

GOING UPSTREAM: NEZ PERCE STORIES

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[BRING UP BIG DRUM AND SINGING THAT FADES INTO RIVER SOUND]

BRIAN BULL: Coyote, he was going upstream.

Coyote is always going upstream. He was going along and he noticed the salmon were having some difficulty there. So he says. I'll build a fish ladder so that the salmon can go up river and feed my people.

[BRING UP #1 RIVER SOUND AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]

INTRO: FOR THREE DECADES, THE IDAHO MYTHWEAVER HAS BROUGHT NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMMING TO KPBX, SO IT SEEMS FITTING THAT WE PAY TRIBUTE ONCE MORE TO THE MANY VOICES OF TRIBAL ELDERS IN THE NEZ PERCE STORIES THAT FIRST CAPTIVATED US BY LISTENING TO THEM AGAIN ON THE BOOKSHELF.

WE BEGIN WITH PARTS OF OUR VERY FIRST PROGRAM FROM 1991 CALLED KEEPERS OF THE EARTH. BRIAN BULL IS A NEZ PERCE STORYTELLER WHO TODAY IS AN AWARD WINNING PUBLIC RADIO REPORTER ON KLCC IN EUGENE, OREGON.

BRIAN BULL: I think legends form the backbone of the Nez Perce Tribe. Stories have a way of reaching people. Everyone that I've met likes a story. I think it's important that it's saved and preserved. And it's also I think the one most easily preserved aspects of the tribe's heritage because dancing and drumming takes years of developing the mind and the body and the right steps. Beadwork, corn

husk weaving and things, take a delicate hand and a delicate eye and years of perfection. But if you put your mind to it and remember the basic elements, you can tell a pretty good story.

JANE: THE NIMI'UPUU, OR NEZ PERCE PEOPLE, EXPLORED LIFE'S INTERRELATIONSHIPS WITH NATURE AND EACH OTHER THROUGH THE STORIES OF THEIR LEGENDARY TEACHER, CREATOR AND TRICKSTER CHARACTER — COYOTE. SILAS WHITMAN, TRIBAL FISHERIES MANAGER THOSE MANY YEARS AGO, IS STILL A LEADING ADVOCATE FOR SALMON RESTORATION.

SI WHITMAN: Coyote being the all encompassing trickster that he was and the being that initiated all life lessons. The reason that he was always dealing with the salmon was because of the importance it played in the diet. Coyote made sure that he taught you that you would never want for meat, never want for food because they would always be replaced because of the activity that you had done when you were on this living planet; and that you evoke the same type of reasoning and the compassion for replacing what you took.

[BRING UP #2 RIVER SOUND AS SEGUE AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]

SI WHITMAN: Tales of Coyote are not just fairy tales, or nursery rhymes. They are very hard life lessons, ones that serve as examples to you. Coyote teaches you that each day is something that you have been given. Whatever you do in that day, tomorrow will be history, and that you dare not repeat that. You then make it better or you can make it worse. No in-betweens.

JANE: FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, EACH RUN OF COLUMBIA RIVER SALMON MIRRORED THE CHANGES IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT. SUMMER TO WINTER TO SUMMER AGAIN ENSURING THE SURVIVAL OF THE NEZ PERCE PEOPLE. BUT WITH THE PRESSURES OF CIVILIZATION, SALMON RUNS DIMINISHED OVER TIME, AND BECAME THREATENED, ENDANGERED OR EXTINCT. WITHOUT ADEQUATE FISH IN THEIR DIET, THE PEOPLE'S HEALTH SUFFERED.

SI WHITMAN: As a child I remember seeing countless hundreds of fish going by on their way to their annual spawning. Never as a child never realizing that in my wonderment of survival of that fish that would one day come to an end. That's when I get that sense of sadness and then it's replaced with a welling rush of anger and then that too then, I go full circle and I feel badly because the very ignorance that people have about my people, my way of life, and those things that I hold dear to me. Those remaining fish that struggle through the dams, that struggle through the lack of flow, that struggle through the degraded, denuded habitat. We look at that as a cancer creeping into the family and within the circle of our families being the wing creatures, the flying creatures, those that crawl, and those that swim. We have to care for one another and within the matter of survival again we cannot continue with this. This way, this effort has come at the expense of mining and logging, and irrigation, agriculture and power consumption.

