



My Friend, The Lake

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Artist Statement

I firmly believe that culture is shaped by the stories we tell. The stories and narratives of a community influence the beliefs and values that surround one's relationship with the Earth, so to create a sustainable future, it is crucial to foster a culture of ecologically conscious narratives, especially for younger audiences. However, many children have limited access to nature or the opportunity to engage in stories that encourage a healthy relationship with the environment. *My Friend, The Lake* seeks to fill this narrative gap and encourages readers to reflect on their connection to the natural world.

My Friend, The Lake is a children's book I created as a capstone project for my minor in sustainability at the University of Notre Dame. This book was inspired by a project I did for my first sustainability class, in which I wrote about my home, Bay Village, Ohio. Bay Village is home to the Huntington Reservation, one of the Cleveland Metroparks, located on the shores of Lake Erie. I grew up playing with my friend, Lake Erie, learning about her at the local nature center, and witnessing firsthand the challenges she faces, such as toxic algae blooms.

For this project, I have built from my previous research and personal narratives about Lake Erie—her importance, impact, and the problems that face her today (specifically toxic algae blooms)—and put them into a picturebook titled *My Friend, The Lake*, for early childhood readers. The story is enriched by colorful photographs that tell the story while providing material for visual learning. The book is self-published

and acts as a piece of ecologically-conscious media for children to read, engage with, and form an awareness of problems facing the Earth—specifically, Lake Erie.

My objectives were to:

1. Find out more about issues facing Lake Erie and gain a better understanding of how to communicate these topics.
2. Adapt the story to be appropriate for early childhood reading (ages 4-8).
3. Photograph Lake Erie to enrich the story and compile a book using Canva Pro.
4. Self-publish, print the book using DiggyPOD and distribute it/upload it online with Issue.

Challenges

Publishing the book ended up being the greatest challenge of this project. There were unanticipated delays and processes I had to navigate to get the book into libraries so that young readers could easily access it.

Engaging with the Book

I was able to share my book with a kindergarten class and actively engaged them with the material as we read together by asking questions from the following categories.

Sensory

- “On this maple tree, the leaves are red! What other colors can leaves be?”
- “What a pretty flower! What color is this flower? What does the flower smell like?”
- “Here’s a family of ducks! What sound does a duck make?”
- “These people are swimming in Lake Erie! What do you think the water feels like?”

Numbers

The number of anything in the photographs can be counted together as a group with the reader pointing as the listeners count aloud.

- “Those are a lot of ducks! Can we count together how many there are?”

Knowledge of Nature

- “Do you have a favorite kind of tree? What is your favorite tree called?”
- “What season was this picture taken in? How can you tell? What is your favorite season? Why?”
- “What a beautiful bird! Do you have a favorite kind of bird? What song do they sing?”
- “Do you have any friends like Lake Erie?”

Reception

The children with whom I shared *My Friend, The Lake* in turn shared many different responses to the final question above, “do you have any friends like Lake Erie?” Some friends were imaginary, and some were not, such as:

- The cherry tree in their front yard
- The cat in their neighborhood
- The toad under their porch
- The beach they visited in the summer
- The fish in the sea

Problem-solving questions

One of the goals of this book is that it will get readers thinking about how they can have a positive impact on their environment and community. This is a great opportunity to give them the space to think aloud about their ideas.

- “In what ways can we be better listeners with our friends?”
- “How can we be kind to our friends and help to take care of and respect them?”

The audience with whom I was able to share the book actively engaged with the story and afterward, said that they wanted to go see places like Lake Erie! If possible, a fun follow-up activity to reading this book would be discussing the local environment together and then going for a nature walk. To practice ecological literacy, bring a local wildlife identification book along with you and have fun learning the names of local flora and fauna together!

My Friend, The Lake

A photograph of a lake at sunset. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds, with a bright orange and yellow glow from the setting sun breaking through near the horizon. The water reflects this light, creating shimmering patterns. In the foreground, a sandy beach is visible with several people standing near the water's edge. Further out, a rocky pier or breakwater extends into the lake, with more people standing on it. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Written and Photographed by Christina Randazzo

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Dedicated to my friend, Lake Erie

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ISBN: 979-8-218-18005-8 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 979-8-218-18006-5 (Electronic)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023912733

Front cover image by Christina Randazzo.

Book design by Christina Randazzo.

Printed by DiggyPOD, Inc., in the United States of America.

First printing edition 2023.

Randazzo Publishing



I love my home!

I love the red maple
leaves in the fall...

1



the orange
monarch
butterflies...

2

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright yellow glow and a reflection on the water. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a tree branch hangs down from the top left corner. A yellow callout box with rounded corners is positioned in the upper left quadrant, containing the text "the bright yellow sun...".

the bright
yellow sun...



the lush green
grass...

the clear blue sky...



5

and the pretty
purple irises!



6



There is a

rainbow



of colors to be explored!


A wide-angle photograph of a sunset over a large body of water. The sky is a mix of deep blues, purples, and oranges, with scattered clouds catching the low sun's light. A prominent, bright white streak, possibly a satellite or a light trail, cuts diagonally across the upper right portion of the sky. The water in the foreground is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky. In the distance, a dark silhouette of a treeline or shoreline is visible against the horizon.

