

Writing My Way Home
Disconnections, Connections, and Reconnections:
Rifts and the Possibility of Healing Through Memory and Story

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*This paper is
A stuttering
A stammering
A searching for words
Words that break,
That go beyond what is written,
That look for angles and lines of flight*

(Wyatt, 2008, p. 955)

Abstract

The current environmental crisis in western, capitalist, colonial societies reflects a moral crisis for which one more technological fix will not suffice. It reflects rifts between our body and the rest of nature that originate with the lack of a sense of embodied, felt somatic relationship to self, others and to nature, of which we are a part. In this paper, I explore how a critical autoethnographic lens, as self-reflective research and writing: shines a light on the interplay between an individual's lived experiences and those of the wider world; situates the individual in a broader context; returns the gaze and, by so doing, leads to both a greater understanding of the interconnections between all things and to the possibility of healing. Autoethnography has become an important way for those on the margins to "talk back to power." The notion of truth is one I see as very relevant to autoethnography. What is truth, whose truth are we referring to when we say something is true or not true, how is truth constructed and, who is privileged to speak the truth, who is silenced? In a similar fashion, knowledge and knowledge making are important. Autoethnography frees the writer to write in an evocative, engaging manner that can be easily accessed by a broad crosssection of readers. It speaks to how all creatures survive and thrive, even in difficult situations, and how they leave behind, not only the remnants of their material possessions and their physical presence, but their strength, their courage, their passion, their ingenuity, their rage and their love.

"Autoethnography disrupts the binary of art and science (Ellis, Adam, & Bochner, 2011, Section 5). It weaves together the social sciences, the humanities and the craft of writing. I draw on myth and folklore, literature, poetry and photography, as well as academic writing in environmental studies, sociology, social and political theory, narrative theory, philosophy, and women's studies. In telling my story, I am gathering knowledge from the past, but it is not necessarily knowledge

about the past, for all that I sometimes have are traces and fragments. Memory too is selective; it plays tricks on us, for it is mediated. There is also collective memory. Most relevant to autoethnography is the link between personal and collective identity. Through the writing process, I learn how loss begins to fade into memory and how I am able to construct memory and bring to consciousness seemingly lost memories, both individual and collective.

Foreword

My Major Research Paper, like my Plan of Study, reflects who I am and what I value. My Area of Concentration speaks to my personal belief in the power of stories to help us make sense of life. Because stories position us in both a reconstructed past and an imagined future, and, most importantly, because stories embed us in relationships, they are the way we connect with others and the world around us. My Area of Concentration is divided into four components: the first is *Autoethnography as practice*; the second, *Autoethnographic theories and practices*; the third is, *The dialogical relationship between self and the world*; and the final component is *Nature and society*. The Learning Objectives I address through my Major Research Paper include: the role of both autoethnography and writing as autoethnographic practice and the role of storytelling in achieving social and environmental justice; the impact that silence, the culture of silence, secrets, lies and denial have on childhood experiences, on adult lives and on social, political, economic and scientific events, and how both private and public silence get in the way of social and environmental justice; contemporary debates in the field of autoethnography and how they are framed; the dialogical relationship between the self and the world; loss, death, dying, grief and mourning across all species; the rifts which separate us and the rifts or disconnections between all creaturely bodies which must be reconciled. Debates in the field of autoethnography are addressed in my Plan of Study; however I elected not to discuss them in my Major Research Paper. In my Major Research Paper, I do address why I chose autoethnography as my research methodology, but writing as autoethnographic practice and storytelling take centre stage. I believe autoethnography, as a methodological praxis, models a different disposition from the traditional objective, linear, rational, and evidence based forms of social science inquiry. It is evocative. It positions the researcher as both researcher and subject. As a form of critique and resistance, and

with its commitment to embodied knowledges, it is potentially emancipatory. While this Major Research Paper completes the objectives set out in my Plan of Study, there is much still to learn, much I still want to learn. It has been for me a transformative personal and academic journey, one I hope to continue in the years to come.

Acknowledgements

Many people supported me in this project. To all of them: my gratitude. My desire to write a memoir began in 2012 in Chris Cavanagh's Popular Education class. It was his belief in me, his support for my vision, which gave me the courage to pursue an MES degree. I am grateful to Paul Antze, in whose class I had an epiphany that I can weave together personal experiences with scholarly works in ecology, sociology, social and political theory and philosophy. That epiphany moved my vision forward. Mora Campbell and Chris Cavanagh, my academic supervisors, set the bar high and never doubted I would strive to reach the high standards they set. In Sherry Rowley's Storytelling class, I made my first attempt at writing in more than one voice. Thank you Sherry. Your patience and gentle encouragement gave me the confidence to take a considered leap into the unknown and not be afraid. Frehiwot Tesfaye's insights, shared over *India Spice Tea*, deepened my understanding of, and appreciation for, autoethnography as a research methodology. And, I thank Peter Timmerman, in whose classes my mind was opened anew to the complexity of ideas, to wonder and to Romanticism. I owe a thank you as well to Leesa Fawcett for sharing with me her deep knowledge of the relationships between humans and other animals. The kindness of all these people, the respectful way they mentored, the generosity with which they shared their knowledge and skills, made seeing this paper to completion a joy.

To my friend Fiona Miller whose technological wizardry saved me on more than one

occasion, many thanks. To the professionals at St Michael's Hospital and CAMH whose skills are matched only by their compassion, thank you for showing me a path that balances acceptance and change. And to my life partner Paula, I owe gratitude beyond words. Your quiet strength, your belief in me, and your love keep me engaged with life and make all things possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

ix

TWO INTRODUCTIONS

THE PERSONAL	1
The Education of Mrs. Lois	2
My Family: A Reflection of Loss and Disorientation	4
The Presence of Absences	14
THE THEORETICAL	19
Can Words Play a Part in Healing?	20
On Telling Stories: Our Responsibility to the Listener or Reader	22

CHAPTER 1

SECRETS, LIES, SILENCE, AND DENIAL	23
School Daze circa 1951-1962	24
Living on the Edges of Normal	28
Achieving Consciousness	29
A Decorporalized Body: The Rift Between Us and the Rest of Nature	32
Human-centredness and the Rendering of Nature Voiceless and Without Agency ...	35
Planetary Violence, Death, Extinction, and Our Own Mortality	38

CHAPTER 2

BODIES SPEAK	41
The Call to Listen	44
The Elephant in the Room	46
Facing Our Fears	48
On Being Declared an Alien	50

CHAPTER 3

“UNLEARNING TO NOT SPEAK”	54
A Futile Search For Meaning	57
Ecocide and the “Pathology of Normal”	58
“The White Male System” Not Men qua Men	59
Animal Death	61
The “Expressive Earth”	64
Life Lessons and a Way Forward	65

CHAPTER 4

RECONNECTING	70
The Animal That Became God	71
Moving From Self-made Gods to Planetary Thinking	73
Hope Anchored in Practice	73
Healing Love, Relational Resilience and Making Connections	77

The Blame Game.....	79
Connecting With Ourselves.....	82
CHAPTER 5	
IMAGINING A BETTER WORLD	86
The Importance of Wonder.....	88
The Legacy of the Romantics.....	90
Dangerous Words and the Power of Language to Subvert.....	93
Dystopias in the Works of the Romantics and Beyond	96
Giving Wings to Our Imagination	100
CONCLUSION	102
REFERENCES	107

Preface

*People are strange when you're a stranger
Faces look ugly when you're alone...
When you're strange
No one remembers your name
When you're strange
When you're strange
When you're strange*

(Morrison & Krieger/The Doors, 1967)

Morrison and Krieger's lyrics could have been the sound track for my life. Growing up, I felt estranged from myself and others. I felt like an alien residing in an alien universe. I even began to describe myself as a "head with legs." In the first year of my MES programme, I took a course in which we discussed metabolic rift theory, ecological rifts, and knowledge rifts, and I felt this immediate resonance. I had this *aha* moment. When I described myself as a head with legs, wasn't I describing a rift? I became intrigued with rifts and disconnections. I wanted to explore how those many rifts came to be and what, if anything, might be done to heal them.

Growing up, books and stories were my companions; they brought me comfort and introduced me to worlds outside of myself. So I came to the writing of this paper guided by a belief in the transformative power of stories to deepen our connection with, and our appreciation for, the dialogical relationship we have with all life forms. I chose autoethnographic writing because it is best suited to the issues I wanted to explore. Autoethnography as a feminist research methodology makes the private public, validates lived experiences, and gives voice and agency to those rendered voiceless and without agency. This includes non-human animals and an animate earth.

In telling my life story, I write my way into new knowledge, and, by so doing I work

towards healing the rift within. Through memoir, through traces and fragments, I explore how, in part, I became the person I am today and how what we do in our lives is recapitulated in the world. The simple idea which grounds this paper is that we can take lessons learned on a journey to healing our own rifts and apply them, if only in small ways, to healing the cosmos. As James Lovelock argues, the earth will go on, in some form or another (Lovelock, 2007). The environmental havoc humans are causing, is in effect, the canary in the coal mine, alerting us to a moral problem. How we relate to ourselves, to each other, to the cosmos is the true problem. We cannot solve a moral problem by simply coming up with yet another technological fix.

There are two Introductions. The first is the “Personal Introduction,” which provides the reader with a window into my childhood and some of the forces which shaped me. The second is the “Theoretical Introduction,” which addresses some of the theories which underlie the issues explored in this paper. However, throughout my paper, the reader will see personal stories interwoven with an analysis of those personal experiences, for, as much as autoethnography is a product, it is also a process. It is my hope that what I have written keeps a conversation going, affects the reader and, above all, reveals how I came to understand that I could not become my self until I realized that I am a part of a shared, connected cosmos.

Introduction: The Personal

Home is not always an “expressive place, a place of origin and return. Sometimes it is about the illusion of home as a memory.

(Lippard, 1997, p. 23).

I was born inside out. Nerve endings exposed. Like Hongyu Wang (2004) who hears the call of the stranger, the stranger outside, the “stranger [who] also calls inside of me,” I hear the stranger beckoning and I am following her echoes (p.7). That stranger is my self, and intimately tied to my search for home is my search for my self. I am on a long journey, and I yearn for home.

I grew up in a family where silences spoke when words did not. Words, after all, are dangerous. Loss, dislocation, estrangement, fragments of memory, rummaging my way through my memory bank, I uncover what I thought I had lost or never had. I practice radical acceptance and find new ways of becoming. I disrupt what made me a head with legs, disconnected from my body and my feelings, and I find a new vision of home.

Ruby cat journeys with me. She is my Bodhisattva. Like Kuan Yin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, who, when she heard cries of suffering from everywhere in the world, put off Nirvana and remained in the world with humans until all sentient beings were freed from pain, I believe Ruby also made a vow to assist sentient beings in difficult times (Baroni, 2002, p.198). Ruby cat was rescued, injured and small for her age, from the cold streets of Toronto in December, 2006, on the day I was discharged from St Michael’s Hospital after making another suicide attempt. In spite of her troubled early life, she is unfailingly gentle, unfailingly loving.

The Education of Mrs. Lois

I am going to tell you the story of a girl in my Montreal neighborhood who grew up a troubled, and no doubt troubling, only child in a multi-generational eastern European immigrant family. Her mother was her intellectual muse, her inspiration, her guide into a world of ideas, and at this she succeeded wonderfully. In her role of nurturer and protector, she failed miserably. The little girl was charged with answering the door to bill collectors and explaining why cheques bounced. She was responsible for remaining silent when her father was excluded from family events and gift exchanges and from joining her mother in her grandparent's and uncle's living quarters. As a young child, she was deeply offended for her father, but when she asked her mother why she did not stand up for daddy, she was told not to be rude. She was adultified in the way she dressed and behaved. Very early on, the little girl realized that she was the mother in the family, and, despite her discomfort, she never directly confronted the way things were. Any attempt on her part to question this role reversal was met with denial. In time, she had to conclude that expressing anger and challenging the status quo was futile. The destructive effects of what Paolo Freire (2000) called a "culture of silence" were writ large in her family (p. 30). I am that girl. The one the neighbors called Mrs. Lois.

We have little money, but we are rich in music and books, religion and philosophical debates. My home is full of stories. Mother sits in her favourite chair, smoking cigarette after cigarette, drinking coffee and reading a book, but the stories told around the kitchen table are always about other people. They are not about me, not about my family. I feel the hurt as my mother, my uncle and my grandparents talk of their struggles union organizing and the pain

caused by the class divide, anti-Semitism, and racism. My family is enigmatic, full of secrets, and I am puzzled and frightened by the ever-present sense of fear, anger, disappointment, and sadness.

My mother often tells me that she likes me; she likes being my friend, and that that means more than saying she loves me. After all, she says, parents are supposed to love their children, so, when they say they love them, they may simply be saying what is expected of them. If you like your children that is special. She tells me that I could have had an older brother, but he was born dead. She was not sad; she was in fact relieved. She never wanted to have a boy.

While my mother's comments about never wanting to have a son remain with me still, I do not recall being upset by them then, nor do I recall pursuing any discussion about why she felt that way. I also never asked how my father had felt. Did he express grief over his still-born son? Did he grieve the loss of this child? Several years after my mother's death, I asked my father why my mother was so angry at men, a fact she never failed to make quite clear. His response: "some things are better not known." Sadly, I am no wiser, but what I do remember clearly is the compassion and the sorrow that came through in my father's response, and in his facial expression. My father was a man easily moved to tears. I believe he knew the reason(s) why, and perhaps he felt he had to protect her memory and protect me. He was a beautiful, gentle soul. He was also a deeply melancholy soul. The years we had together after my mother died were too few. I miss him still.

My Family: A Reflection of Loss and Disorientation”

Susan Bordo (1998), in *Missing Kitchens*, writes about the impact on families of postwar dislocation and the virtual disappearance of a culture and a way of life. When I read the phrase “cultural trajectory of loss and disorientation,” I am able to see my family in a different light (p.56). I see, a little more clearly, how their lives unfolded, both before they arrived in Canada and after. I see their lives in a particular cultural/sociological/historical moment in time, and I



understand them much better. I can also begin to forgive.

My mother's name is Manya. That is her in the image to the left. My uncle calls her Manya, but other people call her Mary. When I ask why, she tells me that when she came to Canada, her mother changed her name to Mary so the children at school wouldn't make fun of her. That makes me sad. I like Manya; it's a Hebrew name. Other than that she lived in the town of Konin, she tells me almost

nothing about her life in Poland. She is beautiful and she's smart. She takes me to museums, to art galleries, to film festivals. My favorite time is bedtime. My mother sits on my bed and we talk about God and heaven and about dreams, dybbuks, golems and magic. We talk about the news, and history and science. We listen to stories on the radio.

I like her friends; they all work at interesting jobs, and they travel

to exciting places. I love reading the postcards they send her. Some of her friends moved to California. She misses them. I especially like her friend, Rose. She belongs to the Communist Party, and she had gone to Spain to work for the revolution. She dresses in men's clothes like my cousin Lilly. My mother, uncle and grandfather call Lilly "the lesbian." I think that's so funny. They speak Yiddish sometimes to each other and to me, but the word *lesbian* is always in English. I wonder if there is a word in Yiddish for *lesbian*. I never ask. Then there's Sam and his wife. They live in a big, beautiful apartment. I love visiting them. Sam always wears an apron and serves the marzipan fruit he makes. I hate marzipan. I think he knows because he has fresh baked cookies for me. I like their sons. They are much older than me. One of them knits beautiful sweaters. My mother also knits beautiful things. I have a knitted dress she made. It's pink with silver threads. She likes to see me dressed up. On Saturday nights, she and I visit my aunt Annie, and my uncle Julius comes to my house to visit my uncle and grandfather. My aunt has a boarder. He is a survivor, my mother explains. He does not leave his room if anyone is around, but he lets me into his room. He fixes watches, and he has little metal watch cases he lets me take home. I like him. He doesn't talk to me, but I know he likes me too. My aunt tells me that he had a wife and three children, but they were all killed. So were his brothers and sisters and his mother. I am happy he lets me visit with him.

To me, my mother will always be Manya, for her name links her to a people and a place;

it connects her to a home I know little of. The meaning of the name Manya is debated. Many believe it to mean, "star of the sea" or "sea of bitterness" or "sea of sorrow." Other sources, however, cite the alternative definitions of "rebellion" or "rebelliousness." She is by all definitions, a Manya. She is, as I remember her, beautiful, intense, fiercely intelligent and, I believe, deeply troubled. The seeds of despair, like the seeds of joy, are sown early in life and often only bear fruit much later. I will never know what her childhood was like in Poland and in Canada. I will never know what events shaped the woman she became. I will never know of her



hurts, her hopes, her desires, her disappointments, her fears, her moments of joy, for she existed then, as she exists now, only in fragments and traces.

My uncle Abe, is my mother's brother. He is really her half-brother. He is an angry man; he always looks worried and he doesn't talk much. I am surprised to find this picture of him holding me when I am a baby. I have no idea where the picture was taken, and

I don't remember spending much time with him. "She looks like a frog," my uncle said when my mother brought me home from the hospital after I was born. My mother laughs as she tells me the story. He has a different last name from my grandfather. Why, I wonder. Maybe my grandmother was my mother's and my uncle's mother, and the grandfather I know is only my mother's father. But what happened then to my uncle's father? It's all so confusing, but I don't ask. No one talks

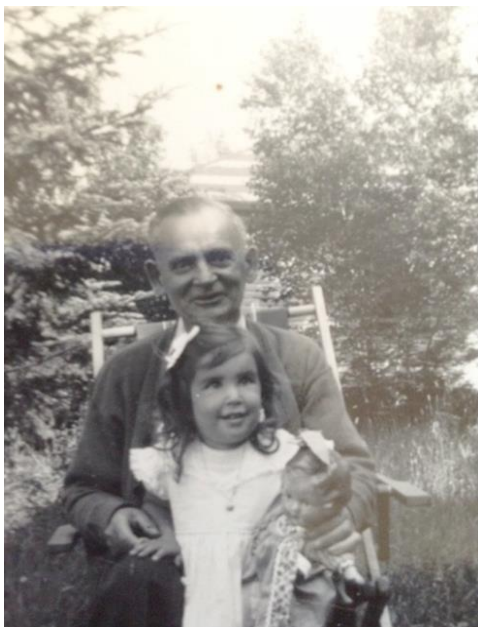
about it. Was he killed in an accident? Was he sick and then he died? One night we are talking about workers in Montreal going on strike, and my mother tells me, that from 1905-1907, there was a revolution in the Kingdom of Poland. In Łódź, the closest city to Konin where they lived, there were worker strikes. The Russian government wanted to make more trouble so they organized pogroms. Maybe he was arrested or he ran away. Maybe he was killed or injured. I don't know.

