We laugh. “What do you get when twenty Killer Whales swim away?”

“Five hundred thousand very happy fish,” the entire redd replies, laughing at their words.

Ron then asks, “did anyone here ever see a Sockeye Salmon as ugly as Scarside?” Joining in the fun, all the Sockeye Salmon shake their heads no. “He is so ugly that every time I look at him, I lose my appetite.” The redd roars with laughter, because we all know that our stomachs no longer desire food. He continues: “the truth is that only

Scarside could have scared the bad Zuss who took one look at his great green head, his lobster-colored body and hooked jaw and said `please let me go before Your Ugliness turns me to stone. Scarside's teeth are so large and sharp that female sharks follow him wherever he goes, because they think he is one of them." Again, everyone laughs until their sides hurt, because all males have green heads and red bodies with hooked jaws and sharp teeth.

"The real truth is the Killer Whale swam away from Scarside, because he knew he had better not get between him and the females. Because Scarside would have flung him on land for blocking his view of the females." Again, Ron's words are funny because all male Sockeye Salmon now become fighting-mad when another male gets between them and the females. Ron has more to say. "Speaking of females. Have you noticed how Scarside no longer wants to lead us? He just wants to float around and make fish eyes at the females. Replacing the Great Steven Sockeye Scare is the Great Goo-Goo Eye Stare." We laugh again, because, since our bodies changed, all the males and females constantly stare at each other.

"Have you noticed how all the females now swim around Scarside and wiggle their tail fins at him. Why would they want to be around a Sockeye Salmon who takes ugly pills? These females aren't so pretty either, they are so fat that they must swallow chubby pills to stay that round. So tell me what do they see in each other?" We all roll in the water with laughter, because the male Sockeye Salmon think the females as the prettiest fish they ever saw. The females think the males very handsome in their green and red bodies.

We have some big laughs at our celebration, which ends with everyone dancing to, *You can't always get what you want. But if you try, you might get what you need*, played and sung by Kitty's rock band.



The next morning we enter the fresh water at the mouth of the Columbia River. The Harbor Seals are gone, preferring not to feed on such tough fighters as we have become. We feel the mighty river's swift current pushing against us, but our muscular bodies are strong, and we make a good distance our first day.

The fast water has lots of oxygen in it, so we all feel energetic. "You see, Button-bellies, we have different lungs than you do, because our lungs take the oxygen out of the water. And our gills push the used water out of our bodies. The higher up you Button-bellies go on land, the less oxygen there is to breathe. With Sockeye Salmon, the slower and warmer the water, the less oxygen there is for us to breathe. How strange it is that you can't breathe under water and we can't breathe out of it."

About one mile up the river, Logan and his scouts report hundreds of Stick-mammals in small boats, throwing lines with hooks into the water. We swim to a narrow part of the river where Stick-mammals occupy the banks thicker than the trees. I examine the lines and see where the Stick-mammals fastened salmon eggs to their hooks. These eggs on a hook confuse the Sockeye Salmon from the other

redds. The females think they have lost some of their eggs and pick them up in their mouths and carry them to a safe place to bury. They do this because eggs are the most valuable thing a grown up Sockeye Salmon has. Even the males believe this and help pick up the eggs. The Stick-mammals, as soon as they feel a tug on their lines, when Sockeye Salmon try to save the eggs, yank the line and hook the fish in the mouth.

We watch the hooked salmon, now very strong from their feeding in the ocean, fight the line for as long as thirty minutes. But the Sockeye Salmon's fights always end with them being pulled to shore or onto a boat by the Stick-mammals.

Willie, a white Sockeye Salmon whispers a plan to me. I laugh and immediately put his idea into action. I gather our redd together downstream of the Stick-mammals. Then all five hundred and one of us take turns jumping high out of the water. The Stick-mammals became very excited and yell at one another to throw in all their lines in our direction. Next, every Sockeye Salmon in our redd carefully grabs a line above the hook and swims to where a long log is wedged against a large rock. We snag so many hooks into the log, it looks like the world's biggest spider web. All five hundred and one of us push the hook snared log away from the rock into the current. We watch the log float downstream, then take turns jumping to see what the Stick-mammals will do.

