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Photography and Poetry in Children's Literature: An Illustrated Journey Through Environment and Place

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SIT Study Abroad

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**Photography and Poetry in Children's Literature: An Illustrated Journey
Through Environment and Place.**

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*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Australia: Sustainability and
Environmental Action, SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2011*

ISP Ethics Review

This ISP paper by _____Hannah Crews_____ (student) has
been reviewed by _Peter Brennan_____ (Academic Director)
and does/does not* conform to the ethical standards of the local community and the
ethical and academic standards outlined in the SIT student and AD handbooks.

*This paper does not conform to standards for the following reasons:

Academic Director: Peter Brennan

Signature:

Program: Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action

Date: December 8th 2011

Abstract

This creative independent study project began as a photo documentation of the environment along a two-week hiking trip on the Great South West Walk in Victoria. It developed into a lesson in experiential education in nature and environmental education through children's literature that ultimately produced a photographically illustrated children's story called *The Future of Cobboboonee*. The story, written in poetry, takes the main characters on an adventure into an unfamiliar world in search of more space for expanding their population. Ultimately, they learn lessons of sustainability and conclude that they must conserve their home, for it is all they have.

I used experiential education to learn for myself what it means to live away from society; to gather an outside perspective on the direction we are taking our planet. I documented the experience with a Nikon D80 digital SLR camera and three lenses. When I returned from my trip, I edited the photos to create the illustrations for my children's story, which would establish a setting and mood for the story. The story is told through poetry that reads easily and humorously.

The book is intended to be used as a tool for environmental education for children as well as adults. It draws on the existing body of work by Australian authors and explores the potential for further developments into the field.

ISP Topic Codes

208 Early Childhood Education

537 Environmental Studies

232 Environmental Education

Subject Keywords

Bush walking, photography, poetry, sustainability, environmental education

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Goals and Justification of Study

I created a children's storybook about a species confronting overpopulation in their finite world and learning to live within their means of natural capital. *The Future of Cobboboonee* is written in rhyme and illustrated with digital photography.

The greatest theme of my story is sustainability. My goal was to create something that could deliver the message both beautifully and assertively, without marginalizing my audience with blame or politics. I chose a children's story as the skeleton for the substance of my project, my photography of nature, because it provided a proper frame of the principles of sustainability to hold up the imagery. The genre has immense potential for social change: it appeals to children on the brink of their journey into environmental education, holds universal relevance and significance, and could be reached by an international, multigenerational audience.

My project was built from three essential pillars in the process: embarking on the Great South West Walk, a 15 day hike through the bush; structuring the story and photographing along the way; editing photos and writing poetry to create the book. Each pillar had its own purpose and justification, each related to sustainability in a unique way.

The first portion of my independent study project required me to plan and undertake a challenging journey of physical and mental pursuits, engulfed within the womb of Mother Earth. Rather than fighting nature by hiding behind walls of brick and conditioned air, I wanted to intimately experience the elements. As long as we view nature as something to be tamed, something to be broken, we will never truly comprehend the everlasting consequences of our destruction of it. Recognizing our own insignificance and the great, permeating power of this planet teaches us to respect and admire nature.

Making my way through forest, river, pasture, desert, and cliff with a silent partner of 25 kilograms riding piggyback the whole way forced me to use my body and mind in harmony, rather than independently. In an overly intellectual world where we no longer have to use our bodies for work, we have become soft and fearful of the elements of nature. We let our bodies lie useless while our minds go numb working tediously, and our souls are left to fend for themselves under the crushing weight of a nine to five cubicle job.

I set out to intentionally remove myself from all of the complexities and necessities of modern life: from the shopping centers, the billboards, the traffic, the

consumption, the waste. The people of the first world have become enslaved by our addiction to consumption. We are suffering from obesity and serious health effects of over-nutrition. We are burying ourselves in debt in a frantic race to keep up with the Joneses. We are killing ourselves with the stress and constant headache of never getting enough sleep, exercise, love, or freedom of thought. Even more so, our demand for cheap energy, raw materials, and disposable labor is destroying our planet and causing serious social injustices around the world.

The dizzying cycle of obsession in the upper classes to make more money and buy more things has created a life that is inherently unsustainable and unethical. Stepping off the hamster wheel and evaluating it from an outside perspective allowed me to grasp the elementary importance of a simple, sustainable life so that I may relate that understanding to others. My journey provided the basis for all ideas, words, and illustrations in the book that I created.

