

Remembering Chuck Weis

(July 28, 1933 - January 31, 2009)

..... Gareth Stevens

USCA lost two great longtime members and leaders in January, 2009. In our next issue, we will remember and honor Thor Ronemus, one of USCA's founders. In this issue we remember and honor Chuck Weis.

“ ‘Ambassador’ is the best word I could think of to describe my father,” Rebecca Weis lovingly recounted. “I can't tell you how many condolence cards and emails contained the phrase “Chuck introduced me to...x,” or “Chuck got me started in...y.” He was literally incapable of keeping his mouth shut, so it is good that he used it most of the time to share his various passions. And like an ambassador, he usually got folks involved in things that would somehow benefit him as well!

“He offered his mouth, his time, hard work, and love to our local, state, national, and international communities, his family, church, friends, and ecosystem. He was a mentor and advocate for children, a lobbyist for the environment, and a champion of river sports. He enriched lives through his writing and broadcasting, events organization, storytelling, speechmaking, historical interpretation, gardening, photography, and some fairly bizarre artistic handicrafts. He was a devoted and involved parent and a supportive husband. He had his shortcomings, as do we all, but you could not accuse him of not trying. He was as obstinate as water, and so I was inspired to write this elegy:

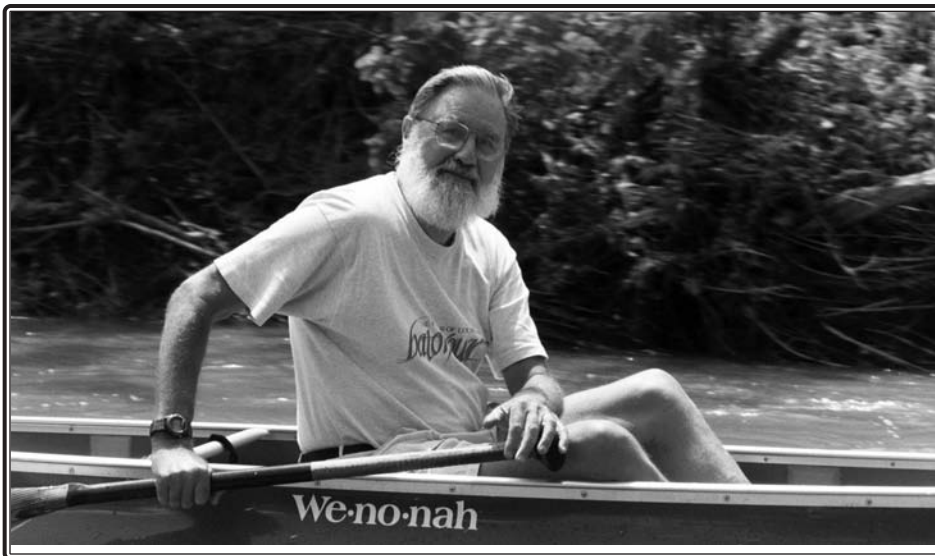
An Elegy for “Greybeard”

“Still waters run deep,” but, like Chuck, the raucous waters are often more fun.

Perhaps shallow in places, or babbling a bit, the raucous water, when channeled, can be an explosive force with a strong clear voice rolling boulders and carving exquisite wonderlands out of the very earth.

Water is both calm, and furious.

Like Shiva, it destroys, yet also brings life.



It will nourish you and drown you in turn.

It will sink to the center of the earth, and fly in the sky.

It will crack a mountain.

When the water suddenly evaporates, hard times flow in to fill the empty riverbed.

It occurs to us to wither. But while we will thirst in the absence, take comfort: the water is only resting awhile in the ocean.

It is amusing itself in the wandering clouds, searching for new canyons to carve.

In a time perhaps beyond our imagining, the water will return to us bringing new generation.

Take comfort: the raucous water is always somewhere, destroying and rebuilding, quenching deep thirsts, and babbling pleasantly between lush green banks. ”

Two USCA members, its president Janet Perry, and the Canoe News editor, Gareth Stevens, attended Chuck Weis's memorial service and reception at St Andrew United Methodist Church, West Lafayette, IN on March 28.

It was both a sad and a happy occasion, and moving. Chuck's family, neighbors, fellow churchgoers, and many friends of common interest in paddling and conservation were there, sharing stories about Chuck. Neither Janet nor I knew any of them personally, but we were warmly welcomed, and Chuck's family, especially, seemed touched that we attended.