[BRING UP RIVER SOUND AS SEGUE AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]

Why we need things like water quality, water quantity flows in order to allow those fish to migrate to the ocean, and then flows to enhance a return, adequate passage. Whatever man in this instance —meaning all of us— have done to to circumvent the system, we must somehow substitute something that allows us to allow life to go on in its cycle. We would like to do it all if possible; but, of course we have states around us, and other Indian tribes that have a stake in this also. What we would like to be able to do is to ensure that we have the ability to be at the forefront of pursuing good management. And it's a collaborative effort. Life is a circle and that's basically what we seek to do is to reinstate those circles of life somehow. If technology allows us to put in substitutions for what Mother Nature created naturally, then we must do that we must do that in order to survive.

JANE: THE LOSS OF FISH RUNS AND THE RESULTING CULTURAL CHANGES WERE SIGNIFICANT. IN 1991, JAMIE PINKHAM WAS FOREST RESOURCE MANAGER FOR THE NEZ PERCE TRIBE. HE EVENTUALLY MOVED ON TO BECOME THE DIRECTOR OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER INTERTRIBAL FISH COMMISSION, AND TODAY SERVES IN THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION WITH THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS.

JAIME PINKHAM: “We respected the Mother Earth because it provided for us and we became dependent upon it. We interacted with it on a day to day basis for food for shelter, and for worship. So that when one of those

elements in the environment changes all of Indian life can change and a good example is the salmon. When we look at the fishing at Celilo Falls, when they put the dam in and we lost the Falls, one of the stories that was told to me by a friend that expressed it in a traditional view, is that when you change the land or you change the fish then you change the people. And that certainly is what had happened at Celilo Falls. Because we had fished there since time immemorial and relied upon it for subsistence.

But when that fisheries resource was gone, what did the Indian people have to turn to next? So you know some people had to find a different way of life to make a living. Then we look at the interrelationship and how that connects with maybe social problems, with unemployment, with loss of spirituality. And so the whole thing is interconnected. So when you change one element of the environment, we've got to look at the impact it has on the Indian people. For us to be strong, to maintain our culture, we've got to make sure that we are able to preserve and maintain all important elements in the environment, because through each animal there is a spiritual power that that animal provides us with, or for each plant, it provides us with a food source or with medicine. So we've got to make sure that we keep all those things in the circle. Try not to change them so that our life can go on as Indian people in a traditional way.

The stories carry the message of the Indian people. It's one way that we're going to use to take tradition to tomorrow to make sure that our traditions, our beliefs as Indian people thrive, and what better way to do it than using the traditional stories?

[BRING UP RICK'S SINGING AND FADE UNDER]

JANE: BACK IN 1996, THE LATE RICK ELLENWOOD TOLD ME STORIES AND SHARED HIS MEMORIES OF FISHING AT CELILO FALLS.

FRITZ: You used to fish down at Celilo? I was just by there the other week. What about that place? What do you remember?

RICK ELLENWOOD: When I was a young boy, I was young then when I went down to Celilo. You could see salmon hanging from all those...well, shacks is what they were. But they were happy people. Because they were catching salmon to take home; food for the winter. This was in the fall time, and they dried it, or else they salted it. Or they took it home fresh and put it in the freezers. That's what we used to do. We'd fish and fish, and we had a trailer and we had a car and we'd load all that fish on there. But the thing that I remember most was that each tribe had their own island, and it was established, recognized rights that they had on each area that they fished. Like they would say, 'There's Johnny Woods' fishing place.' My grandfather. Everybody recognized it. You didn't have to have papers. You didn't have to have any title rights or anything like that. You had your rights by establishment. In some cases, where the person would die, it would go to his son or go to his family.

At our place you had to go across on these big box-type things that we rode on, on a cable that ran across (the river). And when you went over the falls, oh, boy! I have to tell you it was an exciting experience! It had you on

edge. I always remember that. And when you go over there and they'd load the fish on these big boxes, and big fish too, these are king salmon. They're huge. You'd load them all on that box and you come back and that thing would sway left to right, left to right, and you're coming across. You bring them over and you put them in sacks. We had them loaded in sacks and wet down, and you'd take them up and the women would clean them out and everything else and get them ready. Some went to the cannery and some went for your own use like I was talking about.

[BRING UP RIVER #1 SOUND AS SEGUE AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]

Grandpa had told me to go ahead and take this one fish home, and I was carrying it on my back and it was pretty heavy. I was walking uphill, and these people from all over were watching us fishing and everything that was going on, and they stopped me and they said, 'young man, can you sell this fish to us?' Of course, by that time I hadn't had my pop, I hadn't any ice cream or anything for a long time, so they said they'd give me \$5 which was a lot of money to me. And so I sold it for \$5 and went up to the store and I had a bottle of pop, and an ice cream cone, and also ate a sandwich, and got some candy bars. And shared it with my buddies that was with me. Of course, I played the rest of the afternoon, I never did go back to fish. We went along the river there and we played.

