

News from the Rum River Watershed

Special Issue: **ANNUAL WATERSHED OF CREATIVITY!!!**



Great Blue Herons

*Watercolor by Cheng-Khee Chee
(2003, 24 x 40 in. Used with permission)*

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From the Editor:

Let's just dive into this one! I am excited with these great submissions from people from all around Minnesota. Starting with the watercolor artist: Cheng-Khee Chee hails from Duluth, and is a master in his media. Perhaps best known for the book he co-produced with Doug Wood, "Old Turtle," many of his works depict vistas from our great neighboring watershed to the north: that of Lake Superior.

This ditty came to me while stretched out in one of its tributaries:

water run over me
water run under
water run through me
tear my tired soul asunder
(1982)

Don't hold your breath. Kriste



Waves forming the North Shore

*Watercolor by Cheng-Khee Chee
(1989, 25 x 37 in. Used with permission)*

Discovering Nearby New Lands

"You know, they don't build land anymore." These poignant words were uttered by the late world-renowned American humorist, Will Rogers.

Though it's true we cannot make the earth any bigger, there are natural land-building processes going on that don't require bulldozers or earthmovers.

Last week four of us pushed off in a pair of canoes on the upper St. Croix River for a few days of paddling and camping. The fact is that with the thick, humid air, we spent more than a fair amount of time submerged and keeping company with the fish and shifting sands. It is these very shifting sands that cause the river channel to form new routes, create interesting stripes of sand on the river bed and build emerging lands of *terra firma*.

I find it pleasantly astonishing to know that we can paddle on a "wild and scenic" river, within an hour of a major metropolitan area with millions of human residents, and still set up a tent on new land.

Most earth scientists date the age of the earth at approximately five billion years, a number far too big for me to grasp. Some folks would argue that the earth is maybe five or ten thousand years old. Those are also big numbers. Regardless, I will concede that our planet has been around for a goodly measure of time. In that period, continents and islands have shifted, risen, merged and spread in the heat of oozing magma or flowing sands.

By their very nature, rivers flow. When the gradient of the watershed is great the speed of the current is faster and more erosive; when the slope of the land is nearly flat the flow is lazy and unable to carry loads of river-borne debris and sediments.

To complicate matters even more, a river, stream, creek, or brook have primary currents but also infinite subtle currents that spin off, rise up, or dive deep in the flow. Consider the large boulder that sits exposed in the middle of a fast section of a spunky section of the river. Negotiating the rapids in the canoe we steer towards the massive boulder, a glacial remnant, in the fast current.

In our approach, a trio of basking map turtles are disturbed and they not-so-gracefully scurry from the boulder and plop into the river. Underwater, they can let the current carry them quickly away from the canoe disturbance or they can slip unseen into the quiet water directly behind the boulder on the downstream side. The upstream mass of rock forces the current to each side and only after it has passed the rock will the diverted flows merge together.

The boulder has many identities. If I were to cast a small spinner or a bass bug I would do well to direct my efforts towards the slow water directly at the downstream side of the boulder. The quiet, swirling water, referred to as an eddy, is a likely spot to hold a smallmouth bass. These quiet pockets of water are good fish holding-locations because the fish does not have to work so hard to hold its position in the flowing river. All it has to do is maintain and wait for the current to carry a food item towards its mouth.

When paddling whitewater, these boulders are both obstacles and rest stations. Like the bass, we can, through a series of strokes and maneuvers direct the canoe to a quick stop behind

such a boulder. It is an amazing feeling and sight to be sitting in a canoe with your paddle resting across the gunwales in the middle of a rapids. Such pauses allow the paddlers to scout and communicate their route before easing out from behind the boulder, leaving the eddy and moving on downstream.

While the riverbed might be scoured free of sand in the fast current, the protected pockets behind the boulder allow the river-carried sand to settle to the bottom.

"Garden Island," only recently christened by my canoe and life partner, Nancy, is a relatively new land. The name seemed appropriate with the abundance of colorful blooms growing there. These included the rose-pink Joe-Pye weed and swamp milkweed, the deep purple ironweed, the buttery yellow of sneezeweed and goldenrod and the cream-colored boneset flowers.

