

## My Precious Jacquelyn by Curtis Leonard, St. James Middle School

On the warm and sunny first day of April, I was swimming and quacking with my daughter Jacquelyn. We were in search of a meal in the Waccamaw Watershed; Jacquelyn went down for a fish, but never came back up. She swallowed some plastic pollution mistaking it for fish; it clogged her esophagus, eventually suffocating her.

I decided to bury my precious daughter under an overgrown crepe myrtle. Eventually, I left Jacquelyn's grave knowing that I had to try and stop future occurrences of this atrocity so that no other animal would ever have to die like she did. I decided to just walk along the waterline of the Collins Creek Tributary which is part of the watershed. I saw a trail of litter, and I followed it until I reached the ugly source. There was a man dumping waste straight from his truck into a tributary. I was in such a state of disgust because I could not do anything about his criminal actions.

The next day, I walked in search of pollution in the watershed along the divide because it was the highest place around. Suddenly, I stepped in a puddle of surface water; it caught me off guard causing me to lose my balance. I slipped and fell to the forest floor landing five feet away from a large rusty discharge pipe that was pumping an unknown substance into the drainage basin. It was a slimy, black liquid with the appalling odor of eggs. I tried my best to plug the pipe and remove all of the substance that I could from the water, but I didn't know how long the plug would hold.

Just as I was leaving the drainage basin, a shimmering object caught my eye. I went underwater to bring it to the surface. It was a dead fish, partially decayed. It looked like it was a host for decomposers and other micro-organisms. It was covered in the same black substance that was coming out of the discharge pipe. I buried the fish right next to Jacquelyn so they could rest in peace together.

Just a week later, I noticed a teenage couple having a picnic at Brookgreen Gardens along the banks of the Waccamaw River, an integral part of our local watershed. When they finished their meal, they just tossed their trash straight into the river. This time I could not stop myself. I went berserk, I ran and ran like there was no tomorrow; I bit the young teens with my bill, I quacked, and I chased them away.

Sometime after my daughter died, I saw two kids in their twenties camping near highway 31. One boy lit a match, and it slipped out of his hand causing a fire. Being in a heavily forested area of the watershed, it spread quickly. Before long the fire was out of control. It took weeks for the fire to die down; it eventually rained, and I was so glad to finally see precipitation. Sadly, while the rain was a welcome sight, it was extremely acidic due to its pH being below 5.6. It was polluting the ground and water as a result.

I was walking along after my last toxic incident when yet another one occurred. I noticed a bridge that was passing right over one of the tributaries. I saw a multi-colored, shiny substance flowing off the bridge, down a hill, and into the water. When I sniffed it, a weird stench crept up into my nostrils. I later came to the conclusion that it was oil. I decided to dig a make-shift moat to try to contain the oil. I was so relieved when I saw the Waccamaw River Keeper coming my way. What an unbelievable coincidence! Christine Ellis collected the oily substance and brought it to her truck to keep it from further contaminating the watershed.

As I walked through Carolina Forest, I witnessed humans wasting this phenomenal natural resource. The first thing that I noticed was a father and son using a very sudsy liquid to wash their car. The soapy water seeped down the driveway and into the sewer grate. I walked on further to find something I wish I had not seen. I saw this man using a hose to wash his dog's droppings out of his lawn and into a retention pond. That was a double kill. He was not just wasting water, he was polluting it. I quickly walked away from that dilemma. Sadly, in the midst of trying to escape the horror, I witnessed people using the water in wasteful ways. They were washing their cars, watering their lawns daily and running the faucet while they brushed their teeth.

Their abuse of water left me in such a state of abhorrence I left the neighborhood and looked for shelter. I found a bush that I fit into like a key fits into a lock. I looked out into the beautiful world showing me a new perspective on life. The South Carolinian breeze was in my face; the aroma of fresh flowers was reaching its way up my beak. I saw other ducks swimming as were other animals such as fish, frogs and turtles. I saw birds flying and feeding their young. I also saw a minimal amount of pollution; there was crystal-clear water, no trash on the ground nor were discharge pipes running, and the rain was setting the watershed into perfect motion. My mission was complete; I have made my promise for my precious Jacquelyn.