

**BACKWATER BAY**

**Episode 2:**

**"Flora, Fauna, & the Biosphere in the  
Communal Life of Backwater Bay"**

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Production Note: This transcript is taken from the podcast script. There may be some minor differences in the transcript and the final podcast due to cast improvisation, editing, and sound design.

**CAST**

BUSTER LAWRENCE, the announcer.

BETTE "CUPCAKE" CRAWFORD, the host

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT  
U.S. President. 1933-1945

TEMPUS and FUGIT, Backwater Bay's time-telling geese

**THE BROADCAST OPENS WITH AN UNDERWATER AMBIENCE SOUND**

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

If we haven't been killed by mobsters and just dumped into the drink, what are so many residents of Backwater Bay doing at the bottom of the lake? And why aren't you down there with us? Stay tuned to learn what why, when, where, and how!

**BACKWATER BAY MUSIC JINGLE:**

Upbeat radio jingle music. The lyrics are:  
Backwater Bay! Where speech is free and so are we, and we never shut up! Good morning!

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

Welcome to Backwater Bay, an undisclosed site in the public imagination, its zephyr-like visions floating gently across the cosmic ether to the invisible brain waves of your own formidable creative powers.

**MUSIC: A PERKY, OPTIMISTIC MELODY MIXED WITH BIRD SONGS**

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

I'm Buster Lawrence, that still, small voice in your head, the friendly voice - no, not the other one - inviting you join us down by the lakeshore for a bit as we contemplate the wonder and importance of the natural world. Today's adventure: Today's adventure: "Flora, Fauna, and the Biosphere in the Communal Life of Backwater Bay."

And here to tell us about is your neighbor and mine, that kindly but crusty old broad and one-woman community grapevine, Bette "Cupcake" Crawford.

**THE VOICE OF FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT BOOMS OUT:**

The only thing we have to fear is...fear itself!

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

That's not Bette! That's Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

Very perceptive, Buster.

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

Thank you, Bette.

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

I never get used to it, that voice just booming out of the mists of time when you least expect it.

**A FACING ECHO OF ROOSEVELT'S VOICE IS HEARD:**

...fear itself...fear itself...

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

The thing is...I'm not sure I entirely agree with FDR. Some things actually are frightening. Cruelty, for instance, or indifference to suffering. Criminalizing and brutalizing entire communities. Separating immigrant parents and children. Or suddenly deciding that parents and kids can just be locked up together indefinitely, as if that's more humane. Widening and deepening poverty in a world of hyper-concentrated wealth. Those things enrage me, but I'm afraid of them, too.

Still, each time I start just getting sucked into the paralyzing quicksand of despair -

**A LOUD "BEING SUCKED INTO QUICKSAND" SOUND IS HEARD**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

-there's he is. FDR always reminds me that if we're silent in the face of fear, we'll always exist in a society ruled by it. If we're going to open up space for new possibilities, we have to move forward, even when we're afraid.

**MUSIC THAT EVOKES THE BEGINNING OF A WONDERFUL OCEAN VOYAGE**

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

Of course, it matters how we move forward. We can't just grab the first so-called solution that offers itself. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Thanks for joining us today. It's another lovely day here, and I hope it is in your community, too. Or if it isn't, that there will be better times, better weather tomorrow.

Come on, Let's head over to the dock.

For years now in Backwater Bay, we've been increasingly concerned about environmental devastation. We're worried about the health of the land and air and water. We worry about the health of all the forms of life on and in them.

Pollution and poisoning of soil, air, and water. Hazardous and radioactive waste. Deforestation. The relentless spread of urbanization. Rising seas. Global warming. Mass extinctions of species. It's painful to think about. That's probably why so many people choose NOT to. Or are afraid to.

### **THE SOUNDS OF GARBLED RADIO STATIC ARE HEARD**

#### **BETTE SPEAKS:**

Overwhelmed, uncertain, and overloaded. Stuck between panic and paralysis.

That's probably because our society's imagination is so stingy and partitioned. It stuffs everything into separate little single-issue compartments. All disconnected. We never see how *this* affects *that*. It's all very subtle and intricate, the interrelationships that make possible all forms of life on earth.

