

Stories driven by Nature and Change of plans in K’jipuktuk-Halifax, NS, Canada

Photos by
April, Henry, Pedro & Susana

July 2026

HRC & GRABS
Collaboration

GRABS
Growing Up Across Borders

Halifax Refugee Clinic

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Special thanks go to
Julie Chamagne and Gillian Smith at the Halifax Refugee Clinic
and to
Professor Evangelia Tastsoglou at Saint Mary’s University.

Credits and intellectual property

The photographs included in this photo book were produced by and belong to young participant artists:

April, Henry, Pedro and Susana.

The design and layout of this photo book were produced by the young participant artists. The final photo book was produced by GRABS researcher and PhD candidate Juan Manuel Moreno and printed at the *Centre des recherches sociologiques et politiques de Paris* (CRESPPA), Université Paris 8, France.

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Front cover photograph, ‘You look great btw’, sidewalk art, K’jipuktuk-Halifax, NS, Canada, taken by Juanchila, July 2025
Back and inner covers illustration, *Growing Up Across Borders*, by Juanchila, 16.10.2024
Font used: Baskerville Old Face; Liberation Sans, by Pravin Satpute & Steve Matteson

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The GRABS project

Growing Up Across Borders (GRABS) is a five-year research project examining the lived experiences of young people aged 15-25 years old who are growing up in situations of forced migration and (im)mobility across borders. The project aims to better understand how lived experiences of violence, displacement, migration and borders impact young people's lives and transition into adulthood, crossing geographical mobility with mobility across their life course.

The GRABS team is based at the Centre de recherches sociologiques et politiques de Paris (CRESPPA), Université Paris 8, France, and is composed of five researchers: Professor Jane Freedman, who is the project leader, post-doc researchers Dr Glenda Santana de Andrade and Dr Isabel Morrell, and doctoral candidates Jessi Kume and Juan Manuel Moreno. Developing and exploring creative participatory methodologies, we work together with young people to gain a better understanding about their challenges, needs and priorities, as well as their copying strategies, agency and resilience when faced with such difficulties. We believe this will put us in a better position to understand how they can be better supported in their mobility and in their transition into adulthood. In this way, we hope to provide feedback to those who deal with policies and provide services for young people in situations of forced migration.

At GRABS we work in collaboration with local researchers, service providers, and community organisations in various locations across five countries – France, Greece, and the UK in Europe, and Canada and South Africa – each place experiencing varying migration, asylum and refugee situations and regimes; housing, employment, education, health and social security systems; and historical, socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. In K'jipuktuk-Halifax, part of unceded Mi'kma'ki territory and today Nova Scotia, Canada, we have worked in collaboration with the Halifax Refugee Clinic and the YMCA Youth Outreach Team at the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programmes. We are being hosted by Saint Mary's University to be able to conduct this research.

The GRABS project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC Advanced Grand 101141171).

You can find out more about the GRABS project and research team in our website:
https://erc-grabs.univ-paris8.fr/

