# Re-Membering Meaning in the Spaces

Tweela Houtekamer
Bachelor of Science in Nursing
University of Alberta
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Readers for the Project
Dr. Cynthia Chambers
Barbara Huston

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Abstract

Through stories of elementary school children she sees as a counsellor and the tensions existing in those stories, the writer enters into an examination of stories from her own life. The main question the author attempts to explore is the importance of narrative and story in her own life and how they function as a site for resistance, reflection, interpretation and meaning making. The writing itself is the process as the author attempts a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry into her own complicity in maintaining existing structures of class, race, gender, morality and education.

To Paul, Nathan and Brenna
without whom my life and the stories about it
would be far less rich.
and
to my parents
for their beautifully crafted stories
and their willingness to share them.

## Acknowledgments

Although these words appear at the beginning of this work, they were born while the work was in progress and were written after it was completed. It might be said that they became evident in the spaces of the work, that they existed in the middle of it all.

Reading and writing are always, for me, about relationships, are always framed by external events and my responses to them. Over the years, many persons have influenced my reading and writing crafts, my abilities to articulate my ideas and interpretations.

I must begin by thanking my parents for their finely-crafted stories so generously shared. They also passed on a love of books and of reading and provided me with a childhood environment where reading was a shared and interactional event.

I wish to thank my husband and children for their patience and support, especially over the last few months when my articles, books and bits and pieces of paper overflowed the confines of the den and took over the living room and dining room as well. This work was created in every room of our home, in the middle of my life; it accompanied me to coffee shops and donut shops where I waited between deliveries and pick-ups, to swimming pools, hockey arenas, orthodontic offices and music lessons and festivals. I am not sure if my writing occurred in the spaces of my life or if my life occurred in the spaces of my writing, but my family has always been at the core of it all. I wish to thank them, too, for their generosity in allowing me to re-member and include bits and pieces of *their* stories while I wrote my own.

Eight years ago, while teaching at Lethbridge Community College, I shared an office with Rochelle Yamagishi who invited me to be a member of a writing group which also came to

include Evelyn Good Striker and Cynthia Chambers. Writing for this group, sharing with and receiving feedback from them, and travelling together and presenting at conferences, helped me to reclaim my childhood sense of myself as a writer and convinced me I had something both to gain and to give by pursuing my studies. My participation with this group set my feet down on the path I now follow.

I was fortunate and privileged to have Dennis Sumara as one of my instructors for a course about research in education. Dennis, along with his partner Brent Davis, helped me to see that research is art is life. Both encouraged and supported me in my fledgling attempts at research writing and helped me believe that digging into my own life can be a valid form of inquiry. Dennis' support, through e-mail and telephone calls, also helped me move past my initial panic when attempting to begin this work, restored my ability to ground myself as a writer, and guided me to some influential resources.

I have been privileged to have been influenced by several other teachers and friends over the last five years. Richard Butt demonstrated the power for most participants of publicly sharing stories about teaching; David Smith taught through his own practice how spirituality can be brought into the classroom; Michael Pollard affirmed my belief that children's literature can be used beautifully and effectively even in a classroom full of adults. Cynthia Chambers, as my project supervisor, allowed me to find my own way while gently insisting on a central question and a theoretical framework. At each point in my inquiry, she knew just which book would be helpful, just which article would clarify or inspire. I hope she has discovered, while reading this work, that I really was listening after all. More than any other teacher or writer, she has provided me with a model for my hermeneutic inquiries and has encouraged me to continue this kind of

writing, knowing herself how difficult it is and how deep one must go.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their support and for their patience with my pre-occupation and forgetfulness, especially Wayne Aikins for his willingness to be the sounding board for some of my ideas, while sharing his own, and Glenda McCue for her thoughtful reading of my first draft. I wish to thank Aishield Barrantes for her kind permission to include her story in this work and Barbara Huston for providing me with warm and encouraging feedback about the writing itself.

I am especially grateful to the ladies at the lake for three days every summer filled with love, stories, laughter and renewal.

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# Beginning in the Middle

Ginnie's teacher has invited me into her grade two classroom to talk about what I do in the school, what my job is. I am offered the special chair, situated in one corner of the carpeted area used as the place for stories: stories read, stories told, stories shared. The children are seated on the floor around me and, as I speak, with the assistance of my raccoon and bear puppets, the children slowly inch forward, sliding across the carpet, so that almost all of them can reach me, can touch me. Like butterfly kisses, their hands shyly touch my shoes, my ankles, my skirt hem, my sleeves, my arms and the puppets. Eagerly, they look up at me, anticipating my story. They know what story is; they understand their important role as audience and participants.

In trying to describe my role as a counsellor, I use a technique suggested by a more experienced colleague. I tell the children that I am a person to whom secrets can be told, especially secrets so big, they interfere with being able to sit still, to do school work, secrets that make it difficult to come to school, maybe even hard to go home after school. The children are all nodding, faces quite serious now, as I speak. They all have secrets. When their teacher asks them if they have any questions, several hold up their hand, or come closer and whisper to me. One by one, whisper by whisper, these children choose to share their secrets with me.

Mrs. H., my dog died and I was very sad. Mrs. H., my mommy and daddy had a fight and I was scared. Mrs. H., some kids made fun of me on the bus and called me and my sister names. Mrs. H., I like your shoes. Mrs. H., I have a pet turtle. Mrs. H.,

my daddy moved to Montreal and isn't coming back. The butterfly kisses continue, reminding me that story is always about relationships, always of the body. Even as I speak, I am struck immediately and uncomfortably with my own complicity in reinforcing the idea that there are stories that can be told in the classroom, and stories that should not. I am also aware of my hypocrisy in promising to keep secrets, knowing that I will share some of the information I learn from children with teachers to assist them in providing this child, this unique person, with a more personalized learning experience.

In my work as a counsellor in three public elementary schools, I find myself working in the spaces between school and home, school and community, school and individual, classroom and my office, child and me. The children who are referred to me are in many cases labeled by others as *bad*, or *clinical*, or *toxic*, as *aggressive*, or *troubled*, or *unable to concentrate*, as *unable to make friends*, or *suffering from poor self-esteem*. Whatever the label, these children are marginalized in their classrooms, and perceived as *other* in varying degrees by parents, teachers, administrators, peers or themselves. Whatever the issue or problem, it is seen as causing or contributing to the child's inability to succeed, academically or socially, in the classroom. My job is to assess the situation and facilitate some degree of resolution, so that the child can be more successful. I feel somewhat uncomfortable in this role too, with the illusion that life at home and school can be separated into "in-here" and "out-there."

As part of my work with these children, I encourage the telling of stories and I listen to the stories children tell. Sometimes we read or write stories together, asking

questions and commenting along the way. I have developed a curiosity about the stories children tell inside and outside the classroom, the ways in which these stories change and develop, the ways in which I respond to, or recall the stories. I have observed one child invent stories of a *normalized* version of her "dysfunctional" family to share with her teacher and classmates, while telling me quite a different story, and writing still another in her journal. I have observed another child frequently blurt out stories about his personal life in front of classmates, stories that made him vulnerable, a victim of teasing and abuse by his classmates.

Research has shown that relationships with caring teachers or other school personnel can help to protect children from the negative outcomes associated with abuse or neglect, as these relationships can present a "different representation of adults and a different model for relationships built on trust and mutual respect" (Korn, 1997, p. 16). Yet the ability of teachers and other professionals working in the schools to listen, to respond in a trustworthy fashion, depends at least in part on their beliefs about the children's lives, and about what should or should not be talked about in the classroom or school, beliefs potentially grounded in unexamined issues of gender, race, body, marginality, respectability, appropriate curriculum, and professionalism. School as a place where one will be heard is "especially meaningful for children with histories of abuse and/or neglect...Resilient children are optimistic that they will be heard and be able to protect their legitimate self-interests, while vulnerable children expect to be ignored or used" (Korn, 1997, p. 16). Schools can help these vulnerable children develop skills to protect themselves from the perceived harmful effects of neglect.

Recently, we are seeing the commodification of schools as another variable affecting the perceived *safety* of the school setting. Social mobility outstrips other educational goals such as democratic equality, good citizenship, and social efficiency, so that schools are seen and experienced increasingly as sites for gaining and securing social position with its attendant power in a market society. This has the effect, some believe, of turning schools into places of competition and extreme individualism and creating an atmosphere of wariness and mistrust, inventing schools as sites for private gain rather than public good, for acquisition of diplomas and degrees as exchange commodities rather than usable knowledge (Labaree, 1997). This has consequences for the types of exchanges that occur between students and for the motivation of students to learn or participate in classroom activities. Yet Bruner (1990) believes that psychology, as well as the other social sciences (and he includes education as a social science), must begin to organize around the meaning-making and meaning-using processes that connect humans to culture. That is, by our participation in (home, school, western) culture, "meaning is rendered *public* and *shared*. Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation" (p. 13). The child does not, according to Bruner, enter the life of his or her group as a private user of primary processes, but as a participant in a larger public process in which public meanings are negotiated. Even such private phenomena as *secrets*, Bruner believes, are themselves a culturally defined category and, once revealed, turn out to be publicly interpretable and even ordinary. So, we live "publicly

by public meanings and shared procedures of interpretation and negotiation" (p. 19). The children gathered around my feet in Ginnie's classroom understood this. They know the audience "becomes part of the telling" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. xiii).

Linda Laidlow (1996a) quotes Madeline Grumet as suggesting that "language: speaking, writing, reading, provide us with ways to create possibilities for ourselves and provide a bridge between 'our public and our private worlds' " (p. 44). Laidlow recalls a year when a child in her kindergarten class died midway through the school year. Following their mutual knowledge of the death, she allowed herself and the children to share their stories with each other, to respond to each other as *storyteller* and *listener*, and describes the experience as teaching "against the grain" with the stories all "dangerous, stories of loss, fear and longing. Dangerous because they evoked emotion, 'real feeling', which is often awkward and out of place in school" (p. 45).

There are many reasons why the kind of discourse encouraged by Laidlow, Korn, Bruner and Grumet does not occur in schools. While I was originally interested in how teachers respond to children's stories in the classroom, it became clear to me as I researched and wrote that such a project would help me avoid examining my own relationships with the children, and my own responses to their stories. How does my role make me different from a teacher or a parent? Do the goals I negotiate with the children go *against the grain* of institutional or school goals or, in an attempt to help children succeed in school, do I compromise my values and theirs? How do I interpret and judge the behavior of the children who come to see me? In examining my own reading, writing, and storytelling past, how did my activities function as a site of

resistance, and to what extent do those personal, historical experiences reappear in my current interpretations? I am in the school, but am not exactly of it as I work in three different schools and have multiple and different roles, relationships, and spaces in which to meet students, parents and teachers in each school. My office is not a classroom, but neither is it neutral territory. How do my experiences of my role as counsellor, my own isolation or marginalization within the school system, my own accountability to multiple players and their own agendas, affect my interactions? How do my interactions with children support and reinforce the marginalization they create and/or experience, or serve to continue to dichotomize home and school experiences, *out-there* and *in-here* experiences? How do the children and I choose and negotiate, select and name what really matters (Grumet, 1991)? I seek to discover and examine some of the complexities, the tensions, contradictions and ambivalence in the stories and responses, exploring ways that I can more effectively support children, their families, and their teachers as we all negotiate the "space between the intimacy of home and the public space called school" (Korn, 1997, p. 17).

Julie Cameron (1992) describes how children are urged into thinking of the arts as hobbies, as "creative fluff around the edges of real life" (p. 26). And so, she describes, a child who is a "born storyteller may be converted into a gifted therapist who gets his stories second-hand" (p. 27). Perhaps this describes me. This project may be a way of bringing me in a circle back to my storytelling nature. But we are never one thing or another. As I am given the gift of the children's stories, I am drawn back into my own, often long-forgotten, stories. As I chose the stories I wish to tell, stories

about the children I meet and listen to, I discover the degree to which a level of interpretation has already occurred. Why these children? Why these stories? I discover, as I write, that listening and hearing, both important, are quite different. Listening, for me, involves an *other* orientation; hearing involves an interaction with echoes of my own stories, stories about myself as a child, my care taking and caring for my much younger siblings, stories of mothering and caring for my own children, together with and often in conflict with my husband, and stories of my relationships with other women. Listening and hearing are equally important and lead me to the larger question, the one I will attempt to explore in this paper:

*What is the importance of story and narrative in my own life?*

When I first started taking courses in the M. Ed. program at The University of Lethbridge in 1994, I was teaching courses at Lethbridge Community College and had decided to pursue this new degree as much for my personal growth and satisfaction as for my professional development and feelings of legitimacy as an educator (thinking, at the time, that the two were separate). I had been a participant in a writing group that also travelled and presented together at conferences and had been encouraged by these experiences, and the generosity of my co-presenters in providing provocative and mindful feedback, to continue my education. I indicated an interest at that time in adult education, anticipating that I would continue teaching at the college. Having an almost completed M. Ed. opened opportunities for me that I had not planned, and I am now working as an Elementary Liaison Counsellor in three public elementary schools in Lethbridge.

In beginning this work, I struggled with how to tie the experiences from these two different careers together with my past experiences and my new knowledge. I had been stretched and excited by the writings of Ted Aoki (1986) which encouraged me to examine the spaces in between one point of view and another, and the tensions that reside there, as opportunities for true learning and growth. I had been challenged by Lous Heshusius (1994) to understand that the questions "How do I teach?" or "How do I counsel?" are ultimately the same questions as "What kind of person am I or do I want to become?"

I can position myself easily in the present moment in some of the broader categories. I am a white woman, enjoying a middle-class income. I am the daughter of a Dutch, immigrant, Protestant father and a French-Canadian, Catholic mother from a farm community in southern Saskatchewan. I am married to a Locomotive Engineer, and have two teenage children. My schooling up to and including high school occurred in the same city in which I now reside, and my undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, was earned at the University of Alberta. As I try to define who I am in more detail, what my beliefs are about nursing, teaching, mothering, counselling and family life, and the spaces in between, I find these broad categories are not enough. I begin to appreciate the influence that reading and writing have had throughout my life, the stories I have heard and now tell about my ancestors, the ways in which I use story to make sense of the seemingly small and everyday events in my life as well as the big and important ones, stretching my interpretations across the spaces that connect them.

Madeline Grumet (1991) tells us that such *dailiness* is hard to recover, and how it is recorded by memory when it serves as a backdrop to a drama that interrupts regular and ordinary events. She states her belief that this process of selection, this "determination that something matters" (p. 75), is at the very heart of curriculum. It is also at the heart of the pre-understanding I bring to my hearing of and listening to the stories of the children I meet. It is my goal to push this pre-understanding further.

I will use stories about children I see as a starting point. The stories are not *factual* in the sense that they are not transcriptions. Nor are they even completely accurate, colored already by my memory, by what I noticed and remembered, and what I did not attend to. The names and some of the facts are altered to protect the identities of children and families. But the essence, the *tension*, in the story that make it important to me, remain present and authentic. I will use the stories about the children as a point of entry to explore the importance of story in my own life.

My paper will be a multigenre research paper through which, as described by Tom Romano (1995), I will attempt to meld "fact, interpretation and imagination" (p. 109). Like Romano, I perceive the world through multiple genres and include my visions as they come to me. He tells us:

> Perception is all.
>
> Ways of seeing.
>
> Ways of knowing.
>
> Ways of learning. (p. 109).

He sometimes sees the world through prose, sometimes through poetry, sometimes

through dramatic encounters, imagined and played out before an anticipated event. Each genre offers him ways of seeing and understanding that others do not. Each piece created is "self-contained, making a point of its own, and is not connected to any of the other pieces by conventional transitional devices" (p. 110-111). Such a paper recognizes there are many ways to see the world, shows others what we see, and allows for the possibility of a multi-layered, multi-voiced blend. This writing will attempt to achieve such a blend.

## But is it Research?

Schools, and their classrooms and offices, are sites where stories are told. Textbooks tell stories; curriculum is taught as teacher stories; children read, share and tell shorter stories; teachers share stories about their practice and their lives with colleagues; parents tell stories to teachers about their children. These stories are "part of a narrative way of knowing that is basic to the ways in which human beings understand the world and communicate that understanding to others" (Gudmundsdottir, 1991, p. 1).

If we extend the notion of text and story to mean the text or story of life, "life as it presents itself to us" (Smith, 1994, p. 72), then we are in a position to gain insight into our relationships with our students, and teaching or counselling, in new ways. The original senses of the word *read* are those of taking or giving counsel, discussing, guessing, taking charge. The sense of explaining or considering something secret or mysterious is common to several languages but the sense of *read* as interpreting written symbols is peculiar to Old English. In the *original* senses, then, we *read* the children we work with as text. In this sense, too, a reading of our own stories counsels us: to interpret; to consider the secret or mysterious as it is revealed to us; to be surprised by what we know, knowledge we did not know we had; to be surprised into a new understanding of our past, present and future world and our relationships in it.

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world (van Manen, 1990). To "*know* the world is to *be* in

the world in a certain way" (p. 5) and so the act of researching is the act of becoming more fully a part of that world. We question the world's secrets; the world as we experience it becomes the text we read. Then, van Manen says, "research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being" (p. 5).

Jo Anne Pagano (1988) reflects on the artistic medium of the teacher being the narrative enactment, and talks about teaching as art. She goes on to say that artistry demands an attitude, a way of being in the world. Romano (1994) also believes that the "act of researching and reporting is no less than the creative act of living. We perceive through our spirits. Our past experiences guide us, our self-awareness, our knowledge, our dreams - however grand or humble..." (p. 129). We research, write and express our voices in a particular way because of all we are. Research is art, teaching is art, counselling is art, a particular way of being in the world.

Seen in this way, my reading and writing past, my stories about the children I see, and the echoes from the past these encounters trigger, are all texts to read artistically to discover a new understanding of my way of being and acting in the world. Writing itself is a way of knowing. We write because we want to know something, to learn something we didn't know before we wrote it (Richardson, 1994). The process of writing itself can be seen as a form of *reading* in its original senses.

What will be attempted in the pages that follow, then, is a piece of hermeneutic phenomenological research using mixed genres, in which I will tell/interpret stories from my own lived experience. Such experimental texts can be messy, messy because they "insist on an open-mindedness, an incompleteness, and an uncertainty" (Marcus,

1994, p. 567). Such work can be said to be engaging in what Greeks called *practical philosophy* (Smith, 1994), an activity which can be linked to the Greek pantheon character, Hermes. Hermes delivered messages, an intermediary between gods and mortals. He was known for his "eternal youthfulness, friendliness, prophetic power and fertility" (p. 99). A further aspect of Hermes that is worth noting is his impudence, his potential for playing tricks, even on the gods. Such writing can, Smith warns us, lead us into trouble with the *authorities*, it can unintentionally offend.

One important requirement of hermeneutic inquiry is "to develop a deep attentiveness to language itself, to notice how one uses it and how others use it" (Smith, 1994, p. 121). Such attentiveness requires an examination of the words heading this work. The hyphen in the word *re-membering* is significant, distinguishing it from *remembering* or recalling. This choice reminds me that narrative inquiry is more than a nostalgic revisiting of former events in my life but, instead, an opportunity to examine relationships in past and present contexts, and develop new insights. The word *member* originates with a Latin word which means *limb, part, member*. *Dismember* means to *deprive of limbs* or *to lose membership*. In the language of the body, the parts are separated from the whole. In re-membering, those parts are returned to the body, the connections to the larger body are re-established and the body becomes once again whole. Without limbs, we cannot stand or easily move forward. This form of inquiry is about relationships, and the blurring of boundaries. Without re-establishing a connection to the whole (body, community, world), we cannot understand or move forward in an authentic, chosen direction. The hyphen creates a space and a break in

the word, a place of tension that simultaneously signifies interruption and joining, suggesting that such joining can be disruptive, uncomfortable, that it is both a space in which to *be* and a state of *movement* from one place to another. Fine (1994) suggests that qualitative research can both reproduce and interrupt a colonizing discourse of self and the Other, and examines the hyphen "at which Self-Other join in the politics of everyday life" (p. 70), reminding us that we need to be mindful of our representations or misrepresentations of Other in our research. The hyphen often stipulates binary opposites, fixing their relationship, but can be seen as a site of investigation, as a space where opposites are joined, become one thing. The prairie is the place I experienced my childhood; the horizontality of the hyphen reminds me that what appears as flatness often hides deep and fertile river valleys, rolling hills teeming with life, ruined and deserted buildings and ancient trails. Long shadows are cast on the prairie landscape, throwing that which stands above it into stark contrast and visibility.

