



***Tim Tingle***

## **TeachingBooks.net Original In-depth Author Interview**

**Tim Tingle interviewed August 9, 2011 in his home in Canyon Lake, Texas.**

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** You are an award-winning author and acclaimed storyteller, bringing the life and lore of the Choctaw people alive. Please talk about growing up Native American.

**TIM TINGLE:** I was raised on the Texas Gulf Coast in a small town about 20–25 miles outside of Houston, which was a good distance in those days. I was raised close to my grandmother who was full-blood Choctaw. We were Oklahoma Choctaw, which means that someone in our direct ancestry survived the Trail of Tears, made claims to an Indian land grant in Oklahoma. We never really understood that we were Indian because of what TV and movies were presenting to us as Indians. We knew that wasn't us at all.

So, once we reached an age of understanding in my dad's and uncle's eyes, they would toss as many of us cousins as would fit on the back of the pickup trucks, and we would drive several hundred miles into the big thicket of east Texas. This was the wilds at the time—there were actually wolves in the big thicket. I believe it's a national forest now. Someone could build a house deep in the big thicket and no one would say a word as long as they could get their truck back there and live. We would bring backpacks and camp out for several days most summers. We would have to walk a full day where no car or truck could ever drive carrying salt, sugar, coffee, eggs, water, and we would either fish or hunt the whole time.

The whole purpose of doing that was after supper, my uncles and my dad would get us snuggled in our sleeping bags and the campfire would burn low and they would tell us about being Choctaw. They would talk to us about my great-great granddad, John Carnes, and how he had walked on the Trail of Tears. He survived it, his mother died on the trail, but they carried her body and she was buried in what is now Oklahoma. At the time, it was Indian territory.

They told us about my grandmother having been orphaned and sent to an Indian boarding school, not being allowed to speak her language. My grandmother always warned us not to let people at school know that we were Indian. She said it was just safer not to let them know. Of course, by that time there wasn't the kind of extreme racism against Indians that she had experienced, but she couldn't imagine it changing so much, so she warned us. I graduated in a class of 700, and only a few that were very close to our family knew that I was Choctaw.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** It is tremendously powerful that you grew up living a cultural secret. And now you are a voice for Native Americans, often bridging the gap between Indian and White cultures. As someone who has such a role, please share what terminology you prefer to use.

**TIM TINGLE:** I use the terms “American Indian” and “Native American” interchangeably. Some people favor one, some people favor the other, but most of us simply refer to ourselves as “Indians.” I’ll say “American Indians” because now there are so many people from India that I think we need to distinguish, but I think those terms are interchangeable and neither should be politically more correct than the other. The same with “First Peoples.” We know whom we’re talking about.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What was it like being raised with a foot in both worlds?

**TIM TINGLE:** Most American Indian writers I know were raised in both worlds. It seems as if it’s somehow easier for us to build bridges between them, knowing the stereotypes and the expectations of the Anglo Western European world and knowing that in Indian country, even today, there is the idea that white Americans are much more insightful and much more educated and much more aware of American Indians today than in years past.

In reality, as I wrote in *SaltyPie*, I really think it’s still true that we’re the most misunderstood of Americans. If you think of “Celebrate Native American Month” and you walk into an elementary school, on most of the bulletin boards you’ll see a single picture with a name under it. It’s one stereotype after another.

To break those boundaries and build bridges, you first have to make friends. You have to let people know that your intentions are respectful, and you’re not about waving a flag saying they are ignorant—you’re simply trying to teach in a good-natured and respectful way.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Can you talk about some of those controversies? Please share your thoughts on how they are presented and what you suggest for people who are not Indian.

**TIM TINGLE:** I think the primary point of understanding is that American Indians were never a primitive people. When Columbus landed, more than 50% of the American Indian population lived in towns, had town governments, had councils, had the equivalent of state and national governments, and recognized boundaries. They raised gardens and oftentimes raised livestock, and had what would be equivalent to social welfare. For example, if a husband or wife lost a key family member and could no longer take care of the children in the way that would be comfortable, then there were communal gardens and storehouses that they could pull from. There were communal storehouses as well as individual storehouses.

