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THE MEASURE OF A WOMAN

by

Tracey Grozier

**A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2004

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Abstract

This creative project deals with the issue of measurement in its multiple representations. Though my work is autobiographical, it is my hope that readers will be able to experience a personal recognition in the recounting of my memories.

I have set an extra place for you at my Sunday dinner table. Pull up your chair and enjoy.

This book is lovingly dedicated to my father George, my mother Patricia, and my big brother Jamie, without whom I would have no stories to tell.

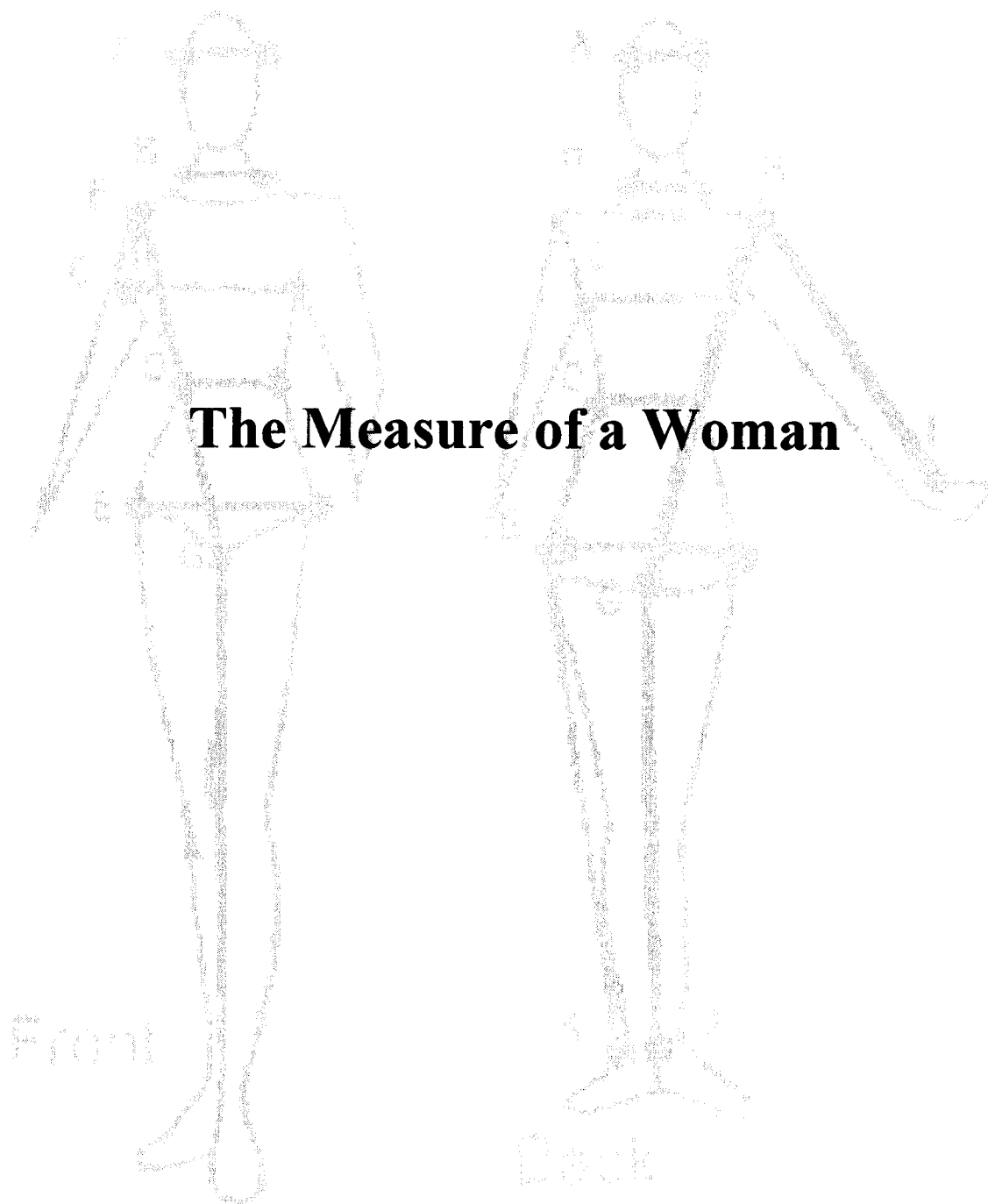
Acknowledgments

Susan Holbrook, Dale Jacobs, Charlene Senn, Margaret Murray, Beth Oakley, Joy Mihovilovich, Amy Bowins, Quratulain Khan, Scott Kerwin, Steve Rozic, Residence Life, and my dog Angus.

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The Measure of a Woman



palms pressed
together fingers folded
over chubbed knuckles my
skin turning white
the squeeze of waiting
wanting to be first picked
teacher at the board her
choosing face her eyes
narrowed my back is the
straightest i know it feet
hooked around ankles i can almost
taste my girl guide
cookies wrapped in stretchy
seal

but the vanilla
ones only the
vanilla because
chocolate makes me
fat

and wet grass waiting to
mark my knees it is
recess and i am ready i
sit the nicest hair straight
down my back clipped at the
sides with bows purple
i think and chewed at the
clasps always hungry
to get them open my shoulders straight
so stiff it hurts to breathe the
teacher pacing backandforth clack-clack
arms crossed over her chest and
i'm not breathing i can't move just
wait be patient and wait
for the nod

dear butterball long time
no see i hardly recognize
you in the mirror it's
been so long ten years and
five sizes if memory serves
and did you remember to eat
breakfast this morning i can
see your ribs count them under
a sweater did you think the fat
pictures were burned just
wait until you get married if you
get married you should have
stayed fat saved us all some time
are those legs yours i barely
remember knees invisible under
rolls of leg fat you didn't walk
until two years four months
butterball the biggest girl in your
class we really must do
this more often the catching
up the visiting i'm sure i'll
see you soon meet you
in the dressing room next
time there's a sale and you're
convinced those pants actually
look good on you

a wedding photo
flattened in the
big gold album,
chubby fingers tracing
my mother's hat, tiny bouquet,
beige bride
with longer hair, curls
spilling from under the brim
of a gauzy hat
my father with a
wide fancysuit smile
spread across his
then-scarless chin

fifty other pictures,
family thrown
against flycatch paper;
pops in hornrims holding
gran's elbow under Barbie-pink
brocade, dress shoes and bag to match,
my father beside his own mother,
a woman i remembered from
a family trip
out west, the four of us
crowded into her
small bedroom at the home,
smell of stale bingo night popcorn
and overcooked vegetables, probably
from a can

only later, twelve years old and
at a friend's sleepover,
sneaking from her kitchen to
the dining room with the silky

unstained couch, keeping company
with shiny silver frames,
her mother pictured
in a long
white wedding dress,
my friend
whispering behind me
white means she was a you-know...
but i didn't, wondered what
beige meant,
avoiding the question
when asked what my
mother's dress looked like.

bad mother
at a young age, i threw
my doll into the Pacific
from a Panama City shoreline,
expected her
to come swimming back
like a good little girl,
plastic arms flailing in the surf
i was a patient mother, waited
let my gran wade in,
a rescue mission,
caught my baby by the hair
on an incoming wave.

we renamed her
Baby Blue,
a blue jumper dress
knitted by gran
to mark the occasion
and i felt guilty, not
for my just-rescued baby,

hair drying in salty
matted clumps one eye
not closing anymore
she was put to bed
with no dessert,

but for gran and her dressy slacks,
water darkening the cuffs,
drenched
and dragging sand
onto the hotel room carpet

1cm) Casing Allowed

revue
ra jareth

2

BACK
DOS
ATRAS

Cut 2
Coupez 2
Córtese 2

McCALL'S 4063

Miss size Y (XSmall, Small, Medium)

5/8" SEAMS are allowed on all sewing
otherwise specified on the pattern.
1.6cm est prévue sur chaque bordure à moins d'indications
contraires sur le patron.
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otra cosa en el patrón.

