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Homecoming

Ron Beard

University of Maine, Emeritus Professor of Extension

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Homecoming

The osprey knows.
Sitting ready in the snag of a pine,
waiting for the return of the herring
from far out to sea, waiting for their blue backs
to sparkle and splash
in the mouth of the stream, pushing
up and through the tumbling standing wave of fresh
mixing with salt, up and over the ledge in fast current
driving through to the first pool.

The osprey knows the herring must return to the same stream
they left as fingerlings. Before
the compass, before we scratched
ink on vellum, the herring used what--
whiff of elements, tang of particles, magnetic pull,
magic-- to call them home?

Not just the river herring,
salmon, too, perform some alchemy,
to return to their spawning river,
generations fighting past harbor seals,
past the nets of fishermen, up stream
to lay eggs, release milky sperm.

I pass under osprey-eyed guards, beyond the jaws
of sniffer dogs, poked and padded, x-rayed,
jammed in too-small seats,
a long night of flight, blinking
in morning light before the journey north,
something calling
from the granite past of these heathered hills,
some scent from wind-twisted pine
marking the landscape of my familiars.