

An Autoethnographic Approach to Cultivating a Sense of Belonging in the Niagara Region:

Weaving Place through Intersecting Historical and Cultural Threads

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A Major Paper submitted to the  
Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Masters in Environmental Studies, York University,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

July 31, 2022

## **Abstract**

The way individuals belong and develop a sense of self in the world is grounded in the history and culture of their community. Belonging is also determined by the social construct we have depending on where we are in the world. This determines how the individual moves through their world, which I reflect upon by confronting my own perspectives of my cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences. By understanding the foundation of these perspectives, I deepen my analysis of belonging through theories and concepts of sense of self and sense of place. Following an autoethnographic approach, I address my sense of belonging in place through acceptance within a community, connection to the land, and understanding place attachment in physical and social spaces from emotional and symbolic belongings. I embed my story of childhood experiences into my adulthood within the culture, politics, and society of the Niagara Region. I cultivate sense of belonging further by including art as a way to express my ecological and ontological connection to the environment, and as a means to ground myself through contemplation and metaphor. My art, therefore, is embedded throughout as a collection of photographs and paintings to situate myself in historical places that are foundational to my belonging in Niagara as I weave together the tapestry of who I've become.

## **Foreword**

This major research paper is the final submission to the Master in Environmental Studies at York University. It is the culmination of studying slow pedagogy, emotional geography, and environmental education in environments that generate a sense of place and belonging. Both my plan of study and my major research paper examine the interconnections of symbols and emotional bonds in physical and social spaces that generate place attachment. Deeper ecological understanding of place and belonging can be achieved through a slow pedagogy and place-based education to learn about the local place and its history and individual history through family, culture and society. Theory of place, belonging, and art as an ecological expression are examined in the paper, which provides the foundation for my autoethnography to cultivate my sense of place and belonging in the Niagara Region. By incorporating my art into my research paper I am able to cultivate my sense of self as I reflect on my journey to return to the Niagara Region, and situating myself into the historical and cultural aspects of the area. I emphasise the importance of community, and the collective importance of connecting to the places we live, particularly how we share culture and history. I aim to generate questions to ask what kind of world we live in by committing to their own place and belonging and connecting to their roots and their community.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to first extend my gratitude to the support of my supervisor and advisors throughout the journey of my Masters: L. Anders Sandberg, Leesa Fawcett, and Cate Sandilands. They have been incredibly patient as I embarked on the journey of belonging throughout the pandemic. I also want to thank Ouma Jaipaul-Gill and the administrative staff in the department.

I would not have been able to complete my project without the support of my parents, Maria and Henk van Leeuwen; each equally patient and who provided the base of my belonging.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to Rob Blom. Not only a good family friend, but also mentor and director of the WiseOak community I was part of during my stay in St. Catharines. He helped me transition the topic and methodology of my Masters and patiently guided me through the writing process as I procrastinated by reading about belonging.

My project would not have been the same without Jamie and the canoe trips we shared. I also want to recognise Rebecca, Sannia, and Zakia, the best school friends I could have met. Lastly, I want to recognise Sarah whose story of belonging is similar to mine which sparked meaning in my Masters work; our meeting in the park was timely.

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## **Chapter 1: The Tapestry of my Masters**

*All my life I've longed for someplace to call my own - and not just a physical building, but a niche, somewhere that I fit in and feel a sense of harmony and belonging (Karp, 2011, p. 334)*

*When you walk, you are retold that you belong to the world and that the world is lucky to have you. A step is cozy. (Gillies, 2019, p.170).*

### **a. Situating the Theory**

Sandberg *et al.* (2013) stated that place attachment comes from interconnections between physical and social spaces which are constructed from emotional and symbolic belongings. This is known as emotional geography, as our experiences are connected to what we call home, which is a part of a community and surrounding familiar landscapes. The history of a place also determines place identity, the symbolic importance and the emotional bond to a sense of belonging, and sense of place and place rootedness (Sandberg *et al.*, 2013). Attachment to place can come from familiar and historical connections, but also from change in the form of the development and displacement that may go along with it, particularly when the attachment is questioned (Sandberg & Wallace, 2013).

A slow pedagogy aims to develop a deeper ecological understanding of place and belonging, to learn about the emotions of living locally, and explore what to know in the place one is in, through family, culture, and society (Phillips, 2004; Sandberg *et al.*, 2013). This can be achieved simply by being in a place and imagining the changes that a particular space has been through (Campbell, 2013). Recognising a place in the relationship between humans and nature and understanding one's own sense of place requires an ecological, place-based, and inquiry-

based approach to learning (Judson, 2015). Orr (1991) states that the process of learning is just as important to the knowledge that is gained.

Relationships with a place develop and change over time, particularly as physical and cultural changes occur. Individuals develop and change their relationship to place through community belonging and cultivating a deeper connection to the land and local place. Experiences of place and belonging are vastly different from childhood to adulthood, and the choice an individual might make to return to a place after a long absence can develop a different connection with place. Sense of identity and sense of belonging are further developed through the relationships with people and memories created in a place, which becomes more than just a landscape (Lippard, 1997; Antonsich, 2010). Lippard (1997) further analyzes landscape as the perceived landscape that is seen or a scene that is viewed, from the outside.

Painting and taking photographs is my way of communicating with others and to experience belonging, both with myself as I discover my own sense of self, but also with others when I share what I have created. There are times that I am not proud of what I create, as I notice details that I did not accomplish the way I wanted to in my mind. My tapestry evolves as I continue to evolve, and understand my sense of self, sense of belonging, and my attachment to places socially and culturally. By situating myself in the place I am, I am able to truly connect to it with my heart. The components of my art will communicate my own life in the world as I come to know and respect all the experiences and relations that have helped to form who I am, and in turn, inspire others to recognise the possibilities of being in the world (Lippard, 1997).



## **b. Overview of the Narrative**

By incorporating my own history with a Dutch ethnic background and growing up in a rural Canadian environment, I seek to achieve an understanding of my own attachment to place and sense of belonging that is both physical and emotional. With my family, I would often go to the Netherlands where my grandparents and most of my aunts, uncles and cousins live. Here, I would experience a culture completely different from my own in Canada, and the experience of both have shaped my own understanding of cultural and emotional geography with the local landscapes (Sandberg *et al*, 2013). I also hope to portray and identify issues of place, landscape, power, identity, and representation of place attachment in time and space through artistic expression.

My study of belonging and sense of place focuses on my experience and history in the Niagara Region, the place where I grew up, by connecting the present experience of the landscape to its history and development, as well as my own history to examine my place and belonging. Wade Davis (2009, p. 22) wrote that “every feature of the landscape resonates with a story.” The details are at every point on a trail, along with the changes of the landscape over time. My story with the landscape of the Niagara Region begins from before I was born. My parents made a choice to move here from the Netherlands, however, they are not the only ones. For centuries, people have immigrated to North America, and before that, Indigenous people lived here. The stories created by individuals who share and create places together are achieved by a sense of belonging in places through through cultural, social, and political meanings (Lippard, 1997).

I now live in a community called WiseOak, an intentional community created purposefully by orienting the goals and values towards a holistic lifestyle that incorporates

mindfulness and permaculture practices. The overarching philosophy is to produce a sense of belonging for everyone present (Lopez & Weaver, 2019). Rob, my landlord and family friend, has created the community to be committed to mindfulness, meditation, and metaphysics practices. It is located in the south of St. Catharines, in the Merritton neighbourhood, across the city from my parents' home in the west end of St. Catharines. From living in this community, I have learned what it means to belong as I journey through discovering new and old parts of the region I grew up in, including my place in my family.

Belonging is harmonised through an awareness of relationships between individuals and the surrounding environment. When belonging is valued through love, it enables an individual to develop and reach a sense of belonging to a certain environment or society (Rode, 2013). Lippard (1997) states that local belonging and connections form from past and future belonging in a place is based on personal memory and experience and entwining known or unknown histories of a place. Personal relationship to history and place is formed and informed by social relationships, and the culture that defines the meaning of place to people through particular beliefs or traditions. Spiritual aspects connect symbols which represent real things from landscapes and acknowledge nature and cultures.

Socio-cultural and ecological understandings reflect and ground traditions and histories of cultures in place-based education systems and present-day realities. Despite the challenge to create a close relationship with familiar places due to the distance and unfamiliarity in multicultural societies, celebrating traditions and rituals give life to daily activities and networks of places through ceremonies and stories (Lippard, 1997). An individual can feel belonging through their sense of self when they find comfort in the place that they are. Having traveled to and lived in different places, including a year in France and a year in the Netherlands, it is

comforting to find familiarity in an environment that is unfamiliar. Community and acceptance add to the sense of belonging, particularly when the history and culture becomes part of the individual, while retaining and developing their sense of self.

I use autoethnography as a way to cultivate and deepen my sense of belonging in the Niagara Region. My journey is a culmination of memories, and feelings; the mistakes and successes along the way; the connections with others I formed along the way to generate a sense of belonging in a community. Gaining a better sense of understanding of the region of my childhood -and my return to it in my adult years after spending time away from it is important to me to appreciate what it means to belong. The experiences of my journey have helped me to consciously and intentionally develop my sense of self in a community. My childhood in Niagara and sense of self has shifted dramatically, as my identity was once tied into living in the rural west end on the outskirts of St. Catharines. The same place is only minutes away from the big box stores and the new hospital which have been built to serve the growing community. In my reflection, my upbringing did not involve independently visiting friends or walking to a store by myself; but I did have the whole of my parents' property to explore, as well as neighbouring farms, and a creek.

My own belonging culminates in making my home at WiseOak, a community which intends to incorporate farming, education, and meditation, to achieve a greater connection to the land and clarity of an individual ontology, while focusing on mindfulness with the emphasis of living in the here and now. Its proximity to the Niagara Escarpment, the Bruce Trail and Welland Canal make it stand out for the connections to historical landmarks. Also at WiseOak, I connected with Jamie; we became friends, bonding over our love of being outside in nature, going on hikes and canoe trips to Obabika River and Killarney Provincial Parks. These trips have

expanded of what it means to experience nature, and to feel comfortable anywhere, thus cultivating a sense of belonging and understanding sense of self in place.