They go nuts, jumping up and down and screaming, "I got one! I got one.! Fish on! Fish on!" They all run down the shoreline, following the log and reeling in their

lines, yelling, “I GOT A BIG ONE!” Soon, they grow red in the face, straining to pull the log toward them. They bump into each other. Lines get tangled up. The Stick-mammals scream and push at each other and then hit one another over the head with their poles, fighting for a space to pull in what is at the end of their lines. Boats ram each other trying to get close to the log snagging their lines, and angry Stick-mammals throw their fishing gear at each other. We Sockeye Salmon laugh a lot while we swim past them up stream.



We find that all the dams in which we earlier used the spillways to shoot through when we formed our giant Sockeye Salmon formation going downstream on the Columbia and Snake Rivers also have a long cement passage for salmon to swim upstream. Water flows over the steps of this passage, leading through the dam to the up-river side. The Stick-mammals built the passage so that we could leap from step to step and pass through the dam. We believe they did this to make up for all the bad things they did to fish in waters elsewhere.

We make it through all the dams to the last big one on the Snake River, the very last Stick-mammal barrier for us to get through before we enter our stream. Logan reports to me that the Stick-mammals take swimming Sockeye Salmon out of the water-filled ladder and put them into tanks, holding them for study. He informs me that sometimes the Stick-mammals release the salmon, and sometimes they never release them. Even though we guess

the dam to be twenty-five feet high, we decide not to use the ladder to get through it. Not one of us is willing to lose a sibling to the Stick-mammals for study. Our decision not to use the ladder disturbs us all, because no Sockeye Salmon has ever leaped higher than ten feet. So, we can think of no way to get over the twenty-five foot high dam.

The next day, Logan and his scouts take us to a spot where the water flows very slowly at the foot of the dam. We float in the gentle water and study the twenty-five foot high dam. John takes this time to weave a long rope out of tough grass he found near the shore. He makes a loop on the end of the rope and asks me to put the loop around my neck, because everyone thinks me to be the best jumper. The purpose of the grass rope will be to pull each member of our redd one at a time over the damn once I clear the top of it. But I doubt I can jump twenty-five feet in the air. Then, I tell myself that I will never jump twenty-five feet unless I try. Impossible or not, I decide to give the leap my best effort. I swim before the dam as all five hundred of my redd nervously watch. The water is very deep at the front of the dam. I dive until my nose touches the bottom, shoot upward and spring twelve feet in the air. Before I reenter the water I hear the Sockeye Salmon groan their disappointment. I try again. Fourteen feet. More groans of disappointment sound around me. Then I jump fifteen feet. The redd shouts, "just ten more feet, Steven Sockeye. You can do it. You must do it."

I tell myself that I have to do it. We have come too far to fail this close to our spawning grounds. I feel myself growing tired as I drift back down stream to get a longer run at the dam. I find a flat spot in the water where no

current flows. With all the desire and power I can generate, I charge the dam from the deep water and break into the air and soar to a height eight feet higher than any Sockeye Salmon ever reached. Eighteen feet. Still short. Very tired and feeling sad, I swim to the shoreline to rest under the bank until my strength returns and I can try again. The Sockeye Salmon who earlier decided they wanted to be leaders follow me. The rest of the redd rests in a deep and still pocket of the river. I know they worry about not getting past the dam and being gone in this water where the dam traps us.

Dina, who has trained herself to be one of our strongest Sockeye Salmon, coaxes me to follow her back to the face of the dam where the water flows over the top. After a few warm-up tries, she jumps fifteen feet into the air. Thrasher and I look at her with amazement. No female has ever leaped more than eight or nine feet. Her achievement is better than mine, because she is smaller and not as strong as I am, and the leap, for her proportion to it, it is a much better one. I congratulate her, but do not understand why she chooses this time to show me her leaping skill. She laughs at my puzzlement. “Remember Steven Sockeye when I told you I would knock you on your butt if you didn’t give me a chance?”

I say, “I remember.”

“This time I intend to knock you up instead of down?”

“How?”

Dina tells me her plan, and I feel a tinge of hope, even though her plan sounds impossible. Although, there is a tiny chance it might work, and as I see it, it is the only chance our redd has to get past the dam.

