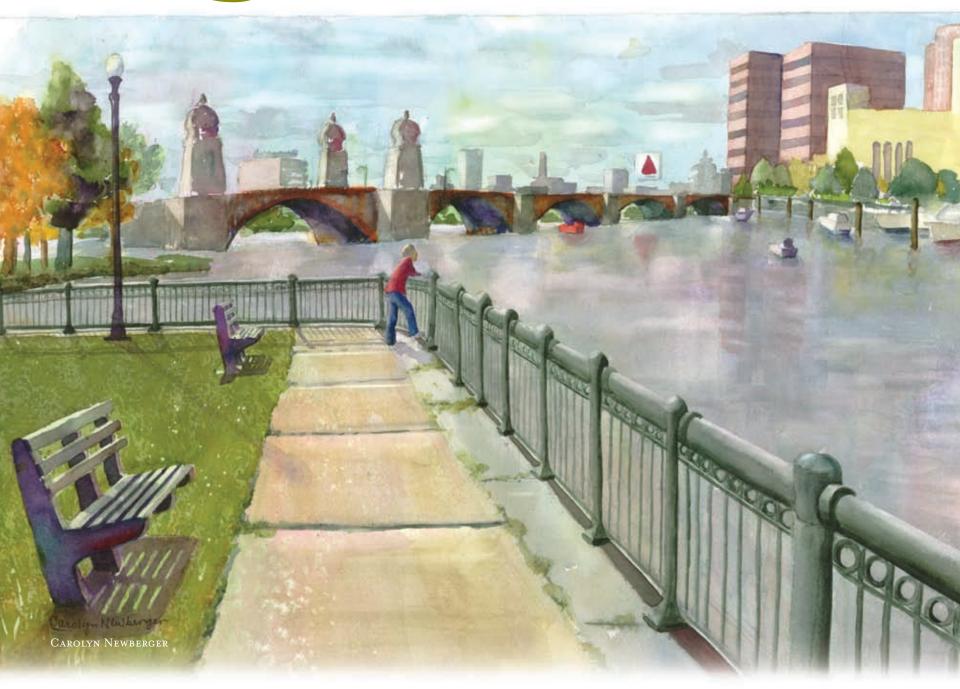
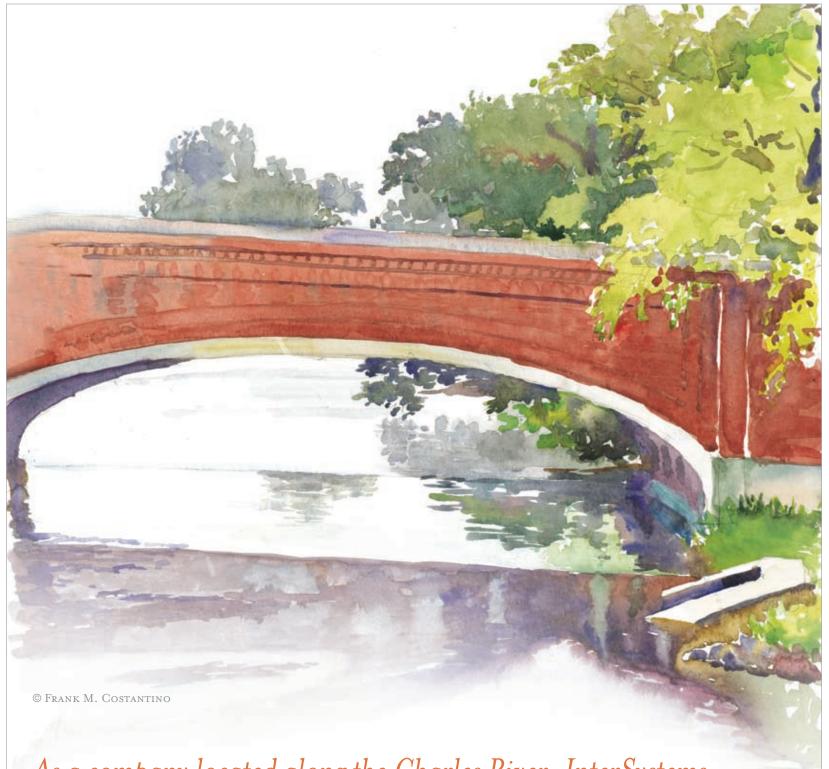
The Charles River Conservancy presents

River Stories





A treasury of poems and stories about the river and the parklands by the people who cherish them



As a company located along the Charles River, InterSystems Corporation applauds the work of the Charles River Conservancy to support and sustain these important urban parklands.

INTERSYSTEMS

Dear Parklands Friend,

We are delighted to share with you these "River Stories," a collection of reflections, memories, essays, and hopes and dreams about the Charles River. These stories come from a wide array of people: some are published authors, while others are leaders or active citizens in their communities. But all are united by a deep love of the Charles River and the tremendous gifts that this band of green and blue, flowing right through the heart of our brick and concrete city, offers us.

When I founded the Conservancy IO years ago, it was because I realized that this amazing civic resource—what Charles Eliot had called our "democratic common ground"—lacked the support of citizens themselves. Although the Parklands along the Charles are owned and managed by the state, public funds for parks are at best limited, and in difficult financial times, as we have seen recently, they are subject to the most drastic of budgetary cuts.

We are proud that in IO years we have been able to accomplish so much. In partnership with the Department of Conservation and Recreation, we have engaged more than I5,000 volunteers and contributed \$I million worth of labor to improve the Parklands'

health and aesthetics. We raised \$2.5 million to build a skate park and thereby provide for an under-served group of young athletes. We offer free games for kids, families, and senior citizens on Sunday afternoons in the summer. We have repaved pathways, built stairways to improve access and prevent erosion, pruned hundreds of trees, painted miles of seawall railing and park benches, and collected and removed tons (literally) of litter and debris.

But there is still much to do if the Parklands are to fulfill their promise, not only as a healthy, ecologically sustainable public park, but also as a place that invites active use and inspires people to care about the environment in their own front yard.

This past spring, you might have seen the IO,000 daffodils that we planted last fall to brighten the Parklands. We will continue such efforts, and we will expand our landscaping work by replacing the invasive plants that grow high along the shoreline, obscuring views, with native plants. Arbor health and management continues to be a priority. And our advocacy work—whether we are calling for bridge underpasses to improve bike and pedestrian access or leading the campaign for a return of public swimming—will be key in the years ahead as our urban population grows and clamors for green transportation, active lifestyles, and equal access to environmental resources.

We have a small but hard-working staff, and our plans for the next IO years are ambitious. Thank you for joining us in celebration of our first decade of achievement. Whether you are a long-time supporter or new to our organization, I hope these stories will inspire you join us in the work ahead.



A Calm So Deep

There are two ways to drive from the airport

TO MY HOUSE. One is a straight shot on a wide highway that requires almost nothing in the way of animal cunning to navigate. The other road twists and bends and scares the wits out of novices. I am no hot dog, but I always choose the second road. It follows the river.

"Look," I say to my out-of-town guests. In any season, I say, "Isn't it wonderful?"

They agree, of course. Because it is patently wonderful to have a river in your city. I do not mean to slight neighborhood lakes and ponds. Nor is a harbor view anything to sneeze at. Any body of water is like a sigh of relief in the nonstop urban conversation. Every vista that turns sunlight into liquid stars gives respite and healing to eyes weary from pavement and page.

Wherever there is water, people are permitted to behave in ways that look suspicious anywhere else. Loitering is, after all, a crime. But in the unspoken name of reverie, water blesses long lapses of purpose and industry. Sitting by the dock of the bay or on the bank of the stream, everyone is a happy vagrant.

I am, however, especially fond of city rivers because they disappear and reappear, and remind me that there is actually an ancient, organic reason that these towers and stop signs and garbage trucks stand on this particular spot. I live where I live because of a river, which once fed and gave drink as well as transport to the people who settled its banks.

Now, of course, its usefulness is not only forgotten but wounded. We talk about the health of the river as though it draws breath: Will it recover? Will it ever again regain its vitality?

There ought to be river reports on the evening news, along with the weather. Those silly men who are never more than half right about the sky's performance should take a moment to tell us whether the river is low today or high. And inform us when it freezes clear through, and when the first mallard nestlings are sighted.

I keep an eye on the river mostly from the car. It never betrays its problems. It invites everyone to come on down. I like to go with a cup of coffee and a book. But I never get around to reading. There is too much going on.

There are sculls and gulls to keep track of, and sometimes a kayak. I count the number of cameras and easels. I study the joggers' gaits. I peek at the freshman lovers. And I try to stay alert for the sound of water lapping, audible between truck roars.

I walk a bit to see the river widen and then narrow, and notice how much the breadth of the water changes my understanding

By Anita Diamant

of chimneys and windows. And I look around to see who is out and about on this bend. A pond can be gentrified, but a river is more stubbornly democratic in the way it meanders through all sorts of neighborhoods.

