

## Chapter 1

# From the Get-Go

Jojo was born on the Kenai River in Alaska. A coho salmon, she hatched from an egg and was a fish that many people love. A baby coho is a fry, then after a few weeks, a smolt. Jojo spent (more than two, but not a lot of) months growing up on the Kenai. There, she learned how to travel safely through life on the river.

Jojo went around asking a lot of questions. She had such a habit of asking questions that cohos sometimes avoided her. She was over-curious at times and couldn't turn off the questions.

“When is your birthday?”

“What is your favorite color?”

“What do you want to do when you're grown?”

“Can you show me how to make paper planes?”

“Where do you go to church?”

“How fast can you swim?”

“Can you show me how to do a cartwheel?”

The questions were endless!

Sometimes, Jojo's friends felt like they were being interviewed when Jojo came around. But overall, they knew she didn't mean any harm. Jojo was just being Jojo. She was great fun to be around. She made everybody laugh, plus she was very smart. So Jojo became the go-to coho.

Friends often called her when they got stuck on a homework problem. Some would swim over to her habit. Others might call her on their cell. They counted on Jojo for answers to the tough problems. Jojo didn't mind helping her friends. She was a cool coho. The word on the river was Jojo had the mojo, or almost-magical energy.

Something else that made Jojo like nothing else in the world was her size. From the beginning, she was the shortest coho in her cohort.<sup>1</sup> She was about an inch shorter than average. That caused her to work harder to swim as fast as the other cohos.

She struggled to keep up with the cohort. Cohos teased her with many jokes. They called her “Shorty,” “Pippy,” short for pipsqueak, and “Stubby.” Jojo wasn't fond of any of these names. Every nickname made her feel she was living a life of shame. That’s the feeling that you have when you believe something is wrong with you.

One day, someone called Jojo the “So Slow Coho.” It was the coho named Barrie. He wanted to embarrass Jojo in front of all of his friends to get a few brownie points. He could care less about Jojo and had no sympathy for her.

Cohos are funny fish and creatures of habit. After someone started something, the rest followed. Jojo did her best to stop the teasing. She tried shaking it off. But the cohos kept doing what coho do—acting out of habit. Sometimes, they acted like they didn't hear her complaining. The name rhymed, and it stuck. They called her the “So Slow Coho.”

Being so slow, but cool had its benefits. The other coho loved her being around. When Jojo was missing from the cohort, they became curious. Everyone wanted to know, “Where’s Jojo?” They missed her. Things weren’t as fun without her around. Jojo missed being with them, too. One word came to mind when she missed her friends, “bummer.”

The So Slow Coho was the glue for the cohort. She held everything together. Jojo relished her role as the cohesion. But she wasn't always happy about the situation with her nickname. She made peace with it. Jojo didn’t love it, but figured, “If I can’t beat them, join them.”

The cohort in this case comprised cohos born during the same year. Let's call them a cohort of cohos. This cohort of cohos had some cool cohos and one bully. Most of them avoided the bully.

Overall, life within the cohort was a lot of fun. Life on the Kenai River offered constant activity. They chased flies. They swam in schools. Sometimes, being the

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<sup>1</sup> cohort – group of similar fish or other things.

curious type, Jojo would spend the day hanging out by herself behind a big rock reading.

She loved action novels and non-fiction about female heroes, which inspired her. Many were the source of the can-do point of view that she would soon adopt. She thought reading was awesome.

The water was one of the best parts about being a coho on the Kenai River. The spring and summer temperatures stay around 55 degrees. Whether it is sunny or raining, Jojo loves the temperature. Then the fall and winter arrive. Colder water makes all cohos swim slower. Even the fastest cohos swim slower, but Jojo still swims the slowest.

Cohos loved living and swimming in the river. It's like paradise catching flies and mosquitoes that float above the water. There's a catch, though. The flies are not real sometimes. If you bite into one of those flies, you're done. They could jerk you right from the river in seconds. You'd never be seen, again.

That's what happened to Edie. She was swimming one day. Wasn't paying attention to what he was doing. She was showing off her acrobatic skills, jumping, speeding up, then jumping, again.

"You better slow down, Big Ed," someone said from the cohort.

"I got this," Edie said. "Don't worry about me, chief."

"There are stories about fake flies on the river today, Big E!" another coho yelled out.

Edie thought she could impress everyone. She didn't take the warnings seriously. Plus, she had a reputation for being "hard" and showed herself as tougher than the rest of the cohort. She could do things no one could or would even try.

"Check it out!" she yelled.

Those were her last words. Everyone saw Edie flying through the air as the line pulled her out of the river. It looked for a minute like she'd done an amazing flip in the air. But, when her tail kept going higher than fish can jump, everyone knew she was out of there for good.

Except, Edie wasn't gone. As the line flipped her out of the water, they saw her fishy body turn into a bluish, glittery form. She was sparkling like a bar of gold bullion.

When she landed, she was different. Her body looked like a lightly frosted piece of glass. It was partially clear like you could see through her, but not quite. How strange was that?

She was there in the cohort, but not really. She no longer had life in her because she had turned to spirit. Then, she was gone, again. Everyone was spooked by Edie's sudden change.

In her new form, Edie was free from the ordinary restrictions of the river. She was able to move about the river in ways that she couldn't before in the fish body. She was able to swim faster, swim in the deeper water, and most amazing of all, take flight. Edie defied gravity.

Since Edie had a translucent body that sparkled in the color of blue, she blended into both the water and the sky. No one could really see her, although she was able to see everything she'd seen before, plus some. In the spirit form, Edie's body released superpowers.

