

The Story of a Turtledove

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Abstract

This environmental autobiography outlines my process of repositioning the natural environment as a primary character in my life. By exploring moments in my childhood when I made instinctive connections with my surroundings, I have come to better understand the person I am today and where I am going. Throughout this autobiography I address the importance of place and land, and the teachings these have brought me.

Résumé

Cette autobiographie environnementale souligne mon cheminement à repositionner l'environnement naturel comme le personnage principal dans ma vie. En explorant des moments de mon enfance, lorsque j'ai établi des liens instinctifs avec ce qui m'entourait, j'en suis venue à mieux comprendre la personne que je suis aujourd'hui et où je m'en vais. Tout au long de cette autobiographie, je traite de l'importance du lieu et de la terre et des enseignements qu'ils m'ont apportés.

Keywords: environmental autobiography, connection to place, the natural world, environmental/arts education

Introduction

In my current Toronto house I have a view into the backyard, where the trees stand tall and watch over me. We share thoughts in the mornings and again before I sleep.

The garden, at the foot of these trees, has also become an element of great importance. All through the summer I chat with my mother about how the tomatoes cannot go dry or the fruit won't be good, how the soil could use some compost, and how the flowers are taking to the heat. The connection I have made with the garden is so strong that it has become a being unto itself, a pivotal influence in my environmental education autobiography. This relationship is intrinsically linked to the ones I made in my early childhood, at the place I call "home." The yearning to reconnect and to replicate these environmental relationships follows me wherever I go.

As First Nations writer N. Scott Momaday observes, “men and women learn to appropriate their landscapes, to think and act ‘with’ them as well as about and upon them, and to weave them with spoken words into the very foundations of social life” (cited in Basso, 1996, p. 75). Landscape is then said to dwell in people, just as they dwell in the landscape. This creates a reciprocal relationship—“a relationship in which individuals invest themselves in the landscape while incorporating its meaning into their own most fundamental experience” (Basso, 1996, p. 102).

Once a relationship with the land/scape is established, it becomes difficult to ever completely remove oneself from it, in a manner similar to losing a parent, lover, or best friend. On the other hand, if this relationship is not sown or established early, people learn to take advantage of the land/scape. As I delve further into understanding this, I am convinced the way for us to create a more respectful culture is to help others learn to cultivate such relationships by sharing our own pivotal stories with the land/scape.

This brings me to the following environmental autobiography. I wrote this autobiography to examine the ways I have come to reposition the natural environment and land/scape as primary characters in my life. Through exploring moments in my childhood when I made instinctive connections with elements of my land/scape and surroundings, I have been able to better understand the land-dwelling person I am growing towards and into. This text is also a story of my journey away from the natural world, and my subsequent reconnection with it.

This process of rediscovery introduced me to several new ways of knowing that helped to reconnect me with the natural world and maintain a reciprocal relationship with it. These “ways of knowing” tend to exist outside of Western tradition and recognition, and resonate more with Aboriginal ideas of understanding place, land, and the natural world.

Throughout my paper I have addressed the importance of place, land, and the teachings that these elements have brought to me. I do not impose this meaning or teaching. Instead, I allow the place to teach on its own terms. I have attempted to translate this education as truthfully as possible. Many of the places are presented as they were through the innocent eyes of a child, and not with the critical or inspecting eye of an adult.

The ability to return to the place, in memory, allows a different kind of order and intuition. Paul Shepard (1977a) explains: “Space is structured differently in juvenile life than at later ages; it is much more critically defined ... such a construct works imperceptibly on the memory and consciousness, and is especially important to creative adults” (p. 8). The ability to return to place in memory is important because it allows other voices to

be heard, sometimes ones that are thousands of years old, and ones that have been embedded in the places that surround us. The ability to access or hear these voices is referred to as a state of oneness with the environment.

Jo-ann Archibald (1990) addresses such a melding or oneness with nature in the way First Nations peoples store knowledge, by “blending their consciousness/language with their lifeworld” (p. 74). Archibald discusses this melding as oneness with land/scape, and I would extend these understandings to emotion, since emotion is directly affected by one’s interaction with nature—in fact, the connection may be enabled by emotion. This autobiography can then be understood as co-written with the land/environment, through the instinctual, emotional response of a child.

