

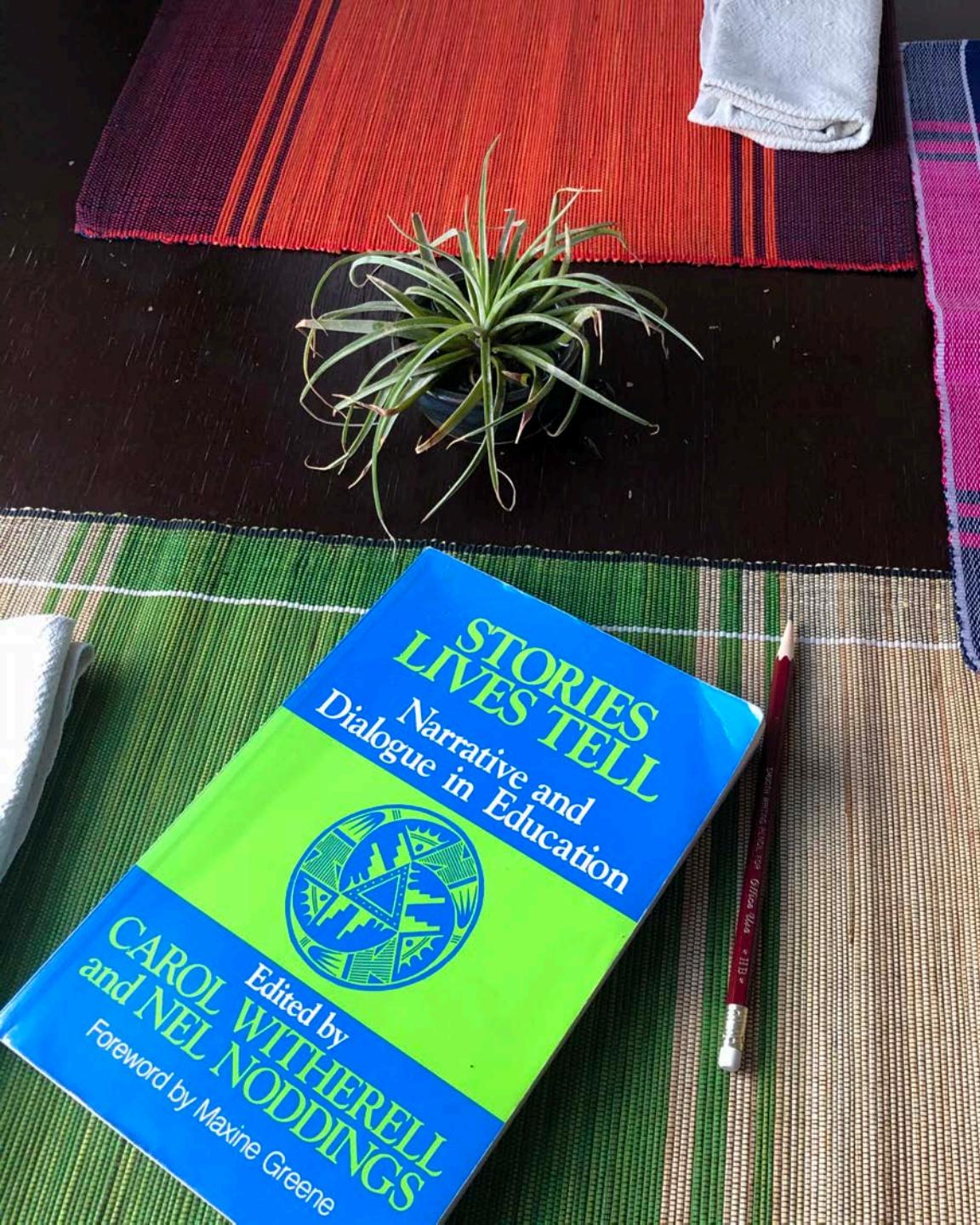


The Stories
We Tell:
Reflective Writing to
Examine how
Nature, Diversity, & Place
Influence Our Teaching

Nature

Nature:
peace, freedom, vanishing,
biodiversity, sorrow, beauty,
nearby, weeds, houseplants,
wonder, ocean, reef, forest,
fear, danger, me, us,
disconnection, immersion,
access, refuge, resilient.