All this existed before Columbus landed. But with the destruction that followed, and the pushing and the moving out, people lost their homelands and became migratory. The image of Indians that was presented was that they were primitives. My strong feeling, and it's very much backed up by history, is that the idea that they were primitive somehow justified what was done to them, including the theft of the land.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** How do you maintain sensitivity with your white readership and audiences when you clarify misconceptions that are so deeply rooted?

**TIM TINGLE:** You have to be very cautious. I had a great learning experience in 1993. I had a Trail of Tears story I had worked on for a year, and I presented it at a storytelling festival. During the first five minutes, the entire first row of the audience stood up, glared at me and walked out. And then for the next 30 minutes, little groups would get up and walk out. It just shook my back teeth. But they had walked out because I had started off by talking about the distribution of smallpox blankets to reduce the population of the people on the Trail of Tears.

I didn't tell the story again for over a year, but I kept working on it. What I did was create a ten-year-old boy—he was my great-great grandfather, but I didn't say it—and I started off by telling the story in first person. As you listen, you really like this kid and you like his mom and you like his dad, and you're 10 minutes into the story before you ever realize it's not me talking about my childhood—I'm doing a first person recollection. Then the soldiers come and the homes are burned down. By the time you're swept up into the history part of the story, you really care about these people. That's a way, I think, that fiction can present history in a much more moving and profound and memorable way than nonfiction can.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** When did you start writing?

**TIM TINGLE:** I started writing at an early age, probably around second or third grade. I wrote short stories inspired by TV shows like *Zorro* and *Rin Tin Tin* and those kinds of things. I would write little skits and short stories about those shows. And I kept writing. I got really interested in poetry during junior high and high school, and mostly wrote poetry then.

My English degree from University of Texas took a long time—seven years for my bachelor's degree—because I paid my way through. I had some incredible instructors, and I just dove into the world of Dostoevsky and Shakespeare—and especially Steinbeck, Hemingway, and Faulkner. I think those still very much influence my writing, even my writing for children.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** You're making literary nonfiction of sorts.

**TIM TINGLE:** Yes. And sometimes what I do is categorized as historical fiction. I think that's not right because the main characters are never the historical characters; they are the characters that are influenced by the decisions made by key figures.

Whether it's ghost or American Indian stories, I really try to focus on families and how families and individuals are impacted by things that happen around them.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Can you give a few examples of how you keep a focus on families in your stories?

**TIM TINGLE:** *Walking the Choctaw Road* was my first published book. It's a collection of 11 short stories that I wanted Choctaw people to read and understand and appreciate. In it is a boarding school story, called "Tony Byars," which focuses more on Tony as an individual rather than on the specific things that happened to boarding school people. It's about how Tony goes through the day and how he learns to deal with what is happening to him. I think it's true of all effective writing, but it's especially necessary with this vast misunderstanding about American Indian history, to write about specific people, about their emotions, and about what's happening.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Is the vanquishing of stereotypes part of the reason why you write?

**TIM TINGLE:** It's a major reason why I write. The American Library Association researched how many illustrated children's books show American Indians in modern clothing—there were maybe four. So even though we strive to teach and overcome the stereotypes, we're giving visual images that reinforce the stereotypes.

When I first started writing seriously, with the idea of getting published, I knew that there were two stories that I just needed to get out there. One was *Saltypie*, the story of my grandmother's blindness, and the other was The Trail of Tears story. It is the key story in *Walking the Choctaw Road*. I knew that those two stories had impacted my life, and the Trail of Tears story has affected hundreds of thousands of Indians' lives going back almost a century now.

There is no way I have of thanking them, but those 20 to 30 people in the front row of that 1993 storytelling concert who stood up and walked out when I gave my first version of the Trail of Tears let me know that not only was my story not well done, but the facts are horrific and I needed to go back to the starting point. It shook me, it shocked me, and it told me that my whole approach needed to be different. I needed to focus on people and families, and readers or listeners needed to like the characters so they would be affected by what was happening to them.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** The boarding school experience is particularly relevant to young people because they're familiar with the concept of school. However, they're not quite

familiar with the concept of assimilation, of forced removal, and so forth. Can you share some of those details?

