

Discussion Questions

Use our LitLovers Book Club Resources; they can help with discussions for any book:

- How to Discuss a Book (helpful discussion tips)
- Generic Discussion Questions—Fiction and Nonfiction
- Read-Think-Talk (a guided reading chart)

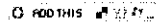
Also consider these LitLovers talking points to help get a discussion started for *Once Upon a River*:

1. How would you describe Margo Crane—what inner qualities enable her to leave home at 16 and survive a journey on the river? As a reader, do you find yourself connecting with her? Or is she too stoic and taciturn to fully engage your emotions?
2. In what way has her mother's abandonment of her shaped Margo's character?
3. Margo's initial reaction to her rape is to wonder whether somehow she was at fault. Do you think her response is typical of rape victims? Had *you* been a friend or family member, what would you tell her?
4. Is Margo responsible for her father's death?
5. How is this a coming of age story? What, by the end, has Margo learned during the course of her adventures? Does she learn anything? Has she grown or matured?
6. What do you make of Margo's sexual experiences? Is she overly compliant? Is her moral compass askew—in other words, is she morally compromised? Or is Margo a sturdy pragmatist, doing what she needs to survive? Or neither? What does the book suggest about moral clarity? Is there a different code of behavior in the wild than in society?
7. What about the men? Does Brian, for instance, have genuine concern for Margo's welfare, or is he merely an opportunist, taking whatever pleasure presents itself? How does Brian leave Margo exposed to the lusts of other men? What do you think of her relationship with Smoke?
8. Has Campbell presented us with stereotypes of men, or has she created them as distinct individuals revealing a wide variety of behavior? What do you think?
9. In her interaction with Michael, Margo says she was "feeling the same urgency she felt when she had a buck in her sights." Why does Campbell make this connection between sex and violence—what could she be suggesting about how the two human activities are related?
10. Talk about the book's title. What is the thematic significance of the river? What other works can involve a boat or ship and a body of water—ocean or river? What stands behind the metaphor?
11. Do you know the story of Annie Oakley? Why does Margo model herself after Oakley—what is the link between her and Oakley?

12. Margo is on the archetypal quest of a young hero (in this case, heroine). She is in search of her mother. What does the mother represent (young males typically search for fathers)? What do you think of Margo's mother once she finds her? For Margo, was the finding worth the journey?

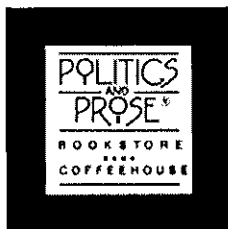
13. What's to become of Margo? What do you predict for her? What do you wish for her?

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Our bookseller, Angela Maria Williams, recently had the opportunity to correspond with Bonnie Jo Campbell about her most recently published book, *Once Upon a River* (W.W.Norton, \$25.95)

Hi, Bonnie Jo, I read *Once Upon a River* this summer and it was wonderful, so I've been recommending it like crazy.

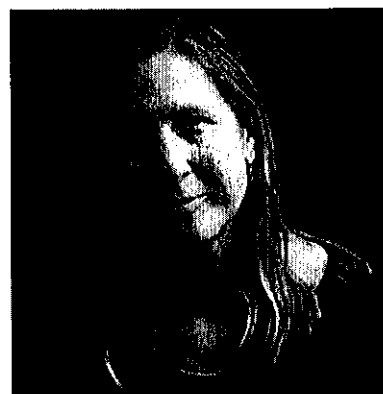
Thank you very much, Angela! You are most kind!

Your narrative flows so well and the story is very engaging but what struck me the most was Margo Crane herself. This is a character with an extremely rich interior life and I'm utterly fascinated by her. So much so that I wanted to pick your brain about how you developed Margo's character.

My pleasure!

So where did this character germinate? Have you been waiting to develop Margo for a while or did she come to you more recently?

