

POETRY CORNER

Tributaries

by Lisa E. Baldwin (2019)

This poem was written for the Applegater's Volunteer Appreciation Party held on June 30 as a tribute to the Applegater team of volunteers who make this paper possible.

The root of *volunteer*
in Latin to Middle English
(perhaps also Elvish)
means *to wish*. Here
we make a collective wish
that together we build
a stronger community.

In my garden, volunteers are gifts
delivered by birds or the wind
—their extra bloom and added green
contribute to the fullness of the spring,
the stunning abundance and generosity
of this Lower Applegate bottomland.
From all our hillsides and creeks—
Sterling to Slate, Humbug to Bull—
the elixir of life flows. As tributaries
we gather and deliver
in generous abundance
respect and love
for our community,
for these mountains and valleys,
and for this river
that draws us together.

BOOK REVIEW

Upstream

Selected Essays

Mary Oliver

Penguin Press, 2016

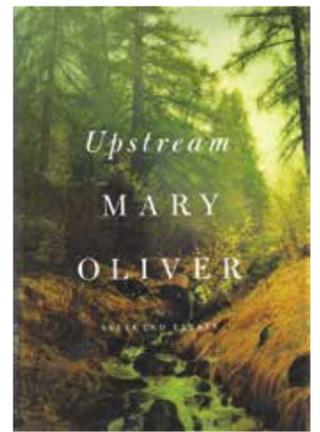
I believe everything has a soul.
—Mary Oliver

Autumn's the time for dipping into a book as though it's a mountain stream and you have a tin cup. In the heat of the day we want a long, cool drink of fresh water as we rest in the shade. This is what Mary Oliver provides for us in both her poetry and her prose. As I scoop up words and thoughts from her book of essays, *Upstream*, I renew my connections to all life.

Mary Oliver, primarily a poet, is read even by people who claim not to read poetry. Before she died, on January 17 of this year (at age 83), her most loved poems were collected in a book titled *Devotions*, because people had begun to think of them as invocations of the human spirit from within the temple of nature. Her essays have a similar contemplative tone.

In her essays Mary Oliver writes about the meaning that springs forth from common things. *Upstream* is a book for thinking things through, a book to open while resting under the tree beside the stream or garden. Perhaps you've put down the basket of tomatoes just picked and let the book fall open to, let's say, her essay, "Bird." Some paragraphs sound almost like her poetry, with images and rhythm that transcend most prose. Meaning emerges almost imperceptibly from within her descriptions. She tells of finding an injured black-backed gull, and, unable to walk away from its suffering, she took it home to provide care until it healed. A complete healing was not to be, but in the time she had with the gull she tells us "we grew into that perilous place: we grew fond..."

"He was, of course, a piece of the sky. His eyes said so. This is not fact; this is the other part of knowing something, when there is no proof, but neither is there any way toward disbelief. Imagine lifting the lid from a jar and finding it filled not with darkness but with light. Bird was like that. Startling, elegant, alive...But the day we knew must come did at last,



and then the nonresponsiveness of his eyes was terrible...The sweep and play of the morning was just beginning, its tender colors reaching everywhere. "The little gull has died," I said to M., as I lifted the shades to the morning light."

Whether she is describing her natural surroundings or individual creatures, such as a turtle, an owl, a spider, or the gull, or contemplating the creative work and thoughts of writers like Emerson, Poe, and Whitman who, in her opinion, laid the groundwork for our American soul, Mary Oliver pens lines that prompt her readers to think about their place in the continuum of things. In her essay "Winter Hours," she writes, "I would say that there exist a thousand unbreakable links between each of us and everything else, and that our dignity and our chances are one. The farthest star and the mud at our feet are a family; and there is no decency or sense in honoring one thing, or a few things, and then closing the list. The pine tree, the leopard, the Platte River, and ourselves—we are at risk together or we are on our way to a sustainable world together. We are each other's destiny."

In the future humans may look back on books such as hers to find clues to former times. Will our earth then be as Mary Oliver experienced it? Will her words still encourage us to walk upstream, to contemplate the natural world, to seek its soul, to dip a cup into the stream's cool waters and lean against a shade tree while we drink? Are we not human? How could we do otherwise?

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MEET SENATOR JEFF GOLDEN



TOWN HALL MEETING



Wednesday, October 16, 6 - 8 pm

Applegate River Lodge, 15100 Highway 238, Applegate

Your opportunity to visit with your state senator representing District 3 (includes Jacksonville, Ruch, and the Applegate Valley).

Hosted by the *Applegater* Newsmagazine.

APPLEGATER'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY FUNDRAISER CALL FOR SILENT AUCTION ITEMS

Thank you to the businesses and individuals who have donated special items for the silent auction at our October fundraiser. We are in need of more items to make this event a success, so please let us know if you can help us out with a donation—large or small—of a product or service.

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