

**THE PAST IN THE PRESENT:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF A ONCE AT-RISK CHILD**

KIMBERLY BRAKE
B.A., University of Lethbridge, 1998

A Project
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Faculty of Education
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

© Kimberly Brake, 2005

I dedicate this work to
Cynthia, who inspired me and taught me to write the truth;
Mason, for his unconditional love;
And Tom, who kept a careful watch over my spirit
as I ventured down dark paths.

Abstract

Through years of work with at-risk youth, I discovered my calling and decided to become an educator. My greatest strength as a teacher has always been my insight into the often difficult lives of my students, as I was once one of them. This inquiry explores various themes which are common amongst youth at risk through narrative accounts of events from my own childhood and an examination of the effects of those personal experiences on my pedagogy as an educator. This inquiry reveals a different perspective of life for the troubled child and the necessity for intervention. The purpose of this inquiry is to share these insights through an autobiographical format with other educators so that they may be better prepared to make positive interventions on behalf of their students. This project also documents the effects of this style of inquiry on the author both with a literary review and the personal accounts of the author.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Chapter One: To Tell the Truth.....	1
Chapter Two: The Art of Autobiography.....	6
Chapter Three: Telling My Story.....	10
Chapter Four: The Beginning.....	14
Chapter Five: I Am Chaos.....	20
Chapter Six: Two Worlds.....	25
Chapter Seven: Never Enough.....	35
Chapter Eight: Alone in the World.....	48
Chapter Nine: Hurt.....	62
Chapter Ten: Sticks and Stones.....	82
Chapter Eleven: Look at Me.....	90
Chapter Twelve: A Life of Substance.....	103
Chapter Thirteen: The Soundtrack of My Life.....	125
Chapter Fourteen: The Significance of Connections.....	136
Chapter Fifteen: The End and the Beginning.....	149
References.....	151

Chapter One: To Tell the Truth

Since the time of my youth, I have tried and failed many times to put onto paper the events of my life. I would usually get to the fifth page and decide to scrap the effort, not because the writing was poor or because I had lost interest, but because it didn't feel right on many different levels. My motives were different when I was younger. I wanted to tell the story for the sake of the story itself. I wanted to be dramatic and I wanted to shock others with the life I had led. My goal is very different now. I seek transformation through the recognition, acceptance, and integration of that side of me that has been oppressed by my own silence, and by my insistence on leaving the past in the past, regardless of its importance and relevance in the presence.

My motive for sharing with others is one of providing awareness for educators working with children who suffer similar circumstances as I did, and to illustrate in human terms the possibility of growth both internally and externally. I separate the two because it is possible to grow externally, which I did for a long time, acquiring things I never dreamed of owning, living in places I never thought I would belong, and moving on to a life that was viewed by myself and others as "normal and successful"; yet still be stagnant internally, which I did not even realize was the case for me until I began to work with children who'd shared a similar history. For me, having things and being places which were desirable did not make me happy or whole. In many ways, my external successes were an attempt to further oppress and forget that side of me which needed the most nurturing and opportunity to be a part of the real world in the present tense. My own autobiographical inquiry became a tool to allow for that personal growth and transformation, and to allow others to witness at least some part of that transformation as

it unfolded on the page. Chambers (1994) refers to writing as both a political and spiritual tool which allows for healing. I was not even aware that I was in need of healing until I embarked upon the challenge of putting my past experiences into words to be shared with others. The political purpose for my writing was to give insight to other professionals so that they might be better equipped to reach out to those students who need it most, and so that they might be more aware of their own attitudes and values in regards to children who live in the margins of society. The spiritual purpose for my writing was more personal, as I was in need of much spiritual healing, whether I knew it or not. I have long viewed myself as lacking in spirituality, but this inquiry has taught me that I could not have been more wrong, and I have come to learn the necessity for nurturing my spiritual side. Writing my own autobiography, with all its limitations, has taught me to love myself, in turn teaching me to love the world I am a part of (Norman, 2001, cited in Chambers, 2002).

Fear of judgment was an enormous obstacle blocking my ability to be truthful about the experiences I have had and the effects those experiences have led to in my life. I have been judged many times by others in my lifetime, many of those others were people I loved and trusted. Those people labeled me a liar in order to protect their own reconstructions of their reality. I am now at a point in my life where those animosities are no longer in the forefront of my daily existence and I do not wish for them to return, so I struggle with my own anxiety and cling tightly to the knowledge that it is not wrong to speak the truth, whether others choose to acknowledge it as such or not. "In the traditional conception of autobiography, language 'reflects' the 'truth' of the author's experience, and the work's value depends on its faithfulness to 'the facts', which exist

independent of the telling,” (Lundgren, 1998, p. 1). I also feared the judgment of those who know me as I am now. How will reading such graphic details of my history affect the image that others have of me? Will they ever be able to look me in the eye again without turning away for shame of knowing such intimate details of my life? I do not want pity or shock or awe. I just want to tell my story. Regardless of what I want though, people will have their own feelings and make their own judgments about the things I reveal to them. This is the risk that I have to take in showing such a personal side of myself. I felt the same as Chambers (1998) reveals in regards to her own autobiographical accounts, “writing can leave me naked” (p. 26). This was the risk I was unwilling to take all those times I tried my hand at autobiographical writing in the past – I was unwilling to relinquish that control I had over the image of myself in the eyes of the world. My past writing sugar-coated everything and omitted the most important of details and so it ended up being nothing but fluff. I had been attempting at telling the story without revealing any of the dirty details, which proved to be a frustrating and impossible task. However, over time, again like Chambers (1998), I learned that “if I write long enough, the act creates the vulnerability I find necessary for truth telling” (p. 26). In my case, it is not necessarily about the amount of time I spend writing, but more about my own awareness of the internal obstacles I erect when I attempt to share my story with others. When I first began the Masters program and took curriculum studies with Cynthia Chambers at the University of Lethbridge, she started the first class of the course with a personal writing assignment. Before I began the assignment which was time-limited, I were told to take that voice that is inside of us which edits the truth and to tell it to sit to the side and “shut up”. I was dumbfounded. It suddenly occurred to me that this editing is

what I had been doing all along, every time I tried to write the truth about my life. It would take me hours to write a mere few pages because I did so much of the writing and editing in my head before I ever touched the page. I actually managed to do what I was told for the assignment and wrote as I hadn't in years, with true grit and passion, in a composition which was frighteningly revealing and sincere. Something awoke inside of me and I have not been able (nor have I tried) to put it back to sleep ever since. This is not to say that autobiographical writing has become easier for me, on the contrary – it has been a test of my strength, but I have learned its value for myself and others I am attempting to communicate with. Autobiography and narrative inquiry are creative methods for engaging in communication and for ensuring the continuance of sharing the stories which connect us, despite my differences (Chambers, 2002).

My greatest struggle in depicting my own story was the ethical dilemma I faced in the telling (or not telling) of the stories of others which were interwoven with my own. I realized at once that this had been another obstacle all along to the telling of my own story. It was not my intention to hurt others, even those who had hurt me. I did not want to damage relationships that were on their way to healing, especially in regards to my mother, who has done enough of her own suffering over her lifetime (a fact which has become more evident to me in the course of my inquiry) and does not deserve to suffer any further, regardless of whatever shortcomings I might have judged her for. I see now in my own struggles as a woman and a mother that life is never black and white – I continue to learn this lesson in different ways each day. I faced the same struggle in relation to my students, as part of my goal was to link my own experiences with theirs and to draw comparisons between my worlds and the effects that others have had on my

realities. I intended to share a story of my own and compare the similarities and differences with a story from one of my past students, but this was not to be. What occurred to me early on during the planning and writing process was that it was not my duty or right to share the stories of others. That decision must be a personal one. This is why I do not mention others by name in this inquiry. I considered what it would have done to me as an unsure and often unstable adolescent to know that one of my trusted confidants had retold one of the stories which I had shared in confidence. This consideration served a dual purpose, the first being the decision to refer only in general terms to my students, guarding their identities and stories as closely as possible; the second being the discovery that tapping into my past psyche, or how I was thinking and feeling at various stages of my life, was not only possible, but necessary, if I was to sincerely set out to achieve the goals I had set for myself in creating insightful and informative dialogue with other professionals and in preparing myself for my own transformation – a transformation which I would come to learn over the course of my inquiry would not end with the completion of my autobiography. I still have so many stories to be told and so many lessons to be learned. “I write to learn how I live and how I want to live, to understand who I am and who I am becoming” (Chambers, 1994, p. 26). The process of transformation is unending and unpredictable.

Chapter Two: The Art of Autobiography

“Having the opportunity to talk about one’s life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it.” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 593, cited in Chambers, 1994, p. 1). This is the purpose of writing about my own experiences - to take control of myself and my life, to truly live life the way that is right for me and to be conscious of my thoughts and actions and the consequences. “Narrative is both a phenomenon and a method,” (www.labweb.education.wisc.edu). Not only am I telling my story, I am unraveling what that story means to me and to others and gathering what wisdom I can from it and from the process of writing it, so that I can move further down the path towards who I am and where I will go in life. Telling my story has allowed me to view the effects of my experiences from a safe place, a place where I am finally strong enough to face the history which I have run from for so long. I thought that I had simply left those things behind as a matter of choice because I was done with that part of my life and no longer needed to endure the hardships that inevitably come with healing. I avoided healing because there was too much pain involved – healing requires the re-breaking of old bones that are twisted out of shape and the opening of old wounds that I thought had long since disappeared into scar tissue. However, I have learned that it is better to take the immediate sharp and bitter pain of dealing with the past, than to live day after day with the dull roaring of the neglected injuries I have carried with me for so many years. As quoted from Sanders (1989), “I write, therefore, to drag into the light what eats at me – the fear, the guilt, the shame – so that my own children may be spared” (p. 75). This hit home for me because my role as a parent has been one of the driving forces in my search

for personal transformation, not because being a parent made me want to be different from who I already was, but because it made me want to be what I could be, what I was meant to be. I imagine I will spend my lifetime seeking the answer to the questions: What is my purpose? Who am I? Who do I want to be? Why do I want this? How do I work towards becoming who I am? As difficult as these questions are and as consuming as they can be, I am happy to be at a place in life where I am finally truly seeking the answers and accepting the truths I find along the way, although it's often difficult. It is a sign of budding wisdom – my elders would be proud – I am proud.

Phenomenology is a mode of inquiry which uses lived experience as a critical tool for examining social constructs and political discourse. The key to phenomenological inquiry is the anecdote, which conveys the lived experience (van Manen, 2002, cited in Chambers, 2002). The anecdote is a tool for gathering and sharing the knowledge of lessons learned through experience. Autobiographical anecdotes are moments in time which were given the breath of life by way of the written word. According to van Manen (1999), “Once articulated, these vignettes, and the researcher’s interpretation of them, bring to life knowledge as it resides in action, in the body, in the world and in relations,” (cited in Chambers, 2002, p. 7). Telling my story allows me to focus the attention of my audience on what I deem to be the significance of a given experience. It is critical that in doing so, I consider the nature of my audience and the possibilities of their own lived experiences, so that I can provide the opportunity for them to understand and integrate the purpose of my message. A good story will be nothing more than that if its message is lost on the audience. In order to ensure that my audience receives the intended message, I must be aware of the obstacles which lie in the way of communication, and I must strive

to make my audience aware of these obstacles, if I am unable to remove them from the equation. “While phenomenological inquiry endeavours to make understanding possible, hermeneutic inquiry identifies both the barriers to that understanding and the conditions that make it possible” (Chambers, 2002, p. 8). The autobiography which strives not only to tell the story, but also to teach the lesson, must therefore adopt the theories and practices of both phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Although I was not aware until I was finished with my autobiographical inquiry, my writing followed Pinar and Grumet’s (1976) method of *currere*, which is a focus on the first-hand educational experience of the individual. *Currere* involves regression, progression, analysis and synthesis (cited in Chambers, 2002). My writing took me back to where my stories were and then brought me into the present to take part in my own transformation as a result of reliving and retelling my stories. Each individual story caused me to analyze what the effects of my lived experiences were on my life and on myself as a growing and changing individual. “The aim of narrative inquiry is to understand how people think and act in the situated contexts in which they live through their stories” (www.labweb.education.wisc.edu). The process of writing allowed me the clear vision needed to synthesize what I had learned from my stories and what I had learned about myself in the telling of my stories, into the practices of my everyday life, my professional life, and in my own personal transformation. Engaging in this method involved asking the necessary questions for the knowledge I was seeking. In my first semester of the Masters program I took a course with Richard Butt on wellness in the workplace; his method of understanding teaching, thinking and praxis involves asking the questions: “What is the nature of my working reality? How do I think and act in that

context and why? How through my worklife and personal practice did I come to be that way? How do I wish to be in my professional future?" (Butt, Townsend & Raymond, 1990, p. 257, cited in Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 556, cited in Chambers, 2002, p. 12). I wrote the first of my narratives when I was in this class. I talked about my working experience, focusing on a problem I had encountered and what I did to overcome it. I had already begun the process of considering how it was that my past experiences spilled over into the present. I was living the effects of working in such close quarters with children who had endured similar difficulties as I had in my own youth. I was in the company of kindred spirits and it was exhilarating, comforting and absolutely terrifying all at once. I had a special insight into the world my students were growing up in, which meant that they also had insight into the world I had come from. It was a powerful experience. I started to focus on the extent of the effect that my own life experiences had on my pedagogy.

Chapter Three: Telling My Story

As soon as I began the process of storytelling, I found my thoughts turning to the task more and more. I began the journey with a naïve excitement that I would have the opportunity to share my stories and my insight and that I would be able to finish my degree on a more creative note than I had initially planned for. What I wasn't prepared for was the effect that the remembering, the choosing, and the writing would have on my perspective and on my life.

Initially, the stories flowed and memories returned with a frightening brilliance. Some were expected and others were not. Often one thought led into another and I would find myself typing furiously, crying aloud, taking quick breaks to lie down and allow my thoughts to sink in. Even early on I felt a change taking hold; it was nothing I could put my finger on; it was more diffuse than that. It was permeating from my thoughts and feelings, out onto the page and into my life. It seeped into every crack and crevice of my existence, affecting everything I said and did, as well as those around me. My first reaction to this sense of change which I did not yet understand was one of fear. I considered scrapping the project altogether and tackling something a little safer but once the path was set I had to satisfy my own need to see it to the end. In time I grew braver and allowed myself to write even those stories I knew I would never share with anyone but myself. I allowed my self to cry and to laugh. I let the memories come and I accepted them all. It was then that I realized that the change I had sensed somewhere in my environment was actually inside myself. I was transforming, not into something different, but into what I already was and never allowed. Not only was I incapable of halting the emergence of the parts of myself which I had suppressed for so long, I no longer wished

to. I was growing to love the person I was, the person I always had been, triumphs and failures, pride and shame, all at once; all was allowed. Those who I had felt were closest to me saw that I was changing; they felt that I was different, but that was only because none of them had ever really known who I really was – I was always hiding. “Having been excluded from the universal self and forcibly embodied, some women approach autobiography as ‘access to the identity it constructs’” (Gilmore, 1994, cited in Lundgren, 1998, p. 3). I was finally allowing the image I had built of myself to fall away (it took little effort, as the veneer had always been quite fragile), and searching for what it was that my identity would be. I felt almost as though I was between two existences, in limbo, not moving, yet racing back and forth between the past, present and future at breakneck speed in a quest to find what steps were the right ones to take. I identified strongly with Chambers’ own dilemma, “what you hear is a struggle to unname myself and to find a name all at once” (1994 ,p. 4). My newfound self-acceptance coupled with the inquiry process seemed to accelerate the transformation already under way.

I recognized the transformative process in Danica’s observation of the writing process and the discursive construction of subjectivity when she states, “I sometimes think that I wrote myself as a character called ‘Self’, and as new insights were gained I had to find ways to re-vision the ‘Self’ to allow for what I learned,” (Danica, 1988, p. 81). I found that there was power in the written word and more importantly for the author, in the process of writing itself. As a survivor of an oppressive history, I was empowered by my own ability to create anew the woman I was. It was not a conscious decision to take part in my own transformation, I didn’t choose to abandon the identity I had created for something more genuine; it was a natural, fluid process which was largely

beyond my control; my own words were forming who I was to become. “Words have the power to create and change, as well as to suppress and hide...Language at once tells us who we are and enables us to express and re-create who we are,” (Chambers, 1998, p. 21). The power of re-creation which is embodied in the autobiographical text allows the oppressed woman to shift from “dominated to autonomous, from victim to survivor, and from object to subject,” (Lundgren, 1998, p. 4). I think that the power I felt to transform myself emanated from the power I had to reconstruct the stories of my life in a form which made them truly my own. It was up to me to decide which details were important, which people would be included and how, and what message I would deliver to my audience, in which form. Chambers (1994) noted that autobiographical writing is a reconstruction of memories which are a reconstruction in themselves.

There is nothing easy about transformation. I recognize that it is a positive force that guides me from one phase of existence into the next, but there are few days that pass when I do not find myself in tears at one point or another, these are not tears of grief, they are merely a result of feeling overwhelmed and exhausted with the seemingly unending changes which are happening in myself and in my life in the present. I have recently parted ways with my husband whom I had been with for fourteen years, since I was only fifteen. The struggles of single motherhood and single womanhood are dizzying and empowering. Chambers (1998) says of the lives of teaching mothers, “Endurance becomes the way, survival the only goal. The life in progress seems less like improvisational jazz and more like a solo by Sid Vicious from the ‘Sex Pistols’, screaming vocals accompanied by screeching, discordant guitars,” (p. 22); this rang so

true of my own life right now that I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, so I did both, sporadically, throughout the entire day.

I find myself taking stock of all the parts of my life. I have pushed some people into the margins and drawn others nearer. I am examining my beliefs and values and reading as much as I can in an effort to add to what matters. I am remembering, questioning, and trying to learn from the choices and actions of my past, and looking forward to what choices are in my future; I often can't help but feel self-centered in doing so, I'm not used to focusing so much on my own needs. Upon questioning the paths I have chosen in life, the most difficult thing to endure is the guilt in even asking myself such questions (Chambers, 1998). I am gradually learning to put my guilt aside when it comes to making my own destiny a priority; I am learning that my own happiness and fulfillment is as important as the happiness of those I love.

Chapter Four: The Beginning

I've been thinking about leaving my job. It is time for me to move on. I am becoming too close to my work – it's happened before- but this time I am concerned for my own well-being. It seems as though I am picking up from the same point where I left off at the end of last year, as though I hadn't had a break at all.

In my work, the burnout is a result not so much of dealing with my students as from coping with the stress of the reality they live with on a daily basis. The consistent difficulties of working with at-risk children can be overwhelming, but for me, it is like being at home. I feel this way because at one point in my life I was one of these kids – in many ways I still am. As much as that is a strength for me, and that is the basis of this inquiry, it is also my greatest weakness, as it is becoming more and more of a struggle to keep myself separate from my work – not that I've ever been able to do that, but I feel that somewhere in the near future I will need to give myself the time and space to withdraw from the sometimes harsh reality of my students' experiences, a reality that I have tried to leave behind in my own life, or so I thought. Conducting this inquiry has brought a flood of memories into the present time. These memories have never left me – I used to say I was cursed with an unfailing memory for the events of my life – but in time I have learned to put them to the side, to make them a part of the past which does not directly affect me in the present. This inquiry has made me realize that even if I don't think about things on a daily basis, their effect on my life is always there, it is in the tiniest and grandest of my decisions and actions. It is what builds me. It is who I am. I used to lay awake at night, wishing to change one moment in time, to try and figure out that one point that would make it all different, the turning point that would allow me the

fairy tale childhood I had always hoped for and never received. I am older and wiser now, and I am happy with the person I have become, and my understanding of the effect the past has on the present has led me to the realization that I wouldn't change any of it. The past is what slowly and painfully, piece by piece has made me who I am. It is also what has made me the educator I am. I belong with these children, and that understanding makes thoughts of leaving my current position working with youth at-risk very difficult.

This week a former student came to visit me for lunch. When I mentioned that I would be leaving my school, which is an outreach program geared towards serving students who do not fit the traditional model of education, this student was visibly shocked and dismayed. He could not imagine me being anywhere else and he behaved as though he had been betrayed, as though my decision affected him directly, despite the fact that he has moved on to a traditional high school and no longer needs me. Perhaps it is unfair to assume that he no longer needs me just because I don't see him on a daily basis. From my own perspective, I still need to know he is okay still and that he is finding his way in life. He needs to know that I am still here for him, that I still think about him and care for him. We are connected forever now. That is the best part of teaching – the privilege of being a part of someone's experience, of having the opportunity to make a difference.

Just recently, at the end of a long hard day, I found myself doubting the significance of my influence on the lives of my students. I spoke to my teaching partner about my frustrations, which led to a discussion of the years I have spent doing this work. I talked about some of the students I have had in the past and the ways I have affected them with my teaching, my concern, my discipline, my love. I began to tally the numbers

of children I have had the chance to reach out to and to then consider the possibilities of how far-reaching a kind word or gesture can be. I looked to my own past, to people who cared for me and how deep their effect was on me and I felt revived again. In other ways though, it made my thoughts of leaving this work even more difficult, as the guilt is overwhelming. This guilt seems ridiculous to me at times, as it is in relation to the students in my future, those I might leave behind and fail to affect – it's ridiculous because I haven't even met them yet and I am angry at myself for considering abandoning them. This connection with children I haven't even encountered is possible because of the connection I feel when I am with them; I feel a need to try to reach out to as many children as possible who are in need. The insight I have into the reality of my students' lives is my greatest gift as an educator, yet it is my greatest weakness, as I find myself unable to escape the overpowering instinct to protect and save them from the world they live in. That is not my job but I overstep my bounds everyday, and it is becoming more difficult all the time to define my boundaries. I look back to when I was their age and I think of how badly I wanted to be protected, to be saved, and I wonder if they wish for that too. It sounds noble enough, to want to protect a child, but in reality I cannot do that, I can only guide them and support them the best I can, and hope that my influence will be strong enough to act as that voice of care in those difficult times when they make the decisions that will effect their daily lives today and into the future.

As difficult as it is to put aside my feelings of guilt and concern, I will leave this place, this comfortable little school that has been like a second home to me for the past six years and it will be one of the hardest things I have ever done. I feel a safety here, a belonging that I think (I hope) my students feel as well. I am so afraid to leave that

belonging behind. What if I never find it again? What if I resort back to the bliss of forgetting the past? I don't really think that's possible anymore, but *what if* is always a concern.

It has been my constant desire to challenge my students, to draw them out of the comfortable, safe shells they have built for themselves as a coping mechanism. Pushing my students to take risks and to chase their dreams has drawn me out of the shell I had built for myself as well. Time and time again I have had to face my greatest fears in an effort to encourage my students to do the same. Time and time again it has been rewarding and has helped me to grow as a person and to regain some of who I once was. Allowing myself to find those parts of myself that I forced deep down means accepting those parts, accepting myself, tolerating my quirks, loving my unique perspective, just as I do the perspectives of my students. It has been good for me, and it has been good for them.

So why leave? What compels me to venture out and try my hand at something else? It is for my sake and for theirs. I will not know until I come to the end of this narrative, which consumes my waking moments, if it is the writing that has led me to realize that it is time to step back, or if the writing is the cause of my need for distance. It wasn't long ago that I finally settled on the questions which I wanted to explore in this project. I was excited but scared. At the time I wasn't even sure why I was scared, but now I know. This has been a labor of love. This opening of the box of my life has not been as neat and well-planned as I had hoped it would be. I can't seem to let tiny whispers of the past come creeping out of that box. Instead, I lift the lid and the force of my history causes the contents to come spilling out all over the place in a big, messy

heap, leaving me feeling overwhelmed and disorganized, out of control and emotional. I am feeling like a teenager again – a wonderful feeling – and at the same time, an awful feeling. Teenagers have boundless questions and energies and not the common sense to answer them or direct them appropriately. Teenagers want and need control but can't seem to find it even in the simplest of things. Life is messy most of the time. Even my bedroom has begun to reform those old familiar landscapes with mountains of clothing which silently scream rebellion, and a forest of cosmetics in some attempt to focus my control on myself, outwardly if I cannot manage inwardly. Had I forgotten that being a teenager was an often miserable and tormenting existence? As a result of my writing, I am remembering now. It is the remembering - the knowing - which doesn't allow me the safe distance necessary to work with troubled children, because I feel too close to their experiences, because I know too much. My understanding of my students' lived experiences blurs the lines that separates my own identity from theirs, "I can not tell anymore where I end and someone else begins, there are only scattered pieces of everyone, all mixed up," (Potvin, 1992, p. 157). I know what it feels like to be unloved, to be unwanted, to be judged, to be hungry, to be alone even when you are surrounded by others. It is that knowledge that makes it harder and harder everyday for me to maintain the necessary diplomacy with the other adults in my students' lives – those who are meant to protect but fail, those who hurt them knowingly or otherwise. I want to pull all of these children closer and protect them from the world, but I cannot and it is killing me. It makes me cry, it makes me angry, it makes me realize that I cannot save them all, and then it makes me realize that it is not my job to save them all. That doesn't make it any easier.

I look back on my career and I realize that I have always had this weakness. I have always cried and stomped around, getting into trouble for being too passionate ever since the first day I accidentally embarked on what I'm sure will be my life's work. That is who I am. That is what the past has built. What has changed is my ability to cope at the moment. I find myself feeling shaky a lot of the time lately. I am sure it is this damned writing. It would be so easy to walk away from the task of writing my own story, to close the box forever, but that would be cowardly, and I can't bring myself to do it. I believe this story is meant to be told, and as I am telling it the healing will begin. When I am done, this will be another moment in my history, another building block which will form the woman I am to become. When I am finished with this inquiry, I will still be me, and the teenager part, as messed up and incorrigible as she can be, well, she is welcome to remain – I will not force her to stay behind anymore. She belongs with me.

Chapter Five: I Am Chaos

In classical Greek mythology, the Earth (Gaia) was born of Chaos (Cotterell, 1999). This is a common theme amongst many ways of understanding the beginnings of existence - somehow something emerged from nothing. Then is chaos nothing? Is it everything? Perhaps both - one before the other - or all at once. If chaos is a part of the Earth and the Earth is a part of me, then it would stand to reason that chaos is in my blood.

European rationalism attaches a negative connotation to the idea of chaos. In general usage, people refer to chaos as a “state lacking any order” (Whatis.com, 2005, p. 1). People who are not in control of their surroundings or themselves are often described as chaotic by those who feel they are in control. Often, my own students and their families are perceived in this light. When I first considered writing about this particular subject, it was with this notion in mind. I have viewed my own history and even my own personality as something which was lacking order and control and even purpose. When I began the process of reviewing the literature on chaos, I found that my perception of both the concept, and its relation to my own life and personality, changed dramatically, allowing me to take a more positive and transformative perspective on the subject.

“Chaos theory refers to an apparent lack of order in a system that never follows any particular laws or rules” (Whatis.com, 2005, p. 1). When I read this definition, I identified immediately with the lack of rules, but was further drawn by the statement that it is an *apparent* lack of order. Although my history, at first glance, may seem to lack order and purpose, I have learned, especially through the reflecting which I have engaged in for the purpose of this inquiry, that my unorthodox and colourful experiences, despite

their often negative consequences for my immediate existence, have served a purpose in preparing me for the work I do in helping youth who are in a similar *chaotic* state in the present tense.

