The Chronicles of North Narnia: A Scholarly Personal Narrative of Place-Based Learning on the Lakehead University Thunder Bay Campus

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I would also be remiss if I did not express my gratitude for the beauty, complexity and stories of North Narnia. At the outset of this endeavour, I never could have imagined how much this one forested section of campus would shape me as an individual and as an educator. I will always treasure the experience I had, the lessons I learned and the relationship that developed with this remarkable place.

. Lastly, to my fiancé (and soon to be husband) Lucas: We did it, we made it, I love you.

Abstract

Whether they are large intact forests or small urban greenspaces, places have the potential to captivate, inspire, educate and foster a deep sense of stewardship towards the natural world. Place-based education is a growing field that views places not only as potential centres of academic learning, but also as catalysts for community collaboration and care. Utilising a primarily phenomenological approach, this study focuses on my direct experience engaging with a specific place on the Lakehead University campus, referred to as North Narnia, over the course of nine months. Observations and anecdotes from this immersive experience are represented in the form of a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), a form of writing and inquiry that weaves together my personal experience interacting with place with relevant literature. The major themes I address include nomenclature, place engagement practices, seasonal change, emotional connection to place and the specific implications of my experience for individuals, educators and institutions. Through the SPN, I detail the significance and benefits of connecting with place, place engagement practices that learners might use to authentically engage with their surroundings and how institutions can support place-based learning and stewardship through a living laboratory approach. The findings of this study are broadly applicable to individuals and educators looking to connect meaningfully with place, and specifically applicable to Lakehead University's ongoing efforts to integrate sustainability across the campus.

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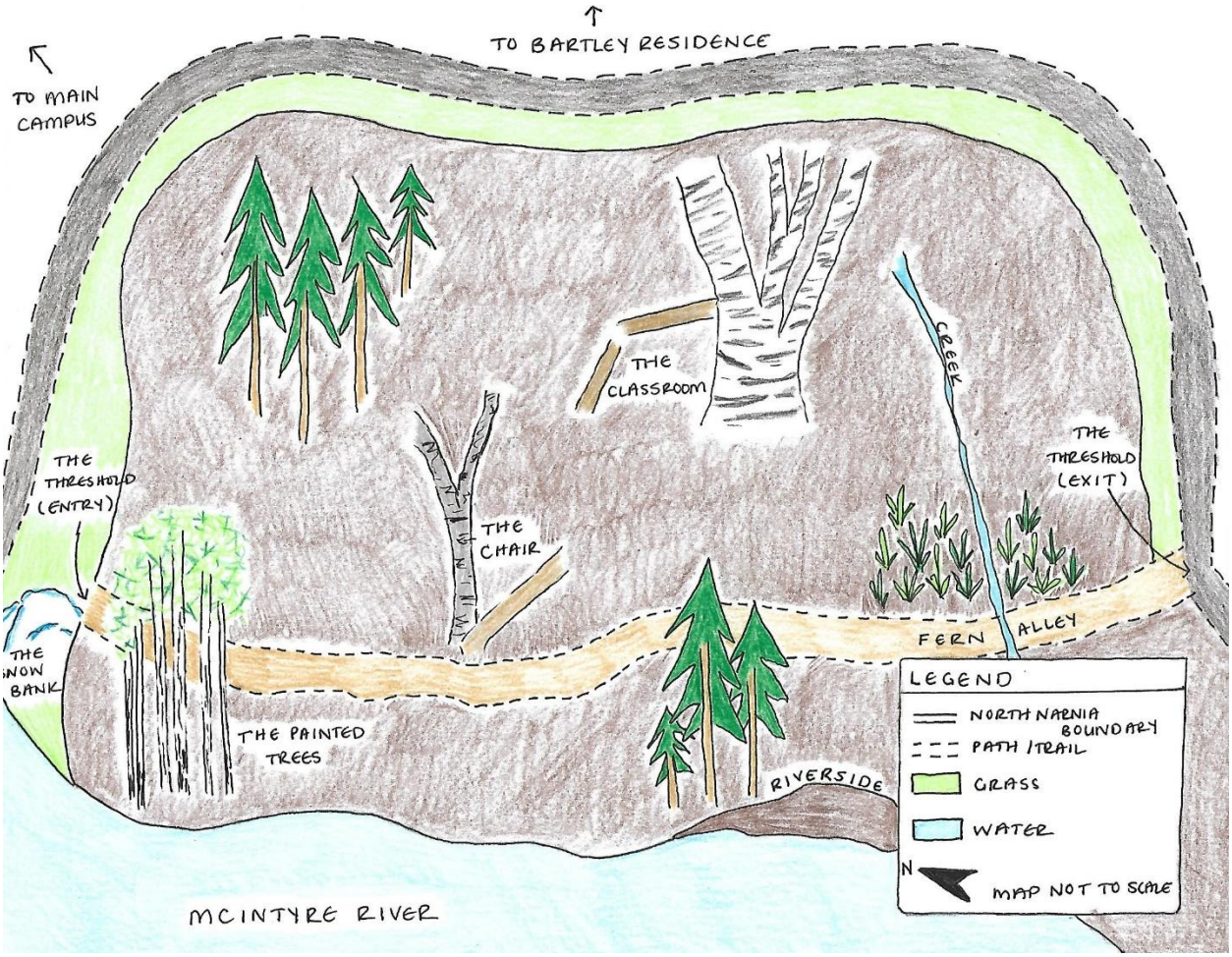
Map of North Narnia

Figure 1

Map of the North Narnian landscape, identifying sites of significance to this project



(Note: map is an artistic interpretation and is not exact or to scale)

Chapter One: Where it All Began

> Telling the life of this one place is a way of digging out from our impressions that it's merely one static place, stuck in its little urban lot, going nowhere. Telling its stories is a way of reanimating the way we imagine place - this place, any place. (Coleman, 2017, p. 237)

I still remember the first time I encountered this passage from Daniel Coleman's 2017 ode to place, *Yardwork*. I started reading *Yardwork* in early 2018 when I was in my first year of the Master of Education program at Lakehead University. Through my coursework I had quickly developed a keen interest in place and place-based education, recognising how my previous experiences with the natural world shaped me as an individual and educator, and understanding the compassion for other beings that can develop when we engage with the world around us. Despite my growing passion for place, I was having difficulty putting into words exactly how impactful connecting with our surroundings can be. *Yardwork* resonated so strongly with me because of its thoughtful commentary on the relationship between people and place. Recounting his experience engaging and learning from his backyard in Hamilton, Ontario over many years, *Yardwork* wove together history, culture, ecology and personal experience, sharing specific stories of Coleman's backyard and community while also underscoring the broad importance of cultivating strong connections with place. With each chapter of *Yardwork* that I read, I found myself identifying with statement after statement Coleman made about place, almost as if he was putting into words exactly what I had been trying to say.

After reading Coleman's experience of engaging with place in *Yardwork,* I felt moved to connect with place in an active way and to talk more about place with others. I marked up the margins of the book, underscoring the passages that captured what I was feeling but had been unable to convey. I read my favourite passages out loud to friends and family, hoping that they would feel the same passion for place that I felt when I first read them. Even though I had never visited Coleman's backyard, the stories he recounted in *Yardwork* still had a significant impact on my own perception of and relation to place. I began to wonder if my own experience cultivating a relationship

with place through long term place engagement could be similarly impactful for other individuals, educators and even institutions. And that is where this project truly began.

I often say that stumbling upon *Yardwork* was a case of finding the "right book at the right time", but more and more I feel that may be a bit of an understatement. Indeed, reading *Yardwork* and sharing it with others brought together my disparate ideas for a study of place and snowballed into a meaningful nine-month study that has permanently impacted the way I engage with my surroundings. Though *Yardwork* was the first example of a lengthy and personal engagement with place that I had encountered, it quickly became a gateway to other works like *The Forest Unseen* (2012) by David George Haskell and *A Sand County Almanac* (1966) by Aldo Leopold that recounted similar experiences of engaging with place over an extended period of time. Haskell's work focused on a very small place (a roughly hula-hoop sized section of old-growth forest in Tennessee) over the course of one year and used a primarily ecological perspective. Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* explored a much larger place (Leopold's Wisconsin farm) through decades of ecological and sociocultural observations and reflections. These three works soon became the primary models for my own study. Though they were similar, I appreciated how these examples showcased a range of temporal, spatial and thematic scales for engaging with place. I also found myself inspired by the writing styles of the authors, and found their ability to evoke emotion, provoke thought and vividly describe place to be particularly inspirational.

The place that I chose to engage with for my study was a section of forest near the heart of Lakehead University's Thunder Bay campus which I refer to as North Narnia (see Chapter Two: A Tale of Two Narnias for the origin of this name). This campus features a unique mix of natural and human-made spaces, intertwining locally representative forest ecosystems with more modern infrastructure like roads and buildings. While it could be perceived that these elements are in opposition to each other (and indeed sometimes they are), the Lakehead community (including faculty, staff and students) continues to find unique ways to support their co-existence, from

conducting labs and classes outdoors to sustainability initiatives like educational gardens throughout the campus. North Narnia embodies this interplay between the human and more-than-human world in a variety of ways. It is physically located between Bartley Residence (to the east) and the McIntyre River (to the west) and literally bridges the gap between the human-made buildings and the naturally occurring river and forest. North Narnia is also host to both human and more-than-human beings and activities, including chipmunks that scurry nimbly across the highways of fallen trees, joggers and walkers that maintain the dirt trail through the forest with their routine paces and a diverse collection of plants, from the smallest strawberries and bunchberries to the tallest green tipped spruces and aspens. Lying in plain view yet hidden from the consciousness of so many in the community, North Narnia's ability to hold this beautiful tension intrigued me to dig deeper into its layers and stories.

From April to December 2018, I visited North Narnia one to two times per week, using a variety of place engagement practices to observe, understand and connect with this complex forest (see Chapter Three: A Day in the Life for the exact approach I used in my place visits). As this study centres primarily on my personal experience, I used a predominantly phenomenological methodology that supports this type of subjective and interpretive study. Phenomenology is both a branch of philosophy and a form of qualitative research that aims to determine the primary essence of a lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The lived experiences explored through phenomenological studies are often deeply personal in nature, highlighting the emotional and embodied aspects of an experience. Education researcher Joanne Nazir references this aspect of phenomenology in a 2016 article, detailing its "ontological base for looking at the world in a new way" and "epistemological base that allows researchers to consider forms of data…that other methodologies do not" (p. 187).

David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) is a strong example of phenomenology in the context of place and the natural world. Early on in this work, Abram notes that "phenomenology is the Western philosophical tradition that has most forcefully called into question the modern assumption of a single…objective reality" (p. 31), though there have been significant contributions

from other fields including critical and feminist theory, particularly in the 20+ years since this book was published. Phenomenology aligns with the relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology in which I am working, which centres on a belief that we each experience the world differently based on our individual contexts and realities (i.e., there is no single reality or universal experience).

Abram draws strongly upon both Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (two prominent philosophers in the realm of phenomenology) in his discussions of perception, experience and science; in one such instance he alludes to Husserl when he notes,

> The true task of phenomenology, as Husserl saw it at the end of his career, lay in the careful demonstration of the manner in which every theoretical and scientific practice grows out of and remains supported by the forgotten ground of our directly felt and lived experience. (Abram, 1996, p.43)

Here, Abram highlights how our collective scientific knowledge is both grounded in and derived from lived experiences with the natural world. While many modern scientific discoveries happen in labs or on computers, direct experiences with the natural world laid a strong foundation for modern discoveries and continue to contribute important knowledge to many scientific fields.

Nazir's 2016 article also makes similar mention of the relevance of phenomenology in environmental education as it recognises that "experience is embedded in a variety of forms like thoughts, feelings, actions, intuitions, artefacts and memories" (p. 182). I identified with this description and appreciated the freedom phenomenology offers to investigate an experience in a personal and multidimensional way. By utilising relevant aspects of phenomenology in concert with other approaches, I was able to incorporate place-based observations, personal reflections and cultural and historical research to document and express my lived experience with North Narnia in a way that was authentic to the place itself and our time together.

While there are many different dimensions of place that could be explored, I chose to focus on three for this study: the ecological dimension, the sociological dimension and the perceptual

dimension, as defined by David Greenwood (cited as Gruenewald) in his 2003 article "Foundations of Place". According to Greenwood's classification, the ecological dimension of place explores not only the traditional environmental facets of place (e.g., abiotic and biotic elements of an ecosystem), but also many culturally and historically significant aspects (e.g., local Indigenous culture/history, intersection of environment and gender/race/other social justice issues) (2003). The sociological dimension centres around interconnectedness, highlighting both inter- and intraspecies relationships in a place as well as our role as humans in these interconnected systems; culture and history are also frequently discussed in relation to this dimension (Gruenewald, 2003). The perceptual dimension focuses on our sensory experience of place, and the way that active and embodied sensual engagement influences our interpretation of and connection to place (Gruenewald, 2003). I felt that these three dimensions aligned well with the nature of the place I had chosen and provided helpful theoretical boundaries for my observations. Through this focused and intentional engagement with North Narnia, I hoped to better understand the various ways individuals and institutions can connect with place and how my own experience can help facilitate connections between people and places elsewhere. I outline my personal approach and methods for each place visit in more detail later in this work, though I want to briefly note it here as an introduction to my study.

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It may seem counterintuitive that my personal exploration of place began by discussing the place-based stories and experiences of others, but I have come to learn that the concepts of place and story are closely intertwined. The methodology and practice of narrative and storytelling have shaped many aspects of this project, from the name that I use to refer to my chosen place, North Narnia (derived from a series of children's books), to the narrative structure of this final written work.

Narrative or storytelling is one of the oldest methods of communicating knowledge and features prominently in both Indigenous and Western traditions (Bell, 2003; King, 2003; Lawrence & Paige, 2016; Simpson, 2014). The stories and histories of places are often recorded in a narrative

fashion, highlighting the progression of a place, the particular events that have occurred there (including individual experiences) or the specific features that make that place unique. These stories of place can take the form of oral traditions passed through generations and communities or written stories of place captured in books or interpretive signage (Lawrence & Paige, 2016; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Despite the importance of storytelling in both oral and written formats, its use in research tends to be focused in a few disciplines (primarily in humanities and social sciences). Patrick Lewis highlights this discrepancy in a 2011 article when he notes, "If story is central to human existence and understanding, why, in the research world, is there not more storytelling?" (p. 506). Lewis' inquiry is something that I appreciated and attempted to address through my use of narrative/storytelling in the data collection and final representation of the study. Lewis has a long and varied background in the field of education including roles as a curriculum developer, teacher, principal and researcher. Having educational authorities such as Lewis identifying the need for storytelling in research underscores the specific relevance and applicability of storytelling-based approaches for educators, students and educational institutions.

In their 2016 work, "What Our Ancestors Knew: Teaching and Learning Through Storytelling", Randee Lawrence and Dennis Paige outline a compelling case for why storytelling is an important technique for both teaching and learning. From a teaching perspective, storytelling communicates important place-based knowledge and traditions between generations and communities. Storytelling, according to the authors, is also significant from the perspective of the learner. Sharing stories representative of different cultures and experiences encourages empathy among learners, while simultaneously helping individuals cultivate a deeper understanding within themselves through emotional and spiritual exploration (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Lawrence and Paige also note how learners synthesize information from these stories, connecting "new learning and prior experiences" (2016, p. 67) to better understand their world. Throughout their article, Lawrence

and Paige weave together the cultural significance of storytelling with its more modern applications in sociocultural movements to highlight how storytelling is a persuasive and effective technique.

The statements made by Lawrence and Paige are echoed elsewhere in the literature on place and education. For example, researcher Michael Dahlstrom explores the potential of storytelling as a tool to communicate scientific concepts to non-scientific audiences. In a 2014 article, Dahlstrom describes how storytelling increases engagement, immediate understanding and future recall of a subject among a variety of ages and experience levels. It is through this greater understanding that additional feelings of care and stewardship can also be fostered, bringing audiences closer to abstract, complex and sometimes invisible scientific or educational concepts (Dahlstrom, 2014). Similarly, Ontario environmental educator Anne Bell (2003) discusses how storytelling and narrative can help challenge current ways of teaching and learning in order to move beyond hegemonic structures in our educational system. In her 2003 article, Bell discusses how storytelling is the primary way that we make sense of the world around us and connect with others, and that this should be encouraged and explored rather than dismissed. These examples in the current literature act as strong examples of why a storytelling or narrative can be a powerful and effective approach to teaching and learning.

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What is it about place, then, that makes it a deserving focus of this story (and so many other stories throughout time)?

Places have a tremendous ability to impact us emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually (Coleman, 2017; Leopold, 1966; Pelo, 2014). Places can be associated with memories, feelings or people in positive and negative ways (Kress & Lake, 2017). Both natural and human-made places have the power to inspire and teach us about ourselves, our communities and the numerous ways that we are interconnected (Gooley, 2017). While most people's first thoughts when they hear the word "place" are vast landscapes or impressive natural features, meaningful places can take many forms, including religious buildings, rooms in a house, sites of cultural or historical

significance and more. I'm sure that if asked, almost every person could conjure a place that holds deep personal meaning. The diversity of meaningful places reflects the multifaceted nature of place, including the various layers of a particular place (e.g., history, ecology) and the dimensions of place we explore in our person-place interactions (e.g., perceptual, sociological) (Gruenewald, 2003).

Coming from a background in environmental studies and nature interpretation I have always been intrigued by natural (ecological) places, from the large-scale "wilderness" of provincial parks to the urban charm of a schoolyard. In my experience, some of the most special and educational places are the ones that appear to be the most ordinary. Their magic is often disguised by their commonality, and individuals tend to walk past these places rather than spend time there or listen to their stories. This notion was echoed in Holly Doremus' 1999 article, "The Special Importance of Ordinary Places" that highlights that while the majority of conservation efforts in the last few decades have focused on "special places" (e.g., vast landscapes like forests and mountains), the majority of places that we interact with are actually "ordinary places" (e.g., smaller and less assuming areas like backyards or community parks). She goes on to describe how this discrepancy has led to shortages in conservation of ordinary places and an overabundance of consideration for special places, an imbalance that has trained most people to view special places as more worthy of protection.

I have personally witnessed the imbalance Doremus talks about in my educational and professional careers, and it has become something I feel quite passionately about. We are surrounded by places that hold personal and educational value but are often conditioned to undervalue or unintentionally ignore their potential (Doremus, 1999). In my personal experience exploring place, I've witnessed significantly more emphasis being placed on parks or conservation areas that have been deemed remarkable as opposed to promoting the remarkableness of the natural world as a whole. This imbalance not only bolsters the idea that some places are more worthy of our attention than others but can also lead to people disregarding the inherent value of a place (i.e., the ability of a place to have value in and of itself). In *A Pedagogy of Place* (2011), Brian Wattchow and Mike

Brown refer to this phenomenon as "*Genius loci*...the belief that the land and things within it have inherent meaning" (p. 59). Doremus indirectly refers to the inherent value of places when she notes: "We also need to emphasize what is special in the most ordinary nature...We should treasure them, and encourage others to treasure them...even if they are neither spectacular nor economically viable" (p. 15). In both quotations, the authors allude to how places possess their own significance, and how we have shifted that narrative through our own priorities and beliefs about place. Telling the story of a place necessitates an understanding of inherent value, something that I have tried to maintain throughout this study; I don't believe that I am making North Narnia valuable by telling its story, rather it is valuable in its own right and I am trying to share that with others.

The idea of special versus ordinary places factored into my considerations for choosing a study place. I wanted to connect with a place that would be considered ordinary, that is, a place that was not overly interpreted or considered special in the eyes of most people. I chose to do this to draw attention to some of the amazing qualities of ordinary places that Doremus noted: that they are just as layered and multidimensional as "special" places, that they have their own rich and unique stories to tell, and that they have the potential to be accessible educational resources for all ages (Doremus, 1999). North Narnia is a place that would be considered by many to be "ordinary"; despite some students and classes visiting the forest for educational or personal purposes, many in the Lakehead community are unaware that they can move beyond the forest's edge and engage directly with the lush flora, rushing river, beautiful boreal birds and much more. Even though I expected my experience connecting with an ordinary place to be impactful, I was still surprised by the depth and strength of the connection that developed and the impact this one place had on my life.

The need for stronger connections with place is perhaps more important than ever in our current socio-political climate. In communities across North America, an increasing dependence on technology, fossil fuels and mass consumption has led to a disconnect between individuals and the natural world. At one time a deep and nuanced understanding of an area's natural history, including

basic species identification and an intimate understanding of seasons and local history, was not only commonplace but also regarded as important knowledge (Pyle, 2001). Traditional Indigenous knowledge was another significant way of knowing based on generations of observations from individuals closely connected to the land that reflected local culture, history and ecology (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015). In recent decades, beginning largely in the post-war mid-1900s, this experiential and holistic understanding of our surroundings was exchanged for more specialized fields of study, often with a mechanical or technological focus (Pyle, 2001). This disconnect is exacerbated by the devaluation and marginalization of traditional Indigenous knowledge by western science and colonial culture, furthering the separation between individuals and the land (Simpson, 2014). These pervasive shifts in perception have led to generations of individuals well versed in their own fields who lack a deeper understanding of the species and cultural histories that surround them (Charles et al., 1995).

Despite this disconnect, I believe there is still much hope to be had for the future of our communities and our planet, with stronger connections to place playing a significant role. In a 2004 article, prominent place-based education authority David Sobel describes the potential for strong connections with place to reverse the negative impacts of this disconnect. Though Sobel advocates most strongly for place-based education approaches for young students, he highlights the broader trend of active engagement with the natural world frequently leading to improved community well-being and increased feelings of social responsibility towards these spaces among individuals of all ages (Sobel, 2004). I have personally seen an increase in this type of engagement on social media in the past few years, from large-scale climate protests in major cities to the subtle but impactful environmental changes made by individuals and businesses in the Thunder Bay area. In the face of global climate and social justice crises, individuals are engaging with their communities in ways they hadn’t before. Though place is just one dimension of these communities, it can be extremely powerful, helping individuals identify what is important to them and the type of world they want to live in. It is difficult to expect individuals to take a stand for something that they do not have a

connection to, so the more we can connect with our surroundings, the more likely we are to advocate on their behalf. Coleman (2017) perhaps says it best in *Yardwork* when he notes, "once I know that one life intimately, I have a better chance of caring about others like it" (p. 236). In our current fast-paced and individualistic socio-political climate, I believe that the largely positive impacts of connecting with place are more relevant than ever.

My personal experience spoke to some of these many facets of place. My time with North Narnia impacted me emotionally, mentally and physically (which I will describe in more detail later), in ways that surpassed my expectations. The time I spent with North Narnia and the encounters I had there created new multisensory memories for me that I will forever be able to recall, from the rich earthy smell of the soil and pine trees after a spring rain to the still silence of a winter day punctuated by the call of a familiar crow or chickadee. My observations of North Narnia highlighted the many relationships that exist within a place, as well as the role of humans in these complex connections. Writing this narrative was a full circle moment, where I was able to thoroughly reflect on my time there and recognise the significant and diverse impacts that North Narnia had on me as an individual and educator. It is my hope that my experience can help others engage with place in their own context and support educational approaches and experiences that bring us closer to our surrounding communities, species and systems in personally impactful ways.

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An important clarification I would like to make at this point is one that I encountered when reading Monica Gagliano's 2018 book *Thus Spoke the Plant*. Gagliano describes the author's role in telling the story of a more-than-human being when she states:

> The human is not an interpreter who translates a mental representation in her head as if it were plant-speak and then puts it into words we can comprehend... Rather, the human is a listener who filters out personal human intelligences, which are far more real than our current scientific constructs allow us to contend with. (Gagliano, 2018, p. 6)

In Gagliano's context she is speaking about individual plants, though I find the concept applicable to place as well. In all my visits to North Narnia, the plants, animals, soil, and river never directly spoke to me in a language recognisable to most. I can't exactly translate the movements of each individual life form present into conversational English, nor would it be helpful for my purpose to try and do so (and unlike Gagliano, my focus lies outside of the field of plant communication). Rather, by giving North Narnia my attention and presence I was able to observe connections among aspects of place that I would not have normally recognised to better understand the forest as a whole. For example, I was not able to predict the exact date a flower would bloom in late spring, but the time I spent observing them allowed me to register small changes and generally anticipate what was to come. This notion of paying attention is quite possibly one of the most important aspects of connecting with place that I encountered and features prominently throughout the rest of this work. In many ways I feel that I learned more from North Narnia's silence (and my own silence) than I had ever expected.

Gagliano (2018) also asserts that her stories are told through a combination of the "language *of* plants and [her] language *for* plants" (p. 6). I appreciated Gagliano's multifaceted writing approach as I felt it aligned strongly with the reciprocal relationship with place that I aimed to establish. I do recognise that the sounds, movement and other traits of some species are a language unto themselves; by the end of the nine months I certainly knew when the squirrels were okay with my presence and when they were not. However, while I can extrapolate information from my observations and experiences, to a large degree I am still interpreting what I saw and speaking on behalf of something else. In a similar vein to Gagliano, I try to be faithful to what I saw and experienced, to avoid bold assumptions and to use this text to honour and express gratitude towards North Narnia rather than speak for it, as much as possible.

