THROUGH THE GATES OF LOVING INQUIRY:
WHERE THE HEART OPENS INTO RELATIONSHIP

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
(Language and Literacy Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

April 2010
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Abstract

I am an artist, arts-based researcher and healthy relationships educator. This dissertation documents my engagement in the creative and contemplative research practice of Loving Inquiry while living at my home on Butterstone Farm. After many years of teaching about healthy relationships in the classroom, and writing poetry and essays about my experience of relationships with people (Shira, 1998, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009), I moved to the farm and discovered a new place of learning. Walking through the gates on the farm is a journey of encounter, marked with a tone of sacred possibility. Attending to the ongoing sensual, visual experience of opening and closing the gates, I attend to the relationship between self and other. Through the arts-based research practices of poetry, narrative and photography, I learn to pause, attend, breathe in and open my heart. Sounds, smells, visual cues, sensations as well as images, metaphors and linguistic resonances all invite me into connection.

*Through the Gates of Loving Inquiry* communicates a transformative vision of loving relationship as an ongoing artful and heartful practice of attending to the generative and joyful possibilities of moment to moment engagement with self, other and the world. There is always another gate to open, another opportunity for the heart to open into relationship.
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Acknowledgements

I am humbly and deeply grateful to all the people, beings and things who have contributed toward the completion of this dissertation.

I offer my gratitude to my mother and father for their unconditional love, generous financial and moral support, as well as their continued participation in the celebration of my achievements over the years.

I thank my farm-mates Doug Chapman and Leslie DeAthe for the opportunity to live and practice Loving Inquiry on Butterstone Farm as well as for their sustained and sustaining friendship and willingness to provide both technical and emotional help along the way. I offer thanks to Greg Allen, my gardening mentor and Butterstone brother for his perpetual care and concern for my writing and being.

I am grateful to poet Robert Hilles for thoughtful editing of many of the poems in this thesis and to my friend Susie Anne Bartsch for her copy-editing skills and her ceaseless you-can-do-it cheers. I would not have been able to move so deeply and fully into the thesis writing process without the ongoing intellectual, aesthetic and elemental support of my dear creative companion Lisa Lipsett. Her generous presence, insightful questions and intuitive reading and rereading of my words helped me to write with more clarity, poetry and heart.

I would not have made it through without the love and long-time friendship of Mia Korn and Christine Oades. Their faithful presence on either side of the water eased my anxieties and calmed my worried mind. I also thank my writing and telling sisters, Lynda Monk, Wendy Cutler, Chris Smart and Rowan Percy for their stories and support.

I bow to each member of my Buddhist sangha, and to our teacher Heather Martin, whose wise and open-hearted presence has been a vital source of strength and support.

I owe my sincerest gratitude to the man I call my lover, Greg Watson, for his ongoing encouragement to move past all obstacles, both inner and outer, toward uncovering my skills and confidence as a writer, educator and researcher. His abiding attention kept me warm, nurtured, and well-nourished throughout my studies and enabled me to devote the necessary time and attention to this intense, joyful process.

Drs. Carl Leggo, Karen Meyer, George Belliveau, Hartej Gill and Lynn Fels have each in their own big-hearted and wise ways allowed me to embrace the wondrous, and at times difficult, journey of adventure and discovery that this doctoral dissertation has been. I thank each of them for their careful and care-full reading(s) of my words and recognition of my worth as an artist, educator and human being. I am grateful to Dr. Belliveau for his mentorship and attentive support in my work as a research assistant on his SSHRC funded research project; Dr. Meyer for her inspiration through Living Inquiry and her thoughtful presence and mindful listening; and Dr. Leggo for his joy in and celebration of
my creative and pedagogical voice, as well as for his honest and sincere cajoling toward honouring my need for slowness and contemplation.

I am deeply humbled and awed by the beauty and wonder of the world(s) within and around me. I offer my sincere blessings and thanks to all the beings with whom I have been engaged over the past four years as a doctoral student, from colleagues to community members, to fellow riders on the bus. I am grateful for the living plants and animals on the farm and on the island with whom I have been engaged through Loving Inquiry, and to all the gates, the trees that they came from, and the people who made them, and therefore made it possible for me to inquire with and through their presence.

I understand that there are thousands of beings both near and far who have made it possible for me to achieve this milestone; from the people who have grown the food I eat, made the clothes and shoes I wear, driven the buses, sang the songs I listen to on my iPod and cleaned the bathrooms of the buildings where I take classes. I acknowledge my inter-relations with them and with all beings, near and far. I wish that all beings may be happy, peaceful, healthy and at ease; that they be free from suffering, and experience the joy of being.
Artist’s Approach

Once in her life a woman... ought to give herself up to a particular landscape in her experience, to look at it from as many angles as she can, to dwell upon it. She ought to imagine that she touches it with her hands at every season and listen to the sounds that are made upon it. She ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. She ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colours of the dawn and dusk.

(Momaday 1969, 1993, p. 83)
I am an artist, arts-based researcher and healthy relationships educator. This dissertation is based on my experience of practicing Loving Inquiry over the past year while living in my new home on Butterstone Farm, on Salt Spring Island. A year-long contemplation of life on the farm, it demonstrates how—through poetry, story and photography—I learn to pause, attend, breathe in and open my heart into relationship with myself and others. For many years I have been teaching myself and others to love, to move through the barriers that interfere with opening our hearts to each other.

As a healthy relationships educator I have been facilitating workshops with middle and high school youth for ten years, engaging them in activities and conversations in order to support them in making the shift from harassment to respect, aggression to compassion. I teach this because this is what I have struggled to learn and unlearn. Lessons I have been trying to assimilate for years, all of my adult life, have been and continue to be about love.

In the fall of 2007, at the end of a course on the arts-based research practice of Living Inquiry with Dr. Karen Meyer, I realized that all of the fieldnotes I had written during the course demonstrated a creative and contemplative practice of shifting my experience in relationship from violence to love. Recognizing this, I shifted the “i” in Living to “o” and identified my research practice as Loving Inquiry. Further inspired by courses I had taken in the arts-based research practices of Performative Inquiry (Fels, 1999; Fels & Belliveau, 2008), Narrative Inquiry (Leggo, 2006, 2007), and Poetic Inquiry (Leggo, Prendergast & Sameshima, 2009), I decided to focus my comprehensive exams—and my dissertation—on this newly-articulated arts-based and heart-based research practice of Loving Inquiry.

It was at the same time that I declared my research practice Loving Inquiry that my partner and I moved—together with another couple—to Butterstone Farm. After many years of teaching about healthy relationships in the classroom, and writing poetry and essays about my experience of relationships with people (Shira, 1998, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009), Butterstone Farm became a new place of learning, and a new environment to learn
in. Here I was living on a farm in community with good friends, something I had never
done before. Also, this was land I was responsible for co-stewarding, a place where I was
learning to grow food, to live from garden to table, to cook and share our harvest with
others. What would it be like to consider my experience of relationship on the farm for a
year? What would I learn about my practice of Loving Inquiry? How would it change?
How would I change?

Welcome to Butterstone Farm

What takes place here is not ordinary or commonplace unless my
preconceptions make it so. What takes place here is extraordinary.

(Meyer, 2006, p. 5)

Butterstone Farm is a magical place: 23 acres of valley and forest, pastures and hayfields,
ponds and creeks, gardens and orchards. Nestled in the hillsides of Mount Maxwell, in
the watershed of Roberts Lake, it is a nature lover’s paradise. Wild and cultivated,
expansive and secluded, at 1000 feet above sea level, our human neighbours are few.
Relationships here are therefore mainly with the more-than-human world.

Water descends onto the farm all fall and winter, from cloudy skies and mountain streams
that pour into our creek, channelled through diverse manmade culverts that empty into
several ponds. Quaint wooden bridges lead you across its banks. As you walk along, you
can hear its seasonal syncopations. Flagstone paths meander through flower gardens and
around grassy knolls. Fruit trees and berry bushes sweeten the vegetable garden, and a
young orchard grows slowly on an eastern slope.

As I walk through the farm, I am surrounded in every direction by fences. Arranged
around the perimeter of the forests, gardens and pastures, these fences protect the gardens
and orchards from the appetites, and deceptively far reach, of the white-tailed deer that
wildly inhabit the island. Each fence has its own particular, handcrafted gate.

Living on the farm I am constantly coming into contact with these gates. The gates open
me up to relationship.
Gates of the Heart

*The motion of the heart to wonder, to investigate, to offer ourselves full-out to whatever is most true.*

(Treace, 1992, p. x)

As I practice Loving Inquiry on the farm, I observe a similarity between my experience of opening and walking through the gates and my experience of opening and entering into relationship. Both require me to pause and to listen to what is happening inside myself as well as outside. Both need me to practice letting go of anything that is keeping me from being present—whether it is an internal belief or emotion, in the case of relationship with another, or an external barrier such as too much snow or ice in the case of the gate. Both demand my sensual, embodied awareness, and invite certain contemplative, spiritual qualities of attention.

Many artists (Hirshfield, 1994; Lauterbach, 2005, Whyte, 1997), educators (Fels & Meyer, in press; Meyer, 2006), Christian, Jewish and Buddhist teachers (Loori, 1992; Maslin, 1079; Merton, 2008; Shibayama, 2000; Tobin, 1999; Yamada, 2004) have used, and continue to use gates as a symbol and metaphor for the study and development of their creative and spiritual traditions. Zen master and teacher John Daido Loori (1992) developed a path of training for monks called the Eight Gates of Zen, using gates as a symbol for entering into exploration of the nature of the self. Corresponding with the Buddha’s eightfold path, each gate teaches specific ways to relieve suffering in the world.

Writing about her training in this practice, Loori’s successor Bonnie Myotai Treace (1992) asks:

> What is it that opens and enters as “gates” all that once stood as life barriers, closed places, places where our hearts would die innumerable small and large deaths? (p. x)

Walking through the gates on the farm becomes a journey of encounter, marked with a tone of sacred possibility. Attending to the ongoing sensual, visual experience of opening and closing the gates, I am attending to the relationship between self and other. Each moment I practice Loving Inquiry—whether through my senses, through writing poems
and stories, and/or through taking photographs—I am walking through a gate. Sounds, smells, visual cues, sensations as well as images, metaphors and linguistic resonances all become openings into relationship.

**Touching Wood**

*Here, the act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own.*


*A heart finds its vocabulary in the senses.*

(Pelias, 2004, p. 10)

What is the nature of a loving relationship? How do I engage in loving relationship with nature?

In *The Way of Love*, feminist philosopher and writer Luce Irigaray (2002) says, “Silencing what we already know is often more useful in order to let the other appear” (p. 165). In order to enter and embrace the reality of another, I have to let go of my ideas of who that other is, and/or who I want them to be. Irigaray suggests we find “gestures or words” that “touch the other in his, or her alterity” (p. 151). She adds:

> Attraction is often awakened by the difference between two worlds, by the mystery that the one represents for the other... Such an approaching can exist in the respect of two familiarities which wed without cancelling each other out. (p. 151)

Through my practice of Loving Inquiry I search for those gestures or words that touch the other in their alterity, or difference, to approach the other in what Irigaray refers to as a “poetic way of dwelling”(152). Ecologist Stephan Harding (2006) offers a similar understanding with regards to our relations with the natural world:

> We need to allow ourselves to be open to the subjective agency at the heart of every ‘thing’ in the world so that we can speak and act appropriately in their presence and on their behalf. We must keep alive and nurture a sense of ‘otherness’ of whatever phenomenon we might be considering, allowing a strange kind of intimacy to develop in which the urge to control is replaced
by a quickening awe at the astonishing intelligence that lies at the heart of all things. (p. 37)

Through poetry, narrative and photography, I seek to enter into relationship with an openness and intimacy that keeps alive this sense of ‘otherness’. As with the practice of Miksang Contemplative Photography—whose practitioners aim to see things in their own innate nature—(DuBose, 2009; Wood, 2004), when I write and take photographs of my experience of relationship on the farm, I am guided by curiosity, spontaneity, and a sense of play. Tibetan Buddhist monk, dharma art teacher and Miksang founder Trungpa (1992) offers:

> What a work of art is all about is a sense of delight. Touch here, touch there, delight. It is an appreciation of things as they are and of what one is — which produces an enormous spark. Something happens—clicks. (p. 75)

My poems, narratives and photographs access the “creative use of the imagination” to touch into this experience of delight in things as they are (hooks, 2006, p. 90). Even a “mere momentary glance” becomes a place of contact, producing sparks of joy and wonder (Thomas, 2004, p. 242).

This mindful, artful practice of Loving Inquiry is an invitation to listen, to watch, to notice, to softly knock on the gate of patience and compassionate attention. Prendergast (2009) names it “a calling between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’, a call-and-response” (p. xxxv). Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) expand: “We learn to practice this generosity of spirit in relation to ourselves and others, acknowledging how we are all inextricably and ecologically connected, all of us needing to be heard” (p. 154).

It is also an invitation to accompany and obey the heart’s need for less pressure, for rest and retreat, for leisure and treasuring vulnerability of otherness in all its infinite expression. Such an invitation requires time, as Irigaray attests:

> In order to be able to welcome the other, a certain fullness must be restored, which escapes the control of the will. Time is indispensable for such a reconstitution which will permit the memory of oneself, of the other, of their difference and of their approach. (p. 154)
There is a legacy of artists (Dillard, 1974; Lane, 2004; Momaday, 1969, 1993; Neilsen Glenn, 2007; Oliver, 1983, 1992, 2006) and arts-based researchers (Leggo, 1994, 1999, 2004; Meyer, 2006; Thomas, 2004) who have immersed themselves for extended periods of rural retreat in order to explore their relationships with themselves, their art and the natural world. On a year’s sabbatical in York Harbour, Newfoundland, poet and educator Carl Leggo (2004c) eloquently declares:

In this place I am focusing on rural rhythms and sensual living... And I am learning again a lesson I have often learned in the past: poetry invites me to breathe, to attend, to slow down, to embrace the healing of body and spirit and imagination. (para 1)

Poet and activist Muriel Rukeyser (1949, 1996) acknowledges: “We need a background that will let us find ourselves and our poems, let us move in discovery” (p. 211).