The river says, "Lay down your sword and shield," and I know one long stretch where the nations unite, from one summer to the next, over spicy variations of barbequed chicken. The Russians come with folding chairs. The Cambodians bring fishing rods. Balls and Frisbees fly.

Students discourse, couples coo, and friends catch up on other friends. I have taken people to the river in order to confess. To lay plans. To end things.

A river makes a wonderful backdrop. I attended a wedding by the river. I fell into it once, too, when the sailboat went over — the mud smelled bad on the mast, but otherwise the experience was more exciting than alarming. I have walked its shores for miles in the dark, surrounded by a throng, to the concert with the fireworks. And I still have a scar from a fall during a bicycle ride taken while the path was being repaired.

It is not entirely tame along the river. Although the fauna is mostly canine, ducks still mate. I saw a monarch fluttering in October. Crows and squirrels flourish. Gulls visit. And because it manages to stay a little bit wild, with places to hide and stretches of solitude, and because it is a city river, it is not always safe.

I was robbed once. I saw a flasher. Far worse things have happened to others in the bushes. I am careful there.

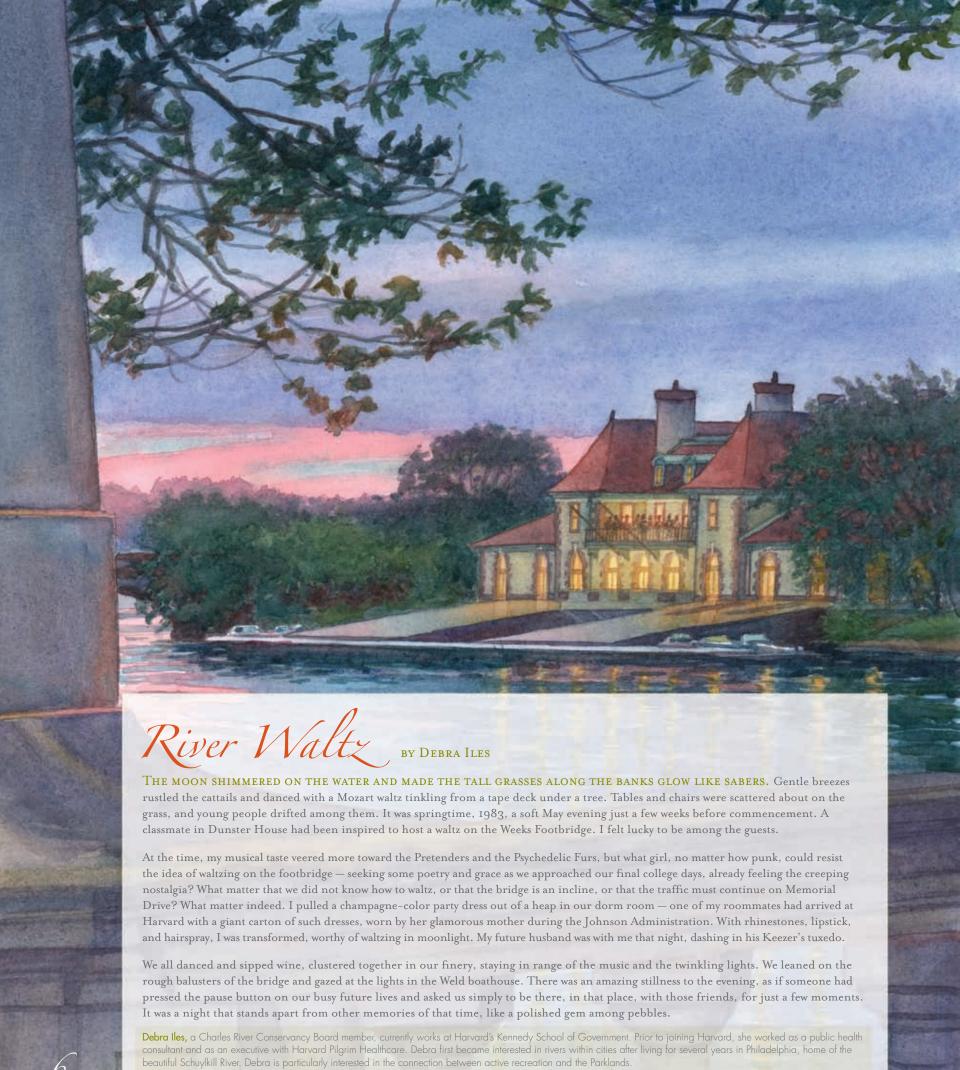
But even at a distance the river makes its peace. When the morning commuters come rumbling out of the subway tunnel and over the bridge, the water view makes them forget themselves and perk up. Maybe it makes them remember the last time they stared out to sea. The city looks lovely but not imposing. The river puts things into perspective.

I feel sorry for people from the other side of town who have never seen the fog hang wraithlike, upside down on the river's surface. Or the red and green lights, guiding starboard and aft in the dark, hung on arches whose curves date from Rome, which sits on the Tiber.

Sometimes, even in the middle of the city, you can catch the river's scent – the cool, neutral, sweet scent of fresh water. It smells wonderful.

Anita Diamant is an American author of fiction and non-fiction books. She is best known for her most successful novel The Red Tent which was a New York Times best seller. This was followed by the novels Good Harbor and The Last Days of Dogtown and her newest book, Day After Night.





The Lost Smoot Verses from the Engineer's Drinking Song

BY JOSEPH LARUSSO

A BOY QUITE FAIR NAMED OLLIE SMOOT WAS LAID OUT END TO END

To measure out by metes and bounds a bridge without a bend,
Halfway to Hell did Ollie tire and cried out, "I'm through!"

Alas that I'm but five feet seven and not eleven feet two!"

"It grieves us so," his brothers said, "you feel you're such a runt."

"Your frame, we find, defines the mean, you're perfect for this stunt."

"Why?" you ask, "try Ollie so?" — They'd demolished forty beers,

Because, because, they were, they were, they were all Engineers.

Three hundred sixty four point four was not enough to span,
The bridge that ends at MIT according to God's plan,
"Fell short?" you say, "Alack, alas!" Indeed you need not fear,
Mark Antonys all, his brothers cried, "Ollie, lend us your ear!"

And now this tale is over and you are free to go,

But carry with you from this day the fact that you now know,

That Ollie Smoot has left a mark that shall remain quite clear,

For generations yet to come, and not just Engineers!

Joseph LaRusso, a Roslindale resident, wrote these verses to MIT's infamous drinking song for State Representative Marty Walz when she was asked to speak at MIT for the 50th Smoot Anniversary celebration in 2008. She knows the Harvard Bridge (aka the Mass Ave Bridge) well and also its Smoot markings as she walks across the bridge regularly. Her walking loop around the Charles River Basin also takes her over the Longfellow Bridge. Her experience navigating the difficult sidewalks on that bridge inspired her to work with various advocacy groups to improve pedestrian and bike conditions. These bridges form an important part of the Parklands.



Memories of the Charles

By Frederick P. Salvucci

My earliest memory of the Charles is walking alongside it

AS A LITTLE BOY WITH MY MOTHER AND COUSINS, to visit family friends in Watertown. I thought it was beautiful. I had never seen boats before, and they seemed magical, and the little waterfall near Watertown Square amazed me. I loved the golden tea color of the water and asked why we couldn't swim in it. I was told that it was polluted by industry, especially the foul–smelling slaughterhouses, but that people used to swim in the river. My father had learned to swim at Magazine Beach, when he first came to the U.S. from Italy, and brave cousin Joe had even dived off of the Cottage Farm Bridge. Maybe someday it would again be clean enough to swim in safely.

I remember a traffic jam when Storrow Drive was being ripped through the Esplanade. Later, when I was a student at Boston Latin School, the Esplanade dock was where I rowed crew in whaleboats with my cousins from Tech and Trade. At MIT I got to row in sleek shells that reminded me of a mandolin, and go on dates to the Totem Pole in Norumbega Park. I remember walking across the Mass. Ave. Bridge to visit my future wife, who was working in a doctor's office facing the Charlesgate Hotel before the ugly Bowker overpass disrupted its beauty. Later we would ice skate with my sister and our kids at "The Cove" in Auburndale. Today I walk with my wife all along the river's banks from Charlestown and North Station to Waltham, row in it with my grandchildren, and hope someday to swim in it with them.

