

**Women Activists:
Lives of Commitment and Transformation**

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Abstract

This thesis is based on a life history study of two women involved in activism for social change. Broadly guided by life history methodology and feminist and constructivist postmodern theories and approaches, this inter-disciplinary research explores experiences and stories in the lives of these women that evoke the transformative journeys of women's long-term commitments to social change activism, and that portray ways in which personal and social transformation interweave. The stories illuminate how individual courses of action both resonate with and diverge from meta-narratives of social movements, and how they reflect and resist the contexts in which those courses evolve. Reflection on the process of constructing the stories reveals the effects on the participants and the researcher of the inter-subjective realm from which life history arises. The study's practical purpose relating activism, transformative education and postmodernism also leads to experimentation with creative texts that at once provide educational tools and invite participation in the interpretive process. Overall the thesis melds more traditional approaches with more unconventional ones. The study is both provocative and supportive of those working for social change through transformative education and activism.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Virtue and Willard Hanson, in recognition of four decades or so of unwavering support. Thank you too, for all the help with childcare, food, transportation and all the other oft-forgotten details.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is based on a life history study of two Euro-Canadian¹ women involved in activism for social change. Broadly guided by life history methodology and feminist and constructivist postmodern theories and approaches, this inter-disciplinary research explores stories in the lives of these women that evoke the nature of their long-term commitments to social change and portray ways in which stories of personal and social transformation interweave. The stories illuminate how individual courses of action both resonate with and diverge from meta-narratives of social movements, and how they reflect and resist the contexts in which those courses evolve. The study is at once provocative and supportive of those working for social change through transformative education and activism.

1.1.1 Organization of the Thesis

In this first chapter I situate the study: describe the study's overall context and rationale; suggest the personal and academic relevance of the study; and pose the study's purpose and questions. Chapter two discusses concepts and theories on social movements, activism, and transformative education that sit in the background of the study. I follow by relating a personal and literature-based journey through the epistemological and methodological assumptions and choices I made to arrive at my variant of feminist postmodern life history in Chapter three. Chapter four describes the methods of the study. Chapters five and six consist of the stories of Dianne and Nancy. Their stories are both situated through prefaces that highlight features of our relationships and the inter-subjective nature and context of the telling. Chapter seven reflexively explores the effects of the research process on the research relationships at its core. Chapter

¹ Euro-Canadian/American cultural perspectives are the prominent lens through which the study is viewed; I am Euro-Canadian, as are the study participants. (One participant has dual Canadian and American citizenship.)

eight explores some creative ways of thinking about aspects of personal and social transformation and of life-ways² of activism suggested in the stories, and considers the study's relevance for educators and activists. Chapter nine offers closure.

1.1.2 A Reader's Guide

In the thesis, there is a melding of more traditional approaches with more unconventional ones. To help the reader, it may be helpful to think about the thesis in terms of it being situated philosophically and epistemologically between modernism and postmodernism, being located between and beyond disciplinary borders, and being directed at multiple audiences. To illustrate the differences in orientation and emphases among various forms of research inquiry, I include a chart in Appendix A that conceptually maps where the study takes place. The chart is useful as a thumbnail sketch or starting point to contrast the differing but non-exclusive emphases of empirical, interpretive, liberatory or aesthetic inquiry, and to locate the modern and postmodern (e.g. social constructivist, feminist, arts-informed) approaches that inform this study.

Using both academic prose as well as creative literary devices, the various chapters, sections, footnotes and prefaces illustrate the creative potential in a study that is situated among various forms of inquiry that draw on several disciplines and that potentially speak to multiple audiences. Chapters one through four are written in academic prose; chapters five and six are more accessible stories; chapters seven through nine fall in-between, as combinations of academic prose and creative writing. Overall the thesis organization and its component parts reflect some of the tensions and possibilities that exist simultaneously in such in-between locations.

² Briefly, the concept of 'life-way' considers an overall pattern of public and private involvements – in work, family, and political life – within one biography. An activist's life-way involves patterns of practice of activism throughout his/her life course. The concept is explored in more detail in the following chapter.

1.2 Study Context

1.2.1 The Challenge

As the globalization project unfolds, it exposes its bankruptcy at the philosophical, political, ecological and economic levels. The bankruptcy of the dominant world order is leading to social, ecological, political and economic non-sustainability, with societies, ecosystems and economies disintegrating and breaking down.

The philosophical and ethical bankruptcy of globalization was based on reducing every aspect of our lives to commodities and reducing our identities to merely that of consumers on the global market place. Our capacities as producers, our identity as members of communities, our role as custodians of our natural and cultural heritage were all to disappear or be destroyed...Our capacities to give and share were to shrink. *But the human spirit refuses to be subjugated by a world view based on the dispensability of our humanity* (1, p.115, my emphasis added).

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students (2, p.13).

All of us involved in the work of education for social change are immersed in a grand and challenging project. We must be attentive to the realities of the growing social, economic, gender and cultural inequalities in the world, while affirming, as both bell hooks and Vandana Shiva do, the spiritual and intellectual growth and well-being of ourselves, our students and others in our communities of practice. We are challenged in these times to be openly critical of the failures of the colonialization cum globalization project of the modern world, yet are called upon to foster hope to counter the widespread powerlessness and cynicism it has spawned. In other words, we are called to find ways of engaging ourselves and our students in both personal and social transformation. As critical educators and researchers, part of our challenge involves finding meaningful ways to create or pose alternatives and simultaneously to reposition ourselves and our work in support of change.

This study commences from the recognition that in all parts of the world, small groups and large movements of committed people actively engage in social change daily; sometimes they do so over a life-time. The nature of their commitment and the meanings of their experiences can be heard in the stories they tell about their activist experiences, their personal lives, their hopes and their dreams. This project stems from my desire to “release those voices into the academic landscape” (3) and to evoke a sense of what underlies or accompanies such experiences, particularly women’s experiences of activism.

The study is premised on the belief that stories of women who have dedicated years of their lives toward social change can be inspiring, provocative and exemplary for students and educators alike. Narrative research and the stories it produces can help us understand the nexus between personal and social change in a way that other qualitative research methodologies may not. Stories can evoke the personal lived meanings behind such concepts and theories as activism, social change, social movements or transformation, extending our holistic understanding and capacity to ‘bring alive’ those concepts. Stories of activists can inspire a reader’s personal agency and can add to the repertoire of activist strategies by example, hence working to extend the scope and range of possibilities for work in particular community-organizing sites. Stories encompass social contexts as well as experiential worlds (4) offering alternatives to theoretical representations of activism and social transformation. Representing individual courses of action both affected by and affecting the local context, stories are sometimes exemplary of and other times outside of the meta-narratives³ and grand theories of

³ The concept of meta-narratives comes from postmodern scholarship and is particularly associated with the French philosopher Lyotard. Meta-narratives are considered a form of total philosophies, schema or frames of history, which make ethical and political prescriptions for society and which influence the adjudication of what is considered Truth. Meta-narratives roughly equate to the everyday notions societies are founded on, or the commonplace ideas that frame phenomena or processes in that society. The meta-narratives of the Enlightenment societies were about

social movements (5) that typically describe those courses. Overall this research acknowledges and creatively evokes the uneven path of activists' personal life histories. Solnit captures the idea:

Causes and effects assume history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension. Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later; sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal and change comes upon us like a change of weather. All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope. (6, p.4).

1.2.2 Study Relevance

This study acknowledges current global trends that are inviting us to consider the links between personal and social transformation in studies of social activism. It explores those links using a feminist inter-disciplinary approach, hence avoiding the exclusionary logic of the largely andro-centric and discipline-specific study typical of this field. In this study, life histories of women activists evoke a holistic sense of long-term commitments to activism, and portray personal experiences and aspects of social change activism. The approach and methodology allow for a creative exploration of such experiences, and provide a way to appreciate the influence of gender, class and race/ethnic diversities among social activists without recourse to simplistic or additive formulas based on that 'holy trinity'. The study engages the idea that all people are makers of history irrespective of race, class and gender, and that part of the radical intellectual's task is to make room for multiple voices and versions of history. Departing from plural disciplinary, epistemological and theoretical positions, the study is thus consistent with a call by analysts of social movements to engage a "refusal of higher authority" in studies of social

grand quests, for example. The progressive liberation of humanity through science is also a meta-narrative, as is the "discovery" or "conquest" of the Americas.

activists as a way to shift the “center of gravity of knowledge, understanding and judgement to the participants” (7, p.432).

As noted above, participants of social movements against corporate globalization claim the human spirit as a vital place of resistance, power and hope. In the West, the re-appearance of personal and spiritual dimensions of activism⁴ in tandem with social change agendas is occurring within a generalized trend that is seeing unprecedented numbers of people on multiple kinds of spiritual quests or “walkabouts” (8). Indeed increasing numbers of people working in social movements describe activism as inherently personal or spiritual engagement in what ecologist Thomas Berry (9) refers to as the “Great Work.” Yet given popular religious associations with the term spirituality, many activists resist describing activism as spiritual work. Although the study does not pose that activist work for social change is primarily a personal or spiritual endeavour, it recognizes the growing critique of the modernist, reductionist or patriarchal assumptions that often underlie theories of activism (10,11) and includes alternative perspectives.

Several recent American and Canadian studies on the nature of commitment to social change or activism appear to support the idea that long-term commitment to work for social change can be understood in terms of emotion, spirituality, vocation, transformative learning or “a very personalized sense of political responsibility” (12, p.3). The studies focus on topics similar to those of this study including: commitment to the common good over time (13); the role of transformative learning and self-renewal in sustaining environmental non-profit activism (14); the role of emotion and morality in protest and social movements (15,16); spirituality as a

⁴ To distinguish my use of terms, ‘spirituality’ here refers more broadly to a sense of interconnectedness with all living things or a sense of personal meaning underlying material experiences (14,17). I expand on this notion in the following chapter.

motivator of commitment to transformative education (17) or to social activism (18,19); the role of creativity in sustaining activist commitment to pacifism (20); and personalism and political commitment among environmental activists (12). Most often the studies utilize standard qualitative research methods, including open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviewing, thematic and categorical analysis, phenomenological approaches and a priori discipline-specific theoretical framing. Although useful and informative, such studies potentially pre-empt more integrated understandings or portrayals of lived experience outside of existent discipline-specific frameworks and dominant intellectual traditions. A particularly weak aspect of most of these studies and the related social movement and transformative education theories they call on is their lack of attention to gender and gendered lives⁵. As McAdam notes:

Teasing out the generic dynamics of individual activism [... the theories] have almost totally ignored gender's impact. In doing so, [they] have perpetuated a fiction: that recruitment to, participation in, and the consequences of activism are somehow experienced in the same way by all participants. Clearly this is false (21, p.1214, 1234).

The more open-ended process of story-telling and story-making involved in this life history project adds another dimension to current writing on women activists' lives. By releasing women activists' voices "into the academic landscape" (3), this study offers alternative narratives of activism that both illustrate and speak to 'collective meta-narratives' or 'grand theories' about social movements, raising new questions. The study also reveals how the multi-faceted and intersectional nature of race, class and gendered inequalities at the root of activist struggle are, paradoxically, ubiquitous within the lives of women activists and in community activism. In multiple and nuanced ways, the research contributes to understanding core concerns of feminism regarding social, political and material inequities in women's lives.

⁵ Many feminist scholars have noted such omissions. (See special volumes on the theme in *Gender and Society* (36,43,220) and other works (3,21,27,38,221,222). I offer additional feminist critique of social movement theories in chapter two.

The study also holds practical relevance to the work of transformative educators and activists. The stories and the creative experimentation that arise from them add to current repertoires of activist teaching tools. The narratives offer holistic portrayals of gendered life-ways of practicing commitments in particular contexts of activism. The literary experiments suggest aspects of long-term commitment and transformation useful for reflection on the meaning of those concepts. Potentially in these ways, the study offers educators tools to both incite and inspire activism. But in addition to its academic relevance, the study holds a great deal of personal relevance as well.

Having worked in women's health promotion, transformative adult education and various kinds of community or social movement activism for over two decades, I was deeply interested in reflecting generally on how each aspect informs the other. More specifically I was interested in exploring how commitments to work for social change might be fostered in the students I now teach in my current occupation as educator of health and human service professionals in a university setting. I wanted to articulate what commitment might look and feel like in ways that made the possibilities of joining in long-term social change efforts come alive for students. As an academic, I was troubled by the lack of particular women's voices, personal gendered accounts and other diversities in the scholarly writing on motivation and commitment to social change activism and on personal transformation. I was also uninspired by the styles of academic literature on social movements that seemed too often to essentialize⁶ or objectify social actors thereby stultifying the personally creative and socially meaningful work that social change activism can entail. I wanted to write *something else* on this topic. Finally, as an activist and a

⁶ Essentialism is the notion that one woman's or one activist's experience "can be described independently from other aspects of the person and that there is an 'essence' of that experience. An essentialist outlook assumes that the experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical political and personal contexts"(223).

mother, I have personally sensed how gendered, cultured and class-based life experiences are woven into the forms that community activism takes for women, and how activism can ebb and flow over the lifespan of ourselves and our children.

In the end, as I had suspected, I discovered stories of practices, paradoxes and perspectives both similar and different from mine and from the extant theories, which suggest ways of knowing this topic that I had not otherwise located in writing. I believe that these two women's stories and their creative re-interpretations offer a way of knowing about activist commitment and transformation with a kind of subtle complexity not often explored in academic texts. Listening to and experimenting with the stories, I think it is possible to hear and portray some "quiet moments of incredible shifts" (2) that provide an understanding of how particular commitments to social change activism can shift and transform over time.

In summary, it is the gendered socio-economic inequalities and concomitant human suffering, violence and ecological destruction in the world set against the growing social movements for radical and participatory democracy, increasingly imbued with spiritual and personal overtones that make up the macro global context for this study. The global context gives particular urgency to academic study of topics related to personal and social transformation, but calls us to learn about and create alternatives and to reposition the hegemony of the academy in the act of so doing. The study also holds personal relevance, for it has emerged from life experience. It is a study that elicits the power of narrative and of creative writing to evoke the lived connections between the personal and the social meanings of experience; a study based on the strength of narrative to understand the relation between the "particular and the general" (22); a study that offers alternative ways of understanding how a

woman's personal life can shape and be shaped by her involvements in activism and by the contexts in which her activist work for social change is embedded.

1.3 Study Purpose

Broadly, the goal of the study is to inform and inspire commitments to social change activism and to improve practices of critical and transformative education. My personal and professional connections to that goal are already noted. Of course, I also carried out this study for a particular audience and for a particular purpose that is perhaps less grand in intent; specifically, the study was carried out as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD. I expose that purpose not to bemoan or apologize, but because I believe it to be enormously influential on the product.

In the study I explore in-depth the lives of two women activists in order to learn about and to write into the academic landscape their particular and personal life stories that relate contexts, perspectives and paradoxes that underlie or accompany sustained commitments to activism for social change. In other words, the study seeks to illuminate life-ways of long-term activists and to consider how those affect and are affected by the particular contexts within which those courses evolve. I purposefully adhere to a postmodern telling of "microhistories – local, provisory and limited stories" (23) in order to portray stories of lives in ways often marginalized vis-à-vis the grand theories or meta-narratives (5,24) of activism. To the stories, I add contextual prefacing, a reflexive interpretation of the research process, and several re-inscriptions of aspects considered particularly salient. I do so through evocative experimentation with creative writing. Together, these are the multiple ways of disturbing the categories into which activists in social movements are often thrust, and of posing creative alternatives. Accordingly, the study recognizes and validates women's stories as epistemologically important

tools for understanding and knowing about activism, while noting that stories are at once problematic, purposive and partial (25). In these ways the study offers multiple nuanced, subtle, simple and paradoxical portrayals of complex personal and gendered life experiences of activists that sometimes are rendered invisible in existent literature. Finally, related to its goal, the study's practical purpose is to locate inspiring or problem-posing teaching tools.

I hope that the study will offer its readers opportunities to engage critically with the topic, with the stories within stories, and with Dianne, Nancy and myself as co-creators of this work. I also hope that the stories and their interpretations will broaden or deepen ways of knowing about the nature of lives of commitment to social change, and evoke understanding or heighten sensitivities to underlying or accompanying qualities and contexts that both challenge and sustain such work.

1.4 Study Questions

I modified the questions a number of times as the study evolved, reflecting new understandings and re-interpretations of the data gathered and of the methodology that underlies the study. The following questions remained salient based on the overall study goal, on the nature of the data gathered, on the issues raised by the women in their stories, and on my own academic learning imperatives. As a life history project the key question was the first. Other questions were supplementary.

1. What does a woman activist's life history reveal about her sustained commitment to activism over time? What aspects of her life and the contexts of her life are construed as influential on her commitment over time?
2. What do the stories suggest about personal and social transformation? What do the stories suggest about life-ways of activism and long-term commitment?

3. What are the effects of co-constructing life histories on the researcher and researched?
4. What is the relevance of the study for activists and critical / transformative educators?

2. Chapter Two: Background Concepts and Theories

2.1 Introduction

In conventional approaches to research, an extensive review of published academic literature often precedes data gathering. In a postmodern approach, the notion of literature is more open-ended, the place of literature is less prescriptive, and its use and features depend upon the nuances and emergent issues of a particular study (22). In this particular study, the life history methods I choose and the study's purpose are inextricably intertwined. That is, although personal and social transformation and women's long-term commitment to activism are topics of interest in the lives of these women, the intent of the study is not to test or fit current theories of commitment or transformation with those stories. Nor is this study's intent to pose new theories based on discernible common perspectives and patterns across participants. Rather, the study presents micro-histories and reflexive and creative interpretations that offer epistemologically distinct and more evocative presentations of life-ways of commitment. Hence a review of the literature and the subsequent discovery of a 'gap' are inconsistent with the approach used. Nevertheless, writing this thesis for an academic purpose and audience necessitates bringing theoretical aspects of the study to the fore, illuminating contributions that other academic work has made in this area of study. Thus, in this chapter I offer somewhat selective and broad explanations of complex theories, terms and concepts related to activism and transformation that are published in the academic literature, and propose several 'theoretical transgressors' making their way into this area of study. In the next chapter I situate the thesis methodologically. In other chapters, I attempt to integrate relevant commentary from various other literatures, hopefully all helping to place rather than displace the women's stories and their interpretations.

While I recognize that stories cannot be taken for granted and do not present a self-evident truth, neither do the concepts and theories presented herein on activism, commitment, and personal and social transformation, present a ‘gold standard’. All of the definitions and the theoretical assertions I privilege here can be and are contested. Further, academic readers may find that within their particular discipline or disciplinary tendency, the concepts hold somewhat different importance or meanings.

I include here a broad selection of topical literature delimited mainly by three disciplines of significance for studying activist commitment and transformation: sociology (social movements); education (transformative education); and women’s and gender studies (inter-disciplinary critique of social movements theories). I also draw from additional inter- or trans-disciplinary literature⁷. Hopefully the multi- and inter-disciplinary nature of this chapter “constructs an intellectual space in which scholars and students with different disciplinary orientations (or none at all) learn each other’s language...[as well as] alternative reading and viewing strategies” (26, p.114-115).

I also selected these particular definitions, concepts and theories therein because they enter into and influence narratives on activism in visible and invisible ways. The social movements literature, for example, infiltrates the discourse on social activism both in and outside of universities. The two theories related to personal and social transformation that I cite influence both the understanding and practices of activist /educators. In many ways, the ideas

⁷ I am attempting to use both multi-disciplinarity and inter- or trans-disciplinarity here. ‘Multi’- refers to the use of literature from more than one individual discipline. The notion of inter- or trans-disciplinarity presents work between and among the disciplines that crosses and transgresses boundaries (26). Trans-disciplinary also refers to some less specialised or popular literature cited herein. I recognize that we are all trained in particular ways of thinking that influence the way we define things, My training and experience in health promotion, international development and adult education – all of which include non-academic actors and inter-disciplinary sites of practice – influenced my choices.

and theories I make note of here are a sampling of the grand theories or meta-narratives related to activism and transformation that I refer to in the body of the thesis.

The reader is cautioned that both the breadth and brevity of this section may lead to an over-simplification of these concepts and theories and to an accompanying loss of nuance⁸. Cited references and footnotes intend to embellish as well as counter some of my own assertions.

2.2 Social Movements and Activism

The social movements (SM) literature provides theoretical insight on the processes and features of social movements, and suggests overall patterns of recruitment in those movements. SM theories are generally not as helpful in understanding the nuances of long-term engagement of the individual activists that comprise movements. Nevertheless, because of the influence of SM theories on popular images, understandings and definitions of activism – in other words their influence on the creation and diffusion of popular meta-narratives of activism – they sit as backdrop and entry point to discussions of activist commitment. In this section I outline major ideas and shifts in the theories over time, name several noted problems of understanding (especially women's) activism through the lens of SM theories, reflect on the influence of SM on common and persistent definitions of activism, and elucidate the characteristics of activism used to initially delimit participation in the study.

The oft-cited narrative of social movements describes how the progression of thought in North American and European social movement theories mirrors that of other Western sociological and political theories, in the past reflecting the nature of popular contention as being class-based and structurally and economically determined, and more recently including diverse forms of political and cultural critique. Particularly following on and arising from feminist and

⁸ I am also cognizant of the Western origin of much of the literature on social movements and activism cited herein, and recognize the inevitable errors and omissions that come with that.

other social movements of the 1960s, discussions and debates on cultural politics and theories of collective identity infiltrated the scholarly writing on social movements. At the same time the debates jettisoned social movements into a recognized sub-field of sociology⁹.

Most authors contend that by the 1980s, two major theoretical trends for the scholarly study of social movements had emerged. In Europe (and later in a modified way in Latin America) the new social movements (NSMs) theories prevailed, while North American theorists favoured Resource Mobilization theories. NSMs are usually depicted as theories of the ‘why’ of social movements. That is, they seek to answer questions of the cultural factors and processes that lead to the construction of a collective or movement identity, which in turn is considered the “beating heart” of social movements (27). The movements claim to be ‘new’ in the sense that they reject the meta-narrative of state-oriented and class-based struggle (which are widely considered dominant features of earlier movements). Differentiating themselves from the turn of the century labour and socialist movements, for example, NSMs include the civil rights, peace, feminist, environmental, ethnic, indigenous, and gay rights movements. The theories pose that NSMs’ struggles have shifted the focus to extending the “political and cultural spaces” (28) for marginalized groups, enabling them to redefine, transform and re-inscribe the meaning of politics and of life. Diani’s definition of (new) social movements is instructive: “A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity” (29, p.13).

⁹ Of course, the era also influenced related sub-fields of study and theories on, for example, collective action, political contention, civic engagement, volunteerism, public spaces, identity politics etc. in diverse fields such as social psychology, anthropology, women and gender studies, native studies and political science. To delimit this brief introduction to activism I focus mostly on SM theory from sociological perspectives, adding the contributions of feminist inter-disciplinary critique.

Resource mobilization (RM) and political process theories are usually portrayed as being focused on the ‘how’ of (the same) movements. They consider how organizational aspects, such as goals, strategies, interests or actions are determined by a movement’s access to resources. Resource mobilization theories grew out of a rejection of collective behaviour theories wherein movement activists were portrayed as deviant and irrational. RM theories instead draw on instrumental rationality, a trend influenced by rational choice theories in psychology (30-32). Originally RM theorists considered the idea that activists engage in movements as individual rational actors seeking a ‘free ride’ or, in other words, a low risk way of addressing social grievances (33-35). As the theories matured they grew to encompass and to refocus on the organizational nature of collective strategies and actions. However the idea of participants as rational actors assessing costs and benefits still permeates the RM discourse (30). RM theorists came to regard collective action as an expression of interest group politics played out by socially connected groups with movement ‘entrepreneurs’ or leaders holding the job of mobilizing resources and channelling discontent into organizational forms (34). In RM theory, the success of social movements would be measured more by structural or policy reform than cultural transformation.

Increasingly scholars grew to reject the separation of foci suggested in these ‘structure vs. culture’ conceptualizations of movements and sought theoretical insights through combinations of aspects from both¹⁰. Feminist scholars worked to document feminist movements in a parallel track, but arguably it was feminist critique that played a key role in forging links between the two trends (36). According to Edelman, the synthesis which emerged toward the end of the

¹⁰ For a more thorough exploration of these theories and their comparison and critique see also McAdam (38), Polletta (64), Buechler (224), Tarrow (225), Cohen (226), Diani (29), or Edelman (34).

1990s related how political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing all influenced movement construction and actions (34). Framing was particularly useful as “a category encompassing the ways in which collective identities arise, as well as the interpretative, discursive, and dramaturgical practices that shape movement participants’ understandings of their condition and of possible alternatives” (34, p.291).

More recently, scholars studying grassroots movements for radical democracy, usually associated with anti-corporate globalization, turned their attention beyond the rather dichotomized US and European theories and fomented a burgeoning scholarship on transnational activism¹¹, a term influenced by SM theorists from the global South, and by feminists worldwide. Also a contested term, transnational activism seeks to elucidate the ‘local in the global’ by illuminating cultural modes of struggle which suggest the webs of connection among the micro, meso and macro levels of political organizing, and which re-inscribe the political and cultural connections between, among other things, the private and public spaces where women participate as activists (37). These theories potentially offer both a more detailed and robust sense of how the local and global forces for social change interact¹²; how particular, situated, local and experiential forms of activism both differ and converge in communities everywhere; and how class, race and gender infiltrate and intersect with and within all movement activities, structures and social relations (37).

In spite of overall changes to the modes of conceptualizing social movements and social movement activists, conceptual problems arising from the “periodization” of social movements

¹¹ Theories of transnational activism are also influenced by but not the same as the body of work sometimes known as radical democratic theories, e.g. Habermas (227) and Mouffe (228).

¹² Although similar to the critique of ‘new’ in NSM theories, transnational theories are critiqued as ahistorically presenting this as a ‘new’ idea.

are ongoing (34). Among the problems cited is the problem of ‘hardening of the categories’. The idea refers to symbolism used to describe aspects of particular historical movements that persists beyond the movement, becoming reified in popular uses and definitions of activism. A most notable example is the deterministic or essentialist representations of movements and movement actors drawn from the stylized view of primarily U.S.-based movements of the 1960s (33,38), which equate social movements with disruptive protest in public settings, national or state-centric political struggles, urban or campus-based activities and claim making by disadvantaged minorities (38). By extrapolation, activism in movements becomes associated with oppositional politics wherein the state or its associated structures are challenged by groups with common experiences of oppression.

Although many authors continue to argue that even in this current era of transnational politics and global political movements the state remains an important referent (27,34), the presence or absence of ‘state’ in sociological definitions of activism is increasingly contested from both below and beyond. That is, some argue that a focus on the state tends to abnegate the growing trend toward protest aimed at both local practices and supranational private entities (3,15,37-40). The urban bias in SM theories and ‘protest’ as a common feature are also increasingly contested in recognition of the exponential kinds of strategies associated with activisms, the growing trend toward institutionalization or professionalization of all activisms including feminism (41), the locations of such work which are equally broad (33,41) and which include millions of people in rural movements operating globally (27,34). Critics highlight that the urban, oppositional and state-centric features are the easiest to see and measure and thus are (still) over-represented in academic discourse on activism (15,40) even though they may or may not have ever fully captured movement qualities (38,42). Further, they tend to negate the diffuse

locations and work of women activists (3,21,43) and to trivialize non-rational and non-public aspects of collective (inter)actions (15,16,40,42).

Increasing numbers of scholars and social actors suggest that social movement activism -- and particularly the nature of recruitment, participation and sustained commitment to activism -- requires something beyond the dominant and somewhat dichotomised bodies of theories that by and large still focus on the publicly visible aspects of movements and the presumed individualist rationality of activist recruitment, identity formation and participation at their root. (See particularly: McAdam (21,38,42,44); Jasper (40); Goodwin (16); Polletta (45-47); Geoghegan and Cox (33); and Hercus (31).)¹³ As mentioned previously, feminists are among those at the forefront of the critique, calling for attention to the class, race and gendered nature of all institutions, structures and internal dynamics that interact with and within social movements.

For example, Kruzynski (3) notes several important problems with the literature. First she notes that attention to the gendered, classed and racialized 'nature' of activist involvement has been noted only recently by scholars of social movements in spite of the overwhelming evidence that "women are the backbone of community... across time, and irrespective of ethnicity/race or class" (3, p.15). Second, she notes this lack of attention has perpetuated an important fiction about what constitutes women's political participation. That is, given the propensity of SM theories to focus on formal politics or social movements outside of the community sphere they have also perpetuated the myth that women, particularly low-income women, whose politics are located in the local community sphere, are not political. Thus an error of omission occurs in that

¹³ I confine this discussion of background literature to social movements and activism, rather than including volunteerism, civic engagement, collective action or other related terms that incorporate forms of involvement in community. Those literatures often interact with and sometimes encompass activist work, but not exclusively. Although the scope of that literature is much broader than that required as background here, a study of activism *per se* would benefit from their inclusion.

social movement theory has tended to ignore the fact that “community organizing and the work done by women in community often provides the networks which form the bases of social movements by tying them to the grassroots” (3, p.16). Kruzynski’s work sheds light on the ubiquity of gender, class and ethnicity/race relations in all forms of activism, and concludes that attention to those relations are needed at all times and not only when women or people of color are involved.

Feminist theories of activism also highlight the need to research the multi-faceted and interconnected nature of community and transnational activism, as well as situated and particular instances of women’s lived experiences of activism i.e. including the everyday lives of women as a locus of study of collective action. Speaking back to social movement theories, feminists continue to seek alternative constructs, theories and modes of representation of movements and the activists within them.

Disheartened by the binary oppositions in social movements’ theory -- for example the distinction between expressive and instrumental politics, identity and strategic activism, cultural and structural change, and rational and emotional action – [feminist scholars] suggest that the key to understanding not only gender movements but social movements more generally is to develop a more nuanced set of constructs that gets beyond these dichotomies (36, p.5).

This project represents a small contribution to the reconstruction of submerged histories of women activists in both gender-based and non-gender specific movements and in community politics, calling attention to women activists’ “everyday lives and experiences, their needs, perceptions, emotions and ideas, considering these to be critical areas of study in their own right” (27, p.20).

2.2.1 Activism: A Working Definition

Many of the noted gaps and critiques I outline are not new. Over the past forty years important theoretical debates have expanded the repertoire of tools for thinking about social

movements and activists within them. However, popular sources illustrate the diffusion and persistence of common yet contested ideas in mainstream use and understanding. According to such popular sources as Wikipedia:

activism, in a general sense, can be described as involvement in action to bring about change, be it social, political, environmental, or other change. This action is in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial argument. In contemporary use, ‘activism’ tends to be a word associated with the actions and ideologies of those on the political left (48).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines activism as "a doctrine or policy of advocating energetic action" (49), and an activist as an advocate of activism. The Random House Dictionary complements this definition, identifying activism as "involvement as a means of achieving political or other goals, sometimes by demonstrations, protests, etc." (50). Overall, the commonly cited feature of activism continue to be taking sides on issues, group-oriented actions, grassroots organizing or voluntary involvements (51) and “direct and militant action” to achieve a political or social goal (52).

In practice and in the body of this work I generally refer to activism and activists as inclusive of people involved in collective efforts that actively work to create liberatory political, cultural and social change – regardless of how or where they occur. Nevertheless, for purposes of communicating how I would narrow the potential pool of activists, I initially highlighted three features of activism that participants were asked to self-identify around: 1) involvement in organizing community-based (or grassroots), group-oriented activity that promotes change in the status quo toward increased social equality; 2) involvement in public or street activism, such as rallies or protests that take place in public locations; and 3) voluntary involvement (where at

least some of the activist work takes place outside of the context of paid work)¹⁴. In keeping with the autobiographical feature of my chosen methodology, following the first group session held, I added to this operational definition of activism, a fourth criterion for participant selection, which was a history of involvement in Central American solidarity activism¹⁵.

2.2.2. Commitment to Activism

Recruitment, participation, strategies and commitment to activism are sub-themes of studies of social movements often referred to as ‘micro-mobilization’ processes. In the social movements literature, RM and NSM theories inform how these processes are conceptualized, with feminist, social constructivist and postmodern critique increasingly integrating or disintegrating aspects of them. Transformative education theories also framed some of the studies. Not surprisingly, the empirical studies’ findings were mostly congruent with the frames and disciplines used. As a result, in most of the SM literature the grand theories of micro-mobilization processes include structural concerns, (such as social network connection), cultural preoccupations (mainly collective identity), or psychological explanations (particularly rational choice theories)¹⁶.

¹⁴ Defining features of activism and asking people to self-identify was an imperfect exercise. I initially utilized popular conceptualizations of activism for delimiting participation in the study given their pervasiveness and ease of self-identification, recognizing that those features are among other things, ahistorical. Delimitation was also an abstract exercise. I knew most in the potential pool of participants well. I knew the nature of the organizations invited to identify women for the focus group. Further, not all people doing social change work in collective efforts self-identify as activists and as it turned out, I invited some participants to the group based on what they do and what they support, as opposed to how they self-identify. In the end, my life history interviewees came out of serendipitous encounters rather than any particular process of definition and exclusion. Most importantly perhaps is that all of the women who participated in some way in the study engage in collective social change work and have done so for a long time. They have worked in the ways suggested by the named features of activism but not exclusively. Many of them have also done volunteer self-help, personal support or educative work, but have not solely focused their efforts on those activities. (Although some authors consider self-help as social movement (229), others question that strategy as activist activity in absence of strategic social change goals.)

¹⁵ Aspects of my life that inform that choice will become clear in the autobiographical prefaces and footnotes offered throughout this thesis.

Although *recruitment* to activism has received considerable research attention, *commitment* to activism curiously remains relatively under-studied and under-theorized (53,54). Long-term commitment, in particular appears more difficult to study as it necessarily involves forms of longitudinal study or a reliance on historical artefacts and individual memory. More typically, activist micro-mobilization processes have been studied using surveys, case studies, phenomenological and narrative approaches, (newspaper) event analysis and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. However as Passy and Giugni suggest:

To understand the *factors* that lead to sustained participation is a crucial task for social movements, especially those relying on the work and energy of voluntary members [but] ... to ascertain the *conditions* of commitment of participants is equally important for analysts of social movements, not only because this is an under-studied topic, but also because it will provide new insights on the individual variations of political participation, thus *avoiding abstract generalizations* (53, p.118, my emphasis added).

Although my focus is specifically on political or activist commitment, several general theories about commitment illustrate why it is a concept worthy of study in relation to the junctures and overlaps among multiple aspects of personal and social life-spheres (12,53). What follows then, is a general introduction to commitment, and a brief overview of selected theories and concepts related to commitment to activism, namely, social networks, collective identity and personalized politics. Two studies of commitment, one framed by radical democratic theories and the other by transformative educational perspectives are then highlighted. Some of the literature herein suggests the use of popular terms, holistic imagery and creative writing as ways

¹⁶ Theories of commitment generally and in the SM literature are influenced also by rational choice theories from the field of social psychology. Although I do not focus on them here, rational choice theories infiltrate SM theories, particularly resource mobilization studies. Rational choice theories use psychological explanations for movement participation. The idea is that movement participation is a result of individual cost-benefit calculations (32,224,230), self-interested “reputational concerns” (62), a free ride (35) or preferences and interests of which social actors are consciously and rationally aware. Often they are set in opposition to altruistic formulations of motivation for collective action or to cultural interpretations. Feminist theories question the implicit separation of rationality from emotion (31) at their core. Rational choice assumptions also pervade North American popular discourse. See also Polletta and Jasper (47,59,62); Passy and Giugni (30,53); Lichterman (12,231); or Gamson (54).

to consider and inspire public commitment. The last section considers these ideas as well as the notion of spiritual-political worldviews.

2.2.2.1. General Theories of Commitment

Early academic writing on commitment is exemplified by that of Foote, Becker, Kanter and Stryker. These authors theorize commitment from a somewhat ahistorical and uncritical perspective. They examine commitment as a conceptual bridge between personal experience and social activity, or as a way to examine how active individuals initiate and sustain lines of activity.

Foote's 1951 study of commitment concentrates on role identity. For Foote, role playing without identity is empty behaviour. One's full commitment to his/her identity is necessary in the creation and realization of the active self and realizing an active self (one capable of reflexive thought and self-initiated action) is explanatory of persistent social actions (55). Becker's 1960 study similarly considers commitment as explanatory of the ties a person has to a line of action over time and across situations (56). Kanter's 1968 study of commitment mechanisms in utopian communities specifies commitment as arising at the intersection of organizational requisites and personal experience (57). For her, commitment refers to the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems or communities, and to attach the self to social relations within which those are seen as self-expressive. Her descriptive analysis recognizes multi-faceted ways in which individuals are linked to groups and in which different dimensions of commitment become salient for individuals depending on how they are linked to the groups under study (57). For Stryker, commitment refers to the strength of relationships to others while in a particular role identity. He considers that both the numbers of relationships to others entered

by virtue of that identity (extensiveness) and the depth (intensity) of the relationships matter (58).

In these theories of commitment, there is no mention of power, class, race or gender and no apparent differentiation based on duration of commitment. Yet, most of the theories link commitment to concepts of self or identity either directly or indirectly and a few authors, such as Stryker, relate the role of social networks or relationships to commitment.

2.2.2.2. Social Networks

Influenced by Resource Mobilization ideas, social networks theories pose that social networks and social ties are key factors in social movement recruitment and in “differential participation”¹⁷ (30) because of how they make structural connections between movement and non-movement actors, and more so how they socialize movement actors. Social networks are specified as involving influential types of informal and formal ties. Organizational forms that an individual belongs to or works within are exemplary of formal ties, while friendships exemplify informal ones. Social networks are said to be particularly important in facilitating an individual’s structural connection to movements. A friendship, for example can be a (structural) conduit facilitating the connection of an individual to an “opportunity to participate”¹⁸.

Social network theory also considers ways that social networks and organizations mould personal preferences and constitute political actors (59,60) by assessing or comparing different kinds of organizations, networks or life-spheres (30) that act as potential sites of politicization

¹⁷ “Differential participation” is synonymous with commitment as it involves aspects of intensity and time that define a long-term engagement in activism (30,53).

¹⁸ The theories derive credibility from various large scale surveys in both Europe and North America that illustrate that the “opportunity to participate” is one of the key factors in movement recruitment and participation (30,44,61). Critics of the literature on network ties, or “structural connections”, though reveal that: “We do not really know whether it is the presence of a tie, the number of ties, or the salience, centrality, or strength of a tie that determines its effectiveness as a recruitment agent” (44, p. 643).

and mobilization (61,62). Acknowledging that such forms include networks and organizational forms with racist and sexist agendas highlights the importance of studying networks and public commitment not only quantitatively, but also in terms of content¹⁹. Feminist works have specified how gender hierarchy is both created / reproduced and resisted / challenged through organizational forms and that “we should expect that gender and its intersections with race, ethnicity, class and sexuality to be as much an organizing principle of protest groups as it is of institutionalized ones” (36, p.9). Social network theorists informed by critical feminist positions then, examine the influence of organizational forms on the socialization of movement actors rather than solely focusing on structural connections. Socialization appears more likely to influence commitment, as it involves the process by which social networks embed social actors in “interactive structures that allows them to define and redefine their framing of the social world” (30, p128). Embeddedness also appears useful for understanding long term commitments to activism (30,44).

In summary then, RM or political process theories, upon which most social network theories of recruitment and commitment draw, emphasize *how* organizational structures and social networks or social ties, both within and outside of movements, appear to influence activist mobilization, participation and long-term commitment. NSM theories provide an alternative explanation of micro-mobilization focusing on *why* movement actors might join and stay involved in activism.

¹⁹ A weakness of studies that focus on measuring numbers of social organizations and networks is exemplified by Putnam’s now infamous US based study *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community* (232). His empirical study used a highly instrumental application of social network (social capital) theory to illustrate how numbers of organizations and networks in the US declined in the latter twentieth century. For him, that became proof of a decline in American civic engagement and communitarian spirit. However, an important issue left out of his discussion pertains to the quality and nature of civic engagement that *does exist* and begs deeper questions (61). His ideas (and other similar broad generalizations on volunteering etc.) have become widespread images, heard in the common meta-narratives of ‘civil society in decline’.

2.2.2.3. Collective Identity

In the general theories of commitment posed earlier, identities are often uncritically and ahistorically posed as something static and pre-existing, as “stable sets of self meanings” or roles that people are ascribed, belong to and get committed to (63). NSM theories informed by feminist and social constructionist perspectives move the focus from personal to collective identities and the locus of study to the socio-cultural process of identity formation and expression²⁰. Commitment to an activist identity is here considered in light of the latter idea.

According to these theories both the ongoing formulation (process) and expression (product) of collective identities motivate participation in social movements, influence strategic choices that movement activists make, and capture or measure cultural outcomes of movements (64). Collective identities are not viewed as pre-determined, but constructed, composed, discovered or performed through social and cultural interactions; those interactions include the stories activists tell each other (45,46,65). The growth of a commitment to a collective identity occurs not in the abstract, but rather as a process learned or reconstituted as movements and the consciousness of the actors within them change *over time*. “Hence a collective social actor emerges only as a result of complex processes involving on-going interactions, opposition, contestation, negotiation, accommodation and renegotiation among the social actors themselves and with their political environment” (27, p.22). Polletta and Jasper, considering collective identity construction as a cultural expression define it:

as an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a *perception* of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity...Collective identities are *expressed in cultural materials* – names, narratives, symbols, ... but not all cultural

²⁰ See also works by Polletta and Jasper (64) and Bernstein (66).

materials express collective identities. Collective identity does not imply the rational calculus for evaluating choices that ‘interest’ does (64, p.285, my emphasis added)

The perception or realization of a ‘shared status’ or a connection to something broader than self does not imply a one-time achievement, nor is it momentary or transient. Neither is it a solely cognitive process. Rather, one’s identity as an activist might be said to grow in tandem with one’s commitment to the process of expressing or imagining who an activist is.

Paradoxically, collective identities appear important in explaining activist recruitment processes and aspects of retention or commitment, but they are also considered a factor leading to disengagement from movements (30,64). In fact, collective identities and the identity politics which they forge provoke strategic dilemmas for movements when the identity that serves as a source of political recruitment and organizing is also the basis for oppression (66). Thus, while some pose that calling on a particular collective identity can become salient at specified times and in defined situations, serving an important political organizing purpose, (27,34), others point to ways that collective identities can reify inequalities, periodize, essentialize or stereotype movement actors, fomenting exodus from movements, particularly when “cross-cutting identities” come to the fore (64,66)²¹. Certainly in such cases long-term and deep-seated commitments exacerbate the paradox. Post-colonial and postmodernists focus on this potential, contending that identity theories and the identity politics that they often utilize are ultimately constrictive or reformist rather than transformative (66). Hence, they pose that “new readings” are required to go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions of collective identity theories (67).

²¹ Critics of theories of gender identity for example have noted a propensity to foster the equivocal idea of “woman” as a pre-determined, essential or exclusive category based usually on white heterosexual middle-class norms. In response, social constructivists have claimed the collective identity of “woman” or “man” as “an interactional accomplishment, an identity continually renegotiated via linguistic exchange and social performance” (67, p. 387).

2.2.2.4. Personalism and Political Commitment

Lichterman's study of environmental activists in the U.S. is perhaps one such 'new' reading (12). Lichterman questions many taken-for-granted assumptions and meta-narratives regarding activist social identity and political commitment, by comparing four environmental organizations, two from the U.S. Greens movement and two from the grassroots anti-toxic waste movement. Using cultural theories of radical democracy and feminist perspectives, he poses that stylized views of activism, particularly as motivated by a communitarian ethos which often subtly pervades studies of social movements, constrain the emergence of new understandings of political commitment and a new imagery of political actors. He claims that rather than using the static imagery of "society in decline", where the numbers of activists who root their commitments in communities decreases as the culture of self-fulfillment grows, this "seesaw model" needs to be replaced with theories of commitment that take into account new social activist identities emerging in the current era of radical democratic practice (12, p.8-10). These identities need to be re-inscribed to reflect social actors who glean their commitment from a "highly personalised sense of politics" (12, p.6), who define themselves less in relation to community and more as individual agents of social change, and who often belong to geographically dispersed communities.

Lichterman categorically deconstructs the meta-narrative of America in decline, and instead attempts to re-inscribe the nature of American commitment to the public good using the metaphor of personalism. He argues that personalism is a counter-narrative posing that neither individualism nor personal fulfillment are necessarily in opposition to a commitment to the public good. Rejecting the "seesaw model" that pits individualism against such communitarian ethos, he argues that public commitment can be enacted through rather than impeded by

personalism. In other words personalism is not individualism, but rather is a cultural process informed by the cultural norms associated with individualism and the self-fulfillment society of late twentieth century U.S.A. Personalism is a cultural expression seen in ways of speaking or acting which highlight a unique individual self.

Personalism supposes that one's own individuality has inherent value, apart from one's material or social achievements...[it] does not necessarily deny the existence of communities surrounding and shaping the self, but it accentuates an individualized relationship to any such communities (12, p.6).

The two groups he studies essentially prove his thesis, albeit with limitations that he admits²². Lichterman's comparison of communitarianism and personalism as culturally influenced styles of political commitment illustrates shifts in thinking about forms of activism as cultural expressions²³. A key cultural concept in his study is "life ways" of activism which holistically embeds activism in quotidian processes.

A life-way is an overall pattern of public and private involvements – in work, family, and political life – within one biography. Committing oneself to activism means making ongoing decisions about how much of life and what parts of life one will devote to political activity rather than other aspects of life. Life ways show through in everyday interaction, but are not necessarily deliberate plans; we can think of them instead as patterns of deciding and improvising one's way through the life course. They are, in other words, kinds of practices (12, p.149).

Rather than teasing out independent variables that cause or inhibit political commitment, life-ways require attention to interconnection.

²² Attempting to explain notable differences in the two groups in terms of the forms their activist commitments take, he also examines race, class and to a lesser degree, gender relations in the two movements. The results are somewhat predictable. Class and educational levels predicted affiliation or "entry fees" into personalized politics. Those with the resources, in terms of special skills and opportunities have a higher likelihood of practicing personalized politics. But the relationship is not linear, he argues, and the differences can not be reduced to the jargon of "class interests" that pervades sociological theories or the "contradictions of individualization" hypothesized by some NSM theorists (See also Melucci (233-235). Rather, the "class culture", i.e. distinctive cultural skills and preferences, make either communitarian or personalized forms of commitment more appealing.

²³ Lichterman's study is an example of a larger trend toward a re-conceptualization of culture in SM theories. See for example the collection of essays by cultural theorists examining Latin American movements in Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar (236) or recent writing by Melucci (235).

2.2.2.5. Commitment to the Commons

A study by Daloz, et al. (13) counters Lichterman's central contention. The study departs from the commonly held idea or meta-narrative that individualism and personalized politics weaken social movements, diminish social capital and decrease the number of committed citizens working for public goods. Yet the study also considers that 'the commons'²⁴ of the late twentieth century is changing to "a larger sphere of responsibility, one calling for a keener recognition of the diversity, complexity, and ambiguity that have become the warp and woof of the common life we all share" (13, p.3).

Using a rigorous phenomenological approach and extensive interviewing, the study explores the formation and nature of commitment of a diverse group of over one hundred American citizens involved in work for the commons. The study identifies factors influential on the formation of politically committed citizens such as opportunities for community service, cross-cultural experiences and a good mentoring experience, with a key finding being that all participants had experienced a constructive engagement with people "significantly different" from them. The study's findings are creatively presented in a popularized and inspiring style²⁵.

Ultimately, the patterns of commitment that emerge in the study support their argument that commitment is fundamentally driven by a need to connect "with the life of the whole, and to work on its behalf"²⁶ (13, p.8) and that it is fed by vocation, which they defined as "something

²⁴The expression 'the commons' as they use it in the study is not totally clear. They use it to refer to the sense of "shared public spaces" or as a place where diverse parts of communities come together with "shared sense of participation and responsibility" in preserving the 'common good'.

²⁵ A homogenized view of the sample obscures some of the findings. Although the sample was broadly representative, no class, gender or racial disaggregation is reported. Further, activists, or what they refer to as people involved in protest politics, make up part of their sample of "citizens working for the commons", but no distinction is evident which part.

one cannot not do” (68). They are persuaded that no one factor explains political commitment, rather that “the greater number and depth of certain key experiences one has, the greater the probability of living a committed life” (13, p.17).

2.2.3 Off the Grand Theoretical Path: Spiritual Politics

Spiritual and political worldviews offer two vast and profound modes of understanding experience. Those who uphold a political view often respond to spiritual worldviews with suspicion and vice versa. Traditional Left politics, for example, are indelibly stamped with the Marxist notion that ‘religion is the opiate of the masses’. Yet numerous social movements have been fuelled by both political understandings and spiritual or religious teachings. The civil rights movements, liberation theology, and indigenous struggles for land rights and sovereignty present a few examples. For this study the focus on spirituality comes not solely from its influence as a factor fuelling political movements, but on the capacity of spiritual worldviews to conceptualize commitment in other than materialist ways. As postmodernists call into question the atomization of Western thought and perception, new questions arise and new non-materialist modes of understanding activism appear. The spiritual side of politics, the political side of spirituality, and the spiritual and political side of everyday life (19) are leading to new fields of study, new modes of practice and even, new movements²⁷. Therefore the use of ‘spiritual politics’ is important to consider.

²⁶ This idea is fundamental to ‘spiritual politics’, a frame that bridges political activity and behaviour with moral convictions and relationship to a larger whole. I explore this idea in the following section.

²⁷ Studies relating religion and moral duty, or religion and social change have been around for decades. I am here referring to the increasing interest, as expressed by the amount of popular and academic literature, conferences, courses, workshops and the like, on the wider notion of spirituality, spiritual practice and spirituality in the workplace which has re-framed and extended this field. I am not referring to new fundamentalist religious movements (which are effervescing simultaneously), but rather those aiming to change the status quo toward increased socio-cultural equality. Spiritual politics are sometimes used as a way of framing new movements such as eco-feminism, for example.

Spiritual politics focus on the concept of interconnectedness found in both political and spiritual approaches. Whereas a political view, exemplified by the social movement theories, directs attention to material and socio-structural organization of human life, a spiritual view directs attention to an experience that is before and beyond human social organization. At the center of most great spiritual traditions is a belief that human beings are united as expressions or emanations of a central energy or principle, whether named as spirit, Creator, God, Goddess, life, love or nature. According to this idea, the recognition of humankind's fundamental relatedness motivates progressive political activity²⁸. Conviction about human interconnectedness provides will and courage to confront structures and cultures that inequitably segregate people by class, race and ethnicity, gender, age and sexual orientation. Yet a critical understanding of spirituality does not evade power questions. That is, a spiritual political approach needs to explore how certain spiritual values come to dominate over others, for example, or how religion has been manipulated as a tool to reinforce gender, class and ethnic social inequalities (18,19,69). Critical approaches to spiritual politics thus recognize both the empowering and disempowering, essentialist and anti-essentialist tendencies in both political and spiritual worldviews.