The second pillar of my study was the collection of photographs of the natural environments we experienced, and the story ideas that unraveled along the way. My goal here was to formulate the basis for an illustrated story that would foster ideas of sustainability, sense of place, and land care ethic, while maintaining an imaginative and creative disposition.

The piece was written from the perspective of a non-human race. Children from my background grow up with a general perception that the world was created for humans to exploit and conquer. We are taught from a young age, both directly and indirectly, that nature is something we use, that it is something that exists for us. In this piece I wanted to write from a non-anthropocentric view, in order to show the importance of habitat and biodiversity for creatures of whose existence we may not even be aware.

The third pillar of my project was the post-walk editing and production of the book. The work I did over the last half of the ISP period was ultimately responsible my final tangible product. My time spent editing and writing tied all of the loose ideas, raw photographs, and disconnected lessons of sustainability together to produce a single, succinct product that balances aesthetic appeal and educational value.

Introduction and Background

Nature photographers have a unique responsibility in the role of mainstream environmental awareness. Like a journalist on a mission to bring home a message of famine, war, or natural disaster in a distant land, nature photographers are responsible for showing the masses what is happening to the environment outside of their own backyards. Unfortunately, most urbanized, industrialized, westernized people know relatively nothing about the natural environment: what little we do know about the planet's vast complexities comes from what the media chooses to show us. In recent years, as the environmental movement has become an increasingly partisan issue, it is difficult for any report on planetary science to reach the ears or eyes of the majority. Photographers, writers, and documentary makers who managed to overcome this great hurdle have made a huge contribution to the environmental movement, simply by showing the apathetic masses how beautiful unspoiled nature can be.

In March of 2006, BBC released its revolutionary television mini-series, *Planet Earth*. This record-breaking show is arguably one of the most important sources of inspiration for a love of nature in the modern environmental movement. Originally produced in the United Kingdom, the show has aired in hundreds of countries all over the world with immense popularity (Nicholson-Lord, 2006). *Planet Earth's* success as an environmental tool may actually be credited to its political neutrality and silence on man's ecological destruction. Because the show does not take sides or point fingers, no viewers are alienated: everyone loves *Planet Earth*! Although my creative piece cannot claim to be as impartial, or certainly hope to achieve the same amount of success as *Planet Earth*, my photography will hopefully be used as a tool for inspiring appreciation of nature's beauty in a similar way.

Australia has produced some of the best examples of nature photographers representing the wild nature of Australia. Of course, Peter Dombrovskis, the great photographer of Tasmanian wilderness, has an awe-inspiring collection of large format photographs of some of the most pristine natural environments in Australia (Dombrovskis, 2011). John Chapman is another well-known Tasmanian wilderness photographer and bushwalker; he has written a number of books, as well as published a collection of photos from his adventures. *Australian Geographic*, founded by the legendary Dick Smith, has an impressive online gallery of nature photography in untamed areas around the continent from a variety of artists (*Australian Geographic*, 2011).

Ansel Adams is the original nature photographer of North America: any American photographer owes him credit for inspiration and education. His work is also responsible for increasing awareness and appreciation of the pristine western landscape of the American national parks Yellowstone and Yosemite (Alinder, 1998). His large format, highly detailed images of the west are ubiquitous in galleries, bookstores, calendars, and photographic libraries.

Over time, as issues of resource availability and land conservation have grown, so have public awareness and concern for environmental protection. Many environmentalists today understand that the only effective way to secure a livable planet for future generations is to instill in our children an ethic of care and compassion for nature. Education and awareness from a young age create a foundation for conscious, progressive agents of change. There is a huge body of research in the field of environmental education that suggests the power of story telling as a means of knowledge, understanding, and cultural literacy (Hart, 2003).

A number of well-known Australian artists and authors have taken an initiative to produce influential works for children with powerful messages of sustainability, connectedness, and compassion. One of the most notable of these is author Tim Winton, an Australian native, who is actively involved in many campaigns for the environmental movement. He has written a number of children's books for which he gathered inspiration from the natural landscape of western Australia. Winton utilizes the sustainability principle *sense of place* in all of his writing: "Place comes first," and then the rest of the story can follow (Reimer, 2008). His work, now a huge success in Australia, is an expressive, eloquent example of environmental writing. It is an important resource for anyone producing pieces that hope to inspire those who don't categorize themselves as environmentalists; my creative project should not be compared with Winton's work, but I believe that I am furthering the goal of all writers, journalists, and artists who strive to share their intimate connection with nature with the public.

