

# **DRIFTWOOD:**

**making sense of a life informed by nature**

by

**Bridget Walshe**

**B.A., B.P.H.E. Queen's University 1986**

**B.Ed. Queen's University 1987**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS**

in the Faculty

of

Education

© Bridget Walshe 1999

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

June 1999

All rights reserved. This work may not be  
reproduced in whole or in part by photocopy  
or other means, without the permission of the author



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-51497-8

**Canada**

## **Abstract**

Some writers have said that in writing they make sense of their lives. Whether through fiction, non-fiction, poetry or prose, they wrestle with questions that are both universal and immediately relevant to themselves. A perspective is gained on their lives that allows them to accept the complexity and vulnerability of being human. One method of using writing to make sense of a life is to impose lines of continuity, and thus order, on what at first appear to be disparate bits and pieces of life. Meaning is highlighted for the writer and hopefully for the reader as well.

This thesis is a personal narrative in which the writer attempted to make sense of her life through a central theme - her relationship with nature. Four distinct life stages were examined chronologically from childhood to the present. In these, personal stories, journal entries, and poems were related to the central theme of the writer's relationship with nature and assembled under three main subjects: nature as home, wild animals, and nature and technology.

Through the process, the writer found that her relationship with nature was deeper and more profound than she had realised. By acknowledging the importance of nature as a dominant teacher in her life, the writer formed a new commitment to nature education. In addition, the process of making sense of her life through the telling of important stories allowed her to see the value in creating a classroom environment where students' personal stories are celebrated and used as a foundation for learning.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated with love to  
Shan and Margaret, my parents,  
whose paths into nature I have followed  
and to Michael, my husband,  
who walks these paths with me.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank Allan Mackinnon for his patience and his belief that I could do it, Andrea Lebowitz for her support and valuable suggestions, and Marsha Lippincott for her unwavering friendship throughout.

I am deeply grateful to my husband Michael, without whom this work would not have been possible. It is difficult to summarize the countless ways that Michael was there for me throughout this long and challenging journey.

# Table of Contents

<b>approval page</b>	.....	ii
<b>abstract</b>	.....	iii
<b>dedication</b>	.....	iv
<b>acknowledgements</b>	.....	v
<b>Introduction</b>	.....	1
Connection to Nature	.....	2
Nature as Home	.....	4
Wild Animals	.....	5
Nature and Technology	.....	6
Methodology	.....	8
<b>Chapter I - Cedar: forming roots</b>	.....	10
Connection to Nature	.....	10
Nature as Home	.....	11
Wild Animals	.....	18
Nature and Technology	.....	21
<b>Chapter II - Forest Fire: branching out and changes</b>	.....	23
Connection to Nature	.....	23
Wild Animals	.....	30
Nature as Home	.....	32
Nature and Technology	.....	35
<b>Chapter III - Driftwood: picking up pieces</b>	.....	37
Nature as Home	.....	39
Connection to Nature	.....	41
Nature and Technology	.....	44
Wild Animals	.....	49
<b>Chapter IV - Arbutus: evergreen</b>	.....	59
Wild Animals	.....	59
Nature and Technology	.....	62
Connection to Nature	.....	63
<b>Summary</b>	.....	64
<b>References</b>	.....	69

## Introduction

There comes a time - it is the beginning of manhood or womanhood - when one realises that adventure is as humdrum as routine unless one relates it to a central core which grows within and gives it contour and significance. Raw experience is empty, just as empty as the forecabin of a whaler, as is the chamber of a counting house; it is not what one does, but what one realises, that keeps existence from being vain and trivial. (Lewis Mumford)

I learned to walk barefoot on grass and stones. I lived in wilderness parks and played outside more than in. My playground was made of plants and water, sand and stone. I shared space with wild creatures.

My father made his living as a park naturalist. We talked about nature as though it were part of the family. At dinner, daily observations of nature were shared and celebrated with reverence.

Memories. Spring - the thrill of finding the first blooms of trailing arbutus and marsh marigold, of sighting a rare prothonotary warbler. Summer - measuring the passage of time by the ripeness of wild berries - strawberries first, then raspberries, then blueberries. Fall - seeking chanterelles and shaggy mane, listening for geese and for rutting bull moose, tasting the air for signs of frost. Winter - the swish of snowshoes, frosted eyelashes, cold air in warm lungs. My life was measured by the cycle of the seasons. My identity is marked by these memories and it is through a connection to my past that I make sense of my present. This paper is a walk down my life's path. It is an attempt to make sense of a life lived close to nature and a life informed and shaped by nature.

That nature has been a powerful and constant teacher in my life started to become clear during a year-long wilderness adventure to the Driftwood Valley of northern British Columbia beginning in June of 1996. During that year I began the process of collecting parts of my life, reassembling them and reflecting on their importance. This is a process that continued when we returned from Driftwood Valley and that continues still.

This paper is divided into four chapters corresponding with four distinct periods of my life; **Cedar** - Forming Roots; **Forest Fire** - Branching Out and Changes; **Driftwood** - Picking up

Pieces; **Arbutus** - Evergreen. Within each of these chapters, I explore through stories, poems, and journal entries the major theme, **Connection to Nature**, as well as three related themes: **Nature as Home**, **Wild Animals**, and **Nature and Technology**. I use these stories, poems, and anecdotes to reflect on my experience of nature. The organisation of the paper around time periods in my life and the themes within, provides a framework within which my life can be looked upon from the perspective of nature's role in educating, nurturing, and creating me.

## **Connection to Nature**

Why am I drawn to nature? Why do I feel such a part of nature and at the same time separate from it? This feeling of connectedness to nature is the feeling of the power of the natural world to stir something of fundamental importance inside me. Over and over I am deeply moved by it. It is only through an understanding of this connection to nature that I may better understand myself. Malone and Malone (1987) define "connection" as moments of intimacy with another person or with nature:

Why did Archimedes jump out of the bath and shout, "Eureka!"? Was his response not his intimate self shouting in relief? Did he not feel the immediate, wondrous connection of self with nature? Not simply the excitement of intellectual discovery, but the joy of being momentarily intimate and, as is always true with intimacy, the joy of learning something new. Was he not learning something new and different about himself and his nature, an awareness that his human nature is part of all nature, finding an even more exciting awareness - the knowledge that what he is as a human being allows him to more surely know all of nature. Intimate self-knowledge becomes an exciting, eternal, widening sense of connection with what there really is in nature. Human beings, seeing nature as a fabric within which they are woven, can then experience the connections that make knowledge possible. This is a way of knowing that comes from being connected, in contrast to knowledge that comes from being convinced of what things should be. It is knowing from what is, not what is supposed to be. It is experiential, not judgmental. You can know only you, you can know intimately only what you are connected to through your self. And only in that experience can you change personally. Only in that experience do you feel your basic humanness, your commonality, your being so beautifully a part of nature. (p. 244)

This definition comes closest to my experience, to this feeling I am trying to understand. Though I have felt this connection to nature my whole life, I did not know how essential the connection was to my well being until I was away from nature and felt a loosening of the connection. This loosening happened partly because I had distanced myself physically from nature and partly because I had purposely left little room inside myself for nature. I had left nature in both body and spirit.



Another dimension to the connection to nature has to do with the role primitive memories play in drawing us to nature. I have often wondered why it is that, despite all the comforts and conveniences of modern life, many of us are still drawn to wilderness. Why many of us choose to leave these comforts to live as simply as possible, to sit and watch the embers of a campfire burn slowly, to catch a fish for dinner. I believe it is because we remember, unconsciously perhaps, the comfort that a fire brought to our distant ancestors, and that we feel a primordial connection to nature. However weakened that connection is, it still exists.

There is a curious tension between this feeling of connection to nature and feeling of being quite separate from nature. There are times when I feel nature is an extension of myself, when I know that I belong in nature. Thoreau (1962) spoke of this feeling when he said, "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?" (p. 136). And Watts (1970) believed it impossible to consider man as separate from nature:

But the important point is that a world of interdependent relationships, where things are intelligible only in terms of each other, is a seamless unity. In such a world it is impossible to consider man apart from nature, as an exiled spirit which controls this world by having its roots in another. (p. 4)

At other times I feel separate, that nature will not let me in. An example of this is in my relationship with wild animals. For as long as I can remember I have felt an intimacy with wild creatures. But, while I have always felt a strong connection to these creatures, I have also sensed a barrier between us. A barrier that prevents me from truly knowing them. Perhaps it is because one can engage animals, look into their eyes, interact on some level with them, that one feels more of a connection directly with the heart of nature. And it is for these same reasons that our separateness from nature is so apparent. Animals seem to let us in only so far before shutting the door in our faces. In Chapter Four I relate an experience with a pine marten that illustrates both the connection and the separateness I feel with animals and thus with the whole of nature. Mabey (1995) illustrates the dichotomy in the following way:

Deliberate attempts to portray the life of nature in prose face a huge philosophical barrier. Here, after all, is language, one of the most exquisite human inventions, resonant with the structures of human consciousness, being used to describe a world about whose inner states and meanings we can know virtually nothing. It forces us to rely on external clues, on empathy, and most notoriously on anthropomorphism, the assumption that nature shares human motives and feelings. Yet attempts to sidestep this by, for example, denying any

inner lives to species other than our own, or attempting to contain their behaviour within apparently objective description (that is, description based on our definitions and categories), can also suffer from a kind of backdoor human-centredness. (p. vii)

Though I may not be able to understand nature's inner states and meanings, I have a strong sense that my relationship with nature is tied not only to *who* I am but also *how* I am.

Ecopsychologists believe that the healing of our relationship with the earth and the healing of psychological selves must go hand in hand. And that the way we abuse or use the earth is a reflection of our unconscious needs and desires. This makes sense in my life. I have felt many times that my psychological health had much to do with the quality of my connection to the natural world. Conversely, when I was not psychologically strong it was more difficult for me to connect with the natural world. Watts (1970) agrees when he says that, "It is this very ignorance of and indeed, estrangement from ourselves which explains our feeling of isolation from nature" (p. 2).

When I walk through the forest or along the seashore I feel my energy being renewed, my mood lighten, my inner self becoming calmer. For me there is a palpable healing power in my connection with the natural world. Terry Tempest Williams (1994) speaks of a similar feeling when she says, "Hands on the earth, I closed my eyes and remembered where the source of my power lies. My connection to the natural world is my connection to self - erotic, mysterious, and whole" (p. 56).

## **Nature as Home**

What is it about a natural landscape that makes me feel so at home? The theme of nature as home continues the exploration of kindredness with and separateness from nature. Schama (1995) spoke of the importance of memory in one's sense of landscape:

And if a child's vision of nature can already be loaded with complicating memories, myths, and meanings, how much more elaborately wrought is the frame through which our adult eyes survey the landscape. For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. (p. 7)

The landscape my memories have built is one of wild nature. I have always felt at home in

that setting, as comfortable curled up in the sand as on my bed. This familiarity and comfort with the elements of nature became a reference point to which I would return time and time again. Being in nature, wherever it exists and whether it be camping, hiking, canoeing, skiing, a walk on the beach, always feels to me like going home. It is a refuge, a place of comfort and familiarity.

If home is where we establish our identity in relation to others and is an idea, then home is a general rather than a particular place. But, while I feel more at home in nature than anywhere else, there exists in me a feeling that nature's essence, its silent mysteries, are not fully known to me. I can feel the connection, can feel that this is my place in the world, but as with animals, I can also feel the existence of the barrier. What is disturbing about this barrier is that it seems to be like a two-way mirror through which nature can see me but I cannot see nature - only myself staring blankly into my own eyes.

## **Wild Animals**

What is it about my interaction with wild creatures that puts me more in touch with nature and with myself? Perhaps, as Clinebell (1996) says, it is a natural process:

Animals play a prominent role in the learning processes of children as well as in our social relations as adults, including the core of our imagination as expressed in our languages, dreams, images, art, speech, and play. When humans' relationships with other species are diminished, their caring about and for all life, including their own species, is lessened.  
(p. 55)

As I continue to pick through the pieces of my life I realise that nature has been my classroom and animals my primary teachers. When I look back at my experiences in nature, I see times of introspection while sequestered away in special places, times of watching and discovery, times of fun and freedom with friends and family, and times of close interaction with animals. The memories of animals are the most softening and the most vivid. It is said that it is the sense of smell that has the longest memory. That the smell of chalk dust and freshly sharpened pencils can transport people of any age back to their grade one classroom. But for me, seeing a fox, a crow in springtime, a bear cub, is like bumping into an old friend and I am taken instantly back to times spent with these creatures and am reminded of lessons learned through past interactions with them.

Like Sharon Butala (1994), who learned it from nature in general, one of the most important lessons I have learned from wild animals, is humility:

I began to see from my own experience living in it that the land and the wild creatures who live in it and on it, and the turning to the earth, the rising and setting of the sun and the moon, and the constant passing of weather across its surface - that is, Nature - influenced rural people to make them what they are, more than even they knew.

Close proximity to a natural environment - being in Nature - alters all of us in ways which remain pretty much unexplored, even undescribed in our culture. I am suggesting that these ways in which such a closeness affects us, from dreams to more subtle and less describable phenomena, are real, and that we should stop thinking, with our inflated human egos, that all the influence is the other way around. We might try to shift our thinking in this direction so that we stop blithely improving the natural world around us, and begin to learn, as Aboriginal people have, what Nature in her subtle but powerful manner has to teach us about how to live.

More and more I am coming to believe that our alienation from the natural world is at root of much that has gone so wrong in the modern world, and that if Nature has anything to teach us at all, her first lesson is in humility. (p. 105)

## **Nature and Technology**

What is the impact of technology on my connection with nature? I discuss this issue through my own experiences and attempt to put it in a broader perspective as well. I suggest that we need to develop a comprehensive language to evaluate technology more carefully and look at what we are losing as a result of blindly jumping on the technology band wagon. In particular, it is the loosening of our bond with nature as a result of our infatuation with technology that I am most concerned about. I discuss the implications of this weakening of our connection with nature for my role as a teacher of young children.

I use two separate but related definitions of technology as I discuss technology in two different contexts. In the first case, I use a narrow definition of technology. That is, as a tool designed to make a task more efficient or more comfortable. This definition is used here in the context of preparing for the Driftwood adventure and in deciding what technological tools to take with us into the wilderness and what to leave behind.

Secondly, I use a definition of technology borrowed from Ursula Franklin (1990). That is,

as a practice or a way of doing something, or more importantly, as a state of mind. This definition is used in the context of a discussion of the pervasiveness of technology and the resulting distancing from nature both in my life and in our culture:

Technology is not the sum of the artifacts, of the wheels and gears, of the rails and electronic transmitters. Technology is a system. It entails far more than its individual material components. Technology involves organisation, procedures, symbols, new words, equations, and, most of all, a mind set. (p. 12)

In Franklin's definition, technology is an integral part of the social landscape. So much so that we are often unaware of its influence upon us. To make this point, Franklin uses the vivid metaphor of a house that technology has built and in which we all live:

The house is continually being extended and remodelled. More and more of human life takes place within its walls, so that today there is hardly any human activity that does not occur within this house. All are affected by the design of the house, by the division of its space, by the location of its doors and walls. Compared to people in earlier times, we rarely have a chance to live outside this house. And the house is still changing; it is still being built as well as being demolished. (Franklin, 1990, p. 11)

This metaphor adds new meaning to the phrase "the great outdoors." It is more and more difficult to get out of the house of technology, even in wilderness, as I found in the preparation and experience of our Driftwood adventure. The walls of the technological house encompass more of nature than ever before. Natural forests are being turned into tree farms and the technology of producing "wood fibre" replaces the technology of the sustainable use of a natural forest. Technology, says Franklin, has changed our relationship with nature to such an extent that many of us don't even realise it.