For example, Eddie could see further. She could swim faster. She could guess the future better. She had become a superfish. It took time before Edie understood she was different than before. At first, she thought she was still swimming among the cohort. As time passed, she realized the cohort couldn't see her any longer.

Edie realized being in the spirit world was better than she'd imagined (not that she'd ever given it much thought). She began seeing other coho spirits. They had remarkable colors like lilac, watermelon red, chocolate brown, sage green, and banana yellow. There was one common feature -- they glimmered and were invisible to others in the regular world.

It was a secret other world. You could call it otherworldly.

In this new life, some things were totally different. You didn't think about food, well water, or when to rest. Life was 24/7 on-the-go and there was little to worry about what would happen to you as a fish, as a coho. It was a carefree existence, except it wasn't.

There was something known as purpose. All the fish in that world had a given job to do. It wasn't like work; it was more like a natural ability everyone had. Some cohos were always on the fish line or sell that went directly back to the River. they were

speaking to cohos who were sick and needed some form of comfort. That was their job.

There were some cohos that seemed to be dressed like doctors and nurses. Anne would operate on hurt cohos they came from the regular world. After they were finished those cohos would go back from the spirit world to the regular world.

There were other cool cohos that were always tidying up the place. They kept the spirit world clean and free of rubbish. The place was extremely clean.

Eddie and her new friends decided to leave the Kenai and travel to another River. They decided to fly there using their special wings. And they flew to a River called The Mississippi, which was about 2000 miles away from the Kenai. There in the Mississippi were spirits called catfish.

These so-called catfish had a totally different body than the cohos. They were sparkly but the colors were gray, blue, silver, and yellow, only. Eddie learned that these catfish were very popular among the fishermen in that part of the world. They had to be very careful throughout their lives otherwise they were likely to get caught.

Funny thing about the catfish was they spoke a different language. Eddie knew from the very beginning it was different than what coho spoke. However, they were able to understand each other because they lived in the spirit form.

That part of the Mississippi was called the Delta. Flying over the Delta in the spirit form, he could see that people there were different than in Alaska. They like listening to a different form of music called the Blues. It was a very soothing sound, but nothing like what they heard in Alaska.

Eddie met a catfish named Bessie. Since there was no idea of age in the spirit world, and people got along automatically, Eddie and Bessie hit it off immediately. They understood they had many things in common. The catfish swam in cohorts, too. There were bully catfish around that people always avoided.

Something odd happened on the Mississippi. When Eddie tried to swim, it felt like she was going to melt. The water was so warm to Eddie she couldn't explain it. She never experienced anything except the water on the Kenai, which was always cool.

A change began happening on Eddie's body. She could feel a slimy substance growing on her. It had to be the water or the temperature of the water. Besides the slime, Eddie

again feeling itchy. Never before had she had such a feeling. Everything felt very sticky and itchy.

It became clear that she had to get out of the Mississippi quick, fast, and in a hurry. If she didn't, there was no telling what might happen to her.

“Bessie, something strange is happening to me since I've been here in the Mississippi,” she said. “I'm getting itchy and sticky all over me.”

With one look, Bessie could tell that Edie was changing. She was growing that same slimy substance that catfish had on them. For catfish, the slime was their protector. But for the coho, the slime was like molasses. The coho couldn't swim or fly with the slime.

“Edie, you better get out of the Mississippi, sister, or else you'll be forever stuck here and unable to swim or fly,” said Bessie. “If you get out now, the slime will dry up and you'll be back to your usual self.”

And with that, Edie popped out of the Mississippi just as Bessie told her. Notice, there was no arguing back-and-forth. That's what you call trust. Just like that, Edie began feeling the slime lose its sticky and itchy effect on her. Soon, she was back to her normal coho spirit self.

Edie invited Bessie and her crew to come to the Kenai. So after a couple days of being on the Mississippi, they all flew back to the Kenai together. It was a long flight that took a few days, but they all made it there safely and without any problems. But shortly after arriving, the catfish realized it was very cold there. Even spirits could feel the temperature change.

The temperature had an odd effect on the spirit fish. The colder they became the stiffer their bodies got. They began losing their ability to swim and fly. It became obvious they needed to stay in their natural temperature or else they'd eventually turn into solid blocks.

After a couple of days in the Kenai, Bessie and the catfish crew had to get out of that camp and head back to the Mississippi. The temperature was the one thing that remained the same for the spirit fish and the normal fish. Although they could fly around the world, they had to keep their hometown habitat as their permanent base.

From time to time, Edie's bluish, glittery figure showed up in the cohort. She was there like a mirage, sparkling and wavy, like fumes you see in the desert. She had no real contact with her old cohort because she was spirit, but if ever wondered how they were getting along, she could pop in and check on them.

A fake fly got him.

The fake flies came from predators that showed up in the summer — fishermen who loved catching salmon. They especially loved catching cohos and showed up every June. They stay until July or maybe August and fish day and night. The genuine danger was for Jojo and her friends as they grew larger. They'd grow large enough to get targeted or snagged by a hook.

The possibility of losing a friend was a worry for Jojo and the cohort. If they made it through the summer, they were good. While no one wanted to end up like Eddie, the possibility was always there in the river.

Besides that constant risk, life was great on the Kenai. Jojo and the cohort expected a life filled with joy and happiness.

The So Slow Coho had one big dream. She dreamed of growing one inch so she could swim as fast as the rest of the cohort. Every night, Jojo went to sleep hoping that she would wake up an inch longer. She just wanted to swim less slowly. Then the other cohos would stop teasing her.

"I'll be super happy forever," she thought.