

JOURNAL OF MY POTOMAC PILGRIMAGE

From the Fairfax Stone to the Chesapeake Bay:
The Headwaters to the Source of the River

The Roots to Sky
Sanctuary has
sponsored my journey
in a fellowship called
Re-Storying the
Potomac which has
allowed me to explore
the stories of the
Potomac River on a
deeper and more
personal level.

Evans, Ilene

My Journal and
Reflections

Roots To Sky Sanctuary – Re-Storying the Potomac

Journal: Down the Patawomeck River - Ilene Evans 2023

Roots To Sky Sanctuary – Re-Storying the Potomac

Roots To Sky Sanctuary – Re-Storying the Potomac

I took a challenge from the fellows at Roots to Sky Sanctuary to work on a project called *Re-Storying the Potomac*. The idea was to tell the story of the river from the perspective of people of color who have been a part of its length and breadth for more than four hundred years.

For my part my fellowship, I decided to make a pilgrimage, from the headwaters to the source of the river, where it pours into the Chesapeake Bay, an intentional journey along what I consider to be a sacred place. It was time for me to attend the river that has been my home for more than twenty-five years. I have told the story of many of the people along the river, but never of the river herself. The Potomac River runs behind my house in West Virginia. My house is about a mile from the official headwaters and by the time it gets to me it is a fully fledged creek, or crick as folks around here may say. I listen to her song every day. But there is so much more to learn about her and her story. So, with several invitations to travel through Washington D.C, I was able to plan a driving itinerary over the 2023 Labor Day weekend, while the weather was friendly. I left the cool misty mountains of West Virginia, starting at the Fairfax Stone State Park and Monument the headwaters of the river. I planned to gather more stories of our people, people of color, women, indigenous stories and to integrate them into a better understanding of our journey in this land. My journal of that trip is what follows.

Entry One – Travelling from the Headwaters of the Potomac River

I started my Potomac Labor Day Pilgrimage at the headwaters of this mighty river and watershed. I started this journey in wonder. Water sings and speaks, and cries, even screams. As one of the mighty elements, she has a voice that will be heard. Earth, Air, Fire, Water. We are made of these things, and yet we sometimes lose perspective of just how much a part of them we are, more than they being small parts of us. When we ignore them, there is an enormous price to pay physically, environmentally, and spiritually. It is time for me to pay my respects and reflect on this river, where I make my home.

Living at the headwaters as I do, there is a sense of the beginnings of things. Where the small droplets trickle down from the mountain rains and then swell into pools and creeks and flows; washing and feeding as it rolls. The start of the river is a sacred place, a holy place, a birthplace. I think of it as a story of the river 's beginnings, it begins quietly, but assuredly. It seeks out others to join in its travels and turns and bends with so many other streams that feed into what some native Algonquians peoples called the Patawomeck River.

The headwaters are quiet, simple, rushing along stones and branches. I think she is a friendly, social being. She has room for others and welcomes them to join and fill her banks. There, the song is of the layers of pebbles and rocks washed down for millennia. How old is the river you ask? Hummm... how old indeed? Some say it is three and a half million years old – long before people lived along its banks and fished the waters, made settlements. There are things in this world that are so much older than we people and our memories. How long have the fish been in the river? How long? Hummm... How long have the birds been here? Ah, there's a chickadee... how long has the river heard their song? Hummmmm?

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Poem 1

There's a Way

There's a way that the river curves that makes me feel like I am melting into the soft edge of the bank, flowing, and melting with the warm shifting sand. Snuggling in, I bond into the curves as fluid, as bank, as sand, as river. For river is more than water, more than its shores, more than its banks, more than its reefs and tangles, more than its bottom, more than its's mud, more than its grasses, fish, frogs, snakes and flies, dragonflies, and ripples. I curve with the river and loose the stiffness of my two-leggedness. I become supple and pliable like the softened clay, taking the shape of the strength surrounding me, taking in my body the energy of all the forces within and without. Above and below. I am fluid, flowing, skin dispersing so all the atoms touch and are touched, all is stroked, all is held. I add to the rivers. I add to its knowing. We ride and fly across the land. We are free. Spraying falls, splashing curves, we play and ride all together. When I come away, stepping quietly back on the shore, my soul is no longer dry.

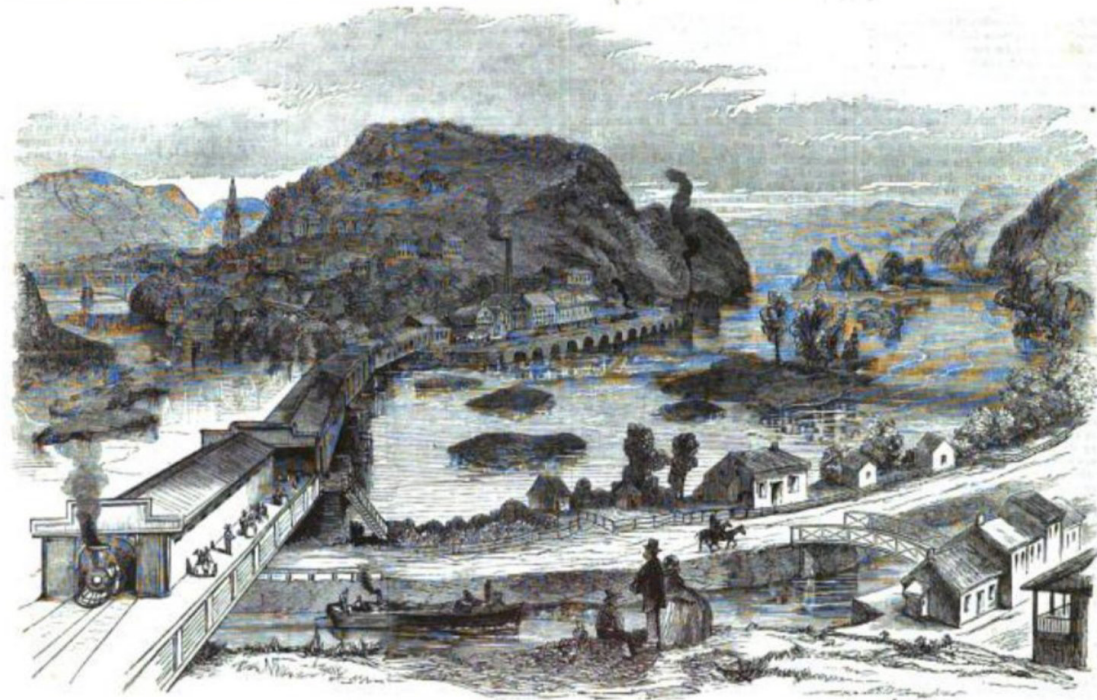
I This little trickle is making a pool at the Headwaters of the Potomac river – Fairfax Stone Monument, Thomas, WV 2023

Entry 1 Part 2: Reflections on Historical Connections

It was a beautiful day for driving, the weather mild, the roads dry. I found myself identifying many of my memories in and around the river, reviewing stories that I have collected and told to learn of our journey of freedom here in America. As I passed the signs on the highway for Harper's Ferry, I recalled the story of Coralie Franklin Cook of Storer College. My story is now woven in and around these historical anchors as I share her life and times with others. Her story is part of the story of the river too. She graduated from Storer College in 1880. Quite a feat for a woman of her times. The confluence of conflicting currents is very strong here. Storer College was one of the post-war initiatives of the Free-Will'd Baptists to educate and prepare newly freed slaves to begin a new life as free men and women. The towns people of Harpers Ferry did not want them there, considered them inferior, not worthy of freedom or education. The townspeople terrorized the teachers, students, and overall attempts at any sense of equality. But Storer College persevered and Coralie and her older sister Mary were two of the first students taken into the fledging programs. First in the normal school, then into the teaching college. Coralie went on to study English, elocution, and was the one to establish what became the drama department at Howard University. She lived at Howard with her husband, Dean George Cook for many years. They continued their family trips and support back and forth to Harpers Ferry.

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There, in Martinsburg, was also one of our first successful black newspapers, The Martinsburg Press. The editor of the paper was the well-known lawyer and publisher, J. R. Clifford, Franklin-Cook's brother-in-law. They were both part of the Niagara Movement, the origins of the NAACP



HARPER'S FERRY—THE SCENE OF THE LATE INSURRECTION.

(National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). The initial meetings included W.E.B. DuBois there at Storer College and Harpers Ferry. The story of John Brown is here too at Harpers Ferry. My research on Harriet Tubman and her relationship with him brought me here many years ago. There are many iconic figures in black history woven into the Potomac: stories of resistance, protest, courage, strength, strategy, and construct.

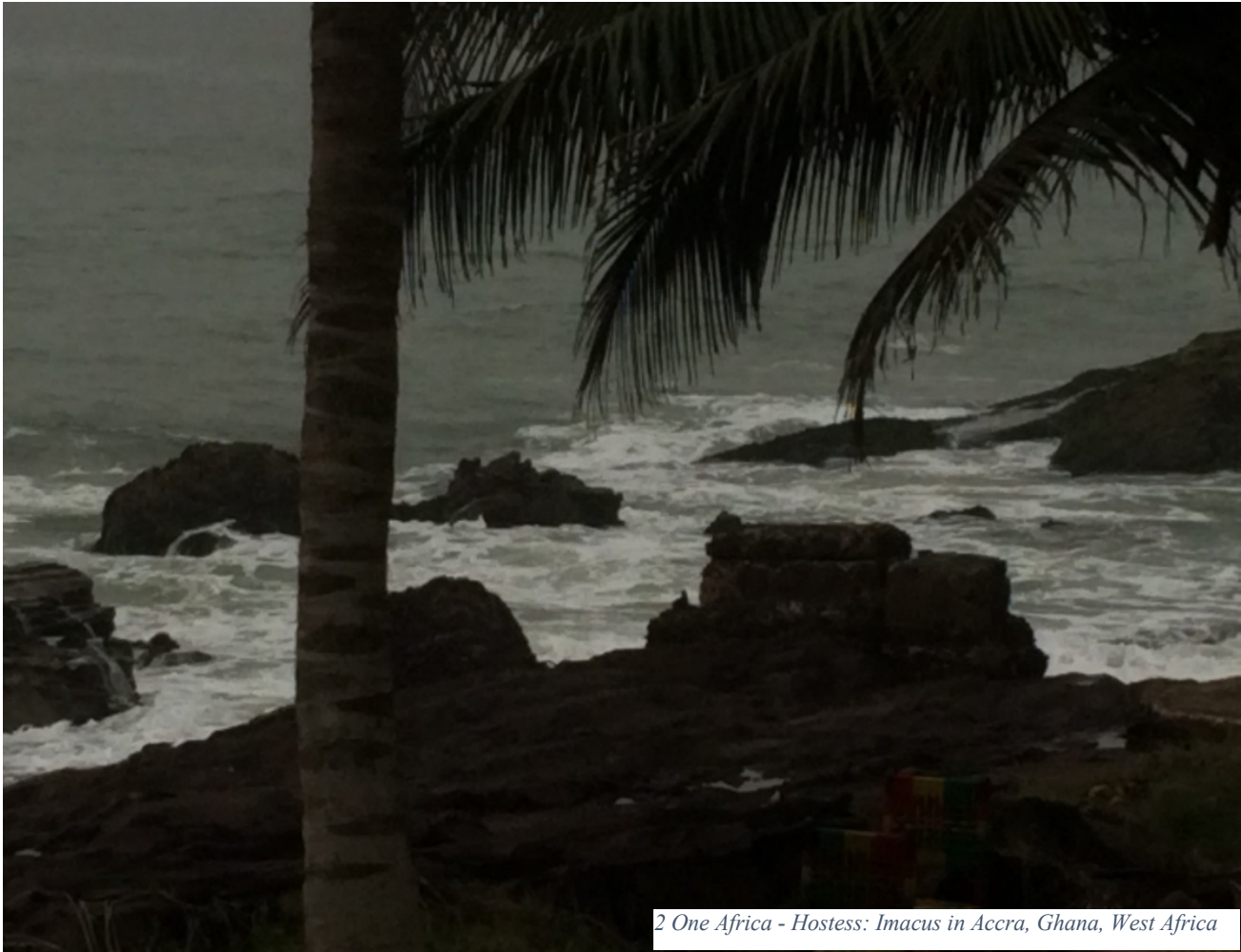
I reflected on another long-running current in my career: my journey as a storyteller and Chautauquan telling the stories of Harriet Tubman and her travels up and down tidewater Maryland. I have been telling her story in portrayal for more than thirty years now. The river is a part of the victories and losses of freedom woven in her story. Her life managing the tides and currents of her condition, caught in slavery, demonstrated the hidden power of the river and of her determination to be free, and to free others.