I myself am overawed by the way in which technology has acted to reorder and restructure social relations, not only affecting the relations between social groups, but also the relations between nations and individuals, and between all of us and our environment. To a new generation, many of these changed relationships appear so normal, so inevitable, that they are taken as given and are not questioned. (Franklin, 1990, p. 13)

If we view technology in this sense we see that technology can be pervasive and, in many ways, insidious. I am afraid that we are raising generations of children for whom connection to nature means little, if anything at all - generations who are not aware of what has been lost. Mander (1991) explains how easily this happens in our everyday lives:

Because technology is now everywhere apparent, pervasive and obvious, we lose awareness of its presence. While we walk on pavement, or drive on a freeway, or sit in a shopping mall, we are unaware that we are enveloped by a technological and commercial reality, or that we are moving at technological speed. We live our lives in reconstructed, human-created environments; we are inside manufactured goods.

We do not easily grasp technology from the outside, or, in McLuhan's terms, "extra environmentally." And once we accept life within a technically mediated reality, we become less aware of anything that preceded it. We have a hard time imagining life before television or cars. We do not remember a United States of mainly forests and quiet. The information that nature offers to our minds and to our senses is nearly absent from our lives. If we do seek out nature, we find it fenced off in a "park," a kind of nature zoo. We need to make reservations and pay for entry, like at a movie. It's little wonder that we find incomprehensible any societies that choose to live within nature. (pp. 31-32)

The more we become enamoured with the house that technology is building, the more we become disconnected from nature and, as the ecopsychologists argue, the more we become disconnected from ourselves. In becoming disconnected from both nature and ourselves we fail to see the value of nature to us and the need to preserve it. Though nature is fundamental to our well-being, through technology, it becomes irrelevant to our everyday lives.

Further, compared to what technology can offer, nature has become too slow, outdated, obsolete. We live with the illusion that we can outsmart nature through the use of technology, or if nature fails us that we can build our own environment in which to live - in space perhaps, or under the sea. The "science will save us" mentality pervades because it is science, after all, that gives us the "magic" of technology.

## **Methodology**

I have chosen the form of a personal non-fiction narrative or new autobiography to make sense of my life through a central theme, my relationship to nature. Rainer (1997) calls the new autobiography, "a late twentieth-century liberation of the established genre of writing" (p. 10). It remains the description of an individual's life by the individual but with new freedoms:

New Autobiography transforms how we view and value even the most private and seemingly insignificant lives. It is a complete redefinition of who may write about their lives, who they write for, the reasons they write, how they write, what they write about, and what they do with the writing. (Rainer, 1997, p. 10)

This freedom means that even I, a non-famous person at the young age of thirty-five, can write about aspects of my life that I would not have been able to entertain under the previous notion of autobiography. This new definition also gave me permission to look at my life from one perspective.

By using stories, journal quotes and poems to examine the four chapters of my life, and by the use of themes (home, animals, technology), I am able to look more closely at and make better sense of the major theme of connection to nature.

The stories of our own lives require active searching - learning to look through our memories in a new way. To find story in our life, you must engage imagination with memory: you must invent a line of continuity - not from nothing, but from the raw materials of your life. (Rainer, 1997, p. 37)

The form of the new autobiography seems to fit perfectly with what I am trying to do. That is, to make sense of my life as I write it. It is in the process of writing that I seek clarity and in so doing find the meaning in my life. I refer to "the" meaning in my life as Anais Nin warns that to search for the universal meaning in life leads nowhere and that one can only find the meaning specific to our own lives (Rainer, 1997, p. 1). And Annie Dillard points to one of the dangers of writing important personal stories. She says that by writing about experiences, as in a memoir, the memories, which are the essence of the writing, are replaced by the work (Rainer, 1997, p. 102). This is a risk I am willing to take because it is not to preserve the memories of my past that I write, it is rather to make sense of the present.

I am also aware that in writing such deeply personal material, I make myself vulnerable. I am exposing some of my deepest thoughts as they relate to what is most important to me. I am willing to take this risk as well. Into the inner wilderness I step.

# **Chapter I**

## **Cedar: forming roots**

### **Connection to Nature**

The seeds of my connection to nature were planted before I was born. My parents loved the outdoors, spending as much time as possible in nature. From the womb I heard the music of birds, felt the gentle rocking of the canoe. Six months after officially entering the world I was taken on my first canoe trip, tucked in a teakanogan in the middle of a cedar strip canoe. I was comforted by the softness of wind in white pines and was bathed in lake water. My mother called to the birds. My father spoke the Latin names of plants.

My father's field work took us to a variety of natural settings - Fundy Park, Algonquin Park, and finally, when I was seven, to Quetico Park in Northwestern Ontario where I would spend the rest of my childhood. We lived in tents during those early summers. I played with grasshoppers. Tasted moss. Fed chipmunks by hand. Covered myself with large-leafed asters and slept in the grass. Learned the musky smell of bear. Swatted mosquitoes. Stepped over logs. Danced around the discarded skins of rattlesnakes. Uncovered hornets' nests and suffered the consequences.

I was taken on the fall moose hunt and hung in my teakanogan from a tree branch while my parents skinned and gutted the creature. Later, we searched for wild mushrooms and bog cranberries to add to the meal.

By age four, I was walking proficiently on snowshoes, and exploring winter. Over fresh snow I followed tracks and read their stories. Built nests in the dark caves of uprooted trees. My father took me ice fishing and I spent hours cuddling the frozen trout and making beds of evergreen boughs for their stiff bodies.



My connection to nature came early. My senses were initiated by nature. But I recall no conscious awareness of this connection or of its importance in my life. It was not until I became aware of the lives of other children, my relations and classmates, that I gradually became aware of my unique connection to nature and realised that I felt at home in nature in ways that others did not.

## **Nature as Home**

Quetico is a large provincial park on the Ontario-Minnesota border. It is a Class "A" wilderness park which means there is no logging or mining allowed within its boundaries. Its campsites and portages are left as natural as possible and are not even marred by signage. The majority of the park is inaccessible by road. Airplanes flying in Quetico's airspace are not allowed to land and are required to fly above a certain altitude in order that wilderness values are maintained as much as possible.

By canoe, it takes about a week to travel from north to south and more like two weeks east to west. Quetico is mainly typical Canadian Shield country - lakes, streams, evergreens, spruce bogs, countless rocky outcrops. But Quetico is special. There is something about the place, the way the trees line up against the sky that connects itself to me as if by blood. I suspect this feeling exists because I grew up there but I do not know. Others, who know Quetico only through sporadic summer visits, have said similar things about its ability to connect to one's soul.

We had the privilege of living in a log home on French Lake, just inside the park border with the entire park as our backyard playground. I was fortunate to have parents who not only loved wilderness but actively fought to maintain it. In his twenty years as park naturalist my father came to know Quetico intimately. Unlike many of his colleagues in the park office, he took every opportunity to be out in the park, often alone, combing his favourite bogs for rare plant species, or calling moose in just to get a better look. As the oldest daughter, I had the honour, although I didn't always recognise it as such at the time, of accompanying him on many of these outings.

One of my first memories of Quetico was of a fall fishing trip my father and I took shortly after we had moved there. I was eight years old and my youngest sister Shannon had just arrived

that spring. My father was anxious to explore the park and my mom glad to have us both out of her way so she could get some house work done.

My mother drove us down a remote logging road and dropped us off at the edge of the park with a canoe and a day's supply of food. Our plan was to fish in the nearby lake and then paddle back to our log home through a series of rivers and lakes. The fishing was good and we stayed much longer than we should have. This, and the fact that my father had grossly under-estimated the time it would take us to paddle home, made the next thirty-two hours something of an adventure.

We arrived at the first portage after a long search along the shore for its beginning and found it to be a bog-filled two kilometres long. Each step along the route had to be carefully calculated. My father slipped in the middle of a particularly bad section and disappeared under the canoe he was carrying. I could only watch as he turned the canoe over and used it to haul himself out of the waist deep quagmire - "loon shit" he called it. My father and I reached the end of the portage together and he left me there while he went back for the second load. I remember being not very happy about this, but he felt he could make better time going alone so I sat on a rock and waited. In ordinary circumstances it would take an hour to cross a portage of this length and return with a load. These were not ordinary circumstances. The portage was not heavily used and the trail was therefore difficult to keep track of. Darkness was descending quickly and my father lost his way several times on the way back.

I sat, unable to move, huddled against a winter's-coming wind and watching evening shadows paint a bay of flooded trees darker shades of blue. In my child's mind the dark shapes of stumps took on grotesque and gigantic proportions as each cracking twig from the forest behind me was amplified and became the footfall of some giant beast. Voices from my Catholic upbringing suggested that this was penance for all my past sins and this made it seem all the more terrible. In the eternity it took for my father to return, the night had turned black, but I was still alive.

We crossed one more lake and portage that night. I helped my father negotiate his way down slippery cliff faces, over upturned roots, and around more sinkholes of loon shit. My father didn't

say much as we stumbled our way through the dark. Instead, he was focussed and calm, as if this was the most natural thing in the world for a father and daughter to be doing. Thankfully, the second portage was a short one as was my wait at the other end.

While paddling the next lake, I began to doze and lean to one side of the canoe, making it difficult for my father to counter balance. The increasing possibility of capsizing in the frigid waters and the prospect of more difficult portages between us and French Lake forced my father to decide that we would spend the night out and continue the journey home the next morning. Somehow he found a campsite - a rocky point with a giant dead red pine laying across it. He built a fire a few feet from the trunk of the tree and placed me in between so that the fire's warmth would be reflected and keep both sides of me warm. I spent the night curled up on my life jacket while my father tossed broken branches from the tree onto the fire.

At the time I didn't think much about this experience, just took it in stride - another outing with my father. Through this trip, and others, with my father, I was learning to be at home in nature. I learned to be comfortable in darkness, comfortable alone in the forest. The fishing trip experience also taught me that I have the inner strength to endure, to overcome self-doubts. The monsters I fear are often only in my mind. Through my fear I learned to allow the wilderness to speak to me, to comfort me, and in the process become more open to what it has to teach.

As I was growing up there were more adventures with my father. Somehow, whenever I went with my father it turned out to be an adventure. I learned from him how to be in nature, how to respect nature as a powerful force that is not to be taken for granted. I saw how comfortable he was in nature, how it seemed to nurture him, how he loved more than anything to be out there. Watching my father helped to strengthen my own bond with the natural world.

Nature also fed my imagination. I tried to figure out how to make a gift out of a pine cone or a piece of wood or rock. It was the reindeer lichen and tripe covered rocks that provided the backdrop for the stories of my Barbie dolls' lives (my Barbie's were usually happy gypsies who dressed in rags and had lot of wild animal friends).

I spent a lot of time alone in nature, especially during my teenage years, as I tried to make

sense of the adolescent changes going on in me. The constancy of Quetico and its presence in my daily existence provided a shelter for my emerging self. I was learning to be at home in nature as well as learning to be at home in my own skin.

I discovered a seldom used beach across from our house on the opposite shore of French Lake, a beach inaccessible by foot unless one bushwhacked through thick alder brush. A good deterrent. It was a beach of white sand with bright green grasses sprouting here and there among scattered bits of silver driftwood and clusters of interesting stones. It was open, exposed, full of sunlight. The “secret beach,” as I called it, became one of my regular haunts. In summer, I paddled a canoe or swam there. I lay naked in the warm sand and watched water diamonds sparkle. I would sometimes stay for hours, reading poetry, writing, exploring, dreaming. The place had a sensual, dreamy air about it. I could go there in a heavy mood but leave feeling lighter, more centred. It was at the secret beach that I first experienced what Thomas Moore calls “enchantment”: “Enchantment is a spell that comes over us, an aura of fantasy and emotion that can settle on the heart and either disturb it or send it into rapture and reverie” (Moore, 1996, p. ix).

I went to the secret beach religiously, every year on my birthday, and there I would reflect on the past year and make wishes for the coming year. The secret beach became more than a nice place to be alone for awhile. It was a mirror for my growing sense of self. It was years later, while living in Vancouver, that I wrote this poem to reflect on the significance of the secret beach:

*Secret Beach*

*Caught in the  
stillness of summer days  
I'd steal away  
swimming naked  
across the lake*

*to my secret beach  
I glided  
laying for hours  
soaking sun  
Liquid diamonds*

*quenching the  
thirst for silence  
Vague visions  
emerging*

*In a warm sand dress  
I danced with you  
and the loons  
watched wild roses grow  
in our footprints  
Always touched  
with sadness  
when the image  
faded with dusk  
and I slipped back  
into the night lake*

In this poem I reflect on the fact that even as a teenager I longed for the silence and solitude of wilderness. It was there that I dreamed of someday being able to share my love of nature with a kindred spirit. It was there that I dreamed of finding someone who would understand me, my relationship with nature.

Other places in Quetico grew on me and gradually became part of what I called home. The two kilometre long road to and from the school bus stop was one of the places whose every detail is indelibly etched on my mind. My two younger sisters, my brother, and I, walked it twice a day regardless of the weather. Sometimes my father would join us, helping us to carry our many bags of books, figure skates and school projects. Most days I loved the chance to watch for creatures or to catch the subtle changes in the seasons. I was often late for dinner after having stopped to watch some natural phenomenon unfolding before my eyes - a dragonfly nymph emerging from its shell, a painted turtle laying eggs, a fox springing around on all fours while trying to catch a mouse in the snow. I knew the route so well I'm sure I could walk it blindfolded. Some nights, when I had missed the school bus because of some school activity, I would come home on the commercial bus, the Grey Goose, which passed by the park gate on the way to Thunder Bay. The drivers

always asked me if I would be all right walking home from here alone. I told them I'd be fine. They always asked if I was sure. To them, it must have seemed like they were letting me off in the middle of the wilderness as there was nothing but a narrow road that disappeared into the trees and no lights to be seen. I walked home in the dark, mostly unafraid, except for when I approached that part of the road with the tall white pine that leaned over and looked to me like a nasty giant poodle. I always ran through that section as fast as I could. More monsters. More learning.

A hollow cedar tree in a bay east of our house was another sanctuary, another place to be invisible for a while. There was an opening in the side of the tree just big enough for me to slide through. Once inside I could sit on soft, punky bits of decayed wood and cross my legs comfortably. I could see the bay from inside the tree and I liked to spy on the ducks that often dabbled there. The smell of the rotting wood and damp earth beneath me was comforting. In the security of those wooden walls, I contemplated my life, worked through problems, and nurtured dreams. There I stashed bits of wood, clumps of moss, and stones - treasures collected from the forest. Mostly though, I just sat, soaking in the quiet, listening, watching. I suppose it was a meditation of sorts. As with the secret beach, it wasn't until years later that I began to see how important the cedar tree was in my development and in helping me to feel at home in, and nurtured by, nature. This poem was written a few years ago while I was living in Vancouver:

*The Search*

*a teenager  
confused  
I'd hide in a hollow  
cedar  
along  
French Lake*

*leaves of paper  
burned letters  
painful words of  
self-hate  
witches broom branches  
and old man's beard  
fuelled ritual  
while wind  
shifted puzzle pieces  
broken ice  
on the new lake  
of my heart*

*tree hidden  
I'd watch mallards  
dream of summer  
wild friends  
hinted at  
earthly connections  
sweet smoke  
dried exhausted tears*

The poem emphasised a particular visit to the cedar tree when I was struggling with self acceptance, and with peer pressure. I found comfort in watching the ducks, in the smell of smoke and damp cedar.

