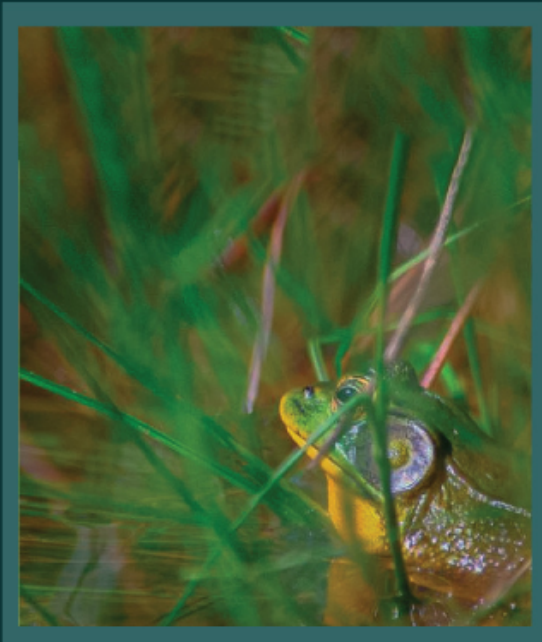


Frog Swamp and the Wild Pickles



by Michael Erlewine

Frog Swamp

And the Wild Pickles

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*For Iris and Emma and Josephine, my grandkids that
about the right age for this story.*

*This does not mean that Max, Molly, Lukas Connor,
Micaela, or Norbu might not like them. And even
some adults who are not too old at heart.*

INTRODUCTION

My five-year-old granddaughter Iris is learning to read, so I have been writing her letters, which she likes to receive. And she writes me letters back. I heard that in my letters, she especially likes the little stories, if I tell them. OK, I will write her some stories, although I am not a fiction writer. However, I do have a good imagination.

And so, I wrote a couple stories and sent them to Iris. Then, I sat down and wrote a short story on top of that, just a trial story to see if Iris likes it. It is called "Frog Swamp and the Wild Pickles."

If Iris does like this longer story, I can write more chapters for it. I include it here because I have nothing more to share with you as to how I spent my time yesterday.

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FROG SWAMP And the Wild Pickles

William Bigsly lived in Traverse City, right up by Lake Michigan, one of the largest lakes in the world. One thing that William (we can call him Willy) liked was to make his own sandwiches, and his mom would let him. Willy was almost six-years old.

Willy's mother would give him two big pieces of bread and some mayonnaise and Willy would go at it. He made sandwiches that were tall and sandwiches that were tiny and small. There was no stopping him, because Willy liked to eat sandwiches. He would take those two pieces of bread and between those slices put anything he wanted to eat. And, his mom would let him.

He had cheese and lettuce and tomato and, if he could find it, even a little tempeh. Yet, what Willy liked best of all was to add a little pickle on top. In fact, Willy's mom would sometimes even let him go with her to the Oryana co-op shopping. What Willy wanted to do was pick out the cucumbers which he used to make pickles, the larger the cucumber the better. Willy took the cucumbers home, added a little vinegar and maybe a tiny bit of salt, and then wait for those cucumbers to turn into pickles. It took a few days, sometimes longer. And this is where this story gets interesting.

Willy went to school and had friends. And sometimes he heard stories, stories about cucumbers. And his ears picked up with the word cucumber and especially the word “pickle.” If someone was talking about pickles, Willy would listen real hard.

And then one day, he overheard someone talking about wild pickles. Now, Willy had never heard about wild pickles before, so he moved right over to where the kids were talking and squeezed right in next to his friend Bill. Willy listened up and this is what he heard.

Now, Michigan has lots of water, more fresh water than anywhere in the world. And, not far from where they lived were many lakes, marshes, and even a few swamps. Now, the swamps were where the best frogs were found and Willy loved frogs, which he learned about from his grandpa. Grandpa liked frogs so much, that whenever Willy went with his mom to the used thrift shops, and found an old rubber frog, he would beg his mom to buy it and give it to Grandpa. Grandpa had dozens of rubber and plastic frogs. :)

Anyway, somewhere, not far from Traverse City were some very special swamps, swamps not like the other swamps people knew. And there is one more thing you need to know about. The lower peninsula of Michigan is shaped like a big mitten with hundreds of lakes and water holes all over it. But underneath the whole of the Michigan mitten is one of the largest salt domes in the world, thirty-thousand trillion tons of salt. Now, that’s a lot of salt.

