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Rest as Resistance: Visiting with Land as a Method of Rest

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Abstract
As part of my ongoing research articulating a Metis-feminist theory of rest as resistance, this paper explores the practice of visiting with Land as an act of restful resistance. A theory of rest as resistance responds to the exhausting ways that the settler state attempts to devastate Indigenous communities. This response sees rest not as succumbing to these oppressive powers but as a method to actively resist them. In this paper, I argue that visiting with Land is a practice of rest as resistance as it first refuses colonial and capitalist standards and expectations of what it means to be "productive." Second, it centres knowledge and relationships not valued by colonial capitalism. Finally, it engages in slow practices of well-being focused on relationality and reciprocity that offer space and freedom to understand ourselves and our communities. I will root my considerations of this resistance in a practice of autotheory that reflects on my own practice of visiting with Land, both in my Métis Territories and as a visitor in Syilx Territory. Understanding this practice of visiting with the Land as restful resistance is essential as it centres and supports the concept that resting is part of the work when we are attempting to build and maintain sustainable communities and activism.

Introduction

When I was young, I used to traipse around the bush in Treaty 8 Territory behind my dad, marvelling at the ways he seemed to sense everything occurring around us. At the time, I did not see the way that my dad was showing me the different pace required to build a relationship with Land that holds and cares for us. I did not understand that my dad's attunement to bush was showing me a path to a way of living restfully with the Land that I would so desperately crave later in my life. My dad was showing me the ways that building relationships with Métis values at the centre requires a slower pace and deep reverence. My research articulates a Métis-feminist theory of rest as resistance that works to express a way to respond to the deeply exhausting ways that the settler state has (historically and presently) attempted to harm Indigenous communities.

This response sees rest not succumbing to these oppressive powers but as a method to actively resist them. The concept of rest of resistance was recently popularized by Tricia Hersey through her ongoing project *The Nap Ministry* and book *Rest Is Resistance*. Hersey writes as a Black womanist and activist deeply concerned with dismantling the white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal expectations of productivity (2022, p. 40). In these terms, productivity is valorized and our value as beings is tied to how much we can produce. Think of all the ways we are encouraged to do more – optimization of the self is always the goal. To reject this, and rest, is thus an act of resistance. This follows Audre Lorde's famous proclamation that self-care "is an act of political warfare" (1988, p. 125). As I have worked to shift my relationship to value through a practice of rest, I have relied on an expansive understanding of rest that allows for the manifold manifestations of pauses that comfort our physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional selves. These methods of rest do not retreat from the world to escape feeling but gives oneself the space to process the feelings the world brings.

Having this understanding of rest has allowed me to trace two tenets of a Métis restful resistance. First, following Black feminist theories of rest as resistance, rest becomes resistance when it refuses colonial and capitalist standards and expectations of productivity. What is distinct for Métis people specifically and Indigenous peoples more broadly as we untangle ourselves from the morals of colonial capitalism is the ways we must grapple with harmful colonial narratives that stereotype Indigenous peoples as lazy and the reality that we are working extraordinarily hard for our communities. Part of extricating ourselves from colonial capitalism's unrealistic expectations is to remind ourselves we cannot be everything for everyone. As Kim Anderson prompts, "Acting on responsibility to family or nation doesn't mean that we deny our own needs or undermine our responsibility to take care of ourselves" (2016, p. 207). When I

reflect on this statement, I think about how disentangling these notions of value and productivity are often offered more easily to our more-than-human relations who we know have more value than colonial capitalism's resource approach assigns them. Yet, we continue to struggle to bring this acknowledgement inward and truly know and feel that we are worth more than what we do.

The second tenet of a Métis restful resistance asks that we centre knowledge and relationships that colonial capitalism attempts to devalue or discredit. A version of rest that centres relationality acts as an antidote to the hyper-individuality that colonial capitalism fosters. When we rest in ways that connect us to other beings and the multitudes of ways we hold knowledge, we make room for contemplation and reverie that is more holistic. As Métis Elder Rose Richardson reminds, Métis people have long carried knowledge in and through plants and art (Belcourt, 2007, p. 10). We can find pathways for self-care and wellbeing when we come back to these forms of knowledge.