One time, while asleep in my cedar tree, I awoke to the scurrying noise of a mother squirrel carrying her naked youngster by the scruff of its neck from one tree to another. I felt privileged to witness such an event. The sight was a gift. I stopped feeling alone and sorry for myself. I thought of this wild mom managing so magnificently on her own. The tenderness of that moment softened me and gave me new perspective on my own life.

The canoe was an important way for me to get out into nature and it was also a home in itself. I spent as much time in the summer months canoeing as I possibly could. I went on long canoe trips and loved the feeling of having everything I needed for a week or two packed into that tiny vessel. I never seemed to be able to stay out there long enough. I loved how simple life is on a canoe trip, how all physical and mental energies are engaged. How simple pleasures like putting on dry socks after a day of walking in soggy sneakers was all I needed to be happy.

I learned during those years in Quetico, how to be comfortable and at home in all of nature's seasons including the harsh northern winter. I learned how to build a quinzhee, or snow house, by piling snow in a large heap, letting it harden for several hours, and then digging it out. I learned how to make a fire in the snow from the dry under branches of spruce trees, "witches broom," my father called it. Sometimes I would drag my camping mattress and winter sleeping bag down to the lake to settle in for a night under a brilliant starry sky. During the night my eyelashes would frost up and seal together so that in order to open my eyes in the morning I had to first thaw them out with my fingers. Laying out there without anything between me and the entire universe was always humbling, as I experienced that big mystery first hand. I felt small and

fragile. The reverence I felt during such moments as these fostered in me the beginnings of a spirituality that had less to do with the Catholic church and more to do with nature itself.

## **Wild Animals**

Nature was teaching lessons in many areas of my life and as I grew I began to become aware of the value of these lessons. Animals are a special part of nature that I have always felt a strong connection with. Everyone in my family loved wild animals. We would talk with excitement about animals we had glimpsed in the forest. And living in a wilderness park was an ideal location for nurturing orphaned creatures - baby rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, herons, owls, crows, ravens, even a bear.

When I was sixteen our family adopted a young raven, named Murphy, who had been causing trouble in town by stealing golf balls right off the course. The folks at the Ministry of Natural Resources brought Murphy out to live in the park near us. We were thrilled.

Murphy loved to play. He'd roll on his back like a dog when he wanted his belly rubbed and on hot days he loved to fly back and forth through the lawn sprinkler. He slept perched on the half open back door so he'd know if anyone left the house. If we weren't up in time to get his breakfast he'd fly around to my parent's bedroom window and peck loudly on the glass until someone got up to feed him. He perched on our shoulders, and flew after us as we rode our bicycles up and down the road.

Murphy loved to make off with shiny objects and one day he made the mistake of stealing from the picnic table of an ornery camper. Murphy flew out over the lake with the camper's only set of car keys dangling dangerously close to the water. The camper screamed and yelled, incensed that nobody could control this wild beast. Murphy dutifully brought the keys back and dropped them back on the picnic table. The park attendants had warned everyone who entered the campsites about Murphy, but this particular camper had no patience for a young pesky raven. Later that day, as Murphy was doing his rounds of the campgrounds, the irate camper snuck up on him and whacked him on the head with a paddle, killing him instantly. The camper acted like a



knight who had just slain a dragon.

Murphy's death starkly illustrated for me how perspectives can differ. The man who killed Murphy seemed to see him as the enemy, as evil. It simply had not occurred to me that anyone could see in that bird anything other than humour and intelligence. Murphy was what he was, could not be different. How, I asked, could he be punished for that?

In Murphy's death was also a lesson for me about the importance of educating people about the things we hold in common with wild creatures. I understood that the paddle-wielding camper had a different viewpoint from mine and I immediately pronounced his as wrong. It was then that a desire began to grow within me to teach others that, while it is necessary to have a healthy respect for wild animals, it is possible to see them, not as enemies, or commodities, but rather as fellow participants in the banquet of life. For I believed that animals are brothers and sisters who have just as much right to be here as we do. I began to see that until we can learn to view animals in this way, we will not begin to heal our damaged relationship with nature.

When I was ten, my father took my sister Kathleen, who was seven, and me on a week-long canoe trip to Sturgeon Lake in the park. We were to stay in a portage crew cabin but on arriving discovered that the cabin had recently been ransacked by a black bear. The bear had broken through a large window close to the ground and had dumped and poured the entire contents of the cupboards in the middle of the floor. Flour mixed with honey and dried beans. Dozens of tin cans lay on their sides oozing their contents through bite holes. It took us the better part of that first day to clean up the mess. That night, my father had to stay awake most of the night while scaring off the bear who had returned to finish his feast. All night my father took cat naps and had to get up many times to bang pots and yell at the bear who kept sniffing and pawing at the flimsy sheet of plastic my father had fastened over the broken window. The next night, the same routine. During the day, Kathleen and I were keen to play outside and swim in the lake, meaning my father was not able to catch up on lost sleep. On the third night I awoke to hear the bear pawing at the plastic. I slipped out of bed and tiptoed over to my father. I shook him but by that time he was so exhausted he did not wake up. By now the bear had poked his head in through the plastic, his large sandy snout sniffing the air inside the cabin. I was frantic. I ran to the counter, grabbed the cast iron frying pan, and hurled it with all my strength at the bear hitting him right on the head. The pan

bounced off the bear and clanged heavily on the wooden floor. Stunned, the bear fell back through the window and landed on his hind end. There he sat a few yards away staring at the window with his small eyes while I tried to comprehend what I had done. The noise had finally roused my father who lit the lantern and surveyed the self-explanatory scene of torn plastic, cast iron frying pan, and frightened little girl. "Why didn't you wake me?" he said.

Kathleen had slept through the whole thing. The bear eventually wandered off. My father rehung the plastic and said he should have thought of the frying pan trick two nights ago. I think he was proud of me as he told that story for years afterwards. We stayed awake for awhile longer but didn't hear the bear again that night. I lay in my bunk imagining the revenge the bear might take, and feeling small and vulnerable.

For many of the years I lived in Quetico, a red fox followed us out to the school bus in the mornings. I would often feed him sandwiches from my lunch bag and go without food for the rest of the day. I didn't mind. I was always afraid the fox would not find enough food for himself and I could not bear the thought of him starving while I had all the food I could eat and more. He was my companion, silently following me just beyond the edge of the road in the shadow of the trees. I took comfort in his wild presence. He taught me about grace and to keep my body in shape so that I could follow him through the woods. During the fall of my first year away at university the fox died in a local trapper's leg-hold trap. I was devastated. His presence had been so much a part of me that his sudden absence left a huge empty space inside. For Christmas that year my parents bought me a stuffed animal that looked exactly like him curled up with his nose buried in his tail. I kept that toy fox on the corner of my bed for many years and to this day when I look at it I feel a little wilder.

My strong connection to wild animals helped me see them as brethren trying to make their way in the world and I knew that they had plenty to teach if only we were willing to listen. Their wildness allowed me to accept the wildness within me.

## Nature and Technology

The bond I now feel with nature was also strengthened by the relative lack of technology in our house and in our psyche. The relationship is simple - there was less available to take the place of time in nature. We did not have a television, radio, or many music records in our log home on French Lake. Though my parents ordered *Time* magazine and we were encouraged to read it, we rarely had a current newspaper in the house. It was a sheltered place, I suppose, and I grew up largely unaware of what was happening in the rest of the world. My father was the most informed of our family. He made an effort to keep abreast of the news whenever he was in town, or by reading, and he would discuss with us some of the news stories of the day. My mother, on the other hand, seemed to want nothing to do with the news as she had more than she could handle in managing a family of four children. Both my parents talked about how depressing the news was and about the mind-numbing qualities of television. Thus, at a young age I picked up a wariness of certain kinds of technology. I don't remember ever feeling deprived though I eventually became aware that we did not have the household technology that other families had. I suppose it's hard to miss what you've never had. More than most families, though we depended on electricity and used a car, our family lived outside of Ursula Franklin's house of technology.

As the eldest child I spent a lot of time playing alone. Instead of the companionship of a television or "interacting" with a computer screen, I entertained myself outdoors. During this time, I was surrounded by nature, not gadgets. The natural world was utterly fascinating to me, full of surprises and mystery. To me, it was anything but boring. I learned that nature was always exciting if I was patient enough. I learned that I needed only to keep my eyes open and that, "beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there" (Dillard, 1974, p. 8). I discovered these words of Dillard's as a teenager. They continue to remind me of the importance of making time to be in nature.

One of my favourite things to do was to go for long walks along the provincial park campsite roads and paths with what I called my "bush purse." It was a khaki-green heavy canvas bag with a shoulder strap and in it I would put the North American field guide to birds, a pair of binoculars, a snack and a water bottle - all I needed for a day of adventure.

I remember one particularly warm day when I was over at the Dawson trail checking for marsh marigolds, a plant that always heralded spring for me. While there I happened to spot a scarlet tanager in a nearby alder. A flash of red, a little flame among the dull brown of early spring. That moment was a jewel, a treasure held out just for me. It was especially wonderful because scarlet tanagers are not native to Quetico and nobody else saw it, though they searched high and low, and made quite a fuss about my reported sighting. Actually, I am not sure they believed me. I was only ten at the time. But I knew what I had seen and I felt as though nature had confided in only me a special secret.

There were numerous other experiences like this that lead to myriad images and memories. These are the reasons I still get excited whenever I have the opportunity to go out into nature. Whether it's spring trout fishing trips with my father or summer days spent wild berry picking with my mother, summer canoe trips with my girlfriends or an after school ski around the campsites, I often in my mind visit these childhood experiences for the comfort and reassurance that nature defines part of me, is part of me. What would I remember if I had spent my time inside the house watching TV or playing computer games? I interacted intimately with nature because there were fewer technological distractions, but more importantly, because, rather than the technological mind set Franklin warns about, my family's mind set centred around nature and the outdoors and an appreciation of quiet, of solitude.

My childhood experiences in nature provided a solid foundation out of which the central theme of my life, a close relationship with nature, would evolve.

## **Chapter II**

### **Forest Fire: branching out and changes**

#### **Connection to Nature**

The transition from Quetico, my wilderness sanctuary, to Queen's University was a difficult one. I longed for the familiarity of my special places in Quetico and at the same time I fought this longing. I thought that letting go of home was a necessary part of growing up. Since nature was so much a part of home for me, I tried to let go of it as well.

I tried to adjust to living in an unfamiliar urban landscape, surrounded by concrete and unending noise. I struggled to find others with whom I could relate. Queen's was peopled with wealthy students from private schools and I felt out of place. The woman who sat in front of me in my first year calculus class wore a silver fox fur coat. She had obviously never seen a wild fox let alone fed one her lunch on the way to school. The students in my life sciences program were highly competitive and unfriendly. It seemed everyone was trying to get into medical school.

I felt like a mere number, one of over ten thousand students. I buried myself in my studies, hoping to boost my confidence with something I thought I knew how to do - do well in school. I soon found out that my high school education hadn't fully prepared me for first year university. I spent a great deal of time relearning grade thirteen physics, chemistry and calculus before I could proceed with the university courses. I had gone from being at the top of my class in high school to being an average student struggling to maintain the 75% average I needed to maintain my scholarship. I was overwhelmed.

Though I could not have articulated it as such at the time, I was feeling dehumanised at university. My first year biology lectures consisted of a series of prerecorded tapes. A bad lecture is hard enough to listen to, but a bad lecture on a television screen is far worse. I could not believe they expected us to learn about biology, the study of living things, from a television screen. It

seemed like a cruel joke. What about going out into the woods and looking at real plants, asking self-generated questions, finding answers? This was my first reaction. But, I went with it. I was leaving home and this was the real world after all. I was bombarded with technology, surrounded by people who had grown up with television and who seemed to know so much more than I did. They seemed to dislike the quiet and kept stereos blaring at all hours of the day and night. No one else seemed to notice the noises of the city, sirens, car alarms, traffic. I felt different from them and this led me to question deeply who I was.

I didn't have the confidence in myself to withstand the pressure to conform. I cut my hair into the latest style, bought fashionable eyeglasses, joined the rowing team. I strove for intellectual and social sophistication without realising where this might take me. The more I branched out, the more my connection with nature was loosening, the more unsure of myself I became. The stress showed in my body as I didn't have my period for that entire year. I gained weight, and by the end of that year was feeling very confused. In retrospect, I was more disconnected from my roots and from my self than ever before.

By my third year of university I had transferred out of life sciences and into a double degree program in biology and physical and health education. I started that fall with a canoe trip as part of an outdoor education course where, for the first time since I left home to go to university, I met other people who enjoyed the outdoors. The Physical Education faculty was smaller and more friendly. And by this time I was more confident in my academic abilities as I had worked through the difficult subjects that I hadn't been prepared for.

I bought a bicycle that year which allowed me to escape to the country whenever I could. A conservation area near Kingston became a new haunt. Along country lanes I searched for lilacs and bouquets of wildflowers and brought them back to my room at the student residence. I hung pictures of Quetico and began to take more delight in the little pockets of nature right outside my window. Although I didn't realise it fully then, these small connections with nature were my way of keeping my sanity. My confusion about who I was and how I would fit in here was still present, but I was becoming less inclined to fight my natural instincts to maintain a connection with nature. In some ways I thought I had failed to make the grade here but I began to care less.

In my fifth year of university, while at the faculty of education, I came to know some kindred spirits. One of my education professors, Mac Freeman, taught a course called “Human Dimensions” which was all about the importance of being authentic as a teacher. I learned that you can’t be authentic unless you know who you are. In this course, I became more conscious of how much I’d tried to change myself to be accepted by my peers at Queen’s and by the world at large. And that in doing this I had down-played the importance of my connection to nature and had let this connection loosen.

Mac owned a 200-acre homestead a half-hour outside of Kingston and he would invite all his students there several times during the year. In the fall we went for long walks along old railway tracks, hugged trees, and pressed apple cider. In winter we gathered in the loft of the big barn to play music and share stories and food. In spring we helped Mac gather and boil sap from sugar maple trees. It was a crucial time for me to be in a community of people who appreciated nature and the importance of community. I was learning that my connection to nature could be shared with others in a community setting. Most importantly, I began to acknowledge that my connection to nature was an essential part of me - a part of me I could be proud of.

The next fall I took my first teaching job, at Hinchinbrooke Elementary, a rural school forty-five minutes north of Kingston. I took my young students outside whenever I could and probably more than the official curriculum would have allowed. We ran through the local fields, flew kites, searched for bugs, exploded milkweed pods. I started an outdoor club and shared with the children some of what I knew about living and being in nature. In return, my students helped me to realise that I had a passion and a connection with nature that was worth paying attention to, worth nurturing.

During those three years, I lived in a small cabin on a lake. I had a canoe and would often paddle down the river from my lake into relatively wild country. I learned about hardwood forests and took delight in discovering different wildflowers than I’d known in Quetico - hepatica, wild ginger, trillium, dog-toothed violet, jack-in-the pulpit.

