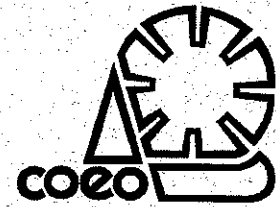


Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION
Spring 2010, 22(3)



Pathways

COEO

Formed in 1972, the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that promotes safe, quality outdoor education experiences for people of all ages. We achieve this by publishing the *Pathways* journal, running an annual conference and regional workshops, maintaining a website, and working with kindred organizations as well as government agencies. Members of COEO receive a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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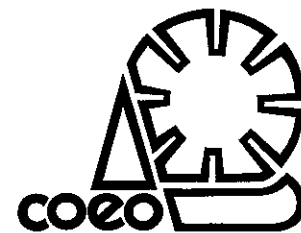
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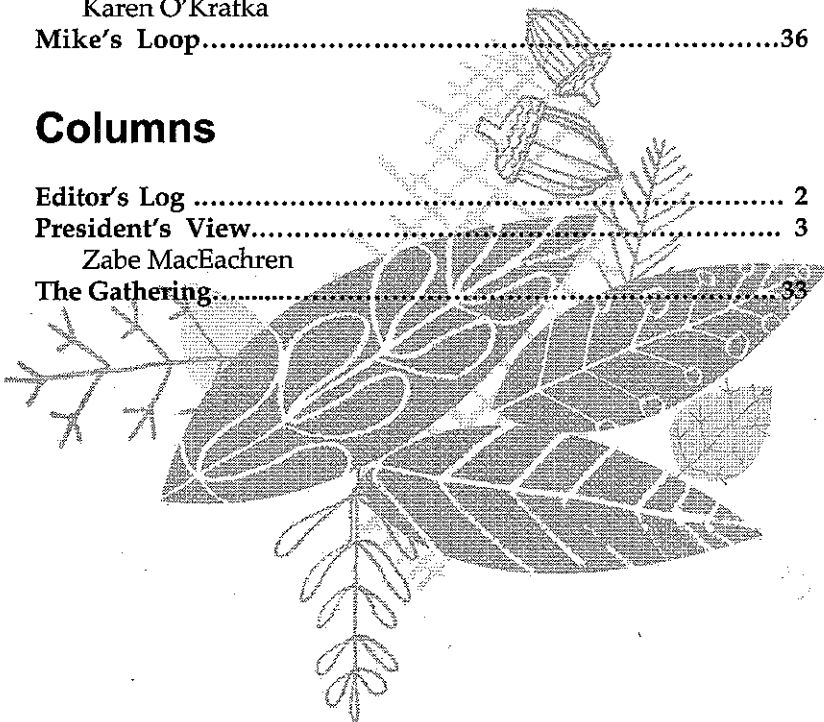
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This issue of *Pathways* is a special tribute to Mike Elrick, who passed away due to cancer in November 2009.

If we had our way, this issue of *Pathways* would arrive in your mailbox trail worn and water stained.

All of the contributors to this tribute issue have been bettered by the trail-time they each spent with Mike Elrick — “trail” as a literal interpretation, on the land, but also as a metaphor for life’s pathway. So many of us followed Mike on life trails of ideas and practice. This tribute issue is a fitting testimony to the way he touched and impacted so many lives. And so this issue should arrive trail worn to reflect the life experiences and lessons Mike shared with so many.

This issue should also arrive with the signature disheveled look of a journal left out in the rain. Here the water stains are tears dripping onto the pages or wiped from keyboards as many struggled to get their words down on the page or to the screen. It’s probably safe to say those tears are a mix of sadness and anger at so early a departure, and also celebration and joy in realizing that a vital presence of Mike remains to comfort and inform us still.

Also within are selections of Mike’s writings previously published in *Pathways* and

elsewhere, as well as excerpted journal entries. Mike’s writings always blend philosophy, pragmatic thinking on everything ranging from local school boards to global systems, and a celebration of life. We hope to share these writings widely with this tribute issue. Perhaps Mike also shed a tear of joy on the page when he wrote some of these excerpts: joy for good work, good play, good teaching and learning with students, friends and family.

If you are learning about Mike for the first time by way of the writings here, of his own as well as his friends, colleagues and students, we are certain you will be touched by the vital presence of Mike Elrick that remains. If you are family, a friend or a colleague, we know you will experience many emotions as you make your way through the pages of this *Pathways* issue. We hope primary among them are feelings of joy and celebration — both for Mike’s life and for his contribution to outdoor education.

Note that both CELP and Headwaters continue under the direction of Katie Gad and Janet Dalziel. Many friends have offered to help out on the trail experiences. February saw a successful time on the winter trail for many students. The traditions continue.

The Editor

Sketch Pad – Zabe MacEachren contributed the winter trail images that lovingly fill these pages and cover. Zabe provided the art on the front cover as well as pages 12, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, and 36.

Josh Gordon, a wonderful friend of *Pathways*, contributed the art on pages 8, 14, 16, and 34, as well as the creative river metaphor treatment for the centrespread (pages 18 and 19) collection of Mike’s journal excerpts. Josh is a graphic artist living in Hamilton and can be reached at info@joshgordoncreative.com.

P resident's View

In the mid-1990s Mike asked if I wanted to join him winter camping. He had just bought his first wall tent and was beginning to think his new Community Environment Leadership Program (CELP) would be better served by taking students winter camping instead of on canoe trips during the late fall or early spring. I clearly recall our first night — the snowflakes were large and made the portage hills up to Gill Lake a tough haul. Somehow I ended up with the task of trying to find firewood as Mike fussed with setting up his woodstove. Darkness surrounded us as I ventured out, tapping trees with my axe and listening to hear if they were dry.

Inevitably, whacking a tree in a snowstorm means getting a lump of snow falling down your neck. I was able to keep my bearings by watching the small glow of a candle in the tent where Mike was setting up the woodstove. I figured Mike knew what was involved in getting firewood when he asked me to do it. Needless to say it was quite late by the time dinner was over and we could unpack our sleeping bags. Mike explained to his co-op students who joined us why I had stayed out to hang up the sleds and toboggans and why I kept tapping trees. He confessed he was chuckling a bit every time he heard a whack and then thump, and could make out my shudder as I tried to accept the snow that had fallen onto my neck. Thus began our habit of teasing each other about always tending to be setting up in the dark whenever the other was along on a trip. Thereafter, invitations to meet in the park would come with promises of boiled kettles and bannock waiting upon the other's arrival.

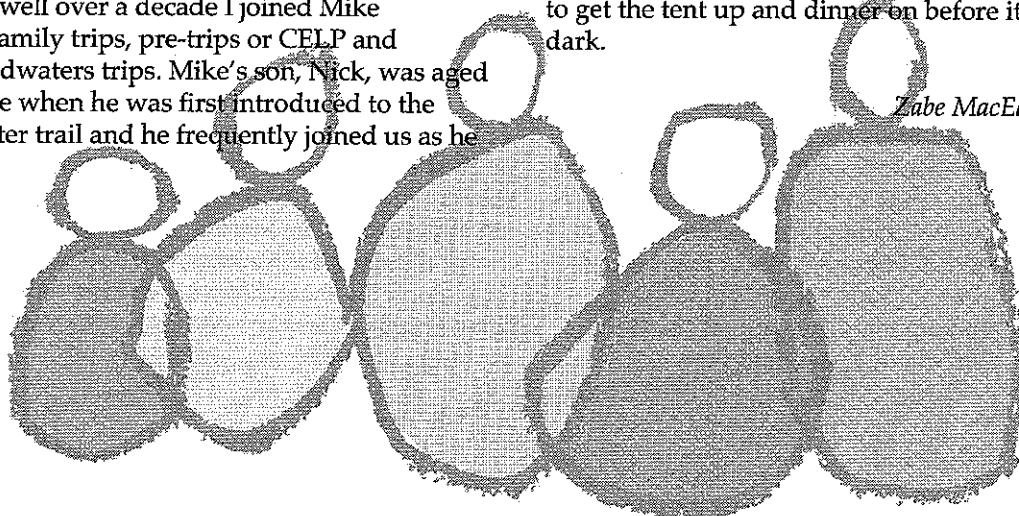
For well over a decade I joined Mike on family trips, pre-trips or CELP and Headwaters trips. Mike's son, Nick, was aged three when he was first introduced to the winter trail and he frequently joined us as he

got older. I watched his daughter, Meaghan, use the purple axe her dad had given her. These trips were like yearly winter rituals and I now crave the type of conversation we would have, the songs we would sing (Mike always brought a guitar) and of course the banter about equipment. Talking with Mike about trail traditions came naturally, it was so much a part of him. The smell of balsam boughs and the whistle of his Norwegian copper tea kettle became familiar and essential aspects of trail life. Mike often said, "Every night spent in a wall tent is another night spent on the trail building memories and community."

Mike and I got to know each other when he was a student at McMaster University and he asked me if I could teach him how to make moccasins. Our first trip was into Toronto to find leather. Later I learned of Mike's kayaking aspirations when we attended CANEXUS: The Canoe in Canadian Culture conference. Who would have known that a decade later we would begin to meet on the winter trail wearing mukluks we had made and 'yarning' about the role of snowshoes in Canadian culture? On our trips we dreamed of someday taking a winter trip where we would hunt and get the hide to make mukluks and snowshoes. Mike used the outdoors to build community like no person I have ever encountered. It has only been one winter without seeing him on the winter trail, yet I miss him so much.

Mike, even as I grapple with the loss of your passing, I can't help but smile remembering our last trip together and how we chuckled because it was the first time we had managed to get the tent up and dinner on before it got dark.

Zabe MacEachren



Dwelling Where I Teach: Connections with Friluftsliv

By Mike Elrick

This article was first published in Henderson, B., & Vikander, N. (Eds.) (2007). *Nature first: Outdoor life the friluftsliv way*. Toronto: Natural Heritage Books. It is reprinted here with permission.

I was born in Guelph, Ontario, Canada in 1963 and grew up digging forts and tobogganing in the backyard of my parents' home. Today, I still live in Guelph, reside in my old neighbourhood, and teach at my old high school. I continue to run the trails and paddle the rivers of my childhood. My children now know Guelph as their home and slide down the same hills (though with fancier sleds), climb the same trees and attend the same schools. And as far as I can see, when I die, my ashes will contribute to the organic layer somewhere nearby.

I have always wanted to start an article or speech with this proclamation because it declares "Who I am and Where I come from." The unique part is this: I am one of the few that teaches in their hometown. And this "uniqueness" has had a direct influence on, and has shaped much of my teaching. Life and work naturally intersect when, to use the words of Wendell Berry, "I eat my history day by day."¹ I might argue today, that "who I am is where I come from." Teaching and dwelling to me are tributaries of the same river. For many years, I have struggled to describe the kind of curriculum and teaching techniques I have been drawn to. Hence, when the idea of friluftsliv education was described to me, it lined up with much of what I believed in. It was as if someone had twisted my camera lens into focus after years of being slightly blurry.

For ten years I have taught what we call in Canada — An Integrated Curriculum Program.² Its name is CELP (Community Environmental Leadership Program) and it is best described as a package of regular high school courses grouped together and taught at an off-campus site. The students earn the following credits in their grade ten year: 1) English, 2) Careers, and Civics, 3) Outdoor

Education and 4) Interdisciplinary Studies. The program, however, takes place outside of the sanctioned walls typical of most schools in our community. Daily, a bus transports us to and from a 55-acre summer camp that we rent in their off season. Several units take place in the city and one in a more remote wilderness setting several hours away. A second teacher is responsible for the English course, and I am responsible for the other three. The setting is one of intimacy with a strong focus on community. There are no "bells" and the same students learn together all day with the same teachers. We have a formal classroom with desks in one building, and we utilize another with a kitchen and living room. The camp property includes open fields, trails, a large forest and a small river. For five months, or one semester, this is school for twenty-four students and two teachers.

