

BORDERLAND JOURNEYS:  
A LAYERED AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis - a story-thesis - is, first, dedicated to my family and my faculty. They have helped me discover who I was and who I am, and have helped me to consider who I will become. Second, this is dedicated to those who work to change the conversations of their lives.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Among IUPUI's Departments of Communication Studies, English, and Religious Studies are many faculty who have mentored me in the process of this project. Catherine Dobris, PhD; John Parrish-Sprowl, PhD; Nancy Rhodes, PhD; and Elizabeth Goering, PhD have acted as the members of my committee. They have each challenged me to reach farther into myself, to unpack ideas, and to create a work that is both interesting and useful. Karen Kovacic, PhD, has inspired me to inspire others. David Craig, PhD, has mentored me in studying religious practices and their cultural and personal implications. Shirley K. Drew, PhD, of Pittsburgh State University, has also mentored me, especially in the artful and scholarly writing of autoethnography. Christopher Whitlow, Teri Short, Beth Bankert, Bryan Bankert, Amanda Baker, and Scott Countryman have all assisted me in challenging my assumptions and also loving myself. My children, James and Marianne, have cheered me on. I acknowledge the time, energy, and passion that each one of these people put into my story-thesis with me.

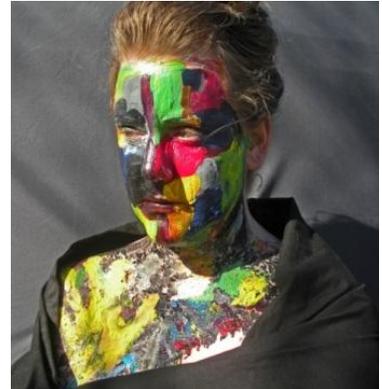
## PROLOGUE: AN INVITATION

My story-telling begins a few months before my 34<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is the Lenten season. Ash Wednesday was less than a week ago, and my Catholic self is thankful for the 40 days of reflection and preparation for Easter, the day my Lord rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven to sit at the right hand of our Father. My pagan self senses the coming rebirth of the world that is represented by Easter and the fertility celebration of the first of May. I am a fragmented person, a woman who lives and loves and relates to others from a Borderland of faiths and lifeworlds. I am not whole. I have ever sought the peace of wholeness; I have yet to find a place where all of my selves come together to celebrate one life, one Janice. This project is a telling of my journey of hope and struggle to discover such a place: this is a story-thesis.

Metaphors stream through my mind. I see myself as a broken mirror. A trampled body. A Victorian woman in white, sitting by the window of her room in a sanitarium. I see myself as a mother lion protecting her cubs. A crying baby. A girl who gave her innocence away for a moment of relief from loneliness. I see myself as a woman warrior, avenging the little deaths she has faced every day. I see myself in all of these ways, but I know that I have never seen my self at all. *What a privileged life I lead*, I think. I have the time and the resources with which to ponder my identity. *What a blessed life I lead*, I think. I have lived a life of deep feelings and continuous discovery. *What a cursed*

*existence I bear*, I think. I am jealous of all those around me who seem content in their own skins and souls. *What lies we tell*, I think. Others must feel as I do, but also do as I do, cover themselves with cloaks of socially appropriate masks. It seems impossible that I alone face the anxieties of searching for an identity that works. *We do what we need to do to take care of ourselves*, I think.

Part of how I am taking care of myself is exploring my own process as a person who was raised in a cult and who continues to struggle with the associated aftermath. This story-thesis represents just part of my overall journey of discovery and healing. I do not remember a time even as a child when I did



Reflections  
Photograph  
Marianne Gaebler  
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not consider who I am and how I fit into the world around me. As a scholar, I continue to ponder these questions. My goal is to use the reflexive processes of autoethnography and self-portraiture to chain out the steps I am taking to explore and articulate the heteroglossia within me so that I can relate to myself and others in what Buber terms an I-Thou relationship. There are many voices raised in song, raised in screams, that I choose to discern now, and that I also choose to allow you to experience with me. Listen with me. Reflect with me. Wonder with me. Seek with me. Maybe we will find what we are looking for.

## **PREFACE: A GUIDE**

Neil Gaiman writes in *Anansi Boys* that the stories that we share change us. In the book, the god Anansi explains how storytelling shifts people's sense of reality:

People respond to the stories. They tell them themselves. The stories spread, and as people tell them, the stories change the tellers. ...now they're starting to dream about a whole new place to live. The world may be the same, but the wallpaper's changed. Yes? People still have the same story, the one where they get born and they do stuff and they die, but now the story means something different to what it meant before." (Gaiman, 2005, p. 296)

I was raised in a cult, and the wallpaper of my life has changed drastically over time. The collection of pages spread before you now, this story-thesis, is a collection of stories about my journey from cult member to the place in life I am now, stories about those stories, and stories about the people who lived or read them, talked about them, and were changed by the tellings. Most importantly, the goal of this story-thesis is to illustrate how the process of story-making and -telling changes how we interpret our identities and our lifeworlds. I argue that the stories that we share change our identities, and I also argue that how we perceive our identity and the identities of others affects the stories that we share.

My story-thesis is organized into several chapters. Chapter 1, "Framing the Story", explores philosophical frameworks and communication theories that create the context from which I live and work. Usually academic authors privilege one theory or framework over

another, communicating to the reader that there are neat gridlines that separate one thought structure from the next, that one theory is more important than another. The structure employed here is more organic. My literature review grew and changed as I read and wrote and labored with this project. I found that in some moments Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) is my favored lens, and I sometimes choose a postmodern lens that Foucault might have used. Often, I choose several lenses, and I imagine how Foucault, Pearce, and Anzaldúa, for example, would negotiate a meaning together.

The trouble with and blessing offered by this project has been its ever-shifting nature. Imagine a child sitting by a window and playing with a large old-fashioned wood and glass kaleidoscope. Imagine the child turning it around and turning herself around, over and over, every time in a new angle of sunlight, every time in a new position on the window seat. Imagine the wonder she feels as every breath and movement alters what she sees. This is one metaphor applicable to this project: theories are my breath, and methods are the movements I make.

My literature review begins with Bakhtin's heteroglossia. I recognize that many ideas, many voices, meld, build upon another, and/or interweave to construct the constructs that shape my lifeworld. A literature review is simply a way of acknowledging the many voices that have contributed to shaping a field of inquiry. In the case of this literature review, the many voices discussed dance with one another in

sometimes unconventional ways. However, this dance is the paradigm upon which my story-thesis is built. My framework is an ever-shifting heteroglossia.

The parts of my framework can most easily be understood as the parts of a framed picture. If heteroglossia is the frame as a whole, then postmodernism is the most basic element of my framework; it is the glue that holds the pieces of the frame together. Next, CMM is discussed because it is the communication perspective employed throughout this story-thesis and throughout my life. CMM is the glass that covers the picture. Out of CMM emerges LUUUTT, or stories *Lived*, *Untold stories*, *Unheard stories*, *Unknown stories*, stories *Told*, and story *Telling* (italics added). LUUUTT leads to an exploration of the nature and power of story-telling as perceived by Pratchett and also Bormann. LUUUTT, Pratchett's narrative causality, and Bormann's fantasy-theme analysis interconnect to create the sides of the frame. Last, Anzaldúa's idea of Borderlands is explained. Borderlands is where I live and where I work. All of the lenses that I use are used here, in my Borderlands. Borderlands is the backing on the frame; it is the foundation upon which everything else rests. The picture inside the frame? This is the story-thesis.

The second chapter, "Creating and Using My Toolbox: An Experiment in Mixing Interdisciplinary Methods", explains the varied methods and disciplines from which I created my own set of tools. In

this chapter, each method is described as a component of the toolbox itself, which is autoethnography. Every method in my toolbox assists me in opening up new territories for me to explore and new ways of articulating what I discover to you, my reader. First, autoethnography, memoir, and the beginning stages of this project are discussed. Next, the interviewing process that I used is described. Third, I explore how art-work is employed in this project as a way to reflect, analyze, and communicate about my experiences as both the researcher and the subject of this story-thesis.

The third chapter, “Memoirs, Hotseats, and Art-work”, includes three memoirs, which are the foundation of my story-thesis. These memoirs are arranged in chronological order. The first takes place during a religious meeting when I was five. The second details the period in my life when I was seventeen when I learned that I had been raised in a cult. The last took place recently and describes a conversation about spirituality between my son and me. After these memoirs are hotseats, or secondary memoirs, based on conversations between selected research partners and me. Last, Chapter Three includes art-work that I created as an additional layer of conversation about this story-thesis.

The last chapter, “The Shifting Kaleidoscope: Immediate Outcomes, Theoretical Connections, and Symbolic Divergence”, reflects upon the process of this project. My artist-teacher-researcher self comments upon what I have learned and how I have changed through the course of co-

creating this story-thesis. I then connect the outcomes of this project to the larger theoretical context. Last, a new area of study, symbolic divergence, is described and related to communication, identity, and Borderlands.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: FRAMING THE STORY OR "All right stop! Collaborate and listen"</b> .....	1
<b>The Genesis of My Story-thesis</b> .....	1
<b>Framing My Story-thesis: A Literature Review</b> .....	4
Listening to Many Voices .....	4
The Context of Postmodernism .....	5
Coordinated Management of Meaning and our Lifeworlds.....	8
Narrative Causality .....	11
Fantasy-theme.....	12
Borderlands.....	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: CREATING AND USING MY TOOLBOX: AN EXPERIMENT IN MIXING INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODS</b> .....	21
<b>Methods: Using Many Concepts</b> .....	22
Autoethnography .....	23
Specific Ethnographic Methods Employed.....	25
<b>The Process of My Story-thesis: Using an Autoethnographic Lens, Memoirs, Interviews, and Art-work</b> .....	28
Step One: Therapy .....	28
Step Two: Practice .....	29
<i>Angela's Ashes: The Complexities of Writing and Sharing Memoir</i> .....	31
Step Three: Memoirs .....	36
Step Four: Interviews and Hotseats.....	38
Interviews as Ethical Dialogue .....	39
Step Five: Art-work as Reflective Emotion Work and Continued Dialogue .....	46
<b>CHAPTER THREE: MEMOIRS, HOTSEATS, ART-WORK, ANALYSES</b> .....	49
Memoir One.....	50
Memoir Two .....	56
Memoir Three .....	62
<b>The Hotseats</b> .....	69
Pre-hotseat: "And so it goes..." .....	69
Hotseat One: Mom .....	72
Hotseat Two: Dad .....	82
Hotseat Three: Scott, Karen, and Teri .....	91
<i>Part One</i> .....	91
<i>Part Two</i> .....	98
<i>Part Three</i> .....	103
Hotseat Four: Amanda.....	113
Post-Hotseats: Beginning to Process .....	125
<b>CHAPTER FOUR:</b>	

<b>DISCUSSIONS OF THE SHIFTING KALEIDOSCOPE: IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES, THEORETICAL CONNECTIONS, AND SYMBOLIC DIVERGENCE</b> .....	128
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A .....	147
Appendix B .....	148
Appendix C .....	149
Appendix D .....	150
Appendix E .....	151
Appendix F .....	154
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	155
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE</b>	

**CHAPTER ONE:**

**FRAMING THE STORY**

**OR**

***“All right stop! Collaborate and listen!”***

## **The Genesis of My Story-thesis**

Because this is an autoethnography, and because this story-thesis is part of a longer conversation, it is appropriate to share the history of this project and the context in which it was written. I started this project nearly three years ago when I attended my first NCA (National Communication Association) conference in Chicago. My father, husband, and I drove to Chicago for a one-day excursion. While Dad and Scott ran around the museums of Chicago, I ran from hotel to hotel, panel to panel, doing what Cheryl Crow has called “getting high on intellectualism” (Crow, 1996). The first panel that I attended acted as a bifurcation point in my journey as an academic and as a person. At an 8:00 a.m. Ethnography Division panel, Rachel Williams-Smith offered a presentation of her autoethnographic dissertation, which “...examines the unique challenges of adaptation from an isolated religious subculture to the broader social and cultural milieu” (Williams-Smith, 2007). Williams-Smith had been raised in a different religious group than the one of my childhood, but I identified with her pain, her struggle, her courage. She and I spoke briefly after the panel concluded. We bonded immediately over our similar experiences and agreed on a time to engage in a longer conversation after the panels were over for the day. That evening, we shared stories, we hugged, we cried, and we wondered where the other scholars like us are and why there is so little autoethnographic conversation in our discipline about the dramatic identity issues involved

in the lives of those who experience living in and/or leaving cults. Indeed, at the time of the writing of this literature review, hers is the only paper I have been able to locate within our discipline that addresses the topic. As Dad, Scott, and I sat in the cab of Dad's truck on the drive home, I shared Rachel's story. Dad and Scott both agreed that I was "on to something", as I remember Scott saying. Dad patted my knee and said with a smile, "Well, this is great, honey. This sounds great."

Thus began this project. For the rest of my graduate education, I wondered how this article or that book or this theory could be used as a way to articulate, explore, and understand my experiences as a cult member and my journey of constructing an identity as an ex-cult member. I became overwhelmed with possibilities, and I almost gave up because I felt angry and alone, lost in a scholarly investigation without a map to guide me. One day, my husband, children, and I were singing along to Vanilla Ice in the car, and I suddenly got it: the point is not to discuss using a map; no map currently exists. No, the purpose of my thesis is to illustrate my map, bringing together all of the narrative paths that have led me to where I am, so that I can then offer the map to others, adding to conversations about the intersections among identity transformation and dialogue. Reflecting on Vanilla Ice's song, I played with the knowledge and experiences that I have gained in graduate school and worked to create a framework that utilizes a multitude of voices.

## **Framing My Story-thesis: A Literature Review**

### Listening to Many Voices

Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia is interwoven into every aspect of my story-thesis. Heteroglossia, or the many voices, refers to the aspects of language that are centrifugal in nature (Bakhtin, 1981). While the "True Word" encapsulates language that expresses hegemonic ideas and is centripetal, heteroglossia offers dissonance. Bakhtin wrote, "Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification to go forward" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). According to Bakhtin, every speech act participates both centripetally and centrifugally. Lifeworlds are co-constructed by the dialectic, and without the dialectic, there is, in fact, no life because there is no conversation.

This perception of dialogue provides scholars of communication with opportunities for examining how we participate in the construction of as well as the deconstruction of hegemony within our social worlds. Within this story-thesis, as within my life, I am interested in listening carefully to the voices that I use and that are used around me. I am also interested in exploring how the interplay of centripetal and centrifugal forces hinders or assists me in constructing an empowering lifeworld. To study this dialectic, I choose to see myself as a character in my own

story. To study myself and my story, I draw back and locate myself within a larger social and scholarly context.

### The Context of Postmodernism

Narrators and characters in stories always have a frame of reference. As the author and character in these stories, and a communication scholar, I am situated in a postmodern world, and I am a postmodern thinker. Thus a brief discussion of my perception of postmodernism is pertinent here. Grenz (1996) offers definitions of modernity and postmodernity. In contrast to the milieu in which I operate, modernity is a philosophy that traces its roots to the eighteenth century and the time of the Enlightenment project. During this time, scientists and philosophers argued that as humans, we are capable of discovering how the universe is ordered and how we may gain control over it. Modernists believe in a single truth, a rational world, and self-determined, rational people. Modernists also believe that we are capable of viewing the world through dispassionate eyes. Last, modernists believe that knowledge is always good. For the purposes of this story-thesis, the modernist facets of the existence of an external, objective Truth and the existence of an autonomous, acontextual self are most important because they contrast so definitely with my frame of reference, postmodernism.

Postmodernism is built upon much different ideas. Grenz (1996) argues that postmodernism was first birthed by Nietzsche in the late

1800's but did not gain great momentum until the second half of the twentieth century. Postmodernists believe that knowledge is co-created through discourse. For example, Michel Foucault, a postmodernist of the twentieth century, argues that there is a difference between language and discourse. A succinct explanation of Foucault's perception of the difference between language and discourse is offered by Grenz, "Language' recognizes itself *as* the world; 'discourse,' in contrast, sees itself as *representing* the world. The sole function of discourse is to be a transparent representation of things and ideas standing outside it" (1996, pp. 128-129, italics in original text).

One form of discourse, according to Foucault, is the study of history. According to Foucault, history is not the objective accounting of past events; rather, it is a way of making sense of the present by privileging some past events over others and by making sense of those events in the context of the present. According to Grenz, Foucault viewed history as "... the study of the unfolding of the self through time" (Grenz, 1996, p. 130). Foucault would have seen this project as a history, a choosing of particular events followed by a sense-making of my self's past and present through contemporary discourse about those events.

Another postmodern theorist worth noting here is Richard Rorty. Rorty subscribed to a postmodern pragmatism, sometimes called neopragmatism (Grenz, 1996; Pieterse, 2002). In specific, Rorty

perceives the primary importance of communication in reality making and maintaining. According to Grenz, Rorty "... declares that statements are 'true' insofar as they cohere with the entire system of beliefs – the 'vocabulary' – that we hold. The aim of inquiry, in turn, is to make our beliefs and desires coherent" (Grenz, 1996, p. 154). Rorty was a relativist, meaning that he believed that "truth becomes in essence truth *for us*" (Grenz, 1996, p. 155, italics in original). Rorty's insights into the individual and communal search for truth conflict with any notions that we are able to find or create concrete, absolute, timeless truths (Grenz, 1996). Instead, Rorty argues that truth is created and interpreted within the context of our own personal histories (Grenz, 1996).

Rorty uses the term "strong poet" to describe those individuals who study their personal histories and who seek out ways to self-create. Self-creation refers to the process of interpreting individual truth through dialogue with others (Grenz, 1996; Pieterse, 2002). Rorty's strong poets eschew the molds fitted to them by societal norms and reliance on supernatural powers (Pieterse, 2002). Strong poets seek to discover and nurture individual identities that work for them. Pieterse asserts, "For Rorty, self-reliance becomes an ethical act of profound courage, because it chooses for human solidarity [sic], freedom, and self-determination against the false security of the necessary, the noncontingent, and the transcendent" (Pieterse, 2002, n.p.). Through the act of self-reliance, strong poets create identities for themselves. Pieterse quotes Rorty:

[Strong poets] engage in projects of self-creation, reweaving the inherited scripts of their lives so as to "give birth" to themselves. Facing the terror of being merely a "copy" or "replica," strong poets continually redescribe the lives they have inherited, making the past bear the impress of their creative self-assertion; in this way, the strong poet will be able to say with Nietzsche, 'Thus I willed it'. (Pieterse, 2002, n.p.)

Rorty acknowledges that engaging life as a strong poet is uncomfortable, but he argues that when we encounter life as a strong poet, we perceive that identity, community, and reality is created among people rather than created by nature or a god. Rorty stresses that, "... what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging to together against the dark, not our hope of getting it right" (qtd. in Grenz, 1996, p. 157). Thus strong poets are self-determined, yet they are also community members and co-creators.

### Coordinated Management of Meaning and our Lifeworlds

The postmodern outlook argues that identity, truth, and reality are all made by humans through dialogue and are also all dynamic. Both Foucault's and Rorty's perspectives are heuristic, meaning that they are based in action and personal experience. Rorty's concept of interaction in which "the 'other' is not really other but is actually a moment in one's own becoming" (qtd in Pieterse, 2002, n.p.) dovetails elegantly with Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), a theory co-constructed by Pearce and Cronen. According to Pearce, CMM asks us to consider what we are making together through our communication practices (Pearce, 2005). Pearce has written, "The events and objects of the social world

are not only made in communication, the process is one of co-construction, of being made by the conjoint action of multiple persons” (Pearce, 2005, p. 43). The idea of a co-constructed reality is explained by Pearce’s use of the concept of lifeworlds.

Pearce (2007) relates that communication is the foundation of our lifeworld. “Lifeworld” is a term commonly credited to Habermas. According to Habermas, our lifeworlds constitute everything we know and how we operate that knowledge (Scambler, 2001). Campos (2007, p. 405) states that Habermas’s idea of *Lebenswelt* relates to the perceptions of the individual and might be better translated into English as the “lived world”. We co-create lifeworlds over time; it is a process that has no clear beginning or end as conversations meld and bifurcate (Pearce, 2007). In part, according to Pearce and Pearce, a communication perspective perceives that the lifeworlds in which we live are “made, not found” (2003, para. 13). Sampson wrote, “All that is central to human nature and human life – and here I mean mind, self, and society itself – is to be found in processes that occur between people in the public world of our everyday lives” (qtd in Pearce, 2007, pp. 10-11). Pearce perceives life as a process of “persons-in-conversation” and exorts us to communicate in ways that co-creates “better social worlds” (Pearce & Pearce, 2003, para. 7; Pearce, 2005, p. 50). Persons-in-conversation engage in “episodes”, which Pearce (2007, p. 131) has defined as “sequences of speech acts, punctuated with a beginning and an end, and

united by a story”. One of the ways that persons-in-conversation engaged in “episodes” can create better social worlds is to consider all people’s lives and interactions as parts of stories that are “unfinished”, “contextual”, “biased”, and “valid” (Pearce, 2005, p. 50). A discussion of LUUUTT contributes to a deeper understanding of this action-based narrative perspective.

LUUUTT offers a particular lens for understanding how lifeworlds and co-constructed, maintained, and deconstructed through the communication process. LUUUTT stands for stories *Lived*, *Untold* stories, *Unheard* stories, *Unknown* stories, stories *Told*, and story *Telling* (italics added) (Pearce, 2005). Pearce argues that we share stories that are safe but deny to ourselves and others stories that we “hate or fear” (2007, p. 211). Like Bakhtin, Pearce perceives that dialectical relationships exist in how we employ language. Pearce argues that the choices that we make – such as what stories we share, what stories we ignore, how we story-tell – are vital components of our relationships (Pearce, 2007). When the stories that we live and share differ too greatly, we are faced with a choice: to change the story or to change our telling of it. This dissonance and how we choose to cope with it strongly affect how we interact within our lifeworlds. Pearce argues that empowering lifeworlds are only co-constructed when persons-in-conversation engage in dialogue, which means that, “... each participant remains in the tension between standing your ground and being profoundly open to the

others” (2007, p. 215). The primacy of stories and the dynamic part they play in our lives is echoed by many authors, including contemporary novelist and philosopher Terry Pratchett.

### Narrative Causality

Pratchett is aware that stories in themselves wield influence and has developed his own theory called narrative causality. In a 2000 article in the journal *Folklore*, Pratchett reflects on his writing career and how he views stories in general. In the article, he shares an excerpt from one of his novels, *Witches Abroad*, that illustrates how he views the nature of story:

Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling... stories, twisting and blowing through the darkness.

And their existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a mountainside. And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper.

This is called the theory of narrative causality and it means that a story, once started, *takes a shape*. It picks up all the vibrations of all the other workings of that story that have ever been.

This is why history keeps on repeating all the time.

So a thousand heroes have stolen from the gods. A thousand wolves have eaten grandmother, a thousand princesses have been kissed. A million unknowing actors have moved, unknowing, through the pathways of story.

It is now *impossible* for the third and youngest son of any king, if he should embark on a quest which had so far claimed his older brothers, *not* to succeed.

Stories don't care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats. Or, if you prefer to think of it like this: stories are a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself. (pp. 166-167, italics included in original text)

The above excerpt illustrates Pratchett's theory of narrative causality, which refers to the human need to make sense of the world through story (2000, p. 166). Pratchett explains narrative causality as "the idea that there are 'story shapes' into which human history, both large scale and at the personal level, attempts to fit" (2000, p. 166). Pratchett (2000, p. 166) eloquently argues, "We may have begun as *homo sapiens* but we have become *homo narrans*, story-making man." While Pratchett may argue that we are likely to attempt to fit into a story-shape, Bormann may argue that we are able to reify stories and our shared realities through stories, but we are also able to challenge and even change stories, and thus shared realities.

