

2019

Dead Without Water: Personal Storytelling Of Place As An Education Tool For Interdependent Survival Of Our Earth Home

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DEAD WITHOUT WATER: PERSONAL STORYTELLING OF PLACE AS AN
EDUCATION TOOL FOR INTERDEPENDENT SURVIVAL OF OUR EARTH HOME

A Thesis Presented

by

Lisel M. Peters-deCourval

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
Specializing in Interdisciplinary Studies

May, 2019

Defense Date: March 21, 2019
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ABSTRACT

Do you have stories of meaningful places in your life? Are there examples of stories of place(s) you have heard have been powerful influences for you? Why? How have these places been impacted by climate change, and how will they be impacted by climate change? Our shared environment is at a critical juncture. The physical survival of this planet and our collective wellbeing is increasingly dependent on challenging our ways and bettering educating ourselves and others to respect and acknowledge the interconnection we have with the planet home that gives us life. In this research, I examine the power of personal stories which focus on relationship to place in order to connect us to each other and to the places we inhabit as a powerful tool to forge practices that are benevolent towards the Earth. Sharing personal stories of our meaningful place-based settings has the power to expand universal understanding of the link between our behavior towards the Earth and the wellbeing of these places, which is crucial for the health of all species, including human survival. Stories are perhaps one of the most efficient methods in highlighting interdependency between humans and the environment to foster an ethic of a care for the planet and future generations.

This thesis draws from storytelling as action in indigenous cultures and their effectiveness in Earth justice movement building today specifically in the United States. I examine the Gwich'in Steering Committee as one vital model that uses storytelling as their primary tool for not only Earth and human rights justice, but importantly, their survival. Additionally I will reference storytelling used as a method of education and action used by the Water Protectors of Standing Rock and *L'eau Est La Vie* camp. These indigenous organizations are by no means the only indigenous models that use personal, place-based storytelling for movement building, but serve as the research focus for this thesis. The literature review will reflect upon the Gwich'in Steering Committee's use of story throughout their movement; their own sustainable, cultural and spiritual way of life, to protect *The Sacred Place Where Life Begins*, their water and food sovereignty in the face of oil drilling proposals and climate change.

Through Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology, this deep dive account unearths my own depictions of my place-based stories which have taught me that the Earth deserves our compassion, our empathy, and our urgent attention and to craft a sustainable planet. This thesis will draw from on my personal lived experiences in my local and global settings, my own stories of connecting to the places sources of cultivating care and wellbeing for the planet. This project explores my narrative journey through my childhood in Vermont, my family homes across Maine, my four undergraduate years in Connecticut, my studies in Chile, and return to Vermont. My hope is that the indigenous model of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, paired with my personal and reflective account of place-based stories can prompt educational leaders to reflect and utilize personal storytelling as one educational tool that assists with building empathetic and active healing for the wellbeing of our shared planet.

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METHODOLOGY

In my opinion, one of the most powerful outcomes we can hope when we write, is that when our audience reads and hears our stories, they *feel* the words they read. In my experience, the stories that have stuck with me have been the stories that have made me deeply *feel*. When purposefully choosing to write about my own lived experiences through personal story in connection with this research's overarching theme of storytelling, relationship to place, and climate change I believe electing to put my own self into this writing, has served as a one way to allow myself to both *feel* my personal connection and experience as a way to *heal* as I write my way into ongoing learning. *"The paradigm of storytelling emphasizes the importance of the personal in learning that is lasting."*¹ (Deniston-Trochta, 2003). When we cultivate a form of healing through expressing our personal stories, we thus cultivate a stronger self, a self who can gain more and more confidence, more positivity and more hard work into working what they care about, and what they need in their own lives and own communities. Robert J. Nash, the founder of the SPN genre of writing describes this writing style as:

*"...a willingness to dig deeply in order to discover the truths that lie buried in our pasts and presents, an ability to thematize and universalize these insights for readers, and a profound, almost unyielding commitment to the belief that writing one's way to healing, meaning, and wholeness is not only possible---it is necessary. All of this leads to wisdom."*²

That is not to say that once we start working on strengthening ourselves, the road ahead of collecting continuous wisdom and healing will not have a few potholes and a

¹ Grace M. Deniston-Trochta. "The Meaning of Storytelling as Pedagogy." Visual Arts Research. Vol. 29, No.57, 2003, pp.103-108.

² Robert J. Nash and Sydnee Viray. 2013. How Stories Heal: Writing Our Way to Meaning and Wholeness in the Academy. Peter Lang. p.34

few flat tires. But we become better equipped to take our individual and shared challenges when we listen to ourselves and to one another.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in her book, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, shares her how within her personal life, her Nishnaabeg heritage and Nishnaabewin intelligence have taught her to be responsible of contextualizing learning through lived experience as influencing perspective.

*“Within Nishnaabewin, I am responsible for my thoughts and ideas. I am responsible for my own interpretations, and thus you’ll always hear from our elders what appears to be qualifying their teachings with statements that position them as learners, positions their ideas as their own understandings, and place their teachings within the context of their own lived experience.”*³

These two unique yet echoing perspectives are both distinct callings to contextualize our learnings through reflection and story of our own lived experiences. Both have served as crucial and recurring references that have guided me while embarking on this project with the hopes of holding myself accountable to Simpson’s guide, to *“place (my) teachings within the context of (my) own lived experience.”* I have taken on the challenge of Robert J. Nash’s encouragement of striving for *“...a willingness to dig deeply in order to discover the truths that lie buried in our pasts and presents...”* as an introspective responsibility and direction for my own writing, and therefore I have chosen to write this thesis in Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology. This writing format has been a recurring and in-depth writing methodology of my own graduate coursework with Robert J. Nash at the University of Vermont.

³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Intelligence*. University of Minnesota Press. 2017. p. 156.

My goal is that by involving myself, as the writer, into a graduate thesis, I allow myself to tell my own lived stories of why relationship to place and justice for our planet's wellbeing strike a chord with me. In Scholarly Personal Narrative style writing, the goal is for readers to search for meaning with a multifaceted lens. This form of writing serves as a lens for uncovering writing that simultaneously holds both universalizability to the diversity of experiences in our world around us and particularity to their own unique, lives. This particular writing method allows writers to pour out their selves in connection with their academic work (the scholarly "S") as linked with developing their own reflection into their real-life experiences they have chosen to share (the personal "P"), wrapped up in each writer's voice and storyline (the narrative or "N").

*"SPN writing can take many forms. While it is personal, it is also social. While it is practical, it is also theoretical. While it is reflective, it is also public. While it is local, it is also political. While it narrates, it also proposes. While it is self-revealing, it also evokes self-examination from readers. Whatever its unique shape and style of communicating to readers, an SPN's central purpose is to make an impact on both writer and reader, on both the individual and the community."*⁴

In other words, Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology is a foundation for writers who choose to place themselves as purposefully standing in the midst of their writing, brave, vital pieces of their own reflections. This form of writing does not shy away from writing with emotion, with honesty about both adversity and triumph and strives to unify our individual lives and personal meaning as interconnected with the wellbeing of the local and global communities we interact with and inhabit.

⁴ Robert J. Nash. 2004. *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*. New York. Teacher's College Press. p.29.

CHAPTER 1: STORIES AS EDUCATION, STORIES AS SURVIVAL: GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE

Storytelling is already a practice embedded within educational practices, this is not news to the story-sharers and story-listeners of our planet. However, how can we purposefully weave our personal, place-based stories as motivation for better care for the planet that cares for us? Leanne Betasamosake Simpson eloquently emphasizes that crafting educational practices is not only about working a sense of place as the focus for these pedagogical practices, by writing: “...*we shouldn't be just striving for land-based pedagogy. The land must once again become the pedagogy.*”⁵ Contextually, this is within Simpson's reference to Indigenous education. This message reveals that transforming pedagogy cannot only be about, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson puts it, creating a “land-based” approach, instead, in order to grow a love and ethic of care for land, it is key for us to listen to how the land is a pedagogical source itself.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson situates this knowledge within a storytelling context. Simpson shares, *Binoojiinh Makes a Lovely Discovery*, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg story. This story expresses a non-binary child's love, delight and gratitude for the gift of maple sap from the sugar bush. Listening to this story, it is remarkable in that it is both a declaration of self-education as well as an education which learning is taught by and with place. “*Binoojiinh....learned both **from** the land and **with** the land. They learned what it felt to be recognized, seen and appreciated by their community. They **came to know** maple sugar with the support of their family and elders. They came*

⁵ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press. 2017. p. 160.

to know maple sugar in the context of love.”⁶ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s perspective has grown from her experiences within her indigenous Michi Saagig Nishanaabeg identity, revealing that through learning “*both from the land and with the land...*” is most positive and resonating when it is immersed “*...in the context of love.*” By teaching ourselves (or for many, re-learn) how to love this biosphere that gives us life through seeking our own personal stories we stir up when we reflect upon our own relationships to place. In my opinion Simpson’s conceptualization of land as pedagogy is a crucial framework to keep in mind going forward, because it instills a sense of value towards the Earth, reflecting a perspective of land as a place of knowledge. This particular indigenous knowledge teaches that it is key to listen to the land as we would an engaging educator.

As highlighted in the 2018 edition of the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Arctic Report Card, the Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world. Sheila Watt-Cloutier, in her book, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman’s Fight to Protect the Arctic and Save the Planet from Climate Change*, eloquently echoes her own perspective and knowledge of the urgency of Arctic climate change for our global community, writing:

“The Arctic...is the cooling system, ‘the air conditioner,’ ...for the entire planet. As its ice and snow disappear, the globe’s temperatures rise faster and erratic weather becomes more frequent. This results in drought, floods, tornadoes, and more intense hurricanes. Sea levels around the world rise, and small islands from the Caribbean to Florida to the South China Sea slip into the ocean. From the farmers in Australia to the fisherman in the Gulf of Mexico or the homeowners of New Orleans, the devastation

⁶ Simpson. 2017. p. 165.

*escalates. The future of the Inuit is the future of the rest of the world---our home as a barometer for what is happening to our entire planet.”*⁷

Sheila Watt-Cloutier highlights our crucial need to pay attention to the stories of the Arctic. We need to be listening and standing in solidarity with the stories of Arctic residents if we want to build a stronger empathetic communication for changing our universal behavior towards the environment. Additionally, regardless of our geographic distance from the Arctic, our universal wellbeing goes hand-in-hand with the environmental wellbeing of this region. As Watt-Cloutier explains, the future of the Inuit, among all Arctic inhabitants is a “*barometer for what is happening to our entire planet.*”

1.1. The Gwich'in Steering Committee

*“The land ties into the Refuge, the water ties into the Refuge, the air space ties into the Refuge. The way we take care of ourselves is the way we have to take care of the world.”*⁸—Ernest Erick

The Gwich'in people are an indigenous group of approximately nine-thousand people who reside in fifteen villages that stretch across northeastern Alaska up until the northern Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada. The Gwich'in have been living on this land (as well as living off the land) for longer than 20,000 years.⁹ In the Gwich'in indigenous language, the word *gwich'in* translates to “people of the land”, which strongly symbolizes the Gwich'in people, their practice of subsistence and their ongoing dedication to their homeland and their way of life as the most northern indigenous nation. The fifteen Gwich'in villages in both the United States and Canada are as follows: Arctic

⁷ Sheila Watt-Cloutier. *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Fight to Protect the Arctic and Save the Planet from Climate Change*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, MN. 2018.

⁸ Ernest Erick. Gwich'in Steering Committee. <http://ourarcticrefuge.org>

⁹ “Gwich'in Steering Committee: Protecting ‘The Sacred Place Where Life Begins’ ”. Gwich'in Steering Committee. 2017.

Village, Aklavik, Beaver, Birch Creek, Circle Canyon Village, Chalkyitsik, Eagle, Fort Yukon, Inuvik, Old Crow, Teetl'it Zheh (Fort McPherson), Tsiigehtchic and Venetie.¹⁰ Currently, the headquarters of the Gwich'in Steering Committee is located in Fairbanks, Alaska. Sarah James, a Gwich'in elder who has been actively involved in the Gwich'in Steering Committee since it was founded in 1988 describes the powerful interconnection between the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich'in people in the following words, “*We are caribou people. Caribou are not just what we eat; they are who we are. They are in our stories and in our songs and the whole way we see the world. Caribou are our life. Without caribou we wouldn't exist.*”¹¹ Other explanations of the link between the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich'in people echo this belief, intertwining the survival of the herd and the Gwich'in people themselves.

1.2. Addressing the Major Issues

Since 1988, there has been a tumultuous history of land grab in northeastern Alaska and North Slope by the oil industry that Gwich'in people have fought and continue to fight against industrial development that deeply threatens the well-being and survival of the people and environment of Alaska and Canada. The Gwich'in Steering Committee outlines their current active projects in North Slope, Alaska stating,

*“Exxon, British Petroleum, Conoco and other multinational oil corporations have turned over 1,000 square miles of Alaska's North Slope into an industrialized oil field maze that includes: 500 miles of roads and pipelines, more than 200 exploration and production gravel drilling pads, 4,800 exploratory and production oil and gas well, 28 oil processing facilities, power plants, refineries etc., 36 gravel mines...”*¹²

¹⁰ “Where the Gwich'in Live”. Gwich'in Steering Committee, 2017.

¹¹ “About the Gwich'in”. Gwich'in Steering Committee, 2017.

¹² “Gwich'in Steering Committee: Protecting the Sacred Place Where Life Begins since 1988”. Gwich'in Steering Committee, 2016. www.gwichinsteeringcommittee.org

As of 2016, 95% of the North Slope region has already been explored and developed by the oil industry. Additionally, to put the pollution damage in a statistical perspective, 70,000 tons of nitrogen oxide per year are emitted into the atmosphere and thus polluting the air in North Slope alone.¹³ The Gwich'in Steering Committee outlines some of the key issues within current government policies stating,

“Supporters of the tribe...have introduced House Resolution 1889, the Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act. But Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski has sponsored Senate Bill 49, to permit drilling on 2,000 acres of the refuge...Trump introduced his budget which includes drilling in the Arctic Refuge to raise budget revenues.”¹⁴

In December 2017, Congress passed a rushed Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that permits lease sale for oil and natural gas drilling the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.¹⁵ But the mission to protect the coastal plain did not end there. The Gwich'in Steering Committee, allies, environmentalists, and supporters of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge have continued to voice their stories and are standing against oil and natural gas drilling in this region. The Bureau of Land Management has been in charge of the processing an environmental impact statement¹⁶, (EIS). Leading up February 2019, hearings have been happening Washington D.C where these protectors of the coastal plain are speaking out and acting against oil drilling.¹⁷

The Gwich'in Steering Committee began in 1988 after proposed oil drilling along the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is the northernmost

¹³ Gwich'in Steering Committee: “Protecting the ‘Sacred Place Where Life Begins.’” Gwich'in Steering Committee, 2016. www.gwichinsteeringcommittee.org

¹⁴ Gwich'in Steering Committee. “Alaska Natives Ask for Southwest Support to Protect Their Homeland.” 2017. <http://ourarcticrefuge.org/about-the-refuge/>

¹⁵ Robinson Meyer. “The GOP Tax Bill Could Forever Alter Alaska’s Indigenous Tribes.” December 2, 2017.

¹⁷ David Ade. “Gwich'in Leaders Travel from Alaska to D.C. Opposing ANWR Drilling Plans.” Gary Washington News Bureau. February 13, 2019.

coastal region in Alaska. This organization was born in June 1988 as Gwich'in elders came together during a traditional gathering as all fifteen villages for the first time in over a century, agreeing to unite in immediate action to protect the sacred coastal plain and created a formal resolution called, Gwich'in Niintsyaa. Although many elder Gwich'in community members play a regular role in the current teachings and meetings of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, additionally every two years the group devotes a special meeting between elders and younger Gwich'in to talk and share about any new additions to their mission to "Protect the Sacred Place Where Life Begins".¹⁸

This traditional gathering of Gwich'in elders is what prompted the formation of the Gwich'in Steering Committee back in 1988.¹⁹ The Gwich'in Steering Committee is dedicated to preventing any development of the coastal plain, habitat and birthing grounds of the caribou.²⁰ The Gwich'in Steering Committee therefore seeks to spread the word and educate about their terrifying struggle as the decline of the Porcupine Caribou Herd at the hand of oil drilling alongside the coastal plain. Although the coastal plain is within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, these 1.5 million acres are not included in the 8.9 million acres of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) protected as wilderness.²¹ The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge expands 19.5 million acres and exerts a strong biodiversity of animals including: the Porcupine Caribou Herd, moose, sheep, bowhead whales and polar bears and this region. Oil drilling currently is extending all along the Prudhoe Bay and around the outskirts of the 1.5 million acres of the coastal

¹⁸ "The Gwich'in Steering Committee on Our Arctic Refuge". *30 Minutes*, KXCI Community Radio, Tucson, June 4, 2017.

¹⁹ Gwich'in Steering Committee: Speaking With Once Voice". Gwich'in Steering Committee 2017.

²⁰ *The Refuge*. Directed by Kahlil Hudson and Alex Jablonski. Patagonia, 2017.

"About the Refuge". *The Gwich'in Steering Committee*, 2017. <http://ourarcticrefuge.org/about-the-refuge/>

plain. Despite the harmful impact oil drilling has on our environment, animals and people who live off the land, large oil companies and the current Trump administration seeks to drill in the coastal plain region.

The following section of this chapter will extend the major conflicts beyond these proposed policies to explore how acknowledging the stories of the Gwich'in through a multidimensional human rights lens can have the potential to build awareness on the complex nature of this particular fight of the Gwich'in people. The remaining sections of this chapter will address how current video and visual projects by the Gwich'in and their allies are seeking to use storytelling as direct action to teach not only the urgency of the Porcupine Caribou Herd story, but also reiterates that climate change issues should be addressed as deeply linked to the human rights justice, in this particular case, storytelling is the route being shared across the United States in order Gwich'in people to maintain their own survival.

1.3. Protecting the Coastal Plain as a Multidimensional Human Rights Struggle

“...To destroy this interconnected, interdependent web of life by turning the ‘sacred place where life begins’ into a vast oil field and so fossil-fuelize Donald Trump’s dreams of 1950s-style American glory, would be little short of a crime against both nature and humanity. In the wake of any such development, there will, of course, be the inevitable oil spills, toxic residues, and other environmental crises as ever more oil and natural gas are extracted from a planet that can ill afford to see them burned.”²²

Banerjee’s description reiterates that these issues are not just about environmentalism or human rights, but tied together as action for protection for our entire planet and all living species that call Earth home. In a social media post, Gwich'in

²² Subhankar Banerjee. “Drilling, Drilling Everywhere. Will The Trump Administration Take Down the Arctic Refuge?” Intercontinental Cry. November 10, 2017.