**TIM TINGLE:** I was at a fort in Jacksonville, Florida, and the man who ran that fort had the philosophy, “Kill the Indian and save the man.” In other words, completely wash away every language, every bit of culture, every element of clothing from the Indian youth. If you could wash brain cells to do away with memories, I’m sure they would have done that.

They took young Indians, moved them far away from their homes—from their families, from their tribal communities—and punished them if they spoke their own language. If they didn’t speak a word of English, they still punished them for speaking their own language and made sure that they learned English.

Also, they would not bunk people with members of their own nation in the barracks. So a Choctaw would never be roomed with other Choctaws. A Navajo would be roomed with maybe Lakota, maybe Abenaki, maybe Cherokee—people who didn’t speak their language. If they spoke their own language, no one would understand them anyway, so English became the language of conversation. Even before the first day at the school—sometimes even before they got on the trains to go to the schools—the kids would have their hair cut, their clothing burned, and be given uniforms to wear.

What I wanted to do with the “Tony Byars” story in *Walking the Choctaw Road* was to focus on one particular character. Someone who had gone to an Indian boarding school allowed me to interview him about his experience. He wanted me to know what had gone on there. I started the Choctaw Storytelling Festival just a couple years later and now have about 100 hours of interviews with old Choctaws, and probably 20-plus hours of descriptions of boarding school experiences. They vary from one boarding school to another, but the philosophy that they lived through, “Kill the Indian and save the man,” was very consistent.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Did your grandmother talk about her boarding school experience?

**TIM TINGLE:** She talked about it some, but more to my aunts than anyone else. The information we got about what she had experienced was more through my aunts and a few of my uncles.

She was orphaned and sent to a boarding school. She didn’t speak a word of English, and she was punished. She said they would have to hold their hands out and a teacher would whip them on the knuckles with a wooden ruler until their knuckles bled as punishment for speaking their own language. All of the kids went home for Christmas and for holidays, but my grandmother had no home to go to, so they would trade her around from one teacher’s house to another during the Christmas holidays. It was a very hard time for her.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Are the hardships she endured the reason *Saltypie* sort of glosses over that aspect of the experience?

**TIM TINGLE:** Yeah, I think so. She was a quiet woman but she learned how to be strong in her silence. She would study people, and even when she grew blind, she was still one of the most incredible judges of character you could ever imagine because she would pay so much attention to what other people were doing and saying.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Is it okay with your family for you to publish stories of your family and ancestors?

**TIM TINGLE:** I think every writer has to answer that question on his or her own. My family is universally supportive of my telling the family stories. At a big family reunion I gave away autographed copies of *Walking the Choctaw Road*, and everybody was very excited about it. It includes "Saltypie" and a story called "Archie's War," which is about my troubles with my dad and how we learned to respect each other in the midst of the Vietnam War, with both of us taking vastly different sides on it.

The book *Saltypie* is very well received. My cousin, who works with the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., is an attorney, and she came to hear me speak about a month ago at the Library of Congress. She came up just beaming and made a nice Facebook post about it. The family is very excited and very proud of it.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Is it true that stories have to be written differently depending on whether the audience will be listening to or reading the stories? You're an amazing storyteller, and a lot of what you say wouldn't necessarily work if it were written.

**TIM TINGLE:** That is one of the reasons I unplugged my storytelling career and went to the University of Oklahoma to study with a great Cherokee poet, and chaired the American Indian Studies Department at OU. I began to recognize that when I would transcribe my stories, they just did not come across well in written form. Without the voice inflections, the gestures, the facial expressions, and the silence . . . they just didn't work. Silence is the number one thing I discovered that you cannot do on the written page. It has no impact on the page.

In an oral performance, if you have something critical to say, you pause first, and what follows needs to be important because people will remember it. You can't do that on the written page.

Also, the author has no control over the speed with which the written story is presented. I realized that the written word is a totally different art form, and I needed to re-inform myself around that art form because I'd been in storytelling for several years.

In storytelling, you never need adverbs because you get all that across with your body language and your tones of voice. You don't have to say, "He spoke angrily."

When you do the quote, you do it with a bitter expression on your face and the audience gets it.