Growing up, my mother says, her brother protected her when she went to the village well to get water. She is careful now never to upset her brother and she reminds me to be careful too, not to say or do anything that could upset him. What it is that I might do or say, she never makes clear. Over lunch one day, I say that the soup doesn't taste good. My mother gets mad. I was not to have said that because it was my uncle's favourite soup. She tells me I am lucky to be born in Canada. Where she lived in Poland, it was very frightening. She doesn't tell me any more. I think maybe people hurt her. I feel scared.

When I am about eight, my mother has a heart attack and lung problems. She is in hospital for a long time. When she is ready to come home, my father and I go to the streetcar to pick her up from the hospital. My uncle asks us where we are going. My father tells him and he says, "Good, Manya is coming home; now we can eat proper meals." My mother is a terrible cook. Why would Uncle be so excited? Something else I can't figure out.

I learned just recently, in the course of doing research for this paper, that during the years of World War 1, there was fierce fighting in and around Konin. The Jews suffered at the hands of both the Germans and the Russians (Dabrowska, 1976, pp. 235-238). After Poland regained independence in 1918, virulent anti-Semitism resulted in large migrations to the United States and Canada (Richmond, 1995, p. 97). Perhaps it was these events to which my mother was referring when she said that life in Konin was very frightening

Shortly before my uncle died, suddenly, in his early 60s, he had found a companion. She would come and visit with him upstairs in his living quarters. My mother was very angry. Even though his companion was Jewish, single, with no children and close in age to my uncle, and seemed therefore to be an appropriate match, she found fault with her. When my uncle died, my mother created a huge scene at the funeral parlor, forcing my uncle's companion to grieve alone in an adjoining room during the visitation and funeral. She also did not permit her to join us at the cemetery for the burial. I asked my mother to explain her actions. I asked her why she wasn't



happy for Uncle. He always seemed so alone, so sad, so bitter; finally he had found love. Why was she not happy for him? Why was she not sad that his chance at love had been cut so short? She simply walked away. My mother's relationship with my uncle seemed to me to have been almost proprietary, as if she was his one and only woman.

A very special person in my world is my grandfather. I look happy in the image to the left, and he looks so proud. I am the only grandchild, and I can do no wrong. He is a tailor, and sometimes

he is allowed to take leftover pieces of cloth from the factory to make clothes for me. He makes me a beautiful coat. Sundays, we go for a streetcar ride, and then we visit his brothers. My great-uncle Harry is the rich brother. My grandfather works in his factory. Harry lives in a beautiful apartment. He wears a silk jacket; my grandfather tells me it is silk. Harry sits next to a big radio when we visit. His wife serves ginger ale in crystal glasses. I feel so special. When I tell my mother how nice my grandfather is, she says he is not a "nice" man. I think she is afraid of him. She tells me she had a dream; she believes in dreams. In her dream, she is leaving my father, but my grandfather comes and tells her she can't leave him. I don't understand.

Some mornings, I go and visit my grandparents upstairs in their part of the house. My mother and my grandmother are in the kitchen making breakfast. I sit on my grandfather's bed and take things out of the drawers. We play store, and I sell things to my grandfather. We have fun. My grandfather always tells me exciting stories. One night I am taking my bath, getting ready for bed. My grandfather is looking after me. I am probably about seven. If I was younger my grandmother would have still been alive and she would have been looking after me. My grandfather, seated on the right in the image to the right, shows me his Russian army medals and tells me



about the big horse he rode. As soon as my parents come home, I run to tell them all about his medals and about the big horse he rode. My mother gets upset. How strange, I think. How disappointing. Instead of being interested and listening to my story, she is angry and sends me back to bed.

When I am older my mother tells me stories which might explain why she says my grandfather is not a "nice man." One of these stories is about how he waited eight years before sending for her, her brother, and her mother. She told me my grandfather came to Canada first, to establish himself. He came to Montreal from Russia-Poland on a ship that left from Bremen, Germany and arrived at the port of New York in 1913. He then went to Montreal. He had a job right away. He worked as a tailor in his brother's factory. He had a place to live, and he had other family members who had also arrived in Montreal at around the same time. I wonder why he did not send for his family sooner.

My uncle Abe had to be the 'man' of the household in Poland and the person in charge of keeping my grandmother and my mother safe. But he was only 6 and my mother was only 4. Finally, around 1920, my grandfather's wealthy brother, the "patriarch" of the family, told my grandfather he better bring over his wife and children or he would not have work, and he would not have the support of his brothers and their families. My grandfather, my mother says, "made a life for himself in Montreal. He didn't want to bring over his *grine* (greenhorn) family. He may even have had another woman."

To say my mother, my uncle and my grandmother arrived in Canada to something of a less than enthusiastic welcome is an understatement. My grandfather's situation is captured perfectly by Eisenstein.

"Standing between two worlds, where the past joins the present, it is impossible not to feel dislocated, unmoored from the familiar ties of our daily lives. . . once memory is unearthed it informs our hearts. Sorrow accompanies regret" (Eisenstein, 2015).

My father, Max, lives with us, but I feel sometimes that he is not part of the family. He hardly talks. He sits and smokes his pipe and reads. He travels for his job, so sometimes he can be away for a week. His family lives in the United States. He and my mother visit his sisters in Florida and speak to his brother in Chicago on the telephone, but I never meet any of them. My father does not go in my grandparents' and uncle's part of the house, and when my mother and I visit with my Aunt Annie, and the men come to visit my uncle and grandfather, my father sits alone in our part of the house. I ask why. My mother tells me I am rude. I like my father. I feel sorry for him. I feel I have to stick up for him.

My mother keeps asking my father to find better-paying work. He always says no. Maybe that is why the family is angry at him. Or maybe it is his reason for not finding another job that makes them angry. My father works as a travelling salesman in a business owned by one of Montreal's "elite" families. Mr Fraid, the man in the black coat, in the image on the next page, is the owner and, aside from my father,



the only other person working in the business. "Until Mr Fraid dies or closes the business I will not find other work." That is what my father tells my mother one day when they are fighting. Why does my father not want to leave Mr Fraid? He would make the family so happy if he did. Maybe they

would be nicer to him if he had a better-paying job. Maybe, though, he likes working for a rich man. Mr Fraid lives with his mother in a big house near Mount Royal. Maybe he likes being away from home. Since we don't have a car, he gets to travel by train. Maybe he likes that. Or maybe there is something else, something more personal that keeps him stuck to his job and to Mr. Fraid. I feel so sad for my father. My rich uncle Harry visits every year with presents for everyone but my dad. One time I was so sad I cried. I wish my mother would stand up for my father. How come she doesn't?

I remember a conversation I had with my dad much later, shortly after I was separated from my husband. My mother had been dead for about 5 years.

My father tells me over dinner, that growing up he had never seen me as the "marrying kind," but, now that I am planning to divorce, he is worried I will be alone and lonely. I assure him I have many strong

women friends and that I have a special woman friend with whom I am very close. I am not alone, nor am I lonely. He is silent for a few minutes after which he says, "like lesbians?" "Yes," I respond. "This special friend," I say, "is more than a friend. She is my lover." His response leaves me speechless. "Lois, that's hard; people make trouble for you." I am not prepared for such a response. Could he, perhaps, be speaking from personal experience, is my first thought. We finish our dinner and never raise the matter again.



These two pictures are of a family dinner. My father took the picture on the left, but, looking closely, I do not see an extra chair, so where did he sit after he took the picture? To the right of that photo is another picture of the same family dinner, and, in that picture, my father is sitting in the chair my mother had sat in before. There is still, however, one chair missing. Who was not at the table when the

picture taking was done? I can't remember. Within my family, people who are present are somehow made invisible, while people who are not present, become visible.

The Presence of Absences

There is a tall man with a moustache who stands at my bedroom door. Who is he? My next door neighbor, Dave, perhaps, the father of the two boys I play with? They are my best friends.

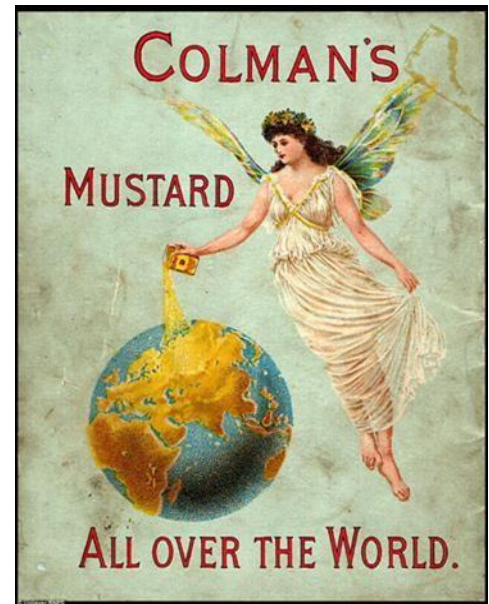
In flashbacks, this mysterious image of a man, haunts me still. Recently, I asked the mother of a childhood friend what she thought about Dave when we were all growing up together. She asked why I was asking. Before I could formulate a response, she asked if I thought he had molested me. I was ecstatic, hardly a response one would expect. Perhaps I was not as alone with my thoughts as I had come to believe. I said, yes. She said she would not have been surprised. She was never comfortable around him: she found him "odd," and she detailed some things that she had witnessed at the neighborhood park. They were not sexual, but they were cruel, and they seemed directed at the little girls. One incident stayed with her. Her daughter was on a teetertotter with Dave's son. His son was at the bottom; her daughter was up in the air. Dave came over, and, for no reason, pulled his son off, causing the teeter-totter to drop hard to the ground. Her daughter begins crying and screaming, Dave *smiled* and walked away.

There is a little girl, no, two girls, two different girls, or could one girl be both girls? Could I be the little girl? They are very young. They are on vacation at a country house, feeding apples to the cows, cuddling the piglets, rolling in the hay. One day, however, is different from all the rest. That is the day the little girl hurt her

“pussy” and has to see the doctor. His office is up a long narrow flight of stairs. And that is all there is to the story. Who is that girl or girls. Could I have been the little girl in the story? Who was the adult or young adult who used the word “pussy?”

In traces, in slivers of memory, they are present. They are the presence of an absence, “a memory [that] over the years takes on an air of unreality, hidden as it is in a private unacknowledged world. And yet it persists. Even undefined it retains a vividness, it nags, and will not disappear” (Griffin, 1992, p. 47).

For so much of my childhood, I felt like Alice when she falls down the rabbit hole and arrives at the Mad Hatter’s tea party. I felt like I was living at the Mad Hatter’s table, caught up in his language games, everything was arbitrary and inconsistent, and I never really knew who I was, who anyone else was. In my world, happy was really sad, up was really down, the sun shone when it rained and it rained when the sun shone. Life was a meaningless puzzle with an ever-changing number of missing pieces. What possible sense could I have made of the world or my place in it? I spent time in my bedroom screaming and banging my head against the wall or, I locked myself in the bathroom, and threatened to kill myself. My mother ran around with a yellow can of Colman's Mustard Powder in case I needed to throw up whatever I may have swallowed. Her ability to deny the depth of my suffering can best be described as magical thinking.



Looking back, words from *Missing Kitchens*, by Susan Bordo, Binnie Klein and Marilyn Silverman (1998), could so easily be applied to my family: “My father travelled with his sample case of stories that were to him possessions salvaged from the destruction of a richer life” (pp. 65-66). It was impossible for me to feel rooted, connected to a larger world, to feel like there was firm ground under my feet. With my parents dead and no extended family able or willing to fill in the blanks in my family story, I am exactly like Eisenstein (2006), “lost in memory. It is not a place that has been mapped, fixed by coordinates of longitude and latitude, whereby I can retrace a step and come to the same place again. Each time is different. . . death leaves a hole that grows covered with longing” (p. 19).

Bernice Eisenstein (2006), in her book, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, talks about how she kept looking for pictures of her father behind the barbed wire of Auschwitz. “I want to find my mother’s and father’s eyes, looking out from behind barbed wire ... I want to compare



those eyes to the ones I know,” she says (p. 19). I had just this feeling when I toured the Art Gallery of Ontario exhibit, *Memory Unearthed: The Łódź Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross*, and looked at a wall of photographs of individual people in the ghetto. Had my maternal

family remained in Poland, they may well have been in the Łódź ghetto, if they weren’t massacred in the forests near Konin. Konin, was just 61 miles from Łódź. My mother spoke often of Łódź and of the Jewish *gimnazjum* (middle school) there. Ghetto residents were posed by Ross, in his studio, in scenes that restored their dignity, so there were family pictures,

couples, a mother embracing a new baby. Were some of them my relatives? Was one of those photographs, on the previous page, a photograph of my mother's and my uncle's childhood friend, teacher, rabbi? Was someone their neighbor, their butcher, their milkman? All dust now. Again, Eisenstein (2006) speaks to me: "The collective memory of a generation speaks and I am bound to listen, see its horrors, and feel its outrage" (p. 25). Though my immediate family escaped the Holocaust, my extended family did not. Like Bernice Eisenstein I too grew up in the shadow of ghosts, ghosts which no doubt were very present in my family's life and therefore in my life. Marianne Hirsch (2008) speaks about post memory, a form of second-generation or inherited recollection: "Postmemory is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generation removed" (p. 106).

Growing up "Mrs. Lois" I sought solace in my books, my ideas, my intellectual adventures. I became a head with legs. Through the act of writing stories, I become visible to myself. And, through reading the poetry and the stories of other people, I learned that I was not alone. I found comfort. Paul Simon's words accurately describe "Mrs. Lois."

I AM A ROCK

I've built walls,
A fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate.
I have no need of friendship;
friendship causes pain. It's
laughter and it's loving I
d disdain.

I am a rock,

I am an island.

I have my books

And my poetry to protect me;

I am shielded in my armor, Hiding in my
room, safe within my womb.

I touch no one and no one touches me.

I am a rock,

I am an island.

And a rock feels no pain;

And an

island never cries.

(Written by Paul Simon. Recorded in 1965)

Introduction: The Theoretical

Rifts: a crack, a split, to cause to split open or break, a moving apart, a break in friendly relations

*I am not so different in my abandonment
from anyone else after all. We have all
been split away from each other, the
earth, ourselves.*

(Griffin, 1992, p. 360)

Karl Marx (1981), in writing about an “irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism,” (p. 949) was drawing on the work of Justus von Liebig. Liebig was an agricultural chemist who, in his ground-breaking 1840 work, *Organic Chemistry in Its Applications to Agriculture and Physiology*, explained the important role soil nutrients play in the growth of plants. Liebig expanded on the notion of the body’s metabolic processes to include the biochemical processes of natural systems (pp. v-ix). John Bellamy Foster (1999, 2010), introduced the term “metabolic rift,” or “ecological rift,” for Marx’s social-ecological rift and Mindy Schneider (2010), introduced the concept of a “knowledge rift.” These rifts, they argued, explained the crack or rift capitalism has created between social and natural systems (Foster, 1999, 2010; Schneider, 2010). More generally, a rift is usually described as: a crack, a split or break in something; a move apart; a serious break in friendly relations. To create a rift is to form fissures, cracks, or breaks; to cause to split open or break. In an epiphany, I realized that what I had experienced growing up as a, “head with legs,” could also be described as a rift. And then, in another revelatory moment, I realized that all creaturely bodies, and bodies of land and water, as they are experienced in western society, reflect a serious break in friendly relations. And while not everyone in the western world subscribes to a point of view which separates humans from the rest of nature, it has become the dominant world view.

Carolyn Merchant (1981), philosopher and science historian, describes how the world view of the earth changed from its being a sensate, living organism to which we owed a duty of care and respect, to one where the earth was something mechanistic, dead, incapable of feeling, a resource lacking agency and simply there for our use. She links this shift in worldview to the scientific revolution. She goes on to argue that this shift in how the earth was viewed and how it was treated, encouraged a commensurate shift in how women were viewed and treated (pp. 1318). Another rift. Katsi Cook (2014), a Mohawk midwife highlights the relationship of women and the earth:

My story is not my story alone, it is many women's story, it is the earth's story.

That woman is the first environment is an original instruction. In pregnancy our bodies sustain life. . . At the breast of women, the generations are nourished. From the bodies of women flows the relationship of those generations both to society and to the natural world. In this way is the earth our mother, the old people tell us. In this way, we women are earth. (p. 417)

Can Words Play a Part in Healing?

Helene Cixous (1976) speaks about the importance of woman's writing: "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal" (p. 875). I believe that in the same way, "for the same reasons, by the same law, and with the same fatal goal," we have been violently driven away from nature.

We stand now at the edge of a precipice, facing environmental degradation and the possible destruction of civilization as we know it. How can we heal these many rifts? Can words

play a part in that healing? Susan McHugh poses an intriguing question: “What if narrative works as an integrated conservation strategy and space, for maintaining the bearers of unique currents that are at once poetic and genomic, reflecting and extending the lives of cultures and creatures beyond ordinary biological limits, narrative may be the best, and even the only effective means of intervention when species meet on killing fields?” (McHugh, 2013).

There is a transformative power in the act of sharing stories. In the last twenty-five to thirty years, there has been a turn to the narrative as a form of qualitative research with “narrative enquiry... characteristically beginning with the researcher’s autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle” (Trahar, 2009, section2, par. 1). It is possible to weave together personal experiences, with scholarly work, for together they can, perhaps, heal the disconnect we experience from ourselves and the rest of nature. Literary and poetic sensibilities, which have been associated negatively with the subjective, the emotional, can go hand in hand with intellectual and academic rigor by calling into question and redefining what counts as academic rigor. McHugh (2011) argues that “scholars of animals and animality today are mapping more permeable species boundaries. . . locating narrative as a zone of integration (p. 2). She also makes clear the power of animal stories to touch us in ways which break down barriers between species: “Animal narratives pointedly appeal to the power of affect to defy the regimes that benefit from separation, isolation, and fragmentation of our lives and theirs” (p. 19). While McHugh is addressing animal narratives specifically, in my opinion, what she says speaks to the potential of stories generally. For stories, once told, shape our personal mythologies, shape our societies and shape the choices we make. Stories have power; therefore storytelling carries with it social and moral responsibilities.