“Although chaos is often thought to refer to randomness and lack of order, it is more accurate to think of it as an *apparent* randomness that results from complex systems and interactions among systems” (WhatIs.com, 2005, p. 1). Life is a series of interactions among systems. It is these interactions that make up the meaning of existence. This notion supports the ideal that I have come to hold over time; that all things, people and experiences serve a purpose. The suffering I endured in my youth served a purpose in the lessons I learned and the insight I have gained into the suffering of others. This insight has given me the purpose to help those who may have trouble helping themselves, and who may feel their own life is lacking purpose or order.

According to the Blackfoot and Navajo philosophies, the world is in a constant process of transformation, deformation, and restoration and the essence of life is movement (Little Bear, 2004; Witherspoon, 1977). For humans to grow and change, they must learn to move with this process of change which is natural and never-ending in the world around them. Stagnation is not only undesirable, it is virtually impossible. In time, all things change. I do not agree with the common notion that “all good things must come to an end,” rather I feel that things are transformed and restored, becoming more or less of what it was, becoming what it was meant to be, preparing for the next evolution. From this perspective, nothing ends, it returns to its beginnings – it returns to chaos and nothing so that it may return to take its place with everything. I have felt this transformation in

myself over my lifetime; and, I have seen it in others. I have especially witnessed it in myself since I have taken on an examination of my own life and its purpose.

My teaching partner has always told me, “chaos creates change;” he was very wise to say so. He would purposefully create an atmosphere of upheaval in our classroom when he felt it was time for a change, not just in the environment, but in those who were a part of the environment. Even when the initial reactions were negative from our students, the change was a necessary component in our school, and the results were necessary for the growth of the program and our students, and even for us as teachers. One thing I am intimately familiar with is upheaval. In my life I have moved from one place to another, from one home to another, from one school to another, from one family to another. These changes were imposed on me at times, and were brought about by my own doing at other times. Even when I felt that the changes were not for the better, they were a stepping stone to the next phase of my life, and a part of the transformative process of who I was becoming. In the present, I am working through one of the most trying and difficult periods of my life, one of serious change and upheaval, one which may be seen by most as negative, but I have learned through my writing that these changes serve a larger purpose. I have learned to embrace transformation in my life and to see it as a necessary part of my own personal growth. According to Cajete (2000):

chaos is both movement and evolution. It is the process through which everything in the universe becomes manifest and then returns to the chaos field. The flux, or ebb and flow, of chaos appear in everything and envelopes us at all times and in all places. From the evolving universe to the mountain

to the human brain, chaos is the field from which all things come into being (cited in Little Bear, 2004, p. 137).

Cajete sees chaos as not only as an unavoidable and infinite force, but as a necessary and positive component of the universe. It is what makes us and it is what we all return to.

Through this writing I have gained an intimate knowledge of my own transformations. I have witnessed them and been aware of them as they occur. I am now conscious of the transformation, deformation, and restoration which I and others experience in every moment of every day. I have learned to embrace this constant movement and to learn to flow with it, so that I may fully experience the beauty of change, of growth, and hopefully, someday, of transcendence. Danica (1988), an author and survivor of severe childhood sexual abuse, writes, "I sometimes think that I wrote myself as a character called 'Self', and as new insights were gained I had to find a way to re-vision the 'Self' to allow for what I learned," (Lundgren, 1998, p. 81) this allows for the facilitation of transformation. This is the experience I have had with writing about my life. I have learned through this process that I must continue on with this re-visioning of who I am for the rest of my life. I will learn over time to accept and embrace the changes which I have no control over, and those which I choose for my life. I have come to accept that I am Chaos, and that it is a beautiful thing to be.

Journal Entry

I used to regard the notion of chaos as an external force, something which occurred, an occurrence which I allowed to happen around me and cause my life to run in a constant state of disarray. To the untrained eye my ever-growing collections of papers,

sentimental trinkets, scattered music discs and a vast array of half-empty Diet Pepsi cans was a cause for concern at how I might ever be able to organize my existence. I, however, was unafraid. I referred to the shambles of my environment and activities as “organized chaos”, as I had in the back of my mind what I needed and where to find it and what I had to do next in the flurry of activities that makes up a typical day in my life. Regardless of my attempts to organize and make myself orderly, in the fashion of others I knew, the world around me would always seem to find its way back to the state of disarray I had become accustomed to since my days as a wayward teenager.

When I first considered mentioning this issue in my autobiographical inquiry, it was to give the audience a sense of what I was made up of. Despite the fact that I had already come to accept my own chaotic personality, I didn't realize that I still attached a negative connotation to this facet of my identity. In a sense, it was like I was including this chapter in order to apologize for myself, but as I researched the concept of chaos, I came to view it as a positive, driving force in my life and the life of others. I came to realize that chaos was a natural element in the universe and that it was a part of me which encouraged my own transformation and development as a human being. I know now that this part of my personality is nothing to apologize for, I can be proud of it now, not only because I feel that it sets me apart and allows a sort of rebellious spirit to flow into my mostly unrebelling life, but because it is a positive aspect of my life, it keeps things interesting, and it allows me the freedom to be fluid and ever-changing.

Chapter Six: Two Worlds

Although I've spent my life growing up across the country, I have always seen myself as a part of two distinct worlds. I am of biracial heritage – half-Caucasian and half-Inuit. My father's family is from Newfoundland and is of Scottish descent and my mother's family is Labrador Inuit. I am very proud of both my cultures. I feel lucky to be a part of these two worlds and I identify with both. I wasn't always as proud though. I had my struggles in my youth with being a *half-breed* as I was named many times.

Having a biracial ethnic heritage can have a problematic effect on a child's development (Herring, 1992; Schwartz, 1998). Many biracial youth feel that they are splintered, that they cannot be a part of only one culture, and yet, they cannot be a part of both. According to Poston (1990), "successful identity formation, or a satisfying feeling of wholeness, requires that multiracial youth appreciate and integrate all components of their heritage into their lives," (Schwartz, 1998, p. 3). This can be very difficult for a young person, especially if she experiences any pressure in regards to identifying solely with one or the other, or if she is made to feel that one ethnicity is inferior to the other. It is common for biracial youth to be encouraged to assume a "white identity" if they appear to be Caucasian, as there is the assumption that this can aide in avoiding the experience of racism (Schwartz, 1998). When I was a young girl I was encouraged by an elder in my family to hide my Inuit heritage and to spend my time with the white children so that people would assume I was white because I had such fair skin. I remember feeling confused because the elder was Inuit and I could not understand why she would encourage me to betray my heritage; it made me wonder if she would if she could. Feeling that the advice must be wise because of the source, I dutifully listened to the

elder's advice, although I could not avoid playing with the Inuit children, as they were my friends and I was unwilling to give them up.

Hiding the truth about my ethnicity became easier to do when I left home because people no longer equated my maiden name with my heritage. People assumed that I was Caucasian and I let them. I could not hide from the ugly truth of racism, however. I can recall many times when I was exposed to the hate of others because they did not realize the company they were in. I could not help but feel that their cruel and thoughtless comments were directed at me because despite my deception, I did identify with my Inuit culture on the inside – it was what I had grown up with, I was a part of it, and it was a part of me. When I was fourteen I was in a cab and the driver was making nasty remarks about aboriginal people, although he didn't use such politically correct terminology. I became enraged at his disgusting and ignorant opinions and before I stepped out of the cab I said to him, "You'd never think it to look at me that I'm Inuit would you?" I remember feeling so proud and indignant when he turned a hot shade of red, embarrassed for his indiscretion. I slammed the door and walked away with a renewed sense of pride in who I was. From that moment on I abandoned my Caucasian identity and identified solely with my Inuit heritage. Some people believe that identifying as a single, specific minority shows unity and power (Chiong, 1998; Schwartz, 1998), however, I did not understand until years later that I was only deceiving myself again, as declaring only one part of yourself does not make it the truth and it does not make you whole.

In order to develop a healthy and whole identity, biracial children need resilience and self-esteem; family stability; a supportive community and school environment; and a connection with other biracial families (Schwartz, 1998). It is important to accept all of

who you are, or there will always be a part of your identity that is suppressed and underdeveloped. This is not healthy and in time, it will crush any chance of developing a positive self-image that is genuine and true. Being a part of more than one culture can be a positive experience for the individual if they allow it to be. To identify with multiple cultures is a gift and a privilege. According to Thornton (1996), people of biracial heritage have “an enhanced sense of self and identity, and greater intergroup tolerance, language facility, appreciation of minority group cultures, and ties to single-heritage groups than do monoracial people,” (Schwartz, 1998, p. 6). Another strength of biracial people is their ability to identify multiple aspects of a conflict (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993), which gives them the ability to make strong mediators and to act as liaisons between multiple cultures.

Despite the fact that I strongly identify with both of my cultures, I grew up predominantly in the Inuit culture and witnessed and lived both the positive and negative aspects of living in an aboriginal environment. The strengths I drew from growing up in an aboriginal culture were a love of the land, which is the basis for my spirituality; a strong connection with others, which is fundamental in a culture which has grown out of the ability to survive with the support of the community; and an ability to heal one’s own wounds, through self-reflection and the sharing of personal experiences, which is the purpose of this inquiry. Inuit shamans were known to make people confess their wrongs as part of the healing process (Petten, 2003). I am not sure that what I am doing is a confession of my wrongs, or if it is an acceptance and sharing of the lessons I have learned in life, some of those lessons were learned in connection with the wrongs I did and the wrongs which were imposed upon me. Autobiographical writers and sexual abuse

survivors, Danica (1988) and Potvin (1992) use their text as a method of remembering their shattered selves. They were broken by abuse and must be restored (Lundgren, 1998). I can identify with this process. I feel very much like I am rebuilding and realizing the person that I am. More importantly perhaps, I am rebuilding and carrying on in order to assist others with their own personal struggles; this is important in the Inuit culture, as it is the spirit of individuals to carry on the race that matters, not oneself (Kusugak, 2004).

There are many negative aspects to growing up in an aboriginal community as well. Aboriginal communities have high rates of substance abuse, domestic abuse, child neglect, substandard housing, and limited employment opportunities (Clark, 2002). As a result of these difficult conditions, suicide and feelings of despair are more common among native youth than non-native youth (USDHHS, 1999). I experienced these feelings myself, and struggled with the despair throughout my youth. It is difficult to have hope when your life is in constant turmoil.

“The term ‘at-risk’ usually refers to children who are likely to fail in school or in life because of their social circumstances,” (Leroy, 2001, p. 2). Aboriginal youth are at a high risk for such conditions as poverty, social and economic marginalization (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). Individuals who are at-risk often have multiple problems which compound each other and later translate into difficulties in various social settings, including school (Leroy, 2001). It is important to note that although middle-class children are less likely to be at-risk than impoverished children, they are not immune to risk factors (Human Resources Canada/Statistics Canada, 1996). Some common characteristics amongst at-risk youth are that they have suffered sexual and/or physical

abuse, neglect or abandonment, broken homes, that they come from disadvantaged or dysfunctional families, and that there has been a failure of support systems to intervene (McNutt, 1994). Many educators feel that aboriginal children are more likely to fall through the cracks of systems of social services (Leroy, 2001), and the statistics support that belief.

One of the most common problems amongst the aboriginal population is poverty. I lived with poverty for most of my upbringing and understand the far-reaching, debilitating ramifications. Recently, when I was watching Nelson Mandela making a speech for the Live Eight concert in London, he stated that poverty is man-made and that there is no place for it in the twenty-first century. Although this is a powerful ideal, it does not change the fact that half of all aboriginal children under the age of fifteen live in poverty, making them the most vulnerable of the population (Sibbald, 2000). Poverty leads to many high risk factors for children, including inadequate nutrition, a lack of opportunities, unstable families, and a low self-image. Inadequate nutrition can cause long-term, negative effects on school achievement, including poor attendance, concentration, and vocabulary development (Morse, 2000; National Council of Welfare, 1998). I have seen this fall-out many times with my own students. For them, making school a priority, or even being capable of maintaining the necessary focus in order to achieve success, is almost an impossible feat. They require care and support in order to develop the needed resiliency to overcome such difficult conditions.

Economic and familial instability may also increase the risk of family violence (Cunningham, 2003), especially in cases where poverty and instability spans generations. “The more parents were deprived, rejected, or misunderstood during their formative

years, the greater the impairment of their parental functions, regardless of their stated commitment or concern for their children” (Firestone, 1993, p. 2). Many aboriginal parents have suffered at the hands of others and have no experiences with which to build a positive environment for their children. This leads to a cycle of poverty, violence, and despair. Children who are exposed to domestic violence and physical abuse often suffer adverse effects on their behavioral, cognitive and emotional functioning (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Johnson, et al., 2002; Knapp, 1998; Ward & Bennet, 2003; Wolfe & Korsch, 1994;). When a child is in danger, it is difficult to function past the immediate need to survive, making it almost impossible to thrive.

Family violence causes gender-specific reactions. Boys tend to externalize (under-control) behaviour problems, whereas girls internalize (over-control) behaviour problems (Hughes & Barad, 1983; Muller, 1994; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981). This is not an exact science however, some may experience the opposite reactions, whereas some like myself, may exhibit both. Children who are faced with violence may repress their feelings in an effort to control their fears (Wallach, 1994) or they may exhibit aggressive behaviours (Kratcoski & Dunn-Kratcoski, 1980; Lorber, Felton & Reid, 1984; Muller, 1994; Sack & Dale, 1982; Stephenson & Lo, 1974) and incorporate their own anger into their personality structure, making it difficult to control their own behaviours and interfering with their relationships (Wallach, 1994). According to Lewis and Michalson (1983), anger has three components: the emotional state of anger, the expression of anger, and an understanding of anger. Some children learn to express their anger negatively (Cummings, 1987; Hennesy et al., 1994) primarily through social interactions in their families (Honig and Wittmer, 1992; Marion, 1997). This inappropriate expression of

anger directly affects the quality of life for the child, as it robs them of positive relationships and opportunities. I have seen this in many of my students and I have found that it is difficult to change, especially if it is a response to the negative conditions they have experienced in their home lives. It is the responsibility of children's educators and advocates to assist youth in developing positive life skills so that they may have a chance at a successful adult life and to empower them so that they can envision a positive future for themselves. Children who live with violence feel they have little control over what happens to them and may have difficulty seeing themselves in meaningful future roles. This lack of hope for the future can make it difficult for individuals to focus on tasks such as socialization and learning (Wallach, 1994).

Education is one of the greatest tools for communities and individuals to build positive futures. Children who develop important academic skills are also better equipped to cope with adversity (Clark, 2002; Prothrow-Stith & Quaday, 1995). Unfortunately, as many as thirty to forty per cent of Canadian children are at risk of not completing school and as a result, face personal development problems (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 1998; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001). The statistics are even more grim for aboriginal students, whose high school completion rates are thirty percentage points below non-aboriginal students; however, there is hope in the fact that higher than average proportions of aboriginal students who drop out return to school later in life (Hull, 2000; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2000).

Aboriginal youth face many other risk factors as well. Single factors are usually not a basis for placing a child at risk – multiple risk factors are what cause the greatest amount of harm for a child (Barr and Parrett, 1995; Barry & Gunn, 1996; Centre for

Education Research and Innovation, 1995; Leroy, 2001). Aboriginal youth are often facing multiple risk factors in their lives, including poverty, substance abuse, and unstable familial structures. Adverse conditions in the home - such as ineffective discipline, lack of parental involvement, conflict, child abuse and/or neglect, and rejection - are predictors of antisocial behaviour (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2000; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Often aboriginal youth are facing mutually reinforcing threats such as weak families, neighborhoods and economies, which may lead to increased levels of high-risk behaviours such as promiscuity and substance use and abuse (Barry & Gunn, 1996). Although risk-taking behaviours are more common among aboriginal youth, these behaviours often diminish with maturity (Clark, 2002; Shaughnessy, Branum & Everett-Jones, 2001). I have seen this trend in my own family, with myself, and even with my students over time. These behaviours diminish especially if the individual feels empowered to follow a more positive path in life. This brings us back to the importance of the role of educators who work with children who may be at risk. The best tool that a teacher can give a child in need is resilience, as it will carry on with the student even beyond the classroom setting and into the coming years.

“We are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose,” (Benard, 1995, p. 2). We all have the capability to overcome the odds. I am an example of this possibility. Despite my difficult history, I was able to overcome because of the people who helped me to foster resilience so that I could move past adversity and begin a life of my own choosing. When children are faced with adversity, they feel lonely, fearful, and vulnerable. If they are resilient, it is less

overwhelming for them (Grotberg, 1995; Seokhoon, 1997). Social, familial and academic interactions are critical factors in the development of resilience (Ainsworth, 1989; Seokhoon, 1997). However, supporting resilience in the development of a child is not an easy task. For a child who lives with adversity, it is often their circumstances which get in the way of their ability to develop resilience, as they are immersed in difficult and threatening situations. Factors which impede the development of resilience are social problems such as substance abuse, child abuse, and teen pregnancy, as well as the destruction of social networks in the community (Seokhoon, 1997). All of these are real issues in the aboriginal community, more so than they are in other sectors of Canadian society. Educators must make special efforts to understand the environment that aboriginal students grow up in, as it is often different from the reality they know themselves. Once educators understand what their students are faced with, they must then make the effort to reach out and offer non-judgmental support both to the children and their families. It truly takes a community effort to responsibly and effectively raise a child. Aboriginal children need this more than most, as they are the most vulnerable group in Canadian society.

I am proud that I am a part of two distinct worlds. It did not always make for an easy life when I was growing up, but it was worth it. My pride did not come naturally, or even easily, it needed to be nurtured and encouraged. Much of this nurturing was of my own doing. I had to decide what was important in my own self-image, and I have never been more whole than when I made the decision that all the parts of me were important

facets of my whole identity. I consider myself lucky to have the privilege to be a part of two cultures. It was worth the struggle.

Journal Entry

I wasn't sure if I would include this chapter at first. I didn't want my ethnic background to be a focus for my audience, I'm not entirely sure why. I somehow didn't see it as relevant at first. I think this feeling was largely related to the denial that things are somehow different for those who grow up in an aboriginal society – I didn't want to take this into account. Upon some deep introspective consideration, I realized that being a biracial woman who has lived in many different environments with a variety of cultural backgrounds has affected me deeply and played a significant role in shaping the person I am now. Things are different for those of us who belong in two worlds and in neither all at once, whether or not I like to admit it to myself. I now realize that my heritage is very relevant to this inquiry and to giving my audience a true sense of who I am. I am not only shaped by my environment, my experiences, or the people who were a part of my life; I am also shaped by the blood that courses through my veins. It is one part of me that will never change. I will always be a Scottish-Inuit woman, regardless of whatever parts of my identity are integrated and fall away over time, this will remain. In many ways it is the core of who I am and who I will grow to be.

Chapter Seven: Never Enough

Recently I met someone who is a colleague of a close friend. They were passing through town and decided to spend the night at my house. I shared an evening of food, drinks, and conversation. Much of the conversation was politically charged, as was the tone that was set following the recent election in the U.S.A., and the announcement of a coming election in Alberta. Amongst the many topics of discussion that night was a brief argument about the risks of cutting back on human services, including education, healthcare, and child welfare. When my friend's colleague asked what the problem was with cutting back on these services, considering how lucky I were to be living in job-rich Alberta, I responded with an explanation of the difficulties I have seen with many of the children I have worked with over the years and how addressing the issue of poverty in such a rich province should be the first priority. Again he responded with doubt and cynicism, stating that he found it hard to believe that any child in Alberta was actually "starving to death" as a result of poverty and laughed off the notion of widespread suffering amongst the province's youth. I was hurt and angered at his ignorance and lack of compassion. I told him that until he knew firsthand what it felt like to be hungry – to not be able to focus on anything else in life because of the significance of an empty belly – that until he knew what that felt like, he had no place to speak because he didn't know what he was talking about. I told him that I knew what that felt like, and that the feeling never leaves you, and that it has affected the decisions I make and the way in which I live my life and the way in which I support my students, who often know the same feeling, which is a direct result of poverty and neglect.

“Poverty has been described as not having access to the basics” (Morse, 2000, p. 3). When I was growing up, poverty was a fact of life. Much of my life before I left home at fourteen was spent living on welfare. Many of my memories I have are of the things I did not have, and the shame and embarrassment of being a “welfare case,” as the other kids would call it. I recall eating the bare minimum day after day, of wishing for more, of having no self-control when I had the chance to eat a plentiful meal. I recall going to school in kindergarten and wanting to hide during recess and lunch, when all of the other children would eat their snacks and bagged lunches. I could not stand to watch them, and I remember the difficulties I had focusing on my school work, because my tummy would growl so loudly during class and make the kids around me giggle hysterically. I was so ashamed, as though I had done something wrong to deserve such deprivation. I, like other children who live in poverty, was more fearful, anxious, and unhappy than my peers who did not have to endure the same conditions (Bower, 1994).

I remember hating the fact that I was the only one who didn’t pack a lunch. I felt that I was somehow a lesser person because of the things I did not have. My friends would take pity on me and share what they had, but usually I would just find a way to be alone, because I was too proud to accept their handouts. At the time I was too young to understand why there was this difference between my peers and me.

When I first started working with at-risk youth, it took a while for the reality of their lives to hit me. One day it struck me that just because my suffering was over, did not mean that others I cared about were not enduring the same struggles in the here and now. Approximately twenty per cent of children, many of them living in poverty, are not adequately prepared to attend school (Morse, 2000). It was my understanding of this fact,

and my own lived experience of hunger, which prompted me to bring food to school that my students were free to eat. I had always sold snack foods at a very reasonable price, but no price is reasonable when you have nothing, and the consequences can be devastating. Poor nutrition has many negative side effects, including learning difficulties for the child, and feelings of inadequacy and guilt for the parents (Morse, 2000). At first I started with bagels in the morning. I would go to the grocery store before work in the morning and get gigantic bags of bagels from the day before for two dollars. The students were very appreciative and they all started out their day with breakfast. The difference I noticed in their focus and quality of work was remarkable. The morning became the best part of the day for academics and I took notice of the change. According to Morse (2000), all schools should provide free nutrition programs to their students. A nutrition grant from the health region allowed me to expand what I had to offer and I began cooking with the students, instructing them on how to make cost-effective meals which could go a long way. My efforts had other unforeseen effects as well, bringing the students together as a cohesive unit, the model of a healthy functioning family.

“School leaders need an indepth understanding of poverty and its complex, interrelated causes; of beliefs about the causes of poverty; and of poverty’s effects on families, children and learning” (Cunningham, 2003, p. 6). For the average teacher, having empathy for a student who lives with the struggles of poverty is not a difficult task, truly understanding their plight can be much more difficult. How can you understand what you have not experienced? Even if you do your best to try to put yourself in someone’s shoes and imagine the suffering of hunger and not having enough money for the basic necessities, such as shelter and clothing and proper medical care, it is

even more difficult to understand that the shame associated with poverty, especially for children, is often worse than the going without. It is this shame which makes it so difficult for these children to ask for help and to make their suffering known to others. The fact is that equal access and opportunity in school is not a reality because children do not come from equal places in society (Morse, 2000).

I once had a student who was working on an assignment she had to do as part of a high school distance education course she was working on. She had to choose a letter to the editor of the local inquiry and respond to it with her own letter to the editor. She chose a piece in which a woman expressed frustration over veterans having to stoop to accessing the food bank, as they did not have enough money to adequately cover their expenses. This caught my student's attention and she felt that it would be an interesting piece to build upon.

When the time came to write her letter, she sat in contemplation, and in frustration, finally approached me for help. She asked what she should write about, since the woman who had written the original letter had pretty much said it all. I asked her why the piece had caught her attention in the first place and she started to talk about her own family's experiences with living on government assistance and how they too had to use the food bank on a regular basis to supplement their needs, and how it was still very little for her large family. Although only twenty-seven per cent of the population are children, as many as thirty-one to fifty-four per cent of people who utilize food banks are children (Sibbald, 2000). I pointed out to my student that her experience was very important since she was coming from a completely different experience than the woman who had written to the editor to express her frustration. The writer had said nothing about having to use

the food bank herself and had written the letter to express her concerns over the government's handling of veterans. My student and I discussed how her perspective was important because she had a first-hand experience of the struggles of living in poverty and relying on the charity of others. Children who live in poverty are rarely included in the discussion of how their own experience with poverty affects them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Much of the discourse concerning child poverty is moving into the scientific realm, focusing on the notion that it is bad parenting which causes difficulties for these children, however, this decontextualizes the issue (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000) and makes it an individual concern, rather than a community concern.

Our open conversation caught the attention of the other students in the classroom and soon we were all embroiled in a discussion of poverty and the government's policies on issues such as social services and healthcare. The students who had shared similar experiences seemed invigorated with the opportunity to voice their opinions and share their stories. Many of the students who were most deeply affected by poverty come from single-parent families. According to Cunningham (2003), children in single-parent families are substantially more likely to be living in poverty than those in two-parent families. Poverty brings a whole other host of problems for families, including the possible deterioration of the home environment, including parental discipline; behaviour problems (Bower, 1994); less opportunities for extra-curricular activities (Cunningham, 2003); as well as difficulties in paying for extra school expenses, which often leads to the perception that the parents are uncaring or inadequate (Morse, 2000). My more "privileged," middle-class students seemed mesmerized with the discussion and listened

intently to their peers and asked questions which were poignant and respectful of the sensitive nature of the issue.

This was not my first experience with students using class time to discuss the issue of poverty. With the population the outreach school serves, the issue is relevant and real for many of the children. In fact, the issue is a pertinent one in any classroom when you consider the fact that at least one in five children in Canada is affected by poverty (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000), one of the highest rates in the industrial world, second only to the United States (Morse, 2000). What is most interesting is the pride which I see in many of these children. Although there are those who long for a more stable, middle-class existence, in which all of their needs and wants are met, many of my students are proud of where they come from, and have chosen to accept their socioeconomic status as an integral part of their identity. These students recognize that they are not a part of the more privileged classes and state that they would not want to be. For these students, there is a pride in learning to cope with struggles and in learning to survive and thrive with less in a consumption-based society. According to Gabarino (1995), poverty in and of itself has little effect on individual development in the absence of other risk factors. Knowing the perspective of many of my students has led me to further explore how poverty has effected me personally, and how it continues to effect my values and behaviours, despite the fact that I no longer have to endure the hardships of not having my basic needs met. I have come to know myself better because of my students, and have come to realize that although my circumstances at this time in my life allow me to live a middle-class life, my personality and many of my behaviours are still grounded in the experiences of my childhood.

Shame is a very powerful emotion. The experience of shame can affect how you view yourself and the world around you. Growing up, I remember being ashamed of so many things. I was ashamed of the fact that my parents had never married; I was ashamed of the fact that I did not have a lunch to bring to school like all of the other children; I was ashamed of the fact that I did not have the nice new clothes like the other girls; and I was ashamed of where I lived. Although these feelings were with me from my first memories, they were especially heightened by the awkward identity struggle of adolescence. I always wanted to be more than where I came from and was depressed with the reality of my life. Girls often react to economically induced hardship and family conflicts with feelings of anxiety and depression whereas boys tend to react more aggressively (Bower, 1994).

