



The Living Shore: Rediscovering a Lost World

Rowan Jacobsen

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In the 1990s, a marine scientist named Brian Kingzett was commissioned to survey Canada's western coast. He saw amazing sights, from the wildest, most breathtaking coasts to the smallest of marine creatures. Along the western side of Vancouver Island, Kingzett nosed into an isolated pocket beach where he found something unusual. Amid the mussels, barnacles, and clams were round oysters-Olympias. Kingzett noted their presence and paddled on. A decade later when he met Betsy Peabody, executive director of the Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF), he learned that this once ubiquitous native oyster was in steep decline, and he knew that together they would return to this remote spot.

Rowan Jacobsen, along with Kingzett, Peabody, and a small group of scientists from PSRF and the Nature Conservancy, set out last July to see if the Olys were still surviving-and if they were, what they could learn from them. The goal: to use their pristine natural beds, which have probably been around for millennia, as blueprints for the habitat restoration efforts in Puget Sound. The implications are vast. If Peabody and her team can bring good health back to Puget Sound by restoring the intertidal zones-the areas of land exposed during low tide and submerged during high tide, where oysters live-their research could serve as a model for saving the world's oceans.

During a time when the fate of the oceans seems uncertain, Rowan Jacobsen has found hope in the form of a small shelled creature living in the lost world where all life began.

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