Several recent studies on the nature of commitment to social change or activism appear to support central ideas in this emerging area of study and pose the concept that long-term commitment to work for social change can also be understood in terms of emotion, spirituality, creativity or vocation. [Mentioned earlier, those studies include, for example Tisdell (17), Faver (18,19), Downton and Wehr (20), Jasper (15), Goodwin (16) and others.] All of the studies to a

²⁸ See works by Starhawk, Charlene Spretnak or Vandana Shiva for feminist examples. See also works by spiritual activists Thomas Berry, Michael Lerner, or Satish Kumar.

greater or lesser extent incorporate what I call a spiritual political approach, though only some do so from a critical perspective.

More so than academic studies, informal, grey and inspirational²⁹ literature initially spawned my interest in exploring the personal or spiritual side of public or activist commitment. Some of that literature includes works by aforementioned spiritual activists and a variety of authors of transformative learning theory who all, differently, are inciting new ideas and understanding of activist and transformative educational practice. Roughly converging on ideas akin to spiritual politics, these authors use varied genres to expand ways of thinking about activism and commitment to social change. In doing so, they are simultaneously recognizing and working beyond the limits of science and rationality, incorporating spiritual imagery and creative ideas into descriptions of political processes. Thus, although they often sit at the periphery of social movement and activist study and theories in academic literature, what they write both complements the preceding discussion of activism and commitment, and appropriately heeds the post-modern call to become accessible and to extend beyond current academic writing repertoires. Making research accessible can also involve creative or literary genre, such as stories and poetry that simultaneously act to evoke, conceptualize or inspire activism in holistic or non-materialist ways.

2.2.3.1 Theoretical Transgressors

“We don’t see something until we have the right metaphor to perceive it”
- Thomas Kuhn –

²⁹ I would not want the reader to confuse my use of the term ‘inspirational’ with either overtly religious dogma or new age predilection. I am referring to books for a lay audience that intend to inspire as well as inform. Often written by academics that are simultaneously committed activists, most incorporate academic research without ‘talking’ in research terms.

In this section I tentatively introduce two inter-related ideas, which will be expanded in the next chapter. The first involves the possibility that utilizing creative literary devices might work to transcend some of the limits of social movement constructs; the second involves the possibility that creative forms of research texts might simultaneously “elicit response, lure participation and demand attention” (70, p.166) creating “catalytic validity” (71,72). Together these ideas give rise to the creative experimentation presented later in the thesis.

Various researchers allude to the power of story, legend, myth or poetry to change perceptions of social phenomena by restructuring the collective unconscious through both linguistic and visual means (6,70,73-82). According to these researchers, the use of creative literary devices can illuminate the wholeness and partiality of experiences, as well as the interconnections of thoughts and feelings. Creative texts can capture the rhythms of embodied speech and facilitate a disintegration of the distance between reader, writer and Subject (75,81,83,84). Drawing the reader in, such texts can act as a way to join the experience of the participants vicariously. Further, the process of writing creatively can add transparency to the analytic process. As Richardson (83) argues, creative writing in research holds the potential to displace the hegemonic researcher/writer as “philosopher king” and replace him/her with a “teacher/facilitator”. By allowing complexities and ambiguities to come forward, writing research texts creatively offers a way to (re)constitute the self, gender, social relations and culture without resorting to “linear, teleological, hierarchical, or binary” (85) ways of thinking and being.

Anzaldúa's work on Chicana identity is an instructive example of these ideas. In her work she portrays the physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual borderlands of the mixed racial and ethnic lineage or *mestizaje* of Chicana women through evocative poetry and academic

prose. Written in combinations of Spanish, Nahuatl and English, her texts use archetypal metaphors to present "a new value system with images and symbols" beyond the deterministic black and white notions that infiltrate most scholarship on *mestizaje* (73, p.81). Overall her work evokes both the material side of lived experiences and the complexity of *mestizaje* consciousness including "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities" (73, p.38).

A call for new holistic constructs or concepts to describe and to inspire activism is alluded to vaguely in various SM theories posed in earlier sections. However, I did not locate any academic work related specifically to social movements or to activism that utilized such creative devices. Yet, most researchers and activists would agree that every social movement has creative and inspirational visions for change embedded in the metaphors and slogans it uses. The mantra 'a different world is possible' used consistently in anti-corporate globalization movements is a current example. Such slogans both constitute and are constituted by collective imaginations that at some level, function as a call to action (70,86). Accordingly, I sense that the use of alternative metaphors and varied literary genres might act to transcend the limits of social movement constructs, offering a way to elicit holistic understanding of activism and to foster simultaneous shifts in collective consciousness about what it entails.

Certainly to engage such work requires a repositioning of scholarly authority and an accompanying epistemological shift beyond the "reductive practice of theoretical production" that "resist heterogeneity" (7, p.430). It is a paradigm shift that requires both skill and methods, but also the space to acknowledge that creative work is a serious project of social change, and that creative re-inscription makes other worlds possible.³⁰ Perhaps finding alternatives requires

³⁰ I am arguing here that to speak of imagination is not to engage in some kind of anti-theoretical, utopian idealism, nor is it a bourgeois stance of a bored academic. Hope, inspiration and imagination are the ultimate resort for many

that the researcher experiment and play with representational possibilities. As Rich contends: “if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives... [As writer] you have to be free to play... For writing is re-naming” (87, p.43).

For many activists and academics and the organizational and institutional structures in which they work the spiritual and the creative dimensions of research and of activism are simply off the canonical path³¹. Arguably the inexperience with spiritual worldviews in turn fuels scepticism, which intensifies resistance to creative experimentation and restricts modernist researchers’ imaginations. For the academic researcher who wishes to engage in alternative and creative representational possibilities therefore, an important question becomes: “How do we get out of our own way?” (78, p.103).

In both the next section on transformative education and in the next chapter I will probe these ideas further. Suffice to say here, creative experimentation in research appears useful for holistically or spiritually re-inscribing and simultaneously eliciting participation in activism, and for transgressing the more static imagery of the scholarly theories noted above. I turn now to several key concepts and theories in the field of transformative education which discuss social change or activist agendas in terms of the learning processes involved in personal and social transformation.

of the world’s poorest and sickest people. Cultivating hope helps keep people alive. Human-centred development is based in part on such non-material ideas.

³¹ The effects on academics seeking to do research that incorporates forms of creative writing is discussed in various works by authors such as Laurel Richardson, Ruth Behar and Carolyn Ellis.

2.3 Personal and Social Transformation

Transformation in the fields of education and development studies³² has been referred to as “pervasive forms of [human and social] development... in the grand movements from one social paradigm to the next” (88, p.21). Differentiation usually occurs between what is referred to as human/personal transformation and social transformation, though they are almost always considered interwoven. In this section I present the theories of Jack Mezirow and Paulo Freire on transformation as a learning process and outcome, and as a social change or development goal. As a caveat, there are hundreds of other worthy theorists who have derived their own approach to transformative or emancipatory education³³ some of whom challenge these works; however, I thought it apt to begin with these two theories for several reasons. First, given the frequency with which these two authors are cited in other works, and the consequent influence they have on my thinking and practice, they underscore both how I cognitively frame ‘personal and social transformation’, and how I enact the term activist/educator or ‘transformative educator’. Second, as noted previously, personal learning and change are not well integrated into social movement and commitment literatures, nor does that literature offer insights into the ways to foster a re-conceptualization or re-imagining of a different world. Mezirow and Freire’s theories are helpful for posing a way academic work can incite as well as inform. Finally, I note these transformation theories because as suggested earlier, some studies have suggested that

³² Although literature on transformation also exists in other fields, I use definitions and theories from the fields of education and development studies. I decided to focus on two of the major theorists in those fields in order to expose major ideas and tensions. I do not uphold these two authors’ work as the ‘gold standards’ but I recognize their influence on the thinking in this field and on my own practice as educator.

³³ See for example, hooks “engaged pedagogy” (192); Giroux “border pedagogy” (237); Arnold, Burke, et al. “education for social change” or “popular education” (238); and edited works by O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Connor concerning “integral transformative education” (69) among many others.

people working toward social change, whether through formal or informal educational programs or activist struggle, are sometimes said to live on a transformative learning path (80,89-91).

2.3.1 Mezirow's Perspective Transformation Theory

Educational theory poses that we can measure or see glimpses of human transformation in events that radically alter consciousness or cause shifts of awareness. The process of individual cognitive change entailed in such shifts is 'mapped out' in transformative learning theories (TLT), for which Jack Mezirow is often quoted as being one of the most significant educational theorists.

Many educators agree that Mezirow's "perspective transformational learning" (92), or transformative learning theory (TLT) has dominated adult education discourse over the last two decades. Grounded in psychoanalytic and critical social theory, it builds upon the scholarship of Habermas and Brookfield to offer a comprehensive theoretical description of the process by which individual learners construe, validate and reformulate their experience (92-94). For Mezirow, the goal is to foster learners who are able to act upon their own purposes, values and beliefs rather than uncritically acting on those of others (92,93) in order to become "more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous thinkers; to make informed decisions by becoming more critically reflective as 'dialogic' thinkers in their engagement in a social context" (93, p.29).

Mezirow's theory suggests that to be human is ultimately to engage in "meaning making" (92,93). Humans derive meaning from experience by turning to tradition, accepting explanations from authorities, or at times resorting to "psychological mechanisms such as projection or rationalization" (92). However, due to inevitable dissonance in peoples' lives between past and current experiences, they continually need to reconstruct and renegotiate contested meanings that

arise. Central to his theory is that those contested or dissonant meanings hold the potential for transformative learning / personal transformation because they can be deconstructed and remade. The learner's experience is always the starting point for learning, but the context is also subject to questioning; both elements can be changed and acted upon (95).

In brief, the three major phases (of ten) of Mezirow's theory involve 1) a disorienting dilemma, 2) critical reflection, and 3) reflective discourse (93). The disorienting dilemma can be a major life crisis or transition or can result from a series of smaller transformations in a person's specific beliefs or attitudes over time. Importantly, no easy way out or correct solution is apparent. A person then engages in the second phase (critical reflection), wherein they consider what they know and believe to be true, questioning the basis for her/his meaning schemes (ethical, philosophical, epistemic assumptions, values and beliefs etc.) which are embedded in the historical, cultural, and biographical context in which he or she lives. Such a reflection is important as it creates self-awareness of one's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or habits of mind. But the critical difference between mere reflection (and resultant change in a particular belief), and a deeper personal transformation concerns the third phase or reflective discourse. One engages in reflective discourse on one's meaning schemes by making a deeper assessment of and examining the sources of the problem being reflected upon. The resultant shift in one's worldview is less specific, and more inclusive and global in nature (95). Such shifts are infrequent and more radical, in that a learner becomes more discriminating, gains an integrative perspective, and a capacity to think autonomously. Even more importantly, the learner expresses a willingness and capacity to make choices or intentionally act upon these new understandings (94,95). In other words, such a shift increases both autonomy and personal agency. Importantly for Mezirow the shift is ultimately prompted not solely by a need for individual realization, but

rather because of the human yearning for inclusion and connection. Hence, personal transformation has an important social and communicative requirement or domain.

Post-secondary adult education settings are where his theories both originated and took root. In part that explains some of the major critique of Mezirow's work which has centred on his over-emphasis of rationality as a dominant form of knowing and learning, the exaggerated role of educator as catalyst (ignoring the many learning opportunities where no educator is present), and the suggested linearity of the transformation process³⁴ (96,80,89,94,95,97).

Certainly Mezirow's discussion of ideal conditions for transformation reflect somewhat idealized or controlled situations, with pre-requisites of "accurate and complete information, freedom from coercion, an openness to alternative points of view, and the ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively" (93, p.14). Nevertheless, they constitute principles to which teachers can aspire. Additional critique of his work centres on the race, class and gender-blind aspects of the theory, lack of adequate attention to learning contexts and conditions, and lack of clarity regarding the interface between personal and social transformation (94,96,98-100).

Overall, the critique of his theories have led to two divergent tendencies in TLT. On the one hand is a leaning toward forms of 'integral transformative education' with overtly affective, spiritual and creative dimensions augmented, and on the other, an augmentation of the critical theory and analysis of structural and political relations of power. Occasionally the theory expands in both directions simultaneously, as exemplified in the definition of TLT coined by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE):

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our

³⁴ For a more comprehensive review of these critiques, see especially Taylor's (98) review of empirical studies of transformational learning outcomes and edited works by O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor (69).

understanding of ourselves and our self locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (101).

A problem with this and other definitions is that the ‘shift’ is inadvertently portrayed as a static or one-time event, while many authors consider transformative learning to be a philosophical orientation toward life events, which is both cumulative and constantly shifting (97). Still, the breadth of the definition also allows an interpretation of transformation as a life way (14,69,90).

2.3.2 Freire: Emancipatory Education

In terms of education for social transformation, Paulo Freire is among the most highly influential educators, development theorists and intellectual authors. His emancipatory³⁵ education theory is similar to TLT but differs in origin, emphasis and central purpose.

The theory of emancipatory education developed by Freire (102) evolved as a response to his experience of teaching literacy with people who were marginalized by poverty during the 1950s and 1960s in Brazil. Originating from his own experience of poverty and drawing upon the reality of his students, Freire viewed society as being characterized by relations of power and domination (95,103). Education in his view is never neutral; it is either “liberating” or “domesticating” (102). As an extension of institutionalized relations of power, traditional or domesticating approaches to education are essentially prescriptive. The teacher is perceived as the owner of knowledge and prescribes or deposits that knowledge into the receptive and passive learner. Education which is based on this model has been criticized on the grounds that it perpetuates de-humanization, objectification and power imbalances which exist in societies,

³⁵ In discussing Friere’s theories or my own practice, I tend to use terms interchangeably. Liberatory, participatory, critical, problem-posing, active learning, etc. are all versions of theories and practices influenced by or equated with Freire’s work that exist in many disciplines.

since it poses that some people have prestige, power and knowledge and others are seen as dependent, inferior and ignorant (104-106). The values of society that are reflected by domesticating education are both exercised and internalized, obscuring vision beyond such a system (104). Thus, if educators do not encourage the oppressed (the learner) to question, to challenge, and to see the exercise of unjust power as problematic, they enable the oppressed to accept it, adapt to it, and engage in its reproduction (102,104). According to Freire, the pervasiveness of domesticating patterns of thought and behaviour makes education for awakening or conscientization necessary in order to break the cycle. Conscientization or the creation of critical awareness essential for social action occurs through dialogue and problem-posing education and results in praxis.

The reality of the oppressed (the learner) is the starting point for dialogue for it is only within their reality that the teacher may discover genuine ways of engaging with and acting on the conditions of oppression. Dialogue is established through verbal and non-verbal interactions and by establishing trusting relationships. Neither information-giving nor consultation are considered dialogue. People in dialogue must essentially trust one another, have compassion for each other, and be committed to changing oppressive circumstances (102,107). The teacher therefore, must come to believe situationally and strategically in the ontology and epistemology of the oppressed (108).

Freire's emancipatory educational methods utilize active participatory learning based on a problem-posing approach where the intent is for learners to deepen their understandings of reality through critical reflection on the personal and socio-political dimensions of the problem they are encountering (102,104). Problem-posing builds on dialogue and involves three stages: 1) listening for the felt issues or themes of concern in the group; 2) creating a 'code' that represents

the group identified issue through strategies such as role plays, stories, and photographs; and 3) collectively engaging in reflections structured by the teacher in a particular sequence. The teacher or animator may also add new knowledge to the group but in a way that broadens and deepens collective understanding. The critical reflection questioning sequence moves discussion from the general (affective and cognitive reaction), to the personal (applicability), to social analysis (lessons learned and 'theories of action'), to actions (planned and carried out). The sequencing is important because it represents increasing levels of risk and a broadening of analysis as the learners' underlying assumptions, values and beliefs are challenged, critical reflection deepened, and actions imagined and enacted. Conscientization or critical awareness is the outcome of critical reflection and is realized in ongoing efforts to engage with others in addressing the root causes or systemic forces of oppression (102). Praxis results as the newly awakened oppressed (the learners) discover their capacity to make meaning of their own lives and conditions, recognize the links between structural forces and oppression, and their capacity and right to act upon this knowledge. Praxis embeds as people learn to integrate theory and practice through ongoing cycles of reflection and action. Through these cyclical processes of acting and reflecting, individuals in groups or communities become active subjects empowered to act, thereby transforming themselves through transforming their surroundings / conditions (107,109,110). Altogether, then, emancipatory education theory is said to illuminate a path for social transformation.

Critics have argued that Freire's writing is obtuse, his thinking naïve or overly paternalistic, and his theory informed more by ideals or ideologies than empirical study. Of particular note are his ill-defined use of the categories of 'oppressed and oppressor'. Feminist critique focuses on his inadvertent reification of those dualistic categories, which in turn obviates

the possibility for subjective positions to change, and which pay insufficient attention to multiple sites and intersections of oppressions (95,103,111). Although Freire's thinking changed over time to include not only class oppressions, but also gender and race, his critics contend that his theories remained overly dualistic, obscuring the potential complicity of learners in maintaining socially oppressive structures and mechanisms of domination (97).

2.3.3 Synthesis and Relevance for Activists and Educators

Both Mezirow's transformative learning theory and Freire's emancipatory education focus on experience as the starting point for transformation, though the types of learners and experiences from where the theories were derived were significantly different. Both consider the importance of enabling strategies that would move the (passive) learners to become (active) 'subjects', though the specific methods differ in form and level of participation. Both theories argue that reflective dialogue involves the critical investigation of former knowledge or ways of thinking by all involved in transformative change, including both the teacher and learner. And finally, both Mezirow and Freire insist that engagement in praxis is the ultimate evidence that transformation or transformational learning has occurred. However, praxis in Mezirow's theory is signified as change of individual values, beliefs, and behaviours whereas praxis in Freire's theory extends to collective action directed at changing oppressive social structures (95). By extension, for Mezirow the self can be extricated from the social realm, and can act independently of it. Therefore challenges can be overcome through the process of deepening one's autonomy, self-realization and self-empowerment. For him, personal transformation is paramount. Freire's theory emphasizes the power of social forces to shape the contextual reality of people's lives, thus posing that the collective site is the necessary locus of transformation. Social change is the central goal. Taken together the two theories and their many derivatives

offer a way to understand and strategize for personal and social transformation and are relevant to educators and activists in both educational and community settings.

Transformative learning theories, their variants and their critiques also point to a need to investigate and document the diversity of ways personal and social transformation is experienced, and to explore the interdependence between the rational, emotional and creative processes involved in sustaining it over time. These are seldom located in grand theories of activism, but often are part of the stories activists tell.

3. Chapter Three: Points of Departure

In this chapter I delineate the points of departure for the study, that is, the epistemological affinities, philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, and methodological choices that I made in this project that guided and influenced the work herein. I begin with a preface as a way to “expose the origins of [my] epistemological assumptions” (112) and to suggest personal reasons for choices made.

Preface: Something Else

Cole and Knowles (22) encourage postmodern life history researchers to “unpack their research baggage” by writing a personal history account in which the researcher tells an account or segment of her life story that relates informal and formal inquiry experiences, and / or experiences related to the origins of interest in the topic in order to communicate those influences to the research audience and to gain insight into ourselves as researchers. With similar purpose, Nancy Naples invites feminist authors to tell their epistemological journeys³⁶ as interested stories (112). This preface reveals glimpses of some early influences³⁷ on ‘Lori as researcher’ that foreshadow my choice of feminist postmodern life history research methodology as a way of researching and knowing about women as activists.

³⁶ This preface is consistent with feminist approaches wherein one is called to “expose the origins of epistemological assumptions” but I do so resisting “defining myself in categories not of my making” (112). In other words, I don’t write this story in terms of theoretical affinities to say, a standpoint feminist or an historic materialist perspective because to do so would be to superimpose or to invent memories. Such affinities can be ‘read into’ this story; however, I use theoretical language to explain my theoretical position only when memory of such an affiliation is strong.

³⁷ I recognize that my memory, consciousness and language all make available to me only some parts of my story while obscuring others, and further, that this story is selective and told with a particular purpose(25,149,180).

When I was a part-time undergraduate student³⁸ in the early 1980s, my passion, my favourite activity, my relationships, and my way of seeing the world were all wrapped up in activism. Academically, what classes I took, what I argued in the papers I wrote for them, and what I preferred to read were things that validated and clarified ‘the struggle’ as ‘we’ knew and lived it. Although I supported many progressive or left-wing ‘causes’, the struggle or movement that held my closest attention was Central American activism.

I eventually focused my studies on sociology and development studies. Neo-Marxist theories were often part of the syllabus and finding resonance in the sometimes ‘fiery passion’ in them I was, by my last year, a dedicated Gramsci-ist. Although that affinity had a number of reasons, two of his ideas were / are particularly salient: his ideas on organic intellectuals which validated my own personal background as a rural Saskatchewan kid; and his ideas on hegemony and counter-hegemony which offered a way of articulating how so many people in Central America were turning history on its head.

For me, reading and understanding political and sociological theory was not a difficult task, but overall something was amiss and I grew impatient with it. I eventually switched out of sociology as a major, feeling cynical and bored by the way most of the literature and the professors talked about things that mattered. I tried other programs and moved across the country to a new university. Perhaps prefigured by my rural working class origins, I remember jokingly associating academe with sterility -- the suits, the dry lectures, and the theoretical writing were to me evidence of that. I craved *something else*. Although I was a good student, at

³⁸ Before I entered university, I attended two transformative learning programs in non-accredited ‘free schools’ and programs. These and other like experiences (still) indelibly colour what I ‘know’ of education and learning and how I practice as an educator, but in this preface I focus mostly on personal experiences and some of my ‘disjunctive moments’ (143) as related to formal study, as they have perhaps had more impact on ‘Lori as researcher’.

the completion of enough classes to fulfill requirements for a B.A., I arrogantly decided I was finished with school.

For the next eight years, including five years of living and working in Central America, I learned about community development, popular education, midwifery and primary health care in hands-on apprenticeships, through observation, self-study and work. Living in revolutionary Nicaragua in the 1980s was ‘schooling’ unlike any other, and as I had suspected, it seldom felt related to the comprehensive academic theories on social development and social movements I had studied in the academic literature. That writing just hadn’t and perhaps couldn’t have captured all the exceptions, paradoxes and diversities of experiences of living the Sandinista³⁹ revolution, particularly women’s experiences, and it had been particularly remiss on the personal aspects of social change. Even the writing of revolutionary socialist feminists such as Margaret Randall brushed over aspects of women’s personal lives⁴⁰.

Thus, aside from the popular education manuals and reproductive physiology texts I was reading, I continued to search for understanding of myself and that movement, reading in earnest a diverse array of literature, both fiction and non-fiction. Many authors were feminists; some were political analysts; some were historical fiction writers or poets. The genres varied. I read for flashes of brilliance, for bits of personal insight, for simplicity and for clarity. It was writing I ‘felt’ and could therefore somehow internalize and use.

³⁹ In July 1979, the Nicaraguan Sandinista movement toppled the Somoza family dictatorship, embarking on an eleven year social revolution. Health centres, schools, rural water and electrification and social programs flourished. Although women and children benefited from many structural changes, arguably many women’s personal lives changed little in a country with entrenched machismo combined with decades of violence and war. During the 1980s, the U.S. administration financed and equipped a counter-revolutionary force. The counter-revolutionary war combined with the economic blockade imposed on the country lead to a sixteen year hiatus from power when the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections. In November 2006 they were re-elected, just as I was finishing this thesis.

⁴⁰ Randall still writes on women and revolutions, but now notes her blind-spots from that era. I offer her work only as an example, not to pose that she was/is the only feminist author writing about social revolutions.

Since that time I remain suspicious of critical distance in writing on human dilemmas (or the social sciences). I look for authors or subjects that are critically and creatively engaged, those that write from experiences of duress or struggle and/or who write emotively. My trust in the sources seems to grow if those things are in place. By way of example, Uruguayan historian Eduardo Galeano wrote and researched much of his writing while in exile. One particular set of writings, his three volume set on Latin American history entitled *Memorias Del Fuego* (113) passionately and vividly portrays historical complexities using folklore, historical annals, poetry, newspaper clippings, and his own sharp-tongued political analysis. He is without doubt the most colourful and communicative Latin American historian I have ever read.

Let me try to tie this all to the current discussion of ‘Lori as researcher’. I believe that for me, the brilliance and inspiration of authors like Galeano come from their capacity to think critically but write evocatively and accessibly – to emotively convey and intellectually illuminate vital but small pieces of the whole. As I would frame it now, such writing stands in contrast to the omniscient and masculinized voice of ALL in the sociological grand theories of social movements wherein individual acts and actors are absent. Galeano’s style of writing brings alive both individual stories and complex concepts.

In the mid-1990s I went back to university, in no small part to be able to reflect on what I had learned in Nicaragua. More than a tad naïve about post-graduate training, I entered a Community Health and Epidemiology program searching for enlightened discussions on ‘community’ and ‘health’ – both words that to me conjured up radical ways of working in the world. Instead, I learned about research; and I got another degree, this time a Master of Science. During my time in Calgary, I had lucked on to another transformative learning experience, called

a *pasantía*,⁴¹ and I eventually chose it as the topic of my thesis. But both method and topic I used were outside the boundaries of the (then) typical thesis projects in that discipline, and so for most people on my committee, there was little understanding of the project. Overall, given the lack of fit with my initial expectations (and other extraneous and endogenous factors) the experience of being a student was once again rather dissatisfying. However, the research project itself was inspiring and it expanded my faith in the possibility of research as a political act. In hindsight, I think I was figuring out how to work academically at the margins and to work politically using academic tools.

Over the next few years, I engaged in various community-based and participatory research projects locally and internationally, and saw in practice how research could be used as a tool for promoting or supporting social and personal change. Then, more by serendipity than conscious choice, in the year 2000, another university-based opportunity arose. This was the opportunity that led to the ongoing story of teaching *Global Health and Local Communities*⁴² using transformative and experiential learning methods.

⁴¹ A *Pasantía* is a transformative experiential methodology. The term literally means “passing through an experience”.

⁴² ‘Global Health’ is a relatively new and growing field of academic study and practice. The field is concerned broadly with the relationship between health and development, and often focuses on health inequalities among and within nations, and on the supra-national or global forces that influence those. From a development studies perspective, Global Health necessarily looks at local or national health contexts and development approaches. In the fields of epidemiology and medicine, it considers global burdens of disease and the factors associated with global disease patterns. *Global health and Local Communities* is inter-disciplinary, drawing from these and other fields, but is distinguishable from most global health courses by its focus on linkages between local and global, personal and political, and by the transformative educational methods used (such as those posed in Chapter 2). My approach to teaching it involves consideration of issues of historical and political North-South, gender, race and class relations that influence capacities to critically and reflexively engage as activists in solidarity and as professionals in health development work. The goal of the course is to foster critical engagement in personal and social change at local and global levels, and to increase the capacity of students to understand the links between the health determinants of marginalized peoples of Saskatchewan and communities elsewhere. Hence activism, development, and global health are intertwined in my approach.

Six years later, I still feel like an “outsider within” (114). I continue to teach those classes and as an instructor I feel confident in drawing on what I have learned about learning. But it is a constant challenge to provide alternatives for coming to know about global health and community activism in ways consistent with the radical intent of transformative learning. One part of the challenge is in finding literature. Although by no means the only route to learning, I know it is imperative to read published literature and direct students to it, but twenty five years after my own frustrating undergraduate experiences with academic literature, I find it still exceedingly rare to locate academic writing on topics related to global and local community health that is as informative, inspiring and accessible as, for example, Galeano. As a result, my students read a lot of ‘grey’ literature⁴³. Within both kinds of literature, I am ever on the hunt for ‘good examples’ including instructional, historical, personal, fictional and even mythical stories. But clearly *something else* is still needed.

Thus ‘Lori as researcher’, relatively confident in community-based research, came into this project a novice as academic researcher, although with her own lifetime of reasons to seek alternatives. What I have come to know this time round, is how common a sentiment it is to want to try alternatives in research and in writing, particularly outside of my own Department. In some disciplines a few things have changed over the past couple of decades and luckily, I am studying this time in a program without disciplinary borders.

The current project was conceived when two things happened. First, my initial idea of a community-based project fell through. Second, through new methodological readings for my classes, I realized that there is deeper crack than I had thought in the foundation of social science. It was in those class readings that I saw how narrative stories were being crafted and

⁴³ I don’t mean to paint ‘grey’ literature as a negative option, for it allows us to delve into epistemological and ideological questions.

validated as ethnographic researchers ‘met’ postmodern and feminist authors, such as anthropologists Ruth Behar and Martha Ward, sociologist Laurel Richardson and psychologist Mary Gergen, (among others) that are challenging omniscient writing forms of male academia. Those authors and many others are creatively forging ahead, in spite of an irony noted by Behar and Gordon (74), wherein “as women we are being ‘liberated’ to write culture more creatively, more self-consciously, more engagingly by male colleagues who continue to operate within a gendered hierarchy that reproduces the usual structure of power relations within anthropology, the academy and society in general” (74, p.5).

Feminist and postmodern approaches to life history seemed to be an apt way of approaching the idea of doing *something else* and provided a methodologically good fit as a way to creatively compose portrayals of women activists’ lives that might ‘bring alive’ concepts related to transformation. And so with this brief glimpse into the past trajectory and current position of ‘Lori as researcher’, I now turn to the story of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological points of departure for the present study.

3.1 Points Of Departure

In the following sections of this chapter, I delineate the points of departure for the study. To do so I briefly describe narrative reasoning and analysis, give examples of and variants on life history, and explain ways in which feminist methods and postmodern turns inform the type of life history used in this study.

3.1.1. Narrative Research Methodology

A fitting way to situate this study theoretically is to map the epistemological and methodological journey I followed to arrive at my variant of postmodern life history. I do this in line with Harding (115) and Naples (112), who pose that our epistemologies and our

epistemological assumptions drive the specific methods we choose and how we employ those methods, how we define our roles as researchers and ethical standards, and how we decide what form the written product should take (112). The route I took on my epistemological journey includes attempts to navigate and avoid the pitfalls of the absolutism of modernist grand theories of social movements, the essentialism of realist stories of women's lives, and the relativism and esotericism of radical postmodernism.

While I clearly recognize the multiplicity of available methodologies for studies of activist commitment, this project had as its departure point a particular epistemological affinity to stories, as a way of knowing and a way of teaching, and with a concurrent desire to illuminate particular stories of individual women for and in academe and beyond. My first methodological decision was commensurate with both my study's purpose and my epistemological stance on stories as a way of knowing, and it drew me to narrative inquiry.

Drawing on Kuhn (116) and Bruner (117), a classic definition of narrative reasoning is instructive. Bruner (117) introduces narrative reasoning as one of two distinct modes of thought, the other being what he terms the paradigmatic mode of reasoning. Whereas paradigmatic thought relates to logico-positivist versions of science that seek universal truths through observable patterns, narrative is concerned with the meaning and purpose of human affairs and as such provides more fluid interpretations of the social realm. In narrative reasoning one's life events occur in meaningful sequence, and events in one's life are related (though not causally) to other events. Experiences and how we make meaning of them influence future actions. Narrative inquiry helps us understand the ways humans "experience the world" and is "the closest we can come to experience" (118). Epistemologically, then, researchers who hold to a positivist or paradigmatic mode of reasoning search for knowledge through the patterns and

categories that together comprise what are considered universal or transferable truths, while narrative inquirers consider knowledge as situated and bring forward interpretations of thoughts and intentions, by attending to how one is living, telling, reliving and retelling lives within particular social and cultural plotlines (118,119). Narrative inquiry thus is based on people's stories.

Stories, of course, come in many forms and exist for many purposes. Stories entertain, inform, teach and connect us. Stories evoke emotion and empathy. Stories can also be powerful personal tools for making meaning of the everyday experiences and events of peoples' lives and can serve as cultural tools for understanding or for challenging cultural norms (117-121). How stories are told, by whom they are listened to and for what purpose, as well as how they are analyzed and reassembled again differentiate the narrative field.

Merriam (23) offers a useful taxonomy of narrative inquiry suggesting three broad approaches: 1) psychological; 2) linguistic; and 3) biographical. As in all qualitative approaches, in practice the forms tend to be less than distinct so she classifies narrative by its differing emphases in purpose and techniques of analysis. Psychological narrative research for example, focuses on personal cognitive structures and processes (122) including thoughts and motivations, inductive processes and human intention. It takes into consideration cognitive, affective and motivational dimensions of meaning making (23) as well as the recall of stories, thus including attention to processes of memory and theories of schemata (122). Linguistic or socio-linguistic narrative research is sometimes identified as a form of discourse⁴⁴ analysis (123), conversational

⁴⁴ It is important to distinguish terms here. *Discourse* as I use it in the body of the thesis refers to systems of representation based on institutionalized ways of thinking. Bound by language or other cultural coding systems, discourses define social boundaries that act to circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. Discourse and power are intimately related. Most dominant (patriarchal, capitalist) discourses serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates and which works ideologically to naturalize those

analysis, or narrative evaluations (124) that take as its object of analysis the language and use of language, including pitch, pauses, and intonation in the story telling (25). Her third category outlines a biographical approach to narrative research. Loosely, biographical narrative research includes oral or life stories, family histories, personal narratives and life history. Generally, in life history, stories place the personal in context, focusing on the relation of the particular to the general or the micro to the macro (4,22,125).

Pulling these together, then I began with a methodological approach consistent with my study's purpose and epistemology. Those depart from a point of narrative reasoning, and are located within a biographical narrative inquiry tradition. Within that tradition, there is additional differentiation and specification of method and theory required, for "while all life histories are narratives, not all narratives are life histories" (126) and further, not all life histories are supportive of feminist, postmodern or liberatory intent (3,127-130).

3.1.2 Life History

Cole and Knowles' (22) work on life history methodology was highly instructive for this study and I utilized their approach as a base from which to start my exploration of life history as a "relational approach" based on an "ethic of caring" (22,112). For them, the guiding principles of life history research (which they identify as relationality, mutuality, empathy and care) appear less a description of method, than a kind of moral code for relating. Their view is that a life history research orientation is both an intellectual and moral "extension of who we are" (22,

meanings into common sense. Importantly it is not possible to escape discourse, for everything that is named or represented in language, or other codes of representation, is steeped in it. But because discourses are socially and culturally defined, they are possible to alter. Usage of 'victim' rather than 'survivor' represents conflicting discourses on gender-based violence for example. Our language, and our stories or narratives reflect the cultural and social discourses in which they are steeped. Analysing how things are said and what language is used in the stories people tell reveals the ideological base of the narrative. As a form of narrative research then, discourse analysis investigates the meaning and use of the language in narratives.

p.25). Because of that, there is considerable diversity amongst scholars in their interpretation of the approach.

In this project I synthesized my own approach from various related methodologies that seemed appropriate. I did not seek one specific 'right way' to do life history methodology nor one fixed definition for the term. Rather, I began by identifying features of life history that seemed to distinguish it from the more than a dozen variations of narrative genres from which Cole and Knowles derive their approach. They pose as a hallmark feature that "context is everything". In other words,

Lives are never lived in vacuums. Lives are never lived in complete isolation from social contexts... To be a human being is to have connections with others and the collective societal influences and institutions... To be human is to experience 'the relational' no matter how it is defined... To be human is to be molded by [and to mold] context (22, p.22).

Most authors agree that life history is an approach that poses personal narratives and their subjective interpretations within the broader contexts in which they occur, focusing on the relation of the particular to the general (4,22,125) and taking into consideration such things as gender, race, class, family of origin, life events, and turning point experiences (131).

Considerable divergence occurs at the level of analysis and representation in life history.

Polkinghorne's (119) taxonomy is useful to illustrate. He differentiates between "analysis of narratives" and "narrative analysis", pointing out that "the former uses narrative (stories) as data, and produces taxonomies and categories much like those in other qualitative studies, [whereas] narrative analysis gathers descriptions of events... and generates a narrative as research product" (119, p.125-6). Although either can be used in life histories, narrative analysis best suited my study purpose as it enabled composition of "easy to read, jargon-free, accessible" stories (130).

Representational forms, particularly in postmodern life history research, are more varied and I return to that discussion.

In addition, life history from a critical or liberatory perspective exposes the theories and practices that attempt to make it so and state how it integrates them (127,129). In this section I briefly describe the origin of life history, identify examples of life history studies, and outline related research forms that both contest my assertions and influence my interpretation of life history as methodology. Then in a subsequent section, I outline three key features of life history that Cole and Knowles work delineates that frame some of the tensions and paradoxes in the genre.

3.1.2.1. Description and Examples of Life history

An early definition of life history might resemble the following 1965 passage: “life history is an extensive record of a person’s life as told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography” (132, p.23). Such a definition reflects the biographical tradition of life history but does not capture its historical purpose or current usage.

Life history writing has been traced back as a literary tradition as far as the fifth century⁴⁵ (133). Feminist historian Kruzynski (3) and anthropologist Marr (133) have charted a critical history of the genre. They make the important note of its origin as an andro-centric European genre originally created to emphasize and celebrate [masculine] “individual self-invention, self-representation, self-narration and chronology” (134, p.215) and as a way of documenting and celebrating prominent individuals’ lives (133). They also note that as both a literary and research

⁴⁵ This brief historical note is not irrelevant to the present study, as tensions around representation persist, as do questions of subjectivity and validity of biographical writing and I return to these in various subsequent sections. However, this is not a comprehensive review – for more historical background on life history studies in the social sciences and education see: Goodson and Sikes (130) and for a review of its development as a feminist history method see also Geiger (129) and Naples (112).

form, life history writing fell into disfavour with the ascent of positivism. Indeed certain questions regarding its validity and legitimacy as a research form in the social sciences have persisted. Nevertheless, as a “portal” (128) into the lives of socially or culturally silenced peoples, life history was reinvented by the social sciences coincident with the rise of feminist and other new social movements of the 1960s. At the same time, the method also became an important tool for the recovery and validation of stories of everyday lives (135,136) and a preferred methodology for “giving voice” (127,132,135).

Arguably, traditional versions of life history continue to utilize cultural generalizations and to project models of social life that reinforce euro- and andro-centric ways of being in the world (127,133). But more recently in this “moment” where traditional positivist science is under a postmodern siege (137), and where marginalized and silenced groups are seeking ways to assert alternatives to essentialisms (127,138), new forms of narrative inquiry are emerging, and biographical life writing is enjoying a resurgence (22,23). The purpose and forms of many life history projects are therefore often quite different from those of the past, as seen through its extension as a genre into new disciplines and as evidenced by new topics and subjects of study.

Examples of life history studies in the health and education field, for example reveal a number of theoretical and practice-based uses and foci such as: Patel’s (139) doctoral research on memory and meaning making processes entailed in life history interviews with a generation of former youth activists in South Africa; Stroobant’s (140) doctoral research on biographical learning processes of women during transitions in their work situation; Ebbeson’s (141) doctoral research on women’s experiences of cardiac rehabilitation; Will’s (142) life history study of the influence of nurses biographies on nursing knowledge and practice; Gates’ (143) and Periera’s (127) life history research on activist educators; and Kruzynski’s (3) feminist life history study of

community activists. I also located examples of life histories that were embedded within other designs or used to create a theoretical framework to complement a larger qualitative study, such as in Mizrachi's (4) story of Anna, used to both exemplify and frame her study of the recruitment of women elites in Israel. In one unusual case, a large international and comparative life history study focused on the role of personal biographies in the creation of active citizens in a kind of life history meta-analysis (144). Life histories also continue to figure largely in history and anthropology, frequently being experimented with as a type of "new" or "extreme" ethnography (133). Several of the studies suggest life history as a good methodology for the study of activists' lives given its appropriateness for studies of individual's identity construction (127); and women's historical agency (3).

Researchers' usage of terms associated with the life history genre and ways they classify those forms are influenced by their epistemological, ideological and disciplinary orientations as well as the historical moments in which they write⁴⁶. Thus I echo the caveat offered by Tierney (128): definitions in this field are frequently contested. Life histories appear frequently as an assembled methodology. I continue to illustrate that by my own example, making note of two additional related forms of research that influenced my interpretation of the variant of life history used herein. Both appeared frequently in the methodological life history literature and empirical life history studies I read. The first is life story and the second *testimonio*.

3.1.2.2. Life Stories

Goodson and Sikes suggest that life history is "the life story located within its historical context" (130, p.6). For them, life stories then become the starting points of life history research

⁴⁶ For example, most authors reviewed cited life history as a form of biographical narrative research, however, not all. In Marr's anthropological study, both biography and autobiography are subsumed as categories of life history (133). In Cole and Knowles work in the field of education, studies of people's lives are grouped together and named variously, but none are categorically subsumed to others (22).

and although stories are already lives interpreted, in order to move from the lived experience to life history, researchers have to add a second “interpretive layer”. Further, in order for life stories to be considered life histories, they must also add a range of data to triangulate the interviews and go beyond the unstructured interview to actively seek particular information from informants, and to document the historical context. They offer their own caveat, however, noting that to move from life story to life history offers the researcher considerable colonizing power to ‘locate’ the life story with all its “inevitable selections, shifts and silences” (130, p.17). For them, the life story is what people narrate about their lives, whereas the life history is collaboratively constructed by a life story teller and life story researcher. Both their description of the method and the distinctions they note appear more instrumental than substantive and are contested by others who compare the two approaches.

Marr’s (133) anthropological study, for example contains somewhat different assertions. For him, it is the life story that is the more collaborative of the two approaches. He prefers the term ‘life story’ because of connotations of western academic traditions of ‘history’ being a chronological assembly of facts. Stories on the other hand do not necessarily intend to reflect reality as understood in an objective sense. That is, stories “may contain elements of fiction, myth, lies, exaggerations, and other elements” yet are as informative and enlightening about lives lived as historical facts. Hence:

[T]hose things often on the periphery of history are given equal weight in a story... Names and dates are surely important, but they are important insofar as they evoke the significance of the narrator’s accounts of what happened. Those accounts, told at a certain time of life, in a certain place, to a certain audience, are the speaker’s own representation of his experience. The focus becomes not one of historical accuracy, but of personal authority. The researcher must hold true to the narrator’s account, blemished and all, in order to capture a sense of the life as lived (133, p.38).

These two examples are among many that highlight the inconsistent application of the terms life history and life story, particularly when crossing disciplinary boundaries, and I offer them to illuminate the issue, rather than as an exhaustive review of the differences. I do so, because as noted earlier, researchers' use of the terms life history and life story are influenced by their epistemological and ideological orientations, by the historical moments in which they write, and by their professional or scholarly or disciplinary backgrounds. For clarity, the term I use is "life history" (22). However, my usage of that term recognizes the influence of life story concerns and should be considered a mixture of the approaches. This is so particularly given its "preference for personal authority vs. historical accuracy" (133) in representational decisions, and hence the potential inclusion of artful exaggeration, omission and myth. But the study's broad purpose to contribute to liberatory ends is not directly addressed in either description and on that concern, a third variation of life history was also influential on my thinking about this approach⁴⁷.

3.1.2.3. *Testimonio*

In the literature on life history one particular variation stands out as always "openly ideological" (72) or liberatory. That form is known as *testimonio* (128,145). *Testimonio* is a research form which emerged from a tradition in Latin America of oppressed or marginalized peoples bearing witness on their own lives, in order to tell the story of their (peoples') oppression (128). In it, the researcher strives to balance the desire for both trust and distance, and

⁴⁷ I sense a need to qualify this. I do quite intentionally don the armour of an "insurgent researcher" and of course in this study there is a *potential* for emancipatory or empowering things to occur. Life history research can be experienced as empowering by participants, as a validation of their experience and knowledge. Stories of activists can also inspire a reader's personal agency and can add to the repertoire of activist strategies by example – hence working to extend the scope and range of possibilities for work in particular community organizing sites. Certainly one of the intended audiences for the project or its eventual products is activists and educators; however, I wish to recognize that this thesis, while broadly inspired by these and other feminist emancipatory goals, has a primarily academic purpose and audience.

“objectivity and solidarity” with the participant(s) with whom he or she is working in order to create a public record of private yet collective experiences (145). One of the most famous *testimonio* projects, recognized internationally as testament to the suffering and repression of Guatemalan peasants is the autobiography of Rigoberta Menchu (146) who ‘wrote the book’ by telling her life story to Elisabeth Burgos Debray (146). That project caught the attention of the world hence fulfilling its political purpose. However it also drew scepticism from its critics. The concurrent acceptance of her story as an historical artefact, with the subsequent critique of its accuracy highlights quite dramatically both the risks and the political usefulness of such stories (138). It also begs the question of whether the success of her campaign was in spite of, or because of, the potential “exclusions and exaggerations” (133) in its telling. Perhaps more than most forms of life writing, *testimonio* has drawn criticism from ethical circles due to its overt politics and use of rhetorical and fictional devices to make a point, with a moral imperative in research often cited as a counter-position (138,147). Beverly for example, asserts that to not use devices at their disposal, “intellectuals and writing practices are themselves complicit in maintaining relations of domination and subalternity” (145, p.562). It follows for him that in *testimonios*, the texts become a “confrontation between writer and reader” forcing both to assert their level of possible solidarity.

Testimonio influenced my thinking and my approach, and more so my representational decisions. But this study is not strictly a *testimonio*. Similarities exist in that the participants of my study also bear witness on their lives and the forms of activism involved within particular communities and contexts. As well, both tell reflexive stories of collective struggles. Further, and of particular note there is a spirit of solidarity reflected throughout the researching process (145). Finally, my reading on *testimonio* offered inspiration and validation for representational

decisions I eventually made for the stories. As is common in *testimonios*, I left the participants' words stand as authoritative, while emphasizing particular aspects of their lives, such as comments on their contexts, communities and struggles. However, it is important to note that this is not strictly speaking a personal narrative of an oppressed people (145), is not written in "urgency... by an individual testifying about a compelling social problem" (128), and is not authored by the participant as activist seeking audience through the researcher as 'interlocutor'. Consequently, the study as a whole should not be considered a *testimonio*. Both of my participants are white, English-speaking, heterosexual, home-owning North Americans. Still I make note of the similarities because of how the relationships of solidarity, the purpose, and the text forms in testimonial research influenced my version of life history.

Overall, I consider the study methodology a mixture of life story/history in which I acknowledge the influence of *testimonio* on decisions made in the course of the research. Life history remains my primary affiliation or orientation, and for ease of reading in the study I use that term. While not comprehensive, Cole and Knowles' (22) description of postmodern life history's three defining features -- relationships, artfulness and self -- find echo in the methodological literature I reviewed and are helpful as additional descriptors and guides to the genre as it was employed. I briefly outline those in the following section.

3.1.3 Three Features of Life History

3.1.3.1. Research Relationships

Feminist and postmodern life history approaches pose that the researcher- participant relationships are central places from which the inquiry emerges (5,22,148) and both offer ideas on how to conceptualize and conduct research that "minimizes exploitation of research subjects" (112). In doing this research, I had a prior relationship with both participants and we had shared

various activist experiences. Consequently, this study exhibits the (contested) idea of “insider epistemology” (148) wherein I am close to both the persons involved and to the research topic. That position enables both “ease of entry” and the gathering of rich data (17,149,150). Such relationships seem highly consistent with Cole and Knowles’ conceptualization. They contrast research relationships in life history with more conventional qualitative research that “promotes distance, formality, or adherence to strict role boundaries”. Although they acknowledge that as with any human relationship, the research relationship is complex and fluid, they consider “intimacy and authenticity as foundational to [life history] research quality and to knowledge production” (22, p.27).

Although the researcher-participant relationship is considered the heart of life history, and the participant’s relationship with his or her social context is a defining feature of the genre, Cole and Knowles’ approach considers additional relationships. These include the relationship of researcher with the topic, and of researcher and reader to the research texts produced. Importantly, the reader must be invited to be involved in the interpretive process. “Life history as a representation of human experience, draws in viewers or readers to the interpretive process and invites them to make meaning and form judgments based on their own reading of the text as viewed through the lens of their own realities” (22, p.11). The relationship of the reader to the research texts is contingent and particularly risky for it asks readers to enter the interpretive process. Further, it “demands active and reflexive readers, readers willing to be moved by personal stories...[and] demands that writers put their empirical materials in a form that readers can use in their own lives” (151), although it cannot guarantee that all readers will engage (152).

An important task for the researcher therefore, is to identify the intended readers or to “audience” (153) their research⁴⁸.

Certainly, relationships and all the complexities they entail are of central concern in life history, but “how we deal with the tensions is of more importance than merely naming them” (118, p.82). I reveal the effects of the relational issues and tensions in this project in a later section.

3.1.3.2. Arts-informed Research

Science does not stand in opposition to rhetoric; it uses it. And, conversely, the use of rhetoric is not irrational (83, p.40).

Cole and Knowles consider postmodern life history as a form of arts-informed research because it involves a process that is “creative and responsive, [with] representational forms for communication that vary” (22, p.10). Arts-informed research, in turn is a form of transformational inquiry that “rests in the intersection of the researcher, the research focus, and the process and art form that eventually comprise the public representation of research findings” (82, p.203). To be “arts-informed” is to evoke both cognitive and affective understanding (83,151), which can include writing reflexively and “vulnerably” (75), or performing the research as poetry, art, drama or other creative forms (154-157). Although representational forms are the focus of much of the literature on arts-informed research, some authors suggest that utilizing it has a deeper purpose. As Glesne notes:

In the blurring of boundaries, experimental writing helps to heal wounds of scientific categorization and technological dehumanization. With its aesthetic sensibilities,

⁴⁸ On my last night in the first iteration of data gathering at Dianne’s house, she hosted a potluck with some of the ‘old’ West Kootenay Central America committee members. We had an entertaining evening, and shared many stories. The event also provided an opportunity to hear opinions from other activists about my study project. People were genuinely curious and interested. Many expressed looking forward to reading the story of Dianne’s life. I believe their enthusiasm was my first external verification that they were a potential ‘audience’ of at least some aspects of this research. That ‘audiencing’ influenced choices I ultimately made in favour of an accessible first person story form for the life histories.

experimental writing can introduce spirit, imagination and hope... If our work provides an opportunity for the maker and the beholder to reflect upon his or her own life and on what it means to be in the world, it can be transformative (81, p.215).

In thinking about the aesthetic aspect of life history research I find it useful to compare life-history to portrait painting. A portrait seems apt, for as with life history, “a portrait (a good one, anyway) is meaningful, evocative, and even inspiring” (133, p.32). Certainly, thinking of life histories as portraits illustrates how ‘researchers as artists’ might produce different versions of the same subject. What they produce as portrait would depend on their own preference and talent, on how they connect with and understand the subject, and on the intended audience.

For me, being “creative and responsive” speaks to both the nature of relationships sought, and the opportunity to democratize the research representations. Such representations in turn enable the research to “reach out from the academy, beyond its sacred halls to communities beyond” (82, p.9) and to invite participation in the interpretive process (70). Epistemologically, then, the use of aesthetic texts acknowledges the many and varied sources and ways of knowing and understanding. The idea of ‘evoking’ meaning rather than describing lives also frees life history texts from problems associated with linguistic mimesis and the use of inappropriate scientific rhetoric such as “‘generalizations’, ‘verification’, ‘truth’ and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of fieldwork” (158, p.129) or in the writing of life histories. Issues raised by attention to the aesthetic in life history include questions related to the “crisis of representation” (156,159) and quality criteria in postmodern research (160-162). I return to these issues.

