Chapter 10. The Spirit of Algonquin

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Introduction

"Algonquin Park, so wild and free, You've got a lariat on me."[1]

1 This poem was written in 1927 by John W. Millar. A copy of the poem was found in the Algonquin Park Museum Archives and printed in the book Glimpses of Algonquin which was compiled by George D. Garland and published by The Friends of Algonquin Park, in 1989 and 1994.

John W. Millar, who served as Algonquin Park's Superintendent in 1922 and again from 1925 to 1930, was referred to as the "Poet-superintendent" for sharing his talent as a writer of prose (Garland, 1989, p. 110). One of his lyrical verses was penned to express his admiration for the beauty of the landscape and pay tribute to those forces, both natural and human, that founded Algonquin Provincial Park. In the first two lines of that poem "Algonquin Park so wild and free, You've got a lariat on me," Millar provides a powerful metaphorical image of "rugged hills, lakes, rippling streams and towering pines" encircling him like a rope and securing him to what he called "this mystic land" (Garland, 1989, p. 109). An emotional bond that ties people to a place, like the lariat hold Algonquin had on Superintendent Millar, is known as a 'Sense of Place.'

Historically, the concept of Sense of Place has roots in the Deep Ecology movement and the work of the late Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who applied his skills as a philosopher to understand the ecological crisis. Naess, a university professor in Oslo, took an approach to ecology that went far beyond the scope of a traditional academic. In addition to being a lover of knowledge, Naess was also enthusiastically devoted to spending his time observing and climbing the Hallingskarvet mountains of Norway, an area that was a key influence in his life and work. From the simple cabin that he built there in 1937 he wrote at length about the principles of deep ecology and created a

model of ecological wisdom to resolve the environmental crisis that was based on developing a loving and intimate relationship with natural space.

Yi-Fu Tuan, a China born environmental psychologist, originated the term “topophilia” to describe the study of the relationships, perceptions, attitudes, values and a world view that affectively bond people and place (Tuan, 1974). As a professor at the University of Minnesota in the 1970’s, Tuan published two books, “Spirit and Place” and “Place, Art and Self,” to record his research on the emotional connections between physical environments and human beings. Profoundly influenced by the writings of

Arne Naess, Tuan was instrumental in the development of Environmental Psychology, a branch of psychology that systematically accounts for the relationship between people and their environment. Today, cultural geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, urban planners and others all study why a certain place can hold special meaning to particular people or peoples.

There is no question that Algonquin Park holds a special place in the hearts and minds of Canadians. According to Dan Strickland, Algonquin’s Chief Park Naturalist for over 30 years, “Algonquin Park - more simply ‘The Park’, to its admirers - is held dear by countless people as one of Canada’s very special places. This ancient dome of hill and lake country, at the southern edge of the Canadian Shield - Algonquin - evokes an affection, almost a reverence, that must go far beyond anything that the founders could have imagined when they conceived the idea of a Park nearly a hundred years ago” (Reynolds and Dyke, 1983, p.5). Algonquin National Park, as it was first known, was created in 1893 to prevent any further clearing of land by settlers thereby preserving the forests for timber production, to protect the headwaters of the seven rivers that originate in the area, and to provide a sanctuary for fur-bearing animals.[2] While the Algonquin landscape was recognized as a place of exceptional and notable beauty, the idea to reserve and “set apart” the area as a “health resort and leisure ground for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of the province” was not the primary motive of the founding guardians. (Standfield and Lundell, 1993, p.5)

2 In 1893, when the Algonquin National Park Act was formulated it referred to seven major rivers with headwaters within the Park (Amable Dufond, Petawawa, Bonnechere, Madawaska, Muskoka with the tributaries Big East and Oxtongue, Magnetawan and South) In Chapter One eight rivers with headwaters in the Park are documented, however, the York River was added later.

However, many of the early visitors were drawn to the area now known as Algonquin Park for exploration, resource extraction, and other commercial interests, pleasure, or due to their strongly held aesthetic, religious, scientific, and educational concerns and

convictions. They imbued the experience of being in the Park with significance and meaning, and in doing so, inspired future generations.

When naturalist John Macoun arrived in Algonquin Park in 1900 he saw this place of high- lands and headwaters, where northern spruce and sugar maple meet in the native land of pine, as an interesting place to study and then set out to inventory the significant natural history of the area. Educator, Fannie Case, a trailblazer in the field of Outdoor Education came to Algonquin in 1905. The young women, who were students in her open air classroom, developed outdoor skills, self-reliance, physical competence, as well as imaginative, creative and artistic expression. Tom Thomson, who arrived in Algonquin Park in 1912, spent five years painting the landscapes that would become a lasting documentation of the splendours of Algonquin Park in all four seasons and provided “some of the most unforgettable images of Canadian art” (Reynolds and Dyke, 1993 p.6). The impassioned and influential work of Macoun, Case, Thomson and a long list of others has inspirited writers, film makers, scientists, naturalists, musicians, educators, and artists. According to Dan Strickland, saying that “Algonquin Park is a place of outstanding importance to the recreational, scientific and cultural life of Canada seems like stating the obvious, however, it is another matter altogether to be able to express just how this weighty significance came about.” (Reynolds and Dyke, 1993, p.5-6).

The geographic space that makes up Algonquin Park holds great importance and significant meaning for many people. As Ontario’s oldest Park and one of the best known parks outside the province, Algonquin is an icon. Jim Murphy, Algonquin’s Manager of Backcountry Operations, recalls feeling extremely honoured when he arrived at the Park to work full time with the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2000 as a Park Planner. For him, Algonquin was a “special iconic piece of geography” with a “symbolic landscape” and “very strong human values.” Murphy compares coming to work in Algonquin to getting drafted by the Montréal Canadiens, as he was now working for an organization who not only valued heritage and tradition but had millions of adoring fans who supported these same values as well (Murphy, 2008).

Algonquin Park is also known internationally and while this iconic status is in part due to an appreciation of its flora and fauna created by arts, books, and film, it is also because of the tremendous affection that people all over the world feel for the Park that comes from first hand experiences. Algonquin is the place that many take their first canoe trip, at- tend summer camp, stay at one of the lodges or pitch their tent in one of the many campgrounds. It is where we may have seen our first moose, heard a wolf howl or been put to sleep by the call of the loons. It is where we return to take novices and international visitors for a uniquely Canadian experience. And, most importantly, it is where humans come into direct contact with the natural world; seeing, learning,

feeling, smelling, hearing, loving and developing a relationship with the northern lakes and rivers made famous in the paintings of Tom Thomson.