My outlook on life and my ways of teaching were born from a childhood of one house, one community and what I believe to be an inherited connection (to be discussed later). Specifically, its alchemy grew from my walks to school, trips to the swimming hole, excursions to the city dump, and, in particular, my connection to the local river. At age eleven, I became interested in the sport of slalom white-water kayaking, an activity I was introduced to from attending a typical Canadian summer camp. And when the water was open, I spent much of my time in it. With white water, it is necessary to learn how to roll, to turn the boat over and suspend oneself in the water. True immersion. And to know how to paddle and manoeuvre in rapids, from an athletic perspective, one has to intimately know the river and its ways. More than anything else, this daily river sojourn slowly flowed its way into my soul. A friluftsliv upbringing perhaps? Canadian style?

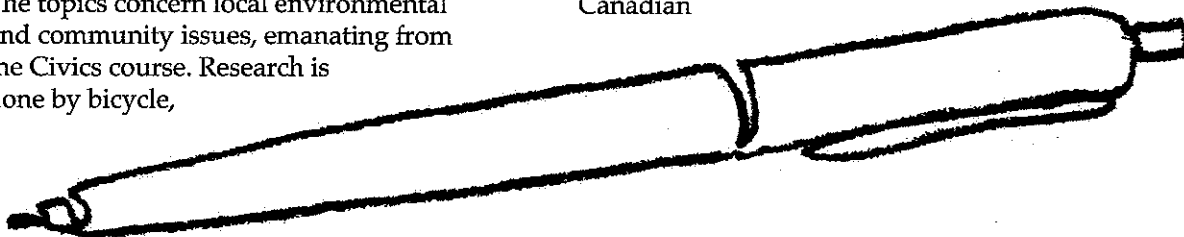
After high school, my kayaking pursuits and university education took me around the world for several years.³ Returning to Guelph to live and work was not something I considered. It just . . . happened. But now, with some reflection time in my backpack, (a kind way of saying I have aged) I know that much of what I share on a daily basis with my students has a direct correlation with my own life's journey and personal connections to my home. I teach what I know. And what I know is that this land speaks to me on a daily basis. It speaks to me with stories and meaning and a sense of connection beyond what's possible with textbooks and basic field trips. And I wonder, is an education taught with this perspective part of the missing link? Because, I might argue, today's environmental learning is failing us.

A typical day at CELP begins with a 20-minute bus ride. I enjoy referring to our school as "upstream" from town. Simply mixing the students from different high schools begins the community-building process. They have to meet the kids from "that school!" Upon arrival, we have a morning circle for announcements and one student provides a reflective reading for the day. English class follows for 70 minutes and the curriculum requirements are met with themes that meet the overall goals of the program — Community, Environment and Leadership. In the first week students are asked to write a paragraph about a memory for them in the natural world, a moment they felt a sense of connection to nature. The skills of reading and writing are used as tools to excavate and create relationships with themselves, their community and the world around. Integration occurs because much of the curriculum of the other three courses overlap and swirl together. For example, when students engage in debates, they are learning research and oral presentation skills from English and Interdisciplinary Studies. The topics concern local environmental and community issues, emanating from the Civics course. Research is done by bicycle,

interviewing local citizens and visiting places of issue — Outdoor Education. A journal is also kept, an all-encompassing mirror of reflection weaving throughout the four courses.

I visualize the program as a river's journey. We begin at a lake near the mouth of a river — our community. We then travel upstream, against the flow. This is a somewhat different approach to learning than most conventional education today, and sometimes hard to do. However, people used to always journey upstream, and there is much to be gained by traveling in this direction. We head to the source — where the real issues flow out of — past the band-aid environmental solutions we have produced to date. We ask the underlying questions of our problems and investigate truly eco-effective practices. And when we travel back downstream, we use the skills and knowledge to paddle with the flow — long term, and sustainable ideas of how to live on this planet. We arrive back to our communities with a sense of responsibility, connection and purpose. We have engaged in practices towards deep ecology. In the process it is hoped students develop a personal life "ecosophy." Arne Naess, would be pleased I think.⁴

Our upstream journey begins with a five-night wilderness canoe or snowshoe trip, depending on the semester. We spend two weeks learning and practicing the traditional travel skills of the region and reading stories of those who have travelled before. Though this unit takes place several hundred kilometres to the North, and goes against the "local" approach of friluftsliv, we have concluded that the remote wilderness setting has a power to "awaken" one's sense of connection with the natural world more quickly than our more urban setting. As well, there is something truly Canadian about going on a canoe or snowshoe trip. It is a window into Canadian culture and Canadian



stories.⁵ Upon return we make links and draw parallels by trying to live the lessons of our wilderness trip in our day-to-day lives. A recent student, Brent Goemans, captured this intended outcome in his journal:

As I sat on the rocks and drank the tea, I looked around at the fog materializing off the water. I thought what a magnificent sight this was and how lucky I was to witness it. It was at this moment I realized that these sights are happening all the time. Nature is always here. It does not just perform for people when they arrive. These sights are happening all the time, some even more glorious than I have ever seen . . . I am now making an effort to try to acknowledge nature even when I'm at home or in the city.

After the trip, English class focuses on a reflective essay of the wilderness venture. It is a chance to write from direct and potent experience. The careers course walks them through an investigation of their own skill sets, future employment ideas and job application techniques. We improve our communication and problem solving through activities such as trust falls and group initiative tasks — learning to work together. Every Friday is “community day” where, as a class, we share a meal and clean up our site. A group of six students is empowered to design, shop for, pre-cook and finally serve a meal for the entire class. We finish with a full-camp clean up, including dishes, toilet scrubbing, mopping and vacuuming. This covers healthy eating habits from the physical education course. And we investigate the interconnected nature of food from different perspectives. Who grew this food? What chemicals were used or not? How does the purchase of a banana directly impact the farmer who grew it, both positively and/or negatively? We learn, through integrating curriculum, that when it comes to probing the sustainability of our planet, no learning happens in isolation. “All living things on the earth are connected,” as the Institute for Earth Education so eloquently states.⁶

One of my most important lessons of education to date arose from these community days. When I started CELP, I thought that the most important thing was getting outdoors, being on the land — the “E” (environment) part of CELP. I designed lots of activities for that purpose. The Friday routine was thrown in at the last minute from another program’s model and from the necessity for cleaning at the week’s end. But something magical began to happen on these days. I was struck by how the simple act of sharing of a meal nurtured the growth of our class. Fridays became a big deal. At first I didn’t get it! It finally dawned on me that adventuring on the land wasn’t enough to truly build an environmental ethic. If my class couldn’t get along with each other and function as a community, we could never get anywhere with the greater community around us. It took me a long time to realize that the skills of how we relate to each other are the same ones needed for how we relate to the earth.⁷ Perhaps there is much more to educating about food than I am presently aware? My students taught me why “C” (community) is the first letter of our acronym.

Nearing the source, my students teach a program called Earthkeepers™ to over 300 grade five students from our school board. For if a child can begin his/her life where the water is pure, perhaps this river may be clean in its journey downstream. Earthkeepers™ is a three-day program designed by the Institute for Earth Education.⁸ It is composed of a “head, heart and hands” section. For the head component the students learn ecological concepts. With the heart, the activities develop feelings for the natural world. Finally, in the hands, students commit to lessening their impact on the earth and sharing what they know with others. The program is full of creative learning activities and is woven together beautifully with the earning of four KEYS. These keys, in turn, give them privileged access to locked boxes with secret meanings about the earth. The true magic of the program, however, is in the relationship between the high school and elementary students. My students gain real, hands-on experience in teaching. The elementary students get an “awesome”

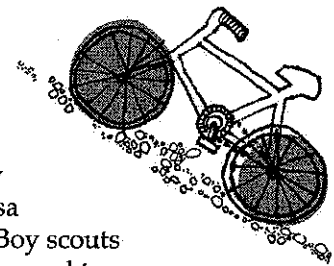
education program and get to meet kids from high school! On Monday mornings in this unit, my students will often share that they ran into several of their little "Earthkeepers" in town on the weekend. Little do they know that the learning and role model effect continues, even after school hours. Over half of my high school students now have been participants' years earlier in Earthkeepers,TM returning to the same place to share what they experienced. The students become teachers: returning again to the source.

Last June I had two former students simply "drop by" the CELP site. They wanted to "come back and see the place." They brought their girlfriends and boyfriends and told me, after their wanderings, that the campfire stones from their daylong solo spots were still there! Though words couldn't quite grasp the deeper meanings, their hearts were displaying a sense of place, sense of home and sense of comforting continuity. I run into my students about town all the time. I often feel my most important lessons happen here, not in official classroom time. When I ride my bicycle to work, buy local produce at the market or paddle with my children on the river, they witness me attempting to live a life with sustainable elements in it. They see my compassion, connection and concern for my "home." This is, I believe, the next layer in the foundation of an education system that teaches "sustained life" as former Chief Gary Potts of the Temagami Bear Island First Nations Anishinabe peoples once stated.⁹ But because I grew up and live here, it all seems so normal to do.

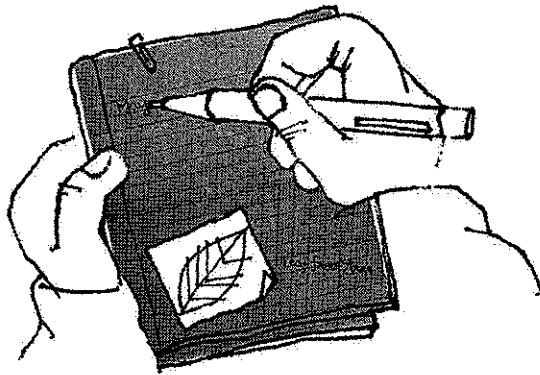
As we spin around at the source, the downstream curriculum attempts to find ways we can live sustainably, ways that flow with our ecosystem or, as Bill Reese recently stated, "... ways when we see ourselves as a mere part of nature, and not separate from it."¹⁰ In Civics, we explore political structure and discuss local, national and international issues. We learn how to participate in matters that have meaning to us right in our own community. I have always felt, though, that to make decisions about community, one must know community. So, for seven days, we

take to the streets on our bicycles for just that purpose. On Day 1 we learn the rules of the road and feel, in our bones and muscles, that the bicycle is a viable form of transportation. Anchored by research for debates on local issues of sustainability, we bike to our water source, to the sewage treatment plant, and to City Hall. We bike to our waste-handling facility and to the old landfill. We bike to an organic vegetable farm and tour a local abattoir where they slaughter 2,000 head of cattle a day (perhaps the most powerful tour on the circuit). We visit an organic dairy farm and talk with people fighting to keep Wal-Mart in check. The community becomes the classroom. In between visits we picnic by the river, have ice cream at the historic Boathouse, and play "grounders" on park play structures. It is hard to capture in words, the joy I feel biking around my hometown with students, discovering and learning its complex inner workings and hidden places of beauty. The feelings of freedom, the welcome physical exertion and the visits with our local citizens all weave together for an incredible week. We meet our community on a level beyond what is typically possible. Sharon Butala once stated that, "To discover these truths (about the wonder and beauty of the world) we don't need to scale Mount Everest or white-water raft the Colorado or take up skydiving. We need only go for walks."¹¹ I might add "or for bikes."

Often our travels will take us by a small dam on the local Eramosa River where we stop for lunch. Boy scouts built it fifty years ago. It creates a pool to recharge the springs from which our city gets its water. Before departing, I gather my students around an outflow where a small rapid is created. Here I tell them a story. "This place," I explain, "is sacred to me. As a child, my friends and I took bike hikes here and spent hours skipping stones and swimming. In teenager days, we camped in the hills behind. As a young adult, I portaged my canoe traveling both up and downstream. And several years ago, when my wife and I had a stillborn baby boy, we spread his ashes here in ceremony." After an emotional pause,



I tell them, "It gives me joy to see all of you enjoying this place — this sacred place." It is a moment, perhaps, that the previous four months have led up to. But it is a moment that is unique to my situation, and attempts to awaken questions in their minds of what being a true dweller is. The land must have elements of sacredness for us to love and care for it. It has that for me and I hope to instill the same with my students. I often wonder, when they return to this small dam, if they tell others this story. For now it is their story too. It is part of who they are, and where they come from.



In the final leg of the course we spend a day in our home community where the students plan, execute and evaluate an Active Citizenship Day. By consensus, they decide in small groups, how to "Better Their Community." On the actual day, the students take to the streets without direct teacher supervision and carry out their chosen tasks. It is a day of celebration as I bike from group to group and see them walking dogs at the Humane Society, flipping pancakes at a kid's breakfast program and performing self-written puppet shows about the environment. It is a culminating day of so much of what we have learned.