3.1.3.3. Self: Autobiographical Elements of the Research

Rather than reflexively noting and then bracketing out the researcher, for Cole and Knowles the quality of a life history research project is determined partially by the researcher’s

willingness and capacity to bring his/her own personal history to the study, and accept “the multiple mediations at work in the creation of the text... exposing them, rather than hiding them, wishing them away, or assuming they can be resolved” (128, p.547). So conceived, postmodern life history researchers advocate a new kind of reflexivity that produces some form of fused biographic and autobiographic or autoethnographic text. Feminist writers similarly reflecting on biography and autobiography, pose this position as essential to consider given the issue of “how women are to make other women the focus of their gaze without objectifying them and thus ultimately betraying them” (75, p.28). The idea of fusion is a way of including an autobiographical voice, not to overshadow other voices but to remind the researcher and the readers of the inter-subjective realm (5,22) or the “borderland, between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (75, p.174) from which such research arises. Thus, the terms autobiography and autoethnography, (which are often inter-changeable in the literature) claim to “synthesize both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question” (163, p.2). Cole and Knowles and others caution that being an autobiographic writer is fraught with tension “between creativity and restraint” (22,163). Certainly how and how much to incorporate reflexivity in the research project are contested questions. Taken to the extreme, reflexivity can lead to a “threshold of an infinite regress of reflection on reflection” and a flourishing of narcissistic accounts (128). Still, reflexivity is considered in life history to be a mark of research quality (22,160,162).

3.1.4 Tensions, Paradoxes and Dilemmas of the Methodology

Life history methodology is not inherently liberatory (129,130). Rather, under critical scrutiny particularly through a feminist lens, life history as a narrative genre continues to provide substantiation for claims that the cultural generalizations and models of social life projected in such writing is typically euro- and andro-centric (127,133). Critics also note that the resurgence of life history is consistent with the “cultural logic of late capitalism”, the “conservative politics of late postmodernism” and “the myth of the autonomous, free individual” (164, p.8). Indeed it can be. The paradoxes and tensions in life history methodology must be attended to, if not to resolve or avoid them, at least to reflect and decide on strategies to expose them. I attend to that task here using the three categories above.

3.1.4.1. Research Relationships

Most critical and feminist authors start from the assumption that all (research) relationships are uneven and are affected by differing social conditions, locations and positions of the researcher and researched. Yet what to do with that recognition of difference and how much it affects the process and product remains contested. During the research process, a central dilemma becomes one of finding ways to expose and address the tensions inherent in balancing the tendency toward “masculinist distance” with the inclination toward sisterhood or full engagement (3,22,148). The traditional distance called for by social science research at one extreme invites a potential for research to recreate colonialist, oppressive, objectifying, or exploitative relations that obliterate the subject (3). On the other end of the spectrum is the “false erasure” of all the differences between researcher and narrator that eradicates all claims of different positions and power (129). Feminist research recognizes this issue as an ethical dilemma and suggests that the researcher must be explicit in finding ways to infuse the research

with conditions that foster respect and dialogue (112,129,148). This involves ongoing negotiation, sharing of authority, dialogue about the process and product and honesty about the limitations of the project. It can also involve strategies to invert the authority in the research interview process, to “pivot the centre” (165), or to otherwise create opportunities for discussing and representing the merging of subjectivities that occurs in a research process (5). In addition to general strategies, two research methods, described more fully in the next chapter, de-centre or invert the authority in this project. The first method involves open naturalistic interviews and ‘research exchanges’, and the second involves group sessions. Understanding how these methods impact those involved in the research requires attention to inter-subjective realm inherent in the research encounter.

Conceptualizing the research encounter as a duality is commonplace, with for example, insider/outsider standpoints and epistemologies being mentioned and studied frequently (112,114,148). These categories of inclusion create a paradox though, and they are increasingly contested as binary constructs which themselves conceal the complexities of relationships as they have the reifying effect of “fixing the constants” interview to interview, place to place, over time. Suggestions such as “gradations of endogeny” (166) or “non-unitary inter-subjectivity” (5) seem to more accurately reflect the fluid nature of positionality and subjectivity, place and time, trust and intensity of research encounters. But such ideas, too can lead to such “total relativism” that they preclude political activism by obscuring the identification of (even temporary) subjective positions and power differences inherent in all human encounters (112,167). The idea of merging subjectivities does not assist in determining, for example ‘whose account’ to give precedence to when there are differences of opinion, memory or position, nor does it offer a way of discussing ‘on what basis’. On that note, Spivak poses that “the intellectual should neither

abnegate his or her discursive role nor presume authenticity ‘of the oppressed’ but allow for the possibility that the oppressed will produce counter-sentences that can then suggest a new historical narrative” (168, p.110). A counter-sentence presupposes a sentence, however, and sets up an oppositional stance. Hurtado and Stewart suggest instead a form of “narrative affirmative action” wherein “feminist scholars self-consciously underplay hegemonic voices ...and relentlessly create textual room for counter-hegemonic narratives” (169, p.120). Others suggest a complementary alternative. Rather than simply claiming ‘insider’ status, researchers should employ a reflexive practice (112) that explains and makes visible their own “selves in relation” (22) wherein they expose their position as situationally created (3,170) both separately and ‘in the field’ alongside of their participants. To do so, is to call attention to the “complexities and ambiguities of engagement and strangeness, intimacy and distance, identity and difference” (171, p.193) and to recognize that “members of the groups we research are also active participants in the research process and can play a powerful role in shaping what we come to know about their lives and the communities in which they live and work” (112, p.37). I understand these postures as invitations to make central the ‘confessional’ aspects of writing and the emotional aspects of the relationship and the research encounter, and to experiment with multi-layered texts to avoid the pitfalls of single-authored texts, in favour of “messy” ones (3).

Taking up that invitation I pose multiple kinds of creative interpretations including allegories, poems and poetic transcriptions (81,154), and I note some of my own situated stories and reflexive interpretations that offer glimpses of emotional or situational contexts of our relationships that speak of our “engagement and strangeness, identity and distance” (171). These reflexive and relational accounts are written into several prefaces, and are also possible to read ‘between the lines’. Less obvious for the reader but perhaps most important overall, are the

myriad ways that I work to break the traditional researcher-subject dichotomy, and to understand and apply a ‘feminist orientation’⁴⁹. To do that, I rely on the basis of the “ethic of caring” (22,112) at the heart of life history and at the root of friendship.

A friendship however, can be a more complex and dynamic site of research relationship than those typified in the research literature. When the consequences and the contradictions of an ethic of caring within a feminist interviewing encounter are discussed in the literature, they are often presented as issues of authenticity or “artificiality of the closeness” (5,112). Almost nothing, by contrast appears in the methodological research literature about ‘what to do about friendship’ and the emotional consequences of those being the basis of fieldwork (112).

As a result, in this project, where I needed to make decisions that tested my fidelity to either the research or the friendship, I relied on what I will call an ‘authentic ethic of caring’ combined with my conscious choice to “create textual room for counter-hegemonic narratives” (169). In other words, whenever whose version of events was in question, I responded “in solidarity”(145), at times negotiating the text and other times relinquishing my hegemonic researcher power and instead amplifying their words, therefore intervening in the world of academe where my participants do not reside (145).

3.1.4.2. Arts-informed Research

Denzin and Lincoln (159) note that postmodern arts-informed ‘turns’ in research arose from two related crises, that is crises of representation and crises of legitimization (validity).

⁴⁹ What I found most difficult was not the break with the traditional distancing in doing the research, but in writing it up. I hold to the ideas that our theories are only liberatory if our practice makes them so (192). In the practice of this research I found breaking with the traditional distancing and researcher-subject dichotomies relatively easy. But as a novice academic researcher, with this research being completed as part a doctoral project, I was left sensing something illicit about doing that, and I sensed the dissonance particularly when trying to write up the methods of the study in traditional terms. That linear academic story just didn’t support a way of telling how ‘breaking boundaries’ might and did happen in practice. Ironically, my perception of academic boundaries that ultimately determine the legitimacy of any project loomed much larger and seemed less permeable than those of the research encounter itself.

Both sent “rhizomatic” effects rippling throughout the social sciences (172). One of the major responses to these crises was the attempt at multiple representational forms that blurred genres (159) and created new fusions of the arts and humanities with the social sciences. A search for new ways to legitimize the work of such fusions accompanied the move. In narrative research the turns resulted in the use and growing acknowledgement of arts-based alternatives to traditional academic texts, such as poetry, drama, fiction, painting or emotion-infused and autobiographical writing. But such arts-informed research presents new dilemmas and creates new paradoxes. I briefly outline several reported dilemmas here and complement them in my discussion of critical postmodernism.

Non-conventional or experimental writing forms or performances as replacement of the traditional research text are an appropriate political and theoretical response to the need to “evoke the messiness” of diverse ways of knowing and of multi-vocality so characteristic of the postmodern age where “unity is no longer desirable” (120), categorical explanations are being replaced and political contentions over masculinist epistemological supremacies common (162). As Richardson aptly points out, “wherever text is produced, there is a question of what social, power, and sexual relationships of production are being reproduced” (154, p.57). Hence according to both her and Clough (162), experimental writing is a political act of postmodern feminists, useful as both cultural critique and a way to re-present diversity. They see experimental writing as one way to provide diverse alternatives to the inadvertently essentialist consequences of qualitative research relating ‘women’s experience’ as if singular. But they advise caution to do so with integrity as the political aims of feminism are a “seriously difficult task” wherein there is “no getting it right” (154). Indeed, carried to its extreme, the over-emphasis on aesthetic writing or an “overly textual focus”, rather than highlighting women’s

lives can render them irrelevant (112). The experimentation with auto-ethnography, as a favoured form for highlighting diverse forms of knowledge, including emotional knowledge, can also inadvertently re-privatize women's worlds (162) and thus serve a regressive political purpose. Certainly not all moves toward diversity are "successful in giving all sides their due" (173).

Despite increasing use and acceptance of aesthetic forms of representation in interpretive research, little is written about how this approach actually takes place, how the techniques are employed, or what skills are required of the author (77,84). This highlights a dilemma for researchers wishing to incorporate aestheticism, because the author as the "arbitrar of inclusion, emphasis, and integration" (173) is not always an artist, educated in the arts of literary rendering (84). Further, sometimes the basis for articulation of method is complicated for the author to fully communicate, particularly when the rendering is highly personal or abstruse and involves use of "transgressive data" such as dreams, emotions or sensual data (172).

Yet, whether obtuse or well-defined, the reader is invited to be involved in the interpretive process (70,152,153,174), and "to make meaning and form judgments based on their own reading of the text as viewed through the lens of their own realities" (22, p.11). I sense that the sometimes obtuse descriptions of aestheticism in research spawn some of the 'modernist' critics of arts-based works or performances as excessively narcissistic, navel gazing, or exhibitionistic (128) and why experimentation is sometimes thus cast as anti-theoretical (162). Yet there are those who are concerned about the potential for the experimentation to fail, unleashing a conservative backlash that works against the kinds of epistemological and cultural critique made possible through such writing (152,154,162). There are many more who utilize

the potential for art to infuse research given its communicative and democratizing potential. I have a particular affiliation with this latter assertion.

This project is arts-informed, as it portrays autobiographical, emotional and confessional aspects of my and my participant's lives in multiple ways, without privileging any particular aspect or claiming it as the new Truth. The life stories are offered in simple prose to make them accessible beyond academe. Because of my concern with the potential that the first person form can be conflated with 'realist' narratives that present hegemonic accounts of coherent selves (175), I add complementary sections. By writing personalized prefaces and reflective commentary, for example, I situate the stories. By adding creative experiments I involve the audience in re-inscribing meaning from them. Such infusions of multiple and perhaps 'messy' forms of writing, i.e. confessional, creative, relatively jargon-free and poetic, are useful as analytic devices and interpretive representations. But at the same time, utilizing them in an academic project is risky, and presents new paradoxes that highlight how the project (and I as researcher) are in fact somewhere between the modern and the postmodern era.

I attend to the major tensions outlined above by being as transparent as possible about the process of articulation and purpose for the assertions that are made in the text, and by outlining major theoretical influences on the project. In the thesis I restate in multiple ways how I locate life history research as a form of both literary and scientific writing, and how I adhere to that amalgamation as useful "not because it produces good art or rigorous science (although it could possibly do both), but because it opens up a spirit of discovery and creation in the researcher and the reader, who may begin to think about the process and product of research in very different ways" (81, p.217). In other words, with the view that writing and interpretation are integrated and complementary, and that research and representation are inextricably entwined rather than

separate events (120,174), the process of writing in different genres provides a way to test out different analytical ideas and present “crystallized” (154) reflections and refractions of aspects of activist selves and lives. I sense that by writing in this way I offer a visible means to expose and accept both the “messiness” and the finite possibilities of representing activist lives (176).

The second major paradox with arts-informed research arises from the first and concerns issues of legitimacy of arts-informed research. Stemming from the so called ‘crisis of validity’ or “legitimation mania” (177) in interpretive research, the “impossibility of linguistic mimesis” (156) is highlighted in discussion of arts-informed research, though not resolved. For Smith and Deemer, “in this non-foundationalist age when the God’s-eye view is no longer a realizable hope, relativism in some form or another, is a consequence that is inescapable” (176, p.877), and any discussion of criteria for judging social inquiry must start from that point. Ultimately they consider the task of setting criteria for judging research in the postmodern age as involving a recognition of the finite nature of human beings, a “time to accept our vulnerability and contingency, drop the last traces of the epistemological project, and thus change the conversation” (176, p.878). And so, they and others suggest moving the conversation from epistemological concerns with proof and legitimacy of research claims to practical and moral concerns, or a “vision of research that enables and promotes social justice, community, diversity, civic discourse, and caring” (160, p.277). The emerging quality criteria involve a moral stance, a consideration that setting criteria is “not a solitary engagement” and an acknowledgement that criteria cannot come with fixed or rigid definitions. The challenge is to recognize and value “plurality, multiplicity and acceptance and celebration of difference...without giving over to excess, [or to] inquiry so fragmented that lines of connections have been lost” (176, p.894). Having research judged by its named audience, whether that is a supervisory committee or a

community of interest, is posed as a partial way to do that. Therefore, although tensions persist, it is incumbent on the researcher to expose how the project has both involved and been judged by its “community as arbiter of quality” (160,178). Additional lists of suggested criteria for judging aesthetic research abound, such as: quality of the crafting, nature of communicability, and pragmatic value (177); neighbourliness (179); reciprocity, caring and spirituality (160,178); or a seamless synthesis of rigorous procedures that unite in an expressive aesthetic whole (22). I discuss the criteria I chose that attest to the quality of this research and how I employed it in the next chapter.

3.1.4.3. Self

Postmodern life history acknowledges personal, social, temporal, and contextual influences on the lives being explored, but also recognizes that from conceptualization to representation, life histories are “an expression of elements of a researcher’s life history” (22, p.10). Consequently, it is incumbent on life and oral history researchers to deal with the issue of reflexivity and self-representation in their work.

Bloom (5,24) and others (128,148,180) aptly observe that subjectivities of the researcher and participant may be falsely dichotomous. Accordingly, attention to both the researcher ‘self’ and to the inter-subjective nature of the research process are necessary in life history research. In fact, both issues are intertwined in the notion of reflexivity. The term reflexivity as employed by Russell and Bohan, relates to the need for researchers:

to reflect on the ways in which our own and our participants’ locations in the world shape our work... [but also] to the fact that when we study human beings we cannot stand apart from our own humanity; our vision is unavoidably influenced by the fact that what we see in our informants is often true of ourselves as well. Embedded in ‘reflexivity’ lies the recognition that research is not an objective rendering of reality but a form of participation in the phenomena under study (181, p.402).

When asking how to represent self reflexively in the text, researchers' responses appear to range on a continuum from the openly vulnerable account (128), to poetic and fictional voices of self (182), to accounts of co-construction of 'the story', described as a textual product of the researcher participant relationship, but almost devoid of the direct experiences of either. The call to vulnerability reflects, perhaps, the yearning for a kind of evocative text (151) that elicit a response. As Tierney suggests, "when we write vulnerably, we invite others to respond vulnerably" (128, p.549).

Feminist researchers both employ and problematize self-reflective practice. Lather (71), for example ponders whether, how and how much reflexivity in practice might serve in a post-foundational era to expose one's own work and the epistemologies being employed without "entangling [our]selves in an ever more-detailed self analysis, an implosion into the self". In addition, the researcher may fall prey to a "faith in the powers of critical reflection ... a belief in self presentation which seems to guarantee that we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean and know what we have said" (71, p.685). Therefore the use of reflexivity must necessarily involve a delimitation of its possibilities and a recognition that the "careful monitoring of one's own subjectivity...does not have in all situations a potential to keep distortion away" (112, p.42). Naples recommends that researchers utilize a reflexive practice which indicates both individual self-assessment and collective assessment of research strategies.

Consistent with this call for a reflexive practice, I bring myself into rather than limit my self in this research. This is not to legitimate my own subjective voice and overshadow other voices in the study, but to allow my voice to come forward and join with the "selves of others" (183), hopefully resulting in an openly inter-subjective understanding of the lives and topics of study. At the outset of this research, I recognize the risks of autobiographical disclosure and that

to involve my self is to make myself “vulnerable” (75). However, the quality of a life history project is partially determined by a willingness to bring personal history to the study, and accept “the multiple mediations at work in the creation of the text... exposing them, rather than hiding them, wishing them away, or assuming they can be resolved” (128). In the project I utilize reflexive prefaces, footnotes and sections as well as reflective commentary on the research process as ways to expose the complex dynamics at play in the writing of their stories. In those ways, I render visible the inter-subjective realm or “borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (75, p.174) from where the life histories arise. The group sessions serve as a complementary self-assessment or “accountability” process (169).

3.2 Orientations: Postmodernisms and Feminisms

3.2.1 Constructivist Postmodernism

Defining the postmodern is a perilous enterprise and naming subpostmodernisms is similarly risky. One of the insights of postmodernism relates to the hazards of definition, of the power play that is behind any attempt to box a living, breathing, fragmented ever newly constituted thinker. Nevertheless, it is possible to seek the poles behind the rhetoric and practice of postmodernism and to create new, albeit temporary, categories to describe what we find (184, p.87).

I don’t propose here to cover the history or breadth of postmodernism and its variants in the multiples disciplines and sites where the term is used⁵⁰. Rather I explore several broad epistemological and methodological possibilities of a kind of “sub-postmodernism” which seeks to combine aspects of social constructivist and feminist theories with less relativist postmodernism. These notions help to locate this study, exposing important influences or lenses

⁵⁰ For more comprehensive reviews of postmodernisms, their interpretation, uses or integration in various disciplines see Griffin (86,188), Marchand and Parpart (185), or Mirchandani (184) among others.

through which I read my world. To begin I will offer a brief synopsis of common tenets of postmodernisms.

Postmodernism is sometimes defined as a moment, a movement, a trend, or an “amalgam of purposefully ambiguous and fluid ideas” (185) that has infiltrated art, architecture, humanities, social sciences and economics, to name but a few disciplines. Many authors converge in the opinion that postmodernism contributes most to epistemological concerns regarding the production and validation of knowledge (184), language usage, subjectivity, (156) and relations of language and power (185). All variants of postmodernism at some level question the certainty of the learned meta-narratives of the social worlds reflected in both liberal and critical theories. Hence, they reject simplified or universal definitions of social phenomena which essentialize aspects of reality, failing “to reveal the complexities of life” emphasizing instead, the need for specific, local, situated analysis that is grounded in multiple contexts (185). However a search for local or specific counter-narratives is not undertaken in order to replace the dominant ones, because ‘truth’ is viewed as partial, subjective and situated. In other words, there are always limits on ‘knowing’. Further, subjectivities are not fixed or constant, but are contingent, fluid and multiple (5,24). Postmodernism thus celebrates differences, and accepts the partial nature of all knowledge systems and claims. In a dangerous move to categorize the uncategorical then, I note that at least two dominant trends exist within postmodernism. The first trend is toward complete scepticism and radical relativism (Everything is so contingent that Nothing is knowable), and the second is toward an infusion or exchange of the postmodern uncertainties with critical and feminist ideas and political concerns. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated in the body of the thesis I use the term postmodernism referring to the latter trend.

Many questions and claims emerge in juxtaposing postmodernism with critical theories and some authors reject the possibility of their co-existence, (see for example essays by Christopher Norris (186).) Preferring Naples posture (112), I resist the dichotomous distinction of ‘modern and postmodern’ theories, recognizing that in practice we can and do draw from both. Accordingly, I see that the fraying of traditional academic boundaries noted in postmodernism and the centrality of notions of social constructivism in feminist critical theory (112,120,128,159) can and do inform one another. I further see that forms of critical postmodernism can help to merge an epistemological orientation that embraces forms of openly ideological research and action, social constructivist concepts and strategies, creative writing and spiritual ideas.

Importantly, not all writers who draw from critical or feminist theories and postmodernism label this place accordingly and each of their theories emphasizes one or more of these components differently. For example, “grassroots postmodernism” refers to “a wide collection of culturally diverse initiatives and struggles of the so-called illiterate and uneducated non-modern ‘masses’ pioneering radical postmodern paths out of the morass of modern life” (11, p.3). Gubrium and Holstein (187) suggest a combination of naturalism, ethno-methodology, “emotionalism” (which relates the visceral, affective, and subjective dimensions of experience) and postmodernism to create “a more affirmative variant” in opposition to sceptical postmodernism. Spretnak (10) signifies an “ecological postmodernism” representing the transitional space or “passage beyond the failed assumptions of modernity” toward spiritually meaningful participation in the global community. Philosophers of spirituality name this a “constructive or revisionary postmodernism” that involves a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions (86,188). For Kincheloe & McLaren, such a theory maps a

place characterized as “resistance postmodernism” with critical researchers engaging as “insurgents”, charged with articulating the synergistic potential for “the praxis of the critical and the radical uncertainty of the postmodern” (189, p.295). Grassroots, affirmative, ecological, constructive, critical or resistance postmodernisms all differently enable a “re-telling of oppression in order to re-configure lives” (128, p.549). In the re-telling they offer a way to simultaneously oppose reductionist modernist concepts for describing multiple-layered realities, and deconstructive and relativist forms of postmodernism as “totalitizing” theories (10). Resisting modernist dualisms including subject-object, self-other, developed-developing, “west and rest” (11,75), these theories are a call to remember diversity and to think, write and act beyond the confines of essentialism.

3.2.1.1. Postmodern Life History

The approach articulated by Cole and Knowles (22) is an example of postmodern life history in its emphasis on the multiple sites of relationships, particularly in its attention to aesthetically diverse representational forms, and reflexive attention to the inter-subjective space created by the research process. Authors converge on the idea that postmodern life history projects must be centrally concerned with the process of de-centring academic grand narratives (3,112,128) and redefining previously excluded voices. As Tierney writes:

A goal of life history work in a postmodern age is to break the stranglehold of meta-narratives that establish rules of truth, legitimacy, and identity... individuals and groups previously excluded from official versions of history get included – but more important, those previously excluded groups as well as other individuals and groups become redefined and re-described (128, p546).

The goal of amplifying previously excluded voices is not however to create a replacement narrative, or new ‘truths’ about subjects. The idea is to illuminate in multiple ways, non-traditional sources of knowledge that have been historically remiss, including personal,

storied, creative representations and experiences as expressed in oral, embodied and ‘emotional’ knowledge. Consequently, a feminist postmodern life history project might set the representations against or beside other sources to compare or problematize aspects of those theories or to note absences or differences, but without seeking to replace them with new theoretical meta-narratives.

3.2.2 Feminisms and Feminist Research Methodologies

3.2.2.1. A Feminist Doing Research

Reinharz’ work on feminist research methodologies cites a number of authors who have described features that distinguish feminist research from other forms including: the choice of research problem; the liberatory intent or objectives; the valuing of subjectivity and personal experience (particularly the often excluded experiences of women and other marginalized groups); the ways of working both within and across confining disciplinary paradigms to extend and transform them; and the acknowledgement of disagreement and diversity in feminism and in defining feminist methodologies (148). Within this plurality of feminisms and feminist research methodologies there are of course epistemological, political, disciplinary and philosophical distinctions between liberal, radical, socialist/Marxist, neo-Marxist, empiricist-feminist, standpoint feminist, social constructivist, post-structural, postmodern deconstructivist, postmodern constructivist feminist and others. Rather than framing this research through any one feminist approach or theory, I draw here on various ideas associated with feminism and feminist theories, adding to them possibilities opened by the postmodern turn⁵¹. In other words, I risk employing Reinharz’ pragmatic and anti-hierarchical approach of self-identifying as a

⁵¹ I don’t propose that the study is framed by any one particular feminist theory or approach. Rather, both feminism and postmodernism infuses this research. In some ways this will be congruent with what some have named a constructivist postmodern feminism (120) but not always.

‘feminist doing research’, and have chosen the research focus, purpose, process, objectives, methods and representations accordingly. As a result, although I make note of the epistemological and theoretical influences of aspects of standpoint and postmodern feminisms, the study takes a broad approach to incorporating feminist methodology. It does this particularly by openly questioning the dominant patriarchal paradigms of research and knowledge in both process and product, and intentionally making alternate knowledge claims that speak to diverse audiences (72,129,148,190). In this way, because I eschew the notion of value-free science and seek to validate and creatively represent multiple epistemological stances, particularly highlighting those found or created from within particular women’s situated experiences⁵², this research takes an approach that is both feminist and “openly ideological” (72,191).

Independent of my stated claims however, feminist or postmodern approaches and theories are not inherently liberatory. Theory “fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end...the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being” (192, p.61). In this research project, I incorporate bell hooks’ apt sentiment by practicing a reflexive research process guided by an ethic of caring and by using methods congruent with diverse feminist approaches. I elaborate these details in other sections of the thesis, but by way of example, I initiated the life-history process with telephone and street conversations with my participants, Nancy and Dianne, about the process, the time involved, the issues of authorship, the limits of my own experience as life history researcher, the possibility for unintended effects, and my stance as insurgent researcher wanting to do *something else*. Those conversations were also infused by hope that they would agree, because I felt them to each be

⁵² Feminist research is not monolithic, and feminists of various stripes continue to grapple with issues of women’s voices, and women’s experiences. For a description of some of the arguments about these issues see also Naples (112) or Oleson (239).

‘good examples’ of life long activists, but in different ways. Weeks before the interviewing commenced, I mailed a copy of my full proposal to Nancy and Dianne. Before the interviews, we talked at length about the project’s purpose and how I hoped to carry it out. We discussed their roles and my use of the data. In the case of Dianne, I resided with her as I interviewed, relying on the rhythm of her life to determine when and for how long we would talk (on record). I also clarified often that above all, openness, respect, and preserving good relationships as friends would prevail over research priorities where those things diverged (5,22,193). As a result, the interviews were conversational and naturalistic, and were led in form, content and length by the interviewees.

3.2.2.2. Postmodern and Social Constructivist Influences

A feminist life history openly acknowledges inequalities in women’s lives, including consideration of the multiples sites and intersections of gender with class and race inequalities. Geiger (129) suggests that for life history projects to be considered feminist they also must be composed as multiple products for multiple audiences. This study’s products are a montage of different writings for different purposes and audiences that represent my attempt to write beyond the forms and content of the grand theories and meta-narratives that bind (particularly women’s) expression of experience (5,75,154,154,170). The stories heed the call of feminist postmodernism for replacement of the “grand narratives and myths” by women’s “microhistories – local, provisory and limited stories” (23, p.374). The ‘messy’ experimentation (81,83) that stems from the stories is an attempt to “intervene in and rearrange the construction of meanings and the social arrangements they support” (194). Together such writings explore the boundaries of academic writing. They also convey the “limited location and situated knowledges” (195) from which one might begin to develop portrayals of the “social relations in which experience is

embedded” (170) and in that way, the writings are influenced by standpoint feminism and social constructivist theories (112,120,170). Importantly, the study’s products validate the everyday or quotidian experiences of women by using their own words, voices and experiences (115,148,196). However, they do so while rejecting the idea that women’s “ways of knowing” (197,198) are somehow intended as a more accurate depiction of reality.

Influenced by diverse feminisms then, the women’s stories, experiences and voices remain central. However, the situatedness, the composition process, and the partiality of the micro-histories are highlighted by autobiographical prefaces, as a way to build reflexivity into the research process (151,163,180) and to bring attention to the inter-subjective space that is both created and converted by the research process (5,24). Creative literary devices further highlight other possible interpretations and optional or additional ‘truths’. Overall, this montage of writing was my attempt to seize a postmodern feminist moment. Gergen captures the idea:

Now that this stranglehold of ‘logic’ is broken, the entire edifice of Western, male-dominated world making, along with its seemingly value-neutral approach to problem solving, is also in jeopardy. Within this [postmodern] frame, the opportunity exists for feminists to defy all conventions. Every social form that has been created to control, classify, bound, edge, and formulate becomes subject to skepticism and to disrespect...Here, the notion of blurred boundaries becomes prominent and political (120, p.37).

3.2.2.3. A Paradox

While the project stems from this postmodern space that openly defies research conventions, blurring the boundaries of feminist research leaves a quandary for the structural and political aims of feminism, and for the identity politics that are foundational to many feminist movements (199,200). On the one hand, some feminists posit that too much plurality results in relativism and gives neoliberalism its most effective ideological weapon. On the other hand is the claim that a return to univocal and omniscient representations of such movements recreates

the reductionism and essentialism that initially spawned the critique. In their practice, feminist researchers are trying to grapple with associated issues.

As one example, Bloom's analysis of narrative conversational interviews and her struggle with representing women's voices and identities calls for writing "beyond the ending" (5). For Bloom it is incumbent on feminist researchers to find strategies for addressing the challenges of exposing the humanist assumptions that underlie the notion of a "unitary subjectivity stemming from the idea of a identifiable, fixed and unique human essence and ... the lack of analysis of the relational, contextual, fragmented and active nature of subjectivities of both the researcher and researched" (24, p.292). To do so is to recognize and expand understanding of how non-unitary subjectivity is produced and how we might choose to interpret it in self-representations. Others note that exposing the problem of essentialism by "writing beyond the ending" exposes but does not resolve the problem. Naples for example, poses that to reduce the problem for feminist researchers to a textual or representational one is to reduce "feminism to a discursively produced phenomenon" (112).

Certainly the debate spawns many questions. For me an important question is whether both the process and products of this research project might shed light on such dilemmas⁵³. In the end, although I acknowledge the influence of postmodern, social constructivist and standpoint feminisms I did not subscribe to any one feminist theory. Rather, this project is positioned somewhere in their intersections.

⁵³ Embracing the possibility that I see here, I yearned for, gained and then agonized over how to treat this space for expressing the complexities of lives in context, in aesthetically and critically informed ways. And so I asked myself reflexive questions like: How does a feminist researcher act in the process of doing research? How does she conceive of research beyond the confines of essentialisms and learned meta-narratives that confine our voices, experiences and research practices? Are there alternatives that work -- scientifically, creatively and politically? And is a "messy" array of multiple, fluid and fragmented questions and answers acceptable as one of those alternatives? Is this project even appropriately called "messy"? What I might learn from trying to do *something else*?

3.2.3 Feminist Postmodern Life History: A Synthesis

Overall, I consider the study methodology a variant of life story/history in which I acknowledge the influence of *testimonio*. Life history, particularly as described by Cole and Knowles (22), remains my primary affiliation or orientation and I use that term, recognizing the influences of postmodernism and feminism on the life history methodology herein.

Clearly many researchers hail the return of narrative methodological approaches in general, and life history in particular, as politically appropriate (liberatory) responses to both conservatism and essentialism (3,22,112,128). This is so particularly when life histories are explicitly undertaken to pose counter-hegemonic insights (127), to expose the absences and inadequacies of the dominant ideology, grand theories or meta-narratives (128), to highlight the capacity of human beings to respond, to sustain hope, and to work to build just nondiscriminatory societies (127,201) and / or as in this study, “to help make movements, their struggles, and mainly their characters’ lives more visible” (127, p.81-2).

Life history methodology relies on peoples’ own stories as sources of knowledge, thereby providing opportunities for “amplifying” voices (25) of people typically excluded based on gender, class or race by re-fashioning their identities (127,138), by portraying their historical agency (3,149), and by naming their political subjectivities, based on their own understanding of their locations and identities and their own sense of how those shift over time (3). Hence, life history, although frequently described as a methodology that illuminates the logic of individual courses of action and the systems which constrain them (22), also has potential to include in its portrayals “the working out within a specific life situation deliberate courses of action that in turn have the potential to undermine the conditions and relationships in which the life has evolved” (202, p.6).

As Geiger (129) argues, life history methodology is therefore very useful where it attempts to expose and to evoke 'women' as historical agent who is both constructed by, and participates in the construction of economic, cultural, national and ethnic/racial realities. By starting from women's own descriptions of their experiences and their social and political locations, the methodology thus affirms that women are actors in the construction of their identities and of their society (3). A feminist approach to life history acknowledges and illuminates the material and social inequalities in the everyday lives of women, recognizing that all people have ways of expressing themselves and describing their lives that are worthy and that constitute knowledge. In that way feminist life histories also challenge the sexist, racist, and classist bases of epistemology and history (203). However, as Geiger (129) argues, this challenge is met only when "multiple products are construed for multiple audiences" that include minimally the narrator's communities and the scholarly community "sympathetic to the cause" (3). In this project I accept the challenge of multiple representations and redefinitions.

4. Chapter Four: Methods

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design and methods, offer a commentary on the use and placement of literature in the study, explain the strategy for participant selection, describe the methods of data collection and data analysis, explain strategies used for ensuring research quality, and outline the ethics procedures used in the study.

4.1 Overview

Given the purpose and focus of my proposed research, as well as my relationship to the research topic and participants, I selected life history research as a fitting methodological design for this study. As explained in Chapter two, the study is guided by research methods consistent with and perceptibly influenced by theoretical, epistemological and philosophical perspectives of feminism and postmodernism. Thus, in this study, the research purpose and methods and the textual representation are inextricably intertwined (173).

The variant of life history research methods I utilize is consistent with a biographical approach to narrative tinged with testimonial form and purpose. As such, the life histories herein pose personal narratives and their subjective interpretations within the broader contexts in which they occur, focusing on the relation of the particular to the general (4,22,125) and taking into consideration such things as gender, race, class, family of origin, life events, and turning point experiences (131). Three study features -- relationships, artfulness and self -- further define the methodological approach (22). Consistent with feminist and constructivist postmodern research approaches, the process and purpose of research and the relational space created or extended by the research project itself remain central concerns (22,125,129). I also recognize that narratives are constructions created through relationships of listener and teller and that they are shaped by contextual and momentary identities, purposes, audiences, plots, morals and other influences

(5,128,204). Hence, I openly acknowledge that using life history methodology and creating these stories are not neutral endeavours.

The study involves a small number of participants in in-depth conversational interviewing. I use group sessions twice, the first to engage a group of women activists in a broad discussion of themes to initiate the research, and the second, to judge the research representations using the criteria of “community as arbitrar of quality” (160,178). In the study, stories in the lives of two women, Nancy and Dianne, are the source of the majority of data recorded in conversational interviews. After transcript review and analysis, I reorganize these data and “compose” (205) life histories in a modified chronological way. The life histories are written as autobiographies. I preface each of the autobiographical chapters with a story that highlights the inter-subjective nature of the telling by discussing features of our relationships, shared experiences of activism, and the context of the research (22). In these ways and others, reflexive elements infiltrate and diffuse throughout these chapters. In addition, I reconsider salient ideas in the stories which respond to or resonate with research questions and represent them in experiments with creative and literary devices. Although the final product is my own, I consider the research texts co-creations due to the various iterations of ideas and drafts in which Nancy and Dianne participate, and due to their ultimate say in the stories that come forward.

4.1.1 A Comment on Literature

As noted in Chapter two, conventional approaches to research consider literature differently from postmodern life history approaches, a key difference being the types and placement of literature in a study. This study presents background theories on the topics to illustrate examples of the grand theories of social movements, activism and transformation, and offers methodological theories as instructive points of departure. Placing the theoretical

literature up front is intended to help to locate and justify the epistemologically distinct micro-histories, and the reflexive and creative interpretations that follow without being displaced by them.

Importantly, the study goals and location of my degree program are inter-disciplinary. The literature I use is also therefore inter-disciplinary. This is particularly appropriate given that activists and critical educators are located in many sites and disciplines. Accordingly, I offer topical literature delimited mainly by: sociology (social movements), education (transformative education), and women's and gender studies (methodological and theoretical perspectives on research and activism). That literature is used to explore, integrate and critique background theories related to activist commitment and transformation. As well, the extensive methodological literature I use that orients the study as feminist and postmodern validates the production of creative texts that traverse the specific languages of particular fields of study (26).

Cole and Knowles (22) notion of literature in a postmodern life history extends further. They purport that authors' thinking and writing is influenced not only by what literature is read during or directly preceding a study. Accordingly, they suggest the use of bibliographies to cite literature which has influenced the study more subtly without necessarily making the criteria for inclusion on a traditional reference list. For illustration sake, both fictional and grey literature would feature strongly in my bibliography and would include such disciplines and genres as: political studies, international development, Latin American studies, community and cultural studies, history, spirituality, health promotion, Latin American fiction and poetry, African fiction and others.

4.2 Participants

Based on the four main criteria named as defining features of activism (described in chapter one), I posed eligibility criteria for participation in this study. These criteria were that participants would:

- have a minimum of ten combined years of community-based work experience and activism, although they need not be contiguous years;
- be self and other-identified as a social activist ('other' meaning that organizations approached will be asked to identify women either in their organizations or known to them that fit my operational definition of activist);
- have some level of diversity of experience, meaning different levels of intensity and types of activism and breadth of life experiences – (if possible, diversity in age, race, marital/child status, sexual orientation etc.)
- have an expressed interest and willingness to dedicate the needed time to reflect on their lives as activists through this research process.

Six women participated in the first group session and two women in subsequent in-depth interviews. Five women took part in a final reflection session. All but one of the participants were middle class, Euro-Canadian women, between 45 and 70 years of age. I originally approached three community organizations with which I have current relationships to locate participants for the first discussion group: Quint Community Economic Development Corporation (through the staff or board); The Saskatoon Women's Community Coalition (through the board or members); and Oxfam-Canada (through staff, board or members). The nature of the organizations, and the participant selection criteria ensured that I would be speaking with activists whose work challenges the status quo and moves toward social equality, by

organizing protest of international trade regimes and international development policy (Oxfam), organizing local advocacy campaigns on housing issues for inner-city residents (Quint), or working in a volunteer coalition to organize street protest around issues of gender-based violence (Saskatoon Women's Community Coalition). I invited the participation of women meeting the selection criteria who were either members of those organizations or who were named by those organizations.

Consistent with the approach however, the selection of Nancy and Dianne was ultimately a serendipitous one (22). Both met all participant criteria, both met the additional criteria of involvement in Central American activism and importantly, both were willing to devote the time toward the project.

4.3 Data Collection

In the literature, data gathering in life history (and its variants) typically involves a small number of participants through in-depth interviewing over time, although documents, artefacts or observation can be used if relevant for understanding individual stories (22,141). In this case, there were many occasions prior to the research wherein I had interacted with the participants, and for which we held a common history and artefacts (such as posters, pictures, drawings). I pulled some of these artefacts out and used them for the study, albeit mostly indirectly. Life history research also requires gathering data on context, although "context itself is not the 'unit of analysis'; context is a reference point, an essential backdrop that helps us understand an individual's life" (22, p.79). One of the ways suggested for understanding immediate context is via observation and immersion in the natural settings of the participants. In this case, the interviews and my observations of the immediate context took place by immersion in the

participant's daily lives in their homes, offices and gardens, in gatherings of friends, and in social events.

Conversational interviews in naturalistic settings provided the majority of the study's data (5,22,148,193). I used group interviews twice: 1) as an initial session held in order to locate life history participants and identify broad thematic areas to explore in the in-depth interviews; and 2) as a follow-up session as a reflection and sharing session (story-dialogue) near the end of data analysis. Reflective journaling was another data source and it took place throughout the data collection. However, I generated most of these data post-data collection on reflection at the whole of the project and its meaning, as well as after telephone conversations or visits with participants outside of the interviews.

I initially held an open-ended group session in my home with six participants. We had a lovely three hour session of tea-drinking, reminiscing, sharing and suggestion-giving. Because I only intended for the session to explore broad themes, I did not distinguish individual voices in the transcripts. Data from the meeting took the form of audio-tapes and summary notes I made post-session. I subjected these notes to a preliminary analysis to grasp and identify general themes in the stories told. The themes assisted me in finding entry points and ideas for prompts for the in-depth conversations to follow. Overall, the session also validated the study and boosted my confidence. This was a topic and a methodology worth pursuing, if only because, in the words of a participant, “‘We’ don’t typically share these kinds of personal activist stories... and we should.”

The main sources of data for this research were the subsequent in-depth interviews or ‘conversations’ with Nancy and Dianne (22). These conversations varied in length from one and a half to over four hours. I interviewed Dianne in her home in Balfour, B.C. and in her truck en

route to the airport a total of six times, generating 500 pages of interview transcripts. To do the interviewing, I traveled to Balfour and stayed in her house for periods of three days, twice over six months⁵⁴. The interviews were not scheduled. Rather, they occurred within those days during moments of quiet activity. I also reciprocated her hospitality through what we dubbed ‘work-for-research exchanges’⁵⁵.

I interviewed Nancy four times in her home in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and in her graduate student office on campus, generating a total of 300 pages of interview transcripts. We spent a small amount of additional time together in an attempt to complement those more formal sessions. For example, on one occasion we visited the annual Save the Children garage sale and on another we attended a Sierra Club sponsored event.

Because each transcript and each story was reviewed by its narrator, there were also interesting and relevant margin notes (and telephone and e-mail comments) that sometimes provided additional data for the analysis. I utilized a reflective journal to make note of this data, to gather data on my own journey of inquiry and to make observations about the interview or story contexts. However, I found that most of that writing actually occurred after each round of data collection was completed. As a result, the journal held mainly summary reflections. I also relied also on some of my own letters, diaries and memorabilia from the periods of time in which our activism was a shared experience.

Near the end of the data analysis a group of women educators and activists participated in a group session. All of the participants read the prefaces and stories prior to the session. The

⁵⁴ I had stayed in her home on other occasions and there was a certain comfort about that arrangement.

⁵⁵ For each of the two trips I took to Balfour to do interviewing, Dianne had small projects that I helped her with. For example, on the first trip, we spent a rainy spring morning hauling and then shoveling manure onto her garden. The experience provided us with good humor about the symbolic equality of that exchange!

session added particularly valuable data in reference to my last study question regarding the study's relevance and acted as a process of helping to establish the quality of my portrayals. The data took the form of audio-tapes and summary notes post-session. I did not distinguish individual voices from the session. Group participants agreed to my use of anonymous quotes.

4.4 Data Analysis and Writing

4.4.1. Initial Analysis

Most writing on qualitative data analysis has obscured the actual act of interpreting and analyzing that shapes the research process throughout. Analysis occurs in visible ways, in the interviewing process, the journaling process, discussions with supervisors and in the process of writing that is inevitably analytical (174). Analysis also occurs in invisible ways, in the dreams, thoughts, feelings and hunches about the project that subtly influence its eventual shape. Indeed data analysis in this project did not begin as a discrete phase of the research. Data analysis happened from the time 'data' started appearing, that is, from the moment participants began to come forward and we began to converse. I asked initial questions based on informed hunches and assumptions. I actively listened to participants' stories, asking questions and "leading respondents down certain paths and not others, making decisions about which issues to follow up, and which to ignore, and choosing where to probe" (206, p.124). In the discussion groups, my ongoing interpretation of comments began to shape the data and I soon recognized that part of what I was doing was following my own analytical thinking. "Transgressive data" (172) such as emotions, dreams or sensual data that pervade one's consciousness and very being when immersed in such a project inevitably informed those hunches and my analytic path.

4.4.2. Transcription and ‘Saturation’

I did not do my own transcribing. I did listen to taped interviews several times while reading written transcripts, reflectively pondering what had happened, what was said, how things were said and sometimes why conversations seemed to veer off. I wrote notes in the margins and highlighted aspects for which I wanted more details. I posed alternate explanations for verbal and emotional responses, reliving them and making analytical notes based on my relationship to the written form of conversation. I wrote out questions for clarification, and returned to earlier transcripts to see how each participant’s stories were coming together.

In most qualitative research texts, data analysis is described as starting with the end of interviewing when the researcher is “left alone with the mounds of written transcripts” (206, p.124). As well, various qualitative methods descriptions suggest that the researcher cease data gathering once ‘saturation’ on a particular theme is reached. However, the idea of data saturation is not really applicable in a life history. Consequently in this case, ending the data collection and ceasing the interviewing was due to the available time and energy of participants for the project and the gathering of a reasonable amount and quality of data. Ending the interview phase was hence both an interpretive and intuitive act informed principally by attention to the purpose of the study and to its underlying relationships.

4.4.3. ‘Reading’ the Narratives

As I delved into my repeated readings of the last round of participant-checked and returned transcripts, I struggled with my resolve to continue to hold our relationships and their own words and phrasing pre-eminent “as I interacted with the life texts, entrusted in [my] care” (22, p.93). They now seemed flat, one-dimensional and toneless; the laughter was silent and the passion of talk snuffed out. The transcripts seemed ripe for scientific dissection, but I resisted,

wanting instead to preserve them more holistically to hold true to my epistemological and methodological assertions. In opposition to approaches to qualitative data analysis that “fracture” texts in the service of interpretation by taking responses out of their narrative context to fit with categories or themes that have emerged from a priori theoretical framing or from readings of the data (25,131), I searched for an analytic method that preserved the integrity of the narratives and narrator. In other words I interpreted quite literally the argument that “precisely because they are essential meaning making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents’ ways of constructing meaning” (25, p.4). I located such a method in Kryzinski’s study (3).

In Kryzinski’s study, she describes four major ways narrative data is read: biogram; analytic; interpretive; and standpoint. In the biogram, a simple summary of the participant life is presented in linear form, a “sort of curriculum vitae of the narrator.” Analytic method involves discourse analysis, or deconstruction in search of salient “facts and actions.” The interpretive method borrows from narratology and textual analysis, is more phenomenological or socio-symbolic and searches for pattern and metaphors in the telling in an attempt to make meaning from the text. The fourth approach is standpoint, in this case meaning a reading that “preserves the subject as knowing actor, as an embodied subject located in a particular actual local historical setting” and that utilizes the subject’s voice as is (3, p.70).

The choice of method was driven by my epistemological affinity. I wanted to highlight their voices, as well as to expose the situatedness and partiality of the stories. Further I wanted to explore the stories for the intimations or evocations within them via other analyses (described below). Consequently, the analytic process merged and extended her standpoint and interpretive methods.

4.4.4. Analytic Process and Representational Decision-making

As indicated earlier, analytic decision-making enters in at numerous points in the research process, and all narrative and feminist researchers confront them. Yet little is written that clarifies the basis upon which decisions are to be made (25,148,180,204). Instead, the process of highlighting text and choosing the form of stories is often described as an almost intuitive one driven by the researcher's capacity to "immerse in rather than dissect" the data, to "listen with both head and heart" to the information accumulated about the lives lived, and to "imagine the possibilities" for representational forms (22).

The analytic process in this study involved reading and re-reading transcripts, margin notes, e-mail and telephone notes, and highlighting salient stories, text, and characters. I read for plot lines and for their emphases. I identified the major relationships and influential factors each woman seemed to be highlighting by her intonation, emphases, descriptive adjectives or pejoratives, length of story and general way of telling the story. I also highlighted those passages that seemed to resonate with academic theories I had read on transformative learning or on activism or with other literature off the grand theoretical path. Deciding on what to include and to highlight in the stories was a non-linear process utilizing all of the above as well as a general sense of balance of the personal and contextual, and of the reflective, analytical and descriptive data.

Once the stories were written, I returned to my key claims and to several key ideas from the literature. Using those and the additional data, I searched for appropriately reflexive, relational, multi-vocal and evocative forms of representation that seemed apt for responding to my study's purpose and questions. Below I outline the autobiographical prefaces and experiments with creative form that were the result of this process.

4.4.4.1. Contextualizing the Life Histories

Kate Gates' life history research project provides a useful example of providing context for exposing underlying considerations in a biography (143). In her dissertation she uses a form of biographical writing to profile her participants. In order to dispel the idea that she is 'truth-telling' about their lives, however, she exposes the context of that story-telling by contextualizing each profile with a preface. The prefaces reveal important relational context. In them she provides a glimpse of the interview context and her reason for including the participant. Sometimes she reflects on the political context of their stories, and sometimes comments on resonant knowledge between participant and scholarly work. I modified her example as a way of prefacing Dianne and Nancy's stories focusing on aspects of our relationships related to activism, and exposing the contexts of the storytelling.

4.4.4.2. Invoking Themes and Provoking Interpretations

As an arts-informed project, the study is infused with autobiographical, emotional and confessional aspects of my and my participant's lives. I chose a relatively jargon-free writing form for the stories to potentially make the life histories accessible beyond academe for both artistic and political reasons. As I was concerned with the potential for such 'realist' narrative to undermine the anti-essentialist agenda of the research, I sought a complementary way to interpret and re-inscribe the stories in order to "reveal the masks of re-presentation" (207). Chapter seven and eight are the result of that search. Chapter seven is a reflexive interpretation of relational and inter-subjective aspects of the life history process. Chapter eight offers problem-posing literary devices as a way to provoke thinking about salient issues on personal and social transformation and commitment to activism intimated by the stories, and to propose the study's potential relevance for activists and educators.

4.4.5. Analysis: Summary

Overall, I considered the data temporally, episodically and thematically, ultimately organizing and analyzing the narrative data according to roughly chronological events in the life of each. I then highlighted the context, including our shared history and key autobiographical influences, in prefaces to those stories. Finally I experimented with creative forms of representation that suggest salient research themes in response to the study's purpose and questions.

4.5 Quality of the Research

4.5.1. A Group Reflection Interview

The last group session acted as a reflection session. As such, it represented a departure from what I understand as typical life history research. However, I proposed it as fitting for this project given the context for activism as a public and group oriented activity, the intended audience of (at least some aspects of) this research and particularly, as a place to propose criteria by which to judge the study's quality⁵⁶. Perhaps, also, using a final group-oriented activity for checking the quality of the research was a way of "coping responsibly with the by-products [and shortfalls] of the research design" (208, p.35-36).

Further, sharing in a group setting holds empowering and transformative potential, builds connection and community between people, and improves community practice (65). In research, the sharing that takes place in a group interview, particularly when participants have some sense of shared history or identity, offers a chance to examine or create inter-subjective understandings of that history, by making meaning of the multi-vocal attitudes, experiences and beliefs that are

⁵⁶ I wish to note that this session was not associated with the traditional notion of triangulation but was related to what Denzin and Lincoln (159) contend. They pose that using multiple methods "is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation" (p.5) best understood as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth.

shared by the group (196). Finally, reflectively sharing with other activists is a way for the research to become potentially relevant and empowering (17,190,191).

In preparation for this session, five women activists (three of whom had also attended the initial session) read the two stories with their respective prefaces. Each received a letter with the stories, asking them to reflect on: 1) aspects of the stories related to things they 'knew' of women's lives in general, of women's activism, and of long term engagements in social change; 2) if and how aspects of Dianne's and Nancy's lives were similar to theirs or to people they knew, noting things that seem radically different or even in opposition to their own knowledge; and 3) to consider the relevance or usefulness of such stories in inspiring a commitment to activism. In the session we reflected on themes and issues that appeared in the stories, comparing and contrasting them with our own lives and lives of women and of activist women we know. The session lasted a little over two hours.