The history of a human presence in Algonquin Park goes back as far as 7000 BC when Paleo-Indians occupied the area.[3] Since that time many others have made Algonquin their permanent residence, summer camping ground, spiritual home or final resting place. Although Algonquin is officially classified by the Ministry of Natural Resources as a Natural Environment Park, the traveller in search of the sights and sounds of wild territory will find much evidence of a human presence and influence on the land. A set of old stone steps, remnants of a wooden fence, discarded pieces of logging era machinery, old river rock foundations, a grave marker, and wide open clearings that were once depot farms all have stories to tell. Some of the early inhabitants and visitors left their lasting imprint on the Algonquin region with a lake name, material structure, environmental policy, public awareness, or scientific knowledge. Their relation- ships and intimacy with Algonquin may differ, but they have all developed a special connection with the landscape.

3 Kennedy, C.C. 1970. The Upper Ottawa Valley. Renfrew County Council. As cited in A Chronology of Algonquin Provincial Park by Rory MacKay. This Algonquin Park Technical Bulletin No.8 was first printed in 1988, reprinted in 1990, revised and reprinted in 1993 by The Friends of Algonquin Park. Whitney, Ontario.

Human ecologists define an ecosystem as an “eco- logically integrated set of relationships between the environment and all other living and non-living things.” The ‘human ecosystem concept’, therefore, denotes a way of thinking about the world that sees humans and human communities as part of the earth’s ecosystem. As an academic discipline, human ecology deals with the relationship between humans and their natural, social and created environments. With foundational roots in biology and economics, human ecology now includes a more far reaching cross-disciplinary perspective on the ways human-environment relationships are influenced by physical environment, psychological, cultural and societal factors. Researchers in the field of human ecology study the influence of humans on their environment. Human ecologists are also equally interested in the affect of the environment on the human which is the purpose of this chapter.

In this essay, The Spirit of Algonquin, I explore my continuous personal relationship with a place - Algonquin. As Roy MacGregor, a noted Canadian writer, Algonquin cottager, and author of several books about Algonquin Park, once wrote “there is something magnificently persistent about this huge sprawl of grey granite and hardwood bluff and tamarack swamp and dark, dark, water” (Standfield and Lundell, 1993, ix). For me, Algonquin’s impressive and tenacious spirit has created an affectionate bond that has persisted for almost half a century. In the preceding chapters

of this book foresters, fish and wildlife biologists, geologists, historians and First Nations people all share their research findings, scientific data, charts and historical facts regarding human impact on the ecological state of the Algonquin ecosystem. This chapter provides the reader with yet another voice speaking from a different perspective. Telling the story of how Algonquin has left its enduring stamp on me is not dependent on statistics or developed through study but based on a feeling deep with- in my heart strengthened by the character of the place itself - the Spirit of Algonquin.

When Audrey Saunders published her book Algonquin Story in 1946 it was the first attempt to write down the reminisces of some of the early Park residents. In the last paragraph she wrote that “to many a former resident of Algonquin Park, to many a past visitor, the name brings back a nostalgic flood of memories. But the Park, with its roots in the past, stretches its branches up towards the future; a young lusty pine, bursting with sap, and reaching out into the clean northern air.” (1946, p. 196) I wasn’t even a pine seedling when Audrey Saunders was writing the story of Algonquin Park, but now, after almost 50 years of my own Algonquin memories I could be one of those old timers that she interviewed.

My Sense of Place in Algonquin developed over many years and evolved from not only spending time there, but from learning about the natural and cultural history of the place. While my feel- ing of attachment to Algonquin is derived from the natural environment, it is a mix of natural and cultural features in the landscape, as well as the people who occupy the place that has enabled me to feel a connection to the unique identity and character of that environment in a holistic way. My Sense of Place in Algonquin has been enhanced by poetry, works of fiction and non-fiction, as well as art and music. Learning that others share the same deep affection for a place, through a variety of mediums, has assisted me in the ability to articulate my own feelings about Algonquin and at the same time strengthen my strong sense of belonging and attachment to this place.

My relationship with the character of Algonquin, its people and landscape, has guided my perceptions on how to live my life personally and professionally. My well developed Sense of Place here in Algonquin has given meaning to the person that I am today and no doubt will continue to give my adventures of the spirit both purpose and direction in the years to come. There is an ‘intangible spirit’ of this place Algonquin and it is this subtle, perhaps even indescribable, feeling that continues to be the reason why the rangers, residents, visitors and all who know Algonquin truly love it. Perhaps my story will resonate with others and that in weaving together cultural stories with memories, and most importantly the natural world itself, an ancient bond with the landscape

will be re-established. It is also my hope that when people find their own sacred place in nature they will be inspired to nurture and protect that place in the same way that it has enhanced and enriched their own lives.

Lecko's "Algonquin Story"

"Algonquin has something magical to offer for anyone who visits for a day or stays a lifetime." Lorne Pigeon[4]

4 Lorne Pigeon, an Algonquin Park Ranger, lived year-round on Cache Lake. He and his wife Mary raised their two sons, Tom and Jake, in Algonquin Park. Mary (nee McCormick was also born and raised in Algonquin as her father was Chief Park Ranger Tom McCormick), a certified teacher, taught the children of the other full time residents using her own cabin as the school. Today, Tom resides and works on Cache Lake and Jake manages the Brent Store on Cedar Lake.

My "Algonquin Story" begins at a cottage on Cache Lake. My aunt's simple cabin nestled in the woods on an island holds fond memories of swim- ming in the lake, drying my hair by the wood stove, and watching the deer eat their breakfast of cedar sprigs and maple leaves while I enjoyed a steam- ing hot bowl of oatmeal smothered with brown sugar. The sounds of those summer days spent in Algonquin have been recorded forever in my consciousness causing the slam of a screen door and the splash of water from a hand pump to bring a youthful smile to my now weathered face. And no matter where I am the sound of waves lapping against the shore will always take me back to the loft of the boat house where I was tucked into bed under a red Hudson Bay blanket and rocked to sleep by an Algonquin lullaby.

I was just five years old when my ears first caught the beautiful sound of singing and the steady beat of paddles on a wooden gunwale from somewhere down the lake. From that moment on it didn't matter what the weather was like, what time of day it was, where I might have been or what I was doing, I would drop everything and run down the winding path from the cottage to the dock. There I would find the most amazing sight ever. Three canoes would appear from out of the mist or around the tip of the island and I would stand there motionless with my eyes fixed on a canoe trip of girls from an Algonquin camp who were either coming from or going to the unknown lakes that were just over that first portage. Very seldom were there any words spoken. Those girls must have known that I had a trace of Voyageur blood somewhere deep inside me because they would always wave in such a way that made me feel completely connected to them. I would wave back watching them intently until their canoes were long out of sight. The spirit of adventure combined with the idea of traveling to new and faraway places by wood-canvas canoe with other girls was all I wanted to do and to this end the rest of the day would be spent driving my parents crazy with questions about going to camp.

