

Art Speaks Water: Love Letters to the Lakes

Prepared for the International Joint Commission on Great Lakes Triennial Assessment and
Public Participation on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement
Traverse City, Michigan



July 24-25, 2019

Love letters sponsored by FLOW
and written by
concerned citizens, writers, poets, artists, children
and a couple of spirited animals

What Did You Do?

Who can own this blue-blessed blessing,
this wide-as-night liquid body, this
life-making water that comes in the shape
of waves that sculpt our very souls?

And how will we answer our children
who will need it to answer their own thirsts,
who will ask the question we all must carry:
what did you do with our precious water?

Anne-Marie Oomen

To the Commissioners of the International Joint Commission of the Great Lakes

How the Love Letters to the Lakes came to be

We heard the news. You, the commissioners, were coming. Your visit became catalyst and springboard for hope. But what could we who are not scientists, lawyers, politicians, lobbyists, or professional advocates, we who hold no titles—what could we ordinary citizens do to show that the lakes mean more to us than commodity, more than resource, more than means to money? How could we express that for us water is life and communal, that it is to be protected and kept clean for all, that we must defend its clarity, use it wisely, and reuse it with integrity.

The words, *write love letters*, came from Liz Kirkwood, director of FLOW, our beloved organization that works for these waters. *Write love letters!* A way to invite our community into your important visit. *Write love letters*, not to you commissioners, but to our lakes. And then share these heartfelt missives with you commissioners. Would these letters reveal to you how much these waters mean, how much we hope they can be protected, our insistence that these waters matter beyond words. Thus, with immense respect and great optimism, we offer you these letters in appreciation for our lakes and in hope for your work. We do so in the belief that our lakes are as valuable to you as they are precious to us, and that, as you read these, you will see your way to help us all hold and defend this shared blessing for all our citizens, (and not merely for those who see water as commodity). We are not naïve; legal and scientific work must be funded. Battles fought, priorities set. But in these letters you will discover the citizen spirit: that these waters are essential not only to human beings—our joys and sorrows, our growth and sense of wonder, our well-being and spiritual health, but also to the entire ecosystem, to all beings, and to Being itself. How might that awareness shift y/our thinking, actions, decisions? We ask that you read these letters with open hearts, that you do your work from that place revealed in these words, from inside the heart and wisdom of these love letters for our Great Lakes, written to our still living waters.

FLOW
and the authors, listed below

Gathered by Anne-Marie Oomen

The Writers of the Letters

Michael Delp
Gordon Berg
Emita Brady Hill
Joseph Herringlake
Elaine L. Phillips
Amber Edmondson
Loreen Niewenhuis
Fleda Brown
Arnold Johnston
Deborah Ann Percy
Theresa Nielsen
C Joanne Grabinski
Kelly Fordan
Brita Siepker
Mary Ellen Newport
Mary E. Robertson
Nancy Kreck Allen
Mary Bevans Gillett
Christine Arvidson
Sadie Tebeau
William Allen
Nan Sanders Pokerwinski
Hilde Muller
Captain Chein Nowland
Maggie Singer
Julia Poole
Margaret Fedder
Dennis Blue
Marsha Davis
Caitlin Early
Gaye Gronlund
Angela Warsinske
Christopher Giroux
Sharon Bippus
Elizabeth Kane Buzzelli
Jacob Wheeler
Rose Hollander
Jack Dempsey
Elizabeth Schmuhl
Tulah Himburg
Brenda Earl
Monica Millen
April Bautista
Alison Swan

Bridget Klaasen
Maureen Dunphy
Robb Astor
Jill Marcusse
Emily Levang
Grace Giroux
Keith Taylor
Kelli Fitzpatrick
Nigel LaCoursiere, Rat Terrier
Keli MacIntosh
Lujine Nasralla
Patricia Ann McNair
Judy Childs
Daniel Carey
Christine Maul Rice
Linda Nemece Foster
Dawn Newton
Connor J. Dalton
Lynne Van Ness
Terese Schlachter
Cindy Miner
Kris Brady
Geradine Simkins
Jerry Dennis
Teresa Scollon
Annie Muller
Elmer F. Peterman
Ruth Peterman
William Penn
Carol Shuckra
Sylvia McCullough
Aneka Jo Liska
Kris Brady
Bronwyn Jones
Karen Anderson
Ted Gilmer
Mae Stier
Ruth Nathan
Libbet Paullin Terrell
Emily Baker
Berta Meserve
Dave Dempsey

Cover: "Beach Kids" by Linda Alice Dewey

“Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculite patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.” Cormac McCarthy

Michael Delp

The Mad Angler’s Water Love Rant

Eons before there was the lugubrious voice of a Hollywood actor shilling for a Michigan that ceased to exist well before he was born, “Pure Michigan” began in the belly of a glacier. Counting back from now to then, a relative spasm of time, there is not much to recommend our continued presence here. Yet, despite the hordes who lemming their way North, I love these waters, from the smallest feeder seep on my home river to the immense rolling skin of Lake Superior. I love all rivers, creeks, and streams, the clear bleeding springs I find on the sides of hills or in the dark pits of even darker swamps. I love the sound of waves and the shapes they leave behind on the bottom. I have spent some of the best years of my life alone, in rivers, avoiding contact, conversation and the general scent of those who manage to find their way out of cities. I praise roads into supposed fishing hideouts that peter out, leaving the lost even further lost. I praise the living aquifers under our feet and I praise the rain that enters into them when the ground opens itself to let it enter. The days move away from us as I they were clouds, but stand in a river and know that moving water is like being in an artery where water is blood and the heart never stops pumping, time merely a tiny swirl on the surface as it moves toward us, through us and then undulates away. We owe everything we are to water. I praise the mind it has of its own... left alone it does its holy work despite our constant and feral greed. We should bow to every glass we drink, every single drop of rain, every tear, even the sweat beads on our necks, even the perspiration on the sheets of our death beds.

Gordon Berg
Traverse City, MI

My Dearest Lake Michigan,

I have never paused to tell you this, but I love you.

Your waters have flowed through our combined families for five generations ... the lifeblood of our ancestral history and cherished memories.

You have welcomed us unconditionally to your shorelines as we came from Canada, Sweden, South Korea, Russia and Poland. You have sustained us with your bounty. You have inspired us with your beauty. We have sailed upon your waters and soared in the skies above your waves.

And of all the countless memories from all these people across oceans and continents and time, there is one magic moment forever etched in my mind.

It was a crisp Fourth of July, 1993, on your shores near the village of Manistee, Michigan. A day filled with a parade of patriots and a family reunion. We celebrated with burgers, hot dogs, lemonade and blueberry pie. As the sun faded, it painted your waters with reds, yellows, pinks and purples ... a rippling canvas of colors. Campfires dotted the shoreline and filled the air with the rich smells of summer. My elderly parents watched with amusement as our six-year-old son gleefully played tag with your waves washing ashore. Fireworks off the end of the pier lit-up the sky and reflected on your waters as we huddled close beneath our blankets ... generations together cocooned.

If this memory were the only one I had nestled next to your body of water, I would consider myself immensely blessed. But I alone have thousands of such memories of you. My wife has more. My son has even more. Multiply these times the hundreds of us across generations and our families' memories would completely encircle and enfold you with our love.

So dear lady, our dear Lake Michigan ... thank you. We love you for all time.

With deep bows of gratitude,
Gordon Martinson Berg

Emita Brady Hill
Traverse City, MI

Dear Lake Michigan: A love letter and a promise.

Dear Lake Michigan . . . How could we have been so foolish, so careless, so greedy and so ungrateful?

Dear Lake Michigan, the one I've known and loved of all the Great Lakes—and they are truly “great” and a marvel--gouged out of our continent's rocky surface in time immemorial by the receding glaciers in the Ice Age.

Dear Lake Michigan, joy of my four score and more summers. We, your children, have played by your shore, dived into your crystalline water, sailed over your waves, fished in your depths, been loved and indulged and carried and calmed by you. We have loved you like a mother, and you have held us like a mother as we've swum on your surface and under it reveling in the summer chill that never truly warms even on the hottest days. You nurture and refresh us. You rejuvenate the elders and thrill our young ones as they venture into the waves or gather quartz stones from the beach.

We've climbed and crossed the Sleeping Bear Dunes and seen you from afar and finally at our feet. We've watched the sun set behind the islands and marveled at the moon shining on your surface. By day and by night, in summer's sun and in winter with your majestic ice floes and caves, you have welcomed us and enriched our lives.

And yet, dear Lake Michigan, with all this love and joy you have poured on us, we have despoiled you, polluted your clean water, threatened you with gas and oil lines crossing in your depths, poisoned your abundant fish with chemicals, forgotten that with all your greatness you are not immortal. The Aral Sea and other Great lakes on other continents are now dry deserts. These are your cousins, your sisters, and their fate could be your fate. As individuals we have been blessed by your presence, but we have not given thanks or taken thought to how we might preserve the quality of your water and keep you safe.

Dear Lake Michigan, I have enjoyed your gifts without paying tribute until now and without taking action to care for you as you have generously cared for us. I promise you now to add my voice and take action wherever and whenever possible to protect and safeguard you against further transgression, to vote, to urge other people to vote, to protest on your behalf and that of the other Great Lakes and of all our smaller lakes, rivers and ponds.

The quality of your water—the quality of water of all the Great Lakes and the smallest lakes—determines the quality of our life. Without water we cannot live. Without clean water—think of the tragedy of Flint—we sicken. We need healthy water if we are to have healthy lives. We need to recognize and shout from the rafters for all to hear how much we need you and must now and in future care for you.

Dear Lake Michigan, I give thanks to you for what you provide, beauty, health, and spontaneous joy each time we encounter you. I pray for wisdom on the part of all those empowered to act on your behalf and promise to take thought and action from now on for your preservation.

Emita

Joseph Heringlake

Joseph Heringlake
Empire, MI

Dear waters of the good Earth.

I have many stories in my heart, mind, & soul.

As a form of self zen in my teens through my 30's at my parents cottage, I would wake early, quietly after oatmeal slip out, grab the family sailboat rigging & set sail out the channel into the Big Lake. At the 7 a.m. hour Lake Michigan often is an inviting glass surface with the beginnings of the atmospheric stirrings that give the sailer a "tell" about the day. I set the rigging on the small Butterfly settle into the cockpit & depending on the prevailing breeze, head out for the new adventure into the shipping lanes often losing sight of land behind me. The sounds of the rigging, the gentle rocking in the building swales, the mantra of Earths doings, it wouldn't be long till that state of being in which one immerses into that I welcome always comes. With eyes long closed and drifting into a state of being that is the natural ephemeral state, allowing the boat with sheet line held by my toes & tiller on my shoulder to send the message what adjustment is needed, hours pass. The winds build a bit, fish jump at insects on the waters surface, sea gulls squawk as the boat cuts through their resting space, the monarchs land on my legs likely glad for a rest being so far off land. Then, the one thing that really gets my attention is the mechanical rumbling fairly audible but past experience enters & by the sound with eyes remaining closed I calculate time & distance away. Oops, my error, the small sailboat begins to rock more, my eyes open & there it is barely 1/2 mile away & bearing down on my course. It doesn't take but a couple of minutes & there it goes directly in front of the Butterfly, a lake freighter maybe 75 yards off the bow. The wake is pretty impressive & I scramble out of my zen state & adjust the boats direction to ride the very large rollers. That generally indicates that it's time to come about, & ride a wonderful broad reach with the building early afternoon winds back home.

Later my Dad meets me on the beach as I slide in to shore, he smiles knowingly with me, we head to the cottage for peanut butter & banana sandwiches, and split some wood together.

The days of our innocence in youths & having my Dad kindly there with me. This lake story is one of many that heals & sustains me.

Joseph Heringlake

Elaine L. Phillips

Love Letter to Lake Superior

6/03/19

Dear Lake Superior,

I love your moods.
You represent Mother Nature at her finest.
You can express fury on a moment's notice,
after gently rocking a family of loons back to their nest
in the stillness of an early morning.

You interact directly with the gods of the sky, the lightning bolts, the dark rolling clouds;
you rise to meet them at any level of intensity
or gentleness they offer up.
You express yourself clearly,
with no regrets.

You have conversations with the sun, the wind, the moon, and the clouds.
These conversations are understood by the reeds, the dune grass, the trees and shrubs and
the wild rice that grows in protected bays.
These beings reflect on the conversation and change colors in joyful participation.
We watch quietly,
not understanding the conversation,
but feeling gratitude at having witnessed it.

When we humans become arrogant, boastful,
believing ourselves to be large, powerful gods of the earth,
you laugh and remind us what power is
and who we are: small beings, who are here for a nanosecond, mere mortals.
You will remain long after we are gone.
You will continue your conversations with the earth and the sky until time is no more.

With awe,

Elaine

(Love Letter to Lake Superior ©Elaine L Phillips, 2019, used with permission)

Amber Edmondson
Gwinn, MI

Winter, Superior

You could heal yourself
at the palm of the lake
all winter long.

It inflates
and deflates
like a living lung
on the shore,
its breath harnessed,
black and deep.

There are deer tracks
on snow-covered ice,
a weaving path
from the old cliffs
and down to the place
where the ice slopes
at the edge
and into the water.

You could match
the quiet of the doe
who came before dawn
to drink, to trust
the thickness of ice,
the grace in the sound
of shattering.

Loreen Niewenhuis
Traverse City, MI

Dear Lake Michigan:

My earliest memory of you is of a six-year-old me racing my siblings up the mammoth sand dunes at Warren Dunes State Park. We climbed the shifting hill, one step slipping back for every two taken. At the top, we turned to look out on you.

Blue.

On and on and on. There was no way to see the other side. You stretched left and right and forward until you merged with the sky. The breeze off your waters blew up the dune, warming and lifting from the hot sand.

Lifting.

There was so much rising air that hang gliders would launch off the top and glide all the way to your edge, banking and stalling and turning. We could fly off that dune with the right wing.

We did the next best thing: we ran.

We ran so fast that our legs could not keep up with our bodies; we'd pitch forward, heels-over-head, and end sprawled on the warm slope. Once we caught our breath we'd continue the downhill race.

That exhilaration, that rush – followed by a plunge into your always cool embrace – marked me, and I have been constantly drawn back to your shores.

Loreen

Fleda Brown
Traverse City, MI

Dear Intermediate Lake,

My entire childhood, I thought your name was Central Lake, but that's the town's name! We all have to put up with names we didn't choose. I have memorized you. I know Birch Point, Deepwater Point, and the rest. I know where the spiritualist camp is. It's true, KenThelm is now called Central Lake Cabanas, which again, is a boring name, but there's the same shape of trees. This is all surface, of course. This is simply the fringe of who you are. You are the unfathomable below, where my grandfather's hammer lies, the canvas sling chair that blew into the lake, my grandmother's ashes, my aunt's, and my father's.

Underneath is the slow pull through countless trickles, through sandy soil, on down through the Chain, through the Green River with its underwater grasses like wind, toward Lake Michigan.

I say all this to prove how closely I follow you. There has never been a love affair like ours. We have stared into each other's eyes; we are like twin halves. Over sixty percent of me is you. You are my reflection. We have survived in spite of cancer, Asian crawfish, zebra mussels, phragmites, Loosestrife. We are of course mortal. We were carved from the natural movements of the universe, and we will shift again. Nonetheless! Nonetheless, here we are, and we wish to have life, right now! We wish for clarity, for passage, for the joy of being useful. We wish to be our own irreplaceable selves, unhampered by confusion, unhampered by what is foreign to our nature.

Who am I to say what you want? Wanting is not even in your idiolect. All I can do is stand at the end of the dock, with my thoughts.

There are four of us doing water ballet. We are trying to hold up a leg, in sync, to make a flower. Light from the cottage sparks our churning. This is the happiest I will ever be. I will be happy again and again, but this is pure immersion, pure memory, which can be pure only in memory.

The old rowboat is softly banging against the dock. It is music to my ears. It has been softly banging there through the deepest troughs, through divorce and illness, through anxiety and loss. It has not been there for years, yet it is as real as anything. It is saying, "Right now, right now."

Love,

Fleda

Arnold Johnston
Kalamazoo, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

You're the Big Lake, *mishigami*,
The great reviser.
Along the shore each morning
There's a line of water-worn pebbles till Hell won't have them:
Quartz and tiger-striped agate, blue chert pretending to be agate,
Leland Blue Slag pretending to be blue chert,
But often exposing itself with a hole clear through.
Siderite masquerading as pebble,
With lightning patterns of calcite in the cracks,
Petoskey Stones with their subtext of fossilized coral cells,
Unakite with its streaks of green and pink,
Horn coral trumpeting at one end but always making its point,
Like a Paleolithic sonnet,
Petrified wood, Charlevoix Stone with its little Favositic eyes—
No, wait, you say, you meant it to be Honeycomb Coral,
Or Stink Stone, cratered like an asteroid—
Moonstone—well, feldspar—not to be confused with quartz,
A green and bubbly chunk of Frankfurt slag,
Crinoids in necklacefuls of little rings,
And hosts of other fossils only scholars can identify
As you throw them up from your uncatalogued depths,
All along the Third Coast;
Multicolored pebbles, yes, real pebbles, worn to smoothness
By rubbing around in the bottom of your great pocket
Before you reduce them to grains of sand.
And beach glass: the various bottle browns and greens,
Bud, Labatt's, Heineken, Newcastle, Leinenkugel, they're all here,
But you transform their cliché into smooth little opaque jewels.
The frosted white of old gin and vodka bottles,
Boodle's, Bombay, Tanqueray, Beefeater,
Grey Goose, Absolut, and Stoli,
Scotch and bourbon, too,
J & B, Dewar's, Johnnie Walker, and the whole parade of single malts.
You sing the seltzer blues, too, Bromo and Alka,
With Milk of Magnesia on the side,
And the rare and delicate amethyst of old Mason jars.
Driftwood, of course, delicate and skeletal
Or thick and sodden,
Moss and weed, drinking straws, the cups they came in,
Condoms, hypodermics, beach toys, dying bees and ladybugs.
And farther out, kayaks, canoes, skiffs, schooners,

Cabin cruisers, fishing boats, freighters, and ferries,
And their loadings, cargoes and crews.
And far beyond the shipping lanes,
Full fathom fifty,
Who knows what's there in your depths
To be revised tomorrow morning?
The long line of the shore, the metrics of the tide,
Alliteration of the waves,
Beauty and dross, connections churning
Out of all you are.
Collective unconscious?
Don't get me started.