Another Australian who believes in the importance of teaching positive environmental messages to kids from a young age is Jeannie Baker. She writes and illustrates children's stories that teach sustainability, connection to nature, sense of place, and importance of family (Baker, 2010). Baker studied art in school and uses her creativity to create picture books with beautiful, inspirational illustrations for her stories.

The Wilderness Society's *environment award* for children's literature is used to promote care and responsibility for nature. The award supports Australian authors who publish outstanding children's literature. It also promotes awareness of these works by creating an easily accessible list of environmentally ethical books for parents and kids (Wilderness, 2008)

Another resource to spread awareness for high-quality, environmentally responsible literature is the website *childrenoftheearth.org*. The company recommends books for kids that foster an understanding of and appreciation for nature. Some of the recently featured titles on their list include *Over in the Jungle* by Marianne Berkes, *Places of Power* by Michael DeMunn, and *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry. The last title is a story of a logger who falls asleep in the rainforest one day while working, and the animals in the woods whisper in his ears a plea to save their home. When the logger awakes, he sees why the rainforest is a delicate and important habitat for these animals and leaves the forest for good. Lynne Cherry also wrote *A River Runs Wild*, a story about the Native American land ethic when the United States was colonized (childrenoftheearth, 2011).

Outside of literature, Australia claims one of the most popular environmental films for children in the United States: the 1992 animated film *Fern Gully: The Last Rainforest*. Based on the book by Diana Young, *Fern Gully* has a strong environmental focus that encourages young viewers to see the forest as a majestic, sensitive habitat for a wide variety of species. The villains of the story are a careless logging company, concerned only with cutting down trees to make money, and an evil spirit that feeds on pollution. Set in a rainforest near Mount Warning in New South Wales, the film contains some informative and factual elements that teach viewers about the local environment. With its wide popularity in the United States, *Fern Gully* is a perfect example of an Australian children's film that can be credited with raising awareness for environmental issues in young children around the world (1992).

One of the original American children's writers to include meaningful ethical and political messages in his stories was the renowned Dr. Seuss. Even twenty years after his death, Seuss remains the most popular children's author worldwide. *The Lorax*, written in 1971, was Dr. Seuss's environmental masterpiece. One of my personal childhood favorites, the closing line of the story still echoes in my head:

"Unless/ someone like you cares a whole awful lot/ nothing's going to get better/ it's not." (Seuss, 1971)

The Lorax is a treasured story of brilliant poetry, illustrated in Seuss's imaginative, psychedelic style with a firm rooting in principles of social and environmental sustainability. Far ahead of his time, Dr. Seuss was the master of allegorical children's books: the story represents how consumer obsession and greed can cause overexploitation of natural resources in an unsustainable manner to ultimately destroy a delicate, precious natural ecosystem. Dr. Seuss is a legendary inspiration for all authors and illustrators of children's books with powerful social messages.

My story, *The Future of Cobboboonee*, fits into, and hopes to continue, the existing body of creative environmental education for children in Australia. The story for this piece was led by the illustrations: I let my journey and the imagery of nature inspire my writing. Essentially, I wanted to create something that people would see, and be moved by. I wanted to create something that would fall into the existing river of environmental education and contribute something uplifting and beautiful to a field that is often flooded by despairing facts and fatalistic predictions. My photography hopes to inspire viewers to feel humbled by the power of nature, to be in awe of her sheer beauty. My book should further develop the work of authors like those listed above by contributing poetry that children love, artwork that inspires, and a story that they take to heart.

Methods

The project started with an idea to create a photographic documentation of nature; that idea led to my joining a team of two friends hiking the Great South West Walk in Victoria. Another SIT student, Stephanie Seidmon, initiated the walk and formed a partnership with friend Andrea Mathy.

The 250 kilometer Great South West Walk begins and ends at the Visitor Information Center in Portland, VIC and goes through forest, river gorge, coastal desert, and cliff tops. It was designed as a long distance walking track, rated "Easy/Medium" in difficulty, and is broken up into 17 small sections. Along the walk there are sixteen campsites, all (all but one, it turned out) of which have fresh water, cleared tent sites, and pit toilets.