I strategically placed the session at the end of the data analysis, to address the issue of quality of my analysis and to assess the evocative or inspiring potential of my portrayals. Also I sought to check my own assumptions and deepen my understanding of the meaning and relevance of narratives as a way of understanding women's lives, and as a teaching tool to inspire activist involvement.

4.5.2. Quality Criteria

As noted in Chapter two, emerging "quality" criteria in postmodern research (rather than research validity criteria) are consistent with concerns with communitarian, ethical and relational issues in research, and pay special attention to the contexts of the research and the positionality of the researcher within that research (160,178). Utilizing postmodern criteria to judge research quality, I considered the group, as part of the researched community, an "arbiter of quality" (178)

through being consulted on how emotive and authentic the stories seem, within their own standards for judging (83,160,178). Further, the final session explored, in a way that the individual interviews could not, whether story-telling and story-sharing, as a form of action, might have “catalytic validity” (191), meaning the potential to move participants thinking and feeling. Finally, the group session enabled me to get a sense of how well I did in the eyes of a lay audience, in writing vulnerably or evoking empathy and understanding (75,149,151,180). So conceived, the session simultaneously added data and addressed several criteria useful for judging the quality and credibility of the research.

4.6 Ethics

The study followed the procedures and guidelines for ethical approval outlined by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University, which makes use of the standards of the Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct. I assumed the research to have minimal risk to participants. To ensure ethical conduct during the research, I created and utilized a detailed informed consent letter with statements of research process and purpose, risks and benefits of the research, rights of withdrawal from the study, and procedures for storing and using the data gathered. I used transcript release forms, and spent considerable time with the participants in discussing the research purpose, process and potential products to ensure divulgence of all potential risks and benefits of the research. Because of the small sample size and the close relationships called for by the research design, I sought and received permission for use of their real first names, but used pseudonyms for all other characters in the stories to diminish a minimal possibility of negative consequences. I also paid special attention to the use and ownership of transcripts, ensuring that participants had the last say in decisions about inclusion of personally sensitive information, and that transcripts were ultimately their own.

In both the initial informed consent letter and in ongoing discussions with participants, I explained choices and limitations. For example, use of pseudonyms and changing the names of significant identifying events were strategies offered that I felt would not unduly affect the research but would protect any identifiable participant for whom it was felt the research could unduly affect. Both Dianne and Nancy agreed to have their names used for the dissertation. Throughout the research I ensured that choices being considered for research text formats were fully discussed and approved by participants. Nancy and Dianne read and approved for release all transcripts and final texts of their stories. In keeping with the goals and principles of this research, the final research text is thus a co-creation, although for purposes of the dissertation, I am sole author. Copies of ethics letters are appended.

5. Chapter Five: Dianne

This chapter is prefaced with an autobiographical account that situates the telling by revealing glimpses of our relationship prior to the research, of the nature of our shared activist experiences in the 1990s, and of the context of the interviews for this study⁵⁷.

Preface

My first memory of Dianne is from a West Kootenay's Central America Solidarity Group meeting at Manning and Pauline's house over fourteen years ago. She came in on crutches to their living room in Nelson, with her long auburn hair characteristically pulled back under a bandana, and wearing a warm smile. The meeting was also a potluck, and although I don't remember what she brought, surely it was organic and wholesome food from her garden. Pablo (my partner) and I were both there, with our then two-year olds twins, Xochitl and Sasha, and were still kind of local anomalies or maybe 'celebrities', having just returned from 5 years in Nicaragua. We had chosen to land in the Kootenays, because my parents had moved there in my hiatus from Canada.

We lived in Castlegar as did Pam and Doug (from the Christian Task Force), but meetings of the committee were usually in Nelson, which was a more central spot for those coming from the Quaker community in Argenta or for Dianne from Balfour. The committee meetings were both social and organizational affairs. As we ate, we talked, laughed, visited, and organized educational and fund-raising events. In my memory, group conflict was minimal, and

⁵⁷ Again, I recognize that my memory, consciousness and language all make available to me only some parts of my story while obscuring others, and further, that this story is selective and told with a particular purpose (25,149,180). Still, rather than simply claiming 'insider' status, the preface is an employment of reflexive practice (112) that explains and makes visible my "self in relation" (22), exposing the situatedness of this telling (3,170). I attempt thus to call attention to some of the "complexities and ambiguities of engagement and strangeness, intimacy and distance, identity and difference" that characterize my relationships to Dianne as friend, and Dianne as research participant (171).

the group got along well. That is not to say that all members were equally ‘politicized’ and certainly some members had a more charity-oriented reason for being there than I was comfortable with, but the level of care and acceptance of those differences in the group enabled its smooth functioning.

Many of our fund-raising events were family oriented. There were July 19 Victory day picnics in the park where we served ‘*gallo pinto*’ and watermelon ‘*refrescos*’ and made revolutionary speeches. There were cultural events, where the Guatemalan refugee families dotting the Slocan Valley came together to play home-made marimbas’, and there were piñatas for the kids. But mostly we organized events based on speaking tours of Central American political representatives of different organizations and networks coming through. We were connected in different ways with Vancouver and Toronto networks, but we also had our own connections to local Nicaraguan organizations too, some of them being connections Pablo and I held personally.

Although it was a relatively small community of people, there were a lot of events organized by all of us in the two years we lived there. The Central America Group members quickly became a community of friends. It was not insignificant for this project that I remembered those two years as being very good ones. After six years of living in Nicaragua, I felt I couldn’t have landed on a better place to come home to and to reconnect with Central American political work in Canada. This was 1992, two years post defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. I knew from conversations with other Canadian activists that our Kootenays committee was equally or more active than those in many parts of the country, many of which

were struggling to make meaning of the defeat and were dissolving as energy for that work waned⁵⁸.

When we moved to the Kootenays, Dianne's house was under repair to make it more amenable to someone who was mobility impaired (that story later) and with my Nicaraguan husband's need of work, carpentry skills, limited English, their socialist political affinities, and her solidarity leanings, he ended up spending long days there working for her. They became friends before we did.

I grew to love Dianne as a friend and a *compañera* throughout those two years, despite an almost twenty year difference between us. She was no simple character, and was quietly but firmly opinionated. I remember being both impressed and a little intimidated by the strength of her convictions. But both of us love to talk, and she always had good stories to tell and a good sense of humour in telling them, so I loved visiting her. She also always had good books lying around and interesting projects on the go. I mean, Central American solidarity was certainly not her only activity.

Dianne was a gardener and an herbalist, well grounded in the land. Although I came from rural stock, I knew nothing really about plants and less about eco-systems. But Dianne's affinity to nature and women's spirituality were things I highly valued, given my rural origins and my ongoing work (at that time) in women's health and midwifery. We also shared an Eastern European background, and had some crazy relatives. I think we both valued being a tad on the stoic side, and both being incredibly independent, neither of us were particularly 'bound'

⁵⁸ The drop in interest and organization was palpable in the 1990s. Just recently I saw an NFB documentary on Nicaragua made ten years post-defeat that perhaps sums up the sentiment with its title: "The World Stopped Watching." It is a sequel to the producers' first film. Completed in the 1980s, which was called "the World is Watching."

by those traditions, at least not in obvious ways. I felt a strong affinity to her, respected her integrity, and grew to love her as a friend and confidante.

Pablo and Dianne had a simultaneously close and distant relationship. He had a high respect for her political integrity, but complained of her 'stubborn streak'. From her, I heard that he too was stubborn and sometimes downright hard to work with, but that he understood her way of living, knew how to laugh and to work with little, and so she could work with him.

Skip forward: We moved away after two years, (and a great going away potluck). First we went to Calgary, then back to Nicaragua, and then to Saskatoon. Communication between Dianne and I was sporadic during that time, but occasionally we visited. I think I have been back to the Kootenays about five times and Dianne has been to Saskatoon once. We call on occasion, though, and our phone calls are seldom short. Although always punctuated with laughter, we tend to go straight to the non-simple talk of relationships, politics, work and money, with a little gossip on the local scene in Nelson and district, and lately my droning on about this project.

Dianne lives still in the R.M. of Balfour, BC. By mainstream Canadian standards her farm is isolated, and her living conditions rustic. The farm is not really nestled, but rather boldly situated on the side of a south-facing mountain. The forest flanks the farm on three sides; to the west the steep gravel road gives access to the farms and community below. The setting is incredibly picture perfect, a postcard of the B.C. interior. From the deck or huge sitting room windows of her home she has an eagle-eye view of the surrounding mountains and of the huge blue sea of Kootenay Lake.

The house itself is made of logs cut from surrounding trees, for the most part unfinished. The front door is particularly heavy, presumably as a deterrent to bears. Inside, the house is overflowing with books, papers, blankets, baskets and glass jars. Her small and atypical

collection of 'chicken art' paraphernalia and souvenirs are hung here and there. On her fridge are the usual photos of grandkids, postcards and lists.

In the summer, there is evidence of food production and of the business in seeds and herbs. A press, bark and cuttings, seed packages in a hand-made display box, dark bottles and droppers literally cover one side of the long kitchen table. Fruit, herbs and greens, fresh and preserved, are everywhere in bags, pails, bundles and bunches. The fruit dryer by the north window is full of prune plums. Later in the season drying braids of onions or garlic hang from the open rafters.

Her garden and yard are a beautiful, colorful, chaotic (dis)array of plots and pots, tubs and tresses of plants, shrubs, and fruits trees. It is quiet, except for the occasional eagle or hawk and for Laird Creek which always audibly trickles from the surrounding forest. The outbuilding that houses her chickens sits behind the house with bits of cloth tied to the fence that surrounds it.

Before this life story-telling had initiated, I had eaten, played, partied, organized and worked in her home on many occasions. Even before we left the Kootenays, our family had been overnight guests in her home. She is one of the few friends I have that is unfazed by having me arrive for an overnight visit with four kids in tow. There are always enough beds and blankets.

When I began in earnest my search for women activists as research participant, Dianne was one of the first people I considered. In other parts of the thesis, I have already told the immediate research story so I won't repeat those details. But I should note that I was hesitant about inviting her, knowing how complex a person she is, how much and how non-linearly she speaks. Moreover because of how deeply I respect her, I just didn't want to threaten our

friendship or turn her into a 'Subject'. But in the end, I thought we had shared enough history, and that her stories would provide a strong base on which to build a good, in fact a really good, story of activism.

Importantly, this is not the first research project she has been invited to be participant in, but it was the first in which the research proposal, details of the project, and a strict adherence to ethical protocol was used. She has been also interviewed as an environmentalist and a wild-crafter, but has never seen the results of those projects. Yet she trusted me as researcher, and wanted to help me out as a friend, so she agreed to the project.

And that is where this life history project begins. It is also where I will switch my voice to researcher / narrator.

5.1 Introduction

Dianne's stories as both told and composed, intentionally move back and forth between a kind of socio-political analysis or "ethnographic wide-angle lens" focusing outward on social and cultural aspects or contexts of her personal experiences, and then looking inward, revealing an "understanding of self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist" both cultural or structural interpretations (157).

In this telling, Dianne begins by reflecting on her life at the outskirts of a small conservative town, in the McCarthy era, in Yakima, Washington. She continues by relating transitions in place and time, from urban Detroit where the family moved when she was eight, to stints in England and Mexico, and then back to Detroit, landing finally in the Kootenays as a young adult. In the 'chapters' of her history she calls up memories of formative moments, relationships and philosophies in a way that clearly embed them in particular socio-historical eras and allows us to hear them through her own class, gender and ethnic voice. The choice and

purpose of her telling particular stories also reflects her awareness of the larger project of which they are part – that is, her life history as an activist.

A glimpse into one of our research interviews might look something like this: Two friends sit at a kitchen table. One is reminiscing, telling some good stories about her younger ‘selves’ as remembered. The other listens, thinks, reflects, paraphrases and sometimes gets distracted by her own self-relating. When ideas or experiences resonate loudly, the two friends voices talk at once or “cooperatively overlap” (209). The two friends talk, laugh, pause, and go on talking. They get up from their chairs occasionally to take dried fruit trays out of the dryer, to stoke the fire, to answer the phone, make some tea ... or they veer off topic, to comment on a bird flying by, or to talk about the herbal medicines being concocted in the same room. This is all part of the context of the conversation. So is the tape recorder, running while this simultaneous daily life activity takes place. And we both know that. In a way, the interviews might appear a kind of relaxed narrative performance.

And so I begin this composition. These are Dianne’s stories. They are excerpted from transcripts, fixed only for clarity and written in (her) first person. Dianne’s speech is recognizably influenced by both her breadth of theoretical knowledge, and her early exposure to English spoken as a second language. For the most part I have preserved that, leaving much of the syntax, grammar and verb tense as spoken. As Dianne talked to me, she sometimes highlighted particular aspects of her own personality or stories, through pitch, tone, words, or other emphases. Other times I ‘heard’ important contextual and theoretical resonance with what was being said. To me, these were things she wanted heard, and/ or they illuminated major influences on her life-way as activist, and so I use *italicized bold* script to highlight them. The titles are my own.

5.2 Dianne's Story

A free agent

So, I'm in my 60s and I'm looking at my parents' end of my life, right? I've been trying to spend more time with them because I'm looking at what made me the way I am, and I've noticed that I've always wanted to ask people, "How old are you?" But really what I want to know is when they were born, because I think that the years that we were growing up in are formative and we are influenced from what was going on, right? I didn't go to Detroit until I was 8 years old but I had a lot of formative stuff before that.

From ages 1 to 8, I lived on the outskirts of Yakima, Washington, in the Okanagan Valley. It's at the north end of the Columbia River Basin. Between the ages of 5 and 8, I was pretty much *a free agent in a rural area*. Our street was still semi-paved and that kind of thing. We were on septic systems. Everybody else for maybe another block was still on electricity but beyond that there was no electricity and they had outhouses beyond our house.

Yakima was a very segregated place. From our road, it was a hodgepodge...a lot of people from the South had gone there during WWII and also they went to pick crops because it was a good growing area and so there were a lot of Mexican people there. And the area I ran in as this free agent is where people from the south (they called them hillbillies then) lived, and then there was this section of the Mexican-Americans (who had settled there), and then there was some fields....

The old original Yakima town was along the river and that's where the black people lived. They had no power and no electricity but they had nice old wooden houses with big verandas. And those people along the river also ran the dump. So as kids we ran through all the cornfields and played together and then went through the dump and then ran in between the

irrigation canal and the Yakima River. For kids there was no racial tension there. In the 40s everybody was allowed to run free. My parents didn't worry about me as long as I showed up for dinner. Y'know. You just had to show up.

Well, a few times I didn't and my dad had to call on the loudspeaker. My dad had a little school bus that he had turned into an electrical repair shop and he fixed things on all the farms in that whole area so he traveled a lot and on top of this bus he had some kind of advertising thing and he had a loud speaker and a couple times he had to drive around, "Dianne L. -- It's time to go home" and I do remember that 'cause I was mortified. My mom, she ran the business and looked after the kids. She answered the phone, kept the books... They never made any money. He did a lot of trades and us kids liked trades, right? My mom hated trades. He'd bring home two cases of peanut butter mixed with honey from the beekeeper beside us. Or he'd bring a bunch of chickens. And my parents always had big gardens. Everybody ate out of their own gardens.

So I ran free in a wild area...but for some reason or other I was also very aware of the setup of the town. I can still draw a map of everything...who was where and what kind of circumstances they were living in. I was aware then. Nobody talked about that but *if you were observant you noticed*.

I also remember kindergarten. My mom didn't walk me to kindergarten because I had an infant sister and a 2 and a half year old sister that she had to look after. She had to answer the phone for my dad's little business so she had to stay home so she'd just walk me across the busy street. I had a wicked teacher. I would stand outside and could hardly bear to go in the basement where the kindergarten was, but finally they would catch me and I would have to go in. In the 40s I don't know what kind of training they had as teachers, but we had to learn these colour

codes. She'd say "blue and green" and I would think about my favourite thing to do -- to lie in the grass and look at the trees and the sky. And then "pink and orange", to me the colour of sunrises and sunsets, right? So I really didn't think too much of her, and besides it was in a basement. *I was just very self-focused already* so I would be doing art and the rest of the class would have gone onto something else and I hadn't noticed it, so *I was always in trouble...*

One more thing had a big impact on me at that time. Yakima, because it was so close to Hanford was so paranoid about being hit by the bomb, so once a month we had air raid drills and the whole town had a siren going (this is....it would be 1950, 1951, O.K.?) They would put the siren on and everyone ran home from the schools. You had to run home and your mom had to write down how long it took you to get home and we had to study the chart that said if you were this close when it hit...this would happen to you, and if you were this far, that would happen to you... I only lived about two miles away. But there were kids that lived four miles from the school, right? It wasn't a bus system. It was a walking system. So I would think, I'd just made it home, but so and so is not going to make it home now. Their time is up. My side would be hurting from running and my heart would be pounding.... We did that once a month. With these sirens going full blast!

So I think that being a free agent and those things had to have had a big impact on me. And because I had lots of time just to do what I wanted to do I could also look around and see. And then in 1951, we went to Detroit. We were supposed to go there on a vacation, but we had some financial trouble along the way. We blew a piston in the motor, and then my dad ran out of money, so we'd stop every so often and put up a sign and fix radios and stuff. But my mom was tired and homesick to death of being isolated from her family and having to just stay and answer the phone and do all this stuff and nobody to help her with 3 kids. (I was 8, and had a 5 year old

sister and a 3 year old sister.) My dad told us recently “well your mom just gave me the ultimatum. I could go back by myself or we could all stay together as a family.” So, we stayed in Detroit.

My dad had left Detroit because he was drafted in the war but Ford motor company had a thing that if you left for the war you could come back and you kept seniority in the union. So he had a job there. Also, it was a polio epidemic and my sister had a slight case of polio so they put her in a hospital but we had no money so he had to go back to work at Ford’s. After awhile we moved in with my grandma, which made my mom very happy. We lived with her from when I was 8 to when I was 16.

My mom had taken a business education in high school and then worked for maybe a year and a half before she joined my dad. All her sisters worked too. My aunt worked in a factory and my other aunt worked as insurance agent and all the boys worked. The girls were allowed to finish high school but the boys quit to start working because there was no welfare in those days, and when my grandpa died there was no insurance or anything from him and he had been the wage earner in that house. With 7 kids my grandmother couldn’t go out to work. So, she grew what food she could, and got what bones she could from the butcher, and made or remade all their clothes. And the kids went to work.

My grandparents on both sides were immigrants to the United States and that’s an equally important experience. Learning what it meant to hear other languages spoken that we couldn’t understand – my maternal grandma spoke highland German, she spoke Romanian and she spoke French. When she didn’t want us to hear what she had to say, she’d speak another language because by then, she had named English as a first language and so had everybody else,

right? It was the same in my dad's family. Both of my parents had shown up at school not speaking English.

My dad went to a Russian school until he was 19. My dad's family was a family that had split up so my dad's mom and his older sister went back to Russia after the Russian revolution. They'd emigrated at the turn of the century and then went back and stayed until 1927. Then his mom came back with her new husband. So they must have been communist or Trotskyist, I don't know; they didn't want to talk about that. But I knew they still got Pravda at that house because I saw it. And they talked Russian, but they were quiet about all that. The Russian community was pretty quiet then because *McCarthyism was in full swing*, right? In fact, I remember the first TV I ever saw was in the fall of '51. Basically what we saw was Ed Sullivan and Howdy Doody and the McCarthy trials. That was it.

Also, my maternal grandma had a very different world view and part of *my awareness of different worlds came from her*. She was from a kind of pre-electricity age and who had had a forced marriage to someone who was not nice to her, who had died leaving her with 7 kids to raise. My grandma was a matriarch. My grandma was very strong. She was also half the time in some other reality, so on the first day at her house she told us "don't let your beds touch the wall; and don't pay any attention to the voices in the wall." Sloan's Lineament was her holy water, because she kept herself walking around and functioning with no problems just using it. She would put it on here "because she ache so much" and then she would also put it there "to keep the spirits at bay." But I learned to adjust to that. I didn't hear any voices myself and so I didn't worry about what they had to tell me or not!

Also in her philosophy there were *two important things -- one thing was, you really had to take care of yourself*. Nobody else was going to do that. I don't know if I told you this but

it's one of her most famous stories. My youngest sister had mono in high-school. So my mom and my grandma and I went to visit her at the end of this long ward in the hospital that had 8 beds on one side and 8 beds on the other. So, my grandma was so convinced that doctors were really useless, she started with the first person in the first bed. "If you value your life, you'll get up and walk out of this hospital now." And she went right down through the beds until the nurse came and started realizing there was a hullabaloo going on.

And her other philosophy was about plants; that *God gave us plants to cure us*. So both of my parents grew up eating from their garden and I grew up eating from my garden and I still eat from my garden!

I think it's true that the older I get the more I understand how informed I am by my parents and grandparents.

High School Politics

It wasn't until I was y'know 14 or 15 or 16 that I started asking questions. *I asked questions for a couple of different reasons. One was I was always a reader.* I just read everything. In class, I'd just put a book in my lap and read. I had read since when I showed up in grade 3. And when I was bored, I would just open a book in the class and if you were quiet they left you alone. I remember one time a very exciting thing happened when I was in grade 5. I was reading and the teacher asked me a question and finally says, "Miss L..!" and I jumped and I stabbed myself with a pencil and the lead broke off and they had to take me in and take this lead out and I was very scared and upset, right? So that was another big thing, beside the love of plants and gardens was a love of reading, a love of books and reading.

The other thing that happened in the early '50s was that the Russians put Sputnik up in space, O.K, so the U.S. school system went insane because they didn't have anybody that could read Russian so an order went out when I was in my ninth grade that every school had to train X number of Russian readers and speakers so that they could read the technical stuff. So, those of us that signed up for Russian were all mostly of some kind of Slavic descent. So I decided to take Russian and there were 8 of us in our Russian class. We were a very mixed group of people and it was fun because I had three years of Russian in school and then in my English class we could read Russian literature too. It was problematic though, because when I went to get *Dostoyevsky* from the library it was behind the counter. It was in a closet and I had to have a permission slip. My mother had to sign permission so I could read these books, right? And then my mother would get paranoid and say "why do I have to sign for that?" So she tried to read them to find out why it was that she had to sign. Finally she decided with *Crime and Punishment* that it was because there was a prostitute in it, telling me that she finally figured it out.

My mom is not political and neither is my dad They voted democrat until my dad became a foreman but up until then they voted Roosevelt democrats. Then after that they voted Republican because Ford told you to vote Republican. This was '50s pressure and everybody knows where their bread's buttered, right? So for my generation, we didn't like that, but that was the kind of atmosphere. And even in school, there was a lot of stuff going on where people just used to get back at people. Like, we had a music teacher and one day he didn't show up. Everybody's there waiting and they said well, where is he? What happened? And then someone said, "he was a communist and he was fired." And another teacher was a gym teacher and he was called a communist and he was fired...

One other thing that happened when I was in high school that's very relevant is the civil rights movement got started. It was when Rosa Parks sat down on that bus. In Detroit there was a picket line when I was in high-school around Woolworth's because they wouldn't serve blacks lunch in the south. I remember looking at that and thinking about that and some people said it was the communists that were doing it and I even asked my Russian teacher, "Does he think it was communists that were picketing Woolworths?" I was very puzzled by that, right? At that point, I hadn't met any communists. They were just the bogey man, but by then I had read so much I didn't think they were really the bogey man.

We had moved from Yakima with these siren drills into Detroit where they also had big air raid drills, but there we had to have a white jacket and put our heads inside a tin locker...a white jacket so the radiation would bounce off of us! It was insane and everybody knew it was crazy, but that was the shadow.

I also hated Detroit in the beginning because I was restricted. I had been used to being a completely free agent in a rural setting. My recurrent dream was that I would go into that park and it would turn into a cement whirlpool that would suck me in. I sleep-walked and I ran away and I rode the bus very often. I would steal the milk money that was always in a jar for the milkman. I would pack my underwear and my socks in a bag and get on the bus thinking I was heading west. When I was older I found out I was heading east! Eventually, I grew to really appreciate and love Detroit 'cause I learned things there that I wouldn't have learned in Yakima. It was way bigger milieu and a better library.

And I was in a school that my mom had gone to. Their yearbook was called *The Aryan*. Yet by then, that school was probably 50 or 60% black. And the neighbourhood, except for a few mixed blocks had a high percentage of black people and an extreme amount of racial

tension, so *I had come from being an innocent wandering through the black neighbourhoods in Yakima with no problem, to finding there was extreme racial tension when we moved to Detroit*. White kids were getting beat up by black kids in that neighbourhood...it was just the kids acting out the tension between the two communities.

There was also an extreme amount of classism going on with the more, so-called middle class kids that were bussed in. They ran the schools. They ran the junior high school and the high school. They ran all the student councils and all of that stuff so like I never went to a high school dance ever. It was another social circle completely, and they had sororities and things like that and you had to have a certain kind of brand on your socks and your sweaters and all that stuff. *My friends were an eclectic group* from around the school...very eclectic and included people of different colours, right?

Monteith College and Detroit Socialism

Really the only place I was offered a scholarship was to the Lutheran College but I had to say, no, I'm a non-believer. 'Cause during that period I also had really looked well at my own church and I had become an atheist by about age 14. Even all those times in my life that I'm scared and I'm saying the Lord's Prayer, I'm still an atheist, right? Partly why I don't really believe is because when I look at what Christian missionaries did, they did nothing but bad, as far as I can tell. They were disrespectful of the people. They went and mucked them around and they caused a lot of trouble and so I said to the pastor, who was a really nice person, "How can I be a practicing Christian if that's how it translates into the world? Look at half of the people in this church. They are here because they get some personal power out of the pleasure they get from being Sunday school teachers and deacons and they're not good people and the pastor says,

“Oh my daughter, you lack faith.” Well, later I go to university and I’m not concerned about religion really. I love nature and a couple of times I wonder, well maybe I’m a pagan, I don’t know.

I also started working when I was 16 downtown part-time after school and then as soon as I graduated, I worked full-time at a little bank and then part-time at an import shop downtown to save enough money to go to school so I wouldn’t have to go to work. Then I got one of the letters inviting me to Monteith College at Wayne State University. They had just opened up Monteith two years before that, which was started by a bunch of left wing intellectuals from the University of Chicago that wanted to do an experiment with working class kids and give them an interdisciplinary education that was different than the mainstream one, so they had a bunch of hotshot radical profs and they invited every fourth student that was enrolled in Wayne State University. *I had enrolled in university because I knew I didn’t want to get married and I didn’t want to have a regular job.* That’s why I went to university.

But I had to pay my own way. My parents said it was a waste of time for a girl to go to university and especially a waste for me that couldn’t say what I wanted to do. I didn’t really want to be a teacher and I didn’t want to be a secretary.

At Monteith College basically I think that you learned how to think. Now there were lots of graduates and the course was divided in the end, from people that resented that, because these people were also cynical about academia and cynical about opportunities, right? They were radicals. Other people felt that they hadn’t got any kind of analysis, and that they valued being successful in the world as working class. A friend I had, Dennis, was really brilliant with languages. He could have been a brilliant linguist. He really could have, or he would have been a good anthropologist. He was a good musician too. But he ended up doing factory work. He

felt, and others did too, that some people got subverted trying to get out of the working class, which was really what all of us were trying to do. Myself too. *I'm an escapee from the working class, but I've just turned out downwardly mobile instead of upwardly mobile.* Other people went on to become brilliant in academic careers because by the time you finished with the multi-disciplinary courses with all those different points of view, you really knew how to think and so the people that stayed in that became brilliant. But I don't think there was a high percentage of working class students that did that. I think there were more middle class ones that chose that. Because, you got your first degree as philosophy and where would that take you? That's where people go that don't know what they want to do.

I only went to classes I liked and the ones I didn't like, I didn't go to. So, I ran into trouble with some faculty people. And there were times I thought, "Aw, these guys y'know, they have big ideas but they can't hang in."

So this is 1961. And both the civil rights movement and the peace movement were just starting. And I was keen on the ideas of the civil rights movement – it had woke me up. So I *became an activist when I went to university*, but my working life at the bank interfered with it. They'd say, OK, well you just work Fridays and Saturdays, and I had to say but I have to go for a demonstration and I'm going to be gone on Friday and Saturday. I can't come to work. Those days they didn't fire you, but I finally had to quit.

Detroit had every radical group that you could ever imagine. Because that's where *anybody that had the idea that the working class was going to transform society went to Detroit to colonize.* And so they were in the factories and then their kids, who were my age was the next generation. They called them "Red Diaper Babies" but Detroit had maybe three socialist parties and I don't know how many communist parties. But the socialist or the socialist

labour people, or the “baking soda” hammer and sickle people -- that was socialist labour party -- were pretty old. They had no young people. The Socialist Worker Party was the Trotskyist party and they had a youth group, called the Young Socialist Alliance... Then the Socialist Party had a youth group, the Young People’s Socialist League. And then there were a bunch of independent radicals that had broken from parties that also held meetings. So when I went to university, everybody has their pamphlets. You can’t go out to a class without someone handing you something...*so I went to everybody’s meeting. I went to all of them - everybody’s.* And it was the same thing for the civil rights. It was CORE then. SNCC hadn’t started quite yet and the Black Panthers was further on so I went to the CORE meetings, too. The Student Peace Union had everybody in it, too.

I was one of those people to make the posters. *I liked to just write “ban the bomb neither east nor west.”* The threat of the bomb I felt was equal from Russia and the United States and so I was always shocked that the Student Peace Union -- a certain group of people there -- wanted to erase the “neither east nor west” signs. It was just anti-US. It wasn’t anti-bomb. And if that issue emerged during discussions they would just start singing. I couldn’t figure it out. Much later in a women’s group I was in, I figured it out. But that was later on -- that’s already 1968, (which was a ways down the line and after the peace movement and the civil rights movement and the radical movement and then the women’s movement. Those were the progression of movements that I was involved in then OK?) Anyway, in the women’s movement in my women’s discussion group I became friends with some of those people and I ask them, “How come you guys always sang when the discussion would really get going about what should go in the slogans?” And the people that were from communist families, said “Well, we were told that the student peace union was a bourgeois, reformist peace group and we should break it up.”

To me that was a bit of a mystery, 'cause I got along with everybody because I was not involved with party politics and as far as I can tell, I still have that bias. *Party politics brings out the worst in people*, the absolute worst. And when they get in power, then it brings out even more, (like the BC – NDP).

I guess everybody goes through these things differently but *I would have to say that in the peace movement and the civil rights movement I also got my first sense of organization to how different people operate within them, and my first sense of how difficult it was to be a woman in those organizations* because basically they want you to type and make the posters and make them coffee and supply their needs right?

One other thing that sticks out for my personal growth was something that happened to me very early in a civil rights group of mainly black students that had a few white politicals in it too that was working with The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. They were organizing different boycotts and picket lines and stuff and there were some swimming pools adjacent to Detroit that wouldn't let black kids go to swim there. Now, the white radicals were always very quick because they had access to mimeograph machines that the Trotskyists use and somebody said, OK Dianne, you do the posters and write the slogans. And all of a sudden I had this feeling and I just stopped. I just thought, *it really wasn't my place to write those slogans. And I remember the change that happened for me and everybody in that group, white and black*, when I asked the whole group to come up with the slogans and what they wanted on the posters, instead. And I felt good about that, 'cause *I think that was a recognition of what was mine to do and what wasn't mine to do.*

“Facing Reality”

So the radical group I ended up liking the best was the independent radical group that didn't believe in political parties, right and that believed in self-activity, that *people could organize themselves and act in their own behalf and that that was an innate trait of people and so that was an analysis that I was OK with*. That means that they weren't part of any political party, but were born of the splinters in the Left in North America. They kept publishing and carrying on discussions and were involved with various committees so that they had a public profile. A lot of groups didn't have any public profile after they had gone through some splintering and quit and went and nursed their bad feelings. This group called themselves “Facing Reality” which was a very funny name. *They were the generation older than me and they were all very good humoured*. They were almost like an intellectual tendency that kept talking to people in the factories. They had people who worked in factories. They had students. They also had a thing called then the “women question”, and this was before the women's movement, right, but they took that seriously. *They took themselves very seriously, too* and they kept putting out publications and they had a little newsletter that was called *Speak out*. It was a very *eclectic mix of people* that were a combination of intellectuals and factory workers and civil rights people and peace movement people like me and they attracted, in my generation, a group of young people. *There were people like me that had gone to every single tendency that had put a public notice out. And that were looking for some kind of overall analysis that made some sense, separate from what you were getting taught in university.*

I was nervous about people who were too dogmatic that didn't see that there is a least three sides to everything...those kind of people made me uncomfortable. That's from being super sensitive and knowing that there's a minimum of two sides. So I liked their ideas – and the

idea that your consciousness is determined by your work and your place in society. I thought, yeah, that's true. *That self activity of people is what makes it possible to change anything, right, and I liked that concept. I still like that.* So, I'm a young women at 18 and 19 years old looking at all that. So this little crazy organization called "Facing Reality" was associated with this fellow named C.L.R. James, who wrote a history called *The Black Jacobins* that a lot of people knew and read and circulated before it was banned in some countries. He had been involved with the West Indies independence movement and with the African independence movement also. He had been kicked out during McCarthyism and was living in London. They kicked out a whole bunch of people that weren't U.S. citizens during that period and they had to go other places.

And I remember that summer I was 18, and I had read Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. *It was very interesting but she was very middle class, and we're from the working class, so it didn't grab me. But then I read Rosa Luxembour and then there was this thing called the Women Question where women had rights....*

Gerry

My life became different once I left home and then became an activist and a student and a wife all at once...and a Faculty wife! I was a terrible faculty wife. And when Gerry and I married, his department head said, "You better take a year's leave of absence, Gerry, and you can come back and teach when you're done. Let this cool out because you have violated *In loco parentis*."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The term *in loco parentis* is Latin for "in the place of a parent". The term refers to the legal responsibility of a person or organization to take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent. American courts primarily

I had married my professor, who was working on the slave narratives at that time. The slave narratives were from a very worthwhile make-work project that Roosevelt did. He had a bunch of ethnologists and folklorists go and interview all the people that had lived under slavery and take down their stories. So a whole bunch of famous people like Langston Hughs and Zora Neil-Hurston and others went into the south and took these slave narratives down, they just interviewed person after person after person that had lived under slavery and all this stuff was packed up into boxes and was sitting in archives. So what Gerry was doing – he was an historian - was going through the slave narratives, getting them ready for editing so they could be published. C.L.R. James had done the history of the revolution in Haiti, called the *Black Jacobins* and both were part of this independent radical tendency.

I got married to Gerry at 19. In that time, those guys had way too close a relationship with their students. Profs and students were sleeping together and those lines had started to blur terribly, but nobody married. But Gerry had never been married before and he fell crazy in love with me and my working class friends say to me, “Dianne, *Here’s a chance to be with people like you. You’re someone who’s always obsessing about ideas and changing the world right, y’know. Go for it!*” But there were other reasons that I went for it. One was that I had gotten pregnant the first time I sleep with Gerry and I know nothing. I had an abortion and I felt terrible about that abortion. I’m pro-choice but that abortion practically did me in and I didn’t find out until after I had it how really I felt about it. And an abortion was illegal so that’s another long story. *How I found out that I really hated doing that was in my dreams. I’m somebody that*

apply the doctrine of in loco parentis to educational institutions. It is applied as a broad provision allowing such institutions to act in the best interests of the students as they interpret that. To do otherwise could be considered a violation of the student’s civil liberties.

sometimes if I've blocked something in my day-to-day because I've made a decision, I find out really what I feel in my dreams. I still think that that was the best decision for me to make right then.

Gerry was raised to be a rabbi but he became a communist at 14. At that time, (1940s) people truly had the belief in those ideals about the failures of capitalism and thought communism was a wonderful thing. He joined in at that time but just didn't have the personality for parties...you have to be disciplined. *And there was no spiritual manifestation there, people didn't believe in that. They believed religion was an opiate of the people.* Anyway, so Gerry was supposed to be the rabbi. He was the only intellectual in that family. He was the only child. His parents were orthodox, right? So when Gerry want to get married, he say to me, well, you'll have to convert to Judaism. By that time I'm an atheist. When we had moved to Detroit, and we had to go to Sunday School and we had to sing this *Yes Jesus Loves Me*, I refused to sing it. Jesus did not love me or he would not have let me go to Detroit! If Jesus truly loved me, he would have left me in Yakima. *I personalized a lot of things.* And by the time I was 14 and by the time I was confirmed I already had read the Bible three times and decided that the old testament is filled with horrible people.

So Gerry says, "You don't have to do any practicing, but if you don't convert to Judaism, my parents will die and they won't accept any of our kids and they won't see you and maybe they will disown me too so it's important to me." So I say, "well I don't care as long as I don't have to change any belief." So I studied Hebrew for a year and I studied Jewish history and I go through the rituals. And when we got married, his mom gave us four sets of dishes "because that's what you need, two for everyday and two for high holidays."

Now, I was raised that if my mom cooked dinner, we had to wash dishes. Only much, much later did I figure out that was 'cause she had three daughters. ***I thought that was a rule of life and had nothing to do with gender, right?*** I was very literally minded in some respects. So we get these pots and I would cook and then Gerry wouldn't do dishes so I would just stack them up. Well, you can do that for a long time with two people and four full sets of pots and pans and dishes. I stacked them right up, and then the day would come, there wasn't any more clean pots or pans or dishes and then I would say, "Gerry, I can't cook dinner now because there's no clean pots and pans and dishes." He would give me this funny look. I'd say, "We have to eat out." So he'd say "OK." We'd go eat out and then he's come home and he would sigh and roll up his sleeves and after about 10, 15 minutes, I would feel sad for him that he had to do so many and I would go help him. Well, many years later, I finally ask him, "Gerry, how come you let your dishes pile up and your pots and pans go so long? I always wondered about that but I didn't think to ask. You could do them when you wanted to do them. It was your job." And he looked at me with this strange look and he says, "You know, I always wondered what was wrong with you then...that you let the dishes go for so long" and then we roared on the floor for a long time. That was pre-women's movement. ***I didn't think to challenge him on why he wasn't doing them, but I thought for sure that was his job.***

Anyway, I'm sure that I got married because I felt so bad about having an abortion because that was before we were married and Gerry had said, "Absolutely not, I'll lose my job and I can't handle a kid." I was worried that maybe if I had a kid my mom would feel obliged to raise that kid because I had a brother that was 3 years old at home and they had almost adopted a cousin and then other circumstances intervened. And also my dad was starting to drink. So, I didn't know what my family would do. I think that was part of the reason that I got married,

because I felt bad about having the abortion. I'm sure I was thinking that if I got married and had a kid it would be OK. *It's just it was a big deal to have an abortion, right? It was a very big deal...*

So then when his department tell him to take a leave for violating *In Loco Parentus*, Gerry said, "OK, let's go to London and we'll visit C.L.R and we'll take 6 months off." I wanted to go to Europe, but my sister had turned 17 and graduated early. She wasn't getting along with my mom and my dad was starting to drink, so I was scared for her to stay at home because she couldn't work legally. So, she didn't know what to do, so I said, "come with us." And we went to Europe for six months, the three of us.

England, Kennedy and C.L.R.

So we go to England on this freighter... and Kennedy gets shot while we were in the middle of the Atlantic. The whole crew was Welsh. They're all crying and giving us condolences while Gerry and I are thinking, "Oh my God, Lyndon Johnson's going to be president of the United States. Oh shit!" But then I realize, we're being inappropriate, so we had to accept condolences and act sad and then we'd go into our room and say, "Johnson's president and they're going to be rounding everybody up, everyone that's a Cuban sympathizer and they've got this set-up with this guy, Harvey-Lee Oswald and who in the hell is he? What's going on here? It's not the Cubans that want Kennedy gone. Look at the Cuban missile crisis, it was Kennedy, right, look at the Bay of Pigs, it was Kennedy. It wasn't any Cuban sympathizer who'd taken him out, it had to be their own guys, right?" So, there we are, thinking, "Oh my God!" And everybody else gets to England, and everybody's crying. *So then I know I'm in a very small group of people thinking like this, right and I'm scared for my friends at home.*

So we get to London, and we go to meet C.L.R. C.L.R. James. (They call him “Nello” or C.L.R.) He was involved in the whole West Indian independence movement and also later with African independence movement so that was another world. Matt and Jess were in this group and they decided to come and look up everybody that had this similar point of view in England and Europe, that is, *those that were not part of any major party but still believed that there could be a revolution, right and that people had the capacity to change their lives.* So, for one month we went on a tour of Europe to meet all those little groups, some of them were quite crazy. Some of them were as crazy as we were and some of them were really crazy!

So, like the group in France that had split two ways and one of them were exploring places that R.D. Lang went, y’know, saying that maybe schizophrenics have the good point of view on the world, right? So, Matt went into Germany. He was our paid functionary for this group so at some point, that group had become big enough and he got to quit working in the factory and got to become a functionary of that group.

I ran a “Facing Reality” book service and I volunteered there. We supplied mainly all the black bookstores that were just starting, but they were our biggest customers because we had *Black Jacobins*, and a bunch of other stuff. And I went and did secretarial work for C.L.R.. And we had one month of a tour up and down England for the Independent Socialists. They were the socialists that weren’t really just in the labour party that had their own organization

Gerry spoke, but I was also used to speaking because in this little organization, everybody had a voice. Every sector was honoured. Everybody had to do educational things so my time came for an educational meeting same as others. *There wasn’t any difference between the intellectuals and everybody else per say. Or between women and men....*

So then Gerry is speaking and what I loved about him is you could participate equally and he always listened. So he'd be giving his thing and I'd say, "but Gerry, there was this and this" and some man would say, "Don't contradict your husband." In my little circles in Detroit the women were very outspoken. C.L.R had two very strong women, that he worked with and counted on their intellectual challenging. And then he married Jan, who's the leader of this Wages for Housework movement, OK? And she'd gone to high school with Gerry. They used to fight in high school, because she was a Trotskyist and he was a communist.

In the movement the women were very outspoken. They were used to being listened to but there I found out that wasn't the case. I was astonished, absolutely astonished. And then the people my age, the more trade unionist people, they just laughed, right? And I could see that not everybody felt like that. So, I thought England was much more classist and much more sexist and much more racist than Detroit and the States. So that was eye opening for me living in England. The community that I lived and worked in was the West Indian and African community so it was more black than white, with some white South Africans that had produced an anti-apartheid committee there too. That was all part of that circle. So I got another education, a more international education there.

Then, after six months in England, we went back to Detroit and Monteith told Gerry, "Uh, we can't hire you. You'll have to go. Sorry."

A Spiritual Wake-up Call

That was a rough period because he thought he was going back to a job and when we came back from England they had decided that he had violated this *In Loco Parentis*. So then he

had to find other jobs. So that first summer, he worked two jobs. He had no place, so we had to live with my parents for two months until some other friends let us house-sit. We had no money.

Now, I was raised with class biases, OK? Very strong class biases. My sisters articulate that a tremendous amount. I learned to keep my mouth shut on that, and I tried to escape the working class but like I said, I'm more downwardly mobile than upwardly mobile. So, my poor parents didn't understand really what Gerry did. He taught university but what did he really DO? They knew he was writing a book, so my grandma would tell him various herbal remedies and he was just puzzled. So she would say, "You put that in your book Dr. R., because somebody had told her he was a doctor, right? So, she was giving him medicine recipes to write down." And my mom would say, "Why's he upstairs studying all the time? He at least could mow the lawn."

So, the other thing that summer was that one of the people from this University of Chicago group was this fellow named Rob. He was a Cherokee medicine man and an anthropologist and he was tied in with a bunch of people, some Canadians, like Doug M. and Sam T. from the native centre in Chicago and they had just started a summer school for native university students in Boulder, Colorado. And what that school did was to try and give these students, who were having a very high attrition rate, some understanding of the difference in world views from where they were coming with, and what the urban world view was. They invited Gerry to teach there. So I got to be a fly on the wall, with a bunch of native students my age, learning about all this difference in world view and got to read a whole bunch more literature and got to hear people tell story and story after story and then when I didn't go down to sit and listen, I got to run around in the mountains near our camp.

The one thing I had asked Gerry that was really important, before we got married was, “Do you like to go camping?” and he said, “sure, sure, sure.” All of his friends told me after that they couldn’t believe that Gerry did the things that he did with me. Gerry didn’t drive. He was from New York and he didn’t know how to drive. I drove. So, I got a car and I got my driver’s licence two weeks before we left and I picked a camping spot up in the Roosevelt National Forest. When we went up there, we had to drive through a river to get up there because of the spring runoff that come down these roads, right? So I had picked a place on the map and I knew where I wanted to camp at 9300 feet. Then Gerry could go down with Rob and teach and when I wanted to run around up in the mountains, I could. It was a good place for us, ‘cause they could do their sweats and their salmon cook-outs and their thing called 49 dances, round dances and stuff, and nobody was around. It was in a mountain meadow at 9000 feet, right? We went for two summers, first when I was 19 and then at age 22.

I was finished with organized religion, but those summers though, when I’m in Colorado running, I just went back and fell into love with the natural world. Absolutely. And what I loved about what the students were doing was they made no separation from the rocks...Bob was my friend too and he was somebody that walked a medicine path.

Years back, before we married, we were living together and it had been stressful. I had to sneak out the back door because the apartment was across from his work office. I got a lot of migraines then, really bad migraines and one time they wouldn’t break. The doctor had said if I give you any more medicine, it will be morphine. So one day Gerry is upset, ‘cause he finds me lying in the room in the dark, and no noise and I groan and I’m vomiting liver bile. Then Rob comes with this medicine bag and he do his thing with me and it broke. Now sometimes people say migraines break when they break. It was maybe coincidence, but *I think what it was for me*

was a wake-up call for what my belief system was about. And he had helped me out when I had my abortion too. So when we go to that native school and there's all those people with a sense of the sacred in the land and in the plants and in the natural world... and I already have that sense, I make friends. *I always made friends with people that had that sense, always. Even most of my Marxist friends, they were in that light-hearted group.*

Separating

Now we were a political couple and we functioned well, right, and *in our circle in Detroit they have a big stake in Gerry and I as a couple by this time as part of an active centre for that group.* All of our comrades liked us as a unit and are used to having a house that everyone could come to. Matt and Jess's house and our house were the two houses that hosted everything, hosted the international travelers and hosted the parties... Gerry was looked after and we had crazy politics and all of his faculty buddies liked me, and liked me looking after Gerry.

Then when I am 22, Vern was born. By the time he was a month and a half, *I knew that I could not look after Gerry and Vern, both.* When it was just me and Gerry, it had been exciting and fun but I didn't have to look after anybody but him and me. Then Vern was born and Gerry couldn't do his writing. He couldn't do his study. He also couldn't leave me alone. He would go to work, and I would take the phone off the hook. I would just unplug it so that I could take a nap. (I'm somebody that needs a certain amount of sleep...always and if I don't get it, I get a headache.) So I would unplug the phone and then Gerry would panic and then he would call a neighbour and he would be banging on my door. So at a month and a half, I went to Matt and Jess, my comrades, and I said, "Look, Gerry is driving me crazy. I need a break or I'm

going to have a nervous breakdown right now. Vern is only a month and a half - send me somewhere.” So they said, “OK, do you want to go to New York or do you want to go to Toronto?” That’s where we had comrades. So, I said, Toronto. So they sent me to Toronto with Vern to my friends there. I go there and Gerry is calling me everyday like four times a day and they don’t know how to tell Gerry to stop, because Gerry is mentoring this guy, too. So I only last a week and I go back home.

By the time Vern is a year and a half, lots of stuff has happened but I know that I’m not happy in my marriage, that I cannot maintain looking after Vern and looking after Gerry. So Gerry has been offered another six month teaching time in England. He wanted to go for six months on a teaching exchange and he want to do one month of research in New York, so I say, “OK Gerry. I’m going to go. You go to New York and let me go to London for that month ahead. I want a one month separation.” Meanwhile, my friend Mary is telling me, *“Dianne, when I was on the birth control pill, I wasn’t happy in my marriage either. It’s the pill. It’ll muck up your mood.”* So, I say, “OK, I will go off the pill when I leave New York. Gerry, you give me a month and I’ll see what it’s like to be separated and see what it’s like off the pill and I’ll look for a place and then you can come in a month, OK?” So, I negotiate that. Lots of people liked Gerry and me as a couple, never mind my family that doesn’t believe in divorce.

So, I go to London, I go off the pill and I’m staying with Nello and Jan. Gerry shows up a week later and I get pregnant with Len. We last about a month and that was it. Our comrades in London said, “That’s OK. It’s alright to separate.” C.L.R. says, “Dianne, it’s too stressful for you. I can see that.” And Jan says that they love Gerry and they love me. They support both of us being separate. Gerry don’t want to separate. He don’t want to and he’s furious. *So, they hold his hand and they hold my hand too. And it was easy to separate then and we do.*

My English comrades were the more traditional left wing, and they say “you have a good political marriage, you have the same kind of ideas, there’s not that many people who would want to work together, what’s the matter with you?” But the people in my organization didn’t ever question it, right... They had an idea that when they make up their mind about what they want to do, then that nobody else could say not to, right? The women in it were all very strong, independent women and they had a clear idea of what they then called the “women’s question” before the women’s movement began. And Jan finally leave C.L.R too. By ’67, everything was breaking apart, right and *the women’s movement maybe didn’t officially start ‘til ’68, right, but it was ready. Everybody that worked in the civil rights movement and the peace movement was fed up with the men’s poor attitude.* That was the summer of ’67, and everybody’s separating.

And they have a big conference -- and R.D. Lang comes, Stokey Carmichael comes, Hooper comes, even Gramsci comes, everybody comes. They come from Europe, they come from the United States. European intellectuals come. My friend, Jan, she had the contract for BBC for translating. So she gave me some of those jobs. It was a big symposium on non-violence in the world that happened in the summer of ’67 in London at this thing called Roundhouse, which was this big old train station a lefty playwright had transformed into a cultural centre.

Anyway, at that time, big demos are all over Europe, right, and I’m starting to get a little nervous about some of the demos. I had already gotten a little nervous in Detroit. I don’t like large crowds of people and I don’t like being with people that want to fight. So I’m always a little bit to the side when I go to a great big demo. If the guys had marbles to go under the police horses, I’d go somewhere else. And sometimes I’m taking my kids too. *But I always*

have my escape route and I keep moving from the tension. I can tell when there's group tension coming and I don't like it. I truly am a pacifist that way. Anyway, so London is popping and I separate.