The following kind of writing is of particular interest to environmental educators because it is an example of how the environment affects, is a central character, and connects us through our (emotional) collective storytelling, especially when it is observed through an instinctual and emotional consciousness rather than a critical perspective. As this autobiography was initially much longer, this paper is an attempt to capture its essence and to make connections with theories about environmental education.

In his book, *Wisdom of the Myhtellers*, Sean Kane (1998) says, “the story must make sense in more than an intellectual domain, but also in physical, emotional, and spiritual domains” (p. 205). This is what I have experienced in writing my story. I hope that its simultaneous themes of caution and encouragement shine through for the reader/listener.

The Story of a Turtledove

birds . . .
they fly across boundaries like the shaman. In much of Aboriginal Australia birds are the messengers of the unconscious part of creation, signs of shifting energies in the Dreaming. (Kane, 1998, p. 110)

* * *

BIRTH

**They lay the baby in the grass and she cries.
They lay the baby in the grass and it tickles so she cries.
They lay the baby in the grass and it tickles so she cries and curls up into a ball.
They call her a turtle.**

Once there was a turtledove who was born into the world with big eyes and a big heart. She was eager to start her journey as soon as she arrived, so without hesitation she began to sing and take up any challenge that came her way.

Mud

squish, squish
A new dug out
Mother is building a garden but it's not finished so it is at the best stage possible in my mind. She agrees that it can be our playground for a while, before it becomes inhabited with plants and therefore off-bounds to the wandering and stomping feet of children. To make it the perfect grounds for cleansing we add water. If ever one needs to add any "something" to a recipe, it's usually water; water just seems to know how to make things better. Mother fills the patch of soil with a generous lot of water so that it soon becomes a stew. We mix it in with our little shovels, with our hands, and then with our feet and before we know it we are immersed completely in the mud stew. We stretch out, drawing its borders wider and wider, making spaces for the water to collect in streams and great lakes. Mountains form in between the waters and we climb them, sliding back down to meet yet more water.

squish, squish
The water and dirt mix together between our toes, mix with our toes. Soon they are all the same thing.

Gardens

I see my mother gardening in the yard. She pulls out some of the plants that are no good and discards them. Those are the weeds, she says, we don't want them in the garden because they choke the vegetables. Later on she is inside and I decide to help her. One by one I pull the weeds from the garden. I've seen her wash them and lay them out in rows, so this is exactly what I do. My friend Sara is over and I teach her to do the same. Soon after my mother comes out of the house and I am thrilled because I know she is going to be so pleased to see all of the weeds, including the not yet fully grown carrots, onions, and peppers (which to me look very strange) laid to dry in a tidy row.

This is the beginning of my presence in the garden.

BIRTH/Mud

When I recall my childhood experiences, I usually do not remember specific times. If I tried, I could likely attribute estimated ages and years to events based on how old my sisters were, what house we were living in, or which teacher I had in school, but the time is often irrelevant to the memory/story of the place. Keith H. Basso (1996) describes a similar philosophy among the Western Apache in his book, *Wisdom Sits in Places*. He writes: “What matters most to Apaches is *where* events occurred, not *when*, and what they serve to reveal about the development and character of Apache social life” (p. 31). This is not to say that time and “temporal considerations,” as Basso puts it, have no significance, but they are of secondary importance. For the Apache, and for many North American First Nations peoples, place is what allows for such vivid emotional memory of an event, and it is within this event that meaning arises. Apache culture relies on place as a method of keeping stories and history, and as a way of teaching social structures. Place, in this case, teaches and maintains culture while keeping it strong and resilient.

Gardens

I have never thought of my family members as storytellers. Trying to pull a story out of my mother and father is like pulling teeth. I realized recently that I was wrong, and that I was simply looking for a specific format of story.

Sean Kane (1998) conceptualizes the activity of oral storytelling in *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*, explaining: “It means the passing on of stories from generation to generation—forms that exist only in the tenuous moment of their actual performance” (p. 33). When I think of this description in relation to the knowledge I have gained from my parents, I understand that they have told me many stories. My mother taught me to cook and to garden. She never used a book, but simply told me and showed me how *she* did it. I observed, listened, and gradually understood how to do these things myself. Any cookbook or plant book can only offer additional tips and suggestions. The deep understanding of these activities could only arise from the lived experience of the embedded events and their re-enactment in stories, which in turn reinforce the teachings.

