

Kelly Scott

Community of Residence: Kwanlin, Whitehorse YT

In July of 2023 I had the great joy of going on a trip to Alaska's interior on the Education Exchange with the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee (YSSC) and Yukon River Drainage and Fisheries Association (YRDFA). It was a very impactful trip for me, solidifying what I already had heard about the declining salmon population while also teaching me new aspects of the crisis I had yet to consider.

These poems were written with the idea of highlighting the concern for the decline of Chinook salmon, facing extinction in the years to come. The outlook is not a positive one and although these poems have an undertow of sadness, I hope they also inspire folks to learn more about the interconnections of all living organisms and about the Indigenous communities along the Yukon River, Porcupine River and Alsek River drainages. It is up to us to educate ourselves on the current state of salmon.

Will there be salmon in 30 years?



My mouth waters and my heart aches

My mouth waters and my heart aches,
For the lost subsistence lifestyle.
When fish wheels turned, filling crates,
And fish camps bloomed every mile.

When fish wheels turned, filling crates,
We ate salmon morning, noon and night.
Elders knew we were facing a doomed fate,
As the numbers dropped to new heights.

We ate salmon morning, noon and night,
Til the salmon were no more.
The birds no longer took flight,
And the rising waters eroded the shore.

Til the salmon were no more,
We took only what we needed and were happy.
Now we see our village people feeling poor,
Their connection with the water is lacking.

Fish camps bloomed every mile,
Along the Yukon in the states.
We have lost our subsistence lifestyle,
My mouth waters and my heart aches.

July 2023

Written above Russian Mission (flying to Anchorage at end of trip)

Inspiration from Alexandra Kozevnikoff of Russian Mission, the keystone species: salmon, and Pantomime Poetry.

Patience

As we stand ashore and meet the river,
A silent agreement takes shape.
In the form of a fish,
We will find purpose.

With gas, gear and goodies,
Together we get into the boat.
On the murky water, upriver,
We let hope warm our hearts.

With gloved hands and patience as my guide,
I toss the net to make a catch.
Piggy-backing a promise of love and respect,
I grip the rope tied to our future.

As the net touches the water once more,
It bounces along the riverbed.
You must feel it with your body
And pull the rope when it's time.

Many hours pass us by,
Few birds seen overhead.
A quiet patience consumes us;
The new way of taking stock.

July 2023 - February 2024
Written in Kwanlin (Whitehorse)

Inspiration from: Russian Mission, the keystone species: salmon, and Free Write Fridays with Ivan Coyote.

One River, One Voice

Even the bank has changed;
Sediment drifting, silt settling.
Downriver and upriver looking
For longterm solutions.

Where are the salmon?

The shutdown of a life cycle
Means the shutdown of a lifestyle.
Nändhät, stand up for subsistence,
No more want and waste.

Where are the salmon?

We see a shift on the shoreline:
A non-native beach that never dries.
The river isn't ours,
We're not the boss of the river or land.

Where are the salmon?

We're all people and need to eat,
Yet our food is swept off our tables.
Change takes power and unity,
One river, one voice.

Where are the salmon?

July 2023-February 2024
Written in Kwanlin (Whitehorse)

Nändhät – stand up in Southern Tutchone, Ta'an Man Dialect
Yukon Native Language Centre

Inspiration from Basil Larson of Russian Mission, Serena Fitka of St Mary's, the keystone species: salmon, and Free Write Fridays with Ivan Coyote.