Halifax Refugee Clinic

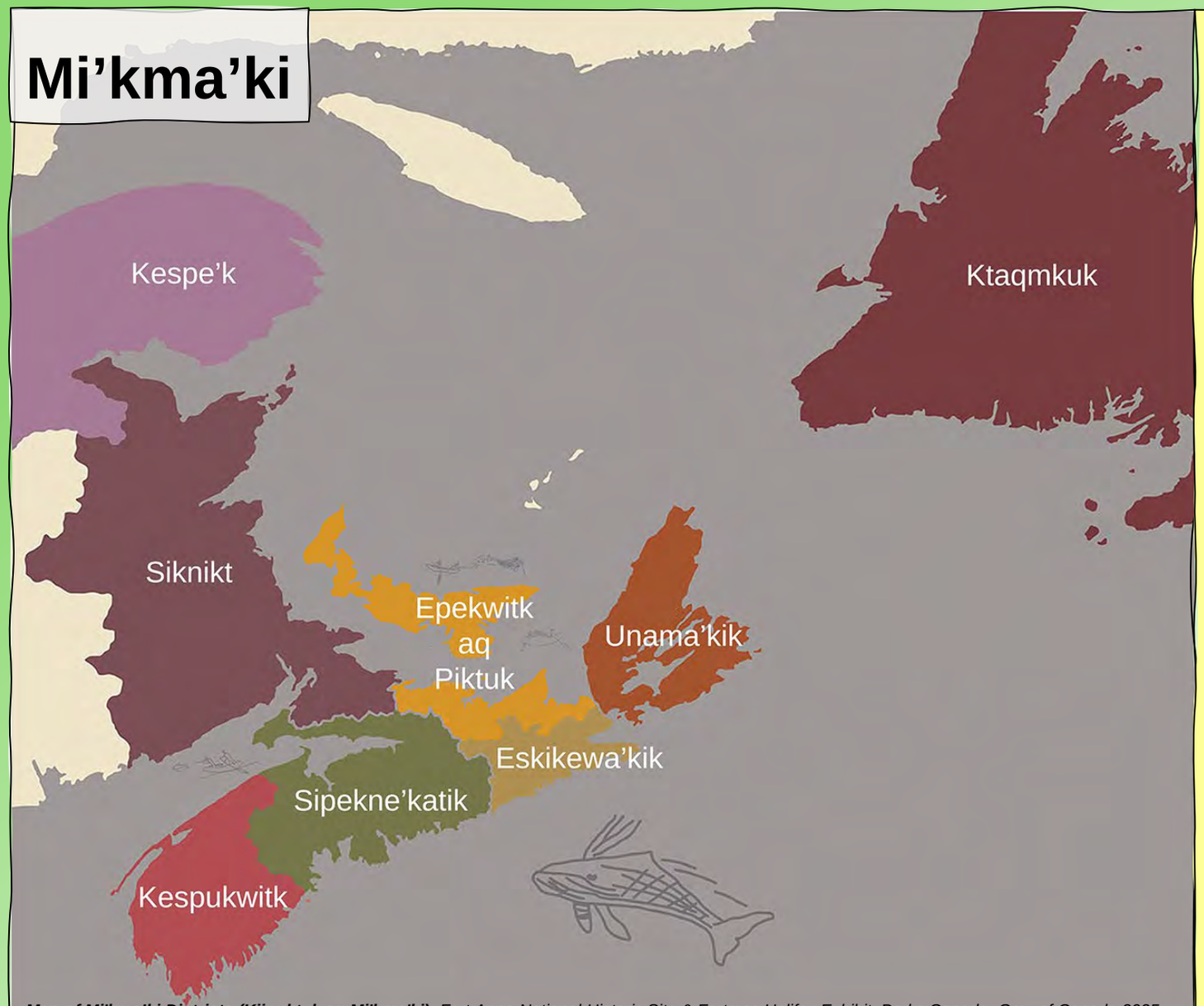
The Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC) was founded in 2000, by immigration, refugee and human rights lawyer Lee Cohen, K.C., to ensure that some of the world's most vulnerable and persecuted people receive urgently needed support and representation while they navigate the complex refugee determination process. The HRC's mandate is to provide legal representation for those claiming refugee status and seeking protection in K'jipuktuk-Halifax and in Nova Scotia, to ensure that they are given a fair opportunity to present their cases before the Immigration and Refugee Board, and that throughout the process, their rights and their integrity are fully respected. In addition to immigration and refugee legal services delivery, the HRC provides robust and comprehensive settlement services, engages in local and national advocacy efforts and serves as a hub for community engagement and partnerships.

The HRC's approach is anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and client-centred. Through direct, intersectional legal and settlement services provision, the HRC works to ensure that people seeking safety in our community have meaningful access to justice, and the support and opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity and self-determination.

HRC's life changing work is guided by a volunteer board of directors and is implemented by an expert multidisciplinary and multilingual staff team and a network of volunteers, placement students and community partners. The work is made possible through various grants and funding sources and by the generosity of private donors.

You can find out more about HRC services and work with the community on their website: https://halifaxrefugeeclinic.org/about/

K’jipuktuk, *Great Harbour*, it’s part of Mi’kma’ki



Map of Mi’kma’ki Districts (Kjipuktuk aq Mi’kma’ki). *Fort Anne National Historic Site & Fortress Halifax Exhibit, Parks Canada, Gov. of Canada 2025*

The research and workshop sessions leading to this photo book were carried out in K’jipuktuk, today also known as Halifax. K’jipuktuk means ‘great harbour’ in Mi’kmaw.

K’jipuktuk (Halifax), and what is today known as the province of Nova Scotia, form part of Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory where the Mi’kmaq Peoples have lived for more than 11,000 years.

