



# High Water

*Richard Bissell*

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## **High Water** Richard Bissell

“A river, a very big and powerful river, is the only natural force that can wholly determine the course of human peregrination.” T. S. Eliot

Duke Snyder found his first job on 'a dirty old cinder-throwing stern-wheeler' when he was sixteen years old with just sixty-five cents left in his pocket and nothing else to do. Ten years later he's still on the river aboard an old diesel towboat hauling eight barges of coal toward the Chain of Rocks above St. Louis with all hands on deck facing the ominous rise of high water.

An expert at finding the details that make a story exceptional, Bissell reminds us how rich and abundant, vibrant and dynamic life can be if we just open our eyes and ears (and noses) and take notice.

“Unless you have ever smelled the Mississippi River you don't know what that means. . . she smells like islands and willows and railroad ties and mud and . . . she smells like standing under a bridge, or sitting in a duck blind, and like old overalls and marine engines, and like a retriever when he is crouched shivering in the boat on the way home. She also smells like wet oilskins, coal smoke, dead catfish and buffalo and gar pike, like rotten logs and hepaticas on the hillsides, and like the whiskey breath of an old deck hand who can't quite remember where he come from.”( Ch 12)

As the waters of the Mississippi rise to alarming levels Bissell takes us aboard the steamboat with Duke, now first mate, and captains, Ironhat and Casey, engineer, Greasecup, and crew members Arkansaw, the Kid, ole Swede, One Eye, and Zero. Embraced by rain and fog and night is as black as 'the inside of a Holstein heifer', we learn about the lives of the crew, past and present, losses, loves, strengths and flaws, and are caught up in the flood of their lives much like the swell of the raging river.

Bissell loved river life and spent much of his time on a towboat on the Mississippi. They say to write about what you know.

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