

THE ART OF LEGACY

EVERY AUTUMN, EXTRAORDINARY CREATURES ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING MIRACULOUS.

In the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, salmon stop eating, turn toward shore, and—pulled by an ancient call—return to the rivers where they were born years earlier. Those same crisp days, gardeners across the north press flower bulbs into the cooling earth. These two acts, so different in appearance and experience, share a profound spiritual demonstration of faith in action for future beauty and bounty.

Accepting the fatally exhausting journey, muscular fish navigate rapids, waterfalls, and dams, some traveling more than 1,500 miles.

Gardeners planting bulbs in the fall display a quieter forward-facing faith in action. They bury seemingly lifeless chunks in the cold ground, knowing there will be no quick reward, no speedy green sprout, no proof of future beauty.

As I'm aging, and hopefully maturing, I'm benefiting from accepting acceptance. I've come to accept that I'm not likely to achieve my grand goal of helping transform the entire global economic system into one that is restorative to the planet and good for all people. I've accepted that I probably won't get to experience my greatest longing: being part of a human species that is a healing force on all of nature. However, such acceptance doesn't mean I stop planting seeds and spawning better ways of being. Not seeing the fruit doesn't negate the power of the planting.

The salmon arrive at their natal streams gaunt and battered. They use their last bit of strength to carve nests in the gravel and deposit eggs and sperm. Then they die, but they do not disappear.

The decomposing bodies feed bears, eagles, and tiny new-hatched salmon. The nitrogen, phosphorus, and marine-derived nutrients nourish the ecosystem. Scientists have found nutrients from salmon in the growth rings of trees hundreds of feet from the water—trees that were saplings when the fish died and likely will outlive everyone reading these words.

A buried bulb undergoes its own quiet alchemy. Outer layers break down, feeding the interior. Cold temperatures trigger a physiological reaction necessary for the flower to

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bloom. Where I live there are fields and roadsides that erupt in glorious gold in the spring. I have no idea who planted those daffodil bulbs. I hope the bulbs I plant will delight after I am no longer in this body.

Legacy is often defined as something we've built or an accolade we've received. The salmon and autumn gardener suggest something different. Legacy is what we become part of. The salmon transforms into the river, the trees, and the next generation swimming downstream.

We have this same capacity. The kindness we extend today may echo in ways we'll never know. The knowledge we share, ground we tend, people we encourage, animals we help, communities

we strengthen—these are bulbs pressed into fertile soil. We may not live to see the blooms, but they blossom nonetheless. Paying it forward is not a transaction; it's a philosophy, a recognition that life fully lived is not spent but invested—in soil, in water, in one another, in futures flowing downstream. We matter most not in the moment of our own success, but in what we leave behind for the successes of others. ☁

Action Ideas:

- Leave your yard a bit messy this fall and winter. Many insects, including pollinators, overwinter on dead flower stems and fallen leaves. Waiting until spring warmth to clear out dead stalks gives new generations a chance to flourish.
- Press bulbs into rich soil, literally and symbolically, and have faith.
- Bloom in your own unique ways.