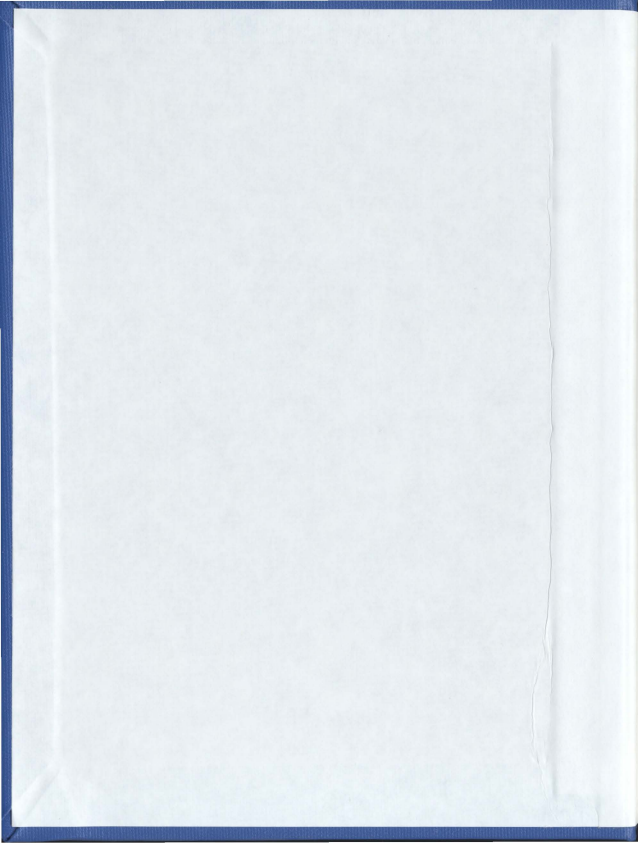


FINDING FAMILY THROUGH THE TREES:
EMOTIONAL MEANING IN FELLING,
MILLING, AND BUILDING

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**FINDING FAMILY THROUGH THE TREES:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores my family's engagement with spruce trees on our family property, through a three-staged project of felling, milling, and building a deck on our family home in Nova Scotia, in 2009. Rather than emphasizing our technique and the material process, this thesis focuses instead on the emotional experience of our engagement with the trees, and the quality that each work stage brought to our lives.

The experience of tree harvesting and use is an unexplored topic in folklore studies and beyond. Exploring how this engagement makes us feel and, potentially, the far-reaching effects within our lives is a movement towards ethical approaches to tree harvesting—principally through increased mindfulness. Doubly, awareness for a non-human other, and its participation in our lives as a part of our group, can lead us into deeper relationships with our natural world, with ourselves, and with one another, enabling a greater sense of purpose, confidence, and self-expression. This is true of my family through our project.

As folklore explores the art of ordinary living, this thesis focuses on social emotion as a form of artistic expression within the creative process of life. There is an emphasis on 'now' in this thesis, interested in how, as a group, we can create meaningful and fulfilling lives through conscious connections with our immediate surroundings and experiences. In my family, attention to our natural landscape, and specifically the trees, plays a very important role in this reality.

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PROLOGUE ~ THE “VISION TALK”

“Suzanne wanted to have this meeting to discuss our vision for the project,” I begin. It is our first meeting and I am nervous. In fact I am so nervous, I cannot remember even a little of what I wanted to say. I shuffle through my papers, the notes I made for this morning’s talk, looking for a particular page. Dad makes a hand signal for my attention as he points to the small digital recorder at the center of the table. He is cautious of the noise I am making and the quality of our recording. My sister, Mom, Dad, and I are sitting on our sunny kitchen deck, positioned around the table and around our recording device. Meeting like this as a family does not feel natural, yet the support in the air is palpable.

I find my place in my notes and continue, “The vision is sort of a double vision,” I say. “Because it’s the vision for building the deck itself and how we see that happening and it’s also the vision for this thesis.” Whether in a phone call between Dad and I while I was still at Memorial just a few weeks ago, or whether at the breakfast table with my parents after arriving home a little broken from a hard year—I seem to remember both—I suggested and my parents agreed that their scheduled summer project would make a great family folklore thesis. Building a new deck on the west side of our family home is the final stage in a project that my parents, Marilyn and Len Hollett, began earlier this year. In the winter of 2009, Mom and Dad felled thirty tall, leaning trees from around our family home. That spring, my parents then milled the felled trees on-site, with the help of my brother, Chris; sister, Suzanne; and a portable mill operator. It is the first project of this kind and size to unfold on our family property.

Unfortunately, Chris, the eldest sibling of three, is not here to participate in our “vision talk” this morning. He probably will not be here for most of the project. Unlike my sister and I who have returned home many times over the last fifteen years to live with our parents—as we are now—Chris departed at eighteen years of age to become a pilot through the military college of British Columbia. My brother never came back to live at Mom and Dad’s. Through the support of the military and his own enthusiasm and rigor, he began an independent lifestyle straight out of high school in 1992.

“Although I will be ultimately putting the thesis together,” I continue, “I’m really hoping that building the deck and working on it together will naturally and organically move into a thesis with everybody’s direction and input: hopefully something that everyone will be happy with. I see that happening through these conversations, and maybe one-on-one conversations, and through our logbook, and probably through a personal journal that I keep as well—which I should start! Are there any other ideas?”

“I like this,” Mom responds. “This is really nice. I think this is a great way to start.”

I look to my sister who suggested this morning’s meeting. “Good idea, Suzanne.”

Suzanne replies, “I like that Dad shared his, well, one thing that was important.” She is referring to something Dad said earlier, before we began recording while we were waiting for Mom to join us. Dad suggested that the final thesis could somehow include the story of Mom and him starting their family together in the early 70s on our five acres of forest and seashore, the one and only family home we knew as a family of five.

“We were definitely coming from different lives,” describes Dad of their union. Me, from a fishing village,” he says. “She, from a military family, as far away as—she

was born in Calgary. But I guess that's how relationships, that's how they're made special, because they're so different." Dad and Mom each left their respective worlds when they came together on this land we call home, clearing a path through the fir and spruce trees to where they would build their home on the ocean. I am surprised and touched by my father's lead this morning. Dad tends to leave the emotional detail in conversation to my mother, sister, and me. But as individuals in relationship, we are always changing in subtle and dramatic ways, even as we sit together now.

"If that works," he continues. "It's got to work with the way you see it, and the way you present it," Dad says to me. I identify with his vision and the meaning he has brought to the table; we all do. The way *we* present it is a cornerstone in family folklore (see Stone 1988, 10; Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982, 2). But sitting down now in this "vision talk" to speak about who we are as a family and what is important to us—*the way we present it*—also feels like new territory. We have become more and more comfortable over the years sharing with one another how we are feeling at any given time. But discussing our vision as individuals, as a family, and within a specific context, is quite new to us. Starting a group work project—and with eyes wide open to boot—is not something we do every day, and neither are we in the habit of making ourselves the focus of an academic study. How we see ourselves coming together is a bit of a mystery and an adventure.

Suzanne has reminded us that Dad has already offered a vision for this thesis. It is clear that he is inspired by earlier times and our story together, as we continue to shape our story on this land. It seems that Suzanne finds herself motivated in a similar way as she dives into her own temporal layers through the lens of this project.

“Because things are coming up, aren’t they?” she says. “Like for me, this morning, I knew we were going to have the meeting so I went down to the water—I’m finding it very emotional.” Suzanne stops speaking as her eyes fill with tears. “Well, I’m remembering things that I had forgotten. I’m just remembering things about the trees. So for me it’s very focused on the trees today.”

As Dad was, Suzanne is also moved to speak of past and present meaning set in the landscape of home, with Suzanne specifically focusing on the trees. Her recognition is obviously deep, as she is moved to tears in remembering her lifetime connection with the trees around our family home: their presence in her life. We are reminded that this summer project is not only about us building a deck; it is also about meaningful relationships with the trees that surround us.

“[They’re] such an important part of the project,” Dad affirms. “because the trees are supplying the material, the timber.” As our reason for being here today, the trees and us form a fantastic group. We necessarily influence one another’s lives and we have done for years: we have shared the same space since 1973 and we are now considering our intentional harvest of some of these same trees.

It was my parents alone who started this project four months ago. Just the two of them were living at home that winter, when they decided to do a large scale felling around our property. It was a focus that required attention as many trees were leaning dangerously close to the house.

Mom is the first this morning to direct our attention to this early stage in the building project. She states: “The trees: that was a labour of love for Len and I that we did in the cold of the winter when the ground was frozen, when you could transport the

trees without damage to the property—because we had to get them from where they were felled out to the road. We were dragging them across the frozen lawn and over the snow, and if we'd done that in warmer weather it would have really left its mark on the property.” She pauses in quiet reflection. “It was like saying goodbye to old friends. It was like saying goodbye to the giants of the forest.”

Mom remembers the felled trees in a way that touches my heart. She describes a very personal relationship with them, which was significantly realized through the felling itself. Mom, Suzanne, and Dad all emphasize, this morning, a meaningful connection with the trees. To my surprise, I do not seem to share this focus. Having just arrived home from university, my head is still buzzing with thoughts of school, while trying to find myself home again and start a thesis. In the middle of all of this, I realize that I am more attached to the idea of doing and creating with my family and particularly my father. It is their support I seem to crave. It is our social group and the physical work that we can achieve together on this land that interests me.

When I began my master's program in 2008, it had followed a four year departure from academia. I arrived at Memorial almost directly from a volunteer position in western Africa where I had been working as a chimpanzee caregiver in a primate conservation effort—a long time dream of mine. For five months, I lived in a very remote camp setting along the Niger River, within a fluctuating community of five to ten people and forty-one chimpanzees. With the closest town and amenities over a five hour drive through the jungle, I experienced for the first time in my life how physical strength, group co-operation, and truly working *with* your environment, are all necessary for survival and for quality of life. In my rural camp setting, there were no cultural powers

that circumvented direct connections between a person and their physical body, between people and people, and between people and the rest of nature—now so prevalent in most cultures and in most parts of the modern world. I discovered that this style of subsistence is a lifestyle that I personally identify with. I am drawn to this summer project with my family in this way.

Without my needing to, Mom introduces this theme of directly providing for one's self to our conversation this morning. She states: "It's really an old experience, felling trees." She recalls her and Dad's period working in the woods, saying, "At the same time, I was reading *The Nine Lives of Charlotte* (Armstrong 2007) somebody or other [*Taylor: The First Woman Settler of Miramichi*] and that was the first thing they did. They came, and they felled trees, and planted crops, and they had huge properties."

"Built houses," Dad adds.

"Built houses," Mom affirms. "But it's a really old practice."

"That's important to me," I say looking at Mom. "That part what you just said: an old practice, making this deck together. I feel like it was once natural for anybody, maybe men, I don't know, but certainly anyone in the family—certainly any male in the family—to pick up a hammer and to build their own house and clear their own property. I'm really interested in that. When I was in Somoria [Guinea, West Africa] this past year, people would do different projects, different physical projects. And I don't have any experience with a hammer, with putting wood together, with working—just that kind of outdoor work." With hesitation I continue, "I dream, sometimes, that building this deck with you, Dad, and with Mom, and with Suzanne, is going to give me the experience. So

maybe I'm not going to be an expert, but just to have some familiarity, just to—" I stumble in my shyness to speak of matters that are important to me.

Dad saves me: "You know it can be done."

"Yeah. Does that interest anyone else here? It's really important to me."

"Yeah. Building of the house like the beaver," my sister jumps in. "And also the nurturing, supporting in other ways," she adds. "Being a provider of harmony like music and also of food." Suzanne includes a few more ideas for participation in this project, reminding us that we can contribute in a variety of ways.

Picking up on this thread of participation linked with possibility, I say, "When I first thought of doing this, I saw everybody working on [the deck] together all the time." I pause. "Maybe that's really not how it's going to be, you know. You can participate in different ways, like you said [Suzanne]. And also Dad, I noticed you're kind of the chief of the deck. And sometimes I feel like the gofer. Is that what you call it? The gofer? And I *guess* that's ok," I pause, "because I'm learning."

"Well, yeah, you need gofers," Dad says. "You need workers."

"You need an apprentice," Mom provides another term, adding some glory to my role.

"And you need planners," Dad continues.

I respond, "But you were [saying] Suzanne, that you wanted to talk about how—in this "vision talk"—about how *you* saw *yourself* participating: as a helper, or as a leader, or as a, I don't know—" I trail off for fear of not making my point, or knowing how. I am interested in the idea of *creating* roles in this work project, versus sliding into familiar familial roles already in place. I see an ally in my sister.

Suzanne replies, “I sense I’m bringing in energy—well, we all are—of gratitude. Because the more I feel into the project, the more I feel really grateful for the trees and for all of you. But I must say, today it’s mostly the trees and everything that they continue to teach me. Especially when I was a little girl, when I was just letting them be around my heart.” Suzanne pauses. “And I was remembering things, you know, how they give, how the trees give so naturally, and they receive so naturally? They receive the sun and the rain and the birds’ songs.”

To our conversation Suzanne brings a lesson from the trees. A reality where, as humans, we give and we receive as naturally and as simply as the trees do—just as they are as they encircle us now. This lesson lingers among us only for a moment, before our conversation moves along. Mom, Dad, and I appear too shy to respond, and Suzanne, too shy to continue. As a family, we both fail and triumph, variously, through our evolving conversations and the tension of what we consider to be “normal.” Acknowledging trees as our teachers, for example, is not a habitual form of everyday conversation within our family, or within our larger community. As a family, we seem to demonstrate a measure of concern for what culturally conforms, with an equal measure of loving support for unique expression—no matter the form or content. This is our balance and our struggle.

“And they provide firewood. We’re using a lot of the waste,” Dad says moving us into a less emotive, yet still important realm of conversation.

“Yeah,” Suzanne affirms. “They provide.”

“Also, the idea that we can get more [lumber],” Mom says with enthusiasm. “I was thinking of building—well, say we build another house on the property? We can still access, there’s so much more wood we can access for other structures.”

“We know we can do it, yeah.” Dad says with pride.

“You’re probably not thinking about that right now though, hey?” Suzanne asks.

“No,” Dad replies.

“No,” Mom agrees. “But like the deck [was], that’s kind of in the back of my mind, so eventually that could well happen. The deck was just kind of a gentle thought in the back of my head for a while.”

With vision facing forward to future possibilities our meeting comes to a close.



Figure 1. Trees and sky of Harbour Woods, c. 2009. This and every photo in this thesis was taken by Michelle Hollett, unless otherwise credited with permission.

CHAPTER ONE ~ INTRODUCTIONS

Overview

The Prologue describes the first recorded conversation of this thesis. It was held on June 9th, 2009, by my sister, Suzanne; mother, Marilyn; father, Len; and me. The location was our family home, and this is also the setting of our family folklore thesis. We are situated in Hackett's Cove, Nova Scotia, on the eastern shore of St. Margaret's Bay and about ten kilometers from the fishing village and tourist destination of Peggy's Cove. I appreciate the unfolding contained in the initial "vision talk." In the span of a few years, I can look back to a younger version of our family who is self-consciously, but also boldly, sharing who we are and where we are at that time in our lives. To hear, for example, my sister question my parents ever so lightly on the possibility of building another house on the family property, and my Mom's reply, "No. But like the deck [was], that's kind of in the back of my mind, so eventually that could well happen." (Hollett 1, 2009) is wonderful foreshadowing. At the end of the summer and upon completion of our deck, a decision had already been made. Building my sister's house began the following spring, with our own lumber and labour and on my parents' land. Suzanne has told me that this thesis project helped to inspire and support this development in her life (personal communication, 2010).

Around home at the time of "the vision talk" there were feelings of excitement, satisfaction, and transformation in the air, and these emotions inspired the emergence of this thesis. Mom and Dad—both retired professionals, both grandparents in their sixties, both beautiful people on an adventure—led a grand scale project to fell, mill, and

ultimately build with trees from our family property. Built structure took the form of a deck facing west, and with the help of their children they completed the entire project themselves. From start to finish their hands and hearts were directly involved in each stage of the project, and this included growing alongside the trees of this project as well, for thirty-six years.

In the opening paragraph of *Folkloristics*, the introductory text used in my master's program at Memorial, co-authors Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones provide the following definition of folklore, what it is, and how it is generated:

As we interact with each other on a daily basis, we continuously express what we know, think, believe, and feel. We do so in a variety of readily distinguishable, often symbolic ways: by songs and making music, for example, or by uttering proverbial expressions, dancing, and creating objects. Much of what we express and the ways we do so have the behaviors of our predecessors and peers as sources. We learn most of the stories we tell and the games we play not in the classroom or through print or other media, but rather informally and directly from each other. With time and repetition, some examples of human expressions become pervasive and commonplace. When they do, we conceive them to be traditions or traditional; and we can identify them individually or collectively as *folklore*. (1995, 1, emphasis original)

This definition of folklore appeared in kind, again and again, throughout my studies. While fascinating in its own right, and valued in the discipline, it has never settled well with me as a fulfilling definition of expressive culture. In my personal experience, it feels deceptively neat and, ultimately, it does not ascribe to my prominent interests in the study of folklore.

In this thesis, I am motivated to document the immediate, unfolding experience of family life, as the varied and emotional context it is, driven by individuals who manifest themselves in family. My approach is inspired by Benjamin A. Botkin's concept of "folklore in the making" (1937, 469) in the truest sense of the word "making." Botkin

writes: "for every form of folk fantasy that dies, another one is being created, as culture in decay is balanced by folklore in the making" (1937, 469). Knowing that our emotions form the basis of our experiences and, that as beings, we are not static but are constantly responding to a world in motion, I approach my family and our folklore in the spirit of discovery. Because this thesis describes the emotional context of a new experience in our lives and not an established tradition in my family, it departs from the expectations of a typical family folklore study. At no stage in our project did we concretely know what we were doing, or what to expect. We trusted, tried, and discovered, adding to our repertoire of who we are. Our context with the trees within the landscape of home created strong roots, grounding and unifying us in our experience *now*. This thesis attempts to capture and value this experience.

As a folklore student interested in understanding her own sense of identity and culture through her studies, a typical approach to folklore posed an additional problem for me: I did not recognize my family within my studies. My family group is not a likely candidate for a typical folklore study. As a formally educated group, with culturally diverse interests and experiences, and few obvious collective ties, other than being of the Anglo-Canadian race, we do not fit well into traditional folk categories and groups, based on region, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, and occupation, all commonly applied in the study of folklore.

In my undergraduate degree in anthropology, I had come to understand that my family and I were not characteristically 'exotic' enough to fit into the anthropological exploration of culture. While in my folklore degree, I realized that neither were we characteristically 'folk' enough to fit into the study of folklore. Throughout my

university education I have struggled to find myself and my family included in academic definitions of culture and identity. Upon stating this in class one day, I recall it being suggested by my professor that my lack of definition was the identity experience of the privileged class. Temporarily, I became quiet on this subject. As privileged, I assumed I did not have the right to consider a fuller definition of myself, and one that makes sense to me. As a study, folklore takes pride in valuing the individual's sense-of-self, and how they fit into the world (e.g., Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982, 2). But not all families, and not my own, come to fully understand self through the birthplace of their ancestors, for example, or the shared lifeways of their region, based in established tradition.

William A. Wilson identifies three main themes, or tendencies, within the practice of folklore that he believes has limited the discipline's exploration of expressive culture. I find that two of these tendencies apply here. These are: "the tendency to be preoccupied with the past at the expense of the present, and the tendency to pay more attention to individual folk groups than to the broader humanity they share" (1988, 159). Wilson further describes this second tendency as "[t]oo much emphasis on the particular occupational, regional, ethnic, and religious clusters of people who keep lore alive" (1988, 164).¹ Wilson inspires me in my approach; he identifies drawbacks within folklore that I have personally identified with, within my own experience. He writes these encouraging words that motivate me in this thesis: "We must never fail to recognize and honor all the artistic murmurings of that heart; we must see it as equally important and equally inspiring in all ages, past and present; and we must hear its beating in all

¹ Wilson's first tendency is: "to treat folklore as handmaiden to other disciplines" (1988, 159).

places” (1988, 166).

Folklorists have paid little attention to our everyday perception of non-human others in the nature that surrounds us. They have not significantly considered who and what, we share space with as a part of our group, and how we manifest this in our daily lives. One exception is Mary Hufford; she has long been interested in the “interplay of culture and environment” (Hufford 2007, 2). Her work inspires me and it features throughout this thesis. Although engagement with nature is not a common topic in folklore studies, the discipline is still a perfect place in which to set this study and to explore the experience of ordinary, yet extraordinary, interaction with trees within my family.

We learned that we are able to directly know the value of the trees in our lives. That they never left the property, but lived, died, and were made into a built structure on the same land, was the strength of this project. Our growing awareness for their presence in our lives has enriched our lives in profound ways. Hufford suggests “that collectivities can’t find fullness in themselves alone, whether as regional collectivities or as human beings; that region and humanity are generated through encounters between humans and ‘primordial others’” (2003a, 288). In this thesis, the white spruce trees of our family land become our ‘primordial others’ that bring us back to ourselves in ways fuller than before.

Henry Glassie has said: “That is one purpose of art. It brings confidence to its creators. Those who make things know who they are” (1999, 194). There is a certain profound truth in this. Our intentional family project, with each other and with the trees, had the very important effect of reconnecting us with a creativity that is deep within. A belief in ourselves—*we can do it*—blossomed in this project. But not only did we learn

that we can provide for ourselves structurally from start to finish, we also learned about what it means to create a new space together as a family, and that we can also do this very important process. Contrary to static notions of family, as individuals we can continue to grow together, our relationships are not set in stone (see Danielson 1994).

While my thesis is significantly inspired by concepts of building family identity and expression through our engagement with trees, it also promotes environmental awareness through the space and time of our three-staged project of felling, milling, and building. Trees are endangered—and the health of our entire planet as a result. Two years following the fieldwork of this thesis, the United Nations named 2011 the *International Year of Forests* with the following rationale: “All 7 billion people on earth have their physical, economic, and spiritual health tied to the health of the forests,” further stating that, “This year’s theme of Forests for People highlights this relationship and our role in ensuring forests’ well-being and development” (United Nations 2011).

But even with grand affirmations like these, indiscriminate clearing of trees in my own community and the world over, would more than suggest that trees do not have a sound footing in our culture. In *The Social Life of Trees*, anthropologist Laura Rival encourages individuals to explore how trees are “more than a background to activities” (1998, 2). A call along these lines is set amidst the knowledge that human beings are destroying forest spaces everywhere for industrial, commercial, and private development. I hear this call deep in my heart, as our family property has become a shrinking island of trees over the years. When my parents first built in 1973, our house was set in acres and acres of thick spruce and fir trees spanning in all directions. But the woods of my

childhood, of my brother's, and of my sister's all but disappeared, as developers sold adjacent lots to be cleared and further divided for more people and fewer trees.

Despite this underlying theme of loss, my thesis is yet about harvesting trees and use. This relationship with trees is insufficiently explored in academia, considering the pervasive and urgent nature of the reality. Neither is it a common topic in everyday conversation. A significant goal of this study is to generate interest—within my discipline and beyond—in this very commonplace, yet culturally quiet subject. My hope is to contribute to a reality that encourages attentive relationships with trees, and as such, with our own selves. Our hold on trees, and their hold on us, remains. We need trees and not only to breathe but to dream. Thomas Moore writes: “The vast, creative inner truth of the tree extends itself outward into paintings, decorations, sculptures, poems, and songs with such extravagant fertility that the care of trees must at the same time be the care of the human imagination” (1996, 22-23). Approaching the topic areas of family and trees as one, while unique in folklore studies, reminds us of a very important truth: that life is a dynamic web of relationships between people and all aspects of nature. Exploring these connections in our lives can support us and our world in healthy and abundant ways.

Thesis Sketch

Chapter One, our current chapter, introduces my study. Following the Prologue and Overview the final section is called Foundations. It provides further context for the project setting, the family participants, and my fieldwork.

Chapter Two is my Literature Review. I have chosen to consider literature in three subject areas: family folklore, folklore studies with environmental themes, and autoethnography, as inspirational in my overall approach.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five represent my family's project experience. These chapters are organized by the project stages of felling, milling, and building. While each chapter stands on its own, each stage is considered an integral part of the complete, creative process. The chapters on felling and milling are designed principally through the memories of my parents. The final chapter on building is told through Mom, Dad, Suzanne, and me as the individuals who made the deck.

Chapter Three, "Felling: Touching Nature," explores my parents' experience of touching the life and death of the trees they felled. When approached mindfully, this engagement brings my parents and the four of us together, into greater awareness for, and fuller expression of, a dynamic world that includes us and the trees.

Chapter Four, "Milling: Realizing Self," is inspired by the event of transforming trees into milled lumber. As my parents step away from the cash economy and the idea that they would sell their felled trees, they transform latent dreams into realities through directly providing for themselves with milled lumber.

Chapter Five is the scene of creativity where my family comes together to build the deck. "Building: Creative Expression," is about negotiating family relationships. This is approached as a form of creative expression, realized through the space and support of our unique project context. To a lesser degree but equally important, this chapter will directly consider how the wood we work with supports our family dynamics in obvious and in magical ways.

Chapter Six concludes this thesis with a project summary, final remarks, and future considerations.

