Rising Tides

REFLECTIONS FOR CLIMATE CHANGING TIMES

Edited by Catriona Sandilands

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Territorial Acknowledgement

LEVI WILSON & EMILY MENZIES

My name is Levi Wilson. Through my grandmother I am a member of the Gitga'at First Nation, with strong familial connections to the Hwlitsum and Lamalcha peoples. I would like to acknowledge the shared, asserted, and unceded territory of the Penelakut, Lamalcha, other Hul'q'umi'num'-speaking peoples, and any other peoples who hold rights and responsibilities in and around the territory that is now known as Galiano Island, as well as the treatied territory of the Tsawwassen First Nation. I would like to acknowledge the privilege of living, learning, and caring for one another and the land in their traditional territory.

Acknowledgements today are an adaptation of a traditional protocol that is observed by many Indigenous groups across what is now known as Canada. At their best, acknowledgements achieve the goal of recognizing the peoples who have lived and hold rights and responsibilities in the region that the sharer is now in. For example, when I am in the region that surrounds the Salish Sea, I include in my acknowledgements words such as "shared" and "asserted" to represent how the peoples here live through the seasonal round, and that the Indigenous inhabitants have never stopped knowing, believing in, and, most importantly, acting on their rights and responsibilities.

Why is a territorial acknowledgement critical in a book seeking to inspire and equip people hoping to survive and even thrive during a time of climate chaos? Done right, a territorial acknowledgement is more than just a way to identify oneself as an ally in the struggle for self-determination among Indigenous Peoples. By insisting on acknowledging place, and the peoples of our place, territorial acknowledgements also provide an opportunity for us to learn about histories, current politics, teachings, and relationships that can contribute to rebuilding ecological, social, and economic sustainability in our communities.

Acknowledgements are living documents, meant to grow and change, much as we as people grow and change over time. Done by rote, an acknowledgement quickly becomes meaningless: it stops growing. What I really want you to take away is how I have built this practice and changed the wording of my acknowledgement based on conversations with and challenges by those who have heard it. For example, in many of my early versions, I included a "thank you" to those First Nations mentioned "for living on their land," but after I had listened to and tried out acknowledgements for a month in every single high school class that I teach, one of my students nervously called in this wording. She felt that, by including a thank you, I was assuming that the Nations listed welcome and enjoy all of the disparate peoples that now inhabit their territory. I invited my students to help figure out a solution, and, over fifty suggestions later, we decided to take out the "thank you" and replace it with "acknowledge the privilege."

Sharing a territorial acknowledgement is one way to foster awareness, community, leadership skills, and hope for the future, all of which, I believe, are integral to riding the storms of climate change instead of drowning in them. When we take the time to learn about our place and who the Indigenous Peoples of our places are, we build relationships with survivors of the colonial apocalypse, with the keepers of knowledge about how to live within the means of our local ecosystems: both how it has been and how it is now. By learning how people have lived, for thousands

of years, in the places we call home, we gain insight into how to weather future change.

Acknowledgements are an expression of our relationship to the land, no matter whose territory we find ourselves in. If it is a place that you have lived in for a long time, then the acknowledgement will be longer, more complex, and more thought out than one that is done in a place you may be visiting. The first few times a person engages in this practice it will feel rough; it should be a chance to learn and, in the future, to show that learning. An acknowledgement is a practice rather than just a protocol. Any person giving an acknowledgement needs to work and reflect, to try again and again, and to get better and more comfortable with giving acknowledgements as something that requires practice.

Beginning with acknowledgements, settlers can take the opportunity to learn social survival skills that have helped people not only endure genocidal policies but also live well, here, for thousands of years, such as using humour to overcome adversity, and the importance of holding extended family networks dear. We may learn how to prioritize relationships over clocks, mutual respect over control, our role as part of a collective over individual greed. We may ponder why so many First Nations are traditionally governed by matrilineal, if not matriarchal, social structures, as well as by clan systems that cross otherwise separate Nations, and how these structures may help foster co-operation even in the face of dire hardship and family breakdowns.

