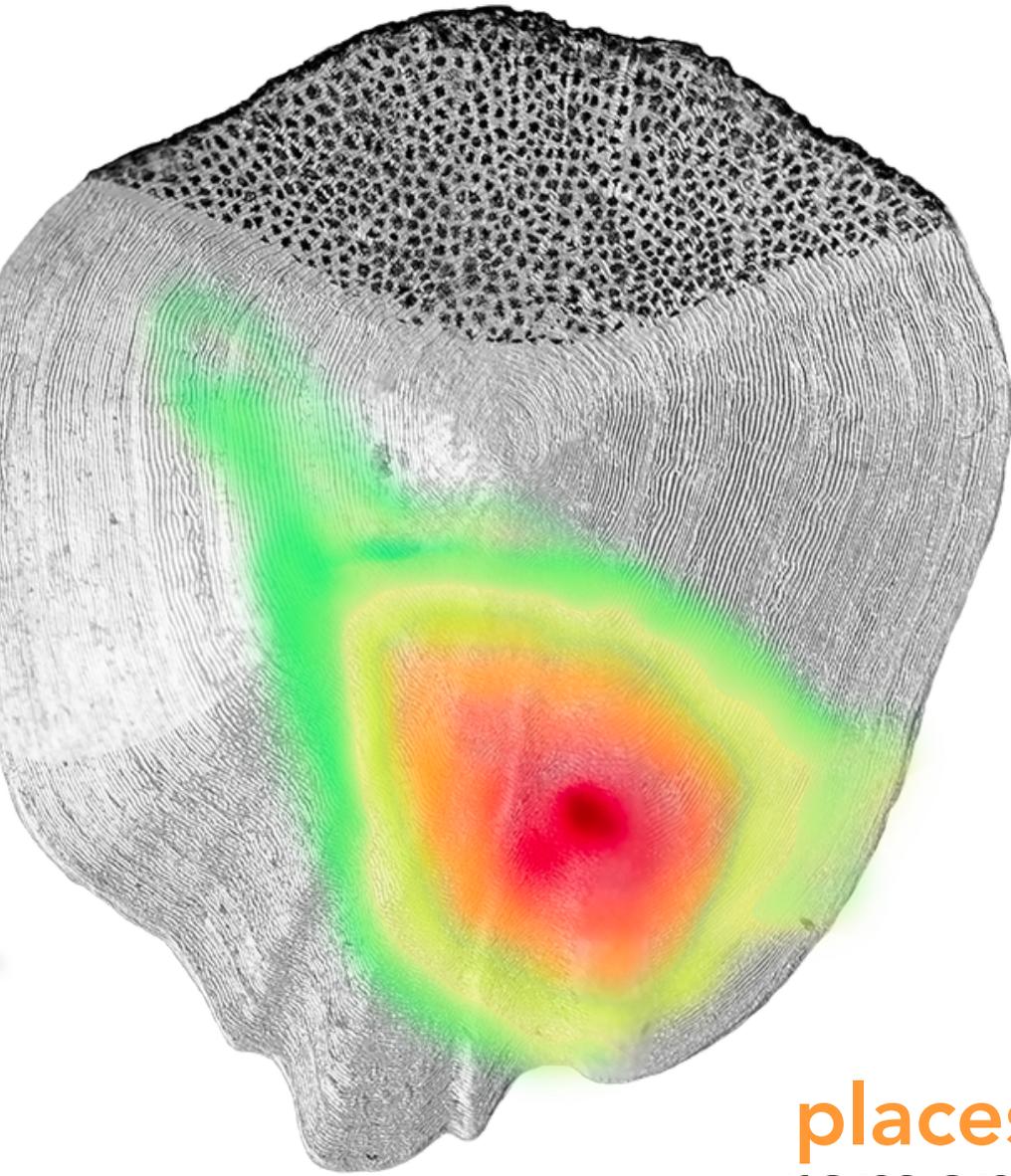




the
places we
remember



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remember



From June 16 to 18, 2025, a group of scholars, students and artists came together for a writing workshop with Kerri Arsenault and Cory Beizer of The Environmental Storytelling Studio (TESS). Just Waters hosted this workshop to support the creation of an Open Educational Resource that brings together perspectives on water and justice from a diverse set of disciplines. Throughout the workshop, we explored the idea of bringing our whole selves to the writing– the act of being un-disciplined, one could say.