Over the past year this background has been Butterstone Farm, where, through the sensual, intellectual activity of art-making (Brady, 2009, p. xvi), I have been able to “slow [my] pace” (Meyer, in press, p. 17), and allow for “moments of arrest” so that “new possibilit[ies]” could announce “[their] presence” (Fels, 2009, pp. 4-5). Here, my practice of Loving Inquiry has enabled me “to listen deeply,” to “be empathetic, aware, non-judgmental, and cautious” (Nielsen, 2004, p. 42), and to “embod[y] the sensual, tactile nature of knowing” (Thomas, 2004, p. 6).

Walking through the gates of Loving Inquiry I travel in the footsteps of scholarly artists, educators and researchers who—having traced their own artful and heartful journeys—offer inspiration and reflection. As I let my heart open and close, open and close, I learn to take a risk, to let go of what I thought was true, to see things in a different way. I become the beginner again, the student again, the child again; the one who loves and loves and never stops loving.
**Seasons of Relationship**

*If we live close to nature in an agricultural society, the seasons as metaphor and fact would continually frame our lives.*

(Palmer, 2000, p. 96)

*What if we stopped assuming that to be powerful means to require worship and obedience? What if we imagined that it might mean the ability to participate in pain and joy?*

(Ostriker, 2000, p. 15)

As I walk through the gates of the farm at each season, I am exposed to each season’s interpretation of sun and soil, wind and water. Daily I encounter birth, death and a full range of experience in between. Thus I learn patience, to wait the seasons out. I engage with the bitter months of winter knowing that surly spring will surely come when it is time. Walking steadily, I learn to see and appreciate the beauty of each season.

I also enter into the heart’s expansive repertoire of feeling. As the gates open and close, as the breath moves in and out, so my heart knows sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure. I learn to recognize the seasons of relationship, to honour the constant shifts and changes, and to have compassion for the journey we all must take through the gates of our own hearts.

However, sometimes I don’t want to stop, to open my heart to another. I prefer certain seasons over others. Certain emotions are easier for me to feel. Loving happens over time.

**Preparing to Enter**

*In entering the domain of the heart, I yearn for a language.*

(Denton, 1998, p. 33)

This thesis is an attempt to create a multisensory experience for you, reader. This is also the role of the art work presented. Poems, narratives and photographs invite you into my embodied practice of Loving Inquiry on the farm. Though each gate is a point of
welcome, you may struggle with walking through the gates at times. Like entering a stranger’s home, or any place where you might encounter another, there may be moments of “resistance, desire, thoughtfulness, caring, integrity, and renewal” (Fels, 2009, p. 3).

Some of the poems and photos may not resonate. Images may startle, upset. You may want to close that gate and move through another one. Find your own way of walking through.

Practicing Loving Inquiry on the farm is a journey of discovery and of homecoming. The gates open into a place of extraordinary diversity, beauty and interconnectedness.

Take your time as you move through the gates. Let the words and images wash over you. Breathe into the language, rhythm and form of the poems. Receive the colour, shapes, light and shadow of the images. Pace yourself. Allow yourself to pause in between gates. This is what it is to practice Loving Inquiry.

In Case of Emergence

*We have to cultivate what Suzuki Roshi called beginner's mind, where we stop having to know and name everything in advance and allow ourselves the satisfactions of discovery and revelation. In doing this we actually start to re-mould our identity in the form of the learner and listener.*

(Whyte, 2008, p. 1)

This dissertation participates in the ongoing conversation in the academy on what is considered to be acceptable scholarship. It offers an approach to research that invites the reader to step outside of analysis and abstraction (Glazer, 1999), and to approach the work with what, in his *Methodology of the Heart*, performance studies professor Pelias (2004) calls “critical compassion” (p. 12).

Pelias also offers those of us who are engaged in nontraditional forms of research and representation some thoughtful and purposeful descriptions of the type of scholarship we are trying to achieve with our work. I resonate strongly with these and feel they speak to
the effort, effect and affect I expended and extended toward this thesis on Loving Inquiry (p. 12). I have thus chosen to reconsider them in light of my work here, as well as to add one more to Pelias’ list:

“Evocative”—By engaging with language in compelling, complex and creative ways, this thesis opens its gates through a contemplative and aesthetic presentation. Its power is seen, known and felt through a heartful and playful imagination. Its care-fully crafted words and images seek to support the reader to feel the embodied and inspirted experience of my practice of Loving Inquiry on the farm.

“Multifaceted”—Through acknowledging my locatedness on Butterstone Farm, I honour my privileged position as writer and researcher to be able to speak of my relationships with people, things and beings here. Through employing the arts of poetry, photography and narrative I seek to promote a diversity of stories and meanings within these relationships.

“Empathic”—Through sharing this nuanced practice of engagement in relationship between self and other in the particular context of Butterstone Farm, on Salt Spring Island, this thesis seeks to open up connections between the writer and the individual reader, as well as the writer and researchers/scholars who are similarly and diversely located within and among the field of education including spirituality, ecology, arts-based practice, violence prevention/healthy relationships and social justice education.

“Reflexive”—In this thesis I share my present moment locations while acknowledging that I am constantly moving into a new place. Walking through the gates I engage in artistic and contemplative practices in order to keep opening my heart into fresh and fruitful understandings of my experience of relationship.

“Useful”—This thesis, like Pelias’ writing, “works on behalf of social justice” (p. 12). It develops the conversation on how we may engage in loving relationships with ourselves and others within and beyond the scope of our human relationships. It also expands this
pedagogical practice from the walls of schools and universities outward toward our experience with nature. I write of my particular location and situation with the desire to inspire and educate others to attend to their relationships within their particular personal, political and pedagogical locations. As Chambers (2009) asserts: “To write is a political act. To write in the particular is deeply political” (pp. 86-87).

“Passionate”—In this thesis I am making a distinction to inquiry as loving inquiry: loving as an adjective for a kind of inquiry; and as a verb for the love, pleasure and enjoyment of it. This alters the commonsense idea of inquiry as something that is undertaken solely for knowledge creation or for pedagogical implications. In The Joy of Inquiry, Montuori (2008) affirms:

Inquiry is often associated with dry, analytical processes, with data collection, number crunching, and so on. What is almost always left out of the picture is that real inquiry is also a process that is deeply passionate, exciting, and creative… I want to suggest that along with a passion for a specific subject we wish to learn about, there is also a love of inquiry, which I see as very closely connected with the love of life itself. (pp. 17-18)

Through the Gates of Loving Inquiry communicates a transformative vision of loving relationship as a passionate practice of ongoing attention to the generative possibilities available within our moment to moment experiences of being in the world. There is always another gate to open, another opportunity for the heart to move into relationship.
Following the Sign(s)

I am a reader of signs. A glance, a quiet word, or a hand opening and closing may be all I have.

(Pelias, 2004, p. 172)
I am opening the gate. Come walk with me through these gates of Loving Inquiry.
Befall

To happen, or happen to somebody, especially through the unexpected workings of chance or fate

Encarta English Dictionary North America, 2009
Let these be the gateways

into our new sense of belonging in a living world,

and let our reason take its rightful place as the servant

of this deeper, more intoxicating knowledge.

(Harding, 2006, p. 227)
There are leaves everywhere, scattered like bits of popcorn under the seats of the cinema. I wade through them on my way to the Bramley tree; it still has apples worth picking and eating. To reach it I have to open two gates, the one outside my office and the one beside the tree. Stepping up to the first gate I run my hand over the splintery surface of the wood, whisper a ritual hello as I lift the hook out of its eye. Finicky, I am never sure if it will disengage easily or require some effort to undo. Today it slides up and out with a flourish. Grateful, I pull the gate toward me and enter. After pushing the gate back into position, I reach my hand through the fence to re-hook it, which proves a bit more challenging. I breathe in, bring my mind back from its daydreaming and focus on the task at hand.
Gate of Reflection
All things fall away. What matters is known, and is sometimes apprehended in its moment of radiance. A song.

(Friesen, 1995, p. 122)
Radiance

Outside my bedroom window the maple has metamorphosed into a vibrant amber canopy, buttery and warm to the eyes. I am awed by her golden mane, treated with each glance to the glow of her rustic presence that satisfies some deep longing within me for reverence, affection. A reflection of such beauty, like I see in the mirror each day. I admit I think myself ravishing when I look in my own eyes, seeing my own heart and its sheer striving for love and joy and kindness.

All things have their radiance, the light that shines from within them. It is that light I am seeing in the tree’s autumn bouquet, its copper blossoming. Soon will be its death bell ringing, leaves scattering like children leaving home. But not the new buds, already formed and waiting on the branches, next-of-kin, like the vestibule of not-yet-born souls queueing for their human call to service, duty, karma. The tree lives on, in roots and trunk, branches and bark, continues its journey, a cooperative adventure season after season.

Here I am to witness this ebullience of fall, its luminosity. To participate by witnessing my own light streaming at me through the mirror and in the eyes of my lover, in the painted webs of branches and in the faded arms of a twenty-one-year-old stuffed bear hugging my waist as I read about how Slow Is Beautiful on the couch (Andrews, 2006).

All of us have it. Remember. We only need to be looking for it, beyond the self-doubt, the judgments flung at our wrinkled chins and dimpled thighs. We all possess this light, wake with it each morning, carry it with us through our days, bring it back with us to bed. Some of us may not see it, may not even know it’s there. Someone failed to point it out to us, forgot to tell us how to look for it. Because no one ever told them.

Noticing the quality of light on the farm this morning, from the mountains in the east to the hillside in the west, I am mesmerized and transfixed. Last night the moon was full, the wind warm, the light soft and diffuse, romantic. I pulled my lover toward me as we walked the flagstone path from the big house to the loft.
On the one hand, writing takes us away from our experience; we step back, we reflect on what happened, we choose images and forms that we hope will convey to readers our understanding of that time. On the other hand, writing calls us to pay attention to the details, to the rhythms, and the shape of our living.

(Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 46)
Gate of Compassion
shadows run
slender fingers
through the wind
autumnal gestures
harvesting desire

(Soutar-Hynes, 2008, p. 9)
Appetite
   for Mary Oliver

1.
I was house-sitting
for my farm-mate
when yesterday I lost
one of her cats

neglected to assure
both indoor cats
were present and
accounted for

forgot to wonder
why the cat bowl filled
with crunchies went
untouched

why I saw only one cat
most evenings

2.
This morning Thomas
our outdoor cat
perches on the roof
above the barn

he usually gets his pets,
and food next door, where
one of the indoor cats is
missing

but last night he
rubbed his fur along
the sliding loft doors

daress after caress

we left the doors
open, invited him in

his front right paw raised
like a hand to be kissed
he kneaded the front step
like a blanket
hesitated

3.
I scoop him up in my arms
like a bundle of kindling
he warms my mangy heart
with his soft purr

4.
The next morning
I remember your words¹

You do not have to be good
You do not have to walk on your knees
through the desert repenting

You only have to let the soft animal
of your body love what it loves

¹ Taken from Mary Oliver’s poem Wild Geese (1992, p. 110)
It is an attempt to walk (and live) on the rackety bridge between self and other and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other.

(Phelan, 1993, p. 174)
Gate of Play
A typical autumn day, if autumn days can be typical

(Aronoff, 1980, p. 3)
**Listening to Leaves**

1. Walk outside to the yard now layered with hundreds of fallen leaves

   startled hues of mustard brick, coral, carrot, banana

   each tree, bush, leafy plant displays their own distinctive shades of fall

2. In the museum of modern art in New York City

   sit on a bench before the Monet triptych stare across at the the two Bonnards
to you they are more alive, soulful regardless you are not a spectator you are being painted the artist strokes your hair with a thick brush dabs a swath of copper for the leaf that just fell on your lap where the cat once lay, out of the picture now leaves have taken his place
the painter prefers them anyways
she has had enough of cats

she wants leaves in your lap
where your hands are resting

In play we manifest fresh, interactive ways of relating with people, animals, things, ideas, images, ourselves.

(Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 42)
Overwinter

To spend the winter by taking up residence in a particular place.

Encarta English Dictionary North America, 2009
An encounter between self and other becomes an interstice, an invitation, and an improvisation.

(Meyer, in press, p. 18)
It is cold out, zero degrees this mid December Wednesday. As I leave the farm, I have to get out of the car to open and close the front gates. I’d rather not have to do it, can remember when I didn’t, before I moved here. But it is good for me.

I slide the beam out of its sleeve, like a belt out of its buckle, pull the bolts up out of their concrete holes in the ground, swing the gates out, one to each side, then secure them by lowering the bolts into metal cylinders that are staked into the ground so they won’t be budged by the wind. Then I get back into the car, drive through, repeat the whole pattern in reverse; lift the bolts out of the cylinders, pull the gates back into position, drop the bolts into their respective holes in the concrete; then slide the wooden beam back into the closed position.
Gate of Perception
The overflow and gush, I
wanted that,

to stumble
in deep snow,

(Pearson, 2006, p. 45)
Understated

1. When I pick you up I am surprised by my tears. One of the last passengers off the ferry, a small black suitcase wheeled beside you like the one I roll from small town to smaller, when I travel across the province for work.

2. After the hug you put your arm around my shoulders Once outside your hand retreats to your pocket. In Arizona it is hot and dry.

