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Career transitions : creating rainbows

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CAREER TRANSITIONS: CREATING RAINBOWS

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Abstract

The past four years have marked a period of tremendous growth in my life. The events that have initiated my career transition are presented through the use of metaphor. During the course of the metaphors I moved from being a single person to not single, being a child of a nuclear family to being a child of divorce and a fatherless daughter, and from being a regular classroom teacher to being a teacher in a non-traditional assignment. The purpose of this project is to present the events, to describe their impact, and to compare my story to current career transition theory. Specifically, the project addresses the question: what have I learned about myself and the nature of transitions as a result of the events of the past three years. The last stage of the career transition process is marked by a beginning. I am a work-in-progress. The metaphor included in the last chapter represents my new direction.

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Chapter 1: Research Question and Background

Background

The intent of this project is to connect elements of career development and personal growth, two themes of my coursework at the University of Lethbridge, to make meaning of my personal experience over the past four years.

My life has been very different since moving to Lethbridge three years ago. I left a coastal community in northern British Columbia where I had taught high school Business Education and Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) courses for nine years. I left the security of a full-time continuing teaching contract, employment seniority, and numerous friendships close enough to be considered family in order to pursue a personal relationship. One week prior to leaving for Lethbridge I was informed that my parents were separating after thirty-nine years of marriage. The disintegration of my concept of family combined with the stress of leaving friends and employment left me emotionally frozen.

Like a cat with many lives I have landed on my feet in Lethbridge. The personal relationship that I set out to explore in coming to Lethbridge has enriched my life and continues to do so daily. Employment was quickly addressed as I secured a temporary contract position for a pilot project with Palliser Regional Schools. The pilot project was successful and developed into additional contract work. As of August 2000, I was promoted to a leadership role within the project. I was accepted into the University of Lethbridge Master of Education program when I arrived in town and was able to transfer a portion of the credits I had completed earlier through the University of Northern British

Columbia. The coursework requirements of my program have now been completed and I am ready to conclude my degree requirements.

The content of my coursework at the University of Lethbridge has been threefold: leadership, technology, and personal/professional development. Themes from Teachers' Life Stories, Career Counselling, and Self-directed Professional Development courses specifically, have had a significant impact both personally and professionally and have served as the basis for this culminating project. As I reflect on my experience during the Teachers' Life Stories course, the first course I took upon returning to Lethbridge, I am aware of the depth of my emotional freeze. I was a walking ghost throughout the course, willing to examine my experience strictly on a professional, unfeeling level while classmates dove deeply into stories to make meaningful connections with their experience. I was simply not ready for this undertaking. Kris Magnusson's Career Counselling course gave many of my beliefs about career education a theoretical grounding. Perhaps the most significant learning from the course was the expansion of the term 'career' to a focus on the total person, including recreational, educational, and professional roles (Gysbers, 1988). The Self-directed Professional Development course emphasized the interconnectivity between personal and professional lives through guided journal writing. The personal analysis demanded by this course was similar to Teachers' Life Stories except that this time I was deeply affected by the process. My goal at the end of the Self-Directed Professional Development course was to give myself the gift of time to process some of the events that had occurred since leaving Prince Rupert.

Two specific events have contributed to the development of this project. The moment I finished reading Lankard's (1993) article on self-renewal I remember thinking

I had found the concept on which to base my project. Within the article, self-renewal was described as a process for negotiating change and that change inevitably happens because of the cyclical nature of our lives. Our attitudes toward change, and the manner in which we choose to manage change, can be a self-renewing process. Some of the elements of self-renewal, happenstance being one, were strategies that I had used in the past without realizing they were a part of any theory. The second event happened in May 2000 when I had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by John Krumboltz at the “Building Tomorrow Today Conference” in Edmonton. Krumboltz described the role of ‘happenstance’ in career development as turning unplanned events into career opportunities. Hearing a recognized leader in career development give credence to serendipity was personally affirming, as many of my own experiences have been the result of preparation combined with time and chance. I believe my current employment is an outcome of happenstance. The initiation and maintenance of some of my personal relationships also have a hint of happenstance.

The challenge has been to create a culminating project that reflects my understanding of personal career transition enabling a connection between my experience and theory. The writing of this project comes after a period of relative calm that has provided a chance for reflection and thought. The telling of my story seems to have emerged as a critical step in bringing closure not only to the Masters program but also the series of events that created the transition itself.

Research Question

While on a trip to the University of Lethbridge library in search of leadership literature my fingers tripped across a bright orange text entitled Transitions: Making

sense of life's changes. Perhaps because the title was similar to the name of my office, or perhaps because it was the only bright color in a sea of black and blue book spines, I signed out the text. As I read the text it seemed to be speaking directly to my situation and quickly became the focus for my project. My central question was clarified when I read Brammer's (1992) article that stated "goals can be reached through learning specific coping skills and attitudes as well as acquiring knowledge about the nature of the transition process through engaging in self-inquiry" (online). Given the amount of change that has happened in my life both personally and professionally over the past three years, I have spent considerable time in reflection trying to make sense of the events. Brammer (1992) defined transition as a life change that was characterized by a sharp discontinuity with the past, definite endings, and usually identifiable beginnings, a portion of which I had certainly experienced. It is my intention that this project will provide the motivation to identify and answer the following question: what have I learned about myself and the nature of transitions as a result of the events of the past few years.

Rationale

The central theme in Palmer's (1998) text, *The Courage to Teach*, is that "we teach who we are" (p. 2) and the better we know ourselves the better teachers we can become. Palmer (1998) wrote:

if we want to grow as teachers we must do something alien to academic culture; we must talk to each other about our inner lives – risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, [and] the abstract" (p. 12).

In sharing my story and the meaning of the events I feel exposed and vulnerable. During the proposal phase of this project I kept feeling like I should justify the idea and why it was important to be considered and accepted as part of my master's program. Accepting the need to recover inner resources, resources that are critical in teaching, helped to clarify why a project such as mine should be undertaken and valued. It would have been easy to hide in Palmer's (1998) technical, distant, abstract world by completing a final exam or to creating a quantitative experiment but neither would have had the personal impact of this project. The understanding and feedback I received from others as well as the insights that I gained about my self balanced the risk of sharing my story.

Palmer (1998) identifies integrity as one of the key elements of a good teacher and that by choosing integrity one "becomes more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection, it means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am" (p. 13). I have come to appreciate the journey for wholeness rather than perfection. It was tempting to paint a glossy, rosy picture when writing the analysis and conclusion sections but the more truthful version won out; I may have unraveled part of the story but it is still a work in progress.

Semesters have lapsed since I completed Cathy Campbell's course on Self-Directed Professional Development and it is with excitement, and some anxiety, that I write my final project. The significance of this work personally, is to demystify some of my thinking and assumptions that I had previously taken for granted or left unexplored. The reflection on lived experience linked to theory has provided a basis for understanding my behavior and beliefs. For others who read this work, I am sure that my reality has

shared truths with others that have walked a similar road and may have relevance for those that will follow with their own career transitions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The saying ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’ was never so true in my case. I found a wealth of material that addressed career transitions; a topic that I didn’t know existed a few months earlier. It would appear from the vast amounts of literature available on the topic of career transitions that I am not the first to be curious about the topic. Transition is a component of career development. A summary of a portion of the available literature serves as background information on the topic of career transitions.

Defining Career Development and Transitions

Frank Parsons, cited as the father of career counselling by Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz (1999), developed a theory of career development during a time when people were moving from a largely agricultural world to an industrial age. The purpose for Parson was to assess workers’ values, skills, and interests and then match the individual with an appropriate job. Theories of career and career development were expanded during the 1950s to include a more comprehensive view of individuals and their occupational development over the life span rather than being restricted to occupational choices during a specific time period of life. In an effort to expand the definition of career from an occupational perspective to a life perspective, Gysbers and Moore (1975; 1981) redefined life career development as “self-development over the life span through the integration of roles, settings, and events of a person’s life. The word ‘life’ in the definition placed emphasis on the total person, the human career” (Gysbers, 1988, online), rather than limiting the definition to the portion of time when an individual is paid for their work. Using Gysbers’ (1988) definitions, career development is a combination of the term ‘career’ which identifies and relates the roles in which

individuals are involved, the settings, and the events that occur over a lifetime and ‘development’ which indicates the continual process of becoming. Kerka’s (1992) definition of career development although similar to Gysbers (1988); emphasizes the series of continuous choices across time and views career as a sequence of all life roles.

A transition, as defined by Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, is a passage from one state, stage, or place to another and is an important component of career development. As far back as the days of the pioneering settlers, who were drawn forward by the faith that better things lay just beyond the horizon, change and transition has been a part of our lives (Bridges, 1980). Hudson (1999) defines a developmental transition as a normal process in which we shed some or much of our previous identity as we discover new possibilities in our undiscovered selves. During the transition we “gradually discover our emerging values, priorities, excitement, and dreams” (p. 110). The image of settlers arriving in a foreign land, ready to carve a new life for themselves and their families, armed with knowledge and tools from their homeland, would indeed require shedding parts of a previous identity in order to co-exist with a new environment. Transition is a process to deal with change that involves holding on to what is working, letting go of what is not working, taking on new learning and moving onto new commitments (Hudson, 1999).

Dynamics of Career Transitions

The situations that cause individuals to enter into transitions are sometimes voluntary and sometimes involuntary (Lankard, 1993). Career change, divorce, and bereavement are important and specific life transitions that we either personally initiate or are engaged in because of someone else’s initiation. The degree to which we feel positive

about the change is often linked to whether we purposely decide to enter into the situation or we feel thrust into the midst of the scenario without our choosing. In addition to the element of personal choice, the perceived outcomes of the change factor into our attitude toward the transition. If change opens doors to human betterment, it is viewed positively, as a source of new opportunities, and “if change has diminished human betterment already in hand, it is considered a threat to the quality of life” (Hudson, 1999, p. 19). Some individuals experience a feeling of powerlessness connected to involuntary transitions. If we perceive our world as beyond our control for very long, we abandon the feeling that we can shape destiny and replace personal power with helplessness, fear, depression and reduced motivation (Hudson, 1999). When the change is painful and tragic such as losing a relationship, the change is often experienced as a loss and the individual is thrust into mourning.

Major impact is not exclusively connected to tragic events. Events like marriage, sudden success, and moving to a dream home are often discounted because they are ‘good’ events and therefore not supposed to lead to difficulty. Any change, whether we perceive the event as good or bad, involves an ending. Endings are often fearful because they break our connection with familiar settings in which we have come to know ourselves, comfort and familiarity (Bridges, 1980). For example, when the day arrives to move into a dream home, something that has been actively pursued and eagerly anticipated for a long period of time, it is puzzling when a part of us has difficulty letting go of the old home. We question why letting go of the past is so difficult when we have looked forward to the event; fear begins to creep into our thoughts -- perhaps the dream home wasn’t a good idea. Unexpected loss is sometimes a result of identifying ourselves

with the circumstances of our lives, the roles and relationships that we have and transitional situations force us to look at both the negative and positive aspects of our life situations (Bridges, 1980).

Hudson (1999) describes transitions as “a normal and inevitable part of adult life that help to clarify issues and define life direction” (p. 71). An appreciation of the function of career transition can also be gained by living Gelatt’s (1992) philosophical statement that “what to be when grown up is less important than growing” (online). Hudson (1999) classifies Americans, likely North Americans, as ‘doers’ that thrive on achievement, results, and the prestige and recognition that accomplishment brings in our culture. For this reason, “Americans are particularly susceptible to issues of transition and self-renewal as we continually embark on new personal challenge” (p. 105). Although no one place in the life cycle is better than anywhere else, “each transition has its own timing and purpose” (Hudson, 1999, p. 71). The challenge in managing a transition is to discover, and learn from, the message being presented.

