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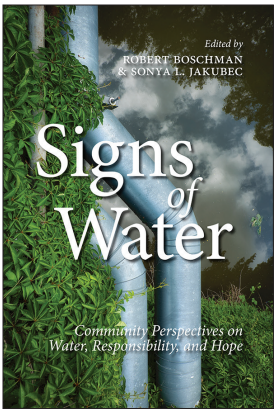

SIGNS OF WATER: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON WATER, RESPONSIBILITY, AND HOPE

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Ghost Story: A Community Organizing Model of Changemaking

Sharon Meier MacDonald

Fifty kilometres northwest of Calgary, the Ghost Valley is a critical watershed for the over-allocated Bow River, the water source for 1.6 million Albertans, and three irrigation districts in a flood- and drought-prone area. The Ghost Valley encompasses rangelands, lush wetlands, forested foothills, and majestic mountains. Approximately five hundred Albertans call this beautiful area home. Thousands of recreational users visit the Ghost Public Lands every weekend, a landscape subjected to multiple overlapping land uses.

And so it Begins

Despite the area's beauty, all was not well with the Ghost in the spring of 2014. Like much of southern Alberta, the Ghost Valley community was recovering from the previous year's unprecedented flood. Eight homes had been destroyed, and those families were still displaced. Heavy trucks hauling aggregate to rebuild berms and bridges opened several dozen sizeable potholes in Highway 40, the Ghost Valley's main transportation corridor, adding to the community's sense that the valley had become an unsafe place. Lack of information regarding project timelines or safety precautions further eroded community confidence.

Rumours began to swirl: "Did you know they're going to frack twenty gas wells?"; "I hear they're building a dry dam on the Ghost River"; "Did you hear about the clear-cut logging that's coming later this year?" No one seemed to have concrete information. When it came to industrial land uses in the Ghost Valley, residents were often the last to know. We were a danger-oriented people, viewing changes thrust upon us as crises, threatening, and even victimizing. We felt we had no choices. We just had to adjust.

A community elder noted the profound unease within the community and determined that we must come together. He enlisted my help because I had previously hosted many community social events and I had contact information for most residents. I naively said yes, never imagining where the next three years would take me and the Ghost Valley community.

Propelled to Act

We came together at the community hall on March 19, 2014, a group of sixty-five neighbours sharing information and offering support to one another. We spoke of how we seemed to be the last to know about local land use decisions. We were determined to change this, believing people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Our process of community organizing was extremely organic. Only eighteen months later did we find the time to reflect on our process of changemaking, realizing we had intuitively incorporated key elements for successful community activism. In times of crisis, communities find their way forward not because they have a good strategy, but because they begin to act (Weick 2000).

We quickly gathered information and received reassurances related to the dry dam and fracking plans. However, the timber harvest planned for a settled portion of our valley alarmed us. The Ghost Valley is part of Spray Lake Sawmill's Forest Management Agreement and quota areas. Spray Lake Sawmill's online maps seemed to indicate that the South B9 Quota area along Richards and Jamieson Roads in the Municipal District of Bighorn would be harvested over twenty years, something the community felt it could live with. Then, at an April 2014 meeting focused on proposed log haul routes, residents questioned why so many truckloads of timber

were leaving the valley in such a short timeframe. The answer was that timber harvest would be compressed into only three short years.

Shock ran through the community. Within eight months, vast clear-cuts as large as 285 hectares (seven hundred acres) would open between legacy properties. Trucks would haul more than fifty-three hundred loads of timber over narrow, winding residential roads. Timber harvest would alter wildlife habitat. Highly visible clear-cuts and cutover trails would negatively impact the local tourism economy. Residents feared that the speed and scale of the proposed timber harvest could potentially endanger water resources and reduce the flood mitigation capacity of this critical watershed upstream of Calgary. As well, clear-cut harvest plans would impact the Traditional Land Use area of our Stoney Nakoda neighbours.

Spatial Harvest Sequence, an Alberta forest planning standard, is meant to ensure that forest health, ecological services, and socioeconomic values of the surrounding community are preserved. Spatial Harvest Sequence refers to the way in which timber harvest is scheduled to take place in five-year quadrants over a twenty-year period, pacing harvest in a way that allows the landscape and its inhabitants to gradually absorb the changes. To compress this harvest into three years was too much and too fast for the community to accept. None of it made sense until a government spokesperson revealed that favourable timber prices were a deciding factor (Fedeyko 2015).