One of our old pals, Aldo Leopold, was a devoted ecologist and conservationist. You might have read his book *A Sand County Almanac*. It's been around a long time. In it, he describes his close observation of goings on around his Wisconsin farm. You know. The kinds of things that most of us might never notice until someone who knows more points them out.

Aldo is a Backwater Bay kindred spirit. He only stopped by once, and that was after he'd passed on, but still. He helped get us thinking about ecological interdependence. When injury and harm start stacking up, most of us don't pay much attention until a crisis happens. Aldo Leopold

used to point this out. Buster, what was it he used to say?

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

He said, and I'm quoting, "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on the land is quite invisible to laymen."

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

Yes, that's it.

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

He said that the task is to notice the marks of death in a community that wants to believe it's perfectly fine and does not want to be told otherwise.

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

Right. To become aware of these ecological relationships is to start caring about them. Of course, some politicians and corporations and real estate developers don't want us to care.

So here we are, living out that age-old story of tragic societal conflict between the Jets and the Sharks.

**MUSIC EVOCATIVE OF THE DANCE AT THE GYM IN THE MUSICAL "WEST SIDE STORY," WHICH CONCERNS THE TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE HOSTILITIES BETWEEN RIVAL NEW YORK CITY GANGS, THE JETS AND THE SHARKS.**

**BETTE SPEAKS:**

The Jets don't care about the earth's health. They just care about themselves. And the profit they can make from extracting earth's resources.

The Sharks in this story are the living ecological ethos. And they are trying to tell us

that in the good society, we care for each other's health and well-being. All of us - plants, land, water, air, and animals (including humans).

We need each other, not only to survive, but to thrive.

Here in Backwater Bay, we found out the usual models for environmental protection don't work. You know: a separate department that's supposed to monitor and address harm. At first, many of these agencies and departments were pretty good, a step forward. We started getting cleaner air and water in many places - although not everywhere. And these departments weren't really organically connected to other areas of community life. They were kind of add-ons, one department among many competing for resources. Too many of which were going to corporations and policing. Big money -

#### **THE SOUND OF A CASH REGISTER RAPIDLY RINGING UP SALES.**

#### **BETTE CONTINUES:**

- really gained the upper hand.

"Property rights" rather than "the public good," began to dominate how these issues got talked about. And the idea of "property rights," defined by big money, completely squashes the concept of the public good. All discussions and decisions revolve around very narrow ideas of "economic benefit" and "cost."

But benefits and costs to whom? Poor people and people on fixed and low incomes end up even worse off. The money almost always spirals directly upward. The rich pay less and less into public coffers, so there's less to distribute for human needs. Indigenous peoples historically have told us all that "water is life." That was the message again at Standing Rock, where water protectors stood against the Dakota Access Pipeline. And it's true.

But even water and other elements necessary for all life keep ending up in private hands.

Think about this for a minute: How do most politicians and mainstream media talk about ecological harm and catastrophe? Most of the time, they pay lip service to the environment. But they almost never talk in any serious way about carefully tending the intricate relationships among humans and non-humans. Even if they mention harm to human beings, it's almost always against some backdrop of property damage and economic cost. Damage to *things*. The cost of *things*. The impact on private profits.

Occasionally someone points out that the greatest ecological and climate-related harms to humans are borne by poor and people of color communities, both rural and urban. But what actually changes? Nothing. Think about what happened after Hurricane Katrina. And Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Even catastrophe becomes a way for big business to cash in again.

**AS BELLS RING, A STREAM OF COINS CASCADES ONTO METAL.  
JACKPOT AT A SLOT MACHINE.**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

So the framework for public discussion centers around property and cost, not the public interest. Even when groups try to talk about the public interest, it gets sidetracked into property/economics discussions: what can we afford right now, given existing budgets and budget priorities? You notice there's hardly ever any talk about adopting entirely new budget priorities.

**MUSIC: A REFLECTIVE LAKE ADAGIO**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

And yet...all of life is at stake. Your lives and mine. The lives not only of people, but of lakes, rivers, streams, and forests. Of cities and

farms. Of plants and insects and critters, living on land and in the waters. The life of the land itself.

Some time ago, Backwater Bay decided to stake a collective claim to the integrity of ecologies and the in our imagination and decision making.