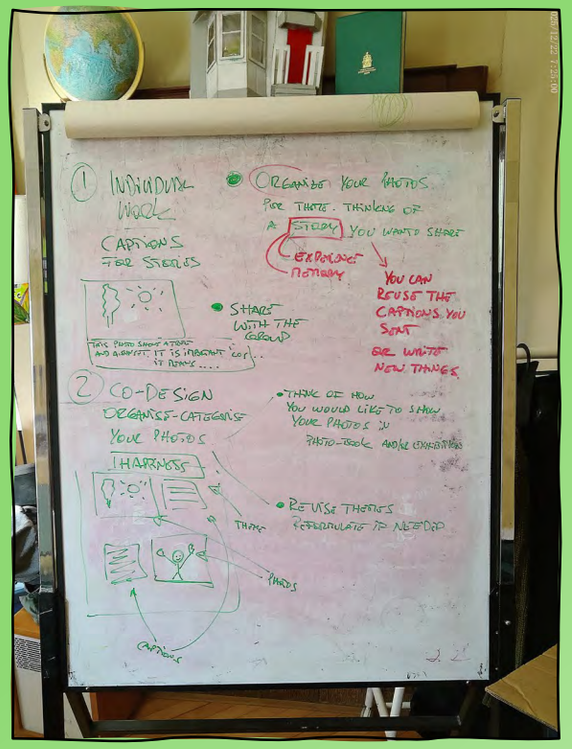
Located within the Northeastern Woodlands, Mi’kma’ki territory extends across all 4 provinces of today’s Atlantic Canada (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland), the Gaspé Peninsula, and parts of the state of Maine, in today’s United States.

We acknowledge and are grateful, as foreigners visiting, studying, working, living, or just passing through, to be in these lands to carry out this research project. Wela’lin.

Mi’kmaw district place names for Mi’kmaki and their meanings: The districts of Mi’kma’ki shown in this map and described below were based on rivers, streams and natural drainage systems. They were flexible, permeable boundaries that reflected the “changing conditions and the needs of people in each area, rather than acting as geopolitical boundaries.”

Kespe’k (”end of land”) is comprised of the Saint John River Valley and the Appalachian Mountain Range of northern New Brunswick and the Gaspé area of Quebec. **Ktaqmkuk** (”across the waves/water”) Newfoundland. **Siknikt** (”drainage area”) includes the Miramichi River and the Acadian Coast and Bay of Fundy Region. **Epekwitk aq Piktuk** (Prince Edward Island, “cradled above water” and Pictou “explosion place”) is comprised of PEI the lowland area along the Northumberland Strait, sperated from neighbouring districts by the Cobequid Highlands and the Pictou and Antigonish Highlands. **Kespukwitk** (”end of flow”) includes the area west of the La Have River to Yarmouth/Cape Sable in South/southwestern Nova Scotia. **Sipekne’katik/Sikipne’katik** (Shubenacadie, “area of wild potato/turnip”) is comprised of the Shubenacadie District and the Minas Basin Coast. **Eskikewa’kik** (translation uncertain at this time, some suggest “skin dressers”) comprised of the portion of Atlantic Coastal Region from the western portion of Nova Scotia west of Sheet Harbour to Canso. **Unama’kik** (a variation of the word Mi’kma’kik, meaning “Mi’kmaw territory”) Cape Breton Island.

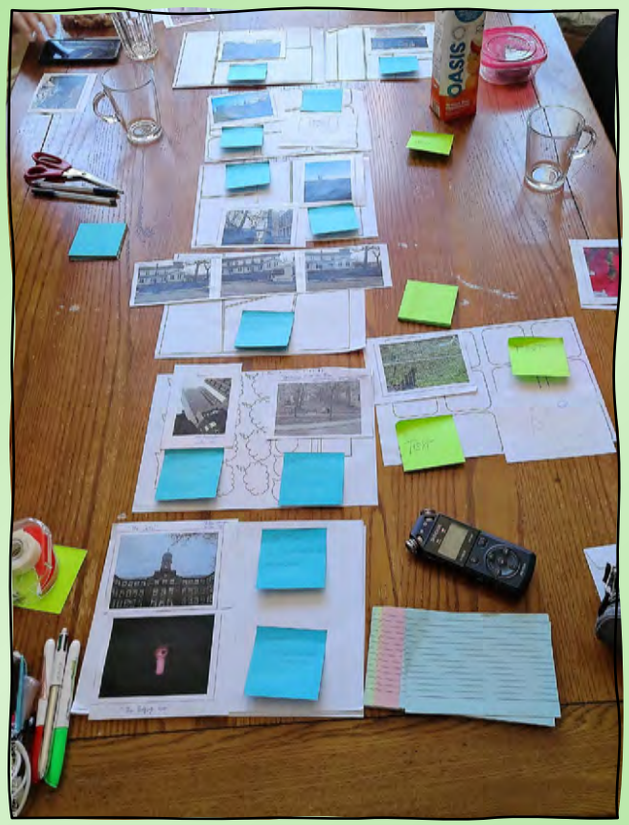
Sources: **Sable & Francis (2018)** The Language of this Land, Mi’kma’ki, pp.21-22; **Mi’kmaw Place Names Digital Atlas (n.d.)** (https://placenames.mapdev.ca/); **Mi’kmawey Debert Cultural Centre (n.d.)** (https://www.mikmaweydebert.ca/)





Photovoice workshop sessions, June 2026.





