DEATH AS TRUE BRIDGE

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, storytelling was used as a bridge to dialogue with young children around death. A children's story with a death theme was read by either the author or her colleague to four small groups of children ages three to six. These story sessions were part of the children's weekly routine, and relationships between the children and their respective storytellers were previously established and on-going. The spontaneous reactions, questions, comments, and stories that the children interjected during the stories are woven throughout the text.

Interviews with this co-storyteller/colleague and another preschool teacher at the same school were conducted to ascertain whether or not they had discussed death in their early childhood classrooms and if so how, their ideas and beliefs about children's perceptions of death, their own experiences with death, and whether or not they thought these personal experiences influence their curricular decisions.

These story sessions and interviews provided a framework within which the author could reflect upon and share her own experiences and struggles with death, and her grief over the recent death of her mother. Journal entries, dreams, and stories past and present are interspersed throughout the text in an attempt to document the ways in which participating in and then writing about these experiences have impacted her as a storyteller, researcher, teacher, and daughter. These many voices are woven within three themes, or chapters: other in self, gain in loss, and life in death. Death is used as the medium with which to bridge each of these binary opposites.

This thesis explores ways of doing as well as ways of being with children and death in the classroom, with the hope that educators and parents might choose to broach this subject with the children in their
lives. This thesis concludes with the author's realization that death has taught her to reach; reach out to children, teachers, graduate students, the bereaved, and others who choose to listen to the stories she weaves.
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For My Mother

Sandra Ann Bruch Rosenberg
1934—1994

As each of my committee members guided and supported me throughout this arduous journey, while simultaneously acknowledging their own growth as a result of it, they were constant reminders of what teaching truly is. I therefore sincerely thank Dr. Hillel Goelman, Dr. Betty Davies, Dr. Carl Leggo, and Dr. Marilyn Chapman. I would also like to thank Dr. Ted Aoki who cleared a space for me, and then silently urged me to fill it with my reflections and experiences of illness and death.

I would like to thank my father, my sister Ellen, my sister Paula, and her husband Gary for their encouragement and patience throughout the final leg of this extended process. I realize that there are as many versions of this story as there are tellers, but I hope my telling will help each of them to better understand mine, as well as their own.

I truly would not have been able to complete this project without the academic and emotional support of my friends, particularly Louise McLean and Rosa Mastri. A special thank you to Christianne Hayward-Kabani, without whom this project would have been considerably hindered, and to Lauren Hirsch who is hereby absolved of her responsibility, bestowed upon her by my mother, to make sure I got it done. Finally, I wish to thank Daniel Jordan whose constant support and confidence in my ability to finish this project made me make it happen.
DEATH AS TRUE BRIDGE

1 The phrase "true bridge" is based on Ted Aoki’s notion of bridges as dwelling places for people that he describes in his article, "Bridges That Rim the Pacific" (1992). See my Chapter One, p. 39, for a more extensive quotation.
I was playing with Life one day, just the two of us. We were laughing and scheming, planning far off adventures. But then Death wanted to join in. I didn't like Death, so I always avoided it and made up an excuse whenever it asked me to play. One day it wouldn't give up. It yelled and screamed and stamped its feet. So Life and I gave in. That was a sad day, one I will never forget. But now that I look back on it, I guess being with Death isn't so bad. Death really knows a lot. It's been all over the world and has touched many different lives. Learning from Death has been hard, but you know what? Life and I get along better now.
INTRODUCTION

Describing what I have done in this thesis is a difficult task. I have traveled words past and present in an attempt to understand my mother’s death. I have spoken with children, teachers, my mother, and myself, to create meaning around death; not the meaning or a meaning, but meaning-fullness. I have read death and written death and spoken death, but I desire to live. Is this possible? Can I experience death and life simultaneously? Can I grieve? This thesis aspires to linger with death in the context of life.

RETRACING TRANSITIONAL STEPS

The illness and subsequent death of my mother forced me to grapple with physical, educational, and emotional transitions. I moved from Seattle to Vancouver, Vancouver to Chicago, Chicago to Seattle, and then back to Vancouver in a two year period. I shifted academically from a quantitative needs-analysis of teachers integrating children with special needs into their classrooms, to this layered exploration of death. The emotional tides and tidal waves resulting from these experiences are too many and complicated to summarize in a sentence, although I have tried to paint these watery landscapes throughout this thesis. My decision to write about death seemed like an obvious choice. Yet in this introduction I would like to retrace the more elusive daily life experiences that led to and resulted from this decision.

I first discussed the notion of addressing death in the classroom during a graduate course on curriculum in the spring of 1994. Then I was adamantly opposed to "teaching death" and voiced my opinions to the
class. The professor and some of my colleagues argued with me, but I stood firm: there was no space for such subjective topics in the classroom.

At that time in my life my mother had been diagnosed with colon cancer. Illness surrounded me; death was waiting patiently to enter my thoughts, my life. How I loathed it.

During another graduate course that summer, the subject of death in the classroom was addressed again. I was willing to listen, but not to speak. After hearing a moving presentation on the experiences of terminally ill cancer patients, and the proddings of Dr. Ted Aoki who was teaching the course, I began to write and reflect on the subject of illness—my mother's illness. Two months later I would be taking a leave from my graduate studies to spend my mother's last months with her.

My mother died on 4 December, 1994. After I returned to Vancouver and my graduate studies, I was no longer interested in the study I had proposed before I left. As I was already reading, talking, and thinking about death, it seemed both appropriate and natural to incorporate them into my graduate work. I could not conceive of isolating the two areas of my life that demanded the vast majority of my time and energy: my grief over my mother's death and my thesis. Exploring death through academic eyes has added an intellectual layer of understanding to this very emotional topic for me. This process has enabled me to simultaneously address my questions about death as a teacher, a daughter, and a human being.

Although I thought my decision was a sound and reasonable one, I encountered many people who thought otherwise as I searched for information and interested faculty within the university. Department secretaries, graduate advisors, and professors reacted awkwardly to my requests. I had many conversations with people who tip-toed around the
topic and the word, death. I felt frustrated, but also guilty for forcing people to entertain death in their lives. I have often cursed my mother for forcing death into my life, and cursed myself for choosing to make it stay for the duration of this project.

I've Been Dying to Meet You

I meet on death, talk about death, ask about death on the telephone: distance, abruptness, denial. "No, no one in this department deals with those issues." They can't even say the word. I'm sometimes apologetic about having to bring it up. I make them say it, make them think about it. I step lightly, I am vague, I ease them in. Sometimes I don't feel like dealing with it either. Who needs death anyway? I want to run from it. I want to crunch numbers or count peer interactions; anything but this. I have to fixate on what we call life for a while. I need a break from death. This is hard work—her legacy, her curse.