3. I have never felt good enough for you although you tell me you love me at the end of every phone call in between there is lots of advice, your way of saying you don’t trust my choices.

4. When I show you the loft you say I understated its beauty

5. In the morning we walk the farm together, you borrow a pair of gumboots, don’t complain although they are several sizes too small.

You would have loved to have raised us on a farm but my mother was a city girl who conceded to summer camping in a trailer in Vermont.

She found little peace there, hated to clean up after us in the small space
6. 
When I take you back to the ferry, you call me a lucky girl, say it’s *beshert*, that the four of us living on the farm is “meant to be”. I think I’ve won some approval.

7. 
I liked listening to your stories, how you left high school after your grade nine teacher failed you even though your marks were better than most,

and that first job you created for yourself, gathering bags of leftover fabric from wholesalers and selling them to farms for a dollar a bag, sewing patterns included.

After six months you’d saved enough money to buy a car, would drive by school, pick up your friends, girlfriends, liked hanging out with them so much you stopped working.

8. 
It isn’t easy being with you. Yet your hand in mine as we walked around my home, the land, this place my peace, you could have said anything you wanted.
Roasting Vegetables

In the new propane oven
two glass baking dishes

dozens of cut up cubes
shiny red beets like Dorothy’s shoes
soft orange yams, snow white onions
slivers of garlic harvested from the garden

I sit and write while
the vegetables roast

two glass dishes full
enough to feed an army

although I’m dreaming
of serving them to the

man I saw push a Thrifty’s shopping cart
through Ganges the other night

past the yoga studio and the day spa
the art galleries and the beer & wine store

We’d sit down together
on the knoll in Centennial park
the shores of Ganges Harbour in front of us
with its trawlers and sailboats and seagulls
a west coast canvas

I’d unfold the napkins, place the
two pans steaming on the grass

before us
Poets make things, but they don’t make poetry; poetry is present to begin with; it is there, and poets answer it if they can. The poem is the trace of the poet’s joining in knowing.

(Brighurst, 1995, pp. 53-54)
**Hitchhiker**

As we pulled into the dock at Fulford he knocked on my window asked for a ride into town.

I hesitated before opening the door asked him to take off his dirty red knapsack to put it in the back before getting in.

As we drove I learned that he has two children, does flagwork for BC Hydro prefers country music, mostly listens to CD’s from a collection he found at a garage sale sometime after he moved to Salt Spring eight years ago, around the same time I did.
Looking and seeing—color, texture, light, line, moments of tender heart, flashes of perception… To fully experience each day in a fresh way.

(DuBose, 2009, para 2)
Charms to Children

While their family
sat seven days
on low hard chairs
and friends
brought food
and condolences

my parents
made
love

*Ahava* means
love in Hebrew

I was conceived
during your *shiva*

exhausted
from the
crowds of well-wishers they fell
into bed, found
a place of refuge
from death

your name was
*Avraham*
like the first
Jewish man

my father’s father
I never met you
never got to
call you *Zaidye*

I was born
nine months
after you died

Last night over dinner
at my cousin’s
house on Salt Spring

(your brother’s grandson)
he told me that you used to
give chiclets and other
little charms to children

I only got mine
after you were
gone

This translation from the language of the source, this labour of love,
where we all try to reach one another, each with our own strange words.

(Holzer, 1994, p. 107)
Gate of Interdependence
Old man's beard
in your apple tree, the alchemy of light
into lattice, draping over dead limbs.

(Neilsen Glenn, 2007, p. 65)
Learning

It is snowing, small flakes in a steady stream fill the distance with a haze of falling white. This is what beauty looks like. The farm is still covered in at least a foot of snow from the weekend’s storms. Now the stream denses, speeds up. When we moved up to Butterstone Farm we didn’t fully realize what we were getting ourselves into. The snow up here at 1000 feet falls heavier than elsewhere on the island, stays longer with the cooler temperatures.

Last weekend my partner put up a Christmas tree. I went out for a few hours, to meet with some girlfriends in between major snowfalls, and when I got back there was a beautifully decorated tree gracing our living room. It is a very special tree, renewable; artificially-made to be set up and taken down each year. It looks completely real, adorned with a string of white Christmas lights, and silver and gold balls. A few years ago we found some gold Jewish Star ornaments at the local hardware store.

When we first lived together six years ago, I was quite averse to celebrating Christmas. I didn’t want to have anything to do with it. Our conversations about it at the time revealed the depth of my prejudice. In the Jewish community where I grew up, I learned that our ways were the right ways, and those of others were not to be emulated, if even tolerated. At the private Jewish schools I attended full-time from kindergarten through grade 11, I had studied mostly about our rituals and history, our language and religion. Sure they taught us about Canadian and Quebec history. I excelled as a student of both Hebrew and French. However I also absorbed the message that being Jewish was better than being anything else; we were, after all, the chosen people. I learned to look down at other cultures and religious traditions with judgment and sometimes even pity.

As I sat and listened to my partner explain the warm fuzzy feelings he carried for the holiday and the meaning its celebrations had for him, my heart opened. While I grew up with the simple rituals of candle-lighting, dreidel-playing (a spinning four-sided top), singing Hebrew songs of the holiday and receiving Chanukah geld (chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil), I also watched all the annual Christmas specials on TV. I
remember Bing Crosby singing *Little Drummer Boy* with David Bowie, and how I anticipated Donny and Marie’s Christmas show each year. There were the Charlie Brown Christmas specials, the *Grinch Who Stole Christmas* and one year, Gloria Estefan had her own holiday show. I was familiar with the songs, and loved the feelings evoked through those TV specials where the celebrities gathered in their cozy living rooms, drinking eggnog and singing carols together by the fireplace. I was entertained by their laughter, soothed by the colours and comfort of their warm woollen sweaters and curious about all the trees hiding the carefully wrapped presents underneath.

Still I grew up feeling grateful that I didn’t have to be a part of Christmas; both of the chaos of the holiday shopping frenzy and the beliefs and imagery connected to Jesus. This year I am embracing Christmas—enjoying the glow of the tree in our house, and the downloaded Christmas music—while holding on to the quieter, less consumerist traditions of Chanukah.

Where it was a matter of integrating into the same, it is now a question of recognizing what differs, and of trying to compose a moving whole in which each one welcomes the contribution of the other while guarding their own life.  

(Irigaray, 2002, pp. 170-1)
Walking

A walk along Wright road this afternoon alone amongst the trees and snow, birds and stones and mist. Hiking boots deep in densely packed snow, the trees have shed their heavy white coats since yesterday, no longer needing them with the rise in temperature. The colours are incredible, the thousand hues of green, some on the very same branch, the contrast between fir and cedar, and arbutus, between new stands of arbutus and new alder. Comforted by the familiarity of this setting, I am overcome with intense joy, pleasure.

I look across the farm, and at the other houses on the road, partly hidden by stands of tall firs and expansive cedars, and other less recognizable but equally arresting foliage. Long narrow drives—framed by second-growth forest or well-tended pasture—lead both up mountain and down, toward custom-built West Coast residences. I take photos of horses knee deep in snow, three foot high snow banks, a neighbour in his tractor plowing a steep “private drive” with four separate addresses. I consider the phrase: photos of privilege. How many can afford to live here, in this beautiful place, with little noise, traffic and much resources, including a watershed lake as our backyard?

The love story of this place is that I was invited with my partner to live here, amongst friends, on a pastoral 23 acre farm, regardless that neither of us has invested any money to do so. My partner is being paid to help care-take the property, a means of making a living he has been practicing ever since he moved to this area 22 years ago to house-sit and manage a home on an even smaller island a boat ride away. He is also being commissioned by our friends to manage and oversee several other building projects. We have been fortunate to create such a situation for ourselves, which has come about both because of my partner’s competence, skills and experience as a carpenter, designer, and caretaker, and equally because of the nurturing of our close friendship with the couple with whom we make the farm home.

My partner and I share a valuing of time, creativity, and relationships over things. We have both made choices in our lives that have moved us closer to these, without as much
concern for monetary accrual and material acquisition. Instead we have devoted
ourselves to pursuing our pleasures, our values and our dreams. For me that has been my
writing, teaching and performing, my spiritual practice, the joy of movement, higher
education and a commitment to healthy eating and living. For my partner that has been
his love of physical activity including mountain biking and road cycling, sailing, rock-
climbing, and gourmet healthy cooking. For both of us it has also meant a strong focus
on the care and nurturing of our relationships, with ourselves and others.

I wonder if any of the affluence that we live amongst now matters much when it comes to
how I am practicing Loving Inquiry? As I walk along the road, paying attention to the
life all around me, I stop to rub my face in the needles of cedar and fir, to breathe in the
rich green scent of the vibrant conifers, and to smile at the three horses grazing in their
wintry blanketed pasture. I recognize that it is intimacy I am practicing, an intimacy that,
as Palmer (2004) suggests “does not annihilate difference” (p. 75), but that is curious and
open to difference, whether of resources, language, cultural celebration, or habitation
rituals. Here in this neighbourhood we all attempt in our own ways to keep warm, safe
and well. We are all sustained by the cycles of the land, nourished by the foods grown
and sourced around us, enlivened by our living and making, whether stone sculptures,
quilts, jams, nest, babies or poems. We each find shelter, alone and/ or with families,
comfort with friends, welcoming them into our neighbourhood community—known as
the Cranberry Valley—when they show up for a visit.

I walk and breathe in the beauty of the landscape around me, the landscape that is
becoming me, the one I take in, ingest and assimilate with every vegetable I grow that
becomes dinner and each fruit I pick that is eaten out of my hands, or preserved for later.
When selling or trading these foods in the local markets or across the street with
neighbours, we become a part of each other’s lands. The neighbourhood grows in us as
we keep it growing.
Meaning is created in the matrix of relationships.

(Park, 2005, pp. 138-9)
Reading

I am reading the novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* (Guterson, 1995). While it took me a while to enter into the story, I am now fully immersed. I just read chapter eight and feel as if I have read the most poetic chapter I have ever read in a novel.

I love that feeling, when reading, as if the writing were truer than anything, as if the author had access to some absolutely astounding source of inspiration that allowed them to manifest such lyric storytelling. Breath-full, life-giving. One of my reasons for being alive is to read such works of literature.

Sitting still, breathing and listening to my breath, relaxing in one of the low black hammock chairs in front of the fire. Outside all is still and white and frozen. I am so enjoying the feeling of being here, in this place. Alone with my lover, we sit beside the Christmas tree, listen to carols sung by classic jazz and blues artists like Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles and more contemporary chanteuses like Diana Krall and Sarah McLachlan. Right now, as I pay attention to the way Krall sings, to the details in her intonation, pitch and the inflection of her words, I am appreciating the effort and passion with which she imbues her music. I feel soft and receptive in my body and heart.

I cooked a leek and potato soup this morning. What a new enterprise for me, to get up early and cook. Yesterday I told my partner, as we sat cuddled on the couch after a delectable Mexican dinner, that food needed to be a part of this dissertation. Somehow I need to write about my gradual effort and confidence in cooking. I am learning to take the time to do it, enjoying especially the craft of preparing the local organic farm ingredients, both our own and those from other island farms, including veggies, fruit, lamb, beef, chicken and herbs. It is such a change for me to be involved in the complete experience of eating.

This morning as I read in the novel I soaked up the description of childhood friends Ishmael and Hatsue digging for clams—what they called geoducks—on the beach of the fictional San Piedro Island; how they grew up playing and hiking and foraging together
in the forest and along the beaches of the Pacific Northwest, an almost identical ecosystem to the one in which I live. My heart warmed as I savoured the imagery of their secret hiding place, where as teenagers they kissed inside the hollow of a burned out cedar tree. When I was 14, I was sneaking around the Cavendish Mall with my secret boyfriend R.A, and spending hours kissing on his bed in his house just across the street. And just like the teens in the novel, my parents never knew.
Being

I step out onto a thick dense carpet, my black rubber boots sink in slowly, in stages. I have to trust their fall, caught by the solid layer of packed snow beneath. It takes a long time to walk this way, my limbs want to move quicker. I have no choice but to step slowly and patiently, wait for the ground to yield and to push back. Bundled up in a brown and beige Cowichan sweater—bought several winters ago at a salvation army thrift store on the old island highway by the turn-off for Shawnigan Lake—along with my partner’s brown down vest on top, I set out to receive what is happening moment to moment outside on the farm.

The wind breathes in and out, bristles through the Lombardi poplar, shakes the tall branches and needles of the Douglas firs framing the edge of the farm all along Wright Road. Cedars, salal and arbutus grow younger amidst giant fir elders. As I make my way on the path, slow step after step, I pass the fence of “Le Jardin”. The words mean “the garden”, in French, and were written on a sign hanging on one of the gates to the interior garden when we first looked at the farm as potential dwellers. Although the sign was removed by the previous owners when they left, we have chosen to keep using the French name to distinguish between the gardens within that fence-line and those on the outside and around the rest of the farm.

On my right, the glass windows of the potting shed reveal my winter-garbed reflection. Along the fence, rusting leaves of clematis and other summer flowering vines stir. I hear many sounds at once as I keep moving. There is a steady dripping, a familiar rhythm of water descending and hitting the ground. I don’t know where it is coming from; I trust that I will come upon the source eventually. Further along another steady source of water flows, the seasonal creek. It is loudest where a lone maple leaf has lodged amongst the thin grasses and variable sized stones.