On Telling Stories: Our Responsibility to the Listener or Reader

Adam Zachary Newton (1995) makes a case for understanding narrative as ethics. He argues that “narrative as an ethics [implies] fundamental ethical questions about what it means to generate and transmit narratives, and to implicate, transform, or force the persons who participate in them” (p. 7). Newton argues as well that “narrative [is a] participatory act” (p. 3) and he speaks of “a reciprocity between life and fiction” (p. 8). What then of secrets and lies in personal, familial and governmental stories which deceive and leave us baffled or in a state of denial. What responsibility do we have for unhiding those secrets and lies? Newton reminds us of the enormous responsibility we have as both storytellers and readers. We are never absolved of our responsibility. It is impossible to free ourselves from that responsibility by saying, “It’s not my concern.” While we can say that a particular event was then this is now or, that is there, in that place I live here, or, I did not know or, they are other and therefore not my concern, we have no choice for, as Levinas contends, “the relation to the other, as a relation of responsibility, cannot be totally suppressed. . . it is impossible to free myself by saying, ‘It’s not my concern.’ There is no choice, for it is always and inescapably my concern. (cited in Hand, 1989, 247)

The stories of the Abrahamic religions, of the Enlightenment, of the scientific and industrial revolutions, have brought us to the environmental crisis facing planet earth right now. How did this happen? Why did this happen? Do we need new stories to guide us in a different direction, or do the old stories, relegated to the dust heap of a long ago time, need to be reclaimed and seen in the light of a new day?

Chapter 1

Secrets, lies, silence and denial

I am not free of the condition I describe here. I cannot be certain how far back in human history the habit of denial can be traced. I have found it in the legends surrounding the battle of Troy and in my own family. . . All that I was taught at home or in school was colored by denial.

(Griffin, 1992, p. 3).

Michel Foucault (1980) argues, with great conviction, that social power accrues to privileged speakers, such as kings, religious authorities, intellectuals, celebrities: all persons endowed with the authority to speak the “truth.” Foucault speaks of power-knowledge in which knowledge is both the creator and the creation of power (p. 156). Catherine Marshall (1997) notes that, “Power resides in knowledge that has legitimacy” (p. 6), and Griffin (1992) describes “the loss of selfhood when nameless others have so much power over one’s life” (p. 59). What Foucault, Marshall and Griffin say is key to understanding how secrets remain secret, how lies attain mythical status and how silence and denial are the great enablers. Consequent to this interplay is the disconnect, maintained through artifice, which separates us from the person we know we are and the person that family, peers, neighbors and teachers say we should be. Because of “nameless others” our inner voices are drowned out.

In a similar fashion, the rest of nature’s voices have been drowned out and our separation from the “more than human world” has been maintained (Abram, 1996, p.101). Christopher Manes (1992) refers to Foucault when he discusses how women, children, the insane, prisoners and minorities are silenced, rendered voiceless by those in authority who jealously guard their status as speaker. To this list Manes, like Abram, adds nature.

When the issue is the silencing of nature by the rhetoric of “Man” we need to find new ways to talk about human freedom, worth and purpose without eclipsing, depreciating and objectifying the nonhuman world. . . In an attempt to reanimate nature, we must have the courage to learn a new language, even if it puts at risk, the privileged discourse of reason –and without a doubt it does. (p. 349).

Carolyn Merchant (1981), speaks of the earth becoming something mechanistic, dead, incapable of feeling, a resource lacking agency and simply there for our use. This exactly parallels how I would have described myself: a resource to serve the needs of others. Merchant goes on to argue that this shift in how the earth was viewed and how it was treated, encouraged a commensurate shift in how women were viewed and treated (pp. 13-18). I would add here that it also resulted in a shift in how indigenous peoples and racialized peoples were treated. My story, while a story of mind and breath and soul, and separate in some ways from the material world is still the earth’s story and the earth’s story is still my story. Miriam Greenspan (2003) speaks about something she calls “emotional ecology . . . the inescapable relationship between individual heartbreak and the brokenheartedness of the world” (p. xiv). Private and public suffering and tragedy are not separate.

School “Daze” Circa 1951 - 1962

Growing up, I found comfort in intellectual pursuits. School, however, was an unwelcoming place. What I learn in my family is reinforced for me in elementary school. Those who wield the power determine what is considered good and right and what is considered knowledge. The economic, social and political views of the dominant culture are imposed, not necessarily through violent means, but through a process called hegemony. Gramsci’s (1982) concept of hegemony is that “it is a relation not of domination by means of force but of consent by means of

political and ideological leadership” (p.21). What we take for knowledge is really “common sense” that needs to be unpacked because it carries ideas forward with little examination. It is as dian marino (1997) says, “the ‘folklore’ of philosophy” (p.105). When we critically analyse common sense, there is a history of power issues: exclusion, inclusion, control. Hegemony works because there is an implicit threat of violence if we step out of line. Growing up, it is not stories as much as silences and the act of being silenced that shaped my personal mythology.

By high school I had opted out. I spent more time in the office of the “Lady Vice Principal” than in the classroom. I stopped listening to my own stories. I stopped hearing my own voice. The silence was deafening. My lived experience went unacknowledged or devalued. I was dying from the inside out. I rebelled to feel alive. When that failed, and I was punished for stepping out of line, I thought killing myself was the only thing left. I had become an agent of my own destruction as I raged against the forces that were destroying my self.

I had to chuckle when I read an anecdote in Susan McHugh’s 2011 book, *Animal Stories*. A professor said to McHugh, when the class was reading Wordsworth’s poem “Nutting” and she commented that the poem reflected the squirrel’s thoughts on seasonal change, “That’s insane. Animals don’t think and they certainly don’t write poetry.” Ah, control by indoctrination. While I am heartened that, yet again, I am not alone in my experiences, I am saddened by how little room we give to another’s thoughts and ideas and how devastating the consequences can be.

School Daze 1951-1962

#####@@##!!!@

That's my grade 2 teacher shaking me until my nose bleeds. I have no idea know why

U-Unsatisfactory book report
"You picked a book from the wrong side of the Library. You are not old enough to be reading that book."

"Yours is the best essay but we don't believe you wrote it so the prize goes to Maureen!"



"Jews speak in sing song voices. Learn to speak properly or you will never get ahead."

"Hitler was really a poor misunderstood artist living on the streets of Austria."

"Stop asking questions and just read the problem. It's simple math."

"You can take Home Economics or Band. Industrial Arts is only for boys"

"Some kinds of education are worse than no education at all"
Amada community council member. Guarjila, El Salvador

Kane,L., 2001. p. 7

I do not understand what later will become very clear. Rebellion, acting out in school instead of paying attention in class, drinking, being sexually active with no thought to the consequences, are inevitably self-destructive acts. I remained trapped, unable to see a way out of rebellion for many, many years.

University is out of the question: there is no money in the family for university, but, even if there were, my marks are so low I won't be admitted. I am able to go one year to Teacher's College and become a certified teacher on a temporary permit. So by default, I guess I will become a teacher. At nineteen, I was in a grade 3 classroom in a school in Montreal's north end, a tough working class neighborhood, where poverty and poor health were the norm. University was just a dream.

Several years later, after my move to Toronto, I entered York University's Atkinson College, where I soared as a mature student. I achieved the same level of success in subsequent graduate programs. What gave me the confidence to pursue a university degree is a question I often ask myself. All I can say is that somewhere, deep inside me, even as I continued to act self-destructively, there was the will to live. I liken it to a flower or a blade of grass that somehow makes its way up through a crack in the concrete. My rheumatologist likens me to iron that becomes steel in the fire. I like her analogy. Something urged me on. I have been described by friends as resilient. Mostly, though, what I felt was tired. Putting feet on the ground and moving forward was an exhausting daily struggle, but I will take what was clearly meant as a compliment and agree: I am resilient. I am like the mythical firebird who rises from the ashes of an old life to achieve a new life. When people ask where I was born, I often respond with "When? I have lived many lives, to which life are you referring?" I have, many times over,

fashioned a new life out of the ashes of the old. Elizabeth Hoult's (2012) description of resilience as the "nexus between resistance and persistence [and] resilient adult learners [as the] firebirds of the education system" is most apt (p. 1).

Living On the Edges of "Normal"

My formal education as a child growing up in the 50s and 60s taught me several painful lessons that would resonate with me throughout my life. Those lessons shaped my future work life in education and my work with abuse survivors and street-involved youth and women, as well as youth in correctional facilities. I disliked many of the institutions I worked for, but I cared deeply about my students and clients who, like me, were positioned on the margins. It is important to note here that the "margins" can also include in its descriptor people who are in the world but invisible within their schools and workplaces. They are ignored by school mates or co-workers, excluded from school or workplace social activities and passed up for special assignments, awards or promotions. And they can include people who *refuse* to be seen, people who embrace the role of outsider. Virginia Woolf (1938) calls their actions "active indifference" (pp. 164-167).

While my story is one woman's story, of lessons learned from the margins, I want it to be a story where "group identification rather than radical individuality is the rhetorical ground of appeal" (Smith, 1998, p. 161). I do not want it to be a story which essentializes, objectifies, or romanticizes the lives of those on the margins, removing such experiences from an understanding of their many complexities. The personal story I share is the story of many older women who, in the words of Marge Piercy (1999), participate in a process of "unlearning to not speak" (p. 147).

Achieving Consciousness

My struggle was, at its core, a struggle against the forces that control knowledge and knowledge making and determine what “truth” is. Unpacking what we take for knowledge, to reveal the power issues that exclude us, silence us and control our behavior, is what achieving conscientização or critical consciousness is all about (Freire, 2000, p.35). It is what I began to do for myself in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s and what I encouraged other women to do for themselves. What follows is a story I created and shared with groups of women I worked with who were living in shelters or precariously housed. It never failed to elicit a mix of both anger and laughter.

A woman walks up to someone's home, someone she knows, someone she expects will welcome her into their home. She knocks, but no one answers, so she knocks a second time. Still there is no answer. Then she hears voices inside. "Surely my knock was heard," she says to



Drawing by P.J.S.

herself and she tries again. She knocks a third and a fourth time, still no answer. How could that be, she wonders? They must have heard my knock. Am I at the wrong house? Am I too early, too late? Did I forget to bring something? Am I dressed wrong for the occasion? In her heart of hearts, she just can't believe that indeed she is not welcome, so she keeps knocking. She knocks until, knuckles torn and

bleeding, she is forced to admit defeat and retreat. Head down, sad and angry all at the same time, she leaves.

Some of us, I tell the women, retreat into silence and never knock again. Others of us though, share our story. And, as we share our story, one person, then another, then another says, “That happened to you? It happened to me too.” And we discover we are not alone. And then, one day, someone comes our way and explains just who was in that house and why they wouldn’t answer our knock. Then we understand. We reclaim our voice, and we go on to tell others who was in that house and why they wouldn’t answer our knock. They find their voice, and they go on to tell others, who then tell others, who then tell others. We unmask our oppressors, and we speak out against patriarchy, sexism, racism, classism, ableism, whatever isms of domination keep us out and hold us back. In the late 1930s, when British Members of Parliament argued that “[there are] thousands of women doing work which men could do while at the same time there are thousands of qualified men, young and middle-aged, who cannot get a job of any sort,” it was Virginia Woolf (1938) who unmasked the oppressor. She spoke out against sexism and patriarchal thinking, albeit in tongue and cheek fashion. “The cat is out of the bag and it is a tom” (p.78). When one person knows what the lie is that they have been told, change is difficult. But when many people all find out what the lie is that they have been told, then change is possible.

All of us, myself included, were eager, in the groups I facilitated, to share who was behind the doors we have been knocking on unsuccessfully for what seemed like all of our life. Different possible endings to my story also emerged. They ranged from a play on the *Three Little Pigs* children’s story: “I’d have huffed and I’d have puffed and I’d have blown the house down” to “I’d have gotten a gun and blown the door down.” The rage which fueled the suggestion to get

a gun was something I could understand.

I am in my early 20s and I have just been diagnosed with rheumatoid-



Hands and wrist prior to reconstructive surgeries
(2011-2013)

like psoriatic arthritis although the doctors believe I likely had the disease in my mid to late teens. I am fortunate my hands are so useless. People look shocked when I say this but it is true. My useless

hands make me unable to act on the rage I fantasise acting upon. My damaged hands protect me from myself, for the consequences of acting on such feelings would be terrible. The type of psoriatic arthritis I have is arthritis mutilans. It is severe, deforming and very destructive. It is destroying my hands, and feet as well as causing damage to other parts of my body. My rage is not against my disease for I live outside my body; more to the point, I have no body. While pain and reduced function are my constant companions, I simply make what accommodations I have to make to get through my day and go on with my life.

My disease is the outward manifestation of my inner anger and rage. My body is the tablet on which pain and bodily disconnect are inscribed. To speak, to be listened to, to feel safe, to feel loved, to simply feel, to dream, to *be* brings peace. Being denied these things is destroying my body and soul. I am reminded of this every time I read a poem by Langston Hughes (1994); a copy sits on my book shelf for just those moments when the struggle seems too great.

HARLEM

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up like

a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags like

a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

(p. 426)

A Decorporalized Body: The Rift Between Us and the Rest of Nature

In the same way that we unpack what we take for knowledge to reveal the isms of domination that exclude us, we must unpack what we take for knowledge about our place in the cosmos, and we must reveal the power issues which continue to maintain the rift between us and the rest of nature. The current environmental crisis reflects a western, capitalist and colonial model of endless growth as well as a philosophical perspective that separates humans from the rest of nature. There is a rift, an *us* and a *nature*, and while not everyone holds to this view, it is the dominant view in the Western world. This disconnect allowed us to manipulate and transform nature and by transforming nature we have transformed society, and in transforming society we

have incurred environmental damage. The story, the one that dominates today, is the story Rene Descartes, Francis Bacon, and other Enlightenment scholars first posited in the seventeenth century. Their worldview was one that separated mind and body, with mind/reason/man superior to body/nature/woman. This privileging of the mind has made the body disappear, hence “bodily absence.” I am not alone in my sense of having no body. As we sharpened our wits, we dulled our senses. This marginalization of the body was insidious; we were hardly aware it was happening. Now we are forced to confront its often devastating effects. Paradoxically, the experience in Western society of “bodily absence” means the body, *in its absence*, is playing a far more important role than Enlightenment scholars originally ascribed to it” (Leder, 1990, p.3).

The roots of Enlightenment thinking, however, go back to 1500 BC when the Hebrews introduced a worldview centred on monotheism. This marked the start of the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There was only one God, and he created the world and everything in it, but he was apart from all he created. As the story unfolds, Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, were living an idyllic existence in the Garden of Eden. One interpretation has it that that all changed after Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, something God had forbidden. This Fall from Eden signified both a loss of innocence, and the loss of “man’s” control over creation. In another interpretation, it signified that man must now toil for what he was once given freely. Bacon believed the Fall could in part be repaired through faith, religion, the arts and science. In particular, it was through science and technology that nature’s secrets would be revealed and dominion over creation would be restored. “Only let mankind regain their rights over nature, assigned to them by the gift of God” (Bacon, 2012, p. 96). Bacon then goes on to elucidate how that “right over nature” was to be accomplished. He argues that, “the present discoveries in

science are such as lie immediately beneath the surface of common notions. It is necessary, however, to penetrate the more secret and remote parts of nature in order to abstract both notions and axioms from things” (p. 5).

Nature being gendered female, what comes to mind when I read that passage is woman/nature being taken by force. If, as some societies believe, the earth is our mother, then, as Carolyn Merchant (2005) points out, we should respect her, not violate her: “one does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold, or mutilate her body” (p. 43). Reuther (1975) addresses this coupling of woman and nature and argues that, for both, there can be no amelioration of these conditions without a major change in societal beliefs. “there can be no liberation, and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination and struggle” (p. 204). While we owe a debt of gratitude to the Enlightenment, which brought the Western world democracy, scepticism, the scientific method and empiricism, and while it is fine to suggest, as some scholars do, that we read Bacon in the context of his time and, with an appreciation for the challenges inherent in translating early literary and scientific works, what Descartes, Bacon and other Enlightenment scholars have had to say has had far reaching social, political and environmental effects. These effects have been both good and bad. Much of Western society lives a disembodied, decorporalized existence. Clearly, our culture remains influenced, in large part, by the Cartesian paradigm. The dominant world view of such Enlightenment scholars as Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes has helped create an anthropocentric society based on reason, on categorizing and controlling, separating head from heart and self from nature, a society which views nature as a resource, there for human beings to use and abuse at will. Neil Evernden (1993) contends that

humans are akin to natural aliens. We are at home everywhere but nowhere. We are detached or set-apart from nature, and, as a result, some people feel fundamentally placeless and homeless.

Reflecting on Miriam Greenspan's thoughts on "individual heartbreak and the brokenheartedness of the world," discussed in Chapter 1, I am drawn again to Susan Griffin (1992) and her similar point that "our own history and the history of the world [is] embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung" (p.8).

Loss, dislocation, estrangement, secrets, lies, denial, are my inheritance. In small ways and in big ways, they are all of our inheritance.

Human Centredness and the Rendering of Nature Voiceless and Without Agency

It is hubris, an extension perhaps of Enlightenment assumptions, which has created human centredness, and a perspective of ascribing the status of speaking subject only to humans. We have rendered nature voiceless, silent and without agency. It is a perspective which has opened the door to exploitation and cruelty and to widespread environmental destruction. Other cultures understand that there are more languages than human language. There is the language of the wind, the rivers and oceans, the soil, the birds, the whales, the wolves. They recognize, as well, that not only humans are agents of change. Voice, a metaphor for women's empowerment, has always been at the forefront of feminist writing. Today, scholars who study and write on the subject of "re-animating matter" are urging us to "become open to hearing sound as voice, seeing movement as action, adaptation as intelligence and dialogue, coincidence and chaos as the creativity of matter. ...it is permission to depict nature in the active voice, the domain of agency (Plumwood, 2009).

Of paramount importance, then, if we wish to change this world view, is to meaningfully engage with all life forms and recognise what Valerie Plumwood (2012) calls their “intentionality” (p. 177). Plumwood affords to nature intrinsic value, and acknowledges in all creatures the elements of mind. The questions which, no doubt, arise for those less open to the idea of nature having agency and voice, are how is it possible to communicate with non-human species who are viewed as “simpler, lesser beings” lacking in the human capacity for reason and higher order thinking, and, to an even greater extent, how is any communication whatsoever a possibility with plants, trees, bodies of water? Again, for some, hubris and human centredness close the door to engaging with these questions. Plumwood, however, does have an answer. Much like David Abram (1996) who suggests in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous* that we need to write “language back into the land” so that our words “respond to the speech of the things themselves,” (p. 273) and Deborah Bird Rose (2013a) who speaks of “earth language” (p. 107), Plumwood (2002) suggests that:

we can join scientists in hearing basalt cones and pumice speak their past to the wellversed observer who stops to listen. We can rejoin the poets in hearing the voices of the pines playing with those of the wind and agree with the forest care-taker in thinking of these same pines as needing adequate rainfall and as liking to get their feet wet. (p. 177)

Perhaps we would not need to “penetrate” nature to learn some of her secrets. Perhaps she would willingly share her secrets, which have all along been there for us to share, not really secret at all if we stopped awhile and quietly looked and listened. Communication need not be limited to the “rational” verbal or symbolic discourse. We can consider communication, more broadly, to include gestures and actions with, of course, the understanding that, like words, gestures and

actions are open to interpretation. Embodied communication is with us every day. It is the language of embodied beings.