In English class the students read a book called *Halfway Man* by Wayland Drew. It is a wonderful story involving an upstream canoe trip to the source and back as well. And for six of my ten years I finished with a local canoe trip that literally lived out our river metaphor. We would portage out the back door of our high school in the city, down to the local

Eramosa River, then paddle, pole, portage and drag our canoes upstream for a day, heading to a local park. Here we would camp for two nights, doing a solo and a year's end reflection — what we learned about the source — at the source. Then, we would paddle, in half the time, back home. The gentle current pulled us along. Next year we are initiating a grade 12 (age 17) integrated program called HEADWATERS that will complement the existing grade 10 CELP. We will be resurrecting this final canoe trip. The students will be milling wood from our off-site school property to carve out paddles for their trip.

CELP ends when we invite all the students and their families to a closing ceremony. Beginning with a potluck supper (the theme of food again), we move on to share slides and journal quotes of the semester, narrated by the students. Following this, the teachers award the students a certificate and honour each with a brief story. It is meant to be a transitional moment. The students will return to their home schools having completed half of their grade ten requirements. And, in tune with our overall philosophy, our program is never meant to exist in isolation. The skills and life lessons gained at CELP are meant to help them in their ongoing river's journey. This is simply school for five months.

Last summer I had the unique opportunity to travel to Norway to attend a family reunion held on a farm that has been in my lineage for over a thousand years. A journey to my source — way upstream! I ate roasted lamb with relatives, saw the house where my great-great-great-grandparents emigrated from in 1857 and shook my head at the resemblance of one elder to my own grandfather. But the most significant moment came when I traveled up to the family setter (a small cabin traditionally used in the summer pasture lands). The host of the reunion, Nils Rosholt, a large, gentle man of six foot-four, spoke of how every year he and all the men of the Rosholt farms (now a group of three divided farms) gather for a fall moose hunt. They have a fire pit which they circle around and "talk about things" as Nils stated, as if his English translation was not quite capturing his deeper

meaning. He said they work at "getting along" as a family and that this is something they are "very proud of." And with those words, a tingle ran up my spine. My bloodline believes in community, works at nurturing this community, and is connected to their land — their home. And this has been "home" for quite a while. It was an affirming moment. This is where I come from. The words and aspirations of Nils run through me, like a river.

After being in Norway, I realized Canada is a young country. The mindset of "going west to find your fame and fortune" complemented more recently by the cheap fossil fuel era of constant mobility, perhaps have never allowed a percolation of stories to settle into place. But this may change as we move more into the next century. As a global community we are reaching the peak of oil consumption, and in an ironic way, it may return us to being a true dweller of one place. I think the type of education I am providing for young people lines up with this outlook, but I may never know in my lifetime. It has been a natural progression for me as a teacher and dweller, to share the stories, foundations and issues of my community with my students. Learning the term *friluftsliv* affirmed and clarified for me, this might be a way — a way of seeing the world from a long term, sustainable outlook. To date other ways don't seem to be working. As Aldo Leopold stated so many years ago, "Is it certain that only the volume of education needs stepping up? Is something lacking in the content as well?"¹²

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April 22, 1991 Earth Day — My foundation stones — what are they? Heather and my love and relationship with her, my kayaking, my contact with the natural world, my running/fitness, my contact with children and others in a teaching/guiding framework, my family, my native lands.

The Mississauga River — Yes! It is a full possibility for this summer. It just could be the fix I need as well, though fix is not the right word. It could be the "base work" that I desperately need in my life, in my life today to keep me going through May and June as well. What better river to paddle than Grey Owl's river? The person who was there when my life was consciously awoken to the outdoors.

July 15, 1991, on the Mississauga River — When I come upon a small rapids like this it conjures up images in me of so many training sites I have visited such as these. How many hours I played and trained on waters like this and so enjoyed gaining that ultimate feeling of harmony with the river. Physically feeling in good shape and working my body, emotionally, setting challenges, striving for goals, socializing with others and, finally, spiritually that sense of contact with the natural world and that deep inner part of me that felt fulfilled in a positive way.

There's No Place Like Home

By Mike Elrick

This article was first published in 2002 in *Pathways*, 14 (4), 23–24.

The integrated program that I teach — the Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) — begins with a five-night wilderness trip. Here our connections to the Earth are clear: water comes from lakes, fuel comes from trees and our waste decomposes in the soil below. Students learn quickly that they shouldn't pee in the water they are drinking. This is logical and easy to understand on trip. But on a typical day at home and at school, water comes from the tap, waste is flushed down the drain and fuel comes from a gas element on the stove. The learning is not as simple. The connections are not as clear.

It is my opinion that to live sustainably on this planet, we need to begin at home. We need to bring the wilderness trip lessons into daily life. The following unit, called "bioregions," is an example of how I attempt to do this in an integrated program based in the City of Guelph. This unit can be taught in all settings, obviously tailored to fit each community. Bring the lessons of the wilderness trip into daily life.

This is one of my most enjoyable units to teach and I believe it represents the essence of what an integrated program allows: full-day field trips, all by bicycle, no conflicts with other classes, and seven days when our community is the classroom and we never step inside the traditional four walls.

Bioregions: A Seven-Day Unit for Understanding Home

Day One: We begin with a one-day CANBIKE instruction course. The morning is spent discussing rules of the road for bicycles and doing riding exercises in the parking lot. In the afternoon, we head out on the city streets and learn to "be traffic." This is important since five of the seven days are spent entirely on bicycle, the Earth-friendly and cost-effective form of transportation. (Teacher's note: Of all the

activities we do in CELP, urban biking is by far the most dangerous. Safety and proper instruction are critical).

Day Two: Water Day by bike. Stop #1: We begin with a tour of the Arkell Spring Grounds just outside of town. This is where Guelph obtains 80% of its water supply. I make sure the city employee lifts off the maintenance hole cover so that we can actually view the water flowing out of the ground. While there, we also visit the local river at the Spring Grounds to discuss the ground water recharge system. Stop #2: We then follow the underground pipeline into town to our purification plant and pumping station. Here we see where the water is stored, how it is chlorinated and the way it is then pumped into our houses. (At this point, I ask all students to take a drink of water, and then try to go to the washroom. In this way, we become part of the water's journey!) Stop #3: We finish the day by getting a tour of the sewage treatment plant. I ask for students to be shown the outflow pipe into the river. We discuss how Brantford gets its drinking water from this same river further downstream.



Day Three: Waste Day by bike. We begin by riding to our local wet/dry plant where 60% of our waste is either recycled or composted — a progressive facility for our times. We then travel to the landfill where the rest of our waste ends up. (I gather up any non-recyclable garbage that the class has produced over the last week and ask them to toss it on the ground at the landfill. I tell them this garbage is simply taking a shortcut!)

Day Four: Food Day by bike. We first tour a local farm. Over the years we have visited dairy, chicken and vegetable operations. We then tour our local abattoir. Guelph is home to the largest abattoir in Eastern Canada, in which over 15,000 cattle are slaughtered each day. They take us through the entire "disassembly line" (as they call it), including the place where the life of the cows is taken. This is not meant to be an anti-meat tour but a discovery process of where our meat comes from. (This is a highly emotional tour and I do an in-depth discussion prior to our departure and later engage in a post-trip reflection. I don't ask them to eat anything after the tour!)

Day Five: Organic Day by bus. We look at a sustainable alternative in agriculture. Over the years we have visited an organic lettuce-grower, a meat operation and a vegetable

farm that supports Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). We do lots of tasting when possible!

Day Six: Sustainable or Eco-Home Day by bus. We visit a house that typically has solar/wind power generation, passive solar design, rainwater collection, composting toilets, masonry woodstoves, wood and solar hot water. We investigate alternatives to the norm and talk about what is possible.

Day Seven: Municipal Politics Day by bike. We visit City Hall where we sit in the actual chairs of our local Council and Mayor. One of our councilors discusses how local government functions and answers questions regarding local environmental issues.

While the curriculum links are endless, here are some straightforward ones for courses taught at the Grade 10 level:

- Outdoor Activities: Bicycle unit
- Civics: Local politics and active citizenship
- English: Hands-on research and interviewing for debates on local environmental issues
- Interdisciplinary Studies: Research skills and collating ideas into debate form.

November 16, 1992 — Looks like the CELP course will go through and now it is my time to take ownership over it and roll with it. No doubt the possibilities are amazing and potentially powerful — just the idea of a seven-day canoe trip is great. And this is for me too — this is what I'm after, a deeper experience, one that forms a deeper relationship with the natural world, one that provides avenues/opportunities of responsibilities and one that has the aura of a rite of passage. I like that more and more, the passage from childhood to adulthood. Gotta work with that one some more.

Headwaters: The Next Stage in High School Integrated Programming

By Mike Elrick

The full version of this article was first published as Elrick, M. (2007). Headwaters: The next stage in high school integrated programming. *Pathways*, 19 (3), 14–19.

In 2006, the grade 12 program “Headwaters”¹ was initiated and offered the following four courses: Environment and Resource Management, Canadian Literature, Outdoor Activities and Interdisciplinary Studies. In 2007 the credit of grade 12 university English replaced the Canadian Literature credit but it is still offered to those students who wish to take it. Headwaters runs concurrently with CELP and both programs take place at the same off-site campus, 15 minutes from town. One teacher is designated for the three credits in CELP, one teacher is designated for the three credits in Headwaters, and one teacher is designated for the two credits for the English courses of both programs. By the end of March 2005 the first Headwaters program was launched.

Some Program Specifics

I have always described our program as simply “school.” We teach curriculum courses outlined by the Ministry of Education. We are certified teachers hired by the public school system, and we support students to continue to play sports or music with their home schools. Our integrated programs are not intended to exist in isolation, but rather to support and enhance the educational

possibilities for those in our community. The skills and lessons we impart are meant to be “taken back” and used in each student’s home school, university or college.

The overall theme of the Headwaters program is *A Journey to the Source*. We attempt, metaphorically, to journey farther upstream, to the source of environmental and community problems, and to the source of solutions for a sustainable future.

Food is a topic that is explored in depth and used as a vehicle to accomplish much of the curriculum for several courses. Every Friday the students are responsible for designing a meal for the entire class using the principles of locavores.² Using a local online delivery service that specializes in locally grown and organic foods, the students order their ingredients on Monday, delivery takes place Thursday, and lunch is made for Friday. The delivery company lists beside each of its ingredients whether the product is organic and/or locally grown, and where the product comes from. My assignment allows them to order only locally grown products (mostly from Southern Ontario) and asks them to calculate their food mileage for each meal. This is calculated as a basic estimate by



averaging the food mileage of each item, excluding spices. (There are more complex formulas available for doing this that account for the type of transportation used to deliver the food item for sale.) Our first meal in February, for example, was maple parsnip soup and sweet potato quesadillas. This assignment also encourages students to start their own connections locally. For example, one student knows an egg farmer; another knows a beekeeper who produces honey. The main purpose is to reduce one's ecological footprint by lowering food mileage and to make the connections to healthy agricultural lands, local farmers and good tasting food!

In March we make maple syrup with a small 50-bucket operation. It is the first "harvest" from the land with our own hands. In conjunction with this we are piloting this year a grade one education program called "MapleKeys," which will be taught by the grade 12 students and will meet four main objectives of the grade one Science and Technology curriculum.

At the end of March we start, in a small, makeshift greenhouse, seeding a vegetable garden where we will grow our food to use weekly, and to share with our parents at a closing celebration meal in late June. As well, fall crops will be sown in order that the following year's class can utilize the bounty for their locavore meals in the winter and spring. This involves digging, double digging, planting, weeding, fertilizing and

harvesting. In mid-May we transfer the plants from the greenhouse to the garden and also help some plants along with cold frames. This year we hope to have a few chickens to obtain eggs from, and more importantly, to demonstrate the soil cycle by making compost from their manure. We have some perennial rhubarb plants and often our first tastes of spring come in the form of rhubarb pie sweetened by maple syrup. Soon there is salad and spring squash. Living locally is an overriding principle of the Headwaters program and food is our entry point to the curriculum objectives.