Defining the Crisis

Land and people are inextricably linked. We are neighbours on a shared landscape and what we do on the landscape matters. Land use planning decisions are in essence decisions about people and their way of life. Throughout history, land use decisions have often caused conflict and suffering. With the flood fresh in our memories, we worried that clear-cut logging in the upper watershed could increase the risk of downstream flooding. This particular timber harvest had been approved in principle years before. There seemed no mechanism by which to bring new realities such as burgeoning population, a tourism economy, and the 2013 flood to bear on this timber harvest. We determined that as a community, we must challenge both the clear-cut logging and the lack of meaningful public consultation because of their negative impact upon two things essential

for sustaining the humanity: water and community. The urgency of the situation propelled us to act.

Forging Identity

Our community is made up of country residential dwellers, fairly new arrivals who love the landscape and who plan on making it a permanent home; ranchers, long-term land stewards whose families arrived a century ago; and First Nations, whose families have lived on this landscape for generations, sustained by its plants, animals, and waters.

In other words, we each possess a deep love for this landscape. It is not simply a commodity. It is our heritage passed down from those whom the land sustained before us, and it is our legacy, what we will leave to sustain those who come after us. The land is the constant, not us. We come and go but this land remains. We are bound together through history by this landscape.

The Ghost Valley's prior reputation for strong opinions and strong emotions led some to doubt we could work together long enough to achieve anything. Yet from day one, we experienced surprising synergy. We constantly reminded ourselves of our identity and purpose: "Together we are the Ghost Valley community and we are trying to be good neighbours to one another. We are simply asking industries that operate in the Ghost Valley to also be good neighbours, showing respect for people and for the land."

Building Trust and Friendship

Community implies relationships, typically relationships between people within the same geographical area. In the case of Ghost Valley residents, lived experience upon the landscape and profound love for it made our relationship with the land a powerful driver in our community's process. In fact, it was largely our shared love for the Ghost Valley landscape that opened us, reclusive country folks, to the possibility of forming strong relationships with one another.

Community meetings became a tool for building trust and understanding. Sitting in a circle, we each shared where we lived and why we cared. Long-term residents distrustful of new arrivals heard in their introductions a deep dedication to their new home. Newer residents who

thought some of the long-term residents were odd or standoffish realized the great wealth of knowledge they possessed through decades of lived experience upon the landscape.

Conversation Among Equals

Before we knew it, we had built the foundation for respectful dialogue. Every person in attendance was assured the chance to speak and to be heard. Deep love for the land and a sense of urgency leveled the playing field. Participants checked their status and their egos at the door, articulating that any hope of success depended upon our standing together to create change before it was too late.

In our quest for better-managed forests, we were launched on a journey of discovery. We realized that all water is connected. Water connects us all. We are neighbours on this shared landscape. We soon realized that our greatest strength was in the community of relationships we possessed with the land and with each another. The stronger and healthier our relationships, the more successful our work would be. Healthy relationships require communication, trust, common goals, and maintenance through time (Homan 2016). Prioritizing these things was essential to our success.

Grounding in a Unified Purpose

We had plenty of different ideas and lots of differences between us. How could we possibly agree long enough to get anything done? We had to dialogue and listen closely to one another. Intuitively we kept notes on what community members said in meetings. Certain themes kept being repeated. Sometimes a community member expressed one of these themes especially well and we captured the wording on paper.

Soon we were able to create a values statement, the "why" of our community action:

> We know that we need water for life, that water is life.
>
> We know that all water is connected, that water connects us all.
>
> We are neighbours on a shared landscape and everything we do on the landscape matters.

We believe that we must show respect for people and for the land.

People have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

Species that call this landscape home have the right to continue to exist.

We make space for them.

We refrain from unnecessary violence to the landscape, even though we use its resources for our needs.

When the effects of our actions on the landscape are not fully understood, we err on the side of caution by waiting until more complete data becomes available to inform our actions.

We know that the landscape sustains us.

It provides air, water, food, shelter, and belonging.

We do our work from a place of gratitude and humility, acknowledging what the land gives us for life and acknowledging what the land needs from us so that it can continue to provide for us.

