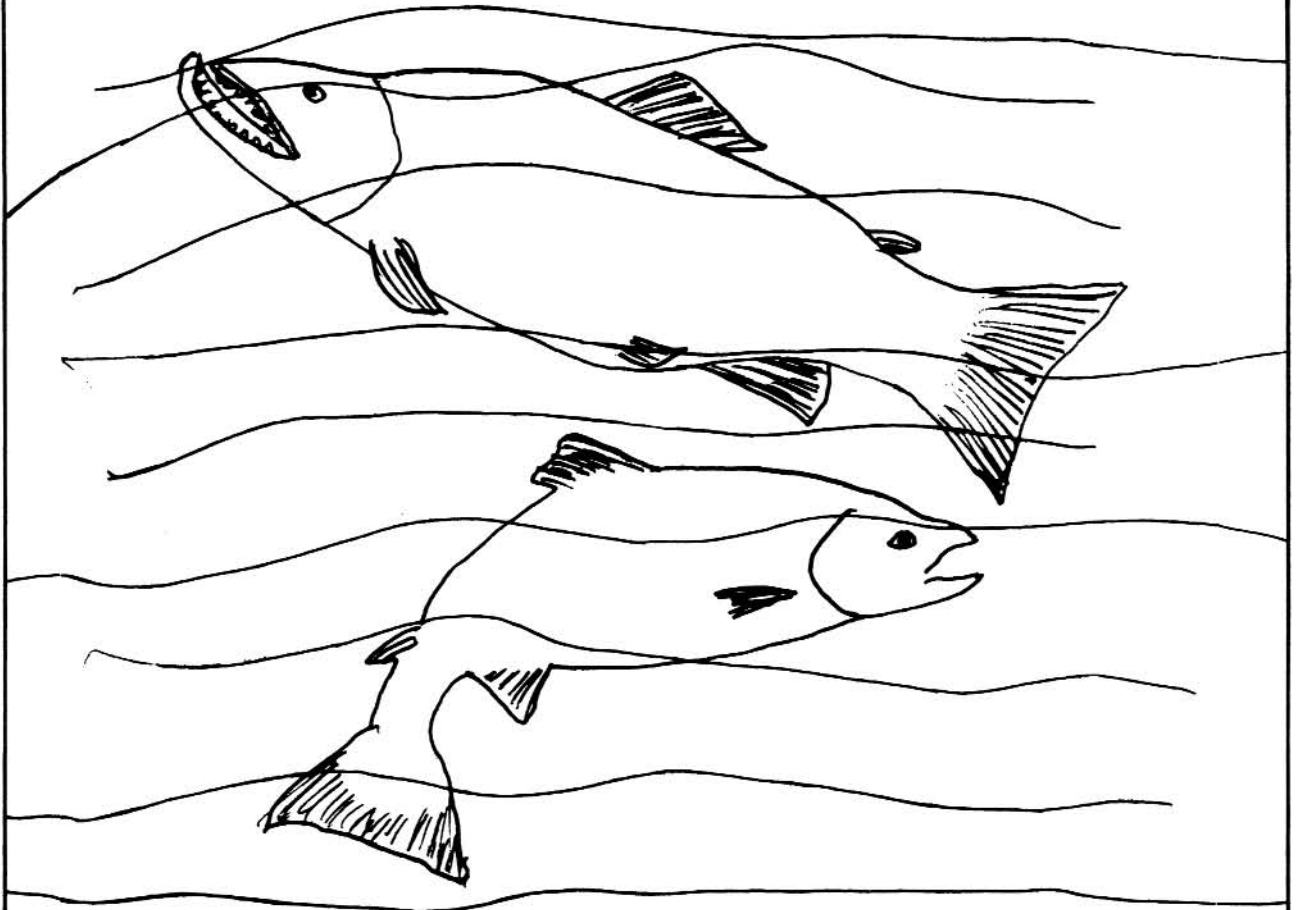


# IN THE LAND OF THE SALMON

(Skokomish)



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# IN THE LAND OF THE SALMON

(Skokomish)

When salmon are old and through spawning, they return to where they came. This is what the old people believe.

A young man who possessed great (Tamanawis) power could do many supernatural things. He wished to find out where the salmon went after they spawned their eggs. One spring while he was watching the salmon, he spied a very large, old and worn-out salmon. He tied a piece of cedar bark around the salmon's tail. He went home and waited. After awhile he went back to see the old salmon. The salmon was gone.

Many months passed quickly. Spring came again and the young salmon returned to the rivers of their birth. Spring dwindled away as summer arrived. The fish were sighted in the inland bays and harbors. There was a strong and mysterious urge calling them to return to the rivers of their ancestors. They gathered around the mouth of the river. This was where the water changed from fresh water to salt water with the movement of the tides.

The salmon were now going back to their spawning grounds. The young man rushed to the river to see if the big salmon had returned. Sure enough, there he was, all new and shining with the same cedar bark tied around his tail. The young man told the people not to touch the big salmon with the cedar bark around its tail. "I put that bark on his tail to see if he would come back."

Everyone went to look at the spawning salmon. The salmon was old and all worn out. As the young man watched the salmon, the salmon spoke, "We are going to take you to our home."

Time passed and the people noticed that the young man had disappeared. They said to themselves that the salmon had taken him away.

It was Dog Salmon who took the man to the salmon country.

The young man's spirit stayed home, although the people could not see it. He had turned into a salmon for the long journey to the salmon world. When the salmon are in their own country, they look just like people. In our country they look like salmon. In the salmon country the young man saw that salmon had homes much like his own.

The Dog Salmon called all the salmon people to come and look at the man he had brought to their country. He called Humpback, Silver, King and all the other salmon. Steelhead said, "I know him. He kills me and eats me." King salmon and all the other fish who swam up the Skokomish River knew him.

Finally, it was time once again to return to the river. The fish told him, "You must eat and grow strong in body for the return journey home. Only the strong

among us survive the journey.” The young man began his return journey with the rest of the salmon. Soon they saw people along the shore. The longhouses were sending up smoke. As they swam past a village, the Dog Salmon said, “That is your village.”

The young man’s spirit and body were reunited and he was no longer a salmon. He removed the cedar bark from Dog Salmon’s tail. All the people gathered to see the missing man. He told the people, “You can’t kill a salmon. No matter if you kill and eat him, his spirit goes back to his world. Salmon are people. If you kill a crooked jaw salmon, you must save his bones, for he is the chief. You must carry his bones to the water and throw them in so that his spirit can return to salmon country.”

He told the people that the salmon say, “Be careful with us. Don’t butcher us on the ground. Lay us on a mat of cattails or ferns.” He told the people to watch for the big salmon. When the big salmon comes back to the river, thank him. When the women butcher salmon, thank them.

Every year the fish return to the river and the people thank them.