The search for a larger and more satisfying life experience can lead an individual into change and transition. Lankard (1993) cites discomfort in life situations motivate career transitions and defines one of the outcomes of self-renewal as “the process of learning how to move from situations considered negative to positive ones” (online). Learning how to move from situations that we consider negative to positive ones is one outcome of self-renewal. Transitional periods are key times in a natural process of self-renewal where an outward change in situation or relationship causes personal growth. Both Bridges (1980) and Hudson (1999) discuss transitions based on adult development as a process of disorientation and reorientation marking turning points on a path of

growth. Resistance to change is connected to an inability to let go of a past that has become unworkable (Hudson, 1999). The transition process provides a vehicle to deal with change, “to provide the necessary closure or completion on old issues allowing ‘freer’ travel in the present” (Bridges, 1980, p. 19).

The focus of this project, the transitions that occur in adulthood, can be caused by “external factors such as job loss, divorce, and moving, or internal triggers such as boredom or emotional distress” (Hudson, 1999, p. 54). For example, choices made in young adulthood such as quitting a post-secondary program can lead to a crisis in later adulthood when the results of the decision leave the adult feeling trapped. Sometimes it is incongruity between our expectations and reality that lead to a transition. Bridges (1980) summarized Levinson’s work regarding the ‘age thirty transition’ as a time of second thoughts (p. 37). Those who made decisions early may regret that they did not see more of the world and explore their own interests before making long-term commitments. Those who experimented and explored options wonder if they waited too long or missed something by not settling down sooner. Many of those currently in the ‘age thirty transition’ were also raised by parents who had a linear view of life and therefore “distress is deepened by the old idea that if you did things right, you would have everything settled once and for all by twenty-five or so” (Bridges, 1980, p. 38). The forties transition, commonly referred to as midlife crisis, revolves around a reassessment of the hopes and plans that have brought the individual to their present situation. When a person has realized their dreams they can be left with an emptiness. If a person has failed to achieve their goals it is often during this period of time that one must come to terms with the loss. In summarizing the forties transition paradox, Bridges (1980) quotes Oscar

Wilde who wrote “the Gods have two ways of dealing harshly with us – the first is to deny us our dreams, and the second is to grant them” (p. 43). Bridges (1980) summarizes the path of aging as a journey unique to each individual recognizing that some live their best stages of life in youth while other shines in the second half of life reinforcing Hudson’s (1999) cyclical theory that finds value across the age spectrum.

Developmental Transition Models

Two themes in career transitions, the timing of transitions and the connection to age / stage models, can be traced to the writing of Carl Jung and Erik Erikson (Hudson, 1999). In his preface, Hudson (1999) cites Carl Jung’s work portraying the second half of life as a time of “immense growth and development, particularly for personal introspection, reevaluation, and spiritual discovery” (p. xiii). It would seem no accident that career transitions are more likely to affect adults than teens as young adults are consumed with developmental issues of their own. Kerka (1992) describes Erickson’s work as defining life as a series of sequential stages with each stage containing developmental tasks requiring completion before moving to the next stage. One criticism of Erikson’s work, and age / stage models is the generalization of specific ages to a standardized sequence of prescribed development (Kerka, 1992). Super’s (1986) Life Career Rainbow model defined career as all the roles played by a person throughout a lifetime and linked the roles to age and stages of growth, but also considered psychological, biological, social and historical factors - an improvement over Erikson’s model according to Kerka. More recently, Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) suggest that adult behavior is determined by transitions and not age. They believe that in order to understand adults you need to know about their transitions because the more the

transition has altered “adult roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships, the more the person will be affected by the change” (p. 58).

Environmental Influences

The expanded definition of career is one factor that has led to the study of career transitions, possibly even the initial existence of the concept. Social forces and an evolving global environment have provided a second critical factor influencing the study of career transitions and the increasing frequency in which we experience change. My world is not the world either my grandparents or my parents knew. New adult realities include an aging population where the meaning of retirement is being redefined as a “sudden disconnection from work to a redefinition of work and other life interests” (Hudson, 1999, p. 8). My parents were governed by unwritten rules regarding the appropriate time to marry and have children and I question whether I feel compelled to do either. The immediacy of television and the Internet brings global events instantly to attention providing an electronic, if not emotional, connection to every crisis. Technology has provided an “information explosion [that] confronts our lives at such a pace that it is difficult to maintain a distinction between trivial and important data” (Hudson, 1999, p. 10). Gysbers (1988) cited changing economic, occupational, industrial, and social environments as creating conditions and needs not previously present that forces individuals to give more attention to personal career development and transition issues. According to Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz (1999) planning alone would produce successful lives if careers were to follow a simple, straightforward, and logical path; however, major technological advances have changed the world of work and leisure to

demand more than just planning. Today's world "presents us with more freedom than we ever asked for and more complexity that we ever wanted" (Hudson, 1999, p. xiv).

Not only has the worldview changed from the previous generation but the work environment is also radically different. Modern day workers are experiencing frustration from external sources such as "economic and cultural changes in society, technological and organizational changes in the workplace" (Lankard, 1993, online). Brown (1996) describes a changing relationship between employers and employees. In the 1960s the relationship could be described as "a parent-child connection where the employer provided status and security for the employee in exchange for hard work, loyalty and good performance" (online). The relationship between the employer and employee of the 1990s is more of a partnership. Employers provide opportunities, tools, and support for employees to develop their skills but employees have the responsibility of managing their careers by taking advantage of opportunities and updating their skills to fit the market.

Characteristics such as

stability, independence, and the willingness and ability to precisely follow instructions that were eagerly sought out in the past have been replaced by different priorities: coping with constant change, teamwork, continuous learning, and technological skills which were unknown a generation ago. (Avedon, 1995, online)

Linear and Cyclical Lifeforms

Historically, individual career development followed a traditional, linear path which usually contained education and training leading to employment followed by retirement. According to Leach and Chakiris (1988), linear careers in large corporations

“very likely account for less than one third of all the careers in the United States” (p. 52). Lankard (1993) noted that many people have a linear view of life, “especially those whose lives have paralleled their desires” (online). Hard work and perseverance have been credited for their steady achievement through life. Hudson (1999) echoes Lankard’s thoughts with respect to linear models representing the steady progression of our lives “following predictable sequences of learning, loving, working, living, leading, and succeeding” (p. 30). Future goals and results shaped by a backbone of perfectionism, progress, success, happiness, planned change, and social constraint drove the linear lifeform (Hudson, 1999). Individuals one and two generations ago worked in stable environments and held a job until retirement and therefore functioned successfully using the linear life view (Avedon, 1995).

The conditions that enabled linear lives to be successful have crumbled due to societal, environmental, cultural and technological changes. Brown (1996) encourages individuals to recognize all jobs as temporary and to prepare for unexpected events that will redefine career paths and require self-reliance. Hudson (1999) uses the term ‘cyclical’ to describe current life patterns that are often in a state of flux and ambiguous, the opposite of ‘linear’ situations. Cyclical lives and the reliance on cyclical thought demands a major shift from being product oriented to being process oriented. Process thinking places emphasis on daily events, seeing life as a stream of continuities and changes that is a journey to be enjoyed daily rather than focussing on a single distant destination that will eventually bring happiness. Happiness and security are achieved at various points along the journey in cyclical lives rather than delayed until the end goal has been accomplished in linear lives.

To illustrate the difference between linear and cyclical thought, consider the aging process. Western culture often places importance on youth creating a prejudice against the old as aging is considered a steady linear process. In the linear view there was a specific plan of when and how events of the adult years should unfold. Adult years were meant for “family development, vertical career climbing and cultural enhancement” (Hudson, 1999, p. 35) and when the ‘golden years’ of retirement finally arrived many individuals found themselves reminiscing over past accomplishments and mourning the loss of physical abilities. Hudson (1999) cited the writings of Erik Erickson and Carl Jung who envisioned crisis as “a crossroad in life that evoked strong emotional turmoil but could result in opportunities” (p. 36) as the basis for creating an alternative to linear thinking. In contrast, the cyclical perspective of aging portrays life as a ferris wheel or roller coaster with up and down times that are repeated within the cycle of continuity and change finding value and meaning in every life period. Bridges (1980) uses the riddle of the sphinx:

What animal walks on four feet in the morning,

Two feet at noon,

And three feet in the evening,

Yet has only one voice? (p. 28)

to illustrate transitions and that one lifetime has natural and distinct phases. The answer to the riddle is the human being, whose style is developmental in nature rather than mechanical. Life stories for those who view their lives as a cyclical process do not easily fit into a prescribed formula. Hudson (1999) argues that each of us is involved in a lifetime of transitions, periods of relative stability followed by moments of

unpredictability and challenge. Continuous learning is essential in the cyclical model as individuals explore their new circumstances and use self-knowledge and training to make their current world effective. Lankard (1993) states that “most adults today can identify with the cyclical view of life” (online) as they have often felt the impact of significant life changing events regarding jobs, family, and health. Adults have established one life structure only to find that they must develop a new structure based on their changing circumstance. The theory behind cyclical thought that Hudson and Lankard describe resonates in current career development theory found in Alberta Learning curriculum called the High 5 which could also be considered a model for managing career transition. The High 5 elements are: change is constant, follow your heart, focus on the journey, learning is ongoing, and access your allies.

Recognizing Transitions as a Process

Accepting that transition is a part of adult life is only part of the equation; dealing with change is equally important. Bridges (1980) identifies three stages of transition starting with an ending, moving to a neutral period, and finally a beginning. Hudson (1999) describes a similar theory that includes many more stages or steps. The simpler, three-stage process is described in the following paragraphs.

An ending signals the beginning of the transition process. For one person, an ending may be an event while another person may experience an ending as a state of mind. In either case an ending is often painful as we are forced to let go of the “old cue-system which served to reinforce our roles and to pattern our behaviour” (Bridges, 1980, p. 92). Endings signal a break of some sort in the continuity of things, in roles, relationships, or circumstances. Often there is a sense of “loss because we have come to

identify ourselves with the circumstances of our lives” (Bridges, 1980, p. 13). The more our identity was defined by the roles and relationships that we had, the greater the sense of loss. A change in circumstances can lead to disenchantment when we discover that what we thought is no longer real. To move past disenchantment, an individual needs to “realize that some significant part of your old reality was in your head and not out there” (Bridges, 1980, p. 100). For some, the ending can seem like a death experience and grieving is often experienced in the ending stage. The ending serves to bring closure or completion to old issues and the “refusal to process an ending creates a storage pile of barnacles from your past that clutter all your future life options” (Hudson, 1999, p. 102).

Bridges (1980) defines the next stage as the neutral zone; a time designed to provide perspective on the ending and to rest. The neutral zone is like a Band-Aid, it allows us to heal from the ending and provides protection in order to decide how and when to proceed once the bandage is removed. The time-out provides an opportunity to reminisce over the event that has just ended, to review it and put it in order. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) found that for each transition that adults dealt with, there was a period of “introspection and a time to take stock” (p. 59). One of the functions of the neutral zone is renewal through a process of disintegration and reintegration (Bridges, 1980, p. 119). The neutral zone provides an opportunity to examine events in a semi-detached manner and to appreciate that “one of the things you let go of in the ending process is the need to see the past in a particular way” (Bridges, 1980, p. 124). Hudson (1999) describes the neutral zone using the term cocooning, a period of inactivity used to contemplate who and where you are, to leave the outer world of action and to enter the

inner world of soul searching. During the cocooning stage:

ever so gradually, you let go of the external chapter as it clings to your mind – lost dreams, lost roles, lost beauty, lost muscles, lost parents, lost careers, lost children, lost marriages, - and you live for a while in a neutral zone where you are psychologically speaking, by yourself, in suspension, in limbo, and more aware of who you are not than who you are becoming. (Hudson, 1999, p. 65)

An environment of solitude and the absence of activity which some would consider boring, is one of the most important things in life according to Dr. Bruce Perry. Perry cites boredom as a “critical element leading to creative thinking by drawing on inner resources and imagination” (Lethbridge Herald, 2001, p. A10) rather than external stimuli.