Water

We swim. Wherever and whenever we can. We swim in the lake that is cold and full of weeds when no one else will; we swim in the pool built just for us (only three feet tall but wonderful to our tiny bodies); we move and seek out another pool just down the street; we visit the neighbours and clean their pool in exchange for a swim. We swim. We like it when no one else is around, and so we swim out far into the water to where all the other children are afraid to journey. The waters carry our bodies out into solitude and quiet. We float, staring up at the sky. The energy and anticipation that we used to get so far out into the water melts away and we allow ourselves to exist in the silence of the waters for a moment. Just for a moment though, because then we remember how deep the water must be beneath us, and thoughts of the snapping turtles or biting fish that could linger about bombard our minds and our imaginations start to stir. With a couple of silent screams we bolt back to shore, where we can at least see the bottom and what is lurking underneath.

Lightning on the Lake

The sky cracks open all around us. No one speaks, there are no words worthy of speaking. Streaks of silver flash, imprinting themselves on my mind. The thunder roars without delay. We are inside of the storm, and the storm inside of us.

Air

It's the dead of winter and I'm in sixth grade. Recess consists of three options: building a snow fort, which will systematically be destroyed by the older kids in the yard, playing tag and falling on your backside after slipping on the snow-covered patches of ice, or throwing snowballs until a teacher catches wind and sends you to the office. I have done all three but today I do none of them. Instead, I locate one of the larger patches of covered ice and spend a good half of the recess clearing it, using my boots and mittened hands as my makeshift zamboni. After I finally have a satisfactory area cleared and confirm that it is indeed in a low-traffic zone, I rest down in the centre of the ice and imagine I'm flying. It's similar to making a snow angel, the same action, except the fact that you are on a patch of ice allows you to glide with little friction. All that I can see, if I focus straight ahead, is the sky. Just blue and clouds. I watch the birds flying by and suddenly I am flying with them. It's easy. In the ease of the glide, my arms move as a bird's do. They are wings. I am flying. I am a bird.

Shelter

At the edge of the woods my sisters and I choose an area that is open on the floor and covered completely with branches from every direction. It is our shelter, constructed by nature itself. We play there, making patters on the ground with fallen leaves or sticks. One day we even make what we call a tipi by leaning a series of large branches against each other. About a year later the construction crews arrive, and a large hole is carved from the woods for a big yellow house. Our shelter and our tipi, however, remain in a thin strip of trees left between our yard and the new house (the intruders' house). It isn't the same anymore. We try to play as though nothing has changed, but we know that the people in the yellow house can see us. It turns out that there are children living there as well; we find this out when we see them playing in our tipi one afternoon. Soon after we discover the tipi has been knocked down. We stop playing there. Our sacred and quiet place has been tarnished and nothing can be done to repair it. We are forced to move on.

Air

Edith Cobb (1959) encapsulates the experience that I had as a child in the natural world: “I did not call it by that name, I had no need for words. It and I were one” (p. 546). I did not know what certain plants and animals were called and I did not know that I could not fly or think like a bird. I wanted to do so, and so I did, in my experiential learning of place/land.

Shelter/Lightning on the Lake/Water

A conversation took place in my youth between the natural world and myself, and I learned to appreciate it for its own worth, not as a piece of property or real estate. This conversation had a great impact on my mental and spiritual processes and how I developed my environmental philosophies. Keith H. Basso (1996) writes on the connection of self-development and the natural world:

place possesses a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become ... As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process—inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together—cannot be known in advance. (p. 107)

Here Basso identifies the reciprocal relationship that grows between a person and the land/scape or environment. It is very much a cyclical occurrence as the environment and the person give back and forth in the creation of one another. Although unconscious, this process comes through in my interactions with the environment in which I was rooted as a child.