Another sound moves my eyes to the tree on my right. I barely recognize it as the cherry tree in Le Jardin. Without its leaves and many buxom cherries, it is less familiar. Now I see how it is held sturdy by a narrow though solid trunk, no more than a foot in diameter,
with at least one hollowed out section the size of a round casserole dish. Everything rests on its shoulders, the hundreds of branches with elbows leading to smaller ones and wrists that handle the even smaller tributaries. When I pull my focus back I see an incredible vast network of lines and connections, as convoluted as the New York City subway map. Like each subway line, every branch has its trajectory, its Y-shaped intersection. In mid-summer plump Bing cherries grow everywhere along the network. It often takes a while to find them; we have to look around each branch, check underneath and in between the leaves.

As I stand here with my boots buried calf deep in the sticky dense snow, I notice the white ground like a shag carpet; this one’s covered in fallen needles, branches and leaves of neighbouring trees, plus other tiny residual bits relocated here by the forceful winds of recent days. A bird with a red cowl neck sweater and matching hat perches and knocks at the cherry tree. “Can I come in?” it asks over and over again. Knock, knock, knock. I stop and listen to its insistent attempts at entry, although I don’t think it is that interested in going in anyway. Not a few of us are enamoured by the sound of our own knocking. The wind picks up again, drowns out the sound of the bird who dusts his weary beak off and alights for more hopeful landings. I watch it swoop and dart across the yard as it heads for the Big Leaf maple across the field.

It sings, the wind. I stand by and listen, wonder how the others hear it, from their points of hearing. Each one of us invariably touched, there’s no escaping it here. When will the next rush come? Like a peri-menopausal hot flash, or the latest West Coast snowfall, unknown to all of us who wait, amazed by the surge and deliver.

Standing in the middle of all this life of which I am a part, I am in awe of the culture of forest and valley and creek and orchard and garden. There is a métissage (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt & Leggo, 2009) here of greens and whites, reds and yellows: of wood that is still standing as tree and wood that has been shaped into fence posts and gates and gazebo and phone poles and shingles and siding; of soil that rests beneath garden beds, and growing grasses, and flowing stream. Everything is a part of something else.
As I make my way around the land I am less recognizable to myself, parts of me entwining like the branches of vines that grow over and around the fence wires so that they are inextricable. So too the people here, my partner and my farm-mates, our lives linked by shared resources and holiday rituals, borrowed cars and recycling runs together.
I would define love very simply: as a potent blend of openness and warmth, which allows us to make real contact, to take delight in and appreciate, and to be at one with—ourselves, others, and life itself.

The greatest ills on the planet—war, poverty, economic injustice, ecological degradation—all stem from our inability to trust one another, honor differences, engage in respectful dialogue, and reach mutual understanding.

(Welwood, 2006, pp. 7, 11)
Gate(s) of Listening
We turn to her—
eyes wide
in the winter night.

(Nudelman, 2000, p. 102)
Thresholds

1.
Here on Butterstone Farm

the moon at night
is a kerosene lamp

I hike across a
frozen field in
Tibetan Sherpa boots

consider bright
stars of garlic
growing beneath
snow and straw

secure the latches
of wooden gates

wonder at hands
deft with
corralling branches
into thresholds

2.
Each day I light fire
after fire
and sip tea

rituals I never tire of
instead I regard them as
sacred, textured

When the fire doesn’t light
at first match
I try smaller logs, more paper

3.
Being alone here
with words

without needing them to mean anything
I want to talk about images. The images that come to us and tell us things. Sometimes they come from inside, and sometimes they come from outside. One needs to pay attention when they come. And one needs to receive them without too much questioning at the time. Listening to them, so to say, as one can listen to an object, or to the wind, or to the sun as it enters a room.

(Holzer, 1994, p. 68)
Reciprocal

I place the kindling
criss cross like checkers
on crumpled newspaper

this morning
it’s the last pages of
the Monday Magazine

once the match is lit
the paper flames
then the first slivers of wood

I watch as
each additional log
catches

on Sundays
my lover
splits logs into
eighths and sixteenths

a week’s worth of firewood
we haul in one armful at a time
Riot

I step outside
our loft

blue sign
says SLOW

careful
not to slip on
the deck where ice
remains for days

I’m greeted by a
rush of sound

a riot of birds

whistles
chirps
CAWS
tweets

I have never heard
so many birds
outside this house
before

how I adore
the calm velocity
they bring
Often the tug is direct and contemplative—the impulse to awe pulls me immediately to stillness; draws me, with no intermediary, to centre and adore.

(Lee, 1995, p. 39)
Bird in the Palm

This morning as I cleaned spider webs from the corners of the window, smoothed away little cocoons with a dry cloth, I heard a bang on the glass. Another little bird hit. Quick step into boots then outside onto wet cedar deck, climb over lattice to reach the shivering body.

My palms curve around grey and white stripes. Soft down falls on the deck. I wipe a fleck from its face, caress its head, eyes open and close through a veneer of gossamer. Underneath a swatch of yellow feathers. I don’t know what kind it is.

I quiet my mind, listen for other birds, wonder if it hears them too as it clutches my palm with its small black talons. I attempt bird sounds to comfort it, fail miserably.

It’s only stunned, flies away before I slide the loft door open. It lands on a branch in the big leaf maple and from a distance it looks like any of the birds that perch there.
Little Deer

As I walk out to the back of the farm, my rubber boots sink into fresh tracks. The gardener told me where to look. I stop within 500 feet, let the ravens flee. I don’t mean to spoil their dinner, just want to have a closer look.

After living for 8 years on this island I think that death won’t scare me so much. I bring my camera so I can take a picture. I see its ribs all bloodied the insides of its stomach brown and gelatin-like. I’m not sure what I am looking at. I step back, tell myself it is okay this is a part of life, what the body is—blood and feces and guts and ribs and we just don’t see it. Then I am able to step closer again.

Ravens squawk in surrounding trees. Eager to get back to their dinner? I pray for this little deer, wish it peace. It might have been the one that found its way through our fence into the garden, where it ate up the rest of the raspberries. It escaped us. Death never does.
**Break the Glass**

Last night I dreamt
of marrying my
long time lover

in a ceremony out
in the frozen pasture

beneath the halo of a
brimming January moon

before us a crystalline field
cocooned guests exhale joy

everyone dancing and
breathing in persimmon light

the *chupah* held up by
larch and lombardi poplar
fir and maple

steady limbs
for a crowd of ravens
their beaks open in awe

I promise to live here
amongst the slugs and swallows
stinging nettles and california quail

pinch me

here I will thrive
till death do us part

tending our hillside orchard
singing songs of pear and apple
cherry and fig

go ahead wind,
break the glass

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2 In the Jewish tradition, the groom breaks a glass at the end of the marriage ceremony, symbolizing the destruction of the Second Temple in the second century BCE. As the couple celebrates the joy of their new beginning, they are also asked to remember the adversity of the Jewish people.
This is what I seek to do in my poetry—to be attentive, listening with care, seeking to learn by heart.

(Leggo, 2004c, p. 31)
Offspring

A person’s child or an animal’s young, or sometimes a descendant of a plant;
The result of something, the product, consequence, or effect.

Encarta English Dictionary North America, 2009
There must be receptivity

An opening,

a patience,

a letting go.

(Friesen, 1995, p. 121)
I am standing at the gate beside the budding maple on the south side of Le Jardin. It is probably one of the oldest, and largest, gates on the farm. I can tell by the moss and lichen that grow on its wooden beams. A curved branch arches through its center like a rainbow. In order to get through it I have to put my whole body into it. I bend down and cup my hands around the thick base, haul it up off of its landing on a thicker sunken beam, and bring it forward slightly, then carefully place it on the ground. Then I slip my body through, careful not to get caught in the meshy wires that supply added shielding to its lower frame. As I turn back to secure the gate into its closed position, I notice the thin wedges of wood that vertically line the bottom are twisted this way and that. Appreciating their awkward elegance, I wonder whose idea it was to build this gate this way?
Gate of Interconnection
When you’re lost in the spell of spring,
Your heart throbs with the newness of things

(Aronoff, 1980, p. 10)
1.

the first peek of green
after drawing up the blinds
a cup of tea with lemon
the walk to my writing studio
any kind of weather on my skin

2.

A morning of
bird music
through my bathroom
window

lyrical voices
chant

remember
who you are

remember
we are also
3.

Snow drops

don purpose

like praying nuns

who trust
in love to lift
their spirits
I chop wood
stack it into a leather carrier
haul it across the driveway

over narrow bridge
then

s
r
i
a

and into
up

the loft where

I place it in a basket by the stove

and start a fire with the smallest slivers that also once were

    t t t t t t
t t t t t t
r r r r r r
r r r r r r

    e e e e e e
e e e e e e
e e e e e e
s s s s s s

    s s s s s
Under the sink behind the garbage basket and the dish soap I spy a mouse, head flattened by plastic trap who knows how long it has lain there cupped inside my pink rubber glove I breathe in and out will myself to look at its face, one eye open the other closed say a brief prayer for its peace and quick release open the front door and swing my arm out watch it lands just before the fence on the edge of the creek I put my gumboots on to make sure it got there safely no sign of the mouse when I bend down to look its body already sunken

On a sunset walk along Cranberry Road we meet the neighbours jeepload of young men four-wheelin’ over rolling fields black and white cat licks its paws where the old Howard barn recently burned next door pastoral swampland and wild salal get cozy while further up arching maples still winter bare share space with shapely copper-trunked arbutus

At the gate in the garden by the strawberry patch under soft rain I reach up unhook you out of your eye my hand trails your curves hello I say to you and your carver I too have come here to move through
8.

Everybody wants
to be heard

creek
chinwags

renegade leaves
and stones
share savage
winter highlights

snow melts
and lower than normal
temperatures
threaten (promise)
departure

birds
natter
in the
orchard

my song is only
one of many
when we make love
vernal waves contract
and release

_I don’t know all of your names_

sun caresses yellow
willow crocus
daffodil still dreaming

other beauties promised to us

phantom cherries
shimmer their branches
sculptural serene

overhead unseen thrill

raven bats its
wings just before two
sparrows weave

air is music when wings enter

spare as Philip
Glass ornate Mozart
symphony

_this ecstatic steady faith slide_

words emerge, scatter
toward highest
trees
Meanings embedded within visual imagery may become illuminated as you, as reader, become immersed.

(Thomas, 2004, p. 11)
I've got everything I need (almost)
but I don't got you, and you're the thing I need the most
the blues brothers

Robins on the maple
frogs in the pond
lover in the kitchen

need I go on

The voice of the natural and the voice of the poet meet… And the unspoken naming for this joining might be eros—for why do nightingales sing, or frogs, if not for love?

(Hirshfield, 1997, p. 84)
11.

A whole valley
  echoes
  between proud
  willows

when throat singers
  flirt

with amphibian
  feet

12.

Stand awestruck before praised limbs
breathe slow oxygen waves
stroke long strands
of fine green hair
trail this body
mud bloody
rest heart
open wide
against
time
Writing is not simply self-expression. Writing is a way to seek lines of connection and intersection with others.

(Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 154)
13.

hocus crocus
white and purple
pocus, yellow’s
mellow, orange
you are sun

sun you are
orange, mellow
yellow’s, pocus
purple and white
crocus hocus

yellow’s pocus
purple, mellow
orange, and white
you are crocus
hocus sun
14.

_For Beverley_

On this unsteady beach

each weathered
stone betrays embrace

tide refuses rhythm

horizon swallows step
after step

only driftwood dares to
linger openly

hugs your passing
body

offers grace

---

Coda

_The bud stands for all things_
Galway Kinnell

Everywhere there are signs
Letters writ large
Evoke hope, emancipation
Grant voice and seedling
Young lovers scoop soil into bed
A way to allow people to feel the meeting of their consciousness and the world, to feel the full value of the meanings of emotions and ideas in their relations with each other, and to understand, in the glimpse of a moment, the freshness of things and their possibilities.

(Rukeyser, 1949, 1996, p. x)
Gate of Intimacy
Y entre agua y luz que el aire desarrollan
Ya esta la primavera inaugurada,
Ya sabe la semilla que ha crecido

And between water and light that unroll the air
now the spring is inaugurated,
now the seed knows that it has grown

(Neruda, 1997, pp. 240-1)
Budding

Here on the farm everything is budding; intimations of apple and pear, cherry and raspberry; the garlic close to two feet high, snap peas a vertical foot, strawberry leaves spiky and bushed out. Tulips have come and are almost gone, and now irises, purple and yellow, hover on the outer edges of the angel pond and around the gardens. Lilacs still bloom and wisteria grows so intertwined with the wire fence around Le Jardin that I described its trajectory to a friend by putting my own arms through the fence holes and twisting them around. Its soft purple petals hang suspended like teardrops. Other flowers blooming or coming into bloom include columbine, lupine, crimson bouquets that dot the horse chestnut tree, and a yellow fringe on the laburnum branches that have reappeared, phantom of the tree we cut down a year ago.

Last week I planted herbs in the planter boxes on my deck: parsley, basil, lettuce and edible flowers (marigolds). This week I put in more herbs—oregano, marjoram, two kinds of chives—cilantro, and more edible flowers (nasturtiums). The gardener planted seeds earlier this spring and let them germinate in the potting shed over the past few months. This week I planted the tiny roots in the soil. I also weeded the baby orchard, although it is getting on eight years old so perhaps it is better to call it child orchard. I sat out with my straw hat under the afternoon sun, removed the straw mulch surrounding the base of each tree, then clawed out the weeds growing around the trunk using a three pronged trowel, which also aerates the soil.

Before I went out to do the weeding I sat and ate lunch on the deck. In front of me in the forest was a young deer eating the short green shoots growing in between the tall firs. No one else was on the farm. It was just me having lunch with the deer. I watched it for a while through the binoculars. Then I put them down.
The heart returns us to an animal intimacy, intimacy released from confession into immediacy, the courage of immediate intimacy, and not merely with ourselves, but with the particular faces of the sensate world with which our heart is in rapport.