Through baby sitting, I met my friend Sarah, and we became instant friends after we talked while her kids and the kids under my care played on the playground. She and I have similar roots in St. Catharines, growing up in the west end, similarly leaving the region to discover our individual selves, and similarly returning to our respective families. Sharing a similar journey with someone has created a special connection as friends that I did not realise I would also need in my life. My friendship with Sarah has become something that I can depend on in this adult stage of my life, something I had been missing since early childhood.

I went away from my hometown, as some people do, to find out where I belonged. I have lived in Australia, France, the Netherlands, and different parts of Ontario and Canada as I tried to find out where else I could belong. I made a home for myself in all of these different places, but over time I started to realise that I needed to go back to my childhood home to piece together what I had gone through in my early adulthood. My upbringing is also connected with the historical geographical elements of the Niagara Region; Short Hills Provincial Park, the Niagara Glen, Fort George, and the Bruce Trail are places I visited often when I was young. I lived quite close to the lake, and visited the beach at Charles Daley Park frequently. Many of the memories I have of Niagara and my community are positive, but some of them, one in particular, have challenged me to question where I belonged.

I aim to address the meaning of home, as it accentuates belonging and an individual relationship to sense of place. Just recently, I read a book called “Cozy: The Art of Arranging Yourself in the World”, by Isabel Gillies (2019). She writes about the need to connect, and even in the most uncomfortable situations, it is possible to be comfortable by figuring out what it

means to be an individual and how to belong in the world. My own return to St. Catharines felt a bit uncomfortable, but I also wanted to figure out my own meaning of being an individual and belonging in the world. Every time I leave and come back, I change, but so does the region that I have called home in my heart for my whole life. In the time that I have moved back, I have also been able to develop my relationship with my parents. After my father's heart attack in September 2021, I was able to visit him in the hospital easily, because I lived so close.

Through reflection, I have been able to observe changes in the development of St. Catharines, and the impact these changes have on my belonging based on my memories of St. Catharines, and growing up in a more rural setting. I incorporate my art, a collection of photographs and paintings that put some of the places into perspective for me. I have been able to gain a better understanding of who I am in the creative process with the purpose to explain sense of belonging in an educational way. The collection of photographs, paintings, and drawings are curated in a way to achieve a sense of belonging by drawing on memories and experiences in places that I believe are meaningful in the development or geography of Niagara.

Two places that stand out to me with both small and significant changes are the downtown area and public library (Figure 1) and the forest of the Niagara Glen (Figure 2). Downtown is a significant part of St. Catharines, as it is the area that was first inhabited by European settlers. Every time I visit or pass through the downtown area, I notice the ravines near my old high school that formed in the glacial period. The Niagara Glen is a forest area beside the Niagara River, the changes of the forest structure. I now notice more details that I may not have noticed before after reading about the history of these places. Many parts of the region have experienced similar small and significant changes. This is especially noticeable for me as development continues and new subdivisions are built on agricultural land.



St. Catharines Public Library  
downtown St. Catharines  
I love getting books to read

*Figure 1: I loved visiting the library when I was young, visiting regularly and the librarians knew us for how many books we'd always borrow*



overlooking the Niagara Glen

*Figure 2: I loved visiting the Niagara Glen, my parents would take us for family hikes most weekends*

### **c. Framing the Chapters**

My study will be approached with an autoethnographic methodology where I will draw upon several lines of inquiry from my own lived experiences to what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) call a “crystallisation process” that reflects “interpretive, narrative, and theoretical perspectives.” My goal in undertaking a self-study is to better understand my own journey and sense of belonging and how such an inquiry process can inspire others (*i.e.*, educators) to do similar work. I include personal experience, introspection, and reflection by reading of historical and creation of art to better grasp my sense of belonging. Furthermore, I apply interpretive practices through

the creation of art to bridge my personal experience involving aesthetic issues of representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) as a synthesising task.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the theories of belonging, and the literature that supports belonging. I start first with the autoethnographic approach which allows me to tell my story of finding a sense of belonging. I then focus on the theory of belonging and what belonging means in a changing landscape. I explain how individual belonging through coming back to place is connected with artistic creation, memories, and historical and cultural ties to place.

In Chapter 3, I aim to understand geography and how it ties into the concept of place and its importance for situating belonging. The physical, historical, and economic geography concepts contextualises the importance of my belonging in the Niagara Region. To situate my own belonging, I focus on the region of Niagara, which is an important place to me, as this is where I grew up. Studying the physical, cultural, and economic aspects of the region has helped to base my own journey to and from the area, and be aware of the changes the region has gone through in my time away.

In Chapter 4, I unfold my own story of belonging in the region through an autoethnographic approach. My personal memories, experiences, goings and comings to the region tell a story of how an individual evolves to belong. The account shows how the personal can enhance an understanding of a place. I reflect on my parents' home in relation to the geography of Niagara, and that of WiseOak, which culminates in my return to the region, and how I and the region have changed. I include my art, a collection of paintings and photographs in places of my own belonging, and suggest that the process of belonging is an individual and community journey.

In Chapter 5, I explain how art can be used to explain belonging as an educational tool and to situate an individual in a place of belonging. How to connect to the environment and the way individuals encounter the world by reflecting on the changes and engaging with the environment is tied together with art, whether it is photographs, painting, even film or music. In my own journey, I focus on visual art, which renews my sense of place in the world and my self; the bodily experience of being in the world through the process of creation aids me to express and situate my belonging. This process is important for me to develop a deeper understanding of who I am and the journey I have been on to situate belonging. This has been important to me to come to a deeper understanding of who I am, and where I am.

Chapter 6 wraps up my journey with the finished tapestry by explaining my art and situating my belonging not just in Niagara as a place, but the journey to realise my sense of self in my community. I tie together the theory, the background, and my journey, where I share more of my art that has helped me discover my belonging and the process and journey to realise why I chose to paint and photograph what I did. From reading through the history of Niagara, and the process of re-discovering my hometown – what has stayed the same, what has changed; I embrace my perception of the local knowledge and culture.



## Chapter 2: The Four Theoretical Threads on the Loom

In this chapter, I focus on the theories of belonging, and the literature that supports it. I start first with the autoethnographic approach, which allows me to tell my story to find a sense of belonging. Next, I examine the theory of belonging, and hone in on belonging in changing landscapes and what sense of belonging means. I follow this with theory of place, and how coming back to place, historical ties to place and cultural ties to place impacts an individual sense of belonging. I give an overview of incorporating artistic creation to demonstrate individual perception through multisensory experiences to evoke empathy which is essential to know particular ecologies. Individuals can exchange experiences and connect with transmissions of wisdom, memories and traditions that evoke belonging and sense of place through shared art inquiry.

Autoethnography is used to examine what it means to belong through historical and cultural ties to a place, which is accompanied with art as a way for individuals to express their place and belonging. The theoretical creates the foundation for the basis of geography and grounds my overview of the general history of Niagara. I embrace my perception of belonging in the Niagara Region as I develop a deeper understanding of the physical and cultural history. The meanings and values of place make it possible for my own experiences to be part of the region as a step to understand my belonging (Figure 3, Figure 4). The development of my sense of place is integrated with my personal story of belonging through the creation of art. The feeling of connection to others helps individuals to connect to the physical environment they live in, and helps develop a stronger sense of self to aid belonging.



*Figure 3: Looking at WiseOak from Mountain Street, my home while I live in St. Catharines*



*Figure 4: My parents' house on Third Avenue, I was able to visit them frequently*

### ***a. An Autoethnographic Approach***

Autoethnography highlights the relationship of experience and stories to culture and cultural practice while providing a critique of the relationship in the work. The framework focuses on self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy), by studying and writing about culture from a perspective of the self through an inside-out trajectory. An epiphany, nuance of experience, or aspect of experience usually highlights a cultural phenomenon. Diminished, silenced, or denied experiences or stories of people can also be included in autoethnography by demonstrating knowledge on past research that contributes to scholarship by situating the writing within an existing discussion. Sharing a vulnerable subject, disclosing secrets, or making histories known is grounded in personal experience that simultaneously becomes open for

criticism and actively seeks a reciprocal relationship by calling for contributions from an audience to enable an ongoing relationship. Furthermore, autoethnography is about living more meaningful and just lives by telling stories through a lens of culture. The artistic and analytic demonstrations are used as tools to reflect how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experiences (Jones, Adams, Ellis, 2013, pp. 22-24).

The autoethnographic process uses personal experience to engage ourselves and others in research involving culture, politics, and society. The personal experience further confronts tension between inside and outside perspectives of social practices and social constraints, while describing and critiquing cultural beliefs, practices and experiences. The values of researchers' relationships with others are acknowledged through deep and careful self-reflection, *reflexivity*. Intersections between the ethnographer and society are named and interrogated personally, socially, culturally, and politically, by showing people the process and figuring out what to do and how to live. Struggles to balance intellectual and methodological rigour, emotion and creativity, and striving for social justice and to make life better often occur in the autoethnographic process (Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015, pp. 1-2).

Our sense of self and the world begins with thoughts, feelings, identities and experiences in events that make us uncertain and propel us to strive to question, reconsider, and reorder our understanding of ourselves, others, and our worlds. These events can make us look inward into our identity, thoughts, feelings or experiences in relationships, communities, or cultures. Anything that persists to prompt pausing and reflecting is important to find the self in the story by exploring aspects of ourselves and others that would otherwise not have been present to explore. Past and present experiences that lead an individual to certain questions about the world and problems related to why things are the way they are are necessary to situate into

the story (Jones, Adams, Ellis, 2013; Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015). Over the course of writing this research paper, I have been reflecting and reliving many moments and memories of my life, and determining which parts of my story to focus on to best illustrate how I achieved a sense of belonging.

### ***b. Theory of Belonging***

Writing about place will often acknowledge the past and the way it is associated with the present that can ground the way an individual feels they belong in the place (Huggan, 2003). The concept of belonging is associated with personal or intimate feelings, like being at home in a place or with a formation of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion through a political construction to claim, justify, or resist an individual's belonging. In social sciences, belonging is often undefined or it is used as a synonym of national, ethnic, or citizenship identity. Place attachment is developed through everyday practice, most often occurring in the home, through a sense of rootedness in the sense of place and place identity through familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment. Sense of self is associated with feelings of belonging in a place, which are tied to personal and social relationships with friends or family, or interactions with strangers sharing public spaces. Language, economy, and security are also associated with a sense of belonging in a place (Antonisch, 2010).