The word *meaning* is defined as intention or signification, having in mind, thinking, having an opinion. Its root word also once meant to complain, mourn, or moan. Searching for meaning, then, involves discovering what matters, what is significant, in a mindful and thoughtful way. This text itself is created in the spaces between an old, established way of doing research and a newer, still evolving one. *Space* derives from a 13th century word referring to the extent of time or distance, and further back, from a word meaning to *draw, stretch, span, extend, swell, tear away*. It shares its root word with spade, span, spare, speed and spin. The title for this paper could be re-read as "re-establishing my membership in community while searching for

what matters in the places where I dig."

## She was the First: Reading as Relationship

> She begins with a child. But which child, which story? Each child tells a different tale of her as teacher. There are so many stories, so many kinds of teacher she seems to have been. Who will she write? Who will be written? In choosing to write one child's story she does not write a hundred other stories. She chooses the story which is a puzzle, the story she still does not understand, the story which seems to be a piece of something larger. (Laidlow, 1996b, p. 3)

I met Tansy during my first week working as an Elementary Liaison Counsellor. In one of the three schools to which I had been assigned, I was invited by teachers to spend some informal time in the classrooms, sitting in during regular class time, assisting students as seemed appropriate, as a way of knowing and becoming known to them. In her grade two classroom, Tansy almost immediately grabbed attention. Her large eyes (which I later learned were hazel) filled her roundish face, surrounded by long, wavy and unruly brown hair. She was loud and bossy, telling other students what to do during an art activity, interrupting the teacher and classmates alike, demanding that her art work be looked at first, and then telling me long, complex stories unrelated to the art work or the events of the classroom, stories seemingly designed instead to hold my attention a little longer. The teacher later confided to me that he and this student were like "oil and water;" the principal shared some of Tansy's personal history and indicated that her step-mother had already requested Tansy be seen by the school

counsellor. Tansy was my first "client."

Tansy's step-mother revealed to me, in a telephone conversation, that Tansy visited her mother on week-ends. Her mother lived with her own parents and Tansy's grandmother doted on her, investing much in the way of attention, love, and any material thing Tansy demanded. Leaving mom and grandma and returning to her father's home had been the site of much resistance, temper tantrums and difficult evenings at home. In this story about Tansy, I wondered what was *not* revealed.

I observed Tansy in the hall ways, at recess and in gym. I noticed that she talked loudly and excitedly; she never walked slowly, but usually ran. Her movements were large and dramatic, filled with high energy like her speech. The first time I asked Tansy to meet with me, she was hesitant but co-operative. I tried to explain to her what a counsellor does, including that I am a person to whom secrets can be told. Tansy was sitting on the edge of the chair, feet on the ground and both hands gripping the edge of the table at which we were both sitting, as if ready to flee, ready to fight.

"I don't have to tell you anything! My *real* mother told me I just share my secrets with her!"

"You are absolutely right, Tansy. You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to. Your secrets are your own. They belong to you. You may share them with whomever you decide. Nobody else owns them, not even your mother."

"My *real* mother is the only one I share things with and I don't have to tell you that I live most of the time with my father, and only get to see my mother on the week-ends because she used to drink too much and now she doesn't."

"No, you don't have to tell me anything."

"And I don't have to tell you that...." Tansy went on to tell me about her parents' divorce, her father's remarriage, the circumstances of her father gaining custody, her closeness to her mother, and many more details about her personal life.

During my second visit with Tansy, we read a book together that I had chosen and to which she agreed to listen. It was a book about a little girl whose parents get a divorce. In this school, I meet with children in the staff room, the contents of which include two comfortable couches, and a coffee table. Tansy and I sat on one of the couches, shoulders touching while we read. Tansy was open and easily able to make connections to the experiences of the child in the story, interrupted often to respond to the text, to share her own experiences and how they were like and un-like the ones described in the text. She revealed to me that she had temper tantrums when she left grandma's house, but that she didn't really like the way she felt when she behaved that way. She decided to stop acting this way, as it made her feel a little embarrassed, just like the girl in the story.

When Tansy joined me for our third visit, she brought a book with her that we read out loud together, taking turns by page. This became the ritual for subsequent visits. Tansy chose the texts, bringing them from home or choosing them from the school library earlier in the week, specifically for our visit together. We agreed that I would spend this regular time with her and that she would save stories to share with me at that time. Each session began with Tansy erupting from the classroom, book clutched under her arm, exclaiming "Mrs. H.! Wait 'til you read *this* one!" Seated side

by side on the couch, we read as the starting point. The content did not seem to matter as much as the shared act of reading itself. Often stories were not even completed as, after only a few pages, conversation in response to the text would lead Tansy back into her own stories. These stories were filled with *dailiness* (Grumet, 1991), the emotions and relationships that formed the experiences of home and meaning-making for her, the everyday events that served as a backdrop for something deeper. Tansy would begin, for example, telling me about the new shoes she was wearing, high-heeled, vinyl runners several sizes too big that her mother had purchased for her on a recent trip on which she and a new boyfriend had taken Tansy. Then she would begin to talk about the boyfriend and her opinion of him. I became the audience to her story-telling, asking for details, helping move the story along. "Then what did you do?" "How will you tell your mother what you think?" The daily talk helped Tansy move to talk about what really mattered.

Our reading together led to writing together. We wrote a letter to Tansy's mother about the new boyfriend, a carefully worded representation of Tansy's feelings and thoughts. I kept the letter for Tansy and, after re-reading it the following week, she decided to take it home and give it to her mother. Tansy's mother married the boyfriend anyway, and divorced him less than a month later, telling Tansy, "You were right." Tansy's thoughts and feelings were affirmed in a very important way. Tansy brought in a book about the Spice Girls which included a fact sheet about each of the group members. We made up a fact sheet for Tansy, the work punctuated by jokes and giggles. Tansy wanted to take the fact sheet home, to show her mother. Each reading

and writing experience seemed to help Tansy establish boundaries between herself and her mother and allowed her to explore possibilities for other relationships.

Very young children recognize *story* and can shape their language and their ideas into its form (Livo & Rietz, 1986). Perhaps because their introduction to oral language is immediate, while experience with written literature depends on the later development of reading abilities, children are often considered natural born storytellers (Brody, Witherell, Donald, & Lundband, 1991). Children and adults alike story events to help better remember them (though telling the story may change the memory). In this way, storied events are "somehow larger than themselves" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 5) because they bind people together in a fabric of future, past, and one another in the present, to find commonality of experience, to order events so that experience, even existence, becomes more sensible and meaningful. Our private lives become part of a larger, collective experience, we make important personal discoveries, and we create a sense of belonging together, a re-membering in the shared space of storying.

I was immediately drawn to Tansy, realizing quickly that she reminds me in some ways of me at seven years old. I was an only child at that time in my life (though a brother and a sister would arrive soon after). I was free-spirited, confident, and passionate. I loved reading, telling and writing stories. I realized that this reading of my own past self affected the way I *read* Tansy. I also gained a sense of the connection we share through our mutual love of reading.

I became aware of the importance of the space, the physical space where we shared our reading. It was like home but *not* home. It was in the school but not in a

classroom. I am not a teacher, nor am I Tansy's parent. The space we created together was in part created by my own reading and writing past and what it meant to me.

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As a "not yet reading independently" pre-schooler, I remember the safety and closeness of nightly bed-time stories...the globe of light that fell on the page from the bedside light, enveloping the reader (sometimes my mother, sometimes my father, sometimes both) and me and the text in a private, secure place, darkness smudging the edges of the private sphere of light. Reading was an event that involved others, a shared event, interrupted by comments on or a joke originating in the text, conversations triggered by events in the story. Sometimes my mother would sit on the edge of my bed with her guitar and sing.

I can recall many details of the room: where the bed was situated, and the small bookshelf beside it that held the bedside lamp and the radio I liked to listen to, the position of the window, and the doll-crib below it (made for me by my father and almost big enough for me), the dresser and the closet, the bedroom door. Grumet (1991) tells us that memory often records such detail only as a backdrop for some drama that interrupts it. For me, the nightly reading was one such drama. When I was six years old, my grandfather in Holland, whom I had never met, died: my father shared the news with me and the tears of his grief in the same small sphere of light that defined our reading space. It seemed natural that such sharing of what Natalie Goldberg (1993) describes as "raw, real root thought"(p. 92), the energy that comes "from the bottom of the mind" and the heart, should be shared in that space.

My mother and I made weekly visits to the library where I would pick out and take home armfuls of books. I especially remember a series of books about twins from other countries, books that opened up possibilities of other places, other ways of being, in the very same world in which I lived. I was aware that my father came from another country, across the ocean and far away, and reading such books also helped me imagine his life as a child. I was reading independently long before I started school, though I don't remember how that came about. I do recall being eager to learn more on my own about *possibilities*.

I remember sitting on our couch arranged to face the newly acquired T.V., occupied with a book or listening to a 33 rpm recording (most particularly I remember Teddy Bear's Picnic, Alice in Wonderland, and the Singing Dogs), or busy knitting, crocheting or hand sewing, all skills and crafts taught to me by my mother before I entered grade one. Though I remember performing such activities, I do not remember learning them. All these activities are knitted together in thoughts of home, safety, solitude and privacy, crafting and creating. I would trample secret circles in the tall grass growing between the tall cottonwoods in the empty lot beside our house, taking a blanket, scribbler and pencil to the hidden place where I would write my stories. Reading and writing became intertwined, entangled activities. My own narratives, as Grumet (1988) suggests, evoke reading and writing as forms of "comfort and safety, reading in bed, surrounded by pillows and quilts" (p. 459).

My favorite grade one activity was reading circles, where designated students were allowed to go to the back of the room, sit in a circle, and take turns reading from

our basal reader. I don't recall being impatient with slower readers (though I probably was) and I don't remember hurrying them up by providing them with the right word, or reading for them (though I probably did) nor do I recall the teacher's presence in the group. I know I enjoyed the reading, as at bedtime, as a social event, as a shared activity.

After grade one, I have few memories of reading at school. In grade two, I always had a scribbler with me where I wrote my stories, determined to write a great novel. An older girl, several grades ahead of me, always was interested in reading my latest bits and pieces, always took them seriously, always encouraged me to continue. She treated my stories gently and with respect. Unfortunately, the scribblers were not saved. They represented the last of my private writing shared in public for several decades. Stories written for school conformed to the needs of the teachers and the curriculum. They were designed to demonstrate pre-determined skills and were corrected or criticized by the teacher. I particularly remember a small piece I had written for my grade eight teacher. I had attempted to describe the fear I had felt walking home from a friend's house one evening, in the dark. The fear raised the hair on the back of my neck, goose bumps on my arm. I shivered, but not from the cold. The teacher read my story to the class. "How ridiculous is this?" asked the teacher in a sarcastic tone. "What else would give you goose bumps and make you shiver except the cold? This is exactly the kind of stuff I do not want in your stories!" The teacher did not identify the writer to the class, but their laughter and her sarcasm made it clear to me that I was not a writer and effectively silenced any confidence I once had in my

writing abilities. My stories became woven into my journals, my knitting, my cross-stitch and my dreams, their meaning often hidden even from me.

I loved reading at home, but remember this experience as distinctly separate from school or schooling. Any reading out loud at school was now the turn-taking reading of texts, science and social, a way of filling up class time, as I thought then, by teachers with no other voice to share about the subjects at hand. Sumara (1996) describes the classroom experience as a location in which various functions are performed. "In the math classroom we learn that four multiplied by four is sixteen, not eighteen. In the social studies classroom we learn that Ottawa is the capital of Canada, not Toronto; in the science classroom we learn that water is made of hydrogen and oxygen, not helium and oxygen. There is comfort in the right answer. And so, it is not surprising that...we often do not get down to the root thought" (p. 5).

One partial remembered exception was language arts in junior high grades. The texts (for example, Chalmers & Coutts, 1951) contained short stories, like "Leninger vs. the Ants," and poems like Hilaire Belloc's "Jim" and Robert Service's "Cremation of Sam McGee." It was through these books that I was first introduced to the art of Emily Carr, Paul Kane, and The Group of Seven.

I vividly remember reading "The Dog of Pompeii" by Louis Untermeyer about a blind orphan boy and his dog and their fate the day Mount Vesuvius blew. I was overcome with emotion, tears overflowing the banks of my eyelids and hastily wiped away, as I thought about loyalty and love, the lack of family or home, the love of an animal for its human companion even dying for him. I had been taken to an unexpected

place. While such responses were acceptable in the reading retreat of my bedroom, they were less comfortable, less acceptable, in the public space of the classroom.

Whatever place I had been unexpectedly taken to, whatever joy or passion was experienced in the reading of the text, was more than balanced by my discomfort with and dislike for answering the "Cues for Understanding" at the end of the story, questions most often assigned as homework, and seldom opened up to discussion in class. Such questions focussed on literal textual context, on grammar and word meanings, on story structure and schema. They did not ask how I felt about the story, how the story related to my life. They did not ask whether I knew anyone who was blind or disabled or homeless, they did not encourage me to examine my assumptions about such people. They did not help me make sense of the story nor make new meaning in my own lived experience. Still, I did maintain a curiosity about the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, fuelled not by the content of the story, or the questions following it, but by my emotional response to it.

In high school, I had a wonderful language arts teacher, Louis Burke, who provided us with a rich and powerful reading of our required novel, Cry, the Beloved Country (Paton, 1948). Mr. Burke had lived and taught school in Africa, as well as in northern Canada, so was able to bring the personal to the classroom, to bring the story alive, to change it from an invented fiction to a story about real, living, feeling, bleeding and dying people. He was able to combine reading a story with storytelling. He also provoked us to read and learn history from more than one point of view, to know our facts and come prepared to debate with more than opinion and beliefs. He forced us to

examine some of our own assumptions about what we believed to be true and why. So shared reading became a site of exploration, of inquiry.

At home, I was reading science fiction, discovering it as dangerous, as it isolates for examination religious, political, moral and ethical issues. I discovered it as a type of morality literature, inviting readers to examine their own moral views, and the contexts in which morality is constructed. I had also discovered, around that time, a box of books and magazines, a small cardboard box in a dark corner of our cold storage room, hidden underneath shelves of home canning, out of season clothes and bedding, extra wool and material from finished projects, and empty jars from food and preserves already eaten. There, amongst the artifacts of my mother's private domestic domain, were the remnants of my father's collection of erotic literature. These readings contributed to my sexual awakening; the erotic and classic literature mixed in with the pornography filled in the gaps of my education, gaps left by "So Now You are a Woman" from the doctor's office and my mother's brief and uncomfortable explanations.

One of the books I discovered there was Xavier Hollander's The Happy Hooker. I read it under the bed covers with a flashlight. I had learned that my parents could see if a light was on in my bedroom window even from their upstairs perspective, so had taken to greater secrecy. I also knew, as a good Catholic girl, that this book was definitely not on the church's list of approved literature. These words were considered dangerous, and required hiding.

Such dangerous, hidden readings are not unusual for adolescents. Ruth Vinz

(1996) ponders about adolescent readings of horrorscopes, of books about vampires by Anne Rice, books by Stephen King and Dean Koontz. She states her belief that these readings serve a deconstructive function, "challenging and violating definitional schemes of sensation, experience and reason" (p. 14). These young people, she believes, may invent identities as they read, helping them to negotiate themselves in out-of-the-ordinary landscapes. They can "transgress, protest, resist, and violate without the consequences" (Vinz, 1996, p. 15) of actually doing so.

The horror stories invert natural boundaries and heirarchies, distorting that which is accepted as commonplace, and satisfying the desire to experience the forbidden and often dangerous realities, living the experience while in the safety of their own beds, being aware of their own reactions to the reading, using an inward gaze (Vinz, 1996). I was able to read The Happy Hooker, without agreeing or disagreeing, without taking sides, because I knew I would never have an opportunity to enter the world she writes about. It was a private and secret reading, the book soon replaced in the box, placed exactly in relation to the other contents of the box as when first discovered, as though never disturbed.

Years later, while living in Amsterdam, I had the experience on more than one occasion of speaking with Xavier Hollander on the telephone, answering and taking messages for a newly made friend who was, it turns out, one of her ex-lovers. I was invited by this same friend to accompany him to a party at Xavier's home in Amstelveen. While I could handle communication mediated by the technology of sound and air and wires, even I was surprised and amused by the strength of my resistance,

the power of my refusal to my friend, to the possibility of meeting Xavier in her own home. If that secret, private, safe reading could become a public reality, what other reading experiences might leap off the page, out of memory, into real life? Despite all rationality, and the certain knowledge that I would regret this missed opportunity, I could not allow myself to meet Ms. Hollander, face to face, in the flesh.

In my early years at university, I maintained the separation of school and personal reading and writing. The writing I did for assignments was mostly an objective outlining of the facts, proven by others, and rarely overlapped the thoughts, questions, feelings, or everyday life events dripped on the pages of my journals, like tears, like blood. The exceptions are vivid. I remember a young English teacher from India or Pakistan who chain-smoked while he lectured and tried to engage us in discussion about Keats, whose poetry he loved. I remember nicotine stains on colored fingers, long white tunics over baggy white pants, legs bent unnaturally backwards at the knee and two hours of the Beatles' White Album listened to in semi-darkness, overlaid with occasional renderings by the teacher of one of Keats' poems. He encouraged us, ordered us, gave us permission, begged us to debate with him interpretations of these poems, sharing his belief with us that such readings, such interpretations, are always personal but can be enriched and stretched by public sharing. Keats is still one of my favorite poets.

I had a professor of abnormal psychology who had us buy a book called The Abnormal Personality Through Literature (Stone & Stone, 1966). Through this text and through him, I gained a whole new understanding of mental illness as a social

construct, embedded in history, culture, religion, and beliefs about rationality. I also gained a new way to "read" characters like Walter Mitty, King Lear or Ophelia. I have kept the book. It is even more interesting to me now that almost none of the categories of mental illness addressed in the book still exist in current diagnostic manuals. A psychiatrist I worked with years later engaged me in a memorable discussion about the public nature of mental illness, that there is no such thing as psychiatric emergencies, only social ones. It is not an emergency that Aunt Matilda wanders around occasionally in the nude until that one day when she opens the door in the nude to our son's visiting kindergarten teacher.

It is at this point in my reading history that my private reading and my school reading did begin to intersect, overlap. I was reading books by Herman Hesse, Kahlil Gibran, Allan Watts, Baba Ram Dass, and T. Lopsang Rampa, books more dangerous to my unexamined Catholicism than Xavier Hollander ever could be. In addition, my professors teaching mental health nursing handed out a recommended reading list that included books by Rollo May, Clark E. Moustakas, E. F. Schumaker, Viktor Frankl. In private, I would consider how these books overlapped, how clear it was to me that psychology, religion, philosophy, the "occult" all had bits and pieces of the same truths, that psychoanalysts and priests and medical doctors shared many of the same bases of power. Still, I kept these opinions and insights to myself, to my private self, in my journals.