Margo has been creeping up on me for years. Many years! There is a piece of my novel that came from one of the first stories I wrote, in my first real writing class. The story was called "The Fishing Dog" and the year was 1995 (And the teacher was Jaimy Gordon, National Book Award winner in Fiction 2010). This story is in my collection *Women & Other Animals* (Scribner, \$14), and the gal's name was Gwen. The second time Margo appeared was as the mother of the protagonist in my novel, *Q Road* (Scribner, \$15). And when I was out promoting that first novel, I would often encounter someone who would ask me to tell more about Margo Crane, who made only a brief appearance in the novel, as a beautiful woman who skinned animals and lived on a houseboat. Still, I thought I was finished with her. A few years later I wrote another story called "Family Reunion," which appears in my collection, *American Salvage* (W.W.Norton, \$13.95), in which a girl is molested by her uncle and after a year discovers the way to revenge his violation. So you might say that I've been living with Margo Crane for a while. And I enjoyed living with her the whole four years I was writing this novel.



Once Upon a River (Hardcover)

By Bonnie Jo Campbell

\$25.95

ISBN-13: 9780393079890

Availability: Not in the store - Ships in 1-5 days

Published: W. W. Norton & Company, 7/2011

Other Editions of this Title

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You've led quite an interesting life and I was wondering which specific experiences helped shape the background of Once Upon a River and Margo's experiences?

Compared to most of my stories, Once Upon a River contains very little autobiographical material. Probably the main inspiration from my life was my experiences growing up on a stream and a river. Behind my mother's house runs a stream, and so my brothers and sister and neighborhood friends spent a lot of our time Spring to Fall in the water. There we learned about minnows, muck, snapping turtles, blood suckers, and adventures traveling upstream. And my grandparents lived an hour away on a tiny island in the St. Joseph River; there we spent lots of time swimming, canoeing, rowing, fishing and playing in and around the swift current. There were water snakes, painted turtles, ducks, nighthawks, herons, and heronries. We met all kinds of interesting river folk, too, lots of people who knew how to make things and fix things.

I appreciate that while Margo has had a very traumatic life, she does not succumb to being a victim. In fact, her ability to overcome these things is what makes her such a strong character. But the question in my mind as I kept reading was if Margo is autistic. The length of her emotional process, her sharpshooting, that stubborn determination to live a very out-of-date lifestyle: these are all marks of someone with high-functioning autism (or perhaps something else?). Am I just the child of a psychologist overanalyzing it, or was this indeed a part of the character?

You are not the first person to ask me this question, about whether Margo is autistic, but I'm afraid I don't know enough to answer the question. I didn't specifically set out to create an autistic narrator, but perhaps I have done that—it would take a diagnostician to determine such a thing, I guess. Hey, maybe we can bring in a psychologist just for fun!

If it is a part of the character, what was its impetus? And could you talk about the process of developing Margo since it affects everything about her, from her reactions to what her uncle did to her to her struggle later on in the book on whether to have an abortion or not?

We writers develop characters the way parents raise children; we nourish them and study them and take note of their traits, skills, and sensibilities. Maybe the difference is that we writers don't want to fix our characters' flaws—instead we want to understand the consequences of having these character traits. Margo's slow deliberateness in making decisions and in understanding new stimuli is something I wanted to explore, in part because it's a problem I have myself, and also because it seems very much at odds with a contemporary existence, in which we are called upon to constantly make decisions and adapt. Like parents, we writers can be ignorant about the ones in our charge.

I revise a lot. Maybe that's where my own slowness at decision making works to my advantage. I tend to read my own scenes over and over to see if they feel true and true to the characters in them. The scene with Cal and the scene at the family planning clinic were ones that worked on endlessly, asking myself, "What is it like to be Margo now?" and, "What would Margo do?"

If it's not part of the character, what was your thought process for the above particular character traits as you wrote them because they're fascinating, especially since most of Margo's narrative is internal.

One of the greatest challenges of this book was that I was writing a character who didn't talk very much and who was alone most of the time. I was desperate to tell Margo's story, but there were many stages of writing this book at which I decided that it was going to be impossible to make Margo interesting. So thank you for telling me I succeeded.