Both Hudson (1999) and Bridges (1980) place great importance on the function of the time-out period. The neutral zone provides a time for healing which cannot be rushed because of the complex nature of the loss that resides at multiple levels within our beings. Healing occurs over time and with the discovery of new personal resources (Hudson, 1999). Hudson (1999) noted that very few people possess all of the skills required to move through transitions independently and the “culturally approved solution is to rely on professionals, especially given that transition can trigger regressive issues for some people” (p. 109). At some point during the neutral zone period, the vacuum of emptiness eventually gives way to the development of opportunity.

The final stage of the transition involves making a beginning. We imagine a beginning as “some clear and conscious steps that we ought to be taking” (Bridges, 1980, p. 135), but often find a beginning as a chance happening, random thought, impression,

or feeling. The boredom in the final days of the neutral zone allows us to detect the subtle first signal of a beginning which otherwise may be lost in the chaos of daily life.

The concept of happenstance is useful in describing the nature of beginnings. Happenstance can be defined as “a circumstance regarded as due to chance; luck or fortune; without plan or intent; or accidentally” (Miller, 1983, p. 17). With respect to managing transitions, Miller (1983) defines happenstance as an unplanned event that measurably alters one’s behavior. Happenstance plays a role in career development and transitions because of the myriad of chance-situational events that occur that cannot be simply or rationally planned. Mitchell, et al (1999) view unplanned events as opportunities for learning. Happenstance should not be confused with reliance on fate as there is a “crucial difference between someone who passively relies on luck to solve problems and someone who is actively searching while remaining open to new and unexpected opportunities” (p. 117). Planned happenstance theory is based on two concepts: “exploration generates opportunities for quality of life and skills enable people to seize the opportunity” (p. 118).

When we are in transition and ready to make a new beginning, the exploration of chance events can often lead to a new direction if we are willing to take the risk. During the initial exploration it is sometimes difficult to be sure whether “the path leads forwards or back, and it may be necessary to follow it for a little while to be sure” (Bridges, 1980, p. 145). To help clarify the direction it is sometimes useful to “identify yourself with the final result of the new beginning” (Bridges, 1980, p. 146), a technique often used in solution-focussed therapy.

Healing Mechanisms

Both Bridges (1980) and Hudson (1999) emphasize the healing nature of time itself in dealing with change. As stated in the introduction, “transition seems to have a timing of its own and a way of resisting efforts to rush it” (Bridges, 1980, p. 78).

Although outer forms of our lives can change within seconds, inner reorientation takes time and patience. Within the process of change, acknowledging and recognizing reasons for discomfort as well as expecting times of anxiety can prove helpful. Brammer (1992) lists several factors in determining the length of time required for resolution including:

- (a) the meaning the transition has for the person;
- (b) the extent to which the person is aware of and expresses feeling about the transition;
- (c) previous experiences with transitions;
- (d) availability of support systems;
- (e) counselling;
- and (f) personal coping skills such as building/accessing support networks, cognitive restructuring, problem solving, and managing stress. (online)

Coping is a form of self-initiated problem solving and those skillful at coping “are effective in appraising the possible threats and dangers in the change event and can choose among alternative courses of appropriate action” (Brammer, 1992, online).

Attitudes toward change can contribute to effective coping. Less stress is likely to result if change is viewed as a normal part of living as opposed to viewing transitions as some kind of curse, unlucky event, or difficult problem. People who perceive themselves as being in control of their life, “knowing who they are and what they want often view change as just another hurdle to jump along life’s raceway” (Brammer, 1992, online).

Both attitude and self-image are affective constructs built over time. Cognitive coping strategies seek “to reframe unplanned interruptions as opportunities for learning

not as annoyances to be endured” (Mitchell, et al, 1999, p. 120). Brown (1996) recommends that individuals reorganize career development around learning to accommodate workplace changes. Gelatt (1992) developed a paradoxical process called positive uncertainty, “to make decisions using both the rational and intuitive minds” (online). Positive uncertainty is based on four principles:

(a) be focused but flexible, know what you want but not rigid so there is balance between achieving goals and discovering them; (b) be aware and wary about what you know; (c) be objective and optimistic about what you believe by balancing reality testing with wishful thinking; and (d) be practical and magical about what you do by treating intuition as real and balancing responding to change and causing change. (online)

Gelatt’s (1992) paradigm emphasizes interconnectedness and requires system or global thinking rather than focussing on specific details. Traditional approaches to transitions include utilizing “counselling to assess personal interests, values, and skills, to identify potential opportunities, research information regarding education and training opportunities while identifying potential resource barriers” (Kerka, 1991, online).

Accessing role models and mentors, identified by the changing individual, also provide assistance during transition periods. Perhaps Hudson (1999) summarized cognitive interventions for managing transitions most simply when he stated the key was “to trust my vision; to learn how to learn, and unlearn, and relearn” (p. 4).

Summary

Individuals can experience many transitions throughout a lifetime. In summarizing the literature, it would appear that there are some common themes with respect to events

that trigger transitions and the process to accommodate change as well as some unique strategies that individuals employ to address transitions. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) write that adults are motivated to learn and to change by their continual need to “belong, matter, control, master, renew, and take stock” (p. 58) and their readiness for change depends on four S’s – situation, support, self, and strategies. The circumstances surrounding a transition can be identified as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired, dreaded, on time, or off-schedule and the individual’s response to change is dependent on how he/she defines the situation. Our past experience with change plays a role in how one manages transitions. “Endings and beginnings, with emptiness and germination in between” (Bridges, 1980, p. 150) captures the essence of the process common to transitions. Time is a significant factor in dealing with transitions as is attitude and self-image. Transitions seem to operate on an independent timeline that cannot be rushed and although few people want transitions to last a long time, Hudson (1999) notes they are seldom short. Much of the current literature emphasizes life as a journey to be appreciated each day rather than a race only to be enjoyed upon reaching a specific destination.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Throughout my coursework I have endeavored to choose courses that were personally meaningful and relevant to my situation. I wanted my Masters' program to be more than a purely academic exercise. I had just finished reading Bridges' (1980) and Hudson's (1999) texts about the same time I was involved with presenting a parent workshop regarding career development and how parents could assist their children. I shared the information regarding change and the transition process that I had just finished reading. The information had the same impact on the parents that I had experienced - relief. The focus of my project became making sense of my own transitions and relating my experience to existing literature to see what I could learn about myself. The project is written from my perspective and examines my personal beliefs, actions, and decisions, relative to career transition.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research recognizes that "people act based on what they think and intend" (Page, 2000, p. 5) and allows for the exploration of meaning and context constructs. Van Manen's (1990) introductory chapter provides a rationale for undertaking a project such as mine. Where natural science studies nature, things, events, and behavior, qualitative research "studies persons, or beings that have consciousness and that act purposefully in and on the world by creating objects of meaning that are expressions of how human beings exist in the world" (p. 4). This project is based on personal experience and the reason for undertaking the assignment is to make meaning of the events. The preferred method for human science "involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective or critical analysis" (p. 4) in order to understand. Human science is a broad

umbrella term for many types of research and creates the “curriculum of being and becoming” (p. 7). Using a life history approach is reflective of human science methodology and is congruent with the purpose of the project, to better understand my experience and to learn from the transition. This project also contains elements of phenomenology which “questions the way we experience the world” (p. 6) to gain a deeper understanding of everyday experiences. Van Manen (1990) states that the ultimate aim of phenomenological research is “to become more fully who we are” (p. 12) by examining meaning.

This study definitely utilizes qualitative methodology where the reader is given the opportunity to consider what is happening specifically within the text and then to move to what the events and words mean to the writer (Brizuela, Stewart, Carrillo & Berger, 2000). The central question “what is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely” (Best & Kahn, 1998, p. 245) further represents the heuristic perspective. The reader receives one interpretation of the data and can use it to construct their own interpretations. The literature reviewed is based on the experience of others in transition. In the final chapter, my experience has been compared to existing theory to determine how my lived experience supports and/or contradicts that theory.

Storytelling as a Tool

The terms *life story*, *life history*, and *narrative* all refer to the act of storytelling, sharing an account of an event, an experience, or any other happening (Atkinson, 1998). As the story is shared we often “increase our working knowledge of ourselves because we discover deeper meaning in our lives through the process of reflecting and putting the

events, experiences, and feelings that we have lived into expression” (p. 1). Life histories have been utilized across the social science disciplines to provide the reader with an insider’s view of the storyteller’s experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Storytelling is a fundamental form of human communication that brings meaning to our lives and “the use of narratives for serious academic study is considered to have begun in psychology with Freud” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 3).

The storyteller is the first interpreter of the selected events and through the chosen words it is possible to highlight common elements and issues shared by others and possibly some differences. It is important to recognize that there will always be a “gap between experience and its representation” (Page, 2000, p. 6) and that the value of the story lies in the meaning behind the events. Atkinson (1998) credits Jerome Bruner as the “cognitive psychologist who has illustrated that personal meaning (and reality) is actually constructed during the making and telling of one’s narrative” (p. 7). The use of life story is an appropriate method for this project because it allows for the identification of themes that “shed light on the particular developmental path a life has followed, highlighting the important influences and relationships” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 6). It is my intention that in the telling of my story I will make sense of the events, learn from them, and bring closure to that chapter of my life as well as my master’s degree.

Life histories are divided into two different types, retrospective and contemporaneous (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). Retrospective histories, such as this project, are a reconstruction of past events based on memory and deal with an individual’s feelings and interpretation of the past events. Contemporaneous stories focus on the description of daily life in progress. Histories can be published as a narrative story

using the individual subject's own words or presented in themes based on the subject's story and then edited by the researcher. The influence of the researcher is most evident when histories are interpreted and edited "since the researcher sifts, distils, edits, and interprets the words of the subject while retaining the feel and authenticity" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 114) of the story.

The ability for the reader to share the experience vicariously and the identification of interconnected elements of otherwise unconnected phenomena are strengths of the life history approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). For third-party researchers, "the quality of the relationship with the storyteller and the researcher's own experiential frame of reference and perspective brought to the story are important factors to establish the meaning and validity of the recorded story" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 58). As life histories are often autobiographical, "limitations include the perceived lack of generality as well as issues of truth and bias" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 97). Since the storyteller filters the story, it may represent a unique point of view and a personal truth rather than historical accuracy. The researcher and the storyteller are one and the same in this particular project and the story will be recorded directly in written form rather than first as oral and later transcribed.

The value in using life stories may be the meaning that telling the story brings and the time spent in reflective thought prior to, during, and after telling the story. Data for the stories has been collected from a variety of sources including journal writing, course assignments and professional presentations. Specifically, assignments prepared for Teachers' Life Stories and Self-directed Professional Development recorded thoughts and feelings at the time. A journal kept from September to December 2000 that recorded the

events and experiences of the first four months of my new administrative role, provided insight into my skills and strategies in accommodating change. In attempting to deal with some of the emotion through the transitions, I recorded conversations relevant to the topic between a close personal friend and myself that will also serve as data for the life history. A journal kept as the story was being written has provided support for the analysis section of the project. The journal preserved questions, feelings, and thoughts that occurred in the development of the story that are not necessarily reflected in the story itself.