Ways of Doing

Approaching this research with the intent to live this topic and commit to an active practice of resting, I enact the methods of resting that I reflect on in this article – the restful act of visiting with the Land. To accomplish this, I utilize a narrative voice that reflects the feminist methodology of autotheory. Autotheory is a feminist methodology where theory is combined with and emerges through personal stories (Fournier, 2021, p. 7). I am cautious of the ways this method of writing seems to reflect (and perhaps co-opts) well-established Indigenous practices of storytelling – Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson describes the storytelling practices I utilize as storying personal experience or experiences of others to support the learning of others (Wilson, 2008, p. 98). Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder explains that "autobiographical practices are in our culture" and this becomes clear when "we recognize the importance of

declaring our position on the land on which we are situated" (2022, p. 133). Simultaneously, autotheory provides a useful way of phrasing what the personal nature of this research is intending to accomplish. This form of writing combined with practiced-based research methods illuminate a way to enact visiting with Land as a restful method of activism.

Enacting this method asks that I first make clear what I mean by both "visiting" and "Land." The kind of visiting I invoke here follows the Métis methodology of visiting. Métis scholar Janice Cindy Gaudet explains how "keeoukaywin [visiting] was, and still remains, at the heart of how my mother, grandmothers, aunties, and sisters anchor a sense of belonging, a sense of self, and sense of responsibility to family, community, and land" (2018, p. 51). The act of visiting is the "process of meeting together over tea, listening to, and talking with, one another, and understanding each other's point of view" (Flaminio et al., 2020, p. 58). A form of knowledge translation that foregrounds the responsibilities we have in our relationships, according to Gaudet, "visiting creates and fortifies connections that unify and build community from the ground up. It is how humour, silence, news, concerns, pain, knowledge, ideas, and arguments are disseminated at a grassroots/ground level." (2018, p. 53) As Gaudet makes clear, visiting is certainly active work (2018, p. 48). Simultaneously, though, I understand a visiting methodology to be a restful practice as it centres ways of doing research that prioritize relationships and are not based in extraction and productivity.

This methodology is one that is embedded in family and community structures – every time I visit my Métis grandmother, she anchors my understanding of belonging in family as she tells stories and makes little quips about cousins, aunts, uncles, and other relations. It is through visiting that I come to understand my place in our family and community despite the distance that often obscures my sense of belonging. Visiting as methodology and practice reflects and

honours the profound power and impact Métis women have on family, community, and culture (Gaudet, 2018, p. 54). Visiting as methodology asks that we consider how we are responsible for tending to the spirits of all our relations through connecting with them (Gaudet, 2018, p. 48). While the considerations and theorizations of a visiting methodology often are rooted in human-to-human visiting, what I employ here is human-to-Land or human-to-more-than-human visiting to consider the agency and knowledge that comes from all relations. Visiting with Land as a restful methodology prompts a contemplation of how Land and more-than-human relations care for our spirits and wellbeing in radical ways.

This approach to visiting prompts that I make clear what Land means to me. First and foremost, I think of Métis author Maria Campbell's explanation of Wahkotowin:

> Today it is translated to mean kinship, relationship, and family as in human family. But at one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it. Wahkotowin meant honoring and respecting those relationships. They are our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, human to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. And in turn all of creation had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us. (2007, p. 5)