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The structure of this narrative is inspired in part by *Yardwork* and *The Forest Unseen,* two of the influential works on place mentioned previously. In each of these works, the authors organize

their thoughts into thematic chapters. Coleman's *Yardwork* uses broad themes such as "Deer In Their Own Coats" (wildlife) as headings to lengthy chapters, with each chapter addressing ideas and anecdotes within that broad theme. Haskell's *The Forest Unseen* also utilises specific topics such as "January 1st - Partnerships" as chapter foci, though each topic is also attached to a specific date that associates that theme and observation with a distinct time of year. My chapters will be more in line with Coleman's structure, fleshing out broad themes with specific experiences and anecdotes and connecting similar ideas from the course of my entire interaction with North Narnia.

Within each chapter the writing takes the form of a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), a narrative format developed and popularized by Robert Nash (2004). Narrative structure is well suited to support nature-based writing because of its ability to combine concrete observations and personal interpretations with relevant literature. The SPN, a specific form of narrative writing, views personal experience and story as powerful tools that help us understand the world, communicate complex concepts and relate more strongly to our surroundings (Brookfield, 2013; Nash, 2004). The relevance of the SPN to this project was twofold. Initially, I was drawn to the SPN's ability to balance scholarship and personal experience. In an SPN, relevant anecdotes act as teaching or learning moments while scholarship forwards the narrative by supporting that experience with a critical academic perspective (Nash & Bradley, 2011). Two examples of the SPN's recent use in higher education are Beth Christie's (2018) "Telling My Story: Being Female in Outdoor Education in Higher Education", a powerful personal narrative that speaks to the professional challenges that Christie has experienced as a female in her field, and Alyssa Fraser's 2017 doctoral dissertation, "Discovering the Leader Within," which is an exploration of mindfulness through both her individual experience and role as an Educational Director who works with educators and students participating in research in education and mindfulness practices. These examples of the SPN in action highlight the capacity of this format to be accessible, engaging, personal and academically relevant.

I also appreciated the way that the SPN gave a voice to undervalued forms of knowing and learning, validating that the stories that individuals have are worth sharing. It's sobering to think of how many stories have gone untold simply because they do not fit neatly into traditional academic formats and are regarded as less valuable to a field of study. Written in an alternative format, it is likely that Christie (2018) and Fraser (2017) would not have been able to delve into their personal experiences with as much depth, emotion and understanding as they were able to through the SPN. By using a SPN, I was able to translate my personal experience into a narrative that expressed a multidimensional connection between me and North Narnia.

Inspired by the styles of Coleman, Haskell, Nash and many others, then, this work is comprised of five main chapters, with each chapter focusing on a key theme that I identified in my time with North Narnia. In "A Tale of Two Narnias" I explore how place names reflect culture and story and the parallels between North Narnia and its literary namesake. "A Day In the Life" delves into what a visit with North Narnia entailed, including the inspiration for my approach and the specific engagement practices I used. Inspired by an experience early on in this study, "A Forest in Flux" explores the significance of seasonal change and the importance of slowing down and paying attention. "To Love a Place" attempts to answer three key questions: what a strong emotional connection with place looks like, why an emotional connection with place is important and how we can foster these types of connections. The final chapter, "Moving Forward" highlights the implications of my experience for individuals, educators and institutions looking to integrate place into their practices, with specific reference to the living laboratory approach in higher education. I close out this work by briefly discussing how my experience with North Narnia has helped me connect to my new surroundings following my recent departure from Thunder Bay. In every chapter, I endeavour to balance observations and conclusions that are specifically relevant to the Lakehead community with broader place-based commentary that is applicable to other individuals and places.

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When I began this project, I outlined four key goals that I intended to accomplish: (a) to connect with place in a respectful and multidimensional manner; (b) to explore my experience of connecting with place; (c) to represent this experience in a format that can influence how others interact with place; and (d) to develop a synthesis of my encounter with place that can help me and others engage with place in a more meaningful way. Reflecting on these goals, I believe that I have accomplished what I set out to do. Over the course of nine months (though I have visited North Narnia since then) I developed a connection with place that exceeded even my expectations. Stepping into North Narnia felt like meeting up with an old friend, focusing on my connection to place and listening to what North Narnia was sharing with me that day. I feel that I grounded my relationship with North Narnia in gratitude, understanding, reciprocity and respect through my time, attention and actions. I hope that I have been equally successful in translating my experience here for others, and that I have been able to capture a fraction of the energy and joy I felt interacting with North Narnia.

It is my hope that this narrative of my experience finds the right person at the right time, just as *Yardwork* and I found each other, and that they will feel moved in some way after reading it, just as I had in early 2018. Perhaps that individual will be inspired to look at place through a different lens, recognising that places are multidimensional and that there is always more than meets the eye. Maybe that person will be moved to explore a new place, devoting time and attention and absorbing some of its vast knowledge. Or maybe they will want to talk about place with friends, discussing the impact that places have on our lives. I hope that this work can make a ripple in the waters of a growing field, bolstering existing examples of long-term place engagement and encouraging others to connect with place in their own lives. Even if this work finds no one else but me and my committee, I will still be content for I have learned from and befriended an incredible place in a life-changing experience that I will forever be grateful for. Thank you to North Narnia for letting me interpret your beautiful story and tell it here, and thank you reader for taking the time to appreciate it: I hope the following chapters move you to connect with place in your own way.

Chapter Two: A Tale of Two Narnias

I grew up on a small street called Berry Patch Lane, though you'd be hard-pressed to find a berry bush growing there anymore. Over the past few decades this area has transformed from a mix of forest and green space to a twisting network of streets lined with brick houses and asphalt roads. The small green placard at the top of the street is the only hint of what this place once was, a subtle nod to the layers of place buried beneath the suburban facade. Like pieces of a puzzle, the place names found on each placard refer to some aspect of the history or ecology of the area; when pieced together these names reveal a more complete picture of how this neighbourhood transformed. For example, Berry Patch Lane took its name from the raspberries that once grew abundantly in the area, where historic forests intersected with the Grand River valley (City of Cambridge, 2018). Nearby streets Carolinian Lane and Oakhill Drive draw their names from the towering deciduous forests that stretched into the area, the remnants of which are still visible today (Carolinian Canada, 1998). These ecological references are complemented by other names that allude to the history of the area, with street names like Inverness Drive (named after the Scottish city) and St. Andrew's Street (named after Scotland's patron saint) that highlight the roots of the Anglo-European immigrants who settled in the area (Francis, 2009). By learning the stories behind these names, I began to understand the sociocultural and ecological roots of my neighbourhood and how this place has changed over time.

The more that I recognised the connections between place names and place histories in my own backyard, the more that I began to look for these connections elsewhere. When I moved to Thunder Bay to attend Lakehead University, I tried to learn more about the storied place names that dot the shore of Lake Superior. Some names clearly alluded to the ecology and geography of their lakeside location, like Terrace Bay, named for the terraced land upon which the town was built. Other place names like Marathon and Wawa drew upon the history and culture of their respective locales; the name Marathon refers to the Marathon Corporation that owned the lumber mill in town, while the name Wawa derives from the Ojibwe word for "wild goose" in honour of the geese that

migrate through the area (CBC News, 2017; Stortz, 2015). Even individual street names had their own place-based stories to tell, with names like “Bible Camp Road” and “Fish Hatchery Road” leaving little doubt as to what lies at the end of their respective roads. Each place name that I encountered told a unique story, highlighting the diverse relationships between people and place.

These connections between people and place are evident in the place names of Thunder Bay and the surrounding area. Lakehead University and Thunder Bay are situated on the traditional territory of the Fort William First Nation, members of the Ojibwe Nation and signatories to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850 (Lakehead University, 2019a). Indigenous peoples have been present in the region since time immemorial and have shaped the area in innumerable ways. Elements of Ojibwe history, language and culture (including a strong connection to the land) are embedded in place names of Indigenous origin prominent throughout the region. For example, the physically impressive waterfall just west of Thunder Bay is known as Kakabeka, from an Ojibwe word that has been translated as “thundering waters” or “sheer cliff” (Ontario Parks, 2018). Shuniah, a community just outside of Thunder Bay, derives its name from an Indigenous term for “silver”, referencing the deposits of silver throughout the area (Thunder Bay Historical Society, 1921). The stories held within these names describe not only the landscapes themselves but also the people those landscapes inspired and the deep connection they had with their surroundings.

In addition to the Indigenous history of the area, place names in Thunder Bay also reflect a long history of European settlement. The area became a major outpost for trade, beginning in the 1600s with the arrival of French couriers du bois and continuing into the 1800s as English fur traders and surveyors travelled more extensively and eventually settled in the area (City of Thunder Bay, 2018a). Populations of English and French immigrants continued to grow over time, with both languages and heritages representing significant proportions of the town’s current demographics. Like other regions in Canada with English and French heritage, the influence of both cultures can be found in the names of local neighbourhoods (e.g., Prince Arthur’s Landing, named after a member of

the British monarchy) and natural features (e.g., Oliver Lake, named after a French-Canadian prospector who discovered several silver deposits in the Thunder Bay area) (City of Thunder Bay, 2018a; Ontario Plaques, n.d.).

Thunder Bay also has a significant Finnish population who have influenced the landscape and place names of Thunder Bay. Many Finnish immigrants chose to settle in the Thunder Bay area in the late 1800s/early 1900s because of the strong geographic (i.e., climate and landscape) and industrial (i.e., logging and mining) similarities to Finland, as well as the growing economic opportunities (van Cleef, 1952). Eventually, Thunder Bay became home to one of the largest populations of Finnish people outside of Finland. The cultural influence of these Finnish settlers can be seen in place names throughout town, including the small community of Suomi (meaning "Finland" in Finnish) near Whitefish Lake or the rural street Kivikoski Road (roughly translated as "related to stone") (Toivonen, 2018). These place names were one way that Finnish immigrants brought their own culture to the Thunder Bay area and made their mark on the existing community.

Drawing upon the Indigenous, English and French history of the area, the name Thunder Bay is one of the most significant examples of how place names can reflect the cultural history of an area. Prior to the fur trade, the Indigenous name for the area was "Animike" or "Anemki", an Ojibwe word roughly translating to "thunder" (City of Thunder Bay, 2018a). This name honours the thunder often heard in the area and the rich mythos of the thunderbird, a sacred creature and protector of Ojibwe peoples that generates thunder when it flaps its wings (Andra-Warner, 2018). In the 1600s, the French couriers du bois adapted this term and began referring to the area as "Baie du Tonnaire" or Thunder Bay (City of Thunder Bay, 2018a). As the fur trade expanded and the population of the area increased, two distinct communities began to appear. The community of Fort William centred around the fur trading outpost on the Kaministiquia River and was named after the North West Company head William McGillvray, a major player in the fur trade (Morrison, 2011). The community of Port Arthur developed on the shore of Lake Superior northeast of Fort William and was named after a

member of the English royal family (City of Thunder Bay, 2018a). When Port Arthur and Fort William eventually amalgamated in the 1970s, residents chose the name Thunder Bay to represent their new joint community (City of Thunder Bay, 2018b). The evolution of the name Thunder Bay demonstrates how place names can reflect historical, linguistic, and cultural changes to a landscape.

Having encountered so many names in Thunder Bay that illustrated the relationship between people and place, I was excited to learn more about the meaning behind the name of the forest I had selected for this study. What place-based stories would be held within this name? What cultures would this name be connected to? How would this name shape my developing relationship with place? Unfortunately, this excitement and anticipation soon turned to confusion and uncertainty as my efforts to find the forest's name yielded no results. Despite the forest's prominence on the Lakehead University campus and its use by classes and students, none of the maps or documents I encountered showed a specific name associated with it. The forest's lack of a name was made even more peculiar by the fact that its surroundings, the McIntyre River and Bartley Residence, both had names that were recognisable to anyone familiar with the University. The more that I searched for a name, the more that it appeared that this forest had been overlooked. How could this be?

One potential reason that this area did not have an existing or well-known common name pertains to Australian linguists Luise Hercus and Jane Simpson's question of "what counts as a significant feature?" (2002, p. 13). Hercus and Simpson note that names are ascribed to places that are viewed as significant in some way; for example, sites of major historical events, sites with deep cultural meaning or sites of geographic importance. However, what is significant to one individual is not necessarily significant to others, as evidenced by the imperfect overlap of place name networks among cultures in the same area. On the Lakehead University campus, "significant" (that is, named) sites include buildings, sites of specific cultural significance (e.g., the sweat lodge), and a limited number of natural features (e.g., McIntyre River). Perhaps the lack of name for the campus forests

was because they were not viewed as significant enough through Lakehead's development by those who had named other areas of the university (or who had features named for them).

Whatever the reason for the apparent namelessness of the area, the absence of a commonly used place name posed some unique challenges within the context of my study. Without a specific place name, I found myself referring to the area with vague placeholders, like "this place", "that place" or "my study place". The ambiguity of these names stood in contrast to the specific observations and stories that I was beginning to uncover and the personal relationship that we were cultivating. These names lacked the specific connections to local ecology and cultural history that place names like Carolinian Lane or Wawa had shown. These intimate descriptions of and references to place are important as they help us better understand our surroundings and establish stronger connections with a place. In the presence of a place without a name I felt myself truly appreciating the weight and significance that place names can hold, not only for the stories that they share with the world but the way this insight helps us bond with the world around us.

It had become clear that this place needed a temporary name, though I knew that this would not be an easy task. The chosen name had to acknowledge many different dimensions of place including ecology, history, culture and personal perception. It needed to specifically represent what this place currently looks and feels like while also being thoughtful of what it once was and its development over time. It also needed to represent this section of the Lakehead campus in a way that aligned with the notions of respect, gratitude and reciprocity that this study was rooted in. With all of this in mind I began to look into the world of toponymy (the study of place names), hoping to find inspiration in the language, culture and history contained within seemingly everyday place names.

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Throughout history, place names have held a dual role as indicators of location and as representations of culturally, socially and ecologically significant moments, people or features. The unique naming conventions found within Indigenous and European place names reflect different

aspects of their respective cultures, histories and languages. Hercus and Simpson's 2002 exploration of Australian place names identified similarities and differences in the conventions and significance of place names in both Indigenous and European naming traditions. While the authors acknowledge the tremendous variation in nomenclature within and among Indigenous cultures and European cultures (by language, by region, through time, etc.), their research focused on some of the overarching conventions common within each of these two broader categories.

These conventions of nomenclature are perhaps most obvious in names of Anglo-European or colonial origin. Hercus and Simpson (2002) note how Western names tend to fall into one of three categories: commemorative, topographic or relational. Commemorative names are intended to honour influential people and places, though this can make them sometimes divisive. The place names used by European settlers often have colonial origins, referring to benefactors, members of government or the monarchy, and towns from their homeland (Hercus & Simpson, 2002). Canada's commonwealth history means that commemorative names are prolific throughout the country, from Prince George, British Columbia (named after a member of the British royal family) to the McIntyre River that flows through campus (named after the last head of the Hudson Bay Company outpost at Fort William) (City of Prince George, 2017; Thunder Bay Historical Society (TBHS), 1921). But as Gilles Champoux (2012) notes in his article "Toponymy and Canadian Arctic Sovereignty", not every commemorative name is colonial in nature, with many names honouring local individuals who made important contributions to their communities. An example of this is Lloyd's Lookout in Red Rock that commemorates long-time resident Lloyd Roy's dedication to the creation and use of local hiking trails. Commemorative nomenclature therefore has an inherent duality, with some names representing a "top-down" settler influence and others reflecting grassroots community figures.

Topographic and relational names both reflect the physical landscape of a place. Topographic names refer to a specific geographic feature; for example, Red Rock near Thunder Bay refers to the iron rich sand and siltstone cliffs surrounding the area. Relational names refer to the physical location

of a place in relation to another place or feature, often utilising terms like outer/inner, upper/lower or the four cardinal directions (Hercus & Simpson, 2002). Westfort, a suburb of Thunder Bay, is an abbreviation of West Fort William that denotes the specific position of this neighbourhood in relation to its surroundings. While these conventions are sometimes present with Indigenous place names, Hercus and Simpson (2002) note that they are far more common in introduced place names. These three broad Western nomenclature practices reflect a historical and cultural connection that memorializes influential (though potentially problematic) people or events. Despite their clear historical roots, these names often lack a deeper connection to place, referencing the history of those who colonized North America rather than the traits that make those places special unto themselves.

While the Western approach to place names centres around largely historical and colonial references (with general geography also playing a role), Indigenous nomenclature draws more prominently upon direct relationships with place, marrying connection with culture and connection with place to imbue place names with significant meaning. As noted by the Government of Canada on their interactive map "Stories from the Land", Indigenous place names,

> Reinforce an intimate relationship with the land, convey a broad range of knowledge such as travel routes and traditional hunting and fishing grounds, and are touchstones for history and legend. They also embody and honour the teachings of Elders, and are a tool for educating youth. (Government of Canada, n.d.)

Though Indigenous place names don't follow the same naming conventions as European names, their approach to nomenclature weaves together elements of culture, language and place. This sentiment is echoed in Keith Basso's 1996 book *Wisdom Sits in Places*, which explores the relationship between place and language in Western Apache culture. Basso highlights the deep cultural and linguistic significance of place names in Apache culture, noting that "the Apache landscape is full of named locations...a repository of distilled wisdom, a stern but benevolent keeper of tradition" (1996, pp. 62-

63). These examples highlight how Indigenous place names reference a place's appearance, important events that occurred there and the place's overall significance to the local community.

Geography, culture and story are found in Indigenous place names throughout Canada and around the world. As many Indigenous communities and cultures did not keep maps or other written records, place names had to communicate information about their appearance, direction and purpose so that they could be located by those who travelled there in the future (Basso, 1996; Hercus & Simpson, 2002). The Kaministiquia River that flows through Thunder Bay is a prime example of a geographically descriptive name, having been translated variably from Ojibwe to mean "river of islands", "ragged shores involving portages" and "wide river" (TBHS, 1921, p. 15). Geographically descriptive names also frequently refer to important hunting and fishing grounds. Examples of these names in Ontario include the Niskibi River (near Hudson's Bay and the Manitoba border), a Cree name meaning "goose stopping place", and Gowganda, an Ojibwe name meaning "place of the big pickerel" (Government of Canada, n.d.). These names hold important traditional knowledge and demonstrate a clear understanding of the ecological dimension of place. The use of these Indigenous names allows this knowledge to be shared among individuals, communities and future generations.

As storytelling is a culturally important method of communicating information among Indigenous peoples, it is not surprising that the use of story extends to the nomenclature of place. Much like geographically descriptive place names, these storied names communicate the significance of a specific place. Basso (1996) notes that in Apache culture, "place-names become indispensable resources for the storyteller's craft" (p. 47), from the descriptive and visually evocative nature of these names to their unique method of storytelling that begins and ends by recounting the place name where the story occurred. Canada is rich in traditional place names intended to evoke a place-specific story, including Qimivvivik, Nunavut (roughly translated from Inuktitut as "place where a hunter once got tangled in his dog team ropes") and the island of Equay Miniss in northwestern Ontario (roughly translated from Ojibwe to mean "women's island" in honour of the women and children

who sought refuge there during times of conflict) (Government of Canada, n.d.). These names use story to paint a picture of a notable event that happened there and highlight that place's significance.

In countries with strong Indigenous and colonial histories (like Canada, Australia and the United States), the landscape often features a mix of both introduced European and traditional Indigenous names. The different cultural approaches to nomenclature combined with the deep and divisive colonial history of these landscapes often leads to overlap and conflict between the two sets of names. This friction on the landscape can lead to including the presence of two different names for one single place, the erasure of existing Indigenous names in favour of European alternatives, or the adoption of Indigenous names with significant alterations to their pronunciation or meaning.

One prominent example where two names exist for one place is the mountain Uluru/Ayers Rock in Australia. Uluru is a site of immense cultural significance to the Anangu culture in relation to their creation stories and ancestry, as noted in a 2013 article by Anthony Lock. Lock states that despite the presence of the Anangu people around Uluru since time immemorial, the site was renamed Ayers Rock upon its "discovery" in 1872 to commemorate a member of the Australian government. In the years that followed, the sacredness of the mountain was threatened by tourism allowing significant access to the site; it is only in the last 20-30 years that the significance of Uluru to the Anangu people has been better understood and respected, including the repatriation of the land and the official dual naming of the site as Uluru/Ayers Rock (Lock, 2013). Lock quotes Bill Watt, former chair of the Committee for Geographic Names in Australasia (now the Permanent Committee on Place Names), who suggests dual names promote stronger connections to place through deeper cultural understanding, regardless of whether you are a local or a guest on that land. Though the dual name is an imperfect response to the difficult history of this site, it is a positive step in shifting the narrative to focus on the cultural significance of place rather than the spectacle of expedition.

Locally in northwestern Ontario, there are many places that informally possess both an Indigenous and a European name. One of the most significant in the Thunder Bay area is Anemki

Wajiw, also known as Mount McKay. Anemki Wajiw (alternatively spelled Anamikiwakchu and Animikii-waajiw) is an Ojibwe name that has been translated as “Thunder Mountain” or “the place where the Thunderbirds land” (TBHS, 1921, pp. 12-13; CBC News, 2016). This site is culturally significant to Fort William First Nation, both in relation to their traditional stories and as a sacred site for ceremony and gathering (Spare, 2019). Despite the name and the cultural importance of the mountain, a diary entry from a European settler in 1821 states “this very fine mountain has no name” (TBHS, 1921, p. 16). Early records of the name “Mount Mackay” or “Mackay’s Mountain” appear around 1857, referring to fur trader William Mackay who frequently climbed the mountain during his stay in the area (TBHS, 1921). While the name Anemki Wajiw was used by the local Indigenous community, the name Mount McKay became more commonly used by fur traders and other white settlers of the Thunder Bay area. I personally had not encountered the name Anemki Wajiw until one or two years ago, despite visiting the mountain many times during my eight years in Thunder Bay.

Unlike Uluru/Ayers Rock, there is no resolution or official dual naming of this site. Both place names are used though Mount McKay appears to be the more widely used/recognised name. The presence of both names for one place reflects the divisive history and tense relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers in Thunder Bay. In response to these tensions, there have been several grassroots movements working to promote or reclaim these traditional names in Thunder Bay. Recent installations include a 2016 billboard by Indigenous artist Susan Blight in Thunder Bay featuring the name “Animikii-waajiw” under the outline of the mountain and a series of etched glass murals installed in 2019 at the Thunder Bay Airport by local Indigenous art group Neechee Studio that feature traditional imagery centred around the Thunderbird (CBC News, 2016; Spare, 2019). This art and activism aims to make the local community more aware of the cultural significance of this place through the reclamation and use of its traditional name (CBC News, 2016; Spare, 2019).

In addition to the overlap of traditional and introduced place names, there are many examples where Indigenous nomenclature have been adopted by European settlers in a heavily altered form.

Intentionally or not, these alterations dismiss the culture, story and connection to place inherent in the original name. An example of this practice can be found in the Eurocentric naming practices of Canadian geologist and surveyor J. B. Tyrrell, as documented in John C. Lehr and Brian McGregor's 2016 analysis of nomenclature in the Canadian prairies. One of Tyrrell's practices was to arbitrarily shorten lengthy Indigenous place names to "about four syllables, retaining, as far as possible, the general character and sound of the words" to make them easier for Europeans to pronounce (as cited in Lehr & McGregor, 2016, pp. 79-80). While this practice may have made the pronunciation more convenient for Anglophones, altering the spelling or pronunciation of these names would also often alter the traditional meaning and stories behind these names (Lehr & McGregor, 2016).

While many places names in Canada reflect tensions between cultures or reference divisive historical figures and events, some place names are changing to reflect new societal perspectives and positively respond to the need for reconciliation. In 2017, the Ontario community of Blind River changed the name of "Colonization Road" to "Youngfox Road" in honour of a local Indigenous artist (CTV News, 2017). This name change was intended as a small act of reconciliation that would shift the narrative of this place from the difficult and problematic history of colonization to a celebration of local Indigenous culture and talent. I believe that when people are connected to a place, it is easier for them to recognise the impact (positive or negative) that place names and their histories have on the community. The change to Youngfox Road stands as an example of how a change in place name can positively respond to, and potentially support, ecological or social changes.

The diversity of place names on the Canadian landscape reflects the diversity of people, languages, cultures and natural features that this country is known for. In northwestern Ontario (including Thunder Bay), the landscape is primarily dominated by place names of either Indigenous or Anglo-European origin. Introduced European place names tend to be more commemorative in nature, focusing less on the specific features of each individual place and more on honouring influential people and places from their home country. In contrast, traditional Indigenous place

names tend to reflect a stronger connection to place and demonstrate a thorough understanding of specific geographic features, seasonal animal behaviours, and sites of historical or cultural significance. By recognizing the connection between culture and nomenclature we can better understand the stories behind place names and the cultures and worldviews that inspired them.

