

Virignia Afield
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Listening For The Bullfrogs
By C.C. McCotter

It's a quiet morning after we observed first day of school rituals for our 11th grade son. It's too early to go back for many reasons but none matter to those that make the rules. So instead of complaining, permit me to tell you about an amazing place in my memory on this hot, August day.

Sometimes you just need to remember a time when your life was simpler, less complicated and daydream. It makes it easier to get through the rough spots in life, I think.

When I was a child each summer I spent a couple of wonderful weeks with my grandparents at their home in rural Maryland, just outside the town of New Market. We called it Lake Ethel (my Granny's name) because Pa (what we called my grandfather) had a sign made up and hung it on an old post next to a rusting hay rake.

My Granny and Pa had five acres and a pond tucked in between dairy and horse farms off a state route before the subdivisions came. When I was old enough to realize it, I began to appreciate what they had.

The view from their living room/den window was like something out of Middle Earth, you could look over the pond, past the willow trees, past five pastures and finally to the green hills that met the horizon and rising sun.

I saw that amazing view so many times over the years that I now often dream of it, even though the place was sold many years ago after Granny fell and broke her hip.

Before that though, my younger brother and me had so much fun at Lake Ethel.

We caught the frogs, toads and mice that hopped into the window wells (I sometimes used the frogs and mice as bait),

picked blackberries on the nearby hills, explored the woods and old homes tucked in them, found where the cows went to die, bow hunted carp in a turbid pasture stream, watched as my sick uncle (Granny's brother) lay in a day bed in the living room and eventually passed on, sat on my great grand mother's lap, learned manners during the many cocktail parties on the screened porch, enjoyed fireworks displays on Fourth of July and so, so much more I could devote a year's worth of columns on what resides in my memory of that place.

I'm 49 now and I think I've gathered just enough wisdom to be able to share these and the lessons that came with them. The perspective I've gained in just the past few years is illuminating. I can see some benefits from age that at least for now outweigh the knee pain and back aches, but not the kidney stones.

These days, whenever I'm down or harried I've got a memory I've been relying on that helps turn things around, and I'll share it with you.

Granny and Pa's place didn't have air-conditioning on the upper floor for many years, so we just opened the windows and turned on the fans at night. We really weren't up there much during the day any way, there was just too much to do outside.

When dinner was over, the ice cream bowls were washed and put away, my brother and I went upstairs to brush our teeth and get ready for bed.

There was one window in the bathroom and it faced the pond. As we would brush our teeth there was always this great symphony of bullfrogs with their baritone croaking – each one had a distinct tone. I don't know how many of them there were (less after Uncle Alan and Uncle Leland went frog gigging), but that sound came to me one day this summer. We would listen carefully and laugh at the dueling frogs. And as I drifted off to sleep thinking about the next day's adventures, I could still

hear them through our bedroom windows – just a wonderful feeling.

Recently, I was super busy and wondering how I would get to everything that needed to get done, and the feeling of safe contentment I had as a child on those nights at Lake Ethel with the bullfrogs singing to us came bubbling up.

Was it one of those “fits” of melancholy said to come with age? Perhaps it was, but it brought back so many memories of the times I spend with Granny and Pa I thought I’d write about them and perhaps inspire you to find your own comforting memory.

Today’s children have a difficult time hearing the bullfrogs I think. There’s so much that gets in the way. Electronic entertainment, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Fortnite, over-scheduling with sports and parties, not to mention grandparents that don’t retire at 60 any more, these are all reasons life has changed.

Before school starts this year, make sure your kids get to “hear the bullfrogs”.

Until next time, remember to cherish, protect and conserve the outdoors while sharing it with others.