And, every once in a while some of that salt that is deep under the earth would bubble up into a few of

these swamps, so that the water in those swamps, which was very fresh and clean, also already had some salt in, just exactly right for making pickles. And it just so happened that one of the largest salt swamps was outside the town of Traverse City, near where Willy lived.

And this is what Willy liked to hear best. In that one salt swamp, which was called Frog Swamp, there were pickles that just grew wild. Now, I didn't say there were cucumbers there that turned into pickles. I said there were pickles there that were just naturally pickles. And the swamp was so wild and so friendly to growing things that some of these pickles got very big.

Willy only had seen pickle-sized pickles like you see in the grocery store. He had never seen pickles bigger than that. However, if he heard right, as he listened, they were saying that in Frog Swamp, pickles just kept on growing. And they grew so large that they were the size of human beings, even bigger. Willy had never seen one of these.

Of course, there were a lot of teeny pickles, small pickles, medium-sized pickles, larger pickles, and great big pickles. But Willy had never heard of pickles the size of people or even larger. And Willy was not the only one who loved pickles, and some kids (and their parents) even went out to Frog Swamp to hunt the pickles and eat them raw or take them home, slice them up, and put them on sandwiches. By now, Willy was all ears. He had to go to Frog Swamp.

Yet, Willy also heard about the dangers of Frog Swamp, and he had to think about that. The biggest

pickles sometimes broke off from the vines they grew on, but they kept on growing, right there in the salty swamp water. Not only that, but these really large pickles somehow learned to move, actually swim and get around. And these great pickles were not easy to spot and liked to hide out. They liked to be left alone. And, above all, these swamp pickles did not like to be caught and certainly not ever eaten.

A large swamp pickle could swim underwater and suddenly jump right out of the water, high in the air, and fall back in with a great splash. If you stood at the edge of Frog Swamp and listened very carefully, you could hear these large splash sounds far out in the swamp. In fact, some townspeople would drive out to Frog Swamp, bring their folding chairs, and just sit at the edge of the swamp as the sun went down and listen to the great swamp pickles splashing way out there in the swamp.

Very few people were brave enough to actually go into the swamp because everybody knew that way out in the swamp was dangerous. It got deep far out in the swamp and the swamp pickles swam underwater and got very big. If a big swamp pickle hit you while you were walking in the swamp, it could knock you down and even run over you. And so, although people loved to sit in the evening on the edge of the swamp, very few of them ever went very far in there.

Now, there were some who did go in, mostly great big guys (and some girls) who wanted to hunt the swamp pickles, try to capture them, and drag them out of the swamp. Once in a great while, you would see a car on the road with a big swamp pickle tied on the top of the car. That was something to see! In the beginning,

Willy had never seen a big swamp pickle, but he really wanted to.

More than any Christmas present, little Willy wanted to go out next summer and go into Frog Swamp and see for himself. And so, Willy asked his grandpa to take him to Frog Swamp, and grandpa said yes, next summer. Willy couldn't wait, and he got ready. And Willy's mom helped him to buy some very tall swamp boots that came up to his hips. And his grandpa showed Willy how to make and use a lasso, a rope he would need to catch and capture swamp pickles. He would have to be older to do that, but grandpa could teach him how to get ready.

Now, everyone knew that Willy was too young to go out and deep into Frog Swamp himself; even Willy knew that. Willy was too young and had to wait until he was bigger and stronger. This took years and Willy was very patient and waited until he grew up. However, Willy and his grandpa talked about it every summer, and grandpa showed Willy how to rope a swamp pickle and pull it in. Willy would practice on an old tree stump in his back yard. He would rope that old stump again and again, until he got really good at it. Just the right number of years went by until Willy was a young man, and Willy never forgot about Frog Swamp and the great swamp pickles that lived there. He hoped the pickles were still there.

Then, Willy's 16th birthday came up. Grandpa told Willy that now he was old enough to go into Frog Swamp and learn to hunt the pickles. Willy knew he was ready because he was big and strong and could take care of himself, even in Frog Swamp.

