

CRAIG RIESER'S STANISLAUS STORY

November 2023

I started in spring 1970 - with Gary Winburn and a few others... Alan Deubner had brought us onto the river because Lou Elliot's ARTA was exploding. Gary, Alan and I were buddies from high school. I was inspired by the stories Alan told at lunchtime.

As I recall, my only training trip was sitting on the back of Mark Dubois' raft the first time he guided commercially (he had a few other private trips before that), watching him to see how it all was done. It was a high water trip. As we entered Death Rock Rapid, he remembered that he hadn't given us our safety talk, so he dropped his oars to demonstrate how to swim in case we flipped. As luck would have it, though, as we got down to Death Rock, another raft bumped us into the rock and we flipped us over (Mark remembers that he tried to cut left in front of Death Rock and Dick Linford, also a newbie guide, pushed him into the rock, causing the flip). But, regardless, it was a great introduction and I'll be forever grateful!

Next trip, I had my own boat. The day before the trip, I rented a rowboat and practiced on a small reservoir to get my right and left strokes somewhat coordinated, with hopes of maybe figuring out how to turn. On flat water at least. I remember Alan saying the way to row rapids was to "face your danger... and pull away." So next day, I was given my own oar boat on a Stan commercial trip. I started by following Gary Winburn... a little too closely: I made him flip when he got stuck sideways on a rock and I slammed into him from behind. He was really pissed (not that I blame him!). Good lesson, but also, it was a bit of an ego thing back then, about how many rocks you missed - or hit. So, I seriously infringed on his river karma by making him flip! Great memory though, and a good hello! to me, and a memorable welcome from the river that has led to so many lessons, loves, and learnings ever since!!

REFLECTIONS:

Years later, off the river and living in the flatland city of Sacramento, I discovered the flow of the river in Aikido, a martial art form with no attacks, that arose in Japan out of WWII with the purpose of bringing peace into resolutions of any conflict. With its fluidity and purpose, I have found that Aikido has an essential kinship with river navigation. The exception lies wherever it may be poisoned by ego, which we sometimes have seen on rivers as well - "ego" and "rivers" are like oil and water... they just don't mix. So I've found that perception unifies with the deepest purpose of Aikido - love. And Aikido thus became my "river" when I couldn't escape civilization more often to reach the water with my boat. I think the lessons within river navigation are profound, clarifying, and universal, from a personal level to a global one... and in the smallest to the most consequential ways. Nature speaks to us in its many languages about being present and aware as well as about love, respect, joy, courage, community and more. But regardless of which language touches your heart, the message, the translation, is the same. It just requires an unfiltered listening. And at the heart of it is Love.

You know, I've always thought of the Stan as "dying for our sins", to borrow from a Christian view. As a consequence of that tragedy, of watching in deep sorrow as the water rose, other rivers have been saved, and a greater consciousness has grown forth. As Alexander Gaguine once put it, saving the Stan was the work of a thousand heroes. And the Stan's story may be our reminder to keep growing, to sustain a greater consciousness, to work with love, and to value our gift of community.