Night Sky

I am petrified of the window at night. I fall asleep with my curtains drawn tight and my head tucked neatly under my blanket. Sometimes I wake up during the night and lay paralyzed under the covers, knowing that if I peer out some sort of terrifying creature's face will be lurking in the window. For years I feel this, fear this. Until one day I decide that this shouldn't be. I don't have to be afraid. I move my bed closer to the window, open the blinds and lie facing the stars. I lie there awake for hours, but I find comfort in the stars and the tall branches of the trees. I get to know them and they me. Soon they become my protectors and I can't fall asleep without seeing them.

Sunlight

The rays of sun that gleam through the clouds on a sunlit day.
They are staircases.
If someone has just died, they are going to heaven on these staircases of light.
They are the path that transcends the earth and the sky.
They usher us to the creator.

Following Water

The creek runs through the conservation area, all the way through town, and beyond for an eternity. My father takes us there sometimes and it becomes a favourite place to discover things about the world: the time I sank to my waist in clay; the time we went swimming in the scorching heat; the time I flirted and had an exciting first kiss under the bridge. With my youngest sister I discover the ultimate hideaway near this creek. We follow the creek in a direction that we had never before dared to go. It is further away from the bridge and rockier, but we decide to take the chance. After treading in the waters for some distance we notice what looks like a path on one side of the creek. We get out of the water and cautiously follow it, trying to determine the poison ivy and oak from the countless other plants that all seem to look the same. Then, ahead of us, there appears a clearing that opens to a field, which was once upon a time a farm. We know this because at the edge there is a silo and a caved-in barn, both covered in a fantastic array of vines. We won't go into the collapsed barn in fear that something will fall on us, but we quickly find an opening in the silo through which we enter without hesitation. There, in the bottom of the topless silo, we stand silent and frozen as the sunlight spills in over our faces. Plants sprout up all around, butterflies dance. We have found the secret meeting place of the angels.

CAGES

Suddenly great walls appeared to be closing in on all sides. They were white and taller than Feather, the little turtledove, could see; they reached all the way up to the clouds. These walls were constructed thick with cunning and manipulative mastery, and with every turn they seemed to be one step ahead. She began to sing to call for help but no matter how loud the turtledove sang, no one could hear her for the hovering walls. Soon the turtledove found herself very much alone. The air was still and cold, and she stopped singing altogether.

Away

RRRRRIINGGGG... the school bell
I learn about dates and numbers
I don't understand them but I learn them and can recite
I don't want to go out for recess because it's no longer fun

Night Sky/Sunlight/Following Water

“Much of our ordinary life is made up of tiny unaware acts of faith in what we are doing, and a functional separation of categories of awareness and knowing seems essential to unconfused behaviour” (Kane, 1998, 113). I still have to be able to see the trees and the stars while I fall asleep at night. I cannot explain this connection in a way that makes “logical” sense to other people. It is just something that I have a deep spiritual urgency to do.

Louise Erdrich (2003) describes a similar urgency in relation to her Indigenous (Anishinaabe) belief systems: “Does this make any sense? After a while such questions stopped mattering. Believing or not believing, it was all the same. I found myself compelled to behave towards the world as if it contained sentient spiritual beings. The question whether or not they actually existed became irrelevant” (p. 16).

Acts of environmental faith, such as my viewing the night sky, have been questioned again and again in my life. I find myself at a point of education where being able to explain is only possible when someone has had a similar experience of the natural world. Regardless, this environmental faith helps me to understand my place amongst beings, amongst all my environmental, human, animal, and spiritual relations.

CAGES / Away

“We are reminded with painful regularity of our continuing sense of dislocation, the neuroses of personal identity problems, the terror of loneliness in the crowd, of isolation both from society and from the rest of nature” (Shepard, 1977a, p. 26).

Beginning in high school and through university, I experienced an increasing sense of dislocation that was accompanied with all of the symptoms of alienation that Paul Shepard describes. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual limitations that are constantly placed around a young student often become overwhelming. In this sterile environment, this disconnected built space, my sense of self was diminished, isolated, and emptied.