Now that I am at home writing, Ruby my cat has a playmate. She runs to me. Then, looking behind to make sure I am following, she runs into the bedroom where there is a collection of her toys scattered about. I pick up the closest one to me, a small catnip pillow, and throw it to her. That clearly is not what she has in mind. This time she jumps on the bed and rolls on her side: a signal she wants me to roll a ball to her which she then catches, rolls or kicks back to me. I pick up a blue rubber ball; she kicks it once, but still it is not quite what she has in mind. She leaps off the bed; runs behind the bed then back on the bed, on her side again, hopeful this time I will be able to discern exactly what she wants to play with. "Ah, the tennis ball," I say. "That's what you want." The tennis ball is her favorite: Not only can she kick it to me, but she can grab it with her teeth and scratch at it with her back claws. That is it. That is what she wants to play with. Ruby and I play happily for several minutes.

Quietly observing Ruby as she goes about her day, I am fascinated by the rich inner life she has. Her food dish and water mug (yes she prefers a mug to a bowl) are on a towel on the kitchen counter. She plays with her catnip mice and her favorite tiger toy or lamb. She chases them around the house; they slide easily on the hardwood floors; she stalks them; then pounces on them and shakes them as if they are prey; then she carries them up on the counter and lays them

beside her food bowl as she eats. One time she even dropped one of her mice right into her food bowl, and then proceeded to eat. Today there are four mice and a lamb around her food dish.

Not only humans, then, as Ruby demonstrates, possess the ability to actively engage in reconfiguring their world. That said, it is important not to over idealise or romanticise such communicative experiences for while they have promise to play a part in healing the rift between humans and the rest of nature, and while such communicative experiences, can open us up to new possibilities, the power imbalance entrenched in hegemonic communicative relations is not eliminated. What is important, therefore, is to deconstruct the primacy of the human subject. By acknowledging and respecting the many ways all of nature speaks and acts, by acknowledging and respecting that other creatures possess intentionality, that they can be agents and choice makers, and that they can be communicative subjects, if we could begin to see our place in the world differently it would be harder to abuse.

Planetary violence death and extinction and our own mortality.

The violence, death and extinction enacted on our fellow beings and on the earth itself, cast an especially dark shadow on our planet now. In so many ways we have become the agents of our own destruction. As Buber (1988) reminds us “one cannot in the nature of things expect a little tree that has been turned into a club to put forth leaves” (p. 127). And so, we are being forced now to confront not only our own mortality, but also our complicity in the “loss that surrounds us now, and for all that is coming” (Rose, 2013a, p.1). There is: a price to be paid for seeing in the Fall the requirement to recover control over creation, and, today, all of us are paying a price for the actions of the global north and some nations in the global south. Women and children in

particular are paying a heavier price globally (Browning, 2012; Demetriades & Esplen, 2008; Equal Climate, 2011).

As all of humanity finds itself at the edge of a precipice, we are being called to consider our moral obligations to the earth, and we must respond. We need to consider carefully the void secrets leave, for the emptiness can resonate over a lifetime. We need to also consider the consequences of the lies many of us have accepted as truth about ourselves and our relationship to the “more than human world,” for we do have a choice. We can decide “whether to use knowledge as power or intimacy” (Griffin, 1992, p. 295). Martin Luther King Jr. (1965) reminds us that when there are things that matter, when there is injustice, we cannot be silent. We must speak out; otherwise, in a figurative sense, our lives begin to end. “A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.” What is it, though, that will give us the courage to reclaim our voice and move beyond secrets and lies? I believe it is the knowledge that we belong which empowers us.

Emmanuel Levinas’s (1986) plea that we not abandon others, and that in turn, we will not be abandoned, can offer the reassurance we need to be vulnerable, to learn a new language and new ways of relating to all life forms (pp. 23-24). For, by necessity, we are all entangled and dependant on each other in order for life on earth to flourish. In order to restore our sense of being at home in our shared universe, we need to rethink our connections to and our place in this complex and varied ecosystem. We also need to open ourselves up to personal encounters with a shared world. Reclaiming intimate physical connections with the world, is, in part, how we can

heal the internal and external disconnect that plagues us: “the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh” (Abram, 1996, p. 69).

Chapter 2

Bodies speak

*Sometimes the mouth lies or the head does not understand;
but the functions of the body always speak
the truth*

(Adler, 1956, p. 434)

*There is nothing so whole as a broken heart. The world
breaks our hearts wide open; and it is the openness itself
that makes us whole. The open heart is the doorway,
inviting the angels in, revealing that the world—
even in the pit of hell—is charged with the sacred.*

(Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, cited in Greenspan, 2003, p. 44)

Joanna Macy (1995) argues that until the latter half of the 20th century, people believed that their children and their children's children would "walk the same Earth under the same sky" (Macy, p. 241) and they lived according to that certainty. Faced with illness, with suffering and death, they could find comfort in continuity and in close intimate connections. Today, we live with increasingly less certainty and fewer intimate connections within a connected cosmos, and that sense of loss has now become our psychological reality. When we ask people to reflect on the state of the world today environmentally, politically, socially, strong feelings of uncertainty, grief, loss, anger and fear are likely to surface, and, in the wake of those strong emotions, feelings of helplessness can become overwhelming. Those emotions are then written on the body and expressed as dis-ease: "Illness [becomes] not merely a burden to be lifted but a . . . declaration" (Robb, 1932, 61-67). Our bodies speak. They speak of joy and of sorrow, of good health and of illness, of pain and of death, but do we listen?

It is Friday afternoon and I am in the midst of completing my revisions for the Introduction and Chapter 1 when I become aware of a

pain in my neck and across my shoulder blades. I think, "Oh, I've felt this pain before. I'm just a bit stiff. I've been hunched over the computer for several hours, it's nothing serious, I'll just keep going." By the next day I am in excruciating, crawling-out-of-my skin, pain. No over-the-counter-medication helps. This is pain I can no longer deny. My body is shouting "STOP, pay attention, listen to me." Since I can't do much of anything except moan or pace or sit with my head in my hands, I stop working. Could I be experiencing a flare of my arthritis? I call my rheumatologist Monday morning and I call the occupational therapist from the Arthritis Society who has been my go to person since I had a cervical spine fusion in 1996. Monday I see my doctor. I return home armed with a prescription for Oxycodone and Robaxacet and await an MRI of my neck and shoulder. I am told to stay off my computer because what I likely have is a rotator cuff injury brought on by long hours on my laptop, seated on a chair and at a table ill-suited for such work. I am angry. A part of me wants to believe that it is my body betraying me. "It must be my arthritis acting up," I say to myself. "It could not have been brought on by me betraying my body." When I step back from being defensive, I wonder if indeed I could be responsible, even in part, for the pain I was experiencing. If I had responded sooner to the messages my body was sending me, would I have been spared the excruciating pain I was then experiencing? Would I have been more open to considering what might have been causing my discomfort and would I have then acted sooner to work differently? Could it be that the content of that day's writing was particularly demanding causing my body to tense, and could that have

stressed my body even more?

While no one was pointing a finger at me and blaming me for my pain and distress I chose, for a time, to see it that way. I assumed a defensive posture and closed the door to any discussion. Once I was prepared to acknowledge my part in the pain I was experiencing I opened the door to a meaningful dialogue with both my rheumatologist and my occupational therapist.

Several years ago I was sitting in my psychotherapist's office struggling with psychological and emotional pain. My heart was broken, and I was looking for a way to heal. My body was also being ravished by my arthritis, but again I failed to listen to my body. I failed to ask why my body was attacking itself and, most importantly, I failed to ask what part I may have played in that sequence of events.

I am angry I tell my therapist, that men have laid siege to my body, mind and soul from the time I was a child. I tell her how angry I am that even as an adult I always seem to be taken advantage of by the men in my life. She acknowledges my anger and my pain, but she also suggests that there may have been situations when I could have said "no." How dare she, a feminist therapist, blame me for what was done to me! I am the victim. I confront her. She repeats what she has said. We go back and forth until I stop and reflect on exactly what she has said and, *how* she has said it. In a moment of profound understanding, I realize that I have not actually seen a metaphorical finger wagging at me in judgement. I have not actually heard a "should." What I have heard is a simple statement of fact. I could have said no. "No" like "yes" or "maybe" is indeed, an option. Why then I wonder did I not, ever say "no?" Was I not free, in some situations, to make a choice about how I would act? Did I not know perhaps that "no" was an option?

Did I know but did I not see it as an option I could act upon? Was “yes,” in my opinion, my best option at the time and one I did not perhaps want to move from for many years? And, if that was the case, why? So many questions. I share these thoughts with my therapist. She smiles and says, in her wonderful Viennese accent, “Good, now you can begin the real work you must do.”

The Call to Listen

So, what does my current rotator cuff injury and my long ago visit to my psychotherapist have to do with our current environmental crisis? Just as my body had to scream “STOP” before I listened, bodies of land, bodies of water, other creaturely bodies are screaming “STOP” but we have “sever[ed] their vocal cords” so we cannot hear them (Evernden, 1993, p. 136). But hear their silent screams we must, for like my body, the earth is sick; she is suffering; she is dying. We are being called now to notice the extinction of a bird here; a Siberian tiger there; the disappearance of a sea creature in some far off ocean or a tree in the Amazonian rainforest; the loss of agricultural land to urbanization; more severe weather events brought about by climate change. The oft quoted speech by Martin Niemöller (Niemöller, Holocaust Encyclopedia), the best known version of which is the one that began circulating in the 1950s, springs to mind.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

In a similar fashion we notice the degradation of the land, the water and the air and the disappearance of species, but none of that, many of us conclude, has anything to do with us. We are not a bird, a tiger, a sea creature or a tree. We have lots of water in our lakes and rivers, and we have the technology to ensure our water is cleaned of impurities. Food is plentiful, and even if it comes from afar and some may not be able to afford it, many of us can, so all is well. Then like the crow in van Dooren's (2014) "Mourning crows: Grief and extinction in a shared world," we will be looking for company, "but there is none to be found – nowhere" (p. 275).

Just as I saw the need, in my therapist's office, to "think differently," we might do well, when we consider our current ecological crisis, to "endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 8-9). "Legitimizing what is already known" is a trap from which a way out is urgently needed. We are being called now by the very urgency of our current environmental crisis to avoid the blame game, to avoid defensiveness and paradigm fundamentalism and to embrace different points of view on our relationship with the rest of nature. Patrick Murphy (1998) argues for a relational model of "anotherness" to replace the alienating model of otherness which maintains Western hierarchical power relations, and which continues to enjoy wide acceptance. He argues for "the conceptualization of difference in terms of "I" and "another," "one" and "another," and "I-as-another" (p. 40). He goes on to say that "nothing human is intrinsically "strange," but rather needs to be recognized as strange-to-me; that is to say a difference of perspective or degree of recognition and identification rather than a condition of being" (pg. 41). Gaining insight into why we think as we do does not ensure a way out; it may, though, offer some important clues and, as difficult as it may be to change our outlook, we can no longer afford to do anything less. Our discomfort may even help us to see in new ways. As Thompson

(1986) asserts, “To be cast adrift from one's moorings is both liberating and disorienting, and is a condition of the thinking we are searching for. We sense our limits and appear to be open for a conversation with other traditions” (p. 236).



The Elephant in the Room

The elephant in the room is the question of why, in the face of all the information available on the anthropogenic degradation of the environment many institutions and individuals still deny and still fail to act. Psychology with its understanding of human

nature, motivation, behavior, development and experience, may provide at least part of an explanation. Leesa Fawcett and Janis Dickinson (2013) engage the reader in an important conversation, one which holds both clues to our disconnect from the rest of nature and insights into how it may still be possible to turn things around. That conversation is about our own mortality and how, especially in the western world, we erect barriers to anything that confronts us with the reality that, as humans in nature, our bodies age; death and decay are inevitable. All living things age and all living things die and decay and therefore so will all of us. Becker (1997) eloquently captures that reality.

[Being] a self-conscious animal means to know that one is food for worms.

This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self,

Deep inner feelings, and excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression-and with all this yet to die. (pp. 87, xii)

When I was twenty, I could look forward to possibly 60 or more years of life; when I was 40, possibly 40 or more years; now at sixty-eight I am acutely aware that I have significantly fewer years ahead than behind me and I am filled with a deep sadness, the sadness that comes from, as I put it, having arrived late to my life. I had always said that I wanted on my gravestone, "Here lies Lois, she died with no regrets." Now I am not so sure that that would be an apt inscription. Today I am thinking it should read, "Here lies Lois; She arrived late for her life and so died too soon." There are many different kinds of deaths. There is the death of the soul which can come before the death of the body. I liken it to dying from the inside out. Perhaps that is what I am still mourning. A famous Hasidic rabbi, using an interpretation of a story from the Haftarah, the book of prophets, taught "Let me not die while I am still alive." And, in the words of Rabbi Naomi Levy (1998), "Death is a great tragedy. But to die while we are still living, that is the greatest tragedy of all" (p.27). "Am I forfeiting time in the present, grieving for time past?" I wonder. Then I think about the many friends I have had and lost. They died before their sixtieth birthday, some much before. Their presence in life is still with me. How have I mourned their loss is another question I have been asking myself more and more now.

So there is another conversation we must have, and it is about how, in the "shadow of all this death," we can grieve and mourn (Rose, 2013a). For if we are to re-engage with nature we have to confront our fear of aging and our denial of death. Harrington (1992) contrasts humans with the more than human world:

Nature knows how to die, but human beings know mostly how to kill as a way of failing to become their ecology. . . And in the final analysis only this much seems certain: that when we do not speak our death to the world we speak death to the world. And when we speak death to the world, the forest's legend falls silent. (p. 249).

Societies define themselves as much by what they resist as by what they acknowledge and embrace.

Facing our fears

Today, humankind is caught between what Macy (1995) argues is “a sense of impending apocalypse and the fear of acknowledging it. In this caught place, our responses are blocked and confused” (Macy, 1995, p.242). Life hurts and so “we think without feeling, [but] underneath our logical postures, we are driven by passions we never examine” (Teich, 2011, p. 119). And, those “unexamined passions” can lead people down dangerous roads, as suppressed anger and grief and unacknowledged fear erupt into violence. Our task, then, is not to strive for a life free of pain, free of suffering, ignoring and resisting death and decay, for such a life is unattainable. We are here, as the Hasidic scholar Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk said, to have our hearts “broken wide open” and somehow to turn that pain into love. Through the cracks, through the rifts, “That's how the light gets in” (Cohen, 1992).

The call to consider our moral obligations to the earth is a call to notice the other. It is a call to not ignore another's suffering. The term Emmanuel Levinas (1996) uses to talk about this call is the “face.” The revelation of the “face” makes a claim on us. On the basis of Levinas's “the one for the other” we have a responsibility to act (p. 169). While Levinas's focus is on

connections between humans, we can extend Levinas's idea to all others in the world, as Martin Buber does (1970): "Inscrutably involved we live in the currents of universal reciprocity. . . [it is a relation] that reaches from the stones to the stars" (pp. 67, 173). Buber believed that human beings can have a dialogic relationship not only with other human beings but with both other animate beings such as animals and trees, and with the divine. In *I and Thou* (1970) (pp. 57-59, 145, post-script) and *Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments* (2002) (pp. 26-27, 41-42) Buber expounds on these relationships.

Deborah Bird Rose (2013a) discusses Levinas's definition of the face and how embedded within that definition are two messages: "There is the command against killing, and there is the plea not to be abandoned" (p. 11). Rose's description of a love which emerges in the face of death speaks directly to Levinas's plea that we not abandon those whose lives we cannot save. Rose calls this love "crazy love," a love directed at "earth love" (Rose, p.5), a love that sustains those who struggle to protect threatened creatures, those who grieve in the wake of death and those who choose to bear witness to another's grief. In acknowledging that all creatures experience pleasure and pain, life and death, and that all creatures mourn and grieve their losses, and further by not abandoning those whose suffering or death we cannot prevent or whose suffering or death we may even be complicit in, we acknowledge our shared responsibility, our interconnectedness and our shared place on earth.

The courage to be vulnerable and to "think differently" is fostered in large part by the reassurance that comes from knowing we belong. Neil Evernden's (1993) concern that the human condition is one of placelessness, a sense of not being at home in our home on earth resonates. In order to restore our sense of being at home in a shared cosmos, it is necessary to

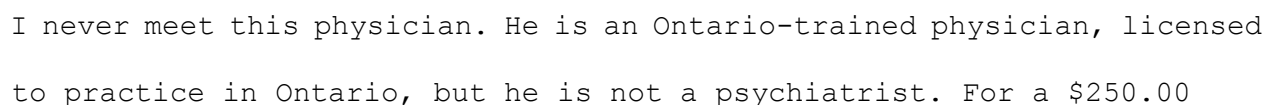
rethink our connections to, and our place in, a complex and varied dwelling. We must demonstrate, “the kindly concern for land, things, creatures, and people as they are and as they can become” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149). We must acknowledge, as Heidegger (1971) argues, that “The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving...to take under our care, to look after . . . to let things be in their presencing” (pp. 149-151). We must open ourselves up to dialogical encounters with an expressive, “animated earth” (Abram, 1996, p. 117).

On Being Declared an Alien

While efforts are being made to heal the several rifts I speak of in my Introduction, for many, and I include myself, the important sense of knowing that we belong, that we have a place in our families, schools, communities, in the cosmos, in which we are but a speck, remains illusory. In December 2006, I attempted suicide. This was not my first suicide attempt as an adult. I had made another attempt in 1989. In 2006 I was unconscious in my home when my partner found me and called 911. Members of the Toronto Police Service and paramedics attended and I was transported to St. Michael's Hospital.

