

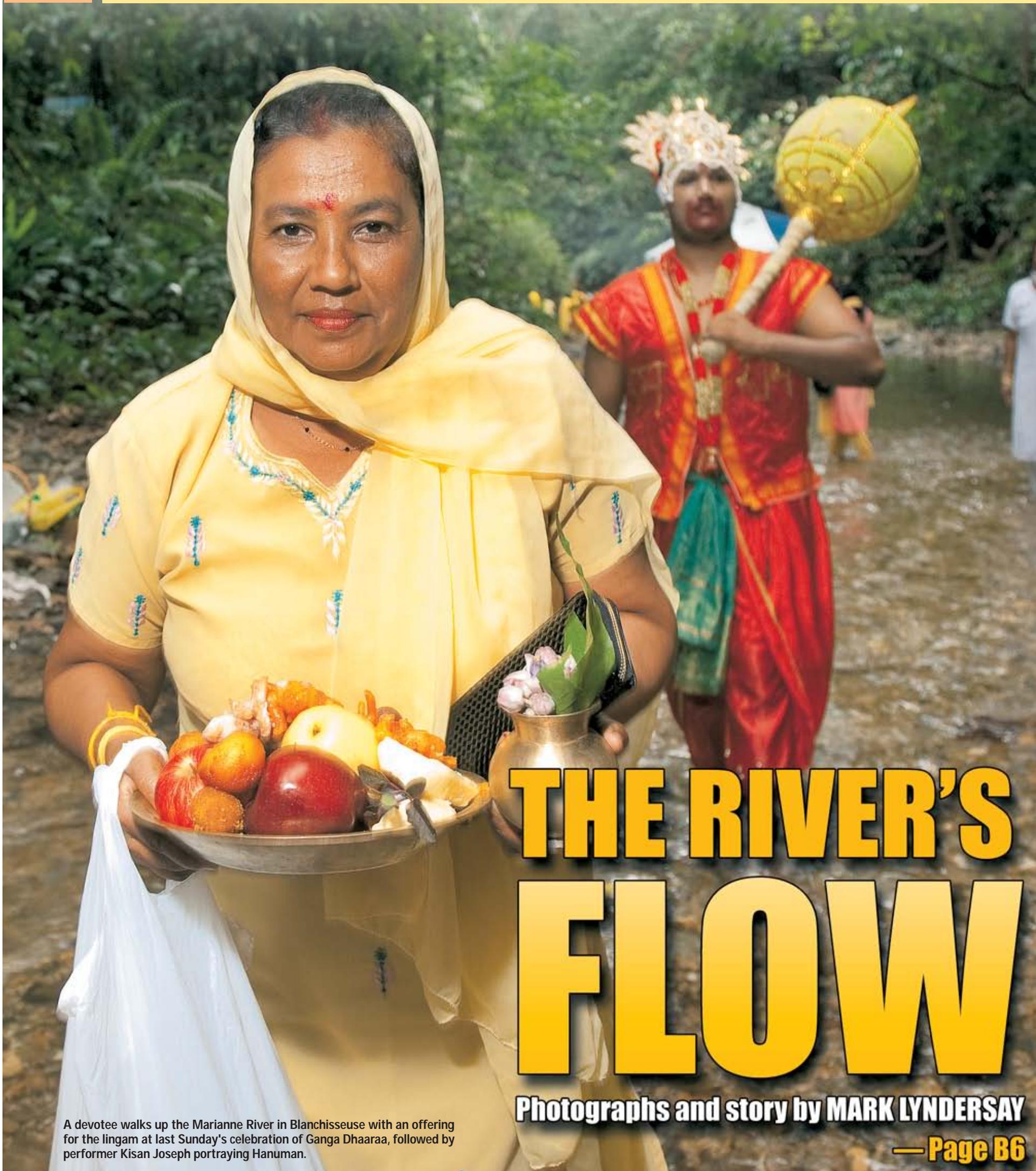
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TOY STORY 3 GETS A FIVE STAR RATING—Page B15



THE RIVER'S FLOW

Photographs and story by MARK LYNDERSAY

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A devotee walks up the Marianne River in Blanchisseuse with an offering for the lingam at last Sunday's celebration of Ganga Dhaaraa, followed by performer Kisan Joseph portraying Hanuman.



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A BOY'S FIRST TEERATH



Two-year old Yash Boodram in his father Prem's arms (above left) watches as his brother has a token of protection tied to his wrist. While prayers are said (above) Yash loses the first of his locks to Sookram Babwah's practiced scissors.

Yash, who was the first child to participate in the Mundan Sanskaar ceremony (above right), weeps in his mother Usha's arms as Babwah shaves his hair.



Down by the river

Photographs and story by
MARK LYNDERSAY

Sixteen years ago, Ravindranath Maharaj stood here, the cool dusk breeze on his face, river water gliding over the slippery rocks and in that moment, he found the genesis of a recurring dream.

The pundit, better known as Ravi Ji, hasn't had the dream since, but that's probably because he's been too busy making the Ganga Dhaaraa real every year since.

"It was a festival that I knew in my childhood," Ravi Ji explained, "but it disappeared."

"When I went to India, I saw it again and it was so large and so colourful that it became one of my favourite experiences in India. When I returned, I wanted to bring it back."

The dhaaraa, or flow of the event, ebbs back and forth along the riverbed of the Marianne River over the course of a day but it begins quietly, with three women carefully preparing a pooja for Lord Ganesh on a table set in the middle of the riverbed.

Further up the river, along a stretch that wends gently along, the stream of water runs brisk and shallow, and tents, platforms and ramps have been built to create spaces of worship. The most impressive of these is the Trinnaadeeshshwar Mahadeo Ghaat, nestled in a large natural grotto on the bank of the river where singing and offerings continue throughout the morning.

For the Hindu devotees in attendance, it is a teerath, a pilgrimage to different destinations in this single space. Some seek blessings on their young sons; others refresh their marriage commitment.

The date is set by the lunar calendar and is convened on the Sunday following each year's celebration of the importance of the Ganges.

The next day, every trace of these elaborate and inventive constructs will be gone. The festival, a religious assembly of worship and faith, completely disappears after echoing its inspiration half a world away and reflecting the synergies of the flow of the Mother Ganga in India.



- 1) A young girl has her hair brushed at dawn as worshippers gather and prepare for the 16th Ganga Dhaaraa.
- 2) Kumari Chadee and Sandra Bridgell perform a pooja for Lord Ganesh before the formal start of the Ganga Dhaaraa.
- 3) Mala Tulsii performs aarti as the murti of Ganga Maiyaa arrives at the riverside.
- 4) The murti is carried up the river, wreathed in incense.
- 5) Worshippers perform pooja before the murti of Ganga Maiyaa.
- 6) Devotees walk up the river to make offerings at the Trinnaadeeshshwar Mahadeo Ghaat.
- 7) Newlyweds gather for Ardhanaareeshwar, blessings on their marriage and future together.
- 8) The Trinnaadeeshshwar Mahadeo is nestled into a deep natural grotto in the stone of the river bank.
- 9) The offering of flowers, is gently lowered onto the surface of the water.
- 10) Buttercups are strewn on the river.
- 11) Buttercups, hibiscus, ixora and a deya floating in a coconut shell swirl, caught in an eddy of the Marianne River.