Don't cut along dotted lines

XS

S

M

W

S

SX

M

S

XS

M

S

grade eight Halloween and
dressed to impress my two
friends and i before a party a
trip to see gran i insisted she would
love the costumes

(a genie a hippie and
me the bum who almost
fit into her father's clothes

pretended to be a stranger
five o'clock shadow rubbed
on my chin like dirt a stain
gran waited in her wheelchair
wouldn't come to the door and
cried, moaned thought we were
robbers she didn't know me
the genie and the hippie still
outside the door quiet and
whispering then running back
to the car i was a stranger
a bum even with my hat off i
reached for her hand saliva
glazing her whiskered chin she
slapped me scared and sobbing
yelling for help and the
bum got no candy

scrawly signature
on official papers makes
a wider family portrait,
a longer Christmas list,
one more place setting at the
dinner table

i used to think
i was adopted,
questioned
the absence of my
baby pictures

no fat bundle
of crocheted blanket rocked
while mom stared adoringly
down pretended not to see
the flash of a camera

but so many photos
of my older brother, Jamie
his fuzzy
babyhair nuzzled
into mom's shoulder
or held away from dad,
wide-eyed with fear
of being dropped at any second

my life in pictures
started at age two, stretching
seams of a home-sewn sundress
handed down to one of my dolls,
my legs too chubby
to support me,
or i was five and heading off

to school, still fat but taller
and hair longer, to my bum
Jamie said
they loved him more,
i added up all the pictures i found
in mom's desk,
counted on my french fry fingers
and he was right,
i must have belonged
to someone else
imagined myself
on the apartment balcony,
dad preparing to barbecue outside
and finding me in a basket,
a new gift for my mother
who was too busy finessing
mashed peas
between Jamie's tight-lipped frown
to notice the orphan
in her kitchen

Jamie and his
inherited Harvey
forehead, strong
browline and a widow's
peak to match just like
pops and hair the
colour of dad's
when he was young

we both shared the
height Jamie and i
tall tall but my own
hair was *original*,
not matching anyone,
orange

tire-tracked
pumpkin smushed into
November fields
(would that fit on a
paint chip?

and long,
rope almost, but everyone
told me i looked so much
like dad's sister,
just like Chris,
the other half,
his twin
i only met her twice but
always a birthday card
and one at Christmas too,
with a cheque
and a long note discussing health
or the weather

in Surrey,
a place whose view
of the mountains i recalled
better than the face
of my aunt Chris
the cards, long notes,
always signed
by her dog,
whose hair matched
mine closer
than anyone else in the
family

to Peterborough
in the blue Mercury
dad behind the wheel
looking to break a
time record, get there
before happy hour ice
cubes could hit the glass
dad thought he knew, could
predict traffic patterns,

*the eastwest flow
on the onefifteen*

convinced he had it timed
this time, the rest
of us guessed,
tried to come closest,
bottom-line mom
annoyed with the game
or maybe a late departure,
rolled her eyes
looked out her window or
spun around,
and dropped her heavy
ten pound sigh
in the backseat, Jamie
and me silent, couldn't
take her side
secretly
loved the game, waited
with careful guesses
sometimes within a minute
of each other, make things
interesting,

mom turned up
the volume for Max Bygraves
in the tape player,
a song i knew
by heart but couldn't understand
only hum along
in time
with dad's fingertaps
on the wheel

Won't you come home, Bill Bailey
Won't you come home,
She moans the whole day lo-oong

dad built the suspense,
held on to
his tally, always
remembered who guessed what
shifted the car into park,
the announcement in
my grandparents'
driveway,
i dreaded to win
tried to lowball my
guess and i barely knew
what a *km* was anyhow but
my arm twitched
in advance,
the spreading ache
of Jamie's two
punches
even before my victory
was declared
and mad
because i only deserved
the first hit

**GLAZIER MEDICAL CENTRE
MEDICAL HISTORY REQUISITION**

Ht.(cm): 180.3

Wt. (kg): 68.9

DOB(mm/dd/yyyy): 01/15/1979

Place of Birth: Mississauga

Family Doctor: Dr. Barker

Allergies: dust mites, dairy products, televised sports, overcooked spinach, lipstick, paper cuts, filing, orange socks, writing with a pencil, temperatures over 24°C, high heels, the word 'slacks'

Other Health

Conditions: asthma, anemia, chronic homesickness, persistent anxiety at mention of the word "exam", acid reflux

Most Recent

Illnesses (if known): a slight chill at a restaurant last weekend, onset of a headache just around the corner

Doctor-Prescribed

Medications: ferrous gluconate, Pariet, large doses of black licorice at regular intervals

**Immediate Family
History:**

Name	Age, If Living	Age at Death	Relationship
Patricia Grozier	64		Mother
George Grozier	67		Father
James Grozier	27		Brother

a thin manila envelope
the judgment for the year
and pops waiting
in the living room, sipping
a cocktail, chewing beernuts and
waiting,
his magnifying glass hovered
closely over thin paper,
asked my mother
what "very satisfactory"
meant

a surpassing of
the typical satisfactory,
like extra-mediocre,
he suggested

i was ready, anxious half-
running home from school
sweaty pits and tangled hair
wheezing and wiggling presented
the results, not an oscar but better
i was always "excellent"
or "very satisfactory"
in comparison
to my brother, always
having to face up
to the questions,
pops wondering why
he wasn't "very satisfactory"
like his sister

and then the unveiling
sometimes money or a
trunk-hidden treat

for both of us
no matter the number of checks
in a certain column it
wasn't important we had to
be equals, keep the peace my
brother smarter for
knowing it didn't matter how
hard you tried
all my neat
colouring, blackboard
brush cleaning and teacher helping
got me the same life jacket,
floating lake toy,
fifty bucks or an extra
scoop of ice cream at dessert
as if pops felt marks didn't
"make the man"
but might make
the grade three girl

this continued
talk of disappointments
things left out of biweekly
talk across a wire our
litany of collective mistakes
are accepted, celebrated
a shifting definition of family

*2b. a collection of birds and animals of different
natures and propensities living together in harmony
in one cage.*

how strange to sit at this
salvation army table my
friends my surrogates
the talk is still
familiar
but the table different and
set with plastic forks
Styrofoam plates
the absence of damask
tablecloth and linen
napkins barely noticed and
i could eat straight from the
pot i'll leave that part out from
this week's call tell them i am fine
everything is
fine

1. Of superior quality, choice of its kind.

neverbetter school is great i
just got another A and i might
be crowned queen of everything
next week if i'm not too busy
they should be so
proud