For me, developing a character is sort of intuitive, like learning to dance or to sing or to ride a horse, or how to talk to a new friend. I write what I know the character does or thinks, and then I spend time with the character on the page, and that helps me know what else she is capable of or might enjoy. When I think about doing it, it seems very difficult and strange; when I sit down to do it on the page, it feels like the most natural thing.

Booklist called Margo the female Huck Finn. How do you feel about that comparison?

Bless the book reviewers. They've got a short time to live with a book and a small space in which to say something that will guide readers, and comparisons can be helpful in situating a book in the imagination. I will say that Margo is temperamentally nothing like Huck Finn. He's a trickster and a huckster and a fun-seeker, while Margo is just trying to survive and understand the world around her in her quiet, thoughtful way. Compared to Huck, she's kind of dull—or perhaps I should say, Huck would be more fun at a party. However, there are some similarities. Both kids are motherless teenagers forced to flee home after the deaths of their fathers. Both are determined to survive. Neither are primarily victims, though both of their situations are filled with trouble and strife that they did not bring onto themselves. Both books are episodic; my book owes some of that to the Odyssey, and we can guess that is the case for Huck Finn as well.

Finally, what couldn't make it into the book that was most difficult for you to leave out?

Much of what I had to cut from the book was more of everything. I had more of the Indian, more of her mother living on the lake, more about Smoke. My editor, Jill Bialosky, had to remind me at some parts of the book that this was Margo's story, not the Indian's and not her mother's.

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us about Once Upon a River! We're excited to share your interview with our customers on our website.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about Once Upon a River. It's been my pleasure. Cheers!



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By Bonnie Jo Campbell

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10 Questions with Doug TenNapel ▶

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Review: 'Once Upon a River' by Bonnie Jo Campbell

Her mother has already abandoned her, and with her father gone, Margo sets out to make a life for herself on the aptly named Stark River.

By Alan Cheuse

Special to the Tribune

Have you ever seen a deer eating a bird? Then you probably haven't yet read a beautiful, advertisement if not always pretty, novel about a latter-day female Huck Finn either. Well, the scene of the deer eating a bird comes from "Once Upon a River," a new novel from Bonnie Jo Campbell. (Her stories, "American Salvage," made her a finalist for the National Book Award in 2009.) Her novel contains a large number of other interesting details in addition to the aforementioned curiosity of animal life, all of them observed by Margo Crane, the teenage girl who serves as the main character. The details that make up her story I find to be quite unparalleled in our fiction.

The opening paragraph, for example, stands out as one of the most striking I have read in a long time. "The Stark River," Campbell writes, "flowed around the oxbow at Murrayville the way blood flowed through Margo Crane's heart. She rowed upstream to see wood ducks, canvasbacks, and ospreys and to search for tiger salamanders in the ferns. She drifted downstream to find painted turtles sunning on fallen trees and to count the herons in the herony beside the Murrayville cemetery. She tied up her boat and followed shallow feeder streams to collect crayfish, watercress, and tiny strawberries. Her feet toughened against sharp stones and broken glass. When Margo swam, she swallowed minnows alive and felt the Stark River move inside her..."

What a way to begin our own journey through this engaging novel! Everything is here: young Margo's deep ties to the living world, water in particular, her curiosity and adventurous nature, the presence of blood and family ties (and the hint of death), way the world tests her and moves inside her, and hints of her struggle to find freedom in a world of predetermined flow. Upstream, downstream, this young hero wants to make her own way. Though because of all this a reader may immediately conjure up an association with Huck Finn, Margo herself has a real-life hero in sharpshooting Annie Oakley. She, like her idol, has a knack for target-shooting, a skill that changes her young life when, after she is raped by her uncle she shoots him in his privates, which leads almost immediately to the death of her father.

Her mother has already abandoned her, and with her father gone, Margo sets out to make a life for herself on the aptly named Stark River, which Campbell has invented to help Margo go with life's flow. Or sometimes against it. She skins fish, cooks ducks, beds down in the raw elements, makes friends, hides from enemies, mourns for her father, searches for her mother, takes lovers—which, at least when she first starts out, makes all the men she sleeps with into statutory rapists and turns her into the most realistic underage runaway in modern fiction—and sometimes shoots to kill.