CALLING THE PICKLES

Over the years, more and more townspeople liked to drive out to Frog Swamp in the warm summer evenings, set up their folding lawn chairs at the edge of the swamp and watch the sun go down. They would talk, laugh, and a few of them even used to try and call the swamp pickles, like you would make a bird call. The swamp pickles never answered those calls, but every few minutes you could hear a distant sound far out in the swamp as a big swamp pickle leaped out of the water, soared through the air, and came down with a big splash.

Now, not that many people had ever seen a big swamp pickle. Little ones? Sure. Everyone had seen (and eaten) some of those, but the really big pickles? Not so much. Every year or so there might be a picture of a giant swamp pickle in the newspaper, but that's about it. Willy had not seen one, but he had ridden his bike out to the edge of Frog Swamp and sat with the old folks on the edge and listened to hear the big pickles splash far out in the swamp. But Willy had never been far out in that swamp or had even waded along the edges.

However, Willy had learned from the old folks how to call the big swamp pickles. They would use a conch-horn, a horn made from a large conch shell that, if you blew into it just right, would make a lovely deep moaning sound. Willy could do that and he had a pickle horn that he kept at home under his bed. Sometimes he would take the pickle horn out to the edge of the swamp and call the pickles. They never called back, but he could hear them splashing.

Just as you might think (and Willy was told), the huge swamp pickles looked just like giant pickles. They were dark green, wrinkled, and even smelled like pickles. How or why they moved around, no one knew, but they did move. You didn't want to be standing in the swamp when a big pickle swam through; this Willy had also been told. They could knock you right down and even pull you under by their wake as they swam by.

By the time he was eighteen, Willy had read everything he could find about the swamp pickles: books, magazines, and what very few videos that were ever made. Willy had them all on a little shelf in his room. No one around Traverse City knew more about swamp pickles than Willy, unless they were among the few who had ever actually gone into the swamp and hunted them. And they didn't talk much.

Grandpa and Willy would drive out to Frog Swamp, put on their hip boots, leave their lunch in the car, and very slowly start to enter the swamp. At first, they just went a little ways, not too far. They could hear the pickles splashing far out in the swamp, but still could not see anything. Willy loved walking in the reeds and the water up to almost the top of his hip-boots, the sun on his face, and the warm breeze blowing through the swamp grass. Willy and grandpa did not bring any ropes to catch pickles, because they did not want to hurt them, but just watch.

Willy wanted to actually see a swamp pickle up close, but he did not want to scare or make the pickles upset or angry. Willy loved the big pickles, or at least he thought he did. He had never seen one... yet. Willy and grandpa went a little bit farther out each time they

went into Frog Swamp. And, after a while, Willy and grandpa would come out of the swamp, spread a little blanket down on the edge of the grass and have their lunch. Those were some of the best times Willy and grandpa ever had, just sitting there, eating lunch, and listening for the splash of the big pickles far out in the swamp.

THE FIRST TIME

The first time Willy saw an actual swamp pickle was almost by accident. Willy and grandpa went farther and farther into the swamp most every trip. After a while, Grandpa would be tired and have to go back. And sometimes Willy would stay on and even go farther and farther out all by himself. All he could hear were the sound of his own boots moving through the reeds, so Willy liked to stop every minute or so and just stand there. He could feel the sun on his body, the breeze in his hair, and listen to the songs of the frogs (and some birds) all around him.

And so, one day, everything was so nice that Willy just kept walking deeper into the swamp, farther and farther. Willy lost track of time. He was just way out there. He must have been almost a mile from the car and the edge of the swamp. Even Willy was getting just a little tired and he looked for some place to rest. Sometimes there were hammocks, little islands of grass in the swamp, that you could rest in, or maybe the trunk of a large tree that had fallen in the swamp.

Willy saw what he thought of was a large rock sticking out of the water, He could perhaps rest on that. And as Willy moved through the water in his heavy boots toward the rock, the rock suddenly disappeared. It

was just gone. Willy looked all around and there it was again, but it seemed a little farther away than he thought. How did he miss that? Willy again moved toward the rock. But this time he saw it clearly; the rock just went under the water and was gone.