For the USCA Chuck was Secretary

(1977-79), President (1983-84), served as Chair of the PR Committee (1987-91) the Cruising and Camping Committees (2002-05), and was Annual Meeting Coordinator 2007-08.

His contributions to Canoe News over the years were many. And anything you see by George Leatherhand anywhere, well, that was Chuck, too. George was his main storytelling alter ego. (I already knew Chuck, but I first met George when he was after-dinner speaker at the Savannah, GA Annual Meeting in 2002 – a meeting that he organized, and the same meeting I volunteered to work on this magazine.)

Taken ill at the end of December 2008, Chuck could not attend our Annual Meeting in January 2009, one of the few he ever missed. The bid he had prepared for one of three hotels in the Chicago region won the 2010 Annual Meeting site vote, and up to a week before his death at the end of January, though much weakened, he continued to advise me on final negotiations, as we played one hotel off against another – with a fine outcome a few weeks after his passing (details to be announced).

USCA members mostly knew Chuck in that part of his life which he devoted to USCA — and he was devoted to the Association. His wife, Doris, told me a few days after his death, that Chuck wanted any donations in his memory to go to the USCA, and/or to the Sierra Club, and/or to his church.

Here I share some of the stories that his family, his neighbors, and his non-USCA

friends told, to give a glimpse into his other lives. All of his friends in the USCA will recognize the same kind, passionate, talkative, humor-loving, unpredictable **Chuck** that we all knew!

Rebecca Weis, **Chuck** and **Doris's** younger daughter welcomed the congregation. "On behalf of **Chuck's** family, I would like to thank you all for coming, and for all the wonderful condolences we've received.

"Friends have stepped forward to assist us in a hundred different ways . . . as they say where I recently lived down southern Appalachia, bless all-a-y'all.

"**Abraham Lincoln** said, "It is not the years in the life, but the life in the years."

"**Leonardo Da Vinci** said, "As a day well spent makes it sweet to sleep, so a life well used makes it sweet to die."

"We can surely say of my father that there was more life in his years than years in his life, and it must have been sweet for him to die, for that life was certainly well used."

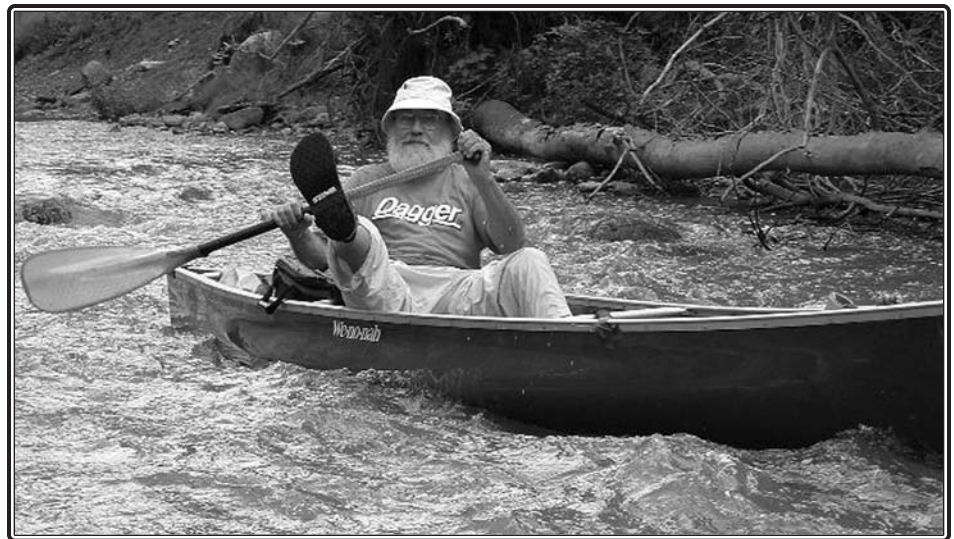
Roadkill Taxidermist, Outdoor Adventurer

..... *Eve Nasby*

I moved in two doors down from the Weises when I was 10. (I am now 41). **Becky**, **Chuck's** youngest daughter and I were the same age and we became friends. From 7th grade until **Becky** was old enough to drive, **Becky** and I walked to school together every day. Early in the morning, I'd walk to her home and knock on the door.

