

POSTCARDS TO THE BELOVED: AN INQUIRY INTO OUR SHARED WORLDLINESS  
THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF A STORY MENTOR

by

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# Abstract

Narrative understandings into the nature of our shared worldliness and its import can emerge through the practice of writing stories about our lived experiences. This dissertation argues, as have many others, that in order to engage critically in political acts and social acts in the world with others we have to restore and reinvigorate the eye of the imagination. We need to restore and to develop abilities to question and form narrative understandings. Developing our capacity to pay attention to how narrative understandings reveal our relationship to our shared worldliness allows for the possibility to think through other practices that lie outside predominating conceptual frames and perspectives. It challenges our shared human condition of remoteness, our worldly alienation, as theorized by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*.

This narrative inquiry focuses on the practice of being a story mentor and the writing of stories. These stories are drawn from my own experience as an artist, documentary filmmaker, and writer with a practice of story mentoring in community engaged settings spanning over twenty years. The inquiry is initiated by questions that emerge in a specific digital storytelling research project with a community of seniors. Plagued by a sense of unease and dissatisfaction with the narrative voice of these stories I begin to see them as stories preoccupied with the domestic and the known. I make the decision to form an inquiry based on writing as a path into seeking the unfamiliar and unknown, the undomesticated. The inquiry centers itself around Arendt's theme of worldly alienation and stories of uncertainty and death. I give up and replace the predetermined narrative voice with an evolving narrative. Each gesture, in Maxine Greene's words, creates new structures of knowledge as the learner attempts to orient herself in the unfamiliar.

The inquiry proposes that the revelatory presence of the world can be made manifest through this kind of storied awareness, born from narrative understandings. I forward the proposition that by fostering and mentoring stories that seek out the condition of worldly alienation and remoteness we can foster deeper levels of awareness of our shared worldliness.

# Preface

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# Dedication

In memory of my father and mother, David Fraser and Helen Fraser

and

To my granddaughter Kaya Fraser

# Introduction

## FIELDNOTE: APRIL 27, 2005 ~ “I MISS THE DARK.”

*After leaving the highway and its corridor of bush, tree, and mountain riverbed, I enter the suburban streets under the watch of looming green and blue snow-swept mountains. I soon arrive at the doorstep of the Silver Harbour Seniors Centre, carrying an uneasy sense that I, once again, returned to an alien yet familiar place.*

*This place with its tired linoleum floors and windowless walls is nothing like one imagines as a refuge or harbour of safety. It appears more like an emergency ward where elderly patients are waiting for help to arrive. Urgency permeates this basement room, creating a heavy demand on my attention. I struggle with opening doors and wheeling out computers and cameras, microphones, and scanners for our workshop.*

*Once plugged in and turned on, the eight monitors light up the room, projecting photographs of homes, babies, mothers, fathers, sisters, houses, friends—Kodak moments from another time. People appear awash in the great swath of the twentieth century: the rural 1930s, the suburban 1940s, and the 1950s. A gallery of ghosts materializes before us, surrounding us with bright party faces.*

*As story mentor in the project, I’ve turned into a makeup artist. Freshen everything up. Restore old photographs. Ready lively faces from the past for perpetuity. It is so bright in this room and so noisy. Backdrops appear behind these party faces as shadows of a living world that disappears as we progress through time.*

*While sitting beside Shirl and helping her with her editing, she asks, “What do you think?” I want to tell her “ I miss the dark.” But I don’t.*

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NARRATIVE

I wrote this field note during the first year of my doctoral program. It speaks to the growing unease I was experiencing in my practice as story mentor in a community development project. I wrote field notes to document my practice as story mentor, teacher, and artist in residence in this arts-based project with older adults. The research context was part of a larger study that investigated the relationship between art and health with adults at Silver Harbour Seniors Centre over a three-year period.<sup>i</sup> Colleague and artist Corin Browne and I were mentoring the seniors in digital video production using stories of lived experience as the focus of their learning digital literacies.<sup>ii</sup>

My history with community and story is extensive. I began my career over 25 years ago as a writer and performer for the professional stage, national radio, and documentary film. By the mid 1980s, I encountered the work of Augusto Boal (2000). At that time, he was adapting the pedagogical theory of Paulo Friere into a body of theatrical work known as the *theatre of the oppressed*.<sup>iii</sup> Boal's work influenced theatre artists, social workers, political activists, and scholars throughout the world. While working with Headlines Theatre, under artistic director David Diamond, I facilitated and directed *forum* theatre events and workshops provincially and nationally. This theatre form depends upon an investigation into a community's lived experience out of which a story for the theatre is created.

In all these projects, the stories from people's lives remain my most vivid recollections of that period in my professional life. I worked with asylum seekers on the plight of being a refugee; with First Nations communities on issues of domestic violence;

with elders on the challenges of aging; with those whose lives were affected by HIV/AIDS; and school communities on issues of racism and violence; and so on.

In the late 1990s, my work in popular theatre and education shifted to the new medium of digital video. For example, *The Gulf Island Film and Television School* invited me to offer preproduction story mentoring. I started by working with communities and individuals in developing methods of story mentoring to serve in various programs of self-producing digital video. I was invited to work with Corin Browne and Dr. Stuart Poyntz, in the Summer Visions Film Institute for Youth in 2000. Here we developed a model of digital video production that was run and produced by youth. My role in this institute was to supervise and mentor the story or concept in the preproduction period. Our process was initially drawn from a feminist model of mentoring. In such a model, the mentor views her work as one who seeks “creating a relationship built on the sharing of power, mutuality, equality, and respect” (Benishek, K. J., & Slattery, 2004, p. 434). It was our aim to create an environment whereby the youth could see themselves as creators of their creative and social worlds (Poyntz, 2008). This program was a collaborative and democratic experiment in media education. Digital video production was the medium.

I offer several descriptions of my projects in popular theatre and digital video production to emphasize the diversity within my practice of people and communities and the stories from their lives. I have heard and helped develop hundreds, perhaps even a thousand, stories throughout my career. My work is, in essence, based on developing a collective path of inquiry, like a bridge, seeking a way through the story from each individual’s life to an expression of a collective experience that the entire community shares.

In the beginning of my doctoral research, the Arts Health and Seniors Research Project invited me to work as an artist in residence in one of their project sites. I decided to use the Silver Harbour Digital Storytelling Group as the focus of my research and dissertation. My research would investigate the use of story as a means to: educate older adults in digital media production, examine the pedagogy of story mentoring as an avenue of critical engagement with communities, and explore approaches that mentor community contexts.<sup>iv</sup> I also intended to further scholarly discourse on this relatively new genre of public art practice among other artists, researchers, and scholars.

By the time I began documenting the project, I already had accumulated scholarly arguments, like marbles in a child's treasure bag, to validate the practice of story mentoring across different contexts. I had begun constructing a narrative of my practice of story mentoring using a classical definition of community-engaged arts practice, by Garoian (1999), whereby the practitioner's role is to "mediate through soliciting and mentoring" (p. 27) stories from the community's lives. Such practice is intended "to aid, educate and foster participation" in work that serves the vital interests of the community. (p. 28).

I knew from my previous experience that mentoring seniors in digital productions that feature their personal stories from lived experiences is a critical avenue for documenting their local knowledge. That is, this story making helps the storyteller to recreate meaning of their lived experience to share with family and community. I also knew how meaningful this work is to individuals who participate in such a program; in evaluations, they repeatedly view a direct relationship to this work and their growing self-

esteem. And, I appreciated the significance of fostering their abilities in order for them to be able to share stories as gifts from their lives in coherent and entertaining ways.<sup>v</sup>

However, as my research deepened and the project at Silver Harbour completed its first year, I could not find an avenue of inquiry that authentically represented my practice as a story mentor. I had initially drawn a definition of this practice from a commonly held understanding of a community-engaged artist, as one who solicits and facilitates stories from lived experience. In this view, the creative practice of story mentoring serves the vital interests of a given community. At this point I asked myself, what does it mean to serve the vital interests of this community through story mentoring? I reflected on this question while conducting a scholarly review, seeking to further my understanding of narrative and story. Through this line of research, I came across a definition of narrative by Michel de Certeau (1984). This definition of narrative opened up a line of inquiry for me. De Certeau sees the primary function of narrative as “the story we assume that authorizes, founds, and sets in place ways of experiencing the world” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 123).

In our first project at Silver Harbour, we encouraged the group to write a very short memory or story from lived experience. Unsure and unfamiliar with the technology, the participants needed encouragement to express themselves in a safe and supported way. As might have been expected, all of the stories, with the exception of two, were based entirely on an event in the past, drawn from memory. However, when I viewed these stories I asked myself another set of questions. Was there a larger narrative at play in these reminiscences? Was there a shared metaphor or concern? What was, in de Certeau’s words, “the story we assume” (1984) that was setting in place a way of

experiencing the world? From my initial perspective, the stories realized at Silver Harbour were mostly charming anecdotes intended to entertain the viewer. The stories were tales of domestic life and relationships,<sup>vi</sup> but the prominent and unexamined role of a *self* as the main character of all the stories called to my attention. My unease grew despite the appreciation of audiences, the accomplished production values of the individual pieces, and evaluations from the seniors themselves.

With these concerns in mind, I consulted several scholarly texts. In *Searching for Memory*, Schacter saw autobiographical memory as being from a synthesis of knowledge of lifetime periods, general events, and specific episodes in one's life (1996, p. 93). This construction is neither true nor false. Rather it is a synthesis of interpretation. Pinar viewed the autobiography as a construction of a self, an "architecture of self, a self we create and embody . . . becoming flesh, in the world" (1994, p. 220).<sup>vii</sup>

When viewing the final collection of these digital stories at a public screening, I finally began to see a larger narrative emerge in our work together. In my reading about memoir, poet Don McKay's insight into memory as "the temporary domestication of time" (1995, p. 22) reverberated in this collection of work from Silver Harbour. The stories are, for the most part, of a self, frozen in time. The stories of this self are set against backdrops of shifting images, of an increasingly domesticated world. The meaning of *domesticate*, "to adapt life in intimate association with and to the advantage of humans, to bring to the level of the ordinary" (Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary, 2005, p.146) echoed throughout the pieces.

While listening to the narrators at Silver Harbour recollect personal memories, I watched archival photographs that document living environments such as Horseshoe Bay

on the North Shore of Vancouver, once a local swimming hole, become a busy ferry terminal; the small hamlet of Lynn Valley, nestled in the embrace of rainforest and river canyon, turn into the chaos of suburban shopping malls; and the wildlife along the Burrard Inlet disappear. The settings and the *worldliness* of the personal stories become increasingly domesticated worlds. These are portraits of lives, of friends and family, home and work, and adventure set in a world where the intrinsic wilderness disappears in a progression towards the present. Their worldliness is a setting that is constantly being adapted to the human and, in the doing, made to appear ordinary. The narrative of this collection speaks to an increasingly domesticated experience of the world. I am reminded of James Hillman (1992), a post-Jungian psychologist, who saw worldly presence as things of the world having their own depth, mystery, and intentions. Hillman also saw this mass loss of acknowledging this presence as defining the modern epoch, and has given us this flat, disconnected, uninviting, depersonalized, and literal appearance. Hillman asserted, “we have deanimated the world and inflated the significance of the human person” (1992, p. 187).

While the ensuing demise of these environments is sometimes mourned in the seniors’ individual stories, the impact of the disappearance of wilderness isn’t seen as anything beyond the ordinary. This portrait of the world, the matrix for all human affairs, never became the subject of inquiry in their stories, nor its nature. I was reminded again of the meaning of the phrase *to domesticate* to bring to the level of the ordinary as it relates to the primary function of narrative, “as the story that sets in place our *experiencing* of the world” (de Certeau, 1984, p.123). The progression of this loss of natural wilderness in favour of an increasing domestication began to influence my



thinking about my practice with this community. As artist in residence, I felt compelled to inquire into how I might invite the community to extend the boundaries of what they consider worthy of remembering, of inviting a narrative understanding of the self and place and in the here and now, as “becoming flesh in the world” (Pinar, 1994, p. 8). The words of philosopher Henry Bugbee (1999) became clear to me. Bugbee wrote that by cultivating a willingness to evoke meanings in writing through responsiveness to the realities of our place, our worldliness, we can restore ourselves to our place *in* our shared worldliness.<sup>viii</sup>

The levelling to the ordinary, or the domesticating, as evidence of a kind of progress, as it appeared in the seniors’ digital stories, wasn’t the only ordinary and flattening unfolding in a narrative surrounding the practice at Silver Harbour. As my research deepened, I recognized my own intent to construct an argument that provided evidence of progress in my practice at Silver Harbour. In so doing, I domesticated the narrative of the dissertation, made it predictable. Similarly, Janet Miller (2005) wrote about the problem of autobiographic narratives whereby “the fabric of the narrative appears seamless, spun of whole cloth. The effect is magical—the self appears organic, the present appears as the sum total of the past, the past appears as an accurate predictor of the future” (2005, p. 51). The desire to tell stories as evidence of progress was shaping the narrative of this dissertation and making it ordinary.<sup>ix</sup>

In further thinking about the voice of the narratives produced at Silver Harbour, I realized Miller was characterizing the voice I was attempting to use in my dissertation. I had been writing from the perspective of an already defined practice, instead of from the point of view of an inquiry. There was no *evolving* narrative. It was a portrait of a

practice, not unlike the portraits of the self that were coming out of the first years work at Silver Harbour.

There was a predictable story emerging in my work. At the same time, I knew that the understanding we gain from writing and telling our stories is anything but predictable. In becoming a story, an event is experienced twice, once in the experience and again in the recording and retelling (Baldwin, 2005). The experience we gain in the retelling or rerecording cannot be predicted. We cannot predict the narrative understanding we gain from paying close attention to the stories we choose to tell. Out of *this* process a narrative understanding is formed. In other words, a narrative understanding is gained from the construction of stories from our memories but not through an attempt to *recapture* a moment. Narrative understanding interprets a past event in order to determine how it contributes to the moment we are currently living. For me, it was becoming evident that in order to gain a narrative understanding of my own practice, I would have to practice my own writing of stories.

Meanwhile in my scholarly research, I began to read the philosophy of Hannah Arendt (1958), who wrote about our concern of the self as overshadowing our relationship with the world, our inherent worldliness. The worldliness of this self is, in the modern age, a reflection of “world alienation,” a condition she maintains as being the most persistent trend in modern philosophy, revealing itself as an exclusive concern with the self and an attempt to reduce all experiences with the world, as well as with other human beings, to experiences between “man and himself” (1958, p. 253). She stated, “*world alienation* not self alienation has been the hallmark of the modern age” (1958, p. 253).

Arendt's (1958) insights into the human condition of worldly alienation resonated with the way in which I was viewing the concerns with the self and in the eclipse of the concern for the world that appeared in the collection of Silver Harbour stories. I wondered what was possible in writing stories that sought out this worldliness.

Also, during this time, two events took place that assumed an important place in what was becoming an evolving narrative regarding my practice. The two events were writing about my father's recent death and writing a story based on my being charged with criminal contempt of court and sentenced to a period of house arrest. While the events themselves were distinct, and my experience associated with my father's death by far the more significant, in my writing about them and in creating a short video using the last recorded images of my father, the thematic preoccupation of world alienation was disclosing itself again for me.

I came to see, through the retelling of the events as stories, the stories themselves becoming an exploration of a time when the gap between what I identified as my self and the world momentarily collapsed. Both reflected a time when the flattened ordinary fabric of what I thought of as the objective world was torn, and I experienced "a larger frame of presence." The stories of these two events involved a narrative that sought to describe an experience of being exposed momentarily, to seeing and feeling what philosopher Henry Bugbee (1999) calls "the revelatory presence" of the world (1990, p. 76). The experiences of these moments were neither comfortable nor unambiguous. The revelatory presence of the world did not reveal itself as evidence of human progress, rather it revealed itself in moments when the seemingly solid experience of the self and the solid experience of an outer world collapsed and another view replaced it, if only momentarily.

Similarly, Bugbee described an experience of the revelatory presence of the world as “a capacity to sense a felt relationship to things, this felt experience illuminates or gives meaning to our existence, and then to the primacy of the world of appearances” (Bugbee, 1999, p. 155).

A line of inquiry was forming for me. Could this capacity to sense and experience “the primacy of the world of appearances” be employed through the practice of being mentored by story? Could this avenue of inquiry evoke a richer capacity to respond to our immediate experience of being in a shared world, one that seeks a larger frame of reference than the self? And, could this kind of inquiry hold a promise for the educative project as William Pinar defined it, “as moving us from a closed space to a more open one” (2009, p.46).

Viewing the collection of work at Silver Harbour initiated the inquiry which was furthered by a developing awareness of what is the essential practice in story mentoring. It is a *focal* practice that demands that we pay attention. Influenced by the philosophy of Bugbee, Albert Borgmann (1992) defines a *focal practice* as that which focuses our attentiveness to the things of the world that may speak to us through their own right (1992, p. 117). According to Borgmann, such encounters can, through the mind and the body, centre our lives and give us a sense of our integral continuity with the world. These encounters of focal practices do not provide evidence of our progressing through the world. Rather, they ask us to pay attention to how we are *moment by moment born into the world*.

As I mentioned earlier, my writing stories about two events in my own life were now shaping the inquiry. The first story, *House Arrest*, investigates a perceptual moment

of *collapse* I experienced in a clear cut on the west coast of British Columbia. This collapse instigated an act of civil disobedience and an ensuing house arrest. The experience formed a new structure of understanding, which influenced my own social and political actions.

Through the *writing* of the story of *House Arrest*, the theme of domesticity emerges. This theme revealed itself through the story, beginning with the act of leaving home and ending with being put under house arrest. However, the theme of domesticity was not evident to me *until* after I had written the story. Now years later, I recognize this theme in the course of my narrative inquiry into the story. In uncovering the possible meanings of domesticity, as they pertained to the story and in the collection of work at Silver Harbour, an inquiry emerged, which is more than coincidental.

Literary theorist David Freeman writes about our ability to see things and feel things *through story* that could not be seen earlier on, as having emerged from a temporal dimension. He calls it “Story Time.” Through Story Time, he writes, the “present must await the future in order for its meaning and significance to be discerned” (2003, p.123 - 125). As I understand it, Freeman asserts that it is only possible to see things and feel things that could not be seen or felt in an earlier time, until they emerge through the telling or writing of the story of the event. Freeman’s writing about Story Time furthered my inquiry. How might we come to view the revelatory presence of the world if we develop capacities within ourselves and within others that seek to disclose this presence through the dimension of Story Time? What kinds of meanings are made available to us through the action of the story on our memory? What reveals itself as having its own kind of truth or reality when seen in retrospect?

As I mentioned previously, there were two events from my lived experience that I used as a basis of narrative inquiry. One of them was the story, *House Arrest*. The other was my father's death. I wrote about his death as an inquiry into the unknown. I chose again, a moment in my life when my ordinary view of the world threatened to collapse. I realized *through writing the story* that I could not locate the actual moment of his death, although I had been with him throughout the event. I only understood this from the standpoint of the present. I only understood this through living the experience twice, once temporally and once through Story Time in the recollection of the event. A narrative understanding was made available through my focus on the story as it emerged in its retelling.