I loved isolating myself and focusing on short stories. I did quite a bit of poetry there too, but I really focused on writing *Walking the Choctaw Road* from about 10:00 until midnight in my office at University of Oklahoma. I was teaching freshman writing classes while going to grad school.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** When you're writing, what's your process? Is there something about coming out of a culture with a powerful oral tradition that affects your writing process?

**TIM TINGLE:** Yes, I think there is a difference. Hopefully it's subtle, but some reviewers have mentioned that there is an oral quality, an ease of movement, to my writing.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** The characters in your books are really powerful. Where do you do your research?

**TIM TINGLE:** When I'm involved in written work, I'm here in my wonderful study, out by the lake, and I don't have any close-by neighbors. If a car goes down my street, it's either the mail carrier, the trash collector, or they are lost.

I'm isolated, so when I go out to just go to a restaurant or the grocery store, it's an adventure for me. And, it's as if the people I encounter are characters. I love to engage in conversation with the checkout person or the person making my coffee, or the person sitting next to me when the plane is late.

I like to make stories up about people that I see that I don't even talk to. I just try to figure it out—by what they're wearing, how they're walking, the expression on their face, what they do with their hands and their faces when they think no one's looking—how this person got to be this way. I think this is true for a lot of writers. Whenever we go out, we are always keeping our eyes open for something that could go in a story. I like to tell young writers that they should see things that no one else has ever seen before. If their writing is going to be unique, they need to see and observe things that no one else has seen before in the things around them.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Please talk about some of your book characters.

**TIM TINGLE:** In the boarding school story called "Tony Byars," there are two teachers. One teacher is very stern and punitive, and the other is very warm and understanding.

I modeled the second teacher after two teachers that I had in school. They were both history teachers, and both were so caring about the students. One was an amazing seventh grade history teacher and a fabulous storyteller. He would stand and tell stories about historical figures and you would never forget them.

The other was a quieter person. I had him for two years of high school. He taught the course that was contemporary American history up to the Vietnam War, which we were experiencing at that time, and he would bring in folk singers and make it a whole cultural experience. To get us ready for college he would arrange the schedule with all the other classes so he could give us three-hour exams, knowing that we were going to be taking three-hour exams for finals in college.

So, a lot of the characters that might seem to be minor characters in the stories that I write are people that I know. If I can't quite get the description of a person, it's always on a side burner.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** Please talk about *Crossing Bok Chitto*.

**TIM TINGLE:** I volunteered at my son's school for a few years and people started asking me questions. This was before I became a professional storyteller.

People would say, "I have a friend who teaches at this school," and I started volunteering and giving little Choctaw history lessons and stories. People were asking more detailed questions than I had answers for, so I started traveling back to the Mississippi homeland of the Choctaw, bringing a tape recorder, meeting Choctaws, visiting with them, and taping their stories. I would basically visit and get to know the culture, go to museums, talk to tribal people, and go out into the woods where older people lived and record them.

I met a man named Archie Mingo in Mississippi. Archie was astounding. I kept hearing about him at the tribal center that he went into schools and taught languages and chants and told some stories. I was driving around the deep woods in a van with a Texas license plate, and no one knew me. When I would pull over and say, "Can you tell me where Archie Mingo lives?" people would give me wrong directions deliberately. I didn't realize this, but they did that for two days because no one knew why I wanted to find him, and they were protecting him.

Finally at about 10:00 at night, after I had decided that if I could find my way back to the hotel I would just give up and go home, I drove right by a house that had about 30 cars around it. I thought, "Well, what is this?" And, "At least they can tell me how to get home." So I knocked on the door. No one answered, but there were 30 cars there.

So I walked around the edge of the house and saw that they were having a huge celebration. It was Archie Mingo's 70th birthday party. Everything had conspired to get me lost so I didn't show up two days earlier at 10:00 in the morning. Instead, I showed up right in the middle of this man's 70th birthday celebration. It was astounding.

When I'm seeking older people out like that, I always wear a tie because it looks more respectful. So I came into this deep woods Indian gathering and everybody is just in denim and overalls, and I walk around the corner of the house and he sees me in a tie and he said, "Come on over here, I've been waiting on you." Everybody had been telling him, "There's a guy driving around looking for you."

