Bringing Nature to Consciousness in Peace and Conflict Studies through a Phenomenological Analysis of Veterans' Narratives of Nature and Recovery

by

Stephanie Westlund

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Department of Peace and Conflict Studies

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

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Abstract

Peace and conflict studies arose as a response to the human experience of violence, with an intention towards finding possibilities for nonviolent ways of relating. These possibilities, however, tend to be preoccupied with social conflict, peace and reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery as taking place solely within the realm of human beings, thereby creating an ontology that renders nature silent. This thesis asks questions about why it is so difficult to attend to natural contexts and the more-than-human world in peace and conflict studies. This research suggests that the shift in experience that comes through connection with more-than-human nature opens possibilities for peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Thus, while it explores responses to the human experience of violence, this thesis also works to articulate an understanding of how all human activity, including conflict and peacebuilding, takes place within a shared, interconnected and interdependent global ecosystem.

The core of this inquiry is experience-centred narrative research within the phenomenological interpretive framework provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This research narrates and explores the personal experience stories of veterans suffering from stress and post-traumatic distress from their military training and combat exposure. All of the veterans have suffered and/or continue to suffer from stress and/or post-traumatic

distress, and all regard their personal recovery from stress and traumatic experiences as intimately tied to their nature experiences. These experiences are further illuminated by supporting interviews, personal narrative interludes, other stories and anecdotes from the edges of violence, and theories and praxis in ecology, ecopsychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience.

Through exploring themes of sensory experience, safety, sense of purpose, relationships, basic needs, and regained humanity, this research culminates in the remembrance that as human beings, we are nature, and the insight that it is our (human) nature that impels and enables us to reach out and relate with others and with the more-than-human world. This central insight holds profound implications for peace and conflict studies, which focuses on peacebuilding through recognition of common humanity and conflict transformation through changed relationships. The thesis concludes by exploring possibilities and implications for bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies and for revising theoretical and practical frameworks to re-embed peace and conflict studies in the everyday world—the world beyond the boardroom or negotiating table, and the world that sustains all life on earth.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ..... *II*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... *IV*

DEDICATION ..... *VI*

ABBREVIATIONS ..... *X*

EPIGRAPH ..... *XI*

PROLOGUE – A CONVERSATION WITH KURT HOELTING *1*

PART I – UPROOTING OLD STORIES AND UNEARTHING NEW ONES *8*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION *9*

- Casting Sideways Glances 15
  - Overall Research Focus and Research Questions 16
  - Some Notes about Language 20
- Outline of the Thesis 30

NARRATIVE INTERLUDE – EXCURSIONS INTO MEMORY AND EMBODIMENT *37*

CHAPTER 2: ABOUT THIS RESEARCH *41*

- The Evolution of a Thesis 42
- Defining Nature: Concept and Story 45
  - Philosophical and Historical Underpinnings of Nature 47
  - Nature in this Thesis 51

CHAPTER 3: EXPERIENCE-CENTRED NARRATIVE RESEARCH *57*

- Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology 58
  - The Mind/Body Split 59
  - Modern Science and 'Objectivity' 61
- Narrative Research Methods 65
  - The Study 69
  - Writing, Presenting and Analyzing the Stories 75
  - Gender and Ethnicity Imbalances 78

CHAPTER 4: DECONSTRUCTING PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES *81*

- Reviewing Peace and Conflict Journals for References to 'Nature' 83

The Phenomenological Interpretive Framework 85
Peace and Conflict Studies—Oriented by Cultural Meta-Stories 88
Rationality 89
Progress 95
Meta-stories and Environmental Conflict and Security 105
Phenomenology, Perception, and Peace and Conflict Studies 109

PART II – EMBODIMENT, NATURE AND NARRATIVES 111

CHAPTER 5: BRINGING BACK THE BODY 112

Merleau-Ponty—Life, Influences and Phenomenology 113
Merleau-Ponty's Views on the Body 116
The Flesh, the Chiasm, and Nature 121
Biophilia and Ecological Intelligence 126
Approaches in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science 129
Ecopsychology 132

NARRATIVE INTERLUDE – ON BIRTHING AND RAISING A CHILD 136

CHAPTER 6: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NATURE AND HEALING 139

Empirical Connections between Humans and Nature 141
Wilderness Therapy and Wilderness Experiences 146
Horticulture Therapy and Green Care 147
Mental Fatigue and Aggression 152

NARRATIVE INTERLUDE – ON POLITICAL VIOLENCE 155

CHAPTER 7: INVISIBLE WOUNDS AND POST-TRAUMATIC DISTRESS 159

Invisible Wounds and Post-traumatic Experience 160
Trauma and Suffering Amongst Canadian Soldiers and Veterans 164
Symptoms Commonly Associated with Post-Traumatic Distress 171
Treatment and Coping with Post-traumatic Distress 176

CHAPTER 8: NARRATIVES OF NATURE AND RECOVERY 180

Christian MacEachern 183
Tim Lewis 197
Gord Cousins 209
Shepherd Bliss 220

CHAPTER 9: OTHER STORIES FROM THE EDGES OF VIOLENCE 231

Veterans-Turned-Farmers in the United States 232
Farming Together in the Buduburam Refugee Camp 236
Into the Forest with Srebrenica Survivors 237
Wilderness Therapy Project of Kathorus, South Africa 238
The Butterfly Peace Garden in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka 240
Workshop with Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis 241
The Football for Peace Project 242
American-Soviet Walks 243

To Reflect and Trust 244
Seeds of Peace 245
The Cyprus Consortium Peacebuilding Project's Youth Camp 245
Ending Apartheid and Negotiating a New Constitution in South Africa 247
The Norway Channel and the Oslo Accord 250

PART III – REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS ***254***

INTERLUDE – A CONVERSATION WITH ANDY FISHER ***255***

CHAPTER 10: WE ARE NATURE: REFLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS ***262***

Sensory Experience in the More-Than-Human World 266
Safety in Nature 271
A Renewed Sense of Purpose through Experiences in the Natural World 276
Relationships Facilitated in More-Than-Human Settings 281
Fulfilling a Need to Carry Life Forward 286
Regaining Humanity through the More-Than-Human World 289

CHAPTER 11: BRINGING NATURE TO CONSCIOUSNESS ***297***

Why Does this Research Matter for Peace and Conflict Studies? 297
Narrative: Bringing Nature to Consciousness 302
Nature as an Active Participant in Peacebuilding and Recovery 309
Expanding the Veterans' Narratives to Civilian Trauma Survivors 312
Detractors: Nature as Antitherapeutic for Post-Traumatic Distress? 318

CHAPTER 12: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: MEANINGS FOR PRAXIS ***320***

Intersections with Indigenous Perspectives and Other Traditions 322
Meanings for Praxis 324
Personal Implications 327
Challenges and Opportunities for Peace and Conflict Studies 329
A Final Thought: Stories of Caution, Stories of Hope 334

REFERENCES ***335***

APPENDIX A – ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE ***357***

APPENDIX B – SAMPLE CONSENT FORM ***359***

Abbreviations

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

C	*Causeries, 1948.* Translated into English as *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception*
N	*La Nature, Notes, Cours du Collège de France*. Translated into English as *Nature: Course notes from the Collège de France*
OE	*L'Oeil et l'esprit.* Translated into English as "Eye and Mind"
PP	*Phénoménologie de la perception.* Translated into English as *Phenomenology of Perception*
RC	*Resumes de cours, Collège de France 1952-1960.* Translated into English as *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960.*
VI	*Le Visible et l'invisible, suivi de notes de travail.* Translated into English as *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*

Why not go into the forest for a time, literally? Sometimes a tree tells you more than can be read in books.

—C.G. Jung (letter to a friend)

Prologue

A Conversation with Kurt Hoelting

"I have always felt a deep sense of homecoming in wild places and a sense of wholeness that seems to be missing from day-to-day life in urban settings," Kurt Hoelting told me in September 2011 from his home on Whidbey Island within Puget Sound in northern Washington State. Formerly a commercial fisherman, as well as the author of *The Circumference of Home* and the founder of Inside Passages, Kurt has been offering sea kayaking retreats since 1994. He also teaches Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in the Seattle Veterans' Affairs (VA) Hospital to veterans who suffer from post-traumatic distress.

The inspiration for Kurt's sea kayaking retreats came to him during a Mountains and Rivers Sesshin (Zen retreat). In a typical Zen retreat, participants spend much of their time sitting in silent meditation but during this particular Sesshin, the teacher incorporated hiking in silence as a form of extended meditation. As a long-time Zen practitioner and someone who has spent a lot of time in nature, including as a fisherman as well as a climber and recreational backpacker, Kurt was intrigued. "I found that that approach to time in the wilderness, where a lot of time was spent in silence, and [which] incorporates formal meditation practice, sitting practice, as well as informal silent

walking and hiking, was really powerful and took the whole experience deeper than just my going out with a group of people or on my own to have a wilderness experience," he told me over the telephone. At the time, Kurt had been feeling conflicted about his role in the commercial fishing industry, which, while it provided "a lot of contact with wildness and big forces, big animals," the work was also in the context of a "very industrial kind of extractive activity." So from the Mountain and Rivers Sesshin, Kurt came away with the idea to start Inside Passages and to begin offering kayaking retreats, with a focus on bringing the contemplative model "into the experience of being with a group out in a wild place." Sea kayaking, Kurt finds, is a "naturally contemplative activity . . . you're on the water, you're right down at water level, you're in silence, you can get into places that you can't get by any other means." Most of his clients are environmental activists and religious leaders, and the retreats are designed as a means for "restoring our inner habitat of heart and mind and spirit, which naturally happens when we're in nature in all kinds of ways," he tells me.

Over the years, Kurt has developed a deep belief in what he calls "the three-day rule." He reflects further, "Whether I'm in a meditation retreat or out backpacking or kayaking or whatever, it takes about three days for the nervous system to drop the buzz, the hectic energy, the anxious energy that we're carrying around with us that we don't even really notice. It's just so much part of us—you can't flip a switch. You actually have to be for a duration of time in an environment that is really conducive to this kind of experience before the soul can catch up with the body and really be present. And that's something that in my experience is biologically non-negotiable. You can't think your way there. You actually just have to slow down, stop, be in a place in that way for several

days before the mind and the body and the heart all join forces and are present and can receive what's there. And because we're moving so fast and we're in such a hurry, most of us don't even have that experience for five or ten minutes, let alone three days. So there's a danger for that part of our conscious experience, or that potential that's in us—to actually die or go extinct, just because we're not experiencing it anymore."

Kurt incorporates the three-day rule into his kayaking trips by giving retreat participants "the duration of time to be in a place that is evocative in this way in order for something to come back alive in them, that they then recognize it as being an essential part of what it is to be human. And that they have in their direct experience, so that they can apply that to whatever work they're doing in the world back home or the places they live, apply that longer view, thousand year view, of our lives across time, the places we live across time, and the depth of presence that that can convey in the moment if we're able to access it. That's the best way I can describe it. It's very difficult—you can describe it all you want, but it's the kind of thing that you have to experience in order to realize: Oh yeah, this is part of who I am. I'm actually a piece of this much, much larger whole that is the life force that I have and move through, that's just so much bigger than this small, encapsulated ego that we think is walking around separate from everything around us. I have some direct experience of that."

Some of the most powerful moments on Kurt's week-long trips come when the group is paddling in silence. "If the weather is favourable and not too rough and the tide is with us or the wind is with us, [the paddlers just] stop and sometimes have long, silent drifts, where by ceasing activity—even when you're out hiking or out paddling there's always the sound of the swish of clothing and the crunch of feet, or the paddle dipping

into the water, that drown out the larger soundscape. And so when you just stop, really stop, which is something that people rarely do, even on wilderness trips—they're either talking, chatting, moving around—so to just really stop and allow the expansiveness and the kind of deep silence and the full power of being in a huge wild expansive area is really, really powerful."

Kurt believes that these profound moments on his trips often facilitate a discovery beyond the intellectual level, that "at a cellular or visceral level, we're part of something really huge . . . And the same thing happens when we do our sitting practice in a wild place, where for a period of time as a group we're sitting in stillness for a half hour or so, where no one's moving. There's no interruption, no one's talking. You're aware that you're with other people. You're aware that you are in an amazing physical place. But there's nothing that gets in the way of that kind of connection with the part of ourselves that is that wild place that we come out of. So there's a visceral experience that tends to happen. It's quite different and quite a bit more catalytic than just sitting around talking about it, or talking about the issues, or seeing the natural world as a kind of backdrop to whatever kind of tapes you're spinning in your mind."

Unlike his kayaking retreats, Kurt's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) work with veterans at the VA Hospital in Seattle often takes place in a room in the basement of the hospital, a context he describes as "pretty bleak" with no nature around. MBSR is a secular approach to mindfulness meditation based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who founded the Stress-Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn initially designed the eight-week MBSR course for patients suffering from chronic pain, who could not be helped by the medical system.

Specifically, the course incorporates insights from meditation and gentle yoga to help participants to work with their experience and learn to relax, even amidst a lot of discomfort and pain. The patients' homework is to practice mindfulness for approximately 45 to 60 minutes every day. Then, they come together once a week to meditate together and to talk about their practice and experiences during the week, including both challenges and insights. In this way, course participants reinforce and support one another's mindfulness experiences, and as Kurt describes, many of them "come to an understanding that they have a lot more capacity than they thought they did to shift their relationship with their pain, if not eliminate the pain itself."

While on the surface Kurt's kayak retreats and his MBSR work with veterans may seem to be two very different approaches, he sees many "overlapping circles" between them. "Just as it's possible to be in a really gorgeous, drop dead beautiful wild place, and feel really depressed, be really not present," he tells me, "It's possible to be in [a room in the basement of the VA Hospital] and do the work of mindfulness, of sitting quietly, of working in a non-judging way with whatever is coming up in our experience in the moment, and actually drop into a place of deep presence and gratitude and buoyancy, resilience." As such, Kurt describes both his work with veterans and with the participants on his kayaking retreats as "leading people into the vicinity of their own inner wildness and giving them some ways to navigate that so that the grief can actually have its place at the table, the fear, the anger, all of that as well as the wonder and all of the positive things that we associate with being in a beautiful place."

As he explains this to me, Kurt also reflects on the deep interconnections between the nature outside the human body and the nature inside us. "In a sense, our culture tends

to think of nature as being out there and something that we go out there to get. But actually, this is inside of us every bit as much as it's outside of us," he tells me. "I'm blown away, actually, by how much of this same capacity for being present in a way that is relaxed and at ease even in the midst of a lot of pain and a lot of distress in our lives—that that happens at the VA Hospital as well over time through the application of these tools of mindfulness. So that suggests to me that it's the inner nature, inner habitat, however you want to call it, that is the critical component here."

Kurt observes that perhaps "being in a place of natural beauty and abundance calls out [our inner nature, inner habitat] more easily [than a hospital basement] in some ways, but you still have to do the same work of attending, of arriving, of allowing things to be what they are. And it doesn't just do that for us. We have to do that work ourselves." On the MBSR course, in addition to the weekly two-hour meetings, there is also a full-day meditation retreat at around the six-week mark, in which participants come together to spend six hours in silence. Most of the all-day retreats for the courses at the VA Hospital take place in the same basement room used for their weekly meetings, but Kurt once hosted one such retreat in a natural place. "And I think the benefit is pretty obvious," he says, recalling the experience. "When you get away from a place that's noisy and dank and dark and you get out in the light, you get out into the fresh air and you get into a place where natural sound is able to make itself felt and you're not just dealing with mechanical sound overriding natural sound all the time, the heart and the mind just open more easily and so you can oftentimes have an even more satisfying and healing experience of presence more quickly. You can feel the boundary between self and world

softening. It doesn’t have that hard edge that is just always there when you’re in a hospital basement somewhere.”

However, Kurt emphasizes the importance of understanding that this kind of stress-reduction work *can* and *does* happen in the more bleak context of the hospital basement. And this is perhaps because it is the work of our own human nature, he suggests later during our conversation. As Kurt describes his work with the veterans, he shares his growing affection for them, and his admiration for the courage it takes for them to commit to the MBSR course and to do the work of mindfulness. Over the weeks of a course, Kurt finds that an important human connection develops between him and the veterans. “And I see that [connection] actually as a manifestation of healing nature,” he tells me. “That our human nature wants to connect. And the primary way that we connect with nature is through each other, through our human nature, through words, through emotions, through shared experience . . . And then when it can be linked to the wider nature that we actually come out of and that sustains us literally from one breath to another and from one meal to another and it sustains our sense of being part of something much bigger than ourselves, then all the better. But in a certain strange kind of way, it’s all connected. It’s very much working with healing nature.”

PART I – Uprooting Old Stories and Unearthing New Ones

Chapter 1

Introduction[1]

> Man [sic] feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature, and has lost his emotional 'unconscious identity' with natural phenomena. These have slowly lost their symbolic implications. Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god, nor is lightening his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man from stones, plants and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied.
>
> —C.G. Jung, 1964, p. 85

The seeds for this thesis might have been planted in 2004 when I watched the documentary *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire*, which tells the story of Lieutenant General (ret) Roméo Dallaire's experience as the commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda. In the film, Dallaire returns to Rwanda to attend the 10-year commemoration of the Rwandan genocide, accompanied by his wife Élizabeth and a film crew. The film is a devastating account of the UN mission's failure to prevent genocide in Rwanda, and depicts both the breakdowns in the

[1] Portions of this thesis have been published in the following article:
Westlund, Stephanie. (2010). Incorporating 'the earth and skies, the winds and rocks': nature as an active participant in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. *Global Change, Peace & Security, 22*(3), copyright Taylor & Francis. Reprinted by permission of the publisher (Taylor & Francis Ltd). Article available online at http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cpar20/22/3 [DOI 10.1080/14781158.2010.510244].

UN system and the toll of the genocide on the Rwandan people as well as on the peacekeepers who were present but who had neither the mandate nor the personnel to stop the genocide. Approximately an hour into the film, Roméo and Élizabeth Dallaire stand holding hands on a verdant terraced hillside in Kinihira, which in his book *Shake Hands with the Devil,* he describes visiting a number of times during his mission in Rwanda, and which he writes, "rapidly became one of my favourite places" (Dallaire, 2003, p. 103). In the film, Dallaire reflects that this hillside is the place in Rwanda where he felt most comfortable, and he tells Élizabeth, *"C'est ici que j'ai redevenu humain"* (English translation: "It's here that I became human again"). Towards the end of the film, Dallaire returns again to the same hilltop and tells the filmmakers, "I want to show you where in all this I could find myself. I could find the solace and be one with my soul, with my heart, with my being." These two images were forever burned in my mind—the serenity and calm beauty of this hillside contrasted with the extreme violence that occurred in and around it in 1994. It wasn't until well into my research for this thesis, however, that I became conscious of the effect that those two scenes in the documentary had on me and how often the images of Dallaire standing on that hillside have returned to my mind over the years.

A second seed came while reading Viktor Frankl's (2006) account of his inhuman experiences in Nazi death camps during WWII, in which he also provides several glimpses of how hope and solace are found in human beings' relationships with nature, even under desperate—and perhaps the most 'unnatural'—circumstances. He reflects that even in a concentration camp, prisoners would draw one another's attention to the beauty of a sunset. Frankl recalls another time, when he and a group of prisoners were being

transferred by train from Auschwitz to a camp in Bavaria: “If someone had seen our faces on the journey . . . as we beheld the mountains of Salzburg with their summits glowing in the sunset, through the little barred windows of the prison carriage,” Frankl writes, “he would never have believed that those were the faces of men who had given up all hope of life and liberty. Despite that factor—or maybe because of it—we were carried away by nature’s beauty, which we had missed for so long” (pp. 39-40). Frankl also recounts meeting a woman who was ill and would die within days. As she lay in a hut, the woman pointed out the window to the only branch of a chestnut tree that she could see, which held two flowers. “This tree is the only friend I have in my loneliness,” she told Frankl. “I often talk to this tree.” Upon hearing that she spoke to the tree, Frankl wondered whether the woman was delusional and he asked if the tree spoke back to her. “Yes,” she replied. “It said to me—I am here—I am here—I am life, eternal life” (p. 69).

A third inspiration for this thesis came when I read scholar and peacebuilder John Paul Lederach’s (2005) description of his integrated framework presentation to a group of Guatemalans. During the lunchtime break, an indigenous Mayan priest came up to him. While “your framework captures many things,” the priest said, “[i]t is missing one overarching element” (p. 140). Lederach was puzzled, and couldn’t imagine which “political, economic, or historic piece” he had missed in his presentation. The priest continued:

> Your framework is missing the earth and skies, the winds and rocks. It does not say where you are located. In a traditional Mayan view, if there is a problem in the community, the first thing we would ask is: Did you greet the sun today? Did you thank the earth for the corn? It is not the only thing, but it is the first. We always must know where, [in] what place and time, we are located. (ibid.)

While Lederach takes up the latter part of the priest's critique as a different way of understanding space and time, he does not address the first part: "Your framework is missing the earth and skies, the winds and rocks." The dominant narratives in the academy and particularly in stories about conflict and peace tend to neglect context, place and nature. Indeed, while questions about human embeddedness in ecosystems are increasingly being asked in diverse academic fields such as epidemiology, environmental psychology, neuroscience, medicine, education, urban planning, and social ecology, such questions are rarely asked in connection with conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. Peacebuilding scholar Lisa Schirch (2005), whose own research and practice focus on bringing the body back into peacebuilding and conflict transformation, reflects that "there is relatively little documented information on the importance of physical context in peacebuilding processes" (p. 68). Rather, Schirch says we tend only to hear stories of "serious negotiations, rational discussion, and problem-solving efforts" (p. 148). This lack of attention to place and context was confirmed by my brief study of all the full-length articles published in five major peace and conflict studies journals from 2008 to 2010, which found that only five percent of articles included nature as a major theme, and none of those suggested that nature might be an active participant in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and recovery. (See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of this study.)

War and other forms of political violence have many direct effects on people's health and wellbeing—for combat soldiers as well as civilians, including men, women and children—and there is a growing body of literature documenting such effects. There is also a growing body of literature focusing on the importance of nature for the human

psyche, but relatively little focus on bringing the two discourses together. It seems, however, that peace and conflict studies' focus on issues of justice, power and emancipation provides an opening to see that the "society that violates human nature" is the same one that violates the more-than-human world (Fisher, 2002, p. 25). This thesis aims to widen this opening by exposing the complex intertwinings between conflict, peace, and recovery—that is, all of life—and nature. The broad intention of this research is to extend current social research methods in peace and conflict studies to include non-social factors, highlighting the many ways that nature tends to be left out of discussions, analyses, planning, and execution.

The core of this inquiry is experience-centred narrative research within the phenomenological interpretive framework provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It is also informed by theories and praxis in ecology, ecopsychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience, among others. All of these areas are, from different angles, illuminating the problems associated with the meta-stories of rationalism and progress that guide and orient Western life, and pointing to the profound and inextricable connections between humans and nature. According to Buddhist scholar David Loy (2010), such meta-stories come about in the search for an all-encompassing story that explains all stories. They are the stories that we internalize and take for granted as 'true.' They teach us what is important and they teach us how to behave. They also justify patterns of thought and behaviours, such as believing human beings are superior to nature, or social orders in which some humans are more important and deserving than others. Such stories cannot get outside themselves and when we are living within them, we forget that they are stories. But meta-stories are just "stories about stories" (p. 7), and we can challenge them

by questioning the stories themselves. For example, Loy suggests asking whether our meta-stories "alienate us from nature or embed us in it?" (p. 10). And if we stop believing in and telling certain stories, this opens space for the stories to change.

Psychoanalyst Harold Searles (1972) maintains that "an ecologically healthy relatedness to our nonhuman environment is essential to the development and maintenance of our sense of being human" (p. 368). Thus, inspired by the Mayan priest's words, Dallaire's description of that hilltop in Rwanda where he "became human again," and Frankl's recognition of the interconnections between nature and human beings even when living in inhuman conditions, this thesis explores new stories about what it might mean for studies and practices in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and recovery from conflict to *include* the earth and skies, the winds and rocks. What might it mean to say *where* we are located? And importantly, what is the relationship between the nature inside us—inside our human bodies—and the nature outside us?

Given the seriousness of social conflicts and the violent legacies of colonialism, oppression, protracted ethnic conflict, or seemingly zero-sum territorial disputes, some people might be sceptical about the significance of including nature in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and recovery approaches; however, it may be these difficult and intractable conflicts that benefit the most from inclusion of the earth and skies, the winds and rocks. It may be, as described by Kurt Hoelting in the opening story of this thesis, that contact with the more-than-human world provides the best way of softening the boundaries between self and world, and for opening the heart and mind more easily in order to connect both with one another and with the world around us.

Casting Sideways Glances

Marlene Atleo (2008) shares the words of *Ahousaht* elder Trudy Frank, who reflected on the importance of "just watching until it becomes clear to you" (p. 231), suggesting that clarity and vision come over time, through enacting a curious gaze rather than only accepting what is seen at face value. Cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) asserts that if we look only directly at problems in the world, we will see only what is most obvious, what our worldview allows us to see, and what is brought to attention by those in power. Yet in cases of conflict, violence, and recovery, obvious causes often mask other important issues. For example, social conflict is sometimes thought, simplistically, to occur over 'tangible' factors (i.e., things that can be touched), such as two toddlers fighting over the same toy. Or, in another instance, Richard Louv (2008) brings attention to Western society's "myopic focus on high technology as salvation" (p. 137). This mesmerization with modern technology includes a focus within the Western medical model on treating sufferers of trauma and post-traumatic distress with drugs and talk therapy, wherein even suffering is viewed as manageable and 'curable' through technological innovation.

Žižek (2008) argues that casting a "sideways glance" often reveals more than meets the direct gaze, and exposes the different and complicated questions that need to be asked. Indeed, sideways glances at issues of violence and conflict tend to reveal that they are rarely so simple as to be only about tangible factors. While many conflicts involve tangible elements, such as land or oil, most often, intangible factors such as identity, culture, emotions, stories, religions, ideologies, language, perceptions, fantasies, and/or images of the 'other,' come into play, rendering the situation inherently complex (Senehi,

2002). When conflicts grow to a protracted status, they often come pervade most areas of social life, and might even fuse with an individual's, group's, or nation's identity and culture. Similarly, while the Western medical model's focus on medication and talk therapy may provide relief for some post-traumatic distress sufferers, these methods are not a panacea. Indeed, the veterans whose stories are shared in this thesis all describe turning to nature as an alternative to, or in addition to, traditional therapy and/or medication.

Casting these sideways glances that seek to reveal more than meets the eye is not an easy task. Such curiosity about life and the world takes energy. But as feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (2004) points out, this curiosity is often needed to uncover issues that are taken for granted. In particular, Enloe's feminist curiosity leads her to ask about patriarchal relationships in the academy and international relations, revealing her central question: "Where are the women?" Throughout my doctoral studies, my own curiosity—what might be called an *ecological curiosity* (in addition to a feminist curiosity)—has led me to ask about the natural world, ecosystems and human bodies that, like women, tend to be overlooked or altogether missing within fields such as international relations and peace and conflict studies. My main question over the past six years has been "Where is nature?" and it is by casting sideways glances and watching until it becomes clear, that I now work in this thesis to uncover the ways that our human processes for developing identity and making meaning are tied to and embedded in nature (Norton, 2009).

Overall Research Focus and Research Questions

This thesis addresses the lack of attention to nature in peace and conflict studies by asking urgent questions about how social conflict, peace and reconciliation, and post-

conflict recovery might be envisioned as inextricably interconnected with nature. Specifically, this research takes up the examples veterans suffering from stress and post-traumatic distress from their military training and combat exposure. Over the course of this research, I have come across the stories of a number of Canadian and U.S. veterans who regard the more-than-human world as crucial in recovering a sense of their inner nature, in recovering their sense of humanity. This thesis narrates and explores the personal experience stories of four veterans' post-conflict interactions with/in nature. All of the veterans have suffered and/or continue to suffer from stress and/or post-traumatic distress, and all regard their personal recovery from stress and traumatic experiences as intimately tied to their nature experiences. Thus, through the veterans' narratives, as well as through supporting interviews, this thesis illuminates the ways that as human beings regain a sense of connection with the more-than-human, we are calmed and changed in the process, and often life becomes imbued with new and/or remembered meaning.

Situated in the context of narrative inquiry within the phenomenological interpretive framework provided by the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this thesis is guided by the following questions:

1) In what ways do veterans' narratives of post-conflict recovery highlight nature as important for physical and/or psychological and spiritual wellbeing and survival?
2) What role does narrative play in bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies?
3) How might nature be considered an active participant in recovery processes, rather than a passive backdrop?

4) Since the majority of conflict-related trauma survivors in the world today are civilians (Roberts, 2010), in what ways might the veterans' narratives inform the stories of civilian survivors?

Learning the personal stories of those who suffer materializes this suffering in the present, and enables a better understanding of the long-term difficulties associated with post-conflict trauma, healing and recovery. In hearing the stories of veterans, one has to accept that war and conflict create deep and lasting wounds. One also begins to understand the ways that, as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) reflect, "Our body is intimately tied to what we walk on, sit on, touch, taste, smell, see, breathe, and move within. Our corporeality is part of the corporeality of the world" (p. 565). Through gathering the detailed narratives of veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress and their embodied interactions in nature, I am seeking to get beyond the socially constructed boundaries between humans and nature, and to revise theoretical and practical frameworks in peace and conflict studies to be more inclusive of the natural world. This requires expanding the context of peace and conflict studies in a way that incorporates human relationships with the natural world, and situates conflict, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery in its ecological context.

Since its inception as an academic discipline, peace and conflict studies has lacked an overall interest in nature. The approaches to issues of peace, conflict and recovery have been dominated by anthropocentric discourses and research methods, which see these issues as taking place only within the realm of human beings. Existing research methodologies tend to neglect more-than-human others, factors with little or no 'economic' value, and most long-term interests and rights, including those of future

generations. Social research has, in the past, similarly excluded other areas, such as gender and culture, that are difficult to 'measure,' in favour of those that can be easily documented and controlled. These approaches are understandable when one examines both the roots and traditions of peace and conflict studies, as well as the discipline's general focus: war, violence, conflict, and peaceful resolution and transformation of conflict. Peace and conflict studies and the disciplines from which it is descended are profoundly situated in the Western philosophical tradition of the separated mind, this idea that the human ability to reason is what separates us from and places us above animals (this tradition is explored in greater detail in Chapter 4). The dominant culture and training in Western society, Mark Braverman (1999) observes, "has taught us to look for neat simple solutions to complex problems. We are hungry for easy, 'cookie cutter' answers" (p. 3). But as I explore in this thesis, if we instead begin to regard and understand the human mind from the perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, as well as theories in ecopsychology, cognitive science, biophilia, and neuroscience, among others, our understanding of the human mind is radically altered and we in the Western world begin to remember why nature—the more-than-human world—is so important in our everyday lives.

In Mary Lawson's (2003) novel *Crow Lake*, narrator Kate reflects that water "is the medium we came from . . . We were all rocked by water at our beginnings" (p. 101). Like all other mammals, Robert Greenway (2009) argues that this time spent in the oceanic experience of the womb continues to exist "in our psychic depths" (p. 135). Moreover, our human capacities and capabilities evolved from and grew out of animal capacities and capabilities; indeed while our society may reject such thinking, we continue to be

animals, a “carnal density of muscles and skin and breath” (Abram, 2010, p. 84). Many authors and scholars are now arguing in favour of a human ‘ecological unconscious’ (e.g., Louv, 2008; Greenway, 2009; Wilson, 1993), which came about during human evolutionary history but is now mostly repressed. Further, as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) explain, “Human reason is a form of animal reason . . . our bodies, brains, and interactions with our environment provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real” (p. 17). That is, our reason, emotion, and perception are bound up in our *bodies*. The consequences of this understanding seem profound for peace and conflict studies.

Some Notes about Language

> The limits of my language are the limits of my world.
> — Ludwig Wittgenstein (as cited in Loy, 2010, p. 5)

Despite being a long-time lover of language, while writing this thesis I have been occasionally paralyzed and imprisoned by language as I realized the deep and varied meaning that permeates many words. Yet “the only medium with which we can define language is language itself,” writes David Abram (1996, p. 73), concisely describing my conundrum. In Western society, we tend to overlook the subtle ways that words work. Language can be a powerful tool of domination and oppression. Those who control words’ meanings are often in a position to determine not only the direction of dominant narratives and discourses but also what can and cannot be conceived within a language and its associated worldview. And so it is always important to ask: who defines words and whose interests do they serve?

Cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) reflects that “a basic fact of language [is] constructing and imposing a certain symbolic field” (p. 60). Whenever we write or speak, we use words in ways that communicate our own view of reality (Callenbach, 1998; Fisher, 2002; Richardson, 1997). Drawing on the work of Henry Giroux, ecopsychologist Andy Fisher (pers. comm.) reminded me that the language we use, and indeed “our whole culture is a form of pedagogy, it’s constantly teaching what is right or wrong.” In each society around the world, the words used always encode a narrative, and within Western society, this narrative is often situated within the dualistic frameworks that arose from Descartes, to perpetuate the meta-stories of rationalism and progress. This points to an overall difficulty presented by language—that it is slippery, with meanings that shift and twist, that cannot be contained.

Language can be inherently violent, reducing something complex (such as nature) to a simple feature or word. Language “dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity, treating its parts and properties as autonomous. It inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it” (Žižek, 2008, p. 61). Meanwhile, compared to our Western nonchalance around language, Indigenous peoples often have deep understandings the power inherent in words. Basil Johnston (1999) shares that many Indigenous peoples hold views of words as “medicine and sacred, bad and good; they could either injure or heal, offend or comfort, mislead or enlighten” (p. 50). And Joe Sheridan (2001) reminds us that practices of naming through language keep “speakers elevated from the ground and [also elevated from] the place where the things and their real names live” (p. 202).

If language is about creating and applying a specific symbolic field—indeed, if language is *pedagogy* and words hold deep power and meanings—then some of the most important decisions made while writing this thesis have been about language: Which words do I use? Which do I avoid? I have reflected often about words associated with nature, as well as those that describe the stress and distress that come about from traumatic experiences. For example, opting to use a medical term and abbreviation such as 'PTSD' would immediately situate this thesis within a particular pattern of thinking. Andy Fisher (pers. comm.) also points to how "using words like 'mental health' and 'nature is good for your mental health' . . . right away just pushes the 'Play' button on a certain discourse." Thus, below I reflect generally on some of the terminology used in this thesis, which will be explored in greater depth in the chapters that follow.

Language and Nature

I have realized over the past few years that to invoke the word 'nature' causes trouble, and brings forth problems of meaning. It is a difficult, slippery word. The word nature brings about a multiplicity of responses, ranging from wonder to discomfort and even hostility. I don't have an answer as to why the word evokes such an array of responses. Indeed, people's reactions to and discomfort with this word could be the topic of a PhD dissertation in itself. It may be that the strongest associations the word nature holds for some people involves romantic notions of pot-smoking hippies wearing tie-died t-shirts and rose-coloured glasses who are 'communing with nature,' and they don't wish to be associated with 'tree huggers' or 'nature lovers.' For others, it may be that the word invokes images of 'radical' or 'crazy' environmentalists, such as activists and others who chain themselves to trees, hang from buildings and ship masts, and protest in the streets.

Particularly in places such Western Canada, where the oil industry is deeply implicated in the lives of many people, jobs are often pitted against nature. For example, the Canadian federal government recently branded as “radicals” anyone opposed to the Northern Gateway pipeline project, which is intended to run from Alberta’s tar sands to the B.C. coast in order to supply Canadian crude to Asian markets (Paris, 2012). In this case, the word nature invokes the world and interrupts current discourses about economics and capitalism—it becomes the unwelcome guest in the room, and people don’t always know what it means for the guest to be there. It is generally easier to lock that guest away, or to wish s/he was at a different party altogether.

Beyond these associations, since language holds meanings from the basis of our experience (Merleau-Ponty, PP, xvii), I also wonder whether at a deeper level the word nature might unconsciously bring forth the ways that as human beings, we have separated ourselves from the world around us, and perhaps the word reminds us of the ecological trauma associated with this separation. Perhaps the word nature recalls our fragility and mortality, and reminds us of things that we might not wish to think about. Perhaps it brings up a response of deep unconscious grief. The world most of us live in most of the time cannot take in this word nature; to bring in this word can make our work and life difficult. It is often easier, particularly in academic settings, to focus only on the bits and pieces, while overlooking or dismissing the interconnections between all things.

In working to situate my own inquiry and analysis, I have deeply contemplated peace scholar Betty Reardon’s (1992) reflection that “our language and our metaphors reveal just how we think more clearly than our arguments and proposals” (p. 395). It becomes necessary to carefully consider both the words I use and the ones I reject. A

term I reject outright is the oft-used ‘non-human nature,’ which with its negative prefix not only maintains dualistic thinking about humans and nature, but declares any ‘non-human’ entity as somehow less deserving than those that are ‘human.’

Since I advocate a view of humans *as* nature, I have come to prefer David Abram’s (1996) ‘more-than-human,’ a term capable of accepting the radical ecological dependencies and relationships within the larger family of things. Perhaps an example is useful here. If a tree defined everything other than itself as ‘non-tree,’ the ‘tree’ world becomes very narrow. The ‘non-tree’ world would include, among others, the soil in which the tree grows, insects that pollinate the tree’s flowers, the birds and winds and squirrels that disperse the tree’s seeds, the rain and snow waters that help the tree grow, the animals whose excrement and decomposing bodies provide essential nutrients to the tree’s roots, the human who sits in the tree’s shade on a hot summer day and breathes out carbon dioxide to give the tree breath, the insects and worms that decompose the tree once its life ends so that it may provide life to other trees (and so much more!). By subtly changing ‘non-tree’ to ‘more-than-tree,’ however, it becomes possible to conceptualize the tree as being in ecological relationship with all these other beings that, while distinct from her, are important in her lifecycle. Without this ‘more-than-tree’ world, the tree would not live. Similarly, the term ‘more-than-human’ (instead of ‘non-human’) helps to account for the complex ecological dependencies that form the basis of human life.

Despite the trouble and problems of meaning I allude to earlier, I also use ‘nature’ as a synonym for the more-than-human world (Chapter 2 takes up a more detailed exploration of the word nature). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s definition, the word nature used herein refers to “our soil [*sol*]—not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that

which carries us" (N, 4). While Merleau-Ponty often capitalizes the word nature, particularly in his later works, after some reflection and discussion with others, I have chosen to use a lowercase *nature*, since there is perhaps more permeability and room to push the term's boundaries and edges. (I have kept the capitalization of nature in quotes from other scholars and authors, particularly when drawing on the works of Merleau-Ponty.)

I acknowledge that to use this word can be—and *is*—at times problematic. Every so often, I have been frustrated by my inability in this thesis to transcend the post-Cartesian separations of body and mind, humans and nature. Despite my attempts to get outside the constraints and dualisms of Western culture, I found myself continuously drawn inside the Western discourse and the language of separation that underlies the whole Western timeline of capitalism, colonialism, and urban-industrial contexts—the language that has contributed to many of the problems we now face as a planetary community, including unprecedented ecological change and strain, characterized by mass extinctions of species, languages and cultures, alongside escalating population growth.

Reflecting on the difficulties I have encountered, I have come to realize that the project of relanguaging and restorying is infinitely complex—an infinite and humble project that goes beyond this thesis. It may be that finding language and ways of speaking that can permeate and transcend the discourse are still in the future. Indeed, this will likely become part of my life's work, just as it has been and continues to be the work of many others over generations. I hope, however, that I have succeeded in pushing the boundaries and edges, especially of the peace and conflict studies discourse, even just a little bit. And as I and many others continue to work on this project, it may be that as

openings are created for exploring deep interconnections with the more-than-human world, other forms, such as ritual, painting, poetry, song, and dance, among others, are better at communicating and bringing meaning to these connections.

'PTSD' and the Medical Model for Responding to Suffering

The more conversations I have and reading I do around the topic of suffering, and particularly the suffering that extends from traumatic experiences, the more I understand how the modern Western medical model has one general standard for dealing with suffering—it is labelled, often with an abbreviation (PTSD) and 'treated' with drugs and/or talk therapy. Clinicians are generally taught how to respond to an instance of suffering, but not to the physical experiences of the person who suffers (Frank, 2001). Arthur Frank explains that suffering itself "resists definition because it is the reality of what is not . . . Suffering is expressed in myth as the wound that does not kill but cannot be healed" (p. 355). While the medical model is very good at healing a broken arm or tendonitis, which can be isolated and treated, on the whole it has difficulty with suffering, which extends into the whole body and human experience.

In his analysis of war, Jungian psychologist James Hillman (2004) brings attention to the "the inhuman stress of war" and argues that "the very idea that human agony can be named a 'stress syndrome' is inhuman, imagining a man as a machine part, a cog in a military wheel" (p. 62). Indeed, in its conception of humans as machines, the medical model overlooks and dismisses humans as nature. As Besthorn, Wulff and St. George (2010) describe, "one of the effects of the modern industrial, techno-scientific worldview is the constriction and elimination of language to communicate views of reality inconsistent with the dominant worldview" (p. 26). As such, since this thesis research

explores the narratives of veterans who have found ways of easing their suffering outside the medical model, it also requires a break with the language used in the medical model. First, however, it is helpful to understand the history and development of the medical term ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (PTSD). (The invisible wounds of war and the experience of post-traumatic distress are discussed at greater length in Chapter 7. The discussion below highlights primarily the way that the language has changed over the past few centuries, and how the abbreviation PTSD came into common usage.)

The invisible wounds and anxiety that can come from combat stress have long been recognized and described using various terminologies. In the seventeenth century, Spanish doctors used the expression *estar roto,* literally meaning “to be broken” (Tick, 2005, p. 99). During the American Civil war, it was called “soldier’s heart” (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008). The term “shell shock” first appeared in *The Lancet*, the British medical journal, in early 1915, a few months after the start of World War I (Alexander, 2010). Shell shock was initially considered to be a physical injury, since it was thought to result from a soldier’s brain being shaken in his skull during a shell explosion. However, over the course of the war, psychiatrists began to see shell shock in increasing numbers of soldiers who had been nowhere near an explosion. When it was realized that these soldiers were suffering from emotional shock rather than physical trauma, they were often singled out as “cowards and traitors” by their peers and superiors, a stigma that many veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress continue to feel today (Lamprecht and Sack, 2002, p. 224).

“Combat fatigue” and “battle fatigue” were the common terms used during World War II (Herman, 1997; Singer, 2007). As evidenced by the word fatigue, it was becoming

better understood that war brought psychological trauma for many soldiers and other service personnel. The Vietnam War brought the term “post-Vietnam syndrome” into common usage (Poole, 2010). Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, as psychiatrists Chaim Shatan and Robert Jay Lifton worked with many distressed veterans, they also lobbied for a new diagnostic concept to be added to the American Psychiatric Association’s official diagnostic manual (Satel, 2011). It was during this time that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) first became identified as a syndrome undeniably related to combat exposure and in 1980, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was officially added as a category in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, then the *DSM-III* (McNally, 2003).

Post-traumatic stress is often understood as “an emotional and behavioral response to a traumatic stressor (or stressors) that becomes generalized and maladaptive” (Benedek, 2011, p. 550). However, within the academic and psychological/psychiatric communities, as well as amongst the sufferers themselves, there is now some debate over the term *disorder*. Stein and colleagues (2007) explain that on the one hand, some view trauma as abnormal and generally outside the realm of experience, and therefore employ medical language to define *disorders* stemming from trauma. In this view, because trauma is abnormal, disorders associated with trauma are also rare. Others, however, suggest that trauma is widespread in human life and that many people will at some point experience distress during the post-trauma period, although the persistent distress experienced by those diagnosed with ‘PTSD’ is much less common.

While the language around PTSD continues to be popular in the media and academy, the umbrella term ‘operational stress injury’ (OSI) is now also used to describe

"any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from military service. OSIs include diagnosed medical conditions such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder" (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2011). A report from the Canadian Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence (2003) indicates that many veterans seeking assistance for their distress favour the expression *operational stress injury* because it "is less intimidating and emphasizes that the problem is an 'injury', not a mental disease" (p. 7). Accordingly, all peer-support clinics for veterans suffering from invisible injuries established by Veterans Affairs Canada are named "Operational Stress Injury Clinics."

In searching for terminology outside the medical model, James Hillman (2004) suggests becoming aware of "the decline in the power of the term" associated with post-traumatic distress. Expressions such as *estar roto* (to be broken), *soldier's heart*, and *shell shock* all convey powerful images of shock and distress when compared with 'PTSD', which simply becomes an abbreviation or organizing category on a medical report (p. 64). Hillman eschews the term post-traumatic stress disorder, opting instead for 'shell shock' to describe soldiers' suffering from the traumas of war. In his keynote address as part of a Farmer-Veteran Coalition event, Shepherd Bliss (2008) spoke to attendees about "Farming as healing, especially for post-traumatic stress." He continued, "You'll notice I don't say post-traumatic stress *disorder*. It's *not* a disorder. It's an *appropriate response to trauma*." In our conversation, Shepherd Bliss explained further:

> I don't like the term PTSD because . . . the problem is, then you see yourself as a disorder. Nobody is a disorder. I don't like the terms illegal immigrants. Nobody's illegal. So language is key . . . There is a shock there and I think [shell shock] is a better term. And there is stress. But you don't have to image yourself as a victim. It's how not to be a victim, how to know that you hurt,

> admit you were hurt, and not perpetuate it on the next generation or people—but somehow pick up your bed and walk, basically.

I share James Hillman and Shepherd Bliss's aversion to the term *disorder*, which seems to blame the sufferer for traumatic experiences beyond their control. Accordingly, in this thesis, while I do occasionally use the term PTSD when referring specifically to some of the medical literature or quoting a participant, I generally use the term 'post-traumatic distress', which I first encountered in an essay by Andy Fisher (2006). I have chosen this term, despite Hillman's and Bliss's suggested 'shell shock,' because shell shock seems to apply specifically to soldiers and veterans, while the notion of post-traumatic distress extends beyond soldiers and veterans, to encompass the suffering that can accompany any post-traumatic experience.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis opened with the story of Kurt Hoelting's kayak retreats and his work with veterans at a Seattle VA hospital. This story, in many ways, captures the essence of this thesis and prepares the ground for the academic explorations, narratives and reflections to come. In addition, narrative interludes are interspersed between the chapters. These interludes are primarily stories from my own experience that have contributed to my understanding of nature, embodiment, and the effects of political violence and trauma.

This thesis is divided into three parts, each providing the basis for the next. *Part I—Uprooting Old Stories and Unearthing New Ones* includes chapters one through four, which lay the groundwork for this thesis. Following this introductory chapter, *Chapter 2: About this Research* tells the story of this research and its evolution from an ambitious

project to one that was more manageable and focused. It provides an overview of the different perspectives that have influenced my thoughts and research process in the past six years. In addition, this chapter explores the Western philosophical underpinnings of nature, some of the current Western views of nature, as well as how I refer to nature in this thesis. Nature is not a tidy category. In some senses, nature is everything because nothing comes from nothing. This is what makes nature both difficult and necessary to define.

Chapter 3: Experience-Centred Narrative Research describes both the methodology and methods underlying this thesis. This chapter briefly introduces Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and explores his critiques of the Copernican/Cartesian worldview as well as his critiques of modern science. This is followed by a description of narrative inquiry as a relational form of research, which makes it capable of paying attention to context (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007), and thus makes it an ideal method of inquiry for this research project. Merleau-Ponty (2003) said that "if Nature is an all-encompassing something we cannot think starting from concepts, let alone deductions, but we must rather think it starting from experience" (p. 87). A phenomenological approach for understanding and evaluating the patterns and roles of nature in conflict and peace considers personal experience stories—embodied experience stories—as legitimate knowledge; it recognizes that through stories, we get at subjectivity and experience (Senehi, 2000). Perhaps through stories of experience, we can begin to uncover the pretheoretical[2] dimensions of human interactions with nature, the ways nature resists, the

[2] Both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram suggest that interactions with nature occur prior to thought—that is, prior to being articulated in words, either through mental conversation in one's own mind, or articulated aloud.

ways it connects with human bodies. Perhaps through stories, we might remember to trust intuition and sensory experiences again. And perhaps through stories, we might gain access to the experience of others. In addition to exploring the main tenets of narrative research as it supports this thesis, chapter three also delves into the specific research methods used in this study, including descriptions of how participants were selected, how interviews were conducted, and the process of writing, presenting and analysing the narratives. I also reflect on the obvious gender and ethnicity imbalances amongst the participants in this research.

Chapter 4: Deconstructing Peace and Conflict Studies presents the details of my brief study of all the full-length articles in five international peace and conflict journals published over three years to illuminate the ways that nature is discussed (and overlooked) in the peace and conflict studies literature. Following that, I briefly explore the phenomenological interpretive framework, which lays the groundwork for investigating the ways that nature is dismissed in peace and conflict studies. This chapter then reveals how peace and conflict studies is deeply embedded in the Western meta-stories of rationality and progress, and deconstructs the dominant perspectives in the field to expose the theories and ideas that underlie these various perspectives. I seek mainly to investigate the patterns of thought and action towards nature now operating in, and influencing, the Western academy and thus orienting research and praxis in peace and conflict studies.

Part II—Embodiment, Nature and Narratives, which includes chapters five through nine, focuses on bringing the body back into academic research and praxis. *Chapter 5: Bringing Back the Body* delves further into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, whose

work has been important for a number of scholars writing about nature, ecology and ecopsychology (e.g., Abram, 1996; 2007; Cataldi and Hamrick, 2007; Fisher, 2002, 2006, 2009). The broader appeal of Merleau-Ponty's work in ecology- and ecopsychology-related works may be his assertion that perception is "an organism's entire *bodily* relation to its environment" (Carman, 2008, p. 1). My own work and research have also benefited from and been influenced heavily by Merleau-Ponty. His work both philosophically situates and experientially grounds this research, since perhaps more than any other Western philosopher, he provides a holistic philosophy of embodiment. He articulates an embodied way of participating in the world, a world in which we are deeply implicated and on which we are profoundly dependent for our own human survival. In addition, this chapter explores theoretical insights from biophilia hypothesis and ideas about ecological intelligence, approaches in cognitive science and neuroscience, and ecopsychology, all of which seek to reintegrate the body into Western thought and research.

Chapter 6: Empirical Connections between Nature and Healing reviews some of the recent empirical studies that demonstrate the important interconnections between nature and humans. Some studies, for example, show that hospital patients with a window view of trees recuperate faster than those with a view of a brick wall, and others reveal that nature walks result in lowered blood pressure while urban walks can lead to increased blood pressure. This chapter also explores insights from some of the work done with refugees and trauma survivors in healing gardens, and overviews the green care movement in Europe. Additionally, it examines connections between violence and lack of access to nature.

Prior to presenting the veterans' narratives, *Chapter 7: Invisible Wounds and Post-Traumatic Distress* works to contextualize the veterans' experiences within the overall history of post-traumatic distress. This chapter describes the changing picture of veterans in Canadian and American society, the invisible wounds that can result from military experience, including peacekeeping and combat exposure, and the ways that the understanding of such wounds has changed over time. It also examines general symptoms associated with post-traumatic distress, and the most common treatments currently provided. I hope that through this chapter, readers will get a sense of the deeply embodied experience of post-traumatic distress, including flashbacks, anxiety, insomnia, and nightmares. Even in cases when the sufferer does not recall the traumatic incidents that led to his/her post-traumatic experiences, the body *remembers* the experience.

James Hillman (2004) reflects that in general, human beings have difficulty imagining and understanding war because war is inhuman and impersonal—it goes against our very being. Narrative and story are what move us (Kearney, 2011). Learning the stories of those who suffer materializes this suffering. It makes it real, and enables us to imagine ourselves in their place, and to acknowledge the pain and suffering that result from war and military experience. As such, *Chapter 8: Narratives of Nature and Recovery* presents the narratives of four veterans, highlighting the role of the natural world in their recovery from post-conflict/post-military experience.

Chapter 9: Other Stories from the Edges of Violence offers an additional thirteen short stories from around the world from contexts of trauma, violence and conflict, and/or processes aimed at transforming conflict. Like the veterans' narratives in Chapter 8, the significance of these stories, which include former soldiers and civilian trauma survivors,

as well as people from peacebuilding contexts, is that in each one, the more-than-human world was a key component. Of additional importance is that all of these stories were obtained primarily by 'reading between the lines'—that is, in the original articles and/or books from which these stories were taken, the role of nature tends to be downplayed (if noted at all), in favour of the connections and relationships that are built between adversaries.

Part III—Reflections, Implications and Conclusions includes chapters ten through twelve, and focuses on the thematic connections within the veterans' narratives as well as explores the theoretical implications of this research and its meanings for praxis. This part begins with an interlude that shares some of the insights that came out of my conversation with ecopsychologist Andy Fisher.

Chapter 10: We Are Nature: Reflections and Analysis returns to the question: In what ways do veterans' narratives of post-conflict recovery highlight nature as important for physical and/or psychological and spiritual wellbeing and survival? In this chapter, I review and reflect on the thematic connections that emerged from the veterans' narratives. I also draw on my supporting interviews and other stories from the edges of violence to highlight the ways that the rhythms of the more-than-human world became part of and left traces on the processes and the people involved.

Chapter 11: Bringing Nature to Consciousness begins with an exploration of why the themes explored in Chapter 10 as well as the overall research in this thesis matter to peace and conflict studies. This chapter also returns to and explores the other three main research questions: What role does narrative play in bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies? How might nature be considered an active participant in

recovery processes, rather than a passive backdrop? In what ways might the veterans' narratives inform the stories of civilian survivors?

Finally, in *Chapter 12: Concluding Thoughts: Applications and Meanings for Practice*, I reflect on possibilities for remembering the more-than-human in peacebuilding and recovery praxis. By listening to veterans' stories of their experiences with stress and recovery in natural settings, I hope to bring a new story to the meaning of recovery, and to begin to highlight the connections between human life, bodies and nature in a way that until now has been missing in academic inquiry in peace and conflict studies, as well as in many other related academic areas, and in the practical work being done with veterans and civilians recovering from the stresses of war.

In writing this thesis, I organized the chapters in the manner I considered most logical, so that one chapter would provide the basis for the next. However, depending on the reader's interests and background, it may make sense to read the chapters in a different order. For example, for readers who have little familiarity with the discipline of peace and conflict studies, reading Chapter 4 prior to Chapter 3 (or even prior to Chapter 2) may provide a better sense of how the discipline tends of overlook nature, and accordingly the contribution of this thesis to the field. Other readers may be most interested in the veterans' personal experience stories, and may wish to skip immediately to Chapter 8. In general, there is no right or wrong way or order in which to read this thesis; however, I would encourage readers most interested in the analysis and reflections provided in Chapters 10 and 11 to first read the veterans' stories in Chapter 8, as well as the Prologue conversation with Kurt Hoelting and the interlude that presents my conversation with ecopsychologist Andy Fisher at the beginning of Part III.

narrative interlude

excursions into memory and embodiment

Vivid memories of childhood flood my mind frequently while I write this thesis and reflect on raising my son. As a child, I spent much of my time outdoors, trekking in and around Alberta's swamps, lakes, and rivers, forests and brush, stacking wood for fires, canoeing, camping, cross-country skiing, riding horses, and pursuing small critters. From ages two until five, I lived with my family outside of Rocky Mountain House in central Alberta. Sunny summer days were spent searching the nearby swamp for tadpoles and frogs, or standing at the edge of Crimson Lake, waiting to scoop up minnows to bring home by the bucketful, only to have to return them later to their home in the lake. Countless hours, too, were spent lying on my belly on the boat dock, watching the leeches and tiny 'hair snakes' that knotted themselves around the plants that grew in the shallow water. These little 'snakes' were no fatter than a thick piece of thread and less than a foot long. We would reach in to the water, mindful of the leeches, and begin to untangle the tiny creature from around a plant, only to watch it re-entangle itself as soon as we let it go. Many nights were spent around the campfire, singing songs and listening to stories. Throughout the summer months, my skin was so swollen with mosquito bites

that my mother often worried what others might think of our home situation. Winter found me sledding and playing with my sisters and friends in deep snow banks, or locating a clear patch in the ice on Crimson Lake to see through to the underwater world still alive beneath.

When I was five, we moved to a rural area in the dense pine forests of the foothills halfway between Calgary and Banff, and my rural life continued until I was 18. Power outages were a regular part of our life, on rare occasions lasting several days, and reminded us of the influences and unpredictability of the weather. And my parents told us often that we must never forget those such as bears and cougars, who lived in the same woods as us. We were never to go walking in the woods alone, and even in the company of others, we needed to make plenty of noise so as not to startle any animals. Deer and coyotes were part of every day’s reality; more occasionally moose, badgers, and porcupines were, too. We didn’t often see bears, but knew of their presence by the tracks and scat on the trails around our house, and the flattened patches of grass near the raspberry patch. Early one morning, a bear even left tracks in the frost on the wooden deck of our house, where it had looked through the patio door.

Some of my most vivid teenaged memories are from several week-long canoe trips on the North Saskatchewan River, during which I, along with a group of other teenagers and a few adults, made camp each night on the river banks far away from any amenities, surviving only on the food we brought with us, and hauling wood for a fire to dry our clothes and shoes, cook our food, and warm our bodies. Our communal tent was crudely constructed of canoes stacked one on top of the other with a plastic tarp draped over top.

These experiences mingle with the stories I heard often while growing up. My mother sometimes spoke about her parents' love for camping, and how they took her and her sisters out whenever they could—right on the sandy beaches of the Baltic coast in Germany, and later at Redberry Lake in Saskatchewan and at Long Beach on Vancouver Island. As a teenager, I remember once walking by the ocean with my mother when she suddenly stopped and sniffed the air. "This, to me, always smells like home," she said.

