

'TIL THE RIVER RUNS CLEAR

July 1, 2007

Total Running Time: 26 minutes and 33 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories Presents

By the mid - 1960s, the Hudson River was one of the most polluted rivers in America. You could not swim in it, fish in it, or drink from it. The river was nearly dead. This is the story of a dream that helped bring it back to life.

00:00:29:00

PETE SEEGER:

I think more than one person thought I was really kind of foolish. There were more important things going on than raising money for a sailboat. And all I could say, it's not just a sailboat. We've named it Clearwater. The purpose of the Clearwater is to clean up the river.

00:00:51:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Sailing up my dirty stream. Still, I love it. And I'll dream that someday, though maybe not this year. My Hudson River and my country will run clear.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

'Til the River Runs Clear

00:01:19:00

PETER SEEGER:

My thinking got switched around when I read the book *Silent Spring* in 1963, a very quiet little book, simply pointing out that the poisons we used, like DDT, were killing off the birds. I suddenly realized that the world is in real danger.

00:01:42:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

The river was probably at its worst at that period. Communities all up and down in the Hudson had their own industrial sites that created constant streams of pollution. And of course, then nobody was concerned with what we're doing to the environment. It was progress. You know, that the world was growing and things had to be done.

00:02:05:00

PETER SEEGER:

About that same time. I had gotten interested in sailing. I started earning a little money, and I bought a little plastic bathtub of a boat and took my family out in it.

00:02:15:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Sun and water are all mine.

00:02:21:00

TOSHI SEEGER:



It kept tipping over all the time. But we bought this little picnic because Peter was already in love with the river.

00:02:28:00

PETER SEEGER:

And you'd be sailing along and suddenly look down and you see lumps of this and that, floating by with the toilet paper.

00:02:36:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

I'll have them wherever I go—

00:02:39:00

PETER SEEGER:

And I thought of the phrase private affluence, public squalor. I didn't know quite what to do about it.

00:02:48:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

Well, the truth be told about, you know, my interest is this is all boats. You know, I just loved old boats. And I found this book, "Sloops of the Hudson." I discovered that the Hudson River sloops were as common as yellow cabs in New York City. And all gone. None of them are around anymore. Right around that time, Pete Seeger was sailing up and down the river. So I showed him the book and I said, "Gee Pete, I never knew about these sloops." And I thought I knew a lot about boats.



00:03:19:00

PETER SEEGER:

Well, I read it [and was] fascinated. It was a book full of love. They said these were the most beautiful boats we ever knew, and they will never be seen again. Steam had taken over the river. I read it and reread it, wrote a little poem and put it on my wall. Couldn't get it out of my head. Finally, about a year or two later, I wrote a letter to my friend. I said, Vic—

00:03:43:00

KITAMA SEEGER JACKSON:

Dear Vic, one way to see if a pipe dream has any practicality is to get it down on paper. So I'm writing to you now with the most grandiose and ambitious plan. Here it goes. You and I would both love to have a Hudson River sloop. Just like the old days.

00:04:00:00

PETER SEEGER:

You've got the original letter.

00:04:01:00

KITAMA SEEGER JACKSON:

I've got the original letter right here. When was the last time you looked at it?

00:04:05:00

PETER SEEGER:

40 years ago?

00:04:06:00

KITAMA SEEGER JACKSON:

Yes.

00:04:07:00

KITAMA SEEGER JACKSON:

In fact, I began getting gray hairs that I remember.

00:04:12:00

PETER SEEGER:

As I remember, I stayed about 2:00 in the morning writing this. I go to all this expense just to have a few days sailing. Partly because we love the Hudson River and want to see it loved by other people. So it will not be completely ruined by creeping in one of the immediate things to be done. We'll have to write letters. Next, we should locate a builder willing to build it. Now, I'll close this long letter and hope you and your wife and friends will write to me.