We believe that preserving this landscape depends upon a strong community, working together for the common good.

We have found that trust and friendship are the most certain means by which we can orchestrate lasting change.

As a caring community, as a community of people who care—for one another, for our shared landscape—we can find joy and purpose in uncertain times.

We are not alone. We are grounded in the landscape and in each other. We are home.

Reading this values statement and making time for a few moments of silence at the beginning of each meeting provided opportunity for

participants to quietly reaffirm within themselves their dedication to furthering the common good (Joy 2011). Our values statement grounded us in what we knew to be true, including the importance of conducting ourselves in meetings with the respect, transparency, and humility necessary to maintain right relationships with one another (Joy 2011). Remembering what we knew to be true enabled us to bring our best selves.

Valuing Interdependence

We found ourselves referring to the principles within our values statement when we needed to make tough decisions. At times, outgoing community members were eager to speed ahead with various initiatives, while more cautious community members sought to slow things down, citing reasons of credibility or ethics. Remembering that "trust and friendship are the most certain means by which we can orchestrate lasting change," our more outgoing members willingly put several schemes on hold in order to preserve trust between community members. In some cases, deferring action avoided what could have been a terrible mistake. In other cases, the more cautious members of the community realized they could trust their outgoing colleagues to listen respectfully and to slow things down, until the more cautious members had enough time to become comfortable with the proposed course of action.

Unleashing Capacity

At first, we hoped for a simple solution. Maybe a conservation group like Yellowstone to Yukon would help us. Perhaps Alberta Wilderness Association would take up our cause. Some resident could have quiet words with government officials or with mill managers and decision makers would make the desired changes. But when no miracle materialized, we realized that we had to do this for ourselves. Not only did we have the right to a good life together in this place, but we also had the responsibility to make it so (Homan 2016). We had to shed passivity and self-doubt to see ourselves as actors, changemakers, and way finders.

Realizing our shared responsibility for our community's future, we took stock of what we could each contribute to further our common goals and we were astounded by the resources that existed within our community—within us! We ourselves were our greatest assets. Once in motion, we

grasped the scope of the problem and identified necessary tasks and those with the resources to accomplish these tasks. Each action generated other possibilities, involving additional community members with the necessary skill sets. In the words of Deng Xiaoping, we would "cross the river by feeling for stones."

Overnight, a small group of neighbours pledged their skills in hydrology, geology, archeology, photography, marketing, technical writing, social media, graphic design, environmental management, and firsthand knowledge of the landscape. The group chose the name Stop Ghost Clearcut to indicate its opposition to clear-cut forestry in this critical watershed. Seven core participants provided information and raised awareness through a website and a Facebook page. The group researched ways to advocate for the Ghost Valley landscape and provided options to the broader Ghost Valley community. The Stop Ghost Clearcut team's value to the broader community was well recognized, even by those who found its name too radical. This group of neighbours became the leadership team of the community action, forwarding me information to disseminate via the Ghost Valley community's bi-weekly email news update.

Open Systems and Egalitarian Structure

To be a true community movement, power must be shared as equally as possible. Community members who possess expert knowledge or influential status must use these forms of power for the good of the whole (Joy 2011). So too must community leaders who have access to unseen forms of power, such as access to information, control of the flow of information, access to power (e.g., invited to meet with high-level decision makers), and the ability to provide or withhold a platform for the voices of other community members.

From the outset, our leadership team tried to practice an open information flow. Information was put into the hands of community members as often as possible through website links, information briefs, and cloud files. In this way, community participants could determine what level of information they desired without becoming overloaded. Community members were invited whenever possible to attend high-level meetings and educational opportunities. Notes from these meetings were shared openly whenever possible. To our surprise, we observed that the open

information flow calmed the anxiety palpable within the community, even while the open information flow facilitated increased participation from neighbours who wished to contribute to the community effort.

Connecting People With one Another

Soon community members were getting together between meetings to gather information, walk the land, and engage in projects they designed. For eighteen consecutive months, thirty neighbours dedicated multiple hours gathering information, writing letters, taking pictures, making videos, managing social media, monitoring maps, walking cut blocks, spreading the word, booking special speakers, organizing educational opportunities for the community, and meeting with decision makers. Their findings and connections were shared back with the leadership team. This new information was collated and communicated back out to the community, a positive feedback loop generating new activities and new connections. This just seemed to happen as people stepped forward to offer what they could. Later we discovered that this method of social change is characteristic of a community-organizing approach.