In my journal, I had found a place where I could express my thoughts. I found my journal writings moved beyond a mere outpouring of feelings and became a

dialogue with the texts I was reading. My journals provided me with an improved ability to both let go and hang on. I could let difficult feelings go temporarily through the day, imagining as I did how I would write about them in my journal, daydreaming while I searched for just the right phrases and words, repeating them to commit them to memory. I could hang on to the public face, the image, until I got home. I could savor the anticipation of writing, of letting go, while I pursued other private activities, saving the writing for the last waking hours of the day, like my private reading, under the covers. I would prepare for the reading and writing as a parent might prepare a toddler for bedtime or as a person might prepare for partaking of the sacraments: food, ritual music, bathing or cleansing of home and body. Throughout the day, looking forward to the time of writing was the thing that knit together my public and private realities - thinking during the day what I would write at night in my journal, in safety and privacy, about my day-time publicly lived life. Writing and reading became activities of privacy, dark, and night. It felt as though they were activities I needed to protect; they seemed subversive, a type of resistance to the grand narratives being spread out before me in my classes. Even now, I find it difficult to write in daylight.

The journal evolved into a reflection on my own writings. The writings themselves moved from a mere recounting of the facts as I perceived them, to a conversation with myself about why I perceived things in certain ways, why I remembered certain things and chose not to remember others. This process was another type of holding on and letting go - holding on to select versions or stories of my life, and a gentle, safe, private opportunity to let go of old ways of seeing and to try

on new ones. It became a place where my own unheard voices found expression: the bitch, the whiner, the whore, the running faster-than-the-speed-of-light-burning-at-both-ends-afraid-to-die neurotic, the singer, the lover...Where did all these voices come from? How could they all be me? And yet I knew they were, and understood that we are all made up of a fluid, shifting and ever evolving mosaic of selves.

Ultimately, in any situation described, I would begin to see the complexities of relationship operating, small glimmerings of my own complicity in creating the situation in the first place, in breathing life into it, of actively keeping it alive. Hidden motives and agendas began to peek from underneath page corners, hiding again before the page could be turned, before the pen could capture their nature, but clearly in existence.

The journal became a place, a location, for an on-going discovery of self, for a celebration of voices finding expression, for a movement toward holding more than one perspective simultaneously, for identifying the influence of outside agencies on my perceptions, for seeing the connections between artificially separate parts of my life, for developing empathy, for writing through fear and walking a path through the patriarchy to the feminine, to the mother. Grumet (1990) says autobiographical writing is not introspective but retrospective, that all such writing is, in the end, about relationships. The writings in my journal became a way that I could express my anger at the Catholic church and its patriarchal and oppressive nature. It was a place where I could admit how difficult simply living was. It was and is a place where I try to name my desire, my longing, and what is absent. It was the beginning of a long journey home.

I have spent many long hours of writing exploring the theme of home, and have

discovered, for me, that home is all about trying to define the places where we have lived our private lives, spoken our private language, and have been free and safe to speak, to admit to and experience our longings, desire, pain, love and dreams. Home is where life is not just lived, but examined. For me, it is a welcoming thing, a safe thing. Home is where I am recognized, acknowledged, encouraged, and accepted. Home is where I invest my energy and my love. Home is also about place, about the landscapes in which I have lived: the way the sky looks, shadows stretching long across a flat horizon, sounds hanging a certain way in the air.

The journal is where I can write about those things, those private thoughts. It is also where I try to integrate my public life, trying to make sense of it, trying to sort it out. In that sense, the journal writing leads me home. And the sharing of some of my journal writing orally seems to be about the telling, directly or metaphorically, about private lives in public. It tries to bridge the gap between "personal and public, inner and outer, considered and spontaneous, mind and body" (Grumet, 1990, p. 322). Journal writing and public storytelling both create home: the journal carrying the sense of relationship and community and home inward, the storytelling helping to expand and build it outward. Listening to and reading the stories of others helps flesh out the stories handed down by my ancestors, helps me write the story of my life to hand down to my son and daughter.

Scott Russell Sanders (1997) outlines why, in his belief, we will always need a good story. He states stories are, first of all, a playground for language, and quotes Italo Calvino who describes literature as "a struggle to escape from the confines of

language" (p. 54). Sanders believes that stories create community, linking teller to listeners, and listeners to one another. Stories help us see through the eyes of other people. I believe that reading and listening to the stories of others also help reveal to us the limitations of our understanding. Stories can teach us about the consequences of actions, to foresee where certain actions might lead without us having to carry them out.

Stories educate our desires and teach us what is truly worth seeking, having or doing. And as they have the power to lead us away from greed, suspicion and obsession with material goods, toward generosity, compassion and concern for the spiritual, so do they have the ability to convey a powerful and passionate knowledge of place, of how our narratives are connected to and reinforced by the landscapes in which they occur. "Stories of place help us recognize that we belong to the earth, blood, brain and bone, and that we are akin to other creatures" (Sanders, 1997, p. 55). Stories help us dwell in time, linking before and after, past and present, within the lives of those in our stories. They help us gather experience into shapes we can hold, repeat, and pass on, through time, across generations. Stories help us deal with difficult times, like suffering and loss and death. They teach us how to be human, and remind us of the mystery of our existence, the wonder of all that surrounds us.

I read Roland Barthes' (1986) deliberations on keeping a journal and I wonder if my writings and recollections can be considered stories. He states that the journal corresponds to no *mission*, no social, theological, mythic, aesthetic, moral end, as in what he determines to be great works of literature. He describes the journal as that

"form which essentially expresses the inessential of the world, the world as inessential" (p. 370). If a journal is inessential, then, he argues, it is unnecessary as well. He could not, he states, invest in a journal as he would in a "unique and monumental work which would be dictated to me by an incontrovertible desire" (p. 370). His words seem to be addressing those very facets of a woman's life that have traditionally not been included in dominant discourse: the mundane, the domestic experience, the babies and diapers, the clean and the dirty, the knitting and the canning. Yet, Grumet (1991) reminds us that "here is our dilemma: When these accounts are omitted from our scholarship, when we look elsewhere, anywhere, for our sources, our reasons and motives, we perpetuate and exaggerate our exile" (p. 84) from our own lives, from what matters and from what we fear we have lost. Grumet goes on to remind us that the woman's standpoint is one which honors the connection and intimacy of those who share the time and space and events of everyday life. The stories we tell of that life, what Barthes calls inessential, signify the process of making a shared life, a community.

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Tansy and I used our reading, storytelling and writing to do what Grumet (1988) describes as *bodyreading*, that is, to bring what we know to where we live, stringing together our actual situation with the possibilities that texts suggest. Reading helped to bridge the gap between private and public worlds. As we shared someone else's text, as we listened to the words we read, we were drawn into our own stories, sharing these with each other. My relationship with Tansy reminded me that all reading is about relationship. For me and for Tansy, the content of the texts was significant, but

equally significant was the location created by the act of reading itself: a location where the texts of Tansy's life and my life intersected, where Tansy's voice was allowed expression, in the form of story, where she was able to explore the contextuality and intertextuality of her own lived life. She does not have a single identity; her own life contains many texts, many possibilities. Her identity can be fluid and changing, depending on her circumstances. Our time together became a sort of hyphen, a place where Tansy and I could talk about the hills and valleys of her life, the mysteries of her life, and where I could hear and explore the echoes of my own stories.

The act of reading together became a way of re-establishing our intimacy each week. The location where we met seemed important too, a place that seemed like home, but was not home, a place that was in the school but was not a classroom.

The texts we read were chosen by Tansy, favorites brought from home or chosen from the school library specifically for our time together. They seemed to introduce some *hominess*, some familiarity, into our session. The act of reading together helped us enter a world where time slows down. Sumara (1996) speaks of this as a world Margaret Hunsberger has "called 'not-time' - a world where the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction become blurred" (p. 3). Our experience of reading together supports Sumara's idea that there is not a collection of things that make up the "act of reading - reader, text, meaning - but only one: the experience of reading as it becomes part of our remembered, lived and projected lives" (p. 5).

Tansy and I used the framework of story to build a relationship and to enter a space our shared reading of text helped create, a space that was not her and was not

me, but a meeting place somewhere in the middle, announcing a location for dwelling and in-dwelling.

In Private Readings in Public, Sumara (1996) discusses Heidegger's inquiries into the words *building* and *dwelling*.

> 'Building,' he tells us, emerges from the Old High German word 'baun,' which means to dwell. 'Dwelling' is, most essentially, what it is to 'be.' At the same time, 'bauen' means to cherish, protect, preserve and care for. Dwelling, then, is not understood as simply existing; dwelling means living in a place with others with an attitude of caring and attention. Building cannot take place without dwelling, for as Heidegger suggests, 'We do not dwell because we have built, but we build because we are dwellers.' ( p. 160)

The constructions of things such as buildings become *locations* which become spaces for which room has been made. The boundaries marking these locations, Sumara tells us, are not meant to be understood as demarcations that separate but, rather, mark a place where meaning unfolds. (It is interesting to note here that the word *explain* emerges from a Latin word that meant to make plain, to smooth out, to make level, to unpleat.) The act of building occurs simultaneously through a process of and for the purposes of dwelling. Reading together, Tansy and I used a deliberate construction (text) in order to create a space for which room is made, a space for thinking with an attitude of listening and caring. The relationship between me and Tansy became one of what Palmer (1983) describes as *obedience.*

> The word 'obedience' does not mean slavish, uncritical adherence; it comes from the Latin root *audire*, which means 'to listen.' Obedience requires the discerning ear, the ear that listens for the reality of the situation, a listening that allows the hearer to respond to that reality, whatever it may be. (p. 43)

Such discernment, such listening, does not require a silencing of my own stories but, instead, demands an attentiveness to them. I can notice what is both present and absent in my stories, how they are similar to and different from the story to which I listen. By remembering and examining my own stories, I can become more aware of why they are recalled at this moment, and how they may interfere with my ability to listen to the reality of another's story. I shape my responses around the kernels of tension between my story and theirs. I am relieved somewhat of the dangers of speaking for or mis-representing Other when I am writing and reading my Self. I am the Other in the text.

My relationship with Tansy has given me many gifts. I am given the gift of my own storytelling past. I am given the gift of my own stories, nudged into the present to be remembered and re-membered. I am given a new path on the long journey home, understanding at last that such a journey is nothing more nor less than a recovery of Self. I am given permission to both listen and hear when present with the children with whom I meet.

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> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories

> between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. If you're lost, you really start to look around and listen. (Metzger, 1986, p. 104 as quoted in Edwards, 1998, p. 1).

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I have always been a storyteller. Even as a young child, I eagerly shared the adventures of my day with my parents, with dramatic gestures of the body and intonations of the voice, adding embellishments sometimes called exaggeration and sometimes called lies. Soap in the mouth was a familiar companion after some of my stories. Undaunted, my voice was never silenced but slowly became sanitized, became cleaner and brighter.

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Lean, and long-limbed, skin sun-kissed brown, she runs, barefoot even on gravel, a habit her mother hates but does not disallow. Her hair is brown, thick and long. Living on the edge of the city, on a Federal Agricultural Research Station, she is free to explore. Living dangerously.... She and her same-age companion lie in leaves collected by the wind in the irrigation ditch below the cattle-guard, loving the thrilling rumble and hugeness of the vehicles driving over their heads, sticking their heads through the bars to see how far away the next vehicle is. Putting on gum boots and sailing pieces of wood on irrigation-water flooded parks, sailing them around the world to places she has read about. Climbing trees as high as she can go, collecting and chewing spruce gum on the way down. Hanging over the railing on the rickety wooden

bridge spanning the canal, dropping pine cones or sticks on one side and racing to the other side to see them emerge. Climbing in with the Clydesdales, the ones that pull the old-fashioned wagon in the annual city parade, whose hooves are larger than her head, grooming them with currycombs. Chasing snakes through tall grass back to the watery places from which they slither (he is afraid of snakes, but she is not). Pulling legs off daddy-long-legs, to see how few they need to continue walking and feeling only mild curiosity when they could no longer walk at all. Lining up different kinds of caterpillars and stepping on them, one at a time, to see which one contains the prettiest color guts. Weaving dandelions into necklaces and crowns, sucking sap-blackened fingers. Crawling on hands and knees and pulling up grass with their teeth, chewing it and swallowing it to know what it feels like to be a cow. Dancing around the fairy rings, hair flying wildly, and jumping in, daring the fairies to kidnap her, knowing they would not, suspecting she was already one of their own. Sitting, still as grass, blending into sky and trees, 'til the wild cats, deserted by former owners, came to her. Running straight into the wind, laughingly embracing it, hair sliding across bare shoulders. Singing the world.

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I go to the classroom after school to talk to Tansy's teacher. We share stories about Tansy. There is a tension between my stories and his. I describe her as I know her, talking about her affectionate nature, her eagerness, her passion for stories, her imagination, her trusting search for meaning and love and her passion for life. As we share stories about Tansy-as-text, the story becomes larger than what we know of her

life, and our understandings of our reading stretches to considerations of what we can do, in counselling sessions and in the classroom, to help make the fit more comfortable for her. Our discussion leads to stories about ourselves as children, and creates a space where our understanding of each other can grow in mutual respect, appreciation and friendship. We are using the story of Tansy to build a relationship. In exploring Tansy-as-text, we have begun to create, together, a community in which she can grow.

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My grandparents' house seemed always full of people. Even at breakfast, people would drop by and Grandma would slap another steak into the red-hot cast iron pans on the coal and wood stove. After supper, there was often a crowd of relatives, friends and neighbours, music and laughter, stories told of past get-togethers, stories and lies told to make the laughter deeper, drinks poured and passed around to keep the tongues wagging, the throat relaxed, the harmonies smoother and the guitars and fiddles playing.

I learned to tell stories from these people -- parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins of varied degrees, neighbours -- and from their traditions of performance. Children were never excluded and we "listened, watched, and participated, learning to do by doing" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. xv). While the "adults played for their adult reasons" we were part of the play. The stories were not concocted for our entertainment, nor coded or censored to protect our tender ears and years.

Like Livo and Rietz, I was given many gifts through these experiences. The first was a parental attitude that did not separate children to another location to special

*childlike* activities. I did people things with people, without age being a limitation. Secondly, I learned that "stories and storytelling are not simple inventions for children, but profound experiences for everyone" (p. xv). I and my cousins told stories and performed along with the others, if we wanted to, when we were ready. Thirdly, I learned to manage the risk taking involved in making stories, singing songs, playing musical instruments and games. I was given the gift of knowing that what I did, and who I was, was valued. Finally I was given the gift of the content of the stories themselves, rich tapestries containing "visions of community as people and the invitations to join in the story" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. xvi). For this, I thank them all, all my relations.

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Tansy and I are sitting together on the couch, our legs comfortably stretched out, our feet resting on a chair positioned for just that purpose. We have decided not to read a book today. Tansy has shared the events of her week with me, shown me some new gymnastics moves she has learned, asked for my opinion on her purple bangs, new hair clips and nail tatoos. We now share a comfortable silence, simply enjoying being in each other's company.

"Mrs. H., I didn't tell you last week!" Tansy excitedly interrupts the silence. "I haven't had a temper tantrum for weeks and weeks now!"

"So you just don't have them anymore. You just stopped having them. Wow! How did you do that?"

"I don't know. I just decided!"

"So if you really make up your mind about something, you just do it!"

"Yep!" The silence resumes briefly. "That boy in my class, the one I told you about before, he still has temper tantrums. He is really mean to everybody else. He is someone who should see you."

"You think seeing me would help..."

"Well, it really helped me."

"How, I wonder..."

"I don't know....just having someone to talk to."

We sit once again in silence, shoulders touching, until the bell rings.

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> We pass texts between us. We touch the texts instead of each other and make our marks on it rather than on each other. The text is material, it has texture, it is woven; we pull and tug at it, it winds around us, we are tangled up in it. (Grumet, 1988, p. 144)

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There is no doubt in my mind that, when I am with Tansy, I am partly once again that pre-schooler encircled in a small and intimate sphere of light with a beloved other with whom I share the story. And so am I the seven-year-old, running wild and free in the wind, and the 13-year-old, with a pre-school sibling cuddled up on each side of me as I read. And I am a mother, with a young son and daughter replacing siblings in the small, intimate space on the couch, sharing the reading and the closeness, and the dialogue with each other.

"Snow White is *good,* wight, Mom? And the evil queen is bad!" comments my three-year-old daughter.

"What would happen if they buried her and she wasn't dead? Why do they bury people any way? If she never spit up the apple, would she go to heaven? How could we get to heaven; could we go in Grandpa's pick up truck?" asks my four-year-old son.

I care about these past selves, the joy and comfort of the locations in which I remember them and the past others with which I people these locations; I care deeply about Tansy and her stories and the stories told to me by the other children with whom I meet. In the space the children and I create, I am compelled to further explore the importance of my own past experiences with reading and writing and the contexts in which they occurred. I am also drawn to more closely examine my role as listener, as background for the foreground of their stories, as entering a space where I forget about myself and forge a deeper kinship between myself and Other. Through this, I gain an understanding of the act of knowing as having a direct participatory and caring nature.

History suggests two primary sources for our knowledge: curiosity and control (Palmer, 1983). Curiosity tempts us to open boxes, control urges us to use what we find to our own, practical ends. Thus, these two forces join as the passion behind our knowing, but both, Palmer suggests, are undeflected by ethical considerations or respect for life itself. Another kind of knowledge is available to us, one that originates in compassion, or love. Such knowledge has as its goals a re-unification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds, aiming to reconcile the world to itself. Then the act of knowing is the act of "entering and embracing the reality of the other,

of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own" (p. 8) and becomes a way of reweaving, re-membering community.

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In the stories that follow, each piece is intended to stand on its own. The connections are left for the reader to make, as readers are apt to do anyway. Hopefully, space is created for the readers' own memories and responses. These writings are offered as an act of knowing that reweaves and re-members each of us and our stories into a larger community.

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> This is how we learn. Human life is very big. There is no short cut... We learn with every cell and with time, care, pain and love. (Goldberg, 1993, p. xiii)

Ginnie approaches her teacher after my presentation in her classroom. She has a secret she wants to talk to me about. Her father sometimes drinks too much. Ginnie's teacher asks me if I can meet with Ginnie.

Ginnie is dark skinned, with a smooth olive complexion. Her eyes are large and black and very expressive. Her hair is also dark, brown and long, clean and shiny. This is in contrast to her fingernails which have several coats of chipped nail polish, each coat a different color, and are long, broken and dirty. In the classroom, Ginnie has difficulty finishing work, frequently talks to her classmates, and is often out of her desk and off task. She seeks out the teacher several times in one class period and often interrupts the teacher, or other students, with her demands, her needs, her stories. On the playground, she is boisterous, busy, and bossy. She likes to "stir things up" between her classmates, ordering up friendships between others, and ending them, at her will.

Ginnie tells me that her father drinks too much when he is not working. He is well known to city police and the family is well known to Child Protection. According to Ginnie, "Dad sometimes gets kind of mean when he has had too much too drink." He is often not home, either working, unemployed and spending time partying with his friends (whom Ginnie does not like as they also drink a lot and make a lot of noise so she cannot sleep) or in jail. I telephoned Ginnie's mother to get permission to continue seeing Ginnie. Her mother wondered where Ginnie came up with such stories. Nothing like that was going on at home and no one was in danger. At the same time, she told

me that she, herself, was working hard at up-grading courses, and just keeps busy so she doesn't have time to think. She agreed to let me continue seeing Ginnie.

Ginnie and I spent a lot of time talking about her experiences. I tried to be neutral in my responses, neither too enthusiastic, nor upset, nor judgmental. I design the response in the belief that the child will know I am listening, that I am interested in knowing their story as he or she wants to tell it. I ask questions like "I wonder how you must have been feeling when that was going on", "What were you doing when that was going on?", "What did you do next?", "What else did you do to take care of yourself?", "What else were you worried about?" or "Is there any one else you can tell this story to?" I believe I must be careful not to take sides, not to let the child know my true feelings about the events as they have been described to me. Children are very loyal to their parents. Many of the children I counsel have already had experiences with Child Protection workers and foster homes. As bad as things may be at home, they do not want to be taken to a foster home, nor have either of their parents taken away because of their actions or secret sharing. Many of them have been punished by their parents and siblings for previous tellings and warned not to share the family's secrets again.

Ginnie told me she was not afraid of her father and stated emphatically that he would never do anything to hurt her. When her dad was drunk, or her parents were fighting, she would go to her bedroom, remembering to take the small kittens with her, and stay out of her dad's way. She never cried, either, she told me, but frequently woke up during the night and heard her fifteen-year-old brother crying.