Endnotes

1. The name "Headwaters" is widely known in the outdoor field as the business name for Hugh Stewart's canoe manufacturing business in Quebec. The name Headwaters was first suggested by the CELP English teacher Janet Dalziel. Michael Elrick felt it was necessary to gain permission from Hugh Stewart to use this name, thus, a letter of permission was sent. Hugh Stewart responded that he has no legal authority over the use of the name, though he was grateful for being asked and sanctioned its use for our program.
2. According to the website www.locavores.com, locavores' principles are as follows:
 1. If not locally produced, then organic.
 2. If not organic then family farm.
 3. If not family farm then local business.
 4. If not local business then Terroir (foods known from the region).

January 16, 1994 — Feeling good about the CELP course these days, it's starting to fall into place. Had some creative ideas come to mind too like making maple syrup and using the RIVER as our metaphor or as our learning journey. I like the idea — the river, the river, the river. Starting at the headwaters and journeying down to the lake. I like that.

Striking a Memory the Right Way

By Mike Elrick

This article was first published in the *Globe and Mail*, Facts and Arguments, Monday, February 9, 1998.

I have strong childhood memories of sitting on the ledge of our open fireplace after a bath on a cold winter's evening. While the logs crackled and sizzled, my brothers and I would toast our pajamas on the screen and slowly dress ourselves before bed.

These are good memories for me. So it was with great joy that I recently bought a secondhand airtight wood stove. The next step was to get it installed in my two-storey house with no existing chimney. No big deal, I thought, and off I went to one of the nearby fireplace dealers.

"Hello," I said, "I've just bought a secondhand wood stove, and I'd like to discuss some options about its installation."

I described my house and what I believed were the existing couple of possibilities. But, in the words of Arlo Guthrie in his famous song about Alice's restaurant, "there was a third possibility that I hadn't even counted upon!"

"Have you thought about switching to gas?" the fireplace man asked.

"Ah, well, no, not really," I said, a bit stunned. "As I said, I've already bought the wood stove," emphasizing the wo-oo-oo-od part.

"Well, you know gas is about three times cheaper to install and you don't even need a permit. And we've got some beautiful fireplaces here which look like real log fires!"

I paused for a moment, trying to absorb this. Fireplaces which "look like" real log fires? I replied that my house didn't have gas (which is true) and left. Frustrated and a bit disillusioned, I drove home and started to talk to myself.

Perhaps I needed to be more clear. I didn't want a "gas" fireplace. I like wood. I don't

want an instant gratification, switch-and-presto! "cozy fireplace in second" as a recent advertisement promised. I would have had no connection with this process. I wouldn't have split the wood, spent five minutes setting up and starting the fire, doing the old half-hour, stoke-and-poke. And besides, you can't tell me a gas flame compares to a real wood fire. They are just not the same.

A couple of weeks went by and my emotions settled. I walked by the cast-iron beauty sitting quietly on the back porch and promised, "I'll get you installed yet!"

My spirits were elevated because I heard of a man who quit his job 25 years ago to design and manufacture his own brand of wood stove. With a smile on my face, I buckled my two-year-old boy into his car seat and headed to the far side of town.

Take two.

I greeted a young man just inside the door.

"Hello, I've just bought a secondhand wood stove and I'd like to discuss some options about its installation."

I was full of expectation. A few more sentences about my house and . . .

"Have you thought about switching to gas?"

Thump went my proud shoulders and chest. What is it with you people? Am I the only one left in this world interested in having a wood-burning fireplace? "Are you the owner?" I asked.

"I'm the co-owner, but the original owner is in the office. He's more the wood-stove person anyway. I'll get him."

In a few minutes a healthy-looking, white-haired man approached me.

"Hello, I hear you are interested in having a wood stove installed?"

"Yes," I replied, chasing my boy around the store. This is the guy. I have finally found a kindred spirit. But after five minutes of discussion he too suggested the G-option. My throat tightened, and my heart sank. This time right to the floor.

He talked about the difficulties with building inspectors, the pain of cutting and hauling wood, the dust, the bugs! He told me he has installed gas in his house, and he repeated those desperate words, "And it almost looks like a real wood fire!"

Virtually at rock bottom, I asked the burning question.

"Do you miss the wood?"

"Well, not at home, but at my cottage I only burn wood."

Aha, a flicker of hope. I looked over at my little boy, my thoughts fell into place and I began what I later realize is my testimony.

"You know, the more you talk about the splitting, hauling, dust and bugs, the more excited I get. That's what I love about a wood fireplace. Being and feeling connected to the heat and light

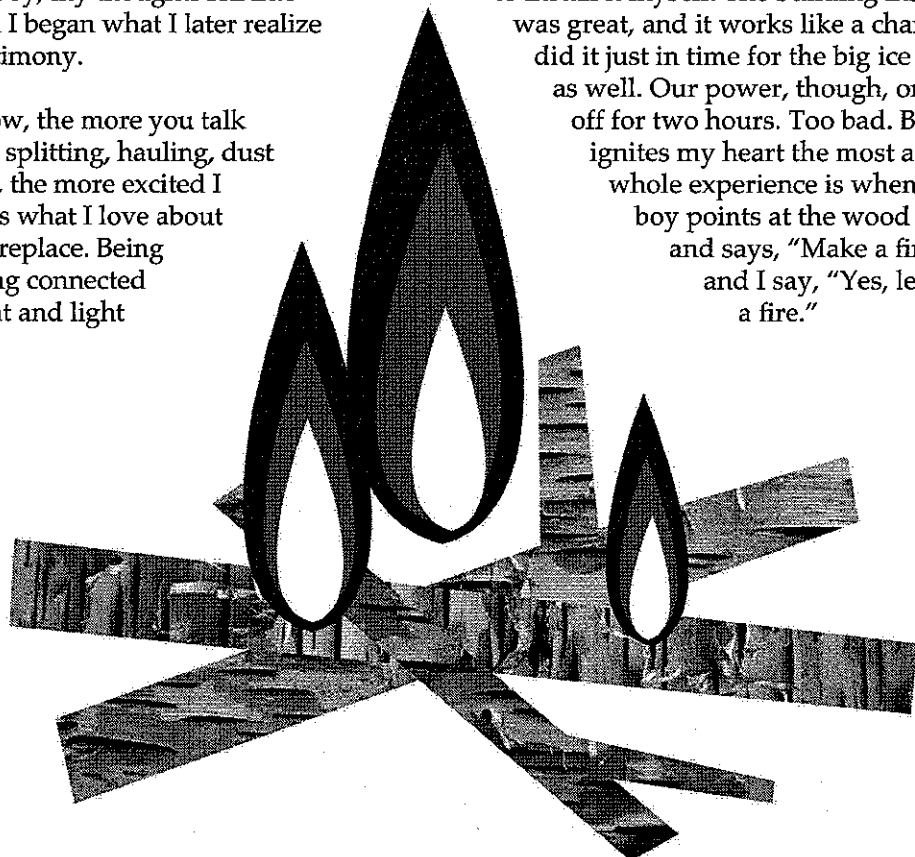
that warms me. I don't connect with gas in the same way and never will. I understand trees, wood, matches, fire. And (I was warming to my subject) I don't want my boy growing up thinking that this gas-flickering things is a 'real' wood fire."

Yes, that was it. I understood now. I'm worried about my son growing up believing that gas fireplaces are true wood fires. In fact, I'm worried about a whole generation of kids who will know only fireplaces that get started by a switch, not a match, and who think that wood comes from a ceramics factory, not trees.

I had said enough, perhaps too much. We briefly discussed the wood-stove installation again. He had a person who does it. And would have him come by to give an estimate. Well, no one ever dropped by or called.

Strike two.

After two attempts, I was left alone with my wood stove and worries. In the end I decided to install it myself. The building inspector was great, and it works like a charm. I did it just in time for the big ice storm as well. Our power, though, only went off for two hours. Too bad. But what ignites my heart the most after this whole experience is when my little boy points at the wood stove and says, "Make a fire, Papa," and I say, "Yes, let's make a fire."



On the Tip of the Toes Foundation: Wilderness Therapy for Teenagers Living with Cancer

Mission

To help adolescents living with cancer regain their self-esteem and sense of pride by offering them an exceptional adventure therapy challenge in Canada.

Supervised by external resources, medical specialists and outdoors adventure experts, these expeditions also aim to change the image of cancer for both the youth and the general public.

Goal

To offer teenagers living with cancer an opportunity to leave the hospital and become separated from civilization, from their day-to-day environment. In doing so, we aim to create a situation through which they can rediscover themselves and begin to rebuild their self-esteem and self-confidence. They are challenged and thus offered a chance to reach beyond their limits.

Since 1996, the *On the Tip of the Toes* Foundation has been organizing therapeutic adventure expeditions for teenagers living with cancer. Much more than outdoor activity, these trips offer a chance to spend time with other teenagers who share the same reality, who can understand without needing explanations. They also represent an opportunity to make friends by meeting challenges together, as young people often dream of doing at that stage of life. Through these challenges and by overcoming their limits, we hope to see them rebuild their self-confidence, and their hope for the future.

Over the past 14 years, the foundation has organized expeditions that have allowed the discovery of magnificent destinations all over Canada for some 250 teenagers living with cancer. Depending on the type of expedition, the youth discover nature through hiking, sea kayaking, dog-sledding, canoeing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling.

Financing

One hundred percent of expedition costs are covered by the *On the Tip of the Toes* Foundation, thanks to private financing and generous donations.

To send a donation, please make your cheque payable to the *On the Tip of the Toes* Foundation and forward it to the following address:

On the Tip of the Toes Foundation
240, Bossé
Chicoutimi, Québec G7J 1L9

All donations are deductible in the calculation of taxable income for corporations and will result in a tax credit for individuals.



Fondation Sur la pointe des pieds
On the Tip of the Toes Foundation

Initiated in January 2010, by a small "starter group" of COEO members, funds have been generated to send one youth on an *On the Tip of the Toes* Expedition in honour of Mike Elrick. Please join this group in adding funds to those generated by the starter group. Note "Mike Elrick Tribute" on your cheque (any amount is helpful) and send to the attention of Héléna Longpré at the address above. The Elrick family will receive information about the upcoming trip and the youth involved. Information on this will appear in the COEO newsletter and *Pathways* as appropriate. Join us over the years in supporting this worthy initiative in Mike's name.

For more information, visit
www.tipoftoes.com

April 22, 1991
My (cousin) Pam from "what are they? the other end of the world" will be my buddy, my "outpost" with the old and new, my "new" friend, my "outpost" with the old and new, my "new" friend, my "outpost" with the old and new...

July 15, 1991
On The Highway Road when I came upon a small rock the size of a quarter of a dollar in one of my many training sites I saw what I call a "Rock". How many have I played with? I found it so soft like this and so hard like that...

November 16, 1992
The DEEP course will go through and now it is my time to take ownership now it and call it "the rock". The possibilities are endless and perfectly powerful...

November 16, 1992
Looks like the DEEP course will go through and now it is my time to take ownership now it and call it "the rock". The possibilities are endless and perfectly powerful...

January 16, 1994
I'm glad about the DEEP course then after - it's starting to feel like there had some sense to take time to find the rocks, make some sense and using the DEEP as my metaphor for the training course.

August 27, 1998
Sitting here at Hogshead Lake - Scraped out the old ranger portage today from Sunny Lake to Hogshead - that was a slog, hard physical days, pushing the envelope - but feeling alive and well. I know my body and soul like a full physical day.

June 9, 1999
The day before the DEEP closing ceremony - another year. The year of the naming winter camp and the straw-hole that Honour the boat and let the honour you take and let life flow through you as the river flows without knowledge of where it goes - but has the deep sense that where it is going - must be the right path.



A SELECTION OF

MIKE'S

JOURNAL ENTRIES

September 17, 2000

Magnetawan River, fall OCEP trip. Fall tripping does not get much finer. Morning fire - coffee a brew. Got up with the morning star - and saw Orion's belt low in the horizon at dawn - winter morning is coming.

March 8, 2004

I was having coffee this morning at my morning meditation. Could not cut the cherry trees in February and have them dried in the solar kiln for May/June. Make paddles from the land to paddle on the land. Our home and native land.