Each of us had a unique contribution to make, ensuring our individual role as a valued member of the Ghost Valley community. Deep appreciation for one another's contributions resulted. Several community members specifically commented that they had always felt as though they did not fit in socially, but now for the first time, they felt as though they had something valuable to offer and as though they belonged to a community. These experiences furthered trust and friendship between community members, which in turn facilitated the flow of resources.

A Leader who Loves us

While change can be led by the grassroots, a leader will eventually be required to facilitate meetings, to coordinate communication, and to manage projects. These roles come with unseen power, giving a leader greater influence upon the leadership team and gradually upon community members participating in the action. For this reason, a community must carefully choose its leader, selecting a person who truly grasps that facilitation is leadership without taking the reins.

Essentially a community-organizing model requires what Alice Walker terms "a leader who loves us" (Walker 2008). A leader who loves us knows how to listen and how to pay attention. A leader who loves us sees the positive potentialities already within us and can hold up, to us, an image of what we could be if we so decided. A leader who loves us continually shifts our focus to what is strong and what is good, for whatever we focus on will grow to squeeze out old ways that no longer serve ourselves or the community well.

A leader who loves us also recognizes that we are often fearful people. An underlying fear of loss frequently accompanies a community's experience of crisis. Some participants may be paralyzed by this fear. Other participants may turn fear into anger, with a propensity to use a language of violence, even harming relationships with other community members. Many people have not learned skills for appropriately expressing fear, sadness, or anger. Inappropriate expression runs the risk of cementing the separation between "us and them," reducing or even eliminating options for resolution of differences. A skilled facilitator works to calm participants' underlying fear of loss, ideally guiding participants to realize that they are capable of more adaptive responses than language tinged with violence.

Within the Ghost community, we intentionally worked to shift our language of anger and violence towards more effective responses. We built calming strategies into our meetings, taking an early coffee break once the opening circle finished and the evening's topic had been introduced. People found comfort in refreshments and in conversation with supportive community members. As facilitator, I circulated, connecting with those who might find the topic challenging and urging others with expertise or insight to share with the community. Public speaking is terrifying for many people, even more so in a large group or when discussing a stressful topic, so index cards and pens were provided for those who preferred to write either speaking notes for themselves or notes for the facilitator to read to the group. The facilitator's own inner work is foundational to an ability to remain grounded and thereby have a calming effect on others.

Despite a facilitation role, the leader should blend back into the group whenever possible. Community members are capable of letter writing, media interviews, meetings with external networks, and numerous other

tasks. Others should be empowered to represent the community, diffusing leadership and ensuring continuity of the community action even if something should happen to the identified leader.

Even if the group facilitator becomes the face of the organization or coordinates the many pieces into a cohesive whole, the leader must always conduct herself so that community members say, "Look what we did," rather than, "Look what she did." A community's capacity for change-making must always reside within as many community members as possible acting for the common good.

External Networking

The Ghost Valley community had some early successes. Public pressure convinced Municipal District of Bighorn councillors to refuse the forestry company access to municipal roadways for a year. Other access options over private land were also refused. The Ghost Valley landscape gained one year of grace.

In December 2014, a team of community members created a press release documenting the pair of Trumpeter Swans nesting on the Ghost Valley's Kangienos Lake, the shores of which were slated for clear-cut within the year, even though forestry's Operating Ground Rules prescribed buffers. The press release received wide media coverage and mobilized over one hundred people, many of them grade four students using art, music, theatre, and letters to the editor, government, and mill managers to secure adequate buffers for the swans of Kangienos Lake.

From January through October 2015, a speaker series with such notables as Robert Sandford, Kevin Van Tighem, and Karsten Heuer enlisted the support of people from Bragg Creek, Calgary, and Cochrane. These friends supported the Ghost community's actions through financial contributions, letter writing, and spreading the word to their contacts.

When Albertans surprised the world on May 5, 2015 by electing a New Democratic provincial government, we hoped timber harvest plans would be reconsidered. We had little success in reaching our previous government decision-makers. Now maybe change would come.