*7d. Of organic structures: Overgrown, exuberant, too
luxuriant*

after school and mom's
white Chevy Malibu
with red vinyl seats
and AM dial set
to CFRB crackle
curbside idling
our mothership had docked and
we raced to the car,
fought for the seat next
to mom, Jamie four
inches taller than me and sharper
elbows, we squished
into the front seat middle
belt forgotten
and on good days we took turns
begged turns
to wrap hands over
the huge steering wheel, turn it
starboard around the
corner before our house,
mom's knee
balancing the bottom
of the wheel, holding steady course
my own turns always
swayed a little,
i turned port
Jamie laughing shaking
his head and ready
to take my spot,
that night eating
silver dollar pancakes with
dry scrambled eggs and
dad late from work, Jamie
pounced ran to the door
mouth full of syrupy
mush and telling dad how i
drove the car that day

captain Jamie the
oarsman, the
labourer and me,
tri-coloured umbrella
and my head cocked
to the side i squinted
wrinkled my peeling
nose at skinny boyhands
wrapped around two plastic
oars, back strained arched to make shoulder
blades rub each other with
each pull and dreams of
a rubber dinghy cruise day
drowned by repeated
circles, my dead weight in front
the frustrated captain threw
oars overboard,
abandoned ship
and stormed ashore

sweaty knees sticking to vinyl
i cried a little tried peeling
myself upright but
scared myself sitting with
imagined lake sharks
a rescue mission by dad,
sundried towel waiting at the
dock i shivered under pilld
cotton, wondered if i
would get past South Bay,
China, maybe,
if i was good

a rebel, a bad kid,
my brother in the schoolyard
exercising his right to free
speech the "f-word" flowing
freely from milk-crusteds lips
my mother called,
informed of the *episode*
picked him up in the white Malibu,
my father issuing a general warning
at the dinner table

swearing would not
be tolerated

and it was true
even pops caught me out
asked me to leave
the table during Sunday dinner
steamed cabbage and honey ham

i hated cabbage and ham

when i said *damn*
even though I might have
only meant darn

that first time i heard her, my
mother, say *fuck*
to her own mother in the cottage
kitchen, between washing and drying dishes,
it was electric,
Shakespearean with the rain
and some thunder

(i could have just
made that up

even a big girl could be
a bad girl like my mother,
the cupboards slamming and
the men out fishing
then footsteps, stomps
over waxed hardwood floors,
mom storming
into the family room
and flipping pages of an old
Woman's Day so fast the pages tore,
rain pounding the roof
and the sound
from the veranda of wool
being torn from a paper sleeve

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AMU-4A1-01 MUSIC BRONSON D. MR. B	1.00	81	86.0		EXTRA EFFORT HAS PAID OFF but you are still a little flat
ENG4A2-03 ENGLISH HANDLEY LJ HANDSWEAT	1.00	84	72.0	2	EXCELLENT even though you are a girl
FSFOA1-02 FRENCH HOEFS C	1.00	82	77.2		TRAVAIL EXCELLENT, FELICITATIONS! mais ton accent peut improver
HSDOA1-04 SOC CHANGE DE KOKER PP TWITTY	1.00	85	81.0	3	EXCELLENT TERM WORK despite your shaky legs in debate rounds
MAT4A1-06 MATH SPRAGGS KL MATH MAN	1.00	83	71.0		GOOD WORK, WELL DONE and did you finish last night's assignment
MFNOAG-05 MATH-FINITE BERNARD S	1.00	78	72.0		GOOD WORK, WELL DONE but a matrix has no fives, for reference
SPH4AG-08 PHYSICS ADDINGTON RH	1.00	71	72.0		A SATISFACTORY EFFORT even though your laser failed miserably

AVERAGE 81.7 VERY AVERAGE

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a trip to gran and pops',
with the usual detours,
a fruit stand off highway
seven, run by that famous family who
sang together,
or maybe the bakery for
for a danish coffee cake with
icing and eight cherries to
mark slice sizes

(a berry turnover thrown in
for me and Jamie if we promised
not to fight my brother's
turnover was always bigger

even though
my mother knew
gran would have made something
from scratch,
Jamie and i in our
gran-stitched clothes - fat folds smushed
between cotton criss-crosses
of my sundress, eyeing
Jamie's baggy plaid
button-down

long stretches
of startstop ritual, then
Jamie's punch for a
sausage thigh spilled over
the invisible line
between our velour
seats in the back,
an open threat to
half-eaten bakery treats
mom yelled from the front,

we were lucky,
lucky we were,
spoiled and lucky
to have grandparents and good food
while lots of other kids we knew
ate at McDonald's
every Sunday and
our father could
just turn around and take us back
home if we wanted,
Jamie silently marking with
his finger
the line i was not
to cross

two days
to figure out the blueprint
pops and his pencil
sketches on graph paper
and his mouth
full of nails—he never swallowed
a single one;
two-by-fours for the floor and
two longer thicker support beams
underneath with some legs,
from far away it could have been
a table for a family of giants
instead of a treehouse,
railing, ladder and some scrapwood chairs hammered
together by Jamie the
apprentice

i had to be good,
quiet, agreeable
to stay in the treehouse
do what Jamie

the boss, always bigger
and the boss of me

told me
so i could sit in one of the
chairs they looked so nice
the boss invited the happy hour guests, wanted to serve
hors d'oeuvres, my mission
to steal food from the verandah—
the good crackers, kielbasa
and cucumber or cheese, mom
laughing while gran swirled her
cocktail, said nothing

and the boss waited
at the foot of the ladder
escorting one by one
up the rungs and giving
the grand tour
while i served the food,
waited my turn
in line

just so you know, we are rich rich my father wears suits to work he's an executive—you may want to look that up in your picture dictionary—with a fast car and our house is big bigger than yours and my mother loves me more than yours does because she stays home to look after me doesn't forget to pick me up because she's at work and she waits on me makes me things and i go home for lunch i'm not a stayer like you i don't do brown bagged stale bread and cheese whiz sandwiches i've never even had cheese whiz and my mother would never take me to McDonald's for a Sunday dinner because fast food is trash food we'd rather go for a fancy dinner where we all dress up in our expensive clothes and order things from a five page menu and i am smarter than you any day and so it really doesn't matter if you don't want to invite me to your birthday party because i wasn't going to invite you to mine and i don't like you much anyhow

length of a day
easily measured
by the intervals mom
swathed me in SPF 30

a race to the lake
Jamie ran faster
than me over sun-warmed
dock slats, tan chest
shadowing ribs and maybe
two parts of a six-pack,
my own burnt body squeezing
out of a polka-dot bikini,
mom's applause to Jamie's
swimtricks in perfect form
smooth strokes
against my own doggie paddle

a show was in order,
the temperature and the time
being right, a captive
audience of mom
who was taking off
her nail polish
but still able to clap
Jamie picked me up
wet hands slipping over
rolls of flesh mom laughing
Jamie hummed a few bars
of the wedding march
started to run
wet hands slipping under
rolls of leg, arm
i waved to mom

just before he dropped me,
his arms giving out
under my weight
my head hitting the side of the dock
but he still managed
a perfect dive
over his injured bride,
the star of the show
and me, a bumped
bruised bit-part walk-on
who didn't get
the script edits

i was not a camper
hated campburgers, dirty bunks
shared by other camper
strangers with dirty hair

mom said other people were dirty

only six blocks from home
a scout camp
across the street from the Olco station
gas for farmers, commuters
but i called home every night
lumpy throat and pleading for rescue
escape from other camp kids
who smiled at breakfast,
joked and knew
all the camp chants

*Tracey, Tracey, if you're able
Get your elbows off the table
This is not a horse's stable
But a first class dining table
Stand up!*

dad gave in, pulled up
in the blue Merc, suit jacket
hooked over his pointer finger
he carried my bags
drove two hours to the cottage
and no stop for ice cream,
headlights bouncing from gravel to trees
over every bump and mom
at the screen door waiting
with a plastic cup of pops' special drink,
six ice cubes to numb my shame
fizz tingle across verandah
wickers, tension travelling
from pops' chair to mine i
became a disappointment
over a glass of
raspberry gingerale

a summer ritual
trip to the rock
litmus test for quality of
company, whether our guests
would jump or shake
in soaked swim shorts,
peer down from the rock's edge

i was the boat catcher
in front and jumping out
to save the bow
from rockscrape
but missing half the time
watched green fibreglass grind
against granite,
Jamie yelling

good for nothing,
(or good for
very few
things and not a
regular jumper like him
anyway so why did i come

i was a one-timer,
a record-holder
longest wait
before a jump and
the only one-timer
at the cottage,
even the guests jumped more
than i did,
Jamie so confident
he even stopped looking stopped
aiming just ran
from the back,
wet feet coated
in dead pine needles
while i waited stared heat into
late August water