Then I ran into some health problems with Len, and I had to go to bed for a month. Now, it was getting to be the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution and C.L.R liked to write about Len and Shakespeare when he's working on stuff. So I work for C.L.R every morning, and I do a daycare trade with my landlady who's upstairs in the house. They were professional musicians. So they looked after Vern in the morning and I look after their little girl in the afternoon and *that wake me up to English child-raising methods, big time.* They have their paints and rosin and stuff on the bottom shelf, so Vern get into that, and I say "if you don't want your kid to go into the bottom shelf, you put that up high. You have stuff on your bottom shelf that your kids CAN go into because otherwise, you had too many NOs and then your kid learn to just sit there." So we had lots of discussions there. *Living there also opened my eyes to racism really big time, and to classism.*

They were middle class people, right, and I have a roommate from Jamaica. She come to be my roommate when I have to be in bed for a month. I start to spot and to maybe lose the baby and I decide I want to keep that baby so that Vern have a playmate. So I have to go to bed for a month. And they're trying to deport her back to Jamaica. She's a trained teacher and her lawyer was fighting that. Finally she gets to stay and she brings her daughter over and then we exchange daycare and I say to my landlady, "I want Marina for my roommate, do you have any trouble with that?" And they say, "It's OK, because she's a teacher, she's not a bricklayer." And I go, "oh.." And they also asked me, "How old is that C.L.R? I've seen him on TV but I

can't get the ages of black people"... And they would call my flat-mate's daughter a little monkey. So I have an eye opened there.

Birthing in Mexico:

Now for a while I had wanted to go someplace warm, so I think, maybe I go to Spain and then I think Dianne, you're crazy. You're going to have a baby in a country where you don't know anybody. Don't be insane. So I pick myself up and go back to Detroit. Everybody's slightly shocked that I'm pregnant. And so I'm living with my sister in my old neighborhood. And Allen, my best friend's ex, show up and he decide he's got the hots for me and he start following me around. I hadn't ever been courted like that before in my life, right? Turns out he's on his way to California and asks me to go, and I say, "no, I don't want to go to California. So he say "what about Mexico?" and Mexico sounded a little bit like Spain to me. It sounded warm. And so finally I say, "OK, *I will go to Mexico with you if we make a six month contract, that you don't leave me in Mexico, and that we stay in Mexico for six months, and* that you're nice for that, right? No matter what. So we go to Mexico together.

I had to tell my parents that I'm going to Mexico and I remember the way I told them was that I asked my mom "OK, how do you kill a chicken again? I remember us doing this but I was too young. What do you do again?" And my mom got wide-eyed and she said, "Why?" And so I say "Well, 'cause I'm going to Mexico and I'm not going to live in the city 'cause I only have two hundred dollars a month. I'll probably end up in the country, so maybe I have to get my chicken live, right?" That's how I tell her I'm going to Mexico.

I'm a little scared to go someplace so I ask one of my comrades, "Who do you know there?" and he say "OK, there's this comrade. He's in Mexico City. He's a doctor. If you get into trouble you can call him."

So first we go to Guadalajara. I don't like the medical system in Guadalajara. The hospital is dirty when I go for a prenatal check. There's blood on the gowns and blood on the bed and blood on the floor and so from Guadalajara we go Mexico City and I go call this doctor up and I say, "***Hello. I'm a comrade of so and so, and he gave me your name and I want to come and see you about where I should go in Mexico. I'm going to have a baby in another 3 weeks*** and I tell him, OK, I have 200 bucks a month. He says, "OK, you'd better go to Oaxaca. I have a doctor friend there and here is a reference. When your baby's born, you can go like to Puerto Angel or someplace to the south and have your rest. And let me know how it is on your way back." So, that's what I do.

I moved into this house in Oaxaca to have electricity and have a water tank and have a refrigerator, and then after I move in, they start putting in sewer lines all around so you can't bring the car anymore. I have that van that we drove down, but you can't bring a car anywhere near. You have to park three blocks away and then cross on a plank across this great big ditch, right? And so I go and I meet this doctor and he wanted to practice his English and so he's getting English lessons in exchange for being present at this birth.

Now, Allen, he has this other girlfriend who has a boyfriend... and he invite them down there too. I don't know about this, but they show up in Oaxaca and Allen gets some kind of urinary tract infection and he pass it to me. So, I'm starting to feel cramping and feverish just before that baby's born. Anyway, one day I know it's time for the baby to be born and I call to the doctor and he come by the house and he say, "OK well, it's 1 o'clock. Meet me at the

maternity clinic at 6 o'clock. But at 1:30, I can't wait. So I walk 1 block, and my waters break. A drunk offered me a drink. I walk the next block and I have to go across this plank and I feel like the baby is crowning. I don't want to drop my baby in a ditch. I tell Allen, "I don't know if this is really good for Vern or not. He's only 2 and a half years old." And so I said, "I'm going to lay down here because I'm not dropping my baby in this ditch." So I just lay down. I just don't go anyplace.

Well, here's all these workmen smirking, and Allen panics and takes Vern away, and the women in the neighbourhood right away realize what's going on and *I'm saying "My baby is coming now."* So they bring these beautiful sheets and they make a tent over my bottom half and somebody run across the plank and they grab a midwife a block down. She come running up there. She go underneath and catch this baby, and my landlady's in the back going "Tut, tut, tut, like, don't y'all have enough sense to stay at home?" And everybody else is having a big party and they're passing the baby around and the midwife cut the cord and stuff, and I say, "OK, I'm going to the maternity clinic," and then they take me, keep me there a day and send me home.

But then, I'm getting a fever and I'm getting sicker, and running a really high fever and having a hard time feeding Len. And I've started to pass big black clots and I can hardly stand up anymore. So, I tell Allen, "You better go find me a doctor and you find out where is there a hospital here. A city the size of Oaxaca has to have a good hospital. You find that hospital and you get me there or I'm going to die." And then he wake up, and he go into the rich neighbourhoods and he knocks on the doors of people to tell him where the hospital is and I go there. They have to bring my fever down before they can even do a D&C. I had a bad infection. *And they bring me this stuff in a jar afterward that was a little bit like my abortion*

*dream, all these great big black clots, right? And the nurses were very good. I said, “no bottle for Len, you have to keep him nursing on me” so they would come every hour then because I was so dehydrated they put me on the drip and give me the antibiotic too and hold him to me. I was the only giant in that hospital so they made fun of me and I had taken the belt and sewed it on the bottom of my gown so that it would be a little longer, more passable, acceptable style. And even the table they first put me on was too short. They had to get another little table and tie it together. Finally they get me under control. And then, **that’s where I meet someone from Kootenay Bay - right while I was in the hospital.***

Kootenay Bay has this Ashram that was started by Swami Radha in the ‘60s. This guy I met in the hospital, Jon, was an ordained yogi. He had taken a six month leave of absence because in 1967 and 1968, the ashrams were getting swamped with young people. They were religious celibates and everybody that showed up was having drug and sex problems so they didn’t know what to do. So, we had philosophical discussions and he talk to me. He’s a little bit older than me and also had a lot of clout. Because Allen was into drugs, my house had become a drop in house for everybody passing through. The neighbourhood loved Len and they loved me, but they did not like all these young people coming with drugs. So, Jon came into that house and he just straightened everybody up. When he tell everyone to clean up their act downstairs, they do and he make sure I have enough food and enough water. I knew it was time to leave. And then Jon tell me about Zipolite.

So, I left, went to Zipolite and rented a house for 8 dollars a month. It had one room kitchen and one room to sleep in and that was a luxury house there. What I did for drinking water was every day I went and filled two 5 gallon, which was an enormous amount of water when you think about it, for washing and drinking and everything like that. I’d go down the steep hill with

one kid holding hands, and another on my back and then up this other little steep hill. I also had green deprivation there and I asked everyone, “What do you eat when it was the dry season? What do you eat for greens?” And they say “We don’t.” ***And every night, I was dreaming that I was walking in over this hill and I would find a bunch of spinach greens and sit down and eat. I was eating in my dreams, right?*** I was skinny, skinny, skinny. But there were these young survivalist types on the beach there. They’d walk along the beach between Puerto Escondido and Puerto Angel with their backpacks and their plant books, right, so one day I ask them what you can eat that’s green, and they get their book and say “There’s an Ocean Perslane that grows just inside the beach. It’s salty but it has vitamin A and vitamin C in it.” So, I pick it and I eat it and it tastes good to me, and I stop having those dreams. ***So, there I have my first experience of that other than when I was a kid in Yakima -- of robbing gardens, and picking wild plants. And then I’m OK.***

And I made friends with one woman who was a Zapotec speaker. We had our own language with my pidgeon Spanish, and we’d talk about everything, what was happening in the world, why young people were coming down here, what was going on with their government. She was an organizer for that area.

I could see that there was tension starting in Mexico and I could feel the tension. This was the pre-Olympic clean-up and there were *Federalis* on the beach. When I left finally in the beginning of June, she asked me if Len was named after a famous revolutionary and she take down a suitcase up in the rafters. She had 4 plastic bags and a little picture of this revolutionary and a little pamphlet in it. ***That was another eye opener for me.***

When I left, those people came and collected my wax and collected the tin cans that I had washed and saved. When she showed me that picture, she also had 4 plastic bags in her

suitcase. It changed my attitude towards plastic bags and tin cans and candle wax. It changed my attitude about who has what and how that all is, right? Detroit working class and English working class didn't have a lot, but they had. Y'know what I mean? I mean, they were asking "Can I please have your wax droppings and your tin cans?"

And during that year Martin Luther King was killed too. So, I remember hearing that news on a short wave radio in Puerto Angel, and a couple days later there was rioting in all of Detroit and Chicago and everywhere, there was rioting. So I just sat there wondering about what I should do.

Y'know, that had been a big year for me. *I think years like that are one, because the world is moving, and two is that you're open to moving with it, right? Now there's been a big nostalgia for that period time and tons of books written and tons of denunciations of people romanticizing those times and people's illusions.*

The Women's Movement

Also, when we came back from Mexico, the women's movement had started. The way it was first formulated was by people inside the other social movements that were fed up of the bad behaviour of men. While I was in Mexico, people that I knew had gone to the first meetings in Chicago, and they were ready to call a meeting in Detroit. So they say, "OK Dianne, c'mon we have to have a women's meeting" and I thought that was a good idea. *By then I was ready to call myself a feminist. So that's when I started in the women's movement.*

Our first women's group was a consciousness raising one, and there was a hodgepodge of us. We decide ourselves what to read and we discussed that reading, but we discussed way more about our personal lives. We were a backwards group in some ways though. We were

good on the race thing because we were a mixed race group with Asian women and black women. But there were two women that were lesbians and I remember a woman, who was a wonderful woman and their house was open to everybody so they had totally interracial house, but one day when we were talking about alternate child-rearing arrangements, she says in the Israel kibbutz arrangement there was no schizophrenia and no homosexuality. And I remember two of us in the group, my friend Susan and I looked at each other and raised our eyebrows and *we knew two women in that group that were gay and were closeted and they never could come out in that group, right?* All the other women in there were movement people, some of them second generation. I think if we'd started talking about spirituality in that group, nobody would have been interested either. We put on a big conference that was very successful but there were only two of us that were willing to even talk about sex because when we divided all the areas that we would have workshops, nobody wanted to take the sexuality one and so I said, "OK, I will" A funny thing happened at the conference and that's how the beginning of the women's movement was. *The conference was women only and it was the first public women only conference at Wayne State University but men tried to crash it. Even radical men tried to crash it. That was a big challenge and a lot of the married women got shit from their partners, right? But I was separated so I didn't have anybody to give me any shit. I had Allen in my life but he wouldn't dare to tell me anything like that.*

The Kootenays (1)

But also when I come back from Mexico, I know I don't want to live in the United States. I was ready to leave. I had considered England, but when I lived in England the second time, I found myself longing on the weekends to go to northern Scotland. *I just could not stand that*

there was no wilderness. I could not bear that, right? There was something in me that had to be able to get to something that was a bit wild, that was not overdone. I mean, it was a very exciting intellectual times there. I had a really good social world and intellectual life but I was missing that. And I looked at immigrating to Mexico, too. Mexico had plenty of wilderness and I could still be in community, but I felt I could never participate as an equal. And I didn't see a way to support myself there. I might feel different now about that now but then I felt like I could never be just an ordinary person there.

So I was back in my base and I have a good support circle there, but I don't like to live in Detroit. We had formed a parent co-op daycare and I had another childcare trade with a friend in the League of Black Revolutionary Workers so when I wanted to go work at the Facing Reality office in the mornings, I had childcare. But I thought, if I was in the city I was torn apart in too many directions and I wouldn't be a good mom. *And also there was absolutely no way that I wanted my sons to be open to the U.S. draft.* I never even had Len registered in the United States 'cause he was born in Mexico.

But also *there's a thing that happens with urban politics. Even though I was involved with probably the most non-sectarian group there, it was a still a hothouse. And I also think at some point in an organization you give it up.* C.L.R. was in London where he could be an intellectual on his own and there he had an international world set-up to publish what they want and to talk about those ideas. They had plugged into the world. They didn't need to have an organization here that meet once a week. And the generation before me, and the few people my age were all ready to go their own way and *I didn't want to carry it any more, right? I didn't have the same attachment to it. I also didn't think that the revolution was truly was going to happen.* As Art Saul would say I was one of the "love it or leave it" people. That's what he used

to tell everybody. Well, if you can't change it now and it looks like you guys aren't, well then you don't have to stay here either. *By the time I'm older, I think this discussion isn't just about how you make a more just and better society. It's also about how you live a better life and that's not a better material life. That's how do you live in a better relationship to each other and to the planet.*

So, I think that all my life, since we had left Yakima, I had been looking to live in the natural world. And Jon had written at that time and said we could come to the Kootenays and live here. So, I look up British Columbia on the map and see the Columbia River – that's my childhood Columbia River. And then I decide to just come and check it out. So it was all those things together that bring me here, plus, having somebody that invite me and then falling in love with the place.

The Kootenays, Daycare and the Women's Movement

We drove out here, went to Kootenay Bay and I fell in love with this place stronger than I thought I had fallen in love ever. I fell in love with it and I haven't fallen out of love with it. It absolutely knocked my socks off. Allen and I had come and found a place in Kootenay Bay that was \$60 a month. It was a little place and as soon as I got here, I found out what you could eat that was surplus and that I could also grow gardens.

Allen said, "Let's invite Mathew and Sally to come out here." Sally was my good friend and they were ready to leave the city too. Sally and I were in the same women's group together and we were best buddies, so they come out to live with us. My sister and her husband came out when things weren't working good for them back east, too. It was a bit of a group house. *Those were the days when everybody thought everything could be handled by openness and group*

living and stuff like that. We'd all read R.D. Lang and we thought that mental illness was a result of having to live in oppressive society. *And people were moving all over the place. So it was also in the air* to do all of that.

I wanted my kids to have somebody to play with and I was always making arrangements for my kids to be with other kids and not just with me. That was very important to me. There was lots of talk about daycare then. Was it good, was it bad? But daycare was still radical in this area. People thought mothers were supposed to take care of their kids, period. This was the early 1970's, right and in this area people still thought that moms should stay home with their kids.

But it turns out the landlord I rented from was part of a discussion group that met once a month as sort of the West Kootenay progressives. They were a generation older than me. I was in my 20's and they were in their 40's to their 60's. They came from as far as Trail and as far as Argenta. That's about 100 miles apart that these people came to meet and chat together once a month. They were either some kind of lefty progressives or Unitarians or Quakers. It rotated houses and whoever hosted it had to come up with a topic of discussion. I had told my landlord that I had been involved in the women's movement and I had asked if there was any women's group here and she said, "No, but maybe you could come next week and talk to us about this women's movement and what a women's group does and stuff." I said, "Sure, right?" I thought, well maybe there will be some women in there.

That group turned out to be very hostile. They weren't like the progressives that I had known that had an idea of this woman question, right? These people hadn't really considered that and they got really upset with me and really uptight. So, I was starting to get worried and upset because already 10 people had spoken against me, They asked me how I dared have

children, how I dared be in a relationship with a man if I felt that woman had a right to their own life. And that's when I met my plant teacher, an elderly woman, Marla who was sitting there with her white lace collar and her black dress and her hair all braided and wound up. She was right across from me in this big circle that was getting so mad. Now, at that time I was not too respectful of middle age people, right and I didn't care if those other people were beating me up, but I thought, if this woman gets mad at me, I'm going to cry, because of having been so nicely raised by my grandma... But all of a sudden Marla starts speaking out, "What's the matter with you people? There's a long history of this," and she starts to defend me, so right away then I know that's somebody I really like.

What Marla had to say to me was always so interesting. She became my friend, and my plant teacher and really my literature teacher. And she knew all of the Scandinavian literature, so I got introduced to that, and to a lot of the early socialist pacifist literature. And I'm already gardening, and Marla's gardening, so when we meet we don't want to sit all our time in at the kitchen table. We go and sit in the garden and pull some weeds together and then she tells me about this plant or that plant and I just keep it in my head. I don't write things down. And years later when I'm working at the women's centre she'd say, "OK, if you need to come here for a rest or you need lunch, come and have lunch with me, right or come and have dinner with me." So, if I was staying in for a meeting at night, I'd go and eat with Marla, and whatever she'd have on the table she put there because she knows I'm interested in that, right? So she'd say "OK taste this. This chickweed is so good tasting and it's got this and this in it," and she'd introduce one or two plants at a time and she'd always have a bouquet on the table. We never meet without talking about plants and books...never. And she was a member of War Resisters League and A Voice of Women and different organizations like that. Her dad had come as an indentured

servant from Ireland and became a doctor, and her mom was from Sweden, and she was a weaver and a plant person, so we have all those interests in common.

Kate was her daughter and she was at that first meeting too. Kate was an artist and she had an interest in organizing childcare and she had had the experience in a Head-Start program in the states. My first fall here, Kate recruited a little group of us, first to work with a group daycare, but it wasn't child-oriented and community-controlled. Professionals had taken it over and it started to turn into bad childcare. So, Kate went and found five of us that had homes with kids that she knew that we were open to certain kinds of ideas, and certain ways of being and she recruited us into forming a family daycare society. We got better parenting, training for raising your own kids and we got little jobs and we worked in teams. I couldn't think of a better set-up. The two daycares were just crossways on philosophies of childcare.

In my first year, I had made friends with Marla and Kate but most of the young people that were my age had left here. So that spring I was hungry for a women's group. Kate was interested in organizing on daycare issues. She had her agenda and I had my agenda which was to meet some women to talk about women's issues. Her agenda was to organize an alternative to this group daycare. I had made some other friends through Kate too, and I had met Fanny. So three of us talk and decide that we would like to have a women's discussion group and that we would go to Adult Ed and ask them to sponsor us so that they would run an ad and give us the free space. We planned this open women's discussion group for whoever wanted to come and decided to run it six weeks in a row. So we picked the topics. One was daycare, one was health care, one was reproductive issues, separate from health care. And 20 women showed up from totally different places. Some of them were professionals; some of them were Doukhabor women, and even a Catholic fundamentalist, absolutely opposed to abortion. We were pro-

choice, right but it didn't matter. So we had that public discussion with a very mixed group and we thought that was OK.

And one thing that came out of it is some of those women ended up running a family daycare in Glade. Kate was a much more astute community organizer than any of us, right and she flushed out who it was that she could start up family daycares with and she met with us once a week for discussions about what we were doing and why, and she was our teacher for early childhood education. And this group also set up a support service so that people could register when they want to do family daycare. They could find out what good family daycare was that they could share toys and equipment and have a network because people felt that doing family daycare in isolation was not such a good idea, that it was compounding the isolation of women. So that's how those two community activities, family daycare and that first public women's discussion in this area, started for me. And they connected me to two different groups of people.

Back in Queen's Bay, by the time we'd gone around and I'd talked to everybody about those issues they ended up saying, "Well, you shouldn't have had to explain that all to us Dianne, really. Sorry about that." That was OK, because *sometimes talking to people about stuff they're upset about is really good, if it's something that you really know and care about, right? So that was my first experience with community neutralizing.* Really on an issue the people hadn't thought through, and were just opposed because of how they were raised.

Then around the same time as my kids are starting to go to school, another group of women decide they would like to have a women's centre. They were all young NDP people; they weren't old party people. They were same age as me. Anyway, they met at Marie's house and started a little women's discussion group and one of them was very oriented towards setting up programs 'cause she wanted a job. Everybody wanted jobs. And at that time, there was an

NDP government here. There were also LIP grants – the Local Initiative Program – that was a federally funded program. These women wanted to have this women’s centre and they knew about getting funds, OK. That was not my thing. But, they advertised that they were having a women’s discussion group so my friend Fanny and I went. Now, they were a nice group of women and they were serious, but they wanted to have a women’s centre that would be a drop-in and do education stuff and both Fanny and I kind of said, “Oh, then they just want to set up some kind of a government agency, right?” *I like to talk to people in their regular life and I’m at ease with that. I’m not afraid to be public about those issues and I also understand the need for organization, but I didn’t want to be responsible for an organization and I didn’t want to start some social service agency.* Still, I liked these women and I thought, well, they’re for real. I remember asking Marie again after, “But why do you want to ask the government to fund you for an office? Explain that to me. How will that help?” And Marie said to me, “I’m tired of people coming into my living room all the time.” She had five kids, two sets of twins that were 11 months apart, and she had left a bad relationship and was single. And she said, *“we want to have a public place to meet.” And I thought, well I can understand that.* So, Fanny and I talk about it and we both joined.

So they go and they get a secretary of state grant and a LIP grant and Vye and Marta, who started a Women in Trades organization here, became the paid functionaries. They did it for a year and then Marta decided she wanted to be a carpenter and Vye said, I want to go and do broader economic development from a women’s perspective. There was more funding to be applied for, but both of them said, “OK, now we’ve done this for a year and we’re really tired of it so if you guys want a women’s centre, you better do it.”

Well, by then my kids have just gone to school and I thought, OK, well, why not. We had been board members, right? So, they said, “OK, if you want to want to keep the women’s centre going, it’s yours but you have to go and get those grants and do it.” So, I went “Awww!” But I have to see what this is like. Well, I didn’t know how to fill out a grant application or anything so then I would call Marie up all the time. I didn’t know the language, I didn’t know what to do. So she would walk me through all that and we got that funding.

At the same time, because the NDP was in, they start up this community resource board (CRB) that given the right to dispense community funding, and we wanted a health care worker. We wanted our midwife financed there. We wanted somebody that could teach you self exams, have discussions on health care issues, and advocate. Well, women’s health was very hot and touchy subject. One of the issues was that there were no fathers allowed in birthing rooms in the hospital and no rooming in when you had your baby. Also they didn’t do any testing for any sexually transmitted diseases in Nelson. They had a provincial lab but they sent all their testing to the coast and found out that often it was dying en route. And there was no birth control counseling. So, we wanted all those things so we really organized.

The methods that we used were we would all meet and discuss issues and say, “OK these are the issues we want to get changed right here and now in this area. So, what to do we need to do this? Well, we need somebody that’s just paying attention, and we need to know who makes those decisions in this community, OK? And who will be our allies?” *So, it was sometimes alliance building.* Like we found out that the director of public health for the region really thought it was a good idea that they did the testing for sexually transmitted diseases here. He was tired of it being done in Vancouver but he couldn’t advocate for that and when he found out we wanted to advocate for that, he was delighted. But they didn’t really want us on the CRB

and we were never invited to sit at a committee. So, *some of it was crashing down doors too*. We'd advertise all over, poster all over, talk on the radio. We'd get ourselves invited to the radio station. We would go and talk about every issue we were working on. We had lots of conflict with the hospital and with the CRB. We didn't hit the streets on that, but we would have 60 women that would pack the corridor outside the meeting if they had closed it. We would have three people in there presenting for us and everybody else sitting outside and waiting for the decision so that they would know that as many people as we could pack into that space were waiting on their decision. We had no qualms about that. We were in the newspaper all the time. And for any festival or anything we were present at, we had an information table.

One of my other things was legal stuff. I had changed my name from my kids' name because they told me in the courthouse that I had to. They said, if I wanted to keep what my kids' last name was, I had to go back to the states so I could file some form. They wouldn't let me keep that name when I got married to Allen here. I got married here so that I could go across the border and have enough points to come back here. Well, it turns out that court clerk was lying to me. So, *I had some little issues like that about what legal information women needed to know, right?*

Then 1975 was International Women's Year OK, so we organized a big women's festival. We'd had had smaller festivals and had trouble wherever we wanted to have them 'cause they were women only. This women only issue was tricky and Nelson City Council said we couldn't have the women's festival in the city park.

Now, I was also active in the co-op movement for food, too, for getting cheap, wholesome food in here. For that movement, half the time I worked in Nelson in the food co-op and half the time I worked in Kaslo. *I lived in Queen's Bay and I was getting fed up with*

Nelson and what I found was that the rural areas did all the work for that co-op and the Nelson people would come and pick up their stuff. So when Nelson city counsel said no to the festival, I said, “Well, I’ll ask Kaslo then” and Kaslo city counsel said sure. So we took over the Kaslo Park. Well, then the shit hit the fan when they found out it was women only. There was a lot of militant people there. We had trouble with the women from Vancouver. They insisted they didn’t have to wear their shirts and we said, “No, it’s a public park. You have to wear your shirts. Sorry folks.” Later some famous poets that came wrote great poems about the betrayal they had coming to the Kootenay Women’s Festival because they had to keep their shirt on. Of the three day festival, we opened it up to everybody on the last Sunday so that men could come, but *I still spent one month neutralizing in Kaslo afterwards*. I had to go to the Kinsmen and to the senior citizens and talk to people and ask them what they were upset about and tell them what we were trying to do and why, and then ask them what they’d heard about that and what they don’t like and I listened to that and we’d chit chat and stuff. So, I got to know that community too.

And some people wanted us to become a Status of Women group. They didn’t want us to be a women’s centre that decided our programs separately, and we talked about that, but decided not to be. Castlegar became a Status of Women group ‘cause they were all professional women. We had professional women on our board from the university here, a bunch of wonderful radical faculty, but we also had a bunch of young women that were not professionals. And *professional for some of us at that stage was a dirty word*. It wasn’t the same as being a prostitute but it was close to it.

Allen and Sam

Allen and I had broken up fairly soon after our marriage of convenience. Allen was a great believer in open marriage and more than one sex partner, right and he had gotten the hots for my best friend, but in the end she wouldn't get engaged with him. That whole thing finally ruined it with me and Allen.

At the same time there was another friend, Sam from the states who want to go to Cuba or to Canada. The Cubans wouldn't let him in because he had been in the Trotskyist movement. Lots of people want to get out of the states right, and then Sam write to me and he write to everybody, "I'd like to come. Can I be a member of your house?" Everybody say, "Yes, yes, yes," and I'm the nervous one. So, anyway, Sam ends up in Queen's Bay. Sam is a bit of a introvert. He don't like that Anne and Robert and everybody else around and Allen was still around then, too, so Allen leaves and Anne and Robert go into town. That group is breaking up partly because nobody else have money. I have \$1000 saved and Sam have \$1000. Robert and Anne have some money for land that Robert's folks give him, but they say it has to be just his name on the property. Sam and I have the only independent money, \$2000, or \$1000 each, right?

So I've been in Queen's Bay gardening for these 5 years and doing my little home trip. And I'm nice to whoever knocks on my door. I'd had an aunt that ran away and joined the Jehovah's Witnesses so my grandma would always say to us, "Oh that could be Great-Aunt Hannah. You'd better just be nice" because a lot of people were rude to them. So when the JWs are coming around I was always nice to them, and it turns out that they are incredible gardeners. They like my garden and they know we're looking for a piece of land, and they tell me 3 years in a row, "We have this piece of land up there, Dianne. It would be really nice for you. You can

grow a good garden up there. It's really good sun. It's got really good water. Why don't you buy that land?" First, the group didn't like it. Nobody wanted to live up here. It's a terrible road and there's lots of snow in the winter and really what it came down to was nobody in that group have any money or they had their parents' money. So these JW people came for the third year, but I had also come up and found that there was this woman - Ivy - squatting up here in that house with her two sons and I didn't want to kick her out. And buying that land would have meant her going. I didn't like that either. But they finally came and said, "OK Dianne, we want to retire. We want to go to the Canary Islands. We want the money from that land, it's \$5000. We're going to sell so if you're not going to buy it, we're going to sell it to somebody else." Three years in a row, they kept asking me. So by then we weren't looking as a group anymore. Sam and I were looking and we liked it. We had each \$1000 and we had managed \$500 so we had \$2500 but they needed \$5000 cash. Now, Doris and David had been my friends since I was 18, and they had known Sam since he was an infant because they were friends and comrades with his parents. They were looking to buy land out here too, so we bought it together. But at that point still, it was Sam, Dawn and Duane's names on it. I didn't get my name on it then 'cause Sam was worried that maybe Allen had some claim on it 'cause I was legally married to Allen, right? And *that's another thing that was making me sensitized to these women's legal issues, right?*

Sam and I started building in '72 and we didn't move here until the spring of '75. We cut the logs and we dragged them up the road, just hired a Cat for a day and skidded them up the road. I peeled all these logs and I was peeling them as Sam was trying to put them up all at the same time. That's why they're not peeled quite right. I'd say, "Just give me another half hour." And he'd say "No, that's good enough. I'll sand later." Everything went like that. We were

fighting the whole time. Anyway, by then Dawn and Duane had bought the adjacent parcel really cheap, so we said, OK, we have to buy you guys out. We don't want land partners that aren't living on the land because at that point they didn't want to cut a tree down or anything. So, then we bought them out and I insisted that my name goes onto the land. And Sam and I start this house.

Sam had very confident outdoor skills and he got on good with the neighbourhood working class guys. He liked to go to the bar and play pool once in awhile and all that. Me, I didn't care about that at all. I had quit smoking and I didn't like to go to the bar. But other than that, *I could live my life and unless he got some public flack about it, right, he didn't care.* *That way it was good.*

But Sam don't like to be around kids and at some point, I realized it's not good for my boys or for me. I had been determined not to break up that relationship because I had broken up all my other ones and so I thought, I can't do this a third time. I have to learn how to compromise. And Sam didn't really want to leave because he felt guilty, right? But finally, I just had to say, "OK, you have to build a separate room onto here." He didn't want to put energy in because we weren't getting along, but he didn't want to leave because he felt guilty. That was in June and we make that decision that Sam will move out in September. So every week, we have a family meeting. Len's pissed off because he don't want Sam to leave. And he give Sam holy heck for those months. I see that, so then I know my turn will come next and so it did. The next six months after Sam left, I caught it from Len, who's an in-your-face kid. When Sam left, Len was in grade six and Vern was in grade eight. And I had been involved with him for eight years.

And at that point, there was a floor upstairs but there were no walls. There was a bathtub inside that was hooked from the sink but no indoor toilet. As soon as I was on my own there was a women's work party, and I got inside walls to make rooms. Then at some point I cried 'Uncle' and when my house became old enough to fix up old houses that were substandard to the Canadian standards, I got a RAP grant and got a new roof and a septic system, and proper indoor plumbing instead of my Jerry-rigged system that I had put in....

Growing Food and Subsistence Living

I also had to grow my food, right 'cause I wanted to only work part-time. I had kids to feed and I wanted them to eat well and I had kids that had some health problems that would not have thrived very well on junk food. And also I grew up eating out of my garden and my parents did too. So while my kids were growing up I worked three days a week in town, worked three days a week here in the garden, and I took one day off. I liked that. I liked it lots. I have always liked being involved in my food and my medicine and *the more of my own needs that I can meet, the happier I am*. So we also had chickens and goats, and from them there was milk and cheese. We grew or raised more than half of our food and I used to do lots of bartering too, for other things.

It was subsistence living. And I still live that way. To me a subsistence livelihood doesn't mean that you're living below your needs, it means that you're meeting your own needs. Of course there are things you have to have cash for, but you can still be in more than one economy. And that's okay. *I mean I'm OK with being outside the formal economy and I get annoyed when people say I'm marginal*. On the scale of things here, I'm way below the

poverty line, but on the scale of the world, I'm way above it. So, that doesn't mean anything to me. *I don't feel marginalized. I live on a marginal economy, but it works.*

I have always believed that the people that can feed themselves and the people that can get their own medicine are way ahead...way, way, way ahead. My grandma had been big on saving yourself, right? And gardening was my grandma's programming too. She said, if you have a little piece of land they can't take away from you and then you have a place to grow your food and you can gather your medicine. And there's no better way to be, right? And I feel that is so basic. Everybody should be entitled to food and shelter and water and clean air. That's so basic. Yet we deny it to people by the way we live. And so I also think once you get that, you have to live differently. I mean, I'm very much a product of the women's movement too, in that the personal is political. So, I think almost everything is political, right?

But, I remember once with a little group of women's centre radicals. I had just finished some job and they said, "Well, what are you going to do now?" and I was like, "I'm going to go home and work my garden." We talked about that and they said "you think that's a revolutionary act to grow food?" And I said, "Well it's sure not revolutionary to buy it at the supermarket, with all those farmers and workers that are poisoning themselves for you to have your cheap food, right? You think that's a revolutionary act?" Well, and it's not that I don't have some great big weak points, right? The truck is one of them. I mean I love my truck and I love my washing machine too, so I'm tied in....

Activist Mothering

Sometimes my kids suffered because we didn't have much money. That was one thing. Vern said he didn't care and he's raising his kids without much money now too, but Len suffered

from it. He would have liked to have had a more mainstream mom that had a regular mortgage and that lived in town. There was one year we were so broke that I had put big strips in the side of their jeans and in the back and things on the bottom. Hippies could do that but not regular kids. And maybe that's the pain of being from an immigrant family in the first place, y'know? *There was some part of me that just wanted to be like everybody else too and that wanted them to fit in.* And, in some respects, they are not much different from other kids that grew up in Balfour except maybe that Vern will stand on a picket line and Len will stand on a picket line and they have friends of different races and different sexual orientations.

But I also refused to be the mom that took the kids to town. They begged me to do that. "Can we go for this or that or the other thing?" But I never had enough money to support the sports and I didn't have the time to carpool them so I said "No, when you go to town in school, you can each find one friend that's an OK friend and you can stay over night there when you want to stay for activities. But otherwise, it's based here" I just didn't have the economic margin to do any different. So basically they were raised here because they were one and a half and three and a half when I came and plugged into this community.

Before my family came out here we celebrated Christmas and Thanksgiving with friends. So they grew up with lots of different kind of people. I think the first marriage ceremony that they went to was between two women, but they didn't even really notice that much about it, right? And when I went away to town for meetings, my friends helped look after them. I did take them to demonstrations, to things in the women's community and to the women's festivals, but not to meetings.

I did those things with them because I needed to feel like I was participating in my community and the world at large, and I wanted my kids to know that that's a good thing, right,

but there was a price to pay for that. Like for example, there was a district government manager that lived up here that didn't like me. So when my kids walked up the road and his kids were playing there and they'd say "hi", and his kids would turn their back to them. Vern would come home and say, "They're really snobs those kids" and Len would say, "They turned their back and wouldn't even say hi to me."

Now I see traits of me that are in both Vern and Len. Vern's mental health is in his gardening, and when Len is bent out of shape, he heads for the bush and he makes sure that his family has time there too. They're not intellectuals either one of them. One waits tables and the other works construction. They know how to support themselves, they know how to get by in the world, and they know what's going on in the world too, so they won't be blind participants in something that's not good. They also know how to do the shopping and the cooking and both of them are absolutely committed to their marriages. They both want to be fathers and when their kids were little, they cooked real food and freeze it so that they wouldn't have Gerber baby food, right? Both of those guys have their freezers full of food. And even though Vern and Mary are fundamentalist Christians, they are also a pacifist brand and are anti-war. They're not sophisticated or political but they're aware of what's going on in the world.

Global Politics

You get really busy when you're trying to build your house and grow your food and work outside and raise your kids, and whatever, so you get really busy. And I'm not a world traveler because I don't have any money and I had kids, but I always had an international perspective because of the kind of socialist politics that I was involved in that had an international perspective. And I was involved in that international organization with ties to the

West Indies and to Africa... and also from my time in Mexico. I was always interested in women and development stuff too. So, when the Nicaraguan revolution happened in '79, and people here said 'hey', I was already "there."

But here in the Kootenays, it was through the women's movement that the first education around revolution and international issues happened. Right around that time Sally, who was in that Women's Center group, went to Nicaragua and when she came back a group of us from the women's centre decided to have a public film and a discussion. So, first we had that discussion group, but by about 1980 we'd decided that we'd get more public around these women and development issues. So, we had films from Cuba and some early Nicaraguan stuff and Africa stuff and whatever women and development stuff we could get our hands on. It was open to everybody but it was focused on women.

So, out of that then, *we started to pull in the people that were interested in international issues and in revolutionary support and Central American support-- people that had either been travelers that were political like NDP-ers that that had been travelers, or people that they knew about the South and had a feeling for it, or were political of some other sort that were excited about people taking charge of their lives and with moving with that. And from that we formed a group to do solidarity work in a public way.* Then Tools for Peace⁶⁰ also started. So, for me this was all another chance to work on that international level.

At that point, I had stopped working for the women's centre, and was ready to take a break when family daycare called me back to work. So I went back to work part-time for family daycare. Also by then my plant teacher, Marla, had had to move to Vancouver because she'd ended up with very serious emphysema, and so I also wanted to see her. Tools for Peace wanted

⁶⁰ Tools for Peace was a national non-governmental organization run by thousands of local volunteers that donated material aid to Nicaragua during the years of the American economic blockade against it.

a regional rep and I was the only one that had a part-time job, so I said, OK, I can be the regional rep, and then I can also go and see Marla. That was my personal reason for wanting to do it.

As a Tools for Peace group, we were well organized and knew how to be public in this community. So, if someone came through from anywhere else we hosted them. And Pam and Doug had started coming to our group in Nelson 'cause they didn't have any group in Castlegar and she couldn't stand working in isolation. So we realized that *we were really doing Central American support not only Nicaraguan Tools for Peace work. And so we just became a Central American support group* and then through Pam and Doug, because they were involved with Guatemalan refugees and Christian Task Force, we became involved with that too.

You always need a group of a certain number of people, right and so I was often saying OK, we have to meet. There's this coming up or there's that coming up. Let's do something. I remember that's where I came to really appreciate Fred. One time, our high school was hosting a provincial environmental conference for high school students, so, I wanted to have a Central American component there and Fred did too. At that time, the rest of our group was tired and couldn't do it, right, but Fred said, "I'll work on it with you, Dianne. I've got all of these neat pictures from Nicaragua" and stuff like that. I thought a little bit and I said, "Well, there's also that United Church 10 Days Committee; they all care and they show up to all of our stuff. I'll ask them to volunteer." I had tried a year before to get in at the school but they blocked me because we weren't quite educational enough or something like that. So, another year had gone by and I had figured out how to get in -- through that United Church committee, 'cause one of them was a teacher. So I told Fred, "We don't ask for us anymore. We ask her to ask for a table for Central American stuff." So Fred and I did that and Fred was great. He came here. We laid plywood across this whole area, made a great big wonderful display, right, got volunteers and

then some of our committee came and volunteered too. I mean, *we were excellent at organizing one time events for an evening, but it was another leap of energy that many of them didn't have - for practical stuff that took a lot of physical, practical work.* Maybe for me it's just such a strong working class thing, if somebody doesn't know how to work, then they can't see what they're dependent on. I get fed up with that.

Organizations go through births and youth and middle age and death, y'know. And I remember when Tools for Peace was getting near the end, there was a regional meeting in Vancouver where we were discussing what to do next. And we went to work in the warehouse after that meeting, and I could see that half of that warehouse was filled with stuff that shouldn't go to Nicaragua. I mean they didn't need all those fluffy stuffed toys that were just going to be germ-laden and rot on the ground. *It had gotten so big, everybody was just sending whatever they couldn't bear to throw away. And I was appalled.* It would have been better to send them the money, right?

And then what happened was the Central American Peace Accords started, and the Guatemalan refugee return started happening. There were groups that had been paying visits each year, trying to do support or sending money, but that was before the Guatemalans were starting the peace negotiations and the return process to Guatemala. Now, Pam was getting fed up with the Tools for Peace work too, and she was busy trying to make the support group bigger so she drew me in to the work she had been doing with Guatemala through the Christian Task Force. Our Kootenays support group was ready to do other than Tools for Peace stuff too. I was personally ready to do other stuff. I think that's around the time that you came, and we had already grown quite a ways as a group.

Now, this wasn't even a year after my accident so I wasn't supposed to be working, right, and Pam said, "I will tell them to send you to Campeche, because if you go to Chiapas you have to walk for four hours or five hours to get into the camps," and I couldn't do that. This was when they were trying to set up Project Accompaniment; it was still the Christian Task Force who had been asked by a refugee organization for accompaniment, but it takes a big long process to set up so they wanted to send one last delegation to find out exactly what people wanted in terms of accompaniment and what kind of training they were looking for, and they were also trying to set up a network of support.

So there were eight of us that went. I would've rather gone into Chiapas than Campeche - especially because they put me with a guy who was a lecturer in Latin American studies and *he was an arrogant, uptight guy that really hadn't worked out his issues with women, right and so he didn't like me. I was an older woman that kept telling him to shut his mouth, really nicely, but he was jeopardizing our security.* Here we would be in a brand new camp, right, with these people that had all been carrot and sticked into these camps. The Mexican government agents were there and he'd say things like "Well, we had been visiting these camps for six years now," right, which was all illegal. People had snuck in at night and forged papers and stuff, and to visit those camps you had to have a special passport. The Mexican government agents didn't want anybody in there.

Luckily, we had a wonderful translator who was a British "Red Diaper Baby" that had gone to Nicaragua when the revolution happened and had stayed in Central America. She was superb translator, got along well with everybody, and just was having conniption fits to try and translate this guy. He would ask a question and she'd say, "Well, you've asked that three times different ways now. They don't want to answer that one or they don't really have the context.

What are you after?" And as soon as were done with our meeting, he would get in a hammock and read a book, where I would be all excited and I'd be looking at the plants or trying to talk Spanish. And we would carry on these hilarious conversations which would embarrass him, but those people and me were having a nice time, right? They didn't care; we were just trying to shoot the shit together. And once he just took over the meeting and I just had to say, "Be quiet now, it's their meeting." Well, after that, he hated me. But I felt like, if I didn't say anything, there would be such a bad taste in their mouth for Project Accompaniment. But they had a southern coordinator that was great too, and she had to somehow explain the rude and aberrant behaviour of their northern visitors in some kind of context that people could use.

So, after I came back I complained to the Canadian organizers "You have to vet people before you send them down." I had a lot to say to them and I was unhappy. Anyway, *that whole experience opened me up to some of the problems with the solidarity movement and I realized that working down there wasn't for me.* I just decided, well I'm based here; this is my community and I have to find things to do here that can help change things. Now, I'm not sure about this really because no-one really knows how to change things here, but *the other thing I noticed is everybody that's so critical of the world doesn't want to stay at home and change things.* I would say that about those guys in CUSO, and three quarters of our committee. They had a hard time relating to what kind of changes have to happen here too, and really, if we could change things here, we would ease the problems of the rest of the world tremendously. I know *everybody has different levels they operate at, but I'm a real hard-nose with that.* So I wanted those guys with all their great international expertise in forestry and water issues and community development to manifest that really concretely here. I mean not the whole movement because there's people that I know that I believe are doing work in the South that is very, very good

work, and they may or may not have time for work here, so I would consider you in that and maybe Mani and lots of other people. But, *I also got the feeling from watching many of the CUSO cooperants that any sense of privilege they had got reinforced by working in those countries* and they carry that back to here too. And they all complain about how little they made, which was about twice as much as what I live off here.

Centenos⁶¹

How I got involved with the Centenos family? Well, I went to a couple of meetings but that idea of refugee sponsorship just wasn't my focus. But other committee members were involved in that, right, so that's the level they worked on. I became involved with Centenos because they came here when I was getting ready to go to the camps in Mexico and I thought, well, I'm going to go visit them and see who they are. So I got someone to translate for me and I interview them. I find out who they are and I find out that Karina was in with Mama Maquin and she's connected to health promoters and that she would have joined to be a guerrilla but they wouldn't take her 'cause she was too young. And then they say "here's some tapes. If you're going to the camps, take these tapes to these people." So I carry their little package with me when I go to the camps. Before I go though, it's their first Thanksgiving and so I say, "You better come out here for Thanksgiving dinner. That's not nice to have a national holiday in your first year here and nobody include you in, right?" Well, they came, and Karina kissed the chickens and she kissed the Rue plant, and they were so happy to find that there were some *campesinos* here. And they tell me how really they're so totally puzzled about everything. Like,

⁶¹ The Centenos were a family of refugees brought to Nelson on a refugee sponsorship program. They had been community activists in Guatemala and when they moved to Canada they worked with the Central America group in the Kootenays.

how can there be all this food in the supermarket? Nobody's growing any food, and all this unused land and what's going on here, so we just tick, tick, tick, tick... And they tell me about this Nevermore plant and I don't know about that plant. And Karina say "And that's a very good plant - that's a Nightshade." And I had not even been giving Nightshade to the chickens! And the Guatemalans want to pick it and eat it and they're so happy to see it, they're kissing that plant too, right? So I become friends with them.

I couldn't ever understand why some people would ask me the question, "But what do you talk about with them?" *When I hear that I just kind of shut down for that professional community. And that don't mean I don't like professionals and admire them and I know that everybody works on different levels but what feed me is something different.* So then the Centenos come here all the time 'cause I'm the only place that let their kids in all at once too. They tell me that, they say, "Well, people don't ask us over. They panic!" And for sure their kids were messy, right? It was absolutely messy, but they always cleaned up after themselves and were always so respectful. The house would be completely torn apart. First I would have to tell the kids, OK, don't pee off the porch and spit a little bit further away with the shells of your fruit and stuff, right? And there were times where their other relatives would come from Nakusp and take the bus or somebody would drive them and there would be no floor space left. And they had got in the habit of coming here for holidays, and then finally we got a bus system, so we weren't having to hide them in the back of my Datsun pickup truck, hidden under blankets, right?

We all like to be outdoors and I like people like that. They'd come and then we'd make a fire. We'd cook outside. We'd sing songs. In the beginning they don't speak a word of English

and my Spanish is terrible so I figured the only way around that is to start. So we'd laugh and laugh and they'd teach me Kanibal words and we'd look at books.

And the dad drink too much 'cause his heart broken and he don't know what to do. And when their son died, that was terrible for them, horrible for them. I mean when I think about the resilience that they have, over what we have, most of us would have been catatonic. I mean, I learn so much from them. And we were plant friends, and chicken friends, and we talk about the philosophies of the world. And when I go to Mexico I find there was more joy in those refugee camps than there is in the gatherings here, right?

I mean in Central America, the people there have a very strong idea of community and of working together. They see you can't do anything on an individual basis, and that's something that many, many activists in the north haven't got. *And so that all became very clear when I'm with the Centenos, and when I started working in solidarity movements and we had interaction with people on tours from the south, or when I went to the south. So, I try to work really hard with my community, and to include everybody.* And, of course, I'd had that early political training that was pretty inclusive even though it was a small group. In that group everybody read everything, and everybody wrote their comments on anything that C.L.R. wrote. Everybody freely critiqued it, right? And was paid attention to, and listened to.

So during that period I could see that people had a different idea of how inclusive your community was. In the Central America work I got to see that other people were embracing their struggles with a helluva lot more energy and good humour than we were. Even in the refugee camps they had a better nature except maybe for the people that were in trauma and shell-shocked. Y'know *those people still have a better connection to the planet and to themselves than we have in the industrialized countries. So I really noticed the disconnect, and that*

probably pushed me even more into trying to stay connected. So I can't say that Central American work didn't have any influence, because it did. I got to see a concrete example of people trying to better their situation where, here our activism was so abstract...you couldn't understand it.

Environmental Activism

The environmental movement here had a bunch of people that had an abstract idea of wilderness. Not all of them, but many of them were wilderness advocates but didn't understand about people's relationship to the land; that we are dependent on the land and we have that kind of relationship. I think many of the environmental activists really didn't like people that cared about community *per se*. The high point when I saw that was when CESTA⁶² people came through. They had wanted to hit the tree-planter community and they also want to learn whatever they could about tree nursery development so I had organized a tour for them for the West Kootenays. The woman they sent was very astute. So when the eco-centre people did a presentation, they had no people in their slides at all. It was just mountain scene after mountain scene, right? It was quite lovely but they could have been working for the tourist ski bureau too. And I could see her surprise, and so I finally say, well where are the people?

Anyway, I was still doing a lot of solidarity work then, and there were people from the south that were very interested in environmental issues too so *it wasn't really a switch of movement. But then the Central America group just stopped meeting. And also about that time the West Arm Demonstration Forest started*, and everybody thought that was wonderful. I mean, Laird Creek majority population are not political activists, but everyone cares about where

⁶² CESTA is an environmental non-governmental organization in El Salvador.

we live and where we get our water. And I got thinking I am so lucky to live here. I have this piece of land that practically was given to me and I have people that are supportive to me and I have these mountains that I love that have all my medicine plants on them, and maybe it's time for me to pay back my community.

I had already had certain engagements with the environmental movement through the West Arm Watershed Alliance but that had really collapsed. They had been meeting for a few years and had all kinds of people trying to talk sense to the Ministry of Forests. This guy Allen had urged me to go into that because he said they only had one woman on it, and they knew that I wasn't afraid to open my mouth. There were a bunch of women, but that just weren't ready to take it on. They'd get really upset and I think part of that is 'cause they get so angry that they're afraid they'll blow and they'll want to tell them what a bunch of shitheads they are. *Alot of the rural working class women have that style. But they know it doesn't work and they lose their voice that way.* Anyway, I had had to quit that Alliance when I had my accident because they met on the 4th floor city hall and I couldn't get up there on crutches.

So they started this West Arm Demonstration Project in about '92. The ministry of forests thought that would appease the West Arm Watershed Alliance and that they would try alternate forestry. The conservatives in our district office and our regional office did not want to have a demonstration forest. They wanted it to go away. They wanted the forest practices code to go away. They did not want a demonstration forest but they had a provincial government that did, and it was saying, "we want to do some research, because people are saying we're doing a lousy job. You have a big environmental community there. You have a superb growing site." So the Ministry invite the public to participate in setting up their strategic planning and they hold

the first open meeting and lay out five different ways that the public could be involved. And everybody from Laird Creek show up.

One of the five options was that the community was part of the decision making, so some of us liked that plan. So we called everybody again, and a huge number of people come. We didn't even have anymore room in the Balfour hall. And there were three generations of people - - everybody that's in this watershed here – from the Black Angus farm to the east and the trailer court people, to all of this road.... We picked three of us to go to their meetings, but of course two of those had calves being born or something like that, and so Dianne goes, right? And I end up sitting on that working committee.

So we write to the Ministry of Forests and say yes, we accept your invitation for this, and they were so astonished. And they were also afraid because they weren't used to discussing anything in front of the public. And they kept “forgetting” to tell us when they were meeting and finally we find the guy in charge and we say, we want to know when those meetings are. We would like to participate. And because I'm not afraid to push my way in, I do that. And we sat down with the 8 pages of concerns we had about logging in our watershed, and things we wanted them to address. That was a long time ago. We engaged in that discussion in '92, and we're still engaged with it. They're punching a road in now, but we postponed it quite awhile. So, in that I kept engaged with my community and I was proud of my community too, that I lived in a place where people really cared and they cared for three generations.