This kinship network informs how I understand Land – relationships breathe life into the world. Care and respect for the Land was the first and most important teaching my dad shared with me and my siblings. I hold very tenderly my memories of traipsing through the bush behind my dad as we harvested firewood and spent time with the trails that were sometimes new friends, sometimes old. In these moments, as we would pester my dad with questions and wait for him to point out all the beings whose home we were in, he made sure that we knew we were responsible for acting with love and care toward the Land. While he welcomed our curiosities and acknowledged the propensity kids have to screw around, he made sure we understood that those inquisitive behaviours never infringed on our responsibility to act with care. In fact, the only

time my dad ever gave me real trouble was when he found out I had used a glow-stick as a trail marker on a camping trip. He made me walk my sorry arse back to this "special" tree to collect the glow-stick with an admonishment that if I truly cared for the tree I would remember it without a glow-stick. I did – and I do. It is through this relationship with Land that my dad instilled in me that I first began to understand the ways that visiting with Land is a restful act of care. My dad offered us the space to slow down with the Land and spend time with all the beings enveloped in the Land's care. While my dad never used the word Wahkotowin to describe the deep relationships he has with the world around him, he acted and parented in ways that always centred this notion.

Much to my dad's chagrin, though, I became a bit of a city kid as I got older. A busy (and self-centred) teenage life meant I did not prioritize camping trips and drives into the bush with my dad. As teenagers are wont to do, I distanced myself from my family as I sought out an identity not predicated on being a daughter or a sibling (I am sure both you and I know that this independent identity is never quite possible, nor is it something very comforting, but keep that to yourself because my teenage self needs to get there by herself). In these city-kid identity searching projects, I fell into the colonial trap of separating capital-L Land and the city. I think of Emily Riddle's explanation of the prairie propensity to forget that the city is Territory – is Land – too (2022, p. 54). Land, worthy of care, was out in the toolies – out in the bush. It was not the sprigs of grass and rogue dandelions that forced themselves through concrete cracks or even the cedar tree in the front yard of my suburban home. I defaulted on my responsibilities to this precious relationship my dad had centred in our lives. Sometimes I like to imagine that the trees reassured my parents as they waited with a knowing hope for my return to these relationships.

Similar to Emily Riddle, it was my experience living on unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory that first shifted my understanding of city as Land (2022, p. 54). These Nations' powerful presence in the city demanded that I reimagine what Land means. This shifting was further shaped by my experience living on unceded Syilx Territory. I have been an extraordinarily fortunate student in this territory as I have had many opportunities to learn from Syilx teachers and Knowledge Keepers (like Dr. Bill Cohen, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, Coralee Miller, and many others) who generously shared the ways that Syilx Lands and people have cared for each other since time immemorial. I think of Jeannette Armstrong's insistence that "Land as language surrounds us completely, just like the physical reality of it surrounds us" (1998, p. 178). These words remind me that this place, called Ki-low-na, is *all* Syilx Land – whether I am surrounded by the bush or concrete.

Alongside this shift in my understanding of Land through the lived experience of being a visitor on unceded Syilx Land/cities are Métis scholar Erin Konsmo and Cree scholar Karyn Recollet's insistence that we disentangle ourselves from purity narratives that denote some Land (the bush) as "good" and other (the city) as "bad" (2018, p. 239). Their words ask us to consider who (as in people and more-than-human kin) gets left behind*, and hurt*, when the only "good" Land is inaccessible bush Land (2018, p. 240). They explain that these purity narratives also spill over into how we view and engage with people who do not fit into purity narratives themselves – as in cis-heteronormativity, able-bodiedness, whiteness, etc. (2018, p. 243). Thus, they prompt that "we need to reimagine not only our cities, but also bodies of all abilities as being good on the land/water. We can reimagine these plant medicines that persevere in the ruins of environmental devastation as part of our kin, and ultimately still valuable in assisting our bodies

and spirits" (2018, p. 243). This prompt is in conversation with nēhiyaw poet and community organizer Erica Violet Lee's "In Defense of the Wastelands: A Survival Guide," where she describes what it means and how it *feels* to live in and be "the wastelands" (2016). She writes:

> the heart of wastelands theory is simple. Here, we understand that there is nothing and no one beyond healing. So we return again and again to the discards, gathering scraps for our bundles, and we tend to the devastation with destabilizing gentleness, carefulness, softness. For those of us in the wastelands—for those of us who are the wastelands—caring for each other in this way is refusing a definition of worthiness that will never include us. To provide care in the wastelands is about gathering enough love to turn devastation into mourning and then, maybe, turn that mourning into hope. (2016)

Wastelands – city Lands – are Indigenous Lands that deserve to be approached with the same love, care, and tenderness that the bush deserves.