It didn’t take my family long to realize that I was serious about spending my summers under a canvas shelter and exploring Algonquin beyond the islands and bays of Cache Lake regardless of any future plans they might have had for me. We tried that fall to get into the camp on the adjoining lake but we were told, that at six years of age, I was still too young. A friend of my parents mentioned another girls camp in Algonquin and before too long I was getting ready to have an interview with a woman named Couchie in a place called Toronto. I remember my mother and Couchie talking as I patiently sat in a huge chair swinging my legs back and forth and looking around the office. I really had no idea what was being discussed as my focus was on the photographs on the wall and the natural artifacts on the shelves but I did hear Couchie when she asked me if I had any questions. Of course I did and I liked her already; “Do I get to go on a canoe trip?” To which she replied; “If you think that you are ready then you will be sleeping in a tent next summer.” I wriggled myself free from the big leather chair to in- form my mother and Couchie that I would be going to camp next summer for a month.

The following July I boarded a train at Union Station along with hundreds of other campers bound for Algonquin Park. I gazed out the window with interest and watched as the paved sidewalks of the city gave way to winding trails through farmers fields and wildflowers that lined the railway tracks. Eventually the meadows and pasture lands turned

to dense forests and swamp lands interspersed with small lakes and outcrops of glorious grey granite. As the conductor walked through the car announcing our arrival in Huntsville I noticed that my box lunch lay uneaten on the seat beside me. I had been too excited and too preoccupied to eat. When I stepped down from the train the air smelled of northern ad- venture. A neatly parked line of yellow school bus- es were at the ready to take all of us campers to Ontario’s oldest provincial park. The bus ride was a blur and I could hardly see out the window. Eventually I heard someone say “We are in Algonquin.” (how they knew remained a mystery until I too had traveled the concrete portage for several years and gained the necessary inches to spy the rock cairn out the window myself.) When the bus came to a stop about twenty minutes later this was still not our final destination. The docks were filled with boats and canoes of all shapes and sizes to take us across the lake on the last leg of our journey to the island.

I found myself that summer in a cabin with five other little campers and began a relationship with a special place and the very remarkable people that I found there. One day we were invited to visit Couchie’s mother who was the founding director of the camp. When we arrived at her log cabin we looked through the screen and saw her sitting in a wheelchair looking back at us. “What kept you girls so long? Come on in!”

she called out. We ended up sitting on the porch in the warm sunshine, all our eyes focused on Tonekela, as she read us unbelievable stories of adventure in the wilderness from an old musty book with photographs of young men and women living in the outdoors and adopting native ways. She closed the book at the end of one of the stories and told us that it was time to quietly walk back to our cabin. This was to become a favourite rest hour ritual.

Before we could go on a canoe trip every camper had to pass their twenty-five yard swim test. I came to camp as a non-swimmer which meant that I had to wear a red bandana around my neck at all times to let the other staff members know of my lack of aquatic prowess. As an eager canoe-tripper-to-be this was my motivation for passing the swim test. Every day I attended swim classes in the shallow water of the 'chippy pool' blowing bubbles, bobbing up and down and turning my dog paddle into a rookie front crawl. After weeks of practice with patient instructors the day came when I was able to swim unassisted and with confidence the entire length of the swim dock in deep water. That evening after dinner while the whole dining hall cheered, Tonekela untied the 'chippy scarf' from my neck and congratulated me on my success. I smiled outwardly to acknowledge the applause, although inwardly, I was joyfully celebrating getting closer to my goal of going on a canoe trip.

In addition to learning to swim, canoeing lessons were also a big part of our preparation for our first canoe trip. With paddles in hand we made our way every morning after breakfast to the canoe docks where we were met by our engaging and cheerful canoe instructor. He was part kid himself despite being over 50 years old. Canoe lessons with Omer Stringer were always held in a section of the lake between the main canoe docks and the shore that was boomed off with logs to keep us together. He would be paddling his trademark red Chestnut canoe and each of us six year olds would be the master of our own craft - a green twelve foot wood and canvas 'sports car' complete with grey racing stripe.[5] We paddled, played, splashed, and laughed while Omer glided effortlessly among his students all the while reminding us to feel the paddle and keep our eyes on the bow of our canoe and the beauty of Algonquin beyond. As a 'grandfather' of canoeing and one of the great exponents of the Canadian style of paddling, Omer relished in getting us little campers all excited and riled up and sending us back to our counsellor to settle down. He successfully demonstrated canoeing skills to millions of people through live presentations, radio, TV and motion picture films. For this Omer was later awarded the Friends of Algonquin Park Directors Award in 1988 for making

5 These small canoes were referred to as 'Chippy' and 'Inky' canoes to correspond with the name of the youngest sections at the girls and boys camp. According to Dave Standfield, Head Canoe Builder at the Taylor Statten Camps, these canoes were most likely a Chestnut Teddy or Trapper model, that were purchased by the camp in the 1940's for the smallest campers.

Figure 10.1. Lecko (on the right) with cabin mate Mary Jean Mitchell on the Camp Wapomeo docks. 1965 Fred Leckie

a significant contribution toward the appreciation of Algonquin Park. His future celebrity status aside, back then Omer was our friend too.

We also developed a friendship with Dr. Harry (Couchie's husband and the Camp Doctor), who was known to us as the 'keeper and feeder of the turtles.' The ringing of the three bells, to signal that our dinner was in half an hour (and time to feed the turtles), sent us racing as fast as we could to the turtle pond. There we would find our pal Dr. Harry talking to his four-legged friends. He shared with us everything he knew about turtles and we knelt on the ground with elbows perched on the side of the rock walls watching the every move of those slow moving reptiles. Lessons in ecology also came more formally and we always looked forward to the special evening programs when the Park Rangers arrived at camp to tell us about flora and fauna that was native to Algonquin Park. They showed us specimens that could be passed around so we could closely examine the beaver teeth, touch the moose antler and feel the softness of the deer hide. The visiting rangers showed us wonderful films and answered our questions with their own stories of experiencing Algonquin Park first hand while out on patrol by canoe. They were my heroes and I always marvelled at how they kept those crisp beige uniforms clean while camping and canoeing throughout the park.

As a cabin group we were also busy exploring our is- land home and came to know every trail and pathway, every nook and cranny, every plant, tree, rock and piece of shoreline intimately. We knew where to find the first ripe blueberries, where to find the ducks, sunning snakes, and chipmunk holes. The red squirrels woke us up, the loons put us to sleep and throughout the day there were turtles to feed, trees to climb, and rocks to sit on. Global warming and acid rain were unfamiliar terms to us. We wanted to know how to share the is- land with the locals - the flora and fauna. Therefore, we were taught to collect dead-fall for fires and not live trees or potential habitat, to show care for wildlife and their young, not to feed the bold brave chipmunks no matter how much they begged, and not to wash dishes in the lake and other practices that would be harmful to the environment. In that first year of our Algonquin education we came to know everything (well we thought it was everything) about our Algonquin summer home. Although just a speck on the large map of Algonquin, that island made an enormous impression on all of us.