When I got home that evening, my grandmother was there and I seen that look on her face, like oh-oh. Grampa said, 'I want to talk to you. What did

you do with that fish that I sent you home with to cook?’ Well, I said I had sold it. I said I got a little bit of money left, I tried to give him that money, but he didn’t want the money. He said, ‘You know that food was supposed to be for our supper tonight, and we’re suppose to eat it tonight and all share in it together. That food is more important than money. Money does not make you feel full inside. Money will buy things, but money is not that valuable, but food is. That salmon gave its life to us, for us to share.’ Needless to say I got a good lesson in the back room. But it was expected to get a whipping for something like that. Because you were taught. After that, I never did do it again. No matter what. Because then I learned what it was for, why that salmon was so important. So I tell it to the kids nowadays. Indian food, you don’t throw it away, you just eat what you can, and can’t eat; don’t take more than you need.

FRITZ: Do you remember what it was like when they flooded Celilo? Did you go down there after that?

RICK ELLENWOOD: Yeah, it was very disappointing when the dam inundated Celilo Falls. Just like losing something really valuable and great. Like losing a close friend. You kinda felt really downtrodden, and just lost. Now what are we going to do? It wasn’t just a place to catch fish, it was a gathering of many people and we had a lot of friends and we’d visit. We had dances down there and we had feasts, dances, get-togethers — all these tribes and it was fun. And that was gone. And the fish was gone. Sure they give us all kinds of money— you’re going to get several million dollars,

and it was doled out. And I still don't think that we ever got paid enough to even take away the heartbreak and the fish and the things that we are now fighting over. It's never has compensated that void in my life. It's still empty. And that's the way I still feel about it. Money has never done me justice. It's gone. Salmon would still be here as far as that goes. But now we're destroying that, too. So I just feel that Celilo was something that we all lost. All the Native Americans in the Northwest. We lost something all together. A close friend.

[BRING UP RIVER #1 SOUND AS SEGUE AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]

JEANETTE: Hello, my name is Jeanette Weaskus and I am an enrolled member of the Nez Perce Tribe, or Nimi'ipuu. I used to work for the tribal radio station, KIYE and my show was called "Titwaatit Time" which means "Story Time."

My contribution is to share a story that fascinates many of the tribal elders that I have known over the decades and continues to be their favorite. This story is called, Coyote Breaks the Fish Dam and is also known as, How Coyote Freed the Salmon.

First, I will talk a little about what Coyote means to the Nez Perce people. He is one of the Creator's eldest children and was put on the earth to help human beings who are the Creator's youngest children. This relationship mirrors the tribal kinship way of how the elder siblings teach and help their younger siblings. Coyote continues to be a good big brother to us through

the pantheon of Nez Perce Tales where he taught everything good and bad that a person would encounter in everyday village life. Coyote has also made the world safe for human beings by ridding the land of dangerous monsters, and kept people alive by creating all kinds of foods to eat. As the eldest of Creator's children, Coyote was taught by the Great Maker of us All and passes this knowledge down so that humans can live their best life. And now we will take a look at what teachings from Coyote are held dear by the most knowledgeable of tribal elders.

Now we will hear the late Nez Perce elder, Mari Watters, tell the story of 'How Coyote Broke the Fish Dam':

MARI WATTERS: Once Coyote was walking along on a hot day. He was going upriver and he saw the river and said, 'Oh let me cool myself in the water.' And he swam down the swift river. After a while he came ashore and mosquitos just swarmed all over him. So he named the place by saying, 'This will be Mosquito Place.' He swam down the river a little further and then he got out again. 'Ah, this is a nice sunny slope, they will call this place Hiila'qat Paat Kiine Ka, 'The Sunny Slope.' He kept a little farther until he came to a waterfall near where the Wasco people lived. Five maidens had dwelt there from ancient times. This was the place where the great dam kept the fish from passing up the stream. Then suddenly he saw a maiden. Quickly, he went back upstream away and said, 'Let me look like a little baby floating down the river on a raft in a Flathead type baby board, all laced up.' And so it became. As Coyote was drifting down he cried, 'Wah-Awaa-Awaa.' And the maidens hearing this quickly swam over thinking that a baby might be drowning. The eldest

maiden caught it first and she said, 'Oh what a cute baby!' But the youngest maiden said, 'This is no baby, that is Coyote.' And the others answered, 'Stop saying that, you will hurt the baby's feelings.' The Coyote put up his bottom lip as if he were about to cry and then the maidens took the baby home and cared for it and fed it and he grew very fast. And when he was crawling around one day, he spilled some water on purpose. 'Oh mother,' he said, 'Will you get me some more water?' And the youngest sister said, 'Why don't you make him go and get it himself? The river is nearby' So the maidens told Coyote to get the water himself.