Foundations

This section aims to provide the reader with a greater sense of who we are, our home setting, and some of the values which are important to us. It is graced throughout by self-introductions written by each of the participants. The individual content of each introduction was their choice. Together these inspired the overall content of this section. I begin below, describing my parents' move to Harbour Woods in 1973, a venture that was formative for us as a family. Harbour Woods is the vernacular place name of our home.² It is set within the community of Hackett's Cove and the area of St. Margaret's Bay, which are also described below. Finishing this section is a description of my fieldwork experience. This family background is by no means conclusive, it is only one representation—one tiny drop in the colourful sea of our lives—of selected stories, facts, and feelings about us and our home, for the purposes of this thesis.

Harbour Woods: Establishing Home

In the spring of 1973 my parents, Marilyn and Len, were in the first stages of many things. They had recently married in the summer of 1970. Their first child, my

² A note on name: When I was a child, Harbour Woods was the name used in our family household to refer to our home and the surrounding woods. It was also used by community members to refer to the area in which we live. But as our area developed, as new arrivals came, local elders passed on, and with fewer woods all the time, this place name fell out of use. Occasionally today, local elders still recall this name in conversation, but this is rare. In my thesis I recall to use this name that has been so important to my family.

brother Chris, was growing inside of Mom. My parents were also in the first job placement of their careers. Mom was teaching third grade at Joseph Howe Elementary School in the North End of Halifax. Dad was designing bridges as a civil engineer, with the Department of Highways in their downtown Halifax location. My parents were also embarking on one other very important first, one that would significantly shape the rest of their lives.

In “Telling the Landscape: Folklife Expressions and Sense of Place,” Mary Hufford quotes prominent nature writer Barry Lopez, who says, “The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of the exterior one; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes” (1987, 13, citing Lopez 1984). At that time in their lives, my parents were looking for land to build on. It would be a move that would take them from their small apartment in central Halifax, to the then very rural Peggy’s Cove Road, on St. Margaret’s Bay. Mom was twenty-five. Dad was twenty-seven.



Figure 2. *At left, Hollett family home built in 1973; at right, recent addition in 2005, c. 2010.*

Mom and Dad had been looking at several different spots of land all on the ocean, and about one hour's drive beyond the capital city of Halifax. Each of the properties was also just a few minutes' drive to a small fishing cove in the community of Indian Harbour where my father was raised in a fishing family. His parents, Flossie and Joseph Hollett, and much of his family—siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins—were still living in Indian Harbour. Mom's parents, Margaret and John West, were in Halifax. This was their final destination in a lifetime of military moves following my Grandfather's career in the Canadian Military. Mom's two brothers were already dispersed: one in Alberta, the other in California.

Ultimately, my parents chose the most secluded spot of land. They decided on five acres of thick spruce and fir, surrounded by many more acres of undeveloped woods. This land also held a magnificent sunset view of the very large seagull rookery, Shut-In Island. An imposing feature in the bay, the island is made grey by its granite rock and dark green—almost black—by its *white* spruce. My parents choose something quite special. Nestled amongst the evergreen trees life would be secure and supported. Looking out at St. Margaret's Bay, life would be expansive. Mom and Dad were the first to build in an area that was known locally as Harbour Woods. This land was where the 'barren' harbour community of Indian Harbour, where Dad was raised, met the thick evergreen landscape of Harbour Woods, within the community of Hackett's Cove. The landscape that spoke to my parents was quite different from what either of them were used to.

Mom is the daughter of Margaret Lela McFarlene (1916-2006) and John Golding West (1916-2000). My grandparents were both raised in Calgary, Alberta as only

children. Margaret became a medical doctor and practiced predominantly in public health services. John was a colonel in the Canadian Military. They journeyed eastward over time raising their family in the cityscapes of Calgary, Ottawa, Camp Borden (Ontario), London (England), Montreal, and finally, Halifax. Neighbours and city life were always surrounding Mom. As a child, an outdoor landscape meant playing with friends in the streets, her backyard, and city parks. It also meant family vacations: camping trips in the summertime and, when living in England, visiting castles and seaside villages.

In contrast, Dad was raised in an intimate fishing cove of no more than twelve households, and around forty households in the community of Indian Harbour as a whole. Referred to as the Barrens, my father's home area was literally treeless. It was built on the ocean, granite rock, red and green ground cover of bay leaves and juniper berries, and the connections that people had with one another. My father's parents are highlighted in a local history book. It reads: "Joseph Hollett [1902-1976] was another Newfoundland fisherman who relocated in Indian Harbour. He married a local girl—Flossie [Jean] Richardson [1911-1995]. Their descendants still live in the Harbour" (Crooks n.d., 21). Dad's father was from all accounts a very quiet and kind fisherman. As a young man, Joseph had sailed to Halifax on a fishing vessel from Harbour Buffett, in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. Sadly, he died in Indian Harbour before his grandchildren had the opportunity to know him. Dad's mother was the third generation of Richardson's established in the Harbour. She kept a busy household raising five children, while also periodically working as a cleaner. For many years my father's family also shared their living space with an additional family to help cover expenses. There was no reason to live apart in the Harbour, as people relied on one another. Although Dad's inside world

was crowded, outdoors his landscape was as far as his feet could take him, through the Barrens of Indian Harbour.

The setting Mom and Dad chose for themselves, and to start and raise their family, was a striking departure from what either of them had known growing up. Harbour Woods was very private and secluded. The thick trees, the ocean, and the long driveway they built, made it so. The evergreen trees of white spruce and balsam fir were a very significant part of the landscape they chose, becoming a part of their internal

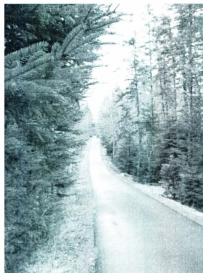


Figure 3. Driveway of Harbour Woods; looking towards highway, c. 2009.

landscape for the rest of their lives. As for my brother, sister, and me, we were born into these woods making them our first world upon arrival. Over the years, my mother has often recalled the following story of our family's beginnings in Harbour Woods:

There were just so many trees. It was just so rural then. I remember when Len and his father were clearing the road in the woods from the highway down to the ocean, Joe using only his axe. I was pregnant with Chris, and I remember being so sleepy I couldn't keep my eyes open. So I laid down on a mossy rock in the woods, and fell asleep in the sunshine.

This story is paraphrased by me now. But Mom has told it so many times, I know this story off by heart. It describes the beginning of us: Dad and Mom, Chris within, finding their way through the trees towards the ocean, and for the first time.

Family Participants

To my tribal guilt, the thoughts and feelings of my brother are not included in this family folklore thesis. Chris lives about one hour's drive away from our family home, with his wife Shelly and their three young children, William, Nate, and Olivia. My brother is a very dedicated husband and father. He is a Major in the Canadian Air Force, assigned to the navy as a Sea King pilot. I consider my brother an environmentalist with a keen interest in trees, his vegetable garden, and energy efficient homes. Chris' contribution would have been a valued one in this thesis, as a family member and because of his personal interests. But with busy lives, Chris and I found it impossible to come together for interviews. Ultimately, we did not make the space beyond our regular and already full family gatherings.

The intimacy of everyday family life is difficult to maintain, as family expands to involve more people, more places, multiple directions, multiple homes, and seemingly less time. My sister and I, living together with our parents in recent years, has provided us with a continued daily experience of one another, and one that is fresh: as four adults, we come together more ready and able to understand ourselves and one another. Feeling

the absence of my brother at home, and now in this thesis, I have struggled with a self-conscious weight: I have not done my part in maintaining the bonds of our family of five (see *Ties That Bind* 1994 for like issue). Although this family folklore thesis takes place in the setting of our family home and with the trees that all five of us have known and loved, this thesis does not represent all family members. Through the event of living under the same roof, this thesis is told through Mom, Dad, Suzanne, and me.

Leonard Nelson Hollett
b. November 8th, 1946

I was born and raised in Indian Harbour, NS. I was the fourth child in a family of five; graduated from high school in 1964 and left my fishing village at Middle Point to attend Dalhousie University. That same year, I met my future wife, Marilyn West, and we eventually married in 1970, one year before graduation with my Engineering Degree. Upon graduation, I went to work for the Department of Highways. We lived in Halifax for only 2½ years and then returned to my rural roots to build our home on St. Margaret's Bay in Hackett's Cove. This is only 5 km from my original home in Indian Harbour. We have never moved, and raised 3 beautiful children on the shores of the bay. I hope to spend my remaining days here with my loving wife, children, and grandchildren.

My parents met as blind dates for their high school prom in 1964 at Halifax West High School. Through a mixture of how they have remembered themselves, and how I imagine them to have been, my parents met as two quiet, studious, and shy individuals. Mom was a young high school graduate at sixteen years old. Additionally, she had recently moved from Montreal to Halifax, and these moves were never easy for my mother. My father was traveling from Indian Harbour by bus each day to attend high school in the very different world of Halifax, and this was not easy for him. I see my

parents as very courageous: two individuals at a time in their lives when they were both feeling a little pushed beyond themselves, but braving the elements none the less.

As the story goes, they fell in love almost immediately, with Dad wanting to marry Mom by their second date. Mom always told it this way. Dad always smiled when she did, with only the slightest amount of protest, shy embarrassment before his children. My parents married in Halifax on August 15, 1970.

I am not convinced that either Mom or Dad felt impassioned by their career choice. But when my parents embarked on their careers, as elementary school teacher and civil engineer, they were stepping into a life of independence and a future together. I believe that this was the inspiration they needed to move ahead as they did. Their careers would mean many different job placements for each of them, in and around Halifax, and a great deal of their daily energies focused outside of the home. Despite being a wonderful adventure, there were undoubtedly challenges on this journey; there were departures from themselves.

My parents both attended Dalhousie University in Halifax. Mom recalls being fascinated by a world of lichens and insects at that time in her life, and she still is. Despite her strong interest, she discontinued a master's program in biology that she had started at Dalhousie. She focused on a B. Ed. instead, what was considered a more direct and established career path for a woman then. Earlier on, Mom also let go of her desire for academic training in fine arts. This was at her parents' insistence that she receive a more practical education. Mom had many diverse interests and talents, obvious today in her love for gardening, pottery, swimming, the natural world, varied approaches to spirituality, and equally evident in her teaching style throughout the years. But I get the

impression from my mother that when starting out in the university setting, a young woman in the 1960s with very involved parents, she did not know how to boldly explore everything she was. Such satisfied explorations had to largely wait until she was closer to the end of her career, and after raising her children. Mom took thirteen consecutive years off from teaching to bring my brother, sister, and me into the world. She was a very natural mother, encouraging us to crawl naked in the sunshine whenever possible.

My father has never told me what he might have traded for his university education and professional work world, but I might guess. When my father set out for university, he was the first member of his community to achieve a secondary education. St. Andrew's Anglican Church of Indian Harbour, a strong part of his family tradition, sent Dad to Halifax with a small education bursary. Certain members of the congregation had hoped that Dad would return home a minister, but Dad had no such intentions. My father fell into engineering as a natural choice for males of his time. But Dad also enjoyed numbers, calculations, and design.

I heard a local fisherman once say of my father, using his birth name, which only people from his childhood do, "Leonard made it out. He made something of himself." That these boundaries of inside, outside, and measures of success, might have actually existed as a part of my father's life and by extension our family life as well, surprises me for some reason. But not for lack of evidence. As a young family, our relationship with the Harbour was familiar, yet distant. We had strong ties with Dad's Mom, Nanny Hollett, but not with the rest of our family in Indian Harbour. This was in striking contrast to the strong social relationships we cultivated with Mom's parents in Halifax,

Nanny and Grampy West, and with Mom's brothers and their families in California and Alberta, despite the distance.

In Dad's venture outside of his community, I can see that he traded his everyday connections with his family and therefore their primary means of being close. Among Mom's side of the family, it was expected that we would spend lavish leisure time together: Sunday dinners with china, family vacations, elaborate celebration of holidays, and trips to fine dining restaurants and the theater. But this was not true of my father's family. With less financial means as one reason, the Hollett's shared ties through living next door to one another, sharing in lifeways and in community news. I can imagine that these ties may have been difficult for Dad to recapture after he returned home from Halifax to build and live in the adjacent community. I imagine that this was not easy for him, nor for any of us. Although this is not something we spoke about as a family, I believe that the dramatic departures between family lifestyles, on family sides, produced an ongoing question within all five of us: "Where do we belong, where do we fit, and what do we aspire to?"

Marilyn Lela (West) Hollett
b. June 6, 1948

Hello. My name is Marilyn. I have lived in this body for 62 years. It is said that I am in my "Golden Years." I believe that this is a very special time for me. I am bringing grandchildren into the world. I have let my parents go. I am now watching, guiding, and helping my own children through their lives. I have time to seek pleasure in doing these things and also in taking care of myself. Seeking pleasure is important to me, as I know at this stage of my life I have less years rather than more left to live.

I find pleasure in my home, which is my husband, my 3 children and my 2 grandchildren (with 2 more on the way). I love them. And I love the forest that surrounds us, also the ocean that we live by. Each morning, I walk out on my deck, coffee in a mug, and feel extremely grateful to be part of such a beautiful life. I think about my family and look at my gardens, the forest, the sky, and the ocean. This makes me feel very happy. It gives me pleasure and peace. I am amazed and delighted that my 62-year-old body (and mind) can feel this way.

Mom and Dad are now the elders in our family. They are the eldest living generation for their children and their grandchildren. Significantly, they are also now the eldest living generation for themselves. With these considerable shifts in our family life, my parents have entered into a new dimension of their lives; this is true of all of us. Like the presence of mind, body, and emotion that is described by Mom above, greater balance has been achieved in our family life.



Figure 4. Marilyn and Len, Harbour Woods, c. 2010.

As a young family we were busy and occupied. As I remember it, each one of us was rather self-consciously directed in our individual pursuits: career, school, and

hobbies, without enough time to adequately share. My parents gave dramatically to us as a family but I believe we also missed each other during these very busy years. Much has changed following my parents' mutual retirement from their careers, Dad in 1999, and Mom in 2003. They were able to let go of accumulated stresses, when they let go of this stage in their lives. They now have the space and the time to have deeper, more fulfilling connections with each other and with themselves in ways that truly make sense to them.

My parents today are continuously sinking themselves deeper and deeper into the earth of our home, in subsistence and in simple pleasures. Their individual passions have grown. Mom, for example, now has her own pottery studio in the basement of our home, where she practices her art; and Dad has become one of the most prominent individuals in his grandson Kai's life, through the shared time they spend together. Their participation in local community life has also grown, developing notably within the Anglican church of my father's youth, and relationships with certain members of Dad's family have become some of the most important relationships in our lives today.

Experiencing Mom and Dad engaging in a life that makes them happy and nourishes their souls, is very satisfying to see. As Suzanne and I have continued to live in Harbour Woods, our growing understanding of our parents gives my sister and me permission to reach for this same self-nurturing quality in our own lives. We learn by osmosis, by example. Significantly, Mom, Dad, Suzanne, and I spend time together as friends growing within this space, within our home and community. Through our project, we have captured this period in our lives like a family photo. Because my brother has not lived in our home and community as an adult, continuing to share in this everyday space, I often wonder what his experience has been. Perhaps Chris is realizing a similar one

through his wife, Shelly, and the family and community that she has introduced to their lives. I hope this to be true.

Suzanne Margaret Hollett
b. December 29, 1975

I love to communicate thru Sound. Making sound with people and giving Space for Silence to be listened to is "making love" to me. I feel one with all. So I am sharing with others this Love Language. I call the creation a Love Song, and my vision is ONEnes. All people, animals, and sentient beings, all of earth and all of the universe in harmony.

My sister returned home to Nova Scotia in 2007, when she was thirty-two.

Suzanne returned with a very special intention in her heart: to start a family close to her own. She was not in a committed relationship and neither did she have finances in place. But she had the very important knowledge that she wanted to become a mother soon, and that she wanted to be close to her family to do this.

Both Suzanne and I spent most of our twenties living outside of Canada, although Suzanne more than me. Our years abroad began formally in 1998. I had just finished my first year of university at King's College in Halifax. Having nearly failed my year despite my efforts, I decided it was time for a break from the school setting. Suzanne had just finished her BA double Major in International Development Studies and Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University, and she was in the process of deciding her next step. Upon my invitation, we took our backpacks to Australia for a proposed twelve-month work holiday. This trip marks the beginning of Suzanne's nine-year residency in Southeast Australia, a country for which she now holds citizenship. For me our trip sparked years of international travel and living abroad. Throughout this time, Suzanne

and I have always returned home to live with our parents for shorter and longer periods. Now five years into the future since Suzanne's decided return home in 2007, she and her partner, Kelly Beale, are now raising their son, Kai, and building their home in Harbour Woods as Mom and Dad's neighbours.

In my sister's return to Nova Scotia, she brought with her a very spirited sense of community, which she became very serious about sharing with her family and beyond. The many cultures that my sister was a part of while away spoke to Suzanne in ways that the more reserved cultures here at home had not. In Australia Suzanne embraced simpler living, sharing resources, earth-based spirituality, and significantly, sharing music as a form of healing. Suzanne came home with these values and experiences, and a strong sense of living in community to share in the burdens and equally the delights of life. My sister has encouraged me, and others, to recognize community everywhere, to reach out of my own comfort zone and share in other's lives, to ask for help when help is needed, and to realize a bolder vision of love. She has a strong resolve that we should not struggle as individuals, or even as individual families, but that all people should come together.

Drumming, playing various musical instruments, and voice have become strong parts of Suzanne's personality and talent. She shares this with us as a family. We now have musical elements at many of our gatherings, and this was not something we did pre-Australia despite our family of five all being musically inclined. I know that all family members have felt stretched at times, as we have entered into more vulnerable communication styles through Suzanne. But my sister consistently chooses to move through structures of society and modes of interaction that do not feel right to her. I know

this has not been an easy journey for her to follow. But it is one in which she has grown, and in which we have all grown together.



Figure 5. Family Vacation, Windhorse Farms, NS. Clockwise from left: Michelle, Nate, William, Chris, Shelly; and Kelly; c. 2009. Photo taken by Suzanne Hollett.

Suzanne maintains that creating and sharing in spontaneous music and song versus scripted music, is a way of getting out of one's head and into deeper feeling and communication with self and others. She calls this "The Love Song," and this is a part of her work. Suzanne guides group and individual song sessions, in and around Halifax and our local community.

During the fieldwork portion of this thesis, I had just returned home from my master's program in Newfoundland, and Suzanne had recently returned home from Hawaii, and her studies in traditional Hawaiian massage. She had begun this work while living in Australia, and she offers it today from her home clinic in Harbour Woods. Over the last decade Suzanne and I have always been drawn home, over and over again.

Without adequate income to support ourselves independently, it became natural to live with Mom and Dad during these visits and extended stays, and share in the household that already existed. But in other ways, apart from finances, it also made sense to share in a communal space as a family. In this space, there has been a wealth of emotional support and growth generated. Finding a satisfied balance between individual life and family life has been in the making for Suzanne and me. Suzanne is perhaps achieving this as she moves into her own home with her new family. I am still working this out: “home is where the heart is.” I continue to learn about finding my home in my heart so I may attempt to take “home” with me wherever I go. I believe that this is a lesson we have each been working on in our family: finding home within one’s heart.

Land and Trees

When my parents first walked through Harbour Woods as potential buyers my father was surprised to realize that he had been there before. In fact, he had childhood memories of frequenting the land of our home that he had forgotten about. Several times, as a young boy, my father came through our woods to our shoreline with his mother’s brother, his uncle Acey. Dad and Acey would collect mussels and take them home to Indian Harbour for a feast. Harvesting mussels was a tradition we continued as a young family. We often baked them in seaweed over a fire, directly on our beach.

At the time of my parents’ purchase there was already a meagre driveway in place from the main road down to the shoreline. This road had been used in preceding decades to haul sand, earth, rock, and seaweed from our land. The shape of our property still reveals this stage in its story. Undulating lawns around our house would have been dug

pits at one point. A beach was also indirectly started on our shoreline as a result of this small scale quarry. What were then likely scars on the landscape, my parents made beautiful over the years. But not by altering the structure of the landscape. My parents added layers of loving attention to the landscape as it was, and allowed the natural beauty to grow. They retained the woods, incorporated exposed granite boulders into gardens, let the wild green grow, and added colour to it.



Figure 6. Beach at very high tide, Harbour Woods, c. 2010.

The woods of Harbour Woods are principally softwood trees. Hardwood trees do grow on our land, but they are so few they stand out as singular trees on our property. Of hardwoods we have one trembling aspen, some fruit trees which my parents planted themselves, and a few thin stands of birch. The dominant tree species of our home has always been a softwood sea of spruce and fir.

White spruce (*Picea glauca*) and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) are both conifers. In appearance they are very similar to one another. Their trunks are variant shades of

grey-brown with a significant difference: spruce bark is rough and fir bark is smooth with blisters of sap. For years, I have blended spruce and fir trees together in my mind. Even after my parents repeatedly shared with us kids the key to their distinction: “The needles of the fir lay flat with the branch,” they would say, “and the needles of the spruce lay around.” Perhaps this teaching originated with our annual hunt for the right Christmas tree. We had always understood that spruce will shed their needles in no time, and fir will endure the Christmas month. In contrast, my father tells me it is the spruce that will endure as a structure, whereas fir will not. The trees of this thesis, in which we tell our story of felling, milling, and building are the white spruce.

The standing trees of Harbour Woods are not old in tree-time. Size reveals the oldest trees as around my parents’ generation. I have seen larger spruce and fir hidden in forests a little more inland from us. These trees have been granted their time to grow thick, tall trunks. But our woods have grown tall and thin, while exposed to the elements of the rugged coastline. In Harbour Woods only the spruce trees dare to grow directly on the ocean. They brave the Atlantic salt and wind like no other tree. But this is not an easy task. They grow creatively along our seashore, as they do all along the shores of Nova Scotia. When I was a child, I remember a few spruce trees growing horizontally out of eroded, sandy banks in front of our house. Some of our trees today lean on each other in their growth. Others grow individually and poker-straight—although their connected root systems underground would tell a different story. Our trees wave and creak in the wind. We hear them, see them, smell them, and feel their roots rock beneath our feet.

Recently, Mom has begun to write and paint family stories. All of these stories incorporate our woods. They are simplified versions of our family life, but even as simplifications they are true. All of our truths, simple and complex, are a part of our family story. In 'A Christmas Tree Hunt,' Mom describes our yearly holiday felling on our land:

Once a little while ago, there was a family that lived in a wooden house by the sea. There was a mom, a dad, a son, and two sisters. They lived a very simple and happy life....The children loved the thick spruce woods that surrounded their home. It was their place to build magical forts and traps for dangerous foes. They played for hours in the forest by the sea. In the fall, the Dad felled trees and chopped thick trunks and branches into firewood. He kept their furnace fed and their home warm all winter long. In the winter, Mother Nature would cast her icy spell over the forest and coat the spruce trees delicately in layers of sparkling white snow. It was at this time, which was just before Christmas that the Tree Hunt began.



Figure 7. Chris and Suzanne, Harbour Woods, c. 2009.

As a young family, the woods were very special to us. Describing our adventures

in these woods would be a thesis in itself. The above passage will hopefully satisfy as a sample of our endless days tied to the woods.

Hackett's Cove and St. Margaret's Bay

Our highway is Peggy's Cove Road. This road functions as our lifeline, ushering tourists to the working fishing village and tourist attraction of Peggy's Cove. It is also the well trodden route of around sixty kilometers to the city of Halifax, where many people from our area travel to work. Hackett's Cove, the community in which Harbour Woods and this thesis is set, is one of nine defined villages along Peggy's Cove Road, following the eastern shore of St. Margaret's Bay. My experience of community today includes Hackett's Cove, Indian Harbour, and Peggy's Cove: all of these communities feel like home to me. Boundaries of villages can be both definitive and inconsequential in the reality of community life, and this can change over one's lifetime. Peggy's Cove, for example, used to feel like a far-off place, which my family would occasionally visit, as local tourists, with my grandparents from the city. Now this community is familiar to me, as our family has expanded to include residents of Peggy's Cove through my sister's partner, Kelly Beale.

In very early years the ocean of St. Margaret's Bay, and not Peggy's Cove Road, would have been the most significant point of reference for developing communities. European fishermen found themselves in these waters in the early 1600s; there is a reference to *Baie de Marguerite* on an early Champlain map from 1612 (Withrow 1985, introduction). Early fisher families of French and German descent—and later followed by British Loyalists—became the first permanent settlers along the eastern shore of our

bay in the late 1700s. These families came by boat from the already settled western side of the bay. Local historian Alfred Withrow writes, “The families have been described as hardworking, which helped them to prosper. As each generation built homes, and established businesses, their villages began to grow” (1985, introduction).

Of the Mi’kmaq story in Hackett’s Cove and the immediate area, little to nothing circulates. Certainly, that my father’s community is named Indian Harbour is evidence of aboriginal people. A local, non-aboriginal elder recently recalled a memory to me, which was passed down to her from her grandfather, and before his time as well. The memory was of smoke rising from fires then attributed to Mi’kmaq people, from within the woods of Harbour Woods. Her story struck a chord with me. It is the first and only time in my life to hear an account of aboriginal people in our immediate area. Not all memories were established in text and drawn on maps. As challenging as it may seem, these stories must be rediscovered and remembered in different ways.

