

To the Deep!

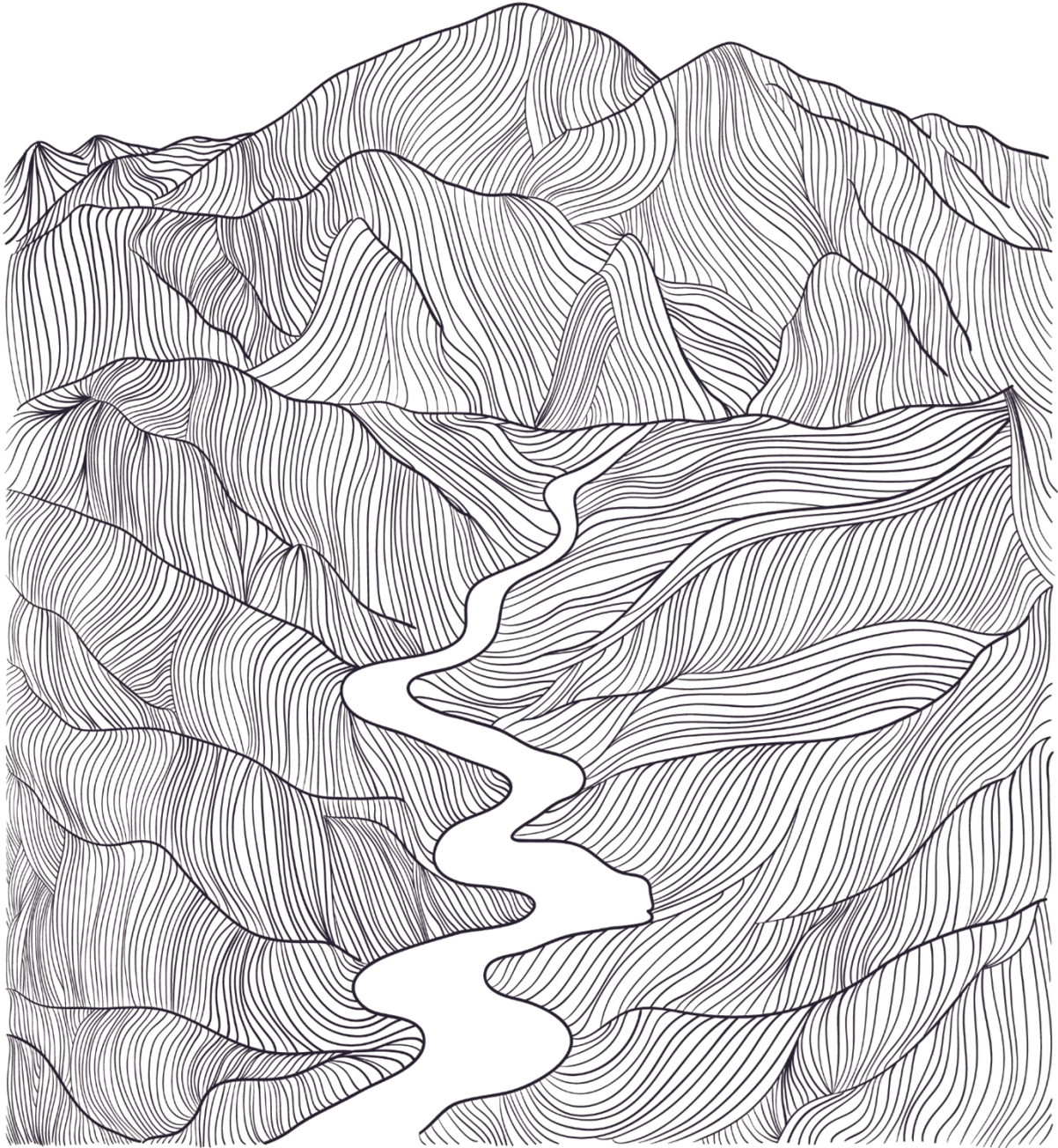
Yvonne Ghavalas

Community Minister of the Southern Region, Riverina.

I'm a city girl from South Africa.

What do I know about rivers, I wondered, other than the fact that tons of waste - human, plastic, metal and rubber – flow with the Jukskei through the heart of Alexandra Township where children play and women rub their hands raw cleaning clothes and the really poor draw, with their drinking water, cholera and other contaminants; and foreigners and newcomers are accidentally baptised along with all their meagre belongings when the bank caves in or the river floods I wonder, and slowly memories float to the surface... of riding horses on a family holiday beneath the festive canopy of flaming poplar leaves - the Caledon River a wide and muddy divider between us and the children on the other side who stop skipping stones to wave and shout and run beside us until they're out of breath and disappear against the brown hills where thin donkeys bray...

...of running barefoot with my brothers on freshly cut grass to join the black blurs of our dogs in the shallow stream where we spent lazy Sunday afternoons vying to catch cranky crabs with bits of bacon tied to a string and tadpoles with my mum's flour sieve (which one of us had carefully smuggled out - though, in hindsight, I'm sure she knew) ...



... of careening round narrow UK roads between Hadrian's Wall and Gretna Green in a tiny car with the windows rolled down to accommodate my heavily pregnant friend while I slowly turned purple from cold in the back seat; our raucous laughter silenced by a silver cascade splitting open the grey canopy of cloud and glistening and gleaming down the green, green, green

of a hill that disappeared too rapidly from view ... of hiking through the empty expanse of the Kruger National Park to gaze over the Luvuvhu River Valley and the eerie, enormous, evergreen Nyala trees which send their roots down deep into the soil where there is water even when the river runs low, and the baboons seek shelter, and the antelope graze, and the leopards hunt in the undergrowth, while the crocodiles control the balance of fish in the water - all animal and plant life working together for good ...

... of taking my children by the hand to gaze up at rainbows strewn in the sky by waterfalls -framed by the verdant greens of things growing in the unlikelyst of places; or down at giant potholes that swirling eddies of water have shaped in the sandstone through the ages -unperturbed, unprepared to alter their course, no matter the obstacle...

... of leaving my Anglo-African roots - long nourished by the living waters of heart-family and Christian community - to be planted, by faith, by the big waters of the Murrumbidgee in a time of drought when the language of scarcity and decline makes it hard to remember where we've come from or perceive the signs of life all around us or trust God for what lies around the unseen bend or hold community together with our own shallow strength.

Let's listen again to the shh-shh-shh of the Spirit murmuring over the hard, hurt places: "to the deep, to the deep"... to the deep, beloved, where we'll one day walk again in the garden with God, and the tears that we cried by the rivers of Babylon will be wiped away by God's own hand, and the crystal

clear waters of Life will flow from the throne down the middle of our streets, and night will be no more.



Yvonne Ghavalas