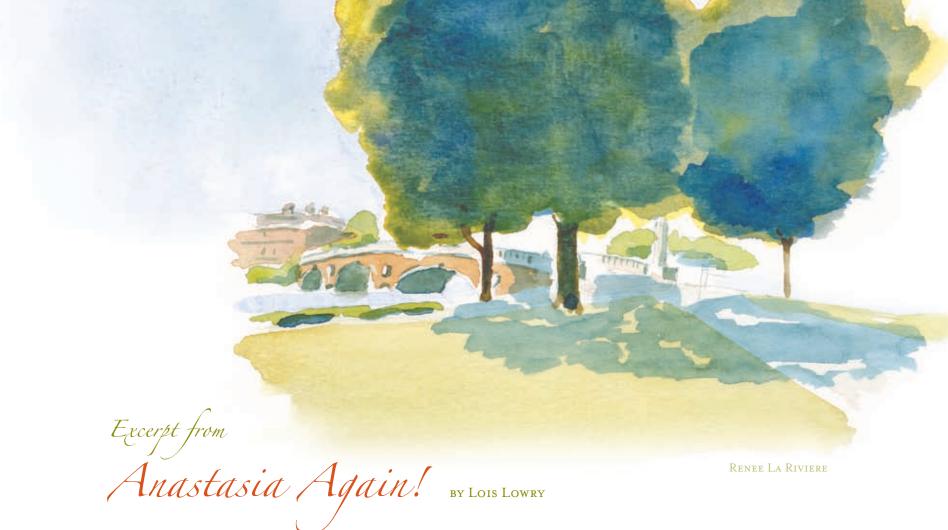
I read "Inventing the Charles" and learned that much of the Charles River Basin is manmade; I study the structural problems of the bridges over and along it, and think about how to maintain the accessibility of the region during the decades of reconstruction by increasing the use of public transportation. If we can figure out how to live with fewer autos crossing and driving along the Charles for IO to 20 years of reconstruction, why not reconceptualize the road and bridges as being primarily for pedestrians to enjoy access to the river? When Storrow Drive was built through the Esplanade, violating Mrs. Storrow's will, it was "justified" because commuter rail was decaying, and there were no other regional roads — not the Turnpike or Route I28 or Central Artery, no Red Line beyond Harvard Square or Green Line north of Lechmere. But now that we have added or improved all of those facilities, why don't we reconceptualize the bridges with much wider sidewalks and better trails along the riverbanks, allowing pedestrians to stop and ponder the river?

There's an old Neapolitan saying that we get the government we deserve. We have an incredible opportunity to reinvent the Charles, to make it even more beautiful, but we will miss this chance unless we invest in the civic engagement to demand it. If James Storrow could imagine a beautiful Charles River Basin and Esplanade to replace an open industrial sewer and mud flats in the early 1900s, why shouldn't we invest the civic energy to make it even better in the 21st century? If we work hard enough, we can make it happen.

Fred Salvucci is a civil engineer specializing in transportation, with particular interests in infrastructure, urban transportation, public transportation, and institutional development in decision-making. He served as transportation advisor to Boston Mayor Kevin White between 1970 and 1974, and then as Secretary of Transportation of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under Governor Michael Dukakis between 1975 and 1978 and again from 1983 to 1990. In those roles he participated in much of the transportation planning and policy formulation in the Boston urbanized area and the Commonwealth of the past 35 years, with particular emphasis on the expansion of the transit system, the development of the financial and political support for the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, and the design of implementation strategies to comply with the Clean Air Act consistent with economic growth.







"OKAY. I GUESS. I THINK WE'RE GOING TO MOVE."

"You're going to move? Where are you going to move to?"

"Someplace out in the suburbs, I guess. We're looking for a house."

Robert wrinkled his nose. Anastasia wasn't sure if he was making a face about moving to the suburbs, or if he had to wrinkle his nose to adjust his glasses. Sometimes she did that to adjust her glasses, especially if it was hot.

"That's lousy," Robert said sympathetically. "You'll have to go to a new school and everything, and you won't know anybody. You won't have any friends."

Boy. Some people really know just what to say to cheer you up.

"I don't think I want to talk about it," said Anastasia glumly.

"Well, come on then," said Robert. "Let's ride down to the river." They got on their bikes. Robert had his briefcase hooked onto the back of his. Typical, thought Anastasia, looking at the briefcase. Typical.

The Charles River separated Cambridge from Boston. From their side, they could look across and see the sky-scrapers of the city. Anastasia loved Boston, but she loved her side of the river more, where the old brick buildings of Harvard stood. Her father taught at Harvard. He rode a bike to work each day, and he carried a briefcase with him on his bike, but that was okay because he was forty-seven.

Her mother's bike had a little seat for Sam, and that was okay, too. In fact, her parents were perfect Cambridge people,

Anastasia thought. Lots of Cambridge men had beards, as her father did, and rode bikes to work. Lots of Cambridge mothers wore jeans and rode bikes with baby seats to the grocery store, as her mother did. Nobody stared, in Cambridge, at her mother's clothes, like the French tee shirt with the picture of the chicken, and under the chicken an oval with the word oeuf in it. Oeuf meant "egg" in French. Anastasia's mother spoke French. She had spent a year in Paris, painting, before she was married.

Not one single person in the suburbs would know what oeuf meant. Anastasia was absolutely certain of that.

The banks of the Charles were filled with people. There were always lots of people there on warm days, all sorts of people. College students lying on blankets, reading. Families with babies and small children. Black people, white people, Chinese people, people who spoke other languages. Anastasia liked looking at the Indians best; the women wore long, flowing dresses that were not really dresses at all, but pieces of bright cloth wrapped around them in a complicated way. Some of them had a single red spot decorating the center of their forehead. Their husbands wore turbans and had bushy beards and mustaches that came to points on the sides. Two of the turbaned men were throwing a Frisbee back and forth, and between them a dark-skinned baby toddled, wearing Pampers.

Lois Lowry is the author of more than thirty books for young adults, including the popular Anastasia Krupnik series. She has received countless honors, among them the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader's Medal, and the Mark Twain Award. She received Newberry Medals for two of her novels, Number the Stars and The Giver. Ms. Lowry now divides her time between Cambridge and an 1840s farmhouse in Maine.

Excerpt from Anastasia Again! by Lois Lowry. Copyright (c) 1981 by Lois Lowry. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Cambridge on the Charles BY MAMEVE MEDWED

"BUT WE NEVER CROSS THE CHARLES," my friend says. "What got into us?" We are lost, driving to a fellow author's house in Jamaica Plain. We've made an exception this time and are regretting it. "From now on," my friend adds, "we'll hold every writer's group on our side of the river."

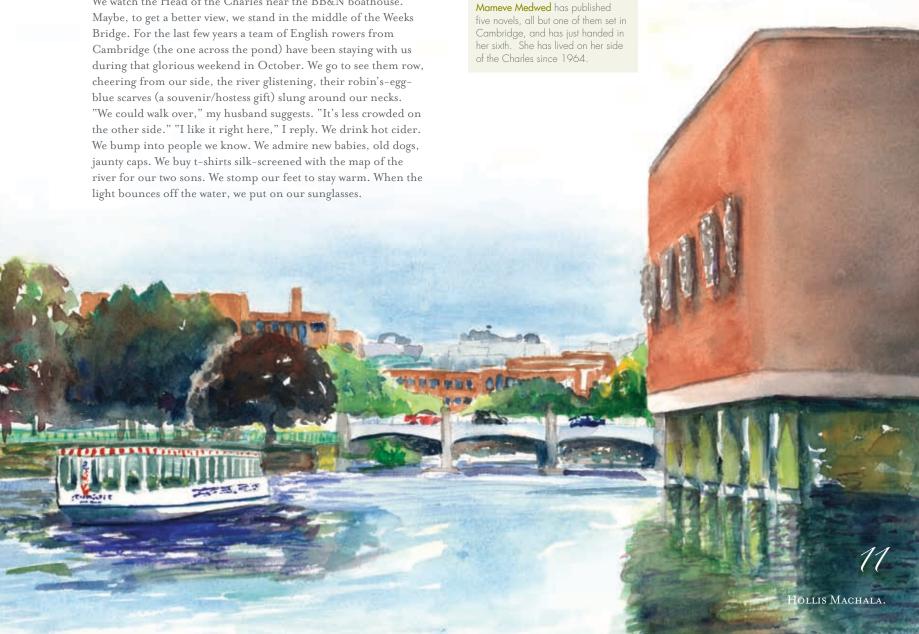
I agree. Of course, I do travel over the Longfellow Bridge to Boston, over the BU bridge to Brookline, over the Lars Anderson Bridge to the Mass Pike, over the Eliot Bridge to Newton-but not often and not unless I have to.

Everything's hunky-dory on our side (the Cambridge side) of the Charles. What do Bostonians have on their riverfront that Cantabrigians don't have here? Look at our joggers huffing and puffing along Memorial Drive, our students and our sunbathers donning tanks and shorts the instant the leaves appear on the imperiled sycamores and the temperature shoots up. We can claim our quota of kids in strollers, senior citizens, balloons, kites, and boats. At our annual river festival, the air is fragrant with the smell of sausages and fried dough.