00:04:40:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

And I read a letter and I said, yeah, we could. And I think Alexander Saunders, he was the first one who could immediately see what having that boat on the river would do. He said, you guys have a great idea. And he said, I think if I have a party and invite people in the neighborhood, we can get interest going into it.

00:05:02:00

PETER SEEGER:



Must have been, as I remember, about 15 of us.

00:05:05:00

TOSHI SEEGER:

16 of us.

00:05:06:00

PETER SEEGER:

Something like that.

00:05:07:00

TOSHI SEEGER:

Yeah, that's about all.

00:05:11:00

PETER SEEGER:

I sang on the lawn out there for about an hour. Then we had an intermission, and it was a long intermission where about 15 of us.

00:05:20:00

TOSHI SEEGER:

Open this and—

00:05:21:00

PETER SEEGER:

Gathered in this room and decided to form a committee called the Hudson River Sloop Restoration, Inc. non profit, and no one knew what it would lead



to. [SINGING] Sailing up my dirty stream. But still, I love it. And, I'll keep the dream that someday, though maybe not this year my Hudson River will once again run clear.

00:05:56:00

ANDY MELE:

We have to remember that in 1966, when Pete and Vicki Schwartz and everybody were starting to meet to cook up this harebrained scheme, there were no environmental laws. They were making these things out of whole cloth. They were really having to invent an environmental movement.

00:06:13:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Dropped by some hikers to warn of things to come.

00:06:17:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

The first one of these concerts was a rather impromptu affair. Pete decided that he could take a chance on me, and the two of us should start the whole thing by singing Sea Shanties together. But he was pretty confident I wouldn't blow it on him, so I guess that was probably the thing that kicked it all off.

[SINGING] What will he do with a drunken sailor? What'll we do with a drunken sailor? What do we do with drunken sailors early in the morning?

[SPEAKING] We were swapping verses and I started wool gathering. So I thought, gee, I know so many people, so many kids I've run into who give their right arm to be doing. I'm standing on a platform, singing with this man, having the greatest time of my life. I just can't believe I'm that lucky. Just said.

He leaned over and he said, I just sang that verse.

00:07:04:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Way way up she rises. Way way up, she rises. Way way up she rises.

00:07:11:00

ANDRA SRAMEK:

I was 13 growing up in beacon. And it's like I have to go to this fundraising concert. It just drew me to the idea of building this boat, and I was just so proud when they gave me my little membership card and it was like, wow, this is really going to happen.

00:07:30:00

PETER SEEGER:

And I think the first year we raised about \$5,000. We also found it would cost a lot more than that. So when we had another festival the next year, the third year, 1968, Arlo Guthrie was our guest star and 6000 people came.

00:07:54:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

It was almost more than we could handle. One of the great advantages we had was that at that time, Peter first knew everybody was in contact with everybody of any importance in the folk world. Here, all they do is call him up and say, we're doing this concert. And they say, sure, we'll be there.

00:08:11:00



PETER SEEGER:

Mary Travers of Peter, Paul and Mary says, Pete, what are you building a boat for? There's a war [going] on. This is a distraction. And all I could say, well, we're not aiming just to sail it. We want to clean up the river. Up in Maine. Harvey Gammage says, let's get started building. I said, wait a minute. We only have \$30,000. We don't know how we're going to get the rest. He says, well, you'll find when the keel is laid, the money comes in quicker. And he was right.

00:08:46:00

ALEXANDER SAUNDERS, JR.:

We planned to christen the boat with this, and hope that maybe in a few years we'll be able to do better.

00:08:53:00

PETER SEEGER:

When you lay the keel for a boat, you usually have a little prayer and some sample water. And I think we had some Hudson River water, which Toshi sprinkled.

00:09:08:00

TOSHI SEEGER:

Well, as I remember, I wore an orange coat. I made it myself. And then I started christening. And then someone said, face the camera. So I just put my leg over the whole keel and reversed myself.