Belonging to a place can be through a synonymous spatial identity, which can be represented through embodied, multisensory, and imaginative inclusions of art (Antonisch, 2010; Bertling & Moore, 2021). "Environmental art pedagogies" is the combination of visual art and environmental education, which responds to local ecology and culture. Place-based pedagogy combined with art making opens up space for social critique, scientific inquiry, and political

activism. Environmental art pedagogies in curriculums today still requires more knowledge of environmental awareness among educators, and for more resources and professional development to assist with curricular ideas, lesson plans, and best practices (Bertling & Moore, 2021). Connection to a place to develop a sense of belonging can be achieved through a mindful practice of stillness, or a practice of drawing. Creating some of the images which come later on in the paper have helped me to understand my sense of belonging.

### **i. Belonging in Changing Landscapes**

“Hometown is an intimate place. It may be plain, lacking in architectural distinction and historical glamour... Home place and quotidian life feel real” (Tuan, 1977, pp. 144-145). We anchor these familiar places when we are not in them, often feeling like something is left behind or distinguishing differences between the familiar and the unfamiliar place (Tuan, 1977). Similarly, when landscapes change, whether from the experiences of an individual leaving and returning, or changes occurring as communities evolve, the meaning of places are protected by local values and identity based on the traditions and history. Our existence in these places is based on perceived intrinsic qualities of memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences and conceptions of behaviours an individual carries to define their existence (Preston, 2003).

The freedom to belong in society is impacted by individual and collective responses and understanding of belonging. Humans need their basic needs, including feeling love, met to thrive, and without those the notion of belonging and freedom of expression becomes suppressed and limited (Antonisch, 2010; Rode, 2013). Belonging to a place requires a sustained preservation to perceive and understand the surrounding world and mutual communication of people, ethics, and aesthetics. For example, Latvian folk songs, *dainas*, from the late sixteenth

century, are folklore songs instructing on how to live ethically in mutual compatibility for human belonging in relation to the phenomena of nature (Rode, 2013). How people pass on the stories of landscapes over time demonstrates the relationships we have with places and the way we interact with the landscape. These interactions are formed by the history of relationships between humans, plants, animals, water, and minerals (Gibbs, 2014).

I have found that most of my sense of belonging comes from the freedom to interact with my neighbours and exploring the world around me, especially through observation and creation of art. Sharing my individual experience by exploring my process of creating art has widened my perspective of what it means to intentionally belong. I also know I can come back to the Niagara Region and connect with the community and neighbours from my childhood with a new perspective. Additional connections are formed when memories are shared and stories are told of the surrounding environment. A recent conversation with a neighbour in my parents' neighbourhood allowed us both to reflect on the changes in the neighbourhood, particularly when the neighbouring orchard and my parents' greenhouse were sold to new owners.

After moving away from my childhood home, I have been able to build my community that is separate from my parents, which continues to expand in the different places I live in. Each place feels like home in a unique way, and I become part of the community. When I chose to move back to Niagara, my community grew again at WiseOak where I have been able to share experiences with the neighbours, John and Evelyn. They are supportive of the WiseOak community; whenever it is possible, I like to connect with them, often stop by to say hi or by helping with their yard work.

In my time at WiseOak, I explored the Bruce Trail section for a morning walk most days. Similarly, when I lived near High Park before the pandemic, I would hike the trails every

morning, often meeting other people in the neighbourhood. Both the Bruce Trail (Figure 5) and High Park (Figure 6) are popular places to visit, and their use and significance changed with the pandemic. To me, they are important as places that I feel a connection to the land, through their history and significance in the community.



*Figure 5: Bruce Trail by the first Welland Canal, near WiseOak. I would walk every morning for a few months, I would often stop and talk to community members who also accessed the trail*



*Figure 6: Howard Park Avenue entrance to High Park. When I lived in Toronto, I loved to visit High Park, something I did daily when I moved into the neighbourhood on Sunnyside Avenue.*

Places are formed by the history of interactions between humans, plants, animals, water and landscapes, particularly based on the passage of shared stories over time (Gibbs, 2014).

When governance and planning are based on the values of stories about people and places, the definition of places becomes defined by the communities. The physical and cultural aspects of



landscapes are prioritized when community commitment values the subconscious and consciousness of place, and community virtue becomes legitimised in planning decisions (Preston, 2003). People who are from a certain place and their successive generations, as well as new individuals and cultural groups who immigrate into the place, become part of an evolving landscape, which includes perceptions and knowledge of individual and collective experiences (Preston, 2003). The biophysical process and cultural activities change the landscape, and simultaneously carry meanings and symbols that ground the cultural heritage as landscapes change over time (Preston, 2003). These changes are as simple as observing the spring growth and bird migrations after a long winter. The daffodils (Figure 7, Figure 8), are some of my favourite ones to see return every spring, for their bright and vibrant colours.



April 16 2021 first  
WiseOak backyard daffodils

*Figure 7: The first daffodils of the year at WiseOak, April 2021*



first daffodils, High Park,  
April 18, 2020

*Figure 8: The first daffodils of the year at High Park, one month into the pandemic before I moved back to St. Catharines.*



## **ii. A Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging can be a phenomenological experience, which occurs through human-nature relationships. A sense of belonging is in the soul and cannot be reached by mere articulation, but by engaging in activities of the local society and culture. Ultimately, belonging to a place is determined by how strongly an individual feels connected to the identity of a place. The level of empathy and emotion experienced through participation and involvement is part of the experience. Alienation occurs from incidents of being outside other activities (Relph, 1976).

Technological advancements and increased spatial mobility makes it more difficult to achieve sense of place and thereby sense of belonging in contemporary society, resulting in more disconnected feelings. The fast pace changes occurring in our environments also leave individuals struggling with feelings of alienation due to lack of social connections (Relph, 1976). Sense of belonging is difficult to express as living environments become increasingly unfamiliar. Individuals can spend their whole lives to find their place in the world, referring to spatial and political meanings, including location, social position, and life purpose. There is a material and biological relationship for people to connect with each other in particular places to form a sense of belonging to both the place and the community (Segers *et al*, 2021).

The quality of experiences an individual has in their community deepens their relationship to the environment, which is accentuated by an authentic sense of belonging achieved from openness and honesty of intentions (Relph, 1976). The different identities of places and genuine experiences an individual has creates an authentic-placemaking when they are aware of their relationship with the world. The relationship humans have with their environment requires a learning process for individuals to be accountable to themselves and their surroundings. This is achieved by ensuring an individuals' personal responsibility generates a

greater relationship with the community (Orr, 1991). This process needs a contribution of knowledge and an ecological, place-based, and inquiry-based investigation to understand the sense of belonging in a place (Judson, 2015; Orr, 1991).

### ***c. Theory of Place***

Gabriel Marcel stated “an individual is not distinct from his place, he is that place” (cited in Relph, 1976, pp.43). Theory of place is based on the essence that is curated from the actions and intentions of meaningful events which focus on the context of certain places. Social and cultural values give meaning to place; appreciation of a place always involves a physical material form, ranging from a favourite chair to a metropolitan area or region. The association of built or natural elements, and the investment of time or energy puts additional meaning and value on a place, which can be interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, or imagined (Relph, 1976; Gieryn, 2000) by an individual.

Experience, attitude, memory, and sensations determine the depth of intensity a place is appreciated for, which is distinct to each individual, and can be sharper between individuals with shared experience. Common language, symbols, experiences, and interactions develop a socialised identity of place that it becomes known for. This identity is maintained by progressing knowledge and reconciliation of new and old constructions of expression to adapt, accommodate, socialise, and assimilate belonging. Identity of place is dynamic, based on knowledge and reconciliation of meanings to reflect changing social, spiritual physical, aesthetic, and cultural traditions of a community (Relph, 1976).

The relationship humans have with nature also determines the authentic and unique characteristics that are significant to places. These are often lost in modern landscapes that increasingly look alike which makes a place feel superficial and sense of place is inauthentic. When individuals are unaware of the governing body, the significance a place has in the landscape becomes unappreciated because it lacks authentic involvement, engagement, or commitment. Relevance of place is also based on socially accepted opinions through tourism. Tourism today provides uniform experiences through mass communication, mass culture, big business, and modification of significant and diverse places to create similar landscapes experientially and visually. Self-expression within the landscape and community is also important, for an individual to be aware of their sense of belonging in a place (Relph, 1976; Relph, 2016).

Central authorities and economic systems formulate standardised places which manufacturers, governments, and designers communicate through the media. Inauthentic, dispassionate, impersonal, and manipulated treatment of places is known as *kitsch*, by focusing on the economy rather than the significance of culture. Presently, mass production dictates mass culture; and centralised governments reduce local initiatives of communities, despite the scale a state must accommodate to manage the economic-industrial system. The modification of landscapes has changed social attitudes, resulting in individuals feeling placeless, particularly as environments are artificially lit and become more separated from nature (Relph, 1976; Relph, 2016).

Authentic geography focuses on the experience intended by a landscape, where the place is understood through the symbols and lives of the individuals and communities. Expression of landscapes through traditions and symbols of cultures also influence how individuals experience

an environment. Emotional and psychological relationships tie people and places together, particularly through the combination of experience and intention when nature is infused in the creation of a place. Human experience plays a significant role in how a place is developed. Places cannot be truly unique due to associated identities with other places or that there are many different places. Detachment to place occurs when individuals are uprooted, whether voluntary or imposed, and results in feeling not belonging anywhere (Relph, 1976; Relph, 2016).

When culture and community remain central in a place, significant and distinct places can be created and appreciated (Relph, 1976; Relph, 2016). It is important to note that places have become hybridised cultures, with ideas and practices brought from people travelling to and visiting from other places. The ideas of home are practised in these new places and modified based on the knowledge that is passed on. Today cultural connections are interwoven in the same place as cultural significance remains intact through the ease of communication with relatives from home countries, while individuals assimilate into their new place. The amalgamation of networks influencing place makes it important for individuals to value their roots while aspiring to intertwine themselves into the local place (Relph, 2016). Distinct qualities borrow elements from the local environment, which can change as humans change their relationship with the landscape. The physical features and terrain elements change and influence actions and patterns of settlement. Landscapes are also modified based on cultural and social norms, economic values, and technological advancements, and government responses (Jackson, 1976, p.15).