And, as Willy stood there, suddenly in front of him the rock exploded out of the water, wriggling high through the air, and came down with a huge splash, all over Willy. And as Willy stood there, soaked to the skin, the huge swamp pickle just swam away under water, parting the reeds with its waves.

Willy stood there, silent. There were no sounds now, just the sun beating away, and a few birds calling. Willy had seen a swamp pickle all by himself, although not for very long. And Willy waited, hoping the pickle would come to the surface or return, but almost afraid of what he would do if it did. It was a little scary, but mostly wonderful.

After a while, Willy slowly made his way back to the car. It must have taken him at least an hour, but Grandpa was there waiting for him. Grandpa could see the great smile on Willy's face and he knew that Willy had seen a swamp pickle. Grandpa was so glad. And they sat by the edge of the swamp, ate their lunch, and talked together for a long, long time.

“LOOK MA, NO HIP BOOTS”

Willy went home from his first encounter with a large swamp pickle with lots to think about, yet very happy. All he wanted was to go back and walk into the swamp again. He was old enough to go by himself now, and Grandpa was all for it, because Grandpa

was spending more and more time out by the car, talking with folks and watching Willy wade toward the far back of the swamp.

And Willy went to Frog Swamp more and more just on his own, whenever he had time from school and the work he had to do for his mom. Instead of wading back a mile, Willy found a little two-track road, little more than a couple of tire tracks where the grass was worn down and that took him to the far end of Frog Swamp. He could ride his bike down in there all by himself. He often went there with and without Grandpa, who, as mentioned liked to stay back by the cars where people sat and talked.

And Willy did go. He found that wading in the high hip-boots very tiring and sometimes water would pour over the tops of the boots by accident and fill them up so that he could not even walk through the deep water. One day when this happened, Willy just took off the boots and carried them back to shore. After that, he never wore the boots again. After all, it was summer, the water was warm, and Willy found a pair of what they call "river-walking shoes," which he ordered from a catalog and they came in just a few days.

From then on, Willy didn't wear those high boots, but just the river-walkers and a pair of long pants. It made walking into the far back of the swamp so much easier and faster. And so now, Willy would ride out on the tiny two-track road to the end, where the swamp began. He would leave his water bottle and a small lunch on the bank of the swamp and just wade on in.

Willy liked to get way out there and often would just

stop wading and stand there in the silence. Well, it was not all silent, because he could hear the frogs croaking all around him, and birds too. But most of all Willy listened for the sound the big pickles made when they leaped in the air and splashed way out there. And he also heard what they called the sound of the bull pickles calling one another from across the swamp. Either it was pickles calling or maybe it was just townspeople blowing their conches from the far-away banks of the swamp. It was a strange and wonderful sound.

And Willy saw pickles, big swamp pickles. He wondered if maybe the pickles were getting used to him wading out there among them, because he started to see them every so often. He did not see the big ones every time he came to the swamp, but he did see them often enough to keep him wanting to come out to the swamp and try to find them.

The swamp pickles were still very shy. They didn't just come up to him or show themselves, but he knew they were near. He could always feel when they were close to him. And more and more of the time the big pickles did not always stay underneath the water. They would float on the top of the water, their big dark green backs glistening in the sun. He could see the shine of their skin through the swamp grass, even if he could not see them all that well at first.

And sometimes, they came in pairs, two at once or maybe more. They did not just swim up to Willy, but at the same time they no longer seemed afraid of him. They kept their distance, always just out of reach, not that Willy was about to reach out and touch them. And there was a really big discovery that happened one

fine day.

One of the big swamp pickles was floating on the surface of the swamp with its back sticking out of the water. It was swimming very slowly past where Willy was, and right next to it was another pickle, but a small one. When the big pickle would change direction, the little pickle would too, staying right by the side of the big one. When the big pickle would duck under the water and swim, so did the little one. Now, when I say the little one, it was not really all that small, but just a lot smaller than full-grown swamp pickle.

It was almost like one was a mother pickle and the little one, its baby. But that couldn't be, thought Willy, pickles don't have babies, but he wondered. And Willy also had learned that, at least with these big swamp pickles, there were two basic kinds, the really giant big pickles, and also pickles that were also big, but smaller and slimmer. The giant big pickles had a kind of silver color on their backs, while the regular big pickles did not; they only had a little oval of light green color near their heads, which almost looked like a hat.

