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## **On the (Im)possibility and Bliss of Telling My Dad, "I Love You"**

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## On the (Im)possibility and Bliss of Telling My Dad, "I Love You"

*Daniel Wade Clarke*

**Key words:** son-  
father relations;  
personal narrative;  
research poetry;  
grief; love;  
lingering; blissful  
writing;  
autoethnography

**Abstract:** While fathers seldom say "I love you" to their son(s), there is also acknowledgment that sons rarely say it to their father. Confessions of love are like notes in a melody of previous affirmations, so what is it like for a son to say it, especially if large parts of his life are spent in "connective avoidance" with his dad? Writing on the (im)possibility of eventually saying "I love you," just before he died, I offer a "blissfully poetic" account of the experience of saying it. I also reflect on the lingering significance it has had for my experience of loss and bereavement. Although this text offers no easy formula, it ends by showing what a text of bliss might eventually look like for a son in recovery. Addressing the questions, so what? And, now what, then? implications beyond the self are also considered.

### Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
  - [2. Setup: Connective Avoidance](#)
  - [3. A \*Good Enough\* Method Poem ...?](#)
    - [3.1 Poem 1: Writing the story](#)
    - [3.2 Poem 2: Becoming](#)
  - [4. Buildup I: Disconnecting](#)
  - [5. Buildup II: Lingerings](#)
  - [6. Payoff I: A Love That Lingers](#)
  - [7. Payoff II: Possibilities in an Impossible Text](#)
  - [8. Payoff III: Bliss](#)
  - [9. Our Need, Your Need and My Need to Know ... Is Also Payoff](#)
  - [10. A Lingerings Bliss](#)
  - [11. Closing Thoughts](#)
- [References](#)
- [Author](#)
- [Citation](#)

"I celebrate writers of bliss whose texts are beyond pleasure ... 'untenable' ... cannot be held, maintained, or defended. Such texts are 'impossible' because they are what they are: open possibilities, opportunities available upon passionate encounter ... will not settle into place, not even in the moments following pursuit. Their potential insists upon continual recognition. 'What about this?' 'What about this?' they repeat like a demanding child. They offer no easy formula, no simple logic, no quick summary ... want no principles or rules to follow ... resist closure ... strive on instincts ... desire an erotics of now" (PELIAS, 2011, p.74).

## 1. Introduction

I can't remember ever telling my dad, "I love you." Not even when I was about ten, and I came home from school to learn that Ninna (Dad's mum) had passed away peacefully in a care home. I received the news seated in the corner of the living room, in an armchair beside the hi-fi cabinet and the sideboard, below the plant that grew from a cutting that my mum's dad gave my parents when I was a baby. Perched on the end of the sofa out of arms reach but next to me, in front of the TV on mute, I know now that the two meters between me and my dad must have been filled with warmth compared to the cold, emptiness he was feeling inside. [1]

I had never seen my dad cry but as he told me the news, tears came to his eyes. In the years that followed, the fierce man's man and father of my teenage years slowly became an increasingly emotionally-detached problem-drinker (PIRSKANEN, 2015), often sliding into long periods of complete withdrawal from family life, living locked away inside a cave of "cerebral reflection" (BOCHNER, 2012, p.170). I sometimes found myself wondering what life would be like if he was dead. [2]

Our communication, even during this family bereavement, was bereft of touch and comforting words such as "I love you." Why didn't I reach out to my dad, hug him and tell him "I love you"? Why didn't he hug me when he could see the emotion building up inside of me? Perhaps you just get families like that. Families who don't do "I love you's". Perhaps this is just how we do bereavement in the CLARKE's. [3]

I do not mean to say that there is necessarily an absence of love if it remains unsaid. My point is this: now I realize I missed out on opportunities to express my love to him, making him feel loved. Like TAMAS (2009, §19), "What we—what I—may need, is to write both what and how we actually feel." Anticipating grief and guarding against regret, I took it upon myself to tell him "I love you" before he died. [4]

This is a scholarly personal narrative (SPN) (NASH, 2004) focusing on the relational possibilities that can be opened up in son-father relations. I explore the fashioning of possibilities within the context of connective avoidance (DEALY, 2014), as conveyed from the vantage point of the connection I managed to develop with my dad before he died. Blending imaginative-creative writing