Ginnie's teacher showed me a picture Ginnie had drawn of her family. Ginnie told her classmates of wonderful family outings, and this picture showed them all at the ski hill, lined up in a row and all smiling, as if posing for a camera. When I asked Ginnie, in private, to tell me more about skiing with her family, she revealed they had never been skiing. But, she told me brightly and enthusiastically, one day when her dad was sober, they all went to the Sugar Bowl with some plastic saucers. "And that," she stated optimistically and with confidence, "is almost the same thing as skiing!"

Ginnie and I sometimes read stories together, stories chosen by her about cats or dogs or horses. We had a small notebook where she decided what comment she would make about each session's work. She dictated while I wrote it down, before she picked her sticker and placed it beside the comment. Ginnie liked to make our sessions like school. Usually the comment had to do with how hard she had worked, how well she sat still, or what we had done. One day, she wanted to include a summary of what we had talked about. "School is a 10 out of 10. Recess is a 10 out of 10. Home is a 3 out of 10 because last night my dad drank too much and pushed my brother around and smashed a window." Ginnie wanted to take the book home that night to show her mother. "Are you sure, Ginnie? Do you want your mom to know that you shared this with me?" Yes, she did.

When I asked Ginnie the next day what her mother thought of our little book, Ginnie shrugged her shoulders and said her mom thought it was fine. She gave the book back to me and I put it away, locking it in my filing cabinet, a very important ritual for many of the children who come to see me. Only several days later did I

happen to look through the book. On the bottom half of the very last page, the final words crowded together on the last line, in her very best printing, Ginnie had written:

> My dad drank too much and pushnt my brother around and smashed a window. I wnt to my aunts while my Mom and dad stayed home and did her homework school tomorrow. he took the tapes he is mad and drinks too much. It scares me and I feel bad. I love you.

So Ginnie invents a family for the classroom, as though she has already learned about a *normal* family, a desired image of a family to which she compares her own and finds gaps, difference, shame and secrets. Ginnie knows about public stories and private stories. Ginnie shared some truths about her experience in conversation with me, but she could reveal to me in writing what she cannot reveal in conversation. She could tell about the hurt and abuse her brother and mother had experienced, but could not, would not, talk of her own pain.

When I mentioned to Ginnie several days later that I found her small entry at the back of her journal, she did not want to talk about it. She did not want to continue using the journal, but did not want it thrown away. She wanted it to stay locked up in my cabinet.

How had Ginnie learned about public and private? What are my own beliefs about this duality? What things should be allowed in the classroom, in the fresh air of public space, in the dialogues occurring there? What things should not be talked about?

If the classroom and pedagogy and curriculum are places to explore possibilities, then there should be room for the lived experience of children to be told.

Each teacher I talk to has stories about these kind of dialogues. Most seem unsure how to respond. The teachers are caring, sensitive, conscientious people, aware of the power of their responses and the potential lack of safety in their classrooms for such stories. They do not want to respond in ways that are harmful, often remembering some long ago personal humiliation in the classroom. Some discourage the telling, wanting to protect the children from potential ridicule from classmates as they become aware of difference. Yet we must remain mindful of the messages being given to children about the validity of their story if we do not allow its telling.

Ginnie and I were still meeting weekly as Christmas approached. Consistent with their caring nature, teachers and staff at Ginnie's school contributed money to a fund to assist families in need. Each teacher knew several children whose families were struggling. How could a decision be made about which family to help? Ginnie's family was on the list. Someone mentioned that Ginnie's mother, no matter what may have been happening in her personal life, was always most cooperative and supportive of the school. Everyone nodded and Ginnie's family became one of the recipients. I was uncomfortable with this rationale but could not articulate why, so said nothing.

Our own core beliefs lead us to act, teach, respond, each and every moment of our lives, in value-laden ways. Each response to Ginnie, inside or outside the classroom, reveals to her what we believe. What do I believe? What do my responses to Ginnie reveal about me? What tensions does Ginnie's story create for me?

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In the summer of 1998, I attended a four-day workshop to learn about Solution

Focused therapy. Of the nineteen participants, 15 were female. During breaks, the fifteen of us shared one two-stalled washroom. I had been writing in my journal about the concepts of public and private and found myself noting how these were defined in the various circumstances in which I found myself.

On the first day we had begun with a get-to-know-you structured conversation in dyads followed by an introduction of our partners to the larger group. Such exercises always remind me of Tupperware parties and baby or wedding showers of by-gone decades, with their memory and word games, but I did try to participate enthusiastically, aided by several cups of coffee and an interesting partner.

Fifteen women crowded into the small washroom on our first break, lined up in a serpentine fashion. We shared stories and laughter, talking loudly to the group at large, or more softly in dyads and triads. Even once behind the closed (and locked) stall door, we continued our public conversations while our bodies engaged in functions considered quite private, as though our bodies, mouths and thoughts were not connected, were not all existing together at that moment. We pretended that the closed stall door kept our bodily acts secret, that the gassy, watery sounds and smells did not move beyond the stall door. Without needing to speak of it, we all agreed to this pretense, this invented reality. It is, it seems, an unspoken norm of bathroom culture.

Finally, it is my turn. I am the last one to use a stall, and the bathroom is empty except for the workshop presentor, who is washing her hands at the sink. "Well, that went rather well, I think!" she stated. Apparently, the bathroom conversation was an indicator for her of the success of the dyad exercise. "Everybody seems to be a lot

more comfortable with each other now." Pre-occupied as I was with my current journal theme, and uncomfortably aware of my position at that moment, I was unsure whether she was talking to herself, or wishing for a response from me. Our circumstances did seem to require more of a response than a grunt or moan or some other bodily sound, so I replied, somewhat mischievously, "Yes! I agree. Here we are, for example, having this friendly conversation while engaged in activities normally considered fairly private." I did not receive a reply other than the sound of retreating footsteps and the swishing sound of a hydraulic door closing. Still seated, I pondered. Is there a rule that states we must know, but must not talk about, the norms? Which of us had been unclear about cultural constructs of public and private in that situation? Which of us needed an adjustment in attitude, in her sense of humor?

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In Western consciousness, a fundamental split exists between subject and object, between mind/spirit and body/nature. This division began with the Greeks and was maintained by the Christian church, which supported Aristotle's organization of scientific knowledge throughout the Middle Ages (Capra, 1975/1976).

Further development of Western science waited until the Renaissance when men began to show a new interest in nature, and studied it in a scientific way, with experiments undertaken to test ideas. A parallel interest in mathematics led to the formation of proper scientific theories. "The birth of modern science was preceded and accompanied by a development of philosophical thought which led to an extreme formulation of the spirit/matter dualism" (Capra, 1975/1976, p. 21), crystallized in the

seventeenth century philosophy of Descartes who perceived two separate and independent realms, that of mind and that of matter. Scientists treated matter as dead, as separate from themselves, as objects assembled into a huge machine. Newtonian physics was based on this mechanistic world view and dominated all scientific thought until the end of the nineteenth century.

Cartesian philosophy and Newtonian physics had a tremendous influence on the general Western way of thinking which continues to the present time. The mind is separate from the body, the subject separate from that which it studies. The subject/observor is objective, standing outside of and in opposition to the object it studies. The knowing subject is a gazer, an observor, standing in the presence of reality without any involvement with it. The object is a passive being-seen (Young, 1990). "The sense of touch, by comparison, involves the perceiver with the perceived; one cannot touch something without being touched" (Young, 1990, p. 125). Sight is distanced and unidirectional.

The gaze of modern scientific vision is, Foucault tells us, a normalizing gaze (Young, 1990). It assesses its object according to a standard it claims is objective, measuring objects according to scales that reduce a plurality of attributes to a oneness, a unity. Some particulars, then, are devalued, defined as deviant, or eliminated altogether. Foucault summarizes five operations brought into play by such a gaze. It invites comparisons, differentiates individuals from one another, and heirarchizes in terms of value attributes, abilities and natures of individuals. It introduces the constraints of a conformity that must be aspired to, and defines the limits that will

determine difference and the circumstances for exclusion.

Much recent scholarship and research has revealed the white, male, European and middle-class biases that have become attached to the subject/observor. The virtues of science and the scientist have become the virtues of masculinity: rationality, detachment, measurement, reasoning, male, authoritative speech supported by objective evidence. These virtues also became the standard used by the normalizing gaze. Anything not white, male, middle class, or European was seen as separate from the subject, the knower, the scientist. Anything not white, male, middle class was seen as inferior.

Such views of science and philosophy have had an enormous and on-going influence in modern Western culture, underlying issues of class, race, gender, nationality, education and morality, with deep, complex and abiding consequences for the structuring of privilege and oppression.

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Madeleine Grumet (1988) describes the history of the feminization of teaching within this larger framework of Western thought. The era of industrialization in the early nineteenth century brought about the shift of capital and labour from agriculture to industry. Machines became more accessible and manufacturing more extensive. The wages of unskilled labor increased less rapidly than those of skilled and managerial employees, and a sharper class structure began to emerge. A growing middle class favored the assimilation of immigrant children and the homogenization of culture through common schools. While supporting common schooling on the belief that it

would provide children of all classes equal opportunities to access the new wealth of industrial society, working-class men and women were excluded from having any say over the shape and ends of public education.

During this same period, middle-class women found themselves transformed from being producers of food, cloth and other commodities their families required to being the consumers of such commodities. Cottage industries diminished as labor and production was drawn into factories. Independent women were excluded from the medical and other professions, and were less often artisans or small business owners. "Productive activity is shifted to public spaces. Fathers go to work. Mothers go shopping. Children...go to the common schools" (Grumet, 1988, p. 35-36). Teaching provided one of the few occupations open to women. Young men had a plethora of jobs to choose from. The young men and women recruited for teaching were young, single, and free of family responsibilities. Young men teaching were often working to finance college educations or preparation for the professions. Even in the early part of the nineteenth century, the average salary of men teachers was almost three times what their female colleagues were paid. As the teaching profession became better organized and more formal preparation was required, young men sought other jobs while young women, with fewer options available to them, acceded to the requirements as they evolved.

It has been estimated that, in Massachusetts during the middle and latter half of the nineteenth century, one out of five women had taught school at some time in her life (Grumet, 1988). The degree of contact with the classroom, for young women

between adolescence and motherhood, "suggests that not only did females influence the character of teaching but also that teaching in these schools at this time may have influenced the character of their femininity" (p. 37) and, it might be added, their later mothering.

Earning 60 percent less than their male counterparts, female teachers were employed to stretch the education dollar. The positions of principal and assistant principal were definitely closed to women, and curriculum, organization and teaacher preparation requirements remained firmly in the hands of men. Grumet believes that "the common school movement and the feminization of teaching colluded in support of a program of centralized education that exploited the status and integrity of the family to strip it of its authority and deliver its children to the state " (p. 39). The onus of poverty and disorganization was shifted unto the character of the poor. Children of the working-class farmers or immigrants were seen as unfit to participate as productive and self-disciplined citizens unless they had gone through school, and children became the property of the state, the parent no longer seen as the absolute owner of the child.

The responsibility for educating these children was placed in the hands of women. The role they were given maintained their submissiveness while elevating their right - through their own characteristics of purity, obedience, and self-sacrifice - to dispense morality in schools. All of these factors worked together to create a cult of motherhood that praised self-denial, self-sacrifice, patience, love and industry. Childhood was also affected by this cultification, and became characterized by innocence and cuteness. Children were seen as incomplete and malleable, as requiring

shielding from the ugliness of the real world, as separate from the world of adults, from the world of work to which their fathers went. These assumptions about children envisioned school as a transitional place, a location where children were simultaneously prepared for and kept out of the mainstream of productivity in the larger community. Childhood and schools for children became a type of prison, as they removed children from their homes (in here) and denied them experiences in the larger world (out there).

Thus was created a growing schism between public (productive work and commerce) and private (reproductive and domestic work, woman's work), between work and home, men and women, adults and children, middle/upper classes and the lower class.

While the ideal teacher was to be like the ideal mother; "the ideal teacher was one who could control children and be controlled by her superiors" (p. 43). Women were hired for the qualities which had become identified with the cult of motherhood, but were absorbed by the paternalism of the institution, by the discipline and control and authority that substituted for the nurturance and morality of the home and family. Women were expected to be the medium through which paternalistic laws, rules, language and authority were communicated to the child. As Joanne Pagano (1988) outlines,

> In some ways, the relationship of the female teacher to her students recapitulates the mother-child relationship. Her duty is to wean the student from dependence on her, from pre-occupation with his or her own subjectivity, to a mastery of the objective rules of the

> disciplines...she represents a disciplinary canon and an institutional text from which she is excluded, within which she must treat herself as Other to herself. (Pagano, 1988, p. 330)

While schools claim to mediate the private and public experiences, those of us working in schools may need to examine our own complicity in excluding the private experience from the discourse. If female teachers are required to deny their personal identity and histories (as daughters, mothers, sisters, lovers, wives) in the classroom, they may begin to find the private stories of children as intrusions in the curriculum, in the order of the classroom.

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In her Bryn Mawr Commencement address, Ursula K. Le Guin (1989) described to the students how she knows three languages. She calls the one she learned in college the father tongue. The father tongue is the language of power, science and commerce. It is the language of public discourse, of rugged individualism, of patriarchy. It is the language that objectifies, that lectures, that tells. It is a language that does not require or desire an answer. Many now believe it is the highest form of language and that all other forms are less evolved, more primitive.

Le Guin calls her second language the mother tongue. It is the language of everyday life as lived, of love and hate, of births and diapers and housework, of blood and vomit and tears, of disappointment and shame, of skinned knees and broken hearts, of kittens and coyotes. It is the language of the earth and the sky, of the body, of mothers rocking and singing to their children. It is the language of touch and

conversation, inviting response and relationships. It is the language we learn from our mothers in our homes. It has the rhythm of poetry, the tonality and pitch of song. Because it is all these things, it has been relegated to the trivial, the unimportant, the powerless.

The third language is a language Le Guin claims to have spent her whole life trying to learn. It is her native tongue, her birth right, a language that is both mother tongue and father tongue, that bridges the gap separating dichotomies such as mother tongue/father tongue, public/private, good/evil, man/woman, adult/child. Such dualities imply a positive and a negative, one part of the duality being superior in some way to the other.

Many believe the father tongue to be the language of rational thought but Le Guin reminds us that reason is a faculty that is much larger than objective thought. She goes on to say that

> the essential gesture of the father tongue is not reasoning but distancing-making a gap, a space, between the subject or Self and the object or Other. Enormous energy is generated by that rending, that forcing of a gap between Man and World. (p. 148)

College, indeed all schooling, teaches us the language of power, gives us the tools to be empowered. To be successful, we must learn the language in which "success" is a meaningful term, and the conditions of success. Those who do not know this language, or won't speak it, are "silent, or silenced, or unheard" (p. 148).

Mother tongue connects, binds, expects an answer. It does not distance with an

observor's gaze but, instead, invites. It is repetitive, and common, "the same over and over, like the work called women's work" (p. 149). "It flies from the mouth on the breath that is our life and is gone, like the outbreath" (p. 149), gone yet repeating, like the rhythm of our pulse. "It is the language stories are told in. It is the language spoken by children" (p. 150).

The third language is unlearned and requires unlearning. It can be poetry and literature, speeches and science. It is the "coming together, the marriage of public discourse and the private experience, making a power, a beautiful thing, the true discourse of reason" (p. 152).

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While writing this paper, I find myself in a constant state of aroused awareness, particularly of how I simultaneously resist and collude in constructing Others, in the construction of my own Othering. I have not yet learned how to deal with the emotions such awareness helps create, often angry with others, disappointed in myself, struggling to see these spaces as opportunities for learning rather than places of intolerable tension.

At a recent conference I attended, I listened to a learned gentleman speak about violence in the schools, in our society. He presented statistics, a review of the existing body of knowledge and solutions in an authoritative voice, a voice that did not invite or require questions or dialogue. He told the audience of teachers, predominantly women, that what we need in our classrooms is more compassion. I had just finished reading and writing about the feminization of teaching and the patriarchal control of what

occurred in the classroom and felt angry, betrayed. I looked around the room, wondering how many understood the irony, the unfairness, of this conclusion as I did. I wondered at their silence, at my own, as we listened, without interrupting, in agreement.

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> In the seventies, Grumet (1988) tells us, we
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> sorted curriculum into manifest and latent content. Manifest were the ideologies of participatory democracy, the melting pot, and achievement produced by effort and intelligence. Latent were opportunity determined by social class and replication of labor/management relations in the classroom and the school. (p. xiii)

The democratic ethos of schooling, that is, "equality of opportunity leading to social mobility based on achieved rather than ascribed characteristics" (p. 21) misrepresents, disguises, the on-going commitment of both the middle and upper classes to retain their class status and privilege, and the ways in which schools function to maintain and support these privileges.

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In grade one, our school day at least weekly began with the teacher checking our teeth and nails. We would receive a star if both were clean. The ladies from the I.O.D.E. visited our classroom and checked our note books. I received a cash award because my printing was so neat. Many of the children in my class spoke English with an accent, often poorly. "D.P. children!" my father sneered in public, as though he did

not speak with an accent, or reminding people he had chosen to come to Canada and had more right to be here. In private, he sympathetically explained what D.P. meant, displaced persons whose home countries no longer existed or were places to which they now could not return.

My learning about Others, about being Other, continued in grade two, where I learned about the language of the father, of the Father, the Catholic Church's definition of God and His rules. The language of the f(F)athers ruled that girls must wear dresses and so we were limited to more passive recreations than those enjoyed by the boys and were disallowed a presence on the boys' playground. We could skip two bars on the monkey bars, but we were not allowed to "skin the cat" (what we called pulling our knees up through our arms and turning a summersault). We played with skipping ropes and jacks, or 7-Up with rubber balls against the wall of the school, or sat quietly and talked. Somehow, I often ended up playing marbles in the dirt with the boys, or leading large crowds of girls in fast romps around the school yard as we pretended we were a herd of wild horses. I was always named Fury or Flicka, leading the herd as I invented the story for the game.

I learned to lie in the Catholic school, inventing lists of sins for monthly confessions before First Friday Mass, and learning to raise my hand on Mondays when the teacher asked who had been to Mass the day before, whether or not my family had attended. I dutifully said the prayers handed out as penance, saying them as quickly as possible without actually making the individual words completely indistinct. They became a sort of mantra, a sort of meditation. Perhaps that was the real purpose. It was

like writing lines with four or five pencils held together with elastic bands. No one had actually said it shouldn't be done, so it wasn't exactly cheating. When the teacher told us it was a sin to play with Protestants, one more seed of doubt about her reliability was planted in my mind. My father was a Protestant and, privately, I knew the teacher was wrong. My father taught me to think critically about what I was learning. "Do you really think all the people who get hurt are people who didn't pray enough to their guardian angel? Sometimes bad things happen to good people!" Publicly, I did not admit my father was not Catholic, did not share my thoughts on guardian angels. Like Ginnie, I had learned to invent stories for the classroom.

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Before I started school, my family was poor. They shared a basement suite with another couple who also had a baby; there was no indoor toilet. The basement was so humid, my mother recalls, that mold would grow on the walls. I had no vocabulary or frame of reference to know what being poor meant. I did receive frequent messages from my mother about the state of being poor.

"There is no shame in being poor" she would say, emphasizing her words with extra tugs of the brush through my long hair. One hundred strokes a night would help, I knew, to keep it strong and healthy and shiny.

"But being poor is no excuse for being dirty. A bit of soap and water cost very little. Clean, mended and pressed clothes only take a bit of work, time, and paying attention."

"There is nothing wrong with hand-me-downs. It only takes a little bit of

sewing or hemming to make them fit, to make them look like new." Underwear was changed daily and was never to have holes in it. "You just never know when you might be in an accident and have to go to the hospital."