Sincerely,
Arnie Johnston

Deborah Ann Percy
Kalamazoo, MI

Dear Big Lake,

Late in the morning the sky darkened and the wind blew in fiercely from offshore. I tucked my wool scarf tightly into the neck of my coat and turned my head as I walked on the beach. My husband had taken the two boys to shop for my Christmas present. I had driven the small old Peugeot. Children's debris littered floor and seats: empty water bottles, picture books, candy wrappers, some things I could hardly identify.

At breakfast my son had stopped eating his cheesy eggs and said, "What would you rather have for a gift? A pet monkey? A big knife? Or a sparkly necklace?"

I paused in cutting a cantaloupe into bite-sized cubes. "Actually, I have my own personal monkey, so I don't really need anything else," I said, pointing the knife at him.

"Yes. Yes, you do, Mom."

I really didn't want a Christmas present.

"Well, your children will want to get you something," my husband said before leaving with the boys. "Give me a clue."

"Write a poem for me."

"About what?"

"How much you adore me. About the big lake."

"You adore the big lake."

"I do. But *it* doesn't love me back. There's no love, no hate. Only indifference that will kill you and not notice."

Now the wind whipped the hem of my coat, my long skirt. I sat down on the cold sand, just beyond the wild waves rolling toward me. I took off my gloves and sat on them so they wouldn't blow away. Then I ate the sweet watery melon cubes from the small baggie I'd filled earlier. The big early winter waves made the horizon lumpy. Soon the shore would be covered with ice. Every year, foolish people walked out on the ice and disappeared into holes hidden by snow. I pulled my scarf loose and used it as a pillow to lie down on the sand. I closed my eyes and listened to the waves.

Later, I sealed the baggie and put it back in my pocket. I put on my gloves and got up, making my way up through the sand to the parking lot, back into the messy car, then home. I wanted to get there before my family came tumbling noisily in. I wanted just a few minutes to savor the deep dangerous calm the big lake had given me once again. Had given me without ever caring.

Yours truly,

Debby

Theresa Nielsen
Royal Oak, MI

Dearest St. Clair River,

I've been visiting you for the past 38 years, there are so many fond memories. My first time was before I got married, and where I spent my honeymoon shortly after. My husband and I strolled along the water's edge, so happy together. Even in the winter on what was one of the coldest days of the year, there we were taking in your beauty, large chunks of ice slowly floating. But I didn't care because I was so taken with your awesome view.

Over the years we have enjoyed day long visits, picnics on a bench and walking our dogs. We travel about forty minutes to be near you on a regular basis. I so love and enjoy sitting on a bench taking a few stitches on my quilt and watch the passing of the ships. The water is so blue, the atmosphere so inviting and peaceful that I never want to leave. But I must, only because I know I will soon be back to see you again, very soon.

As I sit by the water's edge enjoying the view, the people and the Blue Water Bridge, it makes me happy. My quilting comes to life, I appreciate all that the water has to offer. When I'm not quilting, I'm able to complete the next chapter of my novel, a work in progress. What ever it is I may be doing I thank you for the most amazing view, the inspiration, the gentle waves and the sunshine on the water.

It's love like no other, to be near the water, our beautiful St. Clair River. The beautiful view that you provide, water as far as I can see. I long to see you again soon and I look forward to each and every visit with you.

Forever and always my love,
Many peaceful blessings

Very truly yours,
Theresa Nielsen

C Joanne Grabinski
Mt. Pleasant MI

Dear Saint Clair Lake,

I love you! Ever since I first saw you from the porch of the House on the Hill B&B all those years ago, my love for you has grown and remain. Even now 6-7 years since I last was there in person, you remain a peaceful image in my mind. Yes, I am very fond of some of your Chain of Lakes siblings; glimpses of them are nice, but it is you I truly miss. What is it about you that drew me in and holds me there still? You are small—short and a bit wide like me. From the porch, I could see almost your full length and across you to the back drop of a season-changing hill. You were most often pristine and serene—slowing me down, calming me as I gazed on you with my early morning mug of coffee. Sometimes a lone fisherman drifted across your surface. Sometimes motor boats skimmed across you with water skiers behind them, but most often it was a canoe or some kayaks you held. On 4th of July, you hosted a raucous boat parade and later reflected the bright flares of fireworks overhead. Sometimes my view was from a table or the patio at Tapawingo, where the rows of high trees on each side of the lawn perfectly framed a pizza-like slice of you. One foggy Brigadoonish evening, the view included a tree on its tiny grassy perch at your edge and also its reflection in your water. Beside you, I recruited graduate students for an EMU graduate certificate program at NMC's University Center in Traverse City and celebrated birthdays, anniversaries and graduations. You refreshed me in good times and consoled me in not-so-good life moments across three decades. Your image is still securely fixed in my mind so I can sit again gazing out upon you to work through difficult challenges. As a native Oregonian, I grew up alongside a small creek at the edge of our farm, the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean. I have come to recognize the personal importance of being beside water (but NOT in or on it). Being transplanted to Michigan—now for more than half of my life, it is lakes I have come to treasure. Big, active lakes are good, but you, Saint Clair Lake, are my ideal.

With Love,

Joanne

Kelly Fordan

Dear Lake of Summer Memories

My father standing sentry on the deck,
the dog on a green bath towel by his side,
donuts greasy from the warming oven,
sandy skin and small moon skipping stones,
rickety beach chairs. Talent shows performed
on the lawn, my father jangling his Manhattan,
holding it aloft, a crystal goblet beam of light.

I knew nothing of war and scoliosis,
dead siblings, long nights in separate bedrooms.
It was all bright clear days on Lake Erie for me,
no fear of waves or sudden shifts in weather.
And he never let on. Only, sometimes when I
ventured out too far, I'd look back to find him
waving frantically from shore.

With all that in mind,

Kelly

Brita Siepker
Glen Arbor, MI

My dear Michigami,

I have loved you all my life, since the days before I could walk your shores or swim your waters or speak your name. I believe I have loved you since first sight, though my memory doesn't reach that far, and I have loved you at each sight, though there have been so many I can't begin to remember. I have loved every stone I've collected from your shoals, every grain of sand I've grazed on your shores, every mouthful I've gulped from your depths. My veins pulse your freshwater.

I learned to live in your waters. I learned to live freshly. Your crystal clear waters reflected up the image of every bit of rubbish, taught me to never litter your waters with my waste. Your receding waterline in years of drought taught me to use your precious fresh water sparingly, to protect your watershed. Your algae-covered rocks taught me to grow a garden without pesticides, with mulch to hold the moisture in and keep the weeds out. I learned to live adventurously. Your waves taught me to swim, plunging into troughs, surging up on crests. Your winds taught me to sail, lifted by your katabatics, headed by your shadows. Your waters carried me out through your exorheic basin to the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, and eventually all the way around the world. I learned to live perseveringly. We spent hours scouring your shores for Petoskey stones where the light shines through the clouds. I spent months sailing around the world, knowing I wouldn't stop until I came full circle to your shores.

My life is your water.

With all my heart,
Brita

Mary Ellen Newport
Interlochen, MI

Dear Platte River – Betsie River Watershed,

I cannot believe that I have the great blessing of living at your headwaters. I cannot believe that I get to kayak down your minor tributaries and mainstem. I am even grateful for the times I've T'd into a deadfallen cedar, for full immersion! Thank you for floating me! Thank you for supporting all the hidden life beneath your surface: all the gar and snappers, the fish and minnows, the gorgeous and weird macroinvertebrates. What a privilege it is to be plumbing your depths, your shallows, your gracious good flow.

With love and delight,
Mary Ellen



Mary E. Robertson
Huntington Woods, MI

Dearest Lake Michigan, lake of my heart:

I know you were worried. The competition is stiff—Powerful Superior, Infamous Erie, International Ontario and your eastern twin, Huron. Each member of the H.O.M.E.S. family we memorized in third grade has something special to offer.

But for me there was never a moment's doubt. I love you best and always have. How could I not? I was born on your shores in Grand Haven, sunbathed on your beaches in my tiny one-piece and little plastic goggles as a tot, longed for you during my college years of exile in Ohio, and finally found you again and could not let you go.

I had to have you, to own you, though no one really can. I heaved a heavy but committed sigh while signing my name to the deed on a narrow lot that abutted your shore. It meant I would be in debt the rest of my life. I didn't care. I had realized a dream at age 27 that I knew others spent lifetimes chasing. I could go to you whenever I wanted. I could look at your amazing, ever-changing face morning, noon and night.

The only way to repay such good fortune was to share you with everyone I knew. I have a bookshelf full of journals where all those visitors recorded their memories, their love for you. My own memories are there too. Of laughing on your shores with my dearest friends, hunting Petoskey stones with my nephews, building sand castle masterpieces, watching my 90-year-old mom swim her elegant crawl in your clear waters, kayaking farther than was prudent with my dying husband, rowing in a yellow raft with my girls, singing at the top of my lungs as I walked to the point and back, and bobbing for hours in my rubber tube, my happy place, letting you wash away every worry and fear.

You hold my whole life in your powerful arms. I've been thrown to shore when you are angry, imagined underwater kingdoms in the shadows of your calm, watched unparalleled light shows approach from your far shore. You are the only *thing* that I have ever loved. I travel the world and find nothing to rival your beauty, your grandeur.

Thank you for 65 years of joy.

You own my heart.

Mary

Nancy Kreck Allen
Maple City MI

BeLoved Lake Michigan

I've lived near your shores over forty years. I admit that at first I took you for granted. I allowed other, smaller lakes to get in the way. I avoided you. I was afraid.

You seemed so vast, mysterious and fickle. Eventually, though, I fell in love with you.

After twenty years in Northern Michigan I moved to New York City. I often daydreamed about a secluded spot along your shore near Bohemian Road, rich with the scent of warm pine needles and the call of loons. Eagles dove from the pines to catch prey in your waters. I imagined myself there with the hot sun on my back.

Memories of you kept me grounded.

Whenever I would return, you became the first place to which I made a pilgrimage. I still stand at the top of the stairs at Lane Road or peer down County Road 669 eager for a sparkling sight of you. Just a glimpse of your aquamarine water thrills and soothes me.

That will never change. You are the heartbeat of my world.

When I developed a chronic illness you listened as I walked, danced, cried, sang and yelled out my fear, my pain. No matter how much I hurt, I never stopped finding solace in you. You've captured my tears, heard my fears and bathed my aches. You danced alongside me. You gave me meaningful gifts. I'm ever grateful for the fierce waves, warm sand, ice caves, sailing, swimming, your ever-changing beauty and the precious stones that connect me to you and my community when I'm away.

I know that your body, once polluted, was rehabbed back to health through the wisdom and caring of many. You inspire me and give me courage that I can heal.

You are my wild and serene and sometimes forbidding companion. I hope that I can return your love and friendship. For me you are the face of God I see in my prayers. Your depths contain all of what makes me whole. My beloved Lake Michigan.

Nancy Kreck Allen

Mary Bevans Gillett
Traverse City, MI

Oh Michigan, My (Lake) Michigan

Michigan, my mitten state. Your rugged fingers stretch north, east and west, wrapped in the great protective shawls of Erie, Huron, Superior and Michigan. Lakes that protect us, feed us, frighten us. Lakes where we frolic in the waves, sail free in the wind and lumbar along the shores. The Great Lakes that call us home with personalities entrenched in legend and lore.

Your waters fed our forests, friends and first peoples. Your brisk currents moved the voyageurs and missionaries, soldiers and settlers, lumberjacks and lumber barons, miners and migrants ... all seeking their tomorrow. You brought goods from the cities we sent lumber to build. You carried the ore and coal and horses and plows. You shared dreams of tomorrow with tears of the forgotten. You forged our future.

Your beauty is boundless, as are your moods. Waters as smooth as glass whip into waves of fury at the drop of a cloud. Diamond glitters dance with the sun across the bays and along the sands before exploding with sunset and melting into darkness. Reflected sunrises quietly, majestically, welcome the day, waking the loons, calling the swans and offering reverence while wet swirls of blue and green meet the sky in vivid strokes of color and light...and remind us that northern nature is indeed God's palette.

Your anger can be cruel. Shattering ships and swallowing souls. Turning frigid, you batter the mitten with ice packed shores left rigid and reckless with broken shards and bitter winds. You remind us how quickly life can change from bright to dark, and your gifts are not to be unvalued.

Your waters are deep and strong. Home to Islands - Beaver and the Manitous, our baby cubs just out of Sleeping Bear's duney reach. You shape the Petoskey stones and Leland blues, while feeding the salmon, trout, perch and endless gulls. Your sands are long and broad and deep while welcoming toddlers and travelers to share space with the pines and dune grass and locals who wish you wouldn't be found. You shroud our shores and carry our crafts, and try to stay strong amidst the invaders, the trash, the tourists and too much selfish abuse. You can be broken.

And we would be broken hearted.

Michigan, my Lake Michigan. You are our north star, you nurture our spirit, you bring us home. You are loved ... and must be protected.

Mary

Christine Arvidson
Charlotte, NC

Dear Lake Michigan:

Last night I had a hard time falling asleep
I found myself standing on your dark shores
Illuminated only by a bright full moon
That cast sparkly bits across your slow little waves
In the slight breeze that blew in to your shore.

Then a surprising thing happened - I rose up and up
Not a being with wings like an angel or bird
Just lighter than air I soared up and over your waters
Holding my hands above my head, reaching for the moon
From on high I looked down on your peaceful waters
And saw the life within, all around.

I sank back down a bit and saw otters at a creek mouth
They smiled and waved at me floating above them
Further I sank and let the tips of my toes feel your cool water
I flew along your surface and lake trout leaped up alongside me
Laughing as they chased.

Just because I could, I soared up again
To a height where I could still hear you, smell you
And lay back in the comforting air
Closed my eyes
And sank slowly, finally,
To sleep.

Christine

Sadie Tebeau
Petoskey, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

I love all your colors. I think with every color you have an emotion: when you're aqua you're astonished; when you're teal you're excited; when you're light blue you're happy; when you're dark blue you're mad; when you're navy you're sad. When you have these emotions they spread to me and I feel those emotions too. Since I was born about one or two miles away from you, you have always been part of my everyday life. I drive past you every day. I swim in you. I boat on you. I play on your beach. It's fun to watch the sky turn to cotton candy when the sun sets. In the winter I ice skate and ice fish on you. When you are a person who feels lake emotions like me, your life is different and special. Even though I have my own emotions and life, the ones you have, Lake Michigan, are the ones I feel most. Even though the emotions you have are simple, it still makes me feel special. You are a great addition to my childhood. Not everyone gets to experience growing up by you. You need to be protected. Too many people are putting trash in you and that's a problem. You are like a big jar of memories and we need to save them all.

I'm so happy you're a lake and I get to live so close to you. Michigan would not be a good vacation spot if you weren't here to see. You make people's lives a lot better. My life would not be fun without you. There wouldn't be a good spot to boat, fish, swim, or relax on the sand in the sun. There wouldn't be dunes to climb on or a spot to ice fish. If we didn't have your moods, it would be harder to feel any emotions. You help us activate our emotions in our bodies. You are a place that opens fun potential for anyone soon to visit you. You send a good whiff of happiness to anyone who sees you.

Love,
Sadie
Age 8

William Allen
Maple City, MI

Dear Lake Michigan

Growing up on your Southeastern shore, I have cherished a childhood in awe of your vastness, pristine forests and towering dunes. I just turned seventy years old. I'm still growing up, but now on your Northeastern shore.

Lake Michigan, you inhabit my dreams.

For decades I have had two variations of watery dreams. In one I am a child standing on my family's cottage deck looking out over your glassy smooth water. You meld into the soft haze without a horizon line. Then your surface begins to undulate and small swells begin to form. Gradually they move toward the shore building and building until finally heaving into monstrous waves. Your waves tower over me and the cottage, higher than the trees, on the verge of breaking and crashing over everything. Yet that doesn't happen. I am not inundated and remain safe, left in awe of an immense power.

In the other dream I am far from shore way beyond a long concrete pier jutting out into your deep water. The day is bright and sunny with a brilliant blue sky. A strong Northwest wind churns your blue green water into a frenzy. Clouds of spray fill the air with every deafening crash of a wave. I am in some state between swimming and flying through and over your turbulence. Though fearful, I am exhilarated and joyful managing to stay above danger while still engulfed by the experience.

Whenever I have dreams such as these I awaken knowing that I have really been somewhere. I wake with a feeling of joy. Karl Jung has written that water symbolizes the vastness of the unconscious. As a visual artist I believe that the unconscious inspires art and creativity in all forms.

Lake Michigan, your essence has given me energy to help give form to my interior self. You are a force inhabiting that place, where art, inward journey and all creativity begins.

Bill

Nan Sanders Pokerwinski
Newaygo, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

You're not like the others—the ones I grew up with. In that flat and dusty land, those pretenders to the title were mere puddles. Knowing no better, we suited up, dived in, toweled off, sat on shore with sandwiches, staring out across their dense, red-silted expanses, thinking, “Well, this is nice.”

Then I met you, and I had to expand my vocabulary. I'll admit it: you dazzled me, spangled like a rock star, necklaced with villages whose very names enchant: Empire, Pentwater, Saugatuck.