The Potomac River is a symbol for the journey to freedom for many of my people. Through it all our songs tell of the power the river has to carry the message of freedom – *Stand Still Jordan, One More River to Cross, Wade in the Water*.... Toward the end of the Civil War Aunt Harriet's assignments brought her to Fort Monroe to aid the United States Colored Troops with the hospital soldiers there. She did not have good things to say about their conditions and the care they received at the hospital. However, she continued to remedy the suffering of the wounded. Fort Monroe is now a National Park and the NPS recognizes her historical influence and presence there. The Fort was also recognized as a place for the first landing of enslaved Africans, and they include these stories now in the park's narrative. That was not always the case. In 2009, I visited the site of the landing of the ships in 1619 with other Blackstorytellers from NABS where we could grieve, honor, and pray together remembering our ancestors. The grim

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colors of the water and the sky together felt heavy and tear-filled. What did they see at that landing? Which one of our grandmothers stood in these waters? How will we find their stories?

Entry One : Part three - Ghana, On the Oceans Edge with Harriet Tubman



2 One Africa - Hostess: Imacus in Accra, Ghana, West Africa

As I drove on, another deep dive moved my memory. I felt the connection of the vast ocean right along with the journey of the river east. They say, “*From the east we came and to the east we will return.*” I am not sure who said it first, but it is a sentiment that has carried me forth in my need for connection and identity. There was the link between West Virginia and Africa, our motherland.

The Potomac is the only east flowing river on this side of the continental divide. The graves of many of our ancestors on plantations long forgotten are oriented to the east. I believe this is true for both Mount Vernon and Monticello. I send my prayers on that ancestor superhighway all the way across the ocean.

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3 NABS Storytellers at One Africa in Accra, Ghana, West Africa: Mama Edie, me, Imacus, Queen Nur, TAHIRA, Debra, Vanora, Arthuretta and Gwen of

I was fortunate to travel to Accra and Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, West Africa in 2015 with other storytellers for the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS). I was invited to present the program that I do of the historical portrayal of Harriet Tubman there one evening during Panafest Festival. I felt an uncanny connection to the waters there, as we took turns sharing the stories we brought for the festival to an eager audience. The warmth of the waters, the feel of the sea on our skin, the tides pulling in and out were carrying messages from the west. It was almost as if I could

reach out and touch the east flowing Potomac River from the shore. As I faced west, home, I knew the listeners were feeling the spirit of our ancestors too. The Ghanaian people revere Harriet as one of their own. Many Ashanti claim her as part of the family heritage and now I could feel the same spiritual connection and energy flowing through me, through the ages and all the souls whose bodies lay at rest there in the sea. We are a spiritual people, and our traditions encourage us to listen to our dreams, to the elders, and to our ancestors.

The Cape Coast Castle has yet to reckon all of the shame it bears in the story of human trafficking, rape and pillage, but for us on that trip, we learned that families are still learning about what happened to the people that disappeared, never to be seen again. There was a sign on one of the doors that said, “*Door of No Return.*” And so, it was. We walked through that door as our ancestors did. When we reached the beach outside, we could see the fishermen tending their nets and some out in their fishing boats. And when we turned to go back in, there was a new sign placed there for those of us who were new to these shores and horrors. It read, “*Door of Return.*” The sign was meant to welcome those of us so displaced, so torn from home and family.



4 Panafest Festival: Welcome Home Accra, Ghana: Adoption Ceremony – Mama Edie in front with the Queen Mother

Ashanti leaders filled our days with ceremonies to welcome us back to the motherland, to help us reconcile such a brutal historical reality. We all bore it in our hearts, in our bones. We wept and grieved for the lost ones, the mothers, the babies, the lost, the broken. The Panafest Festival meant to celebrate the return from across the waters. I was very moved by the welcome.



The river has the power to bring freedom and abundance. The river also has the power to

5 From the East We Came - To the East We Return Cape Coast , Ghana, West Africa 2015

ensnare, the power of life and death. I have sung river songs for years like **Deep River**, *Deep River, my home is over Jordan, Deep River, Lord, I want to cross over into campground*. They echo in the souls of our people. Another current that moves through us, determined to survive.

Poem 2

The River Remembers It All

The River Remembers It All ... waters gathered before the glaciers began to pull the earth with all that water power, water freezing and the frozen power of the waters pulling the land higher and higher till the earth was left in peaks and caps.

Sculpture shaped and Reshaped, held in place. The waters pulled the earth - higher and higher till the earth rose to magnificent heights from the great depths...

From the grains of sand to the granite stone, sandstone, the composite folding and refolding.

The river remembers it all.

The tiny creatures, the winged, two legged the four legged the two legged again.

The river remembers it all.

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The river remembers the crashing and diving, smooth, strong, pulling, pushing, eking through crevices and cracks, shifting beds, finding the narrow, the easy push, stubborn, insistent,

The River remembers it all.

The river remembers the soft yielding grasses, and loose stone through mosses and branches, through rock, hard rock and the crash against the rock, and the pull against time.

The River remembers it all.

Entry One - Part 4: The Power Of The River Became Real – Very Real To Me...

People move in a similar way to the river's waters, mirroring the river's many currents. Moving uptown, downtown, crosstown, midtown, out of town... Some currents are easy to see, easy to follow, and some are hidden, deep, almost lost, almost forgotten. The movement of people in cities is likened to the circulatory system in the human body. Some city planners, researchers, and people who study biomimicry, study the flow of traffic. They measure the increase of traffic in the different times of days and seasons. With an understanding of the human system, traffic controllers have been able to improve human currents, learning from nature. The river has so many different speeds that are moving, sometimes in harmony, sometimes on collision courses. But the river knows its destination and has the will to drive toward the sea. There are many obstacles, but the fluid nature of water will create a way out of no way. The river knows the way. And she remembers.

The river, like the earth, remembers. She carries the accumulated blessings along with the curses in her many currents. A river cursed? How can that be?... Well, I think the river has known abuse on a scale beyond our own generations neglect and overuse. But she has also seen the efforts to restore, reclaim, and rebuild it to its early health and harmony. The river is resilient. It is strong. But it can be damaged. Three and a half million years. What is that to the mighty Potomac? Tides and time wait for no man. The timescale for the river is beyond our understanding.

What makes a river strong? What makes a river friendly? Applying such human terms to such an elemental force of nature seems childish. But those very words clarify the measure of our relationship with the river and its surrounds.

Poem

The River Runs And Runs And Runs

I try to catch up – run beside the river, bouncing and leaping, sliding, and falling... and running again...

As I run alongside the river, I see myself! Ahh, keeping pace, sliding across the bank, shore to shore, moving in the under current easy... easy, ... then stronger and stronger, deeper and deeper the current pulls and there I am moving easily along the bottom. The soft bottom of the river all sandy, smuschy mix of stone and rock and clay and sand... then up, up... cooler the water, then warmer, it keeps moving, never stopping the river runs and runs and runs.

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With such small beginnings, imagine my amazement as I drove into the nation's capital to see an enormous and powerful expanse – a waterway that rivals the ocean even before it meets one. It was vast and millions of years old. I was overwhelmed. The Atlantic was waiting, by way of the Chesapeake Bay. The power of this river became very real to me. Two people drowned in it this year. I was reminded of the hidden currents, the keeper currents feared by kayakers and the novice river riders. The waters lie still, or so it seems when looking from the shore. But beneath lies a power, an unpredictable power in currents that run deep, pulling, and pushing with invisible force. Oh, the *Keeper Currents*? Yes. I am told that they will pull a rider to the very bottom of the river. The instinct is to struggle against it, in which case you will surely drown. But if you let the current take you, it will carry you down and bring you back up to the top, shooting you out again. Unseen mysteries and powers are at work here.

The highway through the city allowed me to see the river with the backdrops of the monuments and tourist attractions. The traffic was heavy, but the view was remarkable and very impressive. Huge buildings and bridges shape the city and leave their mark. I started the journey in wonder and the wonder at this immense confluence was overwhelming.

There I was, in the heart of Tolkien's Mordor, as one of my friends describes the innards of Washington D.C. The nation's capital has been a crossroads for some very wicked people and events. It has also been a haven for free thinking and freedom. The journey of freedom in America has been fraught. The river bears witness, ancient witness to the good and the bad of each generation.

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My invisible guide via the technology of the cell phone helped guide me to lodging for the night. Hers was a friendly voice in my sea of thoughts and memories – Nadia. Old homes, Old streets, new lights, new construction. A full on maze to navigate. “Look for the 100-year-old red maple tree.” “Oh,” I said.

When I reached my destination for the night, I was in a very old historically black neighborhood. However, the population there is quite diverse these days. The homes are charming, and the yards well kept. There was a one-hundred-year-old tree at the front of the house where I was staying, and I know it has seen a lot of change. The story of people of color in the Nation’s Capital is fraught with challenges to the very liberty it means to represent. I am glad to be a place where I feel safe and have time to rest and reflect. There are so many stories, and they are complicated, intertwined and always changing – like the river.

As I lay to rest, I kept seeing the image of the vast river at the crossing of the George Washington Bridge as I drove past the national monuments. A river so vast, so ...so vast so ancient, so unknown and unpredictable. I, without knowing it, had been struck by one of the hidden currents. As I unpacked for the night, so weary from the drive, I only thought of resting and getting ready to teach a class online the next day. I called Nadia to assure her that all was well and realized I was having trouble speaking, but thought it would just be me having bit my tongue. Surely, it was a small thing. But my tongue continued to swell and kept swelling until I could not speak or swallow. I thought I may have to go to the emergency care. Had I taken on some of that hidden power – power that could take away someone’s voice, render them speechless? How many ancestors had been silenced? Was I feeling their pain, their journey. Was their story part of my story in this way as well? What does it mean when a storyteller cannot tell their story? I was on the edge of panic and it was a restless night. Dozing, waking to see if I was still breathing. But under it all, I knew I was loved, surrounded by love in a place where I was safe. So, I let myself lay in faith and trust.
..... until I fell asleep right alongside our greatest teacher – death.

By morning the swelling had gone down enough to believe that I would survive this trip and not abandon the pilgrimage – this was a part of it too. Now, I felt the miracle of life on a whole new level and such deep gratitude to share this journey with our ancestors. I taught my classes and rested, planning out the next part of the drive.