(CHANG, NGUNJIRI & HERNADEZ, 2013) with identity poetry (JANESICK, 2016) to create good enough—potentially lousy—autoethnographic research poetry (LAHMAN et al., 2010), my personal narrative emerges through scholarly and poetically methodological poking around in both the bliss and the love that lingers after saying it. There is an extensive conversation on the use of autoethnography (see CAMPBELL, 2017; ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2010; HOLMAN JONES, 2004) and poetic inquiry (see ADAMS, 2015; CHAWLA, 2008; JOHNSON, CARSON-APSTEIN, BANDEROB & MACAULAY-RETTINO, 2017; LANGER & FURMAN, 2004) within *FQS* to which I hope to connect with by adding to voices that seek to carve a place for lousy and good enough poetry in autoethnographic writing. A contribution of this work is that much of that process is made visible by synthesizing some of the existing writings on autoethnographic poetry and detailing my own procedures (see Section 3). [5]

In seeking a clearer understanding of the lasting effect(s), I briefly explore the "perplexing relational ride" (BERRY, 2012, p.135) that preceded its saying but aim for a fuller understanding of the relational possibilities opened up to us after it was said. My story joins persons such as TAMAS (2016, p.121), who write as a means of pushing "relational patterns to the surface to interrupt intergenerational transmission" so they will not shape my (un)born children(s) lives. Furthermore, it also joins those, like ELLIS (2007), who suggest talking that about relationships with others can contribute to our desire to become the best selves we can outside of the relationship. [6]

This research seeks to make a two-pronged contribution to the knowledge on son-father relationships. First, building on BOLEN (2014), CLARKE (2017) and DEALY (2014), I add to the growing number of beautiful son-father autoethnographies to celebrate the joy (ADAMS, 2012a) to be gained from the opening of new spaces when we find "the courage to write and to come out of the closet" (SLIEP, 2012, p.81) about saying differently. In doing so, I share my positive learnings that can emerge from autoethnographic inquiry, especially in the context of writing about death and loss (COMERCHERO, 2014). Secondly, in keeping with BERRY (2012) and TAMAS (2016), my research adds to our knowledge on son-father relationships by creating future relational possibilities, even if only momentarily, through interrupting the intergenerational transmission of relational patterns. Ultimately, I add to voices that seek to open new son-father relational possibilities that otherwise might be less visible (e.g., BERRY, 2012). [7]

I begin by locating this study within theoretical and empirical accounts of relational possibilities in son-father relations (Section 2). This is followed by an account of the methodology of the study, including two method poems on how the autoethnographic research poetry presented later in the study was created (Section 3). After that, I reveal my perplexing relational ride and how I struggled with saying "I love you" (Section 4) before showing how I experienced eventually saying it (Section 5). This leads on to a discussion (Sections 6-10) and conclusion (Section 11). [8]

## 2. Setup: Connective Avoidance

It can be seen in literature on son-father relations that sons often crave more attention from their father, and that generally, they wish their fathers had noticed them more (BOCHNER, 2012). AUSTER (1982, p.20) observes that even as an adult, "[y]ou do not stop hungering for your father's love ... ." While it is also common in this literature to observe that fathers rarely say "I love you" (ANONYMOUS, 2015, p.11), the fact that sons might also rarely say "I love you" to their fathers is often unacknowledged<sup>1</sup>. BOCHNER (2012) hints at one reason for a sons' reticence: "A man wants to love his father ... But your actions made it so difficult and confusing" (p.169). I want to write into such tension and confusion to show how connecting with my father to tell him "I love you" created new relational possibilities before he died. So how does a lover (i.e., a son who says "I love you") emerge from it "neither victor nor vanquished" (BARTHES, 2002, p.23), especially when avoiding connections (DEALY, 2014) seems to have been the earlier foundation on which that son-father relationship developed? [9]

Apart from some notable exceptions (ADAMS, 2012b; ANONYMOUS, 2015; DEALY, 2014; POULOS, 2012), the role of the son in avoiding connections has not taken center stage. More specifically, it is in situations where the role of the son's avoidance is recognized but it is the son who has never told his father "I love you" that constitutes a "crucial void" (ELLIS & ADAMS, 2015, p.265) in existing research. In this regard, the literature on son-father relations largely writes out sons *telling* fathers "I love you" whether in subtle or explicit ways. [10]

While sons have written about their agency in maintaining a disconnection (e.g., ADAMS, 2012b; BOCHNER, 2012; DEALY, 2014), from these writings it seems doubtful that they will have explicitly told their fathers "I love you." Recognizing this "critical silence" (ELLIS & ADAMS, 2015, p.265), I address this void in the "imaginative-creative writing" (CHANG et al., 2013, p.124) that follows. [11]