As I join these scholars and writers in their calls to see city Land as Land worth caring about and caring for, I recognize that a tension emerges through the heightened settler-colonial surveillance that occurs in cities. This surveillance harms Indigenous kin and other marginalized folks in different ways from the social histories we inherit – I think about Filipina-American writer Jenny Odell's reflection that some bodies are read "as an invitation to violence" when they exist in public spaces and how this inhibits the ability to fully rest (2023, p. 100). For Indigenous peoples in particular, though, Cree-Métis-Saulteaux scholar Jas M. Morgan writes that in prairie cities, this surveillance works to "criminalize Indigenous presence in the city on behalf of white prairie families" (2020, para. 11). Through Morgan's words, I understand how even the presence of Indigenous bodies threaten the colonial family structure that depends on a belief in terra nullius. While Morgan theorizes this surveillance from the lens of houseless youths engaged in projects of basic survival, I also think about how settler city surveillance seeps into projects of cultural connection.

The fear of settler city surveillance leaches into my attempts to come back to my responsibilities I have to more-than-human kin and their spirits. I think of the first time I tanned a deer hide and needed to return the parts I was not using to the Land. For me, hide tanning is a restful, meditative practice as it requires repetitive action and opens space for reflection. Hours of love, care, and laughter goes into sloughing off deer hair and membrane as I worked to make rawhide with friends and mentors. It can be an enchanting process – watching a hide go from smelly and slimy to strong and flexible. It is mesmerizing to know that my hands that did this work hold the knowledge and memory from my Great-Grandmother Fee who used to do this work too. Here, I think of Narungga scholar Natalie Harkin's words that "our bodies too are archives where memories, stories, and lived experiences are stored, etched and anchored in our bloodlines deep. They ground our creativity in what become personal and political acts of remembering, identity making and speaking back to the State" (2014, p. 4). The beauty of tapping into this intergenerational bodily archive was dampened with the reality of doing this work in the middle of Okanagan white suburbia.

As we began the hide tanning process in my aunt's backyard in Vernon (shared Secwépemc and Syilx Territory), her neighbours would walk by and gawk, and I felt a niggling sense of discomfort. When the time came to return the deer's hair and spirit to the Land, I was afraid of inquisitive and policing settlers reprimanding me for enacting a teaching so central to the work but feels unwelcome under settler colonial surveillance. So, under the cover of nightfall, my roommate drove far into winding Okanagan hills and parked along an empty trail as I sheepishly hauled a Rubbermaid of deer hair out of the car and sprinkled it back into the trees. In this act, I hoped that my unease would not outweigh the reverence I held for the deer that gave up their life. As I reflect on this experience, I think of Morgan's insistence "that surveillance and

violence against us is a way of continuing to remove us from the land" (2020, para. 3). Morgan is writing from the particular experience of being Indigenous and trans while being surveyed by white settler colonialism. The threat of surveillance and what it produces inhibits our ability to engage with city as Land. Settler surveillance requires that Métis folks, particularly queer and trans Métis folks, and other Indigenous kin, act with hyper-vigilance – we must always be aware of, and fear, the repercussions of transgressing settler expectations of appropriate public behaviour. Lee considers this reality as she narrates the way that settler surveillance impedes the ability to rest, to dream (Lee, 2016). As my whiteness bolsters me with unearned privileges and protections in the city, I think deeply about what responsibilities I have to enact interventions into settler colonial narratives that do not see cities as Indigenous Land. ts'élî-iskwew scholar Anita Lafferty's words anchor these thoughts:

