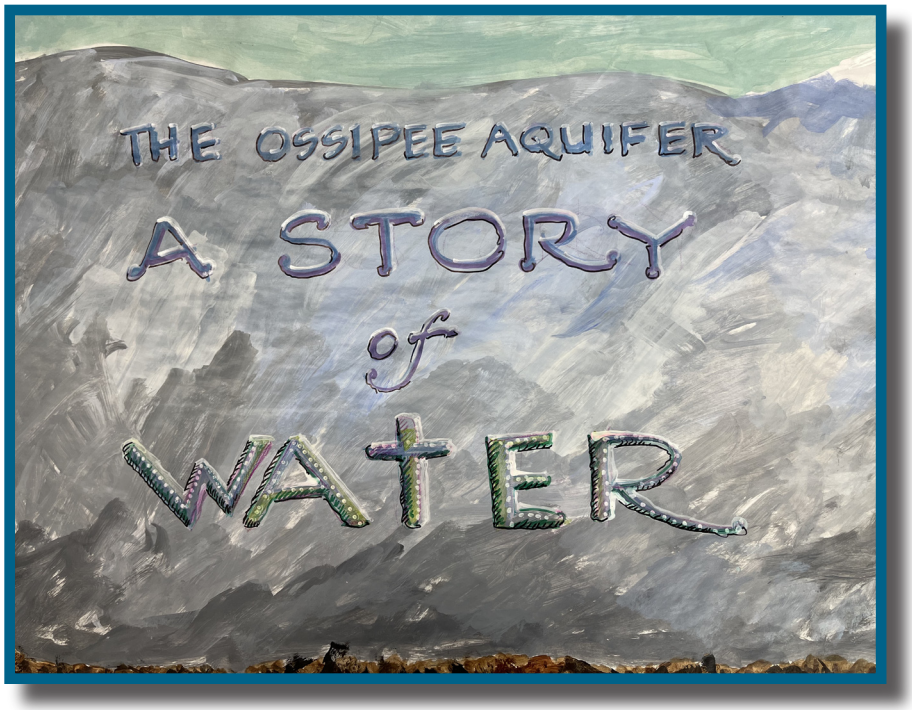
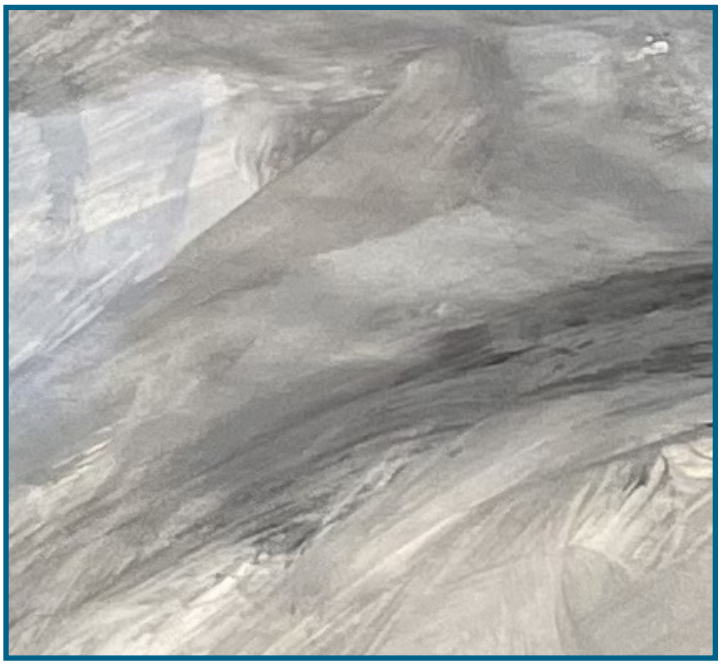
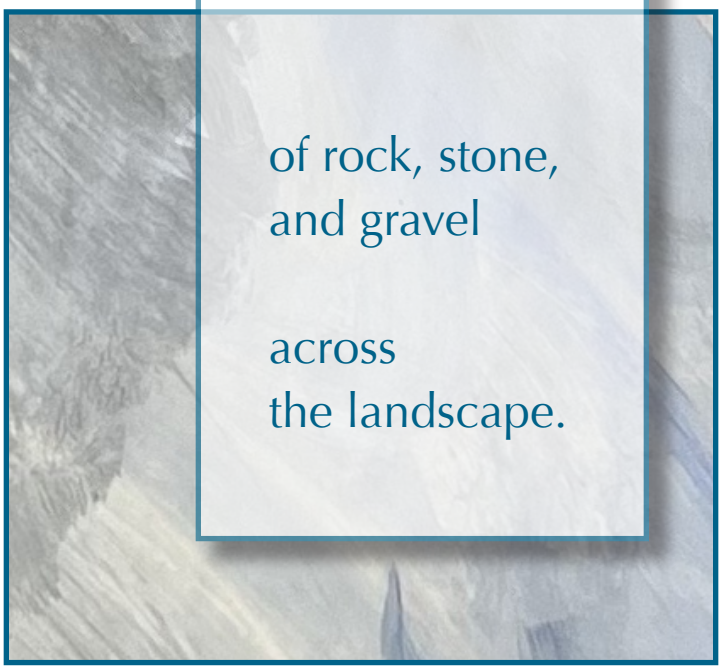