He began to crawl toward the river, but when he got out of sight, he jumped up and began to run. The oldest sister turned around and said, 'He is out of sight already, he certainly can move fast!' 'That is because he is Coyote!' the youngest said.

When Coyote reached the river, he swam to the fish dam and tore it down; pulling out the stones so that all the water rushed free. Then he crawled up on the rocks and shouted gleefully, 'Mothers, your fish dam is just broken down!' The sisters ran down and saw that it was true. The youngest maiden just said, 'I told you he was Coyote.'

Coyote said, 'You have kept all the people from having salmon for such a long time by keeping them from going upstream. Now the people will be happy because they will get salmon. Now salmon will go straight upriver and spawn.' This is how Celilo, Oregon came to be. Where the Wasco people are today because Coyote tore down the fish dam.

JEANETTE: Now you know how Coyote went to a great deal of trouble to break down the fish dam long ago and create Celilo Falls so that all the people and animals could have salmon. In 1957, the Army Corps of Engineers together with Bonneville Power Administration rebuilt what Coyote tore down with the construction of The Dalles Dam. On that day in March, thousands of people from all the tribes who fished there gathered to watch as Celilo Falls went underwater. What does Coyote think of these new 5 sisters who put up a dam so they could sell electricity to all the people? He may say something like, “If you are starving, you can’t eat electricity, but you can eat the salmon I gave to everyone.

JANE: THE FUTURE FOR THE SALMON NATION OF THE NORTHWEST LIES IN THE HEALTH OF THE OCEAN, THE COLUMBIA RIVER, AND ALL ITS TRIBUTARIES. IT ALL DEPENDS ON US. NEZ PERCE ELDER AND FISHERIES EXPERT, SILAS WHITMAN.

SI WHITMAN: The change that is foretold, that will be coming, will then signal that there'll be a new life after the end of an old. And that once again we will be able to see rivers full of flowing with fish, compassion once again that will rule people's lives. And when I look at these things and they give me pause to think and listen to the water, watch the water, listen to the wind, listen to the call of the animals, what they're saying. It's a matter of trying to retain that within this rush of activity and paper that pervades our very essence today.

*[BRING UP THE DRUMMING AND SINGING AND FADE UNDER UNTIL
END OF MY FIRST PARAGRAPH “...Began with a story.” AND OUT]*

JANE: NEZ PERCE LEADER, CHIEF JOSEPH, ONCE SAID ‘THE EARTH AND MYSELF ARE OF ONE MIND.’ THAT ONENESS BEGAN WITH A STORY.

THIS EPISODE OF THE BOOKSHELF WAS PRODUCED BY ME, JANE FRITZ, AND ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, JUSTIN LANTRIP, FOR THE IDAHO MYTHWEAVER. SPECIAL THANKS TO STORYTELLER AND NEZ PERCE PRODUCER JEANETTE WEASKUS AND TO OUR MANY SUPPORTERS.

[BRING UP RIVER #1 SOUND AS SEGUE AND FADE UNDER AND OUT]

LIKE COYOTE, WE WILL CONTINUE THIS STORY BY GOING UPSTREAM, ALL THE WAY INTO THE NEZ PERCE HOMELAND IN THE WALLOWAS OF NORTHEAST OREGON. TO THE MANY RIVERS AND SPAWNING GROUNDS OF OCEAN GOING SALMON. IN OUR UPCOMING DOCUMENTARY CALLED “PEOPLE OF THE SALMON,” WE’LL CONTINUE OUR EXPLORATION OF NEZ PERCE CULTURE AND HISTORY, AS WELL AS THE NEZ PERCE FISHERIES SALMON RESTORATION EFFORTS, ESPECIALLY COHO AND CHINOOK SALMON, AND THE HOPEFUL RETURN OF SOCKEYE SALMON INTO WALLOWA LAKE.

THIS TWO-PART PROGRAM WILL BE PODCASTED ON OUR WEBSITE, MYTHWEAVER.ORG, WHERE YOU CAN HEAR MORE STORIES ABOUT THE NEZ PERCE. THANKS FOR LISTENING.