While caring for my father until he died, I read Dunne's *Time and Myth: A Meditation on Storytelling as an Exploration of Life and Death* (1973). Dunne wrote about our relationship to the world as a progression of storytelling about our experience and our exploration of the unknown. He asserted that it is in our relationship to the unknown and to the unknowing within as more fundamental "to man [sic] than his relationship to the world he knows" (1973, p. 57). There is nothing less known than death. Heidegger wrote about death: "A strange and *unhomely* thing that banishes us once and for all from everything in which we are at home" (as cited in Dunne, 1973, p. 39). It was Heidegger's use of the term "unhomely" that resonated within the inquiry, uncovering a shared metaphor or concern surrounding the meaning of the domestic in the work at Silver Harbour, of leaving home, and house arrest in my own writing. Now it appeared in my lived experience of my father's dying. Death became an experience of living in the world that could neither be domesticated nor turned into a narrative of

progress. It simply could not be known in this way. Once again, a narrative understanding disclosed itself.

Returning to my field notes from Silver Harbour, the line “I missed the dark” *now* becomes another clue. The field note becomes a missive in Story Time where the past waits upon the present and the present waits upon the future in order for its meaning to be realized (Freeman, 2003). I missed the dark of not knowing, *the yet to arrive*, the unexpected we discover through the story.

In both cases, in the writing about my father’s death and in writing about my house arrest, the meaning and significance of these experiences emerged or transformed when understood as an episode in an *emerging* story. The narrative threads weaving themselves through my writing and my research became an inquiry into the obscured perspective of worldly alienation and the unknown. Could the story and the practice of story mentoring create a narrative understanding of this largely obscured perspective?

“I missed the dark” was originally written as an afterthought. “I missed the dark.” Perhaps this simple longing stemmed from a desire to turn off the bright lights of the computer monitors on which all the digital stories were then being constructed, or a longing to stray from what could be seen and known. “I missed the dark.” This statement became in the light of the following passage from Cixous, a narrative understanding of Story Time. Cixous sees the act of writing as:

lessons of knowing...*knowing how not to know*, ... each time we come to know something, in reality it is a step...to make our way along the dark, with an ‘apple in our hand’ like a candle. To see the world with the fingers: isn’t this writing *par excellence*? (1991, p.161)

In the end, I made a decision to be mentored by stories as the basis of my inquiry. To seek, as Cixous (1991) sought, by making my way along the dark, to write my world and my understanding of my practice through this line of inquiry. To seek a narrative understanding of how this practice of writing story, by being mentored by story, related to my work at Silver Harbour over the course of the research project.

## THESIS STRUCTURE

Imagine for a moment we are standing at the mouth of a cave just as the sun sets, when the richly mysterious sounds of night in the forest close in. We are situated in a place we can sense but not see, a place full of hidden crevices and wondrous structures, a place of rock and earth, a place we cannot see but imagine. It is dark. In layers of memory, eruptions of thought and reflection, we are trying to locate ourselves in the landscape of the mind. We try, like bats that use echolocation to orient ourselves, to journey into the dark, seeking nourishment.

This thesis is a collection of episodic echolocations, a metaphor drawn from the descriptions of lifewriting by Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009). Through the writing of story these echolocations are used to represent a narrative inquiry. The thesis is conceived as a triptych. Each panel/section of the triptych is composed of a particular thematic preoccupation realized through the narrative inquiry of the stories, introductory interludes, and extensive endnotes. Traditional triptychs were used as altar pieces, often carved or painted panels, hinged together, which could be folded shut or opened for display. Often the centre panel was the largest, flanked by two smaller related works. The structure of this dissertation reimagines this form.



The three panel/sections of my triptych are titled respectively, *Home*, *Leaving Home*, and *Under Her Gaze*.

Section I, *Home*, initiates the inquiry into Arendt's (1954) theme of shared worldly alienation and the reoccurring metaphor of home. This section includes stories when the gap between what I saw as myself and the world momentarily collapsed; the three chapters include stories of crises. Arendt, whose philosophy informs much of the first section of my inquiry, viewed a crisis "as an opportunity that tears away facades and obliterates prejudices as the essence of education" (1954, p. 174). But what is collapsing here? An idea of *home*, so aptly put by McKay, as the "action of the inner life finding outer form; it is the settling of self into the world" (1995, p. 21). The three stories are tied to my identity as a homemaker on a journey away from home, as an artist researcher working at home, and as an educator at her place of work.

In chapter one of *Home*, the story *House Arrest* investigates an environmental crisis. The narrative understanding is gained in the dark of night in waking out of a dream and instigates an act of civil disobedience. The punishment is house arrest, a forced containment within the walls of the domestic. This story is followed by a narrative inquiry in chapter two into the question of uncertainty posed by Pinar: "what knowledge is of most value in a reality that is ever shifting?" (2009, p. 7). In this chapter, in the story *Whose There?* a feared domestic break-in intersects coincidentally with a much larger global concern.

In chapter three of *Home (Section I)*, titled *Vampires and Oil Spills*, the story locates itself within my practice as story mentor in a youth-based, digital video production program. The shared concern with the other chapters in this section is the

crisis of a burned-out educator burdened with the responsibility of safety. Reminded again of Arendt's idea that it is a crisis that "tears away the façade and obliterates prejudices" (1954, p. 174), I inquire into that which has been laid bare. In the performative writing of the story I was reminded that we are in the act of continuously echo-locating ourselves as we move forward in our work, "to make our way along the dark" (Cixous, 1991, p. 161).

The second panel/section of the triptych is titled *Leaving Home*. The title of this section is a gesture towards an outcome of creative work instigated through the narrative inquiry of this middle, largest panel of work. There is a crisis of a personal nature, death threatens. In chapters four and five two stories, *The Island* and *The River*, further my narrative inquiry into the unknown. These stories explore the central metaphor of home. There is, through the stories in this chapter an acknowledgment of a felt relationship with the appearing world. The philosophy of Bugbee (1999) introduces this section. In response to Arendt's insights into a shared human condition of worldly alienation, Bugbee asserted that we seek out responsiveness to the revelatory presence of world. In the two stories, *The River* and *Islands*, I start to pay attention to the world as a place of possibility for experiences of a revelatory nature. It is through paying attention that I begin to see how we might be mentored through these appearances and learn to be at home in the world.

In the following chapter in Section II, titled *Postcards* and *The Digital Shrine*, the narrative understandings, acquired in the chapters *The Island* and *The River*, are creatively experimented with and documented. The inquiry begins to shape personal creative expression, scholarly work, and the community-based practice at Silver Harbour.

I conceive of new forms of digital media and a new home for a collection of creative work. The artist statements, descriptions, and images of the work offered in this section of the triptych are offered as a kind of evidence of these creative endeavours.

*Under Her Gaze* is the title of Section III of the triptych. It forms a presentation of another iteration of my understanding of Arendt's (1958) theorizing on the condition of worldly alienation seen as the "condition of remoteness" (p. 261). This condition of remoteness characterizes a relationship between a mother and a daughter in the first story of Section III, titled *Galileo's Telescope*. A narrative understanding of the "condition of remoteness" explored in *Galileo's Telescope* is augmented in the unfinished field notes titled *Fieldnotes on the Curve of Time*. These field notes document the death of my mother through poetic inquiry. *Fieldnotes on the Curve of Time* represents in this dissertation to use narrative as a path of inquiry that went beyond my known limits, beyond my periphery into a new experience of time and place. It represents a practice of using poetics to mentor an investigation of death, domesticity, and the "condition of remoteness" experienced as the human condition. It also seeks to reaffirm the centrality of metaphor and the language of our shared sensory world in order to express the most challenging aspects of our human experience and existence. What is inwardly experienced needs the outward manifestation of worldliness in order to be communicated and shared.

Through my struggle to form a narrative understanding of my mother's death, I inquire into the measuring gaze born from Arendt's theorizing on the advent of Galileo's telescope and the perspective of its all pervasiveness within even our most intimate relationships. This measuring gaze, according to Arendt (1958), which began with

Galileo, challenged the adequacy of the senses to reveal our reality. This need to measure leaves us “with a universe of whose qualities we know no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments” (Arendt, 1958, p. 261). Leaving us with a flattened view of our worldliness and a lack of confidence in the revelatory potential of the world. The shared metaphor of this gaze appears in chapter six of the third Section, *Under Her Gaze*.

The last chapter, *Field notes on the Curve of Time*, suggests the possibility that everything we attempt to hold on to, to define, and to measure is illusory. It is a perspective we can barely see, like silouetted behind the screen in a shadow play. The world is fluid and dynamic impermanent and yet still capable of revealing immeasurable truths when we take up our narratives and express ourselves imaginatively. We act with our imaginations to seek a connection with the world and continuously recover our sense of being in the world. This continuous recovery unfolds in the gap and on the verge of the unknown.

The narrative understandings that emerge in this inquiry affirm what Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009) see as the fundamental nature of narrative “as pedagogical rather than prescriptive” (p. 6). Narrative inquiry can become narrative understanding when we access the kind of truths made available to us through this practice. Narrative inquiry involves a reliance on and confidence in truth born from a narrative dimension and a narrative time. It is the story that mentors the mentor. We can learn from the stories we create when we allow ourselves to be mentored by the story. The stories emerge as the guide, the one who holds the light to guide us as we make our way along the dark. It returns us once more to Arendt (1958), who asserted that only *in*

story can we disclose who we are. “Every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end” (p. 184).

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## Endnotes for the Prologue

<sup>i</sup> *The Arts Health Seniors Project*—of which Silver Harbour Seniors Centre was one research site—was a four year research project that studied the effects of art making on the health of older adults in a community engaged arts setting. This project was inspired by Cohen’s (2006) extensive study conducted in three large American cities. This research project studied four communities of older adults who participated in an artistic practice with a professional artist. When these communities were measured against a control group that was given regular exercise, the participants who were involved in creative practice were, after four years, healthier. Not only physically but mentally as well; their self-esteem was enhanced, feelings of isolation and alienation were relieved, prescription drug use was reduced, and falls were less frequent. *The Arts Health and Seniors Project* sought to replicate a similar research model in *The Arts Health and Seniors Project* with the University of British Columbia School of Nursing, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

<sup>ii</sup> My initial interest in this project was rooted in a desire to mentor self produced digital stories seen as legacies that could be handed down as gifts to family and community. Corin Browne and I had recently completed in a small project titled ‘Dear Baby’ with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. In this project, the digital videos produced by a group of young mothers were created as letters to their babies. The intimacy and vulnerability in these letters were powerful personal testimonies; testimonies that would continue to have value for the mothers and their children through time. They were deeply personal documents.

<sup>iii</sup> Augusto Boal (2000) applied Freire’s pedagogical theory to the theatre through theatrical games and exercises, eventually developing a body of work known as the Theatre of the Oppressed. Working dramatically to find ways to perceive our shared reality differently, Boal, like Freire, maintained we must make explicit images of our world and our consciousness of this world in order to transform it. Through the transformation of images a new reality is born.

<sup>iv</sup> At Silver Harbour, my role had become one who listened to and encouraged the elders to write stories about themselves in the past. The practice of working in communities with stories of members’ lives is written extensively in Arlene Goldbard’s work (2002). As an advocate for cultural democracy, she argued that story functions within cultural development as revolutionary, “one that is transforming our world this very minute, is fueled by a democratic counter-assertion: that everyone contributes to culture” (2002, p. 3). She went on to assert, “that the knowledge sorely needed by future generations must come from every ethnic group and region and social class, from men and women of infinite variety; and that everyone has

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something to teach and something to learn” (2002, p. 3). The position underlying Goldbard’s writing—whereby everyone is a cultural producer—was the narrative out of which my work developed.

<sup>v</sup> I had no doubt this work contributed to the elder’s sense of self-esteem. It countered the prevailing ailments of ‘story’ deprivation, which Fulford (1999) introduced as a concept and key ingredient of making meaning in our lives. To discover we have no story is to acknowledge, according to Charlotte Linde (1993), that our existence may be meaningless. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (as cited in Fulford, 1999) maintained that humans are “symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-making animals,” and “the drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order is evidently as real and as pressing as our biological needs.” He furthered his argument by stating “we are unable to live in a world we cannot understand” (p. 15). Fulford called *narrative deprivation* a condition in which a person is story poor. In my work with communities, I have experienced this condition, especially in older women who, once they experience someone as an avid listener, can and do develop stories about themselves.

<sup>vi</sup> See Youtube

silverharbourstoriesat<http://www.youtube.com/user/silverharbourstories/featured>

<sup>vii</sup> Pinar (1994) wrote: “the curriculum is not comprised of subjects, but of Subjects, of subjectivity. The running of the course is the building of the self, the lived experience of subjectivity. Autobiography is an architecture of self, a self we create and embody as we read, write, speak and listen. The self becomes flesh, in the world. Even when authentic and learned, it is a self we cannot be confident we know, because it is always in motion and in time, defined in part by where it is not, when it is not, what it is not” (p. 220).

<sup>viii</sup> The place where we live is completed by our responsiveness to it, and depends on our responsiveness to undertake a life with others that is always emerging and always underway (Bugbee, 1999, p. xix). This is a phenomenologist’s method of finding expressions for a reality given to lived experience before reflection and as a way to re-achieve a “direct and primitive contact with the world” (Fisher, 2002, p. 11), which can offer a kind of truth to our experience as a description of the world as it is actually lived. Its goal to effect a shift in our experience can bring us a new awareness of the world.

<sup>ix</sup> In writing about teacher autobiographical narratives Miller (2005) saw the need to provide evidence of progress as critical to the narrative. It assumes the teacher’s interventions on behalf of the students will evoke a progress in their learning. Miller wrote about the proliferation of unproblematized identity constructs of “teacher” as well as “teacher’s stories,” which have proliferated in US educational literature. These often assume one singular, authoritative, and completed (as in empowered teacher or reflective practitioner) version of self, identity, experience, voice, and story, and are used as evidence of “progress” or “success” in school reform, for example, “so that the fabric of the narrative appears seamless, spun of

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whole cloth, The effect is magical—the self appears organic, the present appears as the sum total of the past, the past appears as an accurate predictor of the future” (Benstock, 1991, p.10).



## Section I: Home

### CHAPTER ONE: HOUSE ARREST

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## An Introduction

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I'm reading Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) when the light from the sun suddenly emerges from under the brooding west coast sky and illuminates my dull muddy February back yard with brilliant clarity. Shafts of golden light strike bare branches of trees and mossy bushes, outlining these familiar sights into momentary glorious lit sketches of reaching into the sandcastle sky. It is a startling and revelatory sight. The golden columns of light are nothing if not transcendent after weeks of dull flat winter light.

Arendt (1958) wrote about the absence of belief in transcendence. She claimed the modern age began with a sudden eclipse in the belief in transcendence and in this absence "modern" men [sic] "were not thrown back upon this world but upon themselves" (1958, p. 253). She went on to assert since that time the most persistent trends in philosophy sought to reduce all experiences with the world as well as with human beings, to be experiences between man and himself, we became in the modern age exclusively concerned with the self. Reading this passage, I struggle to understand what she meant by *worldly alienation*.

It strikes me, *now*, as more than coincidental that as I'm reading Arendt's (1958) passage on worldly alienation and the modern age while sitting just outside the door to

my home on my back porch, here at the intersection between a publicly shared world and an inner private domestic one. This is when the light from the sun suddenly emerges.

It is not until this moment, with the combination of the light from the sky, and the reading of Arendt, that I reinterpret a significant period in my life as it was conceived through the story of House Arrest. Realizing this reinterpretation cannot possibly be made until *this moment* of inquiry has arrived (Freeman, 2003).

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## The Story of House Arrest

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~ Part One ~

It is the fall equinox, the evening of September 21st, 1993.

I am standing on a little bridge over looking the Englishman River Falls. This mossy fall of water reflects the last good sunlight of the year and then, tumbles into darkly ominous pools. It is the time of day when you want to go home, find light, or a good fire. The falling dusk; the houring of homesickness.

I am midway between the east coast of Vancouver Island and the west coast; on my way to a place close to Tofino.

The Englishman River Falls is a little valley full of cedar and Douglas fir. It could be a stop on the way in one of Tolkien's stories and I, like one of his hobbits looking into these changing waters, am riddled with indecision.

The future holds my traveling hand  
A road into this living land past the places  
not quite seen of what is;  
and what will be.

On the bridge, standing uneasy between the east and west coasts of the Island, between the light of day and night I see a world where it is quiet enough, far off the road to not be seen and heard.

Dusk falls, and I find my way back to the little van and fall asleep. Wanting to leave early the next morning, excited by the prospects of the next day and the ever increasing distance between home and myself.

~

Located a few miles east of the turn off to Pacific Rim National Park a makeshift sign directs the curious to the 'peace' camp. We follow a logging road into a clear cut and a jumble of makeshift tents. There in the central matrix is a parachute awning, a communal kitchen, and an outhouse.

If one were to take this road now, in 2012, knowing where to turn your head and look; you would see a path, and the beginning of a monoculture tree farm, in preparation to be harvested in the year 2040. The timelessness of Rain Forest captured and loosened. Now this place in human time can be claimed by the seasons of harvest. It has entered the curve of time.

The forest itself is gone, a mere haunting. This, too, is the common feature of human existence.

In the fall of 1993, in this clear cut, a temporary human world has haphazardly planted itself after the grosser human intervention of a clear cut.

In the fall of 1993, the land looks like a picture of moonscape, captured by Apollo astronauts.

Now dead wood forms skeletal stand-ins for live trees.

Gigantic boulders of granite and dug up and discarded rubble scars the reaches of the very peak of this unnamed mountain that rises above us.

I imagine the fathers and mothers with their children driving in minivans on their yearly camping trips to Long Beach, rolling down their windows. Pointing up.

Hey *Look!* I think I see

A landslide about to happen!

Look

up there.

There. Where the great secret reaches of the gods

have been scraped off by MacMillen Bloedel and transformed into toilet paper.<sup>i</sup>

In 1993, the Peace Camp is plunked in the middle of the clear cut rubble. And there are too many people for the too few structures. Everyone seems to be standing around looking for something not to be found.

Standing in a line-up waiting for a free dinner, I feel I have landed deep in the next century. It is a kind of humanistic Blade Runner world. Here people from all over the planet have staggered into a kind of holding tank for the coming age.

The human things, the make shift kitchen with the blue tarp roof, plastic plates, and cups stored in yellow milk box containers, bowls of cooked rice and vegetables shared in a unhygienic chaos suit this ruined land. It is a place that does not invite lingering. It is oddly free from domesticity.

In the parachute roofed assembly hall a group of youth lounge on makeshift straw bale seats demonstrating to the rest of us newcomers their ease with this place, this new found home. These ragged orphans fit in with the devastation of the land around them.

In a few years from now, I will become a 'story mentor' in a youth media production project to some of these young ones who gather here tonight. But for now, they lounge in the centre of this assembly, happy to be out of the cold.