About this photo book and the themes explored by participants

This photo book is the product of a collaboration between the Halifax Refugee Clinic, and the ERC Growing Up Across Borders research project. This collaboration led to a series of creative participatory workshops in photography and photovoice ran by GRABS researcher and PhD candidate Juan Manuel Moreno, consisting of 6 three-hour sessions held between April-June 2026, in K'jipuktuk-Halifax, NS, Canada.

During the first couple of workshop sessions, participant youth discussed and decided on which themes they wanted to work on, they were given a digital camera and introduced to some basic skills in photography. Between each weekly session, participants were invited to take photos related to their chosen themes and bring them for discussion with the group. During these discussions, copies of the photographs were printed for participants to organise them according to the themes, while reflecting on their meaning, and the stories and feelings behind them.

The two main themes explored during the workshops and featuring in this photo book – **Nature** and **Change of Plan** – had originally emerged from focus group discussions held during a prior visit in February 2026 and were later further discussed during the first session of the photography-photovoice workshops. Initially, the theme of 'Change of Plan' was that of 'Adaptation', however, participants felt adaptation did not fully encompass the meaning behind their stories. While broad in scope, the themes carry different meanings and represent some of the lived experiences and stories the young people wanted to share through their photographs.

Participants chose how to display their photographs in the pages and organised them by themes.

Nature

Henry



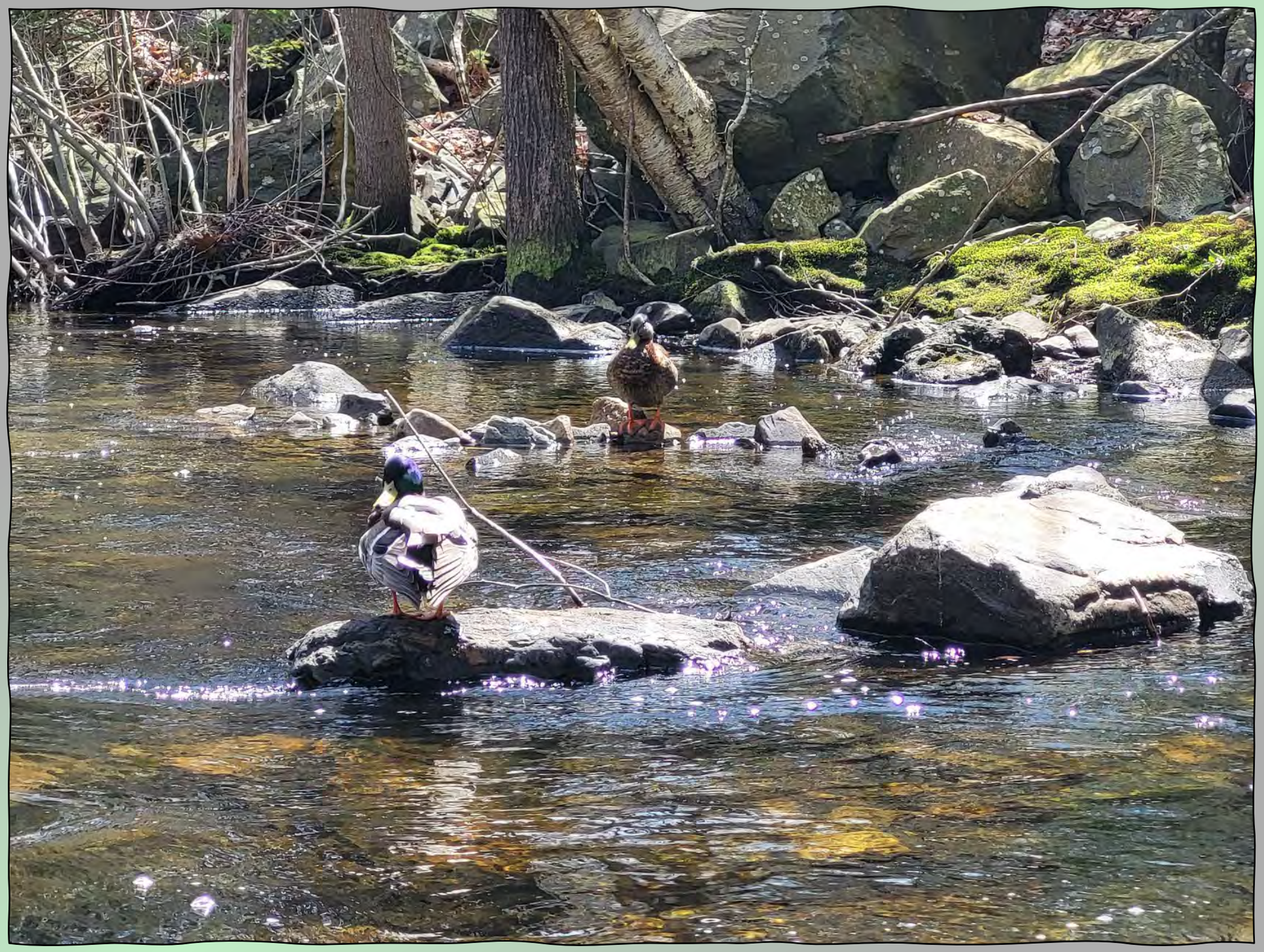
It stands for love, peace, blessing, happiness and sorrows depending on the season and reason it is given. In the period of Mother’s Day, in Canadian culture, bouquets of flowers are given to mothers by their loved ones in order to show love, appreciation and join them to celebrate their heritage as parents or mothers. Personally, flowers are a means to show love.