Steering Committee Executive Director Bernadette Demientieff explains in her own words²³, why this personal, human rights issue for the Gwich'in people, through stating, *"They are making decisions down here in Washington D.C. that are going to affect our future. We are demanding that our human rights be respected."*²⁴ This quote from Bernadette Demientieff reflects the vital thread that has emerged within this narrative of interconnected survival between the Gwich'in and the Porcupine Caribou Herd: not only is it essential to understand that the survival of the Gwich'in is tightly woven with the survival of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, it is also key to argue that this is a multidimensional human rights issue that have been ignored in oil drill proposals over the last thirty years.

The Gwich'in Steering Committee outlines that the human rights that would be violated if oil drilling were to begin in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, are as follows: the right to health, the right to culture, the right to their own means of subsistence, the right to health, the right to practice their own religion and spirituality.²⁵ All of these human rights are, without question, deeply bound and directly impacted from the wellbeing of the environment.²⁶

As Bernadette Demientieff reveals in a radio interview with KXCI Community Radio²⁷, so much of the American public (and government for that matter) still does not

²³Note: While writing this thesis, this project is centered on literature review and reflecting on these scholarly sources, no human participants were involved and no interviews were conducted for the purpose of this thesis. At the time of writing this, I considered that this is an especially critical time for the work of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, their priority is their current action for their own survival. If this research were to be continued at a future date, I would reach out to Gwich'in leaders and, if granted permission, would inquire about their thoughts on the process of sharing their personal stories surrounding their intertwined survival with the survival of place and the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

²⁴ Our Arctic Refuge. *Twitter*, December 6, 2017.

²⁵ Gwich'in Steering Committee. "A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich'in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." p. 17-23.

²⁶ Gwich'in Steering Committee. "A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich'in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." p. 18.

²⁷ "The Gwich'in Steering Committee on Our Arctic Refuge". *30 Minutes*, KXCI Community Radio. Tucson, June 4, 2017.

realize that this boils down to a web of human rights issues being ignored in policy decisions, and specifically in this case for the latest proposal to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling. A deep overarching sentiment within the stories of Gwich'in Steering Committee leaders within their June 2017 interview with KXCI is the common shared knowledge that the death of the caribou will mean the death of the Gwich'in people. The Gwich'in Steering Committee outline this mission by asserting that for them this struggle goes back to protecting "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins", to protect the caribou that are embedded into who they are as people, and protecting the Porcupine Caribou Herd means keeping their own lives and the future of their children alive.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd specifically depends on the coastal plains in order to give birth to young caribou calves. Without the coastal plain, birthing and nursing place for their young, the species population is at grave risk because without the survival of their young caribou calves, as with any species, there is no future population without the survival of young caribou.²⁸ Right now, the Porcupine Caribou Herd is estimated to currently be at around 197,000 caribou²⁹ which is a significantly high population. However, threatening the birthing and birthing grounds that make up the coastal plain, would pose a very high risk to the Porcupine Caribou Herd since this place is needed to care for their young population at a very vulnerable stage in their early life. Destruction of the coastal plain for drilling would threaten the survival of porcupine Caribou calves³⁰

²⁸ "About the Gwich'in People". *The Gwich'in Steering Committee*, 2017.

²⁹ "Porcupine Caribou News". Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Summer 2017. www.adfg.org

³⁰ "A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich'in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." *The Gwich'in Steering Committee*, 2005, p. 1-29.

who rely on the coastal plain as a safe habitat where they need to grow as young calves.

The Gwich'in Steering Committee explain this by stating,

“The roads, pipelines, traffic, drill rigs and other disruption that comes with oil drilling could drive the caribou away from their calving grounds. Studies of female caribou have shown that they reduced their use of the heavily developed Prudhoe Bay oil fields³¹, to the west of the Refuge, by 78 percent.”³²

The Gwich'in people respect the coastal plain land as being sacred, they do not hunt caribou on this land in order to preserve the continuation of the population, and any interruption to this land.³³ Additionally the tundra climate of this region, tundra does not bounce back very successfully from environmental damage and makes the potential for adaptability of tundra, a key ecosystem that is full of life, extremely low. The serious impacts of this unsustainable oil drilling not only threatens the vulnerable birthing and nursing grounds of the caribou, but has contributed to serious health impacts for the Gwich'in people. Going forward with this framework, it is key to emphasize that conceptualizing the story of the Porcupine Caribou Herd as a multi-layered human rights issue is one story within a world of stories that urges us to recognize these multi-layered issues are united, and call for us all to understand this as a multispecies justice issue³⁴.

³¹ See Figure 1.1.

³² . About the Gwich'in People”. *The Gwich'in Steering Committee*, 2017.

³³ “The Gwich'in Steering Committee on Our Arctic Refuge”. *30 Minutes*, KXCI Community Radio, Tucson, June 4, 2017.

³⁴ Subhankar Banerjee. “Drilling, Drilling Everywhere. Will The Trump Administration Take Down the Arctic Refuge?” *Intercontinental Cry*. November 10, 2017.

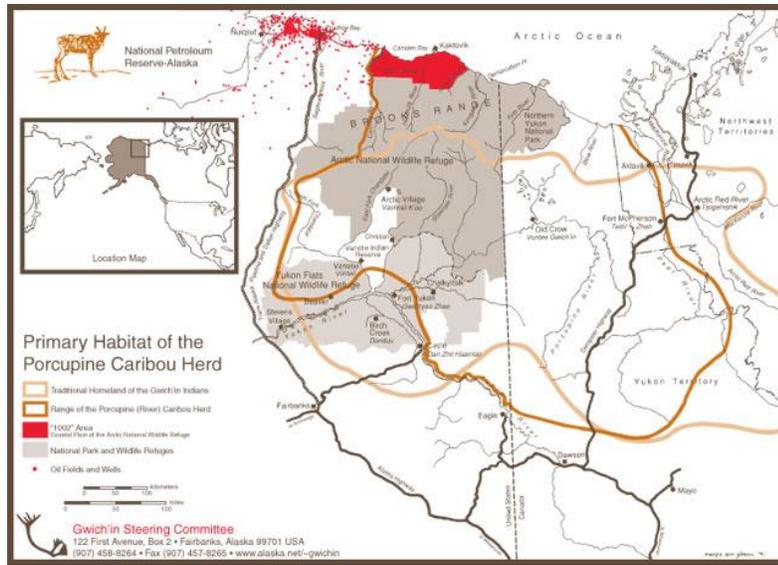


Figure 1. The habitat of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, Gwich'in land, and already existing oil drilling in Prudhoe Bay.³⁵

11.3 Health Impacts

“The Constitution of the World Health Organization recognizes that ‘[t]he enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.’ ”³⁶

We know by now that sustainable energy sources have been shown as effective and are clean forms of energy, such as choosing alternatives such as wind and solar energy. However, we also know the detrimental hunger for oil continues, and the cost is taking a deadly toll on the health of our planet’s species. Unsustainable industrial development, such as oil and gas development is rapidly contributing to the increase in health issues including: diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, and cancer. In Arctic regions home to many indigenous communities, such as Alaska and Canada, indigenous bodies are at even greater risk. In the book, *Indigenous People’s Food Systems and Well-Being:*

³⁵ <http://ourarcticrefuge.org/about-the-gwichin/caribou-people/>

³⁶ Constitution of the World Health Organization, July 22, 1946, 14 U.N.T.S. 185, 186 (signed by United States July 22, 1946), qtd. in “A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich'in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.” Gwich'in Steering Committee. p. 21.

Interventions and Policies for Healthy Communities, the seventh chapter, “Gwich’in Traditional Food and Health in Tetlit Zheh, Northwest Territories, Canada: Phase II” highlights a fitting overview of some of the factors contributing to serious medical issues such as high cholesterol, obesity and diabetes explaining that these concerns are increasing at a record rate in indigenous communities.

“Climate change and...reduced access to traditional food species...a sharp increase in market food and fuel prices (2008)...As traditional food use and lifestyle patterns decline, the Gwich’in are experiencing increases in many non-communicable health conditions influenced by suboptimal nutrition, as mirrored among other indigenous groups in northern Canada. Poor nutrition and high prevalence of obesity were also observed among northern indigenous children. (Nakano et al., 2005a).”³⁷

Reduced access to traditional foods, as exposure to industrialized agriculture increases, have been one factor contributing to the series of health risks which have emerged for many Gwich’in as they are confronted with the increase in less nutritious food of industrialized agriculture. Subsistence practices, or “living off the land”, is a diet that is highly nutritional. Traditional foods provide a very healthy and energizing diet due to a variety of factors including: the high amount of nutrients in traditional foods and lack of processed foods (unlike the overall agriculture industrialization of agriculture and processed foods normally seen in many United States supermarkets). Additionally, animals with particularly large bodies such as seals, whales and caribou especially have a high healthy fat concentration that sustains a healthy diet for indigenous groups including the Gwich’in. Indigenous groups in the Arctic, including the Gwich’in, have witnessed changes in the bodies of animals, such as the caribou themselves. Fikret Berkes, in his

³⁷ Kuhnlein, Erasmus, Spigelski, Burlingame. 2013. p. 101.

book, *Sacred Ecology*, outlines how environmental stresses have been impacting the health of caribou has been tracked through caribou fat monitoring grounded in Traditional Ecological Knowledge.³⁸

*“...the monitoring of fat content for caribou management...provides an index of health of both the individual animal and the herd. Fat as indicator integrates the effects of a number of environmental factors, such as environmental stresses and range conditions, acting on the caribou population. It is therefore not surprising that the monitoring of caribou fat is not merely an area-specific bit of local knowledge but rather a principle of traditional ecological knowledge widely applicable across the full range of caribou distribution from Labrador to Alaska.”*³⁹

Monitoring the body fat content of the back fat, stomach fat, and marrow of the caribou, is one TEK method that is an important indicator of caribou wellbeing.⁴⁰ In terms of sustainable resource management, the Gwich'in, like many indigenous groups, do not only use animals only as a food source, but they also use the hide to be made into warm clothes, shoes and everyday materials conducive to the cold, Arctic climate in Alaska and Canada. For the Gwich'in people, subsistence practices such as hunting and fishing both are vital for keeping alive their cultural survival as well as their physical survival. *“Hunting skills, food preparation techniques, clothing and tool-making as well as knowledge about family lineages and lessons about respect for the animals are all passed down....”*⁴¹ During practices such as hunting and fishing, the Gwich'in teach their youth traditional knowledge and respect of the land and animals, as well as resource use intertwined with their spiritual interconnection with the caribou. As this cultural

³⁸ Fikret Berkes. *Sacred Ecology*. 2012.

³⁹ Berkes. *Sacred Ecology*. “A Story of Caribou and Social Learning.” 2012. p. 144.

⁴⁰ Berkes. 2012. p. 144.

⁴¹ Gwich'in Steering Committee. “A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich'in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.” p. 19-20.

value of respecting the caribou is grown, Gwich'in youth are taught that the caribou as a food source should be used sustainably, and thus the entirety of the animal is used in order to reduce waste. Additionally teaching respect towards the caribou is a value is an ethical foundation⁴² at the heart of Gwich'in traditional ecological knowledge (Wray and Parlee, 2013).

Marla Cone explains that contaminants carried by wind and water travel by passing through ecosystems and food chains. Cone goes into depth about the consequences these contaminants have on indigenous bodies. She explains that because indigenous populations are the most at risk for serious health and food concerns because of the toxins permanence in the animals used as traditional foods, the poisoning of these normally naturally nutritional animals is now by being poisoned by pesticides what Cone quotes as “all twelve of the “ ‘Dirty Dozen’ ” contaminants. Cone writes,

“Today, about two hundred toxic pesticides and industrial compounds have been detected in the bodies of the Arctic’s indigenous people and animals...PCBs, DDT, mirex, dieldrin and chlordane that are capable of inflicting the most ecological damage....these synthetic marvels can survive virtually anything they encounter on their global voyages, they are gradually building up in the remote reaches of the far North to levels that jeopardize people, wildlife, and cultures that have survived this harsh environment for millennia.”⁴³

Marla Cone’s explanation of the wide-spread journey of pollutants from the Lower 48 states to Alaska really puts in perspective how harmful the current oil drilling in Alaska is, especially when the pollutants are already happening in such close proximity

⁴² Kristine Wray and Brenda Parlee. “Ways We Respect the Caribou: Teet’it Gwich’in Rules.” Arctic Institute of North America. Vol. 66, No. 1. March 2013. p. 68-78.

⁴³ Marla Cone. 2005. “Blowing in the Wind: A Contaminant’s Long Journey North.” *Silent Snow: The Slow Poisoning of the Arctic*. p.23.

to the Porcupine Caribou habitat in the neighboring Prudhoe Bay. Cone uncovers that the reality is these pesticides “*jeopardize people, wildlife and cultures...*” really reflects how we cannot separate the health issue impacts on the Gwich’in people from the human rights narrative of this struggle.

By conceptualizing health as interdependent with human rights, cultural survival, and environmental justice corners of the Gwich’in Steering Committee action of “Protecting ‘The Sacred Place Where Life Begins’” emphasizes that this issue cannot be confined to one approach, as this conflict is a network of interconnected concern for the environmental, cultural, health of the Gwich’in, and the continuation of unsustainable behavior such as oil drilling will is a looming reality for all of us. Gwich’in or not, indigenous or not, we need to pledge to a sustainable energy future for our planet. The Gwich’in people have been fighting oil drilling for more than thirty years: their human voice to survive in the face of some many ongoing environmental, cultural, physical and health related injustices against them: is a call we cannot ignore.

1.4 Video and Visual Storytelling as Action

Throughout this research into the Gwich’in Steering Committee and their movement to protect “The Sacred Place Where Life Begins” one of the most resonating aspects of this organization and story in my opinion is the powerful and active method of storytelling through video and visual documentary. The Gwich’in have dedicated their lives to using storytelling, and specifically stories of place to share why this land is so crucial to keep from oil drilling. For example, in 2017 the Gwich’in Steering Committee and their supporters have been showing a video tour of their film, *The Refuge*, throughout

southwestern United States has been an especially captivating form telling the story of the Gwich'in and the Porcupine Caribou Herd. This vital project within the Gwich'in Steering Committee sticks out because I believe the use of video storytelling pushes us as video story listeners towards a reflection of the human rights issues and physical, cultural, spiritual survival are such a fundamental piece of their thirty years of work. For me, this video has unearthed the following lesson: we cannot continue to favor economic gain at the expense of our planet, the people who live there and just as much the vast biodiversity of species and interconnecting ecologies that make up our planet. It is destroying lives, and threatens the future of generations to come. When watching this short film, you can feel the rawness and hope in the voices of the Gwich'in people featured in this video. You can feel how much this movement is beyond activism for them, it is about life, their personal lives. This use of storytelling is used by many besides the Gwich'in and has become a significant part of numerous social justice and activism today. Shirley Roburn cites current research behind the public sharing of stories to explain how this popular emergence of using storytelling to encourage social movement and how it overall has become such a thought-provoking form of action, especially within the last decade.

“In the early 2000s...Marshall Ganz proposed that social movement storytelling, which he referred to as ‘public narrative,’ acted as ‘a discursive form that we’ve developed . . . to answer that question of when confronted with challenge, how do I find the emotional or moral resources to deal with it?’ (Wherry, 2015, para. 13)... stories play(ed) a specific role in building social movements by creating solidarity, hope, and a sense of urgency; these helped overcome isolation, self-doubt, inertia, fear, and apathy, priming people to purposeful political action.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Shirley Roburn. 2017. “Beyond Film Impact Assessment: Being Caribou Community Screenings as Activist Training Grounds?”. p.2528.

In this article, Roburn predominantly focuses on the impact of another film that also worked to share the story of the Porcupine Caribou Herd back in 2005, titled Being Caribou which is told by a Canadian couple who followed the migration of the Porcupine Caribou Herd to show audiences the long journey the caribou take to reach their birthing and nursing grounds. This couple hoped their project and video would help inspire those who viewed the film in community screenings to take action in this cause. During this time, President George W. Bush had continued to try and propose oil drilling in ANWR but this was prevented by a filibuster in December 2005.⁴⁵ Shirley Roburn's reference to Marshall Ganz's description that storytelling "public narrative" explains a relevant framework to thinking about how we can become inspired by social justice based stories and have the potential to prompt ourselves to question our own connection and position to these real and urgent stories. This concept of a "public narrative" specifically in terms of storytelling social justice issues I think really gets to the heart of how this story of the Gwich'in people themselves have been implementing this goal of "public narrative" storytelling methodology to spread the message of their survival-based link with the protection of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

A visual photography project that was formed as a support project to saving the coastal plain is the work of Subhankar Banerjee, who created a photo exhibit depicting the Arctic that has also been a significant step in working towards utilizing Marshall Ganz's "public narrative", specifically in terms of Arctic photography in order to change the way the Arctic is portrayed to the American public. Dunaway reveals how Banerjee's

⁴⁵ Palmer, Brian. "The Long, Long Battle for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge". July 13, 2016. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/long-long-battle-arctic-national-wildlife-refuge>

work promotes an idea of global ecology and prompts us to rethink about the Arctic and to question how the arctic, and it's urgent challenges has not been incorporated into general knowledge about the Arctic to Americans in the past. Dunaway writes,

*“Banerjee indeed locates himself within this tradition and often describes the Arctic in spiritual and emotional terms. Yet even as his photographs portray the refuge as sacred, Banerjee also reimagines the wilderness as part of larger ecological systems, not an enclave set apart from modern life. This idea of connectedness, one shared by a growing number of ecologists and environmental activists, respects the distinctive qualities of the refuge while also reincorporating it into a broader vision of global ecology.”*⁴⁶

Finis Dunaway's reflection on the potential social impact of Subjankar Banjeree's photography of the Arctic is key in thinking about how the Gwich'in storytelling and “public narrative” that stems from the film “The Refuge”. This is because Banerjee's work reveals a pivotal example of how the crucial and current issues of the Arctic can be brought to the public eye that tell the real, raw stories in a “public narrative” format: displaying at museums and universities. Like the powerful and raw stories the Gwich'in Steering Committee presents to us in “The Refuge”, Banerjee's photography shows us the ability visual storytelling can have a great potential to inspire us to become active agents in addressing the social, political and environmental obstacles that lead to these realities shown in Banjeree's honest photographs and captions of the Arctic today.

