

THE CREDO OF JACK LONDON

By Lou Leal

Jack London lived his short life true to his credo that the purpose of man is to live and not just to exist. Even in childhood he possessed an endless curiosity, not only of the world around him but also of the rest of the world he hoped to explore. Thus began the yearning of a life full of adventures. As he grew into manhood he became focused on learning and achievement. His goals proved to be limitless as he also possessed an endless number of interests, many of which included adventure. When he focused on a project, he drove himself to produce the highest results attainable.

As a young man Jack learned to be an expert sailor of small crafts. As a hobo, tramping across the country, he learned to survive by hiding on freight cars and living on food he was given at the doors of strangers. At twenty-one, he survived the harsh Yukon Territory environment in his quest for gold. In becoming a writer, he meticulously studied the style and structure of the writers he admired most in order to continually improve his own skills. He drove himself to write twelve hours a day to work on fiction and non-fiction while developing a strong faith in his ability to produce worthwhile manuscripts that would sell. His faith was severely tested as he received hundreds of rejections from publishers during the first few years of his writing career. Along with the faith in himself, he also possessed an inner determination that rejected defeat.

Jack London's first published works were short stories in 1899 and a book of short stories in 1900. As he achieved acceptance and some popularity, he finally started to earn money which allowed him to pursue more adventure and to also experience cultures in many parts of the world. He accepted an offer from William Randolph Hearst in 1904 to become a war correspondent to cover the war between Russia and Japan which was taking place in Korea and Manchuria. Three years later, Jack and his wife, Charmian, made their attempt to sail around the world on the Snark, a boat designed by Jack. The voyage ended after eighteen months due to the serious health issues Jack contracted in the Solomon Islands.

Upon return to Glen Ellen from the *Snark* voyage, Jack concentrated on building a dream home called Wolf House. With construction started under the guidance of Eliza, Jack's step-sister, Jack and Charmian left in the summer of 1911 on a 1300 mile wagon trip over dirt roads into Central Oregon and back enjoying the beauty of the coast and also Crater Lake. They were off again in 1912 for a five month voyage on a sailing ship from Baltimore around the horn to Seattle. The next year, the "fireproof" Wolf House burned down on August 22, 1913. The year 1913 truly became a bad year for Jack when his doctor told him that his kidneys were in such bad condition that his life would end within a few years. This news prompted Jack to engage in his last great adventure, the rapid development of his "Beauty Ranch." He envisioned a ranch that would be the finest possible in the growing of crops and the breeding of animals. His ranch spending

escalated during this pursuit, requiring him to obtain advances from his publisher for unfinished books. A model ranch based on sound farming knowledge and experimentation became his final great goal, with writing the sole purpose of achieving that goal.

Jack London truly lived his short forty years of life at high speed, achieving much in adventure, writing, travel, and learning. He lived up to his credo:

I would rather be ashes than dust!
I would rather
 that my spark burn out in a brilliant
 blaze
 than it should be stifled by dry rot.
I would rather be a superb meteor
 every atom of me in magnificent glow,
 than a sleepy and permanent planet.
 The proper function of man is to live, not to
 exist.
I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong
 them.
I shall use my time.

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Jack London State Historic Park