I realize that death is a difficult topic for most people to talk, and even think, about. But I am beginning to believe that if death was not such a forbidden subject, that if people shared their feelings and thoughts about death, we would be better able to cope with life, which inevitably includes death. William Pinar (1992) recognizes that death and life are inseparable, and advocates for its integration into conversation as well as curriculum, where teachers, parents, and children can begin to reach out to death:

Even in such protected lives [of children] there is death in life and life in death, and these are matters for parents and teachers to mention and explain. My own view is that the concepts and realities of death need to be integrated into everyday conversation, in everyday curriculum, not treated as exotic topics of extreme anxiety. I think it is when death is treated as distant that it becomes terrible and provokes fear. Life leads to death. And while one ought not to tempt death, perhaps one ought to make friends with it. Until we parents and teachers have confronted the fact of our impending deaths, we cannot aspire to impart a sense of the presence of death in life to our children (p. 99).
DEATH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD?

What happens when the subject of death is broached in a preschool setting? Using storytelling and children's literature as a bridge, I dialogued with young children around death. How did I experience these interactions after so recently experiencing the loss of my mother? How would another person, with a different life story, experience dialoguing with children around death?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I conducted a study at the University Child School, a preschool located in an urban area of British Columbia, where I was employed part-time. A children's story with a death theme was read by either a colleague of mine or myself to four groups of children ages three to six. I read the book *The Very Best of Friends* (1989) by Margaret Wild to two groups of children. My colleague, who is an experienced storyteller and a specialist in children's literature, read *Badger's Parting Gifts* (1984) by Susan Varley to one group, and *The Snow Goose* (1945/92) by Paul Gallico to another group. These story sessions were a part of the children's weekly routine, and relationships between these children and their respective storytellers were previously established. I then interviewed this storyteller/colleague and a preschool teacher, asking them to share their thoughts regarding both how to discuss death in preschool classrooms and how they had been affected by their own personal experiences with death.

I used these experiences as a springboard to reflect upon and share my own experiences with death and grief, and to explore the ways in which these death experiences inside and outside the classroom mutually influenced each other. I couldn't share the stories of children and their teachers without sharing *my* story; the story that initially led me on this
journey of life and death. Yet how have I lived with writing death so soon after the death of my mother? The process of writing has been a continuous struggle. However, I began to mold these struggles into text, rather than hide behind them. Incorporating my fears and hesitations into my writing allowed me to physically and emotionally begin, and continue.

After a review of some of the relevant literature, and then a description of the modes of inquiry used for this project, I weave the words of children, children's literature, storytellers, teachers, my mother, and myself within three themes/chapters: other in self, gain in loss, and life in death. I attempt to use death as the medium with which to blur the boundaries between each of these binary opposites. These themed chapters are separated and connected by four segments of a personal narrative titled, "The Ring." I then conclude with some thoughts of how this project has transformed my relationships with others, including my mother, and how it may influence teachers, graduate students, the bereaved, and others who choose to listen to the death stories I weave.

Many of the stories I share are dyed with struggle. I invite you to travel this sometimes arduous path as we follow narrative zigging and zagging as pedagogical thread through a fabric of death and life.
COME OUT, COME OUT, WHEREVER YOU ARE:
LOOKING FOR DEATH IN SCHOOL LIFE AND LITERATURE

CHAPTER ONE
Like the experiences that led me to this research, the areas of literature through which I have had to travel do not always flow smoothly from one topic to the next. I have included six main topics: death in education, children and death, death for adults, stories of death, phenomenological connections, and integrating dispersed death. In my themed chapters, where the voices of children, teachers, book characters, and myself resonate within the stories of lived experience, these areas interconnect surprisingly well. Perhaps it is in the talking about the stories rather than the telling them, describing children's reactions to death rather than listening to them, debating educational theories of best practice rather than asking teachers how they have dealt with death in their early childhood classrooms, that these notions become muddled. We must remember, that "in our efforts to make sense of lived-experiences with theories and hypothesizing frameworks, we are forgetting that it is living human beings who bring schemas and frameworks into being and not the reverse" (van Manen, 1985, quoted in Lim-Alparaque, 1991, p. 147).

DEATH IN EDUCATION

In my attempt to link my relatively new interest in death to my ongoing interests in education, I have explored the ways education and curricula do and do not address death. As an early childhood special education teacher, I am drawn to the area of early childhood in particular. I have divided the literature on death in education into two areas: official sources and curricular documents from the ministry of education and school districts, and published curricular guides and articles written by educators and researchers. The latter category falls into two sub-headings: resources that describe and suggest general daily activities, themes, and
subject areas to be used in early childhood classrooms, and ones that deal specifically with death education.

Official Sources and Curricular Documents

As I became interested in the idea of death in curriculum, I began to make phone calls to various institutions to inquire about how they deal with the topics of grief and loss and to request any written material they had on the subject. I felt that before I conducted research in the schools, I needed to be more familiar with what was already being taught. I contacted and spoke with numerous people working for school districts in the Seattle and Vancouver areas, the Washington Educational Service District, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, the unions Washington Education Association (WEA) and British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), and private organizations that deal specifically with grief and death.

These phone calls gave me a glimpse into how the issues of grief and loss are, and often are not, being addressed in the public schools. In Washington, the subjects of grief and death are not mentioned, nor ever have been according to everyone I spoke with, in any documents or curricula at the state or federal level (personal communications, September, 1995). Many Washington school districts, including the one in which I taught, dealt with death in a reactive way. The death of a teacher or student, for example, was lumped in with fire and earthquakes and addressed in the school's or district's crisis intervention plan. In the absence of or in addition to such a plan, crisis models from outside agencies were used (MADD, 1990; Project Cope, 1991). Death was voiced as too controversial a topic to include in the classroom, especially at the elementary level (personal communications, September, 1995). A few
districts in the Puget Sound area dealt with suicide and/or violence prevention at the high school level. One woman that I contacted, who runs a children's bereavement organization in Washington, lamented the school's unwillingness to address the topics of grief and death in the classroom. It is her opinion that death can and should be included in preschool and elementary curricula (personal communication, September, 1995).

The Vancouver School District, the BCTF, and the B.C. Ministry of Education do address the issues of grief and death in their curricula and/or resources for elementary students and teachers. The Vancouver School District sent me the primary portion of a ministry document from 1990 titled, *Personal Growth: Humanities Resource Book*, in which one of the twelve units is entitled "Changes." One of its objectives states, "[To] recognize the extent of the impact on the family as a whole and on individual family members of significant changes within a family (e.g. death or illness, divorce, new baby)" (p. 39). The unit contains four pages of suggested reading and class activities and a six page section called *teacher background* that discusses typical reactions and feelings associated with death and loss, and classroom strategies for helping students cope with death. The BCTF does not have a particular curriculum on death and dying, but does have a few books and resources for teacher use.

The Ministry of Education sent me their most recent *Integrated Resource Package for K-1—Personal Development*. Although its suggested instructional and assessment strategies do not mention death or grief directly, the list of recommended learning resources includes topics such as HIV/AIDS, childhood diabetes, aging, and death (1995, pp. 19-23). One woman who worked for the ministry expressed that the ministry has
taken a good first step, but needs to be more specific and thorough in its expectations of and suggestions for teachers so that they can feel comfortable dealing with these difficult topics in their classrooms (personal communication, September, 1995).