Most of all, I love to visit my friend, The Lake!

A photograph showing two ducks on a pebbly shore. The ducks are brown and orange, and they are standing in shallow water. The water is blue and has small waves. The shore is made of small, dark pebbles.

Lake Erie is very important!

She gives fresh drinking water to over 11 million people! Without her, many people would have no clean water to drink. Can you imagine having no fresh water to drink?

A photograph of a Great Blue Heron standing on a large, dark rock in the water. The heron is grey and white, with a long neck and a long beak. The water is blue and has small waves.

She is also home to half of the fish found in all of the Great Lakes put together.

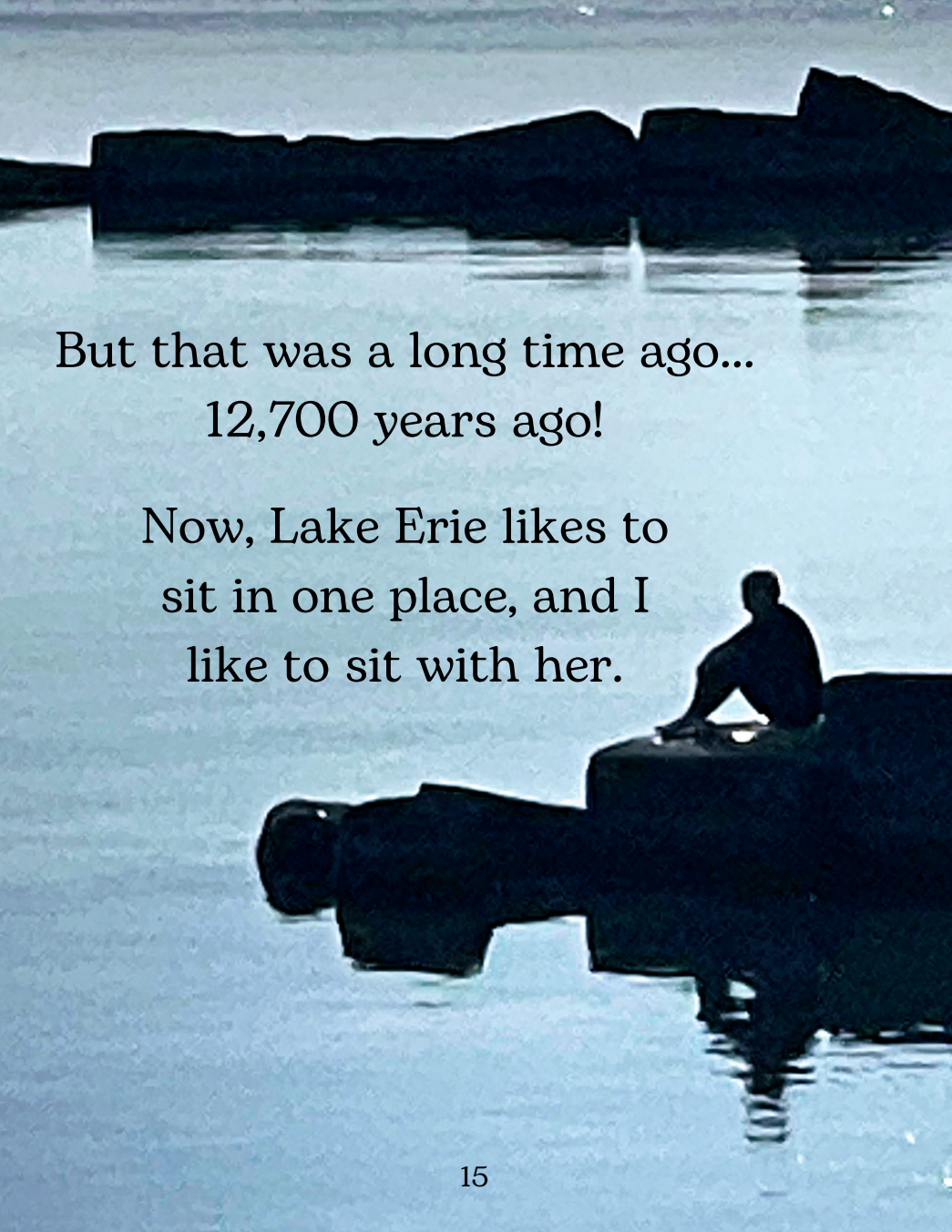
Great Blue Herons rely on her fish for food, and many people do too!



When Lake Erie was little, she was a glacier!


A glacier is a big group of ice that moves slowly across the Earth.

In the winter, she likes to act like a little kid again! She becomes icy like she was in her glacier days.

A person is sitting on a dark, rocky outcrop in a calm lake. The water is still, reflecting the sky and the person. In the background, more rocky formations are visible across the water.

But that was a long time ago...
12,700 years ago!

Now, Lake Erie likes to
sit in one place, and I
like to sit with her.

A close-up view of a person's legs and feet sitting on a dark, rocky shore. The person is wearing a dark, ruffled skirt. The background shows a vast body of water under a dramatic, cloudy sky with a bright sun or moon breaking through the clouds.