The Gwich'in Steering Committee use of video storytelling through their film, “The Refuge” as a teaching tool in the hopes United States citizens may understand that oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will rob the Gwich'in of their livelihood, values, history and identity as Gwich'in and their intertwined existence with

⁴⁶ Finis Dunaway. 2006. “Reframing the Last Frontier: Subhankar Banerjee and the Visual Politics of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.” p.161.

the Porcupine Caribou Herd. I would like to reiterate that this mission, for the Gwich'in goes beyond activism. The Gwich'in struggle is a human rights battle at its core: the right to spirituality, tradition and culture, health, land and to maintain their lives and the lives of their children for generations to come. Throughout interviews conducted by KXCI Radio, as well as through the "The Refuge" film with Patagonia, there is an omnipresence of how crucial it is to understand that the Gwich'in struggle to protect the coastal plain is complicated and multidimensional. Throughout the three-person interview on KXCI Radio with Gwich'in Steering Committee representatives: Berndette Demientieff, Jeneen Frei Njootli and James Nathaniel Jr. all reiterate a call to American citizens to protect the coastal plain that needs to remain the birthing and nursing grounds for the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

The use of "public narrative" exemplified by the collaborative Gwich'in Steering Committee and Patagonia film "The Refuge" and Banjeree's photography gains positive power when it centers around pulling a common heartstring: humanity. In other words, if we think back to Roburn's assertion that public narrative can cause political and social movement, how can we connect these broad issues of environmental and social justice, in order to teach that this is a story of survival? Not only speaking about "The Refuge" and the Gwich'in Steering Committee's use of public narrative to put into action their need to tell their story, but how can incorporating a human rights and "survival" focus of public narrative potentially become a tool to assist other conflicts arising today within the rest of the Arctic community? Public narrative has been such a powerful tool that has gained support for the Gwich'in community, as Patagonia and viewers of the film and supporters

have joined in promoting and sharing their story and they have told this same story to government officials. Although many legislative obstacles remains, I have optimism in that there is something that strikes each of us in their story: whether it's the loss of their culture, their dedication to their people at the hardest of times, or shared concern in climate change. That powerful piece of the Gwich'in story that stands out to us. I personally think that power of this story, and this overarching call to examine our interconnectedness (not only as humans, but with the rest of the planet) within the video storytelling mission of the Gwich'in, or the Arctic photography of Subhankar Banjeree can create this powerful potential that these two examples share with us about social activism (or even survival activism is maybe a more suitable phrase).

With oil drilling of ANWR looming even closer than ever before, this issue doesn't have to be over. We can continue questioning and taking action about how the public is informed (or not informed) about what is at stake in the Arctic. We all have a complex individual and universal survival to hold on to, in some form or another, and if our stories are all we have: let's take the power in that and publically share them, even when they are not listened to. In the words of Madelyn A. Nash, "*For how can we hear others' stories without being touched by them in some way? What better way to build empathy and understanding between and among students?*"⁴⁷ (qtd. in Nash and Viray) We can take this powerful model the Gwich'in share with us, and we can support one another's battles for survival and keep fighting to save what survival means to each of us.

⁴⁷ Nash and Viray. 2014. How Stories Heal. p.167.

A year ago, while taking a course titled: Human Ecology in the Arctic, I came across a particular story of indigenous survival that stopped me in my tracks. While listening to a radio interview on KXCI, a community radio station based in Arizona, I listened to the story of Gwich'in indigenous peoples fighting for the protection of Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit⁴⁸, or, *The Sacred Place Where Life Begins*. This is the coastal plain along the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Gwich'in live in fifteen villages which span across of northeastern Alaska and northwest Canada. The Gwich'in Steering Committee is an organization that was founded in 1988 with a mission to stop the Congress oil drill proposals that began during this time in the coastal plain region of the Arctic Wildlife National Refuge specifically including the coastal plain.⁴⁹ In the words of Sarah James, "*We are caribou people. Caribou are not just what we eat; they are who we are. They are in our stories and songs and the whole way we see the world. Caribou are our life. Without caribou we wouldn't exist*".⁵⁰ For me personally, listening to this story for me was both heartbreaking and inspiring. Gwich'in members tell their stories of how the continuation of their own lives, and the lives of future generations is linked with the survival of the Porcupine Caribou herd which is definitively and dangerously threatened by oil drilling that has already begun in ANWR or the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and is headed towards the coastal plain or birthing ground of the Porcupine Caribou Herd calves.

⁴⁸ Gwich'in indigenous language, Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik. *Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute*. www.gwichin.ca/how-we-speak

⁴⁹ Gwich'in Steering Committee. 2018. <http://ourarcticrefuge.org>

⁵⁰ Sarah James. "About the Gwich'in". *Gwich'in Steering Committee*. <http://ourarcticrefuge.org/about-the-gwichin>

Hearing this story for the first time, while riding to campus on a snowy early morning...half-awake because I had yet to have my ritual morning cup of coffee...the urgency, raw emotion and powerful story awoke me quickly from my sleepy daze. The Gwich'in movement to protect of the Sacred Place Where Life Begins, is not just about fighting for a cause, it is about the survival both for the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the generations of the Gwich'in.⁵¹ I would like to emphasize that this story of protecting the Sacred Place Where Life begins, is not my story. Above I refer to summaries of this story written and spoken by Gwich'in individuals, talking about their community story in their own words. I believe in self-determination, and In this case, I believe in the self-determination of stories as well.

Harsha Walia defines indigenous self-determination, writing: "*Indigenous self-determination is increasingly understood as intertwined with struggles against racism, poverty, police violence, war and occupation, violence against women and environmental justice.*"⁵² In respect to the Gwich'in and the Porcupine Caribou Herd, I feel this powerful story and reality is conveyed best through Gwich'in voices. I encourage you, dear readers to lend an ear to these stories of the Gwich'in and the Porcupine Caribou Herd. One great source to watch in order to hear the story of the Gwich'in and the Porcupine Caribou Herd is the film produced by Patagonia, *The Refuge*. Additionally, the radio interview I discussed earlier with Gwich'in Steering Committee members Bernadette Demientieff, James Nathaniel Jr., Jeneen Frei Njootli can be found on KXCI

⁵¹ Amanda Shauger. "The Gwich'in Steering Committee on Our Arctic Refuge." KXCI Radio. *30 Minutes*. June 4, 2017.

⁵² Harsha Walia. 2012. "Decolonizing Together: Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity Toward a Practice of Decolonization". Briar Patch Magazine.

Radio 30 minutes and is titled, “The Gwich’in Steering Committee on Our Arctic Refuge.” June 4, 2017. Additionally, I encourage you, dear readers, to research the stories of the L’eau Est La Vie camp in Louisiana in their movement for water justice against the proposed Bayou Bridge pipeline.

1.5. Listening to the Story of *The Sacred Place Where Life Begins*

It is difficult to know where to begin to put words into how listening to the Gwich’in stories of protecting The Sacred Place Where Life Begins has echoed in my heart, struck my gut, and rattled my mind. Education is one of the most beautiful and challenging agents of healing for our world. In my opinion the Gwich’in Steering Committee journeys throughout the United States to speak to government leaders and citizens about keeping alive the Porcupine Caribou Herd birthing grounds is clearly a deep form of education. Listening to Gwich’in experiences throughout the Gwich’in Steering Committee’s last more than forty years of work to protect Porcupine Caribou Herd survival is a mission I deeply admire and would like to stand in solidarity with. This is not my personal story, but I see parallels with my own values, and I share the belief that all Earth survival is linked with the wellbeing of the places, environments and ecosystems within my daily life.

I am not an indigenous person. I am a white, twenty-four-year-old woman from Middlebury, Vermont. I am not currently watching an oil pipeline spread across the local surroundings in my life: the Green Mountains, summer sun-dipped pastures, winter icy ponds and ever-changing maple trees. But that is not the point. My home is thousands of

miles away from Alaska. However, just because right now it is not happening where I personally live does not mean it is not urgent..

A piece of responsibility to this planet is to intertwine taking care of our individual lives with the lives of our Community of Life around us. Dearest readers, my hope is that those who do hear this take a deep look at the stories that have moved you, your own as well as not your own. And then, where would these stories be without the places they are intertwined with? That's why the Gwich'in Steering Committee's mission to tell their story and Congress members and state representatives and those who need to hear it most is so awe-inspiring to me. Storytelling is both key to support and the intertwined survival of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and Gwich'in survival. My personal existence is linked with the survival of this planet and the places I feel my own heart lies in. Water and food security, to choosing what we put into our bodies, to protect our cultures, languages, ways of living, and sustainably going forward on this Earth that gives us life. These need to be human rights. Yet so many are still fighting for them. I believe far too often, financial profit is put before the health of the planet, and ultimately ourselves. Yes, we need a healthy economy to take care of ourselves, but we can use sustainable energy and we can work on alternatives to transferring energy that do not have high tendencies to pollute water and food sources in our environment. The work of the Gwich'in Steering Committee I view as living proof that people can fight for the places that built us, grounded us, and challenged us. We can unify fight for health of the people along with the planet home of living beings we depend on to breathe, to have clean water.

Western ideology depicts humans as separate from the wild nature and our physical environment. Too long I believe this worldview taken for granted the resources this planet has given us, stretched them thin, turned a blind eye to the pain and harm this has caused both the welfare of the Earth, as well as peoples' lives. I understand that it is key to understand that our planet is filled with a long history of a net of different worldviews, but disregarding the interdependence between humans and environment we just do not have time for anymore. I believe non-indigenous people such as myself have to evaluate how we can unite and stand in solidarity with indigenous movements. We also must find our roles in standing up against the destruction of this planet by decolonizing within environmental justice efforts, and must stand up against environmental racism. Sherri Mitchell writes,

*"I have learned that the only way out of pain is to stop running from it; to meet it, sit with it, feel it, and see what it has to teach you... The anger, the shame, the guilt, the rage, the frustration, and the fear are all outcroppings of the pain we carry. The wound that is causing the pain we are now feeling within our societies is not new. But how we respond to it can be. When properly addressed, this pain can mobilize us and lead us to the transformation we so desperately need. If we can find the courage to face it openly and honestly, it will heal us."*⁵³

I will admit, I myself have often been daunted and overwhelmed by the monstrosity of problems our planet is faced with. I have also been frustrated with myself in my own habits and seen I need to make change in my own behavior towards the planet. There have been many days where I couldn't handle one more relentless headache from the news, from watching harmful history repeating itself, and hopelessness. I cannot stand how divided our country has become and do not think shaming our fellow human beings as a tactic is doing any good at all. But, more than anything I have seen where

⁵³ Sherri Mitchell. *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*. North Atlantic Books. p.67.

education on many issues has not reached all of the audience of our country. Too many times greed has grown for those ignoring the wellbeing of the planet, like a toxic mold, taking a hold over humanity. Many days I feel beaten down and helpless as I watch there are people in powerful positions who continue to disregard humanity and disregard science. Global climate change is real, has happened and is happening at a devastating and rapid rate. But I agree that those who chose to stand up against threats to the wellbeing of water, all living beings, and survival of our shared planet, have the power to spur change s and to teach why the wellbeing of the planet, impacts all life, and to find ways for these stories to reach those who are willing to listen.

CHAPTER 2: THE WATER PROTECTORS OF STANDING ROCK AND L'EAU EST LA VIE, STORYTELLING FOR WATER SOVEREIGNTY

“The trend towards controlling the water has amplified significantly in the last twenty years. The use of water for toxic fossil fuel creation, industrial farming, and the extractive practices of the bottled water industry are all having devastating impacts on people’s lives. Lack of access to clean water is a life-threatening reality for millions of people on this planet. The colonization of our water poses the most immediate threat to life that we are facing today. We can only survive for three days without water.”⁵⁴

In 2016, during the No DAPL (No Dakota Access Pipeline) movement at Standing Rock, Sioux indigenous groups, along with allies protested against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. *“In honor of our future generations, we fight this pipeline to protect our water, our sacred places, and all living beings.”⁵⁵* Polluting water sources means our future generations are likely going to be fighting battles for drinking water someday. The fact that globally so many are currently fighting for their water’s wellbeing proves how urgent this problem is. No one can live without water. Health plummets when food and water have been or will be poisoned by toxins, when communities’ needs are being ignored and when the environment that gives us life is suffering. All over Earth, there are indigenous movements composed of stories that share this common thread of Earth survival, keeping places alive, as being at the heart of working towards merging fighting for human rights action with sustainable behavior towards our planet.

⁵⁴ Sherri Mitchell. Sacred Instructions. p.96.

⁵⁵ Stand With Standing Rock. www.standwithstandingrock.net

Recently I listened to a radio podcast on a program called *Native America Calling*, which featured an episode on the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, which shares many similar threads within the challenges faced by the Water Protectors at the Standing Rock in 2016. Louisiana, where the Bayou Bridge Pipeline construction is being proposed is a state deeply controlled by oil and gas systems. Oil spills and leaks from the pipeline will be another project that contaminate drinking water for the people living in this region.⁵⁶ The Water Protectors of the L'eau Est La Vie floating camp in Louisiana have been protesting against the proposed final stretch of the same pipeline and have held this protest strong and by putting their physical bodies on the line, with many similarities to the actions of the Standing Rock Water Protectors. This overarching movement for *Water is Life* has been continuing in the swamps of Louisiana to protect this habitat from being contaminated from oil spills. The raw and real stories of the Water Protectors is a fight for survival of place, of identity, of fundamental human rights to drink clean water and live in safety and health. The Water Protectors are not only in these places I have mentioned. Stories of action for water sovereignty echo across the planet, and I refer to these stories in order to illustrate specific examples of storytelling for earth and human rights justice and survival, within the international web of stories of Water Protectors advocating for their own local rights to water, the right to live.

During the radio episode on *Native America Calling*, Mark Tilsen, an Oglala Lakota educator and poet from Pine Ridge and Dallas Goldtooth, a Diné and Dakota from the Keep it in the Ground organization and campaign organizer for the Indigenous

⁵⁶ Art Hughes. Guests: Mark Tilsen. Dallas Goldtooth. "Bayou Bridge Pipeline." *Native America Calling*. www.nativeamericacalling.com November 8, 2018.

Environmental Network discuss this urgent story of fighting against water contamination. I believe we all need to be listening to this story, because regardless of whether or not a pipeline is being constructed cross our own individual water sources, I believe our solidarity is crucial in advocating for water sovereignty because we are all beings that depend on water, and need clean water to maintain our own lives. As I tuned into this radio conversation, it is chilling to hear how urgent these concerns are for local residents in the region. Mark Tilsen and Dallas Goldtooth, as well as American citizens expressed how they have seen food sources poisoned with toxic chemicals, the high frequency of oil leaks and saw that if this project is passed, this plummet in interconnected human and environmental health will happen to their communities.

As many of us have, I have watched the severity of storms increase, the temperature of the ocean increase, and see as deforestation and desertification deplete our oxygen and water. I see that erosion on our coastlines and the rise of sea levels is quickly increasing our vulnerability to dangerous storms. The stories that have emerged in my own education have taught me to understand that “natural” disasters such as Hurricane Irma, Maria, and Harvey are not “unusual” “rare” “or once in a lifetime” storms as many media sources have often portrayed but are new reality and the severity and frequency are increasing. *“María fue inocente. Lo fue porque, como dirían los sociólogos, los desastres naturales no son tan naturales como solemos pensar. Sus causas son más sociales que naturales.”*⁵⁷ (Translation: Maria herself was innocent. She was because, as sociologists have said, natural disasters are not as natural as we used to think. The causes are more

⁵⁷ José Anazagasty Rodríguez. “María fue inocente”. 80grados. November 9, 2018. p.g. 2.

social than natural.) Naomi Klein's novel, *The Battle for Paradise*, reiterates that too much of an hopeless attitude towards planet's devastation and destruction on the other hand can harm human morale and further harming to ability for communities to become resilient after severe storms.⁵⁸ Climate change is our current reality, but that does not mean hope for our planet is lost. Without concrete action I've learned that fear doesn't help motivate change. In order to recover, and most importantly work on solutions that are not temporary "band aids", but sustainable and humane action that build a lasting and healthy future for generations to come, we cannot give in to hopelessness, to devastation, to past irresponsibility.

Storytelling has already been a powerful piece of my own experience with education. Education to me is storytelling, and storytelling is education. We all take away morals, and realities and questions and lingering thoughts when we listen to a story, and even when we share our own. I've found in my own classrooms as a student, my ears have perked up more as the teachings I am listening to are grounded in personal story, and lived experiences. *How can stories be shared with a greater community or a wide, even global audience? How can we take the impact and power of stories and turn it into action and positive change for our survival?*

In my final year of undergraduate at Connecticut College, I attended a campus event of viewing the documentary series, *Years of Living Dangerously*. One message for evoking environmental activism that stood out to me in this film was one of the creators, Joel Bach spoke about how his hope that when we learn about environmental conflicts,

⁵⁸ Naomi Klein. *The Battle for Paradise*. Haymarket Books. 2018.

we all have the potential to hear and discover an element, a cause, a story that we personally relate to.⁵⁹ Joel Bach describes how discovering even one connection to our personal lives has the potential to propel us to action to help in the healing of our planet.

These stories of the Gwich'in are not my own. The particularities within their lived experiences of caribou and Gwich'in survival are distinct from my own intersectional identities and lived experiences. For that reason, I used story quotes, writings, and referenced radio and video spoken words by Gwich'in leaders themselves, citing their own words gained from literature and audio resources. I believe their voices call for us all to better our relationship with our environment with an empathy for humanity. They call us to think about our responsibility to future generations of our families. I find their personal stories relating to place within these indigenous movements so moving, humbling, and urgent because they have inspired me to dive deep into my stories of my relationship with place. My purpose for the remainder of this thesis is to dive into a Scholarly Personal Narrative reflection of my lived, personal place-based stories. My own personal, place-based stories that will tumble across the following pages serves as my driving force to motivate and educate myself to become responsible for doing my part to stand up for the wellbeing of the planet, as it is intertwined with the wellbeing of all life. My hope is with this glimpse into to Gwich'in Steering Committee's fight to protect The Sacred Place Where Life Begins, as well as my own place-based stories may encourage you to reflect on your personal ties with the landscapes of your live, and ultimately to actively protect these places.

⁵⁹ Dir. Joel Bach and David Gelber. *Years of Living Dangerously*. Connecticut College. New London, CT. April 6, 2017.