> Ask yourself: What happened on this land long ago? Whose footprints were here before mine? Where were the grandmothers and what knowledge did they share back then? What is important today that reflects their teachings? Bring forward your footprints with intention as you unpack the past, the traumas, the notions of heteropatriarchy that exist. Make new trails upon old trails. I know matriarch Dene footprints existed and still exist here, maybe relatives or maybe not. I honour those pathways as the wise paths, as the forgotten paths and now I remember them as I (re)establish my own pathways that allow me to exist here too. (2022, p. 58)

I hold all these intricacies of Land and relations together as I enact a practice of visiting with Land as an act of restful resistance.

These days, I like to call myself a recovering city kid – not to devalue the city as Land but to renounce the ways that being a city kid is mired in colonial conceptualizations of Land and value which damage our relations with the more-than-human world. I continue to live in cities – either as an uninvited visitor to Syilx Territory or on (sort of) homelands in Grande Prairie – but I work to repair my relations with Land and all the beings it cares for. Inevitably, as I work to slip back into these webs of relations, I feel all the profound ways that the Land cares for me,

too. As I allow myself to be engulfed in this care, I think about how this follows a long tradition of going to Land to care for oneself (Anderson, 2016, p. 106). Engaging in this sort of care is an act of restful resistance as I prioritize relations with more-than-human beings and centre knowledge that colonial capitalism attempts to destroy.

Woodhaven

These days, I live and work in a park on unceded Syilx Territory that is colonially named Woodhaven. Over the course of my master's degree, Woodhaven (its Lands, Waters, and More-than-Human beings) has cared for me in profound ways. As I am a Métis visitor to these Lands and recovering city-kid, building a relationship to this Place has been a privilege. I am reminded of Métis scholar Janice Cindy Gaudet's reflection that there is a "complex combination of having both privilege and traditional responsibilities that comes with being Métis and living on a land that is not part of their territory" (2018, p. 51). As I wander around Woodhaven, chatting with the trees and bees, peppering in the few words of nsyilxcən I know, I attempt to return the care. I take seriously Syilx scholar and Knowledge Keeper Jeannette Armstrong's words that "all my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die" (1998, p. 176). I will never be quite sure if my slow shuffling and reflective routines is enough to reciprocate Woodhaven's care, but I try. And in this trying, I feel our relationship deepen, strengthen, shift.

There is a specific rock that I sit on near Bellevue Creek that runs behind the house. At this rock I often read, write, contemplate, and dip my toes into the water to remind myself of the feeling of this relationship. This rock, this creek, holds me as I return tear-y waters to the Land

while I make space for the difficult parts of life. I am reminded of Armstrong's poem "Grandmothers," where she writes:

> I nestle
> and draw nourishment from
> voices speaking to me
> in early morning light
> glinting off water
> speaking to me in fragile green
> pushing upward
> groping sun and warmth. (Armstrong, 1998, pp. 176–177)

In so many moments, having this relationship with Woodhaven was the only thing that carried me through.

The day my grandfather passed away, I paid a long visit to the creek. My grief filled body was drawn to the creek with the reminder from Métis therapist and scholar Cathy Richardson Kinewesquao "that the antidote to stress can be found outside, in nature. The energy offered by the waters, trees, lands, forests restore mind, body and soul" (2023, p. 41). I watched as the slowly increasing spring freshet dipped into crevices that were usually stagnant and slow. I watched a little squirrel skitter across the rocks and climb the slope behind me. As I followed its movement up, I noticed the little family of deer that often hung around Woodhaven came to mourn with me. These deer, which I lovingly call my roommates and friends, certainly grew braver around me as my time at Woodhaven lengthened. They no longer fled from the yard when I came outside and would let me sit and watch them as they munched on leaves outside my big living room windows. Every time the deer visited, I reacted with a childish joy – greeting them with sheepish words and revelling in the way they meandered across the Land that bore my footsteps, too. So, on this day that I received devastating news with no family around to grieve with, the deer appearing felt spiritual. I thought of Métis scholar Zoe Todd's insistence that "grief is shared across human/non-human boundaries" (2017, p. 133). While Todd writes about