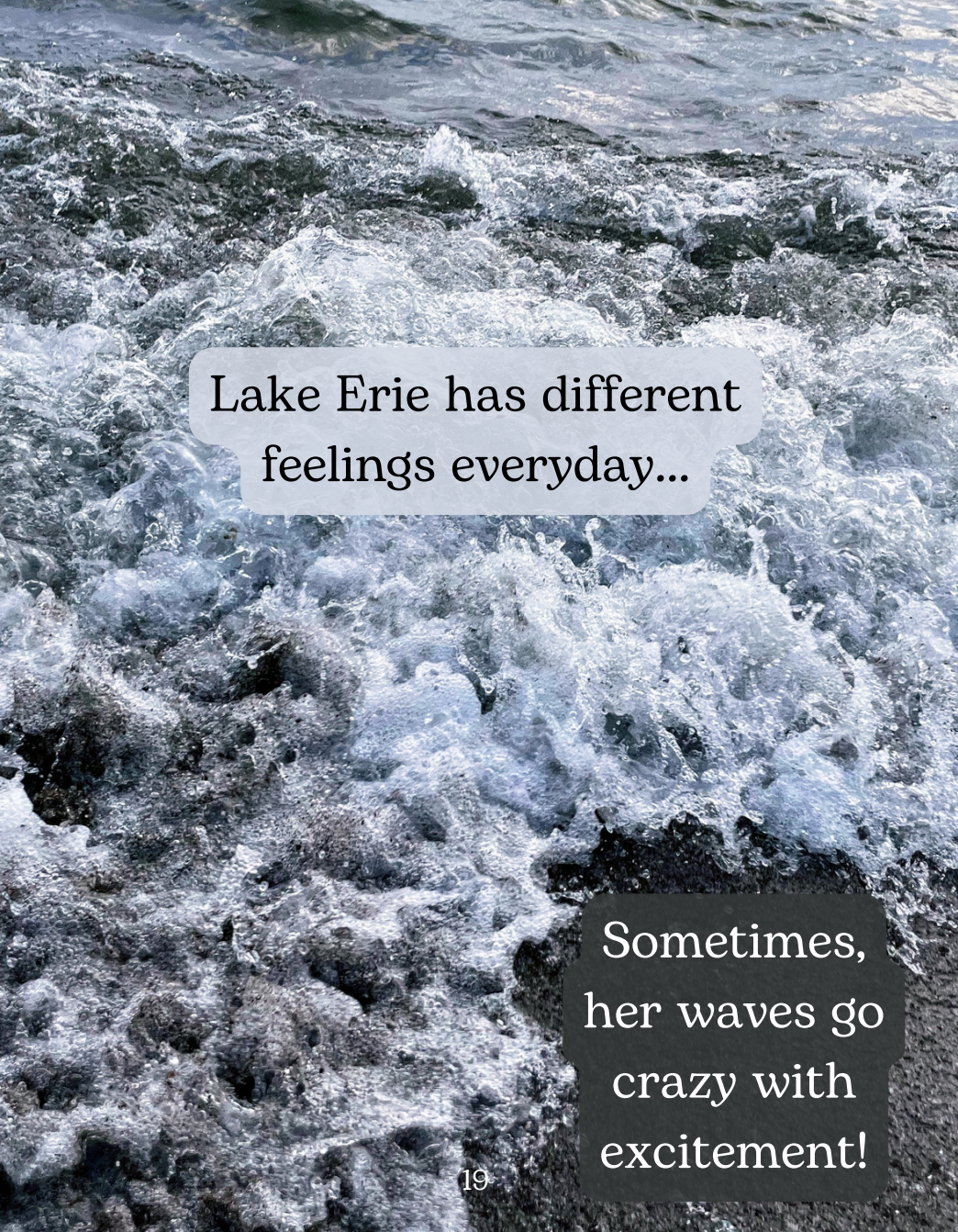
I love standing on her
rocky shoulders and
listening to her voice in
the waves.



In the summertime, I
would jump off her rocks
and into her arms.