Using Metaphor

The text titled “Who Moved My Cheese” (Johnson, 1998) is written using a metaphor and deals with the topic of change. Although the text takes twenty minutes to read, one can spend hours reflecting on the characters and the personal relevance. It is the same impact that I hope to achieve by using a metaphorical life history to relate my experience of transitions. Several authors have used or written about the use of metaphor as a method to share stories. Bridges (1980) uses metaphor to summarize the themes within his text in his epilogue, a story of a young woman named Psyche. Gysbers (1999) endorses the use of metaphors as a way of talking about experiences by providing clients a story to which they can relate their experiences. The use of metaphor supports Eisner’s (1991) notion that “we seek not a mirror but a tale, a revelation, or a portrayal of what we think is important to say about what we have come to know” (p. 190).

Johnson’s (1998) mousy characters, Sniff, Scurry, Hem and Haw provide anonymity so that the reader can personally experience the story as any one or combination of characters. This project is about me but the transitions also involve real

people, whose identity does not alter the depth of the story and who deserve a degree of anonymity. The use of metaphor is also one ethical way to protect the identity of other characters.

Analysis

The qualitative nature of the method allows for emerging themes once a story has been shared rather than directed outcomes that are so critical in quantitative research. Qualitative research is influenced by personal style, a dimension that cannot be dismissed nor easily duplicated (Eisner, 1991). Analysis of qualitative research is difficult to define because “there are no routines to prescribe, no rules to direct one’s steps, no algorithms to calculate” (p. 170). Life stories are not based in quantitative theory and Atkinson (1998) writes, “it is not necessary to try to interpret the life story interview against quantitative standards of analysis” (p. 59). The categories of analysis emerge from the life story rather than being set from the beginning as in quantitative studies.

Marshall & Rossman (1989) and Hitchcock & Hughes (1989) suggest one possible analysis method utilizing three categories, dimensions, turnings, and adaptations, modeled after the themes first used by the anthropologist, Mandelbaum. Dimensions refer to the general, social, cultural, and psychological experiences that influence the subject’s attitudes and values. Turnings happen when an individual assumes new roles or status and their self-concept is altered and can be identified by examining key turning points in life. The last theme, adaptations refers to the amendments, alterations, or changes in values, attitudes, and/or behavior patterns that occur as a result of new situations.

Eisner (1991) suggests that researchers using qualitative methods will “do things in ways that makes sense to them given the problem in which they are interested, the

aptitude they possess and the context” (p. 169) of the experience. The analysis of my story has been completed in two parts. The section entitled; ‘Behind the Metaphors’ represents my personal conclusions about the experience, my own understanding. The last chapter of this project compares my story to the literature that was reviewed in the second chapter. The analysis of the life story provides an opportunity to determine the usefulness of the experience both personally and to others in general.

The analysis provided as part of this project shares only one version of meaning with the reader. The text can be interpreted in a variety of ways and the reader will likely arrive at their own conclusions based on their understanding of the metaphor and their own experiences. Personally, a number of regressive issues were triggered by the transitions that I experienced and I have explored some of the issues much deeper than others. Some issues have yet to be unraveled, while with others, I made a conscious decision to retain some of the insights as personal and not to be publicly available through this piece of writing. My purpose in sharing my story was to understand the transition process and I have accomplished that goal.

Chapter 4: Metaphors

I started teaching in Prince Rupert in September of 1989. I had finished a Bachelor of Education degree at The University of Lethbridge earlier that year and I was eager to begin my professional work. I began work at a very old, historic junior high school that had a reputation for being one of the toughest junior high schools in northern British Columbia. No matter, I was determined to make my mark on education. A few years went by and a new secondary school was built to replace the existing junior high. I was delighted. Now I was able to extend my teaching assignment to include senior high school courses as well. I found myself participating on curriculum committees, presenting workshops to other teachers, installing new technology, and implementing new programs. I was immersed in my professional role. The staff of the school was young and all of my close friends were teachers at the school with similar values and interests. My life was very full with work and supported by my friends and family. Christmas and summer vacations were spent travelling to visit with my parents in my hometown. I spoke with my parents every weekend during the school year, just as I had ever since I left home to attend university. After seven years I decided I was likely going to be in Prince Rupert for quite some time so I bought a house. Life was very secure, stable, and comfortable for the most part, remarkably good. Then things changed.

To begin my story I want to share a metaphor that I wrote in July of 1997 for a graduate course. The assignment for the class was to write a metaphor that described how I perceived my professional life. At that time, my professional life consumed my world so the metaphor also describes who I was as a person five years ago. I share it because it

describes my 'perfect' world, a world that was familiar until moving to Lethbridge in July of 1999. The metaphor also sets the stage for the rest of my story.

Better Homes and Gardens Tour '97

Better Homes and Gardens is pleased to include this 1964 Rancher model home in the tour this year. This home is included in the 'work in progress' category and offers several current features along with some of the traditional favourites. Sit back and enjoy this interesting stop.

The house is built on the shores of a lake with picturesque mountains in the background. The grounds feature huge grassed areas with no flowerbeds. This is a planned landscape feature to decrease the emphasis on the daily irritations of weeding in exchange for the focus on the panoramic view. The environment has impact not only on your temperament, but also attitude and energy. Why focus on weeds when you have a post card vantage point to appreciate? The house is only one component of a total lifestyle choice: the view, the neighbourhood, the town, and the climate all factor into the package.

The layout of the house is unique. A secondary school teacher designed the floor plan and to fully appreciate the uniqueness you must view the design from the educational perspective. The house features a main hall entry, kitchen, dining room, living room, master bedroom, bathroom, den and basement. There is a self-contained nature to some of the rooms: in some cases you could spend the entire day in a particular room and never venture further.

Let us begin the indoor part of this tour on the main level of the house. The entry is the organisational centre of the house. Originally this administrative area was quite small, but as years passed the need for expansion saw the wall pushed out, encroaching on kitchen space. The kitchen, the historical centre for nourishment and energy, has several unique features. The

upper cupboards have been removed in order to house a huge collection of recipe books. Obviously the previous owner was tremendously organised. The lower cupboards have been customised from Ikea. All of the most current gadgets, including sliding shelves and adjustable storage units have been installed in order to provide flexibility. Planning creativity can be accommodated depending on the contents of the fridge, the mood of the cook, and the appetite of the guests. The kitchen is the common room between the entry and the dining room. The dining room can seat a maximum of twenty-nine people. The teacher came from a large family but interestingly enough, she had relatives in Alberta that had families of thirty-five and larger! The dining room is the social hub of the main floor. Although designed to serve daily meals for thirty, the room also accommodates informal meetings and entertainment on special occasions. That concludes the main floor, let's move upstairs.

The upper level features the living room, den, bedroom, and ensuite bathroom. The living room is approximately the same size as the dining room providing a healthy balance between work and pleasure. The built-in entertainment unit occupies one complete wall. The living room is a comfortable place to digest a wonderfully prepared meal or simply sit and relax. On those moments when deep philosophical thought is required there is a small den. The den is rather closet-like and dark but serves for thought-provoking meditation. Currently there is only one bookshelf in the den and it is full of British Columbia Ministry of Education documents and little else. The den has had limited use to this point, the majority of the time seems to be spent in the kitchen and entry. The final two rooms on the upper floor, the bedroom and bathroom, are joined. These two rooms are designed with comfort in mind, as a place to de-stress from the day and recharge in preparation for the next day.

The full concrete basement is the last stop on our tour for today. There is plenty of room to store the treasures you can't use at the moment but can't bear to part with. There is a workbench on one side used to refinish and recycle antiques, turning them into current day treasures.

In general, the house has been well maintained. There have been no major structural faults and upkeep has been consistent. New paint has been applied to refresh some of the basic features of the home in order to keep the modern appearance. An architect has drawn plans for a renovation project. Action began in January of 1997 with phase one of the project, a garage sale. The owner was forced to simplify and streamline her lifestyle and decide what was worth keeping. The next phase involves installing a deck off of the dining room to enable entertaining and collegial sharing. In combination with the deck (which faces the waterside) a larger picture window is scheduled for the living room to increase the access to the panoramic view. The den did not escape the architect's critical eye. Natural light, more space and energy-efficient heating will be installed into the den making it one of the central features in the home. The renovation plan does not increase the overall square footage of the home. The aim of the project is to make the home a more productive and innovative piece of architecture. The renovations are not expected to be completed for two to three years but the results should be astounding!

Behind the Scenes

The majority of time I was quite content with my seemingly perfect world. I had a good job, friends, and family – what more could a person wish for? I think I just got bored – professionally speaking and maybe even a little lonely personally. It seemed that every spring I got itchy feet and was on the search for new opportunities and challenge. I

applied for a Ministry position one year, then applied for a couple of local administrative positions next, coordinated a provincial work-experience for teachers project, in short, I was searching for something more. I was getting tired with teaching grade eight keyboarding year after year. The home row loses its appeal after seven years.

The summer of 1996 was spent in the usual fashion; a little time at the beach in my hometown and a road trip out to Lethbridge to see an old friend. While in Lethbridge I reconnected with a fellow that I had dated years before. We spent a couple of evenings in conversation catching up on life's adventures over the past few years and promised to keep in touch. I returned to school in September of 1996 in preparation for another year of teaching and began to sift through the summer mail. I tripped over an announcement from UNBC (University of Northern British Columbia) that indicated a cohort masters of education program was going to be held in Terrace (only an hour and a half drive from Rupert). I had always thought that at some point I would take on an administrative role and in British Columbia a masters degree was a prerequisite along with successful teaching experience which I did not see as a problem. I convinced two of my closest friends that this was an excellent opportunity, all three of us applied and were accepted into the program. This seemed to be the shot of rejuvenation that I needed. We began our first class in January of 1997. One day the professor spoke about a Western Dean's Agreement which enabled students to take courses at other institutions and apply the credits to UNBC, the home program. I had spent spring break '97 in Lethbridge and had an invitation for accommodation if I wanted to take summer school. I decided that I would take the opportunity to study in Lethbridge over the summer. I used the excuse that there were more course options in Lethbridge, but in reality, I was curious about the

possibility of a romantic relationship. The summer coursework went well as did the relationship.

I had mixed feelings as I returned to teach in Rupert. I was eager to get back to my home base and to sort out just what I had experienced over the summer but at the same time I didn't want to leave my vacation life in Lethbridge. It was going to be a long year. It was fairly apparent that if the relationship was going to grow we would need to be in the same town. My occupation was portable but there wasn't much call for feedlot technicians in Prince Rupert. By Christmas, I had decided to take a yearlong leave of absence for the following academic year in order to give things a try in Lethbridge. I had no idea about work but I was confident that someone would hire me to do something. My house sold in January, my possessions were packed and shipped to Lethbridge, and I moved in with a friend until the end of the school year. I hardly remember the months between February and June but I do remember the feeling of being unsettled and living as a guest in someone else's home for an extended period of time. June finally arrived and I was barely able to contain my nervousness and excitement.

Tornado Strikes

The last day of regular classes arrived in Rupert and I went through the motions of calculating marks and cleaning up the computer labs. This year there was much more to be done as I prepared for a new teacher to take over my role as department head, teacher, and technology support leader. I wanted to leave so badly but I wished I could transplant the school, the staff, students, and community along with me. I found new meaning in the term bittersweet. The weekend before I was scheduled to leave clouds started to form in the sky. The forecast was for clear skies but the storm began with a

lightning strike. The phone rang and after a few short moments the force of the storm was upon me. The house trembled. My father announced he was leaving my mother after thirty-nine years of marriage. The wind whipped at the trees and rain pelted against the windows. Everything went dark in the blink of an eye. There was such fear, bewilderment; I hadn't prepared for this storm. In the back of my mind I had always known that the possibility of a tornado existed but I couldn't believe the timing. Why now? I could feel the foundation of the house tremble. The sturdy structure that had been taken for granted for so many years was not what it appeared to be. The timbers that supported the house had been overlooked. The foundation had hosted a termite feast and was weakened. The fear built, the wind was relentless, the funnel formed, the house was being torn from the earth. I had no control over what was now happening. My decision to leave Rupert seemed small compared to the impact of the storm. I was very alone.