We watch the Head of the Charles near the BB&N boathouse.

This fall our guests' competition takes place at eight in the morning. I defer, but my husband leaves early to cheer them on. "You should have seen the crowd there even at that hour," he tells me. "Intrepid ones," he stresses. We pack a lunch and go back to the river's edge at noon.

Thirty-four years ago, during the bicentennial, we stuff ourselves into a neighbor's converted hearse—he has five children. We take baskets of cheese and bread and champagne. We are headed for the Esplanade. We get as far as MIT. The bridges are jammed. Opposite us, the crowds swarm and blur in their bright summer clothes. "Will they have enough Porta-Potties?" my husband asks. "Will we have room to spread out our blanket, to keep a watch on the kids?" I worry. By mutual agreement we stop the car. We park the hearse on a residential street nearby. We lug the kids, the food, the blankets and set up in front of the Pepperpot. The wind blows the strains of the 1812 Overture to our banks. Above us, the fireworks explode. We pop the corks. "Why cross the river?" we say. "We can see and hear everything from here."



My Own Back Yard BY E. DENISE SIMMONS

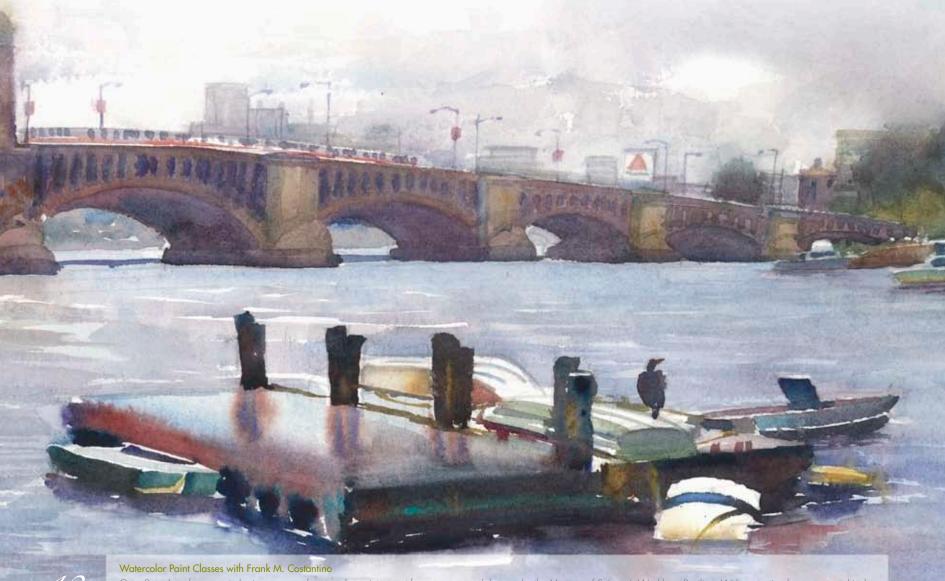
WHILE I WAS GROWING UP IN CAMBRIDGE, the Charles River was my playground. As a young child I recall taking long walks along the banks of the river with my mother. We would observe the geese as we passed by, and if I walked close enough to the banks, I could see the fish swimming in the water. There was no other place in Cambridge quite like this. No playground could compare with it; it was a place of serenity and childhood bliss. I wasn't the only one who enjoyed the Charles. Many other children came to explore the banks as well. There, I was able to play with children that I didn't go to school with or who grew up in different parts of Cambridge.

As I grew older, the river was not as inviting as it had been. I became saddened by the dirty water, the lack of luster and life that used to greet me as a child. I realized that a wonderful resource was taken away from me and from generations to come. Growing into adulthood, I became more hopeful. Environmental-action groups began reclaiming the Charles, and over time, the Charles

has become a place for recreation again, and I hope it will remain so for all the generations to come.

As a city councilor, mother, and grandmother, I am happy to see these changes taking place. As an adult, looking back on my experiences, I can see that exploring the Charles was a great way for children to establish a sense of community and to learn about other cultures and the people who live in Cambridge. I am happy to be in a position to emphasize the need to clean up and maintain the Charles River, because it is personal to me. All the children and adults in the city of Cambridge, as well as visitors from around the world who come to visit our prestigious city and universities, should be able to experience the Charles River just as I did many years ago.

Denise Simmons, a lifelong resident of Cambridge, was raised in a family that taught her the value of hard work, the importance of civic engagement, and the power of community. As a city councilor, and later as mayor, she has made great contributions to the growth and livability of her city.

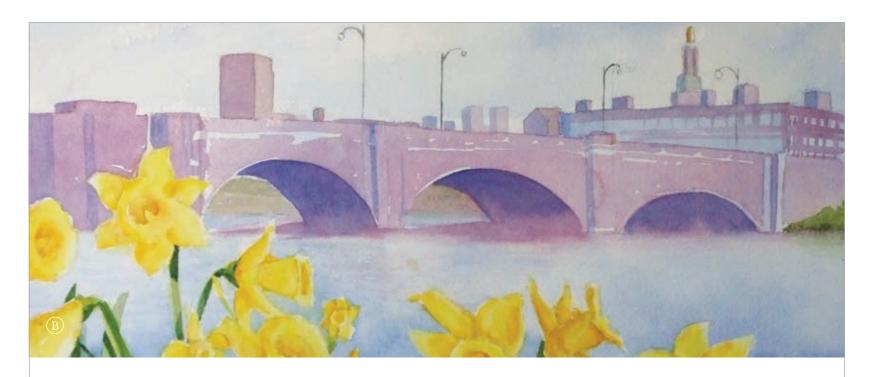


On a Saturday of unexpected rain, a group of watercolor painters met for a summer workshop under the Museum of Science's Washburn Pavilion. With protection from constant drizzle, painters captured the River Basin, the Longfellow Bridge, the Pavilion's iron tracery, and duck boats as subjects. Watercolor workshops enable the sunny or rainy day painter to capture some views of the ever-shifting beauty of the Charles, while developing their skills and appreciation for the medium. A season's schedule of Mr. Costantino's seminars can be found at http://www.fmcostantino.com/gallery/fineart/gallery_seminarschedule.html.



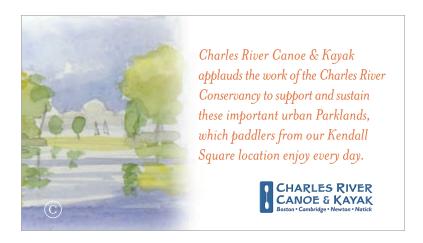
"Bank of America is proud to support The Charles River Conservancy for stewardship of the environment."



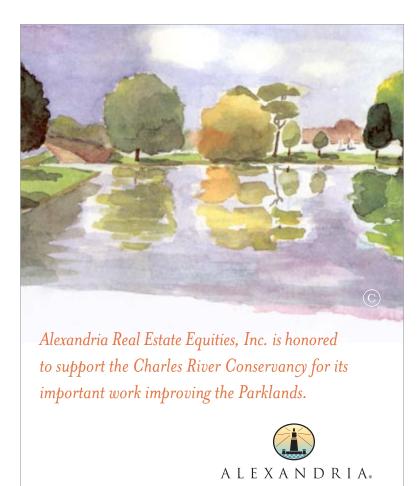


Harvard University is a proud supporter of Charles River Conservancy's work to enhance the Charles River Parklands. Thank you for your service and vision, and congratulations on your 10th anniversary.





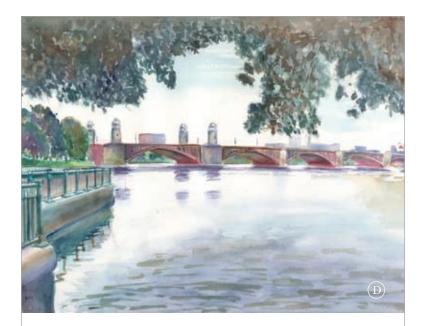






ESi is proud to be working with the Charles River Conservancy and their wonderful staff—in celebrating their 10 year anniversary sustaining and enhancing the Charles River Parklands.





The Boston Foundation is proud to have been "there at the beginning" for the Charles River Conservancy and congratulates the Conservancy on a decade of devotion to one of our most important natural resources. Happy Anniversary!



EF Education First is honored to support the Charles River Conservancy for its important work protecting the Charles River Parklands.







Equity Office Property is honored to support the Charles River Conservancy for its efforts to make the Parklands more attractive.







WBUR 90.9 FM - committed to making a positive difference in our community to keep the Charles River Parklands vibrant! We are proud to continue our partnership with the Charles River Conservancy.



