

A Voice for the Spirit Bears

This Story is Simon Jackson's Story

A Voice for the Spirit Bears tells the story of former Vancouver resident Simon Jackson's efforts to raise global awareness of the importance of British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest.

"Simon peered through a telescope from a lookout post in Yellowstone National Park. Hours ticked by. Rain soaked his clothes. Still, he didn't budge.

Finally, a mother grizzly bear emerged from the pine forest with two playful cubs by her side. She was huge, especially when she stood on her hind legs. Coyotes quickly retreated. No one messed with a grizzly. Seven-year-old Simon wished he was as powerful as a bear."

This is the beginning of *A Voice for the Spirit Bears* (<https://www.kidscanpress.com/products/voice-spirit-bears>), a new children's book released in May 2019 that tells the story of the real Canadian hero, Simon Jackson.



Image Source:
<https://twitter.com/dsimonjackson>

But who is Simon, the boy peering through a telescope, and what is his story? Simon Jackson is originally from Vancouver and this social responsibility story, *A Voice for the Spirit Bears*, starts when he is seven years old.

How It All Started

"When I was seven years old, I went on a camping trip with my family to Yellowstone National Park in the United States. On that trip, I saw a grizzly bear with two cubs, and it captured my imagination. I wanted to know everything there was to know about bears. One evening after we returned home, I saw a story on the news about Alaska's Kodiak bears, and the plans being drawn up to develop their home. In my seven-year-old mind, it was an assault on those same bears from our camping trip. I wanted to help, and of course the answer of what to do was obvious: have a lemonade stand. I raised \$60, wrote a couple of letters, and sure enough, the Kodiak bear was saved. It obviously had nothing to do with me, but it planted that seed. It made me realize that my voice mattered."

(Source: <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/speaking-spirit-bears>)

In 1995, Simon learned about the Kermode or "spirit bear," a rare white subspecies of American black bear that is only found only British Columbia, and the threats to its rainforest habitat.



Image Source:
commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spiritbear.jpg

Spirit bears, like other bears, play an important role in the rainforest ecosystem. They bring salmon into the forest to eat, and the remains provide food for other scavengers and ultimately break down, returning nutrients to the soil. According to Tsimshian First Nations story, Simon learned, spirit bears were created by Raven as a reminder of the last Ice Age. Raven decreed that one in every 10 bears would be white, and that these special bears would live in peace and harmony forever.

Spirit Bear Coalition

Simon was determined to do his part to save the bears, so at the age of 13, he shot to fame as the founder of the **Spirit Bear Youth Coalition**, a youth-led, Canadian based advocacy group whose mission it was to save the Great Bear Rainforest; this started with a letter-writing campaign to convince the B.C. government to protect the Great Bear Rainforest. At 13, he also began to visit high schools to raise awareness and encourage others to get involved. While doing all of this, Jackson had to overcome a speech impediment, a fear of public speaking, and bullying from his peers. He sometimes felt really alone, but he stuck to his goals.

After 20 Years of Advocacy

It took 20 years of negotiations with the province and logging companies and the perseverance of First Nations, environmental groups, and concerned citizens like Simon Jackson, but in 2016, an agreement was reached that made the majority of the old-growth rainforest remain off-limits to logging. Much of the spirit bears rainforest has been protected. His efforts, joined with the efforts of other people across BC and Canada, have been mostly successful.

Simon led the campaign to save the spirit bear for twenty years, helping create the largest land protection area in North American history. For his efforts, Time Magazine named a “Hero for the Planet” and he was the inspiration for the movie, Spirit Bear: The Simon Jackson Story.

Simon’s Advice to Young Activists

“I say to people all the time, I’m not special, I’m not gifted, I’m not even particularly smart. I was one person who found my passion at a young age and was extremely fortunate to be able to chase it. The fact that together we were able to help save the spirit bear should prove to the world that one young person, no matter their skills or intellect, but armed simply with a passion, can take hold of a cause and change the world.” (Source: <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/speaking-spirit-bears>)

Simon truly believes that one person can make a difference. You are that person!

Next Steps

Simon is continuing his work in helping to care for the environment. In 2013, as the Spirit Bear Coalition ended, Simon was part of a team that started a global movement, “Coalition Wild”, dedicated to supporting young activists and helping them to find their voices to create positive change. Since 2013, this organization has supported young leaders in 54 countries, leaders who want to tackle our planet’s greatest conservation challenges.

Maybe one day, you will join them?



Sources:

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Pope. "Speaking up for the Spirit Bears." *Canadian Geographic*, 1 May 2019, www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/speaking-spirit-bears.

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