

The Song of the Sockeye

words by Ross Cumbers

music by P.J. Thomas © 1962

One more fishing song - this one from Phil Thomas' excellent collection, Songs of the Pacific Northwest (see also Far From Home). The words were written about 1940 by a gillnetter, Ross Cumbers. Nick Guthrie discovered the words on a glass-covered noticeboard at a deserted cannery around 1960. The tune was written by Phil. Thanks to Vancouver folksinger Dianne Campbell, who sings this song so beautifully, for introducing me to it.

Musical notation for the song, featuring three staves of music in 4/4 time. The melody is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. Chord symbols (Dm, F, C, Am) are placed above the notes. The lyrics are: "Oh, hark to the song of the sock-eye Like a si-ren's call of old; When it gets in your blood you can't shake it; It's the same as the fe-ver for gold."

There's a hole in the B.C. coastline, River's Inlet's the place I mean;
And it's there you will find the old timer, and also the fellow who's green.

Oh, the boats head for there like the sockeye, and some are a joy to the eye,
While others are simply abortions, and ought to be left high and dry.

Now they go to the different canneries, and before they can make one haul,
It's three hundred bucks for net, grub and gas, which they hope to pay off
before fall.

Then it's off to the head of the inlet, at six o'clock, Sunday night,
But when morning comes and you've got about three, the prospects don't look
very bright.

Now, of course, there is always an alibi, to account for a very poor run,
Oh, the weather is wrong, the moon's not full, or the big tides will help
the fish come.

Some of us think of the future, while others have things to forget,
But most of us sit here and think of a school of sockeye hitting the net

And when the season is over, and you figure out what you have made,
You were better off working for wages, no matter how low you were paid.

For the comforts of home are worth something, so take it from me, my fri
Oh, frying-pan grub, and no head room, will ruin your health in the end.

Repeat verse 1