It's November 20, 2010, my partner and I arrive at Pearson International Airport in Toronto to catch a flight to Los Angeles. We are going to spend American Thanksgiving with family. As we have done many times in the past, we present ourselves to United States border officials but, this time, I am told that I have to go to “Passport Control Secondary” for a secondary screening. I am perplexed but not alarmed. With the heightened security in place now, maybe I have been selected at random to test some new screening system. I arrive at secondary screening and grow increasingly uncomfortable. The room has frosted glass and Homeland Security officials look intimidating.

He then tells me that I am being denied admission into the United States because of my 2006 suicide attempt. I will only be permitted to enter the United States or fly over American airspace if I receive medical clearance from a "State Department Physician" in Toronto. He gives me information on how to obtain the I am photographed, fingerprinted and escorted



processing fee which I pay directly to him, he reviews the information my physician was required to forward to him, and, several days later, I am cleared to fly. My physician at St Michael's Hospital, the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association encourage me to hire a lawyer familiar with such cases. Through a request under the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Privacy Act* my lawyer submits, on my behalf, to the Toronto Police Service, I learn that the Toronto police enter all attempted suicides into The Canadian Police Information Centre database (CPIC), a database shared, through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), with law enforcement agencies in the United States. That is now being challenged in the Courts by the Information and Privacy Commissioner's Office in Ontario because what happened to me has happened to many others. The United States

TO BE COMPLETED BY ALIEN WHEN APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION WITHDRAWN

I understand that my admission is questioned for the above reasons, which I have read or which have been read to me in the English language. I request that I be permitted to withdraw my application for admission and return abroad. I understand that any voluntary withdrawal of my application for admission is in lieu of a formal declaration concerning my admissibility.

☒ by an immigration officer ☐ in removal proceedings before an immigration judge

11/20/2010 [Signature]

INSTRUCTIONS

For withdrawal procedures, see Inspection Field Manual Chapters 17.2 and 17.15. Aliens who appear inadmissible pursuant to section 235(b)(2) of the INA who elect to withdraw application for admission may choose at any time to appear before an immigration judge for a hearing in removal proceedings. Aliens who appear inadmissible pursuant to section 235(b)(1) or inadmissible pursuant to 8 CFR 217.4 are not entitled to a hearing before an immigration judge.

If a visa is cancelled pursuant to 22 CFR 41.113 or a consular-issued Border Crossing Card is voided under authority of 22 CFR 41.22 or 8 CFR 212.6, forward original of 1-275 to consular post which issued the cancelled or voided document.

ATTACHE Any listed document
 Relating form 1-213 or 1-862 (Notice to Appear)
 Relating removal or waiver revocation order
 Any relating memorandum report or sworn statement

Form 1278 (Rev. 08/10/07)

government, however, holds my personal medical information. I wonder, every time I consider taking a trip to the United States, if something in the comprehensive file of medical information I was required to send, might pop up on some computer and again, I will be barred from entering the United States. In a moment of levity that situations like this seem to provoke, I think how fitting it is that one of the

papers (see image on previous page) I am required to sign reads at the top:

TO BE COMPLETED BY ALIEN WHEN APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION WITHDRAWN

How did they know? I wonder; How did they know my true identity? For as long as I can remember I have felt that I am an alien residing in an alien universe. In an odd way I should feel happy I think. I should be appreciative of both the efforts of the Toronto Police and Homeland Security to help me find the true me. There is, however, the not so minor problem of that turkey dinner waiting for me in California that I might not get to enjoy. I quickly call some of my close friends and organize a pity party. At a party store, I am surprised and delighted to come upon the perfect likeness of the real me. A few pumps and we are ready to greet our guests.



To feel one with the cosmos when one has for so long felt apart, silenced, and unacknowledged is a daily struggle. Marge Piercy's poem, *Unlearning to Not Speak* (1999), excerpted in Chapter 3, powerfully addresses just that struggle. Her poem details a woman's struggle to speak in her own voice. Unlearning to not speak is far more difficult than learning to speak, for it implies a past silence and the presence of institutions which govern whose voice is allowed to be heard and whose is silenced. In his ground breaking work, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, written in the late 1800s, Emile Durkheim (1951) argues for an understanding of suicide as something other than an expression of individual pathology. Suicide can, as Durkheim claims, be expressive of a societal malaise. My experience with Homeland Security seemed other worldly. I felt even more like a "stranger in a strange land". While Valentine Michael Smith, in Robert Heinlein's (1961) *Stranger in a Strange Land*, fought, on his return to earth, to be heard and understood, so do I, an alien on a planet I never left.

Chapter 3

“Unlearning to not speak”

*She must learn again to speak
starting with I
starting with We
starting as the infant does
with her own true hunger
and pleasure and rage.*

(Marge Piercy, 1999, p. 147)

*Validate me
Witness me
See me
Love me*

(Sarah Kane, 2001, p. 41).

From the time I was a young child, I saw killing myself as a way to affirm that I was alive. Living things die; therefore, if I die, I must be alive. Suicide for me was, in part, an act of resistance; it was an assertion of power, a way of opposing the forces that silenced me, that did not hear my silent and not so silent screams, and which left me wondering what meaning life held. For Sarah Kane (2001), a controversial British playwright, suicide was also, in part, an act of resistance. Kane, in her play, *4.48 Psychosis* critiques the mental health system in not so subtle ways while at the same time she acknowledges the complexity and the difficulty of the relationships between hospital staff, preventative services and patients. Her play though, is about much more. Kane gives voice to what some consider an *unspeakable* act, as she speaks about her need to be seen and to be loved even at the moment she chooses to take leave of life.

Validate me

Witness me

See me

Love me

watch me vanish

watch me

vanish

watch me

watch me

watch

(Kane, S., 2001, p. 243)

Kane killed herself shortly after she completed *4.48 Psychosis*. She was 28. Who this validating, witnessing Other is, is not revealed. Nor is the self. The line from Kane's play which speaks most powerfully to the disconnect, the rift, I experienced from myself is: "It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the underside of my mind please open the curtains" (p. 245).

I am at a 1989 School Board workshop on adolescent suicide. I tell a room full of my colleagues, social workers and psychologists, that I had attempted suicide earlier that year. I also tell them that I am seeing a therapist to help me understand and heal my broken places. A colleague, standing at the podium, immediately reminds me that, "We are professionals, you can't say these things." WOW, and he is a psychologist! How, I wonder, can he deal with someone else's vulnerability when he can't face his own? What good is a healer who hides his humanity under a cloak of professionalism? His comment, meant to silence me, comes too late. The truth has already been unpacked. Several people come to me after the workshop, with

questions and with personal stories they wish to share. Contrary to what my colleague might think, I have much to contribute to my colleagues' understanding of illness and healing. None of us is without an illness story. None of us is without a story of healing. Everyone in that room has something to contribute.

A similar workshop, held shortly after, is arranged by the Friendship Centre in Regina for First Nations people living in Regina and on neighboring reserves. I am honoured to be asked to attend. We sit in a circle, no one talks to anyone's back. No one stands at the front and speaks as an authority. Everyone who wishes to tell their story is invited to do so. I share mine; even Santa Claus shares his story of addiction, multiple suicide attempts and recovery. He arrives to much laughter. Could he be a trickster, here to raise awareness? A woman thanks me for helping her daughter. I am accepted. I am not alone. I feel connected to something bigger than me. Also, hearing peoples' stories of what helped them heal and what got in the way of healing, practical advice, delivered many times with a wicked sense of humour, gives me hope, for myself and for the people I help. What would my shushing colleague think of Santa's disclosure? I have to smile.

Current research, and my own experience working with children and youth in crisis, make clear that my suicide attempts, before I was twelve, are sadly not unique. While few studies among that specific age group have been conducted, and while completed suicides among very young children are rare, suicidal behaviours are not (Bourdet- Loubère & Raynaud, 2013,

Freuchen, Kjelsberg, Lundervold, & Grøholt, 2012, Granello & Granello, 2007, pp.32-51, Tishler, Reiss, & Rhodes, 2007). Child suicide is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it something which has just recently come to the attention of researchers. Emile Durkheim (1951) discusses the different opinions scholars had about child suicide and he discusses the frequency of suicide across various age groups (pp.100 -102). Durkheim's (1951) primary interest however is the social determinants of suicide, and it is those which bear consideration as we reflect on our world today.

A futile search for meaning

Durkheim's four categories of suicide include: egoistic, anomic, fatalistic and altruistic. Egoistic and anomic are the two I will focus on. Egoistic suicide Durkheim (1951) saw as due to social norms which emphasised "excessive individualism" (pp. 209-210). Since we are by nature social beings, for some people, a society such as ours where individual initiative, action, and interests are prized over the collective, can have devastating consequences. As Durkheim says, "whatever is social in us is deprived of all objective foundation... [and] we are bereft of reasons for existence (p. 213).

Anomic suicide Durkheim (1951) links to disillusionment and disappointment and unfulfilled aspirations. He speaks as well about economic anomie, where anomie is not simply the result of a temporary social disruption or dis-equilibrium but rather "in the sphere of trade and industry-it is actually in a chronic state" (p. 254). He goes on to say that "economic progress has mainly consisted in freeing industrial relations from all regulation. . . greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it . . . society's influence is lacking, leaving [individuals] without a check-rein" (pp. 254-258). R.H. Tawney

(2012) in his Foreword to the republished version of Max Weber's (2012) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* notes as well, in what has proved most prescient, that "If capitalism begins as the practical idealism of the aspiring *bourgeoisie*, it ends, Weber suggests, as an orgy of materialism" (p. 13). Neil Evernden (1993) comes to the same conclusion that, "by immersing ourselves in the trivia of mass existence we attempt to conceal our placelessness from ourselves. In effect we establish through common consensus, a make-believe place to point to when the "sacred horror" confronts us in the night" (p. 121).

As societies in both the global north and the global south grow more affluent, more people have what they need. They have the means to live but increasingly no purpose, no meaning to live for. As Frankl (1979) says, "... man is revealed as a being in search of meaning-a search whose futility seems to account for many of the ills of our age" (p. 17). We have bought into, and consciously or unconsciously we have taken part in, a collective lie. There is no endless growth; there can be no more, more, more, more, and there are no human beings apart from non-human nature.

Ecocide and the "Pathology of Normal"

Timothy La Salle (2007) poses an intriguing question. He asks, "Is ecocide [the destruction of large areas of the natural environment by human activity] an actual suicidal attempt of the human psyche directed at life as we know it?" (p. 43). While it is outside the scope of this paper to address this specific question, it is noteworthy that Sigmund Freud (1962) asks a related question:

If the development of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in

reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilization possibly the whole of mankind have become 'neurotic'. (p. 91).

And, a similar question to the one raised by Freud, is raised by Erich Fromm in his 1990 book *The Sane Society*. Fromm asks whether it is society that is insane, and he argues for an examination of social pathology, what he calls the “pathology of normalcy” (pp. 12-21).

Benny Goodman (2013) reminds us that “‘normal’ men were responsible for killing probably over 100,000,000 of their ‘normal’ brethren in the last century” (p. 186). Goodman reminds us as well that “‘normal’ men planned mutually assured destruction of millions in nuclear war [and] sent armies into foreign countries resulting in thousands of civilian deaths” (p.186). He reminds us that “‘normal’ men in testosterone fueled frenzies armed with clever mathematics and a disregard for the welfare of society, gambled on financial markets and lost” (p.186). Finally, mention must be made of the advertising and marketing sectors in most countries, for they play a huge role in both sustaining the warrior, hero image of masculinity and convincing us to buy ever more stuff we likely do not need, with money we likely do not have to give meaning to our lives and impress others who likely do not even know us. We are, in George Monbiot’s (2011) words, “sucking out our brains through our eyes.” Lest we fault Goodman for using sexist language, he reminds us that “yes, it is usually men who plan, send others and carry out the killing and maiming” (p.186). That statement however needs to be unpacked. For that the work of Anne Wilson Schaef is noteworthy.

The “White Male System” Not Men qua Men

With men continuing to be the power brokers and knowledge makers globally and, when women do hold positions of power, it is “male thinking” which often prevails. Anne Wilson Schaef in

her ground-breaking 1981 book *Women's Reality* talks about the “white male system” which she says is pervasive. She includes in that “system” women and people of colour who have bought into it. So, when Goodman speaks about men who are responsible for wars and economic collapse, I prefer to think of it in Schaefer's terms, and, rather than pointing a finger at any one individual, any one gender or any one race, I think patriarchy and patriarchal thinking. It is not men *qua* men but the institutions which shape our world and are built on male culture, male values. From the Father in the sky to the archetypal male on the ground, the dragon slayer, the hunter, the warrior, the king, power is most definitely gendered. The renowned writer Ursula Le Guin (1986) describes the “white male system” and the myths that have for so long sustained it, in a way that never ceases to put a smile on my face. In her essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Ursula Le Guin talks about the myth we have come to believe about cave men wielding big sticks, aka spears, killing a mammoth and returning victorious to their women folk. In reality, the odds of killing a huge animal were so poor that if that was the sole source of food, human beings would have become extinct long ago. First we foraged and gathered and hunted small game that happened our way. Sometimes we ate what was left from a large four legged animal's kill. Le Guin expounds on her carrier bag theory of fiction:

We've heard it, we've all heard all about the long sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit . . . but we have not heard about the things to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news. . .

before the tool that forces energy outward we made the tool that brings energy home. (p. 167)

As Le Guin makes clear, what's the point of digging up lots of something from the ground if you do not have something to carry the ones you don't eat home, hence the carrier bag. The first tool,

then, was probably not a weapon but a carrier bag, and we in the West need a different story. We would do well to think as well about a different narrative structure to the one where there is a beginning, a middle, an end, and a “thok” as someone or something gets bashed or broken (Le Guin, 1986, p. 169). While not the only story, it is the “hero” story many of us grew up on. It is the story of the men who hunted the mammoth, the men who went about with those long sticks, bashing, poking and hitting. It is the story that, in Le Guin’s words, “hid my humanity from me” (p. 168).

Animal Death

My cries and Kane’s (2000) cries, for voice and visibility, are echoed in the cries of non-human animals who have been relegated to the realm of a commodity, a marginalized product. They are, like some humans, deemed “other,” unknowable, and apart from humans, and therefore resources for our use or objects of curiosity. One need only look at animals in zoos, aquaria and laboratories, and the parallels to Durkheim’s (1951) egoistic and anomic suicide are striking. High mortality rates, failure to breed, repetitive behaviours such as pacing, excessive grooming, self-mutilation, aggressive behavior, are, in no small measure, a result of isolation from others of their kind, a loss of space and habitat, a loss of opportunities to forage, to hunt, to play, to mate. As well, animals in captivity are utterly dependent on their keepers. They are rendered not only voiceless but also without agency as they passively wait, in their artificial environments, for their daily needs to be met. As we face multiple extinctions of species, it is strange indeed that we think zoos can be our Noah’s Ark and that zoo breeding programs and programs to re-introduce animals back to their ancestral homes will save them and us from our destructive ways. On that, we need a serious rethink. Animals in zoos live “within a living monument to their own

disappearance” (Berger, 1991, 26).

It was not always thus. Animals were once, and among some people they continue to be, more than objects on display for us to look at, more than “meat, leather or horn... Animals first entered the imagination as messengers and promises” (Berger, 1991, p.4). Erica Fudge (2002) in her book *Animal* highlights the irony that, at the same time as humans became closer to animals through domestication, the use of animals as subjects in scientific experiments, and through their imprisonment in zoos as well as through turning them into much beloved characters in children’s story books, cartoons and toys, we distanced ourselves from them in the natural world. Fudge refers to the German philosopher Walter Benjamin whose perspective is that while we desire closeness and communication with animals we also harbour a fear of them “and this fear manifests itself as disgust” (Fudge, 2002, p.8). Fudge goes on to say, “We are horrified that there is a kinship between us and them . . . they are the limit case, if you like, of all of our structures of understanding” (p. 8). By setting up oppositional and value dualisms: mind/body; us/them; human/animals; man/women, we create the “other” against which we war.

In constructing mental and moral separations of two living entities “a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness” is constructed (Plumwood, 1993, p. 41). The inferior group is consequently subject to exploitation at the hands of the more powerful one. What we fail to realize, or perhaps we do realize it and it terrifies us, is that there is also the “other within,” those parts of us yet unknown, awaiting discovery. The “other” resides not just in the world outside us, but within us as well. We grow, we change and so we are never fully revealed or fully known to ourselves or to the world. In the same way other beings cannot be fully known. We must learn to live with that uncertainty, that unknowability. Fear of the “other” both

outside and within and fear of uncertainty and unknowability are then projected out and expressed as domination and control, for fear and anger are two points on a line.

Susan McHugh (2013), a scholar of literary animal studies, and interdisciplinary human animal studies, is interested not just in stories about the link between the erasure of species and the loss of cultures and not just in stories about extinction and genocide, but in stories peoples around the world tell about the intersections between species extinction and genocide. What emerged from what McHugh calls her “narrative gathering process” is something she calls “interspecies atrocities . . . the intimate linkages of particular kinds of animals and often indigenous peoples in scenes of state sanctioned mass killings” (McHugh, 2013, video file). A familiar example is one close to home. With the opening of the west to European settlers in both Canada and the United States, the killing off of the buffalo was seen by some in government as the solution to the “Indian problem.” They almost succeeded. As the buffalo neared extinction, so too did the Plains Indians for whom the buffalo was important for survival. Their close spiritual relationship with the buffalo meant the devastation of their culture. Paul Shepard (1998), calls such mass killing events “seizures of extermination” and he argues that this “collective personality disintegration” can provide insights into the question of why Western society so cavalierly destroys nature (p.5). He likens man’s destructiveness and sense of omnipotence to “the juvenile fantasy of heroic glory” (pp. 119-120). All this begs the question of what is madness and what is sanity?

Several patterns become apparent from McHugh’s (2013) research: the stories she gathered reveal more porous categories between human and animal, more porous understandings of different life forms; and the narratives lend themselves particularly well to use for new ideological purposes. Since the 1990s there has been increased interest in societies previously

under colonialism, in reclaiming old stories and creating and sharing new stories of cross-species intimacies. These stories not only provide a historical record, even if all that remains for that record are traces of former lives, but, by returning voice and agency to those from whom it was so cruelly taken away, they also provide a record of the incredible resilience of certain animal species and certain indigenous groups. Important as both of these may be, such stories provide something even more important according to McHugh.