An extensive survey was conducted by John D. Morgan of King's College in 1986, "to determine the extent and complexity of death education across Canada" (1990, p. 9). Out of the then 980 school boards across Canada, 225 were contacted representing all provinces and territories. Of the 88 elementary school boards that responded to the survey, only 31.8% included the topics of death and bereavement anywhere in their grade 1-8 curricula. Reactive or spontaneous death education, responding to a particular death that had occurred, accounted for 17.9% of this teaching. A follow-up survey in 1990 indicated that although the amount of spontaneous crisis teaching has increased, the number of formal programs that include these topics had decreased. The authors lament that although the death awareness movement has been active since 1967, and that the need for more openness about death has begun to be recognized, little impact has been made on school curricula. The authors point to our society's chronic avoidance of the topics of death and dying as the main reason for this omission. "A curriculum is a statement of priorities. If a topic is considered important, it will be included in the curriculum" (Morgan, 1990, p. 11).

Curriculum Guides and Resources

I am not an expert on the subject of death, and avoided the issue of death in the classrooms in which I taught. For the purpose of this thesis, I returned to the many curricular guides that I had collected and used when I was teaching in the Seattle area to see if the subjects of death,
grief, or loss were addressed. None of them referred to these topics (Claycomb, 1988; Dodge & Colker, 1992; Feldman, 1991; Johnson-Martin, Attermeier, & Hacker, 1990; Sobut & Bogen, 1991). I do not intend to use these exclusions as an excuse for my own oversights. However, I do believe it contributed to my lack of awareness of death education in general, ways in which it can be incorporated into an early childhood classroom, and necessary resources. "As preschool teachers we do pretty well in helping children develop some understanding of birth and life.... But many of us continue to avoid the subject of death" (Riley, 1989, p. 33).

Because these general early childhood curricula do not address death, I have had to seek curricular guides and articles that deal specifically with death to find ways in which the subject can be brought into the classroom. Educators who advocate for death education in schools list numerous reasons for its inclusion, even in classrooms for very young children. Our society's denial of death is at the root of much of the rationale (Corr, 1980; Oaks & Bibeau, 1987). The silence surrounding death relays the message to children that the subject should not be discussed (Garanzini, 1987). Children who have fears, anxieties, or questions about death may hesitate to broach the topic, and bereaved children may feel reluctant to display their grief, which can lead to emotional problems and insecurities (Garanzini, 1987; Oaks & Bibeau, 1987; Parness, 1975, cited in Seibert & Drolet, 1993). "A child understands inclusion rather than exclusion and what is mentionable is manageable" (Grollman, 1976, quoted in Excell, 1991, p. 102). When death is left to a child's imagination, images and beliefs may develop that are far worse than what actually occurs (Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Knowles & Reeves, 1983; Maurer, 1961, cited in Gatliffe, 1988). Some children may assume that what is not discussed does not occur, which can lead to denial and misunderstandings
"Among the many ways of dealing with death, the most doomed to failure is your attempt to ignore it" (Grollman, 1976, quoted in Garanzini, 1987, p. 30).

Many adults feel it is necessary to shield children from the harsh realities of death (Corr, 1980; Oaks & Bibeau, 1987; Riley, 1989; Siebert & Drolet, 1993). We make the incorrect assumption that if we avoid the topic, children will be unaware or unconcerned with it. Yet children's interest in death is displayed in their games, play, and conversations (Knowles & Reeves, 1983; Maurer, 1961, cited in Gatliffe, 1988; McKeever, 1980; Riley, 1989; Ulin, 1977). Children are also bombarded with images of death by the media, and many experience at least the death of a pet or grandparent at a young age (Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Essa & Murray, 1994; Riley, 1989; Ulin, 1977). "To conceal death from the child is not possible and is also not permissible" (Nagy, 1948, quoted in Corr, 1980, p. 15). Because adults ignore the subject, children's first experiences with death are often from television shows, news programs, and movies where death is violent, gruesome, impersonal, dramatic, and sometimes funny and entertaining (Gatliffe, 1988; Kubler-Ross cited in Mills, Reisler, Robinson, & Vermilye, 1976; Rofes, 1987; Ulin, 1977). These images, especially in the absence of adult interpretation, lead to misinformation and fear.

Death education has a therapeutic effect as it reduces fear, anxiety, and misunderstandings, and helps children cope with their own and other's grief when a death does occur (Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Koocher, 1973, cited in Gatliffe, 1988; Oaks & Bibeau, 1987; Rofes, 1987). Respect for self and others and a greater appreciation for life are additional positive outcomes (Hymovitz, 1978). After a one-year death education course, a group of middle-school students concluded, "a lot of
mystery and fear surrounding death has been brought about by ignorance and avoidance, and, the more we learned throughout the year, the more confident we became with this difficult subject" (students in Rofes, 1987, p. 111). As educators, we are responsible to help prepare students for one of life's most stressful and complex events (Oaks & Bibeau, 1987).

There is general consensus among educators who advocate death education, as to its goals in an elementary setting. "Effective death education must deal with feelings, factual information, open discussion of beliefs, and learning skills for resolving grief" (Wass & Corr, 1982, quoted in Seibert & Drolet, 1993, p. 86). Dealing effectively with the idea of personal death and the death of significant others, being informed consumers of medical and funeral services, discussing socio-ethical issues regarding death such as euthanasia, formulating life and death values, learning vocabulary with which to discuss feelings about death, and breaking down myths are other topics that can be included in a death education curriculum (Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Gatilffe, 1988; Gordon & Klass, 1979, cited in Oaks & Bibeau, 1987; Rofes, 1987; Ulin, 1977).

However, it is widely recognized that children perceive death differently according to their age. Therefore, death education should correlate with children's understandings of death (Speece & Brent, 1984, cited in Oaks & Bibeau, 1987). For example, the literature states that children aged three to five years most often deny death as universal and final, and assume biological functioning after death. (I will elaborate on these developmental perceptions later.) Therefore, death education at this age should focus on these aspects as well as the differences between animate and inanimate objects, distinguishing between sleep and death, the birth-life-death cycle, awareness of feelings, and physical body

Other death education literature is written by teachers about their own experiences with death in the classroom, both planned and spontaneous. Activities for young children who have experienced a loss, range from simply listening to the child, writing dictated words, discussing the event, and sharing related experiences (Miller, 1987). After a classroom pet had died, some teachers arranged a simple funeral and burial accompanied by the writing and reading of poems and letters (Hofschield, 1991; Maclsaac & King, 1989). Reading death related literature to children is another common method of implementation (Hofschield, 1991; Seibert & Drolet, 1993). One teacher wrote of an exchange program she established between her preschool class and a retirement home (Liebman, 1984). Another brought her kindergarten class to a cemetery for a field trip (Riley, 1989). However, numerous sources cite the need for educators to reflect upon and resolve their own issues around death before discussing it with students (Corr, 1980; Knowles & Reeves, 1983; Mills, Reisler, Robinson, & Vermilye, 1976; Oaks & Bibeau, 1987; Ulin, 1977; Wass & Stillion, 1988, cited in Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994).
CHILDREN AND DEATH

The literature that falls under the heading of children and death is vast. That which I wish to discuss can be divided into five categories: children's responses to loss, best practices for explaining death to children, death and children's literature, children's notions and perceptions of death, and blurring the boundary. This last category includes experiences, including accounts of terminally ill children, that challenge notions of death and life as binary opposites, and have forced me to think of death and life in new ways.