My father regularly talked about growing up in war-torn Berlin. He often told stories about my grandfather who, during the Allied Airlift, turned their entire yard into a garden which they guarded at night, so that his family, compared with many others in Berlin, usually had enough to eat. They kept animals, such as rabbits and goats, in the attic of their house, since if they were kept outside, desperate and hungry neighbours would steal them in the darkest hours of the night. When others used to ask, "But what about the *smell,* Herr Seidel?" my grandfather would joke, "Oh, the animals don't seem to mind us." And while my father and his brother's friends always went out to play immediately after school, the two boys spent had to first spend several hours each day picking grass and dandelions to feed the animals.

Not long after we moved to Alberta's foothills, one of my sisters got two pet rabbits from her friend in town. Both were supposed to be female, but not long after, we had 10, then 20, then 30 rabbits. And with echoes of his own childhood, my father would send my sisters and me out with five-gallon pails to pick clover and dandelions for the rabbits. Soon these rabbits began to fill our freezer, too.

In those first years after we moved to the foothills, my father also brought home a load of tiny chicks every spring. I remember always scooping them up and taking great

delight in their soft downy bodies. The chicks grew quickly, and within a few days turned into gawky teenagers, with long necks and white adult feathers peeking out from beneath their yellowy down. And within weeks, they became adult chickens. We fed and cared for those chickens all summer, until early fall, when those chickens also shared space with the rabbits our freezer.

I share these memories as a way of situating my own knowledge, and positioning how my rural childhood has influenced my thinking and given me an embodied understanding of human life as connected with the natural world. To this day, despite living in cities for many years, I still dream of wild animals with some regularity—even when these dreams come in other places, the setting is always the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. When I returned to Alberta in the summer of 2007, after spending the first year of my doctoral studies in Winnipeg, I felt an old familiarity take root in my body—the smells, the great swaths of pine forests, the mountains, the colour of the glacial lakes. I relaxed in a way I had not during the previous year in Manitoba (both while awake and in my dreams). And I realized that even as an adult, I still feel most rooted here—most at home in these places, and feel my tensions release and anxieties decrease when walking in the woods, camping in the mountains, or sitting and walking by the water. In early 2009, after spending two years in Winnipeg for graduate school, and one year in New York City for my partner's work with the United Nations, we decided to return to Calgary, which is where both Scott and I feel most at home.

Chapter 2

About this Research

> Nature is not simply the object, the accessory of consciousness in its tête-à-tête with knowledge. It is an object from which we have arisen, in which our beginnings have been posited little by little until the very moment of tying themselves to an existence which they continue to sustain and aliment.
>
> —Merleau-Ponty, RC, 64

This chapter starts by telling the story of this research and thesis. In searching for a way (or ways) to explore questions about nature in peace and conflict studies, this dissertation has meandered across topics and locations—from Calgary, to Winnipeg, to New York, then back to Calgary. In all of these places, I continued to listen for the ecological story, and indeed, it was in Calgary again—the place I feel most rooted, most *at home*—that I finally found my focus. It has also been coloured by some wonderful experiences (becoming a mother), some unspeakable experiences (the death of a beloved nephew), and some unfortunate experiences (the disbanding of my research group). This chapter also explores definitions of nature, including Western philosophical underpinnings and modern uses as well as the ways that I understand and use the term nature in this thesis.

The Evolution of a Thesis

Asking questions about nature has not been easy and in the past few years, I have stumbled a number of times in my attempts to articulate and find examples for this research. At one point several years ago, I realized that it might have been easier to focus on a topic such as environmental conflict or ‘resource’ scarcity, since there is considerable work being done in the area, and I could easily have found a specific example to investigate. However, my sideways glances and ecological curiosity revealed that the issues I wanted to explore run much deeper. I wanted to find ways to engage the earthly nature of the human body in academic inquiry, which is inherently messy and has not always been popular in Western academic circles. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty was accused of being anti-intellectual for his attempts to bring the body into philosophical inquiry (Madison, 1999). An additional difficulty inherent in this research project is that it is not well contained within disciplinary boundaries, but rather, it reaches out across disciplines, and attempts to build bridges between phenomenological frameworks, ecological and ecopsychological perspectives, and peace and conflict studies.

This research began as part of a larger study, in which I intended to explore the ways that nature features into the entire conflict cycle—to draw out stories involving patterns of reciprocal interaction with nature, with a focus on not only content but also context. For example, there are many stories of the Jewish Partisans who survived the Holocaust by escaping into the forests of Poland and Belarus during World War II (e.g., Grabowski, 2004; Yad Vashem, 2001). A different but similarly valuable example might be Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement in Kenya, which works to connect peace and good governance with environmental protection (Maathai, 2003). Other examples

include the Cyprus Consortium Peacebuilding Project's summer camp that brought together Greek and Turkish Cypriot youth in a wooded area of Pennsylvania (Schirch, 2005), the negotiations that brought an end to apartheid in South Africa, which included fishing trips, 'bush' conferences, and meetings held in park-like settings in England (Sparks, 1995), and the Norway Channel that led to the signing of the Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which involved secret meetings held in the Norwegian countryside, surrounded by pine forests, lakes, mountains, and fjords (Corbin, 1994). In all three of these cases, the locations themselves became part of the peacebuilding story (Westlund, 2010).

As I set out to begin this project of gathering living examples of patterns of interaction with nature amongst both individuals and groups during the entire cycle of conflict, peacebuilding, and recovery from conflict, I did not envision how difficult it would be to find participants and stories. In hindsight, I might have better anticipated the struggles inherent in looking for the story that is usually excluded from standard or traditional academic research—that perhaps part of the reason it is excluded or missing is that it is difficult to tell! When I proposed this project to my committee, I also did not intend to have a baby in the middle of this research, and was not prepared for the debilitating nausea and exhaustion that consumed me for the first 16 weeks of my pregnancy nor for the difficulties associated with travelling to do research once my son was born. During the second and third trimesters of my pregnancy, I also took my first university teaching job and found most of my time consumed by all of the experiences and learnings associated with teaching in an academic setting for the first time. As such, both my pregnancy and teaching job meant that most of this research had to take place

after my son was born. Thus, the research needed to evolve to support my new role as a mother, and to be present for my child with no long absences from home.

In December 2009, towards the end of my pregnancy, I became involved with the Canadian Veteran Adventure Foundation (CVAF), a Calgary-based organization founded by veteran Cpl. (ret.) Christian MacEachern, C.D. After years of undergoing treatment for his post-traumatic distress through the medical system, Christian discovered that he felt best during and after spending time in nature. Based on his own experiences and insights, he founded the CVAF to facilitate nature experiences for other Canadian veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress. In December 2009 and January 2010, I conducted initial interviews with all of the CVAF board members and realized that it might be possible to focus on this one organization and the experiences of individual veterans participating in its programs.

Then, my son Cameron was born in February. Since my husband was eligible for a paternity leave, I intended to shorten my maternity leave and to resume my research with the CVAF in the summer of 2010. However, the shock and grief that accompanied my nephew Isaac’s unexpected death in June 2010 left me both unable to concentrate academically and made me profoundly aware of the fragility and preciousness of life and of spending time with my young son—time that I would never get back. Therefore, I extended my leave and did not meet again with the CVAF until January 2011, when together we planned for me resume my research in conjunction with their July 2011 program.

Unfortunately, before that could happen, the CVAF, which had always been plagued by funding difficulties, disbanded due to a lack of funding. After a period of

disappointment and uncertainty, in my search to salvage my research, I came across the stories of several other veterans whose experiences in nature complemented the story I had heard from Christian MacEachern and the CVAF board members. In the end all of these unforeseen events and circumstances have led to a stronger thesis—not one that I could have imagined when I started out, but one that has fascinated and inspired me, that has interested and captured the attention of many others I have spoken with along the way, and that is timely and relevant as thousands of Canadian and U.S. soldiers return from their military experiences overseas. With the help of the veterans' narratives, some narratives based on my own experience, and several from other interviews, I explore in depth the idea that humans *are* nature, that there is no mythical separation, and the ways this holds important propositions for trauma recovery, peace and conflict studies, and for all life.

Defining Nature: Concept and Story

Phusis kruptesthai philei wrote Greek philosopher Heraclitus in Ephesus around 500 BCE (Hadot, 2006, p. 1). These three words from Heraclitus's small book are now commonly translated as "nature loves to hide," a phrase that has been the subject of much interpretation (and, according to Pierre Hadot, misinterpretation) over the centuries. Indeed, the word nature is a term so dense and complex, often holding several levels of meaning at once, and so burdened with history, that it seems nearly impossible to define. Merleau-Ponty suggested that rather than thinking about nature starting from concepts, the only way to conceive of nature is to start from lived experience (N, 87).

In *The Elements of Style* (1918), one of the most influential writing guides in North America, William Strunk, Jr. lists 'nature' among the "Words and Expressions

Commonly Misused." Strunk advises avoiding the word nature unless one can be specific in one's meaning. He especially urges that writers avoid ambiguous phrases such as "a lover of nature" and "poems about nature" since "the reader cannot tell whether the poems have to do with natural scenery, rural life, the sunset, the untouched wilderness, or the habits of squirrels" (p. 39).

Kate Soper (1995; 2000) suggests there are three overall ways in which the concept of nature is understood in Western society. In what she refers to as the "realist" sense, we as human beings continue to see ourselves as nature and as being affected by the "laws of nature," which apply to the entire physical world. Like all other creatures, we are born and we die, we need to eat and excrete, we are affected by gravity. However, Soper also suggests a second sense, in which nature is dualistically posed against culture, and against human (i.e., human vs. non-human). In this sense, what is 'natural' is that which is not human. It tends to be this "metaphysical concept" of nature that we use when pondering the question of human specialness—that is, when differentiating ourselves from other life forms and setting ourselves as superior to nature. Soper additionally draws attention to a third sense, which she suggests is the "surface" or "lay" concept of nature. This is the most common use of nature in everyday life and language, which tends to depict nature as the opposite of urban, as in the concepts of countryside, wilderness, landscape, rurality, and domestic and wild animals. Commenting on this lay concept, Soper (1995) writes, "This is the nature of immediate experience and aesthetic appreciation: the nature we have destroyed and polluted and are asked to conserve and preserve" (p. 320). Wilderness here becomes the binary of 'civilization' and those who lament urban lifestyles often long for what they perceive as the pureness and simpleness

of a life in the wilderness (van den Berg, 2007). William Cronon (1995) describes how this idea of wilderness offers itself "as the best antidote to our human selves" (p. 1).

The way that nature is thought about and defined is also a cultural story; it is used to justify a way of life in terms of what is natural. For example, capitalism regards competition and survival of the fittest as "natural" (Evernden, 1992, p. 27). And Neil Evernden argues that no matter how I define nature, I am implicitly making a judgement about 'the good life'—about what is worthwhile for me, my family, my society, and the world. The industrialist, oil sands executive or nuclear plant operator has a conception of the good life, too, perhaps even a conception of nature's role in the good life, but it is likely different from mine. Specifically, the industrialist might think of nature as 'resources' to support the good life, or s/he might enjoy spending time hiking and camping and canoeing when not at work, able to consciously separate work from playtime and not perceive any connections between the two.

Philosophical and Historical Underpinnings of Nature

Nature and its relationship to human beings has long been one of the main topics of Western philosophy. In seeking to understand and define nature, it has been helpful to explore the philosophical underpinnings that underlie the topic of nature within Western consciousness. I do not investigate all views of nature, since in this thesis I am suggesting that the Western tradition needs to look inside itself for alternative ways of knowing and thinking. Therefore, this section reviews some of the Western philosophical basis for thinking about nature, as well as some of the main perspectives of nature that operate simultaneously in contemporary Western society. I delve into the many contested

meanings of nature—attempting to hold at bay any illusions of certainty about nature, and exposing the theories and ideas that underlie the various perspectives of nature.

Most often, over the centuries, Western philosophers have sought to establish human *being* as a unique category of being, superior to everything else on earth, thus leading to the development of what is commonly considered a hostile view of nature. However, this hostile view did not always exist. In ancient Greece, for example, one found a holistic concept of nature based on an understanding of the interrelationships and interdependencies between humans and the world around them (Abram, 1996). Nature featured prominently in the myths and epics, where the living gods could be heard, seen, and felt in nature: Athene in the owl's hoot, Boreus in gusts of the north wind, and Poseidon in the stormy seas (Hillman, 2004). In this primarily oral culture, David Abram (1996) explains that words were mere "utterances," whose meaning arose and existed only in their spoken context, and then immediately "slipped back into silence" (p. 110). Words and meaning were only ever connected to phenomena and events in the wider world they sought to describe.

The orality of Greek culture changed with the two men considered to be the founders of Western philosophy: Socrates and Plato. Though mostly illiterate, Socrates set the stage for change with his *dialectic*, when he asked students to reflect on and explain the meaning of their spoken words, to "separate themselves . . . from the phrases and formulas that had become habitual through the constant repetition of traditional teaching stories" (Abram, 1996, p. 109). Plato expanded the Socratic dialectic, a move that David Abram argues was facilitated by the emergence of the phonetic alphabet,

which gave words “new autonomy and permanence” (p. 111). Once words were written down, their meanings could be contemplated outside of their spoken context.

Plato’s view of the nature was established in his dialogue *Phaedrus*, in which his main character Socrates talks to Phaedrus and explains: “I’m an intellectual, you see, and country places with their trees tend to have nothing to teach me, whereas people in town do” (Plato, 2002, p. 7). Here, Plato sets the tone for the Western philosophical tradition to deliberate *nature* apart from (and below) the human experience of being (Abram, 1996). But while European thought has long been associated with this hostile view of nature, the new way of thinking did not immediately filter through all of European society. For hundreds of years still, many people lived in reciprocity with their surroundings. It was only with the sixteenth and seventeenth century witch burnings that Europeans saw a final attempt to extinguish the remaining “traditions rooted in the direct, participatory experience of plants, animals, and elements” (p. 199).

Along with the violent rooting out of these remaining land-based traditions, the beginning of the seventeenth century saw the rise of the first ‘modern’ philosopher, René Descartes, who in his *Sixth Meditation* described nature as only a “thought,” thus entrenching it as wholly separate from, and exterior to, human being (Merleau-Ponty, N, 83). Indeed, it may have been this changed conception of nature that allowed for the many scientific discoveries that began shortly thereafter. Merleau-Ponty contends that if the conception of nature had not become so estranged from human being, the scientific revolution could not have occurred.

Following on Descartes, Immanuel Kant also took up the idea of nature, articulating a humanist hierarchy that even more firmly placed humans in a position of

dominance. Kant reinforced nature as a construction of human reason, and suggested that human being is only complete in opposition to nature (Merleau-Ponty, N). Within Kantian humanism, "all that we can speak of is only an attribute of human being. Such thought tends to make the problem of Nature disappear" (p. 136).

Not long after Kant, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling introduced a romantic conception, referring to nature as "the barbaric principle" (Vallier, 2003, p. xviii), which he argued was the most ancient element in the world, even "more ancient than God" (Merleau-Ponty, N, 38). Even though nature remained opposite humans through the process of reflection, Schelling perceived that there was a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, not the linear and hierarchical one-way relationship advocated by those who preceded him. It was Schelling who first suggested that "we rediscover Nature in our perceptual experience prior to reflection" (p. 39). Schelling's notion of perception became important for Edmund Husserl's articulation of phenomenology and his *Lebenswelt* (life-world), which entailed "the world of our immediately lived experience, *as* we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it" (Abram, 1996, p. 40). Husserl believed that it was phenomenology's responsibility to reveal how all theory and science arises from and is sustained by our embodied lived experience.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Maurice Merleau-Ponty was still responding to and grappling with the Cartesian conception of nature, which he viewed as highly destructive. Following Husserl, Merleau-Ponty set out to offer an alternative philosophy of experience based on the role of perception and human embodiment in the world. Drawing on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty began articulating a new vision of nature, in which the human body emerged at the intersection

of nature and thought/reason (Vallier, 2003, p. xx). For Merleau-Ponty, the human mind was not "an impartial observer of Nature," but rather human awareness was itself a process of nature (N, 117). Thus, he argued that there exists "a sort of reciprocity between Nature and me as a sensing being. I am part of Nature and function as any event of Nature: I am by my body part of Nature and the parts of Nature allow for them relations of the same type as those of my body with Nature" (ibid.).

Perhaps echoing Merleau-Ponty's philosophical iterations, renowned psychiatrist C.G. Jung (1964) reflected on his connection with nature this way: "At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons" (p. 225). This is a view that regards nature not only as a surrounding context, but acknowledges that nature is intimately "*with us* and *within us*, both at once" (Casey, 2006, p. 193). This view implies that nature exists deep within the human psyche and experience, and it is this view that I take up in this thesis.

Nature in this Thesis

Ultimately, the word nature is "always the expression of an ontology—and its privileged expression" (Merleau-Ponty, N, 204). That is, conceptualizations of nature within Western thought and languages are historically situated and change over time, which makes nature inherently difficult to define. Evernden (2002) goes so far as to suggest that nature is a dangerous word, for "it's never exactly what you think it is" (p. 112). Nature does not name itself (Schama, 1995). Renowned storyteller Ursula K. Le Guin (1994) observes that "as soon as you call it nature, you immediately create a dichotomy between you and it" (p. 113). And by naming it nature, it becomes something

other than human. Le Guin suggests that most peoples who fully inhabit and respect their ecosystem do not have a word for it: "They'd just call it the world" (pp. 106-107). Indeed, James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson (2000) observes that most Indigenous languages have no word for nature. He provides an example from the Atlantic coast Míkmaq, who when referring to nature and their environment might use words such as "'space' or 'place of creation' (*kisu'lt melkiko'tin*)" (p. 257).

In opening up this word nature, poet Gary Snyder (1992) is helpful when he advises that nature is not easily *known*, that "whatever it actually is, it will not fulfill our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models" (p. v). Does or can *nature* ever have a single meaning? Is it the tree that grows outside my window? the park across the street? farmland? wilderness? only those we designate as 'natural resources' or 'raw materials'? is it cows? fishes? insects? rocks? rivers? wind? Only elements that are 'alive,' or all of the animate and inanimate earth? In looking at these questions, I become temporarily preoccupied with finding *the* meaning of nature, only to discover that there isn't one, that perhaps Snyder is right: "the greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us" (ibid.). Nature is infinitely unknowable.

Still, as Merleau-Ponty (2003) asks, "Wouldn't there be something that had always been intended, if not expressed, by those who use words?" (p. 3). Tracing a word's etymology sometimes reveals surprising connections, forgotten meanings embedded within the word itself. 'Nature' can be traced to the Latin *natura*, literally meaning 'birth,' and *natura* itself comes from *natus* ('to be born'). Perhaps this Latin word for nature came from its speakers' conceptions that the earth provides life to, or quite

literally *births* (and keeps alive), human beings. Indeed, even the word *human* comes from *humus*, meaning ‘of the earth,’ which points to human beings’ mortal and fragile nature (OED, 2001). No matter how hard we try, it is not so easy to escape our origins. In modern English lexicon, however, these original meanings are all but forgotten.

When I use the word nature in this thesis, I am trying to use it in a way that acknowledges that all life exists within a non-growing ecosphere.[3] Ecology might be considered narrowly by some as the scientific discipline that studies “all interactions among living beings and the environment” with the goal of understanding “the functioning of whole living systems, not simply [breaking] them down into component parts for analysis” (Callenbach, 1998, p. 34). However, here I use the word ‘ecology’ more broadly, not just in the scientific sense, but stemming from its origins in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning ‘house, dwelling place, habitation’ (OED, 2001). Ecofeminist philosopher and theologian Catherine Keller (1996) reflects that this sense of meaning is shared by many ecologists and Indigenous peoples, for whom nature “is first of all habitat, the reality in which—or more precisely, as *part of which*—one dwells” (p. 146). Thus, in this thesis, I draw on an understanding of human experience as taking place within complex interdependent ecosystems, and rejecting any human/nature and mind/body splits wrought by Cartesian thinking. As humans, *we are nature*, our existence itself is “a network of relations” (Fisher, 2002, p. 11).

Despite the common view of Western philosophy as hostile towards nature, the ways that I am thinking and writing about nature in this thesis are not new, but have

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[3] Callenbach (1998) explains that this term ‘ecosphere’ is often interchangeable with ‘biosphere,’ but that ecosphere is capable of not only referring to all earthly living things, but also granting “a stronger sense of their interconnections with their nonliving environment (soil, rocks, air, and water)” (p. 20).

swirled about and been articulated since time immemorial, existing in the West alongside the separated view of humans and nature. For example, historian and philosopher Pierre Hadot (1995) recalls that for the Stoics, such as Marcus Aurelius who lived nearly 2000 years ago, when one acted according to nature, one was acting “in full awareness of the fact that one is part of a cosmic whole” (p. 283). Hadot observes the similarity to Einstein’s view at the beginning of the twentieth century when “he denounced the optical illusion of a person who imagines himself to be a separate entity, while he is really a part of the whole which we call the universe.” Accordingly, Einstein asserted that it is “our duty to open our hearts to all living beings, and to all of nature in her magnificence” (ibid.).

My purpose in using the word nature it is not to say that nature is *other than human*, but rather that as humans, we *are* nature, nature *is* us. I am trying to get away from human-centred notions of nature, to reveal the intimate bodily connections with nature—with plants and animals, earth and sky, winds and rocks. Merleau-Ponty said, “I am part of Nature and function as any event of Nature: I am by my body part of Nature” (N, 117). And at the most basic level, it is our bodies that remind us we are nature. As Timothy Beatley (2004) points out, our bodies have a biological need for full-spectrum sunlight, and for access to the stars, sky, and other elements in nature. Moreover, Gay Bradshaw (2009), whose work centres on trans-species psychology, reflects that “attributes once considered uniquely human—including culture, mourning rituals, empathy, self-awareness, suffering, tool use, distinct personalities, ethics, complex linguistic abilities, and a sense of aesthetics—are now identified in myriad species” (p. 159).

Nature is not an assortment of things that exist *out there* but rather as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) observe, “it is part of our being. It is the locus of our existence and identity. We cannot and do not exist apart from it” (p. 566). This thesis is exposing and attempting to get beyond the falseness of human/nature dichotomies, and beyond the socially constructed concepts of ‘nature versus humans’ or ‘nature versus society.’ While industrialization and Cartesian thought have supported forgetting that humans are nature, physicist and plasma scientist Timothy Eastman (2008) reveals the ways that modern comprehensions of nature are beginning to shift based on research in fields such as nonlinear dynamics, quantum theory, superconductivity, and space plasmas. This research is showing that “all entities are constituted by networks of relationships, in contrast to substance views that ground all things in some type of immutable substance” (p. 89), an understanding that has been at the base of indigenous philosophies since the beginning of time.

Richard Louv (2008) suggests that in its most broad interpretation, nature is everything, including toxic waste, or in a more narrow interpretation, nature might be conceived of as what is not human and things not made by humans (p. 8). When I think of and use the word nature, it falls between these two extremes. Toxic waste and iPods and computers are not nature (although the products that go into them are nature, such as the metals mined from the ground, the plastics derived from petroleum, itself from the fossilized remains of plants and animals that lived long ago). As Merleau-Ponty (2003) said, nature is “that which carries us” (p. 4). It is the food I eat, the clothes I wear, the shelter over my head. It is my own body, my permeable skin, the water inside that I both expel and replenish constantly, the minerals and elements found in my bones and in the

bones of other living creatures, as well as in the earth's soil. Nature is language itself, writes Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*, "the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests" (VI, 155).

Nature, as it is used and described in the stories in this thesis, inspires wonder, imagination and vision. It is something with which one can have intimacy. It awakens our senses, breathes new life into places that once seemed dead or broken. It is the earth, the skies, the winds, the rocks. It is the trees outside my window, the park down the street, the food I eat, the plants in my living room, the garden in my backyard, the farm an hour from my house. Even more, it is not separate from what is human—it is our human bodies, the young child playing in my living room, and my own self sitting at this computer. As Andy Fisher (2002) writes, "The body is the site of intersection of inside and outside, self and world; it belongs to both realms and mediates their relations" (p. 64).

Chapter 3

Experience-Centred Narrative Research

> Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways.
>
> —Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 10

The core of this inquiry is experience-centred narrative research (Squire, 2008) within the phenomenological interpretive framework provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Narrative research and phenomenology share many overlapping qualities, particularly in that both focus on *lived experience* and the meaning of that experience. In his seminal work on phenomenological research, Max van Manen (1998) writes that "To do phenomenological research is *to question* something phenomenologically and, also, to be addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like. What is the nature of this lived experience?" (p. 42). The phenomenological framework appeals to me in the ways that it encourages reflection on embodied experience. In particular, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy encourages reflection on how the body inhabits and is intertwined with the world of nature. In addition, because human experience takes place at both conscious and unconscious levels, narrative is a helpful and necessary way of understanding and making sense of that experience, and within this research context especially experience in nature.

This chapter briefly introduces Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and explores his critiques of both the Copernican/Cartesian worldview and modern science. Following that, it provides an overview of narrative research methods and a discussion of the specific methods used in this inquiry.

Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that there is no 'objective' world, that everything starts from subjective experience, and that all meaning is derived from that experience. He explains that in phenomenology, "We are interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us up to what is not ourselves" (VI, 159). Unlike many philosophical methods and academic inquiries, which focus solely on the realm of the intellect, for Merleau-Ponty, "my body is my point of view upon the world" (PP, 81). Indeed, the central tenet of his philosophy is that the body cannot be taken out of the subject—we, as human beings, are subjects by virtue of our embodiment, and all meaning is grounded "in the bodily intelligibility of perception" (Carman, 2008, p. 23). At its core, Merleau-Ponty is proposing a philosophy of experience—both a way to conceive of human embodied experience and to acknowledge that our ways of knowing only ever arise from our own personal experience. As Matthews (2006) reflects, "we can only attach meaning to an abstract idea by referring back to our own direct experience of things, that is, to perception" (p. 21). It is only by living in the world—by *inhabiting* the world—that we come to know about it, since as Merleau-Ponty points out, "the world is there before any possible analysis of mine" (PP, x).

Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception refers not to abstract ideas or thought, but to *direct* contact and engagement with the world around us. The

value of phenomenology for this inquiry, and particularly the value of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, is that it provides possibilities for theorizing and investigating the human body, including intuition and sensory experiences, in conflict, peacebuilding and recovery—through examining the ways nature may support human physical, psychological, and even spiritual wellbeing at all stages of human life, including situations of conflict, peacebuilding and recovery. In addition, Merleau-Ponty provides an alternative to competitive scholarly traditions which exist namely to refute and prove one another false. Instead, Merleau-Ponty offers a cooperative, non-adversarial philosophical approach, undertaking to tease out and learn from the positive aspects of different traditions, and to build and expand on these aspects (Carman, 2008). As an interdisciplinary scholar, I find this approach is appealing, because it implies a focus on research and theory as method for bettering the world through discussion and collaboration.

The Mind/Body Split

René Descartes is often blamed for severing the thinking mind from the living body in Western philosophical and scientific thought, but the origins of the mind/body dualism likely began with Nicolaus Copernicus, who approximately a century before Descartes first advanced the theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun. David Abram (2007) reflects that the heliocentric system radically contradicts human sensory experience, in which we observe the sun moving across the sky while the earth remains motionless beneath our feet. Thus, as Europeans began to accept Copernicus's theory, they no longer felt able to trust their bodily senses, and when Galileo later confirmed the heliocentric system, he proposed the necessity of splitting objects from the human perceptions of

those objects (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). Thus the work of Copernicus and Galileo laid the foundation for the first 'modern' philosopher, René Descartes, whose famous dictum *cogito ergo sum* ('I think therefore I exist') provided the orientation for all subsequent philosophy. With this dictum, Descartes completed the detachment of mind from body, and moreover, privileged thought over bodily sensations (Abram, 2007). Thus, as Merleau-Ponty explained, "The Copernican revolution . . . [allowed for] a return to human being as the power to construct" (N, 22).

These moves by Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held deep implications for all philosophy and science that followed. In Merleau-Ponty's essay *Eye and Mind*, he suggests that science and philosophy are "two monsters born from [Cartesian] dismemberment" (OE, 308-309). With Descartes, thought became "placed in the service of the body and functions according to the disposition of the nervous machine" (N, 19), a view that continues to dominate Western philosophy and science today. Philosopher Taylor Carman (2008) explains that the continued dominance of Cartesian dualism has meant that in scholarship, and in life more generally, we have become used to conceiving of the body as a simple object standing apart from ourselves, as a machine comprising individual parts. The legacy of the Copernican revolution and the subsequent Cartesian split was a retreat into thought as "our essential relation to the world" (ibid., p. 12), which is the mind-set that Merleau-Ponty worked all his life to revise.

In his 1948 talks on French public radio, Merleau-Ponty insisted, "we are not alone in this transfigured world. In fact, this world is not just open to other human beings, but also to animals, children, primitive peoples and madmen who dwell in it after their own

fashion; they too coexist in this world" (C, 54). While Merleau-Ponty's manner of speaking, particularly his reference to "primitive peoples and madmen" is no longer welcomed as politically correct, the heart of his point is important—that different ways of knowing, points of view, and experiences, both amongst human beings and within the more-than-human world, have been largely ignored in the science and philosophy following Descartes because scientists and scholars "believed that there is such a thing as a *fully-formed man* whose vocation it is to be 'lord and master' of nature" (C, 55). Merleau-Ponty observes that "Descartes saw animals as no more than collections of wheels, levers, and springs – in effect, as machines" (C, 54). In addition, any attention paid to children "fell on trying to measure how far their efforts fell short of what the average adult or healthy person was capable of accomplishing" (C, 55). Thus, in the Cartesian worldview, if you do not 'measure up' to the definition of the 'fully-formed man,' you are not worthy of attention. Furthermore, if you *are* a 'fully-formed man,' only your mind is important, while your embodied experiences should be dismissed.

Modern Science and 'Objectivity'

The legacy of the Copernican worldview and Cartesian thought continues to influence philosophers, scientists and other researchers into the twenty-first century, not only in terms of the ways that we conceive of and separate thought from corporeal experience, but also the ways that we separate humans from nature, in what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the 'ontology of the object' (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). In this view, which continues to be held and advocated by many modern academics, human beings are removed from an active, engaged and responsive relationship with/in the world, and we pretend ourselves instead to be only external, passive and disembodied

observers. The problem that Merleau-Ponty points to, however, is that the objectivist disembodied account is only make-believe, for we can never be without a body. As Robert Kirkman (2007) writes, scientists, too, "are participants in the flesh of the world" (p. 28).

For Merleau-Ponty all of human experience is "through and through compounded of relationships with the world" (PP, xiv). Importantly, in his critique of Cartesian dualisms and modern science, Merleau-Ponty was not confronting science itself; he saw the importance of scientific research and was interested in the outcomes of science in its proper context—that is, as scientific observations. He was bothered, however, by the privileging of science and the ways that utilitarian attitudes had gained favour over lived experience in the world. He was particularly concerned by the dogmatism that lived experience is of little value while science "thinks itself capable of absolute and complete knowledge" (C, 36). Merleau-Ponty was thus deeply critical of the objectivist stance that views science—and only science—as providing the best and most dependable description of reality, for as he would point out science itself is a human accomplishment—designed by humans for human purposes. "All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge," writes Merleau-Ponty, "is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced" (PP, ix). All of our experiences and knowledge are located in and moulded by our corporeal animal bodies. "I am the absolute source," he argues (ibid.). Thus human beings gave science and all scientific concepts their original meaning, including

the notion of objectivity, but this seems to have been forgotten in the search for objective knowledge and the modern privileging of science.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the objectivity sought within scientific research is impossible—that all of our actions, choices and experiences in life provide the lens through which we interpret and understand the world. Our engagement in and understanding of the world comes not from theoretical positions, but from inhabiting the world in/through our bodies. As human beings, we are not disembodied minds: “Human existence can never abstract from itself in order to gain access to the naked truth” (C, 80). Rather, all human thoughts and theories are themselves embodied. While science reduces the human body to a series of discrete systems—respiratory, circulatory, digestive, reproductive, nervous, immune, and so on, which can be documented and diagrammed in medical textbooks—David Abram (1996) explains that the “breathing body, as it experiences and inhabits the world, is very different from the objectified body” (p. 45).

In the last essay published before his early death, Merleau-Ponty continued his critique of science and the absolute reverence for scientific knowledge in Western society:

> Science manipulates things and gives up living in them. It makes its own limited models of things; operating upon these indices or variables to effect whatever transformations are permitted by their definition, it comes face to face with the real world only at rare intervals . . . . [the] fundamental bias [of science] is to treat everything as though it were an object-in-general – as though it meant nothing to us and yet was predestined for our use. . . . To say that the world is, by nominal definition, the object *x* of our operations is to treat the scientists’ knowledge as if it were absolute, as if everything that is and has been was meant only to enter the laboratory. Thinking ‘operationally’ has become a sort of absolute artificialism, such as we see in the ideology of cybernetics, where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines. (OE, 291-292)

Scientific theory relies on finding conditions and qualities that can be quantified or measured so that the knowledge may qualify as objective. In Merleau-Ponty's first course at the Collège de France on *The Concept of Nature* (1956-1957), he commented that the scientist "looks for a way to grasp the phenomenon, but he doesn't seek to understand it . . . Immediately after having discovered the phenomenon, he looks for the conditions of it" (N, 86). Matthews (2006, p. 38) draws analogies between what American philosopher Thomas Nagel calls science's "View from Nowhere" and Merleau-Ponty's description that science seeks "the exercise of a pure and unsituated intellect can allow us to gain access to an object free of all human traces, just as God would see it" (C, 36).

The empirical view of the world imagines that we as human beings can step outside our own experience, and see the world solely as a series of separate objects that exist only in spatial relation to one another (Matthews, 2006). In addition, non-objects, such as emotions, cannot be studied scientifically, and as such, tend to be undervalued within the scientific paradigm. Science tends only to be concerned with what can be studied and observed externally (although recently some scientists, such as Esther Sternberg (2000; 2009) and Candace Pert (1997), have become interested in additional facets of human experience, such as senses and emotions).[4] This prestige given to science, reason and thought over sensual embodied experience leads to the belief that empirical and quantitative scientific inquiry is the only valid method for revealing the world (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). However, each of our experiences, Merleau-Ponty reminds

[4] Dr. Ester Sternberg (2000; 2009), who is currently the Chief of Neuroendocrine Immunology and Behavior at the National Institute of Mental Health, has spent much of her career investigating mind-body interactions in illness and healing. In the Preface to her book, *The Balance Within: The Science Connecting Health and Emotions*, Sternberg (2000) comments on the ways that scientists studying mind-body connections are both ignored and often rejected by the rest of the scientific community.

us, are only lived inside ourselves—are grounded in our bodies—and thus our perception is never outside ourselves but always the point of view from which we sense and experience the world. “I live in [the world] from the inside; I am immersed in it,” he observes. “After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me” (OE, 309). Thus, Merleau-Ponty’s critique of science involves specifically asking “whether science does, or ever could, present us with a picture of the world which is complete, self-sufficient and somehow closed in upon itself, such that there could no longer be any meaningful questions outside this picture” (C, 34).

Narrative Research Methods

As examined in the previous section, Descartes’ dualistic legacy has taught us to distrust our senses and instead to trust and rely solely on our intellect to learn about the world. Positivist research traditions, which unfolded from Cartesian thinking, typically focus on the so-called virtues of reliability, objectivity, generalizability, and validity—that is, what counts as true and which ways of knowing are considered valid (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). Such research seeks to measure and prove cause and effect, and explanations derived from this type of research are generalized, so as to be widely applicable. Indeed, Chapter 6 of this thesis provides an overview of the empirical research currently examining the connections between humans and nature. This research typically falls within the positivist paradigm, since researchers measure participants’ blood pressure, or levels of cortisol, for example, after spending time in nature versus urban settings. Or they measure levels of interpersonal violence in accordance with participants’ access to nature settings. Similarly, the medical and psychological research on post-traumatic stress disorder often focuses on large groups and generalizes the

symptoms and causes of the ‘disorder.’ Indeed, a positivist approach to this thesis research might focus on explaining nature’s effects on veterans’ physiology. Such an approach would also seek to incorporate ways of generalizing the veterans’ experiences and to incorporate criteria such as validity and reliability (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Yet, in the veterans’ narratives shared in Chapter 8, despite some commonalities, each person’s experience of stress and distress is unique. Further, their stories reveal that healing and recovery are embodied and individual experiences (despite the fact that the veterans may also describe them as social and place-based experiences).

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty explores the case of Schneider, a psychiatric patient, who suffered from brain damage that left him feeling disconnected from his body. While he is able to perform routine and habitual tasks with his eyes closed, such as blowing his nose, Schneider is generally unaware of the physical location of his body and is unable to perform new or abstract movements, which most people take for granted, such as his doctor’s request to touch his nose with a ruler (PP, 118-159). However, as Merleau-Ponty explains, it is not enough to understand and explain the symptoms associated Schneider’s medical condition. The problem for Schneider is more personal than his symptoms—his suffering stems from the fact that his condition impedes him from that for which he yearns: to interact normally with others and with the world. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s assessment, Matthews (2006) further explains that while “causal explanation will tell us how it came about that Schneider suffered in this way, . . . it will not help us to understand what his disorder meant to him, what role it played in his life” (p. 72).

Thus, paralleling Merleau-Ponty's observations and approach, narrative researchers Stefinee Pinnegar and Gary Daynes (2007) argue that by distilling human experience into measureable and distinct and generalizable portions, quantitative research loses the "nuances of experience and relationship in a particular setting that are of interest to those examining human experience" (p. 15). Positivist methods have turned individual experience into something that can be objectified and quantified, as well as have turned nature into something that exists only outside our human bodies. According to Jean Clandinin and Jerry Rosiek (2007), narrative research is a response to positivist research methods. And Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) define narrative research as "a movement away from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist perspective toward a research perspective focused on interpretation and understanding of meaning" (p. 9). Story is often the best way of getting at and understanding human experience. Narrative allows us to better enter the experience, since "understanding depends on being able to share something with the person whose behaviour we are trying to understand, to be able to see the world from their point of view" (Matthews, 2006, p. 72). In the case of veterans suffering from stress and post-traumatic distress from their military training and service, it is not enough to understand their symptoms causally. Rather, this research draws on experiential accounts and reflections of veterans' lived experiences to illuminate the importance of human senses, and to value their embodied contact with the world around them.

Andy Fisher (2002) draws attention to the ways that "our experience is always directing us toward some sort of contact with the world and the world itself calls forth our experience" (p. 26). Explaining stress and post-traumatic distress causally does not get at

what the experience is like for the individual who suffers, nor can it illuminate the efforts and courage required to live with such experiences and move towards recovery. It is narrative that materializes each veteran's suffering, and enables a better understanding of the long-term difficulties associated with post-conflict healing and recovery.

In contrast with positivist methods, narrative inquiry is capable of paying attention to context—indeed, as Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point out, narrative inquiry is "a relational form of inquiry" (p. 45) and "the qualities of place and the impact of places on lived and told experiences are crucial" (p. 70). Each veteran came individually to the realization that he feels best in the company of the more-than-human world. Each describes his phenomenological experience of nature and this experience is meaningful in ways beyond those which can be explained by science—indeed, this embodied experience of interdependence cannot be measured, proved, or evaluated. Moreover, veteran Tim Lewis shared that he does not need to explain or understand the ways that nature has affected him: "I'm not sure if I really *want* to explain it either. It's good that there's mystery around."

Trauma and distress, argues counsellor and psychotherapist Kim Etherington (2003), are experienced subjectively, and are embodied in various ways, including through "physical illness, disability, addiction and pain" (p. 11). It might be easy to look at the underlying causes of veterans' distress (specific trauma incidents), but it is narrative that sheds light on the experience and the meaning the distress has in their daily lives. Only narrative is capable of getting at the unexpected swells of anger or the unpredictable nature of flashbacks, for example, that impede each veteran from living as he might wish. This research shows that the veterans' subjective experiences vary widely,

as do the causes of their distress and post-traumatic distress. The veterans' experiences cannot be generalized or identified by numerical values—to generalize them would be to lose the richness and stories related to what has been considered private for most veterans—namely post-conflict struggles with recovery; however, when the stories are read together, their experiences inform one another and reveal commonalities and thematic connections.

All of these qualities of narrative inquiry make it an ideal method for this research project which seeks to bring nature and embodied experience into peace and conflict studies and seeks to understand what is gained in the presence of the wider, more-than-human world. Narrative allows us to enter imaginatively and empathetically into the experience of the veterans. In addition, the stories in this research would not likely be included together in a positivist research framework. They are the stories of veterans from different generations, different wars/conflict scenarios, some suffering from distress, others not; but in including these stories together, there are important lessons about the role of nature in human experience.

The Study

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) contend that a crucial aspect of narrative inquiry is that it provides space for individuals to tell their story. It is stories that comprise the research data, and all learning arises out of the stories (Creswell, 2012). Narrative inquiry makes it possible to shed light on details and experiences often concealed or overlooked by other research paradigms. Through narrative, it is possible to access a variety of perspectives on these hidden issues, thus allowing the research topic to be explored in complex ways that include multiple experiences (Schaafsma and Vinz, 2011).

In experience-centred narrative research, one important way of exploring a particular phenomenon is to interview several people about the same experience (Squire, 2008). This thesis research employs an experience-centred narrative research design to tell the stories of four individual veterans. It brings the voices of the veterans suffering from stress or post-traumatic distress, often a marginalized population (or at least, a seldom-heard population), to the forefront and encourages them to talk about their experiences with recovery and nature. It values their embodied knowledge as important and emphasizes the stories they live and tell, specifically highlighting their personal accounts of post-military experience (and in most cases, post-trauma experience) (Creswell, 2012). Through these personal experience stories, we encounter each veteran's personal suffering, and learn how upon returning to civilian life, his coping and recovering from military, stress and trauma experiences have been tied to his lived experiences in the more-than-human world.

In narrative research, in addition to the stories of participants, the researcher often includes some of her own story and insights (Creswell, 2012). Nancy Taber (2011b) cites Chase, who argues that "researchers need to understand themselves if they are to understand how they interpret narrators' stories and . . . readers need to understand researchers' stories . . . if readers are to understand narrators' stories" (p. 334). And Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe how, in their approach to narrative inquiry, they realized that they needed to tell their own stories, too: "Scribes we were not; story tellers and story livers we were. And in our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled collaborative stories" (p. 12). As such, I have included several narrative interludes and reflections from my own

experience that are relevant to this work. For example, in the course of doing this research, I became a mother for the first time in February 2010. Both being pregnant and becoming mother constantly needed by my newborn child for comfort and food, as well as watching my son grow and learn about the world, have profoundly affected my understanding of embodiment and the ways human beings inhabit the world. As an academic, it has often been easy to live 'inside my own head' but more recently I have been compelled to recall and acknowledge my own and my child's embodiment.

In addition, four months after the birth of my son, on the way to a family celebration in honour of my grandmother's 96th birthday, my 12-year-old nephew Isaac died following a terrible accident. The trauma for me, my family, and all those involved in responding to the scene of the accident has led me to a deeper understanding of the experience of trauma and post-traumatic distress. My own suffering and the suffering of my family in connection with Isaac's death has deepened my understanding of and compassion for the suffering of others, and has made me aware of the deep, complicated and slippery ways that trauma can affect us, many of which we may not be immediately conscious. At this point, the experience and trauma surrounding Isaac's death is still unspeakable for me—still beyond words, perhaps even beyond comprehension and reason. But it is important to acknowledge this experience, since I have thought daily about Isaac throughout this research and writing, about his love for the outdoors, and about how his death has forever changed my family, and this has no doubt influenced my writing in ways that I may not be conscious.

The Participants

I conducted eleven in-depth interviews for this thesis. All participants interviewed were selected via a convenience and network sample. I first became familiar with three of the veterans' stories by reading about their experiences in news articles and research books, while the fourth veteran was introduced to me by another veteran. In the case of the CVAF, as described in the previous chapter, I also interviewed all members involved in the board of directors. The make-up of the board changed during my maternity leave; however, I was unable to interview its newest members, since the CVAF officially disbanded before I could resume my research with them. I interviewed two additional people to illuminate and complement the veterans' stories: Kurt Hoelting, whose stories of founding his sea-kayaking outfitter-guide business and of teaching Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction to veterans at the Seattle VA Hospital were shared in the Prologue; and Andy Fisher, a psychotherapist and leading scholar within the field of ecopsychology.

Most participants were interviewed only once, although in the case of Capt. Gord Cousins, C.D., we had two conversations together, since our first conversation was focused on his involvement with the CVAF, and it was through that conversation that I became aware of his personal experiences with nature and recovery. When necessary, I followed up with participants by phone or e-mail in order to clarify any questions I had from the interview.

Three of the veterans, Christian MacEachern, Tim Lewis, and Gord Cousins, live in and around Calgary and these interviews were conducted in person, as were all my interviews with the CVAF's board of directors. My interview with veteran Shepherd

Bliss, who lives in California, took place over the telephone, as did my interviews with Andy Fisher, who lives in Ontario, and Kurt Hoelting, who lives in Washington State.

All four of the veterans retired from the military, although later in life, Gord Cousins rejoined and currently serves as a reservist. Three served in the Canadian Forces, while one served in the United States Army. All are white males, ranging in age from early 30s to mid-60s, and for three of them, it was clear from a young age that they would join the military. Two of the men saw active duty overseas—one as a peacekeeper and one as a combat soldier—while the other two completed training but were never deployed—one due to an accident suffered in training while the other chose to leave the military after hearing Martin Luther King Jr. speak at a peace gathering. Three of the participants have allowed me to use their real names while one (Tim Lewis) requested a pseudonym. All four men tell how their lives were changed by their military training and/or service and describe suffering from stress, hypervigilance and/or distress resulting from their military experiences, although only some have been medically diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic symptoms. None of the men's experiences was identical—yet despite their radically diverse experiences, all four veterans point to their relationship with nature as important in their lives and in their ability to cope with the stress and change resulting from their military experience. Further, they all point to the ways that their bodies carried them forward and implied[5] what was missing from their recovery experiences—namely, it seems, interaction with the more-than-human world.

[5] This notion of "implying" comes from the work of Andy Fisher, and is described in more detail in the interlude that reflects my conversation with him at the beginning of Part III.

The Interviews

Jennifer Mason (2002) advises that flexibility and sensitivity are key factors in conducting interviews, and she recommends keeping interviews open-ended in order "to maximize the interview's ability to produce situated knowledge about processes and experiences" (p. 64). Accordingly, I used an unstructured and open-ended interviewing style (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Rubin and Rubin, 2005; van Manen, 1998). My conversations with the veterans each centred on how he came to realize that nature was important in his own life and around the experience of his interactions with nature and place during his ongoing recovery. The open-ended questions, alongside prompting questions asking for examples and memories of particular incidents, allowed the conversation to follow a trajectory mainly set by the veteran. I asked no questions about symptoms or about the military experiences that led to his stress and/or post-traumatic distress. Some of the veterans chose to talk about these experiences, while others did not. At the end of each interview, I asked each veteran whether there was anything we didn't speak about that he thought we should, and that question, after a few moments of reflection, usually brought forth additional insights. My interviews with the CVAF board of directors were targeted more towards their involvement with the organization, but also sought to understand the experiences that brought them to become involved with the CVAF as well as their own nature experiences (in most cases, the two were linked). The supporting interviews with Kurt Hoelting and Andy Fisher were semi-structured in order to seek their knowledge and experience specifically related to this research.

All interviewees were informed that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to answer, although none ever declined to answer a question. They were also

told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. None chose to withdraw. With each person's consent, the interview was recorded and later transcribed, and I provided a copy of the transcript for the participant's review and approval. Each interviewee was told that s/he could make as many changes as necessary to the transcript as well as to inform me if there were portions of the interview which should not be quoted or included in the resulting dissertation. Only one person made changes to his transcript in order to clarify several aspects of our conversation. Several others noted sections on which they did not wish to be quoted. I honoured all requests for changes and exclusions.

Writing, Presenting and Analyzing the Stories

In academic writing, interviews are often broken into bits and pieces, and sorted along the main themes deduced during the analysis. Sociologist Dorothy Smith (1999) explains that most often "theory is deployed to pick out and tailor extracts from the original events to appear conceptually reconstructed or as fragments of speech or writing sustaining the discursive project" (p. 141). However, as I read and re-read the interview transcripts, and reflected on each veteran's subjective experience, it seemed inappropriate to draw only on fragmented quotes and to selectively employ extracts to support my analysis. After much thought, I decided to present each veteran's story as a narrative. This approach is supported by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who reflect that "narrative explanation derives from the whole" (p. 7). By presenting each interview as a narrative, I sought to maintain the integrity of each story, to provide a sense of each veteran's holistic experience. In reading the stories together, the experiences are illuminated in both their similarities and differences. In addition, while I had initially intended to use selective

parts of the interviews with Kurt Hoelting and Andy Fisher to support my reflections and analysis, as I worked with the transcripts, it also seemed that these conversations were best presented in narrative form.

When it came time to write the veterans' stories, I considered and experimented with several narrative writing approaches, including both story structure and first- or third-person narrative. One example I considered was Julie Heifetz's (1989) book about child Holocaust survivors, in which she presents the survivors' stories in uninterrupted first-person narrative, a style she suggests brings forth an immediate emotional and intellectual response in readers, similar to the one she experienced in listening to each story for the first time. Her primary intent was for each story to provide catharsis for the survivor, and she hoped that hearing or reading their stories in a first-person format would empower each survivor by revealing from a new perspective what they had experienced and survived. However, Heifetz's purpose in writing the survivors' stories was different from mine as a researcher.

Due to the fact that the veterans' stories of healing and recovery were being included in the context of a research thesis, which also requires some thematic analysis and reflection, I opted instead to make my authorial presence visible by writing myself as the researcher into each story (Schaafsma and Vinz, 2011). Accordingly, I chose a third person biographic approach to write the stories, since the interviews were primarily focused on understanding each veteran's experience with/in nature and recovering from stress and post-traumatic experience. While writing the narratives, I also kept in mind Creswell's (2012) assertion that it is important for the final narrative to reflect the participant's story, not the researcher's story. Accordingly, I relied heavily on the

interview transcripts in order to maintain each veteran's voice print by using his words and sentence structure wherever possible. Rather than reworking them into my own words, which would involve my own interpretation, I included extensive quotes from each veteran, since their own words are compelling and speak directly to their experience. Because our conversations also moved around in time and space and some stories were told out of sequence, I reorganized each story into a logical time sequence (Creswell, 2012; Heifetz, 1989; Ritchie, 2003). While I did present the majority of each interview, at the time of writing I made several decisions about certain aspects of our conversation to leave out, particularly in cases where the details seemed too personal to be included in a narrative that was not anonymous.

I hope that presenting the stories in this way enables readers to gain the context for each veteran's experiences and to better understand the ways in which he has found nature to be important in his own life. Most of the stories focus solely on the veteran's account of his personal experience; however, because this research began through my work with the CVAF, Christian MacEachern's story also includes the voices of the board members who were active in his organization. As recommended by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), once I had written the narrative focused on our interview, I returned it to the veteran for his approval. All the veterans' stories are deeply personal, and it was important to give each one the opportunity to make changes if necessary. None of the veterans requested any revisions.

Within a narrative research framework, the researcher's reflections are presented following the participants' stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2012). In order to understand each interview on its own and in the context of the others, I immersed

myself in the veterans' stories. I read and re-read each interview transcript many times, reflecting on common themes and ideas amongst the veterans' experiences. Using a process of inductive analysis, I paid attention to the patterns and felt rhythms in the stories, and the factors that could not be rationally accounted, created or planned for, but that were still present. Chapter 10 of this thesis explores the thematic connections and my reflections, as well as incorporates insights from the additional interviews and the literature.

Gender and Ethnicity Imbalances

It is important to acknowledge the obvious gender and ethnicity imbalances in the interviews and personal experience stories presented in this thesis. Each of the four personal experience stories belongs to a white male veteran, and all but one of the supporting interviews were also with white men; the only woman I interviewed was also white. I attempted to schedule an interview with a female therapist and ecopsychologist, but she declined because she did not feel she had the expertise to contribute to my study.

Although this thesis would ideally present the stories of both male and female veterans from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, the imbalances are perhaps easily explained. First, because of the sampling method used to find participants—primarily a convenience sample through stories in the media and academic texts—I did not encounter the stories of either female veterans or visible minorities emphasizing their experiences of recovery and nature. This does not mean these stories do not exist; I simply did not find them! However, the reason that I did not find such stories may also be due to the fact that white men predominantly comprise the Canadian Forces (CF). The CF has several policies on equality designed to increase the recruitment of Aboriginal people, women,

and visible minorities. However, Captain Hans Jung (2007) cites a 2006 Report by the Auditor General of Canada, which noted that despite equality policies, the recruitment of members of these groups has actually declined in recent years. Military recruitment efforts have traditionally focused on young men, aged 17-24, living in rural areas or smaller urban centres with populations below 100,000. The rural population in Canada tends to be of European descent, as does the population of smaller cities and towns across the country. Typical recruits have thus tended to be young white men, often with family histories of serving in the military. In 2006, only 2.8 percent of the Forces' total members were from visible minorities, and 1.5 percent were of Aboriginal descent (Jung, 2007).

Also in 2006 and still today, men comprised 85 percent of the Canadian Forces. Annika Kronsell (2005) observes that "Military, defence and security-related institutions . . . have historically been 'owned' by men and occupied by men's bodies, which also has influenced these institutions' agendas, politics and policies" (p. 281). Joshua Goldstein (2001), who examines the connections between war and gender, describes how while theoretically all positions in the Canadian military are open to women, in reality, as with elsewhere in the Western world, women tend to be assigned to non-combat roles. The Canadian Forces' (2011) official position is that "women members have the opportunity to work any job in the Canadian Forces." The CF notes that currently about 15% of its service members are women (about 13,000), but the website implies that most of these women work as operators or technicians.

The CF gender imbalance was confirmed during several of my interviews. For example, Tim Lewis told me, "When I was in the military I didn't work with females. There were no females in my unit. There was one or two that were either medical staff or

clerks, but combat infantry is male-dominated almost 99.9%." And when Christian MacEachern spoke about the CVAF's summer 2009 rafting trip, he noted that there was only one female veteran amongst the participants.

The continued male dominance within the Canadian Forces is also confirmed by scholar Nancy Taber (2005; 2009; 2010; 2011a; 2011b), who spent 13 years serving in the Canadian Navy as a Sea King helicopter air navigator. Throughout her time in the Navy, Taber (2005) was one of only two women on a ship with 200 men. In Taber's own experience as well as in her research with other women in the military (Taber, 2011b), she notes that there is a difficulty inherent "in being a woman, a mother and a member of the military" (p. 340), and that this may account for the small number of women in active operational roles. Women in operational roles (which are typically seen as men's roles)[6] often feel forced to choose between their job and being a mother. For example, when Kathy, one of Taber's research participants, arrived in her first military unit, she was told "You better not get pregnant when you're here" (Taber, 2011b, p. 340). Writing of her own time in the Navy, Taber (2005) states that "my experiences were unquestionably different from those of my male colleagues due to my gender" (p. 299). Thus, based on Taber's experiences, and those of other women in the military, it is important to recognize that my research narratives might have been more diverse, which may have affected the reflections and analysis, had I been able to include the stories of female veterans. Similarly, the research might have included additional insights and themes had I been able to incorporate the narratives of veterans from visible minorities and Aboriginal descent.

[6] Taber (2005) defines an 'operational role' as "one that deploys and/or has a combat role" (p. 294).

Chapter 4

Deconstructing Peace and Conflict Studies

> In the West, most people have been trained to think of their mind and their body as separate. Yet all of the body's senses function to *make sense* of the world.
>
> —Lisa Schirch, 2005, p. 42

My interdisciplinary master's research focused on ecological education, during which time I spent two years immersed in the academic ecological literature. So when I began my doctoral studies in peace and conflict studies, I was surprised by the human-centric focus of the field and by the ways that topics related to ecology, nature, and/or the environment tended to be overlooked or missing altogether from the conversations. Throughout my PhD coursework and research, it has not been uncommon to read a peace and conflict studies textbook or journal issue that contains no chapters or articles about nature, and often not even a casual mention of, or reference to, nature.

In this chapter, I present the results of a modest study in which I analyzed all the full-length articles in five international peace and conflict journals published over three years to look more closely at whether and how nature is discussed in the peace and conflict studies literature. In seeking to understand why peace and conflict studies tends

to exclude nature, the interpretive phenomenological framework provided in the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty is helpful. Phenomenology starts from what human experience is actually like, rather than how we might explain or analyze that experience. As noted in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty was deeply troubled by the ways in which the Cartesian worldview continued to underlie most thought, research and praxis in Western society, and he directed his life's work towards offering an alternative philosophy of experience based on the role of perception and human embodiment in the world. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology thus supports a critical examination of Western culture's deepest assumptions about bodies, minds, experiences and nature, many of which are circulating in peace and conflict discourses. He also offers an academic framework for situating experiences in nature. Accordingly, this chapter also briefly introduces some of Merleau-Ponty's main philosophical arguments to prepare the ground for investigating the ways that nature is dismissed in peace and conflict studies.

This chapter then deconstructs the dominant the perspectives in the field of peace and conflict studies. By *deconstruct*, I do not mean 'destruct' or 'demolish' as it is sometimes interpreted; rather, as John Caputo (1997) explains, deconstruction is "a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up, of being responsible not only to the dominant voices of the great masters, but also to other voices that speak more gently, more discreetly, more mildly" (p. 57). Deconstruction is useful as a method for becoming conscious of what the discourses in conflict resolution and peacebuilding may be repressing or overlooking. Thus, I use deconstruction for delving into the dominant perspectives in peace and conflict studies, and the Western cultural meta-stories of rationalism and progress, and for holding at bay any illusions of certainty about conflict

and peacebuilding, and for exposing the theories and ideas that underlie these various perspectives currently operating in the West. I seek mainly to investigate the patterns of thought and action towards nature that influence the Western academy and especially those that orient research and praxis in peace and conflict studies.