We did go out on a canoe trip, and, although it was just to the Joe Lake portage (which was around the corner and two kilometres away), we all thought that maybe we had paddled to the other side of the world. It was absolutely everything that I had already imagined it would be. We swam in our lifejackets when we arrived at the campsite. We cooked all our food on an open fire, baked goodies with a reflector oven, and it all tasted delicious. We listened to our counsellor tell stories and we squealed when we lost marshmallows to the red hot coals. We slept side-by-side like sardines in a canvas tent that kept us warm and dry. We woke up to our guide sticking his head in the door and telling us to come quietly outside and see a moose. We had a morning dip and then warmed up beside the fire where bacon and eggs were cooking. When we loaded our ca- noes and pushed off from our very first campsite to go back to camp I was completely in love with the whole process. Here I was living my adventure - paddling in wooden canoes with a bunch of girls and singing as we travelled down the lake. There was no way to realize that this first summer was the beginning of a number of very special relationships that would include; lifelong friendships, meaningful alliances with significant mentors and guides, a lasting personal emotional bond with a place, professional partnerships, and a deep abiding connection with the Spirit of Algonquin.

For the next ten years I lived for my summers of camping and canoe tripping in Algonquin Park. Each July when I returned to camp the canoe trips became longer and longer and my cabin mates and I ventured further and further afield to travel deeper and deeper into the heart of Algonquin. I became familiar with the Park knowing my way along the well travelled routes leading in all directions from the camp. Winter months would be spent studying the map and wondering where the next summer of canoe travel would take me. Would we climb the hills to Nadine or swim in Eustache the deepest lake in Algonquin? Could I talk my guide into going to White Partridge,

Dividing Lake, or Rosebary which were all places that I had not yet been? I was drawn to the black lines on the canoe route map that designated low maintenance portages not yet fully developed that would take us off the beaten path. When the map claimed low water and difficult travel it only made me want to go there more for the sense of adventure and to be seeing a part of the Park not yet traversed by many. When not memorizing the map and fantasizing about paddling every lake and canoe route in Algonquin Park I was busy working on my canoe trip wardrobe. Dubbin was rubbed into leather Grebb boots, the perfect pair of wool socks had to be found, a pair of blue jean shorts had to be worn in just so, and I had to work on getting my father to give up one of his, and soon to be my, favourite plaid flannel shirts.

While others earned awards in camp for demonstrating their canoeing prowess and painted stripes on their paddles to recognize their achievements I was perfecting my draws on the twists and turns of the Nipissing River, learning to paddle with short quick strokes in a head wind in time with my canoe mates, and to use the muscles of my back to keep the steady rhythm all day long. I learned to paddle close to shore and together, to trim the canoe, to read the wind and waves, to use the islands to make crossings on the big lakes like Lake Opeongo, and to negotiate the swift current on the Crow River. My badges of honour were the Otterslides, Maple Creek, Hogan-Crow, Bonfield-Dickson, and Ink Lake, the names of rites of passage canoe routes and challenging portages. After ten summers as a camper there were not many places that I had not yet been. I could pack a well-balanced pack and wanigan, pitch a tent, find dry wood and build a hot cooking fire, read a map and remember where the 'five star' campsites were. This time spent in Algonquin also opened my eyes to the beauty of the landscape and I learned to appreciate and respect nature. Hiking through the old growth on Big Crow Lake, paddling Hailstorm Creek, watching the peregrine falcons on White Trout, counting over twenty moose in Grassy Bay, and paddling among a group of forty loons on Lake Lavieille could not be painted on my paddle. However, they were significant blazes on my journey that would not fade or diminish over time.

When the time came to say farewell to Algonquin at the end of every summer the smells that lingered on my skin and clothes, sights etched in my mind or recorded in photo albums, and the memorable tastes, sounds and senses of a canoe trip would hold me over for another year.

Algonquin was the smell of wood smoke, canvas, linseed oil and leather. Algonquin was the sight of a small patch of blue water between the trees letting me know that the long carry was almost finished. Algonquin was the taste of fresh picked raspberries from the Du Fond farm on Manitou Lake eaten right out of our hands or baked into pies and bannock. Algonquin was the feel of cedar ribs under my knees, the itch of mosquito bites, and the bracing fresh- ness of the northwest wind. And Algonquin was

the sound of a crackling fire, the beautiful song of the hermit thrush and what started it all - the echo of wooden paddles on the wooden gunwales.

In addition to these sensory experiences and lasting impressions of the natural environment there were also many memories of the people with whom I shared the trail and the Algonquin landscape. During those years as a camper my cabin mates and I had many wonderful counsellors and guides who looked after us, while making sure that we were well fed, safe, and having the best time of our lives. Even today I see many of those trip leaders in myself as I continue to carry on their teachings and routines. Like John Cockburn, all personal gear must be packed up before coming out of the tent and all packs are packed before breakfast. Like Zoe Durst, the portage is a magical trip in itself and a journey that is to be savoured and experienced without any thought to the destination or endpoint. Like Tony Stanton and Barb "Snod" Southee, laughter is the best medicine and a little bit of humour can go a long way even in the most adverse conditions or unpleasant situations. Along the way we met families, groups from other camps, bird watchers, fishing parties, rangers and those who made Algonquin their home. Despite their differences in personality, purpose and profession their love for the Park was evident.

One of the more notorious full time residents of Algonquin Park was 'Smiling Gerry' McGaughie who ran the store at Brent. I can clearly recall my very first visit to the Brent Store as if it was yesterday. We had arrived on Cedar Lake mid-afternoon after making our way from Portal Lake (Burntroot as it is now known) to Catfish and then onward to a series of portages that enabled us to travel down the Nipissing River. We were welcomed by a strong north wind which invited us to camp on the western shore and save the trip across the lake to the store for the following day. All night we dreamed of the legendary wilderness shop keeper who would greet us with soda pop, candy bars and a friendly grin as wide as the lake itself. The next morning when the canoes hit the beach we all raced to the store and bounded through the door expecting to find Smiling Gerry ready to greet us with open arms. "Three against the wall while the other three pick out what they want" barked the not so congenial clerk behind the cash register. "Once you have paid leave the store" he added. Smiling Gerry proved that a nickname for what someone is known for is not nearly as effective as a moniker that describes what they are not known to do. We still loved the gruff and grizzled character for although not sugar coated himself he satisfied our sweet tooth nonetheless. Thirty years later I learned that Gerry really was an affable fellow who carried out the frosty and disagreeable facade to keep canoe trippers and campers in line. This revelation only meant that I loved him more.