Children's Responses to Death

Children experience a wide range of emotions when they are faced with the death of someone significant. Sadness, nervousness, anger, denial, guilt, jealousy, embarrassment, shock, fear, anxiety, loneliness, and disappointment may be felt (Garanzini, 1987; Gatliffe, 1988; Grollman, 1991; Knowles & Reeves, 1983; Rofes, 1985). Children may also complain of physical symptoms and be more susceptible to illness (Gatliffe, 1988; Grollman, 1991; Oaks & Bibeau, 1987; Rofes, 1985). While documenting the grieving process of her two year old son after the death of his grandfather, McKeever (1980) noticed that he began to stutter, craved more physical contact, was irritable, and incorporated his grandfather's death into his games and conversations with family members and strangers. Ten weeks after the death occurred, this child suddenly began to sob uncontrollably; after that his stutter disappeared. Young children's grief tends to be brief and recurring (Knowles & Reeves, 1983). Age, cognition, maturity, experience, the nature of support, the reactions of
family members, and the degree of preparedness all affect the child's response (Essa & Murray, 1994; Knowles & Reeves, 1983).

Davies (1991) describes the short and long term effects that the death of a sibling has on a child. Up to three years after the death, children tend to be nervous, like to be alone, are sad or depressed, perform poorly in school, and display physical symptoms including sleeping and eating disorders. Seven to nine years after the death, these children still exhibit many of the prior behaviors, consistently dream and think about the sibling, but also describe experiences of growth. Some of these children were more mature and had a higher self-concept than other children their own age. A sixteen year old boy stated, "I have a better outlook on life now; I mean, I realize how important my life is as a result of my sister's death" (in Davies, 1991, pp. 129-30).

Best Practices

Another category of the children and death literature addresses ways in which adults should and should not explain death to children when a death does occur. An open, honest atmosphere of communication is stressed (Garanzini, 1991; Grollman, 1991; McKeever, 1980). Earl Grollman (1991) implores adults to speak honestly in the home, school, and religious institutions about death, to not tell children what they will later need to unlearn, to encourage the grief process, to not repress one's own or the child's feelings, to allow the child to participate in the funeral and burial rituals, to access outside support services if necessary, and to attempt to provide an atmosphere of love and assurance. "Sometimes instead of telling them the truth, parents and doctors tell siblings a lot of baloney. It is easier to handle when at least you have all the facts" (Stein, age 15, quoted in Rofes, 1985, p. 90).
The family environment greatly impacts a child's ability to cope with death (Grollman, 1991). "The greater the feelings of closeness among family members, the fewer behavior problems ..." (Davies, 1988c, quoted in Davies, 1991, p. 130). It is necessary to appropriately support children in their time of need, as longitudinal research on adults who lost someone close to them while they were children, talk of the profound long-term effects it had, and continues to have, on their lives (Davies, 1991).

**Death and Children's Literature**

The use of literature to help children confront and cope with sensitive issues is often referred to as bibliotherapy. Children have the opportunity to identify and empathize with the book's characters and/or events, may release their related emotions, gain insight into their own experiences, and perhaps develop alternative options to problems (Guy, 1993). Thurman Guy, in his 1993 study that explored elementary-aged children's conceptions of death through the use of stories, found "story to be an effective vehicle in facilitating the exploration and expression of death components among children" (p. 30). Not only are children able and willing to share their personal experiences and notions of death, but sharing these experiences promoted trust and rapport between the children and the storyteller. Although bibliotherapy is often cited as an, if not the most, appropriate method for explaining death to children (Bernstein, 1983; Dobson, 1977; Klingman, 1980; Wass, 1983; Whitley & Duncan, 1982, all cited in Guy, 1993), Guy regretfully notes the small amount of research that has been done examining the therapeutic effects of bibliotherapy with young children around the concept of death.

Dinah Seibert and Judy Drolet (1993) agree that children's literature provides an appropriate tool for addressing the concept of death with
young children. They analyzed sixty-five books with death as the main theme for children aged three to eight. I believe what they found to be a profile of a typical children's book with a death theme worthy of a lengthy quotation. This book would be:

fictional with a copyright of 1987. The grandfather in the story dies at home, but the cause of death will be unstated. Both adult and child characters cry and express loneliness and sadness. Children are likely to be portrayed as angry, denying and upset, while adults are likely to be shown as accepting. Children's feelings will be discussed with an adult and the adult will accept the child's feelings. An adult will provide verbal and physical comfort to the child. Information provided is accurate, using direct language and no metaphors.

Death is described as final and personal. Death-related ceremonies are not mentioned, but physical details related to the burial and dead body are mentioned. Children's beliefs are not stated, but adults' beliefs are stated and discussed with the child. Life after death and other religious beliefs are not included. The general attitude suggests life goes on and death is a natural part of life. Children and adults use memories and attend ceremonies as the main skills for coping with death. Adults are shown participating in ceremonies and helping the bereaved (p.89).

When I first read the above passage I was hopeful about the positive and accepting light with which death is portrayed in much of the children's literature. Children are being listened to and supported in their grief. However, when I think about the actual experiences that I have heard and read about from adults who lost someone close to them when they were young, my own experiences of death as a child, and stories of parents and teachers who are now facing these sensitive issues with their children and students, there seems to be a vast discrepancy of experience. Many of the women in the books, Motherless Daughters (1994) by Hope Edelman, and Death of A Mother: Daughters' Stories (1995) edited by Rosa Ainley, reported that they were left alone as children and adolescents in their confusion and grief after their mothers' deaths. There were few
bedside chats where adults and children shared feelings and tears. So although I realize the potential benefits from providing examples of a healthy expression of grief in literature, I wonder about the effects on the child who's family distances themselves from death past and present, and neither speaks of it, nor outwardly displays their grief, as in the examples below:

 Everything changed and we were surrounded by people who kept up a pretense that it was all the same and Did Their Best. They didn't like it when I gave in and cried in corners because my mum was dead, .... What I know about her life is very little, and I didn't know much about her death either. I lacked information at the time: I didn't know you were going to die, I didn't know what you died of until much later, .... Damn them for their selfish and considerate protection (Ainley, 1994, pp. 194-196).

