



NEWSLETTER

April - May 2022

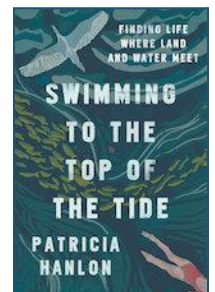
“We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the earth as its other creatures do.” Barbara Ward



April 22nd is Earth Day and our next spotlight guest embraces the importance and beauty of Ebben Creek. Patricia Hanlon’s book, *Swimming to the Top of the Tide* (blpress.org), is about her journey in this body of water.

Please tell us a little about yourself.

My husband, Robert, and I have lived in the West Gloucester/Essex area since 1979, and raised our three children here. For 32 years, we (mostly Robert) ran Walker Creek Furniture. We never take living in the Essex River Basin for granted--this exquisitely beautiful estuary at the southernmost edge of the Great Marsh. Over the years we explored the creeks and channels and beaches with the children, in a successively smaller series of boats. In the summer of 2008, we began swimming these waterways—our bodies became our boats. We made a pact to keep swimming as long into the fall and winter as we possibly could, but were having so much fun that we actually made it through that winter and into the following spring and summer. I began logging our swims, and that’s how I eventually came to write *Swimming to the Top of the Tide*. I am also a visual artist, with work ranging



from multimedia collage to local landscapes. My work life has run the gamut from teaching to marketing to running an art gallery. **How did you get involved with Ebben Creek?**

We started swimming the Essex River Basin during a weeklong vacation at home, but to keep the practice going during our non-vacation lives, we had to keep things accessible and simple. Of all the tributaries of the Essex River, Ebben Creek was closest to home at the time, so it was an easy after-work excursion. To avoid boat traffic, we swam only what I like to call the “B” side of the creek, the side that emerges under the Route 133 bridge, and continues across the street from Farnham’s toward Grove Street and beyond.



What is so special about Ebben Creek?

Great question! I’ve found that people tend to recoil at the thought of swimming a saltmarsh creek. They think: mud, mucky stuff floating in the water, creatures nibbling at you, and so on. But because we swim as the tide is high or close to high, Ebben Creek is a mile-long-curving lap pool, fields and woods stretching out on either side. Because of the way the creek twists and turns, there is always something up ahead you can’t see: cormorants, great blue herons, white egrets, and, exactly once, a small mammal (muskrat, maybe?) that slid into the water as we drew near. It can feel profoundly private and serene, particularly as you wait for the tide to slow down and then pause altogether for a few minutes or two.

What are some interesting experiences you had swimming in the creek?

One year, in mid-November, we had a run of daytime king tides, with the water entirely submerging the marsh grass. Swimming a foot above a marsh lawn is its own kind of wonderful. Then there was the time we got ordered out of the water by the Essex Rescue Squad, for swimming during a blizzard. (We were covered head to toe in heavy neoprene, so we were warm enough. Also, in a tidal creek you’re never far from shore. And there were two of us. But no.) Our kids loved seeing their parents mentioned in the Essex Police Notes.





What are some of the environmental issues that you are concerned about in the area?

When you spend time in an ecosystem, you get to know what it's made of, how it functions, and what important "ecosystem services" it provides. A healthy marsh helps to buffer the impact of storm surges, it filters pollutants, and it also stores "blue carbon." Rising tides, to name just one environmental issue, will mean less and less of this valuable "edge ecology."

What is your second book about?

It's a sequel to *Swimming to the Top of the Tide*. That book's narrative line ended in May of 2020, just as the Covid-19 pandemic was ramping up. The resulting social isolation, along with being early retirees, meant that we've spent a lot of time at home in the two years since—not just our house, of course, but outdoors, exploring the whole Essex River watershed, where salt marshes flat as Kansas meet up with craggy, glacier-formed, granite hills. One of the best definitions of "watershed" I've found comes from the late Peter Warshall, the science editor of the *Whole Earth Catalog* and *Co-Evolution Quarterly* in the 1970s (the pre-Internet internet):

"A watershed is a gatherer—a living place that draws the sun and the rain together. Its surface of soils, rocks and plant life acts as a 'commons' for this intermingling. For humans, the watershed is an aquatic contract that has no escape clause."

Watch the video recorded talk she gave to the Cape Ann Museum at:

[Swimming to the Top of the Tide on Vimeo](#)

EARTH DAY EVENT

Join SEL at the Cox Reservation on April 23rd for a community clean-up day! Bring your kids and friends to help tidy up the marsh and spots along Eastern Avenue and Ebben Creek. (Rain date: April 24)

*Trash clean-up from 8:30-11:30 AM (Wear gloves and tick spray! Trash bags will be provided.)

*Patricia Hanlon will speak from 11:30-12:00 in the barn with Q & A afterwards.

*Sculptor Elisa Vanelli will have her wildlife sculptures for sale as well.

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Save Essex Landscape, Inc. - P.O. Box 10 - Essex, MA 01929 - saveessexlandscape.com