One of the people with whom I shared the trail that had a significant and enduring impact on my leadership style and philosophy of travel was Norman Bates. He was my

guide on a two week canoe trip in the Temagami area during which time he introduced me to fire irons, wanigans and reflector oven baking. He also taught me the art of camping and traveling comfortably with style. Norman had worked for one of the Temagami camps and not only was he a skilled canoe tripper educated in the traditional Temagami ways but he knew the magic of the area known as "the place of deep water" as well. He shared his intimate knowledge of the people and places that made this area special and unique during evenings around the campfire telling us stories of the legendary men and women who made the Temagami region their home. During the day we took time to visit the places of natural and cultural significance even if it meant paddling out of our way. We celebrated crossing a height-of-land portage, hiked through stands of old growth pines, and toured the native settlement at Bear Island. When I made the transition from canoe tripping throughout Algonquin under the care of knowledgeable guides and leaders to becoming a staff member myself I wanted to share with my campers what I had come to know and learn. I wanted to teach them the canoeing and camping skills, share with them the wonders of nature, and help them to use all of their senses to appreciate and value the beauty of the landscape. I also wanted to include a cultural element to the canoe trip experience so in addition to field guides about the flora and fauna I took along resources to share the stories of the human history of Algonquin as well. One of those books would completely change the way I looked at Algonquin from then on.

As a camper and counsellor I had travelled extensively throughout the Park by canoe and with this freedom to roam I had connected to this special place and learned about it simply by being there. However, when Audrey Saunders' book, "Algonquin Story", fell into my hands it transformed my relationship with Algonquin Park. In 1946, Audrey Saunders was commissioned by the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests[6] to collect material from every available source to write the story of how Algonquin came to be. Selwyn Dewdney wrote in the introduction, "out of this conscientious study has come a character as well as a story: the character, if one may speak so, of the Park itself." Algonquin's character, a total impression that Saunders herself described as the Park's "flow of activity" came from "the beauty of the landscape, the vital energy of the wildlife, the warm humanity of old Park residents and rangers, the big ideas of the lumber kings, and the casual activities of the summer visitors." Dr. Lester Scott, one of the many Algonquin characters that Saunders interviewed, referred to Algonquin as "a place apart" and that "camping in Algonquin Park leaves a mark." Reading Algonquin Story enlightened me to the concept that my Algonquin was loved by many and considered uniquely significant for all Canadians (Saunders, 1946, p. vii, viii, 191-2).

6 The name Department of Lands and Forests was changed to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in 1972.

Figure 10.2. A green wood canvas canoe with grey racing stripes. Don Standfield

There were other books that furthered my Algonquin education. George Garland, a noted Algonquin author, park historian and summer cottager, in his book “Glimpses of Algonquin”, acknowledges that “since its inception in 1893, Algonquin Park has meant many things to many people: to hundreds of thou- sands of people, in fact. But it is not easy for one writer either to explain the almost magical attraction that Algonquin has exerted on so many or to capture the spontaneous quality of this attraction” (Garland, 1989, p.1). To this end, Garland’s book shares the personal impressions of thirty-two people who, be- tween 1824 and 1987, visited the region now known as Algonquin Park for periods ranging from a few days to over half a century. These were favourite writings of George’s that he had collected over the years in which fur traders, trappers, explorers, surveyors, lumbermen, fishermen, tourists, rangers, guides, youth leaders, scientists and summer residents recounted the history of Algonquin Park and, perhaps even more importantly, their stories provide an insight into just how the beauty of the Algonquin environment casts its spell to create this bewitching allure.

Regardless of whether these glimpses of Algonquin were for pleasure or for purpose, for a brief time period or for a lifetime, while wandering aimlessly without a time restraint or traveling in haste on the way to a destination, all of the writers were inspired by the beauty of the natural world. For explorer David Thompson it was “all

the vivid tints of October" and for surveyor James Dickson it was the "huckleberries of Redpine Bay." Ranger Mark Robinson described the colour of the Royal Fern after the first frost as "the most beautiful brown you ever looked at" and fisher- man John Robins traced with words the "long light shaking across Lake Lavieille." For naturalist Frank Morris it was when he first saw the Woodsia Fern and for wolf biologist John Theberge it was when the wolf he called Big Gray answered his wife's howl. For Johnny Bowser, who came to Algonquin as a college student, the spell was sensed almost at once and for trapper and guide Ralph Bice the magic lasted for decades. These stories connect the park visitor of today with past generations who stayed at the same camp- sites, shared the same portage trails and admired the same landscapes (Garland, 1989 p. 161).

The more I read about Algonquin the more interested I became in the human history of the region. I knew of the Park's natural beauty and I was now learning about a landscape that was rich in cultural history as well. The land was coming alive for me as I travelled with the early rangers, farmers, lumber- men and trappers; and it was through their diaries and journals that I came to better learn of Algonquin's character and her characters! I developed an appreciation for the uniqueness of Algonquin and in realizing its meaning for others I discovered my own personal connection to this particular place. Algonquin was a very significant landscape and it was enlightening to know that I too was becoming part of the on-going Algonquin story.

It was this interest in the historical perspective of canoe travel that took me away from Algonquin to paddle with the voyageurs along their famous fur trade route through the Quetico-Superior region. Although Algonquin had been my canoe tripping realm the opportunity arose to guide longer trips in the Quetico Superior area. It was in Quetico that I met Sigurd Olson. I didn't actually meet him face to face but I developed a de- voted relationship with this remarkable teacher, guide and storyteller through his many books on the Quetico-Superior area, especially Reflections From the North Country. It inspired me like nothing else that I have read since. Affectionately referred to as the poetic voice of the wilderness, Sigurd Olson understood and wrote about the natural history, knew how to swing an axe and tump a load, and had travelled the trails and waterways of Quetico Provincial Park, Lake Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Country. In addition to his skills and knowledge as a canoe tripper and guide, Sigurd could articulate his feelings for the land. Sigurd had a cabin on the shores of Burnside Lake, that he called Listening Point, which was the touchstone for his soul and where he developed and then wrote about his simple and contemplative approach to the wilderness.

There have been many forays to Kipawa, Killarney, Temagami, Lake Superior and other canoe tripping areas, travels down the Dumoine, Coulonge, Noir, Stikine,

Nahanni and other rivers and even kayaking trips to Nova Scotia, the Mingen Islands and Georgian Bay. However, it was Algonquin that continued calling me back. Algonquin was to become my 'Listening Point' - that sacred place in my heart and mind and dreams. I felt personally connected to this place having spent so much of my time there, especially in my formative years. Algonquin was a place of wonderful memories and where I learned the skills to make my way comfortably in the outdoors. Algonquin allowed me to develop a special relationship with others, past and present, the natural world and myself. Algonquin was where I wanted to be and I lengthened my time to all four seasons. I also returned to the cottage life, this time on Smoke Lake, with thanks to an old camp friend whose extended family has now become an important part of my Algonquin tribe.

