

Pond

Part 1

Before I was born,
when my parents' marriage was new,
my father's mother still alive,
Grandpa Fred dug a pond back on our farm.
It was a spring-fed, always cold,
freezing where the water,
came bubbling up from dark depths.

I remember picnics there just about every Sunday.
Grandparents, cousins, second cousins, friends would drive
down the sandy lane to freshly mowed picnic grounds,
big cars full of kids and bags of food,
young families ready to play.

Everything needed for a good picnic was there:
a shed storing lawn chairs and life preservers,
doing double-duty as a changing room,
an old-fashioned icebox
salvaged when the new refrigerator was purchased,
a picnic table my father toggled together from left-over
lumber,
a fire-pit,
and an outhouse across the lane,
replete with the obligatory corn cob hung on a string,
an homage to glory days of the past.

The adults would cook hot dogs and hamburgers,

corn on the cob in season,
while the kids explored the surrounding environs,
swung on the swing, climbed trees,
fished for the small, stocked blue gill off the wood dock,
swam in the cold pond water
after my dad had raked off the ever-encroaching
algae colonies, tossing the muck along the shoreline,
rotting vegetation smell souring the air.

I learned to swim there,
life preserver vest carefully tied on,
a child-sized orange bobber,
Mother holding onto my pony tail
keeping my head out of the water.
There is also a picture of me, perhaps three,
drinking from my daddy's beer can---
a lover of hops even then.

Part 2

As children grew older
and families busier,
the picnics became fewer and fewer
until they finally ceased.
The swing was taken down and
moved to the house,
the door taken off the icebox
lest some child get locked inside.
The grass grew,
swallowing the picnic table,

the shed and its contents rotted,
the outhouse fell down.
Nature took back Her own.
The pond was still there,
the dock rickety,
the blue gill gone,
suffocated by the algae cover.
But the springs continued feeding the pond
Keeping it icy cold.

One humid summer day,
when my dad
was working back on the farm,
hot and dirty and tired,
he stopped his tractor at the pond,
stripped down to underwear
(although he might have shed all),
moved aside the algae,
eased himself in the frigid water.
His dog, a female Weimaraner named Tay--
never far from his side,
who thought my father was the reason for all things--
saw him in the water
and, wanting to be with him,
needing to be with him,
ran to the end of the dock and jumped,
thinking the water solid;
was surprised when she sank.
Almost drowned herself
and my father.

He managed to get them both to shore,
the dog paddling madly,
whining and spluttering,
feeling betrayed by her god.

Part 3

When I was a young woman,
people from the cities began moving
out to our rural area,
buying their one-acre plots,
wanting to live the country life,
complaining about fertilizer smells
and dust from fields,
the occasional loose animal.

One such neighbor,
with little knowledge of physics,
decided that the pond,
a quarter of a mile from his house,
was the cause of the water in his basement---
not understanding that water couldn't run
up and down two hills before arriving at his rec room.
So, full of righteous indignation,
he trespassed,
destroyed the pond's dam,
allowing water to spill over the old picnic area
and into the lane beyond.

The pond shrunk,

No longer the remembered swimming hole,
an algae-covered puddle of its former self.
No one swims there now;
there is no smell of burgers or roasting corn,
no gleeful childish giggles or contented adult laughter.
Only the deer come there to drink,
and occasionally die,
bloated brown corpses floating in the green bloom.

Cerise

Inspiration: *Summer Light* by Judy Tummino