

Book chronicles love affair with rivers

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Law Professor Oliver Houck tells 32 tales about why rivers captivate his heart and stoke his imagination in his new book, *Downstream Toward Home*. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The story of law professor Oliver Houck's life is punctuated by rivers.

He fought for clean rivers and other bodies of water for more than 30 years, which led him to Tulane University where he teaches environmental law. Any discussion of his personal life will generally meander back to the banks of some river somewhere — rowing the Charles as an undergrad in Cambridge, Massachusetts, or walking his dog on the banks of the Mississippi. In short, Houck loves rivers, and his most recent book, *Downstream Toward Home*, is a collection of stories about that love affair.

“Every place I go, the first thing I look for is a river to be on,” [Houck](#) said. “I washed up here from a river just as if I was a piece of driftwood. What I think has kept me here is not the French Quarter or the other

amenities of this lovely old city, it's the outdoor environment outside the city.”

The 32 stories in the book chronicle Houck's experiences on rivers dating back to the 1950s. When he put the proverbial pen to paper, Houck says the stories flowed from his mind like the rivers and streams he so enjoys.

“I didn't set out to write this book,” he said. “I set out to write one story. As I was writing that story, another one came to mind, then two would come to mind, and I'd scribble notes about this river or that place or that incident just hoping I wouldn't lose them.”

Houck says the response to the book, so far, has been remarkably positive, something he attributes as much to shared experience as he does to his stories.

“I know I'm not alone,” Houck said. “The reason this book seems to be striking a chord is that a lot of other people feel the same way that I do. I'm hoping people will read these stories and say "I had something like this happen to me," and it opens up a book in your life that you thought was closed, and it makes you smile.”

“I washed up here from a river just as if I was a piece of driftwood.”—Oliver Houck, law professor and author