My father came to visit me several times during that time. Our visits usually involved a paddle down the river, or a walk through the hardwoods, or the “Carolinian Forest” as he referred

to it. We talked about birds and plants, about how nature soothes the soul. For the first time I connected with him adult to adult and began to appreciate his unique relationship with nature.

As a child I had taken him for granted and, during my teenage years, had refused to admit to him that I had a special affinity for nature. When I was young, I could only see my father as an eccentric who wore embarrassing clothes - a red and black checkered wool hat with a multi-coloured scarf sewn to it to cover his neck, an old parka stained with moose blood, beige pants, and clumpy rubber boots. I remember sliding low in my desk when he showed up at school to bring me the lunch I had forgotten. Now, as I gained a stronger sense of who I was, I began to see him in a new light. I began to admire his strong connection to nature and his unapologetic sense of self.

It was during my time at Hinchinbrooke that I met my husband, Michael. From the beginning I felt that my relationship with Michael was a gift. Some people are given the gift of song or dance. I was given the gift of a partner who immediately understood me and, most importantly, my relationship with nature. More than that, he had his own relationship with wild places that I admired and appreciated. One of the things that attracted me to Michael is the way he was in nature. He walked softly, listened to the land, was gentle in his approach. He loved watching birds and would often stop and call in a group of chickadees or kinglets. I watched him call in an entire flock so that they were landing in branches all around his head.

Michael is the first person I have connected with who enjoys being in nature in the same way I do. For us, nature is not just a playground, a scenic back drop for physical challenges such as white-water kayaking or rock climbing. We rarely go into nature with such a single focus in mind. Instead, we take nature as it comes to us, letting each experience present its gifts to us. When we are together out there we are able to listen to a deeper rhythm of life around us and let ourselves be fully immersed in the present. It is through nature that we are able to feel most connected to each other.

Within the security of Michael's love and acceptance I was able to better accept and appreciate my past, and my own connection to nature, which itself was changed as a result. Instead of taking it for granted as I did when I was younger or trying to downplay it as I did when I was at



university, the connection became a necessary part of who I was becoming and a necessary part of my relationship with Michael.

Michael and I soon discovered that we shared a life-long dream of living for a full year in wilderness isolation. In 1990 we moved west to follow that dream. Our plan was to pursue our respective careers in law and in education and, at the same time, make plans and save the money it would take to make the dream come true.

Five months after we arrived in Vancouver my father was diagnosed with brain cancer. He was fifty-five years old and the healthiest man I knew. Didn't smoke, didn't drink. He was a naturalist living in a wilderness park. Healthy living in a healthy environment. He was soon bedridden and I flew home to help look after him. We talked of trips we'd taken together. He quizzed me on the Latin names of plants. We talked of "Arbor Vitae," the survival homestead that he had built and stocked - his twenty-year project.

The brain cancer was aggressive. He died two months after he was diagnosed, in March, just as bare earth was beginning to show beneath the white pines. My sense of Quetico as home seemed to fade with his death.

The Christmas after my father died, the whole family gathered at Quetico. We awoke one morning to discover fresh lynx tracks just outside the house. It had been years since we'd seen lynx tracks around there. My father always had a fascination for lynx. He once followed for three days the tracks of a lynx in the snow, noting and photographing the lynx's activities - a few ruffed grouse feathers here, blood and rabbit fur there, an icy oval depression where the lynx had slept. The presence of the lynx tracks that Christmas smoothed out one more wrinkle in the tangle of grief I was carrying. It was like my father had returned to let us know he was with us. Years later, I wrote a poem about my father as a lynx:

*Lynx*

*My father  
I remember as a lynx.  
He walked  
the underside*

*of the forest  
stalking plants  
calypso, pyrola, amanita  
glasses lifted kneeling.*

*In huge strides  
he escaped the  
paper traps/forms/walls  
through thickest alder  
he'd cut  
silent as spruce air  
composing letters  
to fight  
the trapping of his secretive cat  
The lynx he walked  
the winterside  
of the forest  
talked tracks  
saucer-shaped  
bits of fur in snow  
partridge feathers  
scattered signs  
life patterns  
death sudden  
in snow  
Death  
sudden  
so  
sudden.*

*Winter returns  
too soon.  
Emptiness  
lingers  
where he once was.*

*Outside another lynx  
left tracks in the snow  
-a brief shadow  
slips across  
the window weaving  
mysterious comfort*

In the years that followed, it was to nature that I continued to turn to ease the grief of the loss of my father. I went into nature to feel closer to him. My connection to nature now included a connection to my father that had not been there before his death. I had a stronger desire to realise my life's dream of living for a year in the wilderness, to live more fully in the present, to get as

much from life as possible. My father's death brought with it an urgency to honour my connection to nature and also to take more responsibility in showing others the wonders of nature - something my father had loved doing.

In the summer of 1995 I went back to Quetico with Michael and some west coast friends. We paddled into the heart of Quetico to a lake that had been posthumously named after my father. For me, it was a pilgrimage.

Strange things happened on that trip that make me think my father's spirit is thriving in nature. Quetico was dry that summer. Even the club moss, which is usually plump and green with stored moisture, was brown and crisp. We were two days into our trip when, unknown to us, a large forest fire started to the south. For several days we saw no other campers on our route and we wondered where everyone was. We found out later that the park entrances had been closed because of the fire and no new camping permits were being issued.

I had brought my father's ashes with me and, during a short ceremony, buried them on a cliff overlooking Shan Walshe Lake. As we were paddling away from the cliff and toward the portage a sudden strong wind blew up out of a cloudless sky. We were forced to pull up on an island to wait out the strange wind storm which let up as quickly as it had appeared. An hour later, as we were approaching the portage, a loon surfaced just off shore and called out in such an unusual way that, without a word, all eight of us stopped paddling and watched. The loon circled and dove and surfaced again calling out in the same strange voice that had first attracted our attention. Then it dove once more and was gone. In that moment I knew my father was there, that his spirit had become a part of nature, and that all I needed to do to be near him was to be out there and close to wild things.

In the days that followed, a brisk wind picked up from the northwest, blowing smoke in our faces as we made our way out of the park. We discovered newly-posted signs indicating the section of the park we were to return through had been closed to travel. We were forced to exit the park through the southern boundary and into Minnesota and had to hitch a ride back to Thunder Bay. I could not help feeling that my father had something to do with our ordeal. Whenever he travelled through wilderness, he never liked things to be too easy. He believed that, if a little

hardship built character, a little more hardship built a little more character.

A quarter of the park burned in that fire. Foresters said that the severe damage was caused by the build up of dead and dry wood over the years of unnatural fire control that was practised in the park. My father had always been an advocate of controlled burning for that very reason.

## **Wild Animals**

Although I had little contact with animals during this period of my life, one experience was profound. It was after my first year at Queen's and I had returned to Quetico for the summer. I was feeling confused and alienated but was given the opportunity to reconnect with nature through the eyes of an animal. A tourist came to our door and reported that they had seen a bear cub lying in the ditch off the highway. We checked on the cub for the next few days in order to make sure that the mother wasn't nearby. The cub hadn't moved and was growing weaker by the day. It was clear the bear cub had been abandoned. We suspected that the mother had been shot in the spring bear hunt.

My mother and I debated about whether we should leave the cub and let nature take its course. My mother has a softness for animals too and in the end neither of us could bring ourselves to let it die there in the ditch. We brought the bear cub home hoping to nurse it back to health. It was a difficult decision because we knew that the only option for this bear, once it had human contact, would probably be a zoo.

We named him Suki, which means "little flower" in Japanese. He weighed only ten pounds when we took him in and was so weakened by lack of food that his teeth would hardly leave an imprint when he tried to bite our hands. He suckled our fingers and cried for his mother those first days that he was in our house. Slowly, very slowly, we nursed him back to life with bowls of warm oatmeal, berries, and bits of meat. He doubled his weight in the first two weeks.

Suki slept in a basket on the floor between my brother's and sister's bed. He loved to play and preferred we use our bare hands instead of gloves when we handled him. When our hands

were gloved, he would shy away from us and be less animated and playful. It was like he was teaching us the value of trust and sincerity.

He loved to hide out in nooks and crannies of the room. Whenever someone came in, he would ambush them, grabbing at their hair or pants from some secret spot in a closet or under a desk. When the noisy primary school children from town came to visit him, Suki would hide out under the bed, and the only way to get him out was to lure him with ice cream on a long wooden spoon.

My mother bathed him in the bath tub, scrubbed his fur with a floor brush until it shone. But Suki was a wild creature and as much as we enjoyed the novelty and fun of him, there was something tragic about his situation and we knew very well what it was. He became unpredictable and ornery when hungry. And one day we came into his room to find that he had emptied the drawers of my brother's captain's bed. Suki was shredding paper as he dug through the drawer as though looking for ants. But the most difficult part of the whole Suki experience for me was peeking into the room at night and seeing him perched on my brother's headboard staring out the window into the night. His bottom hung down over the headboard and his paws rested on the window sill. He looked so vulnerable, so dependent on our care, and so unnatural in that environment, I couldn't help wondering if we had made the right decision in taking him in.

After three months Suki had gained 65 pounds and was becoming too big for our tiny house. The time had arrived when we had to say our tearful goodbyes. The bear biologists we talked to all agreed that a return to the wild would mean certain death for Suki, either through starvation or in having to be shot as a "nuisance bear". He was taken to a zoo near Thunder Bay. His new home was a 30' x 30' cement and wire cage - a prison cell where he would spend the rest of his life.

Suki passed his days in his cell with only the faintest memories of wilderness to entertain his thoughts. He listened to tourists prattle sweetness and was captured again and again inside their cameras. We had been agents in this fate. We tried to rationalise the decision by thinking that at least there would be one less bear taken from the wild and put in a zoo - that instead, Suki, who would not have survived otherwise, was utilised. But this was just a way to help us feel better.

When I think now of the life he lead in that zoo, I think we made the wrong decision for that bear.

As much as I believe the bear would have been better off left to his fate in nature, I am glad to have had the experience of living with him for that time. In living with Suki I learned that as much as we want to understand and connect with a wild creature, this connection can only go so far. There comes a point when understanding the true wildness of the creature is beyond our grasp. A slow death through starvation may have been less brutal for Suki than the tortured and unnatural life in that zoo. I couldn't help reflecting on the arrogance of the human species. We think we can do better than nature, that we can control it. While I feel a certain kindredness for wild creatures, I know there is an "otherness" that sets them apart, that makes them difficult for us to truly understand.

In looking back on the Suki experience now I realise that I wasn't as involved with that creature as I would be if it happened today. There was a distance that I kept between us that I was not fully aware of until now. A part of me longed for closeness with that bear as I knew that in the bear was the key to a closer relationship to nature than I could otherwise have. But I resisted. I had thoughts of my life at university and the 'outside world' and knew that having a bear in the house did not fit in that world. I went back to school in the fall and it was not until recently that I realised I never mentioned Suki to anyone there - at least not until years later after I had met some kindred spirits.

## **Nature as Home**

In the years that lead up to our departure on the Driftwood adventure, in the spring of 1996, Michael and I worked at our professions and tried to get out into wild places at every opportunity. Michael worked as a lawyer in North Vancouver while I worked for a non-profit science education organisation in a trendy part of downtown Vancouver. In the cafe below my office the scene was black leather, red lipstick, and non-fat lattes. I was much more scared leaving my office at night than I ever had been walking the half hour from the school bus to our home on that lonely stretch of road in the Quetico wilderness. The futuristic shape of the SFU downtown tower, blocks of buildings flooded with lights, the steady hum of cars, wailing sirens. Here I was in another

landscape where I did not belong, where I did not feel at home. The difference though, between this city experience and my first days at Queen's, was that now I was not as confused about my place in the world. I was more conscious of my connection to nature and more accepting of it. This made life in the city both easier and more difficult to take. The confusion I experienced at university was no longer present but at the same time my father's death had shown me that life can be fleeting and that it should be lived in accordance with the spirit. My spirit said that I should be living as close to nature as possible. I wrote a poem acknowledging some of the feelings I had about living in the city at that time:

*City Home*

*Last night  
a slice of lemon moon  
perched on skyscrapers  
told me stories  
of homeless/prostitutes  
lining the tunnels  
of lifeless concrete.*

*Numbed I swam  
through red green gold lights  
unaware of the motions  
bringing me home  
with a slight sadness  
stuck in my throat*

This poem reveals how alienating the city landscape was to me. It reminded me that to live in this large city was to risk loosening my connection to nature. The result was sadness.

Another poem illustrates what happens for me when I am removed from nature or have spent too much time in a man-made environment without the balancing time in nature:

*December Vortex*

*on the street corner standing  
trying to hide the insides  
hanging on the outside  
not sure which is which  
eating exhaust  
smiling at  
unsmiling people rushing past  
as though nothing can wait until tomorrow*

*red green red lights change  
whatever made me think  
I belong here blinking stupidly  
like automatic Christmas lights  
blinded by glittered plastic windows  
mind racing to  
get more done in less time*

*a thought staircase  
leads me skyward  
to a snowy balsam grove  
where coloured lights  
shimmer in lunar rays  
and saw-whet owls  
fly me home*

I did not feel at home there. The pace of life was too fast for me. I was paralysed by the movement of cars and people and overwhelmed by the speed with which everyone around me conducted their business. And while standing on that busy street corner assaulted by exhaust fumes and unsmiling people, it was to nature that I wished to escape. The image that most brought me comfort was a snowy balsam grove with icicles reflecting rainbow colours in the moonlight. I opened my eyes and the image was replaced by fast moving cars, ringing telephones, impersonal interactions with others rushing through their lists, department stores designed to draw your attention in a thousand different directions, beggars on street corners, advertisers telling me to be something different than I am.

A third poem illustrates the little bits of pleasure nature brought amidst the human-constructed environment:

*Even a Starling*

*Even a  
sky rat starling  
looks lovely  
shining purple blue  
iridescence  
amid the cigarette butts  
and old chewing gum  
on the dead grey  
concrete*

I had never appreciated starlings much because it is a species that was introduced from



Europe and as a result has taken over the niches of native species, in particular, songbirds. Still, in this poem, I marvel at the beauty of this bird as compared to the dirty bus depot, and the bird connects me with something, anything, from nature. The starling, like me, was there only as a result of man's intervention, man's processes.

I was aided in the knowledge that we were in Vancouver temporarily, that Driftwood loomed on the horizon. I tried and had some success enjoying some aspects of the city - movies, plays, music, colourful people, interesting restaurants, bookstores, and libraries. That and having the ability to get out of the city to wild places fairly quickly made it seem alright. Still, I was impatient. I spent a good amount of time dreaming of our wilderness adventure.

### **Nature and Technology**

It was during my years in Vancouver that I was most aware of how difficult it was to get away from Franklin's house of technology. For the first time I was experiencing real traffic jams and people living fast-paced lives. I found a disconcerting lack of green things. Any green spaces that were around, such as city parks and beaches, were humming with crowds of people. Many people had cell phones and seemed obsessed with being in constant touch with each other. The combination of the fax machine and the computer meant that people expected to receive immediately whatever it was they needed to keep pace with their very busy days. I was swept into the whirlwind of the technological age and this more than anything was responsible for my feeling of losing touch with nature. Getting out hiking or kayaking on weekends was the only way to feed my soul the nourishment of nature that it demanded.