Fortunately Bonnie Jo Campbell works all of this material, some lyrical, some naturalistic, and all of it contributing to the creation of a heroine some smart young adolescents may find as attractive as Annie Oakley—or Huck. With an ease and an always convincing prose, this novel is one of the most compelling of the year.

Alan Cheuse is the author of the new novel "Song of Slaves in the Desert"

"Once Upon a River"

By Bonnie Jo Campbell

W.W. Norton, \$25.95, 348 pages

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July 22, 2011

Bonnie Jo Campbell's Rural Michigan Gothic

By JANE SMILEY

ONCE UPON A RIVER

By Bonnie Jo Campbell
348 pp. W. W. Norton & Company. \$25.95.

Bonnie Jo Campbell's first novel, "Q Road," published in 2002, told the story of Rachel Crane, an isolated and determined young woman who lives in meth country outside Kalamazoo, Mich., with her even more eccentric mother, Margo. After Margo shoots a local womanizer who has designs on the under-age Rachel, she disappears, and Rachel, more out of practicality than love, marries the farmer who owns the property where she and her mother have always lived. "Q Road" was widely praised for its authentic rendering of rural Michigan: part dump, part wilderness and part farmland. "Once Upon a River," Campbell's second novel, leaves off where "Q Road" began — it is the story of Margo Crane, herself a difficult and willful young woman, who is 15 when the novel opens in the late 1970s.

Margo's nickname in her family is "Sprite," and she has the cautious, defensive nature of a woodland animal — she rarely speaks, she always observes and her affections are remote ones. Even her father, with whom she lives in a little riverside house, can hardly get her to say anything, and so he treats her with a mixture of attention and bemusement. She is estranged, reluctantly, from the cousins across the river with whom she played as a child, and from her aunt, the source of all such homely comforts as cinnamon bread and Thanksgiving dinner. She is not quite sure why her mother has vanished, but does understand that she hated the hardscrabble conditions of life on the river and did not care for the relatives. As the novel opens, Margo's activities have become solitary —

she is no longer going to school, she is an adept oarswoman, she enjoys watching her cousins' dogs and she is learning to shoot.

Once Margo gets a rifle, her great passion becomes hunting. With single-minded dedication, she becomes so adept that she can kill a muskrat by shooting it in the eye (thereby leaving the hide undamaged), and she knows how to choose just the sort of ammunition that won't exit its skull on the other side. She practices every day, until she comes to understand how her body and the world form themselves around the perfect shot, and she soon has a sixth sense about where she is in relation to her guns at all times. She strongly identifies with Annie Oakley, and cannot understand how anyone could feel comfortable in a large building or a town, or even in a parking lot. The meticulous manner in which Campbell deploys the details of Margo's developing expertise as a sharpshooter is utterly convincing, one of the many pleasures of "Once Upon a River." Here she is, for instance, shooting an acorn off a horse apple:

"She took a deep breath, relaxed her shoulders and slowed her heartbeat. She studied the railroad-tie fence post from its base to its top, as it rose to about her own height. She studied the green fruit with the burr acorn on top. Beyond it was the smooth expanse of river. She wrapped the sling around her left hand and elbow and pushed against it. When she nestled the stock in her shoulder and pressed her cheek against it, her stance and grip were solid. . . . She looked through her sights. Her instructor had talked about the 'wobble' in a person's hold, had said a person could never be absolutely solid, but for Margo there usually came an instant like now when she felt solidly rooted to the planet. Without a conscious decision to do so, she smoothly pushed the trigger straight back and held it there as the rifle sent the bullet down the barrel on its way to the acorn. She knew it was a good shot. She held steady even after she heard a sound like the final hard tap of a woodpecker's beak against an oak branch."

Unfortunately for Margo, she is extremely beautiful, which means that she all too often attracts the gaze of men and boys — she herself is the white deer or the blond wolf, too striking to be left alone to follow her solitary path. There is room here for feminist grandstanding, but Campbell tends to be more of a naturalist than that; she lets the facts speak for themselves

so the book's sexual aggression feels, almost, less like a crime than a mere twist of fate.