Garden Island might have got its start from one of the millions of white pine logs that were sent to waiting sawmills far downstream every spring. Perhaps one got hung up in a shallow section of river. Maybe it lodged against a boulder, or maybe it became jammed with a massive root system of a silver maple that had washed into the river. At any rate, the very second it stopped moving, new currents were born and the swirling waters quietly began the process of settling sands and building an island. With the addition of more floating debris getting caught in the mid-river obstacle, the island framework built on itself. And then, over the summer, as the water levels dropped, the sand became exposed. Floating seeds washed up and germinated, or birds paused, leaving their droppings which might have contained undigested seeds to form the island's first flora.

As humans we are quick to title new lands, mountain peaks and discovered rivers. During the golden age of exploration, over the past half dozen or so centuries, it was not unusual to name landforms after wealthy benefactors who provided the necessary funds for an expedition. And then there is the feeding of the ego to simply name it because no one else has, or to let the world know that you are the first to do so.

When I was eight years old, my neighborhood buddies and I named the overgrown vacant lot that now houses the corner dentist office, "the grassy green jungle." For us it was a near-wilderness and the name reinforced its mystique and gave us a reference point.

Garden Island, with its long sand spit extending like the tail of a river-borne comma, resembles a giant tadpole swimming upstream. Our tent stakes pushed easily into the sparsely vegetated ground, and we quickly took to the river to join the legions of sand grains drifting to form new points of discovery.

Tom Anderson, of Stacy Minnesota, wrote this essay, and the poem on page 6 regarding an experience in the environs of Canada's Hudson Bay. He has made protecting the environment both his vocation and avocation, recently retiring from the directorship of the Warner Nature Center, located near Marine on the Saint Croix. That center is well known as the location for the annual fall St. Croix River Rendezvous, bringing together people from all over who are studying the St. Croix River watershed, our neighboring watershed to the east of the Rum River.

SIGNALS

You would read
of the signals of the sky
when the full moon
appeared at midnight
and the stars or the sunshine
filled up the ground
with their brightness.

You would read the signals
of the seasons
and time's track on the iced lakes
and the winter's wood.

The trees
the animal steps
and the slender grass
are opened books
written by the universe!



LEAF

A light
waterfall
orange tree
gold and vermilion
palpitating presence
of autumn
is telling her story
in the hurricane regions.

Traveler of breeze
floats weightless
from the world's uppermost ceiling
and she dreams to find the sun
to dance tango with

Two poems by Maria T. Arrazola, of Stark, MN. From her book "Forbidden Territory."

Teresa is a wonderful friend of mine. Not only does she publish poetry in both Spanish and English, but she is an excellent artist with the oil media, often depicting memories of her native Colombia.

Just The Other Day, A Stark Encounter

The wolves come from the woods, with eyes focused on the chicken coop. Their pace is slow and cautious, having never been so close to the farmhouse before. Sam, the big Lab, lying beside the house in the early morning sun, watches as they approach. He lets out a deep growl as he makes a big leap to his feet and is off, running straight at the wolves. They hear and see Sam, a ninety-pound blur of anger, coming for them. They run a few hundred feet and then stop to face this unknown. Sam has run full bore and stops within a few feet of these interlopers. He is not sure what they are, but knows instinctively that they do not belong on his turf. He lets out his deep bass bark. The wolves, taller than he, but much thinner, stand shoulder to shoulder and wait for Sam to make a move. As he continues to bark, his master, having seen the encounter from the kitchen window, now arrives in his stocking feet. The wolves show no fear of the man, but turn and walk slowly back in the direction of the woods.

Sam and the man walk back to house, Sam to lie in the sun and relive the chase in his dreams, and the master to dry his socks and finish his breakfast.

John A. Sandeen, of Stark, MN, recently observed this interesting encounter between the canine races. He is constantly developing new skills, having just completed his first bronze pour, and is into putting out a folk/country music album.

The Wannigan

Slow-flowing river
in the middle of the afternoon
green and brown water
with cloud-covered reflections

I sit in the shade
on the floor of a houseboat
and listen to the buzz of
flies, one solitary frog croak, and
the chatter of swallows as a blue
damsel fly
sits on my toes.

Next week I turn forty-one.
Am I wise, yet?

Or just pausing a moment
for a summer respite.

K. A. Ericsson, 7-9-98

(You'll encounter my fillers when I don't have yours – anyone know what a "Wannigan" is?)

River Awakening

Good morning river.

I see you've not rested.
Lend me your waters while I
wash away the night.

Cupped in my hands,
I have captured your flow;
only to feel your chill as cupped hands
lifts your arrested current to my face.

I pause for the moment;
to give back your water
as it drips from my brow
nose and chin.

Bent over the river,
I open my eyes and
discover in the passing mirror
a soft, liquid stare,
a grizzled beard, browned face,
and rivers of my own.