Despite superficial appearances, "at the deepest levels of human experience, there is story-overlap between and among all people" (BRADLEY & NASH, 2011, p.55) so, with BERRY (2012, p.135), "I write for people who might have similar experiences from which I can grow and who might benefit by the telling of mine." I am concerned, then, to ask, why was it so difficult to reach the point where I could tell my dad "I love you"? My "worry point" (PELIAS, 2016, p.25) and main focus however, is this: what having said it means for me today. [12]

Before I share poetic interludes—*in italics*—(LAHMAN et al., 2010) on how our disconnection presented itself in our relationship, why don't I also use poetry to capture the description of the method I have used in this study: why don't I write a "method poem" (JANESICK, 2016, p.70)? [13]

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1 See "THE 'I love you' EXPERIMENT" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjtP0BYOA6s>) and "A letter to ... my father, who doesn't know I love him" (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jun/18/a-letter-to-my-father-who-doesnt-know-i-love-him>) [Date of access: June 24, 2017].

### 3. A Good Enough Method Poem ...?

Densely packing a lot of information into this section, early iterations contained many ideas. So instead of making this section one whole poem, a series of shorter poems was produced to ease readability. The organization of this section then, is as follows. Following the example of FURMAN (2004), before each poem, a brief introduction is provided to help contextualize the poem for the reader. The poem is presented and then samples of reflections are given in prose to improve accessibility. [14]

At the heart of my approach to business management education is my passion for introducing and developing more imaginative-creative ways of researching and writing into research methods training. Instead of privileging only *knowledge by representation*, in my research methods classes I seek to demonstrate *knowledge by exemplification* as far as possible (CHIA & HOLT, 2008). So I will now depart from form, capturing this swarm of ideas relating to method; trying to exemplify. I wonder what a text that takes up the invitation to write lousy and good enough method poetry might look like... [15]

#### 3.1 Poem 1: Writing the story

Reading, reading, reading; writing, writing, writing (LAHMAN et al., 2010), then reading and re-reading, highlighting words, couplings, phrases and marking sections and lines in texts which struck me;  
working in the margins;  
writing down memories, making notes, recording observations,  
bringing them into the center.

Finding and re-arranging words, which seem to like, or express a love for each other. Writing can be personal and emotive, presented as poetry, play scripts, dialogues, and fiction (CHANG et al., 2013, p.125).

Drama = "setup, buildup, payoff—just like a joke" (LAMOTT, 1995, p.58).

"There must be movement" (p.59)

Short story = "ABDCE: Action, Background, Developments, Climax and Ending" (p.62).

Go along, then  
go back.  
Then move forward and outward.

Finding  
poetry in  
that story.

Read, write and interweave  
PELIAS' (2011) reading of BARTHES

throughout the scripted portions of my personal narrative to create my own autoethnographic poetry (JANESICK, 2016; LAHMAN et al., 2010).

Write. Just be a typist. "A good typist listens" (LAMOTT, 1995, p.72).

Read. Listen to the possibilities: write and re-write them, interlacing words, ideas, lines found in diaries, journal articles, performances, research projects, books.

Do this until I/you/we have enough

"fodder for a found data poem" (JANESICK, 2016, p.62). Then,

to make a *scholarly personal narrative* (NASH, 2004) of it all:

re-read, re-read, re-read, poetry in order to then re-write, re-write, re-write poetry, in order to then

"see with new eyes ... offer readers the opportunity to create a new vantage point on their own lives" (p.60).

"So what? Now what?" (BRADLEY & NASH, 2011, p.57).

Follow LAMOTT (1995):

What are readers left with? What happened? What did it mean (p.62)?

"... who they are isn't who you thought they were ... The packaging is not who that person has really been all along" (p.83).

But I couldn't have had any way of knowing this when I first started out (p.46).

Who is he / I / us? Who are you? [16]

I addressed the all-important *so what?* question by turning to LAMOTT's simple setup/buildup/payoff formula (p.58) and inserting these words into the section titles. Feeling the need to make my writing more accessible and readable and to help my reader navigate this text, although LAMOTT offers a simple formula, I agree with PELIAS (2011, p.74) in the opening epigraph where he notes impossible texts offer "no easy formula, no simple logic ... ." [17]

### 3.2 Poem 2: Becoming

In wanting to write lousy and good enough method poems, I seek to learn and share my lessons with others both in this text and in my relationships outside the one with my father. Just as above, where I asked *why don't I write a method poem?* what if we ask, what happens and what do you become if you write method poetry?