NOT SO LONG AGO,
here where you sit today
– where *we* sit –
I, THE WATER that is
also part of *you*, was
mostly ice,
a mile thick
above the land.
AS I BEGAN TO MELT,
15,000 years or so ago,

I left deposits





of rock, stone,
and gravel

across
the landscape.

Water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink. The truth hiding in this familiar adage is that *of all the water on earth*, more than 97 percent is the saltwater found in oceans. Of the less than three percent of water on earth that is freshwater, two percent is frozen in glaciers, icecaps, and high up on snowy mountaintops.

I became meltwater rivers and lakes.
Animals, plants, and trees returned, drinking my liquid aliveness into their bodies.

That leaves only one percent of ALL the water on earth for our daily water needs, the water stored beneath the ground in aquifers and groundwater, and in streams, rivers, and lakes. That's all; we can't make more. The same water cycles through its phases as it has since before the time of the dinosaurs.

The ancestors of today's Abenaki people hunted and gathered in and around me, traveled up my rivers in boats, depended on the fish, aquatic plants, beavers, turtles, and other wildlife I sustained. Later, they settled beside me and made gardens.

We call a lake a body of water, but much of my body is hidden beneath the earth in something called an aquifer – here in the Ossipee Watershed I make my home in the Ossipee Aquifer, a stratified drift aquifer that owes its existence to those deposits of stone and gravel left behind as I melted from ice to liquid water.

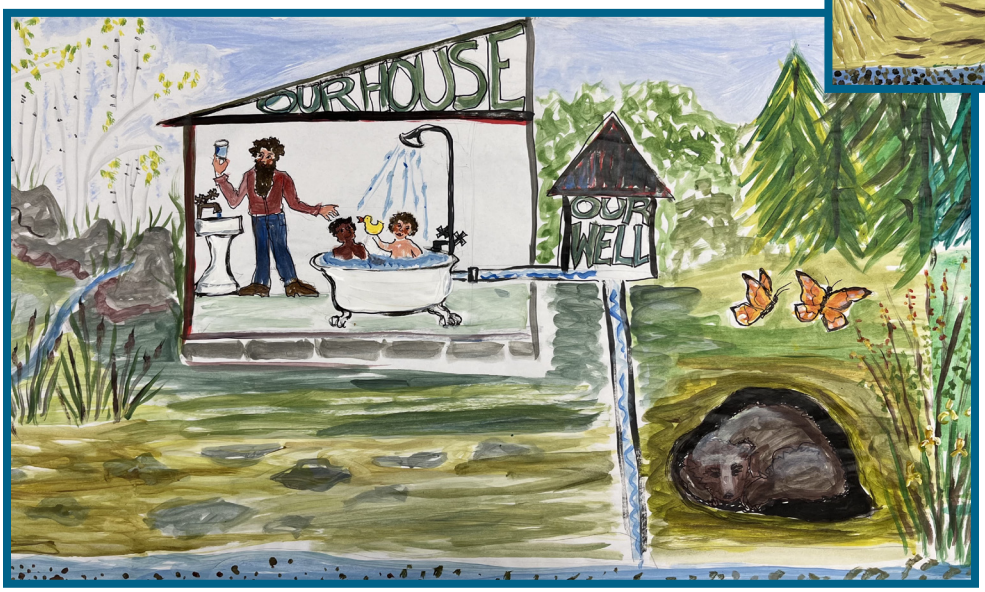
I reach you, and become part of your body, in many ways.