### Fantasy-theme

The fantasy-theme method is a useful lens for understanding how stories influence our lives and also how we can change those stories. Bormann's method is commonly used in rhetorical criticism. Bormann's fantasy-theme method is useful when a rhetorical critic wishes to explore a group's perception of reality and how a rhetor affirms or disputes that reality. Foss (Fantasy-theme criticism, 2009) cites Bormann's work as seminal because it brings together the theory of symbolic convergence and the method of fantasy-theme criticism. Bormann reflects in a 1982

article that he developed fantasy-theme analysis from the small group work of Bales as a way to "... provide a much richer explanation of the connection between message content and audience consciousness" (pp. 289-290). According to Foss, two principles undergird fantasy-theme analysis: 1) "communication creates reality," and 2) symbols can "converge" to create a shared or group reality (Foss, *Fantasy-theme criticism*, 2009, p. 97). In his 1972 article, Bormann explains, "Group fantasizing correlates with individual fantasizing and extrapolates to speaker-audience fantasizing and to the dream merchants of the mass media" (p. 396). I argue that this method is also useful when studying an individual's process of emigrating from one group to another because it assists a scholar in understanding how shared realities are co-created, challenged, and changed.

The concept of the fantasy-theme is the basic element of Bormann's method. According to Bormann, a fantasy-theme is a group's collective vision for an event that occurred in the past or an event that will take place in the future (1972). Bormann refers to the work of small-groups scholar Bales when he argues that a fantasy-theme may also relate to "... repressed psychological problems of some or all of the members of group" (Bormann, 1972, p. 397). Bormann expands on the work of Bales and his colleagues by arguing that there is a reflexive relationship between group fantasies and what is represented in the mass media. These "rhetorical visions", as Bormann refers to them, are

part of “fantasy chains”, which are the pathways of shared beliefs that run among individuals, groups, and large audiences (1972, pp. 396-400). Bormann argues, “The explanatory power of the fantasy chain analysis lies in its ability to account for the development, evolution, and decay of dramas that catch up groups of people and change their behavior” (1972, p. 399). This type of analysis is an excellent tool for exploring a culture’s shared attitudes regarding women’s roles.

To explore fantasy-themes, Bormann proposes that a critic study the dramatic nature of the fantasy, which means that the critic takes into consideration themes of setting, character, and action. According to Foss (Fantasy-theme criticism, 2009), setting themes describe the place and time in which the action takes place. Character themes describe the agents, their motives, and their characteristics (Fantasy-theme criticism, p. 99). Action themes are related to what Foss terms as “plotlines” and refer to the actions of the characters (Fantasy-theme criticism, p. 99). Clearly, fantasy-theme analysis is based on the elements of drama. For a fantasy-theme to emerge, the individual worldviews of the participants in the drama intersect, creating a “fantasy type” (Foss, p. 100). When a group shares a fantasy type, they together form a “rhetorical vision”, which is a shared conglomeration of the fantasy types within a rhetorical community (Foss, p. 100). Foss argues, “... the motives for action for a rhetorical community reside in its rhetorical vision...” and explains, “Actions that make little sense to someone outside of a rhetorical vision

make perfect sense when viewed in the context of that vision...” (Foss, pp. 100-101). Therefore, a rhetorical critic understands a fantasy-theme and the motives of the rhetorical community through the dramatic elements of setting, character, and action. Through recalling, telling, and analyzing my own story, I use fantasy-theme analysis as a way to understand how the contexts, characters, and events in my life have led me to what I consider to be my own Borderlands.

### Borderlands

Anzaldúa’s notion of Borderlands is the final concept that will be discussed in this literature review because for me it is a culmination of the ideas that have been outlined here. More importantly, it is the articulation of where I choose to live as a scholar and a person. My lifeworld is most effectively represented by the concept of Borderlands. Anzaldúa writes, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 3). Anzaldúa’s Borderlands has been defined as a place of transition, an “... ongoing, evolving process rather than a static state, condition, or place” (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999 p. 105). One term in particular, “*neplanta*”, thrums within me for it means, according to Foss et al, “torn between ways” (Foss et al, 1999, p. 105). Further illustration of Borderlands can be found in Anzaldúa’s poetry.

Anzaldúa wrote in *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a book co-edited with Moraga (1981):

I am always surprised by the image that my white and non-Chicano friends have of me, surprised at how much they *do not* know me, at how I do not allow them to know me. They have substituted the negative picture the white culture has painted of my race with a highly romanticized, idealized image. “You’re strong, my friends said, “a mountain of strength.” (p. 204, italics in original text)

She went on to write:

*I’m not invincible, I tell you. My skin’s as fragile as a baby’s. I’m brittle bones and human, I tell you. I’m a broken arm. You’re a razor’s edge, you tell me. Shock them shitless... Spit in their eye and never cry. Oh broken angel, throw away your cast, mend your wing.* (p. 204, italics in original text)

These words that reflect feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and the mystery of connecting personal and social identity turned my world upside down when I first read them in an undergraduate class over a decade ago; I learned that semester that there were women like me, women who lived with feet and hands tangled in multiple realities. However, opening myself to Anzaldúa’s notion of Borderlands entailed a tangled emotional process. The tempest within me and the current I felt suddenly flowing through my very bones almost tore me apart. Anzaldúa wrote, “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds” (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1987, p. 205). My self became for a time a battlefield between the lived oppression of the cult of my

childhood and the personal empowerment I sought as an adult. At first, I tried to claw my way toward breath and safety by defending my past. In class discussions and papers, I defended hegemonic paradigms.

Anzaldúa indicted people I recognized, men and women whose words I had been trained to obey quickly and without thought. Her poems, stories, and theories illuminated the darkness of the life I had lived as a young girl. I felt at first judged, misunderstood, and so I fought with classmates and professors about the validity of Anzaldúa's ideas. I hated Anzaldúa's work, and my emotional reaction began to take a toll. For months, I grappled with anger and depression. Through academic writing and conversations with professors, who were my only mentors at the time, I navigated my emotions and found a certain peace in my own Borderlands, a place that is well represented by Pearce's definition of dialogue.

With the commitment to face my self and my past and discover new ways of encountering my self and the world around me came a love for Anzaldúa. I allowed her poems and her concept of Borderlands to illuminate a path to healing. I ceased to struggle in the river of her words, and I learned to breathe while immersed in the streams of her ideas. This opening to another space within my own Borderlands was furthered through an art project assigned to my classmates and myself in the literature course, a drawing of Anzaldúa's notion of Borderlands. I used only a pencil, and I sketched myself standing in a wide stretch of

land bound on each side by barbed wire. The barbed wire on the side of my past signified my growing sense of urgency to never return the land of my origin. The barbed wire on the side of my future symbolized my ignorance of how to move forward and discover a new way to be in my own skin and in the world. In this picture, there was no sign of safety, but there was a place of hope: my Borderland was the lightest part of the drawing, and my face was turned upward toward the only ray of sunlight in a storm-battered sky.

The appeal of the notion of living on the edge of multiple realities has stayed with me, and I have found that postmodern theorists, Pearce, and Anzaldúa are not alone in her appreciation of borders. Authors from diverse academic backgrounds understand the worth of discovering and using border places as opportunities for change. In the Introduction to the book *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, Mitchell and Marriage wrote:

Real understanding of the other does not come easily in conversations. All too often it is not until the breakdown of communication that any serious thought is invested in repairing and enhancing conversation between different groups. ... Borders can often be places of tension, conflict and even creative change...”  
(2003, p. 2)

Mitchell and Marriage referred to borders as places between groups, but as I have illustrated, borders exist in many dimensions: between individuals, between past and future, between identities within the self. In my experience, Borderlands often occur in simultaneous dimensions

concurrently, becoming tensely pulsating, permeable layers, becoming hopeful chaos. hooks has affirmed this idea of power existing on the edges. Foss et al quoted hooks's work when they wrote, "... marginality is not a standpoint 'one wishes to lose... It offers one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds'" (qtd in Foss et al, p. 82).

Thus choosing to live in a Borderlands allows me to live in a state of meta-reality. I embrace co-constructing my world with those around me, and my Borderlands is a place of the moment, suspended between what was and what will be. It is for me a way of enacting the ever-present tense of what Pearce and Pearce (2003) have termed "persons-in-conversation" (para. 7). This means that I see myself and my relationships as dynamic. Living in the Borderlands is also a way to enact tenets that Pearce has suggested as ways of creating "better social worlds" (Pearce, 2005, p. 50). In part, these include considering seeing people's lives and interactions as parts of stories that are "unfinished", "contextual", "biased", and "valid" (Pearce, 2005, p. 50). Possibly most pertinent to me as I continue to live in the Borderlands and to resist a positivist worldview is this tenet: "Develop the ability to move among perspectives, understanding situations from the perspective of other people involved and from the perspective of observers as well as from your own, first-person, perspective" (Pearce, 2005, p. 51). In other words, engage in continuous dialogue. Possibly because of the depth of

my submersion in the doctrine of my childhood, my development of this ability is still conscious and requires continuous effort.

My walk in the Borderlands has been both painful and exhilarating, but never boring. It has been almost ten years since I have discovered Anzaldúa. It has been sixteen years since my mother affirmed that I was raised in a cult. It has been twenty-two years since my parents left that religious community, but it has been only a decade since I ceased to commune and worship with people who were also part of that organization. Still I grapple with feeling socially ungainly and like I want to seek stability in a positivist Truth. Maintaining my Borderlands, struggling against vacillating only between the dogmatic past and an authority-approved future, causes me both anguish and exhilaration, and it permeates every area of my life. It would be so simple to find comfort in the rules I followed as a child because I continue to wrestle with sensing the eyes of a rigid and judgmental god upon me. However, I choose to consistently challenge myself by challenging what comes most naturally. To do this, I seek out opportunities for authentic communication that can help me continue to sustain my place in the Borderlands. The next section details how I used this story-thesis as a way to explore how engaging in story-sharing with others and with myself has assisted me in constructing a Borderland identity.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**CREATING AND USING MY TOOLBOX:**  
**AN EXPERIMENT IN MIXING INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODS**

## **Methods: Using Many Concepts**

At the core of my story-thesis is the use of tools from multiple disciplines. Bal argued that researching from an interdisciplinary standpoint is based in concepts rather than methods (Irwin & Kind, 2005). Irwin and Kind write, “Concepts are flexible, dynamic, and intersubjective locations through which close analysis renders new understandings and meanings” (2005, p. 898). I chose methods and ideas from various disciplines because doing so aligns with my theme of living in and working from the Borderlands. Every method that I employed is based in the use of my self and my story as subjects of exploration. The following methods section details how I combined methods from three disciplines – communication studies, theater, and anthropology – to construct a methodological framework. I chose these methods because they act as an expansion of my original ingress into a Borderlands. As described in the literature review, when I encountered the idea of Borderlands, I used creative and scholarly writing, talking, and art-making as ways to make sense of and move through my experiences; the methodological choices made for this project act as a continuation of the conversation that I have been having with my self and others about my experiences as a member of a cult and a citizen of a Borderlands.

### Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a multi-layered method that employs both social science and creative writing. It connects well with the literature

discussed previously in that it is based in story-making and -sharing. Ellis argues that stories are so much a part of lived experience that it is essential that they also become part of research methodology (2003). An additional connection is that Autoethnography assists researchers in exploring facets of LUUUTT. Ellis shares about her experience as an autoethnographer, “I write when my world falls apart or the meaning I have constructed for myself is in danger of doing so” (Ellis, 2003, p. 33). This statement reflects the idea that when there is a significant disparity between stories lived and stories told, persons-in-conversation can either change the story or the telling. Autoethnography can act as a method for changing both because, according to Ellis, it is a way of “... writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2003, p. 37).

Autoethnography is a useful tool for exploring the communication process as a whole. Spry (2001, p. 710) defines autoethnography as “... a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts.” Autoethnography asks researchers to investigate communication events in authentically personal ways. I chose it as the foundation and connecting thread for my methods because it matches my goal as a scholarly story-teller: we live in and through stories. Sharing stories and dialoguing about them through the lenses of our discipline serve to create new theories as well as create better social worlds.

As a framework for research, autoethnography is useful because it allows the researcher to deconstruct the traditional idea that any research is objective in nature. Rather, it privileges the voice and experiences of the researcher so that the researcher becomes both the subject and the agent. Additionally, I have discovered that autoethnography presents opportunities for processing my own development as a person and my interactions within my lifeworld. Ellis writes that autoethnography insists that authors forefront their own experiences with and their connections to the topic being researched (Ellis, 2003). Moreover, Ellis shares that autoethnographers may use their whole selves – the five senses, insights, goals, and fears, for example – in their writing. Ellis shares the words of Richardson, “I write because I want to find something out.’ ‘I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it.’... ‘Writing is a method of knowing” (qtd in Ellis, 2003, pp. 170-171). Autoethnographic writing contributes to conversations within the self and across disciplines.

This liberation of the researcher from at least partial observer to full participant allows me as a researcher to acknowledge my agency in the conversation of my research as well as how the process of research affects me. Richardson writes, “How we are expected to write affects what we can write about,” (qtd in Ellis, 2003, pp. 170-171). One of the reasons that autoethnography is an important method is that it brings scholarly validity to the research experience of me, the subject-self.

According to Ellis, autoethnography is a form of feminist scholarship. Autoethnography is a form of feminist scholarship. Ellis posits that autoethnography incorporates individual experiences and beliefs into the research process (2003). Gilligan (1993) argues that women's voices – their own perceptions of their experiences – have long been silenced and discounted. She asserts that women's development has been measured in masculine terms. Thus women's thinking is often equated with children's thinking (Gilligan, 1993). Autoethnography invites authors to own their experiences and also to honor the experiences of others, shifting research writing from being about "it" to being about "I", which, for example, allows women to share their own stories in their own voices. These facets of autoethnography are, according to Gilligan, essential for the creation of psychological theories about women's development that make sense for in the context of women's lives.

#### Specific Ethnographic Methods Employed

Ethnographic writing comes in many forms. In this project, I used a mixture of three depictions of ethnography: impressionist ethnography, dialogic anthropology, and meta-autoethnography. First, impressionist ethnography is a qualitative method that aligns with the postmodern perspective (Ellis, 2003). This type of ethnographic inquiry privileges the heteroglossia involved in story-making, -telling, and meaning-making (Ellis, 2003). Impressionist ethnography argues that there is no objective reality but that meanings are co-constructed in particular situations

among participants who themselves are acting from particular situations (Ellis, 2003). Impressionist ethnographers are “interested in learning about a particular scene, person, event” (Ellis, 2003, p. 361). Last, typical forms of impressionist ethnography include autoethnography, art-work, photography, and reflexive interviewing (Ellis, 2003) – all of which are methods included in this story-thesis. I chose impressionist ethnography because it allowed me to explore LUUUTT with others through dialogue and with myself through art-work, photography, therapy, and the process of writing.

The next ethnographic layer is dialogic anthropology. Collins discusses its definitions and uses. According to Dwyer (qtd in Collins, 2010, p. 241), dialogic anthropology employs an egalitarian mode of conversation in fieldwork interviewing. This means that both the ethnographer and the interviewee direct and participate in the conversation equally – both asking and answering questions. Dialogic anthropology also entails acknowledging the ethnographer’s personal situation. The ethnographer is aware of and writes about sensory, emotional, and personal experiences that contribute to the co-construction of meaning-making in the field and in the final written outcome. Third, dialogic anthropology necessitates the participation of research participants throughout the study and not simply in fieldwork itself. For example, Collins notes the practice of sending material to research participants for their feedback about the content of the write-

up. I chose dialogic anthropology as a layer in this method because it asks that researchers remember that many voices construct a story, and that all of those voices are equally important to the meanings that are co-constructed. As Collins notes, “By foregrounding the ethnographic self as a resource, I hope I make it clear that this practice is a moral as well as methodological necessity” (Collins, 2010, p. 243).

The last, and most explicit, form of ethnography used in my story-thesis is what Carolyn Ellis has termed meta-autoethnography. In 2009, Ellis wrote about this method for the first time in her research novel, *Revision: Autoethnographic Reflections on Life and Work*. In short, Ellis defines meta-autoethnography as “story of the stories” (2009, p. 12). She writes that meta-autoethnography allows an autoethnographer to “... re-present, re-examine, and re-vision...” previous work (Ellis, 2009, p. 12). Ellis drew on an idea communicated by Birkerts when she wrote:

My goal is to model ‘a way to reflectively make sense of experience - using hindsight to follow the thread back into the labyrinth’ and to move readers to ‘contemplate similar ways of accessing [their] own lives. (Ellis, 2009, p. 13; Birkerts qtd. in Ellis, 2009, p. 13)

Ellis argues that we write autoethnography from specific situations of time and purpose and to specific audiences. She argues, “... to persist in revising the stories that we have told over the course of our lives opens us to the narrative challenge to continue to compose a life story for ourselves that is worth living” (Ellis, 2009, p. 13). I was not able to incorporate all of Ellis’ meta-autoethnographic method due to time

constraints. Her 2009 work is a meta-autoethnography of her 2006 book The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography, and this story-thesis needs to be completed in less than three years.

However, I have adapted aspects of Ellis' vision of meta-autoethnography into my own story-thesis because it asks that I write, dialogue, reflect, consider how experiences shift my perspective of memory, and write again (Ellis, 2009) – all for the sake of co-creating better social worlds.

### **The Process of my Story-thesis: Using an Autoethnographic Lens, Memoirs, Interviews, and Art-work**

#### Step One: Therapy

Over the past two years, I have been working on remembering and writing about my life, specifically about family dynamics, critical moments that I consider to be formative of my identity, and my relationship with faith and religious institutions. Before I started systematically thinking about or writing about my life, I began working with a therapist on a regular basis. For over a decade, I have been in therapy more often than not, and there was a brief period several years ago when I was an out-patient at a local hospital's stress center because of a recent emotional trauma that instigated a chain reaction of what I would term psychological breakdowns. Because of my past and my medical history, I felt that the most productive and safest way to purposefully explore my experiences was with the support of a psychologist.

When I met my current therapist, she asked me why I felt that I needed assistance. I succinctly summarized my childhood, my struggles with spirituality, religion, and codependence. Then, I told her that I was starting on my thesis. I explained that my thesis is about my being raised in a cult and that I felt it is a good idea that I have support from a counselor because there are whole patches of my life that I do not remember well. Yet, when a memory does surface, it is often a full-sensory experience that can catch me off guard and cause me to feel disoriented for days, weeks. My counselor agreed to work with me, understanding that part of my work with her would be dedicated to uncovering and analyzing my past. I see my therapist up to eight times a month, and though we often cover topics that do not explicitly relate to this project, I apply the concepts that we discuss to taking care of myself so that this project is what I intend it to be: interesting, useful to my discipline, and – more than anything – authentically and vulnerably written.

### Step Two: Practice

In preparation for this project, I completed two courses that I took specifically to assist me in writing both autoethnography and memoir well. First, I completed an independent study with my advisor that I nicknamed “Baby Thesis”. I read autoethnographic and ethnographic works and looked for connections between autoethnography and dialogic communication practices. I also practiced writing about my life

experiences living in, coming out of, and recovering from being raised in a cult. This project helped me connect autoethnography to CMM and Anzaldúa's Borderlands. With assistance from my advisor, John Parrish-Sprowl, and an ethnographer from another institution, I continued to revise the work until we all felt that it was solid enough to submit to the Ethnography Division of the National Communication Association's (NCA) annual conference. The paper was accepted for a panel presentation, and I presented it in New Orleans at the 2011 conference.

My purpose in presenting the paper at the national conference was to experience how my story and the framework that I used to understand and perform my story would be received by colleagues in my field. The response was varied, but expectedly so. One scholar interested in quantitative work was a little baffled by my purpose and by the notion of autoethnography. Scholars already interested in autoethnography and its possibilities gave me encouraging, even enthusiastic, feedback. The positive feedback felt wonderful, but it was the ambivalent response that I received that was the most useful. I want this project to transcend intradisciplinary arguments, and so a few months after the conference, I invited a quantitative scholar to be a part of my thesis committee.

Concurrent to revising my Baby Thesis and submitting it to NCA, I took a graduate-level creative writing seminar through my institution's English department that focused on memoir writing. I read memoir and wrote memoir and talked about memoir. Over the course of the term, I

became both more skeptical and enthusiastic about the art form of memoir and its possibilities for transforming how communication scholars explore, write about, and dialogue about communication events. Certainly, there are dilemmas raised by utilizing memoir in academic writing.

### Angela's Ashes: The Complexities of Writing and Sharing Memoir

Frank McCourt's famous memoir *Angela's Ashes* provides a platform for discussing truth and ethics in memoir. McCourt's account of his childhood and young adulthood has been called into question. According to a journalist from Limerick, the setting for McCourt's memoir, "Many of McCourt's childhood playmates and neighbours say the book is rife with factual errors, exaggerates the poverty and, most importantly, humiliates his contemporaries by branding them with various sexual transgressions and other so-called sins" (Hannan, 2000-2001). Hannan, who openly disparages McCourt, argues, "In Limerick city, the home of Frank McCourt's alleged miserable Catholic poverty stricken childhood, it is said that everybody loves the author except the people who know him and everybody loves *Angela's Ashes* except the people who know the truth" (Hannan, 2000-2001). According to Brennan, "Locals called him 'a conman and a hoaxer'" (Brennan, 2009). She goes on to claim, "Limerick locals, horrified at the squalid depiction of their town, counted a total of '117 lies or inaccuracies' in the 426-page book, that range from obscure details to wrongly accusing one local man

of being a Peeping Tom. They called for a boycott of the film of Angela's Ashes” (Brennan, 2009). According to Brennan, even McCourt acknowledged that at least moment never happened and also downplayed its importance, saying, “I can't get concerned with these things. ... I told my own story. I wrote about my situation, my family, my parents, that's what I experienced and what I felt... Some of them know what it was like. They choose to take offence. In other words, they're kidding themselves” (Brennan, 2009). Thus the honesty of McCourt’s account has been criticized and, at least to a certain extent, confirmed. On the other hand, McCourt argues that he did write a truth, even if it is not the preferred version.

Truth in memoir is a many-faceted topic. Larson argues, “The whole point for the memoirist is to resist falsification and, at the same time, be aware that narrative embellishment can take any writer over the edge” (2007, p. 108). Too, Birkerts posits that “The point – the glory...” of memoir is that it is based in “actual life” (2008, p. 190). With these statements, Larson and Birkerts acknowledge two important aspects of memoir writing. First, the author is to write what really happened. Second, when the author uses description and other devices to help the piece make sense to a reader, the author is in danger of writing fiction rather than memoir. Additionally, Larson argues that in a memoir, “... the memoirist seeks to know himself by individualizing that self” (2007, p. 162). Moreover, according to Hudgins, memoir is, “... the writer’s own

emotional, spiritual, and intellectual progress becomes the aesthetic progress of the book” (Hudgins qtd. in Larson, 2007, p. 111). According to these arguments, McCourt’s story is a novel rather than a memoir because McCourt is perceived as having privileged plot and scene – both fictional and historical - over discovery.

McCourt’s first memoir illustrates the power as well as the complexity of truth in memoir. Taking Larson’s and Hudgin’s perspectives, when a reader comes to question the truthfulness of a memoir and the credibility of the narrator, the memoir may lose its power to move the reader. Knowing that McCourt possibly fabricated one or more events in the book, the reader now questions other events, and eventually the whole book. The reader then wonders what was brought into the story as well as what was left out. Thus McCourt’s journey from childhood and into young adulthood becomes about events rather than, as Hudgins suggests it should be, about “emotional, spiritual, and intellectual progress”. However, the very definition of truth may be called into question. McCourt argues that his memoir is true, true for him. His argument points to a more relativistic perspective in which a person defines truth for her/himself and tells a story as it makes sense to her/him at the moment of the telling. This standpoint may explain why, even after all of the controversy surrounding the book, *Angela’s Ashes* continues to be a popular memoir.

