

## **Longest Poem for the Longest River Valley Creek Edition 2022, Belwin Conservancy**

This poem was written in place and community standing alongside Valley Creek, 2PM 8/21/22.  
Underlines indicate words written by the community participants, there are a few blanks left for you too.

### **Pt. 1-VALLEY CREEK.**

1.1 billion years ago  
in some magical moment it began

rift, separation  
Something deep and rich-RICH in the earth's crust.

Then some 35,000 year ago  
Superior glaciers worked like sculptors  
to mold and shape the earth.  
To hold and direct spring water that wanted space,

to be a Creek, to move with joy  
to eventually join the Mississippi flow.

Under a Boreal Forest  
the Creek witnessed stars.

Pine and spruce wane  
in climate change of nature's making.  
Heat rising followed by cooling  
A magnetism that gave way to the prairie and ghosts and birds.

I stand with Valley Creek today and ask her \_\_\_\_\_?

I wonder what she thought as beings arrived,  
winged ones, furry ones, long tail ones,  
jumpy ones, and human ones.

The moment first feet dipped in was like coming home.  
Like knowing pure joy.

I wonder if she understood what a treaty was  
How agreements held in ink on an old sister tree might divide & destroy  
change everything.

To the Creek it was irrelevant.

it was a moment.

Centuries peel back till the Creek met  
the ones with "swamp water in their veins"  
The Bells

They played together, they grew together.  
Rocks placed to create waterfalls,  
earth pulled back where the creek could pool and relax into a pond.

New ones came, rainbow scaled ones, loud talking ones,  
steel plated ones, \_\_\_\_\_ ones.  
It felt new.

Then in some distinct moment the waters pulled back  
The Creek had known droughts, it had known floods that destroy.  
This was different. This was a watershed separation.

The Creek welcomes us all.  
It knew it would meet the displaced water again.  
That it would be like \_\_\_\_\_.

Maybe we will meet again in a quiet river.  
That one we are always running to.

Together we will \_\_\_\_\_  
we will \_\_\_\_\_

Meanwhile the Creek is a teacher.  
Her lessons are ever-lasting.

Today she is telling me her origin story. About how she longs for remembrance.  
What it is to be content, to let everything move through you.

And how she is determined, and moving to meet something new,  
seeking the places where waters join  
the boundary of being known differently-

Now I am a river, now I am dew, now I am a lake,  
now I am a snowflake, now I am night,

now I am hovering multitude a patch of fog  
in the valley- just above the creek.

Water always finds a way to come together again.

## **Pt. 2-Into the SAINT CROIX RIVER**

I welcome everything  
Every hawk.  
Every swimming hole.

The spot where Valley Creek meets me is elemental...  
Sometimes she has too much for me, she is too bold.  
In the cold of winter she holds back, icy and contemplative and reticent.

A Creek cold shoulder-  
She waits for my splash.

Then when the day is long enough, and warm  
enough

she let's go and its all rushing and free again.

Together we explore and learn new things.

The river understands things in a way you might not.  
If you stay quiet you might learn to fly.

The river is a teacher. She teaches eternity  
And patience  
And the cycle of life.  
I learn best by observing the ebb and flow

Wide and sweeping the Saint Croix river delta  
Eager to meet the Mississippi River.

They will say hello & cheers  
And join.  
Water always finds a way  
To cleanse  
To heal

To come together  
Again.

## **Pt. 3-Into the Mississippi**

*to be continued*

About: The Longest Poem for the Longest River

This project brings people together in a collective, multilingual creative writing experience for the one and only Mississippi River. A poetic-fill-in-the-blank phrased by writers and completed by people—all ages, all languages—during a community event. The aim is to bring the Mississippi (and her tributaries) to the public beyond its banks inspiring real-talk conversations about our relationships to water and the river. Through collective writing something new emerges that tell us about our contemporary relationship to the MISS—something collective, something beyond Mark Twain—more of the moment.

This project has been featured at community events since 2018. Each poem is of and for the moment.

The Longest Poem for the Longest River is a project conceived and produced by Angie Tillges. This version was prepared for 4Ground: Midwest Land Art Biennial @4groundbiennial written in partnership with poets from up and down the Mississippi River; Moheb Soliman, Writeous Soul, and Monique Verdin.