Early European families supported themselves through fishing, logging, and shipbuilding. But as industries they have mostly outgrown what nature was able to provide them. In the case of the fisheries, the international and local industry together exhausted what nature was able to provide. The seemingly complete disappearance of our local white fish staple, haddock, happened during my childhood in the 1980s, along with the same vanishing of the cod. Lobster and mackerel are still caught along our shores, but who knows for how long. Our communities once thrived on fishing; today this livelihood is a dying breed. My grandfather’s fishing license was passed down to my father’s younger brother, Uncle Walter. When Walter passed away in 2006, his children did not desire to take on his fishing license. It was sold to an individual who had never

fished before, but was interested in learning about fishing as a pastime. Today we have only two full-time, in-shore fishermen in our immediate waters: a father and son who still work from their dory—an incredible sight to see. Hot summer days now see St. Margaret's Bay filled with pleasure craft: sailing boats, speed boats, and jet-skis.

When my father was little, the road to Halifax was made of earth, the fish were abundant in the sea, the 'bone-man' (as he was called) brought butchered meat to Indian Harbour from a community up the road, and each village still had its own general store. Life was very local.

When my parents purchased their land in 1973 local services like the 'bone-man' were no longer in practice, the fish of the bay were nearly fished-out, and the road to Halifax had been paved. Our family drove sixty kilometers to Halifax for groceries and all amenities. My parents also made this daily commute to work, as many individuals in their generation had started to do. Within just twenty-odd years of my father's lifetime, everything had changed dramatically.

Within my equally young lifetime—I was born in 1978—there has been many more changes to our area. In the 1970s and 1980s, we necessarily travelled to Halifax for almost everything. Now it is no longer necessary to leave our area for anything: Halifax has come to us. Only fifteen minutes up the road, we have a thriving shopping metropolis that services growing communities all along St. Margaret's Bay and beyond on the way to Halifax. In a very condensed area, aptly called The Crossroads, there is a commercial complex on each corner. Each corner has its own hardware store, gas station, grocery store, pharmacy, veterinary clinic, medical center, and the list goes on. We also have an organic farmers' market, a public library, and many cafes at The Crossroads.

Our commercial, service community at the head of the road is growing rapidly to accommodate more people and more development in our area. As job opportunities increase at the head of the road, it is with more and more commercial development, and this development is further dependent on increased population to sustain the growth of these businesses. In other words, our larger community as it functions today is dependent on unsustainable growth. The natural world of St. Margaret's Bay is suffering, as previously undeveloped land is developed, making nature spaces for animals and humans alike increasingly rare (see St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association 2012, Five Bridges Nature Trust 2012). Only radical change that stops further development, and finds ways to generate life networks on sustainable and local levels, can turn this story around.

Amidst development in the larger community of St. Margaret's Bay, Hackett's Cove and adjoining communities are also growing. But population demographics are changing. For example, there are more and more summer residents purchasing and developing local coastline, and renovating older homes and fishing stages to live in. But as transient members of community, summer residents do not necessarily add to community life on everyday functioning levels.

Our traditional community pillars find themselves struggling to survive amidst changing times. Our local Anglican church, for example, where my father is treasurer, struggles financially and in their Sunday attendance (see Hollett 2004). Another community mainstay is East St. Margaret's Elementary School in Indian Harbour. Although highly valued by locals, it still has difficulty keeping the doors open. Built in 1958 on the site of the one-room schoolhouse of my father's time, it is the school that my

brother, sister, and I attended, and where my mother occasionally did substitute teaching. Every year, the Halifax Regional Public School Board threatens closure as numbers have dwindled from one hundred children in my time to currently half of this number. The school board's solution is to bus local children half an hour with stops, to Head of St. Margaret's Bay, where hundreds and hundreds of children meet in schools that are expanding all the time. These are tough realities for smaller communities, struggling to stand on their own, and equally tied to the regulatory bodies of larger centers.

Fieldwork

In this family project and thesis we did not have a clear vision of what we were putting together. We learned as we went, as we built our deck, as we lived together in the same house, and as we shared in the interviews this thesis grew. It feels like a big admission to reveal that this entire project was formed through life as it was lived and not more clearly devised ahead of time, as most scholars would have it.

Author and journalist Michael Pollan describes his journey in *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, in a way similar to my own. Pollan writes: "I know more at the end of my narrative than I did at the beginning, and for the most part I have followed the logic of my experiences, as they unfolded season by season, rather than that of any thesis" (1991, 5-6). Similar to my own, Pollan's project was to consider how nature and culture function together, his through a garden he cultivates, and the wild and tame he encounters there. He divides his text into seasonal sections of spring, summer, fall, and winter to ultimately find his narrative at the end of this

natural cycle. Like Pollan, I have used the already present and chronological stages of felling, milling, and building as interpretive sections in this thesis. Guided by the sequential nature of these times in my family's life and our experiences in them, I too have come to understand my project narrative at the end, rather than in the beginning.

Although folklore is a discipline that aims to prioritize real life experiences as our interest, I have found that actually approaching a study in this way has been challenging. Working from the ground up and not the other way around, I discovered, requires a great deal of faith, persistence, and willingness to stretch your mind as you go. Despite good intentions university classrooms are still significantly tied to models that encourage knowing before doing. This is the style of academic training, but it is not necessarily the style of life. I now realize that my fieldwork and writing experience was exactly what I wanted: to have life manifest and to tell a story in this way. Essential to this adventure was finding a project of which I was a sure part. I wanted to do ethnography from the inside, to research and write from this perspective. A significant goal in this thesis was to approach the complicated process of ethnography as both participant and researcher, and thereby gain a fuller understanding of the participant experience in research.

I applaud my family's courage in trusting our bonds enough to go ahead and discover this thesis as it developed. Mom, Dad, and Suzanne each committed themselves to the project. They volunteered to help out in any way that they could, and were then able to let go of the project. They let life happen naturally around home, throughout our fieldwork, and later, while I continued to write this thesis. Ultimately, they trusted me to tell a story about our lives, and this has been a great

honour. As a part of our fieldwork together, my family members supported me in this way. Below, are two such examples, captured in the interviews:

Suzanne: I feel like telling you that I have trust that you are going to put something together with all these strings. It seems like really a lot. But I think the way you work on the computer. I really feel like the way your mind works—all your studying you've done and exploring in different ways—I really feel that you'll be able to organize this. That it'll come together.
(Suzanne Hollett, 2010)

Len: I hope it's successful for you as far as, you know, [this] being the subject that you want to do your thesis on. I hope that's going to work. I really do...That would make the project even more satisfactory...That would be wonderful. (Len Hollett, 2009)

Due to a variety of personal circumstances in my life, to struggles which were directly related to formulating this thesis, and others, which were first related to relationship and health, this project carried on longer than I had originally expected. Although I had a defined fieldwork period in our family home, during the summer months of 2009, I continued to live in this home for at least a portion of the last three years. As such, I experienced an on-going participant observation of sorts—not actively, but by virtue of sharing space and being a family. On realizing life beyond set fieldwork, as a dynamic part of fieldwork, Margaret Mead writes:

We did not yet recognize that every detail of reaching the field and of interchange with those who tried to bar or facilitated our way to our field site were also part of our total field experience and so of our field work....We have learned that every part of the field experience becomes a part of our evolving consciousness—the impressions gained on the journey, our interchanges with government personnel at many levels, with missionaries and teacher and businessmen...the books we read, the chills and fever that accompany work in hot jungles or high, cold mountains.
(Lutkehaus 1995, 196)

Before, during, and after, fieldwork is a continuum of life. This reality was particularly accessible through family. At times, I felt overwhelmed and saturated by my topic on paper, which also surrounded me in my life. But being at home also offered significant periods of inspiration, motivation, and support through family. Additionally, the deck about which this thesis is written sits beneath the window of my writing desk, and the trees were always surrounding me. In any case, my writing period continued to have a strong part in forming this thesis.

Interviews are the principal form of documentation in this thesis. I used a Panasonic hand-held digital recorder (model RR-US350), which I had borrowed from my brother. Chris was kind enough to loan me this small device to record the interviews, when I could not afford to purchase my own. The recorder has limited space and this factor curtailed the interviews at times. Admittedly, I was also not always prepared with the device. Some of our interviews were spontaneous, and in these cases, I would simply grab the recorder and switch it on to capture a conversation in the moment. One result of my spontaneity was the batteries dying mid-recording. This occurred in the interview, Hollett 2, 2009, featured in Chapter Five. Another result, however, was that I recorded conversations with spur-of-the-moment content and emotion, and this was positive for our family folklore thesis. The interviews describe our *in-situ* experience of building the deck. This period began at the end of May and lasted until mid-August in 2009, what was my summer break from university. The recordings also describe, through my parents' reflections, the felling and milling stages on our property. Most of the interviews were held during the defined summer period, but several occurred afterwards due to individual time constraints among us.

Because this is a family folklore thesis, I wanted to capture thoughts and feelings that we generated together as a group. But I also wanted to allow for more private settings, as an alternative to the conversational dynamics of a group recording. I felt it was important to offer both types of interview spaces, to allow for varied content and conversational patterns to emerge. As a result, I held individual interviews with each of Mom, Dad, and Suzanne, and seven group interviews. The group interviews were of the following configurations: Mom and Dad, Suzanne and Mom, and all four of us together. In total, there were ten interviews, and approximately eight hours of digital recordings.

I use the word interview to refer to the recordings, but they are more aptly described as recorded conversations, set against the formal image an interview can sometimes conjure in one's mind—as it does in mine. I did not use a script and neither did I come prepared with notes. Only in the “vision talk,” the first interview of this thesis, did I structure my ideas on paper. In the recordings, topics were introduced variously by each of us, and these topics evolved in a conversational style. There were times when it was obvious by tone or content that individuals were speaking to the digital recorder, rather than engaging in conversation with one another. Consciousness of the recorder reflects a desire to explain aspects of our story to the unknown audience.

As I mentioned above, the interviews about building the deck were sometimes characterized by spontaneity. The ability to sit down and talk at any time is a unique benefit of living together with the people one is doing fieldwork with. Some of the most memorable group recordings for me were those which took place around the supper table after a full day of work. These times could be very satisfying. Our dining room table

faces a wall of windows that look out at the deck. These dinnertime recordings were opportunities to visually take pride in the day's accomplishments and gauge our next step.

Of felling, milling, and building our building stage is the most abundantly documented. Because we were in the middle of construction when beginning this thesis, the methods we used to document the building experience were several. These methods extended beyond interviews to include photography and a communal work journal. Conversely, during the felling and milling of the trees, a thesis was not yet in the picture. As such, I have relied solely on interviews to recall these stages in my thesis.³

In total, I took one hundred and forty-five photographs of the building project with a simple point and shoot digital canon camera (model PowerShot A430). I captured the structural layers of the deck as they were being built, as I did our social experience during building. We also used a communal work journal to document the building project that summer. Throughout the summer, our communal log book—as it was called—sat on the kitchen counter next to the phone. It was interactive; anyone could read it at anytime. Yet it was individually driven. You could include an entry as little as you wanted, as often as you wanted, or not at all. Many different kinds of entries fill the pages of this book: weather reports, personal feelings, reflections on working together, design particulars, structural decisions, and general descriptions of a day's work. This journal proved relevant in this thesis, as it is referenced throughout Chapter Five.

³ During university break in the winter of 2009 (Reading Week), I visited home and took several photos of my parents engaged outdoors in what became the felling stage of this thesis. I inadvertently started to document my thesis, and as such, was able to include photos on felling in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, which documents the milling stage, I use photos from a subsequent milling, which occurred the following year in 2010 (milling lumber for my sister's home), as visual examples where otherwise there are none.

I feel my fieldwork style suited our context, determined by our level of intimacy with one another. Scripted interviews and a more formal fieldwork approach would have been unnatural for us. It also might have been uncomfortable for me to take the more formal role of a researcher with my family. Ultimately, I feel an informal approach allowed me to document what we were inspired to share together and this was my simple goal.

Before discussing the project itself, the next chapter reviews the folklore literature that forms the basis for this study.

CHAPTER TWO ~ LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the themes of this thesis, this chapter presents literature in the areas of family folklore and folklore studies with a focus on the natural environment. As a sub-discipline of folklore, family folklore has been named, whereas environmental or nature folklore has not. In this chapter I use the working term of “folklore studies with a nature focus.” A review of autoethnographic literature, as it relates to my experience of autoethnography within the academic setting, follows my folklore literature review.

Family Folklore

The Public Years

Many of the earliest defining texts on family folklore are direct products of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (Cutting-Baker et al. 1976; Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982; Kotkin and Zeitlin 1983). For three consecutive years (from 1974 to 1976) family folklore was a theme in the annual festival at the National Mall in Washington, DC. In line with the general goals of the festival, the family folklore program was created so that “Americans be made aware of the traditions which are part of their lives, and the beauty and value of those traditions” (Cutting-Baker et al. 1976, 5). Essential to this early concept of family folklore was the celebration of family (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982). Family lore such as stories, holiday traditions, photographs, and other material keepsakes, was represented by folklorists as families’ “glorious moment[s] carefully selected and elaborated through the years, tailored to the demands of the

present” (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982, 2). The first wave of family folklorists taught us that family folklore is synonymous with the past, and serves the purpose of making families feel good about themselves in the present.

Although the family folklore program is no longer as publicly prominent as it once was, the Smithsonian Institute continues to encourage the exploration of folklore in families in online initiatives geared at students, teachers, and the general public (e.g., Hunt 2003, Smithsonian Institute 2012). The institute also maintains their positive definition of family folklore, as demonstrated online in “Precious Legacies: Documenting Family Folklore and Community Traditions.” Here the author states: “These stories, memories, and traditions are powerful expressions...They anchor us in a larger whole, connecting us to the past, grounding us firmly in the present, giving us a sense of identity and roots, belonging and purpose” (Hunt 2003). Knowing a family’s folklore and principally the folklore of a family’s past, is continually presented as a powerful tool in shaping positive family identity.

Family Folklore in the Academy

Although the Smithsonian Folklife Festival likely gave family folklore its name and status as a sub-field in folklore studies, family has always been a source of folklore in the discipline. The documentation of particular traditions, such as folksong and story, within family settings characterized much of folklore’s early exploration (e.g., Creighton 1988, Roberts 1953, Ives 1978). But the significance of family within the study of folklore decidedly changed with Karen Baldwin’s PhD dissertation in 1975, “Down on Bugger Run: Family Group and the Social Base of Folklore.” In this work, Baldwin

asserts family as a rich area of study in its own right and as the “first folk group, the group in which important primary folkloric socialization takes place and individual aesthetic preference patterns for folkloric exchange are set” (Yocom 1997, 278, citing Baldwin 1975). Baldwin’s dissertation was foundational for many folklorists interested in pursuing the nature of tradition within a family.

Folklore has proven to be a powerful tool in the exploration of family dynamics although not always in a celebratory or straightforward manner, as the Smithsonian Folklife Festival proposed. As Stephanie Coontz, quoted by Joseph P. Goodwin, has said: “Contrary to popular opinion, ‘Leave it to Beaver’ was not a documentary” (Goodwin 1994, 35, citing Coontz 1992, 29). In recognizing the dynamic scope of family, most folklorists who continued to develop family folklore beyond the mid 1970s folklife festival started to move the study of family away from the one-dimensional nature of public family folklore. These folklorists embraced more varied concepts of family and with deeper levels of analysis.

Margaret Yocom states that family folklore began to evolve as a study when folklorists turned away from their own families and their experience of family censorship, to openly consider family dynamics outside of their own personal contexts (1997, 279). A review of the family folklore literature of the 1980s and 1990s however, does not support Yocom’s claim. Folklorists in these decades continued to explore tradition within their own families, while at the same time expanding on concepts of family. Often they adopted self-reflexive styles of scholarship, and some of these folklorists brought difficult family experiences to the fore. Kathryn Morgan, for example, in her ethnography *Children of Strangers: Black Families in America*, explores her family’s experience of

widespread racism. She examines how the folklore in her family, through the stories she was taught as a child, helped alleviate “the poison of self-hate engendered by racism” (Morgan 1980, xvii). Morgan’s ethnography shows that a family’s folklore does not necessarily serve the purpose of reinforcing “glorious” family moments (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982, 2); it also repairs, heals, and protects amidst complex and painful times.⁴ “Personal Narratives: The Family Novel” (Wilson 1991) is another influential work. William A. Wilson’s recollection of his mother’s stories and how they figure in his own life demonstrates how personal story—in content and prose—can effectively become a public piece.

Sporadic journal articles of the 1980s and 1990s show an explicit interest in the process of fieldwork within family folklore (see Miller 1997, Scheiberg 1990, Sherman 1986, Wildridge 1993, Yocom 1982). In recognizing the field as a site of profound intimacy, often carried out in natural contexts such as mealtime within the family home, these folklorists raise questions about how to aptly and successfully proceed as ethical and professional fieldworkers. In fieldwork among their own families, they describe encountering issues such as: social interaction as a family member versus as a folklorist, an uncharacteristically personal depth of familiarity with topics and participants, and an emotionally invested approach as a family member. In “All in the Family: Family Folklore, Objectivity and Self-Censorship,” Kim Miller writes:

When collecting and writing about family folklore, problems of the participant observer are magnified. Written accounts can become overly self-indulgent, more

⁴ Alternatively, folklore in families can also hurt. This aspect is a much less spoken about within the scholarship. Danielson (1994) is a good compilation on this topic, as is the recent work of Tye (2010), who considers how tradition and expressive culture have worked to shape her family experience in complex and sometimes ambivalent ways.

like memoirs than folkloristic studies. One can strive for and feign objectivity but never entirely obtain it. And trying to maintain the necessary balance between honesty and self-censorship is often comparable to trying to tiptoe over rows of overripe tomatoes in the summertime. It's a messy business which could potentially land you in a pile of manure. (1997, 345)

There is tension and growth reflected in the family folklore literature. These growing pains are necessarily set within the discipline and within the humanities in general, in seeing "the emergence of more personal explorations of expressive human behaviour" rise amidst the ever-present "constraints of conventional scholarship" (Danielson 1994, 12). Whether acknowledged by these folklorists or not, they were contributing to wider discussions on the very personal nature of fieldwork generally, and not only in family folklore but in all of the humanities. Issues encountered by family folklorists may be magnified by the added layer of family, but ultimately these issues could, or should, touch all fieldworkers in some way or another. In all, these folklorists, including Miller above, agree that fieldwork within your own family can be rewarding both personally and professionally. They agree that, ultimately, the two spheres are not distinct but can develop together. In "A Folklorist in the Family: On the Process of Fieldwork among Intimates," Susan Scheiberg states:

If one is willing to accept the methodological and analytical risks, the rewards, both personal and scholarly, are great. For, as I have said, one not only discovers more about human expressive and communicative behavior, one discovers more about oneself and one's relationship to those one loves. For the beginning student and the professional, that is indeed a great deal to gain. (1990, 213)

Still, other folklorists in the 1980s and 1990s directly accuse their discipline, and themselves a part of it, of distorting family. A special issue of *Southern Folklore*, "Family Folklore Studies 1994," is a particularly inspired compilation on this topic. It opens with a heartfelt prologue by an anonymous writer, reflecting on the realities of

collecting family folklore, and living with the after effects on family experience and identity. Through a family member this folklorist was inspired to reconsider his or her approach in documenting family stories:

[Brother:] "Please," he begged me, "don't ever put together another family story book."

[Folklorist:] "Why not?" I asked him, a little hurt, a little defensive.

[Brother:] "Because we aren't the happy Irish Catholic family in those stories." (Ties That Bind 1994, 3)

The family stories assembled by the folklorist were an idealization of their family world, and were causing pain and confusion among, at least one member of a family that had already grown apart. This folklorist wonders: "[W]hat role my work as a fieldworker played in perpetuating a false sense of family closeness, a consciousness of ourselves as a group that now makes its dissolution so hard to take" (Ties That Bind 1994, 3). S/he considers how the roles of family member, and folklorist, mutually supported an idealistic picture of family, disconnected from its complex reality, writing:

Our parents' insistence on our closeness blinded me to the real nature of our relationship as brothers and sisters, to the fact that we weren't really as close as we said we were or wanted to believe we were. But I was also blinded by folkloristic models of a family as a static entity, a "given" and by the focus of much family folklore work on the traditionality of family folklore, rather than on its use as a means of articulating relationships. No one told me that growing up would mean growing apart. No one suggested that folk groups emerge and disappear according to circumstances and in response to needs. So both the image-making within my family and my folklore training kept me from seeing the truth. (Ties That Bind 1994, 9-10)

The anonymous author of this essay demonstrates that family folklore as a "creative expression of a common past" (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting-Baker 1982, 2) may not serve all family members in the same way. S/he also shows that prioritizing surface layers of family life as family folklore potentially ignores the complicated depth of family life.

This special issue, "Family Folklore Studies 1994," was an explicit attempt to open up the study of family in folklore "beyond sentimental wishful thinking and reinforcement of established stereotypes" (Danielson 1994, 11). All contributors call to expand the definition of family, the experience of family life, and the transmission of family traditions. Joseph Goodwin, for example, in "My First Ex-Lover-In-Law: You *Can* Choose Your Family," introduces definitions of family for gay and lesbian individuals. Drawing on his own personal experience, he asserts that families exist beyond the "biological or natal family" (1994, 35), even if this is rarely considered within family folklore studies. In another example, "Transmission by Customary Subscription: Popular Women's Magazines and Family Folklore," Debbie Hanson explores the dramatic influence of popular culture on family life. In her examination of women's magazines, Hanson argues that family life is not only an island within a home, but is affected by far-reaching webs of popular culture (1994).

Following what Yocom has called a general "explosion of interest and research in family studies" in the 1970s (1982, 251), and a fairly productive period during the 1980s and 1990s, family folklore as an active sub-discipline of folklore all but disappeared. In my literature review I came across only one journal article by an author who defined her work as family folklore. It appeared in *Western Folklore* in 2004, and was written by then graduate student Mary Ellen Greenwood. In "Hunting for Meaning: How Characterization Reveals Standards for Behavior in Family Folklore," Greenwood writes about her first journey into the woods with her father and his hunting companions. Through Proppian character analysis, Greenwood describes the character context of the

hunting camp. Ultimately, she ends her research on a very personal note with a question for herself. Greenwood writes:

My father tells me, “You’re one of the guys, you know,” but perhaps this statement glosses over a situation much more complex. As a woman—a first for this family tradition—how will I ultimately fit into hunt characterization and transmission of a historically masculine culture? And if I do not eventually take aim and make my first kill, will that lead to the feminization of folklore, where traditionally masculine and categorically violent customs of bloodshed are replaced with softer, less controversial rituals? (2004, 99)

I cannot comment on Greenwood’s motives for recalling a somewhat dated sub-field of folklore into her work, but I chose family folklore as the only obvious entry point for my study. Knowing that my thesis is unique in many ways, traveling away from the expected, I believe I chose family folklore for traditional support. It is a sub-field of folklore that is defined and recognized by the discipline of folklore, even if some might consider it a little dated. This was perhaps a self-conscious motivation on my part. But I also chose family folklore because I wanted to show that there is also much to be learned from the kinds of families who have not usually attracted the folklorist’s attention. I wanted to make a contribution to the discipline, but to also see this for myself.

Family folklore has had a tenuous life. In negotiating the politics of family, expressive culture, and conventional scholarship, it is not surprising that it has mostly fizzled out, as too challenging to manage.⁵ The one-dimensional models of the early public family folklore program perhaps did not help with its transition to a respected and functioning sub-field within the field of folklore. As Larry Danielson states:

Unlike many folklore topics researched by folklorists who do not belong to the cultural group under study, family folklore touches directly on our own experience

⁵ Some folklorists still identify with family folklore in their own work and teaching. See, for example, Margaret Yocom’s blogsite www.margaretyocom.com/bio (accessed June 15, 2012).

as family members. Reading about another family's folklore may elicit shocks of recognition, confirm our own personal family values, or disturb us with the alien and the unexpected. (1994, 12)

Notwithstanding the challenges, family folklore has made a valuable contribution to an ongoing discussion about more personal, expressive, and autoethnographic styles of research and writing in folklore and the humanities.

If one looks beyond the relatively small group of scholars who self-identify as family folklorists, it is possible to find many folklorists who continue to study folklore within family settings, but who align themselves with other genre studies in folklore. Foodways is one such area. Diane Tye, in *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*, tells a story about her mother's life, and her family's life, through her mother's baking and recipe cards. Her mother fulfilled multiple roles of mother, wife, and minister's wife through the recipes she made (Tye 2010, see also Alder 1981). Jeannie Thomas, in *Featherless Chickens, Laughing Women, and Serious Stories*, explores generational narratives of her mother and grandmothers about serious topics such as natural disaster, child abuse, and suicide attempts. Thomas focuses on the moments of laughter present within these narratives, as she considers how uncomfortable moments in stories are managed and shared by women in her family (1997). Both Tye and Thomas make valuable contributions to the exploration of family life even if they do not classify their work as family folklore (see also Baldwin 1985, Borland 1991). Studies of material culture also place family at the heart. Family is the social context that defines the makers and users of artifacts and architecture in many of these studies (e.g., Glassie 1982, MacKinnon 2002, Mullen 1992, Pocius 1991). Folklore works featuring family are numerous and continue to inspire folklorists in the study of expressive culture today.

