

**L**AST week after the big rains, I went to the Fitzroy Swimming Pool. It was midweek, mid-afternoon and there weren't many people in the water. My friend and I did our laps in our practical swimsuits. The tender spring sunlight lapped on the surface of the outdoor pool. Afterwards we treated ourselves to the spa and sauna and finally the steam room.

A young woman joined us. Her hair was up in a ponytail, she wore a pink and white striped bikini and electric blue thongs. After an opening pleasantry about the sun's return she took up her spot on one of the white plastic benches. We all breathed in the steam. Above the quiet hiss of the steam vents our companion confided, "Isn't it great about the Murray?"

There was a little pulse of silence while my friend and I absorbed what she had said. Then we both chorused our yeses. Yes, yes, it was wonderful to think the river might live again . . .

Even while we talked I was marveling. Here we were in a steam room with a stranger in a bikini, and instead of inanities about celebrities



we were talking about a river. We were talking about a river that we knew and loved – our friend, the Murray.

In the intimacy that is steam, in that visible, moist air, I felt like I was at a new threshold. I wondered if this care about our brother the river might be a possible future. It is also the past, and for many indigenous people, the forever present.

In the 13th century, Francis of Assisi wrote the *Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon*.

"Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, / And fair and stormy, all weather's moods, / by which You cherish all that You have made. / Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water, / So useful, humble, precious and pure . . ."

And let us be glad for our brother the Murray, for the Coorong and for all the birds who shelter there. Let us be glad for humans who know that this is a good thing, for all of us.

Julie Perrin is a Melbourne writer.