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Recognising the weight that a place name carries, it perhaps isn't surprising that I struggled in the early stages of this study to find an appropriate name for the place I had chosen to study. Whatever name I used needed to acknowledge and respect many different facets of place, culture and history, a delicate balancing act that posed challenges with both introduced and traditional names. Because of the difficult history of colonialism and introduced place names in Canada, I felt that it would be inappropriate to use a name that memorialized any figure or event from colonial history. I also felt that inventing my own name for the forest would convey notions of ownership with place (i.e., that it was "my" place and that I had the sole right to name it), a perception that opposed the partnership with place that I was working to establish. Using a traditional Indigenous name also posed its own set of challenges; even though I had not yet encountered a traditional name for the area, I questioned whether my identity as a white settler not native to the area would make the use of an Indigenous name inappropriate. Many Indigenous place names hold sacred meaning, and I did not want to unintentionally appropriate an important name or assume that I could publicly use any name that I found. My efforts to circumvent these concerns with placeholders like "this place" or "study place" were also problematic due to the vague and impersonal nature of these terms.

The search for an appropriate name became a persistent narrative throughout my early visits, drowning out other observations or thoughts that crossed my mind. After one such place visit, I knew I needed to clear my head and get an outside perspective on the name. I decided to stop by the office of a close friend familiar with the area, having spent close to ten years on the Lakehead campus as both a student and a university employee. As I walked into her office, I hoped that chatting with her

would provide some new insight on a potential name. In a somewhat ironic twist, her office just happened to overlook the exact patch of forest that I was currently struggling with. When I pointed this out to her, she glanced outside before looking back and saying, “Oh, you were in North Narnia?”

I remember staring at her momentarily before breaking into a smile and a little laugh. How could I have forgotten such a magical name when it had been in front of me all along? My friend’s familiarity with the Lakehead campus reminded me of the forest’s beautifully appropriate nickname. Hearing the name “North Narnia” transported me back to my first year when I, like most other students, was living in the Bartley Residence houses next to the forest. Narnia is the name that has been used and passed down through cohorts of first year students to describe the forests between the residence and the river, with North Narnia denoting the forests directly behind residence and South Narnia referring to a nearby patch of forest farther downstream. Though the time and circumstance of this name’s origin are largely unknown, it is a recognisable nickname developed by students to reflect the secluded and magical nature of the forests beside their home.

Though not every student ventures into the lush forests of Narnia, those who do often find it to be a perfect escape from the noise and structure that often pervades the residence. Early in the school year students can often be found sunbathing on the rocks or soaking their feet in the river when the water levels are low. Occasionally the sweet melody of a guitar can be heard coming from the forest, with quiet peeps of birdsong accompanying these musical serenades. In the winter the area is dotted with quinzees or other snow structures created by outdoor recreation students eager to practice their survival skills. When asked where certain friends or roommates were at a given time, “visiting Narnia” was a common response. Reflecting on my visits with the forest up until that point, I could see how the name North Narnia perfectly suited what generations of students before me had known and loved about the forest: that this was a place of seclusion and refuge, a place of fantasy and adventure, and a place where students could find themselves in their new life in Thunder Bay.

The Narnia of Lakehead University takes its name from author C. S. Lewis' literary Narnia, a series that follows the fantastical journey of the four Pevensie children (Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter) (Lewis, 1950). Sent to live with their uncle in the English countryside, the siblings stumble upon a gateway to the magical world of Narnia hidden in the back of an old wardrobe. The world of Narnia that they encounter blurs fantasy and reality, juxtaposing familiar looking forests with talking animals, a god-like lion and a wicked witch. Throughout the series, the children befriend a variety of magical creatures as they attempt to restore peace to Narnia and fulfill their prophesied roles as just leaders of the kingdom. Lewis' series is regarded within literary circles as much more than children's literature, featuring a complex mythology of human and more-than-human beings set in a fantastical realm rich in symbolism, primarily regarding the nature of humanity. Having read much of the Narnia series, I noted many parallels between Lewis' Narnia and North Narnia centred around the concepts of fantasy and hidden worlds, and the relationship between humans and animals.

The wardrobe in Lewis' Narnia appears average and nondescript from the outside, but once the children cross the threshold they are transported to a new world full of fantastical creatures. This immediately made me think of North Narnia and its "ordinary" presence (Doremus, 1999) on the Lakehead University campus near residence. Hundreds of people walk the asphalt pathway past North Narnia everyday, with only a small handful of people noticing the trail into the forest and even fewer following that trail into the forest. Those who do enter the forest are greeted by a largely secluded area where the hustle and bustle of people is replaced by the whispering wind and the rushing of the McIntyre River. I still remember the awe I felt the first time I entered North Narnia for this study as I was transported from the rainy grey dullness of campus to a dense green jungle. Each step I took was met with a new sensory experience: the smell of wet pine, the vibrant colour of the new deciduous growth and the chattering of birds and squirrels high in the trees. The tall deciduous and conifer trees, the thickness of the vegetation and the bowl-shaped valley of North Narnia fostered a sense of seclusion and solitude throughout many of my visits. The action of "stepping through the

wardrobe" and entering the forest quickly became one of my favourite parts of my visits with North Narnia, as I stood in awe of this beautiful realm "hidden" in such an "ordinary" place.

An additional parallel between the two Narnias pertains to the relationship between humans and more-than-humans. *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe* (the first book in the Narnia series, published in 1950) features two distinct perspectives on this connection. The first viewpoint is that of the White Witch, who exerts what she believes to be a rightful dominance over the Narnian creatures, employing them as her spies. Her hierarchical outlook bears a strong similarity to the prevailing Western view that humans are dominant and separate from the natural world, a view that devalues the value and worthiness of other creatures. The perspective of the White Witch starkly contrasts that of Aslan, the lion, and the Pevensie children. With the exception of Aslan (who is revered as an almost god-like figure), the children view all living creatures on a largely equal plane of existence. Their perspective can be seen throughout the books in how they treat all species with dignity, how they listen rather than dictate, and how they fulfill their destiny as leaders rather than rulers of the kingdom. As Rowan Williams (2012) notes in *The Lion's World* (an analysis of Lewis' Narnia), "in Narnia, you may be on precisely the same spiritual level as a badger or a mouse" (pp. 20-21). This perspective aligns with my personal views on place: that we are interconnected with other living things, that much can be learned from our communities if we are willing to listen, and that valuing certain places over others is counterproductive to our ability to connect with our surroundings.

After that meeting with my friend, I knew the name North Narnia perfectly suited the forests that had captured my attention and appropriately addressed many of the nomenclature related challenges I had encountered. Its status as an introduced name was balanced by its grassroots nature, having been passed down through generations of students before being suggested to me by a close friend. It tied into a unique cultural mythos without appropriating any aspects of the local Indigenous culture, focusing instead on the broader concepts of fantasy and story in relation to place. It also felt considered and meaningful, with strong parallels between my own experience of engaging with a

new place and that of the characters in Lewis' Narnia. I felt confident that as my study progressed, the name North Narnia would continue to honour the space and celebrate its unique character. No longer was it "this place" or "that place"; from this point on, it was North Narnia.

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Throughout the study, the name North Narnia continued to capture the essence of the forest in beautiful and unexpected ways. The direct parallels that I observed between North Narnia and Lewis' Narnia inspired me to embrace fantasy in my visits with place, moving beyond my initial qualitative and quantitative observations of place to imagine North Narnia in a range of hypothetical conditions. For example, the first time I saw North Narnia cloaked in a thick blanket of snow I was captivated by the sun reflecting off the icy crystals and the animal tracks that dotted the clean white cover of snow. This inspired me to reflect on the seasons that I had experienced with North Narnia, from the loss of the colourful leaves as fall turned to winter to the colourful signs of spring that would begin to pop through the soil and snow in a few months. Immersed in these snowy surroundings, my mind wandered to the forests of Lewis' Narnia that the White Witch trapped in eternal winter. I tried to imagine how different it would have felt to endure that frigid eternity with no promise of spring or bursts of colour to offer hope. I felt a newfound appreciation for the change of the seasons and the freedom of the winter I was experiencing in comparison to the cursed forests of Narnia. This connection between the two Narnias deepened my appreciation of the place I loved; without the named connection to Narnia, I would likely not have pursued this train of thought.

Having a name that so distinctly suited the character of the forest also made it significantly easier to communicate my experience with place and the stories I encountered. The strong literary and pop culture reference found within the name North Narnia provided insight on its appearance and essence even to those who had never personally interacted with the forest before. A cursory familiarity with Lewis' Narnia would evoke images of a secret world full of lush forests, enchanted creatures and rich mythology. The more that my family, friends and fellow students understood the

parallels between the two Narnias, the more that they could imagine the beauty, wonder and mystery of North Narnia that I found so inspiring. Eventually the cloud of ambiguity and confusion associated with terms like “that place” or “the forest” began to recede, allowing others to connect with my specific experience and the idea of engaging with place in general.

While the name North Narnia captured the essence of this place at this specific moment in time, it is important to remember that place names, like the places themselves, are dynamic. Place names are continually responding to ecological, sociocultural and other changes. The history of the name Thunder Bay was one example of how the evolving relationship between people and place is often reflected in changes to place names. As Karen Heikkila notes in her 2007 Masters thesis on toponymy, “place-names have a living or progressive role in investing human meaning in the landscape and in influencing human thought and action with regards to the landscape” (p. 15). Just as we are shaped by the places we encounter, we influence and shape these places in return. As the Lakehead University campus changes over time, the names that feature prominently across campus may shift in response. For example, the university’s strong commitment to respectful relationships with Indigenous communities could be represented by using Indigenous names for new community spaces. Future campus names may also reflect the university’s growing interest in sustainability, drawing inspiration from the species of the boreal forest. In the coming years it is uncertain whether the forests between Bartley Residence and the McIntyre River will continue to be known as North Narnia or whether they will take on a different name with its own storied meaning.

In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Basso states that “knowledge of places is...closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community” (1996, p. 34). Through my explorations of nomenclature, I improved my understanding of and felt more connected to the places where I’ve lived and learned. Understanding the origins of Berry Patch Lane and St. Andrew’s Street strengthened my connection with my hometown of Cambridge as I learned more about the area’s ecological history and the Scottish heritage I shared

with the area's settlers. Learning the meaning of Indigenous and Western names in the Thunder Bay region gave me greater insight into the complex cultural history of this community and the culturally significant stories these names can hold. Additionally, my exploration of the name Narnia helped me embrace its fantasy and symbolism, both in the context of Lewis' literary realm and the campus forest. By understanding the stories behind these place names, we not only strengthen our relationship with our surroundings but help to keep these stories alive for generations to come.

Chapter Three: A Day in the Life

"So, what exactly do you do out there?"

During the nine months that I spent connecting with North Narnia, this was the most common question that I was asked by family, friends, and anyone else to whom I mentioned my study. I understand why this question was asked as often as it was: to many of my peers, my time with North Narnia didn't appear to be anything more than just sitting in the forest once a week, occasionally making notes or walking around, but not really *doing* much of anything. In comparison to the clear and purposeful way that other students interacted with the Lakehead campus, studying on picnic tables in the quad or sampling water from the shores of Lake Tamblyn, my time spent sitting on a fallen tree likely appeared closer to meditation or personal relaxation than an educational or scholarly exercise. But just as the stories and layers of place are often hidden below the surface, there was more to my interactions with North Narnia than their outward appearance may have suggested.

To truly understand what a visit with North Narnia was like, I'd like to take you back to October 16th, 2018, the date of one of my favourite visits. Taking place near the end of my nine-month exploration of place, this interaction exemplified the organic and place-responsive process for engaging with North Narnia that I had refined over many months, from the moments of contemplation that book-ended the interaction to the deep sensory engagement and observations in between. There was also a sense of familiarity and ease that accompanied this visit, which I felt reflected the personal relationship with North Narnia that had developed over the past seven months. Recalling this visit from start to finish highlights not only the specific practices I used to engage with North Narnia during a typical visit, but also how those practices helped me strengthen my understanding of, appreciation for, and connection with North Narnia. But before I share the details of my October 16th visit, let me take a step back and discuss my methodological inspirations.

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I chose to engage deeply with place out of a longstanding respect for the ability of place to nurture thought, evoke emotion and inspire action among individuals who choose to engage with them (Coleman, 2017; Gooley, 2017; Pelo, 2014). Much of my life has been shaped by both broad engagement and specific experiences with the natural world. Spending my high school days hiking cliffs in my hometown helped me understand the beauty of nature hidden in plain sight, while watching the first snow fall in Algonquin Park made me realize that I wanted to continue to explore the natural world in the future. Field courses in Thunder Bay highlighted the complexity of natural systems, while facilitating interpretive programs in urban and bush settings widened my perspective on the types of places we can learn from. Each instance of direct engagement with place deepened my appreciation for my surroundings and strengthened my connection with the natural world. As I embarked on this new exploration of place, I tried to find place-engagement practices that showed respect and gratitude and supported a meaningful relationship between North Narnia and myself.

My search for place engagement practices naturally began by turning to the three models of place engagement that originally inspired this project: *Yardwork* (2017) by Daniel Coleman, *The Forest Unseen* (2012) by David George Haskell and *A Sand County Almanac* (1966) by Aldo Leopold. These works exemplified how consistent engagement with place over a long period of time can foster a respectful relationship with place like the one I sought to cultivate with North Narnia. Within this broad conceptual similarity, each author crafted their own practices for place engagement that reflected their perceptions of place and the dimensions of place they chose to explore.

In *Yardwork*, Coleman used a relatively informal approach for interacting with place. Coleman's constant proximity to his backyard meant that their interactions mainly occurred over a morning cup of tea or during a relaxing evening stroll as opposed to a rigid regimen of visits for a set period of time. The organic nature of these exchanges aligned with Coleman's original intention for engaging with place, "to pay a more focused attention to this exact, little place: to listen, to learn its manners, to register its hidden wonders" (2017, p. 15). Guided by this intention, Coleman chose

methods of engagement that were authentic to the moment. There were no explicit rules for the frequency and duration of his interactions with place, he simply made an effort to interact with the backyard consistently and attentively. Each visit with the backyard took on a different form, from leisurely walks in the woods searching for signs of wildlife to quiet reflections on community while tending to his gardens. Even the scope of his study was somewhat flexible, as his investigation frequently extended into the surrounding neighbourhoods and green spaces to better understand how this specific place fit into the broader context of his community.

The flexibility of Coleman's interactions with place allowed lines of inquiry to develop freely based on what he observed in the backyard, spanning sociological and ecological dimensions of place. The organic quality of these interactions with place is evident throughout *Yardwork*; for example, the chapter "Watershed" was inspired by an evening rainfall and Coleman's desire to understand how that water travelled through the backyard and beyond. Coleman supplemented his own observations with research and conversations with individuals deeply rooted in the community including Elders, ecologists, historians and neighbours. Through this responsive approach to place, Coleman deepened his understanding of and developed an intimate bond with the backyard.

In contrast, Haskell's (2012) experience in *The Forest Unseen* demonstrated a more structured approach to place engagement. Haskell is the only researcher of the three to detail specific practices or guidelines that he adhered to in his interactions with "the mandala", a small segment of old growth forest in Tennessee. These prescriptive practices are detailed near the beginning of *The Forest Unseen* where he notes,

> My rules at the mandala are simple: visit often, watching a year circle past; be quiet, keep disturbance to a minimum; no killing, no removal of creatures, no digging in or crawling over the mandala. The occasional thoughtful touch is enough. I have no set schedule for visits, but I watch here many times each week. (p. xiv)

The practices and considerations that Haskell lists reflect the unique scale and location of the mandala and provide structure for their interactions. Haskell's choice to limit disturbance or direct contact with the mandala likely relates to the small size of the study area; as the mandala was very small, even a relatively minor disturbance like a footprint in the soil would have a significant impact on the appearance, balance and dynamics of the species that lived there. Additionally, since Haskell did not live adjacent to the mandala, visiting there several times per week for one year allowed Haskell to observe the mandala consistently throughout all four seasons.

Though Haskell's structured visits adhered to these practices, his lines of inquiry were still responsive to the mandala itself. Haskell viewed the mandala as a "contemplative window" into the forest as a whole, noting how "the truth of the forest may be more clearly and vividly revealed by the contemplation of a small area than it could be by donning ten-league boots, covering a continent but discovering little" (2012, p. xii). By focusing on a smaller section of a much larger place, Haskell was able to make detailed observations that could then be considered within the larger ecological and sociocultural context of the entire forest. This practice is reflected in several chapters including "May 18th - Herbivory" (p. 108), where the mandala's ability to thrive in the face of significant insect activity prompted Haskell to consider the unique adaptations of plants that allow them to persist through a variety of challenges. Haskell's specific process for engaging with the mandala balanced structure and responsiveness to foster awareness and connection with place.

My third inspiration for place engagement, *A Sand County Almanac* (1966), profiles naturalist Aldo Leopold's relationship with his abandoned Wisconsin farm. Unlike Coleman and Haskell, Leopold did not set out with the specific intention of connecting with the land through weekly visits or specific observations. Instead, *A Sand County Almanac* documents Leopold's intimate understanding of his surroundings that developed over many years of engaging with the farm. As a result, Leopold's interactions with place vary greatly from the other models. There are no guidelines for where or when interactions with the farm occur, as Leopold was frequently present on

the land in various capacities (work, personal life, etc.) over several decades. Leopold's natural history background supported a multifaceted understanding of the land that addressed perceptual, sociological and ecological dimensions of place. Though *A Sand County Almanac* depicts a year in the life of this rural land, it is really a retrospective of a lengthy relationship with a beloved place.

Leopold's interactions with place were also influenced by the fact that the Wisconsin property had previously been a working farm and was recovering from degradation. Rather than simply observing the land, Leopold actively shaped it through actions like felling trees or hunting grouse. There is a beautiful tension in the way that these moments of purposeful landscape alteration were accompanied by some of Leopold's most reverential references to the natural history of the area. One example of this juxtaposition can be found in the passage "Good Oak", where Leopold recounts his experience felling an oak tree that had stood on the property for decades:

> Now our saw bites into the 1920's, the Babbittian decade when everything grew bigger and better in heedlessness and arrogance - until 1929, when stock markets crumpled. If the oak heard them fall, its wood gives no sign... Neither did it notice the demise of the state's last marten in 1925, nor the arrival of its first starling in 1923... (1966, p. 33)

With each pull of the saw Leopold moved backward in time through the history of the area, imagining the significant change this tree had witnessed. Though many of Leopold's interactions with the farm altered the landscape beyond the natural cycles of growth and decay, he used these moments to reflect deeply on the significance of the land and the species who reside there.

In addition to these three models, I also drew inspiration from educators Brian Wattchow and Mike Brown (2011) and researchers Monica Gagliano (2018) and Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013). In *A Pedagogy of Place* (2011), Wattchow and Brown use their decades of experience leading experiential excursions to highlight specific strategies for place engagement that have helped their students gain a greater awareness of their surroundings. Considerations that Wattchow and Brown found to be successful in their experience include "taking time to pause and understand the local history and

ecology" (p. 127), "sensing a place" both physically and intuitively (p. 113), and "being present in and with a place" (p. 182). Through these practices, students are asked to move beyond physical observations of a place to also consider how that place has evolved over time, what emotions it evokes within them, and the broader personal, cultural or ecological significance that places may hold. These practices help to break down the disconnect between humans and the natural world through deep physical and emotional engagement and critical reflection.

Researcher and biologist Monica Gagliano references similar practices for engaging with the natural world in her 2018 book, *Thus Spoke the Plant*. In this work, Gagliano describes how her research with pea plants focuses on their behaviour and methods of communication. Her research pushes boundaries in science, exploring a specialized field that is often discounted as not scientific enough. In the face of these criticisms, one of the practices that Gagliano espouses as central to the success of her work is the need to "put all beliefs, cultural assumptions, judgements and prejudices aside, and just listen" (p. 2); I found this practice to be meaningful whether one is connecting with a plant or with a place. Any preconceptions or biases that we bring to our surroundings can skew our observations and cloud our ability to connect with place in a meaningful way. Setting those assumptions aside as well as we can helps us be more present and allows a place to speak for itself.

A final source of inspiration came from biologist and botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer and her 2013 book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer shares select place-based stories from a lifetime of engaging physically, emotionally and spiritually with the natural world. Kimmerer's experiences underscore the meaningful explorations of place that can happen when we pay attention to the world around us. In her chapter "Witness to the Rain" Kimmerer notes, "paying attention acknowledges that we have something to learn from intelligences other than our own. Listening, standing witness, creates an openness to the world" (p. 300). To Kimmerer, this attention recognises the role of place as a teacher and encourages us to hear, understand and learn from our surroundings. This anecdote is

just one of many in *Braiding Sweetgrass* that highlights the depth of knowledge that can be gained by listening and attending to a place at different moments in time.

Engaging with place is a personal endeavour, which means that no single approach or model would be completely applicable to the context of my interactions with North Narnia. Instead, I began to assemble my own approach for engaging with place that incorporated the practices from each example that I found most impactful or applicable to the context of my study. I respected the natural quality of Coleman's interactions with his backyard and wanted to emulate his organic lines of inquiry, using smaller observations to inspire larger discussions of nature and culture. I wanted to balance this flexibility with elements of Haskell's more structured approach, so I chose to visit North Narnia on a weekly basis over a nine-month period throughout all four seasons; since I did not live or work adjacent to North Narnia, I felt this structure would support a strong connection with place through consistent contact. I appreciated Leopold's natural history approach and the retrospective quality of his writing, so I incorporated these elements in my own process, reflecting critically on my interactions with multiple dimensions of place (i.e., perceptual, sociological and ecological). I adopted more specific practices from Wattchow and Brown, Gagliano and Kimmerer, like engaging my senses, approaching place with an open mind, and being present and attentive. I hoped to bring together these individual elements to create my own approach for engaging with North Narnia.

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Inspired by these diverse approaches to place engagement, I felt confident that I could develop a format for visits with North Narnia that incorporated the insight of others while remaining authentic to the first goal of this study: to connect with a place in a respectful and multidimensional manner. The format of my visits with North Narnia became more refined and consistent over time as I tested out different practices for engaging with place, investing in those that I felt strengthened my connection with North Narnia (e.g., direct sensory engagement) and eliminating those that I found to have little or no impact (e.g., sound recordings of birdsong or the river). Eventually, I settled on a

process for engaging with North Narnia that centred around four main practices: arrival/moment of contemplation, sensory "wake-up" and engagement, critical observation and reflection, and closing/expression of gratitude. The visit on October 16th, seven months into my time with North Narnia, exemplified what a typical interaction looked and felt like.

The visit began like almost every other visit with North Narnia, with me arriving at the forest and pausing at the threshold for a moment of quiet contemplation. Thresholds represent the boundary between two realms, where one ecosystem or world ends and another begins. I have always found these transitional areas to be significant, and the threshold between North Narnia and the rest of campus was no exception: it was the place where field became forest, where the hum of campus activity was replaced by the whisper of wind through the branches of the aspen trees, and where the vast expanse of the Lakehead University campus transformed into an intimate, jungle-like wonderland. This boundary took on additional symbolic significance once I began to use the name North Narnia, as each time I crossed the threshold to enter North Narnia I was reminded of the Pevensie children of Lewis' *Narnia* series who crossed through the wardrobe and entered a magical Narnian realm of their own. I found that this quiet moment of reflection honoured the significance of where I stood and the interaction with place that I was about to embark on.

This pause for reflection also served an additional purpose as a moment where I could quiet my thoughts and shake off any unnecessary assumptions or distractions in order to approach North Narnia with an open mind. Inspired by Gagliano's use of this practice in *Thus Spoke the Plant*, I felt that approaching North Narnia with an open mind would help ensure that I wasn't unconsciously letting any personal preconceptions skew my observations. It is worthwhile to note that while open-mindedness is important, the subjective nature of connecting with place means that it is neither possible nor entirely appropriate to completely set aside all thoughts and feelings before each visit (Zajonc, 2013). Instead, in these moments of quiet contemplation I tried to acknowledge these assumptions as they appeared while also making a conscious effort to move beyond them. These

reflective pauses took many different forms depending on how anxious or distracted I was. On an average day, this moment consisted of briefly closing my eyes, taking a few deep breaths and greeting North Narnia before entering the forest. On days where I was particularly preoccupied, I supplemented this practice by grounding myself physically (by touching the grass or trees) and/or mentally (by utilising a short calming mantra like "remember why you're here") to provide additional focus. My visit on October 16th was my first visit with North Narnia after a week-long trip out of town, so I used this moment at the threshold to close my eyes and take a few deep breaths to calm my excited mind and refocus my attention before stepping into the forest.

I drew inspiration for these mindfulness practices from the field of contemplative pedagogy, an approach to education that aims to help educators and students make meaningful connections to what they are learning through increased reflection, awareness and attention to their surroundings (Columbia, n.d.). In his 2013 article "Contemplative Pedagogy", Arthur Zajonc discusses how contemplative practices like mindfulness and meditation are gaining popularity in higher education institutions. These approaches are becoming more valued because of their ability to help individuals develop impactful connections with their surroundings, leading to improved awareness and compassion for the world around them (Zajonc, 2013). The use of contemplative practices in my visits with North Narnia, like mindful reflection or expressions of gratitude, strengthened my connection to North Narnia through increasing understanding of both place and myself.

