

My Life Around Water

A Personal Reflection on a Resource We Too Often Take for Granted

Todd D. Davis, President and Founder of C2-It Solutions, LLC

www.c2-itsolutions.com

I have been around water my entire life, but for much of that time I barely appreciated it.

Like many people, I assumed it would always be there. Water was simply part of the landscape and the background of everyday life. It flowed through the places where I lived, traveled, worked, and played. Only much later did I come to appreciate how profoundly water shapes our communities, economies, infrastructure, and quality of life.

Looking back, I realize that water quietly surrounded me and influenced every stage of my life—from being born near the upper reaches of the Missouri River to being raised on the shores of Lake Michigan. Then I lived in Lake Charles, Louisiana which is surrounded by lakes and near the Gulf of Mexico and later spending summers on Galveston Island. Then later living in the Northeast and living abroad in two countries – one surrounded by water and depending on sea-land logistics and the other manufacturing most of their potable water from desalination (UAE), where I was a project manager for a water and electricity conservation program.

What once seemed like background and foreground scenery gradually became something much more important. I began to appreciate how water is a resource that shapes communities, economies, infrastructure, and quality of life.

Growing Up Around Water

My father spent much of his career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, working on projects that ranged from the Fort Peck Dam in Montana to the Galveston Seawall, Houston Ship Channel dredging operations, levees, and flood-control systems throughout Southeast Texas.

As a child, I lived in Lake Charles, Louisiana, a community surrounded by water and deeply



Figure 1. The author and his wife, Janet. Exploring one of the many waterfalls of the Appalachian region in the Poconos, PA. Experiences like these helped deepen my appreciation for water as both a natural resource and a source of beauty, recreation and commerce.

influenced by it. While there, I experienced Hurricane Audrey, one of the most devastating storms ever to strike the Gulf Coast. At the time, I was too young to fully understand its significance. Looking back, it was an early lesson in the immense power of water and nature.

After my parents divorced, I spent much of my youth in two very different worlds. For most of the year I lived near the shores of Lake Michigan in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We often heard about the “lake effect” and how the lake moderated temperatures and influenced precipitation throughout the region. Lake Michigan offered cool breezes, vast horizons, and a limitless inland sea.

During summers, I traveled to Texas, spending time in Galveston and Huntsville. The contrast was striking. East Texas offered pine forests, Gulf Coast humidity, salt air, and the distinctive sea breezes. I also remember when the lower Trinity River was dammed to create Lake Livingston, which became a popular destination for boating, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

My father continued his career with the Corps of Engineers working on a variety of projects including the dredging and levees supporting the Houston Ship Channel, extending the Galveston Seawall, and building flood control pump stations in Galveston County and along the Brazos River.

I still remember ferry rides across Galveston Bay, with porpoises racing alongside the ferry, then there were the shrimp boats docking at piers in Galveston, providing bountiful fresh shrimp. Those experiences created memories that remain vivid more than half a century later.

Water and Public Service

Years later, graduate school took me to Columbia, Missouri. Once again, water was nearby. The Missouri River, one of North America’s great waterways, flowed through the region. While working for the Missouri

Department of Natural Resources in Jefferson City, I gained a greater appreciation for how government, natural resources, planning, and public policy intersect. For the first time, I began to see water not simply as a feature of the landscape but as a resource requiring active management and stewardship. I also appreciated the view of the Missouri State Capital overlooking the Missouri River that ran from Montana to St. Louis Missouri .with passage ways through many cities along the way.

For decades, though, water was still a set of separate lenses having a time and place unto their own and not part of a larger force that impacts so much of our life. But now in my



Figure 2 Galveston Flagship Pier (now called Pleasure Pier)

professional activity in government and working as a consultant, I began to see energy, water, climate, and weather as interconnected parts of a larger system with both risks and opportunities. Now it seems our intended or unintended human intervention results in a wide variety of risks and rewards that sometimes are too fragmented a view and loses sight of the big picture of more complex systems that interact.

In 1980, my family and I moved to the Philadelphia area, where we have lived for decades. Water is everywhere here. The Delaware River and Delaware Water Gap provide a striking example of the power of natural forces to shape landscapes over time.

Entire communities, industries, transportation systems, and recreational lifestyles revolve around these water resources.

I also developed a habit that many frequent travelers may appreciate. Whenever I flew across the country, I looked forward to crossing the Mississippi River. Often visible near St. Louis, it remains one of the most impressive sights from an airplane window. From above, the scale of the river and the way it shaped the surrounding landscape offered a reminder of how geography influences the development of cities, transportation networks, and economies. You can also look down at the Colorado River winding through the Grand Canyon and Lake Powell. Now these waterways are under great stress.

Seeing Water Differently

My consulting work created an opportunity to work in water rich Canada in the Eastern Provinces as well as the Middle East. There, water was impossible to take for granted.

Every drop carried value.

Energy supply sources depended heavily on water.

In the Middle East energy conservation was viewed as a major resource.

When driving from Al Ain to Abu Dhabi, I frequently observed the extensive pipeline infrastructure required to move water across the desert. On trips between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, I passed miles of desalination facilities and power plants that worked together to produce much of the potable water used throughout the United Arab Emirates. In a region where natural freshwater resources are extremely limited, water management becomes visible in ways that many Americans rarely experience.

The experience was eye-opening. Water availability depended upon infrastructure, financing, public policy, technology, and prudent management of the entire supply chain, including experimental cloud-seeding programs intended to enhance rainfall.



Figure 3 Irrigated water amid a desert in UAE.

These choices have important implications for economic development, public health, infrastructure planning, agriculture, manufacturing, energy production, and quality of life. One lesson I have learned is that water problems rarely exist in isolation. They are usually connected to broader systems involving economics, population growth, infrastructure, weather, and public policy.

Water is not merely a commodity.

It is life itself.

The human body depends upon it. Every community depends upon it. Every business relies upon it. Every ecosystem requires it. We use different forms of water for different purposes—drinking water, irrigation water, industrial water, reclaimed water, and many others, but it is all part of the same interconnected system.

For generations, many Americans assumed water would always be available when needed. In many parts of the world, that assumption once seemed reasonable.

But conditions are changing.

Population growth, climate variability, aging infrastructure, groundwater depletion, droughts, floods, competing demands, and rising costs are making water more visible than ever before. Water is becoming increasingly tied to economics, public policy, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

The reality is that water is no longer something we can afford to ignore.

It deserves greater appreciation.

It deserves better management.

It deserves thoughtful conservation.

It deserves more creative technology and financial mechanisms to leverage this valuable resource even further. The challenge is learning how to balance local water needs with the larger forces that influence water availability and demand. The more I studied these issues, the more I realized that water problems are rarely isolated. They are usually connected to broader systems involving economics, population growth, infrastructure, weather, and public policy.

Looking back, I realize that water has quietly shaped where I have lived, what I have observed, and how I understand the world.

For much of my life, I took it for granted.

Today, I do not.



Figure 4. Floating the Snake River at Grand Teton National Park.