

# WALKING UPSTREAM

Lloyd Ratzlaff

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PREVIEW

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I use not their tables, formulas, or schemes, rules and ways, for I have not learned from them. I have another teacher, which is the living fountain of nature.

— *Confessions of Jakob Böhme*, sixteenth-century shoemaker

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THE OLD PATH

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## Prismatic Lens

Full double rainbow on the river's brink,  
and below, faint imprint  
of a third.

I count the colours, not sure—  
are there only seven?

Each rainbow arcs down to the water.  
No hidden pots of gold there,  
only a halcyon sun bending with the waves.

Pelicans float under the great crescent,  
small white arks on the river.

*Pica pica*

I spy a human on the trail  
and think, here comes another member  
of the god species,  
while over there, without divine concepts,  
comes a magpie  
who handily outflies us both.

Magpie, I love you more  
for your flight and strut  
than for your  
squawk,  
but can't vilify a creature  
ten times tougher than me  
and a hell of a lot more handsome.

## The Realm

A king abroad in my kingdom,  
small domain on neighbourhood streets  
but mighty big at the riverbank.

Neither crown prince  
nor enchanted frog,  
a monarch of no account  
who likes to hide sometimes  
in a copse of aspens  
and listen.

## In the Reeds

Red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds  
announce my arrival  
at the edge of the marsh  
where coots and pintails and mallards swim.

*Hey hey,  
whoever you are!*

They light on the bulrushes' woollen heads  
and sway against cloudbanks,  
all reflected in the swamp's green water.

*Hey you  
mud hen in the reeds,  
so near yet so hidden,  
only the tinks on some tiny anvil  
betray the place of your nesting.*

[In the egg that hatches, an updraft. In the bird that flies, a stone.]

PREVIEW



Lloyd Ratzlaff is a former minister, counsellor, and university lecturer, author of three books of literary nonfiction, and editor of an anthology of seniors' writings and a children's book. He was a finalist for three Saskatchewan Book Awards, won two Saskatchewan Writers' Guild literary nonfiction awards, and served on the boards of several writing organizations. He was a columnist for *Prairie Messenger Catholic Journal* through its final nineteen years of publication and taught writing classes for Foundations Learning & Skills Saskatchewan, the Western Development Museum, and the University of Saskatchewan Certificate of Art and Design program. *Walking Upstream* is his first poetry collection. He lives in Saskatoon.

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