Second, McCourt's childhood memoir highlights issues surrounding the notion of ethical memoir writing. Though it is popular, *Angela's Ashes* may not be ethical. McCourt has been judged for the way in which he depicts his mother and other characters in the book. Actor and fellow Limerickman Richard Harris stated in an interview that Angela McCourt, Frank McCourt's mother and a friend of Harris's, felt that her sons hated her and hoped for her death (Phelan, 2000). According to this article as well as others, McCourt hurt other people when his memoir was published (Brennan, 2009; Hannan, 2000-2001). Not only that, but some argue that he tarnished the reputation of the city of Limerick itself (Hannan, 2000-2001; Phelan, 2000). Like truth, ethics is a complex topic. Some memoirists call for a guideline, a way of knowing if a memoirist is conducting her/himself ethically. According to Larson, Hudgins argues that memoirists should "... hold ourselves to a standard that says how we remember, why we remember, and how our remembering affects our families and friends *matters* (2007, p. 112, italics included in original text). If we accept this standard for ethical memoir writing and also the accusations against McCourt as true, then McCourt's memoir is unethical. McCourt is reported to have said that he wrote his story as he remembered it, and he is not concerned with the opinions of others.

Again, as in the topic of truth, ethics is not an easy, yes-or-no topic. Ethics is about, as Larson's text states, standards. Standards are

not universal, and herein lies the problem. Ethics of privacy and motive are built upon standards like the ones proposed by Hudgins, which are culturally based. Thus how can any memoirist be ethical without creating a separate story for each culture in which the memoirist hopes to be published? We discussed in class two ways in which a memoirist can check her/his ethics and write a single memoir. The first, we discussed, is to realize that we live in a tell-all culture and that, at least in our culture, acts done in public are fair game for memoir. The second check point is asking other people who were there or who are familiar with the situation to read our memoir and talk about it with us. Because other people have separate memories and motives, neither strategy is failsafe, but both point toward a common theme: memoir is not about just the memoirist but about the memoirist's community as well.

McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* serves as an excellent example of how complex the topics of truth and ethics are in memoir writing. McCourt's memoir may or may not be truthful and ethical. Both truth and ethics, like a memoirist's tale itself, seem to be based in choices made moment by moment and *ex post facto* perceptions of those choices. Lasron's position makes the most sense to me; a memoirist should take time to consider her/his motives for writing what she/he is writing, her/his memories, and the unintended consequences of publishing those memories and reflections. I do not actually believe that a solipsistic viewpoint reflects the nature of reality even if I do feel alone and godlike

while I am engaged in the act of writing. The choices that memoirists make have far-reaching effects, most of them unimagined at the time of writing. McCourt's *Ashes* abides by many of the guidelines that my memoir-writing class set for "good memoir": the reader is brought into the story, all five senses aware of the situation; the narrator is believable because he is a saint and a sinner and everyone in between, the narrator is credible because he tells a unified story; the narrator provides a recognizable theme with which readers can identify. Most importantly, McCourt's first memoir provides a lesson for other memoirists: each memoir reflects at least one kind of truth and one kind of lie. The case of *Angela's Ashes* demonstrates the possibility that truth, lies, questionable ethics, and solid credibility may actually all be able to coexist in one text.

These two forms of practice – writing and presenting my Baby Thesis and engaging in a memoir-writing class – helped me consider how I could shape my story-thesis in ways that are powerful as well as ethical. The last three sections of the Methods chapter discusses how I wrote the memoirs, conducted the interviews, and reflected on the process of my story-thesis.

### Step Three: Memoirs

Writing memoir is not a simple task. Larson notes that there is always tension as the author to balances the necessities of writing what is remembered, recognizing that we remember differently at different stages in our lives, and also creating a coherent story that is engaging as

well as believable (Larson, 2007). He writes, “The point is to portray that which the memoirist sees when he looks in the mirror of the past: himself, living what he is remembering” (Larson, 2007, p. 62). I worked to write powerful memoirs by taking several steps, all of which have already been mentioned: writing the Baby Thesis; taking a class about writing memoir and, therefore, practicing writing memoir; and engaging in psychotherapy.

This last step is one that Larson explains is a way of bringing forward into our consciousness those memories that were hidden from our view (Larson, 2007). During my sessions in therapy, my counselor and I traced threads of memory and emotion, connecting moments, making meaning, and attending to physiological as well as psychological reactions. Between sessions, I immersed myself in the music, literature, and terminology of my past. I called my parents and my sister. We discussed shared memories and shadow-memories that I could not define but could only faintly feel. I asked them for confirmation and clarification, and we co-constructed coherent stories. Listening to the music from my childhood was the most powerful catalyst for me. I remembered more and also more clearly; my five senses often became overwhelmed, and I experienced moments of being a child again, participating in worship and song. At the suggestion of my therapist, I used deep breathing and centering exercises to slowly emerge from these intense discussions and immersion sessions. I used immersion as a way

to balance then with now, memory with present experience, past voice with present voice, all the time recognizing that, as Larson and Collins both note, memory and the act of remembering are never objective experiences (Larson, 2007; Collins, 2010). The art of memoir making is a personal and multi-layered experience.

#### Step Four: Interviews and Hotseats

My story-thesis incorporates an interview process. As mentioned by both Ellis and Collins (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, 2009; Collins, 2010), interviewing can be a powerful and even necessary tool in ethnographic research. Working from the ideas proposed in impressionist ethnography, dialogic anthropology, and meta-autoethnography, I searched for an interview practice that would allow me to interact with my co-conversationists in an egalitarian and spontaneous manner. What I discovered are two frames that worked well: postmodern interviewing and a technique used by Max Stafford-Clark, the director of the Joint Stock Theatre Company in England.

Postmodern interviewing was chosen because its emphasis is on the moment and the co-construction of meaning in that moment (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Postmodern interviewing focuses on epiphanies, which Denzin shares are “those interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person” (Denzin qtd. in Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 657). This method of interviewing fits well with my goal of co-creating

moments of authentic and reflexive inquiry. This method is, however, unstructured, and so I created my own paradigm of interview practice.

### Interviews as Ethical Dialogue

After multiple email conversations with my institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the IRB decided that my project is not Human Subject Research, and they gave me permission to proceed with my project without their granting me any level of IRB approval. However, because an interview process is involved in this project, I chose to create guidelines myself that I believe are empowering for each participant.

The first ethical standard that I used is that of repowered feminism, which is a framework that was developed by Foss and Foss in 2009 and published in an article entitled "Our Journey to Repowered Feminism: Expanding the Feminist Toolbox". In this article, Foss and Foss describe their movement from a "powered feminism" to a "repowered feminism", using Bitzer's notion of the rhetorical situation as a frame (Our Journey..., p. 37). Foss and Foss recollect their emergence as feminists and then relate how their feminism developed through interacting with other feminists, especially feminists of color such as bell hooks. Finally, they explain their reasons for changing how they perceived feminism and the rhetorical situation. Foss and Foss relate, "... a groupthink ... had come to characterize feminism, feminism's lack of acknowledgement of success, and our exposure to alternative conceptions of change" (Our Journey..., pp. 40-41). Hence Foss and

Foss rejected their past feminist frameworks and searched for new ways of enacting feminism in their personal and academic lives.

After considering new-to-them works by feminist theorists and considering the nature of reality through the lens of quantum physics, Foss and Foss developed the following definition of feminism: “the deliberate application of the capacity for unlimited and resourceful interpretation to engage exigencies for the purpose of creating a desired world” (Our Journey..., p. 45). Foss and Foss argue that their definition is feminist because it connects to traditional facets of feminism. First, it proposes to change the world. Next, it “is rooted in a deliberate and conscious decolonization of the mind, whereby individuals disconnect from hegemonic ways of thinking, believing and acting and choose new ways that do not depend of dominant ideologies” (Our Journey..., p. 45). Third, it asks participants to critique and interpret, which means that Foss and Foss’s definition “... allows for the ‘pursuit of what has not yet been thought’ but also pushes us not to ‘rest content with any identity—even one we have helped produce.’” (Our Journey..., p. 45). Last, and most importantly to Foss and Foss, their definition is feminist because its center is the notion of self-determination. This feminist framework values the importance of individuals and their actions in the world.

The second ethical standard that I used is Buber’s idea of the I-Thou relationship. Buber’s notion of I-It/I-Thou dialogue explores how

we shape and are shaped by dialogue. According to Johannesen (1983), Buber's thoughts were:

... the fundamental fact of human existence is 'man with man', person communicating with person. Interaction between humans through dialogue promotes development of self, personality, and knowledge. For Buber, meaning and our sense of 'self' are constructed only in the realm of the 'between' of relationships; our becoming 'persons' rather than self-centered individuals arises only in the 'between' of dialogic relationships. (Johannesen, 1983, p. 47)

When humans encounter one another in an I-It framework, we treat one another as strangers and possibly even as not-quite-human. In contrast, when we converse from an I-Thou perspective, we recognize that the other is part of who we are, and we seek to build a foundation of seeing one another as similar others, people with whom we share commonalities and trust. This idea is illustrated within the framework of CMM when Pearce quoted Edward Sampson in *Making Social Worlds* with, "All that is central to human nature and human life – and here I mean mind, self, and society itself – is to be found in processes that occur between people in the public world of our everyday lives" (Pearce, 2007, p. 10-11). Thus self-actualization comes about through I-Thou dialogue. Encountering one another within an I-Thou paradigm during the interview process allowed me and, hopefully, my co-conversationalists to investigate the memoirs for meaning as well as co-create new meanings.

The interview process began with my inviting six individuals who have been important in my journey to participate in this project with me. Through email, phone calls, and face-to-face conversations, I explained the topic of my thesis and the purpose of the interviews. I also explained that research participants would be interviewing me. Five of the participants had participated in the writing of my Baby Thesis. These participants include my parents, sister, husband, and a former professor who is now my friend. Only one co-conversationist, my best friend since childhood, Amanda, did not at least read the first generation of this project, and that is only because it honestly did not occur to me to share it with her at the time that it was written. Amanda and Karen, my former professor, were both replacements for co-conversationists who were at the last minute unable to participate.

When I was ready to begin the interview process, I wrote, revised, and then revised again an official email invitation<sup>1</sup> that I sent to each participant. I wanted conversations that evolved organically, but I also wanted to provide enough structure that my co-conversationists felt safe and creative. Every one of my participants is a close family member and/or friend. They were all aware of the importance of this project in my life, and I tried to use layman's terms and a little structure as a way to help them feel less pressure to perform any specific task or role.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

Adopting this perspective was done at the suggestion of a friend and colleague who practiced the interviewing process with me before I sent out the memoirs and email invitations to any of my participants. Sam<sup>2</sup> said that the email<sup>3</sup> that I had sent her was too vague and that she was not sure about her role in the interview process. She also said that she was not sure how to talk with me about the memoir that I sent her, which was a story about the death of my best friend when I was 18. Sam related that she felt unworthy to comment on the story and insecure about talking with me about it because it was such an emotionally-rich story. She was nervous about hurting my feelings or bringing up long-buried pains. Sam offered an idea to create an email invitation that provided a few question stems. These stems would provide participants with a starting place. She also suggested that I make it clear that I want to talk about the story and not necessarily about myself. Last, she recommended that I affirm more than once that I am open to anything that the participants want to say or ask. I took Sam's advice.

The email invitation accomplished three goals. First, it specified the time and place of each of the interviews. My participants and I worked together on scheduling, but I allowed them to pick the location of the conversation, hoping that each person would pick a place that she/he perceived as comfortable for potentially emotional conversation. Second, the invitation incorporated facets of Foss and Foss' concept of

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<sup>2</sup> Name has been changed for anonymity.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B.

repowered feminism by inviting co-conversationists to critique and interpret the memoir. Also, the invitation provided co-conversationists with self-determination because it named them as my interviewers, thus giving them a sense of empowerment to explore questions and ideas of their own. Third, the invitation made clear that I view each as a Thou. I began each invitation with an affirmation, “Thank you for sharing in the journey of my thesis with me. Your contribution is invaluable, and I am blessed to be working with you” and ended it similarly with, “Your unique insights are a vital aspect of my thesis”. Using these strategies, I endeavored to invite my co-conversationists to participate with me in egalitarian and dynamic ways. I strategically chose which memoirs would be sent to which participants. I wanted the participants to be able to share their own memories of that period in my life and compare and contrast both their experiences of me with the person I represented in the memoirs.

I also incorporated the ideas of Foss and Foss and Buber into the process of the actual conversations. I thanked each person for reading the memoir and talking with me about it. Once the conversations began, I allowed silence to blossom, creating space for each person to reflect and shape new thoughts for discussion. I care about each of my co-conversationists, and so I wanted to treat them as Thou’s. I asked questions that began with words like “what” and “how” and avoided questions that began with words like “why”. I also performed body scans

and silent centering exercises during the conversations; the topics were emotional and sometimes hurtful for me and for others to recall and discuss. I worked with each partner to create spaces of safety and intimacy.

As part of the interview process, I employed techniques used by the Joint Stock Theatre Company, a British theatre group. In this company, actors commonly use interviews as a way to gather material for an upcoming project based in verbatim theatre (Cantrell, 2011). Verbatim theatre is theatre that characters from real-life experiences and actual individuals. For example, I did not carry a recorder or take notes during the interview; my goal was to be fully present in body and mind (Roberts, 2007). I limited each interview to one hour. I then engaged in “hotseating” myself within 24 hours of the interview. Hotseating is a technique used by Stafford-Clark and his company to help both the company and a particular actor visualize in full-sensory ways how a role can be developed (Cantrell, 2011). Stafford-Clark’s actors sit with the company and portray the interviewee as the company reenacts the original interview questions (Cantrell, 2011). I employed this technique in a written fashion, writing a memoir about each interview. Each hotseat, or secondary memoir, was limited to 75 minutes. The hotseats are raw and unfinished. The grammar and spelling mistakes are the same as when I wrote them. This choice was made so that when I returned to the hotseats to analyze them, I placed myself back into the

moment of writing them as much as possible. The goal of this process of hotseating and later analyzing the secondary memoirs was inspired by Ellis' method of meta-autoethnography. I chose to remain authentic and wanted to avoid sterilizing emotions or thoughts that were expressed in the hotseats. I wanted to articulate the co-created meanings that were made during the interviews as well as how the conversations re-shaped my understanding of my self and my journey in the Borderlands.

After the interviews and after I wrote my memoirs of each conversation, I emailed each co-conversationist separately<sup>4</sup>. First, I thanked them for their participation. Second, I asked if I could use their actual names in my story-thesis. Each co-conversationist gave me permission to use her/his name throughout the project. Third, I asked each participant to read and comment upon the memoir that I wrote about our conversation. I made this last request as a way to continue the processes of impressionist ethnography, dialogic anthropology, and meta-autoethnography.

#### Step Five: Art-work as Reflective Emotion Work and Continued Dialogue

Ellis (2009) mentioned artwork as a type of impressionist ethnography, and she is not the only ethnographer to discuss its employment in research. A/r/tography is a set of methods that explores the spaces between and among the roles played by people such as

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C.

myself: artists, researchers, and teachers (Irwin & Kind, 2005). Irwin and Kind write:

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through a process of art making and writing. It is a process of double imaging that includes the creation of art and words that are not separate or illustrative of each other but instead, are interconnected and woven through each other to create additional meanings. (2005, p. 900)

I used this process as continuous reflection points during the production of my story-thesis. Incorporated into my project are photographs and paintings that I have rendered over the past year in moments of reflection about this project and all of the emotions I have felt and experiences that I have encountered during the process of co-creating it. When the mood struck, when words were difficult to find, when my emotions overtook me, when I was inspired – all of these occasions led to art-working. I use the term art-work or art-working as a way to reflect the notion that the art shown here was an integral part of the process, a process that was at times difficult to endure and to articulate. As Irwin and Kind argue, creating art as part of this story-thesis was not to analyze or directly reflect any idea, but to simply continue the conversation within myself about the project as a whole, the concepts I encountered as I researched and wrote and lived it, and the experiences that I lived during the course of the project. All of these events are taken into account in the art that is shared in my story-theses because it all helped me re-vision my concepts of my self and my Borderlands.

What follows are the memoirs, hotseats, analyses, and art-work. The memoirs are presented in the order of when they occurred in my life. Each memoir title is footnoted with the names of the recipients. The hotseats are presented in the same order that they occurred. Art-work is presented as a way to illustrate the layers of conversations in which I was engaged during the process of constructing and co-constructing my story-thesis. The final discussion section explores the efficacy of the concepts that were employed in my story-thesis as well as final thoughts regarding the reflexive relationship between story-telling and identity.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**MEMOIRS, HOTSEATS, ART-WORK, ANALYSES**

## Memoir One<sup>5</sup>

Dad raised his right hand and poised it high above his head. Our eyes followed his movement, and we sucked in lungfuls of breath, readying ourselves to make a joyful noise unto our Lord:

*I wandered so aimless  
Life filled with sin  
I wouldn't let my dear Savior in.  
Then like a blind man  
Who God gave back his sight -  
Praise the Lord!  
I saw the light!*

Singing was my favorite part of Sights. Their faces and names are long lost to my memory, but I liked the people who were in our Sights, our home worship meetings. Most of them had changed my diapers, and at least one of them had nursed me. These were my family members. However, I hated the idea of losing a few hours of playtime with my sister and friends. I resented having to sit still, so still, and listen to the teachings my father gave. But I loved song time.

*I saw the light!  
I saw the light!  
No more darkness,  
No more night.  
Now I'm so happy,  
No sorrow in sight!  
Praise the Lord!  
I saw the Light!*

I watched my father on this particular evening and loved him as only a five-year-old daughter can. His freckled hand moved up, down, to the right, to the left, and up again, marking the rhythm of the lines and

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<sup>5</sup> Sent to my father and my sister Teri.

stanzas. His baritone voice enveloped our small dining room in warmth and love. These moments were right; these were the minutes that filled my child heart with delight.

*Just like a blind man  
I wandered alone.  
(Oh, no) Those worries and fears  
I claimed for my own.  
Just like a blind man  
Who God gave back his sight -  
Praise the Lord!  
I saw the light!*

My dad's orange-brown cowboy boots tapped out the beats. His right foot crossed his left knee, and I watched in fascination as I sang, wondering how his feet could swing in different directions from each other and yet again in a different direction and time from his hand... yet he could sing with his face uplifted, his eyes closed, his brow creased, lost to the progression of the chorus.

*I saw the light!  
I saw the light!*

I mimicked his movements with my tiny limbs and almost giggled when my arms and legs became tangled. I looked up to him and smiled; he looked down on me and smiled. Our matching blue eyes crinkled in joy. The moment was perfect, peaceful.

*No more darkness,  
No more night.  
Now I'm so happy,  
No sorrow in sight!  
Praise the Lord!  
I saw the Light!*

I wish I could remember more from that night. I wish I could evoke who exactly was there or the teaching that my father gave. I have immersed myself in the music of the Watchers and have worked backwards and forwards, looking for clues, ways to latch onto more moments. But I was five, and my father's face and his voice fill me every time I work to recall details from that particular Sights meeting.

Listening to Watchers music has helped me remember other things, however. Sights was a time when we gathered together in someone's home as members of the Watchers – as the Body of Christ – to pray, praise God, speak in tongues and practice other manifestations of the Holy Spirit, offer tithe, listen to a teaching prepared by the Sights leader or another member, and sing. When I think of Sights, what I recollect first and most clearly is the singing. Our songbook was tan and felt cool, slippery in my hands. Though the cover was made of thin cardboard, it was pressed with ripples, so it looks and feels like the leather that encased our Bibles. Prominent on the cover are the words “Sing Along...”, scripted in elaborate black lettering. In the lower-right corner is the Watchers emblem and the words “The Watchers” and “The Word Over The World”. There are no page numbers inside the thin pamphlet-type book; there are song numbers only. At the front of the book are songs written by Watchers Productions, and following them are classic Christian hymns. As I write this, I finger again and again a copy of the Watchers songbook that I usually keep safe in my cedar hope

chest that sits at the foot of my husband's and my bed. I caress the book's cover and its pages, seeing myself and my Watchers family as we were more than twenty years ago, hearing our laughter and our voices calling out song numbers. "Number 41! 'He Lifted Me!'"

*From sinking sand he lifted me,  
With tender hand he lifted me,  
From shades of night to plains of light,  
Oh, praise his name, he lifted me!*

"Number 69! 'Farther Along!'"

*Farther along we'll know all about it,  
Farther along we'll understand why;  
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine,  
We'll understand it all by and by.*

"Number 2! 'Gathering of the Family!'"

*It's the gathering of the family –  
The one we've been waiting for.  
It's the gathering of the family –  
When the Body is joined to the lord.  
It's the gathering of the family –  
The one we've been waiting for.  
It's the gathering of the family –  
When our new lives will start evermore.*

The Sights leader or teacher for the evening chose a few songs and then asked for requests at the closing of Sights. I often spent most of Sights working up the courage to ask for Number 57, "The Lily of the Valley (I Have Found a Friend)".

*I have found a friend in Jesus,  
He's everything to me,  
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul;  
The lily of the valley,  
In him alone I see...*

I believed for years that this song had been written for me. I was born in May, and the Lily of the Valley is my birth flower. When we sang “Lily of the Valley”, I was sure that Jesus knew me and loved me especially. As we sang those notes, a personal god who loves me made sense, became real. I felt Jesus smiling with me, reaching out to me. I could see His presence among us, and in sublime euphoria, I gave my all to Him and to the music.

*He will never, never leave me,  
Nor yet forsake me here,  
While I live by faith and do his blessed will;  
A wall of fire about me,  
I've nothing now to fear,  
With his manna he my hungry soul shall fill.*

“Lily of the Valley” was my favorite hymn from our songbook, but it was not my most beloved song. Before Sights started and when it was over, Watchers albums played in the background. One album was and is my favorite. I do not have a copy of the actual album anymore, but I have saved the music to my computer, and I am listening to it in this moment. I don't need the album to be able to reach out and touch it, trace the dark green ivy leaves that circle around the light green background, framing a photograph of the artist, Stevie Kay Louis. I liked to sit next to the turntable before or after Sights, listen to her, study the album cover, and watch the people around me. Stevie sang,

*It's a wonder how our Lord knows  
It's a wonder how His love shows  
It's a wonder how my joy grows  
Now I see the sunset  
And I know God's Son in me.*

and,

*Love, love child  
Sweet sunshine, you make me smile  
And there's nothing that I wouldn't do  
For you, my love, love child...*

and,

*Jamie, Jamie  
My heart is yours to hold  
Leaves of love unfold  
Like a flower  
Before I knew your name  
And before I felt your touch  
I never one boy  
Could give a girl  
So much...*

These last two songs are *my* Watchers songs. I sang along with the record then, and before I located Watchers music and was able to receive digital copies of albums and songs, I sang them with the Stevie Kay Louis who lives in my heart, picturing the album cover and tenderly caressing each note, each word. I sang them when I felt lonely in high school, and I sang them in the shower and in the car. I sang them alone always. Then, I sang them to my infant children. My son is named after “Jamie”. My daughter’s song is “Love Child”. I rocked my children to the rhythm of these songs, nursing them and patting them into slumber. I rocked, too, the small tow-headed girl within me who misses Sights, who misses holding her “Sing, All Watchers”<sup>6</sup> book and watching her daddy raise his hand once more to lead our family in song.

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<sup>6</sup> The name of this hymnal has been changed to the sake of anonymity.