Reviewing Peace and Conflict Journals for References to 'Nature'

Because the observation about the lack of attention to nature within peace and conflict studies is based on my own reflections and experiences while reading textbooks and journals in peace and conflict studies, as part of this dissertation research, I conducted a modest study to analyze all full-length articles in five international peace and conflict journals published over three years (2008-2010). The aims of this study were to provide a snapshot of the ways that nature is discussed (or dismissed) in the peace and conflict literature. The five journals included were the *Journal of Peace Research*, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *Journal of Peace Psychology*, *Peace and Change*, and *Peace and Conflict Studies*. I reviewed a total of 360 full-length articles published in all journal issues from 2008, 2009, and 2010, but excluded publications such as letters, book reviews, and editorials. To perform this review, I began by reading the abstract to determine the focus of each article; in addition, I searched each article for the terms *environment*, *nature*, *earth*, and *ecology*. Some of these terms came up frequently, but they were rarely used in ways that alluded to the more-than-human world. Rather, there were many references to the political *environment*, social *environment*, international *environment*, or conflict/post-conflict *environment*, or the *nature* of peace talks, the *nature* of the conflict, the *nature* of the threat, or human *nature*, or the *ecology* of conflict, the *ecology* of peacemaking, or to scorched-*earth* policies. Accordingly,

searching for these terms also required reading and analyzing the text around each term to determine the context. In each case where the abstract revealed that nature was a theme of the article, or where the search terms revealed that nature was being referenced, I carefully read the entire article to understand how the author(s) was referring to nature. Overall, most articles in the five journals tended to be economic, political, and/or social in focus. The majority of the articles contained no reference to nature or natural contexts. Of the 360 articles, 39 articles (11%) referenced nature, but only 20 of those (5%) included nature as a major focus or theme, while the other 19 included only brief or casual reference to nature. (See *Table 1* for a breakdown of each journal.)

Journal	***Number of articles reviewed***	***Number of references to nature***	***Nature as a major focus or theme***	***Environmental security or environmental conflict resolution***	***Casual reference to environment/ nature***
J. of Peace Research	144	11	9	4	2
Conflict Res. Quart	60	6	5	5	1
J. of Peace Psych	56	5	0	0	5
Peace and Change	62	8	3	0	5
Peace and Conflict St.	38	9	3	1	6
Total	**360**	**39**	**20**	**10**	**19**

Table 1: *Articles reviewed in each journal*

This brief study of peace and conflict studies journals confirms that questions about nature and humans' relationship and interconnections with nature are rarely asked in connection with conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Of the 20 articles that included nature as a major theme or focus, 10 focused on environmental conflict—either from an environmental security or environmental conflict resolution perspective. The focus of each of the other 10 articles varied, including, for example, the effects of warfare on the environment (Reuveny, Mihalache-O'Keef and Li, 2010), the use of treaties to regulate cooperation over international rivers (Tir and Ackerman, 2009), the benefits of post-war subsistence farming to increase the welfare of rural farmers in Northern

Mozambique (Bozzoli and Brück, 2009), the implications of ecotheology for peace and conflict studies (Hrynkow, Byrne and Hendzel, 2010), the environmental origins of Japan's antinuclear activism (Higuchi, 2008), the intersections between peace education and education for sustainable development/environmental education (Bajaj and Chui, 2009), and participatory mapping (social cartography) as a tool for use in resolving both environmental conflicts and other conflicts (Bastidas and Gonzales, 2008). A large majority of the articles—329 articles—included no reference to nature, and none of the articles suggested that the more-than-human world might be an active participant in conflict transformation and peacebuilding and recovery from conflict.

Why is it so difficult to attend to natural contexts and the more-than-human world in peace and conflict studies? The overall lack of attention to context, particularly to natural contexts, within peace and conflict scholarship points to a vital line of inquiry taken up in this thesis. Peacebuilding scholar John Paul Lederach (2005) argues that "when we think strategy, we should be thinking about what gives life and what keeps things alive" (p. 100). Does this not imply that peacebuilding and recovery efforts need to go beyond human individuals and communities, to involve the entire planetary community? What might our work look like if we remembered these connections, creating processes that listen and respond to the more-than-human world—that remember and say where we are located?

The Phenomenological Interpretive Framework

Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty reflects, "tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations that the scientist, the historian, or the sociologist may be able to provide"

(PP, vii). It is phenomenology's focus on describing experience that separates it from psychology, which emphasizes explanation and analysis of experience. All of Merleau-Ponty's work can be understood as a critical response to Descartes and the correlated Cartesian worldview, since Merleau-Ponty proposes a philosophy that allows for "the world which is revealed to us by our senses and in everyday life" (C, 31). Thus, his work supports this thesis and research because it demonstrates the importance of including the body and the sensible in academic inquiry.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has gained popularity in recent years in the English-speaking academic world, particularly in disciplines that explore issues in education and ecology; however, a brief search of major journals in peace and conflict studies shows that there has been very little interest in Merleau-Ponty's work by scholars and practitioners in the field. Only seven journal articles, most of which were published in the 1970s and 80s, make passing reference to his philosophy, while one draws on Merleau-Ponty's essay *Humanism and Terror*. Very few articles published in the last 20 years draw on his work at all.

Towards the end of writing this thesis, I was excited to read John Paul Lederach's new book co-written with his daughter Angela Jill Lederach. In *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation,* Lederach and Lederach (2010) use a phenomenological approach to tell stories of lived experience of conflict and social healing within local communities. While their focus is on stories of sound, poetry, music, and mothering within communities affected by violence, I found many parallels in our approaches, particularly in the use of phenomenology and narrative.

Philosopher Eric Matthews (2006) describes phenomenology as “the study of the different ways in which the same things appear to different modes of consciousness, such as thought, perception, fear, love, imagination, and so on” (p. 8). Phenomenology can make an important and relevant contribution to peace and conflict studies, since emotions such as fear and hate, perceptions of the other, and/or love of country often fuel conflict. Moreover, phenomenology is not trying to describe an ‘objective’ truth, but rather with its emphasis on human subjectivity and experience, phenomenology attempts to get at what things “mean to us” (ibid.). As Lederach and Lederach (2010) reflect, phenomenology helps to explore how modes of consciousness come to be, and gets at “the meaning people attach to things in the social world of intersubjective shared human experience” (p. 14). Importantly, Matthews (2006) observes that phenomenology is not introspective, since understanding what objects means to us requires focus on both individual consciousness and the objects outside of us—these cannot be studied separately since they are all part of the world of experience.

The power of phenomenology, remarks philosopher Taylor Carman (2008), lies in its ability to take us outside the temptation to categorize lived experience within the abstract theoretical groupings traditionally provided in academic settings. He describes:

> The idea of merely contemplating, entertaining, or grasping the contents of our experience in a kind of phenomenological vacuum is itself an abstraction arrived at precisely by ignoring the environmental contexts that always in one way or another, directly or indirectly, invite, provoke, support, or frustrate our attitudes. . . . [P]erception is not merely having something ‘in your head’, but . . . being oriented in a surrounding world. (Carman, 2008, p. 35)

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology therefore provides a particularly compelling perspective for peace and conflict studies, because he brings attention to how we are in

relation to one another, and more broadly to how we are in relation to the world. For Merleau-Ponty there is no existing on one's own, no dichotomies, no 'us' vs. 'them.' He was a holistic thinker, interested in connections, reciprocity, intertwinings, crossingovers, crisscrossings, overlappings, interrelationships—and his interest in these areas grew towards the end of his life. No matter what we tell ourselves, Merleau-Ponty observed, we are always in relationship, and everything is always characterized by a reversibility—speaking and listening, perceiving and being perceived, touching and being touched, seeing and being seen (ideas that are explored further in Chapter 5).

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Carman (2008) writes that "prior to having a perspective we can call our own, we are always already in a kind of unconscious communion with the world" (p. 2). Merleau-Ponty's thought therefore offers unique insights that hold possibilities for transforming thought and praxis in peace and conflict studies. He reminds us that "our engagement with the world is . . . not purely cognitive, intellectual or theoretical. In large part, our interest in the world is emotional, practical, aesthetic, imaginative, economic, and so on" (Matthews, 2006, p. 35).

Peace and Conflict Studies—Oriented by Cultural Meta-Stories

Richard Kool and Heather Eaton (2009) reflect that the worldview of a society encompasses and tells meta-stories about what is important and what should be ignored, about what we are, who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. These are the myths we live by, and we do not spend much time thinking about our personal worldview nor the worldview in which academic disciplines are situated. As David G. Smith (1999) explains, this oversight stems from the fact that Western social theory has arisen primarily out of the urban industrial environment, in which humans have focused

on “hyper-cultivating” and domesticating their surroundings. “Such a site for the generation of theory and policy must inevitably ensure social outcomes that are driven by the ambiences, rhythms and tones of their situational origin, characterised most clearly by prediction, control and rationalization” (p. 82).

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and his critique of Cartesian thought presented in the previous chapter illuminates two of the main meta-stories that orient the Western worldview: 1) rationality, with its focus on the human mind as capable of rational thought and human reason as providing a completely objective view and understanding of external reality, and 2) progress, with its emphasis on never-ending industrial economic growth and technological development. In understanding the perspectives advanced within peace and conflict studies, it is helpful to consider the discipline’s origins and the ways it tends to be guided by these two meta-stories.

Rationality

> [The diplomatic and foreign policy community is] infused with traditionally ‘masculine’ values and behaviors—rationality, logic, stoicism, power orientation, crisis management, competition, aggressiveness, adversarial thinking—and with ‘male’ language, replete, in some cases, with locker-room talk and sports analogies.
>
> —Diamond and McDonald, 1996, p. 28

Peace and conflict studies represents a merging of peace studies, which arose in response to fears about Cold War-related international armed conflict, and studies in conflict analysis and resolution, which has emerged in the past 20 years out of disciplines such as international relations, political science, sociology, anthropology, law, and psychology (Cheldelin et al., 2000). All of the disciplines from which peace and conflict studies is descended reside within the modern university structure, which Bill Readings

(1996) reflects, is organized around the Kantian conception of reason, which extends from the Cartesian argument that *thought* is the most important aspect of human experience. Indeed, one of the meta-stories that supports the Western worldview is the notion that reason is what defines and sets human beings apart from other animals—that is, rationality makes us human. Eric Zencey (1996) offers some insight into the ways that nature has become displaced within the Western academy, observing that as academics, “we’re supposed to belong to the boundless world of books and ideas and eternal truths, not the infinitely particular world of watersheds, growing seasons, and ecological niches” (p. 15). But feminist scholar, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray (2002) argues that there is a need to move away from this “traditional manner of reasoning” which has dominated Western culture (and hence academia) for thousands of years. While this may be difficult and at times painful, she notes that “changing methods is better than losing consciousness. It is a matter of renouncing the attempt to constitute a consciousness through a domination of nature” (p. 97).

Matthews (2006) suggests that the Western philosophical tradition’s enamourment with reason actually originated long before Kant, in ancient Greece, and has always held “pure, impersonal reason” as the most important human characteristic. “We were at our most human when we set aside our merely individual and local perspectives on the world, infected as they are by our emotional and practical needs, and ascend to a more detached, or ‘objective’, view of things” (p. 14). This separation tends to be considered a defining feature of Western culture. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that “reason has traditionally been defined as our human capacity to think logically, to set ends for ourselves, and to deliberate about the best means for achieving those ends” (p. 513). The

scholars observe that rational thought is defined as literal, logical, conscious, disembodied and dispassionate. Furthermore, in Bruce Wilshire's (1990) book, *The Moral Collapse of the University*, he argues that in spite of academia's immense capacities for inquiry and knowledge production, "it exists in strange detachment from crucial human realities" (p. 40). And this is inherently the tradition in which most academic disciplines find themselves today, including peace and conflict studies.

Lisa Schirch (2005) explains that the traditional 'rational' approach to conflict resolution has led many practitioners and scholars to emphasize the tangible dimensions of conflict because they are easily observed. This rational approach suggests that humans in conflict should separate themselves from their emotions during negotiations in order to get to the root issues of a conflict (R. Fisher, et al., 1991). The theory is that emotions often get in the way of finding the resolution best for all parties. In their recent article, Jameson and colleagues (2009) suggest that it is possible to target positive emotions at people and negative emotions at behaviour. This assertion, however, assumes that humans are able to be conscious of and access emotions and specifically target them. Meanwhile, research in cognitive science reveals that at least 95 percent of brain processing is unconscious (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

Despite Western claims that reason needs to be dispassionate and separated from emotion, reason has been found to rely almost entirely on emotions. In *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2005) reviews the case of Phineas Gage, who suffered a large and rather unique head injury during an explosion in 1848. Aside from lost vision in his left eye, all of Gage's senses seemed to be intact and he was pronounced physically "cured" less than two months after the

accident. It was only later that doctors noticed his character change, which was brought about by a brain lesion he had suffered in the accident. While neither Gage's intellect nor language was affected, the parts of his brain dedicated to personal and social aspects of reasoning seemed impaired. Most strikingly, Gage demonstrated no consideration or interest in his future, and especially his social future among other human beings. He was unable to make good choices and to conduct himself according to the social rules he had once known—that is, he was unable to draw on his pre-accident knowledge to make decisions, a common occurrence for other patients suffering from similar brain damage. What Damasio's work goes to show, drawing on both Gage's case and modern instances from his own practice, is that people who have lost their ability to be emotionally engaged through damage to the brain's frontal lobe have enormous difficulty making decisions, as well as responding in socially appropriate ways and in taking decisions to completion. Overall, Damasio's argument is that emotion is an essential component in the human ability to reason, and without emotion, our rationality is impeded.

Indeed, neuroscientist Kelly Lambert's (2008) research highlights the ways that human emotions developed in the context of our evolution as a species, and should actually be considered evolutionary adaptive responses. She argues that our brains evolved in complex environments, in which our ancestors' survival depended on constant physical interaction with their natural surroundings. That is, humans did not evolve independently, but rather, by interacting *with* other creatures, with the earth and skies, the winds and rocks. David Abram (1996) reflects that human perception might thus be understood as "the ongoing interchange between my body and the entities that surround it

. . . a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness—and often, even, *independent* of my verbal awareness" (p. 52).

To suggest divesting of our emotions is simply another attempt at separating or objectifying our living breathing bodies from the world where they can never be separate. As peace and conflict studies scholar Lisa Schirch (2005) points out, "humans do not understand their world solely through one sensory vehicle. . . . Rather, communication depends on multiple paths, both verbal and nonverbal, to transmit a single message" (p. 43). She describes words as limited and verbal language as limiting, especially in times of conflict when emotions are high, and she suggests that it is important in peacebuilding contexts to find ways of engaging people's whole bodies, including all senses and emotions.

The rational approach to studying and intervening in social conflict, which advocates that the conflict problem must be thought through *rationally* and participants must *separate* themselves from their emotions, does not look holistically at problems. This approach tends to view problems scientifically, as though they might be separated and easily dealt with in individual components. It ignores the interconnected wholes of life, particularly ecology and nature, and the ways that all of life is embedded in ecosystems. Merleau-Ponty's work offers a corrective to this tradition of rationalism, since as Andy Fisher (2006) explains, "perhaps more than any other Western philosopher, [Merleau-Ponty] offers a way out of our dualistic bind" (p. 158). The world is not only something to be conceived rationally, but it is where we live our lives.

What Fisher (2002, p. 82) refers to as the human "world-entangled" body has been missing for too long in scholarship on conflict, peacebuilding, and recovery. By bringing

people's bodies—their senses, emotions and physical bodies—into inquiry and practice in conflict transformation and peacebuilding and recovery, we can explore not only traditional 'methodologies' such as negotiation, mediation, and dialogue, but also the role of the arts, sports, ritual, storytelling, and other activities that engage *whole* human beings involved in conflict. Conflict itself is sensual: people "perspire, their heart beats faster, blood rushes to their face, and [their] knees knock" (Schirch, 2005, p. 44). Urging people to divest of their emotions and senses is a futile and damaging attempt to separate or to objectify living, breathing bodies from the natural world, a world from which we can never be separated.

As with all of human and mammalian life, all experiences of conflict, peacebuilding and recovery are embodied. Conflict situations, and the often resulting humanitarian emergencies, recall the vulnerability and fragility of the body. Humans living amidst conflict and violence often focus primarily on bodily needs—on keeping their own and their children's bodies alive through food, clothing, shelter, and other basic physical needs. Peacebuilding, too, is embodied. Abu Ala, the chief negotiator for the Palestinian Liberation Organization during the secret Norway Channel negotiations that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords, commented that "When I negotiate, I negotiate with my eyes, with my ears, with my nose, with my sense of smell, with my mouth. I use my whole body – everything!" (Corbin, 1994, p. 139). And as will be explored later through the veterans' intimate stories of their post-military/post-conflict experiences, recovery is embodied, too. Traumatic experiences, such as the ones lived through and by the veterans in this thesis, tend to be categorized as "mental and psychological" injuries, due to their "invisibility" and lack of distinct physical wounds (The Standing Senate

Committee on National Security and Defence, 2003, p. 2). Yet the bodily nature of stress symptoms is indicated by the term “Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms (MUPS),” which has been another way of considering the symptoms of soldiers and veterans suffering from traumatic distress (English, 2000, p. 34).

As will be discussed later in this thesis, most of the symptoms associated traumatic distress are *lived and relived* in the body. Indeed, within the context the veterans’ stories of recovering from the stress and traumas associated with military training, peacekeeping, and conflict, we come to understand the ways that traumatic experience, and recovery from trauma, are fully embodied. And when the veterans describe feeling better when they spend time in nature, this, too, is a profoundly embodied experience. Or, as Andy Fisher (2006) might say, “that’s the body talking” (p. 167).

Progress

Ronald Wright (2004) suggests that the trust and belief in human progress has become akin to a secular religion in the West, as well as around the world. A meta-story of linear progress underlies many aspects of the Western worldview, including unfettered industrial growth and wealth, technological prowess and power, and political, economic and social development. But the idea of progress is situated outside ecological limits and ecological implications for the planet (McNeill, 2000). Andy Fisher (2002) writes that a “high-altitude narrative about progress is used to explain away obvious human, social, and ecological losses as necessary costs along the way to a better future – those who suffer are enjoined simply to ‘look for future deliverance’” (p. 157). We are told that we “can’t stand in the way of progress, even if it kills us” (ibid).

The emphasis on economic growth within the progress meta-story reveals a view of nature based in Cartesian thought. Nature is utterly detached from human life, considered an 'externality' by most mainstream economists, and generally does not even feature into theories or planning. If it features into economic discourse at all, 'the environment' tends to a convenience rather than a necessity. Within the progress view, nature is something to be studied, researched, understood, and controlled by superior human beings. Here we also see the influence of the rationality meta-story, since economic markets are based upon theories of 'rational action.' As explained by Lakoff and Johnson (1999), it is only possible to regard nature as a resource, such as oil or lumber, within economic theory, since nature itself is not a "rational actor." The focus on monetary profits within economic theory is profits for human beings—not for animals or plants. Environmental damage and loss of natural functions are "not a 'loss' to any corporation—to any rational actor in such a model, much less to them all" (p. 531).

The term *resource* came into English usage in the early 1600s, referring to a "means of supplying a want or deficiency" (OED, 2001), while its first reference to the wealth of a country occurred in the late 1700s. Its origins can be traced to the Latin *resurgere*, meaning 'to rise again,' albeit resources are now divided into categories based on whether they will rise again—that is, 'renewable' or 'nonrenewable.' Either way, resources are seen as needing to be *managed*; however, this dominant view of 'resource management' is inherently simplistic, and offers only a cursory "set of prescriptions for the conservation and sustainable use of resources at the international, national, and local levels" (Escobar, 1998, p. 56). If 'resources' are degraded, this is merely a problem of improper 'management,' easily rectified through more management.

The term resource, both so-called *natural* and *human* resources, dominates the progress meta-story; everything and everyone is a commodity to be bought and sold (Abram, 1996; Fisher, 2002; Loy, 2000). This view forgets at both cultural and historical levels that resources (both natural and human) are living entities—that it is, for example, trees "whose breath gives us breath" (Cole, 2006, p. 132). Language also allows for the earthly living origins of resources to be further erased, such as when a tree becomes "paper," "cardboard," "wood," "lumber," "two by four," "pencils," or "flyers," while the act of killing trees is called "forestry or jobs" (ibid). When the word *nature* is used within the progress meta-story, it almost always means "that which is not human nor produced by humans" (Roach, 2003, p. 13). We might recall Descartes' declaration that nature is "simply a label which depends on my thought" (as cited in Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 14). This 'label' allows nature to be constituted as a site of transaction, as "an 'exploitable' object" to grow the economy (Dussel, 1999, p. 19). For example, the terms 'land' and 'territory' refer primarily to commodities—to property that can be owned, bought and sold, or in the case of imperialism, taken from those deemed less worthy (or 'wild') or who don't have a concept of private property ownership. Etymologically, it is likely that the Old English word *land* (or *lond*) was always intended in this sense of ownership, as in "a definite portion of the earth's surface owned by an individual or home of a nation" (OED, 2001). The word *territory* is used similarly to *land*, although there are two theories as to its origins: one suggests that it comes from the Latin *territorium*, meaning "land around a town, domain, district" and is related to *terra* ('earth, land'); the other theory suggests that *territorium* derives from the Latin *terrere* (related to the modern *terrible*), meaning 'to frighten.' In this sense, *territorium* would refer to "a place from which

people are warned off" (OED, 2001). Either way, territory is something owned, and a place where 'others' are not always welcome.

The imperialism of the last 500 years was inherently a drive for new territory, and the resources therein. Nowhere was this more obvious, perhaps, than in Europe's "scramble" for Africa, which was, within half a generation (from the late 1800s to the early 1900s), "sliced up like a cake" into 30 colonies comprising 10 million square miles of territory, and filled with 110 million 'human resources' (Pakenham, 1991, p. xxiii). Like other colonial subjects around the world, Africans were expected to provide new markets for the products of European countries, while their lands were expected to willingly offer up 'resources' to satisfy the growing desires in Europe.

Further, within the progress meta-story, damage to nature or depletion of 'resources' is named 'scarcity,' and seen primarily as a problem requiring a technological 'fix.' As Ronald Wright (2004) points out, "Technology is addictive. Material progress creates problems that are—or seem to be—soluble only by further progress" (p. 7). This view is championed, for example, by Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999), who focuses on "adaptation" and more particularly "ingenuity," which he refers to as the "*ideas* applied to solve practical technical and social problems" (p. 109). As Harold Searles (1972) puts it, "Nature has often been a bad mother to man, often rendered hospitable to man only through the workings of our good mother, technology" (p. 369). Thus, any problems associated with the destruction of ecosystems are postponed to some future day when they will be solved by a new technology; we only need to wait until the right one comes along. This view goes hand in hand with another popular economic growth narrative: more technology leads to more happiness, or as Fisher (2002) puts it, "the good life is the

goods life" (p. 156). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that "disembodied scientific realism creates an unbridgeable ontological chasm between 'objects,' which are 'out there,' and subjectivity, which is 'in here'" (p. 93). And within the Western worldview, it is the disconnected objects out there that are important, that are believed to be the source of human happiness.

Lederach and Lederach (2010) suggest that dominant cultural expectations also situate peacebuilding and related disciplines within the meta-story of linear progress. Conflict tends to be theoretically presented as involving linear movement from one stage to the next, following which peacebuilding is also viewed as sequential. This linear, sequential thinking, Lederach and Lederach reflect, tends to be driven by external forces such as short-term funding cycles and government agendas. They admit that linearity and sequentiality provide "useful ways to organise theory, thinking about the nature of change, and most-importantly, agency, found in the construct of projects through which peacebuilding funding is allocated" (p. 55). However, lived experience rarely falls into such neat linear cycles or patterns—survival is hard and reality is messy. Violence does not end or disappear just because an agreement is signed between high-level leaders.

Lederach and Lederach (2010) suggest that the linear focus that envelops peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes, from initial program development to ways of measuring success, conceals important aspects involved in the complex realities of people living amidst conflict and violence. They also bring attention to how those aspects of peacebuilding and conflict resolution that do not "easily fit the ways that governments and non-governmental programs organise their funding, structures of action and lenses of evaluation" tend to be disregarded. These disregarded facets then tend to be

thought of as secondary or even detrimental to the programs being developed. Thus, Lederach and Lederach conclude that “the weakness of [linearity and sequentiality] as a dominant metaphor lies in the degree to which, once accepted, it hides, does not account for, legitimate, or explore competing and equally important aspects of the complex lived reality” (p. 57).

Another way in which both the rationality and progress meta-stories influence studies and praxis in peace and conflict is found in the predominant approaches to addressing social conflict. One such approach is the rational or material approach driven by human physical needs, such as access to food, shelter, water, and healthcare (Schirch, 2001; 2005). In the narrow sense where nature is understood as ‘resources,’ environmental conflict is also situated primarily in this material dimension. However, this rational approach hides many aspects, including intrinsic values. For example, many conflicts are not only about tangible objects but about deeper sentiments. The Israel/Palestine conflict is a case in point, since it involves “relationships between groups, their identities, values, perceptions of each other, and the symbolic actions such as attacks on important religious sites made by both Israelis and Palestinians” (Schirch, 2005, p. 35). Similarly, a community may have an attachment to a specific place because their ancestors lived and were buried there, and the ancestral spirits still inhabit that land. For those of us whose ancestral history is one of continuous migration, it can be difficult to understand the attachments of place-based peoples. Yet for those who feel a specific attachment to place, this attachment is real, whether or not it is tangible to others. Their stories are tied to the land, the events and the people who have lived there, and the land also inspires new stories.

The values associated with progress and its visions for economic growth became increasingly dominant after World War II, a time of great prosperity as destroyed European cities were being rebuilt and new industries were developed to sell wartime products during peacetime. This post-war economic growth also brought “severe, debilitating pollution” to most of the planet (Brown, 1999). Indeed, *Silent Spring*, first published in 1962, was Rachel Carson’s effort to take on and expose what she saw as “man’s war against nature” (p. 7). Carson (2002) was highly critical of the celebration of technological prowess, especially in terms of the increased and pervasive use of chemicals following World War II. She expertly traced the links between conflict and the chemical industry to show that the chemicals invented to kill human beings in WWII were being sold to those same people for a new war—*against nature.* The insecticidal properties of these chemicals were known because before being unleashed on the enemy, they were tested on insects. Carson also revealed how the surplus airplanes left over from the war were put to work spraying the chemicals over farmland and forests.

Moreover, the Cold War led to entrenched *realpolitik* security- and competition-based thinking in many academic disciplines, with an emphasis on struggles for and access to power through military force, as well as maintenance of economic and political influence (Gleditsch, 2007; Swatuk, 2006). In addressing issues of peace and conflict, *realpolitik* considers security to be the primary aim of the state and, as Swatuk (2006) reminds us, “a powerful state is made secure by the exercise of power” (p. 204). This power typically rests on maintaining national territory, controlling the natural resources within that territory, and gaining access to ‘resources’ held by other states. Brown (1999) contends that this approach “leaves little room for the idea of environmental threats”

(p. 711). Thus, given the dominance of economic growth and security-based thinking in this period when much of the scholarship associated with conflict resolution and peacebuilding was emerging, it is no surprise that most issues became framed from within a progress and rationalist perspective, while nature was generally excluded from the dominant discourse.

The view of peace reflected in *realpolitik* approaches is one of ‘negative peace,’ wherein peace is simply the absence of war, and is a condition maintained by military power and might (Galtung, 1969). This view justifies de-escalation of conflict by whatever means necessary, including coercion, threat, and enforcement. Thus, the trend for those with negative views of peace has been to simplify both conflict and peace, to look for and address a ‘root cause,’ rather than exploring and understanding all the complexities and interdependencies that make up a conflict situation, such as the effects of history, physical, structural, and cultural violence, poverty and inequality.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) reflect that notions of rational choice and game theory, which tend to accompany *realpolitik*, affect our lives in seemingly invisible ways, because within these rational models, the nation state (as well as corporations) implicitly takes on the status of a person with interests. And within this model, nation states are always seeking to maximize their individual interest and to increase their wealth and political/military strength relative to other states. Lakoff and Johnson argue that this way of thinking about the nation state hides “the real people and all the forms of well-being they individually require. The metaphor also hides all ecological values that do not translate into wealth and military strength” (p. 534).

Many peace and conflict scholars are now criticizing the *realpolitik* approach, arguing that it perpetuates social injustices and is unable to inspire constructive societal change. Lederach (2005) argues that "*realpolitik* is blind to the existence of social spaces, relationships, ideas, and processes that do not fit its preexisting definition of what counts. . . . [I]t completely misses some of the most significant elements of social process capable of generating new relational patterns and structures" (pp. 59-60). Indeed, most recent scholarship in peace and conflict studies emphasizes that since no conflict is a single issue conflict, there is no single approach for resolution and transformation, but rather multiple possibilities for seeking an end to conflict. Time and again it is being shown that hundreds of elements go into reconciliation between parties. For example, in their Social Cubism model, Carter and Byrne (2000) suggest that analysis of ethnoterritorial conflicts must focus on six interdependent factors: "history, religion, demographics, political activity, economics, and psychocultural symbolism" (p. 42).

Yet even a wider focus on complex factors and relationships in conflict continues at the expense of ecosystems and more-than-human others. Despite some recognition that "the earth, too, is the object of violence" (Jeong, 2000, p. 8), this type of violence and its connections with human health and social conflict have had low priority (and status), both in academic and peacebuilding circles. Brian Polkinghorn (2000) notes that "physical and biological systems are delegated to a second-level status to the social framing of the issues" (p. 89).

While many people around the world are today sharing an increased concern for environmental degradation and global warming, these issues continue to take a lower priority next to economic decline or conflict. For example, while some Palestinian and

Israeli NGOs were compelled to begin working together on environmental issues in the late 1990s, their joint work almost completely stopped after the outbreak of the 2001 Intifada (Chaitin et al., 2002). And at the height of the 'economic crisis' in 2008, efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and climate change stalled around the world (Cappiello, 2008), which tends to remain true today. With economies around the world once again slipping (or tumbling) into recession, not only are we faced with pressures to address ailing ecological systems around the planet, we also face daily and competing pressures to deal with troubled economic and social systems, both locally and globally. Indeed, ecological crisis now seems to be taking on less importance compared to the economic situation, as individuals, corporations, and governments argue that environmental degradation is worthwhile if it leads to economic growth and stability. Furthermore, the global media coverage of climate change has declined 42 percent since 2009, despite a global increase in severe weather in the past several years (Fischer, 2012). Meanwhile, a joint study by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication demonstrated a shift in attitudes towards climate change in the last few years, with a decreasing number of American adults believing that climate change is caused by human activities. In 2008, 57 percent believed that humans actions were the main cause of climate change, while in 2011, this percentage decreased to 47 percent (Leiserowitz et al., 2011).

The privileging of economic discourses occurs not only in governments and corporations, but also in universities. Questions about human embeddedness in ecosystems tend to be neglected and even denied in the academy widely and especially in connection with issues of conflict, peacebuilding, and recovery. For example, Brian

Polkinghorn (2000) shares that in his research about environmental conflict, “the data is nearly silent” with respect to “the impact conflict has on the physical and biological systems” (p. 89). Indeed, while the entire twentieth-century international system’s near constant state of agitation and anxiety had “countless environmental ramifications” (McNeill, 2000), the destructive effects of conflict on nature were—and continue to be—rarely discussed. Recall, too, my brief journal search study presented at the beginning of this chapter, in which only one article out of 360 mentioned the effects of warfare on the environment (Reuveny, Mihalache-O’Keef and Li, 2010). When ecosystems are damaged or destroyed by direct violence, it tends to be considered necessary for the protection of ‘national security,’ and justified as a casualty of war. Moreover, we do not often hear about how conflict, peacebuilding activities, and recovery involve ecological contexts (Westlund, 2010). Indeed, there is very little documentation at all about the significance of physical contexts in conflict and peace processes (Schirch, 2005).

Meta-stories and Environmental Conflict and Security

While this chapter has shown that nature is often overlooked in peace and conflict studies, when references to nature do exist, as noted in my study of the journal articles, they often refer to ‘environmental security,’ a theory which suggests that environmental change and degradation result in ‘resource’ scarcity, which has social outcomes, primarily in the form of violent conflict (e.g., Cheldelin et al., 2000; Crocker, et al., 2001; Crocker et al., 2007; Deutsch and Coleman, 2000). Peluso and Watts (2001) argue that the 1990s interest in environmental security filled the geopolitical vacuum left by the end of the Cold War. While previous definitions of security had focused on military and state (and ideological) security, some people began to argue that the end of the Cold War

meant reconceptualizing security to account for the ways that environmental degradation could lead to violent conflict between communities and countries (Swatuk, 2006).

In the mid-1990s, many armies and strategic centres around the world began to develop environmental-security related strategies and policies. NATO undertook a pilot study to analyze connections between environmental (i.e., resource) stress and violent conflict (Swatuk, 2006), while U.S. security planning shifted its focus to “securing access to vital materials” (Klare, 2001, p. 51). “Environmental degradation was, in short, good for military business” since it gave new focus to militaries everywhere (Peluso and Watts, 2001, p. 11). Within environmental security, “scarcity is assumed a priori to be a ‘trigger’ for conflict” (ibid., p. 18). Accordingly, the understanding and conception of nature within the environmental security framework tends to be a simple and shallow view in which nature comprises only resources for human use and consumption. Nils Petter Gleditsch (2007) suggests that rather than using the term environmental security, it might be more accurate to call the approach “resource security” (p. 179).

The theory and language that dominates the rationalism and progress meta-stories is found often in the environmental conflict and environmental security discourses. For example, in his article titled ‘What do we know about environmental conflict resolution?’ E. Franklin Dukes (2004) situates environmental conflict as “a subset of the larger category of public conflicts involving issues such as health and health care, race and ethnicity, economic development, and governance” (p. 191). Throughout the article, he uses manufacturing-related terms to divide environmental conflicts into those that occur “upstream” (over policy, laws, or regulations) and “downstream” (over something that has occurred in a particular location). Rather than focusing on environmental conflict,

Dukes focuses primarily on whether time and money were saved during resolution processes. He cites a study by Leach and Sabatier, who suggest that in cases of environmental conflict, “funding for a professional facilitator or coordinator is justified only if the marginal value of the resulting consensus agreements and improved social capital exceeds the opportunity costs of diverting the funds away from some other type of intervention” (as cited in Dukes, p. 207). This economic language of “marginal value,” “social capital,” and “opportunity costs” could be referring to almost anything.

Similar language is used in Thomas Homer-Dixon’s (1999) discussion of environmental security, in which he argues that “to maintain satisfaction as consumption/resource ratios rise, societies will need to run resource systems ever more efficiently. System optimization will often demand tightly coupled and highly complex horizontal and vertical management” (p. 113). In both cases, there is no sense that the authors are writing about nature as the grounds for all life on Earth. Moreover, Dukes (2004) contends that it is difficult to assess outcomes of environmental conflict and resolution processes, and that trying to do so often holds them to a higher standard than other resolution processes. He suggests the value of resolving environmental conflicts can only be determined when there are “clear and easy” measurable outcomes (p. 213).

Meanwhile, Nils Petter Gleditsch (2007) presents a typical progress-based argument for increased industrialization and affluence. He blames most environmental degradation problems on poverty, and argues that when societies reach advanced stages of industrialization and post-industrialization, environmental degradation decreases. Accordingly, Gleditsch is in favour of economic development as a solution for avoiding conflict over environmental issues. He writes that eradicating problems associated with

environmental security "requires long-term economic growth and technological progress" (p. 186), and further that "moving from poverty to wealth is probably the most effective means to improve all forms of human security" (p. 190).

William Rees and Laura Westra (2003) caution against blind acceptance of the progress-based economic growth models, which they argue are "morally bankrupt" and "ecologically naïve" (p. 120). It is only by ignoring human interdependence with the ecosphere that Gleditsch can make such claims about progress, growth, and wealth, for it is well-known that the Earth's ecological carrying capacity is unable to support current levels of 'wealth' for all people (and not even for the people who enjoy current levels). Gleditsch ignores, too, that industrial development within wealthy countries is supported by ecologically damaging practices in the South. The products of so-called 'developing' countries do not typically satisfy local needs, but rather are sold to wealthy countries. As William Leiss pointed out in 1972 (an observation still appropriate for critiquing Gleditsch's argument today), despite increases in technological prowess, "the attractive promises of mastery over nature—social peace and material abundance for all—remain unfulfilled" (p. 194). Today, the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow and humanity is now "on a collision course with biophysical reality [as] humans are literally consuming the material basis of their own survival" (Rees, 2006, p. 221).

In these three examples of ways that nature is included in the peace and conflict discourses, one perceives the ways that the meta-stories of rationality and progress dismiss nature as the basis for all life. These meta-stories separate human beings from the grounds of all life, something which psychotherapist and ecopsychologist Larry Robinson (2009) names a form of "cultural madness" (p. 27).

Phenomenology, Perception, and Peace and Conflict Studies

> The body is in the text of everyday life; by enacting that text it becomes not a product, but the processor of everyday life.
> —Anne Cranny-Francis (as cited in Neilsen, 1998, p. 261)

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, philosopher Eric Matthews (2006) reflects that all views are situated. “We perceive always from some perspective. Our account of the world is given *from our own point of view*” (p. 28). Recently, an approach to researching and understanding conflict is emerging that is situated in the symbolic/cultural realm and tends to be driven by cultural needs, such as the freedom to follow cultural and religious practices. This approach has grown “out of an understanding that humans have a need to symbolically understand who they are and how they relate to their environment” (Schirch, 2001, p. 147). Thus, strategies for addressing cultural conflicts attempt to create opportunities for transforming relationships through processes that engage adversaries’ bodies, senses and emotions, recognize identity needs, and find alternative ways of communicating, such as through ritual, myth and storytelling.

This perspective is still emerging as more scholars and practitioners begin to understand conflict and peace as holistic processes integral to human existence and experience, and see resistance and conflict as sometimes necessary for changing unjust relationships. Rather than being the absence of war, peace is defined positively as dealing with the underlying issues and conditions that create conflict. The focus tends to be on transforming issues of injustice and power asymmetry, rather than simply conflict management and settlement (Sandole, 2003). Peace is not static, but “a source of energy that impels action” (Jeong, 2000, p. 30). This more holistic view features in the work of scholars who advocate art, culture, ritual, stories, and sport as activities for building

relationships and creating possibilities for living together. However, this view continues to consider most concepts solely from the domain of human relationships, and as such, the field has yet to come fully into an ecological perspective that opens conversations about intersections with the more-than-human world.

In paying attention to ideas not previously attended in the literature and discourses in peace and conflict studies, this research follows on and extends this emerging approach. The meta-stories of rationalism and progress in Western culture have narrated us ‘out of nature’. These powerful stories have enabled and encouraged human beings to act as though we are not a part of nature—behaviour which has wrought extensive damage all over the planet and which also reproduces itself in academic settings. In this thesis, I am specifically interested in embodied/lived experience and ways that nature features (consciously and/or unconsciously) into that experience. I explore the ways that we as human beings inhabit nature, that we *are* nature. Merleau-Ponty was criticized for being ‘anti-intellectual’ in his writing about the body. And conceivably writing about nature, and humans *as* nature may also be considered anti-intellectual by those who have deep faith in rationalism and linear approaches to peacebuilding and conflict resolution and recovery. But Merleau-Ponty was especially critical of rationalism, of “the assimilation of experience to *thought*” (Carman, 2008, p. 27). And I return again to Lederach’s (2005) assertion that in peace and conflict studies, “we should be thinking about what gives life and what keeps things alive” (p. 100). Thus, by exploring veterans’ stories of recovery from military training and combat, this thesis illuminates life-giving/life-flourishing approaches and stories fully entwined in nature.

PART II – Embodiment, Nature and Narratives

Chapter 5

Bringing Back the Body

> Our flesh calls us back to this earthly place whenever we are injured or sick, whenever we need to wash the dishes by hand, or clean out the overflowing roof-gutters, or simply to empty our bladders and bowels on the toilet. Whenever we stumble and hurt ourselves. . . ; when one of our tools breaks or one of our technologies breaks down, we must turn our attentions, if only for a moment, to the bothersome constraints of this gravity-laden Earth that grips our bodies.
>
> —Abram, 2007, pp. 162-3

As described in Part I of this thesis, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides one of the primary theoretical foundations for this study. In situating this research within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interpretive framework, it is necessary to further explore and understand his position on the human body. "What difference does it make if there is no such thing as the disembodied mind?" ask Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 563). This chapter delves into this question in more detail through exploring more of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, with a particular focus on his views on the body and his concepts of the 'flesh' and chiasm. I also provide a synopsis of some of the theories and research in biophilia and ecological intelligence, neuroscience and cognitive science, and ecopsychology, which similarly seek to reintegrate the body into Western thought and inquiry. All of these theories and research combine to illuminate the ways that human embodied experience comes *before* being rationalized, *before* being

explained by philosophical concepts or scientific models. We belong to the world through our bodies, and all encounters in the world are reciprocal. Moreover, it is our terrestrial roots, our experience of the earth that binds us to every other being (human and more-than-human) in the world—that is, we "all inhabit the same 'earthly' space, in the broadest sense" (Merleau-Ponty, RC, 122-123).

Merleau-Ponty—Life, Influences and Phenomenology

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was born and raised in Paris, France (Baldwin, 2004b). He began teaching philosophy in Paris lycées in 1930 and his first doctoral thesis was published in 1942 as *The Structure of Behaviour* (Carman and Hansen, 2005). Merleau-Ponty's main influence while writing this first thesis was the Berlin school of Gestalt psychology, which emphasized that human experience cannot be divided into disconnected parts but must be understood as a coherent and relational whole. For example, Gestalt psychologists emphasize that when I see a book on a table, the book's colour, shape, size, and images are not separate in my mind, but rather I see a "solid object in an environment" (Carman, 2008, p. 19). In addition, within Gestalt psychology, "perception is neither rational judgment nor the registration of meaningless sense data" (ibid., p. 28).

Merleau-Ponty spent a brief time as an infantry officer in the French army from 1939-40, but after the Germans defeated the French army, he was demobilized and returned to teaching in lycées (Matthews, 2006). During the early 1940s, he wrote a second and higher doctoral thesis, which was published in 1945 as *Phenomenology of Perception*, which became his most well-known work (Baldwin, 2004a; 2004b). While Merleau-Ponty never met Edmund Husserl, often considered the founder of

phenomenology, Husserl had a profound influence on the direction of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* as well as the work that came after. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty once described reading Husserl's *Ideas II* as *"une expérience presque voluptueuse"* (Baldwin, 2004a, p. 25).

A major objective of Husserl's was to "get back to the things themselves," which meant invalidating the Enlightenment obsession with 'objective reason' (Smith, 2006). In particular, Merleau-Ponty was profoundly taken with Husserl's notion of the Lebenswelt, or 'life-world'—that is, the world as we immediately experience it, and our pretheoretical awareness of living in the world, prior to thought, culture, and analysis, prior to science and philosophy. Husserl believed that it was phenomenology's responsibility to reveal how all theory and science arises from and is sustained by "the forgotten ground of our directly felt and lived experience" (Abram, 1996, p. 43). As David Smith (2006) reflects, for Husserl categories of analysis are never separate from the world but rather "are always already part of the world they may be attempting to explain or interpret" (p. 109). Thus, my relationship with the world is always "one of 'intersubjectivity', a relation between subjects" (ibid.). As Merleau-Ponty described, "Husserl wants us to understand what is nonphilosophical, what is preliminary to science and philosophy . . . hence the description of the role of the body in perception" (N, 71-72).

Merleau-Ponty's early work was also influenced by Martin Heidegger. Both philosophers shared a critical attitude towards Descartes, with Heidegger remarking that Descartes' famous dictum *Cogito ergo sum* "needs to be 'turned around' as *Sum ergo cogito* in the sense that *Sum* – my being in the world – is prior to *cogito* – my ability to have thoughts about things in the world" (Baldwin, 2004, p. 27). Merleau-Ponty was

particularly influenced by Heidegger's *Being in Time*, in which Heidegger presents his conception of 'being-in-the-world' (Baldwin, 2004; Matthews, 2006). Our own being, Heidegger argued, is never separate from the world of our experience. "We experience the world . . . not as detached subjects or pure reason, but as actual human beings who exist at a particular time and place, and who interact with their surrounding world from that position in space and time" (Matthews, 2006, p. 12). The main differences between the ways that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty use the notion of being-in-the-world lies in the fact that while Heidegger moved increasingly towards an understanding of philosophy as ontology, Merleau-Ponty remained within and wanted to deepen the phenomenological framework. In addition, Merleau-Ponty was adamant that being-in-the-world is inseparable from embodiment (Matthews, 2006).

In 1945, Merleau-Ponty took up a junior faculty position at the University of Lyon, where he was appointed as full professor in 1948. This was followed in 1949 by a move to the Sorbonne in Paris, where he held the chair in Psychology and Pedagogy (Matthews, 2006). Then, in 1953, he was appointed as the chair in philosophy at the Collège de France, a prestigious position[7] he held until his early death from a heart attack in 1961 at age 53 (Baldwin, 2004a; Matthews, 2006). At the time of his death, he was working on another major work, which was posthumously published in its unfinished state as *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty became especially interested in the topic of nature in the years leading up to his death. Nature was the focus of several courses he taught at the Collège de France from 1956-1960, and was also prevalent in his unfinished manuscript.

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[7] This chair position was once held by Henri Bergson, and was later held by philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu (Carman, 2006).

Merleau-Ponty's Views on the Body

The human body is essential for experiencing and understanding the world. It is "our anchorage in the world," writes Merleau-Ponty (PP, 167). Moreover, "to be a body, is to be tied to a certain world" (ibid., 171). For Merleau-Ponty, it is necessary to get away from the temptation to view the world from a disembodied 'objective' stance, and to come back to living in or *inhabiting* the world, to return "to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body – not that possible body which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but that actual body I call mine, this sentinel standing quietly at the command of my words and my acts" (OE, 292-293).

In understanding Merleau-Ponty's idea of perception, it is helpful to think of a child, who "perceives before he thinks" (VI, 11). For example, one night while we were walking outside after dark, my young son Cameron discovered the moon for the first time. While we had often read books about the moon and talked about the moon, only that night did it become real for him. And when we later went into the house, he could see the moon from several different windows. As adults we know that there is only one moon, but for Cameron, each time he looked out a different window he thought he was seeing "another moon." Thus, by perception, Merleau-Ponty does not mean some form of human thought or knowledge. Rather, he is suggesting that the basis of thought and knowledge "rests on and presupposes perception," and perception itself is rooted in individual experience (Carman, 2008, p. 12; Matthews, 2006). Perception, in Merleau-Ponty's view, "is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by

them" (PP, xi). Accordingly, for Merleau-Ponty the only way to understand the human body is as a perceiving body; perception is a bodily phenomenon (N, 214-215).

The Cartesian worldview stems from a position that as human beings we are limited by our animal bodies—that is why within the Cartesian perspective it is useful to separate mind from body, and to think of the body as merely one among many objects in the world. But Merleau-Ponty reflects that mind and body are never separate; instead, we might think of ourselves as "the compound of the soul and body", and this compound lives in the world—a world which itself comes before knowledge (OE, 309). He therefore views science as both "naive" and "dishonest" in the ways that it neglects and takes for granted this world—the world before science, the world prior to thought, the world that we live through and live in (PP, 87). Following Husserl, Merleau-Ponty calls for a "return to things themselves," which is "to return to a world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is" (PP, x).

Merleau-Ponty argues that we can only get to know the world because we are a mind *with* a body (as opposed to a mind *and* a body), and because our body is embedded in the world we can "gain access to [external objects] through our body" (C, 43). David Abram (1996) observes that contrary to Cartesian thought, "far from restricting my access to things and to the world, the body is my very means of entering into relation with things" (p. 47). My body is something that I 'live,' that I inhabit, and that is vital to my engagement with the world (Matthews, 2006). Further, as Hamrick and Van der

Veken (2011) observe, “what it means to be a lived body is to be open to material things, other people, and the world at large” (p. 23).

Merleau-Ponty brings attention to the ways that all of human subjectivity is articulated through the body—seeing with one’s eyes, hearing with one’s ears, speaking as an interaction between one’s tongue, breath and vocal chords, moving with one’s legs and arms (Matthews, 2006). While on one level this may seem ordinary and simplistic, it is perhaps quite profound, since the majority of academic traditions focus only on the mental aspects of subjectivity (i.e., thought and knowledge). One discussion that is particularly relevant to peace and conflict studies is Merleau-Ponty’s examination of emotion, especially in light of the discussion in the previous chapter of the ways that the dominant discourse and meta-story of rationality suggests separating ourselves from our emotions. He emphasizes the ways that as part of the human experience, emotion is bound up—or stuck—in the body, rather than simply existing in the mind. For example, when a person is angry, that anger is often expressed through aggressive speech, hand gestures, and a raised voice. Reflecting on the embodied nature of such anger, Merleau-Ponty asks: “Where is this anger?” While some people might say the anger is only in the person’s mind, the embodied response associated with anger shows that anger actually *takes place*. If a person is angry with me, his anger “really is here, in this room . . . It is in the space between him and me that it unfolds . . . [A]nger inhabits him and it blossoms on the surface of his pale or purple cheeks, his blood-shot eyes and wheezing voice” (C, 63). In reflecting on his own experiences of anger, Merleau-Ponty concludes that there is no way to separate this emotion from his body. As with all emotions, the experience of being angry is bound up in our bodies, an observation that is especially important later in this

thesis in the veterans' narratives, which also highlight the ways that post-traumatic experiences and recovery are bound up in their bodies.

Merleau-Ponty observes that art and the life of the artist (particularly painters) might help us to fully understand the body and the role of perception. French impressionist Paul Cézanne once commented that he "thinks in painting" (OE, 309). Unlike scientists and philosophers, painters are free to observe the world without being asked to assess and evaluate what they see. Further, French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry commented that "the painter 'takes his body with him'" (OE, 294). It is not the mind that paints, but the body. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty suggests that a painter lends his/her body to the world, "that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement" (OE, 294), in exchange for which s/he is able to transform the world into a painting.

We are also always situated in the world at a specific place and in a specific time and our personal experience is only ever part of a whole. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that our vision and the location of our body provide our perspective on the world, and that perspective is always limited. For example, when I sit at my desk, I cannot see the books on the shelf behind me to the left, even though they are there. I can see them if I turn my head, but that I can no longer see my desk! When I look out the window to the pine trees atop the ridge across the river, the trees appear small, perhaps only a few centimetres from my current vantage point. However, if I were to cross the river, walk to top of the ridge and stand beneath one of the trees, it might tower over me by 50 feet. Similarly, when I see an airplane in flight from the ground, it is often only a small dot arcing across the sky. But when I see the airplane out the window of the airport terminal, I gain a completely different perspective on the massive size of the machine.

In addition, our sight and location in the world give us the perception of depth—that is, some objects are closer than others and some objects are concealed behind others. However, as Merleau-Ponty explains, "it is never the case that things really *are* one behind the other. The fact that things overlap or are hidden does not enter into their definition, and expresses only my incomprehensible solidarity with one of them – my body" (OE, 304). If I move to the other side of the room, the object that was once furthest away will now be closest to me, and those that were hidden behind others become visible. As such, Merleau-Ponty concludes that:

> We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely that through it we come in contact with the sun and the stars, that we are everywhere all at once, and that even our power to imagine ourselves elsewhere . . . borrows from vision and employs means we owe to it. Vision alone makes us learn that beings that are different, 'exterior,' foreign to one another, are yet absolutely *together*, are 'simultaneity.' (OE, 318)

What is most important in the context of this thesis, and for peace and conflict studies more broadly, is Merleau-Ponty's understanding that as embodied subjects, the body is the essential background for our living. When we develop a new skill, and particularly once the skill becomes habit, Merleau-Ponty explains, it is the body that "understands" the new skill, not the mind. If I ask you to touch your head with your hand, you will move your hand to the top of your head without actively thinking about your hand or your head (PP, 167). Similarly, all of our past choices and experiences leave a residue in the body—"are 'sedimented' in our body, in the same kind of way that past geological changes now form part of the fabric of the earth as we experience it today" (Matthews, 2006, p. 101). Our past experiences impart the background for our current experiences. This is important for understanding post-traumatic experience, since for

many trauma sufferers, it seems that their trauma experience is never far from the surface of their living. While the trauma suffered does not necessarily determine their conduct in the present, it always provides the background for the present. As Taylor Carman (2008) reflects, "thinking, judging, believing, remembering, imagining, expecting—all such attitudes, however abstract—are anchored in the body and so bear traces, if only faint ones, of the *situatedness* of perception" (p. 13).

The Flesh, the Chiasm, and Nature

In *Eye and Mind*, the last essay published before his death, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing . . . . *the world is made of the same stuff as the body*" (OE, 295, emphasis mine). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, David Abram (1996) argues that human bodies are "tuned for relationship" with the world (p. ix), and that humans only evolved in engagement with their sensuous surroundings. This points to a crucial aspect of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, for "to perceive is to have a body, and to have a body is to *inhabit* a world" (Carman, 2008, p. 19). As Abram (1996) explains, *inhabiting* the world means that perception does not exist solely within me—it is not exclusively in my own brain and body—for without other beings and entities in the world, there would be nothing to perceive. As Merleau-Ponty observes, the human body is "a relation of being and not of knowledge" (N, 210). It is only in relationship with others, human and more-than-human, that I am able to perceive at all. Thus, Merleau-Ponty notes that there is always reciprocity in perception, an ongoing exchange and overlapping relationship between our human selves and the surrounding world. Merleau-Ponty was particularly interested in the way that all human senses work only in

simultaneous reciprocal interaction. In his course third on nature at the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty commented on “the body as a touching-touched, seeing-seen, the place of a kind of reflection and, thereby, the capacity to relate itself to something other than its own mass” (N, 209). I can touch something only because I can also be touched; I see because I can be seen; I can speak and be spoken to; and so on. Moreover, this interchange between my body and the world often occurs prior to conscious awareness—in pre-reflective experience or pretheoretical awareness, or at what Abram (1996) calls “the most immediate level of sensory perception” (p. 49). In this way, we are “completed by an otherness that transcends us” (Fisher, 2006, p. 159).

While the body was always prominent in his philosophical thought, in the last years of his life, Merleau-Ponty began turning his attention towards human sensorial participation and experience in the earthly world and developing the concept of what he called ‘the flesh,’ which he saw as a language to counter the dualisms inherent in human/nature, body/mind, and so on. “My body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived),” writes Merleau-Ponty, “and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world . . . they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping” (VI, 248). Later, in his working notes on the body in the world in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that “the body *stands* before the world and the world upright before it, and between them there is a relation that is one of embrace” (VI, 271). It is through this radical sharing of the same flesh, through being made of the same flesh, that our bodies make contact with and embrace the world (Fisher, 2006). Thus, Andy Fisher believes that

in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the flesh, we find the possibility of going "beyond a narrow world of human projections" (p. 159).

Hamrick and Van der Veken's (2011) analysis of 'the flesh' is helpful in appreciating the three varied but entangled meanings in the ways that Merleau-Ponty uses the term. Firstly, Merleau-Ponty uses flesh to refer to carnality and flesh-to-flesh relationships with others. For example, when speaking with another, "the other gets taken up in my speech and vice versa. In very animated, intimate discussions, it sometimes becomes impossible to establish clear boundaries between interlocutors, the speaking and being spoken to" (ibid., p. 75). This relationship becomes even more understandable, perhaps, when investigating the realm of emotion and desire. In particular, feelings such as "anger, joy, fear, sorrow, and love" shared between two persons can become so intertwined that it is impossible to establish where one person ends and the other begins. Indeed, it is emotions such as love, hate, joy, and sorrow that lead to the deepest flesh-to-flesh relationships, where "we cross over into the other as object of those feelings, and the other similarly becomes part of us as the object of our feelings" (ibid., p. 92). Here, the flesh gets at the inescapable nature of human vulnerability but also at empathy, in that the suffering of others may "find its echo in our own flesh" (Kirkman, 2007, p. 22).

In searching for a name to designate flesh, Merleau-Ponty suggests the second meaning of 'flesh'—that it is not mind, matter or substance, but rather is equivalent to, and should be considered an 'element' such as water, air, earth, and fire (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). He meant the flesh to be designated "in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate

principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being” (VI, 139).