The only time I didn't love you as much as I wanted to was on that blustery September day I ferried across your liquid skin. Your ups and downs! How they unsettled me. Betrayed, I sulked until I reached the other shore and looked back at your troubled face, your spectrum of shades.

You, too, carry burdens, I realized in that moment. And also this: I may have loved you since we first met, but I haven't really known you. Let me know you now.

Love,
Nan

Hilde Muller
Hart, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

Until I was 16, when my older sister began attending Hope College, I thought the state of Michigan ended at Lansing. I believed that you were merely the “M” in the elementary school acronym for the great lakes: HOMES. I didn’t realize you were an actual place with a life of your own.

I grew up in Ypsilanti, a land-locked, blue-collar community east of Ann Arbor. Throughout my childhood we drove 45 minutes to access shabby little Lake Independence—its tepid water crammed with children and swimmer’s itch. The summer my sister stayed in Holland to work, I drove across state with friends and spent an afternoon picnicking on the beach. Wading in for the first time, I was shocked by your cold and raw power—it frightened and unsettled me—the strength of it; its potent aliveness. Timidly, I kept my feet on dry sand.

Years later, my fiancé, who owned acreage in Oceana County, planned an afternoon trip for us to visit you. Driving your way, past Andrews’ blueberry farm, the old truck broke down and we had to call a friend for help. I knew he was disappointed and we talked of other days when we might come your way; but secretly, I was relieved.

It wasn’t until we were actually living in Oceana County on our waterless patch of woods and poison ivy that I began to know you. It was July—I was a month overdue with our firstborn as the mosquitos and relentless heat pelted me pitilessly. It was late in the day and we’d been tearing down a barn to glean building materials for our future home. Enormously pregnant, dripping with sweat and raw with bug bites, I was desperate for some relief. My husband and I piled into our truck, and made for Claybanks Township Park where a small inlet pours out of thick woods into your waves.

There, under the July sun, I laid my swollen, miserable body in your cool, clear water and felt as if the whole world were rising up to hold me and my soon-to-be-born baby. For the first time, I glimpsed the extraordinary gift of your existence—and knew that my own life, and the life of my child, were inextricably tied to yours. I can no longer imagine living away from your buoyant waves and steadfast shores. “M” truly is for Lake Michigan, my home.

With Gratitude,

Hilde

Captain Chein of the Nauticat

Traverse City, MI

Dear West Bay,

When the wind whips from the North the water boils with anger, sinking ships that are poorly moored at its basin, you show your true strength in these days and that's what I love about you. If I weren't prepared for a day like this, then I may end up joining you at the bottom. Your waves crash on the beach, shaping it and pushing back the land, taking back what is yours. I can hear the sound of the air wisp off the top of each wave. This is what you sound like when you've had enough. Your peaks look like dunes until they crash overtop, capping white. All the other directions West, East, and South you act the same. Calm. Leaving me in a sense of comfort that everything is going to be ok.

Love,

Your Captain

Chein Nowland

Maggie Singer
Traverse City, MI

Love Letters in the Sand

I remember our first visit to Michigan. Driving from Nebraska up through Iowa and Minnesota and then on through part of the Upper Peninsula heading toward Traverse City. Marveling at the seemingly endless rolling landscapes and staring through the deep wilderness, I was thinking I had never seen so many trees!

In our hurry to reach our destination, we were car bound with two small children until we crossed the magnificent Mackinac Bridge when we were suddenly awestruck by the inspirational vista of those two Great Lakes sparkling below us on either side, merging together as one, as vast and blue as an ocean. The children stared through the windows in unusually quiet amazement.

We finally stopped by the side of the road after crossing that great expanse; the restlessness and excitement to experience Lake Michigan could no longer be contained. The sandy stretch of beach was warm and inviting, enticing clothing to be shed as twenty tiny toes and little chubby knees were titillated by the rushing waves. Squeals of laughter, the sounds of pure joy invited us to join the fun. It was shockingly cold but also exhilarating! The energy from the ebb and flow of the surf gave me a deep feeling of freedom and relaxation. Or maybe it was just getting out of that car after long hours on the road with two small children! But, as a kid from Omaha the closest thing we had to a lake was man made, a large hole dug out of a sandpit and 30 miles away. So we were impressed!

Michigan was so different! So pure and fresh was the breeze blowing off that big lake, the surrounding landscape so pristine. I fell in love that day and realized I wanted us to live in place like this. This was Michigan!, with the life reaffirming essence of pure, fresh water all around us.

Many times since that day we have had the sensational pleasure of watching great waves crash against a sandy or a rocky shore, the colors changing hue across the water, gazing toward the horizon as the sun sets, an array of magnificent colors in the sky above. These sights have been a soothing salve for the soul.

I used to believe there was little that could spoil the abundant beauty of the many lakes, rivers and streams of "Pure Michigan" so richly endowed with nature's splendor, it once had earned that name.

Alas, much has changed to the detriment of our environment in the past 40 years. We need to face up to the challenge now, so that future generations are able to enjoy the benefits we have been granted. The glorious gift of our waters here in Northern Michigan where we play and swim are threatened by toxins, and in some places even the drinking water is at risk for health concerns.

As we walk or boat along the shores there are plastics huddling on the edges of these once unfettered bodies of water. Sure, we can take a bag along to pick up abandoned rubbish, but this is the very least we can do to be true stewards of our fresh water resources. We must all work together to stop the government allowances of pollution to our water our air and our earth. We need to elect officials who will not compromise our natural resources but instead will work for the protection of the water, the very life source inherent to the well being of all living creatures.

Let us imagine ourselves once again as playful children, enjoying the lakeshore, building castles and moats, writing letters in the wet sand, watching with amazement as our own small footprints are washed away by the surf. Then envision how that nostalgic scene could change as chemical sludge comes creeping closer toward those tiny toes, like in a scene from a bad horror movie.

We cannot turn back the clock, but we the people have the power to “turn back the tide.” We must all take action before it’s too late.

For the love of water,
Maggie

Julia Poole
Rockford, MI



Dear Lake Michigan,

Every summer, my parents took me to your sandy shores—South Haven, Holland, Grand Haven, Ludington, and Petoskey. I swam, sailed, fished, and filled buckets of sand to cover Dad on the beach. Wading into your waters, my toes gripped the squishy lake bottom as your waves embraced me. Later, my husband and I brought our son and daughter to experience you in their own way. See how they loved you? See how your waves mesmerized? Just as your waves captivated the Native Americans who once fished, navigated, and swam your waters, and just as I hope future generations of children will delight in exploring your waters and shoreline.

With sincere gratitude and love,
Julia

Margaret Fedder
Traverse City, MI

To Lake Michigan

The bent curve of bay
and our great water—

 who are we but
bystanders graced beyond
measure.

 This gift then—
our own solidity reassured
by the see-saw of turbulence

and peace before us in
gray, then blue then silver.

Margaret

Dennis Blue

Onkama, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

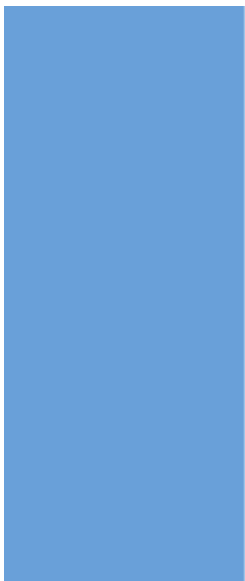
You are a jewel in God's creation. Thank you for the sunsets, hues of bright orange to deep purple as the sun caresses the water; the beaches and sand dunes; the habitat you provide for the creatures that depend on you for life and indulging my passion for fishing.

We met over thirty years ago when I first became a charter captain based in the port of Onkama. Tentatively, I began to understand your moods from calm and relaxing to wild and dangerous. As the years went by familiarity morphed into respect and then a love of knowing you intimately. My charter boat became the means to share your beauty and world class salmon fishing with people from all over the world.

We have seen good times and bad. The growth in social and economic value you have provided to Michigan and the surrounding states is formattable. At the same time the deterioration of your pristine waters by invasive species and man-made activities have sadden those that love you. As a steward of God's creation, I realize now more than ever, my obligation to help protect and maintain your beauty for future generations.

Help is on its way. Great Lakes water quality is gaining international attention. Organizations such as For the Love of Water (FLOW) and the Lake-love Project suggest a bright future for the Lakes.

Fondly, Dennis Blue



Dennis Blue

Marsha Davis

Lakewood Ranch, FL

To my first love,

I reflect in warmhearted memories of growing with you near my heart and body. You flooded me with your tenderness and soothing washing of liquid love. I knew then that you would always be a part of my life.

As I grew older and moved farther away from your constant chosen caresses, I still come to visit you, even though you may not realize my gazes and longing to see you more often. I have realized your relatives who are located in other lands and states are also so wonderful, but they aren't and never will be my dear Lake Michigan. I call myself a salt water lady now, with where I live, but I have returned to your arms every year since childhood and will continue with every breath of my being ...your Lake girl.

I wanted to share these memories with you as time rolls on and one of us remains physically unchanged. You were here long before me and will continue to be long after me but you have my heart and appreciation for all the good times you have given me.

Thank you, my love.

Marsha

Caitlin Early
Traverse City, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

You know every inch of my body—from late night swims with nothing between us, to morning treads in the humid midsummer heat where I bob and somersault in deep water just northwest of the breakwall, your cool current brushing the tips of my toes.

Silently at sunset I slip into your embrace, and find peace. A glint of copper sunshine reflects off of your wave as if a smile, a wink. A silent acknowledgement of a private conversation: we agreed to meet, just here. You take me in, an immediate release. When I am with you, I am infinite.

Being apart from you, my life feels far away. When I am reeling for the sense of home, I find it in you. I was baptized in your water, in my grandmother's arms. You pulse through me, showing me the way through different seasons of life.

I was learning how to walk and your waves pushed me—pushed me over, and taught me balance. I was left alone after spats with friends and you consoled me into independence. I was immersed in the dramatic dregs of being a teenage girl and you granted me grace. I was relearning the rhythm of my muscles after injury and you gave me strength. I was flowing through the tides of emotion after my parents' divorce and you showed me how to be resilient.

I do not need to tell you all of this, because you already know. I tell you this because things immeasurably darker have occurred to your body—things around you, things about you, things within you. No one can own you, you cannot be tamed. I have no idea what has happened to you.

But I will show you the compassion you continue to bestow upon me. I will lift up your voice, the thunderous crashing of your waves, the serene whisper of your calm ripples, to those who cannot hear. I will carry you, as you have carried me.

In love and with love,

Caitlin

Gaye Gronlund

To the waters of Lake Michigan,

I send my gratitude.

On sunny days your sparkling turquoise melds into deep midnight blues. The colors—so rich, vibrant, pure—take my breath away.

As storms stir your depths, your fury boils in the rolling waves that pound your sandy shores. Whitecaps striate the deep greys and blacks of your waters, untouched by sun as rains fill you once again.

We owe you, Great Lake.

We who swim in your clean, clear waters. We who treasure your white-sand beaches. We who kayak and boat and fish. We who thrill at your bone-chilling cold, your ice caves of winter, your ever-changing nature.

We owe you more than gratitude. We owe you our fiercest protection, dedication to your preservation, prevention from harm.

With gratitude comes responsibility.

I pledge to remember and take action. I invite fellow lake-lovers to do the same.

Sincerely,

Gaye

Angela Warsinske
Wixom, MI

Dearest Greater than Great Bodies of Water around the Mitten,

I always knew there was something majestic about you. My parents used to take me on trips to see you in the summer and to everyone's amazement I was always the first to jump into your waters no matter how cold it would make me. I would see the different shades of blue, green and yellow splash together, smell the thick seaweed filled air, and hear the shushing whispers you sent in your waves. The mounds of waves called out to me and your body had cool, sensual arms in which I wanted to be wrapped.

When I was in school we once did a science experiment to see how many drops of water would fit on a single penny. We all predicted it wouldn't be many, but it ended up being a great number due to water tension and the water molecules bonding together. I thought, if that is the power of just a few drops of water no wonder a whole body of water is so powerful.

I was reminded of this power when I brought my daughter to meet you for the first time. It was the first summer she could walk. She got us up early in the morning and it was colder than we had anticipated any part of the weekend to be, but she wanted to go outside and so we put on our thick coats and walked down to the beach.

When she first saw you, the big great lake, her face lit up and she immediately ran toward you. Your yellow-flag waves came closer to shore and she ran back up the beach. She has always been a fairly cautious child, no matter how much encouragement we gave her, she would not yet even climb a jungle gym or go down a slide. After the waves she ran from crashed and broke, she ran back toward the water, and as the new waves got closer she ran back again. A smile spread across her face and she giggled.

You and her continued this synchronized dance until finally she stopped and her face went serious. She was taking in everything about the water and I knew my daughter who didn't have her speech yet was talking to you. I couldn't hear what you were saying to her, but when your conversation was over, she was stronger. She toddled over to the jungle gym on your beach and climbed up it without hesitation. I had to wonder, did she find that strength in you?

That evening we went back to the beach. It was a beautiful evening, the sun had just begun to set and the entire beach had a warm orange glow. People became black silhouettes. The boats had begun their parade of sails out to see the sunset, there was one wedding taking place on the pier and another right on the beach. Teenagers played frisbee. Families laid down blankets to picnic and play, nobody minded that the line for ice cream was long and growing longer. My daughter continued to climb up and down the jungle gym.

It was such a sight to see, all of these strangers were brought to one place by you, this great, body of water. We were forever bonded in that moment, you, Lake Michigan, were the reason for all the memories being made. Everyone watched as the sun sank lower and lower. A chill grew in the air and slowly, we all began to leave the beach. We headed back by the path of light that had formed on your water from the light of the moon.

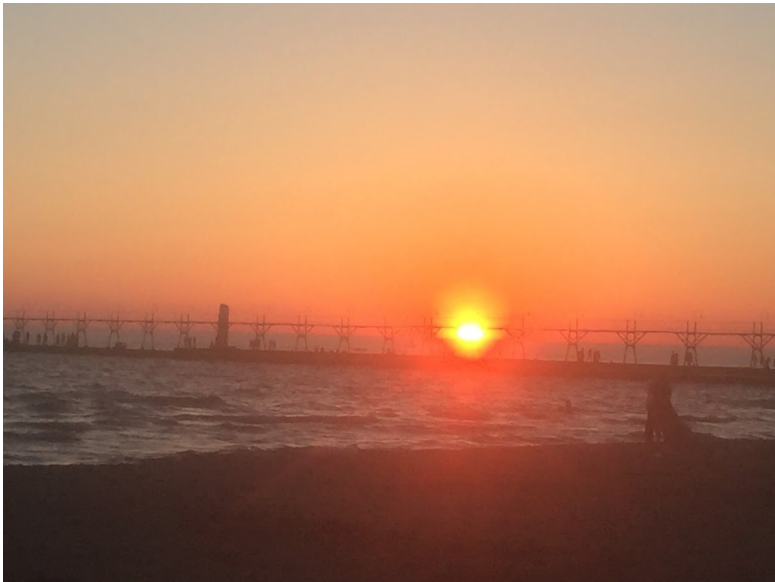
Where would we all have gone that night without you? Even scarier, what if one day, my daughter's daughter cannot speak with you the way she did? I am so sorry for all the hurt that people's pollution has caused. You are not a waste and we should not waste you. Please find it

deep down in your waters to forgive us as we work to find ways to make others understand and work to clean our wrong doings away from you.

I hope we can use your power to bond together and continue to bring future generations together on your shores.

Ever After Love,

Angela Warsinske



Christopher Giroux
Saginaw, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

A short thank you for being a constant throughout my life.

I know you best through South Beach, accessed along Reynolds Road in Leland, Michigan. That was where we first met in the late 1960s while I was visiting my grandparents; it is where my parents then brought my siblings and myself annually. It is where I now vacation with my own daughter, wife, and in-laws every July. In this way, your sun-warmed shores and dark depths are physical representations to me of family and love.

It is through you that I have learned about the beauty and mystery of the natural world: the distant slopes of Sleeping Bear, the call of kingfishers in pines and the shadows made by circling eagles, the sunsets that linger over the Manitou Islands, the fact that sunrises can be found in petoskey stones. You have showed me the many shimmering shades of blue, green, and grey created by sun, moon, sand, and skies (both clear and cloudy).

It is also through you that I have learned about nature's power: the pull of undertows and cold waters; the changing shoreline rediscovered every year; the strength of spawning salmon leaping up dams; the wind's cry, moan, call; the miracle of ice caves.

Even when I have shunned your frigid temps, you have nurtured my spirit. When I first glimpse you, usually in Grand Traverse Bay, driving into Acme along M72, I literally feel a physical change, a lightening in my chest. Furthermore, it is walking along your shores, and those of your sisters, both large and small, that I gain mental and emotional clarity. It is with you that I have learned of art—the art of paintings, photography, poems, living. You teach me, to talk in terms of religion, what communion really is.

You are also, unfortunately, where I have learned of humanity's selfishness. I do not need to tell you of this; you suffer it daily. However, there are those who need to be reminded—those who are motivated only by greed and personal gain; who refuse to consider long-term consequences of their actions; who think that your magnitude can absorb trash, poisons, fuels. Forgive us for the harms we cause. Unfortunately, we often know what we do.

With much love, many thanks, and many prayers for your well-being....

Chris

Sharon Bippus
Three Rivers, MI

Dearest Undulating Beauty,

Before I knew what life might bring me, I sat on your shore, faced away from that city of great shoulders and watched how your waves splashed against the rocks, huge boulders dropped, planted, before I was conceived. I was 22 and thought myself too constrained by your small town Michigan shores. What did I know? I took a boat ride with tourists and travelled out from the Chicago River to view the mighty city from your vantage point. So full of promise but after a hard, cold, yes, windy winter, I sat again on your rocks and listened to the sound of your waves and saw the twinkling light of the sun reflected on your surface. You are an old woman, but so alive, and so wise.

