

A moment

This group of children is very young, certainly no more than 4 or 5 years old. And they are also infectiously enthusiastic, as they have shown throughout their October morning field trip along Kanaka Creek. Despite having taught many thousands of students of all ages over the years, I am nevertheless amazed yet again at this particular age group's insatiable curiosity about nature. They have a connection with and an awareness of the ground, the leaves, and everything else along the stream and in the adjacent forest. I find myself thinking that we could learn a thing or two from them.

"Why isn't this one moving?" I am snapped out of my reverie by the little girl's question, and I quickly see that she is pointing at a dead female chum salmon. She moves a little closer and gasps. "It's dead?" Her bottom lip is trembling, and as her classmates come closer, I am reminded that at this age, emotion is as contagious as the common cold. Suddenly my years of experience mean nothing. I am accountable to this group right here, right now. Fortunately, something occurs to me.

"Do you remember the story," I tell them, "that we told you when we visited your class?" Several heads nod. "What happened to the Mommy salmon at the end?" "She died," replies one of the children, and then one of the others says, "I remember too; her life went back in the creek." "Yeah!" pipes up a third. "Her eggs are in there!" By this time, having avoided an emotional epidemic, I have hit something possibly resembling a stride. I remind the children that the Mommy salmon came home to have her babies, but she also came home to help make sure that the animals in the forest didn't go hungry. Her journey, I explained, wasn't over. "So what if, we give her a gentle push into the current, and watch her drift away? Can you think of where she might go, and what animals will be happy?" Heads nod in unison.

As we watch the spent salmon float away, I can hear the voices beside and behind me. "Goodbye salmon; we'll miss you." "Your babies will be beautiful, just like you." I catch a glimpse of one solitary tear on a young face, and I turn to look out across the creek; perhaps if I stare at the sword fern on the far bank long enough I may just keep my composure. I find myself thinking that the stream and the nature all around it has rarely seemed more beautiful.



- Ross Davies