Adolescents who perceive their families as impoverished have lower self-esteem and are more anxious (Bower, 1994). I always had the goal to move up in the world and was willing to do whatever it took to ensure that would happen. I could never accept my reality and be proud of who I was. This anxiety and lack of self-esteem led me to be a very dishonest child, forever concocting stories to cover up my background and my circumstances, always looking for my own make-believe reality. Honesty is of utmost importance to me now, because I still carry the guilt of having been such a chronic liar in my childhood. I stress the need for honesty and trust with my son, because I don't want him to ever feel that he should have to create a façade of his own existence, not that he has any reason to, as I felt I did.

The experiences with poverty that I had as a child have affected me in other ways as well. One of the after-effects is my relationship with money. I have found that I have

an incredible distrust for money and finances. I never feel completely secure and I am always waiting for my financial security to crumble beneath me. I am incredibly frugal and I am constantly on-edge where money is concerned, always afraid there will not be enough and life as I know it will fall apart. I am terrified at the thought of not being able to provide for my own son, and cannot help but contemplate the possibilities of what I would do, what I would sacrifice, to always ensure that he has what he needs in life. My first goal, every time I get my pay, is to immediately go out and do my grocery shopping, so that I know if I fall short, at least there will be food on the table. I do this, despite the fact that poverty has really not been a real concern for some time now.

My experiences with poverty have deeply affected my relationship with food as well. All of my life I had to make do with what I had, which was never very much. When I left home at fourteen, I got a full-time job at a grocery store. Being able to provide for myself was a wonderful experience and I was careful with my money, but began to enjoy the simple task of buying and cooking my own meals. I love to cook and it became one of my favourite pastimes. I had already developed my own hang-ups with food, although I didn't see it at the time, and I could never leave the table without having finished every bite on my plate, regardless of whether or not I was already full. Somewhere in the back of my mind I was always afraid that the luxury might not be there tomorrow, and I had to take advantage of it while I could. Before long, I developed a weight problem, but I didn't see it. By the time I graduated from high school, three years after leaving home, I had gained over eighty pounds, maxing out at two-hundred pounds, which at a height of five-feet-one-inch, was extremely overweight. It began to take its toll on my health and my emotional well-being. Not until I began to lose the weight, after my first year of

university, did I start to realize the enormity of the problem. I began my struggle with developing a healthy, balanced, active lifestyle, which continues still today, and which I'm sure will always continue. It is difficult to walk the line when your head tells you to be careful because you do not want to return to being unhealthy and unhappy, but your heart tells you to eat what you can while you can, because it might be gone tomorrow. It is a constant tension.

I was truly reminded of my own struggles with hunger when I had a new student who exhibited survivalist behaviours that were even more severe than my own. I had served my students a hot lunch one day and had told him that he was welcome to have as much as he wanted. Despite the fact that he was free to eat, and even despite the fact that his foster home kept him well-fed and cared for, I saw him hiding bread up inside the sleeve of his jacket for later. I didn't say anything to him about it, not wanting to embarrass him. I brought it up with his foster mother and she said that she had the same sort of behaviours happening at home. She said that she would find little bits of food stored all around the house, hidden where he thought only he could find it, just in case he might need it. He, like me, never trusted the security of his new lifestyle, and was constantly preparing for a return to a life where meeting his own basic needs were his number one focus and responsibility.

When survival is a child's number one responsibility and concern, it is almost impossible for the child to see past the moment and the deprivation she is suffering and see to a future which is brighter and more secure, especially if she has never experienced it. However, at times, this is the only thing which keeps life moving, the hope that things will someday be better. For a child, it is difficult to envision how it is you can achieve

such far away goals, the future is often a scary thought, because things might never get better, they might even get worse. When I was a very young girl, I was truly optimistic. I could imagine a life where things would be wonderful for me and my family. These happy thoughts often came in the form of daydreams and fairy tales. I had no understanding of how these things might come about in the real world, which I knew to be cold and harsh. As I got older, my optimistic outlook subsided and I became as cold and harsh as the world that surrounded me. If I was capable of seeing past the moment and into a better future, I refused to do so, I gave up on my dreams, I gave up on hope. I would make such nonchalant comments about dying young and never caring about anything or anyone, I accepted my fate of misery. The isolation and hopelessness of this time as an adolescent led to reckless behaviour, aimed at my own self-destruction. I no longer cared about the consequences of my actions. I no longer cared about the feelings of others. I no longer cared about my own feelings. I convinced myself that I would remain in that state of brooding and darkness for the rest of my life. I would not give the world the satisfaction of wasting my life on unreachable dreams. The further I slipped into this darkness, the less I cared about the things which I had held onto as my salvation as a child. I no longer worked hard at school; I no longer nurtured my spirituality, preferring to let it die. I no longer allowed myself to dream for a better life. I see this same hopelessness in many of my students, not only the ones living in poverty, although their troubles often seem more acute. With these children it is of utmost importance to reawaken that part of them that dreams, that part of them that plans for a future where their world is for the taking. Many of them, like myself at their age, are reluctant to make plans, to set goals, to allow hope into their lives, because it only leaves them open to

failure and disappointment and devastation. They have enough of that and so they avoid the risks to protect themselves, but strangely enough, it is the risks they need to take for self-empowerment which they sidestep. When you take a risk that might improve yourself or your life, you take the chance that you will not succeed, and that you will suffer the loss of a dream or an opportunity. When you take risks that you know very well may have a negative effect on your life, you are preparing for the worst and in a sense, looking for an easy way out, no expectations, no losses.

One of my greatest achievements in my work is my ability to push my students to take the risk of believing in themselves. To witness the transformation of someone who is determined to be done with school as soon as they are old enough so that they can escape the system, grow into someone who works to overcome their own barriers so that they do not have to rely on the system to support them, is a wonderful sight. Many of my students leave my charge with the renewed faith in their own ability to finish school, to possibly even go past high school with their education, and to be productive citizens with meaningful lives. This rebirth of hope is one of the greatest accomplishments of a teacher. It is a difficult goal, but a worthwhile one.

As for my friend with the lack of understanding regarding the real issues behind poverty, he listened intently to what I had to say and I could see that he understood the impact his comments had and apologized for his ignorance. I don't think that most people are purposefully callous or judgmental when it comes to the impoverished. I think it is often the case that they are unaware of the real-life struggles which poverty causes.

Journal Entry

I knew that I would have to write about the subject of poverty as soon as I embarked upon this project. It seemed a given to me. Poverty was one of the first realities of the lives of my students which brought me to recognize the connection I had with them. Although not all of my students came from poverty, a disproportionate number of them did. My first instinct was to protect them, to try to make things better by bringing food to school for them and connecting them with resources in an attempt to make their lives easier. In time I came to understand that this approach, while noble enough in its intentions, was only a short-term solution. I considered my own history and my emergence from the grip of poverty. Although there were many people along the way who reached out to help me, to give me what I needed at the time and send me on my way, it was not their specific acts of kindness which were of most assistance to me; what was most valuable were the lessons I learned in knowing that there were people willing to take the time to care. What I took away was newfound strength, a resilience inspired by the kindness of others, kindness which taught me that I was of value.

My own resilience and persistence were gifts given to me by others who taught me that a better life was worth working for, and to continue to strive for that life, despite the struggle it was bound to be. Writing this chapter illustrated this above all. I regressed through the memories of my history with teaching others and found that over time I learned not just to help my students, but to do my best to share with them the skills they needed to help themselves, along with the knowledge that they were each worth it. This was a difficult thing to do. It meant admitting that I suffered from somewhat of a “savior syndrome” and that although my motives were pure and borne of passion for my work,

the rewards I gathered for the things I did were selfish and self-satisfying. I sought the praise and attention of others and I had to learn to let this go so that I could be genuine to my cause to truly give my students a second chance (or first).

I have witnessed the profound effect that poverty had on me when I suffered with it, deteriorating my self-worth, distorting reality so that my goals and dreamed always seemed unattainable fairy tales, and forcing me to behave as though survival was the only thing in life to strive for. Writing this chapter taught me that although I felt that this was an issue from my past, it still affects me deeply in the present. My values and behaviours are often defined by the struggles I endured in my youth.

Recently I brought my students by my home so that I could pick up some fishing gear to take them to the lake for the day. I didn't stop to think what they might think about the place where I now live. When I returned to the van with my gear, one of the girls asked if this was my house; when I told her it was, she said that I must be very rich. I almost laughed, considering my circumstances and the hardship that I had felt had befallen my life since the dissolution of my marriage, then I stopped and looked at my life through her eyes – I didn't laugh. When I was her age I would have thought the same thing. I felt myself not filled with pride for the blessings I now have, but filled with shame for my forgetting. I did not feel guilty for the things I have, I know how hard I have worked for them, but I did feel ashamed for getting too comfortable in my life. the effects of my past will never leave me.

Chapter Eight: Alone in the World

Some of the most difficult students I have worked with over the years were those who were left behind by their families, or who are essentially on their own, even in the presence of their families. This is the case for many reasons. Abandonment, abuse and neglect are likely to cause social, psychological, biological and cultural dysfunction in adult survivors (McNutt, 1994). These children are usually street-smart and have learned to rely only on themselves. Getting them to trust others, especially adults, is difficult. Sometimes they are in the care of government agencies, which can be a benefit and a downfall, as they are ashamed of their status and are labeled as unwanted or coming from inadequate homes. Others have slipped through the cracks and are enabled by other family members and by overloaded social agencies to simply float from place to place, relying on the kindness of others until they have worn out their welcome and must move on. For these children instability and impermanence is the norm: it is what they know and what they trust. When they are presented with an alternative, with adults who genuinely care and have concern for their well-being, their usual first response is to resist, as they cannot fathom why someone would be bothered, unless they have something to gain from it; for them kindness has frequently come at a cost.

For those who allow others to take a responsible role in their lives, the experience is bitter-sweet. To finally find the acceptance and love they were looking for can be uplifting and allows them the opportunity to truly be a child; to let someone else carry the burden of their own well-being for a change. These can be the most loving and tender of all of the children I have had the privilege of working with and to be able to be there for them is one of the most rewarding parts of my career. There is another side for both the

child and the appointed nurturer in these cases however, as the burden of caring for a troubled child can be huge, and often when you feel you have finally made some headway, a new problem arises. It can be tiring and gut-wrenching, especially when you are emotionally invested, and especially when you are all that they have. What makes it even more difficult is the constant awareness that the situation is not a permanent one, the knowledge that eventually they must move on and more often than not, once again be alone in the world. In my heart they are never forgotten and never replaced, but another child in need is always waiting to take their place. In those cases, you find comfort only in the knowledge that they knew their worth to you; that they understood unconditional love; that they know you will always be there when they need you, despite the years that pass; and that you did your best to give them the skills and strategies they would need to go on with their survival in a cold, harsh world. I grow accustomed to caring for them and with each one I experience a genuinely heart-wrenching sense of the “empty nest” which is difficult not only because of the loss of the relationship as I know it, but also because of the loss of control which accompanies such a change. I can no longer protect them, and that is the hardest thing. For me there is also the sense of being abandoned by the child.

These are the children I identify with the most. Some of the most pivotal experiences in my life are ones of abandonment and loss. Even now, as a successful and fulfilled adult, the fear of loss is my greatest fear of all.

My first experience of abandonment was with my father. He and my mother had been teenage lovers and had separated before I was even born. He had little involvement

in my life, although I knew who he was and spent time with his family at different moments in my life. I was raised to believe that he was an uncaring and selfish man who wanted no part of fatherhood and who cared only for his own needs. I discovered later on in life that this was not true, that he had longed for a relationship with his only child, but that it had been made far too difficult. There were times when I was growing up that he tried to reach out to me, but I was already hardened and had no place in my heart for him. I gave away gifts he had given me as if they were worthless, which was a significant gesture on my part, as I had very little and to part with such luxuries was not easy. I needed to make it known to the world, and to him, and even more so to myself that I did not need him, that I was fatherless and that was it. Looking back I am saddened by my cruelty towards him, but I find peace in the understanding that I was just a child, and that my perception of him had been warped and twisted from the very beginning. He and I have bridged the gap now, but nothing can change the past, and my past was without him.

My mother attempted to fill the gap many times, succeeding only once. She married my sister's father when I was only four. I called him 'Daddy' and he was the closest thing I had to a father growing up. I remember having a fight with him when I was five and running up to my bedroom screaming, "you're not my father," I can't even remember why. The reason I remember it at all is because of his reaction. He came to my room and cried and told me that even though he was not my real father, he loved me like I was his own and that he would treat me as such. From then on he was my father in my eyes and it was no longer an issue. When I was eight, my mother dressed me and my little sister in matching blue sweaters and along with my brother I made the trip from Nova Scotia where I had been living, back to Labrador, for what I thought was a short visit. It

was never discussed with me that I would not be returning to Nova Scotia. I was never told that my parents were no longer together. We just never went back. My mother registered me in school as Kimberly Michelin, her maiden name, although I knew myself to be Kimberly Eddy. I was an Eddy no more, it seems I never had been in the first place; my stepfather had never adopted me after all.

With this move my life changed completely. My mother was absent much of the time and I spent most of my time with my aunts and helped to care for my younger cousins and my siblings. I didn't realize at the time that it was the beginning of the end of my childhood.

When I was nine I moved from Goose Bay, where I had been living on an army base, to Northwest River, a tiny town which was about a forty-five minute drive away. It was a difficult move for me, as I had to leave my friends behind and the security of all of my aunts who lived there. Not that I was all that concerned, as I was moving to the home of my grandparents. At first my mother came along. We had the usual adjustments to small-town life. One day she went to spend the night in Goose Bay and she didn't return. At first it didn't really occur to me, as I had become accustomed to her absence, but after a week passed and there was still no word from her, I began to wonder what was going on and the whisperings within the family began. It was my cousin who asked me where my mother had gone as she was no longer in Goose Bay where my cousin lived. I remember the shame and embarrassment I felt at not knowing the answer. Worse was the fact that my cousin realized from my reaction that I hadn't even been aware that my mother was no longer even in Goose Bay. Her whereabouts were a mystery.

Perhaps I was too young to understand the goings-on in the adult world, but it seemed to me that nobody had expected my mother's departure and that they didn't know where she had gone. I don't know if that was actually the case, as the police were not involved in her disappearance. Looking back, I assume somebody in the family must have been aware of her plans and her whereabouts. That information was kept from me however, and I felt very much like somebody outside of her own life, looking in as other people made decisions for the well-being of me and my siblings. I remember being scared that I would be sent off strangers, as one of my aunts would allude to when I was within earshot. She, in particular, seemed put out by the situation my mother had put the rest of the family in with her departure and she never passed up on an opportunity to let me know I was lucky to have her family around to pick up the mess my mother had left behind. At times I wondered if she held me responsible, as her distaste was focused mainly on me and not my younger siblings.

My siblings and I became accustomed to life without my mother and adjusted to life in the care of my grandparents. My grandmother was much stricter than my mother, but her care was evident and she ensured that all of my needs were met. I felt very close to her and followed her guidance in learning to cook and clean and do all of the things she felt my mother had neglected in my upbringing.

One day my grandmother announced to us that my sister would be going on a holiday to Nova Scotia to visit with her dad. My sister was so excited, as she had not seen him in the two years since I had left Nova Scotia. I remember my brother and me feeling so unwanted and alone at the thought that he did not send for us as well. Hadn't he told me that he considered me to be one of his own? Was that all a lie? I was very confused

and bitter and too young to understand the politics of being an adult. All I knew was that I was truly abandoned by those I had known to be the providers and caregivers in my life. I was not concerned for my sister; I knew how much her dad loved her. I was told she would be gone for a month. She never returned. Her father would not let her go. Although at the time I could not understand how she was different from me and my brother and I was resentful for her being wanted, unlike us, in time I grew to appreciate the fact that he had kept her, as she was safe from harm in the care of her father. I sometimes wonder if we all would have been, but that was not life's design for my brother and me. Our lives would be very different.

The two years I spent living with my grandparents were in some ways the best of my childhood, as I was cared for and enjoyed the security of an adult home. Those years were also the worst of my life, as I endured sexual abuse at the hands of a close family member. In time my ability to cope with the pressure of the secret I was holding inside was destroyed, I became deeply depressed and emotionally bankrupt. When a child is emotionally bankrupt, they have trouble feeling empathy and in being sensitive, causing them to be more careless in their own lives and the lives of others (Gilligan, 1991). Children who were abused can be very abusive in relation to themselves (Firestone, 1993). I finally broke down one late evening, locking myself in the tiny bathroom of my grandparents' home and attempting to drink a cup of bleach in the hopes of poisoning myself, suicide being a common reaction for children who are depressed (Guetzloe, 1991). I survived the attempt, but was discovered in a messy, wailing heap on the bathroom floor by my grandmother, who could not understand the origins of my suffering, other than her understanding that a young girl needed her mother.

Not long after, a social worker came to my home and asked me, with all of my family present, including my abuser, if I was being abused. I denied it and stuck with my story that I just desperately missed my mother. I figured that if they tracked her down, at least she could rescue me from my misery and I could begin my life anew. My plan worked and they were able to track my mother down. Over the past two years she had moved to Ft. McMurray in Alberta and then to Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, where she got a job working as a cook in the local correctional facility. My mother visited us briefly for Christmas and it was decided that I would finish my school year in Labrador before flying to Yellowknife to live with my mother. I remember trying to convince her to take me with her then, but I could not tell her why I was unable to stay and so my silence condemned me to enduring another six months of abuse before I left. That cowardice, which prolonged my suffering, has haunted me ever since. I often thought after the fact that if I had only had the nerve to tell my mother the truth then, I would not have had to endure any further abuse. It was too difficult though, as admitting it to another would mean truly admitting it to myself and I was not ready to deal with that.

When the time came to move to Yellowknife with my mother, my brother and I were both apprehensive to leave Labrador. As difficult as things had been, there was a comfort in familiarity and we were frightened of what our new lives would be. I remember feeling as though my mother was a stranger. I didn't truly understand the depth of the hurt I felt towards her, as my feelings were clouded by the novelty of a new environment, and by the relief of leaving behind the abuse I had endured for two years. In time the hurt emerged and ate away at the relationship between my mother and me, as she

continued to struggle with the responsibility of parenthood, along with the realization that she had lost her youngest daughter while she wasn't looking. She had a boyfriend who at first seemed happy to have us there, despite the fact that I were all crowded into a tiny one-bedroom apartment. My brother and I slept in a windowless storage room which had been set up as a bedroom, and spent most of my time roaming the surrounding neighbourhood. Before long though, the truth of my mother's living situation became evident, as the fights between her and her boyfriend became more frequent and heated as time passed. When she finally left him I felt a sense of relief and once again had the hope that our lives could start fresh, but before long she replaced her abusive boyfriend with a man who would become her abusive husband. His introduction into the family would be the beginning of the end for my life with my mother and my brother.

Through all of the hard times I promised my brother that I would be there for him no matter what. My bond grew very strong, as my relationship with my mother deteriorated as a result of her continued neglect. I had an attitude that it was "us against the world" and I clung tightly to the security of that bond. This need was made all the greater once my mother moved us from Yellowknife, which had become home to us, back to Labrador, a place which was haunted with memories of pain for me. The time came, at the age of fourteen, for me to leave home after one final fight with my mother and her husband. I felt a crushing sense of guilt at having to leave my little brother behind. He was devastated at the loss of his greatest companion and for years following my departure from Labrador he would remind me of the promises I had broken. Ironically, the fight which initiated my leaving home was over him. I had come to his defense when my stepfather began yelling at him and putting him down and I could no

longer tolerate it. That fight got me kicked out of my house on a cold March evening, with nowhere to go and no one to depend on. Once again I had been cast aside, and as difficult as that was, it was nowhere near as difficult as the overwhelming feeling that I was abandoning my brother and that there was nothing I could do about it. I was helpless.

My mother invited me out for a quiet, private dinner at a restaurant about a week after my leaving home. I had flopped from place to place, relying on the kindness of friends and family members. I had the sense that I did not want to stay in any one place for too long. Coming and going had to be my decision; I needed that control. Over dinner my mother tried to convince me to come home. She apologized for how things had been and tried to assure me that things would be different this time, but I could not come back. Looking back, I realize that returning home would mean risking being discarded once again, and I could not bear the thought of it. Instead I was the one to leave. With the help of my father, who bought me a plane ticket to return to Yellowknife to find work and finish my schooling, I left Labrador and my family behind and started my own life. I could be abandoned no more. I had done the abandoning.

At times when I am working with a child who has endured an existence similar to my own, becoming accustomed to being left behind and discarded, I wonder if they too long for the control of being the one to decide who they will be with and when. I wonder if the need for security and love and acceptance are more powerful for them than the need for control that comes with independence and relying only on oneself. I remember the pull between these two forms of security. As difficult as my life had been with my mother, I realized that it would be so easy to fall back into the familiar routine of life as

her child, despite the constant upheavals and insecurities. What I came to realize in the end was that I was the only one who could find the security I needed. I already lived so much inside my own head, that I was mostly alone. Even my relationship with my brother, which was probably my closest to anyone, was one of being a nurturer and caregiver. It was not so much for my own security as it was for his. His personal struggles as a boy on the verge of adolescence were causing difficulties in our relationship and he was growing more and more difficult for me to manage. I came to the understanding that I needed to stand on my own. I needed to be alone.

This insight has pulled me in many different directions when working with children who live with instability and insecurity. I have struggled with encouraging them to work out their issues with their parents, as living on your own as an adolescent can be extremely difficult and stressful, and is essentially the end of childhood. On the other hand, I realize that some relationships are not salvageable, and that in many cases these children are old beyond their years, as a result of their experiences, and gaining the tools for living independently are necessary for them to know any security in their lives. In many cases I find myself in the middle, encouraging them to do everything in their power to exhaust all of their strategies for coping in a difficult home-life while providing them with opportunities to develop the necessary skills for living independently. It can be a precarious line to walk and I must always try to put my own experiences to the side so as not to influence their actions based on my own history, but to act as a solid support and advocate in their own decisions for what it is that they need. As individuals, we must find our own limits for what we can cope with, what we can live without, and what we can manage of my own lives at different moments in time is a different experience for

everyone. It is the job of an educator and nurturer of children to provide children with the guidance and the support to make choices which are in their own best interests.

Unfortunately, many children are not recognized as “at-risk” by their teachers until they are in trouble. This can hinder the process of using the “at-risk” label as a predictor for necessary proactive measures. Teachers may be leery of identifying a child as at-risk for fear of labeling, stereotyping, or creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for the child (Leroy, 2001). Another obstacle for teachers in identifying at-risk children is that teachers often have inaccurate knowledge of the families of their students (Casanova, 1990). Part of the difficulty of making positive interventions is recognizing how much a child can understand the concept of what is in their own best interests. Teachers can support at-risk students by being vigilant in recognizing developmental delays, abuse and neglect.

Teachers can also help by offering support to parents for the child’s learning and support for the student in coping with crisis and developing resiliency (Balster, 1991; Goodman, 1985; Newman, 1993; Tite, 1996; Wang & Gordon, 1994). “Schools help students develop resiliency by providing positive and safe learning environments, setting high, yet achievable, academic and social expectations, and facilitating their academic and social success” (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2000, p. 3). When a school is led with a vision for the development of resilience, it can protect and guide youth who live in adverse conditions (Benard, 1995).

Journal Entry

As soon as I decided on the topic for my autobiographical project, I knew that I would have to write about my issues with abandonment. This is one of the issues in my life that I have always known played a major part in shaping the person I am, the fears I have, and the values I hold dear. I did come to recognize some actions I have taken, some decisions I have made, as reactions to my issues with abandonment, which I hadn't really realized before.

In coming to accept the fact that I have made decisions and avoided certain courses of action, avoided certain risks in life, for the simple sake of security, I have come to realize that I must first accept this as a part of my personality, but also that I must work to allow myself the independence and allow myself to take the risks I need to grow as a person. It is important to take the necessary steps to allow myself and my loved ones a life that is safe and secure, but not at the cost of living life. If I secure the fortress too tightly, I succeed in shutting out the world in the process, and locking myself in. These things are not healthy. When I do this, I not only cheat myself out of endless possibilities for experience and opportunity, but I also take away from those opportunities for the ones I love.

I am an overprotective mother because of my fears of abandonment. My greatest fear is not for myself, but for my son to ever fear that I am not there for him completely. As a baby he slept in my bed with me, where I knew he was safe. I kept him around always and never let him cry uncomforted. I guarded my every word and action in his presence, so that he might see me as some sort of ideal; I wanted to be the perfect mother. With time and wisdom I have come to understand that part of being a mother is letting go

and letting your child make their own mistakes and take their own risks in life. As a parent you must learn to protect without smothering, to love without isolating. Even at the tender age of eight, a boy needs independence to find his own way and figure out who it is he's going to be. I am glad for how closely my fears have made me hold onto my son. He has had a good start in life. He is a loving boy and my relationship with him is very close and very solid. I would want it no other way. I am learning that love is about balance, as is life, and I must work to find mine. I have stopped striving to be the "perfect" mother, and have opted instead to allow my son the opportunity to truly know his mother and the woman she is, and to grow and change those things which I am not proud of, and to accept the weaknesses which are a part of my very fabric and might never be changed.

The chapter on abandonment also raised the issue of abuse for the first time in my writing. I have endured many forms of abuse throughout my lifetime. Some of those were self-inflicted; some were inflicted by others, often others I trusted. I was careful not to go into too much detail, as that is not the purpose of this writing. I do recognize that it is a major factor in the direction of this inquiry however, and that it must be addressed, as it has played an enormous part in my development, and in my handling of my students. It is also an issue which I often have in common with my students and the effect of that awareness is profound. Many of the things which I inflicted upon myself I am ashamed of. The abuses inflicted on me I see as the past and have pushed them far out of my present life. I do not want to infringe on the rights of others and their right to maintain their privacy, yet so many of their own secrets are so entwined with my own.

The most difficult discovery I made in the writing of this chapter was the understanding of how people grow apart. I remember thinking when I was young of how wrong it is to separate children who are bound by blood. I still think this. It makes me sad to consider how far apart I am from my own siblings. My brother is off in Ontario, living his own life, raising his own family. I talked to him a few weeks ago for the first time in two years; I was the one to allow that distance because it is easier than discussing the past. My sister is a stranger to me and likely always will be for the most part. I saw her a few years ago for the first time since I was twelve, and she was a woman, no longer the little girl I remembered. She got married this year to a man I have never met or even spoken to. I didn't go. I'm not even sure of the exact date. I do miss her, but because we are such strangers, I think it must be more the idea of her that I miss. It is sad to not know my own sister. These are the sad realities of families who grow apart. I did not choose this, it was merely by circumstance. It is truly sad to feel so alone – to feel as though there is nowhere I belong. I took heart when I read Chambers' (1994) reflections on the struggles of belonging:

Perhaps my work is to construct my own homeplace, or to re-configure the entire notion of belonging in such a way that I can be at home. A friend reminded me that the feeling of not belonging will probably never leave me. 'But one day you'll arrive at a place where it simply doesn't matter anymore,' she consoled. I write to find that place. Maybe that place is home. (p. 37)

I am not sure if I am looking for home, or looking to belong, or simply looking for myself, I know they are all related, maybe they are one in the same.

Chapter Nine: Hurt

I didn't want to write this. Maybe I'll keep this one to myself. That must mean it's important. It is hard to be brave sometimes. It's kind of ironic, all the years I have spent between that time and now, telling myself and others that if you can just be open and honest and recognize that some things are out of your control in life, that you can come to accept them, to even forgive them, and to move on and be happy. Now that I am here, preparing to write what I am sure will be difficult to write, what I haven't even decided on yet, I feel once again like a little girl, trying to pretend, trying to keep my secrets safe, trying to hide my shame. No matter how much my mind accepts that there is nothing to be ashamed of, no matter how much I share and how educated I am, my mind simply cannot succeed in convincing my heart. When you are hurt, sometimes a piece of you is taken; sometimes a piece of you is left behind but what is left remains scarred; sometimes pieces of other people linger with you, no matter how hard you try to shut them out.