I landed in Lethbridge just like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz – shaken, disoriented, excited, and denying the impact of a deep wound. I didn't feel as confident as I once did. I had made a decision to change my working reality and to leave my social network but I had not bargained on my family structure blowing apart at the same time as everything else happened. I felt like the beautiful, exciting renovation project that I wrote about the summer before had vanished as the Rancher home had been lifted from the ground, uprooted, and sent twirling, swirling, and tumbling eastward. Just as Dorothy said, there's no place like home, and in this case, there was no going back to the way things were. Home had been blown apart and didn't exist anymore. The wizard at the end of the yellow brick road was not going to be able to fix things no matter how much I

wanted to return to the way things used to be. I was lost in a foreign land clinging to a past that didn't exist anymore and desperately searching for something familiar.

Special Invitation

Fast-forward to June 2001 and all that the end of June brings in the cyclical world of public high school. Exams and graduation ceremonies are the common topics of conversation for students and retirement plans are on the minds of veteran teachers. Graduation marks the close of the high-school years with young adults celebrating their past accomplishments, friendships, and awaiting the next phase of life. On the flip side, retiring teachers reflect on their work and contributions while anticipating what the next years will bring outside of the school walls. I am not sure whether I am graduating or retiring or maybe it is a combination of both. This is an opportunity to reflect and acknowledge the work and personal growth that has been a part of my life. I would like to invite you to my June party in tribute to the last four years of life in recognition of what I have learned since arriving in Lethbridge - gifts are definitely not required.

I am both the guest of honor and the emcee of my own celebration; you might consider this a one-woman show. The program features invited speakers with whom I have worked closely with over past few years. I am sure that some of the presenters will be familiar to you and you may even be able to identify common characteristics in your own personal and professional relationships. I have struggled for some time over whom to invite to speak at the party and the order in which to present the program. In the end I decided to unfold my story chronologically and to invite only the most memorable and influential to speak. Thank you for sharing this important event with me. Please refresh your drinks, grab some snacks and find a seat, the program is about to begin.

Alice in Wonderland

I would like to introduce the first speaker of the evening – Alice. (A quick costume change and Margaret appears on stage dressed in a pink cotton dress with a white pinafore, long hair pinned back with a barrette and saddle shoes.)

Let me tell you about being a newcomer in Lethbridge, it is no easy task. The environment is so different than where I came from - and the wind! There were the immediate tasks of sorting out possessions and settling in a new home and then the important task of finding employment. I had left a long-term position and my job search skills were a little rusty. The newspaper seemed the logical place to start. I tumbled into employment. I applied for a position advertised on July 2 and as luck would have it I interviewed and got the job! The first and only position that I applied for I secured, maybe this move was going to work out afterall – employment had to be a good sign.

I left a small community where I knew many people and felt a part of the mix. Lethbridge seemed very established with connections between people dating back generations and I was the overwhelmed but optimistic new arrival, wide-eyed and wanting to fit in. I was energized to re-establish myself and the everyday tasks of changing addresses, transferring vehicle insurance, cleaning up my new home was a welcome distraction from examining the extent of the damage caused by the storm. I was wide-eyed on the outside, ready to explore new opportunities but on the inside very guarded. I felt the need to protect my fragile self after the trauma of the previous weeks. I had a new romantic relationship but I certainly wasn't ready to dive deep into my insecurities with my new partner – didn't want him to think he had just moved in with a neurotic, insecure, weak partner.

I missed my close friends, individuals with similar outlooks, values and perspectives. I felt like I had dropped into the Ozarks – many of the people I was meeting now held very traditional views of women, education, and society. I wondered how I had ended up as part of this circle of connections. The personal, social, professional, and scholastic elements in my life seemed to be mutually exclusive and operating at extremes along a Cartesian plane, as independent quadrants. In one way this was welcomed because I could still deal with specific compartments or departments of my life and manage to shutout the painful regions. Alice brought a wide-eyed naiveté to my life that I could use as a mask or disguise. I could make everything all right and I could keep functioning productively no matter what had happened in the past. Alice allowed me to survive and to re-establish myself in a new place. She disappeared after eighteen months, perhaps to help someone else explore a new world. Cruella arrived just as Alice was leaving.

Cruella DeVil

Cruella was unable to attend in person tonight but forwarded some comments and insights to share. Think for a moment about a day in the life of Cruella DeVil. Imagine yourself in a house with 101 puppies, everywhere you look there are paws and wagging tails. Cruella is a woman who is surrounded by a buzz of activity created by choices she has made. She barely endures the rambunctious puppies within her home and endeavors to maintain a sophisticated, in-control image when in public. Life is a series of problems requiring crisis management which leads to being miserable and exhausted. The incongruency between inside and outside is what draws me to Cruella. Life is lived in the extreme with all of the puppies. It wasn't puppies in my case but a several significant

endings that happened within the same couple of weeks that stacked together to become really big stressors. Just like Cruella who tried to ignore the impact of the Dalmatians, I tried to ignore the impact of leaving close friends, a secure job, my parent's separation / divorce. Any one of the events would have been significant in and of themselves but combined together and occurring within weeks of each other was too much.

Cruella's arrival replaced the innocence and rosy outlook of both Dorothy and Alice. Cruella exhibited a range of emotions including anger, hurt, frustration, and feeling overwhelmed and out-of-control. Stress was taking its toll. I was not particularly pleasant to be around when Cruella was visiting. I felt like I was performing, going through the motions for my audience, but on the inside my nerves, were standing on end. Puppies have a way of getting their owner's attention when they are feeling neglected. The level of energy demanded to continue to ignore unresolved issues escalates until eventually there can be no more denial. Too many puppies, too many unresolved issues – I placed a help wanted sign in my window. Help was costly, not in monetary terms but in pride. It hurt to take the step to admit things were out of control and that I didn't seem able to deal with my problems myself. I had always been a private person, accomplishing almost anything that I set out to do, and now I felt that my skills and abilities had abandoned me as I tried to make sense of my situation. Asking for help made me feel weak and incompetent but I did not have the strength to continue on the same path any longer.

Intermission

Overlaying all of these events was my father's health. Two years earlier he had been diagnosed with cancer. After the discovery he underwent the standard treatment of surgery and chemotherapy. The treatment seemed successful and he had been in

remission. A year after I moved to Lethbridge his cancer reappeared and this time it was inoperable. All my energies were shifted to dealing with a terminally ill parent rather than spending any more time to understand my parent's separation and divorce.

My crash point came at the end of one of my courses. The class was to meet at the professor's house to share insights we had gained from the course. I had a difficult day at work and I didn't look forward to attending the evening event. In fact, I had decided not to attend. My assignments weren't anywhere near ready to hand in and I dreaded the thought of gathering with my classmates to share future plans when mine were so cloudy. Unfortunately, I arrived home to find a message from the professor encouraging (?) my attendance. I still shrugged it off – I was not going to go. I would have been all right except that the professor called and I was forced to talk with her on the phone. Yeish – I was going after all. The evening wasn't too stressful until we got down to serious sharing. I listened to each person tell their story and I dreaded my turn. I waited and some people left - all the better, maybe I could wait long enough and there would only be the professor and myself left. No such luck, I was last to speak and there was still a handful of people. It still felt like standing room only at the Enmax Centre. I struggled to control the emotion in my voice and announced, as best I could, that I planned on doing nothing – taking some time out to recoup. One hurdle was cleared; I had my five minutes of floor-time and had survived more or less. The remaining classmates were leaving and as I said good-bye I felt myself falling apart. I couldn't hold it together anymore and I began to cry. I wanted an intermission – a time out where I could just be and not have to be responsible for anything. I had filled my life with my new relationship, full-time work,

two graduate classes, and at the same time trying to deal with the downhill slide of a terminally ill parent. I was exhausted.

Rather than a professional development course, I felt like I had just completed a crash course in yoga and had been bent in all sorts of shapes that my body had never ever considered possible. I was torn between wanting the comfort of the familiar, the continuation of tradition and the patterns that I had always known and a deep down recognition, almost against my will, that things were going to have to change because I could not continue in the same fashion. I was searching for a solution and trying to determine how to navigate the path without causing myself more discomfort and pain. Deep down, I knew I had to do things differently but I didn't know how or where to begin.

I did not take any more coursework during the spring semester. My father died four weeks after my meltdown moment at the professor's house. My plate was still full of issues and I found myself dealing with seemingly urgent matters of my father's estate and my own survival.

Refreshment

The help wanted advertisement that Cruella DeVil posted received a couple applicants in the fall of 2000. The first applicant arrived in the form of a weekend getaway. A friend invited me to attend a women's retreat in the Crowsnest Pass and I was introduced to a different way of thinking. After the first activity at the retreat I had met a young girl that had experienced a similar family crisis. Several people had experienced parts of my story, one woman had recently relocated, one woman had changed jobs, and another woman was grieving the loss of a parent. I left the weekend workshop feeling

like I was not the only person in the world that had experienced these particular events (although no one had experienced all of them and in such a short time line). The second applicant arrived in the form of a text a couple of months later, right after Christmas. I read the Bill Bridges text on managing transitions and again felt like others shared similar trauma and had been strengthened by the experience. The third and most influential applicant for the help wanted posting was a magic mirror. The mirror had a kind and gentle voice that asked questions that I hadn't considered in the past. The mirror was able to see inside of me, to help me acknowledge the sources of my hurt, and to resolve the issues that were troublesome to enable a renewed self to surface. The mirror showed me the connected nature of events and feelings, things that happened today had roots in the past and in order to get rid of the weed it was necessary to address the root.

Overlaying all of the events that happened on a personal level was my professional life. In many ways, my employment and my university study were steady elements in a very rocky world. The project that I worked on professionally gave me an opportunity to create something new and innovative. I worked in a two-person office and therefore my colleague was very important to me. The working relationship provided so many positive learning opportunities that my counterpart grew to fill a nurturing role. University coursework gave me some definite goals to work towards when my world was rather unpredictable. As things began to settle and become more comfortable, I could begin to look at the impact of all the characters and to deal with the emotion underlying the events.

Where's the party?

So far there has been much drama in this story and I am sure you are wondering what is worth celebrating. For me, there is a personal victory in getting this far. I am in awe that I have been able to write the story and that I have been able to put some perspective on what has happened in my life. I feel like the announcer just called my name and I have just burst through the paper-covered hoop onto center-court at the basketball game. Maybe it is more like I have just taken off my backpack, shoes and socks after a hard climb to reach the next resting point on Mount Everest and I'm now wiggling my toes and dancing without the weight of my pack. Let us get real, I'm not a basketball player or a climber. Prince Rupert is known for its rain. I feel like the rain has let up, the sun has come out, and there is a rainbow over my new home. The rainbow is bright, beautiful and magical. The colors seem just beyond my touch. In my past I have driven to where I thought the rainbow was so that I could be close to the image, maybe to chase the pot of gold, only to find that when I arrived to the destination the rainbow had moved further down the road. Today, I appreciate that I can see the rainbow and the intensity of the color but I haven't tried to chase the rainbow, I appreciate its presence and recognize that without the rain the rainbow is not possible.

I cannot describe my home; it is not the rancher that I started to remodel, it seems to have changed shape. The rooms lack definition and seem to be made out of Play-Doh. There are prisms hanging in several of the windows and the sunlight is causing rainbows to appear in many of the rooms. I would like to say that the renovations are complete and to describe each room in detail but the construction continues. The rainbows shining on the walls remind me of the work that has been done so far and that it was the storm that

brought the rainbows to light. There is a poem on the front door of the house. The poem reads:

Be patient toward all this is unsolved in your heart and

Try to love the questions themselves ...

Do not now seek the answers,

Which cannot be given you

Because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is,

To live everything.

Live the questions now.