(Hillman, 1992, pp. 74-5)
Gate of Paradox
I give birth. I enjoy giving births.

(Cixous, 1991, p. 30)
Passover

It is Passover and as a Jew
I am called to remember

that once we were slaves
in Egypt, and Moses saved us

(aided by his sister Miriam,
& brother Aaron)

who lead us 40 years through the desert,
brought us to a land of milk and honey.

I wonder how my grandparents’ parents celebrated
in the shtetls of Romania and Poland,

what songs they sang at the seder table
who was chosen to ask the Four Questions.

All this I will never know.

because Hitler invaded, lead my
family into gas chambers, went through
their personal objects, sorted their gold
rings and glasses.

This morning I contemplate different questions:

In what language did they sing?

Did any of my great great aunts write poetry?

Who opened the door for Eliahu?

What kind of jam did they eat on their matzoh?
An ability to affirm what is contingent and incoherent in oneself may allow one to affirm others who may or may not ‘mirror’ one’s own constitution.

(Butler, 2005, p. 41)
An Adoration

In the Ganges cafe
I sit across from
a young blond girl
in a stroller

watch her giggle,
shake her head.

For a moment she is
my child and I adore her.
Why is speaking from the flesh, and writing from the body, critical to my teaching? Because my memories are in my body. Because it is in and through my body that I remember and experience violence and pleasure. Because life is really lived with the body, perhaps more so than the mind. Because the body and mind are really one being, not split at all. Because as I am shaping my body, my body is shaping me.

(Chambers, 1998, p. 24)
Cholesterol

I bang you against
the side of the bowl.

Your shell cracks
like the soles
of my feet.

I peel you slowly, place
the tip of you next to my lips. You are
cold, slippery as ice on city sidewalks back east.
I open my mouth slide my tongue over your skin
smooth like a baby’s belly. My teeth clamour with
desire to bite you. Instead I think about giving birth,
about every living thing that reproduces, about a
book I’m reading called Childless Revolution.
My hands now prop you up, look at you
from all sides. My teeth are practicing
restraint. I live on an island. People
say it’s a safe place to raise
a child. Have I come
to the wrong
place?

I don’t want
to raise children.

I don’t want to tell
them to be quiet
while I write.
Writing: as if I had the urge to go on enjoying, to feel full, to push, to feel the force of muscles, and my harmony, to be pregnant and at the same time to give myself the joys of parturition, the joys of both the mother and the child. To give birth to myself and to nurse myself, too. Life summons life. Pleasure seeks renewal. More!

(Cixous, 1991, p. 31)
Jar of Dill

In the photograph
my mother sits in her
kitchen on St. Aubin

an oversized jar
of dill pickles
on the counter
behind her,
beside it the
television.

Her hair is a 70’s
afro, a smile on
her face says
she could have
just returned
from a vacation in
Miami Beach or
Nassau.

She must be
about the same
age as I am now,
looks peaceful.

Sometimes she let
us watch
during dinner.

Neither plants
nor animals
comfort her, nor
damp places, any kind
of uncertainty, men
in general.

She prefers Jeopardy
and Dancing With The Stars,
Grey’s Anatomy and Private Practice,

the last two I watch
on a regular basis.
To write poetry is to shape the ‘commonest living experience’—wood or words—into a frame for human experience. These frames are always imperfect, splintered, bloodstained, torn by suffering—but also poised, stable, something to grasp.

(Wanning Harries, 2001, p. 163)
Gate of Ambiguity
air against our feet.

opens, closes, opens, blows spring

(Neilsen Glenn, 2007, p. 25)
Deconstruction

The construction has begun. Well, the destruction first. Several large fir trees have come down. An eagle crying somewhere above, the sound of its call so distinctive. How often do I hear the voices of birds but don’t see them. Their calls are like harbingers, letting me know what is to come: a hummingbird’s whizz means a beautiful flurry of wings will soon appear, full of shimmer and rich colour. We’ve taken down probably close to 20 trees already. Besides the tall firs along the border of the neighbour’s fence, we felled those along the driveway that had already been trimmed in so many odd ways to prevent their branches from reaching the power lines. Now there is open pasture and a view to the glorious coniferous forest.

As I write this out on the office deck, I feel warm in the sun and my heart responds to the heat. It lightens up. Inside my office it was cool, my toes were going numb. Outside it is soothingly warm.

So much growth on the farm right now, all the fruit trees are showing their buds. Some are more prolific than others. The trees have their cycles. Some years they are more abundant, others they hold back, take a break from producing. Sounds like the life of an artist, or a scholar. I can’t be in production all the time.

Yesterday I picked daisies in the north pasture. A big bunch which I made into two bouquets. It took a while to choose the length of the stems. I had to cut and recut them, organize how to place them in the glass vases. It felt nourishing, as it does these days when I pick food and herbs from the garden and prepare fresh salads for meals. I have been drinking mint tea using the mint from the garden. I boil the water, place two or three leaves in the mug or teapot, and then pour the boiling water in. It only needs a few minutes of steeping. Such simple acts: making tea, arranging fresh-picked flowers. Oh and the laundry. My lover put up a clothesline beside the loft. We haven’t used the dryer since.
I am writing. a deliberate intermingled generative.

(Duplessis, 2007, p. 169)
Ode to Woodpecker

After Pablo Neruda

1.
Busy bird
I cannot decipher
your sounds
as your beak breaks
through rotting wood

beside you, lombardi poplar
rustles and shakes
accompanies your pecking

other birds follow
from the garden

robins poke choke cherry tree
yellow jackets wheedle
snapdragon’s royal reds

pounding from the
farm next door
a shot

yet stillness
reigns

2.
Construction on the farm
Tyrannosaurus Excavator rips trees
devours your nests, ants
fledglings

3.
Being human is a misery
given power to destroy
we erect new buildings
to create again

oh woodpecker
you shred rectangles
dig out food

other creatures depend
on your labours

like men who wield
the saw and back hoe

so that families may live
more comfortably
Gate of Belonging
I feel I am some delicate creature come newly to this place.

(Lane, 2004, p. 5)
The Visitors

As I am on my way out the driveway, an unfamiliar vehicle drives in, a burgundy minivan. I ask who they are looking for. The man in the driver’s seat says he used to live here. I welcome them in, tell them to park the car by the big house, and to walk around. Greg is in the shower, Doug fast asleep in his bed. It is 10:00 am on a Sunday morning, the 14th of June.

The man introduces himself, Bob Nelson and his friend Lillian. 71 years old now. He hasn’t been back here to visit since the 60’s. He was born here, on this farm, in 1937, and his brother, 4 years before that. His dad Jack Nelson bought the farm, 120 acres then, stretching out to both sides of Wright Road—named after Abe Wright who drove a wagon pulled by horses along the road. The Bennetts owned some property too, nearby. This farm was the first cultivated property in the area. The driveway is still in the same place, and the two pear trees on the left when driving in—there used to be three—fed Bob and his parents, two brothers and two sisters well. The creek was here then too. It had a wider part then where they would draw most of their water from. There was also a surface well where they’d fill their buckets to bring the water to the house. It is still here, just beside the maple tree, as it was 71 years before. He lived here for 16 years. His wood shed was situated where the big house is now.

As I write this I hear the beginnings of hammers and nailing. The carpenters are here to start the work on the foundation of the new workshop—being built in the same spot where Bob Nelson’s dad’s workshop used to be. Last week we took down a chicken coop which must have been built by an owner in between. I’m not sure how many owners there have been—about five or six—but I have an idea to make a family tree for the farm.

Still I would never be able to account for all the beings who have lived here. Perhaps most of the owners, but not all the children who were born here nor the elders who raised them nor those that died. And how could I account for all the beings of other species who have lived and died here.
I sit here and write these words, listen to a junco calling from a tree on the other side of my office. Beside me is an apple tree. Now I hear a robin singing its lilting hymn to another glorious day in June. A hummingbird’s frantic buzz just intercepted the junco and robin. All whistle contrapuntal notes that echo and counterecho across the gardens.

It is exciting to find this feeling of home, of belonging and of history. A new history. I wonder how it relates to my cultural history. My ancestors came from Poland and Romania and Russia. There they lived for generations. I imagine that they farmed, loved and struggled against the anti-semitism of their countries. I imagine they were also fortified by the joy and commitment they had to the Jewish tradition, to their family relationships and to the land that sustained them.

How does that ancestral storyline relate to my story now, here on Butterstone Farm, in the Cranberry Valley on Salt Spring Island? I thought I was a city girl? But my ancestors were surely country folk. How far back do we have to go to find out that the one story we’ve been telling about ourselves has been covering up still other stories that also are about who we are?

Reclaiming a way of life that my ancestors surely practiced. Indeed most of our ancestors did, and many people in the world still do. So different from how I was raised, divorced from the natural processes that support life on this planet. Here I am learning to feed myself, to understand what it takes to grow a meal out of the earth, to raise animals for food and milk and eggs. If not by my own hands alone, through our community of local farmers and neighbours. Here I am learning a new definition of community, living amongst a diversity of species and cultures, religions and economies.
To be human is to seek one’s place; to be human is to seek (be) longing in the world.

(Thomas, 2004, p. 244)

Becoming community is an ongoing process that requires an engaged practice of being aware of ourselves as ‘singular plural’ beings.

(Bickel, 2008, p. 81)
To Summer

A period of greatest happiness, success, or fulfillment in the life of somebody or something;

To spend the summer;

To keep cattle or other animals on a designated pasture during the summer.

Encarta English Dictionary North America, 2009
Let my history then be a gate to a new life and not a barrier to my becoming.

(Whyte, 1997, p. 46)
This morning I stood in front of the mirror and asked: what is this life for? Why am I here? Is it for all the things I have, want, don't have, can't afford? I heard a word, one word: relationships. I looked into the mirror and saw myself, smiled. I thought about all the times I have talked back to myself critically, finding not what I wanted to see in the mirror.

When I got out of bed a few minutes earlier, after a period of meditation, I stroked my legs, and thought to myself, these are my legs that I walk on, that propel me through the world. How lucky I am to have these legs.
Gate of Acceptance
Listen,
summer sounded
late
raw, very
personal

(Shira, 2004, personal collage)
But a Dream

It is cold out and the sun is shining but it doesn’t reach the loft. I feel sad because we are in the shade here. I want warmth, the sunlight. It is summer. But this is what is happening. Sadness arises from disappointment and not getting what I want. So I feel it, in the pit of my stomach. And there are other factors.

Last night’s dinner at Sue’s was wonderful. Her house is absolutely dreamy. Big and open with so much south-facing light and a spectacular view to Sansum Narrows. That ocean passageway alone is breathtaking, so expansive, so vivid. She has a place to sit outside on every angle of the house. I can feel inadequate beside a woman with a house like that.

I had a dream last night about it:

I am talking to another woman on the island. She seems to have heard my mumbled thoughts about not liking my own home and the situation I am in. She was giving me heck about it, telling me to be grateful or something. I told her to stop, to leave me alone, I don’t want to hear it. Upset, she turned away, said that’s why she never said hello to me. I said one word: embarrassment, and started to cry. She turned toward me again, understood.

I awoke compelled by the dream. Embarrassment. That is how I feel about living in this small house with everything in one room. I heard the voices yesterday, asking myself what I have been doing all these years such that I don’t have any money or a big house to show for it. I have been writing, learning, teaching, and loving, being in my life. There is such a struggle now to simply be in my life. Yet there is joy being here. I wondered when it would arrive. The joy is present too.

I walk out into the garden at 7:30 am this morning to pick my greens for the day, before the sun reaches them. The lettuce, kale and spinach remain fresher and firmer when they are picked first thing in the morning. I learned this from Michael Ableman, a seasoned farmer who lives up the road from us at Foxglove Farm. It is true.
The other day I forgot to pick in the morning and instead did it at lunch. No sooner had I snapped the kale leaves from their stems then they started to wilt, lay limp in the basket by the time I was back in the house.

My friend gave me a book to read, a collection of essays by Wendell Berry, beloved American farmer and agrarian activist who is also a poet. I couldn’t go to sleep without skimming through the chapters. So much of his writing had to do with his commitment to the inextricable connections between humans and the natural world, to our correlatedness. He says that we belong with the land, and our move to urbanization over the past century has removed us from that understanding as well as from the skills that enable us to feed and sustain ourselves.

He speaks of the shift to a knowledge-based economy as ill-conceived, forgetful that we cannot survive without the resources the land offers us. Without our connection to it, and our love for it, we are doomed to lose our ability to take care of ourselves, and thus to survive long-term on this planet. He speaks with experience and wisdom about what it takes to look after land, to make it ready for planting, for animals.

Something is happening here. I understand and value a lot of what Berry is conveying. He talks about building a local economy, and how we can learn to live simply on the land and develop cottage industries to support home-based lives. There are many people on Salt Spring who would resonate with his vision, who have indeed taken it to heart and practice many of his ideas.

I am a PhD student and I am wondering how I will support myself here on Salt Spring. I don’t want to move away from the farm. I want to stay here, to continue to learn how to care for the plants, to grown our own food. So I am thinking about my own cottage industry.
It can be very awkward to move from between seeing with the eye of judgment and the eye of the heart, half caught in an old way of being and yet sensing, even remembering, that a larger and more generous vision is possible.

(Gendler, 2007, p. 109)
Gate of Presence
These meetings are our summer romance, our fleeting love.