He said, "What do you want?" And I said, "Well, I just want to hear some stories; I want to visit with you." He had me sit down on this beautiful kind of handmade wooden

chair with a cane back and a cane woven seat. Then he said, "Okay, get up." I said, "Well, I just sat down." And he said, "Well, I'm your teacher, get up." I got up and he took the wooden chair and he put it in the fire. There were about 20 people around this huge fire, and he held the chair in the fire.

He looked at me and he started grinning and laughing, and he waited until the cane seat caught and then someone ran and gave him a Coke bottle full of river water. He doused it and ripped two of the wooden legs off and started kind of slapping them together and said, "These make pretty good chant sticks; what do you think?"

He had just burned a chair. I said, "Can I say what I'm really thinking?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Mr. Mingo, I think you're crazy." And he said, "Yeah, that's what most people from the city would think. But if you think about it, all these people were laughing and cutting up watching the look on your face watching me. "Well, here's something for you son: if you can get people to laugh and have a good time in their life, what is a chair?" That was my lesson for the day.

The next day, I showed up at his house, we went out to a sacred mound, and that's when our relationship really started. He told me the story that became *Crossing Bok Chitto*. And, he gave me those two chant sticks. I still have them and carry them everywhere I go in my drum bag. They're very, very special to me; he died about three or four years ago.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** You say he told you a story that became *Crossing Bok Chitto*. What personal elements did you weave into his story?

**TIM TINGLE:** Archie told me about the Choctaw and African American escape; they were very close going way, way back. Long before Underground Railroad, he said Choctaws were helping slaves escape and making them part of their community and families. The secret river crossing in *Crossing Bok Chitto*—the stones beneath the water—was not part of what he told me. He just said there was a secret way of getting across the water that no one knows. It wasn't a bridge or a boat or anything like that—it was a secret way they had to cross that river. I didn't ask him to tell me; it was obvious he didn't want to talk about it.

So when I came to write the story, I had to come up with a way to cross the river. I think this is very important for young writers to understand: the best place to go when you come into a challenge in a story or the book you're writing is into what you know best: your own life. That is the safest place to go because somewhere in your life, you're going to find that problem and you're going to find the solution to it.

I kept going back and remembering that behind our house about a hundred yards away was a huge bayou. It rained all the time, and when the bayou would rise, it meant we couldn't cross over into the woods on the other side of the bayou. So we rolled stones and built a little path. If it rained just enough that maybe the stones were six inches below the water, we could still tiptoe across the stone pathway we built without building more stones up. So that's exactly what I incorporated into the story. I never forgot that path, because there were times when new kids would come into the

neighborhood, and we'd bring them over and say, "I'll bet you your lunch money that I can get to the other side just walking on the water." I don't think we ever took anybody's lunch money, but I know that we raised a lot of eyebrows by crossing over that bayou by the little stone path we built right below the water level.

Other than that, it's pretty much Archie Mingo's story. Most of the time, it's my own creation. I took his basic story and created a family of characters and gave them dialogue and gave them life. By the way, Mingo means "chief" in Choctaw. He wasn't a chief, but his family name was Mingo.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What do schools want to hear about your books?

**TIM TINGLE:** They always like to hear *Crossing Bok Chitto*. And fourth and fifth graders love *SaltyPie*. They love the idea of the whole family deciding to stand up, deciding that we are stronger than the racism that's been circling around us. That's what the line means at the climax of the story, "No more *SaltyPie*." No more silence, no more taking it and quietly walking away. Now we can begin to stand up for ourselves. That's what *SaltyPie* is.

Several of us who were in that room with my grandmother when she regained her sight either had degrees or were well on our way to getting degrees. Two of my uncles were the first two ever in my grandmother's family to get college degrees.

Now, we've got medical doctors, research doctors, and an attorney with the Justice Department. We've got school principals, school administrators, and other people who are doing really well.

It all goes back to my grandmother's strength. Education was everything for her. Not one of her six children ever missed a single day from first grade through twelfth—the whole time. So all of her kids insisted that *their* kids be educated.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What is it that you like to tell young people?