Perhaps you will then gradually,

without noticing it,

live along some distant day into the answer. (Rilke, 1903/1984, p. 34)

Epilogue

I believe that I have learned an incredible amount from the series of events that I have described to you and that it is time I made peace with this chapter of my life. After most public performances there is a critique and in this case it seems appropriate to share my thoughts on the creation of this evening's program. I have been mentally writing this program for months and I am amazed at how quickly it appeared on paper. Before I started physically writing I was apprehensive. I did not want to open up the wounds that had just started to heal and I was afraid that I would experience the pain all over again. The longer I delayed putting the words on paper the more guilt and frustration I felt. I

found numerous excuses and distractions because I just could not seem to sit down and write.

After the first day of writing I was surprised at how quickly and easily the background piece fell into place. As I wrote about the storm I relived moments and I thought about the painful trigger points but it was not like before, I wasn't overcome by the memories. The second day I struggled with the characters and how to write them into the script. I could not decide if they were a part of me or if they were supposed to exist independently. The more I tried to write them as separate people the more frustrated I got with the writing. I gave in and wrote them as parts of my person that emerged at different time periods with the fear that the reader will believe I should be treated for multiple personality disorder. After reviewing the writing from the second day I realized that I had not used the style of metaphor that I had first envisioned. Rather than making one story from start to finish and not including any real life connection I had written more real life than I expected and used a variety of characters to support the story. Disguising my entire story with metaphors may have been my security blanket, something that I needed to have written into the proposal to even consider writing my story. I found that I did not need to hide as much as I originally thought. Even the subject of the metaphors changed from a neat, tidy, inanimate, unfeeling house to characters filled with feeling.

The segment written as Cruella was the most difficult; the character made me twitchy. I still feel embarrassed and see myself as weak by admitting that I could not handle all of the events and feelings on my own. I penciled in the words incompetent and vulnerable in the margin of my notes. So much of my life has been devoted to achieving whatever I set out to do. Not being able to sort myself out was somewhat of a shock and

is something I still struggle with. I noticed that as I wrote the sections up to Refreshment, I would write one segment, one character, and then take a break and come back to the work later. It seemed that I needed to digest and reflect on the feelings that the writing brought forward before I could go on to the next segment. After I got to the Refreshment segment I wrote for two hours before I even knew what happened.

Recently I saw an advertisement for competitors for a strong man competition at the Calgary Stampede. Contestants strap themselves into a harness connected to a rope; the opposite end of the rope is attached to a semi-truck. The object of the competition is to pull the truck a pre-determined distance using only brute strength. Metaphorically, I think I had competed in the competition for most of my life. I believe that if only one of the things had happened, I would have continued to power my way through and not learned as much about myself. The combined weight of all of the issues happening over a short time period turned the semi-truck into a military tank that I couldn't budge. I was forced to face the issues rather than continuing to drag them along behind me. I have come to think of this chapter of my life as one of the most significant to date.

The day that I finally registered for this project was a day with mixed emotions. I was thrilled that I finally had a proposal that I could register and that fact in itself marked a major milestone in my process. At the same time, I felt more pressure to complete the project. Professors had scoffed at my deadline dates and I had company scheduled and holiday plans prior to the completion day. Working under pressure seems to be more common place in my world; everything scheduled for just-in-time delivery. I had tried to rush the healing process unsuccessfully and I was, and still am, uncertain if this writing is

a part of healing that will not happen according to University timelines or my own timelines for that matter. I am about to find out.

One of the last professional tasks this school year was a review of my job description. The outline contains roughly fifteen statements regarding my role and one of the items mentions 'administrative duties as assigned.' I laughed as I read the description. It is this casual phrase, four little words amongst the list that takes up a huge percentage of my time. In some ways I feel the same about this assignment. A handful of written pages to describe years' worth of experience, learning and growing. It is a startling revelation how something so important can be reduced to something so compact.

Chapter 5: Behind the Metaphors

What does it all mean? Telling the story is really only the first step. Perhaps a more meaningful step is to reflect and interpret some of the feelings and thoughts to determine the impact of the experience. The purpose of the following section is to provide some of my current thoughts, my understanding at this point in time, regarding what I have learned about myself from the series of events that were outlined in the metaphors. The term 'current thoughts' is appropriate because it seems that my understanding continues to change and evolve as I continue this journey.

The process behind making sense of my feelings and behaviour patterns has been similar to putting a jig saw puzzle together. The shape of the next puzzle piece is identified and some of the distinguishing characteristics are evident from the sections that have already been pieced together. The next step can be quite time consuming as each of the extra pieces are examined to find the missing link. Sometimes the connecting piece seems to jump into one's hand and sometimes it is a process of trial and error, as some pieces seem so close that they must be tested to see if they fit into the open space. The drive to solve the puzzle can be so strong that one can be tempted to force a piece into a space. Knowing that the piece had to be forced into the space and that the picture is not quite right, it is still possible to deny the cues and leave the piece in place for awhile. Fitting the next piece is next to impossible so the player is forced to take a step back, re-examine the last choice, remove the misfit, and continue. Arriving at these insights has been the process of examining the distinguishing characteristics of the situation and exploring some possibilities before finding the right fit. Some of the pieces have been placed and replaced before finding the

connection. It is almost possible to feel the internal click as the connection is made between events, behaviour, and understanding, just like the puzzle piece that snaps into its home place.

Exhaling

As I reread my story it seems less traumatizing than the events did in real life. It is a different feeling to see the words on paper than just to have thought or talked about the events. There somehow seems less emotion attached to the story as I read it and I am able to look for themes, lessons, and /or insights with less angst than I thought. The story is finally out of me and I can look at the story in a different way now that it is on paper. It almost seems a more objective task – I am not sure if this is a positive development or not. I do not want the experience to become a lab experiment that undergoes scientific analysis.

Under the category of interesting observations, I noticed that in the proposal, the introduction of the metaphors, and in the Alice in Wonderland section I lead off with my work world. Work seems to be my safe starting place, one where I feel I have the most control and the one arena of my world that I have somehow come to view as a constant when other areas of my life have been in an uproar. The number of accomplishments in my work life have given me confidence in my professional abilities more so than the events in my personal life. I was going to use the descriptor 'stable' but perhaps stable is not the best description since I now work in a very nontraditional teaching assignment on a year-to-year funding base. In addition to the unpredictability, the nature of my current work assignment led me to question whether to continue to call myself a teacher at all. This was no small crisis in itself because my profession had come to define my life.

Questions such as, if I was no longer a teacher what was I, and did my work continue to hold any meaning seemed to plague me for months. My concept of what teaching meant and how a teacher was defined has undergone revision. The revision involved examining the components of my original definition of teacher and teaching. Exploring what teaching was as a process, the interactive nature, the requirement of an audience, the sharing of information, researching curriculum, continued to be elements of my current work. When asked I reveal that I am a teacher because the term is easily understood. The following question, where I teach, requires a longer answer as I explain that my assignment is not in a regular classroom but instead I work with students, teachers, and parents. I have decided to continue calling myself a teacher as my classroom experience has had a major influence in my current role providing background, insight, and knowledge but I also recognize that I have many opportunities in my current role that are not possible in a regular classroom assignment. I don't know why the title 'teacher' is still so important to me. The thought of being without that identity holds some fear that I will perhaps understand in the future.

Better Homes and Gardens Tour '97

This metaphor was originally written to represent how I viewed my teaching world. At the time my professional life was all consuming. I taught during the day, socialized with teachers in the evenings, and spent weekends at school planning or travelling to work on provincial specialist and curriculum committees. Education was my world. The metaphor does not require the inclusion of personal life or friends because those elements were connected to my work. At the time, I thought my life was pretty much perfect. Everything fit into its place, things were neat and tidy, and there were very

few surprises or upsets. The description of the landscape as all grass with no weeds was fitting. My world was all work and there was no time to address personal issues – weeds because that would take time away from my mansion of accomplishments. I was extremely focussed on building my professional life and I ignored anything that would distract me from moving forward with that passion.

I am quite certain that the small den that was initially contained a single bookshelf full of Ministry of Education directives has been replaced by a much larger room. The room is brighter and more comfortable than the tiny den; it has become an inviting place. The curricular materials that once filled the shelves have been replaced with a combination of reference materials. There are fewer government publications and a variety of self-development resources within reach. I think the original size of the den in comparison to the other rooms is quite revealing. At the time I wrote *Better Homes and Gardens*, I spent more time organizing and catering to the needs of others in the kitchen and entry than I did on my own needs. Any philosophical thought was directed at teaching where now the majority of my reflection is spent on personal growth and understanding. The last couple of sentences in this section regarding productivity and innovation are very directed toward accomplishments. By targeting goals there was a future focus built into life. I see now how driven I was, and still am to a degree, and how the impact of daily activity was dismissed given this outlook.

There is a loneliness to the metaphor that I did not recognize in the past. There is a mention of self-contained rooms in the metaphor that speaks volumes. I had people all around me but I was alone in some respects. As long as I operated within the bounds of the system I could make my own decisions and choices as to where I would put my

energy. What a contrast to my life now, both personally and professionally as I am surrounded by others who have input into any decision or activity. Perhaps more importantly, I have let others in past the protective walls and depend on them to share my uncertainties and to help me discover my way.

A big part of me really appreciates the neat, orderly, simple life outlined in the Better Homes and Gardens tour but at the same time I realize that it wasn't enough for me. I chose to make things different by leaving Prince Rupert in search of something more from life and it is a decision that I don't regret. Teaching in Prince Rupert prepared me for the professional work in Lethbridge, but personally I was not growing. My life in Prince Rupert was consumed by work and driven by accomplishment. Rupert gave me the opportunity to be independent and prove to myself that I was very capable of looking after myself if I chose to. There is no way of knowing what my life would have been like if I had stayed in Prince Rupert. I certainly miss my friends and I appreciate all that I learned while living there but I have no regrets about leaving. The choice to leave Rupert to pursue a more fulfilling personal life was a positive step.

The goal of the renovation project was to make a more productive and innovative piece of architecture. What was I thinking, how could one have been any more productive without being cloned? As with many renovation blueprints, it is a plan and often as the plan is executed it is revised. The original architect no longer has the same authority in the project. I revised the original renovation plan rather than the architect. The new blueprints focus on balance rather than productivity and connectedness rather than isolation. The final optimistic sentence of the metaphor is correct, it has taken a few years

and it will likely take a little longer. The results up to this point have been painful at times but positive.

Tornado Strikes

The phone call from my father announcing his separation from my mother is burned into my memory and often evokes tears to this day. In the span of a few moments of conversation my world changed forever and it also unlocked so many things. The information from the phone call put me on shaky ground. I questioned things that I had taken for granted, what was real and what was an illusion. The image of a tornado seemed fitting for this metaphor, as the impact of the news was so forceful.

My father provided scant background for his decision but it was enough to trigger an unexpected response. After some time and considerable reflection I had a sense of understanding. Although few details were provided during the first phone call and in following conversations there was enough to bring clarity to some of the odd events and observations from my late adolescence and early adult family life. The mystery of events that seemed to defy explanation at the time, was now unraveled.

The news of my parent's separation descended on me like a tornado, I had never received tragic news before. A flood of feelings washed over me in the moments during the storm – hurt, rejection, confusion, disbelief, and anger. It was strange because in my family, emotions were not openly displayed or discussed without ridicule. Being happy, cheerful, and accommodating were acceptable and anything else was only tolerated if you were my father. Many of my coping strategies have developed in response to the conditions my father put on his presence and interaction with me. Growing up, my father would be present if I was happy not upset or working towards something rather than

playing. It is not difficult to see the link between my childhood experiences and the development of my optimism and need for accomplishment in adulthood. To this day, I rarely express anger or frustration. I believe it is this childhood experience that has made me uncomfortable with conflict and negative emotion and is also connected to why Cruella couldn't make a personal appearance in the metaphor. I am beginning to realize how many of my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are connected to childhood patterns and the enduring strength of those habits.