Again and again, I come to your shores, seeking the peace, healing, and renewal, that only you, great beauty, my love, can provide.
In admiration and deepest respect,

Sharon

Elizabeth Kane Buzzelli
Mancelona, MI

Dear lovely, lovely lakes,

This is my letter to you: Michigan, Superior, Ontario, Erie, and Huron, and your little sister, Lake St. Clair, where I spent summers as a child.

There was a small cottage on Harsens's island, and a rowboat, rowed most summer days into the reeds to hide and fish with a pole and no bait, to lie still with no plans, to read a stack of comic books read too many times, and learn about the sky—moods done in bright and warning colors. And about high white clouds making shapes and faces. Learn about birds that sat at the very top of leaning reeds looking down at me as if they were learning to. The slight rocking of the rowboat—an unearthly motion I craved as I grew older and remembered as soothing, a place to take the tougher edges of life, the place I took the death of my best friend's brother in a faraway place called the Ardennes, took the silence of my parents, took the two-week disappearance of my sister.

Later, when I married, and after studying the history of the lakes around me on this almost-island where I lived, there was no place I wanted to go than to the Upper Peninsula—stay near the big lakes, go with my happy news of love. There was no Mackinaw Bridge, only boats going back and forth as the structure of the great bridge went up. Then standing on the shores of Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Superior and beyond. My husband and I found an Indian village at the end of civilization, where the Ontario tundra began—narrow roads leading into vast treeless spaces and a tiny village of people with skin the color of dark earth. My first time being the 'other' until they smiled and welcomed us. We'd landed in 'Oz,' the shortened name for a Mishkeegogamang First Nation People's settlement. And then home with more knowledge of the land and lakes and history. Back to a new place on a small lake between Lakes Michigan and Huron—easy access to both, with my imagination let loose to write novels, to remember people as I'd met them, and celebrate my ever-growing-relationship with the ponds and streams and your mighty waters, Great Lakes, which shaped my life.

Elizabeth

Jacob Wheeler

Traverse City, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

On these long, lazy September weekends when the forest hints of autumn but Lake Michigan clings to August, you're reminded how water—and the myriad forms she takes—define your life as you float from chapter to chapter. She's been with you on all the great journeys: from the brackish fjords of the old country, to the West African river that carries yam boats, to a volcanic lake in the Mayan highlands, even to the orifice-burning salt of the Dead Sea. She's most forgiving here in these glacial freshwaters, the home to which you always return. She's healing, too. Earlier this summer your friend scattered his mother's ashes among these blue waves. She brings both joy and melancholy. If it's true the eskimos have a hundred words for snow, perhaps we in Leelanau ought to have a hundred words for this lake ...

Some seasons you frolic with her in new ways. You dance with her alone on night swims. When the lightning flashes, you dive into her waters, and then look up to see the sky alight. On a windless Thursday evening last you paddled across her glassy bay and chased a sailboat full of poets. You caught them and pirated their ship, they welcomed you with open arms, and prose, and beer and finger food. You learned, with some unease, that the hurricane ravaging the Carolinas had pushed this delightfully good weather north, to your benefit. (In another life, the odds will turn and you'll be the one living on the low coast, battling tides and tropical storms—and they'll have the inland serenity of the Great Lakes. So just enjoy it NOW, you reassure yourself!)

On the way back toward the harbor, when you've had a few drinks and your blood runs hot, her defense becomes your rally cry, your war call. Fight for her. Build a political manifesto around her. Turn candidates for office into foot soldiers who fight for her defense. Swear you'll die for her. But also, live for her. Make love inside her depths. Write poetry with a stick along her shores. Do handstands and fall with abandon into her surf. Together with your child, document, day-by-day, how she (soon will) metamorphose into ice and back to water again. Gather wood and plan to stoke your hide in a lakeside sauna and take those screeching plunges into her frigid womb. Live to tell about it. Perhaps write a midnight poem about it. Above all, thank her every day.

Jacob

Rose Hollander
Suttons Bay, MI

SUTTONS BAY, West Bay, Grand Traverse Bay, Lake Michigan

Dear Suttons Bay,

I came to you from a beloved place on the West Coast, convinced that I could not live as well here, with your seasonality and snow. It had been my husband's idea to move. Soon after we arrived, we went down to the coal docks in Suttons Bay, a marina where dogs were allowed on the beach. Lucy wasted no time, running down the dock with great speed, springing into the air, ears flapping then body crashing into the oh so clear water, delighted with her new home. We followed suit and were equally enchanted with you. That was thirty years ago.

Your waters could tell our family's history. My children played in the stream that fed you, finding tadpoles and building dams. We loved being on you: drifting in calm water to watch the stars from our old wooden Lyman, challenging each other to swim to the sandbar, skating on smooth ice in the winter. The summer potlucks were a ritual, your water entertaining children while grownups gossiped, watching when your surface was a perfect mirror for the moonshine that mesmerized us. Thank you for so much happiness.

But I must also thank you for the healing. I was in a boat with my husband one August evening. The sun was setting on one side of you, the moon rising on the other and I was awestruck at how lucky I was to live here. My husband turned to me with a big grin and mouthed 'I love you.' Perhaps he was saying this to you as well. Moments later, I held his body to keep him from sliding into the water at the ramp, his life gone, my life incomprehensible. Per his prescient wishes, a party was held at the coal docks a few days later. It was a beautiful sunny, end of summer day, not one made for sadness. That should have been my clue.

After the business of death, I needed to find a way back to life. Then I remembered. When I was twelve, I had moved, which meant a new school. It was a rough adjustment. My walk home from the bus stop crossed a bridge over a stream. On many days, I would stand on the side facing water flowing away from me, and imagined the water taking all the bad feelings away.

I went back to the bridge over the creek at the coal docks, and I stood there facing you, Suttons Bay. I let the water flow the sadness out of me, over and over, day after day, until I found my peace and life and happiness.

This is my love letter to you, Suttons Bay.
Rose

Jack Dempsey
Plymouth Township

Dear Lake Michigan:

Every day, sitting at the desk in my den, I look across to your panoramic photo over the fireplace, and I muse.

I think of a cold gray day when our family, with my mother's mother, gathered for a hasty but pleasurable meal at a picnic table on your shore. I was around 12; Grandma was 60 or so, diminutive, and younger than I am today. She's gone now.

I picture a sunny summer day at one of your beaches when my father swam out a few yards and floated lightly on his back. His rotund shape, buoyed by the calm surface, bemused me. Dad was 40 or so. He's gone now.

This mantle image portrays so much of your beauty and mystery. A path slightly to right of center cleaves dune grasses I can imagine waving from the offshore breeze, leading a way down to a hidden beach, with two indistinct human figures in shirtsleeves who are moving away, their backs to me. A snow fence at one end suggests how dramatically altered this scene will become all too soon. The sun is almost too bright in the far corner. As my eye moves away to follow your horizon in the distance, the sky above grows ever darker as if a storm is looming from the northwest. This image of you is beautiful, and foreboding, always compelling.

I vividly remember, for there's no way to forget, that last summer of our beloved son's all too short life, when we shared elapsing time with you. We walked together through one of your bucolic towns, biked alongside one of your immense sands, paused to marvel at one of your infinite vistas. Images of him then are precious to me now. He was 33. He's gone now.

These people I love and lost but hope, somehow, to be reunited with someday, their stories connect me to you, dear lake, with an inescapable intensity. How, why, can they be gone now, and you are still here?

I am lost with no answers when these reveries end, as all things do. I do know this: I am glad you were sculpted and fashioned, and I am grateful you have been in my life, no matter what. I pray you, in your magnificence, will still be here until the end of the age.

With profound fondness,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John M. Dempsey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Elizabeth Schmuhl
St. Joseph, MI

Dear Michigan,

I took myself to your shore and there I was, spilled out, all blue and glassy. The seagulls seemingly going nowhere against a strong, southern breeze.

Do you remember all of the times you saved me? Those summers I wanted to be my last, you took me and said, "Swim. Lie on your back. Float." Each time: a gift of weightlessness when I needed it.

You're selfless, always giving. The boats, the swimmers, the fish, the sand. The impossible is possible because of you.

And every evening, before sleep, it is you singing as I drift to other lands.

In every way, you move me.

I love you, always,

Elizabeth

Tulah Himburg (Soon to be 9 years old)
Traverse City, MI

Dear West Bay,

Your water is so sparkly that it always makes me want to jump in. Even in November right after Thanksgiving.

I wanted to go swimming but it was really cold. I decided that I would go down to the bay and see how it felt. I brought my bathing suit and put it on at the beach. I decided that I didn't want to touch the water so I ran off the end of the dock. At first it felt really cold. Then I got used to it and it felt really good. The Bay makes me feel like I am in an endless magical world. Please keep it clean for me and my friends and for my own children when I am a mom.

Love you West Bay,
Tulah

Brenda Earl

A Reminiscence of Northern Lake Huron

Picture, if you will, a small cozy log cabin, pine woods at its back and magnificent, northern Lake Huron lapping on the sandy beach in front. A family's cabin on Lake Huron for five generations ----my family.

As I sit on the log swing on the beach, my feet in the cold sand, watching the sun rise over the calm, gray waters of Lake Huron, I can picture my grandfather just as he was in his wooden boat, casting his fishing line into the dark ripples far out in the lake.

And now the sun is a little higher and I notice a sandbar close to the shore where I see my sister and me as little girls splashing in the gentle, clear, sunlit waves with our mother watching attentively from the shore, my father at the dock, lowering into the water the boat he made with his own hands.

Now with the sun high in the sky and warm on my back, I walk along that shore as I have since I was a year old, the sand squishing under my toes and I stop for a moment to watch my own children skipping flat, smooth stones over the sparkling surface of the lake.

As it grows dark, my husband and I sit around the crackling campfire on the beach and I tell stories to our grandchildren, stories that were told to me as a child about people who fished Lake Huron long ago. And for a while our grandchildren are silent as we all gaze out on the moonlit lake.

May that land and Lake Huron always stay that pristine.

Brenda

Monica Millen
New Glarus, WI

Dear Siskiwit Bay of Lake Superior,

Peaceful and tranquil, you are my water love. When we first met, I was a young mother of three, on a thrilling Up North adventure. Watching my children wade in your never-ending shallows, the only sounds were their giggles and your gentle whispers of wavelets kissing the rose-gold sand. Your clear water reflected the blue sky so perfectly there was no horizon. Your scent was pure and fresh. My heart ached when it was time to leave. I have since come to consider you the most perfect place.

Twenty years later and you are in my heart and thoughts. Are you still there? Are you still fresh and clean? Do children still play on your shore, in your surf? Do mothers still rejuvenate themselves sitting on the warm sand, loving their children and you? I would like to come back and see you again, feel you, smell you, hear you. Will you be the same, or better? Have we taken care of you as you once healed me?

Be safe, dear Siskiwit Bay. Overwhelm us with your beauty. Teach us how to preserve you.

Love always,

Monica

April Bautista
Milwaukee, WI

Dear Lake Michigan,

This morning I drove over the Hoan Bridge, the gateway separating home and everything else. To the east, there you were, and I did as I do every morning for the past six months, sliding my sunglasses down with a fingertip and stealing a quick glance at you as I switched lanes from right to left. On the radio, Paul McCartney sings wistfully about yesterday.

I've picked up writing again, so I do this quick exercise where I try and describe you. It's nothing I can jot down or try to remember. Just a small reminder to myself that the world is still terribly alive and exquisite. That there's still some magic left to see and feel and touch and record.

In the fall, we'd sometimes catch a break before the cold. So you often looked perfectly azure, calm and pensieve, a mirror image of the sky. In the winter, you were angry, as angry as we were for the barrage of freezing temperatures and whiteouts. You looked to me like a sudden widow, aggrieved and adrift. In the spring, in the cold, your surface was choppy and foreboding, a mirror image of cut black agate. Now it's summer, and today, you remind me of plush blue carpet, the kind you dig your toes into when you're small and completely untethered from the prospect of growing old.

I can't help it, I blow you a kiss. Next to me, the driver of a car darts a look, one blending confusion and amusement. Woops, I think. And slide my sunglasses back up with my finger tip.

Love,
April

June 14, 2019

Lake Saint Clair
Great Lakes Basin
Turtle Island

Alison Swan
Ann Arbor, MI

Dearest Lake Saint Clair,

Heart of the freshwater heart of a continent, southern boundary of the largest river delta in the Great Lakes, you have been ransacked by many, abandoned by many more, including me. I am sorry.

I had to extricate myself for awhile, not from you, from the stretch of American shoreline where I came to know you, a place so devoted to maintaining appearances growing up there was like constantly skittering along a mirror. I was like almost everyone around me in this way: you were a scarcely considered, beautiful backdrop. You were the view next door, locked into place for miles by a concrete breakwall.

Just a month ago, back for an afternoon, I watched you through car windows. I was en route from a funeral in my childhood church to a wake in the lakeside mansion-turned-community-center I associate mainly with two things: dancing (ballet classes, high school dances, wedding receptions) and a loved one's escape from a beating (shoved from your concrete lip, he did not drown—you *did not drown him*. Thank you.). On this day of remembering, I took your picture but I barely paused.

Know this: a letter composed by another native daughter, my student, brought me to a full stop. She had written to the powers-that-be to advocate for you, lamenting the regular dousings of *E. coli* to which you are subjected. Perhaps you know these dousings are not inevitable. Perhaps you know Michigan's unregulated septic systems and inadequate sewage treatment infrastructure leak deadly bacteria, pharmaceuticals, industrial waste... into watersheds all over the Great Lakes basin. Even simple rain washes toxins off land and directly into streams that will feed the big lakes. I am sorry.

Compared to PFAS, for one example—which is not only invisible, but *forever*—*E. coli* is easy to deal with—in fact, in small doses you can deal with it yourself. Even simple boiling eradicates lethal concentrations. But I think I know what you are thinking: *How does one boil a lake? I am not just potable water*. Indeed. You and your shorelines are habitat. Other creatures who drink and swim are poisoned.

And you are fishery, as any tribal person could remind us. Rather quickly, settler-colonists converted you from lacustrine community teeming with life (and food) to *basin* and *channel*. We newcomers could learn much from the original inhabitants of your shores, instead we continue to

gouge a trench across your middle and batter you with invasive species and toxic effluents. I am sorry.

I am pausing now. I am looking closely at the picture I took the other day. Framed by bare branches, you are photogenic as always, your surface the spangled wash of blues and silvers created by sunlight and a patchwork sky, your horizon the same shiny edge I gazed at dreamily as a girl. Your water-meets-sky surface ignited my imagination, and I went off and learned from the shores of other seas. Thank you.

Every single one of us is called to behold and appreciate your surface. But we cannot stop there. I am sorry and thank you.

With admiration and gratitude,

Alison Swan
Huron River Watershed
Great Lakes Basin
Turtle Island

Bridget Klaasen
Suttons Bay, MI

Dear Lake Huron,

Do you remember when we first met? It was in 1962, you wouldn't recognize me now, I am thinner. Back then, I was a size 10 Chubby and as I was preparing for my first Holy Communion, the nuns gave us scapulars and said, "As long as you wear this, nothing bad will happen to you."

I was excited to hear that because I wanted to learn to swim. There was no one to teach me but with this new information, I was sure I could teach myself. I held the scapular in my fist, it was like a host that wouldn't dissolve, and marched down the dock. I put the scapular over my head, two postage stamp sized live jackets of faith, and jumped in. I glugged and gulped, choked and coughed and finally made it to shore. I couldn't tell anyone I almost drowned because I'd been warned never to go in the lake alone, threats of getting sucked in the under tow, risk of polio if you go in the water too early in the year, split my head open on a rock, or sink because I'm too fat. You were made out to be a monster. I am sorry for that.

I told the nun and she said it was a miracle. I believed her for a short time. I have changed since then. I still think it was a miracle. The miracle of water. Thank you, Lake. I have had a very happy life.

Your Friend,
Bridget

Maureen Dunphy
Royal Oak, MI

Dear Lake Erie,

Gazing out from my desk, your wildness beneath the wind furls waves to whitecaps as they rush in crosscurrents to shore. Yesterday, when I rode your waves, you glowered green under gray sky before the storm and turned yourself gray as the raindrops slashed down, drawing maps on the ferry windows. Now, out from your island shore's tree shadow, the earth tilts the sun's good morning to you, and the muscle of your resplendent waves is imbued with gold, your froth infused with sparkle. Have I told you how fervently I love your every mood?

I know I am just one pixel on the timeline that stretches across your eons, merely one of multitudes of human lovers and all of those others from the animal kingdom and plant kingdom who have loved you more purely than my species these past two centuries, those who love you as home, love you as world.

Here, on this very speck of this particular piece of land you surround, on the bay where an infrequent eagle returns and the blue heron still occasionally perches, you were witness to those who worked the vineyards. Pausing amidst the rows, they took your breath in on their own, while setting out the canes, pounding stakes of island red cedar, pruning or tying the vines, picking the grapes. To you, this evening, I will raise a glass of wine made from island grapes while watching the sun, where you meet sky, sizzle and extinguish itself below your heaving breast.

Before the vinedressers, the Anishinaabe pulled their canoes up on this same shore where you and I commune. I imagine their gratitude for the fish you provided, the life you bestowed. Unlike the Anishinaabe, we have not been grateful enough to serve as good stewards of your love.

Nonetheless, you call to me all night beneath my lake dreams, are always calling. This morning's same view of you inspired a book-long love letter¹, written over several years, to your entire family of lakes and rivers, to the islands you harbor in your Great Basin. The words I wrote cam

borne on the sound of your waves. This morning your call comes through my windows again. As always, I'll be down to meet you.