When I signed up, Steph and I spent two weeks before the onset of the ISP period meticulously planning details of the trip. For me, this meant buying serious hiking boots, a second water container, rain pants, and camping essentials. We had to

formulate the amount of food we would eat everyday in order to accurately shop for fifteen days worth of energy dense camping food. Spread across the cluttered floor of our Melbourne hostel room, three monkeys attempted to map out something none of us had ever done before. Our measurements initially looked convoluted and arbitrary: one cubic inch of cheese, per person, per lunch, per day, plus one cubic inch of cheese per person per dinner on 2 taco nights and 4 pasta nights. $[(1\text{in}^3 \text{ chz} \times 3 \text{ ppl} \times 1 \text{ lunch} \times 14 \text{ days}) + (1\text{in}^3 \text{ chz} \times 3 \text{ ppl} \times 1 \text{ dinner} \times 6 \text{ days})]$

How many cubic inches are in a block of cheese?

Well how many blocks of cheese can you fit in a rucksack?

After the math, we had three packs stuffed with oats, rice, peanut butter, honey, fruit/nut mix, powdered soymilk, vegetarian dinners, and of course, cheese, to last us the duration of our hike. The majority of our food was vegan, organic, and locally or ethically sourced. We spent under ten dollars per day on food (and four weeks later we are still living off the leftovers).

The planning stage also required composing a first aid kit to meet the standards of an international institution of education, transportation to and from the town of Portland, renting a Personal Locating Beacon in case of dire emergency, shipping a box of food to our halfway point to lighten our first week's load, and breaking in my new hiking boots on countless walks up to the Byron Bay lighthouse.

My heaviest accessory was my camera: a Nikon D80 digital single lens reflex. I settled on three lenses. After much deliberation, I decided to bring a Nikkor 18-55mm f/3.5 zoom lens, a 15mm f/2.8 fixed Sigma fisheye, and a Nikkor 70-300mm f/3.8-4.5 telephoto zoom lens. I did not bring a tripod or any external lighting equipment. I would have brought a tripod if the extra weight was justifiable, but for this project, I couldn't afford it. I already had two Nikon genuine EN-EL3e battery packs, but I bought a third just in case. I brought four SD memory cards with a total of 18 gigabytes of available space.

Once the walk commenced, my methods were fairly straightforward. Each day we woke up at 6:00: I made breakfast while Steph and Andrea shook the dew off our little mobile home. The sun lazily showed up just in time for oatmeal. We washed dishes; we put our shoes on, we were startled by the pain; we packed up; we walked.

We stopped for me to take pictures when nature did something extraordinary, or just looked exceptionally elegant. We walked. We'd break for peanut butter and jelly just past our halfway point, usually seven or eight miles in. We walked. We'd

get into camp, relax, cook dinner, and drift into erratic phases of sleep. The sun lazily came to bed too late for a kiss goodnight.

We followed the trail of the Great South West Walk from Portland, through farms and fields into Cobboboonee National Forest, through the Glenelg National Park, to the Lower Glenelg River, along cliffs above the gorge, into the town of Nelson to refuel, then to the coast, down the beach, up into the dunes, around Discovery Bay on windy cliffs, into the Enchanted Forest, and finally back to Portland. We walked for 14 days, and spent one day enjoying the river and letting our blisters turn to calluses. I shot every day, some more often than others.

I wrote down ideas and poems along the way, as our story unfolded in reality and their story developed in my mind. Most of the photos I took, I shot intentionally with an idea already in mind. Some were spontaneous, seduced by the irresistible beauty of nature. After two weeks of collection, I returned to the city where I could upload all of my images, catalog them in Adobe Lightroom and begin to sift through. My editing process had to coincide with writing and developing the story, so I went back and forth writing short poems and building the illustrations. I already had a framework for the direction of the story, so writing the poems was merely a challenge of condensing the events into lighthearted rhyming stanzas of ten lines or less.