Alice in Wonderland

The image of Alice sliding down the rabbit hole and landing in a foreign environment describes my thoughts as I landed in Lethbridge. I could not find any familiar reference points given all of the new situations and new people in my life. My confidence was shaken as I tried to re-establish myself in a new location. I felt very bruised as I landed in Lethbridge. It seemed that I met new people everyday and I was determined to keep new acquaintances at a distance. I was pleasant to people and I discovered that if I asked a few questions the other person would carry the conversation and I did not have to share too much of my background. Playing interviewer allowed me to keep my wounds covered as I began to reconnect with people. The majority of my previous social circle had been teachers with whom I felt comfortable and shared many similarities. I was catapulted into an existing social circle in Lethbridge by way of my significant other and there was not single teacher to be found and my comfort zone shrunk. The emotional distance allowed for a safety zone between the new circle and myself so that I could learn about others before risking sharing who I was and what I was about. I felt very fragile because so much of my life seemed to have been turned upside

down and I did not want any more hurt. It just felt too dangerous to put my real self out in the crowd, a crowd that might reject me because I felt so different than everyone else.

For some time I have realized that I am suspicious of people that do not appear authentic. Long ago I recognized that when I feel that people are not being genuine with me or are operating on a hidden agenda I am immediately on edge. Recently, I have come to believe that this reaction is based on my family experience, the illusions that were used in part of my childhood by my parents. My own experience with Alice put me in a paradox. On one hand I was personally uneasy when I sensed a mask used by others and on the other, I was participating in that very activity when I felt compelled to use a disguise to avoid being hurt. I have become aware of this paradox but have not yet reconciled the reasons I felt compelled to use a mask.

During this time period I was focussed on establishing my new life. I could preoccupy myself with being Alice and ignore the hurt from my family. By asking questions and dodging the limelight I felt like I had some degree of control. I didn't have to reveal who I was, I could continue to play Alice, meet new people and play the curiosity card to avoid sharing too much of myself. Not only did Alice protect me from others; I also had some protection from my own emotions. As long as Alice was available I didn't have to feel the panic, fear, and hurt that stormed inside of me.

Cruella DeVil and an Intermission

My life was full of activity just like Cruella's, I had a new job, a new partner, and new friends. Cruella wrote that she barely endured managing all of the puppies but managed to present a polished public image. On the outside I had managed to settle into my new environment but on the inside I was barely surviving. The stress of denying my

family situation was becoming unbearable. I filled my days with work and evenings with two university courses each semester and still found some time to spend time with my partner. I went to bed exhausted but without having to acknowledge any hurt. It was not long before the grueling pace began to make me feel snarly and miserable.

The Cruella segment was the most difficult to write for a number of reasons. The events represented by this segment and the intermission were the most painful. The evening at the professor's house was the moment I realized I couldn't manage all of the events and that I needed help. Everything just seemed so big and I was already so tired. I had never felt such anxiety and stress. I could feel every nerve in my body stand on end when I would think about all of the things I that needed attention. I was a walking twitch. This was the first time in my life that I had to admit I couldn't manage for myself and the admission that I was overwhelmed made me feel weak, out of control and scared.

Putting out a help wanted sign was very difficult. I was admitting I was lost and couldn't find my own way. To say I have been fairly independent would be an understatement and the thought of letting others know my struggle was huge. Dwelling on negativity makes me uncomfortable and for a long time I only saw this period of time as negative. After considerable time, I view this segment as a critical turning point. The professor's caring, support, and advice that night started my healing process. I am still shy about sharing personal details with others and exposing my vulnerabilities and weaknesses; however, life continues to provide opportunities to risk this sharing and perhaps in time I will overcome feeling judged and incompetent in those moments.

I used to think that I was an extremely patient person but I now recognize times and situations when I am very impatient with myself and others around me. The

intermission period was one of my impatient moments. I wonder how much of my impatience is connected to wanting to speed through process in order not to feel what I predicted to be more painful moments. Perhaps my impatience is one of my coping strategies. I found it difficult to take an intermission. The decision to take an intermission meant that I also had to accept that I was not in control of my situation. Not only was I not in control but I also didn't know who I was anymore. The mask wasn't working anymore and inside I was ready to collapse.

I felt guilty after I made the decision to take a break from University coursework to take some time to rest. A voice inside would drop hints; surely a person could complete a masters degree and deal with a changing family and personal dynamic all while working full-time. The voice kept asking what was wrong with me. That critical voice has been a part of me for some time and I struggle to keep it in perspective. What I had realized, and continue to be aware of, is how easy it is for me to assume fault with myself. Just like Cruella could not manage all of the puppies, I had to admit I had reached my limit. It is a challenge for me to accept insight and comment without passing judgement on myself and jumping to the conclusion that I am wrong. I finally see how the high expectations I have set for myself have lead to exhaustion and it is something that I plan to address.

Refreshments

Writing this segment marks a break from my traditional style. Usually I write from start to finish, introduction to conclusion, but in this chapter I have skipped all around. These are the last paragraphs to be written in this section. Here is another example of my old habits: what can I say about this stage and how can I say it without

being vulnerable. For someone who is impatient and likes to sidestep anything negative or painful, finding refreshment is a huge challenge. Finding refreshment takes time and commitment and has to be something you are open to and ready for. I have to keep setting timelines and making the refreshment stop a priority because I know that I could easily slough off in this department. I recognize that I have made some important connections but I also know that there is more work to be done before I am feeling confident in myself.

After reading the above paragraph for the first time in an earlier draft, my project supervisor's feedback was that I was wiggling around like a worm on a hook. She asked the question if I could get off the hook so that I could stop wiggling and look around. I will try. I want to leave the original paragraph in this text because I want to remember; I want to be able to know where I have come from. I understand her comments and even agree with her on an intellectual level. On an emotional level I still struggle with admitting that I needed help, that I could not fix my life myself.

This summer I visited a high school friend in my hometown. I always looked up to her. Anytime I had a problem she was always there to fix it. This summer I saw her in a different way, the way I used to be. She was astonished that I had changed the topic of my project to one so personal. She described her amazement with logical, rational objections. I drove home with mixed emotions. I could see how different we had become and I was proud of the changes I had made in myself. I was also sad, sad for my friend because I could feel the wall that she held up between logic and emotion. I could feel the way I had held people at a distance. I do not feel that I fully embrace cyclical living yet,

but I do recognize that I have started on the path. I have become aware and each day brings new discoveries.

I chose the title of the metaphor, 'refreshment' purposely. I wanted the title to reflect the degree of relief that I felt when I got help. It was like drinking an ice-cold beer after mowing the lawn on an extremely hot day. I found people that were willing to walk with me on my journey, help me, comfort me. I feel so lucky and overwhelmed (in a good way). I would be remiss if I did not give credit to the many people that have given me support in this process. I have been very blessed to have an understanding partner, friends close enough to be family, and loving family members who walk this road with me, are patient with me, and care beyond words. These people have also been an important source of refreshment, each in their own way, providing laughter, distraction, feedback, and love.

So where's the party?

For much of my life I have been very good about taking the positive moments and stretching them big enough to cover up any negativity. The phrase 'overwhelmed but optimistic' could be used to summarize the metaphors section and represents a major theme in my life. If I were to die today I could use the phrase on my tombstone, here lies Margaret, overwhelmed but optimistic. My tendency is to reinforce the positive and ignore the negative. This section of the project represents a departure from that perspective. I have attempted to be as honest as possible about what I have learned and the process that has got me to this point. It would have been easy to complete a final exam or to create a quantitative study; but I chose to tackle a project that I knew would be

a challenge, to be true to what I knew I would learn the most from. The celebration is that I have allowed myself to feel, to write, to share, and to risk something so personal.

Epilogue

During the course of the metaphors I moved from being a single person to not single, from being a child of a nuclear family to being a child of divorce and a fatherless daughter, and from being a regular classroom teacher to being a teacher in a non-traditional assignment. My definition of who I was had been considerably altered and continues to re-emerge as I continue to change. In the past I spent much of the time thinking and analyzing others or my work but very little time learning about myself and my contributions. The biggest development has been that I have become more conscious of both positive and negative aspects of my character. This is not to say that I always appreciate the awareness or that I have completely healed the wounds of the experiences but I have a level of understanding that I did not have earlier.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

Theory Compared to My Reality

It was almost eight months ago when I read Bridges (1980) text. As I read the chapters I found a degree of understanding and peace regarding my own transitions. I was thrilled to find that there was a process and I could identify with the first two stages, endings and a neutral zone. I believe that finding and reading Bridges' (1980) text was one of the serendipitous events that happen in the neutral zone that leads to the beginning stage. I found many more similarities between my story and the literature than differences. I connected so much of my story to the ideas Hudson (1999) and Bridges (1980) wrote in their texts. There were elements of parallelism between my story and each of the authors I included in the literature review. The following section analyzes my story based on the three stages: ending, neutral zone, and beginning interwoven with the sections of the literature that held the most personal impact.

The recognition that there are voluntary and involuntary transitions seems like common sense now but at the time the concept had a profound impact on my journey. Some of the events were of my choosing and others I had no control over. Understanding, if not accepting, the feeling of powerlessness that accompanied the involuntary transitions was important as I tried to sort out my emotions. I am very aware of my preference to be in control of my situation and myself. The decision to leave Prince Rupert was a blend of emotion, excitement with respect to new adventures and sadness because I was leaving close friends and a secure job; but I had made the decision. The transition that happened in my family life was not of my own choosing and was much more traumatic. I was extremely affected by the decisions of others, decisions I had no

control over. My feelings of despair and helplessness were compounded by the fact that I couldn't 'fix' the situation, a role that I had assumed for most of my life. I also realize the great lengths I travel to avoid conflict, perhaps the reason that being in control and being a 'fixer' became such strong personal characteristics. I am determined to explore the sources of my hurt and to grow as a result of the exploration.

I had made a conscious decision to leave Prince Rupert, a voluntary transition, and a decision that resulted in a need to redefine myself professionally. My feelings of confusion and uncertainty resulting from something that I had promoted myself and were acknowledged and explained by Lankard (1993), Bridges (1980), and Hudson (1999). I learned that the impact of the transition; and the need to recognize the three stage process of ending, neutral zone, and beginning, is not diminished simply because I chose to change my situation.

The involuntary transitions that I found myself a part of, my parents' decisions and later my father's death, were the most painful. Acknowledging the hurt and the inability to 'fix' the situation was extremely difficult. Because of the short time between when my father left my mother and when he died, I know that I did not have the time to move through the stages of the transition process. I think that grieving the loss of my parents' marriage would have been easier if my father had lived a little longer. Although I have resolved some of the emotion and thoughts connected with these events, I have not completely come to terms with my new family circumstances. I continue to feel loss rather than appreciating the redefined relationships. Hudson (1999) noted that some transitions can trigger regressive issues and that was particularly true in my case. Bridges (1980) comments about recognizing that significant parts of my old reality no longer

existed in my head and not outside, has been a long and painful process. There are elements that I have taken so much for granted that questioning their existence is like running into a brick wall at full speed.

