



## THE RIVER YOU TOUCH

Making a Life on Moving Water

By Chris Dombrowski

Publication date:  
October 2023

ISBN:  
9781639550630  
Paperback, \$18

Milkweed Editions  
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## Discussion Questions

1. “I launched this boat made of words: a chronicle of wonder at the place we humbly call home and an attempt to preserve the quality of attention that our children, those messengers of a hopeful reality, so often emit, without which we will find ourselves mortally far out at sea.” [7] Chris Dombrowski ends the Preface with this sentiment of wonder and family. Reflect on your own wonderment of the natural world before and after reading the book.
2. Dombrowski writes on the flawed “the hallucination of innocence” [34] of the Western wilderness over centuries, paving the way for colonialism and genocide. How does Dombrowski combat those ideals in the way he moves about the natural world?
3. In the chapter “Begin, O Small Boy, to Be Born” [83-91], Dombrowski uses imagery of the stars and the ocean to describe his son’s birth. How does this set a precedent for how he writes about his children? What are other moments in the book where he uses natural imagery to ease stressful situations.
4. “If he came here to kill me, per Freud’s assertion, it’s proving a sweet end to suffer.” [95] Recall Dombrowski’s early days of fatherhood: tired and full of awe for his newborn and the patrons of the river he guides. What effect does this family and work life balance have on his storytelling?
5. While Dombrowski’s wife, Mary, is pregnant with their second child, he falls ill from a bleeding stomach lining. “The irony is not lost on me” he writes, “agonies of childbearing versus the inconvenience of a sour gut.” [162] How does Dombrowski write about his own body compared to his wife’s throughout *The River You Touch*?
6. “Picturing how swiftly the sharp branch of a single deadfall could snare me permanently, it was all I could muster to wade a little deeper, to lift my feet from the riverbed. How bottomless the dark water seemed. But how it seemed to hold me too.” [181] Dombrowski offers both the beauty and danger of rushing waters. How are you used to seeing rivers depicted in literature? Do those expectations match Dombrowski’s writing?
7. What comes to mind when you think about the land, rivers, and mountains of Montana? Were you aware of the conservation movements described in the chapter “Heathen” [183-193] and their impacts? Did Dombrowski change your perspective on that region?
8. Dombrowski’s son Luca has an affinity for his father’s stories based in the forest. Which stories stuck out to you? Do you have any childhood folktales you remember from outdoor excursions?
9. With three kids, Dombrowski feels inspired by their attentiveness to nature and blunt observations on life and death. How does he react to these moments with his children? How about handling their reactions during the move to Michigan?
10. While working as a fly-fishing guide, Dombrowski also published several poetry collections. Where do you see his poetic influences throughout *The River You Touch*?
11. Dombrowski ends the book by writing “The journey is long, and then we start homeward, fathomless as to what home might make of us.” [313] Discuss the homes he shares with the readers in the book. Where are the homes in your life that have guided you?