(Levitt, 2008, p. 81)
The Horses

Lived here for a while
boarded in our pasture

just yesterday
I stroked their necks
let them smell my hand
fed them apples from our trees

Farley tried to climb
onto Trisha

a game of dominance

Java nodded her head
Maggie stamped her foot
on the ground

This afternoon
I looked for them
in the field
and in the forest-

they liked it there
especially when it
was hot

I found three of them
bowed in the grass,
nuzzling the green blades like nipples.

watched their tails flick flies
from their neighbour’s eyes.
I appreciate the newness of each day and each hour. Can I appreciate the newness of each moment? This quality of awareness requires a dying to, or letting go of, the previous moment.

(Meyer, 2006, p. 11)
Butterfind

My lover brings me a butterfly
perfectly intact

must have hit a car on our road, he says

I smoothe its soft wing
imagine its last flight

a western tiger swallowtail

place it inside one of the nests
I have collected on my windowsill

Lay it beside an opal stone egg
and an eagle feather
What the Day Holds

In the wind
on a clothesline
two white sheets wrinkle
swing upside down like bats
When breeze picks one up
the other follows
like a happily married couple
they remain tethered
through midnight gales and
morning lulls
not knowing what the day holds
when either will be picked
from the line
carried to bed.

Caught images, rags of rhythm.

(Friesen, 1995, p. 120)
How to Pick Cherries

(The birds will give it away)

Take the ladder folded up by the barn

Carry it over to the cherry tree

Shopping bag slung across your chest to keep your hands free

One holds onto the ladder as fingers ply stems gently

From their branches

Look for those that blush

Rosy cheeks on a yellow face

Do not to disturb those still turning

When your basket is full

Birds still nibble those

(out of reach)
What the Heart Leaves Behind

Sun slaps your cheek like a heavy rain,  
    forces you to turn,  
    look another way

    A thin coat hangs off your shoulders, wind picks  
    it up,  
    sails it across the yard.  
    You see through a periscope of weather.

Fortunately dinner is already planned:

    broiled fish in lemon juice and olive oil,  
    baked baby beets & new potatoes,  
    fresh mint and chives from the garden.

About ten minutes ago you were in bed with your lover,  
    flannel housecoat wrapped around you.

Now scents of purple italian plums and basil mingle with August coolness.

    Contemplate change.  
    It can happen so quietly, without billboards or pendulums.

It happens so quietly,  
    the night sweats,  
    thickening around your hips,  
    breasts befriend waist, become accustomed to meeting halfway.  
    Belly juts out awkwardly.  
    You resent its forthrightness, have always preferred mellow, reserved.

Local creatures comfort, inspire.  
    Their songs wobbly, undelicate.

    Your body temperature rises with the moon.  
    As do your prospects for better pay, shorter hours.

Someone finally recognizes your wisdom,  
    understands your humour.
It is all about a house on a hill in a valley,
   all about a man and a woman, several, a pasture,
   orchards, a handful of ponds.

   How can it be all about anything?

Everything buzzes.
   The refrigerator, morning chickadees, your purple vibrator.
   Sounds you have come to trust, rely on.

Fire all your ex-bosses
   Climb down their ladders
   Find sturdy flagstone paths that snake past

      lilac
      roses
      clematis
      honeysuckle
      lupine.

   Their names mean something.

This morning you open a new gate,
   the last one almost closed behind you,

      a remaining sliver of green
      where the wood splinters at the clasp.

   It’s out of your control.

This new one

creaks when you push your hand against it,
   reminds you of screen doors on camping trailers with family in Swanton Vermont.

   It is a good sign.

   Nothing moves forward without taking some of the past with it.
Settling deeply down on one spot of earth demands that you grow and change constantly just to keep up with the pulse and will of your place… Every spot has a voice, a particular taste, a breath of wind unique to itself, a shadow, a presence.

(Johnson, 2008, pp. 8-9)
**Small Red Fruit**

Supple, bouncing on the palm a memory of things that come and go

letter A scratched in the wooden beam above the bed, her throat tickled with must

the odour of rotten eggs, a path with dirt, stones and tiny footprints

her cheeks have bruises

She walks barefoot on pebbles, holds her fingers splayed

the gesture for empty

her tongue squishy

She is a dreamer the tree exhales an unpicked life
It is in my mistakes, and vulnerabilities, the wounds of my experiencing that I admit, open and soften.

(Denton, 1998, p. 73)

Creation

The poet sees lovely creatures

every live roots’ dark blossoming

stuns breath, writes seasons
Gate of Change
I too have taken

my self into this
summer lake

(Oliver, 2006, p. 11)
Fluency

This month I am taking French conversation lessons with a local woman. She comes over on Friday afternoons and we spend an hour in the Gazebo, speaking & listening to each other. As a means of regaining fluency and practicing vocabulary, I write my poems in French too.

Les Cerises

Penses-toi au futur?
les milles choses qui devraient t’amener
au sommet de tes rêves?

Regardes les cerises
2 3 4
ensemble comme des graines de sable
les herbes de prairie

pour les oiseaux
pour les chats

pour nous humaines
bavardes et tristes
un gateau plein de l’amour
a l’interieur

The Cherries

Do you think about the future?
the thousand things that would bring you to
the summit of your dreams

Look at the cherries
2 3 4
together like grains of sand
prairie grass

for the birds, the cats, for us humans
talkative and sad

a cake full of love on the inside
And if you could see yourself, how could you help loving yourself?

(Cixous, 1991, p. 31)
To the Lake

Five stellar jays shriek in the cherry trees, I think it’s a momma and her babies or parents and babies. They are eating the cherries. They hop up the branches to the top of the tree and back down. The other four have flown off and there goes the last one. I am sitting on the edge of one of the raised beds. No sunscreen yet but I needed the sun and I wanted to write and I also wanted to be in the garden because everything is so bright and blooming here. Well in various stages of bloom. Aren’t we all?

I swam in the lake in our neighbourhood, Roberts Lake—although most people around here call it Fred’s Lake because he owns the land it is on. There’s a beautiful meadow trail that snakes through his property to get to the lake. Past salal bushes, young alder, other flowering shrubs and skunk cabbage. Reminds me of trails I walked on at summer camp when I was a teenager.

It was the first time I was in a lake in a very long time. I have a story about swimming in lakes. I refuse to go in because when I was at summer camp—which was every summer from Grade three to just before university—I was forced to swim in the lake for compulsory lessons. The water was often so cold, but we had to go in, even when it was raining. I hated that. So I have been boycotting swimming in lakes ever since.

But lately I have been wondering about what I am missing. As I hear myself tell the same story over and over to various friends, I begin to see how I am making a decision that is no longer about the past but about the present. Why would I keep doing that?

Isn’t that the way prejudice works, and stereotyping? We aren’t being in the present moment with the person in front of us, but are acting under the pretense of a story we have about them. We prejudge them and generalize it to all circumstances.

So now I go into the lake and I love it, being there with the water, the wildlife. I still don’t like the cold but if I move around I can find the places where it is warmer.


Été Été

Pour venir au lac
suivre le chemin
entre les arbres
et la mémoire

approche lentement

prend la main de ton enfance
tes histoires incorrigibles

rentre dans l’eau
inspire
expire

La tendresse
va te rencontrer
là

même si le froid ne te convient pas

d’autres emotions se ramassent
dans tes bras

laisse les t’embrasser

C’est l’heure de l’étonnement

et les libellules
dansent
Summer Double

To arrive at the lake
follow the path
between the trees
and your memory

approach slowly

take the hand of your childhood
your incorrigible stories

enter the water
breathe in
out

A tenderness will meet
you there

even if the cold doesn't suit you

other emotions gather
in your arms

let them hold you

It is the time of amazement

and the dragonflies
dance
Reunion

After a 24-hour visit with a friend from high school whom I had not seen for close to 25 years, I feel as if I experienced a sewing up inside, with many threads still unwoven. She touched something in me, signalled another movement toward homecoming. Is that what we discover, how the heart is restored, brought into wholeness through the unforeseen meetings that relink us through past to present?

Contacting the experienced and (un)forgotten moments we have lived, a house of gestures, living moments that reside in us even though they have gone from present reflection. Like poetry, not everything has to fit together perfectly.

After dropping my friend at the seaplane this morning I made a brief stop at the local bookstore, ran my fingers along the spines of novels, wondered about the stories we tell and learn to retell. I am a writer. The voice said as I caressed the covers, worn and pregnant with the silence and pleasure of those who have read there.

Writing by touch, touched by writing. I write his touch and hers, yield to each one’s becoming, welcome decades of changes and newer discoveries. Delighted by the gesture that conceals itself inside memory, how she noticed me tuck my hair behind my ears, remembered the motion from an earlier era.

The words in the world, the world with its words, wounds that world us and those that we can’t unwind. Time does that and love. The girl I was, the girl I will never be again. The world we were young in and the one I swallowed almost whole. This farm is a new world to change in, a place where letters can sparkle and colours reach into my poems.

How this heart hums and the joy of not waiting for something to mean it all. For the each that I would and every of time and the matter with happy and inches of dream.
There is only the coming and going, only the space between.

(Pelias, 2004, p. 102)
Gate of Impermanence
There's not much I want this morning in the first heat of a summer day.

(Lane, 2004, p. 207)
**Dragon Flight**

It is hot, and for the most part I love it. We run at 6:00 am to avoid the heat, a lovely run, my lover and I in tandem. Outside, with the trees and the sky and the road beneath us. I love the feeling of travelling, being out in the neighbourhood, meeting horses walking along the road with their human and canine companions, encountering assorted birds and pasturing cows and goats along the way.

We’ve been going to the lake. It is so necessary to get cool, the thermometer reaching into the mid-30’s. Friends come along and we spend time in the water, spy on all the interesting pond life from the dock. We notice many kinds of water insects, and what we think are dragonfly eggs.

I look up pictures and information about dragonflies, also called darning flies and damselflies. They live under water in their nymph stage for up to five years before shedding their exoskeleton and becoming dragonflies, then they only live for about three months. What an amazing phenomenon!

It reminds me of writing, all creativity. It takes many years to write a book and although the final product is what everyone sees and reads, the work that goes into the process is as important and compelling as the artefact itself, yet mostly goes unnoticed. Just as with Loving Inquiry; I have been working on this practice for over 20 years. But this work will only now surface in the world, as I offer it in a form that others will access and appreciate.

There is a breeze today, and although it is also warm, it feels good to have the movement of the air. At the lake the dragonflies skim the water, coast around us as we wade. They go so fast, perhaps up to 60 km/ hr and nearly touch. But they do not stay still.

Just a flash of shimmery green or blue or red or white, their bulbous head and those irrepressible wings.
This morning I reflect on a book my lover brought home from the library. It is about marriage sabbaticals that women take to renew themselves, to relearn who they are outside of their identification as wives, partners, mothers, caretakers, etc. I ask myself the question to myself, something I have been wondering about: How do I yield to others in relationship? How do I give myself “away”? Or am I giving myself “a way”? How I am in relationships with others is constantly changing, depending on with whom I am in relationship, where and when. I may be different when I am with a friend than when I am with myself, or with a partner. Buddhist teachings say that everything is not static but on its way to something else. Just like the dragonfly. Although when we hear the word dragonfly we think of the beautiful being that flits with its outspread double wings or perches ashimmer, green and gold and red. But we don’t consider where it has come from, how long it took to get here, and what it looked like before now, nor that it will—in three months time or shorter—become something else, dying to this expression of itself and becoming a part of the decay, that which was alive and is no longer.

When we encounter someone, do we consider who they were an hour ago, or a year, or ten, or where they will be in ten? We engage them as we perceive them then. Likewise with our partners or peers, students or professors. We see them as the beings that are before us, size them up and respond from where we are. We come to the encounter with yesterday’s frustrations and tomorrow’s demands. If we were to have more space in our hearts for the been-being and becomingness of those we meet, live with and love, then we might be more compassionate toward their failures and frailties, and less envious of their successes and accumulated press.

We are all in various stages of growth and decay. The cycles of cherry and apple tree correspond to us too. How full the cherry tree was, gorgeous lemon yellow and plump burgundy balls tightly clustered and suspended from their individual tiny nests on the rough branches. Between us humans and the waxwings, robins and stellar jays, now, a few weeks later, there’s not a cherry in sight. All gone. Although the taste of the last
cherry lingers, there are blueberries, strawberries and raspberries to fill the mouth with a ceaseless cornucopia of berry flavours.

We cannot hold back the process. The cherries ripened with an extravagance that is thrilling, to us and to the birds. And with an equally startling movement, they disappeared off the garden stage, not to be encountered again for another year. But the cherry tree is still here all the rest of the summer, and the fall, winter, spring. I remember registering its haunting presence last winter. I barely recognized it without its ebullient fruity bouquet. Likewise the dragonfly lives for three months as the dazzling air rocket before another transformation unregistered by us.

How often do I try to pin myself down, to name who I am now, forgetting that who I am is vast, partly unfolded and partly still tucked inside? Who I am is curious, perhaps that is a better description; changing, ambivalent, unsolid. Why do I try to fit all the pieces together then, to imagine that the next step is the final frontier, when life is constantly happening inside and around me, adding space to the picture with endless possible vistas to take in and integrate? There is always another gate to enter, to pass through.

Every thing—moment, opportunity, breath, thought, action—is a piece of this unfinished puzzle, an unstoppable journey that includes both life and death, opening and closing. We have been too much conditioned to vie for the living, and to avoid the dying; we haven’t had enough practice in honouring the arts of growth and decay. Each time I take a breath I am both expanding and contracting, living and dying, moving out and climbing back in.

I wonder if inquiry is simply another word for life and death, for the process of being, existence. Loving Inquiry is about the curiosity and joy of peering into this process, having a closer look, an enthusiasm for the learning that happens when we pay attention.
Relationship is not just about caring for people, although that certainly is important, but the ability to relate to everything, to be open, to learn and grow through every situation and circumstance.