Highlighting Strengths

From November 2014 through August 2015, ever-expanding circles of the Ghost community became aware of the clear-cut plans and joined the community action, contributing fresh ideas and energy. By September 2015, nearly four-hundred of the Ghost Valley's five-hundred residents had indicated their support for the Ghost Valley community's actions, many attending community meetings or participating openly, but others phoning or emailing to indicate their support while explaining credible reasons why they could not attend community meetings. In the spirit of trust and friendship, we did not question one another's level of participation.

In September 2015, fearing their business Saddle Peak Trail Rides might lose clients after clear-cut logging changed the landscape, community members Dave and Jacquie Richards offered neighbours trail rides and a free roast beef dinner. At a time when most people would retreat privately into legitimate sorrow, their generous hospitality in the face of adversity was profoundly moving. Only the most courageous people supported by a caring community could conduct themselves as the Richards family did on that day. We gathered to enjoy this beautiful intact landscape one last time, reminding ourselves that we were grounded in the landscape and in each other, and knowing with certainty that our community includes the best people to be found anywhere.

Dialogue Across the Divide

From July through October 2015, we advocated tirelessly with our new government, attending meetings with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry staff and hosting a town hall with our new Member of the Legislative Assembly, Cameron Westhead. We submitted our petition with the names of nearly fifteen hundred Albertans calling for a reconsideration of timber harvest plans.

We were relieved when the new government directed that the 285-hectare cut block be divided into several smaller blocks with greater retention patches for wildlife cover and some wet areas protected from harvest. In addition, the erosive bluff block overlooking the Ghost River was removed from harvest plans. Back in 2014, a community member had funded legal action to stall final approval for this particular block. His bold risk was

rewarded when the new government conclusively removed this block from harvest.

The new government required the forestry company to perform an exercise in "meaningful consultation." A company forester was to walk some of the most concerning cut blocks with residents. Though the exercise did not achieve much change, we appreciated this forester's willingness to dialogue with us, share sandwiches and cookies, and return later to help fix a neighbour's fence impacted by logging. This forester's presence in our community reminded us that despite being on opposite sides of an argument, we were all just human beings in a community trying to find a new way forward together. We needed to continue to make changes to the system rather than attacking those who found themselves actors within it.

Giving up the Ghost

On Tuesday, October 20, 2015, three of us met on behalf of our community with Minister of Forestry Oniel Carlier, urging him to reconsider timber harvests approved years before by Alberta's previous government. Minister Carlier seemed dismissive, advising us to take future concerns to Forestry staff.

Tragically, as we spoke with the Minister, the cell phone set up to help us keep time flashed up a text. Simultaneously in the Ghost Valley, Saddle Peak outfitter Dave Richards and conservationist Kevin Van Tighem planning to ride Lesueur Ridge were shocked to find the area being clear-cut when they arrived, the recreational trail up the ridge impassable. Kevin Van Tighem poignantly documented this heartbreaking experience in a Facebook post that went viral and included it in his book *Our Place: Changing the Nature of Alberta*. Media broadcast the story throughout Western Canada.

Stepping Outside our Comfort Zone

The Minister's seeming lack of interest coupled with clear-cut harvest of the area's most scenic viewpoint were huge blows to the community. On October 31, 2015, seventy-five Ghost Valley community members and supporters rallied against the government's decision to give up the Ghost. One year earlier, we could not have imagined ourselves as protesters. Now there seemed no other choice. People gathered with their banners

and signs at the intersection of Highway 1A and Highway 40. The media was out in force, helping us spread a message of care for ecosystems and communities.

November 10, 2015 dealt the Ghost another blow. Under great pressure, the Council of Municipal District of Bighorn offered Spray Lake Sawmills a Road Use Agreement for hauling logs out over Jamieson Road. Residents made a strong case for their belief that public safety would be endangered by ten-foot wide logging trucks on this narrow, winding residential road with lanes only nine feet wide in places. Protest rallies on November 14 and 21, 2015, again saw community members waving signs.

Developing Empathy for the Broader Community

During January and February 2016, neighbours living along Jamieson Road saw logging trucks travel this narrow hilly roadway. In a blunt reminder of the interconnectedness of all things, the community noted that not only were the trees expendable, but public safety also seemed to come second to an industry's right to extract natural resources. Several community members courageously used the experience to develop empathy for Indigenous communities worldwide, which endure far worse treatment without the recourse to democratic process, white privilege, and various other advantages.