### **i. Coming Back To Place**

Familiarity of a place comes with knowing and being known in it, as well as having a deep concern for the place based on innate and taught knowledge. Familiarity also comes with a

profound attachment of ties that humans can recognise through active participation in the community to ensure an order of liberty, responsibility, equality, and security (Relph, 1976). When these become disrupted, a feeling of placelessness and displacement can result in yearning for a lost place (Antonsich, 2010).

I see that although I started out to write about *going home*, so far this is less about place than it is about memory and personal history. Even though that shift has been an unconscious veering off-course, it's no accident: the act of returning, as everyone knows who has gone away, is an attempt to know oneself, just as the initial departure sprung from the same source. You think it's the landscape you want to see again, but really you're looking for yourself. Coming back to the place you are from, after a long absence, you see things the way they were, not as they are - you come face to face with surprising ghosts, invisible to everyone else and some of the ghosts wear your face (Huggan, 2003, p. 94).

Family roots generally creates a sense of belonging. Close relationships with people and places can be formed when a family home is the foundation of an individual's identity, particularly for a secure physiological and psychological attachment. This attachment results in a profound commitment for a place which relies on past and future experiences an individual has in a community. Nostalgia for a place occurs when attachment to a place is recognised by the commitment of being tied to a specific place bound with established scenes, symbols, and routines grounding everyday life with basic tasks and hardships of labour. Associations with place begins at birth, and place attachment grows stronger into childhood and adulthood. Sense of place results from a sense of nostalgia that occurs when the individual is uprooted from it (Relph, 1976). Individuals recognise places distinctly from others, and each place has a distinct identity based on the experience and intention of the individual. Belonging does not just occur

naturally, it requires constant and conscious recognition of what makes sense of self in a place or community. Common identities of objects and activities tend to have similar and different phenomena of place. Human involvement in a community continues to improve connections between individuals and deepens shared knowledge of the landscape and its characteristics, contributing to the maintenance and manipulation of places (Relph, 1976). I have *felt* most connected to places when I am able to take or make pictures, as they allow me to be aware of my presence in the landscape and have helped me to discover my sense of self and my belonging in the different places I have lived.

Returning to the place that is part of my childhood has helped me to what perspectives and biases I have of the Niagara Region. Reading through the history of Niagara Region has enabled me to situate myself and my own childhood better into the past and present. Since graduating high school I have left and returned to Niagara a number of times, and each time I notice different things that I never noticed before. Returning also enabled me to discover places I had never been before, and rediscover old places. Some changes are small, and some are very significant. Just as city development causes the urban landscape to change, the impact of invasive species such as the Emerald Ash Borer and Dog Strangling Vine changes the forest landscape as well.

Travelling west from St. Catharines, I remember a greenhouse that was built during my elementary school years, specifically how the structure seemed so expansive once it was constructed. This stands out in my memory, as I watched the building change everyday on the bus to and from school. The western part of Fourth Avenue in St. Catharines has also changed dramatically; an entire plaza now extends all the way to First Street, which is less than three kilometres from my parents' house. WiseOak is located in a much busier neighbourhood than my

parents' neighbourhood, but it also feels like living in a forest because it is surrounded by so many trees.

## **ii. Historical Ties to Place**

Regional folklore including names for flora, fauna, and topography belong to the local history of a place, which are passed down from generation to generation. These become part of the place-based group identity that is intimate and apocryphal, associated with emotions or affection attached to a place. An individual also develops a recognisable sensation of texture, smells, and sounds associated with a place when they feel they belong to it (Lippard, 1997). Geography is used in academics to explore history and it seeks to explain the importance of economy, society, and physical components of a landscape which create the character, feeling, and vitality of a place, *ie*, neighbourhood, city, or region, to understand the present (Jackson, 1976).

## **iii. Cultural Ties to Place**

Social interaction and activity of individuals impact the significance of places, due to the relationship with others taking place within the physical environment. Personal identity generally develops from these relationships which extend to attach to the physical landscape and place, and is reinforced by community beliefs, values, and interpersonal involvements. Persistence of human activities reflects the values and intentions that contribute to the way an individual or a community experiences a place. Visual modifications also reflect how associated attachments and experiences also adapt. Attachment to a place continues to grow with the sense of community to feel that the identity of a place will also endure. The individual attitude or

intention of experiences result in an infinite number of individual private geographies and profound encounters with place is known as ‘topophilia.’ Cultural identity with and of a place is also associated with emotional connections to a place and, which helps to generate a stronger sense of place (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1967).

#### ***d. Art as Ecological Expression***

Art as an embodied, multisensory, and imaginative experience can evoke empathy towards an environment; when art and environmental education are combined, they form “environmental art pedagogies.” Local culture, landscapes, and ecology can respond to place-based pedagogy through art making, social critique, scientific inquiry, and political activism. Local cultural or social elements that reflect a community or an individual are often shared in public art, and more recently adorn the blank walls of buildings at intersections in commercial areas. The creation of a mural can be an act of generosity toward the environment, which adds prosperity and collective memory of the place. Collaboration of groups asserting different interests of the community to best represent and communicate community values is very cathartic for many individuals (Grant-Smith & Matthews, 2014; Lievrouw & Pope, 1994; Rose, 2016; Salim, 2017). The aim of shared images is to bring together contemporary culture as a method to interact and connect with the local culture. Images are interpreted based on the inspiration, material, form, and engagement the artist used (Rose, 2016).

Environmental art pedagogies need to focus on cultural production to consciously understand the meanings in society (Bertling & Moore, 2021; Rose, 2016). Culture is crucial to understand identities, changes and conflicts associated within socio-cultural formation, which



can be achieved through art therapy (Rose, 2016; Segers *et al*, 2021). Art therapy involves principles of relational resonating, creative embodiment, expressive communicating, adaptive responding, transformational integrating and empathising, and compassion. The process of art therapy supports interaction between individuals, by sharing the creation of art with of individual experiences to develop a deeper bond between them (Segers *et al*, 2021).

Identity and self-expression in communities often result in the creation of a mural as a way to make a mark on the cultural landscape. The mural may depict ephemeral or historical events, or seek to determine the progress and direction of the community (Salim, 2017). The process of creation often gives an opportunity for artists and the community together to reflect and create place identity. Community involvement helps to reflect and create a meaningful space that is used daily or for festivities, and extends the qualities of individual experience to tell a more complete story of the whole community (Salim, 2017; Grant-Smith & Matthews, 2014; Rose, 2016). Artistic creation also depends on audience interpretation or perception, which is contributed by those who participate. Demonstrating agency to create a sense of place in a public space as individuals in a community tells many stories of individual sense of belonging in the place (Rose, 2012).

Individual exchanges create experiences of sequence, synchrony, connectivity, mutual benefit and transmission of wisdom, memory, and traditions (Rose, 2012). Rose (2012) explains that biological order has a tendency to create order out of disorder, organisation out of disorganisation, and the gift within this ecological flow is a precarious partnership between life and earth. In a multispecies world, there are numerous relational exchanges, and the condition of life is indebted to the ones who came before is established. Rose (2012) explains that it is a gift to be responsible for others, both to nourish and to be nourished. Crafting *response-ability*,

according to Haraway (2016), is cultivated through entangled multiscalar, multitemporal, multimaterial worlding, through accountability that infects processes and practices. The lives of every living being is entangled which demands a viral response-ability and accountability in an ethical, permanently unfinished time (Rose, 2012; Haraway, 2016). In my own art, I feel it is possible to connect with a community through the pictures and paintings I take or make. They are my own personal memories that I can share and often connect more intimately with other individuals from their creation.

## **Chapter 3: Foundational Patterns of the Tapestry**

In this chapter, I aim to understand geography and how it ties into the concept of place and its importance for situating belonging. The physical, historical, and economic geography of the Niagara region situates my own concept of place by contextualising the importance of my belonging. My belonging is situated by focusing on the Niagara Region where I aim to understand my experiences in certain places.

Perception of people and places is developed from childhood, when curiosity puts a permanence to label experiences of places and people with deep meaning. A steady growth of sentiment towards a place occurs as spaces are organised based on the values of culture, which are determined by how we take up space with our bodies and how we represent ourselves. Societal and family influences determines the way an individual interprets their environment and the relationship they have with the landscape. the landscape. Humans are social beings who simultaneously desire connection with each other and value privacy. When this is possible without restricting individual freedom, the world can feel spacious and friendly, and if these needs are not met the world can feel cramped and frustrating (Tuan, 1977).

### ***a. Basis of Geography***

The study of geography is concerned with the natural physical expressions of environments and the interconnections and characteristics of particular places and landscapes. Landscapes are remembered as a concept of place, which is significant to the way humans experience events. Consciously perceiving and inquiring about spaces and objects of nature in the world makes us human. The world we live in is created phenomenologically, based on our personal epistemology of memory, fantasy, circumstances, and future experiences. Formal

knowledge and identity of places helps further individual experience in particular places, which maintain significance based on distinct and essential features to give context in everyday life (Relph, 1976).

Individual perception of existential or lived spaces are distinguished by experiences when behaviour is instinctive and unselfconscious. The physical solidness of the earth generates an intimacy of setting down roots and foundations in an environment, as places undergo a constant creation by fleeting experiences. Childhood is a significant time of self-discovery, which creates memories and meanings of places for an individual and how they insert themselves into a place. Social and cultural beliefs and practices help to define meaningful spaces for individuals to meet their needs.

### ***b. Niagara in General***

The Niagara Peninsula is a unique landform that is often referred to as a land bridge. The Niagara Region extends from the Head of Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. The lower portion of the Grand River marks the western extent of the river, and the Niagara River as far east. The area became known as the Regional Municipality of Niagara, also known as the Niagara Region or Region of Niagara, in 1969 with the merging of the County of Lincoln and County of Welland. St. Catharines became the primary urban centre, due to its association with the Welland Canal construction (Jackson, 1976, p.15-16). The manufacturing industry, including companies such as General Motors, has also been important for the growth of St. Catharines and other towns in the region. Niagara Falls is an internationally known landmark along the Niagara River, which

separates Canada and the United States, with cities named for the Falls on both sides of the border, about a twenty minute drive from St. Catharines on the highway.