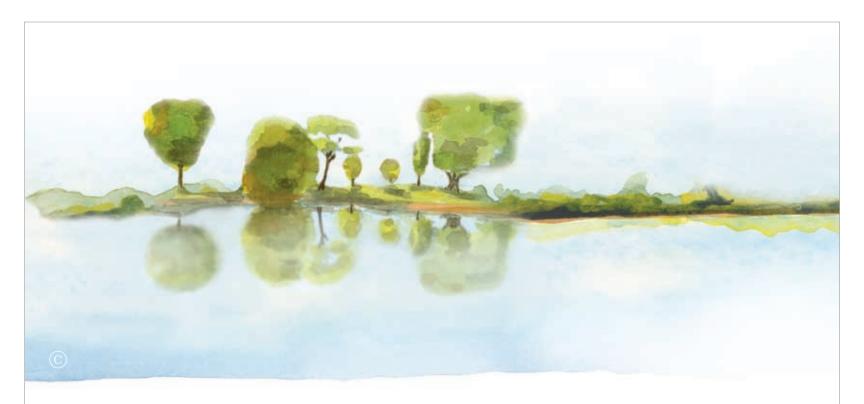


Anchor Capital Advisors, LLC is grateful for the Conservancy's work, which provides a shining example of stewardship and coming together in partnership to preserve and improve Boston's finest treasure.

The Consulate-Swissnex Boston congratulates the Conservancy on its 10 years of making the Charles River a great location for recreation and innovation!







Novartis is honored to support the Charles River Conservancy for its efforts rejuvenating the Parklands.





Proud to serve, support and salute the Charles River Conservancy

Karen Schwartzman





Cambridge Trust Company is proud to support the Charles River Conservancy.

Cambridge Trust Company

Bonsai West: Growing Beautiful Trees since 1982

Proud to be part of the Charles River Conservancy 10th Anniversary Celebration







WilmerHale is proud to support the Charles River Conservancy in its important work enriching the Parklands.

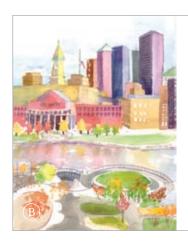


WILMER CUTLER PICKERING HALE AND DORR LLP ®



Sullivan & Worcester LLP is honored to support the Charles River Conservancy for its stewardship role of the Parklands.





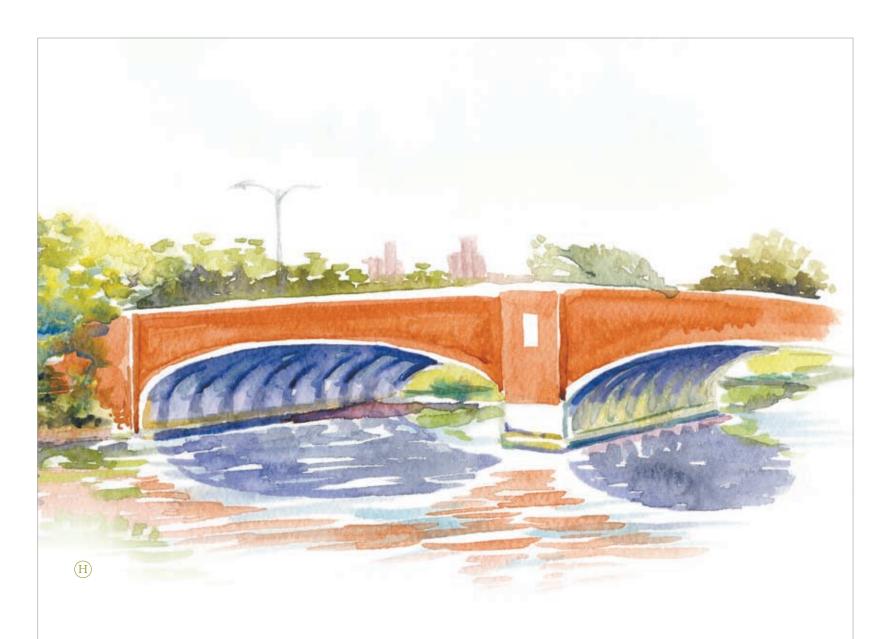
Boston Duck Tours appreciates
all that the Conservancy does for
the Charles River Parklands
and looks forward
to a continued
partnership!
Quack, Quack!

BOSTON
DUCK

MIT salutes the Charles
River Conservancy on its
10th anniversary.







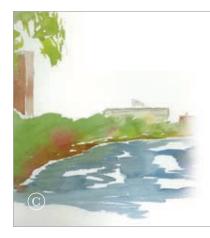
As fellow urban parkland allies, we applaud the work of the Charles River Conservancy!

Watertown Friends of the Riverfront

Friends of Herter Park

Emerald Necklace Conservancy

The Esplanade Association



Wainwright Bank congratulates the Charles River Conservancy for 10 years of supporting and sustaining the Parklands.

WAINWRIGHT banking on Values

The artists listed below have generously allowed us to use their work to illustrate messages from our sponsors:

- Nan Howe
- Caroline Newberger
- Renee LaRiviere
- Hollis Machala
- E Tony Connor
- Frank Costantino
- G Ellen VanDalinda
- (H) Silvia Suñé





Clearing Brush along the Charles River

BY LAWRENCE COOLIDGE

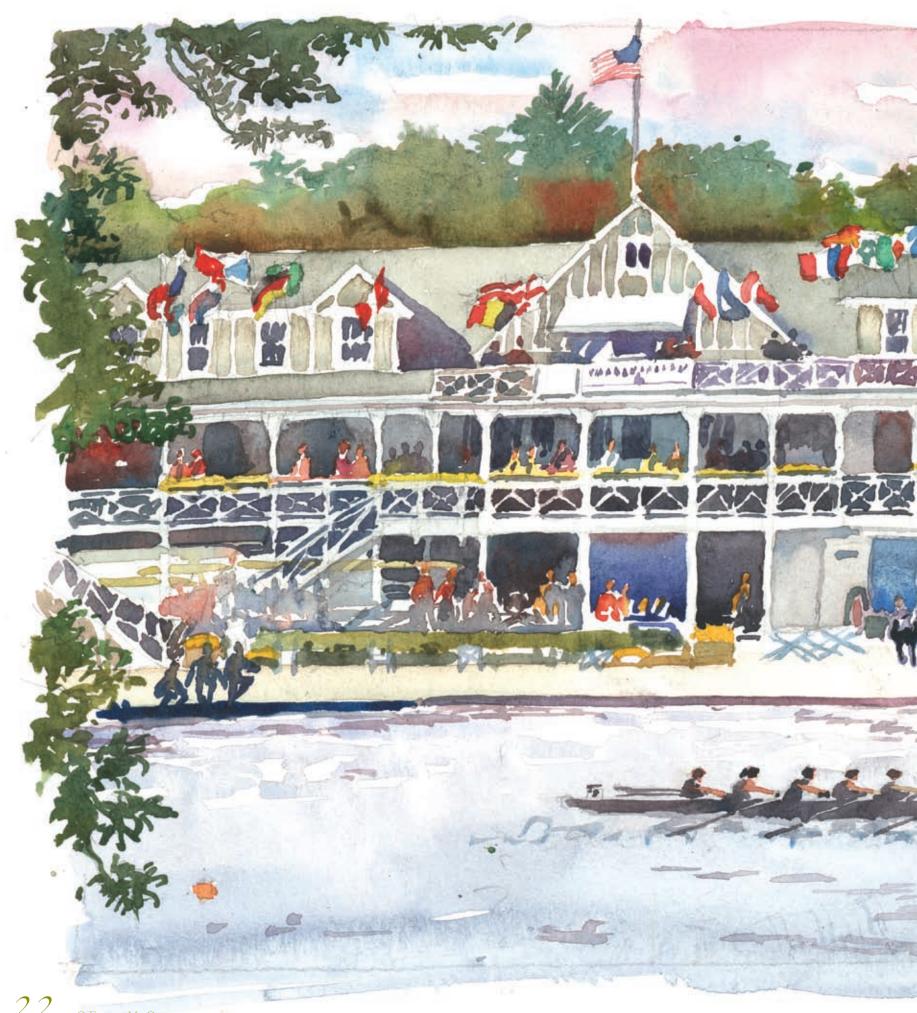
THIRTY YEARS AGO, AS ONE WALKED UP THE ESPLANADE,

for over a mile the river banks were so overgrown with brush, vines, and trees that one could not see the water. However, you did have a fine view of the cars on Storrow Drive! This overgrowth afforded shelter for rats, which were chewing the bark and killing many of the recently planted cherry trees. Seeing this, and with the permission of MDC personnel, I decided to do some clearing, saving the large trees beside the river and cutting out the rest.

There were a number of homeless people's "camps" in these thickets. Some were really sad. I remember a gentle African-American man who lived in a clearing in his sleeping bag surrounded by the electrical appliances salvaged from his house, as well as a quite sophisticated library. He deserted the place several months later, and it was with real sadness that eventually I picked up his ruined books and belongings. Other homeless "villages" were less desirable, with old drug syringes, abandoned knives, etc.

