

Sounding Board

Literary Magazine of Holladay United Church of Christ



1985
vs.
2022



Honoring Great Salt Lake

Spring 2023

Sounding the Alarm

Rev. Chelsea Page

When Tom Sturgeon approached me with his idea of creating a literary magazine at Holladay UCC for our interfaith community entitled “Sounding Board,” I immediately thought it would be fun to create our own devotional for Lent or Easter. This Lent, we have focused on Honoring Great Salt Lake in our Wednesday worship services, ever since the HUCC Creation Justice team and the new Great Salt Lake Interfaith Action Coalition sounded the alarm at our church that Great Salt Lake is dying.

Ten million birds from 338 different species visit Great Salt Lake every year as part of their migration. Eared grebes, in particular, molt while they are migrating through Utah in the fall, which means they are flightless and completely dependent on the brine shrimp in the Great Salt Lake for food, eating between 25,000 to 30,000 brine shrimp a day. Terry Tempest Williams in her recent Sunday New York Times article reported finding more than 500 of these beautiful duck-like birds dead and rotted at the Lake this January.

Or take the microbialites, which Linda Hilton taught us about in Sunday School. They look like slimy underwater rocks, but they are actually reefs made up of microbes. Over the course of centuries, these microbes pull minerals from the salty water of Great Salt Lake to form rock-like structures. Mats of algae and brine flies grow on top and feed the birds of the lake. Now that the lake water level has fallen and exposed them to the air, these unique coral-like creations are dying en masse, and putting the birds at further risk.

These terrifying facts have made this one of the “Lentiest Lents I have ever Lented,” as people said during the Covid lockdown. But we are always called and empowered to be an Easter people, to follow the God who brings about new life. And here in Salt Lake Valley, we are accompanied by a vibrant interfaith community. The landscape around the lake is the ancestral home to many tribal nations, including the Northwestern Shoshone, Paiute, Goshute, Ute Mountain Ute and Uncompahgre Ute Nations. As a visitor to this land, I honor their stewardship, and hope that these artistic offerings show forth our hope and commitment to honoring all our sacred neighbors.

Great Blue Heron

Colored by Kathy Bray



As members of a Creation Justice Church, we are called to do everything we can to help Great Salt Lake survive and thrive. The quote below, from the United Church of Christ website, sums up our urgent responsibility to Great Salt Lake.

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Photo by Brent Gundlah

"Using the term 'justice' rather than 'care' indicates our commitment to not only heal, tend, and restore God's creation, but to ensure the protection of God's planet and God's people from exploitation, as well as provision for the remediation of the damage that has been done." - Shantha Ready Alonso and Brooks Berndt

Pastor's Corner

Rev. Brent Gundlah

Recently I headed up to one of my favorite places on earth, which just so happens to be Antelope Island. It was the first time I'd been there since last fall, and I couldn't wait to get there. But, as we approached the fee booth at the beginning of the causeway leading out to the island, I suddenly found myself experiencing a profound sense of sadness and fear. I say this because, as I gazed across the Great Salt Lake at Frary Peak off in the distance, I saw a bunch of sand and salt in the foreground where there had once been a whole lot of water – where there still should be a whole lot of water. And I wondered how much longer Antelope Island might be referred to as an island in a literal rather than a nostalgic sense, how much longer the name of the Great Salt Lake might be seen as anything other than cruelly ironic.

They say we may have as little as five years left before the whole thing dries up, a prospect that is both incredibly depressing and absolutely terrifying. The whole time I was there – and for most of the past few days since – several questions have been clanging around inside my head:

How did we ever let this happen?
What are we going to do to fix it? In what ways can we be better stewards of the resources that God entrusted to our care?

