

NAMING YOUR STORY

Your Environmental Identity

Activity

Prepare to share your personal faith & environment story.

Question to be addressed

How does a Watershed Moment become a Watershed Movement?

Purpose

To reflect upon and articulate one's calling, passion, or inspiration for being engaged in environmental stewardship. To inspire and build team relationships.

Process

- Read *Starting with Your Own Story: How Did You Come to Have "Watershed Eyes?"*
- Read *Your Watershed Story*
- Create your own Environmental Identity Tree: Roots (Experiences), Trunk (Values), and Leaves (Actions).
 - What has been your "watershed moment" with the natural world?
 - How has your faith inspired your relationship with the environment?
 - How have these informed your current commitment?
- Fill in Inventory of *Key Influences for My Environmental Awareness and Care* handout
What key people, moments, interests, and institutions have strongly influenced you?
- Optional Team Activity: Share your stories in pairs or take turns within your group as a team.

Resources

"Where do You Find Your Ecological Identity," by Kelly Johnson.

<http://www.wingswormsandwonder.com/where-do-you-find-your-ecological-identity/>



STARTING WITH YOUR OWN STORY: HOW DID YOU COME TO HAVE “WATERSHED EYES?”

We all live within a watershed, but this reality is not common knowledge. Most do not realize the implications of the watershed context and the impacts that our daily lives have upon the waters of our local streams and rivers that run into the Chesapeake Bay. At some point you didn't know what you know now about the interconnectedness of all the waters and the significance of our behaviors upon these waters. It took some awareness building within yourself to come to this understanding of living within the context of a watershed. Along the way, you began to develop a keen sense of responsibility for those who are downstream of you. We call this watershed literacy, watershed consciousness, or developing “watershed eyes.”

Thought experiment to prepare your own story/testimony: Read the following reflection and create your story to tell about how you developed “watershed eyes.” Reflect on how you came to this awareness and how it is informed by your faith.

Reflection: Seeing with Watershed Eyes

There's an old hymn that goes “Open my eyes, that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me..., illumine me, Spirit Divine.” My eyes have been opened wider to the deep truth of living in watershed since I started this work with Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake. With this new sight, when I drove home from our summer family vacation at Chincoteague Island, I noticed a sign that says “You are in the Patuxent Watershed.” On my carpool to my daughter's school, I noticed the sign saying “Little Falls Watershed Alliance.” And in my own neighborhood, the “Friends of Sligo Creek” (in the Anacostia subwatershed) posts monthly news about preserving the creek with clean-ups, native plants, and removal of invasives along with poetry. My eyes are now seeing signs of watershed truth.

With these “watershed eyes” we can view the sacredness of water from our Creator's perspective. Chesapeake Bay environmental educator and artist, Tom Wisner, expressed this so beautifully: “This land, these waters are graced by a grand divine presence that is evident in the way we resonate with the simplicity in our native landscape....”

A watershed eyes perspective has a wide-angle view rooted in both the other-than-human and the human community affected by our relationship to our watershed. These social justice impacts are implied by a book entitled *The Web of Life* by preeminent ecologist John H. Storer, written in 1956. He prophetically indicated the social as well as environmental challenges to water conservation: “The best use of...water of the watershed that controls it has become a matter of life and death to [some] communities. The use and pollution, the cleansing and re-use of the water, in an effort to extend its usefulness, become matters of vital moment, demanding close cooperation between people dependent on it....” This indeed is a “vital moment”—a watershed moment!—in which God is calling for “cooperation between people” who live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. With watershed eyes awakened to the fact we are all vitally dependent upon it, physically and spiritually, we are inspired to take action. Heightened awareness with “watershed eyes” goes beyond mere sign reading to reading the signs of the times.

~ Kolya Braun-Greiner, MDiv, Religious Educator, Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