(Smith, 1998, p. 78)
Caught

As I pick lavender in the garden for a bouquet in the loft, I spot a dragonfly perched on a garden post beside the delphiniums. Double wings, long thin tail, white bands and helmet-shaped head; it looks like it is going out for the football team. Six strong legs clasp the post as the wind shuffles its wings, curving bands of black & white. I stop, breathe in. We both perch there for a long time.

The lavender stems in my hand, I slowly crouch to look closer. As I hover there I feel peaceful, curious and content. I love this stance. I seem to be assuming it a lot these days. Still and open to the being that has landed or appeared, whether plant, animal, or human.

I close and open my eyes, pay it attention and pay attention to it paying me attention. I remember the dearth of creaturely friends I had as a child. I wonder what it would be like to fly, to have it land on my shoulder and traipse around the garden with me. I want it to be my friend. As I sit fully down on the ground it takes off, lands on a clematis branch before moving to a stone near the lavender and then to the lawnmower. It never comes back to the post. Tears form in my eyes. I let myself have the emotion without worrying about what it means. It feels good to cry, to feel, to let that be my response.

The gardener shows up and I tell him about the visit with the dragonfly, how I wanted to play with it and how it went away. I understood the meaning then: I try to make others into my friends, to get them to like me. I want my partners to be just like I want, the farm, my bosses, colleagues, students. When they don’t comply I think there must be something wrong with them. Or they do something that is not comfortable for me, and I blame them. I become disappointed. I wonder if I am afraid of grief, if I make decisions to avoid feeling disappointment?

Every choice we make is about holding onto something and letting go of another. What if we learned to feel more comfortable with tears, to understand our sadness, loneliness not
as something terrible but as simply, utterly human. We cannot live without losing. That is the nature of our lives, all life.

I cannot make you into who I want you to be. Although I try, we all do. But better that we learn to let our ideas of the other go, to listen closely for who the other is, in their own original difference. That is what I try to do with Loving Inquiry. To become aware of when I am trying to steer the boat, so I can let go of the controls, ease myself away from the throttle. This is not my show alone. I am not the center of the universe. I am one of a vast diverse assortment of sparks in a vast gridwork of light.

I wonder if this is the core of my teaching as a “relationship” educator. We are all the center, sparks in the grid, interconnected, and yet separate, individual. Can we learn to be like this, to live with this awareness?

Here on the farm I am surrounded by life. I am never alone. All I have to do is be willing to reach out, to open the gate and walk through, with a curiosity for whom I might meet and a willingness to drop my preconceived ideas of who I am meeting, or at least to recognize when I am bringing those ideas with me. However it is not easy to let go. I am well-educated toward judgement, analysis, knowing. Never fully aware of all the assumptions I hold.
Gate of Plenty
Summer's keynote is abundance... A steady state of plenty.

(Palmer, 2000, p. 107)
Harvest

In his memoir about recovering from a lifetime of addiction, poet and gardener Patrick Lane (2004) exclaims: “It is the right time for me to be in the garden” (p. 7).

And so it is for me. This time here, how perfect. We are cooking with foods harvested out of our garden, preserving different kinds of pesto and berries for the winter, continuing to learn about how to grow our own food. Tonight we host the Island Natural Growers monthly potluck and meeting. Leslie is away so I will be the official greeter and tour guide.

This is living in a dream with moments as individual as stringing garlic stems together and hanging them in the loafing shed to cure for a few weeks; hand-watering the beets, basil, cucumber and lettuce nightly; and weighing pounds of vegetables in paper bags labelled with our Butterstone sticker at the local farmer’s market for customers both new and returning, who are nourishing themselves with the foods we have helped to grow. Of course the soil, the sun, the water, all have their parts.

And the farm continues to hold me, as I move deeper and fuller into the present, accept that this moment is all there really is. The frogs on the lily pads, dotting the leaves and boughs, like cars on a freeway. Tiny green and brown, heads facing this way and that. Hundreds. How secure it feels to know they are here too; and the ladybugs on the dill, doing their part by eating up the aphids. Each being with its purpose. And mine, watering, planting and harvesting, feeding others and myself, through food and solitude, relaxation, contemplation. This must be one of the most joyful, peaceful summers of my life.
Gate of Generosity
I always seem to harbor a childlike hope through the berry-stained months of June and July that summer will be for keeps.

(Kingsolver, 2007, p. 219)
Linger

You wonder
how the birds feel during sunrise

how many years you still have
to practice this singing

you have never been a solo player
rely on this astonishment

robin’s saxophone
rooster’s trumpet blare
sparrow’s throaty oboe

you belong to this orchestra

though its not what you thought life would be
you have both nothing and everything to do with it

Meetings at the gates between dragonfly and rose bush,
fence post and grape vine, fig leaf and horizon.

Once these too were only words concepts
Now you linger with their bodies, grateful

Inside doesn’t mean anything here
Out of sleep
another stunned young robin

they are having a good year
she said, that’s why so many are down

its beak bowed in the ground
you lift it out gently

its legs grip your bare palm
strongly a good sign

it is warm
heart pumps hard
beak open wide
tongue a sliver of golden rice paper
big brown black eyes
with pupils like yours only darker

you sit back on deck chair
smooth the top of its head
wind blows you both

loose feathers drift around its face, rusty belly

it looks at you
mouth starts to close
continues to stare
you smile laugh

wish for a song but
nothing comes

another wind shuffles

it rises onto its legs
talons secured to this unfamiliar perch
you recall this week’s earlier casualty—

how you rushed that robin to the wildlife centre
your best friend from high school
unsure what to do when she found it

you went on habit, knelt
and scooped it into your hand

grabbed the New Balance shoe box
the keys and were off—

down the mountain
through town and up
the familiar paved driveway

placed the bird in capable hands
perhaps this one would live

A sudden shift.
first attempt at reentry
you stay put watch it prepare
for departure

grey and white feathers
catch air, the maple its first landing

You remember that line
in your poem fear of falling

“I’ve never saved anything besides myself”

hope it’s no longer true
Generosity to the stranger acknowledges that community exists beyond one’s own family, social group, species.

(Hirshfield, 1997, p. 210)
Fall in Love
& I look at the gate

how open it is…

& where does the road out of it go—

(Graham, 2008, p. 6)
I went out for a short walk and the front gate was open. As I walked through I felt a lot of things, a sense of freedom especially. You see the gate was wide open, its bolts sunk into their cylinders on each side of the driveway. I was able to just stroll right through, with an air of confidence and self-assurance.

I thought about all the gates on the farm, all the opportunities for relationship they represent, for being with myself and others in the world. In my life I have often felt like an outsider, trying to find my way in, feeling not good enough to be accepted, included.

But I walked through the gate and I felt freed. I was mistaken. It was only my belief, my perception that was mistaken. The gate is open, like my heart is open. And I am walking through.
Gate of Choice
I want to fall in deep with words,
    fall in like piled hay in a farm truck,
    fall in smelling love like
this is my whole reason for brushing my teeth.

(Shira, 2001, personal journal)
Return

In the gazebo on Butterstone Farm, after a week away at Hollyhock, it is very warm and pleasant here today. Wind shifts through rose bushes, sings through walnut and clematis vines. A day of returning, home, to our loft and our lives here on Salt Spring. Laundry, food preparation, harvesting apples and greens, beans, potatoes. All activities put on hold for a week while we journeyed in another place. Our focus—26 couples, two leaders and three counsellor-assistants—was to explore how to live more fully, deeply, and skilfully in relationship with our partners.

Well-fed, surrounded by the forest and waters of Cortes Island, we were nourished and supported to look at our experience as a couple with an eye to encouraging greater intimacy and respect between us. I could describe it endlessly but I want to focus on what I learned, what I saw and felt and “got” out of the time there, and from the guidance of the facilitators.

A tremendous amount of joy and peace. Affirmation of the closeness and caring in my relationship with Gregory. Moments of discomfort, curious and uncertain of what I might learn. I think I was afraid to learn that Gregory wasn’t the “one”, that I have made a tragic mistake. I am not sure why I thought I might discover that. Perhaps it is a remnant thought from my old pattern of doubt and fear of failure, or having things taken away from me. What I learned is that it is up to me. If I want to love Gregory, I can choose that. If I want to focus on what is right, good, honest, beautiful about him, that is my choice. Likewise if I want to focus on what is wrong, unpleasant, imperfect about him, I can choose to do that to. There is no grand story only the one I am creating moment to moment. And I can choose which slant it takes, whether of mystery or tragedy or comedy, romance or adventure.

However choice only comes with awareness. That is the gift of presence, of attention, of stepping back and watching, becoming slightly removed from the action—like sitting on
the couch instead of being in the television, as my Buddhist teacher Heather Martin likes to say.

This is mind training, being able to recognize the games the mind plays on us, the stories it tells, the unskilful patterns it perpetuates. Being in a healthy relationship is helped by this training of the mind. Because we have been taught, programmed, are wired to hurt, to judge, to want something other than what is before us. However I have learned this lesson well, continue to learn how much I am capable of seeing, as Gendler (2007) says, both with the eyes of judgement and the eyes of the heart. Life flows, as do joy and compassion when I am practicing the latter. Peace fills me more readily and steadily when I am open and relaxed, in a state of allowing.

I shy away. I need to be reminded of my power. My power is in being here, telling my truth, engaging authentically and self-responsibly. It is the power of awareness. I walk slowly, gently when I am awake. I feel the floor, my heart, your heart, the world. I walk around the world with an open heart, mind, body. I feel the world and I welcome the world in. I am present, I am powerful. Not when I doubt, when I cower, when I worry. That is when I get caught in the “I”. It is not about me, they reminded me.

My truth wasn’t so shocking to me: I am full of joy, happy. I am in a wonderful relationship. I live in a beautiful place with loving people. I left my family so I could have something different than what I was raised with. I moved across the country to find it. I left my mother and father, whom I love. In a visualization I told them that I love them and that I needed to leave. That it is difficult to spend time with them. But I speak to them with love and admiration, for who they are, for being fully in their lives.

I want to share my words. That is my desire. And to teach from the heart, to support others to feel this freedom, this joy of being, budding, loving. It is the willingness to be open, to change, to learn to surrender beliefs and encounter otherness— whether of flowers or trees or human beings—that roots this joy.
The light is different on the farm now, the trajectory of the sun keeps shifting. There is sun in the gazebo now, on my arms and legs. Very warm. The deck of the loft filled with sun first thing this morning, 8am. So much brightness. Maple and poplar leaves fading to yellow. The heart vine has leaves of singe and copper.

We talked, they shared, told us their challenges, showed us their tools, practices for being conscious with each other. No blaming, shaming. We have to like each other, to respect each other. To feel empathy for each other. We are all human. It starts from here. We are all human, living together within the natural world, the more-than-human world. The animal and plant worlds

I am nodding off. Nap time. But wait, the joy, the intimacy, the learning to look into each others’ eyes, breathing together, being together. Amazing.
It means seeing it with my heart—free of judgment, anticipation, and the mind’s analysis… Is it a barrier or an entrance?”

(Meyer, 2006, p. 6)
Gate of Un/ knowing
autumn wind teased

rhythms no poet could name

(Leggo, 1999, p. 12)
Reinterpret

You want to tell everything that happens
each day on the farm

this poem has other plans

what you have to say is not irrelevant
it is giving up one world for innumerable others

this is your joy

the birds and

your disappearance

the empty vase

each season’s blossoming

self-forgetful

as if your next breath were
as if you belong to this

as if the world hinges on the slant

of your right hand

here

as if there never was a better moment to

and you explain it to us

what it means to feel this

then you hear something

scatter yourself

reinterpret
Where are the rituals that open us to not-knowing? The rituals that grant us the space, freedom, and encouragement to grow or change? Almost absent.

What is required today, and for the next century, is an education that is willing to plunge into the unknown, into the unknowable; an education of redemption; an education that prepares us to return and to serve.

(Halifax, 1999, pp. 175, 181)
Gate of Openness
woke up with yellow and gold
leafing open in my palms

(Rempel, 2009, p. 69)
Three

1. Here in the garden beneath cherry and plum, walnut and maple we sit like two schoolchildren reading our study books. Your head perches on my knees my hands rub your neck, a mist hovers like bullies in the hallway but nobody can touch us. We are invisible indivisible. Raven Raven overhead startles, you look at me with your green green eyes, turquoise stones like waters that curl around Polynesian islands. Every now and then I get up and move, trail my fingers along limbs of true cedars, stretch my hand toward cheeks of roses, caress soft crimson ovals, whisper to those still unfolded. Steady, steady.

2. Here I come home with you beside me like vines climb cedar boughs. Mist has ears and beads of rain pearl my waistline. This dark becoming land opens vistas and voices. I wake up bearded and boastful, look at where the children have left their backpacks, footprints. We are alike you and I, nomadic, rooted and winged. We meet in this middle place when no one watches, rub up against each others’ wishes, run over leaves veined and copper, rinse in questions, savor the silent.

3. Here is the time when my heart rests with splendour. Ripple of cloud light encroaches, teal confetti grazes air, branches are bear hugs and moss lunches on mushrooms and slivers of ant hill. Here is no wanting when surrounded by this many robes of green.
Horizon

*The way I forget, each time, how the end
is there, already, in the beginning of things*

(Joseph, 2004, p. 13)

Dawn scribbles wind

wayward leaves guess
at heaven

hope atoms into brown

we lift off, feathers curl
Angels in Transit

I picture all of us
with wings on

angels in transit, some
gossamer, some tattooed

all of us fluttering
(the etymology of wind, wings,
heaven)

how beautiful we all look with
our wings showing

if only we knew it
us with these bodies

with these shells, vines,
roots

alive we are
grounded in this place called Earth
for a while

breathing this breath
and the next

fully equipped
for euphoria

alive we are
all of us

buoyant and bubbly
filled with the curious dust of the cosmos

hungry
and lonely
and wise

our
individual
wings
fluttering.
As we see, whichever way we look into the nature of inquiry, we find that it has to be open. When you inquire into something, you are opening it up, you are revealing it.