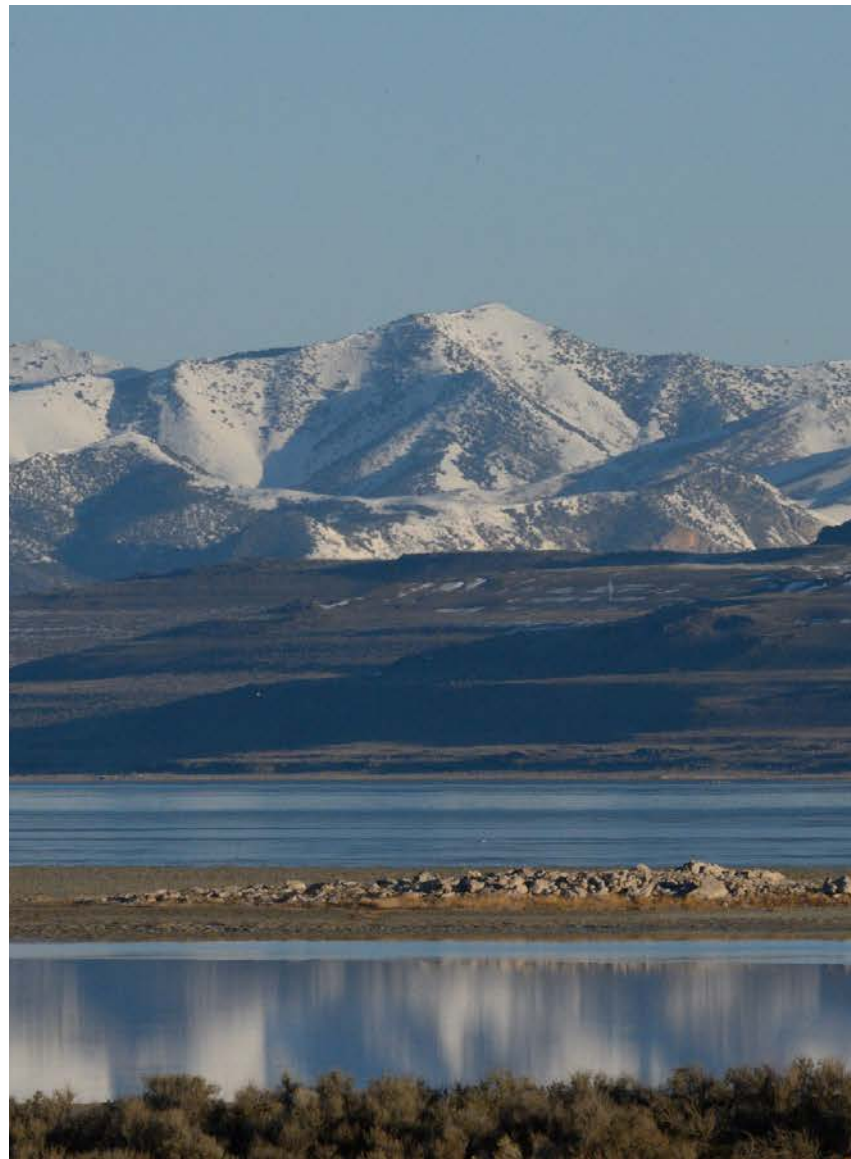


Photo by Chuck Dillard

I hope and pray that many other people – including, but certainly not limited to, those who represent us in the hallowed halls of government – are actively and desperately seeking answers to the very same questions.

The HUCC Creation Justice Team wrote this Faith-Based Call to Action for the Great Salt Lake, which was presented to Utah state senators and legislators during a press conference at the Capitol on February 16, 2023.

A Faith-Based Call to Action for the Great Salt Lake

Despite differences in the beliefs and practices that define our faith-based traditions, we share a common experience and conviction that nature, including our Great Salt Lake, is a place of profound spiritual inspiration, renewal, connection and nourishment. The astounding beauty, utter vastness, and enveloping silence of wild places like Great Salt Lake awaken our sense of awe and connect us to something larger than ourselves—God, Allah, Yahweh, the Divine, Spirit, the unnameable mystery of life.

As a Creation Justice Church, Holladay United Church of Christ seeks to embody God’s extravagant love through care for Creation while seeking justice for all people, all life, and the planet. We are guided by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus’ lead to responsibly care for and love all of God’s Creation. Jesus’ second greatest commandment was to ‘love our neighbors as ourselves.’ Our neighbors include the millions of birds and other creatures who critically depend on Great Salt Lake for their survival, as well as all the people who inhabit the Salt Lake Valley area. Evidence is indisputable that Great Salt Lake is vital to the health and well-being of people living in the Salt Lake Valley and neighboring areas. This is especially true for people living closest to the lake who are already facing social and environmental justice issues. Poor air quality and resultant health risks are worsened when parts of the lake bottom are dry, and people are then exposed to dust from toxic chemicals.

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Bald Eagle



God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." - Genesis 1:20



Photo by Laurel Kinley

Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often I long to gather your children together, as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings." - Matthew 23:37

Islands in the Sand

Esther Merritt Manning

In early 1980's
floods covered the Great Salt Lake.
Rising waters poured through monumental sights,
as if slicing a piece of cake.
Beauty emerged throughout the liquid.
Majestic peaks stood tall,
offering food and drink to wildlife,
enjoyment for all.