My mother would borrow the neighbour's sewing machine and work long into the night, after she got home from work, making clothes for me - wonderful dresses with matching capes, or several pieces made from the same materials so that tops and bottoms could be mixed and matched. Often she would use hand-me-downs, taking them apart stitch by stitch, saving buttons and zippers for other projects, cutting clothes down with pattern pieces centered on the best bits. I learned at an early age to polish my shoes. I learned that appearances matter.

My mother would tell me stories about her maternal grandparents who arrived in southern Saskatchewan in 1905 to homestead in the Palliser triangle. Several of their eight children lived with them in a tent that first winter until a house could be built. By 1929, they owned a large and stylish home which they opened up to other homesteaders until their houses could be built. Local teachers also boarded there. It was beautifully furnished including a large dining suite (complete with crystal and silver) and a piano. My grandmother and her sisters owned fur coats.

My grandmother was engaged to be married and had a hope chest full of embroidered linens, crocheted doilies and tablecloths, cut-work pillow cases and other handiwork for her future home. Her father had given her the piano as she was an accomplished player. In 1929, just before the stock market crash and in the days before insurance, it all went up in flames. My great-grandmother was badly burned trying to

rescue her grandson, Homer, from the fire. He was six years old, a handsome child, a beautiful singer and a gifted piano player, already composing his own little tunes. He lived for a short while only because he had been wearing a cap which had given his brain some protection from the burning the rest of his body had suffered. Still, he couldn't be saved...so young and such a genius. We lost everything in that fire: our inheritance, our middle class standing, our genius, and our hope. The Great Depression arrived shortly after and everyone was poor so it made no difference. Even then, some folks had more than others and liked to flaunt it. My grandpa told me a story about some local rich folks picnicking by the lake with their wicker baskets filled with dainty sandwiches and pastries and fried chicken and jars of lemonade while their neighbours went hungry. They would put those jars of lemonade in the river, to stay cool while they walked around the lake and enjoyed the view. He and his friends would dump out a little of the lemonade and piss in the jars, replacing them in the cool river water. Those rich people drank it, too, not even noticing.

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Partway through grade two, I was "skipped" into grade three. Around the same time, my brother was born, and my name became "sis," my place in the family determined by my relationship to the long-awaited son. I felt displaced both at home and at school and reading and eating became my retreats. Like Maggie Muggins, I could skip across the bridge in the Blue Willow bowl to meet the Chinese man in the pagoda, discovering worlds I could not experience first hand. I could gallop beside Fury or solve mysteries with Nancy Drew. I could simultaneously resist and retreat

from my displacement.

I continued to take religion with the grade two class. Some things, apparently, could not be skipped. My parents made flash cards out of paper and spent hours with me helping me learn the multiplication tables. My father had to learn them up to the 14X in Holland, and so that is what I learned. They, too, believed some things were to important to be skipped. Their personal histories had denied them an education and it was something they both valued. "The world doesn't owe you anything. You have to work for everything you get. Get an education." Poor we may have been, but our values and our aspirations were those of the middle class: Follow the rules; work hard; study, vote, and attend church; say your prayers every night; respect your elders; if you are in trouble at school, you will be in worse trouble at home; read, read, read!

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When I try to think back to my elementary schooling, I actually remember very little other than vague and spotty bits and pieces: a 3-D map of Australia made with flour-and-salt paste; Red River carts that had wooden wheels that made them squeak; in 14 hundred and 92, Columbus sailed the ocean blue and discovered America; Timmins, Ontario is the world's largest producer of tin (or was it asbestos?); when the sirens go off, crawl under your desks and put your hands over your heads; J'entre dans la salle de classe, je regarde au'tour de moi, donnez-moi la plume; we hardly ever have to strap anyone and almost never girls, so this gives you some idea how bad you must be...now hold out your hands; if you rub salt on your hands before they strap you, they will crack and bleed and then you can sue 'em; Did you cry? Naah! Did it hurt? Not

really, just made my hands feel really hot.

In grade five, while the teacher pulled down the map of the world, I noticed for the first time, with great excitement, how it looked like a giant jig-saw puzzle. I put up my hand to share my observation and my excitement with the teacher and the rest of the class. "Look! Australia looks like it should fit in the Indian ocean! Africa and South America look like they should fit together!" The teacher had a good laugh. The rest of the class had a good laugh. I could taste soap in my mouth.

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When I was fifteen, my grandfather died, leaving my mother a small inheritance. Over the next few years, she purchased a beautiful dining room set, including a china cabinet and hutch containing crystal and silver and fine china. She still values most a few beautiful green tinged wine glassed which predate the fire. One of the first things my mother bought was a piano which she gave to me. The bench came filled with music, collections of classical music and sheet music from the forties and fifties. With only a year of accordion lessons, taken years earlier, I learned to play the piano. Now it stands in my living room. My daughter, with the advantage and privilege of several years of lessons, is a gifted piano player.

My mother owns a fur coat. I used to be quite critical of this life-style choice, but now I understand that she wears it with pride, wrapping her history and her re-claimed birthright around her.

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The word *public* has its etymological roots in Latin *publicus*, meaning adult,

belonging to the people. It shares it origins with *pubicus*, belonging to adults, *pubes*, the hair that appears on the body at the age of puberty; *pubis* or pubic hair and *puberty*, the condition of being capable of procreation, the age of maturity. *Private*, originating in a Latin word that means "apart from the state, belonging to an individual," shares its origins with deprive, privation and privilege. The word *home* comes from Old English where it meant home village or residence. Public was associated with things of the body, maturity, ability to procreate, concepts now associated with the feminine, the domestic, the private. Private originally had to do with ownership of material objects that did not belong to the state and has now come to mean "what should be hidden from view, or what cannot be brought to view. It is connected with shame and incompleteness...and implies the exclusion of bodily and affective aspects of human life from the public" (Young, 1990, p. 119) or, put differently, the exclusion of the body from the Body.

Home has come to be associated with private things rather than membership in a village or community. There now exists a "distinction between two kinds of public and private experience: the 'social' and the 'economic'" (Sumara, 1996, p. 136). In pre-modern times, lines between work and recreation were subordinated to the rights and interests of the community. Going against the collective interests was taboo and could result in social consequences including shunning or expulsion. Modernity has produced a distinction between our private lives and our lives in the private sector. In the private sector, success is determined by how much money one can make through one's own efforts with little consideration given to how ethically or responsibly such

success has been achieved. Private feelings can be expressed at public events, through laughter, tears or jeers, but there is little opportunity or requirement to disclose publicly why we have these feelings. The private or public readings of texts are meant to be such private and personal experiences. What we share about our understanding of or responses to a text in communal settings like classrooms threatens to reveal not only private meanings but their origins in our personal lived experiences. Still, as Sumara points out, even if the private meaning of a text is never disclosed, it becomes an inextricable part of the reader's sense of self. Our actual public responses always include our entire history of experience but, if we do not wish to reveal certain secret aspects of our lives, we may exclude the contributions made to our understanding of a text. The response shared in public may not be the response we actually had in our private reading. Our shared response becomes a fiction.

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A large body of research has legitimized the category known as "the underclass" (Fine, 1994). "Poor adults and poor children have been codified as Others, as the broader culture is being prepared for a permanent caste of children and adults beyond redemption" (p. 74). Although statistics on poverty demonstrate the clear relationship between poverty and unemployment, with the number of families living in poverty increasing and decreasing with fluctuations in the economy, still we tend to think of the lower class as a static, unchanging group, with describable characteristics common to all. Fine describes this historic encoding, tracing representations of the poor across social scientific debates and public policies. She argues that social scientists have

insinuated moral boundaries of deservingness that enable us to believe we can distinguish between those who are deserving and those who are undeserving. Such texts construct, legitimate and distance Others, sometimes "used to deprive Them of services; always to rob Them of whole, complex humanity" (p. 74). These Others are represented as unworthy, dangerous, immoral or not respectable. Or They may be represented as pitiable, victimized or damaged. Such texts, Fine claims, naturalize or normalize cultural differences, turning them into common sense or second nature arguments.

Rationality has become associated with impartiality, but this ideal, Young (1990) believes, has generated another dichotomy, between a general will and particular interests. The feelings, needs, histories, motivations and desires of individuals that differentiate them from one another become *merely* subjective, *merely* private. We believe there is a public authority that represents the general interest with rationality and impartiality. But representation and decision making can never be impartial as this depends on a universalizing, a claim to totality, that denies or represses differences, that is fictional. Some persons are excluded from participation in that public, a civil public that excludes bodily and affective aspects of human existence and forces a homogenity on this public, excluding those who do not fit the mode of rationality. The model serves to reinforce the various forms of oppression.

Respectability has become associated with rationality. It is linked to an idea of order. The respectable person is "chaste, modest, does not express lustful desires, passion, spontaneity or exuberance, is frugal, clean, gently spoken, and well mannered"

(Young, 1990, p. 136). The body should be clean and cleaned of all fluids, dirt, and smells. Our environment should also be clean and all signs of bodily functions hidden behind closed doors. The body must be cared for, controlled and covered. Strict societal norms govern how to eat and condemn belching, farting or burping. Speech is also controlled by strict norms of what is respectable and what is not.

Young believes that our contemporary ideal of respectability is retained in the virtues and behaviors of the "professional." The norms of "professional" behavior also include repression of our physicality and expressiveness, and require specific ways of sitting, standing, walking and speaking. One's voice should be kept steady, without expression of emotions, uncertainty or hesitation, and without embellishment with broad or dramatic gestures.

Formerly excluded groups wishing acceptance into the privileged position and status of the professional must accept and emulate these norms. Young suggests that this has created a new distinction between public and private, a distinction in bodily behavior. In public, we must learn to manage our body, the impression we create. I cannot help but think of Ginnie, who has so much trouble staying in her desk, controlling her body into respectability.

In private, we can be more relaxed, more expressive. In public we must be politically correct, but in private settings, where we are more relaxed, more *ourselves*, we may express devaluing judgements about others to people who think just like us. Our discomfort around and aversion to Others must be repressed, made unconscious. Because we cannot publicly admit to aversions to a codified group of Others, we justify

our reactions, even in private, as personal reactions to individual characteristics.

In talking about waking up as a person, on the way to becoming a teacher, David Smith (1997) describes one of the major turning points as taking up the hard work of self-transformation. The task, as he describes it, is one of beginning to pierce through all of the social, political, religious and cultural illusions by which our identities, our definitions of self, have been framed and sustained to the present moment. Such work must involve cultural criticism: criticism of economic practices that deny the world's resources and wealth to many and even destroy the earth for the gain, greed and privilege of a few; criticism of social practices that continue to oppress codified Others, that maintain a particular viewpoint as the only real or correct view. Such work is also painful as it forces a personal recognition of "how one is oneself always and everywhere complicit in such ignorance, and that the hardest work, the work that provides the only true authority for teaching others about social transformation, is by addressing the condition of one's own ignorance" (p. 10). These Other sides of ourselves, the hatred or fear spoken about in private but hidden in public behind professional or respectable behavior, must be faced too, if we are to dwell authentically and openly in the world.

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I have kept almost every book I ever purchased. Even books borrowed from public or university libraries, if much beloved, found their way to my bookshelves through purchases at second hand bookstores or high-priced new editions. Bookshelves line at least one wall of every room in our house, except for the bathrooms (and

recently, I have been eying even them). We dream about finishing our basement and my dreams include built-in bookshelves. My husband's collection now co-exists with mine, the only nod to space-making or recycling being the elimination of duplicates. Children's books taken down from shelves and replaced with the stuff of adolescence have been packed away in plastic storage bins at my children's request. I don't think I could part with them anyway, so I complied with pleasure.

I have frequently wondered about this trait of mine, this obsession. For a while, I thought it represented my desire to own knowledge, to have tangible evidence of my right to call myself intellectual, educated, well-read, cultured. Perhaps this was true at one time but, as I struggle to examine the importance of narrative, of reading and writing, in my life, I acquire a new insight about my collection. Natalie Goldberg (1986/1991) reflects that "to do writing practice means to deal ultimately with your whole life" (p. 3). I can look at each book on my shelves and recall the period in my life during which it was purchased, often even the bookstore itself, and remember the life contexts in which it was read. Each of these books is like a friend with whom I have engaged in lively and passionate conversation. Each one provided me with at least a partial answer to some mystery I was investigating, some question to which I sought an answer. I have been surprised to find that almost every book has been re-read at least once and that I can recall the circumstances prompting the return visit. The books act as triggers to memories of my life and are comforting and comfortable, each creating a particular small, private sphere of light.

I am, at last, comfortable calling myself a writer and know that I am a writer

down to the bone. I write because it is my passion, because I must. These books are the tools of my trade, representing different genres and stances, different voices and views of my world and the world in which they were created and in which they were read.

One novel was read only once, just a few weeks before my graduation with my undergraduate degree. Magister Ludi by Herman Hesse (1969) sits on my bookshelf like a beacon, like a demon. When I read it, it seemed like an indictment of all the formal education I had spent my life acquiring, particularly the university education, emphasizing science, mind, pure thought, truth, rather than art. Perhaps I feared I had been trapped into a way of working, and so living, in a world made foreign to me, other to me, by the very system that had claimed its purpose was to educate me and make life more full and rich, more textured than it would otherwise have been, that promised I would become a creative, productive member of society.

In the novel, Joseph Knecht (which translates as "servant") spends his entire life in the lofty heights of the academic, monastic, privileged and isolated state of Castalia. Throughout the novel, we witness the slow movement of his desire for freedom, his desire to return to the "real" world "out there." The novel moves in a lengthy and steady progression to the point where Joseph Knecht finally achieves his freedom, only to die in his first free and spontaneous act. Or so I read it then. I remember being so angry at the ending that I threw the book across the room, breaking its spine on the opposite wall. The story represented to me all the anger I felt toward what I saw as wasted years, toward all the arrogance and condescension evident in the lofty heights to which I had been admitted and tolerated, but not really accepted. Rather than

looking forward to my graduation, I felt trapped, betrayed, out of sync with myself. Like Joseph Knecht, my work had been well done, but I found myself gravitating, after graduation, to the margins of my profession, moving from hospital nursing to the community, increasingly finding myself in positions of advocacy for people who had been banished to the edges, who had no voices in the larger world: children, the mentally ill, the developmentally and mentally disabled. My personal exploration of feminism, alternate treatment modalities, Eastern philosophy and Jungian psychology felt more legitimate, less subversive, in those locations, in those marginal spaces. My private self felt less out of sync with my public self. I took courses at colleges and university in the liberal arts: history, music, drama, English, languages.

For all these years, Magister Ludi has sat on my shelf, mocking me, a constant reminder of my own resistance to the systems and institutions in which I lived and worked. Its presence became an icon representing all my reasons for distrusting academe, reminding me of my lack of fit in that world.

I reach a block in my writing, in my hermeneutic inquiry. I seem unable to travel back to the real center of my question. What does all this really mean, really matter? With deadlines looming, with pressure from myself, my family and my colleagues to finish this work, this writing, I find myself compelled to pull Magister Ludi down from the shelf and re-read it. After twenty-five years, including four and a half years in graduate school, I face my demon.

It is an entirely different reading this time. Knecht lives a life of disciplined meditation. His early entrance into the small enclave devoted to mind and the intellect,

to analysis of the abstract, already contained the seeds of doubt. His meditations led him to see there can be no true faith without doubt, no actual progression of the intellect without action. The spaces in between these seeming dichotomies are the locations where we can allow ourselves to hear opposing ideas, to sense the germ in them that can reveal the possible future that may evolve if we continue to see our point of view as the truth, as the only right one. Knecht realized he had been free to act, to choose, at each step of his upward rise in the hierarchy. His personal loyalty to the hierarchy of the Order had become more important than his commitment to the ends it had originally been established to serve. He had a suspicion that the teachers, members of the Order not quite able to handle the demands of pure academe, and sent out from their protected sanctuary into the world, were the ones doing the most valuable work. A system smug in its privilege, not understanding the transitory nature of existence, holds on to traditions as necessary, sees the system as an end to itself, to be preserved at all costs, and forgets its purpose, the origins of its privileged position. In its isolation, its air of "perfection," it does not see the seeds of its own downfall, its lack of relevance in the larger world. Tension can create a space for breathing, breathing in new life, breathing rejuvenation, remembering our purpose as servants, our accountability to those we serve. Knecht began to perceive that their role at Castalia as researchers for truth and guardians of culture could not be maintained without an awareness of what it meant for individual people in the "real" world "out there" to be hungry or frightened, to live, breathe, and die. His Order, he believed, contained the seeds of decay because it had forgotten how to listen, had separated analysis from

history, people from politics, had forgotten the responsibility that accompanies privilege, had forgotten who it was they were created to serve.

For the first time, I noticed the complete absence of women for almost the entire novel. Not until the very end is a female character introduced, the mother of the young man "out there" in the real world that Joseph Knecht will tutor once he has completed his withdrawal from Castalia. Now I see this not as a thoughtless omission but as a purposeful one. The introduction of the feminine, of mothering, of a maternal subtext, coincidental with Knecht's move to the outside world, now act as markers that Hesse recognized the need for these influences in obtaining a balance, in blurring the lines between apparent dualities. Without his years in Castalis, Knecht never would have developed the meditative practices and knowledge base which facilitated his self-transformation. Though he died, his actions left a seed of doubt in the entire Order of Castalia and a hope for change in the larger world.

Indeed, this escape from the prison of two minds, the task of self-transformation, is the great theme pervading Hesse's novels (Ferguson, 1980). Hesse himself said, in 1921, that he hoped the spiritual wave from India would offer our culture a corrective refreshment from our perceived opposite pole.

These two different interpretations of one text formulated 25 years apart remind me that the meanings we find in texts are always situated in a particular personal context. Meaning is found in the relational space between reader and text (Sumara, 1996), between that which is given by the author and that which is formulated or imagined by the reader. The typed words on the page remained the same, but the

significance of the words was unstable, existing in the spaces between my lived experience and the text, between my past and present selves.

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In my first year of nursing practice as a graduate, I worked on pediatrics in a federally run hospital in Edmonton which primarily served Cree people from within the immediate service area as well as Dene and Inuit residents of the western Arctic, including Inuvialut from Cambridge Bay and Resolute Bay. I witnessed many policies in action and professional practices that I believed were demeaning to these populations and turned, as I always have, to books to further my own understanding.

One of the books I read was Tales from the Igloo (Metayer, 1972), a collection of traditional legends and fables of the group of Inuit known at that time as the Copper Eskimos. It is a translation into written form of a language and tradition that had been until then purely oral. The book jacket described the tales as "delightful, light-hearted and humorous." In the reading of these tales, passed on orally from the storyteller to a younger generation to offer the listeners answers to the mysteries of their world, I discovered a mythology reflecting a view of nature, people and the supernatural bound to a harsh and forbidding land and a culture bound to the realities of living there. There are no labels to identify the good and evil characters. Humans can change into animals in the blink of an eye, devouring children or eating the flesh off their bones. Terrible things happen to ordinary, good people. Death comes prematurely or is circumvented by the supernatural. There are no happy endings.

Metayer tells us that such stories were usually told during the long Arctic

winter nights. The greater part of the light in the room would be extinguished with perhaps only a few flames dancing from the stone lamp. The domes and walls of the igloo dissolved and became vague forms as if night itself had entered. Each individual was in direct communication with the infinite space that was the Arctic; each imagination was stirred. No one was asleep but each was on the edge of dreams. The age of the ancestors became reality and each person understood the tales "to the extent of his own fears and hopes" (p. 11).

How was I to understand these tales? How was I to understand these children? How could I treat them or care for them in a way that did no harm?

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Aishield's story is about the color red. It is, more particularly, about a young girl's yearning for a new red dress. The story is simply but powerfully told in a language Aishield is still learning (Appendix A).

I met with Aishield after reading her paper. It had been written as an assignment for an Introductory Communications class I was teaching at Lethbridge Community College. "It's a beautiful story, Aishield, and well told, but what does it mean? How does it fit into the framework of the assignment (to tell a classic fairy or folk tale from a different perspective)?"