*Hitting the wall isn't an
inevitable part of running
a marathon. Prepare well
and pace yourself properly*
easy advice for
ten miles ago and pace
pace pace i am alone in
cotton boxers and my lucky
shirt my almost-pyjamas
against high-performance
lycra-spandex blends with neon
stripes and headbands a time
warp how can you pace properly
or at all when the eighty year old
man in front of you is falling
out of his shorts

*In warm climates, be sure to
wear a light singlet or shirt
made of a breathable material*
my clothing the only
thing able to breathe gasps
dragged from dry throat where
is the rest stop is this mile
twenty again pace pace
pace and what is a singlet anyhow
a nice word for single people a tiny
single person or an elementary
school girl who has just been
dumped by her first crush this is
a far cry from grade
three cross country i could
only beat the blind girl thunder
thighs jiggled under sports tights
too tight and forty five minutes

for fifteen hundred metres i
cover that much distance in under
seven today stride steadied
primed for muscle to burn through
taut skin soles biting under
terry cloth socks

*Take time to enjoy the spectators,
participants, and the scenery of the
course. Stop negative thoughts dead in
their tracks and change them to
positive affirmations.*

so much for the fat girl
who'd never finish never
make it i am stronger than the
smell under my arms i pass on
the right elbows in and pace
pace
pace

the only girl in my
class banished to
turning because of my
grade six size ten
feet and i was too tall my
head skimming the rope
and it couldn't be the
other short-armed turners, no
tall was a problem unless
you needed something
off a high shelf, a center
for your basketball team
or balance to the class
picture i was taller
than the boys even and my
pants were too short the
big girl in the back

can you just move a little
and down ok over and
smile big

the famous garden
of South Bay,
noisy boats stopped, cut their
motors to look,
gran asking if we thought they might
be coming in for dinner,
bumped our dock
just to fill their eyes,
and pops kept tilling, weeding,
three-clawed hoe evicting
woven strands of clover
from between planned lupin bunches
tall black-eyed susans stealing
sun, pinwheel petunias
impatiens to match like
carpet or overfill
the window boxes
portulaca hanging over by only
roots
a delicious snack
for trespassing deer
my mother's slippers clunking
over hardwood to scare
them away from the hand
made front window
planters
every fifty kilometres a stop
and close inspection of leaves
stems blooms in the making,
it took four different garden centres
and three roadside stands
to fill the garden
when it was mom's turn to
pick up

where pops left off,
and i was the water girl,
heaved rusty cans
to the boxes and rockery,
drenched each one every
garden day
mom pulled weeds by
hand, loaded the rusty-bottom
wheelbarrow full of garden
scraps for dad to haul off,
her shoulders bared
freckled leather turning
pink then brown in the space
of an afternoon,
lupins right where we left them
last summer

strongly acidic

1

2

acid guilt rot liar
liar pants on fire stolen ju jubes
from a guest's duffel bag

3

stomach churn
gurgle bad like

4

rotten bananas or
too much candy

5

fruity girly shampoo lather
rinse repeat i cannot possibly
be clean enough

6

7

milk for growing boys and
girls who like to bake turn
it sour with a little vinegar

neutral

8

blood a schoolyard squabble
over smelly egg salad
sandwiches in a shared locker

9

10

baking soda
fountain water never put your mouth
near the spout mom says you never
know what you could catch

11

strongly alkaline

12

bleach coke-stained bedsheets
we are not allowed snacks in
the bed starve ourselves in

13

our sleep

14

a friend for dinner and
a decision—my family
was weird by schoolyard
standards a scathing
observation whispered
across a passed butter
dish during Sunday
dinner we always ate
together even on skating
nights or before Jamie
headed out for a weekend
party but to my friends
this was weird strange that
we were in the same
room for every dinner
knives clinking against the
good china brought out
for guests my friend couldn't
hold a knife didn't fold her
napkin in her lap before
eating and she never clinked
her glass at the toast i was
embarrassed, burned scarlet by
family routine *how was your
day what did you do at
school are you going to
pass your friend a roll*
my dad tried to make it up
took his dentures out at
dessert but she never
flinched and by Monday my
whole grade knew i was weird
the tall fat girl with a weird
family with fancy plates a mom
who made stuff from scratch and
a dad who drank from a glass not
a bottle i was weird
so weird

night before my first
day of kindergarten we
were bad and we knew it
refusing liver and milk
when mom and dad
were in New York
Jamie and i defiant
eyes locked across the
kitchen table pops wearing
his angry face,
goddamned spoiled kids
Gran held mom's place
at the table, said nothing
just burped
pssshhhhttt
dabbed a napkin to lips
sipped glass four of
caramel-coloured water
no dessert for the kids

(an oatmeal cake
with the baked-on icing

and bedtime
an hour early
still sunny outside, my
stomach tied in first-day
knots scalp tingling at
the thought of gran
dragging her brush
through my hair in the
morning, imagined my
parents in a fancy
restaurant while i fell
asleep still hungry

tracey is a promising
student
her spelling is flawless
does she read the
dictionary a model student

(without the runway no
beauty is cursed with
braces and glasses at
the same time

laugh during silent reading an
equation adding up to recess
detention two hands covering
her head a fear of projectiles
or just a stray volleyball
second-last picked in gym
class and first in line to go
home always walking a half
hour hike and healthy a
"healthy looking girl" the code
for chubby chunky soft in the
middle a red ribbon science fair
winner captain of the safety patrol
squad and editor of the school
newsletter is there anything she
can't do the only kid in her class
who couldn't ride a bike
smile in the back row braces
dazzle fluorescent beams blind
the photographer

tiny girlhands
fisted
around bundles
of pink flannel
with knotty hair
hiding folds
of smocking,
fine stitches each
one-eighth inch long,
perfect pleats
in thirteen rows, trimmed
with itchy lace
to fit the yoke
of gran's little helper

six years
to make a rink dad arms
crossed pressed against the ledge
below plexiglass windows
ten laps of warmup and
eye contact i smiled
at his waves when i skated past
careful of my form in
rounding the corner arms
up back straight
knees bent and
leaning into the curves
the club had a party once
for skaters and their families
dad wore his old cracked
leather skates a basement relic
maybe a yard sale find or
college keepsake
thick gloves and tissues
mom tucked into his jacket pocket
the hotshot hockey brothers
sisters in senior skate
and all the girls in my level
wearing their best dresses or skirts
me in my double-frill that flapped
if i skated fast enough
daddy-daughter laps and
cross-cuts around every corner
i was faster holding his
hand a thick red line around
the arena wall became
a hula hoop hips shimmy
keeping hoop middled muscled
legs for thrust we glided
after six years of private coaching
i was finally Elizabeth Manley

Yum-Yum Gems

for Lake

<i>1/2 cup shortening</i>	<i>1 cup brown sugar</i>
<i>1 egg</i>	<i>1 cup sour milk</i>
<i>1 tsp. baking soda</i>	<i>2 cups Robin Hood flour</i>
<i>1 ts 1/2 cup shortening</i>	<i>1 cup raisins</i>
<i>1 ts 1 egg</i>	<i>1/2 cup chopped nuts</i>
<i>1 ts 1 tsp. baking soda</i>	<i>mixed peel, cherries, coconut, etc.</i>
<i>1 tsp. cinnamon</i>	

Creed 1 tsp. cloves : and shortening, add egg and beat until smooth. Sift together soda, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, flour. Add to mixture alternately with milk until well-blended. Fold in chopped nuts, cherries, etc. and spoon into large muffin cups. Bake at 350° for 15 - 20 minutes or until nice and golden.

