

Eulogy for a River

By Mary Catherine Graziano

She was an angel and a devil; she gave life and took it. She flowed by for thousands of years, sharing long moments of sweetness, raged in her power and sighed slowly against her shores, leaving her kisses on the pebbles. Her footsteps echoed timelessly through the hills, as she poured, vibrantly, eagerly across valleys and down hills; she gave birth to the big, gentle fish that swam, flashing, through her sand-gilded depths. The blonde river slid past us, singing of history, hers, ours, and those of her children. She breathed life. Sleek otters danced in her waves, overlooked by stiff-necked proud birds, cattails in her marshes waved at the dragonflies sparkling in the air. Small things crept and swam quietly, carefully, all over her swift body, clinging to stones and skipping along her surface, living out their lives in her enduring womb.

A delicate, dangerous woman, the Tisza was, she watched lovers by her shores. She caught small children and grown men and women to her demanding bosom. She fed us. She carried us, and killed us. She watched our stories, of love, war, death and birth. She witnessed our best and our worst, and made no comment. She told many stories of her own, as she glided, sometimes roared, past her banks. She was terrible in her anger, and beautiful in her love. She gave freely of her children, and watched us grow. She was a thing of beauty, a wild and free movement of life that graced the land as she danced past in her glory. She was a river. A monument, a piece of life, a gift.

Now she sings no more; cyanide courses through her veins. Petals drift slowly down her stiff ripples, candles flickering sadly off of her sullen surface as mourners drop their grief into her glassy depths. Her waves splash in rigor mortis her very cells dead. Her waters gleam white from the bellies of dead fish, and the last of Hungary's osprey cry with the pain of poisoning. Fisherman gasp hopelessly as they watch their livelihood stretch out dead along the shores, weeping bitter salt tears for the dead golden-haired maiden who can no longer share their stories with them.

Some Information About The River

The Tisza River runs through Hungary, and ends up in Yugoslavia, where it spills into the Danube River. It is known as the blonde river because its sandy bottom makes it look golden, and is an important part of local legend and economy. On January 30th flooding caused cyanide to spill out from the Aurul gold mine in Romania, dumping the poison into nearby rivers, the Somes, Szamos and the Tisza. Romania and an Australian company, Esmeralda Exploration, own equal parts of the mine. The government of Romania and Esmeralda Exploration deny that the cyanide could have had any impact on the river, which is frankly ridiculous. Fish are 1000 times more sensitive to cyanide than humans are, which means that hundreds of tons of fish were killed by this cyanide spill, some of which were endangered species. Although I only write about the Tisza, the Somes (in Ukraine), and the Szamos (in Hungary) are also officially dead.

The death of the river hit the Hungarians particularly hard economically, spiritually and culturally. They mourned the death of their beloved river the same way they mourn a drowning victim. They lit candles, draped black off of their bridges, and dropped flowers in to the water. People cried as they visited their dead friend, knowing that they had lost something infinitely valuable.

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A Nod of the Head

It is easy to wander through life and say "hello," "how ya' doing," or "what's up" to the hundreds of faces that one encounters while shuffling across campus on a weekly basis. There's a generic conversation that is often recycled throughout the day, one that we all know, one that we, as college students, all engage in. The scene plays out as follows: you're walking to class. You see a face that is smiling in your direction. You smile back, wave or give a nod of your head. Sometimes you'll even stop and chat for a few. Whether it's the kid who snorts every five minutes in the back of Fundamental Accounting or your friend's friend who you've met at a handful of parties, seeing a familiar face is always a comforting experience.

It makes you feel good that there is actually someone out there who recognizes your existence in this world.

What is often lost in all off the small talk, however, is the relationship with the individual who we call "friend." Acquaintances can often dilute the mind and cause it to spin into a sudden lapse of memory when it comes to picking up the phone to call, or dropping a quick e-mail to, the kid who has been by your side every day since the two of you arrived on campus in the fall however many months ago. Tons of acquaintances are quite a lovely novelty, but a handful of people whom one can truly call friends are irreplaceable. Those people who would give their hearts and souls to ensure your happiness are all an important part of the person who you are ... and sadly, for a few days or weeks, they are sometimes forgotten.

This piece may be growing to become a bit more sentimental than I have intended it to be, so I will end my reflection with this: certain things in life are often difficult to explain, like the way that two friends come to care for one another. You can sit down and think about how or why someone cares for you, but when it comes down to it, some things are better left unsaid. Take the time today to let your friends know that you appreciate them. Tell them you're glad that they are a part of your life ... it could very well make you happier than just nodding your head.