CHAPTER 4: WOODS OF EASE AND CLIMBING TREES

“But the Earth is a gift, not a problem---and loving the world is as important as grieving for it. Being an awake and engaged human being is rooted fundamentally in an unequivocal love of the world. Our deepest affinity is for this rich and remarkable world we live in---our fellow human beings, the textures and colors of landforms, the luscious scents of each place we touch. The term ‘biophilia’ indicates our innate urge to affiliate with other forms of life.”⁶⁰

“Escape! ESCAPE to the woods!” These words have spring from my mind whenever I have felt particularly sullen or lost for as long as I can remember. When I follow this message, nestling within trees, rocks and damp leaves, I gain a sense of calmed comfort and introspection. I would describe this as a go-to-the-woods instinct. I know there are others who have shared this feeling in their own lives as well. I’ve always held strong to this powerful sense of comfort I gain from being outdoors, therefore I find myself “escaping” to the woods as an adult too.

When I was seven years old, I would scurry to the two apple blossom trees in front of the condo my mom and I lived in. I remember the smooth bark texture between my fingers as I gripped the branches with my palms. Throwing my torso backwards I caught the branches with my shins, locking them beneath another tree limb, upside down for a second...before pulling myself up into the treetops. I treasured those apple blossom trees so dearly, that years later when one of them had fallen down, I was genuinely upset. Another setting of my outdoor playtime was under the shade of a tree that faced our community swing set. Under that tree I painted rocks and played make-believe while watching the orange and yellow hues sink into the horizon.

⁶⁰ Thomas Lowe Fleischner. “Our Deepest Affinity.” *Nature Love Medicine: Essays on Wildness and Wellness*. Salt Lake City: Torrey House, 2017. 3-15.

When we moved to my grandmother's house I found a new place of outdoor escape. Otter Creek winds its way alongside the fields and cattails growing in the marshland pond at the foot of the bumpy hill our little white farmhouse sits atop. My mom and I would wander through the fields as the sheep and llama made their slow field rotation, quietly grazing except for occasional "bah's". Walking outside in our fields, I could clear my head, changing my surroundings from wallpaper to skyline, feeling as if my perspective had widened...even just a bit.

Down the road, my best friend and I wound our way through "faerie circles" of mushrooms in summer, wooden planks over mud, and frozen-over marshes during our childhood winters. Gliding and crunching our feet over the deep snow, we laughed at our clumsiness in our snowshoes. We still return to these trails today, bundling up in borrowed extra layers of colorful knitted mittens, hats, neck-warmers and the thought of the warm sauna awaiting us, pushes us to pick up the pace on our frosty walk home.

During Vermont summers, we slowly plod through blueberry bushes all the while trying to not think about how many bears were likely close enough to hear us. On July days when nothing else calls, we stretch out on the wooden dock, floating on inner tube for hours, savoring the bursts of sunlight that peaks through overcast clouds, and at night run back and forth between refreshingly cool pond waters and stoking the crackling fire embers, we shout happily into the night air as the moonlight leads a path through the shadows of the long grass.

During our Snake Mountain hikes, we gaze out at the white pebble dirt roads and our arching, vibrant Green Mountains, peaking their way through the trees to the east.

Neither of us can ever spend too long indoors, and when we live in bustling cities, we have both always found time to travel our way back to patches of green, fresh Vermont air, groves of maple trees and water flowing through local streams, ponds and lakes.

I experience being outdoors as distinct kind of renewal. I view time spent enjoying landscapes as a motivation for improving my own wellbeing. Hiking, snowshoeing in the backyard, swimming in natural bodies of water to not only nourish our bodies with exercise, and fill our lungs with clean air, but serves as a mirror into life around us besides our own. Observing the life in natural surroundings has always made me feel rooted with, not separate from our environment. Personally, I have found that when I immerse myself in observing nature, my sometimes-shoved-aside self-assurance returns.

“Cut off the wellsprings of our own confidence and curiosity, people, too are prone to parching. May we cultivate ways of learning that draw up nourishment, and unfurl new leaves to the sun. May our body-minds spark and fire; may our curiosity blossom and bear fruit.”⁶¹

I feel grounded by the places around me, by both the settings where I know every turn by heart and many places where I have alternatively been only a temporary visitor. Each time I spend quality time in the presence of watching the life surge through the environment around me, I am met with this warm sense of gratitude to be on this Earth. I know I am not the only one who feels this way, as this sentiment has been shared by many before me. Walking through trees has always taught me to be grateful to be living: to have a heartbeat, to be in good health, to have family and friends who enjoy being

⁶¹ Sarah Juniper Rabkin. “Spark and Fire.” *Nature Love Medicine: Essays on Wildness and Wellness*. Salt Lake City: Torrey House, 2017. p.127.

around me, to have people and places who have made me feel alive. Of course, I have had days of forgetting this too. However, I have gained this gratitude back when I take the time to reflect on how place has played a role in my life. I have learned that outdoor places have especially taught me that we must value our environments, as much as they challenge us, and awe us, they most importantly allow our identity, and our physical bodies to survive.

A friend of mine recently reminded me of some fond memories from our childhood years at Weybridge Elementary School, which in my opinion molded our Vermont-grown love for outdoor places. At recess every day our playground was a lush, wide-open field for free, young, imaginative minds. Grasping long, smooth wooden sticks that had been discovered by older students, we built and rebuilt a fort that became our beloved hangout in the schoolyard. We would make our way up towards the cattails that grew in the marshland at the edge of the school property, selecting a few to take back to our playground headquarters. If there were no cattails close by, we would scurry deeper into the marsh to pick one or two, hoping not to get into trouble for wandering too far. Our hearts racing, we would jump back into the schoolyard grass. Returning triumphantly with our acquired cattails, we would then carefully break off the pieces of cattail “fluff”, then with two twigs or long plant stems, we would pretend that we were “knitting” sweaters, from our small cattail harvest. We would always be sure to only take one or two, not wanting to drain the source of the marsh cattails we were grateful to play with, and knew we must only take what we needed if we wanted to continue to see our harvest growing in the marsh next season.

A few months ago, one of my friends reminded me that during our elementary school days, we were frequently encouraged to stand up for what we believed in. My friend, with awe and appreciation, spoke about how our years at Weybridge Elementary taught us we could use our voices to create positive change in our small school community. She retold the story of our young protest against our school's recent switch to buying chocolate milk from a large corporation instead of being provided by our local dairy. This was due to our local dairy's shift from a small milk carton to producing a larger chocolate milk bottle. Our elementary school administration thought the larger bottles would create a problem of wasted milk. We did not want to be wasteful either so we decided it was time to come up with a solution that would be beneficial for all of our community. Our idea was that we could purchase the now larger milk containers, but then split these up and therefore share the amount of milk in one larger jug with several students. Using our voices and telling our story of our love for our local chocolate milk worked, and soon we once again we were able to return to supporting our local dairy.

Our dairy sits atop a hill only a few thousand feet from the small pine trees lining the fences where cows graze and we played at recess. It is a place that is a symbol of pride in our small town's history, and locally admired by our town's residents and those who regularly visit. I have my own memories of walking through the front door, eager for chocolate milk and cookie and ice sandwiches. This childhood story of voicing our local support for our dairy I see as one of my first moments of recognizing I do not need to fall silent. I was barely ten years old, and some of my elementary friends were only eight and nine years old, but we had were beginning to learn we had strong voices and a story to

share. We learned by experience that we could speak up for continuing support for our beloved dairy's irreplaceable chocolate milk.

I spent age eight to twelve in Weybridge Elementary School, and that was filled with abundant experiences and stories. I smile thinking about my friend expressing that our unique experiences of our elementary school stories should be told, and agree we might have to write a Bildungsroman memoir one day to put words to it all. I view my friend's recollection of our determination to support our local chocolate milk very fitting to reflect on how our place-based stories can teach us the power of our own voice. We both feel Weybridge Elementary School was a place where we learned the power of voicing our story of supporting our local dairy's chocolate milk, as much as gratitude for what we have from inside the classrooms when teachers encouraged us to speak our minds and be engaged members of our classrooms as well playground fields, marshlands and short pine trees.

Saul Weisberg writes about his experience of being both lost (and found) by time spent outside, and his words strongly remind me of my own time spent outdoors as a kid. Weisberg writes,

*"As a child I lost (and found) myself by going outside. Tents and tarps provided cheap vacations for a family without much money. One family camping trip led to another and national parks and forests became my old friends every summer. Nature was the place where I found the space and time to watch and listen and feel. It still shapes how I engage with the world."*⁶²

In my own moments of feeling particularly lost and glum, my first instinct has always been to duck behind the lilac bushes, or under the giant maple trees shading my

⁶² Saul Weisberg. "Murtle Lake Rx: A Dose of Wind and Rain." *Nature Love Medicine: Essays on Wildness and Wellness*. Salt Lake City: Torrey House, 2017. p. 168-169.

backyard. When I was a teenager, I also “*lost (and found) myself by going outside*”⁶³, as I sat under my backyard maple trees and lilac bushes. These natural surroundings soothed me as I filled journal pages, spilling out the raw emotions of my bad days, disappointing woes, and energetic joys. The trees were silent but comforting supporters of me. Nature has served as a calming presence, during my difficult moments, a place that feels right to turn towards when my present feels as if it is crumbling.

Another friend and I found the woods as our place of solace. For us the woods near her house was our symbol of remaining childlike at heart, we didn’t have to worry about being “too old” to play with mud, or clamber up boulders, naming the maple tree branches as our Life Support keeping us from tumbling down a rocky edge. It felt thrilling to go off on a woodland adventure where we could laugh loudly without bothering anyone, or talk about our strange dreams, chat about our bewilderment towards middle school life, and slip away from the pressure to “fit in” and “look cool”.

For my friend and I, the forest behind her house was a place of our friendship, a place where we felt our truest selves during adolescent days of feeling uncertain in who we were and wanted to become. Sarah Juniper Rabkin writes,

*“Nothing opens the tight fist of my thinking like constructed hours sitting by a mountain stream or walking a wooden slope, taking curious notice of local going-ons---or sitting at the kitchen table day after day, watching the hummingbirds that zip and dart around the feeder outside our window.”*⁶⁴

My friend and I had our own “tight fists”. We were in the midst of a phase of life where your teenage selves were beginning to confront our deepest struggles and

⁶³ Weisberg, 2017. p. 168-169.

⁶⁴ Sarah Juniper Rabkin. “Spark and Fire.” *Nature Love Medicine: Essays on Wildness and Wellness*. Salt Lake City: Torrey House, 2017. p. 118.

insecurities. But I would argue this is never only the case during adolescence, we still have to learn to unclench our tight fists consciously as we become adults. We are never “too old” to escape to the woods, or run to the mountains, or to have trees be our silent supporters because we’ve never too old to be humbled by the life surging through our Earth home. Therefore, we cannot give up on protecting these places, as environmental collapse eerily knocks on our planet’s survival, and our own.

4.1 Ode to the Connecticut College Arboretum

“They promised that consuming, buying, shopping, spending, charging, no-money-downing would make me happy. But they never mentioned how temporary the thrill of a new window treatment was. I couldn’t help but notice how I never had heard them advertise a walk in the woods...”⁶⁵

The Arboretum. It is a place of solitude to let go, as the trees, leaves and pond is my blanket. Wood paths were my anchor, and purposely getting lost was my compass.

I could find a path loop that would lead me back to the trailhead, just as I could find a route that would remind me that all can get better.

It is a place of autumn air and flannel-covered hodgepodes of friends, legs and arms drawing one another in hugs. Bands playing, sizzling aromas of free food truck delights, and friends humming to the music...chatting, dancing and laughter.

It is Lilypad, lights sloping down the grassy moonlit hill, champagne glasses clinking and running barefoot to the familiar arbors of vines are the canopy of belting out the lyrics to Wicked Peach cover songs so loudly that we lose our voices...and turn around to see a mass of joyful classmates, a sea of blue and violet lights dancing our last night in this beautiful tree-land for the last time all together.

⁶⁵ Nancy Slonim Aronie. Writing from the Heart p. 95

It is a place of solo yoga poses on an empty path, or group lessons led by a college friend, who is an aspiring yogi, as our eyes are in view of the pond.

The Arboretum is a place of classmates half-snoozing and half-talking in hammocks with their notebooks and readings, as they peacefully squint in the late afternoon sun. It is a place to wander to, when balance and confidence is off-kilter. I fed this unease by sitting atop Arboretum rock walls and listening to birds' distance calls.

When I felt stifled and craved reflection, I walked over moss grounds and climbed atop small boulders dotted with pine needles. When I felt worn-down and needed fresh perspective, the trees reminded me I could keep stretching forward like their leaves and branches...life goes (and grows) on.

"Where are you right now?" A friend's name pops up on her text message on my phone screen. *"In the Arbo."* I reply, and shut my eyes, letting the sun that sneaks through the arbor vines sweep across my face, as I lie on my blanket, course reading in hand. Connecticut College proudly states that our small liberal arts college has been number ten on a nationally ranked Newsweek list of "Top 25 Most Beautiful Schools". Media rankings aside, one of the timelessly loved parts of my campus is the Connecticut College Arboretum. Nicknamed, "The Arbo", these seven hundred and fifty acres of woods, a pond, fields and trails became my escape and yet simultaneously an outdoor place of leaves and familiar trees and nature perches that became a place of comfort and belonging for me throughout my four collegiate years.

One day, it was on the verge of beginning to rain, the kind of impeding fog and drizzle that keeps everyone huddled inside, alongside their raindrop-drenched backpacks,

curled up in bulky sweaters in the stacks of books in Shain Library, their dorm rooms, or napping in our campus coffee shops. Normally, I often would be in one of those places too, but I was having one of those days where you suddenly find yourself needing to just break out of your everyday routine. It was not at all ideal Arboretum weather, but I didn't care, I just needed to escape the stifling negativity I felt towards the bad day, the piling stress, and a nagging sense of loneliness.

I found my feet hurrying down the stairs of my dorm and out into the gloomy weather. I needed to "Escape! ESCAPE!" once again, and the Arboretum was there, rain or shine. I felt my momentum pick up as my feet carried me down the well-known hill. Hoping I would not slip in the pressing rain and mud, I kept walking past the "amphitheater" of the Arboretum and wove my way towards the jumble of mysterious trails on the western side. I walked and walked, knowing that today not many people would be outside, but continued until I found a mossy rock that felt secluded enough to shield me from the insanely busy rhythm of college life. I had been inwardly "snowballing" all of the problems that seemed to be shadowing me. I never truly felt homesick while at college, but this was one of those days where I definitely felt in despair. I did not know how to put to words what I was feeling. I had friends at college who I loved, but I felt held at somewhat of a distance. I was still reeling from being apart from the life I had and people who had become important figures in my life during my time abroad in Chile. I could not imagine a day without seeing them, and then suddenly found myself back in the United States, thousands of miles away, without a clue when I would see my friends and host families in Chile again. I felt overwhelmed by the usual,

rapidly approaching deadlines, packed calendar of to-do lists, and felt like I was drowning in my current reality.

How could I feel so lost and broken in the college place I sincerely love with all my heart and felt so “right” in? It didn’t make sense. I did not want to leave, not at all. The words, *I know I belong here*, kept appearing in my gloomy thoughts. However, I missed my friends from my study abroad program, and felt I barely was seeing my closest friends on campus. Going to classes each day filled me with joy and passion for my studies, but could barely remember the last time I was truly proud of my written schoolwork, because my perfectionism haunted about every paper I wrote. So I procrastinated and was weighed down by overthinking my schoolwork. This resulted in a deep disappointment towards myself, because I loved my academic pursuits and therefore I wanted my work to be stronger. As Nash and Bradley write, “...*the pursuit of perfection is a pipedream that will always lead to a dead end, as it does, and will for all of us.*”⁶⁶ I did not want to let my self-criticism drown me in this place I cared (and care about) anymore.

Sitting in the Arboretum woods, my problems hadn’t changed even though I had escaped my dorm room for a while, but I felt a twinge of that familiar deep-in-the-woods ease and sense of hope stirring in the pit of my stomach. The life in my natural surroundings continued on. Leaves. Moss. Trees. Worms. The watery echo of the stream. Taking that time to observe that the life in nature around me is able to go on, I was reminded that no matter what, mine can too.

⁶⁶ Robert J. Nash, and DeMethra LaSha Bradley. “Perfectionism: The Killer of the Dream in Academe.” *Me-search and Re-search: A Guide for Writing Scholarly Personal Narrative Manuscripts*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2011. p.64

Rain dripped off the branches, and I could see my breath in the cold, damp air. Suddenly, I think about my grandfather, who passed away when I was four years old, however I remember him as if he were alive yesterday. In that moment, I thought of an article published about him, and I pulled it up on my phone to read it one more time. After a solid hour of distraught crying, my tears of sadness turned into happy, grateful ones. I had not resolved what had been gnawing at me, but the surrounding forest, teeming with life and my memories of my kind, good-humored grandfather left me smiling as the rain poured harder. Gratitude for my family hit my gut. I remember the pals who I don't see as nearly often as I want to, but when I do, will run across Tempel Green to hug me, or out of the blue send me an inside joke in text form that turns my whole day around, or another one that makes me laugh out loud during late-night study sessions. I still missed Santiago, but felt gratitude for Chile, the country that taught me I could care for a place in another continent as much as the ones I know as well as the pattern of freckles on my wrist, or the tree-shaped birthmark under my ribcage.

Thinking back to that day in the Arboretum, sitting atop those rain-streaked, mossy stones, and re-reading that newspaper article about my grandfather brings me back to a quote from a poem I stumbled across recently. "*The gods are not large, outside us. They are the fish, going on with their own concerns.*"⁶⁷ I picture what my grandfather's reaction might be if he were here to read this poem. I can imagine him quietly pondering this quote, his calm smile stretching across his face. I think it is an especially fitting quote for him, because he loved fishing more than any other human I have ever met. The

⁶⁷ Jane Hirshfield. "The Gods Are Not Large." *Nature Love Medicine: Essays on Wildness and Wellness*. Salt Lake City: Torrey House, 2017. p.g. 1-2.

corners of my grandparents' Vermont and Maine houses are decked with decades-old tackle boxes, photos of him with caught fish and "Fisherman Crossing" signs, and embroidered pillows that say, "Eat. Sleep. Fish." When I think of fish, I always think of Grandpa, when I think of fishing, I *definitely* think of Grandpa. That's how it is.

Reading this quote by Jane Hirshfield lifts my mood. This quote reminds of all those times I have needed to escape to the woods and how being physically outside, engaging and observing the constant present of life in the woods has been such a powerful force in helping me heal my own worries. This verse paints such a beautiful, humbling idea; Earth's small wonders (including small creatures) symbolize life, and are happening right before our eyes. Just like the fish "*going on with their own concerns*", we must go forward with our lives, as we work through mistakes, challenges and all.

"Look at Something Green"

Poem by Lisel Peters-deCourval

Dad always tell me
to look outside at "something green"
when my eyes feel strained, when my head aches.
Ok, ok...Green, green.
Green leaves. Green grass. Green hills.
Dad once told me his eyes change color

as the seasons change.

