

WHEN WE WERE SALMON

Princess Daazhrai Johnson

Alaska...

Yukon, Copper, Kuskokwim
Nushagak, Susistna, Kenai,
Tanana, Slana

Oceans and rivers
Once teaming with life

Salmon spirits
Tails thrash in anguish
At the sight of
Bottom trawlers
Scraping against ocean beds
Placer mines along rivers
Oil development...
Water no longer suitable
To drink, to spawn
Year after year
What is this?

*What is this we witness?
Our own kind
Tossed back lifeless and unused
This is not the agreement
We made*

Human and Salmon

Our origin story
Starts with a shared language
An understanding
How we treat each other
Respect

Now we both mourn

As fish wheels turn
And turn
Empty baskets
Empty nets

Mark the sign
Of imbalance, disregard
Human and salmon
Caught up in a current of
Greed and ignorance
It is much more than nets
That need mending

Our Mother Earth warms
And so do these waters
We inhabit

Can't you see
We need each other
Salmon and Human

This is our shared home

Let us make ceremony
Let us sing back LIFE
Let us dream together
Let us honor what is left
And make prayers
To restore our relationship
So we might continue
To swim together

So that we might see once again
Full nets and busy fish camps
This is the way it used to be
This is the way it could be again

We use our voice
An expression of our love
For one another
Human and Salmon
Where water greets land

In the spirit of Katie John
The People sing
We will protect

Our way of life
Our way of life
Our way of life