St. Catharines is associated with Catharine Hamilton, wife of Robert Hamilton, an influential merchant from the late 1700s. St. Catherine of Alexandria is also associated with the name, when La Salle journeyed along the creek twelve miles west of the Niagara River from Lake Ontario or Lake Ontario to Lake of the Eries or Lake Erie. On St. Catherine's feast day a spring was found at the present day intersection of St. Paul and Yates Streets, the location of the Homer Bar . Street names in St. Catharines are associated with some of the first settlers and where they settled. Mills, particularly water-driven mills, would meet the needs of settlers in established areas. Other streets follow historical Indigenous paths and settlers' trails following natural features, and the oldest section of downtown does not conform to the survey grid. As it settled, the Grantham Township was divided into ten concessions with twenty-two lots, excluding the existing concessions near the Twelve Mile Creek. Niagara, Chippawa, and Queenston functioned as the main commercial and business establishments, until the first general store was opened in 1808 on St. Paul Street (Jackson, 1976).

The Twenty Mile and Twelve Mile Creeks were particularly important for water powering mills in the early 1800s, and their estuaries for harbouring industries and ships. Regional Road 81, also known as Highway 8, served as the major east-west transportation route, following the shoreline of ancient Lake Iroquois, just north of the Niagara Escarpment. The meeting point of the Niagara River and Welland River, also known as Chippawa Creek, was a primary settlement for Indigenous people (Jackson, 1976, pp. 27).



*Figure 9: The First Welland Canal, alongside Bradley Avenue*



*Figure 10: The Fourth Welland Canal, facing north*

The Welland Canal was constructed in 1829 (Figure 9) and economic opportunities in the region increased significantly (Moss, 1994; Turner; 1994). The Escarpment and streams along it influenced settlement in the Niagara Peninsula, as the streams could harness water power for mills and later be used for hydro-electric power. The Canal vastly improved the connection between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, enabling more efficient travel of people and goods to and from the St. Lawrence River, and since its conception, it has undergone several changes (Figure 10), to the final and fourth construction which is still in use today, including a trail alongside it for recreation use, which I remember going to when I was young. Waterways also enabled the development of mills, and estuaries were used for industry and ship traffic. The Queen Elizabeth Way, the first multi-lane highway in Canada, was constructed in 1917 to connect the Niagara Region and Toronto, extending to Fort Erie in 1939. (Moss, 1994; Turner; 1994).

The Welland Canal and its recreation trail has become more important to me now that I live closer to it, which is easily accessible from WiseOak via Glendale Avenue. It feels even more significant now that I have studied the history of the canal, and that the first Welland Canal is a few minutes walk from Mountain Street, via Allanburg Road. Prior to this, I knew only of the present day canal, which is particularly stunning to see from the Garden City Skyway. Despite making use of its recreation trail along the west side of the canal as a child, only now does the significant size and impressive engineering of the canal stand out to me.

The Niagara Region is home to more than 200,000 acres of agricultural land, and the unique geographic characteristics of the Niagara Escarpment, and its drainage provides fertile soils near the shores of Lake Ontario (Niagara Economic Development, 2021; Gayler, 1994; Moss, 1994; Turner, 1994). The Niagara Escarpment is also a significant landmark, as well as the Bruce Trail, which follows the Escarpment land formation, and is recognized by the UNESCO World Biosphere program and spans 900 km across southern Ontario. The Niagara Escarpment Commission has put in place preservation policies, which includes the Niagara Escarpment Act, due to the unique environment, with extreme variability and diversity (Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2021). The history and development in the Niagara Region was impacted by the Escarpment, due to its susceptibility to damage to its unique environment.

I can easily envision myself in the specific places of the region that I write about, and the landmarks, their history, and how they became part of the settlement I know today has become much more meaningful as I learned more about them. There were many occasions my parents took us out to places such as Short Hills Provincial Park (Figure 12), the Niagara Glen, Rockway Conservation Area which are all connected to the Bruce Trail. When I was a bit older we discovered the Twenty Valley Trail, that connects to the Bruce Trail and Balls Falls

Conservation Area. On school field trips we would often go to Balls Falls, and we learned about the settler history that took place. Louth Conservation Area (Figure 11) is another place that my family would visit when I was a bit older, and its rocky terrain stands out to me as they might have been the sort of rocks used by settlers in the early development.



*Figure 11: Bruce Trail in Louth Conservation Area, a place I discovered in my early adulthood, still connected to different childhood places along the Bruce Trail.*

*Figure 12: Short Hills Provincial Park, I learned to ski here, and would come here on many family adventures in my childhood, especially when relatives came to visit.*

### **i. Physical Formation of Niagara**

The Niagara Peninsula is separated by three distinct physiographic areas. The Escarpment extends from Rochester, New York west to Ancaster, Ontario, and ends at the Bruce Peninsula. Between the Escarpment at 400 ft elevation and Lake Ontario at 270 ft elevation is the Lakeshore Plain, which also contains the Iroquois Plain of the former Lake Iroquois. The Twelve Mile,



Sixteen Mile, Twenty Mile (Figure 13), and Forty Mile Creeks flow north from the escarpment into Lake Ontario. These creeks are named based on the distance in miles from the Niagara River. The widest part of this plain is at the Niagara River, and tapers near Grimsby. The area is known for a longer growing season, having a more mild and lower annual rainfall than up on the escarpment. The shores of Lake Ontario were bluffs 30 to 40 ft high, which have eroded down to the current sand bars at the Ten, Twelve, and Fifteen Mile Creeks. The natural shorelines at Port Dalhousie and Port Weller have been drastically altered for the Welland Canal. Behind the entrance of the Twelve Mile Creek was once an impounded lagoon, which maintained some depth during the dry season. A 1794 shoreline survey notes that the Sixteen Mile Creek, named also for its distance west from the Niagara River, had a pond navigable for small boats when the water was high, providing a safe and convenient anchorage. This is where Charles Daley Park (Figure 14) is, which I went to often when I was young, mainly to go to the beach in the summer time. We would visit frequently because it is only five kilometres from my parents' house. In the summer my mother would pack a picnic dinner and we would stay to see the sunset; in the winter some years it was possible to walk on the ice that formed on the lake (Jackson, 1976, pp. 28).



*Figure 13: Twenty Valley Trail along the Twenty Mile Creek to Balls Falls, part of the Bruce Trail*



*Figure 14: One of the last willow trees at the beach in Charles Daley Park where I went to often in the summers of my childhood*

The Haldimand Clay Plain has an elevation of 625 ft and is situated between the Escarpment and Lake Erie; near Wainfleet and Humberstone are peat bogs that are much smaller. The Twenty, Sixteen, and Fifteen Mile Creeks drain over the escarpment with waterfalls. The terrain is mostly flat, dipping close to Lake Erie. The Onondaga Escarpment runs parallel to the shore of Lake Erie, which has a low shoreline with limestone headlands and bay-head beaches with sand dunes. Fonthill is the highest point of the peninsula, with an elevation of 850 ft, draining north and south into the Twenty Mile Creek and Welland River. Short Hills Provincial Park, which opened in 1974, is directly north of Fonthill, and is the most central location of the Niagara Peninsula. Narrow v-shaped valleys with sharply etched deposits and

small steep-sided intervening headlands are unique physical features to this area (Jackson, 1976, p. 41).

The Homer Bar is a deposit of small, thin accumulation of sand and gravel 10 feet below the shoreline of Lake Iroquois, enclosing a shallow lagoon or bay. When water from the Homer Bar retreated into the lower Twelve Mile Creek valley, many sharply incised streams and ravines dissecting the Glenridge area between the escarpment and the Lake Iroquois shoreline were formed (Jackson, 1976, pp. 41-42). This is now the location of downtown, currently the stretch of King Street and St. Paul Street, bordered by Ontario Street and Geneva Street.

## **ii. Development of Niagara**

Existing Indigenous trails determined the pattern of European settlement. St. Paul Street, or Regional Road 81, was ‘the street leading to Niagara’, while Ontario Street was ‘the street leading towards the lake.’ Canboro Road from Drummondville to Wellandport was constructed, complementing the Iroquois Trail above the escarpment. Niagara Stone Road crossed the Black Swamp, joining the road from Niagara via Middle Road (now Niagara Street) and links to Ontario Street. St. Johns Conservation Area near Short Hills Provincial Park was accessed with a road diagonally from Greens Corner to Beaverdams and DeCew Falls. Pelham Road, Oakdale Road, and Merritt Street were all improved in the time of European settlement (Jackson, 1976, p. 51).

Queenston Street follows along the former Homer Bar, from which Niagara Street branches off and meets Lakeshore Road, a well used trail to Niagara, now Niagara-on-the-Lake. The trail was relocated often due to the estuarine stream mouths on the bay bars, loose sand, north wind exposure, and constant erosion by the waves. Martindale Road and Pelham Road

follow along the Twelve Mile Creek (Jackson, 1976, p. 52). Today, the QEW and Highway 406 are the main travel routes across the peninsula, providing easy access to other communities including Welland, Niagara Falls, Queenston, Jordan, Vineland, Beamsville, and Grimsby. Short Hills Provincial Park, Rockway Conservation Area, Balls Falls Conservation Area, and Beamer Memorial Conservation Area are still easily accessible along Highway 81, the former Iroquois Trail. Highway 405 from the QEW towards Niagara Falls is the easiest way to go to the Niagara Glen. Niagara-on-the-Lake is still accessible with its original route:

Quarries along the escarpment edge, mill sites and hydro-electric power stations and industry, raceways, residential development and administrative buildings were developed in south St. Catharines, where the escarpment is more gradual, especially west of Short Hills. The Decew Falls Water Treatment Plant and Decew Falls Generating Station No.1, operated by the Ontario Power Generation is situated where the Beaverdams Creek flowing west above the escarpment crosses the escarpment at Decew Falls into the Twelve Mile Creek. The meeting point of Twelve Mile and Captain Dick's Creeks was the first developed area of St. Catharines.