Distraction from this alienation almost becomes necessary in Western society. We consume ourselves with false relationships and false knowledge, which increases the thirst and unquenchable emptiness. We no longer remember how to create real relationships and meanings once this disconnection from land/scape occurs. Caught in this vicious cycle of alienation, we distract ourselves more. We can arrive in a state that Joe Sheridan (1991) describes as the following:

...when thoughts derived from literature race through the mind, or when our ears are busied by musical distractions, and when this becomes the predominant experience, the immediate physical environment becomes displaced as primary. Earth no longer serves to centre us and to nurture our place within nature. Earth

I don't go outside because I don't have time
I learn that there are things more important... books, papers, money... all involving
dead trees
I live in a 9 x 9 cement cube
The walls say I am too busy
The walls are lined with books and I like books—I like books a lot
But the walls are so damn straight
I miss the stars.

...if only

... but God is in everything
... but God made the birds too
... but God says that we are equal
... but Jesus says to love
... but then again I guess I could be wrong

... if only

I watch TV.
Flick, flick.
I am mesmerized by the colours flashing before my eyes.
I try to move. No, just one more hour.
I heard the news today.
Cut to new movies, new fashion, and new trends. What is the latest beef with the lat-
est celeb? What about politics, homelessness, war? Have you heard about Bush? And
whatever happened to Gore? Not the "almost president," but the genre of film—that
other guy is filling his time with some environmental stuff ... I think. But who really
cares, moving on.
Wait! I care ... I think.
What's next?
No one talks, and if anyone does they are ignored. Everyone is busy.
I am busy.
Flick, flick.
I watch TV.

... if only

... but God is in everything
... but God made the birds too
... but God's time might be different from ours
... but God says that we are equal
... but Jesus says to love
... I know you are older and wiser but you are missing the point
... but then again I guess I could be wrong

...if only sky

I keep having this dream about sand falling through my fingers.
I am so confused and all I can think about is....
I see construction and cement walls, cement walls, cement walls.
I smile even when I don't want to because that's what I am supposed to do.
All I can think about is...

... if only I could fly

And then?
Cut to the silence that's left when you are all alone.
Alone.
Fire.
What do you do when you are alone?
All I can think about is fire.
Cut to the blue jay waking me up in the morning SOWAK
SOWAK
WAKE UP
WAKE UP!
All I can think about is FIRE.

becomes taken for granted as the point of departure from which we blast off into orbits of distractions from the guiding forces of Earth. (p. 25)

I felt this disconnection with the land/scape for a long time and was not even really aware of feeling it. I temporarily neglected my environmental relationships and ignored or abused the gifts I was given. Thankfully, the Earth is forgiving and relentless in how it will not give up on any being.

Jo-ann Archibald (1990) relays the story of Coyote with mismatched eyes as a metaphor for the position in which Aboriginal peoples find themselves, faced with the ways of the old (the traditional) and the new (Western industrial). Such confusion has had a great presence in my life, in relation to conflicting ideas about our relation to the environment. I was faced with colonial, anthropocentric, and dualistic information that I knew in my heart was wrong, but was assured of its validity by mentors and teachers. It took me a long time to learn how to juggle this kind of biased Western knowledge and to know when to leave some things aside, just as Coyote had to learn to balance the use of the old and the new.

In *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, Louise Erdrich (2003) writes, “When Ojibwe people fast in these islands, the songs, even if lost for a time, always come back in dreams” (p. 38). I believe this dreaming or reconnection is possible, to a certain degree, for anyone who desires to re-establish a relationship with the land. When we listen with our whole beings, the earth will call us back and constantly remind us of the stories that we need to know and remember. In this segment of my autobiography, the fire and blue jay represent such an experience of the (environmental) spirits calling and intercepting my journey with stories of the past. A true friend or kindred spirit never abandons you.

FREEDOM

Feather, the turtledove, sat thinking about what to do in regards to these big walls, when suddenly she heard someone calling her name. "Feather," the voice called out. She had no idea where this voice was coming from, but as she listened to the calling it reminded her that she could sing, and we all know what happens to turtledoves when they sing ... they get strong. So our little turtledove sang and sang and slowly she got stronger and stronger. And then she remembered that she was supposed to be doing something ... now what was that something? Oh yeah, she was supposed to learn how to fly.

So the turtledove thought back to when she was with her mother and father and how they looked when they flew. She thought about how their feet moved and the way they cocked their necks. She even thought about how her grandparents and great-grandparents flew, and with that she somehow managed to find herself in the air.