## Memoir Two<sup>7</sup>

When I was 17, my parents separated, and my older sister moved home to escape an abusive marriage. I also discovered that my first love was cheating on me and involved with a group of guys who dealt drugs at school. During the day when I was at school, I worked to present an image of confidence, sexiness, and fun. I allowed myself to pretend with my boyfriend that our relationship was stable and even deepening. He was the only person at school who had any idea of what was going on at my house. At night, I allowed the sadness and anger to engulf me. Hiding in my room, I did my homework and then mostly sat in the dark, sitting on my desk and staring out at the weeping willow tree's naked branches swishing in the autumn wind. One night, Mom and my sister Teri came to my room asked me to come meet them in the living room. I sighed and turned off my stereo, dreading what was about to come. By then I knew that when they asked me to sit with them in the evening, what they were really asking was to "talk". "Talking" meant that Mom or Teri or both cried and repented for past sins. I just wanted to finish my economics homework and be left alone. I pressed my fingers against my eyes and then wearily stood up. Finally, I trudged down the hallway and sat on the couch in the living room across from Teri and Mom's place on the loveseat.

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<sup>7</sup> Sent to my mother and Amanda.

“Janice,” my mom began. “Janice, I want to tell you...” Mom started hiccoughing and weeping into her tissue. Teri patted Mom’s knee and rubbed her shoulder. I rolled my eyes. “Janice,” Mom began again. “Oh, honey. How do I tell you this?” She turned to my sister and cried, “I can’t do this, Teri,” Mom keened to the ceiling, “Oh, God, I am so sorry. Forgive me, Jesus. Oh, Jesus, Jesus, forgive me.”

I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. These emotional displays had become more and more frequent in the past months. The more that they happened, the more that I clung to my bedroom as a safe haven. My room was my private space. I had decorated it with the dichotomies of the teenage mind: a poster of Jim Morrison, a quote from the Bible; a t-shirt that proclaimed “Die Yuppie Scum”, a t-shirt of Emily Dickinson’s face and lines from her poetry; a pamphlet for the legalization of marijuana, a picture postcard of the international home of the Watchers. I used this postcard as a bookmark, flicking it gently with my fingers while I read Douglas Adams or listened to the Doors and ignored the goings-on outside my door. I often fantasized about moving to Europe to rejoin the Watchers. However, this night, I could not escape.

“Mom! What is it?” I finally blurted impatiently. It was not that I felt no compassion for her; it was only that I was weary of the consistent turmoil all around me.

While she gathered her breath, I leaned into the cushions of the over-stuffed couch and let myself sink into the upholstery. I felt a long

night was coming, and I was worried about my economics test the next day. I drummed my fingers on the arm of the couch but stopped when Teri shot me a warning look. My stomach twisted. I wanted to run to my room, but fear crept into me and left me stuck to the back of the couch.

“Janice, I had an affair. And you have to know about it,” Mom finally said.

“Ummm, no. I do not.” I was already halfway off the couch and turning toward the hallway.

“Yes, you do. There is a lot you need to know.” Mom looked up at me, her face caked with mucus, tears, and mascara. “Sit down. Please.”

That night, I learned all of the little and big secrets that had been a shadowy but tangible part of my childhood. Children are perceptive, and as Mom and Teri unraveled the history of our family, I was surprised that I was not, in fact, shocked by any of it. Instead, I felt betrayed; with every word, a heavy load was being shifted to my shoulders. I had not been exactly happy half-knowing about our family member’s darker sides, but at least the hope of denial was mine. Finally, long after midnight, I stumbled to my bed and shut out the night.

The next day, I went to school and never said a word to my friends about what my sister and mother had told me. I went about my day as if it was any other day and as if I was living any other life but my own. Nothing related to home seemed real anymore; I claimed school as a sanctuary of normalcy. The storyline of my childhood fractured a little

more each day as my mother and sister continued over a period of weeks to divulge our family's secrets to me: affairs, abuse, alcoholism, and incarcerations. My mother and my sister both gained personal power from the sharing of these stories. They freed themselves from the burden of silence. However, as these stories unfolded, I lost the narrative thread of my self.

One day during study hall, sitting in my high school's library, the teeter-totter that had been precariously balancing my personal reality finally broke. I spread out magazines on a work table and leafed through them, thinking that I might use them as part of a senior language arts project. They were newsletters from the Watchers. The Watchers represented safety and stability to me, a way of life that secured for me a place in Heaven as well as a place in a family here on Earth.

A classmate sat down next to me and began to look over her own homework. "Are you working on your senior project for Mrs. Snyder?" she asked, closing her folders and running her hands over the piles of my magazines. I grunted in assent and kept working, intent on making progress on the project, lost in my own thoughts. She picked a magazine up and studied it for a moment. I peeked at her and wondered if she would go away soon. My heart thudded as I watched her face suddenly grow white and haggard. "Why do you have these?" she hissed. She threw down the publication as if she had touched something poisonous and turned her eyes to mine.

“I found them,” I shrugged and waited for her to look away. She kept staring at me, so I whispered, “I thought they were interesting.” I felt a threat in the air, so I did not admit that I had found the magazines in a box in my father’s basement office. I knew the magazines well. They were my favorite picture books when I was young. I had assumed that they had been thrown away years earlier, and I so had been elated to discover them. When I lifted them out of the box and dusted them off, joy filled me. Many of my earliest, happiest memories were filled with the Biblical quotations, people, and scenes I saw in the magazines’ pages.

My classmate did not feel the same way. Her eyes rounded, and she looked down at the magazines and pushed the stacks as far away from her as the work surface would allow. She flexed her hands against the table and stared at her fingers. Each knuckle was white with tension. She whispered tersely, “My family was in that cult.” She spat out the word “cult”. “My little sister - the one that meets me at the bus stop, you know her – she wakes up all the time. Screaming. Crying. ‘They won’t stop,’ she says. And she shakes and speaks in tongues. ‘The tongues of men and of angels,’ they told us.” She had not looked up at me yet, and I was glad. My own face mirrored the horror in hers. With each sentence she uttered, she opened forgotten vaults within me, places of damply clinging nightmares. She knotted her hands, bent her head, and said, “We can’t get my sister to stop writhing in her bed. We have to hold her down. She just screams and speaks in tongues.”

I wanted to protest, tell her that she was wrong about the “cult”, but instead I murmured sounds of sympathy and surprise, agreement and placation. Then I boxed up the magazines and staggered out into the hallway, trying to put her words out of my head. For the rest of the day, it felt like people were staring at me, murmuring about me. I heard the word “cult” in every conversation, experienced the icy sweat of dread. Friends asked me what was wrong. “Nothing. How are you?” I replied. I wreathed my face in smiles and flirted with the boys. I held my heart in place with my hand, and when people pointed out that my face was red, I explained, “Oh, I was out raking leaves. I always get sunburnt.” During the last period of the day, which was choir practice, I found that I could not sustain any notes. My breath came harder and more jaggedly as the clock’s hands rotated slowly to three.

As I walked home that afternoon, I tried to plan how I would ask my mother. I imagined her denials, laughter, and explanations. Before I went inside my house, I stared at the front door. I did not want to go inside. I did not want to risk losing one more piece of my life. Slowly, I opened the door and walked to the dining room where I put down the box of magazines, my book bag, and my pink Carebears lunchbox on the dining room table. My mother was washing dishes and getting ready to go to her night job teaching at a local business college. I watched her wipe each plate dry and put it away. The words seemed stuck in my throat, but I finally found the courage to say, “Was I raised in a cult?”

She barely lost her rhythm in drying dishes. For just a moment, I thought that I saw her wince. Then she turned to me and replied softly, “Yes.” I can still smell the soapsuds and see the tiny rainbows their reflections made on her hands and face. I can hear the dripping faucet splashing into the sink and the way her answer echoed in my head. I had been raised in a cult, and I had no idea how to cope with that at the age of 17. I turned on my heels, went to my room, and shut the door behind me.

That was the moment when the last shreds of solid ground gave way beneath me. A few days later, I confronted my boyfriend for cheating on me. I was scared for his life and his health, so I also turned him and a few others in to school officials for dealing drugs at school. My boyfriend had for two and a half years been my most intimate friend and my lover. Suddenly, our relationship was over. That night, an anonymous caller threatened my life. That week, I quit high school. For several months, I did little other than sit in my room, listen to music, stare at the weeping willow, and fantasize about living a different life.

### Memoir Three<sup>8</sup>

*Jesus loves the little children  
All the children of the world  
Red and yellow, black and white  
We are precious in his sight  
Jesus loves the little children of the world!*

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<sup>8</sup> Sent to Karen and to my husband Scott.

I wiped plates with the towel and hummed the melody softly. In the den, I could hear the clacking of Scott's keyboard as he read web comics. My ten-year-old daughter Marianne sat on the daybed in the living room, played YouTube songs on my laptop, and checked her Facebook page. The evening had been quotidian and, therefore, for me it had been fun. I reached into the cabinet and placed another plate on the shining stack, satisfied that the kitchen was almost clean for the night. I smiled as I thought about my novel and my glass of Malbec, which were only another half-hour away. As I put the last plate in the cabinet, my son James rounded the corner from the hallway and paused, leaning his lanky adolescent hip against the counter.

"Hey, kiddo. What's up? Is your room clean yet?" I bumped his hip with mine as I walked around him to grab more plates.

"Yeah. It's done." His eyes followed me as I closed the cabinet doors and swiped the last of the crumbs off the counter with my towel. We smiled at each other a few times, and I waited for him to continue talking. James is a reticent boy, and I have learned over the years that he speaks only when he is ready. "Mom. I have something to tell you, and I hope you're not mad."

My mother's heart stopped. I ceased to breathe. Was he failing classes? Had he gotten into a fight? Had he signed up for chess lessons again without asking for permission? My mind reeled from terrible to humorous possibilities. I chose the light-hearted approach, flicking him

with my towel and winking at him. "I'm sure I will be, kid. Get it over with so that I can ground you." James smiled and shook his head. He slumped his shoulders and curved his back, looking up at me with an impish grin. I raised my towel and stepped toward him. "Out with it!" I called, laughing.

He took a deep breath, hesitated, and asked, "What song are you humming?"

I cocked my eyebrow at him, sensing that he was stalling. "You know what I am singing. 'Jesus Loves the Little Children'. Sing it with me now!" I swung my arms around him and tried to dance with him around the kitchen. His feet remained planted on the floor. "C'mon, kiddo! Dance with me!" And again I tried to move with him. He stood still and stared at me. I felt a flutter in my breast. This was unusual; he usually danced a few steps with me before running away.

"Nah. I don't like that song," he said quietly. His eyes roamed the kitchen, and his long fingers trailed in the moisture of the freshly-wiped counter.

"Oh? Why's that?" I asked him, probing his every freckle for a clue as to what was bothering him.

"I think you'll be mad," he replied. He glanced at me, looked away again quickly, and again studied the counter.

"Nope. Impossible. You can always tell me anything. I may not be happy, but I will always love you. Now... talk!" I poised in front of him,

cocking my hip and crossing my arms, trying to look as intimidating as possible. “Talk, or I’ll think you set the school on fire.” I leaned forward and petted his short whitish hair. “What is up, kid? You’re kinda freakin’ me out here.” I laughed and tousled his hair, still trying to set a tone of comradery. Then I raised my hand towel and slowly began to twist it. I cocked my eyebrow and grinned. This is our game. We regularly chase each other around the house with towels and whip at each other, squealing and rough housing together like kids.

“Mom, I don’t like that song because I don’t believe in Jesus...,” He blurted quickly. “... and it’s an annoying song. Ahh! Don’t hurt me!” he said, giggling and groping for a defense towel.

My towel fell from my hand, and I bent to pick it up. I used the time that my hair covered my face to paste a smile over my shock. My son was claiming at the age of twelve that he was not a Christian. How should I respond?

No questions about God were discussed in my childhood home. No doubts were ever expressed. I am not sure I had any. God and the blood of Jesus were as tangible to me – more real to me – than the beating of my own heart. This was new territory. I was not sure how to respond. Simultaneously, two voices spoke in my mind. One paraphrased the Bible, “Bring the little children to me. Raise your children right, and they will know which way to go. He who offends the little children offends

me.” The other voice said, “Love, stability, and safety,” my affirmation of what culture I am committed to co-creating as a partner and mother.

I stared into my son’s eyes and read the worry and fears underneath his twinkling, impish grin. “Is she going to reject me? Is she going to punish me?” he seemed to say out loud. I stepped toward him and held him close to me. “O’kay. What do you believe?” I asked.

James moved out of my embrace and said, “Well, I am an atheist, Mom. I don’t believe in God. And I hate going to Mass.”

“Why’s that, babe?” *An atheist? Sweet Mary in Heaven, I exclaimed in my heart. Is this my fault? I am so going to Hell. God in Heaven, guide me now. Help me love him. Help me guide him. Help me. Help.*

“I don’t know. I just do.” James looked at me, helpless to explain more in that moment.

“Is it the homily? The people? The music?” I needed more. I needed to understand and to comfort him. Or maybe I just needed comfort for myself.

“Look, I just don’t like it. It doesn’t make sense. And it makes me uncomfortable.” He was becoming defensive, and I did not want to lose his confidence now.

“O’kay. You already know that you do not have to go to Mass except for during school.” We had already discussed his aversion to Mass months earlier, and I conceded that he did not have to practice

Catholicism if it was not his choice. However, I mandated that he had to attend and participate in school Masses, except for Communion. I left that choice up to him.

“I know. I know, Mom.”

“And you also know that what Father Guy teaches there is useful whether or not you believe in Jesus.” I bent my head down and gazed at him straight in the eye, waiting for his response.

“I know. I just don’t like it.” He bent his head and looked away from me.

“I know you know. But work with me here. Go to Mass at school. Be respectful. That is all I ask.”

We paused in that moment. He peered at me and smiled faintly. I started to breathe again, a little. There was a peace in growing up in a house where everyone professed the same beliefs. But it was a peace bought at the price of honesty. I do not want that for my children. My daughter is Catholic, my husband is agnostic, my son professes atheism, and I have no idea what I believe anymore, but I claim Catholicism publicly because I like the sense of community it brings and because I feel connected to Mary when I pray. I smiled back at my son and started to wipe the counters again, trying to play the moment out casually.

“What else, hon? Do you want to talk more about it? About what you believe? About what makes you uncomfortable about Christianity? Do you want to go to a Methodist Church? You liked that. Or we could

try Presbyterian, Quaker... anything you want. There are lots of choices. Catholic is just one.” I mentally banged my head against the cupboards, thinking about the logistics of a Sunday morning spent going to separate services with the kids, thinking about how to open doors for my son and at the same time accept his spiritual quest as his own.

“No. I have a book about Buddhism that I like. Is that ok?”

“Yep. I can read it with you if you want. And we can talk about it?” *Please let me in, James. Please let me be part of this. I am scared. For you. For me.*

“Nah. That’s ok.” James took a deep breath and started to go down the hall toward his room. “Mom?” He turned toward me and smiled again. “Thanks.”

“For what, kiddo?”

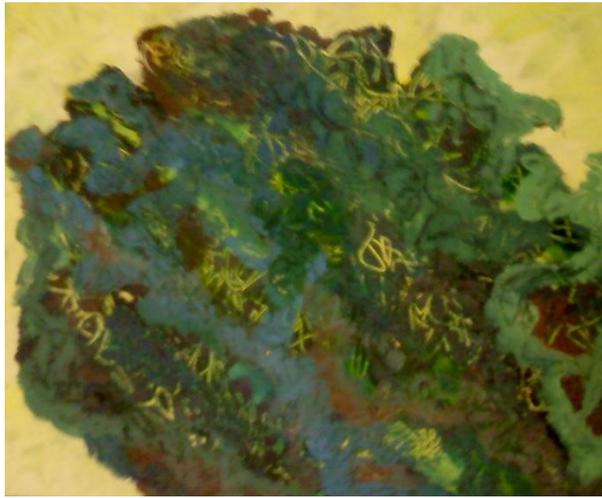
“For not being mad, I guess.”

“Of course I am not mad! I am glad that you feel safe talking about this with me. You know I am here, and I love you no matter what.” The smile was fake, but the sentiment was real. *Don’t look too close, kid. Just see my love. Don’t see my panic, I willed.*

“I know. Night, Mom.” He disappeared down the hall.

“Night! But not before you brush those teeth!” I yelled after him. *I love you no matter what, I whispered in my heart. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what in the hell do I do now?*

## The Hotseats



Neuronic  
Acrylic on canvas board  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
June 2012

### Pre-hotseat: “And so it goes...”<sup>9</sup>

I am truly concerned that at any moment, I may throw up. My stomach is churning, and I cannot eat or drink anything. I am sweating. I am exhausted even though I slept until 10:30 a.m., which is hours past when I usually start the work day. But I did not want to get up this morning. I did not want to believe that this day has finally arrived.

In just four hours, I will talk with my parents about the memoirs that I sent them. The interview process will begin in earnest. And all I can think is, “What have I done? What am I doing? Oh, hell...”

Am I afraid of my parents? No, not really. We agreed over a year ago when I wrote the first paper that my story is my story. All four of us

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<sup>9</sup> (Vonnegut, 1969)

see things differently, but we have all finally accepted that that is o'kay. I am not afraid of my parents. I am afraid of their pain.

Mom, Dad, Teri, and I have all been through a lot. Why, oh, why do I feel it necessary to bring up the same topics and go spelunking in our memories once more? ... .. Because I need to know more. I am not at rest yet. I still struggle. And I have not forgiven. I do not know yet how to forgive. I am not worried about their being able to handle their own emotions. They will be ok, and if I did not believe that, I would not have invited them to participate in this thesis with me. No, I am worried about me.

What if I take on their pain? What if my pain plus their pain unhinges me? I want to reach for the phone and call my therapist, but I hesitate. I wait. I breathe, and I focus on what I know. *Breathe.*

I know that panic is natural. I have put two years of my life into this project, and every step has been a risk. Panic is natural, and I choose to recognize it and release it.

*Breathe.*

I know that other scholars have worked with painful topics and survived and made huge impacts. Ellis and Bochner wrote about their choice to seek an abortion. Who else???. *Stone Butch Blues...* her. Anzaldúa. *Borderlands*. What else? Yes, Vonnegut. Vonnegut explored his mind and wrote *Slaughterhouse*. "And so it goes..."

*Breathe.* And so it goes. *Breathe.* And so it goes. *Breathe.* And so this will go.

And so this will go. I know my stuff. I have read about Joint Stock and Out of Joint. I have read *Revisions*. I know what I am doing. I am exploring. I am co-constructing a map. This is not about me. This is about us.

*Breathe.*

I am scared. And there is no one here to hold me. I am on my own, and I am self-determined. I can do this. I am empowered. “It’s God in Christ in me, the hope of glory...” Maybe I don’t believe that anymore, but I believe in the love behind it. I am loved.

*Breathe.*

I am scared that none of my relationships with these six people, these people whom I love, will ever be the same. Well, of course they won’t be the same. We are all choosing to open ourselves up. We are all exploring, and I bet that they are scared, too. Maybe not. Maybe I am the only one. But I am scared.

*Breathe.* I let it go. I touch you, fear, and I release you. *Breathe.* I recognize you, and I accept that you are here. I am not bound by you. *Breathe.*

It is 11:30. And this is what I know. Each participant accepted an invitation. No one was coerced. They choose to be here as I choose to be here. Here, in this present moment. And so I list my weapons, just as

once I believed in a Sword of the Spirit: I carry with me Foss, Foss, hooks, Anzaldúa, Ellis, Stafford-Clark, Stanislavky. This is about the LUUUTT. “LUUUTT, I am your Janice.” I carry LUUUTT, and LUUUTT will carry me. There is no pressure. There is the emerging, the unfolding, the living conversation. I am a part of it, but I am not in control.

*Breathe.* I am not in control. I am self-determined, but I am not in control.

And so it goes. And so this will go.

*Breathe.*

I am ready. I don't feel ready. Feelings are not facts. Ok, I do not feel ready, but I know that I am. Time to put away the books and the papers. Time to stop preparing and just accept that I am ready. And so this goes.

### Hotseat One: Mom

I met Mom and Dad in Gas City for their interviews. The purpose was two-fold. We would do our interview work, and then I would drive my nephew home to Indianapolis after his week-long visit to Fort Wayne. Dad called me and let me know that they would be fifteen minutes late, but actually, they were on time. He texted me shortly after I arrived in the parking lot of Cracker Barrel to let me know that they were there. Then he texted me once more, “Don't respond.” My mom does not like

the idea of any one texting and driving, and no matter how hard I try, I cannot convince her that I never do it.

When they got out of the car, I wanted to run. I wanted to hide from them and from the conversations that I knew would be taking place shortly. Instead, I hugged them and my nephew. I gave my dad his Father's Day and birthday gifts. Mom asked who was going first. "I don't know. Doesn't matter to me," I said. It did not matter to me. I wanted them to choose. I wanted them to be as comfortable as possible. I felt like I was causing damage as it was. "Then I'll go," she said.

"Ok. Do you want to get some tea and a snack? My treat!" I offered.

We went inside. I asked Mom to get a table in the empty section of the restaurant and fled to the bathroom. After I washed my hands, I smoothed my skirt and checked my hair. I had worn a colorful outfit, but instead of wearing my Guinness beer-cap earrings, I wore the silver hoops they had given me for my birthday. I also wore my chin-length bob down so that it covered my left ear. They did not need to see... or maybe I did not want them to see that I had shaved the left side of my head to a one-inch buzz. Taking a deep breath, I left the bathroom – using my skirt as a guard against touching the door handle – and speed-walked to our table. She had taken the seat against the wall. I stood for a moment and considered the option of sitting next to her, but instead I grit my teeth and took the seat across from her. My back was to the

restaurant. I closed my eyes and checked; I could not feel any one staring at me. My nephew came around the corner and asked if he could join us. I love my nephew, and I have no idea what he knows about his mother's and my childhood. I hastily smiled, and Mom and I sent him on his way.

We ordered coffee – decaf for her and loaded for me – and Southern Blackberry Cobbler. While we waited to be served, we fumbled a little with how to begin the conversation. She got out her notes, and I asked her, “So, tell me your thoughts.”

After that, my memory begins to fail me a little. I can see her face and how lovely she looked in her dark turquoise top. I watched her hands move, and I noticed that her fingers looked healthy and that she could lift her coffee cup. It looked like her RA was giving her a day off. She was even wearing sandals and had painted her toes, which she had pointed out to me on the way into the restaurant. Her beaded earrings flashed in the late-afternoon sun. We were talking about the context of the memoir, when it happened, what else was going on at the time, and all I could think about was making the moment perfect, comfortable for her. I discovered that I had been watching her face for signs of distress or anger. I took deep breaths and tuned in to her voice only. What had we been talking about? I tried to remember.

“No. No. Dad got a different one from you,” I found myself saying.

“Thank God for that,” she replied. I understood her concern. Mom was the only participant of the six who had already read a former version of the memoir that I sent her. Hers was included in the Baby Thesis that I had written almost two years ago. I do not remember her next words, but I remember her face, a mixture of concern, relief, and resignation. I took the mixture of expressions to mean that she was relieved that I had spared Dad a re-telling of that time and that she was also sad that he did not understand the pain that she endured during those months.

The conversation is becoming more clear in my memory as I write. But I cannot transcribe it, do not want to transcribe it. I want to tell about all of my emotions: broiling, confused feelings.

“Are you sorry?” she asked.

“About being brought up in the Watchers?” I returned.

“Yeah.” She studied me, and I wanted to give her a clear answer. I failed, I think. I ask myself that often, and recently, it was been a recurring theme in my thoughts. Am I sorry?

“No... I mean yes. I mean. I mean that there are some things I regret and some things I don't.”

“Like what?”

“Like some of the dogma... I mean the doctrine. Some of the doctrine was pretty twisted.”

She crinkled her face in thought and asked, “Can you give me an example?”

I kind of wanted to laugh. Was she kidding me? But she was not kidding, and it was a good question. “Well, the trinity. And Mary was mostly not even there. Not to mention, it was pretty sexist,” I added almost under my breath. She was nodding her head; I felt safe to continue. “And all the control.” She rolled her eyes and nodded again. I continued, “No, not controlling. It was... but what I mean is...” I searched for the word and noticed that she was searching my face. She was keeping eye contact with me, and I was finding it almost easy to return her gaze. Interesting. I often stare into space when I am in deep thought or trying to articulate an idea or emotion. I felt more confident and the word came to me, “Rigid. It was so rigid. You either believed this, or you believed that, and only one was right.” She kept nodding, and we began to talk about her memories of living in the Watchers and her memories of coming to a place with not wanting to be a part of it any more. “I was done. I mean, I was DONE,” she emphasized.