I chose to present the literature of family folklore in a way that made sense to me and as it stood out for me. Because my interests in this thesis are based in the transformative nature of the social experience of people and trees, I have approached this literature review by considering the transformative power of family folklore. In this thesis, it is not my intention to produce either a study of celebratory family folklore or a record of family struggle. My intention is to create a meaningful study that is true to life. In this, I hope to honour my own family and the varied experiences of families generally.

Folklore Studies with a Nature Focus

In 2005, the Smithsonian Center for Folklore and Cultural Heritage, in conjunction with the USDA Forest Service and the National Endowment for the Arts, produced an exhibit entitled, "Inspirations from the Forest," for the 2005 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. In this exhibit, now featured online, individual interpretations of forests are presented through unique forms of artistic expression (see Smithsonian 2012a). Through a flute-maker and theatrical storyteller, a painter, a photographer, and a quilter, we see that individuals are inspired by their personal engagement with forests. They recreate and share their forest experiences with others through their creative spirit and artful renderings.

The opening page of "Inspirations from the Forest" asks the viewer to consider their own body experience in nature: "When you enter a forest, what do you see? When you are climbing a mountain, what do you hear? When you are hiking through grasslands, what do you feel?" (Smithsonian 2012a). How we experience nature and

ourselves in nature, through our emotions and our physical senses, opens this online folklore exhibit. Although it does not go into great detail about the individual artists and their inspired creations, it is still with enthusiasm that I happened upon this website as a form of support for my thesis topic and line of inquiry.

When I began my thesis I felt hard pressed to find studies in folklore that considered personal experiences in and with nature, let alone trees. It was with disappointment that I came to realize that folklorists are not accustomed to exploring the relationships that people have with other living creatures. How people experience life around them, based in shared space, time, and engagement, and how people affect nature, has been understudied.

In the discipline's early years, collectors were in pursuit of cultural items such as old-country ballads and stories, and they focused almost exclusively on people living in rural areas. Remote communities of fishermen, farmers, loggers, hunters, trappers, and their families were thought to be rich containers of traditional verbal art, sheltered as they were from cosmopolitan cities and fast-paced modernization. Our disciplinary roots are among people who were sustained by their natural environments, yet the field of folklore has not grown to significantly explore relationships with non-human others—plant-life, animals, landscapes—with whom we share lives.

But the discipline of folklore is not alone. Yi-Fu Tuan, a cultural geographer, asserts that in environmental studies, "relatively few works attempt to understand how people feel about space and place...to take into account the different modes of experience (sensorimotor, tactile, visual, conceptual), and to interpret space and place as images of complex—often ambivalent—feelings" (2003, 6-7). Tuan emphasizes a need for these

types of intimate portrayals of people experiencing their environments, as a step towards self-awareness in nature. It is a step we often tend to miss but one that goes hand-in-hand with compassionate identification with all life forms.

On this very global issue Mary Hufford writes, “We think of the environment as a solid object completely detachable from its social and cultural content,” (2003, 270) when, in fact, the natural world “cannot be reduced to a set of physical attributes without doing violence to the local, regional, and national publics anchored in them” (Hufford 2003a, 270). With this in mind, folklorists in public, applied, and regional studies alike, intervene in issues where culture and environment meet (e.g. Brady 1994; Feltault 2006; Howell 1994, 2002; Lamadrid 1992; Marks 1994; Rikoon and Albee 1998; Rikoon, Heffernan, and Heffernan 1994; Rosengarten 1994). These folklorists move to represent people’s rights in maintaining cultural lifeways that are defined by natural environments, and threatened amidst development and change, representing what Hufford calls cultural lifeways with “little national visibility” (2003a, 271).

In *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, folklorists critically examine the effects of heritage projects, national sites, and state policy-making on local people and their lifeways in the United States (Hufford, 1994). In this compilation, some of the essayists challenge the dominant tendency to treat nature and culture as distinct spheres. Erika Brady, for example, in “‘The River’s Like Our Back Yard’: Tourism and Cultural Identity in the Ozark National Scenic Riverways,” considers the plight of trappers and hunters as their traditional practices and homeland becomes a regulated space within the confines of a national park system and tourist industry (1994). Another example is Dale Rosengarten’s essay, “‘Sweetgrass is Gold’: Natural Resources,

Conservation Policy, and African-American Basketry.” Rosengarten explores the revival of African-American basketry along the South Atlantic Coast, amidst declining access to sweetgrass due to commercial development (1994). In one final example, “Cultural Conservation and the Family Farm Movement: Integrating Visions and Actions,” authors Sandy Rikoon, William Heffernan, and Judith Bortner Heffernan approach several merging ideologies: cultural conservation, the family farm movement, and the family farm itself. They consider how identity and purpose meet, or do not meet, in a cultural conservation approach to saving the family farm (1994).

Most of these folkloristic explorations of nature and culture explore the multiple narratives that meet in, and struggle over a contested space, a natural resource, or way of life based in nature. But largely, if not completely, the discourse used is decidedly political without bringing the personal element into the political sphere. Folklorists approaching the topic of nature and culture tend to do so reservedly: they avoid feeling-based dialogue and refrain from describing people’s personal experiences in nature. As they do this, folklorists miss both the people involved and the animate others with whom we share space. I recognize these works as very important, as they attempt to reveal levels of authority that are adversely affecting people’s lifeways. But with humans seemingly distinct from an ‘inanimate’ nature, or at the very least silent one, we conveniently define and redefine nature spaces as needed. As Hufford describes in her work, “Stalking the Forest Coeval: Fieldwork at the Site of Clashing Social Imaginaries,” a conceptually unintegrated space is a place ripe for strife, where the most dominant narrative usually wins, despite the many narratives that create, and engage in, any one nature space (see Hufford 2001).

Moving even deeper into root causes of global concerns, public folklorist Kelly Feltault includes “environment” in a list of “human security issues” in her article, “Development Folklife: Human Security and Cultural Conservation.” Feltault argues for a public folklore that prepares and moves folklorists “beyond the bounds of an arts organization and its mission and beyond...economic growth through cultural tourism” (2006, 90). Based on her own experience working on the Delmarva Folklife Project in the mid-Atlantic coastal region of the United States (see Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation 2005), Feltault asks that folklorists consider human rights issues in jeopardy among the people they work with. She urges fieldworkers to consider their own involvement as a public folklorist in these issues. Writes Feltault:

By the end of the first month, I questioned myself, “Why am I here doing tourism?” The communities’ root causes were embedded in global and regional political, economic, and environmental changes that included state and federal legislation on trade and the environment, as well as racial and class inequalities and prejudices at the individual and institutional level that fit the description of human insecurity. (2006, 94)

She states her concern that well-intended and seemingly benign cultural tourism projects, which are increasingly a domain of public folklorists, are operating within larger paradigms of “*export-oriented industrialization strategy*” (2006, 95, emphasis original). Feltault asserts that as folklorists, we may in fact be feeding these paradigms and experiences of local injustice, which are socially, economically, and environmentally related.

In the discipline of folklore, folklorists have made general calls to address relationship between environment and people. Timothy Cochrane, in “Place, People, and Folklore: An Isle Royal Case Study,” calls for folklorists to examine more precisely how

folklore “reflects” place, including the natural environment. Cochrane found that how place influenced folklore and how folklore influenced the experience of place, was key to the folklore of the fishermen he worked with (1987, 2). In “‘Wild and Free. Leave ‘Em Be’: Wild horses and the Struggle Over Nature in the Missouri Ozarks,” Sandy Rikoon and Robyn Albee contend that “[f]olklorists and other cultural researchers have a great deal to contribute to understanding social constructions of nature and the environment, including the diversities in how people perceive, evaluate, and use physical landscapes” (1998, 203-04). They suggest these “might be best approached as clashes of competing knowledge systems and social constructions held among different social groups” (1998, 204). While on certain levels and in certain approaches these calls are being heeded, I maintain, as I have throughout this literature review, that they are not being addressed in the fullest sense possible. More work needs to be done in this area.

Mary Hufford stands out as a folklorist who has devoted her career to promoting an environmental focus in folklore. Her interest in “cultural policy” and “ecological narratives” (University of Pennsylvania) resembles the work of folklorists above. Many of her own studies in this focus area relate to mountain-top-removal coal mining in central Appalachia and its impact on local culture (2001, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005). Her discourse is political and often complex at first read, but her topics are decidedly unique. Hufford truly stands apart in her approach as the one folklorist who attempts to consider the interplay of humans and non-human others, often incorporating a phenomenological approach (e.g., 1990, 1992, 2001, 2003, 2006). In her studies, she plays with textual layers of engagement, perception, and perspective. Her unique

approach reflects her “broader interest in discourses on nature, environment, and the body, and the production of social imaginaries” (University of Pennsylvania).

In “Knowing Ginseng: The Social Life of an Appalachian Root,” Hufford examines wild ginseng as an “animate player” in the life of ginseng harvesters (2003a, 273). She states that “[i]n the ecological imagination stimulated by ginseng, the condition of ‘knowing’ ginseng is achieved through collectively interacting with a population of wild ginseng” (2003a, 270). Further, she argues the ginseng responds “[a]s a medium for the giving and receiving of signs through talk and other practices, ginseng participates in the social life of the mountains” (2003a, 270). Exploring ginseng’s role in a cultural world, her study also aims to consider how humans might better understand ourselves as part of nature (2003a, 288).

In her lengthy ethnography, *Chaseworld: Foxhunting and Storytelling in New Jersey’s Pine Barrens*, Hufford explores the engaged worlds of the human hunter, dog, landscape, and fox through the event of the chase. In this communicative event, Hufford emphasizes the role of the hound as mediator between the fox, landscape, and hunter. Hufford states: “Any fox hunter will say that the whole purpose of chasing foxes is to hear music from the dogs...The stories that hounds deliver are not only about the natural world, but about the hunters, for whom the hounds are extensions into the natural world” (1992, 38).

As a final example from Hufford, in the Central Appalachian Cove Forests, intensive coal mining is suspected of causing disease and rapid decline in old-growth tree species (2001, 30). In “Stalking the Forest Coeval: Fieldwork at the Site of Clashing Social Imaginaries,” Hufford explores some of the narratives which make up this

“ecological crisis” (2001, 30). Hufford describes two principal imaginaries where the local community and state agenda divide. The state’s narrative, she writes, “is hierarchically produced from without as part of the Corporate State’s imaginary of progress, productivity, and economic growth....to which we relate as observers only, not as co-producers and inhabitants” (2001, 31). In distinct contrast, is the narrative generated by local inhabitants who live in the Appalachian Cove Forests. On this forest, Hufford states: “The forest within this imaginary is not separate from the social world; rather, it forms a dynamic medium through which sociality flows” (2001, 31). Unlike the state’s forest, this one is “reciproating,” as it is, “community-based,” and “saturated with the perspectives of others, including neighbours, animals, agents of the ruling class, and even trees” (2001, 31). Hufford’s work reminds us that culture and nature are inextricably linked and shared through physical and emotional experiences of engagement.

The final page of “Inspirations from the Forest,” (Smithsonian 2012b) the online exhibit mentioned in the beginning of this review, asks the viewer to consider how inspired creation and appreciation of nature are a valuable form of environmental conservation:

The artists, writers, and musicians who draw inspiration from the natural world may not always call themselves conservationists or environmentalists, but they all share the same fundamental principles—appreciating our natural resources and seeking to conserve them for future generations. As our population grows, and with it the demand for natural resources, it is our responsibility to understand and appreciate how ecological systems work, and to make intelligent, informed decisions on how resources can be used most wisely. (Smithsonian 2012b)

I share the commitment described in this passage, and I hope to build on the literature of folklore studies by bringing nature in more fully.

Autoethnography: Making a Connection

My first brush with autoethnography in the university setting was at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. The course, which I attended in 2000, was in Southeast Asian history. The text was Karen Connelly's *Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal* (1992). I am forever thankful to the professor who introduced this vibrant text into our course. Written by a young Canadian woman, this book brought life into what was for me a somewhat dry story of names, dates, and other facts. As a teenager, Connelly wrote *Touch the Dragon* about her experience living in a rural community in Northern Thailand for one year. I was twenty-one years old at the time, and I had just returned home from half a year in Southeast Asia, including one month in Thailand. I was thrilled to come into contact with another's personal experience; it allowed me to enter, more deeply, into what was my own. I felt supported and inspired by another's emotions, perceptions, and courage to experience the world and then write about it. Looking back, I believe this ethnographic encounter sent me on a journey of appreciation for this style of text. Since then, the bar was set: I have continuously desired the personal and emotional, as my inspirational in the academic world.

I remember this text and a few others like it. They stood out for me, for reasons that are the stuff of autoethnography. I discovered that I was able to connect with authors who consciously share themselves in their work. I have since learned that a main goal of autoethnography is to generate inspired communication and dialogue between the writer and reader, through the sharing of personal truths (Ellis and Bochner 1996, 119).

In name, autoethnography is a practice often connected to disciplines like communication studies, creative studies, and performance studies. These are fields that emphasize varied forms of communication, and encourage creative renderings of life that attempt to mirror life itself. Well-respected titles such as *A Methodology of the Heart* (Pelias 2004), *Method Meets Art: Arts-based Research Practice* (Leavy 2009), and *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (Behar 1996), all demonstrate that creativity and emotion inspire an emerging academic style across disciplines (see also Goodall 2000).

My personal understanding of what constitutes autoethnography is inclusive. I am inspired by various forms of personal truth-making which are not limited to specific disciplines or genres. For example, authors writing in natural philosophy, such as David Abram (1997), and authors of creative non-fiction, such as Sharon Butala (1994) and Ross Laird (2002), were motivational in this thesis. These individuals creatively address their relationships with themselves, their natural surroundings, and their craft (magician/philosopher, writer, and woodworker, respectively). My definition of autoethnography is based on the following description by Ellis and Bochner: "Autoethnographies show people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles" (1996, 111). In this, both participants and researcher work together.

It seems to me that I did not know the term autoethnography existed until my master's program in folklore when I was introduced to various folklorists who write in the self-reflexive style of autoethnography, such as Katherine Borland (1991), Elaine Lawless (2001), and Diane Tye (2010), to name a few. I became familiar with texts that showed

folklorists, and other cultural ethnographers, working out the dynamics of their fieldwork experience on paper, allowing the field process itself to tell a story (e.g., Borland 1991). These folklorists helped to demystify the process of fieldwork for me and showed fieldwork to be a cultural event in and of itself. They revealed that field research presents contradictions, produces a range of feelings, and tells a dynamic story about communication.

Autoethnography addresses an incredible range of topics that challenge cultural complacency and taboos, asking us to think creatively and honestly about our physical, mental, and emotional experience in this world (see Ellis and Bochner 1996). Arthur Bochner states, “Maybe another thing that scares people about autoethnography is the kinds of experiences we ask people to reflect on. Often we focus attention on experiences that are shrouded in secrecy—events people are afraid or ashamed to tell about such as illness, family trauma, incest, domestic abuse, abortion, and addiction” (2006, 119). It is my experience that an animate and feeling relationship with nature, has become another topic shrouded in a kind of secrecy, ignorance, and embarrassment just like other topics common to autoethnography.

Freelance writer Fraser Los reminds us that, “With environmental activists now at home in corporate boardrooms, some may forget that the green movement started with an awestruck respect for the interconnectedness of the natural world” (2011, 76). As an emotional experience, our relationship with nature is out of common parlance and heart. I see autoethnography—a descriptive and feeling approach—as a perfect way to bring nature back to the person, and the person back to nature, within the academic setting. This thesis is an attempt to move in this direction.

The following three chapters directly address our project through the words of my family members and our fieldwork experience together. These chapters examine the stages of felling the trees, milling the wood, and constructing the deck.

CHAPTER THREE ~ FELLING: TOUCHING NATURE

I thought of the maple lying in the darkness, its leaves slowly curling inward and becoming limp, its branches cracked and smashed. It took us two full days to haul the maple out of the woods....We took it out, however, every bit. We burned the branches in our stoves. We milled the trunk and used the lumber to make tables, counter tops, and shelves. I always tell people that this bird's-eye maple around our sink comes from a tree we cut ourselves, from our own woods. What I do not tell was how, in the silence after the maple fell, I understood for the first time the extent of my own destructiveness; how I learned that with the flip of a finger I could take something away from the earth, forever. I do not describe how quickly I learned to enjoy my power, to think of trees as my own. I do not recount how my bones felt the shudder of the earth. I do not describe the silence.

—Beth Powning in "Trees" (2005, 198-199)

Powning reflecting on her experience with her husband, felling a grand maple in their back to the land move from Connecticut, United States, to the farmlands of New Brunswick, Canada, in 1970.

In this chapter, I explore my parents' experience felling trees in the winter of 2009. It was the first step in our three-staged project, and it was accomplished completely by my parents. They felled thirty mature spruce trees, which had been leaning towards the family home, and over the driveway and vegetable garden. Although this project was led by my father who, over the years, has felled many trees on our family property, he had never before managed a project of this size. It was also Mom's first time to truly embrace a work period in the woods. Together, this experience was a brand new one for them as a couple. The felling was accomplished in the cold of the winter, when it was just the two of them living at home in Harbour Woods. In this chapter, I attempt to understand what the process has meant to my parents, how it was experienced by them on an emotional and physical level. I include two main parts: "The Felling" that provides a

physical description of the stage itself, and “Tree Engagement” that describes my parents’ intimate experience with the trees.

The Felling

My parents felled thirty trees beginning in mid-February and ending in mid-March of 2009. It was a condensed period of very physical work. In their project, they focused on an area that included the shoreline, house, and garden. This is roughly half of our property and where we do most of our living. In an interview, I asked Dad about the area they chose to work in:

Michelle: Did you want to do [fell] further up [the driveway]?

Len: Well, there was a limit on what we could handle at the time. We just couldn’t do anymore. We were ready to quit. We had about sixty logs we milled. That was enough. [laughs] It was hard work. (Hollett 6, 2012)

As a matter of safety, my parents chose trees which were ready to go. They also selected some with the quality of lumber in mind: trees that were strong, straight, and without a lot of branches, which leave knotholes in milled lumber. If particular trees were not of this quality, but still had to be taken down, my father kept the wood of these trees to split and stack into firewood.

Of their wintertime experience, Mom says, “The place seemed like a lumber camp to me.” She recalls, “I remember describing that my home had turned into a lumber camp” (Hollett 6, 2012). Each day at camp was different. On certain days, they would

focus on one tree from start to finish. This involved felling the tree, limbing the tree of its branches, tidying up these branches, and hauling the log to a defined place where all logs would be stacked. On other days their focus was thematic in task: fell a few trees in one day, for example, and save all of the limbing and clearing for another day. At their constant convenience were their tools: one chainsaw, one ladder, and plenty of rope. They also used a come-a-long, a mechanical lever designed to pull and direct significant weight with the use of rope. To haul the logs, they used their 2002 Subaru Outback. The car never left the driveway, and this meant a lot of maneuvering, more rope, and patience, when hauling felled trees out of different locations.



Figure 8. Len and Marilyn planning a felling, Harbour Woods, c. winter 2009.

My parents each had their own jobs, which they more or less stuck to. Dad always operated the chainsaw. My mother has never used one in her life and neither did

she attempt to in this project. I do not believe it ever came up that she might share in this job. It was simply expected, by both of my parents, that Dad with his years of experience would be directly responsible for making the cuts. Each tree was a unique project, depending on its size, state of decay, and the weather that day. As Dad describes:

You have to be really careful with the direction of the wind. You know that can affect it. And how solid the tree is. If the [tree] was starting to rot at the base you can lose the direction. It's not always gonna go where you planned on. I mean that has happened to me before. Then it will just kind of go. The center of gravity of the tree is pretty important too, with the weight and the leanings. You got to be pretty careful. (Hollett 6, 2012)

Sometimes Dad would fell a tree by himself, and Mom would arrive afterwards to organize the mass of branches, while Dad limbed the branches from the tree. But this depended on the tree. If it was tall—between fifty and sixty feet—my parents relied on ropes and the come-along to better ensure the direction of the fall. Mom assisted in these circumstances. In the following passage, my parents reflect on this experience:

Marilyn: I have a couple pictures of Len up a tree there. [points out of the window] He looks like a little red dot way up in the tree. He had to crawl up to get the rope in the right position. So that he could—

Len: So we could attach it to the come-a-long.

Marilyn: So he could throw it down, and we could attach it to the come-a-long. Because the rope has to be quite fairly high up in the tree in order to pull it.

Len: In order to direct it.

Michelle: Did you do that with each tree?

Len: Not all of them. Some of them we were able to do it [without], because we had lots of room to knock them down—but in cases where it was close quarters.

Marilyn: That particular one, it was really high.

- Len: It was a huge tree.
- Michelle: How many feet up would you be?
- Marilyn: It was pretty high. I mean you'd go with your rope by a ladder.
- Len: Sixty feet—
- Michelle: Did you feel nervous? [looks to Marilyn] Did you feel nervous? [looks to Len]
- Len: No.
- Marilyn: I was nervous! I was at the bottom, watching, holding the ladder. Can you imagine? What good I would be holding the ladder?
- Len: I generally don't mind heights, as long as I am fairly—
- Marilyn: Well, if the ladder started to go, I don't think I would've been able to hold on to it, do you?
- Michelle: I don't know. You might surprise yourself.
- Marilyn: Or would I be there to watch him fall?
- Len: So once we got the tree secure, we would tighten up the come-along. We'd put a strain on it. And I'd cut. I'd make my notch, just at the bottom of the tree. You have to make a notch. You make a 'v'. (Hollett 6, 2012)

There was obvious skill, anticipation, and concern involved in the process my parents describe. The tree is so powerful, with my parents so small in comparison. The felling itself was very physical work, and this effort endured after the tree was felled: it took time and was physically demanding to remove and organize the countless branches from each tree. Mom and Dad describe this experience:

- Marilyn: You know I wasn't there all the time when Len brought trees down. A lot of times, Len would bring them down on his own, and

he'd start limbing them up. I did the clearing away. I mean, there's a huge, huge amount of branches, when you get through it. There's a mass of branches.

Michelle: I can imagine.

Marilyn: And you got to drag all those away.

Len: And we didn't burn them. We'd pile them places where they'd decompose on their own. (Hollett 6, 2012)

In addition to the above steps, Mom and Dad really enjoyed hauling the logs. It was a puzzle-like challenge for them, to remove each log from where it had been felled, across the property, and up the driveway to where it would be stacked. As Mom says below, their vehicle always remained on the driveway, as they could not drive into tight squeezes or over the lawn. As such, there was a great deal of strategy and physical manipulation involved. They used ropes and a single block pulley around different fixed points in the environment, usually a rooted tree. Dad loved this part because it required frequent tying and untying of knots. This is a skill Dad developed through his fishing village roots, something he took with him from the sea to the woods.

Len: Moving the trees from A to B was quite an operation, because it very often meant putting a pulley on a tree at one point, and pulling the tree in that direction. The car would be going, well wherever the car was, but moving it in the direction—

Marilyn: Down the driveway. A car can only go in one direction, down the driveway, or up it.

Len: So you had to use a single pulley to change the direction of the pull. And I was there to watch it, to see it didn't hitch up on another—

Michelle: Like using another tree? [to change the direction of the pull]

- Marilyn: Yeah. Because there was a lot of them out here. So we would have to get out there—but the car was going this way—so we'd have to have [the pulley] somewhere around a tree out there and then attached to the car.
- Michelle: You did a lot of figuring, I'm sure.
- Len: There was a lot of ropes.
- Marilyn: There was a lot of ropes. Oh we were always connecting and disconnecting ropes... Len would have to scream, "Stop!" Because of course, [the log] would get caught in a rut. And so here you are, pulling the rope that's attached to the tree, going around the tree, that's attached to the car.
- Len: That's right. She'd very often drive the car. And I was on the other end to re-direct the pull.
- Marilyn: And I was looking and listening for Len screaming, "Stop!" [both laugh]
- Michelle: What rut would it—oh, on the earth?
- Marilyn: A rock or a rut, or it would just nose dive.
- Len: Or it would come to the end of the pull. So that's far enough, you had to move it now. So you had to change directions.
- Michelle: Wow. So you'd have to do that operation—
- Len: Two or three times.
- Michelle: Two or three times! What a big job.
- Len: It was a big job.
- Marilyn: Then we'd drag it up the road.
- Len: We'd get it up to the place where we were storing the logs. And then we had to get them stored in a pile so they were later on easy to remove from the pile to get to the mill when he arrived. That was another day. And I guess we did that pretty good.
- Marilyn: We did a great job. (Hollett 6, 2012)

My parents' total method was physically demanding, as it was low-impact on our land and the tree population. Mom and Dad were cautious and careful, wise and purposeful, and they enjoyed themselves. They were sensitive to the symmetry of the land and the job at hand.



Figure 9. Felled and stacked trees, Harbour Woods, c. spring 2010.