So the very nature of inquiry is a process of opening up; and what you open up are boundaries, limits, positions, beliefs—any stand you may be taking about what you are experiencing.

We can say that inquiry is a process of always opening and opening and opening, endlessly and freely. And it opens from any place, from any direction, from any level, from any position.

(Almaas, 2002, p. 27)

To train in staying open and curious—to train in dissolving the barriers that we erect between ourselves and the world—is the best use of our human lives.

(Chodron, 2002, p. 45)
Gate of Joy
Joy can't hide here
and why would she want to

though sometimes she sleeps late
spits out words without warning

starts pillow fights

we all fall down
from somewhere

cells let go

gravity pulls
Homecoming

Everything sparkles, pearls of rain mist hover inside a reverie of colour.

A congregation of birds on the roof outside my bedroom window dashes in and out of the maple, its autumnal glow illuminating the loft. I have to pull out the bird book, to identify what kind they are, and what about those that scattered around the garden this morning as I picked fresh salad greens, light & dark purple cosmos for a bouquet. I read that they are juncos, starlings, and those on the roof, sparrows, their brown feathers striped and spotted black, white.

I cry now, another joy, to live here amongst these lofty beings, hover between my own Loving Inquiry and theirs.

In the film *Griefwalker* (Clarke & Wilson, 2008), Palliative Care worker Stephen Jenkinson says most of us in North America feel homeless, displaced. We lack a feeling of connection, to land, to community, to spiritual identity. Poet and educator David Whyte (2009) suggests that once we are able to name our experience of exile, we are already on our way home (public presentation, November 6).

What if this thesis has been a way for me to find the place inside where I actually accept and trust and believe in who I am, how I live, and what I love, that I love? Can a PhD thesis be that, accepting and celebrating my relationship with myself?

Of course it is more than that. I have been learning to open my heart into relationship with all kinds of people, beings, to question and challenge my assumptions about who I am, who others are. We are all here together.

I love being here. I do the best I can, try to take care of myself and those I love. I stumble and fall and sometimes I am better at surviving and picking myself up and starting again. But I am not separate from the rest of us. We all need to be honoured, to be touched,
noticed: the birds I find on the ground and the man I said hi to in Ganges yesterday who walks around day after day; the mouse under the sink; the logs that once were trees. There is so much to notice, to be aware of. So much life we are all a part of. Through the practice of Loving inquiry I say hello to this life, all life.

Through this year of practicing Loving Inquiry on the farm, I have been making myself at home, by opening the gates to myself and all of the creatures and plants and beings here. Feeling at home on the farm leads me to feeling at home in the universe, to accepting and celebrating my place in the unfolding miracle of creation, my place in the family of humanity and earth beings.
Where you are is who you are. The further inside you the place moves, the more your identity is intertwined with it. Never casual, the choice of place is the choice of something you crave.

(Mayes, 1996, p. 86)
Epilogue: The Gateless Gate

Gateless is the Ultimate Way;
There are thousands of ways to it.
If you pass through this barrier,
You may walk freely in the universe.

(Shibayama, 2000, p. xiv)
I went for a walk, just got back. I wanted to see if I could make my way through all the gates in the thesis. I didn’t walk in any preordained order. I just set out. Isn’t that the way I moved through this whole thesis process?

I start at the west gate to Le Jardin, the one I open and close the most of any gate on the farm besides the front gates. You know it as the Gate of Interconnection and the Gate of Reflection, as well as one of the Gates of Listening. Standing before this multifaceted gate, I put my hand on the wood. It is damp from all the winter rains. Soaking but not dripping. I look at the three maple leaves set on top of the wood. The front gates have these same three leaves. They are carved in a similar type of wood and must be nailed on. As I pause before trying the hook, I feel a deep sense of respect. I have to stop, to honour the gate. In honouring this gate I am honouring all of the gates. I wonder what I will find when I go through and am in the garden. Through the holes in the fence I peer in to see what’s going on.

In poet Lorna Crozier’s poem “In Moonlight” (in Lane, 2004, pp. 183-4), she writes:

It has to do with seeds. The earth’s insomnia.

The garden going on without us

needing no one to watch it

That’s how I feel peering into the garden, as if I am spying on that which is happening without my interference. All kinds of plants are sleeping, hibernating, replenishing, their sunken roots deepened into soil to sustain themselves through the cold wet season. When I start to undo the hook, of course it is difficult. This gate is always unpredictable. Its wood has expanded and the gate has shifted angle. The rusty hook attached to it is only able to creep out of its eye with slow jerks. Then it gets stuck right at the tip. I am feeling slightly frustrated, although I have learned to expect the delay and to almost make a game of it. Okay so what are you gonna show me this time, how you gonna treat me?
I teach my students that setting boundaries is how we show people how to treat us. Thus this gate teaches me to treat it with respect, to pause for its invitation, to play with it, and to expect delay and difficulty. Finally I am able to take the hook all the way out of the eye. I push the gate open and walk through, then diligently close it behind me, reaching my arm through the fence and around to manoeuvre the hook back down into the eye.

As I turn toward Le Jardin, I feel a smile widen on my cheeks, am overcome with a feeling of joy and delight. Look at all this life, all this beauty, all this growing and dying, gestating and anticipating. I notice that one of the gates on the east side of the garden is open, wonder who left it that way. It is the Gate of Intimacy. I walk over to investigate, my rubber boots sloshing through the sopping grass. Its hook is even rustier than the one I just handled, and it barely reaches to touch the eye. No wonder it wasn’t closed.

I see that, contrary to the gate I just came through, this one’s hook is attached to the fence and the eye to the gate. I have missed that detail in all the comings and goings. And there have been plenty here too, as this is the gate closest to the cherry tree, the one that practically explodes with bulbous magenta fruit midsummer. We must have picked over 60 pounds of cherries, and even that, I believe, is an underestimation. Most of them we either ate or sold at the Tuesday farmer’s market. I also pitted some which we cooked with our oatmeal for a while in the fall.

After leaving Le Jardin I move through the meadow, past the gazebo and over to the orchard, adolescent and awe-fully pretty this time of the year. Two-foot slender trunks support two-foot stretching branches that appear as chaotic candelabras, with many more branches than I’ve ever seen on one. Naked, the branches range in colour from grey to brown to red. Arranged in three lines set on the side of the hill, they hold so much potential for our continued harvest. About 12 of them altogether, I have spent many an hour with trowel and wheelbarrow seriously weeding at the base of each one.
I walk past them, nodding in the direction of another wooden gate that is not in the thesis. It leads out toward one of the spots on the farm designated for burning and handling of excess organic material created and circulated on the farm. I climb down the steep slope, three rows of wintering lavender plants to my left, a less organized though equally appreciated stand of rose bushes on my right. When I arrive at the Gate of Belonging, the hook is easy to release. However the difficulty lies in opening it. The grass and dirt on either side are soaked and thickened, such that the gate won’t budge either inward or outward. So I kick it, a few times. It is one way to move it with more force. I push it too. But nothing happens. I am not getting through it. I step back, and thank the gate for its lesson.

Boundaries also tell us how to respond to a given situation. If I ask you to borrow your car and you say no, then I know that I either need to borrow someone else’s, get my own—unless I already have one but it’s in the garage—or find another mode of transportation. Parker Palmer (1983, 1993) suggests “a learning space has three essential dimensions: openness, boundaries and an air of hospitality (pp. 71-75). This gate has a boundary that I need to heed. I decide to go look for another way in.

Where I am headed is a gate that I have used in the thesis but have actually never been through. It is the first summer gate, the Gate of Acceptance. Hmmm, how interesting. You see I didn’t originally associate each physical gate, and each image of that gate, with the content of that gate or its quality of practice. Instead I organized them according to shape and colour and aesthetic context. The names of the gates were a late-in-the-game addition, an elegant way to integrate the qualities of Loving Inquiry.

I make my way back up through the orchard and come to the Gate of Un/ knowing, which is also known as the Gate of Interdependence. I have to move through it to get to the Gate of Acceptance. This gate asks for a different kind of effort in its opening. The chain link isn’t affixed however its hinges are non-functioning. Instead it is hoisted at its lower left hand corner up onto the top of a wooden post. In order to get through I have to lift the gate up and pull it toward me. I then have to carefully place it down on the
ground. It is not light, so it takes some muscle power. I succeed and find myself walking down the slope once again on my way toward the Gate of Acceptance.

Turns out it is easy to open, the chain link unwraps from its position on a nail stuck in the fencepost. It seems to only move one way, toward me. Then I have to step over a threshold of several medium-sized tree stumps lined up along its base. Once I do, I enter into a whole new world, literally. I have never been down here before and the first thing I notice is that despite the sound of rushing water, it is very still. I have a strong sense of sacred space here as I walk along beside the streaming water, gushing down the mountain in a deep gulley about 20 feet below where I stand. I follow it a ways before stopping. I can see where it is coming from, but not to where it is going. A copper-leaved carpeted forest is in the way.

I exit the gate and return to the pasture, which I cross lengthwise to reach another seldom visited gate that is also in the thesis. This one is the Gate of Impermanence and it is open. It leads me into another forest that climbs back toward the main area of the farm. At the top is the construction zone for the almost-completed workshop. Here there are two gates of the thesis that are not present: the Gate of Ambiguity, which seems to have been completely dismantled, and the Gate of Play, which is still here but has been re-situated.

As I leave the zone of construction I head toward a very familiar gate. At different points in the thesis it is the Gate of Generosity, of Choice and of Compassion. It is one of the gates with which I am most often in visual contact as I admire it daily through my bedroom window. Today I approach it slowly, curious as to how I will feel when I open it. Its hook and eye are larger than most of the other ones I’ve handled today. They come apart swiftly despite their rusted appearance. When I step through I am in another open pasture, the slight ascending curve of the land carrying my eyes up toward Wright Road and higher, to the mountain that frames the western view from the farm. I love the feeling of being here, all this space feels calming. I take a deep breath, wonder at the beauty of this pastoral expanse and prepare to move on. As I shut the gate behind me, I revel in
how much opportunity there is here to be transported into so many different worlds, both inside the gates of the farm, and within the gates of my heart.

I am now going back to where we began. The last few gates I will move through all lead into Le Jardin. Here I encounter the Gate of Plenty, two more of the Gates of Listening, and the Gate of Change. The first one I come to is a Gate of Listening. As I come closer I hear the chitter of birds in the fir trees all around. The chain is linked tightly to the fence post and I decide not to open it. Instead I turn directly to my right and enter the Gate of Plenty. This gate I have written about in several of the poems in the thesis. It is quite inconspicuous, tucked in a corner in between two other Gates of Listening. However, I am drawn toward it, and especially to the fencepost beside it, which has these etchings that I continue to be curious about. Who made them? When? What were they thinking of when they scratched these lines into the wood?

There is one last gate to visit, which I have called the Gate of Change. It too has a distinctive marking, a deer’s antlers attached to the top of its frame. I wonder who put it there, and when? And I wonder how the deer perceive it? Spending time in his garden, poet Lane (2004) asks, “Do the living things of this garden perceive the same as I do?” (p. 16) It is the presence of the deer that has made it necessary for us to have all of these gates. Perhaps the antlers are a kind of truce, a symbol of harmony. They are most welcome here as long as they do not come past these gates. Indeed as I have walked around the farm I’ve spied traces of deer everywhere outside the gates.

The remaining gates to visit are those that appear as the Gate of Paradox, the Gate of Openness and the Gate of Perception. The twin pair of front gates, their respective driveways lead in to each of the two human dwellings on the farm. However, once construction is complete, they will be merged into one single gate. As I stand before them, I wonder at all the changes that have happened since I first started photographing the gates for this thesis. My partner tells me there will be more changes as we continue to learn more about the needs of the farm. I learn to not be attached to how things are.
In *The Gateless Gate* Zen master Wu-men (2000) used koans—short phrases or sentences—to awaken his students to the path of spiritual freedom and enlightenment. He called it the gateless gate because he taught that those who recognize that they are free, perceive no gate, whereas those who are not free, have to pass through the gate in order to learn that there is none (p. xiv).

What does it mean to be free? In the Buddhist tradition, it means to have relief from suffering through recognizing the non-existence of the self. When we don’t cling to our experience as a separate self, then we become free to experience life as a vast and vivid array of interconnections. As Buddhist meditation teacher Boorstein (2002) shares:

> I have moments in which I understand that there is no one who owns the narrative of my life, no one to whom the events of my life are happening, that all of creation is a huge, interconnected, amazing production of events unfolding in concert with each other, connected to each other, dependent on each other, with no separation at all. When these moments happen, I feel happy, at ease, and grateful. I think of them as experiences of enlightenment. (pp. 218-9)

Here on Butterstone Farm over the past year I have experienced moments of the kind of “enlightenment” Boorstein speaks of, through opening my heart into relationship with the beings, people and things I encounter here. However I also fall into old patterns of seeing and knowing from a separate sense of self, when my mind becomes clouded with harmful beliefs, judgements and assumptions. That is the gift of the gates on the farm: they ask that I slow down, become present and attend. I am grateful for their presence; their solid, steady reminders; and their sturdy protection.

That is also the gift of the gates of Loving Inquiry. The qualities of engagement that I access through being present as well as through writing poems, narratives and taking photographs all support me to have more and more experiences of enlightenment, as Boorstein describes it, as well as a tremendous peace that arises from such experiences.
Bibliography


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*Educational Insights, 11*(1).