**TIM TINGLE:** One of the primary messages I like to deliver to young people is they have more talent than they know. I love to read and I always was kind of writing but I never thought I could actually be a writer.

If a person wants to not only be a writer but to succeed, then the first thing to do is make reading a part of what you do every day. Don't just read what you're assigned, but learn to get so excited about what you're reading that you can't wait to get back to the book and you can't wait to have a few free 30-minute periods or just 10 minutes so you can just get back and turn the page and find out what's going to happen next.

Keep looking until you find the authors that you just love and can't wait for their next book. Also, talk to people about the things you're excited about and make reading part of what you do.

The other thing I say is, "Care about people. Learn to really care about people, and not to judge them." Whatever people do, they do it because of things that have

happened to them. That's one thing I try to do in every book or every story that I write, is I try to give some small moment of respect to even the worst characters in the story or the book.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What do you like to tell teachers and educators?

**TIM TINGLE:** Regarding American Indians, recognize that maybe the teachers that instructed them did not have the information that they needed to fully and accurately describe us.

Don't just recognize change. Even though you have multiple degrees maybe, and education and you've read children's books and you've done the research, there is still more out there that is not known by the general educated public. Recognize that American Indian people are doing the best we can to tiptoe, to stand up, and we don't always know when, but we're trying. We're trying to do it with respect, too.

I want people to know what my family experienced, not as a way of them feeling guilty, but just so people can understand. These stories are important to get across so they will never happen again.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What do you do when you get stuck?

**TIM TINGLE:** Music really helps me not have writer's block. I picked up a technique from Stephen King's book, *On Writing*. It's one of the best books about writing; I used it when I taught at OU. Here's what I do: I usually write with headphones on, and I pick a music group that I just love and get lots of their CDs. For the last two years, I've been listening to the Irish group The Chieftains. Just about everything I've written has been written with their music. Sometimes I even find the rhythms sneaking into my word rhythms.

I'm never between stories because I've always got more stories going than I have time to write. I set a time to write every single day. Between 6:00 and 8:00 in the morning is a real strong writing time for me; so whenever I can, I try to write 1,000 words a day.

I have a really beautiful hardwood, leather-covered desk that I got when I was in junior high school, and it's gone with me everywhere. Every house I've ever lived in, including when I was living in student housing at OU, had the desk, and it's the desk I'm sitting at right now. I have had this desk for half a century, so when I sit down at it, it puts me in a certain frame of mind that is open to writing.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What else would you like to share?

**TIM TINGLE:** I very much want to leave a legacy. Maybe 20 years from now, someone will pick up one of my books and it will help them get through a challenge they're having right now. That's why it's so important that so many of my stories are about family.

Dealing with loss and maintaining a positive, healthy outlook are important. A lot of my stories are about serious problems, but there's always hope and there's always forgiveness.

I think it is also important to recognize the legacy that got us where we are. My advice to aspiring writers is to 1) try to write every single day, and 2) fill in the gaps in reading. Go back to Chaucer, go back to Shakespeare; you need to be familiar with most of Shakespeare's plays. I mean, how much of Western civilization and the writing that comes from it come from Shakespeare? We need to know that even as American Indian people, those things influence us.

Within our tribal cultures, we need to go back to the old people and listen to their stories as closely as possible. Legacy doesn't begin with us. We're picking up something that someone handed us—whether it's a written volume or whether it's a piece of sound. We're carrying that and we want to hand it off to someone else. But it's critical that we know the early writers in America, and the overseas tribal communities. We need to know what they want to pass on.

**TEACHINGBOOKS:** What other advice do you have for writers?

**TIM TINGLE:** A nice way to stay connected to stories, whether you've written them yet or whether you're just getting started, is to pick up little mementoes of places that you go. Not things from a souvenir shop—just a piece of bark or a little stone or water from a special place. Out on my back patio I've got a water bottle filled with a couple of pints of water from the river Bok Chitto. You can keep these things in special little boxes.

That's what medicine bags are about. We carry these things with us and so they always stay part of us. I think it's just a nice thing to have a special little box or special place where you can keep some mementos. When you see these things, it brings back floods of memories. I think all of these things combined can help overcome writer's block and help the river keep flowing.

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