May 5, 2009

My soul and energy are still halfway between here and Algonquin Park. The Headwaters winter trip was a great trip - one might even say excellent. And in the end it is the students that make it. The magic of wilderness travel and its simplicity worked away at my group until it broke them - and on a final evening in sharing a circle of music, dance, poetry and requests. And it all took place inside the tent. We formed a circle, lit a candle and laughed and cried together.



Remembering Mike

Memories of Mike Elrick

By John Sandlos

The first time I met Mike was in the winter of 1989 at my job interview for a senior staff position at Camp Kitchikewana. I was suffering at the time from what developed into a severe case of mononucleosis, so I wasn't really in any state to put a lot of thought into the interview. As I sat nearly comatose in the Midland YMCA, my mom propping me up on her shoulder, Mike came bursting out of his office and gave me one of his huge trademark handshakes. It struck me that he had a lot more energy than I did. Indeed, with the big grin and eager look on his face, I thought he had more energy than most people I had met in my brief 18 years of experience.

I stumbled into the interview room. Mike started off talking a bit about his journey toward becoming the director of Kitchi. I learned he was a kayaker and avid camper, and had recently completed the Queen's Outdoor and Experiential Education program. Hmm, I thought, we had just read Henry David Thoreau in my high school's Modern Western Civilization class; maybe I ought to try that angle. "Have you read Thoreau?" I said. "You know," I continued "the guy who goes out in the woods to live in a cabin and grow beans." Mike answered, "Henry David Thoreau has been a huge influence on outdoor and experiential educators."

Bingo! We spent the rest of the interview talking about *Walden*. To someone who did not know Mike, this might seem strange. What about my swimming qualifications? What did I know about camp programming? Had I taken first aid? Mike, however, was one of those rare people who can become totally immersed and interested in the passions of another person. He saw that I was excited about something, and to him the essence of a person was more important than the details. He always had a way of bringing out the best in people in word and deed.

Mike carried his own passion for outdoor education into his work at Kitchi. The camp



had always had a focus on outdoor recreation, with strong boating and swimming programs. Mike showed his staff that we could do more, using the Kitchi site as a staging ground for children to encounter the natural world in profound and meaningful ways. Many of the staff had likely never heard of outdoor or environmental education, but Mike showed us that a canoe trip, a campfire, or a hike was more than mere fun; each could connect campers to nature in powerful and sometimes indescribable ways. Through his leadership and inspiration, Mike laid the groundwork for the environmental education focus that continues as a critical part of the Kitchi program to this day.

Mike instituted other important changes as director of Kitchi. Two stick out in my mind: He worked to make the camp more accessible to special needs children. He also started to develop the camp's relationship with the staff at Georgian Bay Islands National Park, enhancing an educational partnership with the park's staff that opened campers and staff to the fact that Kitchi was located in one of Canada's unique and very special protected areas.

I feel extremely fortunate to have worked for Mike in the two years that he was director

of Kitchi. His seemingly endless supply of positive energy inspired me time and time again. I remember on a staff canoe trip when he woke me up one morning playing "Born to be Wild" (get your motor running!) on a beat up tripping guitar. I wanted to be mad, but all I could do was grin as I pulled myself out of my sleeping bag into a cold spring morning. On the same trip another staff member, Mike Walton, and I were paddling a canoe upstream against a rapid as hard as we could, but not really getting anywhere. All of a sudden, Mike shoots by us paddling solo in a canoe, slipping effortlessly up the eddies to the head of the rapid. "Work with the river," he said, "never against it."

Mike was always working with the river. From Kitchi he went on to become one of Canada's most revered outdoor educators, developing two unique environmental leadership programs for Guelph students. Not only did Mike continue to pursue the outdoor education ideal of taking students out on canoe and camping trips, but he also taught his students about critical urban environmental issues such as energy use, urban transportation and waste disposal.

I chose a slightly different path, turning away from experiential education and instead

pursuing my love for environmental ideas and history through a seemingly endless stint at graduate school. When I was finishing my PhD thesis in Guelph in 2003/2004, I remember riding my bike to the library one day and encountering Mike's entire class going the other way on bicycles to visit the city's compost and recycling facility. We all stopped and chatted for a bit, that same energy flowing out of Mike as when I first met him. Then I rode off to my books, and he toward another important experiential learning moment for his students. We had taken two streams, I thought, but I hoped we were working with the same river.

Since Mike's passing, I have been thinking about how much of him, particularly his interests in the environment and education, had flowed into me. Then I thought, multiply that influence many times over, as Mike touched dozens of other Kitchi staff and campers, and hundreds of high school students in the course of his distinguished career. Mike was a river. Mike was the headwaters. Mike flowed into each of us and lives on in everyone he touched.

John Sandlos teaches Environmental History at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland.

August 27, 1998 — Sitting here at Noganosh Lake . . . have wanted to explore this territory for a long time. Fun to envision on the map for all those years and now being here. It sure is pretty, and it is pristine — no doubt about that. A few hunt camps here and there but really no one. Scraped out the old ranger portage today from Sunny Lake to Noganosh — that was a slog. Hard physical days, pushing the envelope — but feeling alive and well. I know my body and soul likes a full physical day. Just like Elliot Merrick says, each day is so physical and yet the rewards come in those moments of pure glory that one has done it — one is free — one is alive . . .

Three Stories about Mike, or How to Advance a Play Ethic in Life over a Work Ethic

By Bob Henderson

As a physical educator in the mid-1980s, Mike came to my office with a proposition. Rather than write a research term paper with "X" number of sources properly referenced, a length of "X" number of words, and the correct formula-style structure, Mike wanted to use the "opportunity" to work out on paper a philosophy (a few ideas strung together) he'd been "wrestling" with (see Horwood and Raffan in this issue). The catch for me was he didn't want to use any of the required hallmarks of university paper writing. Mike needed the freedom at the outset to go where he envisioned going with ideas on paper. I cannot remember whose idea it was — his or mine — but the deal was made, playfully, that he would write two papers. First, he would write his paper, his way. Then, once satisfied, he would write the paper according to the class requirement, with references, word count, and structure as specified, in a spirit of fairness to other students in the class. He only really cared about the first paper — his paper.¹

This wasn't my only exceptional early moment with Mike. Among my first memories with Mike include me doodling on the guitar as a background sound at a campfire, or was it in the camp lodge? Yes, the lodge. Anyway, I started playing the tune of "Alice's Restaurant" by Arlo Guthrie. Mike stopped where he was in the group conversation and got a bit closer to the guitar and started singing the chorus with me. Now, for those unfamiliar with Alice's Restaurant, this is a talking rag-time/blues anti-war comedy song of 18 minutes length. Mike started in on the talking parts from the beginning and I joyfully caught on and continued to play to support him on the guitar ("ge-tar" as he often called it, I came to learn over time). Mike did the whole 18 minutes. If he missed something, I, for one, didn't catch it. The energy of the room grew with each minute from the, "and they all moved away from me on the bench there" to

the final "You can get anything you want, at Alice's Restaurant." When he was done, the place exploded with celebratory delight. I had a deep calm satisfaction of having been part of something spontaneous and fleeting that I knew I would carry with me for a lifetime. That sudden impromptu playful performance of Alice was over 25 years ago. I have a faint recollection of stepping back from the immediate moment to wonder, "Who is this guy?"



Many months later, I knew much more about Mike (the warm/cold paper writing experience for one). Somehow in our interactions we had started a debate. What is the better water craft for travel in Canada? He maintained it was the kayak and I the canoe. We both secretly knew, I'm sure, it was a silly, but exceedingly fun, interaction. It was the playfulness of it that we liked as we kept it alive. It was the play that mattered. We'd pass in the school hallway and I would put my arms in canoe portaging position to remind him of the superiority of the canoe because of its ease of portaging. Mike would respond with a high brace and we'd share a pretend dirty-look. This went on for awhile with others involved until a challenge mounted and a crescendo moment ensued that was really accelerated playful mayhem.

The challenge was made that, each with a team of four, canoe-better or kayak-better folks would do the physical education student society ten kilometre fun run. You must picture this: that's portage our respective watercraft ten kilometres through campus and many a town sidewalk. He and I loved the playfulness but had we gone too far. Perhaps we both thought so. The police officer who was to marshal the race thought so and banned the boats from the event. As I remember it, the canoeists dispersed to run the race, but the kayak team ran together and waited for me so we might still celebrate together at the finish line. What fun! I remember catching a look of disdain from a senior professor colleague who had run the race with a fast time. Clearly, I had transgressed an unwritten law in professorial-student event interactions. This didn't matter; the play ethic had won the day.

There is hard work in all these stories. Mike wrote two papers. Somehow Mike learned an 18-minute lyric (Google "Alice's Restaurant" and start the learning process yourself). And Mike was prepared to (with others) carry a boat for ten kilometres. But it was not working that matters to these actions. It was play. Play can be hard work. Perhaps it should be hard work. I might have a "wrestle" with that. Play for Mike was a warm feeling, personally satisfying like that term paper and socially engaging like a performance of Alice amongst friends. Play matters in learning and pushes one passionately. That's what kept the canoe/kayak debate flourishing to an absurd but

playful conclusion.

For Mike the gem of life experience figured brilliantly. There is a play ethic to be had. Life lessons abound in revisiting these stories for me and for you, dear reader, who may have known Mike and now deeply miss him or who may not have known Mike and seek out professional insight and learning to advance your work in outdoor education and life. From Mike: it is wise to keep playfulness close. Thanks, Mike!

Endnotes

1. Mike's paper concerned warm versus cold experiences. Warm experiences involve full willing, passionate engagement in the task at hand. An example might be baking an evening bannock having tended the fire just right, with a kneaded dough ball just right, with fine ingredients well purchased. Once more, all are hungry from a good time spent. That bannock is essential now. It is warm in many ways. Cold is a quick rush, in and out, Big Mac, down the hatch with no involvement in the process. At the time he wrote the paper, Mike wanted people to have more warm experiences rather than cold ones. As I look back on it now, this paper was more Mike the philosopher than Mike the educator, though I sense he never made a distinction.

Bob Henderson and Mike Elrick were at McMaster University together in the mid-1980s influencing each other through countless small actions as happens with the best of teacher / student blurring.

June 9, 1999 — Day before the CELP closing ceremony — another year. The year of the amazing winter camp and the straw-bale shed. Honour the kids and let them honour you Mike and let life flow through you as the river flows without knowledge of where it goes — but has the deep sense that where it is going . . . must be the right path. Summer will be here soon. A time to kick back. Be a full time Papa — and soak up some lazy life.

Remembering Mike at MacArthur

By Bert Horwood and James Raffan

In the heyday of the Outdoor and Experiential Education (OEE) Cooperative Program at Queen's University, there were often seven or eight highly qualified applicants for every 24 vacancies. All talented folk, they have gone on to grow experiential education in its many forms, in schools and beyond the bounds of the traditional classroom.

But never during our careful selection process, in the ensuing classes, or in the fine works of graduates played out in unlikely corners on every continent did either of us ever imagine honouring any of these bright able people in death. Sadly, the world is not always kind. Tragedy strikes, and never more cuttingly than in the passing of Mike Elrick.

Bert's Recollections

Mike, like all good teachers, proved early that he had the ability to predict potential problems and also to look back recognizing problems not adequately controlled. He wrestled with these. He worried at them, not in the neurotic sense of worry, but in the sense of thoroughly examining every aspect of the matter. Here are a couple of examples:

Mike's class had discussed using stories in experiential education, especially at night. I argued that night fright stories were not compatible with making people comfortable with the darkness, especially in the bush. We should increase our students' powers, not restrict them, was how the argument went.

That didn't sit well with Mike. He came to my office close to the end of the academic year. He had a job as camp director and was concerned about deeply cherished customs that were part of the camp's culture. The custom involved tales and re-enactments involving a horrible character who was present both in real life and as a ghost. Mike felt that this was getting out of hand and could become harmful.

On the other hand he was aware that staff and senior campers had grown up with the

tradition and would not look kindly on a new director who attempted to suppress the custom. What were the priorities? What was to be done?