In this parachute assembly hall, the organizers call out to us newcomers. They ask us to 'wiggle' our fingers for approval of what will be the strategy for the next day's blockade. It seems silly and naive this 'collective' gathering. In its third month now, the blockade has become 'routine' and what to do and what to expect normalized.

Tonight, we are being warned of the possibility of an attack by local hooligans. We are told to prepare for a 4:30 am morning departure to the blockade site.

I am uneasy. There were far too many of us to get close to a fire and all I feel is cold. We are strangers. Most of us have not experienced 'disobedience' as something organized and consciously planned, the whole event seems to be more of a mass theatre audition than a revolutionary act.

I feel like a tourist, excited by what I am seeing, but not a part of it. A man from Denman Island, known from my family's home island as a bit of a fool, tells us he will be walking through the camp playing his trumpet to wake us up in time to go to the blockade. Seeing him here as a part of this enterprise, induced a kind of shame in me.

This whole gathering feels ridiculous.

It will take me 15 years to see this gathering in a different light. This story up until now is contingent on the future, needs the future to be understood.

~

I leave confused by this group of dubious revolutionaries, fierce Cassandras who spook the group with tales of the end of the world,

angry people, the already homeless, well equipped Mountain Coop hikers, and people like myself, the curious.

Stumbling over the rubble lit up by the full moon I head towards the van parked some distance away, trying to decide if I will stand on the blockade or to the side of the road in the coming morning which is now only a few dark cold hours away.<sup>ii</sup>

And worry.

I worry about not being able to cross the border.

I'm afraid I might not be able to work,

Afraid of the cost of the court case, about who will support the children,

about having a 'criminal' record,

about something Big

something inside me has felt like it has always been there.

Afraid of being put outside of something I need or have always known.

Feeling a kind of shame, caught up in concerns of the private world of the self.

I am afraid of leaving home.



Away from the lights of the parachute assembly hall, the moon fills the landscape with sharp shadows. It is lonely walking towards the van. I could be in a desert, born from misfortune.

It feels like a great natural cemetery, a dead thing among dead things forever lonely.<sup>iii</sup>

It is a very quiet place. This newly clear cut world. No sound of birds, of water, of wind through trees. It is, the otherworld of capital and resource, the lion's share of this island, hidden from the visitors.

the only wild that is being left behind.

and is uninhabitable,

And a far cry from Englishman River Falls Provincial Park.

In the van, making myself as warm as possible, in not enough blankets, the condensation on the windows of van filming with frost, I try to fall asleep confused about my choice of action in the morning's blockade.

In the in-between time of falling asleep and being awake

Headlights and horns violently crash into the freezing night.

The sounds so violently unexpected I leap up into waking and slam my head against a luggage rack above me. Still asleep, I believe this to be my last lucid moment before dying in a crash.

In this time of waking to the violently dying world

I awaken, for the moment,

A perception not characterized by anything I have ever known  
takes hold.

All reference points disappear in the stillness of this vast and  
heartbreaking place.

Something is felt.

*What had been*

*would never be again.*

Under the light of the unencumbered moon, lengthening shadows  
defined this cratered land. In a place shorn of any familiarity, and  
impossibly strange, I had become impossibly lost.

The bed I had thought was a rock, was nothing, just a torn  
fragment holding nothing.

~

In the muted shadowy predawn light, I stand with 12 others in the  
middle of a logging road. The logging trucks are momentarily  
delayed. Lined up like impatient idling monsters.

And a fellow in a yellow hard hat reads out something official sounding over a megaphone that cannot be heard above the sound of the engines. The words he reads to us, I already know are words that will argue the rule of property, of private rights of the corporation that cannot co-exist with talk of deer tracks, sunlight through Douglas fir, and the quiet language of birds.

This language has nothing in common with an experience of a world that had so violently crashed into my dreams from the night before. I don't understand what he is saying.

A video camera and its spot light are thrust into our startled faces and record our bewilderment at being charged with criminal intentions.

Two RCMP officers escort me to a yellow school bus idling by waiting for its daily run of ragged haul to the local jail for processing.

It is a small party, a funny show, a ridiculous act and everyone knows it.

Sketched in the world's first dawn of winter light.

~ Part Two ~

One of the lasting images I remember after the court case for this small act of civil disobedience is the back of the paddy wagon. I sit across from Carole Chambers, a poet from Hornby Island.

Recalling a poem of hers about the great swaths of churning sea off Tribune Bay and other island storms. Andre Lourde's famous line "poetry is not a luxury" comes to mind.

Silently clutching the bench, holding out against the sway of the hard metal. There are no seat belts for prisoners. Wordless, we are amazed to find ourselves locked in the back of a police van, a plexiglass and steel grid between the drivers and us. Scratched on the walls of the swaying jail are remnants of others, I imagine, as less fortunate and more alone.

*Resist, fuck them all . . .* a record that they too were here, like the etchings on the caves of Lascaux, the last marks of an existence prior to prison.

At the Greater Victoria Correctional Institute, we line up and are handcuffed while rubber bracelets with black boxes are locked to our ankles. Broad rubber bands hold in place a mysterious black box with small lights that blink red, green, amber. Tracking signals. We are given an additional adapter to plug into the household phone jack. Once plugged in, signals are sent and received somewhere far from the soft black night of an early island spring. And thereby telling us we are under house arrest.

But I have already left home.

Once locked on, these heavy black boxes become our own private piece of the world,

a black weight around our ankles.

Who designed these?

Who made them?

How many incarceration devices are, in fact, out there?

Who contacted BC Telephone and decided a private corporation was a suitable monitoring agent of civil disobedience now turned into criminal contempt?

Had I not broken a law I would never have conceived of the dimensions of what had been prepared for those that chose to disobey a language of abstraction.

In the spring of 1994, I am still shocked by these inventions.

The black box strapped to my leg had become a part of my education. It ran from my ankle "like the coursing of an electric shock into my very being."<sup>1</sup>

This awareness starts to inform me in ways I had never realized before. Charged with criminality I begin to see the ways I had been

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<sup>1</sup> Huebner, 1999, p. 3.

policing myself, and how this external sign of enforcement was now, curiously, less potent than before, when I imagined it.

Released from the Correctional Institute, we are given a prescribed time to reach home before plugging in our electronic monitoring devices.

There is a park on the island highway.

Goldstream Park is the place where Emily Carr often camped; it is here she painted her moving forest, her living iridescent trees.

We stopped here on our way home, not caring if we arrived back in time.

Walking through the woods, heightened by the extremes of the day, my perceptions are open to a kind of bend in the air and I just start to walk and follow a trail.

The path leads to streambeds where hundreds of carcasses lie washed ashore. Some are still shockingly alive. Iridescent and bloodied. Bodies in the hundreds, the Salmon of this land and this sea were still making their way home. Bones washed clean, skeletons in the thousands, in the sunlight we stand arrested again.

This time, by wonder. And as witnesses to the testimony of a mystery.

These moments of witnessing is what we are, it is what we do. This moment leads me towards the future and eventually into a thesis.

Because of the contingencies of this particular day and the writing about it the revelatory presence of the world opened itself.

At the time I thought it might have been in gratitude.

But I am in story time.

And we are momentarily back on the bridge at Englishman River Falls, considering the future.

Discovering again “the beginning of a perception that asks us to enter into a life with the life around it. Its source “the presence of the transcendence in us and in our midst.”<sup>2</sup>

Standing here regarding this event, here by the stream bed there was no doubt, at that moment, I was experiencing a freedom the officer who was trying to track my whereabouts from a correctional institute somewhere in the Lower Mainland could not control. I was no longer at home or, in the case of the corrections officer, working for one.

Reminding myself of what brought me to this moment; of the strangeness of being under surveillance, of being charged in a provincial court with criminal contempt, of the uncertainty that this charge brought with it, to the curtailment of my freedom of movement, came about as a consequence of waking up in a clear cut near Tofino.

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<sup>2</sup> Huebner, 1999, p. 3.

In the light of this awareness, my ensuing house arrest felt like an invention only, a phantom of the mind. Something easy to overcome.

It may require giving up that which we are; so we may experience the life around us. Perhaps even forcefully giving up a part of ourselves that clings to the known, the places we call home.

Under house arrest, for that moment, at least I still walked in Emily Carr's land.



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## Endnotes for The Story of House Arrest:

<sup>i</sup> The post-Jungian scholar James Hillman (1992) maintains the greater part of our soul lies outside of ourselves. Worldly things have their own depth, mystery, and intentions, and for their being able to invite us into some kind of relations is to elicit our imaginations. An intangible inner presence lends the world the richness of its visibility, “we are in the psyche more than the psyche is in us.” Like Arendt (1958) in her understanding of our worldly alienation as a condition that is characterized by a complete concern for man and his self, Hillman saw this mass loss of acknowledging this presence as defining the modern epoch. This loss has given us this flat, disconnected, uninviting, depersonalized, and literal appearance. “We have deanimated the world and inflated the significance of the human person” (Hillman as cited in Fisher, 2003, p. 10).

<sup>ii</sup> Action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting...in this sense natality, is inherent in all human activities . . . Everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves - constitutes reality.” (Arendt, 1958, p. 55). Arendt’s *Human Condition* (1958) offered a way into thinking about how we can act in solidarity but not feel compromised entirely by the “other.” She defined plurality as the condition of human action, stemming from being the same, that is human, but in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, and will live. The new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity to “act” and only *when* we as humans can recognize that “action.” Arendt goes on to assert that political activity is action *par excellence* because by its very nature it is comprised of that which can be seen and heard by others. Birth not death is in Arendt’s words is “the condition of the political” (1958, p. 5).

<sup>iii</sup> James Hillman (1992) saw us living in a world that is viewed as dead, as if we humans who live our lives in a cemetery, have put enormous stress on ourselves and our relations with other humans because a dead world can offer no intimacy. He wrote: “an enormous weight now rests on human relations, which have become ‘overcharged with archetypal significance—our mothers fail, for they must always be Great, . . . having to supplant the dead depersonified world and be the seasons of the earth, the moon, and the cows, the trees, and the leaves on the trees.” (Hillman, as cited Fisher, 2002, 10)

## CHAPTER TWO: WHOSE THERE?

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### An Introduction

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The narrative in the story *Whose There?* is an inquiry into the question the curricular theorist William F. Pinar (2009) asked, *What knowledge is of most worth in a reality that is ever shifting?*

The voice of the story, unlike the voice of this introduction, is neither predetermined, stationary, or resolved and is intended to reflect the uncertainty when one can no longer rest on the certainty of being able to know. It is a crisis that is common to students of the academy.

*Whose There?* explores this uncertainty, which ultimately becomes an ethical question. It is times like these when the structures of knowledge falter and a new orientation evolves. The disorder that ensues is in Greene's (1997) view as "meaninglessness recurrently overcoming landscapes which were once demarcated and meaningful" (p. 143). In the age of acceleration and change, the collapse of structures of knowledge is more than personal; it is ethical and political.

The educative project, as Greene (1997) saw it, is the project of the individual as she reaches out to reconstitute meaning, to make sense, to 'close the gap' on this meaninglessness. The story of *Whose There?* is the story of a character attempting to make sense of disorder, to close the gap between the self and the potential meaninglessness of the chaotic world.

This chapter also continues to explore “the condition of remoteness” articulated by Curtis in *Our sense of the Real* (1999). Curtis interpreted Arendt’s sense of worldly alienation by viewing this worldly alienation as perpetuating the greatest insult to humanity, which is the insult of oblivion. Arendt (as cited in Curtis, 1999) wrote, “Man’s [sic] dignity demands that he be seen (every single one of us) in his particularity and, as such be seen” (p. 69). When we are not seen, a crisis is born.<sup>1</sup>

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On October 30, 2010 Parliamentary Bill C—300 was shot down.

The Bill would empower the Canadian federal government to investigate complaints of human rights and environmental abuses levelled against mining companies. If the Ministers investigating a company found it guilty of violating social and environmental standards laid out in the Bill, the company, if receiving support from the Canada Pension Plan or Export Development Canada, could lose funding from the respective organizations.

“The private members Bill C-300 was shot down in legislature yesterday by a narrow margin of 140–134. Twenty MPs were absent when the vote was taken, including Liberal Party leader Michael Ignatieff, and 12 other members of his party, in addition to members of the NDP and Bloc. Stephen Harper however, was present to vote against the

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<sup>1</sup> The story that provoked *Whose There?*<sup>2</sup> is purely fictional. Any similarity to real people is purely coincidental. It is inspired rather by Margaret Somerville (2006) who wrote: “stories are the platform on which a global community—and a shared ethics—must float, which means the language and words we use to tell those stories are immensely important” (p. 77). The story was inspired by a failure in our government, in our institutions, and perhaps in ourselves to see beyond our own borders.

proposed bill, bringing his parliament under scrutiny yet again from non government organization's like Amnesty International.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simons, P. & Macklin, A. (2010, 11, 03) Defeat of responsible mining bill is missed opportunity. *The Globe and Mail*, (retrieved 2011, 03, 23), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/defeat-of-responsible-mining-bill-is-missed-opportunity/article1784168/>

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## The Story of Whose There?

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In the last 24 hours I've been to a funeral, a stranger arrived at my front door in the middle of the night, a tumultuous warm rain has fallen in unprecedented amounts, my vehicle broke down on my way to work at a Seniors Centre, and the BCAA roadside mechanic who had come to help needed more assistance than I, when we spoke at length in the rain of his despair.

I was relieved to see a friend outside my front door the morning after all the eerie confusion of the night and day before. We had planned to discuss my dissertation, to theorize on the work of community-engaged performances and their relation to the curricular question posed by Pinar (2009) in *The Worldliness of a Cosmopolitan Education*. "What knowledge is of most worth? Posed as we are at a specific historical moment infused with a reality that is ever shifting" (p. vii).

Now both of us are standing in the doorway looking out into the world. I'm anxious to tell him about what happened last night with the stranger at my door. But Andrew is clearly distraught. Something has happened.

It occurred to me when reflecting on the events of my own life in the last 24 hours that, in addition to Pinar's question, is the concern Maxine Greene (1997) has for the learner in *Curriculum and Consciousness*. How do we act? How do we know? When the once familiar suddenly appears strange? <sup>i</sup>

It appears as though both Andrew and I are anxious to tell each other something about something strange that has just happened. Lend our lives, lend something of each other, in the hopes that something else, something new might emerge.<sup>ii</sup>

My friend is concerned about a name. There is a new name for his place of work. The new name has made Andrew not know where he is anymore.

He is finding himself in a place that has become suddenly unfamiliar. And he is acting as if there's some kind of emergency.

The centre for performance, where he is employed, was being given a new name.

My friend has just learned the new performance centre where he teaches performance will be called *The SilverCorp Centre for the Arts*.

"SilverCorp?" I ask. "What kind of name is that?"

It sounds like the title of one of the agitation propaganda plays Andrew and I used to create a long time ago, in some past age.<sup>iii</sup>

“You’ve got to be kidding,” I declare.

“Not only is the Centre being christened the *SilverCorp Centre for the Arts*, there is talk of a huge sum of money donated by the company for community development with the downtown eastside.”

My friend is pacing my little room, making it feel too small. The energy of his outrage makes the cat skitter across the living room rug and crash into the door.

“The mining company has an alleged record of human rights abuse,” Andrew says.

His sad eyes remind me of a clown one might see in some old fashioned circus.

The story of the stranger who came to the door in the middle of last night, *my story*, is put aside.

Opening the front door for the cat, who is determined to get away from this pacing fuming stranger in the living room, I imagine the naming ceremony for the new performance centre. Standing on a little stage, various representatives of the company and the institute

that is associated with the performance centre will act out a ceremony, all the while each and everyone of them, like all of us, will be caught up in the burden of their individual existences, and the hope and fear of their still undecided futures. In all likelihood it won't be fun or interesting, having to stand there on the stage in the cold forlorn plaza where folks from the downtown eastside sit and eat their sandwiches or find a place to sleep off the last vestiges of their last personal emergencies.

Andrew and I consider the strangeness of a Centre for the Performing Arts, a theatre, being renamed after a mining company that is known for human rights and environmental abuses in some place else. The familiar is appearing strange. In my sorry attempt to offer Andrew a way into understanding what he 'might do,' I delved into the bookcase looking for something from Boal, my teacher, Augusto Boal, (2000) a rebel in his own way. The author and creator of *the Theatre of the Oppressed*.<sup>iv</sup>

Boal (1992) defined the theatre in a number of ways; as a *place* not unlike the new *SilverCorp Centre for the Arts* as a *setting* for major events, comic or tragic, which we are obliged to observe at a distance, as paralyzed spectators.

In these contexts Boal (1992) maintained, "The theatre and lies are synonymous." But ultimately the theatre is also, in its most archaic sense, defined by Boal, as "the capacity possessed by human beings to observe themselves in action. As the art of looking at ourselves" (1992, p. xxvi).



I start to imagine the events that took place at my door last night as a play. *The Stranger at the Door*.

*"Who's there?"* Female character, mid fifties, in housecoat, stands anxiously at the door.

Male character, mid twenties twists the doorknob from the other side of the door attempting to enter. The door is locked.

*"Who are you? Who's there?"* Female character in dressing gown growing more alarmed asks again.

Male character still trying to open the door. *"Oh come on."* He whines.

As if the locked door and the woman's questions are just a ruse to keep him from coming in and making himself at home.

*"Who are you?"* Female character asks again.

I'm feeling suddenly disinclined to become engaged. Opening the door for the cat, who is scratching on the other side, I notice the rain has finally stopped.

Remembering the BCAA mechanic and feeling suddenly glad.  
Thinking at least he won't be facing the day in the rain. Dealing, as  
it were, with others and their notions of emergencies.

Shutting the door, with the cat cautiously making an entrance. I  
turn back to Andrew and read from Augusto Boal's (1992) book:

The theatrical language is the most essential human  
language. Everything that actors do, we do throughout our  
lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, and dress  
to suit the setting, reveal passions – just as we do in our  
daily lives. The only difference is that actors are conscious  
that they are using the language of the theatre, and thus  
better able to turn it to their advantage, whereas the men  
and women on the street do not know that they are speaking  
the theatre . . . Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and  
can also be a means of transforming society. (Boal, 1992 pp.  
xxx-xxx)

I wonder about this text as it applies to the stranger at my door and  
in my conversation with the BCAA mechanic? It was all about  
where to go and what to do. We were just like the representatives  
standing on the platform at the imagined naming ceremony.  
Standing around looking over the horizon of the future into "the  
horizon of fear and desire, a future full of possibilities" (Gadamar,  
1975, p. 112). Burdened by our existence.

So unlike actors in a play. Where for a moment, the strain of their  
own existences could be relieved. "In subservience to the play, in

the drama that is being performed” (Gadamar, 1975, p. 105). Maybe that is the difference really between actors and non actors?

Female Character in housecoat is becoming very anxious, frightened.

*“I don’t know who you are? . . . Go away.”*

Andrew is concerned. He doesn’t know what to do. He tells me the alleged human rights abuses related to the activities of SilverCorp mining are serious. The president of the institute associated with the performance centre when confronted with people’s concerns about these allegations and the ethical question of accepting large sums of money from corporations accused of serious crimes was quoted in a local newspaper as thinking these people were making a “mistake.” He thought people’s objections were counterproductive, ironic, and horrible if they were going to prevent individuals or corporations from doing good things and antithetical to the value of trying to encourage responsibility on the part of these individuals or corporations.<sup>v</sup>

*Who* is encouraging responsibility to Whom? I wonder.

