

Excerpt: *An American River Almanac: Reflections on Nature throughout the Year*



. . . Autumn by the river:
The late afternoon sun weaves a skein of diamond lights that dance on the river's surface. The current swirls around an angler standing waist-deep in the river, hoping for a trophy steelhead. And a flock of gulls holds a conference on a nearby gravel bar, one of them raising a plaintive *kee-yah, kee-yah* point of order . . .

And the cottonwoods.

How better to expose the senses to the changing season than to scuff through a pile of the dried, parchment-like leaves, evoking a blend of sight, sound and sensation that might have inspired Norman Rockwell to paint a woodsy pathway leading into Americana.

The decaying leaves are in the midst of a process that will return their nutrients to the soil during the coming rains, feeding the roots of the tall, water-loving trees. No false colors for the cottonwoods, which are just what they seem to be.