After this moment of reflection, I would cross the threshold and walk down the winding dirt trail into the forest. I transitioned to the period of sensory "wake-up" as I walked the worn pathway, tapping into my senses one by one and feeling them come alive with each step. As I walked through North Narnia on October 16th, first my vision came into greater focus. I gradually began to recognise more intricate details amidst the sea of green and brown, like the variegated edges of ostrich ferns and the beams of light that danced across the forest floor. My hearing soon followed suit, tuning in first to the rushing of the McIntyre River before registering quieter sounds like the creaking of aspen

trunks in the breeze or the squelching of soil beneath my feet. I touched the rugged tree trunks, caressed the smooth leaves and dug my hands into the damp earth as I walked, taking in their deeply organic scents and firm but light texture. I tried to move through North Narnia slowly and deliberately to enliven my senses without overwhelming them. This period of intentional sensory engagement helped establish a strong physical connection between myself and North Narnia.

Almost all of my inspirations for connecting with place referenced the importance of strong sensory engagement in some way, from Gagliano and Kimmerer's advocacy for listening to the stories of the natural world to Wattchow, Brown and Haskell's more practical references to engagement through touch, smell, sight and even taste. The correlation between sensory engagement and place attachment is also prominent elsewhere in the literature on place and education. In their 2004 article "Pedagogy of Connections", researchers Lou Preston and Amma Griffiths document how different "ways of knowing" influenced their students' relationship with place. In this study students made multiple visits to a single outdoor place, approaching each visit from one of four perspectives: experiential, historical, scientific and artistic. The majority of students found that their most powerful interactions with place corresponded to the use of an experiential perspective, with one student specifically noting that "using all my senses...is what worked best for me to get to know my place" (Preston & Griffiths, 2004, p. 39). Naturalist Tristan Gooley also references the importance of sensory engagement in his 2017 book, *How to Read Nature*. Gooley describes the relationship between our senses and our bond with the natural world, noting that when "senses are heightened, awareness grows...connections are discovered, and experiences become more profound. The cycle strengthens further" (2017, p.157). These authors highlight how the insight into place that we gain through sensory engagement directly contributes to our relationship with place.

In *How to Read Nature*, Gooley also notes that, "almost everything that our senses pick out is eager to tell us a story that will help us more vividly read nature" (2017, p. 101). Our senses are often drawn to features that are unique or distinct in some way, capturing our attention and inspiring us to

learn more about their history, appearance and significance. I experienced this phenomenon frequently during the “sensory wake-up” period, finding that certain sensory observations piqued my interest more than others. I tried to be responsive to these natural inclinations, allowing these observations to guide my attention to areas of the forest or species that I wished to explore further.

During the visit on October 16th, my attention was drawn to a fallen tree that lay in the centre of the forest in a particularly distinct way. The lengthy spruce had fallen right beside a still standing birch tree, their perpendicular trunks mimicking the arms of a clock and reminding me of passage of time in the forest. My eyes had been drawn to the contrast in colour of the two trees, and the way the dark brown of the fallen spruce juxtaposed with the light grey and green lichen on the birch. I stepped closer and ran my hands along the bark of both trees, feeling how the papery nature of the birch bark contrasted with the rugged grooves of the spruce trunk. The dampness of the fall weather enhanced the woody smell of the exposed spruce wood so much that it was as if I was smelling and tasting it at the same time. For many years these trees would have stood side by side in the same small corner of North Narnia, competing against each other for sunlight and water while also supporting one another through the mutual contribution of nutrients to their shared soil. Even though the spruce now lay on the forest floor, their physical connection persisted through the spruce’s slow decomposition, enriching the soil and supporting its friend for years to come. While the tree had not fallen recently, that day was the first day that I really noticed the close bond these trees shared, forged by the cycles of growth and decay.

In addition to their resemblance to the arms of a clock, I felt that the positioning of these two tree trunks also roughly resembled a chair, with the fallen spruce appearing as a wide bench-like seat and the tall standing birch acting as a tall and ornate high back (as shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Chair, October 16, 2018

The organic appearance of this chair was complemented by a forest floor carpeted in golden leaves, which gave this site a comfortable and inviting appearance that I had not felt in previous visits. While I know The Chair was an anthropomorphisation that I perceived in my mind, I felt that it captured the welcoming essence of these trees at that moment in time. I appreciated the way that letting my senses take the lead drew me here and helped me view a site that I had passed by many times in a new light.

This intuitive approach to exploring a place aligned with several of my inspirations including Haskell's *The Forest Unseen* and Coleman's *Yardwork*. Haskell's weekly visits to the mandala all began by quietly listening to and observing his surroundings, or as he put it, "[coming] to nature without a hypothesis, without a scheme for data extraction" (2012, p. 238). During these moments of silent observation, Haskell used what he was seeing and feeling as inspiration for broader sociological and ecological conversations. For example, the interconnectedness of fungi, soil and plant roots in the mandala one week inspired discussions of reciprocity and empathy, while the distant sound of a chainsaw in the forest another week brought to mind the difficult balance between

economic and ecological interests in natural places (Haskell, 2012). Coleman's organic approach to engaging with place meant that many key themes arose from his direct observations of the backyard. The penultimate chapter of the book, "Traffic" is an example of this place-responsive approach, where Coleman's personal observations of the connectedness of species in his backyard inspired him to reflect on the larger concepts of migration, community and the global impact of humans on the natural world. By allowing my sensory observations to shape each visit's focus, I hoped to emulate Haskell and Coleman's approaches and manifest similarly intersectional trains of thought.

With my senses engaged and my daily focus chosen, visits with North Narnia transitioned into a period of observation and reflection; the majority of each visit with North Narnia was spent in this phase. During this section of the visit I frequently drew upon the place-based and contemplative practice of "sit spots", described by educator Dave Strich as "structured time for students to be alone outside with their thoughts and feelings" (2012, p. 22). Sitting quietly for an extended period in one location was a helpful practice that centred my attention and encouraged thoughtful consideration of each visit's particular focus (Strich, 2012). While seated in the forest, I often called upon my background in ecology for insight into what I was observing (e.g., understanding adaptations or the impact of seasonal change on species' behaviour). During this period, I tried to balance critical and interpretive approaches, paying close attention to what I could directly observe while also ruminating on how these observations fit into the broader sociological and ecological contexts of North Narnia.

Beckoned by the chair's inviting appearance on the 16th, I climbed onto the fallen spruce. I felt instantly at ease on this woody perch, curling my legs up underneath me and resting my back comfortably against the birch. From this central location I had an expansive view of North Narnia and the many ways that autumn had transformed the forest. The aspen trees that were once thick with green leaves were now bare, with only a handful of leaves still clinging to their wispy branches. The small floral blooms that once dotted the forest floor had long since passed, buried under a carpet of fallen leaves. The moist soil and cool temperatures of autumn encouraged the growth of mushrooms,

and I saw their small brown and white caps peeking through the leaf litter or tucked amongst the rocks and roots. Chilly winds blew through the canopy, imbued with the scents of the damp cedar and pine trees that they passed. These physical transformations illustrated how North Narnia's diverse flora and fauna responded to seasonal changes in light and temperature, preparing themselves for the long, harsh winter weather that would soon arrive.

As I cast my gaze around the forest I recognised the fast-moving silhouette of a small black-capped chickadee passing by, descending from a high-up branch nearby to search the fallen spruce for food. The chickadee's presence reminded me that as a guest of North Narnia I was far from the first being to sit on this fallen spruce and take in its expansive view. I began to consider the myriad of forest dwelling creatures that may have used this perch before me, and the significance this tree had held for them. In the eyes of the chickadee, for instance, the plethora of insects, seeds and spiders hidden in the spruce bark were a steady source of nourishment as it worked feverishly to bulk up and cache food for winter. The almost panoramic view of the forest that this perch offered could also be of interest to crows or foxes scoping out their next meal or warming themselves in the sun. Though I regarded this fallen tree as a chair in the forest, for many smaller species like ants, salamanders or beetles this log was their entire home, providing them with food and water and sheltering them from predation and the elements. Even the smallest microbes in the soil would rejoice in the presence of this tree and the way its eventual decay would nourish the forest for years to come.

Consciously or unconsciously many people carry a largely anthropocentric view of the world, perhaps considering how ecological or social changes might impact their lives but without thinking how those changes affect other living beings. Viewing the fallen spruce through a more-than-human perspective helped me look beyond my own experience and better understand the significance of this tree to other species. Kim-Pong Tam discusses the usefulness of this practice in his 2013 article "Dispositional Empathy with Nature", noting that individuals who actively try to view situations from the perspective of animals or plants often demonstrate stronger feelings of empathy towards the

natural world. I felt my connection to North Narnia deepen that day as I gained a greater understanding of the complexity of this beautiful forest. By adopting the outlook of other living beings, this fallen spruce was no longer just a tree or a chair, but also a source of food, a lookout, a refuge and so much more. These more-than-human perspectives highlighted the connectedness of life in North Narnia, with the lives of many different species intersecting around this one fallen spruce.

During this period of observation and reflection, I often wrote in a journal to process what I was seeing, hearing, feeling and interpreting. Nature journals act as a record of our experiences, capturing the developing relationships between people and place through creative media like text, illustration, photography, poetry and more (Cormell & Ivey, 2012). I was first introduced to the practice of nature journaling earlier in the Master of Education program, where I used a journal to document and reflect on my exploration of The Cascades (a local conservation area) over a six-week period. I explored several key themes from our time together (e.g., surprise and relaxation) through poetry and illustration, and strongly felt that this exercise helped me develop a deeper connection with a place that I enjoyed and visited often. Because of this previous experience using a nature journal to connect with place, I knew that this practice would support my efforts with North Narnia.

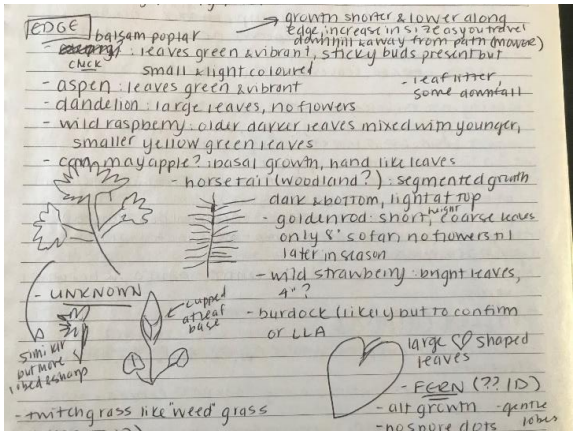
In their respective works, educators Janita Cormell and Toni Ivey (2012) and Traci Warkentin (2011) illustrate how the practice of nature journaling helped their students gain a greater awareness of environmental issues and develop stronger personal connections with the natural world. Cormell and Ivey's 2012 article, "Nature Journaling: Enhancing Students' Connections to the Environment Through Writing" details how Cormell's elementary-aged students used nature journals to document weekly outdoor excursions in their school community. Through observing, journaling and reflecting, Cormell's students made connections between what they learned in class and what they experienced outdoors, leading to a stronger understanding of concepts like pollution, wildlife management and food security (Cormell & Ivey, 2012). Their reflections also inspired discussion that helped students understand their role in fostering ecologically and socially conscious communities.

Warkentin's (2011) article, "Cultivating Urban Naturalists" also discussed the effectiveness of nature journals but in a post-secondary context. Warkentin's students recorded weekly observations of New York's Central Park in their nature journals; over time, their journal entries evolved from simple descriptions of their surroundings to critical reflections on the ecological and societal implications of their observations, including human-wildlife interactions and public perception of place. Warkentin sums up the power of nature journaling when she notes, "the process of learning was more important than the product" (2011, p. 236). In both examples, the practice of nature journaling helped students gain a new perspective on a familiar place and a stronger connection to their community.

I witnessed growth in my notebook entries over the nine months that I interacted with North Narnia similar to what Cormell, Ivey and Warkentin had noted. Records from my early visits (i.e., in the first two to three months) amounted to little more than lists of the plants and animals that I observed and their locations. Figure 3 shows a journal entry from one of my early visits with North Narnia; this entry exemplifies the list-like qualities of these initial records.

Figure 3

Journal Excerpt: Species Descriptions of Plants along the Forest's Edge, Spring 2018



Though the entry shown in Figure 3 highlights a number of species, these references are largely objective and descriptive rather than interpretive and indicative of a more thoughtful connection between me and North Narnia. Towards the top of the page I note that the aspen leaves

are “green and vibrant” without discussing how that colour compares with the rest of the forest and what feelings those colours evoked within me. I describe the Canada Mayapple as having “hand like leaves” without delving into any of the potential symbolism of this shape, like hands grasping at the sunlit sky or hands reaching out to physically connect with other species. The illustrations and photographs associated with these early entries follow a similar trend, documenting specific leaf shapes for the purpose of identification rather than capturing their inherent beauty. The photograph of the nodding trillium shown in Figure 4 was taken simply to confirm species identification when I returned home, with no mention or appreciation at the time of its melancholic beauty and the colourful contrast between the leaves and the sky.

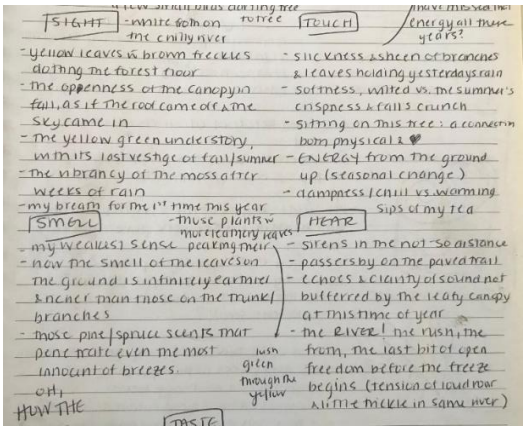
Figure 4

Nodding Trillium at the Forest’s Edge, Spring 2018

Later journal entries and photographs, like those shown in Figures 5 and 6, illustrate how my observations of place evolved to be more personal, interpretive and reflective as I continued to engage with North Narnia. As my familiarity with and connection to the forest deepened over time, the journal became a sounding board to process lines of inquiry and make connections between different visits and ideas. This evolution is evident in the interpretive and inquisitive journal entry shown in Figure 4, recorded during my visit on October 16th.

Figure 5

Journal Excerpt: Sensory Observations of North Narnia, October 16, 2018



In Figure 5, I contrast the appearance of North Narnia after a rainfall in autumn with how it looked in other seasons, noting “the openness of the canopy in the fall, as if the roof came off and the sky came in”, and the softness of the damp leaves in contrast to their usual autumn crunch. The inscription in the bottom left hand corner reads “oh, how the forest glows after the rain”, an observation that reflects a personal rather than objective interpretation of place. Even the photograph shown in Figure 6 demonstrates this growth, capturing a memory rather than a species for identification. I remember writing this entry while sitting on “The Chair” and appreciate the way it captures how inspired I felt by my sensory engagement that day and the new perspective that this view offered.

Figure 6

The Chair: Alternate angle, October 16, 2018

Eventually each visit with North Narnia came to an end, not when the clock struck a particular time but when it felt as if the day's exploration had reached a natural conclusion. On the 16th, I sensed the visit drawing to a close after what I believed to be a thoughtful exploration of the fallen spruce. I climbed down from the woody perch with a deeper appreciation of the ecological significance of this fallen tree, a stronger understanding of the interconnectedness of species, and a greater awareness of the seasonal transformation of the forest in the fall. Satisfied with the time that I spent with North Narnia that day, I ended this visit with one final practice that mirrored how our interaction began: a final reflection at the threshold between North Narnia and the rest of the world. At the beginning of each visit, I used this moment to focus my attention before engaging with North Narnia; at the end of each visit, I used this moment to express my gratitude to North Narnia for everything it had shown and taught me that day.

Throughout *Braiding Sweetgrass* and her other work, Kimmerer highlights the importance of gratitude within her Indigenous worldview. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Kimmerer's relationship with the natural world is shaped by her Indigenous heritage and traditions, including the deep cultural significance of gratitude and reciprocity (concepts that I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five: To Love a Place). In her 2014 article, "Returning the Gift", Kimmerer notes that "gratitude is founded on the deep knowing that our very existence relies on the gifts of other beings" (p. 19). We are one of many species that inhabit the Earth and our ability to prosper is intimately tied to the success of others; we therefore have an inherent duty to not only give thanks for what we have received but also to give back and help each other flourish for years to come.

This sentiment is echoed by Emma Green in her 2014 article, "Gratitude without God", where she explores the significance of gratitude outside of its traditional cultural and spiritual connotations. Green's article quotes psychologist Robert Emmons who comments, "life is about giving, receiving and repaying. We are receptive beings, dependent on the help of others, on their gifts and their kindness" (para. 21). Our most basic needs as humans are inherently tied to other

beings, regardless of whether we perceive those connections to hold cultural or spiritual significance: we rely on plants and animals for food, on trees for clean air, on organic materials like wood and stone for our shelter, and so forth. Even our more abstract needs are intertwined with other beings, like our reliance on animals and other humans for love and companionship. It is only recently, in the face of pressing ecological change and social inequality, that many of us have realised the degree to which other beings are also reliant on us, to be responsible with what we have taken from them and to give back to them in turn. When we continually take from others without giving anything in return (like harvesting from the forest without ever replanting), it creates a one-sided, imbalanced relationship that can lead to burnout, resentment or extinction. Expressions of gratitude are one way to establish reciprocity with our surroundings and ensure that we are giving as well as receiving.

Though I endeavoured to practice gratitude and reciprocity throughout my entire visit with North Narnia, I used this time at the end of the visit to express my gratitude in a more direct and pointed manner, giving specific thanks for elements of that visit that I felt especially moved by. I thanked the recent rain that had fallen for the way it brought the colours and scents of North Narnia to life. I thanked the fallen spruce tree for being my teacher and guide that day, for the knowledge it shared, the reflections it inspired and its significant ecological contribution to North Narnia. I thanked North Narnia as a whole, for its generosity, openness and the sense of wonder that I felt each and every time I entered the forest. Feeling renewed commitment to North Narnia in this moment of reflection, I stepped out of the forest, already looking forward to what our next visit would reveal.

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My October 16th interaction with North Narnia illustrated some of the key practices that I used to engage with North Narnia and helped to answer the oft-asked question of what a visit with North Narnia was really like. So, I return to the question I shared at the outset of this chapter: what exactly did I do out there?

I drew upon the experiences and insights of others to craft a process for engaging with place that was authentic to the forest and the dimensions of place that I chose to explore. I set aside my assumptions and distractions (as much as possible) to approach each visit with an open mind and body. I engaged my senses to physically connect with the forest, listening intently, looking closely, touching the diverse textures of North Narnia and inhaling its distinctive scents. I allowed the narrative and focus of each visit to be guided by the place itself, using the unique observations of each visit to inform my lines of inquiry. I drew from prior knowledge to identify different flora and fauna and understand their unique adaptations. I used illustrations, photographs and a nature journal to capture and interpret my thoughts and feelings from each visit. I considered my observations from alternate perspectives, including those of the more-than-human beings that lived in the forest, to gain a greater understanding of the complex connections present in North Narnia. And perhaps most importantly, I used these practices to foster a relationship with place rooted in respect and gratitude.

In *How to Read Nature*, Gooley notes that "it is a very rewarding exercise to do the same walk repeatedly but with a different focus each time" (2017, p. 63). In essence, this is what I tried to accomplish with my visits with North Narnia, crossing the threshold each week ready to observe, reflect and connect. Even now, after my visits with North Narnia have concluded, I find myself using some of these practices to engage with new places that I encounter. It is my hope that the practices I used will be of use to others looking to engage with place and deepen their relationship with their surroundings, just as I had been inspired by the approaches of Coleman, Haskell, Leopold and others.

Chapter Four: A Forest in Flux

Growing up in Cambridge, Ontario, a city about an hour west of Toronto, my family's home backed onto a small patch of mixedwood forest. The intersection of natural and human-made landscapes made our backyard a hub of activity where plants and animals thrived in the middle of a suburban neighbourhood. In the 15 years my family has lived there, we've spent many mornings taking in the beauty of the forest from the windows at the back of the house. During that time, we gradually became attuned to the signs of seasonal change present in the backyard. Small indigo crocuses poking through the grass were a sure sign that spring had arrived, as was the return of colourful warblers to the backyard birdfeeders. The showy blossoms of irises, lilacs and daylilies in the gardens signified the transition from spring to summer, with their rainbow of flowers attracting pollinators in the heat of July and August. As fall began to shift to winter, we would look to the large red oak in the centre of the backyard; as the oak held onto its leaves much later than the ashes and maples, the loss of the last oak leaves marked the end of fall and the imminent arrival of winter.

Though we never formally recorded our observations of the backyard, our attention to place over time helped us interpret the meaning of these seasonal signals and recognise changes or anomalies over time. For example, we noticed variation in the volume of acorns produced by the oak tree, with most years yielding a modest number of acorns while select years produced a hailstorm that coated the yard like a sheet of marbles. We later learned that the overabundance of acorns occurred in a masting year, a complex ecological adaptation where trees overproduce seed or fruit (e.g., acorns) in certain years to improve their chances of reproductive success and help naturally regulate the population of their predators (Koenig & Knops, 2005). While we may not fully understand some of the more intricate aspects of masting, like the synchronous occurrence of masting events among species in an area, observing this phenomenon strengthened our connection to the backyard through an increased understanding of ecological cycles (Koenig & Knops, 2005).

This type of attention to, and more formally the study of, seasonal changes in species and natural systems is commonly known as phenology. Phenology has evolved through time, though its exact origins remain somewhat unclear. In their 2010 article on the history of phenology, Gaston Demarée and This Rutishauser note that informal phenological observations have been documented in ancient civilizations including China, Rome and Greece. Primarily documenting growth and fluorescence, these early observations include recording when cherry blossoms bloomed in Japan each year and using a calendar to track when crops were planted and harvested in China (Demarée & Rutishauser, 2010). Tracking these dates throughout time helped these cultures become more aware of baseline seasonal cycles in their respective regions and the connection between climate and ecological phenomena (Demarée & Rutishauser, 2010). These examples of ancient place engagement highlight how phenology can contribute to a more intimate understanding of one's surroundings.

Despite the presence of these observations throughout the historical record, it wasn't until the early 19th century that they became synonymous with the term "phenology". The debate around the term's true origin centres around two Belgian scientists who published similar terms with similar definitions around the same time. Adolphe Quetelet, a scholar versed in physics and astronomy, originated the concept of "periodical phenomena", the notion that tracking the occurrence of specific ecological events (e.g., "flowering, leafing and leaf fall") in different geographic locations over time would provide insight on the differences between regional climates (Demarée & Rutishauser, 2010, p. 755). Based on his own phenology of plants at a Belgian observatory, Quetelet developed a set of guidelines to encourage others to make similar, consistent phenological observations throughout the country (Demarée & Rutishauser, 2010). Eventually, Quetelet's network of periodical phenomena observers extended throughout Europe, improving awareness of the differences between European microclimates (Demarée & Rutishauser, 2010).

At roughly the same time, French botanist Charles-François-Antoine Morren introduced the term "phenology" into the literature. Morren regarded Quetelet's observations as too broad and

variable to be of any true value. The phenology he proposed was similar to Quetelet's though much more thorough, demanding multiple daily observations to track additional details including "continuous flowerings, flowers flowering several months and monochronic flowerings (flowering at a very restricted period)" (Demarée & Rutishauser, 2010, p. 756). While the thoroughness of Morren's phenology yielded more specific ecological data, it also prevented his approach from gaining the widespread popularity that Quetelet's periodical phenomena found. Demarée and Rutishauser (2010) summarize phenology's complex legacy, noting,

> The climate-oriented, Quetelet type of instructions have survived, while the more botany-oriented Morren type of instructions were probably never used. However, the term "phenology" has obtained worldwide general acceptance while the term "observations of periodical phenomena" today is more rarely used. (p. 759)

Despite their differences, both scientists recognised how long-term observation of species and systems helps us better understand their growth and evolution. It is fitting, then, that elements of both approaches contributed to phenology as we know it today.

Perhaps one of the most well known modern examples of phenology is Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1966). In the first section of this work, Leopold recounts a month-by-month narrative that weaves phenological observations of his rural Wisconsin farm with additional sociocultural anecdotes from his personal life. Leopold's observations demonstrate an intimate understanding of seasonal changes on the land, referencing phenomena like, "During every week from April to September there are, on the average, ten wild plants coming into first bloom" (1966, p. 47). Leopold's observations reflect two different scales of change – larger scale regional changes (e.g., fluctuations in water levels) and smaller scale individual changes (e.g., specific bloom times). Making observations at both spatial scales increased the depth of his understanding. The regionally specific knowledge found in these observations indicates his grasp of the land's ecological complexity and the knowledge that can be gained by giving a place our attention.