Mike and I floated many ideas, to be examined and rejected during the conversation. Some survived for further consideration. No factor was left unexamined. This is what I mean when I characterize Mike's labour as "wrestling." It was the kind of thing that Mike could simply have let alone to take care of itself, or to be handled when and if something bad happened. But Mike saw potential trouble, cared for the best possible experience for his campers and chose to get into the issue, understand it and have a course of action ready.

Mike also knew how to get the best out of his teachers. During our discussion about stories, he put the problem back in my lap. He did not expect me to solve it, but was inviting me to become part of his "wrestling team." Sort of problem-solving by tag team, I guess. That was how Mike worked. Questions, lots of questions; and answers, some answers. The process was enriched with additional voices and enhanced with whiffs of tea and woodsmoke. Mike was a thoughtful guy.

Both Jim and I remember that Mike took a lead role in developing integrated curricula as he brought the Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) to life at Centennial High School in Guelph and how, at an event at Bark Lake, he took a lead in grappling with an abiding problem with integration: namely, that if education is integrated it can't properly be evaluated in terms of independent subjects. Evaluation of students' work must surely be compatible with the intentions and delivery pattern of the course. No one had a solution to that problem then, although teachers found ways, some very creative, to bridge the gap or live with the disconnect.

Again, Mike displayed the same thorough and tenacious approach to the issue.

He listened, he thought, he argued, he invited more. He was content, in the end, to leave the question open as there was no clear way out. Yet everyone present felt that we had practiced our profession with care and energy, following Mike's lead.

Jim's Recollections

My first impression of Mike was by way of a paper he had written for Bob Henderson at McMaster University. Mike had distilled two approaches to life (and winter camping) into one with heat and one without. The paper was about "warm" versus "cold" approaches to camping but it was apparent in the piece that what he was really talking about was something more profound than the temperature of your skin at midnight. "Warm" living and camping was about a life integrated with nature, but "cold" was more detached from the essential processes of life. Meeting him at his interview for OEE at Queen's University, my intrigue grew.

It turned out, when asked about his achievements as an elite kayaker, that Mike had done quite a bit of what Bert calls "wrestling" before he'd even applied to the OEE program. Instead of pursuing a trajectory in sport that would certainly lead to international competition and perhaps even a place on the Olympic team, Mike had decided that what he really wanted to do was, in the language of his essay, teach young people how to live "warm" with nature. I remember being impressed that a man of his age (his early 20s) had made such an intentional life turn.

Since those OEE days, I watched as Mike became the Director of Camp Kitchikwana and then moved on to Centennial Collegiate Vocational Institute. I visited his programs, traveled with him, and joined him at conferences and festivals. In each instance, I was amazed and reassured by his enduring vision and his quiet determination to see that his students would be agents of warmth in a cold, acquisitive and increasingly disconnected world.

But most often, when I talked to Mike, or met his students, or crossed paths with him on the

winter trails of Algonquin Park, I marvelled at the balance he was always able to strike in his work, his home life with Heather and the children, and the totally sustainable (or so it seemed) way in which the whole package came together in one remarkable teacher's life. Often, as people would ask about the secret of integrated teaching or of a life in experiential education, I'd send them to spend time with Mike. He was an example for me, an exemplar for us all.

And now he's gone. Because of the way he created CELP and Headwaters, we have no doubt that in the fine hands of his successors these programs will continue to thrive and evolve. It is his absence, as a presence in the field, that is going to take some coming to terms with. Mike never called for special attention but he commanded a lot of space, a lot of respect, in education and in our hearts. Perhaps the best tribute would be to try to follow his example, which, in itself, is probably a full-time job.

Bert Horwood, retired but not retiring, is based in Kingston. James Raffan, adventurer and teacher, keeps one foot in Seeley's Bay and stomps across the globe with the other.



Journeys of Mike and Wayland: Reflections on a Friend and Mentor

By Paul Gifford

I write this having recently returned from a Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) winter camping trip. When I arrived in the parking lot at 5 pm, it was empty; the CELP group had gone in about midday. I was heading in on my own and would meet them at their first camp. It was quiet and beautiful — the blue light of the late afternoon in late February. And snow. I took a deep breath.

One thing about journeys is that you move. You keep moving. It's highly therapeutic. I couldn't stand around: I had about a half hour of good light and an hour's snowshoe, so I had to get moving. I loaded my toboggan and I stepped into my snowshoes. That felt really good. I grabbed the haul line and began to walk. I took another deep breath and thought of Mike. Walking and thinking; the trail and a story.

Mike was a close friend, and he was also my mentor. He helped me find my way into teaching and he drew me into traditional winter camping. My first winter camping experience was with Mike 16 years ago in Killbear Provincial Park, near Parry Sound. Mike was thinking up CELP way back then — even before then. Mike could see so far ahead. I'm sure he was writing about CELP (or what would become CELP) in his journal on that trip.

It was late January 1994 and exam week at Centennial Collegiate Vocational Institute — a week between semesters. (I bet this is when Mike got the idea to do his winter pre-trip for CELP and Headwaters during exam week. He's done that ever since.) On the 1994 trip, Mike and a mutual friend, Britta Little, and I had added an element to our adventure that inspired observer Jim Raffan to call that trip "our pilgrimage." On the way to Killbear Park we visited Wayland Drew, author of the novel *Halfway Man*. This book was a big deal for Mike and me. It's part of CELP. We read

from it on the most recent winter trip. Mike reread *Halfway Man* for the last time when he was in the hospital last summer, when he was in the process of being diagnosed with cancer. Understandably, he was having trouble focusing on reading anything, and so Heather brought him the one book she thought he could settle in with. It worked.

Mike first read *Halfway Man* when he was a student of Bob Henderson's at McMaster University.¹ Mike loved the book, and he loaned me his copy in the summer of 1993. I recall reading the last few chapters in a tree overlooking the Eramosa River in Guelph.² Needless to say, I connected. Sometime between then and January of 1994, Mike and I planned the Killbear trip. Well, Mike planned the trip and roped me into it. He wanted to test out some ideas and he needed some help. He was forever doing this, dragging his friends into his experiments. Britta and I didn't realize just how experimental this one was.

Killbear is near Parry Sound. I knew that Wayland Drew lived in Bracebridge. So my idea was that we could get up really early and drive from Guelph to Bracebridge, visit Wayland, then drive to Killbear Provincial Park and make camp. I didn't know Wayland, I just called him up and told him how much I loved his book and then asked if we could drop in and see him. He said, "Sure, come on up." So we did. I must say that Mike was just as excited about this as I was.

We arrived at Wayland's house midday, and he and his wife welcomed us in and served us a massive lasagne for lunch. Mike noticed that Wayland removed his watch when he sat down at the dinner table. Mike noticed stuff like that. The watch removal was a gesture of hospitality: stay as long as you want; time is not of the essence here. We stayed for three hours. We talked about a lot of things — the book, the trail, canoe trips, Lake Superior,



teaching. We talked and talked. Wayland Drew was not only a gifted writer; he was also a gracious host and a good listener.³ We would have stayed for another three hours, but we decided we'd better hit the road because we had to get to the park and pitch the tent; and Mike had just admitted that he wasn't "completely" sure about how the tent worked — an understatement as it turned out. He said that daylight would be good, but there would also be an almost full moon.

I had never done any kind of winter camping, and had no idea what Mike meant by "traditional" winter camping. Meanwhile, he'd never done it either, and he had borrowed all the equipment from Bob Henderson, with verbal instructions on how to pitch the tent, what wood to burn, and how to manage the stove. Mike later joked that we were like tourists renting canoes in Stratford. Except that this was Killbear Provincial Park in January: it was 30 below and dark and we were staying overnight in a tent he'd never set up. But Mike, in his own way (I'm sure many readers will understand), had a handle on it. And we got through the night. We more than got through it. We revelled in it. By the woodstove, by candlelight, we laughed and told stories and Mike read from *Halfway Man*. We fell asleep. Mike stoked the fire that night. He was a good stoker.

I didn't know it then, but Mike and I were making a pivotal connection between the book and the trail, between narrative and landscape. Mike developed that connection

into an art. My favourite passage from *Halfway Man* reminds me of Mike:

*And as his tale swirled in some dam of memory or imagination, what he told me became landscape and narrative both. I think I know now what he was doing. He was telling both me and the land into being. He was teaching me that the real world was not substance, but story, that tales contain the only world we'll ever really know. And that behind the haven of our tales lies a great mystery. (p. 25)*⁴

I read that passage to the CELP students on our most recent winter trip. While I read it a big, healthy-looking Grey Jay landed on a tree beside us. Mike really like Grey Jays. And if you read *Halfway Man*, you'll know what I was thinking when that Grey Jay landed.

The copy of *Halfway Man* I read from on the CELP trip was the very same copy that Mike had "loaned me" 16 years ago. It had been on the trip to see Wayland Drew. Mike read from it that night in the tent. I asked Mike if I could keep that copy and buy him a new one. He said, "Giff, I'd be honoured if you kept it. I'll get myself another one." When Mike used the "H-word" (honour), it was always a good sign.

I've taken that book out on almost every trip I've been on since — snowshoeing, canoeing, hiking — upwards of 50 trips into many places Mike loved — Algonquin Park, Magnetawan River country, Georgian Bay,

and Lake Superior, where the story is set. Landscape and narrative, both. The book looks like where it has been: It is tattered and dirty; there are dead bugs stuck to some of the pages, and several solid coffee stains. There are many dog-eared pages. On the CELP trip, Janet Dalziel read the story of Many Arms (p. 119) to the students as a bedtime story, which is an essential ritual of the winter tent. I chimed in, playing the role of Many Arms — “I’ll take that! That’s mine.” Most of the students fell asleep during the story, a reflection of a good day on the trail, not a bad story. I blew out the beeswax candle (Mike used only beeswax candles), and set up to stoke the stove for the night. I put a big piece of hardwood in the stove, lay back and thought of Mike.

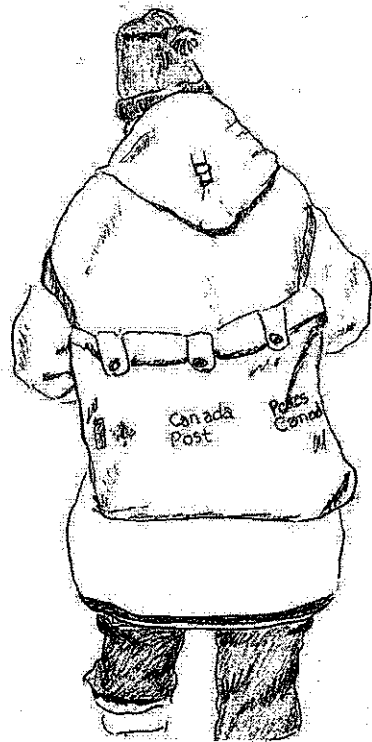
In the hospital I read him the three winter stories from *Halfway Man*, one of which was the story of Many Arms. For the first story, he was awake. He kept nodding and chiming in. At the end of the story, I said, “And that is the first story.”

“The first of three,” Mike said

“And there is no fourth?” I said.

“The fourth is yet to happen,” Mike said.

I read the second and third stories to Mike



when he was unconscious in his final days. I don’t know if he heard me. I had hoped that the fourth story would be one of recovery, or at least an extended life. But it was not to be, and we don’t know where that story is. That last story was part of the journey yet to be taken.

I look back on my career and my life and I find Mike on the trail, just off to the side, because it was my trail, not his. But he had helped guide me. In his wonderful, gentle, artful and affirming way, he’d guided. I see him there: he’s grinning and nodding approval. His blue eyes are lit up. He’s alive.

Walking out of the park at the end of the trip, I felt good. The trail had worked its magic. I’d spent a lot of time with Mike, and his spirit was alive in that place and in this remarkable program. We can do this, you know. We can carry on: in part, because we have to, for Mike is gone. But we are here, and many of us are here, in part, because of him. For that we can be grateful. For him we should keep doing what we do, we should keep moving. For Mike.