00:09:25:00



PETER SEEGER:

It was a good experience for me, working with a wide range of people, different kinds of politics, different kinds of music. Almost half the people wanted to call the boat heritage and make it a historical project like the Mayflower, and strictly steer them away from environmental confrontation. But by a narrow vote, Clearwater won the vote, saying the purpose of the Clearwater is to clean up the river.

00:09:58:00

KITAMA SEEGER JACKSON:

How long did it take to build the boat? Was it eight months?

00:09:59:00

PETER SEEGER:

I think it was October. And it was launched May 17th, 1969.

00:10:06:00

CLEARWATER CREW:

Praise the name Clearwater. May God bless us and all the men who sail on.

00:10:13:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

The boat was launched from a large shed. The shed was full of people, and it's quite a scene. I wound up standing next to Cyrus Hamlin, the designer of the boat, and he started knocking the blocks out to free the boat from the waist. It started to slide. And of course, my gaze followed the boat going down the ways, and I wound up looking at Cy. And Cy was standing here like this.



Holding his hands over his eyes. And how does it look? How does it look as the boat was skimming out into the water? Pete said you really didn't know, did you? He said, well, there are all kinds of things that can happen. Anyway, the boat went up perfectly and just sat there like it was meant to be.

00:11:09:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Sweet rosy—

00:11:18:00

PETER SEEGER:

The first captain of the Clearwater had golden curls to his shoulder. They said, this is a captain. They couldn't believe it.

00:11:27:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

A missile sent—

00:11:30:00

PETER SEEGER:

They thought, oh, this boat is going to be sunk or sold within a year. What are these hippies know about sailing? But Captain Allan Aunapu, who was a very good captain.

00:11:42:00

ALLAN AUNAPU:

Clearwater is probably the nicest thing I've done. Maybe no one had sailed



before, but these guys could do exactly what you asked them to. As soon as you asked them.

00:11:53:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

All the way, you hear me say—

00:11:56:00

PETER SEEGER:

We would sail for 25 miles, and then we'd put on a fundraising concert, first in one little town, and then next day, 25 miles down the coast, in another little town. When we got to New York, 35 days later, we'd raised about \$30,000.

00:12:24:00

STEVE ROCKEFELLER:

I want to tell you that Governor Rockefeller and the people of New York State are delighted to see this boat arrive on a horizon that is all too often clouded with pollution. And in a river that is all too often filled with too much, that makes it impossible for us to really enjoy what it could be for.

00:12:45:00

PETER SEEGER:

I never believed that we'd get so much publicity simply because it was a beautiful boat. It got its picture on television. It got its picture in the papers. I used to joke that The Price of Liberty is eternal publicity. Paraphrasing Jefferson saying, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance and oh, I got it. There's a picture of me. Entertaining with the banjo, recorder and voice of the



band Santa Cool Spring. Quote, the price of liberty. [ARCHIVAL] The price of liberty is eternal publicity.

00:13:21:00

KITAMA SEEGER JACKSON:

So you say the same things. And I feel so special when you tell me these things. Grandpa I always think I'm the first one. My God.

00:13:29:00

ANDRA SRAMEK:

When the Clearwater was first working its way up the river, Toshi came to the high school and said, hey, we have this great boat that's coming to beacon. We're going to have a festival. We need to go and clean up the waterfront. We put up posters to come to this little music festival to welcome Clearwater on her maiden voyage.

00:13:48:00

PETER SEEGER SINGING:

We're filling up the seas with garbage. Garbage, garbage. What will we do when there's no place left to put on?

00:13:58:00

ANDY MELE:

Nowadays we take riverfront festivals totally for granted. The fact is, in the days before the sloop was launched, that genre was utterly unknown. So many waterways were so polluted, so industrial, there was so little public access. Clearwater virtually invented the waterfront festival. People came for

the music.

00:14:22:00

TAJ MAHAL SINGING:

Alright, everybody who's buying!