Tree Engagement

In the felling project, Mom felt a pioneer heritage coming through that she really enjoyed. She felt proud of her work with Dad, and their purpose together:

- Marilyn: So Len and I got started and then it became fun, because I felt like I was a pioneer! I said, "I'm working at a lumber camp this winter, it's like a lumberyard!" And it was fun.
- Michelle: Did you tell people that?
- Marilyn: Yeah. I felt like I was in a lumber camp. I think it was fun, because it was a part of our heritage out of the winter. People

probably would have done that in the winter, the best time to probably cut trees, out of winter: some lumber for your house that you're going to build in the spring or the summer.

Michelle: Do you remember people—I mean you probably wouldn't have had people doing that in your childhood?

Marilyn: No.

Michelle: [I look to Dad] But do you remember people doing that in your childhood? Cutting down trees and using [them] to build structures? Homes?

Len: No.

Michelle: You don't remember that either?

Len: No. In the immediate area where I lived, there weren't any forests to do that. (Hollett 5, 2009)

Neither Dad nor Mom knew felling trees as part of their childhood experience. As an adult, Dad taught himself this practice in our woods. Although his first real encounter felling trees was in Chilliwack, BC, during a summer job he had in his early twenties before he and Mom married. With the Canadian Officer Training Corps (COTC), Dad learned how to operate a chainsaw and how to fell a tree. Significantly, Mom relates to their felling project through the added layer of a borrowed tradition: Mom felt the excitement of pioneer traditions alive in her own self. In my mother's eyes, their wintertime project replicated a strong narrative of early Canadian history. Mom saw this as "a part of *our* heritage" (Hollett 5, 2009, emphasis added).

In an individual interview with my father I ask Dad why he enjoys felling trees:

Michelle: I just thought to myself, [pauses] you like cutting trees don't you? You like being out there, to cut with your chainsaw, and being outside.

- Len: It's healthy work.
- Michelle: So, why do you like it? Because it's healthy work?
- Len: It's good honest work. I like the physical work part of it. One of these days I won't be able to do that. But I can still do it.
- Michelle: You probably do it more now, than you did when you were busy working? [as a civil engineer] Hey?
- Len: Yeah for sure. Didn't have time to do it then. (Len Hollett, 2009)



Figure 10. Marilyn and Len during the felling, Harbour Woods, c. 2009.

Observing my father over the years, I have learned that outdoor, physical work means health to him. I have watched his emotional health improve after he retired from his office job in 1999, and he began spending more physical time working outdoors. Dad is healthy because of the active lifestyle he leads, and he is able to stay active because of his good health. He describes the work he does in the woods as honest, healthy, and physical. Working outdoors in nature, my father finds himself honest and in his element. In this project, my parents join forces in a context which is wonderfully simple. In their healthy wintertime work they have rosy cheeks, aching muscles, and sleepy bodies at the

end of the day. They are pioneers. Both of my parents are inspired in this simple venture of outdoor, physical work.

Height and Weight

Many of the trees on our family property had grown so tall over the years that my parents had begun to consider them hazardous in the event of an unlucky fall. The height of the trees—some of them over fifty feet tall—had now determined their end. Because of this, the height of the trees was significant to my parents. It brought Mom and Dad into direct contact with a sense of time. In the first group interview of this thesis, Mom, Dad, Suzanne, and I spoke about the size of the trees as it relates to our mutual existence—us and the trees—over the years.

The following conversation begins with Mom. She first provides consideration for the seasonal time of year when the felling took place. Mom communicates great love and care, as a strong part of their experience generally.

Marilyn: The trees: that was a labour of love for Len and I that we did in the cold of the winter when the ground was frozen, when you could transport the trees without damage to the property. Because we had to get them from where they were felled out to the road. We were dragging them across the frozen lawn and over the snow. And if we'd done that in warmer weather it would have really left its mark on the property.

Len: We couldn't have done it.

Michelle: But that was still sort of—

Marilyn: It was done in the cold though.

Michelle: What month? March?

- Marilyn: After we came back from our trip to Cuba, so it would have been February.
- Len: Yeah, so it would have [finished] around the latter part of March, like the third weekend.
- Marilyn: Yeah. It was still winter then, it still felt not like spring. It still felt like the cold of the winter. It was hard cutting the trees down. But the more we looked at them, the more we thought these trees have lived their life; they are going to come down. They were coming down throughout the winter. We were having trees blown over by the storm. We must have had about four or five trees down without our help. And these were close to our house. It was hard—
- Len: It was a safety thing. We really had to take them down.
- Marilyn: It was like saying goodbye to old friends. It was like saying goodbye to the giants of the forest. They were beautiful, beautiful, huge trees.
- Len: Sixty years old probably some of them, fifty to sixty.
- Marilyn: Yeah and fifty feet high.
- Suzanne: Really? [sounds amazed] So they would have been how big when we were really little? They would have been pretty big, right? Like half the size?
- Len: Ten, fifteen, feet high, some of them.
- Michelle: I feel like they might have been to the line of the rope there. [points to the clothesline suspended between the house and a spruce tree, roughly fifteen feet from the ground] Maybe that big?
- Marilyn/Len: Yeah, yeah.
- Len: And I came down here as a little boy with my uncle. We got a lot of mussels on the shoal down here, I was probably, maybe, ten years old. So at that point those trees were pretty small. Maybe, five, six, [feet]. [pauses in reflection] The same trees.
- Suzanne: Right. Wow.

Marilyn: We were thinking about this while we were cutting the trees down. [pauses] When they come down it's like the earth moves. They come down with the most loudest—the sheer weight of them—you don't realize. They look tall, and elegant, and majestic, stretching out to the sky. They don't seem very huge or heavy. But when they come down they're giants, mammoth giants. And they shake the ground. (Hollett 1, 2009)

In this conversation, the trees my parents felled become a living family tree of sorts, as we map our growth through the growth of the trees. In discussing the height and age of the trees, Suzanne and I are drawn to consider what their size might have been in our childhood. We do not exactly remember, but this does not seem to matter. The sudden group awareness that we and the trees have grown in parallel all these years, beginning with Dad's childhood memory of visiting the property as a boy, seems to amaze us all.

With attention trees can mark our passage of time. In the above conversation, trees easily become the ultimate doorframe of scattered pencil markings, of heights, dates, and children's names. But unlike families who ultimately abandon the task of recording childhood growth on walls, as we did on the doorframe in our kitchen, trees continue to mark time whether we ask them to or not. They do this, whether we are even conscious of this reality. Waking up to the fact that the trees around us are living, breathing monuments of our time, as well as their own, is profound.

Just as tree height was significant to my parents, so too was their weight. In the passage below, Mom and Dad share with Suzanne and me some reflections on the heavy weight of the trees once they were felled. We grapple with the weight of death in this conversation, somehow at odds with our understanding of trees becoming lumber. Dad

begins this conversation, asserting the physical challenges inherent in moving a felled tree.

- Len: They're heavy! Just handling a ten-foot, two by eight, piece of timber, it's heavy! It takes two people, really, to handle it comfortably.
- Michelle: Does the wood get heavier when it's cut?
- Len: No. It will dry. It's drying.
- Marilyn: Heavier than when it was a tree? [directs question at Michelle]
- Michelle: Yeah.
- Marilyn: It seems it does.
- Michelle: I feel like it is.
- Marilyn: It seems to me, once it's not a tree anymore, it becomes lumber and it just becomes extremely stiff and heavy. It doesn't wave in the wind anymore.
- Len: Well, you can't move a ten-foot log. A ten-foot piece of two by eight, yes you can move it. You start trying to move a ten-foot log—it's ten, twelve inches in diameter—you can't.
- Marilyn: The heaviness really struck me. Because in the wind, they bend, they dance, the roots move in the ground. And then when they come down they just seem like they're, you know. Wow. [becomes quiet] They're just very dense, very heavy. They don't seem that way when they're up. (Hollett 1, 2009)

Everything we do in the process of managing felled trees, such as stacking the cleaned logs, milling them into lumber, and stacking them yet again, helps wood in its drying process. The wood becomes lighter and more manageable versions of itself. But at the time when a tree is felled, the 'dead' weight is overwhelmingly obvious. Trying to move the tree yourself, with your own body and strength, is one realm of experience.

You are challenged by the weight, how immovable the tree has become, as Dad describes above. Yet just a short period before, the tree was a tree and not a log. As Mom describes, “they bend, they dance, the roots move in the ground” (Hollett 1, 2009). Perceiving a tree’s weightless air in the sky is another realm of experiencing the tree. This experience is decidedly one of sensation and imagination together. At once, the tree sways supported by gravity, its roots in the earth, and the sap flowing through its trunk. Branches move in the wind reminding you to dance, to be silent, to listen, and see. Yet everything changes the moment a tree is cut from its roots. These are the same powerful metaphors we have adopted in our human lives.



Figure 11. Naturally occurring branch placement in old tree stump, Harbour Woods, c. 2009.

Canadian author and woodworker Ross Laird says that when it comes to finding the right wood for his projects, “loss brings out its depth” (2002, 3). For example, Laird searches the forest floor for that perfect fallen branch that will become his cupboard door handle. On his ultimate find, he says, “The long fall from the body of the tree, the separation from unity, has given this branch, as it does so many things, a glow of intensity. Loss brings out its depth” (2002, 3). Like Laird’s branch, the trees my parents felled have become separated from unity. They are no longer attached to the roots they have known all of their lives. Some of them are fifty to seventy years old, which is *old* for spruce trees in Harbour Woods. Like Laird describes, our trees, and our understanding of them glows in intensity as they are separated from their roots. Loss asks us to perceive deeply and often that which is always there.

Life and Death

In the mountain villages of the Kii Peninsula, in Japan, tree-felling is referred to as a “life-taking occupation” (Knight 205, 2001). In Kii culture, felling a tree is understood as a death to the tree that culturally requires forgiveness. Each year the regional forest industry sponsors a memorial rite where tree fellers are provided the ceremonial space to ask forgiveness from all spirits of trees they have felled that year. In this culture, a framework is in place to help individuals emotionally manage the reality of their life-taking occupation.

In contrast, here at home in Nova Scotia, no such cultural framework exists, as mainstream and widespread. A local forester from New Brunswick, Cary Rideout, demonstrates this when describing his long-time occupation of harvesting trees with his

father on their family land. On his occupation, Rideout writes, “Not to sound to [sic] New Age, but time spent among these silent trees is akin to a spiritual experience—at least until the sawdust starts to fly” (*Saltscares Magazine* 2011, 45). Rideout indicates having a spiritual connection with the trees, but he does so tentatively, finishing his thought with playful sarcasm, alluding to the challenges he may have in reconciling the full spectrum of his work among trees. The potential depth of his experience is overshadowed, cut short by his humour: “when the sawdust starts to fly” (*Saltscares Magazine* 2011, 45).

In the conversation below, my parents demonstrate that the experience of taking a tree’s life was significant for each of them. They each express themselves in their own unique way. During the felling, my mother spoke to the trees before their end. Her goal was to ask them for their permission in taking their lives, as well as to prepare them for their death. On this she states: “It all came together, it seemed like it was just time. I talked to the forest and I talked to the trees. And I guess they knew this was coming. And everybody had decided it was time, the trees and us” (Hollett 1, 2009). Decidedly different from Mom, Dad focuses on the physical challenges. In the conversation below, he demonstrates an adrenaline-like response to felling trees. Dad also cuts in on some of Mom’s quieter reflections when she chooses to identify the sensitive nature of life and death as a significant part of her felling experience. In this, Dad reminds me of the forester mentioned above, Rideout, who draws attention away from aspects of his experience with humour.

Below, Mom begins by sharing some personal context that added to her felling experience. She mentions reading *The Findhorn Garden*. This book describes the

humble beginnings of the now massive Findhorn Gardens and spiritual retreat center in Scotland (Caddy 1970, see also Findhorn Foundation). The creators, a family of five and one friend, started their garden on very infertile land. But guided by communicative relationships with their plants, their garden thrived. Although I know this story made an impression on my mother, I am also aware that she has always had a tender relationship with her garden, and the entire outdoor world, a long time before reading this book.

Marilyn: I think the thing was the activity in the winter. Like, just think about the Celts and their belief that all life comes out of the cold. [pauses] So, I read that book about Findhorn. So, I talked to the trees and asked them permission, and told them about their good life. And then we cut them down. So their death was giving birth to something else.

Michelle: What did you say to the trees?

Marilyn: What did I say? I said, [pauses] basically, "Please can we cut you down." Because—

Len: "You're about to die anyway." [laughs] They were reaching maturity.

Marilyn: Yeah. I said, "You've had a good life." [pauses] I mentioned all the things that they'd done, like sheltering the animals, and home for bees, and birds nesting and resting in their branches, and their needles dropping and making soil underneath, and holding the soil together, and producing all their oxygen, and being beautiful. I said, "You've lived a really, really good life. And now we need to cut you down."

Michelle: Did you cry?

Marilyn: Well, I don't know if I— [pauses] Yeah, well, yeah. I think the hard part was when you heard—

Len: I didn't.

Michelle: No?

- Len: I was worried about the tree falling in the right place. [laughs]
- Marilyn: Yeah, Len was involved in that. When I heard them thud with their full weight on the ground—
- Len: Oh some of those, they were something else.
- Marilyn: I was just—
- Len: Voom!
- Marilyn: —so impressed with how huge and big and weighty these trees were. They don't look it, but when they came down they were truly giants, you know. Whew. [becomes teary] So it was quite amazing when we felled them, and quite sad. But you know I'm hoping they're alright with it. I think they are. And they're gonna be beautiful deck now under my feet.
- Len: They'll be supplying the wood for a deck that will last hopefully ten or fifteen years, twenty years.
- Marilyn: And then when the wood disintegrates it won't be burned. We'll do something with it, we'll put it somewhere, and it will rot back into the soil.
- Len: That's true.
- Marilyn: So eventually they would come down on their own and rot back into the soil.
- Len: That's not entirely true. If I'm still burning wood I might be putting them in the furnace.
- Marilyn: Yeah? Burn for wood, eh?
- Len: Oh well! I have to go back to work. Michelle, unless you have some more questions.
- Marilyn: I think that's why I love green, because trees are green.
- Len: Thanks for a beautiful lunch. [gets up from the table]
- Marilyn: Trees. [pauses] That's why I named Tree, 'Tree'. [refers to Tree, deceased family dog, and sister of present family dog, named Fir Tree] Remember our first—

- Michelle: Yeah.
- Len: Tree, yes.
- Michelle: Tree and Fir Tree.
- Marilyn: Because I loved trees. Yeah, true love. [becomes quiet]
(Hollett 5, 2009)

During the felling and in reflections like the one above, Mom takes time to consider the passing of the trees in a manner not unlike a memorial service for a family member. She mourns them. She shows her deep appreciation for each tree as she celebrates their lives in words. She acknowledges some of the wonderful ways in which they have contributed to the well-being and healthy abundance of life here on our property. But unlike a memorial service, the trees were still living when Mom spoke their eulogy, and she and Dad were orchestrating their fall. This is no small achievement to mix emotion with awareness for the “life-taking” (Knight 205, 2001) at hand. It was Mom’s choice to use words of gratitude and to hold the space while each tree fell. Quite possibly this was to assuage her own sense of guilt over this event. Adding this layer of ceremony to the felling made each tree’s passing significant for Mom, and perhaps for the trees as well.

Dad tends to focus on aspects of the physical task and the necessity of the job, instead of expressing emotional feelings about felling trees. In the conversation above, I wonder if my mother’s emotion asks my father to feel what is challenging for him to feel. “Make your mind up and just cut” (Knight 2001, 204) is a Japanese proverb from the Kii



Figure 12. Dad limbing a tree, Harbour Woods, c. 2010.

forestry tradition, referenced above. A Japanese forester cites this proverb in “The Second Life of Trees: Family Forestry in Upland Japan.” This individual describes the emotional challenges inherent in his practice as evidenced by the proverb, and through his personal experience:

With a forest you have planted yourself, when you enter it you say, this would be a waste, and nothing would be cut down. With thinning there is the old saying, ‘make your mind up and just cut’ [*omoikitte kiru*]. But after you planted a tree yourself and cut the grass around it, you tend to develop a love [*aichaku*] for it. You feel sorry for this tree or that tree and leave it standing. (Knight 2001, 204)

In my parents’ project, it was Dad’s role to make up his mind and just cut. Dad demonstrates this to be a part of his approach as a forester. The actual weight of safely felling the tree—of making a good cut and creating the right fall—was specifically on my father.

Although Dad does not describe an emotional challenge in felling trees, this does not preclude a sensitivity for the task, which I know my father has. Dad will acknowledge the importance of wise cutting and purpose, when taking trees from the woods:

Michelle: Do you ever feel guilty when a tree goes down?

Len: No. [smiles]

Michelle: No? [laughs with discomfort]

Len: No. [direct]

Michelle: Not like Mom. Like Mom talks—

Len: I figure that as long as we use them wisely. And were not clear cutting. If I was clear cutting, yeah, if I had to do that I think I would definitely question whether it was the right thing to do. We've got lots of trees here, at least, if we use them properly. I mean, they're going to die so we should be taking them down. Smartly, you know.

Michelle: Do you look at it like a forest keeper? Taking care of the forest?

Len: I guess. You want to keep your property looking good. Let the sunshine in so the garden can grow, the veggies can grow, and the flowers can grow.

Michelle: Have the vegetables grown more this year because of trees that have been taken down?

Len: Well, they might be. Because I did take a couple from out of that area. Yeah, I am sure it helped. I took two down to build my crib out on the breakwater.

Michelle: Did you?...

Len: Out on the far edge of the corner of the breakwater, yeah. I needed spruce, and I wanted good, strong, good, healthy spruce, so I took them. They were in the way of the garden. I knew they were, so,

“Well, I guess those two well have to come down.” And they were probably a foot on the base. (Len Hollett, 2009)

Although Dad does not admit to feeling emotional attachment to the trees he fells, he does indicate a great reverence for the woods in different ways. Below, in an interview with Dad, he emphasizes the difference between the job he and Mom did, and the job a commercial enterprise would do. The latter is an approach that many people in our area do for extra income. In communities along Peggy’s Cove Road, it has become common practice to clear-cut trees just beyond houses and tree lines in areas that are not visible from the road. In this way, many private landowners have sold their trees to commercial foresters without compromising the ‘look’ of forest directly around their home. Dad says that this is something he could never do.

- Len: They’d take too many. And we wouldn’t have anything left. I think the way we did it is the way to do it. We would do it, you know, in small blocks at a time. Because thirty trees, we hardly even miss them do we?
- Michelle: No—
- Len: It made a difference, but—
- Michelle: It made a difference in that it opened up the property in a really nice way.
- Len: Sure, which was good. But there’s still a lot more trees. But if you get somebody in there commercially doing that—whew, you’d really see a change. And I don’t think it would be good change.
- Michelle: You wouldn’t like—
- Len: No, no. (Len Hollett, 2009)

In the passage above, my father shows that he is sensitive to taking too much, and too fast, from the woods. Although Dad does not directly say so, I believe he blends his own experience with that of the trees: both he and the woods could not manage such a dramatic fell-swoop clearing. Simply, yet emphatically, my father states that taking too many trees would just not be good. Dad demonstrates that on an intuitive level he knows how much is too much for the woods and, as a result, too much for him.

In her work on the contested forest spaces in endangered Appalachian Cove Forests, Mary Hufford states that within cultural forests extreme realities converge (2001). In the spaces between these realities are the everyday relationships which people have with trees. My father's approach has been building for years, as actual physical engagement. His relationship is decidedly more reserved than my mother's, in terms of describing his feelings about felling trees. But he honours the trees in his own way, as profoundly as anybody. He demonstrates this in the way he respects what the woods can provide, and in his awe for the power of the tree and the operation itself. In his practice, Dad respects trees. This filters into his appreciation for them as living entities, which mark the passage of our time as a family.

The death of the trees was very significant for Mom. It was important for her to consciously include the trees in their decision to fell them. This choice reflects an ongoing relationship with the trees. She regards them as a conscious, sacred, and poetic part of her life. The emotion with which my mother connects to the passing of the trees, the cold of the winter, and the love and care of my parents' month-long period together, demonstrates how deeply she cared for this experience.

Through themselves, one another, and through the trees, my parents recall a very full and grounding experience in the woods. I believe they encountered deep themes there: sense of time, powerful nature, and the almighty scope of life. Important too was the accompanying physical work of this stage, which seemed to have the very important effect of solidifying in their bodies the seemingly larger themes. In Glassie's studies among rural peoples around the world, he emphasizes a deep occupational connection with land, which he has described as "finding the rhythm of the universe during common work" (1999, 255). I see this in my mother and my father in their felling project. They experienced the rhythm of the woods together, in important ways, ultimately bringing them back to themselves in body, mind, and spirit.

In the following chapter, "Milling: Realizing Self," I explore the next stage of this project, where my parents' dreams came together in the milling of the trees.

CHAPTER FOUR ~ MILLING: REALIZING SELF

Creative energy exhibits the same impulse of lightning. It passes over or through the body, scorching and liberating, sometimes painfully, all that has been restrained, cautious, tentative. It drags me from my slumber, tempting me with visions and dreams of what is possible: a chair made entirely from a single, steam-bent ribbon of wood, a tabletop inlaid with bright stones from the river, copper shimmering at the edge of a cabinet door. And all this from rough wood, hewn raggedly, stripped to its very bones with their hidden light. When creative lightning enters deep into me, its charge amplifies all my sensations. It runs fiercely up and down my spine. I cannot sit still. Nor can I sleep, because the static inside migrates rhythmically, exploding into shapes as it fills my hands, showing me poetry hidden in my ribs, the maps of stories that lie on my back. I become an emerging geography of the sacred, sensing the energy pass over the landscape as a searchlight reveals territory of night.

—Ross Laird in *Grain of Truth: Ancient Lessons in Craft* (2002, 53-54)



Figure 13. Milled lumber, Harbour Woods, c. spring 2010.

In our three-staged project of felling, milling, and building, the milling is a strong reference point for beginnings and transformation. With the pivotal decision to mill on our land, years of my parents' dreams and desires came to fruition. Above, Laird

describes his own creative awakenings as lightning unleashed (2002, 53-54). In a similar vein, this chapter describes my parents' lightning. As an inspirational return to themselves, their experience has formed the basis of our family project.

For a long time, my father had wanted to manage the trees of our property for the health of the woods. Also for quite a few years, my mother had wanted to build a new deck on the west face of our house. Although these are now the first and third stages of our family project, for many years my parents approached these jobs as the work of professionals. As such neither job was started. With other expenses like house renovations, vehicle repairs, and daily living, my parents felt they could not afford to manage the woods or build the deck. Until this project, neither job was something my parents saw themselves doing. Neither did they consider felling and building as a possible continuum of stages on our land.

In the winter of 2009, Mom and Dad decided that for safety reasons it was imperative that they begin to remove the taller trees from our property. As their only affordable option, they made the decision to do it themselves. But building on our family home with these felled trees was not yet a part of my parents' plan. Initially, their thought was to sell the felled trees to a local mill.

Michelle: So what really spurred this project on? What got it going?

Len: Well. Your mother always wanted—well at least the past couple of years—she's been talking about extending that deck. And I think it took the fact that we cut the trees down, really, for another reason: we were going to sell them. That was the original [plan]. For safety reasons we wanted to get the trees down and, "Let's try to sell them."

Michelle: So safety was the real—

Len: Safety was the initial. But, "Let's not just cut them up for firewood." They're too valuable of trees for that. Because they're still good. Most of them are still good. Even though they're nearing the end of their lives, very mature trees. Once we did that, and had them down, [we] then realized, "Hey, we can't sell them. They don't want them. The market isn't there."
(Len Hollett, 2009)

Local lumberyards declined my parents offer to sell. As Dad says, the market was not there. Without money as their guide, and what could be considered the heavy promise that *it* sustains and provides for us, my parents found the ability and desire to continue what they had started and create something themselves. In a move that deeply honoured themselves as creators, they decided to mill the trees on site and design and build Mom's deck. Just as our trees were transformed into building lumber in the process of milling them, this section tells my parents' story of transforming years of their own ideas into actions. I begin below with "A Context for Transformation" that describes the economic stage for this change in my parents' lives. This section is followed by a description of the milling, and finally my parents' story of transforming their dreams into realities in "Dream Engagement."

A Context for Transformation

In 2008, one year before this project began, our economy fell dramatically at the peak of a financial crisis in the United States. Vast sweeps of Americans were hit hard and fast, seemingly overnight. I recall media images of long line-ups: individuals looking for work and help in what is now considered a financial recession comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s (*Reuters* September 2, 2009). Here in Canada, our banks

did not run completely dry, and interest rates on housing mortgages did not soar through the roof. But our social, political, and economic networks are such today that one country's story is another country's story. Consequently, our current era is known as the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). One significant area of economic fall-out here in Nova Scotia has been experienced in our forestry industry. For example, there was the bankruptcy and closure of NewPage pulp and paper mill, as well as various subsidiaries (*Chronicle Herald* August 26, 2011).⁶

My parents received no financial blow that was not manageable. There were some minor fluctuations in their income as retired individuals with government pensions, but none big enough to significantly alter their lifestyle. For example, that winter they still traveled to Cuba. My parents have worked very hard over their lifetimes, following what was designed for their time, as a safe government-reliant plan. They have been fortunate in their hard work and choices, ensuring them a strong economic foundation in their retirement. Over the years, they also received financial help from both sets of parents, and this helped greatly in establishing the level of security they have now. But it could be suggested that the GFC has been experienced by everyone, whether it has significantly impacted the finances of one's household or not. For although this crisis has found cultural expression through a story of finances, at the heart of the matter there is a much deeper story to tell.