Spending my recent summers on Smoke Lake enabled me to develop a relationship with that lake and the neighbouring trails and waterways. I was a six year old Kiowa camper once again and gaining a heightened awareness of my surroundings in knowing where the sun rose and set, where and when the moon would come up over the hills in the evening, and where the loons were nesting. I was finding my Sense of Place in Algonquin and getting to know those individuals who knew this place, Algonquin, intimately. One of those unique people was Esther Keyser.

It was with a great deal of anticipation that I first traveled south down Smoke Lake to meet the legendary Esther Keyser. I had heard so much about this woman and it seemed that we were predestined to meet and share our similar Algonquin stories generations apart. We were both touched by Algonquin's magic at an early age as campers and canoe trippers, we each had our own guiding careers and led canoe expeditions for women, we both chose our life partners for their shared pas- sion for camping and canoe travel, and we had each made lifelong commitments to being in Algonquin Park. The pictures that I had seen of her as a young woman reminded me of myself- paddle in hand, hair in two long braids, and smiling from ear to ear.

I was so delighted and very excited to have arrived at Esther's cabin. I could smell the wood smoke from her kitchen stove and watched it drifting up into the trees as I walked up the worn path. I reached for the screen door and heard a voice inside wishing me a good morning and then ask if I would like a cup of tea. That same scene played out regularly summer after summer. We developed a very special relationship from our mutual love for canoe tripping, the campfire and Earl Grey tea. Every time I left her cottage I felt a little more connected to her, my own self, the natural world, and the Spirit of Algonquin.

Esther Sessions Keyser first arrived in Algonquin Park in 1927 to attend Northway Lodge, a girls camp founded and directed by an American educator Fannie Case. When

a twelve year old Esther stepped down from the train at the Cache Lake Station she heard the loons calling out a welcome. After a short paddle down the lake she arrived at the camp with its rustic buildings and wall tents on platforms that made her feel right at home. (Keyser, 2003 p. 25) That same summer Esther took her first canoe trip through the Park. One evening after dinner, as she was looking out over Cedar Lake, a realization came to her like a bolt of lightning and she remarked to her self that "this is where I belong." (Keyser, 2003, p. 26) Esther claims that she fell in love with Algonquin Park. She loved the natural- ness of living outdoors and the simplicity of canoe tripping. She loved the smell of woodsmoke from a campfire and to sleep touching the earth. Esther had words of advice to the modern-day voyageur, "make sure you get yourself a good heavy pair of wool socks for if your feet stay warm and dry will be happy and content." (Keyser, 2000) This was her way of accepting the bush, for it was the simple things that can give the most pleasure – the colours, sounds, smells, and dry socks.

Day trips with Esther made me slow down. Like a young Esther I would have wanted to spend the day quickly paddling and portaging through many lakes to see as much of the beauty of Algonquin as possible. However, my wise octogenarian companion led me slowly around the shoreline of Ragged Lake and in doing so showed me a deeper mean- ing in looking more intently at one lake. She would delight at seeing the details of every plant, rock, and tree. We would sit at lunch under the shade of a big pine and she would share stories of a life well spent here in Algonquin Park.

As Algonquin's first and only licensed female guide she was a mentor in sharing her many experiences and learned wisdoms that have shaped my own canoe trip guiding practices. As my spiritual guide, her well developed sense of place in Algonquin modelled how to live life simply, to appreciate and make the most of what is, and to find your sacred place in the natural world for it will give you strength, confidence, health and a closeness to the spirit.

Figure 10.3. Esther Sessions Keyser - My Spiritual Guide in Algonquin. Don Standfield

Like Esther, I felt a sense of belonging to this unique and special landscape and she taught me how that affective bond could influence my personal and professional life. In understanding how I related to the Algonquin landscape and the significant role it played in my everyday life my Sense of Place in the natural world as a whole was established. Algonquin was the place where I developed my own land ethic and personal philosophy about life and nature. In addition to Esther, I have several other influential Sense of Place pedagogues and on every trip, in any season, no matter where I am, my reading kit includes several well worn and well loved essays.

One of those essays written by Hugh Stewart; a legendary wilderness canoeist, camp director, environmental activist and canoe builder is titled, simply, “Temagami.” It speaks to the importance of a place where he had the chance to define himself in relation to the outdoors and its elemental forces.

“Having had to live (in Temagami) with water, wind, snow, ice, slush, swamp, and rock for extended periods of time, I have acquired some idea of how I, as a human, fit into the world around me.” He understands the importance of continuing to feel these forces from time to time and to be humbled by them (Labatt and Littlejohn, 1989, p. 172).

In another essay by Warner Troyer, a respected Canadian journalist and Algonquin Park summer resident, he asks himself why it is that this particular chunk of geography, with all of Canada’s natural places to choose from, was the centre of his life. His essay, “Algonquin Park: Some ‘Freeze Frames’”, provides the answer in a series of sensory snapshots and a “dipperful of memories” derived from both the natural environment and the people with whom he shares the Algonquin landscape. According to Troyer, Algonquin Park is a nature sanctuary, not just for wildlife, but for people as well. For it is within these preserves where people develop a deeper appreciation of nature and at the same time recognize that they cannot live independently from wild nature (Labbatt and Littlejohn, 1989, p. 136).

And in the last essay to be mentioned, Dan Strickland, explains why he thinks Algonquin has what he calls “intense appeal” and a “lasting and compelling magnetism.” (Reynolds and Dyke, 1983, p.8) For Strickland, Algonquin’s charm is three-fold. First it is the sense of space and freedom which comes from the vast grandness of the place where one can lose themselves far from home. It also comes from experiencing the wonders of nature and the pleasures of life on the trail with friends. Thirdly, for those who have taken the time to explore Algonquin and be attentive to its many moods they will “find the incredible, incomparable beauty that is everywhere, and in a thousand ways, is an endless succession of enchanting images that casts a simple lasting spell” (Reynolds and Dyke, 1993, p.11).

What I learned from these three personal essays is what Jim Raffan called the “numinous connection of people to a place,” (Raffan, 2008) which refers to a deep-seated emotional and spiritual bond that connects people to a landscape. Dan Strickland’s Algonquin had no towering mountains, spouting geysers, and exotic or endangered wildlife (at time of writing), therefore, the enchantment and fascination with a place is not to be found in any obvious dramatic features but in the more subtle sensations and perceptions of the individual. As Hugh Stew- art says about his Temagami, “it is a place where I can feel part of the natural system, a place where I, as a human, feel at home” (Labatt and Littlejohn, 1989, p.172). It is this respect for natural ecosystems, Troyer concludes, that gives people a greater determination to protect it. The spirit of this place Algonquin was grounded in the awareness of my knowledge, appreciation, and attentiveness for the place I called home.

