



Leapold the Frog's Great Lakes New Year's Hop





In the very special town of South Haven, at the edge of the Michigan Maritime Museum, where the harbor of Lake Michigan meets the Black River, a little green frog named Leapold slept wiggled down in the soft mud between the rocks.

He was proud of his little muddy home because from his cozy spot, he could hear everything happening at the Museum he loved—boatbuilders tapping, students laughing during field trips, and the creak of the tall ship Friends Good Will as she rocked gently at her dock.



As the sun began to set on New Year's Eve, Leapold stretched his legs, blinked his big frog eyes, and began to celebrate.

Then he had a fabulous idea, he decided it was time to hop around the water and wish his underwater friends a Happy New Year.

With a joyful croak, he bounded into the river.

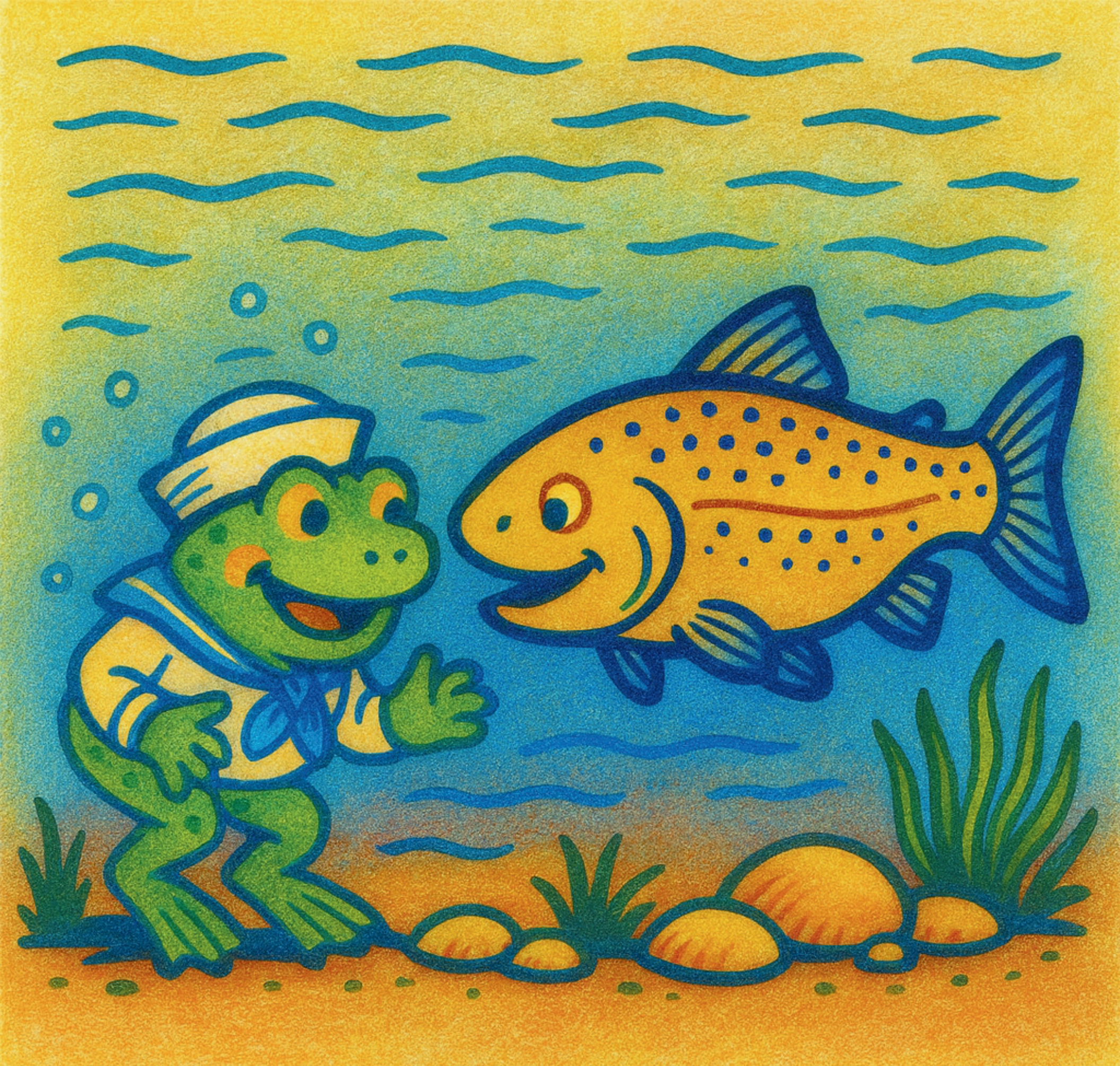


Leapold’s first stop was a deep, slow-moving pocket of water in Lake Michigan where Sasha the Sturgeon drifted like an ancient queen.

“Happy New Year, Sasha!” Leapold called.

Sasha lifted her whiskered snout. “And to you, Leapold. Did you know I can live over 100 years? I’ve seen more New Year’s Eves than anyone in this lake!”

Leapold’s jaw dropped. “A century of celebrations? That’s amazing!”



Next, Leapold hopped to where the river met colder, deeper water. There swam Titus the Lake Trout, lazily circling in the chilly gloom.

“Happy New Year, Titus!” Leapold croaked.

Titus flicked his fin. “Happy New Year, Leapold. I love the deep—sometimes down to 1,000 feet. Perfect for a lake trout like me.”