This was a personal design I made, the flowers symbolising love. We just don’t speak love, we show love, just by giving flowers to a loved one may help brighten their day and make our loved ones smile and happy!

Always show love to everyone! Live, Love, Laugh!

Susana



“Glen Moir”:

My family and I consider Glen Moir as our hometown in Canada. It is a beautiful place with a very supportive community. We would go to this river to clear out our minds, and to remind ourselves that beyond the challenges and difficulties of leaving one’s country, there can be joy and amazing experiences too.

April

George Dixon Central Park

Branches stretching in different directions, just like me learning to grow in a new place. Not everything feels familiar yet, but little by little, I’m finding my way in this country.





Sullivan’s Pond & Point Pleasant Park





Winter feels so quiet without animals around, but summer is completely different.



Pedro

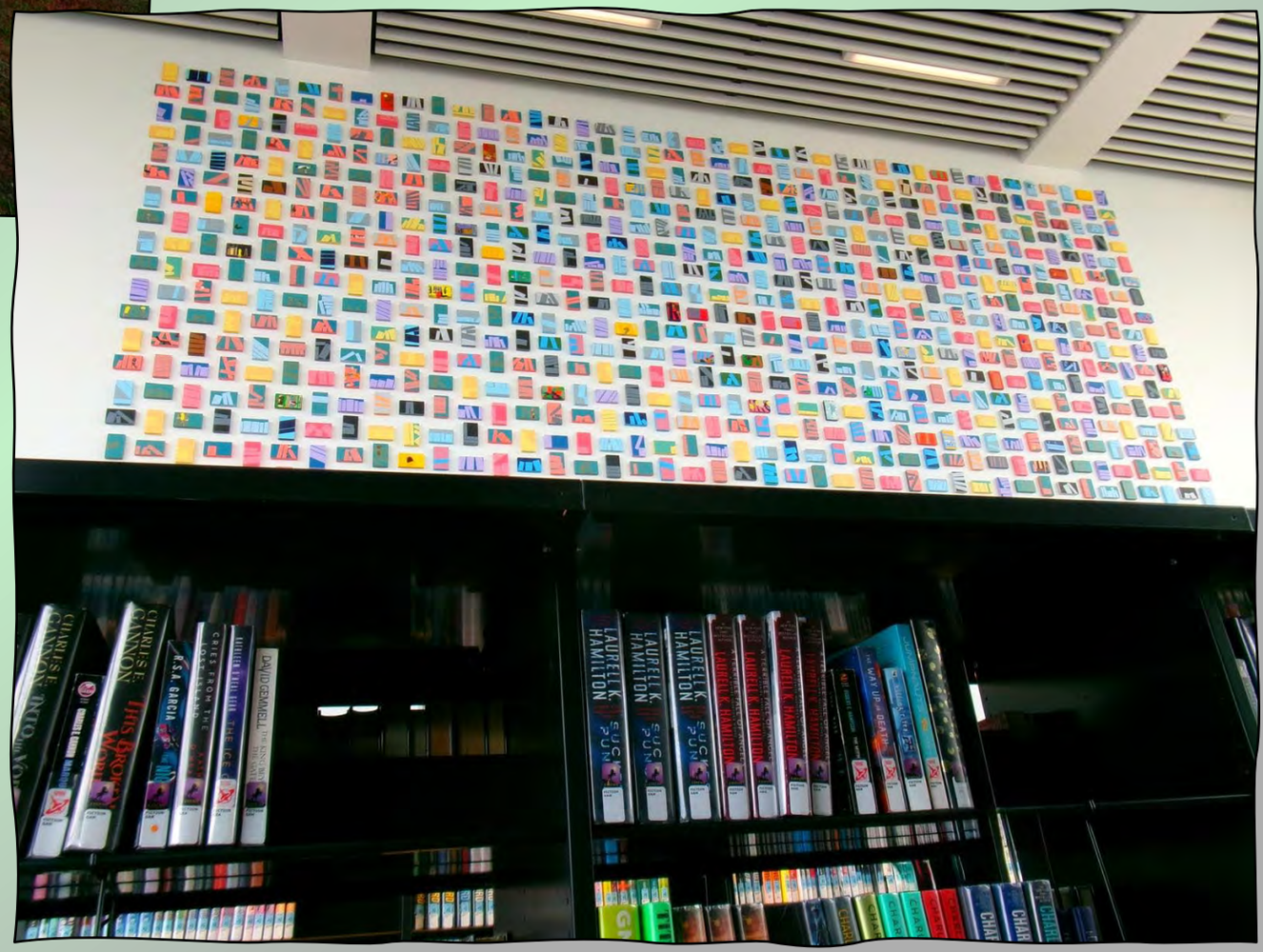
A river’s stream

The passing of time is just like the river’s stream. It goes really fast, and it is wasted just like the water. It happens too fast.

Change of Plan

April





Halifax Central Library

It was an autumn afternoon. I was at the library with my mom and a friend, and for a moment, I decided to look outside and take a photo.

There’s something about this place that feels familiar to me, I used to come here for my English classes, so being back brings a quiet sense of nostalgia.



Pedro



Dalhousie University

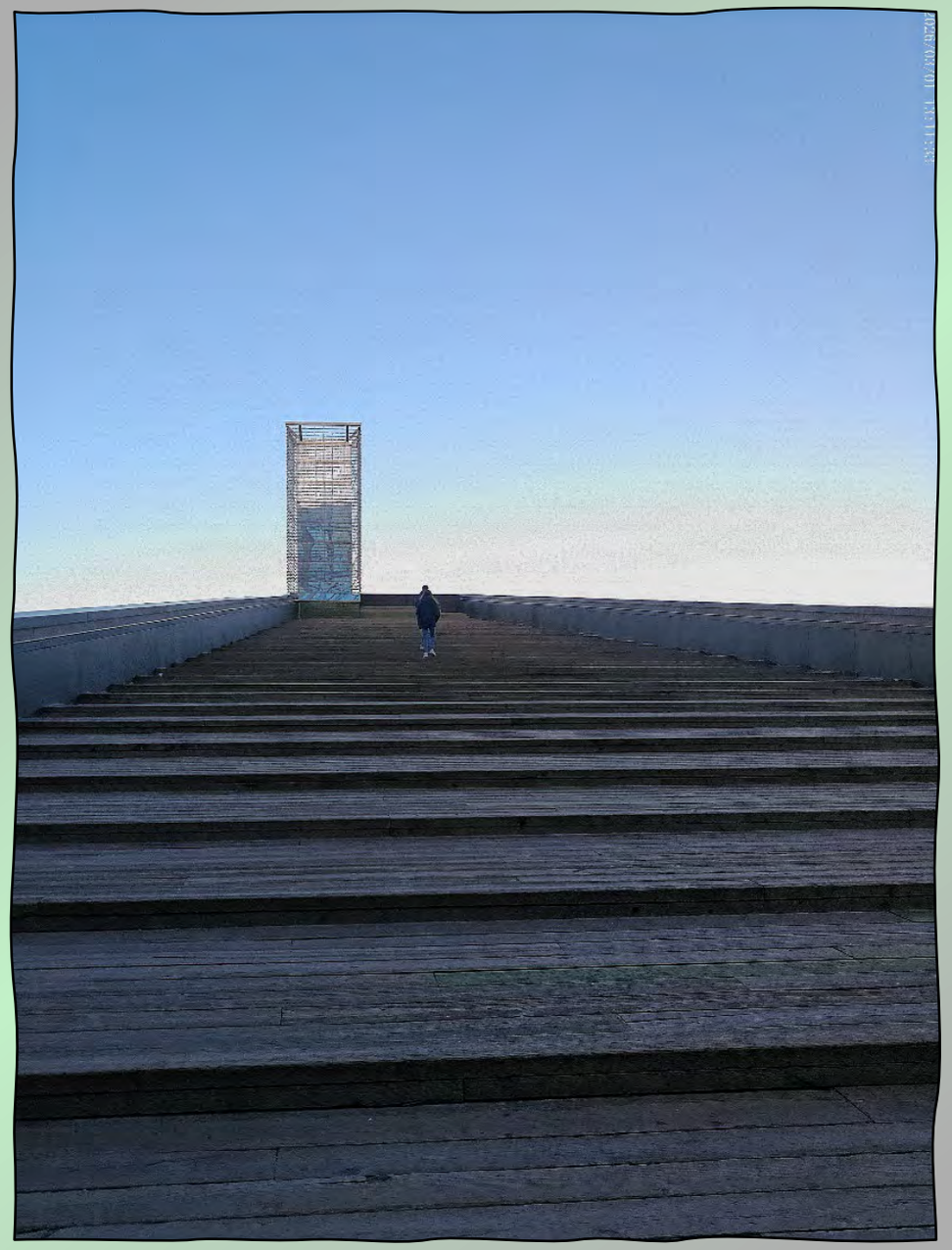
The great Dalhousie University, a place of joy and challenges. It is an open door for opportunities many and my first university experience too. 5.40pm