She asked me why I did not tell her about how angry I was and quoted the part of my memoir where I talk about escaping to my room. God, I was angry then. I was angry at her, angry at Dad, angry at Teri. I felt like they had abandoned me.

“I felt like I had no voice, Mom. I was 17. I was 17, and I just wanted to say, ‘Hello! Anybody paying attention to the teenager here?’” After a moment, I continued, “I guess I didn’t feel like I had a voice, any say in what was going on at home.” The intensity of my emotion was

more than I had been prepared for. Mom looked down at our food and then sighed.

“Yeah, I know. I know. No one was there for you. I guess it surprises me that you didn’t feel like you had support.” She reminded me that she and Dad had packed up and left our house in Ohio to move me back to Southport because I was in such distress. I hated Ohio, and I had told my father that I was going to die if we kept living there. I was serious, and Mom told me today that she knew that I was serious. She said about Ohio and our quick move back to Indiana, “I knew, Janice. I knew that you were unhappy, and that, well...” Suicide is such a hard topic in our family. She finished the statement, but I don’t remember what she said. I was remembering the bridge just a few hundred feet from my bedroom window and all of the plans I had made.

I came back from the cold memory and heard her say, “I was unhappy, too. I didn’t feel like I fit in there at all.” When she said this, my stomach lurched, and I wanted to stare her down, I wanted to hug her. I wanted to yell at her, and I wanted to wrap my arms around her. She had made some unhealthy choices before and while we were living in Ohio, and I immediately snapped the door closed to talking any more about that era.

My emotions were running wild. I wanted to touch her and feel her hand in mine. I wanted to tell her it was o’kay now. I am o’kay now. But I will not lie to her, not now. Not more than I already do.

She asked me at one point when I feel that I started to open up to her and want her in my life again. We had been talking about the period right before I quit high school and how I had withdrawn from her completely. I sat back in my chair and thought hard. I had never considered the question before.

“I think after Mike,” I said. Mike was my first husband, and I do remember drawing closer to each of my family members after he left me. But then I remembered something more. “No. No, it was during Mike. It was when I came out to you and Dad as a feminist.”

“Are you in the closet?” I swear that is what I heard her say. I jumped in my chair, and my heart stopped. “Did you just ask if I am in the closet?” I squeaked.

Mom looked very confused and replied, “No. I said, ‘when you came out of the closet’.”

Relief swept through me. My parents do not know that I consider myself bi-sexual. There is no reason to tell them, right? I am not in a relationship with a woman right now, and... well, they would never understand. Right? For a moment, just a moment, I considered telling her, but then I just went on, “Right. Yeah, well, that’s not a bad description of that conversation.” My then-husband and I sat with my parents in their living room and talked to them about feminism for what felt like hours. Even while sitting in Cracker Barrel years later, I could feel the confusion of my parents, their fear. I was sitting in the Mercy

Chair, a prayer and confession chair. My Mom asked me if I hated men. Someone asked me if I still loved Jesus. “Yeah, well,” I started. “It was a scary conversation to have with you guys, and it was uncomfortable. But you handled it. We handled it.” Mom was nodding her head and smiling. “And then you watched that Jean Kilbourne movie... and then Dad watched it.” I was gaining speed as the memories came back. “And you both came to that women’s festival where I gave a presentation.” I felt the memories slowing. What did they mean? What was I saying? “It’s like... it’s like you started participating in my interests, and I started to feel safe.”

She nodded. We both took a sip of our coffee. “For me,” she began, “It was after Jacob. That’s when I felt invited back into your life.”

I could not talk about Jacob. I have written about him, and I visited his grave last fall on the fifteenth anniversary of his suicide. But I can’t talk about him. Not with Mom. Not with most people. I just fiddled with my cup and tried to stay in the moment, not get swept away by emotion or memory. I wanted to stay in the moment with her. She was not wrong. I did need her after Jacob died. I always needed her. But she is right in another way, too, a way that I think I had not really given much thought to until today. I did need her, but I did not invite her. I was an angry, resentful kid who, as she reminded me at one point during our conversation, chucked a cup of soda at her head when I was about 16 or 17 years old. I had a lot to be angry about, sure. And I

didn't trust anyone in my family, which was probably a smart choice. None of us were safe people, probably especially to each other. She asked me at one point why I never told her and Teri to back off, to spend time with me in other ways than sharing stories and talking about heavy stuff. I hesitated. Why didn't I, indeed? The word that came to mind was boundaries. At the time, I didn't know I could have any of my own. And there was another piece, too, and this I shared with Mom.

"You and Teri were in so much pain." I stopped and struggled with how to proceed. "I didn't want to reject you. You know, devalue how you were feeling." I stopped again. "I don't know, Mom. I just didn't want to rock your boats. They were getting rocked enough. If what you needed was to talk to me, then I could sit there and take it."

"And then go to your room and escape?"

"Yeah." I half smiled because that was exactly what I did. "And then go to my room and check out. That's what I did... how I survived."

This story is not detailed in chronological order. I wrote it as it came to me, as the emotions within my memory blossomed and called out to be recognized. As I wrote, I privileged different parts of our conversation as different memories or emotions came up. One more thing, maybe the most important thing, because for me it is what our whole dialogue was about: Boundaries. She talked about her boundaries and how Dad, the Watchers, her parents, and others had violated them. She gave one or two example of how she constructed and maintained or

even reclaimed her own boundaries and space. And she also asked me, “I wanted to ask you... it is here in my notes... I wanted to ask you what you do now when you are in crisis, when you feel traumatized.” She looked at me with all of her mother’s concern, and I smiled. “Do you still escape to your room?”

“No. I go to therapy once, twice a week. And I talk to Mary. And the more I learn about boundaries, the more I can handle things.” We talked more about boundaries and about a recent memory that we share.

Several months ago, my niece and nephew were baptized at their church. My family and I went, and Mom and Dad came into town for it, too. When we got to my sister’s church, I balked. It was so loud. And it was so huggy. I am cringing now as I write about it. My mouth is dry even thinking about the charismatic, random nature of the service and praise and worship. I explained to Mom that I “can’t hack” that. She asked me about the gifts of the Spirit.

“Oh, no. No. No. No. I never, no. I mean, I see things in people – their diseases, their hurts, but I never pray with them. I pray for them, but never with them.” I felt nauseous.

“You mean that you don’t, like, say, ‘Would you like me to pray with you...?’” and at this point, she reached out to touch my arm as she would reach out to a person to whom she is ministering. I have seen her do it many times. I have done it myself. Reach out. Touch. Offer prayer. Offer healing. Cast out the cancer, the blindness, the

depression, the homosexuality, the evil spirits in the name of Jesus Christ.

My hand shot back from her touch. She never even touched me, and I barely moved. But it felt in the moment like we both sat there and stared at my arm. Her hand was frozen in mid-air, and I was poised for flight. I realized that I would have run from the restaurant, or yelled at her, or both.

It was a boundary. I set it. She respected it. She did not try to even pat my hand. I did not try to make sure that I had not hurt her feelings. We let the moment be what it was. For me, it was a teaching moment. I can present my boundaries to my mother, and I am starting to trust – little by little – that she will not shame me, blame me, or guilt me into changing them. I also learned that my boundaries are mine – and it is ok if they do not work in other people’s paradigms. I do not need to apologize for my boundaries. When I shrank from her touch because of the memories and associations that it symbolized, maybe I hurt her. But nothing bad happened when I did not say that I was sorry. I was not sorry, in fact. And Mom and I continued talking, relating to each other.

#### Hotseat Two: Dad

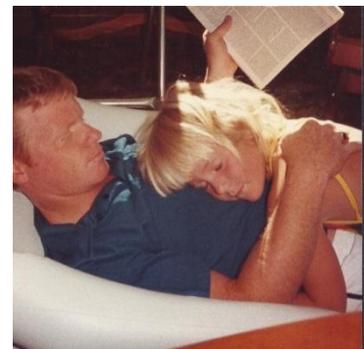
Maybe it is the way that he says, “Honey”, or maybe it is the way that permanent lines have formed deep ridges across his forehead.

Maybe it is the mixture of memories that I have of him: tender to

terrifying. I just know that I love my daddy, and I wanted to spare him this conversation. Mom and Teri seem more apt at dredging up the past and dissecting it with me. Then we can turn to other topics without hesitation or a sense of lingering sadness in the air. With Dad... With Dad, it feels like the past has never really left his shoulders and never will. He carries it with him, both as armor and as penance.

I gave Dad his birthday present and his Father's Day card when we met at Cracker Barrel. Part of the card read, "I listened more than you think." And I did. Dad is so wise and perceptive in ways that I find myself lacking. He can also be an ass, and I also listened to his words to other people and how they reacted to him. I learned from him that there are some ways that it is best not to approach people. I listened to how he talked to me, and I knew I never wanted to treat others like that. But that was years ago, decades ago.

The inside of the card read, "And I love you more than you know." And this is also true – more true than anything else I can think of saying to him. He seems to crave love and affection from his kids and grandkids. And yet he also seems impervious to our touch, like he is afraid that it will sear him.



Dad and me at Diamond Lake, circa 1983

I gave my dad two sets of photographs. One set was just a loose pile of six photos taken of him or of him and me from the time I was five

until just a month ago. Most of them were taken before I was twelve. Dad with me on his shoulders, picking oranges in Florida. Dad and me dressed in my clothes and Mom's clothes, our faces painted with her makeup, my stuffed animals in our arms. Dad holding my lunchbox and my favorite teddy bear. My guess is that he had been taking photos of me, and I had taken the camera away from him and snapped a few shots, too. My favorite one is gilded in sunlight and softness. We are lying down by our living room window, and I am asleep on top of his torso. We are both freckled and sunburnt. He has a book in one hand, and his other hand is resting on me. He is looking at me with all the tenderness in his heart. I must have been five, the same age I was in the memoir that I gave him.

I asked Dad if he would like to walk to start out our time. He wondered if it would be too hot, but then we started out across the parking lot and down the dead-end lane next to the restaurant. I started to ask, "So... what do you...?"

"It was a beautiful story, sweetie. I was afraid it was going to be blood and guts."

My gut clenched. Mom and I had discussed the same thing not an hour ago. My parents had not read each other's stories at my request, and so Mom had checked in with me about what I had sent Dad. I assured her that I hadn't sent anything that I was not yet ready to write about in an academic way. I have written creatively of my volatile

relationship with my father, but that is not the topic of this thesis, and I was a little confused as to how it fit into any conversation about the Watchers. I made a choice and forged ahead. “Nope. But why’s that?”

Dad seemed to quicken his pace. Was it my imagination? Did he seem to be bracing himself? “Well, do you remember the drives to and from Sights?”

“No?” Did I? I remember the car pulling over, but I don’t remember anything else. Before he started talking again, I did remember one more thing: being angry. Feeling stuck.

“Well, that’s good then,” was all he said.

We must have talked of other things, but I came back to the car and his comment about blood and guts. “Dad, so what happened in the car on the way to and from Sights?”

He didn’t really seem to hesitate, “Oh, you would complain and whine. Cry. All the time. Probably about Mom – and me, too, probably – smoking in the car. Or the radio. And I would pull over and, you know...” he paused. I hadn’t looked at his face. I couldn’t. I wasn’t sorry that I had asked. I wanted to know. But I was starting to remember more. Colors, shapes. Sounds. But no words, no faces. I didn’t feel anything in that moment of walking down the lane with my dad. It wasn’t like we were talking about someone else. It was just that I knew intellectually what he was going to say and had no feeling to attach

to it – either from when I was a kid or in that moment. “I’d smack you around a little.”

I remember that. I remember feeling like Dad was always mad at me. But in my memory it doesn’t start until our move to Indianapolis. I remember adoring my dad and wanting him to spend more time with me and less time with his work. But I don’t remember being afraid of him until we moved to Indy. Mom told me years ago that Dad started hitting me when I was a toddler or maybe a baby, but I don’t remember.

Sometimes I am glad, and sometimes I wish I could give more substance to these feelings that I have. It’s like I feel things sometimes that don’t make sense, and I can’t make sense of why I feel that way unless I can trace the feeling back to the first time I felt it.

I wanted to hold Dad’s hand, but I did not reach out to him then. I do not remember what we talked about for awhile. Eventually, we started talking about the Way and the period before and after we left. I watched Dad as he talked. We had climbed a large hill of construction dirt and were poking around in the dust with the toes of our shoes. Dad was playing with a silver chain that he had pulled from his pocket. He fingered it, wrapped it around his fingers, and then just rolled it between his thumb and fingers. Repeat. Repeat. He couldn’t stand still. I wanted him to sit still, to sit with me in the shade, but I was afraid to ask. I didn’t want to break the momentum. I can’t remember when he had last talked this much. I tried to stay as quiet as I could.

Dad talked about our move to Indianapolis. He said that the goal was to enter into the Family Missionary Groups. But it never happened. We left the Way shortly after getting to Indianapolis. Dad said, “There were all these letters. And that thing with Cory<sup>10</sup> and ...”

I knew some of these facts, and I wanted to connect the dots. I wanted to see how all of the events connected up, so I started asking him questions. Often, he would say, “Gosh, I don’t know, Janice,” or give me his theories about what was going on. My dad’s ability to recall information is amazing, and I almost lost the primary thread of our conversation because it was so fascinating to hear him talk about that period. But this conversation was not about historian sense-making. I was here to talk about the Watchers, but I was also here to discover more about my own story – in all of its facets.

I tried to stop asking so many questions and instead allowed him to direct the conversation a little more. We started to walk back to the restaurant and kept talking about the Watchers and leaving it. He echoed Mom’s opinion that we were never in any physical danger when we left. “They got more protective later,” he said. But he did tell me that when he was traveling, even far before we left, he felt that information was not freely given. “I called the Regional Leadership and let them know that I was coming to the area. I wanted a list of fellowship times and places so that I could go to fellowship. They wouldn’t tell me.”

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<sup>10</sup> Name has been changed.

He looked so disappointed. He looked confused and frustrated. I put my arm around him and laid my head on his shoulder as we walked and talked. I am used to talking and thinking about what has hurt me. I wonder if Dad ever thinks about these things, ever talks about them.

The beginning and the end of our conversation were powerful, too. Now I am remembering better what we talked about in the beginning: the music. The music in my memoir. Dad and I talked about listening to the music now. Neither of us could think of anything with which we disagree. He made me a CD for my birthday, and we shared our experiences of how it is to listen to it now. He told me when he gave me the CD a month ago that he had listened to it all the way through and had cried. I cried, too, when I read the song titles. When I listened to it, I cried a little, but mostly I sang along or just let the music take me back. He said that he couldn't hear all of the words to a song and didn't know – had never understood what the song was about.

“Which one, Pop?”

“Oh, she's driving through Tennessee...”

I knew immediately the song that he meant. “Yeah. ‘It's a Wonder,’” I said. And then I explained the story of the song to him.

“Wow. I never knew that. Huh.”

“Yep. Stevie Kay Louis.” My favorite Watchers musician.

After we had walked for awhile, we sat in the rockers on the porch in front of Cracker Barrel. Dad played with his chain. I worked the

mechanic's ring off my keychain and then played with it, bending the paper and seeing what I could do with the ring. We talked and played with our items. Both of us do this. We also both think faster than we can talk. I noticed this for the first time in my father during our conversation. He starts, stops, adds to, and continues sentences in chopped up, staccato rhythms and phrases. He even stuttered once. I couldn't believe it. No wonder I like talking with him. There is no pressure to make eye contact, no pressure to work at the other person's rate. If I have a question, I can just ask him, and we work together to figure out what he wants to say. He is my perfect conversation partner.

Except that he gets almost too intense for even me. Toward the very end of the conversation, we talked about an action-oriented God, action versus just being, church, dogma, the trinity, the Watchers, a retreat that my sister, mother, and father attended (barely, because neither of us want to talk about it), and Living Word Fellowship. I wanted to know why we, after five or six years of almost nothing Watchers-ish in our lives, started to hang out with Ex-Watchers again and even started a church.

I was surprised to find that I was not shocked at his answer. He had stopped rocking. He was still playing with his chain, but his face was almost still. He looked out across the parking lot.

I rocked faster, looked at him, and waited. We had come to this topic two times already, and I was not willing to let it go this time. It is

not that I thought he was avoiding the answer, it is that we kept “running down that rabbit trail” as he said.

“I missed the fellowship. There was good comradery. Good comradery. And I wanted it again. Your mom dragged me there, really.”

We talked for awhile longer, and I asked him about LWF, and we compared notes about what we think is “goofy” (his word) about church.

“I can’t do it, Dad. I just can’t.” I was talking about church and my inability go. I can’t. I can’t stand the people or the closeness or the rustling or the texture of the air. I can’t.

Dad said, “I believe we were made to do that, though.”

I nodded my head vigorously. Finally, someone understood! Then I realized that he meant something else. Cautiously, I asked, “Huh? What do you mean?”

Dad fumbled with his chain and then replied slowly, “We are meant to worship together.” He quoted a Bible verse. I tuned him out. Then I tuned back in quickly. I wanted to see if I could hear him, if I could understand. He talked, and I tried, but I just felt nauseous and tired.

We covered more topics, and I am still processing this entire conversation. I am aware as I write this that Dad and I can talk about three times more in one hour than I can with any other person. We both process quickly, and we are both nonlinear thinkers. I got this gift-curse from my father, and I feel more connected to him knowing that.

But I always feel connected to my father. We can talk about the abuse, and I rarely feel angry or even sad. Well, I rarely feel sad for me. I feel sad for Dad. He carries it with him. This is something else he and I have in common: we carry memories with us. The meanings of the memories might change. We might study them differently, but we still study them.

My seventy-five minutes is up. I am out of the hotseat, and I need to stop writing. But I am not sure what to make of this conversation or this memoir. I am allowing myself to slow down now and think consciously about identity, my identity, my family's shared identity, my dad, how he sees himself – or at least how I perceive that he sees himself. There is no person in my life with whom I have a more complicated relationship, and yet when we are quiet together, and sometimes when we talk, I feel closer to him than I do to most others. I yearn so much for his approval and his praise. I wish he knew how much I love him. I am not sure that he gets it. Before we broke from our conversation, I wrapped my hand around his, and I kissed his hand. I smelled his skin, and I smelled my daddy. "I love you, Dad."

"I love you, too, Janice," he replied. And I know that he does.

### Hotseat Three: Scott, Karen, and Teri

#### *Part One*

Last night, I am sat in Christopher Park across from the Stonewall Inn and wrote for an hour. I was frustrated with myself and this project,

and I knew that one way to move through the frustration was to simply begin writing – quickly, emotionally, and without hesitation or analysis. My initial methodological goal had been to write reflective memoirs within 24 hours of the interviews. I managed to write Mom’s within hours of our talk. Dad’s I wrote within 20 hours. But Scott’s, Karen’s, and Teri’s reflective memoirs have all been delayed, and I find that I cannot pick apart the stories of the past three conversations. Whenever I try, the stories fold into one another, and there are no distinct boundaries among them.

Scott’s and Teri’s interviews had to be rescheduled. Scott and I met a day late. He was on call over the weekend, and he went in to scrub for a heart transplant that took 16 hours. He came home deliriously exhausted Sunday. He could not even walk straight. Teri had to cancel for Monday, so Scott and I met on Monday evening, and I moved Teri to Tuesday night. This change in plans may be contributing to why I feel so disoriented. It is Friday afternoon. It is not that I have forgotten anything. It is more that the extra processing time and the combination of the three conversations in between have led to further questions on my part – questions about myself, my story, and how identity and dialogue are intertwined.

I have written and written this week, crafting memoirs about the conversations. I have worked in my head while walking, which is how I usually write. I am usually able to do this and then sit down and simply

transcribe my papers. This strategy was not working, so I began to write in a notebook that I bought in Brooklyn. But free-writing in the notebook is not working either. I want to write memoirs, but only expositions are emerging. It is as if I am too tired to even write about the action, about the performative drama of each conversation. I am emotionally and intellectually drained from the dialogic and reflective process of this project. My plan now is to write for ninety minutes – to put myself into the hotseat and not allow myself to stop writing until the time is up. I have bits and pieces already written that I will incorporate into this session, but mostly, the material will be fresh. I am not sure what will come of this hotseat, and I feel anxiety about this writing session. I have felt unsettled, on the verge of tears, all week. It is time to find out why. I think an answer will emerge while I am in the hotseat. I am frightened, but I am too tired of this weight to worry about the fear.

On Tuesday morning, I went to my last therapy session with my present counselor. She and I worked together when I was an undergraduate and while my therapist of record was on maternity leave over the past several months. She is an academic as well as a therapist, so we often talk about my thesis and its progress.

“How is it going?” she asks on Tuesday.

“It’s a hot mess. Everything is just a hot mess,” I reply. I feel angry and resentful.

“How so?”

“Nothing is happening like it should... like I thought it would. I have been working on this project for two years,” I complain, drawing out the last words for emphasis. “But with working so much, and Scott’s schedule, and the court case, plus last winter...” My voice drifts off, and I turn my head to look out the window, a common habit when I encounter a painful topic or an idea for which I cannot find the words.

I have a fluency issue. I stutter, and I lose words when I experience emotional extremes. It mostly happens when I am lecturing or am in therapy. These are the times when I am most mindful of both myself and the environment around me; I stutter and lose words because I become overwhelmed with information input, and I cannot process and communicate quickly enough to keep up with the messages that I am

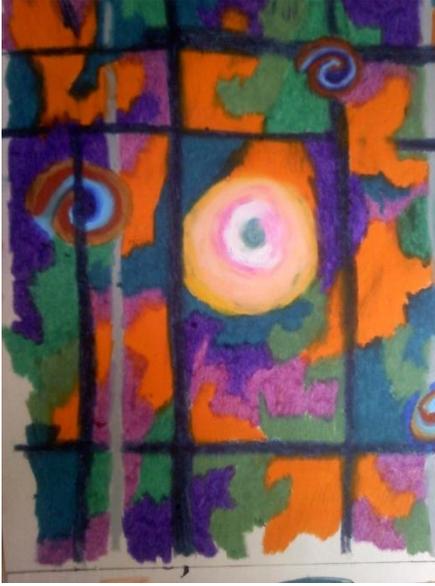
receiving. As I write this, I realize that I also stuttered here and there during the conversations with my family about the memoirs. To find my voice again, I break eye contact, squeezing my eyes shut and willing the words to come out. Sometimes I have to go as far as finger spelling the words to myself or writing them down and reading them. When I talk with my therapist, I can usually simply take a moment to breathe, and I



Woman in Labor  
Charcoal  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
December 2011

feel free to cuss myself out of the block. Cussing is the fastest coping mechanism, but it is the least socially acceptable.

On Tuesday, I stared out of the window not because I had started to stutter, but because I was suddenly overcome with memories of the



Self-Portrait  
Pencil and Oil Pastels  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
February 2012

past eighteen months. The worst segment of time lasted from November through May. A depression settled in me in November. I felt its coming, and I tried to stave it off with additional counseling sessions and higher dosages of my medication. My actions may have saved my life, but my sanity was in danger for months.

The depression settled in my mind and body in late November. The depression caused me to lose minutes, hours. One moment I was working, and ten minutes later, my fingers were poised over the keyboard, an unfinished word typed in a document. I did not remember what I was typing. I did not remember what I had been thinking about. The blank spaces stole my time and thoughts without my consent, and a sense of violation crept into me. By February, I had a plan for suicide. Reality, the world in which my loves ones live, became more and more fragmented and intangible to me. Emotions were either sharp, cutting

me with their intensity, or they were a susurrus of whispered shadows that I could not hold or express.