Though never specifically referred to as phenology, many North American Indigenous cultures demonstrate similarly detailed awareness of seasonal change and regional ecology that stems from their strong ties to the land. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) frequently alludes to the ties between ceremony and season, noting how traditions like planting three sisters species (corn, beans and squash) in the spring or sharing stories over an autumn meal bring together humans, more-than-humans and the land. In addition to the four seasons we traditionally refer to, Kimmerer also describes some personally and culturally significant seasons like "strawberry season" (p. 25), when strawberries are ready for picking and preserving and "sugaring season" (p. 167), when the sap in the trees begins to run. These specific sub-seasons are similar in many ways to the 72 microseasons found in the traditional Japanese calendar. Each microseason is around five days long and describes the specific ecological changes that occur during that period; for example, the period in mid-February known as *Uo kōri o izuru* describes when "fish emerge from the ice" (Nippon, 2015, para. 6). In both cases, the specificity of these sub-seasons reflects the cultural significance of seasonal change as well as the intimate awareness that these cultures have of their surroundings.

In their 2015 exploration of Indigenous food sovereignty, Asfia Kamal, Rene Linklater, Shirley Thompson, Joseph Dipple and the Ithinto Mechisowin Committee discuss the significance of the seasons in the context of traditional food sources of the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN) in Northern Manitoba. Within the article, the authors list several traditional foods associated with each of the four seasons as well as the cultural significance of the harvesting process; for example, waterfowl, beaver and muskrat are listed as traditional food sources in spring, with community members noting how trapping/hunting these species teaches focus and respect (Kamal et al., 2015). OPCN members then note the impact of the 1976 Churchill River Diversion on these traditional food sources, recounting how the loss of marshland and variable water levels caused by the diversion altered waterfowl migration routes and reduced beaver and muskrat populations, leading to a decrease in the availability of these seasonal foods (Kamal et al., 2015). These anecdotal

observations demonstrate the cultural significance of the seasons and how shifts in seasonal cycles can impact the humans and more-than-humans closely connected to the land.

To improve my awareness of North Narnia and strengthen our relationship I began a mini-phenological study in June 2018, visiting North Narnia every day for one week and observing how it developed in that time. Since I had been interacting with North Narnia for less than two months at this point, this mini-study was an opportunity to explore the forest's ecological dimension by observing its seasonal transformation. Though Leopold was the primary inspiration for this week-long endeavour, I was also influenced by Clifford Knapp (2005) and Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013). In a 2005 article, Knapp outlines ten "ways of knowing nature" that Leopold demonstrated in *A Sand County Almanac*, translating Leopold's experience into an accessible resource for place-based educators (Knapp, 2005). I felt that three of Knapp's ten points specifically spoke to the phenological aspect of Leopold's time with place: "observing seasonal changes", "listening intently" and "connecting elements in cycles" (Knapp, 2005, pp. 281-282). Kimmerer (2013) emphasized similar ways of knowing throughout *Braiding Sweetgrass*, noting how our relationship with place intensifies when we listen deeply and observe closely. Through these ways of knowing and this mini-study I hoped to peel back the layers of place and become more aware of seasonal change in North Narnia.

My study began on an overcast Monday in early June, where the new green growth of the forest stood out against a backdrop of grey skies and light rain. I planned to use the first day of this mini-study to establish a baseline understanding of what species were present and their current appearance (e.g., no buds, full bloom, etc.); this baseline would allow me to recognise how species developed from day to day. Instead of crossing the threshold and entering the forest like usual, I moved clockwise around the forest's outer edge, documenting the plants that I knew and sketching or photographing those that I did not. Crouched on my hands and knees, I bent back the wide leaves of Canada mayapples and burdock to reveal the flowerless violets and mayflowers growing beneath. I noted how the toothy dandelion leaves and thin horsetail stalks intertwined with tall blades of wild

grass. Directly above these species were the sparsely leaved stems of willow, wild rose and raspberry shrubs, their ruddy branches intersecting wildly as they competed for light and space. Even the asphalt pathway that wound around the forest's edge was lined with disturbance-loving species like plantain and strawberry, with some individuals displaying seed stalks and flowers in bloom and others showing little to no growth. The thick trunks of spruces and aspens were a constant companion as I inched along the forest's edge, with tender new leaves beginning to dot their wide branches.

As the rain slowed and the clouds began to part, I glanced at the time and realised I had been working for a little over an hour. Looking up after 60 minutes of work and several pages of notes I realised that I had only moved about 50 feet from where I began. I had been so caught up detailing each species I encountered that I had barely scratched the forest's surface, instantly making this once manageable study area feel exponentially larger and more complex. How could I possibly complete a phenology of the entire forest in one week if I had made so little progress on day one? Amid my frustration, I remembered a quote from entomologist and naturalist E. O. Wilson (1984): "It is possible to spend a lifetime in a magellanic voyage around the trunk of a single tree" (p. 22). Every tree and plant in North Narnia has an abundance of life in its individual vicinity, from the tiniest microbes in the surrounding soil to the birds and mammals that moved across the branches and everything in between. Multiplied over the entirety of North Narnia's footprint, that totals an astonishing amount of ecological activity, both visible and imperceptible to the naked eye. The seemingly endless amount of life in North Narnia meant that there would always be an additional aspect or detail of place to explore. This realization helped me recognise the flaws in my current approach and the need to re-align my actions with the original intent of this mini-study.

In theory, this phenology was supposed to deepen my overall relationship with North Narnia by increasing my understanding of seasonal change within the forest; in practice, that was not what was happening. My efforts to gain insight through thoughtful observation had quickly morphed into an informal inventory that documented species with little additional context. Although this yielded

detailed information about one specific section of North Narnia, it meant that I was missing the bigger ecological relationships within the forest. For example, I noted the developmental variation among plantain and strawberries (e.g., some individuals displaying seed stalks and flowers while others didn't) without digging deeper into why that contrast existed; a brief reflection made me realise that the variation was likely related to sunlight, as individuals in open areas showed more advanced development than their counterparts in shadier locations. This was an example of the deeper awareness of North Narnia that I was hoping to gain through this mini-study, moving beyond face value observations to understand the relationships between different elements of the forest.

I knew this phenology would be a departure from my previous visits, but I soon realised that I had abandoned the place-engagement practices that had become routine in the past few weeks and the practices of Leopold, Knapp and Kimmerer that had inspired me like deep listening, observing multiple spatial scales and what Knapp (2005) described as "connecting elements in cycles" (pp. 281-282). I needed to revise my approach moving forward to improve my understanding of North Narnia, emphasizing listening rather than analyzing, attending rather than inventorying, and learning from the forest in its entirety. This new perspective bolstered my awareness of seasonal change and the dynamics of the forest. Listening deeply spread my focus throughout the forest, giving each leaf and songbird in the canopy the same attention I gave their counterparts on the forest floor. Observing multiple spatial scales balanced broad observations of the whole forest, like the way the canopy thickened in the warm spring weather, with more area specific observations, like the way the small creek running through North Narnia became drier and drier over the course of the week. I also drew upon prior knowledge to find the meaning behind each observation; for example, I knew that conifer needles were acidic and made the soil less hospitable for other species, which explained why the understory was usually less dense beneath the conifers.

Through this process of reflection and revision, I finished the weeklong study more aware of how seasonal change influenced the appearance and behaviour of species in North Narnia. Observing

changes in sunlight, precipitation and temperature through the week made me more aware of the unique adaptations (e.g., protective coatings on new growth like the papery covering on spruce buds), the relationships between species (e.g., the mutualism between pollinators and small forest flowers) and the way that species in North Narnia communicate (e.g., alarmed chirping of red squirrels when threatened). These seasonal shifts also made me more aware of how individuals, including myself, perceive and engage with place. While seasonal change has always been something I've noticed in the natural world, spending a week focusing on these changes emphasized how dynamic places truly are and how quickly their appearance and atmosphere can change. Witnessing the transformation that took place over just one week highlighted the importance of being present and attending to place in each interaction in order to fully appreciate how our surroundings change. I endeavoured to integrate and build upon these reflections in the rest of my time with North Narnia.

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The mini-phenological inquiry made two things clear: the significant role that seasonal observations would play in my exploration of place and the importance of investigating the meaning and implications of these seasonal changes. Noting when the leaves of the aspens and birches changed colour would not be as meaningful without also understanding what prompted that change within the tree and how the loss of leaves impacted the species in the canopy and the forest floor. Observations of strawberry or bunchberry blooms could become more impactful by also observing how pollinators interacted with those flowers, spreading their pollen and seeds throughout the forest and supporting their proliferation in the future. Recognising the broader ecological significance of these observations would support a relationship with North Narnia grounded in awareness of place.

As my visits with North Narnia progressed over time, I found that my attention was more strongly drawn to certain areas of the forest in certain seasons based on the seasonal variation in colours, sounds and species. There were four areas of the forest in particular that I felt exemplified the essence of North Narnia in each of the four seasons: Fern Alley (spring), The Painted Trees

(summer), The Classroom (fall) and Riverside (winter) (see the map of North Narnia on page six to provide a visualization for the anecdotes to follow.) Though I drew from the experience of my weeklong phenology in the proceeding months, my interactions with these four areas reflect a more multidimensional exploration of place, like Leopold's reflections in *A Sand County Almanac*.

Spring: Fern Alley

My first visits to North Narnia took place in the early spring, both before and after the phenological study, one of the more dramatic periods of seasonal change in the forest. As winter's grasp began to loosen, dormancy gradually gave way to a period of rebirth in the forest. The snow that once carpeted the forest floor had largely melted, revealing aster, plantain, bunchberry and other herbaceous plants bursting from the earthy brown soil. The trees and shrubs painted a similar picture of revival, from the neon green buds on the tips of the spruce branches to the small green leaves that dotted the raspberry and alder shrubs. Week by week, seasonal songbirds like song sparrows and golden-crowned kinglets began to reappear, filling the forests with their colourful patterns and melodies. For the flora and fauna of North Narnia, spring was a reawakening that transformed a quiet winter wonderland into a colourful forest full of life and opportunity.

One of the areas within North Narnia that highlighted the transition from winter to spring was a region between the trail and the small creek that I nicknamed "Fern Alley" in honour of the dense ferns growing along the trail. When I first encountered this area during my early visits in April and May I didn't give it much notice; the rough soil dotted with the wilted brown remains of last year's ferns was rather unassuming compared to the vibrant growth appearing elsewhere in the forest. But as May turned to June, this small segment of North Narnia began to make its presence well known. From the first week of June to the next I noticed new signs of growth and life in this area, as a few tightly curled fern fronds pushed past their wilted brown ancestors to grasp at the spring sunlight. During the following week's visit I noticed that the ferns had continued to expand; their stems had thickened and grown taller (almost knee-high in certain areas), their green colour had deepened and

their tightly coiled ends had begun to shed their coating and unfurl, revealing tender new fronds eager to soak up the sunlight and warm temperatures of spring.

When I returned just one week later, I was shocked by the scene in front of me. The gradual change that I had observed over the past few weeks had given way to exponential growth, transforming this once modest section of North Narnia into a wilderness of colour and texture. The tightly coiled fiddleheads had unwound themselves with a flourish, unveiling their broad and flamboyant fronds to the world. I found myself wading through a waist-deep sea of ferns, feeling their feathery fronds tickle my hands and legs as I passed by. I found it difficult to identify the exact mix of fern species present in North Narnia, though I believed it included ostrich ferns (with tall feathery fronds belling outward from a central point in the soil), lady ferns (similar to ostrich ferns but with a broader, more delicate-looking frond) and bracken ferns (with smoother and more rounded edges stemming off of a single thin stalk). Regardless of the exact species mix, this swath of ferns featured a diverse range of fronds in almost every imaginable shade of green.

In just a few short weeks, spring had transformed this section of North Narnia from a quiet and modest valley to a burst of life and colour. Though other areas of the forest had also grown or bloomed through May and June, their transformations and response to changes in temperature and daylight were nowhere near as dramatic as the awakening of Fern Alley. I felt that Fern Alley's resurgence captured the essence of spring in North Narnia, a period of growth and change fueled by sunlight and warm weather that breathed new life into the forest. Attending to North Narnia throughout spring reinforced both the dynamic quality of place and the power of closely observing place that I had discovered during my mini phenological study.

Summer: The Painted Trees

The transition from spring to summer in North Narnia was perhaps the most subtle seasonal shift that I experienced in North Narnia as it built on the existing momentum of spring. The increase in daylight that began in spring became more pronounced in summer, stretching from the pastels of

early morning skies to the intense oranges and pinks of evening sunsets. The leafy canopy of the forest reached peak thickness in summer, with each leaf and needle competing with its neighbours for every drop of sunlight. This phenomenon was echoed in the understory, as plantains and bunchberries craned from beneath the umbrella-like leaves of asters and mayapples for the sunlight that penetrated the full canopy. Summer also seemed to have a calming effect on the forest, as species transitioned from the hecticness of spring to a more stable period of everyday activity. Having migrated back to Thunder Bay, the kinglets and warblers settled into routine tasks like finding food, water, shelter and a mate. The once-neon spruce buds had spread out, darkening in colour and joining their neighbours in the daily practice of photosynthesis. North Narnia was not unchanged during summer, but the changes that occurred were more subtle.

It was in the relative calm of summer that I found myself drawn to a cluster of birch and aspen trees situated near the "entry" to North Narnia. Tucked away in a corner of the forest, the only word that came to mind when describing this area in summer was "layered". The physical layers of the forest were the most obvious, from the leafy canopy to the dense understory and the mid-sized alder and willow shrubs in between. The layers of colour and texture were also diverse. The green leaves of the understory ranged from neon to dark, complemented by light and shadow, while the rich organic soils were a deep brown, accented by the woody texture of decaying bark. Behind these physical layers lay the sociological layers of place, glimpses of history and culture buried beneath the surface. Like the stories embedded in the tree rings of Leopold's fallen oak, the tree trunks of North Narnia had stories of their own. The thin bark of the birch trees peeled off like pages of parchment ready to record the stories unfolding in their presence, while the almost black furrows at the base of the aspens provided a glimpse into the heart of the tree, its small diameter disguising the generations of students that this tree had taught. In the heat of summer, this corner of North Narnia came to life.

In July 2018, my parents travelled to Thunder Bay from southern Ontario for a visit. In addition to the local attractions that we saw, they made a special request to visit North Narnia to see

the forest that had captured my attention. As my goal of connecting with place was a largely personal venture, I always visited the forest alone; aside from sharing North Narnia with my thesis committee I had not yet spent time there with anyone else. One of the core tenets of place engagement is that everyone experiences a place in their own way, which meant that my parents would likely experience the forest differently than I did. My mom is an artist with an eye for colour while my dad is scientifically minded and logical, so I was excited to see how their backgrounds influenced their engagement with North Narnia and the similarities and differences in our perceptions of this place.

As the three of us descended the forest trail into North Narnia, I saw smiles creep over their faces as they glimpsed the forest in its summer glory. They traced their own paths through the forest, with my mom gravitating towards the river and my dad leaning more towards the forest's interior. I could see the wheels turning in my dad's head as he silently explored the centre of the forest, making connections between his current surroundings and his prior ecological knowledge. His quiet and thoughtful glances around the forest reminded me of the way he looks at trees in their backyard forest. By contrast, my mom explored the forest more actively, chatting as she walked and pulling out her camera almost immediately to capture the textured foliage, the glassy river and even Fern Alley (an area reminiscent of the thick ferns at their home in southern Ontario). One of the many areas that caught her attention was this corner of birch and aspen nestled near the river. I watched as she moved thoughtfully around the trees with a similar look of admiration and awe that I felt in their presence. She remarked on the colour and lushness of the vegetation, capturing these features as she photographed the trees and the river. Though she and my dad walked throughout North Narnia that afternoon, there was something about this corner of the forest that made a lasting impact on my mom.

My mom's experience with this section of North Narnia inspired several paintings, the first of which she began in April 2019, almost a year after their visit. Using her photographs as reference, she created two paintings (shown in Figure 7) that I felt captured both her personal interaction with North Narnia, but also the layered essence of North Narnia in the summertime.

Figure 7

Original Paintings: "Narnia North" (left, completed April 2019) and "Birches" (right, completed October 2019) by Stacey Vanier, Inspired by her visit to North Narnia in July 2018

Much like the forest itself, the depth in these paintings came from the layers of paint and detail that my mom poured into her art. She shared progress pictures that documented the transition from blank canvas to finished painting. Both paintings began by washing the canvas in a thin layer of red, a complementary colour that would enhance the green tones that would be painted on top. Features were then added, beginning with background shapes like the white of the birch trunks before slowly adding finer details like the papery texture of the bark. Just as I had spent months digging into the different layers of North Narnia, my mom spent months lovingly depicting layers of her own on the canvas, capturing the aspects of place that we had both connected with in a way that words alone could not. These paintings inspired me to retroactively refer to this corner of the forest as "The Painted Trees", honouring the layers of the forest in summer held in each leaf and brushstroke.

The layers of North Narnia and the layers of the painting both serve as a reminder of the multifaceted nature of place, and how certain seasons can amplify the different dimensions or aspects of place. Having only glimpsed North Narnia in this one season, my parent's memories of the forest are forever associated with this one summer day. I wondered how their experience of the forest

would have been different if we had visited in fall or winter and what elements of North Narnia they might have been drawn to instead. I imagined my dad noting how the birch and aspen leaves were predominantly yellow in a North Narnian fall, compared to the rich reds and oranges of the maples and oaks in their backyard at home. I pictured how my mom may have captured the forest in winter based on her other work, using undertones of icy blue or light purple to give depth to the white snow on the forest floor. As I imagined these alternate scenarios, I felt fortunate to have experienced North Narnia in all four seasons, witnessing its transformation and gaining a more multidimensional understanding of its cycles of growth. This reflection reinforced the significance of engaging place in multiple seasons, as there is always another facet of place to observe, appreciate and understand.

Fall: The Classroom

Fall, like spring, was another period of significant transition for North Narnia and its inhabitants. If spring was a crescendo of growth in the forest, then fall was the decrescendo, reducing the buzz of activity in the forest to a gentle hum as the flora and fauna adjusted to the new conditions. Cooler temperatures and reduced daylight restricted the photosynthetic capacity of the trees and plants, causing their green colour to fade away and reveal the yellow and orange pigments that lay beneath. Over time the forest floor became a carpet of gold as the birch and aspen leaves cascaded from the canopy, joining the lilies that wilted gently where they were rooted. Though the days were short, the increasingly sparse canopy allowed more light and sound to penetrate North Narnia's borders than ever before. Seasonal songbirds like finches and warblers took these changes as their cues to migrate, departing North Narnia week after week in search of warmer climates. The forest's few year-round residents, like chickadees and red squirrels, capitalized on the reduced competition to harvest or cache food before it became scarce or buried under snow. Fall transformed North Narnia from a bustling green jungle to a subdued expanse of forest in shades of brown and gold.

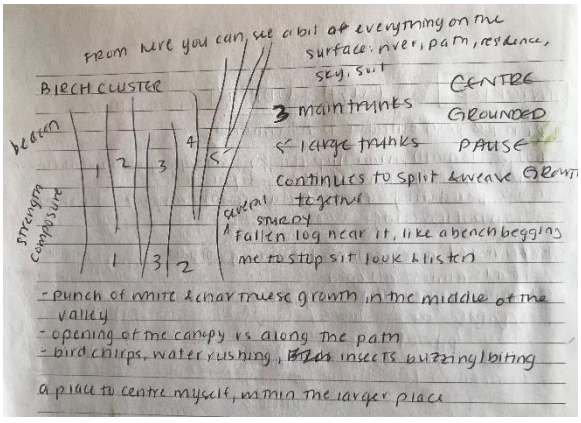
My exploration of the fallen spruce (The Chair) that I recounted previously was not the only interaction that exemplified North Narnia in the fall. In the centre of the forest, mere steps away from

the fallen spruce, was another grouping of trees with their own distinct presence. My first encounter with this section of North Narnia took place in early spring. Walking among the green leaves of North Narnia that spring day I noticed a beam of sunlight shining directly upon a majestic birch, like a spotlight in the centre of the forest. I moved towards this sundrenched beacon and soon found myself standing in a small glade. In front of me was the statuesque birch that had captured my attention so intensely, composed of three main trunks that intertwined and split as they spread wider and wider in the canopy. This birch was distinct even amongst its peers, with its multi-stalked trunk and stark white bark contrasting the lean trunks and greyish tinged exteriors of almost every other birch. A number of spruce and fir logs surrounded this stately tree, with sloughing bark and holey trunks that depicted years of decomposition. These trunks formed an unintentional semicircle around the birch, as if they were sitting and listening to a story. I began to informally refer to this area as "The Classroom" as the semicircle of fallen trees centred around the birch reminded me of the semicircles of desks in the classrooms at Lakehead that centred around our instructors.

I recorded my observations and interpretations of The Classroom from this initial visit in my journal, an excerpt of which is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Journal Excerpt: The Classroom, Spring 2018



Sitting in the shadow of the birch I documented how the lush vegetation around me created an air of seclusion and privacy, referencing the few remaining pockets of sky and soil still visible amidst the densely leaved canopy and forest floor. I even referred to the birch itself as a "punch of white and chartreuse growth in the middle of the valley", highlighting the specific charm of this individual tree and the overall vibrancy of North Narnia in the spring. The sketch of the birch reflected my physical observations, while keywords like "grounded" and "composure" reflected the atmosphere of the forest and what I felt in that specific interaction.

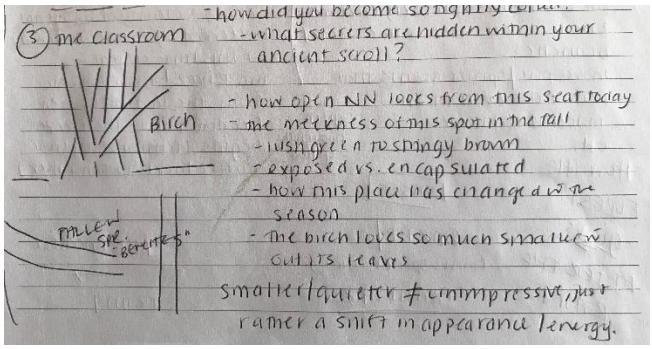
Though The Classroom had captivated my attention so intensely in this initial interaction, I found myself noticing it less and less as the seasons shifted. North Narnia's continued growth in late spring and summer made it difficult to venture near the fallen logs without trampling the thick asters and sarsaparillas on the forest floor. Additionally, the full canopy of the forest in summer often cast the statuesque birch in shadow rather than sunlight, dimming the beacon and directing my attention to other areas of North Narnia. It wouldn't be until a visit roughly four months later, in early October, that The Classroom would once again catch my attention. Fall had taken an obvious hold over the forest: vegetation had wilted and thinned, making the interior more accessible and allowing thick beams of light to reach the forest floor. When I entered North Narnia that October day, I was struck with a feeling of déjà vu. Less than ten steps down the trail I felt my gaze being drawn once again to the large birch in the centre of the forest, bathed in the autumn sun. I smiled fondly as I looked upon this familiar tree, remembering how I had felt in its presence. Without thinking, I began to walk towards The Classroom, excited to reconnect with this unique corner of the forest.

Though I had a sense of familiarity when I arrived at The Classroom, there had been a significant shift in both appearance and atmosphere since our last interaction, as noted in the journal excerpt in Figure 9. One of the most distinctive changes that I observed was the increasing openness of the forest in the fall. As the protective layer of aspen, alder and other leaves that once enveloped The Classroom thinned, its former air of seclusion and privacy was replaced with a sense of exposure

and vulnerability. From my seat in the forest, I could see Bartley residence, feel the gaze of passersby on the pathway and hear the sounds of campus life, all of which had been previously obscured by thick vegetation. The transformation of the forest in fall meant that North Narnia no longer felt as secluded from the rest of campus as it had in spring and summer.

Figure 9

Journal Excerpt: The Classroom, Fall 2018



The loss of leaves and openness of the canopy also painted the stately birch in a new light. Though the tree had still caught my eye and invited me towards it, its overall presence was a little more modest in the fall; I reference this shift in Figure 9, noting the “meekness of the forest in fall” and how “the birch looks so much smaller without its leaves”. As I state in the journal excerpt (Figure 9), just because a feature is smaller and quieter does not mean that it is unimpressive or unimportant, but rather that it is exuding a different energy that corresponds to the change in season. I still found the birch powerful and statuesque even though it was less imposing than it was in spring; while its physical appearance had changed, its essence remained the same. Viewing The Classroom in both spring and fall reinforced the parallels between these two periods of transition and allowed me to directly compare and contrast seasonal changes. While I experienced the privacy of spring elsewhere in the forest, I felt that The Classroom, more than anywhere else, exemplified the forest’s autumnal transition from seclusion to exposure. The shift from summer to fall was a clear reminder

of how seasonal change can influence our perception of place and how engaging with place in multiple seasons can prevent our impressions from being unintentionally biased or one-dimensional.

Winter: Riverside

Winter was the final season that I experienced with North Narnia. The first snows of winter drifted through the open canopy of the forest in early November, a gentle shower of wet flakes that encrusted the alders in a thin layer of ice and covered the forest floor in a blanket of white. The green and gold palette of the past three seasons was replaced by a new colour scheme: the stark blue of the open sky, the crisp white of the fallen snow and the gleaming brown of the wet slate on the river's edge. Sunlight poured into the forest through the open canopy, filling the forest with an unusual brightness. While I had always found North Narnia to be a peaceful place, this quiet atmosphere was enhanced in winter. Crisp air tinged with the scent of cedar blew quietly through the forest, absent of the sounds of rustling leaves. Even the flow of the river was muffled by the layer of ice and snow that had formed on the surface. Winter transformed North Narnia into an airy and serene wonderland.