The “Expressive Earth”

Stories offer clues to how “certain cultural systems and practices, mainly those of certain speakers of indigenous languages, essentially enable high biodiversity to exist” (McHugh, 2013). In light of the controversy that surrounds some conservation efforts, McHugh’s argument, discussed in my Introduction, that narrative may be our best conservation strategy, acknowledges that as storytellers we act as moral agents (Chrulew, 2011). We can bear witness to what other stories and other storytellers cannot or choose not to acknowledge. We can tell secrets and uncover lies. To accomplish this, however, we need what Patricia Hill Collins, quoted in Judith Jordan (2010), contends is “an epistemology of connection versus an epistemology of separation” (p. 206).

We need as well to accept that language is not our exclusive provenance: animals speak, mountains and glaciers speak, and the earth speaks. Oral cultures experienced, and those that “never fully transferred their sensory participation to the written word” continue to experience, the world in a radically different way from our own (Abram, 1996, p. 139). They have not, as David Abram says “closed themselves within an exclusively human field of meanings . . . indeed the linguistic discourse of such cultures is commonly bound in specific and palpable ways, to the

expressive earth” (p. 139). With the introduction of the phonetic alphabet, the emergence of script, and, over time, wide spread literacy, something was lost. Abram suggests that the written word is a form of sensory deprivation, for the printed word now speaks the way nature once spoke. Difficult as it may be to consider the alphabet the enemy, Abram believes that by “short-circuiting the sensory reciprocity between [that] organism and the land,” it has become the enemy. (Abram, 1996, p. 187). Abram's association of spoken language with the breath and the wind, makes clear why dissociating ourselves from the living earth has left us disconnected from our body and the body of the cosmos. There is “no respiration between the inside and the outside” (Abram, 1996, p. 257) and planet earth, our home, is quickly becoming, in Doris Lessing's (1979) words, “despoiled”:

And all this time the earth was being despoiled. The minerals were being ripped out, the fuels wasted, the soils depleted by an improvident and short-sighted agriculture, the animals and plants slaughtered and destroyed, the seas being filled with filth and poison, the atmosphere was corrupted and always, all the time, the propaganda machines thumped out: more, more, more, drink more, eat more, consume more, discard more – in a frenzy, a mania. These were maddened creatures, and the small voices that rose in protest were not enough to halt the processes that had been set in motion and were sustained by greed. (p. 90).

Life lessons and a way forward

What I had to learn, in order to move from living-to-die to dying- to-live, was other ways to resist that were not self-destructive. After decades spent looking for what I came to call an escape clause, I finally understood what Starhawk (1987) meant when she said that “to defy reality alone and isolated is not the same as to change it” (p. 83). I no longer feel alone, nor do I

feel isolated. I took a leap and learned to trust that others were willing to lend a hand. That I can be an agent of change is infinitely more possible as a result. As I tell my story and as I listen to how others struggle as well to find that “middle ground” between destructive and constructive rage, I am able to move forward. I honed my skills in community education, collaboration, legal and direct action and, most importantly, I came to acknowledge that creaturely lives are, by necessity, entangled and dependant on each other and on broad systems which enable all life on earth to flourish. We must, as Jordan (2010) suggests, find a way to “[transcend] the illusion of the separate self” (p. 212).

I am forty and teaching a Special Education course for Nipissing University. The course is in West Bay on Manitoulin Island, an absolutely magical place. The house I am living in faces a wall of cliffs which come down to the water’s edge. A short walk from my house, and I can swim in water so clear I see the rocks below. My neighbor is one of my students. He recently retired from the Canadian military and is pursuing an education degree. He discovered, he tells me, an amazing lookout with a spectacular view. He wants to share it with me. As we walk, I realize the way to that wonderful view is up an increasingly steep incline. Undaunted I trudge on until I find myself slipping backward. I am prepared to go back home, but he is not prepared to let me miss out on that view. He gives me his hand and offers to pull me up the last little bit. I refuse, of course. I do it alone or I don’t do it at all. Then he states a simple fact that rocks my world. He tells me that sometimes we need to take a helping hand or we won’t be able to get to where we want to go. I pause, clutching a

branch so I don't slide back. Trust me he says, take my hand, you'll be glad you did. Trust? Take a hand? Me? Really? He waits me out. I am getting tired clutching the branch. I give him my hand. He pulls me up to the top of the incline and the view takes my breath away. Is a chink appearing in my armour?

That event, his words, my response remain as vivid today as if it was then. Many years after, I was sitting in a friend's living room talking with her and her partner about a problem I was struggling to come to grips with, an offer of help I had received and my reluctance to take the offer of help. The story I just recounted came to mind and I shared it with them. I shared with them as well, a conversation I had had with my therapist. In that conversation I was telling my therapist that I saw myself as a porcupine. My quills kept others at a distance. If I let people get close, I wouldn't be a porcupine so then, what would I be? Who would I be? She suggested that maybe I was never really a porcupine. Perhaps I was really a rabbit or a fox in a porcupine's body. Taking my student's hand, did it mean that I was shedding my porcupineness? If so, I told my friends, I am not sure how I feel about that.

Her partner rushed from the room to her work room in the basement and returned with an early piece she had made that she wanted me to have. It is a sculpture of a figure giving a hand to another. It graces my bookshelf and reminds me that the separate self is indeed an illusion; and that we need each other, we cannot exist alone. Even porcupines must at times come together, albeit slowly and carefully.



There is a wonderful children's book by Patti Stren (1977) which I shared with children and adults alike. The book is called *Hug Me*. It is the story of a porcupine named Elliot Kravitz who wants, more than anything, to have a friend. Even more though, he wants a friend to hug. While all the other porcupines sing the praises of quills, Elliot searches for a hug. He tries telephone poles, parking meters and light standards. He puts erasers on his quills, he dresses himself up as a birthday present, he even puts Christmas lights on his quills, all to no avail. Finally he gives up. He shouts, "I GIVE UP! I don't need anybody. I am going to the forest where I can be alone and no one will ever find me" (p.24)! Then, to his great delight another porcupine hears his cries and listens to his sad story. The book ends with them together in an embrace. "And they triedslowly carefully very gently they hugged (pp. 28-30).

I am not unique, and while my insights, based on my experiences, may not be universally applicable; they suggest that we are all in some way wounded, even those of us charged with helping to heal others. "That identity is our promise and responsibility, our calamity and dignity" (Frank, 1995, xiii).

Instead of pathologizing emotions we see in others but only rarely acknowledge in ourselves, we need to "turn inward, into our own darkness, and experience confusion until 'the great roots of night grow and 'the things that hide in us come out again'" (Kirmayer, 2003, p. 272; Neruda, 1976, p. 5). Taking care of ourselves and our own wounded-ness and sharing our own stories of wounded-ness can be a necessary step in the process of becoming more compassionate carers of ourselves and others and of the earth. We need to be willing to go into those dark places of the soul and let the light shine in. We need the courage to make chinks in our armour, step into the unknown and be vulnerable if we are to reconnect with the cosmos for

all of life is comprised of a multiplicity of connections. We are, like the water lilies I used to see on Manitoulin Island, rhizomes, with any one point connecting to any other point.

Chapter 4

Reconnecting

*'Rifts' in a poem—great gaps between perception and perception
which must be leapt across if they are to be crossed at all.
. . . there must be a place in the poem for rifts too,
and that the magic of poetry lies in encountering,
and somehow finding oneself lifted safely across, those gaps.*

(Levertov, 1993, p. 97)

*. . . just as real walls begin to crumble as mosses and other small
plants combine with weather to gain a foothold in the cracks, so
so too did cracks appear in the wall that divides man from beast.*
(Balcomb, 2006, p. 26)

In an essay on poetic theory, Levertov (1993) talks about how the poet Robert Duncan taught her the need for rifts in poetry. Reading her essay, I was struck by her very visual image of encountering rifts and “somehow finding oneself lifted safely across those gaps” (p. 97). If only, I thought, if only real life imitated poetry and somehow we could find ourselves, by some magical force, lifted across the many divides that separate us from the rest of nature. Better still, how wonderful it would be if somehow there was a way to close the gaps that separate us from ourselves and others and the “more than human world” (Abram, 1996, p.101).

Today, what some peoples always knew, that all creatures think and feel, have agency, intentionality and voice, is still only acknowledged by some in the scientific community. The shift in thinking came with Charles Darwin (1899), who argues, in his book *The Expression of the Emotions*, that lower animals, like man, feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery (Chapter 1, General Principles of Expression). His ideas, however, were not, are not, without considerable push back, for they pose a threat to human exceptionalism. Some humans continue, even today, to have difficulty leaving human exceptionalism behind, and that is why

Balcomb's (2006) optimism that "cracks [did] appear in the wall that divides man from beast" needs to be tempered by the reality that much work remains (p. 26). The changes so badly needed in our relationship with the cosmos, will require great effort by great numbers of people, for the destruction of the natural environment is, as I noted earlier, the canary in the coal mine. We are being alerted to the real danger, the end of civilization as we know it, for "our moral progress has not kept up with our technological progress" (Lovelock, 2007).

The Animal That Became God

Some current research, in the language of hegemonic discourse, has as its goal, to "combat" aging and "prolong" life. Western society's fear of aging and denial of death is thus reinforced (Mehlman, Binstock, Juengst, Ponsaran, & Whitehouse, 2003; Slevin, 2010; Watts, 2011).

George Monbiot whose *Guardian* article I discussed earlier, confirms, what we already know, that the advertising and marketing sectors influence consumer spending. That they play an important role in the burgeoning market for anti-aging creams, lotions, potions, plastic surgery and the like is therefore not a surprise. Some manufacturers of these products and procedures make fraudulent claims, some products and procedures are harmful, some ineffective, yet demand for them is strong. Kathleen Slevin (2010) speaks to the way youth and aging are presented.

Consumerism touts desirable bodies as young, toned, thin; the media convey [that] to be young and beautiful is to possess the most desirable form of cultural capital [and] growing old is seen as a disease that can be remedied. (p. 1004).

And, with genetic engineering and cloning, artificial intelligence and robotics also at the forefront of much scientific work, man has become "the animal that became a God" (Harari, 2014, p. 415). According to Yuval Noah Harari, humans have become "self-made gods with

only the laws of physics to keep us company, we are accountable to no one...Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods?" (pp. 415-416). We are dissatisfied, and so we are also not happy. Sigmund Freud (1962) noted, with great foresight, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, originally published in 1930, "... present day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character" (p. 39). John Burroughs (1902), an acclaimed nature essayist active in the United States conservation movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, speaks eloquently to Harari's point:

The universe is so unhuman, that is, it goes its way with so little thought of man. He is but an incident, not an end. We must adjust our notions to the discovery that things are not shaped to him, but that he is shaped to them. The air was not made for his lungs, but he has lungs because there is air; the light was not created for his eye, but he has eyes because there is light. All the forces of nature are going their own way; man avails himself of them, or catches a ride as best he can. If he keeps his seat, he prospers; if he misses his hold and falls, he is crushed. (p. 165)

As noted in a previous chapter, we have the means to live but increasingly no purpose, no meaning to live for. Studies on the mental health of those living in affluent and technologically advanced countries in the global North and South highlight that a sizeable minority suffer from depression. Some researchers even suggest that depression is to some extent an illness of affluence (Bromet et al, 2011; Klopowicz, Gurian, & Williams, 2009; Wilkinson, & Pickett, 2006)). A related argument, put forth in a recent article, is that "income inequality, which is for the most part greater in high than low- to middle-income countries, promotes a wide variety of chronic conditions that includes depression" (Kessler & Bromet, 2013, p. 129). If we add to that

deaths from substance abuse, suicide and homicide which are, to an extent, socially determined and have psycho-social origins, we would have to conclude that many of us are neither happy nor healthy. According to Paul Shephard (1998), there is, “a kind of failure in some fundamental dimension of human existence, an irrationality beyond mistakenness” (p. 4).

Moving From Self-made Gods to Planetary Thinking

How then do we move from thinking like “self-made gods” to “planetary thinking” (Thompson, 1986, p. 235)? How do we, in Thompson’s words, find “pathways among traditions . . . join the spaces that make up our world? Such a journey not only alters our imaginative geography. . . but produces new spaces and terrain, places we have not dwelt in before.” (p. 250).

In a search for answers, I have looked first for explanations about how we got to where we are now. I have identified, in this paper, a number of factors that have hampered the breaking down of the many walls which separate humans from the rest of nature: the enabling of social power through privileged speakers who control knowledge and knowledge-making; the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam; the Cartesian paradigm; scientific progress; capitalist greed; a fear of death; and a dissociation from the suffering, death and decay which surround us. All of these factors have been analysed and all, in part, explain the difficulty of finding answers to the questions posed here. Explanations however are not enough. We will need the courage to face hard truths and we will need the hope that keeps us engaged in struggles for transformative change.

Hope Anchored in Practice

Freire’s 2014 *Pedagogy of Hope* was written in “rage and love without which there is no hope”; however hope must be “anchored in practice” in order to render it concrete (p.4). Hope alone is

not sufficient:

The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naiveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion. (p. 2)

Sadly though, sometimes rage grows and becomes stronger than love and hope seems nowhere to be found. Further, as Butler (2014) points out, rage can overpower other feelings. “Speaking from rage does not always let us see how rage carries sorrow and covers it over. . . How often is sorrow effectively shouted down by rage.” (Video File). That, unfortunately, may be what we are, in part, experiencing today as death and destruction envelop the planet. We need, though, to believe in a hope anchored in practice, for our very survival depends on it. “Hope is an ontological need” (Freire, 2014, p. 2. A personal situation from the early 1970’s comes to mind.

I was teaching, along with another teacher and a child care worker, in a special education class of twelve 8 – 11 year olds in the public school system. The students were with us for two or more years. In the language of the day, these students were labelled “emotionally disturbed.” However, with the exception of one child who had an acquired brain injury, the rest of the children simply demonstrated behaviour not deemed acceptable in a hegemonic school system. They, as my teaching partner so aptly put it then, were children who “live rough.” Poverty; parental unemployment, underemployment or precarious employment; unsafe housing; a lack of adequate healthy food; exposure to violence and exploitation; all created for these children situations where emotions, their own included, were close to the surface and often expressed in

violent ways. For many, mere survival required extraordinary effort, and there was often little energy left over for the niceties of “good manners” and “appropriate” learning behaviours. At the same time, each of these children demonstrated an exceptional awareness of, sensitivity towards, and compassion for others. They seemed acutely aware of the fragility of life and the need to cooperate in order to stay alive and below police and child welfare radar. Often, when police and child welfare intervene, what results is a state form of induced abandonment from their homes and families. These children saw life, in all its complexity, very clearly.

While many of the children raged at the circumstances of their lives, their support for each other and for the adults they trusted shone through. They stood up for each other, trusted their teachers and child care worker enough to confide when they or one of their peers was in pain and they extended this love and concern to other creatures. There was love enough for all. We had a rabbit in the class who hopped freely about the room. He was lovingly cared for (and cleaned up after). We had a turtle everyone was eager to feed and care for and we had a large aquarium with a wire mesh cover in which two mice lived. They too were tenderly cared for. One day remains with me still.

It is Monday morning. In response to my good morning (silly me I should know Friday afternoons and Monday mornings are rarely “good”), one of the boys tells me to f-off. After everyone is in class and settled, I see that the adult mice are fine, but there is what looks like blood on the aquarium walls. I take the cover off the aquarium, and there are two baby mice partially buried under the cedar shavings. I don’t think the mother mouse had only two babies. Did some of the babies die at or shortly after birth and are they the two partially buried? Were the adult mice stressed and did they eat some of the

babies? Did someone come in over the weekend and kill the babies? I am upset but not at all prepared to deal with the clean-up. One of the older boys takes control of the "death scene". He finds a box with a cover and fixes up a temporary home for the adult mice while he washes out the aquarium and puts it back in order.

The rest of us sit close to each other on the carpet and talk. One of the children suggests that we separate the mice into two cages so they can't have more babies. Someone says they will be lonesome all alone in separate cages. After lots of different opinions on what to do are heard, we decide to separate them. The child care-worker goes out to buy a second cage. Other children, upset at the death of the babies, ask if the mother mouse is sad. Some children say that the mother mouse is a bad mother because she killed her babies. I explain that she is not a bad mother, she took care, as mice do, to bury her babies who likely were born dead or who died at birth. And, if she did eat her other babies, that is what mice do sometimes if they are scared. It is sad that it happened and yes, while we cannot know for sure exactly what she is thinking or feeling, mother mouse is likely feeling sad that her babies are dead. I assure them that, if conditions are right, the next time she has babies, if there is a next time, all may go well.

They also ask what we can do to say goodbye to the babies. We plan a good-bye ceremony for later that day. Some of the children work with my co-teacher to find a poem and a story we can read at the ceremony.

None of the children suggest that maybe someone was in on the weekend and killed the baby mice. I do not mention it either but I do wonder.

That boy who, at age eleven, found a temporary home for the adult mice, respectfully removed the dead baby mice and wrapped them carefully in Kleenex, washed and cleaned the cage and who admonished me for not wanting to clean up the death scene, is the same boy who, at age 19, stabbed someone to death. Sometimes rage is indeed overpowering and hope is nowhere to be found.

Healing Love, Relational Resilience and Making Connections

Friere speaks of rage and love. I bring up rage and love in the context of the story I just shared, and love comes up many times in discussions of healing ourselves and the planet. Deborah Bird Rose (2013a) speaks of something she calls “crazy love” described in Chapter 2. bell hooks speaks of love as “the mutual practice of giving and receiving . . . In the midst of such love we need never fear abandonment” (hooks,, 2000, p. 164) and Martin Buber urges us to “love powerfully”: “We cannot avoid using power, cannot escape the compulsion to afflict the world, so let us, cautious in diction and mighty in contradiction, love powerfully” (cited in Friedman, 1981, p. 342). The concept of love, however, is laden with many incompatible meanings. Judith Jordan (2010) suggests that in our patriarchal society often “love gets narrowed to [something] romantic, sexualized . . . [and] becomes pre-empted and trivialized” (p. 230). So I must ask, what kind of love is it that facilitates the connectedness we seek?

That is a question I have given much thought to over many years. I asked it when I was a child and wondered what love was and, more importantly, where it was in my family, in my school, in society at large. I asked it in the years I worked with children, youth and women,

broken in so many places who, while some grew strong in the broken places, many did not, and I raged against a society that would allow them to be broken in the first place. And I ask it now. While the answers can be found in the writing of many authors, I wish to return to my earlier discussions about belonging and “the courage to move beyond certainty and invulnerability” (Jordan, 2010, p. 212). To my mind, the kind of love that heals requires, as bell hooks advises, the “mutual practice of giving and receiving” (hooks, 2000, p.164) and that requires the ability to take risks, to open ourselves up to uncertainty, all the while respecting ours and others’ vulnerability. All of this, in turn, requires no small amount of courage for it requires action. To act, while aware of our fear and supported and encouraged by others, does indeed require no small amount of courage.