I know I have to write this chapter, and share it, because it is the most difficult to write. It is so important because it is the core of what I have in common with my students. All of the other chapters tie back into this one. Everything is connected, not in a neat little circle, but in a complicated jumble, like the seemingly endless ball of necklaces which sit forever at the bottom of my jewelry box, forever waiting for me to pick them all apart and put them in their places. I hate the detail work though; I just want it all to be over in one quick swipe. It would be easier to just toss the whole mess in the trash and start all over again, after all, I've done that before, but somehow, I return and the mess has found it's way back into the box, and again I am faced with the decision to sort it all out; or to just ignore it and let it sit there, getting bigger and bigger; or to try again to just

throw it away, but it gets harder all the time to deny that it will just return, forever waiting for my attention. The one thing which I always have in common with my students is the hurt.

The forms of hurt are many and its effect is just as varied, but it touches all of us in one way or another, and how we deal with it is highly personal. The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect categorized maltreatment as either: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment (Trocme, et al., 2001). Firestone (1993) separates child maltreatment into two major categories:

1. aggression: refers to degradation, physical and sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and disrespecting boundaries.
2. neglect: refers to deprivation and a lack of concern for the physical and emotional needs of the child.

Firestone also states that emotional or psychological abuse often has a far more profound effect on the victim than physical or even sexual abuse. In 1998, approximately two per cent of children were the subjects of child welfare investigations in Canada, with forty-five per cent of these cases being substantiated. This is an underestimate of actual incidents as it is only based on reported maltreatment (Trocme, et al., 2001). Physical, sexual and emotional abuses suffered by children are more common and more devastating in their long-term effect than what is commonly believed (Blumberg, 1974; Emerson & McBride, 1986; Ferenzi, 1933/1955; Firestone, 1993; Garbarino, Guttman & Seeley, 1986; Jones, 1982; Miller, 1981, 1984, 1984; Shearer & Herbert, 1987; Shengold, 1989; Zigler, 1980).

I have a close friend who is a wonderful confidante. I see her rarely, as she is off teaching in another country for the time being, but when we get together, we talk about everything – nothing is taboo. This past summer she visited and in the midst of telling me of her hardships she paused and apologized for her selfishness, saying that her problems were so petty in comparison to the things I had endured over my lifetime. I scolded her and told her that we all have our crosses to bear, some are heavier than others perhaps, but we cannot live in the shoes of another, and it is our own experiences which we must learn to endure, that our pain is equally valid and important, and that we all need the chance to seek the support and understanding of others.

I have made some sort of peace with my own pain. A big part of that process was becoming educated on the issues and making it a focus in my own career. Intellectualization is like a survival instinct for me it seems. If I can analyze it and understand it, I can overcome it – this should be my motto, although I'm not sure how true it is. I'm not sure if any of us can truly overcome the things we must endure; I am sure that sometimes it is just a matter of letting it fall behind so that I can continue with the path ahead. I have let these things fall behind for a long time, but for some reason, perhaps because of this writing, it is becoming increasingly difficult to allow it to be history. The past is creeping in. The past is once again finding its breath, and becoming a living, breathing thing. I never realized how afraid of it I was. It is easy to pretend I'm not afraid of something when I think it is dead and gone, but when I kick at it in defiance in an attempt to be tough, and it stirs – well, sometimes I flinch, and I do get scared, because maybe it never dies. Maybe it's just always waiting for the chance for me to be off my guard. So I never let myself be off my guard, I keep a protective wall around

myself and I feel safer because the wall is there, but I never forget why it's there, and I can never sleep peacefully again.

I have spent my whole life resisting the notion that I was a textbook example of an abused child. I have explained so many things away as insignificant coincidences – that the decisions I made and the behaviours I displayed were just a part of my personality. With age, experience, and wisdom I am growing to accept the things about myself which point directly back to the experiences I have had over my lifetime, particularly the bad experiences and how they have affected me emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Scars run deep, sometimes so deep that they seep into my core and affect every part of my being. A scar, despite the fact that it is the lingering evidence of old wounds that have hopefully healed, is a visible reminder of real pain. Sometimes I look at it and think that it has built character, that it sets me apart. Sometimes I am drawn to touching it and examining it and sensing the numbness that surrounds it. Often I am left with the knowledge that it is there forever, and that although it might fade, I always know it is there, and that it is an ugly mark that has been added to my being by the world, or even by my own doing.

Born to a teenage mother who had three children by the time she was twenty, my life was never easy. I never seemed to have enough of anything. Parents need the resources to provide the basic necessities (Barry & Gunn, 1996), yet as many as thirty-five per cent of Canadian children from low-income families live in substandard housing and as a result are at greater risk of psychological problems (Sibbald, 2000), stress, and child maltreatment (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Gelles, 1976; Kohn, 1973; Pelton, 1978). Being young and inexperienced and mostly unsupported, my mother often

fell short in her ability to give us safety and security. Impoverished families often over time lack the provision of safe surroundings, exposure to learning opportunities, and parental warmth (Bower, 1994). “Along with food and shelter, children need love and trust, hope and autonomy. Along with safe havens, they need safe relationships that can foster friendships and commitment” (Grotberg, 1995, p. 10). When I consider children I have worked with over the years who grew up in similar circumstances, I have regarded their situation as one of neglect. It was difficult to admit that I had suffered the same experience, but looking back, it was just that. From as early as five-years-old I recall feeling a sense of despair at how little I had. I belittled myself and compared myself to the other children who had what I did not and from a young age I resented my parents for that fact. I felt I had been cheated out of a good life, and often fantasized about being taken away and given to a family who wanted me and loved me. This is not to say that I wasn’t wanted or loved by my own parents, but at the time I didn’t feel it.

As I grew older, I started on a path of self-destruction, and with little guidance or boundaries from an authority figure, I quickly spiraled out of control. By the time I was twelve, I was living life as though I was the one in charge. I could not be told what to do or when to come home, I had lost all concern for myself, and others, and felt that I didn’t need anybody anyway; after all, I had spent much of my life finding my own way – not always a good way – but my own nonetheless. There was power in that; power I was unwilling to let go of once I experienced it. Failing to give love in the form of discipline and modeling and setting boundaries is a form of neglect which is often overlooked by parents and by authorities responsible for the care of children. I see it all the time in my work. I once had a social worker tell me that a child who did not attend school, had

nothing to eat at home, and had no rules or consequences at the age of thirteen, was not really at risk, because after all, even though he was in trouble, at least he wasn't a crack addict. The scary part for me in this conversation was the blank look in her eyes and the total conviction in what she was saying. Did she really believe this? Was this an example of a caring adult, capable of making life decisions for a child who was supposed to be under her watchful eye? All I could say was, "You're right, he's not a crack addict – yet. I'll just wait for that to happen and then he'll be worth helping." After all, there's always room for another adolescent druggie. It sounds a little bitter, but I have a long history with social workers in my career and in my own life, and I have learned over time that the ones who truly care and willing to take the necessary risks for the welfare of the child are few and far between.

According to Garbarino and Gilliam (1980), neglect, which is a passive form of abuse, is far more prevalent than physical abuse. Neglect results in more cases of severe physical harm than any other form of abuse, including physical abuse (Trocme, et al., 2003). Often the attitude that I see regarding neglect is one which is determined by the age of the child. When a child is small and helpless, people are more willing to become involved and to try to help the child in need. Often the approach is superficial, supplying school lunches to those who have nothing to eat, or coats to those who have nothing to wear to shelter them from the cold. Although this is a kind and thoughtful gesture, one which was not available in my own youth, it is still just a temporary fix for an ongoing problem. It does not address the various sources of the problem, whether that is an uncaring parent or a government too caught up in its own wealth to see the suffering of those under its care. This consistent failure to address the source of the problem allows

children who live with neglect to become adolescents who live with neglect. The saddest part of this is the change in attitude which these children must learn to endure. They are seen by the world as fledgling adults who are in some way responsible for their circumstances and who should have the wherewithal to cope with and change their situation. Since these are the children who often exhibit undesirable attitudes and behaviours, they are further ostracized from the community and are overlooked by those who are in a position to offer help. Difficult adolescents are often viewed with suspicion and are criticized for their role in their own struggles. This often leads to a cynical and untrusting perspective on the part of the adolescent, and they become unwilling to share their stories, as they know their perspective and motivation will be questioned, and they often reach a point where they no longer seek help from those in a position to offer it. They are left to their own devices and essentially become their own caretakers, long before they are capable of doing so. Some indicators of childhood trauma are fear or hatred towards authority, withholding and other forms of passive-aggression. These negative effects affect the individual's life as an adult and impair their ability to maintain a healthy, stable family life (Firestone, 1993). Child abuse can have long-term consequences which affect the victim's ability to function as an adult in all areas of life, including their self-image, relationships, overall affect, sexuality, and even professional pursuits (Garbarino, Guttman & Seeley, 1986).

Neglect is often the seed which grows into all of the other forms of abuse which are inflicted upon children. All abuse is a form of neglect, as it is a failure to meet the needs of the child. My own experience of neglect was the reality that neither of my parents were able to care for me. Although my mother's family stepped up and took the

responsibility of caring for me and my siblings, we were unwanted and we often felt it. Much of the suffering I endured as a direct result of that abandonment was emotional. “Bruises heal more quickly than the scars from emotional trauma,” (Ward & Bennet, 2003, p. 3). I felt alone in the world. I felt worthless and unloved, and as though I was a burden on all who were in my life. Feelings of insignificance lead to feelings of helplessness, which is a leading characteristic of suicide amongst youths (Lewis, 1994). Already, by the age of nine, I was deeply depressed and often thought of suicide as an option.

It was during this same time that the neglect I endured led me down another path which has scarred me in a way which has impacted my very being. It disrupted all sense of self-worth, of security, of trust. A close family member sexually abused me for two years, starting when I was nine, and continuing on until I returned to the care of my mother just before turning twelve. It is so strange how I have so many vivid memories, good and bad, of my childhood, yet so many of these are so vague and distorted. According to Terr (1983), when children are traumatized by violence, their memories can be distorted and their cognitive functions may be compromised. One of the most difficult things for me to deal with is the fact that I cannot seem to pinpoint exactly when the abuse began. I cannot remember the first time he touched me in a way that crossed the line from love and trust to filth and despair. I cannot remember that pivotal moment. Some might say that this is a blessing, that it would not be worth remembering, that it would be too painful, but for me, it is disempowering, as it was at that moment that my whole life, my whole self, changed forever, and I cannot even remember it. Perhaps I was in shock, I’m sure I was. I seem to remember most of what came after, but it is that first

moment that always eludes me, and I cannot imagine why. I don't even try to find that moment anymore, it is too far away, and I have grown to understand that if my soul has blocked it out and sealed it off forever, it is likely for my own protection.

I remember the way I could almost sense it coming on, feeling powerless to change it; hating myself for being unable to make it stop. I remember that it would often happen when I was babysitting my baby cousin, and how awful I felt that she would be right there in the room, watching, crying, needing me, and I could not go to her. I wondered how he could do what he was doing, as she sat there crying her little heart out, reaching out to be comforted, finding nobody. Incest objectifies the oppressed, and incest survivors often objectify themselves and are able then to disassociate themselves from the body, as though it were just a thing, rather than a true part of them (Lundgren, 1998). I would try to will myself away, but unlike others who I have heard recount how they would escape to another place and time, I was unable to, I was always there, trying not to be there.

My denial of the pain being inflicted upon me was absolute. I recall sitting in school and listening to my teacher talk about child abuse and how it was so important for children who were being abused to come forward and tell an adult they could trust. I trusted no one. How could I? A man I trusted more than any other had used that trust against me and exploited my helplessness. I even remembering thinking in those classes that it would be so horrible to have to endure that, knowing all the while that I was in fact enduring just that, but I never talked about it, not even inside myself. "Unlike many other forms of oppression, sexual abuse is private, secret, and isolated" (Lundgren, 1998, p. 5). Denial was the only means of survival. I had other family members who had suffered the

same fate, at the same hands, yet even with their openness and trust in me, I could not return the gesture. I would simply deny that anything was happening to me and do my best to help them avoid situations where they might be left alone with him. I helped them but there was nobody to help me.

By the time I was eleven, I considered the possibility of taking my own life on a daily basis. I could not live with myself anymore and I saw no means of escape, even when it was offered. Feelings of hopelessness often lead to suicidal ideations in children (Guetzloe, 2003). After suffering a breakdown, I was sent to see a doctor, who felt that I was in need of more intrusive help. A social worker came to my home and questioned me about what was happening to me in front of my whole family. I could not answer her. I blamed the absence of my mother, which in a sense, was at least partially true. It paid off, as I was eventually sent back to my mother and the abuse finally ended. The repercussions did not.

My new home proved to be unstable, as my new stepfather was an emotionally and physically abusive alcoholic. My focus became my social life. "Peer group support and acceptance is critically important to an adolescent and generally exerts the strongest influence over the values, attitudes and behaviour of most youth" (McNutt, 1994, p. 18). I befriended a girl who had suffered the same fate as my own at the hands of her stepfather. We were two twelve-year-old, damaged girls completely wrapped up in one another's lives. She revealed to me that the abuse she endured had started when she was only four. Her family was wealthy and she was a troubled child and was often viewed as the only imperfection in their perfect lives. She talked about her mother constantly putting her stepfather's needs in front of hers, she felt that her mother was aware, and did nothing to

stop it because of her dependence on this man and his money. She would discuss all of the lurid details with me, which always shocked me, as I was unable, and still am unable, to discuss the details of what had happened to me. Often incest survivors have difficulty with the telling of their own story (Gilmore, 1994). We were both obsessed with boys and we fed off of one another's promiscuity, often making it somewhat of an unspoken competition for who could be the most successful in a string of sexual conquests. It meant nothing to us. We took pride in the control we exercised over our own bodies and in the control we could exercise over others. "For an incest survivor, the body is the site of oppression, and so the body must be recuperated for healing to occur" (Lundgren, 1998, p. 3). We were not necessarily recuperating our bodies, or healing ourselves, but to take control of our sexuality in such an aggressive manner was an attempt to make ourselves stronger. Sharing similar experiences of abuse allows women to develop a collective consciousness to deal with their suffering and their healing (Lundgren, 1998).

Nearing the end of grade seven, we decided that we would tolerate our miserable lives no more. We made a pact to run away and make a new life for ourselves together, somewhere nobody knew us. By then we were no longer allowed to spend time together, as we were considered to be bad influences on one another (very true) and we decided to rebel against those who tried to control our lives, and did a poor job of it as far as we were concerned. We enlisted the help of our classmates in our plan to run away to the big city, but it proved to be our undoing when we did not show up for school one day and someone spilled the beans. After two days of shifting from house to house with older boys who supplied us with liquor and a place to stay, we made a run for it, disguised as boys, but we were found on the highway out of town by the RCMP and were forced to

return home. I remember feeling so defeated, yet still defiant, as my friend cried and I stared at the young officer in the rear-view mirror with an evil look in my eyes and warned him that my death would be in his hands, as I would kill myself if I was forced to return home. He ignored my threats and brought us to the station, where it took him twenty minutes to drag me down a short hallway to a holding room where we would first meet with a social worker and then our parents .

We sat in that room alone for a while, holding hands and drinking pineapple juice from a can we had packed in our belongings. We talked about running again and being more discreet this time. We talked about telling the truth, no matter what the cost. We would stand together. We fantasized about being taken from our homes and being put in a group home together, or maybe a foster home, either would suffice. The social worker didn't speak with us for long. She listened to our stories, my friend's of sexual abuse, mine of neglect and physical abuse. She took notes and seemed to look past us, not really hearing us at all. I felt a sinking feeling when she told us we would have to talk to our parents. We were separated with the assurance that we would be back together again shortly. I didn't want to let her go. I wanted to protect her. She smiled and assured me all would be well in the end. She was wrong.

When my family came in to speak to me their first reaction was one of relief that I had been found. I considered this to be comical, as I felt unwanted and unloved. When they denied my accusations of my suffering I exploded. In a blind rage I told them that I had been abused sexually when I was living in Labrador. The automatic reaction then and now was to label me as a liar. Accounts of incest survivors are often discredited and marginalized because their truth is different from that of the perpetrator's who is usually

part of the dominant groups in society (adult, male) (Lundgren, 1998), and in my case, my family was unwilling to admit that there was a predator amongst us.

In the end, my friend and I were forced to return to the lives we had fled unsuccessfully. We all stood in the lobby, her and her parents, me with mine. The social worker who had been assigned to take our stories stood shaking the hand of the man my friend had identified as her long-time abuser, calling him by his first name, apologizing for the trouble we had brought to his life – it turns out they were personal friends. I wanted to kill her; there was no point. My friend and I embraced and held one another tightly as we cried. We were defeated. As I began to leave her mother said in a calm, cold voice, “Look long and hard girls, because this is the last time you’ll be seeing each other.”

It was a long time before I saw her again. She was moved to a different school and kept under close watch by her mother, and also I’m sure, by her stepfather. I later heard that she had been kicked out of her home and was living in a group home. I went to visit her one Saturday afternoon and asked how she had finally managed to get out. She told me that after all else had failed, she devised a fool-proof plan. She had been involved with a twenty-one-year-old man for a while when she invited him over to her parents place while they were at work. She knew their schedule and was confined to the house, responsible for all of the cleaning and cooking as part of her punishment for shaming the family. She knew when they would come through the door, and when they did, they found her in their bed, having sex with an older man. She thought it was funny that the same social worker who had stood in my way was in charge of finding her a place to live from there on in. I remember thinking how much the group home was like a prison, how

she had no privacy and no freedom, and how much she loved it, because finally she was safe. She had won. That was the last time I saw her. I could move on, knowing she would be okay. I've thought of her often, and about three years ago she managed to track me down. I couldn't believe it because my name had changed and I had moved so far from home. She told me that she was happily married and that they didn't have much, but that they had five children, and that was all they really needed. It was so wonderful to know that she had finally found true happiness.

My relationship with this girl and the behaviours we engaged in, especially regarding our own bodies, has been a source of shame for me ever since. Following my involvement with her, I continued on with activities which put me at risk, not only physically, but emotionally as well. "Studies have conclusively shown that exploitation of the child as a sexual object constitutes a severe infringement on the child's boundaries, leading to ego fragmentation and later to addictive behaviour and dissociative disorders" (Firestone, 1993, p. 8), other researchers concur (Cavaiola & Schiff, 1988; Conte, 1988; and Coons, 1986). Rejecting the theory that abused children often follow a path of self-destruction which is marked by violence, illegal practices, social problems, and promiscuity, I spent years explaining away my own behaviours as a *personal choice*. I related my behaviours to my personality characteristics, which made it much more difficult to avoid self-judgment, blame, and shame. Unwilling to admit that I was a product of my environment, I chose to believe that my actions were free will, that they were life experiences I had chosen because I had wanted them. With wisdom and experience comes the knowledge that many of my actions were a direct response to the abuse I had endured. I see the same patterns emerge time and time again with my

students, as they place themselves in harm's way in an attempt to be independent and grown-up, never realizing at the time that their actions came more from helplessness and skewed moral development. Even with this understanding, it is impossible to outrun the shame of my own actions. I have come to the conclusion that it is much easier to live with the damage inflicted upon me by others than to accept and understand the damage I did to myself. Even though I now see my behaviours as a desperate search for basic needs such as love and acceptance, I cannot deny the shame I feel at the choices I have made. Once I gave myself away, it was very difficult to find a way back to who I was. I felt lost and alone, different from the rest of the world, and the numbers of others who face similar struggles are of no comfort, because I had to learn to live only with myself.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, neglect is the seed of many abuses. This is also the case for self-abuse. Many of the negative choices I made in my life could have been avoided with the implementation of appropriate boundaries. From a lack of boundaries and strong moral values came my own involvement with high-risk behaviours such as drug abuse, promiscuity, and violence. I had the attitude that I would never live past my teen years and so I had nothing to lose – I would try anything. “Teens tend to view life as an all or nothing proposition” (Dickens, 1998, p. 15); this was my attitude, and for the most part, I lived up to it. There was always that little voice though, that would not allow me to overstep certain lines. That part of me was not willing to give up hope and it hung on tightly to the dreams of my childhood. It was because of this voice that I did not partake in particularly addictive and dangerous substances and that I engaged in safe sex activities. If I truly was on a path of self-destruction, if I had given up all hope, I would not have concerned about these issues at all. According to Khahn and Lowe (1999), most

youth, across diverse social groups and circumstances, can be optimistic on some level about their own futures. It was the hope that against all odds I might overcome the struggles of my youth which kept certain demons at bay. Part of me was waiting to see how things might turn out, and if they did happen to turn out in my favour, I wanted to be well enough to enjoy them. This was never a conscious realization though, just a personal insight into why I held back with some of the risks which I had considered in my times of greatest difficulty. According to Werner and Smith (1992), any youth has the potential to develop into a confident, competent and caring adult, regardless of her circumstances. I am so thankful now that the tiny, hopeful voice did not suffocate under the immense pressure of defining myself as some sort of unfeeling, uncaring, destructive rebel. Now the quiet voice is the strong one, and although the rebel still lives, she is under control and still proud, despite her confinement.

One of the most difficult things for me to deal with now is the questions which begin to emerge from my own son. His life is one of comfort and stability and he has no concept of what it means to go without the basic needs of a child and no understanding of what it means to be alone in the world. He asks me more and more often as he gets older, what my own childhood was like. He asks what it was like for me to grow up and whether or not I was happy. I walk a fine line between sheltering him from facts which I know are far too upsetting for him to handle, and being honest so that he can truly know who I am, and so that he can at least empathize with the fact that not everyone is as lucky as he is in life. I never want him to have the idea that the lifestyle he is accustomed to is what everyone has – I want him to be socially conscious – I want him to develop

tolerance and acceptance in different people. Through all of these things, I want him to understand and appreciate what he has in his life.

With my students, my aim is not to push them towards a middle-class lifestyle, as this is not necessarily what they want for themselves. Instead, my goal is to help them to see what it is they are capable of. Individuals and organizations are crucial in providing protection, guidance and hope for youth (Benard, 1997; Bergstrom, Cleary & Peacock, 2002). I want them to hold tight to their dreams and goals and to realize that they must encourage their own little voice of hope. Attempting to assimilate young minds into a world which they do not understand or identify with, risks a complete rejection of the value of self-development. They reject the notion of becoming more like “the norm” because they want to be themselves, even if that isn’t necessarily the norm. Adolescents fear that they will not be successful in a threatening and unpredictable world (Dickens, 1998). The key is to allow them to choose who it is they wish to become, out of who it is they already are; to help them to accept themselves and their life as it is; to teach effective and simple strategies such as skill-building and goal-setting so that they can have the necessary tools for achieving their dreams; and to support them in developing their own resilience, which allows children to overcome the detrimental effects of adversity (Seokhoon, 1997; Grotberg, 1995). According to Grotberg (1995):

Resilience is important because it is the human capacity to face, to overcome and be strengthened by or even transformed by the adversities of life. Everyone faces adversities; no one is exempt. With resilience, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs (p. 10).

I found those things in my own life, with the help of others who cared along the way and I have become the woman I want to be, and continue to develop the woman I can be, without ever losing sight of the girl I once was. She will always be a part of me, and as much as I must live with and accept my own shame for my past wrongs, I would not change a thing. It all serves a purpose and there is always a lesson to be learned. It was the bad parts along with the good, which laid the foundation for who I am today.

Journal Entry

This was another chapter I almost chose not to include in this project, not because I felt it wasn't relevant, but because I was so afraid to open up this part of my past. I was afraid to share it with others for reasons I have already discussed, judgment being the primary one, but more than anything, I was afraid to venture down this path myself. I knew I would have to go it alone. I knew I would be weak and I feared for my own emotional safety. Survivors of abuse often regard autobiographical writing as threatening, as it involved recounting and therefore, reliving the pain (Lundgren, 1998). I knew that the injured little girl inside of me had been waiting a long time for the chance to be given a voice; I was more afraid of her than I was of any of the people who had hurt me in the past because she knew me better than anyone. I think somewhere deep down I knew that once I let her speak, she would never allow me to go back to the surreal existence I had created, she would force me to look at myself, to look at who I had become, and to realize that I was still lying to myself, as hard as I fought for truth and sincerity in my life. I wanted to keep her shut up, but all it took was one word and she was free. Suddenly, she wasn't as scary to me anymore. I realized how much had missed her. I

realized how strong she was and how much I need her. I realized she had been there all along, hidden in my thoughts and in my heart.

It is difficult for me to tell my story of hurt for many reasons. It is difficult for me to accept the reaction of others who care about me. Often I see in their eyes that the pain that I had to endure affects them deeply and they are sympathetic for my sake, but this is not what I want. I do not want to be seen as a victim. I have spent my life constructing a tough, unbreakable veneer which I cling to like a safety blanket. I have come to understand that I see my own victimization during my youth as a weakness. I have also realized that attributing my own victimization to my own faults means that I continue to blame myself for what happened to me, especially in regards to the sexual abuse which I suffered, regardless of the tough talk I use when referring to my abuser. In the end, I wonder if I will always hold myself responsible for failing to protect myself against harm.

Although I gave attention to some of the stories of abuse that I endured, I purposefully left out any detailed account of the sexual abuse. I have never told this story to anyone. I don't think that it is that I am afraid of telling this story. It is more the case that I refuse to give it voice, it does not deserve a voice. I do not see what is to be gained from the detailing of what I endured, other than sensationalizing my own suffering, something I am unwilling to do. There are other survivors who are autobiographical writers who also refuse to devote any attention to the scene of incest itself (Lundgren, 1998). I am not sure that I will ever share this story. I did not have a problem talking about the fact that it happened to me, but that is as far as I am willing to go. Perhaps if I

am truly honest with myself, I am afraid to give voice to those memories, I have encountered the coming to life that writing gives to memories.

Chapter Ten: Sticks and Stones...

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” I recall reciting this childhood rhyme to deflect the neighbourhood bullies of my youth, and then I would march home defiantly, lock myself in my room, and cry my eyes out. The rhyme was a lie, because the names hurt most of all. It is difficult enough to ignore the cruel taunts of mean-spirited children, but when the practice of being labeled by peers, family, and so many others becomes a pervasive part of development, it is the names that are inflicted that do the most damage to the self-image. Bruises and cuts can be easily forgotten, but the understanding that people think you are a lesser being somehow never escapes your memory. It scars you for life, even when you think you have recovered from the blows.

I have been called many names in my time. I have endured countless labels, bestowed upon me from countless sources, most of who probably never stop to consider the effect their harsh words had upon the formation of my personality. Even now that I am an adult, independent and strong, I still must endure the apparent need of others to place me in the box of their choosing, with a bright sticker attached to inform interested parties of my categorization. Usually there is truth somewhere in the label, but never the whole truth. That is what bothers me the most, the tunnel vision that allows others to attempt to pigeonhole me, to say that I am one thing, which naturally disregards all of the many other facets of the person I am. I can be aggressive at times, but I am also a sensitive and compassionate person. I am an extrovert, who is childish and silly, but I am also a deep thinker with a shy side, and I can be wise beyond my years. I am many things. I am proud of most of those things, but it has taken a lot of work to find that pride in any

part of myself, because over time, the labels begin to fill my head and those that are repeated, are especially hard to escape.