 I'm jumping up and down on the bed, trying to do somersaults. I'm pretending I'm in a circus, and I'm really excited. Daddy comes in. He's very cross. "Why aren't you asleep? You've woken Mummy up. Don't you realize she's very ill?" No, I didn't know she was ill. I wonder what's wrong with her (Easterbrook, 1994, p. 178).

 No one was talking to me as my mother died, but neither could I think about what was going on or what it meant. When I did try to talk about it, I would get a response like, "Who do you think you are?" or "We don't talk about that" (Mary Jo quoted in Edelman, 1994, p. 38).

 Damaged people are dangerous. They carve a steep path through your life, and then they leave. Just like that, without a word. Or none that you were told.... My mother was beamed up by Scottie and I don't remember the last time I saw her (Hindley, 1994, p. 104).

 Children's Perceptions of Death

 As was alluded to earlier, much of the literature on very young children and death discusses their perceptions and understandings of death. The issues of whether children have an understanding of the finality and inevitability of death, and comprehend the cessation of bodily
functioning after a person dies are particularly debated (Essa & Murray, 1994). These discussions situate children's understanding of death within a Piagetian (1960) framework. In Piaget's pre-operational stage (eighteen months to five years), children perceive things as they appear to be, and believe they will remain that way. They deny death as universal and final, and assume biological functioning after death (Nagy, 1959, cited in Gatliffe, 1988 and Ulin, 1977). These studies state that the words final and forever have no particular significance to young children, and they most often attribute life to things that move (Gatliffe, 1988; Knowles & Reeves, 1983; Lagorio, 1993). One study showed that children at this stage will often hold ignorant or erroneous concepts of the word death (Anthony cited in Gatliffe, 1988), although another study found young children defined the word using a variety of objects and activities associated with death, including boxes, god, and sleep (Emery cited in Knowles & Reeves, 1983). Children ages five to nine years, in the concrete operational stage, see death as final and irreversible, but do not believe that it will happen to everyone, especially adults with whom they are close (Gatliffe, 1988; Nagy, 1959, cited in Ulin, 1977). When children become aware of death's finality, their fear tends to increase (Knowles & Reeves, 1983). These children may also define death by associated phenomena or references (Anthony cited in Gatliffe, 1988). Children ten years and older seem to have an adult understanding of death (Gatliffe, 1988; Nagy, 1948, cited in Edgar & Howard-Hamilton, 1994).

While I read these studies, I began to wonder what it means to have an adult understanding of death. It seems to me that there are almost as many understandings of death as there are adults. What does it mean to understand death? If adults truly understood it, then I don't think discussing it with children and amongst ourselves would be so difficult. I
have read about and listened to anecdotes from teachers and parents that contradict many of the above findings (personal communications, December, 1995). Although it is widely recognized that children's perceptions of death change with age, it is rarely recognized that other factors such as cultural and economic backgrounds and children's personal experience with death influence these perceptions (Essa & Murray, 1994). A developmental stage model, based on Piagetian notions of age and cognition ignores these variables and focuses on children's lack of knowing. "If children ... have sophisticated understandings of death, and those understandings are ignored or misunderstood by adults because they fail to fit a given psychological model..., there is cause for concern" (Stambrook & Parker, 1987, quoted in Essa & Murray, 1994, p. 75).

Bluebond-Lagner (1977) also criticizes much of the established research in this area and suggests that "researchers have been led astray by equating the child's inability to verbalize with the inability to conceptualize material; and by tacitly assuming that at some point children cast aside 'childish' explanations for 'adult' scientific conceptions of death" (quoted in McKeever, 1980, p. 20). Just because the young child does not have the language to verbalize her or his ideas does not preclude the absence of ideas about death and non-being (Jenkins & Cavanaugh, 1985, cited in Essa & Murray, 1994). "Children as young as two years can grieve and begin to ponder the mystery of death" (McKeever, 1980, p.23). Furman (1970) hypothesizes that very young children are able to understand the irreversibility and universality of death, but deny it in their words and actions as a means to protect themselves from this frightening possibility (cited in McKeever, 1980). Perhaps because as adults we are uncomfortable with our lack of understanding of death, we find it necessary to make some order around it by categorizing children's
ideas and perceived (mis)understandings. "Adults project their own fears and needs onto children who remind them, too, of their very real vulnerability" (Hymovitz, 1978, p. 4).

Blurring the Boundary

The final category of literature I wish to discuss stretches the limits of modernist, western notions of death (Aoki 1992, 1993; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1992, cited in Klass, 1993). For me, these articles were the most interesting to read as they did not attempt to reach conclusions of grandeur or certainty. They resonated with my experience, validated the themes that arose out of my autobiographical work, and provided me with confidence that children's ideas of death could also speak to these themes. These articles tell of children who knew their illness was terminal although they were never told, predicted treatment outcomes (Kubler-Ross, 1991), lengthened or shortened their lives in response to their parents' unspoken wishes (Bouras, 1991), or overcame severe pain in their final moments of life (Papadatou, 1991). These children used pictures or words to express their knowledge. "Regardless of age, every child seems to give a mystical message of awareness of his or her dying" (Papadatou, 1991, p. 290). These stories would support the notion that children do indeed have mature understandings of death as well as an acute ability to perceive the emotions of those close to them.

Other articles talked about ways in which people who had died continued to live. One teacher wrote about how after the death of a student in her grade one class, many of the children spoke of the child, Laura, as still present, especially when her stories were reread to the class (Avery, 1988). Perhaps Laura's classmates do not understand the permanency of death, or perhaps they are merely raising the more
complex questions of how people live on in words and memories after they have died; a notion that has stuck with me throughout my work.

What a week. I have been reading and reading, again. I couldn't write last week because I hadn't read enough, and I can't write this week because I've read too much. I can't figure out where this all goes, in what order, what to include, and what to leave out. Death articles books quotes pamphlets notecards drafts comments conversations overwhelm me. The words that I underlined long ago no longer seem relevant, so I reread with a different color pen; a lens now tinted with different experiences, the passing of time, things learned, ideas expanded upon.

DEATH FOR ADULTS

The grief literature for adults parallels that for children in that there is a large body of the more traditional and accepted notions of grief, and a smaller, but growing body of literature that attempts to push the boundaries of these former categories. I include a brief overview of the more accepted notions of grief, and then discuss some of those that challenge their more established counterparts, including the notion of remaining connected to the deceased.

Acceptable Grief?

All of the grief literature that I collected from various hospitals, grief and loss centers, and hospice centers discuss the notorious "five stages of grief" in great detail. The stages are most commonly described as: shock and denial, anger and guilt, bargaining, depression and despair, and finally adjustment and acceptance. These resources also discuss common physical, emotional, social, and behavioural characteristics of grief, and suggestions for helping yourself through grief (Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, 1988; Overlake Hospital Medical Center, not
dated). Although these resources state that grief is cyclical and unique to each individual, other phrases such as, "major tasks necessary to complete your healing journey" (Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, 1988), and notions of moving through stages connote predictable, normalized grief.