In the same way that western society holds in high esteem, solitary accomplishment, we have defined resilience largely as a personal quality. Current research points us in a new direction (Faulkner, 2009; Flynn, 2012; Hartling, 2008; Hoult, 2012; Jordan, 2004). We are being asked now to view resilience as a process that can be facilitated by family, friends, colleagues, schools, or governments, a view which has very real implications for social change. Linda Hartling (2008) reflects on Judith Jordan’s 1992 work on relational resilience.

Rather than perpetuating the common notion of resilience as some form of intrinsic toughness endowed to a few unique or heroic individuals, Jordan opened the way to understanding resilience as a human capacity that can be developed and strengthened in all people through relationships, specifically through growth-fostering relationships (Hartling, 2008, p. 52).

Jordan’s understanding of resilience speaks to the connectedness necessary to heal, in

part, both the personal and the ecological rifts detailed in this paper. Elizabeth A. Flynn (2012) acknowledges that “resilience begins from a place of struggle and desire” (p.7). At the same time, she states that, “Resilience as feminist rhetorical agency is a relational dynamic, responsive in and to contexts, creating and animating capacities and possibilities” (Flynn, 2012, p. 8). This understanding of resilience is one that I am comfortable with because it speaks to the life I eventually created for myself. In several provinces, in cities, rural communities and on northern reserves, in the company of strong women and gentle men, I found opportunities for work, for friends and lovers and for healing. I was able to face hard truths and find hope.

A conversation that deals in “hard truths,” a conversation about the damage done to ourselves, to our families, our friends and colleagues, our earthly home, is never an easy conversation to have. But without such a conversation, I do not believe the “growth-fostering relationships” Hartling (2008) speaks of are possible. What has made such conversations easier for me, is the knowledge I have gained that there is a clear distinction to be made between blame and responsibility, both individual and collective. That distinction needs to be a part of the conversation.

The Blame Game

To blame diverts light away from what went wrong and shines it onto who or what to blame. As we search for someone or something to blame, we close the door to examining how to keep whatever went wrong, from going wrong again. It can also, if the blame is turned inward, be corrosive to ourselves and ultimately to others. Self-judgement and self-hatred distract us from the problem at hand and leave us unable to act. They can also be expressed as anger and rage which are then acted out in violent ways. For me to be responsible implies that I have the ability

to respond, hence response-able. To be answer-able or account-able means that I have the ability to answer to an individual or to the collective for something.

Responsibility is always present. We always have, within us, the ability to respond in some fashion or another. Sometimes we do not want to acknowledge that fact, sometimes our initial response does not, in the long term, serve us and others well, and, as I discovered in the interaction with my therapist described in Chapter 2, sometimes we need to consider a different response. Sometimes too, how we are able to respond is constrained by our life circumstances, but we are always able to respond, in some manner or another. Returning to the conversation I had with my therapist, described in Chapter 2, little did I know then that I was embarking on a journey which continues today, some thirty years later. What my therapist went on to tell me was that I was a choice maker. I was someone capable of exercising agency. My pain alerted me to a problem. I could respond in my usual fashion and ignore it, all the while blaming life, blaming one individual or another, or I could change myself. Life holds opportunities and choices and sometimes, tough decisions. Life also requires us to take responsibility where we are free to make choices, and it requires us to not take responsibility for the things we cannot change. Reflecting on that conversation now, the work of concentration camp survivor and renowned psychotherapist Viktor Frankl comes to mind. Frankl (200) believed that even in those situations of great suffering, when perhaps it is not possible to change the circumstances of one's life, it is still possible to take responsibility for how one deals with what fate has thrown our way. I did not have to be a victim. As Frankl says, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (Frankl, 2000, p. 75).

Heather Mallick, in her June 7, 2015 column, provides a startling example of people being responsive and responsible. She also asks a most thought provoking question, “How many people does it take to lift a bus”? Her column tells the story of an unicyclist who was just behind the driver’s window of a double decker bus in London UK, as he and the bus turned a corner. In a flash the unicyclist was nowhere in view. He was down on the road, invisible to the driver who moved the bus forward and further onto the unicyclist’s leg. Two men from a nearby office ran over and started banging on the windshield. They screamed for the driver to reverse but the driver was in panic mode and froze. A crowd began to gather. Realizing that the driver was unable to respond, they tried to lift the bus. Soon the crowd grew to 40 or 50 people. People ran from nearby restaurants, stores, offices. No police were there yet, no one was in charge, but collectively everyone seemed to know what had to be done. The bus was lifted off the man; he was dragged to safety and into a waiting ambulance. People were “like a mass of minnows shifting a huge red whale of a bus which shudders against the blue sky” is how Heather Mallick describes the scene. (Mallick, June 8, 2015). Not unusual perhaps. All of us have heard similar stories. Such stories, though, bear repeating since they remind us that while one person doing the heavy lifting is unlikely to succeed, many hands working together can. But Heather Mallick wants to us to take away something else from this story. She brings the story back to Toronto, and to bystanders on the subway, some of whom are annoyed by a suicide which disrupts the morning or evening commute. Mallick, I believe, is reminding us, when she quotes from W. H. Auden’s (1938) poem “Musée des Beaux-Arts,” that as we go about our daily lives others may be suffering and, while it may not be us in pain, we cannot act with indifference to another’s pain. “suffering takes place while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking

dully along . . . for him it was not an important failure. But it was. It was a catastrophe, and the mysterious people passing by [in London] understood that” (Mallick, June 7, 2015).

Connecting With Ourselves

In a search for ways to reconnect to others, and to the cosmos at large, I needed to start with myself. I needed to find something more than anger, more than struggle to move me forward. I needed to find some measure of peace within myself for I can only send out into the universe what I myself possess.

For me that inner peace has come, as it has for many others, from mindfulness and bodyfulness practices such as meditation, silence practice, tai chi and yoga. Christine Caldwell (2014) invented the word bodyfulness to express the state of being aware and present in the body. Mindfulness practice, Caldwell notes, puts the emphasis on mind, and, while it often includes yoga, tai chi and other similar practices, the voice of the body is still marginalised. Caldwell wants bodyfulness “to act as a rubric for centralizing the body within the intrapsychic and social context (p. 71).

Bodyfulness is at its heart a contemplative practice, and this distinguishes it from embodiment. . . Bodyfulness begins when the embodied self is held in a conscious, contemplative environment, coupled with a non-judgmental engagement with bodily processes, an acceptance and appreciation of one’s bodily nature, and an ethical and aesthetic orientation towards taking right actions so that a lessening of suffering and an increase in human potential may emerge. (pp. 71, 73).

Because of my physical limitations, I do chair yoga and I am currently doing a combination of

yoga, tai chi and Pilates in a warm water therapy pool. These practices allow me to reconnect with my body, to heal an old rift.

In the pool I heighten my awareness of my body in space. I bring all my attention to my lungs as I inhale and exhale; I feel my heart beat. I note pain and the absence of pain as I make a small adjustment to a particular pose. I notice the warmth of the water on my skin and the buoyancy of the water. I am aware of my body from a non-judgemental and appreciative stance and I heighten my awareness of the need to take this non-judgemental and appreciative stance, beyond my practice. After so many years living absent from my body, I feel like each time I step into the pool I am about to meet, for the first time in a very long time, an old friend, someone I met a very long time ago, someone I only vaguely remember. The reunion is surprising but joyful.

Reflecting on the stories I have shared in this paper, it is possible to identify some of those people and institutions which thrive on secrets, lies, and denial, and which silence us. By so doing, they exclude so many people from participating actively in life. In the Introduction to this paper I recounted how, in response to my question about why my mother was so angry at men, my father stated that, “some things are better not known.” What strikes me as I hear again my father’s response, is how many other phrases we have that reinforce silence and apathy: Ignorance is bliss; It is what it is; Curiosity killed the cat; Turn a blind eye; What you don’t know can’t hurt you; Don’t ask or you will open Pandora’s Box. Looking back as well on my description of my school experiences growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, it is clear how critical thinking, curiosity and creativity are stifled. As a child growing up, as children growing up in

families and schools unable to nurture and protect us, and unable or unwilling to provide that sense of rootedness and connectedness necessary to feel that we have a place in the cosmos, there are few choices, for as very young children we are usually powerless to ameliorate our own situations. Later, as adults working in hegemonic institutions some of us are equally powerless because we fear being outliers or even fear for our jobs. We can, however take, our experiences and share them, thus relieving others of the soul-destroying sense of aloneness I and so many others experienced. We can offer hope and the encouragement needed to discover, "...the roar which lies at the other side of silence" (Eliot, 1994, p. 162). Moving forward we can then look toward a "potentially liberated future" (Smith, 1993 p. 163).

What else is needed, I believe, is to ask "what if" (Evernden, 1999, p. 140). What if our children could see a better version of humanity? What if more of us believed that human beings are not hopelessly violent, materialistic, selfish and greedy? As I discussed earlier, a complex mix of emotions bubble to the surface when people talk about what is happening today in the world. Feelings of helplessness can arise and, they can leave us feeling overwhelmed, powerless to make anything better. Focusing on what work is being done locally and globally and what each of us can do to further that work can go a long way to relieving the sense of helplessness such conversations can evoke. As Naomi Klein (2014) notes, "The new structures built in the rubble of neoliberalism –everything from social media, to worker's co-ops, to farmer's markets to neighborhood sharing banks have helped us to find community despite the fragmentation of postmodern life" (p. 466). What if we changed the channel then on the images that play out in movies, television shows, newspapers, and political and economic policies, for they create a climate of fear and despair which can be overwhelming and leaves us incapable of action? What if we challenged everyone, but especially children and youth, since their habits may be less

fixed, with a pedagogy which emphasises activism as an embodied practice? (Damerell, Howe, & Milner-Gulland, 2012; Fawcett & Dickenson, 2013; Kahn, & Kellert, 2002). What if we turned for inspiration to our poets and our writers? Let us begin by imagining a better world.

Chapter 5

Imagining a better world

*We have submitted to a society that has tried to make
imagination a privilege, when to each of us it
comes as a birthright.*

(Winterson, 1995, p. 139)

*I have aspired only to ask ‘what if’ – not to prescribe
some splendid alternative which would solve all our
perceived problems.*

(Evernden, 1999, p. 140)

Neil Evernden cautions us about “dealing in terms of problems and solutions” because that way of thinking, in which solutions must follow analysis, serves to reinforce the conventional, Euro western world view. As Evernden sees it, instead of using our imagination and asking “what if” when faced with a problem we reify our conventional world view and immediately go from problem to solution. “Hence, all is transformed into these two categories, problem and solution, and the world again congeals into an indifferent equation” (p. 140).

Pamela Richards (2011), a feminist geographer, suggests that “our embodiment is often written out of geographical discourse, reflective of a key problem in Western thought: the ontological discontinuities perceived between the social and the natural, body and mind, the self and the world” (n.p.). What Richards calls “ontological discontinuities,” I call rifts. We cannot continue to hold fast to what is, in reality, a flawed construction. We must look at what is really in front of us, and that is “The land as an extension of the body, the body as part of the earth” (Hogan, 2013, p. xvii). What we do to and for ourselves we do to the cosmos. What happens to

the cosmos happens to us. Our best hope then may be to rejoin the poets. We need to touch people's hearts as well as their heads. We need a language that re-embodies thinking and reconnects thinking with the corporeal. We need a language of poetic science. And we need storytellers, poets and writers who promote a *science* of caring.

Val Plumwood, in a 2013 article by Deborah Bird Rose, calls for “philosophy to converge with much of poetry and literature because poetry and literature have better methods for “making room” for understanding the vivid presence of mindful life on earth” (Rose, 2013b, p. 106). Rose explains that for Plumwood, the poetic form “articulates her understanding that inside a world of dynamic interaction, knowledge arises through participation one needs to do more than represent. Somehow, one needs to vivify, to leap across imaginative realms, to connect, to empathise, to be addressed” (Rose, 2013b, p. 106). Plumwood herself, in an earlier article expresses her belief in the power of stories, and in the efforts of writers to help us “to think differently.” She says:

Writers are amongst the foremost of those who can help us to think differently.

Of course, artistic integrity, honesty and truthfulness to experience are crucial in any re-discovery of ‘tongues in trees’. I am not talking about inventing fairies at the bottom of the garden. It's a matter of being *open to experiences of nature as powerful, agentic and creative, making space in our culture for an animating sensibility and vocabulary*. (Plumwood, 2009, The Role of Writing)

Earlier in my paper, I talked about how, for much of my life, I felt as if I was dying on the inside; the essence of who I am was dying, while my body, battered and bruised, crumbled slowly. Evernden (1993), captures this, in the context of our current environmental crisis. He

says, “what the environmental movement appears to protest—the extermination of other forms of life—is simply the physical manifestation of a global genocide that is long since accomplished in the minds of us all. The subjects are first destroyed, and later their bodies crumble” (p. 136).

Human communities have long taught their children to imagine, to dream, a better world. The weakening of this quest, this reaching, the constraining of this capacity for imagination within hegemonic routines, is what is new. So, when I recommend “what if” I am not so much recommending something new as reminding us to do something old. Just as, according to Evernden, “any dilemma is but a small manifestation of an entire social context small beginnings may not seem futile - even if that beginning is only a defence of wonder.” So then, “for us wonder is a harbinger of hope since it reminds us of our ability to suspend belief” (pp. 140-141). In the Romantic period one response to the bleakness wrought by industrialization was art, poetry, literature and music. The artist as radical in the Romantic period and artists today explore many important themes, among them a wondrous nature.

The Importance of Wonder

It is wonder, which begins as curiosity, as surprise and then astonishment that we must nurture, for it grows and becomes “an attitude of openness or receptivity that leads a person from a preoccupation with self into a search for meaning beyond oneself” (Sideris & Moore, 2008, p. 271). Sadly, this sense of wonder often leaves us when we leave childhood behind. Rachel Carson (2007) bemoans this loss of wonder and says:

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder, so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the

boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength (p.14).

I stand in the kitchen of my twenty-third floor condo. I turn from preparing dinner, look west through a wall of glass and see a sunset that fills me with awe, with deep humility. The sky is various shades of red and purple and orange, sometimes peach and grey, and always blue. Sometimes the sun is a brilliant red ball, sometimes a soft peachy grey orb.

What I experienced, is “the entwining of matter with sensibility” the losing of one’s self in the moment, the experience of being transfixed in wonder” (Carson, 2007, p. 14). For a brief moment, time was suspended and I could not move. I have lived in my condo for almost two years now, and I never tire of that ever changing view; in fact, I feel disappointed if I am home late and the sun has already set. Martin Bidney (1997) calls such moments “privileged moments, sudden gifts of vision when one’s feelings of aliveness intensifies and the senses quicken” and James Joyce called them “epiphanies” (p. 1). William Wordsworth calls them “spots of time” (p. 429).

There are in our existence spots of time,

That with distinct pre-eminence retain

A renovating virtue . . .

Reflecting on why I feel sad when I come home too late to see the sun set, I realized that I draw strength from its beauty. I described the experience to friends as a moment that made my heart sing. I wondered then what other such moments made me feel renewed in that same way? Several came to mind. Some I have already mentioned, but in less detail. Here are several more.

I am hiking on Manitoulin Island. On three sides, I see limestone cliffs, and below, turquoise water so crystal clear I can see the rocks that lie beneath the water...I am driving across the prairies. Before me, miles and miles of sky and endless fields of yellow canola waving in the prairie wind. Later, sitting on a hill overlooking the Qu'Appelle Valley, I feel the warm sun on my face. I smell the sun-warmed earth. I hear the prairie grasses whispering. With my ear to the ground, I am sure I hear the sound of long ago buffalo thundering across the plains. . . .Riding on a snowmobile from an airstrip in Northern Ontario to the Nursing Station, I feel ice crystals tearing at my face and the biting cold of the wind takes my breath away. . . . I am at peace as I canoe on a lake in Northern Manitoba. It is late at night but still light. The silence is broken only by the howl of wolves, calling. I am standing on the rocks at Peggy's Cove. Storm clouds warn of impending danger. The waves grow bigger. They crash on the rocks. I feel the salt spray on my face. It is time to move to higher ground. Though experienced over thirty years ago, those moments remain with me still. I have long had a fascination with the Romantics, and, as I wax ecstatic about some of the "spots of time" I experienced, I have to smile. I am sounding a lot like a Romantic poet.

The Legacy of the Romantics

Out of my personal musings a question arises. What lessons can be learned from Wordsworth's and the Romantics' way of looking at nature? What can they teach those of us who live estranged from the world around us about how to rediscover our connection to the cosmos? What can be learned about how to move from a position of domination to one of being? The

Cartesian divide was a great concern for the Romantics. For them, poetry had the potential to heal the rift between humans and the rest of nature

Jane Bennett (2001) raises an interesting point, which may, in part, answer the question of why we are so detached from the natural world and, in her explanation, we may find an answer. Bennett suggests that our “disenchantment” with the world may be, in essence, a self-fulfilling prophecy. She says, “For me the question is not whether disenchantment is a regrettable or a progressive historical development. It is, rather, whether the very characterization of the world as disenchanted ignores and then discourages affective attachment to the world” (Bennett, p. 3). “Wonder”, “epiphanies”, “privileged moments”, “sudden gifts of vision”, “spots of time”, do happen in our contemporary time. Further, according to Bennett, enchantment can be nurtured through play and through our willingness to “hone sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things” (p. 4). We can find the extraordinary in the ordinary even in the urban, mechanized world of our cities if we open ourselves to the possibility. Bennett lists, among natural things, such human made things as “sophisticated modes of communication [and] the animation of objects by video technology” to name just two. Neither would be on my list of sources of wonder and enchantment, but, that aside, I do believe there is merit in her idea that if what we focus on is loss, disengagement and disenchantment, we become depleted, we no longer have the energy we need for the work we must do which is the work of engagement and attachment and the healing of rifts (Bennett, 2001, p. 4).