A collection of lightly edited writing exercises, this chapbook acts as a series of snapshots– of places, memories, stories and values that the writers shared with each other throughout the workshop.

About the cover

This fish scale floral has been created digitally versus by hand with physical lake whitefish scales. Using macro photography of an individual flat scale and a cone, the flower is created. This practice moves the creation of fish scale art from the physical to the digital form.

Fish scale art on the cover and inside cover by Erin Konsmo (Red River Métis). <https://www.erinkonsmo.com/>

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My place is a road. Flanked by two ditches and then by two loose, staggering lines of elms, I move along it from shade to shade, pacing the cadence of trees with my steps. The trees are about 80 years tall. They make you look up along a dark length of trunk to the flicker of warblers. These small birds are leaf-shaped, and yellow, catching the shimmer of the sun. The elms make a horizontal distance, but they also frame the sky and make the road into a volume of air that hums and buzzes and trills.

But it is the ditches, two modest, topographic dips, that make this road. Slicks of rainwater gather in the ditch, clammy and sodden and with heavy clumps of last year's leaves. It gives off a slight sulfurous tang. There is more too. The wetness of the ditch supports the whirl of dragonflies, the cacophony of spring frogs that stops at a footfall, and then starts again, and then the ascending trills of a marsh wren. These stay low, their feathers the brown-beige smudges of leaf litter and bark.

The road cuts between the 8th and 9th holes of a golf course. But the fairways and the putting greens are not immediately evident. Flashes of green are only glimpsed through a thickety thatch of dogwood that springs up along the slopes of the ditch, enclosing a narrower shadowy world, both within and distant from endless games of golf.

The road is a place in-between light and shadow and wet and dry. Water collecting in a ditch misses the clear burble of a brook, or clarity of a local lake. Half water, half murk, the ditch water is full of mud and of life. Not dull. This road between ditches is route of the neighborhood, comfortable, and routine: a couple keeping up a good clip as they get the last of their daily steps in; an older man who can longer watch or hear birds, but who knows which ones are where and when. There is a kid learning to balance a bicycle and her mother, confident that stability will come by the time they reach the curve at the end of road and its last, listing signpost.

Kamni Gill

Outside my downtown Winnipeg apartment, a public water fountain stands just within view. Its frame is painted a striking bright orange, surrounding a silver spout with a dog bowl attached to its base. This water fountain is located in a plaza, an inviting gathering space, shaped like a large oval and surrounded by shops and filled with tables, benches, and lush potted plants.

During weekday afternoons, the plaza is dotted with office workers in suits, holding coffee cups and murmuring through casual meetings. On evenings and weekends, it transforms into a lively venue for parties and public events, drawing crowds of all kinds. The bright orange fountain gleams among the activity, seemingly available to anyone. It is kept spotless, always clean, always ready for visitors and even their dogs.

While I notice the fountain's cleanliness, I also notice the ever-present surveillance. Security staff patrol the plaza, watching closely, ready to usher away those who do not appear fit. Those deemed unworthy are removed not only from the fountain's edge, but from the plaza entirely. It's as if the water itself were precious, guarded like treasure, reserved for the few.

From my tenth-floor window, I watch this unfold again and again. The fountain acts as a symbol, not of refreshment, but of exclusion, a marker of invisible lines drawn through public space. The cruelest irony is that the people who most need this water are often the very ones turned away. So the fountain remains, clean and unused, waiting for drinkers who never come.

Emma Cowman

less noxious gas = more life

They call it liquid natural gas, LNG, in their slimy, shiny way, but if you asked the poisonous fracked methane gas what it would prefer to be called (not that it had a choice in what it became), you might hear this: earthwreck; terror & mistake; murder of the aquifer and all its moist lives; militarized atrocity mechanized by trucks, pipelines, compressor gas stations, secret chemical cocktails, alcoholic executives who live far away in glass towers, demoralized entrapped workers and a laser focus on profit to the exclusion of humanity; lunatic nihilistic greenwashing; the stench of suits trashing the only home we have, dispatching armed thugs with impunity or indifference; a sell out and betrayal of your own life, even if you don't yet realize it; a joke that's not funny; millennial sorrow; a curse.