By opening *Rising Tides* with my own territorial acknowledgement for the place the book was born, I am hoping to begin to take acknowledgements back to articulating relationships instead of getting mired in politics—back to helping people understand where they are and how they come to be there. As much as I enjoyed crafting my version of an acknowledgement for this collection, I was hesitant to put it into something as permanent as a book. Anishinaabe author Hayden King, who helped craft the formal acknowledgement for Ryerson University, has said that he now regrets writing it because

"the territorial acknowledgement [can] become very superficial....It sort of fetishizes these actual tangible, concrete treaties. They're not metaphors—they're real institutions, and for us to write and recite a territorial acknowledgement...I think we do a disservice to that treaty and to those nations." I have struggled with how to settle this issue. My response is to try to restart the conversation.

Hwunitum—the People of Time, or the Hungry Ones—are very good at dominating, controlling and exploiting land, people, and other creatures (see Arnett, 1999). However, we are not great at living sustainably. In fact, Hwunitum culture is predicated on the unwavering belief in progress, in moving on when we have used all we want from a particular place. However, most of us settlers come from ancestors who lived in a different way. They may have shared similarities with the ancestors of Hwulmuhw, the People of the Land, here. In my case, each of my Scottish, Scandinavian, Irish, and English foremothers would have had to have known their place intimately: they knew how to keep their families healthy through knowing and cultivating mutually beneficial relationships with the plant, animal, and human neighbours with whom they shared their place. Now we have come to another great time of change, and we need to recover, rediscover, and share narratives and knowledges of how to be humans who are tied to place.

Acknowledgements are best understood as snapshots of a specific time. In this framework, change is not just necessary; it is the whole point of engaging in acknowledgement. Please take the acknowledgement I am sharing not as a form to fill out with small changes made to suit your region. Rather, treat what I, with the help of many, have crafted as a set of possibilities and suggestions. Embrace the ability to make mistakes and to learn. Take the time needed to care for this practice. Then extend your practice to "caring for one another and the land."

We have only one planet, yet we are trashing it by treating our home as if it were merely a way station and we have somewhere else to go. There are so many ways to live, in so many wonderful places, as humans have

done since time immemorial. As our places change, so must we. To live sustainably, to be able to survive and thrive over time, we need to live as if we mean to stay. Through sharing stories, we remember how to live in resilience.

Some people question the validity of territorial acknowledgements, asking, "What is the point when the land will never or can never be returned?" The hopelessness behind this argument reminds me of how some people feel when facing the enormity of climate change.

Levi's grandpa, Fredrick Levi Wilson, a fisherman renowned up and down the coast, witnessed the decimation of the salmon during his lifetime. When asked how fishing was going, he would say, with a straight face and a smile in his voice: "Haywire, haywire, haywire." Somehow, he managed to convey both the challenge and the unwavering belief that the challenge would be overcome, one way or another. For the sake of our daughter, Gladys Arbutus Wilson, and those to come for the next seven generations, we work to make this dream a reality.

The salmon people are survivors, and so are we.
Huy tseep q'u.

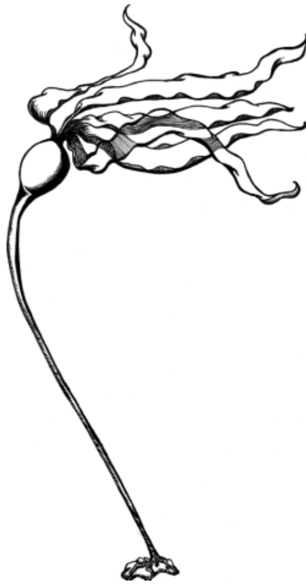
Notes:

Levi's voice is in plain text, Emily's is in italics.

Hayden King, "'I Regret It': Hayden King on Writing Ryerson University's Territorial Acknowledgement," *Unreserved*, CBC Radio, January 20, 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/redrawing-the-lines-1.4973363/i-regret-it-hayden-king-on-writing-ryerson-university-s-territorial-acknowledgement-1.4973371.