In the interviews for this thesis, we spoke little about the GFC. My family referenced it a few times as "the slow-down in the economy," (Hollett 1, 2009) but I did not really pick up on this thread, nor did they overly provide. It was not a strong part of

⁶ NewPage is located in Point Tupper near the town of Port Hawkesbury, NS.

our conscious, social narrative at that time, although I am sure we were all feeling something in our own way. Instead of discussing the economic change and how we were experiencing this, we spoke about our project. In fact, we *did* our project. Only in hindsight can I fully appreciate that our project unfolded as a strong response to changes in our economy. With this realization comes another one, in Paul Ricoeur's words: our lives are "structures of experience which precede connected expression in language" (1979, 127). This is how we tend to live the "immediate experience" (Jackson 1996, 41) of our lives. We "speak" first through doing, then perhaps through telling and less the other way around. Exploring these "pivotal-points" of doing life is a strong theme in this chapter.

Henry Glassie is a folklorist who does not shy away from sharing his regret, when the art forms he studies, among the people he comes to know, are traded for modern and less involved lifeways (see Glassie 2000, 1999, 1982). The degree of Glassie's resolution in identifying lifeways lost feels somewhat rare in folklore studies today. In the very early years of our discipline, documenting rural lifeways in jeopardy was its sole purpose. But as folklore progressed into the 20th century, this focus became entirely too limiting for a discipline that wanted to survive. Tradition as a process, and not something that could be lost, became the new and more balanced approach in folklore. But perhaps the balance was tipped and not found. Modern folklorists seem to struggle with representing the gritty reality of change. Often emphasized instead are balanced perspectives, forward vision, and even superficial fixes (see Wilson 1998, 162 and Feltault 2006). But there is still a place in this lifetime, for strong conviction and taking responsibility.

In *Vernacular Architecture*, on the switch from making thatched roofs to purchasing tin roofing within one Northern Irish community, Glassie writes:

The connections shaped by thatching—between people and nature, between people and people—were direct and intensely local. The change from thatch to tin signals the surrender of local autonomy. In Ireland, as in Bangladesh, people have chosen to adjust to the times. They have chosen permanence, reliance on distant producers, and participation in the international cash economy. Not from the perspective of a privileged observer, whether cynical or sentimental, but from the perspective of the people who live the life, we can sum things up. In the shift from local to imported materials, there is a loss in environmental efficiency and a loss in beauty. There is a gain in permanence, which is compensation for a loss of skill and social connection. The loss of the pleasure taken from a job well done, and the burden of the need for cash, must be set against the prestige that is supposed to accrue to the one who purchases expensive objects. Become a consumer, one reorients. Breaking away from their neighbors with their delicate sense of local hierarchy, people come into comparison with others who, they say in Ballymenone, have money like hay. What is lost is security. What is gained is the hope that commodities will somehow balance the account. (2000, 28-29)

This thesis topic signals a return to a more “direct and intensely local” (Glassie 2000, 28) experience in our lives, rather than a departure, as in Glassie’s example above. But the lifeways Glassie refers to, which are in jeopardy as villagers pull away from a hand-made tradition in their lives, are significant to my family in this thesis. Local, skilled, environmentally efficient, social, secure, autonomous, and connected with nature are attributes that have been somewhat scarce as priorities throughout most of my lifetime. They have been lost amongst the multitude of cultural influences that ask us to be financially successful individuals, above everything else. In this three-staged project, my parents embraced an opportunity to better express and realize themselves. Without the lumberyard to purchase our logs, my parents were pushed to continue along a path that they had already started, and to complete their path in a very satisfying way.

The Milling

I remember the day that the harvested logs were milled into lumber. I was invited out to help feed/supply the logs into the mill. I remember that it was so satisfying to see all the work done logging, being transformed into a very large pile of something so useful. It would later be put together to build the deck on the back of my parents' home. I will never forget that feeling. (Chris Hollett, personal communication, 2012)

We do not remember the name of the man who milled our trees, but the two times that he came to our home, parking his portable mill in our driveway for the day, we all got on very well. I remember that I really liked his manner. He worked quietly and consistently with a calm and even presence. It was quite peaceful. Dad was also very happy with the end product. The lumber looked and felt good: the cuts were clean and smooth, and little wood was wasted.

To locate our miller Dad went through the yellow pages of the phonebook. All in



Figure 14. Milled lumber, Harbour Woods, c. 2010.

all, there are about two hundred millers with portable mills active in Nova Scotia. This is a piece of information our miller shared with us, which Mom remembers. Dad spoke to several of these millers who are relatively local. The man he hired came from Beaverbank, a good hour's drive to Harbour Woods in Hackett's Cove. Dad felt that his price was right at around sixty dollars an hour, the machine he used was powerful and efficient, he was kind to deal with and, importantly, he was available.

There were two millings on our property. One was in the spring of 2009, to produce the lumber of this project. The second was in the spring of 2010, to produce lumber for my sister and her partner Kelly, towards their home.⁷ My father contacted the same miller each time. I was not present for the first milling, the focus of this project, as I was finishing up my term at university. Mom was around that day, but she chose to not join the milling itself, feeling there were already enough hands around to do the job. Dad recalls that Mom made lunch, and everyone ate outside around the logs and the accumulating stack of lumber.

My sister, brother, and Dad worked as miller's aides. They were responsible for keeping the flow of the mill—logs to lumber—moving smoothly. The miller mostly operated from his base at the head of the machine. From there he defined the cut of the log with his eye, his mental calculations, and physical manipulations of the machine. Dad, Suzanne, and Chris would scurry around the mill, back and forth. First, they would hoist one of our logs onto the machine—at times these logs were very heavy depending

⁷ The building lumber used from our land made a small cottage, which originally was going to be a part of their slightly larger, straw-bale, or wooden house. But as time progressed, their plans were complicated by finances, permits, and regulatory bodies. Suzanne changed her vision to realize their home, for how they would build it. It became a house designed by an architect, which passed all building permits and, therefore, required registered building lumber. Legally, it could not be made with our own lumber. The cottage is still there, and has been used by Suzanne, Kelly, and Kai while moving into their new home.

on their circumference. Then, they would receive the freshly milled lumber at the other end of the mill, and stack it into a pile. This was very physically demanding work, and one had to always ensure that the miller had the material and the space to keep the job flowing. In an interview with my parents I asked Dad to share his highlights of this experience. This is how he remembers it:

Len: Well, it's basically; it's experiencing what you create. I mean, you started with a tree a few months back. And then you've got a certain length tree, a certain diameter. And you roll this onto the milling machine, and he with his—the guy that's operating the machine—with his skills, he will produce from that tree the particular lumber that's appropriate, depending upon the size of the tree. So, he produces perhaps two by fours, two inches thick, four inches wide; two by sixes; two by eights. Whatever, you know, it depends on the size. We produced two, eight by eights, because we wanted some nice square timber for posts. That was easy. I think he enjoyed doing that because it was so simple. You just take off the slab wood, the bark, and any irregularities in the tree. And you end up with a nice square timber. You create something quite beautiful. And the smells. [pauses] And then you have to store all this properly so it keeps, so it will not warp out of shape, and so it will dry properly. So you have to store it with certain supports every so often, little one by one pieces of timber that the miller cuts for you out of the—

Marilyn: He cuts them out of slab, though, doesn't he? He doesn't waste any wood.

Len: No, no, he won't waste it. That's right. He'll take a piece of slab and trim it up, and cut one by ones out of that. (Hollett 6, 2012)

The fresh cut lumber was stacked on the side of the driveway in an area surrounded by the garage, vegetable garden, and pond. We did not dry our planks very long at this spot before we used them to build the deck. There were just a few weeks in between milling and building. I have heard some people caution against using your

lumber too early; perhaps it was even my father who said this to me. You need enough time to properly dry your planks so they will not crack or warp under pressure. But we have not had any problems. In the drying stage, our freshly milled lumber was stacked into layers, with one by one sticks placed between each layer to create empty spaces. The moisture that was once a part of the living tree evaporated into air, as the wind and sun ran through the empty spaces.

To Dad's reflections above, Mom adds that there was very little waste in the milling process. Just as no waste was important to my parents in the felling stage; it was also an important part of this stage, which Mom highlights. Below, they continue to share how they made use of any discarded wood. Mom begins where we left off above, referring to the slab wood, which is the first, minimal cut applied to square the tree. It could not be used as lumber, but it would not be wasted just the same:

- Marilyn: Because the slab is the bark and the curve in the wood and you can't use it anyways.
- Len: But we use it for firewood.
- Marilyn: Didn't we give a lot of it to [neighbour]?
- Len: We did. He certainly used a lot of it.
- Michelle: What did he do with it?
- Marilyn: Well, he heated his garage—where he used to do all the chairs and things. [Len: Wood furniture.] And he gave us a discount on a double chair with a table in the middle. The one that's out there. [points to the shoreline]
- Michelle: Oh well, that's cool.
- Len: Yeah. That's right. He took quite a bit of the wood that first year. We used quite a bit of it to burn ourselves. It's an easy way to burn

wood. In fact, that's all we had growing up with Mom and Dad. Other than the alders. (Hollett 6, 2012)

My parents entered into a little bit of bartering in the milling stage of the project. As they said, they received a discount on Adirondaack chairs which they purchased from our neighbour, in exchange for the slab wood they provided to him, to heat his working space over the winter months. This type of exchange between neighbours played a strong part in Dad's early life.

Our project was not entirely environmentally sound. The miller had to drive his machine from Beaverbank to our home using gasoline. The milling itself emitted a diesel fuel into the air, and the mill machine is also made of metals and plastics. But using a portable mill was still a relatively sustainable choice. Had my parents sold our logs for pick-up—as they had originally planned—assuming their eventual re-sale, our logs would have been transported perhaps three or four times. This would have meant a lot of driving. Had my parents ordered their lumber from a retail building supplier, to build their deck, it would have been transported from an unknown and perhaps unsustainable source. My parents would then have hired a team to build their deck for them. In contrast, milling our own lumber without the trees ever leaving the property, is nothing short of an environmental revolution on our land.

The fate that the portable mill provided us is somewhat of an irony. In the early 1900s, when logging was rampant in Nova Scotia, the portable mill provided greater access to uncut lands. Harold Trenholm of Amherst, Nova Scotia, a sawmiller from this period, speaks of his first years milling timber, in Mike Parker's text, *Woodchips and Beans: Life in the Early Lumber Woods of Nova Scotia*. Trenholm recalls:

My first experience in a mill is when I quit high school. I was going into Grade 12 and my dad said, "I think you've got enough experience now. You can read and write. We need you in the woods." He was working in Southampton at this time and he had his portable mill plus a lath machine. These jobs would only last maybe two or three months. They'd be what we called farm cuts in the summertime. The farmers get together, they'd all have little lots and they'd get out maybe twenty-five, fifty, hundred thousand to the clear and come spring they'd haul 'em to a common area where a mill was set up and saw them in a field. (1992, 211)

In Trenholm's time, the portable mill made deeper and larger cuts possible. It provided greater accessibility, shorter distances to haul logs, and common areas to gather together and mill trees. But for us, the portable mill made our project more environmentally sustainable. Returning to a stronger sense of self-belief and the flare of creativity, the portable mill also made life more sustainable.

Dream Engagement

To a very significant degree, Mom and Dad have always maintained their home and land themselves. But like most people, my parents have still depended on the expertise and labour of others to accomplish things they desire in this lifetime. On the significant effort involved in such projects as milling and building with one's own lumber, Laird states:

Any property owner can mill up and use all the wood cleared for a building lot. Here on the West Coast [BC] there's enough wood in the trees taken down to make way for houses to build the houses themselves. But it takes...inspired activity, to make it happen, and most people in our culture have moved far away from an interest in this type of work – skinned knuckles, black pitch underneath fingernails, dirty bark, wet sawdust, and endless sweat. (2002, 58-59)

Laird describes a lack of interest, as having led individuals away from the demanding physical work of their own creation. But through my parents I see this might be better approached as a complex mix of external pressures, ultimately obscuring an individual's sense of self.

For many years, it was my father's spoken intention to employ a professional forester to manage our woods. In an interview with my parents, below, we speak about the financial expenses involved in this, and how it ultimately came about that my parents decided to do the project themselves:

- Michelle: What was the push to do this? Did trees fall down? Or just their height? Like, "Wow, they're getting really—"
- Len: Well, the height, the height was getting a bit scary. And there were—
- Michelle: Did trees fall down last winter?
- Len: There were trees falling down as well.
- Marilyn: We must've had about, what, four or five that came down?
- Len: Over the year, I suppose. Not all during the winter. But there were—I forget when the last hurricane did happen—but there were a couple of trees that came down with this I think. And then over the winter there were more.
- Marilyn: Len had been talking for a long time about getting somebody in to do that. To clear not only around the house, but all the way up the road.
- Michelle: I remember that years ago. [at least fifteen years ago]
- Len: That's right. I had done it once before. And I did it just this past winter, the late part of the winter, probably February. I had a guy come and give me an estimate of what it would cost me to do these trees around here. And it was very expensive, very expensive. Because it's not just coming in and cutting down trees. Because

- you have to be very careful of where you drop the tree. So it takes extra time.
- Marilyn: And you have to be careful of hauling it out. You can't haul it over the gardens.
- Len: So, I forget now what he was going to charge. But I knew that I wasn't going to spend that much money to do it. So I figured, "Well, I'm going to have to do this myself." We couldn't really afford to do it. So we decided we're going to do it ourselves. (Hollett 5, 2009)

That Dad was looking to hire an individual to manage our trees is curious to me. For as long as I can remember, Dad has been active in our woods and has always enjoyed himself doing this. When he and my mother decided to take on the large-scale felling in February 2009, Dad says he first asked a professional to come look over our woods to provide him with an estimate of the job. This was the second time he did this, and Dad still found the forester's quote too expensive. Although this project was delayed for years due to cost, with a little push from the trees, my parents decided to do it themselves.

In a parallel narrative, when it came to building the deck, Dad did not see himself as the carpenter to do the job: the deck was first considered the work of professionals. My parents acknowledged it as something that Mom desired, but again their stated obstacle was money. Dad and I speak about this below, in an individual interview together:

- Michelle: You said she talked about [the deck] over the years?
- Len: Well, the last couple of years, certainly I talked with your Mom at times. I knew it was going to be a lot of work. Well, I think initially it was not me doing it. It was hiring a carpenter to do it, hiring somebody. And that would've been very expensive.

Michelle: So did you suggest doing it? Or did she suggest you doing it? Do you remember?

Len: I forget how that went. I am not sure. She might have been suggesting that we should try it. And then maybe I'm thinking, "Well, maybe I could try it." [laughs] (Len Hollett, 2009)

The deck was considered too expensive. But above, Dad suggests that a tentative belief in himself as a carpenter was also an obstacle. Well into our summer project, Dad stated: "There's a lot of designing in this deck. And the skill part, carpenter skills that I never thought I'd be doing" (Len Hollett, 2009). What a triumph for Dad to realize himself in this role.

Upon completion of our deck, I asked Mom to consider how it would feel to her, had my parents bought their lumber and hired a team to build it:

Michelle: How do you think this would be different if the deck was there, but it was made from materials that you bought? And made by the Caine's Brothers, for example. [local contracting company]

Marilyn: Well, it definitely wouldn't have happened! It would be far too expensive to build that deck. It would cost thousands to build that deck. Just the lumber. And then the labor. What would you be looking at? I don't know. What would you be looking at to build that? Six thousand dollars? Seven thousand dollars? It wouldn't have happened. (Marilyn Hollett, 2009)

Adding onto the deck was something that Mom had wanted to do for quite a few years. Mom felt that the original deck of our family home no longer reflected who she was as an individual. "I wanted the deck to launch me into the outdoors," she says. "My deck held me back—it was under a roof and holding me back into the house" (Hollett 5, 2009). Our original deck of thirty-six years was long and thin, without a lot of room to

move about on. It was also underneath a third-floor bedroom balcony and an overhang style roof. This deck had always been our family's favored gathering space in the summer months, but life evolves, and we are no longer the lone family nestled in the woods. We have been growing with a new generation of children, and the presence of neighbours has made changes in our lives. The landscape before us has been changing as well; we have far fewer trees between us and the ocean, due to significant storm-fall.



Figure 15. Original west deck built in 1973, c. 2009.

In all, our family landscape has been expanding to let more in. As Mom aptly discerns: “life couldn’t have happened on that squished little [deck]” (Marilyn Hollett, 2009). The original wrap-around design, built tight to the house, no longer reflected us as a family, or our connection to the landscape, as it was changing too.

Just as managing the woods was a long-time interest of my father's, building the deck had also been important to Mom. But for many years my parents called both of these projects "too expensive" to realize. The interviews show, however, that expenses are really only one part of the actual experience. Above, Dad reveals a tentative belief in himself as an able carpenter. In an individual interview with Mom, she also reveals her own tentative belief, in her desire to expand the deck in the first place.

Marilyn: Somebody might say, "Well, what do you need a deck for? You don't need a deck." And maybe you should just say, "Well I don't know yet. But I need it for something."

Michelle: Did somebody say that to you?

Marilyn: Ah. I said it to myself. No, nobody actually said that to me. I had a feeling people were thinking that. But maybe, you know, I just need to say to myself, there's a reason. Mm. [pauses to consider then speaks slowly] I'm really connected. I'm really connected to this place, and its evolution, how it's evolved.
(Marilyn Hollett, 2009)

These realities that my parents share could be described as subtle layers of their experience. But they are important. As issues related to self-belief, they tend to hide beneath the larger realities of finances, and are too often easily dismissed. As I have suggested above, money makes decisions for us, obscuring our sense of self.

Knowing that both of my parents were initially apprehensive to go ahead and mill their own lumber and build with it, I asked Mom to share with me her understanding of how the change came about. She describes a long but gentle process of speaking with my father. She also came to realize the falseness of her own self-doubt, to see her role in the project as very important in the first place. Mom will later call herself, with tender

realization, “a person who instigates the opening-up for life to happen” (Marilyn Hollett, 2009).

Michelle: What does the deck represent to you?

Marilyn: It’s still happening what it represents to me. It’s a stage for things to happen. It’s a platform for events. And it’s also a significant reminder of a jar of my little wishes and whims. Yeah, it’s really amazing that it’s built. If I hadn’t had that little wish, would we have ever cut those trees down? Would we’ve ever milled the trees?

Michelle: How do you feel about that?

Marilyn: Well, it could be true. It could be the power of wish. It could not just be, “Oh the trees are cut down, let’s do something with them.” It could be the wish came first. Then the trees were cut. And then the deck was made. And then the stage was set. And maybe you need to make room for things to happen. Maybe it’s good to make room for things to happen. Maybe it’s good to really follow what it is you wish for. Maybe it’s good to recognize them. It’s good to wish.

Michelle: And how did you make room for it? To make room for the things to happen?

Marilyn: How did I make room for the wish to happen? I don’t know. I didn’t really struggle with it. I just kind of whispered it and mentioned it. And I really didn’t think Len took me seriously. I didn’t really struggle with it. Because that’s a big ask, “Could you make me a deck?” A big one! [laughs] That [would] cost a lot of money. And be a lot of work. That’s a really big ask. So I didn’t ask very loud and I just held it there. It stayed in my heart, I guess.

Michelle: Why does that feel like a big ask?

Marilyn: Oh, it is. Did you see the amount of work that went into it? I mean, all the wood, it’s just a huge amount of—we loved it, I loved that part, I just loved, it was so significant. And remember we talked about the trees falling? And their life ending. And how thankful I was for the trees. And how sad I was to see them go. And how Len and I really worked together on that....So there was all of that. And then just the difficulty of finding a person to mill

it. But then, it's a lot of physical work and figuring out. Len worked on the actual deck for a couple months, didn't he? Physically, it's really demanding. So to ask somebody to do that, that's a lot of work. And I didn't really have to ask very hard. Suzanne often talks about the power of our intentions that seem to be more powerful. The unspoken intentions. And maybe there's a lot of truth in that. (Marilyn Hollett, 2009)

Both of my parents demonstrate that it required courage to create their three-staged project of felling, milling, and building on our property. As Mom says, above, it was a great deal of work. When my parents realized that selling their logs to a local lumberyard would not come to pass, the goals of their project changed dramatically, and the push they required presented itself. They had already started felling trees. In fact, they were almost finished. But with no interested buyer my parents suddenly had an opportunity to shift their focus from financial remuneration to themselves. As my parents would never waste good trees, their doubt dissolved, and they wasted nothing:

Len: Originally, the trees were meant to be—we were trying to sell the trees to a local mill because we figured we couldn't use all these trees—"What are we gonna do with them?" And I didn't want to cut them up for firewood because they were too good. Not all of them, but most of them were good. So, originally, they were meant—they were gonna be sold to a mill. And right up to almost when we were finished, we thought they were going to be sold to a mill. But then we found out, "Hey, they don't want them; there's not enough of them." And because of the slow-down in the economy they weren't willing to come and pick up sixty logs, ten-foot logs.

Marilyn: I was happy to know that they weren't going to be burnt. Initially we thought, well, they're going to a mill they'll be used for houses. And then I started saying, "Well, let's see if we can get them milled ourselves." And that kind of looked impossible, didn't it? [looks to Len] But we started asking and asking. And Len started poking around. And we were still trying to sell them. But you

know, in the back of our minds [was] maybe we should mill them. And eventually they got to be milled, which I was thrilled with!

Len: “So, let’s build your deck!” The deck came—

Marilyn: So then the ideas came together!

Len: Came together, yeah. (Hollett 1, 2009)



Figure 16. View of new deck stairway from balcony above, c. 2009.

When my parents completed their three-staged project, with the construction of the deck, they were very proud of themselves and of their creation. Upon completion this is what Mom saw:

Marilyn: I really like the way it looks and feels. The deck is stepping out into the step. And then the steps with the platform are stepping out into the grass. And the grass is stepping out into the hill, which is stepping out into the ocean. It adds to the whole effect of just

walking straight out into the ocean from the deck. One really overlaps and continues into the other. It's really nice.

Michelle: Did you achieve what you wanted to achieve with the deck? Opening it up? Opening the house up? And opening it up to the ocean?

Marilyn: Oh for sure, yeah. (Marilyn Hollett, 2009)

Dad felt a similar profound satisfaction with what they created:

Michelle: What would you say, what is the story of the deck? What stands out?

Len: Well, I don't know dear. I mean, [pauses] just being able to stand back and looking at it, that's a wonderful feeling. Just being able to walk out on the front deck, just go down the steps and you're away! It has opened it up, hasn't it? It really has opened it up.

Michelle: So do you think that wonderful feeling will last forever?

Len: Oh, it will wane, sure it will. And maybe we won't use it as much as we were—I mean, we're not big party people—but to have it there, to have that openness, to be able to walk out there, and just feel. It's a beautiful feeling, isn't it?

Michelle: Yeah, it is. And I think it might well last forever. Because it's such a magical, space, isn't it? It's really magical.

Len: That's true. There's no reason why it can't last forever. The wood won't last forever. [both laugh]

Michelle: As long as the wood does.

Len: As long as it's there, we'll certainly enjoy it. (Len Hollett, 2009)

My parents state that as a structure, the deck makes them feel open; it allows them to feel good. In realizing this structure, they discovered the true extent of how they are

able to provide for themselves from start to finish. In an interview, below, Dad and I discuss how building Suzanne's house was inspired by our three-staged project:

- Michelle: Do you somehow think that this whole process of cutting the trees, and milling the trees, and building the deck, has [pauses] encouraged you guys to go forward with the sub-division of the property, of the lot, for Suzanne?
- Len: Well yeah. [emphatically]
- Michelle: Because that's something new that's come up.
- Len: We always had the thought that maybe one of you would build here eventually.
- Michelle: Does it surprise you, though, that it's happening? Because it surprises me!
- Len: Does it?
- Michelle: A little bit, yeah. [pauses] Life happens.
- Len: It's nice that Suzanne can start this. I think it would be good for her.
- Michelle: I think it's great.
- Len: I hope you and Chris will be happy that we're doing it.
- Michelle: Oh, I don't think there's any problems there about—no that's not—
- Len: And it allows Marilyn and I to add to this by providing the lumber basically. And if I'm physically fit to do it, we'll cut the trees, and we'll get them milled next year.
- Michelle: Do you think [our project] opened up for this development? Spurred it a long?
- Len: Well, we certainly can do it. It certainly shows we have the potential to do it. The trees are there. And look what we did. We used the wood, we've created something. I have no doubt that Suzanne and Kelly could certainly do it. (Len Hollett, 2009)

My father is proud, as he should be. Through our project and importantly through himself, Dad realizes that we can help Suzanne start her home. An attainable reality, it is directly possible because of the trees. In a very real sense the trees have supported us in our dreams, and continue to do so.