Through the white sheer curtain, I would see **Chuck** come to the door and open it for me. I'd wait for **Becky** in the "office" or "sitting room" which held a menagerie of queer things — queer for a mere 10-year-old from Pennsylvania. It was evident that **Chuck** was a person who had a great love for the great outdoors . . . and enjoyed bringing some of that outdoors, indoors.

As my wide eyes scanned the room, I saw a rattlesnake skin that seemed to stretch from floor to ceiling that had



been lovingly hung next to the deer head, and flanked by a few pair of snow shoes. There were stuffed rodents proudly displayed everywhere.

Thankfully one living creature thrived amongst its deceased but beautifully preserved relatives, and that was the family pet guinea pig, named by **Chuck**: "**P Thaddaeus Rassmussen Pig**."

Through the years I became accustomed to the ever growing display of **Chuck's** taxidermist efforts. There was a day, however, that his hobby and my nose met face to face. Quite violently.

One frigid Indiana morning, I unsuspectingly hopped in the passenger side of **Becky's** Nova ready for school and was accosted by the pungent smell of skunk. Fresh skunk. Well, freshly dead skunk. It seems that the day before **Chuck** had driven by a carcass he just couldn't resist. Placing it gingerly in the trunk, he brought it home, and no doubt it then made its way into the family freezer, right next to the frozen peas. However, its brief stay in the trunk left a not-so-sweet reminder for weeks!

Finally, having such an outdoor enthusiast as a neighbor had its great advantages when it came to having the right equipment for unique circumstances. For example, **Chuck** owned a canoe livery and had about 20 canoes in his back yard. One year, our neighborhood completely flooded. Imagine my delight seeing **Becky** paddling down the street to pick me up to cruise the neighborhood in a canoe! And there was the time that we had such a snow that

Becky and I actually got to showshoe to school. What great memories for us.

Chuck also drove **Becky** to her whitewater slalom competitions in North Carolina. I'd accompany them on many of the trips. During our travels, **Becky** and I would be nestled snugly in the tent while **Chuck** slept in his sleeping bag on top of the picnic table. Though we'd wake up with ice on the inside of the tent, **Chuck** never complained about being cold!

He was an amazing adventurer and has a very sweet spot in my heart. I have fantastic memories of him and I will miss him greatly.

The Chuck Effect

..... *Garry Hill*

Hey Wildcat Paddlers, **Chuck** is gone. He left us Saturday morning. If there are thanks to give, well, he did not suffer for long.

I have a lot to say about **Chuck Weis**. I pondered on how to say it. I chose to eulogize **Chuck** in the context of his effect on my life, rather than proclaim his personal accomplishments. Below you will see how **Chuck's** life changed, augmented, or authenticated the lives of others.

And as those of you who knew him well would know . . . that was what **Chuck** was trying to do all along.

My first ever Trip to a River was a rather short, uneventful, and stagnant trip to the ditch-like upper parts of *Pipe Creek* in June 1972. My second trip, a few weeks later, was an Epic Adventure that led to a series of events that changed my life.

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A friend and I traveled the *Wildcat* under near drought conditions from Kokomo's Malfalfa Road Bridge to SR-29 in Burlington. That's 17.4-miles in a beat up old "Boom-Alum," a trip which included at least a dozen logjam portages, with no more than 40 cfs at Kokomo. Three major happenings came to me that day.

- 1) My very first "Head-Over-Heels" dunking into a free-flowing stream;
- 2) The "Very Last Time" I ever stepped into a canoe without "Grabbing the Gunwales;" and
- 3) I Fell In Love With *Wildcat Creek*.

The third of those happenings led me to meet **Chuck Weis**.

On my very first canoe trip to *Wildcat's* lower valley (later in the Summer of '72) I came upon a "burlap-bag" sign, hand-brushed in "blood red," hanging 50 feet above the creek between a pair of huge sycamores. Simple message: "STOP THE DAM." (Those same trees can still be found a few hundred yards upstream from "The Irrigated Rock Garden" in Section 4.)

Back home the next day I read a *Kokomo Tribune* article that told about the *Wildcat Creek Federation* and its seemingly hopeless battle to stop the Corps of Engineers from damming the same part of the creek I had just visited.