"The stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture. Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with the threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives."

- Carol Witherell and Nell Noddings,
Stories Lives Tell, page 1

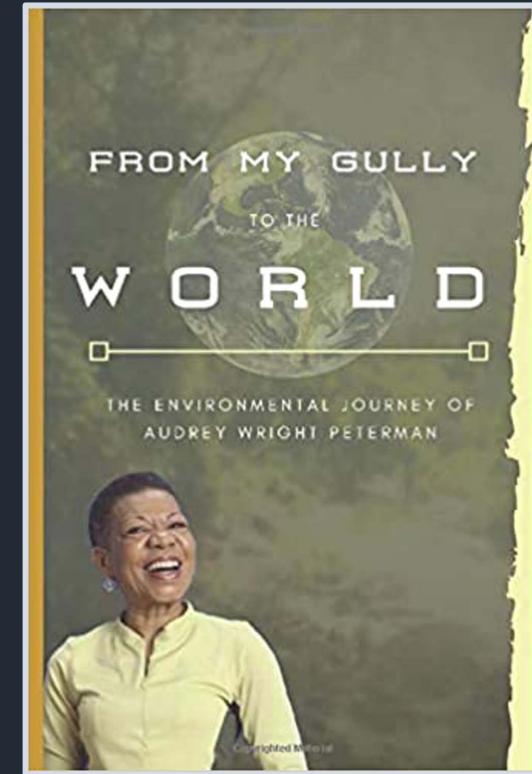
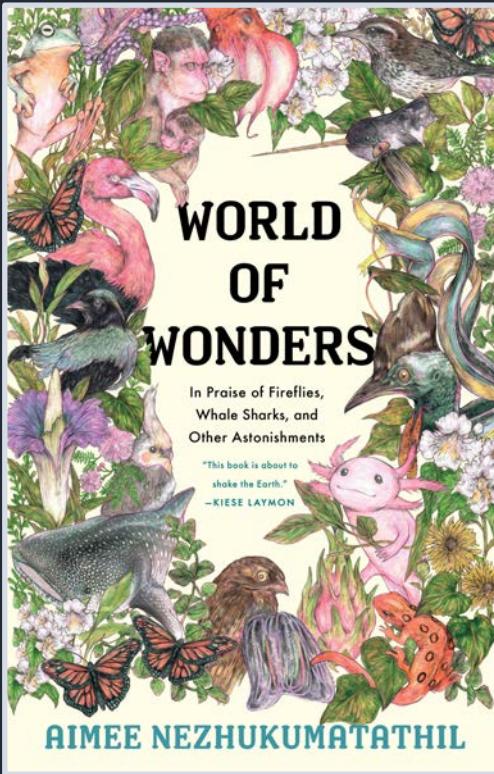
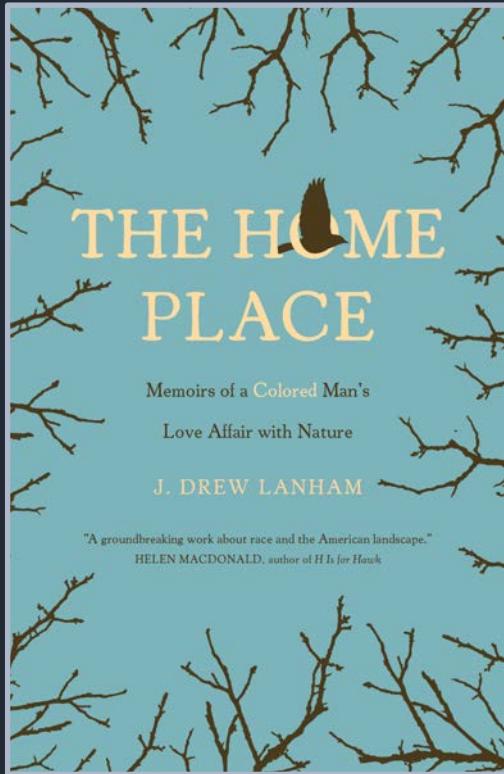


Who am I?