Through our project Mom has also been inspired by the reality that we can directly provide for ourselves. Below, she extends this realization to more areas in our lives, beyond the scope of our building project:

Marilyn: To know that here on this property things are not beyond our reach. We can have organic, beautiful, fresh vegetables just for our labour. We can have a really expensive deck that we love. And we can do it, just with our labour. So, to realize that you can be self-sufficient, that there are ways you can get what you want, you know. If you truly want organic meat, I mean, we could clear some property and have a cow and slaughter it, I suppose. Couldn't we? And eat it. So I guess all things are possible. If I really want to do something, I guess [this project] shows me there's a way. All things are possible, if I really want to do something. Just think, if something is too expensive and beyond my reach, that is really a false notion. Because in fact there are ways to do things. They come about if you want it, don't they?

Michelle: Yeah. It seems to me like you're reclaiming—I don't know if this is me, correct me if I'm wrong, or if I'm hearing it from you—I feel like we are reclaiming the reality that we can be self-sufficient.

Marilyn: Yeah. Yeah.

Michelle: Because it was kind of taken away for a while in a way.

Marilyn: Yeah. I think the government does its best to regulate and take things into its own hands. And it takes it out of our hands, and leaves it beyond our reach—they're doing their best. Now, if we put our lumber into our house, it has to be registered wood. I mean, the quality of our wood is probably much greater than what you'd buy. It's thicker wood. It's actually six by six, not five and a half by five and a quarter, you know. It's really good wood.

- Michelle: So, is that part of it then? Like, believing in yourself, believing in ourselves again? Or does that sound a little bit too dramatic for you?
- Marilyn: No. No. I think it is believing in yourself again. Yeah, I can see it. Because we did it. (Marilyn Hollett, 2009)

Like Dad, above, Mom considers new concepts for our family. She presents a wide-open door for our abilities and possibilities, never quite stated like this before. These concepts have grown in our family, based in the reality of our project, instilling greater confidence in each of us. My parents have creatively laboured their entire lives, but I venture to say, that through our three-staged project, my parents have encountered a new confidence and this has propelled them forth.

On personal power in the context of providing for oneself, Glassie describes the following experience:

Nature conquered nonchalantly at a distance is not like nature conquered face on. The hewn timber and the steel beam both display the aesthetic of artificiality, but the tree I topple and hew to smoothness is my victory. I have known the transformation of nature in my own hands. I am powerful. The steel beam mined and milled by another and buried somewhere in the concrete beneath me is so removed from my experience that it seems to hold no message for my mind. But if I stop to think about it, the message is clear. I am powerless, utterly dependent on a system scaled beyond my control or understanding. (2000, 35)

In the decision to mill on our property, my parents realized a full cycle of creation. In doing so, they honoured long-time desires in each of themselves: Dad's desire to manage the woods of the property, Mom's dream to expand the old deck of our home, and Dad's realization that he could be the person to do this. The satisfaction in this nurtures the self, in a way that making money and its exchange for services and materials never will. As a family who, long ago, joined a cultural drift, moving away from fully knowing these

kinds of experiences, we are now returning and achieving greater balance in our lives. Supporting the creative self in ways like this, is a reawakening to the self, and a belief in these words: *we can do it*.



Figure 17. Len and Marilyn at late summer sunset with Shut-In island in background, Harbour Woods, c. 2009.

The social experience of building our deck is the topic of the next chapter, and the final stage of our project. How we came together on the space of the deck is our expressive culture. It is supported by this project context of people and trees.

CHAPTER FIVE ~ BUILDING: CREATIVE EXPRESSION

From the roots the sap rises up into the artist, flows through him and his eyes. He is the trunk of the tree. Seized and moved by the force of the current, he directs his vision into his work. Visible on all sides, the crown of the tree unfolds in space and time. And so with the work. No one will expect a tree to form its crown in exactly the same way as its roots. We all know that what goes on above cannot be an exact mirror image of what goes on below.

—Paul Klee in *The Thinking Eye* (1961, 81-82)

Building the deck is the stage in this thesis where my mother, father, sister, and I come together in the spirit of a group. It also the sole stage in which I played a direct part. I believe because of this, this section of my thesis has been the hardest for me to write. Mary Hufford sets up her study on foxhunting in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, along self-reflexive lines. Following philosopher Alfred Schutz, she states,

Whether one is participating in a reflexive behavior like foxhunting or studying it from the outside, coming to an understanding of the world requires one to shift from engagement in it to reflection on it. Related to the ability, apparently peculiar to humans, to shift from absorption to abstraction is the ability to turn attention from one reality to another, thus constituting what Schutz terms “multiple realities.” (Hufford 1992, 6, citing Schutz 1970, 252-58)

As both participant and author of this study, I have asked myself to shift between realities of absorption and abstraction, and my absorption has been deep. Although this section refers to the building project of just one summer, I am a life-long member of this group, as are all participants in this family study. At certain times this deep level of intimacy has made for a bewildering experience. Other folklorists working within their families have said much the same about the process of family fieldwork and writing: the story is thick, self-reflection is necessarily deep, and revelations are often profound (see *Ties That Bind*

1994; Borland 1991; Danielson 1994; Miller 1997; Morgan 1980, xvii; Tye 2010; Wilson 1991).

As much as it has been challenging for me to sort through the many layers of self and family, to hear and tell a story on building, I realize that my family members are no different than me. The social process that we share as a family began to interest me more and more, as I started to see *it* as the central component of our deck project. Benjamin A. Botkin and folklorists ever since, have asserted social structure as a “key factor in creating folklore” in the modern world (Hirsch 1987, 6). In our family work project, I see our social structure and the process therein, as our folklore, and not only a ripe foundation for producing recognized forms of folklore.

How we relate to one another affects the nature of our group and our personal experience as individuals within that group. In family, as in other social groups, we often strain to understand ourselves and our modes of interaction. One folklorist has said, “A family is not a given, but a process, a constant negotiation of identity and relationships” (Ties That Bind 1994, 14). The negotiation of identity and relationships was central in our summer deck project. Rather than focus on the tangible structure we created and the building process, I chose to explore the social dynamics which we created on the space of the deck. This marks the final stage in our three-staged project.

Throughout the interviews, my sister and mother provided very thoughtful examples of how the wood of our project, and the trees they once were, support us in our family dynamics. Examples are included in the last section of this chapter. As in previous chapters, I first present a brief outline of the physical stage, followed by the

interpretive sections, “Building a Work Group,” “Making New Space,” and “Father Tree Connections,” under “Social Engagement.”

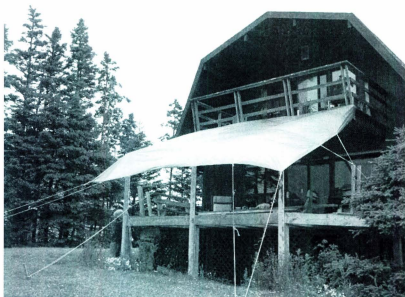


Figure 18. Rain tarp over deck in process; *at left*, Marilyn and Len, c. 2009.

The Construction

The deck we made faces west. It is level with the second story of our house, and is directly accessed through a set of sliding glass doors. The orientation is an important part: our deck leads to the ocean. As such, we built a grand central staircase of seven steps. These show the way off the deck, to the lawn, onto a sloping wood of scattered spruce, down to a granite rock shoreline, and finally to touch the ocean. Steps to shore,

all told, is about sixty feet. The shape of our new deck is half a decagon. Seats, posts, and railing frame the entire structure in the same style as the original deck of 1973.

Mom and Dad purchased a package house design from Lindal Cedar Homes (a BC company that specializes in cedar houses) to build their home in the early 1970s. The deck of the original design was narrow; it wrapped around the west and south sides of the house in one continuous flow, and was framed by bench-like seats.

In building our new deck, we used as much of the old structure as was possible. Through Dad's design this meant we wasted nothing. The original cedar decking remains. We added to it, with our spruce, so that the old cedar planks and the new spruce together form the surface area of our new deck. In order to expand our deck into its new shape, we dismantled the old railings and seats. At Dad's request, we did this very carefully so as not to damage the wood. We took our time removing each nail, which had held the railings and seats fast for almost forty years. We salvaged the wood, and even most of the nails that we straightened with a few hits of the hammer, to re-use in our deck project or in future projects.

Building our deck happened in stages. Dad defined each stage as we went, announcing its start and completion. The basic stages were these: the structural layout, the decking, the railings and seats, and the stairs with its concrete landing (later covered by spruce). Before we began these stages, Dad first designed the deck. He made multiple hand-drawn designs, which calculated and planned the layout, measurements, and the tricky angles. Dad thought a lot about the deck, transferring his ideas onto paper before we began construction.



Figure 19. Len and Michelle in perfect unison, digging holes for structural posts, c. early summer 2009. Photograph taken by Marilyn Hollett.

Structural layout began with plotting the deck on the ground. With survey posts and strings, we defined the limits of the deck and the locations of our structural posts. We used three structural posts: three vertical timber, squared eight inches by eight inches. Each post was in its own concrete base, for which we dug the holes, mixed the concrete, poured the base, and finally, made sure that each post was plumb in its base (vertically straight). The structural layout also included horizontal framework, or supports, as the bones of the deck. This layout resembled lattice work on a pie. We started with horizontal beams, mostly two inches by six inches, securing them to the original deck at one end and to the new structural posts at the other end, and then followed with cross pieces between the beams. This provided the horizontal structural support.

Below, in a recorded dinner conversation, we describe having just completed the structural layout of the deck. Dad talks my sister, mother, and me, through it, and introduces the next stage.

- Len: Just wondering if there's any questions concerning what's been done to date on the structure, because it's pretty well—as far as the structure goes—the main structure is finished. It's ready for the decking. But there's still a lot of pre-work to do before we put the decking on. We have to put on the railing, or the posts for the railing, and the seats, they have to be positioned before we put the decking on. So that's the next phase.
- Suzanne: They do?
- Len: Yep.
- Michelle: Now, why is that? Why do they have to be positioned—or *how* is that?
- Len: Well, it's because of the way they're arranged. This particular style of decking came with this package, this house, the Lindal Cedar Home. And the [railing] posts are tied right into the framework of the structure. You have to put it in place, before you put the decking on. I can show you later.
- Michelle: Oh, I see. We're following the style of [the old] deck.
- Len: Using the same style, yeah. In order to use that same railing, that same style, we have to install the posts first before we put the decking on. I can show you later, because it's pretty clear, if you look underneath, how they're tied into the structure.
- Suzanne: So is that a big deal? Like is that a whole day's work?
- Len: Oh easy. It'll be a day just getting it apart, the old deck, or the old railing.
- Suzanne: So that's the next thing to do.
- Len: Mm. This step's the next stage.
- Suzanne: It'll take about a day to get the railing off?

- Len: Yeah. A lot of nails to come out and, you know, I want to do it carefully so that I can save the wood and reuse it.
- Michelle: So what do you think about the structure that's been laid? What are your reflections, thoughts?
- Len: It looks pretty solid. I'm impressed. I'm pleased with the way it's gone together.
- Marilyn: Mm.
- Michelle: Yeah. It does look really solid.
- Len: It's solid. It's not moving. I thought there might be a little—but it's not moving. I mean, it'd be different if you had a top perhaps, but I don't think it'll move. Once you start putting the decking on, it's solid. Solid as a church, they say. (Hollett 3, 2009)



Figure 20. Original seat and railing still intact with new structural layout started, c. 2009.

Building the structure was the most important part of our deck, as it will carry its own weight and any additional load for years to come. Following my father's lead, we

took our time to plan and solidly achieve this structural foundation. Laying the deck was fairly straightforward, but there were many parts of the process and these took time. We moved lumber from A to B by wheelbarrow; prepared the pieces by scraping off excess bark; made the right “fit” of planks on the deck, not unlike creating a puzzle for the first time; and nailed the boards in place. Like Dad said, above, this necessarily followed securing the posts for the seats and railings into the framework of the deck first—and this was a challenging process in and of itself. Reproducing what were fifteen sets, four posts each, all assembled into ‘v’ shapes, required our time and effort in understanding and reproducing the angles involved. We finished the deck with the stairs, the concrete pad, its spruce cover, and last, but not least, the railing.

In building the deck, we followed the day as it unfolded, we followed the emerging deck, and significantly, we followed Dad’s lead. It was a steady and layered progression of parts, which would eventually complete the whole structure. Mom describes this well, during a short interview one evening on the deck: “I feel like the web is getting stronger, and it’s coming together. Our launch into the ocean, it was always meant to be here I feel, and now it’s finally getting here” (Hollett 4, 2009). In this interview, we had just opened a bottle of champagne that was left over from another celebration, to toast the occasion of another completed stage in our deck:

Michelle: OK. July seconded. End of second phase.

Len: First phase being the structural component, being the concrete posts and all the supporting stringers.

Michelle: OK. Speak loud.

- Len: Second phase has the deck boards completed. It's decked in. The last board being put in as of five minutes ago.
- Michelle: And what time is it?
- Len: Well, right now it's five. No, it's, oh gosh, it's six-twenty eight.
- Michelle: Yay!
- Len: At six twenty-five we had the deck boards completed, second phase done.
- Michelle: Fantastic! So here we sit with our champagne, Suzanne, me, Mom, Dad, and Maki. [dog] The next—
- Len: The next phase would be the, we'll build the concrete pad for the steps.
- Michelle: Here's to the concrete pad! [raises glass]
- All: The concrete pad! [all raise glasses] (Hollett 4, 2009)



Figure 21. Completed deck and family dog, Fir Tree; view from upstairs balcony, c. 2009.

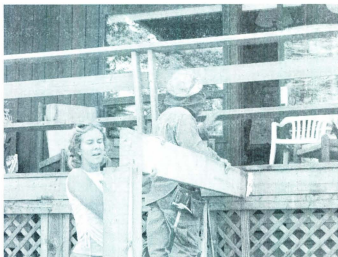


Figure 22. Suzanne and Len beginning the horizontal structural support of the deck, c. 2009.

Social Engagement

Building a Work Group

From the very beginning of this project, when the ideas ‘thesis’ and ‘family work project’ first met, I had wanted to experience a solid family work group. For me this had a definition: being at my father’s side as his valued work partner, and the group of us working together each day on site, motivated by the same goals and desires. This notion of our summer family folklore stuck fast in my head, and I held on to it tightly.

It soon became obvious, however, that a solid family work group as I had imagined it would not come to be. In my personal journal, I describe the first day of our building project in the following way:

We started the deck today. I didn't know how it would start. How would it start, with me suggesting to lead this project? Organize, direct, inform, control? No, none of these things. I was upstairs unpacking [from university] and Dad started the deck, sue at work, mom seeding some bare areas of lawn. "Can I help?" I ask. "Sure." [Dad says]. And so I do. We started the deck. (03/28/09)

I was disappointed that my father had started the family deck project alone, with our family dispersed. When I read it now, it seems that I was also disappointed in myself for not effectively managing the social dynamics I had originally envisioned. I quickly discovered that first and foremost, building the deck was my father's project. It is curious to me that I did not realize this in the very beginning. Instead, I imagined the group of us as equal partners, on the space of the deck, all engaged in the same work. But Dad had obvious advantages: his physical strength and stamina, the expertise, and an unwavering dedication to the project. Mom, Suzanne, and I did not possess any of these qualities entirely on our own. While Dad was on the deck every day that summer until the job was finished, we joined him in the physical labour variously. I was there the most, Suzanne second in line, and Mom not at all. Dad consulted Mom throughout the summer on all aspects of design, but Mom did not actually engage in the labour, as I had assumed we all would.

In our summer deck project, Suzanne, Mom, and I demonstrated an interest in our social dynamics as a group, and in our personal fit within the project. This emerged as a very significant part of our experience. Conversely, Dad did not volunteer similar considerations; he shared himself through doing. Through his physical dedication, Dad built our deck. He and the planks of spruce were absolutely necessary to our work.

But upon reflection and review of the fieldwork, I see that the social awareness my mother, sister, and I brought to the project, was also a very important part of the

overall experience. As Mom has said of our project and of life in general: "It's really kind of nice to be, to really see the process, and to be aware...It shocks you if you're aware. If you're not aware that [life] is happening, it just kind of happens. Doesn't it?" (Marilyn Hollett, 2009). As a family, we had to work our "happening" out. Our summer together was a process of negotiation.

Just days before Dad started the deck, Suzanne made her first entry in our communal log book. Her entry is important. It raises the important question of individual expression within our work group. Suzanne was the first one of us to consider this aloud. She writes:

I had a reoccurring thought, question, as to whether or not I wanted to be a part of the vision, i.e. shaper of the deck. Perhaps I do in a way different to what I'm thinking. Let's talk about it, sing about it. Feels good to be building on and out closer to the ocean. Every project is a chance to carry out your spirit dreams!! Exciting. Let's do it! (Hollett Family Log, 05/27/09)

In this entry, my sister shares that she is having doubts about her participation in the project. She is unsure of whether or not she wants to be involved. But in just a few words, Suzanne comes full circle to express her total enthusiasm for the endless possibilities in all things, and in our project specifically. Although Suzanne does not necessarily know what her preferred expression looks like within our summer project, she knows that she has one, and she is willing to make an effort to find out what this means to her. But more than just a consideration of her own role in the work project, Suzanne desires a communicative forum for everyone to share and think about our summer together in light of individual and group expression.

We did not sing together, as Suzanne suggested, and would have liked. We held the vision talk instead. It was the first interview of this thesis, with Suzanne asking our

group to be all we can be, and to consider the endless possibilities together: “Let’s talk about it, sing about it...Every project is a chance to carry out your spirit dreams!!”

(Hollett Family Log, 05/27/09). This is Suzanne’s call to feel a limitless reality within our ordinary experiences, where open and honest communication is key. This is my sister’s call generally, but within the context of this project her call is also specific. She encourages these qualities within our family work project.

Recently, in passing conversation Mom shared that when starting the deck project, like Suzanne and me, she was unsure of how to personally involve herself. Mom relayed that this experience was challenging for her, but she did not speak of this then. In her first entry in our communal logbook, she focuses on the prospect of group harmony instead.

This is perhaps Mom’s way of working through her feelings. She writes:

The wood is very precious to me, and also Len. This is our winter project, our lumber camp extravaganza coming to life again. We had great fun together felling trees and opening up the gardens. I am so glad we are able to use the wood. It feels Good! And so the project begins—a statement that is always so potent with expectation. How will it go? Will we love doing it?! What will it be like working together? Again? We will come closer to each other. We will laugh and solve problems and invest our ingenuity, creativity together. We will watch our work grow: Len, me, Michelle, Suzanne. And the animals—Joby, Fir, Makai—will lovingly watch. (Hollett Family Log, 05/29/09)

Considering that Mom was feeling unsure of her participation in the project, at least at times, her expectations for group harmony also read like self-reassurance. I believe that most of her affirmations came true, although probably not quite like she had imagined, or like any of us had imagined. As Mom suggests, we did “come closer to each other” (Hollett Family Log, 05/29/09) through our laughter, problem solving, and creativity. But there were also struggles, like when we did not quite know how to start our group, or how to feel like an integrated part of the whole in a way that made individual sense. Mom,

Suzanne, and I each began our project with a vague—albeit determined—sense of what should be, could be, and hopefully would be. This developed into the unexpected.

I believe we started the deck with a heightened sense of awareness, with the intention to be somewhere new, and with the knowledge that we were somewhere new. Dad was not speaking or writing about these kinds of considerations like Mom, Suzanne, and me. But he was still a conscious part of this sharing. Dad was open to sharing his typically solo work self with us. Additionally, he was sharing a type of work project that would normally belong to him alone, if only because he is often the only one interested at home, in something like a building project. In this project, we supported one another in being somewhere new together.

Making New Space

Just days into our project, I wrote in my personal journal, “We have discovered another way of being a family besides eating!” (05/31/09). My family has almost always incorporated a little more than meals into our regular family gatherings and holiday celebrations. There is often an element of surprise or creativity beyond the ordinary. At my mother’s most recent birthday party, for example, immediate and extended family gathered together for a meal as per usual. But preceding dinner, Suzanne asked us all to make Tibetan inspired prayer flags with birthday wishes written on individual flags for Mom. We later hung them for her to see. Mom also prepared her studio space that day, to make clay figures with my brother’s boys, William and Nate. But despite an outward appearance of courageous social interaction, social dynamics are never completely easy. Family meals are still our typical gathering point, and these can be the greatest pleasure,

but also a source of an underlying truth: that socially we require an emphasis on food between us, to break up the uncomfortable spaces (see Tye 2010). It was in this sense of moving beyond the family meal, and all it contains, that I wrote with excitement in my journal about a brand new family space and type of interaction.

In her essay, "Family Geometry," Diane Comer remembers the spaces of family dining in her childhood. The event of mealtime is so fixed in Comer's memory; she is able to tell a story of her mother and their family life through the dining room and kitchen tables of their home. Comer writes, "The table is our first geometry: square, circle, rectangle, or the pecan oval of my childhood where I am a fixed point beside my sister, across from my brother, with our parents at the head and the foot" (2003, 45). I remember this table too, with the very same layout: Dad at the head, Mom at the foot, myself facing west, my brother facing east, and Suzanne alternating between these two directions.⁸ But the geometry space of our new deck, half of a decagon, which step by step we built together, was a different experience than that of the fixed table and similar family experiences. Although relationship patterns were already present on the space of the deck, we also brought awareness and intention to this new space, to move about and shake things up.

The recording below, is an example of some of the unexpected shaking-up that unfolded that summer. This recording captures a conversation that occurred one afternoon. It was between my sister, mother, and I at the kitchen table, following lunch. It was a day when additional deck help had arrived on the scene, in the form of two males

⁸ In recent years, we sometimes mix up the seating arrangement at our dining room table. For several years, we also let go of our rectangle and Mom replaced our table with a smaller circular one (which had always been in the house). As a circular table, there are no sides or divisions.

with carpentry experience. I would spend the next day in bed, in a depressed revolt, feeling I had been displaced as my father's building partner. I am embarrassed by my response, as I am by the fact that my reaction meant it was the only day we would receive additional help with the deck (other than two occasions when my brother came to the house to work on the deck with my father). Although the conversation below makes me laugh a little now, it was very uncomfortable for me at the time.

- Suzanne: I was thinking of the angels this morning, particularly Archangel Michael.
- Michelle: That's interesting. I was reading about Archangel Michael all night. [Urquhart, 1996]
- Suzanne: Well, it's definitely tied into everything we've been talking about around the deck, around being recognized for the work that you do.
- Michelle: Right.
- Suzanne: Because look at the part that the angels play in our lives. They're so huge. [begins to whisper] Yet most might not even know about them. But they're so important. [changes voice to matter of fact] It just got me thinking about everything we do, from now up until the completion of the deck, is a huge part of the deck. Whether we realize it or not, right?
- Michelle: Yeah, I want to continue—[batteries die, recording ends]
[minutes pass to change batteries, recording resumes]
- Michelle: So like you said Suzanne, about the Archangel Michael and angels doing things and—well I don't need to repeat what you said. It's taking a lot of courage now for me to not fall apart and crumble. Because I really didn't realize it—[pauses voice slows] I thought that I would be completely involved, that you and I—Err. [struggles, then comes on strong] I imagined to be completely in the creative process in the building of the deck. But I'm, I'm not. It seems that Dad is much more comfortable with—
- Marilyn: We seem to be taking the female part.

- Michelle: We do, yeah. I'm feeling a lot of strong tradition here, and it's taking a lot for me to not crumble. Like, I almost cried at lunch.
- Suzanne: Mm. Wow.
- Marilyn: I still think you can get around that. I haven't felt to push myself out there. But I'm sure if I went and stood out there—
- Michelle: It takes a lot of nerve. It takes a lot of courage to go out there.
- Marilyn: It wouldn't take me any courage. It wouldn't take me any courage at all. But I just don't feel motivated to go out there. There's so much to do in here, and so much slack to pick-up. I feel like I'm really taking the female part with this.
- Suzanne: [turns to Mom] Do you feel like you're a part of it, the project, in what you're doing here?
- Marilyn: Hmm, [reflecting] Sort of, yeah, in a way. I think I'd like to be more involved too.
- Michelle: Would you?
- Marilyn: Mm. I think I would.
- Michelle: Doing what?
- Marilyn: Whatever needs to be done. And I know I could.
- Suzanne: To be more involved—[speaks slowly, mulling it over]
- Marilyn: Yeah, I know I could.
- Suzanne: Well I—
- Marilyn: I would just go for it if you want to be out there. There is so much to do in the house here—[recording space full] (Hollett 2, 2009)

This is probably the first time that my mom, sister, and I had a conversation like this. It considers our position as women in the household in relation to Dad as a male, and to males generally. Although I am the one who brings up this topic, our conversation

quickly turns into a recognized piece with momentum—a manifesto—with Mom and Suzanne demonstrating that they too feel something within this context. It is something we share as females, like an unspoken code of experience.

We offer rather perplexing, somewhat humorous, and likely deeply emotional accounts of “taking the female part,” (Hollett 2, 2009) as Mom calls it. As two generations of women, each with unique experiences, we offer mixed reactions. I am wholly unsettled by what is going on inside and outside of me, but in contrast neither Mom, nor Suzanne, demonstrate a need to follow any outside determinant. At the same time Suzanne is referencing angels as a metaphor for the inconceivable amounts of unrecognized work we do in this lifetime. Mom is also offering conflicted statements on her experience of working inside the home, versus on the deck. This position, she admits, defines her, but also does not define her; it is something she chooses, but also does not choose.