An unnecessary responsibility. A thought experiment really.

For as long as it remains a non-emergency.

“Speaking of emergencies,” I say.

I want to tell him what happened to me last night.

As far as SilverCorp goes, we are at a loss at the moment.

But Andrew wants to leave.

“Wait,” I say, “listen.”

This is what happened.

*He wasn't leaving.*

*I tried calling my neighbours who didn't answer.*

*Terrified by the thought I had left the key just above the door.*

*Somewhat ashamed of myself, I call the police.*

*They told me to stay on the phone until a car arrived.*

*There was no siren, only the alarming flash of red and blue on the rain swept street below announced their arrival. A police officer escorted a young man down the stairs on to the street and stood there with him under the lamp, just outside the gate. Behind the curtains of the front window, they stood around waiting, they appeared as though they almost knew each other and were for the sake of nothing to do there to keep each other company.*

*I watched hidden behind the curtains. Invisible. No one came to tell me who he was or what he was doing. I just stood there watching the police*

*officer and the young man like a voyeur. It was almost as if I had become the stranger. Surprised at how quickly they had come to escort the unwelcome stranger off private property.*

*This event was obviously thought of as an emergency.*

Andrew is leaving. The cat is looking immeasurably relieved.

As I open the door, a subtle wind comes up ringing a hidden chime. The sun has broken through finally. A transcendent light washes the street. In the house, the light from the windows turns the sullen dullness to something glorious. A small riot begins as birds call to each other, signalling another day of survival. Drops of translucent light fall off the leaves of the trees that surround the house.

I close the door.

I enter the name SilverCorp into an online search engine. There are many sites and many stories. All of them associated with enormous environmental abuse, aboriginal land rights issues, violence, and retaliation against those who have opposed the mining company's activities. One story stands out amongst the many. A couple of months ago one night in a village close to the mining company's operations in Ixtahuacan in Guatemala, a grandmother was shot. Two unknown men, described as young and tall, come to her door, asking for a cup of coffee. When the grandmother was offering them coffee, she was shot at head level in the right eye.

Then the two young men ran away. The grandmother was a part of the resistance movement in defence of the indigenous and human rights and against violations of these rights committed by the company that operated SilverCorp's mining project. She already had been threatened several times for participating in this movement.<sup>vi</sup>

Suddenly William Pinar's (2009) question is no longer a thought experiment, or the president of the institute's response to the ethical questions surrounding the allegations of this company's actions somewhere far away from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Pinar asked,

"What knowledge is of most worth? Posed as we are in a reality that is ever shifting?" (2009, p. 7).

I want to know.

Why did the grandmother open her door to strangers?

Why did police not come to her aid?

Who or what were the police protecting last night?

What did the president mean by viewing people's objections to the naming of the performance centre after SilverCorp as horrible, counterproductive, and ironic?

What did Boal mean by the term the theatre of profanity?

What was Andrew going to do?

What was I going to do?

How is SilverCorp counting on us?<sup>viii</sup>

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## Endnotes for The Story of Whose There?

<sup>ii</sup> Gadamar (1975) stressed that this common ground is established not through a social contract or through some psychological capacity surrounding our empathetic abilities but happens, becomes a place of understanding through the same unfolding as when we play. Language is the habitat, the home turf, the *common ground* of our understanding as in a field of play.

<sup>iii</sup> Andrew and I collaborated with other alternative theatre practitioners, creating what Elia Kirby called performative documentary (Kirby, in personal conversation, 21/2/90). This theatre involved itself in social, political, and public themes. My collaborations with Andrew in performance diverged in the late 1990s. I began to focus on the use of digital video and grass roots media production, Andrew remained working in the theatre. Our venues were where various communities gathered, in back halls, longhouses, church basements, and high schools. Our support came from non-profit agencies outside the arts.

<sup>iv</sup> Augusto Boal was a theatre director, writer, and theorist. He is well known as a theorist and practitioner who experimented with transforming the theatre into a democratic arena.

<sup>v</sup> “I think it would be horrible, ironic, and counterproductive if arts institutions or (institutions) were prevent individuals or corporations from doing good things because some people object to some other things they’re doing. It would be completely antithetical to the value of trying to encourage responsibility on the part of individuals and corporations.” Werb, J. (2010, October 7). SFU president Andrew Petter defends Goldcorp donation. *Georgia Straight*, retrieved from <http://m.straight.com/article/351513>

<sup>vi</sup> From statement from website Human Rights Watch, and Defense Front;  
<http://goldcorpoutnews.wordpress.com/2011/09/15/fredemi-denounces-intimidation/>

<sup>vii</sup> “We are hoping something entirely new and different emerges that never existed before. And we lend ourselves with the great hope of orienting ourselves to possibilities inherent in the world” (Greene, 1977, p. 144).

## CHAPTER THREE: VAMPIRES AND OIL SPILLS

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### An Introduction

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My practice as a story mentor often involved working with communities in an environment of crises. One such place was in Vancouver's Eastside at the Summer Visions Film Institute for Youth and it is a story in part about not being seen or heard by others.

Arendt (1954), writing about the crises in education, viewed crises as events that “tears away facades and obliterates prejudices” (p. 174). Her thinking on the nature of crises is reiterated by Huebner (1999), who viewed the educative moment arising out of a “tear in the fabric of everyday” (p. 363). Both theorists see some façade or fabrication as being shorn, and out of this tear, the opportunity arises to explore and inquire into whatever has been laid bare.

The story of *Vampire and Oil Spills* is a narrative exposition of a time when I was working as the story mentor and story editor at the Youth Film Institute. It explores an experience when a *crisis tore away and obliterated a long held prejudice* in my own practice. This inquiry seeks through the performance of writing to come to terms with this crisis. When the belief structures that helped to maintain the practice faltered and a new orientation to my practice evolved.

A new structure of knowledge was created. And in the act of educating one's self in preparation for the arrival of the new (Arendt, 1954), a new world is constantly



arriving. The new world arrives through the young. This arrival of the new is the essence behind education, as Arendt saw it. She saw this form of natality accompanied by hope. For Arendt every human is born *into* the world and the hope of the ‘old world’ hangs on the hope of the new, which every generation brings. But this hope of what the new will bring is destroyed, if, Arendt maintained, “we try to control and dictate how it will look” (1954, p. 193).

The inquiry seeks the hope of possibility in the witnessing of the emergence of the new in the midst of the old. This witnessing takes place in educative settings, in community, in places of human togetherness.<sup>i</sup> At The Summer Visions Film Institute, the participation in collaborative environments was our key demand. We expected and prepared the young for some kind of participation in community. Everyone who entered the doors was required in some way to be there. Our work at *The Summer Visions Film Institute* intended to create a space where the young could be seen and heard in a form of publicity that is rarely made available to the young.<sup>ii</sup> Arendt (1954) recognized that public forms of human togetherness allow us to most fully appear before one another. “Allow us to see the ‘living essence’ of each unique person as each encounters the world and elicits, in turn the world’s countenance” (Curtis, 1999, p. 38). Hence, according to Arendt, the greatest insult to our humanity is the insult of oblivion, where we are neither heard nor seen by others.

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## Endnotes for Vampires and Oil Spills—An Introduction

<sup>i</sup> Arendt recognized that all forms of human togetherness give us some sensation of a shared reality. However, the newness each one of us represents depends upon others for our distinctness to be recognized and become manifest. We depend on appearing before others and others appearing before us to create a shared reality, a common sense of being in the world (Poyntz, 2008).

<sup>ii</sup> Poyntz (2008) wrote at length and eloquently using Arendtian theory and specifically, her thinking on the role of plurality and natality, and how it relates to publicity and spaces of appearance for youth.

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## The Story of Vampires and Oil Spills

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For the past 10 summers, I walked five city blocks from my home to the back door of the school where the Institute locates itself in the school media studio. I'd walk in the early mornings of the early summer when even the eastside of Vancouver is green with summer hope. Open and waiting.

I had come to think of my work at the film institute as that of a midwife, preparing a place for that which will come to be, challenging the young filmmakers to be patient, helping to ensure that the environment in which they were working was one that could support all of the new voices that arrived each year.

The other colleagues at the film institute are youth themselves, with the exception of the Institute's fundraisers and administrators. They arrive here to work every summer, most of them from this neighbourhood, once participants in the program themselves. They now work as youth instructors, media producers, and mentors in a program of media production in which 85% of participants are given full scholarships in order to attend. Every summer 150 youth come through these doors, and 30 films are produced. Over the years, we received national recognition for the films produced here during the summer.

Every summer I am asked to come back. Asked to come back to refine the stories for their films. As we worked together, a community of practice formed and the youth that took the risk to show up have a safe place to be for the summer.

Our unspoken ethic has always been that no one is turned away. And rarely, on one occasion only, someone was asked to leave. Once a camera was broken, and once a camera was stolen then brought back. Nevertheless, this was a difficult place to be. The world in all its complexity showed up with no screening program of exclusion. "Youth at risk," "visible minorities," "economically marginalized." These designations were not viewed here as priorities or disadvantages. The youth themselves decided who they worked with and how.

The only requirement to participate was a desire to tell a story and to produce a film in collaboration with others.

Every year, challenging the initial offer of the stories, we tried not to make it easy to replicate some plot from the current season's blockbuster. Every year, we sought to find ways to open up the possibilities to return through their stories to their right to play, to be seen, to express their unique inquiry into their lives, to create something new, to listen for what was trying to speak through them to the community and the world.

Every year, as a way of hearing what is in the room, I would start the story mentoring process by asking everyone to brainstorm their story ideas. Every year, preoccupations unique to each summer emerged such as reversals in time, the nature of dream and reality, addiction and suicide, to name a few.

The work of being a story mentor in this community of youth had become exhausting, yet I could not figure out what was tiring me out. This year it was all about oil spills and vampires. I decided to keep a journal, a series of field notes.

July 5, 2010

In the airless cavern of the studio and in our strangeness with each other, the freshness of sunlit air just outside the studio door is stolen, every time the door opens and closes and another, blurry eyed, feeling out of place, young person enters for the first time.

With every opening and closing of the door, there's a rising sense of claustrophobia within me so strongly felt this year above all others. This room is full of hyperactivity. This year above all others, I feel as though too much of the wildness of eloquent things, of nature and sunshine, are sacrificed in order to be here.

Here, in the overheated, getting hotter every summer, noisy chaos, I can only imagine swimming in the soothing waters of a small lake or the beach, which is so far away from the noisy airless chaos of the studio.

July 6

Please come back. We can't do this without you.

This year's administration lament sounds like every other year's administration lament

I give in.

But in the midst of all the striving and in the passing of time

I'm becoming unrecognizable to myself and to the new instructional team.

Known only to the few returning young media producers from "the old days."

I needed their affection and support but they were no longer scruffy kids from around the block. As young adults, they were preoccupied with finding a place and an identity for themselves in the institute. We were no longer able to share the same energy of innocent and fierce endeavour as we had in the early years of the Institute, when this enterprise was new in its beginning.

July 7

We start the program the way we always begin. Welcoming a circle of 60 strangers and screening some films that were made in the past programs; we began the difficult work of coming up with a treatment or story idea for twelve short digital video productions.

I wanna make a film about a guy who finds his girlfriend cheating on him, and then he kills her . . .

how about a robot girlfriend who gets dumped in a dumpster by the guy's real girlfriend? I wanna make a film about zombies . . . where everyone dies.

There's vampires and, it's the end of the world and we are the only people left . . . a giant release of some kind of virus that can't be stopped.

Thousands of stories . . . I've heard the beginning of thousands of stories in this way.

I talked about the falseness and boredom of the medium shot.

A forgery of balance.

Not close enough or far away.

Our lives . . . the lives we live. It's not like that.

This year, irked and impatient with the ideas

*I want to tell* them something instead of just listening.

I want to tell them.

By now,

I know most of you sitting here in front of me,

have already learned to climb the fence.

And I know, you know exactly what spot on Hasting Street is not  
watched at night.

I know you know how to climb that fence and make your own way  
into Playland.

I want to tell them.

We are here because we want some place for you to be in  
summertime

Safe.

Away from the street

Away from your sleeping friends

Away from basement rooms

while the last summer sparrows

unseen

make their nests under the stairs just outside the door

in a place that is still summer young with summer hope.

Away from your tiny apocalypses.

Someplace safe

from *these stories*

you keep pitching over and over again.



July 8

Feeling like the most responsible one in the room, I'm still asking *them* to wait . . . wait for the story with a hope that it's not a done deal.

Not already foreclosed and mortgaged off.

But this year, for the first time, I can't tell if anyone is listening or tuned to their entirely own preoccupations and their own emergencies.

And I keep pitching them the idea.

That *creating* stories that come from ourselves and what we know or what we wish to be or understand or imagine can be antidotes to confusion and bewilderment.

They can help us to find a home, I say, for a while, out of the wilderness.

But I'm not so sure any more. This year seems different.

July 12

It is hotter this year than ever. There have been weather warnings about heat stroke. We are having to adjust the production schedule, trying to figure out locations where the heat isn't at its worst, a difficult task in a place surrounded by highways and large urban transportation corridors, where we need to take buses or walk to

locations carrying all the gear. The scripts aren't ready anyway. This year there is an atmosphere of *persistent* unexamined violence to the stories.

I'm getting nowhere with my attempts to ask them through the stories, *what is it*, what is it that you want to *tell* us. What is the trouble?

What *is* it?

I wanna make a film about a super anti hero with powers who comes into the high school and offs the principal . . . about a business man who steps into a square on the sidewalk and a sniper shoots him dead for no reason . . . about two guys who find a homeless bum.

*This year it's you . . .*

*You . . . are the trouble.*

And your stories.

The stories you want to recreate again and again are making me sick.

July 13

And I always thought you were the ones we were supposed to keep safe.

But you have already left this place called safe.

*Where are you?*

And, from this story mentor's point of view, where is that which can't be colonized, taken over, by the empire of worst nightmares? From what place can I mentor you when I don't know where you are or where I am?

In the past these preoccupations existed,  
but this year it's *me* – I'm getting infected by the epidemic, can't see or feel my way out.

Suggest *through the story* a subtle path of reconsideration, a deepening of insight, a reversal in the fortune and the form of the characters – an opening for possibility, an ever so slight gesture of care for the world.

Care for themselves.

Where are the possibilities for the other outcomes to exist?

*Where are you going?*

July 16.

A mother, no longer a mother, called this morning.

She left a message

The mother, now child poor,

told us of an overdose of something that found one of you in  
Playland.

This year

This story has carried all of us away.

It's true.

Now, anger is my tiny apocalypse.

This is a story about a place that has lost its light.

About a wilderness of the worst imaginings,

Of anger at the contemptible permission we have given our young

*Especially* those who don't live in safe houses

Who aren't taken on holidays to other places

Where in its stead we have allowed the worst imaginings of  
strangers

Entertain them-we have let them,

*all* of us let them,

sit in front row seats

where they watch stories told by strangers  
about degradation and despair  
of violence and the loss of human dignity.

We have let these stories, these stranger's stories  
be our children's bedtime stories.  
And then left them alone in the dark.

July 18

You were my last summer time hope now gone.

July 19

What do I do now?

How do I think through, with the rest of your long lost crew,  
the end of the movie? What kind of story is this?

Where only the image of you as an adolescent vampire remains  
Holding a message in your hand.

While reports from the Gulf keep telling us the spill  
Keeps spilling and cannot be contained.

We are making each other cry.

July 22

What is really happening here?

Things are falling apart.

Is this what I'm supposed to pay attention to?

July 23

Projected on the wall is a vampire you. An illusion.

You hold something written in your hand.

Is it something . . . we need to know?

July 24

We have to keep going.

This message you've written is the story I had thought all alone you were unable to tell.

Brainwashed, I thought you were.

Is this what you want to tell me?

Show me?

To be reminded the world, which is always out of joint, and needing to set anew

All I can do is mentor stories, all you can do is make them into your own telling, for the future. <sup>i</sup>

August 1

Together your crew decides to play rewind, to go back,  
to begin to look at what is really there, what has been recorded and  
what has not.

*If* it is a nightmare they want to create,

here in this dark room full

Of the remains of the image of vampire you, then it is so.

We start again. Start to make another story with what's left.

August 2

And they knew what to do with the image of you.

You become the dark star, gazing in vampire time in the dark  
airless studio in the absence of light. You become the shadow of  
light screened on the rest of our faces.

The makers are new filmmakers fresh out of Playland and I, their  
old mentor, cautious.

A small hope hangs on this new tendril of story, made from ashes  
and a passion that the rest of us feel in your absence.

We see you.

The only ness of you.

Your old crew now newly determines together through the making of their story and the making of their film a not wanting you to suffer

the insult of oblivion.

And I, the one who holds on to my old world and its stories, sees in the toughness of this new generation a hope only to be destroyed if we try to control it or shape it into something of our fashioning.<sup>ii</sup>

In the immediacy of grief, these young strangers are no longer strangers.

And bad bedtime stories cannot duplicate this.

Because this has never been experienced before.

It is new.

And this story, the new one about vampire you, can't be high jacked

It cannot be turned into another bad bedtime story because

It looks and feels like where it comes from, it is the authentic result of the labour of their experience. It is born anew.

Born from a passion of not wanting you to suffer the insult of oblivion.



August 31

The windless days at the end of August in this neighbourhood bring the dog days with it. There is a brief hiatus before the real school term begins. Today, the chicken-rendering factory on Hastings street fills the air with an odour that signals the beginning of the fall. I am closing up the studio and thinking of what had happened here this summer in a new way. In my practice, I am thinking now like a homeopath. Using the essence of poison as a remedy. <sup>iii</sup>

Making 'what kind' of story no longer my primary concern.

Imagining how I might defend the subjects of their imaginings to the funders who will no doubt be disappointed with this year's fall screening.

They who will ask me "What is happening? Why are the stories so dark?"

I will have to remind them of the principles of homeopathy.

Vampires and blood sucking corpses, killers, girl child porn stars, can be seen, as the work of light and shadow.

And measuring the degrees of poison as the remedy to a condition we all share is the substance of our work now.

And next year, if I come back

I'll try not to bring the idea of safety with me.

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## Endnotes for The Story of Vampires and Oil Spills

<sup>i</sup> Arendt (1954) wrote, “we are always educating for a world that is or becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to preserve mortals for a limited time as home. Because the (human) world is made by mortals it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must constantly set right anew.” (p. 193).

Arendt saw the mistaken view of education as an illusion of the new world being built through the education of children. She writes; “of course the true situation is not this at all . . . the world into which children are introduced . . . is an old world, that is, a pre-existing world, constructed by the living and the dead, and it is new only for those who have newly entered it” (Arendt, 1954, p. 177). It is the responsibility of the old world to preserve itself for the new, and this idea of preserving the world, became a key understanding in my thinking about the curricular project at Summer Visions.