Tony Walter (1994) describes the five stages of grief as the most prominent meta-story in grief literature. These five stages originally emanated from Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' work with people who were terminally ill and their families (see On Death and Dying, 1970). Two other prominent grief theorists, although lesser known to the layperson, are Colin Murray Parkes and William Worden. Parkes describes three stages of grief: numbness, disorganization, and recovery (1972/1986 cited in Walter, 1994), and Worden outlines four tasks that must be accomplished by the bereaved (1983/1991 cited in Walter, 1994).

Since the late 1980s, there has been a move away from these theories that compress human experience into rigid categories and ignore the infinite variability of grief as well as the learning and growth that can be a part of the bereavement process (Walter, 1994). Walter laments that "original attempts to get people to listen to stories of the dying may have turned into a way of avoiding listening to dying people," (1994, p. 73). The rich life stories that pepper Kubler-Ross' work have been used to make shallow generalizations of the bereaved. "It is crucial to remember that generalizations are helpful only as a framework within which to individualize. In the final analysis, it is a unique individual with his or her own feelings and experience of life who has to bear a specific loss" (Thomas, 1978, quoted in Walter, 1994, p. 84, emphasis in original). Littlewood (1992) clearly rejects the stage theory of grief. She states, "grief simply does not follow any kind of ordered linear progression. If
anything, the experiences of grief are better characterized in terms of wave after wave of violently contradictory emotional impulses" (quoted in Walter, 1994, p. 69). Graeme Clark (1991) points out that these models capture little of the lived reality of grief. "While trying to explain grief as a universal process, these conceptions fail to convey its essential humanness, as it is lived in relation to other people, through one's body, through one's social and physical world, and through one's sense of time" (p. 255).

In the months following my mother's death, I waded through my grief and pamphlet after pamphlet I had requested from local health organizations. Yet nothing seemed to resonate with what I was feeling or experiencing. I assumed that it was my usual skepticism that kept me from learning from and/or being comforted by these words of widespread wisdom. Maybe I wasn't ready, or was stuck in the anger stage. It wasn't until after beginning my research for this thesis, and reading alternate conceptions of grief including people's own stories and experiences with death, that I began to realize that it wasn't that I was grieving incorrectly, but that these pre-packaged notions of grief just weren't as helpful as they were touted to be. "The word resolution dangles before us like a piñata filled with promise, telling us we need only to approach it from the right angle to obtain its prize" (Edelman, 1994, p. 23).

Alternative Notions

Others from a variety of disciplines have reconceptualized, and hence challenged, these more traditional notions of grief. Allow me to briefly share some of the notions of grief that were helpful to me following the loss of my mother. Thomas Attig (1991) differentiates between the emotion grief that embodies helplessness and passivity, and
the more complex process of grieving that "presents challenges and opportunities and requires that energy be invested, tasks to be undertaken, and choices to be made" (p. 387). He believes the life enhancing process of grieving entails a "relearning of the world" and a "comprehensive reconstruction of personal integrity" (1990 and 1982, respectively, quoted in 1991). "In choosing to actively grieve, the bereaved choose life" (Attig, 1991, p. 394).

Peter Hershock, in his discussion of notions of selfhood within a Ch'an Buddhism framework (1994), retells a story of a mother's grief over the death of her young son to illustrate that "suffering always occurs in the context of a communally articulated life story or narrative" (p. 689). Suffering is both personal and shared in that its importance lies in "how it ramifies among all those whole stories that are in even some very small way included in and inclusive of our own" (p. 690). Therefore,

whenever we speak of "my suffering," ... we are speaking the names of all our friends, relatives, and enemies and the relations established with them through the particular intentions we have formed, the karma we have created.... And so, while suffering is always uniquely embedded in a history in which I am a principal player, it is never mine alone, but always ours (p. 690, emphasis in original).

It is notions such as these, that stress the interconnectedness of the selves and others of community, that particularly spoke to me in my grief.

Remaining Connected

For me, the most disconcerting notion in the stage theories of grief was the final stage of acceptance and resolution which included the severing of ties with the deceased. Directly following my mother's death she lived in my bedroom closet; first in my closet in Chicago, and then in
my closet in Seattle when I returned to the west coast. Now my closets are too full of junk, so she's just around when I need her, not in any specific place. When I began to read about those who are attempting to deconstruct the boundaries between living and dead, I felt less isolated and less crazy.

I first encountered the notion of continued connections with the dead in an article by Dennis Klass (1993) who explains how parents find solace in this continuing interaction with what he and others call an inner representation of their dead child (Fairbairn, 1952; Klass, 1993). These experiences contradict most contemporary notions of the healthy resolution of grief, where one must "let go" of the deceased in order to recover and return to normal life:

The definition of the healthy resolution of grief as severing bonds with the dead does not stand the test of cross-cultural nor comparative historical analysis. Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, and Stroebe (1992) in a historical study show that this definition is an artifact of modernism which values goal directedness, efficiency, and rationality (Klass, 1993, p. 351).

Kubler-Ross also emphasizes a parent's need to remain connected to and receive a sign of life from their dead children as part of the grieving process. "We want to touch them once more, see their smiles, hear their voices, but most of all we need to know that they are all right and not lonesome, as we are" (1983, p. 176).

Louise Kaplan dedicates her entire book, No Voice is Ever Wholly Lost (1995), to her belief that "the [human] dialogue continues even after the body of a loved one is lifeless" (p. 9). She begins her Chapter One with a series of vignettes, one of which particularly struck me:

Your mother is dead. She has completed her journey to the place of the dead. She will never return. So reason tells you. In your not-so-rational heart, you know she still exists. When you speak of her you
say, "She is lost," "I have lost her." If your mother is merely lost, you reason unconsciously, then you might find her again. Actually, you chat with her each morning over coffee and rolls (p. 13).

Kaplan states that "mourning rituals and conventional behaviors of the bereaved are designed to give a semblance of order and rationality to the unruly passions of bereavement" (p. 9). She is more interested in the "latent madness that goes on behind the veils of custom," (p. 9) and believes that "the full work of mourning encompasses the rebuilding of our inner world and the restoration of the beloved in the form of an inner presence—if not precisely a spirit or a ghost, an aspect of ego or conscience, an ideal, a passion" (p. 19).

Margaret Stroebe (1992) asserts that advice regarding letting go of the deceased may be counter-productive. She traces this idea to the "individualistic west's" infatuation with the free and autonomous individual, and realizes that many other cultures promote the maintenance of ties with the deceased (cited in Walter, 1994, p. 83). Western culture's suppression of the emotions of grief, and advocacy of disconnectedness with the deceased actually lead to prolonged periods of grief compared to other societies (Walter, p. 83). The bereaved "can choose to find means to building a new and dynamic relation to the deceased, giving shape to their lives in part through continuing, albeit transformed, interaction with the story of the life now ended" (Attig, 1991, p. 391).