Love,
Maureen

¹ *Great Lakes Island Escapes: Ferries and Bridges to Adventure* by Maureen Dunphy (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 2016).

Robb Astor
Traverse City, MI

Dear Great Water,

Do you remember how it was my mother, yes, who first held my hand within your shallows, she wading, and I uncertain, following? She gave me over to you slowly, until at last I grew sure. I remember that first time I was alone with you, in your depths, and couldn't feel the ground beneath my feet. I learned that freedom that I loved, being buoyant in you, even lifted in your waves. And each August on those evenings when the sun lays low its light across you, again and again I give myself over, and say, "This is nearly everything anyone could ever want, that anyone could ask for." It isn't fair at all, that anyone could be so lucky. I have seen the world, and know what cruelties there are, how many others suffer. I have done what I can, to give what I've been given, to my children, and to those in need of things like these. I always will.

Yours, forever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robb Astor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "A".

Robb

Jill Marcusse
Grand Rapids, MI

Dear Great Lakes,

Oh, how I love you! All my life you have surrounded me, held me buoyant in your fresh water bounty.

Growing up in Barry County, southwest Michigan there were lakes all around me. But you were always special. Lake Michigan lay just an hour away with its vast horizon, stunning sunsets.

Summer vacations as a kid we'd travel north, cross the Straits of Mackinac on the car ferry. Then Mighty Mac was built. We all were awed by its soaring beauty, how quickly we could get to the U.P. We drove to the wild shores of Lake Superior. In Copper Harbor we ate those strange rutabaga pies they said the miners had once taken into the mines with them.

Paddle-to-the-Sea, my most beloved book, mapped all your ways and waters, told the journey of a carved Indian in a canoe, through the saw mills, the ore docks, all the way to the ocean. The author Holling illustrated what each of you looked like in outline: Lake Superior a wolf's head; Lake Michigan a summer squash; Lake Huron a trapper; Erie a lump of coal; Ontario a carrot.

On my honeymoon we crossed over Lake Huron into Canada, on our way to Toronto on Lake Ontario. Another vacation my daughter and I gaped at Niagara Falls, rode the Maid of the Mist in our blue slickers. And coming back from two weeks in Europe once, the first thing I had to do was get to Lake Michigan, sink down in the waters of home.

Great Lakes, you are so big, you've forgiven much of what the 20th Century did to you in the name of progress. Our Governor says she will get Enbridge's Line 5, rusting and vulnerable, out of you. We will hold her to it. You have held us these many years.

With love & respect,
Jill

Emily Levang
Duluth, MN

Dear Lake Superior,

I have come home to your shores because long ago you asked me to take care of you, and now you are in danger. Copper sulfide mining threatens you with contamination that is toxic to all of life: plant, animal, human. My heart aches, for you are not simply a substance to me, you are my mama; I am made of you. Now I am finally listening to what you told me that summer day long ago.

On my annual pilgrimage home to Duluth, Minnesota, I drove straight to Park Point, a nine-mile-long peninsula edged with a sandy beach. I crossed the grassy mound and stopped in my tracks at the sight of your endless vibrant blue. I felt an ache in the gap between what I saw and what I could take in.

I took off my shoes to feel the warm white sand. I was soothed. I wanted to run but I walked, pacing myself as though I were a bride gliding down the aisle, or a devotee at my guru's feet. That day was my birthday, and I was there to give thanks to the one who gave me life. To ask for your guidance.

I steadily crossed the beach, down to the edge where waves lapped gently at the shore. I greeted you and stepped in. The water was so cold my molecules ran inward to the warmth.

Slowly, I inched my way in, whispering "Thank you, I love you." When I was up to my knees, I cupped my hands, filling them with sweet water. I poured it over my head, everything was sparkling. I looked out into the horizon, where sapphire met soft sky.

There was the nagging feeling that I could never be close enough to you. The nagging feeling that I was largely absent. I came home once a year to pay homage, but I missed all the moments in between.

"What do you want for me, for my life? What am I to do?" I asked.

I listened.

"What do you want for me? From me?"

My heart swelled; my eyes fill with clarity. The light on the water danced, expanded in a brilliant arch outward. What I heard, in a voice that was my own and also belonged to your waters: "Take care of me."

Lake Superior, I'm here for you now.

Yours,
Emily

Grace Giroux
Saginaw, MI 48602

Dear Lake Michigan,

I miss you! It's been so long since we got together. If you think about it, you know almost every step of my life. Every summer I've come to visit you for one week, and every year, you and I have both grown. Every year I get taller, and you seem to slowly eat more of the beach. I miss how I could barely touch the sand after just walking into you a few feet out. I love how you and I have grown together – we've evolved. The entire world could change, but you will always be Lake Michigan, and I will always be me. Sometimes growing up seems like the worst thing ever, like changing could be the worst thing ever. But you've always had the same feeling for me. You're calming, careless, and free. And on rough stormy days, you can get angry, just like I can. Next year is my senior year of high school, and after next summer, who knows when I will be able to see you again! I will always cherish our time together. We've basked in the sun together, and we will always roll our eyes together when my mum yells at me to come back. (I'm not really sure if she trusts you. She tells me the same story over and over again about how to get out of a rip tide current, in the event that I get caught in one. But I know you, Lake Michigan. You would never do such a thing to me, would you? We're best friends!) Anyway, thank you for always being you. Thank you for always bringing in beach glass, occasionally a dead fish (ew), and my personal favorite, Leland blue rocks. Thank you for sounding so beautiful and calming, and always being a gorgeous blue-green-aqua-turquoise color. I will not thank you for your smell, or for always putting sand on my feet that is nearly impossible to get off. It's crazy how much we've been through together, and I hope that our journey will never end. I think we're both a part of each other, through all the memories we've shared. I'll see you next summer. Have a great winter!

Lots of Love,

Grace Giroux

P.S. – Stop trying to eat the beach!!!

Keith Taylor
Ann Arbor, MI

Dear Erie:

Some folks like to say you're ugly,
what with all those old stories
about your burning rivers,
and the algal blooms, the microcystis,
that late summer green slime
slithering through waves
out in your western basin.
Those are people who prefer
sand or granite at the edges
of their big lakes, who see only
nuclear plants, abandoned car factories,
and the swamps lining your shores.

But my daughter and I spent
hours one morning just this last spring
walking a peninsular trail
over on your Canadian side,
counting the rarer migrants – water pipits,
prairie warblers, clay-coloured sparrows –
under a light grey sky
and a steady fresh wind
rising up from your water
that was clean and cold,
covered with rafts of ducks
diving for mollusks and fish.

Many, many thanks, again and again,
Keith

Kelli Fitzpatrick
Midland MI

Dear Lake Superior:

Do you remember my tiny sandaled feet
tripping over smooth wet stone
on fog-smothered Whitefish Point?
Water and sky a fortress of grey-blue.
Foam skirting wild depths.
Ice wind from your inland sea,
the sigh of a giant folded in sleep.
You kept ships.
You kept secrets.
I knew you would never be tamed.

Dear Lake Michigan:

Do you remember my feet beside his,
clambering through ageless sand
to the highest point
our together point
on the cusp-corner of the state?
We drove two hours to stargaze at your shore
but a slate blanket swaddled the dusk sky,
so instead we climbed,
rain balling damp beads in the grains
until there was no more height
until there was no more distance between us and you,
between his lips and mine.
You were there when the sun tore a crack in the felted clouds
to streak your surface and his hair.
“Look,” he said toward the light. “We brought it back.”
You saw too. And I think you smiled.

Dear Lake Huron:

Do you remember the day I opened the notice from the DEQ
and cried in my kitchen
because parts per million do not belong in your body
any more than they belong in mine? Yet here we are.
PFOS, released into your marine wilderness
a careless industry
a forever problem
a lifetime of carbon filters and shame.
You reach across the mitten

to quench our thirst and I can't imagine,
I cannot fathom having to hand all the people you love
a spiked drink you didn't spike
and watch them wither.
I know where your heart is. I know you would choose life.

Dear Great Lakes:

Do you remember the ice-sharp moment people
lent you their throats and sang out truth
to the only power on the planet that could threaten you:
Us.

You can't remember this yet. It hasn't happened yet.
It is the calm before the gales of November. The inhale before the scream.
We will remember the day our leaders
whose fingers press your glorious pulse
whose throat-songs bring action and consequence
stepped out on a point
and protected our lakes, whatever the cost.
Theirs is a legacy glacier-carved into bedrock,
a handprint flooded with justice clear and cold.
You are not forgotten. You are loved.
We choose life for you too.

Sincerely,

Kelli Fitzpatrick
Teacher, Writer, and Lifelong Michigan Resident

Nigel LaCoursiere, Rat Terrier
currently living with my owners Paul and Karen
United Kingdom

Dear Lake Michigan,
My sail from Chicago to Traverse City was one of the most memorial weeks of my life.
Standing on the bow of the boat, with the mist from the water washing against my face, was exhilarating.
There was a comfort to your embrace in the darkness when we were out of sight of land.
Enjoying your majesty was a wonderfully peaceful time with my family. I shall cherish the memory.

Love,
Nigel LaCoursiere, Rat Terrier

Keli MacIntosh
Traverse City, MI

Dear East Bay,

At six months old, my daughter sat in the sand at your water's edge, laughing as she splashed at the gentle waves repeatedly washing over her little legs.

Her older brother would anticipate the new supply of Petoskey stones each spring and patiently polish the best to show off to his friends.

They both learned to swim and sail in your refreshing waters. Our Golden Retriever would run the beach with the neighborhood kids.

In winter, if the winds allowed, and you froze smoothly, we would skate to visit friends further up the shore.

And now, years later, my daughter is introducing her babies to the gentle waves lapping on the beach.

The family has come full circle at your shore. Your waves embrace and protect our memories.

Love,
Keli MacIntosh

Lujine Nasralla
Detroit, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

May of last year, I watched the sun set over your resonating blues, expansive and eternal. I held the champagne in my mouth because I wanted to feel it fizzle over my taste buds as the sky turned pink over the water. I hugged my friends, relished their presence. We gathered stones and set them in the shape of ABUNDANCE on your shore.

You made me feel deep. Rooted. This was my first lesson.

In August last, you healed me with your forgiving weight. I reached for you in distress, angry at my circumstances, at feeling homeless and unwanted. You whispered, “home is what you decide it to be.” I chose you then. You held me close and rocked me until I fell asleep. My second lesson was complete.

I woke up in the ghost forest, and I watched you from the top of the mother, bewildered by your many facets. How can you be many at once? How can you do so much at once? *Can I be like you?* My third lesson was stalled.

In February, my friend held me in his arms as I cried over the truth of leaving you, my forgiving healer.

I am (often) foolishly mistaken. I think I am a steady rock, able to withstand the waves as they roll over me. But even the most jagged of earth is weathered by water, smoothed down by its relentless mercy. This, I continue to learn.

This is what your waters taught me. I hope, Lake Michigan, you will continue to be my teacher as I am a plant that needs watering to flourish. I, and many others, need you. Please stay. What can I do to make you stay?

Please, teach me. Tell me. I am ready.

Your student,
Lujine

Patricia Ann McNair
Chicago, IL

Dear Lake Michigan,

When I was four, I went to nursery school in a lakefront neighborhood on Chicago's North Side. Sometimes for recess we went to the beach at the end of the street. It was day-long preschool, a necessity since my parents both worked downtown, my older brothers were in real school.

Weeks before, my summers had been full of people close and familiar, so when I got to this school, I was both thrilled and aching in my aloneness, my apartness. But I remember standing on your beach, sand under my sneakers, your vast, watery horizon before me. Our teacher told us you are a Great Lake, and that was clear to me. Your greatness challenged my loneliness, and I stood on your shore, listening, watching, yearning.

Twelve years later I came to Foster Beach, not far from that first one. I was a woman then, I needed to believe. Sixteen and barefoot on the sand, walking into the water in my jeans and with a boy/man, the glorious cool of your waves lapping at us as we kissed and pressed our bodies together, loving the moment, maybe each other. Loving you.

For the more than three decades I have lived close enough to walk to you. Now I live across the street. There is very little that separates us. Every morning I see you from my bed, every evening I watch from my couch as the light changes over your waters. There is not a room in this apartment I share with my husband that does not have a view of you. I leave the bathroom door open, sit down, and there you are.

When we chose this building, we imagined taking a flat on its west side with a view of the city sprawling toward sunset. Now we wonder how we even considered that, just as we wondered, when we first visited, why people choose to arrange their couches with the backs to the lake-facing windows so they can watch the television against the inside walls, where we've placed our couch, facing out. There's the lake, don't they know? What television show can compete with you? What screenshot is better than you who tugs at us, at all of us, who makes us look up and out, who makes us yearn and settle?

There is nothing better to see. There is nothing greater.

Still,
Patty

June 16, 2019

Judy Childs
Traverse City, MI

Dear Shalda Creek,

You flow gently into Lake Michigan, partially hidden by tall grasses and tumbling trees. The beavers are downing trees and building a dam. I stand by your clear waters, keeping my eyes open, and feeling the ancient pulse of being.

I am surrounded by love. Your energy is awash in peaceful coexistence. The more I sit and observe, the more I see.

Walking along Shalda Creek and Lake Michigan offer respite from injustice and insensitivity. This opportunity to be alive by the living light of the water blesses us all.

Love,
Judy Childs
Traverse City

June 16, 2019

Daniel Carey

Dear Sleeping Bears of Sleeping Bear Bay,

You are family friends, warm and courageous
Never hesitant to comfort my soul or challenge my strengths
Now you live just beyond

All of us
Share family ashes of both the real and imagined
The bears now live just beyond our sunset

The puppy laps the water
She now holds eternity in her belly
The draw towards mystery prevails

Sincerely,
Daniel

Christine Maul Rice
Chicago, IL

June, 2019

My Darling Michigami,
Wily.

That's you, I think, walking along North Avenue Beach, my terrier nosing a good throwing stick from beneath clumped lake weed. Yesterday your surface barely rippled—pond-like across, I imagined, the 22,000 square miles of you—but today a biting Easterly raises frothed hackles and cuts through my windbreaker, beneath the layers I thought would protect me. I'm afraid to toss the stick too far, fearing you'll spirit the pup out and away, into the belly of you. Places I can't reach.

When our girls were small and we plunged into your cool depths, I kept a firm grip on their wrists, my fingers leaving red marks to remind them that riptides and currents care nothing of a mother's fierce love. These moods of yours are ever-present and, whether hidden beneath your surface or displayed in froth-tipped beaks, they threaten to strip me of my strength, leave knots of helplessness in my gut.

Is today's fury in response to the abuse we've subjected upon you? The radioactive water dumped into you from nuclear power plants, the chemicals, toxic pollutants, pesticides, heavy metals? And now, additional cruel jokes: climate change and micro-plastics?

How odd that a disgraced president said this before enacting the Clean Water Act:

"Lake Michigan, as all of you know, is the largest body of fresh water in the United States. Lake Michigan, at the present time, is still not labeled as, and does not deserve the title of, being polluted. But unless something is done now with the potential pollution of Lake Michigan, it could become like Lake Erie, which at this time could be classified as a dead sea, an inland sea. We do not want that to happen. And the time to act is now."

- President Richard Nixon, February 6, 1970

They say love makes you strong (and that, for some, may be true) but it leaves me weak. In you, I find deep and abiding solace, yes, but the weight of what this modern world does to you crushes me with worry. Like my children, I ache and hope for you and, in an uncomfortable reversal, I—we—become caretaker, hoisting that weight instead of looking away.

Linda Nemec Foster
Grand Rapids, MI

Dear Lake Erie,

Dear small sister of the Great Lakes—the lake I first saw as a child—the lake reflecting the color of my mother’s eyes—I love you. I love the shimmering sparkle of your waves in the summer. I love the icy sculptures you carve on the silent beaches in the winter. I love your Pelee Island and its magnolia warblers in the spring, its monarch butterflies in the fall. I love you in every season.

And yet, I’m sorry that all my love can’t save you. Can’t save you from the polluting flames of the Cuyahoga River of my past or the green algae blooms of my present. Lake Erie, my fragile childhood companion, please know that I care—even though I now live far away near the shores of another Great Lake. I still care for you, the lake of my youthful dreams where everything seemed possible. Clear waves, clear waters, clear visions. This girl from Cleveland—who embraced your waters even when the flames of the Cuyahoga River embraced you—this girl still loves you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Nemec Foster". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'L' and a long, sweeping underline.

Dawn Newton

Your Laps

I stood in a shore squat, chubby thighs balanced over toes clenching sand, fingers held out to touch lapping water, other hand captured in my mother's. My journey through your waters began with inland lakes in Waterford, where bodies of water carved long ago by glaciers lapped near every curve of main roads: Williams Lake, Pontiac Lake, Maceday Lake, Lotus Lake.

As I grew, family vacations took my sisters and me east to Lake St. Clair, and then to you, dear Huron, as we travelled north to relatives in Alpena through Pinconning, Standish, Tawas.

Walking your shores with cousins, light fading from sky, your waves making patterns on sand under moonlight. In the light of day, hopping over sand, each step a jolt of heat with flip flops forgotten back in rented cabin, each step bringing me to cooling waters, mewl of seagull.

Marrying into a family cottage to the west, I migrated away from you, dear Huron, to your hearty sibling, Lake Michigan, eyeing warily its mixed welcome, waves bigger, louder, choppiest. Still, I brought three children to your waters, Michigan. Sat them in sand, toes touching water, but only for an instant, pulling them back, respecting your force. Watched them grow to wear buckets on their heads, watched them shovel your water, your rocks, your detritus into shore magic, while large water raced and crashed and small stream water trickled, wearing patterns onto sand.