Chris Arnett, *The Terror of the Coast: Land Alienation and Colonial War on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, 1849–1863* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1999).

What We Have Lost



Ceremony

JESSE THISTLE

"What happened here is a tragedy, Earl," Mr. Dobbs, the lead RCMP detective, said to Cree Elder Earl Keshane, eighty years old. Dobbs adjusted his fedora, shook his head, and flipped open his pad of paper to begin the interrogation. The pair stood on Earl's porch, staring at the smouldering embers of the grass fire that'd claimed the lives of three ceremonial fasters of the local Ocean Man Indian reserve.

Dobbs was sent to investigate the July 5, 1937, incident and to arrest Earl, after he was notified by the local Indian agent, Mr. Dunkirk, who knew that the Elder had illegally conducted a fasting ceremony after being forbidden to do so. Earl stood motionless; his deerskin robe and single headdress feather gently blew in the sweltering summer wind. He'd lost two members of his own family. The old man turned to face Dobbs, and a tear rolled down his aged leather cheek—the deep crowfeet wrinkles around his eyes mirrored the prairie landscape: cracked, brown, and starving for water.

"I have been doing these ceremonies all my life," Earl said, his voice warbling a bit. He steadied himself and eased into his rocking chair. "Please, sit, sit." He motioned to Dobbs to take the chair next to

him. The detective did so and placed his trench coat on a nail jutting out of the cabin siding.

Earl went on, "Nothing like this has ever happened." He bowed his head and ran his hands over his long white braids, searching the wooden planks beneath his feet for words.

"Earl," said Dobbs, "I've known you all my life—remember when you'd bounce me on your knee when Momma got tired?" Dobbs reached over and rubbed the Elder's leg. "You ranched with my grandpappy and dad; so did your sons. Always were good farmhands. Just explain to me what happened."

Comforted somewhat, Earl leaned back and remembered back to when the land around Yellow Grass, Saskatchewan, was green and filled with herds of wild bison and lush grass, years before his family worked for white people like the Dobbses. Back then, fasting ceremonies were conducted regularly. They helped his people make relations with the land, all its creatures, all its relatives, and with the living and non-living forces of the world. A longing for that time panged in his heart as he began to recount the tragedy.

"I'm eighty now," Earl began. "And when I was a young man, before the treaty signings, I was taken into ceremony, like the one yesterday." The old man shifted his feet as his hand searched the wall for his cane. He found it resting near the door. "I was given a traditional name; I am sorry I can't share it with you—protocol forbids it—but it came with the job of teaching others how to sit with the silence of the land. We do that by fasting."

Dobbs followed along, making notes on his pad, a bead of sweat upon his brow.

"And every ten years," Earl continued, "I take our future leaders out and teach them our ways. That's what I was doing here." Earl waved his hand over the land out toward the area where the fasters were consumed by the midnight blaze. The only thing that stood on the open plain were the half-scorched staffs the fasters had planted

outside their lodges to mark the four directions. A few blackened tobacco ties and feathers still hung off them. It was an eerie sight.

"I took everyone into the Sweat Lodge at six yesterday evening and had my nephew, sixteen, minding the hot rocks and fire and the water when I called for it." Earl made a motion with his hands like he was forking up grandfather stones with a set of antlers inside the Sweat Lodge, like he, as the ceremonial conductor, would do. It was a job Earl was known for around these parts, a job that had been illegal for forty years since the passing of the Potlatch laws banning Indian ceremonies in Canada. Earl looked at Dobbs and cowered, afraid that he was incriminating his nephew.

"Don't worry," Dobbs assured him. "We just need to get to the bottom of this—we can leave your nephew out of it. Dunkirk will not find out."

The old man's brow eased and he regained his train of thought. "We took them out on the land and into their individual lodges at nine," he went on. "Right before the sun set. That's how we count the days. Then we went to bed."