"I am an ornithologist, wildlife ecologist, and college professor. I am a father, husband, son, and brother. I hope to some I am a friend. I bird. I hunt. I gather. I am a seeker and a noticer. I am a lover. My being finds its foundation in open spaces.

I am a man of color – African American by politically correct convention – mostly black by virtue of ancestors who trod ground in central and west Africa being brought to foreign shores. In me there's additionally an inkling of Irish, a bit of Brit, a smidgen of Scandinavian, and some American Indian, Asian, and Neanderthal tossed in, too. But that's only a part of the whole: there is also the red of miry clay, plowed up and planted to pass a legacy forward. There is the brown of spring floods rising over a Savannah River shoal. There is the gold of ripening tobacco drying in the heat of summer's last breath. There are endless rows of cotton's cloudy white. My plumage is a kaleidoscopic rainbow of an eternal hope and the deepest blue of despair and darkness. All of these hues are in me; I am, in the deepest sense, colored."

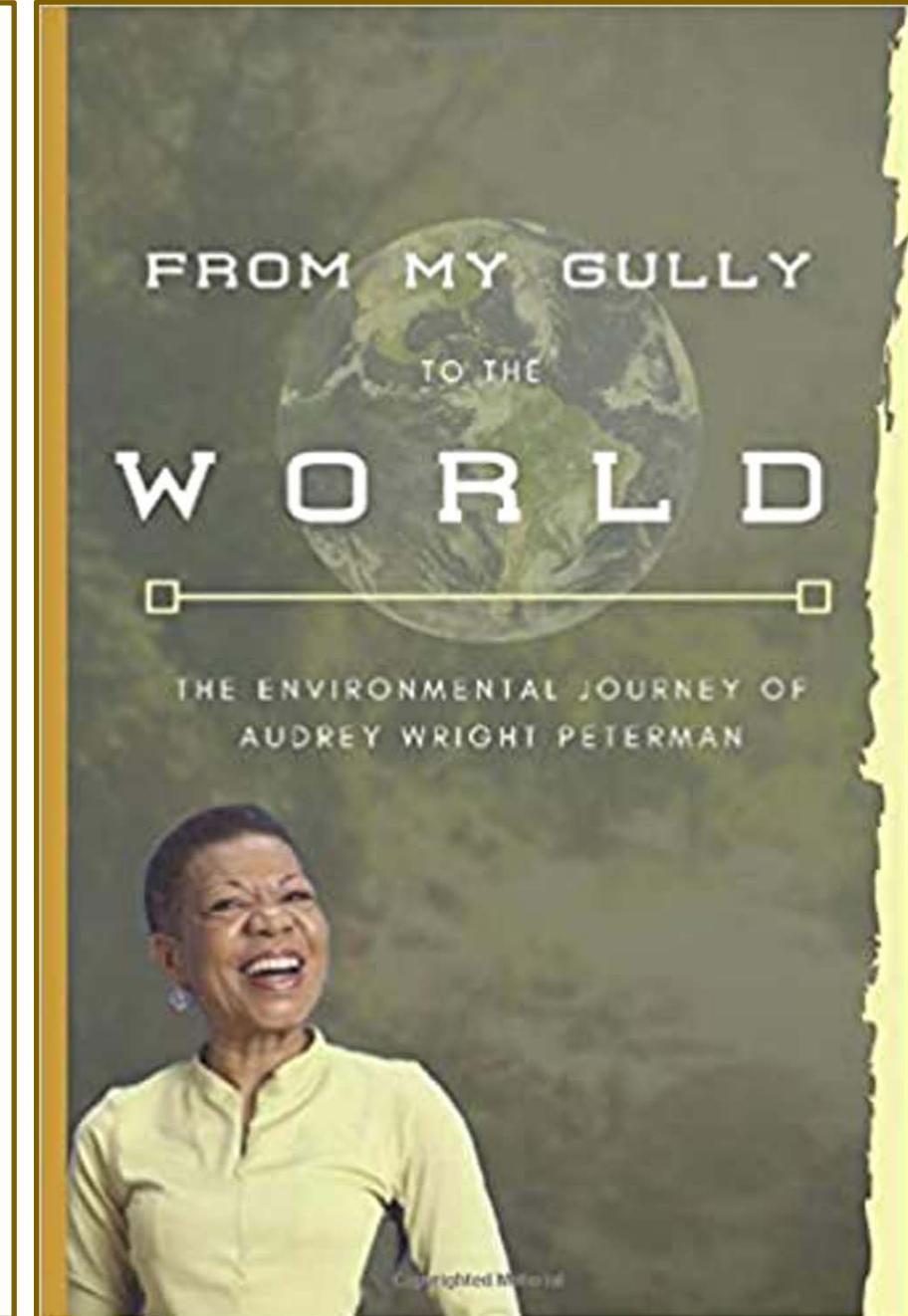
– J. Drew Lanham, *The Home Place*, pages 3-4