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Entry Two

Friday – September 1, 2023

Accokeek Park – The Accokeek Foundation and the National Colonial Farm

I met Sebi Tayak at the Roots to Sky Sanctuary. He had me mark two special places on my pilgrimage map: Accokeek Park and Nanjemoy. These were places he knew well and where he grew up. His tribal affiliation was with the Piscataway people and his mother one of the outspoken leaders on cultural identity. The next day I felt encouraged to visit Accokeek, the park and reserve across the Potomac River from Mount Vernon. Accokeek was not just the name of a place; it was the name of the people who lived there, Algonquian people. There were so many tribes and settlements of indigenous peoples, bands and families, farmers, and fishers, united in this area as the Piscataway. We could be speaking Algonquian instead of English, had British settlement been handled differently. Conflicts between bands and tribes made it difficult to form a unified defense against British encroachment, or even to evaluate their settlement as an invasion. The Catholic Jesuit priests used their sense of divine right to convert native people and appropriate their land. Later the protestants took over with the same sense of “God on their side.” The colony started in Jamestown in 1608 was the beginning of a relationship fraught with greed, betrayal, hidden agendas, broken trust, often under the veil of faith and righteousness.



I got in the car with my GPS all loaded. Soon, I passed Howard Divinity School and Catholic University. Religious movements have left their mark on the city. This was a call, a reminder, to be our best selves. Religion is just one of the many ideological currents that runs parallel to the mighty Potomac. There are currents of uplift and education; currents that carry the stories of our ancestors like Nannie Helen Burroughs Drive. Then it was over the water by way of bridge, bridges so crowded, so busy, and in constant motion.

Currents of people and currents of cars, busses, trucks, scooters, and gym shoes. Again, the confluence of so many different waterways pouring into the river and meeting in forced integration. Of course, the currents are strong, of course the flow can move mighty stones and

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sand. We are such a reflection of that multiplicity of purpose, intent, and mission, driving the waters insistently toward the ocean. How the river harmonizes its many branches is not always peaceful and in fact, the waters hide much of the violence in such confrontation. The currents run so differently from the riverbed, waters get quiet in places, in caves and coves and drops only to rejoin the cacophony further downstream.



The road to Accokeek Park snakes through a dense forest grove. Bits of the wild, left to the natural elements, with houses and projects of reclamation and protection scattered on each side of the asphalt ribbon. One car was following me as I come down the winding lane and we pulled into the parking lot, half full of visitor's cars and vans. I saw the gentleman in the car that was behind me, take his fishing gear, and disappear down a path. I smiled – coming to the shore to fish. It was not long ago that the river was so toxic that fishing, swimming, and most water recreation was not allowed. That seems to be changing

as the river gains a healthy review.

The park has a teaching farm, and an historical living history interpreter to share stories and lifeways with the many students, schools and families who come. I first headed to the Accokeek visitor center – (there were signs instructing us in the parking lot to start our visit there). At the center, I was immediately confronted by the colonial framework for telling stories. There are stories of first contact, betrayal, murder, and the confusion of cultures. The many bands and tribes who met the early settlers, looking to make home on these shores. I found much of this disturbing because I know these stories are complex. Some people cast the country's origins in terms of winners and losers –in my opinion, we all lost and in many ways are still losing.

I walked out to the pier which faces George Washington's Mount Vernon home. I came to understand a new word to me, "viewscape." The Accokeek Park is a viewscape for Mount Vernon. The park land and the Accokeek Foundation has its protected designation due to Mount Vernon and its visitors. Hum. How Posh...

POSH – my dear teacher and friend Reid Gilbert made sure that I understood the origins of this adjective. We apply it to anything indulgently beautiful, ornate, or extravagant. It is also commonly applied to the rich, wealthy, and privileged. Our celebrity culture encourages the

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POSH lifestyle. It is an acronym for a sea faring term: Port Out, Starboard Home. As a ship may sail in and out of a port the riders seek out the best view. It's all about the view, a view that comes with a high price tag and a certain social status. To me, this is about controlling what one sees and keeping from view the things one would rather not see. The privileged can afford to pay to see only what they want to see and pretend that the rest doesn't exist. That special ticket allows them to have the best view whether coming in or out of the port. I find that phrase accounts for attitudes and yearnings yet today as a status symbol. The park's very preservation reflects the practices of the POSH.

That does not stop two gentlemen fishing off the pier and that makes me smile. It reminds me that even though most of us cannot afford a POSH ticket for the cruise, we can find our own beauty, so much beauty, joy, love, and laughter in the magics of everyday things. The POSH view does not guarantee happiness.

The Potomac River mirrors our own conflicted and complex story. Nation building, some call it. Others call it colonization. Whatever you call it, the story of America and our experience in the country is about power. Power. Water is power. And who controls it, masters its mysteries, commands the wealth to be gained from it has the power. Not power with, but power over. Power in harmony is a concept lost on the mainstream American culture. Power in dominance seems to guide most of our political and community leaders.

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When I left the gift shop, I followed the maps and hoped to see some of the re-enactors and interpreters, but they were not there that day. So, a self-guided tour was just the thing.



I started down the gravel path to The National Colonial Farm. The park is meant to be a living history museum of both the settlers, the enslaved, and the freemen who worked the lands. The National Colonial Farm was quiet the day I went. The reconstructed buildings host a number of activities that show life in the small farm production of tobacco.

This farm is meant to represent the common, middle-class farmers of tobacco and corn. They raise sheep, use the wool, and have a full garden, and activities for students and families who come to visit colonial life on a small scale. The people who carry this story are part of the paid staff and are deeply committed to the value of telling their story with integrity to their life and times, the good along with the not so good and downright ugly aspects of those lives and times. They include an enslaved woman, Cate Sharper, her husband, a free man, and their son. They refer to the documents which account for their time on this land, the census, the land deeds and trusts and so on. The story of Cate Sharper gives some of our ancestors a voice in the mix of life in the 1700's.

The park has not shied away from the brutal beginnings of first contact. Living history presentations keep alive the mixed heritage of freedom this country has entertained. It is clear that only some people were meant to be fully free in this context. Freedom, though, in some form may be bought, had its limits. This is a difficult truth lost on those who would lionize the founding fathers as Christian saints, for they were neither. They were landed gentry whose magnanimity only extended as far as their cultural roots: white men of power and influence. The family of this living history farm are considered middle class tobacco farmers. Their struggle did not include the people whose land they settled or the people they needed as labor. The linear morality of early settlers did not allow for them to see themselves as anything but earnest honest

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hard-working people. Their complicity in perpetuating human trafficking, and land theft were justified in their religious zeal.

I thought about that as I walked down the treelined driveway, past berry bushes, staggered fencing, the sounds of birds and bugs. It was a beautiful walk to the cabins, past the gardens. There were two guests that day on the farm: mothers with strollers and children moving from building to building. They met up for children's play and discovery day. They strolled in the grassy meadow as the children played. The feeling of the place was gentle that day. I wondered what it would be like of an active harvest or planting day.

Accokeek. So, what's in a name? Again, Accokeek is not just a place name, it is the name of people who lived in this cultural landscape. Just so, the Potomac is not just a name for a river, it is the name of the people who lived along its banks. I understand that the river is named after a tribe in Virginia called the Patawomeke, or "river of burning pine" or "river of swans," or "river of travelling traders". They were part of the larger Powhatan Confederacy, which controlled most of the region in and around the river. Their descendants are recognized in the Stafford County, Virginia area. But here, in southern Maryland, I was in Piscataway territory.

I have been stunned by the number of names, tribal names, and bands, that I have never heard of until this trip. The old maps from 1608 show so many people and communities. The indigenous people of this area have been largely invisible to most Americans. The name of a people or person holds the story, their identity. Remove the names and the people disappear. That is largely what happened in the national story. The Nanticoke, the Wicomiss, the Patawomeken, the Piscataway, the Nanjemoy, the Tochwoh, the Nacotchtook, the Potopaco, the Pautuxent, the Mattawoman, the Mattapanient, the Anacostin, the Sacayo, the Portobacos, the Chingwateik, the Masquestend, the Pangayo, the Doeg, the Mikikiwoman all a part of the western shore of the Potomac. That does not include the tribes they had conflict in territorial disputes.

This matters to me because no one thrives when they feel invisible. Identity is fundamental to health and self-esteem. We have been dis-membered long enough. Building and rebuilding identity depends on re-memembering upon whose shoulders we stand. Literally, we need to put back together our stories, our families to find a firm foundation, an anchor in the storms of life.

I learned that the Piscataway and the Nanjemoy did not receive tribal status in the state of Maryland until 2012, and that recognition was hard won. The people have persisted as has their culture. They are still here and the efforts to establish lands and cultural landscapes are in the works. I was able to see some of that work down in Nanjemoy Creek.

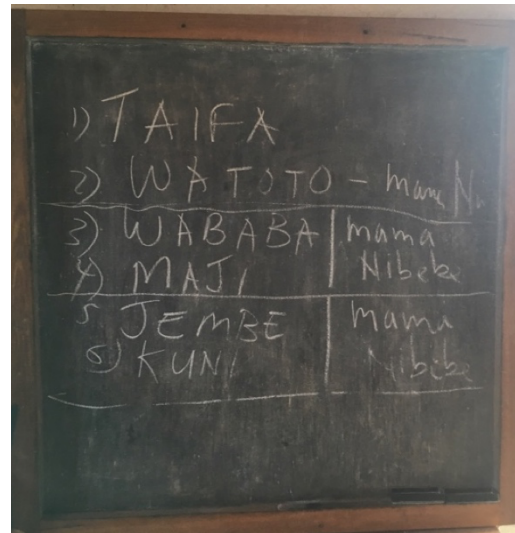
Tanzania – The Women of Maji Marwa (Water for Marwa) and the Nibi River Song

My visit to Accokeek reminds me of another visit which was a strong current that carried me all the way across the ocean to Tanzania. In 2018, my friend and colleague, Tony Duke asked me to help with a project that he was a part of in a small village outside of Some, Tanzania, called Marwa. The people there had been looking for ways to help restore the fresh water available to the village in the bush. Women there had made up songs to thank and welcome the people who were a part of the project and Tony thought that the songs were so good and moving that if they were recorded the village women would be able to raise money. I was to help prepare them for

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such a recording. When I heard their songs, I understood the significance of not only their songs, but their diverse community collaborating to create beautiful music. Twenty-nine women, no electricity, not a computer in sight, I could not speak even Ki-Swahili fluently. (Many of them spoke three or four languages.) But we connected and laughed and enjoyed each other all around our purpose – the waters. We all need water. Their river had always been abundant and available until the last ten years, when the underground aquifer seemed to diminish, even torrential rains had not restored it to its fullness and garden, farming, and other living projects were in jeopardy. Women were forced to walk 6, 7, hours to bring back water to their village. Water was carried in five-gallon containers on their heads. These are strong hard-working people with families and children and so much resilience.

As we sat together at lunch one day, our gracious hosts brought us rice, stew, bread, plantains. Because I was a special guest they wanted to be hospitable. What did I have to share? How could I show them how inspired I was by their singing, their working together, their sacrifice of time to do this project? I thought I would share the work of the Anishinaabe Nibi River Walkers from Minnesota with them. With the translator's help, I thought that knowing that there are people who understand their journey and sacrifice, far away from Marwa would inspire them, they way they had inspired me.



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By way of my translator, I brought them the story of Sharon Day and the Nibi River Walkers from the Anishinaabe tradition. Women are the guardians of the water, men of fire. Sharon Day has been leading the river walkers where they take water from the beginning of the river and walk it all the way to end of the river, returning the water to the river to help the spirit of the river remember who she is. I was able to participate in one of these spiritual walks which started at the headwaters of the Potomac River, my river. And I carried the water for a short way, passing it on to the next woman as they made their way the full 400-mile length of the river out to the bay. What an honor. Singing to the river, saying prayers for her health and our own. I shared the story and sang one of the songs that is part of their tradition. It paled in light of the women of Marwa, but it was an important connection for me. Native women and African women of different faiths, traditions and means. Beautiful- They had sisters across the ocean.



