

Arthur Furtaw – “The Race”

It's an hour before and the anxiety is great, that is, it's an hour before your First Big Race.
It's just minutes before and now you're frightened. The river looks cold and yet it's all enlightened.

The banks are lined; there is just an isle where the canoes pass in single file.
Fifteen seconds is all the gap that's left between the narrow craft.

It's the beginning of a long, hard fight; forty crafts shoot into the night.
You've started out on your long hard grind and your only goal – THE FINISH LINE.

It's this first hour you really hate, for no matter if you are in shape,
Your body aches and throbs with pain, and you know the others feel the same.

You ride a wake a moment or so, they make a slip and there you go.
You see their light drifting back, the other team that you've just passed.

The first bridge is far behind, the people there were most sublime.
You are now canoe number eight. Who's the team that's setting the pace?

You look back on Wakeley as you depart, then push on through the endless dark.
Your hands are sore from burning skin, and your body aches from deep within.

You see the next bridge and people, your body is weak and sort of feeble.
You're four hours gone, it's started to rain; can you stand this strenuous pain?

The last bridge you went by – it was McMasters; your mind keeps saying Faster—faster.
Your jaw is set and your body strains, you're still enduring this biting rain.

When you get to Mio, you're almost halfway. How long can we last? No one can say.
You haven't spoke hardy at all, except for your switches, which you must call.

You finally reach the lighted dam, you must stand up, if you possibly can.
You've eaten twice in the last six hours; you must eat again to keep your power.

The river has taken quite a score, twenty at least, and maybe more.
Your first break, the rain has quit, again you're thankful your light is still lit.

Now McKinley is just behind, this is really a grueling grind.
The clouds are now taking shape, the endless night is about to break.

The land around you is now all lighted and Alcona Dam has just been sighted.
You are now the fifth canoe, can you hold it — It's up to you!

At the dam your legs are so cramped, you have to struggle to get on the ramp.
You're in your boat, it was hard to cross, you want to stop, but you slowly shove off.

The sun has risen higher into the blue, you keep saying, come on, it's up to you.
Your partner and you are a tired pair; the pain is what's hard to bear.

Your back is stiff from the night before, how can your body take any more?
You know that you must keep up the fight and now Loud Dam has come in sight.

You see a boat, its color is RED, its number four, they're just ahead.
Something tells you, push on harder, Oscoda is not much farther.

In front of the dam you are side by side, what have you done to the other teams pride.
Over the dam and down below, the-other-team sees you go.

Now you are all alone in third place, this truly has been a great canoe race.
Five Channels Dam is next in line; you waited for this one, a Very Long Time.

Cooke Dam is the very next stop, from this to the last; it's just but a hop.
You've gone through the night and also some showers, you've been on the river for about 12
hours.

As you cross Cooke, how the crowd cheers, it sounds like their yelling right in my ears.
But this is the greatest of all prizes won, by paddling in darkness and also the sun.

The next stop comes slower than ever before and from Foote Dam to Oscoda is really a chore.
Your lips and your hands begin to swell, as you pass through the water, you know so well.

As we round the last bend, we're right in town; both of our bodies are about to set down.
You see the Big Fifty Thousand or more, you no longer think of the burden bore.

You finished in third place, that's good enough, knowing your job was nothing but tough.
And then you have a wonderful sensation, after finishing such a Huge TRIBULATION.

Words By: Arthur Furtaw