Once while working on the river, I was approached by a disheveled homeless man with a fierce expression on his face and armed with a drugstore cardboard camera. He took pictures of me while I worked with my chain saw, growling the whole time, and then he walked off stiffly. I felt very bad that I had made him so angry. A week later the same man came back, and while I was cutting branches he tapped me on the shoulder. When I turned around, he presented me with some pictures he had taken of me the week before, accompanied by a growl and a great big smile. I then realized that in all probability he had lost his ability to speak, and I was profoundly touched by his gratitude. For a short while I felt as though I was walking on air! On the riverbank where he used to live, I often think of him.

Lawrence Coolidge is a private trustee and charitable foundation manager with a strong interest in conservation of both land and fisheries. He has relationships with several timberland management organizations in Maine. Mr. Coolidge was the founder and treasurer of the Beacon Hill Elms. He has enjoyed rowing a single shell on the Charles for the last five decades, and as a result he has a special attachment to the Parklands along the river. Through advocacy and with his chainsaw, he has tried to improve the condition of these Parklands, which are so important to the enjoyment of our city.





My Walden in the City

BY JOHN DEVILLARS

WE ALL HAVE OUR WALDENS, the places that define our connection to nature and where, in presence or imagination, we find peace and comfort in our lives. The Charles River is one of those places for me.

For the better part of 40 years, I have had the good fortune to live within a five-minute walk to the river. And in that time it has been a rare day when my life, like so many others', has not been enriched as a consequence. Some of the pleasures are simple and solitary — an early-morning row as the sun rises over Beacon Hill, a peaceful afternoon on the riverbank with a good book in hand, an evening walk along the Esplanade as the sun sets over Cambridge. Other pleasures come in the company of tens, even hundreds, of thousands of others — celebrating Earth Day at the Hatch Shell or international excellence at the Head of the Charles Regatta. Fun has been had and friendships formed and strengthened in touch football and softball games on the river's playing fields, in picnics on her banks and hand-in-hand strolls with friends and family at her edge. Running, biking, and cross-country skiing along the river, rowing and skating on it, swimming in it — the mighty Charles has brought each of these pleasures to my life and generations of others.

The diverse character of the Charles is part of what makes this 80-mile treasure so special as it winds its way through 35 communities, from its upper reaches, which provide naturalists the unspoiled opportunity to explore all of its rich flora and fauna — to catch a sunfish or spy an egret — to its basin, a hub of urban activity with trains crossing over it, cars whizzing alongside it, and aquatic vessels from tour boats to sailboards transecting it. I'm a city kid, and it is this aspect of the river that has the most appeal to me. I love looking downstream from the Mass. Ave. bridge and seeing a Red Line train gliding over the Longfellow Bridge with sailboats in the foreground, the Zakim Bridge beyond, and the Golden Dome to the side; history, commerce, recreation; people moving, some intent on a destination, others content to simply drift. The city is at once alive with activity and fixed in time, its architectural and natural beauty coming together as one.

For those who love cities, the Charles is special for another reason as well. A river once derided in song — "Dirty Water" — is now celebrated as a national model for urban ecological restoration, a textbook example of how citizen activists and government leaders can come together to achieve ambitions that few thought possible. For the Charles, that ambition has been to transform a river into which, just 15 years ago, 1.7 billion gallons of untreated sewage and storm water flowed each year into a river safe for swimming. That ambition, once dubbed "Mission Impossible" by the skeptics, is now very close to reality. Those discharges have been cut by more than 90%, and bacteria levels today meet state swimming standards most days of the year. Now those same citizen leaders and public agencies are hard at work finishing the job of the clean-up and embarking on the final chapter — finding a permanent place for safe, accessible public swimming in the Charles. The result will be yet another reason for future generations to see the Charles as their Walden too.

John DeVillars lives and works in Boston. As former administrator of the New England Region EPA, he initiated the "Swimmable Fishable Charles 2005" campaign. He is currently Managing Partner of BlueWave Capital, LLC, a renewable energy development company, and Senior Vice President of the environmental consulting firm TRC, and enjoys the Parklands daily.

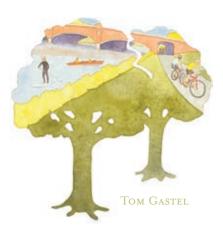
Falling in Love with the Charles BY RENATA VON TSCHARNER

THE CHARLES RIVER AS I EXPERIENCED IT IN 1979,

when I first arrived from Switzerland, was a body of water down the street that positively invited one to step in. But why was nobody in the water swimming, the way I was accustomed to doing in Switzerland? Whether it was fact or some approximation of it, the story of my father's daily swim in the River Aare when he lived in Bern, Switzerland's capital, had always been powerful lore to me. Well, I thought, a new country offers other opportunities, and I accepted the fact that this water was too dirty to swim in. With small children and a career in city planning, my life was full and exciting, and riding my bike along the shores also provided exercise and fun.

Then came a letter from the Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) asking my family to donate a room for the out-of-town rowers who came for the Head of the Charles Regatta. Not only did that experience bring the Hayden family of speed skating fame to our house for several years, but it also introduced me to the efforts of the CRWA, which had worked so hard to clean up the water in the Charles. I then started to volunteer as a CRWA water tester: once a month at 6 a.m., I went to my designated spot at the Western Ave. Bridge to throw in my special bucket, fill it, and deliver the water to the samplers' gathering spot. This small act of water testing felt good — we were making a small difference and moving toward clean water in the Charles. I took my youngest child with me on these early-morning expeditions, and while I got some grief from him at the time, he later admitted that this was a memorable experience that started his environmental awareness

Getting up hours before the normal time was also necessary to catch the May Day celebration at the Weeks Bridge. Almost from the time my children were born, I would bring them to the Weeks Bridge to see the sun rise, to sing Latin hymns, and to dance the Maypole. This ritual on the water's edge, shared with Harvard students in black tie and ball gowns as they return from a night of dancing, captures the joy of a Cambridge ritual. I love civic rituals and wish there were more. Coming together as a community to celebrate the season, to share the beauty of the river, to share in music-making, and to have fun reminds me of the many celebrations in Switzerland.



As I went to May Day year after year, I saw the same faces. Jack Langstaff, Paddy Swanson, and George Emlen were always there, and I also knew them from the Christmas Revels, another Cambridge tradition that my children and I never missed. The dream of bringing those two experiences together finally became a reality when Revels and the Charles River Conservancy partnered for *RiverSing* in 2004. This celebration of the Autumnal Equinox is now firmly on the calendar of singers and lovers of community rituals; it is a gathering of thousands who enjoy the beauty of the parklands and sing songs about water, rivers, and the fall. In the last two years, I have loved how Revels has added yet another magical touch to the event with the sun and moon boats that float down the river.

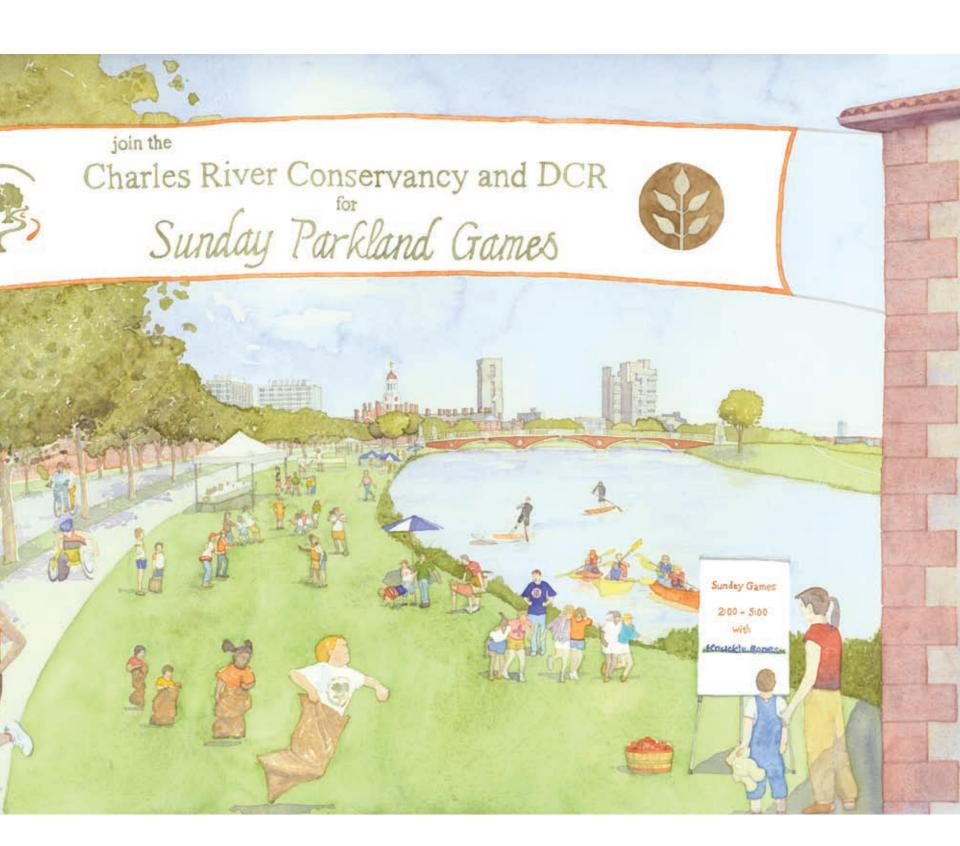
But what about my other dream of swimming in the river? Well, that is still a work in progress. Years of advocacy resulted in the establishment of a governor-appointed commission to study the logistics of swimming in the Charles. The over five hundred millions spent on cleaning the water will, I feel certain, eventually result in our being able to swim in this river. Today, the only people who can legally enjoy that experience are the swimmers who participate in the authorized swim races. But as a regular windsurfer who gets knocked off the board on occasion, I know how wonderful it feels to be in the middle of this urban body of water, to see the golden dome on Beacon Hill, and to feel surrounded by the parklands, where thousands enjoy running and biking.

