

# Four's A Crowd

## Can we ever have enough rivers?

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The orange life vests might have been the giveaway, or perhaps the brown baseball caps with the FLOW logo, or even the neon-green camouflage pants — “with reflective highlights,” points out Macauley Brooks helpfully.

But Brooks and her partner, Car Furman, spent part of their summer walking around Pittsburgh, saying they were private investigators from Huntington, Ind., hired by a Pittsburgh nonprofit (“FLOW”) to investigate our fourth river — in those uniforms, no less. And people apparently believed them.

The “fourth river,” of course, is an aquifer, an underground mix of rock and water that glaciers left behind, and which now feeds the fountain at the Point, among other uses Downtown. The only mystery here is why people paused to consider Brooks and Furman’s questions. The pair interviewed more than 100 people about the fourth river, beginning at the Three Rivers Arts Festival (which they suggested renaming the Four Rivers Arts Festival).

Sitting in a local Bruegger’s, still in uniform (and in character), they chat up a bagel eater who seems sure that a fourth river must exist here.

Furman takes out a slim white “reporter’s notebook” (available at any stationery store; amaze your friends!) and reads a few earlier responses from their river quest:

“People swore they’d seen it. One woman said she had seen it in the William Penn Hotel, four stories down. She had been with someone and he had opened a door and the fourth river was *rushing*. Another man said if you started drilling in the floor of Kaufmann’s you could find it.”

She leafs through the pages: “Connie, age 33: She said, ‘I have heard that a big prehistoric fish was caught, maybe in the fourth river. It was caught but thrown back in.’ People had heard of it in connection with building the U.S. Steel Building, Gateway Center and the subway.”

“One of my favorite stories,” says Brooks: “This man had actually hunted the river with an elephant gun. I’m not kidding.” Another respondent said to talk to Native Americans — they might know about the fourth river. Brooks also heard *something* about the Convention Center renovation, she says — that it will include a passageway for the fourth river, allowing the mythical flow to course

down the middle of it.

Furman e-mailed later to add that “someone claimed that the underground river had a strong magnetic field that compelled people to stay in Pittsburgh, or move back if they had decided to leave.”

Meanwhile, the awkwardly named Fourth River Lobbying Organization Working Group (perhaps FRLOWG didn’t quite scan), an unreachable nonprofit, is supposedly unhappy with their work and has shut them out of FLOW’s offices at 805 Liberty Avenue — a building controlled by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. But Furman and Brooks pressed on, they said.

The whole enterprise smelled fishy from the beginning, of course — even prehistorically fishy. While the city of Huntington, Ind., exists (and its council president is even named Fuhrman, albeit spelled differently), nothing else about the project seemed kosher. In fact, it had that slight scent of crustacean.

Asked whether they might hail from the same institution that gave us the Lobster Boy art project, Brooks and Furman aren’t saying. Even though it’s Chatham College whose lit-

erary magazine is called “Fourth River,” I’m guessing Carnegie Mellon is somehow involved here. Brooks and Furman (certainly *not* their real names) never admitted as much. All they would say is that their work sure did *sound* a lot like an art project.

“We thought people wouldn’t take us seriously,” Brooks allowed, “but they took us very seriously.”

Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century desperately wanted to make news. It seems art in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will want to *be* the news. Although Brooks and Furman were claiming to be private investigators, they had the m.o. of reporters — and were strangely-dressed as most of us, too.

I often wonder why people believe reporters when we call out of the blue. I wonder that more people don’t pretend to be reporters, just to get information out of each other.

Why did people speak to Brooks and Furman? Were Pittsburghers just being polite, as to a drunk? It couldn’t have been the tiny toy boat they tugged along on its plastic trailer.

Must have been those little notebooks. ☞