The land close to Lake Ontario was enriched from the layer of fallen leaves from the trees in the area, including oak, different kinds of walnut, chestnut, hickory, sugar maple, ash, pine, cedar, wild vines, and others. This soil supported agriculture for vegetables, fruit, and wheat, and the rivers were abundant with fish. The oak lands and plains between Queenston and Chippawa resulted in lighter sand, making wheat production harder due to the drainage. Soil of the lower lands near Niagara-on-the-Lake is mostly made up of red clay knoll, and tree species in the area include black and white ash, red and white oak, and elm. Cherry, quince, plum, peach, pear, and apple tree orchards were planted on sandy ridges of the escarpment and across much of the peninsula evidence remains of old orchard trees. Near my parents' house, more west in the

Town of Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake are many wineries and agriculture lands still in production (Jackson, 1976, p. 92).

Other production included timber material, minerals from the saline spring and iron bog ore in the low wetlands; lime, fire and building stone on the ridge of the escarpment; and the natural state of the soil optimising white clover, red top, red clover, spear grass, and herds grass for agriculture. Grantham Township's population was over 30 persons per square mile because it was favourable for the quantity of wool per sheep, yield of wheat in bushels per acre, weight gain of an ox, and milk yield of a cow. Paul Shipman's tavern became the central venue for township meetings, to restore prosperity following the war. This was a slow process without tax revenue, lack of money, scarcity of labourers, and absent landowners. The quality of land access, extent of clearance, drainage, and production capabilities reflected the price of land as well as highest cultivation and wealth between Queenston and Lake Ontario. Over one hundred and fifty acres of land had been cleared and smoothed from frequent ploughing and decayed stumps (Jackson, 1976, p. 93). To this day, Niagara is still very much oriented around agriculture, but has had to focus on artisan goods and tourism for its economy.

Today, many farms are bought out by developers as younger generations often do not want to take over. Housing development is prominent in many places that were once rich agricultural lands; seeing the construction happening is still surprising none-the-less. Farms learn to adapt in the economy by incorporating themselves into tourism; this is very popular for wineries who collaborate with local restaurants to increase attraction. This is not always the case for greenhouses producing flowers, which was the case for my parents to sell the greenhouse as it became harder to be a sustainable business when competing against food agriculture. There are some flower growers that have become partners in the tourism of Niagara.

Studying development of cities in my first year of Environmental Studies at York University, has also made me aware of how close to the city my parents are now, as it continues to grow into the agricultural areas. I significantly remember how the dynamic of Fourth Avenue changed when Walmart and Best Buy were built, associated with the SmartCentres that are found in most cities in Ontario. The new St. Catharines General Hospital moved from its old location on Queenston Street, just past the downtown to the southwest corner of Fourth Avenue and First Street; with the Harvest Barn across the street and surrounded by open fields to the west. These changes have made my parents' house feel like part of the urban sprawl, because of how close these places are now.

### **iii. Culture and Society in Niagara**

Evidence of the earliest human occupation was found in Dunnville, formerly Dunn Township; families relied on fish at certain points of the year, and maintained a subsistence economy to survive. The most prominent period of Indigenous occupation in the region was the Neutral Indians, going as far back as 1550. After 1650 the Iroquois destroyed and assimilated the Neutral Indians, setting up camps for fishing and hunting expeditions. The Iroquois would collect furs for the French fort situated at the mouth of the Niagara River, and later the British fort (Jackson, 1976, p. 95). The British relocated Indigenous groups to the lower Grand River after seeking refuge at Fort Niagara, despite the fact that Indigenous people had lived in the region prior to the permanent settlement of Europeans.

Immigrants arrived mainly from New York State and Pennsylvania, and a few from New Jersey and New England. The British Corps, and those of English, Irish, and Scottish descent settled mainly in Grantham Township; German Protestants, French Hugenots and

Dutch Calvinists (Mennonites) experienced in farming, saw-milling, grist-milling, merchandising, and trading settled in Louth Township, in the area between St. Catharines and Niagara Falls and the Indian lands along the Grand River (Jackson, 1976, p. 95).

According to Jackson (1976, p. 15), the United States invested and developed industry in steel, chemical, and other engineering complexes in Buffalo-Tonawanda and Niagara Falls, while Canada focused mainly on generating electricity and tourism at the Falls. Tourist destinations include the floral clock, the butterfly conservatory, the gift shops, the Falls itself, the greenhouse, and the array of attractions on Lundy's Lane.

## **Chapter 4: Weaving my Personal Story of Belonging in Place**

In this chapter, I begin to unfold my own story of belonging in the region through an autoethnographic approach. My personal memories, experiences, goings and comings to the region accounts for how an individual evolves to belong. The account shows how the personal can enhance an understanding of a place. I reflect on my parents' home in relation to the geography of Niagara, and that of WiseOak, which culminates in my return to the region, and how I have changed and the region has changed. I include my art, a collection of spring flowers, paintings or photographs in places of my own belonging, and how the process of belonging is an individual and community journey.

I have spent most of my life trying to figure out where I belonged. I did not question this in my formative years, however, by the time I was a teenager I felt I did not belong fully anywhere. These are the years often most associated with independence and self-discovery, yet I was quite a shy individual and did not feel comfortable to seek a different community. For that reason, most of my youth was spent alone, spending most of my time at my parents' farm, where they grew flowers in the west of St. Catharines. I struggled to belong in school, particularly in my elementary school class after my two best friends moved away when I was only seven. My class was only a group of sixteen, but I found it difficult to connect with the other kids in the class. Around the same time, my two friends, sisters, from across the street, also moved away. In a short period of time, I lost the closest friendships I had known. I held on to the ones with my cousin Judith, and my friend Elise, who I met on our brothers' Scouts Family Day when we were 10 years old.



From a young age I spent a lot of time visiting my cousins in Hagersville on their farm, usually for birthdays or holidays. When we visited the Netherlands, most of the time we stayed with my maternal grandparents. Once situated, we could walk or bicycles would be arranged for us to use so we could get around independently. We could join our cousins who knew all the ways to get around town, and with each visit, it was easier to learn the directions. What stands out to me the most is how much I loved the journey to these places, and to spend time with people who accept us for being family.

While I have loved being able to explore and experience different places around the world, and I include Niagara as one of these places, it has been challenging for me to feel at home and belong in one place. Humans have a tendency to consider their own homeland as the centre of the world, despite the diversity of the world. The sense of centrality is also made explicitly with geometrical conceptions of space. Centrality is different for each individual, based on “the centre of an astronomically determined spatial system” (Tuan, 1977, p. 149).

When I moved away for school I was left with the feeling of having multiple homes. I got the chance to live in Australia for three months to volunteer with a conservation program. When I returned, I lived in Lindsay, where I studied Ecosystem Management Technology at Fleming College. After graduating, I moved to France for a year as an au pair, and made the decision to spend the following year in the Netherlands near my relatives, also as an au pair. When I returned to Canada, I moved to Toronto to study at York University, able to fast-track the Bachelor of Environmental Studies through the articulation agreement with Fleming College.

All the places I have been to hold different meanings to me, and they shape who I am today. Feelings of nostalgia and yearning for familiarity are present when I am in new places, and often the experiences are associated with landscapes and communities that are similar to

other places (Gieryn, 2000). There will always be aspects of the other places I have been that will remind me of the current place I am in.

Familiarity and unfamiliarity are present in all places, which have provided many opportunities for me to reflect on where I have been in my life, the communities I have been a part of, and locate my sense of belonging in a place. The feeling of belonging comes with the connection to a community. I share a mutual background of Dutch ethnicity with the landlord of WiseOak, who is also a family friend. We have similar cultural values instilled by our Dutch parents, and we often find a deeper connection when we speak Dutch together. Sense of belonging comes from a deeper sense of self, knowing particular things about yourself and where you come from (Gillies, 2019). I know that WiseOak will not be my home forever, but my experience in the community shapes who I am as a person in the world.

### ***a. Analysing Belonging***

“Everything belongs right where it is. There is nothing in our lives that doesn’t fit (Huggan, 2003, p. 329). Belonging is multidimensional and often used synonymously to define national or ethnic identity. Dimensions of belonging include place-belongingness; the feeling of being at home in a place that is personal and intimate; the politics of belonging that constructs claims, justifications, or resistances to forms of socio-spatial inclusions or exclusions; and a sense of belonging through a private sentiment of attachment to place which may build and grow out of everyday practices, either through an official, public orientation, i.e. citizenship, or informal, private connections, i.e. friendship (Antonsich, 2010).

Belonging to a place and sense of self are closely associated, and the feelings of belonging are developed through a process of self-formation (Antonsich, 2010). Sense of

belonging to a group is developed through long-lasting, positive, stable, and significant relationships via physical interactions (Antonsich, 2010). Rode (2013) states that the meaning of life in an environment develops from the respect between other persons, and individuals can reveal and ascertain themselves in the social environment, ranging from nation, family, religious community or social status. When individuals connect and naturally interact with the environment, they can retain a sense of individuality, through creation of art by consciously exposing the connections of land, nature, culture, and place (Lippard, 1997, p. 19).

Belonging can be studied anthropologically, through the symbols in culture, or ethnographically, by finding out the symbols and how they are used in individual lives in the culture (Preston, 2003). Attachment to place is addressed by the traditional culture of a landscape, which is embedded in community identity, based on associated beliefs, customs, and practices (Preston, 2003). My own belonging began when I understood who I am, separate from my parents. I could then embrace my childhood home and explore familiar places that had been part of my upbringing, but also embrace who I am in these places in the present.

I have been able to express my perspective of the world through visual art. Drawing and painting places helps me to remember that it is important to respect my environment and the connections in a community. In the present moment, in part because of the pandemic, I am living again in the region where I grew up. I have come to understand that my sense of self is important as the base to belong in a community, which has been achieved from my time with the WiseOak community. It is a place where I have accepted my present moment by developing an understanding of my past, and a way to situate myself into the future.

## ***b. Childhood in Niagara***

When my mother was young her father taking her and her siblings out on adventures where they lived, and she wanted to pass similar experiences on to me and my brothers. My mother was very passionate and determined to move to Canada, and because of this, my parents were certain to give us as many opportunities as possible to experience the kind of nature they did not have in the Netherlands. A love of nature was instilled in me from childhood, my mother would take me and my brothers to Short Hills Provincial Park after school, and on weekends we would go to the Niagara Glen Nature Centre. We also went to Ball's Falls Conservation Area for sledding in the winter.

