





THE SCENT OF SPRING

Pat Regan

It is a fragrance I cannot describe—crystal clear in my memory but evasive when descriptive words are called for. I catch it on the soft breeze of a February evening. It is neither sweet nor pungent; rather it is slightly warm as it reaches my nostrils. Floating over the ground in the darkness of winter, it is a scent of spring, a promise whispered just loud enough for those willing to stand with faces upturned, still and quiet, on a hillside above this river valley. It will soon be accompanied and even obscured by the exuberant perfume of new life in the forest.

When I was young my family owned property along a river near a town called Granite Falls in northwestern Washington. Summer visits were romantic days of drifting down river on inner tubes followed by a nighttime of brainstorming cabin-design ideas beside the campfire. The banks of the south fork of the Stillaguamish River, the “Stilly” as locals call it, are shaded by massive alders and maples. On a warm summer day they release a resinous and slightly sweet fragrance that is an unmistakable river smell locked deeply in my memory. We shared *our* property with garter snakes and great blue herons, salmon and caddis flies, black-tailed deer and porcupine. It was a place of abundance. We gathered blackberries, salmon berries, and huckleberries by the handful as we approached our private beach and camp-site. To me it was a paradise. What I learned to love there permanently affected the direction of my life.

Life-changes and challenges ended this particular relationship when I was still in junior high school, and paradise was quietly sold to offset growing debts. To this day when I smell alder leaves I am transported back to a time and place where life seemed simple and focused and elemental. That river left

Storm Clouds, Los Laureles Grade

Oil on board, 9 x 12 in.

April 4, 2007, 3:30–5:30 p.m.