These people help deconstruct western notions of death which embrace a modern juxtaposition of life against death; life or death. I wish to pursue more alternative conceptions of death, in which these rigid boundaries are bridged. I personally have not had visions of my mother, although she does appear frequently in my dreams. However, I do feel that in some ways my mother is still alive through and within me.
STORIES OF DEATH

Although these notions of grief helped me to understand my thoughts and feelings, and provided multiple frameworks for which I might comprehend my grief, the genre of literature that provided me with the most support were the lived stories of people who were themselves bereaved. I was particularly interested in women who had lost their mothers, although there is little relevant literature on the topic (Edelman, 1994; Smith, 1994). I wanted to hear voices of death and feel its difficulty, rather than read theorized or researched versions of death. These published personal accounts of death, most often in the form of autobiography, were termed "pathographies" by Hawkins in 1990 (cited in Walter, 1994, p.126). Because pathographies often validate one's experiences and feelings, counselors have found these to be more useful to their bereaved clients than analytical or theoretical descriptions of bereavement (Walter, 1994). Perhaps the story format also helps to connect writer with reader, past bereavement with present. "I've influenced people through telling patients' stories—this is what moves people" (Saunders, 1993 quoted in Walter, 1994, p. 69).

I was in the bookstore today. I don't know where to begin. I don't know which books to buy. Whose knowledge do I want to purchase and read and digest and regurgitate? Too many books. I find myself drawn to the more simple books rather than theory. I want to know how other ordinary people like myself have lived through similar experiences. How did this woman/daughter/family cope with cancer? the pain? the morphine? the tubes? What was it like for them? This is what I want to know. But is it too personal? Not academic enough? How am I going to write a thesis about my mother's death? Maybe this was a stupid idea.
Throughout the writing of my thesis, I've spent many hours reading and rereading the stories of bereaved women that I have collected, hours I probably should have been writing or reading other things. I feel there are four aspects that have most drawn me again and again to their words: common experiences (especially the day to day struggles of illness), the depth and variety of feeling, the acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of a mother's presence even after death, and their struggles with writing.

Sharon Brown, in her book, *Some Become Flowers* (1993), tells how she, her husband, and two young daughters cared for her mother in their home, as she died of cancer. My own experiences and struggles resonated with hers as she recalled such things as when her mother first told her of her illness, their experiences at the hospital and her mother's strong desire to not die there, struggling with morphine injections and other medical paraphernalia at home, her mother's hallucinations and attempts to get out of bed, and finally watching her mother's dead body being taken out of the house. These things all happened to me too.

The book *Cancer in Two Voices* (1991), by Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum, was not about a mother and daughter, but rather a lesbian couple, one of whom, Barbara, was dying of breast cancer. It was, however, particularly passionate and insightful as both women wrote of their struggles with cancer. These struggles, voiced from inside and outside illness, spoke to my experience, my feelings of fear and hope:

> My images are those of tightropes I must walk to keep balanced between my life and ours. Juggling to keep us distinct yet joined.... And sometimes I want her to tell me that she's sorry for getting cancer and ruining our lives together. Other times I want to tell her I am sorry for letting her get cancer, ... (Butler, 1991, p. 14).

Living in the world had become an existential problem for me. How to interpret my very existence is problematic. Am I living because I am alive? Am I dying because I'll be dead in three months without
chemotherapy? Am I living and dying? Are all of us living and dying, except that I'm doing it faster? (Rosenblum, 1991, p. 137)

I have cancer but it is not consuming me. Rather, I am as alive as I can be; my creative juices have never been as electric; my thoughts have never been as clear. With each new stage of my illness, my range of choices shrinks, but I become deeper and richer, dearer and simpler to myself (Rosenblum, 1991, p. 56).

Hope Edelman, author of *Motherless Daughters* (1994), tells fragments of the stories of over 250 women who lost their mothers at various points in their lives. Many of these women, as well as the author herself, describe the never ending influence of their mothers on their current lives. Edelman states in her introduction, "It's been thirteen years since cancer took my mother in the early hours of a July morning, and only now can I begin to understand how her death continues to influence the decisions I make, whomever I make them with, and wherever I go" (p. xvii). This influence can have both positive and negative effects, and cause contradictory feelings. Daughters may want to identify with their mothers, welcoming her physical features, gestures, and words on and within ourselves, but we also may fear that these similarities may lead us to her fate. Edelman uses the word, "cancerphobe" to describe herself (p. 219) and I too have a paralyzing fear of getting cancer. Susan Ardell writes of another way a mother's influence can have too overwhelming an impact on her daughter, "My mother saturates my mind, like a background colour I don't always realize I'm seeing.... I have to be constantly on the lookout so that the mother who persists in my psyche does not constrict me, distort my capacity to live as I want" (1994, pp. 89-90).

The idea that my life might parallel my mother's sounds like an impossibility to me. We are completely different people. And at the same time, the thought makes perfect sense. Aren't my mother and I really, underneath it all, exactly the same? (Edelman, 1994, p. 209)
The final way that these pathographies spoke of and to my own experiences with death is in the authors' willingness to divulge their struggles with and the limitations of their writing. Sharon Brown speaks of the strong urging of her friends that finally forced her to begin her book, as she doesn't consider herself a writer. One of her chapters is entitled, "Stop the Story, I Want to Get Off," in which she describes her need to step out of the chronology of the narrative to discuss three themes that emerged during the writing process (1993, p. 116). Barbara Rosenblum (1991) writes of the inadequacy of language to describe the sensations of her deteriorating body, thus disallowing her the opportunity to relieve herself from her burden of suffering. Caroline Halliday, in the book, *Death of a Mother: Daughter's Stories* (Ainley, 1994), describes at length her difficulty with writing about the death of her mother, which, as you will soon see, sounds and feels uncannily similar to my writing about my mother's death:

> It [her writing] refuses to settle into a style that feels OK.
> I give up entirely. I cannot write about death, I cannot be a writer and write about death.
> I am depressed, confused, frightened, writing has always brought me comfort and this won't.
> I cannot write about death without reminding myself what is life, why I am alive. So I give up and go for walks in the park (p. 126).

