

2020
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Water Awakening

Around Easter, my grandmother-in-law told me about her childhood growing up in the rural community of Coal Hill, Arkansas. As one can imagine, the small town with a population of approximately 1,000 was home to many miners at the time, including her own family.

She recalled the modest home her grandparents and great-grandparents had lived in before her, with an outhouse and an old well. Living without plumbing, simple tasks like going to the restroom at night or preparing a bath were always an ordeal. She laughed remembering when her younger sister almost fell in the garden well (I gasped). Yet, she had fond memories of the taste of cool, clear water straight from the bucket of the well.



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It wasn't until later in life when she moved to Kansas City after high school that she first experienced running water and modern plumbing. When asked about that moment, she described it as magic. Magic to not have to expend such physical and mental energy ensuring water access but instead to have it arrive with the twist of a faucet.

As someone who grew up drinking filtered Lake Michigan water myself, anecdotes like my grandmother-in-law's relationship to water aren't always easy to wrap my mind around, though it is a facet of water's story I have been consistently working to understand, as part of what I'll call my "water awakening."

As part of that journey, on the latest episode of the Talking Under Water podcast I spoke to Nathan Ohle, CEO for the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, on the

proposed American Jobs Plan's impact on water and other legislative issues for small systems (listen to the episode at bit.ly/tuw39). He shared with me that of the approximately 150,000 public water systems across the country, 97% serve communities of 10,000 or less. That's a startling statistic and one many of us living in city or urban environments may be surprised to hear. Because of that lack of awareness, Ohle

recommended communication and storytelling as key drivers to get the message out.

On the legislative front, the proposed American Jobs Plan would allocate \$111 billion for water infrastructure improvements, including funds to modernize aging infrastructure and invest in rural small water systems and household wells and wastewater systems. It is also worth mentioning that it touts a lofty goal of 100% lead service line replacement, but that's a topic for a future letter. The sum of all these parts is that I cannot help but feel that the nation may be on the cusp of a water awakening, as well. As Ohle suggested, it remains our job as water advocates to continue to share stories of these vital issues with our communities and stand up for water. Are you ready?

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