In this conversation, we are responding to the gendered division of space and labour which seemed to automatically occur when more men arrived on the scene. More specifically, we are responding to my personal desire to transcend this divided space. Although I had intentions of working with Dad that day, after social pleasantries with the men, I retreated inside to help Mom and Suzanne make lunch. Nobody said that it had to be that way, but I was embarrassed by my lack of ability on the deck. It took me, at least, six hits to hammer a nail in crooked, instead of two or three hits to hammer a nail in straight. As such, I did not know how to involve myself socially within the male group of three. In the sudden reminder that I was operating within a traditionally male sphere,

within my family and within our culture, I saw this space as no place for an amateur female.

Ultimately, I spent the next day in bed depressed. My father and sister finished what we had been previously working on together, without me, following their unsuccessful attempts to call me out of my room. But in a grand gesture Dad left the final nail un-hammered. The undone nail, left for me, was a gesture of appreciation for the struggles we go through, and the strength of our relationship. Significantly, it was a gesture of appreciation for me as an individual.

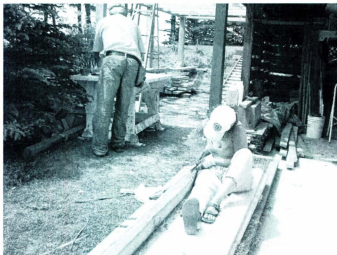


Figure 23. Len and Michelle, c. 2009. Photograph taken by Marilyn Hollett.

In the following interview with Mom and Dad, Mom leads the three of us into a conversation about Dad's social experience on the space of the deck. She describes how,

at times within our group context, Dad required his own quiet space to work. Mom also describes how Dad's unwavering dedication to the deck inspired her in her own pursuits.

Michelle: I have a few ideas about some things that I wanted to ask, but is there anything that you'd like to add? Anything you feel? Spur of the moment? On your mind, that you want to share?

Len: No, you go ahead dear. Get your questions asked.

Michelle: Ok. Well.

Marilyn: Can I just add one thing?

Michelle: Yeah, sure you can.

Marilyn: I feel that this project is really perfectly suited for Len. And when I see him working on it, it makes me feel like I want to really go and do my own thing. Because I see him really enjoying it.... He's really engaged in it, and really liking it. So that kind of gives me—[pauses] I should indulge myself in my projects that I love. There's that. And the fact that he doesn't seem to constantly need somebody else, maybe because he's trying to figure out what he's doing.

Len: That's true.

Marilyn: So he doesn't know what to tell another person.

Michelle: What's true? I didn't catch that.

Marilyn: That he's constantly trying to figure out what he's doing, so he's not really in a position to tell somebody else what to do. Because he's not really sure what he's doing himself at times, but he's really enjoying discovery.

Len: That's so true. It's best to work sometimes by yourself, at your own pace, when you're not really sure what you're doing.

Marilyn: The fun of it is being very quiet, and discovering that you can figure out your solutions when coming across a problem: "Now what am I going to do about this."

- Michelle: You probably felt a little bit of pressure—well maybe a lot of pressure. Did you feel pressure in the beginning from me? Wanting to know, wanting to be involved?
- Len: No, not really.
- Michelle: Because you were [just] saying, you were, wanting to work it out [by yourself]—
- Len: No. I knew that there'd be times when you could definitely help. I knew there'd be times when I'd have to do it by myself. But that didn't bother me, that didn't put me under any pressure. The pressure was more when I had [the] guys there helping me. Because, then we had to—we probably got more done because we were thinking it over together and solving the problems and—
- Marilyn: And they have a lot of know-how.
- Michelle: So why was that pressure?
- Len: Because I was being pushed a little beyond my normal speed.
- Marilyn: It was out of your hands.
- Len: It was out of my hands. Yeah I guess it was. To a degree. Not always. To a degree. I still kept—
- Michelle: So do you like working on your own then? It sounds like—
- Len: Certain times I do.
- Michelle: Yeah. That sounds so familiar for me, Dad. I push beyond my natural speed. I feel like I'm a very slow person. Not a bad thing at all. But I think I work through things slowly, and sometimes I can panic when I feel pushed beyond my natural speed.
- Len: Sure. No, your natural speed is good, is good for you. The proper thing. (Hollett 5, 2009)

Through the conversation with my parents, above, I come to understand something about my father, his experience on the deck, and how I am similar to him. I put the pieces together—or perhaps the pieces were put together by Mom guiding us in conversation—

that while I was feeling self-conscious that day I retreated from the deck space, so was Dad. I am reminded that my father can feel pressure in social contexts too. In this, I learned that he sometimes likes to work things out by himself, slowly and quietly, and he does not know how, or perhaps does not desire, to involve others in this process. This is also quite like me.

In the above conversation, my mother also shares that she was inspired by Dad's dedication to the project and, in other words, his dedication to himself. She is not pushed to work on the deck herself. She is inspired to become more involved in the things she loves. That we were each inspired, growing in our own pursuits that summer, as a result of building the deck—regardless of whomever among us was actually involved in construction—became an important theme. “Building” came to mean many things: a physical structure, a social space, individual creative expression, and seeing and learning from each other, all within the framework provided by the trees. William Westerman states that “art has, shall we say, the potential energy to transform, whether it is transforming space, materials, time and rhythm, the way individuals think, or the way communities behave” (2006, 118). On a summer day that felt particularly cohesive and fun, Suzanne wrote the following piece in our communal logbook. I believe it captures the energy of transformation that Westerman describes. Suzanne writes:

Today we added three pieces onto the old deck. It is feeling very big today. It took much thought today to prepare the pieces for the floor. The right angles took time. Michelle came up with the idea to trace the framework onto a practice piece!! Yahoo. If felt great to get it done together. We are a team, and everyone played their best. Mom made a sweet pot with birds and swirls and I made a swell lunch with seaweed and fish. Good day! (Hollett Family Log, 06/16/09)

That summer, Mom devoted time to her pottery, which Suzanne indicates above, and was inspired by her family's growth all around her. Dad truly experienced the daily pleasures of his work project, and himself developing in his craft. I found the courage to take a personally important trip across eastern Canada at the end of the summer. Suzanne made a commitment to a life partner, and to building a home with him. The context of the deck, the final stage of our three-staged project, provided a foundation for these and other developments in our lives.

Father Tree Connections

Dad's centralized role in this project offered the rest of us an opportunity to experience him in his element; he became a strong force for Mom, Suzanne, and me. This focus on Dad occurred in very positive ways. It resulted in us experiencing him, and ourselves, more fully, as well as, the wood of the trees—all mutually affirming parts of one social experience. I close this chapter with Mom and Suzanne's thoughtful and emotionally expressive representations of these social connections.

In *Perspectives on American Folk Art*, Roger Welsch states, "We have been looking for a definition of material [art] that is the product of the spirit, not the mind, and yet we have been using techniques designed for analysis of products of the mind" (1980, 227). Following Welsch, the connections, described below, are necessarily spirited and artful renderings of how the added layer of the trees—the wood we were working with to build our deck—supported us in our social relationships, and how this was significantly experienced in connection to Dad.

Suzanne

Following Mikhail Bakhtin, Mary Hufford writes:

Losing the self [in nature] is a way of gaining the perspective necessary to completing one's self, by seeing oneself from something approximating another perspective. As Bakhtin put it..."A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the most deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find complete fullness in himself alone." (Hufford 2003a, 288, citing Bakhtin 1984, 177, emphasis original)

In an individual interview with Suzanne, below, she describes something similar to the experience of "another consciousness," of "seeing one's self from something approximating another perspective." Suzanne blends beings and experiences together, to form one consciousness: the trees, herself, and Dad. In the following passages, she speaks from the perspective of a woman who is pregnant:

Suzanne: I've been breathing into my belly, because I have a baby now. And I'm just finding the breath on a deeper level. And I am realizing that it is such a powerful medicine, and it comes from our connection with the trees.

Michelle: Do you want to talk more about that? About the connection? And the breath and the trees?

Suzanne: Well. Fear has been coming up around being natural with my birth, you know, just fears: all the "what if's". What if this happens? What if that happens? And my breath, when I breathe down in, and let it go all around the baby, it's a really strong message, and it really tells me that that's all I need.

Michelle: It's wonderful.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Michelle: And again, it's connected to the trees?

Suzanne: Yeah. I just keep thinking of that time on the deck. Things really affect us and influence us in deep ways.

Michelle: What time on the deck?

Suzanne: When Dad was hammering the nails, and you were hammering the nails, and he was giving everyone a chance to hammer the nails. It just seems connected to that somehow. Somehow everyone was connecting, and the trees were sharing their medicine. [exhales deeply] And the breath! The breath, the breath! If everyone just breathes really deep. It will feed us. It will sustain us. It will let us remember heaven in our bodies. That's what I'm getting. (Suzanne Hollett, 2010)



Figure 24. Kai and Suzanne, c. 2011.

In the above passage Suzanne is five months pregnant with Kai Joseph (born very healthy through Suzanne's breath, on March 04, 2011). Breathing fully into her belly, and surrounding her growing baby with her breath, reminds Suzanne that despite her fears, her breath is all she requires to bring her baby into the world. For the birth of her first child, my sister wanted to remember that childbirth is natural, and she wanted to experience her own power as a mother giving birth, in a way that made sense to her. The nine and a half month journey was challenging for Suzanne. She heard, again and again,

that she should—for herself and her baby—depend on the culture of the hospital to deliver her baby. But this was not Suzanne’s chosen journey with herself and Kai.

In the very thoughtful passage above, Suzanne makes connections between this very important time in her life and our family building project with the trees. Into a circle of influence she weaves: the very simple and fundamental lesson of breath, as life sustaining; the still medicine of the trees; our family working together on the space of the deck; and Dad sharing himself in this project. These become one total experience of support. Suzanne continues:

Suzanne: The sequence of events that have occurred, beginning with the trees, and the deck, and Dad, have led me to feeling more of my spirit in my body. And I think that has to do with the trees, and working with them, and now learning about how they relate, and how they are in the world. And it’s just, nice.

Michelle: That sounds big Suzanne.

Suzanne: Yeah. Because often when I’m talking to people, I can feel it. I can feel my spirit is talking from somewhere. But this time, more and more, my spirit’s talking from right, it’s from the center of my body. And it feels like the trees are helping me to bring heaven on earth.

Michelle: Being grounded and rooted like trees?

Suzanne: Yeah. I know they’re helping me. And there’s something significant about Dad working on the deck, my love for him. (Suzanne Hollett, 2010)

Suzanne describes how experiencing Dad and the trees together, in the context of the family building project, allowed her relationship with Dad to grow. Perhaps the soothing simplicity of the trees, in their incredible way of relating in this world—standing as they do—has allowed her experience to unfold in this way. Thomas Moore writes: “Once we

stop taking trees literally, we begin to see how they frame the world...how they set a limit to the upward reach of the land, and how tall and branching, they stand like nature's doubles of ourselves. If we stop to think about trees in our life, we begin to understand how fully capable they are of relatedness, intimacy, and meaning" (1996, 22). The space of the deck and the trees acted like a medium, of perspective, for Suzanne to experience her relationship with herself, and our Dad, more fully.

Marilyn

One sunny morning late in the summer, Mom and I were walking our favourite path in the woods, a few kilometers from home. The deck was nearly finished. Mom was speaking about Turkish pottery design, and the meditative quality of repetition in this art form. On this pottery tradition, Glassie writes: "In Kütahya [Turkey], the foundation of art is laid in a repetitive, ritualized state of meditative creation that brings natural substances through love into beauty" (1999, 185). In 2006, Mom, Dad, and Suzanne came to visit me in Istanbul, during my year and a half long stay as an ESL teacher. Through this visit, my mother had the opportunity to explore pottery districts in Turkey, like Kütahya. On meditative repetition in Turkish pottery, both Mom and Glassie are referring to the surface design, as in the tulip or a geometric shape, which is painted over and over again. Each addition is painted in perfect mirror image of the last. Glassie has further defined the finished product of Turkish pottery as "devices created in devotion and designed to lead the viewer, step by step, to higher understanding" (1999, 184).

Following our walk that same day, Mom and I held an interview for this thesis. In this recording, Mom recalls the topic of our early morning conversation in the woods:

- Marilyn: Remember when we were talking about that? This morning on our walk? We were talking about how Turkish pottery, it's so characteristically repetitive? And the pattern can be incredibly intricate. It can be large and intricate too. Or small and intricate. But it's repeated, repeated. And it was performed as a type of mantra. It was part of their prayer, just to constantly indulge in repeated patterns. And so maybe [a] viewer would be indulging in the same way. It would be like a mantra. And a soothing one. Something that could calm them, and in such a way, to make them more open to feeling things around them. And the connections they have with everything around them. When Len was doing the deck—the repeated hammering—I think was very soothing for him. It was very physical, and he really enjoyed it. So I think he felt very connected. It made me feel connected, watching him.
- Michelle: Did it?
- Marilyn: Yeah. [emphatically]
- Michelle: Connected to what?
- Marilyn: To him building the deck. Working on our house. Creating something for us, for him, and me, and the family.
- Michelle: So what do those things connect you to?
- Marilyn: Well, it's connected to his environment too. And connected maybe to his training. I think he was probably using his engineering training and all his problem solving: cutting wood at the right angles.
- Michelle: It sounds like you feel really proud of Dad.
- Marilyn: I am. I'm really proud of him. I hope he's proud of himself. (Marilyn Hollett, 2009)

Through Dad's repetitive hammering of nail on wood, Mom imagines that his experience was like a meditation for him. She also relates to it as a meditation for herself. She has become the meditative observer that she wonders about, above, in the context of Turkish pottery design and creation. Over the summer, Mom would have continually experienced

the repetition of the hammer, on nail, on wood—the tap, tap, tap. She would have heard this, watched this, and felt this reverberation throughout the house. All the while, Mom was also cognizant of Dad’s creative energies at work. He was manifesting her dream, and using the wood of their labour. This experience allowed her to feel connected: she was “more open to feeling things,” drawn into making meaningful connections beyond the hammering. Mom experienced Dad—and necessarily herself—joined to realms beyond the immediate action. In a calming way, she felt connected to their environment, their home, his skills, his profession, and Dad, as a father and a husband.

Westerman explores “social transformation” in basketry. He approaches the craft “as an extended metaphor for the complexity of the artistic process” (2006, 111). On this process he states:

The feeling that creative people experience when participating in a traditional, artistic activity is seldom well articulated, because it is fundamentally non-verbal. Usually the words break down, and people only speak in general terms: “It does something for me,” “I feel something,” “I feel great.” We need to concentrate on that “something” in our research and activity. Whether psychological, aesthetic, emotional, or political, that “something” exists at a level where language does not reach. Yet the creative process not only makes us feel more fully human, it connects us socially. (2006, 118)

Westerman describes a deeply felt, individual and social experience, through creative works. He asserts that this experience is not easy to define. Throughout this chapter, I have moved through some of the social dynamics that were our creative experience together. In this final section, Suzanne and Mom both demonstrate how profound this experience can be, as they suspend logical thinking and move into more heart-centered thinking to describe our social engagement (see Pelias 2004).

The connections we made in our project were with each other and with ourselves. When building our deck, we struggled at times to come together, to work as a group. We lacked the certainty that is perhaps realized in carefree attitudes of individuals who are, ultimately, secure in themselves, and equally secure in their family group. Yet, we also came together in this building experience, with the intent, and ultimate result, of emotional security realized through our group (see Martin 1991). Within this project, we emphasized a delicate balance of group and individual expression. I believe we did this with a great degree of satisfying success.

Our connections also include the trees as a part of our experience. Woodworker Bruce Hoadley writes: "Wood comes from trees. This is the most important fact to remember in understanding the nature of wood" (1980, 1). All summer long there was physical contact with the spruce lumber, made from the trees Mom and Dad felled, and had milled, on our land. This lumber was also the trees of our memories, and we were additionally surrounded by waving spruce each day. But despite all of these obvious reinforcements of trees in our lives, it can take quieter reflections to remember our simple and profound connections with trees, which are of feeling and less of mind.

On the creative process of working with natural materials David Abram states: "art is really a cooperative endeavor, a work of cocreation in which the dynamism and power of earth-born materials is honored and respected. In return for this respect, these materials contribute their more-than-human resonances to human culture" (1997, 278, note 22). It is certain, the "more-than-human resonances," of the very special wood my family built with, were felt within our family project. As a social and creative endeavor, the dynamics of our building project made a transformative family space.



The four of us sit quietly at the dining room table. We are looking at the day's work through our bay window, as the sun sets beyond Shut-In Island. The structure is in place. We can see the shape...

Marilyn: It looks really good.

Len: Yeah, I think it looks great.

Suzanne: Majestic.

Michelle: The angles are really beautiful. (Hollett 3, 2009)

CHAPTER SIX ~ CONCLUSION

The Giving Tree (Silverstein [1964] 1992) is a children's classic that I remember well from my childhood. It describes the relationship between a tree and a boy over their lifetime together. In their early years, a strong and mutual love exists between the young boy and the tree. But as the boy grows into an adult, his love for the tree no longer blooms. His engagement with the tree switches from playful and loving interaction, to one of need, as he takes from the tree in total disregard, providing for himself until the tree is no more than a stump. The tree is willing to sacrifice itself—its apples, branches, and trunk—for the happiness of the human. But the man never revisits his early relationship with the tree and, significantly, the man is never happy.

I have always cherished this book. Yet the storyline has always troubled me. I have wondered, "But doesn't the man remember the love that he once felt for the tree?" I find Silverstein's story relates to this thesis. Mom, Dad, Suzanne, and I have explored harvesting the trees of our property for our own use and comfort. These are the very same trees that my brother, sister, and I played with, and loved, as children. In my study, I was inspired by the question, "How can we relate to trees as adults?" even if complicated by a relationship of use. This question is a very important one. It directly relates to the reality that trees are literally being cleared from this earth. Obviously, this is without adequate consideration for the lives of the trees, or the larger reality this creates for our world.

Originally, when I first began this thesis with my family in the summer of 2009, I thought that I would strictly be writing about our summer deck project. But through our

initial “vision talk” and the following interviews, my family showed me that this thesis would also describe the events that preceded building our deck: the three-staged process of felling, milling, and building. This entire process helped me explore my question of how we can relate to trees as adults, while including the larger consideration of “what is lost” (Westerman 2006, 115) from our lives, when we no longer relate to our creative endeavors and our natural environment in fulfilling and healthy ways.

I believe my family has always related significantly to the natural world and to the natural environment that our family home has provided. However, we had never consciously done so as a group, and never within a context like this thesis has provided. As a result, our three-staged project was a new experience for my family. It expressed a time in our lives when we were deeply considering our relationships with one another, our purpose, and meaning in our lives. The connections that we make with our immediate environment, here the trees, have become a very important part of this experience. I contend that this theme of recognizing connections with our natural world, and if the occasion arises through our creative endeavors with it, could be an important one for families and groups of people generally today. Our lives are lived at an unprecedented pace. Engaging with our present time in healthy and supportive ways is our modern test. In this thesis, my family members returned to a more engaged experience with each other through the trees of our property. We experienced fulfillment in this way.

In the world today, I see a general fear of being too personal, too feeling, and sharing too much emotional meaning within our cultural institutions. Emotional reservation runs across the board, in casual everyday encounters, in the workplace, in

social gatherings, in academic classrooms, and in our education systems generally. It occurs in how we relate to one another. It is found in our relationships with our natural world. Undoubtedly, it also exists in our relationship with ourselves. On fostering emotional expressivity in the academic setting, Ronald Pelias writes:

I am drawn to this way of working out of a feeling of lack. I feel the lack in those critical arguments tied tighter than a syllogism, those pronouncements given with such assurance, those judgments that name everything but what matters. I know there is more than making a case, more than establishing criteria and authority, more than what is typically offered up. That more had to do with the heart, the body, the spirit. (2004, 1)

In this thesis, I was drawn to exploring my personal experience of what has been missing. But importantly, this thesis was equally inspired by a grand theme of what is present in our lives: what naturally exists with just a little brushing off of dust.

Exploring the emotional dimensions of building the deck has been important, not only for myself and my family, but for understanding the importance of constructive and creative projects in people's lives. Approaching the emotional content of each stage of our project addressed the heart of the matter, immediately lending itself to authentic conversations about the entanglement of people and trees. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has pointed out that all too often folklorists are overwhelmed by the task of identifying traditional folkloric components in personal narrative, so that they tend to overlook the very essence of the narrative, that of the intimate, personal experience (1989, 134). I approached this three-stage project as it was experienced by myself and family: a creative process based in emotion and conceived through relationships with nature. My approach reveals not only the meaningful experience that the project has brought to our lives; it

also moves to confront modern attitudes to humans and nature: that of divided spheres and a nature that is largely inanimate.

My parents were the foundation of this project. Through the stages of felling and milling they led my sister and me into building the deck. Through their strong start, it was as if we had begun the project together. This is an example of how our parents are foundational in our lives. So often it is said, “The children are our future.” While this is true, our parents—our elders—are our future as well. The ways in which they perceive and experience the world, can bring us into safer and more comfortable spaces within ourselves. My sister and I experienced this in our project.

“Touching Nature,” “Realizing Self,” and “Creative Expression,” were the three main themes of the chapters on felling, milling, and building, respectively. Following my family’s lead, I approached these stages as significant parts of one whole. Felling trees was the stage that brought my parents into meaningful conversations and experiences with themselves through the life and death of the trees. Through my parents’ emphasis on conscious engagement—prioritizing awareness and balance—I approached this stage as “getting in touch” with what is natural in ourselves, through mindfully ending the life of a tree. Awareness for our actions is imperative in our lives. Alternatively, aspects of ourselves and our relationship with the natural world lie dormant. This is especially prominent today, in the grave tendency of avoiding our negative effects on our natural world.

Milling the trees on our property allowed my parents to directly provide for themselves in a project which they had started and would complete. The satisfaction in this was endless. In stepping outside of our mainstream cash economy, through the event

of an economic fall-out, my parents realized their ideas and abilities, as two individuals with very possible dreams. This experience was made possible through the support of the trees: the natural world sustaining us in healthy, balanced, and creative ways.

In building together, our deck became a social space where we could work out the social dynamics of being a family in a new way. This thesis contends that our social experience was made possible through our social awareness, our dedication to being somewhere new together, the medium of the trees, and the meaningful context of our three-staged project. I approached our social process on the deck as a creative one, worthy of exploration in a folklore thesis. The social aspects of our expressive culture can either make or break how we realize ourselves in this world. Our deck is here today as a reminder of this experience in our lives. The three-staged project was an example of what is natural, what is desired, and what is expressed.

I attempted to let life reveal itself in this project, through family, myself, and the trees. I significantly relied on our present context as a family, and how we build our expressive culture now. As a result, I was never entirely sure of my thesis as it was developing—there were surprises at every turn. When initially forming my literature base I drew from areas within folklore that presented themselves as fairly obvious links: family folklore and folklore studies with a nature focus. Neither of these areas of folklore are overly active fields in folklore today. But as fields merged, they could valuably contribute to considerations on family health and healthy nature. As I wrote my thesis, I found more and more inspiration through folklorists writing from within various folklore sub-fields. I found I was often drawn to topics which do not necessarily rely on a canon, but ones which put forth new and unique concepts in folklore. In these, I was drawn to

the inspirational and activist spirit, and their emotionally expressive content. Mary Hufford stands out in folklore, in exploring inter-species communication. Her approach supported my topic focus on people and trees. Henry Glassie also features in this thesis, as do other folklorists, in their poetic styles of relating to, and representing expressive culture. As additional sources, I also drew on individuals writing outside of folklore. I consulted writers such as Ross Laird and David Abram, in their creative considerations of culture and nature.

In writing this thesis, I have experienced what Ruth Behar describes as, “that academic voice I have learned to turn on and off, like a faucet” (1996, 165). I have turned on my academic voice more than is generally comfortable for me. But through this experience I have learned how to better appreciate, and benefit from, different styles of interpretation. I have directly experienced how worlds can merge, and how this can be a valuable experience. This is a very important lesson, one that was also learned on the space of the deck in our social engagement.

I am very proud of our project. I am proud of the project which came together in life, and that which came together on paper. Nevertheless having now completed this thesis, I realize that the topics within are far from completed. There is a thesis waiting to be explored within each chapter, within each family member, and within the trees. I have struggled to adequately represent my mother, father, and sister, and the themes of each chapter. In places, I fear I fall short. But constraints in time and ability necessarily prevail. Stages, upon stages, were revealed to me within my writing process. But this particular project must come to a close at some point, and this is the point I have arrived at.

I maintain that a unified approach in folklore is important, for how people relate to and perceive their natural world. With just a little digging, this topic reveals itself as present and bursting to be told. It was often with excitement that individuals met my thesis topic. The subject of people and trees seemed to generate a spark of recognition in people's eyes. Sometimes enthusiastically, other times carefully and quietly, many individuals added a personal piece on their own relationship with trees. Following this project, and the lead of my mother, sister, and father I contend that nature topics are waiting for further recognition, as a step in enriching our lives and saving our natural surroundings. Approaching this topic area as feeling-based is important. Emotion is naturally the base of creativity, and creativity is the tool for transformation.



Figure 25. Sunshine through trees in Harbour Woods, c. 2009.

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