Pouring into my unblinking eyes,
these wrinkles have gathered
a flotsam of wisdom and mistakes,
just as you, friend river,
gather stones, branches, feathers,
and journeying canoes.

Slowly, I stretch tall
and turn my face
to the drying heat
of the morning sun.

Yes, it's time to join you,
for we have a dance to share
and a story to birth.

Tom Anderson
Seal River
1993

An Evocation of Delight

My hometown of River Falls, Wisconsin has a river running through it called the Kinnickinnick. Isn't that a wonderful name for a river? I'm not sure why or how it got that name. It sounds rather native American, doesn't it? Any indeed, the word does refer to a tobacco-like dried leaf used for smoking, often by American Indians. But what is riverish about dried leaves? Well, anyway, the Kinnickinnick runs through my town much the same today, I suppose, as it did 60 years ago or so when it left enduring marks on my teen years of wandering its banks. Well, not exactly its banks, because you see, there were two tributaries of the river that have provided me with evocations of my early teens, and that, together with another creek, provide an enduring nostalgia for those long-ago years.

One of the streams running into the Kinnickinnick was called Pete's Creek, which, before emptying itself into the river, ran through the pasture of a farm belonging to the college in River Falls. You see, the college, in my years there called River Falls State Teachers College, featured a strong emphasis on agricultural education, and so operated its own farm for the edification of future vocational agriculture teachers and others of similar calling.

Well, across the creek, as it meandered (creeks always meander, don't they?) through the pasture of that farm, was a small concrete bridge, really only a cement slab across which farm machinery could be driven and cattle could walk and on which a lad could sit and dangle his feet in the cool stream and even poke his toes into the sandy bottom of the creek. A few minnows navigated its shallow waters, but a barefoot boy could wade its 10 or 12 foot width and mid-calf depth without trepidation.

My friend Newton Nelson and I spent many easy hours by and in that creek and on that bridge. We didn't really go there to do anything; we just went there to be there, and in those carefree summer afternoons that was enough – just to be there.

Another creek ran into the Kinnie, as we abbreviated it, about a mile downstream from Pete's entry to the river. I'm sure the stream had a name, but we never learned it. Memory fetches a picture of a small waterfall in the creek and a pool beneath the waterfall. Waterfalls have a way of doing that, don't they – forming quiet pools beneath their busy tumblings. From the pool the stream lazyied its way a few hundred feet to its undistinguished entry into the Kinnie.

And so another memory of another Eden where many hours were spent in idleness and where the place itself met our youthful desires. Coleridge said it well as he surveyed one of his places of contentment: "No wish profaned my overwhelmed heart. Blest hour! It was a luxury – to be!"

What a gift is ours to experience an "evocation of delight" that takes us back, takes us back, takes us back.

January 2006. Jerry Healy

All who know him will acknowledge that Jerry Healy, now of Cambridge, MN, is a pure delight! I had the privilege of boarding in his house in Falcon Heights in 1979, the summer after I graduated from Bethel College. Jerry was professor of literature there. Others know him best through Trout Lake Camp, where for many years he was MC for the men's retreats, and through the adoption agency his family started, the Children's Shelter of Cebu.

It is such a joy to get to know people in a community over time, and discover their talents and interests, and learn about their pasts. If you are new to an area, start now – get to know those right around you, then, bit by bit, reach out to those in neighboring communities. It is fun to see all the interconnections, the "schleck de schleck," and whaddaya know, that's how watersheds work too! All interconnected. (You knew I had to work that in somehow!)



View of Park Point and the Duluth Harbor
Watercolor by Cheng-Khee Chee
(1995, 30 x 40 in. Used with permission)

Friends of the Rum River meeting: Introduction to Rum River History at Mille Lacs Kathio State Park! Saturday, Tentative Date: April 14, 10 am to noon. Special Speaker: Park Naturalist Jim Cummings. Spring hike or canoe Lake Ogechie and see the source of the Rum River after the meeting! For more details contact Kriste at RumRiverNews@yahoo.com.

Mission Statement:

To provide a base of knowledge that we can use to make wise decisions concerning the Rum River Watershed, and to preserve, enhance, and enjoy its resources.

Vision Statement

To improve our ability to care for the Rum River Watershed and all of the associated watersheds that make up the Mississippi River system.

Contact Information:

Kriste Ericsson, Editor, PO Box 82, Grandy, MN 55029
RumRiverNews@yahoo.com

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