

## River Talk: Stories

**CB Anderson**

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*Person and place intersect to offer insight into what dysfunction, within both individuals and families, reveals about us.*

The characters in C. B. Anderson's impressive collection *River Talk* live in and around western Maine's river valleys. These men and women are mill workers, pipe fitters, bartenders, bakers, dance instructors, and taxidermists, but what they have in common (aside from the region in which they reside) are broken lives, failing marriages, and children left damaged by dysfunctional behavior of adults.

Take, for example, the wounded souls at the heart of "Frame." After Ray moves out of the house, his wife, Alice, plummets into depression and signs herself into a treatment facility in Wellbridge. Now he's back, tending to their two boys, Sean and Richie. Rushing to get out the door for a visit to see their mother, Ray impulsively decides to bring along a fish tank where "the remaining tetras weave through artificial seaweed, unfazed by their diminished numbers." Over the course of the drive, Ray recalls his early courtship with Alice and the bright prospects of their future together.

But, as in many of these rueful and closely observed stories, things don't turn out as planned. Still, the story ends on a hopeful note: "Later, after the aquarium crashes, Ray will remember not the moments his sons fought and he knew that it would end poorly, but something else." As Alice, an amateur photographer, snaps photos of the boys, "[Ray] noticed Alice had stepped back and widened the angle to include him in the frame. He leaned toward the boys, waited."

Readers will quickly discern that Anderson, a native of Maine who grew up in a village on the Androscoggin River, knows the area and the people she writes about.

In the story "Taken," for instance, Buzz shares his philosophy of successful hunting: "When you're looking for game in the woods you don't watch straight ahead. Instead you come at it slit-eyed and peripheral because the most sensitive part of the eye is along the edge. The edge sees dimness and shadow. The part that deals with bright light is in the center but it's useless unless it's broad daylight. If you look too straight at something, you may miss what matters."

It's also a good description for Anderson's short story collection, where the most penetrating insights into human nature are found in the subtle intersection between personality and place.

LEE POLEVOI (Fall 2014)

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