6 The Maji Marwa Project in Marwa, Tanzania 2018 29 women gathered to sing and record their collaborative compositions – full harmony and wonderful rhythms – all accapella!



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**Entry Three -
Nanjemoy Wildlife Environmental and Educational Center**



The next morning, I was ready to find the Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Educational Center I navigated my way first, moving out into the congested capital and its surrounds. The crowded housing and traffic thinned out and I found myself in the suburbs, then out of the city and into the country on winding backroads. Nanjemoy is quite rural, dotted with single family homes and farms. Most of the people I saw are black families and people of color, taking out trash, cutting grass, doing chores. I was looking for Turkey Tayac Rd. where the Nanjemoy wilderness area educates the school district about the Nanjemoy Creek, marshlands, channels, wetlands, animals, and plants. The name of the road gives honor to the tribal chief who worked to build these bridges for the community to advance its identity and ensure its longevity in recent times.



I met Turkey Tayac’s grandson, Sebi, last year and enjoyed his visit to my house at the headwaters of the Potomac River. He was interested in sanctuary as a concept and cultural preservation. It only seemed right to return to the land he calls home, Nanjemoy. It was a beautiful drive. When I turned onto Turkey Tayac Pl. I looked for some kind of visitor’s center, but all I saw was an unmanned observatory... humm. So, I headed to the next driveway. There was an office marked there, but no one was around as I pulled in to park.

Then suddenly, as I was getting out of my car, Tim Emhoff appeared. He looked like a park ranger, and I guess I looked like a lost visitor, so we made an immediate connection. I told him I was looking for the water, to see the creek, and get a feel for the land and such. He welcomed me and said he would get a golf cart to make our travel easier. As he was leaving, another gentleman in a long green apron appeared, Mike Callahan, and looked like he might be heading to the kitchen or the bar-b-que pit. I couldn’t tell which and so I made a silly comment about the importance of a chef.... He laughed and said,

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“Well, if mice and gophers and small carrion were on the menu, ...” he was your man. He had been getting the food ready to feed the raptors which lived in the enclosures there. They were part of the educational programs. He offered to show me more of the birds when I got back from my ride with Tim. Both gentlemen were delightful.

Tim is one of the resident naturalists, originally from Missouri. He came to the Nanjemoy area because of his wife’s work. She grew up in the area. He was happy to find this job opening at the Center. So, Tim has become an integral part of both the caretaking of the land and its educational programs. He is part of the crew working to return the creek it to a more natural state. He acts as the local instructor for the student sessions when the schools are open. He was quite knowledgeable.



When Tim brought the golf cart around, we headed down to the water’s edge. The path led to a wide bay and a long wooden pier went out about 100 feet. It was a large area to be called a creek. But, I come from a place where a creek, or crick is something you can walk across. The creek referred to the movement of waters from the river up into the channel. It was beautiful. I remarked on the osprey nest high atop a pole, close to the pier. He said it was also a favorite landing place for the eagles who nest in another part of the creek. Tim described a complex and interdependent ecosystem. Tim said that the gulls and fish-eating birds leave tell-tale bits and bones on the dock. You can tell who comes and goes when you see what they leave

behind. At the water’s edge, there are the worn stones and logs that brackish water washed and carved, leaving homes for the little creatures. The salt content there is just high enough to have blue crabs, but not oysters. Four parts per thousand, not enough for a salt marsh.

The land the park uses is called the Posey Easement. More of the surrounding lands were given back to the Piscataway people. If you followed the creek down further, you would end up in the Potomac and they on into the Chesapeake Bay.



Most of us landlubbers pay little attention to the rhythm of the tides. Here at the water’s edge, they have a tremendous impact on daily life and have to be accounted for in each season. The cycle of high and low tide, the amount of salt water, fresh water, and temperature figures into which native species they can encourage, and which invasive species can be curtailed. The food supplies of native fish, like native birds, like the osprey depend on the crustaceans and shellfish that are vulnerable to the change in these tides. And the weather.

Tim drove us around the property and through one of the fields where they will be planting heritage seeds, having

cleared out the Japanese Stilt grass. Stilt grass grows everywhere and crowds out a lot of the native species. Tim was excited about the new plants that will become part of the reclamation.

We drove further in a different part of the marsh. There was a raised wooden platform used as an outlook there, where the students can get a good sighting of the various plants, flowers, trees, and vines around. The tide had come in, however, and we decided not to get our feet wet and stayed on the dry boards. We walked along a board walk that kept our feet from sinking into the mud.

The river’s flavors are outstanding here. The aroma is mild at the marsh. Fresh and brackish, not

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too salty... He said that there have been beds of wild rice there in the past. They may try to encourage that again.



There is a great effort to bring back native plants and to remove invasive species. That is a really big job at this point. The introduced species are so vigorous and strong, they have won battles in disputed territories all over our region. The stories of dominance and control are not lost on these naturalists. The competition between native species and native peoples have found similar challenges over the decades. Some of these plants are so beautiful and look so natural in their setting now, few would recognize them as aggressive invaders. I have been charmed again and again at the garden centers, not knowing any better. So, out comes the English Ivy! When we know better, we are obliged to do better.

Tim helped me identify some of the native tubers that may become a part of this new visioning of the wildlife preserve. I made my visit at the end of summer, just as fall is starting. It would be an entirely different experience to be here in spring. I understand that the storms and tides change the flowing and growing of the plants and animals. There will always be change, and dramatic change where nature is concerned, but our human travels have brought new seeds and critters and added to the complex ecosystem, straining, and stressing the balance.



Mike, the naturalist who cares for the raptors, was waiting for us when we pulled up to the enclosures for the birds. I was invited to take a look – up close and personal. The Bald Eagle, the Red-Tailed Hawk, the Barred Owl, and the Screech Owl are permanent residents there. They have had injuries that will not allow them to go back to the wild. They are used in the education program and what a sight they are! My photos were not very good, because I didn't want to use a flash in the enclosure, but what an honor to be in the presence of such majesty. These guardians of the sky fly confidently up and down our river. They hunt and fish and mate and build their

homes in the woods and keep all of us watching the sky. The Red-Tailed Hawk dropped a feather while I was there... Her name was Tisiphone, a Roman Goddess, a fury, avenger of murder... She certainly looked like one who could avenge wrong. The Red-Tailed Hawk is very special to me - it was an

honor.

Their familiar calls keep everyone alert. The Red-tailed Hawk announces his/her sentry duty with one long Keeerrrr. The Red-Shouldered Hawk makes that call between eight and twelve times in a row. At home, at the headwaters, we know who is in the neighborhood because of all the songs and calls. When the other birds get very quiet, you know the hawk is on the hunt. If you have ever caught or held a feather, you know how mysterious they are: so soft, so strong; no singular feather could guarantee flight, but all together, with the diverse shapes and sizes and

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strength ... There is a feat of flight. The wing feathers, the tailfeathers, the tiny feathers on the face and head around the beak. There is the warm downy feather undercoat. The wonder of each bird, large, small, carnivorous, or vegan, they amaze and teach us the economy of life. Each wing beat, each heartbeat, each season, is a gift.

This summer, I watched a nest of mourning doves hatch and fledge, via my friend's diligent webcam. If you were looking at those tiny featherless forms, you would never guess they were ever meant to fly. Such is the wonder of life on the Potomac.

Tisiphone... an injured Red-tailed Hawk.



The visit came to a close with a special peek behind the scenes at the rookery. had a name. The falconer who worked with the Red-Tailed Hawk named her. Her. She came to recognize her name, that sound symbol. Her name was Tisiphone. She was named for one of the furies, in Roman Mythology. She was known as the avenger of murders. A name is so particular. When I called her by her name, we were connected in another way, a deeper way. I was very grateful. Each of the birds have their own story.

The story of the river is full of the stories of all the life along its banks and shores. The river is the life blood of so many countless creatures and lifeforms. I have a deeper understanding of just how long these relationships have been going on, forged long before people came along to make home here. These nature centers and environmental initiatives attempt to keep perspective of our place in a larger world of life. Too long, the idea of being at the top of an evolutionary hierarchy has blinded us to the perspective of just how small we are in the big universe. On my exploration here along the Potomac River, even in relation to one river, we people are a small inhabitant. The numbers of fungi, avian life, fishes, and amphibians, creepers, crawlers, and four-leggeds, far outnumber us. That night I dreamt of things wonderful and wild. What must it have been to be a free hawk hundreds of years ago?

Story 2 – Tisiphone

Her name was Tisiphone, a Roman Goddess, a fury, avenger of murder...

A mighty wind lifted her higher, then, even higher, riding the warm thermals layered in the fall sky. Flight was easy. She looked skyward for danger, she looked below for prey. Early fall. This would be an easy hunting day. The nest was empty, and all the young mouths were out hunting, looking for their own food. Three chicks fledged this June and dove into the waiting world. She would not have to feed them anymore. Her mate was off on adventure until next spring. He would return with a flourish, calling, and diving. It would be time again for raising a new generation of hunters. But today was an easy day, hunting just for herself. She would arm herself for the winter months.

Down the holler was an eagle pair, nesting. They too had raised a new brood. They too were out hunting on their own. Hawk and Eagle recognized each other at a great distance and rarely hunted the same area of the holler. It was a tense peace accord. The mountains were abundant with mice and chipmunks, rabbits, small birds, and even snakes. Either of their shadows were a sign for the little creatures below to hunker down, stay still, and silent. It takes a lot of hunting to feed a brood and a lot of flying to get that food.

Pulling in her broad wings, Tisiphone landed, resting in the top of an ancient oak; a great perch close to the nest, close to the river, close to a steady food supply. She and her mate would use the same nest again next spring, if the weather did not ravage the carefully placed sticks and branches.

Scanning- eyes in stereo – ever vigilant in watching for the tiniest movements in the meadow, the hillocks, the branches. The thinning leaves on the trees made this a great day for hunting.

Tisiphone had not always been living free in the wilderness. For a time, she worked with a falconer, a hunting companion, Tannen. The human/wild bond was a relationship of exchange. It was a good partnership, but there came a time for her to return to the wild. He knew it and loved her enough to let her go. He took her back to the area where she was found and released the cords, to live again as she was meant to, to mate, raise chicks, and hunt on her own.

Springtime is the time to mate, and it wasn't long before she heard the cry of a beautiful male soaring then spinning like an arial acrobat of the heavens. Spring is the time for courtship. In April the first eggs were laid and

A hawk lives by their sight and their talons. Even the strong can be injured, bitten by prey, or a slight miscalculation in landing, plagued by parasites. Tisiphone was at her prime, healthy, and

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ready to hunt again. The flight down the holler was familiar, she seemed to know exactly where to bank and dive and curve in and soar. She hunted all the nooks and crannies, it was home.

Tannen, the falconer, came to the headwaters from time to time to hunt and to see his old friend. Today he would hunt for rabbits, Tisiphone's favorite. He started down the holler with his gear and crept quietly through the thicket.

A familiar Keeeeerrrrr greeted him. He stopped to look up. No sign in the sky. He walked on deeper into the holler. Again, the Keeeeerrrrr, and there he saw the familiar wingspan across the sky moving swiftly toward the open field ahead. She landed in a snag mid-climb and scanned the holler. Tannen sat down just to watch, to wait, to be. There was no hurry today. He found his old friend.

Suddenly, like a streak of light, Tisiphone was off, she banked the edge of the tree line. Then pulled up. Once again off steaking down the holler. It was toward the Povish farmlands, long abandoned. There at Povish's Lake, he had seen raptors go fishing. The small Green Heron, or the Great Blue, even the Bald Eagle. They could pierce the water's surface to find a real treat. Tisiphone did not usually hunt that far down the holler. What had caught her eye? With his binoculars he could see her turn back flying his way.