Still a child, at times, myself, encased in an old truck tire inner tube, I'd wear you one more time, then another, Oh, Michigan, my legs a swizzle stick in your playful cocktail, your water and the tube buoying me up, my legs rotating underneath, side to side, creating vortex, spinning madly, seasick with frenzy of legs, body, and sun heating black inner tube, cheek pressed to hot rubber. Later, sinking into towel shaped by rise and fall of sandy pockets, I'd bury face into terrycloth and try to grasp the language of your waves, the combinations of vowels, consonants, syllables.

Kwaahhhhhssssssssp. Wosssssssakkkkkk. Kalllllooopp. Why couldn't I name, tame your sounds, shape them? Why so hard to transcribe mystery of air and wave and drum and surf?

Yet still, next day, gentle, you could touch my toe, silent, as I walked in morning calm.

Oh, Huron. Oh, Michigan. How I have loved and respected your laps!

Dawn Newton

Connor J. Dalton
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Lake,

We can already hear the lake in the car, even though we're not yet there

1

We drive through a dark forest to the cottage where your wrinkly jowl and boney hands are superimposed

We feel obligation to silence while sienna tires
crawl down the gravel road
eyes wide scanning for deer, anticipating a crossing

Oh that familiar scent of delicious mold and mildew in the basement upon entering
we wish our senses won't adapt

we call beds on our way to the deck overlooking the lake
and there it is
pretty much the same as it has always been
since we've been coming up here

up on the hooks we keep scratchy hats
the sombrero always throws my balance off

2

somewhere deep down I intuit I am not old enough to appreciate it fully
and that saddens me

good enough, the change of pace

Donning a black and gold sombrero, I watch from the loft as front teeth scrape the artichoke
leaves dipped in melted butter
that smell vaguely of the frogs I dissected in 7th grade
or warm leather
or both

I descend only to share the hearts
The best part
Of an artichoke

3

but now right now a sickly feeling gnaws at my stomach
and in my bed in New York City
in delirium

I cry out for the lake

it is superimposed on my wall

I feel the weight of the sombrero on my head
I smell the smoke of bonfires and sweat
I hear the lake

there is
no better time wasted than time wasted there
and
upon reflection
I think most likely
Those were the happiest moments of my life

My Howard's End

4
I think the lake remembers me
I say
Just listen
To the waves, like hands, raking the shore
Clawing desperately to get back to me

5
I know

6
we'll wake and lake
you say, smiling your mischievous, pursed-lipped smile

we are wary of snakes in the shade of dune grass
but the water allures us still, past our fears

and we bathe in the lake at dawn

Lynne Van Ness

Traverse City, MI

A Love Letter to Lake Michigan

I grew up in Chicago, and many times my family went to Lake Michigan from our house. It was always a breathtaking experience, no matter the weather or what time of year! I learned to love the Lake's moods and colors, and to feel at home in the water.

When I was 5, my parents bought a cottage at the Congregational Summer Assembly, north of Frankfort. I was so happy that it was on both Lake Michigan and Crystal Lake. With another family, we had lots of picnics at Point Betsie – for breakfast and dinner! When I formally learned to swim, it was in Crystal Lake. (No rocks, no drop-offs, and plenty of crawfish to catch.) As an adult, I find that swimming in Lake Michigan is more pleasurable and more challenging! At some point, the whole family decided to collect Petoskey stones. I inherited my mother's collection, so, added to mine, it's pretty formidable! I even broke down and took a silversmithing class, so I could polish some stones and turn them into jewelry.

I wish I could tell you what Lake Michigan has meant to me. There are no words! Now I am an old woman, and it still means so much! Living in Traverse City, on the bay, is pretty tame, compared with the real Lake. I have lived here for ten years or so, and when I was able to move here, I was delighted! I visited Frankfort at high noon on a sunny Saturday in January. I parked on Main Street, and looking both directions, mine was the only car on the street! I decided to move to Traverse City instead, as I figured that I'd be in the car all the time, going to Traverse for shopping, groceries, the doctor, etc. Traverse has been very good to me, and I've enjoyed every minute of living here!

Now my children are grown and scattered. My oldest son and his wife plan to retire here, and that will be a real treat! Now, if my younger son and my only grandchild could manage it too...

Lynne

Terese Schlachter
Shady Side, Maryland

Lake Erie,

You are the lake dissed, bullied to roughness, falling over yourself to the east, to the west, hosting John Denver's lonely Saturday night. But you are my favorite, your surface sliced and smoothed by the hull, then bubbling your revenge at the stern of my father's boat. You did not like to be quiet. Those days you were most disturbed I sat on the console of the Chris Craft, giggling as you tossed us up, then backed away, leaving us walloping into your trough.

You held me as I crouched, dad coaching me to standing on wide, wooden water skis.

You grounded me in your waters.

You carried the rustbelt's steely freighters, determined to save the decaying industry of the '80's. Patiently, you waited, suffocating beneath a blanket of human ignorance until they began, finally to comb through you, tending to spilled fertilizers, invasive mussels and algae blooms.

Your waves coasted us past the Bass Islands into Put-in-Bay's bike rentals (and later, bars,) on to Cedar Point's Blue Streak roller coaster, me stretching my neck to be tall enough.

You gave but you hoarded. Eye glasses and keys and jewelry and men.

You were home to our grown-up Easter ducklings.

I moved away but never forgot your pains, your caress, your smells. Fifty years later I visited, diving in off Kelley's Island, weeks before my wedding, my father long passed, so I could remember us there, your playful spray on my small, wrinkled feet, dangled over the bow's edge, my crooked swan dives off the fiberglass, the crash of the floating docks, and the harbor light signaling the way home.

Therese

Cindy Miner

Dear Lake Michigan

I grew up in Pittsburgh, PA, which has no Great Lake. The three large rivers there, where the Monongahela and Allegheny merge into the Ohio, were lined with steel mills. We thought the rivers were great—barges laden with scrap metal, iron ore or slag, the residue of steel making, floated slowly along, sometimes banging loudly into each other as tough steelworking men jumped from barge to barge. The greenish brown soupy liquid and accompanying stench was certainly not for recreation.

Imagine my amazement when I first saw you! An ocean, it seemed, colored with rainbow shades of blue and turquoise rivaling seas of the tropics. People swam, fished, sailed, waterskied, played, tanned, or searched for stones on your beaches. I was in love! I knew this is where I had to be, but life has a way of diverting us.

Retirement finally gave me the opportunity to live with you in sight daily, and I consider it a privilege simply to drive along your shore. Now there are threats—plastic and other pollution and even the possibility of rupture of a pipeline that could foul your waters forever. I think of those sad, slow old rivers, and think never, never should that happen to you.

Please stay fresh and clean, Forever,

Cindy

Dear Lake Michigan,

- > Life has so few constants
- > So little to rely on
- > Even God can disappear, but the Bay remains
- >
- > Blue, Turquoise, Sky, Green, Grey, Black, and White
- > Still and undulating slowly
- > Wild and crashing fiercely
- > A Frozen tundra 12 inches thick and vast as the Mojave
- >
- > Come when I am sweltering
- > You cool me
- > Come when I am grieving
- > You rock me and listen quietly to my heart
- > Come when I am furious
- > You soothe me with your perspective
- > Come when I am grasping
- > You bring forth my gratitude
- > Come when I am in misery
- > You let me sit and stare
- > Come when we are sharing and loving
- > You share and love us back
- >
- > Sweltering hot sand burning my child sized toes and ground into my scalp
- > On a vigorous, life affirming day
- > Not so long ago you hosted vows,
- > And provided generously the most beautiful cathedral
- > You baptize the believers in your purity
- > And carry the wanderers to and fro
- >
- > A constant beckoning,
- > a glorious welcome,
- > the urge rises,
- > and I acquiesce to the gentle pull.

In Gratitude,
> Kris Brady

Geradine Simkins
Maple City, MI

Dearest Big Mama,

I call you *The Great Mother* not merely because you are old. Yet, being created 1.2 million years ago surely marks you as a revered elder. I call you *The Great Mother*—all five of the Great Lakes that form an indivisible whole—because you shelter 20% of all of the liquid, fresh, life-giving water on earth, and you have created a home of comfort and nourishment, where all of life's beings in our region can flourish.

I have stepped into your chilly waters to exchange wedding vows, made love on your sandy beaches, and when my babies were born, took them to your shoreline and immersed them to their navels. A rite of passage, a sort of baptism, so that they would love and respect the bounty of the natural world into which they were born.

My children have grown up on your shores watching the first flight of blue heron babies, foraging for wild strawberries and rosehips, making sand castles and building dreams, swimming until their lips were blue and skin was gooseflesh, and falling asleep in front of late autumn bonfires at water's edge.

I learned to sail in the protected waters of Grand Traverse Bay, and then adventured out into your wild water wilderness where I could not longer see the shoreline. It was then that I absorbed the grand majesty of your motherhood, the vast blueness of the birth waters, the life-giving and life-taking power you possess. I stood on the stern of our sailboat and could see only the freshwater sea that surrounded me, and I dove naked into your immense turquoise waters, imagining what lies at your depth, coming home to my water nature.

I have walked upon your shores when I needed comfort, laid upon your hot sands when I needed relaxation, and swam for hours when I needed invigoration. Yet, you are home not only to the two-leggeds, but also to four-leggeds, and all those who swim, crawl, burrow, flit and fly—a whole family of beings.

We have a deep-water well on our land in Leelanau County. It gives us the most luscious, nourishing vein of sweet water. I never drink it or shower in it without saying, 'Thank you.' It is the most blessed, delicious, life-giving gift, and you give it, freely, each day.

In gratitude, Big Mama. I love you.

Geradine

Jerry Dennis
Traverse City, MI

Dear Great Lakes,

I've known you all my life, yet in many ways you remain a stranger. Knowing a small place is hard enough—we can spend a lifetime learning our own back yards. But you're probably impossible. You're too big, too varied, you sprawl across too large a swath of continent.

Those of us who live near you might have a basic understanding, but most people around the world don't know the most fundamental things about you.

That you're too big to see across.

That your drainage basin is bigger than France, and is home to one in ten Americans and a quarter of all Canadians.

That you contain 95 percent of the surface freshwater in the United States—and 20 percent of the world's.

That you've been critical to the economic and political fortunes of not just the United States and Canada, but of much of the world.

Or that you were once declared dead but are still alive and kicking—and still in need of our protection.

Often I'm asked what I think are the biggest problems facing you. Is it climate change? Invasive species? Nutrient loading from agricultural run-off and municipal waste? The threat of rupture from submerged petroleum and chemical pipelines? Airborne deposition of heavy metals? The threat of diversion, sale, or theft of your water itself?

All of those are big problems and they need our attention.

But I think there's a bigger danger. One that makes many of the other problems even more threatening. One that made many of those problems possible in the first place.

I fear the greatest threat is anything that causes us to turn our backs on you, to become cynical, to lose hope. It's anything that makes us think it's too late to make a difference. Anything that makes us accept the message beamed to us countless times every day by every medium that our value is not as human beings, but as consumers. Anything that makes us believe the battles are already lost and that we might as well grab what we can for ourselves.

But I want you to know that many of us care. We care about the decisions our leaders make—and demand that those decisions not be influenced by those who would plunder your resources then move on.

We care because in the most literal sense, what happens to you, happens to us. We care when someone dumps their waste in you. Or when a pipeline company with one of the most dismal environmental records on the continent insists that we shouldn't worry about a pair of petroleum pipelines under the Straits of Mackinac that are old, patched together, and not open to inspection.

We care. And we damned well take it personally.

(Jerry Dennis is the author of *The Living Great Lakes* and other books. He lives near Grand Traverse Bay.)

Teresa Scollon
Traverse City, MI

Dear Lake Huron,

I don't speak your language. Well, maybe I do. I have a heartbeat, a pulse, my version of waves.

My body has weather, too—joy, grief, the common cold. Once I knew a Finnish man, who told me Finns can change the weather. But oh, nothing like you, Lake Huron. When I was a girl, my dad showed me clouds far to the east. We were picking up the newspaper in the driveway on a summer morning. “See there, Terese?” He pointed to the horizon. “Those clouds are over the lake.” And here we were living in the heart of the Thumb, surrounded by seas of beans and hay and corn and cattle. We had to drive fifteen miles to Caseville to see you. But you made our weather, our heavy snows.

I remember the radio announcing small craft warnings for Saginaw Bay. And once I was on that bay in a little boat, taking my sick father out to enjoy the water. Suddenly we couldn't see the island we were headed for. We couldn't see the shore. The waves increased, the boat struggled. I was at the helm; my brother leaned far forward at the bow, an anxious figurehead scanning for anything that looked like safety. My father shivered, wrapped in every towel. I passed him a life vest and he accepted it. We did not speak. We were without language, navigating the emergency that is life in this world.

See, that's the thing. You are an enormity, a reminder that we are a small part of an earth that surges with life. We are so small, used to feeling vulnerable, feeling like all we have to do is take care of ourselves. There are countless shipwrecks lying on your bottom, evidence of your power. But now your shores are clogged with *phragmites australis*, evidence of your fragility. It's our responsibility to take care of you.

I learned to swim in you, stepped on your sandy ribs, walked around in your shallows on my hands, a tot pretending I was swimming. All my life you have buoyed me up. All my life you spooned around us in the Thumb, providing beaches and joy and smelt.

Somehow I want to tell you how much we love you. But language is a puny scratching. We will have to show you love, relentlessly, without ceasing, like waves.

Teresa Scollon

Annie Muller
Hart, MI

Dear Lake Michigan,

I love you so, so, so much. I love swimming in you and I am so grateful for you and all the joy you bring me. I love going swimming in you and sharing all the joy that you bring me. Thank you so much for being a part of my life. I love you.

From,
Annie Muller (age 10)

Soo Locks

As a boy, I lived in Sault Ste Marie, Michigan. As a boy, we regularly roller skated by the Soo Locks and sometimes we roller skated across them. Later, we did the same on bikes. All this changed in WWII. In late 1942, 7300 Army troops moved into Sault Ste Marie to protect the locks. The military feared the locks would be bombed. Barrage balloons with steel cables hanging from them were launched and flown over the locks to protect the locks from low flying planes. There were also large search lights. It was important to keep the shipping channel connecting Lake Superior and Lake Huron and Lake Michigan open during the war.

Elmer F. Peterman
Birthdate: October 1932
Traverse City, MI

Continual Wonder

We live on the shoreline of a bay of Lake Michigan. I am in awe of how our one small section of the lakefront continually changes, repairs and at times dominates its surroundings. Our beach has gone from sand to rocky and back to sand, from straight shoreline to large outcropping of sand. There have been wash ups of dead fish, of logs, of dock pieces, of alewives and zebra mussels. Forty years ago there were remnants of the coal dock with large hand hewn posts present along the shore. Now they are gone. The large waves and wind of summer storms have made it a continuously changing marvel.

Ruth Peterman
Birthdate: November 1942
Traverse City, MI

20 June 19
William Penn

Dear Great Lakes,

The language of frogs is complicated. It takes careful listening—frogs know how to hear well, detecting subtle nuances to sounds that otherwise sound much like a riveting croak to the uninitiated or inattentive. Frogs like to chat back and forth across bodies of water, but only at certain hours of the day and in certain seasons. Otherwise, they tend toward independence and even isolation, burying themselves deep into the drying mud of rivers and creeks using their powerful legs and webbed feet to dig deep enough down to protect them from the heat and dryness that comes with the summer months.

Frog is my weyekin, my native Nez Perce spirit guide. The realization of one's weyekin, at least for a displaced urban Indian (and, oh, yes, I am pretty aware of the fact that "Indian" in the post-Columbus terms of exploration is a misnomer that academic Indians like to talk about until the room is packed with bad breath and Carbon dioxide) is a process, and a process that involves realization as well as acceptance. You are not simply what you are but you are how you are, and a displaced Frog is troubled, mentally and emotionally homeless, peripatetic, searching.

In a sense, I was raised homeless. My first memories of home are of the pre-war stucco apartments of Park La Brea near the famous tar pits in which dinosaurs had been discovered and their bones dug up and into which my sisters threatened to throw me if I didn't behave in ways they approved. Then a small house on Laurel Grove in North Hollywood, also stucco with a dirt patch behind the garage in which I dug with Tonka trucks and earth movers, burying things with an instinct for digging deep, and a Maple Tree into which I might climb to hide. A house that is no longer there, of course, changed with the flux of time and economic circumstance. The woman next door who paid the milkman for his dairy with sex and used language I'd never before imagined gone, too, the Forties style stucco houses replaced by Southwest Adobe bungalows, hidden behind adobe walls with iron entry gates and no doubt inhabited by well-to-do descendants of industrious, tax-paying, needed, wanted immigrants from Mexico and Latin America.

I was not unhappy, there, across the street from the twelve foot chain link fence of Strathern Street Elementary School, a fence that kept us in during week day recesses and out during weekends, with barbed wire interwoven to keep us from climbing over with our basketballs or softballs and on which I tore my thigh when trying to climb it I slipped and fell.

But father was. When wasn't father unhappy? After all, he was married to mother who coming from a cold family of unethical wealth resented the required Sundays at Park La Brea with father's mother. Displaced as he was, father mistook changing place for change, and we began to move. From Park La Brea to North Hollywood to Palo Alto by the railroad tracks, a mistake that his children inherited as, older, we began to move and move again, seeking we knew not what.