I felt my mind begin to crack. The fissures spread and branched. Many days, all I could do was hold my self together by sheer force of will. I felt distanced from everyone. I alerted my husband and therapist about my plans for killing myself, and I asked them to honor my honesty by leaving me alone, letting me grapple with the pain. They respected my request and only checked in with me on a weekly basis. They trusted me to make healthy decisions for my self, and that trust helped give me courage to confront the darkness that was overtaking my every waking and sleeping moment.

Not until May did I start to feel some relief. Now, at the end of June, I am in New York City on a personal and writing retreat. I facilitate my online classes, work on my project, and walk. I spend time with my cousin, his friends, and my best high school friend who is ever my kindred spirit. Now, as I write this, I realize that I also mourn. I mourn the things I wanted that never came. I mourn the rejections and betrayals that I have experienced over the past eighteen months, in the past 34 years. I mourn for my self. And I mourn all the years that I have spent in agony because of others' choices and the choices that I have made, too.

I was mourning in my therapist's office on Tuesday as I looked out over IUPUI's campus and got lost in my memories. My counselor calls

me back into that present moment, “What did you think it would be like?”

“Not like this!” I exclaim. I can yell and cuss in her office, and I often do. “I thought it would be, you know, organized.” I see the glimmer of a smirk on her face. She smirks at me a lot, and I allow it. I feel like we are friends, and this helps me feel more comfortable with personal disclosure. “I thought that I would write my literature review, write my methods, have the conversations, write the reflective memoirs, write the discussions, and Boom!” I take a deep breath. “... be done,” I sigh.

My counselor looks at me, and her smirk becomes a soft laugh. “Janice, I have never seen a clean thesis process. Never.” She grins at me.

“I know. I get that now. I am over it,” I reply. But I am not really over it. I am not really over the anger of losing the dream – my dream – of writing my thesis in peace. This has not been peaceful. My thesis has taken the back seat again and again to the need to make money, take care of my children, and write and submit court documents. My thesis, which is the greatest pleasure in my life, has been barely a presence, and I am angry.

Because of my own and others’ time constraints, the conversations were scheduled in a way that I now realize was unworkable according to my original plan of writing layered memoirs. There was not enough emotional space and time to write about each conversation within 24

hours of the interview. By the time that Teri and I met on Tuesday night, I was choked with emotions, and thoughts whirled around my head without ceasing. I could attain a little balance by using mindful meditation techniques like those taught by Dan Siegel and Pema Chodron, but the effects did not last for more than a few moments. I am beginning to feel panicked as I write about my internal experiences of this week. Ninety minutes is not up. It has been only an hour, but I need to take care of myself. I need to take a break.

### *Part Two*

I tell my therapist on Tuesday morning, “I am not sure that doing the interviews back to back was a great idea, but... I don’t know. I have not written about Scott’s yet, and I am leaving here to meet with Karen. I will meet with Teri tonight. It’s like all of the conversations are overlapping now, and I cannot make sense of one without referencing the others. While Scott and I were talking last night, I kept thinking about things that my dad said or mom said... or I said to them. The topics were all different, but they are all connecting for me now.” She nods her head. She is listening to me as an academic now. I know her nonverbals well enough to know that the mood in the room has shifted. I feel more comfortable now because I do not feel like I need to frame our conversation within the realm of emotions. “It’s like with Dad. Oh, my god! I saw him move like me, talk like me. I kept getting lost in *how* he was talking and forgot to listen to *what* he was saying. I kept thinking,

‘My god! It’s genetic! Or I learned this from him’... I am not sure, and I am not sure that it matters... but Dad and I... it’s a lot of work to talk with him, but it’s work that I can do. It’s worth it, you know?” I had been looking at the floor or out the window or at the journals in her bookcase, but now I look at her. “Dad and I... we talk the same. We understand each other’s rhythms. I *get* him. He *gets* me.” She is nodding her head, encouraging me to drill down and go deeper. She gives me this time, this space. “I don’t know. It is different than I thought it would be.”

She waits to talk to make sure that I am done speaking for now. I am at a loss for how to continue, so she asks, “What is different?”

“The conversations.”

“How so? What did you expect them to be like?”

“Oh, man!” I exclaim, running my hands over my face and through my hair. I take off my glasses, a sign that I am feeling very intense and want to be heard, want there to be no walls between my thoughts and her ears. I lock my gaze with hers, and I screw up my face. This is hard to talk about. “I... I thought that it would be like participant observation, I guess. I thought that since I wrote the damn memoirs and have been in therapy talking about them that I could detach.” I lock my fingers together into a pretzel and then yank them apart, making a picture of what detachment looks like to me.

I continue, “But I can’t. I can’t stay detached. I get sucked in. I feel them. Mom. Dad. Scott. I feel their reactions and their emotions. I feel them. It’s too much.” I drift into quietness and let my hands fall into my lap. I lean back into my chair and stare at the ceiling. “It’s too much.” I breathe for a few moments and ask myself what is too much. I want to figure this out, this exhaustion that I feel.

“This is the hardest work I have ever done.” I look back at my therapist. She is nodding, and her face shows concern and understanding. “This is more emotion work than I was prepared for, and in a lot of ways I don’t want to do it anymore. I am done. Over it.” I swing my arms outward like a conductor who is abruptly calling a symphony to rest. My therapist rolls her eyes upward and nods deeply, her head bobbing up and down, but her eyes never leaving my face now. “I am not sure that I can go on.”



Invitational Penetration  
Chalk and Oil Pastels  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
May 2012

I take a deep breath and finish my monologue, “But I know...” I start in a mocking voice. “... that this is a process,” I sneer. She laughs and rests her back against her chair. I stick my tongue out at her. I have succeeded in finding the answer to my problem. I continue, hating every word because it is a truth that I do not want to bear, “This is a

process, and emotion work is part of it – just a much bigger part of it than I thought it would be.”

“And now?” she asks quietly.

“And now I will keep going. I will meet with Karen and Teri, and Amanda in New York. But I don’t know about the secondary memoirs. I don’t know how to write those now.” I close my eyes and lay my head on the chair’s edge. I sigh and say, “I will figure it out. It is what I do.” I resent my resourcefulness at times. It is hard to allow myself to be still when I know that I can work to discover how an obstacle can be overcome.

My therapist and I sit in the silence of her office for a minute, and I allow myself to feel a sense of trust for myself and this project build within me. This, too, is hard. I am not used to allowing my work to flow. I am used to working, to exerting all of my energy and making a paper happen. This project is bucking my system, throwing me off again and again. I am so bruised and disoriented now that I am afraid to try again. So, I decide to stop trying and start allowing the project to take control of where it goes.

“I wonder,” I pause and look at her to see how she reacts to this idea. “... if it was a good idea to stack the conversations so close together.” I close my eyes and try to find the words that will fit the shape of the idea in my head. I open my eyes and look at my therapist, hoping that I can make sense of this feeling for her and for me, too. “It has been

so intense, and now I have two more to do today. I am completely immersed in this. I almost can't breathe," I say, unclenching hands that had tightened without my knowledge. "But I wonder if the intensity of it all is going to work to bring stuff up and out," I run my hands up my abdomen, under my chin, and through an arc in front of my body. "The intensity may be a good thing, may help me think new thoughts, you know?"

She nods her head and smiles at me.

I sense that I have her approval, and I feel comforted. It is good to hear someone say that I am doing something right. But then my smile fades, and I sigh and ask, "Will I be ok? Will this project be what finally breaks me?"

Barely audibly, she asks, "What do you think about that?"

I sneer at her, and then I smirk, and then the smirk turns into a smile. I love this woman, and I love how we work together. I trust her more than I trust myself. If she were concerned for me, she would have said something. "I think that I am going to New York on Wednesday. And I think that the process," I stop to make a mock-angry face at her. I hate that word, and she knows it. "... will take care of itself.

Now I am in New York. I am struggling to think, much less write. My mind feels like it is being washed by cool rainwater, and I cannot stop the run-off from flowing away. I panic at the loss of my greatest sense of self-efficacy, which is the ability to write what I want when I want. But I

know – somehow I know – that my task right now is to allow this story-thesis to unfold. And this is the hardest thing for me: to not work, to not take control. The project is in charge now. There are relationships building between my mind and the memoirs and the conversations. They are not ready for me to get involved yet. I think that I would handle them too roughly and force them into shapes that are not their own. I want this story-thesis to be profound, meaningful, and ground-breaking. I feel certain that if I force myself upon the project now, I will ruin the whole project. Instead, I stretch my comfort zone and decide to take a walk, then go uptown to have a slumber party with wine and chocolate and my Amanda. I will breathe this project into a very small and soft pillow, and then place the pillow in a room in my mind. I will lay my head down on the project-pillow and see what dreams emerge when the project calls to me and not before.

A sense of terror is rising in me, and so I am walking away from this keyboard, and I am leaving this apartment. If I stay here, I will work... and I worry that what I fear will overcome me, and I will not be able to give myself and project the space that we need.

### *Part Three*

On Monday night, Scott and I sat across from each other on the daybed in our living room. I looked at him as he settled against the pillows, and I felt both love and trepidation. He is my partner and my lover, and he is also one of the most penetrating conversationists I know.

I was unsure where our conversation would take me. My stomach flip-flopped in me as I remembered the conversations that we have had in the past about my faith journey. He is not always gentle with me; his words can hurt even when he only intends to ask questions that will invite me to think about something from a different angle. I also realize that I am nervous because I want his approval. I want him to like my writing. I want him to tell me how much progress toward personal peace I have made in the past eight years. I turn my eyes toward the back door and take a moment to breathe, letting go of the pressures that I put on him and myself. I want the conversation to unfold spontaneously, so I work to stay in the present moment and empty my mind of everything but the sounds of my breath.

On Tuesday, Karen sat across from me at the small café table. The breeze was cool, and the sun was not yet too hot for us to be comfortable sitting outdoors. We both ordered tall glasses of iced chai, and I also ordered a Moroccan carrot salad. Karen's soft demeanor helped me relax, but I still felt anxious. Scott's interview the night before had unsettled me and raised questions that I was not yet ready to answer for myself or for others. What if Karen did the same? After eight years of knowing and loving Scott, I trust him enough to be uncertain around him. Karen is a former professor and mentor; I do not want to look like an idiot in front of her. I realize as I sip my chai that this is a fear that I want to release before we begin to talk. It is ok if I do not have the

answers, if my writing is not perfect, if I cannot cogently express every thought. I am a student, and more than that, I am a human.

Uncertainty is part of the gig. In my mind, I softly say, “Borderlands,” and I release myself to the conversation before me.

On Tuesday night, my sister bounced into the small coffee house near campus. She looked adorable in her black and white dress and matching shoes. In combination with her outfit, her short, curly hair and dark red lipstick made her look like a McCall’s ad from the 1950’s. My sister is beautiful and complex. I am looking forward to my conversation with her. We laughed and chatted as we moved my laptop and bag outside to a little wrought iron table. The noise of the rush-hour traffic melts away as we sip our drinks. I had bought her a slice of pie and a glass of milk. I drank my usual medium iced latte and waited for us to settle down enough to talk about the memoir. My sister and I are best friends. I feel only anticipation about our interview.

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I am trying to help Scott understand what daily life is like for me. “I live a life of compare and contrast. Everything is up here,” I point at my forehead. “Nothing is automatic. I can’t just make an easy decision.”

Scott asks, “Is that what it is like for you?”

I stare at the fence that runs around the perimeter of our property and focus on the lights and shadows that play in the wooden boards. “I can’t make decisions easily,” I reiterate, following the thought to see

where it goes. “I want to do something, but then I wonder if I am making that choice because of old habits or because of fear or because it really does fit in with how I want to live my life.” I look at Scott. He is leaning forward and listening intently. He is learning something new about me. “Making a simple choice – like what coat to buy for winter – can take me hours. I can just stand there and think through all the possibilities and all the implications of each choice until my head is spinning so fast that I give up. I leave without a coat, you know? I just get so overwhelmed, wondering which coat is God’s will for me to have... then reminding myself that God just wants me to have a damn coat... but then I wonder if I am being too self-indulgent, which is a sin,” Words are streaming from me so fast, and I am surprised that I am not stuttering. I feel my heart beating hard within me. I reach for a cigarette, light it, take a hit. “... and then I say, ‘Fuck it!’ and reach for a coat that I like, that we can afford.”

Scott nods at me and waits. I continue, “But by then I don’t know what to do, so I just leave without a new coat.” Shrugging my shoulders, I rest my head against the back of the deck chair and grimace at my husband. I can feel the pain in my face, and by his expression I know that he sees it, too. “Sounds horrible, yeah?”

“Yeah... I didn’t know that’s how it is for you. How long has it been that way?” Scott asks.

I consider the question and reply, "Since... well, for as long as I can remember. But it got a lot worse in my early twenties. And now, actually, it is getting better." I snort and stub out the cigarette. I am so frustrated that this is the reality in which I live, but I can't seem to shake it, can't seem to move on.

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Karen asks me, "Do you know what a spiritual director is?"

I shake my head slowly and reply, "I have heard the term, but, no." The confession makes me cringe a little. I do not want to sound stupid, ignorant. "I am not sure what it means."

Karen explains the idea, "It's a person who helps you answer questions about spirituality. It's a mentor."

*Oh, my god, I think. This is what I want. This is what I need. Someone to help me figure all of this out. Someone I can talk to, really talk to.* I realize in that moment that I never feel comfortable telling others about my struggles with spirituality because I feel like a burden. I feel dumb. I feel like I am the only one who has no idea of how to relate to a god I do not understand and am not sure that I trust. As Karen explains what she knows about spiritual mentors in the Indianapolis area, I keep reaching for paper and a pen. I want to remember this. I smile when I think, too, that Karen is a teacher, and I am a student. It makes sense that I want to take notes. I pick up my iced chai instead, and I relax my body as I sip and listen to her stories.

As she talks, I grow more and more excited. She gives me an excuse to write the term “spiritual director” down when she gives me the email address of a contact she knows. I find to my embarrassment that I want to cry. I feel lucky that I catch myself before I feel the need to blink back any tears. *My face is barely red, I think. She doesn't notice.* I find it hard to attend to what she is saying about my memoir and what struck her. I want to run home and email a contact she knows. I cap my pen and force myself to listen to her and finish the conversation. I want to spend time with Karen; she is one of my favorite people. I also want to find a spiritual director today. I want to stop feeling so much pain and conflict in my heart.

After Karen and I hugged and parted ways, I walked to my car feeling both excited and hesitant. *I want to work with a spiritual director, I think. Right? It wouldn't make sense to want to stay where I am.* I pause with my key in my car door. There is a thought that is calling out to me, but I can't hear it yet. I wait for a moment, and then it comes. *Ugh. Sounds like the Watchers. Someone to show me the way. Teach me how to love God. That's not what it is. I know. I know. Just sounds like that from a certain angle.* I am aware even in the midst of the inner-argument that I wish that Scott were here to listen in on my thoughts, to see an example of what I had described the night before. *It's safe, Janice. Whoever it is... their job is to help you be you and grow in ways that work for you. Yeah, but what if what works for me is so far out of*

*God's will that ... what if I am hopeless? What if there is no good match for me?*

I am already driving when I have this thought. I turn on the radio and sing along to a random song, a coping mechanism I use when my thoughts get too loud.

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“When did you write this?” Teri asks.

I crinkle my forehead in consternation. *This is her first question?* I think. I consider a few options for why she is asking, and then I give myself up to the moment and dive into the conversation, “Oh, well, I have been writing the memoirs for over a year. Um... yours was started last fall. I finished it in late winter. I got stuck at one point. I knew that it wasn’t done.” I thumbed through the copy that she had brought and pointed to an area on the third page. “Originally, it ended there. But it was too short. And I had more to say, but I didn’t know what. Then, a few weeks ago, I listened to the old Watchers music that Uncle Tim<sup>11</sup> sent me. And I cried, and I laughed. And I realized what I wanted to say.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“That I miss it. Isn’t that ridiculous? Crazy? I mean, who says that? Who thinks that? ‘Oh, yeah, I miss being part of a cult.’” I pause and look at Teri. I don’t know if she feels the same, but I know that she

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonym

understands. “I do miss it, Sissy. Not the teachings. But the people. And the music. I miss the community. I lost my family, you know?”

“Yeah, I know,” she almost whispers.

“Are you ok talking about all of this?” I ask after a few silent moments.

“Huh? Why?” she asks, looking truly confused.

I try to explain, “Well, I wonder if this is all ethical, you know? I mean, I am asking you guys to talk about stuff that really happened, that was painful. It almost wrecked our family. And I wonder about bringing it all up and talking about it... if I am hurting you guys. I mean, I talk about it all the time – with you, Scott, my therapist. But... I don’t know. On the other hand, I guess, you did agree to it, right? You all could have said no.”

Teri takes a sip of her milk and gingerly brushes pie crumbs from her face. Quite simply, she replies, “Oh, yeah, honey. I am fine. This doesn’t bother me a bit.

“You aren’t frustrated with me? For wanting to talk about all of this yet again? You’re not tired of me bringing all this crap up?”

“Nope. Not a bit,” says my sister as she leans back and shakes her head at me. She is being honest. I am filled with love for my family. I keep needling old topics, looking for answers everywhere. I need to know why I believe certain things, where certain memories come from. I need to make sense of my life, and I sense that many of the answers can be

found in my past and my family's past. I probe myself for a moment to see if I feel like I am almost done with the topic of my childhood and the Watchers. This is the fifth conversation about the Watchers, my childhood, and my personal journey in four days, but I do not feel saturated. I feel curious. My inner dialogue is more and more explicit, and I am having fun listening to myself do everything from argue vehemently to wonder about possibilities. I felt stressed earlier in the day, but now I am so immersed in the process that I feel mostly tired and content to know that I am working on something. *Surely all of this emotion work will go somewhere, I think. All of this work just can't be for nothing.*

I lean back in my chair and allow myself to look as tired as I feel. I had hid my exhaustion from everyone else, except Scott. I do not want to perform in front of Teri. I am too tired, and I also know that I have nothing to perform. She would call me out if she felt like I was "being fake" as she would call it, so there is no point anyway. I feel comforted by that.

This conversation feels different from the others. With Mom, I worked to maintain my boundaries. I was also aware of her feelings and how much I wanted to avoid hurting her. With Dad, I felt the most self-conscious, like I was doing something wrong almost. I also experienced that we worked to understand each other and serve each other. With Scott, I worked to articulate feelings and experiences in ways that he

would understand. I wanted him to really get how scary and frustrating my life is. With my therapist, I labored to understand why I feel so tired and overwhelmed. I allowed myself to worry and feel the anxiety that this project is causing in me. With Karen, I felt some pressure to perform the role of student and also some pressure to show her how much I have grown as a person and as a scholar. With Teri, I just feel glad to have someone who understands. She was a Watchers kid, too. She knows my story. She lived her own version. There is very little translational work that we need to do. We just get each other.

I look at Teri and ask, “Why do you ask?” She looks at me with a puzzled look, and I realize that I had asked a question out of context. “I mean about when I wrote your memoir. What makes you ask that?”

Teri studies me for a moment and answers, “Because I don’t recognize you.”

“You mean that stuff never happened? You don’t remember my sitting by the record player and all that?”

“No, I mean that you’ve changed.” She taps the memoir between us. “You wouldn’t have written this a year ago.”

I consider her words and what they mean. “You are right. I was still angry. And I still am, don’t get me wrong! But I also feel other things, too. Sometimes the memories feel good. Sad but good.”

Teri nods. She says, “You are so soft here.” She fingers the memoir’s pages again.

I nod and look at the memoir. I realize that I feel soft. I feel vulnerable, confused, and soft. My hard edges of bitterness are gone suddenly, and I feel afraid, too. Cynicism and bitterness are heavy, but they are like protective armor. Lead with cynicism and follow through with bitterness – with that kind of punch, no one can touch you. But I want to be touched. I want to touch. I want to find a new place in my Borderlands. “Well, yeah,” I surprise myself by saying. “Yeah. Anger is easy. When you allow yourself to remember the good times, then you have to mourn the loss... and the bad memories. You have to acknowledge the hurt. It’s way more painful to remember the good stuff, but I think I can now. I think I want to. Maybe I can be done with this someday.”

The Borderlands is still my home. I have always envisioned it as a windy place, and I have seen myself walking into the wind, fighting to keep my balance and also to not be flung back to where I came from. I am ready to move a little now, resituate just a bit so that I feel the joy of the wind on my face. The Borderlands is becoming more peaceful. I am more confident of my ability to maintain a place of my own there.

#### Hotseat Four: Amanda

I want to tell you that this has been a painful process. I want you to understand that I cannot talk about this anymore, outside of therapy, outside of my own head. The noise of/from these conversations hurts me. I am wounded. I am exhausted with the efforts of wanting to feel

one emotion at a time but only being able to try to function amidst the chaos of all the voices. This is the last reflection of the last interview. I am done. And I am relieved.

Amanda and I spent a lot of time together while I stayed in New York City. I bounced back and forth between my cousin's apartment in Prospect Park, Brooklyn to her apartment in Inwood, Manhattan. Amanda and Phillip live nearly two hours apart by subway and sidewalk. I learned how to use the time on the train to think, watch people, rock with the motion and simply exist, and read. I also learned how to sink deeply within myself and listen to my breaths, feel the texture and colors of my thoughts. My favorite part of the subway ride every time was watching another train move past mine, seeing my reflection in the window and also seeing other people's shapes in the next train. It is the closest I have ever come to seeing the nature of my mind in the external world: blurred, fast, hard to hold, transparent, hard to grasp, quick to pass, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, and lonely.

Many hours were spent on the subway, and on the day that Amanda and I held our interview, I left her for the last time on that stay in New York. She walked to rehearsal in Riverside Park, and I took a few trains and a walk to Brooklyn, picking up the apartment keys from my cousin, who was working in the Bowery that day. It was a long day. I tried to find the shape of our interview during the rides and the walks, but like the three conversations before hers, our talk left me exhausted

in mind and in body. Even the train ride was overwhelming. My bags were too heavy. The heat of the day was too dry and too extreme. I felt homesick for the first time, but I recognized even then that I was not pining for Indianapolis but for a place of silence and stillness.

I unpacked my laptop when I got to the apartment and began the process of plugging it in and booting it up. I paused as I bent over the socket, the plug in my hand. Slowly I tidied my cousin's room instead, and I left the apartment to find Green-Wood Cemetery. There, I took pictures, studied grave symbols, and walked the winding paths. I took a short nap on a hillside and listened to the city that surrounds the 400-acre graveyard. I felt the age of the place, of the emotions, of the people buried around me. I breathed my passions into the ground, asking forgiveness lest I disturb any flora or fauna or any spirits resting there. And then I began to feel somewhat centered again.

The day after my interview with Amanda, my cousin's roommate let me know that my stay had been too long for their<sup>12</sup> comfort and asked me to leave the apartment by eleven in the morning and not return until six in the evening. Rather than make the trek by bus and sidewalk to the local coffee shop so that I could write, I have waited until now, six days after the interview, to write about it. I am home in Indianapolis now. Yet I know that I am not home. This story-thesis has changed me and how I perceive myself and everything, everyone around me. I face

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<sup>12</sup> This plural pronoun refers to a singular person; my cousin's roommate is gender queer and prefers avoiding any gendered language in reference to themselves.

the task of finding a new home. Luckily, I am adept at this sort of exercise. Am I resentful of my Borderlands now? Do I wish to forsake her and immerse myself, assimilate myself, into a set culture with set rules? It is tempting. But I find that what hope I feel in this moment is grounded in the transitions I am experiencing, and so I take a few deep breaths, stop moving, stop thinking, and sit down here with my memories and my emotions. I will write this last memoir and see what comes. And I will write it from my Borderlands.

