

Lewis MacAdams: Always Searching for the Impossible

“If it’s not impossible, I’m not interested.”



It’s a phrase that Lewis MacAdams, poet, journalist, filmmaker and activist has become known for over the years. Often repeated by friends and fans, it’s made its way on to tee-shirts and is now forever etched in the base of a seven-foot sandstone sculpture of him overlooking the Los Angeles River - his muse and mission for more than 40 years.

Lewis’ relationship with the LA River dates back to 1985 when an impromptu stroll along its banks led to a vision: that the concrete entombed waterway could once again become a flourishing oasis for wild life and recreation.

“Essentially, I asked the river for permission to speak for it in the human realm and the river didn’t say no,” Lewis explained.

Since then, Friends of the River, an organization he co-founded, has made significant strides toward returning the river back to a more natural state. “Friends” organized river clean-ups days,

community events and has advocated for improved water quality, development of surrounding green spaces and increased neighborhood access.

“An unexpected pleasure has come to me knowing just how many people have responded over the years,” Lewis said. In 2017 Friends of the River mobilized 10,000 volunteers to help remove 100 tons of trash.

Lewis’ inclination to tackle the seemingly “impossible,” however, did not start with his mission to revitalize the 48 miles of winding concrete, but has been a guiding principle since childhood, as the son of Civil Rights activists growing up in a sleepy town in west Texas.



Along the way he's penned dozens of books of poetry, co-directed the documentary *What Happened to Kerouac?* and has been a contributing writer for *Rolling Stone*, the *LA Times*, and *Men's Journal*. He is also the acclaimed author of *The Birth of Cool: Beat, Bebop and the American Avant Garde*. He is currently 200 pages into a memoir project, *Poetry and Politics*, which he's working on with

historian Michael Block.

At Kingsley Manor Retirement Community, a community that attracts many artists, intellectuals and like-minded lovers of the “impossible,” he’s found many kindred spirits, including a few fellow river enthusiasts, who share his desire to connect regularly with the thriving metropolis all around.

His favorite spot, naturally, is Kingsley’s rooftop deck which he visits on a daily basis to take in its expansive view of the city. From the Hollywood sign to the Library Tower downtown to the Pacific just on the horizon, it’s a vista which, like the river, reveals itself slightly differently every day: magnificent, impossible and ever-inspiring.