Changing place, which you do not recognize as changing context giving new meanings to old ways, begins to infect your life. You begin to think that changing people goes hand in hand with changing place, so that your emotional homelessness matches up with your moving homelessness. My eldest sister married, divorced, moved, married, divorced, moved, married, divorced, re-married and moved, and finally divorced, married the man who would see her through to her end, adding to the team total of 9 marriages in my immediate family. In my

unsustained homeless self-regard, I have been in the habit of saying, proudly, that I have had one and only one marriage—and will until the end. That sounds stable—and it is—except it doesn't account for the numerous “serious” girlfriends I had up until I finally did marry at 33. I was fortunate in those girl friends—they, not so much in me—and even luckier in the woman who became my wife, giving me not only an emotional home, but also a familial home with her Italian style extended family, willing to change places but with me, not without, as we left Syracuse, moved to NYC, changed apartments in NYC (as one did, in the search not for home but for affordability), and then, having met at Yaddo a poet who taught in flyover country, to the middle of Michigan, East Lansing, safe and as dull as any place in the world, given her Manhattan childhood and my own Californian attitudes about art and culture and the fact that just down the highway is a town in which Black people still don't want to find themselves after dark.

With an emotional home established, what was left was not place but a context in which to allow the how-ness of that emotion to blossom. Never in my as yet life would I have chosen the middle of the middle-Western as that context, not if you gave me an enlarged Google Map and a box of darts. East Lansing, at that time and pretty much still, is a town attached to the State's government in Lansing, populated by young and younger (oh, that's right, I'm the one who's gotten older) kids. The students have remained pretty much the same, year after year after year, except for their gradual digitization and increasing belief that all suffering or disappointment ought to be removed from the paths of their lives, whether by helicoptering parents or oppressive and wrong-headed university policies that make failure not an instigator for harder work and altering when it alteration finds. Thus, the “Millennial Song,” getting trophies for just participating (every grammar school artwork is displayed and ranked high with ribbons). There are more of them, however, increasing your awareness of the local bottleneck—too many people in too little arable space—and by extension the global bottleneck (8 billion people on a planet suited for 4 billion or fewer and governed by people with no awareness of future possibility or concern for anyone other than themselves—not unlike a college sophomore crossing the street illegally in front of your car).

Moreover, East Lansing was no Ann Arbor or Detroit, a small and a large city with the one thing a coastal Californian missed so much that Caribbean Cruises became a guilty annual pleasure. Two cities not only with rivers and a great lake, but happy city things like museums (please don't call the ship that ate MSU's Berkey Hall, known as the Broad Museum, which displays narrowly awful popular artifice, a “museum”), restaurants (a few nights ago, a new chichi restaurant served up fried mozzarella that was so cold it made you choke, pasta that was coolly congealed, chicken parmesan that was worse than heated frozen food, and beef cutlets that, well, were long ago on the hoof), shops worth going to, or cultural events like ballet with live orchestras that engage the audience with the processional interplay of music and dance in a large hall where the sound baffling is, well, baffling, destroying even the sound of canned music. The Midwest, in all our arrogant, naïve East Coast/West Coast thinking was a place to get away from, not a place to live.

But we had children here. We've gone to the shores of Lake Michigan, Huron, and Erie and returned so charmed that we considered renting summer houses along them. We've been to the Detroit Institute of Art, and even purchased memberships for our children to support the lovely shows that museum tries to put on. We've used many of the restaurants and services available in Ann Arbor. We've taken advantage of some of the benefits offered by MSU, like teaching in London—the Thames-- and Ireland—the Liffey--for seven to eight weeks at a time,

going on 11 trips over 22 years. We got a Whole Foods—and while I don't want to advertise for the richest man in the world, the happiness of employees selling sustainable and organic foods while getting benefits like health care is palpable, in a store that is manageable in size and which leaves selling dress shoes and sneakers to shoe stores.

We still don't have many great restaurants, but running restaurants is very difficult in a town that caters to the quickness of things.

We do have climate change. But in a country where 40% are committed to drinking the Kool-Aid, denying climate change (with a president who does not know that global warming and climate change are the same thing in which the climatological events are not necessarily more frequent but are without question more severe—just ask the people of Paradise, CA, or the farmers in the Midwest, or the people whose jobs have been lost to the inevitabilities of automation and technological advancement) we happily find ourselves cradled between three of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world.

A week ago, we returned home from a cruise (I know, it's a hard luck life), what I call a "bathtub cruise," out to Bermuda and back (in this case adding on Boston and its Museum of Fine Arts—a wonderful museum—and Bar Harbor, ME, and its natural beauties). A cruise to get away, to write, think, edit, read, go to the gym, or get off the boat and walk about and see.

This particular cruise had been over-filled with Kool-Aid folk, one of whom looked just like Steve Bannon with the poriky suspended somewhat surprised conspiratorial look on his face and who said loudly—writers eavesdrop, right?—at dinner that the vermin were coming north in caravans to take our jobs and use our resources up. A cruise where I calmly discussed the need for general health care and some plan to help college students repay student debt, allowing people not to have to become bankrupts like the president and his casinos from ill health or allowing young people to fuel our economy (and my Social Security) by buying homes, rearing children, consuming all that Americans are so good at consuming (including me) and gained unequivocal agreement about my propositions from my fellow traveller only to have him then tell me that he still supported the most narcissistic, possibly stupid, immature president my country has ever seen.

A cruise where my wife and I found pleasure in talking with a Christian couple, who apologized for being "boring" (an accountant and an engineer, retired, who refurbished and rented houses) and were not boring at all. They were human. They were decent. They told stories about tenants which were neither mean nor intrusive, but worth the hearing for the perceptions. They seemed to care about other people and were not willing to stigmatize them with the lies of caravans and border walls and resources originally stolen from Native Americans, Mexicans, and the land itself. They were, in their how-ness, interesting because humans are—human beings, with the emphasis on being, on the processes of being human in whatever context they find themselves.

When they asked us where we were from, we began to say "From New York. He grew up in California." Our usual, even after 27 years in East Lansing. We stopped, however.

"We're from Michigan," I said. I felt as though I might have held up my right hand and, palm open, pointed to the lifeline and said, "Here. In the middle."

"Ah," they replied. "The Great lakes."

"Indeed." The Great Lakes. Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. The cliché of "HOMES," the way third graders learn the privilege of fresh water—third graders who do not live in Flint, of course, who are not Black or underprivileged, or who do not live on the algae

blooms of Erie, growing again because of executive orders that allow air and water pollution to proceed unchecked.

As our plane began its long lowering over Lake Erie toward the Detroit airport, I looked out at the massive body of water beneath. I could not help but feel political. I could not help feeling the truth of the belief that we don't own the land or lakes, but they own us, as they should. I could not help looking out and down, the sun glistening off the low chop of the great lake below as it set to our West, and thinking how stupid I was. I haven't been a Californian for decades. My wife hasn't been a New Yorker. Our children and grandchildren are thoroughly Michiganders—from here, in the middle of my right hand's palm. And they ought to feel proud in that. Proud and protected by the water, if we get serious about protecting it.

My four year old granddaughter had asked over Facetime from our ship, "Were they clever enough to put a bathroom in your suite?" What kind of four year old asks such questions?

She also has learned from Uncs and Bumpa both that cliché only becomes cliché because it contains some fundamental truth but gets over-used by persons who forget that truth.

"H.O.M.E.S." is a cliché, of sorts. But home it is and home it will be as I daily awaken, cradled by the largest bodies of fresh water anywhere on earth.

With sincere thanks, Lakes,

A Wiser Writer
Bill Penn

Carol Shuckra
Traverse City, MI

Dear Pure Lake Michigan,
It's you who brings our family together through four generations.
We come from 7 different states and we "gather" to be near you and your surrounding shores.
We've known you throughout your many mood-swings:
serene, calm, choppy, treacherous, frigid, ice buildup, water levels up and down.

Now we must rally to protect you from a possible disaster that lurks below.
Pipeline 5 is under your Straights of Mackinaw and threatens your pristine water.
If this 65 year old pipeline were to rupture, Michigan's water and shoreline would be tragically impacted.
Economically, it would be a detriment to the vital economy you provide.
Tourist and related business depends on your pure water.
Even the Coast Guard tells that they are not equipped to clean up after a spill.
We must persist to protect your water, shores and dunes for all future "gatherers."
With love,
Carol

Sylvia McCullough
Interlochen, MI

Dear Lake Huron,

I remember cold mornings jogging in my gym shorts out to Mickiewicz Park alongside you in Alpena, to play girls' soccer to meet the requirement for physical education that was mandatory for high school freshman during the Kennedy era. There I was shivering, slipping and stumbling on the wet grass, kicking and missing and the gym teacher's whistle blowing "out of bounds!" I hated sports of any kind; I mean getting my bouffant hair style all mussed up before 10am? The only good thing about it was the view out over your water, all grey and steel looking, with the frequent freighters crossing north to south carrying iron ore, coal, and limestone from the quarry at Roger's City to the cement plant we could see at the north end of the point, belching smoke and cement dust over the entire city. But you were steady, always there beside us, oceanlike, lapping, splashing, carrying faithfully and us soggy, limping, kicking, but somehow feeling safe beside your gracious magnanimity.

Love,
Sylvia

Aneka Jo Liska
Royal Oak, MI

Dear Higgins Lake,

I have been coming to visit you now for, what's it been, 15 years? Driving up from down state I always feel an excited anticipation at seeing you again. Nothing like driving over that last upswing in the road and having your beautiful visage spread itself before my eager gaze. You never disappoint.

Unpacking always takes second place to that first toe dip, just to test your mood. I've got to say sometimes it takes you a little too much time to throw off winter's ice and heat up so we humans can survive in your embrace. I know, I know, temperature is not something you control at will. Mother Nature plays the hand on that one.

I don't think I've ever told you how you renew my spirit with the gentle sound you make as your edge touches the sandy shore. The blue hues in your surface are stunning as you change depth. When I'm out on the boat with the grandkids and they have had enough of thrashing your surface on their various inflatables we stop so they can swim. "In the blue water," is what the youngest always begs her daddy.

Me, I am way too old for cannonballs off the bow, so I spend my time looking over the side rail, past your surface and into those mysterious dark places where your secrets are hidden far below. Granted as clear as your waters are, those secrets are safe from my curious eyes. Between you and me though, I fully expect to see the flash of a giant tail one day. Mermaid maybe? Or the glint of scales rushing past just below the surface belonging to a yet undiscovered prehistoric creature. After all Loch Ness has Nessie. Why not Higgy for you?

As for the future, I pray you stay safe from ground pollution, invasive species, and from those who would exploit your beauty to promote commercial gain. The Chippewa people had it right naming you Majinabeesh, "sparkling water." You are a proud lake with a treasured past. Protecting your thriving future is a goal that must be addressed by all. I certainly intend to keep my eye on you. After all, your family!

Love Always,
Aneka

Kris Brady
Traverse City, MI

To West Grand Traverse Bay

Life has so few constants
So little to rely on
Even God can disappear, but the Bay remains

Blue, Turquoise, Sky, Green, Grey, Black, and White
Still and undulating slowly
Wild and crashing fiercely
A Frozen tundra 12 inches thick and vast as the Mojave

Come when I am sweltering
You cool me
Come when I am grieving
You rock me and listen quietly to my heart
Come when I am furious
You soothe me with your perspective
Come when I am grasping
You bring forth my gratitude
Come when I am in misery
You let me sit and stare
Come when we are sharing and loving
You share and love us back

Sweltering hot sand burning my child sized toes and ground into my scalp
On a vigorous, life affirming day
Not so long ago you hosted vows,
And provided generously the most beautiful cathedral
You baptize the believers in your purity
And carry the wanderers to and fro

A constant beckoning, a glorious welcome
the urge rises and I acquiesce to the pull long felt
Forever thankful
the Bay remains

Kris Brady

Bronwyn Jones
Maple City, MI

June 17, 2019

Dear Lake Michigan,

There is young love and then, older love.

As a youngster, I felt the soft wave-rippled sand beneath your shallow water at the edge of Empire Beach like kisses along the soles of my feet. Immersing my entire child's body in your cool wet was to merge with green water, blue air, and the jewel glints of tilted sunlight on the rounded belly of a late summer afternoon. Such communion was intermittent --- once a year, then less. I dreamt of those vacations, daydreamed them over and over. When the silver alewives died in profusion, bunched open-mouthed on the beach, and stank as they rotted the summer before I turned 10, I was alarmed, but undeterred from my infatuation. And as they dried in the hot sun of late August, your sweet water smell reemerged again, rich and pure with rain, leaves, and the dark tart flavor of sand cherries we found in the dune clefts near North Bar Lake. Everything about your shores and edges was tantalizing --- the turning beds of wet stones, beach glass, the rush of piled waves shoving frothing water hard into the shore; the sunsets that plunged last light off the edge of your horizon while darkness flowed high and deep over our shoulders and above our heads.

Older now, my love is also deeper, complicated by the understanding that I knew so little of what was unfolding, changing in your depths. The invasion by the billions of creatures tanked in the ballast water of ships; the phosphates, salts, septage seeping, coursing over land into your basin; zebra, quagga mussels in such profusion your one quadrillion gallons of water is filtered daily, while round gobies, those spiny, fat cheeked little fish, carpet your floor from Milwaukee to Ludington, Chicago to Mackinac. Oh gorgeous lake, you still dazzle, and half blind, we embrace you, while the dark beds of Cladophora release botulism in soft bubbles that climb the food chain into the bellies of mergansers and loons we find perished on your shores. Humans press close around you in the name of abundance, beauty, commerce, thirst. I touch pocketed stones like amulets, and, in this time of carbon and dying, hold love steadfast in the muscle and blood flow of my heart like a prayer that admonishes: no further harm.

Bronwyn

Karen Anderson.
Traverse City, MI

Dear Otter Creek Beach

I love you in all seasons and you love me back. But it occurred to me that maybe I need you most in the cold season, the “off-season,” when weather isn’t permitting and I come anyway, yearning to experience that glimpse of eternity in the moment that is always present on your shores. And I remembered the essay “Ice Floes” from my book, “Gradual Clearing: Weather Reports from the Heart.” Here it is, with love.

Ice Floes

Ours is the only car in the parking lot on this Sunday afternoon. My husband and I walk north along the Lake Michigan shore, pulling on gloves and putting up hoods. It might be twenty degrees on the thermometer but it feels like zero.

Below zero when you factor in the wind chill that freezes my eyelashes. I swing my arms and pick up the pace. The footing is firm because the sand is frozen solid. Then, when I’m finally warm, I need to stop and dig a Kleenex out of a pocket for my runny nose.

It’s a good chance to stare and listen. Strange to be on a beach and not hear waves, but they’re lapping against the ice far out in the lake where white turns to dark blue against the horizon. In the silence I hear the creak of ice floes like voices in a conversation.

The sun has dazzle without warmth, a pale yellow disc in the southern sky. For a moment I wish it was summer again, that I was wading in bare feet and stepping over sand castles, dodging dogs and children.

In July, of course, I never yearn for February. We rarely prefer the harder path but sometimes—like today—I glimpse its harsh beauty.

Karen

Ted Gilmer
Maple City, MI

To Lake Michigan,

I love approaching the lake on foot, where it's presence can be felt and heard before you actually see it. I remember an encounter coming up to the lake from a foot path, I had been hearing the roll of thunder for awhile and knew the lake was going to be rough, but I was not expecting the raw "in my face beauty "that struck me as I crested the last dune. The lake was the darkest blue , broken by 20 foot swells. Safe where I was on a high dune, I saw a lake possessed. A demon in the shape of wind at full gale from the north, pushing the lake along a 100 mile fetch of open water since Naubinway. The tune played by any rigging of any poor ship caught in this winds brash path would have been deafening. The sight I saw was gaped mouth exhilarating. Tens of thousand of white maned horses on the crest of every wave as far as the horizon, with some hundreds of horses flying to their death with a thundering roar as they encounter the immovable pyramid point. The rest of the herd shouldered on, down bound with such speed they may meet their destiny by dawn on the breakwater in Chicago.

Ted Gilmer

Mae Stier
Empire, MI

Dear Lake // Home

It begins with the Lake—it always does for me—sometime before I can really remember, when the memories are hazy and exist mostly as colors and objects. The green leather couch in my Grandparents' family room, the worn wooden steps that led from their house down to the sand, smokey sunsets where beach fires mingled with the sun's glow to turn the horizon and the Lake, and my recollection of it all, a warm orange. Faint memories that are mostly feelings—a cool stone placed in my hand, crashing waves that knock me over— embedded in my body.

Eventually, the warmth of those memories begged me home, begged me to the shoreline I always tried to visit but had never imagined living on. It was vacationland, and living in the community full time seemed largely reserved for retirees. I couldn't picture a life there in my late twenties. I was afraid I would get too lonely or that I wouldn't be able to do the type of work I wanted to do without the hustle of city life. Still, my body knew its home and I moved anyway.

Returning to this lakeshore awakened something in me, required me to pay more attention than I was prone to doing elsewhere. What is it about nature that has a tendency to do that? I walked barefoot in the sand and would feel the way it pressed up between my toes. I smelled the opening lilacs in the spring and suddenly noticed the whole world opening. I was opening too.

I am just thirty miles from where my Grandparents lived when I was young, from where we sat on the beach and looked for stones and made s'mores around a fire that was licked by the shallow waters of the Lake. There are new memories being made in a smaller house a few more steps from the beach. They look differently and the breadth of what I experienced between my first Lake Michigan memories until now has changed the way that I interact with this magic place. But with all the life that has been lived, Lake Michigan still calls me as always, still begs me in to experience the crashing waves, to pick up stones from along the edge. To find myself on this shoreline that is changing and unchanged all at once, in much the same way I am.