I wrote the poems in a journal so I wasn't tethered to a power source, and often worked in the Carlton Gardens across the street. Most often, I worked on the illustrations in the common lounge of The Nunnery, my lovely Fitzroy accommodation. I shoot in raw files, and edit everything in Adobe Photoshop CS3. In my ISP journal I kept a detailed record of the steps I went through to edit the photos, such that a person with knowledge of CS3 could repeat the process and produce a similar effect. Most of the illustrations in the story are far from the original raw image file. This should not compromise the accuracy of the setting. The illustrations should create a world that is recognizable as our own, but with a variation on reality; they should inspire curiosity, wonder, and magic. In order to achieve this effect, I ignored the rules of realistic color tones, fabricated glowing highlights, and exaggerated the scale of the environment.

In a studio atmosphere, the photographer or creative director of the shoot has complete creative control over the mood, feeling, lighting, colors, arrangements, and so on in the images. Essentially, they get to create the world they want, and the photographer just has to capture it. Shooting in nature and then attempting to assert

creative control over the atmosphere afterwards is a much different process, much heavier on digital editing. Although the content of the illustrations maintain the integrity of the places I saw, I primarily wanted to convey the mood I felt in those places. I think emotion is a crucial part of the creative process, so I used noise-canceling headphones and chose music to help put myself in the proper frame of mind for creating the moods in each image. My editing steps include the album or song I played while developing each image.

When I had the images and poems complete for the whole book, I laid out a template in Photoshop and carefully structured each page for accuracy and consistency. With 50 pages taking up 4.08 gigabytes on a hard drive, I took my digital book to Copy That in Ballina, where Natalie advised me through the printing process and helped me produce my final product!

Description and Explanation of Creative Piece

The final piece that I produced is a twenty-five page children's story illustrated with photographs from the Great South West Walk. The story is composed of short poems I wrote both during and after the walk. My writing style in this piece incorporates multiple aspects of the examples set by esteemed children's authors. The most conspicuous of these are the rhyming stanzas in which the story is told. Rather than writing a simple, straightforward account of the journey, I chose to write in small poems. I believe this establishes a story that is both more enjoyable and more accessible to all readers, specifically to the intended child audience. Additionally, the lighthearted rhymes contribute to the overall feeling of whimsy I wanted the book to exhibit.

The poems are intended to be very readable for children, but still maintain elements of depth that older readers can appreciate. Appeal to a multigenerational audience is an important feature of successful children's books and movies. While the writing is simple, I intentionally avoided "dumbing down" the vocabulary or concepts for young readers. Children are much more intelligent than they are often treated, and the best way to expand a vocabulary is to see new words used in context. My hope is that this story will be enjoyable, entertaining, and eye opening for readers of all ages.

Aside from the major themes of the book, I wanted to incorporate minor themes and literary elements that would appeal to adults. The poem on the fifth page of the book, the speech for expansion by a village elder ("She's bigger, she's better;

She's out there, let's get 'er!"), alludes to the ideas of Manifest Destiny in America or colonization of the British Empire. The play on the phrases *drink like a fish* and *swear like a sailor* into "...they drank like sailors and swam like fishes" (pg. 14) is more humorous for someone who knows the original saying, yet still clear enough not to confuse someone who does not. The personification of the koala on page 27, Gonzo, refers to the general Australian view that koalas get stoned from eating eucalyptus leaves all day. Whether or not this has scientific basis is irrelevant; the joke is based on the widespread cultural notion of koala behavior. His name pays homage to Hunter S. Thompson's biography of the same title. The foreshadowing of the wind turbines described as [tall, shiny, white trees with three branches that turn in the wind] on page 28-29 will be clear for some readers, and not for others.

I wanted to maintain a factual basis for the relevant elements of the story. The setting is true to reality, save for a few minor details that I exaggerated for effect. For example, eucalyptus trees, which are also known as gum trees, are referred to as "bubble gum trees" in the story. Likewise, the desert we crossed was smaller than implied in the story, and the Enchanted Forest did not really have magical transportation properties. Of course it is intended to be a fantastical experience, but my story is firmly rooted in real places and events.