Earth greens outside reflecting

a more jade hue in his blue-green irises.

I believe him.

I too, have seen in my own eyes curious color change

hazel eyes

with kaleidoscope like flecks of brown and green

become much more green

when my eyes brimming with alligator tears

with a companion of blotchy redness and puffiness.

My mind wanders to the saying “eyes are the window to the soul”.

Or that science has told us your pupils dilate when

you are looking at someone you love.

Have my eyes given me away before?

Yes, I’m sure they have.

My back aches from ill-fitting chairs from the day

While I am hunting

for “something green” to lie flat upon.

To feel that release of muscle,
bending in relief to be free.

I lie belly down

My eyes meet the sight of blades of grass

Feeling firmly rooted as my stomach meets ground.

My back relaxes, the ache in my head tenderly quiets down.

A breeze floats across the small of my back

Calm but soothing gusts scurry, a soft whistle as my heart ceases its drumming.

I stand up, my eyes still filled with nature hues.

I wonder what Dad's chameleon eyes might mean?

I do not know much about optometry, but regardless

I like to think

That Dad's eyes do love nature greens.

My own eyes, in their own especially-green tearful moments

are reminding me that Dad always tells me I'll feel better if I...

"Look at something green."

CHAPTER 5: THE WORD, “HUMANITY”, AND SHARING OUR STORY VOICES

I keep searching for a word to use that takes the word humanity and turns it into a word that refers to all living things, thus that extends beyond just human beings. As a lifelong humanities student, I of course believe humanity is a powerful, breathtaking word...but lately I keep hunting through my mind to come up with a word that is not only limited to human beings, but all creatures, organisms, living things. During a week-long course I took with the Earth Charter Initiative in El Rodeo, Costa Rica this past summer, I became familiar with the term, Community of Life.⁶⁸ I love this concept because it acknowledges our interconnection with all life in the world around us. The Earth Charter Initiative is organization I have come to deeply admire for the work, teaching and attitude towards their mission of education for a sustainable future. I was honored and humbled to experience this personally this past July.

I am a white, non-indigenous woman, who has not grown up living in the context of Indigenous Knowledge or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). I believe I have much more to learn from these sources, but would like to express my gratitude for my academic coursework specifically focused on themes of indigenous religions and traditions, bilingual and intercultural education, cultural revitalization as well as environment and decolonization. These course themes have taught me the indigenous term, **interdependence**, that all living things are connected and impacted by one another.

I would like to emphasize that in my opinion, recognizing interdependence does not mean we lose our sense of individual identity. Not at all. In fact, I believe if we spend

⁶⁸ Earth Charter Preamble. *The Earth Charter*. 2000. (p.g. 1-4).

too much time ignoring our individual, inner selves, I think that's a slippery slope to further pain and creates a greater distance from our connection with our communities. We must work to balance this need for treating our individual selves kindly in connection with our need for nourishing our interdependent world with compassion.

*"During our journey, we will all have many of the same experiences, seeing the world and one another from multiple angles and through multiple lifetimes. Sadly, there will also be times when we will lose sight of this basic fact. During those times, we will become lost in the unfolding stories of our own individualized realities."*⁶⁹

I believe we must seek to enjoy our lives, while also recognizing that we need must be responsible for the wellbeing of this Earth home we share and grateful for this life and home our planet gives us⁷⁰. There's no waking up to a "perfect humanity" in my opinion. I'm not convinced it exists. How can we heal our Earth if we do not heal our individual selves and how do we heal and survive our inner selves (and future generations) if we do not heal this planet that keeps us living? Using our voices may seem like a simple request, but in reality it takes

*"All the censors in the world are just sitting in wait so they can nab you and give you a ticket for driving on the wrong side of the brain. That's where your one-of-a-kind voice is waiting to surface. And you are the only one who can throw it a line."*⁷¹

We all have a unique voice, a voice that can tell our own distinct lived experiences that have the potential to build others up, to remind us of our link between our particular realities and experiences in our universal home. Sydnee Viray writes,

*"Writing my way to meaning and wholeness does not mean I seek out other's stories, but rather that I get to the healing that my own story enables... When I am asked to share these stories, someone on the other side of the universe may find connection, and therefore, community. And perhaps, just perhaps my stories may help others heal."*⁷²

⁶⁹ Sherri Mitchell, *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*. p.g. 9

⁷⁰ Deloria and Wildcat 2001. *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. p.g. 12-13.

⁷¹ Nancy Slonim Aronie. *Writing from the Heart: Tapping the Power of Your Inner Voice*. p.175.

⁷² Nash and Viray. *How Stories Heal*. p. 144.

Sydnee Viray's words echo a key insight: we must respect the autonomy of one another's stories, as we utilize personal story to advocate and act for the wellbeing of our planet. I agree, stories that are not our own, will never be ours. However, they also have a power that can put us at ease, leave us awestruck or keep us up at night. We must dig up our own stories, but when we listen to stories besides our own, we have the potential to not only heal ourselves, but to build empathy with one another.

Every person needs to have the right to tell their story, to use their voice, in their own words. I believe we each hold as responsibility to allow one another autonomy to our own life experiences and our interpretations and reinterpretations of the stories they tell. I personally do not think it is ethical for me to tell an individual's story for them, but I believe I can speak to and reference how and why a story personally moves me, makes me rethink my ideas, see parallels and contrasts in my own lived experiences and wonderings. We are all distinct individuals with our own stories to tell, but the stories besides our own interconnect us, remind us we live in a community of beings, voices, happenings and places.

CHAPTER 5: TO FALL IN LOVE WITH AN ISLAND

“Near water, I feel connected to humanity, close to my heritage as just another creature, tethered to the greater community...To grow, to mature, to become capable of relationships balances independence and empathy. Somehow the stunning contrast of green oases within the redrockscape echoes the contrasting emotional strengths of these two poles of becoming human.”⁷³

Every summer, I venture to a small island on the Maine coast. This little Atlantic island means the world to me. It’s a five hour drive from my home in Vermont and travelling to this place never ceases to put me at ease. This rocky, Atlantic island restores a wonderful tranquility in me. This place is my true utopia, my real-life happy place. This place heals me, pure and simple. There’s nothing I crave more as the moment my feet hit that sand on our beach and I swing open the creaky screen door of the house, smiling at the humorous inside-joke-of-a-sign that says Pete’s Bar and Grill.

One of the key lessons this island home teaches me is the beauty of the “simple things in life” and how pivotal these life treasures are to help us in allowing us to thrive. We take the “simple things” for granted sometimes, or skip over them using the excuse that our hectic lives could never give us the time to “stop and smell the roses”. But when I’m there, I try to relish every moment of simplicity. Then I leave with this sense of clarity about how crucial these “little things” truly are to us, and how they often unearth our own most blissful memories. Norman Rosenthal discusses the necessity of keeping our dearest memories alive and close to us. Rosenthal writes: *“Your memories make you who you are, if you lose them, you lose part of yourself. So use and enjoy them, for they*

⁷³ Stephen Trimble. *“The Blue Gate”*. *Nature Love Medicine*. 2017. p. 77.

are among life's treasures."⁷⁴ For me, the importance of the "small things" within our happiest memories are especially apparent to me when I return to my Maine home.

Maine. Long days on the beach, soaking up every ray of sun, dinnertime card games and time to just sit and enjoy not having to be anywhere but there. This place gives me joy and fills me with the hope that I can tackle whatever current issue is going on in my life. It is a place that teaches me to enjoy the small moments and to see how very not small they are. For me some of the best "simple" moments are: the grin I see on my uncle's face when he's about to catch a giant wave on a surf board.

True happiness that just washes over me as I feel the summer sun stretching across the sky. Watching the figures of my cousins following where their feet take them as they hop from rock to rock across Fox Island. The shuffle of a deck of cards. The peaceful silence after an overfilling, home cooked meal. Either my dad or my Uncle Eric is snoring, eyes closed and gently swinging in the hammock. The rowdy cries as the game changes with someone's unsuspected high King card. The energy I feel as I climb into the back of the pickup truck, awaiting our day's exploring beach destination. The sweet smell of salty air. The ancient lobster trap that's sat on the porch for as long as I can remember. The clever hide-and-seek spots my cousins and I would crawl into when we were small enough to fit, and vow to never tell our younger cousins until they discover them on their own. My grandpa's wooden signs about fishing, including the "Old Fisherman Crossing" traffic sign, and the checkered place settings we eat dinner on

⁷⁴ Norman Rosenthal. 2013. *The Gift of Adversity: The Unexpected Benefits of Life's Difficulties, Setbacks, and Imperfections*. Penguin Group. New York. p. 23.

every night. These are just a few of the “treasured memories” I have of this place, they will always be remembered, forever etched onto my mind....I seek to never let them go.

I don't know about you, but I sincerely enjoy breathing in the smell of the world around me, especially in nature. Mountain air. Salt water. Lilacs. Pine trees. Being outdoors, surrounded by the ocean, a forest, or even just a backyard chair always soothes me. In Maine, every time I breathe in that familiar, salty air, I am always reminded of how truly fortunate I am to be able to come here and feel this deep rooted sense of belonging with this place.

Being in nature in Maine, I also recognize how our planet sustains life, it is not just beautiful views of green grass and blue waters. It is not just warm sun and picturesque rocks and the smell of salt in the air. These images are powerful, but they are not just about beautiful appearance. Our planet is why we are living and breathing. We cannot keep acting as if humans are above all other species, as the majority of humans discard our trash without a thought to where it will end up, drill for oil without thinking of the consequences and cut down trees as if we will never run out. We have the power to harness that love we have towards places in our lives to stir up more motivation to save our environment, and therefore our phenomenal places. But I cannot discuss how this island teaches me without speaking of how being in this place to me calls to me how crucial it is for all of us to protect our planet. In *Writing to the Change the World*, Mary Pipher cites the following quote by Chief Seattle which depicts how interconnected we are with the well-being of the Earth:

“This we know: All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. Whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. Man did not

weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."⁷⁵

If we look deep enough, we each will find we all have awe-inspiring places on the planet that we cherish. A shady tree, a place we vacation to, a sunny window, a place we lived in for a period of time. For me this is one of the reasons I think it is so important to acknowledge our interdependence with our planet as well as with one another. For me personally, I consider the places that mean the world to me a piece of my own identity. I write about this quote from Chief Seattle because it points to an overarching value within indigenous thought to respect the environment by recognizing our own impact from it, or what "befalls the Earth", "befalls" us as well. I do not identify as an indigenous person, but I deeply admire this value that teaches us to respect our mother earth, that we are linked with as well as one another.

*"...we, human beings, in all our rich diversity, are intimately connected and related to, in fact dependent on, the other living beings, land, air, water of the earth's biosphere. Our continued existence as part of the biology of the planet is inextricably bound up with the existence and welfare of the other living beings and places of the earth...."*⁷⁶

By treating the Earth kindly, we can protect the places that make us who we are, that make us whole again and that hold our kept memories. We also need the support of one another to thrive and honestly to survive, as much we truly depend our physical environment, including our remarkable places.

The small, rocky island I call one of my homes, is a place of white-capped waves my lullaby with my screen window that stays open all night. The house where my toddler toes scurried over hardwood floors and my kindergarten toes, my ten year old toes, my

⁷⁵ Mary Pipher. 2006. *Writing to the Change the World*. p. 207

⁷⁶ Deloria and Wildcat, 2001. p.g.12-13.

teenage toes, my current twenty three year old toe marveled at the sea treasures that lined blue shelves my uncle built. The place where I scramble over rock boulders, seaweed glistens in the 7:00am sun. The place where I fell in love with place. This wonderful island in Maine teaches me again and again how much I care about wonderful people in my life and how important it is for us to enjoy our time together.

The small, calm bay waves that lap at this Maine Island are mirrored in our attitudes. Just like these calm bay waves, this place is peaceful and simultaneously filled with excitement and eagerness for each day ahead. It is for leaving behind busy schedules and difficult timing and excuses to not enjoy what we love. It is for family and taking a moment to breathe in our truly grateful and humbled we are by having this place...and people to love and miss.

I believe we can keep reminding ourselves of these places that sustain our own “aliveness”, if there are places that symbolize that for us. I have at times found myself wanting to be in another physical space than I am. It doesn't always mean that I am not enjoying where I am currently am, but often I find myself getting restless when I stay in one place for a long time. Thus I collect a textile of my most sentimental places, and feeding and cultivating my own sense of wanderlust. I never want to stop looking for new places to refresh my outlook. And I also always want to come home too. Not that I want to travel to run away from anything. Instead, I visualize seeking out unfamiliar places (and returning to familiar ones) like climbing a tree to get a bird's eye view of the ground below. By witnessing places besides my everyday places, I gain the perspective of other branches, gazing at my current ground from a new, treetop angle.

CHAPTER 6: TO FALL IN LOVE WITH A COUNTRY AND CITY ABROAD:

SANTIAGO, CHILE

Boarding a plane to Santiago, Chile I was excited and hopeful that I would enjoy this unfamiliar-to-me place I was coming to. Of course, I had hopes that my time here would be filled with great memories and wonderful people but I had no way of knowing how this would go. I didn't know what would go wrong, what would go right, or what relationships I would create. It just so happened for me that those four months impacted me more positively than I ever could have imagined. But of course they were not perfect, and learning to live in another language and culture other than your own is challenging, exhausting, but humbling and rewarding. I have a lot of people to thank for why my experience was such a personally positive time and place for me. I don't by any means want to paint this place as perfect and emphasize my experience is one perspective, but it is my own. I believe we all travel to different places with our own distinct backgrounds, support, circumstances, goals, ideas and sometimes just downright good timing. But maybe from this tiny part of my story of my time in Chile, you can take away something that reminds you of the places in your life that have moved you, or not. The people that came into my life throughout those four months made my time in Chile especially meaningful: my host families, friends' host families, my American peers in my program, my Chilean program directors and professors.

My host family in Santiago, in addition to my two other host families in Temuco, Chile I grew very close with. In the early days, my host mom in Santiago and I would often misunderstand one another (because of the language barrier, even though I speak

Spanish) or I would feel hesitant about “putting myself out there” or embracing the “stepping out of my comfort zone” as anyone is confronted with when stepping into a new place. Some days I just wanted to be able to speak without muddling through verb conjugations and thinking about the gender of words and worry about sounding like an idiot. But learning another language, takes embracing the inevitable mistakes and learning to laugh when you mess up. Through time and effort, and now, even though she is there and I am here, she remains a mother figure to me.

One of my most significant goals before getting to Chile was to really embrace living in a new home, while keeping in mind my host family was giving me permission and trust to step into their day-to-day lives and to go with the flow of their lives. Living as a student in a host family is being a guest in a different way, because although you are in this country as a guest, you are living as a part (not a guest) in your host family. It's not a vacation, or nor do I think it should be treated as such. I had the responsibilities as someone who lives there; keeping my room clean, doing laundry, preparing meals for myself when I need to be somewhere other than the house. This importance of going with the flow and recognizing that my family there is meant to be that: a family, not a hotel or hosts that are running after your every need is something crucial and respectful for any student traveler to be aware of. I truly believe this is such a powerful lesson I've learned about stepping into new-to-us places.

This wisdom became really evident to me my first night alone with my host family. They had picked me up at our introductory gathering with all of our other host families and given me the tour of my new home, our shared apartment. But later that very

first night we had to go to the emergency room. It wasn't an urgent emergency, my host mom's foot had gotten very swollen and she needed to see a doctor. All went well, and spent lots of time in the waiting room as my host parents spoke with a doctor. This was a clear and first sign that I was becoming a part of this family for the next four months was about truly embracing a new lifestyle (for me), and I believe this helped me form such close relationships down the road with my Santiago host family. Afterwards my host parents, Nany and Lucho, laughed and joked with me about what an unusual first night this must have been for me, and I told them not to worry, I was a part of their family now, unexpected hospital visits and all.

The next several months of my time in Chile gave me a kind of renewed refreshed (and genuine) aliveness that before arriving, had felt as if had fallen silent to me. Even though in the past year of college I had had some truly wonderful days, I had also had some very lackluster, lifeless days too. I had battled through some lost friendships, a few bad grades and the crushing self-doubt that had become a kind of ulcer on my ability to believe in myself. But being in a beautiful country that was new to me gave me the energy and reassurance that I could be a new me. This new me was also deeply my real self, but focused on my own goodness, instead of always seeing the bad ones. This new sense of confidence that felt as if I was waking up my long lost self from a long winter hibernation. Life in Chile just came alive for me. On weekends I walked through shops and chatted with local vendors, sat in the park a few blocks from my house and enjoyed the taste of mouth-watering new foods, that if we're being totally honest, I am craving so damn badly right now.

I learned to love this beautiful place, as I followed my friends through winding hilly roads of cobblestone and murals in Valparaíso, playing pick-up fútbol (soccer) with kids at the schools we visited and listened to them on their playgrounds and in their classrooms. I danced in the living room with my nine-year-old host sister in Temuco, I joined my Santiago host family for afternoon Sunday *pisco sours*. The personal stories of this place for me was days of eating strawberries late afternoons on Claudia's porch, it was buying fresh squeezed *jugo de naranja* on my walk to class, it was my daily commute on the red metro line, It was taking in the view atop Cerro San Cristobal, it was watching as surfers dipped in and out orange and pink reflections on the waves from the sunset in Algarrobo. This place was our program director's peaceful smile and his stealthy photos as we walked by palm trees, and skyscrapers. This place is the Andes Mountains, the Chilean flag, "chilenismos" and exploring new sights all weekend long. I grew to love this place as I spent days in Chapod, hearing my host father softly singing to himself as I drifted off to sleep in the next room. Or when my friend's host brother and I singing karaoke on the couches in their living room. I fell in love with this country as we explored Valparaiso, this city's vibrant murals still bouncing with color at night, and stargazed in San Pedro de Atacama. Falling in love with the country of Chile, was my personal voyage of growing a relationship to place, rooted in as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, "...*the context of love*".

What makes us fall in love with a place? How do places change us? How do places have the power whisper a powerful sense of awe and make us feel as if we belong? What do we do when we are challenged by a place, struggling to feel a sense of

belonging? During my time in Chile, I fell in love with the Algarrobo Pacific winds whistling, the infectious joy of soccer fans singing, waving flags, chanting “¡Viva Chile! into city evenings teaming with business and crosswalks and cars in the glow of a purple dusk. My own love for Chile grew from watching a hazy morning mist as farm animals bend their necks, grazing on blades of freshly drenched grass. It is the quiet calm of strawberries fields in perfect rows while the sun beats down. snuggling up to a fireplace in a thirty-year-old Crazy Creek chair as rain and thunder shout in the wooded night outside. It is perching on a tall mountain summit gazing at the blend of colors of October maple trees seen from the summit of Mount Abe, Vermont or even just gazing below at the rolling hills and farmland from a little hill on farmland in Chapod, Chile.