Suddenly she disappeared. Tannen stood up when he lost sight of her behind a barn. She did not reappear. Everything went quiet and still. Tannen started toward the barn, slowly at first. He broke through the thicket to the deer path. Still no sign of Tisiphone. He headed straight to the road moving up hill as fast as he could. He started to run, and as he turned the curve in the road. The farm was on the right side of the road and the barn, just up the hill.

Hidden behind the barn was an old piece of farm equipment, hidden in the overgrowth of the vines and bushes. There caught in the vines, was his old friend. Tisiphone was hurt, unconscious. Tannen picked her up carefully and stroked her head, checking her breathing and for anything broken or bloody. No blood. Her eyes blinked and he knew he would have to get help for her as soon as he could, if she was going to make it.

He took off his jacket, laid his rifle down and carefully wrapped Tisiphone in the wool lined denim jacket. Shouldered his rifle once again and picked up his friend. The long walk back to the jeep was well known. He never walked it so fast as today. There he laid her on the seat of the car and started the engine, sure that he could get the help she needed.

There are veterinarians close by who manage hurt wildlife. Tannen planned take her to the closest one in Canaan Valley. He called to see if they were in and the was someone on duty. It was clear that she had a broken wing but was not injured otherwise. The vet took her into surgery right away and was able to save the wing. It would heal and they would not have to amputate, but she would not be able to fly to hunt for her own food anymore. It would never be strong enough. They could not release her into the wild again.

Tisiphone would not be able to fly free of danger, she would become an easy target for other birds, if let free to fly. Tannen found a new home for her, where she would be safe and loved and

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well cared for. Tisiphone found her new home far down the Potomac River at the Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center. Hundreds of school children would learn about her and her place among the amazing wild creatures in the world.

She is living there still, and you can visit her today. She is my friend now, too.

Entry Four Saturday at the Farmers Market



The next morning came a special invitation to a city treat: a farmers' market. The invitation for breakfast came from my new colleague and friend, Nadia. She thought this would be a good place for us to find breakfast and get to know each other better and learn about the kinder side of Washington D. C. She drove like someone who is used to traversing a labyrinth. Fruits, vegetables, soaps, candies, languages, breads, new causes, and concerns. The market square draws in all the different kinds of folks. The mix of accents and words adds to the feeling of neighborhood.

Doesn't everyone need fresh tomatoes, potatoes, beans, and a great loaf of bread? There is coffee in your favorite flavor. A band was playing oldies, rock, and sing-a-long songs for light hearted amusement and entertainment. As they might have said in 1940 – the joint was jumping. Young, old, lots of dog owner's, strollers, and sun hats. The colors of the venders made a collage of all the good things summer has to offer. She bought some peaches, and I got a few tomatoes. After my very quiet day in the wilderness, this was a cacophony of sounds and colors. I had a hard time finding a focus, I was just mesmerized by it all. This is another picture of the ways the river is reflected in the people who gather beside it. The ever-moving currents, the flow of people from one part of the city to another, the varied rhythms and temperatures mirror the complex composition of the river.

I have always been confounded by the street layout in D.C. and the many one-way streets, roundabouts and odd alleyways. Nadia was a pro. We had a legal parking place in no time. I have to acknowledge this very particular skill set. I compare it to that of a kayaker - in the way they are able navigate and to anticipate the changes and restrictions of travel. We take a lot for granted in our everyday lives. When navigation seems easy, we lose sight of how many complex systems within us are at work, remaining upright, a clear sense of right and left, up and down, long and short distances, estimating the right pressure for each step, even the balance on uneven surfaces. Navigating the city is as complex as navigating the river. The currents in the river are notorious for their surging strength. I posit that these currents are mirrored in aspects of the city of

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Washington D. C. down to the way people mover through their neighborhoods and get to work or play every day.

We took a short walk to a favorite restaurant, Bus Boys and Poets. There we were able to find a good mix of cuisines, cultural favorites, and delicious food. We curled into an eddy, a calm moment in the raging river around us. There are so many concurrent currents. There were rivers of people, thought, of art, of past times, rivers of words, and music, and paint, and sound, and colors. This restaurant is home for many creative energies. After resting in that quiet moment, we went back out into the flow along the street and found the car exactly where we left it.



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**Entry Five
Rockville, MD**



I reviewed some of the long-ago memories on the drive to Rockville, where my cousin Deborah currently lives. I have family who grew up in the D.C. metro area, close to the river. My father's sister, Dorothy, raised her family in one of the suburbs. My dad's brother went to Howard University to get his Master of Social Work there and he served as the soul counselor for my extended family until he passed away in 2015. My father had another sister, Blanche, who passed away from cancer, leaving my favorite cousin at a very young age. I remember visiting them when I was younger. But such distant memories have faded. We managed to have several family reunions in D. C., and we got re-aquainted when I got older and started my own family. I found out more of the confusing details of our rainbow-colored family in that time. One was about the lingering impacts of segregation.

As a child, I did not see the limits of segregations and the hidden unspoken rules about where we were welcome and where we were not. Now, Cousin Butch, Aunt Dorothy's son, had served in

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Viet Nam, and he was well aware, ready to share. Race is a trigger, a flashpoint, always waiting in the wings to explode. Our family knows this as do most black families. My cousin's road to healing was a long one. And in reflection, it was finding peace in working with nature and the natural world that his spirit found some tonic for the toxins of war. He had many different occupations, but now, I remember his as a woodsman. Because it was the woods that saved him. These are stories of the river too: healing and redemption.

People have counted on the moving waters of the river to cleanse and heal the pollutants that we and all living things add to the waters mix. For the most part, the river is amazingly resilient, however, it does have limits as do we. My cousin was just one of the many casualties of the wars that we know about. A good deal of the conflict swirling around in our capital remain hidden from view.



I stayed with my cousin, Deborah, and her husband, on this trip for the holiday weekend. Labor Day. She told me about Sandy Point Beach. I had not imagined a world where you could not go to the beach or play in the sand whenever you wanted to. In my part of the world, it seemed that we were always going fishing, going to the lake, going swimming, but that was in rural Michigan. With Deborah's story, I learned that our parents carefully planned our trips, guided our play areas, and guarded us fiercely. That was one reason we spent so much time in the countryside. As children, we could not understand our parents' apprehension, the constant tensions, the subtle changes in demeanor. The climate in a room could change so fast, you only had time to respond, not time to ask questions or wonder. Our safety was their mission. The history of the area surrounding the farms, plantations, presidents' homes, the congress, and government always depended on black folks to run. We were a part of everything that made things move, sleep, eat, ride, wear, sanitize... every aspect of D.C. life included the working hours of Blackfolks. My family and friends were a part of all that too. We mirror the river's complex currents, known and unknown.

We are one of the many many currents of the river. What is the destiny of the river? What is the destiny of a family, any family? As the river moves toward the salty sea, do we become a part of something greater than ourselves, greater than our own vision. Are we to be absorbed into a larger entity. If each tributary were a song, a canto; and each song joining into an encompassing chorus. Then, further into an orchestral surge, building, rising into symphonies. We hope for harmony, but we know dissonance – the stronger push aside the weaker, the louder cover over the hushed tones. I can see this in our history. Our story with this river at its heart is all of this

*7 My cousin's backyard of old and ancient Beeches
and tulip Poplars*

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together. No clearer was that vision than the next day, when we went to Great Fall National Park on the Maryland side.

**Entry Six
Great Falls and the C&O Canal**



My cousin, Deborah, and I planned our excursion to the Maryland side of the Great Falls. That is the side where the canal is. I wondered what it was that motivated such a costly undertaking. The



length of the canal alone is daunting in terms of engineering feats. The canal was the answer to the unnavigable series of falls impeding shipping, travel and commerce of all kinds. These falls are a big tourist attraction, now and people come from all over the world to see both the falls and the canal.

The canal made a way for commerce to expand as barges floating on the water were pulled by mules over the many miles up and down river. Many families made their living on the canal and made it their home. Now, the entire length of the canal has been preserved as part of the National Park system. Many tourists, bikers, hikers, historians, and engineers take advantage of it for recreation and education. It was a short walk to the overlook of the falls, and we had plenty of company that day, both human and canine.

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The Old Tavern that once served as an inn and stopover for travelers is now a visitor center and uses rooms for childrens' workshops and presentations for the public. I stopped in to get maps and a better picture



of the canal as it is proposed to be restored in places to give demonstrations of the works and workings of the water and the ships. Moving the water from the river into a lock system takes time. The boat they are restoring is there beside one of the locks and you can imagine the grass filled ravine filled with water and the locksmiths working with the ships as they pass through to the next lock. We are at #14 in the series of 28.

Since dogs are not allowed on the overlook, Deborah and I take turns. We were crossing the bridge to get the bird's eye view of the falls. Deborah went first and I held Zoe, the chocolate lab. Zoe is so fortunate to be well enough behaved to go on field trips like this. My cousin took her time to enjoy the view of the falls with fellow travelers. I waited on the Maryland side of the bridge in the shade along with the other dog owners. Zoe was so fortunate to be well enough behaved to go on field trips like this. And as the sun was getting really hot, I was happy to be into the shade for a bit; joined by groups of young ladies, families speaking German, Spanish and a few that I did not recognize. All were waiting for their party to return as their canine companions took a break.

When it was my turn, I took a deep breath. This was the moment I had been waiting for. I anticipated my first reaction to the falls with a little fear, because where I live and work, the falls are gentle and there are lots of places where you can walk and swim in them. Not here. I am not disappointed. The sheer amount of water coming across the rocks is astounding. Crashing white and blue sprays, slivery in the sunshine. It is a sight to be seen.

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These falls are huge, big, scary, and oh, so powerful. As I come to the center of the bridge, I can see that I was right. This is a place to respect. A sacred place. The power of the water alone is overwhelming. The sound of the rushing against the rock in the narrow corridor was all you can hear. People can smile, but not really have any conversations. The view was stunning: the bare rock gray-brown against the white water and deep blue pools; a moving living sculpture. The sides of the flow had places that grew deep green moss in sharp contrast. I felt daring standing in the center of the bridge. I dared to take my photos and videos. I felt as though the water could pull me in at any moment. And I found that it was a not a place to tarry. I felt almost airborne and as I returned to the path to my cousin and Zoe were waiting.

I was relieved to be back on shore. But I wouldn't have missed that view for the world. Whoever built that bridge for the overlook gave all of us a great gift. The power of the river is going directly into the nation's capital. I needed to see that. People crave power, we need to be able to be active agents in our lives, true. But this gave me a sense that sometimes people acquire power that they are ill-equipped to wield. Some become so intoxicated with their sense of power that lose perspective on just how small we really are in comparison to nature's real power.

We paused to enjoy the park. It is filled with admiring tourists of all ages. The trip was so memorable – the sights, the sounds. I wondered how our story is woven in this part of the river. How many lives were lost? Who navigated the falls? Could anyone survive this wild raging force? It was a puzzle.

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My cousin loves puzzles and again, I see the influence of the river's complex ecosystem. I love metaphors and the puzzle as a metaphor for the currents of the river intrigues me.



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**Entry Seven
White Privilege**



My cousin's husband told me a story that put the "peril of the police" in sharp perspective for him. He said that I could share his story here with you. Just to let you know, he's a white fella, who sings the blues – well. After all, he is married to my cousin, a fearless, powerful black woman. He is more than a little aware of his place in this world and what it meant for him to marry a black woman and her family.