There are a number of references in the story that have a clearer meaning to people with a familiarity of the Great South West Walk, and especially for those who were with me during the walk that this story is based on. The Cobboboonee Forest is an actual national forest in Victoria ("...in the southern state of Victory" pg. 1), bordering the Lower Glenelg River in the Glenelg National Park ("This is the Glen Elg forest..." pg. 18). The evolution of the team of adventurers (pg. 6) happens in a similar, though of course simplified, fashion to the composition of our team; the Cobbobs leaving the forest for the first time (pg. 7-8) represents suburbanized American girls stepping into the bush for the first time; the environments they encounter and the emotions they experience throughout the journey mirror our days on the Great South West Walk. One member of our team did drop out halfway through the walk due to an unfortunate injury, and her speech on page 19 is based on phrases that Andrea used in real life: "We will manage, like we always do."

The major theme of my story, sustainability, appears throughout the piece in a number of different forms. The story is an allegory of over-population on Earth, a planet with limited natural resources, and the urgent need to solve the problem.

Initially, the population boom and sudden realization of the finite nature of their environment mirrors the same experience humans have had over the past few decades. There are two basic directions to take the future at this point: continue exponentially growing and expand into uncharted territories, (colonize the moon?) or halt our growth and implement a sustainable-use policy for natural resources. Of course the young Cobbobs recognize that their forest is the only inhabitable environment for them, and they must make it their highest priority to protect it. Ideally, children of our coming generations will come to the same conclusion about our precious planet Earth.

The people of Cobboboonee Forest get their name from the place: Cobbobs, or the Cobboboonee. Their home is all they know; it defines who they are. Their life is very much connected to their place, as all of their resources come directly from the forest. The relationship of these people to their environment is rooted in the context of *sense of place* as a means of sustainability. The idea is prevalent in Aboriginal culture, and is referenced by many other thinkers and writers in terms of sustainability. Another subtle homage to Aboriginal culture is the Cobbobs calling the mother kangaroo “Auntie Roo” (pg. 15), in accordance with the indigenous tradition of referring to elders as *Aunt* or *Uncle* out of respect.

Although I recognize and appreciate the value of clean, renewable energy sources, the wind turbines in the story were portrayed as something of a disappointment when seen up close. Incorporating them in this role was intentional: I do not believe that the ultimate answer for sustainable energy will come from dominating the landscape with towering structures of unnatural proportion. From far away, they are clean and sparkling with potential, but up close they may be too sterile for nature.

The final lessons at the end of the book incorporate principles of sustainability. The main characters recognize the limits of their environment and conclude that they must live within their means of natural capital if they want to persist. As is stated in the precautionary principle, the characters are not willing to risk the future of their forest and of their people. They appreciate that the forest was not inherited from their parents, but borrowed from their children: they must think progressively for intergenerational equity. Likewise, they must work together as a community for intra-generational equity.

The very last line, “They lived happily in their steady state of victory” refers back to the first line, a reference to the state of Victoria, and pays homage to Geoff Mosley, who created the original Steady State.

Critical Analysis and Evaluation of Creative Piece

Choosing to go on the Great South West Walk was the best decision I could have made for my independent study project. It gave me an outstanding opportunity to experience nature in a way that I never have before. I could never fully appreciate the meaning and value of sustainability without firsthand experience of living entirely submerged in nature. I could not have adequately reported the doctrine without this deeper understanding and appreciation. For my project, the hike was my collection of data: it was my opportunity to gather information, stories, experiences and photographs that would later make up my creative piece.

The methodology of my project shaped the final outcome of itself. The idea for the story did not occur to me until the first day of the trip, and all of the ideas for events, settings, and characters came from the walk. The story’s setting in Victoria makes it relevant to young Australian readers who are familiar with the names and places in the book. As a child, I was excited by books and movies that were set in places I recognized from real life, or that referenced our local environment. My elementary school library and book fairs would always celebrate Texas authors because it teaches kids to have a respect and appreciation for, and sense of belonging to their place. I am excited to share this story with the Friends of the Great South West Walk and schools in and around Nelson and Portland, Victoria because they will have a special connection to the names and images in the book.

The ultimate product of this journey is a tangible device for spreading the message of sustainability to a broad, potentially international audience. Going into the walk, my initial idea was to produce a portfolio of photographs that created an irrefutable body of evidence that the earth is beautiful, delicate, and mind-blowing. I wanted to document the setting, mood, and atmosphere of our two weeks in the bush. Once I was out there, though, I realized that this idea was too vague, and while I would be able to produce a great photo portfolio, it would not adequately communicate the preeminent message of sustainability. Creating a photo essay or illustrated story was an obvious way to stabilize the concept of the images. I decided

on a children's story because it gave me the most creativity and avoided a journalistic or documentary style report of the events.