CHAPTER 7: TO FALL IN LOVE WITH MOUNTAINS

Mountains are powerful settings in my life. Growing up in Vermont, I was born and raised surrounded by the Green Mountains to the east and the Adirondack Mountains to the west. The beautiful view of a mountain is a sight I will never tire of. Walking up mountains, I have felt that invigorating surge of a mountain summit on hikes with friends. Atop mountains in Vermont, I have looked my eyes across bundles of maple and pine trees, felt the texture of rock underneath my palms as use my hands to balance the final steps leading to the summit of Mount Abe. I have felt an awe of mountain places, as I soaked in the breathtaking vista of striking blue water and steady grays and whites of boulders after hiking to the base of the *las torres*, (“the towers”) in Torres del Paine, Patagonia. I feel a rushing sense of gratitude that I have been able to travel to places with gorgeous blue, green and brown and snow-capped mountains. My four months in Chile, I was surrounded by the Andes Mountains. Even in a bustling city with over 5.6 million people, exiting my metro terminal, I would be immediately be greeted with the sight of the Andes Mountains in the distance, visibly standing high above the skyscrapers from my metropolitan daily commute. I still remember the joy (which distracted me from my motion sickness) when I sight of Alps when I visited Austria when I was ten years old. I have cherished seeing mountains during numerous car trips I’ve taken through winding, bumpy mountain backroads of Vermont, driving over our state’s numerous mountain “gaps”. Returning to Vermont, one of my first sights was always the Green Mountains, and driving back to Connecticut, although there were no mountains, my new surroundings would be the ocean fog, and the Long Island sound.

One of my friends once asked: “*I don’t get it, why do people enjoy it (hiking) so much?*” I did not know how to put my personal experience of hiking into words at the time. So I will now. It can feel so energizing and simultaneously calming when reaching the peak of a mountain. There’s this sense of accomplishment that surges through you, this feeling, “Yes, I did this!” There’s also a sense of sweet relief of reaching the bottom of a mountain, or the very physical feeling of your body being ready to rest. I would argue, best of all, spending time with mountains often instills a humble awe of our natural world, which can teach us that not only is our Earth beautiful, but gives us life. The trees that line the mountain slopes give us

Walking up mountains, feet and ground linked, guiding me to climb up, up, and up. The following quote by Mary Pipher describes writing and therapy as “taking people to the mountain.” Pipher writes, “*Writing and therapy are both about creating the conditions that allow us to take people to the mountain. When people’s breathing changes and their eyes fill with wonder, they will walk down that mountain ready to perform miracles.*”⁷⁷ For me this personally relates back to writing about my fondest places, which is therapeutic writing for me, because of how much I care for my sentimental places on this planet. Even if all you want to do after climbing a mountain is collapse on your couch for the rest of the afternoon (believe me I get that) I’ve personally experienced that sense of a change of breath and focus and energy towards our interconnected forest surroundings. I am not sure about performing miracles, but I certainly agree that mountains can remind us that we can change our perspective, as we

⁷⁷ Mary Pipher. 2006. *Writing to Change the World*. p. 107.

walk at different altitudes. For many, walking up and down mountains symbolizes a place of reflection, of being alert to our surroundings, and reminding us we are living and dependent on the terrain around us. I certainly believe that mountains have taught me to be humble. The change in breathing reminds me to be grateful for the breaths we take, as the sights around me, glimpses of living plants, river streams, birds calling, rustle noises of small creatures darting through leaves, as I walk up dirt paths. All are reminders that life is happening, we as humans, are not the only ones living here and trying to survive.

Sherri Mitchell, in her book, *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*, brings up a key perspective which reveals one of the most important lessons we can learn is becoming our own teacher as well.

“In order to find our inner teacher, we have to stop running and start being comfortable with the silence within us...in this silence that we learn to hear the small, still voice that is often drowned out by all the noise and distractions in our life... the inner teacher communicates to us through subtlety; tiny flashes of inspiration, a nagging feeling that we can't shake, seeing repetitive symbols, and hearing random suggestions from others. Learning to listen to our inner teacher takes discipline and practice, but once we do, we realize that the guidance we have been seeking is all around us at all times. We just have forgotten how to receive it.”⁷⁸

Throughout my life, I have been learning and re-teaching myself to love place through guiding myself to reflect on how settings have shaped me and healed me by teaching me to respect and feel grateful towards my stories of place. I picture the secret paths in the Maine woods lined with August blueberry bushes that I have wandered through for as long as I can remember. My own love for place is collected as I watch the three pine trees, standing sturdy above rocky, sea-swept shores from our porch. My inner teacher of loving place has grown as I smell the annual lilac blossoms that linger in the

⁷⁸ Sherri Mitchell. 2018. *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit Based Change*, p.148.

air and white-painted playhouses with a weathered door knob in our backyard. My love for place was explored at seven years old, as I catapulted off a swings at seven years old as monarchs danced across the milkweed. My love for place comes back again as I sat on my best friend's back porch, last summer, tables covered in big salad bowls, pitchers filled with icy beverages. It has grown as we walk around barefoot all day, lawn games in the grass, knocking over wooden "Cuube" sticks at the peak of our lawn game. My love for place is full of indoor places too, dark night pouring through the windows as a keyboard balancing on a table, a classic guitar, music and voices floating up into the roof of a tiny house, just like the steam of water for *mate* that twirls and curls out of the spout of the ever-present teapot on the stove. It has grown as I am surrounded by countertops lined with dough for empanadas as wide-rimmed glasses clink and voices laugh and my host family playfully teases one another. It has grown as I sit in the passenger seat, all the car windows down, lungs full of fresh air, as we drive to get *creemees* in the middle of summer, as blue-green hues bounce off the lake and ripple through the trees as we cruise the curves of the road.

People within the places I have come to love, have taught me we depend on our Earth's wellbeing to live ourselves. My host mom is the one chatting and beaming about her *casita de la playa po'* and the empanadas she's cooking outside. My host dad is the one pinching and rolling the dough on the countertops and joking with his brother-in-law. One of my pals is the one carefully snapping a picturesque photo, capturing those rolling country hills and my peaceful glance towards the lens, as my young host sister sits in the grass beside me. My family are the ones spread out in chairs, shuffling cards as the rain

pours and the fireplace warms us. Close friends bustle to-and-fro from their chatty, boisterous, big kitchen with plates and food for the back porch table. My best friend is the one tossing the wooden Cuube sticks into the night, with rapt focus streaking across her face. My mom is the one who is dipping her feet into the turquoise pool at our condo, while I am a young preschooler with swimming “floaties” and sunscreen-smudged cheeks. My dad is the one huddled over a CryptoQuip puzzle with a pencil, the familiar plaid, and blue and red pillows strewn across the couch behind him. My host father is walking through the hazy morning fog his bright hat and red raincoat, a piercing contrast. He talks to his neighbors as they wander through their strawberry fields and wave hello.

I’m the one, smiling softly as I cross the hectic Santiago streets and see a packed bus full of the soccer fans, chanting, singing and waving flags. One of my college friends is the one standing atop Mount Abe with me. The “rush” of a good summit energizing us, as we happily pose for pictures and then stand silently, the late fall mountains and their colors around us, with chilly air and simultaneous sweat beads on our foreheads drying in the wind. These memories, and snaps in time to me are what it means to love a place, and the people of these places, our places. My cousins are the ones who scampered across the rocky Maine coast, underneath our tree pine trees, one in a bright yellow t-shirt, the other pale blue. Young kids with blond, curly hair and another with straight, blond hair spills into their eyes as they flash happy and mischievous grins. I was five years old, my uncle’s dog scurried around driftwood forts and watched over us, her calm demeanor and soft dog eyes chasing after the people she loved. I think looking out the window to see my younger cousin’s fire-red hair, as she bends down to pick up a shell? Seaglass? A

snail? from the pebbles scattered across the beach...and I see her brother's arms swinging as he jumps from one rock to the next, his distinct tall figure, easily spotted even from the kitchen window.

I truly believe love is a virtue we all hope to have in our lives, in some way, shape or form. If we say we don't need love, I (if I'm being totally honest) think we're kidding ourselves. One crucial piece pf why I feel so attached to Maine is because being there I am surrounded not only by a place of natural landscape beauty, but a place where I personally feel surrounded by the familial love of my family who are meaningful to me and I feel grounded by when I am there. In Santiago, I found that my host families became family figures to me too, as my effort in making their place become a home to me strengthened my courage to bond and cherish my time in Chile with them. Sherri Mitchell writes, "*Healthy humans live to create community and fear the loss of community. The chances of human survival improve when there are other supportive humans around...Community gives us a sense of safety.*"⁷⁹

In Middlebury, Vermont I feel the love of community, family, friends who became a part of who I consider myself to be. I have been able to love my hometown even more once I also grew to love other places, no longer holding one place dearly to my identity and sense of belonging, but several. There are days when being here feels bittersweet, I become restless some days in my hometown, since moving back here two years ago. But there is nothing wrong with that. I know that I am reaching a point where I am ready for another town to be my next home. However, Middlebury will always be the

⁷⁹ Sherri Mitchell. 2018. Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change. North Atlantic Books. p. 84.

place raised me, the place where my family unites, a place where I learned that we all need community. I feel so fortunate to have a hometown that I sincerely enjoy returning to and that makes me proud. In the book, *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanithi asserts that our relationships with people and our surroundings is additionally vital in maintaining our knowledge as humans. He writes: “*Human knowledge is never contained in one person. It grows from relationships we create between each other and the world, and still it is never complete.*”⁸⁰ I love this influential quote because not only does it show the potential our solid relationships with one another hold our own life knowledge, but Kalanithi also reiterates that we alone are never the only ones responsible for who we are and who we become. We have to give credit to the intersecting relationships, and environments within our everyday lives as well that give us life and growth.

Robert Frost is one of my favorite poets, especially since he spent so many of his teaching years at the Bread Loaf School of English in Ripton, Vermont, a place that holds meaning personally for me, because it is a short drive from my home. I also have spent years of my childhood summers there. I love how Frosts’ words are always deeply entrenched in his interpretation of place. I am reminded of his “Birches”, which I value as a stunning poem to me because it confronts us with a realistic metaphor of the obstacles and difficult times of life, but still praises the awe and love of our world. Frost writes, “*And life is too much like a pathless wood, where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs broken across it, and one eye is weeping from a twig’s having lashed across it open...Earth’s the right place for love; I don’t know where it’s likely to go better.*”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Paul Kalanithi. 2016. *When Breath Becomes Air*. p.g. 172.

⁸¹ Robert Frost. 1915. “Birches.”

We've all had our life burdens, struggles and challenges, or our "burns" and "twigs" have "lashed" us. But no matter what, *"Earth's the right place for love; I don't know where it's likely to go better."* (Frost, 1915). We are in a place that needs us to love it back, and our responsible sustainable actions must not only speak about, but act upon that love and respect for our Earth environment. Sherri Mitchell explains to her readers how an indigenous sense of place is a form of knowledge shares the perspective that there is kinship with the Earth. Sherri Mitchell writes,

*"I was taught to love the land around me, to understand the history it connected me to, and to take responsibility for its care into the future. When I stand out on that land today, I still feel that strong sense of kinship, as well as the obligation that I was given to protect it as a child."*⁸²

I feel grateful to have been able to learn about traditional ecological knowledge by reading and listening to the works of indigenous scholars, writers and advocates. This form of knowledge is a long-existing worldview that has been taught by indigenous peoples globally throughout generations throughout of history, and is held strongly today. Personally, places, just like my family, friends, teachers...they have been educators and life sources for me. I'll keep them with me for eternity, wherever I end up, even if I simply become a part of the soil at our feet.

⁸² Sherri Mitchell. 2018. Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change. North Atlantic Books. p. 160.

CHAPTER 8: TO FALL IN LOVE WITH A COLLEGE (SUCCESSES AND STRIFE)

There is something so immensely powerful about that feeling of belonging, that kind of fiery, exultant surge that catches us and sparks, ignites and catches a fire of vibrancy inside of us when we genuinely feel a strong sense of belonging. But of course, we also face challenge and adversity with the people and within the places that make up our everyday lives. Feeling and experiencing a lack of belonging is an immensely difficult, corroding and often painful experience, but I believe we all have the potential to be resilient creatures in the face of this type of adversity when we are lacking a sense of belonging. I believe part of that resilience is recognizing none of us are alone in our not belonging moments. We cannot let it take us down. We cannot let it silent us either. We can tell these stories of feeling a lack of belonging as much as we tell the stories of when we feel we do belong.

When I was eighteen I was incredibly eager to (finally) become a college student. I felt had been waiting for that day my whole life. I was ready to live, study and learn in a higher education academic environment where I could take the courses I wanted to take and be surrounded by an environment of teachers and students. Of course I was excited by the social aspect as well, making new friends and the freedom of independence felt like a thrilling milestone I was welcomed with at the age of eighteen.

College can be as endeavor that is as seriously exhausting endeavor as it can be fulfilling. Many college students experience feeling stuck in this “*going-through-the-motions*”⁸³ rut. As a college student, I had my fair share of experiences like this. There

⁸³ Nash and Jang. 2015. “Preparing Students for Life Beyond College: A Meaning Centered Vision on Holistic Teaching and Learning”. New York, NY. *Routledge Press*.

were courses that I wish I hadn't taken, classes I'm disappointed I never took. I had days where I felt so bogged down by work I felt couldn't function, and campus services I wish I reached out to and utilized to my benefit more than I did. I had times where I struggled with motivation and time management. I had times where I felt alone. I had times where my self-esteem plummeted. However, mistakes are part of growing. My messes have been my teachers as well. I feel such gratitude towards the college that was one of the most positive, meaning-making experiences of my life. Of course, every place is imperfect. I feel proud that my college community I experienced as an engaging, conscious communities are ones who learn to acknowledge they have their own flaws, and room to grow. My alma mater was a place need for growth and healing exists everywhere, even in our most beloved places.

Even though I am now an alumna, I still feel an invigorating sense of belonging with my small liberal arts college by the sea. Connecticut College feels like an everlasting community within my own life of places and people. I genuinely feel so humbled and fortunate to have attended a college I always know will greet me with warmth and wonder. I have no doubt I will feel that tide of belonging wash over me each time I return to visit this collegiate place that has become a piece of who I am.

Brené Brown writes: "*Scarcity thrives in a culture where everyone is hyperaware of lack...*"⁸⁴ By scarcity Brené Brown explains that she means the "never-enough

⁸⁴ Brené Brown. 2012. "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, 3 Love, Parent and Lead." Avery, Penguin Random House. p.g. 26.

problem”⁸⁵ in American culture. The following story, reveals one moment in my life where I struggled with the “never enough problem” Brené Brown examines.

In the midst of the anticipation of college acceptance and rejection letters, I was waiting for one last college to make their decision. That day I had been attending a track and field meet and got an unknown phone call from Connecticut. I did not recognize the number on the line and I let it go to voicemail. When I returned home, I checked my voicemail and was shocked to discover it was a phone call from an Admissions counselor congratulating me: I had been accepted! I was genuinely surprised, but overjoyed the months of applications, essay writing, and supplemental essay writing had paid off. However, I experienced some unspoken, but visible doubt from two of my classmates. *Why were they doubting me? Why did they think less of me in this way?* I started to question my personality and thought it was to blame. *Am I too head-in-the-clouds? Am I not intelligent enough?* These inner criticisms burned and stung inside my mind, it hurt to be aware of this silent but very real aura of doubtfulness from peers I looked up to.

All of a sudden I found myself overly criticizing myself and overanalyzing my interactions with classmates. That negative voice in my head said... *You're not smart enough, they must not take you seriously.* I had chosen to be very private about my grades, test scores, and colleges I was applying to on purpose, because I was very aware of what a competitive culture applying to colleges often can be. It did not help that an individual who discussed my college future with me expressed that they thought I was wasting my time applying to a high number of “reach” schools.

⁸⁵ Brown, 2012. p.24.

I knew I deserved to challenge myself in college. But self-confidence, as I'm sure we've all experienced, will take its toll on you when the comparison and perfection game comes crawling into your present reality. This personally hurtful moment for me especially stung when this person actually bluntly compared me unfavorably to one of my closest friends who was one of the most honored students and three-season athletes at our school. Looking back now, I realize that in addition to this, my inner battle with perfectionism was gnawing away at me. At eighteen years old, I thought I could never show weakness, that if I made a mistake, I would fall and never be able to get back up.

*"Perfectionism is a mean, frozen form of idealism, while messes are the artist's true friend. What people somehow (inadvertently I'm sure) forgot to mention when we were children was that we need to make messes in order to find out who we are and why we are here---and, by extension, what we're supposed to be writing."*⁸⁶

After this difficult experience during high school, I feel grateful towards a guidance counselor I met with who fortunately he believed I was a clever, capable student and never once criticized me for including many selective schools within my diverse list of potential college applications. So when I got the particularly good news that I was accepted into a college I deeply admired, I was joyfully surprised, humbled, and proud. But those negative opinions of my intelligence definitely have come back to bother me for a long time. Fortunately at that time, I had many people who were proud of me and believed in me. These positive supporters outweighed those few negative voices. My future college believed in me and it felt wonderful to have this developing sense of belonging towards a future college academic environment on my horizon.

⁸⁶ Anne Lamott. 1994. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Anchor Books, Random House Inc. p.74

Perfectionism and self-criticism had an awful habit of sneaking back during periods of my college years. In college, when you are often far from other social networks, such as family, college friends often become at the core of your social interaction. It can be very isolating when you have grown apart from certain friend groups, and sometimes difficult to bravely meet new people. Although I had wonderful friends, during that time I missed feeling like I was a part of a college friendship group. At the time, I thought everyone around me had that, as I witnessed their pictures on social media, and watched their close friendships from afar, wishing I had that.

My motivation suffered as a result. I began to constantly feel behind on my work, and was constantly scrambling to get it done and never felt I completed it very thoroughly. I felt I was a far cry from doing my best academic work. Self-criticism haunted my fingers as I typed my papers, and took exams. It shook my shoulders as I wrote my drafts, and over-edited but ironically felt my papers were making less sense. I felt embarrassed and was afraid to ask for extensions, all the while telling myself I was a failure for needing more time. I now understand that extensions in life are not a weakness, but we also have to give ourselves the time (and the self-confidence) to believe in ourselves. Otherwise we will never get where we need to go if we keep shoving our own foot in the door on the way there.