00:14:24:00

ANDY MELE:

And it was a pretty star studded cast in those days.

00:14:31:00

JOHN HARTFORD SINGING:

Let me hear you clap.

00:14:36:00

HEDY WEST SINGING:

On weary River road.

00:14:41:00

PETER SEEGER:

I do think that music at its best helps us not only to forget our troubles, but at its best helps us understand our troubles. And occasionally music helps us do something about our troubles.

00:15:02:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

We started out with progressive jazz. I don't think we would have gotten very



far. Good for a bunch of guys. Well, in a way, on guitars and banjos and singing. Well, you know, sort of on key appeal to everybody.

00:15:15:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

On that dusty highway. I was trying to drive to a property on the other side.

00:15:28:00

ALLAN AUNAPU:

For people like myself. I've never sung for an audience that big, but Pete brings a large crowd. They're quiet. They listen to what you're going to say and sing.

00:15:37:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Where have all the flowers gone? Long time passing where—

00:15:47:00

PETER SEEGER:

When the boat was just launched, I was singing songs against the Vietnam War. Everywhere I went. Including places where I sang. Raising money for the Clearwater.

00:15:59:00

JOHN MYLOD:

It was a time in American history when there was a lot of foment, because of the anti-war movement, because of civil rights, because of all the kinds of



change that was going on in the country at the time.

00:16:12:00

PETE SEEGER SINGING:

Sailing on this.

00:16:14:00

ALLAN AUNAPU:

We were called names by people that weren't like hippies would be one. But we don't say that anymore. You couldn't really describe what was going on. It was the first time youth had ever successfully challenged their government on anything.

00:16:32:00

PETER SEEGER:

The vice president said, as long as Seeger's connected with this project, it'll never get anywhere. He doesn't know how to work with the establishment. And to a certain extent, he was right. On the other hand, the establishment never can move unless the people push it. We sailed the boat to Washington. We got our picture in the papers. I remember singing some songs with Don McLean and others in the house office building. I had a circular pie chart showing one slice of pie. How much goes for this? How much goes for that? And when it came to the defense budget, a huge slice of pie. And when it came to cleaning up the environment, it was such a thin sliver you could hardly see it. And I showed this to the others, and then I threw it like a Frisbee over their heads. Disgusted. That's what the federal budget is. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

00:17:31:00

WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS:

This administration, I believe. And you, Mr. President, have shown your commitment to doing something about the environment, to ending this degradation that we have seen in recent years.

00:17:43:00

PETER SEEGER:

The Clearwater had a big effect on Congress. They passed the Water Pollution Amendments of 1972, and since then, rivers all around America have been cleaned up. Or at least halfway cleaned up.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Since the 1970's, the Clearwater organization has continued to fight for a cleaner Hudson—and a cleaner world.

00:18:01:00

BOB KILLIAN SINGING:

Bound for the Capitol. Site sun harvest is bringing the word in about not. Oh, man. If there is one, you land the car free in the home they bring. When the tide of black waters flows down from the mountains. Sure as the rivers flow into the sea. Clearwater sails for a future that's clean where there's no. The Clearwater sails—

00:18:36:00

JUDITH ENCK:

We've got a long way to go on making the Hudson River swimmable and



fishable, which was the original goal of the Clean Water Act. We're nowhere close to that, but we're definitely moving in the right direction. And that's where Clearwater and other environmental groups are so important. Because when the public grows tired of issues, they're still there paying attention. And there is just as great a need today as there was in the past 20 years. It's really crucial that we not walk away from that.

00:19:13:00

CLEARWATER CREW MEMBER:

This boat is 35 years old, and it was built by a group of people who lived along the Hudson River. And we're looking out at the river back then in the way it was being treated and wanted to see things changed. The river that you guys are looking at today is a completely different place from what it was, you know, in the 1960s, 1950s. What is interactive?