The illustration for the book is composed entirely of digital photographs I took along the Great South West Walk. The photos are based on something real, but I tried to create something fantastical from them. I edited the images to give the world a surreal, unearthly, and imaginative feel. This is not a style of photography that I have ever spent much time with on projects in the past: I usually find more value in photography that is true to reality. For this project, though, I wanted to convey the enchantment of nature; I wanted to give the idea that outside of the forest laid a whole other world. I wanted to show my viewers what the characters in the story saw. The ideas for the dreamlike imagery came from my imagination while I was experiencing the original in nature. Sometimes I try to look around and see the world as though I'm looking through a filter that alters reality; creating photographs that came out of my imagination without a studio, lighting equipment, or models was extremely challenging but ultimately so much fun.

I tried to break the rules of conventional nature photography by playing with lighting, color tone, and multiple exposures. When you let your imagination create a world like this, the sky doesn't have to be blue; there are no rules. I did not use any artificial lighting in the project, so all of the effects come from shooting during times of the day with exceptional lighting conditions and from post-processing. Many of the images maintain a fairly accurate representation of what I actually saw, but I changed some of them more drastically to achieve the effect I needed. For example, the image on page 8 is supposed to show what the Cobbobs see when they step out of the forest, just before their eyes have adjusted to the blinding light. We all know this feeling, like walking out of a dark movie theater to a sunny afternoon, and I wanted to capture that feeling in the photo. On the other hand, page 16 was hardly touched at all because that is exactly what the river looked like that morning before breakfast: I wanted the viewer to experience the heavy fog on the water like I did. Above all, I wanted the illustrations in my story to show what the landscape *felt* like: sometimes this overlaps with the actual appearance, sometimes not.

An obvious element that is missing from the illustrations of this story is the main characters themselves. I intentionally left this open for interpretation because I wanted the viewer to use his or her imagination to fill in the details. My illustrations are intended to set a mood, to evoke feelings, and, I hope, to allow readers to

experience the place through the photographs. The images are not meant to tell viewers everything that happened: there are words in the book to tell the story.

Although it is difficult to evaluate the success of one's own work only days after finishing it, the goals I outlined in the beginning of the process were met. My ultimate goal and justification for this study was that I would create something that could deliver a lasting message of sustainability, both beautifully and assertively, and to evoke the emotions I felt in my own journey out into the world through my photography. I am confident that this book has the potential to reach a broad, international audience and inspire a hopeful future for Mother Nature.

Conclusions and Reflections

Walking 250km with 25 kilos on your back is exhausting. Writing and illustrating a children's book is onerous. Doing it in the strange loneliness of an unfamiliar city or on an empty coastline, too many miles away from your family to count, wears on your soul. Going into this project, I didn't think I was taking on any challenges I couldn't handle, and in the end I know I didn't. But the process from start to finish was demanding, to say the least. Finishing the Great South West Walk represented the biggest physical and mental feat I have ever accomplished. Two weeks in the woods with none of the comforts of home, only one other person to confide in, and a relentless physical mission, all while trying to pump creative juices from my mind through my camera lens and onto paper- it wasn't easy. And the creative piece- producing a photo portfolio with 30 final images, edited beyond their fundamental potential for perfection, and trying to come up with a clever rhyming quip to go with each one that preaches sustainability, and then writing 30+ pages of metaanalysis- wasn't either.

The lessons I learned and inspiration I collected from this trip are too great to discuss in detail here, but suffice it to say, the journey was a life changing experience. The day after this incredibly profound, introspective experience ended, I landed in a bustling city of millions and booked a shared hostel room with 5 other international travelers. I spent 8 hours a day on my computer, sifting and editing the photos I had taken along the walk or writing poems that hoped to simultaneously condense and expand my own journey. It was during this process that I learned the difference between solitude- being alone- and loneliness- feeling alone. There is an indescribable magnificence in the former, and it is something that gets harder to find everyday on a

planet of seven billion. The latter, however, is most prevalent when surrounded by human influence, but left untouched by human connection.

My final conclusion through this journey is that as we have inflated our world with more faceless strangers, more wasteful stuff, more self-promoting trifles, we have lost the things that are most important in life. We have forgotten where we came from. We must get back to Earth.

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