Endnotes

1. It should be said that Bob was a mentor for Mike. We choose our mentors, and I know Mike felt that it was Bob who helped him clarify his ideas around becoming a teacher, and of how outdoor education could figure into it. Imagine if Mike had not taken that course from Bob?
2. That was Mike’s river. He grew up within walking distance of it, and as a teenager he carried his racing kayak to the river from his house. Mike set up a slalom course on the river where he trained for hundreds of hours.
3. Wayland Drew died about 12 years ago of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) — another untimely passing, another tragedy. But his work (and that book in particular) lives on.
4. Editor’s note: Paul is sharing this quote from memory.

Paul Gifford is the Education Manager of Evergreen Brickworks. The Brickworks is an Urban Environmental Centre, in Toronto, opening in September 2010.

Remembering Mike

Following Mike's Blazes: Thoughts from the CELP and Headwaters Trail

By Janet Dalziel and Katie Gad



The students are out on solo, and as we sit here in the winter tent, flames from good hardwood dance in the stove and the kettle shakes to a boil. Looking around us, we recognize the things that Mike loved and take stock of all we have learned in teaching with him. "This is gold," Mike said, when he first saw the potential of winter camping for students. It was a perfect example of his visionary capacity to formulate program. Teaching students to swing an axe for the first time or sing a song around the fire, watching connection to nature form and deepen, self-confidence grow, and the group bond were all "gold" to Mike. His energy and love of sharing these experiences was big. He had a largeness of heart and a generosity of spirit that was remarkable. He was a constant mentor, so often at the side of a student or co-worker affirming, "Ah, great bannock" or "Just look at that sled fly!" He shared his enthusiasm for the simple and durable old technologies of canoe, snowshoe, wool and axe. His corrections were gentle and often humorous: "That wood pile could be just a little higher . . . so two short guys could shake hands over it." His presence is felt in these refrains and in this place as much as his absence.

In his 14 years teaching the Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) and Headwaters, over 500 students have passed through these programs. Mike wove together outdoor education, environmental

education, place-based education, and praxis, amongst other pedagogies. His design of programs was brilliant: it was almost as if he looked at the teenage world and the environmental crises they would be faced with and asked "What will they need to feel, know and do in order to be leaders tomorrow?" Answers were to be found in the experiences he offered, and although he never forced lessons, time and again students came away in awe of the natural world, feeling a stronger sense of self and community, experiencing a new awareness of environmental issues, and possessing a host of new skills.

Mike had a keen, intuitive sense of the educational potential that lay at the heart of certain activities. Recognizing a new possibility, he would launch a new project with enthusiasm and an experimental sense of adventure. In Headwaters, Mike explored the potential of "local food" with his students. Tracking the number of kilometres that food traveled before becoming part of a meal, students learned the meaning of a "locavore lunch." He decided that "local" should include "on-site" and an organic garden at Headwaters followed. The garden demanded manure and as he was on a "permaculture" kick, Mike built a chicken coop — purely for the poop! (The eggs, he realized, were an added bonus.) As he might have said, "Ah, chickens! Fertile ground for learning as well as for tomatoes." A typical "Elrick moment"

September 17, 2000 — Magnetewan River, Fall CELP trip. Just above Thirty Dollar Rapid on the upstream rapid campsite. Another glorious fall day. Absolutely clear sky and mist rising from the water. Fall tripping does not get much finer. Morning fire, coffee a brew. Got up with the morning star and saw Orion's belt low in the horizon at 4 am; winter time is coming. The (Bill Mason) tent, the tent, the tent is allowing that to happen. The views keep me in touch with what I am here for: the view, the stars, the storms, the sunrises. Ah . . . the tent.

ensued on "chicken transfer day," when the principal made an announcement over the PA system to request that, "the staff member who left chickens in the staff room please remove them immediately." The chickens were transported to the site that day on the school bus — one of the many contributions of our CELP bus driver, Darryl. June of 2009 saw the locavore theme catch up with Mike as he found himself forced to live without coffee, having pledged, along with his students, to follow a 100-mile diet for a two-week period. This was really taking education to "the next level" as Mike called it.

With a keen eye for the potential of experiences to nurture and expand spirit, Mike worked into the program ceremonies or rituals missing from our broader culture: a tea ceremony for appreciating a place; a balsam ceremony to induct students as travelers of the winter trail; the making of paddles, carved by students out of wood harvested from the property, earned as a symbol of accomplishing the solo. These in turn would become the stuff of stories to teach from. Mike was always sharing stories of the past, of himself, and of his students that seemed to carry a weight of meaning and spirit. His own connection to the land and the stories that went with it poured out of him — he invited you into the story to take from it whatever seemed to fit.

Somehow, Mike also managed to find time in his years of building wanigans, learning about maple syrup production, and managing the Earthkeeper program to chair, for eight years, a boardwide Environmental Issues Committee, sit on the Centennial field trip

committee, coach volleyball, and help half a dozen other integrated programs across the province with their start up. He was generous with his time and unfailingly supportive in his mentorship of colleagues and numerous student teachers. He practiced what he preached, and in doing so inspired students and staff alike. On rainy days his yellow rain slicker would form a puddle on the school floor as he removed his bike helmet and declared with a grin, "It's a beaut out there today!" before he headed to the office to join the espresso club. His presence was always positive. Community formed around Mike: he didn't build it forcefully; he simply, always, made the space for it to emerge.

As we continue Mike's work and begin making it our own, we find ourselves supported by the network he created of volunteers and resource people. His neighbour came in last week to teach our grade 12's how to make moccasins. Our bus driver has arranged our tree planting dates. Mike's snow walker friends are camped just down the marsh from us, having cleared the trails ahead and made sure that we have "good wood." With help we will continue to pass the essence of Mike's stories on and help students to find their own stories. Mike always encouraged each of us to find our own path, but his mentorship and the blazes he has left to help us along on our journey are an invaluable gift that we will always be grateful for.

Janet Dalziel and Katie Gad teach CELP and Headwaters in Guelph. More information on the programs can be found at www.celp.info

Remembering Mike

Mike's Guiding Warmth

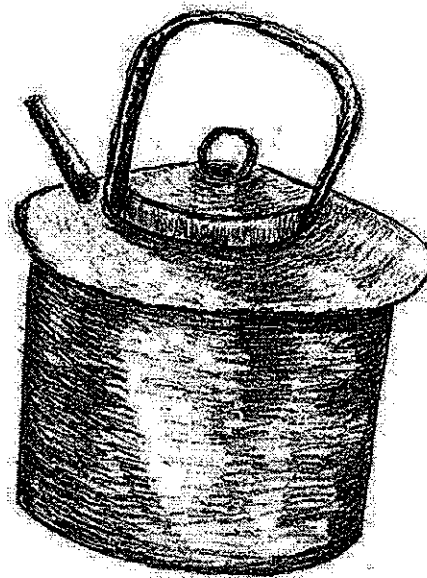
By Linda Leckie

I hear the chop of an axe a little way through the trees. We are going to boil up. The sweet oriental scent of tea and the feel of bread between my teeth sweeps over me like a dizziness. The fire leaps at the base of a big spruce and we whisk snow from our moccasins and leggings as we sink before it like worshippers. (Merrick, 1933, p. 159)

Mike Elrick knew how to stay warm. He loved to wrap himself from head to toe in wool; I picture Mike as a wool-clad moccasin-footed snow walker twisting into lampwick harnesses with his trail axe looped through his belt. Mike looked forward to winter and welcomed a drop in the mercury — the lower the better! He loved the physical work of life on the winter trail and never stopped moving long enough to get cold. If he felt chilled he would simply quicken his pace, add another layer of his beloved wool or stop for a “boil up.”

Mike was always ready for a hot drink; holding a tin cup full of tea or a large steaming mug of “good” coffee in his hands provided much bodily warmth. One cold February night as we stood by the water hole watching the stars come out, Mike looked up at the Big Dipper and quoted Bert Blake, the trapper in the book *True North*: “I wish’t she was full of tea” (Merrick, 1933, p. 11). The act of making and preparing the morning java or the afternoon “high tea” heated Mike’s heart and soul. I can hear the famous holler letting every sleepy head in camp know that the first of several pots of coffee was ready and I can see his special little teapot whistling on the wood stove.

Mike had a self-professed devotion to a wood fire and he shared his spiritual connection to wood openly with others. One of Mike’s favourite childhood memories was sitting on the ledge of an open fireplace after a bath on a cold winter’s evening. While the logs crackled Mike and his brothers would toast their pyjamas on the screen before bedtime. Mike said that what he loved most about the winter



tent was the ability to hang a clothesline and let the heat from the woodstove dry out damp garments. This was his way of reliving a fond childhood memory.

Mike also loved the physical act of working with wood. He once told me how moved he was reading the book, *Paddle My Own Canoe*, that shares the life story of Algonquin Park guide Esther Keyser. Like Esther’s husband Joe, Mike loved to saw, chop, split and stack wood. Tears welled up in both of our eyes as we remembered the passage where Joe, weakened with congestive heart disease, asks Esther to bring him his axe. Despite having to rest often to catch his breath, Joe needed to split kindling; it was his way of saying goodbye to his life in the woods.

In addition to keeping himself warm, Mike was passionate about creating and sharing that warmth with others. He provided a cozy loving home heated with wood for his family, he kindled all of his friendships with deep affection and anyone who met him would instantly feel the warmth radiating from his signature smile. He warmed the hearts and minds of educators with his published writings that shared his passion for teaching

outdoor and environmental education. His commitment to traditional camping principles and philosophies created an endearing glow in the memories of his students. Mike loved a campfire and the mysterious way it brought people together to circle around the dancing flames to share in the warmth and light.

On the first day of a six-day Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) winter snowshoe ramble through Algonquin Park, I overheard Mike telling his students about the virtues of wood as a heat source and how it would keep them warm on this trip in four ways. The obvious three ways, Mike told them, were that the fire would heat the tent, dry their clothing and enable them to have hot food and drinks. The fourth way was that the physical work required to collect, saw and split the wood would create an inner warmth. To Mike, the educational value of the traditional winter travel experience was first and foremost the physical; other dimensions of a participant's being would come out and be known to them as a result of the physical experience. This was Mike's story and now it could be the students' story too.

To Mike, making a home in the winter woods with the proper skills, equipment and frame of mind was a wonderful experience. Living in a wall tent enabled his students to socialize with their tent mates; Mike often called it the best and most effective "floating classroom" he ever taught in. The experience was about forming relationships and making connections to self, each other and the land. On the winter trip the students hauled their toboggans upstream. Along the way they learned the skills to be safe and comfortable. At the source they marvelled at the magic of the natural world. They returned with a renewed sense of purpose and self. Mike came to know himself in relation to a place and he shared that important way of knowing with his students.

Mike referred to himself as a "true dweller of place." He belonged in nature. He was not a visitor or a tourist and he did not tread lightly — he let the land touch him in return. He appreciated the fresh smell of a balsam

floor, the warming glow of the tent stove, and the superior qualities of moose and elk hide moccasins. These examples of relatedness demanded that he engage directly with the Algonquin landscape. When Mike got his new Egyptian cotton anorak he delighted in saying "I realize that I am fully biodegradable and if I died on the trail this would be my kind of no trace camping."

When Mike returned to his winter tent at sundown with a stick of dry tamarack, he saw this experience as being "of a spiritual nature." As a true dweller of place he was able to see the land with elements of sacredness. This is one of Mike's lasting legacies. He felt that not having a sacred place was the missing link in effective teaching for the environment. Mike shared his love for a place with others to inspire them to find their sacred place in nature. The fires of environmental education will burn brightly towards hopeful solutions and new beginnings when we teach and learn from the perspective of what we know about ourselves in relation to the places we love and call home.

Au Large! When I hear that word . . . I see the glow of firelight dancing through the woods and I smell the soothing odour of balsam-boughs piled deep for a woodland bed" (Van Dyke cited in Keyser, 2003, p. 236).

Au Large, Mike.