Calling of Water

How many times have I heard, "go to water"? Water will cleanse you. Water will heal.

Standing on the edge of the cliff looking way down at the glassy surface, I contemplate jumping. It is such a great distance my knees tremble beneath me, and I feel an invisible yet strong wall holding me back. I push myself and run up to the edge. Again and again I push myself and slam into that wall. Until finally I break through. Falling, floating through the air I glide, as if on wings, gazing up towards the sky. With a huge slap on my back I suddenly hit the water. Submerged, I am back.

Full Moon

Ceremony.

My heart is beating fast.

I watch a fire grow and engulf gifts of sacred tobacco bundles.

Each presented with gratitude and hope. Each with grace and prayer.

As the full moon rises, lessons are taught, songs are sung.

I am small.

I am humbled.

FREEDOM / Calling of Water / Full Moon

The beauty and merit of the natural environment occurs by its own means. No amount of fussing or altering that humans perform can elevate it. I came to this realization when I was on a walk with my mother and moved a stick that I thought was in the way of a picture that mom was taking. She told me to put it back, that it was there for a reason and that it should remain there. I imagined a flaw that did not exist and in my attempt to make it more “perfect,” I was actually destroying the natural beauty of the environment.

Keith H. Basso (1996) would agree with my mother, stating: “For where native men and women are concerned, the external world is as it appears to them to be, naturally, unproblematically, and more or less consistently—and rarely do they have reason to consider that the coherence it displays is an intricate product of their own collective manufacture” (p. 72). Through a realization that the creator was in and among all of the natural world, I understood what Basso describes as a “native” [sic] alternative to the dominant Western industrial perspective on the external world. It was at this moment that I began to see again the utter perfection and purpose in the environment. I saw how insignificant I was to the world and I was humbled.

Greatness of the Woods

There are stories about layered green walls stacked up against one another. There are stories about winding and vibrant trails that lead up and down and through and to other winding and vibrant trails. There are stories about rocks that become equivalent to couches, and about open spaces in which to rest. There are stories about reflective waters, double skies, loons calling. There are stories about sleeping under the sea of stars and being beautifully sucked in by what holds you. All I can think about is warm light air.

There are stories about the past. About a French man coming to the new world and falling in love with a Mi'kmaq woman, and she falling in love with him. Somewhere else there are stories about an English man or a Scottish man with a big nose crossing the oceans in the sixteen-hundreds. Sometime else there are stories about generations having passed and people meeting from great distances, people bringing these stories together, people building new from the old. This is the story of how I came to be.

There are stories about listening, really listening ... for the first time in a long time. There are stories about intricately organized kindling. About crackling orange fires melting glucose-fructose on a stick for the perfectly golden marshmallow. About fire songs and smoke, and "white bunny, white bunny go that way." There are stories about silence. Great silence. All I can think about is air.

There are stories about watching the birds fly overhead. There are stories about breathlessness. All I can think about is air. All I can hear is the voices of the past. All I can think about is light warm air.

Starlight

Sit. It's quiet. "Your life won't get away from you if you sit just for one moment." The sky turns bright purple and red, the type of sky that only appears in postcards and nature books (unless you pay attention). For hours the biggest screen available flickers and changes before our eyes. We watch the hawks swoop for mice in the field; we watch the dynamic of the night and the day exchanging and negotiating domains and land rights. The night dwellers come out one at a time; bats and owls replace the sparrows and finches. Then comes the most brilliant show of all. You have to know when to look, what time of year, what type of weather, but when you listen and figure it out, you are rewarded tenfold. In the field, first by the tree line, a small spark. It disappears and then reappears a few feet away. In the beginning only one, then a few more, and before we know it the sky is reflected in the trees and the trees in the field. Everything is illuminated and twinkling, moving, and sparkling. The fireflies reign and create a most beautiful dance of light. Mother earth is pleased and smiles on us all.