Figure 10.4. Reading a map to plot the route.

The whole idea of traveling by canoe within a wilderness landscape remains an important part of my personal life and I am fortunate to have also made it my career. My decision to become a teacher evolved naturally over time. There was no defining moment when I decided to become an educator. I loved canoe tripping, therefore, it seemed like a natural progression to become a trip leader to continue to paddle and share my knowledge and skills with others. Teaching seemed to support my canoe tripping lifestyle. Life on the trail enabled me to understand the importance and significance of developing a relationship with self, others, and the natural world.

In helping students to develop their own Algonquin story and Sense of Place in the natural world, they regain an awareness, admiration and sense of wonder for the land. As an outdoor educator, the Algonquin ecosystem has become my classroom and my curriculum is a blend of natural and cultural interpretation activities - the stories that make Algonquin so unique. Instead of just paddling and hiking through any woods in Ontario, the land becomes alive when we discover who used to travel and live here, how they experienced the land, what is go- ing on here today, and what might happen here in the future? Through a “landful experience” in the outdoors students will understand why the land in which they are traveling and living is special (Molly Ames Baker in Nature First, 2006, p.246).

What I share on a daily basis with my students has a direct correlation with my own life journey and personal connections to Algonquin. I tell my students the stories of my youth that are important and meaningful to me. On some trips we paddle by the island cottage site where I first came to Algonquin almost 50 years ago. On another route, I show them the island where I attended summer camp, where my tent was pitched on my first canoe trip, and where I caught my first fish. It gives me great joy to see my students enjoying this sacred place. The pull of modernity has existed for centuries and will continue to disconnect us from the land with greater force and diligence in the future. Technology is here to stay, however, actively engaging students with natural places is a sure step towards creating a collective connection to landscapes and a more sustainable future. The land must have elements of sacredness for us to love and care for it. I hope they find their Listening Point too.

Algonquin Park has played a very important and significant role in my life. When I look at my par- ents photographs hanging on the wall smiling from their respective places in the canoe I feel Algonquin running through my blood. When I hear a canoe trip coming down the lake I am taken back to my early cottaging days on Cache Lake and I still stop to watch them pass by the dock. When I close my eyes for an after lunch quiet time I become a Kiowa camper once again and Tonekela's voice reading adventure stories carries me to the warmth of her porch dappled with afternoon sunshine. With the taste of Bakers semi-sweet chocolate I am a weary canoe tripper resting in the bottom of the canoe after a long carry on a portage trail unwrapping a special treat.

My travels through Algonquin today are taken with Couchie's promise of a canoe trip, Esther Keyser's plaid wool jacket, Mary Cline's day pack, and a paddle handmade by ranger Aubrey Dunne. When I paddle across Lake Lavieille I can hear Bill 'Swifty' Swift's hearty laugh echo from the hills of his favourite Algonquin lake. When I stop to place my canoe on one of the many canoe-rest bars that are found along the portage trails I thank Jack Gervais who truly was a ranger and friend. If I find myself on Potter's Creek on a Saturday night the gladiator inspired notes of The Hockey Night in Canada song (that we all knew and loved), will always be heard coming from the old Stringer place. The sign at Highview Cabin reads "Here you find mice, here you find snake, here you find everything that keeps a soul awake - it is shelter, it is home but you will never be alone." I am never alone in Algonquin as I am part of the heritage of these legendary characters and I feel their presence and spirit.

Last fall I celebrated my birthday in Algonquin - 50 years young and almost as many summers. The guest list was my extended Algonquin Park family and included a four

month old just beginning his Algonquin Story, several wise elders with an Algonquin history that spans seven and eight decades, and everyone in between, including friends from summer camp, cottagers, park employees, and winter trail companions. Some of these characters I have known for over 40 years and others for only a few Algonquin summers. They came by boat from cottages on neighbouring lakes, and others from homes in Huntsville, Dwight and Dorset - Algonquin's sons and daughters gathered together on the most spectacular of fall days to enjoy a lunch cooked over an open fire, share bannock, roast marshmallows, and eat a birthday cake shaped like Algonquin Park. The Spirit of Algonquin was all around us as was her many spirits who are no longer with us - Wam Stringer and Jimmy Stringer played fiddle with thanks to a taped recording, and Couchie, Dr. Harry, Tonekela, Esther and Omer were there too. On that day and every other day I celebrate the uniqueness of Algonquin's natural and cultural history, her distinctive attributes and features, my cherished memories of the people and places, and most importantly the lakes, forests and scenery, all of which equals the soul and true mean- ing of this very magical place called Algonquin.

Conclusion

The Trail of the White Wolf

A lone traveller, camped on Wolf Lake in Algonquin Park, felt the presence of a powerful being. From the shadows a pair of glittering eyes took on the shape of a wolf, however, this was no ordinary wolf. Formidable in size and presence, and all white in colour, this wolf had been appointed by the Spirit of Algonquin to patrol all the lakes and rivers and to guard the lakes, streams, forests, fish, birds animals, flowers, ferns, plants and myriad of secret hidden places throughout this park. The blowing wind was a signal from the Spirit of Algonquin for the wolf to be on the move and since the wolf travelled across the water his tracks left a trail of white foam on a blustery day. The traveller asked the wolf, "How is such a big responsibility managed and such an enormous mission undertaken by just one individual?" The wolf explained that he was ably assisted by a number of men and women specially selected by the Spirit of Algonquin for their strong spiritual bonds to Algonquin and their sense of commitment to protect their sacred place in the natural world. The wolf then invited the traveller to join the cause and follow the trails of white foam on the lakes and rivers of Algonquin Park to preserve this beautiful land and all of its treasures for future generations.
Esther Sessions Keyser[7]

7 The complete story can be found in "Paddle My Own Canoe: The Story of Algonquin's First Female Guide".

The patterns of foam appearing on lakes during windy days captured the interest and sense of wonder for Esther Sessions Keyser ever since her early days as a camper at Northway Lodge. Her imagination stimulated the creation of "The Trail of the White Wolf" which became a standard campfire story that she told to her clients on all of her guided trips. One windy day while we paddled on Ragged Lake and the white foam swirled around our paddle blades, Esther shared with me her legendary tale. Her message, the moral of the story, is as far reach- ing and important today as it was when she first told the story almost 70 years ago. We need places like Algonquin Park where a strong spiritual and emotional relationship with a place can be fostered and developed. This feeling of connection and kinship between humans and their natural environment promotes a sense of commitment to protect their sacred place in nature, and the more people that the spirits can call upon to patrol and guard these special places the better.