That doesn't mean Margo isn't vulnerable. She has been raped, just after her 15th birthday, by an uncle who lures her into a shed by promising to show her how to skin a deer. The attack, witnessed by her cousin, sets in motion the disintegration of the world she once knew. As "Once Upon a River" opens a year later, Margo accelerates this disintegration by shooting off the end of her uncle's penis (no more difficult, really, than shooting an acorn off a piece of fruit). Her act leads to the death of her father, leaving Margo alone to evade both her relatives and the government authorities who might take her into custody.

As in "American Salvage," her celebrated story collection from 2009, Campbell has a ruthless and precise eye for the details of the physical world. The river is no paradise, with factories like the one founded by Margo's beloved grandfather and run by her uncle polluting both the water and the air. Margo, though, young, innocent and in danger, accepts that this fallen world is hers. She defends her right to make her own decisions, and even when they are bad decisions Campbell is clear they are the only ones she could make. Because she has nothing, Margo must rely upon the kindness of strangers (all of them male). The best of these is Michael, a generous liberal with a good dog and a sense of humor. Margo lives with him for a winter, comes to love him and almost marries him. But Michael is not cut out for survival in the war of all against all that is southern Michigan. As she learns eventually, neither is Margo cut out for conjugal love.

Campbell so intently scrutinizes Margo's inner life that she does not seem to be asserting any larger point about American culture or human nature — but she is. Margo's concerns are immediate: food, dogs, guns, moving her boat from one place to another, finding a place to take shelter. Abstracting meaning from her experience is difficult and almost painful, possibly because the first meaning she would have to abstract is that no one she knows is willing or able to care for her. In this, she could be Huck Finn, except that her world is much more dangerous and confined than his. Nor does she get to follow Annie Oakley's path, realizing her talents to the amazement of multitudes. She must, in fact, engender "Q Road" —

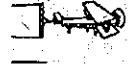
that is, make the best life she can for Rachel, the daughter she is about to give birth to at the end of "Once Upon a River." Because Margo is so strong and idiosyncratic, because she possesses such great natural innocence, the reader would like her to transcend her circumstances, but the constant refrain of her life, as young as she is, is not transcendence but consequences. She is doomed to pay the price for her ignorance, pay the price for her enthusiasm, pay the price for her affections and pay the price for the sins of those who came before. The damaged world she lives in remains an ecosystem in which animals and humans, field and stream, purity and pollution, love and hate are tightly interconnected. It would be too bad if, because of Campbell's realistic style and ferocious attention to her setting, "Once Upon a River" were discounted as merely a fine example of American regionalism. It is, rather, an excellent American parable about the consequences of our favorite ideal, freedom.

Jane Smiley is the author of "Private Life," "A Good Horse," "The Man Who Invented the Computer" and many other books.

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Writer Bonnie Jo Campbell on her new novel ONCE UPON A RIVER

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Bonnie Jo Campbell talks about her new book [Once Upon a River](#)

<http://www.powells.com/partner/34985/biblio/97803993341275?o=ti>

, an odyssey of a novel about a girl's search for love and identity.

(Photo © Bradley S. Pines)

Bonnie Jo Campbell grew up on a small Michigan farm with her mother and four siblings in a house her grandfather Herlihy built in the shape of an H. She learned to castrate small pigs, milk Jersey cows, and, when she was snowed in with chocolate, butter, and vanilla, to make remarkable chocolate candy. When she left home for the University of Chicago to study philosophy, her mother rented out her room. She has since hitchhiked across the U.S. and Canada, scaled the Swiss alps on her bicycle, and traveled with the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus selling snow cones. As president of Goulash Tours Inc., she has organized and led adventure tours in Russia and the Baltics, and all the way south to Romania and Bulgaria.

