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## **My Oasis**

**By: Jenny McCutcheon**

Her luminescent ripples absorbed my deepest secrets and kept them. She never exposed the truth about me—the little bits of myself I only revealed when I was alone with her. She was my confidant. I became anxious when others would use her deck to congregate and watch her tranquil water. Sometimes they would fish. Casting their hooked lines out into her center—pulling and throwing. It made me mad. She was my pond, my salvation.

Sometimes I would slip off my shoes and socks and sit on the edge of her deck, my naked feet dangling in her chilled, murky water. I would scoot to the edge of her aging perch to ensure the rough, splintered wood didn't prick my bare legs. Leaning forward, I would watch her water flow outward in wrinkled ringlets from my swaying feet. The bluegills would oftentimes nibble hungrily at my toes and although it only tickled, I was startled every time.

She was nestled in-between the railroad tracks and elementary school with a beautiful view of three playgrounds and an open, green Frisbee-golf course. The railroad tracks were close, maybe 50 yards away, but the playgrounds and school were set far enough into the distance that when other people were using them, I still felt alone while she cradled me on her deck.

The enormous oak tree close to the entrance of her deck provided shade when the heat from the sun proved too extreme, and became my second favorite place to gather my thoughts when escaping the summer heat was necessary. A number of river birches and maple trees provided a peaceful, green backdrop for the wild green and purple shrubbery surrounding the perimeter of her water.

One spring when I was ten, there was a neighborhood tree planting around her. Over 40 baby white pine trees—each about twelve inches tall—were purchased by Brookside elementary school where the pond resided. The residents of the neighborhood in which the school sat volunteered to plant the pine trees. With the help of my parents, I planted two of the trees—both to the left side of her deck. That way, I thought, when I sit on her deck and face out into her center, the trees will never grow large enough to block the sun that sparkles on her water.

Hundreds of tadpoles and frogs lived in the muddy bank at the edge of her water—beneath the slimy sage algae. One time I collected her tadpoles in an empty strawberry jam jar and brought them home where I stored them on my dresser—next to my *Holly Hobby* jewelry box. When I returned home from school one day, I was devastated to discover that the tadpoles were gone! My mom told me they turned into frogs while I was away, and she had taken them back to the pond so they could survive. I found out years later the tadpoles-turned frogs jumped out of the water and died in my room. There were three of them.

As a teenager the pond was my ultimate refuge. After fights with my parents, friends, or boyfriends, I would escape to her and she would comfort me. I would walk through the freshly mowed grass of the Frisbee-golf course to her deck, while listening to Pink Floyd's "Is There Anybody Out There?" on my headphones. With both wisdom and patience, she would let the current of air move her water, or allow the sun to glisten just right on her surface to console me.

At times I would come to her and cry about my latest heartbreak—achieving relief only after my tears bled into her, and became her burdens to share. I smoked cigarettes stolen from my parents and then littered her water with the butts. She was devastated that I desecrated her, but she understood I was being egocentric, and she forgave me.

The year I was 16 she watched without judgment as I created a potion I learned about from a witchcraft book I checked out from the local library. The book promised this particular spell would secure the love of any boy I desired. As I chanted and lit a piece of parchment paper on fire, I think she raised her ripples in amusement. The wind hissed through her trees—that had grown much taller than me—and snatched the burning paper from my hands. As it twisted and turned in the breeze, the fire was extinguished and the blackened paper fell to grass. I ran to where it laid and tried to pick it up, but when I touched it, the seared paper—and my intentions—turned to ashes.

Sitting with her now, I simultaneously laugh at and long for the intensity and drama we shared during my younger days. I'm captivated by the wavering melody of birds mingling with the burping gurgles from the bullfrogs. I feel a twinge of regret for being so self-absorbed that I was oblivious to these amazing sounds for all of those years. The pine trees are now two-stories high and there is nothing left but an exposed stump to mark the former existence of my favorite

oak tree. The open deck is now surrounded with a guardrail attached by slats of wood and a new multi-leveled deck has been built near the original—although it's set back from her water.

As I admire a family of turtles sun-bathing on a log that is protruding out into her water, I'm consumed with gratitude to have had the privilege of finding this oasis so long ago—and to have shared so much of my life with her.