Greatness of the Woods

Sean Kane (1998) writes of pattern and its importance in weaving together the “sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures of an environment into intuitive wholes” (p. 141). He points out that, “pattern is what the animals and plants know better than we do, and to find out something about pattern you have to enter the spirit of one of the animals or plants” (p. 141). Similarly, Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999) addresses the differences between peoples, referring to the eagle, the deer, the bear, the snake, the hawk, and not just humans as peoples, as beings. She states, “So the human being must learn from these other peoples. Watch, listen, and learn” (p. 237). The human is thus understood as very incomplete, although with great potential if able to communicate with other peoples and learn from and with them in reciprocal relationships. There is importance in listening to others and acknowledging that humans have much to learn from the environment and the beings around them.

In response, my story looks to the bird—the turtledove—as a primary advisor, for the bird has immense strength, remembrance, and patterns of migration. I have allowed this story to belong to the bird as much as it does to me because of the influence that the bird has had in my life.

Starlight

As suggested by Joe Sheridan (forthcoming): “Thinking of mind as a place whose harmonious actions are revealed by other places, and vice versa, assists in understanding the ecological principles that mind and place operate by and through.” The connection that I have with the land/scape has allowed conversation between the place of my mind and the place outside of my mind. This dialogue is continually helping me to understand my position amongst these places, these beings, and how important we are to each other’s survival. This holistic conversation creates my concept and place of ecology.

Coming Home

The deer know when I'm coming home. When I haven't been around for a while they won't come out, won't show themselves to me. They also won't come out when a stranger is around, they can sense the new smell. But after a few days they trust that I haven't changed (or that I have changed but for the better), that I am still a friend and they walk freely through the fields around our home. Waking at dawn and creeping slowly toward the large open window on the north side of the house, I find a fawn and her buck. You could touch them through the glass if they would let you. They come again in the evening, but never as close. We can see them in the soy field next door. They are grazing and every now and then freeze in a state of alertness. They are magic. Last week my sister told me about a deer that was hit by a car or truck, dragged for a few hundred feet and then left to rot on the side of the road. I'm not sure how they didn't see it in time to stop.

On really special days coyote comes out too. A few months ago I saw him pounce. It was probably on a field mouse but he sure looked happy. You can hear them always at night; they sing. I miss this place that I still call "home." I am constantly drawn back to it, no matter how many times I try to run away or how much the world pulls me away. Despite all else the stories here are persistent. They follow me wherever I go.

FLIGHT

Feather, the turtledove, took flight and flew high into the sky. She flew up toward the clouds and when she got there she flew past them and right over the really tall walls. Feather was so happy to finally be free and she spent the rest of her days flying around and singing to others about the story of how she remembered to fly.

Coming Home

In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith H. Basso describes an important moment in which he was scolded by his guide, Charles, for disrespect. He dictates Charles' confusion and disappointment: "What he's doing isn't right. It's not good. He seems to be in a hurry. Why is he in a hurry? It's disrespectful" (1996, p. 10). In this situation, Basso is discussing Western Apache language and the first speech of his ancestors, but Charles is communicating something that is very relevant to life and all of us: We need to slow down.

Basso says that sense of place "seldom crosses our mind. Until, as sometimes happens, we are deprived of these attachments and find ourselves adrift, literally dislocated, in unfamiliar surroundings we do not comprehend and care for even less" (1996, p. xiii). From my experiences, the reason is that once removed from this place, we become self-conscious. We are uncomfortable and start to question our presence in our new surroundings because it just does not feel right.

Basso later states that knowledge of place is "closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one's position in the larger scheme of things, including one's own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person" (1996, p. 34). Place must remain in our lives as a point of reference to which we can always return (either in memory or literally), and renew our sense of strength as a person within the world.

Nick Thompson uses the metaphor of hunting with stories to teach people lessons: "They go to work on your mind and make you think about your life" (in Basso, 1996, p. 58). To the Western Apache, stories are accessed through place. When used as lessons, the places are said to "stalk" people. The places act as constant reminders of how one needs to live—the good life and the good way.

FLIGHT

Turtledoves are a red-list bird, meaning that they are seriously endangered. This small, slender dove is native to Europe and sometimes known as the mourning dove. I have used the turtledove as a metaphor in my story to represent the sacredness of feelings and complexities of the autobiographical story that are "too big for words" (Kane, 1998, p. 143).

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