"Well, it is a folk tale from my country" Aishield explains, in English made rich and rhythmic and textured by her Spanish inflections.

"But I am not sure why the red dress is important. I don't understand the context in which the story occurs - the land, the climate, the people, the politics, the

events that shaped their lives."

Aishield and I have a lengthy conversation lasting over an hour during which she tries to educate me about her story, the story of her country, Nicaragua. It is an hour filled with the tension between her story and my understanding of it, between her history and mine. I have an improved knowledge of the historical contexts - political, economic and social - for the story and a humble awareness of the limitations to my ability to really understand.

"I wonder if there is a way to expand the story a little... to include some of the details you have just shared with me," I wonder out loud.

Two days later, Aishield returns, two more pages conscientiously written and typed, details and explanations to add to the story of the red dress (Appendix B). Now the story is more complete and clear. Now it makes more sense to me, the ambiguity gone. Only recently have I begun to see how I urged Aishield to change her writing from a story to an explanation. I can now see my own complicity in maintaining Aishield's Otherness, in maintaining my position as someone who can demand explanations and expect to receive them. As Audre Lorde (1984) says:

> Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of black and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative

roles in our joint survival. (p.112)

I used the father tongue, the master's tools, to keep Aishield occupied with my concerns, my desire for a finished story, for beginnings, middles and endings, for closure. I had fallen back on my institutional authority as teacher to demand an explanation. While Aishield shared with me that her exploration of the meaning of the story had been useful to her, had facilitated her own understanding of the importance of context in interpretation, I now understand my actions as asking Other to explain itself rather than doing the work of achieving understanding myself. Reading the revised story may leave me, as a reader, more satisfied. But it may also lead to an acceptance of difference without a need to consider the implications for all concerned, or a need to meet Aishield face-to-face, and engage her in a dialogue. When ambiguity is absent, dialogue is unnecessary because there is nothing more to be said. Such acceptance, Smith (1994) warns us,

> only intensifies the isolation of individuals in their difference. If I merely accept you in your difference without exploring *how* you are different and how *your* difference reflects *my* difference from you, that is, how knowing you invites self-reflection on my part - without such a conversation, we merely exist as two solitudes. (p. 72)

I had denied and eliminated the hyphen without working it or, as Fine (1994) describes it, creating occasions, for ourselves and others, to "discuss what is, and is not, 'happening between', within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for

whom, and with what consequences" (p. 72).

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My responses to the children I see as an Elementary Liaison Counsellor are consciously chosen to try to assist children in bringing more detail and depth to their story, to order it, to try to tie bits and pieces together into a narrative form, to help them discover, along with me, the meanings they explore.

"How did you do that, I wonder?"

"What did you do next?"

"Where were you? Can you describe it to me in detail, as though you are sitting there right now?"

"When, during the day, is that hardest for you?"

"Tell me more about that."

Still, I cannot escape the value-laden nature of my questions. Through them, I am still the one deciding in which direction the conversation should proceed, or which part of the story deserves greater detail, and I am the one often giving a new frame of understanding to the child, suggesting that another way of perceiving may be just as valid, even more valid, than the one they bring me.

Children will ask me questions about my life, my home, the rituals, routines and disciplining that occur there, perhaps sensing that my neutrality, my hesitancy in being judgmental, my attempts at being accepting, are somewhat inauthentic. Still, I am aware that my role with children is not expected to be a disciplinary one. I try to assist them in finding the meaning in the spaces between life lived outside the school, and

school experiences and knowledge, often at odds with each other. My position is a privileged one as I have the opportunity to know the children's stories, to engage with them, to interpret them to the teachers. It is the kind of knowing and caring all the good teachers I have been privileged to meet would like to achieve with each and every student if only they could find the space and time.

I am conscious of the institutional agenda framing my position. Teachers and administration will ultimately see me as "helping" if my work with children makes a difference in the classroom. I wonder how often my responses deny rather than work the hyphen, or how often my unconscious aversions or definitions of deservingness are at work in the way I set priorities or determine the length of time I spend with individual children. I wonder how much of the story of the feminization of teaching (and of nursing) is historical and how much of that story still echoes in my actions, in my way of being in the school and with the children, in my determination together with them of what really matters. I bring my own historical past with me, while constantly confronted with the need to undertake "in an on-going way the profoundly challenging, often fearsome task of deconstructing" (Smith, 1994, p. 79) my own storied past and present.

# Boys to Men

Mark sat at the table beside me, glancing at me sideways now and then, mostly focusing on his drawing. He was tall and solidly built for an eight-year-old, without being at all overweight. His face was long and handsome, with dark brown eyes and hair and a square jaw. His smile was thin and straight, barely revealing white, even teeth. His voice was low and soft but articulate. His speech was slow, carefully measured and controlled.

He spent twenty minutes, while we talked, drawing what I thought would be a face, his pencil strokes also controlled and detailed. It turned out to be a sun in an alien landscape, the sun's corona deep red and orange. When I suggested he was a very good drawer, he quietly but confidently replied, "I know."

While Mark drew, I read aloud two different books written for children about divorce. After each page, Mark made a comment, at first in response to my own remarks and later on his own initiative. "Lots of kids I talk to have gone through parents' divorcing, and they mention that they felt the way these kids in the story do. I'm wondering if you felt this way too." Mark shared his experiences in response to the stories while he drew. He never raised his voice. The pitch and volume remained low and controlled. But he showed a willingness to share his experiences and his feelings, an openness, that surprised me.

"Lots of boys I talk to feel like they must be the man of the house after their fathers move out."

"That's what I feel like. That's what my Dad told me...that I have to be the man of the house now, that I must take care of and watch out for my brother. I try, Mrs. H., I really try." Mark put down his pencil and leaned his elbows on the table, his forehead cradled in one hand. "Last week, some kids were picking on my brother, and I went in and gave one of them a couple of shoves. I just don't think I can do it. It's just not in me..." Mark shook his head, his hands both cupping his chin. Finally, he began to draw again, adding deep pits to his alien landscape, and more red to his sun.

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I met with four boys, all in grade five, identified by teachers and a pile of behavior slips from the playground supervisors as physically aggressive and often exhibiting bullying behavior toward other children.

Our conversation lead us into a discussion about power and fear.

"Is there anything any of you are afraid of?"

"Naw!"

"No way!"

"I am...sort a'. I'm afraid there will be another world war."

"Me too...sort a'. I'm afraid the world is going to end."

"Who decides that there will be a war?"

"The leaders of the countries."

"What sort of people do you think they are?"

"Real men. Powerful men. Not afraid to let 'em know who's boss."

"Is there anything they could do to avoid war, to solve their problems in a

different way?"

Silence.

"I know you've learned a lot of ways to solve problems, and resolve conflicts. Some of them we have talked about here, together. I'm wondering, with so may different strategies to choose from, why you choose to fight physically?"

"Because it works!"

"Because I'm not a gay guy!"

"Show 'em you're not afraid. Show 'em who's strongest. Show 'em you're not a wimp and they won't bother you again."

"Because its more fun."

"Most of you are living with just one parent. Do you think you are missing out on anything having just one parent?"

"All that love..."

"Yeah...all that love..."

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An 11-year-old boy, red-haired and small for his age, is always in fights on the playground. He has been suspended on more than one occasion for swearing at his teacher or giving her the finger. He came into my office wearing baggy, big-bottomed black jeans and had a wallet hooked on to his belt loop with a thick silver chain. He liked emptying his pockets to show me the treasures he had collected: a broken yo-yo, a rusted toy car, a jack knife. Before sitting down, he grabbed two stuffed animals, a raccoon and a bear, off my shelf and cuddled with them while we talked.

He wished he could see just one of his parents at least every day. His conversation was full of references to boundaries, respect, control. He described anger as his armor. When he is angry, he is stronger and he doesn't feel anything: no sadness, no disappointment, no hurt. For just those few angry moments, all the pain stops.

He believed he must know how to take care of himself, be independent. This seemed to mean that he must be fearless, tough, able to fight to win, willing to stand up for himself, even against his teachers. Most of all, he must not feel anything.

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Over and over again, the young boys I see talk about what seems to be a crisis in their masculine identity, justifying their physically aggressive behavior as necessary to being a man. Invariably, they see themselves as victims and rationalize that they were just defending themselves against some perceived attack or injustice. It is the victim's fault. They made these boys angry; they asked for it.

Violence is increasing in our homes, in our communities and in our schools. There is a tendency to target some particular group for this increase: single mothers, abusive or absentee fathers, a violent segment of the lower class that has poor parenting skills and models violence, a school system that has no control over the students and is unable to ensure student safety, a poorly legislated and executed Young Offenders Act. Yet seldom do we look at the larger culture for factors supporting and facilitating these trends.

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In Freudian psychoanalytical theory, we use ego defense mechanisms as mental

strategies with which the ego defends itself in the daily conflict between internal impulses that seek expression and the simultaneous demand to deny them. According to Freud, *repression* is the most important and the most frequently used defense mechanism (Wood & Wood, 1993). Repression operates "to remove painful or threatening memories, thoughts, ideas or perceptions from consciousness" (p. 404) and keeps them in the unconscious, or prevents unconscious but disturbing impulses from surfacing into consciousness. Although the thoughts, ideas or impulses are not seen or heard, they are not gone and continue to play a role in personality development and functioning. Their absence becomes an on-going presence that can surface unexpectedly.

Derrida and the postmodernists have shown that the meaning of any word, concept or idea can only be derived referentially. The surfacing of meaning in different contexts, such as reading or writing, always "involves an act of suppression, so that in any present interpretation, something is invariably 'lost,' although...not really. What is lost continues to 'play' within the present interpretations as a 'trace,' " (Smith, 1994, p. 11) which can be recovered through a process of deconstruction.

In my own writing, I discover traces of various Others still present in my stories, others whose presence was noted but not understood, whose lives intersected with mine to create the future which is the present we now share. Their presence surfaces in my stories despite the lack of significance attached to them at the time. Perhaps it was the lack of explanation, the sense that I was seeing something that did not fit in the larger landscape, that marked them in my memory. What we believe is

often built on suppression or repression but still needs what is rejected to mark the boundaries of, to sustain, our identities. We may create the very thing we fear.

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During the early part of the Gulf War, a peace rally and march was organized in the city of Lethbridge. I took my six-year-old daughter and my seven-year-old son, thinking at the time that I was providing them with a learning experience around trying to make a difference in a way that was non-violent and that may communicate to our leaders a belief in myself as a member of a global community, and my desire that different ways of addressing conflicts be found that did not involve armed confrontations.

As we marched peacefully along city streets and avenues, a few people singing songs from the peace movement of the sixties and seventies, hecklers began running alongside the marchers, screaming their anger at us for deserting and betraying "our boys over-seas." The hecklers began throwing things and pushing people. My desire for my children to participate in a peaceful demonstration was over-ridden by my fear for their safety and we quietly left the march, returning to our vehicle and to our home. I had tried to show my children that I was willing to take action to preserve their safety and instead had provided them with a fear-filled experience. How could I explain to them that pro-peace was not the same thing as anti-war when I knew in my heart that part of my motivation was a fear that they might, one day, be the boys and girls over-seas?

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When I was only six weeks into my new job, on the Tuesday following the Thanksgiving week-end, my fourteen-year-old son told me, five minutes before he was to leave to catch the school bus, that he could not return to his junior high school, ever. I was surprised, knowing that something very serious must be going on for my usually quiet and easy-going son to take such a definite stand, and I was frightened by the knowledge that I had noted nothing in his demeanor, in his mood, to indicate a problem existed. I agreed that he could certainly stay home for the day, and we would talk and sort things out when I got home. What emerged that evening was a story that shocked both me and his father. We learned about abuse and pain my son had been suffering, in silence and alone, for more than three weeks.

My son has always been quiet and, though good looking, was somewhat awkward and self-conscious in his physical stance and in his relationships. He had been in a French Immersion program since kindergarten and, by grade nine, what had started out as four kindergarten classes had dwindled to a class of 17 students, mostly boys. Some of the boys still in the class were boys whose behavior had bothered me for years: small, petty and mean behavior toward others, observed at birthday parties or sleep-overs. When I would talk about the behaviors and why they bothered me, my son would tell me it was just a joke, and that nobody minded or was hurt by it. My husband told me I worried too much. My son never participated in the bullying, but remained on the margins, a bemused observer. Over the years, the tricks and jokes had gotten meaner. Then the boys turned on my son. It was, at last, his turn.

The harassment had been mostly verbal in nature, planned and executed like

torture, sometimes every 60 seconds, carefully timed by the ringleader, and almost exclusively sexual in content. He was met getting off the bus in the morning, followed throughout the day during between-class breaks and at noon hour, and taunted, even escorted onto the bus, in the afternoon. All this he had dealt with without telling anyone.

He and I met with the principal who admitted he had been attempting to deal with these boys for the previous two years. Each solution he suggested was met with my son's quiet and repeated response, "You've tried that before and it hasn't worked." The principal admitted that his approaches to the boys' parents had been greeted with responses like "You are making a big deal out of nothing" or "Boys will be boys; don't overreact!" The principal was unable to convince my son that school would now be a safer place for him. I backed and facilitated my son's decision to change schools.

My husband responded with anger. He had, to that point, remained uninvolved in school related issues or events, outside of attending school concerts. I have attended parent-teacher interviews, advocated for our gifted daughter, done the fund-raising, snack days, field trips and camps. But this situation demanded his attention as he struggled with love and concern for his son, anger that the bullies were not at all inconvenienced and seemed outside the control of the school, and anger with our son for being unable to stand up for himself, to handle this like a man. Somebody should pay. He, who normally will not return damaged goods to a store or return an unsatisfactory meal in a restaurant, embarrassed and angry when I do, went in to see the principal, yelling and intimidating. He wanted to have the young men charged by

the police. When *he* went to school, he yelled, the teachers, all priests, would have slammed a few heads into lockers and there wouldn't have been any more problems, and maybe some of that was needed again. My way, and the school's way, clearly did not work.

My son spent a few days with my mother and father while I was at work as I was too concerned about his emotional state to leave him alone at home. I explained why I wanted him with his grandparents, that I needed to know he was with people who loved him and cared about him and could help him make a decision that was right for him. Frequently I reminded my husband that this was not about him, but about our son. Our son chose a new school and decided it would be an opportunity to re-invent himself, a word he had heard me use in sharing some of my learning experiences through my M. Ed. course work. Three weeks later, he had settled in, tried out for the basketball team, continued to play on two hockey teams, and was doing well academically and socially in the new school. My husband remained stuck, still angry and still dissatisfied with how things had been resolved.

During this same period of time, my son had discovered a lump in his right forearm, a lump which continued to grow and cause increasing discomfort when he was checked or slammed into the boards in hockey, We went to a doctor and a specialist in our own city, then for an MRI in Calgary, then to a specialist in Calgary. Finally, one week before Christmas, my son had surgery in the Calgary Children's Hospital. I accompanied my son on all these visits, my husband believing that my background in nursing made me the best decision maker. When I informed my husband

at the end of January that the doctor had called to inform me that the tumor was not malignant and was not a recurring type of schwanomma, he shrugged and stated that he had known all along it was nothing and had not been worried. I, in the meantime, had been experiencing heart palpitations and some insomnia which both disappeared with the clean bill of health.

These two incidents underlined for me the differences in how my husband and I view parenting, handle crises, view the world and define manhood. And I am left with many questions about what it means to be a man in today's world, and how boys are to learn about it.

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My husband is a north-side boy. North and south Lethbridge are divided by railroad tracks and, in our youth, the north side was the wrong side to be from. North side boys had to be tough. My husband doesn't remember his own father and was raised, along with a younger brother, by his mother and step-father, along with six younger half-brothers and sisters. He entered our marriage at 35 years of age cynical about love, especially mother love. He had learned how to be a man from his north-side peers. Though he himself did not fight, he hung around with big, tough guys who could and did solve their problems using physical means. He played hockey without support or encouragement from either parent. He was an altar server at church. He joined the Army Cadets and eventually the Army Reserve, advancing to corporal and winning awards for his abilities with a gun. His way of dealing with the tensions and conflict at home was to never be there. He learned to "disappear" even when physically present, a

trick he still tries to use. He worked full time while acquiring his high school matriculation courses in the evenings at the college. He also took some university courses and was accepted to McGill University but chose instead to stay in his home community and drive trains for the CPR. He is a well read, intelligent and self-educated man who is a responsible provider and father. Still, he believes that his past experiences "helped toughen me up, make me strong, disciplined, a survivor." He thinks his own children have it too soft and could use some of that same toughening up.

My memory tells me that my own parents fought frequently while I was growing up. Although I hated the fighting, I have recently realized how lucky I was to have a mother who was strong enough to disagree, who stood up for herself, who fought back. Doctors had declared that, after three life-threatening miscarriages and several surgeries, my mother could not have any more children and I was my father's best buddy, learning how to bait a hook, shoot gophers, drive tractors, spit and smoke cigarettes. In those days, my father knitted slippers and made a better angel food cake than my mother. He wrote a poem for me on my first birthday, a poem filled with love, which I have kept. We lived on the grounds of a federal agricultural research station, and I had a great deal of freedom to roam and explore. We spent vacations on my maternal grandparents' Saskatchewan dry-land mixed farm, where a love of the earth and nature was reinforced, a love that comforts and sustains me to this day. I attended a country school where girls and boys alike wore blue jeans and gum boots. I was called a tomboy and was invited to all the boys' birthday parties.

Four months before my eighth birthday, my brother was born... the miracle

child, a forsaken dream realized, someone to carry on the family name. My name became "sis" and my world increasingly became restricted to helping with household chores and child care. That same year, I was moved from my country school to a Catholic school in the city where boys and girls had separate play areas, and girls wore only dresses. A much beloved sister, born three years later, was not so much a miracle as an accident and could not eclipse the son upon which my father's sun rose and set. I adored my siblings. After all, I suspected it was my birthday and wishing-well wishes that had been answered by their arrival. Yet I resented the restrictions and changes in my role ushered in with their arrival.

My father encouraged me to examine and question contradictions in my life experiences. Raised in a strict Calvinistic religion, he did not attend church and refused conversion to Catholicism. He encouraged me to research and question what I was being taught about the history of the Catholic Church, its doctrines and laws, its interpretations of the word of God. This questioning attitude was generalized to other areas and subjects and was supported and aided by my love of reading. My father never avoided an argument, nor ever ordered my silence.

Several years after graduation with my undergraduate degree, I worked at one full-time job and two part-time jobs, enjoying my financial independence, a successful career and many, mostly male, friends. I always thought I would marry and have children, and never really had a career plan. I was angered by the degree to which the institutions I worked for were created and controlled by men, but more angered by the accepting and passive attitudes of the women working in them. I read about feminism,

disturbed by the degree to which motherhood and mother love were de-valued, while simultaneously despising women who were trapped in unhappy marriages and unfulfilled lives, victims, I thought, of their own choices.

I confronted the fear of risk-taking inherited from my parents, a legacy in their lives of a world-wide depression followed by a world war, by travelling alone with a backpack in Europe for almost a year. At 31, thinking I really had my feminine power and female shit all together, I married the boy from back home.

Marriage became the stage upon which the together shit fell apart, showed the degree to which the knowledge learned was still separate from the life lived. My husband became the personification to me of all evils ever perpetrated on women by the patriarchy. Our marriage became a repetition of what we both had known mixed in with romantic and unrealistic expectations about how we would do it differently. Our pre-marriage discussions and promises crumbled under the weight of unexamined baggage, almost all related to issues of power and gender. Three months after we were married, I became pregnant and was confronted with my husband's cold cynicism about parenthood. My son was a womb-bound witness to arguments and tears as my husband and I struggled to find the boundaries of our own relationship, to assign ownership of our disappointed expectations, and to confront our own inherited demons and ways of acting in a marriage.