When I first began the Master's program, my research was on the educational use of interactive television. The organisation I was working for at the time was on the cutting edge in this area and I was participating in the latest aspects of it. While I was doing this research I had a vague notion that something wasn't quite right about it for me, that there was something in this work that was running up against deeply held, though as yet unarticulated, beliefs about the role of nature in my life and in the world at large. I realised that in all the excitement over the impressive technical aspects of this innovation, a critical view of the use of the technology was missing. I had

been so impressed by the magic of the technology that I did not want to question the direction this technology was taking us.

Interactive television was new and exciting and it offered amazing promises such as the ability to teach many students at a distance by “interacting” with them through fibre optics and a television screen. And, as a convenient tool of communication, it has many practical uses. But I came to think it dangerous to view it as simply another way for real people to meet with real people. While working with this technology I discovered that we were unwittingly using the word “interaction” in a way that changed its definition. I came to realise that to interact through a television screen is very different from interacting with a person face-to-face. When communicating through a two-dimensional television screen one cannot pick up all the body language or physical presence of the other person which is so important in human communication. One gets only a small fraction of the essence of the person and as a result the exchange is less intimate, less real. In my experience, it was less like interacting and more like taking turns talking to an image on the screen. It became difficult to remember that I was talking to a real human being.

This technology was assisting us in removing ourselves from the intimate experience of communication with another just as being in a car or air plane removes us from interaction with nature. We are left with only the illusion of interaction. To use this technology without recognising that it is just another communication tool, like a telephone with pictures, seemed to me only slightly less absurd than those televised biology lectures.

These years as a young adult away from home brought experiences that at first appearance seemed negative and harsh, but which allowed me to appreciate my connection to nature even more deeply. I had to experience alienation from myself and a loosening of the connection to nature before I could fully accept nature’s importance in my life.

## Chapter III

### Driftwood: picking up pieces

To those that knew of my childhood, it did not seem strange, when in June of 1996 Michael and I put away our busy Vancouver lives and headed north to begin our fifteen-month adventure in the remote wilderness of northern British Columbia. Our specific destination was the Driftwood Valley, 170 kilometres due north of the town of Smithers. After three years of planning and saving we were finally embarking on the lifelong dream that each of us had had before we met and which was strengthened after we met by our mutual passion for wilderness. That dream was to live in an isolated wilderness setting for at least one full cycle of the seasons, to live as closely as possible to the land and to the wild creatures of that land.

Why forsake the security of professional jobs and the comforts of civilisation to live in the wilderness? Why spend every penny we had saved on the transience of this experience? Why do this at this time in our lives, a time when many of our friends are settling down, buying houses and having children? The answers to these questions were never altogether clear. Perhaps we did it because lifelong dreams have a way of gently prodding our awareness, haunting unexpected spaces in our lives until we pay attention. We only knew that the time had come to make the dream a reality. Before we left, many people said they envied our “getting away from it all.” But, it was not that we were getting “away” from something as much as we were going “to” something. Something we both needed.

In 1990, when we moved west from Ontario, Michael and I had only a vague sense of the form our dream would take. As a young person, my dream resembled the typical survival scenario where I hoped to grow personally as a result of having been tested by the powerful forces of nature. Nature in this sense being something separate from myself - an entity to be out-smarted or wrestled into submission. Over the years, as my awareness of my relationship with nature grew, and through discussions with Michael, the focus of the dream evolved. We agreed that we did not want this experience to be strictly a survival game where we would go into the wilderness to

“conquer it.” We had come to view our adventure as an opportunity, not to pit ourselves against the wilderness, but rather to live with wilderness. What we came to chisel out for the Driftwood experience was more along the lines of a wilderness sabbatical - a time-out from the hectic pace of modern life in order to reflect and reevaluate our lives and the direction we were taking. We wanted an opportunity to be a part of nature, to live as close to the land and to wild creatures as we could without spending all of our time meeting our most basic physical needs. We would not attempt to “live off the land” as much as we would attempt to “live with the land.”

More importantly, we wanted to be aware of the more challenging personal journey into the unmapped wilderness of ourselves. This is, of course, for each of us a very unique and personal journey. A journey that is based as much on where we each have come from as where we are now, and as such, though we went on this adventure together, we were bound to take different and distinct inner paths. In this sense the Driftwood experience was an important passage as it provided the time and space for me to look more closely at my life than I ever had before.

As the vision of our dream became clearer we began to feel impatient to set the thing down in concrete ways. The question of where the adventure would take place haunted us. We felt we needed a reason to go to a particular place, something that spoke to us. It was then, through grace and the hands of a friend, that the book Driftwood Valley by Theodora Stanwell-Fletcher floated into our lives. Driftwood Valley is a delightful account of the experiences and observations of two naturalists who lived in the Driftwood Valley off and on during the period from 1937-1941. The Stanwell-Fletcher's went into this wilderness primarily as students to learn as much as they could about the lives of wild things and about life in a wild land. At that time, the Driftwood Valley was unmapped and largely unexplored by the white man. In addition, the Stanwell-Fletcher's did some work for the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, collecting flora and fauna for identification.

Driftwood Valley intrigued and inspired us. We were drawn to the possible socio-cultural differences between their wilderness experience and the one we were planning for ourselves - their relationship with the Native people, the animals, the land itself. These differences were apparent immediately, as on our first visit to the Driftwood Valley we discovered that civilisation had, for our purposes, crept too close to Tetana, the small spring-fed lake where the Stanwell-Fletcher's

had built their cabin. A rail line had been built only a few kilometres away and logging was approaching quickly from the south. For our wilderness adventure, we were forced to choose an unnamed lake approximately 15 kilometres to the northwest of Tetana in the upper Driftwood Valley. From this location we could still travel the same country as the Stanwell-Fletcher's had.

## **Nature as Home**

The idea of wilderness as home and home as more than a roof over one's head began to emerge with clarity on the Driftwood adventure. This quote from my journal was written in the spring of 1997 as we neared the completion of a year in the wilderness:

*I awake to a blue-sky day and the poetic tinkle of Audubon warblers announcing their arrival. Over breakfast we decide to take the day off from slash burning and clean-up to take in spring. I walk down the hill from our cabin, carrying my mug of tea and settle in at the base of a large white spruce. I cannot take my eyes away from the movement of the water. The ice has been out less than two weeks and after a winter of staring at the stillness of ice and snow, the fluidity of open water captivates. I breathe the heady scent of willow pollen and savour it as one would a fine wine. A few feet in front of me, on the water's edge, blades of new grass push through the matted straw of last summer. They are earth's green eyes drowsy with sunshine, remnants of winter still clinging to their eyelashes. I cannot seem to get enough of looking and of being. I long for the moment to stretch on.*

*I catch a flash of movement from the corner of my eye and I am transported down the lake with an eagle. We follow the shoreline past the clearings, over the elongated cone tops of subalpine fir and Englemann spruce to the outflow creek. The eagle disappears but by now my mind has been transported out onto the lake and I suddenly need to be there, to look at the landscape from the water. In a moment I have slipped into the canoe and paddled to the middle of the 1 km wide lake. I lean back and survey the shoreline. I realise that I have come to love this place like one does an old pair of shoes. This is new territory for me yet I feel more at home here than in any of the places I have recently lived.*

(personal journal, May 30, 1997)

I did not always feel at home there on our lake. When we first flew there in 1994 and looked at it through eyes that were trying to judge if that was "the place," I wasn't drawn to it the way I have been to some places. In fact, I thought it rather ugly with its low-lying and boggy shore covered in a gnarled mass of blow downs and devils' club. I was looking for postcard beauty - for spectacular views of snow capped peaks and aquamarine waters - for open pine forests that one

can walk through unimpeded - for rocky shorelines and sandy bottoms to cushion bare feet. This place had few of these things. It didn't seem all that special and I fretted about it being too wet, too dismal without the comforting shoreline of rock or sand that I was used to from the wilderness of my childhood. I did not know at that time that the beauty of this place would become visible to me in a more subtle way, through observing the animals that depended on this land, and through the spirit and charm of the land itself.

In living so intimately with the landscape of our lake, I began to know it on some level and in beginning to know it, I saw in it a different sort of beauty. The hours of looking, walking, sitting, both on land and on water, allowed my idea of natural beauty to evolve. But though I can appreciate it, I can never fully know that land or even pretend that my mere words do it justice.

This early entry from my Driftwood journal shows glimpses of an emerging awareness that my connection with nature is intimately connected with a sense of home and a sense of self:

*I am in our screen tent waiting for a batch of french bread to rise and revelling in the warmth of the sun. It's the first day it has been warm enough to wear shorts. The sun hitting our hanging crystal throws little rainbows on the tent screen. Nearby a Swainson's thrush clucks. I have this deep feeling of contentment as little tingles of pleasure burst in my soul. Ripples of sunlight wash away the last traces of city dust and din.*

*It has been a month since we arrived here and I am finally relaxing, letting go of that frenzied state that got me through those last weeks in Vancouver. It has been a long time since I have felt this way, years it seems. I feel so at home, though we still have to build our cabin. Our fifteen foot high food cache and screen tent are sufficient for now. I guess its a feeling of being at peace with our decision to come here, with being with Michael and for the first time in my life really doing what I want to do. It just feels so right... as if nothing is missing. (personal journal, July 15, 1996)*

When we arrived in the Driftwood Valley we knew that only time would make it feel like home, and in the meantime, we had to build a home. We had to first get our food up in a food cache away from animals, and then get a roof over our heads before the snow fell. My mind was calm despite this pressure. I welcomed the singularity of purpose, of knowing exactly what had to be done. I welcomed the physical labour. I enjoyed building our first home together from the woods around us, using simple tools and, most important, using our bodies and minds. The cabin, for me, became a physical manifestation of the emotional home Michael and I had been working on since we came to be together.

working on since we came to be together.

We talked for hours about how the interior of the cabin would be arranged, about how to make the best use of the space. The corner notches were carefully measured and carved by hand to create the best fit possible. Each log was patiently scribed and a V-groove cut out so that it would fit snugly on the log below. The windows were carefully placed for maximum view and corridors were cut through the brush so we could see as much of the lake as possible. Another quote from my journal:

*At last our cabin is complete...just in time for Christmas. Although we have been living in it for two months, we finally have all the shelving and furniture built. It is wonderful. It is -30 degrees C outside and I am sitting on the 'couch' in my thermarest chair and listening to 'The Messiah' on CBC. It doesn't get any better than this. For an 18 x 20 foot cabin we seem to have plenty of room. It is simple and, to many, it might seem rough and unpolished. That doesn't seem to matter to me for we have made it and it is our home. A sense of peace settles over me. I have much to be thankful for this Christmas. (personal journal, December 21, 1996)*

I began to see how little I needed to feel at home, that the one essential ingredient was the presence of nature.

## **Connection to Nature**

The growing feeling of this place as home was bound closely with the strengthening of my connection to the natural landscape and to nature itself. The mood of the landscape, its aliveness and presence, had a profound and mysterious effect on me. The following quote is from my journal in the depth of the Driftwood winter:

*I set out on snowshoes behind our cabin. The forest is a cathedral. The trees are so covered with snow that they look like white-hooded monks bowing their heads in prayer. I am aware of the absence of sound, the great whiteness absorbing everything. I walk in reverence and awe. I feel the presence of holiness all around. (personal journal, December 16, 1996)*

I do not consider myself a religious person but I am deeply spiritual. As the quote above suggests, my spirituality is intricately linked with the natural world - the natural world is the place I

am closest to the mystery and the immensity of the universe, and to the reality of my own mortality.

*We are experiencing a January thaw. It is so mild I can turn the pages of my book without trouble while barehanded. I've brought a book, thinking I'll need something to keep my mind occupied while I sit at the fishing hole hoping for a rainbow trout for dinner. I should have known better. How can I focus on words when a wonderful drama is unfolding around me. The shoreline is so heavily shrouded in fog that at times I am completely wrapped in a grey-white blanket. A giant hand opens a window in the fog revealing a mottled section of snow and fir. If I didn't know they were trees, I would think I am looking at a woven wool tapestry of infinite texture. I stare at a large spruce about 300 yards from where I sit. A ray of sunlight is pouring out of the clouds painting a fine halo of gold around the tree, separating it from the others. I feel as if someone knows I am here. It is a rare gift and its meaning leaves me motionless, hardly breathing. Moments later the window closes and a cold blue storm presses down on the scene. (personal journal, January 10, 1997)*

In reflecting on that experience, I realise that the significance for me came in the affirmation that there is a larger presence out there and in the knowledge that this is why I came to live in the wilderness and why I will return again. I am reminded of the words of Annie Dillard - words I have pondered most of my adult life. In reading them again now I feel closer to an understanding and marvel all the more at her sensitivity to the natural world:

*One day I was walking along Tinker Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance.. I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck. (Dillard, 1974, p. i)*

When I am with Michael my relationship with nature is enhanced. It was in Driftwood where the clutter of everyday life was absent that I began to see this so clearly.

*Michael is paddling the canoe out into the lake to fill our water containers. He doesn't know I am watching him. The canoe glides over the calm surface of the lake. He wears the canoe like an article of clothing and it reacts to his effortless commands as an extension of himself. It is obvious to me that he is delighted to be out there this morning. Gathering water is not a task for him at this moment - it is rather an opportunity for a moment with nature. Seeing him this way, so enriched, so alive simply by being out here, I reflect on how we seem to feed on each other's relationship to nature - how the sum is greater than the parts. Like two waves that combine to form a larger wave. (personal journal, May 20, 1997)*



Mac Freeman, in his paper on human partnering, talks about the difference between soloing and duetting. In soloing we learn to go it alone, but usually within the support of relationships. There are rare exceptions. In duetting, each partner must be a competent soloer (duocentric as opposed to egocentric) and must be able to listen, work with, and empower their partner. Mac discusses how for a long time the predominant view of human maturation was a push for independence. Now Mac and others have suggested that human maturity is possible generally, and perhaps only, through duocentric soloing within mutual relationships, be it in duet, family, community, or whatever. (Freeman, 1990)

Jean Baker Miller (1986) states that “it is obvious that all living and all of development takes place only within relationships” (p. xxi). In thinking about my relationship with Michael, I think we duet naturally and in doing so, as Mac says, “there is magic in the combination, something happens as each brings out more in the other and also calls forth more from self”(Freeman, 1990, p. 1).

One of the things I like most about my relationship with Michael is our effort to make sense of our lives together, and how we celebrate, try to understand, and try to preserve nature. On a more practical level, our understanding of each other and of the way we needed to be in nature was a critical part of our success in staying safe during our year away. We knew each other well enough to know when it was time to stop or when one of us was not in a space to make good and safe decisions. We were able to read the warning signs of fatigue in each other and had grown to trust each other and therefore prevent many potentially dangerous situations.

In the natural world, in nature, I feel most connected to my female self and to my body. Free from the trappings of a culture that tries desperately to improve woman's bodies, I can accept my “imperfect” body. By what definition do we use the word “improve” anyway? It is merely what we think is better to look at. Out here, my body becomes a useful vehicle in a sometimes harsh environment. It needs to be strong to do the tasks I require of it. Out here, I take care of my body, aware that I cannot risk being sick or injured. With this I feel a kinship with wild animals. I bask in the freedom to move within my own rhythms and find that my rhythms soon match those of nature. During the long winter nights I hole up quite content to read and write and sleep, not needing to be as active as during the summer and fall. I eat when I am hungry, not according to

the clock or social convention.

