

Ross' Rave: Water, Water Everywhere

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“The thing about water,” he said, “is that it's fugitive.”

Rich talked about water constantly. Water rights, water leasing, water waste, water pollution, water conservation. Hard water, potable water, portable water, bottled water and still waters. After a week I felt drenched. While his three-year old daughter Julia danced around the kitchen wearing nothing more than a pink tulle scarf and a Burger King crown, he excitedly described that fugitive water can't be caught.

“Think about it,” he said. “The water flows down the river, where it is channeled through a turbine to generate electricity, and then released. The energy from the water is taken, but not the water itself.”

Julia was now perched on the couch trying to put cherry Chapstick on her 3-month old sister.

“The water continues on its way downriver, where it's used again to irrigate crops or fill a city reservoir.” He nonchalantly replaced the Chapstick with a sparkly, purple ribbon and lifted Julia away from the baby.

“Let's say it goes to a municipality. The same water that generated the electricity for your house, is now filling the tank in your toilet. When you flush, it goes to the waste water treatment plant, where it's filtered, cleaned and used to water the city parks and arbor ways.”

“I have to go pee pee,” Julia shouts from the pillow castle she's erected under the dining room table.

“And then it goes back into the ground, where it nourishes the grass and trees, and eventually returns to the atmosphere so the cycle begins again.”

“How cool is that!” I hear him say from the hall bathroom. “You see, it's fugitive... it's never caught.”

I've just returned from a year in the United Arab Emirates. Tall buildings, fancy hotels, indoor ski slopes, cam-

els, and very, very little water. In fact, it only has a 3 day water reserve. If the water stopped pumping on Wednesday, there would be a lot of thirsty people come Sunday. Oddly, however, the UAE has one of the highest per capita usages of water in the world. Go figure.

As I thought about Rich's “water is fugitive” concept, it occurred to me that information and water share many of the same qualities.

In countless classes, we've all explained how data, like droplets, amass cloud-like from labs and databases, speeches and polls. These data saturate to the point where they collectively release and flow into information streams. It informally flows, at first, in discourse. But eventually (and depending on the nature of the information) it courses into well-honed channels of communication such as professional conferences, academic journals, popular media and so forth. Like water, as it moves through these systems, the information remains fluid. We can use it, but we cannot contain it. We can direct it, but we cannot alter it. Information is.

Of course, like water, information can be polluted (My first day back in the States, I heard an AM talk host state, unequivocally, that Obama is a Muslim). It can be filtered (Over 4,500 American troops have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet showing flag draped coffins on the news is verboten). Information can be twisted (9/11 -> Bin Laden -> Taliban -> Afghanistan -> Saddam -> WMD -> Iraq -> terrorists -> Iran). And, information can be bottled (e.g., Lexis, Proquest, NYT). And, in the case of FOX News, it's all of the above.

Of course, we instruction folk have been using this water analogy forever (sea of information, librarians as navigators, etc.) but there was something intriguing about the concept of information being “fugitive” that seemed new, fresh...exciting. Or, maybe I had been in the desert too long.

But maybe information is fugitive in other ways.

Is information like Harrison Ford from the movie, relentlessly pursued by Tommie Lee Jones down dark city

streets and through rain sodden forests, narrowly evading would-be captors with sheer cunning and deceit? For many of our students trying to navigate a library's home page, or search our databases, I'm sure the similarities are not too far afield.

Or is information fugitive in the sense of its elusiveness; its ability to slip away just at our grasp? Is it its transitory nature, its transient quality, that makes it both alluring and frustrating to its pursuers? And, does it so much flee from our pursuit or is it really pursuing its own aims? How often have we seen graduate students more keen on finding information than on using it?

Or perhaps it's fugitive in a Road Runner way, taunting the stubbornly persistent, and amazingly recuperative Wile E. Coyote. Just when all appears within his grasp, the plan collapses and all is lost. (How often students ask us to help them find that article they saw last night on the web, but now can't remember what it is or how they found it.)

For the water, for the coyote, for information, for all fugitives, nature takes its course. And while there may be distractions and obstacles, transformations and diversions, inevitability will not be halted. The water may not make it to the sea this time, but it may next. The Road Runner will never be caught and information... well... it will find its way into our students' heads for a moment or a month or a lifetime.

"I don't think your sister is old enough to ride on your bike," I say to Julia and remind her that she can't even hold her great, giant head very steady.

"I'm thirsty," she says. "Can you get me some water?"

Of course.

(Pixel Haze...Continued from page 3)

Librarians ROCK!

Picture C: Raster

Librarians ROCK!

Picture D: Vector

Before you begin any project that involves graphic images, ask yourself these questions:

- what type of file am I dealing with?
- what is the current size and resolution of the image?
- how will the image be output? (web or print)
- what will be the final size of the images?
- is the image raster or vector?
- can I obtain the vector image?

Images at the correct resolution will help ensure high quality graphic projects, and will decrease frustration during the design process. Your designs will reflect the awesomeness of your library so well, your boss might even want to have her picture taken with you! Now, excuse me, while I go kiss the sky.