What has happened within this space,
as time has traveled on?
People have used up waters with no regard,
until pools are almost gone.
What will replace our future?
What will become our fate?
If we continue down this path,
our very lives will be at stake.

I saw the wonder with my own eyes,
viewed devastation, shed tears to see it disappear.
Knowledge of what to do,
is unclear.
Value of this great Salt Lake
is vanishing into toxic land,
as we just stand by watching water recede,
leaving only islands in the sand.

2/10/2023

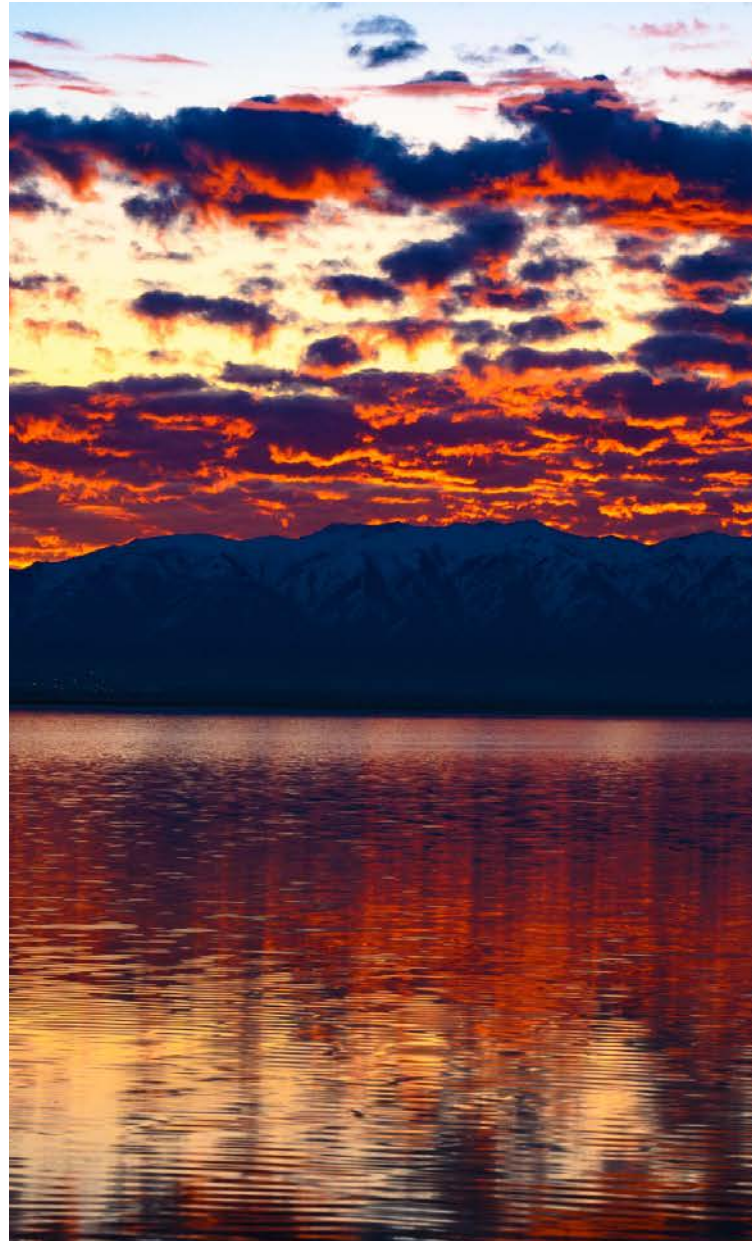


Photo by Chuck Dillard



Photos by Chuck Dillard

Pay the Flow Forward

Tom Sturgeon

The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures include specific stories about bodies of water and rivers. Two lakes, which are also referenced as Seas occur naturally in Israel. The Jordan River runs from the north to the south and feeds into the Sea of Galilee and subsequently water leaves the Sea of Galilee and feeds into the Dead Sea. There is no water outlet from the Dead Sea. Currently Israel has a similar problem with their water supply which was caused by increasing population usage, agricultural usage, and warmer climatic increasing the evaporation.

We here in the Salt Lake watershed area face similar issues with our Great Salt Lake (Great Salt Sea). The Great Salt Lake sits in the bottom of a closed basin and receives its incoming fresh water from the Jordan River, the Bear River, the Weber River. Utah Lake's outlet is the Jordan River. The shrinkage of lake increases the salt content which, if it keeps increasing, will become a dead lake. The Dead Sea has such a high level of salt that nothing lives in it.

The Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea were formed from a shift in the tectonic plates which formed a rift. This rift is a tearing of plates that resulted in the Sea of Galilee being formed with its shoreline 700 feet below sea level and the Dead Sea with its shoreline 1300 feet below sea level (the lowest in the world).

The Sea of Galilee's bottom has many salt water springs which are held in check by the fresh water in the lake. Its water level is kept at a critical level to maintain the lake as a fresh water source. Evaporation of water of the system is on the order of 8 million tons per day being lost; our Great Salt Lake loses on the average order of 11 million tons per day.

Eared Grebe



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American Avocet

"Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are fed by the Jordan River. There is really only one difference between these two bodies of water, really only one thing that causes the Sea of Galilee to be beautiful and alive while the Dead Sea is barren and lifeless.

"The difference is that the Sea of Galilee takes water from the Jordan River, and then it gives water back to the river. The water simply passes through the Sea of Galilee. As a result, the Sea of Galilee is full of life and beauty. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, only takes water, but it gives nothing back, and as a result it sustains no life.

"Those two bodies of water bear witness to a truth of human life. It is in receiving and then giving back that life and hope are sustained. In other words, the Sea of Galilee is a conduit, the Dead Sea is a container. The first is full of life, the second is full of death!

"The same is true in our spiritual life. If you and I have spiritual input but no spiritual output, we will become stagnant, lifeless, bitter, and caustic. However, if we like the Sea of Galilee are receiving and giving back, we become vibrant, healthy and life-giving. This is the wisdom and reality of Jesus' words, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

-- David Yglesias of the Energy Yoga Wellness Center

Sandpiper



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Arabic map: Jordan River by Freedom's Falcon/Goshute map: Noahedits



A Utah Unitarian Universalist Faith-Based Call to Action for Great Salt Lake

Unitarian Universalists are inspired by the wisdom of the world’s religions including Earth-centered traditions that instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature. Our spiritual practice is guided by eight principles that we hold as strong values and moral guides. Among these are justice, equity and compassion in human relations, a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, and working to build a diverse multicultural community. In consideration of these principles, it is clear that the ecological crisis facing Great Salt Lake is also a crisis of faith.

Human overuse of water could cause the Great Salt Lake to disappear within five years, triggering long-term cycles of environmental, health, and economic suffering. Salt Lake City’s diverse west side neighborhoods are already disproportionately affected by pollution. The degradation of the lake’s ecosystem could greatly worsen Salt Lake City's air quality, especially for these west side communities. Our principles of justice and equity require action to protect people by using water more wisely and with more gratitude.

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California Gull



Utah's wild lands are places of spiritual inspiration, awe and wonder. Witnessing the vastness of the lake, the hemispheric migration of millions of birds, or a glorious blaze of sunset reflected from salt crystals gives us a sense of something greater and more powerful than ourselves. Utah's Official State Artwork, Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty was inspired by a sense of awe. Great Salt Lake itself can be viewed as a spiritual being.

Our respect for the web of all existence means living near Great Salt Lake makes us stewards of a unique saline lake ecosystem that supports half a world's worth of migrating birds. It is a big responsibility, but we cannot allow ourselves to fail.

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Rocky Mountain Bee Plant at Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve, by Hillel Brandes

Those who wait for God shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. - Isaiah 40:31

American singer-songwriter Billy Edd Wheeler wrote this folktale into the song "Desert Pete," which The Kingston Trio recorded and released as a single in 1963.

The Old Story of the Water Pump in the Desert

A man got lost in the desert. The water in his flask had run out two days ago, and he was on his last legs. He knew that if he didn't get some water soon, he would surely perish. The man saw a shack ahead of him. He thought it might be a mirage or hallucination, but having no other option, he moved toward it. As he got closer he realized it was quite real, so he dragged his weary body to the door with the last of his strength.

The shack was not occupied and seemed like it had been abandoned for quite some time. The man entered, hoping against hope that he might find water inside.

His heart skipped a beat when he saw what was in the shack: a water pump. It had a pipe going down through the floor, perhaps tapping a source of water deep under-ground.

He began working the pump, but no water came out. He kept at it and still nothing happened. Finally he gave up from exhaustion and frustration. He threw up his hands in despair. It looked as if he was going to die after all.

Then the man noticed a bottle in one corner of the shack. It was filled with water and corked up to prevent evaporation.