*“To narrate is to survive.”*⁸⁷ Personally, writing and stories are my survival. Telling my personal stories means realizing that there will not be a magical day where everything falls into place in my life. Hardship will always return, but so will happiness

⁸⁷ Nash and Jang, 2013.

and good times. It means standing up for my opinions and not letting critics (myself included) step in the way of my dreams. Most of all, it means spending my time on this planet with the people and within the places that ignite my own sense of truly feeling alive, in whatever way I can. If asked if I could complete college all over again, would I make different decisions? Would I have taken on different paths or be involved in additional opportunities? I believe of course there are always pieces I see now that I could have done differently. But that's a part of meaningful place-based wisdom to me. But would I want to do it all over again? No. We learn from our greatest challenges, of days of feeling lost and having no idea where we are going. Being humbled by the places and people who have entered my life, personally has reminded me that I have an eternal gratitude towards my college home, which beautifully and imperfectly became even an even more meaningful place than I imagine at eighteen years old, mess-ups and all.

In my college years, when personal stories were shared by classmates, my professors, community members, as relevant ties to our coursework, it lined the learnings of my undergraduate years became glued to my memory. Their courageous voices in person and the personal voices that appeared in many academic readings taught me that our personal lived experiences do not need to be hidden in classrooms, but must become a piece of them as a tool in which we communicate and stand with one another.

CHAPTER 9: MY GREATEST STORYTELLING EDUCATORS

“...my later teachers invited us into their lives. They shared who they were as human beings---a creative artist, a mother of a young son, a world traveler etc. They made connections with me inquiring about my interests, calling on me, praising, encouraging and supporting me. ...”⁸⁸ (Madelyn A. Nash, qtd. in Nash and Viray)

To My Greatest Storytelling Educators,

I haven't forgotten you all.

This is dedicated to all of you: my most effective, gutsy, passionate, thought-provoking educators. Thank you, eternally.

I will never forget my first class with one of my favorite professors, in an introductory Anthropology course. It was a lecture class, which in my close-knit college meant forty students (which to me, a humanities person felt like a lot). But it being a lecture-based course didn't stop him from showing us he was a human, and being in a class with him just makes you feel like he genuinely wanted to hear what we had to say, wanted us to learn, wanted us to feel we belonged in this space and place together.

Now, I definitely had wonderful college course experiences with professors before that class—a lot actually, but since this was a lecture class, and not my usual seminar courses, I was in awe how rows of chairs in neat lines facing the projector didn't stop him from creating this welcoming and simultaneously and wonderfully rigorous academic atmosphere. He always walks around the perimeter of our classroom throughout his each week's lectures, standing in the midst of our rows of chairs, moving the back of the classroom, returning to his podium and then back to sitting right beside

⁸⁸ Robert J. Nash and Sydnee Viray. 2013. *How Stories Heal: Writing Our Way to Meaning and Wholeness in the Academy*. Peter Lang. p.165-166.

us. Yes, the first few times it is kind of nerve-wracking to have your professor sit right next to when you're potentially about to speak and share your thoughts, but soon I let that go and realized how rewarding it felt to be treated as an equal in class, and to truly believe my professor was fighting against that student and professor divide we often can feel. It's the same feeling I've gotten while sitting in seminar style classrooms with my undergraduate and graduate professors that choose to sit with us, or weave their way through our chairs while we chat with our peers. This has nudged me to create the following piece of advice to myself: Good teachers move around their classroom, but great teachers sit and stand amongst their students, encircle themselves physically with their students. The physical sense of equality that one small choice of sitting arrangement brings within a classroom, may be small choice, but can have a huge impact on the academic environment we walk into.

The following year, during office hours my Anthropology professor encouraged me to take an upper level anthropology course for students who had returned from studying abroad (or were preparing to study abroad). It became one of my most cherished college courses. In the words of Robert J. Nash: *"I often say to my students who want to be teachers, evoke the stories of your students and you've reached them in a way you will never forget. Even more, tell them your own stories, and you have made friends for life."*⁸⁹ In that undergraduate anthropology class, we unearthed the stories of our deepest obstacles while studying in countries other than our own. My professor let us into his stories of teaching and learning abroad as well. He spoke his own stories of his mishaps

⁸⁹ Robert J. Nash and Sydnee Viray. 2013. How Stories Heal: Writing Our Way to Meaning and Wholeness in the Academy. Peter Lang. p.34

with cultural faux-paus while teaching in Vietnam, of his embarrassments, his triumphs and his mistakes. This class became a small academic haven for me that semester, a place where our personal milestones of studying and living abroad were not put on a hidden shelf to be put to the side after our plane landed. Instead that class became a blackboard and our storytelling in these places became our chalk that wrote the words of our questioning, challenging our own previous notions, and listening to our messes that allowed us to step out of our comfort zone and bubble of our prior life on our shared college campus.

Our stories of time studying and living abroad became an outlet for us to reflect on the great moments and the difficult ones. I listened to one classmate speak about surviving through a serious earthquake. Another about how she struggled to finish her final project because she had witnessed how much housework her host mother had to do, and made the decision that it was important to her to commit to helping with that work during her time there too.

My next note of gratitude towards my storytelling educators goes out to my middle school teachers. One figure is my middle school science teacher who was not afraid to tell his students that he expected a lot out of them. However, it has always been very clear to me that his tough love style of teaching was always rooted at the care he showed he had for his students. He never hesitated to tell when we needed to work harder when we hadn't been doing as well as we could. Ten years later, I still remember him explaining how this would help us as we headed on to high school and beyond. He always was pushing us to get the best out of us, and that's what the greatest teachers too.

He also was a teacher who invited us into his life and genuinely wanted to know about ours. Since I am currently living in Middlebury again, recently I ran into him at my local food co-op and was pleasantly surprised to see him again.

While chatting with him in the local co-op grocery store line, he reminded me of this baseball bat my class had given him. In the last decade I had forgotten about that class gift-but the instant he said it, it came flooding back to me. He is an avid Red Sox fan, and that awesome part of his personal life he gladly and warmly shared with us. We knew that he loves baseball, loves the Red Sox because he, as Madelyn A. Nash explains, some of the most influential educators “...invited us into their lives...shared who they were as human beings.”⁹⁰ (qtd. in Nash and Viray) Without a doubt, my middle school science teacher did that. My other middle school team of teachers often shared their stories with us as well. Thus, I grew a deep respect for not only their educational areas of expertise, and the love and curiosity they revealed of these subjects, as well as the love and curiosity they showed they had for their lives outside the school walls, as well as for their care for our wellbeing.

My middle school English teacher was another great example of this. Her seventh and eighth grade English classes I endlessly looked forward too. English was my favorite subject, and every fall, after purchasing my fresh new binders for class, I would always choose the best color for her class. I had (and still have) a deep admiration for her up-beat teaching style, her creativity, her lively and joyful attitude. I also trusted her, and looked up to her as a teacher who also felt like one-of-a-kind-friend.

⁹⁰ Nash and Viray. (2014). *How Stories Heal*. p.g. 165-166.

My middle school teachers made me believe that my own self mattered, and that they believed their young students were capable of wonderful accomplishments in our lives. Even though we were only thirteen year olds, she always made us feel that we were mature, that we were capable of taking on the academic challenges she gave us and therefore we were respected in her eyes. That means a lot when you're thirteen. Once in a while during high school, a couple of my closest friends and I would stop by our old middle school stomping grounds to visit with her, and she'd sincerely be interested in all aspects of our young lives that we wanted to share with her, what our classmates were up to, what our future dreams were.

My middle school teachers, in addition to their taught subjects, showed me that they too, had families, milestones, and obstacles to overcome. A spouse that teachers at another local school. A healthy infatuation with a beloved sports team, a math teacher with hankering for pizza in the middle of the school day. A social studies teacher who loved the movie, *The Princess Bride*, as much as we did. My seventh grade math teacher who bumped me up to the more advanced math section because he saw that I could handle the challenge, and believed in me. Math may still not be my favorite subject, but that year I actually enjoyed it, because I had an educator who understood I deserved to push myself for the better. He taught us that teachers are humans too, when he joked with us, and remembered all the funny middle school stories we told him in homeroom.

My middle school teachers made me laugh, taught me patience, and responsibility. They taught by gearing our learnings towards us. It was never about just checking off the state standards, or rushing to cover material with them. It was about

guiding us to reflect and work on getting something out of all these concepts, and vocabulary and quizzes and lab reports and projects. I may not remember every project or assignment we ever did, but they were certainly a lot that still are etched on my brain. I'll never forget the classroom experiment my science teacher taught about the process of vaporization and flammable liquids when we combined ethanol with a lit match in a five gallon water jug. Or the English assignment where we drew an accordion style pamphlet showing how we understood literary elements such as setting, character, and plot within books we had recently read. I've got to say, believing in your students is t one of the most wonderful, resonating memories a teacher can give to their students.

Last year, during a graduate level language teaching methodology course, my professor assigned us to write a short autobiographical paper reflecting on our own language learning and the teachers we had while learning world languages. His assignment spurred a rethinking of my experiences learning a language other than my own for the first time (French) and second time (Spanish), and this left me with this sense of gratitude for the language teachings that worked, and the knowledge that still has stuck with me today. His assignment re-taught me that learning languages is messy, takes commitment and the importance of variety in teaching styles in order to get that material to “stick” with every classroom’s diversity of learners.

While writing that assignment, I remembered that high school French teacher of mine had this spunky, quirky classroom attitude and her songs and French phrases that remain glued in my memory. There was a children’s song she had us listen to and sing about a story of a French shepherd that still frequently pops into my head. She taught a

song of prepositions to the tune of Frère Jacques we would have to sing when we got stuck. I valued the repetition she incorporated into each of our distinct lessons. She intertwined catchy phrases and reused them in our new lessons (even years later) and they are still stuck in my brain. Today I still have a vivid image of her, energetically talking with her hands as she spun these phrases into conversations, and catchy storylines diligently never letting us forget them.

My first college Spanish professor taught me that if we want to communicate in Spanish, we must dedicate the time to speaking a language out loud. She had us eat at a Spanish language table in our campus language dining hall where you only speak the foreign language you are practicing. At first it was intimidating to eat at a lunch table with professors, many of who were native speakers and their words spun off their tongues, while I was still learning to form sentences. However, I eventually warmed up to the idea and made it a habit to go. Personally, this pushed me to step out of my comfort zone in a beneficial way: speaking about my own daily conversations with peers or professors, and learning to speak in a real-life way, to begin to follow and understand stories in Spanish. My Spanish professor pushed us to make Spanish language learning a piece of our personal lives: to read newspaper articles in Spanish, to listen to Latinx music, talk to members of the college community in Spanish. She helped us took us out to local Salvadorian and Dominican restaurants to practice ordering food, and just taking that courageous step to vulnerably speak, to begin to craft our own voice in another language, and to welcome mistakes as a crucial piece of our language learning. She taught me that we should not be afraid to make our own everyday lives a part of our

practice of a language besides our own, as I slowly-but-surely began to include sentences and questions about academic and college social life into the lunch table conversations with my bilingual peers and professors.

My most effective teachers have been those who have made their own stories pieces of their classroom teachings. They have been the educators who have brought in stories for us to listen to from their own lives, as well as stories (not their own) but in the own words of those brave enough to put their own voice into story form. My greatest educators have been the ones who taught (and acted with) humility, with empathy, equality. They have been the ones who showed me we are all humans. We have lives, and struggles, and triumphs within the walls of our school but also in our homes and our worlds outside of it. They have been the ones who were not afraid to show that they themselves are people too. That educators can teach rigorous courses that require hard work, focus and dedication but still be willing to let their personality and room for their own growth to shine through. I've felt incredibly lucky to have had some truly phenomenal educators.

Dear Greatest Educators...including the additional beloved teachers and professors who I have not included on these pages, there are plenty of you left to one day write about. It might take me an entire book to get to reflecting on my lessons from all of you. I hope one day I get to talk about how you have impacted my education.

Thank you.

CHAPTER 10: CRAFTING STORYTELLING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

*"...stories inspire a dynamic part of people's identities and make places special. Peoples relationships with the land and the land's relationships with people can be viewed as "healthy" if stories bring places alive in people's minds."*⁹¹

So here we are. What are some concrete steps educators could take in order to weave storytelling of place as an education tool for earth survival into their teachings? Every educator has their own unique topics to cover, requirements, preferred forms of teaching methods and new ideas. Regardless of discipline, or level, I believe stories deserve a place in our lessons to connect students with their own lives, and the issues we face today in our global community. As educators, (or hopeful future educators in my case), I believe tackling the following questions ourselves, and with our students can be our first step. The following questions I have created as one guide, and I encourage you to add, edit or brainstorm your own questions, curriculum and resources. Please reflect on the following prompts:

- 1. How can educators and students use and build personal stories of place into our academic settings as a tool to teach and learn about environmental justice?**
- 2. How can we dedicate concrete action as a part of storytelling of place in academic settings?**
- 3. How can we hold ourselves and our students responsible to be compassionate story-listeners as much as story-sharers throughout these learnings?**

⁹¹ Chie Sakakibara. 2008. " 'Our Home is Drowning': Iñupiat Storytelling and Climate Change in Point Hope, Alaska." *Geographical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4. October 2008. *American Geographical Society*. p. 463.

10.1 Sharing Our Personal, Place-based Stories in the Digital Age

Digital media has been and continues to be a very prominent form of communicating stories with a wider audience, in recent history has been through digital sources.

Indigenous digital media has been a particularly resourceful form of communicating indigenous movements and stories of climate and human rights justice in a way that becomes more accessible to a wider community, to share their own voices, with self-determination. Digital story sharing of survival in terms of the Gwich'in Steering Committee and L'eau Est La Vie camp has been at the forefront of their missions for people beyond their own communities to hear how the Dakota Access Pipeline and the oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge threatens their health, their cultural survival, their way of life, and environmental wellbeing. If the indigenous groups and allies at Standing Rock and L'eau Est la Vie had not used their bodies to not only stand in the way of the pipeline, but as a way to tell their story, would they have gained the same amount of awareness

Some examples of digital source include: podcasts, social media, radio shows and internet videos. These sources have been a crucial components of making these movements public. The Gwich'in Steering Committee, The Gwich'in, along with their travel tours across the United States to tell members of Congress, banks and citizens their need to protect the coastal plain, have spoken to radio programs. As educators, how could you use digital sources as an additional with storytelling of place for earth justice in your classrooms? For example, one suggestion could be an effort made on part by educators

and students could look into screenings of stories related to protecting place as a class event or field trip.

As I mentioned earlier, we can discover stories are widely found and recurring in educational environments and practices if we begin to look. At the end of the day, it truly is up to us how we decide to share our personal stories as a part of our education, as well as our personal connections to stories besides our own. I believe we need to make plenty of room for more personal stories to work their way into our lessons and teachings, regardless of academic discipline. Personal storytelling, the act of truly digging up real insights and reflections of our lived experiences is a particular type of storytelling holds a unique kind of power in self and societal change. In my own life, I have witnessed a hesitation to put “the personal” into our stories. On the other hand, I have also been in classroom environments where personal storytelling is warmly welcomed. Regardless, I believe all will benefit from more dedication personal storytelling in our educational places, especially in terms of the wellbeing of our planet and those who live upon it.

Honestly, it is not an easy task to put our personal stories in the spotlight. As an incredibly private person, but simultaneously an energetic sharer of stories, I often am at a crossroads of both craving to share my personal stories, and also not wanting to share them. (Let me emphasize here that I believe no one should try to force anyone to ever share a story you do not want to share. It is your right to which of your stories you choose to share.) However, when you do choose to look for the personal connections between the stories you hear and the choices you make, you heal in a way that gives you a greater strength to become involved.

I am reminded of Bernadette Demientieff's words in the short film, *The Refuge*. She shares why she feels it is her responsibility to advocate for the intertwined wellbeing and survival of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich'in people. Bernadette, with honesty, tells her personal story that in her past she has not been the role model she wanted to be for her children and grandchildren. She talks about how she has chosen to dedicate herself wholeheartedly to protecting The Sacred Place Where Life Begins, because for her personally she wants to be able to say that she stood up and did something, and did not sit idly by. Bernadette Demientieff teaches us we can gain hope and act for change when each of us bravely shares our personal stories in connection speaking, writing and reflecting through these lived experiences and listening to the lived experiences besides our own.

"After all, most of what we know is not a result of explicit pedagogy or teaching; it is learned through living. Many human beings seem so caught up in their machines and technology that they have forgotten or lost the very real sense of what it means to live: to make choices that enrich as opposed to making existence more comfortable."

As Sheila Watt-Cloutier reminds us in the above quote, we need to keep our lives full with enrichment as opposed to only taking the easy route, or only focusing on comfort, and I would add, often is convenient. Change is never comfortable nor convenient. Too often, we let ourselves hide and run behind these screens that are dominating so many lives. Yes, there are certainly some benefits to having a worldwide web at our fingertips. I'll admit I am grateful to share photos, to be able to talk to relatives and friends that are in different states, countries and continents with the type of a few buttons. It is great to be able to read a book online when your library might not have it, or can quickly read related articles. However, digital sources should be an *addition*,

not a *replacement* to how we receive stories. We cannot lose the humanity of face-to-face connection and communication, of making the effort to meet in person, of learning to let our feet take us to play and enjoy time outdoors, to hear the bustle and hum of voices in coffee shops, to hear a speaker have the courage to listen to a speaker express their passions to an attentive room, to learn how to form relationships with one another as we learn through trial-and-error experience how to interact with one another in the real, not digital, world.