You are a scholar if you play with ideas (NASH, 2004, p.45), so join with others who are also willing to play with ideas:

My ideas are bliss *and* lingering

My means are poetic

A love that lingers constitutes change.

That which remains, bliss, moves me forward;

lingering,

is the movement.

What is the payoff?

Write to it (WYATT & GALE, 2018) by rearranging any set of given words, to create found poetry (JANESICK, 2016, p.63).

Learning new ways to relate to dad, coming to new understandings by contemplating ways to incorporate these insights into possible futures to honor this newly created life (BERRY, 2012). But never offer the final account (PELIAS, 2015) because "there are no secure foundations" (DAVIES et al., 2004, p.362) since "we don't really exist as stable units of one" (TAMAS, 2016, p.123).

Reflexivity is not an option, relational ethics neither:

"our stories inevitably implicate others" (NASH, 2004, p.136); because "when we write about ourselves, we also write about others" (ELLIS, 2007, p.14).

A fraught practice of

"inventing our own methods of meaning making as we go *and* catching ourselves in the act of engaging in old practices" (DAVIES et al., 2004, p.362).

Why disclose another's secrets? Could I have made the same point in a different way?

Have I given the other's side of the story (NASH, 2004, pp.135-136)? Have I demonstrated a command of craft (PELIAS, 2017, p.270)?

The human race is filled with passion and poetry is suited to representing ideas (JANESICK, 2016).

Writing about telling my dad "I love you" is a passionate affair and with SPN, a playful one at that. [18]

I am passionate about introducing creative methods into qualitative research courses and the use of SPN or poetry in business management education (BME) is both novel and unprecedented at the university where I teach. If my father were alive, it would be unethical to intrude into his personal experience of dying for my / our own personal purposes (ELLIS, 2007, p.14) but if my narrative serves the purpose for others and me—to become the best we can outside of my son-father relationship—and for students to see methods through fresh eyes, then potential violations of privacy will have served my narrative purposes well. [19]

#### **4. Buildup I: Disconnecting**

Relationships with fathers are a likely focus of tension (CONNELL & MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005, p.852). Of some significance, then, are the mixed messages I received around his aspirations for me. I was nearing the end of secondary school when he started telling me about the availability of engineering apprenticeships at Seaforth Docks in Liverpool. He regularly said things to me like:

"If you want to earn good money, carry on at school, go to college, and get yourself a trade at the same time, then I can put you in touch with the office. You can't go wrong because if you want to go to university, climb the ladder, go into management ..., all



the opportunities are there—you will get a good wage and they will pay for all the training you could hope for." [20]

I imagine if I had gone for an apprenticeship in the same company my dad worked for; going to university to ensure membership of that group of men who ascend over other men (CONNELL & MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005, p.844) as well as "bringing home a wage" (p.840) would have signified my becoming a "man's man" (LONG, FISH, SCHEFFLER & HANERT, 2014, p.126). [21]

But I grew up hearing stories of other men sending the apprentice to the store for a *long stand* and I didn't want this life. I couldn't see myself leading a life in which I felt fulfilled in such a job so I distanced myself strategically, dodging between the meaning and variety of masculinity my dad was offering me to suit my interactional needs. Moreover, I could see for myself the damage to laboring bodies of working class men this heavy work was exacting. In one breath my dad would sell a career on The Docks to me; in another he would remind me that "Years of heaving heavy tools and giant spanners have destroyed my back and both my arms" and "I wouldn't wish that upon anybody." [22]

A man of extremes, he often worked 16-hour shifts. Extremes of commitment in getting to work: he regularly endured industrial injuries but he never complained about anything and still went to work. I saw him hobble down the path to his car with a broken toe and then drive to work; and struggle with the simplest of tasks about the house with broken fingers or a cracked rib. Like many of the fathers in LONG et al (2014), he was a prize "breadwinner" (p.129) and a sterling "economic provider" (p.135). This determination and fortitude manifested itself in the domestic arena too. My maternal grandma would often make meat and potato pies and with the left over pastry she would make an apple and rhubarb pie. After his dinner one time, Grandma reheated the savory pie by mistake and for desert, served it to him with a mighty dollop of custard. Although he obviously knew what he was eating after his first bite, not wanting to waste food or embarrass my Grandma, he ploughed his way through it and upon finishing announced, "Well that meat and potato pie with custard was lovely." [23]