Many of the children I have worked with in my career have endured the same barrage of labels which serve to identify for others which box it is that they apparently belong in. It is so difficult to witness their fight against the names they were assigned; it is even more difficult to watch them succumb and to accept what it is that others see of them. For these children, the label becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy which is difficult if not impossible to overcome. According to Fine (1990), the labeling of children functions to place the focus on the child, deflecting attention from the source of their problems, which are often systemic inequities which are beyond their control (Leroy, 2001).

The labels assigned by peers can be devastating for a child or young adult. Most of the children I know have endured the pain of being teased and stereotyped. The children I have worked with have been labeled, “freak; loser; slut; stupid,” the list goes on. Some run from the labels, some accept them, some do everything they can to change them, often to no avail. As shattering as these labels can be to a developing young person, often it is the labels assigned by the adults in their lives which are the most devastating, as they seem to hold more weight, especially if they come from authority figures and most definitely if they are assigned with medical reasoning. Biological pathologies draw attention away from systemic inadequacies by focusing on stereotypical notions which connote inherent physical and mental deficiencies in marginalized groups (Schissel, 1997). These labels are the most difficult to avoid or change, and many children seem to resign themselves to a life sentence with their label, and often the prescriptions which go with it, and shape their destinies according to what the parameters of their designation

suggests. I have come to recognize this surrendering of oneself to the label they were given when the child no longer refers to their label as something which is a part of them or something they must live with, but instead adopts it as the defining aspect of their personality. The label becomes their identity. I call this the list of “I am,” “I am ADHD... I am FASD... I am mentally ill...,” rather than “I have.” These children become their diagnosis, and carry this distinction with them throughout their formative years, and often into adulthood. What these children are desperately in need of is respect for their individuality, as “the honour of being respected replaces the stigma of being diagnosed” (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001, p. 9).

I was fortunate enough to escape the destiny of a diagnosis, not that there weren't attempts to assign one. When I was twelve, I had a breakdown at school and ended up in the hospital with a psychiatric designation. I was watched night and day for fear I might harm myself. I was questioned about my taste in music and its influence on me. To this day I am unsure as to exactly how much time I spent there, as I spent most of my time sedated, unaware of what was going on around me and the people who came and went. It seemed like an eternity. Upon discharge I was assigned to a psychiatrist. He was intent on determining the label which would best fit me, throwing around words such as manic-depressive and schizophrenic. Luckily for me, my mother was against such labels and against me being on any kind of psychotropic medication. According to her I was just a morose, attention-seeking teenager with a dramatic flair. In many ways she was right. I was depressed, not for any biological reason, but because of my circumstances. During adolescence, individuals begin to review the previous stages of life; this can be very confusing for the adolescent who has no stable family, which leads to identity confusion,

distrust, a loss of control, feelings of inferiority, and little opportunity for success (McNutt, 1994). I was seeking attention, because I needed it. As for being dramatic, I would take it a step further, to say that my drama was fuelled by a keen understanding of the signs and symptoms of various psychological disorders. I was able to take the attention away from the reality of my circumstances by making my problems a personality issue, a medical condition, rather than a normal, human reaction to trying conditions. I am grateful now that my mother resisted biological explanations for my problems, although at the time I resented her for it. She helped me to dodge the bullet of a life of prescription drugs and psychological intervention.

What my mother couldn't protect me from was the labeling I endured which had nothing to do with biology or psychology, but had everything to do with judgment. It began with my family. I look back at all the times I was not spoken to but around, of people speaking as though I was not in the room to hear their hurtful words. I recall some of my cousins, who were my closest friends, being told they were not allowed to spend time with me because I was a *bad seed*, they went as far as to say that I was evil, and to disallow me from coming into their home. I had never done anything to hurt any of them, not even to disrespect them in any way, but they made their hatred for me known and in time I came to accept it as the norm.

It is very difficult for me to endure when one of my students is in the same position of being spoken negatively about when they are in the room. It is especially difficult when it is someone who is supposed to love and protect them unconditionally. To see a child draw their eyes to the floor and put their hands over their ears as their own parents discuss their bad attitude and negative behaviours and make comments about

being fed up and ready to give up on them is difficult. My first reaction is to address the child directly and to ask for their input, at which point they seem to go into a state of shock, having grown accustomed to having no voice and to just being accused and berated. In order for children to understand themselves and be involved in their problem solving they must have true freedom of feelings and thoughts. It is their actions which they must be taught to control because of external consequences, not their natural inner-processes (Firestone, 1993). I often wonder if these parents ever take the time to accept their own role in their child's behaviour. Children need parents who are real in their reactions and interaction, who are emotionally available and responsive, and who genuinely care (Firestone, 1993). I am not naïve in recognizing the responsibility of the child for her own actions, but I am also aware that all behaviours have a purpose, and that behaviours do not appear out of thin air, they are cultivated and formed by the environment in which the individual develops. When people comment that it takes a community to raise a child, they often say it with idealistic undertones, forgetting that it also takes a community to neglect a child. Labeling and blaming the child absolves adults of responsibility and justifies the lack of care and concern given to those children who are so desperately in need of guidance and affection. The labeling of youth creates stigma and self-fulfilling prophecies, and draws attention away from the source of the problem by placing inappropriate attention on the individual (Natriello, McGill & Pallas, 1990; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001). Adolescents are most at risk of being lost, as they begin to lose the endearing features of childhood and take on the callous characteristics of damaged young adults. They push people away and many of those people are all too happy to take their leave.

Young people who are given labels to live by have one of two options: to accept and foster their label, living their life according to the expectations that others have of them; or to reject their label, seeking out their identity in their own self-awareness and development. Both options have risks and benefits for the individual. Those who accept their label, especially a clinical label, are often more willing to accept help from and seem to perceive themselves less negatively. Unfortunately, for these people, acceptance often also means living within the confines of their label and struggling to free themselves from its inherent meaning in their lives. Those who reject the label they have been assigned, often seek to disprove the image others have of them and to rise above their obstacles; however, they are also often cynical and distrusting of those who take an interest in assisting them with their problems and they often isolate themselves from those who wish to support them the most.

Through my own experiences with judgment and labeling, I have learned the importance of accepting people for who they are. Labels connote guilt and blame, which are obstacles to the development of resiliency and healing in children. Aboriginal cultures seek to eliminate guilt and blame from the healing process, which means eliminating labels and focusing instead on needs (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000). Children especially can sense whether or not they are accepted by others and are quick to retreat and to withdraw if they sense that they are looked down upon by another individual, especially if that individual is in a position of authority. Teachers must be especially careful about making value judgments about their students, and must be aware of their own notions of what is normal and what is right, which is a direct result of their own experiences. It is not the task of the teacher to impose their own beliefs and values upon

their students; nor is it their right to assume that their perspective is somehow more valuable than that of their students. Problems associated with issues such as hunger, poverty, racism, and violence are magnified in environments that have specific notions of normality which do not include the people who live with these issues (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000). All individuals have a set of experiences and beliefs which shape how they perceive and react to the world; it is not appropriate to try to assimilate those who are different, but instead to find a way to work side by side, to understand, accept, and progress with healthy relationships in a diverse community.

Journal Entry

I have a neighbour who enjoys roaming the neighbourhood, sticking his nose in one person's business after another. He often comments to me that he doesn't know how I can stand to work with all of the drug-abusing derelicts that I spend my time with. I have learned to control my reactions over time and I simply smile and tell him that I love my work and my students and go on with my day. I hear comments like this more often than I care to admit. I am often shocked at how the most seemingly open-minded and educated of individuals can be so ignorant to the realities of others. It is much easier for them to simply put their noses in the air and look down at the children I care so deeply for.

I was judged in my own youth. I'm sure I still am by some people, in fact I know I am. The pain of being labeled for things I did was bad enough, being judged for things which were beyond my control was far worse. Writing about this topic made me realize the extent of residual suffering I have experienced as a result of the callous

thoughtlessness and ignorance of others. Sometimes I deserved to be judged; perhaps I am my own worst critic.

At this point in my life, it is far easier for me to deal with the opinions of others. When someone has a negative opinion of me and I am asked by a friend how it makes me feel, my response is often, "I consider the source", meaning that I do not care for the opinion of those who would pass judgment on me without really knowing who I am and what I have lived with. Children and adolescents are not so prepared to deal with the negative image others might have of them; their self-image is often fragile enough as it is. I have realized that I am far more protective of the children in my care than I am of myself. The best I can do is to be honest with my students about the cruel reality of our society with all its ignorance and stereotypes. The best I can do for them is give them the opportunity to voice what they have been through and to discuss openly why it is that some people are so unwilling to accept diversity; this has always proven to be an effective strategy, as it takes the focus off of the one being judged and puts the responsibility where it belongs. I am not naïve however that it is often my actions which leads others to place judgment, and I also discuss this openly with my students, encouraging them to accept responsibility for their own choices and the ensuing consequences, and to change those things which they are not happy with. This is what I have tried to do in my own life; my autobiographical inquiry was an exercise in just that.

Chapter Eleven: Look At Me

The other day I brought my students to the mountains for a ski trip. One of the girls complained throughout the day about what was wrong with her; worried about what might go wrong with her; and rehearsed her history of previous ailments. It irritated me (as it always does) and made me laugh at the same time. With this girl, as with others, it is the personality characteristics which remind me of myself which seem to irritate me the most. I'm not sure if this is because of a sense of guilt and shame over my past behaviours, or if it is because of my insight into the motives behind this type of attention-seeking behaviour. I was an attention-seeker myself; I still am.

Hypochondria; defined by Webster's Dictionary (1978) as a "the persistent conviction that one is or is likely to become ill" (p. 108), seems to be a fairly common characteristic amongst the students I work with, whether they feel their illness is biological or mental; it is often both, as it was for me. Hypochondria can be seen, therefore, as an illness in itself, or as a symptom of depression. According to Dr. Joseph Mercola (2004), hypochondria is caused by "holding onto pent up negative feelings or not dealing with traumatic issues from the past. Seeking out medical diagnoses are avoidance tactics, which act as a form of coping mechanism." His perspective is one of the individual's avoidance of *past* issues; I believe it also involves the avoidance of issues the individual is dealing with in the *present*; especially if the individual feels a need for increased attention from friends, family and authority figures. In an effort to appear to be in control and to present as mature individuals, adolescents will hide their problems and mistakes from adults rather than ask for help (Kaplan, 1993).

I remember when I was maybe five or six-years-old; I was put in the hospital and treated for dehydration, although the cause escapes me now. What I remember clearly was the positive experience I had while I was there. I shared a room with a boy who was quite ill and had been there for a while. His parents brought him piles of candy which he kept in a trunk at the foot of his bed. We shared candy and talked and played all day, wearing ourselves into exhaustion. The nurses were incredibly kind to us, making us feel right at home. I remember thinking how nice and clean it was in my room and how good the food was (now that's saying something – good hospital food – I must have been deprived). I also remember how difficult it was for me to leave. I didn't realize it then, but looking back, that experience was the beginning of my own history with hypochondria. I enjoyed the attention that being sick got me.

As a child I was plagued with illness, some real, some imaginary – the line was blurred. I recall cancer being my disease of choice, likely because of my experience with it when a loved-one was diagnosed and treated when I was only eight. I witnessed the cohesion it brought to her family and the intensity of the emotions we all shared. I would convince myself that any little physical problem I had was life-threatening in some way and would terrorize my closest friends with the possibility that I might be dying.

As I got older, and suffered depression prior to and during adolescence, as do ten to fifteen per cent of all children and adolescents (Guetzloe, 2003; USDHHS, 2000), my imaginary illnesses became more focused on my mental state. I would research various mental illnesses and would become convinced that I was suffering a number of them. My stay in the hospital when I was twelve only served to solidify this suspicion for me and I played the part of the mentally unstable patient very well. However, with this type of

attention-seeking, the line between playing sick and being sick is very thin. Regardless of what was real and what was in my head, or merely an act, anyone willing to put themselves in the position of being diagnosed and treated for a real illness for the purpose of receiving attention has a real problem. Were it not for my mother's insistence that it was all a ploy for attention and that I did not need a diagnosis or treatment, I shudder to think of the powerful psychotropic drugs I might still be taking today, and how they would have affected the chemistry and development of my growing brain. It makes me afraid for all of those children who put themselves in the same position - or whose parents put them in the position - of being treated for serious illnesses with serious drugs. As the incidence of assigning medical pathologies to at-risk youth increases, so to does psycho-pharmaceutical medical intervention for these individuals (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001). The effects could be devastating. Misdiagnosis, especially of mental illness, is already such an overwhelming problem in our society; I can only imagine how the problem would be intensified by those seeking a diagnosis at the cost of their own health, perhaps never realizing how they are jeopardizing themselves. Although it is important to identify youth in the school population who are at-risk so that they may receive timely intervention, it is also important to recognize that labeling may cause stigmatization, self-fulfilling prophecies, or inappropriate attention on particular individuals (Natriello, McGill, & Pallas, 1990; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000). Labeling can be dangerous for the individual and should be avoided in favour of building resiliency from individual strengths to prevent problems arising from the presence of risk factors (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2004). The development of resilience in children

allows them to be socially competent, and to develop effective problem-solving skills, as well as a sense of purpose and future (Seokhoon, 1997).

In my work I have come to realize the significance of imaginary illness in all its forms, from overblown injury, to self-diagnosed allergies, to mild and serious imagined illness, and the use of unnecessary drugs (often supported by caregivers). Although it irritates me to the core because of my own history, I recognize that it is a symptom of an underlying emotional problem that needs to be addressed. Often, when the child is given the opportunity to openly express their concerns and feelings and to work towards dealing with their issues, they exhibit fewer and fewer signs of hypochondriac behaviour, as they are finding the attention they seek, for the reasons they need it. It is important for teachers to recognize this type of behaviour or character trait as a signpost for deeper concerns, especially when dealing with at-risk youth.

As an adult, I suffer with the knowledge that my past behaviours were an indication that I took my own good health for granted. I have worked hard and played hard over my life, and with age comes the reality that some of my lifestyle choices might eventually catch up with me. Even worse is the superstition I have that all of my wishing my good health away might come back to haunt me now that I do appreciate my health and live the life I have. I live in fear of the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Cancer especially terrifies me because I never really took it seriously and never stopped to consider what it was like for those who really did have to suffer with such a terrible sickness. My thesis supervisor asked me if I felt that writing this chapter and admitting my wrongs might be a way of cleansing myself and making up for the past, to wipe the slate clean in a sense. I told her that I have been doing that for years in admitting to others

what my past was and the behaviours I exhibited in my youth. Yet, there is still a sense of shame and an awful feeling of foreboding that sticks in my throat, like bad karma for wrongs done in this life.

Closely connected to concocting illnesses for attention was concocting outlandish lies for the same purpose. I lied about everything to everyone, to the point where the lie became the first option, above and beyond the truth, even if there was no real reason for it. For me, lying was not only a way of seeking attention from others; it was also a means of constructing an alternate reality for myself. I did not like the life I had and creating a new history allowed me to feel, if only temporarily, that I was someone I was not. What became scary for me was that after a while, I came to realize that I had lied for so long that I no longer separated fact from fiction. I made the decision to stop lying when I was fourteen, just after leaving home. I decided that if I were to build a new life, it would have to be one based on reality and on truth. I decided that if I disliked my reality so much that I was willing to deny it, that it was my responsibility to change that reality to something I could accept, live with, and even be proud of.

An enormous sense of guilt is still with me because of the lies of my past. I try to make up for it by being as honest as I can be in the present, often at a cost to myself and others. Honesty is not necessarily always the best policy, especially if it harms yourself or others, but I find it difficult to be any other way, especially with myself. This narrative inquiry is an attempt at honesty, yet I fear even in this heartfelt writing that I keep much of the truth to myself, sharing only what I feel the reader needs to know. Since the purpose of this inquiry is as much for myself as it is for others, I recently embarked on

personal journal writing to accompany this inquiry, so that I might be able to track the effects that writing this inquiry has on me.

Many of my students have the same issues with honesty that I had. They lie for many of the same reasons, whether it is for attention or to hide the truth of their lives, sometimes maybe because it is all they know, and what they have learned from their own parents. Whatever the reasons, the lies embroil them in a sticky web of consequences and often alienate them from their peers and authority figures, who are often able to see through such outlandish and transparent fallacies. One of the things I push for, both with my students and with clients I have counseled in the past, is the seeking and acceptance of the truth in their own lives; although the truth can be very painful at times, it can also heal the wounds hidden by the dirty bandages of dishonesty. Although it can be difficult to reserve judgment, especially for those who value honesty as a virtue, it is important for those who work with children to recognize the motives behind the behaviour and to work towards dealing with those motives, rather than just confronting the child on behaviours. Such confrontation is only a minute and often ineffective part of the process in teaching children the value of truth.

Many of the means for deviant behaviours of my youth were attention-seeking and an attempt at belonging. It is why I began smoking, drinking and drugs. It is why I fought and intimidated others. It is why I disrespected authority figures and often made a spectacle of myself. According to Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, an individual becomes involved in delinquent acts when their bond to society is weak or broken. I longed for the approval of my peers, and often found it through questionable activities. According to Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2000), "the absence of emotional or

financial support (eg. friends, employment) may lead to efforts to gain such support through antisocial behaviour” (p. 2). I longed for the prying of adults who might be able to help me, but who rarely did. I felt that if I pushed the limits far enough, someone might think to question why I would and why I wasn’t being stopped and then they might do something to stop it. If they didn’t, I felt I didn’t have anything to lose. In the end, my deviant behaviours continued until I decided they would end, and that wasn’t until I was able to look out for my own best interests and cared less about the approval of others and more about my own standards for what I thought good moral behaviour should be.

Children who take on the identity of a rebel often do so for the same reasons that I did. They seek the admiration and/or fear of their peers, and to disassociate themselves from authorities who were ineffective in improving the conditions of their lives and in providing the support these children so desperately need. According to Rutler’s 1989 study of troubled families, poor relations between children and their parents was a strong indicator of conduct disorders in the children, as “social relations among family members are the best predictors of behavioural outcomes for children,” (Seokhoon, 1997, p. 5). According to Firestone (1988), “the origins of self-defeating behaviour and a good deal of personal misery were directly traceable to harmful operations within the traditional family structure” (p. 1). Children are less likely to be delinquent if they are strongly attached to their parents (Hirschi, 1969); unfortunately, children who engage in delinquent behaviours often damage their relationship with their parents (Thornberry, 1987). The scariest part of this type of attention-seeking behaviour is not necessarily the motives behind it or the reasons it came about, but the vast array of possible consequences for the individual. If you are lucky enough to survive a dangerous, deviant

lifestyle, and to be strengthened by your scars, you may be endowed with street smarts, and a few good stories to tell. Many are not that lucky and suffer the consequences of their actions in the present, and often for the rest of their lives. Children and adolescents who engage in risky behaviours are willing to take the risks they do because they are able to disassociate themselves from the possible consequences of their actions. Crucial factors associated with at-risk youth are poverty, ethnic minority status, single parent families, parents' education, inadequate housing, and child abuse (Evans, 1995; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001). Children who feel their lives are hopeless are at an even greater risk, as they feel they have nothing to lose. In an age where almost twenty-eight per cent of Canadian children are "vulnerable to emotional, behavioural, social, or academic problems" (Zeesman, 2001, p. 5), where deviance and rebellion develop at a younger and more vulnerable age, where moral values are blurred by the imposed values of the electronic age, and where parents are relinquishing their responsibility to discipline and guide their own children, it becomes all the more important for schools and other community organizations to take some responsibility in fostering character development; in providing alternative, positive opportunities; and in supporting those who have already gone astray, on a path back to a more productive and meaningful existence. Many at-risk youth feel their needs are not acknowledged or addressed in school (Ellis, Hart & Small-McGinley, 1998); this problem needs to be ratified. This is a difficult undertaking, but without it, all of the education in the world will falter under the weight of negative social conditions.

For me, one of the worst conditions I endured was the exploitation of my own sexuality. I used my sexuality to attract attention from the opposite sex in the obvious

manner; I used it to attract attention from other girls as a show of power, that I was somehow different from them, that I was more mature and more experienced; I used it to attract attention from adults by flaunting it in their faces, knowing it went against the normal moral code, knowing they were powerless to stop it. In a sense, I used it to attract attention away from the more vulnerable part of myself as well. Focusing on sex and sexual power allowed me to be in control of the identity I created for myself and others; it allowed me to take control of my own body and to exert control over others, but that sense of control was false.

When I teach my students about sex and sexuality, I focus on the usual subjects such as puberty, STDs, birth control, and healthy choices. What I also focus on with brutal honesty are the possible social and personal consequences for poor choices. With my students I discuss the implications of getting a bad reputation; the emotional effect of giving yourself to someone, only to have regrets later; the possible effect of choices made now on the future, especially in how you see yourself now, and how you hope to see yourself in the future – will you live to regret your actions? Many of the young girls I have worked with who show the same characteristics and actions that I did at their age already regret their actions in the present tense, yet they struggle to make different choices, as they have internalized their sexual identity as available and promiscuous to such an extent that it is how they define themselves – without that, what do they have? It is demoralizing and maddening when men objectify women; it is sad and self-defeating when women objectify themselves. It is harder to live with what you do to yourself than to live with what others have done to you.

When I made the list of my attention-seeking behaviours, I purposefully left out overachieving. Although I recognized this as a common trait amongst gross attention-seekers, I felt that I did not necessarily share this characteristic. I considered my schooling and recognized that for the most part, although I always did well in school, I had a very nonchalant attitude towards schoolwork and had to exert little effort for acceptable results. I did what I had to. In reconsidering though, it is as an adult that this attention-seeking behaviour has come about. It is in the continued pursuit of self-betterment, although for the most part that is for myself, but not completely; it is in my workaholicism, which I rarely acknowledge because I am able to balance it so well with playing hard; and it is in my pursuit to be one of the hardest-working, if not highest-achieving in all areas of my life, from work to play, to parenthood. In most ways I see this as a positive trait, however, I must always be vigilant that my motives are pure and that I do not take on more than I can handle, or give up so much of myself that there is nothing left for those I love, or for myself. I never wanted to be an overachiever, it goes against the rebellious side of my personality, because it is people-pleasing behaviour in a sense, but there it is, I am what I am, even when it is conflicting, and I sense in time I will only get worse, because I do strive to do my best, in work and in play.

The one aspect of attention-seeking behaviour which I have always exhibited, which I fully accept and enjoy is my sense of humour, which often places me at the butt of the joke. I was the class clown in school, and I loved the attention it brought me from my peers. I am still the silly and childish girl, always cracking jokes whenever the opportunity arises, at work, in Tae Kwon Do, with my friends. I am drawn to others who are like me in this way and appreciate those who put themselves on the line for a laugh.

The class clowns were my favourite students, as I love to laugh, and can accept their behaviour as humour, rather than disrespect for the learning environment. I embrace humour as a positive medium for providing an open and caring pedagogical atmosphere. I love a good joke or a funny remark, even if it is at my expense (probably especially if it is at my expense). No matter how old I get, or how much I accomplish, I believe I will always be a comic at heart and I am glad for it.

The various types of attention-seeking behaviours I have exhibited have both served the purpose and failed miserably to achieve their goal. My behaviours always succeeded in drawing attention to myself, some good, and some bad. At the same time, they have set me apart and alienated me from others, as I have often witnessed with my students. They have served to bring people nearer, but only at arm's length. Sadly enough, most of the attention which is drawn by these sorts of behaviours is only temporary and superficial, as they do not truly show the identity of the individual, only pieces of them, pieces they choose for others to see, and so they are most often shallow. Although adolescents are preoccupied with their own identity, they are often uncertain about their own feelings, interests, abilities, priorities and goals (Dickens, 1998; Kaplan, 1993). If what you seek is relationships which are real and genuine and deep, then you must let the images you have made for others fall away and reveal your true self - strengths and weaknesses - and you must be willing to risk rejection that may result from such authenticity. This being authentic is scary for someone who has spent her life building walls and protecting herself with fallacies and half-truths. But based on my own experience, the rewards are endless. The development of character which is multi-faceted and multi-layered is perhaps the greatest reward of all because instead of constantly

seeking the approval of others, I can seek and sometimes find that approval and love within myself. That is the most honest and real thing a person can have.

Journal Entry

Writing this chapter helped me to realize that attention-seeking behaviours and dishonesty are some of my greatest annoyances in life. The reason for this became quite obvious to me as I prepared to write about this particular topic; it is because this is what annoys me the most about myself, although I am not guilty of these things anymore, I still include them as a part of my identity, because I took part in them so much when I was young.

Although this chapter was mostly an afterthought, brought about by the annoyance one of my students was causing me with her endless whining over non-existent ailments, it ended up being one of the most transformative for me. I had already come to understand that I hated these things about myself and my past, and understood the depths of my shame through my remembering and my writing, but what I came to consider as a result of writing about this topic was that as much as I valued genuine sincerity and honesty, I was a hypocrite. I was not leading a life which was genuine or honest. My own identity was a sham, not that I had ever even realized it – it had not been a conscious decision. I viewed my own dishonesty with myself as an attempt to transcend the person I had once been, as though I had been so terrible. Once I came to realize this, I could not turn back, because my disdain for the life lived without truth was real and steadfast. I knew that there were changes to be made, even if I did not understand fully what those changes were yet. I am still learning this.

I think the most amazing thing about the realizations I have come to in writing this chapter is where it all began. How it is that my student's hypochondria came to be the seed for my own transformation is somewhat ridiculous and amazing to me. This truly is a chaotic universe.

Chapter Twelve: A Life of Substance

The other day I made a mistake. I was reading a Halloween story to my students. I had quickly skimmed it over in the morning and decided it would be a good one to read because it was about creepy vampire children. My students love creepy stories, but even more they like creepy stories about children because they can identify. The mistake I made was to skim the story too quickly, which caused me to miss some very important details related to the young boy narrating the story who had to spend the first part of the tale sitting in a pickup truck outside a bar, waiting for his alcoholic father to get thrown out into the street. Normally, this would not be that big of a deal, but it bothered me because I knew full well that I had some students who were all too familiar with the given scenario. I winced as I read it and continued on with the story, careful to edit out any further references to the boy's drunken father. As it weighed on my mind throughout the day, I wondered if it had really been that big of a deal to those children. Is it easier on them to know that others suffer a similar upbringing, or is it throwing salt on a fresh wound?

When I was growing up in the 1980's, I don't recall the issue of substance abuse being discussed at school. Perhaps it wasn't seen as appropriate conversation for the school setting, it was an issue to be handled at home. Unfortunately, this silence left many of my generation uninformed about the dangers of using these substances, especially at such a young age. Substance abuse impairs social judgment and can lead to other high-risk, deviant behaviours (Cunningham, 2003). Having no one to talk to about the issue of substance abuse left me feeling very alone in the world, as I was well aware

that the partying which went on in your own family was not the kind of thing you revealed to teachers – not without getting yourself into serious trouble at home anyway.

