THE RIVER

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[Assignment: Describe a person or place you know well from more than one perspective. The words you use should make your subject become almost visible to your readers.]

(1) For me, the Des Plaines River has always been a special place. It holds a lot of good memories for me and my family, but most of all the river is a palpable symbol of the end of my childhood innocence, and of the beginning of my realization about the harsh realities of my world.

(2) I live about thirty minutes from the Des Plaines River in Illinois. For as long as I can remember my family and I would go to the river about twice a year when the weather was warm. It would always be the same scene: my sister, my brother, and I would run ahead and jump down from the three foot cement wall onto the seemingly endless shoreline that led to the seemingly large body of water. Our parents would sit on the cement wall and watch us as we threw rocks into the river to see who could throw one in the farthest. When we were tired of doing that my father would climb down the wall and show us how to make rocks skip on the water.

(3) Sometimes I would leave my siblings and walk far down the shoreline jumping from rock to rock trying to avoid being scraped by the low, untamed trees and bushes that grew there. This walk was my own private time to think and reflect on my life and to just enjoy being so close to nature. It was on this walk that I would look for the biggest and most colorful shells I could find, and then at the end of my visit I would swap them with my brother if he had some that I found more attractive than mine.

(4) I would let my imagination run wild at the river. I never shared my thoughts with my family or anyone else. I wanted them to be my own private thoughts without anyone else altering them in any way. The water, trees, and rocks made me think that I was alone and shipwrecked, wandering around on a deserted island fighting for survival. Or I would pick up fish scales and unusual rocks and imagine that I was making a new and important discovery that would make me famous. Being here at the river hypnotized me, and I felt as if I was escaping reality by my imaginative thoughts.

(5) I felt so close to nature there. The river smelled like fish, dirt, and trees mixed in. The river seemed to go on forever; I did not think that it ever had an end to it. The sand, rocks, and shells were so fascinating and beautiful to me then. The river was so picturesque and perfect. I loved going there and I always wished that we made the trip more often. Instead, as we grew we had less and less time to make the trip and
eventually we stopped going altogether.

(6) A couple of weeks before I left for college my parents and I decided to go back to the river one last time before I had to leave home. My sister and brother are grown up now and were too busy with their new lives to come with us. We parked at the same spot on the road as we always had and went to the same area of shoreline that we had always gone to before but it looked dramatically different from the last time I had been there.

(7) I know now that it was not the river that was different, but it was how I looked at it. The river was very low because of the drought last summer and I could see the beer cans and the paper bags floating on top of the water. I looked down on the shore line and saw the dirt and the twigs lying unruly on the greyish sand. I could smell the river and I realized that part of what made up that familiar smell was dead and decaying fish and pollution in and around the river.

(8) I did not throw rocks into the river or collect shells. I just sat on the cement wall with my parents standing behind me. None of us spoke. I thought about how my beautiful childhood place was not as beautiful as I used to think it was. In the simplicity of my childhood, I had overlooked all of the pollution and destructive forces of nature, and I had made the river perfect in my mind. The reality of it all seemed to slap me in the face as I looked at the almost mystical movement of the water. I sensed a feeling of dread at the fact that part of growing up is losing that simplicity and innocence that I had once known. I sometimes feel that I want my innocence back again. Life as a child was having wonderful images created from your own mind, seeing life as a big adventure, wanting to find and experience new things, and accepting things as they seem and seeing them as something beautiful. That was how I saw the river then, that is not how I see the river now.

(9) Why? Wouldn’t life be so much better if we could see it through the eyes of a child? That is what the river has made me question and think about instead of being a lonely, shipwrecked survivor on a deserted island or a soon-to-be-famous discoverer of new and important artifacts.