<sup>ii</sup> Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative, it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which however revolutionary its actions may be is always, for the standpoint of the next generation superannuated and close to destruction. (Arendt, 1954, p. 193)

<sup>iii</sup> The basic principle of homeopathy, known as the “law of similars,” is “let like be cured by like.” It is based on the belief that a substance that in large doses will produce symptoms of a specific disease will, in extremely small doses, cure it.

## Section II: Leaving Home

### CHAPTER FOUR: ISLANDS

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#### An Introduction

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In the dissertation introduction, I introduced two events and my writing about these events as key to inspiring the initial set of questions in the evolving narrative of this dissertation. One was the crisis evoked by a journey taken to the west coast of Vancouver Island and its outcome of being put under house arrest. The other was a personal crises and journey to the east coast of Vancouver Island, culminating in my father leaving home and then, not long afterwards, his death.

There are two stories that emerge out of these events. Both explore a moment I have *now* come to see through the writing of the story and my research, as an exploration of a time when another gap between what I identified as my self and the world collapsed and a crisis ensued. The stories are intended to reflect a time when the flattened ordinary fabric of the world was torn and I experienced a larger frame of presence, moments when I saw the appearing world as informing my inquiry through the writing of the story. The section is titled Leaving Home. The stories and essays that compose this section represent

the evolving narrative that moves away from the sense of seeking to establish a place in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The inquiry provoked by my father's leave-taking was an inquiry now spiralling inward and away from defining my self in some place in my life through vocation.

It initiates an awareness of narrative as having the potentiality to see and feel what the philosopher Henry Bungee (1999) named "the revelatory presence" (p. 76) of the world.

*Islands* is the story of my father's leave-taking of his island home. The inquiry evokes the realization of a felt connection between the outer elements of place and an internal state of being. A relationship to the ecology of the world furthers the themes introduced in the prologue. It was through the writing of the story that a relationship to the outer landscape and the elements of the place are revealed. The awareness of this relationship loosens my attention, in Abrams, words to the "strictly human sphere" (1996, p. 262).

In *The Inward Morning*, philosopher Henry Bugbee (1966) writes, that by cultivating a willingness to evoke meanings in writing through a responsiveness to the realities of our place (our worldliness) we restore ourselves to our place in a wilderness, evoking an "ongoingness" in the life of things, and mark the place through which we move and live. "This place where we live is completed by our responsiveness to it, and depends on our responsiveness to undertake a life with others that is always emerging and always underway" (Bugbee, 1999, p. xix).

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<sup>1</sup> "We might try to sum up the paradox of homemaking by saying that inner life *takes place*; it both claims *place* and acts to *become* place among others. It turns wilderness into an interior and presents interiority to the wilderness" (McKay, 1995, p. 20).

When it comes within our capacity to sense a felt relationship to things, this felt experience illuminates or gives meaning to our existence, and then to “the primacy of the world of appearances. By recollecting the things of the world, we return ourselves to the things themselves, to their nearness, and in this way we find our way, to the here and now” (Bugbee, 1999, p. 155). The recognition of returning our worldliness expands through writing the story of our being in it. The writing deepens, opens to the depth of presence in the revelatory nature of appearances and the world. Evoking through language a connection with our worldliness, we find a way to represent the “revelatory presence” of the world. Seeking out the invisible inner state of our lives within the visible, this inquiry moves from a closed space into a richer more open one through the recognition of the relationship between the gathering storm and my father’s leave taking of his island, through the ongoingness of a river in relationship to a death.

Ecopsychologist Andy Fisher (2002) maintained that those who can describe their felt relationship with the world through the story of their life, are more likely to care for the world, or what Arendt calls *amour mundi*, a love of the world, that seeks to preserve its future. The better able we are to express our inner states of being through the language of the world, the more we become aware of how much the world is always meaningful to us.

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## The Story of Islands

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I traveled over the Iron Worker's Memorial Bridge on a cold February Morning, this way on my way past Silver Harbour to the ferry terminal on the North Shore.

Whether he knew that he was leaving forever or not has remained a mystery. Or maybe a knowing by degrees.

His leaving started with my returning home.

I caught the ferry for Departure Bay and headed home, up the east coast of Vancouver Island to Denman Island on the new highway north.

In February, it was a fast and relatively empty road. The weather was February damp and February dreary. The bushes lived only as brown smudges against the signs and billboards along the highway. The ferry traffic vied at breakneck speeds to cut loose from each other and grab the emptiness of the road up towards Parksville and beyond.

Just outside Nanaimo, on an inhospitable stretch of road, I passed two young girls hitchhiking. Pulling over, watching in my rear-view mirror as the two red hoodies walked cautiously towards the car, the two girls turned into a tiny native woman and a teenage

girl. Between them, they carried a little sack with a single red carnation precariously sticking out. They tell me they have been on the road for three hours trying to get out of Nanaimo and they are cold.

I turn up the heat in the old Volvo. The tiny woman carefully sets her bag on the floor in the front seat, she tells me she has been visiting her sister in Nanaimo. When I tell her I am going to Denman Island, I'm surprised to find that she has never heard of the place. This island is located only about 50 miles west and north of Port Alberni, her home.

"It is the old people who stop and pick up folks on the roads nowadays, not the young ones," she tells me. Silver Jettas and Honda Civics race past us. We drive in silence. Her granddaughter has fallen asleep in the back seat of the car. The feeling in the car is cozy; with the heat and the sound of the windshield wipers it is a temporary refuge from the rain outside.

Soon it is time to let the travelers out near the old road. They will travel east towards Port Alberni, passing Englishman River Falls on their way. I am heading north. Climbing out, I note how careful the woman holds the small backpack with the red carnation. The flower's colour is exotic and at odds with the grey wash of the midwinter afternoon. We wish each other safe and good journeys. Starting down the highway I realize the new Port Alberni turn off is still miles down the new highway, but take comfort in the thought

most likely the old people will take the old back-road to Alberni anyway.

It is mid-afternoon by the time I reach the ferry at Buckley Bay to Denman Island. When I arrive at the house, my father is standing shaking at the door. He holds on tightly to my hand, and won't let go, bright eyed – he still knows who I am. My mother is already motioning for me to come and see all the pruning they have done. The plum tree is hacked away and looks like a haircut given by a three year old. The tree stands as an awkward and ugly rend in the middle of a view that reaches out towards the oyster lease and then past the sound and up to the snow covered mountains on the main Island's east coast.

“That” pointing at the broken limbs of the tree, my mother says emphatically, “is what happened in the snow storm last month.”

We talk, have tea sitting at the table with cups and plates and fresh chocolate cake. It is an occasion. They are excited and want to hear all the news. How busy was the ferry? What was the weather like in town? This kind of talk, in the past, used to make me edgy with boredom. Now it is pregnant with the knowledge that in all likelihood this will be our last tea together.

Surprisingly, the knowledge of this feels as ordinary as the clean white tablecloth on which it all rests. Recalling it now, revising my language to make it fit, it has become something other.



Tomorrow, my mother will leave for Vancouver. Then the day after, my sister and I will move Dad to my sister's house across the bay on Vancouver Island. His long life with and without Parkinson's and my mother's long life living with him is almost over. He will leave behind the house he built, and the island he loved.

When I step outside to the cool empty yard to prune another tree, Louise, my sister, tells me that Dad doesn't know he is leaving.

Is this a good idea? Leaving with him not knowing?

Clipping the branches, the ones that move in a straight direction towards the sky and the ones that cross over and confuse the others, cutting to give air and space to the central limbs, I imagine what this tree looked like burdened with blossoms. Six years later, these same blossoms will cover my mother's coffin.

A fog has seeped in, blocking the mountains and the shore, making the world like the sea, shifting and ephemeral. The world is silent in this wet gray and dripping yard.

Too soon it is time to go into the hot and noisy house.

Mother prepares dinner. She is bright and talkative, furtive when she thinks Dad isn't listening. 'He' has become troublesome over the past few weeks, angry and pushy, she is afraid of his outbursts and exhausted by all the care. My father is very weak, and can barely get out of his chair.

My mother pours a wine from grapes that grew over their summer balcony. It tastes overly sweet, a reminder of last summer's drought, and our father's restless effort trying to sit through its heat.

The wine sparkles in the glass. Mom gives Dad a taste holding the wine glass up to his mouth so he can drink.

We sit at the table, country darkness outside, wood stove inside. Her dinner is making us sleepy and forgetful.

Too soon it is time for Homecare to come take the night shift with my father. The nights with Dad are not for sleeping any more, but walkabouts hovering on tip toes and wet cloths on and off the head.

In the morning, my Mother leaves quickly.

Throughout the day, Dad keeps asking where has she gone? Puzzling out a sense of absence.

By evening, I'm tired of reassuring him. Tired of pretending that nothing is wrong, that Mom has just gone to Vancouver to visit her brother. My father looks at me and says, "You know, I have a feeling something very positive is about to happen."

Then I tell him he is leaving.

For the rest of the evening my father is restless and needs to be helped up and down and complains about how quiet it is.

He tells me he is waiting, waiting with "his foot on the gas."

Now he knows, he is leaving.

I suddenly remember the huge hull of a sailboat Dad was building by the side of our house when I was a child and the constant smell of fiberglass. Remember how my father was always going somewhere. At that time, the big sailboat was going to take us to Australia. Although we never did go. A year ago he was still banging away at a little rowboat, making plans for Alaska.

Early the next morning when I rise, Lynn, an island caregiver who watches over him at night, has him up and dressed. He has his coat on and is holding a hat in his hand. She tells me he has been waiting for while.

She is crying because she can't say goodbye properly.

Then my sister arrives from off island and she walks him out the door,

"Why wait," she says.

And he is gone.

The house as still, as quiet inside, as the silent foggy world outside.

I have a list of what to pack. My father's itinerary of a lifetime of land, and boats, and houses are all gone. This list is one page long and mainly consists of little things like a bent spoon, his shaver, toothbrush, and, of course, all the pills. The light in the bedroom shifts and everything appears shadowy and in limbo, trying to decide what to take and what to leave. I pack his oldest sweater, and one pair of shoes.

In the drawer is his wallet. Empty. Picking it up I put a five dollar bill in it. Money. Money for the trip.

By now, Dad will be on the little ferry headed to the other shore, trading this stretch of coast for a new reach of land in a little suburb off the Island Highway; it is the place he will never leave. The calm bright day shifts and a small wind stirs offshore as I move his things into my car in preparation to take the next ferry over.

I imagine Dad down at the dock sitting hunched and shaking in Louise's car. He will anticipate the beginnings of the trip. The one that he has been waiting to go on for so long. He imagines there will be a train, or a trailer with a bed for him to rest in, maybe a

little boat, with a soft berth and an East Hope engine, like the last ones he worked on as a young man in the boathouses of his youth.

Maybe he will drive a truck to the Okanagan, through the mountains away from the grey and the rain of the west coast.

All he knows is he is going, he is finally going.

The ferry arrives. At the dock, a lone bagpiper is playing beside the fish and chip stand.

I wish I could call someone or make an announcement that my father is gone. David Fraser has left this island.

But I don't know who that would be, and after all he is just going over to the other side.

I can see the ferry from my parent's kitchen window. Eyeing the half finished bottle from last summer's grapes I drink the last of the wine. Then lock the door and carry his few belongings to the car.

I am at the ferry dock waiting when the wind whips up out of nowhere.

"Look at that" Larry, one of the crew shouts to the bridge pointing. It was a strange direction for the wind. The flag on the boat is snapping, trying to break free.

The once calm sea, grey and muted, is suddenly churning.

Ahead of me on the dock, a young girl with a pink backpack is braving the wind. Tilting forward, barely moving. Another gust pounds the side of the car packed with my father's belongings, shaking it.

It is a ghost wind, this wind. Blowing from an uncommon direction and uncommon force, it whisks the grey green sea into rolling breakers, building towards an unexpected gale.

Battering the car. This wind knows.

I'm afraid to drive aboard.

Taking leave of his island is all that is left.

Still at play, leaning, against it the young girl strides past me with her arm raised to the wind and lets go a bright scarf the colour of the red carnation and leaps fearlessly on to the deck. Then the crew signals and I follow her aboard.

~

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE RIVER

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### Fieldnote: Living Inquiry into a Father's Death

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#### *Fieldnote #1*

*In the lightness of sunlit air, in relief at the end of a long labour, in the rich colours of the room, in the small flutter of a moth near my father's bed, in the newly washed spring world of the open window where this ardent hope seeks the air, I cannot find anything definitive. But there was no demarcation between one moment of living and the next although the boundary by which we could 'know' our father had changed irrevocably forever. I cannot say this moment or this moment or this moment is when he definitively died.*

#### *Fieldnote #2*

*We had been up for days, my sisters, my brother, my mother and I clinging to the raft of our father like shipwrecked souls. Tossed through nights filled with the terror storms and bewitching calm. We were no longer captives of our modern lives. Cut adrift we tried to go with him.*

*We learned many things.*

*Practical things like how to administer morphine, wet sponge a gasping mouth, change sheets. It wasn't easy figuring out what to do.*

*Afraid we were of our 'inexpertise' in the face of his dying.*

*As if it was still a kind of medical problem.*

*Fieldnote #3*

*All his grandchildren hovered outside the bedroom door. On the third day, an extraordinarily vivid rainbow appeared in the sombre skies above Baines Sound arcing over to the island where our father had lived the last years of his life. Lined up and awe struck at the lightshow, a stretch of family is silhouetted in the grey light of the windows of the front room. Standing lined up wife, son, daughter, grandsons, and granddaughters all momentarily suspended in the pale light, their backs turned to the dying man in the room beyond.*

*Fieldnote #4*

*Throughout this experience, I become aware of a gathering of atmosphere where everything that appeared, appeared as significant and luminous. Nothing about this event could be described as ordinary and yet, oddly it felt very ordinary, very natural.*



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## An Introduction

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In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt wrote:

The poet likens the tearing onslaught of fear and grief on the hearts of men to the combined onslaught of winds from several directions on the waters of the sea. Think of these storms that you know so well, the poet seems to tell us, and you will know about grief and fear. Significantly, the reverse will not work. No matter how long somebody thinks about grief and fear, he will never find out anything about the winds and the sea; the comparison is clearly meant to tell what grief and fear can do to the human heart that is meant to illuminate an experience that does not appear. (1971, p. 106)

In this passage, Arendt points to the primacy of the *appearing* world in order to access human understanding and human subjective states. Our subjective states are private states, they cannot be *seen* by others. Through the language of the world, we attend to the world that furthers an illumination of the private and unseen. By developing our awareness of this world and our practice using the language of the world, the invisible is made visible.

The story reveals the unseen, and the *revelatory* presence of the appearing world can make itself known to us.

Through persisting in writing about my father's death, he began to be realized in another way. Through the writing of the story of his death, I began to realize I was not abandoned in the unknown. Rather left with the *inquiry* into it (K., Meyer, personal communication, 6/10/ 2009). It was a *story* that had become the mediator between his

death and my life. His actions and his relationship to the world now were becoming deeds, requiring a story in order for him to be remembered.

If I was to learn anything about this experience, I needed to use the story as a kind of inquiry into that which was questionable. I needed to use my imagination to break through and create a response. In this case, it was through seeking out the definitive moment of his death that a *worldly* metaphor spoke—the metaphor of the river and my worldly experiences of once living near it and in the writing about this place that formed my response, in part, to this crises of his dying. In my research, I was reminded again of Arendt's understanding of the privateness of our inwardly experienced states of being, and needing the experience of our worldliness in order to be understood and shared.

The experience of my father's dying was like a river, constantly moving, always different, yet somehow appearing as one and the same.

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## The Story of The River

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His death is like the river. It moves and we are instructed to stay away, because it will take us with it, and yet nothing of the river remains for those of us who are left behind.

That is how I thought of the Fraser River when I lived beside it, in South Fort George, when spring break up would come.

I'd step out the door and watch the murky water soak up stretches of the lawn. Each day, the river reached closer and closer to the little house. For hours I'd stand there silently watching the current pull uprooted trees downstream faster than I could have run. The brown water looking like it wasn't even moving. And that's how life seemed to me at the time, like some large continent flowing by but appearing as if it wasn't going anywhere.

It was the winter of my newborn. I had just turned twenty years old.

That year, spring breakup came went and came and went. The ice boomed, echoing in the early morning light. Cracking and heaving like a great living thing just outside the door. It would wake me in the middle of the night in the few hours I managed to sleep.

Then a new front would descend from the north and the river lay silent and frozen again.

When the ice groaned the newborn would cry. When the river was still so was Caleb. Every night the same and yet different, just like the river.

My father had taken to coming round occasionally since the baby was born. "To check on things," he said. He lived a few miles away in one of Prince George's suburbs. At that point in his life, he was landlocked in every sense of the word. Trapped in the ruined land of Prince George. Before coming north, my father had always lived by the sea.

He never held Caleb on his visits, or came inside. He would just stick his head in the door at some unexpected time and holler that the steps were clear of ice or the driveway was shovelled, then he would be on his way. I don't know if he was aware of how far from the surface of things I had slipped. Like the river that lay gleaming outside the door, my life seemed to have disappeared and gone completely underground. I strayed little from the house and lived on with the river and his occasional visits for company.

In March, a train derailed. A carload of lumber slid down the bank across the river from the cottonwood house. The lumber looked like a pile of matchsticks against the massive cut banks on the other side.

The next day on one of his visits, my father noted the lumber spill with a beachcomber's glint in his eye.

"It's a find," he said.

"It's too late to cross the river," I replied, uneasy at the way he was eyeing the find.

For the next few days, I held the baby Caleb close because of the cold. Already anxious, I watched my father drag the lumber armload by armload across the rough and dangerous river ice to the little yard of the cottonwood house. His solitary figure hardly visible against the looming walls of the river canyon.

A wave of homesickness swept over me as I stood watching my father tread from one side of the river to the other, the great weight of the newborn holding me fast to this side of the river. My father, the only adventurer I had ever known, seemed to be disappearing into the blue light of evening even as I stood there. Then Caleb would cry because it was too cold, and I made myself go into the house.

One night the boom and groans of the river woke me before the baby, his small ferocity finally exhausted. I listened to the river changing. Some great mass was about to move. I got up and, in the moonlight, saw my father still hauling his load across the frozen steppes of the river.

At the back door, cold and shivering, I yelled at him. "Go home, just go home."

He replied, " just one more trip, that's it, one more." Panting and throwing his load of two-by-fours to the splintered pile that lay like broken bones scattered across the back yard.

"No go home!" I demanded, suddenly sick of his recklessness, sick of his presumptions on my own exhausted life, sick of him using this place as a way of disappearing.

My father turned to me and I thought he was just about to laugh in his way, to let me know nothing was going to stop him. He looked up hard. "It's the only way out of this godforsaken place!" He hollered.

"What do you mean? What do you mean by that!"

*"This place, this lousy place, not a goddamn tree left within five hundred miles of this place except this."*

Throwing down the last heaving armload of two by fours. "At least out there," pointing to the crushed edges of ice on the river "you don't have ya know..."

"Don't have to what?" I screamed ragged with rage. "Don't have to what?"