Honest to God, I did not have an environmental bone in my body at that time. But "Something New" inside me said: "Damming This Creek Is Nothing But SHIT" The *Tribune* told the date of the next *Wildcat Creek Federation* meeting, and I attended.

So did **Chuck Weis**.

And my life changed again.

Besides all the other great people at that meeting (**Connie Wick**, **Persis Newman**, **Carol Baker**, **Kurt & Fran**, **Norb Corty**, **Laura Arnold**, **Rosie Halsma**, **Charlie Hoovler**, **John Marlin**, to name a few). . . . I was drawn to **Chuck Weis**. He was sharing news and views I had never encountered.

My eyes must have been nothing but question marks. The *Lafayette Canoe Club?* *Hoosier Canoe Club?* *Kekionga*

Voyageurs? *St Joe Valley Canoe & Kayak Club?* *Blueberry Paddlers?* *Canoe races?* *Big Pine Creek Fighting Another Dam?*

I was totally lost. This new "THING" I had found? These new feelings that were eating at me? The words of this man?

Chuck and the others were fighting to STOP A DAM. And at the same moment, **Chuck** and the others had opened the full flow of another kind of dam . . . directly upon me! I was clueless. I knew nothing of all this. I was totally surprised. I was inspired. I wanted to see this stuff. I wanted to taste it. I wanted to be swamped by it. I wanted to become a part of it.

And . . . I did. Thanks to **Chuck** I was able to find a place within the framework of protecting "our" *Wildcat Creek*. **Chuck** was always there to answer my questions. To make suggestions. To point the way. Even, sometimes, to grab me by the arm and pull me back.

And that is the **Chuck Weis** I will always remember: a man who would stand up for his passions and his beliefs, a man who exemplified those beliefs in every step he took, a man who was willing to share those beliefs . . . with anyone . . . with everyone, a man who carried that message to others; a man who could inspire others to action, a man who made me want to be the same as he.

Chuck Weis changed my life. It started that first day I met him. But it has continued through the years, even until today.

He was totally behind me with the birth of the *Wildcat Canoe Club*. He was by my side as we initiated the *Wildcat Valley Canoe Race*. I worked with him as he organized the *USCA National Championships* on the *Wabash River*. He was my inspiration and successor of the *Indiana Paddlers Rendezvous*. We worked hand-in-hand to create the *Wildcat Guardians*. I joined with **Chuck** and dozens of other advocates, aided by the *IDNR Streams & Trails Section*, to incorporate *Wildcat Creek* into the *Indiana Natural Rivers System*.

Are you like me? Remembering accomplishments that could not have succeeded without **Chuck**? Were you inspired

by **Chuck** to "step into the unknown"? Did you enjoy the stories he told? Or the stories told about him? Will you, with me, miss him?



How to Fall in Love with a River

.....Valerie Boruff

On August 28th, 2004, my daughter **Morgan**, age 6, and I packed our camp gear and canoe. We were heading with full enthusiasm to our very first "Overnighter" on the *Wildcat Creek* with **Garry Hill** and his *Expedition Team*. The Overnighter meant a 2-day paddling trip in which the participants take all their gear with them in the boats, camping at some great location along the river.

Throughout the day we had beautiful sunshine and great water levels. We met our friend **Chuck Weis** this day on the river. **Morgan** explored everything on the river. Everyone, especially **Chuck**, enjoyed showing her all kinds of wonderful things! **Chuck** was the oldest of our group that day, **Morgan** the youngest, and a great friendship began – bridging the age gap!

A picture was taken on the river that day, which is now called "How to Fall in Love with a River." It captures exactly how things were between **Chuck** and **Morgan**. He would pull up alongside to chat and point something special out to her about the river.

We arrived at our gravelbar, unpacked gear and got busy setting up tents as storms were rolling in. We all enjoyed our creekside meal and then scurried into our tents as the storm arrived in full force. The thunder, lightning and rain continued throughout the night. We

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were all cozy in our tent, not worrying about what was happening outside. When we awoke in the morning and stepped out to start a new day of paddling, we discovered the water level had risen to within five inches of our tent! We had laughter and stories around the breakfast fire about how **Garry** and **Chuck** had watched over us during the night and continually pulled the canoes further onto land, as the creek's water level had risen. They saved our boat and watched as the water had almost entered our tent!

This trip was the beginning of a great friendship and bond between **Chuck** and **Morgan**. **Chuck** always came with a special gift for **Morgan** at canoeing events.

