



The River Story

Label 26. Here, one of New Madrid, the name of which is omitted on the map, should be added here.

By Florida, on the eastern border of this lake, is a remarkably colored history in a blue and white, and should be added. Part of the construction of the river.

The Great Lakes, etc. of which should be added here.

There are two small lakes in the marsh southeast of New Orleans, which should be added here.

Christmas 2019

ALLUVIAL LEANS APPOHITES.

Notes of Missouri, State of Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, State of Arkansas, Texas, with 2 and 3000 maps & Missouri Missouri map of Arkansas & Lake Michigan, Lake Michigan, State of Missouri, State of Illinois, Geological report, Missouri map of Miss. John Lewis.

State of Louisiana, Missouri, map prepared for this map by the U.S. Geol. Survey, formerly Lake Superior.

Many useful information upon this subject, derived from reliable sources, is also included in this map, designed to illustrate the general subject, the Mississippi river, and other information that shall be mentioned in the accompanying text.



The River Story

In 1539, Spanish Conquistador Hernando de Soto led the first major European expedition into the interior of southeastern North America. Landing near what is now Tampa Bay, Florida, de Soto and his 600+ men hoped to discover riches in North America comparable to what he had discovered in Central and South America. He set out with his men to explore the present-day areas of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas.

On May 8, 1541, south of the area that became Memphis, Tennessee and near Natchez, Mississippi, de Soto became the first European explorer to document reaching the Mississippi River. Unfortunately for de Soto, he died a year later from fever at the ripe old age of 42 and was secretly buried in the waters of the Mississippi. Although de Soto called the great river Rio del Espiritu Santo ("River of the Holy Spirit"), the original name given by the Ojibwe tribe is what passed the test of time and stuck. The "Mee-zee-see-bee," which means "Big River" or "Father of Waters," was ultimately adopted as the river's official name.

As it turns out, de Soto's river wasn't just any ole river. It was the second longest river in America with its source or headwaters beginning at a beautiful but remote lake in northern Minnesota. From its origin, the river runs through or along 10 states, from Minnesota to Louisiana - a 2,348 mile journey ending in the Gulf of Mexico, southeast of New Orleans. Along the way, the river defines portions of the borders of Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. That's a lot of real estate, but the River's many tributaries cause the Mississippi watershed to drain all or parts of 32 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces between the Rocky's and Appalachian Mountains. Now that is quite a footprint, indeed!

This past summer Donna and I were thinking about a fun place to go for our annual vacation. Since Donna doesn't fly, vacation for us means a road-trip somewhere. In the summer, we usually like cooler temps or pretty scenery, but this year we chose a different criterion for our selection. We decided to visit some of Donna's aging family members. Our destination was Minnesota, home to an elderly aunt and uncle (both in their mid-80's) and several of Donna's cousins.

Not counting the time it took us to get there (remember, we're auto-bound road trippers), we spent several days visiting family and friends and were grateful to visit older family members while they're still healthy enough to

get around. Observing Donna’s cousins as they took time to care for their older parents served as a reminder to me of my own mortality - a snapshot preview of what life could be like for us in 20 more years. It also reminded me of the saying, “We’re an adult once, but a child twice.”

As we age, mobility and independent living take on new meaning as none of us ever want to be a burden on our children. My parents were considerably older than Donna’s and both of mine have passed away. Although Donna’s dad died young at age 55, her mom, Barbara, is 86 and, like the Energizer Bunny, shows little to no signs of aging or slowing. Talking to Donna’s cousins about their aging parents took me down memory lane. It reminded me of how hard it had been to take my mom’s car away from her almost 20 years ago. Even though it was for her own safety (and the safety of others), it was a painful step that had to be taken.

Today, I look around and most of our peers are finding themselves in this stage of life – dealing with aging parents, their cars and independent living status. If you are facing these types of challenges with your parents, remember that it’s more than just a house – it’s a house *full of memories*; and the old car is much more than just a car – it’s their *freedom*. Both are fragile.

After we visited all the family members, it was time to go exploring. Since we were in northern Minnesota, we looked around to see where we could go. Canada was a close option, but darn it, we didn’t bring our passports. We thought of going west towards Fargo, North Dakota, but seriously, who goes to Fargo? We toyed with the idea of heading east toward Mackinac Island in the Michigan peninsula, but that would have taken us almost another week. Next year, maybe.

We finally decided to trek northeast to Bemidji, Minnesota, also known as Paul Bunyan country and one of the coldest spots in America. It’s a quaint town with a picturesque college right on Lake Bemidji. We enjoyed our visit and were surprised to discover we were only 35 miles from the origin of the Mississippi River at Lake Itasca. Now, how could we get so close to the source of one of America’s greatest and most storied rivers and not go check it out? We couldn’t, so we drove 35 miles to a very remote lake and its even more remote state park.