Trees draw me up through their roots and breathe me out through their leaves.

The people who have lived in this region the longest, from millennia before Europeans came, have a culture rooted in reciprocity—the practice of caring for land and water as family who also care for us and make our lives possible. Penobscot lawyer and activist Sherri Mitchell reminds us that "an estimated nine hundred million people in the world... [face] life-threatening water shortages, and others...[face] wide-scale illness and social collapse as a result of contaminated water supplies."

Streams bubble up from my springs and fill lakes and rivers.

When you turn on your faucet, and pour a clear, cool glass of me to drink, the likelihood is, if you live in the Ossipee Watershed, you are drinking me from my invisible home beneath the earth.



I am in and around your body. I make up more than half of it, you sweat me out when you run, I cool you off in the form of gentle rain. When you reach the lake, you swim in me!

The same qualities—the stratified drift—that created the Ossipee Aquifer also make it vulnerable to contamination: leaked or spilled toxic substances move quickly through areas of sand and gravel. A gallon of spilled fuel oil can render toxic one million gallons of water, a pint of oil in a lake or wetland can damage aquatic habitat across an acre or more of surface water.

I am not only in human bodies, I am part of every plant, tree, animal, insect, bird. I migrate south in the body of a butterfly, and return the following spring. I am in the frog spawn, the tadpole, the frog, and they are in me.

I am in the bees that pollinate fruits and vegetables and herbs, and I am in every bite of food you eat, as well.

I am always moving, up and down, from air to earth to below the earth, across the land, flowing to the ocean, replenishing rivers and streams, back into this and other aquifers, into and out of your body and the body of every living thing. When you can see me, and when you can't, I make life on this earth possible.

Water flows according to the shape of the land; it does not obey town lines or other human boundaries. Contamination in one part of an aquifer can quickly spread across towns and regions, across a whole watershed, harming flora and fauna alike. If we poison the water, we harm all living things.

A poisoned aquifer means poisoned drinking water, with short and long term risks to health, including cancers in both humans and animals. What are we to do when the water that allowed us to live happy hydrated lives now contains substances that make us ill?

An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure, because contaminated water is something we can't always outrun. Once a large area of water is contaminated, it is often impossible to make it pure again. When treatment is possible, it is costly, and making water safe again can take years or decades.

As Jacques Cousteau reminds us, the water cycle and the life cycle are one. We are extraordinarily lucky to have the Ossipee Aquifer with its clean water below us here. Responsibility falls to us who receive this blessing to protect it for future generations.

May we be worthy of water.

May we protect and honor water.

May water continue to nourish our lives.

This "comic book" version of *The Ossipee Aquifer: A Story of Water* crankie includes only some of the wonderful art in the crankie itself—thirty feet of beautiful paintings! The aim of this project is to help us visualize the Ossipee Aquifer. We can't see the aquifer with our eyes, but it's there, in the ground below us, and our lives are interwoven in so many ways with the water the aquifer holds.

The Ossipee Aquifer: A Story of Water is a project of Chocorua Lake Conservancy, Cook Memorial Library, Green Mountain Conservation Group, and Yeoman's Fund for the Arts.

A film version of the crankie will be available on our websites in Spring 2023:
chocorualake.org • gmcg.org • tamworthlibrary.org

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YEOMAN'S FUND for the ARTS

Script: Juno Lamb
Tara Schroeder

Art: Ann Borges
Beth McCarthy
Carol Lovely
Chris Canfield
Deb Marnich
Dexter Harding
Hope Hutchinson
Juno Lamb
Kevin Mahoney
Lew Prillaman
Lucy Gatchell
Norm Sizemore
Peggy Johnson
Tara Schroeder

Book: Peggy Johnson
Juno Lamb