But I'm an enigma in the environmental movement too, and lots of people just don't know what to make of me. Because I'm also at every single demonstration that they've ever had here, like in the South Slokan when they wanted to spray pesticides on the tracks a long time ago and they blockaded that. I was there, right and I sat on those railway tracks. I always step aside

when it comes time to get arrested 'cause I don't want to go to jail. I have kids and stuff to do right, but until that moment, I'm right there for the support. Some people feel very judged that go to work on those blockades, 'cause half of the families are maybe working on it and half of them are against it. We're just a culture that doesn't know how to have big disagreement and still hang in with each other. Our culture too easily demonizes people. So like with the Harrop Procter Blockade, it took them 10 years to heal the breach afterwards. Still I participated in that blockade in South Slocan, I participated in the Laska Creek blockade, in the occupation of the library (well, that was a different movement), in all the demonstrations at the four mile office... so people see me as an environmentalist, and as a radical. But I also cut my trees for my house and dragged them up the road and I'm in the bush all the time, cutting trees and picking plants and stuff. And I talk to the Forestry guys, so Balfour knows me differently.

In the end, to me I feel like I owe this community, so it's doesn't matter how I work. I live here and our interests are the same -- to have nice clean water that keeps flowing. And, I think that if we can care about and can work with people that beat their kids, why can't we talk to people that are not being nice in our forests, right? So I'm not afraid to go on blockades against them, and I'm not afraid to talk to them too. But I understand the co-optation process 'cause I've watched it, and I know you need to have a certain kind of analysis to watch out for that. And *you should never let anybody go in to meetings with them alone.*

Like in the beginning with this Demonstration Forest committee the government was telling the local office that they have to include the public, but they didn't know how to behave. After a while, they got used to me being there and forgot I was there, and I learned way more than I ever imagined.

But it was also a very rude shock for me because I had never worked in a all male environment. I had been working with women and children since I had left Detroit, and then in those mixed movements. But they weren't all male movements. So, I couldn't even believe how the men behaved. I was shocked. *I was truly culture shocked. And I also saw their class stuff, because the worst ones were the ones from middle-class backgrounds that think if you don't have sixty thousand dollars a year that something is not right and that you haven't got it together.*

The Accident

I know that for me this whole issue of - how independent as a woman am I - is a big issue filled with contradiction and paradoxes and some people have seen me as a very independent person. But since the accident, I've been in a funny kind of a place because if I want to stay in this lifestyle that I really, really like, I need to have somebody that chops the wood and cleans the chimney because I don't have the physical capacity now. My chain-sawing days are over.

I look at the accident several ways. I had had a premonition of my ankle being at risk for almost a year. I just had this funny feeling that my ankle was at risk, right? And I usually felt an unease coming down the mountain, so I had even gone and bought new skis with wider boots that went over the ankle. And then what happened is I had been away for three months, and I had had a house sitter here that everybody said was OK.

I remember I got home when they first started the Gulf War 'cause they made the announcement as I was driving between Vancouver and Kelowna, so it was probably the middle of January. And so I came home and this guy that was tending my house had never shovelled out the pathway at all, and the first heavy snow had fallen and then there had been rain and it had

frozen hard. So here was this path that was a very slippery and icy. Now, he was a big guy and I'm big too, but where he had slipped off the foot path he had made these holes that came up to your knee but it was a different foot step than me so I thought, shoot, I can break my ankle in this.

And I was mad because he had used all my firewood. Before I left, I had friends that had come and done all my firewood for when I came back. He was supposed to cut up this whole other big pile out at the bottom of this meadow and I left him the chainsaw and he agreed he would cut that. Well, because it was so much snow he just never got around to it, and he used all my firewood up. So I got home and I told him, you have to go out and cut that. You can't leave me without wood. So we were kind of at each other and I'd spent the first morning filling up those holes in the path. And then I went upstairs because I had a room up there that had glass on all sides, and a sloping roof and the wall was cracking because he also hadn't tended to the roof. Out here you have to pull the snow off around the edges, especially in that kind of weather. So after I got done the path I went up on a ladder to clean the roof so it wouldn't crack the wall anymore. And I broke up some ice, And then he came out of the woods to ask me some question, and instead of me stepping around the corner, like I should have if I had been grounded and not tired and not mad at him, I just turned to answer him. And the snow avalanched off and threw me off the ladder. So one foot landed in a snow bank and the other foot jammed onto a big chunk of ice.

Now when you're avalanched, it's extra pressure, it's not just jumping down one story, which is bad enough, but it's also the weight of the avalanche. So I took my boot off to see what had happened. Well, the pressure had burst open my foot, powdered my heel and smashed and fractured all my bones. And it had cut my artery. So I'm telling him, go and get me some towels

and call the hospital and tell them you're taking me. I have to get there now. You just call them to have a surgeon ready and be there. I can't fool around with this. And shock is a wonderful thing, 'cause I tied it, and I packed it all in dirty ice and snow, and kept my foot up and got to the hospital. And it took an hour and half before my blood started pumping, because I had packed it so good, but then they couldn't tie off the artery. They didn't have a good enough surgeon. She was really inexperienced and young and they couldn't find their crackerjack surgeon.

But finally they did and he come. But they said they couldn't fix anything for six months. They had to wait until some bones solidified. They can't pin anything to the other when it's powder. My heel was powdered, so no weight for six months.

That gave me lots of time and I told myself well, I must have pushed my limits as far as they could be pushed, and now I have lots of time to think about what I'm doing and how I'm doing it.

I insisted the hospital release me after two weeks, and I spent the next two weeks learning how to maneuver on crutches. I was away from my house a month and then my friend Janie came and Len came from the coast and helped me set up, and a neighbour came and built this bed because we were all still sleeping on mattresses on the floor at that point. So that was the first bed that was made in this house. Things got set up different so I could manage, and people stayed with me for a while on a rotation shift but I started realizing I was going to have to have some help here if I want to stay here.

The doctors had said, "You'll never walk on un-even ground again", but that's my life!

And so I did everything I could think of. I got the religion for physio exercises. And I'm not somebody that ever liked to exercise unless there's some product that comes out of it, right? I don't like to just abstractly exercise. I could sit on a bicycle if it was hooked up to a grain

grinder but I have a disdain of physical exercise for its own sake. But I moved my foot twice as many times as they told me to. I was doing it in my sleep, constantly wiggling my toes to get my circulation going. *I had so much nerve damage and my foot was like a balloon, so I asked my friends that were herbalists for help and that's when I got even more seriously into herbs.*

There was so much infection there and my glands were all swollen, I'm running a low grade fever and I decide I don't want to take any more antibiotics. So a friend digs up her echinacea plant from her garden and we chopped it up, and I got St. John's Wort and some arnica tincture and it took the swelling right down. And I did visualization. Every morning and every night, I would either take a walk down to the creek or take a walk up to my water-box in my head. I 'walked' everyday so my body don't forget. And now I can walk down to the creek and I can walk into the bush. I think the doctors said "no" because they want to cover their ass just in case, and I think in that way doctors hex people.

So anyway, I'm home on March 8th, International Women's Day, and the women's centre decides that they're going to celebrate International Women's Day and have a market in the mall. And of course, who's a prime market person but Dianne? So they decide I should go. They said "We'll come and pack up your baskets and put your prices on and haul you into town and take you there and you can just sit in your wheelchair and sell." And I decided, it would be good for me because I hadn't been out. So, I went. But I was madder than a hornet that day and also had my feelings hurt many, many times because as I rolled down the mall in the wheelchair, nobody that knew me saw me. So, my first time out and *nobody would say hello to me because they can't see me because I'm in a wheelchair. It was a big eye-opener.*

Then by I had run out of money too. I had the tiniest little bit put away for my truck, but I didn't have any more money to live on. So I had to cry "Uncle." I mean it was fine for other

people to go to social services, but it was not fine for me -- and for being independent. I had been working since I was age 16 and supporting myself, including right through marriages because I never married anybody that knew how to look after money. But I had to apply to social services. One time they show up here for a home visit and I just felt intruded upon. And I felt dependent on people that I didn't like; I just wasn't ready to think of myself as somebody who couldn't walk. And I still didn't want to give up gardening, so that first year there was a young woman Jacki that want to learn about herbs. And that house-sitter guy was back here too. He was so guilt-ridden that he pay her to help. So, we get a bunch of tubs and she'd fill them with dirt and I would go and sit in a chair and garden in tubs.

So I had all those adjustments to make, y'know, asking for help and accepting help and getting a little tiny glimpse of what it's like to be handicapped too in a culture that really don't like to deal with that. *And the minute you're not working full time, everybody wants you for something. So I would also do phone calling for the Watershed people, and the same for the women's centre and the same for Central American support stuff ... I did a lot of work on the phone and I organized that way* if any tour group came through. So I could still engage with people that way, and I switched to that form of activism for awhile.

Then what happened was I had gotten a little bit better. I could walk around and stuff. Centenos had come and they want to grow here so they opened up some garden areas too. And Pam had recruited me for Project Accompaniment and I had gone on that. But I had to say, well if I'm going to be in this place, I need help. And I have to own that, right? And there was no way around it for me. I had to get used to whoever was going to be here 'cause I had made the decision of keeping my home together, and keeping connected to the outside world and keeping my garden. I didn't feel that I had that much energy anymore, but I was used to being self

supporting. So that's when I started to go back to the markets, because I didn't know another way to do a job that's just one day a week and I had to have a vehicle. I didn't want to work out, or to do computer stuff at home either. I'm a too dyslexic for computer work and it's too frustrating to me and it gives me a headache. It's a big challenge for people that are on very fixed or reduced incomes if they want to have a vehicle, y'know?

WWOOFERS and Plant Knowledge

And I also thought I want to live a certain way and to pass on what I know 'cause I think that's a good way to live too. So I have to open to who wants to learn to live this way, right and there's no easier way for anybody to learn how to live this way than to come into a place that's already set up this way. So there is this organization - Willing Workers On Organic Farms – and you pay twenty-five dollars and you get your name on a list in the WWOOFing Association. And if somebody wants to go and WWOOF somewhere, they get a list of possible places and they call you up. And I did that for awhile. And that's how Jim got my name. But when he came it was winter so I needed a boarder more than I needed a WWOOFer, but he liked it here and I liked him, and he stayed.

Now, he's my business partner and, my very dear friend and my housemate. And it's been ten years that we've worked like that. We started this little business together because he was going out to earn his money two months in the spring and two months in the fall, but in the meantime he had set so much up that I could not keep up with it. So we either had to stop what we were doing on this scale or to figure out how to bring in some money from it. So that's when we registered Laird Creek Essentials.

And so now we do the garden, and that business, and the seed business, and I do those cuttings for the nursery, and those training workshops and my wildcrafting, and I get these students, like Jill, who want to learn about plants, right? She's here 'cause last year I did a plant study group with people that had taken a three-day training with me. They had pushed me to do a regular study group through the whole harvesting season. Jill's friend was in that group and she asked if Jill could come along on our plant hike. Jill was so happy from that plant hike that she asked if she could pay me back by coming and working with me for a day. So she came and worked with me for a day. And then, she decided instead of going to work in a clinic, she just wanted to have a whole season of hands-on stuff. So she started calling me last winter to ask if she could come this spring and summer. That's what she did and now, she's both teaching and doing clinic work. And Jim wants to go and do some other training, so he's had to disengage, so that he can go out to earn money to study.

So, I think it is good if I get to teach about making plant medicine, especially when other medicines are poisoning people and its almost at a point where large numbers of people can't afford them anyway. People should know about that, right? And if I know about that I have to tell people about that. I just have to do it in a way that they want to hear. This last weekend at this workshop I was invited to teach, when we got to discussing what the plants were and what kind of relationship that you could have to them, and the overall economics of it, what we did was move the tables all close together and sat in a circle and passed samples around and talked and people got a chance to ask what they wanted to ask. I thought that was wonderful, 'cause people got excited, they were present for it, they asked questions, they were engaged. And I was engaged, I was a hundred percent, two hundred percent engaged, and I really liked it. I liked it a lot. Y'know, *I think it must be in our nature as human beings to want to really feel good*

about ourselves and to do meaningful work. And I think that somewhere in human beings, there's some thing in our makeup that wants to be engaged and wants to have a future and wants to figure out how to make things better. Maybe we're hard-wired that way.

The Last Story

I can see now that my energy is waning. I want to take my nap and I don't like to go more than one or two days with skipping it. And I also don't feel as compelled to go to every single demonstration that there is. Two days ago there was a demonstration for the teachers. CUPE walked out. And, if I had a little more time, and if my body had felt a little better, I would have gone. But, I had to collect plant cuttings. So, Jim did the cutting in the pouring rain and I did the bundling up and packing for town, and I couldn't get in there early enough to get to the demonstration. And I would have had to say "Okay I'm not going to get this order off to the nursery that they're waiting for, so I could go to this demonstration." But then, I would have been probably gotten a cold from it, 'cause walking on cement in pouring rain is not good for me. But *it might have been good for my spirit, but not my body.* And, so, in that way I'm not as active as I was you know, in my twenties and thirties and forties. I mean I can remember putting down 'activist' as a job category on those Canada Manpower forms. Back then I would have just put work aside and gone.

I would have to say that I've given a tremendous amount of time to activist activities. And in truth I still do that role and it seems like *whatever I get engaged in, for some reason critical thinking, and pushing the boxes, and trying to go in the direction that I think people need to pay more attention to, just can't help but come out.* But where I used to challenge everything, now I let a lot more go by. I've mellowed. So it depends partly too what you mean

by activism. Now I keep encouraging all of my neighbours to talk to the Ministry of Forests *and to keep doing all the little things we do to be flea bites, or to throw marbles under their wheels.*

So I suppose I still am an activist. You can't but help a way of being.

I mean it's not just about the activities you do. It's what you integrate. And unless you integrate it, then it's not real for you anyway. *And if we don't integrate this stuff into our personal lives, we haven't got a hell of a chance doing it socially either.* It's like until we really start to deal with our own stuff, we're not going to change the world. But *being a reflective person is one thing, and what makes you decide to try engage in the world with your reflections is another. And I think being committed to activism takes that engagement -- with our lives and our bodies and our relation to the planet, and to each other.* In that way, I think at least the women's movement really got a handle on that, when they say the personal is political. And it's interesting, because when you think which movement is the broadest all over the world that is reaching into the most far corners, it is the women's movement, as far as I can tell.

But y'know the older I get, the more I realize that it's the grey area that we live in. I'm sixty-two, and when I'm sixty-five, that top-up they have for people at a certain economic level kicks in. I don't know what that is, but every time I've asked, I've been assured that it's more than what I'm living on. So, at that point, whatever is set up here, with the plant medicine and seed business and garden growing I will stop trying to develop that more. I will accept what level that is at, and try to get a little bit, a couple days a week for myself for more creative things and to play more and to go away to visit friends. However, if a demonstration walks down this road, I will have to set my hoe down and join that. *I know that because I have whatever that is, right? That's inside me....*

6. Chapter Six: Nancy

This chapter is prefaced with an autobiographical account that situates the telling by revealing glimpses of our relationship prior to the research, of the nature of our shared activist experiences in the 1980s, and of the context of the interviews for this study⁶³.

Preface

Nancy and I are both Euro-Canadian, and were born and raised in the Saskatchewan prairies. Nancy is about fifteen years older than I, and is from an English family, while I am Ukrainian-Canadian in upbringing. We both graduated from high-school in small town Saskatchewan and pursued a university education. Both of us have been away from and then returned to Saskatchewan. I lived away for almost fifteen years, for extended periods of time in Norway, Mexico and Nicaragua and in three other Canadian provinces. I have now been back for eight years. Nancy lived and worked in other provinces and in Colombia and Bolivia as well, leaving the province for periods of one to two years each time. I think I can say Saskatoon has been her home base throughout.

The course of our lives has had similarities as well as stark differences, one of the major differences being our respective family arrangements. Both of us are currently partnered, but Nancy has no children, while I have four. At present Nancy lives with her life partner in an East-side neighborhood in Saskatoon. I live with my husband and our two sets of twins on the West-

⁶³ Again, I recognize that my memory, consciousness and language all make available to me only some parts of my story while obscuring others, and further, that this story is selective and told with a particular purpose (25,149,180). Still, rather than simply claiming ‘insider’ status, the preface is an employment of reflexive practice (112) that explains and makes visible my “self in relation” (22); exposing the situatedness of this telling (3,170). I attempt to call attention to some of the “complexities and ambiguities of engagement and strangeness, intimacy and distance, identity and difference” that characterize my relationships to Nancy (171).

side⁶⁴ of Saskatoon. My sense is that Nancy has lived a quiet, neat and ordered life, although she doesn't necessarily describe it that way. By comparison my life seems rather chaotic and overloaded. I note such differences not to claim truths about how either of us lives, but to say that my perception is that our personal lives are quite dissimilar.

Because we now both reside in Saskatoon again, we see each other on occasion at social and political events. Many of those events are related to her work in Fair Trade, or to our common interest in international politics. A few times we have connected at events related to work I am currently involved in with the women's community coalition. Overall, I think it key to understanding both our earlier and our current relationship that public events have been the most common sites of intersection of our lives. Perhaps our relationship is best characterized as an activist acquaintance or connection. Also important is that our relationship has spanned 24 years.

I met Nancy when I was still a teenager. Two important events in my life had transpired in the two years prior to that meeting, a radicalizing six-week summer youth camp in the slums of Washington DC, and a year long free-school experience in Norway. Both had heightened my interest in and awareness of alternative education, international politics and activism, and had fostered a particular passion for Central America solidarity work as a way of supporting revolutionary changes happening there. I was 19 when I returned to Saskatoon in 1982. That year I met Nancy on campus at a Saskatoon Nicaragua Support Committee (SNSC) meeting.

⁶⁴ The East-side / West-side descriptors of our location are intended to point out a within-city geographical and socio-political contextual difference between us. In Saskatoon, the west-side has notoriety as the "wrong side" of the river, but many of us who live there consider that idea equivocal. Still, neighbourhoods in the city *connote* class, race and other distinctions and preferences – whether supported by evidence or not. I make mention of this because the east-side west-side difference is more than symbolic in Saskatoon and that discourse enters these stories. I mention it also because the place we live also partially determines our casual social interaction patterns. I don't see Nancy in a casual sense as often as I might, based on where we live, shop, go for a walk etc.

For the next few years I engaged in activism, took part-time classes, worked at many (mostly manual or menial labor) jobs, and lived in communal housing with up to five room mates. Although Nancy and I never lived in the same house, she had also lived in many co-op housing arrangements, and she knew some of the people that I lived with. We mostly saw each other through the SNSC or at related activist events.

Our committee itself was strongly influenced by Trotskyist and socialist feminist politics, although not all members were card-carrying or self-declared as either. The age span of members of the group was from 19 to about 75 years. I recall no particular hierarchy in terms of group tasks or any differential valuing of contribution based on gender, age or educational distinctions. I think as a group we got along very well with a great deal of appreciation for each others' contributions and effort. In the years I was part of the group there was really only one rocky period that shook that foundation, but that is a story I will let Nancy tell.

The dynamics of the SNSC provided some excellent political activist mentoring as well. For both Nancy and I, Ted rises to the surface as one of the group's best mentors. He was a person who at times came across as a bit gruff, but his passion for Left politics and his total dedication to Central American revolutionary movements mitigated that. For Ted, no person's experience was ever discounted and I sense that all of us had a strong collective respect for his six or so decades of activist and educator experience. In my memory, five others figured very large in that group. They were the core of the group, with others among us (including both of my sisters and many of my best friends of that time) moving in and out as we came and went from Saskatoon.

In my memory and judging from many committees and groups I have worked on since, the SNSC was very good at organizing, although twenty or so years later, the events and

activities have become a jumbled blur of memories. I do recall a surprising number in which I see Nancy as the translator or as M.C., standing tall and straight with that no-nonsense approach of hers. I also recall us both selling tickets at the door, moving tables, folding pamphlets, facilitating meetings or introducing guests. There was a lot of ‘ant work’ involved in the myriad of events organized: weekly information tables in the Place Riel Tunnel; public street rallies and demonstrations; cultural and educational fund-raising events including many, many dances, and some poetry readings; and street fairs, coffee houses, film series, public education events and co-sponsored events, both on campus and off. Two highlights I remember were Teatro Vivo from Guatemala and Luis Mejia Godoy y los de Mancotal from Nicaragua.

In those times (and in a different way now), I remember Nancy as someone I thought to be incredibly committed and organized, slightly eccentric, and quite sharp-tongued. I think as a teenager, I was a tad in awe of her and also at times a bit intimidated by her. But while her way of expressing herself and her character still seem to me consistently upright and purposefully uncompromising, I also know her as someone who expresses her compassion openly, and who laughs and cries easily.

My involvement with the SNSC, and the frequency with which I saw Nancy changed considerably after 1984. That year, with a letter of support from the committee⁶⁵ and a pen in hand as student journalist with *The Sheaf*, I visited Nicaragua for the first time. The visit indelibly changed the course of my life. One major change in direction involved my introduction to midwifery when a midwife friend working there involved me in several deliveries (the first being a delivery of twins!). Canada still had no legal midwifery at that time, so on return home

⁶⁵ I left the country with letters of support from the SNSC twice -- the second time when I went there to live. Their letter and one from the Nicaraguan embassy in Ottawa allowed me political clearance to obtain visas in the country. It is/was unusual that a country would give you a working visa and residence card when you apply in the capacity of a volunteer without salary. These letters of support were important.

another line of activism and education began. At that point I also moved from Saskatchewan and within two years was living in Nicaragua. Midwifery and Central American activism both remained important threads of my own life throughout the following decade or so, but with only a minimal Saskatoon connection⁶⁶.

Consequently, by the late 1980s Nancy and I related only occasionally and indirectly through common Central American solidarity campaigns. For example, I was occasionally involved in unloading the Tools for Peace containers in Nicaragua and in redirecting medical supplies to clinics⁶⁷. In Saskatoon, Nancy worked at the fund-raising, educating, collecting and packing for that campaign. In Saskatoon, the SNSC also continued to meet but eventually it folded, as did Tools for Peace.

By the time I returned to Saskatoon in 1998 everything about Nicaragua and about international solidarity work had changed⁶⁸. Certainly people were still involved in international political movements, but Central American committees had dissolved and the character of the work had changed. Nancy's work, for example had morphed into her Fair Trade work (that story to come) and her work with Oxfam. My own activist priorities were also shifting, in part

⁶⁶ Although my strongest political affiliation remained the SNSC, by then I had also spent almost two years off and on in Ontario where I had finished my under-graduate degree, and had both activist connections and family ties there. When I moved to Nicaragua, my truck was left as a community Tools for Peace vehicle for Peterborough, for example, and on visits home I provided Nicaragua updates to groups, at public events, and on radio and TV spots in cities in the East, where my sister lived. Hence my Saskatoon personal/political links grew more tentative over that time.

⁶⁷ Of those six years everything and nothing can be written. In easily translatable terms, I met my husband, we were married, bought a little house, and had our first set of twins. I worked in clinics and volunteered in community projects. It is less easy to write and properly convey the intensity and difficulties of living a 'normal life' in a war zone and post-conflict society. In that context, 'solidarity' took on new meaning by unpacking Tools for Peace donations, organizing and receiving solidarity tours, and 'bearing witness' in addition to everyday work. It mattered that there were people in Saskatoon and elsewhere concerned with what was going on.

⁶⁸ Returning to Saskatchewan in 1998 was much more difficult than returning to the Kootenays had been in 1992. By 1998, the 'movement' around Central America was dissipated. My friends in that movement were mostly elsewhere, and I was returning to a "home" I did not know fourteen years later. A sort of time warp occurred for me. In addition, and no less salient, I was broke, pregnant, and with two kids in tow.

because the time I had available for activism was significantly reduced, as the major breadwinner for our family of four small children including infant twins. As well, during the 1990s, I had lived in the Kootenays, in Alberta and in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. Each change in place challenged old ways of doing things, and offered new alternatives. Coming back, I was conflicted about where and how I wanted to connect back to Saskatoon's activist scene. Many of the personal friends I had in the 1980s were either gone, were not involved in activism, were involved in ways that did not invite participation, or were involved in ways I didn't want to engage in, such as party politics. Further, conflict and tension prevailed in some of the sites I considered engaging in, and particular personalities kept me at bay⁶⁹.

When I resurfaced in Saskatoon activism, it was mainly through the Saskatoon women's movement, and by serendipity that work grew to include support and advocacy with sexually exploited youth. As a result, for the most part Nancy and I seldom engage in organizing together although we see each other at public events. Fair Trade is a banner under which we meet occasionally, for purchasing or for advocacy, and Oxfam provides a point of reconnection, particularly through my older twins who volunteer with a local Oxfam group. But regardless of our changing locations, roles and types of engagements, I sense that Nancy and I still see each other and recognize each other first as activists with a shared history of work for change.

When the opportunity to take part in the initial group session for this project came to her through her Oxfam connection, Nancy was the first to reply. She was also quick to volunteer for the intensive interviewing required for the life histories. She had been in my mind as a good candidate for this research and when she readily volunteered to participate I had no hesitation. I

⁶⁹ During my interviews with Nancy, this issue actually posed some awkward situations, for although I had experienced conflict which I related to power plays with a couple of high profile Saskatoon activists upon return to the city, I stayed mum on the topic when Nancy described the same people in a very favorable light.

was confident our 24 year connection would enable me to both get to know her better and to gather rich data. As I discuss later in the thesis, in hindsight I also recognized my motivation as being even more personal. Choosing her was a way for me too, to relive and reinterpret aspects of my own history of Central American activism and of activism in Saskatoon. Overall, the choice of Nancy as life history participant was anything but neutral.

I have offered this preface to contextualize the telling of Nancy's story. The research also had an immediate context, and to that I now briefly turn. Both the preface and introduction offer reflective glimpses into shared moments influential in the telling of stories, but they are mere background for the telling. Nancy's life history follows the introduction.

6.1 Introduction

I interviewed Nancy in her home and in her graduate student office on campus. Our conversations spanned a year, during which time both of us were working on post-graduate degrees. We intentionally spent a small amount of additional time together in an attempt to complement the more formal sessions, on one occasion visiting the annual Save the Children garage sale and on another going to a Sierra Club sponsored event. As well, because of the Fair Trade and Oxfam connections, I saw Nancy fairly regularly.

The interviews were mostly conversational and hence were reflective, friendly, joyful, opinionated and sometimes ruminating affairs. Occasionally written and more structured interview questions punctuated the talk. Research methods even occasionally made their way into our dialogue. I sense therefore, that the timing of the project influenced the tone and content of the interviews in a decidedly academic direction at times. I also grew to appreciate how easily Nancy expresses emotion, but how difficult the words are in capturing that.

For our first conversation, I thought Nancy had made some preparations. There were selected pictures of her activism and a freshly baked applesauce cake on the table. The house was quiet and the only disturbance in almost three hours was a telephone call. The tape recorder was always audible as was the purring of the cat when she joined us. The stillness lent a certain air of formality to the interview. But when the second interview occurred in equal tranquility, with only very minor interruptions, it suggested to me rather, that such was the nature of her household. Nancy and I mostly conversed in her kitchen and her living room and on one occasion met in her graduate student office in the library.

Nancy's life history begins with her family and schooling in Saskatchewan and then moves as she does, to Montreal, Mexico and back to Saskatoon, which then remains home base with excursions elsewhere. The stories as told and composed approximate her work life, highlighting memories of the nature of her paid work, the socio-political contexts, and the important relationships, groups and movements with which she was affiliated over time. Nancy's choice of words and stories is careful and brief when she tells personal stories, whereas her reflections on activism are rich and colourful, reflecting a lifetime of thought on such work. In spite of occasional mention of paradoxical moments in her life, for example, they are not revealed in detail. Public aspects dominate the stories.

At times during the interviews, we both pause to reflect on the past, and then busily talk at once trying to reconstruct who did what, and when. Sometimes our memories play tricks and the names escape. Occasionally Nancy shrugs, who knows? At times, she drops names of the local historians I might consult. This is all part of the context of the conversation. So is the tape recorder, running in the background.

And so I begin this composition. These are Nancy's stories. They are excerpted from transcripts, fixed only for clarity and written in (her) first person. As she spoke to me, Nancy also highlighted aspects of her own personality, and I 'listened' for contextual and theoretical ideas or reflections that could be construed as influential to her life-way as activist. I use *italicized bold* script to highlight these. Titles are my own.

6.2 Nancy's Story

An Odd Start

My mom was 40, my dad was 55 when I was born. So that was kind of odd to start with. And then, because I was talented academically, I started school when I was 5 and a half *and then I skipped a grade. So I was always much younger than all the kids around me, and living with these really old parents. And I'm sure that had a great deal to do with my life.*

My mom was born of English immigrant parents and they lived near an Indian reserve by The Pas. She was one of 11 kids. My grandmother was a Bernardo child. She and her two sisters were orphans and were sent to Canada. My grandpa, who died before I was born was said to have been a real extrovert with lots of drive. I think they all worked hard and weren't drudges but they were poor. Also, during the depression they were living very close to the tracks in Tisdale, and mom always said that she thought that the people that rode the trains had marked the house 'cause there were always people at my grandma's back door asking for a sandwich or something like that. So, you know certainly having lived in the North and in the rural areas, my mom's family had not necessarily a social analysis but certainly the understanding that not everything was great for everyone. I think maybe my grandparents' early lives as very poor children in England also exemplified that.

As a very young woman, my mom worked in Winnipeg in the 1930's as a stenographer. She had been married in 1929 and had a baby in 1930 but she didn't choose her husband very well so she was essentially a single parent for most of her young adult life. My dad was a lawyer. He'd also had a first marriage that wasn't very compatible and so they were both divorced in the 30's and then remarried in 1942, which I think again was quite unconventional. ***I mean I think they were probably fairly conventional people but they certainly had their own history.*** Although my dad was a lawyer, he didn't have the temperament to deal with people who would lie to their lawyer and stuff like that, which is what some do when they go to the lawyer! So, first he bought the hotel in Codette, but what he really wanted to do was get back to the farm because he had grown up on a farm in Southern Manitoba. So they bought 2 quarters off which you could make a very good living in those days. I grew up on the farm, I went to a country school until grade six, and then took grade 8 in Codette and high school in Nipawin.

Living in rural Saskatchewan was fine but I was sort of the odd one at the school, partly because of my age I think. Also I was good academically and that was never very fashionable. And I remember in Nipawin there was a native speaker of French teaching us French, which must have had ***something of the exotic about it to which I was drawn.*** I mean I think there must be something in me that must have been searching for something that I couldn't have named then, maybe because of my mother's parents having been immigrants, or my mom who was always very interested in traveling. ***I really didn't fit, and maybe that was also partly because I had these ideas that I now know I have, maybe because they were simply ideas that were peculiar at that age....*** So school was really not very much fun, and going to high school wasn't that much better.

We left in the farm in '62, moved into town where I graduated from high school in '64. My dad died in '65 and in '67, my mother remarried and moved back to Tisdale. But you know these small communities...the son of the man she married was the husband of one of my cousins so I mean, it was a very small community. I also have an older half-brother, George, who just had his 50th wedding anniversary. He's not like me at all. He is a small merchant, was a traveler for Winnipeg Paint & Glass and Ashdown's hardware stores back in the days when guys actually drove out to all these little hardware stores out in the province. He owned the only independent hardware store left in Saskatchewan (until he sold it to my cousin). And it is FULL of hardware. I walk into that place and think "this is what a hardware store should be like, oiled floors, nails and paint and china and plant pots...the latest thing that everybody wants." They've got four kids. One of my nieces lives out in Pike Lake and one in Edmonton and one in Calgary, and the one I get along with best I just put on a plane to Australia.

We went to church but I wouldn't say we were religious. We did support community institutions though. My dad was reeve of the rural municipality for many years when I was young. And mom was on the women's auxilliary and stuff like that so I would say they were quite involved. My mom also played bridge so she had her own social circle. In fact, one of her big disappointments about me was that I never learned to play bridge 'cause I just wasn't interested. *It's interesting how much times change. I mean, not that many people play bridge any more, at least not the people I know.* And she didn't work at a paid job so she had considerable control over her time. So, she often said to me when I was sort of early to mid teens, "You should learn to play bridge because then when you're a young married woman and you go somewhere, it'll be a way to meet people. They will say 'do you play bridge?' and you will say 'yes' and go out and meet people." And my dad used to say - and this shows rampant

sexism that reflects those times - that an interesting job would be to be a secretary to a man who traveled and then you would get in on some travels. And that was coming from someone who thought that I was very smart. But those were the ideas they had of what I could do with my life.

Of course I did none of that. I mean, I've never had any kids nor have I wanted to. And I ended up living a life very unlike my parents, *partly I think because of the times, and partly because of the political climate and my activism*. I mean I didn't have that Left family orientation. I had the family orientation of helping the underdog, but individually, not from a class perspective. So, I really have no idea where that orientation comes from, and maybe it's something that I'll never know now, but there must have been something in my past because I knew there was a world out there. *I'm sure there have been some accidents or coincidences along the way that encouraged me to go that way, but there also must have been something in me that led me to see and then pursue those coincidences. And certainly what I learned from my parents, about helping those in need and participating in the community, had a lot to do with it.*

University: Something Sort of Wrong

It was always assumed that I would go to university, but a big thing for me was I was only 16 when I graduated from this very conventional high-school, and I wasn't particularly interested in anything. I think I probably decided to choose French just because I thought well maybe it's a bit different. I mean, I can remember quite consciously making that choice, not having a clue what a degree in French might get me but thinking, "well here's something a little bit different." Also *I think being away from home for a 16 year old was just about having too much freedom*, you know I didn't have to study, I didn't have to do anything. There's a huge

difference between a 16 year old and an 18 year old I think, although what happened to me happened to a lot of people. Also my dad was also very ill and he died in the winter of my first year of university so I mean, everything was kind of upside down.

Back then, I also remember we were supposed to wear skirts to class. I mean, you saw lots of skirts. *I don't know that it was sort of written down anywhere, but I think it was expected. I didn't by the end of my time there, but I did at first.* I did very badly when I was first at university, but I did get my BA in French. I mean I did no work at all until my last year but I got through. Academically speaking, it must have been an extremely modest degree when I got it. But I also must have felt that there was something missing in what I was doing at university because I thought, well, who cares about this academic stuff.

I also must have been looking for something else when I got involved with the local CUSO community and the local WUSC committee. I must have known that there was something going on overseas that was different than what was going on here although I didn't have a specific awareness about anything that I can think of. I mean, African nations were becoming independent and that stuff was in the background, but I couldn't probably have named that then. *It was just knowing that there was something sort of wrong*, and I guess I naively thought, well if I join these things, I could sort of 'help the unfortunate'. I think that idea and my interest in fairness together with my inability to see what was really going on probably came from the fact that my family were not involved in the Left. They were more Liberal in politics. So, I didn't come up sort of through the NDY or anything like that. *I sort of had to figure it out on my own.*

I think there was political activity at the university, but I just wasn't part of it until much later and anyway nothing really happened politically that I can remember until the last year I was

here, which was '67. That year there was a big fuss at the student union because one of the vice presidents resigned and there was an election and someone representing the young socialists ran. But that was a long time ago and I was back in the helping mode at that time so I wasn't involved. But a more important thing is that also in the last year that I was in university, I lived in a co-op house down here on 5th Ave.

Point St. Charles

So then I thought well, there I've studied French, I better go and try to learn to use it, so I went to Montreal. I had a bit of an awakening there because it was kind of hard to break into life in Montreal, but I remember the humanists had some kind of Saturday evening discussion group and who knows how I got there, but one night at one of these events, one of the women who'd lived in the co-op house in Saskatoon was visiting, and she knew some people who were forming a co-op in Montreal. And they asked me if I wanted to move in so I said, "well sure" and that was how I got physically to Point St. Charles. *Then the job sort of came up around the corner. I didn't seek it out. I mean, you have to have your eyes open to take advantage of these things but things do just happen. I've never been that big on strategy or on looking at the long term, and I guess I just thought, hey, well here's something I could do that's near my house and it's useful and it's interesting.* So, that's how I ended up working at the Point St. Charles community clinic.

Point St. Charles is a sort of low income, mixed Anglophone/francophone community and it had this health clinic that some students from McGill had started. It was pretty small in those days, just a store front, with a couple of nurses and some med students and I think a half

time doc. I was the receptionist, and ran the non-medical part of it. It really was about delivering medicine to people who didn't have access to health care anywhere else.

I think the experience of working there was very formative, again not so much because of the work, but because you see peoples' daily struggles with your own eyes. And maybe I was also old enough to start to appreciate, though I couldn't have formulated it then, how hard people worked without sort of getting anywhere. And what I mean by getting somewhere, is keeping your kids fed and hoping that they go to school.

In the year and a half that I was there we moved from a small little store front to a building that must have been a convent or something that had to do with the church. It had lots and lots of rooms and by then there was a social worker and a guy doing outreach and I think maybe had a little lab in it or something and there was all sorts of stuff like that. This was also the days of those first birth control pamphlets put out by people at McGill that used to be called "The birth control pamphlet" -- just black and white on newsprint. And Free! *I mean at that time too, it was the sexual revolution and there were lots of people sexually active out there who I don't think had a clue about what it really meant.* So from there they moved on to little booklets on STDs and on health for men and at about the same time, the Boston Women's Health Collective was putting out those big books.... *And I'm sure my life was much more influenced by that era than I appreciated at that time because y'know it's what's going on around you when you're relatively young.*

So, those were some things that were going on at the same time that I was working, but the patients of the clinic were poor people. This was inner city poverty, so it wasn't necessarily about just birth control for them, it was family medicine and problems with malnutrition or child health, or maternal health. And probably there would be women who'd had a bunch of kids who

might want birth control but it was mostly family medicine, delivered to people who didn't otherwise have access in their neighbourhood. ***But these two things were going on simultaneously*** and I, as a young woman at the time was interested in that. And I was also in the consumer group for birth control.

Then, towards the end of the time that I was in Montreal, women's liberation was getting to be more known. I went to one meeting that I think was probably organized by the Trotskyists (although, of course then I wouldn't have known one to see one). Anyway, this was a meeting of people who wanted to get out and go organize something and I remember saying, well, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to sort of work on my own on issues and they said, "Oh you need consciousness raising; go find this consciousness raising group." So I went to a consciousness raising group toward the end of the time I was there, but ***looking back on it they were very, very middle class women and I felt that it wasn't that useful. I mean these were women I'd never met before and I think they all had kids except me, and they thought that the fact that I lived in Point St. Charles was like exotic, whereas to me it was just a place to live! There was no political analysis, I don't think, in that group.*** So anyway that didn't go very far, but there were these stirrings there that maybe I couldn't really articulate then.

This was about '68 to '71 and at the same time, somehow, I met a guy who was a Baha'i and every Friday evening he had in his house, a fireside meeting where they sort of, I guess they did their outreach. So anyway, I sort of used to do that for entertainment, 'cause there was absolutely no proselytizing involved in it. I mean it was totally eclectic and it was kind of fun and he always had a speaker of some sort. And he was this really nice man, a black guy from Little Rock, Arkansas, who was an architect who worked for CN or something like that and it turned out that he knew one of my cousins, so there was also that kind of connection.

Once at one of these fireside meetings, I remember I was sitting next to a woman who was a bit older than I was at the time, and some other woman was giving the lowdown on the scum of the earth that had been her husband. And this woman and I were kind of looking at each other either trying to keep the lid on without just bursting with laughter because she was really sort of talking it up in an entertaining way. Anyway, we sort of struck up a friendship. She would invite me to come over and stay at her place every once in a while, knowing that I was far from home. And her father lived in Mexico. So one year when I had quit my job at the clinic she and her young brother and I drove down to Mexico. I guess the last year I was in Montreal. That would have been about '71.

I had an old Dodge sedan and we camped on our way down. Her step-daughter flew down and met us too, so then there were two sort of middle to late teenagers and my friend and I and we drove down through Mexico to Guanajuato. Her father was an artist there, and was married to a very beautiful woman and had sort of an artist colony. Well, it turns out that one of their neighbours was Eleanor, who later wrote a biography of Morgentaler. So, here was a famous pro-choice activist who I had met before I had even become one!

Also another one of the guys who had been living in that co-op had a sister getting married in Los Angeles, so a little later that same year I drove to Los Angeles and back. I mean, this was the days when gas didn't cost anything. And it was summer and I'd already quit my job. So coming back, he went to Montreal and I went to Tisdale, supposedly just to stay for a little while. I didn't have any money by this time, so I looked around and got a job at the university and well, I've sort of been here on and off ever since.

I remember at first sort of thinking of it as a defeat, y'know to come back to Saskatoon and I thought I'd go back to Montreal, but really giving it a hard thought, I decided well, there's

nothing really there for me, and it wasn't that long after I got here that I started thinking well, Saskatoon is really a pretty good place. I mean, *maybe I wasn't saying it at the time, but I liked to make things happen. And this was the size of community where you could do that. I mean, it wasn't such a huge city that any organizing that you did would be like dipping the sea out with a dipper, but it was big enough that there were people and there were things going on.*

The Penny Drops: Abortion Repeal

At about the same time, one of the women who lived in this house where I had lived in Montreal got pregnant and didn't want to be. She had gone to Morgantaler 'cause it was sort of known that Morgantaler was doing abortions, but unfortunately between the time of her first appointment and the appointment for the abortion, he was raided and his machines taken away and stuff. So here was this experience I felt in my own flesh and blood, of someone who was really central in my life who had an unwanted pregnancy. I was thinking how often that happens, and *I guess I'd seen enough by then that the penny just dropped somehow, and I felt that there was something that had to be done, that it was an injustice.*

And then, one day early in 1972, I was looking in the Star Phoenix, there was a little ad for a meeting that said "Are you concerned about the abortion situation?" and of course, I was. So, I went to this meeting. It was in the old YWCA, this kind of dull, old building. I walked in, I mean thinking that I was going to a pro-choice meeting, and it was the other side! And then somebody walked up and gave me a leaflet. I mean, the pro-choice group were leafleting at the anti-choice meeting. So already I could see that there were some people organized here. They had this group called the Saskatoon Women for Abortion Law Repeal group. It was a small group, independently organized. So, anyway as we were leaving the meeting, I asked something

of Abigail, who was the woman who had handed me the leaflet, and she of course didn't know who I was so she gave me kind of a snarky answer thinking that I was on the other side. So I clarified my question and she said, "Oh, come with us." I mean here was a recruit. ***I didn't even know I was a recruit but I knew that I'd found what I was looking for.***

I think it was probably the next day we got together at Larisa's, who was the mother of two of the women in that group. ***Larisa was this older woman who was kind of running an open house for women who were doing progressive work.*** She still had two girls in school and she was working at the Saskatoon Public Library, but this was her politics too and she was very supportive of us. (By the way, she just had her 80th birthday about six years ago and I remember relating the story saying, there was this old woman.... And of course, she would have been in her early to mid-50s, a bit younger than I am now, and I thought of her as OLD!) Anyway, she was just really a wonderful person, y'know, who didn't come to meetings but she fed so many young women suppers for so many years that I mean, she probably didn't consider herself an activist but she just made it possible for those of us who liked to be out and running around to be able to do that. ***She provided so much encouragement, and she had so many good ideas for those of us who thought we had the world by the tail. I mean, we had that arrogance younger people have. And how arrogant of me, to not to have seen her with her marvellous ideas, insight, patience, encouragement etc. as not being an activist!***

Anyway, so I got right into the abortion stuff. And at that time, certainly the way things were shaking down in Saskatoon, people looking at that kind of stuff would see that it was the Trots who were doing the abortion stuff and that it was another group doing women's liberation (which I was think was probably the non-trots). I mean women's liberation was organized too by the time I got back here, but there was a bit of suspicion I think, between those two groups.

But for me, *I thought then, and I still think that abortion is the issue on which feminism either stands or falls.* And all this, “well, I’m a feminist but I don’t believe in abortion....” Well, I don’t believe in that kind of thing.

So, anyway, that meeting was sort of a watershed, I mean to have found this group who had started working on the issue. And at about that time there was a national petition campaign. We’d go out in the street and ask people if they’d sign our pro-choice petition and stuff like that. *It was a really good initiation to doing things because I was a bit nervous about asking people on the street to sign, but after you’ve done something like that, nothing else is very difficult.* We did other things too. We presented a couple of briefs to some commissions or hearings coming through. And I think there was some national event and women’s liberation was presenting briefs on birth control or something like that where I can remember Audrey getting really grilled by someone, a guy asking “well, what gives you the right to decide.” And I remember I had presented a very short thing on abortion rights. And at that time, you could still put public opinion pieces in the Star Phoenix.

We were a small group. It wouldn’t have been more than half a dozen or 8 or 10, I mean really active people. And I think we just asked ourselves what should we do now, and what will we do next, and how will we raise the money. I mean we had rummage sales, and we had at least one conference where we invited Eleanor, the woman that I had met in Mexico, and we used national campaigns too.

Once we went to Regina for a forum, rented a place and asked people to give testimony about their own experiences with abortion and with birth control. And I think there was one protester or a few people and again, we were nervous but *we felt that it was important to have some kind of public forum about what was going on. And so we just organized it the way you’d*

organize anything and tried to get people to come in. We just tried to do things to reach people who might support us.

And it was interesting, y'know that some of the activists weren't politically involved otherwise. I remember there was a woman whose husband was in university or grad school, and they lived up in the university high-rises and she came along and her mom would come sometimes. And I remember the United Church had a very good position on that and I remember some woman who had a fairly high position in the church was the guest on an open phone show on CFQC. So we just did what we could in terms of getting the issue before the public and trying to change people's minds. *I mean I think we thought at the time, and actually I still do think that most people are in fact pro-choice.*

At the same time, there was something called the birth control information centre which had an office around where the old Capital Theatre used to be, and someone would be on a telephone line and people could call in, so you'd just go and sit there and the phone would ring. And again there would be sometimes people from out of town who wouldn't know a sympathetic doctor and we were involved in sort of facilitating people getting services. So I really sort of got involved with something I thought was important, and sort of acquired a group of friends. And with some of those like Linda, we're still friends 30 years later because of that connection. And for sure, by then I had decided that I would stay in Saskatoon.

Trotskyist by Association

I can remember the Trotskyists were quite heavily involved in that petition campaign and our Abortion Law Repeal group. They had assumed national leadership of the pro-choice campaign, I think you could say, but the movement had lots of non-Trotskyists too. I think that

probably they were having branch meetings all the time and I think probably at the time you knew everybody who was in with them, y'know? And I was considered a sympathizer for a while just because the things they were working on and believed in were the same as the ones that I was in.

I mean, I appreciated what they were doing and I thought that they were working on the thing that I thought was very important, and so I was happy to be associated. I even thought for a long time, well, maybe I should actually join this group. And I actually did join for a while a bit later on, but being a member was just totally non-satisfying. I mean they'd have these study groups and I was involved in some, but I didn't find it very interesting. We had documents to read and I thought, "Oh, my goodness, this isn't for me." *I mean by then, social activism had become really fun, so having to read documents to decide if you believed in this or that – and the truth is, I couldn't always see the differences. So, I had a very short career as a member.*

And they were never large numerically I think but probably had an influence beyond their size in terms of turning people like me onto issues and supporting things that they believed in. Other people I think would have a different point of view. They might say, "those people were opportunists and all they tried to do was come in here and cause trouble when there wasn't any."

And even later, by the time that the Nicaragua committee came along in the '80s, probably no one was directly a member anymore. I mean it would be an orientation more than it was a membership. (Actually, I was thinking the other day that I remember you as a very young girl maybe just out of high school or something like that, speaking at something in the basement of that building on 20th and Ave. C at some event. And I remember someone saying about you, probably because of your association with the Nicaragua Support Committee, which some

people perceived as being pro-Trotskyist, “Oh, another Trotskyist”). So anyway, I think it was an orientation and we were seen as Trots more by association....

You know the best person in all this, in my opinion, was Ted. I mean I think Ted would have identified himself as having a Trotskyist orientation and certainly there was no one better read than Ted, there was no one who was a harder worker, there was no one who was a better mentor of young people, than Ted. And I mean that’s what I think a party of the vanguard, which is what they thought of themselves of, would do. *If you are the vanguard, then you are out in front and you’re on the cutting edge. I guess I’ve never really thought of myself as cutting edge but I guess in fact the things that I’ve been interested in have been what some people would define as that.*

Activism: Getting to the Struggle

Really I can’t remember when I did and when I didn’t think of myself as an activist, but it had to do with the abortion stuff just because that was fairly early on when I was still learning how to do these activist things. And I didn’t know I was learning to do them but I look back and I think maybe I just started realizing that it wasn’t a campaign that was going to be won by reasoned discussion. I think there had to be an element of being out on the street petitioning or sometimes trying to make the other side look like jerks, y’know? So, becoming an activist must have had something to do with that. And at that time too with a lot of people who were self-identified as Trots or socialists, and since the abortion issue was one of their vehicles for reaching people, maybe too it was something to do with them. *Still, I know I certainly got to that struggle through my own feeling that there was just something wrong and that we had to do something about it. In the end, I guess maybe I was an activist without knowing what an*

activist was. I was just so attracted by the idea of abortion rights and felt the urgency of doing something that maybe I was acting like an activist before I knew there was such a thing or before I understood sort of what the role of an activist was. I don't know.

But not all things felt easy. I know by the early '70s (and I guess it would still be the Vietnam War) I felt that the worst part of activism for me was to be in the anti-war demonstrations. I mean, they were very small and people would be taking pictures of the demonstrators. For the abortion petitioning we just used to stand on 21st St. just around the corner where you go in to the side of Midtown Plaza, and a lot of people would sign once they were asked. Some wouldn't, but I don't recall ever getting into pitched battles with anyone. And I know that was really good training for later, but still in those anti-war demonstrations you know there wouldn't have been very many people there, and I can remember that it was very, very hard for me because you know there'd be police on the street actually taking your photograph. But I think I just asked myself well, is this right or is this wrong and should I stand up and be counted or should I not? *It was just something that was there that had to be supported. But certainly at that first demonstration I didn't go with a light heart.* So going on demonstrations was again that kind of a watershed.

The West Side Clinic and Chilean Exiles

I think I went to work at the Westside Clinic partly because I had kind of enjoyed the work that I did at Point St. Charles clinic. I worked at the Westside Clinic from '75 to '78 as kind of the receptionist who did all the non-medical stuff, and I remember at that time there were a lot of people in what was called the Native Alcohol Centre who were in alcohol rehab. They

would have a physical check-up as part of their treatment at the time when alcohol was sort of the worst trap. So I would help with all the general non-medical part.

At around the same time a first bunch of 100 Chilean exiles came to Canada and some of those to Saskatoon. Since the Westside clinic was quite newly set up and the doctors weren't that busy, the Chileans did all of their medical work for immigration there, and that was really very complicated 'cause you had to fill out lots of forms. There were about 10 men, at first, most of whom had families, some of whom were just single men and a lot of them had been in jail for a couple of years so they were physically and emotionally suffering quite badly. A bunch of them also had little kids whose families had been living in poverty and stuff like that.

By then I think there must have been some kind of qualified victory in the Abortion Repeal group (or maybe it was that the branch of the young socialists closed down and those of us who were left behind went on to do something else, or maybe it was that the group was demoralized and breaking up. I don't remember.) But I guess I probably saw the Chilean stuff as sort of overriding that whole thing and maybe as more important, at least at the time. I mean if you had ears to hear, there was a lot going on about Chile. There was stuff happening right here, and Saskatoon is a small enough town that if you're sort of on the progressive side, I think you would at least have to have known that they were there. What you did about it might be something different, but because I was working at the clinic and a lot of Chilean exiles were there I ran into a lot of it. I think it certainly made me look more internationally instead of just nationally and made me look at more than my own particular interests. *I think I just felt that was the right thing to do. I mean I think the Coup in Chile was a big thing for me. It really got me. It was huge in my life. But anyway, I more or less left women's work when the stuff*

with Chile came along and then Chile morphed into Nicaragua, and then into El Salvador (I guess it does always morph.)