The Power of Personal Narratives About Nature

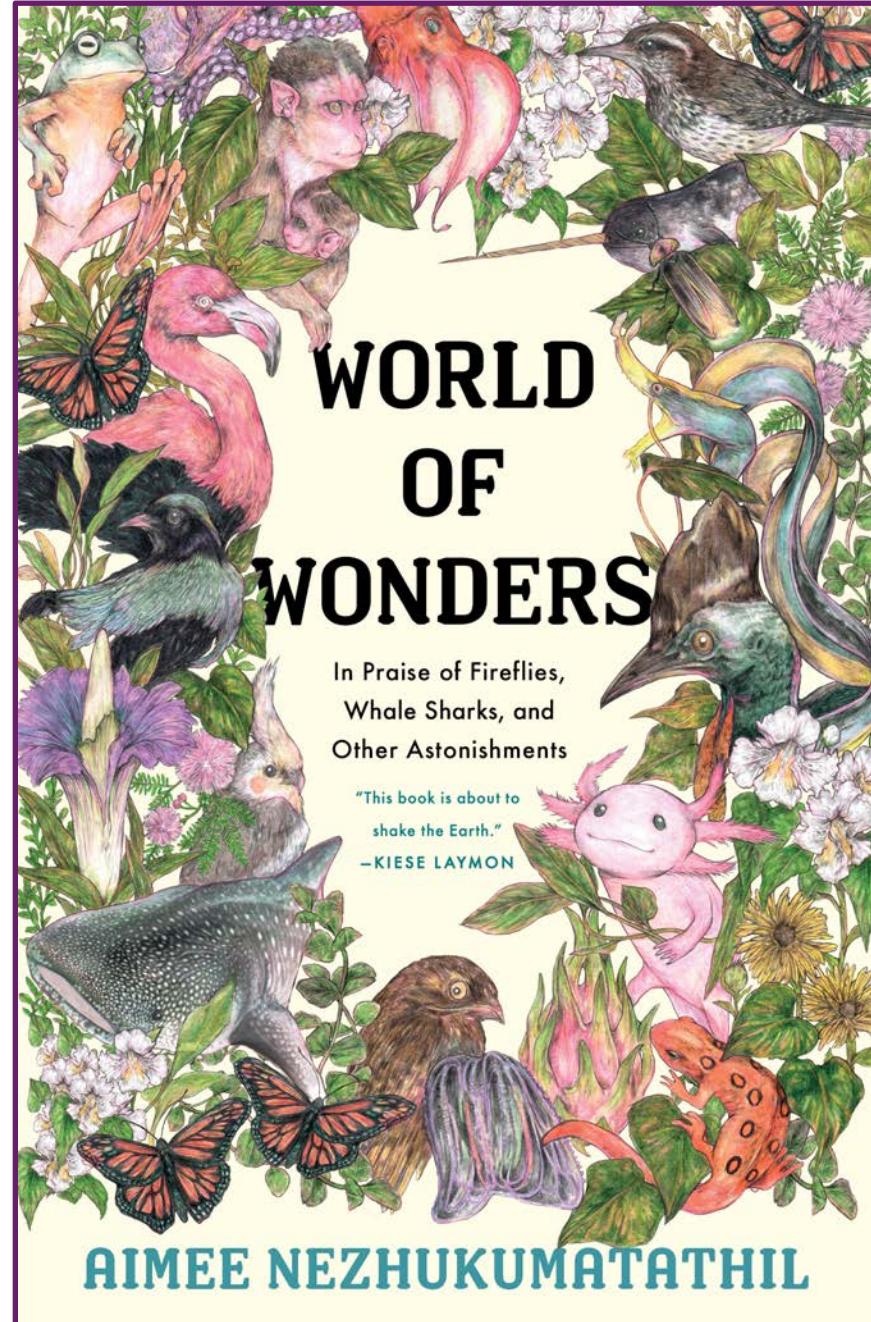
"My earliest memory is of following my grandmother, who I called Mama, down to the gully that ran behind our house to cut coco heart leaves for pepper pot soup. Mama chose the youngest shoots at the center of the plant that were still furled, as they were the most tender. Mission accomplished, I walked behind her in the gully back to the house, feeling the river stones under my feet, the cool water reaching up to my ankles and flowing between my toes. I may have been three or four years old, and Mrs. Ida Butler, my Mama, was the most important person in the world to me. I imprinted on her like a duckling on its mother."