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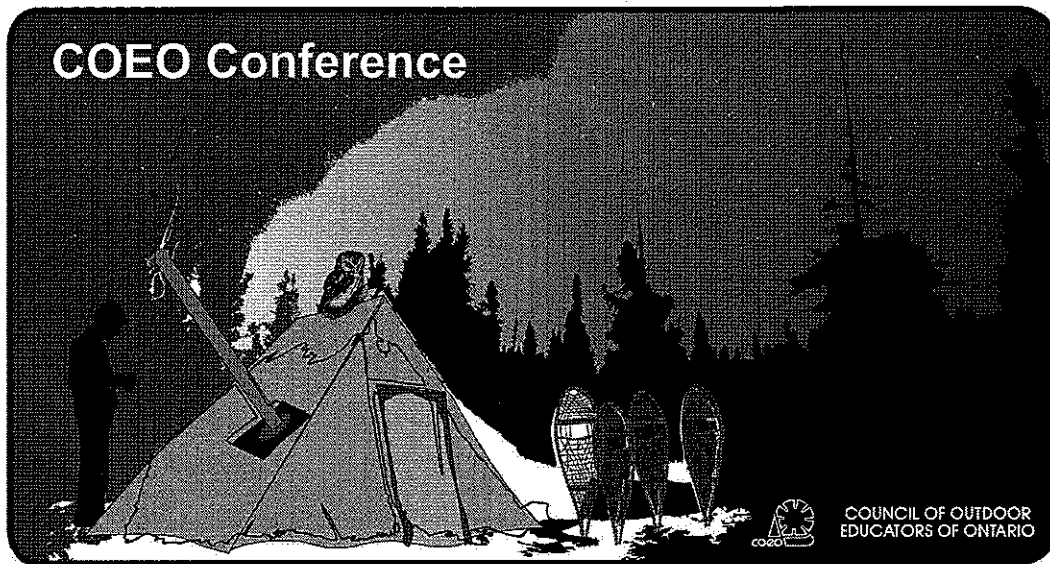
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Linda Leckie was one of Mike's many kindred spirits of the winter trail. Every time she looks up at the Big Dipper she wishes it was full of tea and that her friend was beside her at the water hole getting a few more miles out of that joke.

The Gathering

COEO Conference



Learning to Live Well on This Land: Acknowledging Traditional Territories, Engaging Intercultural Dialogues, and Fostering Nature Interconnections

**Sept 24–26, 2010
Kinark Outdoor Centre**

As outdoor and environmental educators in Ontario we are living and teaching on Aboriginal traditional territory. This is respectful and appropriate for us all to acknowledge. As population increases and places become more culturally diverse, intercultural dialogue is critical to learning how to live well together on this land.

To reconnect our selves, experiences, technologies and teachings with the natural world that sustains us, we must re-imagine and re-learn how to live well in a place.

In what ways can we engage creatively with the natural world?

How might we honour calls from Aboriginal communities to respectfully foreground Indigenous ways of knowing?

How can we come to know place-appropriate ways of living, learning and teaching on traditional territories?

COEO's 2010 conference intends to engage intercultural dialogues to work towards acknowledging traditional territories and building respectful relationships between all beings — in a common effort to learn how to live well on this land.

We are currently looking for presenters to present and/or give workshops within this theme area. Once presenters have been secured, more specific workshop and presentation sub-themed streams within this larger theme will be established.

Interested presenters please contact Josh Berger at joshuacberger@gmail.com and Scott McCormack at ws_mccormack@yahoo.com

Tramping Trail with Elroy in the Early Years of CELP

By Karen O'Krafka

I am sipping tea on the eve of a week-long winter trip — over a decade since I first tramped trail with Mike Elrick into the winter wilderness. This evening holds for me the same electricity that it did in 1997 — anxiety and excitement — when Elroy guided a motley crew of teens (his gang) into the woods and frozen waters of Algonquin Park. With his wealth of wisdom, Mike carefully crafted those frozen days of prospector tents, baking bannock, singing, solos, star gazing and frozen-fingered guitar groove into the first few steps of a semester-long journey. Our journey meandered through winter, spring and summer, and explored a rich geography of life that failed to penetrate our school walls. We were intrepid, exploring the confluence of community, environment and leadership, and gaining invaluable life skills to meet the challenge of any life expedition. This journey was the Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP).

Whatever the brochure might have portrayed of tidy toboggans and well-baked bread, this semester-long program wasn't just a casual wander through the wilderness. CELP proved to be a challenging expedition into uncharted territories of communication, conflict resolution, teaching and learning. There were community day cooking disasters, days when we thought the "rain" — a brilliant metaphor for conflict resolution circles replete with rain stick — would never end, and even the blurred boundary between the new sense of self we felt emerging through our experiences and the familiar life of high school we greeted upon our return from Crief Hills every afternoon. Mike was an anchor and an ear through all of our tumult. He had patience and passion to match all of our angst. He spoke to us as though he were sharing our journey. This wasn't old hat for him; he was in the immediacy of our experience, but brought good long-burning hard wood to temper our sometimes furious fires. Whenever we tripped on our impatience or haste, Mike gently reminded us of the gifts of time for learning these hard lessons. He said it takes ten years to truly learn something. Our impatient adolescence could hardly conceive of ten

years, but time flowed down the Speed River and I end up here, writing about his legacy.

I thought it might be interesting to have perspectives on the early years of CELP, but realize that Mike's qualities are indelible. I'm sure that these qualities resonate with who he has always been as a teacher and as a person; there seemed to be no separation between his roles, and no wavering from his foundations of integrity and authentic living. Mike taught who he was — not from his intellect but from his heart. He taught from his family, his breadth of skills and his passions. He would share stories of his young son Nick, sing his favorite songs, tell of epics on the trail and share both the greatest successes and most difficult challenges of his professional life in rich detail. There was always a timely anecdote to enhance our experience. He was a musical maven, a bread baker, and so many more marvelous things all in the same breath, and it seemed that he wanted to teach the richness of life, not just academics.

These memories have informed so many experiences of continued growth and learning for me, constantly encouraging me to live well. Some have taken on a dreamlike quality, or grown into myths in my mind. Where memories blend together into the soft blur of time, the clarity and effervescence of my journal has endured. It remembers the textures and expressions of CELP 1997 — a brief moment shared with Mike, like so many moments had with so many students, on the winter trail or biking through bioregions. Mike encouraged this documenting of experience, and his penned notes in the margins of my entries challenged thoughts and encouraged reflection. With a few pen strokes he could validate our struggles and invite us to continue. He would write: "Yes!", "great stuff seeing the positive," "sounds powerful, have to chat more," and "we journeyed forward that day" — and we knew he meant it. Authenticity was at the fore of how he interacted with us. On one entry where I debated future paths, he wrote about how he had applied to medical school years back. How were we so fortunate that

he chose the path of educator and mentor instead?

He chose this path, and was constantly learning and fine-tuning the program. He shared that learning with us and never obscured his mistakes. We all learned from those early challenges and his learning enriched ours. One epic from our semester was our winter camp food boxes. These containers might often be a footnote in a winter expedition, but not for us. Mike was experimenting on our trip, and as with all experiments, this one had an unexpected outcome. We had cardboard containment for our food, and anyone who has watched the interaction of cardboard and the elements knows that water always wins. But what if we added spar varnish to our cardboard boxes? Surely what works for boats and paddles and snowshoes would waterproof cardboard as well. Yes, our food was dry and contained, but varnish vapours pervaded our senses for an entire week — lingering in our oatmeal, our lunchtime bagels and gorp, and revisiting us constantly in well-varnished burps. Some ideas are better than others, and there was learning. The best part? Mike had the humility

to admit his error, and endured constant ribbing — in fact our semester was lubricated by the varnish incident. And no one was better at reminiscing than Elroy.

Epics also hid in the woods around our log cabin classroom. What an experience to tap trees and boil down sap as thank yous for our numerous guests, and sticky joy for our Earthkeeper students. Sometimes our efforts boiled over; once they boiled dry, scorching our labour into the bottom of our fire-heated pans. Mike shared our frustration at the loss of a big batch. We cursed and kicked the ground, and then we scrubbed the pan and began again. We learned to persevere, and enjoy the sweetness of hard-earned, sometimes burned success.

And no one celebrated our successes, big and small, more than our mentor, Mike. I will tramp trail this week to the rhythm of his songs and in thanks for his gifts.

Karen O'Krafka is a teacher candidate in the Queen's University Outdoor and Experiential Education program, and is a huge fan of integrated high school programs.

March 8, 2004 — I was having coffee this morning at my morning meditation station in Cedar Lodge and it came to me that if the grade 12 program is going to fly, it is going to have to be in semester two. Start with the winter trip, maybe go a half week later and then finish with the canoe trip the old way — the Eramosa way. Start out at Edgewood, but then head upstream for several days, then back to Guelph to meet the parents at the Boathouse for a potluck supper. Could cut the cherry trees in February and have them dried in the solar kiln for May/June. Make paddles from the land to paddle on the land. Our home and native land.

Just as I was thinking all this through a large broad-winged hawk landed in a cedar across from me. It was huge. The blue jays were trying to scare it away with their call. I went out to see it closer. Beautiful. It simply had the feeling of good medicine. A sign from the great spirit — and just good energy all around. Not to say this grade 12 thing will happen, but things feel good.

Remembering Mike

Mike's Loop

For Heather, Nick and Meaghan

Just back from Mike's memorial,
Emotions tender and unresolved,
Comforted by stories and tributes
from loving family and friends.
We are awakened to the greater breadth and depth
of Mike's life, through them, their remembrances.

We need to gather once more,
To feel expansive and alive to all of this.
To be high on an oak ridge granite outcropping
boiling our tea pail and raising tin mugs
to Mike's memory, in the early winter sun,
looking out over the land.

Recollections abound of shared trails,
Comings and goings, hopes and dreams,
camps, wonderful camps! Imagine
all Mike's years of packateers in a great long line,
shod in ash and babiche, hand-sewn, beaded moccasins,
wool from stem to gudgeon, plaid clad.

Snow walkers swinging out on the sleigh haul,
grubstaked toboggans torquing, serpentine, winding
through rugged Algonquin highlands.
Young hearts feel the pulse of wintry hinterlands,
comfortable, at home in the great north woods,
finding their way, living with simple self-reliance.

Mike is their guide, their trail breaker,
stirring imaginations with the richness of tradition.
Listening, caring, humouring, inspiring, dancing around weather,
he coaxes them into the unknown.
They will never be quite the same again,
parameters of awareness stretched and shifted forever.

Rituals abound; tea-swilling, bannock-inhaling, trail-side mug-ups
a dress rehearsal for camp, our woodland home.
Like the Cree or Innu, journeys tally, not in days travelled,
but in camps where food, drink and rest restore.
Songs, skits, cooking adventures, 'True North' readings,
then deep sleep . . . dreams.

Much care goes into this wilderness home,
an assemblage of cotton tent, tin stove, brush, poles and pickets.

The crackling fire is both hearth and heart
of candlelight-reflected-off-white-wall-snuggess.
We ease into repose, our just desserts
for a day of snowshoe rambling o'er winter trails.

Mike and I share dreams of maps and possibilities,
have caught glimpses of marshes and meadows,
frozen gifts to the winter wayfinder amid rugged uplands.
Like old-time loggers' horses, we too are flesh and bone,
teasing trails from landscapes with a keen eye to grade.
Trails that seem to flow organically across the great wide world.

The scouting has gone well,
a long day of switching off breaking done,
boil-up along the way, blue sky/bald eagle gorp stop,
putting us back to camp at dark.
We are hopeful of closing the loop,
this last connection a promising challenge.

Warmth envelops two weary scouts,
the tin stove chugging to life.
Then supper, relaxed conversation, tea.
We drift off, moonlit tree and smoke plume tracings
shadow the white tent roof above balsam beds.
A tree snaps in the cold.

What good times we shared, Mike!
Perhaps Nordic instincts and sensibilities hint at Norwegian genes,
as if Nansen, Amundsen and Ingstad were looking over your shoulder.
Passionate for snowy forests, wolves, moose, pine martins, grey jays,
You exuded joy that comes of the freedom
of a simple life, well-lived.

Blueskybrilliantssnowdarkgreenconiferdeepcoldperfection,
for 'Headwaters' first circumnavigation of 'Mike's Loop.'
Like so many caribou, they filter into the 'Long Trail' marsh,
bringing sound and motion to my solitary camp.
Mike emerges from the herd, big smile, apologizing
for busting up my solitude, inviting me into their spirited circle.

There was always the fire and the tea.
And Mike, with his big smile, inviting you in.

— Bob Davis, Maple Lake, Winter 2010

