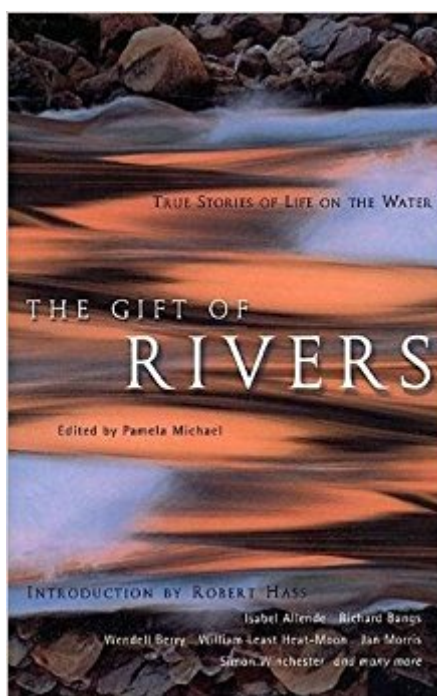


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The Gift Of Rivers: True Stories Of Life On The Water (Travelers' Tales Guides)



Synopsis

Rushing, rolling, flowing — rivers provide the ultimate metaphor for movement. They carve borders, create livelihoods, provoke adventure, and offer healing. From white-knuckle rafting rides to fishing stories to eco-essays, this collection by top authors explores the historical, practical, and spiritual significance of rivers. Contributors to *The Gift of Rivers* include Isabel Allende, Barry Lopez, Wendell Berry, Jan Morris, William Least Heat-Moon, Richard Bangs, Simon Winchester, and many other distinguished and emerging voices — all celebrating rivers, literally and symbolically. A thoughtful introduction by former U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Hass describes the way in which rivers have fueled the imagination and spawned cultures since the beginning of time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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Excerpted from *The Gift of Rivers: True Stories of Life on the Water*, Edited by Pamela Michael.

Copyright (c) 2000. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. From *SWISS SQUEEZE: RISK MANAGEMENT ON AN ALPINE RIVER* (Pamela Michael) Risk comes in many forms-physical, emotional, and even financial-but courage is a singular summoning of a part of ourselves and the

universe that is as elusive as it is powerful. I was flush with newfound courage and determination (or constricted breathing, perhaps) as I joined the others on the rocky shore. The water was a milky blue-gray, from ground-up rock known as glacial flour. Six of us-five "adventurers" and one real adventurer, our river guide, a blond dreadlocked Aussie nicknamed "Home Boy"-set off in a fourteen-foot raft and were quickly swirling through rapids with names like Meat Cleaver, Happy Snapper, Nipple Rock, Prussian Sling Shot, and the aptly named Kotzmuhle, the Vomit Mill. Good river guides possess a necessary combination of river skills-strength, caution, the ability to "read" the water-and people skills, the leadership qualities needed to make greenhorn rafters Paddle Forward! High Side! and Hold On! at just the right times. Home Boy was a Crocodile Dundee/Lord Byron hybrid; he had the perfect blend of daring and sensitivity and we adventurers were soon throwing ourselves from one side of the raft to the other without hesitation on his command. The Michelin Woman was a little slow to resume her paddling position on the rim at times, but she scrambled gamely and with only half a thought of how she looked hoisting herself out of the bottom of the raft. During the lulls, she even found herself relaxing enough to take in the beauty of the En Valley. In the quieter stretches of water, Home Boy pointed out some of the many streams that fed into the river from tantalizing, lushly-forested side canyons. Several of the gushing tributaries had heavy loads of iron that stained the rocks around the confluences a shocking red. We saw abandoned old trinkhalls along the shore, remnants of spas from another age. The region, in fact, has been a popular healing resort since the sixteenth century and still has several operating spas, including a palatial new one at Bad Scuol, located in a romantic village in the lower Engadine that calls its mineral water "the champagne of the Alps." We floated past the edge of the Swiss National Park, the oldest in Europe, established in 1914. In this oasis of wildness in the midst of a tamed and somewhat manicured country, it is possible to catch glimpses of marmots, red deer, ibex, lynx, and chamois. Sadly, the protection of the park did not come in time for the last bear in Switzerland: it was shot within sight of the river in 1904. Halfway through our run we came upon a raft from another outfit, "wrapped" around a large boulder in the middle of the river. The paying rafters sat shivering, despite their wet suits, on the rock-strewn banks while their guide struggled valiantly to free the raft, now swamped with water and barely above the surface. Home Boy parked us in an eddy along the shore and leapfrogged from boulder to boulder to reach the stricken craft. The two guides tried ropes, wedges, all kinds of ingenious-and previously employed, it was clear-techniques, some of them quite dangerous, for at least an hour, in vain. The undercurrent had captured the raft and wasn't letting go. Disturbingly, we were in a particularly rugged and steep section of the gorge; it was clear there was no way to hike out from this spot on the river. But this was Switzerland, the