- Audrey Peterman, *From My Gully to the World*, page 12.





"Ribbon eels are mainly content to stay in the same reef hole or coral heap for years, poking their heads out with their mouths ecstatically open as if to say, Wow—look at this spectacular place I call home! Really, it's just drawing water over its gills to help it breathe, though, and that's how it spends most of its days, most of its brilliant, flat body tucked away. In conditions like these, ribbon eels thrive and live up to twenty years. But the biggest threat to ribbon eels is the home aquarium trade because they don't survive long in captivity. Inside a tank, they soon stop eating, a silent protest against the ugly hands that lifted their elegant bodies up and into a bag or bucket. Most don't last even a year."



"As a baby, my youngest son was famous among our friends and neighbors for constantly opening his wee mouth in shock and surprise and wonder. He never seemed to be tired. If I turned off a lamp, and whispered that it was time to sleep, and slowly let my eyes adjust to the darkness, I would see him still staring at me with eyes as big as malted milk balls in our moonlit room. His pouty mouth parted in a perpetual state of delight. His wispy eyebrows and fine spread of owl-feather hair. The only time he didn't wear that expression of wonderment was when he blessedly fell asleep, so rare in those early years. But oh—when that finally did happen—how he'd sleep so hard against my chest! We'd both wake in a light sweat, although we were in the middle of a particularly harsh Western New York winter.