Rita Wong

i bow down to the river

Concrete

Hard

Measuring lines on the base

Huge

Stoic

Grey

Smell of the car

Covered with mould

Hot and windy

Torn posters flipping to the rhythm of the wind

Different prayer flags - old, tattered, and tired

Syndicate cars passing by

Big trucks passing by

Dusty

Sound of the tractor

Drilling sound

Construction workers in yellow helmets

Children in a school van passing by

Old man with a vegetable bag walking by

People waiting for a car to pick them up to go to a different destination

Slight tremor on the bridge as a car passes by

People stopping to take pictures

People stopping to offer to the water

People stopping to throw garbage into the water

Bridges - sometimes I wonder if they connect or divide. If they do divide - what gets divided, and who divides it? If bridges could communicate, would they want us to be divided? A bridge that has been standing tall for more than 100 years tremors with the sands of time. Thousands of people pass by - some to pay reverence to the

river, others to throw garbage into it. How can we hold so many emotions for the same river? Bridges - are they meant to connect, or to divide?

I bow down whenever I cross a river. My aunt used to tell me to bow down whenever we crossed. It became a habit. And a reverence. And a remembrance. And an act of gratitude for being able to cross. Being grateful, and being aware that the river is bigger than us. We are small people. Elders say that we were smaller than fish even.

When someone asked me why I bow down, I answered... I want to be grateful for having a bridge to cross. Had there been no bridge, the same river would have been dangerous for us. From that point, a different kind of conversation begins, often in a shared syndicate jeep. And now, wherever I travel, I find myself bowing to every river I cross. It's funny how that bridge has shaped a habit in me.

The Teesta Bridge has been a lifeline for so many people. A connection - linking people on the two banks of the river. A confluence of lives from all walks, merging briefly, only to part or travel together.

I remember another bridge - handwoven by my Elders - built after the water washed away the upstream bridge of the Teesta. I fear that the Teesta Bridge may collapse too. If the water rushes down with the same force as in the upstream River Rongnue, this bridge will break, too. But will we still carry the knowledge to build that handwoven bridge? Or will we simply wait for someone else to make it while we remain divided?

Whatever the case may be, I always bow down when I cross a river. Any river.

Minket Lepcha

30% of new teachers leave the field within 5 years¹

I remember a young woman with FASD describing the “boyfriend” who surely did not love her.

I remember the young woman whose father died by suicide, and her wondering whether he loved her, whether she could be loved.

I remember the young woman who wrote about her near-death by overdose and I remember heaping praise on her evocative writing as I held myself back from embracing her.

I remember the young man who smelled rancid, rarely spoke, couldn’t read. I remember receiving his rare smiles as a triumph.

I remember the young woman whom I called by the wrong name for weeks before she corrected me in exasperation. I remember that her name was not Brittany.

I remember when my partner and I argued about whether we should let a student sleep on our couch when the street was the alternative.

I remember how mortified I was (and how hard I laughed) when the finger of a rubber glove showed up in someone’s Rice Krispie square at Cooking Club.

I remember calling CFS.

I remember a student’s toddler saying “fuck you” and I remember how much his mother changed her life to create a better one for him.

I remember keeping my pregnancy a secret for way too long, and I remember how the students all guessed but knew better than to ask (unlike some of my peers).

I remember how delicious the icing was on my baby shower cake and how relieved I was to be free.

I remember how helpless I felt.

I remember how naïve I was.

I remember how hard I tried.

Sarah Deckert

1. Benjamin Kutsyruba and Leigha Treguna, “CURBING EARLY-CAREER TEACHER ATTRITION: A PAN-CANADIAN DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF TEACHER INDUCTION AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS,” Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, no. 161 (2014), <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/42868>.

Held

I've found a comfortable-enough looking spot at the top of the riverbank. I prop my bike against a bush, pull my notebook from my pannier and sit down in a small patch of flattened, straw-coloured long grass. Bushes and tall grasses in front of me open enough to reveal a strip of Red River, brown and murky. Two geese swim by close to shore.