sugar egg smear it was
an accident blurred old blue
ink from recipe card holding it
high for gran as she tossed in
cherries, nuts electric mixer
grinding pieces smaller i wanted
just a taste smelled sugary
thick my chapped lips burning
for a finger-hooked sample leaned
over in my nightie fat girl heft
sagging over the counter my
red hair falling over my shoulder
whisps skimmed the lip of ceramic
bowl beaters twisting high speed
beat and my eyes wide i can almost
taste it now a little closer then my
hair yanked pulled by an invisible
hand a twisty tug i was stuck wrapped
up in it all batter and everything my
hair matching butteregeggherry mess
strands woven a gooey
baker's braid

a fat four
but taller than all the
boys in my nursery school
and already a 6X
mom picking out my clothes,
said the X stood for
extra-special, or
extra-pretty, if i was behaving,
between metal bar restraints
of the shopping cart-
when you are five it doesn't matter
if they see your underwear

the modern girl's bible
sold in yearly subscriptions
for a low, low price
Get slim and sexy in four weeks
Abs! Butt! Thighs! Everything!
a four week committment to
my*SELF* waifing waiting listening for
fat to melt from abs! butt! thighs!
everything! and it seems like
everyone is looking for a leaner
piece of meat trim it down cut
away gristle and get to the
good parts
Natural no-effort beauty in
twelve easy steps a pound of
makeup here or there just a
smattering i might need my
trusty trowel to fill in the gaps
i am not airbrushed a packaging
defect i am outlet shopper sloppy
seconds irregulars almost
perfects or damage discounts
Always tired? Wake up with more
energy every day does this start
with sleeping in or sleeping through
the alarm clock or maybe a day of
pulling the covers over my head I'm
not home right now i am
busy busy busy leave a message
and i will try to get back to you i
just have a few more pages of the
manual to read

greetings from Germany,
a Munich postcard
sent straight
from the airport,
huge stone arches and old
buildings, a garden
and a group of girls wearing
patchwork jumpers-
i think they were dancing

two weeks dad was gone
and Jamie the obvious
replacement man of the
house sleeping on dad's
side of the bed,
but mom still wearing the
pants or skirts if the weather
was nice froggy throatlump phone calls
every other night from
a hotel phone and
dad's words maybe between
chews of pillow chocolates
i ran upstairs,
smelled his pillows,
turned his nightlight
on and off

*Hi baby! These photos were taken in Germany. I passed the
building on the righthand corner just yesterday, the girls
reminded me of you. The weather is terrible - rain, rain, rain.
See you soon, miss you lots!!
XOXO Daddy*

*Munchen
Olympiagelände mit Olympiasee
und Olympiastadion
(Fassungsvermögen: 77-573 Euschade davon 46.073 Sitz-platze - hieryph 29.100
aberdacht)*

every Christmas,
always a few between
twisted fake branches
or hidden beneath the
big gifts
at the back, perfect wrapping
with neat corners and
curly-ended bows like the rest,
but no label
mom and dad didn't,
wouldn't
start placing packages
until a week or so before
the big day,
Jamie tag-checking
and box-shaking
after dinner
i was the lookout the
scout for trouble while
Jamie tallied kept inventory
of who was getting what

unlabelled boxes drove
him crazy bugged
mom and dad for hints
dad smiling he must
have *forgot* to tag them
i sat, listened
to the daily totals
Jamie calculated

boys were better
at math in my family
especially at Christmas

love = $x + y$
where x is number of presents
and y is number of cards

shuffled through
tagless gifts pretended to see
through printed wrap
and my cheeks flushed
with the kindergarten excitement
that what wasn't clearly labeled
might be mine

Christmas Eve, the
midnight service in Peterborough
and pops insisting i wasn't
old enough i begged
to go, stayed up late
and everything
we drove downtown
in the stale, sticky
Humbug-smelling Buick,
i held my mother's hand
wore the green taffeta skirt
she made me legs frozen
under "little miss" stockings
and toes jammed
into new patent leathers
already too small,

(i was growing
like a tree a
weed

the church was full
and i only remember
candles must have drifted
to sleep until the end chorus
insisted on shaking the
pastor's hand i clacked
my shoes a march in
mom-sized steps
i waited in line
behind a fat flowery lady i
was a big girl felt the
sweaty palm from a
white-collared stranger
but couldn't look him in
the eye i blushed ran to pops

waiting at the door the
pastor following us i
slipped all the way
down ice-coated cement stairs,
put a run in my stockings and
cried and certain that
God saw me fall asleep
in his house

another strategy meeting
in the room with the shipmate's
bed i always sat on the floor
neck cramped from looking
up and long red hair piled
on the floor at my back
he had a plan
i would be the secretary
carry a pocket-sized spiral book
with a Garfield pen
and he would be the spy
red balaclava pulled
over his face i would
take orders
my brother the spy
crept down the stairs around
the hallway table flat
against the wall and peeking
past the corner the
secretary scribbling madly
inked rows of wiggly lines before
i could write my own name
stayed behind the spy he
whispered for retreat
walked backwards on
tiptoe and turned to run
but instead stepped
on my feet fell on his knees
mission aborted
the secretary waving at
mom and dad
a parental laugh of approval
smiles making the spy
turn rogue
without the secretary

a camera for my tenth birthday
i practiced for two weeks
before a family trip to Ottawa—
the kitchen wall, my budgie, dad
in the kitchen
wearing his undershirt
day of departure, camera
tucked into my purse with
three extra flash strips packed by mom

standing outside the Parliament building
gran and pops linked
arm in arm, gran's wide smile
showing her grayed back teeth
the table at the restaurant that night
all five of my family smiling
laughing when I bumped
the waiter, ordered *squish in*
played with layout—
portrait, landscape
until everyone fit perfectly
but forgot my purse that night
my camera inside and
i sat tearful while dad called
the restaurant asked them to keep
it for the night
twelve whole undocumented hours
my camera locked in a restaurant
safe
film developed in Oshawa
mom and I flipping
through the stack in the strip mall
parking lot i wondered about my
headless grandparents and why
i took a picture of a table
plates of food
mom helped me lay the pictures
onto album pages
told me it was some of my
best work

i remember red a toboggan
a traffic light
on the way to the
golf course
one yard of handknit
scarf, my snowsuit
bleeding nylon and corduroy
against white white snow,
or even the lining of
dad's jacket
from Sears, smelling
of barbecue and Player's Light
king size
on the back of my four-foot sled
and Jamie's nose red
to match but just
the end wind-bitten
or was it the stain of jealousy
on his cheeks seeing
dad on my sled
my side this time,
flying past Jamie red
scarf flapping covering my eyes
at the bump before the
end of the hill

size thirteen
belonged to my father i
was no match for the
snowprints from his
brown paint-splattered work boots
laces frayed
in more than one spot
he walked up Weller Street with
Jamie and i behind him
fighting wanting to be
the first to walk
in his prints try
to match his size
Jamie pushed me shoved
me into a snowbank and ran
fast to catch up to dad
i sat in snow soaking
through to my jogging pants
hat slipping from
my head but dad
turned around walked back
to lift me, let me walk in front
the rest of the way to the
One Stop
it was my path we followed
dad playing the same game
and Jamie working hard
to erase my trail of prints

basketball hoop screwed
to the roof
just above the garage
and my father beating me at
H-O-R-S-E
for the ten thousandth time
i missed the rebounds
but my skill at freethrows
was not so bad
we practiced after dinner
a dirt magnet from
garden to pavement then set
into the fine lines
of my hands the ball
pushed, pounded and caught
by reddened palms
a harvest moon rising
orbiting from driveway
to net

my aim for the redbox
target was better
hitting corners of the square dark
ball prints on white
fibreglass each beat
on freshly-tarred driveway
like train gears

i could make
the junior team this year
falling asleep thinking of
team pictures

i'm good enough
i'm good enough

maroon polyester shorts like
my dad foot on the ball
and smiling, hair ponytailed
like the rest of the girls

i knew the drills
the half-court run three
in the key

(should i stay or
should i go?)