As kids, my brothers and I spent a lot of time exploring the neighbouring orchard and traversed through the properties to another field with a creek behind a greenhouse near us. I fell in love with this sort of adventure, but it also scared me. I did not know what to expect because it seemed we were the only ones who ever came there, except for some of the people working in the fields around it. I did not experience downtown St. Catharines independently until adulthood, despite going to high school in the city. It was still very foreign to me in high school, and I felt intimidated by the constant movement that I was not used to at home. Any experience in downtown St. Catharines was with my friend Elise, who lived a lot closer than I did. After I moved away from home, I started to feel more comfortable with independent experiences of the city.

I compare many of the places I live to my parents' home and Niagara. Having experienced living in different towns and cities around the world, each place is both different and similar in their own unique way. Tsing (2013) writes about forming a trajectory through the

livelihood of everyday life that is awakened through discovery. Furthermore, Coleman (2018) states that there is something to experience in every part of the world. Coleman (2018) states that cities are still part of nature. Often, nature is thought of as places that humans have not inhabited. However, our actions will impact the experience of any wildlife, whether we are in the city or in the farthest away place from a city.

The experiences of living in different places of the world has helped me realise how many similarities of nature there can be. Cairns, Australia, is nestled between the ocean and the tablelands which is similar to St. Catharines with the escarpment and Lake Ontario. The rural town of Lindsay where I studied Ecosystem Management at Fleming College, had its share of city feel, but also felt very close to natural spaces. Rennes, France is a naturally old European city, compared to those of North America, and with gardens and parks showcasing some natural beauty. Until I started living away from my parents, I did not realise how much I took for granted living in a rural area. I have come to realise that cities are as much nature as most forested places, and from the experience of living in in both city and rural, I have come to appreciate my roots in Niagara more thoroughly, and feel accepted within the community I am part of.

### ***c. Community and Acceptance***

Haraway (2016) emphasised that we need each other, that it is crucial to stay with the “tangles” and patterns we map on Earth. We become empowered to give back to the world when we are accepted for our trials and tribulations as individuals in a community. Acceptance continues when we are able to make kin and create community wherever we are in the world. A

| lot of my life, I felt challenged to fit in-, particularly being the only girl among four brothers.

Living outside of the city, without a lot of neighbouring families with kids close in age, made it difficult to form peer connections.

When we visited cousins from out of town or in the Netherlands, connections were always intentional, but they were also short in duration. From the loss of my friends in school and my friends across the street, there were not many more close connections until I made the conscious choice to seek out “my” community. These connections have developed at different stages of my life, particularly when I first moved out of my parents’ house. Initially I did not intentionally seek out a community, as I was only just beginning to learn about who I was outside of the family home. The more time I spent away from my childhood home, the more I learned about myself as an individual in new contexts and settings.

The facets of who I am as an individual also speaks to the community; together we learn and grow as we help each other as individuals. For myself, it is important to be somewhere that I can paint, be in the forest, search for flowers, and even find love. The WiseOak community accepted me, and allowed me to grow through experiences that I can take with me, as I continue to learn how to express myself, connect with the landscape around me, and paint in places I find belonging.

#### ***d. Connections to the Land***

The land is about connections of nature, that are found in the city and also outside of the city, and the history the landscape holds. In St. Catharines, the Niagara Escarpment is a huge part of daily life, as it serves our hydro plant at DeCew Falls, it is visible when driving on the Queen

Elizabeth Way, and it is part of the raptor migration route. Gillies (2019, p. 108) asked “is it easier to find comfort in trees and mountain ranges and the animal kingdom? If so, then we must look to it for comfort and solidarity, and we must protect it.” WiseOak is located on the escarpment, and behind it is a former easement of the Bruce Trail directly south of us on top of the escarpment. I appreciate the connection I have with my childhood home, and all the places I have been able to call home, including WiseOak. Historically, the neighbourhood WiseOak is in was an orchard from the 1800s, and had an important part of the region’s economical history.

Tsing (2013) stated that we have a responsibility to maintain the small piece of the earth in which we live. My parents live in the northwest of St. Catharines, surrounded by agricultural lands, which are continually being developed and urbanised. They are still surrounded by orchards and greenhouses, so the increasing development is not yet visible. Living again in Niagara, I have had many opportunities to discover new places and rediscover places my parents brought me to as a child. Reading the history has helped me develop a deeper understanding of Niagara, and how it came to be my mapping out its social, cultural, economic, and ecological geography. My map (Figure 15) is a collection of memories that are pieced together as I experience the place that shaped my childhood, and now that I have returned to it as an adult, I can reflect on my experiences that also define my sense of self in my discovery of belonging.







### ***e. Sense of Belonging in Place***

Brene Brown (2022), in an interview, states that true belonging is a spiritual practice, a sacred ability of being a part of something and the ability to stand alone. Sense of belonging is a feeling that comes through a twofold community acceptance. The agency of an individual needs to feel comfortable and supported to participate in the community, as well as acceptance for who they are as an individual. With my own journey, I have experienced this when I am able to speak up about my needs, but also having the courage to own my story to reflect and grow.

Looking back, I am grateful for:

- Painting flowers ‘en plein air’, being very specific of what I want to paint, really noticing the environment
- Connecting to new places through the practice of watercolour painting on my first canoe trip

I recognise that my parents were my home that is now an external part of who I am now to who I was as a child. This has now changed as I have entered into adulthood, and lived in places around the world without my parents, now home also resides within. I have been able to reconnect with my childhood home in my adult years only with this lens of understanding who I am in the world, and that who I am is part of the past and will be part of the future. I am a small part of history, but the more I read about where I grew up I came to understand about one small place that is part of my roots. I have also come to understand and develop a deeper connection to my family, and integrate myself into a community with this sense of self. My parents also shared with me the places they grew up when we visited the Netherlands, that I got to experience on my

own for a year without them. The Netherlands will continue to be an important place to me for the family connections.

Not just one place can create a sense of belonging, and while I chose to focus on Niagara, there are other places that I have experienced on my journey that make up part of my sense of belonging. I am able to appreciate my belonging from my childhood in Niagara as I returned to it. From this return, I have been able to find love with Jamie, and whose connection has helped me learn more about myself.

## Chapter 5: Connecting to the Environment through Art

Encountering and seeing the landscape anew by working through and qualifying a sense of newness is effective to distinguish distinct landscapes, and reflecting memory, changes, narratives, or spirituality. Engaging with a place through drawing can emerge a sense of knowing and renew a sense of place, world, and self (Wylie & Webster, 2018). When sketching or painting outdoors, *plein air*, a bodily experience in the world through the process of artistic creation can authentically express space, and intimately contemplate the relations of the environment (Wylie & Webster, 2018).

I have focused most of my art on the specific on aspects of the environment and landscapes that I have seen. In the Netherlands, the daily calendar showcased all kinds of flora and fauna of the country, from which I found a love for drawing birds. In early spring, as the temperatures become hard to navigate between cold and warm, I find it exciting when flowers begin popping up from the ground, in awe of their ability to push through the cold ground of a long winter. I also set out to study watercolour painting so that I could still make art on a canoe trip. The process of drawing or painting makes it possible for me to sit in a place, and truly observe and connect with my surroundings. This has been important to me to come to a deeper understanding of who I am, and where I am. It has also been a way to transmit my own memory to connect with those in my community (Rose, 2012; Segers *et al.*, 2021).

### ***a. Art as my Educational Tool to Explain Belonging***

Reading through the history of Niagara has enabled me to address and embrace my perception of its local knowledge and culture. When an individual understands the cultural

meanings and values of a place, it makes it possible for their experiences to become part of the place where they are as a step to belonging. Engaging with art as a way to belong in a place can occur when an individual also feels belonging in a community. Lippard (1997) stated that an artist has to live where they are, either physically, symbolically, or empathetically. Being centred and grounded in the place makes it possible to be connected to the place in the art making process. Rootlessness or restlessness adds to the process, as these experiences help an individual realise nothing is absolute, but through exchange and empathy in a community makes it possible for components of the art to be significant. Meaningful art needs to recognise a genuine response of belonging (Lippard, 1997).

The art an individual creates is impacted and based on their social, economic, psychological, and spiritual experiences with and in a community (Preston, 2003). Gillies (2019, p. 69) states that, “If we are lucky, we have the freedom and the ability to express it.” In this case, Gillies is referring to decorating, however, the way an individual feels when they express themselves freely by what they create is indeed lucky. The freedom for an individual to express their sense of self, their sense of belonging, their connection with the community and the environment is a powerful tool. “Knowing exactly where something comes from – like a bean – is cozy” (Gillies, 2019, p. 32). History is important, and appreciating where you come from is important as it “enchances the experience of whatever you do next...” (Gillies, 2019, p. 32). In this case, Gillies is referring to the history of the bean and its succeeding generations. Furthermore, by enhancing and engaging myself with heritage movements and the value of the local community, it is possible to be a steward of the land, and empathize with a collective past by connecting to people and places through generations (Gillies, 2019). The expression and creation of art and map-making (Preston, 2003) also helps me to connect with others and

navigate my experiences, by situating myself in the history of a place, environment, and the history.

### ***b. Art as my Grounding Tool in Place through Contemplation and Metaphor***

I have always been creating art as a way to understand myself in the world, which has made it possible to express myself. My mother says that I would draw little cartoons of myself, I believe I used that kind of drawing as a way to situate myself in the world.. Not all languages are able to express or articulate experiences of landscapes, and pictures and rituals are often used to supplement the language through the depiction of experience. The effectiveness of depiction is determined by different individuals, however, the process of expressing and conveying feelings from contemplation and thought often evokes the intimate imaginations of individuals. The way images are portrayed enables individuals to communicate about what they see or feel; viewers will notice different details, or describe the way they feel when they look at the image. It is a way of bringing people together in the descriptions of their experience while viewing the image, and sometimes bringing up their own memories.

An individual can also be distanced from the direct experience to conveying thoughtful reflection of elusive past moments in the present to gain a measure of permanence (Tuan, 1977). For myself, this distance allows me to process and reflect my experience as I progress in the creation of my art. When I take the time to truly observe where I am, who I am with, I can make art to express my belonging and sense of self. While I observe the environment and the landscape I am in, I choose how I want to share the place, take into account my capabilities in my own art making, and consider what others might notice or observe from the finished piece.

These details will be different for everyone, and it is the differences of perception that are appreciated, as it opens up possibilities of communication about the memories, feelings, or experiences of others.