the collective grief we share with more-than-human kin that emerges from the violence of colonial projects, I believe that when we act with relationality and honour the agency that more-than-human kin hold, we can build relationships that recognize each other's spiritual wellbeing. This belief reflects Métis scholar Monique D. Auger's finding that central to wellbeing is interconnectedness and reciprocity (2021, p. 19). As I wept, the deer stayed – gently peering down at me. They stuck around in the yard for hours that day – an unusual act for these deer that seemed to use this yard as a place to travel through. In the evening, they were still around, poking their heads out as I said see you later when I left for my aunt's house.

Mourning is tricky work. It is difficult to stay in those heavy feelings, yet they need significant room to be worked through. As I near the sixth month mark of my grandpa's death as I write this, I continue to be flooded with grief. I find relief and solace in the moments I retreat to the water and Land – feeling deeply Auger's assertion that it is "healing and grounding" (2021, p. 19). The comfort I find in the Land also reflects Métis poet Aron Skworchinski's statement that "when I feel the land's presence, the search is over. It's like finding the missing piece. When I make that connection, it's like we are working to sew back together the torn-up pieces of ourselves. It's the pieces we know are a bit frayed and jagged" (2023, p. 2). I also think about how it is through my position as a student with an extraordinary supervisor and wonderful mentors that I was able to take time for myself to grieve. Similar to reflections from Black feminists Karla D. Scott (2016, p. 129), Layli Maparyan (2012, p. 44), and bell hooks (1995, p. 126), Métis scholars Anna Corrigal Flamino, Janice Cindy Gaudet, and Leah Marie Dorion emphasize that Métis women struggle to find time and space for acts of self-care (2020, p. 62). It is through my and my committee's collective belief in living this project that I have been able to have so much time to dedicate to visiting with the Land. My mentors' insistence that I rest from

the relentless work of graduate school was a radical intervention into the pace of capitalistic academia that I could not have taken on my own (Black, 2018, p. 24). We rely on community, both human and more-than, to find ways to rest during the heavy moments.

The Black Path

I began missing the care that Woodhaven offered when I was visiting family back up north this summer. Feeling abashed about my lack of relationship with the Land around me, I thought about what places were around me that I could tend to. I pondered over Gaudet's assertion that "I needed to do the hard work—to slow down, take time, make the effort, knock on the door, sit down, listen, share, go to the land, meditate, empty myself, and be present, as my research on land-based wellness had taught me" (2018, p. 48). I thought first of a path just down the road from my family's house in the town of Sexsmith. For my family and friends, this path had been named the "Black Path" – a reference to the dark asphalt that paved it and perhaps reflective of the dark, spooky, and nefarious vibes that my mother ascribed to the path. As a child, I was not allowed to visit the path. Best to stick to visible and brightly lit sidewalks rather than mingle amidst the dense trees and troublesome teenagers that laid claim to the path. Even now, as I'm an adult, my mother chastises me when she learns I've been to see this path. Thus, the Black Path has always been a bit of a mystery – or perhaps a stranger – to me, despite our proximity. I have managed some glimpses over the years, though.

The path walks along a creek that has experienced unforgettable amounts of harm over the years. My dad says it used to flow from a swamp that is now home to a fancy subdivision. To make room for this subdivision, the water from the swamp was diverted into this creek that flows through the town. In the spring, we act surprised when it floods as the swamp attempts to take

back its territory in the basements of these houses. I asked my dad if this creek has a name – he was sure there was but no maps or town plans or friends of his know it. Sometimes, I imagine that the heavy spring freshet that pours through is the creek reintroducing itself – a name I can't quite understand, but feel, nonetheless. When I hear the creek's water rushing, I think about how "the land speaks to you in ways words and written language cannot" (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p. 84).