Her collection [details the lives of extraordinary females in rural and small town Michigan, and it won the AWP prize for short fiction](#); her story "The Smallest Man in the World" has been awarded a Pushcart Prize. Her novel <http://www.powells.com/partner/34985/biblio/9780743203074?o=ti> *O Road* <http://www.powells.com/partner/34985/biblio/9780743203561?o=ti> investigates the lives of a rural community where development pressures are bringing unwelcome change in the character of the land. Her critically-acclaimed short fiction collection [American Salvage](#) <http://www.powells.com/partner/34985/biblio/9780614334126?o=ti>, which consists of fourteen lush and rowdy stories of folks who are struggling to make sense of the twenty-first century, was a finalist for the 2009 National Book Award in Fiction.



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A WELL-READ ONLINE COMMUNITY
Once Upon a River (Campbell)

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Once Upon a River

Bonnie Jo Campbell, 2011

W.W. Norton & Co.

348 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780393079890

Summary

Bonnie Jo Campbell has created an unforgettable heroine in sixteen-year-old Margo Crane, a beauty whose unflinching gaze and uncanny ability with a rifle have not made her life any easier.

After the violent death of her father, in which she is complicit, Margo takes to the Stark River in her boat, with only a few supplies and a biography of Annie Oakley, in search of her vanished mother. But the river, Margo's childhood paradise, is a dangerous place for a young woman traveling alone, and she must be strong to survive, using her knowledge of the natural world and her ability to look unsparingly into the hearts of those around her.

Her river odyssey through rural Michigan becomes a defining journey, one that leads her beyond self-preservation and to the decision of what price she is willing to pay for her choices. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—c. 1962
- Where—Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA
- Education—B.A., University of Chicago; M.A., M.F.A., Western Michigan State University
- Awards—Pushcart Prize; Associated Writing Programs Award for Short Fiction; Eudora Welty Prize
- Currently—lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Bonnie Jo Campbell is an American novelist and short story writer.

Campbell attended received an B.A. in philosophy from the University of Chicago in 1984. From Western Michigan University, she received an MA in mathematics in 1995 and an MFA in creative writing in 1998. She has traveled with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, and has organized adventure bicycle tours in Eastern Europe and Russia.

She was a finalist for the 2009 National Book Award in fiction for her short-story collection *American Salvage*, which the *Kansas City Star* also named a Top Six Book of 2009. *American Salvage*, was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction. She has won a Pushcart Prize for her story "The Smallest Man in the World," the 1998 Associated Writing Programs Award for short fiction (for Women & Other Animals), and the 2009 Eudora Welty Prize from *Southern Review* for "The Inventor, 1972."

Her stories and essays have also appeared in *Ontario Review*, *Story*, *Kenyon Review*, *Witness*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Utne Reader*. In 1999, her story "Shifting Gears" was the official story of the Detroit Automobile Dealers' Association Show.

Campbell lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, with her husband, Christopher Magson and teaches fiction at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, in the low-residency MFA program. (From Wikipedia.)

Book Reviews

The river is no paradise, with factories like the one founded by Margo's beloved grandfather and run by her uncle polluting both the water and the air. Margo, though, young, innocent and in danger, accepts that this fallen world is hers. She defends her right to make her own decisions, and even when they are bad decisions Campbell is clear they are the only ones she could make.... [Campbell's novel is] an excellent American parable about the consequences of our favorite ideal, freedom.

Jane Smiley - New York Times Book Review

For many chapters this is a sad, harrowing story, but Campbell doesn't leave us there. Margo's hushed voice is so pure, her spirit so indomitable, that you'll yearn for her to find the freedom she craves, along with a stretch of clean water. *Once Upon a River* makes you realize with a stab of regret just how cramped and homogeneous our lives and our expectations of others are. I hope Margo's out there somewhere skinning a catfish and cooking it on a hickory stick. It's a hard life, to be sure, but this novel is a celebration of that possibility and its brutal costs.

Ron Charles - Washington Post

If this sounds a bit like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the comparison is, perhaps, inevitable: Put a teenager on a river, and that's what you get. Yet Campbell has something less resolved in mind here, not a picaresque journey, not even a moral awakening, but a coming-of-age in the most concrete sense.