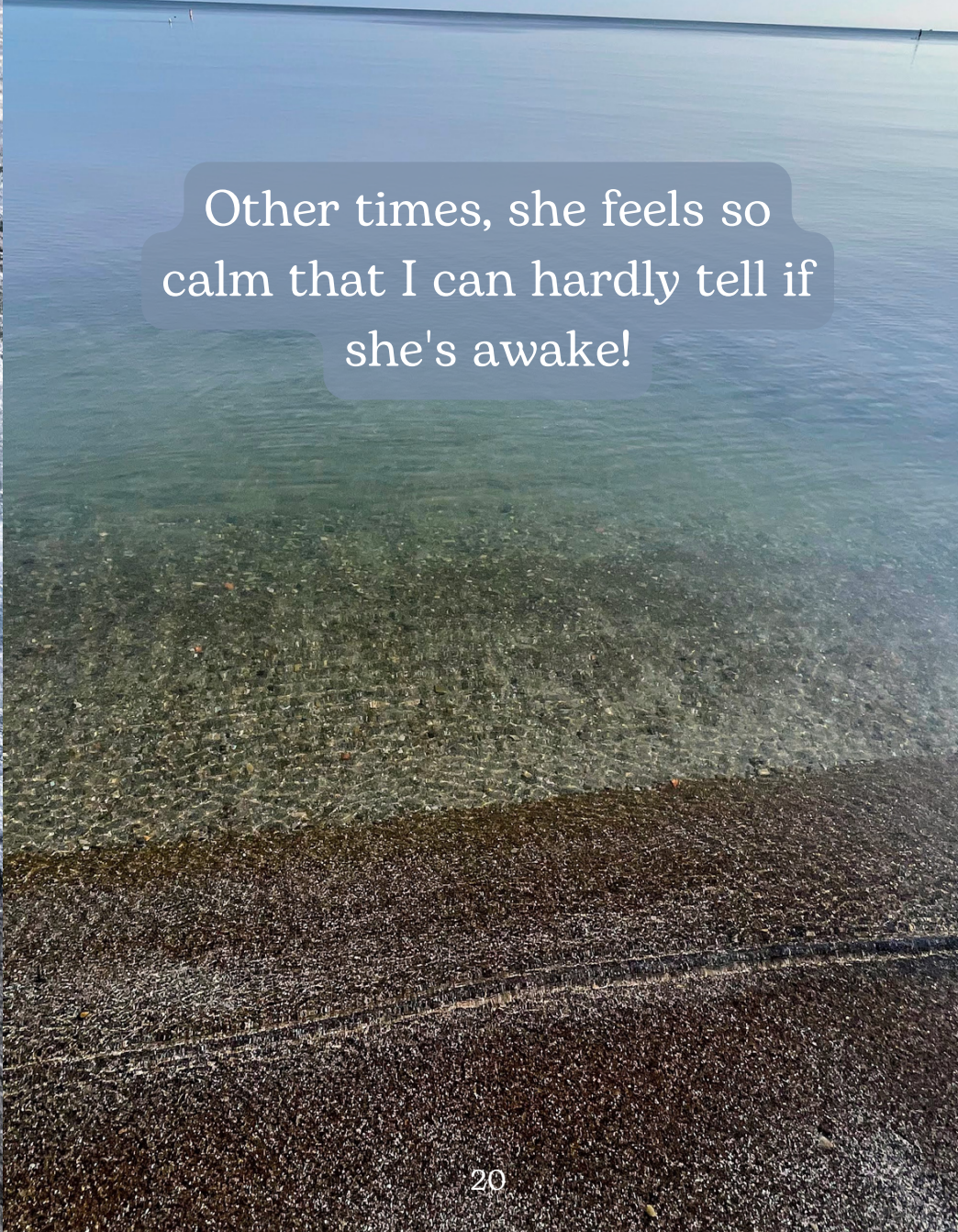


Sometimes, other friends
would join us as well and
we would all play together
for hours!




Lake Erie has different feelings everyday...

Sometimes, her waves go crazy with excitement!



Other times, she feels so calm that I can hardly tell if she's awake!



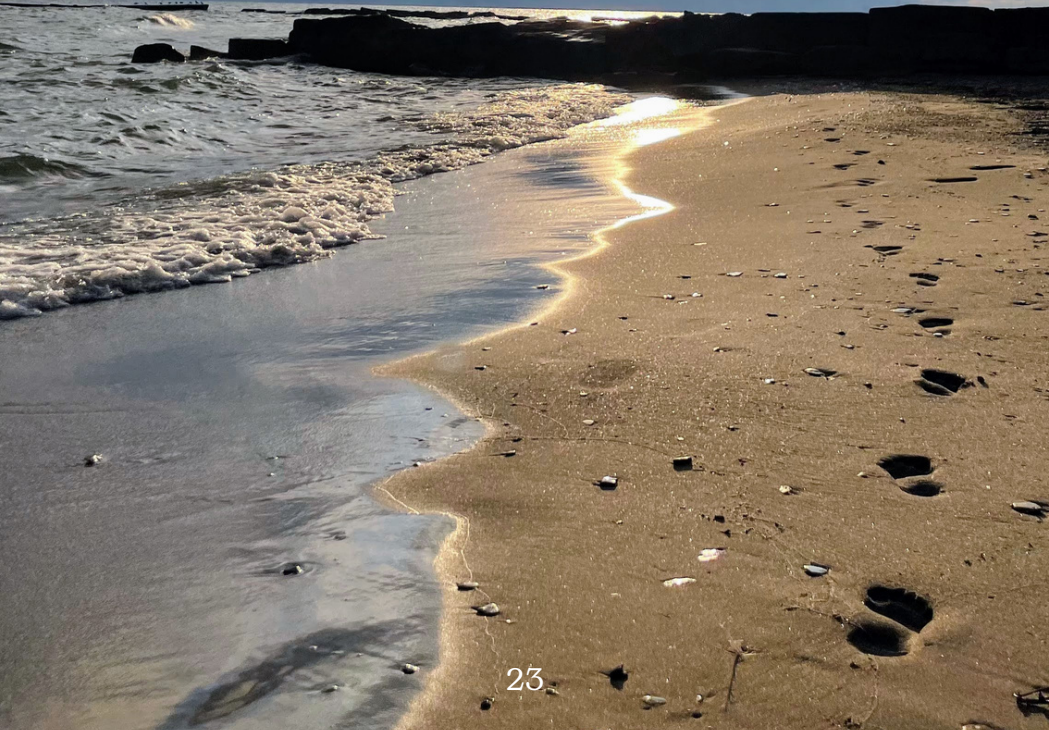
Sometimes, she
likes to share her
colorful glass
beads with me...



and I have
fun making
them into art
to share with
even more
friends!