The third meaning of flesh comes from the reversibility, the overlapping and intertwining between body and world, which leads Merleau-Ponty to develop the notion of chiasm to refer to the reciprocity of seeing and being seen, touching and being touched (Cataldi and Hamrick, 2007; Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). It is “this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself . . . and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it” (VI, 139). The word chiasm comes from the Greek *khiasmos*, meaning “a placing crosswise, diagonal arrangement,” and from the Greek letter *chi,* which forms the shape of an X (OED, 2001). Merleau-Ponty was particularly taken with the optic chiasm in the brain, which is where the optic nerves meet and partially cross over to the other hemisphere of the brain in order to transmit the images seen by each eye (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). Merleau-Ponty saw this chiasm as an appropriate analogy for expressing the seeing-seen, feeling-felt, speaking-being heard, and other reciprocal sensory relationships. The chiasm is thus always defined by a reversibility and an exchange. The core of Merleau-Ponty’s observation was that perception is always echoed by other entities—that contact with what is ‘other’ is possible because of the crossing over between my flesh and the flesh of the world. As David Abram (1996) further explains:

> Without this body, without this tongue or these ears, you could neither speak nor hear another’s voice. Nor could you have anything to speak about, or even reflect on, or to think, since without any contact, any encounter, without any glimmer of sensory experience, there would be nothing to question or to know. The living body is thus the very possibility of contact, not just with others but with oneself—the very possibility of reflection, of thought, of knowledge. (p. 45)

Further, Hamrick and Van der Veken (2011) bring attention to how "almost all the words used to express the chiasm are topological: *enveloping, overlapping, encroaching, coiling over,* the *fold,* and *intertwining*" (p. 95, emphasis in original). Merleau-Ponty writes:

> We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or conversely, the world and the body as the seer in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only 'shadows stuffed with organs', that is, more of the visible. The world seen is not 'in' my body, and my body is not 'in' the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds nor is surrounded by it . . . . There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. (VI, 138)

In the working notes for his unfinished manuscript, Merleau-Ponty also wrote the following: "Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother" (VI, 267). Indeed, at the same time that he was expanding his thought on the flesh and the chiasm, Merleau-Ponty became increasingly interested in the topic of nature. While his earlier texts also featured nature, particularly as the context or setting of human embodiment and experience, in the mid-1950s he began drawing on Alfred North Whitehead's depictions of the temporal 'process of nature.' At this time, Merleau-Ponty began advocating for and articulating a new vision of nature within Western philosophy, in which the human body emerges at the intersection of nature and thought/reason (Vallier, 2003, p. xx). For Merleau-Ponty, the human mind was not "an impartial observer of Nature," but rather human awareness was itself a process of nature (N, 117). He argued that there exists "a sort of reciprocity between Nature and me as a sensing being. I am part of Nature and function as any event of Nature: I am by my body part of Nature and the parts of Nature allow for them relations of the same type as those of my body with Nature" (ibid.). Drawing on Whitehead and describing nature as process, Merleau-Ponty argues that

"Nature is something that continues, that is never grasped in its beginnings, although appearing always new to us" (N, 118). And he suggests that perhaps the best way of conceiving of nature is as "the memory of the world" (N, 120).

Further, Merleau-Ponty observes that "there are no substantial differences between physical nature, life, and mind"; rather, they arise together through reciprocal perception (N, 212). Insects, birds, animals, winds, rocks, and waters—and even human skin!—do not recognize human-imposed borders and boundaries, showing notions of objectivity and separateness to be purely artificial and imaginary. As Andy Fisher (2006) explains, Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of contact/interactions were not only referring to humans but to the possibility of coming into contact with everything, including the more-than-human world. "He spoke, for example, of a 'kinship between the being of the earth and that of my body,' noting that the kinship extended to other animals and even stones" (pp. 159-160). It is only in contact with what poet Mary Oliver (1986) in *Wild Geese* calls the "family of things"—that is, in relation to what is more-than-human—that "thoughts, images, emotions, percepts, or behavior . . . arise" (Fisher, 2002, p. 11). Perhaps what is most important in Merleau-Ponty's notions of the flesh and chiasm and his descriptions of nature, is that the world and the body are never separate. It is through our bodies that we are part of the world, and it is through our bodies that we understand and make contact with the world.

Biophilia and Ecological Intelligence

The term *biophilia* was first suggested by psychologist Erich Fromm in the 1960s. Bio-, from the Greek *bio,* meaning literally 'one's life' but more generally referring to anything living or alive, and -philia from the Greek *philia* meaning 'affection' and

stemming from *philos,* ‘love,’ so that *biophilia* quite literally means ‘love of life.’ Fromm (1964) suggested biophilia as a term to refer to love of life, orientations towards self-preservation or the life drive. He contrasted this term with ‘necrophilia,’ which he suggested was the opposite human attraction and orientations towards death and destructive behaviour as well as qualities of greed and self-absorption. As a psychologist, Fromm’s concepts were targeted towards describing only human behaviours and interactions, and one might acknowledge the similarities to Freud’s theory of life and death instincts. However, as Bernard Landis (1975) explains, while Freud believed that both life and death instincts were biological drives that existed in every human being, Fromm believed that only biophilic tendencies were biologically given, and that necrophilic tendencies developed “only when man is thwarted in the development of biophilia” (p. 419).

Later, renowned biologist E.O. Wilson suggested expanding the notion of biophilia to encompass the love of all life forms. Wilson (1984) observed that “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life is to some degree innate, hence deserves to be called biophilia” (p. 85). Humans exhibit biophilic tendencies from early childhood, and Wilson argues that this affinity towards all life is programmed into the human brain—that this urge to connect with other living beings expresses a deep-rooted genetic/biological need in human beings. Both Wilson (1993) and Louv (2008) observe that humans today, despite our technological prowess and increasingly urban lifestyles, are genetically the same as our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Indeed, anthropologist Euclid Smith (2002) likens the rate of biological evolution to “the speed of a glacier in comparison to the rate of change in our culture” (p. 13). And E.O. Wilson (1993) recalls that “Humanity did not soft-land

into the teeming biosphere like an alien from another planet. We arose from other organisms already here" (p. 39). As posited by evolutionary theory, every multi-celled eukaryotic life form, including plants, insects and animals (humans are animals, too), are descended from one common ancestor 1.8 billion years ago, which provided the elemental cell structure and universal genetic code for all higher organisms. Wilson (1984) suggests that evidence of this genetic programming in the brain is found, for example, in the ease with which and interest humans show in learning about plants and animals, something he says is "too consistent to be dismissed as the result of purely historical events working on a mental blank slate" (p. 85). Indeed, for Wilson, our humanity is defined by our interactions and kinship with other organisms, which provided "the matrix in which the human mind originated and is permanently rooted, and they offer the challenge and freedom innately sought" (p. 139).

In the early 1980s, psychologist Howard Gardner (1983) advanced the theory that there are multiple intelligences other than those measured by standard intelligence (IQ) tests, and that such intelligences enable humans to perform well in different areas of life. Author and psychologist Daniel Goleman (2010), perhaps best known for his work advocating for emotional intelligence, has recently promoted another form of intelligence, which he calls *ecological intelligence*: "our ability to adapt to our ecological niche" (p. 43). Similar to Wilson's conception of biophilia, Goleman argues that ecological intelligence is an all-embracing receptivity and empathetic responsiveness for all life. "Just as social and emotional intelligence build on the abilities to take other people's perspective, feel with them, and show our concern," writes Goleman, "ecological intelligence extends this capacity to all natural systems. We display such

empathy whenever we feel distress at a sign of the 'pain' of the planet or resolve to make things better" (p. 44). In order to make use of our ecological intelligence, Goleman argues that we need to stop thinking in dichotomies, which set human beings apart from nature, and instead to remember and acknowledge that human life is inextricable from the ecosystems we inhabit, and that all organisms mutually impact and affect one another, in ways that are either beneficial or harmful.

Approaches in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science

Neuroscientist Kelly Lambert (2008), the Chair of Psychology at Randolph-Macon College, examines connections between the evolution of the human brain and modern lifestyles. Like Wilson (1984; 1993) and Louv (2008), she argues that our brains evolved in complex environments, in which our ancestors' survival depended on constant physical interaction with their natural surroundings. That is, humans did not evolve independently, but rather, by interacting *with* other creatures, with the earth and skies, the winds and rocks. Lambert's main contention is that the 'modern' technologies associated with contemporary lifestyles (which are supposed to improve our lives and make us happy), from cell phones and microwave ovens to computers, may be leading to high rates of depression in modern life. Despite the fact that human nervous systems are basically the same as those of our long-ago ancestors, these new technologies require us to use our brains very differently. Most importantly, Lambert's (2008) research shows that our bodies, senses, and emotions were crucial to human evolution and becoming, but today increasing numbers of people all over the world are engaging almost exclusively in cognitive tasks (such as writing a thesis!), which leaves our bodies behind.

Reflecting on Lambert's research while writing this thesis as the mother of a young toddler as compared to my pre-motherhood academic work, such as writing my doctoral candidacy exam and my master's thesis, is interesting. While this work has taken longer than it might have without a child, life feels more balanced overall and I am generally less stressed. Rather than engaging in the cognitive tasks of reading and writing for upwards of twelve hours per day, I now spend a maximum of five to six hours, with the rest of my day devoted to playing, cuddling, going to the park, making meals, and so on, all of which engage my body in ways that thesis writing does not, and which also prevent me from taking myself too seriously.

Lambert also shares the story of one of her colleagues, Jack Trammell, who after years of suffering from depression bought a farm and returned to his rural roots. He explains the ways that the farm has become like an antidepressant for him:

> Even when I feel paralyzed with fatigue, anxiety and worry about my complex life, the animals still need to be fed, and they don't care about the expensive unexpected car repair or the problems at work that must be resolved. By tending to their needs, it forces me outside myself, and requires me to physically exert myself. Inevitably, I always feel better after feeding the chickens. (Lambert, 2008, p. 214)

Thus Lambert (2008) argues that "the environment around us is a critical variable in determining the severity of our stress responses in different situations" (p. 243).

Meanwhile, linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson's (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh* uses emerging lessons from cognitive science to show the profound disjuncture between what Western philosophy tells us about the disconnected human mind and body and the lived realities revealed by cognitive science. A scientific discipline that arose in the 1970s, cognitive science draws on the body as a lived text and

establishes the interconnectedness of all things. The term *cognitive* refers to all elements connected with visual and auditory processing, memory and attention, thought and language, mental imagery, emotions, motor operations, and neural modeling (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, p. 11). Cognitive scientists suggest that at least 95 percent of human thought is unconscious. Importantly, when cognitive scientists refer to reason and thought as unconscious, they are not suggesting that it belongs to the realm of the "repressed" as in the Freudian sense that it could be accessed through appropriate guidance and therapy, but rather that it takes place at levels below our cognitive awareness and to which we have no direct conscious awareness or access.

At its base, cognitive science works to counter the meta-story of rationality—the disembodied view of human reason commonly espoused within the Western philosophical tradition, which suggests that human reason provides a completely objective view and understanding of external reality. In response, cognitive science shows that the majority of human reason, rather than arising in our minds, is unconscious and rooted in our bodies and in experiences in the everyday world. Further, rational thought, which has been used to separate us from the 'others' (i.e., more-than-human animals), is actually an evolutionary adaptation—that is, human reason arises from animal reason since the basic principles of abstract reason "builds on and makes use of forms of perceptual and motor inference present in 'lower' animals," observe Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 4). In the evolution of the human brain, rather than starting from nothing, the newer parts of the human brain developed from and drew on older parts of the animal brain. What is perhaps most interesting is that even with the new understandings of the human body and brain provided through evolutionary theory, there

was little revision of the traditional concepts of reason, which has persisted as a key Western cultural meta-story and has continued to define humans as separate from and superior to the other animals.

Yet rather than rational thought being the basis for human existence, cognitive science reveals that it is our embodied interactions in the world that offer the grounds for "our sense of what is real" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, p. 17). In line with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, cognitive science asserts that "the peculiar nature of our bodies shapes our very possibilities for conceptualization and categorization" (ibid., p. 19). Thus, when the findings of cognitive science come into contact with the rationality meta-story, the Western worldview collapses in on itself. And the view that arises with the help of cognitive science (as well as Merleau-Ponty, ecopsychology, quantum physics, and so on) is that as human beings "we are coupled to the world through our embodied interactions" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, p. 93). Lakoff and Johnson argue (and one sees echoes of Merleau-Ponty) that as human beings, all of our concepts are grounded in our body's sensorimotor system—indeed, we initially understand concepts only through our bodies. Furthermore, reason itself depends on embodied understanding—the mind can never be independent from the body.

Ecopsychology

> Our humanity is incomplete until we have established our kinship or social relations with the larger natural world and so satisfied our longing to feel at home in or at peace with the cosmos as a whole.
>
> —Fisher, 2002, p. 122

"Once upon a time, all psychologies were 'ecopsychologies'" writes Theodore Roszak (2001). "Those who sought to heal the soul took it for granted that human nature

is densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable, mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos" (p. 14). Today, however, human health is taken outside its natural contexts and placed solely in the urban-industrial context of the individual, separate human being, while everything in the more-than-human world is considered distant, threatening and unapproachable (Roszak, 1996; Fisher, 2002). Within this context, psychology and psychotherapy are viewed as the best methods for helping struggling individuals (Besthorn, Wulff, and St. George, 2010). The focus of such therapies, observes James Hillman (1995), is the individual subject, "simply me in my body and in my relationship with other subjects" (p. xvii). However, he argues, ancient human truths go against the individualistic locus of western psychology. That is, "we cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet" (ibid., xxii). Andy Fisher (2002) therefore describes ecopsychology as an intervention that aims at "the regaining of lost world-relations and life-meanings" (p. 187).

The purpose of ecopsychology is to "place all psychological and spiritual matters within the context of our membership in the natural world" (Fisher, 2006, pp. 153-154). Ecopsychology works to locate the human psyche within what psychotherapist and ecopsychologist Larry Robinson (2009) calls "the complex, interconnected web of humans, animals, plants, microbes, rocks, oceans, and stars" (p. 26). Indeed, ecopsychologists regard urban-industrial society to be at the roots of much of the suffering—grief, despair, and anxiety—in modern times, since our culture leads to estrangement from nature by dismissing ecological instincts deeply rooted in the human psyche, or what some refer to as the ecological unconscious (Smith, 2010). This

ecological unconscious, suggests Robert Greenway (2009), while repressed in modern times and culture, lives “at the depth of our species’ memories” (p. 137).

Thus, also supporting this doctoral research is a growing body of philosophy and research in ecopsychology, which explores the intertwinings between healthy ecosystems and human health conditions (Hillman, 1995; Roszak, 2001), and the ways that day-to-day human life, rooted in economic and technological systems, may be characterized by chronic low-grade trauma (Fisher, 2002; Glendinning, 1995). The difficulty and struggles inherent in this work requires finding a language that does not set humans outside of nature but rather acknowledges that we *are* nature—we are embedded in ecosystems and in a reciprocal relationship with everything that surrounds us. This search for new language is something with which many scholars and practitioners working and writing within the area of ecopsychology struggle, since the field occupies and seeks to bridge the space between the natural and human sciences. Indeed, Robert Greenway (1995) has suggested that ecopsychology itself is “a search for language” (p. 123).

Fisher (2006) argues that it is important to distinguish ecopsychology from mainstream environmental psychology, which maintains an anthropocentric and utilitarian view of nature, and continues to reinforce the cultural notion that nature is solely a ‘resource’ for human living. Environmental psychology, he says, is unable to account for or question the “profound estrangement of the human psyche from the larger psyche of nature” (p. 155). The resourcist outlook to which Fisher refers is present in the language around environmental decline, as seen in the previous chapter’s exploration of environmental conflict and environmental security.

Perhaps Betty Reardon's (1992) advice is warranted when she writes that "we cannot achieve a change unless we can think it. And we cannot rally others to support the changes if we cannot communicate our vision of change to them. Thus we need not only images and maps but also effective and appropriate language" (p. 395). While Reardon is referring to the pervasiveness of metaphors about war in contemporary language, her argument is easily transferred to the context of ecopsychology. She describes how changing the words we use changes the images that form in our minds, and thus to transforming our metaphors. In this way, this thesis takes up the difficult task of finding a different/new language that enables and includes the more-than-human world—the earth and skies, winds and rocks. It is about creating a space for those voices by showing how much those voices mean, by illuminating the power carried in those voices that have been dismissed or relegated as unimportant within the modern academy, and by demonstrating that those voices are part of the complex, interconnected web that we call life.

The most important contribution of ecopsychology to this project is its primary notion that "genuine sanity is grounded in the reality of the natural world" (Fisher, 2002, p. xiii). As with the other theories presented in this chapter, ecopsychology wholly rejects the Cartesian dichotomies that fill our daily lives—the idea that humans are separate from (and higher than) nature, the notion that mind is separate from body, the suggestion that the 'inside' is disconnected from 'outside.' In particular, ecopsychologists' interests lie in envisioning and achieving a fulfilling and life nurturing/sustaining relationship and kinship with what Fisher (2002) calls "the world of nature" (p. 33).

narrative interlude

on birthing and raising a child

When I was pulled away from academia for the first time in six years after the birth of my son, I was deeply struck by the completely embodied the experience of motherhood. David Abram (2010) writes, “this animal body, for all its susceptibility and vertigo, remains the primary instrument of all our knowing, as the capricious earth remains our primary cosmos” (p. 8). Being pregnant, birthing a baby and watching him grow while working on this research and thesis gave me new insight into Abram’s statement, and a more complex understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as well as the other theoretical work that orients this thesis.

During my pregnancy and afterwards, I became hyperaware of the interactions between my body and the world. Would the shampoo with which I washed my hair or the lotion I put on my skin affect the growing fetus? Was the food I ate laced with pesticides and herbicides that would affect my child’s body? And as my belly grew and my body changed, I remember being truly awed that I could grow another human being!

In the first few days after Cameron was born, I was consumed by the euphoria connected with the tiny, beautiful perfection that had been birthed into the midst of our

lives. But as the days wore on, the transition from academic to mother was difficult. A week or two after Cameron was born, I told the doctor that mothering was the hardest thing I'd ever done. She nodded, smiled, and said that most of the academics who come through her office tell her the same thing. I relied almost solely on my body's instincts to soothe and comfort my baby in those first months. For the first six months of his life in the world—and the nine or so months before that—my body provided the only sustenance he needed, and it continued to provide sustenance as he nursed into toddlerhood. There were many days in the first months, when Cameron seemed to nurse almost constantly that I deeply understood my connection with all other mammals. I *felt* truly animal. I became one amongst many mammals doing the same thing and realized that so very little separates us in the end.

And every day now for the past two years, I have watched Cameron explore the world through his animal body. His whole experience is about being in his little body, learning how the world works one sense at a time—or usually through multiple senses together. As a baby and young toddler with little language, he delighted in the different textures of fabrics, rocks, leaves, grass, various toys made of wood and plastic. He would pick up an object, and hold it close to his face. Sometimes he could see through it, and he would hold it to his eyes again and again to look through to the other side, interested perhaps in how it distorted what he saw. He would then put it in his mouth, lick it, taste it, make a face if he didn't like the sensation—then taste it again to confirm the experience! He was amazed when he reached out to feel a plant or tree's leaves and they sprung from his hand. His ears always prick up when he hears new or unfamiliar sounds, or when he hears the train across the river, or an airplane or helicopter in the sky. Now he

begins to dance and move his body when he hears music he likes. He stops and waits when the song ends, perhaps comments “Nice music” when a new song starts, and begins to move his body once again to the beat.

When we are indoors, Cameron loves to play with small animal figures, talking to them, imagining how they talk to one another, sharing his lunch and his books. But he loves nothing more than getting outside. He becomes completely engrossed while playing with rocks and sticks, watching spiders and ants, digging in and watering the garden, plucking pieces of grass and flowers, touching leaves and plants. He is riveted by dried leaves and pinecones on the ground, and together we have spent countless hours moving leaves from one spot to another, gathering pinecones, and exploring their textures and sounds. He loves the snow, too, making footprints and snow angels, sledding, and building forts and snowpeople. Several weeks before he turned two, as we walked to the playground, we realized that we could see the moon in the daytime sky. And Cameron stopped, looked up at me with wide eyes, and said excitedly, “Let’s walk to the moon!” And then he wondered aloud whether the moon could come to the playground with us, and play on the slide with him.

Watching my son, I see that for him, nature is enchanted at every possible turn, in stories and toys and embodied outdoor play. And I wonder, at what point does nature lose its enchantment? At what point do animals and rocks and trees, pinecones and leaves, the moon and stars, lose their voices and only become the passive backdrop to our human lives?

Chapter 6

Connections between Nature and Healing

> In ancient narratives, gardens, pastoral landscapes and natural environments with small lakes and meadows are depicted as places where you can take refuge—places to find shelter and relief from sadness and pain—places where you can be restored both mentally and physically. These narratives portray gardens and pastoral landscapes as healthy, healing places longed for both in life and beyond.
>
> —Ottosson and Grahn, 2008, p. 52

Incorporating nature into human healing and rehabilitation is not a novel idea. Connections between nature experiences and human health have been accepted by poets, sages, and indigenous peoples, amongst others, for thousands of years. Ancient Greek healing places and temples were purposefully located on hilltops in the countryside with views of the ocean, around the same time that Taoists in China were building greenhouses and cultivating gardens as part of their approach for maintaining health and wellbeing (Louv, 2008; Sternberg, 2009). Chinese mystics often escaped the activity and clamour of towns for the countryside, where they sought to find and restore their souls, while the Christian Bible tells numerous stories of holy men who retreated to the desert to have contact with God (Greenway, 2009).

In the Middle Ages, gardens were deemed to be an important facet of human healing, particularly in monastery settings. With its centrally-located water feature and its

open view of the sky, the traditional monastery cloister was designed to facilitate meditation for both resident monks and patients (Messer Diehl, 2009). During the Victorian era, gardens were often found in hospitals (Pretty, 2004). And beginning in the nineteenth century, French churches advocated community gardens as a way to improve the circumstances of the working poor (Di Iacovo and O'Connor, 2009). In the United States, the Quakers' Friends Hospital in Pennsylvania treated patients suffering from mental ill health with gardening and walks in the surrounding lands (Louv, 2008). This focus on nature and healing, however, was lost for much of the twentieth century, and only in the past few decades have outdoor therapy and nature once again gained popularity, with proponents now arguing that "nature should be seen as a fundamental health resource" (Pretty, 2004, p. 71).

Ecopsychologist Andy Fisher (2006) warns about the "resourcist ontology" that accompanies the type of the empirical research overviewed in this chapter (such as Jules Pretty's (2004) assertion above), which continues to maintain human/nature divisions, and to see nature only as a resource, "now a psychological one" (pp. 155-156). In our interview, Fisher expanded on this idea. While he believes the empirical research can be helpful in that it points to the deep interconnections between humans and nature, he asserts that it is always important to remember that this research is limited and "just the tip of the iceberg." He reflected that "we're so confined by even just the way we move and operate in the modern world and how we perceive things, and how we're boxed in by the structures of our society which shapes our perceptions, and shapes our sensory abilities, I think we're just very limited in trying to understand or bring meaning to these experiences beyond the obviousness of them when we're having them . . . I think better

ways will come." Keeping in mind the limitations of these studies, and the ways they tend to be framed by the resourcist ontology, this chapter provides a general overview of the recent empirical research on connections between nature and human health.

Empirical Connections between Humans and Nature

Nearly 30 years ago in the prominent research journal *Science,* Roger Ulrich (1984) described his discovery that hospital patients who had a view of trees from their hospital beds required a shorter stay and fewer medications, and experienced fewer postsurgical complications than patients whose windows looked onto a brick wall. A parallel study found that prison inmates with a view of farm fields used prison health care services less often than those who looked onto the inner courtyard (Moore, 1981). Research in workplace settings demonstrates a similar pattern, where employees whose window provides a view of trees or a park are sick less often as well as more satisfied with their jobs compared to their peers without such a view (Kaplan, 2001). It seems, too, that even pictures of nature can positively influence people's moods and concentration (de Vries et al., 2003).

Two experiments by Terry Hartig's (2003) research team compared the emotional and physiological effects of natural and urban settings. First, the researchers tested participants while sitting either in a room with a view of trees or a room with no window; they found that blood pressure decreased for the people in the room with the view, but increased for those in the room with no window. Next, they took participants walking, in either a nature reserve or a medium-density housing development. The participants who walked in the nature reserve experienced a decrease in blood pressure and reported a decline in feelings of anger and aggression, while those who walked in the urban setting

experienced an increase in all three areas. Researchers at the University of Essex conducted a similar study, comparing the effects of an outdoor walk in the woods and an indoor walk at a shopping mall on participants' self-esteem, depression and tension. The study found that the outdoor walk often improved all three emotions (Mind, 2007a; Mind, 2007b). Thus, like getting regular sleep, it is believed that "regular access to restorative [natural] environments can interrupt processes that negatively affect health and well-being in the short- and long-term" (Hartig et al., 2003, p. 122).

In another experiment, Hartig and Staats (2006) studied participants' preference for walking in the city or in a forest, and found that the more fatigued participants were, the more likely they were to express a preference for walking in a forest. And a longitudinal study by Hartig, Capalano and Ong (2007) found a positive correlation between cold summer weather in Sweden and the levels of antidepressants prescribed to Swedish men and women. The researchers hypothesize that in summers with cooler rainy weather, Swedes were less likely to spend time outdoors and therefore did not benefit from the restorative properties of nature, thus leading to increased levels of depression. Based on such findings, some practitioners have once again begun to incorporate nature into a variety of therapy settings, including treatment for brain injuries (Shanahan, McAllister, and Curtain, 2009; Walker et al., 2005), personality disorders (Eikenæs, Gude, and Hoffart, 2006), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Taylor, Kuo, and Sullivan, 2001).

Indeed, there is a growing body of academic scholarship dedicated to the topic of restoration (also referred to as 'stress recovery'). When people are tired and stressed and their energies depleted, they often experience dark moods, heightened arousal in the

autonomic nervous system, and diminished capacities for focused attention. Restoration, then, refers to renewing these diminished resources and faculties, to enhancing mood, decreasing arousal, and regaining the ability to focus attention on specific activities (Hartig, 2003). A wide range of empirical studies have been conducted over the past 20 years to explore the physiological and emotional benefits of natural settings, as well as the ways nature contributes to and enhances humans' attention spans, and how regular experiences in nature seem to result in better mental health (for example, de Vries et al., 2003; Grahn and Stigsdotter, 2003; Maas et al., 2006; Mind, 2007b; Mitchell and Popham, 2007; Pretty, 2004; Pretty et al., 2006; Pretty et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 2009; Sugiyama et al., 2008; Ulrich et al., 1991; van den Berg, Hartig and Staats, 2007). Even viewing pictures of nature has been linked to restoring fatigued attention, while viewing pictures of urban and concrete environments as well as pictures of geometric shapes was not restorative (Berto, 2005).

Like many of the scholars whose theories were presented in Chapter 5, researchers studying restoration propose that the importance of nature in human life stems from the fact that the human brain co-evolved with other creatures and with rivers, rocks, winds, skies, mountains, trees, and plants. And while over the years humanity has experienced high rates of cultural and technological change, the rate of biological evolution has been quite slow, leading human nervous systems today to be virtually the same as those of our long-ago ancestors. Indeed, the role of nature in renewing humans' ability to concentrate is considered by many scientists to be an evolutionary adaptation. The type of constant, linear attention to a specific task required within urban lifestyles and jobs increasingly over the last 100 years would have been dangerous, even deadly, for our ancestors, since

they could have been easily surprised by predators (Kaplan, 2005). Instead of focusing for a long time on one thing in particular, our ancestors needed to be constantly aware of their surroundings and to frequently shift their awareness. Stephen Kaplan argues that natural settings require a reduced amount of energy and effort compared with urban, or what some might consider to be more 'civilized' settings, even if the latter settings are more familiar to many of us today. Specifically, the human body is thought to respond instinctively to nature in a way that it cannot to the built environment.

Thus, researchers such as Stephen Kaplan and Rachel Kaplan, among others, suggest that nature requires a different type of attention than human-built environments, leading it to play a restorative function for human attention (R. Kaplan, 2001; S. Kaplan, 1995). Other researchers, such as Roger Ulrich (1991) and colleagues, argue that nature provides biological support for recovery from stress. No matter the explanation, however, recent research shows that spending time in nature is genuinely important for human beings (van den Berg, Hartig and Staats, 2007). It seems that nature—or even a window view of nature—relieves anxiety and stress by sending out signals "that mediate rest and relaxation" (Ottoson and Grahn, 2008).

Studies with both children and the elderly are pointing to the importance of nature throughout a person's lifecycle. James Sallis, the program director for the Active Living Research Program for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, told Richard Louv (2008) that children with indoor, inactive upbringings are more likely to experience struggles with mental health and wellbeing. And researchers Andrea Faber Taylor and Frances Kuo (2006) assert that there is enough evidence from numerous studies of the relationships between children and nature to support the thesis that nature is crucial for children's

cognitive, social and psychological development. Han (2009) showed that the presence of plants in a junior-high classroom in Taiwan positively influences students' behaviour and wellbeing. In particular, students in the classroom with plants tended to rate themselves both as more comfortable in the classroom and as feeling more friendly towards others than those students in a classroom without plants. And elsewhere, Taylor, Kuo, and Sullivan (2001) have suggested that natural environments can support children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In focus groups with parents, the researchers discovered that urban environments and modern technologies often aggravate a child's ADHD symptoms, but natural settings never exacerbate—and often alleviate—the symptoms. One parent shared that a Disneyland trip was too stimulating for her child, but a camping trip to a state park resulted in a vacation the whole family enjoyed because her child was relaxed, happy, and calm. Another parent described how his son's struggles with ADHD were minimal when he was engaged in outdoor activities such as hitting golf balls or fishing. The researchers also discovered that the ADHD symptoms of children who tended to play in indoor settings such as basements with few or no windows were much more severe than the symptoms of children who played outdoors.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, Mooney and Nicell (1992) followed patients with Alzheimer's disease at five different care facilities for two years. Two of the care facilities provided patients with access to gardens, while at the other three patients had no access to nature settings. Over the two years, violent assaults by Alzheimer's patients at the facilities with no access to gardens increased significantly (violence is a common occurrence amongst Alzheimer's patients because the disease causes a person's cognitive processes deteriorate over time). Meanwhile, at the two facilities with gardens,

levels of violence amongst patients with Alzheimer's stayed the same or even decreased slightly when patients were given regular access to the gardens. Meanwhile Susan Rodiek's (2002) study with elderly nursing homes residents also showed a number of positive results for the residents who spent time in a garden setting, many of whom reported significantly lower levels of anxiety and positive moods, compared with those who spent time only indoors. Measurements of the residents' cortisol (a stress hormone) levels confirmed these findings, where the cortisol levels of garden participants were reduced by two and a half times those of the study's indoor participants.

Wilderness Therapy and Wilderness Experiences

Throughout the twentieth century there have been anecdotal accounts of the benefits of 'camping therapy' in North America (Davis-Berman and Berman, 1989). Indeed, 'wilderness therapy' is gaining increased attention as an approach that involves a combination of cognitive therapy and/or humanistic therapy approaches within a nature setting typically far away from urban contexts. The major studies in wilderness therapy tend to report improved self-esteem and personal development as well as interpersonal development and enhanced social skills (Russell, 2006). Many wilderness therapy programs have concentrated on treating adolescents living in psychiatric environments as well as those with emotional and/or substance abuse problems, and report significant increases in participants' self-esteem as well as improvements in delinquent behaviour.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there were more than 700 wilderness experience programs in the United States alone (Russell and Farnum, 2007) and those programs specifically designed as wilderness therapeutic interventions numbered somewhere from 60-100 (Russell, 2006). In Robert Greenway's (2009) twenty-two years

of running a wilderness therapy training program at Sonoma State University, he has become a deep believer in the power of nature to facilitate changed psychological processes. In his experience, a wilderness encounter needs to last ten or more days in order to promote meaningful and lasting change.

However, other researchers suggest that even experiences of a shorter duration are worthwhile. David Cole and Troy Hall (2010) recently conducted a study to examine whether the amount of time spent in a wilderness environment was important to individuals' experience of restoration as well as whether the number of people encountered along a trail affected hikers' experiences. They found that no matter the trail congestion or the length of time, most participants reported substantial "stress reduction and mental rejuvenation" (p. 817). Cole and Hall conclude that the restorative effects of spending time in nature can occur in a relatively short amount of time, and whether one is alone or in the company of others.

Horticulture Therapy and Green Care

The horticulture therapy movement, which focuses its work with a variety of populations, including children, the elderly, and patients with physical and/or mental health disabilities, first became organized in the United States around work with veterans in veterans' hospitals (Messer Diehl, 2009; Söderback et al., 2004). Influential American psychiatrist Karl Menninger, who along with his father F.C. Menninger founded the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, was the first to advocate for horticulture therapy to help U.S. veterans recover from their experiences in World War II (Lewis, 1996; Relf, 2006; Louv, 2008). Karl Menninger viewed horticulture therapy as holding possibilities for bringing "the individual close to the soil and close to Mother Nature,

close to beauty, close to the inscrutable mystery of growth and development" (as cited in Relf, 2006, p. 315). In the 1970s, the Menninger Foundation helped to establish the first horticulture therapy program in the United States, at Kansas State University, after which a number of similar programs blossomed at American universities.

In Canada, some post-traumatic distress sufferers are being referred to the Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario, which prescribes horticulture therapy (both in greenhouses and outdoor gardens) as part of its patients' treatment (Hewson, 2001). In Germany, the Berlin Centre for Torture Victims (Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Berlin) incorporates a garden project, 'the Intercultural Healing Garden,' as part of its work with victims of torture and human rights violations from more than 50 countries (Berlin Centre for Torture Victims, n.d.). The Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis similarly incorporates a garden (Wash, 2006). Clients, many of whom suffer from post-traumatic distress, can wait for their appointments in the garden, and many of the Center's counsellors also spend time there to help them cope with the stress and anguish that come from hearing stories of pain and suffering every day. Sarah Wash reports that many of the Center's staff have also taken up gardening at home. Further, since trauma survivors often suffer from loneliness and isolation, the Center uses gardening "to help people connect with one another and reestablish a sense of trust" (ibid., ¶6). The Center's garden designer, Betty Ann Addison reflected that:

> Gardens are all about transition – whether it be from illness to healing or from life to death. They change by the hour, week, month, and year. They require us to relinquish control: A deep appreciation of life emerges with each sprouting plant, even the weeds. And simply by embracing natural rhythms, people from all walks of life, no matter the nature of their past experiences, can learn to accept the inevitability of loss and find hope in the promise of new life. (Wash, 2006, ¶7)

Horticulture therapist Elizabeth Messer Diehl (2009) further suggests that interacting with plants is a powerful method for re-awakening and stimulating the senses, through fragrance, colour, texture, taste and sound. This arousal of our senses and the ways that a garden can completely engage a person's corporeal experience has physical, emotional and cognitive benefits. As a person embraces the embodied experience, Messer Diehl suggests it becomes possible to connect more deeply to the garden, thus further enhancing and bringing forth the healing properties of nature. Additionally, she reflects on the power of particular scents to "stimulate bodily organs to release neurochemicals that help eliminate pain, induce sleep, and create a sense of well-being" (p. 170).

In recent years, a number of European countries, including Norway, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, have begun to include 'green care farms' (also called 'social farming') in their mental and social health programs (Hine, Peacock and Pretty, 2008; Mind, 2007a). Some doctors in northeastern England now refer mental health patients to the 13-week Chopwell Wood Health Project, where patients take part in walking, tai chi, cycling, and/or forest conservation (O'Brien, 2006). In addition, or as an alternative, to drugs and/or therapy, in a country that incorporates green care into its health approach, a doctor or psychiatrist can refer a patient to work on a 'care farm' for a continuous period or as a weekly activity. In some countries, social workers or occupational therapists may also suggest that their clients seek out work on a care farm. Farmers are paid for providing this service and also benefit from the added workers (Mind, 2007b).

In 2008, *Therapeutic Communities Journal* devoted an entire issue to green care. The issue's editor Joe Sempik (2008) writes that "what distinguishes green care from

other social or community-based approaches to mental health and other aspects of wellbeing is the belief that the green component is fundamental to it" (p. 225). Sempik argues that while some healthcare providers emphasize that the important aspects of healthcare include providing "productivity, structure and routine" for patients, the clients in green care programs instead emphasize that what is most important in their own experience is their interactions with nature, both in terms of nurturing plants and/or animals as well as developing a deeper connection with the more-than-human world.

A few countries are especially committed to green care, such as the Netherlands where the number of green care farms recently rose more than a thousand-fold, from 75 care farms in 1998 to more than 800 in 2008 (Elings and Hassink, 2008). The target groups of these Dutch programs has expanded over the years from a focus primarily on people struggling with psychiatric difficulties and those with intellectual disabilities to include people suffering from addictions, burnout, and chronic unemployment, as well as the elderly and young children. The majority of participants in the Dutch programs are male (Di Iacovo and O'Connor, 2009).

In Italy, many psychiatric institutions were closed in the early 1980s, which coincided with the rise of social co-operatives, many of which incorporated agricultural endeavours to assist former psychiatric patients. Similarly, since the nineteenth century many Germany social programs have incorporated participants into their daily work, with a special focus on working in the kitchen and gardens (Di Iacovo and O'Connor, 2009). While this German approach waned in the 1960s and 70s, a new awareness of the importance of nature in human life has recently led to a revival of such programs in the country.

Many clients/participants at various green care farms/facilities have expressed the importance of being involved in the entire lifecycle of plants, from seeds to harvest. For example, the Lothlorien Community in South West Scotland incorporates an organic garden, orchard and woodlands into its programs for residents suffering from ill mental health. The manager at the Community, Brendan Hickey (2008), writes that for many current and former residents, working with nature becomes a metaphor for their own struggles and journeys in life as they notice and reflect on natural and seasonal cycles of life and death. One Community member shared these comments:

> Gardening helps me to feel grounded and helps to take away the negative thoughts I might be having. It helps to stop me from becoming too preoccupied. When I was most unwell gardening was difficult, but over time I built up a strong relationship with it. It was about me and the natural world. I liked working on my own in the garden. It helped calm my mind and allowed my emotions to settle. (Hickey, 2008, pp. 267-268)

Landscape designer C. Colston Burrell (2000) points to the power of gardens to stimulate the human senses of sight, sound, touch and smell. He argues that scent is perhaps the most powerful aspect in a garden, and notes that while fragrances' effects on human beings are not fully understood, they are known to have psychological, physiological and neurological benefits, and even to change hormone production and brain chemistry. Indeed, this is the premise behind aromatherapy as part of alternative or complimentary medicine practices. Some scientists hypothesize that the capacity of fragrances to affect humans in these diverse ways derives from the human nasal passage's direct connection to the brain's centre for emotions and memory (Burrell, 2000). Even at undetectable levels odours have been found to influence the central nervous system. In their research on cut flower arrangements and lavender fragrance, Liu,

Kim and Mattson (2003) concluded that the senses of sight and smell played important roles in reducing stress and producing positive emotional responses in college students.

Botanist and medical and agricultural researcher Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2003) reflects that taking a summer walk in a mature pine forest has, for thousands of years, been considered to be good for a person's health. She brings attention to the biochemical properties in plants, noting that "the fresh leaves [in a pine forest] exert a stimulant effect on breathing with the addition of mild anaesthetic properties. There is possibly some mild narcotic function also in pines" (p. 109). Further, the sound of winds blowing through pine boughs has been found to soothe people suffering from illness. Beresford-Kroeger's work points to similar benefits provided by other trees to both humans and the wider planetary community. Indeed, viewed from the context of Beresford-Kroeger's research, the emotional and physiological benefits that occur when people spend time in nature may be related not only to the restorational benefits of the settings, but quite possibly to medicinal properties released by the plants and trees around them.

Mental Fatigue and Aggression

Stephen Kaplan (1995) found that people whose directed attention is fatigued become irritable and often seek to be alone. Researchers Kuo and Sullivan (2001) bring attention to studies linking increased human aggression and violence with noise, crowding, and high temperatures. And Terry Hartig (2003) and colleagues suggest that the ways in which nature can be associated with a reduction in feelings of anger merits special attention. Indeed, a study by Kuo and Sullivan (2001) found a connection between a lack of exposure to natural settings and aggression/violence amongst inner-city residents in Chicago living in poverty. They suggest that the ongoing stress associated

with poverty and the pervasive risks of crime and unpredictable violence for those living in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods tend to contribute to heightened levels of mental fatigue, since individuals are constantly on guard for signs of trouble. The researchers reflect that "among inner-city inhabitants lacking ready access to attentionally restorative settings, we might expect chronic high levels of mental fatigue and a heightened propensity for aggressive behaviour" (p. 548). Kuo and Sullivan found significantly lower levels of intrafamily violence amongst families living in public housing apartments when those families had access to natural environments such as trees and grass immediately outside their apartments compared with others whose apartments opened onto barren lands or concrete.

While most of the research presented in this chapter has not included combat veterans, it bears strong relevance to the veterans' personal narratives to come. Kuo and Sullivan (2001) warn against over-generalizing their research and urge caution in extrapolating the results of their study to apply to other settings. They argue that further research is needed to better understand the connections between aggression and mental fatigue, and the influence of nature on reducing aggression. However, one might, for example, draw parallels between people living in poverty in the inner city and soldiers' experiences during combat, since soldiers are also under constant stress, vigilant for signs of danger and/or situations of concern, and also often lack access to restorative settings. Other parallels that come to mind are refugee camps and other communities affected by violence, where people are constantly stressed by their life situation.

More generally, despite the increase in health and wellbeing approaches that actively incorporate nature, including wilderness therapy, ecotherapy, care farming,

therapeutic horticulture, green exercise, and animal-assisted therapy, Hine, Peacock and Pretty (2008) warn that "there is still limited acceptance from healthcare and other social service providers, of the role that care farming and other green care approaches can play in health" (p. 257). Throughout the course of a variety of research projects, three main benefits from participating in physical activities in nature were identified:
1) improvements in mood and self-esteem and reductions in anger, confusion, depression and tension; 2) benefits for participants' physical health; and 3) facilitation of "social networking and connectivity" (Mind, 2007b, p. 7). The researchers involved in these studies concluded that the activities in the outdoors, "regardless of their type or level of intensity and duration, yield significant mental health benefit" (Pretty et al., 2007, p. 226). Overall, based on the empirical research, it seems that activities such as spending time in the woods, rafting on a river, or talking around a campfire may decrease participants' stress and anxiety so that they can begin to connect once again with others at the level of their shared human experience. I am reminded of Kurt Hoelting's observation included in the story that opened this thesis: "The primary way that we connect with nature is through each other, through our human nature, through words, through emotions, through shared experience . . . And then when it can be linked to the wider nature that we actually come out of and that sustains us literally from one breath to another and from one meal to another and it sustains our sense of being part of something much bigger than ourselves, then all the better. But in a certain strange kind of way, it's all connected. It's very much working with healing nature."

narrative interlude

on political violence

Prior to beginning this research project, I knew relatively little about military experience. Most of my knowledge came from the media, and from the experiences of a few others: my two grandfathers who served during World War II, the army reservist I dated a few times when I was 19, a friend's partner in the Canadian Navy, and another friend's husband who fulfilled his national military service requirement before coming to Canada. Indeed, until a few years ago, I would never have imagined that I would interview veterans as part of my dissertation research. However, as I began to read and hear in the news and elsewhere about their experiences with nature and recovery from stress and post-traumatic distress, I felt compelled to learn more.

A common idea that comes up in the literature and news stories about soldiers and veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress is that Canadians tend to have very little idea of the activities that Canadian soldiers are involved in overseas, and even less awareness of the ways that many of them are changed by their experiences. The peacekeeping and combat missions in which they take part are so far away and removed from everyday life in Canada that we don't think about them often. However, over the

course of my studies and this research, one thing that has become clear to me is the ways in which many Canadians' lives have been touched by political violence. I recall an assignment in one of my doctoral classes in which we were invited to explore the life of one family member. And I was struck by how many of my classmates' stories involved a family member who had lived through political violence, and many of my classmates had themselves also experienced such violence. Therefore, while political violence is not generally front and centre in our lives and experiences in Canada, for many Canadians it is never far away. It is present in our families, in past or current generations, and perhaps carried in our own bodies. And so while we may not know what life is like for Canadian soldiers on a day-to-day basis, we might be able to envision or even personally recall what it is like to live amidst conflict.

Born in Canada in the mid-1970s, I have been fortunate not to live through political violence in my own life. However, like many others, I grew up in a family affected by such violence. My father was born in Berlin only a few years before the start of World War II, and my mother in Neumünster immediately following the war. Both my maternal and paternal grandfathers served in the German army during the war. And I was not very old, perhaps 9 or 10, when I realized what it meant to be the child of German immigrants. A school friend bluntly commented one day that both my grandfathers had been Nazis. “No they weren't,” I retorted. “They must have been,” he said. “They fought for the other side, for the good guys,” I remember saying. “Not possible,” my friend told me. This conversation is one of the few from my childhood that has stuck with me over the years. I did not ask my parents about it—even as children there are some things to which we do not want an answer.

As a pre-teen and teenager in school in Canada, when we were asked each Remembrance Day to remember those who had sacrificed their lives for our freedom, I was always unsure of what to do or how to feel. It did not seem appropriate to celebrate the actions of my ancestors, so who was I to remember? To think about the Canadian soldiers who fought against my family also seemed inappropriate and disloyal somehow. So I kept this confusion and angst to myself. Today when I think of my ancestors, I do so with more distance and appreciation for how most of the foot soldiers in the world wars, and even those in today's wars, were caught up in a political system much larger than themselves, about how they were boys and young men ordered to do something in the name of their country. I think, too, about how individually many of the soldiers on both sides probably had more in common than they realized, and that rather than fighting one another, they were fighting a national faceless 'enemy.'

Growing up with the stories of my father's childhood during and after the war, as well as the knowledge that my paternal great-great grandmother, Therese Dautz, was murdered in the Holocaust, has sensitized me to others' suffering.[8] In 2004, while researching my great-great grandmother's marriage certificate, I came across her name in Yad Vashem's Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names. I still recall the extreme cold that passed through my entire body when I found her name there, on the list of Shoah victims from Germany, the list of deportations from Berlin, and the list of Theresienstadt camp inmates. For the rest of the day, I could not stop shivering. The emotional impact of discovering these details about my great-great grandmother was immense, and consumed my thoughts and energies for weeks afterwards. It was at this time that I realized the real

[8] At the age of 82, Therese Dautz was arrested by the Nazis in Berlin on January 10, 1944, and transported to the Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia, where she died on January 27, 1945.

impact of political violence, the ways that it could affect me emotionally and that I could feel it in my whole body, even though the victim was someone I had never met, who died 30 years before I was born. It is as though my body stores and remembers the stories of those who came before me.

Knowing the effects of war and violence and the emotional scars left on many of those who survive—as well as how these effects are often transmitted to others who did not experience them *directly*—is partly what has informed my desire to work for peace and justice. Additionally, it has inspired me to work towards an increased social understanding of the world as a shared ecological and interdependent space.

Chapter 7

Invisible Wounds and Post-Traumatic Distress

For most Canadians today, the word 'veteran' invokes the image of men from a different generation—an elderly man, perhaps a father or grandfather, who served in World War II.[9] And while this image was by and large true for decades, many of today's veterans in Canada, as journalist Les Perreaux (2011) describes, are young men and women who have been to war and come back, and are now trying to determine their place in civilian life. Many are at the beginning of their adult life, from their late teens to early 20s, as well as some in their 30s, and 40s. They are from my generation, and the generations below mine. Some served as peacekeepers in the 1990s, while others have served more recently as part of the Canadian contingent of troops in Afghanistan. Indeed, there are some similarities to the Vietnam War, in which most of the infantry were young males in late adolescence or early adulthood who were still forming their identities (McCarthy, 1977).

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[9] Unlike soldiers, who are men and women currently serving in the military, veterans have left active military service and are seeking to reintegrate, or have already reintegrated, into civilian life.

All soldiers who serve are changed by the experience (Alpert and Goosenberg Kent, 2010). Many veterans make a successful transition back to civilian life, but others struggle. This chapter works to develop a deeper understanding of trauma and the experience and symptoms associated with post-traumatic distress. I do not wish to rely extensively on the science and medical explanations of post-traumatic experience in this thesis and I do not want to generalize the experience of suffering; however, an understanding of the various ways that distress is experienced and suffered is perhaps helpful for contextualizing the veterans' stories presented in Chapter 8.

Invisible Wounds and Post-traumatic Experience

For thousands of years, symptoms of acute stress have been associated with and understood as part of a soldier's war experience. The English word 'trauma' is the same as its Greek word of origin, *trauma*, meaning 'wound,' and in Western society there has long been an understanding of the trauma brought by violent conflict. Homer's *Iliad* (800 BCE), which chronicles Achilles' experiences during the Trojan War, is an excellent account of the stress and trauma experienced by combat soldiers. Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay's (1991) work with Vietnam veterans reveals that many post-traumatic distress sufferers report living through most or all of the experiences documented in the *Iliad*: "a leader's betrayal of 'what's right,' blunted responsiveness to any emotional, social, or ethical claims outside a tiny circle of combat-proven comrades, grief and guilt for death(s) in this circle, lust for revenge, renunciation of ever returning home, seeing one's self as already dead, berserking, dishonoring the enemy, and loss of humanity" (p. 562). Another story about the traumas of war was chronicled by Greek historian Herodotus (484-425 BCE), who described how the Athenian warrior Epizelus was blinded during

the Battle of Marathon “without blow of sword or dart” when the soldier next to him was killed:

> A strange prodigy likewise happened at this fight. Epizelus, the son of Cuphagoras, an Athenian, was in the thick of the fray, and behaving himself as a brave man should, when suddenly he was stricken with blindness, without blow of sword or dart; and this blindness continued thenceforth during the whole of his after life. The following is the account which he himself, as I have heard, gave of the matter: he said that a gigantic warrior, with a huge beard, which shaded all his shield, stood over against him, but the ghostly semblance passed him by, and slew the man at his side. Such, as I understand, was the tale which Epizelus told. (Herodotus, 440 BCE, ¶11)

While the wounds associated with armed conflict tend to be thought of as physical wounds, including injury and death, there is growing awareness of the ways that invisible wounds are a significant cause of suffering for soldiers, veterans, and civilians living in communities affected by violence. According to the United States government, for example, approximately ten percent (101 per 1000) of U.S. soldiers in World War II suffered from combat-related fatigue (Nordheimer, 1972). Meanwhile, the Director of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, Richard F. Mollica and his colleagues suggest that twice as many soldiers suffered psychological wounds as physical wounds in World War I, and in World War II, thirty-three percent of all wounds were of the invisible kind (Mollica et al., 2004).

In the 1960s and 70s, as psychiatrists worked with Vietnam veterans, they became increasingly sensitive to and sought to better understand how wartime experiences continued to affect the veterans once they’d returned home. Reporter Jon Nordheimer’s front page *New York Times* story on August 21, 1972, told how “a significant number of Vietnam veterans are encountering serious readjustment problems on return to civilian life that for some at least, is as severe a test of emotional stability as any stress they

encountered in the service" (Nordheimer, 1972, p. 1). More than 80 percent of the time, what was then referred to as "post-Vietnam syndrome" was not manifested in the combat zone but instead became part of the veteran's experience only once he had been discharged from the military and was trying to reintegrate into civilian life. While some Vietnam veterans were able to reintegrate into American society with relative ease, it was estimated that between 400,000 and 700,000 combat veterans encountered tremendous difficulties (Harris, 1980). By the late 1970s, many U.S. veterans were experiencing clear signs of distress. Unemployment was high (48 percent for black combat veterans and 39 percent for white combat veterans), 45 percent gave accounts of poor family relationships, 41 percent of veterans had alcohol problems, and many more had drug problems (59 percent of black veterans and 67 percent of white veterans) (McCarthy, 1977). Some studies estimate that fifty percent of Vietnam veterans suffered from some form of distress after returning home (Hendin and Pollinger Haas, 1984).

U.S. Army psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Borus suggested that one difference between WWII and the Vietnam War had to do with the fact that after WWII, U.S. soldiers had a three-week trip home on a troop ship, which gave them time to decompress and debrief with fellow soldiers, and helped them to gain perspective on their wartime experiences. "Now events move too rapidly," Dr. Borus told Nordheimer (1972). "My God, the Marines even bring them home in jungle fatigues" (p. 24). Shigemura and Nogura (2002) reflect that this rapid transition from soldier to a civilian continues today, when soldiers can travel from a war zone to their home country in approximately 24 hours, and are expected to re-adjust quickly to civilian life.

Since its addition to the *DSM-III* in the early 1980s, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has become recognized as a condition that affects not only combat soldiers and veterans, but also persons subjected to other forms of violence and trauma, including sexual and domestic violence, political violence and terror, and those who have lived through a natural disaster (Herman, 1997). Shepherd Bliss (2006) writes that "those of us who are part of military families often have post-traumatic stress, even if we did not continue the family tradition and go into the service" (p. 27). Complex humanitarian emergencies, in which many people are exposed to life-threatening events, also bring an increase in psychological suffering and post-traumatic distress (Ager, 2002, p. s43). Witnesses to a violent act or accident, such as a motor vehicle accident, an airline disaster, a nuclear accident, and so on, as well as those who learn that something terrible has befallen a close relative or friend, may also suffer symptoms associated with post-traumatic distress (Lamprecht and Sack, 2002). In Canada, recent reports show that a growing number of emergency professionals, such as firefighters and RCMP officers, are receiving a medical diagnosis of PTSD (CBC News, 2011, Oct. 4; Freeze, 2011).

Importantly, not everyone who survives these situations will suffer from persistent post-traumatic distress, although symptoms can take months or years to emerge (Lamprecht and Sack, 2002; Satel, 2011). In general, the greatest risk for suffering seems to be exposure to interpersonal violence—particularly rape and combat exposure for men, and rape and being threatened with a weapon for women—while living through a natural disaster is associated with the smallest risk (Benedek, 2011). In addition, the more traumatic events to which a person is exposed, the greater the likelihood of their experiencing and suffering from distress (Eytan et al., 2004).

Trauma and Suffering amongst Canadian Soldiers and Veterans

During our conversation, Christian MacEachern told me that the Canadian veteran who is "healthy but maybe stressed out" is perhaps the most common veteran. But there are also veterans who have been physically injured, and those who suffer from invisible injuries such as post-traumatic distress or traumatic brain injuries (Perreaux, 2011). According to Tadzio Richards (2010), amongst former members of the Canadian military, "PTSD is now the number one pensioned psychiatric disorder" (p. 40). In an interview with Rick MacInnes-Rae on CBC Radio's *Dispatches*, Brigadier-General Richard Giguere, who spent 18 months in Afghanistan as Deputy Commander of the Canadian Task Force, commented that many veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress related to their service in Afghanistan will take time to come forward about their suffering (MacInnes-Rae, 2011). Still other soldiers and veterans may not be suffering from traumatic experiences or brain injuries, but nevertheless feel changed by their time in the military and are experiencing reactions in their own lives that they don't always understand, as described by Tim Lewis in Chapter 8.

For many Canadians, unless they have direct contact with someone who suffers from post-traumatic distress, it is difficult to understand such suffering and why recovery isn't a more immediate process. Andy Fisher (2006) describes the life of a typical trauma survivor in Western society: "[They] often look unperturbed on the surface but are meanwhile living in a private hell of nightmares, flashbacks, suicidal preoccupations, crippling shame, gastrointestinal difficulties, chronic illness, and so on. Their distress is less visible and more interiorized" (pp. 166-167).

Judy Jackson's (2011) film *War in the Mind* follows several young veterans who recently participated in the University of British Columbia's Veterans Transition Program, an innovative program that uses role play and re-enactment approaches to assist veterans suffering from depression and post-traumatic distress. One of the young men interviewed in the film is Wayne, a soldier who served in the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. Reflecting on his experience as a soldier, Wayne tells Jackson how "Being a basic human being conflicts with being a soldier in some circumstances. Because you know as a human being what you should be doing, but as a soldier, it may be different. So there's a lot of inner conflict."

According to a 2003 report by the Canadian Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, since September 11, 2001, large portions of the Canadian Forces "have been suffering from levels of stress and overwork that transcend 'abusive'" (pp. 18-19). One of the ways for dealing with such stresses is for soldiers to shut down their feelings, something which often doesn't serve them well once they return home to Canada (CBC Radio, 2011, Nov. 11). The Senate Committee's (2003) report also suggested that most soldiers and veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress have not sought treatment or compensation due to fears about being stigmatized by fellow military officers, veterans and the public as weak, crazy, or "malingerers and fakers trying to escape their duties" (p. 21).

By the Canadian Forces' own estimates, approximately 2,000 of the 35,000 Canadian soldiers who served in Afghanistan will suffer from post-traumatic distress (Ballantyne, 2011). However, *The Globe and Mail* (May 30, 2011) used access to information laws to obtain post-deployment screening reports, which found that one in

four soldiers returning from Afghanistan engages in high-risk drinking or other experiences ranging from depression to thoughts of suicide. In addition, according to a CBC News report, an increase in domestic violence on Canadian military bases in recent years is attributed to soldiers returning from Afghanistan with both physical and psychological injuries (CBC, March 31, 2011).

Judith Herman (1997), a clinical professor of psychiatry with expertise in trauma exposure, explains that events causing trauma are “extraordinary . . . because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (p. 33). And LGen (ret.) Roméo Dallaire argues that the Canadian military is not good at recognizing and assisting soldiers and veterans with invisible injuries. Dallaire tells filmmaker Judy Jackson (2011) that the military is a:

> conservative bastion of society that is also Darwinian in nature. It is essentially based on a competitiveness and an ability to overcome. It is also a culture that is very visual—we’ve got to see a map of the ground. So if they don’t see it, they’re going to have a hard time understanding it. So an injury that is visible is recognized immediately as an honourable injury . . . But those that have injuries ‘between the ears,’ how do you handle them? How does an organization that is totally foreign to that concept adjust to that?

Dallaire explains that soldiers are specifically chosen and trained to handle a high level of stress; however, over the course of several missions, many soldiers live through multiple experiences of stress and distress, which compound over time. He describes the suffering from post-traumatic distress as “an intolerable level of pain, and the pain is not in your leg or arm.” In Dallaire’s experience, he tells how medication and therapy can help sufferers to “build a prosthesis of things to avoid. The viciousness of this injury, however, is that every now and again something takes away your prosthesis—a sound or something—and you are found helpless. When you have a physical prosthesis you decide

when you don't need it anymore . . . but with PTSD . . . your defensive mechanisms disappear on you." As such, Dallaire continues to advocate and bring public attention to what he calls "the most vicious of injuries," since he believes this is one of the best ways of changing the military's attitude and capacities for helping veterans (Jackson, 2011).

