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Returning to the River by Steve Duin

Ivory Broom should have been a book by now. Robin Cody fell in love with her when she was six, he readily admits, and wrapped a magazine article around her in 2003, a piece that made a pilgrimage into *The Best American Spiritual Writing* 2004. Cody spent considerable time pondering how to move that wheelchair-bound little girl from the magazine into a book, but in the end Ivory's mother decided her daughter didn't need the audience. That probably didn't bother Ivory any more than she minded saying goodbye to Cody, who piloted the bus that drove her to school every morning. "Ivory doesn't have a memory," he explains. "Ivory doesn't remember things that happened a couple months ago. It didn't hurt Ivory a bit."

And Cody? Well, that's another story altogether. And he's driving an altogether different bus. "You don't want to do the same thing every day,"

Cody told me last week, and these days his bus has the behavioral problems, the kids who are so troubled and out of control that the local high schools can't handle them. "It can be so disruptive on the bus that I can't concentrate on driving," Cody said. "On these short buses, they're out of their seatbelts, kicking another kid, whacking him on the backpack. They'll snort red Kool-Aid—they think they get a good sugar high—then pretend they're bleeding at the nose for the benefit of the passing pedestrians. And the music ..."

I got to thinking about Cody last week because, in the space of three days, I finally read *Ricochet River* and stumbled upon a first edition of the novel at Wessel and Lieberman Booksellers in Seattle. *Ricochet River* is an Oregon classic, the tale of what happens to two kids and their Willamette Valley mill town when an Indian kid named Jesse arrives. For 17 years, Cody got nothing but rejection slips for that book; then *Dancing With Wolves* came out, publishers began looking for Native American material, and magically, Cody says, "All the stars aligned."

Cody admits, "I was forced by rejection to write the story over and over, and it got way better." Jesse's Indian roots and fishing experiences grew more complex. Ward, the narrator, grew more clueless. "The book got way better as I pulled back and made him a narrator that didn't get it." Cody sold the manuscript in 1990 and the novel was published in 1992. When it finally went out of print, Cody approached Portland's Ooligan Press about producing a new paperback edition. Ooligan's only request? Cody had to tone down the sex scenes so the paperback could be promoted to a high-school audience.

As I said, I just read the first edition ... and I don't remember any sex scenes.

Cody—who wrote of canoeing the length of the Columbia in *Voyage of a Summer Sun*—is returning to that river for his next book, a manuscript that's been stuck in a drawer, mocking him, for the last few years. The book—*Ring of History, Reach of Tide* is the tentative title—is about the evolution of species on the lower Columbia since the time of Lewis & Clark. Several of the plant species, he notes, arrived on the ballast of British ships. Cody plans on taking his 20-foot boat/writing studio down among the lower islands around Cathlamet and Clatskanie, and study the beavers, the blue heron and the wood ducks. "I'll stay out there for four days," Cody said, "until the ice melts in the cooler."

Ricochet River is published by Ooligan Press. For more information please visit our website, at www.ooliganpress.pdx.edu