Public pressure impressed government and industry with the need to find another log haul option. Due to unrelenting pressure by community members who wrote regular letters, made presentations to Council, and monitored daily the enforceable conditions of the Road Use Agreement, the forestry company was motivated to strike a deal with a private landowner to haul logs out by another route, restoring a sense of safety to Jamieson Road residents, even as they watched the trees come down on crown lands adjacent to their private land holdings.

In December 2016 through February 2017, the remainder of the Ghost Valley harvest was cut. In only two short years, the forestry company completed a government-approved timber harvest seemingly mapped out over twenty years as per Alberta's Forests Act, Section 19. The environment was unable to weigh in, but over the next decades, its recovery will begin to inform the wisdom of this particular land use decision. The local outfitter also had limited options to weigh in on the impact that an unsightly

environment may have on his tourism-based business. Only time will tell whether his business can indeed survive.

Mitigating Harm

Since we did not save the trees, what did we actually achieve? As Joanna Macy outlines, we must work on three fronts to care for the environment:

1. Mitigate harm caused by our politics and our economy.
2. Change practice to new environmentally sensitive ways of doing things.
3. Change ourselves. (Macy 2017)

We, in the Ghost Valley, have slowly become an opportunity-oriented people. We have learned that there is no magic wand to make all things right. Instead, many of us realize that we are actually taking on the elephant in the room—a global economy premised on continual growth through resource exploitation while overlooking the limits that can be borne by an ecosystem and by those directly dependent upon it. The only way to eat an elephant is in small bites. We have cleverly found ways to make small differences for our landscape, our wildlife, and ourselves, mostly by working together in relationships of trust and friendship to magnify our impact a hundredfold.

What did we accomplish? Not nearly enough. Mitigating harm is an incomplete response to the challenges that our ecosystems face, but for those life forms dependent on the small corner that is spared, it means the world. Securing buffers for the nesting swans, saving the bluff block, preserving a greater number of wet areas and retention patches, highlighting a First Nations ceremonial site which was then left standing—these are some of the small ways in which the Ghost Valley community managed to mitigate harm in the face of widescale clear-cut timber harvest.

Changing Practice

The Ghost Valley community has only just begun its efforts to change current practice for managing our Eastern slopes headwaters. The Ghost Valley community has shown government and industry that doing things

the same way they have always been done is no longer good enough. Albertans have come to expect decision-making that reflects the public's values. Citizens are finding their voice and co-creating their future together. The impacts of these shifts have not yet been fully felt. At this time, anything is possible.

Since the clear-cut, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry staff have shown increased management and oversight of the forestry industry as practiced in the Ghost Valley. Alberta Environment and Parks staff have been increasingly responsive to public requests for enforcement and care for clear-cut landscapes now accessed by recreational users. The Ghost Valley community is encouraged by the positive differences these changed practices are making for the Ghost Public Lands.

On December 12, 2016, our elected representative Cameron Westhead presented Motion 511 in the Alberta Legislature, calling upon the government of Alberta to manage public lands in Alberta's Eastern slopes headwaters with a view to optimizing water resources. He specifically mentioned the Ghost Valley community, listing several community members by name, as he credited those instrumental in shaping this motion. While the motion is non-binding, it signals positive possibilities for Alberta's landscapes.

Changing Ourselves

When we organize as a community, we make tremendous strides in changing ourselves because we quickly come to see our connections to each other and to the natural world lead to changes in our behaviours. Trust, connection, and honest relationships are the fastest routes to changing ourselves.

Advantages of the Community-Organizing Model

We, Westerners, tend to believe that change comes through power. We also tend to believe that power equals force. Both assumptions are limiting, and taken together, they imply that change comes through force. In fact, force is often the crudest instrument available to us when it comes to changemaking.

Change can also come through love, kindness, trust, friendship, connection, conversation, collaboration, negotiation, persistence, knowledge,

new experiences, new ideas or new energy into a system, epiphany moments, positive peer pressure, community cohesion, a sense of belonging, a feeling that one is at home, and numerous other things. If true power is the ability to create change, then the things listed above could be regarded as types of power.

