Township Creek Number 3

We ran down the well-groomed path next to the flashy silver guardrails that signaled to vehicles or pedestrians they were about to cross a bridge. No store bought toy brought as much excitement and joy as Township Creek Number 3, especially on a warm day in the middle of summer. We couldn’t get our shoes kicked off fast enough as we were anxious to wade into the sparkling, gently flowing water. Aunt Margaret, who easily had to be about 110 years old, or so my single-digit self thought, would wait patiently on the flowery, tree covered banks as my sister Gena and I explored this natural playground. I had no doubt that this little creek possessed some sort of magic that brought happiness to anyone who visited.

Wading around, upturning rocks in search of crawdads, was absolutely thrilling. You had to get into the minds of these small crustaceans to figure out which rocks they preferred to hide under. Flat rocks were your best bet, especially the larger ones. Nothing was more exciting than reaching under the water, pulling up the rock and having a crawdad dart from its secure dwelling. If we were quick enough we would be able to grab it and put it into our little pink bucket, if we missed, it would quickly disappear into the now disturbed, murky water. Somedays, however, it didn’t take us long to gather two or three in our bucket. We would proudly present them to Aunt Margaret, who never seemed too impressed by them, and made sure we didn’t bring them too close.

Although the creek seemed to us a happy, carefree, and enchanted section of the world, there were limitations too. Gena and I knew we could not go too far in each direction or something bad might happen. Wandering downstream in one direction might take us right into the Charlestown sandpit, a place that swallows up little girls. In the other direction, was a huge
culvert that helped the water flow under the bridge to the other side. A person could easily crawl through it, or if you were small enough, just bend over a bit and walk through it. Our older brother made sure we were too terrified to try that. If you made it to the other side, you have now entered the Ravenna Arsenal, where you would immediately be shot by guards. Needless to say Gena and I never entertained that idea.

Recently, the same brother that had us terrified of the arsenal recently purchased a cottage next to the creek. It’s been over 40 years since I’ve been there and I was elated to go hiking with my brother and check out our “old stomping grounds.” As we set out, my excitement soon turned to dismay. The perfectly mowed path that took us down to the creek was unrecognizable, in fact there wasn’t a path at all. We made our way through briar bushes and tall weeds to a body of water that didn’t resemble the magical creek that I had known as a child, as mud and silt had narrowed it considerably. Trees and dead branches had fallen in so many directions it looked as if it would be impossible to even reach the creek. I instantly had a feeling of sorrow that no child would ever experience the enchantment of what this wondrous place offered so many years ago. I was not only sad for the creek and the way it looked now, but I also realized I was grieving a wonderful childhood that I would never have again. The old adage, “the more things change, the more they stay the same,” did not seem to apply to this special creek.

As my brother and I hiked the length of the creek that day, I refused to see it in its current state. I just tried to keep up with my brother the best that I could as we balanced along fallen trees and hopped across rocks. It occurred to me that is something that didn’t change. I was always just trying to keep up with my brother. After scaling some rugged terrain we showed up at a tree that my uncle had carved his initials into after returning from the Vietnam War. The sandpit stopped just short of digging where this majestic tree stood. It warmed my heart to see
that this special tree was still standing tall. My brother and I eventually made our way back to the entrance of the creek. I don’t think I would wander in barefoot now, but I was close enough to reach into the water and flip over a rock. A large crawdad dashed away. Had I been able to catch it, I would have picked it up. That didn’t change either.