

The Pond

The Lopez family had been visiting their grandmother's home every summer since Callie could remember. She had listened to story after story of how her dad used to fish down by the pond behind the house and how her mom's family would race to see who could swim across the fastest. It was that very pond where her mom and dad met and became sweethearts. The summers were hot and humid and the pond became an oasis to escape the heat.



Frogs, toads, coyotes, fox, blue heron, and the occasional alligator would share this idyllic place with the family.

About the time Callie was born, the land surrounding her grandmother's house grew into a large residential community with its own golf course. A few miles down the road, a local farm where they would buy eggs and milk expanded until it tripled in size. The creek system that runs by the farm makes its way down to the yard. The nearby factory where Callie's grandparents worked closed down and sat empty for years and years. The locals conveniently and secretly used the retention ponds as a dumping area for old appliances, cars, and trash. Time moved on and the little town grew. Callie's mom and dad were happy to visit the pond but they remarked how it just didn't look the same. They used to have diving contests to see who could touch the bottom but now the pond seemed shallower than ever. The once crystal clear water now has a strange bluish-green sheen to it at certain times of the year. There were fewer sightings of wildlife along the banks.

One summer while visiting her grandmother's house, Callie saw her dog, Lucky, playing in the yard and it appeared that he was chasing something. She and her dad followed the dog and saw that he was chasing a water snake. They were zig zagging down to the pond and both splashed into the water. The snake got away but she saw that her dog was in distress and was having trouble getting back to the edge of the pond. She ran down and dove into the pond and helped her dog get back to the bank. Her dad helped them both back to the house to get cleaned up. She washed the slimy substance out of her hair, changed clothes, and settled down by the fire pit with her cute but naughty dog.

Later that night, Callie woke up with a sore throat and an earache. She went to the kitchen to get a glass of water when she realized that she was going to be sick to her stomach. Her mom came to check on her and realized that her daughter was really sick. The next morning, they went to urgent care for treatment. Observing her symptoms including the rash on Callie's arms, the doctors diagnosed her with exposure to *Microcystis sp.* (a type of freshwater cyanobacteria). Callie's parents were shocked to learn that their daughter was sick from diving into their beloved pond to help the family dog (who *luckily* was not harmed by the algae).