In winter I found myself continually drawn to the McIntyre River, particularly one section at the forest's south end where gnarled cedar roots and flat rocks formed a path between land and water. While there were many factors that drew me to this site, the area's primary appeal came from its location on the forest's edge and the hush of the riverside in winter. In many ways, this vantage point bore a strong similarity to the thresholds at the "entry" and "exit" of North Narnia, both physically and symbolically. Each of these sites were situated at the physical intersection of two distinct ecosystems, with mixedwood forest transitioning to grass along North Narnia's outer edge and cedars giving way to water on the forest's inner edge. These physical transitions clearly defined the boundary between North Narnia and its surroundings; sitting on the shore reminded me of the seasonal change taking place outside of the forest as well as inside. The symbolic significance of these transitional areas felt even more relevant. I believe edge areas represent transition and change; in my final months with North Narnia, this seat on the forest's edge symbolised not only the shift in

season and the shift in landscape, but also the impending shift from engaging North Narnia to engaging with other places in the future. Acknowledging the significance of this season and this vantage point encouraged me to reflect on our time together.

My last scheduled visit with North Narnia, on December 12th, 2018, was a particularly contemplative experience, enhanced by the transformation of the forest in winter. By this time in the season, most of North Narnia was covered in a modest layer of snow that made it somewhat difficult to access the forest's interior. Because of this, I traced a familiar route along the forest trail, ending up once again on the river's rocky shore. Nestling my back against a cedar tree, I marvelled at the growth and transformation that I had witnessed in the past nine months, both in the forest and in our relationship. The openness of the forest in winter reminded me of how openly I had shared my thoughts and emotions with North Narnia and the candid nature of our relationship (see Chapter Five: To Love a Place for more on emotional openness). The intense quiet of the forest in winter was occasionally punctuated by the deep caw of a crow, a familiar sound that evoked the memory of the many species that call North Narnia home and the complex ways their lives intersect through food, predator-prey relationships and more. The atmosphere in North Narnia became more relaxed with each seasonal shift, mirroring the increased ease of our interactions as we became more familiar with one another. I felt a sense of closure sitting on the river's edge as I recognised that the growth and change we had experienced together had come to a natural conclusion.

While a significant portion of this final visit was spent looking back on my time with North Narnia, I also found myself looking forward into the future. Shifting my gaze from the forest to the vast December sky hanging over the river, I began to imagine what the next chapter in both of our stories might be. Some aspects of North Narnia's future were easy to imagine, like the way winter's hold on the forest would eventually fade, revealing the strawberries and dandelions that lay beneath the snow and continuing the seasonal cycles I had observed so closely. Other aspects, however, were more difficult to picture: What will become of the forest as the campus continues to evolve and

perhaps expand in the future? Will other members of the Lakehead community continue to interact with and appreciate this green space as the years unfold? There is no way to know the answers to these questions, but the connection that we had developed through the seasons encouraged me to imagine what North Narnia may face after our time together had concluded. I was similarly unsure of what the next few months would hold for me, but I knew that my experience with North Narnia would continue to influence how I relate to my surroundings. Each time I pass a fallen log I will be reminded of my time with The Chair and The Classroom, and the insight I gained by observing the forest's evolution from these vantage points. Each time I see the colourful bloom of a flower, I will treasure its bright and fleeting presence, remembering how the vibrant colours of spring and summer will eventually fade later in the year. And each time I sit on the shore of a river or lake, I will be reminded of this moment beside the McIntyre River and how the serenity of the forest in winter helped me appreciate the significance of our time together.

It was fitting that my exploration of North Narnia wrapped up when and how it did - on the boundary between the forest and the rest of the world, in the last month of the year and the last of four dynamic seasons that I had experienced with North Narnia. Despite the open spaces between the tree branches, this final wintertime reflection created a sense of closure with a place that I loved.

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Places are dynamic and constantly changing, shaped by both natural ecological cycles and the relationship between humans and the land. The seasons are a helpful window into this perpetual change; as seasonal change corresponds to shifts in the appearance and behaviour of plants and animals, observing these predictable cycles can provide insight into the relationships between abiotic and biotic elements of place and the multidimensional nature of place in general. Seasonal change can also be viewed as a broader metaphor for personal growth or the evolution of a relationship with place. My experience engaging with North Narnia through all four seasons shaped my overall approach for place engagement. I witnessed how seasonal change can influence our perception of

place, as the appearance and atmosphere of the forest shifted with each passing season. The dynamic nature of place that I experienced strengthened my belief that places are living entities that are constantly evolving, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by those who interact with them. I recognised how interacting with a place in multiple seasons supports a more holistic understanding of place and the importance of applying this practice to future place engagement. But perhaps most importantly, I realised how we as individuals are constantly growing and learning as we engage with the world around us, just like the continuous growth exhibited by the forest. Though I sought to gain a greater understanding of North Narnia, its transitional nature meant that it could never be completely understood and that each visit would reveal something new or previously unobserved. My experience observing seasonal change in North Narnia reinforced the importance of continually learning and engaging with our surroundings to be aware and responsive to our ever-changing world.

Though I personally used several practices to observe and document seasonal change in North Narnia, including phenology and nature journaling, there is no "right" way to observe the cycle of the seasons. An additional useful practice that I encountered but did not use is the seasonal wheel described by author Ken Lassman (1997). This tool places the months of the year around the outside of a circle and plots important ecological events in the circle's interior, like the departure and return of migratory birds. Developing a new wheel or referencing an existing wheel provides insight into when specific phenomena occur and helps individuals recognise anomalies or larger seasonal shifts over time; this is in part why I chose not to utilise the seasonal wheel in this study, as it seemed better suited for engaging with a place from year to year rather than month to month (Lassman, 1997). While not mentioned by Lassman, a seasonal wheel could also incorporate culturally significant events related to the seasons, like the ceremonies or communal meals that Kimmerer (2013) referenced in *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Lassman speaks to the ability of the wheel (and similar practices) to connect individuals with place, when he notes that "every place has its own set of seasonal

events...attuning to this cycle is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to get in touch with the place where you live" (1997, p. 137).

In *How to Read Nature*, Tristan Gooley states that understanding how a place changes through the seasons is a "good measure of our connection with nature because a failure to notice dramatic change is symptomatic of a relationship that is on weak ground" (2017, p. 121). Recognising significant seasonal change, like the turning of the leaves in fall, demonstrates a basic awareness of one's surroundings; recognising more nuanced changes, like the way that strawberries growing in the sun bloom quicker than those in the shade, shows a more intimate understanding of and connection with place. I felt that the quality of my observations spoke to the time and attention that I devoted to North Narnia and my willingness to listen, observe, and learn from place. Whether we spend years, months or even just one week observing seasonal change, this purposeful engagement can make us more aware and more connected to the natural world.

Chapter Five: To Love a Place

A meaningful relationship with place. A strong connection centred around care, gratitude and respect. To care for and love a place. These were some of the ways I described the relationship that I wanted to cultivate with North Narnia at the start of my study. But as I began to visit and connect with North Narnia, I realised these descriptors were somewhat vague and that I needed to clarify what they really meant. What does a meaningful relationship actually look like? How will I know if I've achieved a strong connection centred around care, gratitude and respect? What does care or love for place look or feel like? I needed to find a way to define these terms, both in the broad context of connections with place and in the specific context of my bond with North Narnia.

One analogy that I found particularly helpful in defining my emotional and personal relationship with North Narnia came from author and environmentalist Kathleen Dean Moore, a former university professor who advocates for the natural world in the face of changing ecological and political climates. In her essay, "What it Means to Love a Place" (2004) she explores love for the natural world as well as "the ecology of caring", which she defines as "the beautiful, complicated ways that love for people and love for places nourish each other and sustain us all" (p. 34). Moore's initial discussion of this idea began with the creation of two lists: what it means to love a *person* and what it means to love a *place*. It did not take long for Moore to realise that the two lists were almost identical. From these reflections, Moore compiled one final list of ten characteristics that she felt defined what it means to love a person or a place.

Each characteristic on Moore's list evoked specific snapshots of emotion that I felt in my time with North Narnia. For example, reading the characteristic, "to be transformed in its presence - lifted, lighter on your feet" reminded me of the many times that I left North Narnia feeling as if an emotional weight had been lifted from my shoulders. Her final characteristic, "to accept moral responsibility for its well-being" evoked feelings of stewardship towards North Narnia and my

responsibility to demonstrate gratitude and give back in some way. I appreciated how Moore's list gave depth to the concept of love through the use of physical and emotional demonstrations of care.

I encountered a similar list of loving behaviours in Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Throughout *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer shares experiences and stories related to place, environment and culture grounded in her distinct point of view as an Indigenous woman, scientist and author. Her perspective and identity were evident in the list of loving behaviours she created, inspired by the love she has for her family and the love she has for the natural world (in this instance, her love for her garden as a friend and partner in learning). Like Moore, Kimmerer's list drew upon both physical and emotional aspects of care, including "generous sharing of resources", "celebration of shared values", "interdependence" and "nurturing health and well-being" (2013, p. 123). Like Moore's list, I found many parallels between the loving behaviours noted by Kimmerer and the manner in which I expressed my love for North Narnia. I specifically appreciated the way that Kimmerer's characteristics were rooted in gratitude and respect for the places and/or people she was describing, as I had worked to ground my relationship with North Narnia in these same feelings.

Much like my experience reading *Yardwork* by Daniel Coleman, I found Moore and Kimmerer had beautifully described an important part of my experience with North Narnia. Both authors seemed to understand that, in its purest form, a relationship with place is a quiet, uncomplicated expression of intimacy grounded in genuine respect, meaningful connection and authentic caring for one another. Through the characteristics they have chosen, and their comparisons of love for people and place, both authors reinforce the perspective of places as living entities as opposed to static geographic locations. Placing Moore and Kimmerer's lists of traits side by side, I noticed many similarities in their subject matter; both lists are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of Moore and Kimmerer's Defining Traits of Love and Care For Place

Moore (2004)	Kimmerer (2013)
To want to be near it physically	Nurturing health and well-being
To want to know everything about it – its story, its moods, what it looks like by moonlight	Protection from harm
To rejoice in the fact of it	Encouraging individual growth and development
To fear its loss and grieve for its injuries	Desire to be together
To protect it fiercely, mindlessly, futilely, and maybe tragically, but to be helpless to do otherwise	Generous sharing of resources
To be transformed in its presence – lifted, lighter on your feet	Working together for a common goal
To want to be joined with it, taken in by it, lost in it	Celebration of shared values
To want the best for it	Independence
Desperately	Sacrifice by one for the other
To accept moral responsibility for its well-being	Creation of beauty

The comparison in Table 1 highlights the numerous similarities among the traits listed by Moore and Kimmerer. Both authors mention an emotional reaction if the loved one came to harm, both reference an appreciation of the inherent value of the loved one, and both note a genuine interest in spending time learning from one another. The overlap in these two lists highlights that there are underlying traits that truly define loving and caring relationships, traits that may transcend the authors' own specific experiences to be broadly applicable to a wide range of relationships with people and places.

There were three sets of traits in particular, referenced by both authors that I found especially relevant to my relationship with North Narnia: a) "To be transformed in its presence - lifted, lighter on your feet" (Moore) and "Encouraging individual growth and development" (Kimmerer) which I encapsulate below as Vulnerability, Personal Growth and Change; b) "To fear its loss and grieve for its injuries" (Moore) and "Protection from harm" (Kimmerer) which I encapsulate below, like Kimmerer, as simply Protection from Harm; and c) "To accept moral responsibility for its well-being (Moore) and "Generous sharing of resources" (Kimmerer) which I encapsulate below as Gratitude

and Responsibility. Reading these traits brought back some of the most vivid memories and strongest emotions from my visits with North Narnia. I have chosen to share stories in line with these traits to help illustrate the development and impact of my emotional connection with North Narnia.

Vulnerability, Personal Growth and Change

Vulnerability and openness are important elements of any relationship, be it with a person or a place. Being vulnerable means sharing our rawest emotions and giving another being direct insight into the deepest parts of ourselves. These moments of emotional vulnerability support growth and maturity both individually and within relationships. I can pinpoint certain moments of vulnerability with my peers or with my fiancé that brought us closer together, each moment in time marked by the sharing of intense emotions that we hadn't shared before. Reflecting on my time with North Narnia, I remember similar moments that helped me grow personally and transformed our connection.

One of my strongest memories of vulnerability leading to growth came about in July 2018. The visit itself began like pretty much any other. My usual routine, as described in Chapter Three: A Day in the Life, consisted of arriving at North Narnia and, before entering, taking a few quiet moments to leave any distractions - including strong thoughts and emotions at the door to focus on North Narnia. On this occasion, though, I found it hard to quiet the thoughts running through my head. It was a particularly busy and stressful week full of school and work deadlines, upcoming personal commitments, and an undercurrent of anxiety about how I would accomplish everything I needed to in such a short period of time. Despite my best efforts to let go of these thoughts, I found myself overwhelmed and unable to do so. I tried to push through the visit by tapping into my senses more deeply, to no avail. Moments of calm listening to bird song or smelling the rich damp soil were quickly overshadowed by that nagging voice in the back of my head bringing up all of my concerns.

Eventually, I reached a personal breaking point. I felt as if there was so much going on that I couldn't focus on my visit. Since North Narnia's positive and calming influence had been such a cherished aspect of our relationship, I was upset to be clouding it with my negativity. Overwhelmed

by the emotions that I could not shake, I began to cry. At first I tried quite hard to choke back tears, not for fear of being seen but out of embarrassment to be crying in front of North Narnia. Until this point it had been so important to me to keep North Narnia as the singular focus of my visits, leaving my own emotions at the door. As the tears dripped down my cheeks, I realized that they signified a much needed emotional release. I momentarily set aside the need to keep my visits with place purely positive, allowed the tears to flow and cried deeply for the first time in front of North Narnia.

Crying in front of North Narnia brought about an important realization: my efforts to keep my negative emotions from North Narnia had created a wall between us. While I had chosen to visit the forest on sunny and stormy days to see it in different circumstances, I had been presenting only the "sunny day" version of myself in return. I had misconstrued my responsibility as a researcher to set aside assumptions as a need to restrict the emotions that I shared as an individual. Masking these negative emotions meant that I wasn't presenting myself authentically. How could I expect to develop a meaningful relationship with North Narnia if I wasn't sharing what I was truly feeling?

With each moment that I allowed myself to be vulnerable with North Narnia, I began to feel the emotional weight release itself from my shoulders. I chose to speak my thoughts and feelings out loud as I felt it symbolised how I was opening up and sharing my feelings with another being. The significance of this moment was twofold: not only did I feel lighter in the moment for having shared openly with North Narnia, but I also felt as though I could now add "confidante" to the long list of descriptors I ascribed to North Narnia; we had become more present to one another. This instance may have been the first time that I cried with North Narnia, but it would not be the last. My visits with North Narnia after this experience had taken on a new dimension, and I felt that this willingness to share and be vulnerable deepened the authenticity and reciprocity of our remaining interactions.

Protection From Harm

During the nine months I visited North Narnia, there were several changes to the Lakehead University landscape. New buildings were constructed, existing buildings were renovated and

previously underutilised areas of campus were transformed into interactive educational spaces. Through these changes to the campus landscape, North Narnia managed to evade the wrecking ball. Most changes that occurred within North Narnia were representative of natural ecological processes rather than anthropogenic interference (e.g., a fallen tree, the seasonal growth and loss of plants). The closest that North Narnia came to harm in my experience took place in March 2019, three months after our formal visits had wrapped up. I had thought of North Narnia many times over those three months, but had allowed my workload, schedule and the bitter cold of winter stand in the way of a return visit. With a presentation to colleagues on the horizon, I decided to layer up and reconnect with this place I loved for some much-needed clarity and inspiration.

On this particular day I was feeling optimistic about an early spring, walking alongside small patches of grass that peeked through a thin snowy blanket along the pathways of campus. As I rounded a corner and walked towards North Narnia's main point of entry, I was brought to an abrupt stop. On a normal snowless day, there is a patch of grass roughly 20 feet wide that extends between the asphalt pathway and the forests of North Narnia. I soon realised that the snow free paths I had been walking on weren't the result of spring weather, but instead because they had been plowed directly onto this patch of grass, essentially barricading the entryway into North Narnia with a massive snowbank. I stood there for a minute, quite stunned. Thoughts rushed through my mind as I walked around the giant snowbank: When did this happen? Did whoever did this not realise what they blocked off with this pile of snow? Was anyone else upset by this change? I stood there staring at the snowbank for a few minutes, trying to process my surprise at its presence.

The shock, frustration and uncertainty that I felt recalled environmental philosopher Glen Albrecht's (2005) concept of "solastalgia". Literally derived from *solus* (meaning solace) and *algia* (meaning pain), Albrecht defines solastalgia as "the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory" (2005, p. 45). Albrecht recognised that in addition to the ecological and economic impacts of significant

changes to the landscape (e.g., loss of forests through clearcutting, loss of community due to natural disaster), our well-being and personal connections with place can also be profoundly affected. Those experiencing solastalgia may have lost their home, their livelihood, their place of worship, their place of refuge, or a place that held significant meaning. When we have a personal connection with a specific place, witnessing its disappearance can trigger intense feelings including loss, loneliness, displacement, grief, confusion and more (Albrecht, 2005). Experiencing solastalgia is common, though its intensity may vary depending on a variety of factors including the strength of the relationship between person and place, the suddenness and permanence of the change or loss, and the amount of time that has passed since the loss occurred. There is no one way that solastalgia presents or is experienced; the emotional response to the loss of a loved place is as personal as the relationship between person and place itself (Albrecht, 2005). By putting a name to this commonly experienced but poorly understood phenomenon, Albrecht helped those experiencing an emotional response to the loss of place identify and process the emotions associated with their immense loss. While I did not lose North Narnia that day, the sudden change and perceived disregard for a place I loved elicited a solastalgia-esque response of loss, frustration and confusion.

I considered walking around to the other side of North Narnia and entering via the other trailhead, but instead found myself more determined than ever to enter the forest the same way that I had in my previous visits. I clambered over the ice-crusted snowbank that had been piled against the trailhead, following the scant footprints left by the few who had ventured into the forest and trail that lay ahead. Entering North Narnia that day felt like I was entering a different world: unlike the mostly snow-free campus I had walked through, North Narnia was still blanketed in knee-deep snow everywhere except for the narrow trail. I took a few steps to stand in the valley of this beloved place, placing my hand on a trailside birch tree and taking a deep breath.

“It’s been a long time. I’m sorry I haven’t been here much lately. I’m sorry they blocked you off, and I’m sorry it took until now for me to notice.”

I took another deep breath and rested my head on my hand, leaning more of my weight into the trunk of the birch.

"I'm happy to be here today though - I've missed this."

I patted the tree a couple of times with my mitten and smiled as I looked up into the canopy of the forest. I continued to feel a range of strong and conflicting emotions swirling around my head and heart. I felt as though I had let North Narnia down through my extended absence, like I had spent too much time away from a close friend. Paradoxically, that also led me to feel happy to reconnect with North Narnia, like I was finally catching up with that same close friend and reliving the joy of our visits together. I felt frustrated that the snowbank had been piled against the entryway, likely an unintentionally dismissive action that cut off one of North Narnia's main access points. In contrast, I also began to feel the familiar sense of peace that I often felt when visiting North Narnia, noting waves of calm washing over me with each breath of piney air I inhaled. I tried to acknowledge each of these feelings, recognising their tension and making a silent promise to explore them further.

As I walked along the trail and observed the winter wonderland that was North Narnia, I began to come down from my initial, emotionally charged reaction. Despite the snowbank in front of the trail, I realised that the North Narnia in front of me was still healthy and whole. No trees had been cleared to make way for a parking lot, no piles of garbage were scattered among the trees and plants, and, as far as I knew, there were no construction plans in place that would prevent North Narnia from continuing its peaceful existence beside the river. Reflecting on the concept of solastalgia, I realized that my intense emotional reaction was less about the presence of the snowbank and more about the potential for change and loss in the future that the snowbank symbolized. The relative stasis that I had become accustomed to in North Narnia over the nine months was challenged by an unexpected change – the snowbank. Though this change was both small and temporary, it made me realise that changes in the future may have a more damaging and long-lasting impact on North Narnia's health and well-being. It was a distinct possibility that one day trees could be cut, wildlife could be

displaced and soil could be paved over; it was an even more distinct possibility that I would be unaware of any destruction happening if I no longer lived in Thunder Bay or, if I did, that I would feel helpless to do anything other than watch it happen. The sadness and confusion that I projected onto the snowbank was likely the result of having to acknowledge the potential loss of North Narnia in the future but also my potential inability to save or protect a place that I loved.

While this was an important realization, I could not dwell on the "what-ifs". Realising that North Narnia, though snowblocked, was safe and whole, helped me move beyond the sadness to embrace a feeling of pride for the lasting impact of our time together. The more that I thought about the range and intensity of my emotions, the more I realized the strength of my connection to North Narnia. My care and concern for North Narnia's well-being extended beyond the nine months we had visited together, and my emotional reaction was more indicative of little time passing instead of the three months that had elapsed. We had cultivated a truly meaningful relationship that made me concerned for it months after our last visit. I spent the remainder of this visit simply enjoying being with North Narnia, using each moment to celebrate its health and wholeness. I marvelled at the untouched swath of glittery snow covering the forest floor. I heard the familiar song of the black-capped chickadee and watched its fluffy form flit from branch to branch overhead. I felt the late winter sun illuminating the forest and enveloping me in its warm embrace. Despite the snowbank, North Narnia was still as I remembered it: magical and full of life. When I was ready to leave North Narnia that day, I chose to leave the way I had entered, climbing over the snowbank once more. I thanked North Narnia for such a strong friendship and promised to care for it this intensely in the future. I even flashed the snowbank a quick smile on my way out, recognizing that North Narnia's magic was still as powerful as ever, even behind this temporary snowy gateway.

Gratitude and Reciprocity

I knew from the outset of this study that any connection I developed with North Narnia needed to be rooted in gratitude. In all contexts, cultivating and practicing gratitude is an important

way that we connect, empathize and demonstrate respect with others. While gratitude is most often discussed in the context of personal well-being and relationships with other people, it can easily apply to our relationships with place and the natural world. Establishing and expressing gratitude encourages us to reflect, connect and appreciate our surroundings in a deep and respectful way. Practicing gratitude alone though is only half of the equation; practicing reciprocity takes those feelings of gratitude and appreciation to the next level. The concept of reciprocity builds on the thankfulness inherent in gratitude and focuses on giving back. When practiced in concert with gratitude, reciprocity transforms a connection with the natural world from a one-sided acknowledgement and into a true, two-way relationship.

Gratitude and reciprocity with the natural world holds cultural and spiritual significance for people around the world, including many Indigenous cultures. Indigenous perspectives on gratitude and reciprocity are significant in many ways, including their recognition of species other than humans as worthy of our respect and care (Kimmerer, 2014). In her 2013 work, "Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin," which she translates as "living life in a spiritual manner, according to Anishinaabe values" (pp. 89, 93), Kitgan Zibi First Nation author Nicole Bell explores the way that Anishinaabe perspectives and teachings inform relationships with the natural world and approaches to education and sustainability. Reciprocity is one of four traditional values identified by Bell (2013) as central to the Anishinaabe connection with the natural world, along with respect, relationship and responsibility. In the Anishinaabe tradition, humans are viewed as one part of a vast, interconnected and interdependent network of species. Bell notes that reciprocity plays a key role within this worldview by encouraging the development of "healthy and balanced relationships, including a relationship with the natural environment" (2013, p. 101). Reciprocating the gifts that we receive from the natural world supports the idea of balance by avoiding exploitative interactions with place. Bell's comments on the significance of gratitude and reciprocity are particularly relevant to North Narnia, as the Indigenous communities in and around Thunder Bay also identify as Anishinaabe.

Kimmerer also discusses the cultural significance of gratitude and reciprocity in her works, drawing upon the worldviews and traditions of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation of which she is a member. In her 2014 article, “Returning the Gift” Kimmerer describes the relationship between gratitude and reciprocity as sides of a coin, noting that we cannot receive without giving back, and that our success as individuals is inherently tied to the way we support the success of other beings. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer also highlights the importance of the gratitude-reciprocity connection by noting, “Cultures of gratitude must also be cultures of reciprocity. Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them” (2013, p. 115). These descriptions underscore the responsibility and duty that individuals have to other beings to demonstrate gratitude and reciprocity, a duty that arises from a place of love, care and respect rather than a legal or financial obligation. I knew that I needed to demonstrate gratitude and reciprocity with place in a way that reflected my appreciation of everything North Narnia had given me and to give something to North Narnia in return.