Parks have been referred to as social experiments in the relationships between people and nature. (Clark, Hanna and Slocombe, in Eagles, 2008) For over 115 years Algonquin Park has been such a study. As Mac- Kay and Reynolds state in the introduction to their book "Algonquin Park owes its continued existence to the special place it occupies in the hearts of the people of Ontario - the landscape has entered the consciousness of all who have ventured there." (Mac- Kay and Reynolds, 1993, p. 9) How long would Algonquin Park survive if no one visited it and therefore no one cared? If Algonquin was not a park then what other activities would go on there? However, while "the landscape may have entered the consciousness of all who have ventured there" and positively influenced them, at what cost to the flora and fauna and the natural sustainability of the Algonquin eco- system? If there were no visitors there would be no impact, but this assumes that all human use causes damage. What about the environmentalists, conservationists and park employees who work tirelessly to positively impact the Algonquin ecosystem? Today, with the publication of this book we see the outcome of this on-going research and become more educated on the current state of the relationship between people and the Algonquin eco-system.

The very first inventory of Algonquin's flora and fauna, conducted in 1900, revealed an incredibly rich natural history. Although the area had not yet been studied by naturalists or recognized for its varied and abundant plant and animal species the effect of people on the region was already highly visible. The preceding chapters in this book provide a chronological record of the impacts, both natural and human, on the Algonquin eco-system. Starting with the effect of the glaciers in shaping the landscape of the region today, then turning to a succession of human influences that includes first nations, settlements, the railway, farming, logging operations and early tourism, the historical account ends with the impacts on the ecosystem that are being made to- day. In 2008,

the number of visitors to Algonquin Park was estimated to be over a million people and that alone must have an impact on the eco-system.

However, what is also made clear is that despite the negative impact of human activities on the Algonquin eco-system millions of people have been positively affected by their Algonquin Park experience. In Paul Eagle's Chapter, the Algonquin summer camps are recognized for their influence on many children and one of those campers was Pierre Elliott Trudeau who as Prime Minister of Canada created ten new national parks. Eagles states that Trudeau's "child- hood experience canoeing and camping throughout Algonquin Park solidified his ideas towards wilderness and parks so much that they encouraged his aggressive national park creation policies later in his life." (Eagles, 2009)

In this high tech media focused world with computers, networks and video machines, less time is being spent outdoors and this holds significant implications for the youth of today who are potential future leaders. Edith Cobb studied children's need for a close and affectionate interaction with nature. Her research proposal stated that "children need to pass through a number of stages in order to evolve normally and attain full potential." One of these required stages included a period of bonding with the natural world. She found that "there is a special period, the little under- stood, prepubertal halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately between the age of 5 and 12, when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way to produce a sense of profound continuity with the natural world." There is no substitute for direct experience with the land. In other words nature simply has no virtual reality. (Louv, 2006, p. 92-3)

In 1978, Thomas Tanner, a professor at Iowa State University, conducted a study of environmentalists and their formative influences that steered them to environmental activism. What he found was that the most frequently cited influence was a childhood experience of natural, rural or other relatively pristine habitat where they were involved in unstructured play and activities that allowed for exploration and discovery. (Louv, 2006 p. 149) Jim Murphy, Algonquin's Manager of Backcountry Operations, supports Tanners research. Growing up on a farm and spend- ing summers as a cottager on Bass Lake near Orillia influenced Jim's strong affinity for protected areas and guided his career path in park management. His Algonquin story began at Killarney Lodge on vacation with his grandparents and like any five year old he remembers wading in the water, catching frogs, and eating grilled cheese sandwiches. Almost 30 years lat- er he returned to the Park as one of the many stewards of Algonquin - still wading in the water and per- haps enjoying grilled cheese sandwiches even more.

Encounters with the natural landscape with minimal distractions from commerce, industry and civilization enable children to have a personal experience with the land and create an emotional bond through this direct experience. The studies of Edith Cobb and Thomas Tanner support the need for wilderness places where people can develop a positive relationship with nature. Aldo Leopold said that “the key to a more intimate relationship with nature lay in the development of a genuine perception” and that the most serious obstacle in our path was “the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward an intense consciousness of the land.” (Leopold, 1949, p. 166) In looking towards the future we recognize that recreational use will continue and change, therefore, our relationship with the natural world needs to be regulated, directed, and shaped with the help of those who are fiercely mindful of the land. However, where will all the future environmentalists, scientists, foresters, conservationists, park managers and other stewards come from without direct formative experiences in the outdoors? Who will be Algonquin’s future Esther Keyser, Dan Strickland, or Jim Murphy. Who will be the next Norm Quinn, Hugh Banks, or Mike Wilton to write the next book as our future watch- dogs of Algonquin and other natural areas.

The Algonquin eco-system has been tested throughout time and as Tarmo Remmel states earlier in this book; “The continued element of change in this area is the only constant. The Algonquin region has experienced significant changes throughout Earth’s history to witness the colonization by vegetative species and eventually forests. The forests adapted in the face of a changing climate and thus associated flora and fauna adjusted. Now, with an increasing human presence, the countenance of Algonquin Park is further tested.” Currently, increased population growth is placing even more pressure on parks and the challenge for park managers will be to maintain the rich, diverse, abundant wildlife community of a Natural Environment Park like Algonquin in the face of this rise in visitor numbers.

The time has come for us to be tested. As George Garland said, “Algonquin has seen the canoes of Indians who hunted and camped on its shores. It has seen the present-day trippers cross its portages and leave garbage at one end and it has seen other present-day trippers cross its portages and pick up the garbage. Algonquin has laughed as we try to protect ourselves from its rainstorms, and has rewarded us with bright sunshine as we pass its unexpected tests” (Standfield and Lundell, 1993, p. 184) The long term health of Algonquin will depend on our perspective of a vast and complex interaction among humans and nature and how we see our role in this relationship. According to Wendell Berry, a farmer, author and advocate of the good life which includes sustainable agriculture, connection to place, and the interconnectedness of life, we need to ask ourselves the following questions. “What is here? What will nature permit us to do here? What will nature help us to do here?” (Berry, 1987, p. 146)

Humankind needs places like Algonquin Park to visit, to develop a long lasting relationship with or to just simply know that these places exist. The hope is that this personal narrative about a very strong sense of identity with a place, along with the perspectives of the other authors, will resonate with readers and in- spire those who truly love Algonquin, or any natural place, to devote themselves to work towards keeping it healthy. In conclusion, I raise my paddle into the vertical position and hold the blade high over my head like the voyageurs did to give recognition to others that they met along the way. To all the special people who were involved in this project, to all of my Algonquin family, and to the Spirit of Algonquin I offer the Voyageur Salute in gratitude. May we all continue to follow the tracks of the white wolf and whenever we see the trails of white foam on Algonquin's waterways remind ourselves to educate and inspire others to join us on our mission.

Figure 10.5. The spirit of Algonquin! Don Standfield

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