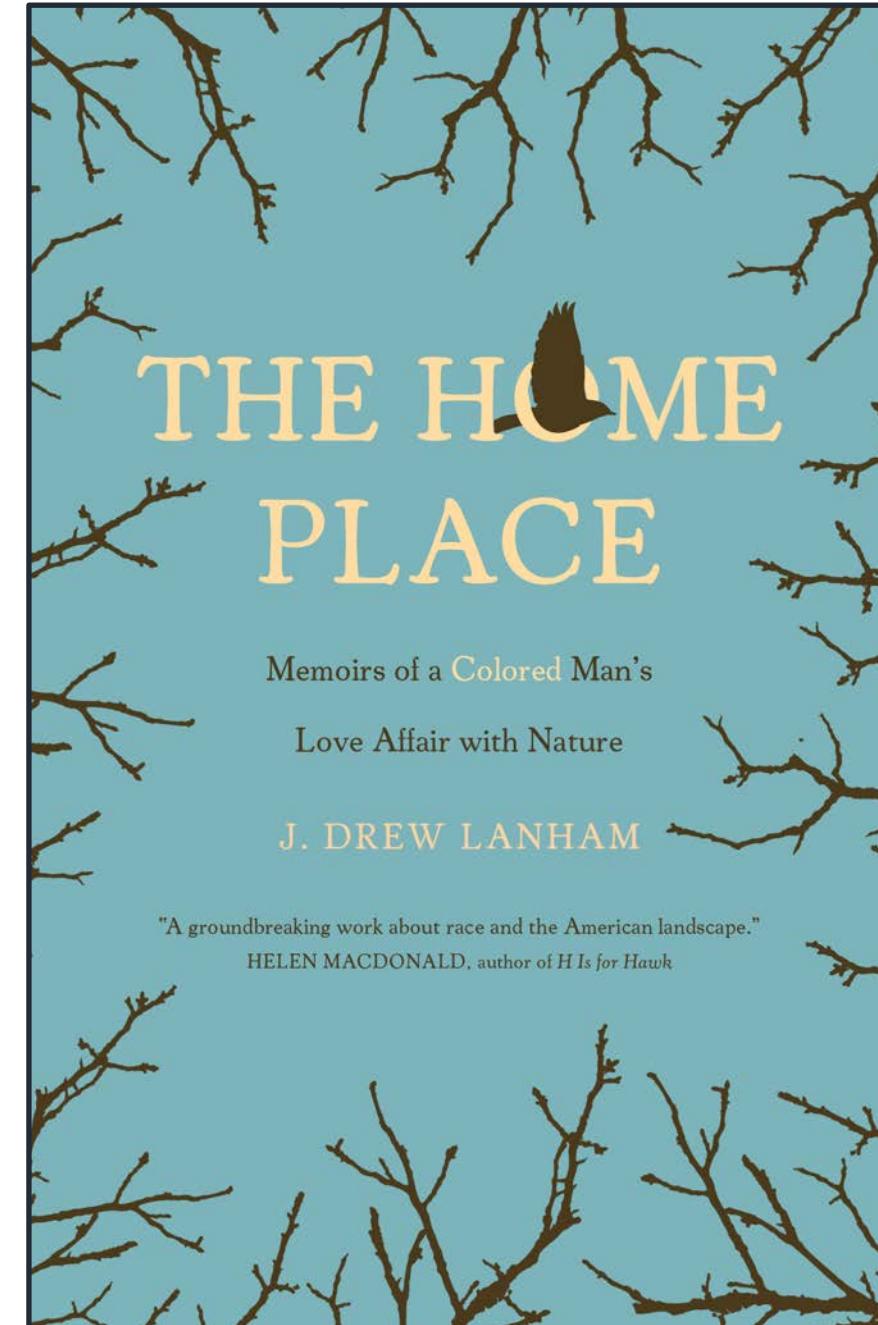
And that is how we passed our quiet days at home together during the first cold season of his life, enveloped under blankets while a foot or two of snow fell overnight. Mouths wide open in astonishment at things I'd easily pass over any other time during the busy academic year. I wasn't able to stay home the semester my eldest was born, so I cherished these slow days with my littlest guy, even though that rascal barely slept more than three hours at a time for his entire. first. two. years. Maybe the only real thing I could do in those blurry months was marvel. Wonder."

- Aimee Nezhukumatathil, *World of Wonders*



“More and more I find myself taking the hard data and wrapping it in genuine caring. . . . Aldo Leopold’s admonitions to be one of those who ‘cannot live without wild things’; to “keep all the parts,” “listen to the mountain,” and “preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community” fly round and round inside me like swifts swirling before the roost. The words are flocks of inspiration that I want to migrate from my mouth into the heads and hearts of others. I shake hands less now and give hugs more. I exchange more heartbeats than business cards.”