*I have noticed that I greet my monthly visitor with honour and respect not as a curse to be tolerated but as an important part of being female. Here I have the flexibility to listen to my body and respond accordingly. Today as the snow piles deeper outside our window I linger in bed with a book. Later, I will lounge in a bubble bath, listen to the music of "Officium," soak in the peace. My period is a monthly reminder of my femaleness, a reminder to pay attention. (personal journal, January 27, 1997)*

## **Nature and Technology**

In preparing for the Driftwood adventure, Michael and I had many long conversations about how much modern gear to bring along.

Wilderness begins teaching as soon as we plan the adventure. We must decide what to take with us and what to leave behind. A critical aspect of experiencing wilderness is the willingness to simplify. But, paradoxically, simplicity is not as easy as it sounds. The tools and techniques we choose to take into wilderness can dilute and drastically alter our direct experience with nature. So we begin by questioning each tool we bring. Wilderness work starts with a basic ecological question: What do we really need? (Harper, 1995, p. 188)

We realised that, as Harper says above, depending on the item, bringing it might fundamentally change the nature of our experience. We talked at length about whether to bring a personal locator beacon (PLB). This is an emergency homing device with a signal that, once activated, is relayed via a series of orbiting satellites to the central search and rescue centre in Ottawa. These satellites, because they are in different positions in space, triangulate the exact position of the PLB giving off the signal. Ottawa then contacts the search and rescue operation which is nearest to where the signal is coming from, gives the coordinates, and a rescue operation is launched. All this takes as little as two hours, depending on the positions of the satellites at the time when the PLB is activated. A PLB would be our only hope of getting help should something happen while we were out on a trip in the wilds and away from the two-way radio in our cabin.

We reflected on the implications of packing this thing around with us. We knew that the presence of this device would push back the edge of wilderness and thus the edge of fear as well. Would it change for us the meaning of the word "wilderness"? Would it give us a false sense of security? Would it serve to take the adventure out of the adventure? And, most importantly, if we decided not to include a PLB as part of our equipment, and one of us did not return alive, would

the survivor still feel the decision was justified?

Though we felt uncomfortable entering the wilderness with the stated goal of living a simple life while at the same time relying on such a high-tech piece of equipment, in the end, we decided to take along the PLB. We knew that even if we did have occasion to activate the PLB, there would be no guarantee that the signals would be picked up in time to help us or that the weather would be suitable for rescue. Being in remote wilderness has inherent risks and even a minor injury can turn into a life and death situation, with or without satellites and helicopters. The edge was still there. We wanted, quite naturally and quite simply, to come back alive if at all possible. The thought of that small and relatively inexpensive piece of equipment in our pack reducing the chance of at least one of us not making it back was enough to convince us to take it.

Another issue we discussed at length was whether or not to bring along a satellite telephone (SAT). This relatively new piece of technology would have been much more reliable than a high-frequency radio, and much less cumbersome to operate. While weighing the pros and cons, we looked into sponsorship for the very expensive SAT phone hardware. Part of the allure of having such a system was its compatibility with a laptop computer. With a computer and SAT phone we could set up e-mail and a web site and share the day to day experience with school children and anyone else who would be interested in following along. Bringing the experience to others had always been an important part of our dream.

The more we thought about it, however, the more we realised that we were playing into the hands of technology marketers and falling under the spell of technological hegemony. That is, buying into the idea that just because it is available and has a use, we need to have it. We realised too that, while having a computer and a SAT phone would link us to the outside world, the link might easily turn into a chain to that world. We feared a negative impact on one of our most important goals - connecting with the natural world. To do that, all we really needed was the technology we were born with - our senses. In the end, what we would have risked losing was far more important than what would have been gained. We left without the SAT phone.

Instead of a SAT phone, we opted for a high-frequency (HF) radio, which we eventually rechristened the "highly-infrequent" radio, as reception was rarely available when we wanted it.

Our radio signal, to reach its target, had to first bounce off the ionosphere as there was no “line of sight” receiver in our area. Whether signals were good or bad depended on the atmospheric conditions on a given day. Most days signals were weak and static-filled at best. It just happened to be a bad year for the ionosphere. Despite these difficulties the HF radio turned out to be the right choice for us. To make a call, we had to first raise the BCTel radio operator in Ladner, identify ourselves, and give out the number we wished to be connected with. If someone wanted to call us they also had to first go through the radio operator who would call out our radio number. We did not have enough battery power to leave the radio on stand-by for more than a few hours a week so we set up scheduled times for when we would monitor calls. This was usually in the early mornings when signals were often best.

Using the radio was a difficult enough process that we were not tempted to use it more than was necessary in order to share a little about our progress and to ease the worries of our friends and families. It was also good to know that friends and family could contact us if necessary to let us know about any family emergencies or crises at their end.

After much debate, we also decided to take along a CD player-radio receiver. At first I did not want this device as I have a seemingly insatiable appetite for quiet. Something about quietness is soothing to my soul. Perhaps it is the slow fluidity of my thinking without the clutter of background noise that puts me more in tune with the natural rhythm of my body and of nature. I didn't want to be caught in the “just because it's there” mentality of the thing. In truth, we doubted that we could get any radio reception up there at all and, for Michael, the main reason for including it was for playing prerecorded music. For him, 15 months without music was unthinkable and he felt that certain music could actually enhance an experience in nature as opposed to detract from it. As it turned out, we did receive the CBC signal at times and, I must admit, it was nice to have the radio to keep occasionally abreast of the news (if only to make me even happier about where I was), and I did enjoy listening to the few CD's we managed to take along. In fact, listening to that same music now has the pleasing effect of transporting me back to the Driftwood experience.

The more we examined the technology available to us, the more we realised that technology was all pervasive and almost impossible to avoid. But we learned in this situation that the wise use of technology involves thinking about how it fits into our lives whether it be in wilderness or not.

In other words, it comes down to the difficult matter of controlling technology rather than letting technology control us.

We had similar discussions around other items, some of which we ended up taking and some we didn't; bear spray, light weight tents and sleeping bags, guns, prepackaged dried food, gortex clothing, chain saw. In the end we took more than we absolutely needed to survive, but I do not think that the extra items detracted from our connection to nature because each was carefully considered in the context of what we were there to achieve.

The physical transition from Vancouver to the wilderness was difficult as it happened so quickly. We chose to fly into our lake rather than walk, paddle, or come in on horseback. As a result, we did not have time to adjust gradually, naturally. It was the technology of car and plane that allowed for our physical bodies to move quickly from one place to another, but it didn't allow for our minds and spirits to keep pace with this transition. Wendell Berry writes about this transition into wilderness in his essay "An Entrance to the Woods":

That sense of the past is probably one reason for the melancholy that I feel. But I know that there are other reasons. One is that, though I am here in body, my mind and my nerves too are not yet altogether here. We seem to grant to our high-speed roads and our airlines the rather thoughtless assumption that people can change places as rapidly as their bodies can be transported. That, as my own experience keeps proving to me, is not true. In the middle of the afternoon I left off being busy at work, and drove though traffic to the freeway, and then for a solid hour or more I drove sixty or seventy miles an hour, hardly aware to the country I was passing through, because on the freeway one does not have to be. The landscape has been subdued so that one may drive over it at seventy miles per hour without any concession whatsoever to one's whereabouts. One might as well be flying. Though one is in Kentucky one is not experiencing Kentucky; one is experiencing the highway, which might be in nearly any hill country east of the Mississippi.....The faster one goes, the more strain there is on the senses, the more they fail to take in, the more confusion they must tolerate or gloss over - and the longer it takes to bring the mind to stop in the presence of anything. (Berry, 1994, pp. 67-72)

Berry is looking at technology as more than just a highway or an air plane. As Franklin does, he talks about technology as a state of mind, as a way of thinking, and he points out how little we are aware of technology's influence on us until we are able to get away from it. At first this separation is difficult and we long for the familiar.

Michael and I both felt how difficult it was to slow down after we had been travelling at that

greater pace and emerging from a technological world. This feeling of not being in tune with the rhythm and pace of the land was predominant for us those first few days, and perhaps the first few weeks, in the Driftwood Valley.

While we were able to control to some extent the technology we brought along or used to get us there, the existence of other kinds of technology in the surrounding area, over which we had no control, caused us some concern. We were directly on the flight path between Smithers and a copper mine which was under construction some two hundred kilometres to the north of us. We would occasionally hear helicopters overhead and in the summer heard float planes as well. I resented the intrusion of this technology but came eventually to accept it as part of life in the north. I learned from the moose and the loons who didn't seem to pay it any notice, how to take it in stride.

Sometimes in winter, after the lake had frozen enough for landing, the helicopter pilots would stop in for a visit - just drop out of the sky for coffee. When this happened, our day would be changed in an instant as we never had any advance notice of visitors. This wasn't too often and we actually enjoyed the occasional chance to chat with "the neighbours."

One particular visit was especially enjoyed. We were closing up the cabin and about to head out on a week-long snowshoe trip around the mountains to the north of us when we heard a helicopter coming. By this time, we recognised the sound of a helicopter that was going to land as opposed to one that was just flying over. Sure enough, this one set itself down on the lake in front of the cabin as we put the coffee on. Michael and I went down to meet whomever it might be visiting that day, but the pilot kept the helicopter running and said he didn't have time to stay. Nevertheless, he started unloading boxes of groceries. We were confused until he told us that our friends from Vancouver had conspired to put together a surprise food drop.

It was like manna from heaven since we hadn't eaten fresh food in many months. I don't think either of us have ever enjoyed the taste and texture of fresh fruit and vegetables more than we did that day - all made possible through the use of sophisticated technology in the form of a helicopter. Sometimes more than others the rooms of Franklin's house of technology are a nice place to be.

An interesting part of the whole experience of the food drop for us was noticing, while we unloaded boxes from the back of the helicopter, that in the rear seat sat a mining executive who was so absorbed in his laptop computer work that he did not look up from it the entire time. He probably had no idea of what was going on or where he was. Nor did he seem to care.

## **Wild Animals**

Animals played an important role on our Driftwood Adventure and it was there that I had the mental space and time to think about the importance of animals in my relationship with nature. The first summer we were on the Driftwood adventure we had only two and a half months to build a food cache and our cabin before winter set in. Despite this great incentive, we had a difficult time focussing on these tasks because of the wildlife activity that was taking place all around us. Most of this distraction was caused by a loon family. We were privileged to witness the growth of a loon chick from the time he was in the egg until the day he flew south for the winter. We called him "Arthur," though we had no way of knowing if he was male or female.

Our lake was small enough that we knew where the loons were most of the time. One of our favourite activities that summer was sitting on a log at the lakeshore with the birding scope and binoculars and watching the trials and tribulations of a young loon's life. In a wilderness setting like this, one is able to tune-in to subtle nuances. For example, we knew the day that Arthur was born because of the difference in the way the parent loons acted and called. They kept calling and making such a ruckus that we stopped what we were doing and went to the shore. At first we couldn't see anything different, but on closer examination, we discovered a tiny fluffy head peaking out from beneath a parent's wing.

Arthur's whereabouts and antics became an important part of our daily life, almost like having our own child. I couldn't seem to get enough of watching him. There was so much to learn and I did not want to miss any of it. We learned how the parent loon submerges to let the young loon climb on its back and how the parents take turns carrying and feeding the young. They are incredibly conscientious parents, chewing and regurgitating small bits of fish and aquatic animals for the little one, hiding him under their wings. When an eagle flies by, they give their

very specific eagle danger call: "it's an e..e..e..e..e..E..E..A..G..L..E!" That call always let us know when an eagle was anywhere near the lake. They didn't seem to worry about ospreys, hawks, or turkey vultures. I believe it is because only eagles will eat loon chicks if they can get their talons on them.

Eventually, when he had grown too big, the parents would refuse to let Arthur on their backs even though he'd try to climb on. Once he succeeded in getting up on the parent's back, but we laughed at his apparent confusion as he was facing the tail - the wrong way around. If he couldn't climb on the back he had to be content with putting his head under a parent's wing while the rest of his body was still floating exposed.

One day we spent an entire morning watching Arthur learn to dive for small fish. The parents would bring him a small dead fish and drop it in the water directly in front of him. Initially, Arthur would put his head in the water to search for the fish but came up empty-beaked and the parent would have to dive down and catch the fish before it sank to the bottom. This procedure repeated itself until, days later, Arthur learned to grab the fish before it sank. It was a long time though before he was proficient enough to catch his own fish.

As he grew older Arthur's personality began to emerge as he became more aware of the world around him. As a chick he pecked at his parent's beak for food, but now he swam up to them while making a nasal hooting sound that seemed to us the loon version of whining. At first the parents gave in and would go find some fish. Eventually though, they began to just swim away, trying to encourage Arthur to fish for himself.

I couldn't get enough of watching the loons and always when I was back in the bush peeling a log I feared missing something - even something like Arthur waving his foot out behind him, just like his parents do.

Arthur was a well behaved young loon for the most part. When a rogue loon landed on the lake, Arthur was banished to the lily pads, an area about 100 square feet just off the point and about 150 feet from our summer camp. Arthur would hide his whole body under the lily pad leaves so that if you didn't know he was there you would never find him. There he would wait



patiently until one of his parents returned to let him know it was now safe to come out. Meanwhile, the parent loons would go and scare off the rogue. Rising up on their feet, spreading their wings out over the water like a dark cape, bills down and menacing, racing over the water like dragons and using both wings and feet to propel themselves forward. You wouldn't want to meet one in a dark alley, I often thought. One day both adults were doing this in unison just meters away from where I was swimming. They paid no attention to me. I felt invisible, and aware that I was witnessing something rare and precious.

One time, when the parents were off chasing a rogue away and Arthur grew tired of hiding in the lily pads, he swam within feet of us. Arthur would never have been allowed to be that close when his parents were with him. It was clear to us that he was curious. He tilted his head side to side as he tried to figure out what we were. As he continued on his little adventure past our camp and down into the bay, we noticed one of the parents returning and wondered what would happen when it was discovered that Arthur wasn't there. The parent frantically searched the lily pads and called out. We watched Arthur as he dove in the direction of the lily pads. On the way back, when he surfaced, he barely brought his head above water. He was sneaking back, either showing his parents how good he was about not letting the humans know he was there, or he was trying not to be seen by his parents until he returned to where he was supposed to be.

The most exciting time for us was watching Arthur learn to fly. It was mid-September and snow had already appeared on the local mountains. One morning Arthur refused to eat the fish that the female parent (the larger male had already returned south) was bringing him. He swam away toward the north end of the lake where in previous days he'd attempted to fly but could never quite get off the water. He was visibly upset, whining in his nasal voice. Michael and I watched from the bank and cheered him on. Half way down the lake he made it off the water. Arthur was airborne. We felt like proud parents watching a child take those first steps. Then we looked at each other as the same question had occurred to us simultaneously. Did Arthur know how to land? Arthur circled the lake once, flying about 10 feet above the water, and then attempted a landing. He closed his wings too quickly and dropped too fast. The crash was spectacular. He cart-wheeled like a fallen water skier - water, wings and feet flying in several directions at once. Mother loon flew over to comfort the little one and after we knew that he was okay, we laughed long and hard. The next morning he tried another flight and this time when he came in to land he

gave a nervous hoot and pulled back a bit just before hitting the water. Rough, but he was down safely on the water. Arthur got progressively better with each landing and eventually he was able to circle higher and higher without fear.

On one of these test flights, Arthur was circling the lake about ten feet off the water when the parent called the alarm: "its an eagle!!". Arthur closed his wings instantly and dropped like a stone directly into the water and disappeared under its surface all in one smooth motion. It was as if he had been shot. It seems to me that the only way he could have known to do that was through genetic coding. Eagles will pick off ducks, gulls and other birds in mid-air and Arthur must have somehow known that. We wondered how he could know that yet not have the faintest idea how to land on water.