During this research, I spoke with board members from the Canadian Veteran Adventure Foundation (CVAF), many of whom eloquently described how during the course of their involvement with the CVAF, they arrived at a deeper, more sympathetic understanding of the suffering that comes from trauma. For example, Ian Sherrington, who taught Christian MacEachern in Mount Royal College's ETOL program, and who was active on the CVAF's board of directors, recalls how it was meeting and getting to know Christian that finally made the issue of post-traumatic distress real for him. "You hear about it on the news, or forever and ever about people who are shell-shocked or who have problems coming back, but it doesn't really sink in. You're still separated, you're still detached, it's there but then it's gone," explained Ian. "But when you actually live it with someone, and you sit in a canoe with them going down a river in the dark on an expedition, and you hear them having a real panic attack and you find out later through a debrief that this is what was going on in their mind, that sits pretty close, that makes it real, it makes it totally in touch and in reach of what you can do for them. Christian brought that to me." Another board member commented that "perhaps as we understand more about PTSD we're going to learn that this isn't something that you just give a pill for and treat over half an hour and it's over, but that this is something that's very long lasting and it's going to need support for a long, long time."

Monica Culic, who founded the CVAF along with Christian MacEachern, suggested that most of the veterans who were involved with the CVAF will suffer from post-traumatic distress for their entire lifetime. “And they know that,” she said. “They can’t undo what they’ve had happen to them, in terms of combat stress and exposure to traumatic events.” Monica also reflected on how the veteran’s suffering affects more than just him/herself: “It’s not just the Forces member that struggles, it’s his entire family, it’s his kids, it’s his wife, it’s his best buddy, because when he’s great, it’s great . . . and then when he has an episode or is struggling, or flashbacks, or he’s not sleeping or his medication gets changed, or something’s triggered him, he’s difficult, he manifests all the symptoms, he isolates, he’s angry, he’s all these things.” Author and photographer Penny Coleman (2006), whose ex-husband Daniel was a Vietnam veteran suffering from post-traumatic experience and who later committed suicide, echoes Monica’s observation, noting that “living with a PTSD vet is its own traumatic experience” (p. 5).

The effects of trauma beyond the primary sufferer are confirmed by a number of research studies. For example, the Australian Ministry of Veterans Affairs has reported that in Australia, the children of Vietnam veterans are three times as likely to die of suicide as members of the general population (VVAA, 2000). Catherine Panter-Brick and colleagues’ (2009) study with school children in central and northern Afghanistan found that in addition to direct trauma exposure, an important predictor in Afghan youths’ mental wellbeing was the mental health of their adult caregivers. Betancourt and Khan (2008) found similar results in other war-affected countries, reporting that caregivers who are suffering the effects of stress greatly affect children’s ability and resilience in coping with war-time stressors. All of these findings are consistent with Vamik Volkan’s (1997)

description of the transgenerational transmission of trauma, in which an older generation externalizes past experiences of trauma onto their children, who become reservoirs "for the unwanted, troublesome parts of an older generation" (p. 43). This trauma is passed through the generations and becomes part of a group's collective memory. While the trauma itself was once tangible for those who experienced it, the children continue to mourn something that they did not themselves experience, yet which they still *feel* in their bodies through intense anger, sadness, and/or humiliation.

As Monica Culic also observed, the effects of post-traumatic distress are long-lasting. While not every person exposed to a traumatic stressor will suffer from post-traumatic distress, those who do will likely suffer from symptoms associated with traumatic stress for a long time, or even a lifetime (Weiss et al., 1992). More than three decades after the Korean war, 90-100% of the veterans who were prisoners of war continued to suffer from post-traumatic distress (Sutker et al., 1991), and at least 50% of Cambodian refugees have been found to suffer from distress, with up to 71% showing symptoms of major affective disorders (Carlson and Rosser-Hogan, 1991). It is estimated that somewhere between 1.4 and 1.9 million German women were raped by invading soldiers at the end of World War II (Kuwert et al., 2010), and that approximately 10% of those rape victims committed suicide (Messerschmidt, 2006). In a study with 27 elderly German women who were raped in 1945, Kuwert and colleagues (2010) found that nearly half of the women still suffered from post-traumatic distress more than 60 years later.

Today, the mortality rate amongst Vietnam veterans in the U.S. continues to be approximately double that of members of the general public (Crawford, Drescher and Rosen, 2009). Vietnam veterans with post-traumatic distress are also more likely to die

than those veterans not suffering from post-traumatic symptoms. Causes of increased death amongst the veterans include both external causes such as suicide, homicide, accidents and substance abuse, but also medical causes such as cardiovascular disease and cancer. The increased mortality rate is thought to be caused by increased substance use, chronic stress, and a general lack of self-care among Vietnam veterans suffering from continued distress.

Shigemura and Nomura (2002) suggest that United Nations peacekeepers have a high risk of developing symptoms of distress related to both direct and indirect experiences of trauma. However, post-traumatic distress amongst peacekeepers is not well understood. Souza and colleagues' (2011) meta-analysis of 12 studies involving peacekeepers revealed that varying methodologies led to varying reported levels of distress, from 0.5% to 25.8%. The authors suggest the overall prevalence may be underreported because soldiers are concerned about how reporting psychological problems will affect their career, including fear of being stigmatized and ostracized by peers and superiors. For example, a Canadian study revealed that 15% of peacekeepers returning from missions to the former Yugoslavia in 1992 and 1993 suffered from post-traumatic distress (Shigemura and Nomura, 2002). The author of that Canadian study, psychiatrist Dr. Greg Passey, told Tadzio Richards (2010) that he and his colleagues found that "one out of five people had PTSD or major depression or a combination of those coming home from the tours [in Yugoslavia]" (p. 41). However, at the time the Canadian military disputed Passey's findings and told him that his statistics were flawed.

The difficulty with understanding trauma experiences and post-traumatic distress amongst peacekeepers may stem from the fact that each peacekeeping mission varies in

both intensity and the types of jobs peacekeepers are required to undertake. Some operations may be more distressing than others, in terms of the circumstances to which soldiers are exposed and how they are able to respond. Souza and colleagues (2011) explain that while the general public might perceive the modern peacekeeper's role as less life-threatening and demanding than would occur during war, a peacekeeper often faces additional burdens. For example, "it is not rare during [a peacekeeping] operation to be attacked by the same population they are supposed to be helping. This kind of threat leads to a situation that is one of the most notable differences between soldiers as warriors and soldiers as peacekeepers: the necessity of upholding restraint" (p. 309). Shigemura and Nogura (2002) observe that the restraint and passivity expected of peacekeepers, even when their lives are threatened, offers no opportunities to release their aggression. Further, peacekeepers often face situations in which there is very little they can do for the population they are charged to protect. In such situations, "while the workers feel powerlessness, helplessness and anger, they also vicariously experience the victims' feelings of rage, powerlessness and despair, resulting in secondary traumatic stress disorder" (p. 486).

Symptoms Commonly Associated with Post-Traumatic Distress

As defined in both the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (currently the DSM-IV) and the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Diseases* (currently the ICD-10), the symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder include disturbing memories, nightmares, thought intrusions and physical sensations that may be triggered by sights, smells, and sounds and include flashbacks, which cause the sufferer to re-experience the

event as though it is happening in the current moment. While many sufferers have intrusive memories, others may have little or no memory of the trauma event(s). Either way, a person suffering from PTSD often avoids situations and people that tend to trigger memories or sensations associated with his/her trauma and distress; however, a person is often unable to predict memory triggers, which leads them to become increasingly avoidant, behaviour that tends to be accompanied by a disengagement with the outside world as well as difficulties with intimacy. Sufferers also experience increased arousal, which can include problems falling and/or staying asleep, inability to concentrate, irritability and eruptions of intense anger, and hypervigilance. A person is medically diagnosed with PTSD only after their symptoms and distress have endured for more than one month (Benedek, 2011; Hewson, 2001; Lamprecht and Sack, 2002). Symptoms may come and go, and can be triggered by various life events (Ozer and Weiss, 2004).

Roméo Dallaire tells Judy Jackson (2011) that in his own experience, the flashbacks to his time in Rwanda are “digitally clear and often it goes in slow motion, and it comes at different random times. And what it does it is makes you *re-live* the experience. And so for me, the Rwandan genocide—and for my colleagues—isn’t 16 years ago. If I sit down and think about it, it happened this morning. I can bring the vividness. I can bring the smell. I can bring that trauma and the sounds back.”

Sleep disturbances and anxiety (or distressing) dreams are especially common for people suffering from post-traumatic distress. “Veterans with PTSD generally report awakening from a dream that involves reliving the trauma, experiencing strong emotions that would have been appropriate reactions to the original traumatic event—usually rage, intense fear, or grief” (Ross et al., 1989, p. 700). While some symptoms seem to abate

over time, sleep disturbances tend to continue over the long term for chronic sufferers. Judy Jackson's (2011) film *War in the Mind* includes footage of an Operational Stress Injury clinic meeting for Canadian veterans from World War II to Afghanistan. John McGowan, who performed reconnaissance in WWII, describes how for the last 60 years, he has woken up every morning at 4:00 a.m. with the sensation that he is somewhere he shouldn't be—and that he is back in the war and crawling around in the dark. A study by Jules Rosen and colleagues (1991) found that for as many as two-thirds of the Holocaust survivors who participated in their research sample, "impaired sleep and frequent nightmares are considerable problems even 45 years after liberation" (p. 62). In 1992, fifty years following the Canadian Forces' assault at the beaches of Dieppe, it was estimated that 30-43% of the surviving veterans continued to suffer from post-traumatic distress (The Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, 2003). Studies with U.S. combat veterans from World War II have shown that post-traumatic symptoms are not static and do tend to improve over time, although as described by John McGowen above, "even after four decades, exposure to war-related trauma has a significant influence on the emotional functioning of veterans" (Rosen et al., 1989, p. 68). The researchers found that while symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares tended to decrease or disappear over time, other symptoms such as sleep disturbances, anxiety and sensations of estrangement, tended to remain although with reduced severity.

In Jackson's (2011) film, no matter how old they are or which war(s) they were involved in, the veterans describe being devastated by the death of fellow soldiers in the field, and upon their return to Canada, suffering from lack of sleep, anger, feelings of edginess, and flashbacks. One soldier described how after he returned from Afghanistan,

he no longer felt safe in Canada; every person he encountered seemed to pose a threat. Another described a brief "honeymoon stage" when he returned home to Canada but once that phase was over, he had an overwhelming sense that he no longer 'fit' into society (Jackson, 2011). Another veteran who participated in the Veterans' Transition Program spoke with Jim Brown on CBC Radio's *The Current* and reflected on the disconnect he felt after returning home from Afghanistan, particularly when people would ask him how many people he'd killed and whether "it was cool" (CBC Radio, 2011, Nov. 11).

Greg Prodaniuk, the western regional coordinator for the Operational Stress Injury support program, explained to Tadzio Richards (2010) that despite the common public perception, veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress are generally not a risk to their communities. "The vast majority of them suffer in silence and in their basements, and they don't hurt people . . . But they do destroy relationships . . . They have difficulty controlling their emotions. They have reactions they're not in control of" (p. 42). Prodaniuk describes how he always tells post-traumatic distress sufferers that their lives are incompatible with alcohol, that drinking is "like throwing gasoline on the fire." However, as noted earlier in this chapter, many veterans turn to alcohol as their respite of choice. Indeed, post-traumatic distress is often accompanied by other illnesses, such as substance abuse and depression, and it has been suggested that co-morbidity rates amongst veterans with post-traumatic distress may be significantly higher than amongst other sufferers (Richardson, Elhai and Sareen, 2011). Post-traumatic distress has also been correlated with homelessness (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008). For example, in the UK, 25% of the homeless population are veterans, while in the United States, 200,000 veterans are homeless (Jackson, 2011).

In addition, suffering from post-traumatic experience is associated with an increased risk for attempting suicide (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008). And suicide, reflects Roméo Dallaire, “is the extreme expression of the stress and this injury” (Jackson, 2011). Dallaire has been open and honest over the past 10 years about his own experiences during and following the failed UN mission in Rwanda, including his struggles with substance abuse, cutting, and suicide attempts. Nine of Dallaire’s comrades from the Rwandan mission have since taken their own lives (Jackson, 2011). In the documentary *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire* (2004), Dallaire describes how once he returned home to Canada, he couldn’t sleep. “I couldn’t stand the loudness of silence,” he says. And in those moments, he became suicidal—he couldn’t live with the pain, and death seemed to be the only option.

The Canadian Forces does not keep medical statistics for soldiers who have left the army, nor does it keep information on reservists who have attempted or committed suicide following a mission. Mr. André Marin, Ombudsman, Department of National Defence told The Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence (2003) that the fact that the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada does not keep statistics related to soldiers and veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress created “a self-fulfilling prophecy. People conclude that since there is no data, it is questionable that PTSD exists” (p. 30). In its report, the committee called this lack of information and data “disturbing and insupportable” (p. 32).

Other countries do keep statistics on both soldiers and veterans. For example, during the United Kingdom’s participation in the Gulf War, 24 soldiers died in combat, but 107 have since committed suicide (Jackson, 2011). Approximately 58,000 U.S.

soldiers died in the Vietnam War, but 102,000 Vietnam veterans have since committed suicide. Indeed top U.S. officials have declared a “military suicide epidemic,” since veterans account for 20% of the suicides in the United States each year. This means that 18 veterans commit suicide every day (Jackson, 2011).

Traumatic experiences and responses to trauma also cross species borders. For example, Gay Bradshaw and colleagues (2008) work with chimpanzees subjected to experiments in laboratory settings, and have found that they suffer in similar ways to humans who have been traumatized. Their research paper examines the symptoms of two chimpanzees now living at the Fauna Foundation sanctuary in Québec, and they note that like many human trauma survivors, the chimpanzees exhibit hypervigilance, hyperarousal, anxiety, dissociation, violent self-attacks, and ritualistic behaviours. These chimpanzees often avoid social situations and interactions and tend to be prone to emotional outbursts and unpredictable anger. Elsewhere, Bradshaw (2009) points to research being done with other animals, including elephants, polar bears, cougars, and turkeys, who have also been diagnosed with trauma symptoms. And a recent article in the *New York Times* tells how at least five percent of the military dogs that served alongside soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan are showing behavioural symptoms of canine post-traumatic distress (Dao, 2011).

Treatment and Coping with Post-traumatic Distress

Psychiatrist Sally Satel (2011) writes that “anyone who fights in a war is changed by it” (p. 52), and she draws attention to how the changeover from military to civilian life is a profound time in a soldier’s life that may be accompanied by intense and overwhelming confusion, instability, and restlessness. The veteran not only needs to

make sense of his/her experiences in the military, but also to develop a new identity outside the military and to imagine a new future. Satel is a proponent of early intervention for veterans, particularly in the crucial period of readjustment to civilian life, and she suggests that many veterans may need professional help during this time. Satel's suggestions are interesting in light of the fact that many indigenous societies host important rites and rituals for soldiers returning to the community after war. While in Western society, we tend to regard trauma as an individual experience, Lisa Schirch (2005) reflects that "many traditional and indigenous communities view trauma as a collective experience needing symbolic group healing and purification rituals" (p. 10).

Alcinda Honwana (1998), for example, describes in detail the healing and purification rituals undertaken to bring a nine-year-old Mozambican child soldier back into his community, which included setting fire to a hut from which the boy's family helped him to escape, and inviting him to breathe an herbal remedy, take a ritual bath, and drink medicine. Finally, an animal was sacrificed beneath a tree, and then roasted and shared with the entire community. Many other soldiers in Mozambique also underwent purification rituals after the war, intended both to restore links with the ancestors as well as to provide the first steps towards social and collective reconciliation. Honwana acknowledges that such rituals have limits, particularly in that traditional practices often suggest that violence and war should be erased from the collective memory through ritual, which poses the risk that human rights will once again be violated. However, she suggests that the ability of the ritual practices to restore stability to communities after war and to provide social support to those who have returned from war is very powerful at the local level.

Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay (1991) who works with Vietnam veterans echoes the importance of community griefwork. He believes that "thwarted, uncommunalized grief is one important reason there are so many long-term psychological casualties of the Vietnam War" (p. 578). Shay acknowledges that the battlefield is not the place for griefwork, but he actively encourages that griefwork be incorporated into military units once soldiers have exited a combat situation.

In the past, treatment programs for veterans with PTSD have been found to be limited in their effectiveness. However, Richardson, Elhai and Sareen (2011) recently suggested that treatment has evolved in the past decade to be more helpful. The researchers followed the treatment response of military veterans who had suffered from post-traumatic distress for more than 10 years. Many of the veterans were seeking treatment for the first time and the researchers found that with an intensive course of outpatient treatment (medication and psychotherapy) over one year, there was a decrease in the severity of distress symptoms. However, they caution that chronic distress symptoms tend to fluctuate and that there needs to be additional longitudinal studies to follow veterans into the future to determine whether their symptoms continue to abate and their health continues to improve.

The University of British Columbia's Veteran's Transition Program is receiving accolades for its therapeutic approach that sees depression rates dropping to minimal or no depression at all amongst participants. The program uses a re-enactment approach to role play events, which the program director says "helps undo the wiring that military training has implanted in their brain" (Jackson, 2011). One of the participants comments that the program "turns on its head the idea that men aren't supposed to feel, and that the

acceptable emotions for a man are anger and that you can express that by fighting or yelling . . . The rest of the emotions are said to you, in the military context, 'That's your personal problem. Bottle that up inside, don't go telling other people about it because you're weak if you do.'" Another young veteran in the program describes that "the only people that can help me are the people that have been there [to Afghanistan]—the people that know" (Jackson, 2011). In a conversation with Jim Brown on *The Current* (CBC Radio, 2011, Nov.11), Dr. Marvin Westwood described how in the Veteran's Transition Program, the participants share their stories with others who have lived through similar circumstances, and through this process, "they start to feel lighter." However, the program helps only 12 veterans per year.

As will be told in the stories that follow, veterans' lives and experiences do tend to fall into patterns that often include isolation, avoidance, anger, and so on. And their stories suggest another approach to healing and recovery that each veteran came to on his own: spending time connecting with nature, ranging from climbing and hiking to canoeing and farming. While most of the veterans find that their nature experiences are important in combination with other forms of treatment, they all emphasize the ways that nature has been crucial in their own recovery and coping with stress and post-traumatic distress. Overall, the story each veteran tells and wants to make available to others is about how his recovery is wholly and inextricably interconnected with nature—he feels best and most human when surrounded by and inhabiting the more-than-human world.

Chapter 8

Narratives of Nature and Recovery

> There's a myth of recovery,
> that you put it behind you,
> remember the good times,
> let bad memories fade.
>
> —Michael Parmeley (2006), Vietnam combat veteran
> from *Meditation on Being a Baby Killer,* p. 414

What does recovery mean in the context of this thesis? The four men who share their stories have experienced the unspeakable—they will never be able to escape these experiences, stresses, and traumas. Each one is working to find ways of living with how he has been trained in the military and with what he has seen, done and/or experienced. As Michael Parmeley (2006) observes further in his poem excerpted above, recovery does not involve simply erasing or forgetting the events and traumas that have happened, but rather these events provide the context—the *bones*—of one's present living. The memories "stand up to be counted. They're part of what's true" (p. 414).

Many veterans, including the ones whose stories follow, live with daily challenges and memories—with the images of past experiences burned into their minds, as well as automatic responses from military training. So what is recovery? It might mean fewer flashbacks, or fewer nightmares, fewer experiences of anger or hypervigilance. It might

mean less isolation, less loneliness. It might mean better sleep, or even sleeping through the night. Or it might just mean experiencing a few moments of peace or joy or wonder in the face of the world once in a while. Recovery is extraordinarily complex. It is a back and forth, up and down process, not a linear one. From my understanding, there is no 'progression' of recovery, because sufferers can and do encounter many obstacles or unexpected difficulties. Recovery does seem to involve a process of time, but as Judy Jackson (2011) examines in her film, *War in the Mind*, many WWII veterans experience as much distress today as they did 60 years ago: they still don't sleep, they still have flashbacks and nightmares, they still weep over their experiences, and many recall the war as though it happened this morning.

What follows are the stories of four veterans, ranging in age from early 30s to mid-60s, and with a wide range of military experiences. Some of them actively took part in peacekeeping and/or combat missions, others never made it to the front lines, but all have had their lives forever changed by their military service. All suffer from invisible wounds left by military service and war. Their stories are both sad and hopeful, as they contend with the sadness of experiences to which most of us may never personally relate, and with the hope and new possibilities for life that each of them has found in the more-than-human world.

In this research, I have deliberately not entered the veterans' stories of trauma—not because these stories are unimportant but because many of them are unspeakable—or if they can be spoken, I do not have the background and training to support the men in telling me such stories. For this reason, I let each veteran take the lead and tell me what

and how much of his story he wanted to. Accordingly, these are primarily the stories of what happens after conflict, stories of post-military experience.

While the veterans’ experiences are unique, each holds that there are broader implications for the story he tells—for other veterans and civilians alike. In the end, connecting with the more-than-human world is not about treating post-traumatic distress or about helping sufferers to erase or forget their trauma, but rather it is about finding ways of living a more balanced life, with less anxiety and an increased sense of wellbeing and connection with the wider world.

Christian MacEachern

It’s one of those warm January days that occasionally bless us on the east side of the Rocky Mountains. As I drive southwest of Calgary, I’m awed by the stunning beauty in this part of the world—by the brilliant sun and cloudless winter blue sky against the crisp white snow-covered mountains. I am about to meet with Cpl. (Ret.) Christian McEachern, C.D., at the house he rents near Priddis with a housemate. Christian meets me by the barn at the top of the hill, where I park my car. I’m eight months pregnant, and he doesn’t want me to fall on the icy pathway leading down to the house. He also makes sure that I’m not bowled over by his two large dogs who rush to greet me.

After a few minutes of casual conversation, we settle into his living room, with its wall of windows overlooking the foothills and the mountains. “I was a good soldier. I was doing everything everybody else was,” Christian tells me. Now in his early 40s, unshaven with greying hair, fit and wearing casual outdoor clothing, Christian presents an image similar to many of the avid ‘outdoorsy-types’ living in and around Calgary. If I passed him in the street, it would not occur to me that he is a veteran, or that he suffers from post-traumatic experiences. He is soft spoken, but I can hear the frustration in his voice. “For the most part, I was outstanding with the top marks you could get as a soldier, but after a couple of tours, I was partying hard like everybody else and started losing focus.”

Christian, who joined the Cadets when he was 12, spent 14 years serving in the Canadian Forces, as a member of the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, including UN-sanctioned peacekeeping missions in the former Yugoslavia and Uganda. On both missions, Christian witnessed or was subject to a number of horrifying events,

leading to his post-traumatic stress diagnosis in 1998. He is animated and candid as he speaks about his experiences as a young soldier in training and on peacekeeping missions.

"When I did my leadership course in '93 before I deployed to Yugoslavia, it was three months of high stress. We started with almost 60 people and graduated with 12, and most of them were medical or physical failures. It was 24-hours-a-day, 5-day-a-week sleep deprivation. You'd go home, sleep Friday night, live fire all day Saturday. . . . Sunday was kind of a recoup day, although it was cleaning gear and getting yelled at and lockers being thrown around and shit like that, but after three months I came home and my girlfriend at the time was like, 'You're a fuckin' mess!'"

One night, Christian got up to use the toilet and realized only later that he was peeing on the plant in the corner of his bedroom. He would also find himself shaking his girlfriend awake. "I'd be trying to wake her up for her shift, saying, 'Come on, get up, it's your fucking shift,' just strange things where she'd find me crawling around on the floor trying to find my rifle . . . because if it's anywhere farther away from you than grabbing distance, you're in serious trouble. They train you so hard that it's instinct after a while . . . and this isn't even combat, this is just what they're training guys to do, and it starts to affect your home life.

"So then you go on a tour, like Yugoslavia, where pretty much you're working 22 or 23 hours a day on the front line, being shot at or guys are getting killed or wounded with land mines, so by the time I came home after about a year and a half in Yugoslavia and with all the leadership training, I was pretty wired. And the thing was it wasn't just me, it was everybody. They trained us hard for Yugoslavia as if we were going to war,

and then we come home from Yugoslavia and we're pretty disgusted with the blue beret and the United Nations, and the rules of engagement. Not that we wanted to go over and shoot people, but we did want to go over and make a difference."

He remembers coming home from Yugoslavia at age 24 with $35,000 in his bank account. There had been no opportunity to spend money on the front lines, other than a weekend break in Budapest and a week in Holland. "For the most part you come home, you're young, you're completely wired, you're feeling invincible . . . It wasn't that we were bad people or that we wanted to hurt anybody, but when you do the sleep deprivation stuff, I've driven vehicles so tired that drunk driving is easy. The guys just start to push themselves. I don't have any trouble talking about this, I'm ashamed of some of the stuff that I did but you have to realize that it was also a lot of the environment that we were in."

Shortly after coming home from Yugoslavia, Christian and his army buddies were partying hard, and they began getting into bar fights. "It wasn't that I was starting them, or some of my buddies were starting them, but when you get these civvies pushing you and pushing you and pushing you, and you get an army guy who's that close to being wired already—and so we finished a few fights pretty good. And then the assault charges started coming in—assault causing bodily harm and all this kind of stuff—and at the time I didn't think too much of it. In fact, nobody thought anything of it, that a lot of guys were getting violent charges and stuff against them. I don't know anything about the statistics about what was going on in home lives with families obviously because I wasn't a family guy, but as a single guy, I was seven-days-a-week partying. You could still do your job, but the home life—you were making more self-destructive decisions . . . . When

you look back at my dossier at when I got in trouble at particular times, it was all related to either right after an operation or after a significant event within the military or things like that."

In 1998, Christian decided to see a military psychiatrist. "The only reason I went in was because I was starting to get panic attacks to the point where I'd be training guys out in the bush and I'd come back off a night patrol at four o'clock in the morning, and usually I'd get about an hour's sleep before first light or the sun starts coming up, which kicks everything awake again, and I'd be rolling over having nightmares, and my recruits would look over and I'd be drenched in sweat, sitting on my pack, with my rifle up, and the guys were like, 'Are you ok?' You kind of have to shake your head and go, 'Ok, right, I'm in Canada.' So it starts to blend together. I literally just thought I was having a heart attack, until I started going in [to see a military psychiatrist]. So yeah, it took a few years, but when you look back at the progression of it, there were definitely a lot of signs that I wasn't right in the head when I got home."

Christian was honourably discharged from the Canadian Forces in 2001. He knows that his post-traumatic struggles are likely to be part of his life's journey for a long time, and throughout our conversation, he provides insight into what life is like for him at the moment. "Sometimes I just get really tired," he admits. "I'm not good with the emotional rollercoaster stuff, the highs and the lows." He discloses that like many others suffering from post-traumatic experiences, he does not sleep well, often getting only a few hours of sleep each night for months at a time. And then there are the "nightmares, which happen nightly, they never go away, I wish they would." After hitting "rock bottom" in 2001, Christian has been coping better over the years, but admits that he's still "not out of the

woods." He still feels isolated, and prefers spending time with animals over people, and all in all, Christian confesses that the last ten years have been lonely: "You start to feel pretty alone on the journey."

A few years after leaving the Canadian Forces, Christian began studying for a Bachelor of Applied Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership (ETOL) at Mount Royal College (now Mount Royal University) in Calgary, Alberta. Ian Sherrington, an associate professor in the ETOL program, remembers meeting Christian and having him in his classes. "He was a phenomenal student from the beginning," says Ian. "Obviously very different from the other students, with an incredibly different perspective. He was much older, at least 10, 12, 14 years older than all the other students, and also had this myriad of life experiences that the other students didn't have—that most people in the world don't have. So I think he struggled in some ways, and he tried to fit in in others."

Christian confesses that he initially felt worried and anxious (something common amongst veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress) about how he would do in the ETOL program. "I was quite worried about performing for some of the bigger tasks, like climbing a mountain again and having a panic attack," he tells me. "When you go from being able to do anything you want to taking a knee in Safeway because you're having panic attacks, it really gives you some severe performance anxiety because you're used to being up at this level [motions high with his hand] and you're crawling on the ground like a baby."

He recalls training hard for the course's first expedition. "It was almost like I was going out for a mountain warfare course with the army, which is pretty hard, and of course, once I got there, I quickly realized that I wasn't out of my element, and that I was

starting to fit in a little bit. It was just nice. We started off on the Columbia River, it's not a fast or a hard river, it's quite placid, but there's a huge amount of wildlife in the area because it's a big wildlife corridor, and just after a couple of days, I thought, 'Wow, this is amazing!' and I'm enjoying the activities with the group, and the activity of being outside . . . It's sunny, in BC, how can you go wrong?"

As he participated in the program's outdoor expeditions, Christian began to notice positive changes in his life. Ian Sherrington, who was Christian's instructor on that first expedition as well as subsequent ones, saw a change in him over a short period of time, and Christian, too, noticed that he was feeling different. "It was almost as if I realized I could still do it," says Christian. "I went from being really quiet, in the background, to starting to become a prominent leader in the program . . . I was trained out here, so I'm good at it, but the confidence wasn't there and once the confidence started coming back, that's where I started noticing lots of changes."

After going through the entire veteran side of the military system, including counselling and medication, Christian describes how it was as he sat on the banks of a river that he felt "at peace with life for a moment" and he "realized that this was a gap that could be filled and maybe it would be helpful for other [veterans] to be able to sit here on the river bank, too."

In the second year, the ETOL program offers a number of classes to help students plan and market programs that they design themselves. Rather than coming up with an imaginary program for the purpose of the assignment, Christian began to work towards his idea of providing outdoor programs for veterans. His professors encouraged his

passion and the basic structure of what would eventually become the Canadian Veteran Adventure Foundation began to take shape.

Christian, along with his then-partner Monica Culic, founded the Canadian Veteran Adventure Foundation (CVAF) in 2006, which they envisioned would provide another tier in the care and treatment of Canadian Forces veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress through outdoor programming and adventure training. Monica remembers the day that Christian told her they were going to found the CVAF: “It was almost like I didn’t have a choice . . . It’s sort of like a partner saying, ‘We’re going to take dance classes, honey, and it’s going to be *great’* and you kind of smile and say, ‘Sure we are, yes,’ and then we were.”

In 2007, the CVAF was officially incorporated as a non-profit corporation with Industry Canada. While Veterans Affairs Canada currently treats veterans with post-traumatic distress with prescription drugs and personal and group therapy, Christian and Monica’s vision was that the CVAF would provide a third course of treatment and support for veterans through outdoor programming. They did not see the CVAF’s outdoor programs as a ‘fix’ to all the veterans’ problems, but rather as compatible with, and capable of enhancing, the effects of medication and therapy.

Importantly, Christian emphasizes that they did not aim to provide gruelling outdoor experiences to veterans. “Outdoor pursuits doesn’t have to be going and climbing a mountain right away. I’m not going to be taking a guy with panic attacks and hanging him off the side of the mountain and telling him to get over it.” Rather, through the CVAF he sought to facilitate programs that met the physical fitness levels of the veterans it serves. Christian shares that it is important to consider both the veterans’ physical and

emotional fitness levels, and to pay careful attention that programs and expeditions do not exceed these levels. “The guys that I’m dealing with, they’re too beat up and too abused, they don’t want to be pushed,” he explains. He further imparts that “leading these kinds of activities doesn’t put the physical attributes to the forefront. The physical is part of it, but knowing how hard and how far you can push people is pretty important.”

Christian also reflects on the low level of trust amongst veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress. “If you don’t have face time with them, they’re not going to trust you. If you don’t have the opportunity to address their concerns face to face, or explain what’s going to happen, they automatically think I’m going to take them out and drag them through a commando course in the mountains, so the guys aren’t going to show up. And especially if they don’t trust you, they don’t want to go out there and look stupid, having a panic attack on the river, so that’s why a lot of the guys will turn down activities like this, because they’re so worried about looking stupider than they already feel.”

As such, Christian worries about similar-style programs being run by organizations or people who don’t have a good understanding of veterans’ post-traumatic experience. “It wouldn’t surprise me that somebody gets pushed too hard, too fast, by somebody who doesn’t know exactly the parameters.” Christian says, “Because of where I’ve come from, I have a real understanding of what they [other veterans with post-traumatic distress] are going through.”

In 2007, CVAF’s first activity involved putting a float in the Calgary Stampede Parade for the families of veterans. Monica Culic, the CVAF’s secretary and communications director, recalls that day. “We got a couple of veterans’ families through connections at the OSI [Operational Stress Injury] clinic here in town and they came out

and they were thrilled . . . It was a beautiful day and hot, and one of the veterans had just come back from Afghanistan. And he said, 'You know, a month ago, I was like: 'I was home, no one knows, no one cares what I've done.' And now I'm walking down the Parade with my family and being treated like I'm important and that really meant something to me.' So we made a difference in two families' lives, and that was it, we were hooked, it was better than any drug that any human being could take—just helping people and giving them the recognition that they needed."

That summer Christian and Monica also organized several day-long rafting trips for reservists from the Calgary Highlanders and their families. Monica shares, "We couldn't really measure what it did for them, being outdoors together with their families and with their comrades, back from combat, but they knew they felt better, being outside, being in the fresh air, being in the water as cold as it was, just made them feel good. We knew we were on the right track, and that we couldn't just let this go, we couldn't stop being the CVAF."

Then, following some time spent solidifying itself as a non-profit organization, the CVAF ran a weekend-long program for veterans from the Saskatoon OSI clinic in August 2009. The participants, all veterans who had served in the Canadian Forces in various locations, including the Balkans, Somalia, and Haiti, and all of whom were suffering from post-traumatic experiences, arrived on a Friday night to a campsite that Christian had set up in Kananaskis Country, a provincial park approximately an hour away from Calgary. Also accompanying the group were Dr. Susan Brock, the leader of the Saskatoon OSI clinic, and Dr. Greg Passey, who leads an OSI clinic in Vancouver.

Saturday involved a full day of rafting, with the morning spent on the Bow River and the afternoon on the Kananaskis River. Saturday night, all the participants returned to the campsite for dinner and sat around the campfire for the evening, talking and reminiscing. On Sunday, the group took a trip into the mountain town of Banff, including visits to Bow Falls and the Banff Hot Springs. Christian describes how already "after the first river in the morning on Saturday, you could see the guys melting, starting to relax and smile and have a little bit of fun . . . They were quite happy that they could be successful at something again." Ian Sherrington, who was also on the trip, similarly reflects that "you could see life flowing back into [the veterans] over the two and a half days that we had them, and at the end, they were all completely charged . . . . You could see the benefits—you don't need to be a sociologist or a psychologist to see it, it was just there." In the end, Monica reports that the weekend was "a big success," noting that "*We* [at the CVAF] measure it as a success because the [veterans] who came measured it as a success—that's the important factor."

The success of the weekend was backed by several participant testimonials posted on the CVAF's website.[10] For example, one participant wrote: "It's nice to feel like part of the team again. As a serving member with PTSD you don't feel like part of the team and sometimes because of the way PTSD affects us we are treated like and told . . . we aren't part of the team and then we are released which rips us from the team. Christian, Monica, Ian and board of directors, thank you for the new team." Another participant shared that "it was the most fun, most relaxed, the first time in a long time that most of us

[10] http://www.canadianveteranadventurefoundation.com/Guest-Book.html

weren't angry, worried, on guard or overwhelmed. For myself, it felt like I actually felt important, that I wasn't forgotten and that someone actually cared how I felt."

Psychiatrist Dr. Greg Passey, who runs an OSI clinic in Vancouver wrote the following:

> The CVAF program provides a rare opportunity for Veterans with physical and OSI type injuries to engage in outdoor activities that they may have otherwise thought they were incapable of doing. The variety of special Canadian natural settings and adventure activities that the CVAF uses can provide a calming effect and a sense of peace in veterans that are often struggling on a day to day basis. CVAF provides a safe environment with a focus on the activity of the day. This encourages interaction with other veterans with similar health issues which helps to diminish their sense of isolation and difficulty connecting to others. The sharing of their current and past experiences in this type of environment can form an important part of their healing/recovery process. Having experienced it first hand and witnessing the positive effect it had on all the participating veterans, it is a program that I would recommend.

As demonstrated by both the participants' and the psychiatrist's comments, Christian emphasizes the importance of the camaraderie that developed over the weekend amongst the veterans, many of whom did not know one another, or who had only met at their group therapy sessions. As one CVAF board member told me, activities in the outdoors bring people together and create the context for them to share something special. And according to Monica, the veterans in the 2009 summer program told the organizers that "finally they felt like there was someone here who actually gave a damn, who wanted to listen, who cared enough to hear their stories and share, and smile and nod and go 'yeah.'"

Sitting around the campfire with the other veterans on Saturday night after the day of rafting, Christian comments, "It's probably one of the first times that I've sat around with a group of army guys who had a good time when alcohol wasn't involved." By

about 10:00 pm, as the veterans' talk around the campfire turned to the subject of war and their involvement in the former Yugoslavia, Christian recalls that several of the participants were "starting to trigger a bit . . . the 'fucks' started coming out and the swear words and all that kind of stuff." However, despite increased levels of tension and "edginess" within the group, Christian reflects that unlike an indoor therapy setting, "it was really easy to diffuse it because everybody was having a good time."

The notions of tension and negative energy are something that Christian reflects upon often in his own life. He has personally noticed that when he grooms his horse while talking about incidents or events related to his military service "it just takes the edge off it a little bit and makes it a lot easier to talk about and doesn't have that lasting effect. Normally guys can get ramped up [in indoor therapy settings] and they'll stay that way for days, so that's one of the benefits about the outdoors."

Further, Christian tells me, "I've done a lot of thinking about the energy that's involved with trauma and trying to get people going, and my theory has been that sitting with a group of guys that are angry in a room with nowhere for all that energy to go [isn't always helpful]." He recalls how rather than reducing his anger, such group therapy sessions often led him to become angrier than he was before the session. Christian continues, "One of the things [I began to ask] when I was on that expedition [on the Columbia River] . . . was why does [group therapy] have to be in an office or a clinical situation? What's wrong with having a group of guys talking about the same traumatic stuff around a campfire after a day of canoeing, or something like that? With being outside, that energy has a place to go."

In my interviews with the CVAF board members, I asked each of them about the reasons they chose to become involved in, and their commitment to, the CVAF. In response, all of the board members spoke about their involvement as a humanistic calling and a societal responsibility to Canadians who had developed post-traumatic distress in service of their country. More important, perhaps, is that most CVAF board members also attested to being compelled by Christian's story because of their own personal experiences working in some capacity in the outdoor industry, whether with children and teenagers at summer camps or with adults in various settings. The clear pattern that emerges when listening to each board member's story is that all of them spoke to the benefits of spending time in the outdoors. All shared stories of what one person described as "the incredible changes that can occur over the length of a trip," and all CVAF members saw these benefits as being extendable to veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress.

After our conversation, on the way back up the hill to my car, Christian takes me to meet his horse, Sozo, at the barn. In the past decade, he believes that his relationships with his dogs and his horse have been of primary importance, so much to the point that Christian tells me, "For me having my animals has replaced people literally." It was through Monica, a horse enthusiast and equine therapy advocate, that Christian was first introduced to Sozo, an ex-racehorse. Monica notes the important changes that have come about from Christian's relationship with Sozo. "I've certainly seen a difference in Christian over the past few years since he got his horse. It's been a big difference. He's a lot more grounded, he's a lot more cognisant of his own behaviour. He thinks about something else first instead of himself, he has to put that creature first."

Including an equine component had recently become another dream for the CVAF. In the 2009 weekend program for the Saskatoon veterans, many of the veterans spoke about their interest in horses and suggested that they would love to come back for a weekend or week-long trailride. As Monica describes it, the equine program the CVAF planned to establish would be more casual than clinical. “It’ll be partnering a guy with a horse for a week, and hang out, and learn to groom it, and we’ll do a little riding here and a little riding there, and learn about the equine brain, and how it’s in some ways similar to humans and in some ways it’s not.”

In August 2010, while I was still on maternity leave, the CVAF ran a second mountain retreat for the veterans from Saskatoon who had attended the previous summer. Then unfortunately, in July 2011, just as the organization really seemed to be getting its feet and had planned a variety of programs for veterans, the Canadian Veteran Adventure Foundation officially disbanded due to a lack of funding; however, using the knowledge and learnings gained over the years, Christian is hopeful that he will eventually be able to start a similar program that continues to serve veterans. Based on his personal experiences, he has a deep belief in the importance of nature for all human beings. “There are benefits across the board for everybody, whether they’re healthy or they’re totally sick.”

Tim Lewis[11]

The summer after Tim Lewis returned from his tour in Afghanistan, he and his wife drove to the United States for a holiday. "I made the mistake of deciding to drive for twelve hours in an SUV that was essentially similar to the one I was driving in Afghanistan," Tim explains. Earlier in the day, they nearly had a head-on collision. Then that night, they couldn't find a place to stay. "It was holiday season, everything was booked up," Tim says. "I had a stress reaction, I had a full on three-year-old tantrum that we couldn't find a place to stay and that it was the end of the world . . . . I'd never had a reaction like that before that I can recall as an adult. It was completely inappropriate to the situation. We were going to have to get a hotel room. We weren't going to camp, no big deal. What I felt after that was embarrassed, and I couldn't really explain why it had happened. I had never done something like that in front of my wife. I thought I was this switched on army guy who was in control of his emotions but all of a sudden . . . I'm punching the steering wheel in the truck and having a tantrum, which I couldn't explain at the time."

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It's a beautiful, warm July morning, and I've driven about an hour west of Calgary to meet with Tim Lewis in the mountain town of Canmore, Alberta. Tim doesn't come into Calgary often and I welcome the opportunity to get out of the city for a morning. Surrounded by the Rocky Mountains on all sides, and with an overall focus on recreation, the pace of life feels slower in Canmore than in the city.

[11] Name has been changed.

We settle in for our conversation, and Tim tells me that from the time he was young, it was clear that he would be the third generation in his family to join the military. He recalls the large woodlot behind his house where he spent a lot of time "playing army." Now in his early 30s, young and fit, the perfect picture of an outdoorsman in Canmore, Tim looks back to the hundreds of days he spent in the woods as a preteen, both by himself, and with friends. During summer breaks, Tim's parents ushered him and his siblings outside by 7:00 a.m. and they didn't usually come home until dinner. Rather than indoor sports, Tim always preferred being outside and early on took up sliding sports such as skiing and skateboarding. At a young age, Tim also began hiking and backpacking in national parks, and went on his first multi-day solo backpacking trip in his teens. He remembers telling his father that he wanted to go hiking by himself and his father never questioning him, simply saying, "Okay, you're going," and dropping him off at the national park. This solo trip was an important rite of passage in Tim's life.

His parents divorced when he was 11, and Tim jokes that climbing saved his life as a teenager—that he was heading down the path of juvenile delinquency after his parents' divorce, and when he discovered climbing, he found a place to channel his energies and spare money. He was already used to spending a lot of time in the outdoors, but all of a sudden this time was spent "being vertical and being with a group of males who were different, who thought differently, and who spoke their own language around climbing." Tim equates it to entering a new culture unlike anything he'd experienced before and it became everything he put his energy into—and is something he has continued putting his energy into for the last seventeen years.

In his 20s, as a member of the Canadian infantry, Tim served in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005. He recalls that he and his fellow soldiers were given no decompression leave at the end of their tour in 2005. “We came straight home to Canada. I went from being in a hostile environment to 48 hours later being back in Canada.” Upon returning home, Tim describes feeling a clear need to go climbing in the mountains. He spent a few days with his wife and then told her, “I’ll meet you in Canmore. I’m going climbing.” He suggests that his strong urge to go to the mountains was his own way of creating much-needed decompression time. “It just made sense, after that tour, to come into the mountains.”

Around that time, both Tim and his wife fell in love with Canmore, which he describes as “a town that embraces all outdoor activities.” Tim’s post-military dream was to become a full-time alpinist, and to have a job on the side to sustain that lifestyle. Shortly after releasing voluntarily from the Armed Forces in September 2005, he and his wife moved to the mountain town.

Tim does not suffer from post-traumatic experience but still describes himself as “changed” by his military service. In the years following his release from the army, Tim began to notice some examples of hypervigilance. He shares a story about sitting at home in his Canmore condo late one night when a driver began honking a car horn outside, most likely to get the attention of a friend. Tim became increasingly agitated as the driver continued to honk the horn for the next 10 to 15 minutes, at which point Tim stormed outside, wearing only his underwear, and carrying a baton and bear spray. As he walked toward the car, its occupants saw him and drove away before an altercation could occur, but Tim remembers being baffled. “I went from pretty much calm and collected and then

ramped it right up to—that's essentially deadly force, if you're going to spray and baton somebody. I thought, okay, what's that all about? At that time, I didn't have any knowledge of what that could really be."

After years of reflection, Tim considers the examples of hypervigilance and stress reactions he has experienced to come from his military training rather than his time in Afghanistan. "You're trained to respond to situations in a certain way," he tells me. "From a combat arms background, the ideal response in a stressful, dangerous situation is *speed, aggression, violence*. So you're going to respond with maximum speed, aggression and violence to take out the enemy or the threat. That serves you great on the battlefield, that's what keeps you alive, that's what it needs to be. When you leave the military and become a civilian again, those things very rarely serve you. *There are rarely situations where aggression and violence are the key*. The speed part, sure. You can be in a situation where you need to move quickly and act quickly, absolutely. But just becoming aware of those things—it was hugely important for me to start making sense of what's gone on in my training and my experiences."

Tim believes that it was through doing outdoor activities, and particularly doing such activities with other veterans, that he first became aware of the changes in his life. In his time spent with other veterans over the years, many have spoken about similar events and responses in their civilian lives. And through these conversations with other veterans, Tim realized that his personal experiences seem to be a "normal" response, but he asks, "Why is it normal? Why are the guys going through the same thing? . . . My service has changed me. I need some answers. Why has my service changed me?"

When I ask about the importance of spending time with other veterans and realizing that many of them—even those not suffering from post-traumatic distress—are experiencing stress responses in their day-to-day lives, Tim clarifies. “I think it’s important that *it’s spending time with other veterans in the outdoors*,” he says. “I found what the outdoors has done for me, and for some other veterans that I’ve done activities with, is it allowed us to create some space outside that essentially is a safe space for us to just talk about this stuff. I’ve spent a lot of time with veterans in other situations, whether it’s drinking at the bar or socializing but not being outdoors and the same types of conversations don’t happen.”

In ordinary social situations, if the topic turns to military service and experiences, Tim reflects that veterans’ conversations are not always “honest” and tend to be filled with bravado. He describes his realization one day that it was in nature that the good conversations were taking place. “In an outdoor setting a lot of those walls and barriers are taken down and you get what people really think, or people really feel about certain situations.”

Tim recalls one experience after he retired from the Canadian Forces when he was working as a ski and avalanche instructor and training the Second Battalion Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry (PPCLI) for their role in the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. “I ended up going to the backcountry with them quite a bit, doing avalanche scenarios all day, going out skiing all day and then in the night spending some time in the tents with the guys—again, drug free, sober . . . . I’d come into the big heated Arctic tents at night and hang out and not really pose any questions. I was just in there warming up my hands and cooking my meal on their stove and socializing, yet these conversations were coming

up. And the light bulb moment for me was that I was putting them in stressful scenarios all day, in perceived-stress scenarios of avalanches and digging people out and protecting themselves against avalanches. And somewhere that's triggering or mimicking a military experience, which is then allowing them to reflect in the evening on whatever it is they're reflecting . . . My boss and my mentor at the time noticed the same thing."

Further, Tim reflects on how, at the end of the training week, at the PPCLI's graduation party from their ski and avalanche training, the conversations were completely different from those that took place in the Arctic tents. At the graduation party, "We would all drink way too much alcohol and then these really awkward, weird conversations would happen. And I wondered, how is it that all week we can do this in a pretty healthy way, and then at the end of the week, the guy who's been quiet all week gets three or four or five beers into him and then he's on my shoulder crying or I'm doing the same thing?"

It was around this time that Tim began to reflect deeply on the power of nature for helping veterans to cope with the stress and changes stemming from military life. "I would argue that being outdoors and doing what we're doing works most of the time," Tim tells me. Furthermore, he argues that spending time outside is healthy, which he says, "is the key. Even if somebody isn't really opening up and talking, at least it's not destructive." Tim does caution that spending time in nature is not a panacea for veterans. "If someone is going down a destructive path, they can also participate in risky and destructive activities outdoors."

After training the PPCLI in the mountains, Tim went to the desert on a climbing trip and spent a lot of time by himself, during which he reflected further on the insights

he'd gained during the training session and on his own personal experiences. "There's something about the outdoors that's helped me move on from my service and look inside. And to become—I wouldn't say *whole* again, but just not so military, if you will. The outdoors has allowed me just to move on and get healthy—not that I wasn't healthy before, but to keep doing something that's healthy and that's just been really good for me."

Tim recalls another 'aha' moment that came a few years later when he participated in a ski trip for veterans on the Wapta Icefields. On that trip, Tim met a fellow veteran from Afghanistan with whom he'd lost touch. The weather was terrible and instead of skiing, the group spent a lot of time in the alpine hut. One day, the conversation turned to Tim's personal life and his at-that-point unexplained stress and hypervigilance experiences. He told the story of travelling with his wife to the United States the summer after he returned from Afghanistan—a story he'd never divulged to anyone before—and after hearing this story, Tim's friend shared some insights about stress. "He was able to explain to me how stress works in combat soldiers. It's like a cup of water and the military likes you to be right on the edge of overflowing when you're in combat, or when you're in theatre. They want you right on the edge all the time so when something does happen, you don't have to wait for that cup to be full, you spill over with speed, aggression, violence . . . . But then when you come back to Canada from your combat mission, or you become a civilian . . . you don't need to be at that level. Daily stresses of life also fill up that cup, whether it's work related, home related, something happens on the street—if you don't have a way of draining that cup, you're right on the edge, just like you were in Afghanistan or wherever."

So when he heard Tim's story about his holiday with his wife and his outburst over not being able to find a camping spot for the night, the friend explained, "Well, that's your stress cup. That's simple. You're going on holidays to get de-stressed. You get in the car. You drive all day. Things don't work out. You almost have an accident. You need a safe place to stay for the evening. You're stressed out. Cup overflows, you have a stress reaction."

Tim believes that like him, many infantry soldiers have a love for the outdoors before they enter the military. "The majority of the people who make a long career of specifically the infantry, which is my background, have a love for the outdoors somewhere. It's your office, it's where you work. So if you didn't like camping and hunting, the recruiter probably would have sent you to the navy or the air force or somewhere else, but if you were foolish enough to say, 'Yeah, I love camping,' they probably would have said, 'Infantry for you, son.' Young men that are from an 'outdoorsy background' can be drawn to more the combat arms—the infantry, the armoured corps, which is the tanks, or the artillery, which is the big guns. Because those three trades, 99% of the time, are working outside . . . I've spent hundreds of days outside sleeping in the dirt under the stars in the outdoors," reflects Tim. "So there's a deeper connection there that probably happens with everybody. Is the military overtly speaking about it? No. Is there still beauty when you're outside in a war zone? Absolutely. There are things that you're affected by. I always remember being on duty at night and looking up at the stars and it's always amazingly beautiful, it doesn't matter where you are when you look up."

Tim reflects further on the experience of talking with his friend about the ‘stress cup’ in the alpine hut. “I think in order for us [veterans] to have some of these conversations about how we’re trained, it’s hugely helpful that when we are outdoors, we feel safe. Combat soldiers work outdoors, train outdoors, play outdoors, and the flip side is you put them into a room perhaps with an expert and then try to explain this stuff to them, it doesn’t sink in [in the same way] as when it’s your battle buddy who’s sitting down with you in a tent or a hut somewhere up on a glacier.”

I am interested in the idea that nature creates a place to feel safe, since it has come up in my other interviews as well, and I ask Tim to tell me more about it. “To me a big part of it is that the outdoors doesn’t care,” he explains. “It doesn’t care if you’re dealing with issues or you’re doing good or whatever. The outdoors, Mother Nature, is going to throw whatever it wants at you. So, in a sense . . . it kind of puts a lot of things in perspective for me. If I’m not mindful about what’s going on with my environment and with me when I’m in the outdoors, especially in the mountain environment, I could be at risk. I could be walking right into a dangerous situation. For me it definitely increases my sense of awareness. It brings down a lot of the barriers to being fully present. And you leave the watch at home. You leave technology behind and you get a chance to slow down and be present . . . You’re on a different clock when you’re outside. You have to be fully present when you’re climbing and skiing and doing all these things. And I think it really just allows for a lot of stuff to be left behind, a lot of baggage that you don’t want to take with you . . . It’s almost like disarming. Does it happen instantly? No. Can it be facilitated? Yes. Can it happen on its own? Absolutely. It was happening on its own for

me for a number of years before I met some different people and they put some words behind it and some ideas behind it, but I was doing it for a long time."

Tim believes, too, that the benefits of spending time in the outdoors exist whether or not a person is aware that it creates possibilities for self-reflection. "If you're going out because you need some peace and quiet, to get out of your own head, that's fine. You don't need to go any deeper than that . . . . I think that's the beauty of the outdoors—it meets you where you're at. It's not like a clinical setting where there's essentially a list of questions and a list of things to be checked off. The outdoor environment doesn't care about any of that, it can often be a mirror just for where you're at."

Tim recalls a point where he realized that nature was mirroring his own personal emotions and space. He suddenly found himself feeling scared every time he went climbing, having fears of getting hurt, of falling and dying. Looking back, Tim believes that these fears were irrational but they were "a mirror to where I was in my own life with stress and things that were not dealt with and transitions that were happening." He took this as a sign to look inward and to begin finding ways to deal with his stress and transition to civilian life.

Similar to his own personal experience, Tim has come across many other veterans spending time in the mountains, fishing or climbing or skiing, often on their own and not as part of a program. "They don't have the words to attach to it, but they're doing it. They're doing it almost full time and there's a reason why they're out there. So I think that's the beauty of it. You don't need all of a sudden this awareness of, 'Wow, I need to be on this healing journey, or I need to recover from something.' When there's a lot of stuff swirling around, and you just want to get out of your head in a healthy way, I think

going into the outdoors and doing whatever high energy activity it is for that moment, can be really helpful. It allows you to come back and just be a bit more present with what you need to be present with. You're not as distracted."

Tim also comments on the sense of accomplishment that comes from doing activities in the outdoors, such as climbing mountains or canoeing down a river, and wonders whether it taps into a biological need in human beings. "It doesn't save the world. It doesn't change the socio-economic diversity of your neighbourhood," he tells me. "But it changes people and it leaves you with this sense of accomplishment. You feel better. Maybe you go out and you're able to resolve conflict in your own home then . . . . Surfing is the same way. How pointless is it to ride a wave on a board? Yet people have been doing it for thousands of years. Whenever I get out of the water I'm a better person for being out in the waves for the day, so it is important. It has value. It's not the great hunt that's going to feed the village but I think somewhere inside it taps into some of the same basic needs. And I can't explain it. I'm not sure if I really want to explain it either. It's good that there's mystery around. I just feel better when I do this."

As Tim gets older, he has noticed that his risk tolerance is decreasing, and he no longer spends as much time climbing as he once did. However, he still spends as much time as possible in the outdoors. "Fly fishing seems to be a lot better right now—a lot safer option. There are probably some hidden dangers with fly fishing, too, but none that I can see compared to climbing. It's just interesting to see my interaction with the outdoors change as I get older."

Importantly, Tim advocates that spending time in nature is not the only important thing for some veterans and they may need psychological and emotional support in other

ways. He attributes the time he has spent in the outdoors with other veterans to helping him gain the courage to see a counsellor to explore some of his own experiences and responses. “Unfortunately one of the last big taboos in our society is mental health,” says Tim. “For me to finally take the steps to go see a therapist in a clinical setting was a big deal for me. And if it wasn’t for the outdoors, I don’t think I ever would have gone. If it wasn’t for all the work I was able to do on myself using outdoor activities, I’d probably still be too chicken to go.”

While he is an advocate for the importance of outdoor activities for veterans, Tim expresses that nature is important beyond that—it’s important for everyone, he tells me, whether it’s a CEO, an immigrant transitioning to a new life in Canada, or someone else. “I think that’s where the common human connection is. [At its most basic level, spending time in nature is] fulfilling a lot of the same basic needs.”

Gord Cousins

The first time I meet Capt. Gordon Cousins, C.D., as I extend my right hand to shake his, I'm struck by momentary paralysis and unsure what to do. Gord, a tall slim man in his early 60s with short greying hair and a friendly smile, chuckles kindly. It's not the first time in the last 40 years he's been greeted by this reaction. He gently guides my right hand to meet his, showing me that we can still shake hands, despite the fact that he's missing all five fingers on his right hand.

Unlike the other veterans I interviewed, Gord did not grow up with plans for a military career. Rather, he joined the Lorne Scots regiment of the Canadian Forces' Reserve Army after a falling out with his Boy Scouts' troop leader. He had been active in the Scouts until age 14, but after leaving the organization, Gord wasn't sure what to do with himself. Then, in 1963, when he was 15, Gord met some other teens who were parading with the Lorne Scots, and he told his father, "I'd like to go, too." So the two of them went together to explore more carefully the requirements for and commitments involved in joining the Lorne Scots. Because of his father's experience as a naval officer during World War II, he was initially not keen on the idea of Gord joining the Canadian Forces. However, his father eventually consented and enlisted him, since it would keep Gord him away from the television and off the streets. Unlike his father's own war experience, it also did not seem particularly dangerous, since his son would not be going overseas.

His father's conviction to keep his son out of combat was made clear a few years later when Gord was 17. His father was offered an opportunity to move to Camden, New Jersey, to become the head of Engineering for the Campbell Soup Company. However,

the Vietnam War had just started, and as the father of two teenage boys, his father declined because his sons would have been drafted into the U.S. Army. While he initially considered taking the job and leaving the boys to live with their uncle, in the end Gord's father decided it was more important to stay together as a family. "I was well aware of the impact [that decision] had on my dad," Gord tells me. "It was the end of his career. He never got promoted again."