Canadian flag

The Canadian flag represents freedom and joy, a childhood dream made true. It stands for love, peace, blessing, happiness and sorrows depending on the season and reason it is given. Dartmouth 4.20pm

Waterfront – steps up to glass house sculpture

A place to relax, chill out. Every step represents a long process full of tasks and challenges, and the sculpture represents the good results. The process is always enjoyable, despite all the drawbacks. Water Front 8pm.





Waiting for Bus #8 at Barrington St

The waiting for the number 8. It was a one-hour trip from Downtown to home but it never failed. It was the daily routine. There were good days and bad days, but daily commuting is progress in life. Barrington Street 7.40pm.

Susana





“Bus stop”:

I would go to this bus stop to get on the only bus that could get me home after 10-hours shifts. I recall feeling exhausted, so helpless while standing there in the cold after dark, in a new city, and surrounded by sometimes unfriendly strangers. It was a time for reflection about all the changes that were happening in my life back then, thinking that better times will come, just like my bus.





“Green”:

Back in my home country, I never thought I would have to clean for a living. This was my very first job. It drained all my energy every evening. I should not complain though, as it pays my bills and even made me a more resilient human being.



“Gathering Under the Rain”:

You wouldn’t think of an armchair as a good companion for a bench and a trash can, and yet they are close, in complicity even during harsh times. They remind me of my (small) group of friends back home. I was not ready to say goodbye.



“The Giant” (Dalhousie University):

As soon as I moved to Canada, I knew I wanted to resume my superior studies and enrol in a local university (Dalhousie). Considering the language barrier, my limited skills, and my financial situation, sometimes I thought that I should only focus on making money fast, that it was nearly impossible to achieve, that I don’t belong there. Today, I am a second-year Dal student. I am still scared, but I know that if I keep fighting, I will defeat any giants I may find along the way.



“The Judging Eye”:

My brother’s eye through an antique door lock reminds me of the expectations society has on immigrants in general. Family back home expects you to do well. Friends and acquaintances in the new country expect you to do well. But what if you don’t? Sometimes the secret to wellbeing is ignoring the judging eye.