Dina and I wait until the redd bunches into a circle around us. I place the grass loop back around my body. I again swim to the bottom and jump a few inches over fifteen feet, instead of eighteen, into the air. Dina times her jump so that when I begin to fall back down, she will reach fifteen feet directly under me. We are to hit in mid air, and I am to flip myself off her body and leap the remaining ten feet over the dam. Dina does not time her jump just right, and when I double-flip off of her we both hit the front of the dam and slam back into the water, dazed from our collision. Dina can barely stay afloat in the water. She has a big bruise on her forehead, and we have to take her into the swift current to force oxygen into her lungs and water out of her gills. No one knows what to do, because even Thrasher can jump no more than twelve feet. We need all of Dina's fifteen feet, because I must have another five feet to clear the thickness over the top of the dam. We spend a very sad night as Will tries to nurse Dina back to full strength.

At the first light of the new day, we stare at the high dam's wall through the water. None of us move more than an occasional flick of our tails.

“Well, Scarside. Are you just going to float here or are you going to get us over the dam?” It is Dina who speaks. The redd cheers her for getting well so quick.

I look at her face, which still has a big bruise on the forehead. “Let’s go.” I leap exactly like I did before. This time we hit evenly in mid air. Dina perfectly times her jump, and when I double-flip off of her, I soar over the top of the dam and splash into the water on the other side. I feel three tugs on the rope, the signal to pull a sibling over the top. I swim against the current, only as strongly as I swim my body is too tired to pull the weight of the Sockeye Salmon over the top. I know they have put a big, strong male on the rope, believing his size will better help me to pull the rest of the redd over. But he is too heavy for me to pull over by myself. But how can I tell them to put a small Sockeye Salmon on the rope? One that I can pull over the top?

I can do little more than stare at the overhead water moving over the dam’s top, carrying with it the fallen tree limbs and leaves caught in the current. The Great Silver Snuzzle’s words come back to me: “an artist explores all possibilities until he finds the right answer.” I wonder what is left for me to do?

A broken branch hits me from behind and almost pushes me into the current as it moves toward the dam. I swim away and watch the branch disappear over the top of the dam. Then the answer to my problem comes to me. I wait until the big Sockeye Salmon tires of waiting to be pulled over. When he releases the rope, I pull it over the top. Then, I bite a large twig in two so that the bark still holds it together. I put the broken twig and a smaller unbroken twig into the loop and pull it tight around the twigs. Then I jump and with a flick of my body, flip the

twigs in the rope's loop over the top and down to my redd. Will my siblings understand my message to not put a big Sockeye Salmon on the rope's end and put a small one there? I wait until the high sun begins to move at a low angle in the western sky. The rope around my body hangs loosely. My spirits also begin to hang. So far, even John has not understood my meaning. I watch the sun start to dip behind the top of the canyon walls, knowing the redd will soon find a spot to rest through the night. The canyon swallows the sun over me, and it grows darker.

I feel a gentle tug on the rope. New hope flows through me as I know they understand. I strongly pull the grass rope against the current, swimming upstream. The rope tightens around me, and I feel it stretch as I pull a lighter Sockeye Salmon over the top. On the other end I find one of the tiny Sockeye Salmon we nursed back to health gripping the grass rope in his mouth. Together we pull another tiny fish over the top, then another one until we have enough combined Sockeye Salmon strength to pull the big ones over. One by one my siblings put the rope in their mouth, and we pull everyone over the dam until all five hundred and one of us swim freely upstream to our birthplace.

“This is what I learned Button-bellies: it is a good thing that we protected the less strong, because everyone has a place in our society. Even the smallest, weakest member can contribute to our well being—as did the fish I pulled over the dam whose small size saved our redd.”



We swim through Salmon River, which flows from very high in mountains of Idaho, and enter Sawtooth Creek, one of the many streams flowing into the Salmon River. It is now the autumn time of the year after the long hot, dry summer, and our stream is not very deep. We swim in two to four feet of water and once in awhile in pools that go as deep as eight feet. Rocks, large and small, cover the narrow streambed, making the water run fast to get around them, pushing against us, testing our strength. We leap over many waterfalls traveling to our birthplace. Compared to the twenty-five foot dam we conquered on the Snake River, this is easy for us.

