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Fishing the Kenai: A Great American Tradition

by Pierre David

A GREAT AMERICAN TRADITION CARRIES ON IN THE ALASKA wilds. As we speak, hordes of hungry fishermen are scouring the rivers of the Kenai Peninsula, a few hours south of Anchorage, for king salmon. June is an okay month. July is when the really big fish — fifty, sixty, even seventy or eighty pounds — are ready to be plucked from the water.

The daily routine of an Alaska fisherman this time of year starts very early. At about a quarter to four in the morning, the day begins (usually with a cup of black coffee). By five or five-fifteen, no later, the angler is on the water, in a so-called drift boat. The bait (salmon eggs, maybe a lure) is dropped in the water. The rods are fastened to rod holders. And then, well, one waits. And waits.

Fishing is, above all, about patience. Patience in the Kenai, happily, comes easily. The peninsula is overflowing with mountains, forests, rivers and multiple forms of wildlife — beavers, bears, moose, eagles and so forth. To drift down the Kasilof River, say, is to be surrounded by thousands of moving parts bolting, jumping, circling, scurrying. It's magnificent.

In the morning, the temperatures are cold, maybe forty or

forty-five, no higher. When the clouds break up and the sun comes out, usually around nine-thirty or ten, the fishermen peel off their jackets and wool sweaters, and they throw their legs over the side of the boat and have a beer and a sandwich. Lunch comes early on the river. By late morning, the predawn chill has dissipated entirely.

You do not fish alone, like it or not. The boats tend to congregate in particular nodes or holes, the places along the river where the salmon are known to go. (This varies from one season to the next.) There may be as many as five or ten boats clumped around a single hole. There are unspoken rules — don't drop your anchor in front of another boat, reel in your line when someone's caught a fish — and the anglers (usually) follow them. There is a civility and a certain camaraderie about the Kenai.

You know that someone has hooked a fish when everyone on the lucky angler's boat stands up. You might be fifty or sixty feet away, floating around a different patch of water, when suddenly a group of three or four fishermen cluster around someone struggling to hold onto a rod that's bent over and bouncing up and

— *continued on page 3*

Thinner

by Stephen King

THIS YEAR MARKS THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE publication of the little known novel by Stephen King titled *Thinner*. King did not actually write the novel under his own name; he used the pseudonym Richard Bachman. *Thinner* is not the greatest of King's achievements — it would be hard to beat *The Stand* or *Christine* or even *Cujo* — but it does represent an important shift in the author's thinking. It's also a great read for all those who are hoping to get in a little time at the beach.

Thinner revolves around one Billy Halleck, an overweight lawyer who, prior to the start of the novel, accidentally ran over an old Gypsy woman in his car. Hauled into court on vehicular manslaughter charges, Halleck has managed to get himself acquitted and to resume life as it had been before the accident. Or so he thinks. The Gypsies are not so forgiving, and Halleck is soon forced to confront a horrifying reality: He is being made *thinner*, smaller, weaker everyday by a Gypsy curse that cannot be easily lifted. He is being killed, and gradually. The novel ends on a gruesome note, but not the way one might expect, and only after lots of drama.

Thinner is noteworthy because it's much nastier, and much more personal, than King's earlier work. Prior to *Thinner*, King was, for the most part, a master of horror — ghosts, demons, serial killers, Nazis. Horror has less to do with people, or characters, than with phenomena — the weird, awful, terrifying darkness that is an inextricable part of life. With *Thinner*, King weaves in several horror-like themes, but the novel is not essentially of the horror genre. It is about a man and his undoing, which makes it more dramatic and poignant and even heart-wrenching.

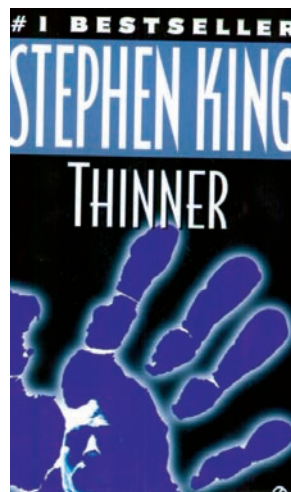
Halleck, after all, is not simply a vehicle used by the author to build the story he really wants to tell — about, say, a haunted house or a lake that swallows up puppies or whatever. That would make for a nice little horror story, in which the characters are not really characters but props who enable the storytelling. Halleck is a real person, someone with whom we can relate. He has his foibles, his fears and anxieties. But he is not exactly a bad person. In fact, he's mostly decent. But he's weak. He lacks a sense of himself and his purpose. We want to say to him: Be the person you're supposed to be. But he doesn't know who that is. Neither do we.