“Take care of anything, right?” I had, instead of the river, woken the baby this time. “You don’t have to take care of a goddamn thing!”

Afraid he might be right, I turned to open the door of the haphazard little house I had to live in, making ready to leave the eerie moonlit night. Turning to him, I steadied myself.

“You have to go! You can’t cross over any more. And you can’t keep coming round at all hours . . . you can’t.”

My father looked at me hard. “I always thought you’d get out of here.”

We both knew then the last of the find was going to be abandoned. He left the rest of his timber on the other side of the river, got into his truck, and drove away.

For a moment I was lonelier than I had ever been, watching his taillights turn down the dirt road. And then I was glad. Glad to know I didn’t have to stand there anymore.

In the eerie light, the ice started once again to crack and boom.

That spring, I regarded the river with more care than ever. Holding Caleb, watching the great rolling currents of brown water creep closer and closer to the house, I knew this was no place to raise a child. This river was too large and too swift for any mistaken step.

I was moving.

Together, this young child and I watched a continent of water flow by, although it seemed it wasn't even moving.



## CHAPTER SIX: POSTCARDS

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### Postcards – An Introduction

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In the fall after my father's death, I was invited to create a personal shrine as a way of remembering and caring for the dead. It is one lantern among the many illuminating the darkness at a newly established public celebratory event called *The Night for All Souls*, held at the end of October at Mountainview Cemetery in Vancouver. *The Night for All Souls* was created by co-artistic directors Paula Jardine and Marina Szijarto. Personal and collective memorials and shrines are created as candlelit installations set before a public for a week as an invitation to reinvigorate our connection to those that have died before us, to care for them in personal ways before a spectatorship that is fluid and unpredictable, in a space that is shared by all who come to observe.<sup>i</sup>

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## Endnotes for Postcards – An Introduction

<sup>i</sup> The idea of public acts of memorialization is as old as our collective recollections of the past. The motivations behind these acts of memorializations are, according to Santino (2006), “complex and many and have to do with sickness, belief, personal devotion, attempts to influence that which is beyond human control, and a need to demonstrate to an audience one does know that one participated in the act of memory for another.” (p. 9)

They are places of communion between the dead and the living. These public shrines invite participation from strangers. They are ‘open’ to the public. They display death in the heart of social life.

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## Postcard to the Beloved

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On the cloth lantern is a photo transfer of this picture. The cloth forms a lantern lit from within. It is my first attempt at a personal shrine for Night for All Souls. Titled: "Postcard to the Beloved".

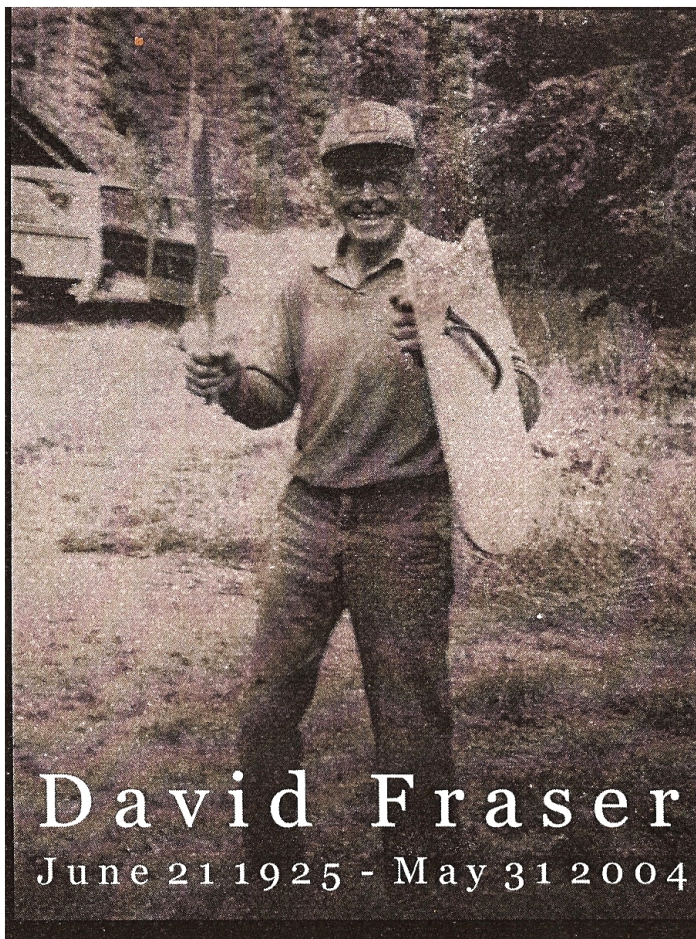


Figure 1. Memorial Handout. Photograph by A. Fraser.

And this poem.

An islander he was in the end, never retired like the folk  
turning up nowadays.  
could build houses, a rough carpenter he was  
the fine work he left to his brother.

Big things like boats  
and roofs of houses  
high places  
where the wind blew  
is where you'd find him.

Places I'd like to be  
instead of here in the city  
closed in on all sides except for  
the view at the front.

Both of them  
Mother and Father  
willing to suffer the empty stretch of time up a lonely  
beach in grey weather that would last sometimes for months  
for months the same muddy little roads  
and the dull weather

both of them willing  
accustomed to it  
to go mad with grey fevers  
to be here on this island.

I miss the Green Ford Truck windshield wipers wiping  
away the rain

In the winter before I left that Island  
with its forced enclosure of damp small children in a  
plywood cabin the size of a woodshed.

If you didn't have a proper fire, like the kind my father  
always had,  
Dry wood, good stove, chimney cleaned,  
you could go crazy.

It was then the Green Ford Truck would come up to the North End  
the chimney sweep brushes bending and swaying like a crazy  
pole vault  
and cedar shakes for kindling. Then we would have a fire like his.  
I did not know then it was goodness that arrived.

Each morning

when my father, would come  
looking for things to fix.

I miss him and his Green Ford pickup,  
the last big truck my father owned.

It carried all the large things of life

a 2000 gallon tank for water

two cords of firewood

split and piled on hot September days

in the sweetest time of the year

when we would cry at the thought of leaving

The bay green water still

the grasses so yellowed by the sun

Gods could walk on them

The sweetest sweetness

After the dog days

And hopelessness of August

And we would cry because the city was filled with the worst  
of the smog then

and the most noise of everyone returning to go somewhere

And I would cry on the way into the city, driving the

Valiant over the  
First Narrows Bridge for the first time  
with \$75.00 and the youngest still in a car seat  
alone with hope and the excitement of adventures cast from  
an idea of having nothing.

I wonder now  
how my Father must have felt,  
climbing out of the Green Ford pickup  
to Check my tires  
guessing at what lay ahead  
knowing  
we were His  
even if no one else  
realized it.

~

The poem speaks to the loss of a world as much as to the loss of the man. It represents the loss of my island life *and* the loss of living with him in this world. I had not realized to this degree how each one of us is accompanied by a world. Though the things of the world remain when we die, the revelatory nature of this particular worldliness is irrevocably altered.

~

I begin to write memoir as Postcards.

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## Postcard #2 – Remembrance Day

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It is Remembrance Day.

The red carnations have appeared again. Now they are floating slashes of vividness – red on green November seas. I've thrown these flowers off a wharf in English Bay, beside the empty plot of land, the past site of my deceased grandparent's home known as the Kitsalino Boathouse. The squatter's cabin was part home part marina perched on the western shore east of Kitsilano Bay.

Recently, an uncle told me he thought we still had squatter's rights to this piece of Vancouver waterfront. I think about this place and my grandparents and those who long before came to see this shore as home.

This squatter's place was home to merchant marines, union men, socialists, beachcombers, boat builders found inhabiting the shores of Vancouver in the 1930s, long before 'waterfront' property became the domain of a select few. An infamous place in its own small way, home to my father's enduring romance with the sea, my grandmother's rat infested shame, a small story plaque written by an uncle memorializes this spot. Occasionally, I come here when I need to feel something hidden, something rooted below this age's current unfamiliarity.<sup>ii</sup>



Today, on this Remembrance Day, all over this bright new city, people are walking towards the cenotaph, planes drone overhead flying in formation. Seeking, like myself, a connection, to a place, I suppose.

Seeking something of Remembrance Day.

I am remembering one soldier in particular.

Who asked me once, if I would pray for him, 54 years ago.

At the time, I was looking up the length of his grey flannel leg.

His great liquorice scented paws holding my small hands.

My Grandfather must have surprised himself by asking,

“Will you pray for me when I’m gone?”

Years later, I learn from the Buddhist perspective that prayers are considered nothing greater or lesser than our minds, and a direction of energy to our heart, its main purpose, to transform the ego, the attachment to the idea of a self, into a larger concern for the world, which in the doing its purpose already fulfilled. <sup>iii</sup>

We are reminded through these prayers to remember our spiritual and ancestral elders. Those who keep the teachings alive, those who are connected to us through wisdom, and those who have given us life, the prayers are a recognition that we are able to live wisely in the here and now because of the past, because of the elder’s kindness.

~

Years later, after watching me fire off a gun in some northern gravel pit, another family member remarked, "You take after your grandfather." And I would remember the moose and deer antlers that littered the back yard in White Rock. Fossilized remains of my grandfather's aim, in all likelihood perfected during the Great War and used again in the Fraser Canyon to feed three young sons after his return.

Our backyard was their final resting place until my father, tired of this yard's claustrophobic gentility, took us all away up north, after the old man died.

But what was this old man swinging his granddaughter on his feet thinking?

He had never been a church going man.

The First World War's four years of trenches had seen to that. After the war, according to my father, my grandfather "didn't believe in anything."

And my father would know. He would know from having developed a philosophy of love. Tested by having to spend too much time waiting for this father outside the doors of the Yale Pub and other establishments along Granville Street.

Had developed a philosophy of love that kept him able. Fit for the sea.

“He didn’t ‘believe’ in anything, after four years in the trenches,” my father would say.

Did he know it would take 54 years?

And only after I *understood* “prayer as that which is directed not towards an object so much as a method for opening one’s heart. Everything, perceived and perceiver, is our mind and our mind alone.”<sup>iv</sup>

Gathering red carnations to throw  
into green November seas  
in the hope of seeing a thought, a wish, a prayer rise  
before being washed away?

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## Postcard # 3 – The Wake

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It's November the 22 and cold for the coast. All day the skies are laden with a presence we rarely witness this far south. My friend Ted and his daughter, Katrina, have just left in time for the 1:30 ferry out of Horseshoe bay north to Sechelt and then on to Pender Harbour.

I imagine them in their rusty van crossing the second narrows and the steep climb on the upper levels highway, along with the rest of the commuters to North Vancouver. The traffic is determined and fast.

Then on to the ferry to the Sunshine coast.

A damp chill has penetrated the inside of the van and they can see their breath as they bump off the ferry dock.

Now I'm imagining the darkness descending. Ted and Katrina will peer out the window as the traffic becomes less and less until only an occasional headlight veers and twists towards them, peering together out the front window of the van, Katrina sitting in the front seat where a mother might be.

At Pender Harbour, the lone IGA is closed. Further along the scattered coast a few lights smear the grainy dusk with a wishing of home. Ted parks the van beside the government wharf and heads for the boat. He struggles with the moor line in the bitter dusk, always the most difficult part of the journey.

Katrina climbs in the little boat and readies herself to push off. She is clutching her newly acquired treasure – a spiked dog collar from an accessories shop on Commercial Drive.

“I’m just letting you know I only wear black,” she declared to me at breakfast that morning.

“Yeah? I used to only wear black too,” I say.

“Were you popular?” she asked

“ No, shy.”

The 14 year old regards me at a distance through her glasses. She is an orphan, the foster child that Ted and Anne adopted a few years ago. She chose Anne to be her mother, Ted once told me. Then a year after Katrina came home with them Anne died from cervical cancer.

“I am,” Katrina says humorously defiant. Ted’s lined face, fixed in perplexity since Anne’s death, laughs.

I imagine them huddled in the cold boat, a November wind whipping up and rocking the faint sketch of coast made visible by the tree's skeletal lines against the growing darkness.

The boat's engine starts and heads them into the waves, leaving a path of wake that is the only trail of light left in their world. Ted's boat heads towards the darkest place on the horizon.

The great magnetic bulk of Nelson Island pulls Ted and Katrina towards its only accessible shore. Back to home, back to the drafty cabin and its small wood stove grown cold by their leaving.

Katrina looks at Ted and points to the sky.

The great burden of it all, turning to liquid as the boat's wake disperses the island's weight like an illusion in the black oil of November seas.

By the time Ted's boat knocks against the wharf of the other side, the snow is falling.

Small offerings to the dark night.

~

Buried away in a flowered cookie tin in the back of my bookcase lay a collection of digital videotapes. They are digital recordings of the last moving images of my father alive. As a part of the course, Living Inquiry, I create a short digital video with this material, using the idea of memorial as a way to look at these living representations of him for the first time. I create a *Digital Postcard to the Beloved* from these recordings.

They are screened at Night for All Souls. My second year in the Arts Health and Seniors Project commences.

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## The First Digital Postcard

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### Artist's Statement

*"Postcard to the Beloved"* was created from the only video footage I recorded of my father before his death from Parkinson's Disease. This piece of media reflects an aspect of my research, in Dr. Karen Meyer's course titled: Living Inquiry.

Over the years, my practice has originated in personal narratives that spiral out into larger reflections. These narratives became the genesis of work in the mediums of radio, the theatre, and digital video. However, these narratives were 'produced' by others in mediums that required high degrees of technical expertise and complex organizational structures. The short video I am submitting is an intentional departure from this kind of production. This piece was created entirely by me, manipulating a video camera for the first time. It was created from footage recorded by someone who knew very little technically about cameras and nothing about how to shoot digital video. Edited in the simplest editing program available, it is also my first experiments at editing my own recorded digital video. Consequently, this submission is a 'produced' piece of media from someone who had no prior experience manipulating the tools of this technology.

What I did know something about was my resistance to looking at moving images of a father who had recently died. My 'Living Inquiry' became the 'way' in which I could look at these highly personal recordings, through mental field notes of time, language, place, and other.

Unlike media produced in specialized environments, this piece does not exhibit accomplished facilitation of the medium. It was created with the express intention of using what some might consider 'mistakes' or unusable footage. This piece is dedicated to my father and made with the intention to demonstrate to others, no matter what our perceived capacities are, that we are all capable of creating expressions of our worldliness.

Patricia Fraser



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## Endnotes for Postcards

<sup>ii</sup> Malpas, (2006) writes about the mutuality of the relation between place and human being based on his understanding of indigenous modes of thought as a place as formed and sustained through journey and movement. He describes how places affect us in profound and inescapable ways. How what is needed is an account that gives insight into “the necessary character of place itself and that allows the connections to place to be seen as a necessary part of what it is to be human” (Malpas, 2006, pp.19 -23).

<sup>iii</sup> Prayer in a Buddhist context is seen as a motivation and an intention.

<sup>iv</sup> Archarya Tenpa, (2011) oral teaching on *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* by Shantideva

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## Returning to Silver Harbour and the Creation of the Digital Shrine

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Reluctant to loosen my attentiveness to the ways in which the world was still reverberating from my father's death and to some of the creative impulses associated with that attentiveness, I return to my tenure as artist in residence at Silver Harbour Seniors Centre in the fall. After creating a series of postcards, I begin to think about the potential of writing memoir as a contemplative practice and a community engaged practice. Albert Borgmann (1992) viewed practices such as these as sustaining a *focal reality*. These practices offer a sense of continuity through the experience of practicing a skill that is devoted to renewing our felt relationship to our worldliness.<sup>i</sup>

Borgmann maintained that communities of memory, engaged arts, and contemplative practices still have “animating power at the margins of the world” seeing community as a force that “gathers in the world” (1992, p. 57).<sup>ii</sup>

In the writing of postcards and extending this inquiry into the creation of a digital postcard, I made the decision to extend this work into the community at Silver Harbour. We would construct audio and visual snapshots intended to be evocations of memory. They would be missives from the creators to a beloved who had died.

As a way of creating a collective creation, Corin Browne and I would assemble the entire collection of individually created digital postcards and project them in an outdoor installation. The collection would become part of the *Digital Shrine* for *The Night for All Souls*.

The intentions of creating something that is described as a shrine, was a radical way of thinking about media in this setting. We were making a new home for our video productions. This work changed the way in which we worked together. It also changed how we viewed the work and whom the work was being created for. By taking our digital stories out of the screening medium of computers and out of tradition public screenings with audience and projector and placing them in an outdoor installation at night in a cemetery, with candles, built artifacts, and the ‘changeableness’ of weather, we asked the observer to interact with the media and its subjectivity in a very different way. The media installation becomes a shrine. A shrine is created and approached with an attitude of reverence.<sup>iii</sup>

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## Endnotes for Returning to Silver Harbour and the Creation of the Digital Shrine

<sup>i</sup> Borgmann wrote about practices such as animal husbandry, care of horses, meditation, yoga, and gardening, as practices that offer us a “profound coherence of the eloquence of things in the world” (1992, p. 120).

<sup>ii</sup> Borgmann (1992) viewed the virtual world as having, in many ways, the same characteristics as a game, bounded by surfaces, limitless possibilities, and protected by boundaries. If you were to spend time with a digital video editing program, the capacity to enhance and perfect past ‘pictures’ of one’s self and one’s life is endless. The world and its incumbent ‘worldliness’ is, however, according to Borgman, fraught with difficulties, as a realm of “grace and misery.” This worldliness is being replaced by the virtual world that “is disposable, and discontinuous, and glamorous, and the sign of the perfect commodity” (1992, p. 96).

<sup>iii</sup> The way in which Lambert (2002), one of the founders of *The Digital Storytelling Centre* in Berkeley California, described grass roots digital video production is a commonly used way to describe the work. He viewed the practice of using story to develop digital literacy in community in this way: as an “effective filtering, indexing, and repackaging tool” to use to manage successfully and consistently meaning that reconstructs as a coherent story” (p. 23). This was very different than how I was thinking about the approach to the medium of digital storytelling. When we think about our intentions associated with building a shrine we approach the creation with a reverent or attitude of devotion. As a way to re-imagine and evoke a different attitude to our work in the digital or virtual reality we created the Digital Shrine. An attempt to bring the glamorous commodious superficiality into the world of grace and misery. The Digital Shrine accomplished this to some degree.

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## Fieldnotes: The Dangerous Idea

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When I asked the older adults at Silver Harbour if they would be willing to participate in this project, there was a palpable tension in the room. Introducing the idea of reflecting on death in this Seniors Centre was a dangerous idea. Stepping into this uneasy atmosphere through asking the participants to consider creating a Postcard to the Beloved, was a key moment. In hindsight it represented the beginning of a real practice of community engaged art, in the sense that we were starting to serve the vital interest of this community as a community.