As had two other interviews before hers, Amanda's interview had to be rescheduled two different times due to time conflicts. Her interview was eventually held on the last Sunday of my trip to New York City. We left her apartment in Inwood and took the train to the Upper Westside where we took seats at one of the sidewalk tables belonging to a posh French bakery and restaurant. She ordered a small breakfast, and I ordered orange juice and coconut macaroons. We chatted for a short time with the French family and the French-speaking server before we settled into our conversation.

I was conscious the whole time of the sorrow I felt about parting from her at the end of our meal. Amanda and I rarely see each other though we have been close friends since middle school. Her family no longer lives in Indiana, and she rarely visits her college town and friends of Bloomington, Indiana. I do not know when I will again be able to fly out to see her again. I was already grieving the loss of the nearness of

her. I was also conscious that Amanda had volunteered to work on this project with me because one of my co-conversationists for this memoir had deserted me and the project in late April, and I have not heard from him since. I had chosen him because he is featured in this memoir, and he had agreed seemingly enthusiastically last year to participate in this process with me. Alas, he – my first love and sometimes friend – did what he commonly does: he vanished into thin air with no warning and no trace. Anger, fatigue, sadness, and confusion have all been a part of this project, and so it was with these feelings and also a sense of relief that the interview process was nearly over that I looked at her as I chewed on a macaroon and asked, “So, what are your thoughts?”

Amanda checked the time on her cell phone and took her notes from her bag. She smoothed them out on the table beside her, and we began to discuss the memoir. “Well, one question I have – I brought it up last night – is about the inconsistencies and places where it seems like information was left out on purpose.”

Amanda and I had come close to talking about the memoir several times, but we had agreed that we wanted to wait until we could dedicate a complete hour to the conversation. Not talking about many aspects of this project with her had been difficult for both of us; Amanda is my scholar-friend, and we talk often about our two disciplines of theatre and communication. We are both artists and performers in our own ways.

She focuses on action and I on context. We both enjoy exploring motivation and identity. “What do you mean?” I asked.

“For example,” she says as she leafs through the memoir, “You say here that you enjoyed leafing through the magazines that you found, and you fantasized about going to...”

“Scotland, I think,” I interjected. I could feel the picture-postcard beneath my fingers, see the castle-like manor that it depicted. “Yeah, I wanted to go there.”

“You say that it was because of...” she paused again and referred to the pages in front of her. I knew that she was prepared. Knowing her as I do, she was probably overly-prepared. She had read for a second time and made notes on the memoir while I had read a novel next to her and then had fallen asleep. It was an odd feeling to know that she was preparing for our conversation while I slept next to her. I felt exposed and yet comforted as I drifted to sleep because of all of my co-conversationists, I trust Amanda most to trust me and love me, no matter what. “You say here that you wanted a family here on earth as well as in heaven.

“Yeah,” I replied softly as I pushed macaroon around on my plate. I looked up at her and continued, “Yeah, I wanted to belong to a community. You were gone – down at IU<sup>13</sup> with all the girls. I was left alone, you know? I mean, you guys didn’t know what was going on. No

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<sup>13</sup> Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana

one did. I didn't really have any friends in my own class – except for John<sup>14</sup>... and we were falling apart. So, I dreamed of escaping.”

“That makes sense – that no one knew and that you wanted to get out of there,” she said.

“How do you mean? Why does it make sense that I didn't tell anyone what was going on?” I was eager for someone to make sense of my choices for me. By this point in the process of the story-thesis, I could no longer make sense of anything that I had done or felt all those years ago or now in this present time, either.

“You were... what, seventeen?”

“Yeah, seventeen.”

She penetrated me with her gaze, “Janice, it makes total sense. You needed a safe place, and no one at home was providing it for you. You found it at school. In choir and the speech team and Stagecrafters...”

“Yeah, I was an officer of, like, four clubs, I think,” I added lamely.

“So school was your safe place. It makes sense that... you say here,” she looked down at her notes, “You saw here, ‘During the day when I was at school, I worked to present an image of confidence, sexiness, and fun. I allowed myself to pretend with my boyfriend that our relationship was stable and even deepening. He was the only person at school who had any idea of what was going on at my house. At night,

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<sup>14</sup> Name has been changed for the sake of anonymity.

I allowed the sadness and anger to engulf me. Hiding in my room, I did my homework,” her voice drifted off. “You had to protect yourself somehow. You were seventeen, Janice,” she accentuated my age. “You couldn’t deal with all of this. Selfish idiots,” she muttered.

I smiled sardonically as I thought of my mother, sister, and father and how they behaved during that time. Amanda is quick to defend a friend who is hurting. I wished then that I had told her – even if just her – what was happening to me and inside of me during the period that the events of that memoir took place. “I’m sorry that I couldn’t... didn’t tell you, Amanda. I... I didn’t know how.” I fiddled with my food and my dishes and then leaned back into my chair, feeling frustrated and close to tears. “I just felt so alone, you know?” She nodded at me and started to reply. I quickly finished my thought, wanting to finish my thought before we moved on. Her face told me that she was going to comfort me, and I was not ready for that yet. “I didn’t trust anyone at that point.”

“God, why would you?” she snorted.

“Right?” I smiled at her. She understood. I did not need to continue to defend my actions, but I wanted to see what I had to say. I felt something unfolding inside of me. “I was afraid everyone would think I was crazy. ‘Oh, look. Here comes Janice. She’s crying... she’s so... melodramatic.’” I waved my hands in the air and spoke mockingly.

Amanda shook her head and said, “Oh, honey. You weren’t crazy.”

“I felt like I was,” I said under my breath.

“I’m sure. What your family did... how they handled all of this...”

She shook her head again. That topic was exhausted. “I want to ask you something.”

“Of course.”

“Did you not know sooner? That the Watchers was a cult? Had they...,” referring to my family, “...never told you before?”

I furrowed my brow and tried to remember, which is a frustrating experience for me. Either I do remember, or I do not. My ability to remember in minute detail the distant past is powerful and respected among my friends and family. However, there are whole years that I cannot recall, and I also cannot understand why they are missing. My therapist has pleaded with me to stop trying to force myself to find the pieces that fill in the blank spaces. But the holes in my memory call to me, and I cannot leave them alone because their presence makes me feel alone, naked, incomplete, and not a little abnormal. I slowly started to answer Amanda, begging memories to emerge as I spoke, “Not my family... no. I’m not sure that Mom and Dad knew it was a cult for a long time. Among some of the Bankerts, whether or not it is a cult is still a point of contention. But...” and then I remembered a brightly-lit kitchen, a voice, an argument. “But, yeah. Do you remember Sarah Farmer<sup>15</sup>?”

Amanda shook her head and leaned forward.

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<sup>15</sup> Name has been changed for the sake of anonymity.

I continued, “Well, she was uber-Christian, went to some non-denominational church. One night I was staying the night at her house, and we got into it about the Trinity. I was raised to not believe in the Trinity. It is God, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit,” I explained, slicing my hand downward through the air to emphasize how the Watchers taught the separateness of each being. “And so we argued, and she went to her mom and basically told on me.” I laughed softly at the scene in my mind, which was terribly frightening and angering when it happened, but almost ludicrous twenty years later when I could remember it like a scene from a movie.

“How old were you?” Amanda asked.

“Oh, maybe eleven or twelve.” The memory was fully constructed now, and I heard her voice from a distance. I was too far away to focus on Amanda’s face because I was in Sarah’s kitchen, talking with Sarah and her mom. I continued, and I noticed that my voice sounded dreamy, “Well, her mom explained to Sarah that she had heard of the Watchers and that the Watchers is all about Biblical scholarship. I remember that she told Sarah not to mess with me – like about quoting the Bible – because I probably could run circles around her, quoting chapter and verse.” I looked up at Amanda and smiled wanly. “And she was right. I probably could have. Of course, I don’t remember anything now. And I don’t want to,” I added even as passages from Romans, Psalms, Corinthians, I John, and other books streamed word-for-word through

my mind. I shook my head to dislodge the unwelcome voices. Then my smile faltered, and I said, “But it was the first time that I can remember feeling like an outsider. Like I was different, what I believed was different. Oh, I didn’t know that the Watchers was a cult, but...” my voice faltered a little, and I did not continue.

Amanda and I talked until our hour was finished. We laughed here and there as we reconstructed scenes from high school. She asked more questions that in this moment I do not even want to remember, but for one. I remember at one point feeling downright irate and saying, “Yeah. About that. What kind of sick fuck wants to re-enter a cult? Not join a cult... Oh, no. I wanted to go back, Amanda.” I looked at her to see if she understood. “That’s fucking sick.” In that moment, I realized that I continue to judge myself harshly for how I felt as a teenager even that I understand what my motivations were.

Amanda asked, “Why did you want to go back?”

I was still very angry, and I answered her in tones dripping with truculence. I did not try to hide my emotions. Amanda is an associate artistic director for a Manhattan theater group; she can handle strong emotions and would be dismayed if I ever tried to hide mine from her because of our long and intimate relationship. “Stability and safety. I know it doesn’t make sense, but the Watchers represented everything that I wanted at that time: community, stability, and safety.”

We continued to explore those ideas, and I was surprised that not only did Amanda not judge me, she also understood my feelings. She helped me make sense of them in a way that I never had before. Because of our conversation, I have more compassion for the 17-year-old Janice than I have ever had.

However, our conversation also left me feeling emptied of all strength to go one with the project. I had spent the last of the emotional currency left in the account marked “story-thesis”. Before we parted ways, I asked her forgiveness, “Amanda?”

She looked at me enquiringly as we tidied the table and gathered our things.

“Amanda, I am sorry. I really believed, you know? But I was an ass.” I fumbled for the right words and the right word order to help her understand. “I really believed that Christianity was right,” I explained. “I am sorry that I tried to force it on you.” She started to protest, but I continued, “I just... I’m sorry. Please forgive me.”

Amanda looked at me for a long moment before her face broke into a smile, and she laughed, “Oh, honey, we were all assholes. That is what high school is about.”

Over the years, I have come to adopt many of the beliefs that Amanda has held since we were teenagers together. With her, I can discuss the magic of a moment, the healing energy of amethyst, the hilarity of watching my parish priest honor the moon goddess and Horus

during Mass, and other thoughts that I would never try to share with my immediate family members or most of my friends. With Amanda, there are no apologies that need to be made or masks that need to be worn. She is a safe person.

Amanda and I kissed goodbye one more time, and I entered the subway station alone. Loneliness shifted back into its places on my shoulders and between my breasts. I stood for a moment and heard an inner Janice weeping. All I could recognize is that I felt suddenly very alone and heavy. As I write these last sentences of the last reflective memoir, I have the insight and the courage to say that my conversation with Amanda – more than any one of the others – helped me perceive that my struggles with spirituality and wanting to feel a sense of community have been so long and so hard because I have not been willing to be honest with myself and others about who I really am, what I really need, and what I truly believe.

#### Post-Hotseats: Beginning to Process



Forgotten Gardens  
Photograph taken in Green-Wood  
Cemetery, Brooklyn

Taking cemetery walks and studying and photographing gravestones is one of my primary ways of both relaxing and expressing myself. On one of my last days in New York, after Amanda and I talked, I visited Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. During the hours that I spent in Green-

Wood, I allowed myself to let go of the project and simply enjoy my



Lonely Angels  
Photograph taken in Green-Wood  
Cemetery, Brooklyn  
Ianice Bankert-Countryman

discoveries. I felt at the time – and still feel

– that what caught my eye were the

monuments and corners that reflected

either or both great loneliness and great

love. The photographs that I choose to

share here I consider to be part of the art-

work that I created as part of this story-

thesis. They not only depict the objects and

shapes found in the cemetery – and later

the subway, St. Peter's Church, the

Museum of Modern Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art – but also

the emotions with which I grappled by myself on my long walks in the

city.

Toward the end of my stay in New York City, I chose more and

more to spend time alone rather than with my cousin or any of the

people I met there. I called my husband less, and I texted friends less.

Though painful, processing my emotions, memories, and conversations

alone was more comfortable than trying to articulate my thoughts or

feelings. Taking pictures became a way of conversing with my self about

my self. Over the course of the trip, I was attracted to negative spaces,

the spaces created by shadows and lights that I saw as the spaces

between focal points: doorways, windows, the spaces between people and

what could be seen between limbs of trees. I was also fascinated studying peoples' interactions with one another. I found comfort



Between the Dark and the Light  
Photograph taken in Green-Wood  
Cemetery, Brooklyn  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

especially in stillness and images of reflection, even sadness. As I look through my nearly 700 photographs taken over a two-week period, I perceive that I was taking self-portraits. Many of my photographs, especially the ones taken on my last day when I visited the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, depict how I view Borderlands.



Hidden; Between Two Paths  
Photograph taken in Green-Wood  
Cemetery, Brooklyn  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**DISCUSSIONS OF THE SHIFTING KALEIDOSCOPE: IMMEDIATE**  
**OUTCOMES, THEORETICAL CONNECTIONS, AND SYMBOLIC**  
**DIVERGENCE**



Rift  
Acrylic on canvas board  
Janice banker-Countryman  
July 2012



Process  
Acrylic paint on canvas board  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
August 2012

As I sit to write this final section, my eye is caught by the last artwork I created while in reflection about this project. “Process” was created in early August 2012. I had returned from New York a month earlier, and I had not been able to write a word for this project. Not only did I feel empty, incapable of continuing the conversation, but I was also caught up in preparing for and then facilitating a two-week long summer program for a group of incoming freshmen. For that on-ground institution, my regular fall semester teaching schedule started four days after the end of that program. For an online institution, I was teaching three additional sections. Teaching overtook my life.

It is now October 31, and in two more days I will submit this story-thesis to my advisor for a final review. I will defend my thesis the week before Thanksgiving. The last several months have been a blur of activity, and I have spent little time with my story-thesis; yet this project has consistently been a part of my daily conversations. For the first time, I have folded Buber’s notion of I-Thou relationships into lectures in my public speaking classes. I have also become more confident about discussing ideas of repowered feminism (Foss & Foss, 2009) and invitational rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995) in those classes. In all of my on-ground classes, I have played with talking with my students about positivism, social construction, and relativism. I use more artwork and videos in class, and I ask my students to write more reflectively and

complete more creative projects, all of which we discuss in class. My teaching habits are changing.

Possibly most importantly, I have discovered a new authenticity in my relationships with my students. I feel that co-creating this project has helped me move toward exploring and playing with engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) and friendship in the classroom (Rawlins, 2000) in ways that I had never before considered. I allow myself to learn alongside my students. I challenge them and myself to question assumptions about themselves and their lifeworlds. I share more of my own experiences. My students and I engage in story-telling. I have noticed that my classes are both more relaxed and more productive. Additionally, I feel safer as well as more dynamic in the classroom. One of my students has said to me this semester, “Janice, you are on fire today!” I know what he means. I feel it, too. The process of researching, writing, and reflecting on my story-thesis has affected my teaching life, and so it has also affected my students’ lives.

Although I did not expect this outcome, I was not surprised. Irwin and Kind write, “A/r/tography dislocates complacency, location, perspective, and knowledge. A/r/tography becomes a passage to somewhere else” (2005, p. 909). I had assumed at the beginning of this project that the most immediate outcome of this project would be that I would see my self, my journey, and my lifeworld in new ways. However, it is the unintended consequences of my story-thesis that are the most

immediately noticeable. Parrish-Sprowl notes that the unintended consequences of a project in development communication should always be considered (2000). My story-thesis does not exactly fit within the realm of development communication, and yet it can be argued that there was a great deal of dialogue and invitation to co-create and engage in new systems of communication. Including myself, there were seven participants, and all of us willingly engaged in reflecting, questioning, and dialoguing. I was the only one looking for a specific outcome; however, my mother and I, my father and I, my husband and I... all of these relationships have changed. I wonder, too, to what extent participating in my story-thesis has altered the lifeworlds of my co-conversationists.

I started out my story-thesis with the goal of understanding the reflexive relationship among stories lived, untold stories, unheard stories, unknown stories, stories told, story telling, and identity. The story-thesis was framed within the story of my own journey within the Borderlands and was co-constructed, using interdisciplinary methods that included autoethnography, interviews, and art-work. I have already discussed one outcome as it pertains to my teaching self. Three more outcomes of the project pertain to my artist self and my researcher self.

First, my artist/researcher selves are intrigued by the growing



Starry 1  
Photograph  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

amount of focus that I gave over time to exploring through art-work how I see Borderlands. On my last day in New York, when I visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I stood before Van Gogh's "Starry Night". That painting was one of the reasons that I chose to visit that museum. However, when I

came upon the painting, what actually moved me was a new angle to this project that I discovered in that place and moment: my memoirs and the conversations that I had about them, my project as a whole, is a co-construction of multiple voices that are engaged in multiple



Starry 2  
Photograph  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

conversations. Whether directly or indirectly related to my story-thesis, every interaction in my lifeworld shifted how I engaged with my story-thesis. In the midst of this process, though I felt like I was the center of the action, I was just another co-conversationist.

On the left side of this section are five photographs that I took near



Starry 3  
Photograph  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

“Starry Night”. Each time, I focused my camera on the painting. Two things become immediately apparent. Though I did not change position, the physical appearance of the painting changed in relation to how bodies of others moved in front of it, stood beside it. The painting shifted meaning for me as I

watched others converse about it, point to different sections of it, block out that star or that corner. I became more immersed in studying how people were interacting with one another in relation to the painting and how their interactions changed my understanding of the painting than I

was interested in the painting itself.



Starry 4  
Photograph  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

At the time that I took the photographs, I used the painting as my focal point. In my mind, I have looked at the photos over the past several months, always fascinated by how shifting conversations regarding the painting provided me with shifting meanings. I

purposefully stood several feet away from the painting and the people who were drawn to it. I placed myself in a Borderlands where I could observe and be with my self, alone, while searching for why the scene struck me as intimately related to my story-thesis. I thought that the only lesson to be learned was in how others' stories affected my own process of making meaning. However, another layer has emerged.

In each of the photos, a young woman with long brown hair is present. As I compiled and edited the photographs, placing them in



Starry 5  
Photograph  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Janice Bankert-Countryman  
July 2012

chronological order, a new story emerged, one that changed the meaning of the moment for me as well as how I viewed my part in it. In the first photo, she appears to be reading about the painting. In the next three photos, she is taking pictures of the painting and

possibly one of her friends in relation to the painting. Each of the photos that she takes is different, and so each one of the photos that I take of the painting and of her are different. What she sees changes, and concurrently, what I see changes. In the last photograph, she is looking at my camera. Her face appears to communicate happiness, surprise, and questions, as if she is transitioning from enjoying her moments with

the painting to asking, “Who are you? Why are you taking a picture of me?”

If I could go back to that moment, I would reassure her that I was taking photographs of general crowds, of movement, of “Starry Night”. However, in this moment, I am not sure that my then-motive matters. Both of our stories changed because of my picture taking. Though we were both strangers to each other, and all we had in common in that moment was place and time, our lifeworlds were altered. This revelation puzzles and excites me. I study these photographs that were taken several months ago, and I realize now that this woman and I co-created a new story, one which was lived together and is now being told. However, our stories are not the same. I was not aware that she was part of my story until now. She was aware of me even as I took the photograph. I thought that I was invisible, ineffectual in my Borderlands; I was wrong.

This story of the “Starry Night” photographs is germane to this project because it highlights the complex process in which we involve ourselves when we seek to understand the relationship between LUUUTT and identity. I was thinking about the communication process, Borderlands, art-work, and myself when I took those photographs. However, now I perceive that my work affected another person’s lifeworld – if even for a moment – and now I see the entire story of my time with “Starry Night” differently. I see both the meanings that I made in the moment and the new perceptions of this moment, meanings that are

emerging as I format the photographs and discuss them as part of this story-thesis. The presence of this young woman in my photographs and thoughts has affected me deeply. One new meaning that is already emerging that that I have not been as alone in my Borderlands as I had thought. This is not a journey that I have owned but one in which I have participated. I feel confident that when I review my story-thesis in a month's time, more meanings about the "Starry Night" photographs will have emerged and will continue unfolding.

I am also confident that more stories will unfold within my family and circle of friends – and outward and outward – because of the work that has been put into this project. I am thinking once again of unintended consequences.

A few weeks ago, I sent each of the hotseats to the corresponding co-conversationist<sup>16</sup>. Each person reviewed her/his hotseat and gave me permission to use it and her/his name. Two people, my parents, provided detailed feedback, which I share here as examples of how the conversation of my story-thesis continues<sup>17</sup>.

One of the most impactful relationships in my life has been my relationship with my father. There was a time when he abused me, and there was also a time when we abused each other, he with his hands and his words, me with my bitter heart and my words. Once I hit him with

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>17</sup> Both of my parents stated in writing that I may use these messages in my story-thesis.

my hands, our relationship began to shift. I do not attribute the shift to the fact that I hit him but to my mother's insistence to our spending time alone together. We started talking to each other that day. I was 15 then, and I am 34 now. My relationship with my father continues to heal and deepen.

In the pre-hotseat, I communicated that I was scared and that I had not forgiven my parents for the hurts of my childhood. Throughout the course of engaging in my story-thesis, I realize that I had already forgiven my father for the abuse that occurred, and I also found that it is my belief that he has not forgiven himself. The unknown story of my forgiveness toward my father affected how I perceived him and our conversation. As I review the hotseat and the email thread<sup>18</sup> between my father and me about the abuse, I wonder how our conversation would have been different. I believe that our engagement in my story-thesis has brought about new layers of healing for me and, I hope, for him. Thus I also wonder how future conversations will be affected and how the entire dynamics of our family interactions will change.

My mother also wrote a response to the Hotseat I wrote about her conversation with me. One section in particular of her response<sup>19</sup> caught me off guard. As I read her hand-written letter, I screamed "Holy Shit!" and scrolled furiously through the hotseats in my thesis. My daughter

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix E contains a transcription of her original hand-written note followed by an edited Facebook email conversation about the note.

ran into my room and asked if I was ok. My hands shaking, my face flushed, and my heart pounding, I said that everything was fine, and I asked her to go get her father for me. When Scott came into the room, he closed the door. I read him my mother's letter.

I wanted my project to be authentic and raw. I wanted readers to feel with me, wonder with me. I wanted my project to be provocative. When I wrote the hotseat for my mother's co-conversation, I discussed my sudden fear that she knew that I am bi-sexual. Over time, I grappled with the problem: Should I delete that section, thereby sterilizing the hotseat and possibly the whole thesis? How would that be a disservice to readers and to autoethnography as a method? To what extent would that be ethical? On the other hand, is it ethical to inform my mother that I am bi-sexual through the channel of academic writing? Am I ready for my department to know? Isn't it enough that I am talking about being raised in and leaving a cult? Do I really want to be this vulnerable with my colleagues and my family? Over the course of several weeks, I wrestled with these questions, turning them over and over. I finally decided that I did not want to sterilize the project; I would move forward and send out the hotseats as they were. However, when I received my mother's letter just two days ago, I had honestly forgotten that choice and even the section about bi-sexuality.

Her response rocked me. Shook me. And elated me. On the other hand, I panicked. What did this mean? How much did I think I know

about the belief systems of my parents? How much could I share with them about my self? Are they actually safe people for me? Have I been unnecessarily hiding from them? My husband asked me several weeks ago – before the letter came – when I would tell my parents who I really am. I replied, “Someday. When we are ready. I will need you with me, standing with me, while all Hell breaks loose.” I think about that conversation while I hold my mother’s letter in my hand. I smile and think again of unintended consequences, of emerging meanings, of persons-in-conversation. A month ago, my sexual orientation was an unheard and untold story in my family. Now that the story is emerging, other unheard and untold stories are being shared. My family’s lifeworld is changing.

My lifeworld is changing. I am being honest with more people about the context of my lifeworld. I am realizing that the stories are not as painful to remember and tell as I thought that they would be. People are responding to me differently than I thought that they would. I do not feel the expected stigma and pity. I am not a social pariah. I am Janice. I know that some people will not respond well and that I will get hurt sometimes. However, another outcome of this project is that I feel more confident about communicating with others honestly about who I am, what I want, and what I need.