I got my first lesson in the importance of education with this subject matter when I was only eleven-years-old. I was living in Northwest River, Labrador. The community was small and all of the children attended the same school from kindergarten to grade twelve, with two grades in each classroom. During the lunch hour I would go with my friend, Susan, to her house, which was just past the edge of the school playground. Susan's family had a bad reputation in my town, as did she, so most of the other children from school avoided her, but I liked her just fine, and I loved the freedom I had at her place. I would spend the lunch hour listening to Bonnie Tyler's *Total Eclipse of the Heart* and smoking rolled cigarettes which Susan's mother was always willing to share. One day Susan asked if I wanted to try something which would make me laugh hysterically for no reason at all. Always up for fun, I agreed, without even considering what it might be. I went behind her house, from which we had a clear view of the school doors, and I sniffed the gas fumes from the tank of their family's snowmobile. She was right, I did giggle hysterically for no reason, but I felt a little sick too, so it was a while before I tried it again – but I did try it again.

Luckily for me, partway through the school year, a young man I had never seen before made a return to my school. He was tall and broad, with messy blonde hair and vacant grey eyes. He was in my aunt's class, in grade twelve, though he didn't really do anything in school besides rolling cigarettes at his desk. Sometimes he would follow me and my friends around the schoolyard, talking to himself and acting strangely. Almost everyday my aunt had an interesting story about his strange behaviours at school. One

day I asked her why he was like that. She told me that he used to be normal, but that he had started sniffing gasoline and had turned his brain to mush. She said he had to be sent away for a few years and that he would never be the same again.

I didn't tell my aunt that day that I had tried the dangerous activity which had turned this boy's brain to grey gelatin, but I did tell my friends. Susan didn't seem to care and said she would keep doing it anyway because she didn't do it that much and was sure she had nothing to worry about. I stopped going to her house at lunchtime. I did my cigarette smoking in the woods behind the school, but I never sniffed gas again. Neither did my other friends. I thought it was weird that the teachers were so concerned that we children not smoke cigarettes because it might give us cancer, but yet they hadn't bothered to mention that sniffing gas for giggles would surely damage our brains for the rest of our lives. I wondered if they didn't think we could handle the truth; if they just didn't know; or if they just didn't care. Although much of the focus of the pathology of substance abuse amongst youths is on an individual level, it is also important to recognize that it is the indifference of adult society which places youth in the greatest jeopardy (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000).

At the outreach school where I work, high risk behaviours amongst my students is the norm, not the exception, and so I make a point of addressing their risky behaviours directly. I have to walk a fine line though, as I do with most things, because although I have a responsibility to ensure my students are informed about the risks they take in, I must also be constantly aware and sensitive to the reality many of my students must live in with regards to substance abuse, whether it concerns their parents, other family members or friends, or themselves. I am aware of these issues because I have experienced

this nightmare from all of these perspectives. I do not assume that my students simply use substances out of a sense of rebellion or even curiosity; many of them do so as a response to their environment. According to Wotherspoon and Schissel (2000):

emphasis on 'at-risk' behaviour may conceal underlying social conditions. Substance abuse by youths is portrayed as irresponsible behaviour that is indulgent and self-destructive. In fact, youths often emulate adult behaviour or attempt to live-up to the expectations of adults as a result of the stresses and strains of a world in which youths have little political and economic effect on the way society runs. Adolescent abuse of drugs and alcohol is frequently a result of relative powerlessness, as evident in research that illustrates that marginalized youth and youths from indifferent families are at greatest risk from substance abuse. (p. 8)

According to the Canadian Institute of Child Health (2000), adolescent substance abuse is often a result of relative powerlessness, making it more prevalent amongst marginalized youth. For many of my students, the use and abuse of substances is a part of everyday life which must be faced on an individual level, hopefully with the guidance of caring individuals – otherwise, for youth who are already marginalized, the results can be disastrous.

My list of experiences with substances has been a long one, and it has spanned my entire life. From my firsthand experience, I have struggled with many chemical demons. My addictive personality has taken me from cigarettes and cigars, to alcohol and drugs – both street drugs and prescriptive. At times I merely dabbled, at other times I fell into the abyss of addiction. My first drug of choice was nicotine. I started smoking when I was

only seven. My babysitter was tired of my cousin and I hovering around the house and thought she'd try giving us some of her cigarettes and telling us to get lost for the afternoon. It worked, and over the following weeks I enjoyed my stinky new habit, which seemed to gain us popularity with the older children on my street. When we were caught, we immediately told on the babysitter, not realizing we were losing our source – not realizing we were already hooked. I smoked from there on, stealing cigarettes when I had the opportunity, struggling for years to quit, never succeeding until I discovered I was pregnant – my own health concerns hadn't been enough of a deterrent, apparently, concern for my unborn baby was.

My next drug of choice was alcohol. Although I had avoided it for years, I began experimenting with it when I was twelve. I had just moved to Yellowknife and had quickly found my best friend, who was also new to the school. My friend's parents were well-to-do and lived in a large expensive house which was only a ten-minute-walk from the school. At lunchtime we would go with our boyfriends and hang out at her house. For fun I began raiding her parents' extensive, well-stocked liquor cabinet. Being thoroughly inexperienced we would mix as many of the most potent bottles with pineapple juice in a thermos, always remembering to add a little water to the liquor bottles to hide the crime. The concoction always tasted of cleaning supplies, despite the pineapple juice, but in time we learned to ignore the nasty taste and drink it down. For us, this experimentation was a part of our social activity, not an antisocial behaviour, as it is often depicted. The most sociable adolescents are the more frequent drinkers, as drinking is closely related to social activities (Tolone & Tieman, 1990). When the effects of the alcohol weren't as exciting anymore we began taking a few Tylenol to increase the potency. That definitely

kept us intoxicated for the rest of the school day. One afternoon, the police showed up at the school and began searching lockers for any forbidden substances. My best friend and I caught wind of it before they found our stash and we quickly ran to a side door and hurled the thermos out over the bedrock, out of sight. I looked for it later on, but never did find it. That experience scared us sufficiently enough that we never brought liquor to school again. From then on, alcohol lost its allure for me. I enjoy the occasional drink, but it is always in moderation.

Marijuana was my next experiment. As with alcohol, I was twelve when I first tried smoking it. It was the summer following grade seven and I spent most of my time with a sixteen-year-old girl from across the street. I knew she did a lot of drugs, but I never considered doing it with her, and she never offered. One day we were walking downtown and I was complaining about not having any money to buy cigarettes. As if it were fated, a few minutes later I passed two girls headed in the opposite direction. I had never seen either of them before, nor had my friend, but they stopped us and one of them handed me a pack of cigarettes (my brand) and said, "Take these would you? I quit." I agreed heartily and thanked her. A few minutes after my friend and I were done raving about the insanity of such a strange coincidence, I opened up the pack, only to discover, to my obvious disappointment, that the cigarettes were of the hand-rolled variety. When I showed my friend she gleefully informed me that they were not cheap cigarettes, they were "joints". We decided to go and smoke one up on the rocks in a nearby park. I was terrified and elated all at once, but my older friend assured me I would love it. When one didn't seem to have any effect I did another, and then another. Being an amateur, I didn't realize that sometimes it took time for the drug to take effect. When it did, it hit me hard.

My friend and I proceeded to make the long trip back to our neighbourhood, which was on the other side of town. All the way home she did nothing but giggle at me because I was so paranoid, convinced that every passing vehicle was a police car and that they knew what I was carrying in my purse. I was so paranoid that I insisted I go to my house so that I could spray myself with perfume, since it was a Wednesday night and likely the house would be quiet. I got home and I creaked open the door to find that it wasn't quiet at all. Instead, I came home to a party which was in full swing, with many people I'd never met before. As soon as I could free myself from the crowd, I made my way to my room, emptied half a bottle of cheap body spray on myself, and ran for the door. My friend had waited outside for me and we ran to the nearest park where I told her of my ordeal and we both laughed hysterically. From that day on, marijuana in its many forms was part of my teenage life.

By the time I was in grade nine, living once again in Labrador, only in the larger town of Goose Bay, I was smoking hashish on a daily basis. I babysat for a drug dealer and she would pay me in hash to watch her two young daughters. I started going to school high and got kicked out after calling my English teacher names and laughing as she tried to discuss a novel with us. I went to a nearby store and bought myself a drink and sat outside on the steps to finish it. My principal came and found me there and tried to get me to understand the consequences of my actions. I listened carefully then told him he looked like a badger and once again began laughing to myself. I was told to leave the school and I continued engaging in several high-risk behaviours. Not long after, I was kicked out of my house. The use of drugs is closely linked with delinquent behaviours, and can lead to difficulties in school and in the family, involvement with other drug-

users, and general rebelliousness (Hays & Ellikson, 1996; Chassin, 1984; Hawkins et al., 1988; White et al., 1987).

Having hit rock-bottom at fourteen – being in trouble at home and at school - I went from friend to friend and continued with my addictions in an effort to cope with the instability in my life. According to Schissel and Wotherspoon (2001), street kids use substances to normalize marginal and traumatic existences. After a brief period of running wild, a kind aunt took me in and I decided to make a change in my life. I swore off all of the things that I felt were dragging me down, including drugs, and I was incredibly proud of my accomplishment, as I remained abstinent for a lengthy period of time. When my principal allowed me to return to school after speaking with my aunt, I was glad to board the bus and see all of my friends. My little brother was on the bus, and I was elated to see him, as I hadn't even spoken to him since I had left home. He sat next to me on the bus and told me he had something awesome to show me. I was excited and he brought out the surprise right away. Rolled in a little metallic ball of aluminum foil he had a chunk of hash. I felt as though I had been punched in the stomach. I felt that I had been the cause of his interest in this nasty black substance. I was the reason he thought it was cool. It made me want to cry. I told him to get rid of it but he turned up his nose at me and told me to lighten up. I didn't say anything more.

A few years later, after moving back to Yellowknife without my family, I once again began dabbling with marijuana and hash. I would do it on the weekends and it was not a big deal as far as I could tell. After graduating high school, my free time increased, as I no longer had to attend school and work, and with the added downtime came an increase in my drug consumption. When I moved to Lethbridge to attend university, the

problem only worsened. I would wake in the morning and get high before I did anything else. I went to school on drugs and virtually stopped all of my study activities, as they were just in the way of my drug habit. I surrounded myself with other drug users and normalized what I couldn't deny was an exceedingly depressing way of life. I remember trying to come up with ways to fund my habit. I would sell my belongings, I even got credit cards so that I could access easy money, but before long, even my most high-interest cards were maxed-out. Once again, I found myself at rock-bottom when I spent my twentieth birthday smoking an entire vial of hash oil, which was extremely potent, on my own. I was incredibly ill and was unable to touch any mind-altering substances for the month following. I then discovered I was a month pregnant and swore off any substances, including drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol. Whenever I stop to think of it, I am so grateful that fate allowed such a sudden halt to such overpowering, daily addictions, so that my yet undiscovered baby was protected from my substance abuse and I didn't unwittingly harm him. I have worked with many children who must live with the often insurmountable difficulties of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and other substance-induced effects and cannot imagine the guilt of those who have caused this pain and suffering in their own children.

What my personal experiences with drugs have taught me is that I have an addictive personality. However, as stated by Sanders (1989) in an article regarding his father's addiction to alcohol and the effect on his own identity as a result, "it is far easier to recognize these twists in my character than to undo them" (p. 75). I met a colleague of a friend just recently and I discussed the issue of addictions. He was surprised to hear that I had ever struggled with this problem. He said that he didn't think that someone like me

might have this kind of history. It is important to understand that anyone is susceptible to this kind of problem if they open the door to using mind-altering substances. Sometimes you don't even think you're opening a door so you don't see it coming. When I was thirteen I was hit by a car while on snowmobile. To help with the pain the doctor prescribed a one-month supply of codeine. I truly believe I was hooked after the first day. Coming off of those pills was difficult but I managed to do it without even realizing I was addicted. Years later when I was prescribed this drug again for some dental work I had undergone, I became violently ill. My body rejected what it had once loved and I am lucky for it. I took other prescription pills as a teenager. Those were purchased illegally, for the specific purpose of getting a high. It terrifies me to even consider the damage I might have inflicted upon myself. In my cloud of infinite adolescent stupidity I ingested drugs without ever even knowing what they were for. This came to a halt after a terrifying experience with steroids, which I was prescribed to treat cluster migraine headaches. The steroids caused a brief episode of psychosis (apparently a fairly common side effect) which left me afraid to experiment any further with drugs in pill-form. Again I am grateful for this twist of fate.

My addictions were many. I have come to accept that there is a weakness in me which I must guard against. Writing this has brought me to the realization that I have struggled with many substances over my lifetime, but it has also shown me that I have conquered many battles as well. If I am truly objective, I will admit that although the use and abuse of chemicals can be a harmful coping mechanism, at times, it is just that – a coping mechanism – a strategy for survival. I look back over the times when I have used substances just so that I could make it through the day. In those situations, one of two

things needed to happen: either I needed to learn more effective and healthy ways to cope with my problems, or I needed to eliminate them by dealing with them, both of which require great strength to accomplish. I have done these things for myself, and I do my best to not judge myself for the weakness I have shown. This is not always an easy task; to quote Sanders (1989), “in certain moods I blame myself for everything. Guilt burns like acid in my veins” (p. 75). I have also learned not to judge others for their weaknesses when it comes to such issues as addiction, although this can be difficult. I realize that the most difficult thing for me to forgive is when adults allow themselves to succumb to their weakness at the expense of a child. I have suffered from this, as have many of my students, and it is always difficult to forgive and to understand. I try to be careful in this judgment. Although I was fortunate enough to have the strength to put the interests of my child before my own problems, some cannot. Some people are too weak – some addictions are too strong.

Growing up in the world I did, I have had many experiences with addictions and their effects on the people around me. I do my best to deal with the trauma inflicted upon me by myself and by others. Sometimes, the two are so intertwined, that it becomes impossible to pull them apart. I consider the guilt associated with sexual abuse and how it eats away at my core. The most difficult thing for me to deal with when I think about the abuse I endured is not that it happened to me, but that I allowed it to happen. No matter how many times somebody tells you that it was not your fault and that you were only a helpless child, you are left with the memories of your own thoughts, and how if only you could tell someone and make it stop, or if only you had the strength to hurt the one hurting you. You can't outrun those thoughts, no matter how fast and how far you run. I

struggle too with the guilt of never having charged my abuser. My reasons are my own – to protect others who are not ready for the truth, to protect myself and the life I have made – regardless of the reasons, they are not good enough, and the pain of my cowardice is difficult to bear. This is only one issue in my life. I consider the complicated mosaic of this issue, and the layers and layers of pain which it has allowed into my life, and then I remember that this is only one of many. I have my skeletons in the closet - my demons – and I have seen the lengths a person can go to in an effort to outrun what plagues them.

I am less forgiving with some of the men who have served as “father figures” in my life. Although I had been exposed to alcohol and drugs and the like since I was very young, I was never exposed to the mean and nasty side of those things until I came to live in Yellowknife when I was almost twelve. My mother’s boyfriend at the time was a guard at the local correctional facility. He was from Texas, although he’d lost most of his accent, and he loved Stevie Ray Vaughn, much to my dismay, because although I enjoy his music and recognize his talent, I am still unable to this day to separate the music from the memories. With this man, most of the memories are bad ones, and any good ones have long since been swallowed up by anger. It didn’t take long to realize that he was an alcoholic. Before meeting him, I had never really encountered alcoholism, as it was never really an issue in my family. I remember noticing how he would drink at least every day, with some days being worse than others. I remember how he would be silly and would dance in the apartment, and then he would be angry and would pick fights with everyone around him. My brother and I would distract ourselves from the screaming by locking ourselves in the room and talking, or we would simply leave.

Over time, his drinking grew worse. I sometimes wondered if he had hidden the severity of his addiction from us for the first while, or if the stress of raising two children who were virtual strangers to him were too much for him to handle. Regardless, his drinking was more frequent and he grew angrier and angrier with my brother, my mother, and I. He would get louder and louder, and then it would be quiet and he would go downstairs and blast Stevie Ray Vaughn over the speakers.

Once I was alone with my mother's boyfriend for a week. It was almost Christmas and true to form, Yellowknife was unbearably cold. I spent most of my time avoiding him and would spend all of my free time at my boyfriend's house, until he left town for Christmas, and then I would go to a friend's place. One day I was at home, drying dishes, when my mother's boyfriend walked in. He had stopped at a bar on his way home from work and he reeked of booze. He went into a rage, screaming at me at the top of his lungs, calling me a "slut". I began to cry and threw the dishtowel on the counter. I told him I was leaving and headed for the front door, grabbing my coat on my way and struggling to get my shoes on, when I felt his large hand wrap around the back of my neck and he threw me against the stairs. I laid there for a moment in shock. He had been angry with me before but had never hit me, but I could see in his face that he had crossed that line now and that there was no turning back. I tried to run but he was twice my size and was quick to grab me and throw me around the tiny front porch like a rag doll. My brother was watching the whole episode unfold from the family room. My brother must have been in shock at first, but then he began screaming for my attacker to leave me alone and he threatened to call the police. My mother's boyfriend finally backed off and left me lying on the stairs as he stepped over me and made his way to his room

where he slammed the door so hard, the whole house shook. I left for the rest of the evening. I collected myself and told my friends what had happened, and that I was afraid to go home but that I couldn't leave my brother alone with that abusive drunk all night. They walked me home and sat on a snow bank across the road from my bedroom window. I told them that I would leave the door unlocked and that if anything happened I would flick the lights and they could come in and help me, or if things were okay I would shut off the light and leave it off. It was a strange sight, a group of five teenage boys sitting on a snow bank in the dead of winter, in the middle of the night, keeping guard. When I went into the house it was silent. I went to my room and waited for ten minutes then shut off the light and watched out my window as the boys slowly left their post with a sense of caution and concern that I could feel from across the street.

The next morning I awoke to find a letter which had been written on the inside of a cigarette pack. It warned me that I was to stay at home for the day and that I was in big trouble for leaving the way I did and that it was time I learned who was in charge in my house. The tone of the letter prompted me to take my brother and head down the street to my friend's house. His mother was a sweet, kind Dutch lady whom had always treated me like a jewel. When I told her what had happened she insisted I stay with her and that she would contact my mother's boyfriend to let him know where I was. I spent the next few days with her. I never spoke of the incident again. I had an unnerving feeling that I was no longer safe in the world I knew. From that day on a black, ugly hate began to grow in my heart. I had forgiven many things in my life, but I was growing too wise for my years and could not fathom what kind of world would allow a man to do what he did and get away with it.

Things grew worse between my mother's boyfriend and I; his attacks grew more frequent and severe. I fell into a deep depression and began to act out at school and at home, which only worsened the problem. According to Weil (1987), living in an alcoholic environment leads to extreme levels of stress, which increases the likelihood of the development of psychological maladjustment. With each passing day I grew darker and meaner and angrier.

Finally tired of tolerating my mother's boyfriend, I had an angry and violent confrontation with him one evening when he was drunk. I think he could tell that some switch had gone off inside of me and that I would no longer take his abuse. His hate, pure and obvious, was now intermingled with a healthy fear. We both spent most of my time at home avoiding one another, although my time at home was growing less and less. Not long after, my uncle, who was spending his weekends serving out a sentence at the correctional center, informed the warden of the goings-on at my house. I am not sure of the details that followed, but in the end, my mother's boyfriend was dismissed from his job and soon after he left my house. He left our lives quickly and easily. It was somewhat unnerving. It was too good to be true.

Not long after his departure, a new man came to live in my mother's house. He was a twenty-two year old construction worker who also had a love for liquor. I couldn't believe I was right back where I started. After only a few weeks, he and my mother married. He and I were doomed from the start. His hatred for me and mine for him was almost instantaneous and I made no effort to hide the fact. Determined to not allow him to push me around the way the last man in my mother's life had, I was in his face from day-one. My behaviour became more and more rebellious and before long I would spend

days on end at a friend's house or a boyfriend's house and would refuse to call home. The battle of wills between my new stepfather and me was growing more volatile with each passing day.

One evening I went to the neighbours' home for a barbecue. I babysat for the lady who lived there and she was my mother's best friend. Her live-in boyfriend was my stepfather's best friend, and strangely enough, was a very close friend of mine as well. I was sitting on the countertop in the kitchen, telling stories along with everyone else and laughing heartily. This came to an abrupt end when my stepfather arrived, already smelling of alcohol from an afternoon at the pub. I intended on ignoring him, considering we were both guests, but he didn't share my intentions. He was angry that I had the nerve to be there and demanded that I leave. The silence in the room was heavy and tense and I replied, telling him that I was a guest and that maybe he should leave instead. He became enraged and leapt across the small kitchen, grabbing me by my legs and pulling me off the counter. I caught myself with my arms just before I hit the floor and I pulled myself up, unprepared for the heavy fist which he pummeled into my cheek, rocking my head on my tiny, thirteen-year-old neck. Everyone just sat there in a state of shock and I was left to defend myself before the next blow was delivered. I stepped out of the way of his next punch and hit him in the face with every ounce of strength I could muster, knocking him to the floor. He laid there for a second, with a look of shock and embarrassment on his face as I stood over him, breathing in short, and shallow gasps. He pulled himself up, swearing under his breath at me, and hurriedly left, slamming the door behind him. Nobody said anything. I left in a rage, sobbing uncontrollably. I sat out in front of my

house, unsure what to do next, and smoked a cigarette. I hated my life completely and wanted out.

Later that night, when I was sitting in my family room watching a scary movie, my stepfather came through the door and fell about the porch in a stupor, fighting to make his way up the stairs. His face was battered and bruised and all that was left to his white tee-shirt was the collar. I was baffled but delighted. The next day my aunt revealed to me that my stepfather had gone to the bar with his friends. His best friend confronted him about what he had done at their home and then proceeded to beat him senseless. He never did reveal to me what he had done that night in my defense. He was the only man who had ever fought for me. I felt forever indebted to him for his kindness and for his anger towards my stepfather that night.

One day, out of the blue, in late August, I was informed that I would be returning to Labrador and that I had one day to pack my things and say my good-byes. I was completely devastated. Yellowknife had become my home, despite the difficult life I had there. I did not want to return to the life I had in Labrador. I felt as though it was the beginning of the end. Nonetheless we left town, without my stepfather. That was when I realized that he had been the cause of my upheaval. Again our lives were turned completely upside down, with no explanation whatsoever. I learned to adjust to the sudden change and settled back into my life in Labrador. After about seven months, my stepfather moved to Labrador with us, that was the beginning of the end of my life there.

The honeymoon period lasted about one week for my stepfather and me. We steered clear of one another and I spent most of my time gone with my friends and cousins. One night I was at home and he was back to drinking. He was picking on my

brother so I called him a nasty name and told him to pick on someone his own size. He advanced on me as I sat defenseless in my chair and I calmly told him that if he touched me I would have the police on him so fast he wouldn't know what hit him. He must have taken my threat seriously, as his hand dropped to his side and he stormed off to the kitchen to pour another rye and coke, his drink of choice. Still angry, I took the opportunity to express my feelings about his habit, and asked in a taunting voice, "Does the poor baby need another drink?" With that, my mother flew across the room and slapped me across the face. I stood up and told her that she'd better not touch me again or she'd regret it. With that her eyes took on a wild gaze and she again flew at me, arms outstretched, and grabbed me by the throat. I pushed her back and advanced on her, punching her repeatedly in the face. I could tell I'd shaken her up, but she was in a rage. She grabbed me by my neck and threw me into the front porch, screaming at me to get out of her house. I left that night knowing I would never return. I also left knowing that my mother's marriage was doomed, and before long, she proved me to be right.

Looking back at these times in my life is like watching a movie that runs through my mind's eye. At times it is difficult to believe that this was my reality, and how at the time it was so difficult to bear, yet, I considered it to be my normal life. I didn't realize at the time that my experiences were gradually forming my own set of values surrounding alcohol use and abuse. I saw these men as anomalies, and never considered alcohol to be the major source of their problems – I had chalked those up to personality flaws. From my current perspective, which has been formed by years of education and personal experience, I realize the depth of their addiction and have come to understand my own intolerance for alcohol abuse. Over the years I have come to drink less and less, never

feeling comfortable with the loss of control which accompanies a night of drinking, and never wanting to take the chance of venturing down that dangerous road of alcohol addiction. I have come to realize that this is the addiction which I have the least amount of tolerance for. I must force myself to pull back and use reason and objectivity when confronted with a parent or student who is facing this struggle. For many of my students, alcohol addiction is a reality they must live with, for many it is a reality they have come to accept. Still, for others, it is a harsh reality that affects their every thought and decision. It is the cold home they return to at the end of the day when they leave the safe haven of school. The inability or unwillingness of support services to respond to such crises is perhaps one of the most difficult realities of my work with my students that I have to endure. I hear so many people make statements about what is directly harmful to children, and what things they must simply learn to cope with, for the sake of family unity, and it is difficult to swallow. At what point does your experience of your own life and living conditions not affect you directly? Who decides what hurt should be addressed with direct, definitive action, and which should be left for the child to cope with, as it is their destiny to have been born into an alcoholic family? It is ridiculous to make a distinction between hurt that is direct or indirect. What is the difference? The response of each family varies, but in the end, it all measures up to pain and suffering. I have yet to meet a child who is content to sit and suffer with the harsh reality of pain and heartache that drug and alcohol addiction has brought into her life. I'm sure I never will.

Journal Entry

Writing the substance abuse chapter was one of the most difficult undertakings of this personal inquiry. Many of the stories told were pushed to the back of my mind for years, always there, never discussed. Although I have never had a problem with sharing the difficulties of my upbringing with others, I have never been one to share detailed stories of my struggles, as I felt it would bring about feelings of shock and pity in my audience. I never wanted for either of these reactions.

I made the decision to tell these stories of my own addictions so that others might see how innocently these things begin. How nobody ever chooses to become an alcoholic or a smoker or a drug addict, it usually begins with curiosity or some other unrelated motive, and balloons into an entity of its own, far beyond your control. As I wrote this chapter, I found it exceedingly difficult to be honest about my own shortcomings, as I dread the day when my own son or any of the children I have worked with over the years come to read the truth about my past. It is not something I am proud of. I recall one of my students asking me in my first year in the classroom about my own experiences with drugs. I didn't deny that I had my own experiences, but I did struggle with the blow I felt that my goal to be a positive role model and was weary of sharing any actual experiences with my students. When I have shared with them in the past, I notice my tendency to exaggerate the negative effects of substances to an extent, not always being true to my own feelings about my own experiences and the fact that although there were many negative consequences for my choices, in many instances, I also had a lot of fun making the mistakes I made.

I told the stories of my mother's partners to illustrate how the effects of substances can become such a major factor in the life of a child. It is scary how even the most awful of experiences can become so expected, so normalized. Telling these stories has served to remind me of the harsh and scary reality that many of my students must return home to every day. My familiarity with such terms as "alcoholism" can be desensitizing to the true reality of those who suffer this disease, and those who must live with the consequences of living with addicted loved ones.

As with much of my writing, it has been difficult to write the truth about the difficulties I have had with my mother. My relationship with her now is much different than it has ever been and I truly cherish the opportunity to start over again. Writing this almost feels like a betrayal, although I know that it is necessary to write it, that it has been sitting at the back of my mind for years now, waiting to be said. Like Brooks (1992), my stories, although difficult to share and relive, were not intended to hurt or get back at others, but to reclaim my own life and to share that experience with others (Chambers, 2002). That doesn't make it any easier.