He uncorked the bottle and was about to gulp down the life-giving water when he noticed a piece of paper attached to it. Handwriting on the paper read: "Use this water to start the pump. Don't forget to fill the bottle when you're done."

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Snowy plover



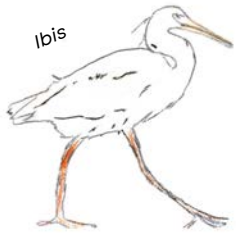
As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. Suddenly the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting on him. - Matthew 3:16



The Spiral Jetty in 2023, by Connie Nomann

Great Salt Lake: A Memoir

Laura Osburn



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The Great Salt Lake is in more trouble now than ever before. As the current subject of national news, shows, podcasts, documentaries, novels and more, it was once insignificant and taken for granted. That is no longer the case. It even was the subject of a recent sermon at church where congregants were asked to band together immediately to act in whatever way they can to avoid a catastrophic environmental disaster related to global warming. Due to multiple successive years of extreme drought and water overuse by an ever-expanding population in the Salt Lake Valley, it is in danger of drying up within the next five years, given the existing conditions. Consider this to be a cautionary tale we, and generations to come, must heed.

The highly acclaimed autobiography *Refuge* by Terry Tempest Williams, written in 1990, is such a tale. It chronicles the extreme ebbs and flows of the lake and her passion for this place, its numerous shore birds unique to the Great Salt Lake and neighboring Bear River Bird Refuge, which is a major feeding ground for the tens of thousands of Canada Geese as they migrate from Canada to Mexico every year.

I have precious photos of some of my trips to the lake: carving an over-sized heart with me and my husband's initials in the sand with a stick; the joy of watching our carefree son and daughter as grade-schoolers strolling leisurely up and down the beach. Over the years it has been the go-to place for thousands of Salt Lake locals who need to "get out of Dodge," if you will, for some needed "me time." Back in the day, there was a small marina, gift shop, cafe, and boardwalk where one could look at the yachts and jealously watch the sailors/owners who would reap the benefit of a day at sea. It was a place where our dogs could run free. Now parts of the lake are far too saline for even the brine shrimp to continue to survive (one of the only animals that can live full-time in such a salty aquatic habitat). The marina is now barren; not a single yacht is even in the water.

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The documentary film named "Winged Migration" was made by placing tiny cameras on the heads of geese. Set to just the right narration and music, it poetically captures their grace and majesty. Years later, it is still one of my favorites.

Brigham Daniels, a visiting professor at the University of Utah College of Law, pointed out the importance of hope when circumstances are so dire with Great Salt Lake: “We need hope. We need to believe that the challenges we face are surmountable – that we can still change the future and that our efforts can make a meaningful difference. Hope precedes action, and we need to find the courage to act. We need to have hope that others will join us as we act, that our neighbors will also make sacrifices to maintain the beautiful place we all call home.”



Laura Osburn's
mom dipping
her toes in the
Great Salt Lake

1976

*What will you tell the children
about Great Salt Lake?*

Scientists note that the foraging habitat for birds has declined over the last decade because of ongoing drought and decreased water levels. Many birds depend on Great Salt Lake for food during their migrations, and some species are already being impacted by changes in their habitat, water quality, and food sources.

Many faith traditions call on us to protect and preserve the natural world and each other. We believe that protective stewardship of Utah's wild lands, waters, and resources preserves our spiritual and physical well-being and demonstrates respect for the sanctity of this place we call home.

We call on Utah leaders to join us in recognizing the critical importance of Great Salt Lake and to act now to help ensure its survival and the well-being of our communities now and into the future.

Tundra Swan



Sincerely,
Rev. Chelsea Page,
Associate Minister
Rev. Brent Gundlach,
Senior Minister
Holladay United Church of Christ

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Letters Continued

Unitarian Universalist congregations in Utah hear a call to action in the recent report, "Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake from Ongoing Collapse" (2023). This report warns that we are underestimating the consequences of losing the lake. The lake needs to receive at least 2.5 million acre/feet of water per year to reverse its decline. The current crisis requires immediate action in this legislative session. We call on Utah leaders to support stewardship for the human, spiritual and natural values embodied by Great Salt Lake.