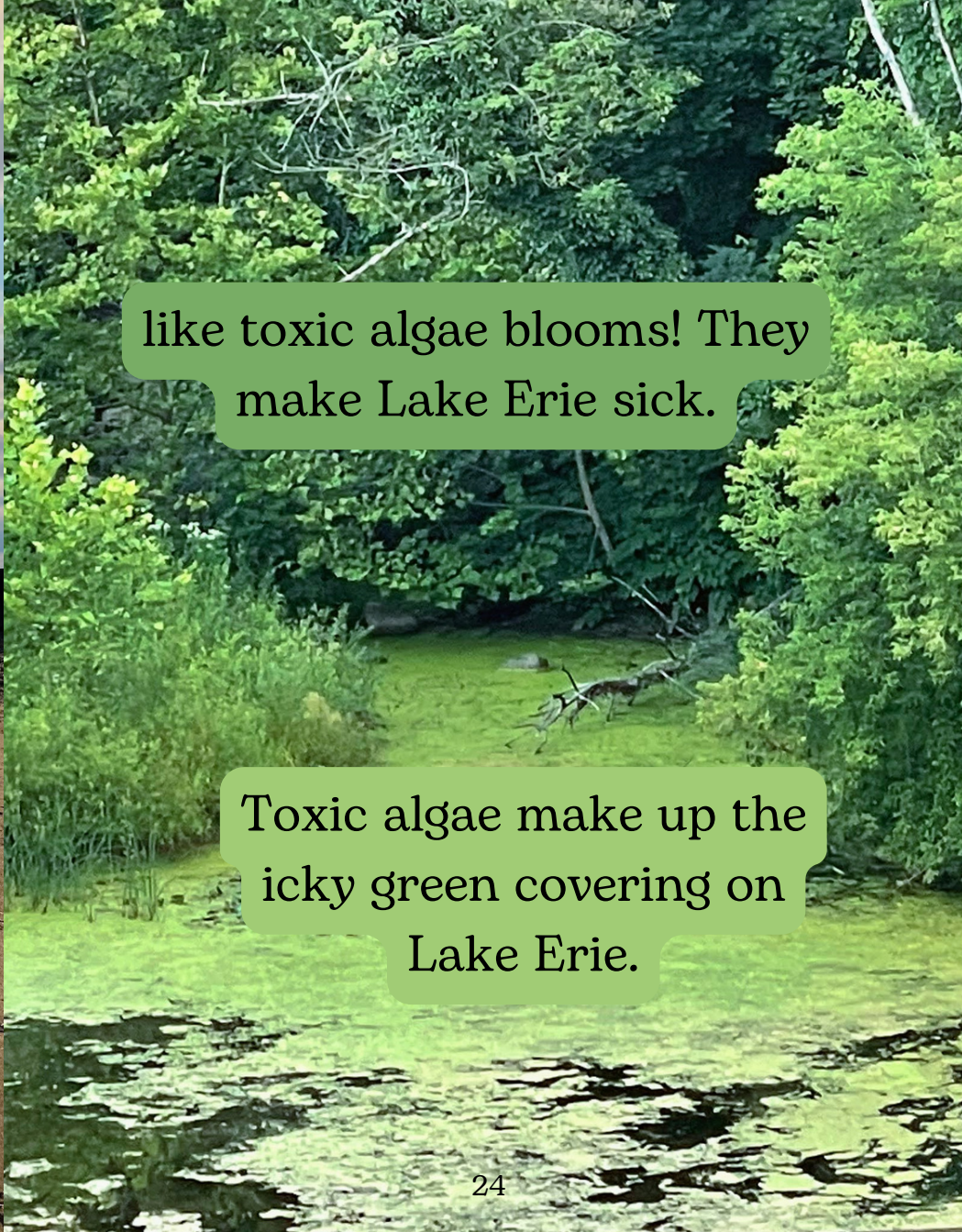
Lake Erie helps so many people!

But there are problems facing
our friend...



like toxic algae blooms! They
make Lake Erie sick.

Toxic algae make up the
icky green covering on
Lake Erie.