Unfortunately, we didn’t get to see as much of the area as we would have liked because a recent storm had downed a number of trees and parts of the park were closed. But we did get to hike to the headwaters of the Mississippi

River! Even though the mighty Mississippi has been made famous by the likes of Mark Twain and stories of riverboats and rafts, its beginning is very modest. If you happen to get to Lake Itasca, THE thing to do is to walk across the Mississippi on strategically placed rocks at the edge of the lake at the river's origin.



While Donna wouldn't think of chancing the rocks, I, on the other hand, called upon the great spirit of Mark Twain and decided to brave the cold river and boldly walk across. All went well for about half of the trip until a mother and her two children tried to go around me to get to the other side. Ever the gentlemen, I tried to accommodate the young family on the slippery rocks but ultimately ended up falling into the river. Of course, it was only about a foot deep where I landed, but it was rocky and cold, and I slipped more than once trying to get out of the place. Donna laughed so hard she forgot to take a picture of me in the water, and the offending family never looked back after I sacrificed myself for their whiney little kids. Go figure.



As we made our way back to Arkansas after our visits and river adventure, I had plenty of time to reflect. Interestingly, we followed the Mississippi River's 2,348 mile path from its small stream beginnings (at the site of my accidental baptism) to St. Paul where it joined with the St. Croix River becoming a navigable waterway, down through Marquette, Iowa where it joined the Wisconsin River, to St. Louis, where it joined the Missouri River, to Cairo, Illinois where it joined the Ohio River and on to Memphis, before it joined the Arkansas River.

At each stage of the river's journey, it grew in size, becoming more unpredictable and dangerous. Because of flooding, the river frequently changed its channel, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly, and I couldn't help but compare the changes in the river to the changes in our lives. Like the Mississippi, we tend to go through small and large changes as we grow. Our major changes typically begin when we decide to go to college (or not) and have to figure out what we want to do when we grow up. Although it's surprising to many, unpredictability and lack of control accelerate when we get our first job, find our spouse and have children. These life changers usually occur early in our lives and careers.

Other difficult life changes occur more slowly later in life with growing unhappiness with our career, work, faith or marriage or even the loss of a

loved one - realizing that our life hasn't turned out the way we thought it would or should. Often these life disappointments lead to a mid-life crisis with work and/or with family, and perhaps even end with a divorce.

Sometimes change occurs very quickly with a life-threatening accident or illness, or a spouse walking out on the family. Just as a river becomes more unpredictable when it converges with another river, we cannot predict or even prepare for some of the changes we will face in life and this unpredictability can lead many of us to disappointments or feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

Over the years, the Army Corps of Engineers who maintain our rivers, became convinced that the extensive network of dams and levees from Minnesota to the Gulf had successfully tamed the floods. After 1920, everyone thought we had it made: our engineers had won the day and flooding was in the past. Like the Corps, we tend to think that modern technology, medicine and science have cured our ills, giving us better health, more free time and removing the frustrations and hopeless feelings from our lives.



Unfortunately, our confidence in controlling the great river eroded like a sandbar after the most disastrous floods in the recorded history of the Mississippi, the great floods of 1927 and 1993. Millions of acres of land were flooded, property damaged or destroyed and hundreds of lives lost. These floods taught the Corps that total control of rivers as large as the Mississippi simply wasn't possible, there is no way to exert absolute control. Since then, "living with the river" has meant moving homes and even entire towns off the floodplains and allowing the lowland areas to flood naturally.

On the mortal side, our assumptions are also challenged. New diseases and antibiotic-resistant strains of old diseases are making a comeback. Smallpox, typhus, leprosy and even tuberculosis have made their presence known again. More families are facing the devastating disease called Alzheimer's. In our own families, we have seen wives fail to remember their husbands of forty and fifty years. Donna lost an aunt from Texas who battled Alzheimer's for years. Her Uncle Joe lost his wife twice, once to Alzheimer's and finally to death, and afterward, he simply lost hope and his will to live. He passed away this year.

As far as an improving human condition, husbands and wives continue to abandon their families – leaving their spouse and kids for exciting job opportunities or for new spouse that "understands" them. To me, after 44

years of marriage, these words are just code-speak for “leaving a tough situation because of selfishness.” Even grandparents are turning their backs on their kids and grandkids to pursue the “good life,” aka travel and fun.

Like the Mississippi floods of the 20’s and 90’s, the Great Recession should have taught us that our financial “geniuses” can’t guarantee financial security any more than dams and levees can guarantee freedom from flooding. And last but certainly not least, if you think our experience has made us more civil, all you have to do is turn on the news and you’ll know the truth. We are as petty and mean and selfish as ever. Democrat, Republican, or Independent, the accusations just increase our sense of frustration and hopelessness.