Since I am neither a rower nor a sailor but someone who loves to be on the river even if there is no wind, I was delighted when I discovered the sport of stand-up paddle surfing. As you stand upright on a board (similar to a windsurfing board) and use a long paddle to propel yourself along the river, the experience evokes the image of a Venetian gondola. And because the board is so thin, waking on water is the next best metaphor.

There are still many dreams to be realized to make this river and its parklands all that they can be, but the number of people who have helped in this effort over the past IO years is simply staggering and gives reason for great hope. I think the dream of rejuvenated parklands has become contagious and unstoppable. I hope that in reading these River Stories you may have caught the bug, too.

Renata von Tscharner, founder and president of the Charles River Conservancy, was born and educated in Switzerland and trained as an architect and city planner. She worked in Paris and London and, as Assistant City Planner, in Bern, Switzerland, before moving to Cambridge.





Growing Up along the Charles BY NANCY SCHÖN

MY EARLIEST CHILDHOOD RECOLLECTIONS CENTER AROUND THE CHARLES RIVER. These had to do with my mother having my older brother and sister and me gather up bread from several days past, each of us putting it into our own paper bag. She was one of the few women of her time who drove. She would pile us into her 1934 Studebaker and take us to the duck feeding area at Norumbega Park in Auburndale. We carefully stepped on the irregular stones at the edge of the river and threw our collective bread to the ducks, who hungrily grabbed at it. We would giggle and then throw some more and giggle again as we watched the ducks magically make the bread disappear. Sometimes, of course, the bread would disappear into the water and the ducks would disappear to retrieve it.

The water was so clear it sparkled, and you could see the rocks at the bottom. Often, we would walk on a path that has now been made into Norumbega Road and go swimming. In the summer, we always had our bathing suits with us. It was easy to either change in the car or go behind a tree. There were few people around in those days. If we didn't run out of energy, our mother would let us continue down that road and climb the Norumbega Tower, which was not that far from the duck feeding area. (The tower was built to honor the Vikings, who allegedly sailed the river in IOOO A.D.) From the tower we could see the Charles River from both directions, upstream and down. What a gorgeous sight my young eyes saw in the fall, when the leaves burned red and gold.

Norumbega Park was a gathering place for families, and they came from long distances to swim and enjoy picnics, the amusement park, the zoo, the peddle boats, and the canoes. It was not unusual for my parents or some of my aunts and uncles to take the three of us to the amusement park for the afternoon. I had my first pony ride there. We went on rides like the Caterpillar, the Merry-Go-Round, Seaplanes, and Dodgems. There were kewpie dolls as prizes if you hit the right moving target — usually a duck! Later came treats of ice cream and cotton candy. It was a child's paradise.

As we got older, we and our friends could ride our bikes to the park without our parents, spending weekend afternoons at the amusement park, or renting peddle boats or going on long canoe rides. If it was a really hot day, we might rent a canoe and paddle some distance from the park; it was not unusual for us to find a small deserted landing and go skinny dipping. The water was so delicious, so clean, so inviting, so cool. It was hard to leave.

And then some nights in our later teens, when the boys had cars, we would rent canoes at night, and if the moon was out, it was really a breathtaking experience, especially if you liked your friend. The boys seemed to want to show off their virility, and they would paddle as we girls lay back, romantically tracing our fingers in the water. Afterward, we would go to our favorite ice cream parlor — Brigham's — for sundaes. The memories of the river at night in the moonlight will always be remembered and cherished.

On other nights, we would drive to the one and only Totem Pole, situated in Norembega Park. They only served soft drinks there, and the admission was very reasonable. All the big bands came there to play, including Harry James, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, and others. It was the best! We danced and danced until we were exhausted. If it was a hot night, we would stroll outside at intermission and sit on the edge of the river, fascinated by the twinkling sounds and sights of this moving wonder. If we weren't dancing or strolling, there were square sofas with high backs where we could sit and cuddle with our friend with a modicum of privacy. It was plain, pure, delightful fun.

Time has altered the way the Charles River has been used — and abused. We must bring back these and other delightful activities that produced my cherished memories. It is Nature's greatest gift to us. A beautiful river like the Charles is like a giant magnet in a city. It attracts us in many different ways and never lets us forget that it is there. It needs continuous attention. It needs people who will constantly care for it and nurture it. It needs to be appreciated for its attributes and used for the pleasure and joy of families and individuals. It needs to be a place for anyone and everyone to enjoy. The Charles River is the greatest gift that we have in this city, and we must appreciate and ceaselessly tend to this valuable treasure.

Nancy Schön is a native of Newton and a member of the Charles River Conservancy Board. She is a public art sculptor, best known for her sculpture of "Make Way for Ducklings," based on the drawings of Robert McCloskey, in the Boston Public Garden





