

[U.S.](#) [World](#) [Politics](#) [HealthWatch](#) [MoneyWatch](#) [Entertainment](#) [Crime](#) [Sports](#) [Essentials](#)

THE EARLY SHOW

Life From A Dead River

By Tatiana Morales
November 4, 2005 / 8:18 AM EST / CBS

The special series with People magazine, "Heroes Among Us," concludes with Bob Nixon, who left a successful movie-making career 13 years ago to clean up the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. He recruited young men and women from one of the roughest neighborhoods in the nation's capitol and soon learned that the river wasn't all that was endangered. Harry Smith reports.

"There's great beauty here. I love this river," Bob Nixon says as he looks at the river. And if the river could talk, it might say the same about Nixon because he may have saved its life.

"It was almost dead before, full of trash," Nixon says. "One of the most polluted rivers in America, flowing through our nation's Capitol."

Make no mistake: the Anacostia River is still polluted. Nixon and volunteers from the Earth Conservation Corps, which he founded, continue to take tons of trash and thousands of tires from the river, and sewage still spills in. But there are signs things are definitely getting better.

"The fish are coming back," Nixon says. "We have 15 osprey nests. We have a bald eagle nest, so that the river is rebounding."

In some cases, so are the people. Each year, 45 young men and women, aged

17 through 25, are chosen from a long waiting list. They work 1,700 hours each on community service projects and recruit volunteers to help.

Their reward is a small stipend, plus a \$5,000 education scholarship. Eighty-five percent finish the program and go on to higher education or a job. It's a huge opportunity in a community where a year with the corps can be the first step in breaking the cycle of crime. Still, violence is an ever present fact of life.

On the day *The Early Show* talked with Nixon, there was bad news. He learned that one of the brothers of Rodney Stotts, a founding member of the corps, had been killed. Shot four times.

"I've been to dozens of funerals. Ten corps members have been murdered," Nixon says. "These were terrific young people. They were trying to do the right thing and were shot and killed, stabbed, beaten to death. The cycle of violence in this community is appalling."

Anacostia is a long way from Hollywood, where Nixon made films before deciding to take on the river. Among his credits is "Gorillas In The Mist," a feature film about the life of activist Dian Fossey, which he co-produced. Now Nixon produces and directs on a different stage.

For the first time in decades, eagles soar in the sky over the Anacostia, thanks to corps members who nurtured and then released them. Their presence is seen as a symbol of hope, tied to the mission of the Earth Conservation Corps.

"This is not a place where you can come and it's just nothing. You're gonna change your life," says Lashuantya Moore. "You're gonna learn something new and you're gonna move forward."

Five years ago at age 20, Moore was a high school dropout with two children and no job. Now, she's married with three children and another on the way, and she's a career training coordinator for the corps. Nixon helped her turn her life around.

"He takes a personal interest in every corps member that comes through the

program," Moore says. "If you meet him, he's there for you."

Rodney Stotts adds: "Bob is one of the most determined-minded persons you could ever meet. And when he gets a vision, he sticks to it. He's relentless."

Stotts had been dealing drugs before he came to the corps, making a thousand to \$1500 a day. But he could see where he was headed.

"Dead," Stotts says. "I know I would have..."

The Earth Conservation Corps saved him from himself.

"You have people that come into your life and you never realize why until it's too late," Stotts says. "But this just happened to be one of those times that I got to realize it before it was too late."

Nixon knows why and he knows he can't leave, not anytime soon.

"I don't know where I would go, knowing that this situation is still here," Nixon says. "There are a lot of people working with me to show that, given the chance, these young men and women can turn their lives and their community and their river around."

Anacostia is poised to benefit from a multi-billion dollar waterfront and stadium project, but the question is whether the jobs will go elsewhere. The Earth Conservation Corps is working to secure some of those jobs through a project called River Of Hope.

First published on November 4, 2005 / 8:18 AM EST

© 2005 CBS. All rights reserved.



Copyright ©2024 CBS Interactive Inc. All rights reserved.

[Privacy Policy](#)

[California Notice](#)

[Your Privacy Choices](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Closed Captioning](#)

[CBS News Store](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)