David Ulin - Los Angeles Times

Once Upon a River, Campbell's second novel, picks up where *American Salvage* left off. But...this is a sweeter, more magical note in Campbell's western Michigan mythology. Set in the late 70s, the deceptively simple premise—a sixteen-year-old girl on a river—draws in the reader. Lush descriptions of western Michigan's Stark River dominate the opening...and dreamlike prose flows along the banks and down the river.... The concrete details are grounding but made extraordinary by Campbell's musical syntax.

Josh Cook - Iowa Review

With all the fixings of a Johnny Cash song—love, loss, redemption—Campbell captures these Michiganders and their earthy, brutal paradise in tales rich with insight and well worth the trip.

Natash Clark - Elle

Margo has adventures marked by sameness instead of variety. Essentially similar events recur throughout the novel, sapping it of initial narrative momentum. These include occurrences both major...and comparatively trivial....Campbell could have called the novel "Twice upon a River.

John G. Rodwan, Jr. - OregonLive.com

This second novel by National Book Award finalist Campbell (*American Salvage*) is set in Murrayville, a rural Michigan town far removed from the modern world. Inhabitants have lived off the Stark River for generations, including 16-year-old Margo Crane's family. She's been taught the best fishing spots and knows the hidden dangers downstream from the Murray Metal Fabricating Plant. Her carefree existence ends when her mother, a depressed alcoholic, leaves town, and Margo is raped by her uncle Cal. Margo's unique revenge leads to her father's death, a tragic event that nevertheless sets her free from being at the mercy of the Murrays. Equipped with ammunition, food, her father's ashes, and a pink envelope with her mother's return address, she takes her father's boat downstream, determined to find her mother. Margo survives by hunting, fishing, and garden pilfering and by distrusting people. Her river odyssey ultimately leads to self-preservation on her terms. *Verdict:* A truthful and deeply human story that pulls us in and won't let go. Readers looking for superior fiction are in for an uplifting, first-rate story. —Donna Bettencourt, Mesa Cty. P.L., Grand Junction, CO

Library Journal

(Starred review.) Margo's earthy education and the profound complexities of her timeless dilemmas are exquisitely rendered and mesmerizingly suspenseful. A glorious novel destined to entrance and provoke.

Booklist



BONNIE JO CAMPBELL | WRITER

EVENTS | PUBLISHER | BOOKS & STORIES | GORILLA GIRL ADVENTURES | PICS | ONLINE INTERVIEWS | REVIEWS | AMERICAN SALVAGE | HELP FOR WRITERS | PEP TALK

(the gorilla girl will take you home)

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Author Biography

Bonnie Jo Campbell grew up on a small Michigan farm with her mother and four siblings in a house her grandfather Herlhy built in the shape of an H. She learned to castrate small pigs, milk Jersey cows, and, when she was snowed in with chocolate, butter, and vanilla, to make remarkable chocolate candy. When she left home for the University of Chicago to study philosophy, her mother rented out her room. She has since hitchhiked across the U.S. and Canada, scaled the Swiss alps on her bicycle, and traveled with the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus selling snow cones. As president of Goulash Tours Inc., she has organized and led adventure tours in Russia and the Baltics, and all the way south to Romania and Bulgaria.

Her collection *Women and Other Animals* details the lives of extraordinary females in rural and small town Michigan, and it won the AWP prize for short fiction; her story "The Smallest Man in the World" has been awarded a Pushcart Prize. Her novel *Q Road* investigates the lives of a rural community where development pressures are bringing unwelcome change in the character of the land. Her critically-acclaimed short fiction collection *American Salvage*, which consists of fourteen lush and rowdy stories of folks who are struggling to make sense of the twenty-first century, was a finalist for the 2009 National Book Award in Fiction.

For decades, Campbell has put together a personal newsletter - *The Letter Parade* - and she currently practices Koburyu kobudo weapons training. She has received her M.A. in mathematics and her M.F.A. in writing from Western Michigan University. She now lives with her husband and other animals outside Kalamazoo, and she teaches writing in the low residency program at Pacific University.

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