Arthur and his parents taught us many things. We learned about loon behaviour by daily observations, not because we had to, but because we couldn't help ourselves. I spent hours sitting at the birding scope watching or sketching the loons and everyday I was rewarded by some delightful or unusual behaviour. Over time, the loons came to trust us, bringing Arthur close to our screen tent, interestingly enough, especially when we had music playing.

The loons taught me about being present and stopping to take in the beauty of the moment. I learned to drop everything and go whenever I thought something unusual was happening. Arthur's valiant effort at mastering flying (and landing) reminded me of my capacity to endure and persevere. His playful curiosity brought out a child-like sense of wonder. Arthur's presence brought forth the deep compassion and softness for other creatures that I need to be in touch with.

The loon's calls in particular hit a deep chord within me - a haunting cry that echoes and evokes within me a certain anxiety. Perhaps the call reflects my awkwardness with being sad or reminds me of the dark side of my soul. If so, one would think that I would not like to hear it. The opposite is true - I love to hear the loons and love the emotions their call evoke in me, however frightening or sad. I have heard the loon's cry ever since I was a baby and perhaps before. Whatever else it may be, it is a sound that speaks of home.

On the Driftwood adventure, fishing for trout reminded me of ice fishing with my father

when I had used the fish as dolls. Perhaps my struggle over killing the fish was linked to those early memories:

*I sit on a bucket by the ice fishing hole. I have a line in one hand, a "mister twister" with a dried shrimp on the other end. Its about minus 10 degrees C and a thin layer of ice is forming around the line. The air is clear and still. I am surrounded by a sea of jewels - rubies, emeralds, amethyst, amber, sapphire, and diamonds all glittering from recently fallen snow crystals. Beside me lay two rainbow trout already covered with a thin layer of frost. I feel a tug on my line. I wait for the hook to set, then pull. The rainbow twists and turns in its fight for survival. I haul it up onto the snow. It dances flashing rainbow colours - a live jewel at my feet. Its will to survive tugs at my heart. I steel myself, take my wooden stick and whack its head as hard as I can. It lies motionless on the snow, blood dripping from its mouth. I reach out and stroke its soft body - so delicate, it is a thing of beauty. Already the brilliant purple and pink and silver along its side begin to fade. I am saddened by the death I have caused. This sadness is tempered, however, with the knowledge that I have caught our dinner and that this food is essential to our survival out here. (personal journal, February 10, 1997)*

In having to kill a fish for food I began to realise the importance of being directly connected to one's food source, especially when it's a live creature. By killing and cleaning a fish with my own hands I am put in touch with the raw truth of nature and am less likely to romanticise the natural world. Wild creatures are either predators or prey and their existence is all about survival. There is no judgment in nature. No good or bad. It is our human prejudices that overlay a moral matrix on nature.

Having put myself in a situation where I was dependent on fish for a nutritionally balanced diet forced me to confront one of the fundamental laws of nature and that is that for something to live something else usually has to die. Through this process I became more respectful of my food source as well as more aware of what I actually needed to survive. I became very sensitive to waste, and giving thanks became an integral part of every meal.

November and December were a quiet time for wildlife in the Driftwood valley. The snow piled up daily as we worked on finishing the inside of the cabin and anything that would survive the harsh winter had hibernated by now, left the territory, or adapted and accepted the snow. We saw few wild creatures aside from a few hardy species of birds - pine grosbeaks, chickadees, woodpeckers and dippers. There were no rabbits in our area and thus no lynx or fox. When the snow started to pile up the moose had left to spend the winter where winter browse would not be

buried and where they could more easily outrun wolves. Bears were sawing logs in well insulated dens. Squirrels came out only on warm days. We saw pine marten and wolverine tracks only occasionally.

But on Christmas eve we were most delighted to witness a marten munching on some fish remains we had left out on a wooden platform, hoping to attract such a creature. We viewed him as a gift. According to Celtic legend, if you see a stranger on Christmas eve it is the Christ child come in disguise and you are given a special blessing. This was the first furry creature aside from a few squirrels we'd seen all winter. We named him "Furbags," and thus began our marten adventure.

The temperatures that Christmas were in the minus 35° to 50°C range and we decided to feed Furbags our fish remains and, just for Christmas, some gelatinous strawberry jam we had made the mistake of buying. We had no idea at that time that by feeding one marten we would, in time, attract at least fifteen others. Martens are a relatively shy animal and in all my years of travelling in wilderness I have only seen fleeting glimpses of them - a brown streak in the bush that makes you shake your head and wonder if you really did see it. I devoured this chance to watch them for long periods of time, to see how they would interact with each other and with us. I tried to stuff as far away as possible thoughts of doing them any harm by feeding them. This entry from my journal begins to explore the connection I felt with the martens:

*I awoke this morning to a world transformed. Overnight hoar frost draped the trees so completely with crystals they seem to be wearing coats of fur and are barely recognisable as trees. Crystals emerge like frozen feathers stuck in the snow at every angle, reflecting a multitude of colours. In places, the paper thin shards of ice hang on black threads of old man's beard like fine jewels on the dresser of a princess. On other trees the frost crystals are compact and nubular like wands of coral. I watch as the first rays of sun hit a crystal plane and send light shattering through the minus 15 degree morning.*

*I settle into the snow bank with a bag of fish tidbits. Furbags is the first to surface. He jumps up onto the bird feeder and begins to dance, running forward and grunting like he can't decide what to do, then standing up on his hind legs with his paws hanging down and his butt sticking out like the bustles of Victorian women. He refuses to come down to eat from the spoon in my hand so I toss a fish head to the feeder and in a flash he's grabbed it and is gone. Freckles, on the other hand, is all grace and manners. He slinks toward me, his body low to the snow and trusting eyes fixed on mine. Freckles edges even closer and places his two front paws on my thigh before ever so gently taking a*

*morsel of fish from my hand. His eyes are black and in their depths I feel the power of my own wildness. To be this close to a wild spirit I feel the blossoming of a friendship I cannot explain. Unlike the others, who run away with their prizes, Freckles pads a few feet away to devour his meal. Meanwhile, Patch is running in 12 foot circles grunting like a psychotic maniac. She is all adrenaline, bouncing off trees with her hind legs and racing close to me before running away. Blanche has climbed a nearby spruce and eyes the whole scene with some disdain and extreme seriousness. She is smaller and more delicately built than the rest, and very wary. Buffy waits on the branch of a nearby fir for her meal to be delivered as she does every morning. She is the most beautiful of the martens with her big dark eyes and buff and orange coloured breast.*

*After the breakfast tidbits have been doled out, most of the martens retire to their condominium within a pile of snow-covered slash. Freckles climbs up a tree and into a soft cradle of snow, framed by lacy ice crystals. After several minutes of walking in small circles figuring out just where best to lay his body, he curls up like a cat in the sun. It is an opportunity not to be missed, despite the frigid temperatures, so we haul the camera and tripod out and spend the next hour photographing our star. He seems well suited to the role as he lifts his head and tilts it this way and that as if he knows and enjoys what we are doing. The sun and reflections off snow are so bright that he has to squint in the sun to see us. His fur shines a sleek brown, offering sharp contrast to the surrounding white. He is so at home here. He sleeps there for another hour before leaping to the ground with all four legs spread out like a flying squirrel and lands with a puff in the powder below. For me, another day has slipped by watching the martens...ahh, the joy of watching. (personal journal, January, 14, 1997)*

Mostly with Freckles, because of his magnetic personality, I was reminded of the importance of being authentic, genuine. These animals are completely themselves and each marten so different in personality and physique. There is no pretence. They have a pure relationship with each other and with us. The martens pulled up some wildness from within me. An appreciation for the simplicity of a life lived in the wild. Something about their innocence and competence draws out that spirit of survival and wellness I need to remain sane and centered.

The more difficult part of the lessons learned from the martens came a few days later when we returned from a day-hike to find that a couple of the rascals had broken into our cabin. They had chewed through some soft wood in the small triangle at the top of one of the gable ends. Inside they had discovered the bag of fish bits and had dragged it over to the couch to eat them in comfort. They had torn our tar paper roof so that, between the boards, the darkening sky could be seen. We were not surprised that they had tried but were taken aback by their tenacity. We had only ourselves to blame.

Originally, when Furbags had shown up on Christmas eve and even when Freckles came

along, we had thought there could only be a couple of martens in the immediate area. We had no idea so many would show up and hang around. But it is a hard life for these creatures in winter so it made perfect sense in retrospect that the prospect of a free meal would attract them from far and wide. I suppose the same thing happens when a winter-killed moose is found. Before too long, dozens of creatures from marten to wolverine to raven to weasel congregate until the last bone is picked clean. We were able to witness the group behaviour of the normally solitary marten. They often fought with each other hissing and snarling and tumbling about in the snow like alley cats. When approaching each other in battle, they approached with their less vulnerable hind ends, their back feet clasping at the butt of the other while curling around for a quick nip with their sharp teeth. It was ritualised - complete with all the rules and protocol of a sporting event. At night we would hear them bump up against the cabin as they challenged each other. More than once we had to get up out of bed to break up a noisy brawl taking place out on the porch.

The break-in was the final straw. We knew we had to stop feeding them if we wanted to take longer trips away and expect to come back to a cabin intact. Once we stopped the regular feeding routine they slowly trickled off until we didn't see a marten every day. Furbags and Freckles stayed the longest. It was difficult to go fishing as sometimes one of them would sit a few yards away and stare. When we carried the fish to the cabin they would follow us right in if we let them. Eventually, we caught only rare glimpses of them, bounding along the lake shore or following their noses through the bush.

We were glad to have had the opportunity to observe marten behaviour for the month or so that they were around, but the experience caused me to question my notion of stewardship. I had thought that, by feeding them in mid-winter, I was helping them out through a tough spell. I felt a kinship and a deep respect for them. Like us, they were toughing out the harsh winter. The difference was that we had the luxury of so many comforts and more food than we could eat. What I knew in my heart was that they would do well on their own without human intervention. That there would not be any martens here if it were otherwise. It was my arrogance and selfishness that made me think I was helping them when really I was helping my self. In feeding them fish, I was really using their wildness, and our interaction, to feed my own soul.

In the process of living with these wild animals I have come to think more seriously about the

idea of anthropomorphism. Michael and I spent long hours debating the concept. Applying human emotion and human traits to animals is frowned on these days; however, I came to believe that it is impossible for me to be truly objective or strictly scientific about wild creatures and I question whether anyone can. We see animals through human lenses and this is what gives our experience with them its magic. I acknowledge that anthropomorphism can go too far - the Disney version where Bambi is merely a human in deer clothing. But somewhere along the spectrum is a place where one relates to animals as a species in their own right, separate and distinct from us, but sees them through the human eyes which we must use to view them. I can't help giving names to animals. In this way I feel more connected to them. They become friends. Somehow it opens up my compassion and a softness and a greater understanding flows forth. It helps me relate to them as equals, not greater or lesser than me. In careful anthropomorphizing, I become sympathetic and connect with them, not in an objective, unfeeling, scientific way, but in an emotional and caring way. In the introduction to the 1987 Penguin edition of Driftwood Valley by Theodora Stanwell-Fletcher, Wendell Berry addresses anthropomorphism:

It is possible unfortunately to imagine a reader who will object to Mrs. Stanwell-Fletcher's anthropomorphizing of animal thoughts and feelings. But of course this is common to people who live and work closely with animals. It is the language of affection and sympathy. How else might one explain animal character to human beings? And why, after all, should one want to be "purely scientific" about neighbours and companions? One must wonder, indeed if there is any "purely scientific" way to get along or cooperate with animals, any more than there is with humans. (Berry, in Stanwell-Fletcher, 1989, p. x)

In my encounters with wild animals I have always been left with a feeling of awe, and of having been blessed by nature itself. Perhaps there is some connection to a primitive past, or perhaps it is just that I am somehow reconnected with my own wild spirit, and through this connection I have a clearer sense of who I am, of where I need to be.

I was fortunate to grow up with wild animals as an integral part of my life. My relationship with them kept a passion within me alive that led me to the Driftwood adventure. There, I had the time and space to step back and see the pattern of how wild animals had been teachers and healers in my life. Animals have taught me the joy in simple things, to laugh, and to engage the present moment. They have reminded me of the importance of authenticity, loyalty, and trust. Without a word they have taught me much when I was willing to listen.

The year spent in the Driftwood Valley was a significant passage in my life because it provided the time and mental space necessary to begin organising the seemingly disparate pieces of my life. It was in the Driftwood that the idea for this paper began to emerge.



## Chapter IV

### Arbutus: evergreen

After our Driftwood adventure we landed on Cortes Island, a relatively wild place off the east side of Vancouver Island, two ferry rides from Campbell River. The series of events that lead us to Cortes make me believe that a certain amount of serendipity was involved. Cortes was the perfect place for us to ease back into civilisation. We could live in relative isolation and in a beautiful natural setting as we acclimatised. For two years we led the simple life on Cortes. Michael worked on a book about our Driftwood adventure and I taught Kindergarten to grade three at the local public school and worked on this paper. In our free time we explored the wild places of Cortes - the many forest trails, the seashore, the surrounding inlets and islands. In these natural settings and within the simplicity of our lives we were able to process the Driftwood experience and I was able to continue my thinking on how my relationship with nature had evolved over the years.

#### Wild Animals

An incident at the school caused me to begin thinking more about how my connection to nature influences, and is influenced by, my teaching. Cortes school was surrounded by forest. I was excited about this as it seemed to me the school ground was a perfect place for children to establish a connection to nature. It was a great wildlife habitat - we would often see deer feeding outside the classroom window or Canada geese nibbling grass on the soccer field. But, one day a cougar was spotted in a tree just beyond the play area. Many people panicked. The children were rounded up and kept inside and there was talk that the cougar should be shot immediately. A wildlife expert from the Ministry of Environment thought the behaviour of the cougar did not indicate that it posed an immediate threat to the children (on seeing them it had climbed a tree and soon disappeared). Despite this, another person was furious that he had not been called so that he could track the creature down and destroy it. The overriding opinion was that the cougar should be feared, that it

should not be here. One parent lamented that it is too bad that officials of the Ministry of Environment have to be called before a cougar can be tracked and killed. She said with disgust that the pioneer spirit was dead. There was an attitude of fear expressed by the community rather than wonder at the rare opportunity of seeing a cougar. I could understand that a parent of a small child would be apprehensive about a cougar sighting near the school, but I did not agree with conveying the message that this cougar is simply the enemy, to be tracked down and eliminated without discussion. I realised that I needed to show the children other ways of thinking, not only about cougars, but about the nature in which they were immersed in living here.

I talked to my students about how when I was a young child growing up in black bear territory my parents allowed me to play outside frequently by making sure that someone was around to supervise me. I talked about how they taught me what to do if I saw a bear or if a bear was stalking me and how through discussions with my parents I learned to have a healthy respect for bears rather than an irrational fear. I taught my students about cougar biology and what to do if they saw one. We searched the woods for cougar signs such as tracks or scratch marks on a tree. We talked about how it would feel to see a cougar in the wild.