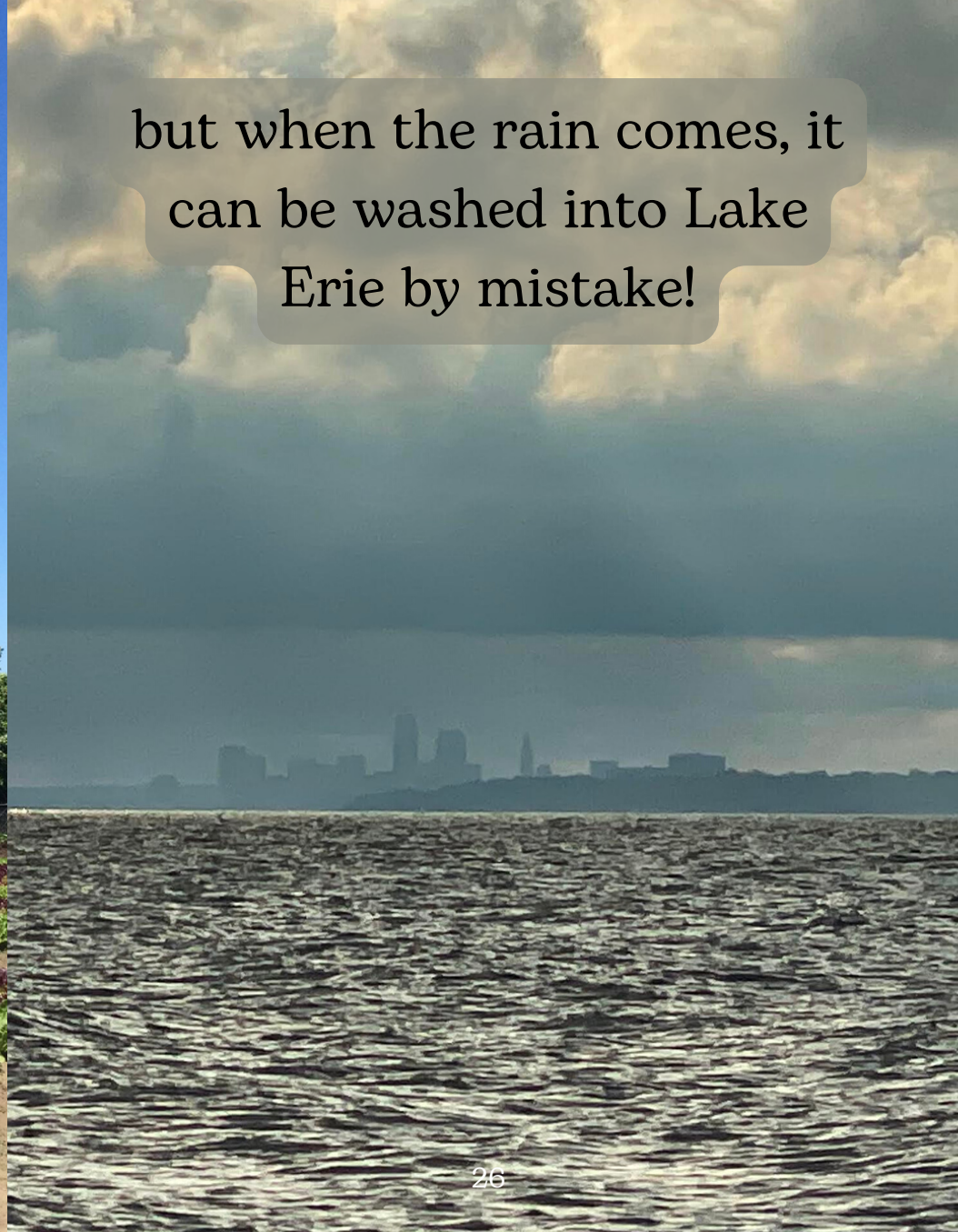


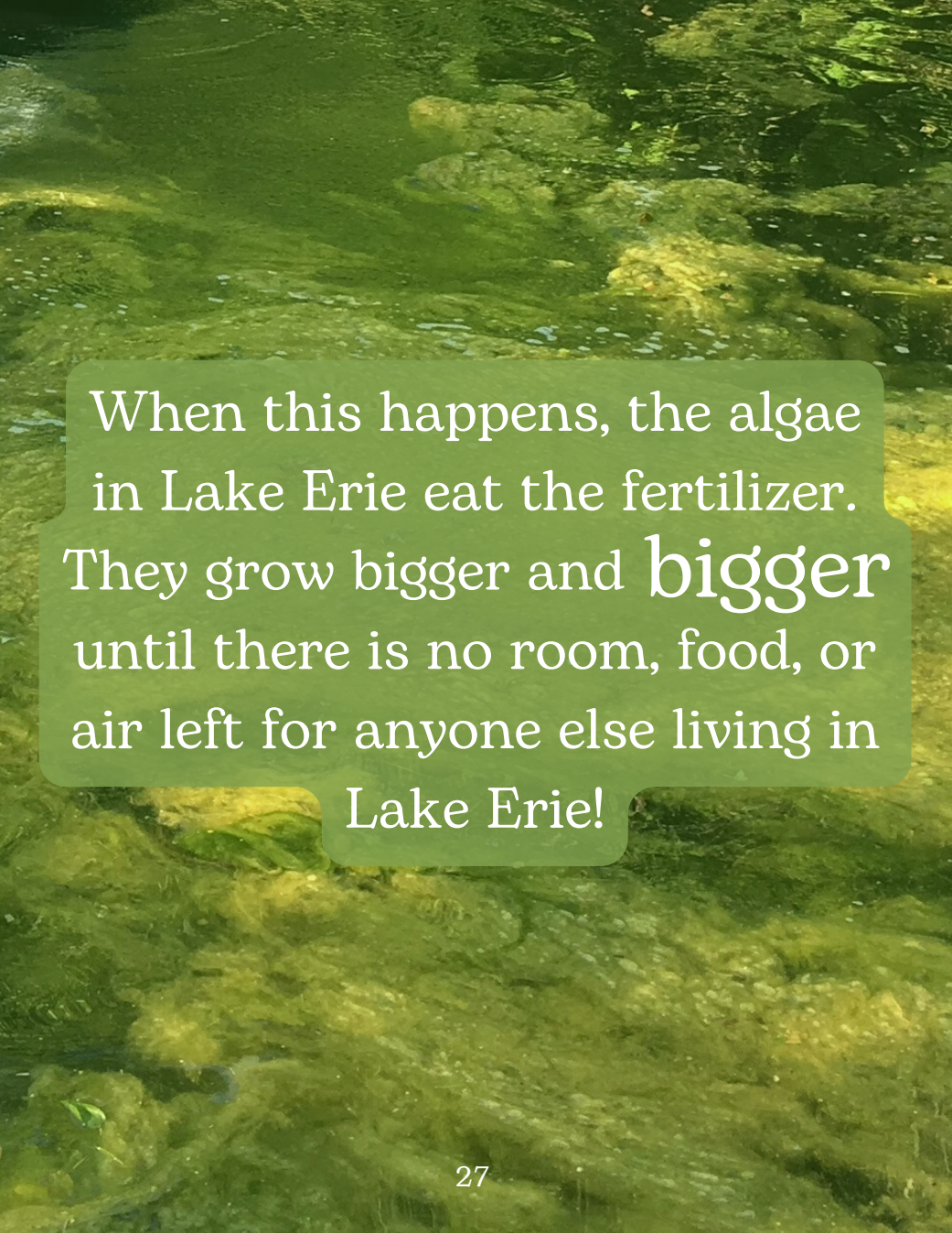
How do toxic algae blooms happen?

Farmers put fertilizer on plants to help them grow big and strong...




but when the rain comes, it can be washed into Lake Erie by mistake!