Before going any further into a discussion of the Romantics and Wordsworth in particular, I want to make clear that it is not my intention, in this paper, to analyze Wordsworth’s poetry through a class, race and gender lens; nor is it my intention to explore different versions

of nature in the Romantic period. I have chosen to give my heart pride of place, and simply highlight the poetry of the Romantics because I personally find in them both inspiration and a way of reflecting on the world which touches me. In that, I know I am not alone. Lewis Hinchman & Sandra Hinchman (2007) note that people apart from, or lacking sensitivity to, nature, sacrifice a vital part of what it means to be human. They characterise Romanticism as “environmentalism's 'predecessor culture', one from which our contemporaries may still recover important insights” (p. 334). Not everyone, of course, agrees. Joseph Grange (1985) suggests that while “factual accounts of nature and its workings cease to satisfy the discriminating mind...poetic appeals to our subjectivity will not balance accounts” (p. 351) and Timothy Morton (2007) suggests that how the Romantics characterized nature is “naïve,” and he likens it to how women are admired under patriarchy (Morton, 2007, p. 5). I do, on the other hand, find hope in Romantic art and literature generally, and Wordsworth’s poetry in particular, and if that makes me naïve, even nostalgic, so be it.

Though Wordsworth denies that he is speaking of utopia in *The Prelude* Book Eleventh 140 – 145, his poetry expresses his utopian dream. While utopia is not realizable, his ideal can be realized so, he is not an impractical utopian. Wordsworth roots his vision in the every day. He envisions a world where the sacredness of, and connection to, nature, is reclaimed and in that we can find hope. His ability to see the beauty in the ordinary and a redemptive power in imagination, makes his work as important today as it was to the Victorians. “Not in Utopia,- subterranean fields--/ Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!/ But in the very world, which is the world,/ Of all of us,--the place where, in the end,/We find our happiness, or not at all!” (p.399). While we cannot expect to be filled with wonder and enchantment all of the time, bringing both to the forefront of our thinking “is to be under the momentary impression that the

natural and the cultural worlds offer gifts and, in so doing, reminds us that it is good to be alive” (Bennett, 2001, p. 204).

“Dangerous Words” and the Power of Language to Subvert

The words of William Wordsworth speak to our imagination, to our hearts. Words have a power. They influence our thinking just as our thinking influences how language evolves. We need to choose our language carefully. Hinchman and Hinchman (2007) argue that the language of the political economy, so pervasive in discussions of a broad range of subjects, fails to provide a vocabulary with which we can adequately discuss many environmental issues of importance to us (p. 276). They quote Jack Turner who sums up the power of vocabulary: “By now, the language of economics (and law) exhaustively describes our world and hence becomes our world ... Every vocabulary shapes the world to fit a paradigm” (cited in Hinchman, 2007, p. 334).

Words also have the power to shape our behavior for good or ill. Thomas King (2003) speaks of how stories emphasise this power and he stresses the need therefore to choose the words we speak and listen to carefully. Stories “can control our lives for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories. Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous ...once a story is told it cannot be called back.” He goes on to say that “Once told it is loose in the world . . . you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (pp. 9-10). Fortunately though, many writers focus on the power of words to inspire hope.

In earlier chapters I highlighted the work of David Abram (1996) who speaks of “writing language back into the land,” Deborah Bird Rose (2013b) who speaks of “earth language [as] never monological; always relational” (p. 107); Patricia Hill Collins who speaks of “an epistemology of connection” (cited in Jordon, 2010, p. 206) and Judith Jordan who speaks of

“relational resilience” (cited in Hartling, 2008, p.52). And the Romantics who see poetry as way to bring humans and the rest of nature back together. There is a story about the power of words to inspire hope that is a touchstone for me, and a source of encouragement. It is a story about a poetry competition held by the government of Nicaragua after the revolution.

Eighty seven poems from the *campesino* (peasant) cultural movement were submitted. Ernesto Cardenal, a famous Latin American poet was to pick the best five for publication. The moment arrives. To a stunned audience, Cardenal announces that all the poems are rubbish; none are going to be published. The reason: “too much rhyme . . . poetry should be free.” One brave *campanero*, Secundino, confronted Cardenal: “our poems aren’t rubbish . . . we just thought that was how you were supposed to do it. But, if that’s how poetry should be, all loose and free, how about this then?” Secundino tells about his day-to-day life as a fisherman. He began:

I’m a fisherman I leave
my house grab my net
throw it over my
shoulder and set off.

When I reach the river
I drop the net
open it
throw it into the water.

When I take it out

It’s full of fish

The big ones I keep for myself to eat;

the small ones, back to the water. (Kane, L., 2000, p.14).

Cardenal complimented Secundino and told him that that was what he called a poem. Secundino was given the honour of being the best campesino poet in Nicaragua. After that everyone was motivated to write.

Autoethnographic writing gives voice to a person's lived experience for the purpose of shining a light on larger socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political issues. In so doing the writer subverts the "master's" agenda. As Audre Lorde (2007) famously said, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110). Neither will the master's words. Giving voice to the personal, to the private worlds of people and their lived experiences, makes room for those who are so often kept out, and heals the split between the historically male, rational, authoritarian voice of the public sphere, and the private voice of women and other marginalised groups. These two languages can then be brought together in dialogue opening up new possibilities for activism and change. Smith (1993) makes the link between autoethnographic writing and the possibility of change. "However problematic its strategies, autobiographical writing has played and continues to play a role in emancipatory politics" (pp. 156-157). Senehi et al (2009) agree:

To connect with our story in a way that brings integrity of self and a vision to our lives and our work and to recognize the ways in which we have been resilient and strong can be a move toward de-colonization, de-silencing, self-respect, dignity, a sense of truth and justice and a de-atomization of our lives and our aims. (p. 91)

Elizabeth Hoult (2012) speaks about how she took a risk and used myth, drama and poetry, along with autobiography in her research on adult learners, and, by so doing, challenged convention. Where she conducted her research, and at the time she was conducting it, she was

expected to conform to the language of the academy, linear, rational, evidence based, and neutral. Hoult (2012) uses the metaphor of ecdysis, a snake molting, to discuss her research journey: “This peeling away of theories was helped by the inevitable friction I encountered while completing the study in the parched and precarious landscape that lies between disciplines” (p. 6). What she says bears directly on the subject of this paper and this chapter in particular. She continues:

. . . there is another kind of knowledge, another kind of knowing that is worth pursuing if we are brave enough to take those risks. It is a way of knowing that draws on the ancient wisdom of stories, the communities of which we are a part, and our own vulnerabilities. This other way of knowing has the might to save us from getting caught up in the power games, field boundaries, and authority moves that restrict our thinking (pp. 192-193).

Through the sharing of stories, this “other way of knowing,” we connect with our foremothers and forefathers as well as our contemporaries and we explore the stories of other people. The words the storyteller or the writer chooses and their use of metaphor, the rhythm of the words in a poem, all assist us in making meaning and exploring new ways of thinking.

Dystopias in the Works of the Romantics and Beyond

Through the power of imagination we can test ourselves against post apocalyptic/dystopian situations and we can envision new worlds and new ways of being in the world. Book VII of William Wordsworth’s (19979) *The Prelude* 723 – 730 could be the mirror in which we see ourselves reflected and Book XIV of *The Prelude* 446 – 52 which ends with a call to the power of imagination to take us beyond “the earth on which [we] dwell above this frame of things” could be the antidote.

Book Seventh 723 – 730

Of what the mighty City is itself,
To all except a straggler here and there -
To the whole swarm of its inhabitants –
An undistinguishable world to men
Living amid the same perpetual flow
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end -
Oppression, under which even highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free.

Book Fourteenth 450 – 456

Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine

Book Seventh Lines 723 – 730 is certainly dystopian in its description of the city. I am reminded of what I said in Chapter 4, if we cannot be a good example perhaps we can be a terrible warning. Indeed, “Dystopias continue to be useful because, as critic Thomas Disch points out, ‘If we don't imagine the worst, we can't avoid it’ and maybe we still can't” (Kitchin, Di Filippo, Pohl, & Kneale, 2001, p. 40). Not to distract from both Bennett’s (2001) argument, discussed earlier, that seeing the world as “disenchanted” drains us of energy and causes us to

disconnect (p.3), and an argument put forth by Plumwood (1993) that, “different stories, with new main characters, better plots, and at least the possibility of some happy endings” (pg. 196) are needed, an argument can be made that hope is present in dystopian works as a warning that if we continue along the same path, if we do not stop what we are doing, the dystopian vision presented is where it could lead.

Brian Stableford (2010) notes that as early as the 1800s there was a “Rousseauesque notion of technological development as a process of intrinsic spoliation of primal innocence” (p. 262). Cities were portrayed as bad places to live by writers like William Blake who gave voice to this idea in the Preface to Milton a Poem, in the short poem, popularly known as “Jerusalem.” In this poem Blake contrasts “dark Satanic Mills,” with “green and pleasant Land” The contrast between the dystopian city and the utopian country is a recurring theme in dystopian literature (Blake, Preface to Milton a Poem; Stableford, 2010, p.262).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, “futuristic” works acknowledged the disconnect from nature as a “pernicious form of alienation that was equally corrupting in its effects on the rich and the poor” (Stableford, 2010, p. 266). Additional themes in works of the early to mid-twentieth century highlighted the folly of technocracy and cowardice. Stableford points out that in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, biological and social conditioning technology produces a rigidly stratified society. Noteworthy as well in *Brave New World* is the notion that because of powerful conditioning, the people living in this bad society are glad to “celebrate their own alienation” (p.267). Huxley’s *Brave New World* foreshadowed much of today’s dystopian fiction and, sadly, much of today’s globalized world under a neo-liberal agenda.

For Raffaella Baccolini (2004) there is another reason that hope is present in dystopias. Dystopian novels can be “sites of resistance” (p. 520). Here Baccolini is referring to what she calls critical dystopias written by such authors as Margaret Atwood, Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy and Octavia E. Butler. In works by these authors, hope is maintained not only because the story is a warning. In addition, the ending is often left open and ambiguous, so the protagonist and the reader can hope to escape. By “rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups, women and other ex-centric subjects, whose subject position is not contemplated by hegemonic discourse” (p. 520). Further, the works by the authors noted above engage the reader in such important environmental and social justice themes as: global warming, technology replacing human labour, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, enhanced humans, scientific and biotechnological disasters, bioterrorism, food insecurity, corporate states and the socioeconomic decline of cities; in addition they highlight issues of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability.

Dystopias and utopias, while one literature, offer us different vantage points from which to engage in dialogue about social and political structures. Dystopias alert us to where we have gone wrong, what we have lost and what we must contest; utopias show us what we have that is beautiful and wondrous, what we can aspire to, and what we must fight to protect. Utopias are where our dreams for a better world reside. Utopia then, can be seen as a strategy, a process that leaves no room for the impossible dream. In the words of Fatima Vieira (2010), “By incorporating into its logic the dynamic of dreams and using creativity as its driving force, utopia reveals itself as the (only possible?) sustainable scheme for overcoming the contemporary crisis” (Vieira, 2010, p, 23). Vieira would certainly agree with Alexandra Brodsky and Rachel Nalebuff

of *The Feminist Utopia Project* whose work pushes us to “dream bigger . . . weirder. To want more. To move beyond critique and to imagine omnivorously . . . People, not ideas, will build our utopias. But the first step toward a feminist world is to imagine it collectively” (Brodsky & Nalebuff, 2015). As I reflect on what the editors of *The Feminist Utopia Project* inspire their readers to work towards, I am reminded that feminism itself is a utopian project, one which is dynamic, one which continues to evolve. Indeed there is no room for the impossible dream.

Giving Wings to our Imagination

Just as explanations alone are not sufficient and hope must be rooted in practice, so our imaginings, our hopes and our dreams must, to take wing, be anchored in practice. To say that we can only do little things and believe that that is an excuse for doing nothing, will not make for transformative change.

While not all of us are poets or writers or artists, each of us can contribute, in whatever ways we can, to making real change a possibility. We can find the extraordinary in the ordinary. We can open ourselves up to new ideas. We can think differently. We can join local efforts directed at educating citizens about environmental issues and solutions. Small local initiatives joining together in a common cause can become, or may already be, transnational movements, sources of empowerment and regeneration. And, most importantly, we can continue to imagine a better, a more loving, a gentler, and a more connected world. Each of us, of course, must find our own path. None of us can tell which path is right for another or indeed, where anyone else may be along their path. All we can do is draw on our experience and share it with others in hope that it may be useful. I learned, for example, that there would always be someone to give me a hand. This insight may be a given to some but reassuring, even inspiring to others.

Through the diverse people I have met and the life changing experiences I have had, I gained a renewed sense of wonder and a sense of the sacredness of the ordinary and I rediscovered my connectedness to all living things. I believe it is possible to heal the rifts which have for so long divided us. Finding a path to that healing is not an idle pursuit, one for which, in our busy lives, we can afford to say we have neither, the will, the ability nor the time. As Alissa Johns (2010) reminds us,

This hope [utopian social hope] has been no less prevalent in non-Western societies than Western societies. Centuries of utopian writing demonstrates how feminists time and again have relied on utopia in order to posit a viable as opposed to an unattainable future. Their repeated contributions suggest that utopia will recur as a force for transforming discontent into critique and desire into practical political action. (p. 194).

We can be agents of change; a better world is possible. We have a duty of care to our home on earth. We must ensure, therefore, that a dream of a better world moves us to make it a reality.

Conclusion

For Bendayan and Obadia the act of looking back through writing constitutes a kind of reparative homecoming that has helped heal this rift . . . the rupture between self and home experienced by an entire community forced into exile.

(Ireland & Proulx, 2004, p. 27)

The way I go is the way back to see the future.

(Hanzlová, cited in Berger, 2013, p. 156)

Edward Said (1990) speaks of exile as an “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (Said, 1990, p. 357). I, however, share Susan Ireland’s and Patrice Proulx’s (2006) more optimistic stance. When they state that, “writing constitutes a kind of reparative homecoming” and “healing such a rift [exile] implies a homecoming, a voyage of return, be it real or imaginary,” they are suggesting that healing is possible (pp.23, 27). I still live with a deep sense of both sadness and estrangement which sometimes, even today, threatens to overwhelm me, but I have come to a hard won rapprochement with those feelings. They are as much a part of who I am as moments of wonder and joy and moments of deep connection.

Tamara Seiler (1994) describes the immigrant journey as “a voyage of transformation whose direction is both away from and toward home” (p.100). She then goes on to describe the final stage as a journey “backward” to discover the “old country” whether that is done literally or symbolically (p.101). Seiler could be speaking as much of the journey to discover, or more accurately, rediscover our home in the cosmos, as the immigrant experience generally, or my family’s and my experience specifically. For me, as for so many others, the journey home is not

one I embarked on alone. My companions on the way were memory, my own writing and the writing of others, music, photographs, growth enhancing relationships, therapy and connections with other than the built environment.

The outcomes of these “backward journeys” to heal the many rifts which divide us from ourselves, from others, from the cosmos, are as diverse as the explanations for how these rifts came to be. As I noted in this paper, these outcomes range from fear, anger, guilt, disillusionment, grief and mourning, to new understandings about the power which comes from the many actions we may take along the way: breaking through tangled webs of secrets, lies, and denial; accepting responsibility; taking risks and thinking differently; finding comfort in recollections, connectedness; rediscovering wonder and ultimately, for me, finding that sense of home I had been seeking. For many years I moved restlessly about believing some place will be home; some place will feel like home. Lucy Lippard (1997) expresses perfectly just how I felt. “Between restlessness and continuity lie a lot of contradictions” (pg.10). Perhaps, as Lucy Lippard says in the quote which opened my Introduction, home, for me, will never be “a place of origin and return” and I am more at peace with that now (p. 23). Home, as I have come to understand it, is a place within me. I now feel more at home in my own skin. Working on healing the rift within has enabled me to extend that feeling of being more at home in my own skin, to feeling more at home in the world beyond myself. It has enabled me to be more responsive to, and more responsible for, the place where I am at the time. An excerpt from a song by the Beatles comes to mind.

IN MY LIFE

There are places I remember

All my life though some have changed

Some forever not for better

Some have gone and some remain

All these places have their moments

With lovers and friends I still can recall

Some are dead and some are living

In my life I've loved them all

(Written by Paul McCartney & John Lennon. Recorded in 1965)

Healing too has come, for me, from the wisdom of a child. In the late 1970s, as large psychiatric institutions were being closed and residents were being moved into the community, I was approached to take in a child whose parents had relinquished their parental rights and who therefore needed a community placement. I opened my heart and my home to a nine year old girl with Down Syndrome. She lived with me until she was 19, at which time she moved into a supportive living apartment. When my mother died, she had been with me for three years. She called my mother, mother.

One day, a few weeks after my mother's death, I am in my home office, deeply engrossed in a report I am struggling to write. My daughter is playing in her room. She comes into my office, toy telephone in hand and says "Mother calls you." In what I realize after, is not my finest parenting moment, I say, "Don't be silly, mother isn't calling; she is dead," to which she replies, "Dead, come back no more."

"Dead, come back no more," speaks to the finality of death but unpacked, it speaks to much

more. It speaks to disconnections, connections, re-connections, rifts, the inter-relation of all things, and the possibility of healing through memory and story. For me, all of these are recapitulated in this one anecdote. My mother, “dead, come back no more,” is no longer a physical presence in my life; she has set me free. Her death marks the end of “Mrs. Lois” and the emergence of Lois. No longer do I have to struggle with her to make sense of our conflicted relationship. No longer do I have to struggle to wrest from her answers to questions she seems unable or unwilling to answer. In memory, she is beautiful, intelligent, (fiercely intelligent is how I describe her in the Introduction), strong, and courageous. And, as best she could she loved me. And, as best I could I loved her. And my daughter, no longer languishing in an institution, has a second chance at life. She has a family she loves and a family who cherish her. She has reconnected with the faith to which she was born and goes to synagogue to “talk to God.” “Dead, come back no more” also echoes Deborah Bird Rose’s [environmental] loss that surrounds us now, and for all that is coming,” discussed in Chapter 1 (Rose, 2013a, p.1), and Susan McHugh’s research on the intersections between species extinction and genocide, discussed in Chapter 3. Rose and McHugh remind me as well, that much remains to be done.

Bakhtin (1986) speaks of dialogism or dialogical structure where truth is a conversation rather than a series of assertions that express a judgment or opinion and he speaks as well of unfinalizability where:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) - they will always change (be renewed) in the

process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1986, 170)

This then is not the end of my journey. Nor is it the end of my story. In what I call a “Hallmark” moment, a quote from a greeting card I found many years ago leaps to mind. “There are no endings just new beginnings.” That too is part of the great mystery of the cosmos, no endings just new beginnings. I have learned that I, in common with others, need to embrace rather than fear the “other” which resides both in the world within us and the world outside us for it is, to echo Patrick Murphy’s (1998) words, simply “strange-to-me” (p. 41). We need to learn to embrace uncertainty and unknowability so, this is not a conclusion, not my story’s end. Consider it instead, a new beginning. . .

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