Dobbs flipped the page and scribbled down the time, careful to note every detail. The dry Saskatchewan wind picked up and knocked his fedora off his head, sending it tumbling across the porch. Earl jutted his cane out with the speed of a lynx and caught it before it took flight.

"You see," Earl said. "Gotta be careful. These winds ain't like before." He smacked his lips as if tasting the moisture in the air; he flipped the hat back to Mr. Dobbs. The detective was astonished the old man could move that fast.

"The rain, too. It's different." Earl stuck his hand out as if to catch a raindrop. He clutched his fingers into a fist and shook it, a look of anger across his face.

"I remember when I was a boy." Earl leaned over toward the detective, the cool steel of ice in his eyes. "I went out hunting buffalo with my grandfather—he was a Chief. The rain used to come all the time." He gripped the arms of his rocking chair; his fingers were powerful

like eagle claws and made the wood moan. "The grasses were once lush—never any dust or drought." He stopped and corrected himself. "Well, not exactly; there was the occasional drought, but not like this." The old man peered off into the distance at the cloud of approaching dust rolling over the horizon.

Dobbs watched it too and remembered that when he was a little boy with Earl on his father's land, the undulations of the prairie weren't as menacing as the last eight Depression years were in South Saskatchewan. Dust storms and death had become common occurrences for white farmers and Natives alike.

"Your people did this," Earl said, the chair still squeaking under his grip. "It's because of what you did." He rocked back and forth, the creak of the floorboards complaining underneath his weight and movement.

Dobbs cocked his head. "How so?" he asked, his pen now dormant on the pad.

"Those bison were murdered. It was them who tamped down the grass, ate it up and shit it back out—that held in the moisture. Plus, all the birds and insects that lived with the bison—they reseeded the grass every season and it held the soil down; they had a role to play too. Like, um, it's...what's the word..." Earl scratched his chin, searching the ancient thesaurus that was his brain.

"An environment?" Dobbs offered.

"Yeah, that's it, but we Indians just call that 'relatives.'" Earl rocked, the creaks the only noises between them. He tried to say something more but tears chocked back his throat. Dobbs tried to refocus on the investigation.

"Earl, please, the fire—"

"No!" Earl shouted, a firmness in his voice like he'd been interrupted by a child. "You listen to me, goddamn it." He rapped his gnarled cane on the porch and asserted his authority. "It's important, what I'm saying."

Dobbs recoiled, respectful of the man who'd helped raise him years ago.

"Those farmers came and ripped this land to all Christ. Planting all kinda stuff that don't belong. That's what caused the droughts and the dust." A heat radiated behind Earl's rage; his octogenarian body quaked with raw emotion.

"That's what I was trying to fix with the ceremony—to get our young to make relatives with the prairie again and ask the animals back to fix this disaster." Earl's eyes were big as he took a deep breath and exhaled.

"Oh, I see," Dobbs said, his pen now active again. "So, you were aware of the aridness and the potential for fire? Yesterday was the hottest day on record—114 degrees. Hottest day ever in Canada."

"Of course I knew. I know this land better than anyone." Earl stood up and pointed to the burnt-out lodges and then over to the rock pit where the fire for the Sweat Lodge was.

"And we took every precaution to put the fire out. See."

All Dobbs could see was a pile of dirt, two feet high and three feet across.

"That's where the fire was. We buried it. And we fasted alongside them in the cabin here, so we did no cooking, had no fire after the Sweat Lodge closed. Just went to sleep."

Dobbs scribbled more notes as a jet-black 1932 Oldsmobile came barrelling up the driveway from up over the horizon. It sent a plume of dust into the air fifty feet high and three hundred feet long. It was Dunkirk. He had four high-ranking RCMP with him. Dunkirk jumped out and ran up to the porch, his finger extended and accusatory.

"That's the man!" he yelled. "He's the one who caused the fire. Arrest him."

"But we don't know that for sure," Dobbs protested as he tried to get in between Earl and the officers.

"No!" Dunkirk yelled, cutting off Dobbs. "I forbade him to do any Indian ceremonies yesterday and he did it anyways. Now three people are dead."