Every book, every story, every life has a beginning and an end. The Mississippi begins at Lake Itasca as a small, shallow tributary running south and ending in the Gulf of Mexico a little over a hundred miles below New Orleans. As you can probably tell, my thoughts on the Mississippi led me to consider how closely it parallels the twists and turns of our lives. While it takes 90 days for the water at Lake Itasca to flow 2,348 miles to the Gulf, it takes each of us around 78.6 years to journey from our personal Lake Itasca birthplace to our final Gulf resting place.

If we align the Mississippi River with a timeline of our life, we can break the trip from Lake Itasca to the Gulf into River Towns. For example, ground zero at Lake Itasca was my birth in Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1953. Minneapolis/St. Paul represents my 16th birthday and my sophomore year at Rogers High when I gave up basketball to focus on running track. I got married in 1975 just north of Marquette, IA and Ashley, my first child, was born between Marquette and Dubuque in 1977. As I write this today, I’m just south of Natchez on my way to Baton Rouge. If I live to an average age, 84% of my life is behind me, but hopefully I still have 13-14 years left. If I live past 78.6 years, then I will likely be somewhere in the Gulf, still on God’s time.

My youngest, Rachel, turned 30 this year as a missionary in France. This summer, Jeremiah, my youngest boy (32) and I helped her move from Bayonne to Paris, France. Her work in Bayonne had been a very difficult and lonely time in her missionary life. The move to Paris was relatively uneventful until we got to Paris near midnight. As we were going through the central business district, I came very (like really) close to getting a three-meter tall moving van stuck in two-meter tall tunnel in the heart of Paris. Thankfully, we avoided that potential disaster by stopping in traffic, moments from disaster, and backing out of the tunnel thanks to the



kindness of a number of Parisian drivers. At least the van didn't have an American license plate.

Overall, the move was humbling as I realized that if Jeremiah had not been there with me, I could never have moved Rachel's furniture from the van into her fifth-floor apartment. Of course, there was not an elevator. We would have been up the Mississippi (or the Seine River) without a paddle.

In River Town terms, Rachel's two years from 28 to 30 were very hard, perhaps like the river passage between Moline, IL and St. Louis. Even when you are doing exactly what God has called you to do, far from home, loneliness can leave you in cold, dark waters. For a parent, it's very hard to look on helplessly from a distance. Thankfully, she is doing much better now.

Speaking of rivers, the Illinois River, one of the main tributaries of the Mississippi, begins in Chicago with Lake Michigan and flows southwest to meet the Mississippi near St. Louis. Our oldest child Ashley, her husband, Kyle and five ½ of our grandchildren live in Chicago, a few blocks from the Lake. I say "½" since Ashley and Kyle are expecting in February of 2020, the coldest time of year for a trip from Little Rock to Chicago.

The Arkansas River is also a major tributary of the Mississippi. Three of our sons, Chad, Josh and Zach, their spouses, fourteen grandchildren and of course, Donna and me, crisscross this river regularly. We are fortunate to still have this many family members close by. Thankfully, other than Mark Twain's two heroes, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn (Josh and Zach) becoming river rats and proud owners of an island in the Arkansas River near Little Rock (for hunting??), not a lot has changed. Chad just turned 40 with the others trailing him every two years. These families are only to St. Louis on their River Town journey and have a lot of river left.



Even though the left side of America doesn't connect to the Mississippi, Donna and I have a significant family investment in the west coast of California. Jeremiah (my French moving specialist) has graduated from the Masters Seminary and is looking for a church. Michael and Beth are expecting their fifth bambino early next year, and Michael still has another semester of seminary to finish. Although most of the rivers around LA are bone dry, in Mississippi River Towns, these families are between Moline and St. Louis with lots of river travel ahead of them regardless of where in the world they end up.

We are all on a life journey, somewhere between Lake Itasca and the Gulf. Truthfully, there is a whole lot of turbulent water at home and abroad

spreading fear, frustration and hopelessness. This Christmas, it seems easier than ever to be distracted and miss the important things you should be thinking about and paying attention to - like real one-on-one time with your children, or your spouse, or a friend or family member who needs help or just a shoulder to cry on.

Thankfully, an event occurred around 4 BC that provided us the only true hope available to us. In the most unexpected place, a dirty cave where animals were kept, God’s son was born to a couple of teenagers, Mary and Joseph. While the world slept, Jesus’ birth was attended by shepherds, summoned by angels to witness the incarnation of God. Thirty years later, this child grew up and referred to Himself as Living Water in John 4:13. In contrast to the frustrations and hopelessness surrounding us, Jesus promised real peace for those who accepted His living water and everlasting life.

George Bernard Shaw commented that *the statistics on death are very impressive - one out of every one dies.*” Our days are short, and our remaining River Towns are few. Make this Christmas the time you leave hopelessness behind and commit to follow the eternal source of living water who offers ultimate direction, peace and everlasting life, Jesus.

*From all of us in the Dennis and Floyd families,
we wish you a very merry Christmas!*



CHRISTMAS
2019