He could be extreme in his determination in other ways too. For example, in relation to drinking and smoking, he would drink whatever the seafarers who came into dock wanted to flog or exchange for cigarettes. "Any drink you can think of, name it, I bet I have drank it," he once said. As a boy I was constantly pleading with him to stop smoking. I knew it was bad for him and I didn't like the smell or how smoke filled the room. Then one day, after recognizing he was chain smoking and moaning at him to "Dad, stop smoking! When will you give it up?!!" he went one better. [24]

He said nothing and from within his nicotine high, he looked at me square in the eyes. He slowly opened the cigarette packet, rearranged to the left side of his mouth between his lips the cigarette he was already smoking, reached into the silver packet with his right hand and took another one out. He placed it between the proximal phalanx of his index and second finger of his left hand. He reached

in again and took a third cigarette. He placed that between the middle phalanx of his index and second finger. Back to the packet again, he picked out a fourth, placing that one between the distal phalanx of both fingers. At the same time as inhaling and exhaling from the cigarette wedged between pursed lips and reaching for his bronze Zippo lighter, he raised his triple *el smoko* to his mouth. Languidly raising his right hand, then pausing to dramatize the flick of his thumb, opening the Zippo to spark a light; he lit up all three in one flaming dance. Emotionless and motionlessly, four cigarettes now balanced in place, he inhaled, held his breath, then lazily exhaled. [25]

This local and internal model of provisionally accomplished risky hegemonic masculinity linking bodily practices of drinking and smoking with circuits of social practices such as working class men carrying on laboring despite their broken bodies, turned my stomach. I thought to myself,

You  
                    *won't be dancing for long if*  
you  
                    *carry on like that,*  
you  
                    *selfish*  
*bastard.*           [26]

In life, as well as in his death, he never gave up. Like AUSTER's (1982, p.66) dad, "he refused to complain about anything." He was as strong as an ox, and as miraculous as it may seem, his bones always seemed to heal within days. He had two hip replacements and on both occasions he healed remarkably well. His arthritis and two tennis-elbows however, got worse as he aged (even before cancer eventually got the better of him). I saw exactly how exhausted he was and what he did (or, rather, did *not* do) to his body when he came home from work every night of the week. So going to work on Seaforth Docks was the last thing on earth I wanted for my future. I wanted a different life and so I resisted every possibility of venturing down any path he had trodden. But as noted in BOCHNER (2012, p.169), "becoming everything you were not" or "not being like you" (DEALY, 2014, p.24), only tightens the noose—*writing against* is another form of bad faith and you can't change the past by *opposing* it. Following BOCHNER (2012), we can only learn to live *with* it. [27]

My dad's reluctance (?) and inability (?) to help me do my homework when I was a boy and his failure to teach me math at the kitchen table, together with the difficulty I had learning from him on some of the very few occasions he did try to show me *long division* is emblematic, in our case, of the impossibility of ever connecting with one another. [28]

Throughout my teenage years, I could sense his growing disappointment in me as I increasingly disconnected from him. This culminated years later in his disapproval expressed jokingly, yet meaningfully, at a small regular Saturday-night family gathering at the house I grew up in. When I appeared from my

bedroom appropriating "bits and pieces" of gay men's style (CONNELL & MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005, p.845)—about to head out for a night on the town—he declared: "Well I never thought I'd have a son who has long hair, wears a pink shirt *and* an ear-ring." Regardless of what might have been intended by this, it cut through me and like BOCHNER (whose dad hated beards too—so he grew one, 2012, p.169), his comments only made me want to buy more pink shirts, invest in a wider selection of ear-rings and grow my hair even longer.

*You seemed to dislike  
pink, long hair, and ear-rings; so  
I wore all three and hoped  
you would notice me more. [29]*

Aside from inciting these felt responses, an important realization is that our disconnection (was) *is* our way of connecting: we connected through "autobiographical occasions" (LEATHERBY & DAVIDSON, 2015, p.354) characterized by disconnection. Growing up, it felt impossible to tell my dad "I love you." In the single heart-bending beautiful moment (BOLEN, 2014; DEALY, 2014), the moment when it felt possible, this is what happened to that sense of impossibility—at least, here is how it happened as I remember it *now...* [30]

## 5. Buildup II: Lingerings

Telephone calls with family and friends. Requests for information and news on progress. "How is he?" Then at the end of every conversation: "It's important to have the conversations you have always wanted to have." "Now is the time to say all the things you have always wanted to say." "...because it is too late when he is gone!" [31]

Hospital visits. Finding the time. Living life according to visiting hours. Time is near, to leave the ward. I ask, "Dad, do you remember that it is my birthday next week? Do you know how old I am going to be?" He smiles and slowly nods. With my long-planned birthday weekend in Edinburgh coming up, I knew I wouldn't be down (to Liverpool) to see him the following week. It is hard leaving. I want to spend every last moment with him. [32]