Anyway, what started Willy wondering about the idea of baby pickles is that every time he saw a big pickle with a smaller pickle swimming together, the big one almost always was one with the light-green oval on its back. It was seldom one of the huge silver-back pickles, but it did happen. Anyway, Willy had to keep telling himself there was no such thing as a mother or father pickle with a baby, or was there? Was there something like a pickle family, with a mother, father, and baby pickles? Willy wondered.

And then one day, when Willy had wandered out in the swamp farther than he liked to think, he came upon something very, very special. It was a place in the swamp grass that had no grass, like a great big circle. Willy stood in the water outside the circle in the swamp grass and peeked in. And in the circle were more big swamp pickles than he had ever seen before. They were all together, like families, and seemed to be enjoying one another. It was some kind of gathering. And there were little ones too, never very far from what Willy thought could be their mother or dad.

As mentioned, Willy stood real still, partially hidden by the grass, and just watched the pickles for a long while. It was like the pickles were having a picnic or get-together all on their own. It was so wonderful to watch that then Willy did something that surprised himself. He was already wet, just standing there in his pants and river-walking shoes. Willy just leaned forward, laid on the surface of the water just like the pickles and swam forward into the middle of them all. He found himself very gently swimming out of the tall grass and into the great circle with the pickles.

Willy still tried not to move much, but just float, yet he very slowly moved out among the huge pickles. They moved a little bit away from him yet didn't really seem to mind. And before long, they didn't mind at all and were coming right up to Willy and bumping into him. One of them even bumped noses with him. It was almost as if they were as curious about who or what he was as he was of them. Even the little ones came close, but their mothers were right behind, watching out for them.

Being with these pickle families was one of the most wonderful experiences that Willy ever hoped to have. And that afternoon, Willy stayed among them so long that he got cold and skin even wrinkled up from the water. Willy almost looked like a pickle himself. That was one of the most perfect times Willy had ever spent in the swamp. And one final note, right toward the end of Willy's time with the families, he suddenly heard the most beautiful sound. It was the sound of a pickle calling and it sounded just like the conch shells that the townspeople on the shore would blow to call the pickles from afar.

Yet, this call came from right next to Willy, and before long other pickles called out in response and soon there was a whole chorus of pickles calling. It only lasted maybe a minute and then it just as suddenly died away. And with that, the pickle families, one by one, turned, ducked under water, and slowly swam away. Willy stood up and made his way back to the shore and rode his bike back home. He felt like he was in a dream.

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

One day, when Willy rode his bike out to Frog Swamp and then down the little two-track path to the far end of the swamp, something very unusual happened. He had just parked his bike and was walking down toward the spot on the bank of the swamp where he liked to leave his lunch, a towel, and a dry pair of pants for the ride home, Willy heard something.

It was a very faint sound of someone singing. And it was a feminine voice and a very pretty one at that. Willy stopped walking and just stood there listening to

the song. And he could not help but slowly move down the path to where the sound was coming from. As Willy got closer and closer to the sound and it got a little more louder, he could see the top of the head of someone sitting on the bank of the swamp.

It was a girl, about Willy's age, with long pigtails tied with red ribbons on the end. She was sitting there with a pencil and a tablet of paper drawing a picture of the swamp, with the lovely trees and everything that Willy knew so well. And, as she drew, she was singing softly a lovely song, one that Willy had never heard before. Willy stopped and listened very quietly and then, afraid he might scare her, he carefully turned around and started to retrace his steps back to where he left his bike.

But, as the tiptoed back, by mistake, he stepped on a branch on the ground and it made a loud cracking sound. And with that, the girl turned around and saw Willy. The girl looked up right at Willy and, she said "Hello." Willy, surprised and a little embarrassed, first looked down at the ground and then up at the girl and said "Hi, I didn't mean to bother you. Sorry!"