I used to love to ride my bike down the Black Path. It was the only place in town with *hills*. It was exhilarating – to sneak my bike into the path and speed through, over rolling hills and around soft bends, hoping that when I'd peak through on the other end, my mother would not be there to catch me breaking this one rule she had for me. My relationship with the Black Path was fleeting. My time spent with it was always predicated on some rule breaking, and thus required vigilance and brevity. I did not spend a lot of time noticing or visiting with the path when I was younger. So, when I came home in the summer, I was pleasantly surprised to meet more-than-human relatives I had only ever known in other places.

I escaped to the Black Path often while writing my literature review. Stuck in the heaviness of reading and re-reading the beautiful and thought-provoking theory that informs the necessity of seeing rest as resistance, I needed time and space for contemplation, reverie – *rest* (hooks, 1995, p. 126). Seeking this space, I wandered toward the Black Path thinking about Kim Anderson's statement that "foundations of resistance" includes "a close relationship with the land" (2016, p. 95). Coming back here felt a bit like the awkwardness of reintroducing yourself to someone you've met multiple times but are not sure if they remember you. In the thick of the path, I began to meet relatives and kin I had never noticed in my childish, speedy encounters.

Particularly striking were the fireweed blooms tucked away in the Black Path. I could see their bright flowers and tall stalks, but I could not reach them. I saw their distance as a reminder to keep mine. These blooms were for me to visit, to befriend, but not to harvest. I knew of these blooms because of friends who introduced me to the plant, but like Métis Elder George McDermott says, "I can introduce you to a plant and tell you what it is. It is up to you to get to know it, to talk to it, to give it an offering" (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p. 24). Popping up in different spots among many other plants, lonely fireweed stalks waved softly in prairie winds, allowing me to become familiar with their leaves and flowers. I spent many restful moments getting to know this medicine. My budding relationship with fireweed reflected Christi Belcourt's statement that knowing the spirit of plant medicines allow her to feel whole, healthy, and able to show up in her relationships (2007, p. 3).

As I began forming a relationship with fireweed, I also pestered my family with what I had learned. Similar to Anita Lafferty,

> While I am on the Land I often think about the future generations. What footprints will follow mine? Will my grandchildren and their children feel the Land as I do? Will they hear the same stories? I seek to understand the Land as a place of knowledge and wisdom, a place where matriarchs and ancestors live among the sights and sounds of the landscapes. Like the breath in my bones, the Land is where the wisdom grows and expands. (2022, p. 55)

So, I told my family what fireweed looks like and the other places it is likely to call home – like "in open fields, pastures, and particularly burned-over lands" (Barkwell, 2013, p. 1). This is typical behaviour for me – to inundate my family with newly gained knowledge whether they want it or not. Amidst their gentle teasing of my new-found obsession with fireweed were reports of their own encounters with it. What began as a simple walk to take a writing break turned into a familial reorientation to Land and life as we collectively took the time to meet and greet all the fireweed we came across. As Elder George McDermott explains, "that plant's life is a whole new

world to people not familiar. It is a different life altogether, it is a different world view" (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p. 24). When my sister and I travelled to Amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton) in July, it became a bit like the game punch buggy as we raced to spot and name the patches of fireweed that grew along the highway. We encountered this road that was so familiar to us in new ways as we took the time to notice the beings and medicines that called these Lands home. We began to follow the trails of fireweed that travelled through the places that I have called home.

