

## The Rivers in My Memory Nourish the Soul

*By Irv Sternberg*

When I think of rivers the first thing that comes to mind is Jerome Kern's masterpiece, the classic song, "Ol' Man River." I first heard the haunting melody and poignant lyrics as a child and both have survived the mounting years in my memory. But my adult years have created more associations, inspired by years of commuting, fishing, occasional floating—and more recently cruising. Collectively, those associations have left me with a treasure of pleasurable memories.

As a New Jersey resident, I commuted for years by ferry across the mighty Hudson River to Manhattan. I recall seeing some of the world's largest ocean-going vessels, like the Queen Mary, steam into New York Harbor after crossing the Atlantic.

Growing up near the Jersey Shore, my earliest fishing experiences were in the surf of the Atlantic Ocean and in lakes and streams throughout the state. Not until I moved to Colorado in 1969 did I discover the joy of fishing rivers. And there were so many to choose from – the mighty Colorado, the tranquil Blue, the glorious Big Thompson, the productive South Platte, the legendary Arkansas, and the Western Slope favorite, the popular Frying pan, among so many others.

In Colorado I was introduced to fly-fishing and I've been a devotee ever since.

To my mind there is nothing to compare with the joy of standing knee-deep in a Colorado river, a rod in hand, a line floating on the surface with a desirable fly enticing a hungry trout hiding in the easy currents that swirl around you. The banks are alive with gentle willows and chaotic cottonwood trees, stately aspens and pines under a cerulean sky. Off in the distance are the majestic, snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains. And no one else in sight. You are alone in all this peaceful magnificence. Your mind is uncluttered, your movements unhurried. What could be better?

Occasionally I associate rivers with floating, although not for a long time. I remember my first time and the thrill of floating down the Colorado near State Bridge with my late wife and our son. The guide suggested we slip into the river in our vests and ride the gentle current for awhile. I joined my son, who was about 12, but soon found the current had separated me from the others into swifter waters. Not a good swimmer, I realized I was in trouble. The guide spotted me and immediately swam to my rescue.

In more recent years I've enjoyed the less adventurous sport of riverboat cruising. I've visited hard-to-reach fishing villages in Alaska and traveled up the Napa River to sample California wines. I've taken a paddleboat up the Mississippi and wandered through an old village with a century-old newspaper where they were still setting type by hand. And I've traveled the fabled Danube from Budapest to Amsterdam, viewing ancient castles and stopping to enjoy some of the world's greatest art in cities like Melk, Vienna and Cologne.

Of course I'm mindful of the devastation caused by swollen rivers that have leaped their banks, ravaged nearby communities and taken human and animal life, especially here in Colorado.

But I prefer to linger on the peaceful pleasures that rivers offer. They give you time to slow down, consider where you are, and take the time to contemplate. Or, as the *Denver Post* recently editorialized about our wilderness: “Opportunities to clean the mind, strengthen the heart and nourish the soul.”