

*The river, like a favourite uncle long outgrown,  
will pick me up and throw me in the air.*

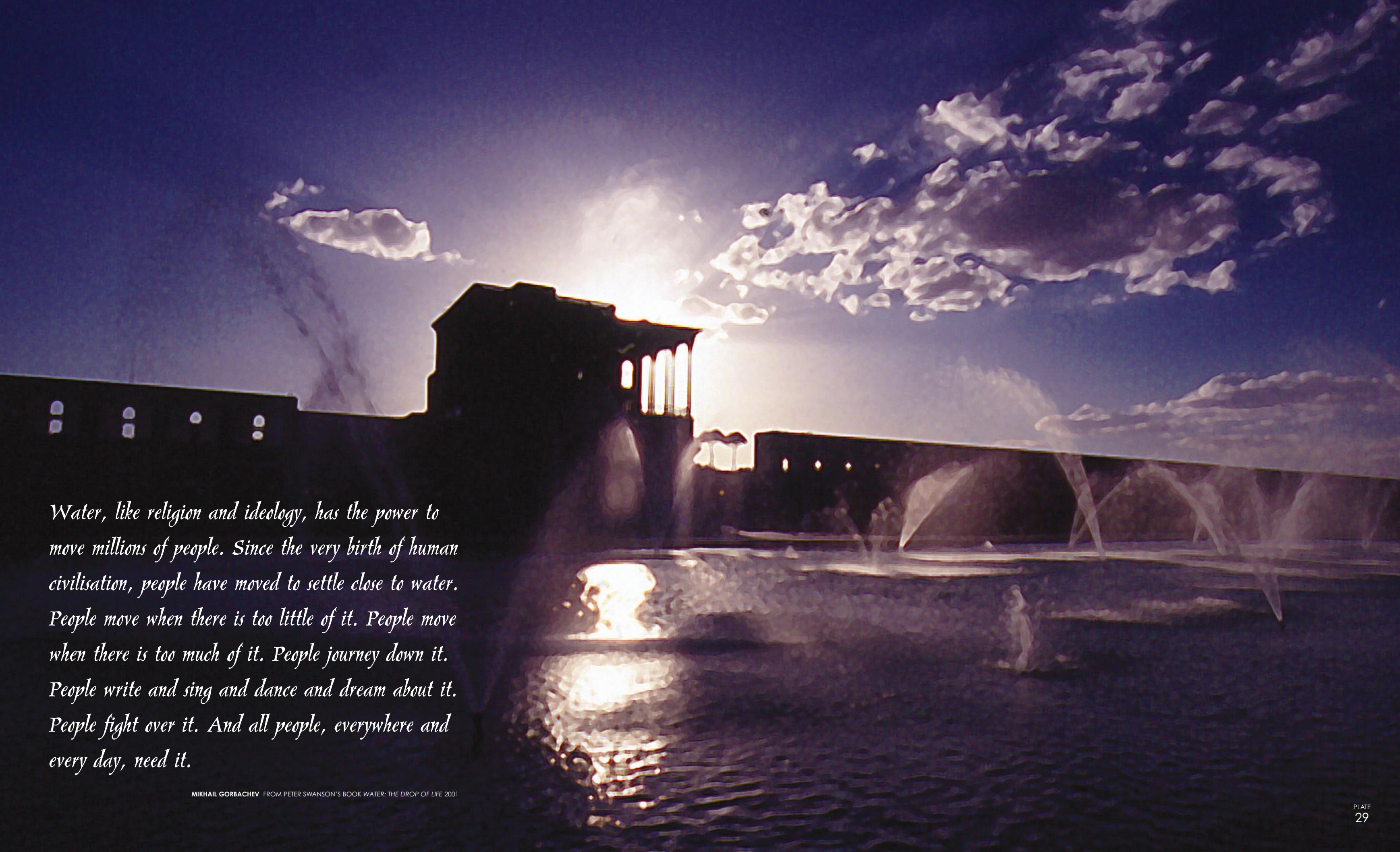
*Head over heels, heels over head.*

*He spins me around and sets me down.*

*Again I plead, again.*

KATIE JOHNSON 2002





*Water, like religion and ideology, has the power to move millions of people. Since the very birth of human civilisation, people have moved to settle close to water. People move when there is too little of it. People move when there is too much of it. People journey down it. People write and sing and dance and dream about it. People fight over it. And all people, everywhere and every day, need it.*

