



David Huer - Chehalis River at flood stage, me at lower left.

The path

It can take years to work through fear.

Here's my "starting to paddle" story:

As some of you know, my father was not a good person. He was a 'local champion' swimmer in his day, and wanted me to be like him, so when I was a boy he threw me off a high wharf into a filthy gunky industrial harbour to force me to learn dog-paddling. I popped up to the surface covered in gasoline film. It was not a good day. In those days, I stayed near the shore. Being out in open water made me nervous. It just did. Got terrified more.

It took years to begin the journey to the foreshore, years more to step beyond the river's edge.

Whilst at university, took my first real risk. Going overseas to college for a year, and then whilst there, choosing to go on an Outward Bound course in Wales. In that course, finding in myself an ability to take "small footstep" outdoors' risks.

Several years' later, friends invited me canoeing; so it was expert paddlers guiding the boat, with me in the middle believing I was paddling lol, not realizing my friends were in complete control.

Looking back from now, recognizing that something awoke in the learning that I could physically help maneuver a boat. And in the learning that rivers are not the same as giant lakes and oceans. Somehow the different environment--the river coursing, water scintillating on a gorgeously sunny day--sparked in me the desire to experience something better.

Everyone else was into team sports. Hockey, football, etc. None of that did anything for me. I liked nature, and the sound of flowing water, but not being out in open water. And I was small and slight until my teens. The fear we carry with us. It took a while to get the next step. Eventually, at age 30, I got in my first kayak in a winter pool session at the local university.

Again, a small step. Making the decision to enroll was huge.

Getting into that first boat, overcoming the sensation of being trapped, was again a huge step for me.

And then learning the wet exit (exiting the boat upside down). A giant leap.

And then, the first river trip, surrounded by experts, screwing up my rolls, swimming a lot.

A year of this, until my first Ottawa River trip. I'd been swimming every rapid (on the huge rapids of the Ottawa!). People were getting pissed, having to rescue me all the time.

And then my buddy Mike gave me a transformative tip. For me, the biggest risk was learning to trust. Mike is completely trustworthy. I trusted Mike. He taught me to take the time to set up properly to roll. We can hold our breath for up to a minute. So taking the time to properly set up is really all about finding my centre, to make the time to have patience with myself.

It took years to see.

Patience wins. Love wins. Patient love wins best.

Patience in me for my self.

With patience for myself, I became part of the river. I found the balance in myself. When paddling at my best, the river and me are one. Through the river I found my way back to myself. Through the river, I find my way back to myself.

Another good friend inspires me to go further. He lives compassionate servant-leadership. It is what I strive to do, now. I do my best. I falter, and screw-up, and then stand up, dusting off my knees, to continue living what I hope the world can be. Patience for our selves and each other builds a better world.

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