My story had three transitions tied together in the same time period and in some ways the ending stage happened quickly and in others the ending was years in the making. I was so excited to be moving to Lethbridge and to begin to build my new partnership. The announcement of my parents separation, moving to Lethbridge, and my father's health combined together to throw me into crisis. Any change that I had encountered in the past seemed insignificant as I struggled to put things back into place. Bridges' (1980) text describes a variety of reactions people have to endings and I was certainly able to see patterns in how I approach endings. I avoid endings. I chose not to attend the year-end staff meeting because I didn't want to say good-bye to my colleagues. I left Rupert early in the morning in order to skip the tearful good-byes from friends. Somehow if I do not say good-bye I feel like I am still connected to those people. I hate the finality of the ending. Delaying and putting off any kind of permanent ending seems to be my style. The leave of absence is a good example. I had a one-year safety net although I knew the chances of returning to Rupert were very slim I did not want to resign my position outright. Delaying an ending gives some me some time and distance; a coping strategy that sometimes makes the ending less painful. The speed and finality of my parent's announcement of their separation was contrary to my coping strategy and shook me. The shock of the announcement was like jumping into a glacial-fed lake when I prefer to tiptoe into the water inch by inch. This was the first of my growing moments, to be aware of a part of myself that I had not realized in the past. The fact that I inch

away slowly makes me wonder if the reason I did not experience transition issues in the past was because the endings became so blurry they were unrecognizable. Rather than bringing closure to an event I simply let it slip away, consciously or unconsciously, because I expected the ending to be painful.

Bridges (1980) describes the function of the neutral zone as providing perspective on the ending and resting. I am not sure if after the ending occurs is one immediately into the neutral zone or is there a gap in the process where one is simply between stages. The shock of the events left me feeling frozen: I did not want to do anything, no reflecting, no discussions, just mechanically moving through the day ignoring the events as much as possible – my best possible ostrich impersonation. My actions and feelings do not fit with the image of the calm, peaceful, reflective, and healing period I pictured after reading the literature. I wonder if the neutral zone is divided into two parts. The first part where one can just rest, to just be free, to do the ostrich act if necessary, and the second part where one is willing to acknowledge the ending, its impact and begin to explore new directions and ideas.

The night at the professor's house marked the end of my ostrich impersonation phase. Denial had served its purpose and it was on to cocooning. In my mind cocooning is different than denial. I decided not to take any courses the following semester and not to take on any extra activities compared to the previous months when I had done anything and everything to stay busy and avoid thinking. I remember taking one weekend to pour through collected items to put together a scrapbook. I reread farewell cards from friends in Rupert and organized a collection of movie tickets, pictures, and newspaper clippings. Melancholy would best describe the mood of the weekend. It was like I was saying good-

bye to Rupert and acknowledging my family situation in my own way. It was after the scrapbook weekend that I read the chapters describing the neutral zone as an opportunity to reflect on the past and to put it in order. The scrapbook weekend was another turning point. It was after the scrapbook was finished that I was willing to look for my beginning.

The definition of linear and cyclical lifestyles has perhaps made the biggest impact on my healing. I am very aware that for much of my life I have lived the classic definition of the 'doer' mentality. A quick scan of the accomplishments listed on my resume and I rest my case. There is a part of me that finds great comfort and safety in the linear lifeform. Order, control, deadlines, and accomplishment, the underpinnings of linear life have provided a structure where I was usually clear about what was required and demanded of me. By comparison, my venture to the cyclical side of life is fairly new and not without discomfort. My professional life is based on a continually evolving project in a non-traditional teaching assignment has definite elements of the cyclical style. In my personal life, I tend to live day to day rather than focussed on long-term goals. My partner lives very much in cyclical fashion. I don't believe it is by chance that I am connected to him. I believe that learning to appreciate this new lifestyle is part of my story and that I met my partner in part to help me learn. I have taken advantage of opportunities both personally and professionally as they have been presented that has taken me in directions I never would have imagined. Although I can see examples of the cyclical style in my life I cannot say that I am totally comfortable. Given a choice, I know that I feel on solid ground when working towards the completion of a task but I also recognize that a large part of my journey has been to appreciate the elements of cyclical life. Growth and process, key elements in cyclical life, have been central themes in my

life over the last few years. For many years I have felt awkward and almost embarrassed because my life path has, and continues to be, non-traditional. By non-traditional I mean not fitting into the pattern and timing of marriage, childrearing, and homemaking defined by previous generations and followed by many my age. Learning about cyclical theory has provided a home for my experience, acknowledgement and acceptance of my path. Lately, the times when I feel the most frustrated are the times when I try to deny the cyclical process and push the linear agenda, resorting to my old habits when I a part of me recognizes I could learn so much more by staying present.

Time is a prevalent theme throughout the literature; the process cannot be rushed, transitions take as long as they take, the neutral zone is a period of suspension, and beginnings are unpredictable. One of my biggest challenges has been to let go of any timeline connected to healing and completing the transition - it must be my lingering linear self making its presence felt. I lived happily for years in an environment governed by bells every fifty-four minutes and now I was expected to float through time, to take as long as I needed when I did not know what I needed, what a challenge. The majority of my time was spent in the neutral zone and frustration resulted as soon as I tried to speed up the process. Having the patience to accept an external timeline is a little like opening an Advent Calendar before Christmas. One square is opened and then a whole other day passes before the next piece of the picture is revealed. The process is a metaphor for living life in a cyclical fashion, each day we learn a little more about our personality, we make meaning of what we know up to that point, and then the next day comes and we know more and sometimes change our perceptions. When I wrote the 'behind the metaphors' section I used the term current thoughts because I believe that my

understanding is not permanent and that once I have a few more squares of the puzzle open I may have a different picture.

The beginning stage seems to be the most difficult to define. I believe that my beginning is just coming into focus. The outside trappings of my life, my employment, my friends, my personal relationships are not the beginning, they will continue. Throughout this experience I have come to be more reflective and conscious than ever before. My beginning is focussed on living true to my emotions. My challenge is dealing with events and emotions in the present to avoid building up the barnacles that slow the journey in the future.

Perhaps it is because these events formed the first major transition in my life but I found great comfort reading the literature and the insight it provided into a process for change. I had moved through the first stages of the process without reading any literature and it was almost spooky the similarity between my actions and the examples used in the literature. Reading the material was a part of finding a beginning. I think that reading the material came at the perfect time, I had some lived experience to compare the writing to and could see elements of the process in my experience. It was almost like hindsight, I read the literature after having experienced a portion of the process and the parallel provided a frame of reference and confidence that I would eventually come through the storm to see and appreciate the rainbow.

Conclusions

Career transitions are no simple matter because they deal with people and emotion. There seem to be different degrees of transitions ranging from simple to complex. Mini-transitions happen as we navigate single events and changes in our lives

and then there are the major transitions in life, which take considerable time to address. Sometimes three or four events combine together in different areas of our lives to form a crisis point. My story for this project represented the first major transition that I have encountered. I am curious about the impact this transition will have on upcoming events and how I will react to future change. I still hear so much pain in some of the language that I have used to describe my experience and feel so much loss. Although I know that intellectually change can bring rainbows, my fear is that subconsciously I will connect transition and change with negativity and being victimized. Perhaps it is a matter of allowing more time for the remainder of the healing to occur. Grieving is so new to me.

As the end of this project nears so does the completion of my master's degree. While I look forward to guilt-free weekends with no assignments, I am hesitant to release the last link between my old life and new life. I began my master's program before leaving Rupert and it has served as a constant in my life over the past few years. Perhaps this is the next mini-transition that I will enter, what to do after a master's program.

Gelatt (1992) wrote that "what to be when grown up is less important than growing" (online). Growth has certainly been a theme of my experience and of my master's coursework. I have been able to examine theories about leadership and curriculum, experience new technologies, and discover and define personal characteristics such as learning style, thought process, and interpersonal abilities. The understanding that I have of my experience at this point contributes to my continued growth and further uncovering of who I am. I find the last few days filled with much more happiness and laughter. Some of the weight of the past seems to have lifted. It seems fitting that the final pages of this project be written in metaphor. To that end, I

offer the story of Otto, the baker, to illustrate where I believe I am in the transition process now and the direction I see my life story taking in the near future.

Otto, the Baker

Otto grew up in a small European town and was born into a family of bakers. Otto spent much of his childhood in his family's bakery doing whatever chores were assigned to him to help his father. As Otto got older he began to learn the family recipes and to help his father bake the breads, cakes, and treats that earned the bakery its famous reputation. Otto loved being in the bakery, the smell of the bread fresh out of the oven, the feel of the dough in his hands, watching his mother decorate cakes, visiting with town elders as he sold the tasty products, and most of all, the companionship with his family.

Life seemed to be laid out for Otto. Before school each day he worked to help prepare the bread dough and as soon as he finished school he ran to the bakery to clean up from the day's activity. He dreamed of the day he would take over the bakery from his father and continue the tradition. At the same time, Otto was becoming more aware of the political and economic changes that were affecting the whole of Europe. Centuries of history were being erased as new geographical boundaries were being drawn, new ways of doing business were introduced and within this new system the bakery struggled to survive. He watched his father grow older and he seemed more tired every day, there were an increasing number of wrinkles in his father's brow. Life for Otto became routine and filled with drudgery. Life at the bakery, that was once so appealing, had lost its shine for Otto. He questioned what he really wanted to do and came up with a plan.

After sleepless nights, Otto decided that to leave Europe and move to Canada. He had become a skilled baker and would surely find work there, and more importantly, the

lifestyle that he was searching for. He told his family his plan. Otto's parents were sad, excited, and proud all at the same time. Shortly after his announcement, Otto left his hometown in Europe and traveled to Canada.

The trip was much longer than Otto expected. A computer error had caused Otto no end of headaches. His original itinerary featured a fairly direct flight to Vancouver with only brief stops. As a result of the computer network problems, planes were grounded for hours and that led to a backlog of travelers demanding immediate service. Otto too demanded quick service but was told the airline was doing everything possible but he would have to wait his turn. Otto got as far as Lethbridge, Alberta and was again forced to wait at the airport for several hours before his next connection. He spotted a newspaper, the Lethbridge Herald, left behind by another traveler. Since he would soon be looking for work, he turned to the classified advertisements and began reading the postings. His eyes scanned the page and came to rest halfway down the last column; the Lethbridge Lodge had an opening in their kitchen. Otto rearranged his itinerary, called the Lodge and arranged for an interview. Otto arrived into town and went straight to the Lodge. As part of the interview, he toured the kitchen and was excited at what he saw. There was a small bakery section but there were so many more departments. Otto's appetite for the position grew. Otto was offered and accepted the position and he was eager to begin.

Every day at work was something different for Otto. The boredom that he had known in Europe was gone. There was so much to learn about this new place. The kitchen staff had different methods and processes that were unfamiliar to Otto. Rather than working individually or with one other person there were teams of people who

worked together to produce the volume of product required for the day. Otto found this challenging. He was used to doing things for himself or with his father and was unsure of the benefit of having too many cooks in the kitchen. Some of the teams did things differently than Otto and he was surprised to see that the different techniques were just as effective. Fresh baking was a feature at the Lodge so some of Otto's family recipes were incorporated into the menu with small adjustments to reflect Canadian tastes and ingredients. For the most part, Otto was very happy with his new life but there was a thorn in his side. The Lodge's philosophy was that each employee should be generalists rather than specialists in their chosen field and so there was a policy that each employee had to work in at least two areas. The Lodge management believed that this policy would promote a balanced lifestyle and develop a healthier staff. The thought of doing anything other than baking was foreign to Otto who had spent his whole life perfecting his craft. Although Otto didn't like the policy he knew that he wanted to keep the job at the Lodge.

Compounding the issue was that there were very few departments that were looking for additional staff. One of the few openings was at the front desk. Otto believed he was fairly open to change, after all he had left Europe and ventured to Lethbridge, but thought of working at the front desk was scary. Not knowing the answers to questions that guests could ask, and having to make himself so available to strangers, was daunting. Working behind the scenes in the kitchen meant that Otto had been able to hide from the guests and immerse himself in activity rather than greeting people. After encouragement from Management, Otto agreed to begin training in the lobby.

As of today, Otto has completed the orientation sessions and has agreed to continue the training. Otto is unsure of where this training will take him in the future but is willing to continue exploring this line of work.

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