Writing this chapter has also helped me to recognize my own value system in regards to substance use and abuse. I didn't really consciously consider the effects that my life experiences have had on my beliefs and actions, but I see some very strong connections between the past and the present. I have definitely been jolted by the reality of my struggles with addictions. I never put myself in the category of those who have struggled with this issue. I have seen myself as someone who helps people with these things, not as someone who could have used the help herself. It's not easy to know these things, to admit them, but it is good to know them. According to Britzman's (1998) view

of psychoanalytical theory, “to know thyself does not mean just what you would like to know but also to come to know, and face-to-face, with that which is difficult to know” (Chambers, 2002, p. 21). Vigilance is critical when it comes to such weaknesses as the various forms of substance abuse, especially having been cursed with an addictive personality and a history embroiled in the mess of alcoholism and drug addiction. I will be vigilant, for my sake and for those I love, more so now than ever.

Chapter Thirteen: The Soundtrack of My Life

Music is the soundtrack of our lives. In speaking with my supervisor for this narrative, I related almost every story I had to tell about my life to some sort of experience with music, whether it was positive or negative. She is a good listener, and she heard that common theme emerging throughout the development of my inquiry. She suggested to me that I write about the significance of music in my life. It was like a light went on in my head when she noted all of the different examples I had used regarding music, and she felt that it deserved some mention. I realized how music has played a part in defining who I am; what I was experiencing at a specific time in my life; how it has pulled me through so many difficult times; how my personal choice in music has so often been rejected by others and set me apart and connected me to certain others; how a certain song instantly brings me back to times that were good and times that were bad; and how my love of music has helped me to connect with the children I have worked with. From all of that I realized my supervisor was right, it does deserve some mention and it is significant in this inquiry.

“Music plays an important role in learning and the communication of culture,” (Dickens, 1998, p. 1). Rock and roll has always been my music of choice. Rock is regenerative and revolutionary in nature, expressing the energy of a new culture (Dickens, 1998). Rock music tests limits and challenges authority both explicitly and implicitly (Fornatale, 1987). Rock music is the music of liberation, and the expression of dreams and frustrations (Carlin, 1998) because rock lyrics “challenge restrictive middle class values, especially those dealing with sexual connotations, drug and/or alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity and suicidal ideation” (Dickens, 1998, p. 2).

I can follow the path of my musical tastes and my experiences with music from the time I was very young. I recall my love for bands like Steppenwolf, Fleetwood Mac, and Nazareth from before I was even in school. The first movie I ever went to see in a theatre was *Grease*. I was only three or four and I went with my aunt. I recall being obsessed with it for years; I owned the record and memorized all of the songs by heart. My elementary school years were set in the 1980's, where the world of rock and roll became more of an industry than a medium for the expression of personal philosophy that had defined an earlier era, and I found myself rejecting this strain of canned pop for bands which were outside the mainstream of music. From punk to heavy metal to alternative, I was drawn to whatever was different from what the radio stations were willing to play.

By the time I was ten, I was hooked on The Cult, a band defined by “pseudo-mysticism and Native American obsessions of the Doors, the guitar-orchestrations of Led Zeppelin, and the three-chord crunch of AC/DC, while adding touches of post-punk goth rock” (Erlewine, nd.). I loved how different it was from anything else I was exposed to at the time, and reveled in the fact that none of my friends understood my interest in them. They were truly one of my first personal obsessions with music and remain a favourite to this day. Because of their lack of experience in coping with stressful situations, youths select music that provides an escape from reality (Dickens, 1998). When I was ten, my life was marked by the sexual abuse I had to endure. I was drawn to the sad, haunting melody of one of the songs from The Cult's 1985 *Love* album, as it spoke of renewal and pride and looking to the love of nature itself to erase the pains of life. The song had an aboriginal influence, which was a common theme for the band, and which further

strengthened my connection with the music. The song, which was called *Brother Wolf Sister Moon* (1985) went like this:

Embrace the wind with both arms
 Stop the clouds dead in the sky
 Hang your head no more
 And beg no more
 Brother Wolf and Sister Moon
 Your Time has come
 Brother Wolf and Sister Moon
 Your time has come
 And the wind will blow my fears away
 And dry my tears away
 And the wind will blow my fears away
 And dry my tears away

I understood the need to find pride and dignity in myself again. There was a commonality in the suffering I sensed in the song. I took the lyrics of the wind taking the tears and fears away as meaning that in time the course of nature would set things right and embrace me and take me away from the suffering I knew. In these lyrics I found understanding and felt that perhaps I was not as alone as I felt in my suffering. I often turned to the comfort and awe the nature which surrounded me for I would often roam off into the woods on my own, or sit by the river, reflecting on my own thoughts and dreaming of a better life in my future. I applied the meaning I found in the lyrics to my own experiences.

As beneficial as this connection with the music and its makers was for me, it had its drawbacks as well; it allowed me to withdraw completely from the comfort of others and retreat into my own world. I had no need to confide in those closest to me, I felt they would never understand, I didn't need them, I had my music. Although music is interactive in its relationship between the artist and the audience, the audience cannot give back to the artist, nor impact the art. This leads to a somewhat dependent

relationship in which the audience takes the product and suits it to their own needs, there is no need to share with others unless the listener chooses to, and if they are not careful, they find themselves isolated and unwilling or unable to connect with others who might be able to understand and support them. I see this often with my students. They feel they have some sort of personal relationship with their music and with the artists, and in their attempts to identify with the message, often attempt to shape their own personalities and characteristics to suit the music, rather than interpreting the music to fit who they truly are. This is frightening considering the negative messages offered up by today's unrestricted music industry. Adolescents who already feel alienated are more susceptible to the self-destructive themes in some rock music (Kohut & Hugick, 1989).

My next musical obsession was with Metallica, a heavy metal thrash band known for its epic songs, intricate guitars, and dark lyrics. Hard rock or heavy metal is about rebellion and power, whereas soft rock is about loneliness and frustration (Dickens, 1998). Although Metallica was my band of choice, I immersed myself in thrash metal music in general, bands with an unhealthy focus on topics such as evil and destruction; violence; and death in all its forms, including suicide. It was a topic menu which I felt served my adolescent needs. According to Took and Weiss (1994), adolescents who prefer heavy metal music have a higher incidence of behaviour problems, sexual activity, substance use, and academic struggles; they suggest that rock music is a contributing factor to destructive behaviour. I fed my own anger with the angry tone of my music and was inspired to begin writing my own poetry to express the feelings I could not seem to verbalize. Adolescents are more receptive to suggestive lyrics because they are more emotionally vulnerable (Dickens, 1998). I was particularly drawn to the romantic notions

I had of suicide, the ultimate power I saw in taking control of my own life and death, never really understanding the finality of death itself. According to Plopper and Ness (1993), rock music is an influential source of communication which delivers messages regarding death in society. They state that songs about death often evoke emotional and behavioural responses including leaving home, crying, and feelings of sadness, emptiness, anger, loneliness, and helplessness, and suicide. One Metallica song, entitled *Fade to Black* (1984) became my personal muse for poetry which focused on my desire for the end of what I saw as a dead-end existence:

Life it seems, will fade away
 Drifting further every day
 Getting lost within myself
 Nothing matters no one else
 I have lost the will to live
 Simply nothing more to give
 There is nothing more for me
 Need the end to set me free
 Things are not what they used to be
 Missing one inside of me
 Deathly lost, this can't be real
 Cannot stand this hell I feel
 Emptiness is filling me
 To the point of agony
 Growing darkness taking dawn
 I was me, but now he's gone
 No one but me can save myself, but it's too late
 Now I can't think, think why I should even try
 Yesterday seems as though it never existed
 Death greets me warm, now I will just say good-bye

As strange as it might seem, this song, with its depressing lyrics and helpless tone, probably lured me further away from my suicidal tendencies than it brought me nearer to them. As with The Cult's song, I found a commonality with the feeling behind the song and could identify with the feelings of overwhelming agony and growing darkness leading to an end which was welcome and warm. In connecting with someone who also

felt, ironically, alone, I felt less alone. As it inspired me to write endlessly about my thoughts and feelings both in journals and poetry, it enabled a catharsis of emotions which threatened to overwhelm me, while giving me an outlet for my anger and misery. This is still one of my favourite songs; I can still appreciate the therapeutic power of sharing those thoughts and emotions in such a raw and exposed manner and recall the solace I took in not being the only one who was feeling such hopelessness.

When I started university, my struggles with my identity and my past began to re-emerge, after having taken a hiatus in the busy life of work and school I led during my high school years. I had been able to put those things mostly to the side as I enjoyed the freedom and novelty of having to make it on my own. With the reality of university and becoming an adult, came depression and substance abuse which were a result of my growing identity crisis and a feeling of being on my own, with no family to turn to. My roommates and my boyfriend had their parents to turn to when they were in need, and although my father was always willing to offer his support, my relationship was not yet at a point where I felt comfortable in asking for it, and so I struggled along on my own. During this period the band, Smashing Pumpkins, became my newest obsession, with one song in particular marking the depression I was experiencing and the need to reacquaint myself with where I had come from, to find where it was I could belong. I particularly liked the fact that the song's title, *Mayonaise* (1993), (incorrect spelling intended), seemed unrelated to the lyrics of the song; like me, the song seemed to be having an identity crisis:

I'll try and ease the pain
But somehow I'll feel the same
Well, no one knows

Where my secrets go
 I send a heart to all my dearies
 When your life is so, so dreary dream
 I'm rumoured to the straight and narrow
 While the harlots of my perils scream
 Mother weep the years I'm missing
 All my time can't be given back
 Shut my mouth and strike the demons
 That cursed you and your reasons
 Out of hand and out of season
 Out of love and out of feeling
 Fool enough to almost be it
 And cool enough to not quite see it
 And old enough to always feel this
 Always old, I'll always feel this
 No more promise no more sorrow
 No longer will I follow
 Can anybody hear me
 I just want to be me
 When I can, I will
 Try to understand
 That when I can, I will

I especially identified with the lyrics concerning missing years, as I felt I had lost so many years in my lifetime to sadness and misery and I could feel it happening again. I felt that “always old, I’ll always feel this” exemplified my life; I had grown up in sadness and there I would remain. I was searching for someone to agree that life was a dark and dreary experience and I found that in this song. I was content to be miserable for the time. Eventually I would escape that daily misery as I matured and moved on to find the things which were important to me – things like my role as a teacher and a mother.

Now there is Radiohead. This band has been my obsession for six years now and they have been with me through most of my twenties. I realize wholeheartedly, one of the things I like about this band and this music is that its following is very limited. Those who like it love it, myself included. I like that they are willing to be different and maybe even a little strange, because that means being themselves, and that means being happy

and real. The past ten years have been about finding my place in the world and accepting myself for who I am. I am learning that I am only at the very beginning of that journey. I am a work in progress.

Radiohead is constantly changing and refining their sound. Each recording they put out is completely different from the last. This is not because they are trying to change who they are, but because they are accepting that who they are is not static; it changes everyday. When they released their first album, they were defined as a follow-up band to Nirvana; angry, hostile, and on the alternative edge. When they came to the realization that they were catering to the image of what people thought they were - what others wanted them to be - they pulled away and made the decision that it would be them who decided what they were, even if the rest of the world didn't like it. What that has meant for them is huge critical acclaim but low record sales. Enough to make a living though, and they still have their dignity intact; like me, working a job for the past six years that I am overqualified for and passing on opportunities for more money, but the work is rewarding and I can feel at the end of each day that I was true to myself and that I have accomplished something.

I have spent the past week trying to choose which Radiohead song is "the one". I had no problem with the other bands from my past. My favourites; those that defined the period I was in (I'm beginning to feel reminiscent of Picasso), were easy to choose, as they jumped out at me as the ones I repeatedly turned to when I needed them. With Radiohead it is different; I am different. I do not *need* to listen to Radiohead; I don't rely on it for some sort of emotional or spiritual support; I just love it. Don't get me wrong, I like particular CDs for particular moods; some dark and edgy; some serene and

comforting; others playful – always creative. The difference is that I can appreciate the band for what it is, rather than what I need it to be. I can take care of myself now. Music will always be more than just entertainment for me, I'm too analytical to enjoy it just for pleasure's sake; but now I listen because I want it and love it, not because I need it. It is a much healthier relationship.

I think part of this independence from my musical fix is maturity. I recognize the value of my own voice. I have my own experiences to draw on for comfort and security and learning. I also have learned over time to turn to others for support. I no longer try to be an island, although sometimes it is difficult not to be, as it is engrained in my personality. My son changed me in that way I think. He often turns to me for support and he gives me his. His love is unconditional, as mine is for him. It has helped me to grow. I recognize my smallness in the universe, while at the same time acknowledging my importance in the world. I have my place. I am learning to lean on others as well, although the trust doesn't always come easily.

And so, I have no Radiohead song that I have leaned on. It seems ridiculous, considering my attachment to them is more powerful than any of the others. It was hard to even choose a favourite; I have so many. So, I'll choose the one that's closest to home, that reminds me of my life and who I am now; *Pyramid Song* (2001):

I jumped in the river and what did I see?
 Black-eyed angels swimming with me
 A moon full of stars and astral cars
 All the figures I used to see
 All my lovers were there with me
 All my past and futures
 And we all went to heaven in a little rowboat
 There was nothing to fear and nothing to doubt

This song makes me think of where I am now in my life. I have no regrets. I don't feel alone anymore. There is something childlike about this song, and yet, at the same time, there is a sense of wisdom. That is how I see myself. Perhaps the greatest wisdom is allowing myself the freedom to be a child; to bask in all of the joys around me; to feel every feeling to the fullest. "All my past and futures"... that is what this inquiry is about.

Journal Entry

This was my favorite chapter to write. I have always known that music is a very important part of life for me, but never truly understood the effect it has had on my experiences and on my identity. It was so wonderful to take a walk back through my life to consider the different bands and songs that went with each era of my life. I think I could write a book just about that. I have come to understand how much of my rebellious side comes out in the music I choose. It used to come out in the form of my love for loud, angry music, now it comes forth in the seeking of music which is considered far out of the mainstream (even most rebels I know and love hate most of my favorite bands). I used to think that this bothered me, writing this chapter helped me to see that it was one of the very things that made me cling more tightly to the music I loved. I enjoy the fact that my musical tastes are considered somewhat eccentric. I am always seeking quiet ways to stand apart from the crowd. This shows not only in my love for my alternative listening choices, but also in my disdain for anything too common or familiar.

This chapter was truly the jewel of my autobiographical writing for my own purposes. When I wrote it I was invigorated and refreshed. I laughed and cried and had to spend much of the following month reacquainting myself with some of my old favorites

(even the ones that kind of give me a headache now – although I'll never admit that to one of my students). I found myself thinking of the people who loved particular music with me, and how it affected our relationship. I know that music will always be an integral part of my life.

The most profound realization I made in writing this chapter was not so much the change in style of music I am drawn to, but the change in its purpose in my life. I hadn't considered the fact that I no longer needed my music as a medium for survival. I had relied on music as an escape from my reality for so long, that it went completely unnoticed when the change happened. I still am unable to pinpoint just where it was in time that I stopped listening out of need and started listening out of joy. The change is a good one. I hope music is never again a crutch I must lean on. I much prefer it as a joyful companion which will follow me throughout my lifetime.

Chapter Fourteen: The Significance of Connections

Age thirteen was perhaps one of the lowest points in my youth. I was living with a stepfather who was an obnoxious, abusive alcoholic who was overwhelmed with a teenage stepdaughter and a preteen stepson. I'm not sure if he hated me more than I hated him, but the tension in the house was constant. Once again I found myself strengthening my allegiance with my brother to maintain some level of control over what was happening in our lives.

During the summer between grade seven and eight I had started spending most of my free time with high school students who were into partying and drugs. I was quickly becoming immersed in the lifestyle. School was, for the first time in my life, not a priority and I remember making a point of coming late to classes, donning a shredded jean jacket with torn jeans, sporting bleached blonde hair, much to my mother's dismay. As always, I intended to make a show of myself and my late entrance coupled with a bad attitude allowed for just that.

My first impression of my new grade eight teacher was one of disinterest. He was just another in a long line of teachers. Having been moved from school to school and not having been a model student since grade two, despite high grades, I had never really connected with any of my teachers and had no intentions of doing so now. I saw them as uncaring and authoritative beings who knew nothing of the difficulties of my existence and I never went out of my way to pay them any respect. In fact, it was just the opposite. In my grade seven year I had tortured my homeroom teacher with endless quips and contradictions, in an effort to illustrate what I saw as her arrogance and her ignorant attitude to the rest of my classmates. I often wonder how much of her decision to leave

her position at the school after that year had to do with me, although I was not the only student she struggled with.

My new teacher was a tall man with a kind face who had a slight accent I couldn't place. When he didn't react to my lateness on that first morning, I made an unconscious decision to get a rise out of him. He spent some time going over his expectations and some general rules before asking if anyone had any questions. I made a point of banging around noisily in my empty desk as he spoke and took the opportunity when he asked if I had any questions to raise my hand and insist that I have another desk so as to avoid the green fungus which was thriving on the inside of the little metal desk. I grinned at him slyly and much to my surprise and disappointment he simply grinned back and insisted that I move if I was frightened of my harmless classroom companion. I was impressed with the laughter that his quick comeback sparked in the classroom and decided to drop my quest for now. After all, I had the whole school year to get under his skin. Little did I know, he would soon become one of my greatest confidantes; a man whose acceptance and approval I craved more than any other; looking back, a man who surely saved me from myself more than once that dismal year.

In retrospect, that first year of my teens was like a roller coaster ride from beginning to end. At the time I couldn't decide if it was the worst year of my life or the best; it depended on the day and the perspective I had of the situation. My list of boyfriends seemed to be getting longer and they were getting older and older, topping off with a twenty-five-year-old man who was a colleague of my stepfather's. Most of my nights were late and riddled with parties with older teens and adults. I was thoroughly impressed with my ability to out-party anyone and left no stone unturned when it came to

taking unnecessary risks. Things were very bad at home and any attempt to discipline me would just prompt me to leave home for days on end and go stay with a boyfriend. I had the perception that I could do whatever I wanted with no consequences. I was wrong; of course, the consequences are still with me now, in my heart for all this time. At the time, however, my life was one endless, out-of-control party.

With the highest of highs comes the lowest of lows. My insistence on living the lifestyle I had fallen into was nothing but a cover. The life of the party was the saddest little girl of all. I was constantly suicidal and kept a journal which held my deepest and darkest thoughts. They were always abstract though, always focused on the romantic notions of death and depression, never really facing why it was I was feeling that way. To focus on the symptoms was to avoid the disease itself. It was not enough to be sad and dark, the darkness had to *be* me. I found myself drawn to the occult not only as an escape from reality, but also as a means of shaping an identity for myself. My mother too had always been obsessed with other-worldly arts and therefore my knowledge base was expansive. When I tell my students what I was like as a teenager they are sometimes disbelieving; I think my bright and cheery demeanor makes it hard for them to believe, but all joking aside, there is still a part of me which carries that darkness around for always, not because I think it was cool or for the sake of shock value, but simply because it served as a coping mechanism which kept me alive through some very difficult times. Retreating to that dark place was like a safety net, one which kept most people at arms-length or even further, but it was very lonely, and it was very easy to slip too deeply into that hole, so deep it seemed impossible to find a purchase to lift myself out. This brings me back to my favourite teacher and his place in my life. He was never afraid of that

darkness, not that he ever showed anyway. He was the one person who was willing to reach down into that scary dark place and attempt to drag me out into the sunlight, biting and kicking all the way. Poetry was his favourite subject to teach and he taught it well. Poetry had become a great escape for me and his love for it made me feel that we were indeed kindred spirits. I wrote a poem for him about death. It was about how nasty life can be and how welcoming death can be. As much as I really did mean what I said in the poem, I had an ulterior motive as well – I wanted to shock him. I wanted a reaction. He gave me a shock and gave me an A+ and said that it was excellent writing. He also stapled a sheet of to the back of it, which I assumed might be a concerned response to my dark and depressing perspective on life and death. He surprised me with a poem which was like a mirror image of my own. It matched my own thoughts line for line, but from a perspective which saw the beauty in life and the possibility of the future. Educators have the opportunity to present their students with alternative perceptions of themselves so that they feel they can turn their lives in a positive direction (Wallach, 1994). I read the poem and felt his genuine concern coupled with a true respect for my thoughts. I cried myself to sleep that night, confused by the seeds of optimism he had planted in my mind. It had never really occurred to me that the future might be different than the present, that one day I might have the control I so desperately craved over my own destiny; that I might actually live past sixteen, despite what most people believed and expressed to me so readily. He gave me hope, and I could never be the same after that. I truly loved him from that moment on.

I try to pass on that feeling to my own students. I try to help them see the possibilities in their own futures and to give them the necessary skills to achieve their

dreams. Educators need to be proactive in teaching academic and social skills instead of reacting to negative behaviours (Christle, Jolivet & Nelson, 2000). I challenge them to think past the day (a difficult task for teenagers) and to envision what they want for themselves, ignoring that ever-nagging little voice that tells them it is impossible, that they don't deserve to be happy, that their destiny is pre-determined, as though misery was some sort of lowly birthright. I challenge them to embrace hope, and regardless of what they'd have you believe, teenagers know it, too. According to Wallach (1994), "for children living in an atmosphere of stress and violence, the ability to make relationships and get from others what they miss in their own families and communities is crucial to healthy development" (p. 4).

The presence of one caring and compassionate person can provide the needed support for healthy development and learning (Benard, 1995). Youths need creative outlets to explore their potential, as well as positive role models (Barry & Gunn, 1996), and according to Werner and Smith's 1989 longitudinal study of resilient youth, teachers who act as confidants are the most frequent positive role models outside the family circle (Benard, 1995). Teachers who act as positive role models and confidants facilitate academic and emotional growth, and develop resiliency in their students (Seokhoon, 1997). One of the best things about my relationship with my teacher was his acceptance of me as a person and his unwavering tolerance for my situation. He never asked too many questions, but always provided me the opportunity to confide in him. He never passed judgment but only offered suggestions for coping and for making my own life better. I thought he was infallible; of course, he wasn't; we all are fallible, but I model myself after him still. I try to reserve my impression of others and do my best to

understand and respect different perspectives, because it is respect that allows dignity and it is dignity which allows growth and to desire it for others.

Teachers who act as mentors provide children with models of appropriate behaviours and positive interactions, along with emotional support and moral guidance so that they can avoid trouble (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001; Van Acker & Wehby, 2000). According to Noddings (1988), youths who experience a caring relationship with a teacher are more motivated to succeed, as children are more motivated to work for and strive for success with people they love and trust. "Through relationships that convey high expectations, students learn to believe in themselves and in their futures, developing the critical resilience traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, and optimism," (Benard, 1995). As my teacher gave me those gifts, I try to give them to my students as well.

My teacher seemed to have an innate understanding that I did what I could at school, that sometimes my life became too heavy a burden for school to be a priority. Adolescents who are having difficulty in school are likely to be in trouble outside of school. Teachers have the opportunity for timely intervention to divert adolescents from high-risk situations (Seokhoon, 1997; Spivak, 1984) because they have a high level of awareness about the risk factors which can impede a child's success (Johnson, 1997; Leroy, 2001). When I would run away from home I would miss school for days on end and instead of disciplining me for my absence, he would tell me he missed me and asked what was going on, without judging the difficulties I was having inside or outside of school. He seemed to understand that it is difficult to focus on schooling when constantly defending against outside dangers and pressures (Craig, 1992; Wallach, 1994). I never

had a problem confiding in him because I believed that his love was unconditional and that there was nothing I would tell him that would make him think any less of me. He seemed to understand I needed survival mechanisms and put himself in the role of being a caring adult that I could turn to whenever I needed. I want to be that for my students as well.

Many teachers hold beliefs about marginalized children which are inaccurate and stereotypical, and which result in a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure for the child (Delpit, 1995; Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Leroy, 2001; Tauber, 1997; Taylor, 1991) largely as a result of thinking which is shaped by colonialist discourse which defines marginalized groups as deficient (Leroy, 2001; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). As a result, many marginalized groups see schools as unable to connect with the lives of the learners they are meant to serve (DeYoung, 1994; RCAP, 1996; and Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001), resulting in the failure to acknowledge and undermining of the strong capabilities that individuals from diverse backgrounds have (Livingstone, 1999). The developments in Canadian education are characterized by the recognition that varied groups of learners and social environments challenge the concept of uniformity in public schooling (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001), which means that schools must be more flexible in their responses to risk factors which affect youth (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). “It is through interaction and emulation with caring adults that marginalized youth develop the skills to do the day to day tasks that facilitate living, to understand what constitutes responsible parenting and responsible intimacy, to overcome the frustration that lands them in trouble, and to learn to trust people in authority,” (Wotherspoon & Schissel,

2000, p. 12). Teachers must abandon the conclusion that being at-risk equates with a disastrous future for the child (Centre for Research and Innovation, 1995).

My favourite teacher made such an impression that he is a big part of my decision to work with children. It is my way of paying him back for what he did for me. I even model much of my teaching style after his, placing my focus on the lived curriculum of the early adolescent life. The best contribution an educator can make is to provide a positive, supportive environment which provides students with care, basic needs and security (Guetzloe, 2003). My teacher always ensured his classroom was an open, casual, welcoming place to be. I could bring my guitars to school and play in my free time on the couch he had in the back of the room. His focus was on group cohesion and making school a pleasurable, safe, and inviting place to be. He took every opportunity to make the most of each moment.

One day the class decided as a group to play a practical joke on our beloved teacher. During the lunch hour, while he was out of the room, we soaked his oversized teacher's chair with water. The wetness was camouflaged by the chair's dark upholstery. He strode into the room, oblivious to our watchful eyes and stifled snickers, and planted himself firmly in his chair, quickly jumping back up when he realized the prank we had played, and sending us all into gales of triumphant laughter. He shook his head and pushed the chair into the middle of the floor at the front of the class.

"So you think that's funny, huh?" he asked in a serious tone, which caused us to doubt the intelligence of our childish prank for a brief moment, for as warm and caring as he was, he also had a temper which would come crashing down around our heads when we deserved it. We quietly looked around at each other, trying to anticipate what might

happen next. He ordered us to arrange our desks in a circle, with the wet chair at front and center. We were visibly scared, as we sensed that this was comparable to a ceremonial judgment circle. He then started by saying the name of a piece of food which started with an “a”. He then told us that we had to do the same in order for each letter of the alphabet, repeating the words of those ahead of us. If we paused too long or forgot the order, we were doomed to the chair. We each took our turns messing up and resigning ourselves to the fate of the chants of our classmates, “the chair, the chair, the chair...” some of us may have even messed up the order on purpose, in an attempt to be a part. We spent little time on formal curriculum that afternoon, but we bonded in a way I never imagined possible and we laughed uncontrollably, like children, it was a good feeling. I never forget that feeling, and I always encourage my students to find it – to leave behind their concerns at the door and to allow themselves to be children, if only briefly. I want my classroom to be a safe place for children, a place all children should know.