Leapold shivered. “I think I’d rather stay in the winter sunshine, but you enjoy it!”



Back in the shallows, Leapold found Penelope the Perch weaving through plants with a whole crowd of perch behind her.

“Happy New Year, Penelope!” he said.

“Happy New Year!” she sang back. “We perch travel in big schools—sometimes hundreds of us. Safety in numbers—and lots of company for a New Year’s party!”

Leapold laughed. “You’ve already got the celebration started!”

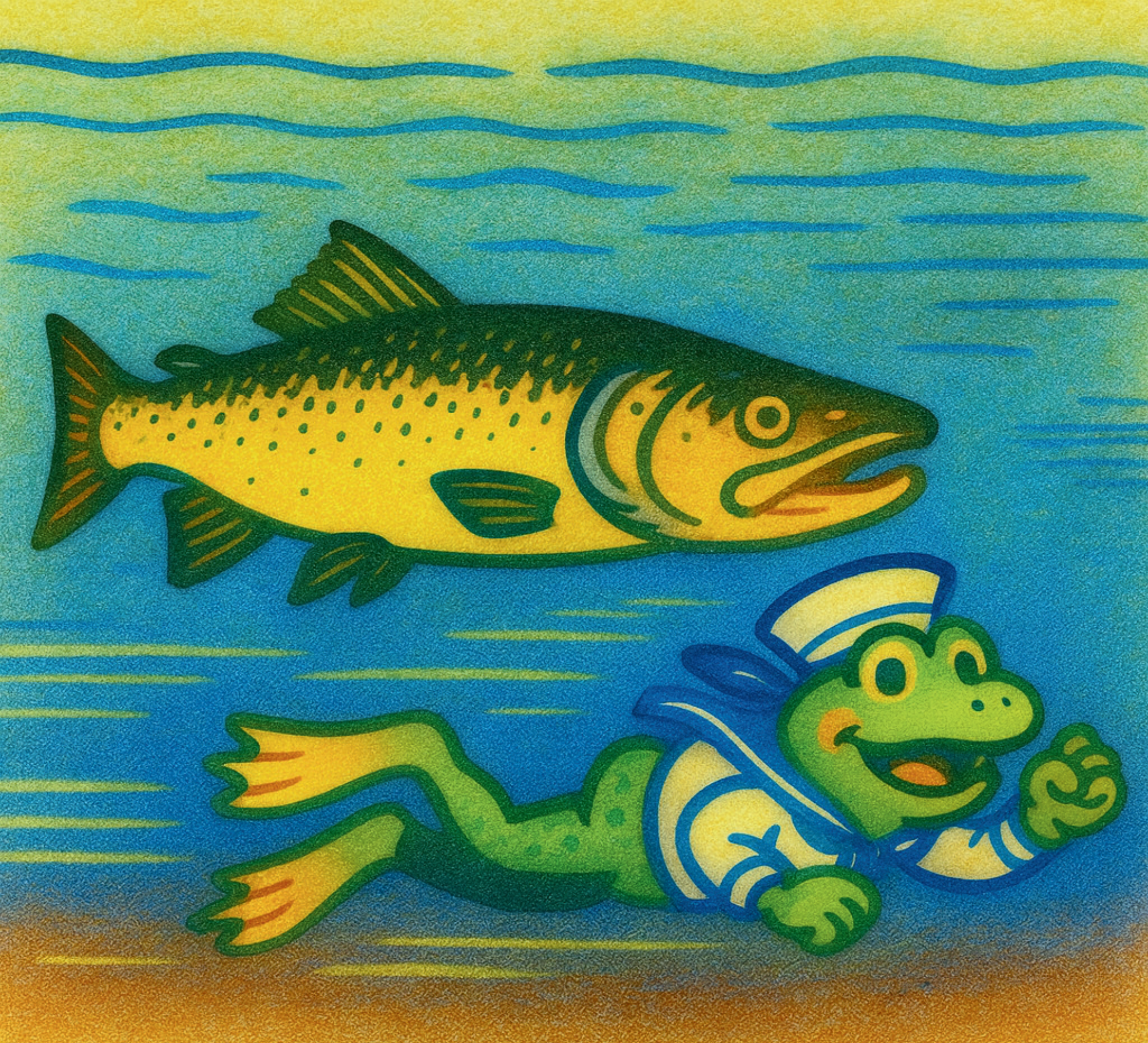


As dusk deepened, Leapold hopped toward a shadowy bend in the river. Two bright, glowing eyes shimmered back at him—Wallace the Walleye.

“Happy New Year, Wallace!”

“Happy New Year,” Wallace replied. “My eyes shine because of a special layer called a tapetum lucidum. It helps me see at night—perfect for a late New Year’s hop.”

Leapold leaned closer.
“You’re practically glowing!”



Finally, Leapold reached the mouth of the river where Sammy the Chinook Salmon was resting after a long journey.

“Happy New Year, Sammy!”

Sammy gave a proud flip of his tail. “Thanks, Leapold! I’ve swum more than 1,000 miles in my lifetime—even without an ocean.”

Leapold’s eyes widened. “That’s farther than I could hop if I tried all year!”



With his greetings finished, Leapold hopped back toward the Michigan Maritime Museum.

He curled once more into his little mud bed between the rocks, listening to the distant noises of Friends Good Will as she rocked gently in the icy waters.





“What special friends I have, what a special place I call home” he murmured. “And what a special New Year it will be.”

With one last happy croak, Leapold drifted off to sleep—his heart full of Great Lakes magic.