*Rev. Monica Dobbins, Assistant Minister
First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City
Rev. Ian White Maher, Interim Minister
First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City
Rev. Lora Young, Minister
South Valley Unitarian Universalist Society
Dylan Zwick, Board President
Unitarian Universalist Church of Ogden
Ethan Payne, President, Board of Trustees
Cache Valley Unitarian Universalists
Ann Foster, President, Board of Trustees
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of
Southwest Utah*

HUCC's letter was also signed by: Rev. AJ Bush (First Methodist Church and Centenary UMC, Salt Lake City); Rev. Brigette Weier (ELCA); Rev. Hansen Wendlandt (Presbyterian Church USA, Utah); Rev. Jenny Boteler (Union Congregational United Church of Christ, Green River, Wyoming); Rev. Scott Wipperman (Trinity Presbyterian Church, Ogden); Rev. Dr. Chris Pritchett (Mount Olympus Presbyterian Church, Salt Lake City); Rev. Lisa A. Petty, Senior Pastor (Christ United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City); Rev. David Nichols (Mount Tabor Lutheran Church, ELCA, Salt Lake City); and Chavurah B'Yachad signed a similar letter.

Consider the birds of the air, how they neither sow,
nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly
Father feeds them. - Matthew 6:26

Water Pump Continued

He had a dilemma. He could follow the instruction and pour the water into the pump, or he could ignore it and just drink the water.

What to do? If he let the water go into the pump, what assurance did he have that it would work? What if the pump malfunctioned? What if the pipe had a leak? What if the underground reservoir had long dried up?

But then... maybe the instruction was correct. Should he risk it? If it turned out to be false, he would be throwing away the last water he would ever see.

Hands trembling, he poured the water into the pump. Then he closed his eyes, said a prayer, and started working the pump.

He heard a gurgling sound, and then water came gushing out, more than he could possibly use. He luxuriated in the cool and refreshing stream. He was going to live!

After drinking his fill and feeling much better, he looked around the shack. He found a pencil and a map of the region. The map showed that he was still far away from civilization, but at least now he knew where he was and which direction to go.

He filled his flask for the journey ahead. He also filled the bottle and put the cork back in. Before leaving the shack, he added his own writing below the instruction: "Believe me, it works!"



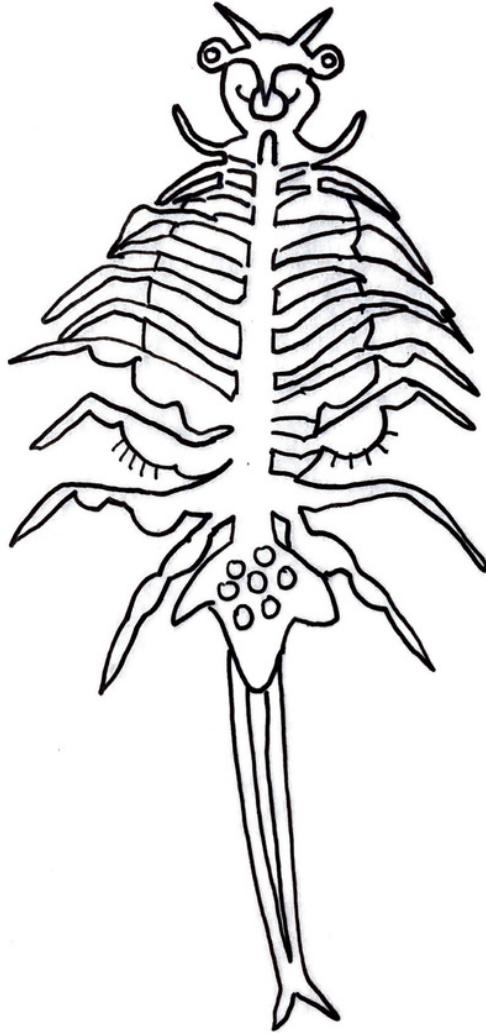
Memoir Continued

Multiple informed and credible sources have outlined simple but critically important changes Salt Lake residents can easily make, such as cutting back on lawn watering; let the parking strip die; fewer potted plants; staying informed; vote and let your legislators know how critical the Great Salt Lake is to Salt Lake City, Utah, and the western U.S. We citizens are the caretakers of our home and surroundings. If we don't take responsibility for being stewards of the earth, who will?

The kingdom is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in her field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

- Matthew 13:31-32

The brine shrimp is tiny but powerful in numbers, able to feed millions of migrating birds at Great Salt Lake. Color in a picture of this brine shrimp floating in salt water, and think about how you can get involved in saving our Lake.



Did you know the brine shrimp of Great Salt Lake are also known as "Sea Monkeys"? On May 16th every year, people celebrate their childhoods during National Sea Monkey Day, remembering their aquariums filled with magical creatures that hatched and grew before their very eyes.