One afternoon, as I took a much-needed writing break to spend time with my nieces, I noticed a singular stalk of fireweed in their backyard. Finding this friend in my sister's flowerbed-turned-weed garden was a joyous surprise. My sister lives in the heart of suburbia with none of the typical fireweed dwellings close by. We marvelled at this serendipitous bloom and watched as it grew and changed over the summer and I thought about how Auger explains that "Métis people remain adaptable and determined to find creative ways of connecting with the natural environment" (2021, p. 22). I stood in awe as fluffy fireweed seeds slowly cracked open and blew away – beginning to understand the possibility of this friend making its home alongside us; reminding me once again that colonial notions of property will never quell the propensity for all relations to find homes in ours. It remains mysterious to me the ways that seeds which scatter in the fall proceed to enliven again in the spring. Perhaps, spending months being held and protected by Land and snow gives these seeds the power to sprout and bloom. Do the seeds find reverie in this time? Do they relinquish the ever-pressing desire to grow in that time so that they can conserve energy? Do they relinquish control so they can feel deeply the wind blowing them to new homes – new relations? I will have to visit them again to spring to hear – perhaps feel – what they think about rest.

As the fireweed seeds began cracking open in Grande Prairie, the Syilx Lands where I attend school were experiencing devastating forest fires. These fires asked that I postpone my typical late-August return to this territory as I somberly hoped for safety and extinguishment. This delay meant I had an unexpectedly longer stay in Treaty 8 Territory. For the first time in eight years, I got to see all the leafy trees in the place I call home turn orange and crispy. It was unexpectedly emotional – seeing these leaves change reminded me that these Lands change, too. A simple reminder lost in my self-obsessed musings on the ways I always come home feeling different. As I took the time to watch leaves fall in blustery prairie winds, I felt a moment of understanding with these trees – there is a spirit of resilience in the ways we change and shed as we bolster ourselves for resistance (to colonialism and cold weather alike). In spending time with these sunset-coloured trees after many years of missing their transition, I thought of Métis scholar Hanna Paul's statement that "intentionally coming back to ourselves exhibits strength and groundedness" (2023, p. 79). Feeling this strength in my relationship with Land connects with Lafferty's assertion that "with each inhale of knowledge, it connects me to the Land, and, as I exhale, the fear that contains a dark history is slowly withering away" (2022, p. 55). Through reflecting on Land and life with these trees, this path, and fireweed as my collaborators – or perhaps mentors – I felt, very deeply, the ways that resting with Land impacts our wellbeing.

Walking On…

These stories I share about visiting with Land reflect the way Métis communities understand the Land as nourishing for the soul (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p. 89). It is profound to recentre this relationship to Land while submerged in a centuries-long project to sunder it. It is profound to act with care towards the Land and

ourselves. As Plains Cree scholar Cash Ahenakew states, “our lands, bodies and minds are not empty, not terra nullius. They belong to the land (to all our relations)” (2023). Resting with Land is an act of resistance because it steadfastly refutes the notion that the only “good” uses of our Lands and bodies are ones that invest in colonial capitalist standards of productivity. From my understanding, though, this relationship to Land is valuable simply because it exists – it prioritizes the maintenance and care of all beings on Land.

As I reflect on these stories, I offer grace to the teenage version of myself who was so eager to disentangle myself from webs of relations. As I grappled with my queer identity in a colonial Catholic town with a desperation to see myself as something outside of *just* the youngest member of the family who didn’t seem to fit, I unknowingly damaged the relations eager to care for me. Reflecting on these moments now, I am grateful to Opaskwayak Cree scholar Alex Wilson writing on “coming in” to community as a queer person:

> Our encounters with racism, homophobia, and sexism may disturb our balance and we sometimes lose our place in the circle. For those of us who lose our place, our traditions, history, memories, and collective experience of this world will still guide us. Two-spirit identity is about circling back to where we belong, reclaiming, reinventing, and redefining our beginnings, our roots, our communities, our support systems, and our collective and individual selves. (2008, p. 198)

Alex Wilson’s concept of “coming in” helps me work through the ways that I found comfort and confidence in myself and my family when I came back into these relations as a queer person. While coming back into these relations was not always easy, I continue to find comfort in the ways my family reaches out and reaffirms these relations – like in the pictures of trees my dad sends to me while I am away in Kelowna. This digital version of visiting with Land reminds me of the networks of care and responsibility I am firmly planted in even while I am away on other territories.

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