The girl said, "No bother, I came here to this far side of the swamp just to hear the pickles splash louder and do some drawing. Willy, who by now had come out from behind the bushes and a little closer. "Do you mind if I sit down," he asked. And she said, "Not at all; it is lovely out here. Willy sat down across from her, but not too close. He felt shy and that she was looking at him, which she was.

And Willy said, "I've never seen you before. Do you live around here?" and the girl said, "I'm still new in

town. My family just moved to Traverse City and I heard about Frog Swamp and my parents drove me out here. They are sitting back where all the people park and I just took a walk and ended up here and thought I would sit for a while.

Willy said, "I've been coming out here for years, ever since I was little. My name is William, but folks call me Willy." And the girl said, "Hi Willy, my name is Rose and I live in Traverse City, up on Madison Street in what used to be called "Slabtown." And Willy said, "Yes, I know that old part of Traverse City very well. Do you like this swamp?"

And Rose said, "Oh, yes I do. I love all the frogs. My grandpa taught me about frogs when I was very young and I love to hear them singing." "I do too," said Willy, but have you heard about the swamp pickles?" "I have," said Rose, "And I was hoping to see one, but I guess they are way out in the swamp. "Well, you came to the right place," said Willy. "Have you seen one?" asked Rose? "Oh yes," said Willy, "Many times. It's why I come out here a lot. And this path is about as close as you can get to where they are without going in the water."

"Aren't they dangerous?" said Rose, but Willy told her that the swamp pickles were not dangerous, not if you are careful and respect their territory. And just then, far out in the swamp came a big splash, and both Rose and Willy heard it. "That's one of the big pickles jumping, right there," said Willy. And they both listened again, but there were no more splashes. "So, you know about these pickles," asked Rose. And you know that Willy liked being asked about the pickles, and he was eager to talk with Rose about them.

“Oh, yes I do. I have been studying these big pickles since I was just a kid. I come out here often, right to this place you are sitting and I go into the water right here and walk back from there “You do,” said Rose, “Without boots?” “Yes, without boots,” said Willy. “I gave them up a long time ago. As long as the weather is warm. This water is very clean, but I do have to wear river-walking shoes so I don’t step on anything sharp like an old can or piece of glass. Some people through junk into the water out here.”

Well, Rose was nothing but interested, both in the swamp, the frogs, the pickles, and also in Willy. Since Rose was new around here, she had very few friends and perhaps she and Willy could be friends. Willy liked Rose and felt the same way. Not many girls would come way out here all alone and she liked frogs too!

So, Willy didn’t go into the swamp that day, but instead just sat and talked with Rose on the bank of the swamp. They sat together for a long time, until Rose had to get back to where her parents were. And after Rose left, Willy just stayed there a little longer and listened to the big splashes far out in the swamp. He liked meeting Rose.

And that is how Willy met Rose Jardin for the first time. And he didn’t even get her phone number or address. Willy hoped he would see Rose again, but at first, he did not even know her last name. He wondered if he would ever see her again. And for sometime after that, Willy would go out to the swamp and down that path more often than he usually did, in hopes of seeing Rose again. And, even when he went

into the swamp, he did not go out very far, but kind of hung around not too far from shore, in the hopes of spotting Rose and her drawing pad.

Willy told Grandpa about Rose Jardin, and Grandpa chuckled and said that he was sure they would see each other again. And Willy also spent more time down where the townspeople parked by the edge of the swamp, in hopes that Rose and her parents might be there. But, so far, that didn't happen.

Then, one day, when Willy was at the Oryana Co-op getting a cookie, there was Rose sitting in the little café having a cup of hot chocolate. They said hello to one another and Willy asked if he could sit down. Rose invited him, and he did and they talked there for quite some time. Willy asked Rose if she had been out to Frog Swamp again and Rose said her parents had only been out there that once, and she was a little afraid to go out there all by herself.

Willy said he understood and told Rose she was always welcome to come out to the swamp with him, if she wanted to. Willy explained that he rode out there all the time on his bike. Well, it turned out that Rose also had a bike and they could ride out together. Willy told Rose all about his history with Frog Swamp. Rose got her mom to buy her some river-walking shoes and she was ready to go.