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV FROM PETER SWANSON'S BOOK WATER: THE DROP OF LIFE 2001



*It was mid-morning and the sun beat down on the dry desert sand. Hiding in what shade we could find, we dragged our boats across the cracked earth to the road. We had just finished a three day trip down the Karun River in the Zagros Mountains of Iran. Dave stood on the dusty roadside trying to hitch a ride back to our vehicle left at the put-in.*

A small roadhouse stood close to the take-out. A red-faced man sat there and it was apparent that he owned the small eatery. He was about 80 kilos overweight and his fat proud face made him look like an emperor. Debs and I soon took to calling him The King; it fit perfectly. He lounged around on big red cushions as if they were his throne and two guys ran around after him with a permanent supply of cold Coke and kebab meat. Each new delivery of refreshment would quickly disappear into his oversized belly, leaving behind empty hands and his greasy round face soon beckoning for more. We hung out there the entire day, playing endless games of cards and being easily entertained by The King.

As the sun dropped from the sky, ready to disappear for another day, Dave returned with our vehicle. By now I had grown tired of the King and his disturbing eating habits and was more than happy to move on. Dave arrived with a whole group of new friends in tow: Four policemen wondering what the hell we were doing there and quite rightly so. What on earth were all of these plastic ships we were tying down onto the roof of the van?

After useless English and Farsi were shouted at one another, the police insisted we accompany them to their headquarters, which conveniently happened to be only seven hours away. It must have been our lucky day! To make matters worse, some smart-ass police official decided to join us in our vehicle. Constantly smiling at him until my face was about to crack made me want to spit. We were off on an Iranian goose chase and all we could do was keep our polluted Western mouths shut.

It was 11pm when at last we arrived at the police barracks. Perhaps everything might be explained now. However, none of the big officials were anywhere to be seen, nor anyone that spoke either English or Turkish. We had no idea what we were doing there! The police had our

passports and guns; we had nothing in our favour but a smile the size of the moon. It looked like we were going nowhere fast.

With the lack of communication came more and more frustration that lingered in the air like stale cigarette smoke. By that time, Debs had had enough of the whole scenario and decided to protest for our freedom with Farsi phrases from the back of the Lonely Planet guidebook. “You must be joking” and “I am not a spy” were my two favourite phrases that she used repeatedly. With Debs' strong Essex accent in full flow, this became very entertaining. The police didn't know what to make of it all. This was Iran, not America; women don't have too many rights here and definitely don't lose their cool with police officials. Little progress was made, so we decided to sleep on it for the night.

Because the police would not allow us to drive our vehicle into their compound, we slept in front of the compound gates. Four of us were squeezed into Dave's van, with the added charm of a guard nearby with an AK-47 in his hands. How romantic! Bob, Debs and Dave slept in the back of the van and I, being the shortest, had the pleasure of sleeping across the front driver and passenger seats. I dropped in and out of poor sleep with seatbelt buckles digging into all parts of my anatomy.

At about 6am, a somewhat persistent guard rudely woke me banging repeatedly on the van demanding that we move our vehicle in order for the other police to enter the compound. Bob, Debs and Dave, who had really had enough by this point, had blacked out all of the windows in the back of the van with towels, fleeces and whatever else they could find. They were not moving anywhere. I, however, was in full view of the rather frustrated guard, cringing with embarrassment and shame as he banged on the vehicle and stared at me through the wide, uncovered



windscreen. Meanwhile, my travelling companions shouted at the top of their voices “we're not moving, we're not moving,” like children in the school playground.

As time went on, we had little choice but to get up and face the music. Endless cups of tea were poured and greasy fingers filtered through Dave's collection of photographs from a previous kayaking trip in Iran. With a little sweet-talking in Turkish from Dave to the Chief of Police, we were eventually free to leave with our passports in hand along with a little new vocabulary. In the end, it turned out that conversational Turkish and some old photos were more useful than knowing how to say “I am not a spy” in Farsi, but you never know when that might actually be just the right thing to say.