He gave her many prized fossils and rocks, including her favorite crinoid. He gave her a book entitled *Girls Who Looked under Rocks: The Lives of Six Pioneering Naturalists* by Jeannine Atkins, which tells of women, now well known naturalists, artists and writers and what began their love of nature as little girls, girls who had a love for the outdoors and took time to look at and observe all the tiny things of nature just as **Morgan** is doing now.

Chuck was of continual encouragement to me as a homeschool mom in his words and emails to keep going, continually letting me know he felt we were on the right track!

Chuck was a great man, who is extremely missed in our household, and on the river!

What a special friend he was to us!

Family Stories

Doris's Stories

As a young man, **Chuck** was especially passionate about the free dissemination of information as the basis for our democracy. I want to tell you about two incidents from the '70s. The first involved a gathering of angry students at the top of State Street hill. They were dissidents demonstrating against the war and the military industrial complex.

The crowd was growing ugly. **Chuck** had the idea to show up on the hill with his tape recorder to interview these students so they could express their dissatisfactions publicly. He put them on the air and that seemed to calm the crowd. **Bob Topping**, manager of the Purdue News Service, was so impressed that he felt compelled to write a letter to **Chuck** saying his work was in the best tradition of the type of journalism that is in the public interest.

The second incident was at Five-points Fire Station where a black lawn jockey stood outside as an icon of slavery in the minds of the black population in Lafayette. That black statue represented servitude. They wanted it gone, but the town fathers touted its historical significance and refused to take it down. Then in the middle of the night someone smashed it to bits.

There was a huge outcry and the police looked for the culprit. **Chuck** was able to discover his identity and interviewed the criminal anonymously and he put that interview on the air. The black population was able to air their grievances and let everyone know how bad they felt when they saw that lawn jockey. The police then tried to put pressure on **Chuck** to reveal his source. He was prepared to go to jail rather than do so. A slightly more humorous incident occurred when a radio listener called WASK news claiming to have seen a frozen camel propped up by the side of the road in Americus, IN. **Chuck's** assistant went to see it and then **Chuck** went out there, too. It certainly looked like a camel.

When **Chuck**, a stringer (a local news person), was able to place a local story on the national wire service, that meant big points for his boss. They started calling around to find out if a circus had passed through town and lost a camel in the dead of winter. About that time, the police department went to investigate. It was only a sheep whose body had been contorted. **Chuck** was kidded about that for years. Recently a local farmer admitted the animal was a sheep placed by the road as a big joke. There

are still farmers around Americus who can tell you just where the "CAMEL CROSSING" is on State Road 25.

Uncle John's Stories

My Uncle **John** remembers when he and Daddy were kids riding bikes on Old Salem Road. **John** was proceeding around a 90 degree corner on the right side of the road. **Chuck**, coming the other way, was riding on the left side of the road. CRASH! Poor **John's** toes got mashed up in the spokes of his bike and ever since he's had 10 broken toes to remember Daddy by.

John and his mother and Dad went to a cub scout meeting one evening, leaving **Chuck** at home. They came back to find all the drawers flung open in the kitchen and some of the contents scattered about. It looked like the house had been ransacked. **Chuck's** dad went immediately to call the police. Then **John** heard a very deep, authoritative voice saying "Do Not Touch That Phone!" It was **Chuck**, who subsequently explained that it had all been a practical joke!

After leaving Grinnell College, **Chuck** proceeded to New Orleans for a visit. After about a week, the Washington DC police called the Weises in West Orange and said that **Chuck's** car had been found parked on a main street in Washington with a note on the windshield. It read, "To Whom it May Concern: This car is too expensive for me to maintain any longer. If anyone wants it, you are welcome to it!" **John** remembers proceeding hastily to D.C. with two gallons of oil to help the car limp home. The whole incident was reported on the front page of a national newspaper! **Chuck** had a flair for the dramatic way back then.

Wendy's Story (The Bobcat)

Hi, I'm **Wendy Smith**, **Chuck** and **Doris's** older daughter.

When I was in grade school, Dad took a course through the mail from the Northwest School of Taxidermy. He stuffed a few animals, and then decided that he was primarily interested

in preserving the pelts. He got to be fairly good. The thing was, he wasn't a hunter, so when he saw a dead animal on the road, he would stop to see if it was suitable for skinning. If it was, he'd bring it home and put it in the freezer until he had time to skin it. Basically, all this meant that riding in a car with my Dad could be a pretty interesting experience.