Here is something to consider: Love, kindness, trust, friendship, connection, conversation, collaboration, and a sense of belonging are at the heart of what it means to be human. As humans, we have free access to these powers of the human spirit. Changemaking need not require money or external resources; rather, the capacity for changemaking resides within each of us. Most often, what is needed to unleash this changemaking potential is a strong community grounded in trust, friendship, and a common goal.

Grief

During these past seasons of clear-cut timber harvest, Ghost Valley community members have been filled with sadness and anger. These difficult emotions come from our sense of connection to the land. We do not apologize for our passion or our grief. Grief is the price of love and there is nothing wrong with love.

We know what it is to pour ourselves into something when success is not guaranteed. We went into this with our eyes open, knowing we were not likely to save that which we love, but that did not stop us from trying. We know it would have been an even greater failure on our part if we had not tried. We will look our children and our grandchildren in the eyes, and say, "We tried our very best."

Other communities affected by clear-cut logging warned us that the stress of dealing with entrenched government and corporate cultures can play havoc with one's physical and emotional health and can divide a community. From the start, we strategized how we would safeguard against this by building a strong community. We speak publicly about watershed values and watershed actions, but running parallel to watershed protection endeavours is a quiet story of which this community can be immensely proud: the strength of this community's practical care for one another.

Over the past years, community members performed countless acts of practical care for neighbours enduring various struggles. Meals were

delivered to those with health struggles. A furnace was fixed free of charge. Grocery cards were gifted to those with financial struggles. A young person received a substantial college bursary. Community members shut in by age or illness were visited. Endless pots of soup were shared. Listening ears comforted those in the midst of grief and loss.

A Cochrane resident who attended one of our meetings for the first time spoke up as the evening ended, saying, "I see what you are doing in the Ghost. This group is held together with love." Our love for the land brought us together, and it somehow enabled us to care for one another long enough to build the goodwill required for working across differences. Many of us joked that we may not have saved the trees, but perhaps we saved ourselves by creating a safe and caring community, the kind of community many of us have always dreamed of. We may not have gone where we intended to go, but we may have ended up exactly where we needed to be. Our community will now be the medicine for disappointment, grief, and anger.

Building Bridges

At times of grief related to clear-cutting, we came together across cultural lines. A most memorable gathering occurred December 4, 2015, when Stoney Nakoda elders led our community in ceremony to make peace with that season's clear-cutting. Coming together across cultures was facilitated by courageous community members within each culture stepping out in front of their peers to show us the way into uncharted territory.

That day, on the strength of relationship built between a community member and the forester cutting the trees, that forester moved his feller buncher away from the ceremony site so that the community could access the site. As well, Spray Lake Sawmills management and staff travelled to the site to escort community members safely to the stand of trees in which the ceremony was to occur. After the deeply moving ceremony, the stand of trees was left uncut in recognition of its enduring value as a sacred site. It is a sacred site in more ways than most of us will ever know.

On May 26, 2016, Driftpile First Nation travelled to the Ghost Valley to join with Stoney Nakoda elders in ceremony to honour the two nations' common clear-cut experience, recognizing that the exploitation model of resource extraction may lead to yet another wave of losses for northern

Indigenous peoples dependent on an intact forest in order to maintain cultural practices.

On May 6, 2017, Stoney Nakoda elders led our community in a process of blessing the land and ourselves to heal, now that timber harvest in our area has concluded. We must build a bridge back to wholeness. Our ongoing work on behalf of the landscape and on behalf of our community must be powered by trust, friendship, love, and gratitude, for these energize the human spirit in a way that anger and fear never can.

Moving Beyond Adversarial Confrontation

Changemaking within the context of community provides frequent opportunity for building bridges and for honouring what is best within one another. On a regular basis, we look into the faces of those whom we suppose to be on the other side of our struggle. When we realize the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry shares a birthday with one of our community leaders, when the wife of a mill manager interacts in the kindest way possible with our young children, or when we share a laugh with the government biologist at the grocery store, we grasp the future we must somehow co-create across the divide. No rationale remains for the designations of "us and them." It is only "we" now.