We feel ourselves prepared to overcome anything blocking our way, knowing Sawtooth Creek will have its obstacles, and it does not disappoint us. Logan reports to me that many Black Bears sit on their big bear butts at the top of a large waterfall. They sit there, waiting for Sockeye Salmon to jump the waterfall and land right into their mouths. I watch the fish struggle to get up the waterfall, so intent on getting upstream they jump right into the paws of the bears who happily munch on them. The bears stuff themselves so much on our cousins that they barely can move.

All five hundred and one of our redd, who beat the Harbor Seals, the gill nets of the Stick-mammals and the Killer Whales decide we did not come this far to be stopped by a bunch of fat bears. We quickly form our gigantic

Sockeye Salmon and race to the waterfall and jump high in the air, all of us in tight formation. When the bears look up to see what comes out of the water. We all scream:

BOOOOO!

The sight and sound of such a large Sockeye Salmon scare the bears so much that they yank their fat butts from the stream and run away as fast as their funny bear legs can take them, dropping the fish they hold. We Sockeye Salmon once again have a very large laugh at the fat mammals racing into the forest.

The next morning, we reach the familiar waters of our birthplace. Our redd averages forty miles a day swimming against the swift currents of the rivers. We do this for eighty days, stopping only to rest when we exhaust ourselves. We jumped dams and waterfalls and fought off all the animals and fish who tried to eat us. Even though our victories are many, by far the best one is that we made it back home without losing one of the five hundred and one who started on our quest to the ocean and back. As I told you Button-bellies in the beginning of this story, Sockeye Salmon are simply the best.

“Button-bellies, I look forward to a big nap here”, but rest will not take place. The females busy themselves digging out nests in the stream’s gravel bottom with their

tails. They do this to deposit their eggs for the new redds, the generation that will follow us. Around me, all the males, even Will, Logan and John act tough, knocking each other around. Each one wants to bluff the other to swim away, so they can be the first to deposit their milt over the eggs. This is the Sockeye Salmon way.

The water flows cool and swallow and so clear that I easily spot the many hungry birds in the sky above waiting for us to finish spawning. They know that afterwards we will age very fast and become too weak to prevent them from taking any of us. But for now, our work still continues.

Ron appears next to me and speaks quietly. “Steven Sockeye, the females voted, and they all wait for you to span over their eggs. Because you are the strongest of the strong, the fastest of the fast .” He starts to sing the words, “. . . the bravest of the brave.”

“That's enough, Ron. I get the message.”

“They believe their children will be the best if you do your duty first.-”

“That may be more duty than I can do.--”

“Then you must be gone trying.”

“Very funny. I could not have gotten everyone over the dam without the runt salmon. Will healed those runts. John made the sharpen stones to cut us free from the gill nets. You, Ron, spoke the first ‘Scarside’ that scared Zuss. Logan discovered and warned us of all the dangers awaiting

us. Dina saved us at the dam by jumping fifteen feet high. Ellen saved us by snooping on the Harbor Seals, discovering their weakness. Thrasher gave us confidence with his support of the redd. The white Sockeye Salmon's plan scared the bears so we could swim past them. I think it is a bad idea to not pass on those qualities to the next generation. Every Sockeye Salmon's qualities should have a chance to live on. So I think we all should be gone trying."

Around us, I see the male Sockeyes bend their hooked jaws into a big grin after hearing my decision. I continue speaking: "I know it is the male way to scare others away for the chance to fertilize the eggs. And it is the female's way to choose the strongest male and reject the weaker ones. I also know that Dina has already chosen Thrasher, Ellen has chosen John. And some of the females have chosen other males. But for the rest of us males, let us share this last opportunity."

"It's milt madness, mighty men. Move!" I shout my last instruction.

A loud cheer goes up from the males. The females laugh, their happy faces signaling their agreement.

So our lives end as they began. By sharing. By shattering the conventional and out of its pieces forging a better way through life.

Most of my redd are gone, worn out by the struggle to get here. They all lived to be very old Sockeye Salmon. Now, their bodies will fertilize the ground and feed the

living. I think back to the time I played Aquasoc as a smolt. I think of how young and good looking I felt myself to be. I think about how much I learned from life. I think of silly, skinny Jennifer who pestered me and about the eagle who forever changed my life when she grabbed me. I think of the Great Silver Snuzzle, who only thought of himself and how he could win fame. Now as I prepare myself to be gone, I think I have no regrets about my life. And I think gone is just the final part of living. I think no one should be sad.

END