and a killer chest pass
that caught dad's breath
sometimes
i walked to school
on tryout morning footsteps
drumming sidewalk an imagined
dribble-catch dribble-catch
pattern

i could be famous
the star guard

stopped at a friend's
for some safety in numbers
and we reasoned
the whole way there we
were too short, not pretty
enough my ankles looked
so fat in tube socks

(or was it my ass in
those stupid shorts?)

and skill was an added
bonus you really had to
know somebody
or be somebody
to make the team never
told dad how i ended up
in my friend's basement apartment
that morning three blocks
from the school gym
laughing over hot
chocolate and the Flintstones
thinking of time drills
almost close enough to
cringe at sneaker squeak
on the court
a relief or release of duty
to check the list face the rejection
dejection disappointment
of being cut

and you can't beat yourself
up about it

(better to get
someone else to do
that for you

just keep on truckin'
push through another letdown
tell yourself that everyone fails
something once in a while you
are not perfect not Martha
Stewart a flawless
fluffy angel cake or meringue
and you can't have it all no
woman can unless she is
born a man or has enough
money to pay someone to
do it all for her you should
know by now it's only
natural this will not ruin
your life tarnish your
record you're the only one
keeping score anyway your
inflated expectations like
running in the wind with
an umbrella you should
know better by now

if girl A leaves her house for school
at time X,
and girl B leaves her house
at time Y,
at which point will girl A and girl B
meet at the corner of streets
M and N, silently compare
outfits

*those shoes with that shirt?
please*

take turns pressing
the crosswalk button
impatiently check their watches
only thirty seconds since
last glance pass thoughts
between finger taps on thighs
was something forgotten
at home a coffee maker
or curling iron housefire
waiting to happen
girl A straightening
a shirt wrinkle girl B wishing
she had bothered to even
press her own shirt
dryer wrinkles set in
like second skin and
stride in separate directions
at the change
of a light

(who am i kidding girls
are never good at math

spoiled rotten the luxury
of choosing our own
clothes wasted on kids
like us
Jamie picking "cool" clothes
mom made my decisions
frills and bows and
everything there was a coat
my first and only white one
a risky move with such
a slob of a girl
warm for winter very pretty
with loopeye buttons
and it covered my bum
i loved that coat my snow
white coat sat in the
living room waiting
for it to come out warm
from the dryer
i grew out of it sleeves above
wrists that even long mitts
wouldn't cover and mom
passed it along gave it
to a neighbour's daughter
i should have felt good
for helping, a good
deed but it was so strange
seeing her wear it coming
across the schoolyard
in my coat
her coat
her black hair making it whiter
than i remembered,
so much white,

and she passed me to line up
for class procession a mud
stain on the back just above
the bum i would have
never done something
like that

(at least not
on purpose i mean

buried my chin
into my newer green parka
with the too-long sleeves
and elastic band barely
stretching over my waist

consider this a long
distance identity crisis staring
at my closet for forty
minutes i still
can't match a top to
a bottom can you tell me
if brown and red match i
should know this by now
at least seventeen
of my twenty five years spent
dressing myself i still feel novice
if clothes are supposed to
say something about you

(does that mean that
nudists have nothing
to say?)

mine are mute abstaining they
would plead the fifth if they
were american and when
did i buy this i was not cut
out for making these
life changing decisions prefer
not to tease salespeople
with nine pairs of pants that
don't quite fit

that first year of
just four in the house
no fighting over who
would surrender their room
or serve the next round
of cocktails and mom
begged us into
Christmas outfits
the nice clothes we saved for holidays
or the occasional funeral
mom wore diamonds

arrived at the front door
of a neighbour's house and
empty-handed by request
we greeted our host
who wore jeans
and a sweatshirt
printed with a Christmas tree
her basement with five
long bridge tables covered
with red vinyl tablecloths
and settings for twenty one
Jamie and I exchanging nudges
prods toward the empty
fireplace hearth we sat
side by side toothpaste
smiles

(i was the only one
cavity-free

canned laughs for family
jokes and nodding
with impressed eyes
for each gift unwrapped

by somebody
someone else's family Christmas
and we were
accessories

the potatoes were different
with sour cream or something
weird and not at all like gran's
the tommy turkey dark meat
saved for the men,
women eating white meat drenched
in canned gravy and
table tension and traffic
tie-ups the carrots were withheld
from a hated uncle or cousin
the host blaming husband
for letting the food get cold
mom declaring everything
perfect

(did she miss having
the same fight with my dad?)

we made an effort, dad
loudly discussing football
and elbowing the person
next to him
my mother helping
in the kitchen
i stared at the napkin
in my lap and went without
dessert knowing we
never ran out
of Christmas cake
and hard sauce
even the year we had everyone
all fifteen at our house
and Uncle Harvey pissed
on mom's good chair while
dishes were being cleared
i hoped the dog was keeping
the dining room table
company

a tradition,
my father and i
on our shopping trips
his insistence that i had
the better taste
of the two of us

(still asked mom how i
looked before leaving
the house

but it was his own long legs
striding through the shoe department
watches hosiery, and straight
to women's underwear
when would i grow out
of my Eaton's cotton
undershirts start looking
like one of the ladies
on the boxed bras my
mother bought
dad narrowed in
on the racked nighties cracked
hands caught on silk
or smooth egyptian cotton browsed
rack after rack
of strappy gowns button-ups and frilled
sleeves it was always
the last rack
something in blue or lightlight pink
with lace but washable he'd
smile take it off the pinchy
hanger and try it
against my too-short too-flat
body, grinning all the way
to the register mom opening
the box and uncovering
the gift under layers of thin
tissue and dad convincing her
i was the one
who picked it out

the poet of my third grade class i was in love with adam famme and
 T is for tomatoes because I love them
 the word diamante but i preferred acrostics still used my primary
 R is for red the colour of my hair
 printer even though the rest of my class had moved on to orange-
 A is for acro my dance class that I will go to tonight
 yellow HBs or a pen stolen from a mother's purse the fatty side of my
 C is for cat because I don't have any pets
 right palm smeared graphite across blue-lined foolscap wasn't foolscap
 E is for Easter because Easter is coming soon
 a funny word and all the girls in my class had shiny striped multipacks
 Y is for yellow I am wearing yellow leggings today
 of crayons with sixty-four colours i hated them and the heat from my
 G is for George my Dad's name
 hand always broke the wax in two before i had a chance to peel away
 R is for running my brother is in cross country
 the wrapper i had pencil crayons sat at my kitchen table the night
 O is for outdoor recess because it is sunny outside
 before school started and sharpened every one to a stabbing tip they
 Z is for for the zoo we are going there for a class trip next week
 stayed in my desk all year the sticky flaps still held down firm pencils
 I is for imagination to write good poems
 shiny and tempting but they felt weird too skinny in my hand my
 E is for elastics i have pink bobbles in my hair today
 rhymes came better with a dull tip
 R is rhyming not all poems have to rhyme

The Measure of Poetics

The poet of my third grade. It seems like so long ago—it was a long time ago, actually, when I thought of poetry as a means of getting attention, rather than an important act of self-expression, an assertion of identity. In third grade I was writing to please people, to win the praise and temporary adoration of my teachers, classmates, and family. I still have the legal-sized manila folder of my collected writing from grades one to six, and I know my mother keeps a similar archive in her own desk. Now the stakes feel higher—I've moved from being the third-grade acrostic wizard to the Masters degree candidate. My search for praise has shifted over the years into my desire for success. I no longer look for the special chair during silent reading time, but instead, search for the quiet favorable nod of approval. Manilla folders have been replaced by disks and hard drives with memories filled to maximum capacity, all aspiring to the tiny blue checkmark in the lower right-hand corner.