Compelling and Credible

In the spring of 2016, we realized our community had pressing needs in addition to forestry concerns. Significant public safety risks existed on the Ghost Public Lands. An increasing number of recreational users were engaging in target practice at informal shooting ranges. Explosive targets had ignited four fires in the Ghost Valley. Community members drafted a press release and composed a letter to government ministries. Media interest in the story persisted throughout the summer. Due in part to the Fort McMurray fire, most of our suggestions for reducing fire risk in the Ghost were enacted by government by summer's end. Our request for change was so compelling that it could not be ignored by media, government, or the public.

We then realized that we needed to get our hands dirty for the landscape we love. The Ghost's TransAlta Road was littered with derelict vehicles, old mattresses, and living room furniture. Enviros Wildness

School and Ghost River Rediscovery, two nonprofits operating in the Ghost, offered to organize a cleanup day, with the financial contributions of Centrica, Spray Lake Sawmills, and TransAlta. On June 11, 2016, fifty people showed up to pick up forty cubic yards of trash. This waste had littered the Ghost for two years, signaling to visitors that dumping and burning were acceptable. No law enforcement body or government agency seemed to have the ability to address this problem, but on June 11, people brought torches to cut up five derelict vehicles, hauling the metal away for recycling. On that day, we realized that we, the people, were truly the leaders, the ones we had been waiting for (Walker 2008).

Change is contagious, beckoning others to join in. Passersby were inspired and asked to help with future cleanups. Another derelict vehicle was removed in October 2016. The Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks sent the Ghost Valley community a letter of thanks for significant contributions to the care of Alberta's Public Lands. Alberta Environment and Parks stepped up enforcement in the area, particularly on long weekends.

By the time the community returned to clean up the same area in June 2017, our Member of the Legislative Assembly Cameron Westhead with us, there was hardly any trash to be found. Our practical care for the land has just slightly shifted everything. With government and a broad cross-section of the Ghost community working together, the culture of the Ghost Public Lands is beginning to change. It started with us.

Sustaining our Community Capacity for Changemaking

Clear-cut timber harvest has wrapped up in the Ghost for the foreseeable future. While most in the community feel relief, we know this is not the time to rest. Our community possesses new learning, new skills, and new abilities to work together and to work across ideological divides. We are most likely to maintain these capacities by occasionally taking on new challenges. New opportunities to enhance our quality of life together in this place are on the horizon. The Ghost Valley community is now recognized as a stakeholder in the upcoming consultations related to the Ghost-Kananaskis sub-regional land use planning process taking place in 2018.

As the Ghost Valley community moves through an intentional path of closure in relation to our clear-cut forestry experience, an odd set of circumstances put another changemaking opportunity directly in our path.

On March 23, 2017, the Ghost Valley community hosted Yellowstone to Yukon's Stephen Legault to speak on forestry's future. Our speaker caught the interest of the off-highway vehicle community, with 115 people from both sides of the off-highway vehicle debate attending. Our meeting was more peaceful and respectful than most in the conservation community expected, with leaders now contemplating ways to build bridges between our communities. We do not know where this might lead. The Ghost Valley community's reality is that we share this landscape with others. We must engage in dialogue to figure out how to make it work. Our first joint event, working together to pick up trash in the Ghost and sharing a barbecue lunch, went well. We will look for other opportunities to work together in hopes of furthering our dialogue on behalf of the landscape we share.

Reflecting on the Journey

I have been called a tree-hugger, but I do not actually consider myself an environmentalist, beyond the grief I feel—as all humans should feel—when standing in the presence of violence and death. Why then have I spent years in what appears to be an environmental struggle? The answer is that I care about my neighbours. They identified clear-cut timber harvest as negatively impacting our community's well-being together in this place. Therefore, addressing clear-cut timber harvest became the work of our community's changemaking.

Sometimes life is simple. When we care about people in our community, we get to work to make our lives better together in this place. As the saying goes, "This is not rocket science." It is not science at all. It is just plain old-fashioned compassion. The fierce untamable goodness of my neighbours is unparalleled. My children and I are fortunate to live among the best people I know in the community of which I have always dreamed.

Confidence in Community

While things have not yet worked out as we hoped, we ended up with each other and with the sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We proved that when people come together in trust and friendship, they find ways to address the community's shared concerns, working together to magnify their individual efforts a hundredfold. We know that

preserving this landscape depends upon a strong community, working together for the common good. This is the essence of a community-organizing approach to changemaking: We the people are truly the leaders. We are the ones we have been waiting for (Walker 2008).

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