

Linda & Gary DeKock: Linda De Kock and her husband Gary live in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Linda retired from her vocational counseling practice and Gary from his career as a wastewater chemist and supervisor in 2013. In 2018 they canoed from Three Forks, Montana to St. Louis. In 2014 to celebrate retirement they kayaked source to sea of the Mississippi. In addition to sharing the trip of a lifetime, they were able to raise over \$17,000 for Water For People, an international organization helping communities in nine countries work on water and sanitation. They also help organize the annual Quiet Water Symposium, which takes place in Lansing, Michigan every first Saturday in March, and would like to invite you to join them there! Photo: Gary and Linda paddle the length of the Mississippi River.

1: First memory in a canoe or kayak? *My first experience paddling was when Gary and I were dating. We were paddling a canoe he had built; I steered the canoe into a rock and promptly dropped my paddle. That was over 45 years ago, and he still brings it up on a regular basis!*

2: Who's your favorite band or musician? *There is no single favorite. I enjoy Eric Clapton, Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, James Taylor...typical old hippie music. Linda waving to a barge on the Mississippi River.*

3. Are you related to anyone famous or have any brush with fame? *The closest I have come is meeting Verlen Kruger and getting a chance to visit with Jim Woodruff, our famous Michigan paddlers, unless you count stalking Margaret Atwood in Canada! Jim Woodruff the Topologist.*

4: Favorite paddling moment? *I haven't had a Missouri moment yet, but I count our days on the Mississippi last summer as some of the best 70 days of my life. Of those days, often the hardest were the most memorable. One of my favorites was a day south of New Orleans when we stopped for lunch on a levee and found out the hard way that we were just above a (very busy!) coal loading facility. The security guy told us we had violated Homeland Security, and he had to call the local police to take down our ID information. By the time the officer arrived, I was best buddies with the security guy, and he pulled out his phone to get pictures, which he emailed to me that evening. When we got back on the water, he notified the boat traffic in his area*

that we were coming through, and it was like the parting of the Red Sea...we had a clear path for miles and got cheers from the ships as we passed!

5: Strangest or most unique job you ever had?

Before retiring, I was a vocational counselor often analyzed jobs. I got to spend a day up on an oil rig in northern Michigan. While in college, I worked in a mental hospital...this was back in the 60s, and things were definitely different then!

6: Best piece of paddling advice that you have ever been given? *“Never drop your paddle, no matter what!” Gary also is fond of saying that no one ever died on a portage trail...*

7: Who or what are your biggest inspirations? *I am a paddler because of Gary's influence, and he has always been my hero. I'm inspired by people who are able to transcend their egos. Spending long periods of time outdoors, especially on big rivers, moves us in the direction of realizing our insignificance and even being grateful for it.*

8: Something no one knows about you?

I'm afraid of water, or at least of having my head under water.

9: If you had enough money what would you do? *I'm not rich, but I feel I do have enough money, so the question then is what will I do? We retired two years ago and now have no excuse for not doing what is most important to us. That was one reason for the Mississippi trip and for our month long trip down the Grand River (the longest river in Michigan) and then down the coast of Lake Michigan this summer. What seems most important, now that I'm 65 and have a pretty clear view of the end of the road, is that whatever I do must have meaning if possible, because life is temporary.*

10: Most unique paddling or camping gear you have? *While it isn't unique, my most essential weapon in the battle with mosquitoes is my Go Girl, which enables me to get through the night without having to unzip the tent and let in the hungry hordes.*

11: Worst day while paddling? *My worst day of paddling was on the upper Grand River this summer. We were paddling north of Jackson, Michigan, and it was a day that kept getting worse. We started by paddling past the state prison, and spent an*

hour listening to scary loudspeaker announcements and reading very threatening signs about trespassing on river right. There was a cold rain falling most of the day, and the river was a jumble of log jams, almost all of which we had to scramble over while balancing on the logs because the river was deep and the banks were slippery mud or on prison property. I lost count of the jams at about 50, but you could usually see the next one while negotiating the current one. And then our boat started leaking...a lot! I think we did as much sponging out as paddling that day! And in 10 hours, we only paddled 6 miles. Gary & Linda on the Mississippi.

12: Best food you've been given by a river angel...i.e. most memorable meal?

There are just so many wonderful river angel stories, and spending 70 days on the Mississippi experiencing only the kindest, most generous sides of people is a life altering experience. The meals were great, but the kindness was the seasoning! One night in Iowa on the Mississippi it was getting late, and we found ourselves paddling through private property on both sides of the river. I figured this was the night we'd be paddling in the dark, something you really don't want to do when you could benefit from cataract surgery! We paddled up to a couple sitting in front of their cottage and asked if they knew of any place where we could camp in the next few miles. The man immediately said, "We can do better than that!" He wouldn't hear of us going on or even camping in their yard. They took us in, fed us pizza and beer, and then said they were heading home. He handed us the remote for the TV, told us to help ourselves to anything in the fridge, and asked us to lock the door when we left in the morning. Such trust and generosity from complete strangers!

13: Worst experience on your Miss trip? *I wouldn't want to have missed a single experience!*

14: If you could paddle anywhere in the world, where and why? *I'd probably choose the Missouri River, although I'd love to do the Mississippi again someday. Maybe we can pull a "Dale Sanders" when we're 80! (Note: Linda and Gary paddled the Missouri during the summer of 2018)*