

# The River Beyond the Dam

*Shooting the Rapids of Progressive Christianity*

• a memoir •

## JEAN L. WAIGHT

illustrations by Emily Wagnitz

A modern, ex-Christian, tree-hugging American woman comes up against a strange wish for church—but only if it could be radically different from what she’s known. It would have to be one steeped in women’s equality and freedom of thought. Unexpectedly, she finds herself on a journey like a canoe trip. The journey will heal her past, widen her present world, and offer hope for the future. Guided by her experiences in river canoeing—navigating the river, learning its currents, and riding its sparkling energy—her story unfolds through twelve years of pointed questions, congenial fellow travelers, and zesty discoveries.

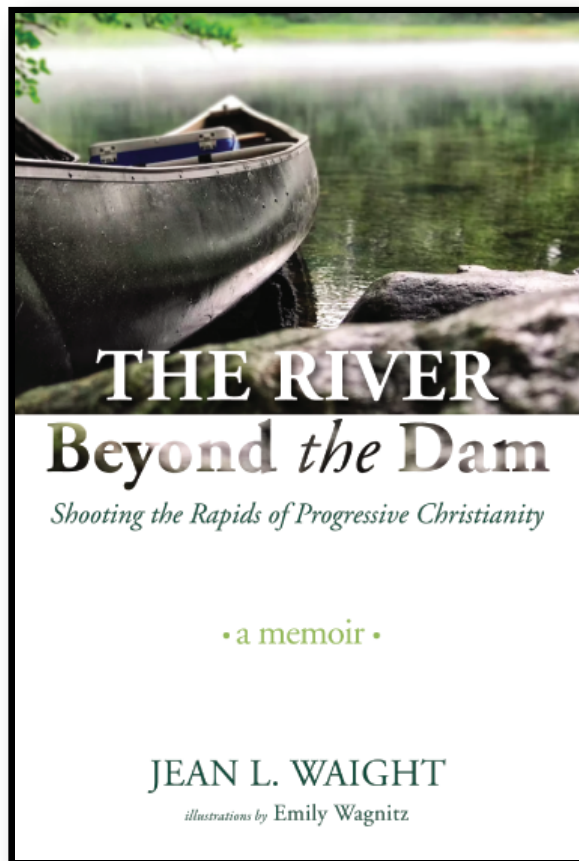
She experiences firsthand what she cannot get from a solo journey, including what it is to support Native Americans, and how Black womanist theology can make her a better white ally of Black women. Paddling the river, she is helped around fallen trees of biblical mistranslation and anti-woman dogma. After a cold-water crash, she repairs her canoe and emerges joyful again with a new, more flexible strength. Looking ahead, she follows clues about how the river is changing other churches—renewing and making them better neighbors and climate activists.

“Having tried to pretzel herself to fit inherited Christian teachings and then rejecting the lot in disgust, Jean Waight unexpectedly finds treasure behind door number three—inclusive, non-patriarchal, and liberating. Weaving an astonishing tapestry of canoeing, scholarship, mountaintop experience, and a very human set of fellow travelers, she brings us on her adventure forging a new identity. And a new understanding of Christianity emerges: that there is always a place for God in a rapidly changing world as long as we accept that we are continual works in progress.”

—CAMI OSTMAN, co-editor of *Beyond Belief: The Secret Lives of Women in Extreme Religions*

“Jean Waight made room on her canoe and let me travel along her faith journey, and it was a most enjoyable ride. Many times along the way I was heartened and encouraged by Waight’s words and perspectives. I felt like I was not alone on my own faith journey, but in good company. This book is a must read for any progressive Christian, or anyone interested in a fresh perspective on what a Christian life can look like. I wholeheartedly recommend this book, and I look forward to more from Waight.”

—PRISCILLA GOINS, author of *Early Bird Special: An Oak Grove Story*



978-1-6667-6772-8 / \$20 / 182 pp. / paper

**JEAN L. WAIGHT** is a memoirist whose work has appeared in *Cirque: A Literary Journal for the North Pacific Rim* and in the anthologies *Memory into Memoir* and *This Uncommon Solitude*. Her sociology masters research appeared in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*. She has worked in communications and community relations, and lives among tall conifers in Bellingham, Washington. For more visit [jeanwaight.com](http://jeanwaight.com).

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