Henry

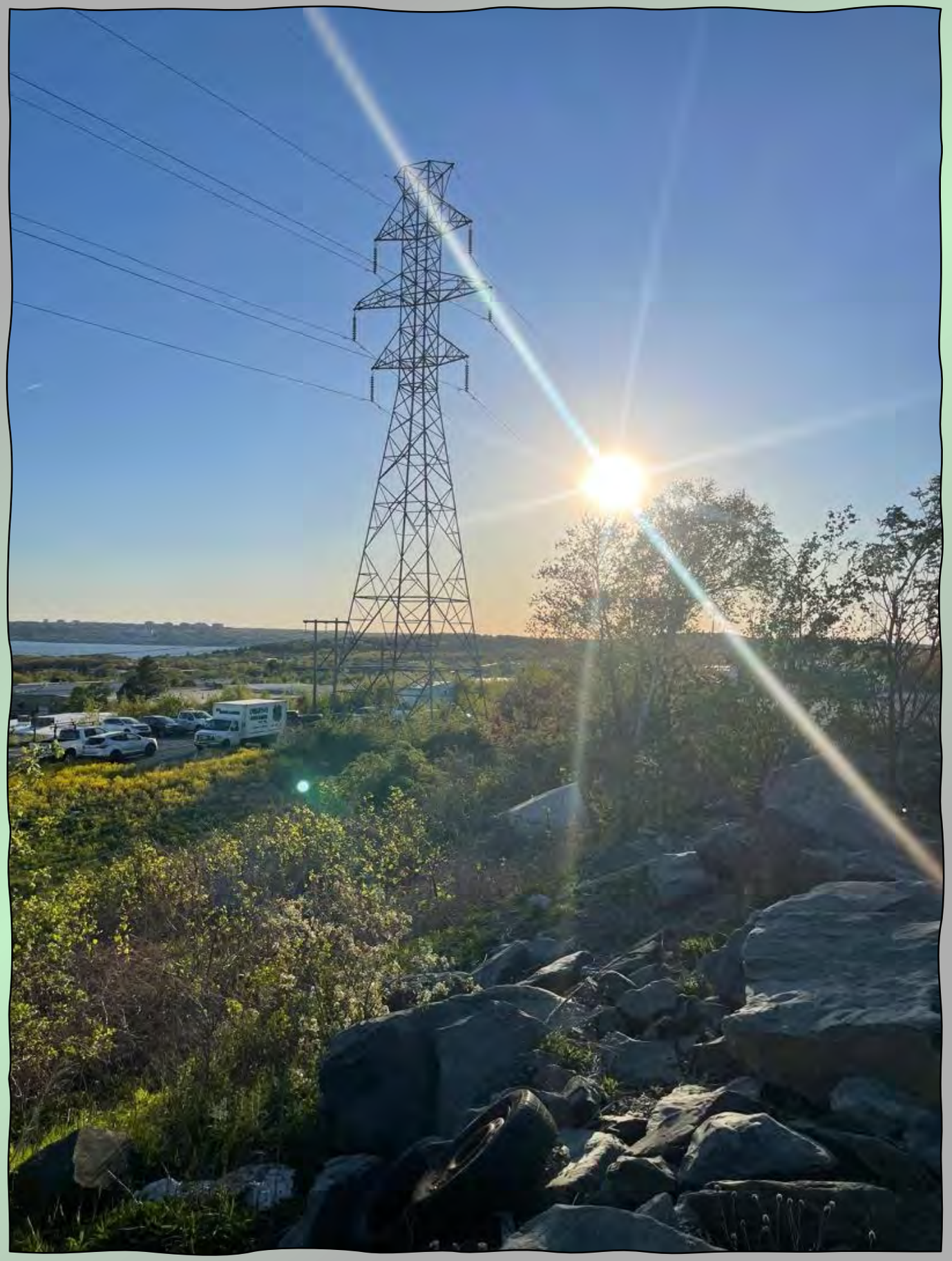


Fence.

The fence to me signifies barriers, limitations or hindrances faced by immigrant and refugees. The green grass stands for opportunities, freedom, liberation, protection, and securities by immigrants. The shadow stands for the dream of people, their motivation, their hopes of what keeps them going, their hope and cry as they strive to make it over the fence. The shadow is the life for some people.

Barriers. In life, there are some barriers that block our paths or prevent an action from happening in our life, but we should not give up or lose hope and believe we can overcome. Be strong, Be courageous, You can do it! Never give up!

By Henry Wewe



The Sunset

It feels so refreshing looking at the sunset at 8pm around Isnor Drive, Dartmouth, NS.
Personally, the sunset reminds me of coming close to the end of my challenges or sorrows. It is a reminder that no limitation, pain, hardship, or suffering is permanent. There will come a time when it will be over just like the sunset.
Never give up because the joy and victory you will receive at the end is worth it.
Hold on for one more day!
Things will go your way!

GROWING UP ACROSS BORDERS

It was a wonderful moment participating in this project and I got to learn a lot and laugh. GRABS in my opinion is pretty much mind opening as I have got to learn a lot during my participation. Life is a journey and as we embark on it don't forget to Live Laugh Love!! **Henry**

This project taught to value our vision as refugees. Taking pictures of the city made me remember the places I used to visit when I arrived, and I really didn't know their names or how to get there. **April**

This was a fun, creative process. Using the type of camera we did reminded me so much of my childhood. I love the human connections made along the way; I'll never forget Juanchila, Henry, and April (I couldn't forget my brother Pedro even if I wanted to). It was therapeutic too. It was nice to express my feelings and thoughts, but also to know that I wasn't the only one struggling. I feel more grateful and lucky now. My work is also a tribute to all the people that once helped my family and I. **Susana**

This project was a good experience. It was very inclusive and it made me explore my artistic skills. I met really nice people that made the process enjoyable, and I ate a lots of cookies during the workshops. **Pedro**

JUANCHILA 16.10.2024

GROWING UP ACROSS BORDERS

BORDER

LIVED EXPERIENCES
CONNAISSANCES
HISTORIAS

Saint Mary's University

GRABS
GROWING UP ACROSS BORDERS

Funded by the European Union

erc
European Research Council

Halifax Refugee Clinic

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Cresppa
CENTRE DE RECHERCHES SOCIOLOGIQUES & POLITIQUES DE PARIS

JUANCHICA
2.16.10.2024