It was just about two years ago in Washington DC. And I was leaving work and of course, I work at a government facility. And I'm driving home and on a major road in DC Connecticut Avenue, a major artery, and I'm stopped in my tracks in my car -by a mail truck that is turning in front of me illegally. And I got upset and I'm in a sports car with a top-down convertible sports car. So, I stood up in the car and screamed at the mail truck driver. I screamed at obscenity out- it was what I did. Because I was driving home from work, and somebody was holding me up. This this mail truck driver turned I stood up in my car with no roof on it and screamed at him. And then once

he turned, I tore off up the street, you know, spun my tires and drove up the street like a like a crazy person. Got about six blocks up and there's lights behind me the cops are pulling me over. And I thought, "Oh crap, I'm in for it now." So, I pull over and I'm sitting in my car waiting for the cop to come up. I've still got the top down and everything in this system. cop pulls up to me. He's a -he's a white man, a white officer. And he pulls up and I'm thinking okay, be very careful what you do. Don't - don't end up getting shot. And he says, "I you know why I pulled you over?" and I said, "Maybe." and he said, "Yeah, that was pretty ugly back there." He says, he says, "I saw what you did back there." And I said, "Yeah," I said I was upset. I said he did a stupid thing. And so, he said, "Can I get your license and registration?" and he went back to his car, and he came back a few minutes later. And he handed me my license and registration back. And he looked at my badge. I had a lavalier on with my State Department badge. And he says, "You said you work for the government Mr. Yonkers?" and I said, "Yes I do." I said, "Do you think do you need to see my State Department badge for identification?" And he said, "no, that's okay." And he says, "I just want to want to warn you, He says "You can't do things like that in public." He says, "I'm sorry to pull you over for this." He said, "... but if I didn't pull you over," he said, "people saw what you did and if I didn't pull you over, I would get in trouble. So," he said, "Be more careful Mr. Yonkers, and have a good day." That was it. That was it. And I drove away from it confused, thinking I had done something wrong. I was expecting to be punished for it, you know, in some way a ticket to something. You know, but I have to say the things that I see in the news went through my mind, because I see stories about black men being stopped all the time for littering and they end up dead. Or, you know, in a job with that, not being able to reconcile what had just happened to me. And I got home the first thing I did was tell my wife about it.

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**Entry Eight
Listening to the Trees**



I returned to the search for “native species” in this quest to name the trees in my cousin’s backyard. I got to use my new plant identifier tool. It was working very well that day! We so often settle for knowing so little about the world around us. At the back of my cousin’s house is a tremendous stand of trees. They have to be quite old. When I asked them what kind of trees they were, they didn’t know. I was surprised, but ready to remedy the situation. I am on a campaign to end all such ignorance!

Out to the backyard – to name the trees! Were there more invaders to discover? I got to use my new plant identifier tool. It was working very well that day. I returned to the search for “native

species” in this quest to name the trees in my cousin’s backyard! It was fun, checking out the bark and leaves and branches. The dogs played at our feet, and we kept finding examples for the identifier. Ah HA! Poplar – Tulip Poplars – the biggest Tulip Poplars I remembered ever seeing. There were Beech trees too. One more – A Japanese maple. Very ornamental – Oh, no – I think it is one of the invasive species. Well, it goes to show that even at the garden center, you need to know which ones will over grow and outrun the native plants. They may not tell you. You have to research that for yourself. I am now armed with a chart naming the invasives!!!



My cousins know little about their trees, their immediate neighbors. But they love them unconditionally. There is a natural affinity that we have for trees. We love their shade and tier elegance. We love to see the way they play in the rain and snow, with icicles and melting droplets, change their colors and release I back into the earth. They breath with us. Finding the names of the trees was a fun investigation.

Poplar – Tulip Poplar and Beech. Now they can call them by name and become better friends. Poplar, oak, pine, hickory, cherry, apple, beech, birch, locust, all native species, that drew timber outfits from the earliest days of pioneer settlements to today. In my counties back home (Preston, Tucker, Randolph, Garrett), we are besieged still by logging trucks and all the accompanying machines! They are still clear cutting and using unsafe practices which damage ecosystems, wildlife, and affect our weather. Wind, erosion, flooding, seem to be of little concern to the companies sending in their men – and it is still mostly men that we see – driving trucks filled to overfull of trees to go market mills and beyond. Most of the value is added elsewhere, so few see

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any real profit from the timber here, close to home. Few old growth trees have survived the avaricious appetite of hardwoods for building and carpentry.

My indigenous roots teach me to look at the forest as a living being and to treat her like one. Taking more than is needed is greed and greed may be one of the worst traits felt in the community. The trees have songs too. The trees sing with the river. There are several large pine trees by my house that sing even when the wind is low and the skies are clear. When they clear cut Backbone Mountain top for the Trail powerline, I felt the songs being torn from the mountainside – I felt it in my throat, in my belly. A group of us signed a petition to become interveners when Path powerline was proposed. That initiative which would have taken twice as much forest. Somehow with the help of some very skilled and persistent lawyers, including Bill Howley, Path was stopped. But that is the exception to the rule. Most of the big money wins the day. the forest, and so we suffer for it.

Story 3 – The Bird Count Poppy and Pepper of the Chick-A-Dee Clan Ilene Evans 2023

*Bugs and slugs, bugs and slugs, we are hunting bugs and slugs.
Yummy for our little tums; we are hunting bugs and slugs.
Caterpillars, worms that squirm, twist and wiggle in the burm
We will find you when you turn, Caterpillars, worms that squirm.*

It was official! Springtime in the mountains. Kimmy's dad had made the pronouncement! Oh, all year long Kimmy waited for the announcement that spring had come for sure, when the birds come back in big numbers. This was her favorite time of year. Today was the beginning of the flying circus – acrobats and tightrope walkers, flips and swoops, upside down. The avian navigators entertained anyone who would sit quietly and watch.

She got on her t-shirt, sweater, overalls, her socks, and boots, jacket, her binoculars and spyglass and earmuffs, just in case... Not many 7-year-olds have their own bird blind but Kimmy was not just any little 7-year-old. In the middle of the backyard there was a quiet place out of the wind, surrounded by low bushes where Kimmy's dad had set up a tiny round ring about two feet high, just above the bushes and made a screened cover where Kimmy could look through with her binoculars and not be seen by any of the wildlife around her.

Kimmy was not allowed to sit out in the blind until her dad said spring had come for sure. At her house it was a formal declaration: there was a sign mounted in the dining room that said "SPRING". That came late April and Early May in the Potomac Highlands when the peeps were loud in the evening and the daffodil snow came and the last service snow had come and gone.

Little Kimmy had been bird watching and counting since she was old enough to count and this was the time when her friends, a pair of black-capped chickadees would begin building their nest. She had learned how to feed them from her hand and each spring, they found a wonderful nesting box, waiting just for them. She named them Pepper and Poppy. Kimmy's dad was a naturalist set up at the river's edge, the Potomac River. It was his job to keep track of the bird migrations and the health of their community. Blinds were important to his work too and he had built one for Kimmy when she showed such an interest in the birds around their home.

She knew the names of the titmouse, the golden finches, the downy woodpeckers, the nuthatches, the black-eyed juncos, vireos, pine siskins, robins, gross beaks Red and Yellow), blue jays, cardinals, crows, ravens, hawks, and even the rare bald eagle. But her favorites and her friends were the Black Capped Chickadees. They were busy all the time, bugs, and slugs they went a hunting. She made up little songs as she sat silent in the blind with her binoculars.

*Bugs and slugs, bugs and slugs, we are hunting bugs and slugs.
Yummy for our little tums; we are hunting bugs and slugs.
Caterpillars, worms that squirm, twist and wiggle in the burm*

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We will find you when you turn, Caterpillars, worms that squirm.

Kimmy's mom was a second-grade teacher at the elementary school by the railroad grade. She loved the outdoors, took her fledglings on long walks in the woods and she collected birdsongs. The black capped chickadees were everyone's favorite next to the witchity bird – the green throated warbler. Of course, some liked the "Drink Your Tea" bird – the Rufous Towhee. Then there were the rowdy ones doing the blue jay – "Haw Haw". All her students knew at least a few birdsongs. Afterall, we should know who is in the neighborhood.

Kimmy opened the back door, boots laced up to face the cold dewy grass. As she walked, the grass crunched under her feet. She could see the footsteps she left behind on the frosty blades, but it was Spring and a little cold was just fine. She ran the rest of the way opening the camouflage net that covered the wire cage and dove inside. The first thing she did was set up her spyglass. Then she opened the screen peek-a-boo net and plopped down on her rollie ball chair.

The sun came over the ridge and warmed the grass. At first, she saw the robins. Robins feast on the ground, hunting up worms and grubs. Then she saw some downy woodpeckers climbing up the nearby pear tree. The blue jays made an loud alarm and flew on past into the next yard. The goldfinches were still green, they turn bright bright yellow as spring gets going. Then, at last she spotted the Chick-a-dee pair, Pepper and Poppy. Kimmy was very excited to see her old friends.

There were Poppy and Pepper scouting from tree to tree, up in the locust tree, then over to the maples, next in the apple tree. Even though Chickadees don't migrate for the winter, they are not too visible until springtime when everyone is busy getting a nest ready, finding mates, and storing food. Generally, the chickadees love to flock, but just now they pair off. There they were! At last, they found their way to the nesting box, placed snugly in the birch branches, just about 10 feet off the ground. Kimmy watched them dart in and out of the box, hidden from view in her bird blind. When Spring comes everyone gets busy!

Springtime Jig

Swoop, Dart, they're looking smart

Swish, flash, they whizz and dash,

Robins and bunnies, chipmunks and squirrels

Building their homes and a-courting they twirl.

Peck and pull, dig and drag, they dance and prance the

Suddenly Kimmy heard a huge ruckus in the rose bush in the front yard, squawking, and chattering. Oh, my! Little birds can get really loud. The wild roses were home to the finches and the wrens. Maybe it was the gang of blackbirds that were invading. They may be some of the smallest birds, but they can really let the neighborhood know when some intruder was about. Alarm, Alarm, Alarm! It seemed to work most of the time. All would calm down and get quiet again, until the next trouble came creeping back in.. Intruders like a chipmunk, other birds, or snake, or weasel. When all got quiet again, Kimmy checked her bird food supply.

There was a little stool just in front of her bird blind and Kimmy would sit there with black sunflower seeds and a little peanut butter in her hand. Very still. Just sitting quietly until Poppy got curious (and hungry enough) to try the yummy bits. If she could stay still, Pepper would join them too. Poppy was the male and Pepper was the female. Kimmy could tell because Pepper is a little bigger than Poppy. Their colors are about the same, but they differ in size.

Kimmy learned how to sit so still from her Aunt Carole, her mother's sister. They played statue in her Aunt's living room. She had filled it with mirrors and they could see the tiniest movement. From all different angles. The games they played were so much fun. They would dance, then freeze and they held their breath until they exploded with laughter. It was so much fun. Her little brother wanted to try to learn too, but he just ended up wiggling and either wasting the feed or eating it himself. And of course, the birds wouldn't come to rest with him. He was only five, after all.

It would be a long time before there would be eggs to hatch and new babies to watch, so Kimmy watched all the preparations. Their nest would be protected from the larger birds getting in. The small opening, only 1.25 inches round, kept out lots of the other birds. The only one who could get in that size would be finches or house wrens. They were out looking for a safe space to raise a family too. Robins are not so careful about where they build their nests. Many times, Kimmy found a nest that had fallen from a precarious perch. The blue eggs were pretty. It always made her sad to see an abandoned nest.