I can see across the river to the trees growing along the shoreline. I hear the distant roar of traffic coming from beyond the trees, and an airplane, which comes into view and makes a trail through the bright, clear sky. A bird or insect chatters nearby and so I pull out my phone. The Merlin Bird ID app tells me I hear the chip call of a Common Yellowthroat, an insect-eating songbird who dwells in wet areas with dense vegetation. I lean toward the sound and squint into the shadows where roots meet soil. The bird doesn't sing exactly, but neither does it sound alarmed. Perhaps it cheeps about its day. And then I see it. It flits along in the underbrush, maybe six feet away from my feet, maybe closer. It does have a yellow throat. It moves quickly. Soon I can't find it anymore, though I still hear its sounds.

I turn my attention back to the river. A tree branch floats by, then two more geese, this time accompanied by three tiny goslings. A breeze ripples the water, then rustles through my hair and the trees behind me, whose leaves have sprouted but not yet emerged fully. I smell the sun on my sweatshirt. A tiny spider makes its way across my page. I put the notebook down so that the spider can crawl away safely, but instead another one climbs aboard. I close my eyes and notice the warmth of the sun on my face. Faraway construction sounds—the bang of a dump truck, the beeping of machinery reversing, some kind of hammering—blend with the rumble of traffic, but somehow this moment feels quiet, peaceful.

Today is the first time I've visited this exact spot. You might call it a stretch for me to choose to write about this place as meaningful. I grew up in a different town, in a different province, close to a different river that people similarly ignore and pollute. But I do feel held here, accompanied by the birds, the sunshine, the breeze, the water, the spiders who have just vacated my notebook. I will admit I hear the call of this river. I will also admit I feel poorly equipped to answer the call, to do the work of helping the river live its best life, the work of getting out of its way. I don't know even the English word for the bushes growing directly in front of me, never mind the word in Anishinaabemowin, never mind how these bushes connect to the rest of the ecosystem, never mind how I'm connected, never mind how I can help.

I've lived long enough to know that sometimes answers come in time. The beginning of learning is not knowing. Earlier today, I didn't know that the Common Yellowthroat is my neighbour. Now I know. My neighbour needs clean water. My neighbour needs thriving wetlands. I hope I can help my neighbour. This is her world too.

Jocelyn Thorpe

Burning Summer

Summers in 1970s British Columbia were long and cool. We were always waiting for a day warm enough to go to the beach, to forget our sweaters. My father was a good and serious backyard gardener, and he said to not even try to grow tomatoes. We didn't get enough heat.

There were forest fires. The law allowed men in uniforms to walk into beer parlours and conscript everyone they found into the gangs of men and boys who fought fires, or at least we thought it did. Even then, there was nothing bigger than a wall of flames.

Ice-cream melted faster than we could eat it during a 1978 road trip to Lytton. After fire claimed that town in total in 2021, nothing would ever be the same.

This was different from the hot July that surprised a white kid from the coast. Now people in Vancouver have air conditioning, at least the ones who can afford it. Now it is easy to grow tomatoes, and I wonder what my dad would have thought about this. Now fires burn all summer long, and there is still no town of Lytton.

Adele Perry

My neighbour John is a photographer. He says that the best photos are taken when you snap the shutter right before something happens.

This snapshot impression of Greenwood Park might not meet that standard, exactly. It's a place that's important to me, a place with a lot of memories and moments, but not a place I've spent a lot of time thinking about.

John's house is right across Wolseley Avenue from the park. I live next door, to the north, with my wife and our son and daughter. We can see this space from our upper-floor windows.

The park is a square of land between Wolseley Avenue and the Assiniboine River, the width of two or three house properties. Once, long ago, it had a lawn bowling green. It's a simple place with two park benches facing the street and a single bench facing the river.

I'm there now, but from the bench I can only see a glimpse of the grey-green current of the prairie river through the thick leaves of the riparian forest: Manitoba maples, knotted and curved limbs intersecting, some trees growing almost sideways against the slow collapse of the ever-eroding bank.

Warblers are singing here for now, at the end of May, and will mostly turn over the tree branches to chipping sparrows as the season shifts to summer.

In spring, the trees here are host to a huge range of migrating warblers. And most every spring a few whippoorwills visit Greenwood Park, stopping for a night, maybe two, marking their presence with their long, distinctive song, and only at night. They were here earlier this week and are already gone.

Glenn Bergen

kamni **gill**
emma **cowman**
jenny **amadi**
rita **wong**
minket **lepcha**
sarah **deckert**
jocelyn **thorpe**
adele **perry**
glenn **bergen**



chrr.info/just-waters