I understand now that I've unconsciously been thinking about the notion of 'measuring up' for a long time, and it is through this project that I have fleshed out some of my issues with this idea, this perception of constant comparison and evaluation. When I was initially deciding what I wanted to write about, my family seemed the most natural choice. By far the strongest influence on my development, my family had been an integral part of some of my most favourite (and most infamous) memories. Summers at the cottage, trips to visit gran and pops, and endless car rides in the family shuttle, my brother and I fighting in the back seat. I wanted to look at my life from an autobiographical stance, and my family seemed to be the most obvious choice, especially since I had so much material to work with,

but a number of questions and concerns quickly surfaced as I gave this decision further consideration. What, specifically, would I write? What experiences did I have that others would want to share in or read about? The more important question seemed to center around what I would **not** write about. I grappled with the conflict Sidonie Smith raised in speaking about autobiography, specifically the female autobiography, as it "...reveals the tensions between their [women's] desire for narrative authority and their concern about excessive self-exposure" (Smith & Watson 12). Not only did I need to consider the implications of personal narrative, but I also had to reconcile myself to being on display within my project.

In using poetry to write my autobiography, I was looking to apply the personal narrative structure as a way of placing myself within my text, but this choice was attended by the question of what authority and impact this narrative structure would hold for my readers. While the memories and experiences I would be narrating in my writing were personally authentic, I didn't want this viewpoint to overpower my readers. I was primarily concerned that my chosen narrative structure would be too limiting a perspective, in that it would dictate to, rather than inspire readers, and thus prevent me from evoking in them a personal recognition. I was also concerned that any authority I would be claiming through narrating in the first person would distance the reader from my work, and thus defeat the function of personal narrative in my project.

With respect to self-exposure, the decision to write in first person did render me vulnerable. I worried about how my experiences and memories would be judged or evaluated by my readers, and a lot of unexpected anxiety rose to the surface in trying to make the transfer from memory to paper. The thought of opening up these experiences and

memories to a wider audience beyond my close friends and family was both scary and daunting. In a sense, I felt as though I would have to censor some of my writing, or at least provide significant edits in order to create a more favourable impression, regardless of whether this would be authentic to my actual experiences.

In trying to reconcile Smith's acknowledged tension between narrative authority and self-exposure, I realized that both of these ideas shared the common ground of measurement. With my narrative structure, I was concerned with how I would 'measure up' to readers' expectations and interpretations of my writing, and there was also this estimation of the authority my personal narrative might hold over readers. In thinking about self-exposure, I was similarly concerned with how readers would personally judge me based on the self I represented in my project, and how I could represent my 'best' self in order to generate a greater interest in my project. In a larger sense, I also had to consider the purpose of my project as a whole, which was to satisfy a program requirement for my degree. This project would be evaluated in front of other people, a process that would determine whether I would receive my degree. Rather than giving in to these pressures as part and parcel of writing my project, I instead chose to place all of my focus on this issue of 'measurement', in whatever capacity it held its impact. In this sense, I reclaimed some of the power I felt had been taken from me in resigning myself to these perceived pressures or standards, and I used this power to fuel the content and direction of my writing.

In deciding to write autobiographically on the theme of measurement, I thought it important to trace my history across my twenty-five years. This took a lot of reflection, and I initially relied on family photographs to help me with the process of recall. There were the

chronicle of the 'fat years', the obligatory school photos, and the endless records of family summers at the cottage. The photos evoked in me a lot of conflicting emotions—nostalgia, regret, disappointment, happiness, and longing commingled, but my sentiments were best summed up by a commentary from Rosalind Coward:

In snapshots there is no sign of labour, conflict, hardship, grief—no sign of sibling rivalry, anguished adolescence, or death. Where the snapshot is under the injunction to record happy moments of family solidarity, there is no attempt to deal with the deep underground streams of emotions. (Coward 51)

My pictures were interesting in that they were these freeze-framed congenial moments which, to the outsider, seemed generally positive and wholesome. There was no back story in these visual representations, but it was this back story, the behind-the-scenes action, that was most applicable to my thematic pursuits. I had to glean from the pictures the images I was looking to convey in my work, and then transfer those visuals into the text along with the inclusion of the context of each event. This proved a difficult task, because of the concern that my project would lose the visual element in the translation and transformation from picture to text. I feel that this issue was reconciled by the more visual installments of my work, which help to create a similar optical impact through more concrete writing. These more visual poems fit well with the motif of measurement, a notion readily represented visually.

As bell hooks states in her essay, "writing autobiography," "[t]he longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release" (Smith & Watson 431). In coming at this project from an autobiographical stance, I could relate to a

lot of what hooks was suggesting. When I first started writing my poems from pictures, I did feel reunited with the past, as if I were visiting old friends. Once I began to work through the poems in their thematic context, there was also a feeling of release, in that I was working through experiences and emotions that were previously repressed to a certain degree, and the writing of my project was also a purging of these feelings, an unburdening of sorts. There was a remaining sense of pressure in the pending judgment, both academically and personally, that I had envisioned in my head. Unlike the photograph's ability noted by Susan Sontag, to "appropriate the thing photographed" (4), the process of writing from an autobiographical stance seemed to give more ownership to the public, to the readers who would be interpreting, evaluating, and criticizing my work. To contrast this idea, I did agree with Sontag's statement that writing, much like photography, "means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power" (4). I felt as though I had at least some authority over my work, considering that the experiences and memories I was sharing were my own. I felt powerful in being able to hold this unique and authoritative knowledge as separate from the knowledge of my readers. There was also a sense of power in working through these experiences as viewed using the lens of measurement, rather than letting my work be filtered through and censored by measurement's constraints. In this sense, I was able to equate the writing of my project with a sense of liberty, which I further believe as partially due to my use of autobiography as the mode of choice.

It was challenging to try and negotiate the placement of my work within the frame of autobiography. In deciding where my work best fit within this construct, I considered the

sentiment of Gertrude Stein that "[y]ou are of course never yourself" (Gilmore 16). This made me question how, exactly, I was going to contextualize my work, in considering how it fit with readers' interpretations, opinions, and generic labels that would potentially be stuck to my project. My work shares a lot of common ground with many of the subgenres of autobiography. In that I was able to work through some of my feelings about the effects of measurement, I feel as though my writing shares the sense of a somewhat therapeutic experience, a feature I understand to be common within the structure of the memoir. Much like confessional poetry, my project is angled toward a personal, and somewhat intimate narrative through which I reveal a close-up version of many of my own experiences. On the other hand, the term 'confessional' seems limiting, in that it brings with it an inference of repentance, of potential guilt that I feel defeats the intent of my work. Certainly, my work can be aligned with creative non-fiction, in that I have introduced the fictional elements of embellished detailing and character development, not only to create interest in the personal narrative, but also to meet the larger goal of plotting a life history on the graph of social comparison. I also consider my work in the context of Audre Lorde's idea of 'biomythography' (Smith & Watson 431), in which there is a blending of autobiography, fiction, and personal mythology. The elements of autobiography are easy enough to assert, in that every visual artifact, every part of my work is my own, taken from my life, my development, my experiences. The fictional element is addressed by the subjective nature of my content. It is important for me to assert that the experiences I write about are my own memories and recollections, but they almost always involve one or more individuals, meaning that someone who has shared in these experiences may have another interpretation

of the events that took place. I would feel it unfair to assume that my own interpretations and remembrances are the single authority on the subject (ask my parents and I can bet they will remember my 'fat years' a little differently than I have), but counter to this, I do admit to feeling as though my own subjective experiences afford me a certain sense of narrative power or authority in comparison to the reader, who has not shared in these memories. The mythological aspect of my writing is much harder to pin down, but to a larger extent in my project, I relate this idea of 'mythology' to the family stories that have become legends—the tales that are passed over the dinner table to new guests, or the stories that are told repeatedly at specific times of the year. I think that most readers can relate to this concept of mythology in remembering some of their own family chronicles, so that I hope to strike a chord of recognition or familiarity, no matter how disparate my experiences seem from their own.