But anyway, the Chile work started just as I got to the clinic. And it took priority. I just felt that it was a way of sort of providing real, immediate help to people; you know, getting clothes and household goods and all that sort of stuff and of course, the political work – the Chile support work. I think first it started by just receiving refugees and helping them get settled, but after that it became political and the Chile Support Committee started. Adelaide was the chairperson, though eventually she handed that over to me. And I remember doing lots of educational work; but also there were demonstrations. I remember one demonstration, probably in about '75, which was a big demonstration for me - probably about 100 people. I think it was Freda who was at this demonstration that I thought was so big, and she was saying “This is the smallest demo I’ve ever been to” because she had recently moved from the US!

There were also factions in that movement and in the Canadian support for them too. I mean I think a lot of them brought their political grouping affiliations from the South up with them. There were the sort of progressives on the left, the MIR, the socialist party, and the communists and then there were probably a few other people who weren’t maybe that particularly aligned or switched when they came up. But y’know I found that very frustrating. You sort of never knew what was exactly going on, and you tried to make sure that someone from every group got invited to meetings.

And then when all of this was going on I met Mario -- a Chilean who I really fell for. I mean, my whole appearance changed. I was crazy for that guy and he was pretty crazy for me. It was pretty interesting. And I got to meet a lot of those people socially through him and they really became part of my social circle, so again *there was the emotional and the social and the*

political all tied up. I don't think we compartmentalize our lives very much so of course we're going to choose our friends from our peer group.

The Worst Job Ever: Canada World Youth

I left the clinic in '78 I think and had gone back to university to take a couple Spanish classes and some Latin American history and geography and linguistics classes, just things that I wanted to learn for myself. And at the end of that year, I got a job with Canada World Youth, which is in the running for one of the worst jobs I've ever had. I'm just not very adept at dealing with that age group. I would have been 30 by then and these participants were like late teenagers at that time. And CWY was not a very good program in my opinion because it was just not contextualized (although it may be better now). Like in my case it was a Columbian exchange. Some of the Colombian participants were people who had lived quite a simple lifestyle but a few members of the staff and some of the participants had lived quite privileged lives. So for one thing they were not a very cohesive group. And I also just thought it was really cruel to expose people to all of the material stuff that we have and then say to them, "well, we can't help you. Go home and just carry on with what you were doing." *I think that's unconscionable. I mean if you don't give young people a way of understanding differences, if you don't have some degree of analysis, that is, beyond having an experience in another culture, it can lead to big misunderstandings. I think it was just a group that didn't have a purpose, and no cohesive strand except experiential and I just didn't think that was enough.*

Nicaragua Solidarity

It's when I came back from Columbia that I started with the Saskatoon Nicaragua Support Committee (SNSC). I had missed its conception 'cause I think when I left there had just been the Saskatoon Solidarity Committee (SSC) but politics in the SSC had caused the division. I think there were seven people involved in creating the SNSC if I remember correctly. So anyway, it was already up and running and I knew those people through the work with Chile. And I think probably by then most of the Chilean work was being done with just Chileans, because there were many of them, and many of the people who had seen the need for work with Chile had gone over to Nicaragua work. I mean there were overlaps with Chile, but at that point when I was just getting home, the Nicaraguan revolution was just starting and in seeing what was happening, I decided to join that group.

In the SNSC we certainly saw ourselves as supporting the process of the Sandinista revolution. I mean we didn't see ourselves as some charity. We were sending money there not because we thought they were poor. We were sending money there because we thought that they were on to something, that they were an example for us, and we hoped that maybe something like that could happen here. But we certainly didn't learn every lesson. I mean part of the success for Nicaragua was that the political factions in that country got over their differences. I mean I'm sure they didn't get over all their differences, but they worked them out, whereas I think probably most of us who were in either one of those SNSC or SSC probably thought that we were right! Although now of course we are quite happy with each other.

I mean they didn't have all the material resources we do. They just had themselves. And of course the other thing was the tragedy of the war and the tremendous loss of life. I mean here no one was asking you to put your life on the line, but you could get an organization to raise

money or you could do something. So we saw that they were struggling and that we could provide some kind of modest but meaningful help. *I can't remember when he wrote it on one of our pamphlets, but Ted had written that the Nicaraguans had made some changes that were 'modest but meaningful' and that's stuck with me ever since. It's kind of like -- you can't take on the whole bloody thing but that doesn't mean you should just sit down and not do anything. And lots of us had never been there, and probably lots of us have never gone yet, but that wasn't why we chose to work for it. It was because they had an organized response to what was wrong.*

So, Ted would be the one who would write the pamphlets. We'd print an 8.5 by 11 and fold it in half. It was very good, simple prose. He would distil messages down into what was happening, someone would find a graphic and we'd have tables and we'd hand those out to whoever was interested in them. Anyone was welcome to join but because it was a group supporting a revolution it wasn't a group for everyone. I remember once there was someone who just kind of just dropped onto us, who really hadn't found the right group but at some social event that she had organized she said something about how the children in Nicaragua are all robbed of their childhood 'cause their life was so hard. And I can remember saying later, at the evaluation of the event, *that's not why I joined the Nicaragua committee. I mean, you can go around the block here and you will see kids like that. I said "what's different and why we support them is because they've got a program, they're fighting back."*

The other thing we did lots of was put on socials. I mean there would be so many socials and dances and events to plan. I actually think I have done that so much that I've got to the point where I'm not very good at going to a social if I'm not working at it. You know I just never

learned how to actually just show up and have a good time. I mean it was a contribution actually just to come to them. But it was still better or more fun, to work.

Overall, I think those times were pretty good for me. I mean, I still had the energy and the enthusiasm that maybe I don't have quite as much today.

A Great Job: CUSO Saskatoon

Also, when I came back from Colombia the CUSO Saskatoon local coordinator job had come up. They had a little office over in McLean Hall 'cause at that time the university still donated space to CUSO. I had my interview with some great people, and I got that job. And now THAT was a great job for me. I loved it. This was still at the time of quite high recruitment and it was fun to meet those people, to organize the interviews, to do the orientation. We also tried to do some fund-raising and Thelma was brilliant at all of these things. And then there would be people coming through, so you could also do all that educational stuff. I don't want to make it sound as though it was fun and nothing else, but it had some perks to it and I think it was fairly useful work. I did that for 3 years, until the one person office took its toll.

I also *had a good deal of encouragement from the people on the Steering Committee to do political stuff and I guess that makes you want to run with it all the more.* Certainly, I think CUSO and Oxfam worked more together back in those days, like the CUSO-Oxfam Labour Project. And *all sorts of people would co-sponsor things and I think they tried to be both international and local.* And another part of the CUSO stuff was this big constituency of returned volunteers. There was a good swack of people around town, and some cared more and some cared less about CUSO, but still they were there so you could be in touch with them when things were happening. And when there was more political work outside of CUSO, I and others

would support it through our organizations and publicize it to our constituencies. *I tried to use the CUSO job to promote the issues that were important at the time, support for democracy in Chile, and for the revolutionary processes going on in Nica and El Salvador.* Also in Southern Africa, though I was less involved in that personally, than I was in the Central-South American work. So that I think was important. I mean we did a lot of stuff and there were many levels of work.

During that time, I had a group of women friends who used to sort of get together too. Nobody had kids and we had that circle. Some maybe weren't as active as I was in the Nicaragua work but certainly very supportive and all of us were sort of political. And I still had some involvement with Mario although that was sort of doomed not very long after the start as a lot of these things are. In fact I had had this dilemma for a long time. I couldn't decide between the two things I wanted. Do I want to go to Bolivia (with CUSO) or be involved with the Chilean? I'm sure I knew in my heart what was going to happen but I fiddled and diddled and dithered and finally, I thought, I have to have this experience. This is a way for me to get somewhere and what could be more exotic than Bolivia, right? *I mean my own interest had always been in Latin America for political reasons, but I'm sure there was also just a desire for adventure.* And I mean I had quit my job with CUSO-Saskatoon at the end of '83, already knowing that I was going to Bolivia, so in one way or other, I could see that the writing was on the wall.

Bolivia and Fair Trade

OOOHHH! CUSO in Bolivia.... The CUSO Bolivia FSO⁷⁰ was a very powerful man. I mean very powerful in terms of having a big budget, surrounded by a bunch of Bolivians who wanted to get some of it. Well this is maybe a little bit jaded but anyway, there was a sort of tiny little middle class in Bolivia that I'm sure were as frustrated as hell. I mean, Bolivia was in a dictatorship for quite a while and people were really I think demoralized and disorganised. Anyway, he was really good at surrounding himself with people who agreed with him. And I was stuck in a job that had looked quite interesting on paper, but turned out to be very different. After a while the people at the institution I was placed at just said, "well, we didn't want you." And I mean this had all been because of the FSO, because they wouldn't speak up to him. So I ended up creating my own job with these women working at a women's coop.

There were these two other women my age, like 30, single and opinionated. And another one that came along too, so altogether there were four of us working with the Bolivian women there. Two of the Bolivians that were knitters had actually founded this group and they had called themselves La Imilla, which means something like Princess in Quechua -- a great name for poor women to choose. Anyway, how they got onto CUSO, I don't know, but through them they got two of the co-operants. They worked with them doing workshops on literacy, numeracy, and stuff like that, and there'd be maybe 30 women in the group.

The group had also been doing piece work knitting for the Catholic Church but the Catholic Church was just as terrible an employer as anyone else – they wanted lots and didn't want to pay very much. But also this place in Bolivia wasn't on the tourist trail, so really what they needed was an export market. So, the cooperants also gave some workshops on that, and

⁷⁰ Field Staff Officer

they'd ask things like "how much does it cost to knit a sweater?" And people would say "well, it costs this much for wool and it takes me this much time so I'll count my time, so it's like this much, and someone else would say, well, no I have to pay for the electric lights when I'm knitting at night...and I have to buy the detergent and I have to go and get water to wash this..." And all of that really caused them to think about the sweaters' real value.

And at the same time, there was this marvellous fellow, Alfredo who was an Anglo-Argentinian who came through there every once in a while. He worked for a British group (Christian Aid) and he had sent me a little mimeographed sheet of paper right off a gestetner, with lists of groups that were buying crafts. So, I took that list and I type-wrote a letter to every one of them. There were probably about 30. Two or three groups replied, one of whom was a man at MCC who just took that and ran with it. And that was really quite marvellous. He came to Bolivia and we went out to Arani, the village where they lived, and he listened to their stories. And he bought 30 sweaters from a group of about 30 people. Well, that was huge, I mean...that was HUGE! And to have people who were sort of validating their work.

So they got a bit of money personally, and they decided that their organization would get quite a bit more. (That was their own decision.) And then a woman from a group in Britain called Traidcraft came and she talked about things like quality control, and that was also a good lesson for people to hear. She was also nice and experienced in visiting people so I mean she didn't just sort of parachute in and say that. She was thoughtful, and she explained that because of the exchange rate, she couldn't buy anything from them because she wouldn't be able to mark it up enough and still sell it in the UK. So this went on. I'd get a bunch of forms from some group and I'd translate them from English to Spanish and then someone would take them out

there and orally translate from Spanish to Quechua and then they'd come back and so we did a bit of that kind of stuff. But, anyway, that really got me started onto Fair Trade.

And something else important I learned there is that ***I think most groups need someone, if not charismatic, then someone who is committed and works hard, someone who has vision.***

And the leaders of this group were like that. They were these four sisters who had lost their mother when their youngest sister was 2 - so there was a 2, 4, 6, and 8 year old. Their father had basically left them so they raised themselves. And I mean I got thinking, ***here's someone who's born the same year as me but she had been fed on a wooden spoon while I had a silver one.***

And yet again, here were people helping themselves and doing what they could with the hand that they were dealt. And for some reason all that really hit me. I mean I just felt well maybe what they were doing there had something for me. I mean, I don't know if I thought that consciously but I think that...looking back at it, that had been important. And that was something else I think I only really learned when I went to Bolivia. My God, you know I was in my mid-30s when I really realized this. I had thought all my life that all that work that I was doing was for others. I hate to have to admit that 'cause that makes me a pretty slow learner, but I only sort of understood it myself, I think, when I actually got to Bolivia...***that in the kinds of activism that you and I do, we'd be naïve and stupid if we thought we were only helping others.*** I mean we're helping them a bit. But you eventually realize that in fact, if it's only helping the downtrodden, well you might as well go take up golf or something like that. ***I mean, we're also activists because we want to share in whatever new creation comes along. I mean if you are an activist just 'cause it's too hard to solve your own problems you're not a very good activist.*** So, I learned to think differently about that.

And maybe partly I just felt it was part of the right thing. And also, Goddammit, I just wanted to be able to have my way. I didn't want those guys in suits to be able to have what they want, 'cause they didn't care about these women.

I also think that there was a difference between working (I don't want to say) in a mere underdeveloped country, but I mean in an underdeveloped country where there was no kind of revolutionary purpose to the work. Y'know *looking at Bolivia at the time, there wouldn't have been much more you could have hoped to do as a foreigner, I think, except help. Whereas in Nicaragua there were people that had a platform and a program and there was a higher level of consciousness.*

A Committee in Bad Times

After a while working in Ottawa, I came back to Saskatoon around 1986, and the Nicaragua committee was in very bad times because of Lou. I mean I came back to the committee that I must say I had idealized when I was in Bolivia, 'cause in Bolivia there seemed to be no outlet for any type of political action for me as a foreigner. But when I came back I'd go to meetings and Lou's actions kept being brought up. He'd obviously gone against some decisions when some visitor was here, didn't bring them back to town when he said he would, I think it was. But I think that was symbolic as well as real; he just couldn't work with a committee. And he'd just take initiatives on his own. There was a meeting one day and then the next day there would be posters downtown that said the Nicaragua committee was doing something that none of us had ever heard about. "Oh well" he'd say, "he'd called as many people as he could" *In some ways I think I could see what was happening better than the others because I had missed some of the actual events but saw the results.* And finally, I said, I

think this guy has to leave, and I can remember not everyone thought it was a good idea, but finally we agreed.

I mean none of these groups are therapy groups, y'know? They were not a way for you to work out your problems. I can remember many of us being in tears after the Sandinistas lost the election, but that was different. So what I mean is that I guess no one was interested enough in Lou to want to y'know, take him on as a project. I mean, I can't think of a case, but there might be someone who's just brilliant or something that just needs to be encouraged, or sort of shown the way to do things or stuff like that. But he showed no evidence of acknowledging what he was doing. I mean, if he had said, "well I really screwed up..." but NEVER did he say that. I mean I think there's room for caring for individuals, but not too much personal stuff, because we've probably got our eye on something that we think is more important.

Anyway, the other thing that started when I was away was Tools for Peace. The SNSC and T4P always were in tandem. One didn't roll into the other. But I couldn't tell you how it was formed 'cause again I was away, but by then Tools for Peace was a big enough thing that someone had to do the coordination, so there was an office in a basement and there were donations of rubber boots and pencils and hospital equipment, all sorts of material stuff. And all kinds of people were involved... the urban churches and the rural churches...and actually I'll tell you a funny story about that too.

There was this guy, a conventional dresser, very short hair, very Catholic, who was involved. I don't know how he got involved but he did and he was a very good packer. Anyway, somehow after a meeting, everybody was getting a ride home in one car and people were talking about the Morgantaler decision or something. And this guy was listening to this pro-choice talk, and I guess the next week, he showed up and gave the other volunteers his keys,

and then he left because I guess the talk had offended his principles. So, that was just kind of funny y'know how *there were some overlapping circles but there are some places where people won't go.*

Anyway, there was already this annual Tools for Peace drive for collecting stuff. And we would pack once a week and get stuff organized and the Nicaraguans were always saying “only this and this – new pencils, not stubs” And of course, you know people here. Well, they'd say “these pencils must be OK so we'll just send them through” and stuff like that. Anyway, there was the once a week packing, and then trying to raise some money through fundraising letters sent out a year signed by a couple of important people. So we'd have this big mass mailing every year and get a bunch of money and send it off so that this stuff could be shipped. And I think it really appealed to people and *it was quite a good vehicle at the timeagain, it was just people who wanted to participate in something.*

I mean people participate in various ways and the only way that some people can participate is to give you money. They can't give their time. They're not in the right spot so they do that. So, we got this money. I'm sure we used some of it for local expenses, sent some of it to Vancouver, and we got it tax-receipted. Tax receipting was a big hassle because I think it was done locally and then it had to be done nationally through the United Church because they used their charitable number. That was a lot of running back and forth, but it was exhilarating in a way too. *I mean maybe we were mistaken. Maybe sending all those pencils was useless but I don't think it was, y'know? I think it was a way of saying to the Nicaraguans, you've actually done the work that I guess in many ways we wish we could do and sending this is our way of trying to represent to the best of our understanding here what was going on there and supporting that.* And I'm sure we were saying to ourselves, well eventually maybe some kind of

change will come about here. But it has come about there under the most difficult of conditions and serious obstacles. And I think it was a pretty good campaign in general. And *it was also I think a training ground for some people*. Someone was coordinating this all out of Vancouver so there was all this stuff being done and sent. And at one point we discovered that all the fundraising went to shipping this bloody stuff, so I mean I think that was the reason that actually made it close down for us.

But you know, I can remember Rodrigo⁷¹ once saying how much he appreciated his circle here because we could've chosen not to be activists. He said he felt that he had to be one because he was Salvadoran, but he didn't see that we had to. But I didn't agree with that because I thought, *we were benefiting so much more from the imbalance of resources and everything, that I just would have been so embarrassed if I hadn't done anything, especially at a time when there seemed to be a role for people in Canada and North America to shift that power balance a little bit*. I thought it was really interesting that he said that, because I think that if I had been Central American or South African or whatever I would have thought, "Oh how come so few of these people in the North get off their butts to do anything?" I mean you might choose Central America or South Africa to work on but *you want to be in there somehow clearly on one side of an unfair situation even though your contribution may be a featherweight contribution, but still you would do what you could in your surroundings. And, also I don't think I ever really gave up anything to do that work*.

⁷¹ Rodrigo was a political refugee from El Salvador.

Nicaragua These Days

Who thinks about Nicaragua these days? Well, you do. I mean, I do but I don't do anything about it. Actually one thing you said a long time ago, I can't remember where, but at some event I was at, was how really, there was still lots going on there. And I think maybe people like me who haven't kept up just assume it all ended, but really when the Sandinistas lost the election things didn't end there. People are still carrying on and I guess, I know that intellectually but I couldn't give you one example of it 'cause I don't follow it.

I can remember after the defeat sitting in Place Riel Room 85 or 86 (which no longer exists). I was sitting there crying and it was either at that meeting or very shortly after, that they sent a bunch of people up from Nicaragua. And there was a guy sitting right there on that couch, I can't remember his name, but he was saying how shocked he was. I mean, and he was probably very high up in the ranks of the Sandinistas. I guess I'm not really sure but he was saying that on the day of the election night itself they were called in to come because it was clear that they were going to lose. And I remember him saying that they were as surprised as anyone else. He was putting the best face possible on it at the time, and I mean they had had the wherewithal to get people off to other countries as just a way of saying, well, "don't give up on us, you guys. It isn't the end of the world." *And I guess in fact it wasn't the end of the world, but it was the end of a dream. I mean in history we have few of those kinds of places and times where we had potential for something more massive like the Nicaragua thing.* It's just some sort of historical configuration that makes that possible. I mean, *I know people make history, but honestly I think history is that much bigger of a beast than anyone,* and we have to sort of be pushing and pulling and trying shape that beast but we're sort of fooling ourselves if

we think, “Oh my God, if only I went out and did X or Y, then it would have been different.”

Well, maybe it would have, but there’s no sense beating yourself up about that.

In the end, I think we stopped working on it out of desperation and honestly not knowing what to do, for most of us. And then maybe some just saying, well, I guess I’ll have to throw up my hands because really I don’t know what to do. But of course the Nicaraguans couldn’t just say, “Oh well, I’ll just throw up my hands.” They had to keep getting their stuff on the table. Whereas in some ways, what could we have done? *And maybe in some ways it was our over-dependence on the Sandinistas and saying, well, they’re doing all that interesting work. Look at how far they’ve come. It’ll just be an unstoppable force. I don’t want to make it sound like that’s it, but in some ways I’m sure people had so much of their hope tied up in that.* Just our thinking, we can’t do it here but they can do it there and we can play this supporting role...

Tom, Family and Politics Now

I wasn’t looking for a partner when I met Tom, but I did have my eyes open enough so that when one came along, I was able to...say, “Oh yeah”... So, what happened was I walked into this SNSC meeting in room 85 and 86 Place Riel where I saw this really bright young guy.... And you know how you see someone and then you really sort of SEE them for the first time. So I mean I just saw this very bright, very energetic guy and I admired both of those things, intelligence and energy. And God, I was just about 40 so I shouldn’t even have had those many hormones anymore, y’know? But we’re still together, although we’re not doing that kind of work anymore.

Tom's doing a PhD in biology now. And now there is someone whose experience in Central America caused him to do a real turn back to what he was interested in at the beginning. As a kid apparently he was interested in biology. He got interested in the Nicaragua committee and Tools for Peace through Paul (a family friend). I think his experience in those two groups and the fact that he was a very bright young guy at that time, and then his involvement in CUSO as a field officer for Central America all made him conclude that the environment was the way to some kind of -- I don't want to say it but -- redemption for human beings. But he honestly feels that work on the environment is what must be done and I appreciate that and I agree with him. Anyway, so that's what he felt, so he has actually moved from the sort of solidarity /NGO /international mode back to the environment.

But, y'know he went to South Africa to do his Masters a few years ago and he was the only student accepted to that program who didn't have experience in Africa. He wrote up his Central American experience and was right up front in saying I've never set foot in Africa but this is what I've done in Central America, and they said, yeah...come on in. *So, I'm sure ...packaging pencils helped him get to South Africa!*

I don't think in either of our cases we are doing politically what we did before, but we're not sorry that we did that. We don't think it was an error. I mean, Tom has said, it's time to affect some kind of change in environmental policy and that's what I want to do. He might not even say this but I think it's because of what he saw in Central America when he was there. Like, the frustration of sort of going the international development NGO route, which for him just didn't serve the environmental disaster that he saw everywhere throughout Latin America that he went.

In my case, I thought, well, all these organizations are supposed to be helping but maybe they are just proliferating more organization ...but, then there's this thing called Fair Trade that does seem to be able to allow some individuals to just even stay on the farm, or make some money that they need, and to feel good about the work that they do ...and so I'm gonna do that. I certainly still admire what he does and I think that he's still supportive of what I do.

And you know, it was about '92 when my mother moved in here and almost the same time that I was getting together with Tom and y'know, *I really appreciate the fact that both of them were willing to sort of form a household in which I was what they had in common.* Not every guy would have done that, and so I really appreciate that. And I think Tom's family adopted mother as a bit of a surrogate older person. She was very important to me and I feel fortunate that I got along so well with her. I actually took a couple 'sabbaticals' from working when she was here and we'd play scrabble all the time and we did things together and I just kind of slowed my pace to match hers, but you know she was as sharp as a tack and she felt things as keenly in the week before she died as she did I'm sure when she was 25. She was very emotional, I guess you could say. Living together was very nice for me and I think it was nice for her and while it might not have been, y'know, the thing that Tom dreamed of doing, I think for a young guy, it's also a good thing to just see that he again could have joined the fast lane if he'd wanted to because he's so smart, but that was something he didn't seek. *But you know, I think that long time that I spent looking after my mother was important, and I mean in a way she was my project.*

Ruminations on Fair Trade: Work that Resonates

But anyway, so the fair trade thing, back to that story ... So I was back here after Bolivia and the women who had been the FSO in Central America for a long time, was working on something called Proyecto Piloto in El Salvador that had a bunch of dresses and blouses, beautifully embroidered stuff. She knew I was interested in that, so she brought me this box of stuff and well, people up here went mad and they sold out in two days or something like that. So I saw that there's a market here, and it seemed to be a way for people to show their skills in some way and get something in return for them. And this was also about the time that One Sky lost its funding⁷² and they'd been selling Bridgehead coffee that used to come in those just absolutely square vacuum packed bricks. So Tom said to me, you should take that on ... and I thought so too, so I just called up Bridgehead and that's when I started selling Fair Trade coffee. And they also had crafts at the time so I started my pre-Christmas open house where my Mom did the catering, with lots of nice little cakes, so she managed the kitchen while I managed the display in the living room. Anyway, a few started coming for coffee and some the crafts, and I found there was a niche out there who wants that kind of stuff.

And that grew slightly, never grew very much but it is something that I still do and it is still fun and it also makes me a bit of money. It's kind of my hobby though, not my job. But, more important it's a way to engage people in talking about what I think is important. And ... *I guess you find what resonates with you, and who knows why things do resonate. Maybe it's just that 20 years ago if we've gone through one door instead of another one, our whole lives would have been completely different and yet... I also think that we also on some level are receptive to the choices that come along and it's not just by accident that we make our choices.*

⁷² One Sky was a Development Information Centre in Saskatoon that housed a library, meeting rooms and various NGO offices.

Take my Fair Trade coffee suppliers who are up there in Whitehorse roasting coffee. Do you think they're struggling? They're struggling. But they love their struggle. They wouldn't do anything else, but I mean it's a financial struggle for them. I mean they're paying all this money to Trans-Fair when Starbucks can light their cigarettes with twenty dollar bills and they get to use that Fair Trade sticker.

Anyway, my suppliers are critical of TransFair Canada and I agree with that, even though, I hope that they will continue being critically supportive of TransFair Canada, because there are others who certify with Fair Trade Federation, in the US. And it is doing piss all in Canada that I know of, yet they can still say they're certified fair trade but you see, you can't even call the Fair Trade Federation on not doing anything in Canada 'cause they're based in the US. What I'm getting at by telling you this is some things I want to do... Like one thing that I would really like to do, and I hope to get Oxfam to go along with it, is try to do something in Fair Trade week. And I'm sure living in the hinterland is also part of this. Because I would like to say to TransFair, "Look, every time there's a tour of a producer that comes up, where do they go? Do they come to Saskatoon and Regina or Winnipeg or Edmonton or Calgary or Castlegar?" Well no, they go to the big places and I think that Trans Fair should be called on that. And another of the other things I would love to do is get bloody Federated Co-op, not to have so-called "farmer friendly" coffee!

And you know there is this thing, where again what the coffee drinking public wants and they all think about is Colombian coffee. I'm often asked, Is this Colombian? As if Colombian is anything and of course, they think of Juan Valdez but I mean... *people are so hoodwinked.* And then people just want to get their coffee for less but if I'm going to be subsidizing the Canadian public to have Fair Trade coffee, well that's...defeating the point. But that's what

often happens. In fact I just got a note from someone from the Presbyterian church who really wants to get the coffee but asked me if I know of a place where its cheaper 'cause she's afraid that the church won't buy it. And I know Ten Thousand Villages sells this stuff that's not certified by Transfair Canada so it's cheaper. ***But I think that's free riding because TFC, with all its warts, does do its best to promote FT here whereas I mean, if you're affiliated with a European group, what work do they do here? Still I guess to me it's more important that people buy Fair Trade from someone. It doesn't have to be me.***

But I've just been rethinking this week that maybe I'm too quick to say that something that's maybe a bit more conventional is no good. Because even though I'm interested in the Fair Trade thing maybe there's something else as effective. I'm thinking this 'cause someone a while ago wrote to me and asked me about Boyd's coffee. They are certified by Rainforest Alliance and they supply some of the coffee to the U of S. Anyway, I wrote to her that Rainforest Alliance believes that the environment is the key to our salvation. And in their pamphlets they sometimes talk about fair trade although they don't declare that they're Fair Trade certified, but their literature just says that workers must be paid at least the legally required minimum wage, and they have to have clean water, and access to medical checkups and if they're required to do dangerous work with pesticides, they have to be trained for it... And until about last week, I thought well if they're calling it fair trade, then that's not very good 'cause its not certified and that's what I had written in this little note. But now I'm thinking I have to write her another note and say maybe I'm reconsidering, because they're using the words fair trade together in a sentence but I don't think they're claiming to be Fair Trade. So, I don't know but maybe instead of wanting everything, I should just see that it's a way to keep banana workers from ingesting pesticides and for the women to maybe have some kind of clean water or for the kids to maybe

get to grade six or something... that at least it's a way to get there. I'm just having to rethink that. I mean, maybe it's going to allow the people who are involved the space to start organizing. And maybe there's someone in one of those communities that the crumbs get thrown to who just needs that tiny little thing and then they'll take that and run with it. *I mean maybe when we narrow our focus too much, we risk excluding the other things... and you can't slide into first base if you've got a foot on home plate, you know what I mean?* Not that I like Rainforest Alliance, though, because I don't think they're that great environmentalists, either, and seem too willing to get into bed with the big labels.

Academics, Administrators and Packing boots: What Grabs you Most

There are some things I am not y'know? I mean, I'm really not an academic. I realized that I'm always saying to my supervisor, I want to be an activist and he kind of laughs because he says, if you do some good solid research and get some information out there, you can do much more than you could as an activist. But, it certainly isn't as much fun and I guess the thing is that both have their place and maybe they can overlap somehow. I'm just sort of piddling in it. *And I don't know about this, but maybe the best activists are involved in policy change and stuff like that, but still those at the upper levels I'm sure depend on the people on the streets or in discussion groups, that are improving the climate so that the guys or the gals up at the top can say, "well clearly, there's grounds for support for X or Y or whatever."*

And there is probably one other role when I felt myself quite a failure and something that I wasn't any good at it at all. After I left Bolivia, I had gone to work in the CUSO Ottawa Secretariat, and didn't even last a year. It was the worst environment that I think I ever found myself in and I realized that I'm no good at administration. I just don't understand it and I find it

quite mundane. On top of that, of course, I hated Ottawa with nobody ever spending their own money and the taxpayers are footing the bills. And I'm feeling the same thing now that I'm on the board of Oxfam, though it's not so distressing. It's just that I have realized that it's a kind of work that I'm not cut out for. And because *it's a bunch of middle aged white guys dominating the discussion, and I mean people realize that, and other people are encouraged to speak, but it's just the way that the board is kind of configured that I think it just works out that way.*

And also frankly, I just don't care a lot about a lot of the things that are discussed. I know that someone has to care and it's great that someone does but when some particular people start to speak, well-meaning as I think all of them are, they make me just stop listening 'cause I know that they will worry a point to death. On the other hand, I can't wait to do that fundraiser for donors to Oxfam. I can do that with my eyes shut and, barring disaster, I think it will be fairly successful.

So, I mean also as the years go by, you get to know what you can do and what you can't, and maybe also what you have to do is just look at a lot of things and see what for some reason grabs you most. And I guess you try to be constructively critical of yourself. I'm just not the player that's meant to be in policy work, (though I'll finish up my term). But the other thing is, haven't we all done as volunteers, things that we wouldn't have done for any amount of money? I mean you couldn't pay us to do some of those things. Packing all those rubber boots for Nicaragua wasn't the most stimulating, y'know? *But I just don't think that activism is related to employment. I think you can be an activist after five o'clock in the afternoon when you got home. In fact, I think that I've always done what I think is my activism as a volunteer or else for sort of a pittance.* Like, I wouldn't necessarily call the work that I did for CUSO activism and yet the work that I think I did for Tools for Peace was activism. Again, *outside of*

work you are just less bounded. With CUSO, you had to interview a bunch of people and try to place some of them and stuff, whereas for SNSC or Tools for Peace, we could get out there and speak much more frankly and we were supporting a movement, with a program that was trying to make some change that was more lasting and more widespread. And I think that after you come home from work, to some extent you didn't have to care how you are perceived by people.

Household Environmentalism & Plastic Forks

I never know quite how to say this but...things aren't so bad here. I mean, there are lots of poor people and y'know there's lots of desperation out there and I don't want to deny poverty here or pretend that it's not dreadful and that it doesn't need to change but we still, in the North, have so much more than people in the South do. So maybe this story goes back to that sort of service ideal or that charitable ideal that I must have started out with. I don't know. But you know what one of my connections is with the west side of Saskatoon? (You can laugh at me. I mean, I'm laughing at myself.) Well, you know, you get so much plastic when you go out, so every time I'm out and I'm given a plastic fork, I don't throw it in the garbage. I put it in my purse and I bring it home and I collect up all the plastic cutlery and I take it to Friendship Inn. I mean it doesn't change the status quo, but at least you're not adding to the environment problem of plastic, right? This must be my mother in me, because of her background of being very poor, and then a single parent and just not liking waste. But I mean, when I was working casually in the Dean of Ag's office there were ten million of those tin foil trays and plastic forks (that don't even need to be washed!) and pepper and salt and sugar and brown sugar and sugar twin and vinegar and all this stuff. I mean again it's so totally insignificant; it really is to be laughed at. I mean if a Martian came in he'd say, "you want to know who's on the wrong track? She is!"

Maybe it's partly my meddlesome nature, my inability not to interfere with things...but ***I call it household environmentalism.*** I knew someone who had a brother who he called a household Marxist so I figure this is household environmentalism. Or maybe this is my own refusal to just have to accept things the way they are and wanting to make things happen. So the raw materials for this segment of making things happen are those plastic forks -- that's part of it. ***And what I've chosen to do about that particular issue is what I can do.*** I'm not artistic so maybe if I was an artist, I would transform all those things into some work of art. I must do it because I think there's some reason to do it and I wouldn't have told you about it unless there were a reason -- this is supposed to be a serious interview, for God's sake!

It is Not Just Entertainment

Maybe why I'm an activist is 'cause I can't do anything else. Y'know to some degree, ***you can't change the set that you were born with. And I mean, you can only work on things that you perceive*** and if you look at the world through a certain lens, you see something either very, micro or macro or somewhere along the line. ***So maybe what you do has to do with temperament as much as it has to do with anything else. But to say activism is a vocation seems to just make it sound a bit more grand than I think it really is, because I think it really is also fun and gratifying and to me vocation has a bit of selflessness to it.*** I mean I think so often vocation is used in a religious sense though I think it's probably just semantics, who knows? But I do think activism has a kind of enlightened self interest in it.

I don't know if I've told you this. It's been such a long time since our first conversations, but Interpares had brought a bunch of women from Chile, the Philippines, a couple of women from Africa. I think they had about five or six women that came across Canada and they

connected up with people who were doing solidarity work. And this was about 1992. There was a public meeting and several of them spoke about their work, followed by questions. Anyway, you know all of the types of question in an event – about their organizations and this, that and the other thing, and I thought, well, someone has to ask THIS question: ***“What can you tell us about ourselves? What have you seen that we who are here are blinded to?”*** And one of the women didn’t answer that question directly but she said, ***“You have to really be careful to ensure that what you’re doing is not just entertainment. It has to be satisfying but you can’t just be playing”*** and I thought, boy are you ever right. Because at the end of the day, you come home to a meal and a comfortable house and you know you’re not gonna get killed when you walk out the door. And I mean, a volunteer can quit the next day or that night and just say, well, I’m sick of this, or it’s too hard, or it’s too upsetting or something like that. But if you get through your head that it isn’t an entertainment, then even when the going gets tough you have to say, well, I still have to keep up.

A Last Story

I had a marvellous time just on Wednesday. I went to Regina to do one of those development luncheons. So here I am again, I left the house at about 25 after 7 in the morning and I got back at quarter to 9 at night for a \$50 fee. I mean I’m supposed to be writing this bloody thesis but it’s much more fun to do that work. I mean, I had a blast. Nice bus ride through the beautiful countryside which, if you were born in the countryside, you need that every once in a while. And that sky was really lovely.

And I had a few ideas about what I was going to talk about and I had a few powerpoints. Well, I talked so much on one slide that the whole bloody screen went blank so I had a bunch of

notes for a talk, but I threw them away and sort of got off on another track, but it was just such a blast. And I hope I was able to give a coherent argument about Fair Trade.

And I just got a CUISR grant to do some research for the SCIC⁷³ on the fair trade locally and I thought it was important to tell the already committed a bit more about fair trade that they didn't already know. So, I don't make very much money out of this. I mean, it's a business in some ways, not like the Teardrop⁷⁴ Crafts stuff, which I do as a volunteer. But the truth is that the Teardrop Crafts bring some people over to my table who wouldn't otherwise come.

But you sort of think, well, can I be an activist in my 60s? Well, if my health stands up I can, unless we run out of oil completely tomorrow and society takes a totally different turn and nobody can do anything. But I mean it leads me to think, well what am I gonna do? You didn't ask me this but I sort of think, well what will I do once the thesis is done because I can't just live off the Fair Trade stuff. I mean, neither can I support myself nor can I just spend my whole time doing it, so I will have to find something else to do and I hope it has something to do with activism in a way because that is what I know how to do and what I like to do.

Even though the activism of now, I don't know. I guess it doesn't seem as overtly political as the work that we did about Central America or Southern Africa or something like that, and *maybe it's just that activism's changed or maybe it's just nostalgia for what was or something*. I don't know. I mean then there was a greater political movement. I mean, you couldn't go anywhere without the United Church or the Young New Democrats, I mean,

⁷³ CUISR is the Community University Institute for Social Research. SCIC is the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation.

⁷⁴ Teardrop Crafts is a very small organization run out of the basement of a home in Castlegar that has Fairly Traded crafts from various countries. Nancy has been selling their wares at various events and venues for many years.

everybody was jumping on the bandwagon. There was something burning in Central America or in Southern Africa or wherever and you couldn't keep people away.

Fair trade itself is of a different nature and I think it attracts fewer people. And maybe the reason that I'm involved with Oxfam is because I think it has a political program as well as wanting to improve the lives of individuals that it can help, and some of that involves activism, (though to me being on the board isn't activism).

I guess in some ways I had thought I would put my activism aside if I focused on getting an academic credential, but I'm not an academic. I mean, I can do this stuff but it's just not what I want to do. I thought that getting that MA might help me speak with more authority about something that I sort of have an emotional commitment to. (Well, I really doubt that, but have to keep hoping it may be true). In the end, there may be no payoff and it's been a bloody expensive and hasn't even been entertaining.

But I'm gonna be 60 and then what? I don't think I'll ever get a job again, to be honest, though I hope I will. Who knows, this is sort of a diluted kind of activism, but maybe I'll just sort of run around and consign coffee with anyone who will take it. Maybe that will be my activism. Y'know, not exactly activism as I would've understood it in my 20s or my 30s, but maybe that's what the times call for...

7. Chapter Seven: The Borderlands

7.1 Introduction: Do You Hear What I Hear?

Rather than reflexively noting and then ‘bracketing’ myself out of this work, I sought to bring my own personal history to the study, accepting “the multiple mediations at work in the creation of the text... exposing them, rather than hiding them, wishing them away, or assuming they can be resolved” (128, p.547). Writing these prefaces and stories involved both reflexive/autobiographic and biographic work, and produced a kind of fusion of both. In this chapter I explore my question regarding the effects on the researcher and the researched related to the process of doing research from the inter-subjective realm (5,22) or “borderland” (73,75) from which the stories arose⁷⁵. I begin by recounting several important considerations regarding inter-subjectivity in a postmodern feminist life history study.

7.1.1. Life history: An Inter-subjective Borderland

Cole and Knowles suggest that life history is fundamentally a relational approach that “has pushed researchers away from the dichotomies of self-other, subject-object and subjectivity-objectivity to an acknowledgement of an inter-subjective realm of being and meaning that places them squarely in the research frame” (22, p.14). Echoing postmodern feminist researchers they refer to this realm as a ‘borderland’ in which researchers can join with the researched to create stories that change the subjectivities of both, in a kind of “fusion of horizons” (22). Feminist researchers also note however, that research relationships are characteristically unequal, because of the differing locations and subjective positions of the researcher and researched. A feminist

⁷⁵ “Borderlands” is a term used by both Anzaldúa, (73) and Behar, (75) to depict ideas of transgression and in-between spaces.

life history therefore pays attention to the influences on the construction of this inter-subjective realm, and suggests the use of strategies to invert the research authority, to explore the effects of differences, and to expose *how* the merging of subjectivities occurs in the research process (5,165). This chapter is largely concerned with exposing the process and the effects of that merging in the construction of the stories.

In order to explore differing researcher and participant subjective positions, the research encounter is frequently conceptualized as a duality, sometimes using the idea of insider/outsider to emphasize the two subjective locations (112,114,148). However, Bloom (5,24) and others (128,148,180) have aptly observed that subjectivities of the researcher and participant may be falsely dichotomous. Dualities may in fact conceal the complexities of relationships, and can have a reifying effect of “fixing the constants” interview to interview, place to place, over time. Concepts such as “gradations of endogeny” (166) or “non-unitary inter-subjectivity” (5) may more accurately reflect the fluid nature of positionality and subjectivity. Such concepts also challenge the modernist assumptions underlying the idea of unitary subjectivity. As Bloom notes:

Humanist and masculinist notions about what it means to be human would lead us to believe that ...fragmentation, conflict, ambiguity, messiness, mobility, border-crossings, and changes in subjectivity means that a person is mentally unstable or weak, lacking an enviable, unified self. Rejecting this notion of the unified self, postmodern feminism asserts that an understanding of subjectivity as non-unitary is a move toward a more positive acceptance of the complexities of human identity, especially female identity (5, p.6).

Yet problematically, a postmodern admonition of fluid, fragmented, non-fixed and relational aspects of subjectivity can lead to relativism, which in turn precludes political activism by obscuring the identification of (even temporary) subjective positions with which particular

women might identify or to which they might aspire (112,167). In this chapter I explore a related paradox that arose in the research.

Acknowledging inter-subjectivity by reflexively exploring the effects of this project on both the participants and me is revelatory. But it is also limited because as Lather (71) notes, the task of monitoring subjectivity does not provide in all situations a way to keep distortion away. Still, as this chapter highlights, this form of research is not an objective rendering of reality, but a form of subjective “participation in the phenomena under study” (181, p.402). Accordingly, by exploring the effects of the inter-subjective nature of the research, the chapter appreciates not only how participants “play a powerful role in shaping what we come to know about their lives and the communities in which they live and work,” but also how they affect what we come to know and feel about *our own* lives and work (112, p.37).

7.2 A Feminist Orientation

In doing this research, I had a prior relationship with both participants and had shared in some of their activist work and in that sense, this study rested on the (contested) idea of “insider epistemology” (148). From the outset, our relational positioning and the shared experiences of activism led me to believe I would experience a more sentient level of understanding than a more distanced project, and I initially (and still) view this position as advantageous for the kind of respectful and friendly research relationships intended in a feminist life history research approach (150,193).

In keeping with a feminist orientation, it was particularly important to me to confront the dilemma of “how women are to make other women the focus of their gaze without objectifying them and thus ultimately betraying them” (75, p.28). As noted earlier, I found that dilemma easier to confront in the process of data gathering than in the writing of text. Ultimately I

recognized that whatever I chose for text and for representing the biographies would be contested.

Stacey (210) encounters this as a basic dilemma in the interpretation of a feminist orientation to research. Paralleling a postmodern life history, her ethnographic research is relationally oriented, and focuses on emotional and experiential aspects of women's lives. But as she writes, she wonders whether such attention to the women's "lives, loves and tragedies" set the stage for betrayal, either of the subject, or of the researcher's feminist ethical principles. The dilemma is highlighted for her when one of her research subjects asks her to leave out an important part of the story concerning a lesbian relationship. She asks herself:

What feminist principles can I invoke to guide me here? Principles of respect for research subjects and for a collaborative, egalitarian research relationship would suggest compliance, but this forces me to collude with the homophobic silencing of lesbian experience, as well as to consciously distort what I consider a crucial component of the ethnographic "truth" in my study. Whatever we decide, my ethnography will betray a feminist principle (210, p.24).

Throughout the project I sensed a need to discern and then to practice what I thought a constructive postmodern feminist research orientation to life history ought be about, and I found myself frequently returning to feminist and constructive postmodernist life history methodological literatures, trying to tease out the principles underlying such work. As noted above, feminist researchers struggle with and interpret that task in diverse ways. As noted in my earlier discussion, two general postmodern tendencies provide ways to approach the task, those being associated with a more relativist and deconstructivist camp and those melding postmodernism with social constructivism. In the latter camp, authors such as bell hooks note that claiming feminism as one's liberating orientation "does not bring that process or practice into being" (192, p.61), while Gergen notes that a constructive postmodern feminist orientation is open to interpretation (120). For her, "nothing by definition is excluded...Acceptability is

determined more by a researcher's *stance* toward a project than by the nature of the work itself" (120, p.42, my emphasis added). Similarly I became convinced early on, that for this project, I would interpret a feminist life history orientation as primarily about relationship and process. Above all I would prioritize an ethic of caring, accepting both the dangers and possibilities of a dialogic positioning and of becoming a reflexive and vulnerable observer (75). To do so was not to ignore central academic tasks. Rather, I would place academic contributions differently: I would privilege the non-hegemonic personal voices of my participants; I would undertake the task of interpretation without administering authoritative closure on the stories; and I would not ignore the structures and contexts of their lives, but use emotions, reflections, and experiences to elicit understanding of them. Adhering to that orientation in carrying out those tasks proved more complex than I had anticipated, with some unforeseen results.

7.2.1 Gathering Stories

One of my first challenges to that orientation came in trying to respectfully balance our mutual interest in the topic of study with my need for gathering data based on actual lived experiences. Weeks before the interviewing commenced I mailed a copy of my full proposal to both Nancy and Dianne and prior to the interviews, we talked at length about the project's purpose and how I hoped to carry it out. I repeatedly clarified to each woman that above all, openness, respect, and preserving good relationships as friends would prevail over research priorities where those things diverged (5,22,193). Nancy and I met in her office and in her home. In the case of Dianne, I lived with her as I interviewed, relying on the rhythm of her life to determine when and for how long we would speak (on record). As described elsewhere in the thesis, the interviews were conversational, and led in form, content and length by the interviewees.

The process I followed both used and diverged from textbook life history data gathering. In the group sessions, in the interviews and outside of them we extrapolated, theorized our own understandings, and at times, collectively damned science and medicine and other Western male paradigms. We talked dreams and bodies. We multi-tasked. We gossiped. We looked at pictures and at books. We diverged. We veered off topic and we agreed on things that were off the record. We laughed – a lot. Overall, the data gathering was a joyful, if not celebratory, meandering affair. Both Nancy and Dianne repeatedly noted the pleasure of having a chance to ‘talk about’ their lives to someone interested in listening. Dianne also frequently joked that my reciprocal duty to her was to get the PhD (to which I added pit the prunes, sort the cuttings or shovel in the garden!). Transcript review involved somewhat different experiences.

Each woman reviewed her transcripts in different ways. In Dianne’s reviews of transcripts she made quite personal margin notes, as well as offering name or place clarifications. Nancy, on the other hand, made more technical and grammatical changes, reordering or clarifying story-lines, dates and events. Each woman occasionally revised particularly negative opinions of a person or event, sometimes requesting those to be taken off the record. I obliged where ethically called for, although often the gist stayed where it mattered to the story-line of activism.

Transcript reviews revealed more so than the interviews how the project was also experienced as up-close and personal, adding to my sense of such reviews as a necessary but burdensome addition to an already stretched time commitment to the project. Still the reviews revealed that occasionally events were painful to recall, and that the transcripts contained sometimes unsettling self-observations. On one occasion, a transcript review itself presented an unforeseen risk to a participant that simultaneously served as a wake-up call to remember the

political risks that overlay personal activist experience⁷⁶. Although many comments are off the record, as an example, one woman commented that her transcript revealed only “stories of petty personal wins and losses.”

A particularly difficult aspect to adjudicate became whether or not to present the stories in the women’s own voices. Nancy felt her story in text came out “a bit boring.” Dianne felt she might be misread, for the transcripts revealed some unusual syntax and grammar which at times mask her well-read and university-educated background. Particularly with Dianne, we queried together ‘who’ the portrayal ought to suggest to the reader and whether authenticity or image were the better basis on which to decide. A passage written in response to critics of the language in *The Color Purple* in Alice Walker’s collected works *Living by the Word* helped clarify the issue and became a basis for our discussion. In it she writes:

...it is language more than anything else that reveals and validates one’s existence, and if the language we actually speak is denied us, then it is inevitable that the form we are permitted to assume historically will be one of caricature reflecting someone else’s literary or social fantasy” (211, p.62).

Dianne’s voice and grammar situates her historically, ethnically, in context; her voice makes her story unique. I sensed that as important, and felt it to be highly consistent with life history-telling, but given the hesitancy, we agreed to revisit the decision to use her voice prior to any additional publication outside of the dissertation. In some sense, thus, the jury is still out.

Overall, our ongoing discussions regarding the framing of the stories were invaluable in assuaging unease about these aspects of the process. My reassurances to them that I would keep

⁷⁶ Last winter, Dianne was reviewing transcripts (in hard copy) on a plane trip to visit her parents in the U.S. Whether due to some past (unofficial) record of activist involvement or perhaps just due to heightened border sensitivity in this era, US immigration officials detained her and searched her hand luggage. They removed the transcripts and copied them page by page before allowing her to proceed. In good humour, she later wrote back to me “good thing they didn’t have that last set of transcripts.” I was guilt-struck and felt sickened by the possibility that the project had negatively influenced her migration status. Many of her family and friends still reside in the USA.

the door open, that I would frame the stories as partial, contextualized, and time-bound, and that I would use creative representations sometimes left me with the quandary noted earlier by Stacey (210). Further, the contingencies left me wondering if I could find a way congruent with a constructive postmodern feminist orientation that lived up to the multi-levelled expectations of my committee, my participants, activist communities, and myself. Ultimately I knew that I couldn't foretell the readers' reactions to choices I would make.

Sensing that I was least likely to betray the ethic of caring principle by bringing each personal voice to the fore, I chose to write their stories as spoken and to contextualize them via reflexive prefaces. Although not unproblematic, doing so highlighted the partial nature of stories and made evident my infiltration of the narrative without displacing their stories. I thereby diminished the effect of:

practices of thinking and writing ...that convert what people experience directly in their everyday / everynight world into forms of knowledge in which people as subjects disappear and in which their perspectives on their own experience are transposed and subdued by the magisterial forms of objectifying discourse (170, p.4).

Further, how they each speak and what they each highlight in their speaking relays a story of who they are, thereby allowing the reader to momentarily enter those two lives, to sense across the stories shared nuances of activism, but also to hear experiential and interpretive differences. Let me now turn to a paradox that adheres to this honouring of sister lives.

7.2.2 A Paradox: Hero Narratives

Heroization or the inflation of the heroic quality of narrative actors tends to adhere to research relationships where the researcher and researched are close. According to Gardner (212), hero narratives represent pervasive meta-narratives and common Western archetypes. In stories of activists, they are most common where the activist under study is member of a cause or site-specific type of activism that the activist's life history is intended to represent. The problem

of hero narratives is that they can serve to distance the subjects from their non-activist reader, facilitating a rationalization of non-involvement, or serving unintentionally to dissuade people. Portrayals of grassroots, voluntary, community-based involvements as somehow ‘super-human’ then denies agency to those interested in other levels and forms of commitment to social change. Further, and perhaps most important, a heroization narrative can mask the complex, messy, paradoxical and problematic aspects of activists’ lives, denying the humanity at its core (5,212).