*Fieldnote: September 17*

*I explain to them why the concept of the postcard is as a way to view a scene. There is a sense of apprehension, almost disappointment in the room.*

*I am watching John as I describe the project. There is a look of puzzlement on his face.*

*I am struck by how unfortunate this all appears, now that we are asking them to consider feelings of loss.*

*Ray doesn't feel it is "uplifting."*

*Someone suggests he consider this as an opportunity to be humorous.*

*Fieldnote: September 24*

*Yesterday we read our postcards to each other.*

*There are a few tears, but the group is actually listening to each other in a different way.*

*There is more patience, more care in how we are attending to each other.*

*October 1*

*Fritjof Capra (1975) wrote that when living systems respond to disturbances, these disturbances act upon the system in unpredictable ways. I'm beginning to see my request to work on the postcards as a disturbance within the living system of this community. But the group is more patient than last year, they don't seem to need as much individual attention.*

*Anne tears up as she reads her postcard to her niece. Richard's grandfather, Sue's pictures of her brother. Death is everywhere.*

*As we make these postcards from scanned images and written narratives, the 'making' is more meaningful than mastering the technology behind it.*

*Roy was happier today now that he has an idea. A simple picture of a teacup with his grandmother teaching him to read the leaves.*

*The awareness of the attitude of devotion in the work of creating a shrine produced a quality of sensitivity to the writing of the stories of the loved ones, which appeared to be qualitatively different than what we had created the year before. The practice, the focal practice of story telling, had started to have some effect. The community talked to each*

*other about how their work was being perceived by other members of their families and in their communities.*

*October 8*

*Alex tells me the work she is doing on her postcard to her grandmother has changed her relationship with her sister. She was shocked to find out her sister felt entirely different about relationships in a shared past. Although her grandmothers has been dead for 55 years Alex's work is, in her words, bringing out a whole new dimension of existence. Her narrative ends with a request for this grandmother to continue 'to take care of the whole gang'. Alex's mother and her father have both died. She tells me her sister and her are now possessed by this work.*

*Anne has abandoned a piece about Canadian soldiers in favour of writing a poem that mourns the death of a niece who died at the age of 19. She was one in the set of twins. It makes her cry. All this, she thinks of as being positive.*

*I am worried about what I have brought into the room.*

*Many chose grandparents, thinking perhaps distance would protect them. There is an energy that is inexorably moving us towards the event - The Night for All Souls. Working together on memoirs of loss brings up a revitalization of the present moment in our conversations. Our work on the postcards appears to make us more attuned to each other and the environment in the room.*

*MaryLee cries when she talks about her experience of not being able to look at pictures that deal with her mother. The reason she tells me this is not because she doesn't want to look at the pictures. It is because until now she feels she had no one to share this with.*

*October 16*

*Equipment list: two lcd projectors, votive candles, speakers, build a shelf, lap tops, portable dvd players, extension cords . . . what if it rains?*

*The short postcards are coming together. They are very beautiful seen together as shorts.*

*It is also getting easier to be with each other, there is the sense of a greater of cohesiveness and cordiality within the community.*

*The feeling in the room is love, seeing the postcards together was for the participants very moving.*

*October 30*

*The Digital Shrine is projected into the dark night on the walls of Mountain View Cemetery's Hall of Celebration. Lit by candles on the night of the event, we watch shadows of unknown strangers walk into the projections, and we are challenged into accepting even the images of our beloved, no matter how intense our grief and longing, are like everything we know. Ephemeral and ever changing.*



*Composed of shadow and light, and sounds echoing into the dark silence of the cemetery's night.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Seen YouTube: silverharbourstories Digital shrine.

## Section III: Under Her Gaze

### CHAPTER SEVEN: GALILEO'S TELESCOPE

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#### An Introduction

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In this last panel/ section of the triptych, I explore through narrative, the “condition of remoteness.” This predominating condition of the modern mind, according to Arendt (1958), was born from three significant historical events that marked the beginning of the modern age. These events were the Reformation, the discovery of America, and Galileo’s invention of the telescope.<sup>1</sup> Arendt saw the condition of remoteness of the modern mind loosening our attentiveness to place and to the particular presence of others close at hand. It stripped us of the notion of our embedded worldliness. Of the three historical events that brought about this condition, Arendt saw the invention of Galileo’s telescope as unparalleled in its influence on the modern mind.

What lay at the core of Galileo’s discovery, according to Arendt (1958), was the idea that the truth of our reality could be measured through an instrument. With the advent of their use, Arendt determined we could no longer trust what we saw with our own eyes. Kimberley Curtis (1999), writing about Arendt’s notion of the intermediacy of instruments of measurement, saw these instruments as challenging the adequacy of our senses, as “a wholesale loss of truth of this world through felt relations to it” (p. 78). The effects of this measuring left us in a world which qualities could only be known in the

way in which they affected concepts and abstract thought. As the modern age evolved, instruments of measurement became the intermediary between the world of appearances and the self (Arendt, 1958). A quantitative universe was born.

It was a universe that fuelled a “restless need for certainty” (Curtis, 1999, p. 78): Through the invention of Galileo’s telescope, an instrument of measurement thus became the intermediary between ourselves and the world of appearances. <sup>ii</sup>

My narrative inquiry in this section is as an inquiry explores the conditions of remoteness in relationship to my mother. <sup>iii</sup> The story is titled *Galileo’s Telescope*.

The storying of *Galileo’s Telescope* becomes the way I begin to understand the condition between my mother and myself at the end of her life. Through this inquiry, another kind of intimacy with my dying mother begins. Her pain and anxiety, while terrible to watch, demanded I seek a felt relationship to the revelatory presence of the world and an intimacy with it in order to care for her while she died at home. *Field notes on the Curve of Time* conclude Section III *Under Her Gaze* and are intended to accompany the story *Galileo’s Telescope*.

The writing of these field notes seeks to evoke another view of the “unhomely thing that banishes us once and for all from everything in which we are at home” (Heidegger, as cited in Dunne, 1973, p. 39), seeking out yet again that which exists between the visible and the invisible, our barely registered felt sense of the world.

During this time, I encountered the writing of Helene Cixous (1975, 1991). Her articulation of writing and the worldliness of a female body as an expression of an

experience created a new path of understanding for me. Her writing challenges the condition of remoteness explored in *Galileo's Telescope*. I sought to understand the felt relations between my mother and myself through writing in order to create new structures of knowledge, attempting to orient my self once again within the unfamiliar (Greene, 1997).

Cixous (1991) wrote of our experience of our worldliness, our bodies, our writing, as expressions: “ as a forlorn, far-off song, this music from a native land not found on any map . . . where we have never been except one time the first time and the last” (p. 162). The last inquiry represented in *Fieldnotes—On the Curve of Time*, is an inquiry into this undiscovered place.

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## Endnotes for Galileo's Telescope - An Introduction

<sup>i</sup> Modernity, according to Arendt (1958), commenced with three profound sources of alienation: the Reformation, the (so-called) discovery of America, and Galileo's invention of the telescope. Each event represents a different form of retreat from the worldly dimension of our lived experiences. Each event brought on the condition of world alienation because we lost our attention to place or the presence of otherness. The Reformation demanded a personal and inner relationship with God, creating a culture of introspection. The discovery of America involved the affairs of men in an entanglement with something distant and far away from nearness of place (Arendt, 1958).

<sup>ii</sup> Using Arendt's (1958) definition of "world alienation" and a worldview that began with the invention of Galileo's telescope and its challenge to the adequacy of our senses has "left us a universe of whose qualities we know no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments"(1958, p. 261). Instead of seeking connections between the appearances of the world and one's self, we only encounter one's self.

<sup>iii</sup> The relationship to our mothers carries with it, according to the ecopsychologist and philosopher James Hillman (1999), one of the heaviest burdens. Hillman (as cited in Fisher, 2002) saw the world as in our predominating condition of remoteness to it, as no longer able to offer us relations of significance or intimacy. It is a de-personified world. This condition puts enormous stress on our human relations because only they are seen to have the capacity to offer intimacy. Our mothers, "overcharged with archetypal significance," are made to "supplant the dead de-personified world and be the seasons of the earth, the moon, and the cows, the trees, and the leaves on the trees" (Hillman, as cited by Fisher, 2002, p. 10).

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## The Story of Galileo's Telescope

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*But I am not a scientist and I do not have to believe that what appears hidden or unknown is merely that which has not yet been thoroughly examined. (Urquhart, 2010, p. 17)*

My mother had an eye that saw much and measured everything.

And she was a great believer in education. She admits later that she wishes she had taken a Business Degree instead of studying Social Science at university the year after World War II ended.

My mother was the first woman in her family to attend university, an achievement I was taught to be proud of. However, it was her modern education, I believe, that failed her in the end.

When she recalled her university days, there was always one story she told about how intimidated she had been, how she had found herself in 1946 in a lecture hall "filled to the rafters" with recently discharged soldiers from the war. She found herself surrounded. I used to think of them, still in uniform, with five o'clock shadows, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes, hardened fighters, crammed into desks made for children.

What I remember most about this story was the way she told it. I always believed she had enjoyed these ex-soldiers' attention, that it

was a thrilling, scandalous time. She often told the story while regarding herself in her bedroom mirror. Sucking in her stomach, standing up straight, exclaiming, "Look how fat I've become!" In the days of our childhood, my mother was anything but fat.

My younger sister and I would stand open-mouthed and in awe of the strangeness, the wilderness of her woman's body.

She always finished this story by declaring that during the time of her university education she only weighed a 118 pounds. As if daring us.

When I think of this story, I see her as she must have appeared in those days. Looking like she looked in a studio photograph that sat on her bedroom bureau, a photograph taken in a time when the elements of light were used to their best advantage. She looks out past us, clear eyed, with luminescent skin, seeking the great distance of her life before her, smiling ever so slightly at the future. When she told the story of the soldiers and the classroom I always imagined her there, looking like this. Her hand confidently raised in the air ready to answer any question put to her, knowing it was going to be good.

Believing those university years to be heady days full of excitement and fun, the disappointments and frustrations were to come later, after graduation, when she married my father, who, while working hard to provide for his wife and four children, was never quite able to give up his adventurous ambitions. A runaway merchant marine during the war, he would never settle down until Parkinson's made

him. Spending most of his time away from the house, building boats, driving trucks, and attending urgent political gatherings, he eventually finally got his way and moved all of us away from the little house in a new suburb in the south up into the wilderness of the north.

“Settle down!” became my mother’s grievous mantra when we were young, swatting at us when we got out of hand. There wasn’t a time when I wasn’t trying get out of her reach. Even so, my sister and I loved to pretend to be her bridesmaids and listen to her talk. Her talk. It filled the days and all the rooms of our lives.

All of it measured against a private thrift, her personal bedrock. People measured against the values of this, her, domestic world. She appeared never to have any need to attend to any other worldly or spiritual call. Always busy making our lives good, a world she saw herself creating. It was a world of clean linen, smelling like the wind, fresh garden vegetables, cans of peaches row on row as a collection of golden orbs glowing on her kitchen counter. Eating well though poor, and given small treats that seemed like grand ones. We wore clothes made by hand or repaired from the thrift store. The modest materiality of her household created stability and predictability. Her modern ambitions, the ones she must have learned or adopted at university, those ambitions that came with with higher educations, she saved for us.



All this was before we moved up north when another life began. This one had us moving from one town to another, each town's employment dedicated to a larger version of an environmental disaster. All of them dedicated to the advancement of progress. <sup>i</sup>

Our domestic world was no exception to this kind of growth. The apartment became a small house, in a new suburb; the small house was made bigger. Curtains and clothes were hand sewn first, later purchased. In retrospect, it was a miraculous endeavour. The ordering and making of it required a personal commitment of hard work and much energy on the part of my mother. As a child I never thought it could be otherwise, as an adolescent I wondered about how her higher education had played out in this life. In the onset of her midlife and the beginning of my adolescence I think she began to feel that our world, the one we shared, might be propelled by other less obvious energies, ordered on something else, something that had no name but felt dangerous.

Perhaps it was all the moves, or my father's restlessness. Perhaps it was the serial deconstructions and constructions of her domesticity, but I grew up seeing my mother as someone who garnered no fondness for surprises and was suspicious of strangeness in whatever form it appeared. I did not think, during this time, the time of her modernity, that she troubled herself too much by contemplating a relationship with the mysterious or the unknown.

As time went by, she chose the days of our childhoods in her first home in the first suburb as the time of memory. The sense of accomplishment she felt from raising four children was, in her opinion, worthy of a life's achievement, her worldly ambitions she saved for us.

When I was a teenager, my mother and father took their first trip abroad. Leaving my sisters in the care of her sister, she had arranged for me to work as a chambermaid in a lodge in the wilderness of British Columbia. This place was strange and lonely and my ensuing pregnancy was just the first of a series of surprises we had in store for each other. Her degree of outrage and her fury upon learning of this pregnancy was a huge surprise to me in this surprising time.

"How could you do this to us?" was a question I had not thought about. Being a teenager, I was concerned with my own desperate need for something that had no name, with the attempt to quell the overwhelming homesickness. She claimed no one would want me now, measuring my worth by the age-old determination of virtue. I already knew this was not so. This knowledge fuelled her fury. While it frightened me, it left me cold. My mother's anger was something I was determined to diminish along with her evaluations.

While outwardly scoffing at her, I couldn't quite escape an enormous sense of betrayal. I had up until this time unconsciously imagined that there was something else, something she was hiding,

preserving from the rest of the world, reserving for the 'in between of us' when the day came. What exactly this was I cannot say, only that it lay outside all the knowing she had claim to about how things measured up. But there was no language for this feeling.

It would be years before I had the opportunity to read Luce Irigaray and her words of evocation, that would attempt to express these feelings. "Words will pass through our bodies, above our head . . . but what about us? Come out of their language. Try to pay attention to yourself. To me" (Irigaray, 1997, p.184).

At the time, I fiercely defended myself and my actions to my parents.

I claimed love. Imperfect teenage love was the reason. When asked "who" did this, the only answer I would give them was silence. "Silence had made this happen." I thought of naming her first grandson Mystery but didn't. By then, I had left her house and was living on my own.

Years later, when attending university as a single mother in the 1970s, my mother tried to claim my efforts as a result of her upbringing and the triumph of her own education. We had on the surface reconciled. And she sought my admiration in the retelling of her story about how intimidating it had been for her in the lecture hall full of soldiers. The admiration she was seeking, I am ashamed to say, was something I could never quite give her.

Then my mother began to suffer strange symptoms, a crippling leg, bouts of crying, an inability to order her world. It was only then, while attempting to find out what was the cause of my mother's strange symptoms in the last years of her life, that I grasped something of what she might have been trying to tell me about her university days. Compared to all the other misunderstandings between us, it had always been a small matter.

She had put a great deal of hope on the diagnosis of a specialist and expected that once a diagnosis was obtained there would be help. She had anxiously waited many months to hear the results.

When the long awaited interview finally arrived, the attending doctor chose me as his audience. Despite my considerable attempts to direct his gaze towards my mother, he barely looked at her. His findings were inconclusive. In a condescending manner, he reminded her that she was, after all, *old*. I could see it – in his eyes, she was an old woman. What my mother was suffering from and would eventually die of would remain a mystery.

As he delivered his diagnosis, I watched my mother become, in the face of his authority, an unrecognizable figure, suddenly compliant and deferential, almost girl-like. She accepted his diagnosis with what appeared to be a coquettish acquiescence. I wanted the other mother back then. My feisty, opinionated, and cantankerous mother. Not this one.

In that awful moment, a memory of my young mother standing before her bedroom mirror arose and with it, the realization she had been not much older than myself when I gave birth to my first child. How strange it must have been for her to try to find herself, seeking knowledge, even wisdom perhaps, in a lecture hall filled with soldiers just back from a war. And how terribly disappointing it must have been to have to learn how to measure one's self, all of her 118 pounds, while learning the meaning of intimidation, to be made sensitive to the presence of a fear inspiring force. Using it, this feeling, to measure something with no name. All of it, such a small thing in the making and the getting of a modern education.

And, predictably perhaps, the thought of how much we had left between us. How much remaining unknown and immeasurable, how much we had learned through intimidation to fear.

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## Endnote for Story of Galileo's Telescope

<sup>i</sup> According to Habermas (as cited in Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009) modernity had as its aim the laudable goal of emancipation and production of plenty for all. The dark side of modernity was not constituted by the mere study of the objective features of human beings, but by the reduction of human beings to those features. Rationality itself became captured by objectifying monological positivistic modes of reasoning, thereby excluding dialogical and intersubjective modes. The hyperrational ego alienated itself from others, from its own emotions, and from the natural environment, ending up in a dangerous kind of dissociation that lent itself to attempts to “control” nature on such a gigantic scale that they appear from hindsight to be almost literally mad (Habermas, as cited in Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 546).

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## Fieldnotes: On the Curve of Time

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“The metaphoric language of the dying is the language of the boatman...the language of transition...holding us up until the crossing is strong enough to get us to the other side.

(Joseph, 2010, p. 9)

Fieldnotes: Standing to the side of the Curve of Time.

Progress Report:

A woman child, a coalescing of shadow lace

all her ages layered one on top of the other

Thinning with age, bits and pieces and trails of thread left behind.

My new old mother.

Reclining magic

confined to a bed in a room with a window full of birds.

She knows them.

Living like a bird herself.

In her own broken cage.

Her ribs a series of hairline fractures. One day soon

these glacial movements will be free. This kind of suffering over.

Still

she retains an undiminished enthusiasm  
in her seeking  
sightings of the winter birds pecking at feeders just outside the  
bedroom window.  
Decimating the entire offering in hours.  
Raucous Jays, streaks of Chickadee, the rare winter Robin.  
Her eyes expressing surprise again and again.  
The look in them  
beyond the reach of  
the monological gaze  
born of Galileo's telescope.

March 7, 2011

Agitated and confused. She speaks only one word over and over.  
Right . . . right . . . right . . . she who could talk and talk. Yet she  
knows when I'm here, she smiles.

I'm stricken.

Humbled by her effort.

Thinking to ease her agitation, I decide to read to her.

Of another mother's journey.

The Curve of Time,

a memoir about journeys taken aboard the little boat named

the Caprice by Wylie Blanchet.



Alone with five small children, Blanchet explores the same waters  
that lie just outside my mother's home between the mainland of  
British Columbia and the east coast of Vancouver Island.

Reading to her

I imagine my mother seeing herself aboard.

Seeking the other shore in the immensity of sea  
carried along in the small realm of the little boat  
made cosy through the care of her four small children.

She is cruising the waters and inlets that lie just beyond  
making way at sunset on a high tide,  
the sun glowing red and gold up the strait to Miracle Bay.

Making way in the warm oily sea green August waters of Baines  
Sound and beyond.

Making way through the flicker and shimmering  
waves of sunlight

Up the bay

ripples of light dancing the undersides of Cedar and Douglas Fir  
along this clean and perfect August shore.

But her frown tells me

She is seeing something else and does not understand.

This is when I most feel our educations failing us.

Offering us no path to walk into the unknown  
and no way to prepare ourselves  
or help another on the way.

To help us in the educative project,  
of moving from an enclosed space to a more open one.<sup>1</sup>

Having been taught no language to help us do this.

Looking out of her bedroom  
at her sea  
all moody cold skies, wet slick boulders, grey underwater  
sandstone.  
dead sea grasses blow against drifts of skeletal wood.  
Shadowy realms at dusk.

In the gloaming  
when her state becomes most agitated and afraid.