The immediate outcomes of this project – my change in classroom habits and teaching style, my new perceptions about unintended consequences

in research and the communication process, the change in perception regarding my father and our relationship, my family learning about my sexual orientation and my mother's acceptance of who I am – are stunning to consider. However, they are not the reasons that this project was developed. This project was developed as a way to explore how identity and dialogue are intertwined.

Identity is co-constructed again and again, moment by moment, interaction by interaction because we continuously see one another and ourselves in new ways. Our conversations are both the channel through which our identities are co-constructed and the expressions of our identities. Pearce argues that communication is persons-in-conversation. I further argue that persons-in-conversation assemble and disassemble lifeworlds and identities with every utterance, every gesture.

My shifting identity has already been discussed in four different ways. Understanding how my identity is shifting is most efficiently studied by combining Pearce's LUUUTT with Kübler-Ross's concept of the mourning cycle. Symbolic convergence occurs through interplays among fantasy themes, and individuals move with one another toward shared group realities. Conversely, symbolic divergence occurs when the fantasy in which a person participates no longer makes sense<sup>20</sup>. Individuals always have the choice to cling to an old reality; when symbolic divergence occurs, it is because a choice has been made to let

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix F for a pilot model of symbolic divergence.

go of what was, enter a Borderlands, and discover what is. Symbolic divergence focuses on the communicated responses of a person or group when she/he or they choose to leave what was normative and enter into a Borderlands where a new fantasy can be co-constructed.

This story-thesis brought together known theories and methods in new ways. Postmodernism, Buber's I-thou paradigm, and autoethnography, for example, are not novel. What is novel and contributes to the communication discipline is the demonstration of how communication scholars can play with known ideas in new ways and thus discover new areas of scholarship. This story-thesis brings together five primary lenses: postmodernism, communication, autoethnography, dramaturgy, and a repowered feminist-inspired interview process. The new area of scholarship that has been discovered is what I have termed symbolic divergence.

One tool a communication theorist can apply to understand the process of symbolic divergence is the stage theory of grief. A 2007 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* substantiates that the stage theory of grief is a valid predictor of what a person experiences when she/he faces loss (Maciejewski, Baohui, Block, & Prigerson). According to Maciejewski et al (2007), the stages include: numbness-disbelief, separation distress (yearning-anger-anxiety), depression-mourning, and recovery (p. 716). These stages were developed by psychological researchers such as Kübler-Ross and refined by Wortman

and Silver (Maciejewski, et al, 2007). The stage theory of grief is commonly accepted both in the lay and research worlds (Maciejewski, et al, 2007). This theory is applicable to more than the process a person undergoes when a loved one dies. According to Maciejewski et al (2007), the same cycle can be used to understand changes in circumstances, such as "... children's reactions to parental separation, adults' reactions to marital separation..." (p. 716). I argue that the stage theory of grief is useful for understanding how a person or group copes with a shift in paradigm, the change of a way of thinking and acting.

Throughout my story-thesis, I communicate about the loss of what was normal and the search for stability. For example, I frame my story as a journey through the Borderlands, a place between places. Pain, struggle, depression, and anger are all components of my story-thesis. My family and I shared stories during our conversations about how we dealt as individuals and as a family with the shift from being members of the Watchers to being ex-Watchers. That shift is the symbolic divergence. When we left the Watchers, we left behind community members who affirmed our sense of reality as well. Eventually, as Dad and I discussed, we chose to once again converge with ex-Watchers members, in some ways reifying old beliefs and in some ways comforting one another in our searches for a new normal. As my other co-conversationists and I discussed, I felt alone in my Borderlands. Whether this was actual or perceived, what is important is that I felt

alone, and so I have until now acted alone, lived alone, in my Borderlands.

The conversations in which I have engaged with trusted others about my Borderlands have revealed to me places in my life where symbolic divergence has occurred and also how I have grappled with it. As my co-conversationists and I explored the memoirs, the ways in which symbolic divergence has occurred in my life became clearer. As I shared my stories with others, and we talked about our shared and separate experiences – thereby story-telling and co-creating moments where stories lived, unknown, unheard, and became stories told – I moved through different stages of grief. Sometimes I felt nauseous with confusion and anger, as in my pre-hotseat. Sometimes I felt levels of acceptance, as in my co-conversations with my sister and Amanda. Sometimes I wondered how to express myself and my Borderlands, and I wondered if anything would ever change, as in my conversation with Scott. Sometimes I began to wonder about the possibilities of healing and moving toward acceptance and a new reality, as in my conversations with Karen and Mom. Regardless of the emotion that I felt, the emotion was connected to the story and the moments of story-telling. My emotional responses to the past differed as memoirs, co-conversationists, and contexts changed. By studying symbolic divergence through the mediums of memoir-writing, memoir-sharing, and reflective art-work, communication scholars can explore how persons-in-conversation

diverge from fantasy-themes, cope with the change in reality, begin to co-construct new realities, and then converge into those realities.

Another new area that has emerged from employing ideas from several disciplines is dialogic autoethnography. Autoethnography and dialogic anthropology were both discussed in the methods section of this story-thesis; however, it did not occur to me until after I finished the last of the hotseats that what I was really doing was melding autoethnography and dialogic autoethnography. The implication of creating a single new method out of the two ideas is that scholars are able to articulate to their audiences that autoethnography privileges the experience of the author and at the same time recognizes that the author's experience is co-constructed through dialogue. Thus the author uses dialogue with her/his self and with others to explore her/his chosen topic. The point is that dialogic autoethnography clearly argues that lifeworlds and studies of lifeworlds are co-constructed through honest dialogue with the self and with others. Such a method allows researchers to better understand communication phenomena because they also better understand their relationships with those phenomena. For example, dialogic autoethnography asks researchers to bring a question their own assumptions, reactions, and conclusions about a communication event. Second, this method asks researchers to dialogue with others about the event, the researcher's perceptions of the event, and others' insights into the researchers' perceptions. Third, dialogic

autoethnography asks researchers to reflect upon the conversations and their outcomes. Last, the method asks researchers to articulate these self-conversations and conversations with others. The process of engaging in and articulating these conversations allows researchers to explore communication phenomena and LUUUTT from a personal perspective. Working from a personal perspective – regardless of the topic – allows communication scholars to remember that we have a stake in and a relationship with our research.

My story-thesis is a pilot study for me. As one of my committee members has stated, “This is not your life’s opus, Janice. Write it. Move on.” He was right, and he was also only close to right. This particular co-creation of my Borderlands journey is finished. However, this project is just one step in a long journey of conversations that were, that are, and that will be. I am not sure that I will visit this particular topic again; the emotional toll on me has been considerable. Yet, I am not sorry that I have placed my self and my lifeworld under such intense scrutiny. What I have learned about my journey in my Borderlands is important to me: I have never actually been alone; I am ready to explore new areas of my life’s journey; some areas in my heart are still healing; and in other areas, I am ready to claim a space of my own that is outside of my Borderlands. I am ready to move into more settled areas where I allow my self to share in others’ experiences, lifeworlds. Symbolic divergence has occurred, and I have walked my Borderlands. Now I am ready to

converge with others' realities – in some areas, in some ways. I am ready to seek a spiritual director, for example. I have also over the last several months been exploring what being gender queer means to me and how I would like to express my own queerness.

I will always maintain a space for my self in the Borderlands because I, like Anzaldúa, find a certain solace as well as power here. I argue that symbolic divergence and convergence are ever-present, concurrent processes in our lives. The place between divergence and convergence is a Borderlands where we move through the mourning cycle and also where we explore the options available to us. Through storytelling, we discover stories that were once unheard. As we hear them, we are changed. As we share the stories and consider them from different angles, our lifeworlds, the stories, and the lifeworlds of others change as well.

## Appendix A

Sam - Below is a draft of the letter that I wrote for the co-conversationists. What are your thoughts?

Thank you again and again for all of your help! Your ideas are invaluable to me. I am so very glad that we are forming a close friendship.

Janice

Hi, BLAH!

Thanks again for being willing to read and talk about a memoir with me. Our conversation will provide me with many insights. I am really excited that we will be talking next week at (name time, place). Attached is the memoir that I have assigned to you. As you read it over, make notes about anything that strikes you, such as:

- In a broad sense, what themes you took from the story
- How the character of Janice is depicted
- To what extent the story reflects your perceptions or experiences of me

## Appendix B

Greetings! Thank you for sharing in the journey of my thesis with me. Your contribution is invaluable, and I am blessed to be working with you. Attached to this email is a memoir. On the date that we have chosen, we will meet for up to one hour. Our conversation may be shorter, but for purposes of continuity, we will need to part after no longer than 60 minutes.

As a participant, your role includes reading the memoir and considering questions such as:

- What questions do you have about the characters?
- What does the overall story mean to you?
- What themes emerge in the story?
- What are some of your reactions to the story?
- What is missing? What more would you like to know?
- How does this story fit/not fit your experiences of me and my personal journey?

Of course, you are welcome to explore in any direction that you like. These questions should serve as guides only and not as restrictions on your thoughts or our conversation. When we meet to talk, our conversation will be unguided and informal. I am not interviewing you; rather, in a way, you are interviewing me, sharing your thoughts about the story, and sharing your own experiences and memories as they relate to the story that you read. In short, we will further explore the story that the memoir tells. Your unique insights are a vital aspect of my thesis. Please email me if you have any questions. I look forward to our conversation!

Best –  
Janice

## Appendix C

Hello! Attached here are the memoirs that I wrote about our conversation that took place over the summer. Please read your memoir and let me know if you see any errors in it or if there is information included that you would like me to leave out. The memoirs are raw and will not be revised except to correct grammar errors. They are called "hotseats" because I gave myself a limited amount of time for reflection and for writing. Please email me if you have any questions about this method, which is based on workshops led by Max Stafford-Clark and the Joint Stock Theatre Company.

In this draft, \_\_\_\_\_, your pseudonym is \_\_\_\_\_.

I am also writing to ask you if it is ok to use your actual name in my thesis. If you would prefer a pseudonym, please let me know, and I will be happy to accommodate you. I know that we have already talked about my using your name, but for the sake of research ethics, it is best to have the agreement or the request for a pseudonym in writing.

I am nearing the end of this project. My defense will be sometime this semester. Let me know if you would like to attend the defense - I would enjoy your support!

I am here if you have any questions -  
Best -  
Janice

## Appendix D

Hi Babe,

Good writing. Hard project for you. Well done, Honey. The only parts I question as to accuracy are the references to me hitting you. I must have said 'smack you a round a little' in our talk at Cracker Barrel, but that sounds so different from what I remember doing years ago. Here's what I remember: I spanked with an open hand. I missed and hit your back, legs or an arm on occasion (moving target) hard enough to leave a red mark. As I remember it I never hit, slapped or punched your head or face. Never hit you with a closed fist or pushed or threw you across a room, which to me would be descriptive of "hitting" and "smacking around". I am not minimizing the inappropriateness of my behavior which stems from the reality that at times I was way too mad to be sure of spanking you safely and there definitely was an element of excessiveness in it. You may portray it any way you want. You may use my name. I do ask you to forgive me for impacting you in those bad, unnecessary and lasting ways.

I think you know that I too wanted to spend more time with you and less time working. I love you so much.

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janice bankert-countryman wrote:

Daddy, I love you. I love you so much. Sure, we went through some rough years, and I won't minimize the issues that I have dealt with... but I also want to express my thankfulness that you are my daddy. You are a good man, and you and I have done a lot to overcome a lot. We are in a good place now, and we have been for a long time.

Thanks for the remarks. I think that I will leave the hotseat as it is and mention your feedback in the final analysis if that is ok with you. (yep, that means that it would be great if you could email me with your permission.)

Oh, yes, I knew that you wanted more time with me. We made a lot of use of the time that we did have - taking little road trips, going on adventures, discussing books and social issues. I loved - and still love- hanging out with my Pops.

Janice

PS - Where is Mom in the process? I need to start wrapping this up.

## Appendix E

Transcript of letter:

Oct 27, 2012

Janice –

Beautifully and insightfully written. I don't remember talking about a couple of these topics, but we talked about so much, I am not surprised. I came home and jotted down a few notes from my "visit" with you – here I will share them with you – if you don't want to read them or this is not the time because it may confuse or distract you from this monumental project, put this away for a rainy day. Not on Hot Seat on other side – Here are my thoughts about this Hot Seat paper. –

Wonderful and Good Reading. Mare Sense to me and I remembered most of it and what I didn't you brought to life and jogged my memory. I loved the way you wrote it, the style and mood that was set. It was good – Include it in your first novel – it was so good, I want to know more about this relationship you have w/ your mom and how it develops and grows. You may not believe this but your mom (me) is somewhat bi-sexual herself. Many times I have felt that a tenderhearted, sweet, understanding caring woman would be all I ever need. In some ways, even sexually. Cushy Boobies and all that. Men can be so hard sometimes – in ways that hurt emotionally, physically – So, now we have something else to talk about, or not... (LOL)

I love you, thank you for the opportunity to participate in your college life – you are my sunshine – even when you are cloudy –

Love,

Mom

That's it – those [below] are notes from my notes of that day.

Golly, she's so graceful – everything she does from holding her fork and bringing it to her mouth to talking & sitting down, she carries herself so confidently and regally.

I hope I'm not gushing with pride @ her, or gushing with overly gushy emotions. I need to be somewhat detached to answer any questions for her. This is not all about me, this is to help her understand and make some sense of all this shit we lived thru – I know – maybe if I think of her as my best friend, this will be a better way to relate to sit here with the knowledge and memories of all the pain I caused her (my daughter) I will not be able to hold on. So, I did. Janice, my daughter, and I were friends – talking, remembering good times & bad – there was no blame, no shame cast upon the other. She (Janice) is so... (and these are the attributes I wrote on the way home from Cracker Barrel.) – shiny; hair ~skin ~ inner light, sweet, understanding, strong, funny, gentle soul, honest, intelligent, skittish, hurting, humble, so pretty.....

Facebook Emails:

**Janice Bankert-Countryman**

Mom, do you know that until I read your response letter, I did not know that I had sent you the part about my being bi-sexual? I was reading your letter, and then suddenly I was scrolling through my thesis, not really believing that I had been that stupid... that negligent... And then I found the paragraph... and I about had a heart attack. Scott and I have been talking for a long time - here and there, not on a daily basis - about what to share with you and Dad. He asked me recently when I will tell you guys who I really am. I said someday...

And someday came. I remember now that I battled a lot with myself before I sent out the hotseats for the member checks on whether or not I would cut that paragraph. I guess some part of me finally came to a decision and chose to not sterilize anything - because all of the hotseats went out as they were. And now here we are. Now you know.

Does Dad know?

I really thought that you would flip out. And here you are telling me that you have felt the same. I thought that you would try to pray for me or something... and here you are understanding.

I have no idea anymore what your views are on homosexuality and all that... but I do know that you love me.

Well, the vase of roses is filled (can of worms - what a gross expression... so, I like to rephrase it...), so I guess ... um... where do we go from here? Do you have any questions?

Per the emails that I got from Dad, I can use anything I want in my thesis - your names, the emails/letters that you have sent me since. If this is wrong, let me know.

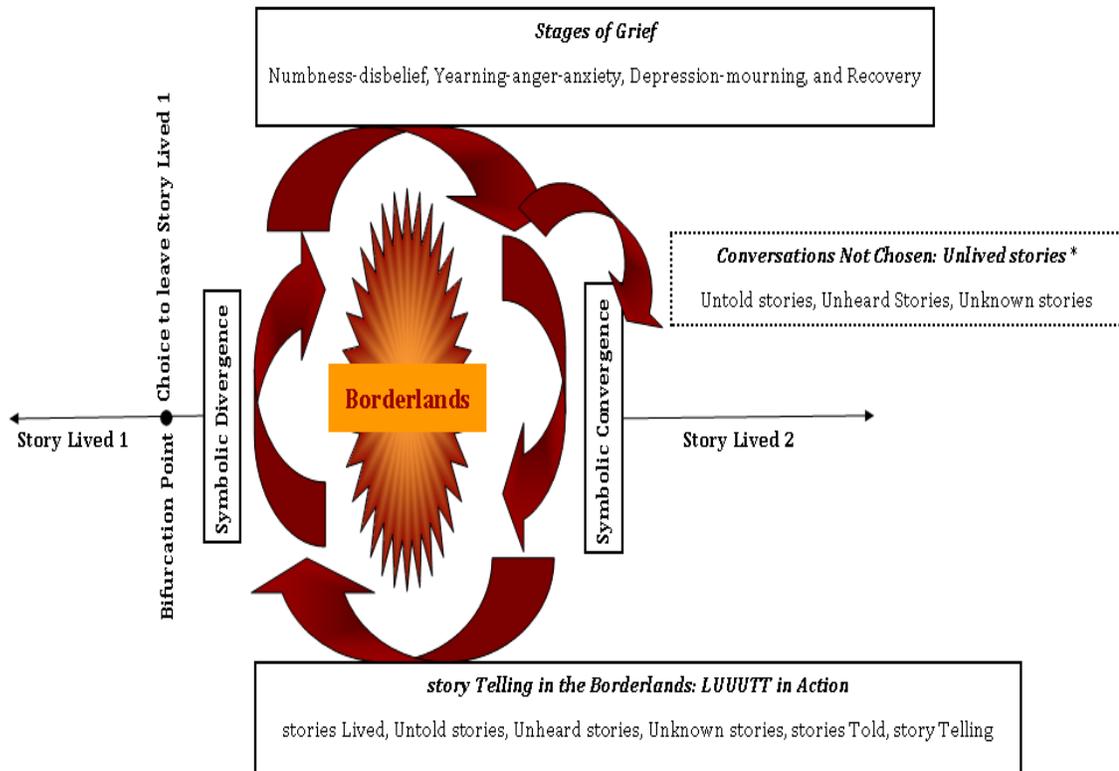
Love,  
Janice

**Elizabeth ... Bankert**

Dad does not know entirely because it is not so much a part of my life now. It was more prevalent years ago and probably in part due to a very unsatisfactory relationship with dad. But since we have grown and matured some, I think less about that once "little" longing. I have no questions at this time but keep the door open and the light on if you would please. ....well since the vase is filled, why not just be comfortable

with how beautiful and fragrant they are to our senses?...when we need to change the bouquet or the water we will know.....Yes, use what you will. Whatever you can use. and yes, I love you....mom

## Appendix F



\* Unlived stories is not part of CMM. This is an innovation offered by Symbolic Divergence.

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Keyboarding  
 Principles of Business  
 Professional Perspectives  
 Psychology  
 Strategies for Success  
 Women's Studies (scheduled for Fall 2013)

### **Grant and Scholarship Activity**

<i>Part-Time Faculty Scholarly Presentation Travel Grant</i>	2011
<i>U.S.-Russia Global Health Care Course Study Program Grant</i>	2010
<i>The Friends of Women's Studies Scholarship</i>	2003
<i>Mary F. Crisler Scholarship</i>	2003
<i>Undergraduate Research Opportunity Grant</i>	2002
<i>Frances Dodson Rhome Scholarship</i>	2002
<i>The Arminda B. and Jean C. Bepko Scholarship</i>	2002
<i>The Friends of Women's Studies Scholarship</i>	2002
<i>The Arminda B. and Jean C. Bepko Scholarship</i>	2001

### **Awards and Honors**

<i>Communication Studies Graduate Paper Award</i>	2012
<i>Top Panel for the Instructional Resources Interest Group at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association</i>	2011
<i>Harrison College Adjunct Instructor of the Year</i>	2010
<i>Harrison College Adjunct Instructor of the Quarter</i>	2010
<i>Harrison College Adjunct Instructor of the Quarter</i>	2009
<i>Preston-Eagleson Essay Award</i>	2002
<i>Annual Women's Studies Essay Contest Award</i>	2001

### **Institutional Service**

<i>Mediator for the Communication Studies Alumni Conference Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis</i>	2013
<i>Judge for the IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Final Round Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis</i>	2012
<i>Judge for the IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Semi-Final Round Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis</i>	2012
<i>Co-President of the Graduate Communication Club Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis</i>	2011-2012
<i>Judge for the IUPUI Spring Speech Night, Semi-Final Round Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis</i>	2012
<i>Mediator for the Communication Studies Alumni Conference Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis</i>	2012

<i>Alternate Chairperson for the Marion University Ethics Bowl</i> On behalf of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	2011
<i>Thanksgiving dinner hostess for international students</i> Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	2010
<i>Judge for the IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Final Round</i> Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	2010
<i>Judge for the IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Semi-Final Round</i> Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	2010
<i>Leader of Effective Teaching and</i> <i>Key Results Areas committees</i> Harrison College – Indianapolis East Campus	2008-2009
<i>Coordinator of campus fitness, recycling, and</i> <i>book donation programs</i> Harrison College – Indianapolis East Campus	2006-2009
<i>Judge for the IUPUI Dominata Classic Speech Competition</i> On behalf of Harrison College – Indianapolis East Campus	2006

## **Professional Development**

### **Membership in:**

Critical Thinking Community of Practice	2013
National Communication Association	2009-2012
Central States Communication Association	2010-2011
Indiana Business Education Association	2010-2011

### **Training and Workshops:**

IUPUI Critical Thinking Symposium	2013
Coordinated Management of Meaning Seminar	2013
FYS (First Year Seminar) Idea Exchange	2013
IUPUI Information Literacy Workshop	2013
IUPUI Critical Thinking Symposium	2012
Center for Excellence in Education online modules	2010-2011

## **Presentations**

- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. and Kelley, S. (2013) *Forks in the road: Encouraging students to apply critical thinking to personal decisions during their college years*. Roundtable presentation and discussion for IUPUI's Critical Thinking Symposium, Indianapolis, Indiana, May.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E., Evans, N., and Thedwall, K. (2012) *Critical Thinking in Themed Learning Communities*. Competitively selected

- discussion session for the National Themed Learning Communities Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana, November.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (2011) *Peace in the Borderlands: An ex-cult member's evolving lifeworld*. Competitively selected paper presented for the Ethnography Division at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, November.
- Davidson, R. Deering, E., Anderson, L. B., Bankert-Countryman, J. E., Foss, K. A., Hunt, S. K., Stache, L. and Darling, A. (2011) *Speaking about the Basic Course: How Student Voice is Constructed and Expressed*. Competitively selected discussion panel presented for the Basic Course Division at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, November.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (2011) *A lock and a key: A case study of Roma and health care in Russia*. Competitively selected paper presented for the Health Communication Interest Group at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (2011) *CMM, Engaged Pedagogy, and the online classroom: Co-creating encouragement*. Competitively selected paper presented as part of the Top Panel for the Instructional Resources Interest Group at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (presenter), Vojáček, L., and Schiavon, S. (2011) *"Unity in Diversity": A portfolio of an intercultural workshop*. Competitively selected paper presented for Collaborations and Collections: Indiana University's Annual International Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, March.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. and Nichols, E. (2010) *Helping students reach for the stars: Facilitating student growth in an online environment*. Competitively selected paper presented for the Indiana Business, Marketing, and Information Technology Conference, sponsored by the Indiana Business Education Association, Indianapolis, Indiana, November.
- Valenzano, J., Worley, D., Thedwall, K., Armstrong, R., Hugenberg, B., and Fassett, D. (Bankert-Countryman, J. E. presenter for Thedwall, K.) (2010) *Administrative advocacy on campus: Engaging the campus on behalf of the basic course*. Competitively selected discussion panel chosen as the Top Panel for the Basic Course Division at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, San Francisco, California, November.
- Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (2010) *A lock and a key: Roma and health care in Russia*. Health Care Dialogues: Problems and Challenges,

an international student conference with participants and mediators from Southern Federal University, Russia and Indiana University, United States, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, June.

### **Publications**

Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (2013). CMM, Engaged Pedagogy, and the online classroom: Co-creating encouragement. *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 3, 10-19.

Bankert-Countryman, J. E. (2011). Letting go. *Genesis*, Fall, 35-42.