And so Gord continued serving as a part-time soldier with the Lorne Scots while he finished high school, and over time he describes, "It grew on me." However, his father's conviction that his son would not be going overseas when he enlisted was proven wrong when Gord volunteered for the extra training required to become a peacekeeper in Vietnam. Then, on May 7, 1968, at the age of 19, during one of those extra training sessions, Gord was accidentally blown up by a "Booby Trap" simulator. He lost all the fingers on his right hand, and severely damaged the hearing in his right ear. In addition, a 21-inch-long piece of shrapnel pierced his right collar bone in two places, opened the top of his right lung, and stopped within a quarter of an inch of his spine. During surgery, when the doctors removed the shrapnel, they couldn't stop the bleeding and Gord went into cardiac arrest, nearly dying before the doctors were able to restart his heart with adrenalin.

He spent the next fifteen months recovering in and out of hospital, including one period of six months in a row, during which time he suffered from staph infections, shingles, pain and nausea, among other symptoms. Gord describes all of these experiences as "one form of stress that builds." In 1971, once he was considered to be

"patched up," Gord was discharged from the Reserves with the status "Struck Off Strength" (SOS), and received a financial settlement to compensate for his injuries.

In addition to his physical injuries, Gord suspects that he also suffered from post-traumatic distress as a result of the accident. "The Armed Forces in the '60s didn't articulate it well," he tells me, "But in hindsight I figured it out." He recalls one instance when he was out of the hospital on leave and driving down the street in his friend's car. Another car backfired and Gord immediately ducked below the window. Another time, he was standing in line when someone nearby stomped on a paper cup, causing him to wince and duck. During the years following the accident, Gord often woke up, tense and sweating, from nightmares in which he was "approaching some catastrophe but not going through with it. Or committing some gross thing . . . I can remember in the immediate post-op period, vivid and morbid situations of me garrotting people, running people over with a vehicle, sliding off a roof and not being able to hang on because of no fingers on my right hand."

Gord also recalls his experiences of tremendous anger, and what he refers to as "a killer instinct coming out," despite never having been on the front lines of combat. In the years after his accident, Gord often threw things out of frustration. The army had designed a number of prostheses especially for him, including special pens, eating utensil holders, and 'carry systems,' but he soon stopped using them because he was too frustrated. "I decided that I would start the journey of doing without the stuff. And I guess in hindsight that helped, but there were frustrating times and embarrassing times."

Gord remembers many clumsy and awkward moments in those early years. "I'd be out on a date with a girlfriend and I'd be cutting my steak, and the methodology was such

that it would sometimes slip and so my peas would go on the next table and maybe a few minutes later the potatoes would go in the opposite direction.” He remembers feeling both embarrassed and frustrated while he excused himself to clean up the mess. And overall, this period when he was learning to do everything with his left hand caused “a build up of anxiety—or anger would probably be more accurate. I didn’t take the anger out on other people as much as it was a stress-reliever for me but it hurt people or bothered people when they saw it happen.”

In 1967, the year prior to his accident, Gord had spent the summer working in the parc national de la Gaspésie, a national park in the Gaspé region of Québec. As he describes the experience, “I was out pretty much by myself on Mountain Jacques Cartier . . . I did prospecting there and I found a gold mine.” Gord was looking forward to continuing his work the next summer, and one of the first things that flashed through his mind after the accident was that he had messed up his summer job. “I felt really bad because as a student and a reservist, every summer I was going out to the bush, and I wasn’t going to be able to go . . . That was a major thing that flashed through my mind: I screwed up my summer! And I knew it instantaneously because I could just see the tendons dangling there on my hand.”

Gord’s boss came to visit him in the hospital and told him to concentrate on getting better and that he could always return to work in the bush the following summer. As it turned out, in the summer of 1969, his former boss arranged for Gord to be hired as part of a geophysical exploration team with another company based out of Thompson, Manitoba. Gord was discharged from the Canadian Forces’ Barriefield Hospital in Kingston, Ontario, and a few days later, he arrived in Thompson. “I had this sudden

transformation from parading every morning in gray flannels and a white shirt at the foot of my hospital bed for the Matron to inspect," he explains, "to three or four days later I was in Thompson, Manitoba."

As the logistics coordinator for a team of field workers collecting soil and mineral samples, Gord ensured that the team received all necessary field supplies, and he then repackaged all their samples to be shipped back to Toronto. "Because I had been in hospital and I was in poor shape physically and I was skitterish, gun shy, underweight, etcetera, I didn't have to live out there but I chartered aircraft and I flew out there," he tells me. Gord believes this job was an essential part of his recovery. "That immersion really rapidly put things behind me and I felt useful. I felt I was engaged. It was the beginning of a feeling that I really had a role to play . . . I was able to get back into feeling useful and getting back into shape during the three months I was able to work before I went off to university."

After spending the summer of 1970 as a cross-cultural exchange student in Ghana, in 1971, Gord returned to work for the same man for whom he'd worked in 1967. "He took me to the Ungava Region in northern Québec and then [in 1972], I went to the Albany River district flowing into Hudson's Bay. We canoed and we flew by helicopter and we would set up a wall tent and stay in this location for three weeks and then we would move to another location and do some more stuff, so constantly outdoors . . . And other than the fact that I would cut my hand and snag it on trees and I couldn't feel it and blood would flow, I had a great time. And nothing held me back and so that was a therapeutic experience—it just erased pretty well all the skitterishness I had about having been hurt."

After completing his degree at Brock University, Gord moved west to Calgary, where he boarded with his aunt and uncle. During the winters, he often took solo trips out to the Rocky Mountains. "I would snowshoe in, pitch a tent, stay for the weekend, maybe do some target practice with my .22, and then I would hike out and get back in the car and come back to Calgary." In the summers, Gord regularly snorkelled in the mountain rivers, "just free flow . . . like a tourist, looking and fetching whatever I found on the bottom."

"And so I would stay close to nature in those areas," he reflects. "I found it relaxing and rewarding. It was an environment [where] there was no lid on the pot, so there was no pressure build up and it was easy to do what I wanted when I wanted to for those short stints of time."

At the time, Gord didn't make the connection between nature and his recovery from physical and psychological trauma. He explains that it is only more recently that he's begun to wonder whether his recovery and adaptability are associated with all the time he spent out of doors. "[Nature] gave me a chance to prove myself again . . . And I didn't really dwell on it very much other than the fact that I was looking to soak up every new experience I could to adapt . . . I had no counselling. I didn't have any understanding of what could happen and so on. So at that point it was more personal proving myself, just like an educational program, as opposed to anything therapeutic. But it's only in retrospect now that I feel I reintegrated pretty well because of that."

Gord credits both the Boy Scouts and the Reserves with his love for nature. Reflecting on his decision to enlist in the Reserves once he'd left the Boy Scouts, Gord knew that he wanted to be outdoors. "I felt more comfortable in the big outdoors than I

did confined—the concept of being confined in a ship or in a plane above ground with gravity issues bugged me. So I thought of that as the happy medium. And so I continued aspects of the outdoors all those years. That's one commonality that continued *before, through* and *after* my rehabilitation time . . . And I feel that I accommodated myself to my situation better because of it."

Recovery, however, is rarely a straightforward process, as Gord explains. "You make much progress forward, then something happens and you're three paces back." In the 1980s, with the busy-ness of working and raising a young family, Gord got away from his active outdoor lifestyle and experienced what he calls "throwbacks to that anger thing." He recalls times when touched by one of his four children while he was asleep, he struck out automatically and was then horrified by what he'd done. He remembers other times when his anger would suddenly boil over while he in the living room, and he would put his coffee cup in the kitchen sink about 10 feet away by throwing it like a grenade. "I didn't raise my voice, didn't hit my wife, but that was an expression of built up frustration . . . No more cup, followed by tears, embarrassment . . . I don't do that now," he tells me. "Other times I'd slam the door. One time my son didn't hear me speak and I bashed down the door to his bedroom. I felt like a heel afterwards, yay tall," Gord says, showing a one inch space between his left index finger and thumb. "He's crying, I'm embarrassed, and so on . . . And so those were some things that I've pretty much overcome."

In the early 1990s, the movie *Legends of the Fall* was filming in the foothills west of Calgary. When the producers put out a call for extras with previous military experience, Gord volunteered as an amputee. However, he quickly found that his work on

the film was triggering his previous traumatic experiences. “I’d come home in the morning after filming all night, and I’d close my eyes and this flash would go off between my eyeballs. I started to react in ways I had not for years. . . . I would wake up suddenly in a ‘panic state.’ Now, that’s not serious but it was interesting how something like explosions on a movie set triggered these flashbacks and these thoughts. . . . ‘Stuff’ returns with simple, stupid little things,” he explains. And then reflecting on the ways that his personal experience might apply to other veterans, Gord shares, “I think there can be a recidivism rate there that needs to be understood and not frowned upon. There shouldn’t be a lot of sanction brought against a person who is recovering over various lengths of time.”

When I ask Gord how he overcame his anger and outwardly antagonistic reactions, he tells me that even though filming *Legends of the Fall* triggered his traumatic experiences, the film also rekindled his love for the outdoors and provided the impetus for him to begin volunteering with the Cadets and eventually to re-enlist in the Reserves, all of which led to his spending more time outdoors once again. In 1994, shortly after the filming was finished, Gord signed his sons up for Cadets and became a parent volunteer. He saw the Cadets as creating a positive environment for his sons, where they would learn important skills such as time management, prioritizing, and developing focus, skills he believes they carry with them to this day.

For the first few years of his volunteer experience with the Cadets, no one asked Gord about his missing fingers. Then, late one evening, the Commanding Officer (CO) of the Calgary Highlanders Army Cadets Corps came out to Gord’s bivouac site under a pine tree and sat down. He said, “Cousins, you know something about this stuff. What

did you do before?" After hearing about Gord's experience with the Lorne Scots, the CO asked him to re-enlist. Gord recalls being surprised. Since the Canadian Forces' policy to that point had been, as Gord describes it, "If you were hurt, you're out . . . I thought they were teasing me because I thought and assumed that they wouldn't take somebody with 'missing parts.'" However, the CO's request was serious, and Gord, feeling proud and happy to be allowed back in, re-enlisted in the Reserves in early 1997.

Gord found that his new role in the Reserves gave him "something to focus upon. I was able to go out in the bush more and more . . . I did like all the exercise. And we did some creative stuff. And so that was a very good replacement." He also started snorkelling and playing underwater hockey again, among other things. "I found that I was now once again useful and so I think quote 'the military' helped in having a role," he tells me. "It helped stem a lot of that issue. Abruptness—sudden anger . . . sudden outbursts. I didn't wake up in the night. I slept right through. Little things like that."

Gord was the first amputee to ever take a canoe course with the Canadian Forces, and some of the course instructors were surprised to see him there. He recalls that he was clumsy with some of the strokes, but he persevered to become competent in a canoe once more. "If I didn't master it the first time, then I would say, 'I didn't do that right. I want to do it again.' And [the instructors] said, 'Okay, what didn't you do right?' 'Oh, this, this and this.' And they would allow me to redo it and I eventually mastered it to their standard . . . And that was a further confidence builder. It made me feel useful and I was fulfilling a practical task that they wanted and I still do it."

Today, Gord is a Logistics Officer with the Cadet Instructors Cadre and an Instructor in Canoeing and Swift Water Rescue with the Cadet Corps' regional expedition

centre in Calgary. When needed, he also trains Cadets in Calgary and the surrounding region in skills such as bushcraft, navigation and cold weather survival. Each summer, he goes up to the Yukon for three weeks for the Cadets' Long Paddle, which Gord describes as "therapeutic but in a different way . . . I get out of the desk, I get paid to be outside, having a thousand kilometre canoe trip that's good for the soul. But it's not because I need it therapeutic wise, it's because I enjoy it. I'm putting something into the kids and I get paid to do it."

When I ask him about the outdoors and what nature means to him, Gord thinks for a moment and then tells me, "The outdoors, regardless of what you do—you climb, canoe, hiking, those types of semi-physical activities—it's something that places you in control of your own self. You're not encapsulated in the city. You're not having a general routine. You're not doing predictable, repetatory things, and you have to use some of your wits and some of your personal skill sets. And so it has the ability to quickly separate you from the things, the stress of the city, accommodating your life to either your circumstance or your community. And you're out and away. And it doesn't matter whether it's winter or summer, I think that it's that separation that allows you to have a measure of control over your own life again. That's kind of how I can articulate it. . . . [You just feel more] fulfilled, in control . . . You're more aware of the things around you rather than having to respond to every circumstance."

Towards the end of our conversation, Gord expands on his thinking. "I like the free flow environment of being out in the bush, doing something I'm familiar with. There's a certain tempo and schedule and there are always exceptions and something suddenly might change, but it's not something that's beyond your ability to control . . . When

you’re out you just go by the rhythm of the outdoors, of the soil, of the season. Day turns to night, you stop. Light comes in the morning, you get up. There’s a rhythm that’s much different than somebody yelling at you to do this or that, or you’ve got to punch a clock at a certain time.”

Shepherd Bliss[12]

It's a mid-summer morning when I arrange to talk by phone with Shepherd Bliss, a U.S. Army veteran, part-time college professor, and owner and operator of Kokopelli Farm in Sebastopol County, California. His gentle, peaceful voice comes through the telephone line, as he describes the view from his window. "I'm looking out on beautiful trees now. They're waving at me, their partner the wind comes along, we're here in the Redwood Empire. Life is good. It hasn't always been that way."

At 66 years old, Shepherd reflects on his life. "Demilitarizing myself has been forty-some years. I was militarized the first twenty, twenty-five." The first of five children, he was born Walter Shepherd Bliss III at the end of World War II into a long-time military family. (Fort Bliss, the United States Army post in Texas, is named after his family.) Shepherd's father, a military officer, was away at the time of his birth, and his mother was a peasant woman from Iowa. Due to his father's military career, Shepherd and his four siblings were raised on military bases and moved on a three-year cycle.

Coming from a long line of military officers, and named "Walter" after his great-grandfather, a naval officer, Shepherd never questioned that his destiny was also to be in the military. As the first born, he was often called "Number One" rather than by his first name. Shepherd admits that he was raised to be a warrior—taught chess and military strategy at age four, often yelled at and marched around by his father. When he was old enough, he enlisted in the army and did basic training at Fort Reilly, Kansas. He began

[12] Shepherd Bliss has written a number of articles about his experiences. This story combines our conversation with insights from his writing. Unless otherwise referenced, the story presented here comes from our conversation.

serving in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War and had requested a post in Vietnam, which he saw as a way to move up quickly through the ranks (Bliss, 2006).

All this was changed, Shepherd tells me, by the first woman he "ever really loved." It was the 1960s after he had been commissioned in the United States Army, and Shepherd's then-girlfriend took him to a gathering at which Martin Luther King, Jr., was the keynote speaker. After hearing King speak, Shepherd underwent a radical personal change, and eventually resigned his commission before going to Vietnam. Around that time, he also found out that his given name Walter means 'warrior,' and asked himself: "Do I want to be called that the rest of my life? Or could I use the name Shepherd, which is my great-great-grandmother's name?" He refers to his decisions to leave the army and to begin calling himself Shepherd as the "first major adult decisions of my life."

Reflecting on his family's views about his leaving the military, Shepherd says, "I'm kind of a black sheep. When I left the military they were not happy . . . . I basically resigned from the military and the family." And while he has worked carefully to demilitarize himself over the past four decades, Shepherd accepts that his military upbringing will always be a part of who he is. "I honour the military virtues like discipline, organization, working in teams, country love, sense of mission. I just don't appreciate the context in which those are applied. I'm not anti-military. I think for some people it's the right thing . . . . I honour the role of the protector and the guardian, while not agreeing with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq."

After leaving the military, Shepherd earned a doctorate from the University of Chicago School of Divinity. He then spent time in Chile during Salvador Allende's democratic government and had planned to become a citizen there until Augusto

Pinochet's military coup in 1973. Shepherd had already left the country, but after the coup, his fiancée was tortured and his best friend was tortured and killed. Reflecting on his military upbringing, his own military service, and his experiences in Chile, Shepherd shares that "there is a whole lot of conflict and trauma that comes from the military for me." And he tells me how, for a while, he "escaped into academic excellence" through various academic positions, including at Harvard and New College of California. However, the various traumas that Shepherd suffered earlier in his life led him to suffer from post-traumatic distress—in particular from what he terms "sound trauma." In 'Sound Shy,' the personal story he wrote for *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*, Shepherd describes himself as "usually oversensitive to noise, but even more so when . . . under stress" (Bliss, 2006, p. 23). He also writes:

> Much of my behaviour is sound avoidant. I often feel a misfit in our increasingly noisy society. If I go into a room with a battery-powered clock, I can hear it ticking. If someone has an old, predigital watch on their wrist and is close enough, I can hear it ticking, ticking, ticking, so methodically. I leave such loud rooms. Those ambient sounds become magnified to me; they thunder and produce headaches. And most refrigerators are too loud for me. I usually build a little room outside the house to contain the refrigerator. (pp. 23-24).

In the same story, Shepherd reveals that while he values his solitude, at times he craves contact with other people, and will venture off his farm into local towns. "Sometimes the interaction with people goes smoothly. But at other times a few sounds can touch me off, overwhelm me, and create a 'Get me home!' feeling" (Bliss, 2006, p. 24).

As a result of psychic numbing, Shepherd does not remember much of his time in the military nor his time in Chile. This type of memory loss can protect trauma victims, but as Shepherd explains, "sometimes, something—often a sound—triggers me. I go to

an uncomfortable place. But after years of counselling, rather than a flashback or dissociation, I tend to just go cold, chilly, distant, or numb. I've gotten better at managing these moments, though I try my best to avoid them" (Bliss, 2006, p. 25).

During our conversation, Shepherd shares the very personal story of the end of his marriage that came about primarily due to his military upbringing and his family's long military history. "I had a wonderful marriage. Before we got married we agreed not to have children because I was afraid I would not be a good father. It was her second marriage, my only one . . . But then she got to a certain age and she decided she did want children. So I agreed to renegotiate the contract but I realized that I didn't trust myself. I didn't have a good model of fatherhood . . . My [other] fear was that it would be a son and that the [warrior/military] genes would prevail in spite of [my wife's] sweetness and her Buddhism, and then I'd have a killer on my hands. Even if it was legal killing. I decided, 'I'm not going to perpetuate these genes.' Now, as it turns out, all the children of my brothers and sisters tend to be more like where I am—not quite in this extreme, but . . . they're less conflictual than we were raised to be. Sometimes I think: Was it the biggest mistake of my life not to have a child? But then I think: No, I wasn't ready in my 30s and 40s and this is fine."

In his early 40s, while living in Berkeley, California, and yearning for something different, Shepherd began to reflect on where he had been happiest in his life, and found himself reminiscing about his time spent on his maternal uncle's farm in Iowa during his youth. He realized that he "felt better with fewer people around and more plants, animals, and natural elements such as water and rocks" (Bliss, 2009a, p. 174).

During our conversation, Shepherd shares other memories about his time on his Uncle Dell and Aunt Alva's farm. "We used to stack the hay. We didn't have electricity. People don't realize that in the late '40s, early '50s there wasn't electricity in the rural Midwest, so we had an outhouse, no running water, but an ice box and a windmill, gas lanterns. At night we had stories instead of TV. Life was good. And just getting up while it was still dark and milking the cows and then coming back to huge pancake breakfasts and cinnamon rolls. It was a wonderful life—slow, contact with animals and plants and bees and good friends. It was different than the more violent family military into which I was raised . . . At the farm I got away from all [my military upbringing]. It was a different scene, animals and plants and hanging out with chickens and piglets and watching their community."

While he had fond memories of the farm, however, Shepherd did not set out to become a farmer. Rather, his initial plan was to find a country home in Sonoma County in Northern California. After spending a full year searching for the right place, he heard that a 93-year-old woman had recently died and her small piece of rural land might be for sale. "I came over here. I turned into the driveway and I said, 'I'm home.'" He made an offer and ten days later, moved into the place he would eventually name Kokopelli Farm.

"It was a mess, of course," Shepherd tells me. "I needed to burn off a lot of prunings. I needed to fix the roof . . . . It's a humble, simple place. It's not big. It's not elegant. It's just minimal. It's big enough for me." He eventually decided to leave his college teaching position and to become a full-time farmer (although he recently returned to part-time teaching at Sonoma State University.) In a recent blog entry, Shepherd connects his time on his Uncle Dell's farm with his current life as a farmer: "I remember

enjoying playing in the dirt, mud, and puddles as a boy. Farming gives me an excuse to continue such play" (Bliss, 2011, ¶18).

Indeed, while he acknowledges the helpfulness of both individual and group counselling in his life, Shepherd (2009a, 2009b) credits farming as one of the most beneficial activities in managing his trauma experiences (the other beneficial activity is his continued participation in the Veterans' Writing Group led by writer and poet and peace activist Maxine Hong Kingston[13]). Farming is, in many ways, the opposite of conventional therapy. It is, Shepherd explains, "not a 'talking cure.' In fact, it is the very opposite: it is not-talking" (Bliss, 2009a, p.178).

When I ask about the particular moment he realized that being on the farm was helping his recovery, Shepherd shares his experience with first encountering a rare lily: "We have a rare plant here that exists nowhere else in the wild, and it's protected by the federal government and the state government. It's not on my farm, but at the bottom of my farm. And I'd heard about it but when I first saw it—it's a lily, big, and it looks like it's bowing down. And I just fell to the ground and wept when I saw it. What a treasure. There was something about the wholeness of this, about the connection of this, about everything—the sounds."

Shepherd also believes that growing food for other people has been important in his recovery. While he garden-farms for his own personal consumption, he also grows and sells organic boysenberries and keeps chickens and sells their eggs. "When I came here, the place was a mess. It had never really been farmed. It had been gardened but the berries were not up on trellises, they were mowed every year. There was something about

[13] "In our group," Shepherd tells me, "we don't judge people. They tell their story. We let them tell their story. And then sometimes we write somebody's story because they can't."

the recovery of the fruit that enabled my recovery. And financially, even though I charge a lot for the berries because they're very labour intensive, I don't make a lot of money from them," he tells me. "[The farm] helps integrate my writing life, my physical life, it's my best health insurance . . . It enables me to think, have a lot of solitude, be my own boss, be independent. I think military veterans like that. They like not having a boss. I mean, there are lots of differences, of course, but they like the freedom. So I like the freedom here. Nobody tells me what to do."

Shepherd knows that sound trauma will continue to be part of his life's journey. He uses only hand tools, such as scythes and machetes, on his farm. He tells me that on occasion, he still gets triggered by the power tools on both properties adjacent to his farm, and he sometimes wonders whether he shouldn't move, whether he shouldn't try to find a quieter place. From our conversation, though, Shepherd's love for and devotion to Kokopelli Farm is clear. He describes his life as a farmer, and as guardian and protector of his chickens. "I get up early every morning, before the sun, I have a good sense of time. I'm punctual. I pull weeds out of the ground even though they're anchored. I yell back at my livestock, because if you don't they won't follow your orders. They want the freedom, I provide the structure. If they fly the coop, they stay out there, the predators will eat them. There are predators in the world. Some nation states are predatory. Some of them have drone airplanes that are predatory and kill whole villages. So one has to be a guardian and a protector. And have those different archetypes within them."

Shepherd continues, "In farming you have to protect your animals. You have to have weapons, whatever they are—pellet guns, BB guns, .22s, depending on what kind of predators you have. Here we have mountain lions, coyotes, great horned owl. Of course

all of those are wonderful animals, but you have to build a structure that they can't penetrate but then there are others, like raccoons and skunks, that it's really hard to keep out. So what is the balance? . . . I have a scythe that I mow with and a machete, so I have weaponry. But it's hand, it's not automatic weapons like the terrorists have. The real terrorists, all of them, on both sides."

Some of the main benefits of farming, both for him and other veterans, Shepherd believes, are in the ways that "it gets us away from people. You have some contact with people but basically you have to re-direct your energy to the plants and/or animals. And it's not talk therapy. It's the bees who work together, the ants who work together, the gopher snakes who eat the gophers, the badgers who make holes. In this case it's the wildlife as well as the farm life and also in this case it's in the wetlands, it's in the uplands of a marsh, which has a rare plant. So it's the whole community of the land."

Elsewhere, Shepherd has written that "farming has moved energy from my brain into the rest of my body" (Bliss, 2011, ¶3). "Over time I have felt some of the walls within me recede," he writes (Bliss, 2009a, p. 177). "By interacting more with the plants, animals, elements, I find that I have improved my relationships with other people and with the community around me. My friends inform me that I have become a better person because of my work in the soil and with farm animals."

When I ask him to reflect further on the ways that energy moves from his brain to his body, Shepherd shares some of his experiences from the Veterans Writing Group led by Maxine Hong Kingston. "One of the things that Maxine leads us in is a walking meditation. We go out, where we meet, where there's giant eucalyptus, and we walk, slowly. Now, for some of the vets, that was hard at first because they're used to walking

point, which means you're in the front when you're going into the jungle looking for the so-called enemy, or you feel it in your body that you'd be the first one to be shot at. But after a while, you really get into the wonderment of knowing that you are protected and there is no threat, so you walk it out. Your body sees the land, not as a place to be scorched with napalm or that's concealing somebody who could hurt you, but it's welcoming. And so you begin to transform that."

The sensory stimulation provided by farming is also made clear through Shepherd's various personal accounts. He writes, "When the wind sweeps through the bamboo, it soothes me, as if it were a harp" (Bliss, 2009a, p. 175). He also shares: "I enjoy watching and hearing chickens dance, talk to each other, clown around, dig into the Earth with glee, and herald the dawn" (Bliss, 2009b, ¶12). In our conversation, Shepherd reflects on how he loves watching his chickens. "Chickens have a lot to teach. They have chicken wisdom. They're also prey . . . They're very curious but they're flighty. They can get hurt and everybody wants to eat them. So they have prey wisdom, which is, they're kind of batty and loony, much smarter than people think . . . One human on one chicken, the chicken will usually prevail unless the human has a tool."

Owning the farm has also brought youngsters into Shepherd's life in a way he never thought possible, given his decision earlier in life not to have children. He shares that many parents bring their young children when they come to the farm to buy berries, and the farm provides an important context for both work and play. "All of a sudden, at 66, I've been captured by the grandfather archetype. And these toddlers just keep walking into my life . . . I'm being re-parented by toddlers." One of the toddlers who comes to the farm regularly told his parents that he plans to move in with Shepherd when he grows up.

And Shepherd finds great joy in these newfound relationships with children: "It's safe, intimate contact, which has been hard for me, maintaining relationships. In the military you move every three years. So, not being on a three-year cycle is hard for me. And being in an ongoing relationship is hard for me. I would theoretically like one, and I find these appropriate women but either they or I, at a certain point, opt out."

Over the years, based on his own experience Shepherd has become a strong advocate for the healing power of nature. He has recently become involved in the Horses Building Communities program in Sebastopol County, which uses equine therapy to support military men and women and their families at all stages, from pre-deployment to re-integration into civilian life. Shepherd also belongs to the Farmer-Veteran Coalition in the United States, whose mandate is to create agricultural work opportunities for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. "It is the belief of the Farmer-Veteran Coalition that our farms can play a unique role in offering healthy places for those physically, mentally and emotionally injured from their war experience" (Farmer Veteran Coalition, n.d.). In an article Shepherd wrote for Countercurrents, he reflected further on the benefits of farming:

> Sometimes dealing with people is just too much, especially when they are mean, cruel, and even deadly. Times come to take it to the trees, vegetables, animals, and elements. They can hold it. Weeds help me. Pulling them out can release anger—better than punching someone. Livestock appreciate attention and vigorous conversation. They bark, bellow, howl, scream, and make all kinds of sounds; they listen better when one yells back, which can be a release. (Bliss, 2009b, ¶18)

Shepherd often hosts others on his farm, including veterans, and provides what he calls "agro-psychology or agro-therapy," which he equates with the larger Care Farms movement in Europe. "Here we hang out, we do something productive, we go for walks.

We value solitude. We let people be. We get things done." When possible, he also does some informal facilitation work. "I love working informally in groups around the picnic table. And so sometimes the men will open up when it's not a clinical room or clinical environment. It can also happen in the clinical ways, but there's something about the healing power of the regenerative earth, the grass, the leaves, the flowers, the bees, whatever wanders in, the ants while they're doing their work, the honey bees that don't sting."

Chapter 9

Other Stories from the Edges of Violence

In Chapter 4, I explored and deconstructed how the roots and habits of rational and linear thought in peace and conflict studies have led nature to be overlooked or missing altogether from mainstream conversations and praxis in the field. This does not mean, however, that the more-than-human world is always excluded from practices on the ground. Indeed, as with the veterans whose narratives were told in the previous chapter, the people themselves, including trauma survivors, victims of violence, and perpetrators, as well as some local practitioners seeking creative approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding, often do incorporate and acknowledge their relationships with the natural world into both personal recovery and peacebuilding rituals. This approach, however, tends not to be recognized within the mainstream academic literature and theory.

This chapter presents thirteen short vignettes from around the world from contexts of trauma, violence and conflict and/or processes aimed at transforming conflict in which the more-than-human world was remembered in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. The significance of these stories, which include former soldiers and civilian trauma survivors, as well as people from peacebuilding contexts, is that I obtained many

of them by reading between the lines—that is, in the original articles or books in which these stories are featured, the role of nature tended to be downplayed (if noted at all), in favour of the connections and relationships that are built between adversaries; however, when faced with these examples altogether, one can't help but notice the significant role of, and relationships and interconnections with the more-than-human world.

Veterans-Turned-Farmers in the United States

American psychiatrist Karl Menninger became the first advocate for horticulture therapy to help U.S. veterans recover from their experiences in World War II (Lewis, 1996; Relf, 2006; Louv, 2008). And green care and social farming advocates and researchers, Di Iacovo and O'Connor (2009) explain that farming provides people with possibilities for interacting "in the varied rhythms of the day and the year, be it in growing food or working with domestic animals" (p. 11).

Today there is a growing movement in the United States to provide opportunities for veterans to move into farming after they leave the military. Many of these veterans are gravitating towards small-scale, often organic, farms. The broader incentive of getting veterans involved in farming is that it provides succession planning for American food security, since many of the current farmers are expected to retire during the next 10 years (Farmer Veteran Coalition, n.d.). However, farming and working outdoors provide possibilities for engaging with plants and animals, nurturing and cultivating new life, and providing healthy foods to feed other people. Indeed, the University of Nebraska - Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) recently began offering a Combat Boots to Cowboy Boots program to help veterans become farmers, ranchers and business entrepreneurs. The NCTA "manages the education and training of participants, helps

coordinate all funding, and maintains contact with participants to train them as future mentors" (University of Nebraska, n.d.). In addition to their work with nature, what the stories of some of these farmers show is their reaching out to other people, particularly to other veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress.

For example, Archi's Acres is an organic farm in Southern California run by Colin and Karen Archipley. Colin Archipley is a former Marine Corps infantry sergeant who served three tours in Iraq. Together with his wife, Mr. Archipley now runs the Veterans Sustainable Agriculture Training (VSAT) program from his farm, offering a six-week course in Organics, Hydroponics, and Sustainable Agriculture for other veterans interested in new careers as farmers (VSAT, n.d.). In addition to teaching farming skills, such as planting and irrigation, as well as designing a business plan to facilitate a career change for veterans, the Archipleys reflect that "six weeks immersed in the VSAT program at Archi's Acres provides the down time that facilitates a much smoother transition out of urban warfare" (Archi's Acres, n.d.). "Farming offers veterans a chance to decompress," Mr. Archipley told New York Times reporter Patricia Leigh Brown, but, more importantly, it provides a sense of purpose. "It allows them to be physically active, be part of a unit," he said. "It gives them a mission statement—a responsibility to the consumer eating their food" (Brown, 2011). Brown also interviewed a graduate of the Archipleys' VSAT program, Mike Hanes, who returned from Iraq suffering from post-traumatic distress, depression, and a traumatic brain injury. Hanes told Brown that "Being outside was my comfort zone—still is." He also noted that "One thing I've noticed about agriculture is that you become a creator rather than a destroyer."

Another example is the Veterans Farm, an organic blueberry farm in Central Florida started by Adam Burke, a U.S. Army combat veteran and Purple Heart award recipient. He returned from Iraq suffering from both a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic distress, and Burke was urged by his psychiatrist and psychologist to find ways to alleviate his stress. Having grown up on a farm, Burke recalled that some of his best times were spent there: "I remembered being in the outdoors and enjoying working with others. I remember the sound of the birds and the mist from the sprinklers, the wind and the calming effect it had on me" (Farmer Veteran Coalition, 2010). With help from the Farmer Veteran Coalition, Burke started the handicapped-accessible Veterans Farm, which draws on principles from horticulture therapy to provide "a Prescription without Medication" to disabled veterans. Specifically, the Veterans Farm offers a 14-week program that teaches wounded combat veterans to grow organic fruits and vegetables, with the mission of providing "a place of sanctuary as well as help [veterans] regain that sense of purpose in their life while working on the farm" (Veterans Farm, n.d.). Talking to New York Times reporter Patricia Leigh Brown (2011), Burke shared that "Squeezing a ball in physical therapy gets monotonous . . . And you don't get the mist from the sprinklers or a cool breeze in a psychologist's office."

In a YouTube video posted on the Veterans Farm website, Burke tells the story of sitting with another veteran under a tree on his farm. The other veteran was suffering from a panic attack, and the two men sat together and talked for two hours, feeling a light breeze on their skin under the shade of a tree. At the end of their conversation, the other veteran turned to Burke and said: "Adam, this is the most peace I've felt since I've been back from war. I can sit in a conference room, I can sit in a medical setting, I can see

psychologists all day, but nothing compares to sitting in this chair under this tree on this farm" (Veterans Farm, YouTube, August 1, 2010).

Matthew Mccue, a former U.S. Army Infantry soldier, runs the Shooting Star CSA in Northern California with his partner Lily Schneider (Shooting Star CSA, n.d.). Their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program delivers a box of fresh organic produce weekly throughout the summer and fall growing and harvest seasons to members who have pre-purchased a share in their CSA. Talking with Patricia Leigh Brown, Mccue commented that he had learned how to face death during his military service in Iraq; however, through farming, he learned that "there was life all around" (Brown, 2011).

Still other examples include the 15-acre Veterans' Garden in West Los Angeles, where veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress and other injuries sustained during their military service cultivate fruits and vegetables in the middle of the city and sell their produce to local restaurants (Seymour, 2009). And in Brockton, Massachusetts, the Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center provides a horticulture therapy program for veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress (Papadopoulos, 2008). Twenty-four-year-old Afghanistan veteran Chris Pina told reporter Maria Papadopoulos that working in the garden at the VA Center has been important for him: "I've learned a lot about plants so far, and actually I'm starting to do it at home now. I see a brighter light." Meanwhile, several other veterans who work in the garden interviewed as part of Papadopoulos's news story described how the plant life showed them the way forward, the ways that life can continue beyond their military experiences.

Farming Together in the Buduburam Refugee Camp

In *When Blood and Bones Cry Out,* Lederach and Lederach (2010) tell the story of Morris, a young man living in the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana. When he was 13, Morris's father was murdered by rebels, and soon after Morris became a child soldier in the Liberian civil war. Later he also trained other child soldiers to fight in Sierra Leone's civil war. When finally struck by the realization that his fighting had turned him into an empty shell and that he no longer felt human, Morris escaped to the Buduburam Refugee Camp. As part of his own healing—from both his roles as victim and as perpetrator in the Liberian civil war—and to give back to the community in the refugee camp, Morris assembled other child soldiers also living in the camp, and the youngsters built a farm together. Today, approximately 200 former child soldiers grow and harvest fruits and vegetables in the camp. All of them, including Morris, continue to carry the stigma of their former roles as combatants and many others in the refugee community continue to see them as rapists and murderers. Accordingly, the healing and recovery process for these young people is anything but easy. They have lived through horrific violence, and many have committed unimaginable acts. As Morris remarked, "It is so hard . . . All you have in your mind is violence. You have been living in violence for so long . . . It doesn't matter where you are. It's embedded in you. And it is creative. You can do unimaginable things, terrible things with this creativity, because you have seen so much violence. It takes willpower to transform that. Some of us are working hard to change" (p. 19).

And so as they work to change themselves, and to overcome the community stigmatization, the former child soldiers continue to work the land and work towards their own healing. The youths find comfort in both their relationships with one another and in

cultivating new life together, and carry hope that the others in the refugee community will see that they have the power to change, to do good, and will one day accept them again into the community (Lederach and Lederach, 2010).

Into the Forest with Srebrenica Survivors

In January 1996, in Perth, Australia, a group of 104 male survivors from Srebrenica arrived as refugees, more than half of whom were between the ages of 15 and 24 (Burgess, 1998). Organizations such as Assisting Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) provided support and counselling services, which some of the older refugees accessed; however, although clearly suffering, most of the young men in the group neither spoke of their experiences nor sought treatment. Later in the year, ASeTTS arranged to take fourteen of the young men to the country town of York, an hour outside Perth. As ASeTTS worker Catherine Burgess describes, “It was spring and the Western Australian wildflowers were in full bloom. The delight on the young people’s faces as we drove into York was incredible as it was the first time we had seen some of them smile” (p. 146). Over the course of four days, along with four ASeTTS workers and an interpreter, the young men participated in a camel trek in the desert, dance lessons, and Australian football. They spent one morning touring a local farm. They also learned ways of coping with their traumas, including breathing techniques, walking by the river and closing their eyes to imagine a positive place, which for most ranged from a beach to a forest to a mountain. According to Burgess, “One young man said that he didn’t need to close his eyes because he was seeing the most positive scene he could imagine” (p. 147). Then on the third morning:

> [W]e asked the group to close their eyes and imagine themselves as a tree. Were they a young tree or an old tree? What was their bark like, and their leaves? Were they standing alone or amongst other trees? Were there nests in their branches or maybe fruit? What were their roots like?
>
> The group was then asked to draw the tree that they had visualised. They sat in silence for over an hour as they drew powerful images of themselves as trees. The pictures were then collected into a collage that covered almost the whole courtyard of the hotel.
>
> Each person took the time to describe their tree and we were introduced to ‘old trees that nobody visits anymore’, ‘lonely trees’, ‘trees with broken branches’ and ‘trees that were weighed down’. Some of the trees were starting to experience growth; ‘it’s finally spring’ and ‘my tree is happy on the top of the hill’, but there were few leaves, fruit or deep roots.
>
> The session concluded with the young people saying that they were actually a forest. The strong trees would support the weak trees as long as they needed it. The forest would survive. (Burgess, 1998, p. 147)

Burgess describes those four days in York as a turning point for many of the young male participants. Although they faced a long journey ahead in finding ways to cope with and recover from their unspeakable experiences of trauma, many had fun and found a new community of support, with whom they continued to meet afterwards. Two of the young men even found work in and moved to York.

Wilderness Therapy Project of Kathorus, South Africa

Gavin Robertson and Stephen De Kiewit (1998) tell the story of the Wilderness Therapy Project of Kathorus in South Africa which was created in 1996 by the National Peace Accord Trust. In the early 1990s, the African National Congress had created Self-Defence Units (SDUs) as alternative policing services to defend black communities who were not being protected by the official police in South Africa. In response, the Inkatha Freedom Party set up Self-Protection Units (SPUs). As Robertson and De Kiewit describe, “the youths involved in these informal structures perceived their key identity to

be that of ‘defenders of their communities’” (p. 139). Thousands of people died in fighting between the two parties, and at the time, the young men and women in both the SDUs and SPUs were considered to be heroes by their respective communities. However, as the violence abated and a new order came to South Africa with the end of apartheid, these youths for whom violence had become the norm shed their hero status and became marginalized; instead, their communities came to regard them as enemies.

In 1996, the National Peace Accord Trust sponsored the Wilderness Therapy Project of Kathorus. The Project served the dual purpose of reconciliation between formerly warring youths and positive reintegration into their communities. It brought together young men and women who had been involved in either the SDUs or the SPUs for reconciliation and healing by taking them on a seven-day “trail” (trek) in the Dragon Mountains. Over their week together, the youths’ relationships transformed. They began to support one another and members from the opposite sides began to reconcile as “the group internalise[d] the underlying notion that the group’s well-being depends on each individual’s well being” (Robertson and De Kiewit, 1998, pp. 142-143). According to the authors, the seven-day experience helped many of the youths to begin the process of reintegration into their communities. Some began to use counselling services they had previously not accessed, and because of the significant changes in the youths’ perceptions and behaviours, they were no longer seen as a threat to their communities.

The Butterfly Peace Garden[14] in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's east coast has, since 1983, been the site of a violent armed conflict between the region's Muslim and Tamil populations, characterized by massacres, rapes, and displacement (Santa-Barbara, 2004, p. 232). According to Chase et al. (1999), the ongoing conflict has affected more than 500,000 children and "represents the single most debilitating and pervasive factor affecting the lives of children and women" (p. 379). In the early 1990s, a team of Canadian medical practitioners was planning a vaccination campaign for Sri Lankan children. However, they soon found that in spite of the conflict, the Sri Lankan government had maintained its immunization programs. But the team then realized that little consideration had been given to children's psychological wellbeing, despite the fact that the typical family life of a child in Batticaloa "involves household displacement, separation and loss from death, refugee migration, and extreme poverty" (Chase, 2000, p. 2).

In 1994, with the help of both Canadian artist Paul Hogan and a Jesuit priest in Batticaloa, plans were undertaken to create the Butterfly Peace Garden, and in 1996, the Garden was opened with the "dual objectives of trauma-healing at the child level and peace-building within the community" (Chase et al., 1999, p. 387). Modelled after Toronto's Spiral Garden[15] program for children, which Paul Hogan had also helped found, the Butterfly Garden created a "'peace zone' to provide children affected by

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[14] The activities of the Butterfly Peace Garden ended due to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in 2004. The Garden was unaffected by the tsunami, but became a site for thousands of people seeking assistance after their homes and livelihoods were destroyed (Osborne, 2005; War Child Canada, 2007).

[15] The Spiral Garden was created in 1984 to offer an opportunity for outdoor summer play, art and gardening for disabled and able-bodied children in Toronto (Chase, 2000; Bloorview Kids Rehab, 2008). Today, the Spiral Garden program continues to operate, guided by a belief that "the patterns, processes, and rhythm of the natural world provide the context for healing" (Spiral Garden & Cosmic Bird Feeder, 2005, p. 2).

armed conflict with a sanctuary where they can heal through engaging their creativity in play, artwork and earthwork" (ibid). Tamil and Muslim children, aged 6 to 16, who were experiencing difficulties at home or school were referred by their schools or orphanages to attend the Garden one day per week.

Children who came to the Butterfly Peace Garden engaged their imaginations through play and art and developed friendships across ethnic lines (Chase, 2000). The program also cultivated medicinal herbs, which had almost vanished in the region due to conflict-related environmental damage. The children were involved in planting the seeds, and tending to and harvesting the plants. They also helped care for ailing birds and animals within the Garden setting (Santa-Barbara, 2004). While no formal research was allowed in the Garden, the anecdotal stories suggest that this combination of activities within the Garden setting had important effects in the lives of the children who spent time there (Ashoka, 2003; Chase et al., 1999; Chase, 2000; Santa-Barbara, 2004).

Workshop with Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis

Peacebuilding scholar Lisa Schirch (2005) shares her experience with a twelve-day workshop that brought Hutu and Tutsi community leaders together in Kenya (p. 11). The group setting was fraught with tension and hostilities, and several death threats were made. However, on the sixth day of the workshop, everyone went on an all-day safari together. On the way home, Schirch noticed that people were calmer, relationships seemed more "harmonious" and tensions briefly dissolved when participants began singing Christmas carols. She suggests that the experience of spotting animals together helped overcome, "if only temporarily, the participants' deep tension and trauma" (ibid.). Reflecting on this, Schirch wishes they had been able to spend more time together

beyond the formal workshop setting. What is of particular interest to me is the activity that brought them together—viewing wild animals. Although Schirch does not go into detail about the experience, one might easily imagine it: participants sitting together in an open-air vehicle, feeling the warm sun and a light breeze on their skin from across the savannah, seeing local birds and wildlife ranging from lions to ostriches and giraffes interacting in their natural habitats. It is perhaps noteworthy that of all the activities within the workshop setting in which the group took part over the twelve days, this was the one that seemed to bring them most together.

The Football for Peace Project

The Football for Peace Project (F4P) began in 2001 in northern Israel as a project to bring children (ages 10-14) from both Arab and Jewish communities together to play football as well as to participate in an outdoor education program.[16] The original purpose of F4P was to create connections and promote cooperation between socially segregated communities (Stidder and Haasner, 2007). Children in the program take part in a wide range of outdoor activities, including "activities that encourage collaborative group work such as route planning, expedition, orienteering, raft building, trust games, team building, problem-solving and joint decision-making tasks" (pp. 135-136). After experimenting with whether to begin immediately with the football coaching or to first introduce children to one another through other outdoor activities, organizers realized that outdoor activities such as trust-building and problem-solving games broke down some of the barriers and anxieties between the youths, thus enabling them to learn and play football

[16] F4P has expanded its operations to include 24 communities in Israel, as well as in Jordan and a cross-border project between children in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (http://www.football4peace.eu/)

together more cooperatively. In particular, the orienteering aspect of the program was found to be very popular with the children and was amongst the most successful activities for breaking down barriers and building bridges. While researchers Gary Stidder and Adrian Haasner never explain in their article why the outdoor setting is important, they contend that outdoor education holds powerful possibilities for transcending cultural boundaries.

American-Soviet Walks

In 1987, 230 Americans and 200 Soviets came together for five weeks to walk from Leningrad (now Saint Petersberg) to Moscow. Following on the heels of the 1986 Reykjavík Summit, when Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan met for two days at the Hofdi House in Iceland,[17] the walk was a peace march in favour of nuclear disarmament, and is hailed as a "pioneering act of citizen diplomacy" (Brigham, 2010, p. 595). While Steve Brigham, a participant on the walk, does not address many details about the setting, his article includes a number of pictures from the walk showing that participants were immersed in the Russian countryside. Every night the walkers set up a tent city in the open air, and every day they trekked side-by-side in the outdoors. Between the villages, Brigham reflects, "we found mostly open or wooded land. As a Russian, if you lived in the countryside, you likely lived in a small village or hamlet" (p. 602). Many of the American and Soviet walkers had never encountered a member of the 'other' side, and most changed their perceptions of one another over the five weeks, discovering that there

[17] Although the two-day Reykjavik Summit to discuss issues of disarmament ended in a stalemate, it is often described as paving the way for later talks and eventually the end of the Cold War. When I see pictures of the Hofdi House and the beautiful views surrounding it, I wonder about the role of nature and how such views may have affected Gorbachev and Reagan.

were many similarities amongst them at the level of their basic humanity. Another walker, Jessica Tracy describes: “The walk was about communication on a very basic level. It was meeting our ‘enemy’ face to face, wart to wart, personality to personality and talking about the price of chicken, or how to raise a batch of healthy kids or giving advice or encouragement if that’s what happened to come up” (p. 616). The walkers were welcomed in most towns by a crowd of people, and were often presented with a loaf of bread and salt. Brigham reflects that the Russians believed that “once you have shared bread and salt with a person, . . . he or she can never be your enemy” (p. 617).

To Reflect and Trust

Dan Bar-On’s (2000) edited volume *Bridging the Gap* draws on participants’ stories and journal entries to describe the experience of the To Reflect and Trust (TRT) group’s meeting in Hamburg in 1998. The group uses storytelling—specifically the telling of participants’ personal life stories—to create connections and to facilitate understanding, if not reconciliation, between adversaries. Founded in 1992 to bring together the descendents of Holocaust survivors with the descendents of Nazi perpetrators, the TRT has since met and held seminars in many different settings (Chaitin, 2003). The Hamburg seminar was the first time that people from other conflict groups were invited to join the process. Shifra Sagy (2000), who participated in the Hamburg seminar’s Palestinian-Israeli sessions, wrote about how her entire group spent one morning walking together in the woods. While the storytelling sessions were divided, tense and filled with anxiety, Sagy reveals that during their time in the woods, “the strongest feeling was that we were a joint group. . . ‘It was so beautiful here, and green and blue . . . it’s good for us to enjoy ourselves. To breathe in a lot of clean air’” (p. 104).

Seeds of Peace

The Seeds of Peace camp brings together teenagers from conflict zones (such as Palestine, Israel, and Egypt) for three weeks in Maine (Wallach, 2000). Set “on the shores of Pleasant Lake and [surrounded by the] beauty of the Maine woods” (p. 24), the mission of the camp is “to help humanize a conflict that has thrived partly because both sides have so successfully dehumanized each other” (pp. 8-9). After three weeks, the camp’s founder John Wallach describes how most teens develop “a new level of compassion for one another as human beings” (p. 13). While Wallach focuses on the coexistence sessions and the changed relationships between campers, the camp’s natural surroundings also seem to play an important (if unconscious) role in preparing the campers’ hearts and minds for making good contact with one another.

The Cyprus Consortium Peacebuilding Project’s Youth Camp

Throughout *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, Lisa Schirch (2005) draws on her 1997 participant observation study at a summer camp, in which forty Greek and Turkish Cypriot teenagers came together for two weeks in a wooded area of Pennsylvania that was “rustic but tranquil . . . nestled in . . . rolling hills” (p. 123).[18] The camp consisted of four very basic wooden cabins. Cabin groups were divided by gender, but mixed ethnically so that Turkish and Greek youth, most of whom had never encountered a member of ‘the other side,’ slept side-by-side. The days were filled with peacebuilding workshops in the mornings, and recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings, ranging from soccer, boating, and swimming in the camp’s outdoor pool, to campfires,

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[18] The camp was run by Cyprus Consortium Peacebuilding Project, which was operating at unofficial levels in Cyprus, mostly by bringing adults from both sides together for conflict resolution training workshops.

outdoor cookouts, talent shows, shopping, and dances. Schirch focuses her analysis and reflections on how the combination of peacebuilding workshops and social activities led to interactions and personal relationships between Greek and Turkish campers, as well as how regular activities such as "eating, dancing, and playing became symbolic ways of communicating about shared humanity and human diversity" (p. 27). As I have described in more detail elsewhere (Westlund, 2010), it seems likely that the camp's rural setting played an important role in the relationships that developed between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot teens.

For example, of all the activities in which the youths participated, they reported three as most important: 1) an outdoor group problem-solving exercise, in which each group built a twenty-foot tower and designed a way to drop an egg from the top to the ground without breaking it; 2) an all-day outdoor ropes course experience where campers worked in teams to travel along ropes strung between trees twenty to thirty feet above the ground; and 3) their efforts to cope with a large number of spiders sharing their living space. All of these required interactions not only with one another but also with elements of nature. In all three cases, it seems that nature perhaps helped to stimulate the youths' creativity and to decrease any previously held anxieties and stress connected with working together. In the first two activities, the youths had more space than they would have indoors, beneath the skies, interacting on and with the earth, perhaps with the winds blowing through the trees and against their skin, and the rocks underfoot. Moreover, the youths reported that two other activities—going to a carnival and doing arts and crafts—held the least significance for building their relationships with one another (p. 167).

In addition, all campers were initially quite challenged (and disgusted) by the many spiders living in their cabins. Schirch suggests that the common act of killing spiders became “symbolic and transformative,” and spider references soon permeated the camp, from the group of girls who began to call themselves the “Spider Girls” to when the entire group of campers began to refer to themselves as the “Spider Camp.” Camp director Louise Diamond was able to capitalize on this spider imagery, telling stories about ‘Grandmother Spider’ and eventually using the spiders as an example of ecological relatedness, sharing her own experience with breast cancer and how bug sprays and pesticides are being linked to such cancer. Thus, Diamond “prompted the campers to see the spiders not as their enemies, but as part of the ‘web of life’” (p. 115). After two weeks, many campers reflected on their newfound appreciation for spiders and insects, including one who wrote in her evaluation, “I learned to love insects and to live with them” (p. 116). In addition to learning to love spiders, campers also came away with a new understanding of their adversaries. Over the two weeks, as the they interacted with one another in the natural environment of rural Pennsylvania, more often than not they realized that their ‘enemy,’ whether a Greek or a Turkish Cypriot, was in many ways like them, with the same hopes and dreams for the future.

Ending Apartheid and Negotiating a New Constitution in South Africa

While there had been racial tensions in South Africa since the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652, a formal system of apartheid was not developed until 1948, when legislation introduced into the constitution by the Afrikaner-led National Party resulted in an “all-but-total separation of the races as part of a regime in which the minority White population brutalized everyone else” (Hauss, 2001, p. 82). This brutally repressive

regime dominated the country for the next 45 years. It is estimated that more than forty thousand people were killed by the police during this time, while many more were terrorized, became political prisoners, or were exiled.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw political change in South Africa, including negotiations to end South Africa's system of apartheid, to create a new constitution, and to hold the country's first democratic elections. Many of the negotiations involved significant interactions between participants within natural contexts. For example, throughout his presidency, F.W. de Klerk took various cabinet members and other officials and advisors, and even occasionally members of the African National Congress (ANC), to the D'Nyala game reserve in Transvaal near the Botswana border for *bosberaad* (bush conference) to discuss and brainstorm strategies for change in South Africa. At the end of each day, the politicians and advisors often sat around a campfire under the surrounding tamboti trees and the African night sky getting to know one another. Many of these meetings had a significant impact on developing the new constitution that would lead to South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994.

Another important event occurred in the spring of 1991, between two men from opposite sides who played vital roles in bringing forth the country's new constitution. Roelf Meyer, South Africa's then-Deputy Minister of Constitutional Development, and his two young sons, were invited by his friend Sidney Frankel to spend the weekend at a remote fishing lodge in Transvaal Lowveld. Also invited was Cyril Ramaphosa, then-secretary general for the ANC (and later the chief ANC negotiator). Frankel thought the remote and relaxed location would create an occasion for these two men to meet and get to know one another. Ramaphosa and his wife, Nomazizi, arrived at the lodge first, and

Frankel kept Meyer’s invitation a secret until the night before his arrival (Sparks, 1995, pp. 3-4). The next morning, just as Meyer and his sons were arriving by helicopter, Frankel’s daughter broke her arm. Frankel and his family immediately left in the helicopter for a hospital in Johannesburg. This turn of events meant that Ramaphosa and Meyer, along with Nomazizi and Meyer’s sons, were on their own for the weekend. At first, the two men awkwardly tried to make conversation in the lodge. Meyer’s sons grew bored and Ramaphosa, an avid fisherman, offered to teach them to fish. The men and boys headed to the nearby dam, where Meyer also decided to try fishing for the first time; however, while casting his line, he got the fishing hook deeply embedded in one of his fingers, which Nomazizi Ramaphosa, a nurse, tried unsuccessfully to take out. After an hour, Cyril Ramaphosa determined he would need to use a pair of pliers to remove the hook from Meyer’s hand. Saying to Meyer, “If you’ve never trusted an ANC person before, you’d better get ready to do so now,” Ramaphosa powerfully pulled the hook out. As Nomazizi worked to stop the blood from flowing, Meyer replied, “Well, Cyril, don’t say I didn’t trust you” (p. 4).

Throughout his book, Sparks invokes this lesson of the trout hook. Both he and Schirch use the example as a ‘symbol’ of the trust and recognition of mutual interdependence required for Afrikaners and the ANC to negotiate an end to apartheid and to develop the new constitution together (Sparks, 1995, pp. 176-196; Schirch, 2005, p. 7). The power of this symbol is undeniable, especially as we learn about how the trust that began that day enabled Meyer and Ramaphosa to work with one another on behalf of their parties, and eventually became “the hub around which the entire negotiation turned” (Sparks, 1995, p. 187). It is noteworthy that the men’s sense of mutual trust did not

develop in the context of a sterile negotiating room, but rather in nature and in an act of engagement *with* nature. The action that led to the symbolic event (the trout hook embedded in Meyer's finger) would not have happened in a meeting room. Thus, both the setting and the activity facilitated their mutual realization of interdependence, which gave them something to build on in the years that followed.

A third example from the South African context involves a series of eleven secret meetings between influential Afrikaners and exiled ANC members at the secluded Mells Park House on a large an estate near Bath, England (Sparks, 1995, p. 82). After formal morning meetings, the afternoons usually saw groups walking together in the woods, coming together for dinner, and then retiring to the House's library around a log fire. Sparks describes how the conversations around the fire sometimes went into the early hours of the morning, and "that is when the real business of mutual discovery took place" (p. 83). The organizer of these secret meetings, Willie Esterhuyse, an academic and member of the *verligte* (the reformist wing of the Afrikaner National Party), told Sparks that the experience at Mells was amongst the most liberating of his life. Both the Afrikaners and the ANC gained insight and understanding of the other side's positions, and fundamentally changed their perceptions of one another. In other words, the Mells meetings, and particularly the informal walks in the woods, meals taken together, and fireside chats, created an atmosphere for dialogue and mutual understanding, and led to real change in the relationships on both sides.

The Norway Channel and the Oslo Accord

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long roots in the histories of two peoples connected to the same land. However, the conflict became formally entrenched with the

creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the 1967 Six Day War in which Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula (Hauss, 2001, pp. 133-143). Over the years, countless world leaders have sought to intervene and 'bring peace' to the region. Thus, a celebrated moment in recent history involved the famous handshake in 1993 on the Whitehouse lawn between Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, where the two leaders also signed the 'Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements' for Palestinians and exchanged letters of mutual recognition.