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<sup>1</sup> Pinar, 1999.

This is all I know

of a Mother's religion.

Reading to her out loud from *The Curve of Time*.

"Standing in the present, on the highest point of the curve, a place you can look back and see the past, or forward and the future, all in the same moment."<sup>2</sup>

Sitting beside my mother in her pretty bedroom

This place

doesn't appear domesticated

or ordinary

in any way.

Everything is changing.

Although none of the furniture has been moved.

Fieldnote - In Between

She lies in bed as still as an alabaster figure, like the kind you find in Egypt.

The skin on her hands more translucent with every visit back into this room.

Her aging appears to have nothing in common with ordinary time.

---

<sup>2</sup> (Blanchet, 1968, p. 1).

Caught up in some kind of magical fast forward,  
all the while rarely if ever moving.

Her few speaking words stand in place for other words and  
thoughts.

We make sense together intuitively.

Our language cobbled together

Stand ins

for words forgotten or not yet discovered

for the in between

of mothers and their children.

This in between

A place of promising possibilities.

I hold her still strong hand.

And she holds mine.

It is a firm grasp.

Such a surprise

To feel the weight of it.

In someone so frail, so fragile.

This utterly precious phenomenally heavy hand.

Weighing in on a scale that measures gravities outside the norm.

Another magical illusion.

Fieldnote – In between, the gap  
I think of the great chasm I created  
between some ideal and her.  
Made up from the ridiculous longing  
To breach the gap between us.

Noticing only now  
The drifting apart is tied to the tide  
that lies outside her little house.  
She returns again for us  
and to see  
Chickadee, Jay, and Finch outside her window.  
A continuous and solicitous offering  
Of coming back  
Her eyes wide open.  
Look, she seems to say, look  
At how good the world is to us.

Fieldnote – The Discovery.  
On the wall in her room, is the Egyptian papyrus I brought back  
from Egypt  
Encased in a bronze frame that glows at certain times of day when  
the light from the sea outside the window hits it.

With great effort she raises her arm and points her finger

Signalling

This

She is trying to say something. She is trying to tell me something  
recognizes something.

It is a picture of an Egyptian Goddess Nut

hovering across the sky

folding herself over the affairs of humans, birds, animals, symbols,  
words

sheltering them with her body and her gaze.

All the things of this world.

The childish star filled sky rests on her back and she gives birth to  
the moon and sun

New stars fall from her nipples

But it is upon the creatures and the creations of the world where  
she rests her gaze.

I learn later this hieroglyphic was used to decorate the inner coffins  
of the dead.

At the time it was the only gift a daughter could give a mother  
returning from the Nile. From a trip she had given to me

A place she longed to go but in the end her health wouldn't allow  
for it.

When she offered it to me

I was resistant.  
Not liking the idea of a touring holiday.  
But decided, in the end, to wear my mother's shoes  
And go in her stead.

Fieldnote: Time - Memory

From The Curve of Time I read out loud.  
"If you stand off to one side of this curve,  
Your eye wanders from one to the other without distinction.  
Time is just a dimension of space."<sup>3</sup>

I remember Cairo.  
And the smell of the rich loamy waters of the Nile  
Pervading even the city's fiercest chaos.

At the museum, our guide points out the oldest statue in the  
building.

Known as the writer.

As the One who looks outward.

Only the eyes of this 4,000 year-old statue have deteriorated.

Only the eyes faced the sun.

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<sup>3</sup> (Blanchet, 1961, p.1).

My mother appears to listen and gazes at the picture of Nut on her wall.

I remember during the time of the trip  
one sensed eyes everywhere.

At the airport police lazily hold mirrors under buses  
Looking for bombs.

Elegant and dangerous looking men sit in hotel lobbies  
and board our tour bus  
carrying revolvers glimpsed under silk jackets.

At the time I thought they were preoccupied with our safety and us.

As we traveled like modern Pharaohs in five star hotels.

Stopping to see  
the Pyramids, the Sphinx, and Temples of unimaginable  
architecture  
an unimaginable size.

Somehow no longer living, made dead by too much of a certain  
kind of looking.

Measuring, informing,

Painstakingly examined

these monuments of archaeological evidence



of a time before Galileo's telescope

When from the appearing night skies

Revelations and information was offered, perhaps as some kind of  
guide

Into our journey of this world and beyond.

Fieldnote: Language

"Galileo's telescope looked away from the earth and saw things we  
could not see with our eyes." But here, right here my mother is  
looking at me. Her gaze frightening.

As if I've been caught out in some guilty act,

As if I was the one responsible for

The condition of remoteness

in the in between

of losing a language of love.

For the place where we are body bound.

Fieldnote: Come out of their Language.

You may ask what is this doing in a thesis?

It's a question my mother would ask.

Because I came here and because I read Cixous and Irigaray.

“words will pass through our bodies, above our head . . . . But what about us? Come out of their language. Try to pay attention to yourself. To me” (Irigaray,1997, p. 184).

Fieldnote: The practice of a story mentor.

I imagine I’m going to tell her a story.

Of the night at the end of March in Egypt while traveling up the Nile

when the unendurable heat

of the yellow sky of day

finally gives way to the humid night.

in a moldy cabin

aboard one

of the hundreds

of gaudy vessels

that cruise the Nile

I fall asleep and dream.

It is so hot even the mosquitoes who plague the few visitors on deck aboard the mostly empty ship seem to fatigue.

Your daughter falls asleep. She falls asleep alone in a cabin alone with a window over looking the river.

She falls asleep with her curtains wide open hoping to catch a glimpse of the full moon when it appears above the waters of the Nile.

Waiting for the moon light like so many before her.

The boat drifts down the river.

Past gothic factories lying hidden at night

fooling all the bikinied tourists, who like your daughter are asleep in their beds.

Spewing smog into the air

and making the waters of the river cloudy and dull.

In the gloom along the shore a mother washes her child. It is the only place to go.

Not far down the river another temple, empty of tourists in this dark night.

Where Hieroglyphics form its inner and outer walls declaring this is the place

Where the God Anubis weighed the hearts of the departed against the lightness of a feather. His worth measured in his relations to the appearing world.

Where even the Pharaoh is judged.

His greatest sin

to pollute the Nile.

Instead of the moon  
creeping shadows appear at your daughter's window.  
The crew of this mouldy gaudy ship gather to watch her asleep.  
and whisper.  
Something wakes her.  
Shame and terror?  
Reaching to close the curtains, heart pounding she knows she is  
alone.  
Recollects her mother suddenly glad she is not here in this room  
being gazed at by the crew huddled on the other side of the glass.  
  
She leaps up and shuts the curtains.  
Shutting out the dark night, and the possibilities of seeing  
Terrified at the thought of them still there on the other side.  
  
She hated Egypt then.  
And thought nothing could ever, would ever, change.  
Between the eyes of men and the bodies of women.  
Made even more complicated by foreigner's bodies.  
Who come searching for another time.  
  
And then falling asleep again  
She dreams.  
Of a teacher who tells her

To look

She sees the river and the moon just as it always is

A reflection on the water.

Reading to my mother from *The Curve of Time*.

“In dreams, the mind wanders in and out of the Present, through the Past and the Future, unable to distinguish between what has not yet happened and what has already befallen.”<sup>5</sup>

Fieldnote: Place

A postcard from Egypt dated: March, 2004

Dear Mom,

On the plane from Frankfurt to Egypt, I meet Farida. She is young woman returning home to Cairo. We exchange stories about our lives. Thinking as a way to reach out, to connect with her, I tell her about Lysa. How her family was exiled from Africa. How she lives with my son. About her dreams to become a musical composer in the theatre.

Shyly, Farida asks if she would be taking the veil?

I imagine Lysa in the apartment she shares with my son. The rooms crowded with her marimba, music stands, and drums from Africa.

Will you? I ask.

Yes, when it is not a burden, she replies.

---

<sup>5</sup> Blanchet, 1968, p. 1.

Field note: The Curve of Time.

She is more interested in the birds at her window than any reading from another story.

I am watching the television brought into the room. There was a time when she loved the news, talked endlessly about what was happening and to whom.

Now on the televisions, there are images of Cairo and Tahrir Square.

And something is being born.

Something I never imagined possible while I was there just a few years ago.

I am reminded of Arendt once again, it is our freedom to begin to begin anew, that inspires and 'animates' all our human activities. It is our natality, which makes us free.

Remember Farida? The young girl on the plane I met six years ago?

The one I wrote to you about from Egypt?

My mother looks for her in the birds at her window.

Is she there?

In Tahrir Square?

Field note – At Last

"You've got a lot of nerve," my mother, unexpectedly says.

" Words will pass through our bodies, above our head.....But what about us? Come out of their language. Try to pay attention to yourself. To me" (Irigaray, 1977, p. 184).

I reach up and bring down the picture of Nut, to show her once again, it is She who watches over the affairs of men.

And this body,

And this house,

In this hand

so transparent now the blue of your veins are as blue as the river on the map of Egypt.

And over those who struggle to be born into freedom again and again in Tahrir Square.

The world is suddenly illuminated and revealed by a brilliance of light from a sun breaking on the outside shore. It is sudden and unexpected.

Reflecting off the framed picture of Nut on the bedroom wall and on to your bed.

It is this that lies between

Galileo's eye and his telescope.

Between the open window and the eyes of the boatmen of the Nile.

We are

So full of potential in our richness of appearing before one another  
We can barely register this,  
This revelatory power of our presence to one another.  
Hardly understand its relevance.

Realizing finally it was my mother who sent me to Egypt  
So I could bring this picture back to her.  
One small gesture on the way  
To realizing  
One small thing.  
Until we are strong enough to get to the other side.



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## Postscript

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### Poem Read at My Mother's Memorial

*"It is not enough to have memories, you must be able to forget them when they are many, and you must have the immense patience to wait for them to return"* (Rilke as cited in Joseph, 2010).

My mother is now memory carried along inside us.

No longer confined to a bed in a room with a window full of birds.

She is spring.

Plum blossoms waving and pointing beyond the well kept yard  
to the wildness of shore and the sound beyond.

A world in her mouth, 'oh look . . . oh see."

She is flannel pajamas lifted

from a clothes line

still smelling of the sun

A white bowl of cream corn

A room of gold light

A glass of white wine

made from

the green and leafy days of her arbour.

A book

*The Curve of Time*

Rain mixed with the smell of cinnamon

Heat from a wood stove

Curtains that close in the night

Her way of holding us

Long enough

To reach the other side.

# Conclusion

## THE CAVE

For a while, I lived on a small gulf island at the north end of the road. In the summer the odd tourist would endure this dusty gravel road that promised much and delivered little, ending up at the dead end in the middle of a bunch of trees, disappointed. Their hope of finding a rumoured stretch of a sandy gulf island beach dies at the sight of a gated driveway at the road's end. On the gate, a "No Trespassing" sign is prominently displayed. It was a long way to come to find nowhere. My little house and ragged property was located just past this driveway.

Those who knew the north end knew of a trail through this gated property. It led to a lonely beach full of prehistoric boulders and slick oyster beds. Whenever walking this trail, I always experienced a prickly apprehension, which I attributed to my trespassing, of my not knowing what to expect. Yet for all the times I walked this trail I never met anyone on it or the beach.

One fall, I made a practice of seeing how long I could keep swimming in the cooling fall water. It was a test of sorts. Enduring the water through September and into October. It was a year of particularly beautiful fall weather, mostly bright and sunny.

On one particular day, I arrived through the little trail ready to steel myself for the now frigid water. It was the middle of October, Thanksgiving weekend. I remember thinking how this day was beyond all the days that preceded it, the most exquisite of all. It was the day the autumn had reached its zenith.

The water was green bottle still, the maples along the shore a brilliant riot of yellow, a dry nutty crunch of Arbutus leaves beneath the feet. The sky a vivid blue, the sun dazzling us with offering the sweetest of light. An ardent leave-taking that always seems to arrive just before the fall. Entering the water on this day was unlike any other. An electric energy coursed through my body. I felt on the threshold of being dangerously alive. Swimming naked into waters long past summer comfort. Another kind of trespass.

It was a feeling I would come to associate with other events in my future life. When I stood in front of the logging trucks on the road to Clayoquot, when I washed a dead father's body, when we spoke of death and dying at a Seniors Centre.

Coming out of this water, I walked towards a shore crowded with the jumble of strangely round prehistoric rocks and boulders. Directly in front of me, one large boulder made itself known, became distinct. There was an opening in it, made by thousands of years of water seeking a path through its fractures. It was a path into a solid face of rock. An opening shaped like a birth canal.

Coming ashore and curious, I wedged my way through this opening, and found myself standing in a dim chamber lit from above.

In this murky chamber, the brilliant world just beyond this opening had almost disappeared. It was a damp silent place. A smell of musk. Shivering, and anxious, I was afraid of being discovered by something wild and fierce.

Turning, more than ready to leave, I caught sight of it for the first time.

A Human Face. Etched into the rock.

Looking past me, eyes wide open, mouth shaped in surprise. Looking through the opening into the brilliant promise of a birth into the world beyond. It was a petroglyph of

a face of a child. A sign from the past telling the story of being born. Hidden away. In a place seen through a gap as thin as a whisper.

This face looked out into a brilliant world beyond.

“Look.” This human face called. “See.”

See the miracle of the appearing world.

~

Over the course of my last year of living at the north end, I would come to look for this rock and this face again and again. There were times when I could easily find it and there were times when no matter how hard I looked I could not. It was a fluid and mysterious place. A place that had yet to be known, evaluated, and measured. Not yet gazed at through the eyes born of Galileo’s telescope. It was a place still making itself known in other ways.

And then I forgot about this place and my experience of it. It lay hidden in the landscape of my mind not returning until now in order to serve this narrative inquiry.

## THE NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING

The insight garnered from this memory discloses itself in hindsight; in a narrative understanding that reaffirms our relationship to the appearing world and in the capacity born from our human condition described by Arendt as that of natality. Natality as in our unique human capacity to call something “into being which did not exist before” (Arendt,

1945, p. 151). Emerging from our own beginning or birth in the world and completing itself as a narrative understanding of our response to this world we are born into.

Narrative understandings come about through attempting to orient ourselves through the practice of inquiring into the stories of our *already* lived experiences, through the practice of creating stories about what we don't know, about what is unfamiliar, or hidden, what we can barely see in the gap between ourselves and the appearing world. Through the inquiry we create new structures of knowledge and new meanings.

My practice of being a story mentor has been changed by this inquiry. My understanding deepened by a narrative understanding as it unfolded in this inquiry.

I arrived at this narrative understanding through seeking in the past a present truth that makes itself available to us through our practice, and informing our present life (Freeman, 2003). It is a kind of truth that requires the vantage of hindsight, needs time to move away from the constraints of the present, needs a story to be created in order to see what is attempting to disclose itself.

This inquiry was initiated by a sense of unease and a thematic preoccupation with the largely obscured shared condition of worldly alienation as theorized by Arendt (1958). It concludes with a recovery of an experience of a shared worldliness through narrative. It speaks to our experience of seeking a narrative understanding of the revelatory presence of the world as an avenue of understanding. It asserts we must allow for the possibility that nothing can be known except what is created through temporary structures in an *evolving* narrative.

Stories of uncertainty and death permeate this dissertation. They move the inquiry in an evolving narrative like the river, moving but never the same.

An inquiry began with unease and with an inability to create an authentic voice to write about my work at Silver Harbour. I was plagued by a voice that was characterized by a sense of predetermination. The narrative voice I was using in writing about my research project was a narrative that viewed the past and the future as the same. It was a predetermined narrative. My practice however, could not be accommodated by this predetermination. “I missed the dark,” the dark of not knowing, of the potentiality of change. All the while I was practicing mentoring stories at Silver Harbour, which were preoccupied with the domestic and the known. One uncertainty reveals itself as a simple statement “I missed the dark.” A decision is made. Inspired by the writing of Cixous (1975, 1991), of using writing as a path into “knowing how not to know” the original intention of describing a practice and research project is abandoned. Evaluating and measuring what is known is given up in favour of the unknown and a search for the felt relations between the self and the world. I relied on the practice of being mentored by a story from my lived experience in the world, to guide, to aid, to shed light, to reveal a narrative understanding at work. In Cixous’s language, I make my “way along the dark” (1991, p. 161). Accompanied by one initial reference point, Arendt’s theorizing on the state of the human condition of worldly alienation. And questions. What does it mean to be worldly alienated? How do we see this condition of remoteness? How do we pay attention to the world, to our worldliness through the practice of narrative inquiry? We can see this condition of remoteness through the mentorship of the story. Through writing a record of its effects. Through challenging this condition imaginatively. Through seeking out times when uncertainty instigates an experience of collapse.

In order to see, we are entitled to see our existence as an evolving narrative. Each gesture, in Maxine Greene's (1997) words, creating new structures of knowledge as the learner attempts to orient herself in the unfamiliar.

The narrative understanding from this inquiry forwards the idea that our shared "condition of remoteness" born from our worldly alienation shapes our view and experience of death. It forwards the idea that in order to see something other, a presence we can barely see, barely register, we must develop practices that allow us to pay attention in imaginative ways, in order to further our inquiry.

And why is this important? What makes the form of this inquiry significant?

I argue, as have many others (Borgues, 2006) that in order to engage in profound critical and radical acts in the world with others, political acts, social acts, we have to restore and reinvigorate the eye of the imagination and with it an ability to question and form narrative understandings that look past the language of measuring. Our imaginations allow us to begin to think about other possibilities. Developing our capacity to pay attention to how narrative understandings reveal our relationship to our shared worldliness allows for the possibility to think through other practices that are not quantitative and lie outside the predominating conceptual frames. It challenges our shared human condition of remoteness, born from our preoccupations of measuring the distance between things, between ourselves and the world.

It affirms the need to develop our creative practices that confirms our worldliness, our shared being in the world. This confirmation is achieved *through* practice. Our narrative understandings are completed by the degree of our responsiveness to what we discover.



The narrative understanding born from this practice needs metaphors drawn from the world in order to make sense and give it form. It needs the rain, and the river, the windy water, a red carnation, the ferry man, the child, the colour of the dawn, a cat, a door, a cup of coffee, strangers, salmon bones, ice flows, a baby, boats, and telescopes, a human face sketched on rock.

When we see the revelatory potential of the world and seek ways to make it available to us, we see its gift, its eloquence, and we pay attention. When we can pay attention, we learn.

William Pinar (2009) asked a question that speaks directly to the concerns of this dissertation. *“Does the human become human in the act of letting the world speak through her or him?”* (p. 46).

Allowing the world to speak through us fosters a willingness to conserve and protect it. One way for the world to speak through us is by practicing narrative inquiry. Seeking narrative understandings through experiences that feel edgy, and unknown. Places that make us uncomfortable, undomesticated places. We are, through this process, challenging the condition of remoteness. We shake up the delusion of the self. Shake up thinking that we are alone with ourselves instead of being constantly accompanied by a world that has the capacity to show a revelatory presence. When we observe, we change. We let the world speak through us and in the doing become human.

We see the face carved in the rock with her eyes wide open.

A message from the revelatory appearing world to us.

A postcard *from* the Beloved.

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