As discussed in Chapter 1, storytelling through digital sources has a great potential for sharing stories with a wide audience beyond local communities and can stretch across geographical distances. However, I strongly emphasize that here I see the role of digital storytelling in sharing relationship to place as an additional, not as an isolated tool at our disposal to share these stories with a larger audience who otherwise may not hear these stories. Digital stories should not be used as a crutch that replaces the act of sharing personal stories related relationships of places actually in person. We have to work to keep the essential form of in person communication through story not only alive, but alive, moving and well-fed. In this technology-focused era of time, one of our real challenges is to not lose our sense of self, and emotion to a screen or machine. In order to hold onto our ability to communicate with one another face-to-face instead of giving into the toxic convenience of only living behind screens and internet searches is imperative if we are going to keep our Community of Life healthy. It would be counterproductive, because we do not want to push ourselves further into the convenient abyss of avoidance technology can often propel us into. If we want our stories of our

relationships to place to motivate for the bettering of the wellbeing of our environment, we need to get our bodies out of our houses and hiding, we have to tell our stories to shift culture, to change laws and policies, to change behavior. In the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson,

*“If you want to learn something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it...If you want to learn about movement building, get yourself outside involved with people that are building movements. That doesn’t mean don’t read books or don’t talk to people with all kinds of intelligences. It doesn’t mean don’t find mentors. It does mean get out, get involved, and get invested.”*⁹²

For example, if the Gwich’in Steering Committee had not traveled, if they had not brought their bodies’ long distances along with their voices to speak with members of Congress, banks supporting oil projects, and to share their story with American citizens, as they have done and continue to do, that would be letting their future slip by. If they had not gathered together as their council of elders an intergenerational community and decided they must speak and act against the oil proposals that began back in 1988, as they did, then The Gwich’in Steering Committee, is one pivotal example, among a history of diverse movements that shows change requires in-person action. In this case, as their bodies have traveled to tell their personal stories as caribou people, their lived experiences of their relationships with ecological wellbeing for concrete change, they are taking their *“bod(ies) onto the land...and get(ing) invested.”*⁹³ As Bernadette Demientieff expresses in *The Refuge*, she is involved in this movement because it her only choice for the survival of her people, in order for her grandchildren to have a better

⁹² Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. p.165. 2017.

⁹³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. 2017.

future, for generations to come to have their right to a better future.⁹⁴ If the Water Protectors of L'Eau Est La Vie had not used their bodies in protest in the proposed drilling sites, drilling would have kept going. As it stands today⁹⁵, construction has stopped for the proposed oil pipeline for Bayou Bridge. But the movement is still a story in process, and their action is not ceasing anytime soon.

10.2 Performance and Art as Story Action

Art and performance have been pieces of sharing the stories within the Gwich'in and L'eau est La Vie movements as well. On the radio program *Native America Calling*, one distinct form of storytelling that occurred at the L'Eau Est la Vie camp was the crawfish musical performed by the Water Protectors at L'eau Est La Vie during one of the protests as a symbolic representation of sharing the voice of the crawfish to protect the water that makes their home in the Louisiana swamps. Hearing about this storytelling action through means of a play or musical was a particularly thought-provoking way to use story in order to teach that construction of the Bayou Bridge pipeline would harm this ecosystem, as leaked oil would contaminate the waters that is home to the crawfish, among many other organisms, threatening the survival of the crawfish. Keeping this example of the crawfish musical performed by L'eau Est La Vie camp in mind, how can educators and students stories use performance or other art forms as a tool to share personal stories of place as a teaching method for earth justice?

⁹⁴ *The Refuge*. 2017.

⁹⁵ Note: this is in reference to the following date: April 7, 2019.

10.3 Lesson Plan: A Day's Pedagogy for Storytelling for Earth Survival

How can educators and students use and build personal stories of place into the curriculum and into academic settings as a tool to teach and learn about environmental justice?

Dear Educators, the following is a step-by-step preliminary guide, an educational “recipe” of one lesson plan⁹⁶ that aims for tackling weaving personal stories of relationship place for the benevolence to the earth. As you are all have your own unique ideas, creative intellects, requirements to follow, my intention is that this is plan is meant to inspire ideas for your own crafting of lesson plans and curriculum that work best for and with you and your students. The headings throughout this guide serve as a general reference to the kind of activity is highlighted in this particular lesson plan. If components of this specific lesson plan are utilized, educators may alter the assignments, questions and activities to fit best for their particular class environments, levels, class period as they see fit.

STEP 1. Class Brainstorm: One option to begin introducing and welcoming personal place-based stories into your classrooms could be with an opening activity which reminds and invites students to talk about the setting you are all inhabit together right now. *What is the background context of the place(s) of where you are and where your learning is occurring?* You could ask that students to form small groups to brainstorm some descriptions and context of this place, or open this activity up as a whole classroom discussion. It may be helpful to write their responses on the board, or have

⁹⁶ The following lesson plan is intended for the duration of a course of approximately 75 minutes.

students walk up to write their responses on a blackboard or white board in the classroom.⁹⁷ The following are some prompts if you would like to use them. **For example, is the location within a higher education setting? Community space? Is this place rural, suburban or urban? What are some descriptions of the landscape? For example are there bodies of water nearby? What is the altitude? What do students know about weather patterns and climate in the region?**

STEP 2. New Knowledge for the Day: As an educator, what information and resources can you find to add to this previous brainstorm activity in terms of contextual knowledge and history of the climate, history and culture of your region? Educators, prior to class, one option could be creating a presentation for this lesson outlining and providing background research on the following question: *How have these local places been impacted by climate change, and how will they be impacted by climate change?* For example, this could be dedicating the presentation to recent or key historical events related to the history and impact of climate change on health and culture in this region.

In other words, one example could be if the educator(s) could teach a lesson on some of the damaging storms and floods in the recent history of Vermont. (For example, Hurricane Irene in 2011 and Hurricane Sandy in 2012). Educators could bring or reference news articles and stories related to severe storms that have happened up in our state's recent history. **Be sure to include references to personal stories and reactions from the community throughout this presentation, in addition to facts, figures and any visuals.**⁹⁸ Set aside up time for students to ask questions.

⁹⁷ For the purpose of this particular class time, this activity should last between about five to ten minutes.

⁹⁸ For the purpose of this particular class time, this activity should last between twenty to thirty minutes.

STEP 3: Day's Quick Review: As a class, ask students to compile a list answering the prompt: *What have you learned from this presentation? How has the wellbeing of these (local) places be threatened by climate change, how will they be impacted by climate change in the future?*⁹⁹

STEP 4: Video Viewing: Pick a current story that has captured your attention as a model of personal storytelling of relationship to place advocating for earth justice. My personal choice would be to share with students the short film, *The Refuge*, by the Gwich'in Steering Committee and Patagonia Inc. (If there is not enough time to watch all of the film in class, students could be asked to finish the last few minutes as an addition to their homework assignment.)¹⁰⁰

Optional Step: Educators, if you find extra class time still remains, one option could be to use this time as a reflection for students' thoughts of how they felt this particular class went for them. Educators could ask students to write lingering questions, concerns, or even a new insight they gained from this class down on an index card (or scrap piece of paper) and hand this in to you at the end of today's class. Listed below are a few question ideas, students could select one or two to answer during this time.

- *How did today's class go?*
- *What has been rewarding for you?*
- *What do you want to do differently in the future, and how do you think we could improve as a class community? As your professor, how can I help?*
- *What are some insights that you have learned today/this week/up until this point so far? Why are you personally here?*

⁹⁹ For the purpose of this particular class time, this activity should last from five to ten minutes.

¹⁰⁰ For the purpose of this particular class time, this activity should last approximately twenty minutes.

FINAL STEP: Assign Homework The final part of this class will take place during the final three to five minutes of class. Explain the following plan for a homework assignment as a follow-up from today's class. The following class could be structured as a discussion and reflection based on student experience of writing this assignment and time allotment for a seminar sharing of their stories written as their assignment.

Homework Assignment: Question Prompts for Reflection:

Please write a journal entry on the following prompts. The word count for journal entries should be at least five-hundred words.

- *Do you have stories of meaningful places in your life? If so, what are they and why are they important to you?*
- *Are there examples of stories of relationship to place(s) you have listened to that have been powerful influences for you? If so, why?*

Agenda for Next Class: When students return for the next course meeting, educators could present students with an opportunity to share their journal entries about their personal stories of relationship to place. Students can choose to share insights they gained from writing about their own life stories and lived experience about place-based stories. For deeper reflection, students can use this opportunity to read aloud pieces (or all) of their journal entry stories. The remainder of the class could be dedicated to a discussion that encourages students to connect their own stories back to the returning to the first prompt from the previous class: *How will the wellbeing of these places be threatened by climate change, or how will they be impacted by climate change in the future?*

If students would benefit from additional research, time could be scheduled for using library resources or computers providing students a tool to research other examples of personal stories of relationship to place in connection with the wellbeing of the planet. I believe it is important to note, that ideally the class would continue to frequently and thoroughly return to reflecting and learning about this beyond this one day's lesson plan. However, although this lesson plan is constructed as an initial dive into the power of storytelling, and my hope is educators continue to expand and keep this storytelling practice a regular and ongoing piece of their curriculum.

2. How can we dedicate concrete action as a part of storytelling of place in academic settings?

Participating in opportunities that would allow academic communities to become involved with concrete action and support for organizations that advocate for aiding the interconnected cultural and environmental wellbeing of this planet. Is there opportunities for students and educators to share the personal, place-based stories they have lived and listened to with their communities beyond the classroom? Using the Gwich'in Steering Committee as an example, students and educators could schedule a community showing of *The Refuge* with the hopes of expanding knowledge of the necessity of protecting "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins". In March 2019, a new short film supporting the Gwich'in was released, titled: *Welcome to Gwichyaa Zhee*. This source has been shared through digital sources who stand in support of the survival of the caribou and the caribou people, and through a request link, supporters can organize viewing events of this film in their own communities. Through websites and social media pages, the Gwich'in

Steering Committee and their allies have created tools for allies to engage with this movement, including the option to create a statement that rejects oil drilling proposals in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that when submitted, is collected and sent to members of Congress.

I personally have chosen to follow the Gwich'in Steering Committee and L'eau est La Vie movements on social media outlets. This small choice in itself has pushed me to connect to updates happening within this movement regularly read news and updates of these actions a regular visual in my day-to-day life as posts appear on my personal Instagram and Facebook feeds. At times, I honestly have given into that sense of helplessness of how I can serve as an ally to these movements. I will admit, at times I have thought about how far away geographically I am from the lived reality of the Gwich'in and the L'eau Est la Vie floating camp in Louisiana. There have been times when I have questioned if I truly can get involved. However, my hope is to remember that wallowing in feeling helpless, does not help growth or push for change. I have felt challenged my own circumstances, such as commitments I have currently in Vermont, I know at this present time, I physically will not be traveling to the birthplace and heart of this action. However, as the Gwich'in Steering Committee has taught me through their dedicated travelling to share their story and gain support, although movements certainly may be local, they can extend across geographical space, through storytelling. Regardless of physical distance, or cultural distinctions, we can build empathy through story with one another. *"Story is bigger and wilder and more faceted than anyone could have imagined. It's disruptive and raucous and outrageous us, enlightens us, and guides us."*

(James Baldwin, *qtd. in Nash and Viray, 2012*). We can make changes in our day-to-day lives that heal ourselves and support one another.

I personally want to hold myself accountable for taking on concrete action, beyond writing and discussion. As it is my own responsibility to follow Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's call to "...*get out, get involved, and get invested.*"¹⁰¹ After my graduate commencement in May, I am considering looking into work with non-profit organizations that are aiding indigenous-led human rights linked with environmental justice groups in the United States, and continue to research the already existing opportunities that groups such as Gwich'in Steering Committee and L'eau Est La Vie list as suggestions to become involved allies across their websites and social media platforms. Regardless of whether or not being an ally becomes my day-to-day job or not, I believe it has to be a regular commitment I would like to dedicate time to supporting in any way I can.

3. How can we hold ourselves and our students responsible to be compassionate story-listeners as much as story-sharers throughout these learnings?

In order to welcome personal story sharing into academic spaces, it may be vital to bring up and create a few helpful guidelines or class expectations with students to create an inviting, positive and supportive atmosphere that assists students to speak their stories. In my own graduate studies, this has been a recurring practice used by my professors within my Interdisciplinary Studies graduate courses at the University of Vermont. It may be beneficial to involve students in the process of constructing a

¹⁰¹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *As We Always Have Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. 2017. p. 165.

guideline. Setting aside time to talk about creating a welcoming atmosphere for personal story sharing, may help students feel that themselves and their classmates are walking into the expectation that they will be supportive story-listeners to their classroom peers, regardless of their diversity of opinions and experiences.

CONCLUSION

There is no story without a setting. During my early elementary school literacy and language classes I was wisely taught by my teachers that no story is without setting. My inner bookworm and wannabe writer was discovering she was mesmerized by an early love of words, and characters with plots and actions all taking place in a setting. That setting could be sentimental, shifting, wonderful, eerie, restless, or breathtaking. It could be a forest, or the seaside, it could be an old garage, a bustling ski lodge, a warm kitchen or the stone fireplace my Dad built. They can be real places or imagined places or a combination of both. But never forget to describe the setting of your stories, whether it's on the page, in real life, and both. Thanks to the great teachers that taught me this wise advice, it's led to eternally be mesmerized by place and belonging, and lack of belonging and how that becomes a piece of my ongoing identity.

My freshman year of high school I was given an English class assignment by one of my teachers that I will never forget. It was to write a poem called, "Where I'm From". I think about this assignment all the time. This poem was to put to words the places, the people, and the descriptive memories of who we are. I could write a "Where I'm From" poem every day and believe it would turn out new memories, changes, new

insights, new takes on who I am. I do think we might reach a point in life where we've grown more aware of who we are and our identity, but that doesn't mean change doesn't slink around the corner and that we cannot continue to grow. As the days go on, I believe more deeply that life is composed of ongoing lessons. Maybe it's just the inner lifelong learner and hopeful future teacher in my soul, but shouldn't we always be learning lessons throughout life? I think so. I encountered the same feeling again in my senior year of high school in my first Spanish class. My teacher had us write a story about "Who I Am" to practice our beginner Spanish skills. This time, I was re-learning my love of how language tells our story, and this time I was finding out how much I enjoyed speaking my stories in another language, as my new favorite subjects became French and then Spanish.

Writing my beginner Spanish sentences on cardboard paper and sticking it onto a wooden box, (mine was a clementine box) along with pictures and descriptions in Spanish of our hometown, of family, friends, sports teams and meaningful relics of my favorite things: for me it was pieces of sea glass, a pencil for writing, activities such as swimming and skiing. My family photos and pictures of my friends and I at our traditional BBQ and camping in my friend's backyard. I still have that box in my childhood room, and every time I walk by it makes me grateful for what I have in this life, and how these people, and places are a piece of my ever growing identity.

If you've never heard of a "Where I'm From" poem, I encourage you to take my freshman English class teacher's wise advice: Go home tonight and write one. It may

teach you something about your life's settings and the people and living (and not living) things who have impacted who you are.

Stories have been among my longest teachers and will continue to be my lifelong teachers. They have come from my foundation places of my life: Vermont, Maine, Connecticut and Chile and back to Vermont again. Culture and nature stories are bound together, as we spend time people and activities throughout time spent in these places, memories with family members, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, from people who you've never met, but listened to their story online, on television, in print. In my life, stories also come from my educators in these places themselves, my peers in classrooms and academic articles that have found their place on my course syllabi. We each have different backgrounds, places and intersectional identities that impact our stories. My stories have come from my backyards, from the nearby places I've ventured towards in times of adversity, as well as places that have become chapters of who I am in times of joy. Our daily routines and our ordinary moments are stories waiting to be told too. Our lived experiences in each of the places we interact with, live in, visit, fall in love with, and even the ones we feel we need to leave become part of our stories.

Down the road, I hope the stories from my future students will become teachers for me as well, as I hope to hear their lived stories of navigating their way through the stresses and successes of college, and from their reflections, discussions, the stories of what they struggle to understand and lingering questions and each of them takes from the classroom. This has been a tribute to my everlasting awe of how stories and storytelling can teach us both comfort and discomfort, hardship and healing. Stories can prompt

reflection but also can prompt action. Stories can teach we are never alone (even if we think it), because stories teach that although we are individuals, we are communities too. Stories teach us there is hatred in the world, but there is also love, and the latter is stronger. They can teach us humility. Speaking and writing our stories keep us alive when we are worn down from crushing silence. Stories can both teach us gratitude but also push us to recognize an urgency for change, growth, and continued learning is a task that is never complete.

At times, we hold ourselves back from enjoying the places, and experiences within these settings that hold meaning for us. At other times the circumstances that prevent us from enjoying our meaningful places may be beyond our control. However, our perspective and our reaction and is our own and can be changed. The real-life stories of communities that have been washed away by severe storms and flooding has been too frequent and far-reaching in our recent history and are growing worse. The people, who have been spent time upon the beloved island I call a home in Maine, within my hometown in the Green Mountains of Vermont, within the bustling streets of Santiago, the golden pastures and Andes Mountains are tied tight to my own belief in loving place. I do not want to see these places I loved lost by erosion, by flood, by storms, by drought worsened by climate change. It pains me to see oceans laden with garbage, to see clips of Inuit families climbing into boats to access their flooded homes, for the people of places such as Flint, Michigan to still be without clean drinking water. It is especially painful when we become aware of how much of the harm done to our planet could have been

preventable. However, we cannot wallow. The stories of the resilient communities that have lived these difficulties teach us we must not give up our right to a healthy planet.

In the words of Jennifer J.J. Jang, *“If I only wait until it is convenient to love, be kind, be intentional, laugh, enjoy, and live, then I would not even begin to comprehend how many possibilities to happiness and contentment I have missed out in life.”*¹⁰² How often do we tell ourselves that what is most meaningful to us is not “convenient” right now? Or we might we tell ourselves we can change how we act “another day”. For example, how many of us wait for “another day” to make sustainable choices for our planet? Far too many of us have used the convenience excuse Jennifer J.J. Jang so poignantly describes. This convenience excuse applies to far too many of us who have shielded ourselves from helping heal our planet. Healing our environment will never be “convenient”. There is not enough time to wait to say we will change our treatment of the Earth “another day”. As written by Bill McKibben, *“At this late date our job is to build movements, ones powerful enough to force the policy changes that give us our only hope up of catching up with physics.”*¹⁰³ We will lose the right to wellbeing, as ourselves and the figures in our lives and near or far on our shared Earth home if we do not hold ourselves, our laws, our government, our leaders and our fellow people responsible for sustainable change with humanity and empathy for another. We are going to lose the meaningful pieces of who we are if do not turn to a sustainable and humane future. I cannot bear to lose the landscapes, the foods, the flora and fauna, the settings that have

¹⁰² Jennifer J.J. Jang. 2011. “Transcending Adversities through Intentional Self-Care: The Rejuvenating Narrative of a Student Affairs Quarterlifer.” University of Vermont, Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration. p. 83.

¹⁰³ Bill McKibben in Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman’s Fight to Protect the Arctic and Save the Planet from Climate Change*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, MN. 2018. p. xv.

planted my own meaning, my own identity as well as my own physical and cultural survival.

We are all dead without water. We are all dead without air to breathe, without food to eat, places to shelter us, all within the planet that is our home. The more we uncover the personal stories within the depths of our lived experiences linked to water, to our Earth, to what we put into our bodies, the greater potential we give ourselves for choosing story and survival instead of letting our settings (and thus ourselves) suffocate and be stripped away in silence.

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