In portraying Nancy and Dianne’s lives I struggled to balance the mundane, paradoxical and sometimes unflattering stories with the inclusion of the risky and courageous self-presentations. I tried to seek a sort of balance in the roles and qualities portrayed as a way to avoid falsely inflating their stories with the “conventional closure of master patriarchal script” (5). Perhaps contentiously, I did not want to do away with the heroic aspects of their stories completely, because I suspect that heroization used in a feminist project offers a potential way to prefigure transformative process or discursive shifts. That is, to portray women as heroes, even momentarily, is to re-conceptualize them in a strategic way that neither inflates nor conceals the very real risks and challenges that activism entails. I did not exaggerate this aspect; in these stories heroic aspects were not the only or even the dominant portrayal. Again, the issue illustrates that determining ‘which feminist principle’ to employ is an irresolvable dilemma and an inherent paradox of postmodern feminist life history, given the close relationship and ensuing “tendency for writers in the life history genre to valorize their subject” (133).

The last group session, which acted as a peer review by women activists, illustrated the effects of this paradox. Women in the group recognized and commented on the *intrepid*, the *fearless*, the *indomitable*, the *riskier* and heroic aspects of Dianne and Nancy’s lives, but also confirmed those as giving an *inspirational*, *exciting*, *celebratory* quality to the narratives.

Importantly, these women weren't seeing them as heroes, but as *rebels*, which I sense as an important conceptual distinction. Still, for some participants reading the stories brought up negative feelings and provoked self-questioning of their own privilege, level of consciousness, or activist shortcomings. In addition, some participants compared the stories to that of Emma Goldman⁷⁷; one contrasted them with the autobiography of Jane Fonda. The comparisons spoke to me of both the strength of the narratives to evoke a woman activist's life, but also to the problem of distance created by that valorization.

The women's insights on Jane Fonda's autobiography also acted as a kind of simulation narrative, a comparative way to discuss and situate Dianne and Nancy's story contexts. Jane Fonda's story is a sometimes painful autobiography portraying a woman with the resources and power both to become famous and to become a target. Diane and Nancy's stories are clearly not stories of fame and fortune, yet too, they portray many potential rewards, losses and risks of being an activist. As one participant noted, those losses are, however, mediated through my telling. Comparing the stories in terms of their socio-economic situatedness ultimately brought Dianne and Nancy's stories closer to home. Ultimately, recognizing contextual diversities and non-monolithic practices enabled seeing both between and within each story what participants noted as a "similarity of beliefs", but "diversity in approaches", a diversity that "encourages us all to do it our own way but still contribute".

Overall, I would contend that whether and how this valorizing aspect of the narratives adhered to a feminist orientation, served to prefigure transformational process, or provoke distance or closeness to activism is a matter of perspective. Contentiously perhaps, I see the

⁷⁷ Emma Goldman (1869–1940) was an American anarchist, and feminist, well known for her work as an early advocate of free speech, birth control, women's equality and union organization.

modestly heroic or rebellious qualities underlying the narratives as both a problem and a strategy.

7.3 Text, Memory and Grief

I discovered in the writing of the research text what historians and literary critics (and many indigenous and elderly people in the world) note time and again -- that the passage from everyday experience to oral conversation to the written word represents a fundamental loss of nuance⁷⁸. The written word is “a thing, not an event. Written words are alone in the text, lacking the support of pronunciation, emphasis, audience-participation: lacking in other words, the performance level...Sight isolates, sound incorporates” (213, p.181). Both exaggeration and omission are part of the act of data display and reduction in any textual production. But that act of reduction is more than textual; it is experienced, sentient. Furthermore, the longer and the deeper you ‘know’ something or someone, the more reduction is required, the more senses need to be ignored, and the harder it is to articulate in text what you know. As a result, I found the task of written articulation of these lives particularly difficult. Somehow, the additional verbal and non-verbal cues of in-person conversational encounter related more than I could possibly reveal via text. In a similar way, although I had anticipated that the research would become “an extension” (22) of our relationship, research and friendship can be two very different pursuits, with the act of research forcing a kind of precision not typical of friendly interaction.

Memory was not always a friendly or reliable ally in the process. Assumptions I sometimes made based on my memory of past encounters shifted and interfered with my understanding of current accounts of experience. When I remembered certain people taking

⁷⁸ Studies that involve or attempt to recreate everyday experience are particularly prone to this problem, for to write about the “everyday” is to objectify it, often thus defeating the purpose of evoking its heterogeneous quality and bringing to the fore a host of philosophical arguments. (See for example, Gregg (240), Sandywell (241) or Seigworth and Gardiner (242).

certain roles in particular events, my participants remembered it otherwise. Other times we seemed to share vicarious memories, where one or the other of us were actually absent from a particular event, but had a memory of it or of each other (149). Most importantly, my understanding of their commitments to particular movements shifted and challenged me throughout. This was particularly so of Central American activism.

Implicitly, by initially adding the participant criteria of Central American solidarity activism, I realized in hindsight that I sought not only a common bond and way to reduce the pool of participants, but also a validation of that work, a collective forum for discussing it, and a way to find people with whom to share memories, nostalgia or grief (149,214). The project did not fully provide that, forcing a personal and reflexive renegotiation of that un-stated goal and an adjustment of the 'story-line' I had perhaps unconsciously anticipated. For example, the first time we discussed Central American activism in detail, Dianne was tired. The topic came up at the end of the day, after a long interview. In that interview, her critique of solidarity activists that do not engage in activism locally was particularly biting. While I philosophically share her critique, I sensed something amiss in her story. Thus, I left Balfour the following day with a somewhat disquieting feeling. I struggled to understand to what I was reacting. In the airport on the way home I wrote about our conversation in an abstract way in my journal, complaining that this was not the inter-subjective conversational interviewing I had envisioned for the project. I had wanted to dialogue with her, to share and explore that critique, not just listen to it. I sensed that I had been seduced by a promise in the feminist interviewing literature that didn't quite materialize, but that I had in part set up and participated in by just 'letting the interview flow'. But I also began to recognize that the Central America experience was nagging for my attention and I would need to return to it.

At the second set of interviews six months later I returned to that movement, that topic, and those comments. The transcript of that encounter reveals how I asserted my own emotional, theoretical and philosophical intervention to remind her that I agree with her. I indicated that I also feel that people betray the spirit of activism when they atomize and disconnect things that way, and how doing so allows a complacency and a myth to be forged about the sexy ‘other’-oriented nature of global activist work that is in my opinion unforgivable in these times...and so on. That second time, a different multi-faceted story of the meaning of Central American activism began to emerge. This time it more fully resonated with how I remembered it, allowing me to present the more complex version of the story herein. But the revisiting also gave permission for something else to surface. Hearing *her* say it helped to legitimate *my* own feelings. Consequently, in reviewing those transcripts I was again left feeling unsettled. Had I asserted some kind of invisible but omniscient power to revise the past? Or was this an example of how one dialogically composes it? What else was going on?

I think that the whole encounter illuminated two very important research issues related to inter-subjective relationships in feminist life history: the first regards the inadequacy of dualistic theories of power in the researcher/researched relationships (mostly unseated in such work); and the second, how the act of conversing brings into focus submerged realities underlying a life history research project.

In this particular exchange, the research had become a vehicle to validate both of our experiences of that movement through the act of collective meaning making. For me, the power to name and interpret that work was shifting fluidly as my positioning of Dianne as narrator / mentor / interpreter / guide to those experiences moved back and forth from Dianne as friend / colleague / *compañera*. Reflexively revisiting that work and dialoguing about those memories

had served the unanticipated effect of repositioning us vis-à-vis both our friendship and our research relationship. I also recognized in hindsight that the feminist methodology itself was not what had failed. It was my expectation that somehow the methodology would “guarantee a particular experience or result” (5). The encounter did however, highlight that the frequent calls by feminist researchers to “pivot the centre” of research relationships (165) oversimplifies what may actually happen in such exchanges. Research and participant subjective positions and power relations can shift in multiple ways even within one project. In this research exchange my position was “situationally” created (3,170), highlighting how research relationships are as full of “complexities and ambiguities... identity and difference” (171) as any relationship. When the topic and research subjects are close to the researcher, it seems to be incumbent on the researcher to not assume to be in the centre, and to recognize that “members of the groups we research are also active participants in the research process and can play a powerful role in shaping what we come to know about their lives and the communities in which they live and work” (112, p.37).

The process of recreating the stories of Central American activism allowed a more robust narrative of that shared past to come forward. Reflecting on those co-creations here is a way to illustrate the tentative, contingent and revisable nature of doing that. In addition, the process of composing those stories through the lens of our shared history illuminated another invisible aspect of the research. The process pushed me to acknowledge how grieving about Nicaragua is an ongoing theme in my life, and how exploring that sense of grief with others had been a subconscious and submerged purpose for the study.

The project acted as a way of keeping the past alive. Other reflexive accounts of postmodern life history authors expose similar understandings of their work. Errante, for

example similarly “encountered herself” in her oral history work with teachers in post-revolutionary Mozambique:

I realized that my identity work through the oral history work is no different from my narrators: In as much as I participated in framing the remembering and the telling I was also trying to communicate some aspects of myself... And so, if the oral histories did not seem to “capture” the experiences I thought they should, it was partly because I was hoping others would narrate something I was experiencing.... Why were they not telling me these stories... (149, p.25).

Bringing up our shared past through the life history interviewing process was also a way to recreate a sense of the community that existed for that time, one where I could explore meaning and look for understanding among friends. In Balfour Dianne provided that reconnection by calling a potluck of the ‘old committee’ during one of the interview visits. With Nancy it more often seeped into the discussions of the characters and campaigns involved in Nicaragua solidarity work. Overall the meaning of that movement for each of them was quite different and I sense that the work had in fact unfolded in very different ways in those two communities. Perhaps this was also an effect of the different histories of social activism in the prairies versus the Kootenays. I can’t say. That issue was not part of this investigation, although would complement further work in this area. The more salient issue here is that where and how Central American activism fit in their lives, what it meant to them, and how they integrated that work was one of *my* central conundrums being explored through *their* histories, but it took until the point of writing to fully recognize the importance of that. Neither story fully resolved the dilemmas.

You are what you eat

**In my twenty-sixth year of Nicaragua
Nineteen year marriage to rice and beans
I hardly remember the meat and potatoes of childhood**

**Christmas always as exception
Then, still we eat perogies and nalysnyky
Funny now *they* break the monotony of rice and beans, Gallo pinto, sopa de frijoles
It used to be the other way around.**

-LH-

8. Chapter Eight: Dreams, Poems, Allegories and Metaphors -

Evocative Experiments with Interpretation

In essence, and ideally, the educative possibilities of arts-informed work are foremost in the heart, soul, and mind of both the researcher and her purpose from the outset of an inquiry. The possibilities of such educative endeavours, broadly defined, are near limitless; their power to inform and provoke action are constrained only by the human spirit and its energies (82, p.212).

If the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming (87, p.43).

Preface

A dream I had after weeks of trying to write this chapter went something like this:

The committee (a fictitious one!) is sitting around a very big table. I am at one end of it. They are all looking my way and are saying one by one “So what?” “Nice stories, but... So what? So what? So what...”

And in the dream I know that is the wrong question; I just know.... So I try to respond with a life lesson that I once learned from Flora, a traditional midwife from Mexico. “In midwifery, she told me, you need a good set of hands, but it is just as important to learn to sit on them.”

I don’t want to tell you how to read this story. I want you to sit with it...

I feel cornered...

And then the dream takes an abrupt turn...and monotonous taunting children’s voices belt out a rhyme we used to play on long family car trips. They shout together:

Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?

Number one stole the cookies from the cookie jar.

Who me?

Yes you.

Couldn't be.

Then Who?

Number two stole the cookies from the cookie jar.

Who me?

Yes you.

Couldn't be.

Then who?

...

And in the dream I start writing: *Don't you see that there is no one version of events. There is no one to blame for stealing the cookies. Isn't interpretation ultimately an infinite practice?*

And I wake up confused and with a lump in the pit of my stomach. The dream leaves me wide awake pondering its meaning. The stories are in. Yet I must write. Perhaps, too I must play.

8.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to the dream, to my study purpose, and to the questions regarding transformation, life-ways of commitment and relevance of the study. Rather than answer those questions via academic prose, I here offer stories, poetry, and revelatory dialogues as modes to “lure participation” (70) in the interpretive process. Here, a sampling of allegorical stories act as codes to reflect on, evoking cognitive and emotional lessons learned and intimating connections

to deeper stories of transformation. A metaphor suggests a way of envisioning a life-way of commitment. Poetic transcription and dialogue act as multi-vocal tools to capture the lessons and relevance of this work. These are in essence, three evocative experiments with interpretation.

The whole chapter is, in a sense, a textual experiment with freedom, “the freedom from beginnings and denouements” made possible by breaking free of the “rules of patriarchal form” (120) of both education and research. As with liberatory research, to engage in transformative education is to work “tactically inside and strategically outside of the system” (97), necessarily embracing the tension between critically examining what is, and posing what could be, and engaging a language of critique and of possibility. In melding the purposes of transformative teaching and research, I suggest that when a research text offers “an opportunity for the maker and the beholder to reflect upon his or her own life and on what it means to be in the world, it can be transformative” (81, p.215). The assertions imply participation in the process. The audience is called in. Thus, in another sense the chapter is a way of calling in the reader, to invite you to explore some ideas spurred by these stories, rather than having me distil them, fracture the texts, or neatly close the thesis with a succinct theoretical answer to ‘So what’. The chapter poses therefore that we briefly “tolerate and interpret the ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity” (215, p38) that exists in this and all such work and join in the infinitely rhizomatic interpretive process.

Grounded in an affinity to constructivist postmodernism, transformative teaching and the epistemological plurality that accompanies both, I offer this chapter as an experiment in writing *something else*, as “an intimation of future possibilities”, as a way of writing beyond the epistemological hegemony of dualistic academic theories on activism (120). This is not anti-

theoretical work, but neither will it likely result in additional grand truths or theories about social movements. The work herein invokes episodic, textual and thematic analyses of the life history data, but rather than presenting a theoretical analogue for those themes, I creatively pose some tools with which to explore them.

This chapter is structured in three parts. The first part is based on Sufi teaching stories. As codes⁷⁹, the Sufi stories present a way of broaching transformational themes I listened for and heard in Dianne and Nancy's stories. By suggesting the themes via Sufi allegory I intentionally promote a way of linking these cognitive 'findings' with emotional processes related to learning about and through the experience of story.

The second section presents a metaphor as a way of thinking about or evoking the life-ways of these women's activism.

The last section offers two poetic transcriptions: the first relates strategies and qualities that accompany long term activism; and the second offers a dialogue on the study's relevance for activists and transformative educators.

I end with a note on the consistency of this approach with my own practices of teaching for transformation.

Admittedly, this chapter is partial and fragmentary, presenting a crystallized medley of possible refractions and tentative reflections of selective and partial yet broad understandings of transformation and activist commitment. These fragments are experiments intended to provoke thinking beyond the academically validated 'known' to a dreamed possible. The form and the

⁷⁹ Consistent with the overarching educational goal of the study I utilize the Sufi stories as problem-posing teaching tools or codes that present salient themes in the stories in ways that at once act as a tool to reflect on them. Transformative learning theory and the basic analytic problem-posing schema proposed by Freire (102) underlies this work. To recall, typically that schema involves three stages: *listening for the felt issues* or themes of concern in the group; *creating a 'code'* that represents issue through creative representations such as stories or role plays; and *collectively engaging in reflections*.

content are off the beaten path, which I think is closer to where the lives of Dianne and Nancy are.

8.2 Transformation: An Allegorical Interpretation

Stories are a bit contagious. When one person tells her story to another, stories emerge anecdotally, triggering memories of other stories (117-119,133). Reading or listening to Nancy and Dianne's stories, I hear other stories, some of them my own, some of them other friend's stories, or other people I know. Some of the stories reflect the big stories, the meta-narratives about social movements, or the meta-stories we tell ourselves. Some are those meta-narratives that we organize around, either to support or to challenge.

But sometimes too, Nancy and Dianne's stories trigger memories of something deeper, something beyond words, in the realm of perception. This section poses the idea that beyond and between the words on the page of their stories lies another kind of story of personal and social transformation, and that if we listen we can hear those deeper stories, those timeless ones. "There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is getting lost and when you are lost, you start to look around and to listen" (216, p.49).

Allegorical stories are a type of story useful for teaching, as they serve as an extended metaphor, suggesting or evoking both literal and figurative understandings. They can also suggest meta-stories to which other stories relate or 'belong', including the stories of the everyday world in which people live their lives, or the deeper stories which belong to a timeless realm. Sufi teaching stories are examples of such allegorical stories. Used for teaching for centuries in ancient Persia and beyond, they have an enduring capacity to reveal the simple and the complex sides of human dilemmas while promoting the development of perception, a notion

of embodied reasoning beyond conditioned belief and informational learning. I offer two very simple Sufi tales that literally and figuratively suggest some of the things about transformation that I hear in and through Nancy and Dianne's stories. It may be helpful, alternatively, to think of the Sufi stories as metaphorical referents, a creative way to convey the more timeless elements of personal and social transformation in their stories.

At the end of each story I offer the reader an abbreviated explanatory note revealing a glimpse of the process of comparison I used to decide on which Sufi stories to choose. I call that note 'resonance'. I have kept it brief intentionally to avoid overstating the obvious or under-representing the possible. *Italicized words in those sections* are quotes from transcripts, followed by their authors (Dianne or Nancy).

8.2.1 Story One

Somewhere, a stream was working itself across the country, experiencing little difficulty. It ran around the rocks and through the mountains. Then it arrived at a desert. Just as it had crossed every other barrier, the stream tried to cross this one, but it found that as fast as it ran into the sand, its waters disappeared. After many attempts it became very discouraged. It appeared that there was no way it could continue the journey. Then a voice came from the wind, "If you stay the way you are, you cannot cross the sands, you cannot become more than a quagmire. To go further, you will have to lose yourself."

"But if I lose myself," the stream cried, "I will never know what I am supposed to be."

"Oh, on the contrary" the wind responded, "if you lose yourself, you will become more than you ever dreamed you could be."

So the stream surrendered to the dying sun. And the clouds into which it was formed were carried by the raging wind for many miles. Once it had crossed the desert, the stream poured down from the skies, fresh and clean, and full of the energy that comes from storms.

- Sufi tale-

Resonance: In transformative learning theory, personal transformation is said to involve dissonant moments, reflexive repositioning, and radical shifts of perception. Theoretically this Sufi story resonates with Mezirow's (1992, 2003, 2017) central tenets.

Like both Dianne and Nancy, the stream as the character in this first story is observant - *self-focused* (Dianne). Even though the stream is a powerful force, in the face of structural obstacles - *women were used to being listened to, but in that organization that wasn't the case* (Dianne), a moral guide, *someone who has vision* (Nancy) can play a role in helping it encounter its shape-shifting capacity *to morph* (Nancy). In the process of changing form, something needs to be given up in order to become something more - *I had a good support system, but I felt a terrible, terrible longing to be able to walk into the wild* (Dianne). Finally comes a recognition that change is the only route - *You can't slide into first base if you've got a foot on home plate* (Nancy). So the stream surrenders - *In the end, we stopped out of desperation and honestly not knowing what to do* (Nancy), making possible the renewing energy of a storm - *some of it was crashing down doors* (Dianne).

8.2.2 Story Two

Once there was a very old man who used to meditate early every morning under a large tree on the bank of the Ganges River in India. One morning, having finished his meditation, the old man opened his eyes and saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the strong current of the river. As the scorpion was pulled closer to the tree, it got caught in the long tree roots that

branched out far into the river. The scorpion struggled frantically to free itself but got more and more entangled in the complex web of tree roots.

When the old man saw this, he immediately stretched himself onto the extended tree roots and reached out to rescue the drowning scorpion. But as soon as he touched it, the animal jerked and stung him wildly. Instinctively, the man withdrew his hand, but then having regained his balance, he once again stretched himself out along the roots to save the agonized scorpion. This continued for a time. But every time the old man came within reach, the scorpion stung him so badly with its poisonous tail that his hands became bloody and his face distorted with pain.

Soon a passer-by saw the old man stretched out on the roots struggling with the scorpion and shouted, “Hey, stupid old man, what’s wrong with you? Only a fool risks his life for the sake of an ugly, useless creature. Don’t you know that you may kill yourself to save that ungrateful animal?”

Slowly the old man turned his head and, looking calmly in the stranger’s eyes, he said, “Friend, because it is the nature of the scorpion to sting, why should I give up my own nature to save?”

-Sufi tale-

Resonance: This story is perhaps a more complex one, yet one with easily recognizable features relating to efforts at social change. The story resonates with feminist theories of power that expound on the multiple sites and intersections of oppressions that inhibit social transformations. It is also about the role of vocation or the moral courage needed for work in social change. I suggest that it thereby resonates with the idea of spiritual politics.

What first seems to be an act of courage or compassion is questioned by a passer-by, presumably a younger one, whose considers the man to be engaging in irrational activity. The old man's effort leaves him contorted with pain - *a leap of energy that many of them didn't have* (Dianne) but he engages even though it is perhaps futile - *maybe sending all those pencils was useless...I mean I know people make history, but honestly I think history is that much bigger of a beast* (Nancy). He can't ignore suffering *because you see people's daily struggles with your own eyes* (Nancy). Nor can he separate himself from the scorpion, for he knows they are connected - *they still have a better connection to the planet and to themselves* (Dianne) even when the scorpion stings - *I spent a month neutralizing in Kaslo afterwards* (Dianne). This story is also a hero narrative. Yet is the old man a hero? Or is he an irrational fool? Why does he presume that he is helping the scorpion? Is it ideological conviction - *what's different and why we support them is because they've got a program, they're fighting back* (Nancy) or knowing of the consequence of not acting - *I know I'm in a very small group of people thinking like this, and I'm scared for my friends at home* (Dianne)? Or is he is morally pragmatic - *doing what needs to be done* (Nancy) - because it is worse to ignore - *unconscionable to not act* (Nancy) - when it is felt to be his nature - *you can't but help a way of being...that's inside me* (Dianne)?

8.3 Life-ways of Commitment: A Metaphorical Suggestion

Writer, storyteller and healer, Deena Metzger (216) contends that stories are often used inappropriately, particularly when they are mined in search of answers. Instead, she says we need to stop seeking to distil stories of experiences and instead allow ourselves the "power to probe" without seeking to resolve problems.

Looking to story to solve rather than illuminate life problems, we miss the intricacies and become lost in reductionism. Better that we probe but not solve the mysteries of conflict, of intimacy and distance, power and powerlessness, authority and madness, fate and free will than that we chance diminishing them (216, p.102).

People's stories offer a way to probe life's 'mysteries' and to bring meaning to the seemingly random assaults of everyday life. Through them listeners or readers have a vicarious opportunity, an almost visceral entry into the practices through which people make choices, shape action, and create social movements (218). From Metzger's perspective, distilling stories in answer to questions is to risk reducing them. I assume that perspective here.

In the last experiment I used Sufi stories to evoke deeper themes related to social and personal transformation in the stories. This section is another evocative experiment. Here, I 'probe' the stories for a way to respond to the question of what the stories suggest about life-ways of commitment. To do so, I recall Anzaldua's (73) work suggesting that evoking the meaning or illuminating central ideas in stories through metaphor can avoid inappropriate scientific reductionism, as well as potentially democratizing representations that arise from our 'probing'. Rather than invoking a complex re-inscription of archetypal metaphors as she does in her work, I take her basic message about the descriptive, cross-cultural and inter-referential power of creative writing to locate a metaphor that evokes what I interpret as life-ways of commitment in Nancy and Dianne's life stories.

8.3.1 Activist Life-ways: Walking on Uneven Ground

A life-way is an overall pattern of public and private involvements – in work, family, and political life – within one biography. Committing oneself to activism means making ongoing decisions about how much of life and what parts of life one will devote to political activity rather than other aspects of life. Life ways show through in everyday interaction, but are not necessarily deliberate plans; we can think of them instead as patterns of deciding and improvising one's way through the life course. They are, in other words, kinds of practices (12, p.149).

Nancy and Dianne's stories reveal life-ways or overall sets of practices that reflect the ways they became and remain personally and politically engaged, embedded and committed activists. Rather than distilling their stories, I suggest a metaphor I think useful in holistically

evoking the paths and practices of activist commitment in their lives. That metaphor, located within one of the stories is ‘walking on uneven ground’.

To me, ‘walking on uneven ground’ implies a quality of moving forward, but not smoothly or linearly as if by some grand design. Rather it captures what I saw in the stories as a set of creative and connective practices. These practices flow within or respond to sometimes interesting, entertaining or supportive, and sometimes difficult, constrictive or distorted contexts and webs of relationships, socio-economic structures, historical moments and meaning-making practices of politics in a male-centred world. Parts of the metaphor can signify different aspects of their activism. I caution that rhizomatic possibilities for interpretation exist here. I offer a few of my own ideas below; you will perhaps have noticed others.

The stories begin and end on points of interaction with, awareness of and resistance to dominant politico-historical contexts. It is impossible to ignore the influence of McCarthyism, for example on Dianne’s early years, or the influence of the sexual revolution of the 1960s on Nancy’s growing feminist awareness. Their ongoing lives, decisions, relationships and interactions are altered by the eras that their stories span. Importantly, the stories are neither bound nor un-constituted by those historical contexts. Rather, as one does when walking on an uneven path, they pay attention. They take notice and they interact with their contexts, eyes wide open.

‘On the ground’ is also useful to suggest the embodied or embedded nature of their life-ways in physical place and time, while ‘uneven ground’ captures a sense of contingency attached to that. Exemplary, perhaps are the contingencies posed by culturally embedded and gendered experiences of abortion, childbirth, partnering, aging, or the experiences of poverty, single-parenting or of an accident. Each is experienced and expressed in deeply embodied physical and

spiritual ways, as both grounded and grounding. In turn each experience alters how they see themselves and how and what they practice as activists.

‘Walking’ is a signifier for both the ‘how’ of activism and the direction that movements intend to go. People become activists to move on an issue, to go forward, onward, one foot in front of another. Walking is what Nancy and Dianne do in a protest and in that sense it is a resistance metaphor. Sometimes walking away, sometimes walking toward, walking also represents Nancy and Dianne enacting the relational practices in their lives.

Finally the metaphor evokes the uneven nature of their life-ways, i.e. the differences between the two women’s activism. I hear in the stories two diverse sets of practices, decision-making and improvising, two diverse interpretations of what activism ought to be about, and two ideas on how much of life ought to be about activism. Those practices and interpretations respond to their different social, economic and political contexts, as well as their varied formal and informal activist learning paths, and their ethnic, political and class-based perceptions of truth and of moral or civic duty.

Overall, ‘walking on uneven ground’ conveys to me the socio-political contexts of inequalities which are the contextual backdrop of activism and of the study. We are, globally, locally and in our gendered, ethnic and class-based lives, indeed walking on uneven ground.

8.4 Relevance of the Stories: Poetic Re-interpretation

“The poem isn’t about an experience. It is an experience itself...”
- David Whyte -

Poetic transcription or poetic representation is a poetic device derived from poetry for research purposes (81,83). Poetic transcription is not necessarily poetry, rather it is an analytic and representational technique that “involves word reduction while illuminating the wholeness and interconnectedness of thoughts” (81, p.207). It approximates poetry in form, but rather than

being created by the author, it reorganizes sections and quotes of transcripts or other data to evocatively “make one pause, reflect and feel” (81, p.213). Percer (84) poses that poetry or poetic transcription as used in educational research is useful in: 1) capturing a more complex sense of experience through expressive texts; 2) capturing more fully the rhythms in speech and conversation; 3) recreating embodied speech; and 4) capturing "poetic dialogues" or conversations between researchers and participants.

In this last interpretive experiment, I present two pieces of poetry, a poetic transcription and a poetic dialogue, in response to my question regarding the study’s relevance for educators and activists. The first poem is based on sections of transcript from interviews, as well as e-mail and telephone conversations and margin notes. The poem playfully but meaningfully conveys ideas and strategies about activist commitment based on salient themes in Dianne and Nancy’s stories and on their recommendations for ‘hanging in there’.

The second poem is a poetic dialogue based on reorganized quotes from a group session that are converted to poetry as a way to capture the rhythm of group talk, as well as the multiple positions on the question of study relevance.

8.4.1 The Secrets of Hanging in There

At one point near the end of interviewing I asked both Nancy and Dianne what they thought the secrets to ‘hanging in there’ were. I have used text and quotes from transcripts and notes from margins, phone calls and e-mails, as well as that conversation to guide me in writing this poem.

The Secrets of Hanging in There

i.

Believing it matters
Caring for people
Engaging with our selves,
 with our bodies,
 with each other,
 with the planet
Honouring the hard work of others
Keeping a sense of humour
Taking care of yourself

ii.

Back away
 From marbles thrown at the hooves
Stick with
 What's yours to do

Never go into the meetings with THEM alone

Analyse
 Neutralize
 Celebrate
 Dream

iii.

Beware of privilege
 Learn the meaning of
 Plastic bags, collected wax, discarded plastic forks
 Do something with them
 Do what you can

iv.

Stay open
 To a changing world
 Move with it

8.4.2 Relevance of Whole Stories: A Poetic Dialogue

In keeping with emerging criteria for research quality⁸⁰ (discussed in chapters two and three), I consider ‘relevance’ of the study as meaning its use-value, action potential, or “catalytic validity” (71,72) as conveyed by a community called upon to act as its “arbitrar of quality” (178). To consider the relevance of this study so conceived and to reflect on the usefulness of the stories for activists and transformative educators, I posed several questions to a group of women activists called together for a final group session.

In the session I asked about the use-value of activists’ stories, about the use of these stories for teaching or dialoguing, about whether one particular anecdote or story within the story might pose a particularly good problem-posing case, about the value of such work and so on. From analysis of the discussion, two complementary positions vis-à-vis the usefulness or value of the stories emerged: whole stories are a way of knowing and inspiring activism; and dialoguing about story is a way of communicating activism. The discussion also revealed that the women’s views on the purpose of dialogical reflection ranges on a continuum from enhancing memory, to adding meaning, to creating transferable concepts.

The relative importance that the women attach to the stories of Nancy and Dianne in particular, and of stories more broadly, as a way of knowing, a way of inspiring, or a way of communicating about activism varies. Reflecting on the different positions (and knowing the women in that session, in terms of work, activism, and something of their personal lives) I also sense that the differences relate in part to women’s individual learning styles, which in turn are

⁸⁰ Moving the conversation from epistemological concerns with proof and legitimacy of research claims to practical and moral concerns, or a “vision of research that enables and promotes social justice, community, diversity, civic discourse, and caring” (160, p. 277), the “emerging” (160,178) quality criteria thus involve a consideration that setting criteria is “not a solitary engagement.” Having research judged by its named audience is posed as a partial way to do that. Thus although tensions will persist, it is considered incumbent on the researcher to expose how the project has both involved and been judged by its “community as arbiter of quality” (160,178).

influenced by many aspects of their personal, activist and/or professional lives. Of course, if and how anyone uses stories in their own lives and work is a function of many cultural, economic, historical, socio-economic and gendered influences (that I did not have a sufficiently diverse enough group, nor sufficient data to explore in depth).

The poetic dialogue offers a way of conveying the two major positions or themes, as well as a sense of this tentative interpretation of learning styles as an important determinant of relevance. For this poem I used quotes from the taped session and rearranged it as a poetic dialogue. The two positions and the range of ideas on the purpose of reflective dialogue are represented below in a poetic dialogue that moves back and forth across the page to indicate bridging ideas and different positions. Different fonts represent different speakers. The underlined bridging titles are my own. Below, then is a poetic dialogue concerning the relevance of the stories for educators and activists.

Not a Her-story, a Whole story ...

The important part is hearing about their WHOLE lives ...

The usual story (at say, an awards ceremony) goes:

A women activist

BULLET: did this,

BULLET: did this,

BULLET: did this,

Without the feelings and the context of her life

Without her family and her parents and her kids

Without her Everything.

Nothing in that answers for me:

How did she connect it up? How did she do it?

Who is she?

[Pause]

WHO is she?

Remember the old Herstory calendar?

It was good

It was useful

But you can only capture so much in one page.

And it told you what they did,

but it didn't tell you WHO they are...

So no, Lori, don't use just one anecdote to teach with

It's not a her-story

It's the whole story that's compelling...

A Catalyst:

Activists' stories are

A fleshed out activism

A way of thinking

Without overwhelming

Making it possible

To be out there

To do things

To be able to work together

People remember stories... not concepts.

I agree

Activism is not all theory

But these stories took on more meaning tonight than when I read them at home alone.

Concepts

The way my brain works is like this:
Just a story,
Without an opportunity to talk about it
Reflect on it,
Analyze it
Conceptualize it
Is not enough
Others visualize
Imagine a story
That's what works for them!
But I need the concepts.

Left with a feeling

Wow -- what lives!
I feel ...
Grateful
A bit envious
Excited
Inspired
Encouraged

8.5 The Last Word

Transformative education, local and global health development, social activism and community-based and participatory research are inter-related aspects of social change work. At least they can be. Examples of the ideological and epistemological concerns that these fields of study and practice have in common are their inherent inter-disciplinarity, their basis in praxis as a methodological approach to working toward increased social equality, and their consideration of the multiplicity of sources of knowledge and power. Although less frequently acknowledged, creativity is a feature also interlaced in these fields. In this study I explore creativity, and experiment with ways of fusing art with science. In this chapter I try to tentatively bridge transformative educational practice and arts-informed research. I do so sensing that arts-informed approaches to research and education are also fitting ways to consider and understand

social problems, and to work toward social change. Accordingly I sense that this study and particularly this experimental chapter resonate with and enhance my ongoing work as transformative educator in the field of global health development.

As educator, I try to model a philosophy and praxis of teaching for transformation. That is, I endeavour to offer both community-based experiential opportunities or simulations, and classroom-based activities that involve students in self- and critical reflection. I try to facilitate learning rather than direct it and consider myself a learner in the process. This praxis promotes a loosening of the boundaries of learned disciplinary, professional, class and gendered ways of seeing, freeing students to experiment with less familiar epistemologies. As I attempted to do in this sampling of experimental writing, I also allow dangling, incomplete, and even contradictory ideas to sit without tight resolution. I do this in part because I refuse to sum up a lesson and to condense learning to a neat take home message. As an alternative, I offer the students ‘the last word’ both literally and figuratively. At the end of class, they are asked to creatively validate what has gone on and to find key questions or ideas that have emerged.

To relate that idea to this project, students end up having to ‘sit’ with all that has happened in the three hours previous, all they have read on a particular theme, and all they ‘know’ from their own lives in order to make sense of the topic under study. They are already aware, and I frequently remind them, that my experiences and my critically informed perspectives frame the classes, for better or for worse, and that there are other perspectives that adhere to other ideologies, other epistemologies. They are charged with making sense of it, and as reflected in class work and their critical reflective writing, most often they do. I believe that in fact some outstanding original work has come of it. Nonetheless it can be disconcerting, because in those classes and here too, there is a partiality, an incomplete or tentative sense or

quality to what I have done or said I have done. Although experienced potentially as jarring or incomplete, I end this chapter with the “postmodern admonition to avoid closure” (120).

9. Chapter Nine: A Summary Note

Having rejected styles of academic writing on social movements that seem to objectify social actors, having engaged a “refusal of higher authority” as a way to shift the “center of gravity of knowledge” (7), and having written in more vulnerable and sometimes ‘messy’ ways in the body of this thesis, it would seem asynchronous to attempt a neat or grand conclusion from a God’s-eye view here. In fact, some postmodernists suggest that the mere suggestion of a conclusion as summary and recapitulation of the important aspects of a study distorts the intent of postmodern writing, which is always partial and contested (185). Nevertheless a conclusion can be “a not-quite-closed summary” (120) that reflects a tentative feeling of completion, while acting as an invitation to continue to reflect on the contents.

9.1 A Not-quite-closed Summary

Heading into the seventh year of the new millennium, I trust that arguments about the existence of value-free science and objectivity in social research have been exhausted, and I both begin and end this thesis with the assumption that readers have already considered those debates. In the broadest sense, the purpose of this study is openly ideological in that it seeks to inform and inspire commitments to social change activism, and to improve practices of critical and transformative education. The thesis was of course also written for and within an interdisciplinary PhD program. Those two broad purposes, and their potentially different audiences, called for the use of both traditional and unconventional approaches, often highlighting how the research was in fact located somewhere between a modern and postmodern project.

I chose feminist postmodern life history methodology as an openly ideological way to evoke the transformative journeys of women’s long-term commitments to activism. These life

histories, and the theoretical literature, reflexive interpretations, and creative experimentation that accompany them offer multiple refractive and reflective lenses through which to view activists' life-ways. Accordingly, they pose a diffuse response to the feminist postmodern call for epistemological multiplicity and aesthetically diverse representational forms. The philosophical orientation and methodological approach of the study are thus entwined with its purpose and products.

In the study I explore selected academic literature on social movements and activism. These are the meta-narratives and grand theories that sit in the background. I outline major transformative education theories that suggest or strategize processes of personal and social transformation, and that inform how I enact my role as transformative educator. I also situate the study vis-à-vis the feminist and postmodern theories and life history methodologies that I draw from. Together these collectively inform the relational approach used in the interviews and subsequent construction of first person narratives of two women activists' life histories which reveal unique personal and nuanced aspects of their lives interwoven through their stories of long-term activism. The stories incorporate ways that the women simultaneously interact with, challenge and reflect changing local contexts and socio-historical eras that their lives have spanned. The stories also suggest cognitive, emotional and spiritual changes that accompany or underlie those interactions. Those changes reflect deeper and timeless stories of personal transformation and suggest the spiritual practice or vocation underlying their work. An emerging life-way or pattern of practice becomes visible in the stories over time. I suggest that life-way is akin to 'walking on uneven ground'. Local women activists who read the stories suggest that the stories are inspiring and compelling for their capacity to validate and evoke a holistic sense of who an activist woman is in all the facets of her life. Overall, these stories are a small

contribution to the project of rewriting the submerged histories of women activists, calling attention to their “everyday lives and experiences, their needs, perceptions, emotions and ideas, considering these to be critical areas of study in their own right” (27, p.20).

The study’s postmodern feminist orientation also acknowledges and calls for epistemological and representational diversity, a recognition of multiple sources and ways of knowing, and multiple ways of experiencing and voicing that knowledge. Consequently, I recognize these women’s stories as ways of understanding and knowing about activism, while noting that their stories, similar to all stories, are at once problematic, purposive and partial (25) and reflect the inter-subjective researcher-researched realm from which they have arisen. To highlight that partiality and the inter-subjective context of the stories, I thus add prefaces that situate them vis-à-vis our relationship and the context of the telling. I also make reflexive note of how the research process and story text are influenced by my interpretation of a feminist orientation, by our collective memory, and by my underlying personal quest to make meaning of a shared history of Central American activism. The stories are only partially successful in helping me understand that work.

Interpreting the stories opens other possibilities, which I explore through an evocative series of experiments with creative literary devices. In melding the study’s purposes relating to activism, transformative teaching and postmodernism, I experiment with creative texts as a way of tickling the boundaries of research, inviting participation and provoking thinking beyond the academically validated ‘known’ to a dreamed possible located within and connected to these stories. The allegorical, metaphorical and poetic experiments thus complement the stories while fulfilling the study’s practical purpose to locate problem-posing teaching tools.

In these diffuse and sometimes ‘messy’ ways the study offers multiple nuanced, subtle, simple and paradoxical portrayals of complex personal life-ways of committed activists that sometimes get rendered invisible in existing literature. Overall, I hope that the study has offered its readers opportunities to engage critically and creatively with the topic, with the stories within stories, and with us - Dianne and Nancy, authors from the academic literature, and myself - as confluent co-creators of this work. I also hope that the stories, their interpretations and the experimentation herein have broadened or deepened ways of knowing about women activists’ commitments to social change, and heightened sensitivities to underlying or accompanying qualities and contexts that both challenge and sustain such work. That hope marks this work as a small contribution to social transformation itself, re-making the world by re-writing it. In that way it will remain a unique contribution.

Appendix A: Kinds of Social Inquiry

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	Empirical Inquiry (Positivism)	Interpretive/Constructivist Inquiry (Post-positivist forms)	Liberatory or Transformative Inquiry	Aesthetic Inquiry (Postmodernism)
Purpose	Causal explanations sought; universal or generalizable predictions result	Understanding patterns and subjective meanings in lived experience	Investigating reality in order to change it. Personal and social empowerment in order to transform inequalities through group actions	Evoke meaning; de-construct meta-narrative; emphasize diversity; de-colonizing research; expose impossibility of linguistic mimesis
Ontological assumptions (Nature of Reality)	Single reality; unique real world and social order exists and can be observed and studied by independent observers	Multiple realities dependent on perceptions. Reality is interpretable through lens of human subjectivity. Human action is influenced by emotion and cognition and constrained by social structures	Reality is constructed and so can be changed. People are active subjects, makers of history, located within relations of power	Reality is chaotic & determined by local discourse / relativist / realities are constructed inter-subjectively through language; There is no one Truth
Epistemologies (Nature of Knowledge)	Objective truth exists; value free science possible; logical rational deductive findings; scientific knowledge is an end in itself	Knowledge is socially and subjectively produced; various forms of knowledge exist with different purposes	Objectivity does not exist. Knowledge is holistic & comes from many sources. Local knowledges are as valid as scientific knowledge	Two camps: 1) Relativist – all knowledge is momentary relative to situation; 2) Knowledge cannot be captured but understanding can be evoked
Methods / Methodologies	Usually quantitative methodologies and complex statistical methods; (example: random control trials)	Usually qualitative; interviews, participant observation, focus groups; inductive analytic methods; (example: symbolic interactionism, phenomenology)	Combinations of methods possible; but involves praxis wherein participants are co-researchers; innovative methods often used; (example: participatory-action research)	Diverse; performance based, experimental, combines research methods from ‘art and science’ (example: postmodern life history; ‘new’ ethnography)
Verifiability	Validity and reliability testable and discernible; generalizability is the intent	Trustworthiness of research desirable and possible through for e.g. member checks and triangulation	Varied; actions as intended product are the measure of research success or catalytic validity	Verifiability irrelevant; audience/reader/researched group as “arbiter of quality”; catalytic validity sometimes used
Knowledge Produced	Technical; instrumental	Interpretive, constructive	Critical; spiritual; holistic; practical	Aesthetic; diverse uses (eg. poetry, art, fiction, performance)

(Adapted by L. Hanson from Dickson, (219) and Smith, (106))

Appendix B: Consent Letters

Consent letter for group discussion

Dear participant,

I would like to express my appreciation for your participation in this discussion group, which I hope you will find both interesting and stimulating. You have been invited to participate in a discussion group that is part of my doctoral research study entitled: *A Life History Study of Women Activists: Exploring Lives of Commitment to Social Change*. Please read this form over carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher Name and Affiliation: Lori Hanson, PhD Candidate in Inter-disciplinary Studies, University of Saskatchewan, phone: 966-7936

Supervisor: Dr. Lewis Williams, Extension Division, U of S & Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre, phone: 966-7932.

Study Purpose and Procedure: As the title suggests, the purpose of the study is to explore and describe lives of women who have been actively committed to working for social change for many years. It is a “life history” study, which is a biographical study that generates narrative stories. I hope that today’s discussion group, which will last approximately two hours, will serve as a forum for collectively reflecting on the stories that I provided you with. I have written those stories for this project based on interviews with two women over the last two years and they are still in draft form. However, I have their permission to share the stories with you and to discuss them. In today’s session I hope that we can discuss the content of the stories, as well as their relevance or resonance with your own stories as activists.

Study Risks: I can identify no known risks to your involvement in this study; however, I would ask that you carefully read the following sections that describe how I endeavor to ensure that this study respects the integrity and confidentiality of the participants of this group and the two women whose stories you will read.

Please note that I am the only person who will hear the tape recordings or see any notes from today’s session. In keeping with ethical protocol, the recordings and notes will be packaged by me and stored by my supervisor (Lewis Williams) for five years from the date of the study’s completion in a locked cupboard or room.

Confidentiality: As a group, you will be asked to share in the discussion of the stories and to consider their relevance for your own work and the work of other women activists. You are free to participate as much or as little in the discussion as you like. The session today will be tape recorded, and I may wish to use direct quotes from this session in my study. However, your names and any identifying aspects of the quotes will be removed in my attempt to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. I am recording the session and may make some notes along the way or at a future date, to make sure that I don’t miss any important points raised. I welcome any notes you may have made as well. No names will be attached to the notes or any quotes used, nor will I put names on any subsequent information taken from the recordings. In this way, your privacy will be respected and you will remain anonymous.

Because we are in a group where many of us may know each other, and because everyone has a right to privacy, please respect each other's right to privacy by keeping what we discuss here in the room –particularly any sensitive or personal information shared. Please also be aware that I cannot guarantee that the group members will respect each others' confidentiality, however, by discuss the meaning of confidentiality and coming to an agreement prior to commencement of the session I hope to minimize this risk.

The results of the final study will be used in a final report (my dissertation) and possibly in other publications or at workshops and conferences. In any way that the results of this focus group are used, I will respect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by removing all names and any identifying information from actual quotes, comments, or notes used in publications.

Right to Withdraw: If you feel you would like to withdraw from the group for any reason, at any time or are unable to participate for the full two hours, you will not be penalized in any way. If you wish to withdraw and request that I not use the tape recordings in whole or in part, I will respect your wishes. Any of you are free to shut off the tape-recorder at any time.

Questions: Please feel free to ask questions concerning the study at any point. You can also contact the researchers at the numbers cited above if you have any questions about your participation in the group at a later date. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on Jan. 31, 2005. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study may be directed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (966-2084). You will be notified of the results of the study and where to find a copy of the dissertation once it is approved.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understand the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in this study understanding that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of the consent form has been provided to me.

Date _____

Participant Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Supervisor's Signature _____

In order to have a sense of the diversity among this group, please fill out the following. Feel free to leave something blank or to add information – at your will.

Socio-demographics:

Age: <40 _____ 41-50 _____ 51-60 _____ 61- 70 _____

Kind(s) of work you do for pay: _____ Retired: Yes ___ No ___

Relationship Status: _____

Children: Yes___ No ___ Ages: _____

Annual Income (in 10,000s): _____

How do you self-identify ethnically (e.g. Euro-Canadian, Aboriginal, first generation Canadian, Norwegian, etc.) _____

What kinds of Activism have you worked in the last 25 years? And/or what groups/organizations have you worked in? (A smattering will do if there are too many!)

Consent letter for Interviewees

Dear ,

Thank you for agreeing to participate as a participant in my doctoral research study entitled: *A Life History Study of Women Activists: Exploring Lives of Commitment to Social Change*. Please read this form over carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have. We will go over these procedures at the beginning of each of our interview sessions, to ensure that you are reminded of your rights as a participant and that you have an opportunity to re-consider your consent at the start of each session.

Researcher Name and Affiliation: Lori Hanson, Inter-disciplinary Studies, University of Saskatchewan, phone: 966-7936
Supervisor: Dr. Lewis Williams, Extension Division, U of S & Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre, phone: 966-7932.

Study Purpose and Procedure: As the title suggests, the purpose of the study is to explore and describe lives of women who have been actively committed to working for social change for many years. It is a “life history” study, which is a biographical study that generates narrative stories. In the coming weeks and months I hope to meet with you to explore some of your stories of engagements in social change activism over the years and what those have meant to you, as well as exploring with you those things in your life that have influenced your decisions to become involved and to stay engaged in such work. I hope to keep our encounters “conversational” and very loosely structured to enable you to direct your story, and enable us to dialogue about issues that arise in the interview. I expect that we will meet from two to five times, for approximately two hours duration over a period of two to five months.

Study Risks and Benefits: In return for the time that you are investing, I hope that your reflections and our discussions on them will be both stimulating and interesting. During this process, I will write up the stories we discuss verbatim, and I will provide you with opportunities to review each transcript of them. After the process of talking to you or “gathering the data”, and as I begin writing the stories, I will provide you with my outlines, discuss with you possible writing formats for the stories, and provide you with drafts of the stories to review, to ensure that I portray your stories in a way that is acceptable to you. I will also respect your wishes regarding anonymity and confidentiality, and to that end will utilize the following guidelines that help to ensure the ethical integrity of this project. Please read the following sections over and then we will spend some time going over them. Please feel free to stop and ask questions as you wish.

I am the only person who will hear the tape recordings or see the notes, except for someone who may be hired for purposes of transcribing the tapes. If I enlist the services of a transcriber, I will ask him or her to sign a letter of confidentiality to protect your identity. In keeping with ethical protocol, all recordings and notes will be packaged by me and stored by my supervisor (Lewis Williams) for five years from the date of the study’s completion in a locked cupboard or room.

Confidentiality: Each session will last approximately two hours. You are free to answer questions, offer stories, or change the format as much or as often as you like. Ultimately this is

a story of your life and your activist work, and so you can change the direction of the process of interviewing as you see fit. Wherever possible, the interview sessions will be tape recorded, and transcription of the interviews will be written up verbatim for you to review. You will be given ample time for review of each interview transcripts and you are free to add, delete, clarify or modify them as you see fit. You are also free to turn the tape-recorder off at any time. I recognize that at times I may hold interviews in my or your “natural” home settings, where tape recording may or may not be possible. In those situations, I may make notes rather than create transcripts, and will share those notes with you for your review.

Because many activists may know each other, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said. Because you have a right to privacy, you will have the right to review and amend any aspect of the transcripts, notes or written stories. Please be aware that I will also do all possible to respect your right to anonymity, if you so wish. For example, I could to use pseudonyms and fictionalize aspects of the stories that you consider to be identifying events or relationships.

The results of the final study will be used in a final report (my dissertation) and possibly in other publications or at workshops and conferences. In any public use of the results of this study, I will respect your decisions on confidentiality and anonymity by using only agreed upon use of quotes, identifying information, or names of people and events.

Right to Withdraw: If at any point or for any reason you feel you would like to withdraw from the study or if you are unable to participate for the full two hours, for any interview, there is of course, no penalty. If you wish to withdraw totally from the study, I will destroy the recordings and transcripts from your interviews and will not use them for the study. You are free to turn the tape-recorder off at any time.

Questions: Please feel free to ask questions concerning the study at any point; you can also contact the researchers at the numbers cited above if you have any questions about your participation in the group at a later date. This study was approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on _____. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study may be directed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (966-2084). You will be notified of the results of the study and where to find a copy of the dissertation once it is approved.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understand the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in this study understanding that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of the consent form has been provided to me.

Date_____

Participant Signature_____

Researcher’s Signature _____

Supervisor’s Signature_____

Data/Transcript Release Form:

I, _____ have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in the study: *A Life History Study of Women Activists: Exploring Lives of Commitment to Social Change* and I have been provided with the opportunity to add, delete or modify information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Lori Hanson. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Lori Hanson to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of the Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Date: _____

Researcher Signature _____

Participant Signature _____

As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) if you have any questions about the study or you can reach Lori Hanson at 966-7936 or Lewis Williams, Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre at 966-7932.

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