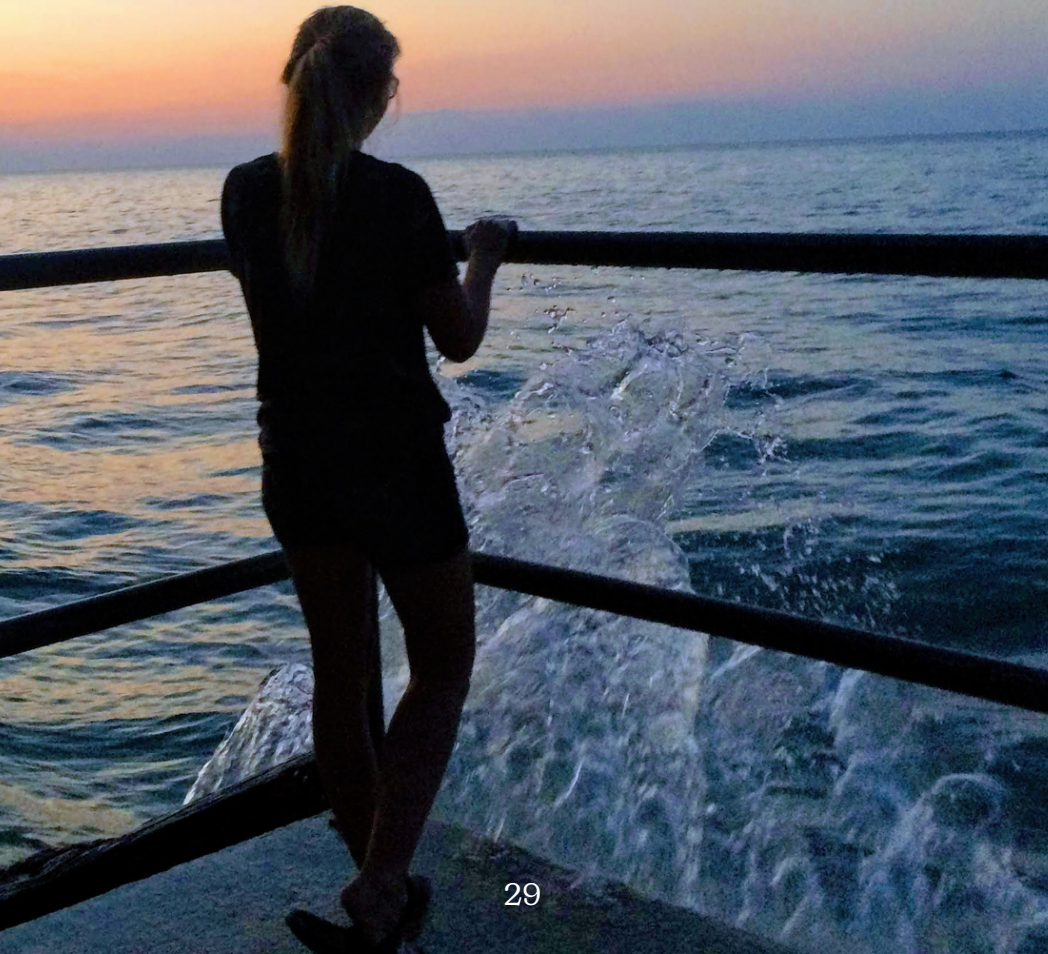


When this happens, the algae in Lake Erie eat the fertilizer. They grow bigger and **bigger** until there is no room, food, or air left for anyone else living in Lake Erie!