The officers pushed Dobbs aside and wrestled the old man to the ground, then cuffed him. The force of it was uncalled for—Earl didn't resist in the slightest.

The four large Mounties muscled Earl forward with his hands bound behind his back, then pushed his head into the car as if he were a common criminal. Earl stared out the back-seat side window at the ceremonial staffs that blew in the distance, then over at Dobbs.

Dobbs's eyes locked on Earl's. "You can't just arrest him like that. I haven't finished my investigation."

"Yes, we can," Dunkirk fired back. "I'm the agent and I knew you'd be too close to Earl to arrest him." Dobbs wanted to punch Dunkirk right in the mouth for treating his old friend the way he did.

"Yeah? How?"

"I knew he'd go ahead with his voodoo magic after I told him not to, so I came out here on horseback last night after the sun went down and I seen all these lodges and the lights out in the cabin."

Dobbs turned his head out toward where the fasters had been consumed by fire, and he walked past Dunkirk to get a better look at the pile of dirt to see if there was any chance of the embers escaping.

Nope, he thought. *The old man made sure. No fire could spread from there.*

Just then, he smelled another waft of smoke but it was different, familiar almost, and he realized Dunkirk was right behind him.

"Damn shame," Dunkirk said, smacking his suspenders, "these Indians dying like that, but the law is the law, and he's got to pay for what he's done."

Dobbs turned, saw a cigarette hanging out of Dunkirk's mouth.

It all clicked into place.

All Our Relations: Climate Change Storytellers

DEBORAH McGREGOR & HILLARY McGREGOR

At 11:00 a.m. on March 29, my son asked me what time he was born. I was somewhat curious as he had never asked me this before. I told him he was born around 5:30 a.m. I realized then that I was not exactly sure what "born" meant in his question; he was a ten-pound baby and it took some effort to bring him into the world. I added that around 5:30 could mean more like 6:00, depending on what "born" meant. Then he told me his dream.

> N'gwis gii-bimose ziizabaakodokeng (My son walked into the sugar camp). At the entrance to the sugar bush, a trail runs about five hundred metres from the dirt road to the camp. Before my son set out along the trail he met a man, maybe in his thirties. My son did not recognize this man, but he knew he was from the North by his accent. The man told him, "The bees (*amok*), the bears (*makwook*), the trees (*mitigook*), the suckers (*nimebinwak*) are facing genocide, yet they continue to fulfill their responsibilities." He talked about suckers, that they are food, they are teachers, they keep the water clean, they fulfill multiple responsibilities, they face many hardships and suffer; yet they are not

> complaining, they humbly go about carrying out their duties to Creation. These beings continue to do what they have been instructed to do; they continue to support the continuance of life through the sacrifice of their own. "Humans are not fulfilling their responsibilities," he said. "We are putting all life in jeopardy."

The dream was so vivid, so real, that my son did not know it was a dream until he woke up around 5:30 a.m. on his twenty-second birthday.

He was worried about what the spirit had told him. That humanity, by forgetting our purpose and responsibilities, will fail all life. He interpreted the words of the man/spirit as a call to action, to act on this message. However, the enormity of the task was overwhelming in light of the state of world.

My son's name is Nenagahsang, which refers to what *aki* (earth/land) is doing at the time of year he was born: the sun is regaining some of its warmth; the snow and ice is beginning to melt. He was born during the Ziizabaakodoke Giizis (making sugar moon), a time when the earth is undergoing a transformation; it marks the end of winter, a change in order to bring forth new life. It is also exactly the time when *ziizabaakodaaboo* (sap) runs in *aninaatig* (maple tree). These are the trees that saved the Anishinaabek from starvation countless generations ago, by offering much needed nourishment when winter supplies were depleted. Nenagahsang also has another meaning: a person who is able to de-escalate a conflict or tense situation; to melt the tension away and bring calm to a situation. The name Nenagahsang is itself a gift, and speaks to his abilities.

