

September 04

Sometimes vacation yields vocation.

Our summer travels took us first to the Okanagan where the memories and images of last summer's fire still smoldered in the stories we shared with residents. Our path continued to the great waters of the Pacific and the trails through the ancient rain forests of the west coast of Vancouver Island. Returning, we lingered in the Rocky Mountains and heard 'The Arrogant Worms' sing of Canada as rocks and trees and water.



Indeed we are a land of rocks and trees and water, a people who make our home with these dear and endangered ones. The real danger faced by our forests isn't fire but deforestation. It is frightening to witness how much of western Canada's forest has been consumed in my lifetime by our insatiable appetite for lumber and paper. It is devastating to witness the declining health of our oceans and the rate at which sources of fresh water are disappearing. And rocks are torn daily from their home in the hills to make room for bigger and better houses.

Traveling homeward, we watched the salmon on their thousand-mile journey from the Pacific through the waters of the Fraser River to spawn in the riverbeds of their birth. I was moved by their tenacity to climb ladders, struggle over stones and jump up waterfalls to do what they were born to do. As I watched their fierce determination, I remembered these words of Mary Oliver:

The Turtle

breaks from the blue-black
 skin of the water, dragging her shell
with its mossy scutes
across the shallows and through the rushes
and over the mudflats, to the uprise,
to the yellow sand,
 to dig with her ungainly feet
a nest, and hunker there spewing
her white eggs down
into the darkness, and you think
 of her patience, her fortitude,
 her determination to complete
what she was born to do
and then you realize a greater thing
she doesn't consider
what she was born to do.
She's only filled
with an old blind wish.
It isn't even hers but came to her
in the rain or the soft wind,
which is a gate through which her life keeps walking.

She can't see
herself apart from the rest of the world
or the world apart from what she must do
every spring.

Crawling up the high hill,
luminous under the sand that has packed against her skin.
she doesn't dream
she knows
she is part of the pond she lives in
the tall trees are her children,
the birds that swim above her
are tied to her by an unbreakable string.

Vacation makes the 'unbreakable string' a little more visible to me. Living in closer communion with rocks, trees and water, I am drawn again to the high calling of our common humanity ... to the vocation of earthling. In a much different world, the Genesis call was for 'caretakers'. Our market-driven world of emissions, pesticides and clear cutting has ended the era for 'caretakers'. The time has come for fierce warriors to 'till and keep' the earth as the garden of God's dream. We have but a little time to make a world of difference. I pray that we may have the courage of our calling ... to be the earth creature that tills tenderly and keeps the string from breaking.

Yours On the Shared Journey
Nancy Steeves