Both Bell and Kimmerer referenced several examples of what reciprocity with the natural world can look like in practice. In “Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin”, Bell’s (2013) examples of reciprocity in Anishinaabe culture included physical offerings such as tobacco before a hunt or harvest, verbal expressions of gratitude for the gifts one has received, and taking physical and emotional responsibility for the well-being of species other than ourselves. I recognised the deep cultural significance of practices like tobacco offerings and acknowledged that other expressions of reciprocity may be more appropriate to my context as a non-Indigenous person and to the relationship that I was forging with North Narnia. *Braiding Sweetgrass* provided additional insight on what reciprocity can look and feel like, with Kimmerer noting that we can “enter into reciprocity with the more-than-human world...through gratitude, through ceremony, through land stewardship, science, art, and in everyday acts of practical reverence” (2013, p. 190). Both examples gave broad insight on what reciprocity could look like without being prescriptive, allowing for individual and

contextual interpretation. The physical, emotional and spiritual demonstrations of reciprocity noted by Bell and Kimmerer highlight how expressions of reciprocity are not “one size fits all” and can take many forms to authentically reflect the connection between a person and a place.

Within Bell and Kimmerer’s examples of reciprocity, I recognised many actions that I had already integrated into my visits with North Narnia. The verbal expressions of gratitude that Bell referenced reminded me of the “thank-yous” and moments of gratitude I offered at the conclusion of each visit. This practice began as a quiet acknowledgement of appreciation in my head, though it eventually evolved into taking a moment to physically speak my thanks out loud as an outward expression of my gratitude. I also identified with the “everyday acts of practical reverence” that Kimmerer mentioned. My demonstrations of gratitude and reciprocity shied away from grand gestures in favour of subtler and more personal ways of showing appreciation like listening deeply to the sounds and stories in the air, establishing a physical connection with the trees and plants and simply spending time sitting with the forest and the river. As Kimmerer and Bell noted, these smaller everyday practices are a simple but meaningful way to reciprocate the gifts I received through purposeful demonstrations of respect, appreciation and attention.

Additionally, Bell, Kimmerer and Moore all refer to the concept of stewardship as an example of reciprocity. Stewardship centres around taking responsibility for the well-being of another through physical and emotional acts of care. Though I practiced some small physical acts of caretaking such as keeping my physical impact to a minimum, I consider this written record to be my strongest act of stewardship-based reciprocity with North Narnia. My relationship and time with North Narnia gave me personal confidence, a greater understanding of history and ecology, increased emotional awareness and made a significant impact on my perspective of place. Having received so much from North Narnia, I felt both a desire and a responsibility to return the favour in a meaningful way. Through my writing I can demonstrate care and appreciation for North Narnia, highlight the importance and impact of engaging with place, and give back in a way that helps North Narnia’s

legacy live on and inspire others in the future. Overall, I felt that the similarity between Bell, Kimmerer and Moore's descriptions of reciprocity with nature and my efforts to engage with North Narnia illustrated the gratitude and reciprocity that became central to our connection.

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Moore and Kimmerer's characteristics for loving and caring for place helped me realise how strong my emotional connection with North Narnia was and the overall importance of a strong emotional connection with place. These moments of vulnerability and openness with North Narnia strengthened our overall relationship, both as partners in learning and as friends. With my own experience in mind, I began to explore other benefits of a strong emotional connection with place.

The development of empathy is one of the most prominent benefits of an emotional connection with place. In his article "Dispositional Empathy with Nature", Kim-Pong Tam (2013) defines empathy as "the understanding and sharing of another person's emotional experience" (p. 92), noting that it can be both positive (e.g., feeling happy for another's success) or negative (e.g., feeling pain or sadness for another's discomfort). Positive and negative empathetic feelings are important as they show our ability to connect with other beings and understand experiences other than our own. Place-based educator David Sobel (1996) discusses the need for developing empathy, particularly in youth. Sobel believes that encouraging feelings of empathy and understanding at a very young age (primarily from four to seven years of age) supports feelings of connectedness rather than separateness from other beings and creates a strong foundation for further understanding of more complex sociocultural and ecological concepts in the future. Both Tam and Sobel move beyond the concept of empathy among humans to briefly note the power of empathy between people and place. When individuals have a strong empathetic foundation, like Sobel recommends, they can recognise similarities between themselves and non-human beings, often leading to a stronger understanding of the emotional experience of another. For example, when my friends or family are hurting, I understand how painful those feelings can be and want to do whatever I can to heal their

pain. Emotional investment in place can evoke similar empathetic reactions, like my reaction to the snowbank, that empower us to act when we understand the pain that a place is facing.

Alexandra Schindel and Sara Tolbert's 2017 article "Critical Caring for People and Place" is an example of the positive impacts that care and empathy for people and place can have on the overall well-being of a community (in this case, an educational/school community). In their work, the authors observe a high school teacher's efforts to engage with his students in genuine and caring ways through several environmental projects in their school community. Schindel and Tolbert's definition of care centres around "connections between personal, social and ecological well-being" (2017, p. 27); these three aspects of care are evident in both the person-person relationships (e.g., teacher-student, student-student) and person-place (e.g., student-school yard, student-community) relationships they explored. Students who were not normally engaged in their education or struggling with issues outside of school became more emotionally open and physically involved with their community through the care of their teacher and the opportunities they were given. As one student noted, "When you have someone who like, cares about [environmental initiatives], it makes you want to care about it too and see why they care about it so much" (Schindel & Tolbert, 2017, p. 31). Students picked up on the teacher's efforts to understand their circumstances and responded by showing similar care to their peers and the natural world. Schindel and Tolbert showed how one individual's ability to empathize with and care for his students and their community translated into feelings of care and connection among many different individuals and places.

In her 2009 article, "Growing Up Green", Louise Chawla also discusses the relationship between strong connection to place, feelings of empathy/caring and action. "Growing Up Green" summarized Chawla's efforts to identify experiences with nature in youth that are common among individuals who actively care for the natural world in adulthood. One influential aspect that Chawla notes is how the language we are surrounded by influences our emotional connection with the natural world. She discusses how phrasing an interaction with nature in empathetic terms (e.g., "imagine

how that animal feels") supports a deeper and more nuanced type of understanding compared to phrasing that is more objective in nature (e.g. "watch what that animal is doing") (p. 14). In addition to the influence of language, Chawla also notes how the duration of our interaction with nature also plays a role in the type and quality of relationship that can develop, advocating for consistent (almost daily) interactions with nature to provoke thought, stimulate emotion and encourage action.

Educator Mark Hansen similarly notes how meaningful contact with nature often translates into interest, care and action for the natural world among young students. Hansen's 2014 chapter, "Exploring Our Urban Wilderness" details his experience of taking his young students into pockets of nature that exist in their urban environment, and the transformative effect it had on many of them. Hansen saw these connections as the foundation for future environmental care and action, sharing how "this understanding of local, tangible relationships is the seed of critical insight into broader, more complicated issues...the way to fuel a student's long term passion for environmental justice is to deepen their relationship with place" (p. 60). By encouraging students who previously had little to no connection with the natural world to investigate their neighbourhoods, Hansen generated a positive response from his students. Hansen believes that continuing to facilitate this type of contact with place will support his students' interests and passion for their community in the future.

It is important to note that the correlation between experiences with nature and caring or action for nature noted by Schindel and Tolbert (2017), Chawla (2009) and Hansen (2014) is not without its difficulties. Just as there are factors that help foster feelings of caring and empathy towards place, there are also certain factors that can work in opposition to emotionally connecting with place. Connie Russell's 1999 article, "Problematizing Nature Experience in Environmental Education" highlights a few issues and assumptions underlying the traditionally linear relationship thought to exist between nature experience, caring and action. Firstly, this relationship often assumes that the only nature worth connecting to is "pristine wilderness" that is "out there", and that the nature that exists within our urban context is less deserving of our time and attention and less able to

inspire emotional connection and action. I appreciated Russell drawing attention to this argument for the same reasons I had connected with Doremus' writings (1999) on ordinary versus special places. Any attempt to prioritize or rank places against each other works directly against efforts to establish meaningful and accessible connections with place. As noted by Onondaga elder Audrey Shenandoah, "Every spot on earth is sacred, not just certain places that are regarded as sacred because something happened there. Something happened all over this earth" (as cited in Coleman, 2017; p. 15).

Additionally, a linear, causal relationship fails to acknowledge internal and external factors that influence how individuals experience the natural world. Utilising several examples from her research on whale-watching expeditions in Canada and orangutan-focused tourism in Borneo, Russell notes how individuals often approach an experience with preconceived expectations of what they will see, hear and feel. Russell (1999) refers to this as the influence of story on experience. These preconceptions can have a significant impact on how those individuals interpret an experience, leading to individuals disregarding elements of an experience that don't align with their assumptions, or disappointment if the experience doesn't live up to these expectations. Though not explicitly referenced in this article, her other work on the intersection of social justice and the environment (e.g., Fawcett, Bell, & Russell, 2002) suggests that factors like class, race, culture and gender would also influence an individual's experience of place and their willingness to care or act.

Together, the observations shared by Tam, Sobel, Schindel and Tolbert, Chawla, Hansen, and Russell illustrate why an emotional connection with place is critical and powerful. Our emotional connection with place is an important part of our overall connection with place and the natural world. It enriches our relationship with our surroundings, moving beyond ecological observations to a more holistic understanding of the places and communities that surround us. Leaning into our emotions with regards to place can help foster empathy, care, and love for the natural world that often translate into broader feelings of curiosity, passion, transformation and action/activism.

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Having explored *what* emotional connections with place look like and *why* they should be encouraged, I was left wondering *how* education can nurture these deeper connections with place. Despite the strong influence of emotions on the relationship I developed with North Narnia, celebrating an emotional connection with the natural world is still a relatively new concept for me. My undergraduate degree in environmental studies was almost exclusively grounded in quantitative sciences, focusing more on species identification and data analysis. I often found myself torn between my desire to celebrate the beauty of forests and my program requirements to analyse those same landscapes in an objective manner. I have strong memories of mentioning the concept of inherent value in certain classes only to be met with eye rolls and laughs. This garnered such a strong reaction from others that it became easier to just downplay this aspect of my connection to the natural world to be taken seriously by many instructors and peers. When I entered the field of education, I finally felt comfortable speaking about the emotional dimensions of the natural world with peers who also celebrated the interconnectedness of life on earth. I hadn't realised how sterile my undergraduate program felt until I was in an environment where these perspectives were actively encouraged.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer (2013) recounts similar stories of how her emotional connection and appreciation for the natural world was consistently viewed as incompatible with a career in science. Inspired by a lifetime of curiosity about the natural world, Kimmerer decided to pursue botany at school. Through her schooling, Kimmerer sought answers to more subjective questions, like why certain species of plants look beautiful together. Unfortunately, from Kimmerer's first days on campus her instructors labeled those kinds of questions as "not science" and unworthy of investigation. From that point forward, she found herself struggling to reconcile her curiosities with the rigid expectations of her chosen field. Kimmerer's heritage and identity as an Indigenous woman added another dimension to her challenges in academia. Kimmerer's background shaped how she interacted with the natural world, from the importance of gratitude and reciprocity to the use of storytelling to share knowledge and tradition. Kimmerer compared her institutional experience to that

of her grandfather in the residential school system when she noted, “the professor made me doubt where I came from, what I knew, and claimed that his was the *right* way to think. Only he didn’t cut my hair off” (2013, p. 41). I found this passage particularly powerful in describing how Kimmerer’s identity, culture and emotions were restricted and devalued by her academic institution.

These types of institutional experiences are not unique to Kimmerer or myself, but are instead a challenging reality of many current pedagogies in scientific fields of study. In a commentary, “What Does it Mean to Love a Place”, author John Bates (2008) describes how individuals tend to downplay their love of place out of a concern that it is too subjective or not credible enough to be taken seriously by others. Several of my and Kimmerer’s experiences speak to this phenomenon; having been taught that there is only one true way to “scientifically” interact with the natural world we actively had to downplay aspects of our worldviews in order to be seen as credible in our field. While a scientific approach grounded in quantitative research may yield empirical results, it only tells a small part of the story and is often devoid of personal connection or sociocultural perspectives. With the numerous social and environmental crises we face in our modern world, it is perhaps more important than ever to establish multidimensional connections with our surroundings. Feelings of empathy, care and love developed through time with nature can extend to both people and places, breaking down prevailing societal structures while working towards a more empathetic future among all living beings. As educators invested in our surroundings, we have an opportunity to challenge this status quo and utilise more holistic approaches that appreciate different ways of knowing and learning without devaluing or disrespecting any specific viewpoint.

Place-based educational approaches represent an opportunity to move beyond the overwhelmingly objective nature of some environmental studies programs and support inclusive pedagogies that allow for other ways of knowing. In his captivatingly titled essay “How My Schooling Taught Me Contempt for the Earth”, Bill Bigelow (2014) discusses how the “hidden curriculum” of his school years prevented the development of caring relationships between students

and their surroundings. Bigelow's anecdotes speak to an early education that encouraged students not to question or connect with the world around them. This in turn led to students viewing the urbanization of their neighbourhood as inevitable change rather than the loss of important green spaces. He notes how this indifference extends beyond ecology, normalizing a lack of discourse on other social issues like racism or inequality. Bigelow now advocates for the use of ecologically literate and socially aware pedagogies in education like place-based education to support generations of individuals willing to listen, question, and advocate for the world around them.

Educator Glynne Mackey (2016) echoes many of Bigelow's statements in her essay, "Love the Place Where You Belong". Mackey advocates for the importance of an ecological identity: a deep connection between individuals and the Earth centred around an awareness of place and a sense of belonging. She states that an ecological identity arises from strong physical, emotional and spiritual connections to place that shape our values and encourage feelings of care towards our surroundings; this identity is especially important in times of socio-political uncertainty as it can help us feel connected with our culture and community. Mackey recommends several pedagogical strategies for educators and students interested in developing an ecological identity, centred around physical and emotional engagement, history, experience and storytelling about place. While Mackey's work is primarily with elementary school-aged students, her recommendations are applicable to my time with North Narnia: I engaged with North Narnia physically and emotionally, I investigated the cultural dimension of place through research, and I utilised storytelling throughout the study. Recommendations like Bigelow's and Mackey's represent some of the many opportunities to counteract the institutional challenges Kimmerer and I faced and support more expansive ways of knowing and connecting with place through education.

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While I started out seeking to better define my emotional relationship of love, care, and connection with North Narnia, I soon realised that any description would be incomplete without also

understanding why these emotional connections are important and how these connections can be supported in a variety of contexts. Reflecting on my experiences with North Narnia, I have come to understand that emotional connections with place are a critical part of how we bond and empathize with the natural world. Just as our emotional investment in other human beings allows us to view them as more than their physical appearance or first impression, our emotional investment in natural places allows us to view them as more than just patches of soil or trees.

Even months after my last visit with North Narnia, I am still amazed at how strongly my experience aligns with Moore and Kimmerer's descriptions of loving place. Their notes on loving place perfectly capture the essence of my relationship with North Narnia and describe many of my fondest memories. Describing how she arrived at the final characteristic of love for place, "to take responsibility for its well-being," Moore (2004) states the following:

> I know there's something important missing from my list, but I'm struggling to put it into words. Loving isn't just a state of being, it's a way of acting in the world. Love isn't a sort of bliss, it's a kind of work. To love a person is to act lovingly toward him, to make his needs my own. To love a place is to care for it, to keep it healthy, to attend to its needs. Obligation grows from love. It is the natural shape of caring. (p. 36)

Moore pulls together love, care and emotional connection with place in this passage, helping me define those once vague descriptors of connecting with place and underscoring their importance. To me, a meaningful relationship with place is one that helps us realise things about ourselves and our surroundings that we might not have otherwise noticed. A strong connection centred around gratitude, respect and reciprocity is one that brings us closer to our surroundings and inspires us to be passionate activists within our communities. Care and love for a place develops over time and requires effort from the individual to listen and learn from their surroundings. Our emotional connection to place is a critical part of our broader connections with place and plays a critical role in our motivations to understand, protect and act in support of the natural world.

Chapter Six: Moving Forward

When Lucy first stepped through the wardrobe and entered the world of Narnia in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), she was awestruck by her new surroundings. Standing in a winter wonderland, she crossed paths with creatures she had never heard of who told her the complex history of a world she never knew existed. As Lucy left Narnia to return home, she couldn't wait to tell her siblings what she had stumbled upon and the magic she saw and felt there. Despite her excitement, Lucy's description of Narnia fell on the deaf ears of her older siblings who chided what they believed to be her overactive imagination and childish exaggeration. Lucy was crestfallen: she knew what she saw, she knew what she felt, and she knew that she had been moved and affected by her encounter with this new and magical place.

It wasn't until later, when she convinced her siblings to step through the wardrobe and experience Narnia for themselves, that they understood the magic Lucy had described. Lucy's love for Narnia grew having shared it with others, and she recognised a wonder in their eyes similar to what she had felt. Each sibling experienced Narnia slightly differently and each grew as an individual based on their personal experiences there. Peter gained confidence, leading the inhabitants of Narnia through many trials and tribulations. Susan gained strength, becoming a quietly fierce warrior with a compassionate heart. Edmund gained self-awareness and selflessness, beginning to recognise the needs of others over his own. Lucy's heart and adventurous spirit grew as she did, helping her understand the plight of Narnia's misunderstood creatures. Their individual growth was supported by their bond with Narnia that grew stronger over time as they uncovered stories and corners of the realm they hadn't encountered before. For Peter, Susan, Edmund and especially Lucy, each visit to Narnia was just as magical and transformative as that first time they stepped through the wardrobe.

Before my first visit with North Narnia on the Lakehead University campus I really wasn't sure what I was getting myself into. What stories would I find in the veins of a leaf or buried beneath the paths I walked? Would I find the type of connection with and understanding of place that I was

searching for? Any uncertainty I had fell away when I stepped into the forest on the first visit and felt my eyes widen, just like Lucy's had. Even though I had walked through this forest before, on this occasion I felt like I was really seeing it for the first time. That sense of awe and wonder from these first few visits stuck with me throughout all nine months; even on the most "typical" of days there was always some new aspect of North Narnia that would catch my eye and remind me to keep listening, learning and reflecting. My visits to North Narnia were often preceded by a feeling of electric anticipation and succeeded by a buzz of positive energy that remained even after I departed.

From the beginning of this endeavour I felt it was important that my experience cultivating a relationship with place extended beyond myself. I hoped that sharing my personal experience would assist others looking to interact more purposefully with their surroundings, just as Coleman's (2017) *Yardwork* had inspired me. Since my visits ended in December 2018, I've had the opportunity to share North Narnia in person with friends, family and fellow students. I felt like Lucy with her siblings when I would bring friends or family to North Narnia for the first time, waiting in eager anticipation for them to experience even a fraction of what I had been describing. My parents were taken by the colour and textures of North Narnia when they visited on an overcast summer day, while a close friend from southern Ontario found a sense of peace and awe by the river's edge when she visited this past fall. I even had the opportunity to speak to fellow students in Lakehead's Faculty of Education, at an indoor conference presentation and by leading an in-person visit to North Narnia. At the end of both presentations I was heartened by the number of students who were inspired to take some time to connect with a place they loved. I embraced every opportunity I had to speak about or directly connect another individual with North Narnia and was excited when those engagements translated into an increased interest in connecting with the natural world among my peers.

This desire and intention to share my experience with others had been formally noted as the fourth goal of my thesis: "to develop a synthesis of my encounter with place that can help others engage with place in a more meaningful way." Through this written work, my experience can live on

and reach beyond my personal community to others looking to connect with place in a diverse range of locations and contexts. This synthesis features takeaways and recommendations for individuals, educators and institutions interested in connecting with place, informed by my personal experience with North Narnia and literature on place and education.

As noted throughout this work, interacting with place is a deeply personal practice that differs based on the individual, the place, and the circumstance of their interactions. While I found these practices to be beneficial, they may not necessarily have the same impact or influence on other individuals. I could invite 10 colleagues to undertake the same nine-month interaction with North Narnia that I completed and each one of them would have a different experience to share, just as Lucy and her siblings were all impacted in different ways by their time in Lewis' Narnia. Perhaps the most important thing that those seeking a deeper connection with place can do is explore a variety of place engagement practices and determine what works best for them. With this in mind, I hope that the takeaways from my experience are viewed as an honest reflection of the practices that helped me connect with North Narnia and a starting point for others interested in exploring place.

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The practice of developing or strengthening a connection with place is something that any individual can do regardless of age, experience, or location. Place engagement can take many different forms, from the more structured and in-depth investigations that Haskell (2012) and I attempted to informally spending a few extra moments observing your backyard. Based on my experience with North Narnia, there are three key takeaways that I believe are most relevant for individuals looking to engage with place: 1) **utilise your senses**; 2) **slow down**; and 3) **pay attention**. These three practices are all connected; each practice is important in its own way but their potential impact on an individual's connection to nature is enhanced when they are used together.

Using our senses to engage with place helps us connect both physically and emotionally with our surroundings. In *How to Read Nature* (2017), Tristan Gooley discusses the role that our senses

play in our physical engagement with the natural world. Gooley notes how humans tend to under-utilise their senses; our eyes and ears take in so much information that our brains are forced to sort the information based on our personal priorities and filter out "extraneous" details to construct a basic picture of our surroundings. According to Gooley, purposefully engaging our senses in new and different ways challenges our brain to focus on different types of information and helps us recognise new or previously overlooked details. One example of this phenomenon that Gooley shares is how most people are wired to pay more attention to things that move than things that don't, causing many individuals to miss something unique just because it was standing still.

I noticed similar tendencies in my own experience observing North Narnia. My background in environmental studies and interest in ecology meant that my attention was naturally directed to trees, plants and wildlife. As a result, I was inadvertently placing more emphasis on observing the appearance and behaviour of those features and missing out on other aspects of place. Once I realised this, I made specific efforts to counter this instinct by engaging my senses with other elements of place I was less familiar with. For example, I had initially tried to ignore the presence of other humans in North Narnia in order to focus on more of the non-human features of the ecosystem; when I devoted more energy to watching how other humans were interacting with North Narnia and listening to the human stories of the area, I began to gain a stronger understanding of North Narnia's people-place dynamic outside of my own experience. I had also always believed that my sense of smell was one of my weakest senses, so I made specific efforts to focus on how different smells connected to other observations and emotions (e.g., the smell of the forest after the rain and the feeling of comfort it elicited). I found that these intentional sensory experiences highlighted aspects of North Narnia that I would previously have otherwise overlooked, just as Gooley suggested.

Engaging with place through our senses can also help us form strong emotional bonds with our surroundings, as we allow ourselves to be moved by not just what we feel with our hands, but what we feel within our bodies and souls. Our sensory engagement with place influences who we are,

from our passions to our values and more. Australian historian William Lines shares the profound impact of sensory experiences on his relationship with place in a 2001 collection of essays, noting,

> I learnt about Australia through my body... through what I could sit on, touch, taste, see, breathe, smell and move within. My surroundings gave me my reality. My corporeality incorporated the world's corporeality. (as cited in Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 72)

Through his reflections on a loved and important place, Lines beautifully captures how our sensory experience (i.e., what we can see, hear, smell, touch and taste) of place shapes who we are from an early age. For example, an individual may perceive their bedroom to be a safe space based on its muted colour palette, soothing sounds, and judgement-free atmosphere. The appreciation that individual had for this type of place might inspire that that person to learn how to design welcoming workspaces as part of a commitment to inclusion and safe space initiatives. The impacts of these sensory experiences with place can be long-lasting, allowing individuals like Lines to evoke the feeling of walking on the sand or the smell of the ocean air years after those experiences took place.

The significant influence of place on our identities is also noted by David Greenwood in his 2003 work, "Foundations of Place". Greenwood notes how exposure to the unique characteristics inherent in a place can "make us" (p. 621), influencing our perspectives, values, passions and more. This aligns very closely with Lines' description of the profound ways the places in his life shaped him as an individual. Greenwood takes this notion one step further by noting that places can also "teach us" (p. 621) through their constant demonstrations of the patterns of the natural world and the role of humans in these complex interactions. In the same work, Greenwood goes on to note that "the kind of teaching and shaping that places accomplish, of course, depends on what kinds of attention we give to them and on how we respond to them" (p. 621). Here, Greenwood posits that while place is prominent in our daily lives whether recognized or not, a strong relationship with place requires active interest and engagement. Gooley (2017) builds on this idea in *How to Read Nature*, noting how the specific elements of place that interest or influence us can change over time based on our life

experiences, priorities and values; there is always the potential to be newly inspired by a familiar place. The simple practice of utilising our senses to engage with our surroundings can impact us on a personal level and transform our relationship with place.

Slowing down and paying attention are two of the most basic yet most powerful actions that an individual can take to develop a deeper relationship with place. Indeed, they have inspired an entire approach in education called "slow pedagogy" as described in Philip Payne and Brian Wattchow's 2009 article on slow pedagogy and place, and Ron Tooth and Peter Renshaw's 2009 work, "Reflections on Pedagogy and Place". The essence of slow pedagogy, according to Payne and Wattchow (2009), centres on enhancing our connection to place through increased time and attention. While slow pedagogy is known primarily as an educational strategy, the underlying philosophy of taking time and paying attention is easily applicable to individuals outside of an educational setting. Both sets of authors note several benefits to utilising a slow pedagogy approach to encounters with place. Payne and Wattchow highlight how slow pedagogy's emphasis on the intersection of mind, body and place supports explorations of place that are multidimensional and meaningful. Tooth and Renshaw (2009) further this idea by discussing how increased time with place promotes self-reflection and awareness, prompting individuals to consider how their own experiences intersect with their surroundings. By slowing down and paying attention, individuals can reconnect with themselves and their surroundings, gaining a greater understanding of both in the process.

