

Small Things

It's the small things you remember.
The old iron pipe with the moss hanging from it,
in the rapid at Duck Bar,
and how it took you all those trips to really see
the run out of the only channel past it.

The sound of a canyon wren in the early morning,
echoing off the walls at Razorback, before anyone was up.

The great drooping oak branch on the lake above Duck,
and below it, the terrific rope swing tree
where you skinned your hands the first time you jumped out,
because you didn't pull up on the rope
like they told you to.

The soft gurgle of water at Lower Chinese in late summer,
when the boats were tied up, the people napping and the food on,
where you could sit by yourself in the shadow of the canyon wall,
overwhelmed by the quiet beauty of the river.

The first time you climbed into Coral Cave, at night,
after everyone had gone to bed,
and how, once you were all the way in,
Ron Coldwell took your flashlight
and disappeared,
challenging you to find your way out in the utter blackness.

The terrible chaos of a high water day one May,
when a boat wrapped at Death, others flipped and floated downstream.
One passenger died, others were stranded,
and everyone pulled their trips off and hiked their people out.
And the almost desperate need the guides felt the next day,
to go back down by themselves,
to find reassurance once again with the river.

The sounds of put in, with the check dam's roar
matched by the cacophony of school buses, old trucks and cars,
of boats being pumped up by hand,
of frames and gear being hauled to wall's edge for loading.
And the people, chattering, eyes bright, anticipating adventure.

You remember a million small things about the Stanislaus River,
and they blend together in a tapestry of love and gratefulness,
and of hope.