On another, very different afternoon our teacher took us all by surprise again. He had been visibly frustrated in the morning and we made the situation no better, being typically rambunctious teenagers. After lunch he came into the room, stood at the front of the class, put his hands in his pockets and looked around at his students as we milled about and misbehaved, paying little heed to our teacher who was about to catch us off our guard. “Fuck you!” he shouted in his booming voice, bringing a heavy silence to the room as we scurried to find our seats, cross our hands on our desks and stare to the front of the room in some sad attempt at order. Then he surprised us again by bringing back a calm and controlled tone to his voice and asking, “How does that make you feel?” We looked around at one another, afraid to speak, unsure what he was looking for, afraid of

his response. He continued, “Nothing to say? Well, I have to listen to you talk to one another all day long everyday like that and I’m pretty tired of it. It makes me feel that you have no respect for me, for each other, or for yourselves.” That sparked a genuine and thoughtful discussion about the importance of respect and managing your reactions to others, and the meaning of maturity. “Teachers can help children deal with anger by guiding their understanding and management of this emotion,” (Marion, 1997, p. 4). I never swore in his presence again. I never swore in his classroom again, neither did anyone else. He had a knack for addressing us in a way that made an impact, whatever that level might be that day, and we respected him for doing it. He took chances and put himself at risk for us. He didn’t try to hide how he felt and I loved him for it. He was real, and he taught us that being yourself and being real was what mattered. We had to learn to accept one another as we were. It is as I tell my students now – “You don’t have to like everyone here, but you do need to respect them.” It’s a basic lesson that all children should learn from an early age. It’s a tradition I feel responsible to carry on.

My grade eight teacher made me want to help others the way he helped me. I try each day to live up to that image he presented of himself to me. More than anything, he was my friend, a confidante I have made contact with over the years, to let him know how I am doing, to remind him of the effect he made on my life. There is nothing more rewarding to me than when my students do the same for me. When they come to tell me that they have graduated from high school and need a referral letter for college, when they come to show me their babies, or to update me on their lives in general, it reminds me of the effect I have had on their lives. It shows me that they know they were loved, and that they return that love in little ways, in all their days. I hope I have encouraged

them to strive for what they want in life and to realize that much is possible if you work hard, if you respect others, and if you maintain a positive attitude. My teacher gave me those gifts and I give them to others as much as I can. To be a teacher is a privilege and a responsibility. I never lose sight of those truths.

At the end of my grade eight year we had a graduation, as that was the senior grade in my school. My teacher announced to us that this would be his final year as a junior high teacher. The class was devastated, just as my own students are when I mention moving on. As a tribute to him I arranged for our class to perform onstage at the graduation. Together we sang “You light up my life”. I did the solo and my classmates sang the chorus. It meant everything to me to let him know what he meant to me. And, in his true fashion, he cried his eyes out and laughed at himself for doing it. I think we taught him as much as he taught us. That is the way it should be. I think of him still – I love him still.

Journal Entry

“These stories are a part of my story, they are a part of my ‘I am’. But they are not my only story,” (Chambers, 1994, p. 33). One of the most difficult things about writing my story was the negative emphasis the whole thing seemed to have, right from the start. I made my list of subjects to discuss. I considered the similarities between myself and my students. I focused on the hardships they have endured, the hardships I have endured, and they were many. In frustration, I asked myself if there was anything positive which I shared with them and there were a few things which came to mind. We are all survivors; we have taken what life has given us and carried on despite the many

obstacles we have encountered. As much as our experiences have scarred us in some way, they have also strengthened us and made us more insightful and considerate of the depth of human suffering. We have maintained a sense of humour through it all; it wasn't easy, but it was absolutely necessary to be able to carry on and maintain a positive perspective. What I finally realized, why I decided to make this my project topic, was that what I had in common with my students was that they had found a teacher who cared about them, who connected with them, and who seemed to understand that their shortcomings were a response to their circumstances. I realized that I had encountered a teacher who made me feel that way too. I realized that I had modeled much of my own teaching after him.

Reading through this chapter also made me realize all of the people who were left out in this discussion. Someone told me once that the more connections a child has, the more caring adults they have in their life, the better the chance they had of developing a healthy, positive outlook and of succeeding in the future. That makes me think of all of the people who have helped me throughout my life; people who were there for me when things got tough, with no consideration of themselves. Now that I am old enough to understand, I realize the sacrifices they made and the hardships they endured, the stress and worry of being someone who cared for my well-being, even when I didn't or couldn't care myself. Many of my aunts have opened their homes to me when I had nowhere else to go. Friends have made sacrifices and even put themselves at risk to ensure that I would be okay. I could fill volumes just to talk about the many times and ways I have been loved by those who took the time and energy to care, but perhaps I'll save that for another time. What is important is that I have gained the understanding that it is important to do

the best I can and to reach out for the sake of reaching out whenever I have the chance, because I can never know the difference I'll make; the load I might lighten; the hope I might give. I have also come to appreciate that none of us makes it alone. Even the strongest of us need to be held up when we are at our weakest. Even the weakest of us can be the strength for someone else who has too heavy a burden to bear.

Chapter Fifteen: The End and the Beginning

I have reached the end. It has been an interesting journey. I have learned many old and new things about myself. I have changed myself, and as a result, there were many significant changes in my life. Although change is difficult, it is necessary and positive and must be taken as an opportunity.

My primary purpose for writing this autobiographical account of my experiences was to share my insight with other professionals, so that they might better understand the difficulties that childhood can entail and the effects it can have on the learning and living process. My second purpose was to offer some guidance on how to best serve students who are in need of extra care. I tried to view things from a perspective I once had, to try to recount what would have meant the most for me. I was fortunate enough to have people along the way who cared enough to make me a priority and who guided me towards a positive future. Not all children have this in their lives; it is the opportunity of every teacher to be there for one of those children. That is what education is, an interaction between individuals with a mutual relationship to teach and to learn from one another.

What final wisdom comes of this? Have I accomplished what I set out to do? I think I have. I hope I have. I know that whether or not I actually managed to accomplish my original goal in undertaking an autobiographical project, which was to share the insights I had into the lives of my students as a result of my own experiences, I have definitely achieved far more than I ever set out to realize.

My expectation when I began this project was that I would remember some difficult moments in my life, draw some sort of wisdom from what I had learned from the

experiences, and share it with others through my writing. What I did not expect was that I would undergo the personal transformation which has overtaken my life. I am re-creating myself. The stories keep coming. I have not changed who I am; I have accepted who I am. I have looked into my darkest corners and I have embraced the things I have found there. I have truly begun the lifelong task of integrating those parts of myself that I have denied for so long. Through this integration I have become whole, I have become myself. The loneliness I have suffered for so long is subsiding because I can now be alone with myself and be truly happy for it. There is no greater feeling than coming to accept who I am, not just the things that I like about myself and the things I choose for my life, but also the things that make me weak and selfish, the things I have no control over because they are merely a part of my fabric.

I feel truly lucky that this is the note I will be finishing my degree on. It was unexpected. What was meant to be a means to an end has turned into the beginning of my life as a whole person. This was not the whole story; the stories have just begun. I feel older in my own skin, and as though I have become a child again. I feel wiser. I feel as though the possibilities are endless. I know they are. I am a butterfly with the sun on my wings, seeking the sweet things in the world and happy to be alive and free. There truly is great wonder in the world. Everything is so bright when you emerge from your dark places into the light.

I have reached the end, which means it is time for a new beginning.

References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, 44, 709-716.
- Balster, L. (1991). Involving the families of at risk youth in the educational process. *ERIC/ECM Trends and Issues, Series 5*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
- Barr, R. D. and Parrett, W. H. (1995). *Hope at last for at risk youth*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Barry, F. and Gunn, H. D. (1996). Endangered children and environmental standards. *Community Development: Research Briefs and Case Studies, 4*, Cornell University: Ithaca, NY.
- Benard, B. (1995). *Fostering resilience in children*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education,.
- Benard, B. (1997). *Turning it around for all youth: From risk to resilience*. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.
- Bergstrom, A., Cleary, L. M., & Peacock, T. (2002). *The seventh generation: Native students speak about finding the good path*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Blumberg, M. L. (1974). Psychopathology of the abusing parent. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 28(1), 21-29.
- Bower, B. (1994, July 9). Growing up poor; Poverty packs several punches for child development. *Science News*.

- Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science, natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers.
- Canadian Institute of Child Health. (2000). *The health of Canada's children (3rd ed.)*. Ottawa, OT: Health Canada.
- Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (1998). *The national youth at-risk pilot project initiative background*. Gloucester, OT: Author.
- Carlin, R. (1988). *The world of music, rock and roll*. New York, NY: William Morrow.
- Casanova, U. (1990). Rashomon in the classroom: Multiple perspectives of teachers, parents, and students. In A. Barona and E. Garcia (Eds.), *Children at risk: Poverty, minority status and other issues in education inequity*. Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychology, page numbers unavailable.
- Cavaiola, A. A. & Schiff, M. (1988). Behavioral sequelae of physical and/or sexual abuse in adolescents. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 12, 181-188.
- Centre for Education Research and Innovation (1995). *Our children at risk*. France: OECD.
- Chambers, C. M. (1998). Composition and composure. *Alberta English*.
- Chambers, C. M. (2002). "As Canadian as possible under the circumstances": A view of contemporary curriculum discourses in Canada. In W. Pinar (Ed.), *Handbook of International Curriculum Research*, pp. 221-252, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Chambers, C. M. (1994). Looking for a home: A work in progress. *Frontiers: A Journal of Woman Studies*, 15(2), 23-50.
- Chassin, L. (1984). Adolescent substance use and abuse. In P. Karoly & J. Steffen (Eds.),

- Advances in child behavioral analysis and therapy, Volume 3: Adolescent behavior disorders: Foundations and contemporary concerns.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, page numbers unavailable.
- Children's Defense Fund (2002). *The state of America's children.* (Introduction by Marian Wright Edelman). Washington DC, WA.
- Chiong, J. A. (1998). *Racial categorization of biracial children in schools.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Christle, C. A., Jolivette, K., & Nelson, C. M. (2000). *Youth aggression and violence: Risk resilience, and prevention.* Arlington, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.
- Clark, A. S. (2002). *Social and emotional distress among American Indian and Alaska Native students: Research findings.* Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural education and small schools.
- Cocozza, J. J. (2000). Youth with mental health disorders: Issues and emerging responses. *Juvenile Justice*, 7, 3-13, WADC: WA.
- Conte, J. R. (1988). The effects of sexual abuse on children: Results of a research project. *Human Sexual Aggression: Current Perspectives*, 528, 310-326, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.
- Coons, P. M. (1986). Child abuse and multiple personality disorder: Review of the literature and suggestions for treatment. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 10, 455-462.
- Cotterell, A. (1999). *The encyclopedia of mythology.* London: Anness Publishing.
- Craig, S. E. (1992). The educational needs of children living with violence. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 67-71.

- Cummings, E. (1987). Coping with background anger in early childhood. *Child Development, 58*(4), 976-984.
- Cunningham, C. (2003). *Trends and issues: Social and economic context. Revised.* Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational management.
- Danica, E. (1988). *Don't: A woman's word.* Toronto: McLelland.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflicts in the classroom.* New York, NY: New Press.
- DeYoung, A. J. (1994). Children at risk in America's rural schools: Economic and cultural dimensions. In R. J. Rossi (Ed.), *Schools and students at risk: Context and framework for positive change*, pp. 229-51. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Dickens, E. (1998). *Correlating teenage exposure to rock/rap themes with associated behaviors and thought patterns.* (Master's Thesis, Salem-Teikyo University).
- Dohrenwend, B. P. & Dohrenwend, B. S. (1974). Social and cultural influences on psychopathology. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual Review of Psychology, 25*, Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Donmoyer, R. & Kos, R. (1993). *At risk students' portraits, policies, programs and practices.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ellis, J., Small-McGinley, L., & Hart, S. (1998). The perspectives of "difficult" students on belonging and inclusion in the classroom. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems, 7*(3), 142-146.
- Emerson, S. & McBride M. C. (1986). *A model for group treatment of adults molested as children.* Las Vegas: University of Nevada, ERIC Document Reproduction

Service, ED272814.

Erlewine, S. T. (nd). *The Cult Biography*. All Music Guide.

Evans, P. (1995). Children and youth “at risk”. In *Organization for economic cooperation and development centre for educational research and innovation, my children at risk*, pp. 13-50. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Fantuzzo, J. W. & Mohr, W. K. (1999). Prevalence and effects of child exposure to domestic violence. *Future Child*, 9(3), 21-32.

Ferenzi, S. (1955). Confusion of tongues between adults and the child. In M. Balint (Ed.), *Final contributions to the problems and methods of psycho-analysis by Sandor Ferenczi, M. D.* (E. Mosbacher, et al., trans.), pp. 156-167. New York: Basic Books (Originally published 1933).

Fine, M. (1990). Making controversy: Who’s “at risk”? *Journal of Urban and Cultural Studies*, 1, 55-68.

Firestone, R. W. (1993). *The universality of emotional child abuse*. Los Angeles, CA: Glendon Association.

Firestone, R. W. (1988). *Voice therapy: A psychotherapeutic approach to self-destructive behavior*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Fornatale, P. (1987). *The story of rock and roll*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

Gabarino, J. (1995). *Raising children in a socially toxic environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Garbarino, J. & Gilliam, G. (1980). *Understanding abusive families*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

- Garbarino, J., Guttman, E. & Seeley, J. W. (1986). *The psychologically battered child: Strategies for identification, assessment, and intervention*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gelles, R. J. (1976). Demythologizing child abuse. *Family Coordinator*, 25, 135-141.
- Gillian, J. (1991, May 23). Shame and humiliation: The emotions of individual and collective violence. (Inquiry presented at the Erikson Lectures, Harvard University), Cambridge, MA.
- Gilmore, L. (1994). *Autobiographics: A feminist theory of women's self-representation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Goodman, Y. M. (1985). Kidwatching: Observing children in the classroom. In A. Jagger & M. Smith-Burke (Eds.), *Observing the language learner*, pp. 9-18. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Grotberg, E. (1995). A guide to promoting resilience in children. *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, Benard van Leer Foundation.
- Guetzloe, E. (2003). *Depression and disability in children and adolescents*. Arlington, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.
- Guetzloe, E. (1991). *Depression and suicide: Special education students at risk*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Hawkins, J. D., Jenson, J. M., Catalano, R. F. & Lisher, D. M. (1988). Delinquency and drug use: Implications for social services. *Social Service Review*, 62, 258-284.
- Hays, R. D. & Ellikson, P. L. (1996). Associations between drug use and deviant behavior in teenagers. *Health Sciences Program Reprint Series, Addictive Behaviors*, 21(3), 291-302. Santa Monica, CA: RandCorp

- Hennesy, K. D., Rabideau, G. J., Cicchetti, D., & Cummings, E. M. (1994). Responses of physically abused and nonabused children to different forms of interadult anger. *Child Development, 65*(3), 815-828.
- Herring, R. D. (1992). Biracial children: An increasing concern for elementary and middle school counselors. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 27*(2), 123-130.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkely: University of California Press.
- Honig, A. & Wittmer, D. (1992). *Prosocial development in children: Caring, sharing, and cooperation: A bibliographic resource guide*. New York: Garland.
- Hughes, H. M. & Barad, S. J. (1983). Psychological functioning of children in a battered women's shelter: A preliminary investigation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 53*, 525-531.
- Hull, J. (2000). *Aboriginal post-secondary education and labour market outcomes*. Ottawa, OT: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.
- Human Resources Development Canada: Statistics Canada (1996). *Growing up in Canada: National longitudinal survey of children and youth*. Ottawa, OT: Author.
- Johnson, G. M. (1997). Teachers in the inner-city: Experience-based ratings of factors that place students at risk. *Preventing School Failure, 42*(0), 19-26.
- Johnson, R. M., Kotch, J. B., Catellier, D. J., Winsor, J. R., Dufort, V., Hunter, W., et al. Adverse behavioral and emotional outcomes from child abuse and witnessed violence. *Child Maltreatment, 7*(3), 179-186.
- Jones, J. G. (1982). Sexual abuse of children: Current concepts. *American Journal of Diseases of Children, 136*, 142-146.

- Kaplan, L. S. (1993). *Coping with peer pressure*. New York: Rosen Publishing.
- Kerwin, C., Ponterotto, J. G., Jackson, B. L., & Harris, A. (1993). Racial identity in biracial children: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Counseling and Psychology, 40*(2), 221-231.
- Kierkus, C. A. & Baer, D. (2002). A social control explanation of the relationship between family structure and delinquent behaviour. *Canadian Journal of Criminology, 44*(4), 425-459, Ottawa, OT.
- Kohn, M. L. (1973). Social class and schizophrenia: A critical review and reformulation. *Schizophrenia Bulletin, 7*, 60.
- Kohut, A. & Hugick, L. (1989). Woodstock: 20 years later, era gets mixed reviews. *SIRS 1989 Youth, 2*, 77.
- Knapp, J. F. (1998). The impact of children witnessing violence. *Pediatric Clinic North America, 45*(2), 355-364.
- Krahn, H. & Lowe, G. S. (1999). School-to-work transitions and postmodern values: What's changing in Canada? In W. R. Heinz (Ed.), *From education to work: Cross-national perspectives*, pp. 260-283, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kratcoski, P. C. & Dunn-Hatcoski, L. (1980). *The relationship of victimization through child abuse to aggressive delinquent behavior*. (Inquiry presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology), San Francisco, CA.
- Kusugak, J. (2004). Inuit traditional knowledge is a real science. *Inuktitut*, page numbers unavailable, Toronto, OT.
- Leroy, C. (2001). Teacher's perspectives on the family backgrounds of children at risk.

- McGill Journal of Education*, 36, 45-61, Montreal, QB.
- Lewis, C. C. (1994). *Teen suicide, too young to die*. Hillside, New Jersey: Enslow Publishers.
- Lewis, M. & Michaelson, D. (1992). *Children's emotions and moods*. New York: Plenum.
- Little Bear, L. (2004). The story of Sokitapiwa/Blackfoot. In *Histories, cultures and contemporary issues of First Nation, Metis, Inuit Peoples of Alberta. A teacher preparation resource package for Faculties of Education and Alberta Learning*, pp. 135-164. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education.
- Livingstone, D. W. (1999). Exploring the icebergs of adult learning: Findings on the first Canadian survey of informal learning practices. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 13, 49-72.
- Lorber, R., Felton, D. K., & Reid, J. (1984). A social learning approach to the reduction of coercive processes in child abusive families: A molecular analysis. *Advances in Behavior Research and Therapy*, 6, 29-45.
- Lugones, E. & Spelman, E. V. (1983). Have I got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism, and the demand for "the woman's voice". *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6(6).
- Lundgren, J. (1998). Writing "in sparkler script": Incest and the construction of subjectivity in contemporary Canadian women's autobiographical texts. *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 65, 233-248.
- Marion, M. (1997). *Helping young children deal with anger*. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

- McEvoy, A. & Welker, R. (2000). Antisocial behaviour, academic failure, and school climate: A critical review. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 130-140.
- McNutt, B. (1994, April 22). Adventure as therapy: Using adventure as part of therapeutic programmes with young people in trouble and at risk. In *Adventure-based interventions with young people in trouble and at risk*. (Proceedings of a one-day conference: Adventure-based Interventions), England: UK.
- Mercola, J. (2004), How to treat hypochondria. Retrieved on July 29, 2005 from www.mercola.com.
- Metallica, (1984). *Fade to Black* from *Ride the Lightning*. Elektra Entertainment.
- Miller, A. (1981). *Prisoners of childhood: The drama of the gifted child and the search for the true self* (R. Ward trans.). New York: Basic Books (originally published 1979).
- Miller, A. (1984). *For your own good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence* (2nd ed.) (H. Hannum and H. Hannum, trans.). New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux (originally published 1980).
- Miller, A. (1984). *Thou shalt not be aware: Society's betrayal of the child* (H. Hannum and H. Hannum, trans.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (originally published 1981).
- Morse, H. (2000). It takes a whole village to raise a child: Poverty and partnerships. *Journal Cahperd*, 66, 15.
- Muller, R. T. (1994). Social support and stress factors in child maltreatment among alcoholic families. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 26, 438.

- National Council of Welfare (1998). *Statistics reference list – Child benefits: Kids are still hungry, a report.*
- Natriello, G., McGill, E. L., and Pallas, A. M. (1990). *Schooling disadvantaged children: Racing against catastrophe.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Newman, F. (1993). *Children in crisis: Support for teachers and parents.* Markham, OT: Scholastic Canada Ltd.
- Noddings, N. (1988, Dec. 7). Schools face crisis in caring. *Education Week.*
- Norman, R. (2001). *House of mirrors: Performing autobiography(ically) in language/education.* New York: Peter Lang.
- Petten, C. (2003). Documentary visits spiritual past of Inuit. *Windspeaker, 21(9)*, page numbers unavailable.
- Pelton, L. H. (1978). Child abuse and neglect: The myth of classlessness. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 48*, 608-617.
- Plopper, B. L. and Ness, M. E. (1993). Death as portrayed to adolescents through Top 40 rock and roll music. *Adolescence, 28*, 793-807.
- Poston, W. S. C. (1990). The biracial identity development model: A needed addition. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 69(2)*, 152-155.
- Potvin, L. (1992). *White lies (for my Mother).* Edmonton, AB: NeWest.
- Prothrow-Stith, D. & Quaday, S. (1995). *Hidden casualties: The relationship between violence and learning.* Washington DC: National Health and Education Consortium.
- Radiohead (2001). *Pyramid Song* from *Amnesiac.* Capitol Records.
- Rosenbaum, A. & O'Leary, K. D. (1981). Children: The unintended victims of marital

- violence. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 51, 692-699.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). *Report of the RCAP: 1, Looking forward, looking back*. Ottawa, OT: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- Rutter, M. (1989). Pathways from childhood to adult life. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30, 23-51.
- Sack, W. H. & Dale, D. D. (1982). Abuse and deprivation in failing adoptions. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 6, 443-451.
- Sanders, S. R. (1989, November). Under the influence: Paying the price of my father's booze. *Harper's Magazine*.
- Saskatchewan Education (1996). *Building communities of hope: Community and school and policy framework*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Schissel, B. (1997). *Blaming children: Youth crime, moral panics, and the politics of hate*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Schissel, B. & Wotherspoon, T. (2001). The business of placing Canadian children and youth "at risk." *Canadian Journal of Education*, 26.
- Schwartz, W. (1998). *The identity development of biracial youth*. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.
- Seokhoon, S. (1997, Sept. 22). *Developing resiliency in young children*. (Inquiry presented at the Asian workshop on Child and Adolescent Development, Brunei).
- Shaughnessy, L., Branum, C., & Everett-Jones, S. (2001). *2001 Youth risk behavior survey of high school students attending Bureau funded schools*. Washington DC: Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Indian Education Programs.

- Shearer, S. L. & Herbert, C. A. (1987). Long-term effects of unresolved sexual trauma. *American Family Physician, 36*(4), 169-175,
- Shengold, L. (1989). *Soul murder: the effects of childhood abuse and deprivation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sibbald, B. (2000). A losing battle against child poverty? *Journal of the Canadian Medical Association, 163*(8), 1042.
- Smashing Pumpkins (1993). *Mayonaise* from *Siamese Dream*. Virgin Records.
- Spivak, G. (1984). Related behavioral difficulties: A longitudinal study. In S.A. Mednick, M., Harway, & K. M. Finello (Eds.). *Handbook of longitudinal research: 1, Birth and childhood cohorts*, page numbers unavailable, New York, NY: Praeger Press.
- Stephenson, P. S. & Lo, N. (1974). When shall I tell Kevin? A battered child revisited. *Child Welfare, 53*, 576-581.
- Swadener, B. B. & Lubeck, S. (1995). *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Tauber, R. T. (1997). *Self-fulfilling prophecy: A practical guide to its use in education*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Taylor, D. (1991). *Learning denied*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Terr, L. (1983). Chowchilla revisited: The effects of psychic trauma four years after a schoolbus kidnapping. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 140*, 1543-1550.
- Thornberry, T. (1987). Toward an interactional theory of delinquency. *Criminology, 25*, 863-891.
- Thornton, M. C. (1996). Hidden agendas, identity theories, and multiracial people. In

- M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *The biracial experience: Racial borders as the new frontier*, pp. 101-120, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tite, R. (1996). Child abuse and teacher's work: The voice of frustration. In J. R. Epp & A. M. Watkinson (Eds.), *Systemic violence: How schools hurt children*, pp. 50-65. London, UK: Falmer Press.
- Tolone, W. L. & Tieman, C. R. (1990). Drugs, delinquency and "nerds": Are loners deviant? *Journal of Drug Education*, 20, 153-162.
- Took, K. J. & Weiss, D. S. (1994). The relationship between heavy metal and rap music and adolescent turmoil; real or artifact? *Adolescence*, 29, 613-621.
- Trocme, N., Maclaurin, B., Fallon, B., Daciuk, J., Billingsley, D., Tourigny, M., et al. (2001). *Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect: Final report*. Ottawa, OT: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- Trocme, N., MacMillan, H., Fallon, B., DeMarco, R. (2003). *Nature and severity of physical harm caused by child abuse and neglect: Results from the Canadian Incidence Study CMAJ*.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000). *Mental Health: A report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1999). *1998-99 Trends in Indian health*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Legislation, Indian Health Service.

- Van Acker, R. W. and Wehby, J. H. (2000). Exploring the social contexts influencing student success or failure: Introduction. *Preventing School Failure, 44*, 93-96.
- van Manen, M. (1999). The practice of practice. In M. Lange, J. Olson, J. Hansen, & W. Blunder (Eds.), *Changing schools/changing practices: Perspectives on educational reform and teacher professionalism*. Luvain, Belgium: Garant.
- van Manen, M. (2002). *Writing in the dark: Phenomenological studies in interpretive inquiry*. London, ON: The Althouse Press.
- Wallach, L. B. (1994). *Violence and young children's development*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.
- Wang, M. C. & Gordon E. W. (Eds.) (1994). *Educational resilience in inner-city America*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ward, M. G. K. & Bennet, S. (2003). Studying child abuse and neglect in Canada: I are just at the beginning. *Journal of the Canadian Medical Association, 169(9)*, 919.
- Steinhardt, A. D. (1978). *Webster's II New Riverside Pocket Dictionary*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Weil, C. M. (1987). *Hassles, social support, symptoms, and alcohol involvement: Their interaction in young alcoholic and nonalcoholic families*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Werner, E. (1990). Protective factors and individual resilience. In S. Meisels & J. Shonkoff (Eds.). *Handbook of Early childhood interventions*, New York, NY: Cambridge University.
- Werner, E. & Smith, R. (1989). *Vulnerable but invincible: A longitudinal study of*

- resilient children and youth*. New York, NY: Adams, Bannister & Cox.
- Werner, E. & Smith, R. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High-risk children from birth to adulthood*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- White, H., Pandina, R., & LaGrange, R. L. (1987). Longitudinal predictors of serious substance use and delinquency. *Criminology*, 25, 715-740.
- Witherspoon, G. (1977). *Language and art in the Navaho Universe*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Wolfe, D. A. & Korsch, B.(1994). Witnessing domestic violence during childhood and adolescence: Implications for pediatric practice. *Pediatrics*, 94(4), 594-595.
- Wotherspoon, T. & Schissel, B. (2000). *Risky business? "At-risk" designations and culturally diverse schooling*. (Inquiry submitted to the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, Pan-Canadian education research agenda).
- Zeesman, A. (2001). HRDC Research on children and youth at risk. In Canadian Education Statistics Council (Ed.), *Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda 2000 Symposium Report*, 5, pp. 81-589, Toronto, OT: Canadian Education Statistics Council.
- Zigler, E. (1980). Controlling child abuse: Do I have the knowledge and/or the will? In G. Gerbner, C. J. Ross, and E. Zigler (Eds.), *Child abuse: An agenda for action*, pp. 3-32, New York: Oxford University Press.