Disneyland of nations, by Gtt, where everything was under control, so Home Boy fished out his cell phone and called in a rescue team. We squeezed a couple of the colder refugees into our raft and pushed off, leaving the rest of the stranded rafters to await the rescue boat. Just down river we rounded a tight bend and-flash!-saw an eagle take wing in a spray of sunlit droplets of river water, a squirming fish grasped in its talons. An icy dribble splattered my upturned face as the eagle flew over our heads. It felt like a benediction. I had become, for a moment, just another element in a shimmering landscape of river, sky tree, mountain, fish, bird. I let out an exultant whoop and fell back into the raft laughing, washed by waves of exhilaration, awe, and gratitude. I had triumphed over my fears and been rewarded with this yodeling, soaring Alpine high. And I hadn't risked my life, really, just my pride. Small stakes, when you think about it.

Of all the wonderful anthologies published by Traveler's Tales, the Gift of Rivers is my favorite. From the Pacuare in Costa Rica to the Tatshenshini in Alaska, I love rivers. Traveling on water is the easiest way to get into pristine, roadless wilderness areas. While floating effortlessly on calm stretches you can see wildlife on the shore without disturbing their environment. Your thoughts glide as easily as your rubber raft wandering softly over a panorama of constantly changing scenery. Being awakened by the thunder of white water ahead keeps the mind and senses alert for adventure to come. Rivers, once the favored mode of transport, harbor tales of ancient spirits. This collection of stories shares with us the richness of rivers. Each of the rivers included have their own "unique balance of menace and charm." This collection is like a candy store of adventures for this travel writer aching to know the pulse of more of the arteries nourishing our planet.[...]Lost Angel Walkabout-One Traveler's Tales

This book really is a gift. Once you read former Poet Laureate Robert Hass's beautiful introduction, you won't want to stop -- and you won't be disappointed. We're talking range here -- from Isabel Allende's to Lorian Hemingway's Arkansas to William Least Heat-Moon's Mississippi ... and from icy mountain torrents like the En in Switzerland to cultural main streets like the Seine in France and the Nile in Egypt and the Ganges in India, to rivers choked by industry and neglect like the Columbia in the U.S. -- honestly, you'll laugh, you'll cry.

I feel fortunate to have had the chance to read the precious river stories contained in this collection. Some brought me and my friends to fits of laughter, others to tears and amazement- most of all they inspired us to listen more carefully to the rivers and waterways that bring nourishment and joy to all

our lives. Thank you Pamela Michael for sharing these stories from around the world with us!

If all of the world's rivers formed a giant continuous watershed (which in a sense they do), I'd put-in at the top and proceed to ride, glide and meander my way down the arteries of our earth. As I entered into each unique river system - Congo, , Seine, Futaleufu, Siuslaw, Mississippi, Narmada - the human and natural histories of each river would be revealed to me, uncovered, discovered like the layers of time and tide of the Grand Canyon. At the take-out I'd be changed. I'd better understand John Calderazzo's observation that a river can "turn into a state of mind, a kind of feeling." That is the gift of rivers. Of course, there is no such thing as a put-in at the top of the world's watershed, but just as good is Pamela Michael's book, "The Gift of Rivers." Turn the page, enter into river time, hear the stories, and fall in love with our watery ancestors, the world's rivers.

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