Guilt. Feeling guilty about not knowing "where to be" (COMERCHERO, 2014, p.72) and every departure leaves the thought that *this is going to be the last time I see you alive*. So I made sure he knew exactly what my plans were:

"Nick, Jon, Rob are traveling up from Liverpool to Edinburgh on Friday night; run up Arther's Seat; get a take-away; have some beers; stay over at Alistair's—in Edinburgh. Saturday morning, mountain biking at Glentress; Saturday afternoon, watch the rugby at Murrayfield; Saturday night, beer and curry. Sunday, travel home." [33]

He got the full itinerary. It was important to me that he knew when he would be seeing me next: two weeks from now ... He paused, looked inquisitively, and

asked: "So what are you doing next weekend?" as though he hadn't listened to a word I said. His short term memory was shot but as soon as I said "rugby" he repeated more or less the full itinerary back to me. His smile told me, that he knew exactly what I was doing, and he was happy for me. [34]

My time had come. Until that point, I do not remember ever telling him "I love you." I didn't want him to die, with me never having said "I love you." Loneliness must be a horrible thing. And I didn't want him to experience my presence while feeling alone at the same time. [35]

Nerves take hold. How is he going to react? And, what is he going to say? In his bed, laying down in a daze, in a position he hadn't moved from in days. When is the right time? Just before I leave? [36]

I wait for him to come around, from his morphine haze, before I tell him, "I had best get going Dad." I hug him with both arms. Uncharacteristically for him, especially given his lack of strength, he hugs me too, with both arms. [37]

For the first time in my life; near the very end of his. I felt a full, proper hug with him.

Leaning across him,  
inclined, on  
the bed.  
My arms around him, and  
both his,  
arms wrapped  
around me ...  
Like no other, I wanted it  
to never end

This isn't all that bad.  
There,  
I said it,  
"I love you Dad"

Moving in, leaning in,  
hugging each other.  
Fabric conditioned softness of  
the hospital gown and  
warmth of his skin  
against my edgy body;  
unmet expectations subside and  
disappointments drift.

Holidays, lingering  
swimming pool chlorine,

seeping into my skin and  
there for days

Making sounds, making a memory. Saying words, lingering longer than chlorine...  
a lingering that stays  
a lingering that grows  
a lingering that lingers a little longer.  
Did I want him to hear it more than I wanted to say it?  
Is this about him, me or us?

Lingering into us  
I close my eyes  
to feel the lightness of  
his embrace.  
Pause.  
Breathe.  
Linger for a while.

Lingering moves me t/here.  
With my paper, pen, coffee and  
here with all of you<sup>2</sup>  
this proper hug lingers.

Forever lingering.  
Death ends a life it does not end a relationship, BOCHNER (2012) says.  
Lingerings of my relationship with my dad connect then and now.  
Chlorine, paragraphs, the remembered and felt embrace  
bring me back to a love longed for all my life.

Impossible to expand the lingering love to write over, on top of, beneath or against time,  
to erase those moments I wished I had another dad. And the lingering can't vitiate missed  
lingerings. But to linger some more can carry me forward.

To live with that lingering  
To live within the linger,  
your, my, our  
love lingers.

Immanent lingering;  
holding on to it. Hold it,  
linger forevermore [38]

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2 In reference to a "Shut-up-and-write" (SUAW) café meet up, held in the Pavement Café, University of Dundee, on Wednesday 5 June, 2016.

## 6. Payoff I: A Love That Lingers

I had a long drive back to Scotland. I did not want to leave. I wanted to stay with him as long as I could. Perhaps this was my moment of acceptance, the formal beginning of my anticipatory grief. Perhaps I said it then so my words would linger in his ears, in his heart, inside his body. Perhaps these lingerings pour out of me and my own body when I tell students who are facing unavoidable suffering in their own lives but they are worrying about their exams and I say: *Go be with your family... be wherever you feel you need to be and do what you need to do.* "[I]t's impossible to be everywhere at once" (COMERCHERO, 2014, p.75). [39]