## Chapter 6: My Finished Tapestry

My hope is that my art can tell a story, or multiple stories, of connectedness and the patterns that extend through time as relationships with places and communities co-evolve (Rose, 2012; Haraway, 2016). When I first left my home in Niagara, I unconsciously set out to find out who I am and where I belong. I came to realise that the process of connecting to the places also means connecting to who I am as a person in the world. This is possible when I focus on my place through art making and recognising the impact of expressing myself when I share what I create with those in my community. Communities of ecosystems thrive on relationships, and it is the same for human communities. We all have ways to connect with those around us in the place where we are, by contributing in ways that also make us feel accepted as individuals. Reflecting on my journey and the places around the world I have travelled to, I realise now that my home is within. Regardless of where I am, I belong to the community; and the communities I have been a part of shape who I am today.

### ***a. The Art that is Me***

The places I have been have shaped who I am now, and I have learned I belong based on these experiences in the right moments. What I create will continue to evolve, as my individual role in life is in a constant motion of learning and growth. Responding to what happens to myself and what is happening around me will reinforce my sense of belonging in a community, as I recall my history and consciously connect with where I am (Lippard, 1997).

I painted a number of yellow flowers (Figure 16, Figure 17, Figure 18, Figure 19) in the spring of 2021, realising as I painted the connection I have had with flowers through the greenhouse and my parents. My maternal grandfather grew tulips until he was too sick, and

passed the business to two of my uncles, who still grow and sell tulips today. Painting flowers also gives me an opportunity to see of the landscape that maybe I would not have noticed.

Making the paintings of the yellow flowers in places of my belonging in the Niagara Region allowed me to reflect on places that are important to me, and helped me remember that I am a small part of a bigger area, and can still make a big impact with my art, as simple as it is.

Learning about the patterns of the landscape, including the progression of flowers in the season and observing the changes in the city I am from allows me to be objective in how humans have changed the landscape but also make it their own. Drawing birds has also been important to me as they make their space in the world. Their songs and colours make them a vibrant realisation that we share the world with so many beautiful creatures (Figure 20).

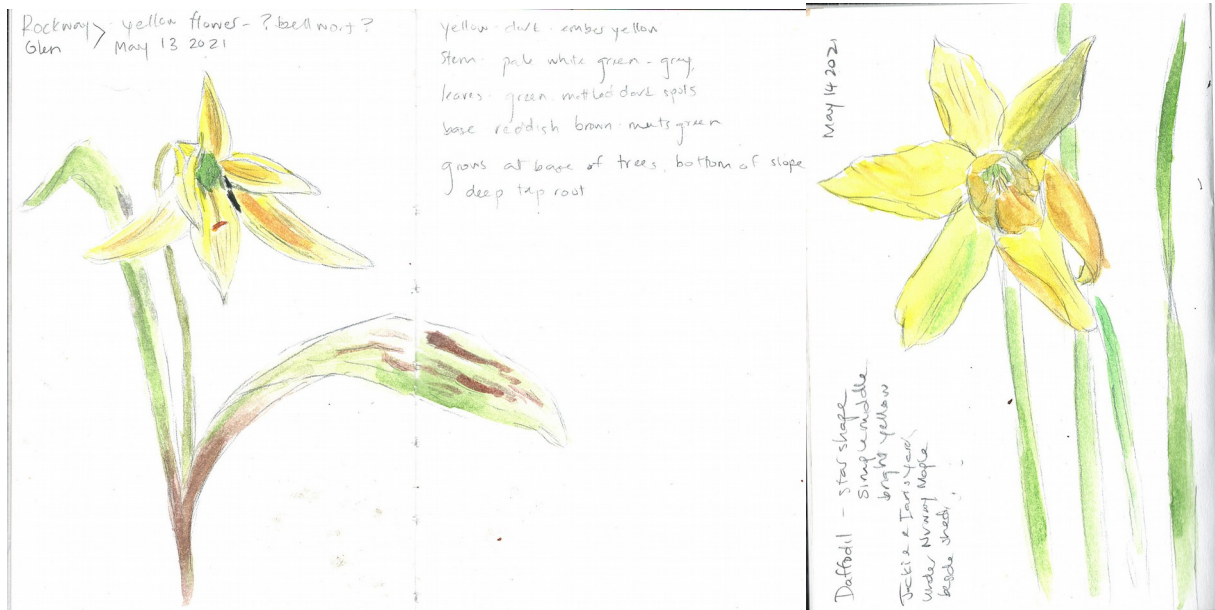


Figure 16: The first yellow flower watercolour, experimenting with plein air painting at Rockway Conservation Area

Figure 17: Daffodil painted in Jackie and Ian's yard





Figure 18: Tulip and daffodil paintings at my parents' house

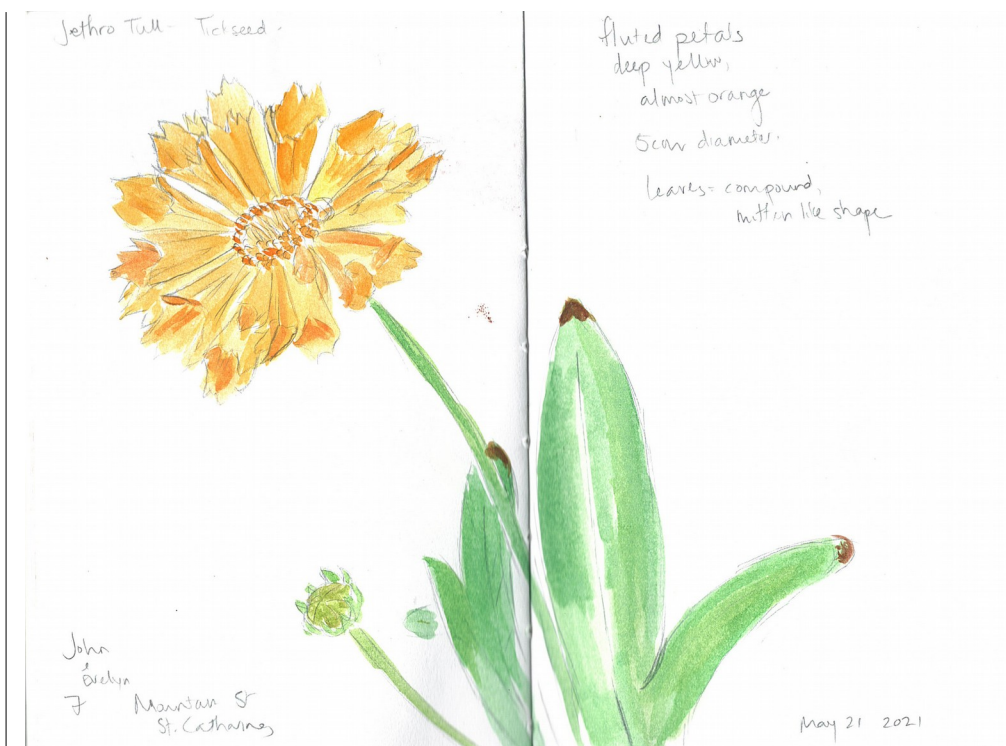


Figure 19: Jethro flower painted in John and Evelyn's yard



Figure 20: I love the way birds are in the world, and often very fleeting, making them even more special

In the summer I was able to take these watercolour paints with me and make paintings on canoe trips with Jamie. I have found a joy to be able to share paintings of the places we live, even only a small piece, when I show the artwork to others, as I can explain where I was and what was important to me when I was there. This helped me to embrace my sense of self and belonging. In June 2021, we followed a pair of Sandhill Cranes on the lake we camped on, and I painted them while we watched them in the canoe (Figure 21). The next day I painted the memory of seeing the canoe in the water when we stopped to take in the view (Figure 22). On another trip to Temagami, I painted a moth on a tree in the old growth forest north of Obabika Lake (Figure 23). I also painted the sunset, with what I hoped was Maple Mountain, the third highest mountain in Ontario, in the background, while testing some techniques to layer the mountains (Figure 24). We had wanted to check it out, but time allowance did not make it



possible based on our starting location. Nonetheless, we fell in love with the area, and the act of making a home anywhere is possible when setting up camp (Figure 25).



*Figure 21: Sandhill Cranes, Killarney Provincial Park, Murray Lake*



*Figure 22: View of the canoe and island we stopped at for lunch in Killarney Provincial Park, June 2021*



moth - little waterfall - spirit forest  
 Figure 23: Moth on a tree in Spirit Forest, Obabika Lake, Temagami,  
 August 2021



maple mountain, view from slate quarry campsite obabika lak  
 Figure 24: Obabika Lake, view from the campsite (Maple Mountain),  
 Temagami, August 2021





*Figure 25: Setting up camp creates a sense of belonging together with Jamie*

In a painting I made later (Figure 25), I took inspiration from these trips, and painted a landscape and included my memory of loons, bears, and eagles, as well as myself and Jamie in the canoe. These are memories that stand out to me, as I have been particularly more aware of my belonging; not just in one particular place, but also the community or people I spend time with.



*Figure 26: Acrylic painting on wooden board, taking inspiration from some of the places I felt belonging and connection outside of Niagara, on canoe trips with Jamie.*

### ***b. Concluding Remarks***

Humans have created a world of possibility and opportunity, yet what kind of world do we want to live in? Is it a world of dramatic and potentially irreversible landscape changes, or to maintain the integrity of the natural world, and rejoice in the beauty of the world? With all the perspectives of artists, cultures, and unique interpretations of the worlds, it is possible to facilitate survival and protect what is left rather than being agents of destruction. If we can collectively realise the importance of connecting to the places we live, particularly how our actions impact wildlife and plants around us, and how these places are all connected, then there is still hope, according to Haraway (2016) and Davis (2009, p. 44). Being able to share culture and connect to history, and even connecting with our roots will help to develop perspectives of

possibilities and how others live in the world, that we can all find a place or a community that we belong to. The importance of connection, to our own families or even a group with common interests, has been removed from our everyday society; yet the importance of connection and communication is vital to our survival. It can be as simple as viewing the world with all the possibilities of life, before we lose everything that exists, while still embracing change and dancing with new possibilities for life (Davis, 2009, pp. 24-28). The interaction of humans and non-humans is necessary for environmental awareness, particularly in the tangled lives we live with multiple species in the same space (Tsing, 2013).

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