

Writing the Waves of Scholarly Whitewater

Kim Riordan
University of Minnesota Duluth

Writing, for me, is a lot like canoeing up stream.
Requiring vision and stamina to stay on course.
Determination. How else will I teach if I don't publish?
It is invigorating, arduous. Intense.

Sometimes I paddle. Hard.
Words come in torrents. Gushing.
My fingers fly over the bow of my keyboard.
I hold my breath. Eyes closed.

At times my writing finds itself in a rivulet, dry patches.
Worse, mud.
Not enough water to float my boat.
The fantasy I'm going somewhere, even when I'm portaging.

Often, I just want to float; look up at the sky.
Peer into the depths. Bob along.
Meander up a tributary. Where might this little brook take me?
Follow the current; the creek less traveled.

There are serious consequences for this floating.
I have returned from daydreams and found I have drifted further than I meant to.
Only fervent paddling will get me back to where I began.
The "undo" function becomes my trawling motor.

There are eddies in the water, turning me around.
Beguiling. Confusing and disorienting me.
I have been tricked by these whirlpools before.
Risked a roll over. Steady, steady.

For long spells I put my canoe away; Favored safer modes of travel.
Walked the banks.
Relied on the spoken word.
Spell check is so much easier on land.

Capsized. I have been dragged under, held too long. Flaied to the surface.
Sputtering and cursing.
Somewhere I lost my watch, my dry matches, and my point.
What direction was I headed? Whose idea was it to take this trip?

There are buoys along the way, colleagues and mentors on my voyage.
They edit me, "you're going down the wrong stream."
At times they reassure me I'm going in the right direction.
Even if it is up stream.

I usually arrive at the end exhausted. Exhilarated. Sunburnt.
Wondering if I'll ever go again.
Knowing I will.
Beginning to plan the next trip.