What can we do to help our friend, Lake Erie?


We can listen to her and hear
what she needs!



We can gather with
our family, friends,
and neighbors.



Together, we can listen to
our friends like Lake Erie,
share their stories, and take
action to help them!

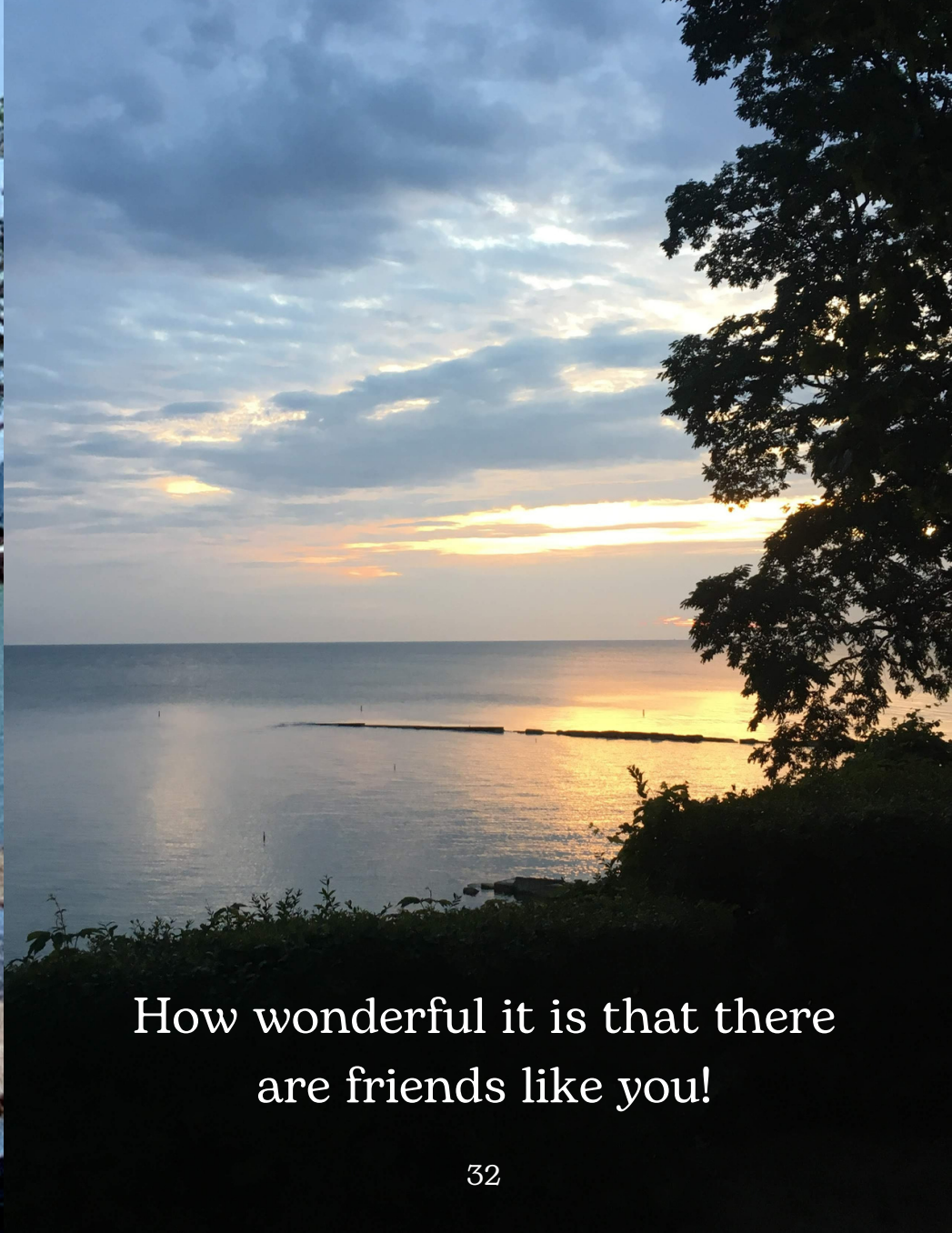
A scenic view of Lake Erie with a city skyline in the background. The water is a deep blue-green, and the sky is a clear, pale blue. In the distance, several tall buildings are visible against the horizon. The foreground shows a rocky shoreline with some sparse vegetation.

What will you do to help
your friends like Lake Erie?

Will you volunteer at your
local nature center?

Will you share stories like
this to help be a voice for
friends like Lake Erie?

Will you help clean
up and protect your
local wildlife?

A sunset over Lake Erie with a city skyline in the background. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The water is a deep blue, and the city skyline is visible in the distance. The foreground shows a rocky shoreline with some sparse vegetation.

How wonderful it is that there
are friends like you!