Recently, I was visiting a friend and while we were walking down a forested path near her house we encountered a young woman with a lynx on a chain. She told us she had obtained the lynx from a fur farm in southern Ontario and wanted to save its life. It has been de-clawed but other than that looked every bit like a wild lynx. But something was missing. She held its long body in her arms like a baby. I couldn't help thinking how pathetic and unnatural the thing looked in that position. Its eyes lacked that wild sparkle that speaks of life. I walked away deeply disturbed by the thought of this wild animal spending its life as a house pet. I was reminded of Suki and our mistaken notions of stewardship. I thought of my father. I was reminded that wild creatures need to live in wild places, not just so we can see them occasionally, but so that they may live their lives as they were meant to. If I never see another lynx in the wild I will be satisfied just knowing that they are there. Nature, I decided, has an intrinsic value that has nothing to do with us.

Last spring Michael and I were eating dinner at a small table outside on the deck. A female rufous hummingbird landed on the edge of our red and white checkered table cloth. So much of

what I had learned over the past number of years came together in that moment with the hummingbird.

*We sit motionless, spell bound and connected to each other through this tiny bird. A patch of iridescent rusty red feathers catches the sun and magnifies her presence. She opens and closes her needle-like bill revealing a fine slip of a tongue - tasting the air? The feathers on her back so neat and orderly shine like bright green satin. From where I sit I can see one eyelid slowly cover the pin head of an eye. She is taking a nap right in front of us. (personal journal, June 15, 1998)*

In that wonderful moment I was also reminded that my relationship with nature is enriched by Michael's presence. There was something in the look we exchanged that required no words. We both appreciated the presence of the hummingbird and in so doing our understanding of each other grew. I was moved to poetry:

Connection

*perched on a porch of wildness  
we meet in a glance  
a hummingbird spins joy  
in the space between us  
so many fragments  
of self... of time  
come together  
in the fabric of love  
delicate as spider silk*

The hummingbird seemed to put her trust in us, seemed to accept us as fellow creatures of the wild. This is, at least, how I prefer to view the encounter. It is also possible that she was very young and hadn't yet learned to be afraid of us. Whatever the reason for her visit, I felt blessed with the gift of her presence for she had opened up in me a deep tenderness for nature and for my connection with Michael.

Also during our time on Cortes, we made friends with a female black-tailed deer and her two yearlings. I loved feeding the deer and like the martens on the Driftwood, could spend long hours watching them, wanting desperately to know what was going on in their minds, wanting them to relate to me, to communicate with me. Our relationship with the deer not only connected us to nature but also to the memories of our Driftwood experience.

## **Nature and Technology**

Even before the cougar incident I noticed that many of the students didn't spend much time outdoors. They, like many children of today, had computers and televisions and I suspect most watch a minimum of two to three hours of television a day. Unless the weather was sunny and warm, the majority of the children spent the entire day indoors. When they did get outdoors many of the children complained of being bored. I think this is partly because most of these students did not learn to take responsibility for entertaining themselves, and partly because of the fear of nature many of the adults on the island had instilled in them. The result was that, despite living so close to nature, these children did not have experience playing outdoors with nothing but natural materials to use as props and did not have nature as a predominant mind set.

As a teacher I found it difficult to compete with the entertainment quality of both television and computer. The children got bored easily and needed constant stimulation. They had a difficult time focussing. When I took my students outdoors, they at first had a hard time settling down and attuning their senses. I worked at teaching them how to focus and how to engage all of their senses when we went outside. I was delighted with how much they seemed to enjoy the experience once I had taught them a few basic things like listening for the call of different birds and the names of some of the bugs under rotten logs. Still, the next morning at opening circle, I would hear students talk of how many hours it took them to reach level X on their video game.

I continued to take my students outside as much as possible. In the spring we would walk along a gravel road near the school and search the water-filled ditches for caddis flies, water mites and anything else we could find. We set up a weather station and monitored the weather daily. We charted the movement of the sun through the year. We stopped to stroke the smooth bark of the arbutus tree that grows just outside the school entrance. Gradually, the children began to share stories of their adventures outside and I watched them interacting with nature in more gentle ways than I had seen before.

## Connection to Nature

While teaching on Cortes I had the good fortune of being able to walk to and from the school. I walked a half-hour each way on a trail through the forest . The walk provided me with a chance to connect with nature twice a day. Besides giving me the opportunity to see wildlife and the subtle changes in the seasons, my walks in the forest had the effect of helping me to sharpen my awareness (on my way to school) and to relax and calm down (on my way home). I realised, as a result of all the thinking I had been doing about nature in my childhood, that another reason I so enjoyed the walk is that it reminded me of the walk to and from the school bus in Quetico. Walking in nature at the beginning and end of every day had been programmed into me at an early age. This is an entry from my journal during the first spring on Cortes that describes the meditative quality of the walks I now take:

*It's Friday and I leave school with my mind chattering on at an exhausting speed. I have not stopped moving since 7:30 am, there is just so little time for quiet reflection at school. How can I create an environment there that feeds me? I am aware that my mind's chatter is quieting as I walk. My muscles are noticeably looser and I feel a new energy and an interest in my surroundings. By the time I arrive home I am ready to greet Michael. I have left most of the needless worry and niggling details of school behind, somewhere on the trail. (personal journal, April 10, 1998)*

The opportunity for time every day amongst green things and wild creatures was essential to my mental and spiritual self. There was a noticeable difference in me whenever I drove to and from work. I was much more on edge, more preoccupied, impatient and uncentered.

In addition to my walks to and from school, most evenings Michael and I would walk down to the beach below our place and wander the shoreline. We stumbled over seaweed, oyster shells, clams, moon snails, crab shells and other sea treasures. We watched for whales and identified waterfowl. Michael took photos and I collected pieces of driftwood.

The two years spent on Cortes provided time to consolidate much of what I was beginning to understand of my relationship with nature. I know that being close to nature or going into nature as often as possible is essential to my well-being. My life's work, I began to realise, will involve sharing my passion for nature with others as well as being a strong advocate for nature education.

## Summary

This brings me to the present. In these pages, I have walked the path of my life as it relates to a profound relationship with nature. In the Introduction, I quoted Lewis Mumford as saying that adventure is as humdrum as routine unless one relates it to a central core which grows within and gives it contour and significance, and that it is not what one does, but what one realises, that keeps existence from being vain and trivial. I am more certain than ever that the central core which gives my life contour and significance is my relationship with nature, and the realisation and exploration of this core has given me the sense that my existence is anything but vain and trivial. The path continues and I must not only walk it, but I must keep my eyes peeled along the way lest I reach my destination and find I have no gifts to pass on.

Why, I have asked myself, is it so important to do this, to explore my life, to give it meaning? Wallace Stegner tells me that it is quite natural to want to do so:

Chaos, Henry Adams said in his Education, is the law of nature, order is the dream of man. Both fiction and autobiography attempt to impose order on the only life the writer really knows, his own. Once at a literary meeting I heard someone ask John Cheever why he wrote. He replied without hesitation, 'To try to make sense of my life.' That is the best answer I can conceive of. The life we all live is amateurish and accidental; it begins in accident and proceeds by trial and error toward dubious ends. That is the law of nature. But the dream of man will not accept what nature hands us. We have to tinker with it, trying to give it purpose, direction, and meaning - or, if we are of another turn of mind, trying to demonstrate that it *has* no purpose, direction, or meaning. Either way, we can't let it alone. The unexamined life, as the wise Greek said, is not worth living. (Stegner, 1992, p. 219)

I attended a creativity workshop some years ago where the participants were given a page of what appeared to be randomly scattered numbers. We were asked a series of questions about the numbers. Many of these questions seemed unanswerable given what we had in front of us. We were then given a copy of the same page of numbers which had, superimposed on it, a nine-square grid. We were asked similar questions about the numbers, the presence of the grid being the only variable. The grid made it possible to make sense of what we were seeing, providing a framework for organising and making clear what first appeared to be a garbled mass of unrelated numbers. The questions were easier to answer.

It was not difficult to identify that nature was a main reference point of my life. I then tried, by superimposing on it various themes and stories, to explore more fully how this was so. My life was made more clear as a result. I was “Composing a Life” in the way Mary Catherine Bateson says, “Each of us has worked by improvisation, discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined” (Bateson, 1990, p. 1).

Rather than living or, more importantly, remembering my life as linear and goal-oriented, I find instead that it is composed of seemingly incongruous components that are just as important as the congruous.

Just as change stimulates us to look for more abstract constancies, so the individual effort to compose a life, framed by birth and death and carefully pieced together from disparate elements, becomes a statement on the unity of living. These works of art, still incomplete, are parables in the process, the living metaphors with which we describe the world. (Bateson, 1990, p. 18)

The themes of **Connection to Nature**, **Nature as Home**, **Wild Animals**, and **Nature and Technology**, were tools that helped me gather the driftwood that is my life. Dividing my life into chronological segments simply provided the template, or grid, to better view it. Have I made sense of my life as a result? Not completely, though now it makes more sense to me. I know better where I have been and why I have been there. I still don't know why nature tugs at me so. Nor do I know why I feel so at home with it, though now I am able to distinguish between feeling at home with it and feeling at home in it. I am not much closer to understanding my connection with animals and the inner stirrings this connection evokes. And, while I know that a technological mind set can serve to loosen my connection with nature, I am not sure it needs to be so, and I am at odds as to how best to deal with this in my own life.

The process of writing to make sense of my life has given me, among other things, hope. I have been prone, at times, to despair or something that resembles it, and this process of viewing my life and trying to put it in some sort of perspective has driven despair over the horizon. I feel calmer, as if future life decisions can more easily be made from a known reference point.

Part of the calmness has to do with fully accepting who I am. I have confidence that it will be easier to be authentic in the classroom. And this, I believe, is one of the most valuable gifts I

can give my students.

The process has certainly been therapeutic, but on a more practical level it has shown me how others might come to know their passions while appreciating that theirs are often different from mine. Some have as their central core music, some have dance, some have art - the list is endless. But I have learned that it is passion, the central core that drives us, that is important. The importance of examining this core cannot be over emphasised.

This knowledge is especially important in my work as a teacher. Knowing how important it is to have related my life to a central core, I am more sensitive to the budding lives of the children I work with. Their passions are likely to be growing within them though, like me, they may be unaware of it at such tender ages. I am more aware of treating these young lives with the utmost care and of creating an environment that will enable them to write their stories and celebrate the uniqueness of each. Stephen Trimble notes that we have more control in this process than we realise:

Every childhood landscape comes with a different set of building blocks from which to construct a life. And that childhood experience - rural, village, suburban or urban - lasts through-out life. In his memoir, Hole in the Sky, William Kittredge wrote after he had left home. He realised that Warner Valley, still, was "the main staging ground for my imagination."

In creating a stage for our children's stories, we make choices. We stake out the geographies of their childhoods in home landscapes, consciously or unconsciously. To do so attentively begins by thinking as a native of a region. We become part of a particular world of earth and plants and animals and humans. (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994, p. 131)

As a result of this work, I believe that the landscape we grow up in has a profound effect on us. I happened to grow up in a landscape in which nature was central. Not many people have this opportunity but most of us have choices about how much of nature we bring into our landscape. For example, if we live in an urban environment we can bring plants and animals into our homes, plant gardens in planters, hang bird feeders and organise the creation of local green spaces. I am convinced that we need nature and that this is a part of our heritage and our experience that we are losing touch with.

At a time when many of the earth's ecosystems are threatened and we are seeing



unprecedented despair among humans, an increased sensitivity and understanding of nature can only help to lead us to a healthier place - both environmentally and psychologically. A solid foundation in experiential nature education is as fundamental as education's three "R's", yet it is not emphasised enough. Could "Relationship to Nature" become the fourth R? It is true we are asked to teach about nature, to teach the life cycle of plants and animals, but this can't be done without going outside any more than music can be taught by simply talking about it. You have to play in nature and engage all your senses..

I have a renewed commitment to sharing my passion for nature with my students and others. My teaching experiences during the last couple of years have lead me to believe that I need to teach my students more directly how to let nature in, how to fully use the senses and how to let nature instruct. A former teacher of mine uses the phrase "to walk alongside" to describe how we need to let nature teach us. We need to walk alongside nature as well as let nature walk alongside us.

It is more important than ever that we as a culture acknowledge that we are a part of nature and that we can learn from nature if we pay attention. As educators, we must develop a critical language to evaluate the technologies that take our children away from nature. We must be careful to include nature in the equation as we weigh educational priorities.

Of course, not every child will have a passion for nature just as not everyone feels music in their soul. But, while I will be sensitive to creating a stage for my students' own stories, I will continue to share with them my passion for nature. By exposing the children to someone with a deep passion it may encourage them, at some point in their lives, to question their own. And, whatever their passions turn out to be, I am convinced that exposure to nature, like exposure to music, is essential to healthy development.

In addition to renewing my commitment to nature education, the process of writing in order to find meaning in my life has given me new ideas about how narrative can be used as a tool to teach children. I now see the value in allowing students time to develop ideas through writing as well as to record ideas. Having gone through the process myself I can assist students in making meaning out of their experiences. With the younger students I am currently working with, this may be as simple as helping them to notice, or question, or wonder about things that are important

them. Having benefited first hand from having my story heard, I am now committed to creating a classroom culture where writing is meaningful and relevant to the individual lives of the children I teach.

I leave this paper now, not because the process of making sense of my life is by any means complete, but because an important part of it, the beginning, has come to an end. I have prepared the soil for the next phase and will wait for new stories to blossom. I can already see that the insight gained from this work has enriched my teaching practice and that it will continue to do so. I look forward to the perspective that only time and distance can bring while I wonder what seeds are already being planted for the future.

Bridget Walshe, May, 1999

## References

- Bateson, M.C. (1990). Composing a life. New York: Plume/Penguin Books.
- Berry, W. (1994). An entrance to the woods. In P. Lopate (Ed.), The art of the personal essay: An anthology from the Classical Era to the present (pp. 668-679). New York: Anchor.
- Butala, S. (1994). The perfection of the morning: an apprenticeship in nature. Toronto, Ont.: Harper Collins.
- Clinebell, H. (1996). Ecotherapy: healing ourselves, healing the earth. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press.
- Dillard, A. (1974). Pilgrim at tinker creek. New York: Harper & Row.
- Franklin, U. (1990). The real world of technology. Concord, Ont.: Anansi Press Ltd.
- Freeman, M. (1990). Human partnering. Unpublished Paper. Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.
- Harper, S. (1995). The way of wilderness. In T. Roszak, M. Gomes, & A. Kanner (eds.), Ecopsychology. (pp. 183-200). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Mabey, R. (ed.). (1995). The Oxford book of nature writing. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malone, T.P. & Malone, P.T. (1987). The art of intimacy. New York: Prentice Hall Press.
- Mander, J. (1992). In the absence of the sacred. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.
- Miller, J.B. (1986). Toward a new psychology of women. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Moore, T. (1996). The re-enchantment of everyday life. New York: Harper Collins.
- Nabhan, G. & Trimble, S. (1994). The geography of childhood: why children need wild places. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Rainer, T. (1997). Your life as story. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Schama, S. (1995). Landscape and memory. New York: Vintage Books.
- Stanwell-Fletcher, T. (1989). Driftwood valley. New York: Penguin Books.
- Stegner, W. (1992). Where the bluebird sings to the lemonade springs. New York: Penguin Books.
- Thoreau, H.D. (1962). Walden. New York: Time Incorporated.
- Watts, A. (1970). Nature, man, and woman. New York: Vintage Books.
- Williams, T. T. (1994). An unspoken hunger. New York: Vintage Books.