My dreams, unusually rich and textured in the first trimester of both my pregnancies, were, with my son, straight forward, full of humor, and comforting. In one dream, he hung by his nails from my womb, a miniature version of his father, beard

and all, yelling that he was NOT leaving. In another, I found myself interviewing several dozen souls all wanting to reincarnate as our son. I remember that all the candidates appeared as males. Though I never did recall the questions I asked, the criteria upon which I would make my choice, or the choice finally made, I woke up laughing. In all my dreams, this unborn child was a male. I loved this child even then for his tenacity, humor, and strong will.

He was seven-months-old when I became pregnant again. I felt guilty as my lap disappeared. I felt guilty as my wonderfully busy and fulfilling time with my son sometimes led me to forget that I was pregnant. I felt terribly sad as I realized I would have to share my time between two babies. I understood how to raise this male child; I had been raised for the job.

My dreams while pregnant with my daughter were, by contrast, filled with chaos and conflict: a riot in a men's prison, a war in an alien landscape, unfamiliar religious rituals in the middle of the night without even moonlight to reveal their secrets. The life of a child was always at stake, with me in a position, sometimes against my own will, to save the child. I was required to take a stand against the rioting, warring, sacrificing men; to defend the value of the child; to nurture the spiritual nature of this life. I awoke, morning after morning, disturbed and shaken. When my daughter was born, I looked into eyes reflecting a soul more ancient and more wise than my own, a soul that sent echoes down the generations of women from whom I had descended, that demanded I remember who I was, that I acknowledge the power of spirituality that is a special gift of my gender. Responding to that challenge

required that I examine the way in which I was raising my male child, too. Responding to that challenge required that I learn how to live in the spaces of all that tension, in the middle of my own life.

My son and my daughter continued in those early years to be silent witnesses to our arguments: my outbursts, dramatic and emotional, and my husband's responses, cruel and cold. I moved from anger to depression, from despair to rage. My husband did not leave me, nor I him. Nor did my husband rescue me, insisting instead that I needed to get a life. As cruel as his message seemed at the time, he was right. Yet, in the midst of all this, we continued to love each other and found mutual joy in our children. My husband learned about mother love, and I about the differences between mothering and fathering. When I was most uncomfortable about the messages my son was getting from his father, I reminded myself that he would still need to survive and be a man in this world, not in some imagined utopia of my dreams.

When my children were six and seven, a routine PAP smear indicated that I had invasive carcinoma. Several more specific and reliable tests were done and, in the two weeks while my husband and I waited for results, we talked about issues that would never otherwise have been discussed. My husband's conversation returned consistently to the children. What would he do if something happened to me? How would he manage? He loved them, but had come to understand that he could not give them the kind of love I gave them, that he could not "mother" them. Despite having argued with me every step of the parenting way, he had come to admit the uniqueness and importance of mother-love, had, in fact, been re-mothered and healed as our own

children grew, as he discovered there was a different way than what he had experienced. He had come to trust in love. We were relieved when informed that my condition, though requiring treatment, was not cancerous. Still, the changes brought about in our relationship remained, positive and deep.

I have struggled to continue the deep work, the deeply personal journey, given to me as a gift with my marriage and my children: reading, working through, reflecting on and writing about male and female interpretations of male and female behavior, masculine and feminine thought. I work each day at trying to identify my assumptions, at becoming aware of the political in the personal, and the importance of examining the personal. I work hard to understand my husband's point of view, perceiving that he is not a terrible man, but a courageous one, trying to do his best in a world changing around him. We continue to disagree about everything but these tensions now are most often opportunities to air differences, with a large dose of humor mixed in. My children, as my daughter demanded at her birth, are given the gift of these differences, of exploring the tensions rather than avoiding them, of being allowed to choose for themselves. And while my husband still talks the chauvinistic, north-side talk, he also cooks, cleans, and does dishes, knows how to do the laundry and sews on his own buttons. Besides all the traditional female tasks, I also install closet organizers, put together furniture, and occasionally mow the lawn.

My husband remained concerned for several months after that our son had chosen "the unmanly path, the wimpy way out." I reminded him of the courage it must have taken for our son to decide he would not fight, but would instead change schools,

going into a new environment where he knew almost no one. I talked about the strength it must have taken for him to stand up to his father, to disagree and make a decision which he believed was best for him. And I reminded them both that the decision gave the principal the information and power he needed to make more definite changes at the former school. Our son's decision and his actions had produced more positive change for all involved than any number of fights could have done.

My son's height, his sexuality, his confident posture and stride, surprise me with their foreignness, their otherness. I do not understand yet all the ways men are different from women, nor why those differences exist. But I am still close to my son, important in his life. He will, from now on, increasingly make his own choices, but it is comforting to know he has gained a new confidence in his ability to choose well, to choose from among many options. My son has witnessed my journey from a tension-filled relationship with my own father to a place of loving acceptance. My father is not going to change. When he asks me "Why do you have to argue about everything? Who taught you to be like this?", I smile and say "YOU did!"

My son comes to me still when he wants to talk about relationships, to have a paper he has written critiqued, challenged, or edited. He gives me an obligatory hug before he leaves for school in the morning, a ritual I have named the Mother-law. I am aware that he must bend over to receive his hug now. When he is home, my husband joins in this morning ritual with both our children, though his hugs for his son are sideways. Our son has re-invented himself, now in high school with his former tormentors, forgiving some and ignoring others. When I read his position papers, I am

pleased to see reflected there a sensitivity to racism and other injustices that I have tried to teach and model, a deep understanding, for his age, of rights and freedoms and a commitment to individual choice.

I recently read a poem by Tom Romano and included in his book Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres (1995). In the poem, he describes a grade five playground fight in which it is his turn to meet the class bully, famous for his headlock that made every boy give up. Tom somehow maneuvers so that the headlock is ineffective, and the boys are locked together, neither one winning nor willing to give in. They are finally separated by an angry, flapping principal long after the recess bell has rung. The two are fast friends after that, until academic abilities take them into different streams. They meet and reminisce as seniors on a school field trip and a few months later, Tom learns that his friend was killed in action in the jungle. I am struck to tears each time I read the last few lines of the poem:

> Pressed between Bobby's back and the ice-coated asphalt
> my ungloved hand burned. My butch haircut brushed
> Bobby's chin, my face crushed against his corduroy coat.
> Breaking loose would have been the biggest mistake.
> Bobby held me so fast, so close, so safe. (p. 38)

I sense here one of the male mysteries I do not understand. I sense here an answer to how it is that the boys I counsel chose to fight to solve their conflicts.

When I counsel boys in elementary school, I talk about my husband and my son. I talk about baseball and hockey and statistics. I talk about the big contest between

between Sammy Sosa and Mark McGuire. I talk about how nothing is so big that it can't be made better somehow, when we ask for help. I talk about how difficult it is for the men in my life, most men I know, to talk about or express feelings, to figure out what it means to be a man. I do not pretend to know the answers, but I try to give them choices, to teach them how to anticipate consequences. When asked if there is anything they fear, they frequently tell me that they fear the end of the world, or a world war that will destroy the earth. We talk about the kinds of choices that lead to war, the kinds of choices that take the world farther away from that future, and I am reminded again and again how much our husbands, our sons, our fathers, need mother love. When they leave my office, many of these tough young boys want a hug.

I ask my husband if he sees a difference in the way I raise my son and my daughter. Usually quick with a witty, even flippant response, my husband is thoughtful and answers slowly. "Honestly, no, I don't think you treat them very differently. The differences have more to do with their personalities than their gender." I am pleased that he has answered thoughtfully and that he is able to make such distinctions. He adds, "You are trying to raise them both to be good human beings."

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Cheek pressed close against the
cool wooden door frame,
standing half-hidden and
un-noticed,
she watches and listens.

He has come home
breath colored by cigarette smoke and
the sweet-sour smell of beer,
stubble which he likes to rub against her cheek
until it burns, while she laughs
and struggles to free herself,
showing now.
Her mother stands at the sink,
turned away from him as she cleans up
the remains of an un-eaten supper.
"Take it back. Take it all back," she says flatly.
"I won it fair and square!" he shouts,
jubilant and joyous.
"It's a whole month's pay. They can't afford it."
"You don't understand. He's a grown man.
He knew what he was doing!"
"He didn't, not if he could gamble away
a whole month's pay,
his wife just out of hospital,
a baby and two young children to feed."
"But I can't take it back. They'll say I'm not
man enough

to run my own household!"

His closed fist slams against the kitchen table.

"But man enough to take money from

those that can't afford to lose it.

Take it back."

"I can't."

"Then give it to me and I'll

take it to his wife."

"It's the same thing. Everyone will think

my wife wears the pants in the family."

"Maybe I should. Maybe I have to."

Quietly, she closes the door,

and climbs into her bed,

to sleep,

to imagine tigers pouncing on her

in her dreams.

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The War was so palpable a presence in the first five years of my life that I still find it hard to believe that I didn't live through it. (Steedman, 1986, p. 29)

I recall images and events from my childhood imprinted on my memory as I moved through the landscape. On the right-hand side of the highway driving into the

city, I recall the remains of the German POW camp (Internment Camp No. 133, designed to hold 12,500 POW), some of the buildings being used in post-war years as storage facilities or warehouses. The familiar groups of hoe-toting workers in the sugar beet fields were largely Japanese (relocated to Lethbridge from coastal British Columbia during the war) or new immigrants ("displaced persons" who took over the shacks so recently vacated by the Japanese).

Once we acquired a car, my parents and I would go out for Sunday drives. Sometimes we would go downtown and window shop or sit in the parked car and watch the sidewalk traffic go by. Sometimes we would go out to Kenyon Field, Lethbridge's modern airport, to watch the miracle of planes landing and taking off.

Only in later years did I learn how the nature and scope of the airfield had been radically changed during the war, as the military became the primary user. Kenyon Field had been the site of the No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School, part of the vast British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (Johnston & den Otter, 1985). The RCAF eventually moved to another location, the high and constant winds in Lethbridge proving too strong and gusty for the trainee pilots. Kenyon Field continued to grow as it became the site for the RCAF's No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery School. To support the program, a project was launched by the air force to "lengthen and strengthen runways, to build a parade square, as well as to build additional huts, hangars, and a hospital" (p. 139). Many of these buildings remained visible and in use during my early childhood.

In childhood, Steedman (1986) tells us

Only the surroundings show, and nothing is explained. Children do not

> posses a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them, so the landscape and the pictures it presents have to remain a background, taking on meaning later, from different circumstances. (p. 28)

I believe that children are still capable of responding to the larger movements of which they are a part. They are capable of viewing other possibilities, of feeling the tensions between opposing visions, of feeling at some very deep level the "psyche" of the world in which they live, of responding to the symbols of their time. For me, memories of these deep responses are the past that remains in the heart of the present. This past is the interpretive device, the "means by which I can tell a story" (Steedman, 1986, p. 28).

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I am laying on my stomach on the rich, thick carpeting at "Auntie" Jean's house. She is not my real aunt, or even related to me, but she and her husband are "family." They are older than my grandparents who live several hours away by car, but they are childless themselves and have become substitute parents for my mother and father. We spend week-ends at their house. I love the rich wood frames around French doors opening up from the living room to the dining room, the stippled ceilings and walls, arched doorways, and the big, over-stuffed chair in the small lush room that is the entry way.

There are few things to entertain me but many things to observe, examine, and explore. There is, for example, the Balloon Man and Balloon Lady on the mantelpiece

over the small, grated, natural-gas fireplace. I can feel the carpet rubbing against my knees as I look at the pictures in the LIFE magazines Auntie Jean has given me to read. I am four, maybe five. I look at advertisements for CAMEL cigarettes, women's bras, fancy new cars. I have also looked at Saturday Evening Post magazines, loving the Norman Rockwell covers depicting family life.

I turn the page and come across a painting of a soldier in World War II. I know my father was in the navy during that war and I understand, in some deep and unarticulated way, how much this war still affects my parents, underlies the way the world is making sense of itself: a tentativeness toward all pleasure; a feeling of lost youth and innocence; a constant, nameless fear; never being certain again of security or safety.

The soldier is partly crouched, one knee bent. I'm not sure if he is trying to get up or just falling down. The background is a battlefield, things destroyed, burning, broken, all of a sameness of color and tone. "Like hell," I think. The soldier's left arm is mostly gone, tendons and strings of flesh hanging down, blood dripping. I stare at his face. What is the expression? What is he experiencing? Surprise? Anger? Pain? Fear? Does he even realize what has happened to him? I remember thinking his mother would be sad.

I hate the possibilities presented to me by this picture, but am drawn to it again and again, forcing myself to look closely at the damaged arm. How do I make sense of this? How do I go on living? Which picture do I believe? Which is the "real" one? Do I find the meaning of my life in the picture of this soldier, or in the Norman Rockwell

drawings? Are they mutually exclusive? Or do we create new lives somewhere in the middle, in the tension between the two pictures? I am never certain about my fascination with this picture but it is, I know, important. It really matters.

The wood-encased clock ticks away in its place midway between the Balloon Man and the Balloon Lady on the mantel. When one listens, really listens, a second is a very long interval of time. There is something safe and secure about the slow, steady ticking, like the pulse beating at my wrist, giving a forward direction to things, separating the dying soldier from my current life. Each second puts him further and further away from me. Yet there is a look about my father's eyes...

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Me: Dad, tell me again about how you got into the navy when you were only fourteen.

Dad: Well, Holland was occupied, and all of us, except my mother, were in the underground.

Me: So, what does that mean? What did you do?

Dad: Well, we would go around with our wheelbarrows, under the pretense of collecting fodder for our rabbits, and steal rifles when their backs were turned, hiding them under the foliage in the wheelbarrow. (pause) I realize now that they must have known... Maybe they had kids our age at home. It was during the early part of the war and no one thought it would go on so long.

Me: What else?

Dad: We would race the Germans to where airmen came down in their parachutes,

for the silk, you know. It was very valuable. We would disable any German vehicle deserted or left at the side of the road, stealing what ever we could. Once I came home with an alternator, and my mother was really angry. She told me to take it back!

(Laughter)

All of us hid Allied soldiers caught behind enemy lines in our homes. Injured guys were even admitted to hospital, and treated, right under the Germans' noses.

Me: So how did you end up in the navy?

Dad: Well, we lived in a house outside of town...You remember it, you walked by it when you were there...

Me: Yeah. You could still see the different colored brick from where it had been repaired...

Dad: From where the dud shell went into our attic. My sister was getting married, and all her stuff for her new home was up there...all got wrecked...kind of funny now when I think of it! Anyway, you could see the Oosterschelde from the second-story windows. Maybe that's why the Germans tried, in the end, to shell it. So we could see the British submarines coming up the Oosterschelde at high tide. Me and two of my buddies were poling a flat boat out to a submarine, taking two British airmen out to it, when we were spotted from shore and were being shot at. They had no choice but to take us on the submarine, too.

Me: Weren't you scared?

Dad: We thought it was a big game... We were only fourteen. Anyways, they didn't know what else to do with us when we got to Great Britain, so they let us join the Royal Dutch Navy which was operating out of Britain at that time. They gave us some sort of intelligence or aptitude tests to determine where we would be placed. I ended up in RADAR. My best buddy ended up as a cook... You remember him, you met him when we went to Holland in 1968...

Me: Oh yeah, at the big party they had for us at the end...

Dad: I always thought it was pretty funny that he ended up as a cook. We kind of felt sorry for ourselves then, thinking how good and easy our friends at home had it. Then we found out things got harder for them. A lot of them were recruited for work camps, and farm camps. They ended up having it pretty rough.

Me: So then where did you end up?

Dad: I was sent to the Isle of Mann for my RADAR training... That was a lot of fun. I had a girl friend there... Patsy O'Grady... Her mother and father were divorced and she lived with her mom, who was pretty strict. But her dad owned two resort hotels on the island, and he was a pretty good guy. I was having a good time, and then Patsy decided she wanted to get married. I thought of the first excuse I could, and told her I couldn't get married without my mom's permission. I wrote my mom, thinking that, during the occupation, she would never get the letter. I got an answer three weeks later, telling me, if I really loved her, to go ahead! Luckily we were shipped out right away, so I didn't have to marry her. She kept in touch for years, even after your mom and I were

married...

Me: Where did you go, after your RADAR training?

Dad: I was in Aberdeen. The destroyer I was assigned to escorted convoys to Russia, or met them coming from North America and escorted them into port. Sometimes we would be gone for five or six weeks. Sometimes we would only be out for three or four days.

Me: What would you do when you were in port?

Dad: We might be confined to the ship and that was pretty boring. But other times we would get shore leave, and that was always a lot of fun.

Me: Where were you when the war ended?

Dad: I was in Dundee. We all got drunk and stole the forks and spoons and knives from the pub where we were drinking.

Me: Why did you do that?

Dad: I don't know. I guess we thought they would be great souvenirs.

Me: So, when the war ended, you were just seventeen, still several months away from your eighteenth birthday, and you had already seen three years of service.

Dad: Yeah, that's right....

For the first time in all the times I have heard this story, and asked for its retelling, I finally realize my Dad is not talking only about the war. He is also talking about his youth.

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Like the young boys I see, I worry that there may be another world war. But

unlike these young boys, the time of my childhood was, as Steedman (1986) suggests, spent in a point between two worlds: an "older 'during the War', 'before the War', 'in the Depression', 'then'; and the place we inhabit now" (p. 29). Working-class children of our generation were taught to be good, to appreciate just being alive. We were told that the War had been fought for us, for a better and more peaceful future. In the economic boom of the post-war years, we were still taught self-denial, perhaps as preparation for a future lifetime in labor intensive or menial jobs. My parents wanted material things but did not have the money and, not trusting the permanency of anything, refused to use credit to make purchases. Steedman quotes Jeremy Seabrook as stating that children of more recent generations have been offered, instead, "the promise of easy and immediate gratification which, in the end, can sabotage human development" (p. 108) just as effectively as, or more effectively than, the poverty of the past. Seabrook believed that the old, defensive culture of poverty gave working-class children a sense of security which is denied the current generation of children. At least we knew what we desired. This generation believes the world owes them something, but cannot name its desire.

In working with these children, I often question whether or not I am focused on the right issues. Most programs or policies seek to protect the larger school population by attempting to control these aggressive children, by using peace-keeping strategies. Most schools also devote a large chunk of curricular time to teaching students the principles of peace-making. In addition, they use non-coercive classroom and school management styles, and present and model conflict resolution, critical thinking and

problem-solving strategies. These approaches are helpful, but do not go far enough, as some children use these strategies in a sophisticated way as a new method for getting each other in trouble.

I believe that we need to move one step further, to teach children peace-building skills. Aggressive children will not stop fighting until they can feel good about not fighting. In Boys will be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence, Myriam Miedzian (1991) postulates that the masculine mystique and its associated values--such as toughness, dominance, repression of empathy, and extreme competitiveness--play a major role in maintaining criminal and domestic violence and in the thinking and policy decisions of many political leaders, stating that we have an obsolete psychology still controlling our culture. She examines the resistance to change resulting from a continued belief in dualistic thinking about male and female behavior, with male behavior still being seen as the norm. It is her belief that the adherence to this masculine mystique is what poses the biggest threat to our society and our security. She examines factors in our culture that contribute to violence (such as schooling and child-rearing practices, violence on television and video games, competitive and contact sports, and the escalation of violence in toys and entertainment in general) and warns that changes need to be made in all these areas but cannot be made until people have a greater awareness of the impact of all these factors on our young boys. Even the Oedipal complex can be seen to be created and maintained by our Western philosophical point of view. Culture forces it on mothers, fathers and sons. Women collude in the belief that boys must be led into manhood by men, that what it means to

be a man in this world must be passed on from men to boys (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). The result is that boys are exiled from their mothers' relational world. The male child must either love and be loved or achieve, must choose between being and doing. The workplace values "instrumental" qualities (which have come to be associated with masculinity), while home life requires "expressive" qualities (which have come to be associated with femininity). The father may even introduce the instrumental into the home, switching the tone of a conversation a boy may be having with his mother about relationships to conversations about chores needing to be done or sports scores on television. This can result in boys even as young as six or seven being uncertain about what kinds of feelings they are allowed to have. Big boys aren't supposed to have certain feelings, so unacceptable feelings are disguised with bravado, silliness, or anger. The cost, for boys, is emotional connectedness, boys whose goal is to feel nothing. Somehow, we need to teach our children that power is something more than strength, age, privilege, or the lack of fear. Somehow we must help them unlearn that they can only be strong if they don't feel, or if they win.

