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WRITTEN RIVER

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Featuring: The Poetry of: Brandi Katherine Herrera, Marisa Handler, Beth Anne Boardman, J.K. McDowell, Simon Peter Eggertsen, Jamie K. Reaser, L.M. Browning, Roselle Angwin, Rodney Nelson and Kasey Phifer. An interview with author Jason Kirkey by Jenn MacCormack. The Photographer for this issue: Duncan George. Essays: Nature and Education by Theodore Richards and Truckee River Reflection by Pamela Biery. Also featured: Celebrating the Launch of Homebound - an imprint of Hiraeth Press devoted to fiction. Previews of Western Solstice by Leonore Wilson and The Sapphire Song by Todd Erik Pedersen.

TRUCKEE RIVER REFLECTIONS

Pamela Biery

river

It really isn't much of a river; sometimes it's barely a stream. The Truckee River flows through Squaw Valley as it nears Lake Tahoe, ignoring the heavy seasonal road traffic with a mind only to the snow melt, rainfall and summer sun. In the spring, churned and torrential in narrow banks by the town of Truckee, it's flow broadens and curves along the journey downstream of nine or so miles to Fanny Bridge and the fishery at Tahoe City. This river bears witness to many chapters of my life. The Truckee didn't belong to anyone, was not strongly associated with any vagrant friends or disappointing relationships. This river had a clean slate as far as I was concerned. A safe retreat, a place to recharge. Somewhere to make my own, as much as any place ever is "owned."

current

Maybe this is why some years back, as I watched the form of my life collapse around me like the flattened hoops of a grand party gown, I drove to the Truckee River. Sitting near the bank by a fine flower box, a stone wall and the sound of the river flowing by, I realized life would continue, though nothing would be the same again for me. This, was of course, both good and bad, like so much of life. As I watched the light fade, a little paper cup floated by downstream, bobbing along in a seemingly carefree manner. The cup was indifferent to the fact that it might be crushed around the bend, for the moment it was the captain of its destiny. Isn't this how I had sailed my ship? Not noting that the appearance of control was just an illusion, just glad to be out on the current. The evening chill started to set in.

drive

Now I must drive back, back to the illusions I had created. To the dream that wasn't, until the memory of the sun setting in my rear view mirror would seem to be the dream. I had begun to make the Truckee my own.

drought

When there's a drought year you can't even raft on the Truckee in the early spring. Perhaps it's nature punishing us for our bad behavior—no, we can't play in the water this year, we tore down too much ozone and have to make do with other toys. So we do. The bikes come off the roof of the car and we race the straight-aways and the bends while birds and strollers scold. Jumping frogs along the marshy northern bank laugh with us, croaking a sacrilegious chorus. I leave more of myself each visit.

regeneration

When the rainfall has been good, and the summer temperate, the Truckee warms from its winter chill, still flowing with enough boisterous body to keep a few rapids going. Just like the little paper cup on the river, our raft bobs and dips and even capsizes a few times. The day is hot, the water refreshing. Stopping at a sandbar, I bury my feet in the sand and watch my son dive. He rode his first bike along this river. His second and third bike, too. This path is now just the point of departure for greater adventures around Lake Tahoe and other trails. He presents me with a sapphire blue piece of river-worn glass. Holding it up to the light, I squint with one eye, and watch the clouds change color. Regeneration through prisms of light, glass, water and sand.



road marker

Sometimes, I drive along the river, taking the turn off at Tahoe City around to the West Shore of the lake. It's reassuring to see the Truckee, flowing on with its tale of life. This reassurance has a different tone when driving in blizzard conditions and trying to make out where you are; at these times the Truckee's a critical road marker: something to steer by, a guidepost.

irony

I'm not a California native. When I first came to Northern California from Washington state, it was like driving through Mars. The sky was so intense and blue, cloudless for days. The soil was bright red. The traffic enough to inspire respect, even from veteran drivers. Road kill was everywhere. I looked at the rolling hills dotted with oaks and blinked. Then came the heat. 105° was a far cry from 80° at the beach in Seattle. Here you drive right up to the ocean, so these incredible places are magically accessible—to everyone and all that comes with it. Beauty, trash and crowds: California's irony from the Redwoods to Malibu.

change

A geologist told me once that California was still shifting geographically—was less “set” than most of America, still changing. This feels true. After twenty some years, I've become a Californian. The hills along one side of the Truckee are sliding, the beetles have killed many of the pine trees that hold the slopes in place. The course of this river will change and shift.

swirls

Autumn is the shortest season, and along the Truckee, trees turn brilliant red and gold against a clear, intensely blue sky. Water reflects back its green hue and murmurs along. A hawk swoops low, eyeing a trout, a stray Red-hooded Merganser paddles hurriedly to catch its mate. We examine swirls in the frozen puddles during our early morning walk. The air is cold, often frosty, but warms to a fine fall day. Only fools complain on such days.

moment

Each time we see a river, we see a new river. The water is different than what passed before. Whether we see it new or through our memories is personal choice, often made unconsciously. Memories can prevent us from seeing something new in the moment. Recollections are like boulders that stay the course of the flow of new experiences.

new

A river is always *new*.