In *How to Read Nature*, Gooley (2017) gives particular praise to the way that slowing down and paying attention can transform ordinary interactions with place into extraordinary moments. For example, a fallen log in the backyard is suddenly a microcosm of life if we take the time to crouch down and peek behind the decomposing bark. Gooley gives a similar example of increased attention transforming ordinary moments into extraordinary interactions when he notes,

> A shallow impression in long-dried mud that goes unnoticed by most who walk past will suddenly whisper questions up at the individual who develops an interest... Who, what, when,

> and why? A couple of bland tracks become a short story when we identify them as those of a dog chasing a deer. (pp.45-46)

The imagery that Gooley used to make his point reminded me of how slowing down and paying attention enhanced my experience with North Narnia. At the beginning of the project I would note sightings of wildlife that I encountered, making very matter-of-fact notes to myself like “saw a crow in a tree” or “heard a bird cawing as I walked by”. Over time, these once simplistic sightings had evolved into more complex lines of questioning: “What kind of bird is it? What is this bird trying to communicate to me, or other birds, right now through their call? Does the bird have a nest or food source around here that I’m encroaching on? What is the cultural significance of this bird to the local community?” Taking my time and paying more attention to my surroundings sparked an active desire to delve deeper into the stories and meaning behind each observation. Sometimes I was able to answer those questions in real time based on my own personal knowledge and sometimes I wasn’t. Sometimes I was able to find the answer after doing a little post-visit research and sometimes I wasn’t. The answers that I was able to find brought me closer to North Narnia, while each unanswered question motivated me to listen harder, dig deeper and learn more. This is just one example of how slowing down and paying attention enhanced my physical understanding of my surroundings and my desire to understand those surroundings in a more multidimensional way.

Utilise your senses, slow down and pay attention. Though simple in name, these actions are powerful in practice as noted by Gooley, Payne, Wattchow, Brown and Greenwood. It is important to mention that these practices extend beyond the ecological understanding of a place I noted into more social, cultural and historical contexts. Listening to the stories of local elders or Indigenous community members can help us bear witness to the rich, complex and too often marginalized stories of these vibrant cultures. Slowing down and paying attention can help us become more aware of the contemporary societal crises we are facing and the role that people-place interactions play in those issues. The demanding nature of our current fast-paced society makes it more important than ever to

slow down and appreciate what we have and where we are, moving beyond the face value of our surroundings and finding a deeper connection with our community.

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In recognising the inherently personal nature of connecting with place, it may seem difficult to integrate place-based concepts on a larger scale within educational institutions. Higher education institutions are working to balance a number of different objectives, with economic priorities often edging their social and environmental counterparts. This dynamic is beginning to shift in the face of current socio-political and climate crises, with social and environmental issues becoming a more pressing priority. As this potential shift in institutional priorities arises, there is an opportunity to implement educational practices that are collaborative, experiential and connected to the ecological and social history of the land. But what would that type of educational institution look and feel like?

Imagine that you are a prospective student interested in place and sustainability touring the campus of a higher education institution for the very first time. Walking onto the campus quad you pass by a group of students sitting and reading by the river. Looking closer you realise they are utilising the campus as their outdoor classroom, learning *from* rather than *about* the local boreal and riparian ecosystems in front of them. As you walk along the campus pathways you pass interpretive signage detailing the complex history of the campus landscape, including acknowledgement of the traditional territory of local Indigenous people. At the registrar's office you are greeted by a campus course calendar with sustainability-related courses in a range of disciplines including "Introduction to Land-Based Learning" and "Modern Issues in Sustainability". Noting your interest in and excitement about these courses, the registrar links you to the institution's Sustainability Initiatives Directory, a service that matches interested students with sustainability-focused faculty, academic projects and volunteer opportunities. The projects in the directory are extremely varied, from a potential thesis on campus stormwater management collaboratively supervised by Geography, Engineering and a local environmental organization, to a call for visual art, photography and poetry for an upcoming

exhibition on the local impacts of climate change. On your way home you pass a group of new faculty getting outdoors and engaging with their surroundings as they explore the campus trails on their lunch break. The more time you spend on campus, the more you are inspired by the institution's commitments to social and environmental sustainability, opportunities for participation in collaborative and interdisciplinary applied research, and health and well-being of humans and more-than-humans on campus. It doesn't take long to realise that this is the institution for you.

It might sound aspirational, but the picture that I painted above is beginning to become a reality as more higher education institutions in Canada and around the world integrate a living laboratory approach (alternatively known as learning laboratory or whole-of-university approach) on their campuses. In their respective works on sustainability on university campuses, Jennifer McMillin and Rob Dyball (2009) and James Evans, Ross Jones, Andrew Karvonen, Lucy Millard and Jana Wendler (2015) define a living laboratory as an approach that brings together stakeholders from an institution and the community to explore issues related to environment and culture, execute interdisciplinary investigations that challenge current social structures and develop and test potential solutions to overcome these issues in an applied, bounded, real-world setting. Both sets of authors note how higher education institutions and their campuses are well positioned to become living laboratories due to their vast and diverse capacity (including financial resources, labour and campus space) and connections to other institutions, government organizations and community groups.

Both McMillin and Dyball (2009) and Evans et al. (2015) go on to discuss some of the benefits of a living laboratory approach in higher education institutions. One of the key benefits identified by McMillin and Dyball is the collaborative nature of this approach and the way that it encourages interdisciplinary communication and partnerships. Prioritizing collaboration challenges the tendency of university departments to operate in isolation, breaking down barriers between stakeholders who may not traditionally work together (McMillin & Dyball, 2009). Evans et al. (2015) build on this idea, noting that these interdisciplinary partnerships often lead to more holistic

solutions to the multifaceted issues they aim to tackle. These collaborations can take many different forms including co-supervision of research by faculty members from different departments, more diverse representation of interests on institutional committees, or increased engagement of and partnerships with non-institutional stakeholders in campus initiatives such as partnering with local environmental groups in campus beautification projects. Through the collaboration inherent in living laboratories, institutional stakeholders and community members can combine their knowledge and skills to create diverse and innovative solutions to contemporary social and environmental issues.

Researchers Marianne Krasny and Jesse Delia (2015) discuss an additional benefit of utilising university campuses as living laboratories: a stronger awareness of and connection to place that stems from moving learning opportunities beyond the classroom and into the real world. In their exploration of campus sustainability and place, Krasny and Delia found that individuals who participated in nature-based stewardship initiatives on campus (e.g., campus gardens, ecological monitoring) often develop stronger place attachment and sense of place. In the context of their study, Krasny and Delia describe place attachment as the "degree to which a place is important to someone" (2015, p. 89); an individual's sense of place is made up of this attachment as well as the emotions and meanings they associate with that place and their overall awareness of their surroundings. Campus stewardship initiatives can increase an individual's place attachment and sense of place through increased recognition of the value of natural places, an improved understanding of the meaning and impact of their actions, and an enhanced willingness to support nature in the future through advocacy or other similar initiatives (Krasny & Delia, 2015).

These findings were generated from the authors' study of participants in a student-run environmental organization at Cornell University that focuses on stewardship of local natural areas. As the mission and actions of this organization (conservation and appreciation of local natural areas through stewardship and recreational activities like trail cleanups and group hikes) are very similar to those of environmental groups at other universities, it is likely that the observed increases in place

attachment and sense of place are achievable at other institutions, including Lakehead. When asked to reflect on their experience in the environmental group at Cornell, student participants noted a range of place-related shifts in perception including an improved connection to and appreciation of their community, increased awareness of their behaviours related to sustainability, and a newfound desire to shift their educational or professional goals based on their experience with place (Krasny & Delia, 2015). While it is important to note that not every individual will experience these same shifts in perspective, Krasny and Delia's research shows a correlation between participation in campus stewardship projects and a meaningful and lasting connection to their surroundings.

McMillin and Dyball (2009) also make specific mention of place within the context of university campuses as living laboratories. Like Bill Bigelow's (2014) comments on his elementary school years mentioned previously, McMillin and Dyball note that there are often two curricula present in higher education institutions: the "explicit" curriculum (i.e., content taught to students in the classroom) and the "hidden" curriculum (i.e., actions or values demonstrated by the university through their practices and priorities). At some institutions, these two curricula align very closely, with the direction and actions of the university closely mirroring what students learn in class. Other institutions, however, struggle to reconcile these two agendas, leading to a disconnect between what students are taught and what the university supports, and vice versa. An example of the latter can be found at many Canadian universities where students in sustainability-focused programs are encouraged to research and develop renewable energy solutions while a portion of the university's financial endowment is actively invested in the fossil fuel industry (Fossil Free Lakehead, 2014).

McMillin and Dyball suggest that some of this disparity between curricula and practice stems from an overall disconnect from the knowledge embedded in the campus landscape. Utilising a living laboratory approach on a university campus is one way to address this disparity as it reconnects students and the institution to their surroundings through experiential and place-based educational opportunities, including research. When institutions are connected and accountable to the land on

which they stand, they are more likely to act in that place's best interests socially, environmentally, culturally and economically; the lessons taught to students in the classroom will then reflect that institutional commitment to and understanding of place. Transforming a campus into a living laboratory grounded in place helps to align the values and objectives of the university with the content and opportunities presented to the students (and vice versa), creating tremendous opportunity for powerful, meaningful transformative learning experiences to occur.

Institutional change can be difficult and slow due to a number of factors, from the competing priorities of different individuals and departments to the bureaucracy and governance that these institutions must follow. The numerous institutions around the world who are successfully implementing a living laboratory approach in spite of these challenges demonstrates that it is feasible and beneficial for students, institutions and the surrounding community. Through the living laboratory approach academic institutions can become leaders in their communities and respective fields, as much for their knowledge as for their commitment to social and environmental change.

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Though traditionally associated with educators and subjects that are more scientifically focused, place-based educational approaches are applicable to educators working with a wide range of subject matters. In his endorsement of place-based education, David Sobel (2004) highlights how the cross-curricular discussions and experiences characteristic of place-based pedagogies makes them suitable for communicating non-science based subjects like social studies and languages. Additionally, place-based education's emphasis on concepts like community and stewardship also makes it an applicable pedagogy for educators working outside of school settings (e.g., park interpreters and museum guides). Educators can potentially implement both the individual practices I recommended as well as aspects of the living laboratory approach I recommended for institutions.

The three personal practices I recommended for individuals (using your senses, slowing down and paying attention) also are applicable to most educational contexts. In her 2014 article, "A

Pedagogy for Ecology", educator Ann Pelo recommends several practices for educators that support awareness of place among her young students; two of these practices, walk the land and embrace sensuality, directly echo the personal practices that I found helpful in my experience with North Narnia. Through the practice of walking the land, Pelo's students are encouraged to "look below the surface, to move slowly, to know a place deeply" (2014, pp. 43-44) as they visit and revisit the same handful of places throughout their school year. Pelo notes how this practice is an important counterbalance to the attraction-based school trips most students typically experience. This strategy for educators also aligns with the slow pedagogy approach to education described by both Payne and Wattchow (2009) and Tooth and Renshaw (2009), where a stronger connection to place is forged through educational opportunities that allow students to devote time and attention to their surroundings. Like Gooley, Wattchow and Brown, and Greenwood, Pelo (2014) also recommends educators encourage students to "embrace sensuality", tapping into their senses to make connections between what they learned in the classroom and what they see, hear and feel in their interactions with place. Pelo's recommendations align strongly with my experience with North Narnia, including my endeavour to use names that honoured the natural history of the area (i.e., learn the names, learn the stories), my efforts to explore multiple dimensions of place (i.e., explore new perspectives), and my efforts to share my experience with others (i.e., tell the stories).

While there is opportunity and potential for educators to integrate place-based experiences into their practices using these strategies, it is important to note that educators interested in doing so often face barriers or constraints. In her 2005 article, "Green School Grounds as Sites for Outdoor Learning" educational researcher Janet Dyment summarizes the key barriers to implementing outdoor educational approaches that she identified through conversations with Canadian educators. In Dyment's review, these barriers include perceived health and safety concerns, teacher inexperience facilitating outdoor experiences, pressure to meet curriculum requirements and lack of resources or institutional support and more. In many ways these barriers portray a perception of

outdoor and place-based education as overly resource-intensive and daunting to implement. I hope that my experience and recommendations can challenge this perception, demonstrating some simple and accessible entry points for educators interested in engaging with place and highlighting their applicability for a wide range of ages. Even the smallest experience can have a potentially significant impact on the way that students relate to their community. One of the most powerful things that educators can do to help students engage with place is to simply open the door and provide them with opportunities to physically interact with their surroundings, connect what they learn in the classroom with their place-based observations, and begin to make meaning of the world around them.

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With these general recommendations for individuals, institutions and educators in mind, I thought it important to explore the specific implications of my experience and applicability of my recommendations to the Lakehead University community. Lakehead University has the capacity and potential to facilitate meaningful experiences with place among its students and to invest in a living laboratory approach to education and institutional operations. Over the past few years, the Canadian magazine, *Maclean's* has consistently placed Lakehead in the top ten in their assessment of primarily undergraduate universities in Canada, ranking the school even higher in the category of undergraduate research (Lakehead University, 2019b). These high rankings are likely due in part to small class sizes that support strong teacher/student interactions and significant opportunities for experiential learning and research that exist in several different disciplines (Lakehead University, 2019b). In many cases these experiential learning and research initiatives see students physically engaging with the university campus, from scientific studies of the lake and river ecosystems in Biology to native species identification in Natural Resources Management to engaging in outdoor education activities in Education, and connecting in variety of programs with Indigenous elders and history through teachings at the sweat lodge, medicine wheel garden and new outdoor classroom.

These types of place-based experiential learning opportunities are critical in helping students gain a greater understanding of their surroundings. As Krasny and Delia (2015) note, moving learning opportunities beyond the classroom and into the real world often helps students and the university community better understand the impact that their actions can have on their surroundings. The more opportunities that students have to physically engage with and learn from the Lakehead campus, the more they will understand the real-world applications of what they are learning in the classroom. These course-based interactions with place can be taken even further with additional place-based strategies. Prolonged or repeated interactions with a specific place or interactions that promote critical reflection can encourage a deeper awareness of place among students, allowing place to become an active partner in teaching and learning rather than just the backdrop for an assignment. How might we expand upon these examples of place-based educational experiences to promote understanding of and engagement with place at Lakehead?

One area with immense potential for increased place engagement is through implementing Lakehead's new Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) (Lakehead University, 2019a). Through the development and release of the SAP in 2019, Lakehead solidified its commitment to sustainability and an overall approach to education operations that is rooted in awareness of place. The development of this plan occurred over several years, led by Lakehead's Office of Sustainability in consultation with students, staff, faculty, Indigenous elders and community members, and relevant community organizations. The SAP lays the groundwork to make sustainability an overarching priority for the university going forward, supported by interdisciplinary partnerships and investments in place- and sustainability-conscious practices. The plan utilises a definition of sustainability that is both broader and more contextually specific than many other definitions, noting:

> Sustainability is a complex term as its meaning can differ from place to place and from person to person. At Lakehead University, sustainability is considered in a pluralistic and inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice and equity,

> Indigenous rights, secure livelihoods, workplace wellbeing, and leadership for vibrant and resilient communities. (Lakehead University, 2019a, p. 4)

Much like the multidimensional nature of place, this definition acknowledges the multidimensional nature of sustainability and the need to support holistic interactions between people and place.

The plan itself is structured around four key areas that can contribute to a collaborative and enhanced practice of sustainability at Lakehead University: academics (including curricular content and research opportunities), operations (including infrastructure, waste management, energy use), engagement (including the on-campus community and the broader public), and planning and administration (including integration of Indigenous perspectives and socially and environmentally conscious investments) (Lakehead University, 2019a). The focus on these key areas of campus is supported by literature on living laboratories and campus-wide sustainability initiatives, including Habib M. Alshuwaikhat and Ismaila Abubakar's 2008 study of integrated approaches to sustainability on university campuses. In their study, Alshuwaikhat and Abubakar identified three main areas that can support campus wide sustainability initiatives: university environmental management systems (including waste and infrastructure), sustainability teaching and research and public participation and social responsibility. The three areas of importance for a successful living laboratory approach in higher education institutions noted by the authors align almost identically to the areas identified in Lakehead's SAP. Alshuwaikhat and Abubakar note that these three segments of the institution must work collaboratively to accomplish campus-wide progress in sustainability.

Each of these focal areas in the SAP is broken down into goals, strategies and actions, creating not only a clear road map of how to accomplish larger goals through smaller tangible actions, but also providing a framework to assess progress and stay accountable to the goals and timelines that have been set out. Several of these goals, strategies and actions directly support increased engagement with place. The first strategy within the Academic category is the development of a "wish list" of diverse topics sourced from campus authorities (e.g., Physical Plant, Office of

Sustainability, Office of Aboriginal Initiatives) that could be used as potential research projects (Lakehead University, 2019a). This strategy directly supports a living laboratory approach on Lakehead's campus. Institutional attention to this list would not only identify opportunities for students, faculty and staff to engage with campus, but would also encourage collaboration between stakeholders to address these challenges through research and action. This strategy lists a wide range of potential topics to be explored that address environmental, health and well-being, Indigenous culture and social justice aspects of sustainability on campus.

Another strategy that would enhance connection to place on campus can be found within the Engagement category. Strategy 2.3 specifically recommends the development of culturally relevant interpretive signage that brings attention to the Indigenous history of the campus and sites of specific importance (Lakehead University, 2019a). This signage would encourage collaboration between the university and members of Fort William First Nation on the Thunder Bay campus and would greatly increase the university community's awareness of local Indigenous history and respect for places of cultural significance within the campus boundary. In my own experience with North Narnia, I discovered how these cultural aspects of place are not always visible on the surface of a place and that additional research and conversations are needed to engage with these stories. Signage like the plan recommends would help make these stories visible and encourage discussion, reflection and research of the potentially overlooked cultural dimension of place.

These are just two of the many strategies outlined in the SAP that utilise place-based approaches to bring sustainability to the forefront of education and operations at Lakehead. Place features prominently in the plan in a number of different ways: in the engagement of members of the university community with the university campus, in the interdisciplinary collaboration between stakeholders, and in the multifaceted and holistic exploration of the world around us. As Tristan Gooley asserts, one result of this type of deep, meaningful and direct engagement with place is that "changes occur in how we perceive things, how we think, how we feel, and how we act...This

positive change encourages us to invest more in the process. The cycle strengthens" (2017; p.148). The more time that we spend engaging with the multiple layers of place, the more these interactions transform our attitudes, our priorities, our values and eventually our actions. Within the SAP, engagement and connection with place becomes the doorway into sustainability-related care, consideration and action at Lakehead University. Whether through smaller-scale individual or course-based actions or through larger, living laboratory-esque collaborations, place-based approaches have the potential to transform how we view and relate to not only the Lakehead University campus, but also the broader sociocultural and environmental context of our world.

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I first "stepped through the wardrobe" and embarked on my exploration of place with North Narnia more than two years ago in early 2018, just a few months after I first picked up Daniel Coleman's (2017) *Yardwork*. At the time I had no way of knowing how deeply I would be moved by this experience, or the lasting impact that my time with North Narnia would have on my life.

In November 2019, my fiancé and I moved from Thunder Bay to Thompson, Manitoba to start the next chapter of our lives together. This was a difficult move as Thunder Bay had been such a formative part of both of our lives for the past eight years. Both of us had taken a huge risk coming to Thunder Bay, moving almost 1500 km from our families and lives in southern Ontario to attend Lakehead. I still remember the odd mix of nerves and excitement that I felt leading up to the big move. It didn't take long for Thunder Bay to become central to our lives and our identities: it was where we met, where we fell in love, where we found work, and perhaps most importantly where we began to establish roots together and become actively invested in our community. With another 1500 km move to another new community on the horizon it felt like history was repeating itself, with that distinct mix of nerves and excitement creeping up as it had before the move to Thunder Bay.

Our last days in Thunder Bay were extremely hectic, full of trips across town to tie up loose ends and attempts to say goodbye to the wonderful friends and contacts we made in town. On one of

these busy days I found myself running around the Lakehead campus, attempting to connect with colleagues, return borrowed books and say goodbye to campus. As I rushed from one end of campus to the other, I realised there was one more important goodbye that needed to be said. Without even giving it a second thought, I found myself shaking off the day's busy agenda and walking towards that familiar patch of forest between residence and the river to sit with North Narnia one last time. In a few short minutes I found myself standing at the threshold to North Narnia as I had so many times before, taking my customary deep breath before stepping into the forest one last time.

Once again, the words of Tristan Gooley echoed in my mind as I gazed upon the forested panorama in front of me: "Is this the same place I stood in before? Am I the same person who was here earlier?" (2017, p. 158-159). This question really resonated with me. In many ways, we were the same. North Narnia still had the same quiet intensity and magic that I had felt from day one, commanding respect without demanding it and eliciting pause in its presence. There were still generations of stories lying beneath every root and rock that gave insight into North Narnia's richly complex history. Personally, I was just as passionate about nature and environmental issues as I had been at the start of this journey and was still eager to engage with place in a meaningful way.

And yet, in so many ways, we had both changed. My time spent observing North Narnia highlighted its dynamic nature. Physically there was always something moving, growing, or decomposing, so much so that even within the first minute of a visit it was not the same place it once was. More importantly, perhaps, was that there was always something being shared. This flow of information worked both ways, and the more I learned to tap into what North Narnia was sharing, the more comfortable I felt sharing pieces of myself in return. As I walked around the forest, I found these personal changes reflected in little pockets of North Narnia, just as I found parts of North Narnia within myself. I recognised my willingness to share and be emotionally vulnerable in the openness of the tree branches. I found myself listening to the wind for the stories of those who came before me, a reflection of my efforts to move beyond ecology and embrace the culture and history of

place. The vibrant end of season colours that dotted the forest floor echoed my passion for place and place-based education, their energy and spirit matching my own. The more I walked with North Narnia, the more that I recognised the impacts of our time together on my personal perspective.

This changed essence and perspective, and indeed this whole experience, has helped me begin to adjust to life in a brand-new province and city. As a newcomer to my current community I am starting from scratch in my efforts to understand my surroundings. I have found myself relying on the practices I used to connect with North Narnia to connect with my new home in Thompson. I walk slowly along the trails and streets near our home to absorb where we now live. I engage with my surroundings in a physical way, bringing a tree branch to my nose to inhale its familiar scent or layering up to spend time outside everyday, even on the coldest afternoons. I follow my dog's lead on some of our walks as she tracks scents and sounds that I wouldn't have noticed on my own. My fiancé and I speak with coworkers and new friends to learn the sociocultural context of where we live, from the history of specific trails and sites to the broader history of the area. The practices I used to connect with North Narnia have helped me begin to understand the land where I now live and the beings with whom I share that land. These practices have helped me shake off the nerves I had felt at the start of the move and embrace the excitement for my new life in a new place.

Though my journey has ended in a different place than it began, it feels as though I have come full circle. At the beginning of this endeavour I outlined four goals: (a) to connect with place in a respectful and multidimensional manner; (b) to explore my experience of connecting with place; (c) to represent this experience in a format that can influence how others interact with place; and (d) to develop a synthesis of my encounter with place that can help others engage with place in a more meaningful way. At the end of it all, I feel that I have accomplished what I set out to do. I developed an authentic and multidimensional relationship with a place through interactions that were grounded in openness, attention, gratitude and reciprocity. Even though I am no longer able to see North Narnia in person, I still see and feel the results of our time together. The writing process, though

long, has been invaluable in the way it has pushed me to find how my personal experience fits into the broader context of place engagement and education. Putting it all together through narrative storytelling has allowed me to speak passionately about my experience in a way that I hope resonates with others. I lovingly hold my experience with North Narnia in my heart and in the chapters of this work. I like to think that North Narnia holds our time together in its own way, perhaps in the furrowed bark of my favourite tree, just one more story in this forest's expansive memory.

Near the end of *Yardwork,* Coleman states that "telling stories about a place...is an effort of care, a way to pay attention to its unfolding life, to free it from our tendency to package it as a piece of real estate, an immobile object, a stereotype" (2017, p.241). I hope that the experience I shared with North Narnia and our stories have cast place in a new light, as a dynamic living entity with the potential to inspire thought, emotion, action and help us make meaning of the world around us. Through this experience I have learned how interactions with the most seemingly ordinary places can have an extraordinary impact on the way we connect with our communities as individuals, our pedagogies as educators, and the potential environmental and sociocultural change that educational institutions can create. By stepping through the wardrobe, engaging with our surroundings and sharing our stories with others, we can follow Coleman's lead and "reanimate the way that we imagine place - this place, any place" (2017, p. 237), from Thunder Bay to Thompson and beyond.

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