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Kimmy's mom and dad helped her find out about the science about birds. Sometime Kimmy would play with words – the big latin and scientific words she was learning. Each day they added a new vocabulary word to today's word was "OMNIVOROUS"

*Omni omni – omni- ivorous! hummy yummy; happy tummy.
omni- ivorous!*

Science was fun, but her Auntie Carol passed on her love for their fanciful flights, of birds. She took Kimmy's imagination deep into the wonder of feathers and wings and flying. Auntie Carole told her stories about how the tiny eggs hatch, and at first they have no feathers, are completely blind and cannot find food for themselves. She told her about the siblings tucked into the nest lined with moss and fur learning to speak chickadee. They clear the sound of father brining food. FEE-Bee Fee-Bee. That is the call. Kimmy imagined herself a fledgling, peeping for food, learning her own name, learning to speak Chick-A-dee. Yes, each little baby bird has a name all their own and Poppy and Pepper would call them by their name. There were so many different calls and alarms - quite distinct. Kimmy was proud she could speak chick-a-dee. It seems that birds seem to understand each other's call to a great degree, especially if there is shared danger near, a hawk, a blackbird, a snake, or chipmunk.

Kimmy carefully unwrapped the small packets of food that she kept in her pockets. Last spring Kimmy watched Poppy and Pepper bring food to each other when they were nesting. Beaks full of caterpillars and grubs emptied quickly. Kimmy knew that they store food in small hiding places, caches that they could remember throughout the winter, when food was scarce. Chickadees could remember hundreds of places where they left sunflower seeds and bits of suet and bugs. Without these secret hiding places, they would starve and freeze in the long Potomac Highland winters. What good memories they have, Kimmy thought. Maybe that's why they remembered her from year to year. They had about 12 feeders placed around the backyard with different kinds of treats for some of the birds. Some liked seeds, some liked fruit, some liked bugs and grubs. So, there were places in the yard for every appetite. With lots of room for them to deal with territorial squabbles. The fenced in yard was about an acre in size.

It was time for Kimmy to get to work. Her job in the bird blind was to help her father with the backyard bird count in February – the official nationwide bird count. But they kept records all year long. Her dad used them in his tracking of migratory birds. Kimmy liked being to able to help with a real grown-up job. Maybe you can do a bird count this spring, like Kimmy!

*Wrens, and doves, and Robins, fly
Blackbirds, Catbirds, Cowbirds, oh, my!
The Hawks, the Sparrow, the finches go by.
We greet these winged masters of the sky.
Woodpeckers, Towhees, Phoebes and Blue Birds
Sing and trill and make their whistles heard.*

*Turkeys, Wood Cocks, Pheasants, Whippoorwills,
Make their home here in the River's Rill,
Nuthatches, Juncos, Cardinals, and Jays
Eagles, Owls, Green Herons and Blue,
Color the skies and our dreams too.*

*Crows, Ravens, Vultures, and Falcons
Green Throated Warblers, Grosbeaks, and Flickers
Meadow Larks, Wood Thrushes, and Baltimore Orioles
We sight them all in our backyard arboreal.*

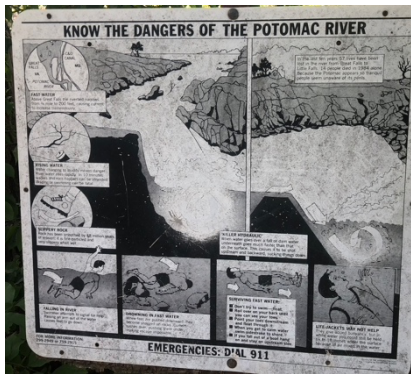
Entry Nine The Return – Moving Upriver – A Refuge for a Refugee

The Story of Marianne and Vital Akimana.

Just as the landing at Fortress Monroe brought people to these shores against their will, the same landings have offered sanctuary to people who have been under siege. This story is about a

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family which faced the brutality of the rebels in Rwanda at a time when Marianne was following her dream. She was a woman of the earth, loving the plants and growing their own food. She had been so successful that she was teaching others how to care for themselves in this way. That was her crime. She was arrested and sent to be executed along with many others. Ironically, it was her potatoes that were sustaining the rebels in their ravaging of the country. Her family had given her up as lost, knowing that she had been taken to the arena where so many had been locked away. Her fate was to be all the worse, because as a trophy, her body would be chopped into pieces and sold to the highest bidders as a status symbol. Her family, her husband, her four children had no hope of her surviving and fled to friends in a neighboring country, under cover. Imagine their surprise when they heard their mother's voice on a pirate radio station's program. She had escaped and was looking for them. That reunion brought them safely to these shores on the Potomac River. I got to meet them at the Roots to Sky Sanctuary in western Maryland, right on the river. Their story they survived took my breath away, but it also became an example of the significance of the river, its abundance, and its healing power. Marianne is still a woman of the earth, who loves the earth and life and laughs easily. She cannot stop herself from saving seeds, planting them wherever she can and that includes her bedroom. Even when you don't have a garden to till outside, the garden we nurture inside provides the connection to life that we need. Marianne enjoys a life in freedom, though her trauma is recorded in her body, she is filled with light and love and laughter. Her sons and daughters may not have her green thumb, but they have become protectors, guardians and healers in their own right. The river helped them find a path to reclaim their joy.



I said goodbye to my cousin and her husband, thanked them for their hospitality and love of adventure. Like the salmon returning to spawn, I headed back home upstream. It was one of the hottest days of the year and so, the car became a cool cave for my travel.

Going back up stream.... Going home from this pilgrimage reminds me of what the land was like before we settled here. How did we come to take such abundance for granted? It is hard to live where I live, we like our comforts, but at what cost?

If we could turn back time, like they do at Accokeek Park or the C& O Canal, what would we see. How would we feel about the river then? What would we be willing to sacrifice for it to remain healthy? The power of the river seems so absolute, so overwhelming, it is hard to imagine that anything could damage it. And yet we have.

As I live on the edge of the forest, I see the displacement of animals' movements, migrations, and the impact on the rain, the snow melt, the flow of the river, the water that runs down the mountain; the windbreaks gone. The loggers have changed our landscape and not for the better. Their attack has been ferocious. The assault has in my very own backyard. I have been a witness for many years now. Years. The power lines have come to take more and more of the forest. They spray regularly to ensure that the lines stay free the brush and tress that would be growing there. That spray travels beyond the path of the power lines and affects some of the farmers and gardeners. Then came the windmills and wind farms on the high ridges. I moved to the forest

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intentionally. I did not realize how quickly our land would be encroached upon, how fragile that wilderness was, the taking of resources and the irresponsible use of land. Management? There is not really any management with a clear intelligence that continues to use common sense and longevity as a guide.

It does seem like the struggle for living in balance with nature is a like going upstream, working against the current. How easy it seems when we are going with the current. How satisfying it is to feel that we are moving with a sense of harmony along with the forces around us.

Entry Ten
Back at the Headwaters

I'm listening to the pulse of the river; the heartbeat is strong here in her beginning. Every time I visit the headwaters site, I feel I am standing on holy ground. The river and its waters are a holy place. That sense has never flagged. Now the site is a WV state park, but it has little adornment. And I think that helps it keep its quiet beginning, its identity. When I settled on the name for our company, Voices From the Earth, my focus was on the voices of our human ancestors. Now I see that the call was to share the voices of all the earth, her elements, her fishes, and fowls, her Wingeds and swimmers, her creepers and crawlers, her four-legged and two-legged, the grasses, the trees, the bushes and flowers and mycelium and soil and all of her members. The voices of the earth and many. Hoots, cries, caws, growls, rumbles, whinnies, grunts, bleats, screeches, moans, trills, whistles, baying, barks, purrs, bellows. We are acoustic beings and the language that is spoke under the water may still be foreign to us, but it is no less a part of us.

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A few years ago, Sharon Day, an Anishinaabe elder, led us in the river walk. As guardians of the waters, the Anishinaabe women lead in restoration efforts across the country. She taught us the songs that are sung to help the river's spirit, to heal it and to lend our strength to hers. It was at this sight one cold October morning when she led us in prayer and song to begin the long walk of this mighty 400-mile river to its mouth. She took her bucket to the muddy spring and filled it as best she could, there at the Fairfax Stone. The day was cloudy, rainy, and cool, but her heart was focused on a mission.

I was able to join in the walk for one of the early legs – it was for about a mile that I carried the precious treasure. Then, I passed it to the next woman, waiting to share the burden. There were men who walked alongside, carrying a staff and alerting traffic, when necessary, to keep the women safe. Their burden is to protect and also to be guardians of the fire.

I have come to see myself as some kind of guardian, not the warrior with a sword kind of guardian, but one who is mindful. Keeps love active and naming the good, beautiful, and engendering. I have found this river gives so much, even when we are not looking. The giving of life, the taming of the mountains, hiding treasures for the patient seeker, its songs that carry the frogs' and turtles' songs too, the blue heron, the eagle. All their songs are part of this wild place. I saw a shy little baby black bear this week, then down the road, several new fledging turkey tribes, and so there are so many young deer this season. Even six points bucks have made their way to our apple trees. Mother deer and babies skitter and play in my meadow. Then down the ditch line, a random red fox and ground hog. So many make their home here on the edge of the wilderness. We have plenty of pests too – but they belong, as do we. How pesky are we to the ones who knew no other world but the mountainsides, these easy to cross streams, these living banks. We are to share the riches. Nature's abundance is hanging high up in my apple tress right now; round and red and luscious. That is the model to remember. The pattern is abundance, when we are willing to harmonize as part of the great orchestral symphony. I like that we start here as a trickle. We should learn how to manage abundance more slowly.

Poem

Shh.

*The river is low
and slow*

today.

The bottom,

visible with it's rocks and fallen leaves,

Green, and yellow, and gold

Red scattered here,

scattered there

Twigs entwined ...

in the trickle of the water – sing: ah – ahahhhahhha ahahahahaha

The call of the crows and the red shouldered hawks,

The blue jays that are still here, though the fall is for certain

The sand appears and then it disappears

down the slow moving stream

The quiet of the river

Rests,

Quiet,

Slow,

Rest,

For the rains will come ...

and the waters will wash down,

and the river will rise again,

And her heart will beat strong against the bank.

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***Poetic Reflections
Ilene 2023***

Water Droplets Holding Fast

*I see the hemlock branches hanging low over the rushing river,
filled now with snow
melting, slow and steady.
Filling and filling the river til she is broad and buxom.
Drip by drip.
The sound is rich and full. I soften. I yield.
I feel a warmth as these tiny parts of the rivers stream
drip to form droplets so slowly that they are freezing in place
the dawn breaks on the mountaintop.
day will warm and the frozen droplets will melt and we can see a miracle.
Transforming magic in the quiet shadows, lost to anyone in a hurry.
I love the soft hanging droplets, poised and waiting,
paused for now, frozen for now,
and when they drop it will be an explosion the into the streams miniature tide
and that tide will swell with that one drop.
Who would notice those tiny water droplets joining the river song.
Once, the river covered everything.
Maybe that time will come again
and the river will cover everything once more.*

The Chickadee Song:

*Bugs and slugs, bugs and slugs, we are hunting bugs and slugs.
Yummy for our little tums; we are hunting bugs and slugs.
Caterpillars, worms that squirm, twist and wiggle in the berm
We will find you when you turn, Caterpillars, worms that squirm.*

Springtime Jig

*Swoop, Dart, they're looking smart
Swish, flash, they whizz and dash,
Robins and bunnies, chipmunks and squirrels
Building their homes and a-courting they twirl.
Peck and pull, drag and dig,
They dance and prance the springtime jig.*

Maybe you can do a bird count this spring, like Kimmy!

*Wrens, and doves, and Robins, fly
Blackbirds, Catbirds, Cowbirds, oh, my!
The Hawks, the Sparrow, the finches go by.
We greet these winged masters of the sky.
Woodpeckers, Towhees, Phoebes and Blue Birds
Sing and trill- make their whistles heard.*

*Turkeys, Wood Cocks, Pheasants, Whippoorwills,
Make their home here in the River's Rill,
Nuthatches, Juncos, Cardinals, and Jays
Eagles, Owls, Green Herons and Blue,
Color the skies and our dreams too.*

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*Crows, Ravens, Vultures, and Falcons
Green Throated Warblers, Grosbeaks, and Flickers
Meadow Larks, Wood Thrushes, and Baltimore Orioles
We sight them all in our backyard arboreal.*

Shh.