Though events are the touchstones throughout my project, both memory and my writing are shaped and filtered by life experiences subsequent to each event. As well, my recounting of these more collective experiences may lend a certain degree of distortion to the authenticity of the events I discuss, and thus, challenge the more narrow definition of memory as active and accurate recollection. I feel that my work exemplifies, as Liz Stanley states, "...the way in which a 'self' is construed and explored as something much more than 'individual': unique in one sense, but also closely articulating with the lives of others" (Stanley 62). To try and temper my subjective experiences within my writing, while also accounting for events that may have been more collective than personal, would be both impossible and unrealistic, a standard to which I could not possibly 'measure up'. I allowed my memory to push the progression of my poems, both literally and figuratively. Since

memory did serve as the primary source of information for my project, I wanted to suggest the dynamics of memory recall within the patterning of my writing. While my project starts out in the present, most passages are temporally disjointed, connected by an associative thread but not necessarily following an established chronological order. I aligned my project with Rita Felski's suggestion that female autobiography

...seeks to reduce the patterning and organization of experience which characterizes historical narrative, its structure is episodic and fragmented, not chronological and linear. The organizing principle of the text is provided by the associations of the experiencing subject. (Smith & Watson 86)

The disjunctive structure present in my work attempts to recreate the recall process of recall, where there is not necessarily an order to the events brought to consciousness, but rather a connection between external stimuli and internal coding. The use of fragments to represent a semblance of recollection also assisted me in asserting my authorial presence.

The non-linear organization of my project operates in combination with the diminished "i". In researching the topic of the colonial "I", traditionally upheld as a male-constructed generic, I found it described as

...a sign of the Enlightenment subject, unified, rational, coherent, autonomous, free, but also white, male, Western. This subject has variously been called "the individual" or "the universal human subject" or the "transcendent subject" or "man". (Smith & Watson 27)

I did not want to be spoken for, and I used the "i" not only to affirm my stance specifically as a female who is separate from this male generic, but also to provide a greater distance between my work and ingrained male traditions. My work is not that of a typical male writer carrying the full weight of the patriarchal "I", and it was important to me that my writing

reflect this idea. As Louis Althusser stated, autobiography functions "...as a powerful cultural site through which the "individual" materializes" (Smith & Watson 21), and the use of the "i" assists me in further calling attention to my emerging identity.

The diminished "i" is also important to the specific content of my project. I use the "i" to arrange my identity in the context of other important figures in my life. My consistent concern over the authority that my use of the personal narrative might be claiming lead me to employ the "i" to assist me in considering others within my project. There is not just the all-important "I" to think about, and the use of the diminished "i" seemed to afford more space for others within the construct of my work. As well, the size of the "i" that I use speaks to the issue of measurement and 'measuring up' that I am exploring throughout my project. Certainly the "i" represents the size I always wanted to be—petite, skinny, non-descript, and definitely not fat, pudgy, or too-tall.

There is an inherent evaluative suggestion in the use of the "i". First, there is the self-effacing impression given by the "i", a sort of shrugging off or downplaying of the self, or what I finally affirmed as a modest attempt at relinquishing a part of authorial power to the reader. Contrast this with the bigger "I" which gives an impression of possible omnipotence or authority; it was difficult to decide between the two, especially considering the struggles I had faced in the earlier stages of my project when considering the power of personal narrative. I questioned my use of "I" and "i" in my first draft of this project. I didn't know which "I/i" would be seen in a more favourable light, which "I/i" would be best. Although the use of the diminished "i" seemed to be a better fit to the larger project, the big "I" was holding out this essence of greater authority. I wondered whether I would be asked fewer

questions in my defense if I used the traditional "I", or if I would receive some sort of extra credit, a medal or maybe even a red ribbon, if I adopted the other "i", but I ultimately had to make a choice that would best suit my writing.

Further to the great "I/i" debate, I agree with Estelle C. Jelinek that my work is not necessarily a "success story", a construct informing many prototypical male autobiographies by authors such as Rousseau or Franklin (Smith & Watson 9). I chose not to distance myself in this way, but rather to assert myself as a work in progress, much like my writing, through the use of the "i". There is a sense that the "i" is working up to the "I", that perhaps the "i" will one day carry with it enough size to contain both male and female authority, but for now, the two must be kept in separate corners. In a similar vein, the selection of the "i" was partially founded on consideration of Rowbotham's argument that a woman is unable to "...experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined as woman, that is, as a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture" (Smith & Watson 75). This statement bears a strong correlation to my own perceptual experiences, and I do feel that I am defined and determined by largely male-constructed norms and evaluations. My project prominently showcases the impact of such strong influences, as well as acknowledging my own falling short of these prescribed expectations. To ignore the level of impact such forces have had on my own socialization and development would be to ignore my larger authorial aims. The "i" gives me a place as a woman in both my project and in society, which I feel is important to the larger attempts of my project in sharing my experiences as a female.

Assertion of my identity as an individual, both inclusive and exclusive of my identity as a female, was also challenging. While membership in the collectively acknowledged category of "woman" is undeniably significant, the recounting of memory and thought points to the importance of individual experience, and thus, to the importance of defining individual identity in the context of larger constructs. As Sidonie Smith states, "...the writing and theorizing of women's lives has often occurred in texts that place an emphasis on collective processes" (Smith & Watson 5), making it more challenging for individual identities to receive the recognition they deserve. It was important for me to separate my work from male traditions, but I also wanted to assert my place as an individual within the context of my work. Smith furthers her argument around the impossibility of an independent self in stating that:

...the cultural injunction to be a deep, unified, coherent, autonomous "self" produces necessary failure, for the autobiographical subject is amnesiac, incoherent, heterogeneous, interactive. (Smith & Watson 110)

I don't feel that autonomy is necessarily related to coherence or depth at all. I would instead argue, as illustrated by my own project, that it is the incoherence, the disjunction or displacement of formal logic, that defines autonomy to its fullest. I associate logic with the patriarchal "I", which I then interpret as the "I" that might lie, the "I" that attempts to assert authority but does not necessarily stay true to self. Acknowledging moments of unintelligibility, of dependence, show a recognition of human nature, but to censor these experiences is to fabricate a truth, and in terms of autobiography, a self.

I like to think of my project in the way that bell hooks conceptualizes autobiography—a hope chest where all of my most precious and coveted memories are put

for "safe keeping" (Smith & Watson 431). Through creating a record of my life I have traced a history that has been founded in my own subjective memory, but from this I hope my readers will be able to negotiate and meditate on their own ways of fitting into the larger discussion of 'measuring up'. In using the construction of measurement to write a life trajectory based upon disjointed and chronologically mixed events and experiences, I have constructed and established a place for myself through my writing, while also asserting myself not only as a woman, but an inimitable woman with immeasurably unique experiences.

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VITA AUCTORIS

Tracey Grozier was born in 1978 in Mississauga, Ontario. She graduated from O'Neill Collegiate and Vocational Institute in 1998. From there she went on to the University of Windsor where she obtained a B.A. (Hons.) in English Literature and Psychology. She is currently a candidate for the master's degree in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Spring 2004.