While two years of talks between the Israelis and Palestinians had been sponsored by Washington prior to this handshake, the informal name of the agreement signed—the Oslo Accord—pays homage to the fact that the 'Declaration of Principles' was actually negotiated in Norway during from fourteen secret meetings between lower-level Israeli officials and the PLO. Journalist Jane Corbin (1994) paints a clear picture of these secret meetings in the Norwegian countryside, producing what is perhaps one of best documented cases of nature's role in peacebuilding activities.

From January to September 1993, meetings were held at an old mansion south of Oslo called Borregaard (a spot favoured by all participants), a manor-house on a farm north of Oslo near Gressheim, and the Thomas Heftye cottage and Halvorsbole Hotel and Conference Centre, both near the Holmenkollen ski-jump. Rather than sitting at negotiating tables in sterile boardrooms, the negotiators came together in sitting rooms with a roaring fire, or in rooms with panoramic views of the countryside. Most importantly, the men not only spent time together in these comfortable and intimate indoor settings, but on many occasions went outside, walking together in the woods,

along lakes, and at the fjords, in what Corbin calls “the Norwegian way of solving problems by communing with nature” (p. 87). Indeed, at the group’s first meeting in January 1993, the negotiators spent much of their time walking and talking together in the woods surrounding the Borregaard house. Sometimes the entire group went out together, while at other times a Palestinian was accompanied by an Israeli. Corbin tells how “the Israelis and the Palestinians, roar[ed] with laughter in the quiet woods, [and] saw that the same things made them laugh” (p. 87), and also about the time that at 3:00 a.m., when Israeli Joel Singer and Palestinian Hassan Asfour left in the middle of a negotiating session at Halvorsbole to take a long walk together on the shore of the fiord.

After the negotiators reached a consensus and secretly signed the Declaration of Principles on August 20, 1993, in Oslo (prior to Arafat and Rabin’s public signing of it in Washington on September 13, 1993), the Israeli team leader Uri Savir reflected that the “Oslo spirit – this special harmony you conveyed to us, between man, nature and conduct – was contagious in creating a new Middle East spirit” (p. 169). And while the negotiators were reluctant to attribute their success to the intimate approach (as opposed to the formal negotiating process) taken in Norway, the participants did talk about “the strange impact on their spirits of discussing death and conflict in the sunlit, tranquil surroundings of the fiords” (p. 211). Once again, the earth and skies, the winds and rocks, featured prominently in this peacebuilding process.

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In reflecting on the narratives and stories presented in both the previous chapter and this one, David Abram (1996) might say that the more-than-human world engaged participants and provoked their senses in a way that urban, indoor settings could not. Theodore Roszak (1995) suggests that “it is homely common sense that human beings must live in a state of respectful give-and-take with the flora and fauna, rivers and hills, the sky and soil on which we depend for physical sustenance and practical instruction” (p. 6). And perhaps it is this homely common sense, which is often far from our daily reality, that takes hold of the veterans, trauma survivors, victims and adversaries alike in these natural settings, and allows them to connect with one another at a new level. While the stories presented in this chapter involve very different groups of people, settings, and situations, all of them reveal the ways that interactions with/in the more-than-human world can change people and change relationships. In many of the cases, the circumstances involved traumas and various other life-denying or life-threatening situations, and it seemed that nature offered an alternative for the people involved, and pointed to a path that would enhance life, cultivate life, move life forward. With this in mind, this thesis now turns towards an analysis of the narratives, and reflects on the implications of these stories for theory and practice in peace and conflict studies.

PART III – Reflections, Implications, and Conclusions

> There is a kinship between the being of the earth and that of my body (*Leib*) which it would not be exact for me to speak of as moving since my body is always at the same distance from me. This kinship extends to others, who appear to me as other bodies, to animals, whom I understand as variants of my embodiment, and finally even to terrestrial bodies since I introduce them into the society of living bodies when saying, for example, that a stone 'flies.'
>
> —Merleau-Ponty, RC, 122

interlude

A Conversation with Andy Fisher

> Our bodies . . . still carry the knowledge of our buried needs, of our unactivated interactional patterns.
>
> —Fisher, 2002, p. 109

Andy Fisher is a leading scholar in the field of ecopsychology as well as a psychotherapist in private practice in Eastern Ontario. Reading his book, *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life* several months into my PhD studies was critical in determining the direction of my work and research over the next six years. My insight at the time was that peace and conflict studies, while it focuses on issues of direct and structural violence, neglects *ecological violence*—the connections between environmental decline and what this does to the human (and more-than-human) psyche. I came to understand that what is missing from the academic discussions of complexity and interdependence is the ways in which all human activity—including conflict and peacebuilding—takes place within a shared, interconnected and interdependent global ecosystem. And I realized that ecopsychology could directly complement and extend the approaches within my new discipline, since ecopsychology is "fundamentally a response to violence (for to violate something is precisely to insult its *nature*). . . [T]he goal . . . is to work toward the recovery of our ability to *perceive* and *answer back* to this violence, and to engage in nonviolent modes of relating" (Fisher, 2002, p. 55). As I conducted this

research and reflected on the experiences described by the veterans and other interviewees, I contacted Andy Fisher, and he agreed to help clarify my understanding of his work and to illuminate from an ecopsychological perspective some of my findings.

Early one morning in October 2011, I spoke with Andy by telephone.[19] Much of our conversation centred on the ways that the human body responds in different environments, and the ways that after certain experiences, our bodies might call for different things. After an experience of trauma, Andy tells me, the body and the psyche need to regain their sense of security. And the body is capable of recognizing when it is in the presence of what it needs, what it's implying. "I'm very big on this idea of implying," Andy says. "If I'm hungry, then my body's implying food. And if I'm traumatized, my body's going to be implying certain experiences that will help restore a sense of security or calm or peace or life. So if my body's implying that all the time, it's a matter of what enters into my experience and does that match with what I'm implying?"

In particular, Andy reflects that the veterans' stories of their experiences in nature suggest that what is being called for—*what their bodies are implying*—is vitality and a more-than-human experience to carry life forward. "In order to complete these trauma experiences, or recover from the trauma experiences, [when the veteran] comes across the river, [he has a] shift in his experience. His body is saying, 'This is it! This is what I'm

[19] The morning of our telephone conversation, I had been up with Cameron since 5:00 a.m., and was not feeling as alert as I would have liked. Before placing the call to Andy, I tested my recording device; however, I must have forgotten to turn the recorder on at the beginning of our conversation, something I only realized with a sickening feeling about 35 or 40 minutes into the telephone call. As such, some of what is presented in this section comes from my notes. Direct quotes are only put around portions of our conversation that were recorded, although it may be that some of the other sections are very close to Andy's own words; however, since they are taken from my notes, I cannot attribute them as direct quotes. Andy was very kind and at the end of the interview, he took the time to return to some of the main points so that there would be a better record of what he said.

implying.' So that takes our thinking of the healing process beyond the therapy office into a more-than-human field of what might be called for in the healing process."

Andy emphasizes the ways that ecology studies the relationship between an organism and its environment, and this ecological way of thinking can be helpful in understanding the differences between a therapy room and a natural setting. The therapy room is limited in space, he tells me, and it tends to require a particular posture of sitting. "That really limits the possibilities of healing by thinking in terms of that organism-environment field," Andy says. Meanwhile, ecopsychology asks about and brings attention to what other organism-environments are possible, and shows that natural settings bring other possibilities, other postures beyond the sitting position required in a therapy room. "It's quite a risk for therapists to step outside the office; that's the place where there's a kind of comfort zone for therapists," Andy reflects, but he observes that the veterans' experiences are demonstrating that other organism-environment fields are both possible and essential. "[It] would be important to recognize for how [these other fields] perhaps take us to a deeper place in terms of that resonance with the world . . . that really draws on a very deep memory of our place in the world."

As our conversation goes on, we both describe the importance that getting out of doors has in our own experience. Andy relates that when he is feeling irritable or restless, his wife often encourages him to go out for a walk. And in his experience, the change in mood and sensation are almost immediate when he gets outside. This leads Andy to express his curiosity about the "the rapidity of the shift of the experience, when just simply walking out the door and how quickly that takes you, in my experience, into a whole different mood and sensibility and how there's something about the contact with

something other than human that seems to have very, very deep roots and takes you there very quickly." This is similar to my own experience, and especially now as the mother of a toddler. If we are indoors, and Cameron is becoming ill-tempered or impulsive, going outside is nearly always my first course of action, and as soon as we get outside, I see the change in him: he becomes happier, less irritable, more accommodating and engaged, and he even tends to sleep better after the experience.

"I think there are just very, very deep resonances," Andy reflects. "This is the mystery of it, but if this is the world that we've emerged from or that's made us somehow—that on a level that's not necessarily cognized there are these profound resonances." But because of the ways that the modern world and particularly Western society shapes and structures our perceptions and sensory abilities, "we're very limited in trying to understand or bring meaning to these experiences beyond the obviousness of them when we're having them." However, Andy believes that better ways of talking about and describing these experiences will come. Accordingly, he considers the phenomenological method to be very important in conducting research about experiences in nature, "especially in these territories where we don't have conceptions or language to right away make sense of things, that we need to follow the lead of our experience and then find a language that describes this experience."

The value of phenomenological research, Andy explains, is that "it forces us to pay attention to the actual experiences people are having, even if they don't fit the categories of the normal discourse. And then that forces a stretching of the discourse or a reconceptualization. We typically conceptualize the natural world as inanimate; it's just so much matter or inert stuff that we can then use for resource purposes one way or

another, whether it's a visual resource or a material resource for industry, it's a resource somehow. But if people are having the kinds of experiences that [the veterans in your research] are describing, well then that forces a different kind of conceptualization and within ecopsychology, the idea is that the more-than-human world has its own interiority, its own life, that it's animate somehow, that it has agency, that it has its own creativity, and perhaps even has a will of its own, and that to place ourselves in that psyche—to get out of the indoor environment and place ourselves in that psyche—will automatically place us in a different mindset, in a different psychological field and then different things can happen."

Andy brings attention to how part of the task of ecopsychology is to bring an earthly understanding to developmental psychology. He describes one theory, based in attachment theory, in which during middle childhood, we graduate from having a secure base in our parents/caregivers to finding a secure base in nature. "One of the ideas I like is that in our own psychological development, especially in middle childhood, the natural world just becomes so attractive and you just want to be out there and building forts and playing in creeks and things, that there's a moment where we really bond to the natural world, and graduate from the security of our parents to the security of the larger natural world," Andy reflects. A child can return to his parents or caregiver for emotional refuelling and sense of security anytime, "but if the security with mom or dad is good enough, then we graduate to this larger field of security, which is the more-than-human field, and then that becomes a secure base, and we learn to rely on the places where we are and our knowledge of them to ground ourselves and to feel a sense of security in the world." It is this security in nature, in a certain place or landscape, that gives adults the

grounds for providing security back to the children. This is one of the reasons, Andy explains, that "if you dislocate people who very much have that relationship with a place, it's so traumatic for them because you're removing them from the ground of their security. And I think there's a way in which perhaps people who have these healing experiences in the natural world, who are coming from a place of trauma, are reconnecting with that sense of security that I think is normal in us to experience in middle childhood."

The veterans' stories point clearly to their bodies saying that the natural world is a place they feel secure. And, as Andy says, "if people phenomenologically are discovering, well look how easily we make contact within this psyche compared to another psyche—and this is kind of a new way of talking, where we don't talk about the psyche as being inside us, but we're *in* a psyche. What is the psyche of this place and how does this compare to the psyche or the soul of a therapist's office and what is possible here versus what is possible there because it's a different psychological field, sitting in a different soul in a way."

Another part of our conversation focuses on the ways that natural spaces foster social interaction. It's just a phenomenological fact, Andy tells me, that social interactions occur in natural spaces, and that these experiences point to the unity of body and the environment. He and his wife, Jill Dunkley, offer wilderness quest retreats several times per year, and Andy reflects that on each of these retreats, even though many of the participants have never met before, they often find it easy to come into contact and connect with one another in natural spaces. This is because, Andy suggests, the world itself is ensouled. It has the power to affect us, to move us. When we do not separate

ourselves from the world, different things will happen, which he suggests implies the possibility for change in the world much broader than what we are currently doing. Indeed, Andy comments that this is a radical way of re-envisioning life and experience. “If we’re having certain experiences in the natural world, well that implies a reconceptualization of reality, and if we’re reconceptualising reality, well that’s radical.”

Chapter 10

We *Are* Nature: Reflections and Analysis

> My terrestrial roots . . . nourish everything else.
>
> —Merleau-Ponty, RC, 122

Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserts that all experience is prior to thought or theoretical attempts to explain it. Andy Fisher (2006) writes about the ways that the body—not the mind—“is always implying further steps of living that will carry our experiencing forward” (p. 165). All of the veterans, and many of the supporting interviewees, shared with me that their relationship with the natural world often came *before* conscious reflection and theorizing—they each realized that they were *feeling* better, and only following that realization did they reflect on *where* and *in what context* they felt better. Merleau-Ponty notes that “reflection does not withdraw from the world . . . [but rather] it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice” (PP, xv). Based on this understanding, it is likely impossible to completely analyze pre-reflective experience; however, in this chapter I work to bring attention to the various threads in the narratives in this thesis that demonstrate our human attachment to and interconnections with more-than-human nature. In doing so, I keep in mind Norman

K. Denzin's (2009) observation that interpretation itself is a form of storytelling. In choosing to present the veterans' stories in narrative form, rather than partitioned into themes as is common practice in qualitative research, I am situating this research within a particular story—one that asserts the veterans' experiences are more understandable, contextualized, and situated when presented as a narrative. I am also presenting possibilities for each reader to reflect and form her/his own interpretations, and am suggesting that there is more to learn from the veterans' experiences than I could ever illuminate through interpretation alone. Further, I suggest that the more-than-human world itself comes into consciousness by reading and experiencing each veteran's story in its entirety. As Fisher (2006) writes, "we also need to let nature speak again, by allowing our bodies to have a voice" (p. 164). Ideally, by presenting the experiences in as many of the veterans' own words as possible, I am suggesting that they are more qualified to speak about their experiences than I am. However, as the writer and researcher, I am still responsible for crafting the story, for choosing those parts of the interview to include and those to exclude, as well as which parts of the stories are highlighted. This is the reason that I have also included and reflected on my own experiences throughout this thesis—to make more visible my role as researcher and storyteller. Together, all of the stories and conversations co-mingle to create a new (and more ecological) story.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warn about the danger of the "Hollywood plot" in narrative inquiry, where participants' stories are smoothed and moulded by the researcher to show that despite hardships, everything worked out and ended well. It is important to remember that the stories told by Christian MacEachern, Tim Lewis, Gord Cousins, and Shepherd Bliss are ongoing. These are the stories they continue to inhabit every day.

Their experiences in nature have not 'cured' their stress reactions and/or post-traumatic distress, and all of them spoke of their need for more than one avenue of recovery. For Christian, in addition to spending as much time as possible in the outdoors and with his animals, the path has also involved medication and therapy. Tim described how, in addition to spending time in nature settings, he eventually sought counselling to help understand some of his own behaviours and reactions. Gord believes that re-enlisting in the reserves and once again having a larger purpose in life was important for his own recovery. And Shepherd reflects that his involvement in the Veterans' Writing Group has been a crucial part of his healing, as well as some individual and group therapy over the years.

As I read and re-read the interview transcripts, and reflected on the veterans' experiences as well as on the insights from the supporting interviews, I realized that their stories, while different and individual, shared a number of commonalities. The first of the four research questions outlined at the beginning of this thesis was: In what ways do veterans' narratives of post-conflict recovery highlight nature as important for physical and/or psychological and spiritual wellbeing and survival? This chapter returns to this question to examine the main thematic connections between the veterans' stories as well as across my other interviews and the other stories and anecdotes uncovered in this research. Specifically, it takes up the theme of sensory experience in nature and how each veteran spoke to the ways that the rhythms in the more-than-human world provide a greater structure such as night and day, and the turning of the seasons, which serve as a reminder that the world is larger than his military experiences. The theme of the sensory experience involved in interacting with/in the natural world also contributes to

mindfulness and living in the present that often eludes trauma sufferers. I also explore the safety and security that each veteran found in nature, which is important since many veterans, and particularly those suffering from the effects of stress and/or trauma, describe not feeling safe in their post-military experience. Another theme that runs through the stories is the way that encounters with/in nature helped the veterans to work towards regaining their confidence and a sense of purpose that had been lost after their military service. In addition, an important theme emerged in the ways that camaraderie and social support arise out of spending time in the outdoors with other human beings, and particularly with other veterans who share and can relate to their military experiences in ways that members of their family or friends might not. For several of the veterans, relationships with more-than-human beings, such as animals and insects, were especially important. Furthermore, all of my interviewees asserted their belief that contact with the more-than-human world is a basic human need. All of these themes lead to the central connection between all the stories and experiences in this research, which involves the regaining of humanity through connecting with the more-than-human world, and the core remembrance that *we are nature*. These themes and insights hold important meanings for theory and praxis in peace and conflict studies, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 11.

Sensory Experience in the More-than-Human World

> Nature is imperfectly perfect, filled with loose parts and possibilities, with mud and dust, nettles and sky, transcendent hands-on moments and skinned knees.
>
> —Louv, 2008, p. 97

Earlier in this thesis, I summarized Kate Soper's (1995) "lay" or "surface" concept of nature, in which nature is depicted as the opposite of what is urban. Timothy Beatley (2000) argues that the vastness of the North American landscape contributes to the urban/nature dichotomy, in which the nature viewed as important tends to be seen as the nature that is far away from cities, "in national parks, national seashores, and wildlife areas" (p. 224). And while I am working in this thesis to advocate for a more holistic conception of nature, it is important that for many of my interview participants, these places 'away' were significant—it was these places that took them away from the pressures of everyday life and modern technologies, that opened space for their energies to dissipate, to explore their wounds and to find stillness.

Accordingly, an important connection between the veterans' stories lies in the way that their sensory experience in the more-than-human world, and particularly in these places 'away,' leads to increased mindfulness, and lends to a feeling of being more fully present in the world. As Merleau-Ponty observes, "we have an access [to nature] . . . through the vital relation that we have with a privileged part of nature: namely, our body, through the 'natural inclination' whose lessons cannot coincide with those of pure understanding. It is life which validly comprehends the life of the human composite" (RC, 70). The mainstream psychological literature tends to focus on what is happening in the brain of the trauma sufferer, but is not always good at exploring the

phenomenological experience of trauma, Andy Fisher told me. And in hearing the veterans' stories, I was struck by how that phenomenological experience is often the opposite of feeling present. Through flashbacks and panic attacks, sufferers are easily drawn into the past—a past which seems to be happening in the present. Furthermore, through Christian MacEachern, Tim Lewis, Gord Cousins, and Shepherd Bliss's stories, as well as in reading about the experiences of other veterans, I came to understand the ways that stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic distress are themselves sensory experiences manifested in and through the body.

Connecting with the more-than-human world seemed to provide each veteran with an alternate sensory experience, in which he described becoming more present to his surroundings. As Roméo Dallaire observed in the film *Shake Hands with the Devil*, when he visited that hillside in Rwanda, he came to feel human again. And journalist Robert Poole (2010) describes how the Pathway Home, a private, non-profit residential treatment center for U.S. soldiers and veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury and/or post-traumatic distress, encourages veterans to go for walks in the hills every morning, and the program gradually re-introduces them to community life through physical activities, which include fly-fishing and bicycle tours through the California countryside.

In listening to and re-reading the veterans' stories, I was struck by how their embodied experiences in the natural world have turned their attention back towards the ways that nature is regulated by cycles and seasons, by birth and death, by relations between animals and plants, and so on. As Tim Lewis reflected, "There's something about the outdoors that's helped me move on from my service and look inside. And to become—I wouldn't say *whole* again, but just not so military, if you will." Tim also

shared how since he was a young teenager, climbing has "been where I've always gone to, to be myself, to feel present, to put myself in real situations, real decisions." He commented that being in nature often helps him to put life and his experiences into perspective. "If I'm not mindful about what's going on with my environment and with me when I'm in the outdoors, especially in the mountain environment, I could be at risk. I could be walking right into a dangerous situation. So for me it definitely increases my sense of awareness. It brings down a lot of the barriers to being fully present. You leave the watch at home. You leave technology behind and you get a chance to slow down and be present . . . you're on a different clock when you're outside. You have to be, like I said, fully present when you're climbing and skiing and doing all these things."

Gord Cousins spent a lot of solo time in the mountains after moving to Calgary in the 1970s, and he observed that spending time in nature leads him to feel more "fulfilled, in control, you're responsive to the things around you . . . perhaps a better way of saying it, you're more aware of the things around you rather than having to respond to every circumstance." As Gord spoke, he emphasized the physical/embodied aspects of spending time in nature, and the ways that human experience itself takes on a different rhythm in the natural world that contrasts sharply with the constant demands of modern urban life. Rather than going by the rhythm of urban lifestyle or demands of other people, nature presents its own rhythm, Gord explained. "Day turns to night, you stop. Light comes in the morning, you get up. There's a rhythm that's much different than somebody yelling at you to do this or that. Or you've got to punch a clock at a certain time."

Shepherd Bliss sought to recreate some of his childhood experiences on his uncle and aunt's farm when he bought his own farm in the early 1990s, a place where he now

interacts daily with plants and animals and the community of the land. He remembered his uncle and aunt's farm as "a different scene, animals and plants and hanging out with chickens and piglets and watching their community." The sensory experience available through farming and working the land became clear in Shepherd's description of using only hand tools, such as scythes and machetes, on his farm. He pulls weeds by hand, and enjoys hearing the wind blowing through the nearby bamboo, as well as watching and listening to his chickens as they dance and talk to one another and dig in the dirt. Similarly, Shepherd's description of his and other members of the Veterans Writing Group's slow walking meditations beneath the canopy of the giant eucalyptus forest points to the ways that nature opens possibilities for mindfulness. Shepherd observed how difficult the walking meditations were for veterans who were used to walking point in the jungles of Vietnam. "But after a while, you really get into the wonderment of knowing that you are protected and there is no threat, so you walk it out. Your body sees the land, not as a place to be scorched with napalm or that's concealing somebody who could hurt you, but it's welcoming. And so you begin to transform that." I recall, too, Shepherd's experience of coming across the rare and delicate lily at the bottom of his property shortly after he'd moved there, the way that it evoked for him the interconnections between everything, that it reminded him of the wholeness of all life. Indeed, he credits farming as one of the most beneficial activities in his learning to live with and move towards recovery from his trauma experiences (Bliss, 2009a; 2009b). Farming, in many ways, is the opposite of conventional therapy; it is the opposite of a "talking cure". It is, Shepherd explains, "not-talking" (Bliss, 2009a, p. 178).

In Christian MacEachern's narrative, he shared how one of his first moments of feeling "at peace with life" in his post-military experience came while he sat on the banks of a river. Moreover, in remembering the CVAF's summer 2009 weekend trip for veterans, both Christian and Ian Sherrington described how they could see palpable differences in the other veterans after just one morning of rafting on the Bow River. They both described the participants as seeming more relaxed in their bodies. Christian said, "You could just see the guys melting, starting to relax and smile," while Ian commented more generally that over the weekend he could "see the life flowing back into [the veterans]." Even psychiatrist Greg Passey, who participated in the weekend's activities, observed in his comments on the CVAF's website the "calming effect and sense of peace" instilled for many of the veterans.

It seems that in their sensory interactions with the elements, with the earth, air, water, and with more-than-human beings, the veterans began to transform their experiences. Their encounters with/in the natural world provided alternative experiences to those manifested during their stress reactions and/or through their symptoms associated with post-traumatic distress. As Andy Fisher (2006) observes, "Against the historical interiorizing of the psyche, our bodies call for a re-establishment of safe and loving world-relations" (p. 167). Further, he writes that "the voice of traumatic pain in our own time is thus asking for a more loving, human, spiritualized world. That's the body talking" (ibid.). The body speaks clearly in each of the veterans' narratives.

Safety in Nature

> The Nature in us must have some relation to Nature outside of us; moreover, Nature outside of us must be unveiled to us by the Nature that we are . . . By the Nature in us, we can know Nature, and reciprocally it is from ourselves that living beings and even space speak to us.
>
> —Merleau-Ponty, N, 206

Many veterans, and particularly those suffering from the effects of stress and post-traumatic distress, describe not feeling safe once they return home to Canada or the United States. Their wartime and/or peacekeeping experiences are forever imprinted on their psyche and body, and become the new vantage from which they experience the world, which leads many to feel constantly threatened by the people and situations they encounter in daily life at home. In the Foreword to *Outside the Wire: The War in Afghanistan in the Words of its Participants,* which tells Canadian soldiers' stories of experience in Afghanistan, LGen (ret) Roméo Dallaire (2007) writes about the realities that most soldiers have lived through:

> [E]xperiencing the intensity of battle; being the cause of the destruction of villages, of putting people's homes in the target cross-hairs; being able to do little to address the extreme poverty and deprivation of the children; witnessing the burden and abuse of women in this male-dominated social order; hearing the suffering and cries of the wounded, military and civilian alike; seeing the cold and cruel face of death on your enemy as well as your comrade. (p. ix)

When soldiers return from peacekeeping missions and combat zones, they must contend not only with such experiences, but also with the dramatic contrasts to life at home, including the affluence of our industrialized society and the easy ways which most people go about their daily lives with few or no worries about their personal security (Dallaire, 2007). Dallaire reflects that as the adrenaline high associated with being in a combat zone slowly subsides, "the hurt rises in your stomach and buckles your shoulders under the

weight of sorrow and grief. You're surprised to feel the deep ache of lonesomeness as you sit once again at your family dinner table—where you longed to be" (p. x). He describes how combat itself becomes drug-like—it delivers a "rush" that is unequalled in ordinary human experience, from the smells to the sense of pure power to the exhilaration that comes from defying death.

Robert Poole's (2010) article in *Smithsonian Magazine* tells the story of the Pathway Home treatment center for U.S. soldiers and veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury and/or post-traumatic distress. The center's director, Fred Gusman, describes the common experience of veterans living at the centre:

> You shut down emotionally except when you're raging with anger. You are hyper-vigilant because you don't know where the enemy is. You look for signs of trouble in the line at Wal-Mart, or when someone crowds you on the freeway, or when there's a sudden noise. They are very, very watchful. This kept them alive in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it becomes a problem when they come home. It's not like a light switch you can turn off or on. (Poole, 2010)

In Judy Jackson's (2011) film, one soldier described how after he returned home to Canada from Afghanistan, every person he encountered posed a threat to his person. Similarly, Christian MacEachern described "taking a knee" in Safeway during a panic attack, while Tim Lewis shared the story of how he rushed out of his condo with a baton and bear spray towards the occupants of a car who were honking their horn outside.

What does it mean to feel safe? The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines the word safe as "free of danger or injury" (Barber, 2001). When we do not feel safe, our body becomes tense, constantly on alert. Our heart might pound as increased adrenaline courses through our veins, and we may react in ways that take us by surprise, as in Christian and Tim's examples. Meanwhile, the feeling of safety is also something that we

experience in our bodies. Indeed, an etymological examination of the term 'safe' reveals important insights and connections. Its Latin root *salvus*, which means 'uninjured, healthy, safe,' is related to the Latin *salus*, meaning 'good health,' and *saluber* meaning 'healthful.' Furthermore, all of these words share an ancestral tie to the root *sol*, from the Proto-Indo-European ancestral language, meaning 'whole,' and are thought to be connected to, among other words, the Sanskrit *sarvah,* 'uninjured, intact, whole,' and the Greek *holos,* 'whole' (OED, 2001). Therefore, a sense of safety refers not only to an experience of freedom from danger or lacking injury, but also a state of good health, and a sense of wholeness.

Accordingly, an important thematic connection amongst the veterans' stories is the way they each describe finding safety and/or security in the more-than-human world. For example, Tim Lewis reflected on the difference in the quality of the conversations that occur between veterans in outdoor spaces compared to indoor spaces. He commented that "in order for us [veterans] to have some of these conversations about how we're trained, it's hugely helpful that when we are outdoors, *we feel safe*" (emphasis mine). Further, Tim shared that spending time in nature "allowed us [veterans] to create some space outside that essentially is a *safe* space for us to just talk about [experiences of post-combat stress reactions]. I've spent a lot of time with veterans in other situations . . . but not being outdoors, and the same types of conversations don't happen."

Christian MacEachern reflected on the notions of tension and negative energy and the ways that in his personal experience, it is much easier and feels safer to talk about military incidents and events to a friend or another veteran when both of them are grooming their horses. He contrasted this with his experiences of indoor group therapy

sessions, after which he often found that his agitation and anger had increased rather than decreased. And as he came to notice the ways that spending time outdoors seemed to ease his suffering, Christian began to ask why therapy sessions could not be held outside, around a campfire after a day of canoeing or something similar. His own experiences support his belief that "with being outside, that [negative] energy has a place to go."

Gord Cousins observed that from his childhood through to his rehabilitation and even today, spending time in nature has been the commonality that has carried through his life, and he believes this interaction helped him to adjust to his changing life circumstances. He shared his struggles with frustration and anger during the 1980s, and during our conversation suggested that perhaps there is a link to the fact that when he had young children in the 1980s, he wasn't able to keep up his active outdoor lifestyle. In the 1990s, as he once again became active in the outdoors through his new roles with the Cadets, Gord describes how his angry outbursts and waking periods in the night began to subside.

Shepherd Bliss shared that in his experience the main benefits of farming lie in how it redirects energy to the plants and animals, and there is (or can be) limited contact with other human beings. He has written about how his relationships with other people have improved because of his work on the farm (Bliss, 2009a). Additionally, in Shepherd's narrative, the theme of safety came up in the ways that his farm provides possibilities for new relationships with children. Even though he has no children of his own, Shepherd described himself as newly captured by the grandfather archetype, and observed that his interactions with the children who come to his farm provide "*safe*, intimate contact, which has been hard for me, maintaining relationships." Furthermore, Shepherd reflected

that the farm—the earth, grass, winds, leaves, flowers—the whole community of the land, provides safety for others, who spend time there. In describing some of his informal facilitation work with the veterans who visit his farm, Shepherd noticed that the men sometimes open up around a picnic table in ways they might not in a clinical setting. In this context, Christian McEachern's question "why does counselling and group therapy have to be in the office all the time?" becomes very important.

It seems to me that the veterans are each describing the ways that the natural world calls forth their experience, their negative energy, their suffering. The more-than-human world is big enough to hold their stress and distress. Drawing on attachment theory, Andy Fisher observed that the more-than-human world can become a secure base for children in middle childhood. He reflected that "we learn to rely on the places where we are and our knowledge of them to ground ourselves and to feel a sense of security in the world," and he suggested that this security, while developed in childhood, is something we can return to in adulthood. Thus, when the veterans describe feeling safe and secure in natural spaces, it might be interpreted as their bodies speaking, their bodies saying, 'I feel safe. I feel ok. Let's do more of this.' Indeed, understood within an ecopsychological framework, the experiences and safety the veterans are describing are demonstrating a "life-forwarding directionality." As Fisher (2006) has written:

> When we drop down into our body's silent conversation with the world and join with it, what we find there is nothing arbitrary but rather implied steps of living that move in the direction of an increase in vitality, a resolving of conflicts, a forming of satisfying new meanings, a healing of old emotional wounds, a softening of frozen or structure-bound experiencing, an increase in awareness and feelings of wholeness, and many other possibilities that feel right. (p. 165)

Tim Lewis observed that rather than having expectations about what should be talked about or what needs to happen next, nature "meets you where you're at." And Fisher (2002) has noted elsewhere, "Bearing pain is always a matter of placing it in a larger context so that it both loses its overwhelming power and is given the space it needs to move" (p. 192). In the veterans' narratives, it seems as though the more-than-human world calls forth each one's suffering and says to them, 'You don't need to feel alone. Let us help you hold this suffering. We are bigger than you and we can hold this pain.' Thus, this sense of safety and security found in nature might be one of the best ways of understanding Merleau-Ponty's assertion about the relation and reciprocity between the nature inside us and the nature outside us, of how "the Nature in us must have some relation to Nature outside of us; moreover, Nature outside of us must be unveiled to us by the Nature that we are" (N, 206). At its base the security found in the more-than-human world leads to a sense of good health and wholeness held within the etymology of the word *safe*.

A Renewed Sense of Purpose through Experiences in the Natural World

> My body is a sort of open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others, in the encompassing earth.
>
> —Abram, 1996, p. 62

Another theme that connects the veterans' stories is the way that as each of them spent time in the natural world, he redeveloped a sense of purpose, regained lost confidence, and realized that he had a valuable role to play in his community (which often included helping other veterans, as will be discussed in more detail in the sections still to come). Through spending time in the more-than-human world, the veterans began

to connect mindfully to their surroundings and to find purpose and meaning outside the institutional context of the military, and possibilities for integrating into the wider community.

In exploring the issue of lost confidence and lost purpose, it is perhaps helpful to consider the military, and especially contexts such as military academies, basic training (or 'boot camp'), and missions away from home, within the realm of what sociologist Erving Goffman (1962) names a "total institution." Goffman defines total institution as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals are cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life" (p.xii). Such institutions provide an all-encompassing experience for those working and living inside them. Goffman (1962) observes that in total institutions:

> First, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of the member's daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together. Third, all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time to the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfill the official aims of the institution. (p. 6)

Through military training, members learn very specific ways of being and acting in the institution's context. Joshua Goldstein reflects that the key goal of basic training implants in soldiers a deep sense of discipline and an "instinct to obey orders" (p. 203). This instinct was conveyed in Christian MacEachern's observation that "they train you so hard that it's instinct after a while." Similarly, it is found in Tim Lewis's comment that

"you're trained to respond to situations in a certain way . . . [and] the ideal response in a stressful, dangerous situation is . . . with maximum speed, aggression and violence to take out the enemy or the threat." It also becomes clear in Shepherd Bliss's description of being born into and raised in a long-time military family and growing up living on military bases. He commented that "Demilitarizing myself has been forty-some years. I was militarized the first twenty, twenty-five." In addition, militarization as Goldstein (2001) observes, involves training and disciplining soldiers to suppress their emotions, particularly fear and grief, since "cultural norms [in the military] force men to endure trauma and master fear, in order to claim the status of 'manhood'" (p. 264).

This awareness of the military as an institution that totally orients the lives, bodies, and emotions of soldiers is helpful in understanding the sense of loss and lack of purpose upon leaving the military that was described in some of the veterans' narratives. In addition, as explored in Chapter 7, lost confidence is common for veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress, because flashbacks and panic attacks are unpredictable. Experiencing a flashback and becoming incapacitated in an everyday life situation, such as shopping at the grocery store, can lead post-traumatic distress sufferers to increasingly avoid such situations, and to withdraw and disengage from community life. After all, panic attacks and post-traumatic suffering might be viewed as the opposite of what Nancy Taber (2011a) defines as the "archetypical (ideal) military member" who is "a strong, capable, courageous man who is willing to give up his life to protect the freedoms and way of life of western citizens" (p. 1). Indeed, Christian MacEachern observed that a common sentiment amongst veterans is that their flashbacks, panic attacks and anxiety

make them feel "stupid," and they are always worried about "looking stupider than they already feel."

Christian, too, described a sense of lost confidence and lost purpose after being discharged from the military. And it was a number of years after leaving the military, as he participated in Mount Royal's ETOL program's outdoor activities, that Christian describes a moment of sudden insight after which his confidence started to return: "It was almost as if I realized I could still do it." As his confidence in his own abilities began to return, Christian felt able to take on more of a leadership role amongst his peers. He also began to trust in his ability to provide support to other veterans also suffering from post-traumatic distress, which led him to found the CVAF.

Shepherd Bliss believes that growing high-quality food for other people—organic boysenberries and chicken eggs—has been especially important in his life. "There was something about the recovery of the fruit that enabled my recovery," Shepherd told me. Not only did he, through painstakingly hard work, recover his farm from its previous state of disarray, he also began to provide food to nourish the bodies and souls of others living in his community. Furthermore, he takes on the role of guardian for his chickens, protecting them from predators such as mountain lions, coyotes, and great horned owls. In addition, Shepherd has a prominent role as an advocate for the Farmer Veterans Coalition, hosts other veterans on his farm, and recently began volunteering with the Horses Building Communities program, which supports soldiers, veterans and their families.

When Gord Cousins was discharged from the hospital, he recalls being "in poor shape physically, . . . skitterish, gun shy, underweight." He believes that the sudden

transformation from being in the hospital to working in the bush in and around Thompson, Manitoba, for the summer was crucial to his recovery. “That immersion really rapidly put things behind me and I felt useful. I felt I was engaged. It was the beginning of a feeling that I really had a role to play.” And in the summers that followed, Gord continued to work outdoors. He recalls the experience of getting back into a canoe in the years following his accident: “In each case, I was the bowman. I wasn’t in charge of the canoe. But I was able to portage it and paddle and do the different strokes, like a crossbow draw and stuff like that quite well.”

While Tim Lewis did not expressly speak about lost confidence or a lost sense of purpose, he did describe his clear need to go climbing in the mountains immediately upon his return from Afghanistan. This urge to go climbing was his way of creating decompression time, since his unit did not receive decompression leave at the end of their tour. “It just made sense, after that tour, to come into the mountains,” Tim told me. In the context of his interview, one might interpret Tim’s time in the mountains as him demonstrating his ability and competence to succeed at something outside of the military, while also connecting with the more-than-human world.

In each of these cases, the veterans describe remembering or reacquainting themselves with skills and activities that they had known outside the military—or even that they had learned in the military but perhaps forgotten or not used in their post-military experiences. Andy Fisher (2002) writes that “our bodies . . . still carry the knowledge of our buried needs, of our unactivated interactional patterns” (p. 109). It is important that the areas and activities to which each was drawn involved connecting with the wider world, rather than withdrawing inside themselves. As each veteran immersed

himself in the more-than-human world, and opened up to that experience, his buried bodily needs became known, became once again present in his life. In many of the stories, the veterans described feeling separate from the human communities in which they were living, but as their bodies remembered their role, it would seem that they remembered their humanity, and gained a purpose in life beyond the institutional context of the military. It was the wider world of nature that enabled them to once again connect—with their own bodies, with other humans, and with the more-than-human world. Both Christian and Shepherd described how it continues to be difficult for them, at times, to be part of the human community, but in those times, the wider planetary community—plants and animals in particular—provides the support to ground their lives in the present and carry their living forward.

Relationships Facilitated in More-than-Human Settings

> Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.
>
> —Judith Herman, 1997, p. 133

The veterans' narratives also reflect the importance of social support and camaraderie that are found and facilitated in more-than-human settings, and particularly the importance of these experiences with other veterans. Kurt Hoelting observed that the veterans who take his mindfulness-based stress reduction course get great benefit "from doing this work with others who have been where they are." James Hillman (2004) stresses how even situations of war often bring forth a tenderness and fellow-feeling amongst comrades. He recalls the words of a French soldier who wrote that his experience in the trenches was "the most tender human experience that he had ever

enjoyed" (p. 147). Hence, Hillman reminds us that despite the violence and cruelty inherent in war, there is also beauty in the ways that one soldier's soul responds to another's, and that soldiers find community in fighting together—and even in dying together. The military becomes akin to a second family for most soldiers. For example, Sergeant Russell D. Storring (2007), who served in Afghanistan, describes how the Canadian military "prides itself on being like a family, and the soldiers I have been working with and for prove to me that they care for me as one of their own" (p. 13). Indeed, the ways that the military becomes like a second family can complicate a soldier's experiences and sense of responsibility towards their biological family, since the families tend to have different and often conflicting requirements (Taber, 2011b).

Therefore, when a soldier leaves the military, it is comparable to leaving a family. And in Shepherd Bliss's case, he describes how the experience was like leaving two families, since his decision to resign from the military was not well-received by his biological family. In her discussion of traumatic stress, Judith Herman (1997) indicates that "disconnection from others" is a core experience associated with psychological trauma. Recent research indicates that stress and isolation are harmful to human health and can lead to slower healing and both magnify and multiply illness outcomes; thus, Esther Sternberg (2009) reflects, "positive social interactions are important buffers against stress" (p. 230). Social interaction is an important part of human experience, since as Fisher (2002) observes, "Only a being who essentially belongs *with* others can suffer from isolation" (p. 78).

The experience of isolation, as described in Chapter 7, is common amongst veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress, and during my research, several

interviewees commented on the fact that many veterans spend a lot of time in their home basements. Psychiatrist Dr. Susan Brock, who leads an OSI clinic in Saskatoon, and who also participated in the CVAF's 2009 weekend, wrote the following on the group's website:

> Avoidance, withdrawal, and social isolation are often the most treatment resistant symptoms of PTSD, and the hardest to challenge within a traditional therapy setting. Outdoor adventure programs such as the ones offered by CVAF provide a much needed adjunct to the Veteran's healing by providing opportunities in which the Veteran's fear and anxiety regarding their ability to tolerate social/recreational activities is challenged in a positive and meaningful way. It was a truly rewarding experience as a therapist to witness first-hand the transformation that occurred in this group over the course of the weekend; anxiety transformed into smiles and expressions of joy.

Recent studies have shown the importance of social support in reducing rates of post-traumatic distress among those affected by war (e.g., Ahern et al., 2004). "As human beings we have a need for a place," writes Larry Robinson (2009), "where we can be connected to a community of people, plants, animals and the land" (p. 29). Richard Louv (2008) argues that experiences in nature can be likened to social glue, and that experiences such as gardening together create the possibilities for bonding and creating community. One of the teachers interviewed by Louv noted that when she takes students in her class out to work in the school's garden, no matter what their day has been like, "there is a feeling of shared joy and peace" (p. 217). The more-than-human world, it seems, provides an important context for people to connect at the level of their shared experience. I return again to Kurt Hoelting's remarks about the ways that veterans connect with one another during his MBSR course: "The primary way that we connect with nature is through each other, through our human nature, through words, through emotions, through shared experience."

Indeed, while Western society tends to treat trauma as an individual disease or disorder, Lisa Schirch (2005) observes that in indigenous societies, trauma is often considered a collective experience. And in each of the veterans' narratives, one finds examples of how it is this collective experience that supports veterans in helping one another. For example, Christian MacEachern described how on the first morning of rafting together as a group, the veterans on the CVAF's 2009 summer program began to relax. Indeed, Christian's whole purpose in starting the CVAF was to provide support for other veterans who, like him, were suffering from post-traumatic distress. In Tim Lewis's story, when veterans came together in the outdoors, their conversations often turned to their post-military experiences with anger and hypervigilance, which provided them with insight and understanding into the ways they had been changed by their military service. While Shepherd Bliss focused on the ways that farming can provide solitude when a veteran needs it, he also described how the veterans sit together and find comfort in one another's experiences and stories, both on his own farm when talking together around the picnic table as well as in the Veterans' Writing Group to which he belongs. And Gord Cousins described how it was first volunteering for the Cadets and then being invited to re-enlist into the Reserves—into his old family—that gave him a new sense of purpose in the 1990s, which also coincided with reduced angry outbursts and better sleeping.

Merleau-Ponty brings attention to the fact that "we do not start out in life immersed in our own self-consciousness (or even in that of things) but rather from the experience of other people" (C, 65). He argues that it is only through contact with others that we come to be aware of and understand our own existence. And it is this common understanding and contact with others that seems particularly important in the veterans' stories. But as

Tim Lewis emphasized, in his experience the more-than-human world facilitates interactions that do not happen within more urban or indoor contexts; however, Kurt Hoelting's opening story highlights that through mindfulness practice, changes can and do occur, even in bleak contexts such as a hospital basement. Hoelting asserts that our inner human nature makes sure that we can connect with one another in *any* environment, but that being in a natural setting facilitates and makes the process easier. As Andy Fisher described, it is simply a phenomenological fact that being in the natural world opens human beings to the possibility of making good contact with one another. He suggested that this is related to the ways that the more-than-human world provides a secure base from which we can feel safe enough to make contact with others in a supportive way.

Robert Greenway (2009) recalls that human evolution took place in a tribal setting, in which mutual care and the sharing of activities were important for the very survival of human beings as a species. He argues that spending time together in nature, and particularly in situations that require mutual trust and care, such as camping together, as well as preparing and eating food in a communal setting "arouse this tribal consciousness" (p. 136). And as the veterans expand their sensorial experience of the world, Merleau-Ponty's notions of the flesh and chiasm perfectly encapsulate the moment when they come to realize they are in relationship with one another, that they are indeed human, not so different from one another, and their lives overlap and are intimately intertwined with human and more-than-human others.

In addition, Andy Fisher (2002) writes that "making healing connections with nonhuman others can involve the simplest of acts. Plainly put, any practice that helps reembed us within the society of nature, or expand the field of our care, cannot but help

us bear our pain and suffering" (p. 192). Fisher's reflection is borne out in both Christian MacEachern's and Shepherd Bliss's descriptions of the importance of more-than-human beings in their lives. For Christian, who has often felt isolated since he left the military, his dogs and horse have provided great company and important relationships. Further, Monica Culic observed that Christian has become more grounded and aware of his reactions through spending time with and caring for his horse Sozo, which she implied has helped his relationships with other human beings. And throughout our conversation, Shepherd Bliss referred often to animals and insects. When he remembers the time spent on his uncle's farm, Shepherd recalls milking cows, and making good contact with the animals and bees, watching the community of the chickens and piglets. On his own farm today, he loves to watch his chickens dance and play, and advocates that they have something to teach him. During our conversation, Shepherd also told me about his involvement with the Horses Building Communities program in Sebastopol County, which uses equine therapy to support military men and women and their families at all stages.

Fulfilling a Need to Carry Life Forward

> As André Marchand says, after Klee: "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me. . . . I was there, listening. . . . I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it."
> —Merleau-Ponty, OE, 299

Another commonality across all my interviews, and suggested by the other stories, philosophies and research drawn on in this thesis, is that remembering and connecting with the more-than-human world fulfills a basic need, and as Andy Fisher commented,

creates the possibilities for carrying life forward. Further, ecopsychologist Robert Greenway (2009) suggests asking the following questions: “If healing takes place in the wilderness, what is disease? Does this healing really take place in the wilderness more efficiently than elsewhere? If so, why? And lastly, how?” (p. 133).

Reflecting on some of conditions upheld as ‘disorders’ in modern Western society—‘attention deficit hyperactivity disorder’, ‘seasonal affective disorder’, ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’—one sees that the symptoms are manifested in the body and we might wonder whether our own Western view of the body needs to be reviewed and revised, rather than suggesting that the individual people suffering with these ‘conditions’ are themselves a ‘disorder.’ For example, Richard Louv (2008) reflects on the ways that spending time in nature tends to reduce the symptoms of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He argues that this insight suggests inverting our understanding of ADHD. If ADHD is “a set of symptoms aggravated by lack of exposure to nature,” Louv proposes that “the society that has disengaged the child from nature is most certainly disordered, if well-meaning” (p. 109). Perhaps society is disordered—or pathological even—in its expectation that we dismiss the natural impulses of our bodies. These conditions might instead be understood as the body speaking—the body seeking to gain a voice and to bring attention to the disordered society in which we live.

Yet, in our technologized and economized society, the problem attributed to these ‘disorders’, which generally involves the inability to carry out what is considered a ‘normal routine,’ is attributed to the individual person’s body. Rather than acknowledging that our bodies, too, are natural, and affected by the soil and the rhythms of the seasons, it is implied that there is something wrong with the person who feels this

way. Yet it is interesting to reflect on other possibilities provided by the world, and ways of incorporating rather than ignoring our bodies. Jackie Seidel (2006), for example, describes taking her elementary school students outside to do some writing, and she observed that a child who struggled in an indoor environment was able to concentrate and write as his body connected with the soft grass:

> On the east side of our school yard is a little rise, with a few straggly struggling trees, grass, litter. It is not very nice, but we go there anyway. A warm breeze softly blows against our skin. Each child has chosen a comfortable space. . . . Their bodies are grounded. A child who is never settled inside the school, writes and writes as he lays sprawled widely on the soft grass. (pp. 1904-1905)

Similarly, drawing on the stories of the veterans in this thesis, one might also wonder if post-traumatic distress is perhaps aggravated by lack of exposure to the natural world. Each of the veterans described individually coming to the same realization—that he feels better when he's outside and interacting with the more-than-human world. Tim Lewis shared that he has come across many other veterans, often on their own, also spending time in the mountains, fishing or climbing or skiing. "They're doing it almost full time and there's a reason why they're out there," he observed.

Indeed, this was a common theme across all my interviews, not only with the veterans but also with all of the CVAF board members, and with Kurt Hoelting and Andy Fisher, as well as in my own personal and family experience. All the CVAF board members spoke about the ways that in their experience with groups in the outdoors, they had personally observed remarkable changes in participants over the length of, for example, a camp experience or a mountain climbing trip, and how these types of experiences bring people together. Moreover, all of the veterans asserted their belief that

experiences in the more-than-human world are important for every human being, not just those suffering from stress and distress. As Tim Lewis commented, "I think somewhere inside it taps into some of the same basic needs. And I can't explain it. I'm not sure if I really want to explain it either. It's good that there's mystery around. I just feel better when I do this."

Regaining Humanity through the More-than-Human World

> A human being is a servant of nature, a plain member of the community of all life . . . As a psychotherapist I know that all people need to love and be loved, that they all suffer in some way or other, and that they are all basically good. As an ecopsychologist, I can now say with equal confidence that *all people need to experience themselves as part of the natural world, need to understand their own naturalness*.
>
> —Fisher, 2002, p. 193 (emphasis mine)

None of the themes explored to this point stands on its own; rather, they all work together to contribute to the veterans' experiences. Moreover, all the themes culminate in the main theme underlying this research: that through the more-than-human world, it is possible to regain one's lost sense of humanity. This lost humanity seems to be a common experience amongst those living in the midst of violence and conflict. In Judy Jackson's (2011) film *War in the Mind*, Wayne, a young veteran, observed that "being a basic human being conflicts with being a soldier in some circumstances. Because you know as a human being what you should be doing, but as a soldier, it may be different." Meanwhile, Morris the former Sierra Leonean child soldier, whose story was told in Chapter 9, reflected that what led him to escape from his former life was that he felt empty, he no longer felt human (Lederach and Lederach, 2010). And I return to the scene in the documentary *Shake Hands with the Devil*, when LGen (ret) Roméo Dallaire stands

on that verdant hilltop in Rwanda and tells his wife Élizabeth, *“C’est ici que j’ai redevenu humain”* (“It’s here that I became human again”). Outside a military context, John Wallach (2000) contends that most of the teens who come to the Seeds of Peace Camp in Maine develop over the course of three weeks together “a new level of compassion for one another as human beings” (p. 13). All of these reflections share a similarity in that all comment on being human, and imply that war and violence can lead a person to lose their sense of humanity.

Indeed, when reading accounts of soldiers in both training and combat, one realizes the inhumanity involved in becoming and being a warrior—that both the training and the actual act of being a soldier tend to go against a person’s very nature. To be clear, in suggesting this, I am not advocating for a romantic view of the blissful and harmonious “peaceable kingdom” in which there is an absolute lack of conflict and violence. Nature itself involves a certain amount of violence in a world where, as Ursula Le Guin (1994) reminds us, “we eat each other in order to live . . . When lions and lambs lie down in the wilderness, the lamb ends up inside the lion. That’s how it is” (p. 110). However, I am also not basing my reflections in the view popularized by ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who described human beings as inheriting through evolution an “aggressive instinct” (Mansfield, 1982, p. 3).

In the trauma literature focused on soldiers and veterans, an area that seems generally lacking is the way that military training itself might contribute to the trauma response; instead, the focus tends to be only on the specific traumatic events that result in experiences of distress. Yet the UBC Veteran’s Transition Program director commented to Judy Jackson (2011) that part of the purpose of the program is to “undo the wiring that

military training has implanted in [the veterans'] brain." And as noted earlier, Christian MacEachern, Tim Lewis, Gord Cousins and Shepherd Bliss all spoke about their military training and/or upbringing as influential in their lives. While each described gaining many skills and a sense of discipline through his training, I was often struck by the ways that their training, such as sleep deprivation training, being marched around to the point of exhaustion, being constantly yelled at, and being taught to respond with speed, aggression, and violence, also involved ignoring their bodies and what their bodies were signalling. As Jungian psychoanalyst James Hillman (2004) reflects, "The eventual unbearable division between the engine of war and human warrior commences in the drills learned in basic training performed as ceremonies of separation. The hard-ass drill sergeant hollering at recruits is one way to imagine the beginnings of stress" (p. 63). Ryan Flavelle, a reservist in the Canadian Army and a student at the University of Calgary, who volunteered to go to Afghanistan in 2008, provides an example from the combat zone. In Flavelle's (2011) book, *The Patrol*, he reflects that he came home to Canada a completely changed person, and he writes: "I left behind a lot of what was good about me in the grape fields of Panjway" (p. 7).

Andy Fisher (2002) suggests that when we, as human beings, are alienated from our body's naturalness, our body is in *conflict* with itself. He describes how "kinship with the rest of nature has traditionally been won by admitting boundaries and then *dialoguing* with the nonhuman presences on the other side of them, through ritual, dream, myth, nonordinary states of consciousness, skillful everyday interaction, and so forth" (p. 96). And the veterans' experiences themselves spoke to the ways that their training often went against their instincts. Tim Lewis described how his training taught him to respond with

speed, aggression, and violence to situations he encountered in the battlefield, but how these responses did not serve him once he left the military. Christian MacEachern, too, spoke about the training he received on the leadership course: “They train you so hard that it’s instinct after awhile . . . and it starts to affect your home life.” Shepherd Bliss described being raised in a military family, in which he was marched around, called “Number One” rather than his real name, taught military strategy at age four, and moved every three years. As Shepherd reflected on these experiences later in life, his realized that during his youth, his only respite came during the time he spent on his uncle’s farm in Iowa. It was on his uncle’s farm that he felt most at home in his own body and being.

Coming back to the theme of losing and regaining one’s humanity, it is important to then ask: What is it to be human? Dallaire answers that question, at least in part, later in the documentary, when he returns to that hilltop in Rwanda and tells filmmakers, “I want to show you where in all this I could find myself. I could find the solace and be one with my soul, with my heart, with my being.” In Viktor Frankl’s (2006) account of life in Nazi death camps, it seemed, too, that encounters with sunsets, mountains, and trees, no matter how brief, reminded concentration camp prisoners of their humanity. Many of the young Srebrenica survivors who participated in the ASeTTS program came to a personal turning point after their time and interactions in the Australian countryside (Burgess, 1998). In the Wilderness Therapy Project of Kathorus, formerly warring youths began to transform their relationships by taking part in a seven-day trek through the Dragon Mountains, and also transformed their relationships with their communities (Robertson and De Kiewit, 1998). And during the American-Soviet walks, Brigham (2010) noted that it was in the

act of sharing bread and salt together (both of which come from the earth) that the Russians and Americans came into a new relationship with one another.

In looking at these examples, it is helpful to return to the etymological origins of the word ‘human,’ the Latin *humus*, which quite literally implies that humans are of the earth, soil or ground. Similarly, the Hebrew word for ‘man,’ *adam*, comes from the Hebrew *adamah*, meaning ‘ground.’ Indeed, this notion of being human, as connected to the earth and soil, points to the central insight of this research—that our bodies and minds are inseparable from the sensible world. To be human is to be nature. As Merleau-Ponty observed, “There is no break in this circuit; it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here” (OE, 319). The Western habit of mind, however, resists this insight, since the separate self is a defining feature in our individualistic worldview. Drawing on the work of Alan Watts, ecofeminist philosopher and theologian Catherine Keller (2002) observes in an interview with Derrick Jensen that “one of the prime hallucinations of Western culture—and I would add the paradigm of dominance—is the belief that who you are is a skin-encapsulated ego” (p. 274).

Amongst the symptoms associated with post-traumatic distress are feelings of isolation, loneliness, and helplessness, resulting in increasingly avoidant behaviour and a disengagement from the outside world, and an overwhelming sense of being able to do nothing. The word ‘alone’ itself is a contraction of ‘all one,’ and comes from the Old English *all ana* meaning ‘unaccompanied, all by oneself.’ Similarly, ‘isolate’ stems from the Latin *insulatus*, meaning ‘island.’ To be alone and isolated thus implies that we are unrelated. Meanwhile, the word ‘humanity’ refers to kindness and graciousness, and stems from the Old French *humanité*, which referred, in part, to life on earth, and

originally came from the Latin *humanitatem*, also suggesting philanthropy and kindness (OED, 2001). These notions of kindness, graciousness, and philanthropy that lie at the heart of the word 'humanity' are all opposites of feeling alone and isolated—they suggest moving outside oneself, an engagement and relationship with others and with the world. A restored sense of humanity thus implies coming back to participation in the (more-than-human) world.

Within Western thought, nature is sometimes metaphorically thought of as 'mother.' However, Leroy Little Bear (2000) shares that from an Indigenous perspective, "Earth is our Mother (and this is not metaphor: it is real)" (p. 78). Similarly, when I write that we are nature, this is not metaphor. All the narratives in this thesis demonstrate the realness of this statement in a profound way. As David Abram (1996) observes, "We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (p. 22).

So many of the stories in this thesis have been tales of lost humanity—amongst war veterans, former child soldiers, refugees, and other peoples affected by conflict. And in each of the cases, what helped to recall their humanity, and to reimbue life with new or remembered meaning, was intimate contact with more-than-human nature. It was through intimate embodied contact with/in nature that they remembered they are part of the world, that they are anchored to the world, and that they began to make sense of their experiences. It seems, perhaps, that it is only in contact and deep relationship with the natural world that we become most human (*humus*—of the earth). Indeed, Catherine Keller (1990) has suggested revising Western views of ourselves as human beings and instead adopting the concept of *earthlings* in a "matrix of relations to all the other earthlings" (p. 221). While those of us who have grown up surrounded by the language

and culture of science fiction may feel slightly uncertain about this term *earthling*, the original meaning of the term refers to an 'inhabitant of the earth' (OED, 2001). Indeed, it seems that this is the overall direction pointed to by the veterans' stories and the other narratives in this thesis.