*Whilst surfing the other day, I remembered how it felt to play as a child – in pure bliss, laughing and oblivious to worry.*

*As we grow older, we forget where to find that playful place: the one we all love but only a few carry on searching for. It's like finding a forgotten packet of chocolate biscuits at the back of the cupboard – unless you look for them, you will never know they are there.*

DEB PINNIGER 2002



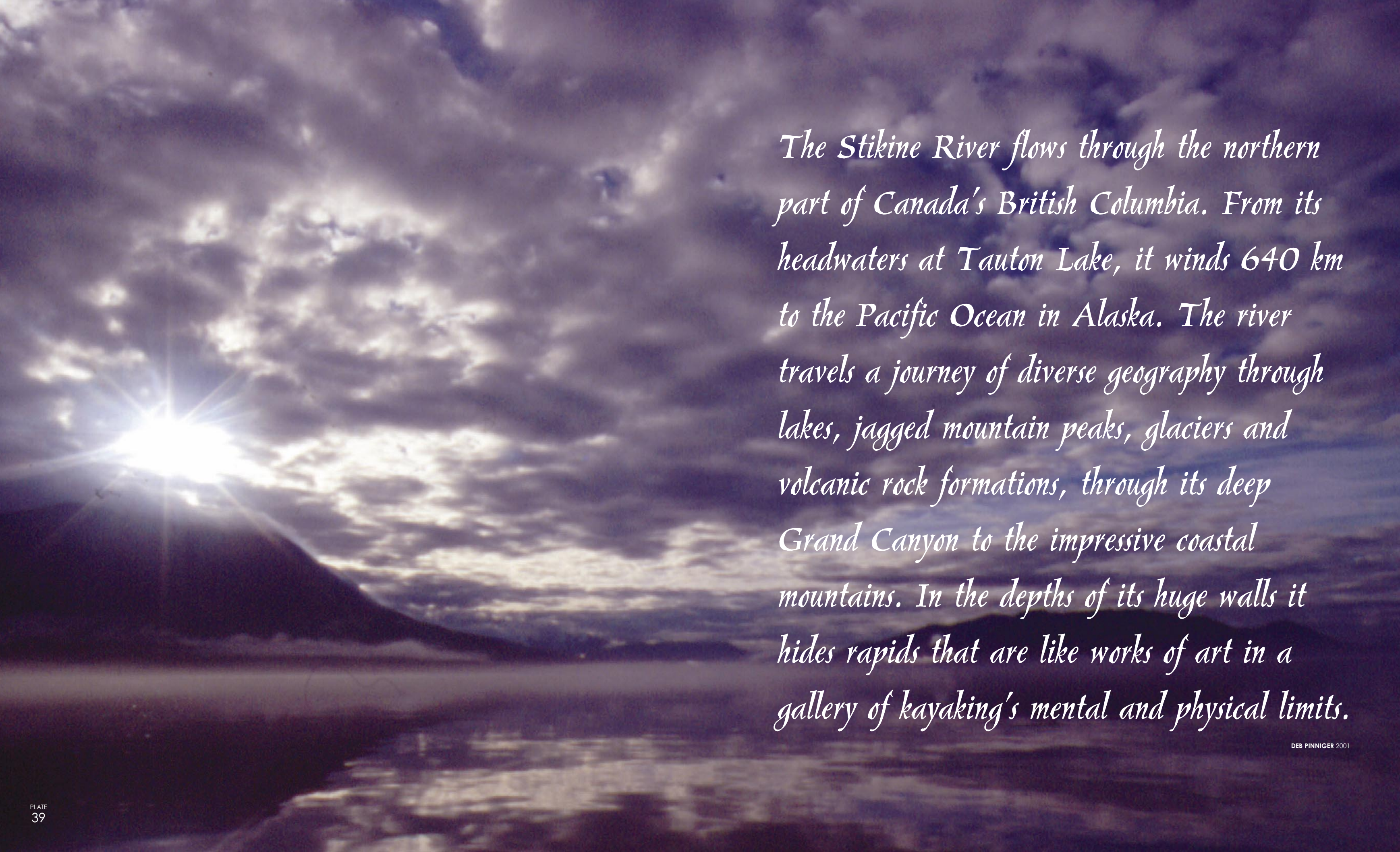












*The Stikine River flows through the northern part of Canada's British Columbia. From its headwaters at Tauton Lake, it winds 640 km to the Pacific Ocean in Alaska. The river travels a journey of diverse geography through lakes, jagged mountain peaks, glaciers and volcanic rock formations, through its deep Grand Canyon to the impressive coastal mountains. In the depths of its huge walls it hides rapids that are like works of art in a gallery of kayaking's mental and physical limits.*

DEB PINNIGER 2001