



## Falling Leaves, Falling Nutrients

By Rosaletta Curry

Autumn Leaves  
Crimson, auburn and gold,  
Bright colors on a blue canvas,  
The brush in nature's hand.

Waters Movement  
Splashing and gurgling,  
Leaping, dancing, and twirling,  
Into the unknown.

### Elwha River, Fall Observations: October, 2006

We take a short day hike along the banks of the upper Elwha River, above both dams. There the river and forest are mostly untouched by humans. It is a beautiful day, the sky is blue and the sunlight dances upon the clear surface of the Elwha. We walk through deep forests of tall hemlock and Western red-cedar, with thick underbrush of salal, Oregon grape, wild blackberry, sword fern, and other forest shrubs. This opens into a patch of an old burned forest, where the undergrowth is not so lush and some trees are scarred.

Here we begin to walk downhill toward the river. As we near the river I notice that we pass more bigleaf maples than before, their leaves are in a beautiful transformation, from a bright green they fade to a yellow then to a reddish brown, then fall to the ground and begin to rot, feeding the tree and the river rich nutrients. Standing beside the bigleaf maples are grand fir and Douglas-fir there are also a scattering of smaller cedars and hemlocks. We rest for a few minutes at Goblins' Gate. I sit on the stone overlooking the river and enjoy the warm sun on my back and the roar of the water as it surges into the deep rocky gully.

Further up the river we stop to observe the conditions. I find a round rock to sit on right by the sparkling clear water, I close my eyes and take a deep breath of fresh autumn air.

The Elwha gurgles and splashes happily by. I dabble my hands in the water, its temperature is cold and has a sharp, icy feel. The water is shallow here and the bottom is made up of cobbles, gravels, silt and sand. The only debris in the water is a few twigs and leaves. Across the river from where I sit is a small grove of red alders, they are still very young trees and are growing on what is clearly a floodplain.

As we hike out, the afternoon sun touches the leaves of a vine maple and makes them seem to glow. They are pink, the color of the salmon that would, if there were no dams, be coming far up the river to spawn. I sit and reflect, watching the beautiful fall colors progress while the river appears and disappears from my sight.

#### About the author:

Poetry and Writing are by Rosaletta Curry. Rosaletta is a student from Chimacum High School's Pi Program. She captured these observations while attending an Elwha field science program in October, 2006.