It seems clear to me that we should not convince our young males not to fight, but should instead teach them how to determine what is worth fighting for. Carolyn Mitchell (1998) believes the war is on and that we need warriors. It is a war to save our sons--and the young men we teach or work with--from "mythification," from internalizing the prevailing myths about gender, role, intellectual ability, and manhood. If our sons know their reality more deeply, they *will* be angry. We must teach them that anger can be a positive tool. But we must also teach them how to be clear about where

the injustice lies, how to name their desire, and how to determine what really matters.

Schools have been designed to raise generations of young people knowing the virtues of discipline, obedience and personal commitment to democratic principles but the result has been "the cutting off of young people from any deep meaningful engagement with the broader life-stream" (Smith, 1997, p. 7). Smith suspects it is the isolation of youth from meaningful relations with significant adults that is the reason for so much youth violence today. He believes that children need to be brought into full conversation with adults. We also need to look to the margins of collective life for signification, at the place where we discover our limits. Problematic children in schools can become markers for our identification of our own need, our authentic interrogation of our presumptions about children and our own storied past. The increase in the number of children in trouble, Smith (1994) tells us, should be seen as a symptom of something gone wrong, as a child in trouble is "a child without free, spontaneous, and friendly access to adult thought and action" (p. 195). Postman (1995) believes that the great problem of education today is of a social, moral and spiritual nature. It is the problem, he states, of how to mend a broken heart, the "problem of finding narratives in which students can believe and that will provide them with transcendent reasons for learning" (p. 13). While our children are learning critical thinking, perhaps they should also learn to be clear about what it is they should think critically and for what purpose. While students are learning to adapt to change, they should also know to which changes to adapt and which changes to resist. Finally, he states

The gods of consumership and economic utility - and, especially, the

> god of technology - may say something to our children about how to make a living. They are silent on the question of how to make a life. (p. 13)

The children I see are not growing up in the in-between places in which Steedman and I grew up. I wonder what images imprint on their memory as they pass through the landscapes in which they live. I wonder how to talk to them about this. Such challenges require a use of Le Guin's third language, a language that can encompass a culture where both men and women can be involved in mothering, where children are engaged in conversations with adults about what really matters to them, and where men begin to see that they have more to gain than to lose by embracing a changing definition of masculinity. Such a language would be able to describe the spaces in the middle.

Unpacking the Sack

"Of all the kids you see, Mrs. H., which has been the most hurt?"

"I'm not sure what you mean, Greg..."

"You know, had other people do things to them that hurt them...like I told you about..."

"Like you've been hurt."

"Yeah, by lots of people."

"That's a really important question. I have to think about it for a while. There are so many different ways of being hurt...the body, the spirit, the emotions... and some kids are able to heal very quickly so end up not so damaged as others. The question might be who has been the most damaged, who has the hardest time healing."

"What do you mean, hurt in the spirit?"

"Well, some kids live with people who tell them every day that they are stupid, or lazy, or that they wish they had never been born..."

"That's me."

"Tell me more."

"I wish I had never been born....but there's nothing I can do about it. I was born, and that's that."

Greg and I sit in the room lit only by mid-winter sunless daylight coming through the window. In silence, we just sit, being together. I am holding Greg while we listen to whale songs on the tape recorder. It is one of Greg's favorite tapes.

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That is why I want to be a therapist. There is a lot of beauty hidden in broken lives. There are many voices that have never been spoken. Because of their wounds they may never be as strong as they could have been or as lovely, but as Tillie Olsen says, 'There is still enough left to live life by.' (Brody et al, 1991, p. 266)

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We have known each other for 12 years. We met when our children were all pre-schoolers and babies, our common need being the company of other women sharing our experience of chosen, full-time motherhood. We met through a womens' sorority, originally a book-reading organization, administered then and now by a man. It was full of ritual, mystery, strict rules of membership and progression, carefully structured meetings framing new and tentative friendships.

Only one of us still belongs to that formal organization but our friendship continues. We live within ten miles of each other geographically but do not keep in regular contact. Still, once a year, we meet at the lake. Andrea and her husband own a cabin and each year Andrea reserves three days in the middle of the summer just for us women. For four years now, we have met there: no telephone, no T.V., no husbands or children. We bring food and take turns cooking for and serving each other, an important way of nurturing. Arrivals are important - who arrives first, second, third - the greetings and hugs, jumping up and down, three of us negotiating for the use of two good lawn chairs. We could bring more chairs with us but never do.

We bring large supplies of various beverages including herbal teas, exotic juices and flavored coffees. We bring alcoholic beverages too but end up drinking little. We follow our individual agendas. I get up early and run, solitude under the sun, surrounded by mountains, the lake always in sight. Dana gets up and sits on the deck, an open book sometimes read but more often face downward on her lap while she watches the lake, the clouds, the ducks and loons. This year Andrea has slept longer. She has been unwell and needs the healing of natural sleep and natural waking.

We gather slowly on the deck with morning coffee, and gradually move inside for breakfast, or for lunch, depending on the pace set by our conversation and our bodies. We may go for a walk or we may not. I indulge in cross-stitch and crossword puzzles but rarely make much progress on either. For this, I am annually teased.

Our time is filled with stories: where our lives have taken us, how we have found our way back to this meeting place, how we have survived, lived, grown over the year. There are stories about our children, our husbands, jobs and careers; our disappointments and regrets; our celebrations; stories about our first true loves; and stories about unresolved painful events in our lives: the suicide of a brother, the loss of a baby, an alcoholic mother, the declining vitality of our parents, birth parents not known, exclusions and loss in our early childhoods, gaps in our personal histories that parents and relatives cannot or will not fill. These stories are usually shared in the dark, illuminated only by candles or stars, framed by the voices of loons and wolves. This year there was a full moon reflecting off the lake and through the windows. This year, an eagle circled overhead. We talk about how we chose our husbands, or they us, how

difficult marriage is, how we decide to stay, how we continue to love.

There are favorite stories that are requested and repeated year after year, the stories that shake us into laughter, the great hooting laughter that goes on and on, fall on your knees, stomach-aching, tears-flowing laughter, healing laughter.

Each year there are new stories: about our families, our relationships, the courage of our husbands, the wonder and beauty of our children, our fears, our ability to accept and forgive others, our struggle to accept and forgive ourselves. Throughout the conversation, we share the names of books we have read that touched us, changed us, shaped us. We exchange recipes, gardening tips, craft ideas, ways we have learned of communicating with our children, now all teenagers.

More recently, our conversations have also focused on our aging bodies, on how our life experiences find expression there, written on the wrinkled faces, greying hair, deteriorating strength and health. This year, we were nostalgic about our children's babyhood, aware of our shifting role, motherhood like quicksand beneath our feet, unstable, sinking, losing our footing, losing their dependence on us, their unconditional love of us. We share the important events of our lives but, more importantly, we share the trivia which we have come to realize forms the base that holds it all up, discovering how the small and everyday events, the stories never told before or never told anywhere else, situate our lives in the larger world.

Over the years, these three brief days have taught me about kindness, about serving others, about generosity and the love of women for other women. Most of all, these annual meetings underline the importance of story in my life. Each year's stories

add to the web, new threads in old stories, new directions and themes in this year's stories. Through our sharing of private stories, we negotiate a larger, public meaning. We tell the stories of our lives and sew the stories together, using the fabric of our lives to create a wonderful whole, one that brings comfort, warmth and beauty to our view of them, to our understanding of them.

There is confrontation, lovingly and laughingly offered.

"Quit complaining! You present yourself as desperate, rather than presenting yourself as indispensable and just exactly what a potential employer needs. You are so smart... you should go back to school."

"Take over the books of your husband's business. You have the knowledge, the ability. You know what needs to be done, and what a difference it could make."

"Just finish that damn degree! Why are you avoiding it? It's like you can't move forward. You're even repeating your stories. We love them, and we love hearing them, but only once a year!"

"You really need to talk to your biological father before he dies. He is the only one who can answer your questions."

"Why did you haul all that stuff up here? You never actually DO any cross-stitch!"

Our days together end in hope and love. The stories are treated gently by a perfect audience, the criticism and feedback given lovingly, the stitching done conscientiously and meticulously. The work is important. It nurtures our lives, gives meaning to them, helps us make sense of one more year, helps hold our individual lives

together, seamed and situated in the larger completeness.

The shit in our lives is opened up to the sun and the air and composted into new earth, transformed through our public sharing of private moments into that which can sustain us, nurture us, help us to continue to grow for another year. Our lives are written on our bodies, but are not the same thing as our bodies. Our stories help us re-member, situate ourselves back in our deepest spirits, where we--our lives, the lake, the loons, and the wild call of the wolves--are all pieces of the same mystery.

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Treat them gently,
take their stories, gently sift the words,
love them and return them
blessed.

Hold them in your arms,
Madonna.
Wipe the tear
anointing your own forehead
with the water of their life
blessed.

Listen for their truth,
return it to them

so the soul

re-members who they are

blessed.

Stillness grounded in the spirit,

hear the small voice

from the margins of their story.

Enter into their own vision.

Hear the story in the story.

Small child running down the path ahead,

laughing over her bare shoulder,

hair sliding 'cross it in the wind.

See the path ahead and run together

blessed.

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I try to find a way to finish, to bring this writing to some sort of closure. I am conscious of Smith's (1994) warning that

> Conclusions are dangerous...The human conversation about what it is to live humanly is never over, and we have a deep responsibility to protect the conditions under which that conversation can continue. (p. 96)

I am also conscious of Grumet's assertion that our fascination with origin, with causality, suggests a need to name the source, a need that "repeats the reproductive

project" (p. 33) of patriarchy. The static model of writing that requires a beginning, middle and conclusions is a form of organizing that works well when writing quantitative research, but "ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process" (Richardson, 1994, p. 517) and can undermine the confidence of qualitative researchers, requiring them to silence their own voices, to ignore the process of writing itself as their research instrument.

Traditionally, narrative and story are used to connect events in time. Narrative involves a movement through time; it "makes a journey" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 38). It is a "strategem of mortality...a means, a way of living...It asserts, affirms, participates in directional time, time experienced, time as meaningful" (p. 39). Yet narrative can also, according to Le Guin, be like a sack, or a bag. "A book holds words...They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us," (p. 169) a carrier bag full of, among other things, beginnings without endings, losses, transformations, and failures.

Still, I feel some obligation to close the "hermeneutic circle." I will dump out the sack and examine the contents, not a conclusion exactly, but a taking stock in the middle of the journey. As Fine (1994) states, the "work will never 'arrive' but must always struggle 'between' " (p. 75).

People define themselves differently than others define them. Ginnie does not, for example, define herself or her family as lower-class or working-class. She does not define herself as abused or neglected. Her story of herself includes a description of a

complex set of relationships within the intricacies and intimacy of a family.

I am fascinated by Ginnie, reminded of my own working-class childhood and my own public inventions. Yet I also discovered, in writing my personal history, that my childhood existed in an in-between time where many lives were disrupted and many people displaced, in class structures as well as geographically, due to larger world circumstances - a Depression and a World War - that were publicly acknowledged and publicly shared. My lower-class status was seen as temporary and the values with which I was raised were middle-class.

Ginnie's location in a particular class has no such publicly acknowledged or shared cause. Her differences are, instead, attributed to the circumstances of personal and private life-style choices and assumptions made about the character of her parents. Yet, as I listen to her story, I am reminded of my own middle-class location and my own unquestioned assumption that this location and its associated values are those to which Ginnie would and should naturally aspire. Ginnie has taught me to listen more carefully, more mindfully, to put aside at least those assumptions I can identify and enter her story, let her tell me what it is that is important, really matters. Still, I am also left with a belief that part of Ginnie's story should be public, that many of the events in her life, like poverty and abuse, are shared by large numbers of others and should be publicly examined and addressed, some public responsibility assumed. I am uncomfortable with the knowledge that my middle-class lifestyle is maintained by the poverty of others.

Mark's story led me to examine remembered images from my childhood. I was

surprised to discover the degree to which the Depression and World War II had been a palpable presence in my childhood. Perhaps it was this palpable but, then, un-named presence that led my generation, as young adults, to protest the war in Vietnam, and to participate in various peace and civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s. I understand now that I was somewhat uncomfortable and uncertain when first meeting with boys who celebrate and honor violence and aggression. My own unarticulated fear of war and its effects, my knowledge that good and ordinary people can be persuaded to support and follow someone like Hitler, my fear that it could all happen again, affected my interactions with these children. I wanted to fix them, control them, change them, increase the distance between them and me. Yet, through listening to their stories and my own reading and writing, I have discovered other possibilities, other interpretations. I wonder now the extent to which these children are in exile from a world that insists on their collusion, their passive agreement with its materialism and belief in the myth of masculinity. Smith (1994) tells us that

> the increasing rebelliousness and diffidence shown by the young towards teachers and other school authorities can be read as an interrogation by the young as to whether time spent in school serves any other purpose than a rhetorical one, that is, fulfilling someone else's definition of destiny. For young people, the real reasons for their nine to twelve years of compulsory institutional confinement are not clear in any deep sense. (p. 153)

There is something about the eyes of these boys that reminds me of that injured

soldier. They have already engaged in battle and have already been wounded. Their agreement to participate in the world as they perceive it, or their resistance to it, has already cost them dearly.

I think of Greg, who so desperately seeks for a place where he belongs, a home. I worry that there will not be a place for Greg in the world where he will be valued or accepted, where he will be permitted to live a life of dignity. I see the parallels in my own search over the years for home. Greg and I talk about healing. I understand that I cannot help others heal unless I continue the deep and on-going work of healing myself, of recovering my Self.

Each child I see touches me. I realize that touch is an important element in each of the stories I tell about the children: shoulders touching while sitting together on the couch, hands touching as we hold and read a book together, an arm around a crying child, hugs requested by and given to the tough boys. My own heart and tears respond to these children as I listen to their stories. My relationship with each child is allowed to be individual, private and personal. I am given the privilege of listening to their stories and want to communicate to them that their stories matter to me, that I am really listening, that they have a place where they will be respected and heard. I bring my experiences as a mother to these encounters. But I also bring my experiences as a child, remembering what it was like to be young, the idealism and the insecurities. I try to have a genuine conversation with the children, allowing the silence that indicates a living space (Smith, 1994) where meaning and memories can be constructed.

Hermeneutic encounters require a "deepening of one's sense of the basic

interpretability of life itself" (p. 122) and I have developed a realization that this is at the root of the importance of story and narrative in my own life, that is, that they have served as a vehicle for taking up the interpretive task for myself. The hermeneutic imagination, as it has operated in my reading and writing, has helped me to connect the specificities of my life to the larger contexts in which they have occurred. Smith believes that one of our highest priorities is to pass on this sense of "the human world as being a narrative construction that *can* be entered and engaged creatively" (p. 126) to children and young people. Children need to gain a sense that this construction can be interpreted and re-interpreted, that there are always several possibilities. I hope to facilitate this in my continued use of narrative and story in my own life and in my work as a counsellor.

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Because we are human beings, we are going to meet failure (Le Guin, 1989). We are going to experience injustice, disappointment and loss. We will discover ourselves weak where we hope to be strong. We will work for possessions to find ourselves trapped and possessed by them. We will find ourselves in dark, lonely places.

Le Guin's hope for all of us is that we will be able to live comfortably with ourselves in those dark places, in the places of exile, and that we will be able to go on doing things our own way, neither for or against the current power hierarchy. She encourages us to be at home there, and to do our work there, whatever we are good at.

> I hope you live without the need to dominate, and without the need to be dominated. I hope you are never victims, but I hope you have no

power over other people. And when you fail, and are defeated, and in pain, and in the dark, then I hope you will remember that darkness is your country, where you live, where no wars are fought and no wars are won, but where the future is. Our roots are in the dark....the dark that nourishes, where human beings grow human souls. (p. 117)

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In his introduction to Selected Short Stories by Guy de Maupassant, Roger Colet describes the advice given to de Maupassant by his mentor and tutor, Flaubert.

There is a part of everything which is unexplored, because we are accustomed to using our eyes only in association with the memory of what people before us have thought of the thing we are looking at. Even the smallest thing has something in it which is unknown. We must find it. (p. 10)

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The Old Story will no longer do, and we know that it is inadequate. But the New Story is not yet in place. And so we look for pieces of the Story, the ways of telling it, but it hasn't come to us yet. So we now are the ulimate *bricoleurs*, trying to cobble together what we are beginning to suspect will never enjoy the unity, the smoothness, the wholeness that the Old Story had...And so we cobble. We cobble together stories that we may tell each other: some to share our profoundest links with those whom we studied; some to help us see how we can right a wrong

or relieve oppression; some to help us and others understand how and why we did what we did, and how it all went very wrong; and some simply to sing of difference. (Lincoln & Denizen, 1994, p. 584)

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# Appendix A

## The Red Dress

by Aishield Barrantes

Once upon a time, in the Department of Chinandega, Nicaragua Central America, the following story happened. There lived a very close family, a mother and a father who had three boys and one girl. The boys were teenagers and the girl was four years old. Her name was Margarita. In Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, there were not too many jobs, so the family decided to move to the south west. They went to the Department of Chinandega to look for jobs. There, there were a lot of people working at gathering the cotton crop. The whole family worked very hard in the fields gathering the cotton. They worked until the sun went down. The family lived in the train station with other families. All were poor families. When the cotton crop's time was finished, the family went to live on the other lands.

The owner of the lands was a rich woman who helped these families. Many of the other families, moved with this family. When it was time to pick the cotton, Margarita wanted to wear a red dress that she saw in the open maket in the street, in Chinandega. Her father could not afford to buy her the dress and he told Margarita, "Hold on, Margarita. Some day you will have it!" The days were passing by and Margarita was waiting for the dress. One day, her father came home and he brought the red dress for Margarita. She was feeling so happy. She could not wait for the day

that she could wear her dress.

Margarita's mother got sick and they took her to the hospital of Chinandega. The family were a close family. They always walked together. After a long wait in the hospital to see if the doctor examined the mother, they came back to the hut, where they found a bad surprise. Around the neighbourhood there were army jeeps and squads of soldiers all over the place. There were a lot of people watching. The women were crying, the children were screaming, the men were angry. They were biting their lips because they were feeling helpless. When Margarita's family arrived at the scene, they fund their hut burned and several national soldiers watching the hut burning to make sure it was completely burned. Margarita approached her father and she was sad, very sad, and said, "Dad, Dad! My red dress is also burned!"

## Appendix B

### Addendum to Aishield Barrantes' story

This story is an important story because at this time, the Nicaragua Revolution was starting to be as a turmoil. The people in general who were suffering were poor families who, in order to subsist and survive day by day, had to move to other cities to look for jobs. These families were illiterates who never had the opportunity to get an education at all. The type of jobs that these families were able to do were in the cotton crop, coffee crop, sugar cane crop and so on.

The soldiers in the Somoza army were illiterate too. Even though these soldiers were from poor families, they had to kill their own country people. These soldiers needed to have a job somehow. In 1978, the Nicaraguan people started to rebel against the Somoza government. The turmoil started mainly in the outskirts of the city. The Somoza's army did not have any mercy for anybody even for animals who were wandering around the streets. The red dress that Margarita wanted represents the blood that many Nicaraguan children shed when they were assassinated by the army. Also, the red dress means that these poor families were hot tempered giving them the courage to overthrow Somoza's government who was governing for fifty years.

The way Margarita's father helped her was by supporting her and telling her that he and their family would always keep on working and stay together to collect again the money to buy her another dress. The family overcame the conflict by persevering and never giving up their own principles, that is, to keep the cohesion of the family and this way they would defeat the antagonist. The antagonist was the

Somoza's government. Cohesion of the family as the whole idea means the more close the family is, the less they can be defeated.