00:19:35:00

DANNY EINBENDER:

Clearwater really invented the term environmental education. This is where it started. And now there are boats and programs doing what Clearwater does. Two bodies of water all over the world.

00:19:47:00

SAMANTHA HEYMAN:

You cannot expect people to care about a river and to fight for a river until they learn to love it. You can't beat people over the head and say you have to care, but if you take them out on the river, you make sure they have a good time. They get a look around and they go, wow, this place is beautiful. And



then the next time something comes up, you're not going to have to say, come on, come on, you guys help out here because they're going to want to do it themselves.

00:20:23:00

JEANNINE CAHILL:

I was so excited to have the kids touch the fish and they never touched. You know, something living in the river before. And it really amazes them or grosses them out.

00:20:34:00

STEVE STANNE:

Look at those kids. They're engrossed in learning about these little tiny creatures that are a critical part of this environment here. And everybody takes the time to appreciate what a wonder it is to be out on this magnificent sailing vessel.

00:20:53:00

SAMANTHA HEYMAN:

The quiet time that we have on the river is pretty important, because it's easy to kind of forget that you're out in the middle of the river and we're sailing along and it's and it's quiet. And this is the power of the wind doing this. 69 tons. No engine. Quiet. Breaking the science, always done with music, and that encouraged us to think about where the boat came from. Music is responsible for bringing this boat about. Pete Seeger used his music to raise money to build the boat in the first place. So just a little bit of a tribute to our founding father.



00:21:51:00

MIN HI CHOI:

The fact that it started as such a labor of love. And it was just a bunch of hippies who loved the river and loved the history of it and wanted to make it happen. And it's just amazing that simply by loving it so much that it's lasted this long.

00:22:08:00

ROBERT H. BOYLE:

The river has a constituency which it did not have before. 400,000 people have been out on board that vessel, most of them youngsters. That plants a seed that carries on into adult life and that's beyond comparison with any other program I know.

00:22:23:00

CLEAR WATER CREW:

Why did we do that? Yeah. Go ahead. That's right. We made history.

00:22:27:00

PETER SEEGER:

I'm a great believer in the old biblical story of the sower of seeds. The sower scatters seeds and some fall on stones. They don't even sprout. Some fall in the pathway, they sprout. But they get stepped on. But some seeds fall on fallow ground and grow and multiply by a thousand fold. And I look upon myself as a sort of seed in my life. And I believe that the clear Clearwater has been like this. Who knows? Who knows where the results of the Clearwater will come from?

00:23:27:00

INDIGO GIRLS SINGING:

A blistered hand on the handle of a shovel. I've been diggin' too deep, I always do—

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Every year Clearwater sponsors the Great Hudson River Revival—a two day celebration of music and environmentalism.

00:23:34:00

LEE BARTELL:

We take the park and turn it into a festival. And we take this lodge and turn it into our sign painting headquarters. And we have a fabulous hootenanny of wonderful music.

00:23:47:00

RON AJA:

Music is the glue that brings people together. It was so true in the 60s, and it's true now.

00:23:55:00

BLACK 47 SINGING:

Every little thing is gonna be alright.

00:23:59:00

BACON BROTHERS SINGING:



Oh—

00:24:20:00

PETER SEEGER:

There must have been 2000 people joining in with me, and I thought to myself, this is getting better every year. Well, right now it's like a good Baptist church out there singing out. [SINGING: Deep in my heart I know that I believe in. We shall overcome.]

00:24:48:00

VICTOR SCHWARTZ:

It's way beyond anything that Pete and I ever thought of or any of us began this thing never thought would be. I'm 73 years old now, and it'll always have for me the wonderment of, you know, this crazy idea working.

00:25:08:00

PETER SEEGER:

Well, I feel like old grandpa. No, in more ways than one. I see young musicians around the country doing what I've tried to do. I love it. I see young people learning to sail as I learn to sail. I think. I'm not sure, but I think this campaign is going to keep on and on until the water really is clear.

END TC: 00:26:31:09