First, we completely changed our economic priorities. We choose to focus on human and ecological health and well-being, public education, affordable housing, community gardens, and community programming in science, arts, and the humanities. Everyone's thriving, including an economy that finally reflects our priorities.

We also added several representatives to our Community Council. Individually and collectively, they provide ongoing reports, updates, alarms, and assessments on the well-being of our region's flora, fauna, larger ecosystems, land, and water. No major decisions of any kind are made without taking all this into account.

And I should note that we consider ourselves a part of the fauna, not superior to any other part. That was very hard for some people at first - Herb Hatcher, I'm thinking of you, you churlish old crank. But anxiety and uncertainty are giving way to greater involvement by more residents in community life.

**A BRIEF, PENSIVE AND REFLECTIVE MUSICAL SNIPPET PROVIDES A BACKDROP TO BETTE'S NEXT WORDS.**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

The shortcomings of our approach are considerable. Human beings tend to see everything through a human lens. That's not good. But we're studying animal and plant communication and we'll branch out from there. And we have other ways of being more in touch with our surroundings.

**WE HEAR FOOTSTEPS THROUGH THE BRUSH AND INSECT SOUNDS.**



**BETTE CONTINUES:**

Our governance protocols, for example, insist that we meander aimlessly and frequently in the field.

We hold one-third of our community meetings in the lake. Not on it. In it. People are transported -to Backwater Bay's Lake Bottom Bubble-

**WE HEAR THE SCI-FI-INFLECTED SOUND OF A TRANSPORTER, ALONG WITH UNDERWATER AMBIENCE AND LARGE BUBBLES ARISING FROM THE LAKE BOTTOM.**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

- which also functions as a station for monitoring lake health. It's fascinating down there and never boring.

Another third of our meetings are held in the surrounding lakeside woods, which is always interesting, especially in times of dramatic weather.

**WE HEAR THE CRASH OF THUNDER AND LIGHTNING**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

And one-third of our meetings are held in our most revered community space, the public library. Our meetings aren't all talk-based. They're also reverence-based. Sometimes we watch a relevant documentary, like Spike Lee's "When the Levees Broke. Or feature film like Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust." We listen to poems by Joy Harjo and Lucille Clifton, and constitute ourselves as an occasional book group. (We're currently reading Curt Stager's wonderful *Still Waters: The Secret World of Lakes*.) But it's not such a secret to us anymore.

All of our locations are accessible and welcoming to neighbors with disabilities.

It's not perfect, by any means. We're still trying to give the combined flora and fauna of the region more direct participation, and we've got some unusual ideas for the future.

**THE SOUND OF GEESE HONKING.**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

Tempus and Fugit, our trusty time-telling geese, are telling us it's time to say goodbye for now. Being busy people, I'm sure you've got lots on your plates, and I'm going to head out onto the lake in my little rowboat. But I hope you'll return.

**THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS ON THE DOCK.**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

Until we see you next time, remember: You're never alone. Backwater Bay is just one of many radical way stations in the public imagination. You'll find others at the Crossroads hub and the Miscellanea page on **backwaterbay.com** right now - and so much more in the weeks and months to come. All of us exist to remind you that while things are bad out there right now, it's doesn't have to be this way. So we mourn. We imagine. We organize. We move directly into great storms with brazen and compassionate spirit. We join together in ever-greater numbers. In this way, new worlds can be, new worlds are born.

**WE HEAR THE FAINT SOUNDS OF WATER SLOSHING AND THE BOAT BUMPING AGAINST THE DOCK.**

**BETTE CONTINUES:**

From all of us here, this is Bette "Cupcake" Crawford wishing you radical imagination, bold schemes, and sweet dreams.

**BUSTER SHOUTS:**

Wait, Bette! Don't you want oars in that boat?

**MUSIC (OUTRO): THE WORDS "BACKWATER BAY" ARE SUNG A CAPELLA**

**BUSTER SPEAKS:**

Backwater Bay is the brainchild of Kay Whitlock. This podcast was produced by Autumn Barnes and Beth Anne Austein, with special creative contributions by Guy Palmzer. Please visit [backwaterbay.com](http://backwaterbay.com) for more information and for terms and conditions of sharing and use.