THE FINALE AT THE FIREWORKS

And it was not long before Willy and Rose rode their bikes out to Frog Swamp and back along the two-track where they could enter the swamp. Rose had a brand new pair of river-walking shoes, so long pants,

And Willy was wearing his, although Willy's ever-walkers were by now old and faded from the water and the swamp. They also brought some sandwiches, their water bottles, and towels.

Rose was not a bit afraid to step into the water and before you know it Willy and Rose had waded far out into the swamp. They had not come across one of the large swamp pickles, but they could hear them splashing farther out. And then one of the most amazing things happened that Willy had ever seen in his life, and I want to describe it vary carefully because it was so wonderful.

Willy was trying to guide Rose out to the area where there was that great circle of open water, the place where Willy had first seen the families of pickles all being together. He knew Rose would like that because he did. At last, they managed to find that circle of open water and sure enough there several groups of the large swamp pickle families already there. Willy and Rose very quietly came up to the edge of the circle and peeked through the swamp weeds.

Rose was captivated by seeing the large swamp pickles close up and especially loved to see the baby pickles. And it was here that the most wonderful and surprising thing happened. As soon as Willy and Rose stepped out from the reeds and entered into the circle of open water, all the swamp pickles just stopped what they were doing and turned toward Willy and Rose. They just froze. And Rose just continued walking in the water out toward the center, leaving Willy behind her.

And as she walked, all the pickles, every one, swam over and surrounded Rose on all sides. And they all came closer and closer, many of them touching Rose very gently with their noses. Willy couldn't even get close because the pickles were packed so tightly around Rose. It seemed that all of the pickles wanted to touch Rose with their foreheads. Willy had never seen anything like it in all his years of being around the pickles. They never did that to him.

And then a large mother pickle who was just behind Rose, gently bumped her until Rose almost sat down in the water, but the nose of the mother pickle just lifted Rose up until she was sitting right on the top of the large pickle. And then the mother pickle raised Rose up until she was high on its back. And then the pickle, with Rose on top, began to swim and parade around the great circle of water, followed by all the other pickles, even the little babies. They all swam together.

Willy, who was still standing on the edge by the swamp grass, just took all this in. It was somewhat of a celebration as the whole parade of huge pickles bobbed and weaved through the water in the large circle. And, as for Rose, she was not a big afraid, but smiled and reached down and touched the nose of those pickles who tried to get close to her.

And then they all (or most of them) began to sing that haunting sound that the adult swamp pickles make. It filled the air and must have been heard all the way back to where people sat on the far bank, almost a mile away.

Willy could see that the pickles loved Rose and he felt

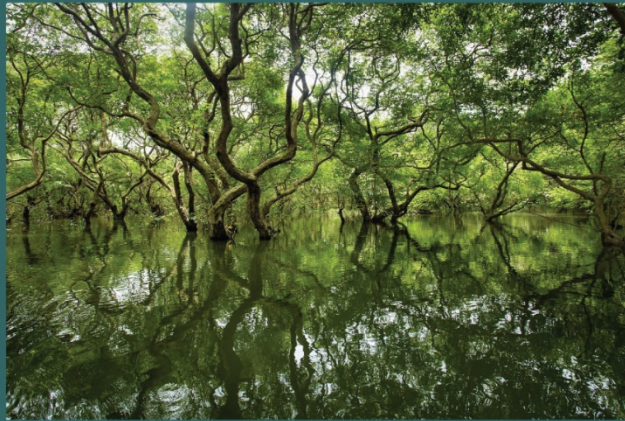
a little left out, but he was so happy for Rose. And perhaps most amazing of all, Rose was not even a little bit scared, but took to it like, as people say, a duck takes to water. She just was loving the whole thing. And the pickles were certainly loving Rose.

The water parade must have gone on for more than half an hour and then the mother pickle carrying Rose just gently let her down in the water, where she could stand up. And then, in the next few minutes, the pickles, one by one or in families, just ducked under water and slowly swam away. Willy and Rose could see the water move the reeds as the swam away under it. Willy and Rose were so happy. They gave each other a big hug and then slowly made their way back to bank.

And that's the story of how Willy met Rose and walked together back into that big swamp There are more stories, in particular some stories about just Rose and her life, but someone has to write them. I could be me. 😊

Thanks for reading.

Frog Swamp and the Wild Pickles



by Michael Erlewine