I think to myself that there is something about the synergy of these events: the time of his birth and the dream, his name, the place,

the moon he was born under—Ziizabaakodoke Giizis—the spirit visitor and the message.

The spirit's call to action has him troubled. That responsibility to act—what can one person do? It is not my dream to interpret, that work still has to be done. So instead I tell him the story of the Pipe and Eagle, the version relayed by Anishinaabe Elder Edward Benton-Banai in *The Mishomis Book*. In this story, despite teachings of how to coexist with the rest of Creation, and the gifts given to remind us (the *opwaagan, odeh'egan, semma*) of how to live, the people have become vain and unkind, and we begin to hurt each other and abuse our other relatives. The teaching of peace, humility, and generosity are forgotten, and the gifts are used to advance our own personal power. The Creator is upset about the abuse of the gifts that were provided to support all life. A spirit was to be sent to destroy the earth after four days. On the fourth day, just before the sun rises, Migizi (Eagle) calls to the Creator at *biidaaban* (at daybreak—there is already light), that very spiritual time when it is no longer night, but not yet day. The Eagle cries four times to get the Creator's attention and petitions to spare the lives of the people and the unborn. The unborn, the Eagle said, can learn from the humble few who still follow the instructions to live in harmony with the earth. It is the unborn that provide hope for the future and for people to correct their ways. The Eagle is thus entrusted with the responsibility to fly over the earth each day to find at least one good person who continues to live according to the principles of *mino-bimaadizawin* (living well with the earth—a good life) and report back to the Creator his observations. Each day, the Eagle seeks that one person or family about whom he can report back to the Creator so that life on earth can be spared.

There are many teachings in this story, but three come to mind. First, it is the Eagle who petitions on our behalf. We are not able to save ourselves as humanity, for despite our intelligence and our free will, we can choose to be destructive. Yet we are spared despite causing our own demise. Once again we are saved by our relatives

(as we were by the *aninaatig*). Second, we have orchestrated our own destruction by our arrogance—we continue to ignore our responsibilities to life and the unborn. Third, the Eagle needs to find only one person still using the gifts as instructed to support life; if there is one person, one family, there is hope.

I reflect on where the spirit visited my son, at the entrance of *ziizabaakodokeng*, where my family has come together *minookming* (in the spring time) for countless generations to make maple syrup. Forest science tells us that in one hundred years maple trees may well disappear due to climate change. I cannot imagine what this means for generations to come, to not receive this gift from the *aninaatig* that was offered so long ago to nourish us in our time of great need. Despite all this, *aninaatig* continues to offer medicine water, year after year, despite increasing hardship, fulfilling its responsibilities.

It is easy to become disheartened, with climate change and other environmental crises threatening life as we know it. But then I remember the Eagle, who needs to find only one person to petition on our behalf so life will continue. So, year after year, my family continues *gii-miizhyaang* (to receive) from *aninaatig*, as we continue to nourish our spirit and pray that Migizi can find us.

These stories remind us of the tremendous yet often forgotten power possessed by our relatives, such as Migizi, *amooyak*, *makwook*, *mitigook*, *nimebinwak* and Aninaatig. These beings are wilful entities that can change the course of events in the minds and hearts of people and the rest of the natural world, both now and in the future. These stories remind us also that we humans are not the only climate change storytellers.

I suggest that the knowledge we need to survive as humanity may not derive strictly from the "human realm"; we need to revitalize and relearn the traditions that will ensure all knowledge is respected,

including that from our relatives and teachers. We have not been able to solve the greatest challenges of our time on our own, despite great advances in science and technology. Human-centred and human-generated knowledge has not proven to be enough. Stories about what is happening now, and what *will* happen soon, are being told every day, every minute, by the earth itself. We have failed to remember the storytellers of the natural and spirit worlds; we have failed to listen to dreams, visions, and intuition. We need to remember that it is with *humility* that we must breathe life into our responsibilities and obligations to the continuance of life. We have to *act* on the stories being told by the earth. While it is often the voice and experience of the most humble that escapes our attention, we, like Eagle, must seek those who continue to support life.