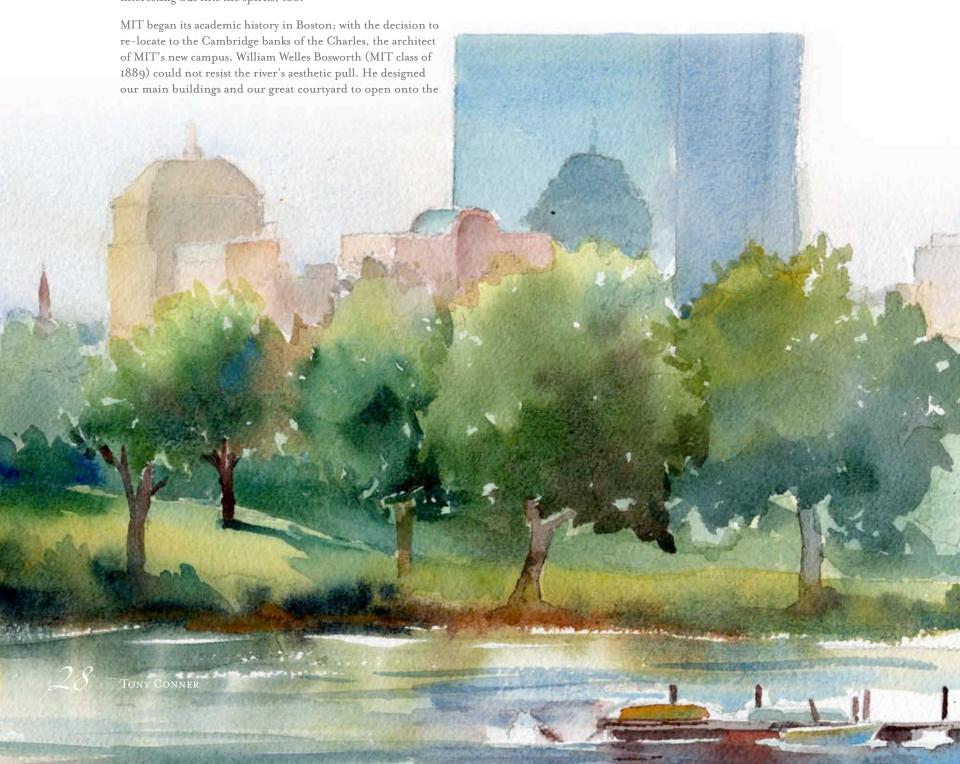
River Story BY SUSAN HOCKFIELD

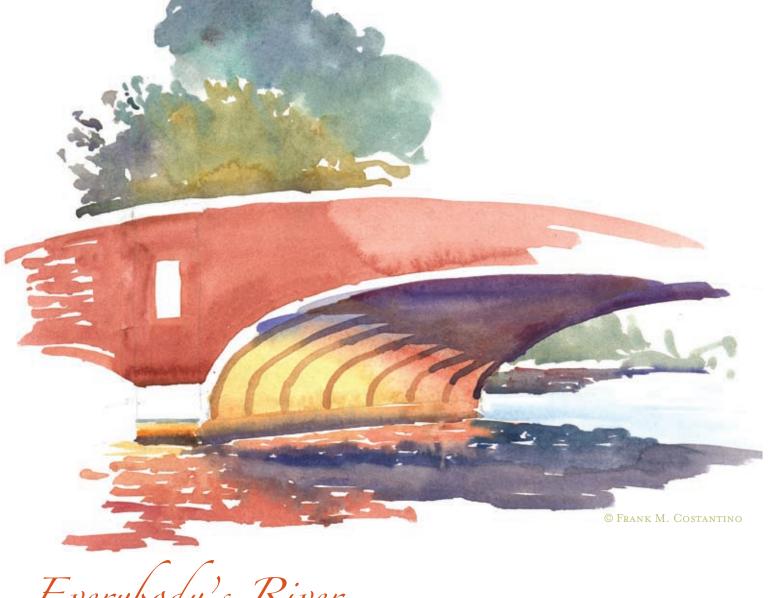
When we moved to Cambridge from New Haven in 2004, Casey was the first member of my family to fall in love with the Charles. From his end of the leash, its banks could not offer a more fascinating banquet of smells nor a better selection of chase-able squirrels. But I have developed my own friendship with the river as a constant companion—offering its on-the-spot weather report every morning from our windows at Gray House, rippling past my daily meetings in the president's office at MIT, and ushering me home at night with the sunset glint of sail, oar, and the reflected lights of Boston and Cambridge.

For MIT, the Charles defines us geographically, organizes our campus travel, and pulls us together. It serves as a ready, delightful reminder that nature is not only intellectually interesting but lifts the spirits, too.

Charles, in part because Bosworth, working before the advent of Memorial Drive, imagined that the river would serve as a practical approach to MIT. It did on one occasion, if no other: At the celebration to open the new campus in the fall of 1916, the Institute's then-President Richard MacLaurin and the members of the MIT Corporation ceremoniously ferried the MIT Charter across the Charles in a barge specially designed by architecture professor Ralph Adams Cram and elegantly encrusted with plaster nymphs and mermaids—though, regrettably, as far as we know, no beavers.

Susan Hockfield has served as the 16th President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology since December 2004. A noted neuroscientist focused on the development of the brain, Dr. Hockfield is the first life scientist to lead MIT.





Everybody's River BY RENÉE LOTH

THE CHARLES IS A TREASURE FROM SOURCE TO ESTUARY,

but my favorite sections start about five miles upstream from the Esplanade, where the river grows narrower and sinuous, and its raggedy banks are thick with vegetation. Here you can hear the conk-a-ree of the redwing blackbird and watch the night herons perform at dusk. And here, too, are the polyglot sounds of Boston's immigrant community, engaged in close, sometimes direct contact with the languid waters.

Neither the pristine meanderings of the Natick sanctuary nor the manicured precincts of the Back Bay, this stretch of the Charles is a welcoming gateway for Boston's newcomers. Living in crowded city apartments or triple-deckers, they don't often have their own private backyards, so they make good, democratic use of the public one.

At the Christian Herter park in Allston, epic volleyball games seem to combust spontaneously and continue burning for hours. The players are from Brazil or Jamaica or Colombia, their grunts and shouts punctuating the air in the universal language of sport. Nearby, women in bright-colored saris unload massive tiffin baskets of food for family picnics, and children with tinkling glass bangles on their tiny wrists chase ducks into the water.

In the community garden, Italian women all in black bend to their tomatoes, and willowy Asian women, some in woven rattan hats, train snow peas along elaborate structures built of bamboo and twine. Russian or Slavic men with lined faces and thick voices stroll arm in arm along the paved paths.

Off California Street in Newton, conservationists have built a fish ladder to aid the herring in their spawning upstream migration every spring. Two distinct predators ply these waters hard by the old industrial corridor: the clamorous seagulls, wheeling and diving into the churn, and the old Asian men who wade into the rushing waters, collecting the fish with crude nets or even their bare hands. The poaching is officially frowned upon, but I've never seen anyone rousted.

A group of frail elders from a nearby nursing home are out for a bit of fresh air, their heads wrapped in scarves from the old country. Some chatter in their familiar tongue, but most sit in the weak sunshine and stare across the water, remembering.

To many, the river can seem part of a painted background, beautiful but passive. It takes a newcomer's eyes to see that "nature" is not some distant place out there. The immigrants who embrace its gifts so fully remind us that we are nature, too. Their river is the opposite of still life.

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Get Involved

The Charles River Parklands are among the most beautiful public places in the Northeast. But like all public places, they need our care and attention to realize their full potential.

There are several ways that you can join us in this effort:

Sign up your business or neighborhood group for a team-building day of landscaping work along the Charles. Each year, we bring 2,500 volunteers, including hundreds of corporate groups, out to the riverbanks to help prune, plant, paint, and pick up debris.

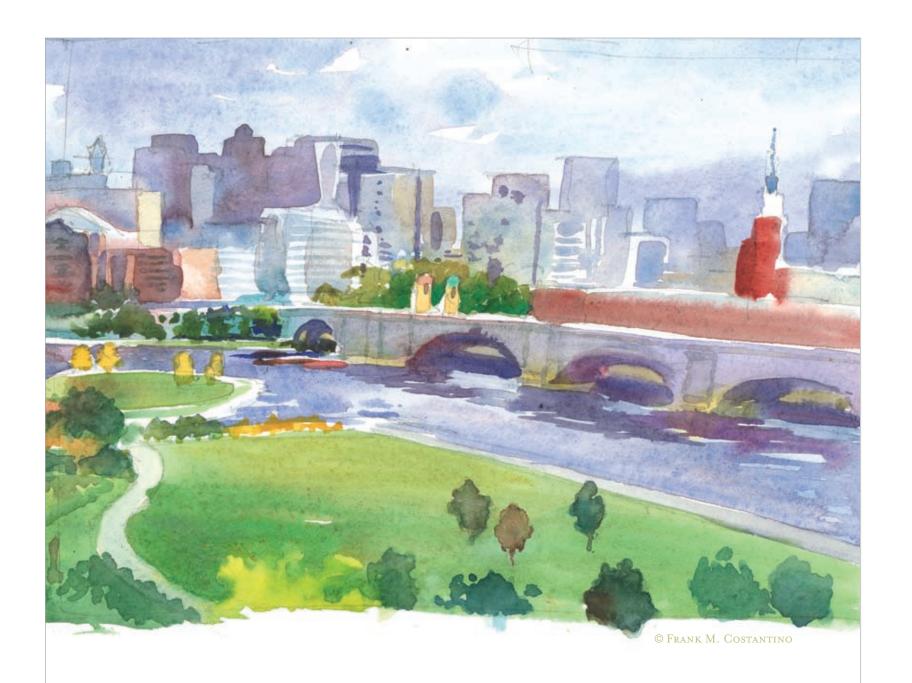
Visit our website, The Charles.org, to learn more about the Parklands, Conservancy events, and our vision for the next IO years. Sign up for our e-newsletter to stay informed and current about happenings that affect the Charles. Contact us to share your ideas and memories or to get involved.

Contribute your own River Story. Only that which we consciously treasure will become an object of our care. Your stories, like the ones in this booklet, help inspire and foster a community of people who share affection, responsibility, and a vision for the Charles.

Make a financial donation to ensure that Conservancy programs and our landscaping and maintenance work along the riverbanks continue. You can give securely and easily through our website, TheCharles.org. Or, for planned giving or stock donations, call 617.300.8174. As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, we depend on your caring for these Parklands.

Consider including the Charles River Conservancy as part of your estate plan. A gift or bequest to the Charles River Conservancy will have lasting impact on our community by sustaining, revitalizing and encouraging engagement with our urban river and parklands. Certain gifts and bequests may also have favorable income, gift or estate tax consequences for you. Please contact Renata von Tscharner if you would like to learn more about how you can help the Charles River Conservancy with a gift or bequest through your estate plan - it may be a taxefficient way for you to make a difference.





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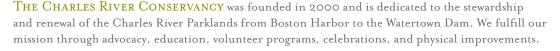


A river touching the back of a town is like a wing. River towns are winged towns.

Henry David Thoreau

CHARLES RIVER CONSERVANCY

The Charles.org



To make the Parklands more active, attractive, and accessible to all, our programs include:

- · Parklands Advocacy
- Conservancy Volunteers
- Service Learning
- Environmental Education
- Swimmable Charles Initiative
- Skatepark
- Sunday Parkland Games
- $\bullet \ Bridge \ Illuminations$
- Tree Stewardship
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