POULOS (2013, p.476) suggests that writing autoethnography is a method of *relating*. Like POULOS, my writing and relating with students *inspires* me, so for sure, autoethnographic poetry is *spirited* writing of relationships. Like the words I say to my students, the words I said to my dad were spirited. They inspire me, like COMERCHERO (2014), toward "making my work more meaningful" (p.71). So these words linger: "the stubborn voice is raised which lasts *a little longer*: the voice of the Intractable lover" (BARTHES, 2002, p.22). The potential for a writing of bliss (PELIAS, 2011) insists upon continual recognition. Through daily rememberings of this encounter, I come to recognize a love that lingers within spirited encounters with others as I go about living my life. But my text won't stand still ... [40]

I am a writer of bliss whose text will not settle into place and "like a demanding child" I wonder, "*What about this?*" "*What about this?*" (PELIAS, 2011, p.74) and I want to ask: Why didn't you take this moment to tell me *I love you*? Did you hear me? Can I be sure you heard me? Do you love me? Did you ever love me? Did I hear you say, "Son, I love you too"? Am I remembering this *correctly*? Did it last as long as I recall it did? Did he know it was me hugging him? Did he feel my love? Do I even love you? How do I know? What is love, anyway? Why did I need to confess my love for you? Was I offering these words out of a selfish desire to see myself as a loving son? Was it for you, for me, or us? Answers to these whhhhha ... whhhhhe ... whhhhhy ... whhhhho ... questions are impossible. [41]

## 7. Payoff II: Possibilities in an Impossible Text

An impossible text, it is what it is and the text is "available upon passionate encounter" (PELIAS, 2011, p.74, citing BARTHES). After reading PELIAS I turn to BARTHES (2002) because I want some of whatever of it was PELIAS found there. BARTHES (2002) writes, "[I]love has two affirmations" (p.24). Devoured by desire and the impulse to be happy, there is an immediate affirmation when the lover speaks and says "I love you," then "There follows a long tunnel: ... riddled by doubts, love's *value* is ceaselessly threatened by depreciation: this is the moment of melancholy passion" (p.24). I need to know that he knew I loved him. I need to know he heard me. I need to know he felt it. I need to know he knew I meant it. Why am I doubting so much? Have I, like BARTHES (p.23), "withdrawn from all finality, ... [and] ...: I am tragic"? Like a whiplash, jerking me forward, these questions unleash a "productive ambiguity" (PELIAS, 2011, p.75):

Passionate melancholy  
A passionate encounter.  
Am I being tragic?  
A moment of passionate melancholy.  
Am I caught in a long tunnel?  
Speaking in bundles of sentences.  
Are these "verbal hallucinations" (BARTHES, 2002, pp.6-7)? [42]

## 8. Payoff III: Bliss

I want to emerge "beyond truth and falsehood, beyond success and failure... [so] I live according to chance" (BARTHES, 2002, p.23). What if he did hear me? What if he did feel it? What if he did know? What if he did say "Son, I love you too"? What if he was blissfully leaning in to me, saying "*Let us begin again*" (BARTHES, 2002, p.24)? Entwined with this blissful text, what if our entangled bodies know and feel love and "I am simultaneously happy and wretched" (BARTHES, 2002, p.22)? What if I allow myself to celebrate what can't be touched, heard, said or, held? What if I listen to PELIAS (2011) when he says:

"To celebrate what cannot be held may just mean that the notion of productive needs to be shaken loose from any cognitive sensibilities. Perhaps the most productive is a place where there are no threads to follow or patterns to trace. [...]

I celebrate writers of bliss whose texts speak the unspeakable, say the unsayable. This oxymoron, this possibility of saying what cannot be said, is an opportunity to stand within a world that cannot be [...] a world of guessing and gasping. I wander around, searching, touching the untouchable. [...]. I am an undertaker, burying what needs to be laid to rest. I am a guest entering the master bedroom. I am a lover" (p.75). [43]

Reading PELIAS's (2011) text of bliss (Chapter 7), which is inspired by his reading of "The Pleasure of Text" by BARTHES (1973), witnessing him turn into a "desperate plagiarist" (PELIAS, 2011, p.75); like him, I also seek a "plagiarism of elegance" (p.69). I blissfully surrender to his writing, seizing opportunity to move between his writing and our reading of his blissful text; I want to give myself over to being and writing *in its fashion* so that "between his assertions and our insertions" (p.77) I might write *in* a lingering bliss and be transformed by my confession of love *in* and for my dad.