Over the course of the novel, we learn a great deal about Halleck. The reader hopes, naturally, that his plight will bring out in him some latent power that he never knew he had. The reader hopes that Halleck will rise to the challenge — will be made better.

That would be one ending. That would be a nice ending (even if the book ended on a sad or morbid note). That is not the ending for King, who has never had a taste for happy endings. King is determined, in *Thinner*, to show that awful events sometimes bring out not the best but the worst in us, that some of us don't rise up in the face of conflict but simply fall back, recede, become less, become the people we always feared we were. Billy Halleck is that person. Instead of becoming the man we hope he will become, he retrenches deeper into the empty self he always was.

The question that King leaves us with is this: Are we Billy Hallecks? Or are we someone else, some better alternative to Billy

Halleck who triumphs over his shortcomings and comes out new and improved? We want to believe the latter, of course. (Who wouldn't?) But we suspect — we fear — the latter. That is King's genius. He is not a great stylist — nor has he ever pretended to be — and his plots are sometimes needlessly roundabout and layered with extra characters we don't really care about. But he is a genius of a storyteller, and the story he offers in *Thinner* is rich, engaging and hard to put down. And above all, it does what King is best at doing. It makes us scared. —PD



SCIF RELOCATION RAISING CONCERNS

Big changes by the State Compensation Insurance Fund to consolidate its workforce and streamline its processes have generated a lot of chatter this year. But as the agency prepares to relocate 700 jobs from its Burbank and Glendale offices to Fresno, Stockton and Santa Ana, the rumblings have gotten louder.

SCIF is embarking on a three-year plan to cut the 7,400-person workforce by as much as 12% through attrition, as well as a combination of consolidation of office space and relocation — changes officials say will save the agency \$200 million in operating costs.

But this reorganization has raised concerns among some lawmakers in the state. In particular, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Industrial Relations, Sen. Ted Lieu (D-Torrance), recently sent a letter to SCIF's president expressing his apprehension about the changes. At the top of his list of grievances is the claim that SCIF is not doing enough to help workers who face difficult relocation decisions.

While Lieu is concerned about a lack of transparency and communications by the agency, SCIF leadership disagrees with his claims. In fact, a May 19th letter signed by SCIF Chief Executive Thomas Rowe stresses the value of their restructuring for SCIF employees. "We are consolidating underwriting and claims staff into geographical areas where it is not only more economical for us to do business," he writes, "but where our salaries are more in line with the cost of living."

And the SCIF appears to be covering all its bases. State Fund spokeswoman Jennifer Barga stressed that SCIF gave workers a minimum of nine months notice, and in some instances up to a year. The agency has held negotiations with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and it claims it hosted resume-writing and job-seeking seminars, offered relocation expenses and encouraged workers who decline to move to be "voluntarily laid off," so they can qualify for unemployment benefits.

— Sabrina L. Schaeffer

Fishing the Kenai: A Great American Tradition

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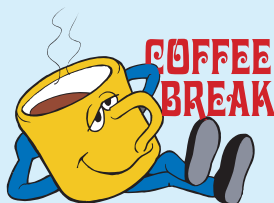
down. That's when you know. The struggle, pitting man against fish, can persist for a few minutes, maybe more, maybe much more. It depends on how big, how strong, the salmon in question is. Sometimes the salmon frees itself from the hook and floats away. Usually, that's not what happens. Usually, after much struggling, the angler reels him in, and then someone else (a fishing guide, a fishing buddy) jumps in the water, which is usually only a few feet deep, and scoops up the salmon with a net. And then, as they say on the Kenai, the salmon receives a "wooden shampoo." It's wild and full of emotion and a little bit bloody. And it's amazing to watch, to smell, to listen to. Above all, it's an amazing experience to catch one of these fish. It feels somehow primal, or immediate, full of urgency and passion.

On a good day, a boat can reel in five or six or seven healthy kings. Or more. It depends on the fish and, of course, the fishermen, and it depends on when you go. Sometimes, these things are hard to pinpoint.