- J. Drew Lanham, *The Home Place*, p. 175

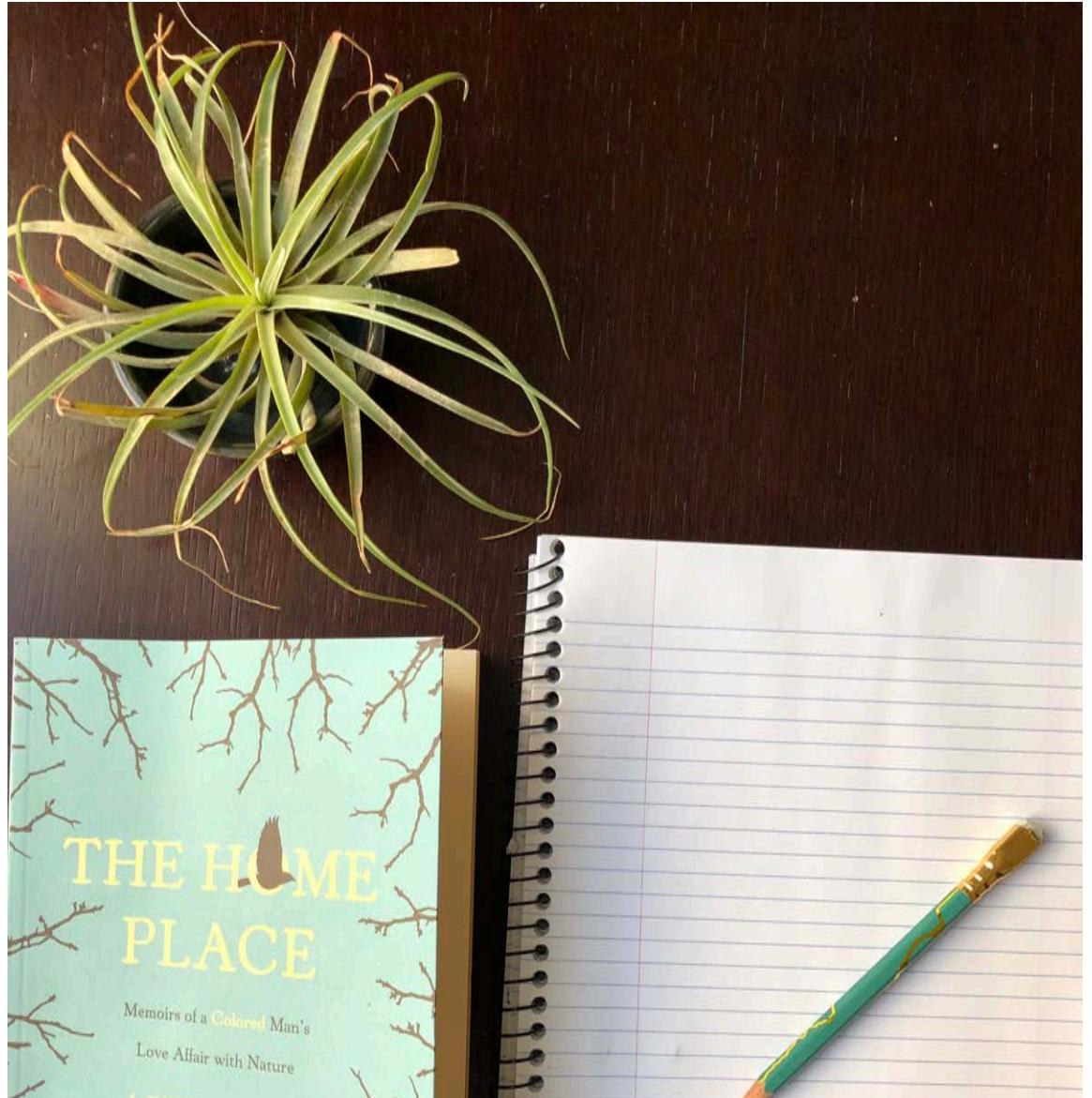








Questions?



“I think about land. But more and more I also think about how other black and brown folks think about land. I wonder how our lives would change for the better if the ties to place weren’t broken by bad memories, misinformation, and ignorance. I think about schoolchildren playing in safe, clean, green spaces where the water and air flow clear and the birdsong sounds sweet. More and more I think of land not just in the remote, desolate wilderness but in inner-city parks and suburban backyards and community gardens. I think of land and all it brings in my life. I think of land and hope that others are thinking about it, too”

– J. Drew Lanham, *The Home Place*, page 183



Hope Through Nature, Hope Within

I'd love to continue the conversation.

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