I---I-o-v-e---y-o-u---D-a-d [44]

## 9. Our Need, Your Need and My Need to Know ... Is Also Payoff

I end this story by asking, what might a text of bliss that writes "I love you" mean for a son who has spent large parts of his life in connective avoidance with his dad? NASH (2004) observes how composing an alternative story for living my life can change my life (p.33) and notes that we can't change the past but we can change how we remember it (p.130). Here I use insights from my imaginative-creative writings on lingering to contemplate how my life has changed. [45]

Exiting, I pull back from my books, from my print outs, from my notes, from the screen, to see what I have written; to see what I have and to see who is left there (PELIAS, 2011). Maybe I see myself? Maybe I only see my need? But my need, is his need, is our need, to know. [46]

My need to tell my dad, "I love you," is a need to know through SPN. It is also a "relational need" (PELIAS, 2008, p.1313). As I write I recall AUSTER's need to story and with him "It occurs to me that I began writing this story a long time before my father died" (1982, p.71). Writing about my need for him to know is a relational truth that stories our relationship in a way that settles, if only for a brief moment, my need to know. "The stories we tell are only a version of the truth, maybe not even the whole truth" (PELIAS, 2008, p.1311) and "the act of writing alters the way we think about what we know and how we know it" (PELIAS, 2016, p.25). I write because I want to be happy, knowing that my heart-felt confession was felt but the narrative "won't hold still" (ibid.). My need to know is our need to archive and to know a relational truth about what happened in this "heart-bending" moment (WHITEMAN, 2010, p.328). [47]

Ensnared in the comfort of your embrace, the years of frustration, hatred, missing you, problem-drinking, detachment, withdrawal, connective avoidance, dreaming and longing for another dad—a nurturing one and wishing you were somebody else or that you were dead—slipped away from me. A weight lifted. There was me, on my drive to Scotland, and the car felt much lighter. Feeding an expanding sense of connection, one I'd longed for all my life. We did it. In death. You're gone. Your life is over but your love lingers on. A love that lingers ... tears ... awash with tears ... when I revisit that place ... I realize I began writing this story a long time ago and it will no doubt continue long in to the future. [48]



## 10. A Lingering Bliss

For NASH (2004, p.100), we all seek wholeness (and bliss] in our personal and professional lives; so now I end with what is ahead of me, what bliss means for me. Again, with JANESICK (2016, p.71) I ask, "why not use poetry to ... conclude"?

The man's man,  
of my teenage years  
has softened

I am a  
different reader, and  
different writer of a  
new story;  
the one who wants to redefine what connection might mean,  
one who wants to write in bliss, in a poetics of response.

I long for a new space, a place to  
be rather than a place to see. And in such a longing, maybe, for just one single,  
impossible moment,  
I am BARTHES.

I am my Dad leaning towards me, saying  
"Son, I love you too" [49]

## 11. Closing Thoughts

NASH (2004, p.29) notes that "[s]cholarly personal narrative writing can take many different forms" and "whatever its unique shape and style of communicating to readers," its "central purpose is to make an impact on both writer and reader, on both the individual and the community." Here I have expressed what saying "I love you" means for *me* and what it meant *after* saying it (i.e., the individual). And weaving in stories from readers / scholars who write about connective avoidance (DEALY, 2014) and "perplexing relational ride[s]" (BERRY, 2012, p.135), I have sought to connect with the community of scholars. [50]

Another aspect of community is the student body that I serve as the BSc Business Management program director, a management learning educator and a research methods lecturer. I can now be more empathetically-emotionally available to student advisees who might be struggling with anticipatory grief and worrying about where to be (COMERCHERO, 2014) and, I now realize that although I began writing this story a long time ago, I continue writing this story when I say "go do and say whatever and be wherever you need to be." [51]

Additionally, while it may not be possible to be passionate about every method I introduce students to, I can be passionate about some. This is passion-based research/teaching that (hopefully) helps to 1. illustrate knowledge (of method)

through exemplification (CHIA & HOLT, 2008), 2. infect students with enthusiasm and 3. inspires students to aspire to nurture and develop new ways of knowing. [52]

Anupholsteraphobia describes feelings of inadequacy and failure and fear of not covering all the material (BRICKSON, 2011). I can now speak first-hand about method poetry and SPN in my qualitative research methods classes, encouraging students to embark on their own journey with SPN. Talking about relationships with others to become the best selves we can outside of the relationship is *work worth doing* (CONKLIN, 2012). Focusing on intersubjectivity yields to the recognition that being the best selves we can is not just about two individuals interacting but more crucially about recognizing that we are always in relation with others (CUNLIFFE, 2016). [53]

What has emerged from this personal narrative, then, applies to saying, writing and knowing. Imaginative-creative writing has made blissfully real a love that lingers, adding to the diversity of ways of saying and doing "I love you." Are you blissful enough too, to do/think/say/write...? [54]

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