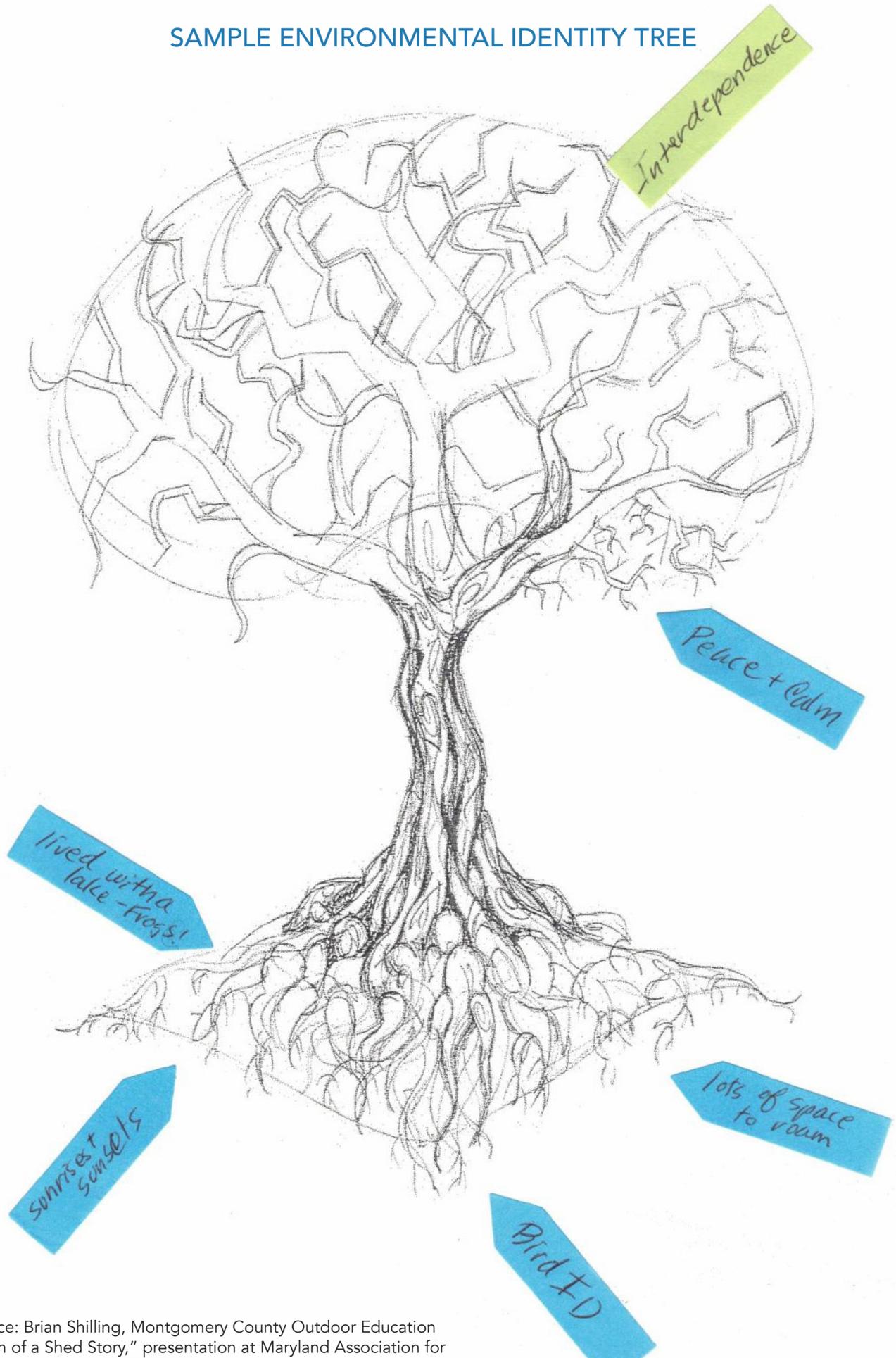
NAMING YOUR STORY

Your Watershed Story

Some of the following ideas are drawn from Brian Shilling, Montgomery County Outdoor Education, "Birth of Shed Story," presentation at MD Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education Conference, 2019

- *How does a Watershed Moment (when you realized something you never were aware of before - e.g., connection with water/shed) become a Watershed Movement?*
- What are your watershed moments? (Personal connections with water.)
- In order to understand the watershed we have to immerse ourselves in it! (Note: Patuxent Riverkeeper, Fred Tutman urges us to "*Forge a spiritual relationship with your local watershed.*" Our spiritual connection with our local environment is strengthened by a "place-based" understanding rooted in our experience within it.)
- **Environmental Identity:**
"Ecological identity work is valuable for anyone choosing to engage with others on environmental topics, ideas, processes, action, teaching, or anyone wanting to get at a deeper personal understanding of their own environmental values. Thomashow describes exploring ecological identity as becoming a "reflective environmentalist" on a search to "recover and reclaim the importance of nature in one's personal development." Delving into ecological identity helps people "understand their motivations and aspirations, to clearly articulate their environmental values, and know how to apply them to professional and personal decisions." ~ Kelly Johnson (Excerpt from: "Where Do You Find Your Ecological Identity?")
- **Create Your Own Tree Image** (see sample)
 - ROOTS:** How did your experiences of the environment change/shape your life? e.g., where you played as a child, experiences with friends and family outdoors. Also could include negative experiences.
 - TRUNK:** What core values — of your faith or other beliefs — do you hold that connect your roots to the leaves, that inform your actions?
 - LEAVES & BRANCHES:** What environmental actions you have taken? (that express your core values) e.g., volunteering, hobbies, future plans.

SAMPLE ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY TREE



Source: Brian Shilling, Montgomery County Outdoor Education
"Birth of a Shed Story," presentation at Maryland Association for
Environmental and Outdoor Education Conference 2019

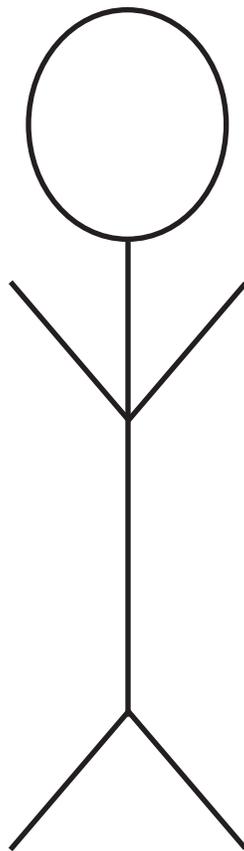
INVENTORY OF KEY INFLUENCES FOR MY ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND CARE

Key People

Who has made an impact in your life? How & why?

Key Moments

Share a time in your life that helped shape who you are (good or bad). How & why are you different?



Key Interests/Drives

What are you passionate about and why?

Key Institutions

What institutions (school, union, religious organization, community) made an impact on your life? How & why?
