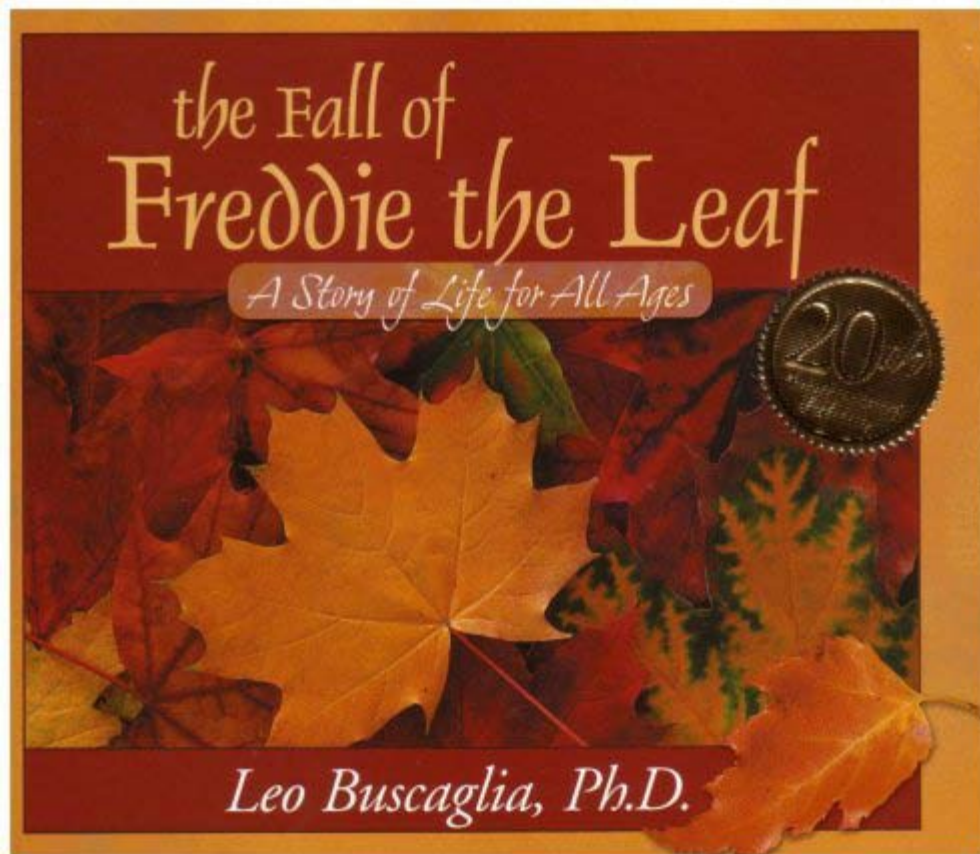


Chautauqua Watershed Notes  
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy  
October 26, 2008

Lessons in Life from Freddie the Leaf  
By Tina Nelson  
For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



*The children's book, The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia, reminds us that living things in the Chautauqua Watershed must adjust to the environmental changes that autumn brings - and that death is an essential part of the cycle of life.*

As Halloween and its companion holiday Day of the Dead approach and the Chautauqua Watershed's colorful autumn is slowing down into monochromatic winter, cemeteries are appropriate places to contemplate nature. Here death is the theme – the death of those represented on the headstones and death of the organisms around us. Beautiful wildflowers are fading. The bright butterflies that flutter by will soon flutter no more. And crisp fallen leaves crunched underfoot that emit a rich ripe scent now will eventually stink with rot. Is this depressing? It is sad in some ways, perhaps, but not depressing.

There is a most delightful children's book by Leo Buscaglia titled The Fall of Freddie the Leaf that adeptly “illustrates the delicate balance between life and death” (quote from the book jacket). Freddie the leaf experiences life as a leaf should – loving his branch, his

light leafy friends, his place high in the sky, the wind that jostles him about, the sun rays that warm him and the moon that covers him with soft white shadows. He learns that, like all things on earth, he has a reason for being – to make shade for old people and to provide a cool place for children to come and play. Then one day in autumn he watches in horror as some of his friends are torn from their branches and dropped softly to the ground. “It’s what happens in the fall” explains Daniel, the wisest of Freddie’s leaf friends, “It’s time for leaves to change their homes. Some people call it *to die*.” Freddie does eventually meet his fate and lies upon the snow preparing to change his home. Freddie decomposes so that his new home is in the water and nutrients that nourish the earth and all that grows in it. This is Life. “Life lasts forever and we are all a part of Life,” says Daniel.

So although death is sad sometimes, it is not depressing. Death is Life and in life there is great joy. Death is change not the end. The bodies and spirits of those whose names are engraved on headstones were needed somewhere else. Meanwhile they leave a legacy of kin and deeds here. Everything that dies leaves a legacy. When autumn winds shake withered flower heads future flowers, packaged in tiny seeds, scatter. When a butterfly alights for the last time the eggs it has left upon a leaf will hatch into voracious caterpillars that will wrap themselves in shimmering chrysalis cloaks and emerge as bright dancing fairy-like creatures.

So in the autumn let us wander through the memories of past lives and see the future of Life here in the Chautauqua Watershed.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake’s shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its 2008 annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake’s most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join for 2008!