On one of our family vacations we were driving back through Florida. Crossing a bridge, Dad saw a dead bobcat lying by the road. He slammed on the brakes and went back to check it out. It was in good shape, but when it died, it was stretched out, in full rigor mortis.

Dad had a hard time nonchalantly dragging the carcass back to the car, knowing full well it was against the law since it involved possession of an endangered species. He was lucky, because the cat just barely fit in the trunk. He drove along, being particularly careful to obey the speed limit so as not to draw the attention of the police. But he had a back-up plan. If he did get stopped and the police asked him to open the trunk, he was going to act very surprised and exclaim, "Oh no, kids! Kitty died!"

When it came time to stop for the night, we searched for a hotel with a long enough table to use for skinning the animal. Mom and Dad sent me and Rebecca to the office to get some newspaper to cover the table. The process took a long time. Meanwhile...Rebecca and I had to do our homework. I remember looking up from my math problems periodically to see this half skinned bobcat staring back at me with these incredibly huge eyeballs. (In case you ever wondered, eyeballs look much bigger when there aren't any eyelids!)

Well, once it was done, Mom and Dad washed the skin in the hotel bathtub. Ticks fell out all over the place. They had to wash it three times before it even began to look clean.

Once the animal was skinned, we had to figure out how to dispose of the body. Remember this thing was long, and we were worried it would look like a hu-

man. We wrapped the remains in several layers of newspaper, trying to cover it up. Mom and Dad sent Rebecca and me out to the corner of the building to be lookouts. We were to let them know when no one was coming. I remember being so nervous. I was afraid if we screwed up, Mom and Dad were going to be hauled off to jail! When the coast was clear, Mom and Dad managed to haul the body down a long flight of stairs to the car. They drove out to a wooded area in the country. Dad tried to point the headlights into the forest. He wanted Mom to help him carry the body well into the woods, but it was dark and Mom refused. They finally left the body at the edge of the woods and beat a quick retreat.

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They say the experiences you have as a child help to prepare you for your adult life...and you know...it's really true! In my adult life, as a park naturalist, people frequently bring me dead animals, thinking I might be able to have them stuffed for use in educational programs. I put them in the freezer until I have enough money to have them mounted. Some folks would probably be horrified at the thought of having a dead raccoon or whatever in their freezer...but not me. That was just a normal part of life. So...they prepared me well. And you know...I think Dad still may have one last animal in the freezer.

Some final thoughts from Wendy

I'd like to share a song with you...it's one I know at least a few of you in the room will know. It's called "Watching the River Run" and was written by **Kenny Loggins** and **Jim Messina** back in 1973. This is one of those songs that can be interpreted in many different ways, and I'd like to share with you one of the ways I've come to interpret this song during the past couple months.

"Watching the River Run" is really about living life to the fullest, and about celebrating life.

If you think about it, the water in a river

is on an incredible journey – experiencing something new as it flows over every rock, under every tree branch, and around every bend. It touches the lives of plants and animals and people. It's on one long, continuous adventure. It's like life.

As people, we're born into the current of that river of life. God's right there with us, like a river bed, supporting us throughout the entire journey. We bounce along, having one adventure after another – making our contributions to our families, our communities, and our world. ...And then one day we go around a bend, to a different stretch of the river farther downstream, where our friends and family can no longer see us, but where our amazing adventure still continues.

I think Dad's gone on ahead – around that bend in the river. We can't see him, but he's there, he's with God, and he's having adventures that are so amazing we can only begin to imagine.

Here's a quote Dad shared with me recently. It's by **Leonardo DaVinci**: "When you put your hand in a flowing stream, you touch the last that has gone before and the first of what is still to come."

So...I hope you'll enjoy this song. I ask that you think of Dad, like a river, flowing from his birth, through the celebrations of his life, and on around the bend. And I ask, too, that you consider your own journey along the river...after all, we really are all connected.

Hear it yourself on "youtube" on the web:

<http://tinyurl.com/5jcyyz>

... And it goes on and on, watching the river run

Further and further from things that we've done

Leaving them one by one

And we have just begun, Watching the river run

Listening and learning and yearning, run river run