Mae

Ruth Nathan
Alamo, CA

Dearest Lake Michigan,

Of other people, we humans write of genius—its astonishing sweep, swiftness, and power. Such were words written of late about the poet, Marie Ponsot, a writer of quiet depth who passed away this past July. As I continued to read the language apropos of Marie, it somehow morphed into a metaphor of you, my Lady of the Lake. I once overheard a student call her a sorceress. Melodramatic, but telling. She was enchanting. We were all in love with her, and it was true love. She empowered us: thanks to her, we were more of the best of ourselves than we ever imagined we could be. (Rosemary Deen, *Commonweal Magazine*, July 17, 2019)

“Sorceress—melodramatic, but telling.” Hardly “melodramatic” when it comes to you, my Lady. In winter you stiffen up, yet yield to human nature, empowering me to explore your roughened skin so I can sing to Orion even as I test your complexion with fire. In summer you offer springs of warmth, like vats of some precious juice that flows through your chilly body to embrace mine. My breast stroke keeps time, beats to your tidal wave. In spring and fall I ride you as I stand on Paiwen board and conquer my fears: I am more of the best of myself. I am swift, sure-footed, grounded on your sheen.

I thank you for my lot (sors)—my fate to have known your astonishing sweep and swiftness. You give me power over myself: Teacher. Friend. Inspirer. I rise-up on your waves. I am in love with you.

Xxx
Ruth Nathan

Libbet Paullin Terrell

LOVE LETTER TO THE GREAT LAKES:

I HAVE ALWAYS LIVED CLOSE TO YOU,
I PADDLED IN YOUR SHALLOWS AS A CHILD, DRINKING IN YOUR TASTE.
WAVES CARESSED MY BACK AS I WATCHED SAND ON THE LAKE BED,
PILED INTO TINY RIPPLES & DUNES...IT WAS MAGICAL!
I DREW MAPS & GAMES WITH MY BIG TOE IN WET SAND ON YOUR SHORE
AND SPENT EVERY SUMMER DAY, EVEN SOME WARM NIGHTS NEXT TO YOU.
SOMETIMES AT NIGHT I WATCHED SILENT WAVES OF "GREEN LIGHTNING"
FAR OFF IN THE NORTH, WONDERING "WHAT COULD THAT BE?"
FAR INTO THE DARKNESS I WATCHED WHITE CRESTS OF WAVES ENDLESSLY
CREEPING TO SHORE,
SCANNING THE STARRY SKY ABOVE UNTIL MY SLEEPY LIDS CLOSED

I LEARNED TO SAIL...
ACROSS THE WIND ON A CLOSE REACH, HEELING & "HIKING OUT"
TRYING TO STAY LEVEL SO WE COULD SPEED
TACKING & JIBING WE ROUNDED A MARK ON A RACE COURSE,
YOUR WAVES SPARKLING AND TEASING "GO FASTER!"
WIND ON THE STERN, WE FLEW THAT CHUTE LIKE A KITE PULLING US
TOWARD ANTICIPATED VICTORY.
SOMETIMES WE WERE FORTUNATE TO SLEEP CLOSE UNDER THE FOREDECK
FALLING ASLEEP TO YOUR VARIED & CONSTANT LULLABY LAPPING LAPPING

I STORED THOSE MEMORIES LIKE A MOUSE FILLING ITS CHEEKS
WITH CORN & SEEDS FOR A COMING WINTER,
STUFFING THEM INTO PLACES I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD.
NOW CALLED BACK IN TIMES OF STRESS, IF I CLOSE MY EYES...
I CAN WATCH THE SCENE PLAY IN MY HEAD, SEE RIPPLES & SPARKLES.
FEEL MY TOE SCRIBING THE SHORE.
I AM BACK IN THE SHALLOWS, A CHILD...
I AM RUNNING BEFORE THE WIND, LAUGHING...
I AM AT PEACE WITH STARS & THE UNIVERSE ABOVE
AND I WILL FALL ASLEEP TO THE LULLABY LAPPING LAPPING

Libbet Paullin Terrell

Emily Baker

Red Queen Waves

When the Red Queen led Alice
To the chessboard field
Where horses, towers, and men and women
Common, knightly, priestly and royal
Would play their match
(This was after giving an etiquette lesson
And explaining she owned all the ways
So that none were lost without her leave)
She ran pell-mell
The child hanging on tight and trying to keep up
But the scene around them, instead of blurring
Stayed the way it was.
Had they not run that fast, she said,
The world instead
Would push them back
At a pace to make the head swim.

You must move fast to stay in one place.

Evolution, I read, works that way.
All that lives must run, fly, swim,
hide, fight, feed, grow, multiply
To keep pace with a changing world
Or else be swept away
As those in the Red King's dreams when he wakes.

Alice herself would make a crossing
Playing in the place of the White Queen's little pawn-princess,
Through an oddly organized train ride,
Wondrous insects,
A wood where names wane,
Meeting those who step out of nursery rhymes—
Two who battle over a ruined rattle and flee a crow
An egg precariously on a wall
Who works words to his own will
Two out of a coat of arms
Vying for a crown that's not their own
Along with eccentric pieces—
The queens assume different forms
And one white knight bears many inventions—
And two familiarly mad messengers

Until she reaches the farthest space
And ascends to a crown, title and feast
All the while, there is much she must stay ahead of
Before passing through the mirror again,
All the while collecting verses...
Many of those who live in the water
Mammal, mollusc and fish...

In the inland sea near where I live
Sometimes the waves are strong enough
To reflect the Red Queen's statement for me:
As all the beasts, fishes and molluscs do,
Stride, tread, cling or swim as hard as you are able
To stay in one place;
I butterfly or crawl freestyle
Just enough to keep that pace,
But only in short bursts
Before needing to rest,
Lest I collapse like a bread-and-butter-fly
That has had no cambric tea.
Yet I would often fly to it
As an aspiring snap-dragon-fly to a lamp;
For if I can't keep a queen's swimming pace
I go with the flow towards shore,
Leaping in the waves, swaying to and fro
As a rocking-horse-fly moves from branch to branch
(Minding large hidden stones as I go),
Wordlessly curtseying in the waves' wake
Freely acknowledging the lake's Majesty.

-Emily

Berta Meserve
Lake Ann, MI

Sent from my iPad

Dear Lake Michigan this is for you.

One of my fondest memories while growing up was going to a cottage on Glen Lake with my family. I could hardly wait to get there and get clothes off and suit on. What a magical time when I was young. Glen Lake runs into the Fisher Lakes that run into the Crystal River that then empties into Lake Michigan. Now I have a great fear for my beloved Lake Michigan and that is pipeline 5 that sits on it's bottomland. I am very fearful of a breach in the line, which Line 5 has already leaked 30 times, spilling over a million gallons of oil on Michigan lands. That damn line runs not only on the bottom of our Great Lake but through rivers, streams and other tributaries that eventually lead to Lake Michigan. This is a real fear, not one that is an impossibility, that the oil company wants us to believe, as all the oil and gas companies want us to believe. Yet more oil has spilled in the United States in the last couple of years than in any time of history. Think about that when you turn on your faucet because it may not be clear running water that comes out of that faucet unless we ALL take a stand and help our AG Dana Nessel and Gov Whitmer put a stop to what our former Gov Snyder did at the lame duck session just as he was leaving his office. This sickens me every day and when I look out to see the beautiful blue waters of Traverse Bay and Lake Michigan, I sure hope they will be there for our next 7 generations, as our Tribes help us to foresee.

Love
Berta

Dave Dempsey
Traverse City, MI

Hello Lake,

On the first camping trip of my life in the summer of 1981, at the age of 24, half a dozen environmental advocates from the Sierra Club persuaded me to strap on a backpack and walk eastward with them into the back country of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Michigan. As we neared our campsite on the overnight excursion, the sky over Lake Superior, to our left, grew troubled, and thunder rolled far out over the waters. The storm bypassed our resting place, and soon the clouds yielded to brilliant evening sun.

That night I slept for the first time in a tent. After adjusting to the feeling of a thin air mattress below and thin roof above, I fell asleep. I awoke at sunrise to hear a rhythmic pounding, like the slap of a giant hand on a drum.

Boom...boom...boom.

Pulling on my sweatshirt and jeans, I struggled out of the tent and wandered, slack-jawed, to the edge of the great bluff overlooking Superior. No one else in our party was yet awake, leaving me alone to stare at the frigid blue waters that reached to the north like a yearning for eternity. The early morning sunlight broke into little shards of white glass on the tops of the waves that slammed against the base of the bluff.

I thought: I want people 100 years from now, 500 years from now, to be able to behold and admire this same scene.

Dave Dempsey

Art Meets Water: The Script

On July 24 in Traverse City, at the West Bay Resort, this script was read for the International Joint Commission. It consists of sentences lifted from these original letters (some 26,000 words) and reordered for meaningful short text.

Great Lakes Love letters: ART Speaks Water

A Script inspired by the Great Lakes Love Letters Project
Written by the Citizens

Selected and Assembled
for the International Joint Commission on Great Lakes
Triennial Assessment and Public Participation
on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement,
Traverse City, Michigan

Participant readers:

Kelly Thayer V1
Bronwyn Jones V2
Anne-Marie Oomen V3
Joe VanderMuelenV4

Excerpts, sentences, phrases from letters assembled by
Anne-Marie Oomen

July 24, 2019

Great Lakes Love letters: Love Speaks Water

(Musicians enter and take places. Begin with 30 seconds of music that softens and fades under the first three lines. During music, four readers enter reading area and place scripts on music stands. Music, long slow notes on bass interrupted by bright flashes of horn. During music one reader presents books to the commissioners. Return to music stand.)

*Note: **Bold** indicates a line added for information or transition. Parenthesis indicate slight variations of an original line in order to keep consistent meaning, tenses, or grammar. Elipses indicates part of a phrase left out.*

V1

***Welcome. Thank you for being with us on these shores. Thank you for listening. Each line of this reading is borrowed from a love letter enclosed in the full book you hold.**

V3

But first. We don't know you well. You collect data, study policy, create law. How do we speak to each other?

(Music fades.)

V4

Would it be helpful to hear some data from these love letters?

V2

The word love occurs 150 times in these letters.

V3

Calm or calming occurs 20 times

V2

Healing or health, 17 times

V3

Beauty, 26 times.

V4

Protect, 27 times.

Defend, 15 times.

V2

Care, 30 times,

Clean, 35 times

Help, 14 times, twice in a letter by an eight-year old girl

V4

Remember or memory, 50 times

Water, 88 times

Lake, 66 times

V3

You get the picture.

V1

But what of spirit; of how these citizens speak water. What from some 26,000 words declaring love will tell you what the lakes mean to us...

(Transition Music begins again and fades a few lines in)

V3

Perhaps how we met the waters?

V2

Dear Lake, I was baptized in your waters...

V3

I've loved you since the days before I could walk.

V4

My earliest memory... as a six-year-old racing my siblings...

V2

I've lived near your shores for 40 years

V3

My entire childhood... Thank you for 65 years of joy

V4

Ever since I first saw you from the porch of the House... I am now seventy.

V2

I'm an octogenarian. From childhood, you still inhabit my dreams.

V1

OR what about the family stories? Your waters could tell our family's history.

V2

My children played in the streams that fed you, finding tadpoles and building dams.

V3

I was a month overdue with our first born. I laid my swollen, miserable body in your cool, clear water and felt as if the whole world were rising up to hold me and my soon-to-be-born baby...and knew my own life and the life of my child were inextricably tied to yours.

V2

Coming into a slip after the sail, my husband turned to me with a big grin and mouthed 'I love you.' Perhaps he was saying this to (the lake) as well. Moments later, I held his body to keep him from sliding into the water at the ramp, his life gone, my life incomprehensible.... I let the water flow the sadness out of me, over and over, day after day, until I found my peace.

V4

Next year is my senior year of high school, and who knows when I will be able to see you again! I will always cherish our time together.

V3

I knew my daughter who didn't have her speech yet was talking to you. I couldn't hear what you were saying to her, but when your conversation was over, she was stronger

V2

I tell stories to our grandchildren, stories that were told to me as a child about people who fished Lake Huron long ago. And for a while our grandchildren are silent as we all gaze out on the moonlit lake.

V3

This girl from Cleveland—who embraced your waters even when the flames of the Cuyahoga River embraced you—this girl still loves you.

V4

Our teacher told us you are the Great Lake (Superior), and that was clear to me. Your greatness challenged my loneliness.

V3

Tulah, age 9, writes: The Bay makes me feel like I am in an endless magical world.

(Music returns softly)

V1

(Or) What of the healing?

V2

I have savored the deep dangerous calm,
the wild and serene and sometimes forbidding companion

V3

The water allures us still, past our fears

V4

To find myself on this shoreline that is changing and unchanged all at once... (mae)
is nearly everything anyone could ever want, that anyone could ask for.

V2

It's love like no other, to be near clean waters

V1

I call you *The Great Mother* not merely because you are old though you are a revered elder. I call
you *The Great Mother*—all five—because you shelter all of life's beings.

V3

In you, I find deep and abiding solace...

V1

Why so hard to transcribe mystery of air and wave and drum and surf? What if we sang praises?

(Transition music shifts for praises)

V4

You and your shorelines are habitat.

V2

water pipits,
prairie warblers, clay-coloured sparrows –
- and a steady fresh wind
rising up from your water
that was clean and cold,
covered with rafts of ducks
diving for mollusks and fish

V4

And you are fishery, as any tribal person could remind us.

V2

I praise the mind water has of its own... left alone it does its holy work despite our constant and
feral greed.

V3

You are the Mantra of Earth's doings, of her dreams...

(Music rises)

V4

You're the Big Lake, mishigami, The Great Reviser

V2

You have conversations with the sun, the wind, the moon, and the clouds...
the wild rice that grows in protected bays.

V4

You could match
the quiet of the doe
who came before dawn

V1

The Chippewa people had it right naming you Majinabeesh, “sparkling water.”

V2

You are the heartbeat of my world

V3

You are the precious fresh...

V4

You are our north star, you nurture our spirit, you bring us home.

V1

You interact directly with the gods of the sky, the lightning bolts, the dark rolling clouds

V3

You are an old woman, but so alive, and so wise.

V2

You grounded me in your waters.

V4

You made me feel deep. Rooted... my first lesson.

V3

You are an enormity, a reminder that we are a small part of an earth that surges with life.

V1

You are a force inhabiting that place where art, inward journey, and all creativity begins.

V2

You are not simply a substance...; I am made of you.

V3

I am your lake girl. You... must be protected.

V1

The Anishinaabe pulled their canoes up on this same shore where you and I commune. I imagine their gratitude for the fish you provided, the life you bestowed. Unlike the Anishinaabe, we have not been grateful enough to serve as good stewards.

V2

Oh gorgeous lake, you still dazzle, and half blind, we embrace you, while the dark beds of Cladophora release botulism in soft bubbles that climb the food chain into the bellies of mergansers and loons we find perished on your shores.

(Transition music. Bass only)

V3

You too carry burdens

V4

Humans press close around you in the name of abundance, beauty, commerce, thirst.

V2

I touch pocketed stones like amulets, and, in this time of carbon and dying, hold love steadfast in the muscle and blood flow of my heart like a prayer that admonishes:

ALL

No further harm.

(single chord)

V4

We care when someone dumps their waste in you

V1

Or when a pipeline company insists that we shouldn't worry about a pair of petroleum pipelines under the Straits of Mackinac that are old, patched together, and not open to inspection.

V4

Or when the water that should be held in common, in common

ALL

is stolen.

V2 and 3

We care.

V1 and 4

And we damned well take it personally.

V2

We care because in the most literal sense, what happens to you, happens to us.

V3

Ten-year old Annie writes: I love you so so so Much. (You are alive.)

V1

BUT (we know) you can be broken.

V2

You are also, where I have learned of humanity's selfishness. There are those who refuse to consider long-term consequences of their actions; who think that your magnitude can absorb trash, poisons, fuels.

V3

Unfortunately, we often know what we do.

V4

...we humans become arrogant, boastful,
believing ourselves to be large, powerful gods of the earth...

V1

Let us imagine ourselves as once again playful children, then imagine the change, the sludge, the death creeping toward those tiny toes.

V2

(Imagine) the day I opened the notice from the DEQ
and cried in my kitchen
because parts per million do not belong in your body
any more than they belong in mine?

V4

What if one day, my daughter's daughter cannot speak with you... the way (I) did?

V3

We owe you more than gratitude,
We owe you our fiercest protection

V1

We should bow to every glass (of water) we drink, every single drop of rain, every tear, even the sweat beads on our necks, even the perspiration on the sheets of our death beds.

V2

We rarely prefer the harder path but sometimes—like today—I glimpse its harsh beauty.

(Transition music begins under slowly and builds to end)

V3

(BUT) I have a heartbeat, a pulse, my version of waves.
My body has weather, too—joy, grief, the common cold.

V1

A vision: tens of thousands of white maned horses on the crest of every wave as far as the horizon, with some hundreds of horses flying to their death with a thundering roar as they encounter the immovable...

V4

But the impossible is possible because of you.

V2

We will have to show you love, relentlessly, without ceasing, like waves.

V3

We must persist to protect your water, shores and dunes for all future “gatherers.”

V1

Do you remember the ice-sharp moment (the) people
lent you their throats and sang out truth
to the only power on the planet that could threaten you:
Us.

V4

You can't remember this...
(music silent for this)

All

It hasn't happened yet.

V1

(But know this) We will remember the day our leaders...
Stepped out on the point
And protected our lakes, whatever the cost...

V2

Theirs (will be) a legacy glacier-carved into bedrock,
a handprint flooded with justice clear and cold.

V1

(Now) is the calm before the gales of November.

V2

The inhale before the scream.

All
Fight for her.

V1
Build a political manifesto around her.

V2
Turn candidates for office into foot soldiers who fight for her defense.

V3
Swear you'll die for her. But also, live for her.

V4
The impossible is possible because of you.

V3
And every evening, before sleep, it is you singing...

V1
The impossible is possible—

V2
Overwhelm us with your beauty

V1
Teach us how to preserve you

V2
We choose life for you too. (Our lakes.)

V3
You are not forgotten.

V4
The impossible is possible because of water

V1
(focus on the commissioners)
The impossible will be possible (because of you.)

ALL
No more harm.
(Music rises big, extends and fades.)