Toward the end of the day, around two or three in the afternoon, the drift boats settle into the river. The river turns a little darker, the clouds fold together, the temperature drops. Finally, you disembark, several miles from the place where you started, at a boat stop crowded with other boats overflowing with fellow fishermen. The boat, your jeans, your rain gear, maybe your face and hands, are splattered with mud and a little bit of salmon blood and salmon eggs, or roe (which looks like blood). You haven't moved very much today. Your body has been mostly still, perched in a swivel chair peering out over the river. But you are exhausted and drenched and probably exhilarated. The smell of the river, the salmon, is kneaded into your palms and fingernails. You realize only then, after the day is over, that you have received many little cuts and bruises — from the hooks or reels or jumping in and out of the boat. During the day, these things seem unimportant, and they are. Only now, after the day is over, do the unimportant things float back to the surface. That is when you know you have left the river, for a few hours, at least. —PD

Paresthesias are:

- A. the sensation of flashing lights whether or not one's eyes are closed
- B. a sign that one's vision is disturbed
- C. facial rashes that occur intermittent allergic rashes on one side of the face of unknown etiology
- D. a sensation of pins and needles caused by compression of a sensory nerve



ANSWER: D
Paresthesias are the sensation of pins and needles caused by the compression of a spinal nerve that is the source of the sensation.

BUSINESS EXPANSION ON PAUSE

Last week the Labor Department reported the unemployment rate rose to 9.1 percent in May. Private sector employers added a mere 54,000 jobs last month, compared with 232,000 in April. All of which is leading economists – and America's main street – to worry that the nation's fiscal recovery still has a long way to go.

At the heart of this economic stagnation is a sense of uncertainty that plagues nearly all business owners from large corporations to small, mom-and-pop shops. In fact, it's this economic uncertainty that many business owners claim is preventing them from expanding. Aziz Hashim is the president of an Atlanta-based company that owns numerous Popeyes, Checkers, and Domino's Pizza franchises not only in Georgia, but also in Florida, Arizona, and California. He told the Washington Post, "We have been expanding...but we have to be very careful because we can't adequately project" the future.

For many business owners it's not only changing government policies that worry them; it's the reality that expansion means more than just paying salaries. It also means paying more in benefits and regulations, including unemployment taxes, workers' compensation, and health insurance. For an employer facing uncertain times, each of these additions makes the risk of hiring a new employee exponentially more dangerous. — Sabrina L. Schaeffer

SCIF BRINGS SUIT AGAINST LEHMAN BROTHERS

The morning Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy, September 15, 2008, is a day many of us will remember for a long time, as it threw the economy into a serious downward spiral from which it has yet to recover.

Still, the collapse of Lehman – and other Wall Street giants – has a way of seeming very far away from California. Now a new lawsuit being brought against Lehman by the State Compensation Insurance Fund, reminds us that the financial quake on Wall Street sent shockwaves around the globe.

State Fund is suing directly for bonds it purchased from Lehman between 2004 and 2008 and alleges Lehman officials misrepresented the risk associated with the medium-term notes. According to the SCIF complaint, "Lehman and its bankers raised billions of dollars in several offerings of investment-grade rated notes by means of false and misleading [filings]."

Central to their claim is the notion that the documents did not accurately show "Lehman's losses and exposure in connection with its subprime...lending activities." They continue that Lehman executives were dishonest, making "materially false statements about its financial condition," resulting in note prices to be "artificially inflated."

No matter the outcome of the case, it reminds us just how widespread the ramifications of Lehman Brothers bankruptcy really was. — Sabrina L. Schaeffer

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WELCOME DR. ADDES!!



DR. ADDES SEES CLAIMANTS IN OUR TORRANCE OFFICE.

A native of the Soviet Union, Irina Addes, M.D., immigrated to the United States thirty years ago. She joins NAS after years of practicing psychiatry in both New York and Los Angeles. Dr. Addes received her M.D. from the Pritzker School of Medicine at the University of Chicago and completed her residency at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. She served as Chief resident at North Central Bronx Hospital, where she oversaw the acute inpatient unit.

Dr. Addes is a Qualified Medical Examiner who has been in private practice in Torrance since 2008. She brings a holistic approach to her assessment of each patient, considering developmental, interpersonal, social, genetic, and medical history. She previously worked in a variety of capacities, including many years with the QTC where she provided psychiatric evaluations for veterans, many of who suffered from PTSD. She also has experience treating developmentally disabled and emotionally disturbed youngsters at St. Agatha Home at New York Founding Hospital and working with children, adolescents, and adults in community clinics, outpatient drug treatment programs, and group homes. Dr. Addes is fluent in Russian. ■