*The river is low
and slow
today.*

*The bottom,
visible with it's rocks and fallen leaves,
Green, and yellow, and gold
Red scattered here,
scattered there*

*Twigs entwined ...
in the trickle of the water – sing: ah – ahahhhahhha ahahahahaha
The call of the crows and the red shouldered hawks,
The blue jays that are still here, though the fall is for certain
The sand appears and then it disappears
down the slow moving stream*

*The quiet of the river
Rests,
Quiet,
Slow,*

*Rest,
For the rains will come ...
and the waters will wash down,
and the river will rise again,
And her heart will beat strong against the bank.*

There's a Way

There's a way that the river curves that makes me feel like I am melting into the soft edge of the bank, flowing and melting with the warm shifting sand. Snuggling in, I bond into the curves as fluid, as bank, as sand, as river. For river is more than water, more than its shores, more than its banks, more than its reefs and tangles, more than its bottom, more than its mud, more than its grasses, fish, frogs, snakes and flies, dragonflies, and ripples. I curve with the river and loose the stiffness of my two-leggedness. I become supple and pliable like the softened clay, taking the shape of the strength surrounding me, taking in my body the energy of all the forces within and without. Above and below. I am fluid, flowing skin dispersing so all the atoms touch and are touched, all is stroked, all is held. I add to the rivers. I add to its knowing. We ride and fly across the land. We are free. Spraying falls, splashing curves, we play and ride all together. When I come away, stepping quietly back on the shore, my soul is no longer dry.

I love the river - especially when she sings... and I find that I need to be by the water.

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Water is life. Sara Thomsen's song starts, Mni Wičoni : Water Is Life – we are one...

River Song – 2023

I hear the river's songs in stories sung across time;

Stories that span eons.

Stories told in

Schools of fish

Flocks of migrating and nesting birds

Swarms of bees

I hear the river's songs in stories sung across time;

Singing summer katydids and crickets and

Hibernating families

Boring and digging and building the shorelines

I hear the river's songs in stories sung across time;

The sounds of living free.

This river of freedom

Lightening and thunders

Rapids and Rock Falls

I hear the river's songs in stories sung across time;

The life of a river - three and a half million years

Running, leaping gurgling, bubbling

The Fresh, the swamp, the marsh, coves and culverts

I hear the river's songs in stories sung across time;

The narrows and the wild river song

People came late to the river's song, its story so long

... Three and a half million years late to the song

Weaving into the edges love and laughter

I hear the river's songs in stories sung across time;

Weaving into the river its loss and life and blood

The River Runs And Runs And Runs

I try to catch up – run beside the river, bouncing and leaping, sliding and falling... and running again...

As I run alongside the river, I see myself! Ahh, keeping pace, sliding across the bank, shore to shore, moving in the under current easy... easy, ... then stronger and stronger, deeper and deeper the current pulls and there I am moving easily along the bottom. The soft bottom of the river all sandy, smuschy mix of stone and rock and clay and sand... then up, up... cooler the water, then warmer, it keeps moving, never stopping the river runs and runs and runs.

The River Remembers It All ... waters gathered before the glaciers began to pull the earth with all that water, water freezing and frozen pulling higher and higher till the earth was left in peaks and caps. Reshaped and held in place. A sculpture. began to pull the earth - with that water higher and higher till the earth peaked in caps...

From the grains of sand to the granite stone, sandstone, the composite folding and refolding. The river ever remembers it all.

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The tiny creatures, the winged, two legged the four legged the two legged again. The river remembers it all. The river remembers the crashing and diving, smooth, strong, pulling, pushing, eking through crevices and cracks, shifting beds, finding the narrow, the easy push, stubborn, insistent, the river remembers it all.

The river remembers the soft yielding grasses, and loose stone through mosses and branches, through rock, hard rock and the crash against the rock, and the pull against time. The River remembers it all.

The Song The River Sings...

How many octaves to the river's song? The one AHhhh ahhhhh- Pitch higher)

The roar of the rapids the rich and mighty gurgles (Gurglesssssssss) .The song that the river sings; and dances as it sings.

I hear the voices of the fishes, of the Chickadee, of the hawk, of the nuthatch, of the turtles, (gerlunk) of the frogs and peeps. I hear them sing together like an orchestra. They raise their pitch, and they tell the meadow next to the river and the river listens and hears and takes in the sound into the river's song. It is a song of love. It takes the sounds into its long gentle arms: its gentle power - power that smoothes the stones. And feeds the branches, the roots, the leaves, the drip drip drip of the rain into the water. In the deep winter there are places that yield to the cold, solid in form, and we go to the river's edge listening to the ice that crunches as we cross, her narrow path. Only now can we walk over the river. With the springtime muds and floods and flows and springs and ebbs and eddies, the flow wwwwww (CrunCH CrUnCH) Knowing that frozen moments - these frozen flows are rests in the song. - the breaking sounds of the ice are soon gone. With the springtime muds and floods and flows and springs and ebbs and eddies, little sand banks in places - the flow will be free and there will be the familiar places where the crayfish hide and the minnows dance - dashing - And we know we are home.

Once, the river covered everything. The Shawnee say that it was Grandfather turkey Buzzard who found the land so that the people could survive. It was the strength of his wings and his determination that kept him flying around and around, over the waters looking for land. Some say the people were still in the sky, some say they traveled on the back of a giant turtle. Either way, they were suffering for the want of home and nourishment surrounded by the waters. Here is that story.

Story 1 [Shawnee Creation Story](#)

(the sound of wind and wings 3X)

I am sure you have seen a kettle of Vultures, of Turkey Vultures as they score the sky - the tips of their wings like long fingertips?

Brother Black Eagle is elegant in flight, with a long tail,the underside of his wings are made with a silver lining that shinesit reaches from the tip all along the way back to the sides of their body. A brilliant red head makes them stand out among other masters of the skies.

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Grandfather Turkey Buzzard is very highly regarded among native peoples, especially the Shawnee and the Cherokee. Here is the reason why.

The Shawnee people came from a different world far, far away in the sky. With ALL their relations the Shawnee People came. ...With the Wingeds, the Swimmers, the Creepers, the Crawlers, the Four-Legged, the Two-Legged..., they all came on the back of a Giant Turtle.

But when they arrived Dark Waters covered everything - the entire Earth. They could see nothing but water, no place to make home. And so...

The People prayed. They sent out scouts to look for land. The Hawk family took to the skies, the Raven Clan, the Aerie of Eagles, but when they returned to the people, their message was the same. There was no land to be found. They flew far and wide. Nothing but water. And so....

The People prayed, then they called on the Swimmers to dive into the watery depths and return with the news of what they found. They swam far and wide, Whale, Dolphin, Sea Lion and all, but they found no place for the people to rest. They told the People all they could find was mud. And so...

The people prayed and then called on Grandfather Crawfish to bring back some of that mud. Little Brother and Sister Crawfish and all their relations dove into the dark waters. One by one, they slid off the Great Turtle's back and phup, phup, phup, ,... in the blink of an eye their red shells disappeared into the water. It was a long time before they returned. Suddenly, "Pop," "Pop," "Pop," each little red crayfish returned to the Great Turtle where the People waited – each carrying their load of mud.

But the people could not make a home in mud, And so ...

The People prayed. Ahh, Grandfather Turkey Buzzard, the greatest of the winged ones, the oldest among them all – so old - the skin all around his eyes was all wrinkled.

It was Grandfather who could carry the mud on his wings and his mighty back - so that it could dry out and make dry land for the people – for a new home. It was decided. The Crawfish tribe clambered and up spread mud all across the old man's back and all along his wings, feather after feather.

Grandfather was covered in mud, yet he rose from the ground - in a single spring. He beat his wings only a few times and sailed toward the heavens.

Grandfather circled over the people once, twice, and then Grandfather lifted himself into the air with his burden.

The People watched the strength and power of the mighty bird's wings.

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He soared higher and higher. He looked, here, he looked there – “Oh, my children,” he said, “Indeed, all is water - everywhere.” There was no dry land, there was no place to rest. And so, on he flew - Higher and higher. Circling into the clouds and beyond –

The People watched and waited on the Great Turtle’s back.

As he soared and circled, Grandfather looked back to The Great Turtle and all his people - he thought of all his relations. He must keep flying... he must do this... and dry this mud for their new home.

And so, he flew, His wings held the mud and at last, he felt it begin to dry.

But in all this time aloft, Grandfather started to grow weary. Though He was riding with ease in the air currents, - the weight of the mud took its toll, and he was growing weary.

The beating of his wings slowed, and the labor became painful in his ancient wings. He started to drop down toward the Earth. He was getting closer and closer to the dark water. The lazy circles got smaller and he was becoming winded and the muscles in his back ached.

Then, suddenly, “Splash, plushshshshshsh”,..... one wing touched the waters surface.

The people called out “Grandfather, stay strong!” “Splash,” The beloved elder exerted himself, pushing against the water, but as he did so his wings brought the land up from beneath the waters.

He flapped his wings again and more land rose from the tips of his wings. Each feather drew up the land and again and again and Grandfather worked to stay aloft, more land was forming into mountains.

The mud was forming great peaks and valleys, rills and ridges. Again, and again his wings tipped into the edge of the waters, each time more Earth rose from the dark waters, molded from the length of Grandfather’s wings, like fingers on a mighty hand.

There was the land that the people had hoped for. Land was rising from Grandfather’s wings - dipping into the waters as he flew.

The people rejoiced, watching from afar.

As the Ancient One wearily beat his wings, he lifted and molded our mountains and valleys. Streams ran down the back of the ridges and back to the dark waters.

The People watched and were amazed.

But Grandfather did not stop. He leaned into the dark waters, lifting up earth, and then more earth.... Mountains and more mountains.

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*“Oh,” the people cried, “Grandfather come back, come back!”, They called and called,
“Grandfather come back, come back! Or soon all the world will just be mountains.”*

Grandfather Turkey Buzzard listened to the People and to all his relations. And so, with great effort he returned to the Giant Turtle where the people gathered to thank him for his noble efforts.

They prayed for aid and were miraculously transported across the water onto the new land, now made because of Grandfather Turkey Buzzard’s great strength of flight.

These are the mountains we now call the Appalachian range, the Alleghenies, the Smokeys, the Blue Ridge and far beyond. Thanks Grandfather, thank you for our land and our home.

Kettling - Kettle of buzzards Cherokee – “suli” -

Bio: Ilene Evans is an energetic, vibrant, original performing artist, using movement, poetry, story, song, rhythm and rhyme inspired by a rich Affrilachian life and all its folklore. Tonight, she is sharing a Shawnee creation tale, shared by way of our WVSG friend and colleague Elessa Clay High, esteemed elder and professor of Native American Literature at WVU.

Intro: Ilene’s family is Cherokee and it is no secret that the Shawnee and Cherokee were not always at peace, but tonight they share the respect for Grandfather Turkey Buzzard in the creation of the American landscape now known as the Appalachian Range.



*“With them, flying is a luxury, a fine art; not merely a quicker and safer means of transit from one point to another, but a gift so free and spontaneous that work becomes leisure and movement rest. They are not so much going somewhere, from this perch to that, as they are abandoning themselves to the mere pleasure of riding upon the air It is beneath such grace and high-bred leisure that Nature hides in her creatures the occupation of scavenger and carrion-eater!”
— John Burroughs, Winter Sunlight (1885)*

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Am I that hard rock pushing back against the water, resisting the flow, the steady stream