

## The Impact of River Tides on Creativity

Somewhat like Thomas Wolfe's novel, *Of Time and the River*, the poems of my mother, **Florence Rubert Graves**, in *Lowcountry Tides*, deal primarily with the passage and meaning of time, love, dreams, nature and the impact of river tides on one's spirit—in this case, the tidal May River of Bluffton, South Carolina.

The early exposure to tidal landscapes often lasts a lifetime. It did with my mother. It has with me. Tides are outward and visible signs—and one might say visceral signs—of invisible forces that are



*Florence Rubert Graves*  
(1916-2010)

ever present in our lives, forces like the gravitational pull of the sun, the moon, and the earth upon each other. There is a liturgical nature to tides, similar to the seasons of the year. Tides are also like poetry: full of rhythm, form, import, prophesy, excitement, and often, something unexpected. Tides enter into the poetic imagination.

Many people who live near these tides probably do not fully understand the scientific reasons for them, but they certainly know how the tides affect their lives—especially those who depend on the fishing, vacation and excursion industries for their livelihood. Tides remind us that we have to synchronize our activities to the patterns of nature, not the other way around.

Many can testify that river tides impact their lives, but may not be able to fully explain or understand the rotational and gravitational cycles of the sun, moon and earth that cause them.

There are two kinds of tides: spring and neap. Both can have high and low tides, flood and ebb tides. Flood tides are coming in and ebb tides are going out. Flood and ebb tides occur with both spring and neap tides. *The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration* explains the difference between spring and neap tides:

Tides are long-period waves that roll around the planet as the ocean is "pulled" back and forth by the gravitational pull of the moon and the sun as these bodies interact with the Earth in their monthly and yearly orbits.

During full or new moons—which occur when the Earth, sun, and moon are nearly in alignment—average tidal ranges are slightly larger. This occurs twice each month (every other week). The moon appears new (dark) when it is directly between the Earth and the sun. The moon appears full when the Earth is between the moon and the sun. In both cases, the gravitational pull of the sun is "added" to the gravitational pull of the moon on Earth, causing the oceans to bulge a bit more than usual. This means that high tides are a little higher and low tides are a little lower than average.

These are called **spring tides**, a common historical term that has nothing to do with the season of spring. Rather, the term is derived from the concept of the tide "springing forth." Spring tides occur twice each lunar month (every other week) all year long, without regard to the season.

Seven days after a spring tide, the sun and moon are at right angles to each other. When this happens, the bulge of the ocean caused by the sun partially cancels out the bulge of the ocean caused by the moon. This produces moderate tides known as **neap tides**, meaning that high tides are a little lower and low tides are a little higher than average. Neap tides occur during the first and third quarter moon, when the moon appears "half full."<sup>1</sup>

Most of us could not explain the tides this completely to anyone who asked, but these facts are just more evidence of how mysterious the natural world can be. Natural mysteries have always been a primary theme of poetry. River tides—or the memory of tides—can and do stimulate the poetic imagination.

My mother spent most of her childhood summers, and parts of her winters, on the South Carolina Palmetto Bluff Plantation of R. T. Wilson, a New York financier. Her father, H. G. Rubert, was Wilson's private secretary and manager of the plantation. Later my mother lived in Bluffton full time from 1938 to 1950.<sup>2</sup> And she lived there imaginatively the rest of her life.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference: [What are spring and neap tides? \(noaa.gov\)](https://www.noaa.gov/education/outreach-and-partnerships/what-are-spring-and-neap-tides/)

<sup>2</sup> Detailed in my book, *Testimony of the Infant Children, The Untold Story*. See [graveshouse.org](http://graveshouse.org) or [astarfell.com](http://astarfell.com) for more information.