The movement from aloneness to humanity is vivid in all the narratives. For example, there was Morris, who brought together other former child soldiers living in a refugee camp in Ghana, to start a farm together, and build relationships with one another as they work the land, as well as continue to reach out to the others living in the refugee community. Christian MacEachern started the CVAF with the specific intent of working with other veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress. Shepherd Bliss hosts other veterans on his farm and is involved in community programs for soldiers, veterans and their families such as Horses Building Communities. And Tim Lewis and Gord Cousins are also active with reaching out to other soldiers and veterans.

Catherine Keller (2002) comments that, "We know that on a physical level, one is not 'on one's own,' that we have to breathe and eat and excrete, and that even on a molecular scale our boundaries are permeable. The same is true psychically. Life feeds off life" (p. 274). During our conversation, Kurt Hoelting reflected on the moment on his kayak retreats when participants move beyond their intellectual understanding of nature and realize that "at a cellular or visceral level, we're part of something really huge." Kurt described how this experience is catalytic for participants. Similarly in the veterans' narratives of recovery, one can appreciate their realization that the more-than-human world is deeply implicated in their own life and experience. The veterans' stories point clearly to their bodies saying that nature is a place they feel secure, and that it is in

contact with the wider world that they find hope and possibilities for carrying their human living forward.

Each in their different ways, the veterans seem to be describing their innate desire—perhaps both conscious and unconscious—to go beyond human communities and to connect with the more-than-human world. As Robert Greenway (2009) writes, “the ecological unconscious is as ‘ecological’ as it is psychological—it connects to our surroundings, to the balances, cycles, patterns, and relationships that are described by ecology and that we can experience by staying outside” (p. 137). Moreover, as Andy Fisher describes, each veteran’s body is implying its need to connect to the larger world, which is demonstrated by the shift in their experiences when they spend time in nature. Each veteran’s narrative provides an overwhelming sense of presence, mindfulness, and awareness, as well as the calmness and peace that comes with that experience. Indeed, perhaps the veterans are describing what Kurt Hoelting remarked is “the boundary between self and world softening,” the ways that he describes the heart and mind can open more easily and quickly in nature. In the next chapter, I explore why this and the other themes and insights presented in this chapter are important for peace and conflict studies.

Chapter 11
Bringing Nature to Consciousness

> Story has the power to bring soul back to the world: old stories about the Earth and its landscape, new stories that give us fresh ideas about connecting to the Earth and to each other.
>
> —Larry Robinson, 2009, p. 29

This chapter begins with an exploration of why the themes in the previous chapter and the overall research in this thesis matter to peace and conflict studies. Then, to explore the broader theoretical implications of this research, I return to the three remaining research questions outlined at the beginning of this thesis to examine the role that narrative plays in bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies, the ways that nature might be considered an active participant in recovery processes, and the ways that veterans' narratives might inform the stories of civilian survivors.

Why Does this Research Matter for Peace and Conflict Studies?

A theme running through the veterans' narratives and other stories throughout this thesis, as well as a purpose of this thesis, involves contemplating and bringing remembrance to our bodies and minds as inseparable from the sensible world. By extension, this entails working against Western culture's general forgetfulness that *we are nature*. The question that now arises is the significance of this remembrance within peace

and conflict studies. Why does contemplating and remembering that we are nature matter for those working within the areas of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and trauma recovery?

In his book *The Nonhuman Environment: In Normal Development and In Schizophrenia*, psychoanalyst Harold Searles (1960) argued that most studies in psychoanalysis have been limited to understanding inter- and intra-*personal* processes in personality development and have considered nature to be irrelevant, “as though human life were lived out in a vacuum—as though the human race were alone in the universe, pursuing individual and collective destinies in a homogeneous matrix of nothingness, a background devoid of form, color, and substance” (p. 3). In response to these studies, and drawing on his work with schizophrenic patients, Searles began articulating his vision that nature is of primary importance to the human psyche, since the human personality matures within a “total matrix” comprising “predominantly nonhuman elements—trees, clouds, starts, landscapes, buildings, and so on *ad infinitum*” (p. 53). Accordingly, he observes that when humans ignore the connections between their psyches and nature, it endangers their psychological well-being.

At the end of Chapter 4, I briefly pointed to the importance of recent work by some peacebuilding scholars and practitioners, who are advocating art, culture, ritual, storytelling, and sport as activities for building relationships and creating possibilities for living together (e.g., Bar-On, Kutz and Wegner, 2000; Cohen, 2003; Lederach, 2005; Lederach and Lederach, 2010; Schirch, 2005; Senehi, 2000, 2002; Shank and Schirch, 2008). And Chapter 9 featured stories from around the world which showed how in

practice, more-than-human nature does feature into peacebuilding and processes aimed at recovery from trauma, violence, and conflict.

In his lectures on Canadian public radio on the topic of “Becoming Human,” Jean Vanier (1998), a philosopher and the founder of the international network of l’Arche communities for people living with intellectual disabilities, reflected that “the discovery of our common humanity liberates us from self-centred compulsions and inner hurts; it is the discovery that ultimately finds its fulfillment in forgiveness and in loving those who are our enemies. It is the process of truly becoming human” (p. 5). This notion of coming into relationships with others—even with those who are our enemies—is an important theme peace and conflict studies theory and praxis. A central focus of the field is on building and changing relationships between adversaries and people living in the midst of violence and conflict, and finding possibilities for nonviolent ways of relating. For example, John Paul Lederach and his daughter Angela Jill Lederach (2010) recently reflected on their growing admiration for the role of love and the tangible impacts of loving relationships in peacebuilding contexts, but they note that love tends to be overlooked and dismissed in the scholarship associated with healing and reconciliation. They suggest that peace research is often considered a ‘soft’ science, which causes it to struggle for legitimacy amongst other established disciplines, and they argue this struggle may be part of the reason that love does not feature into the discourse, for “to directly and openly discuss love enters the slippery slope of the intangibles that lie outside the scientific endeavour” (p. 231). Lederach and Lederach, however, believe that it is unconditional love in the face of violence, hatred, and animosity that changes relationships and opens spaces for individual and social healing. Indeed, their musings

about the overall dismissal of love within academic disciplines parallel my own experiences of trying to discuss nature.

Two recent Canadian studies involving children whose school grounds incorporated diverse aspects of nature settings, such as food, wildflower, and/or butterfly gardens, and other natural play spaces including ponds and trees provide important insights (Dyment, 2005; Bell and Dyment, 2006). Not only were children in these play settings more physically active and had a better understanding of nutrition and where their food came from (compared with children playing on the conventional asphalt and turf spaces found at most Canadian schools), the children in the green school grounds also showed tremendous increases in civil behaviour and cooperative, collaborative, and respectful play, and were much more likely to demonstrate increased curiosity and wonder about the world, as well as to think more creatively. The children who played in these natural spaces were also much more likely to integrate groups traditionally excluded from their play, and to overlook the habitual divisions of gender, socio-economic status, physical ability, and ethnicity, so that all children played together (Dymant, 2005). Concepts such as civility, cooperation, collaboration, respect, curiosity, and creativity are all important in peace and conflict studies, for they are considered key aspects in changing and fostering different and better relationships between human beings.

In revisiting Kurt Hoelting's assertion that it is the nature inside each veteran that connects outward, and that helps them connect with one another and facilitate their own healing, one finds deep resonances with the central ideas in peace and conflict studies. Kurt reflected that the human connection that develops between him and the veterans is "actually a manifestation of healing nature . . . That our human nature wants to connect.

And the primary way that we connect with nature is through each other, through our human nature, through words, through emotions, through shared experience." Most importantly, Kurt's observation lends itself to understanding why this research matters for peace and conflict studies. Reflecting on his comment opens the current the focus on human relationships within peace and conflict studies to broader conversations about intersections with the more-than-human world: that it is *because* of the fact that we are nature that we seek and are able to establish connections and relationships with other humans (and with more-than-human beings, too), including with our adversaries and those who have harmed us. *It is our very (human) nature that connects us—and that enables and impels us to connect.*

A frequently expressed idea within the field is that peacebuilding requires people to recognize their common humanity. Based on this thesis research, I propose that the recognition of common humanity, at its base, is a recognition of the nature inside one another. Accordingly, when people develop changed relationships with one another (including with their adversaries), these relationships are the biggest manifestation of the ways our human nature wants to connect beyond ourselves. And then as Kurt further commented, when this desire to connect with others "can be linked to the wider nature that we actually come out of and that sustains us literally from one breath to another and from one meal to another and it sustains our sense of being part of something much bigger than ourselves, then all the better."

To further explore the theoretical implications of these insights and stories for peace and conflict studies, I now turn to examining the questions of: 1) What role does narrative play in bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies? 2) How

might nature be considered an active participant in recovery processes? and 3) In what ways might the veterans' narratives inform the stories of civilian survivors?

Narrative: Bringing Nature to Consciousness

> Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long.
>
> —Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p. 35

Narrative has a holistic quality, and is capable of getting at experience in ways that other forms of research are not (Connelly and Clandinin, 1991). In Chapter 6, I explored some of the recent empirical studies into the ways that interactions with the natural world lessen stress, anxiety, depression, anger, aggression, and overall tension in human beings. This thesis research, however, has come at the connections between nature and recovery in another way—through the use of narratives and stories of embodied experience.

Human life might be thought of, at least in part, as a quest to make meaning. Storyteller Ben Okri (1997) reflects that "we are storytelling beings" (p. 114), while Thomas King (2003) declares that "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (p. 2). According to Linda Hogan (2002), the vital quality of stories stems from the way they create "a shortcut to the world of emotion, a direct path to the mythic and unconscious, to meaning" (p. 124). Thus, the stories we tell, and the stories we are told tend to determine the future directions and possibilities for our society (R.T. Lakoff, 2000). As noted earlier, one of the factors that inspired this research involved the ways in which the dominant narratives in peace and conflict studies, and in the academy more broadly, overlook and dismiss context, place, and more-than-human nature. I have described the tendency in academic accounts of peacebuilding processes to disregard context in favour

of reporting the methods used and relationships changed. Based on a shallow view of nature as ‘resources’ for human wealth and consumption, stories tend to be told independent of their locale, as though they might have occurred in any place. Yet David Abram (1996) reminds us that events are always specific to the places where they occur, that “each place has its own dynamism, its own patterns of movement, and these patterns engage the senses and relate them in particular ways, instilling particular moods and modes of awareness” (p. 182).

Recent years have seen a newfound appreciation for narrative within Western academic contexts, which has created openings for the stories of the long-marginalized ‘other’ to be heard (Berger and Quinney, 2005; Cohen, n.d.). There are increasing examples of the use of personal stories throughout Western society, including as a research method in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as a method to support suffering. For example, Svetlana Alexievich (2005) collected and published *Voices from Chernobyl*, an entire book of stories—no analysis—of the first-person experiences of people who lived in Chernobyl at the time of the 1986 explosion and fire at the nuclear power plant. Oral historian, therapist and writer, Julie Heifetz’s (1989) collection, *Too Young to Remember*, tells the stories of child survivors of the Holocaust who had never before told their stories. In her work with the Suicide Prevention Action Network, Heifetz has also worked to gather and write the stories of people whose lives have been affected by the suicide of a close relative (www.spanusa.org). Another example is the Jerusalem Stories Project, started by Carol Grosman, which aims to harness the “power of personal stories and portrait photographs to promote empathy, a critical component of sustainable peace,” to present “a human perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” and to share

"the deeply moving experiences of a broad variety of Jerusalem residents" (Jerusalem Stories Project, n.d., ¶1).

There is also increasing interest within peace and conflict studies in using narrative to understand conflict issues and provide possibilities for understanding and reconciliation between adversaries (e.g., Bar-On et al., 2000; Cohen, 1994; Heifetz, 2003; Jerusalem Stories Project, n.d.; Lederach and Lederach, 2010; Senehi, 2002; Wallach and Wallach, 2000). Cynthia Cohen's (n.d.) research points to the powerful effects that sharing stories can have on former adversaries. The ultimate possibility, in terms of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, is that sharing stories can help adversaries "to understand each other's experiences, the meaning each community attaches to historical events, and their moral sensibilities" (p. 15). It seems, too, that story holds the potential to bring peacebuilding and ecology together, since stories not only can help adversaries find ways of empathizing with one another, but stories are always place-bound and rooted in ecosystems (Westlund, 2010).

Rinda West (2007) contends that when we are exposed to stories that differ from the dominant cultural narratives (for example, stories that reveal the deep connections between human life and the ecosphere versus those that *exclude* nature or that shallowly include nature as resources for human exploitation), we begin to see other possibilities beyond those once assumed universal. Perhaps, then, it is important to unleash narratives that counter the dominant stories independent of locale and nature, since once a story is told, "it is loose in the world" (King, 2003, p. 10). Unleashing such counternarratives has the potential to open spaces for new dialogue and possibilities for living differently with one another and in the world.

Many scholars, philosophers and activists now acknowledge and are harnessing the potentials of narrative to connect humans and more-than-human beings, both past and present, in ways that are concrete and lived, rather than the abstract generalizations that come from theory and generalized accounts (Peterson, 2001). Story engages our imaginations; it allows us to imagine ourselves as another (Kearney, 1997). Story is capable of moving people to action, precisely because it integrates bodies and lived experience (Neilsen, 1998). Lorri Neilsen (1998) reflects that stories grounded in real lives have the power to move people from being spectators to being actors. Indeed, Julie Heifetz (2008) observes that stories "are a powerful way to understand the experience of others. Stories teach us about another's situation at the same time as they affect us emotionally" (¶1). As political theorist Hannah Arendt (1968) observed, "the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would think and feel if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking" (p. 241).

Thus, unlike the world of statistics and norms which have become commonplace for making and sharing meaning within the contemporary meta-stories of rationality and progress, storytelling cannot be controlled and has important capacities for contributing to social change. Accordingly, the veterans' narratives in this thesis seek to give space to the former soldiers' personal experiences and to their realizations that their embodied interconnections within the more-than-human world provide alternative experiences to their military training and combat exposure. In examining the possibilities of narrative for bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies, one finds that through the veterans' narratives, their bodies have a voice, and beyond that, nature has a voice

through their bodies. It may not be that narrative can story nature into sense, especially in modern Western thought and language, which often depict our bodies as entirely separate from or outside of nature; however, narrative provides a move towards storying nature in modern experience.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that “our body is intimately tied to what we walk on, sit on, touch, taste, smell, see, breathe, and move within. Our corporeality is part of the corporeality of the world” (p. 565). Further, nature is not an ‘other’ or an assortment of objects we might stumble upon. It is the basis of our being, “the locus of our existence and identity. We cannot and do not exist apart from it” (p. 566). This research therefore suggests a holistic move towards an understanding of human beings as embodied minds, as animals who respond to the world in certain ways, for whom context, surroundings, and the more-than-human world are essential to our experience. As Merleau-Ponty commented, “nature and consciousness can only truly communicate in us and through our incarnate being” (RC, 77).

Since he was born, my son Cameron and I have spent a lot of time looking at and reading books together, and I’m often struck by the vast number of children’s stories that feature animals, insects, plants, rocks, the moon and stars, oceans, rivers and lakes. Most of the animals talk and have relationships with one another, with human beings, and with the readers. The animals are not the passive animals that we adults tend to think them to be—they are animated and wise, cunning and clever with wonderful senses of humour. They do both fun and foolish things when the humans aren’t watching—talk to one another, play together, and make fun of the humans. Indeed, in this way, there is a similarity between children’s stories and the stories told by indigenous peoples around

the world. Yet, unlike for many indigenous peoples, for most of us living in Western society, nature at some point loses its voice and the enchantment that it held during childhood. Still, as seen in the narratives in this thesis, the rhythms of the more-than-human world become part of and leave traces on each person's story. Thus, one of the strengths and possibilities provided by narrative is that it can open space for the long-marginalized 'other' to be heard—the other, including bodies, including nature, who has fallen outside our consciousness.

Historian Simon Schama (1995) argues that "our entire landscape tradition is . . . a tradition built from a rich deposit of myths, memories, and obsessions" (p. 14). He reflects that these myths and memories lay generally beneath the surface of consciousness but that they are accessible with some work. And within this thesis, one might begin to see the ways that narrative can bring nature to consciousness. Each story is embedded in a set of ecological relationships and the locations themselves become participants in the story. Nature speaks through the veterans' bodies and through their stories of embodied experience as they come into relationship with one another and with the natural world.

The other importance of paying attention to narrative and stories of experience comes from the enormous difficulty that exists in describing and articulating the importance of nature using contemporary English (and other Western) language and thought. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, I have at times struggled (and still do to struggle) with finding the right words, and with using words, such as nature, that are deeply embedded in certain discourses and therefore, it has been difficult to transcend the dualistic categories that first come to mind: inside/outside, human/nature, mind/body, and so on. Indeed, much of what I have been working to describe in this thesis is beyond

language. It is about a depth of feeling, about embodied experience, about something beyond the traditional words and language we rely on in both the academy and in everyday life. This is why Merleau-Ponty was seeking a new language towards the end of his life, working to express his thought using concepts such as the flesh and chiasm and exploring these notions using topological terms such as enveloping, overlapping, encroaching, coiling over, the fold, and intertwining (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011). Similarly, Robert Greenway (1995) has suggested that ecopsychology involves a search for new language to "reveal the dynamics of the human-nature relationship" (p. 123). During our conversation, Andy Fisher expressed his belief that new and better language will come for talking about our experiences with/in nature. At the moment, however, we're limited by our Western perceptions and language, and Fisher emphasized the importance of the phenomenological method, "especially in these territories where we don't have conceptions or language to right away make sense of things, we need to follow the lead of our experience and then find a language that describes this experience."

I have struggled in this thesis to articulate the dynamics and depth of the relationship and what occurs when we have experiences within, and connect to, the more-than-human world. This is why it is necessary to read and hear stories of experience, because these stories enable us to imagine ourselves in the place of another. For example, when Shepherd Bliss described his first encounter with the delicate and vulnerable lily at the bottom of his property and how he fell to the ground and wept—his response was beyond language, yet we can perhaps imagine ourselves in his place and understand what this might have been like. When we learn of Christian MacEachern sitting on the banks

of the river, after experiencing years of isolation, depression, anger and other difficulties associated with post-traumatic distress, and his description of feeling at peace with life for a moment, we can imagine ourselves in his place, and know that this was a moment beyond words. There are similar moments in each of the narratives in this thesis, ranging from the former child soldiers who are working the land together and we might imagine their joy and excitement as they cultivate new life, to the Palestinians and Israelis who walked, talked, and laughed together beneath the trees in that Norwegian forest. All of these examples demonstrate the power of stories of experience to shift us out of our old paradigm into a new one, and hopefully as this shift occurs, we can also cultivate a shift in language to represent our new understanding.

Nature as an Active Participant in Peacebuilding and Recovery

Another of the questions asked at the beginning of this thesis was: How might nature be considered an active participant in recovery processes, rather than a passive backdrop? All of the narratives explored in this thesis demonstrate the power of what happens when this inner human nature is linked to the more-than-human world. Deep change can occur, both of the fleeting and lasting varieties. The veterans' stories, as well as the other interviews conducted for this research, have emphasized the importance of the earth and skies, the winds and rocks in Western frameworks for recovery from conflict. In telling these different stories together, it seems that the more-than-human world really does *matter* for post-conflict recovery—and also matters for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. By telling these stories, I am arguing that remembering nature, and remembering human beings *as* nature, in any and all endeavours, including

peacebuilding and trauma recovery, hold powerful possibilities for change and for life on earth, for human beings and the more-than-human world.

Through embodied interactions with/in the natural world, Christian MacEachern, Tim Lewis, Gord Cousins, and Shepherd Bliss, as well as the veteran-farmers mentioned in Chapter 9, were set on a path of recovery from their stress and/or trauma. Through farming together in their refugee community, former child soldiers are working towards their own healing and attempting to heal relationships with their wider community. Young male refugees and survivors of the Srebrenica massacre now living in Australia found new ways of coping and recovering from their unspeakable traumas through time spent in the Australian countryside. Formerly warring youths in South Africa developed new relationships both with one another and with their communities following their experience trekking together and caring for one another in the Dragon Mountains. In the Butterfly Gardens in Sri Lanka, Tamil and Muslim children developed friendships across ethnic lines. Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis experienced a brief moment of calm and harmony together after an all-day safari. The outdoor orienteering aspect of the Football for Peace Project was found to be the most successful activity for breaking down barriers and building bridges between Arab and Jewish children. During the Cold War, in walking through the Russian countryside and breaking bread together, American and Soviet walkers developed new relationships and came to recognize their many similarities. During a walk in the woods together as part of the To Reflect and Trust seminar in Hamburg, participants in the Palestinian-Israeli session experienced a sense of togetherness that was absent from their indoor sessions. At both the Seeds of Peace Camp in Maine and the Cyprus Consortium’s Youth Camp, teenagers from conflict zones came

to new understandings of one another and developed deep and lasting friendships with those they once considered their enemy. And in both the negotiations to end Apartheid in South Africa and the talks between Palestinians and Israelis that led to the Oslo Accord, many of the transformative moments and opportunities came when the adversaries spent time together in the more-than-human world.

Indeed, in exploring nature's role as an active participant, this section connects with the previous one, in terms of understanding narrative's role in bringing nature to consciousness in peace and conflict studies. It seems that narrative also offers the best possibility for considering nature as an active participant in recovery and peacebuilding. As Merleau-Ponty points out, the body is what provides the most immediate access to nature. And narrative is able to explore embodied experience, which counters the meta-stories of rationalism and progress in contemporary Western society.

In addition, in Richard Louv's (2008) work with children and nature, he advocates that schools should build relationships with "agricultural associations, nature centers, environmental organizations, and bird sanctuaries, rather than using them for one-shot visits" (p. 222). And I wonder whether those working in the areas of peacebuilding and recovery would also benefit from working with such organizations and associations? It may be that building relationships with the more-than-human world taps into the ecological unconscious and the innate need to connect with the wider world. And it would be my hope that as the ecological unconscious moves into conscious memory, and we realize that nature is what connects us with one another, with our ancestors, and all other past, present and future life on the planet, that new ways would be found of

interacting and exploring relationships with the more-than-human world. As David Abram (2007) writes:

> The one world we all have in common is the very world that we share with the other animals and the plants—this earthly dimension of wind and water and sky, shivering with seeds and warmed by the sun. Hence, it seems unlikely that we will locate a lasting ethic without rediscovering our solidarity with all those other shapes of sentience, without remembering ourselves to the swallows and the meandering rivers. (p. 175)

If we can escape the power of the rationality and progress meta-stories, and instead replace them with ones that recognize the interdependence between humans and more-than-humans, it is possible that this not only leads to increased wellbeing amongst all human beings but also to finding better relationships with one another. We might once again be in touch, quite literally, with the seasons, the trees, the rivers and oceans, the soil, the pebbles and mountains that support all life.

Expanding the Veterans' Narratives to Civilian Trauma Survivors

Human lives and relationships are harmed and destroyed by extended cycles of violence and conflict. Lederach and Lederach (2010) argue that "an inquiry into healing requires that we think about how to recoup what has been lost" (p. 203). This research with veterans has illuminated that, at least in part, what has been lost during their training and/or combat experiences is the connection with the wider world. It also suggests that the veterans' healing and recovery is best understood when located in the context of nature—human nature and the more-than-human world. Moreover, the veterans' stories show the need for constantly nurturing this relationship with the more-than-human—it is not a one-time process, but rather one that sustains them through continual interaction with the wider planetary community. Lederach and Lederach write:

> There is no 'and-they-lived-happily-ever-after' in the real world of deep-rooted conflict. In fact the rise of resonance may last for fleeting moments only. What can last and remain more permanently available are the elements that permit the creating and re-creating of meaningful conversation, the bases from which resonance may rise, alongside other experiences of dissonance and silence. From this perspective there is a need to nurture the context within which a mixing of vibrations can happen, not as a one-time event but as a continuous engagement, constantly in need of renewal. (p. 207)

Trauma does not disappear when peace agreements are signed. Often the agreement is just the beginning. Lederach and Lederach (2010) reflect that healing and recovery are experiences and journeys that are "unique and highly idiosyncratic and varied" (p. 204). They require courage and strength. It is well-known that war and violent conflict deeply affect the human psyche, for soldiers and civilian populations alike. Indeed, refugees and internally displaced peoples have suffered high levels of exposure to severe traumas and commonly suffer from post-traumatic symptoms and depression (Carlson and Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Mollica et al., 2007). In Somalia, for example, which has been ravaged by war and extreme violence for the past two decades that has forced many people to flee their homes, up to one-third of the population suffers from ill mental health, and many of them from post-traumatic distress (York, 2011).

The effects of post-traumatic distress amongst conflict survivors also last long after a conflict is over and peace agreements are signed (Prince et al., 2007). For example, amongst Bosnian refugees, 45% were found to suffer either from depression or post-traumatic distress, or both (Mollica et al., 2004). Steel and colleagues (2002) found that amongst Vietnamese refugees who had been resettled in Australia, those who had been exposed to three or more incidences of trauma (which is considered high exposure to trauma) were likely to continue to suffer from mental distress even ten years after

resettling in their new country. And more than twenty years after refugees from the Cambodian civil war were resettled in the United States, many of them continue to suffer from the effects of trauma (Marshall et al., 2005).

In De Jong, Komproe and Van Ommeren's (2003) study of four post-conflict settings (Algeria, Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Palestine), peoples who had been exposed to violence during conflict as well as to other stressors, such as those associated with living in refugee camps, commonly reported suffering from post-traumatic distress. Catherine Panter-Brick and colleagues (2009) recently found high levels of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic distress amongst Afghan adults. And Derluyn and colleagues (2004) found extreme rates (97% or 69 out of 71 children in their study) of post-traumatic distress amongst former child soldiers in northern Uganda who had been part of the Lord's Resistance Army. Almost all of the children had experienced multiple incidences of severe trauma. Thus, in most post-conflict settings, high levels of suffering amongst many different sectors of a population continue for a long time after the end of the war.

Simon Schama (1995) suggests that "the cultural habits of humanity have always made room for the sacredness of nature" (p. 18). Importantly, while post-traumatic stress has been medicalized in the West, in other regions and especially amongst indigenous cultures, there are different responses to post-traumatic distress. Researching and writing this dissertation has been a reminder of the fragility of all life, as well as how personal resilience within indigenous worldviews is intimately tied to/with/in nature. In reading accounts of indigenous peacebuilding and reconciliation approaches, I am often intrigued by the presence of the more-than-human world as the context for the human contacting

and connections that develop. For example, Elizabeth Hoffman (2008) describes a reconciliation ceremony between two young Sierra Leonean men:

> On a warm late-March evening, the sky still swirling with the afterclouds of an unexpected storm, two young Sierra Leonean men stood before a bonfire, surrounded by their families, elders, and neighbors from surrounding villages. Once the closest of friends, Sahr and Nyumah had been brutally torn apart by Sierra Leone's vicious civil war while still in their early teens—one boy forced by rebel soldiers to beat his friend and kill his friend's father.
>
> The two came face to face that night, with each other and with their pasts. One man testified about his suffering; the other admitted his guilt and begged for forgiveness, which—in an astonishing act of grace—was freely given. (p. 129)

Hoffman (2008) tells how after the two young men embraced, the other villagers sang and the men danced together around the bonfire. In early 2008, dozens of similar bonfire ceremonies were held throughout the Kailahun district of Sierra Leone. In addition, in order to facilitate ongoing dialogue between community members following such reconciliation ceremonies, a village tree was designated as the "peace tree" to provide a meeting place for ongoing and future conflict resolution dialogues. In the same article, Hoffman describes another reconciliation ceremony in Bormaru, in which villagers came together to walk through the woods to a sacred rock that had long been used as a place to communicate with the ancestors and to ask for their help and blessing in facing coming challenges. However, villagers had not visited the rock since the outbreak of war in Sierra Leone and it had been overgrown by the surrounding brush.

Meanwhile, during Alistair Ager's (2002) work in Angola, he and his colleagues found that post-war strategies for addressing suffering "made extensive use of African traditional medicine and African indigenous church movements" (p. s44). Additionally, there was Alcinda Honwana's (1998) description of the ceremony to bring the nine-year-

old child soldier back into his community, which involved interactions with all four more-than-human elements: *earth* (the herbs and medicines, the sacrificed animal, and the tree under which the sacrifice took place), *fire* (setting fire to the hut, preparing the sacrificed animal), *air* (breathing the herbal remedy), and *water* (the bath, the medicine drink). And I am reminded, too, of the indigenous Mayan priest's words to John Paul Lederach (2005): "In a traditional Mayan view, if there is a problem in the community, the first thing we would ask is: Did you greet the sun today? Did you thank the earth for the corn?" (p. 140).

These examples point to how responses to address suffering need to be culturally relevant. These responses are situated in long traditions, even if these traditions have not been used for a long time or seem to have been forgotten. Based on the stories from the edges of violence presented in Chapter 9, it seems that more-than-human nature is always relevant, in every circumstance. As Cynthia Chambers (2008) observes, particular places provide nourishment for people who go there: "they feed human beings with knowledge, spirit, and with bodily sustenance" (p. 116). It may be that the sitting posture taken in many Western contexts, whether the therapy room or the negotiating table, is not always the most helpful posture, but rather that change and movement and turning points oftentimes come when humans interact with the wider world around them. Lederach and Lederach (2010) define 'social healing' as representing "the capacity of communities and their respective individuals to survive, locate voice and resiliently innovate spaces of interaction that nurture meaningful conversation and purposeful action in the midst and aftermath of escalated and structural violence" (p. 208).

The stories of the veterans find echo in Lederach and Lederach's statement. In their experiences, connecting with the more-than-human world gave them the space to voice (and possibly let go, if only momentarily) their suffering, to develop resiliency, to have meaningful conversations about their experiences, and to find ways to continue living their lives. And through their individual work, each one is creating a social foundation for helping others suffering from post-traumatic distress to also move towards healing/recovery. In looking at the relevance of the veterans' stories for civilian trauma survivors, however, I am reluctant to provide a list of ways that the veterans' narratives can be expanded to work with civilian trauma survivors. Indeed, there is a danger that this entire thesis will be taken up within the view of the Western progress meta-story, and nature will be viewed and *used* as simply another 'resource' for peacebuilding and assisting trauma victims in their recovery. Rather, I am arguing for a remembering of our human embodiment, that we are in and of the world and affected by our surroundings. Linda Chalquist and Craig Buzzell (2009) write:

> If we can learn to see nature as a partner in human healing and humans as partners in the healing of the natural world, we can shift from the exploitative posture of human domination of the Earth—a position encouraged by the social paradigm based on industrial growth—to a more truthful and restorative relationship of mutual interdependence with the nonhuman world. This re-education includes practices for going outdoors and finding ourselves. . . It also includes relearning as a species how to be in the presence of other living things with whom we share this planet. Insects, plants, animals, and even entire landscapes then become co-therapists and wise teachers as well as beloved relatives. (p. 131)

And returning for a moment to Kurt Hoelting's comments in the prologue, one might then think of social healing as the ways that human nature connects—both with other human natures and with the more-than-human world.

Detractors: Nature as Antitherapeutic for Post-Traumatic Distress?

During this research, I encountered one detractor arguing against the incorporating the wider world into recovery from post-traumatic distress. Nature therapist Ronan Berger (2010) contends that while nature therapy holds many benefits, it may not be appropriate for those suffering from post-traumatic experiences. Indeed, Berger goes so far as to suggest that nature settings can be antitherapeutic for post-traumatic distress sufferers. He bases his argument on the story of a young girl, Jessica, who participated in a nature therapy program in Israel. Jessica lived through the first Lebanon War and was suffering from post-traumatic distress. Towards the end of the nature therapy program, the group to which Jessica belonged went on a day trip to the Gamla nature reserve on the Golan Heights. However, the group leaders were unaware of Jessica's post-traumatic suffering, and the nature reserve was situated in range a military training zone. The group's visit initially went well, and for the first few hours, Jessica was interacting with the other participants and she seemed to enjoy the experience. Then suddenly, shelling drills could be heard from the military zone nearby, and Jessica became overwhelmed and hysterical, and ran around searching for shelter. Berger concludes:

> This example shows how an unpredictable element in the [Nature Therapy] workshop environment can reactivate a posttraumatic episode. More than the sound of the bombing itself, it was the unpredictability of an event related to the person's experience that triggered the trauma. This example highlights a situation in which [Nature Therapy] can actually be antitherapeutic. (p. 73)

However, it is my opinion that Berger's example shows a lack of attention to Jessica's needs. The problem in Jessica's case was not nature, or even the unpredictability of nature. The problem was that a child suffering from war-related post-traumatic distress was taken into range of an army training zone.

The veterans' stories in this thesis provide compelling counter-examples to Berger's assertion, and show the ways that more-than-human nature supports their recovery from stress and post-traumatic distress. Shepherd Bliss did acknowledge that his sound trauma is sometimes triggered by his neighbours' use of power tools; indeed, post-traumatic distress symptoms can be triggered anywhere, by anything, ranging from sights to smells to sounds. As Roméo Dallaire commented, it is part of the viciousness of post-traumatic distress, that the sufferer never knows when s/he will be reminded of and led down the path of revisiting previous trauma experiences. This does not strike me, however, as a suitable rationale for keeping post-traumatic distress sufferers from interacting with/in the world, and particularly the world of nature.

Chapter 12

Concluding Thoughts: Meanings for Praxis

> If we surrendered to earth's intelligence we could rise up rooted, like trees.
> Instead we entangle ourselves in knots of our own making and struggle,
> lonely and confused.
>
> —Rainer Maria Rilke, II,16 (2005)

Throughout this thesis, I have been illuminating the ways that peace and conflict studies' discourse and praxis focus primarily on the conscious aspects of human experience. The realist and rationalist roots of peace and conflict studies are often preoccupied with issues such as security, competition and economics, and resources and trade, topics that are deeply entrenched in the violent and dualistic Western tradition of separating minds from bodies, humans from nature, reason from emotion. These preoccupations are situated within an ontology that renders nature silent and speechless—one that is shut off from the corporeal world, and that gives "a fantastic image of man, spirit and history" (Merleau-Ponty, RC, 62). French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, however, showed that all activities in which humans engage, from language and history to science and politics (which includes peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery), are precisely that—*human activities*. They are all creations of the human mind, and they

need to be understood as "situated activities grounded in the everyday world" (O'Neill, 1970, p. xiv-xv).

Accordingly, drawing primarily on the narratives of veterans suffering from post-traumatic distress but also on other stories from the edges of violence, I have been weaving together these dualisms, to show that reason and emotion are intimately connected, minds and bodies are intertwined, and humans and nature are one and the same. I have laid the groundwork to re-embed peace and conflict studies in the everyday world, the sensible world, the flesh of the world—the world beyond the boardroom or negotiating table, the world that sustains us and all life on earth. I have argued that nature is an active participant in all life, but in the more particular context of this research, in post-conflict recovery as well as in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has been significant in this project precisely because of his focus on the lived body. In particular, his work on nature and his philosophy of embodiment open up an important intellectual as well as a grounded space for thinking about and understanding experiences with/in nature. In contrast to the meta-stories of rationalism and progress that pervade Western thought, in which nature is viewed as an object outside human being(s), Merleau-Ponty's focus on the lived body, and his notion of the 'the flesh' develops an intercorporeity that overcomes subject/object dichotomies. It is through our bodies that we have access to nature—indeed, it is through our bodies that *we are nature*. And the body—the natural body—is now being shown as profoundly implicated in conflict, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, as well as recovery from trauma and conflict (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Lederach, 2005; Lederach and Lederach, 2010; Schirch, 2005; Shank and Schirch, 2008).

Intersections with Indigenous Perspectives and Other Traditions

My aim in this thesis has been to uncover and explore an understanding of nature primarily from *within* the Western framework, both because the academic field of peace and conflict studies is deeply situated within the Western tradition, and because those I interviewed are situated and living within this tradition. Moreover, as depth psychologist James Hillman (2006) observes, the ideas advanced in this thesis about interconnections with the wider world of nature have been perhaps “repressed” but have still continued to exist throughout the history of Western thought:

> It is affirmed in differing ways in Plato, the Stoics, Plotinus, and in Jewish and Christian mystics; it appears splendidly in the Renaissance psychology of Marsilio Ficino, in Swedenborg; it is revered in Mariology, Sophianic devotion, in the Shekinah. We find notions of it in German and British Romantics and American Transcendentalists; in philosophers of various sorts of panpsychism from Leibniz through Pierce, Schiller, Whitehead, and Harshorne . . . *Anima mundi* reappears in further guises as ‘the collective unconscious’ in Jung, as physiognomic character in the Gestalt psychology of Koffka and Kohler, in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, of van den Berg, . . . and of course, ever and again in the great poets, specifically of this century in Yeats and Rilke, Williams and Stevens. (pp. 47-48)

Further, I take very seriously arguments by Indigenous scholars, such as Peter Cole (2006), who are wary of outside interest in their traditions. Cole asserts that rather than looking at Indigenous perspectives as an alternative to Western thought and seeking to adopt (colonize) ideas from an entirely separate context, Westerners ought to look inside their own traditions for alternatives. Many other Indigenous scholars have begun to voice doubts about whether Indigenous philosophies can be fully and properly articulated in English, since English was at the heart of colonial practices in North America, and is embedded with an ideology often at odds with Indigenous languages (Duran and Duran, 1995; LaRocque, 1999; Turner, 2006).

However, at times in this thesis, I have drawn on specific examples from Indigenous contexts and it is important to acknowledge that many traditions, including Indigenous perspectives and philosophies, as well as many other wisdom and mystical traditions, hold similar values and viewpoints to those expressed in this thesis. When speaking and writing about Indigenous peoples' perspectives, it is important to emphasize the diversity of cultures grouped together under the label 'Indigenous.' The term literally enfolds thousands of different languages, customs, and spiritual beliefs, none of which can be generalized across the many peoples in the world considered to be Indigenous (L.T. Smith, 1999). But while Indigenous perspectives are anything but homogenous, many Indigenous scholars do point to some similarities, especially in views about nature. Winona LaDuke (1999b) suggests that most Indigenous peoples share an understanding that "all societies and individuals are accountable to natural law" (p. 266). While both Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Winona LaDuke (1999a) warn that Indigenous peoples' relationship with the land is romanticized, LaDuke suggests that a certain truth may underlie this romantic notion since "the ongoing relationship between Indigenous culture and the land is central to most Native environmental struggles" (p. 88).

In the speeches to the United Nations in 1993 by nineteen leaders from Indigenous peoples around the world, a common theme was the perspective that the world comprises an interconnected community of living beings, and there are deep ties between Indigenous peoples and nature (Ewen, 1994). A similar view is expressed, for example, by Richard Atleo (2004), who presents the Nuu-chah-nulth theory of Tsawalk that "everything is one" (p. xi). Leroy Little Bear (2000) observes that from a Plains Indians philosophical perspective, "interrelationships between all entities are of paramount

importance" (p.77). Giichi Nomura reflects on the Aina word *Ureshipamoshiri*, which represents the "concept of the world as an interrelated community of all living things" (in Ewen, 1994, p. 71). The centrality of land in the lives of Indigenous peoples derives from their philosophy that "power flows from respect for nature and the natural order" (Alfred, 1999, p. 60). And as Joe Sheridan (2001) observes, the oral tradition itself involved "a chorus of rocks and trees and an animal choir" (p. 203). Often within Indigenous contexts, stories and words themselves are articulated as originating from the natural world.

The Buddhist worldview also holds at its heart a teaching of interdependence, and the notion that all things are connected (Gross, 2000). Indeed reflecting on various wisdom and Indigenous traditions around the world, Harold Coward (2000) observes that "in traditional Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese and Aboriginal societies self-identity is constructed not by individual choices but by participating in a 'family' that may extend out to include caste, tribe, and all humans as well as plants, animals and the cosmos" (p. 44). Accordingly, while in this thesis I focused primarily on Western discourses and did not follow the thread of Indigenous and other traditions' knowledge and perspectives about the more-than-human world, a future project may involve looking more closely at these perspectives and the possibilities for integrating them with the stories narrated in this thesis.

Meanings for Praxis

This research unmasks and counters the tendency to tell conflict, peacebuilding and recovery stories out of context, by showing that place and nature do feature prominently into all areas of human life. The narratives counter the dominant culture and training in

Western society, and open up the insularity that has dominated peace and conflict studies, to show that no one path or approach is *the* significant path, but only ever part of a larger system (Diamond and McDonald, 1996). While research in peace and conflict studies often concludes with programmatic recommendations and suggested solutions, such recommendations and solutions are not in line with the approach taken in this thesis. Indeed, such thinking arises out of the realm of the rationalist and progress meta-stories, which assert there is a masterful solution to resolving issues of conflict, strategies for peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and for post-conflict recovery. In contrast, I am arguing that there is no masterful solution.

However, as many scholars and activists are pointing out, it is crucial that the academy comes to recall and act on, rather than ignore, humans' dependence on the natural world. Ecofeminist philosopher and theologian Catherine Keller (1996) notes that "only a theoretical construction which gets off the stage of the academy and into *practice*—which *performs* its *counterpoint*—can make any difference" (p. 277). What might the university and other educational settings look like if we remembered this? If such thinking was incorporated into and enacted through our daily memories, schedules, and activities? Certainly, as these questions enter my imagination, I see that places of education would be very different from those we know today. Indeed, in his research on the Aboriginal wilderness education program 'Rediscovery,' David Lertzman (2002) describes his conversation with a Kwaguilth Nation elder and cultural educator, who observed that "the teachings of the elders are different than in schools today. With the elders, it's hands on: you touch, you smell, you taste, and breathe it in" (¶2). Is it possible to incorporate such an approach into schools and universities, and into peacebuilding and

trauma recovery programs, to create a more holistic model that listens and responds to the more-than-human world?

Paul Shepard told Derrick Jensen (2004) during an interview that living on an endangered planet leads human beings to attempt to control other living beings as a way to demonstrate our superiority. However, Shepard observed that there is an alternative to this dominating behaviour: "to live in such a way that the rest of life is not endangered" (p. 259). And so perhaps it is no coincidence that many writers in both the ecology and the peace movements are pointing to practices in which we examine both who and how we are in the world. E. F. Schumacher (1973/98) wrote: "Everywhere people ask: 'What can I actually *do?*' The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can, each of us, work to put our own inner house in order. The guidance we need for this work cannot be found in science or technology, the value of which utterly depends on the ends they serve; but it can still be found in the traditional wisdom of mankind" (p. 252). This is similarly reflected in the bumper sticker Thich Nhat Hanh (2005) recalls seeing in New York City: "Let peace begin with me." And his further reflection that "let me begin with peace" (p. 113). Accordingly, in this thesis, I, too, am advocating the necessity of shifting our attention and disentangling ourselves from the dominant stories and approaches in Western society. Below I reflect on what this research has meant personally in my own life, as well as the implications it holds more generally for praxis in peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and trauma recovery.

Personal Implications

> As we listen to, write or tell stories we are changed by them and something new is formed.
>
> —Etherington, 2003, p. 180

Through story, change can happen for both the teller and the listener/reader (Levine, 1994). In the previous chapter I explored the ways that the process and experience of sharing stories not only holds the potential for helping to heal those who share them, but can also affect those who listen to or read them. In this context, doing this research and writing this thesis has also *changed how I think*, both personally and professionally. Overall, this research has led me to seek out areas and creative ways, in both my personal and professional life, to connect with and engage the wider world, both human and more-than-human, as much as possible.

For example, this research has changed the way my partner and I parent our son and the way we interact in the world. We are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to engage both Cameron and ourselves in the world, with the planet, with other species, and we actively work to cultivate Cameron's interest in the more-than-human world. Our son's daily time out of doors, exploring in nature, has become sacred time, and we often rearrange our schedules and plans to ensure that he gets quality long-term time to connect and integrate himself in the one nature that is inside and outside our bodies. And we know that this time outside is important for us and our bodies, too. Cameron's ceaseless wonder in the face of the world and his child's eye and mind have opened the world to us in new ways—to experience and re-cultivate our own wonder and joy in the more-than-human world, to remember how truly amazing and beautiful the moon is, to see pine cones in a new way, and to find simple pleasure in wading through and jumping in

puddles, playing with sticks and stones, standing beneath a grove of pine trees and breathing in their fresh scent, sifting sand through our fingers.

After a number of years without a garden, I was inspired to once again plant a small vegetable garden (and am in the process of expanding that garden this year), to facilitate Cameron's understanding of the cycle of food production from seed to consumption, but more importantly as a way of connecting with the world, the soil, the plants and insects and birds and small mammals that pass through our yard, and with our neighbours (since we've found that giving neighbours organic, nourishing vegetables from our garden is one of the best ways to connect and build relationships with them!). In the summer of 2011, while Cameron was primarily interested in digging in the garden soil, by the end of the summer, around 18 months of age, he began to make connections between the zucchinis, pumpkins, and snap peas growing in the garden and the food he ate. He would climb into the raised bed to pick the few end-of-season peas, which he would then bring to one of us (or his grandmas) for help with eating. We've also become active in building relationships with local food providers, and have bought grain, egg, poultry, and vegetable shares through several Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs run by local farmers.

After interviewing Kurt Hoelting, I also enrolled in an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course, which piqued my interest in the possibilities of mindfulness and further areas to explore, both in my own life and in my professional praxis. Furthermore, as I prepare for my teaching this spring, I am constantly thinking of and planning ways to incorporate this research into my (windowless) university

classroom, including possibilities for engaging students' bodies by taking them outside for part of the class time, and perhaps eating good food together.[20]

There are days when I feel tired, when it seems easier to go with the flow of modern life. On the one hand, while it can be easy to connect to the wider world, it can also take great effort to escape the patterns and habits of the Western mind. Sometimes I experience great sorrow and despair over the state of the world and the planet, and am sucked into thinking that what I do does not matter. But most days I find great hope that change is possible—that each of the veterans' stories, as well as the other stories and interviews comprising this research show the power of connecting with the world, of remembering and returning to the things themselves, to the grounds of all life, and I remember that all of these pockets of experience matter.

Challenges and Opportunities for Peace and Conflict Studies

While I have been critical of peace and conflict studies for its emphasis on linear thought and rational action, and especially its lack of attention to nature, peace and conflict studies is also the field that has inspired and created the space for this research, and made this work possible. Indeed, I believe that peace and conflict studies, with its focus on relationships and interconnection is in a unique position to examine and bring attention to urgent questions about how social conflict, peace and reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery might be envisioned as inextricably interconnected with nature.

[20] As I make the final edits to this thesis, I am now well into my spring teaching, and have been taking my students outside for our small group readings discussions whenever the weather allows. Inside the classroom, most students are continuously "plugged in" to their electronic devices, such as laptop computers, tablets, and cell phones; however, when we go outside together, to sit in small groups on the grass, surrounded by pine and deciduous trees, feeling the sun and a light breeze on our skin, the students, of their own accord, put these devices away and genuinely focus on one another. On the days when we go outside together compared with the days we stay in the classroom for discussion, it is my impression that students engage in better discussions and develop deeper and more intimate connections with one another.

John Paul Lederach (2005) writes that “breaking violence requires that people embrace a more fundamental truth: Who we have been, are, and will be emerges and shapes itself in a context of relational interdependency” (p. 35). And Elise Boulding (1988) writes that humans “come into the world needing the other, dependent on the other for nurturance, feeling a common bond of unity with the other in our humanness, in our need, and even in our isolation from each other” (p. 140). Indeed concepts of interdependence and interrelationships are increasingly prevalent in the peace and conflict studies discourse. Boulding (2000), too, envisions that a culture of peace “involves living gently on the earth, in tune with the planet’s regenerative capacity” (p. 192).

In the previous section I reflected on the ways that this research has affected my own life, as a person, a parent, a citizen, and a teacher. These reflections extend into important questions, challenges, and opportunities for praxis in peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and trauma recovery. Most importantly, the veterans’ narratives in this thesis, as well as the other stories, point to the significance of paying attention to lived experience within conflict settings, and for people recovering from conflict. What are their experiences telling us? If we listen carefully to their stories, what is learned? What do we gain by casting sideways glances and paying attention to aspects that dominant culture and training in Western society suggest we ignore, such as our human interdependence with nature? Nature, Merleau-Ponty says, “presents itself always before us, and yet as new before our gaze” (RC, 65).

In seeking to weave together dualisms and re-embed peace and conflict studies in the everyday world, this research suggests asking the following questions as often as possible, including in academic teaching, in mediation settings, or when working with

small groups in conflict, in larger contexts affected by conflict and violence, or in association with small- or large-scale peacebuilding and/or trauma recovery processes:

1) As community members, peacebuilders, and earthlings, what are ways of cultivating our own humanity (our human nature) and engaging the world?
2) In group contexts, what are possibilities for spending time together in more-than-human nature?
3) If the traditional sitting posture taken in negotiation and trauma healing contexts limits our capacity to engage with one another and with the world around us, what are the possibilities for remembering our bodies? In what ways can such processes engage our bodies to facilitate approaching and connecting with one another on different levels and in different ways? For example, is it possible to, among other things, incorporate walking together, gardening together, and eating good food together?
4) What other possibilities exist for resisting the Western habits to quantify and rationalize peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and to instead centre efforts and processes on creating opportunities for the nature inside each of us to connect with the nature of the other, as well as the broader nature out of which we have arisen?
5) What are the possibilities for paying attention to interconnectedness and interdependence, not only between human beings but with more-than-human nature? What are ways for intentionally deconstructing and destabilizing the Western construction of the individual? For remembering our relationships with the world around us?

Furthermore, it is important to take into account the element of timing and how it relates to this research. The questions listed above, for example, may not be appropriate at the height of a crisis, such as ongoing violence, genocide, or all-out war. At the same time, the more-than-human is always there, is always before us and part of us, in every situation. This is clearly demonstrated in Roméo Dallaire's description of his experiences visiting that hillside in the midst of the Rwandan genocide. And as the Mayan priest alludes in his conversation with Lederach (2005), "the earth and skies, winds and rocks" are always there. Similarly, during our conversation, recalling his experience with the Canadian military in Afghanistan, Tim Lewis observed, "Is there still beauty when you're outside in a war zone? Absolutely. There are things that you're affected by."

In asking these questions, I am not offering 'solutions' or 'recipes' for recovery, nor any grand theoretical explanations about nature that transcend boundaries and space, but instead am suggesting finding ways to be *closer to the ground*—both metaphorically and physically. I am wary of approaches that offer *certainty*, since humans and the more-than-human world are nearly always uncertain and unpredictable. I have not sought to 'explicate' or reduce nature to something readily knowable, nor to describe *absolutely* what happens when veterans spend time in the woods, paddling on a river, climbing a mountain, or digging in the soil. Embodied and emotional engagement with both the human and natural worlds does not guarantee transformation in recovery and peacebuilding settings and processes. Accordingly, this research and the questions above only illustrate *possibilities* for ways that nature might be brought to consciousness and remembered in future research and praxis in peacebuilding, reconciliation and conflict recovery.

Dorothy Noyes (2008) suggests that “all our work is essay, in the etymological sense: a trying-out of interpretation, a provisional framing to see how it looks” (p. 40). In the end, this thesis, like all academic work, is a story, although I prefer to consider it a counter-story or counternarrative to the dominant stories about the separateness of humans and nature. As Buddhist scholar, David Loy (2010) comments, “when our accounts of the world become different, the world becomes different” (p. 5). Thus, this thesis is a counter-story to the dominant narratives of linear views of change. It is a counter-story to the international political and economic system, which Diamond and McDonald (1996) remind us, is “strikingly Eurocentric and overwhelmingly white and male” (p. 147). Within this system, diplomacy and foreign policy tends to be “infused with traditionally ‘masculine’ values and behaviors—rationality, logic, stoicism, power orientation, crisis management, competition, aggressiveness, adversarial thinking—and with ‘male’ language, replete, in some cases, with locker-room talk and sports analogies” (p. 28). The meta-stories of rationalism and progress that undergird the international system simplify reality, and create a myopic focus on reason and objectivity and economic values. These stories are not awake to the wonder of the more-than-human world. These stories are possibly amongst the reasons for much of the war and combat in the twenty-first century (and before). These stories about rationality and progress are themselves viewed as rational and progressive—any peoples or cultures who do not tell these stories are viewed often as irrational and ‘backwards.’ Moreover, arms sales and war tend to be ‘good for the economy,’ at least in the short term. In contrast, to engage this thesis research often requires going against dominant practices and efforts, and purposefully undermining these approaches.

This research also suggests taking the line of questioning in the environmental security discourse, an approach heavily dependent on progress stories, beyond whether degraded environments will lead to war: that is, as environments are degraded and ecosystems destroyed, does this imperil future peace and recovery efforts and possibly lead to further conflict? If "we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (Abram, 1996, p. 22), then what does this mean if we continue to overlook and dismiss our interdependence with the more-than-human world?

A Final Thought: Stories of Caution, Stories of Hope

Historian Lynn White Jr. (1967) remarked, "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to the things around them" (p. 1205). This research and the narratives in this thesis are both stories of caution and stories of hope. They offer cautionary tales about the ways that violence can lead to lost humanity and a body in conflict with itself, to isolation and loneliness and withdrawal from the world. But they also offer hope that one's lost humanity can be recalled though intimate contact with more-than-human nature, and the recognition that we, too, are nature. In this, perhaps most importantly, this research offers hope for telling a new story about ourselves and who we are in the world; for developing more embodied, creative, and holistic approaches for praxis and for coming into our senses; for remembering who we are and for creating the conditions for good contact and healthy, whole relationships with the nature inside us as human begins, inside one another, and with the more-than-human world. To return to Shepherd Bliss's words, "there's something about the healing power of the regenerative earth, the grass, the leaves, the flowers, the bees, whatever wanders in, the ants while they're doing their work, the honey bees that don't sting."

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Appendix A – Ethics Approval Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
Office of the Vice-President (Research)

CTC Building
208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Fax (204) 269-7173
www.umanitoba.ca/research

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

21 May 2009 SSHRC

TO: **Stephanie Westlund** (Advisor J. Senehi))
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Wayne Taylor, Chair**
Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

Re: **Protocol #J2009:054**
"Placing Stories of Conflict, Peace and Recovery"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- **if you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to Eveline Saurette in the Office of Research Services, (fax 261-0325, phone 480-1409), including the Sponsor name, before your account can be opened.**

- **if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.**

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/ors_ethics_human_REB_forms_guidelines.html) **in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.**

Appendix B – Sample Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Ph.D. Program in Peace and Conflict Studies

Arthur V. Mauro Centre
for Peace and Justice
at St. Paul's College
252-70 Dysart Road
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone: (204) 474-6054
Fax: (204) 474-8828

Informed Consent Form

Research Project Title: Placing stories of recovery

Researcher: Stephanie Westlund, PhD Candidate
Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba

Sponsor: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
(Canada Graduate Scholarship – Doctoral)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process for informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

What does this research involve?

You are about to participate in an interview to discuss your interactions with the environment during recovery from conflict. You will be asked to share the story of your experience with recovery settings. You have been selected for an interview because your personal experience within these settings is valuable, and documenting your experience may provide important insights for future research and practice related to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. If at the end of this time period our conversation does not seem finished and you agree there should be another interview, we will arrange to meet again at a time that is convenient for you. In the event that I have any minor follow-up questions for you, I will arrange a time to reach you by telephone.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you wish, the interview can be terminated at any point and I will erase the recording of our conversation and destroy any notes I have taken. In addition, you have the right to withdraw from this research at any time without penalty. Should you choose to withdraw entirely from this research, any data collected from you will be destroyed.

The expected outcomes of this research will include a final report and a PhD dissertation. I will also use the research in future writing and subsequent publications.

What type of personal information will be collected?

This research will protect your privacy and anonymity as much as possible, depending on the preferences you select below. If you choose, your name and the names of any people or organizations you mention will be replaced by pseudonyms in the transcript and in any writing I do that uses information from your interview. I will seek to exclude information that might allow readers to identify you. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. Despite all these precautions, however, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. There is a slight possibility that readers of this research who know you or are familiar with your story may be able to identify a quote that came from you. If there is anything on which you do not wish to be quoted, please let me know and I will respect your wishes.

What happens to the information?

If you grant permission below, the interview will be recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed, and quotations from the recording may be used in my writing. Only I, and possibly my supervisor, will listen to the recording of your interview. If you wish, I will provide you with a transcript of this interview for your review and approval. After the interview, I will immediately upload the recording to my password-protected laptop and erase it from the digital recorder. My laptop will be locked up to prevent theft. I will also take notes during our interview.

All of the information that you provide, including the notes I take during the interview(s), will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a locked cabinet, for the duration of this project (5 years). Only I will have access to this material. (If my supervisor requests it, she will also have access to this information.) After this period, all audio recordings, notes, and drafts will be destroyed.

Are there risks or benefits involved in participating in this research?

There are no known harms or risks associated with your participation in this research. You will *not* be compensated for your participation.

Questions/Concerns

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Stephanie Westlund (stephanie_westlund@umanitoba.ca) or Dr. Jessica Senehi (jessica_senehi@umanitoba.ca).

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Signatures (written consent)

There are several options for you to consider as part of your consent to participating in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please mark the corresponding box to grant your permission to:

I grant permission to be audio recorded: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

I would prefer that you use my real name: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

I would prefer that you refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: ______________________________

______________________________ ______________________________
Participant's Signature Date

____
Participant's Printed Name

______________________________ ______________________________
Researcher's Signature Date

Contact Information for Transcripts, Project Summaries, and Dissertation

I would like to review and correct or approve a transcript from this interview: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

I would like to receive a summary report of the findings of this study: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

I would like to receive a copy of the resulting PhD dissertation: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Please provide your contact information so that I may send you copies of the transcript, a summary report, and/or the PhD dissertation as you have selected above:

e-mail: ______________________________

phone: ______________________________

street address: ______________________________

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