In a poem later on in the same piece, Halliday displays her frustration with not being able to fully convey the extent of her grief, her experiences, nor her dreams about her mother:

> *I can't describe this dream properly*    *I can't express the meaning of it to you*
> ...
> *what do I do about the yearning*
> *the yearning which aches away up from the belly up*
under my
guts up under my ribs the place of it
this is all I will ever have this dream
ever? can you understand a word like that?  (pp. 132-134)

The words of these women spoke to me. Their courage to tell their stories gave me the courage to tell mine.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS

I was introduced to phenomenology during a summer course with Ted Aoki who is, along with Max van Manen, responsible for the flourishing phenomenological work in Canada (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). Phenomenology's emphasis on the importance of lived stories and meanings attracted me to this theoretical framework, and has influenced this work. Aoki calls not for a rejection of, but a decentering of the modernist view of education characterized by objectified meanings. Rather, he wishes to "open way to alternate meanings, including lived meanings, legitimated by every day narratives—the stories and narratives in and by which we live daily" (Aoki, 1991, p. 6). He also wishes to disrupt the western culture's gaze on nouns, and turn our attention to the and, that which dwells relationally between (Aoki, 1991, p. 11). In application to my work, this would mean lingering within the relationship between life and death, life and death, rather than focusing on either life or death. Robert Brown, in his overview of van Manen's work, also emphasizes phenomenology's focus on the in between; the pedagogical relationships among parents, teachers, and children who dwell within the school community (1991).

In this thesis I have attempted to dwell with children and their teachers, my mother, and myself within a storied context of death. I have
read stories of death with children, listened to their lived stories, the stories of their teachers, and have attempted to tell fragments of my own story. I use story like a glue—holding me within and among the people that tell them. Phenomenological notions of story have taught me to look within my self and those around me to find meaning in our every day interactions and relationships. I have had to learn that "to know phenomenologically is to allow to unfold what is already present but not yet seen" (Caputo, 1987 quoted in Pinar & Reynolds, 1991, p. 7). Within the folds of personal experience "we shall find in ourselves and nowhere else the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is ... not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what [you have] been waiting for" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 quoted in Pinar & Reynolds, 1991, p. 2).

Not only have the distinctions between ourselves and others been accentuated within modernist notions of education, but also the distances between ourselves and the world in which we live. van Manen writes, "phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insight which brings us in more contact with the world" (1984a quoted in Brown, 1991, pp. 49-50). William Pinar and William Reynolds summarize these aspects of phenomenology nicely:

> The firmament in the positivist sky twinkles with precision and rigor. However, the spaces between the stars and those hidden by clouds recede and disappear. Phenomenology seeks to name those spaces, their relation to the stars, and to us. The unity of the epistemological whole resides within ourselves (1991, pp. 1-2).

In this thesis I am attempting to use death to bridge that which it typically accentuates: difference and distance. Yet phenomenology decenters these distances that have been fabricated by positivist assumptions of separate selves and others, and the separateness of the
individual from the world in which she or he lives. What might a phenomenological notion of death look like? I have turned to others to provide me with possibilities. Darlene Witt phenomenologically remembers the childhood loss of her mother which to her was:

an exploration of the phenomenon of remembering a parent who had died. The personal narrative into which I have gathered this experience is my way of placing myself and the lost one into a story. Therefore, it is a way of understanding my own experience. It provided a frame for memories and a way for me to see my own going on with life (1991, p. 278).

Others describe what an intersection of phenomenology and death might look like:

Through reminiscing and remembering, in returning time and time again to our grief, we honor our loved one. In doing so, we ultimately honor ourselves. By way of exploring the nooks and crannies of our grief, we discover ourselves in relation to the other. As we open to the fullness of grief, we open to the fullness of ourselves. Through our acts of acknowledging the other, whether for better or worse, we are affirmed and so strengthen the vital basis from which we live (Clark, 1991, p. 265).

[A] phenomenology of death will not seek to uncover what it is like to be dead, or what the singular event of death is like, but, as a description involving a reduction to meaning, it will be ultimately related to a "phenomenology of life," exploring the ways in which death penetrates human understanding as a necessary condition of being-in-the-world (Leman-Stefanovic, 1987, p. 5).

A phenomenology of death might trace [the] moods and metaphors of death and life, enabling us to affirm those who have gone before us, those who, like us, are dying now, and those children born and unborn who bring life to our dyings, all of us, past, present, future, blessed by death, blessed by life (Pinar, 1992, p.100).

INTEGRATING DISPERSED DEATH

Thus far I have briefly traced my experiences of coming to death, and searched for death in elementary school curricula, the lives of children
and adults, and phenomenological theory. My desire was to bring this dispersed inquiry together under the roof of my thesis. Although people have studied children and death, and have written about their own experiences with death, it was difficult to find anyone who had attempted to interweave these experiences, and to explore how they might impact and inform each other. When I finally found this longed for source, it was a homecoming as well as insight into new ground. Jonathan Silin, in his book *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS* (1995), has intertwined the elements of living and dying with AIDS, early childhood education, educational theory, and personal experiences with death.

It is difficult to describe the impact that this book has had upon me. It gave me great hope and relief, and also helped me clarify and organize my thoughts and feelings regarding this research and my prior teaching experiences. Allow me to briefly summarize some of Silin's ideas that particularly struck me: his naming of the topics that remain unspoken in early childhood classrooms, his recognition of the inseparability between the parts of ourselves that we bring to school and the parts we leave outside, the deconstruction of the many binary opposites upon which schools rest, and the distances these binaries create among teachers, students, and parents. Silin advocates for a life-supporting curriculum in which AIDS and death must be a part.

In her introduction to Silin's book, Madeleine Grumet touches on the systemic exclusion of particular topics from the early childhood classroom, and its consequences:

Silin wrenches what he knows out of the categories of discretion and avoidance that define knowledge. He shows us how the early childhood curriculum deploys a false altruism, pretending to protect children from what adults are afraid to think about. He shows us
how we culture ignorance in children and in each other by refusing to hear and respond to what they and we already know (1995, p. x).

Silin and Grumet understand that when we omit subject areas from school curriculum, we also leave behind the parts of ourselves that have experienced and/or know about that which is educationally unspeakable. Grumet asks, "how do they [student and teacher] speak of the lives they left at home ... ? What portion of what is said—as coats and boots are taken off and stories read, as questions are asked and paint brushes are washed—will they take home again?" (1995, p. ix).

Silin recognizes the common practice of separating our private and public selves, yet rejects it. How as teachers can we create a meaningful curriculum if we leave at home what is meaningful to us as human beings? After he shares a story about Michael, a friend and ex-lover who died of AIDS, he comments:

I recognize, too, that even as I read my story as the story as a friend and lover, I also read it as an educator—and with these words I feel as though I have crossed an invisible line.... Yet I reject the artificial barriers that are so frequently used to separate the private from the public, the personal from the professional, and the individual from the social. As I try to assimilate Michael's dying, it stretches and transforms my educational commitment. I do not want to set this experience aside and get on with the business of teaching children (p. 39).

Including the multiple parts of our selves in the classroom helps to minimize the distances among those that cohabitate there; distances that interfere in attempts to dwell relationally between. It is interesting that Silin attributes his own conceptual disintegration of the distances between those in the educational community to AIDS. "It [AIDS] has placed into question the distance that I once assumed separated health and illness, and from that point all the other binary oppositions upon which our
educational institutions are constructed—teacher and student, adult and child, parent and educator" (1995, p. 112). Speaking about controversial subjects such as AIDS and death can begin to fill in the spaces between the binary opposites of education, and act as bridge to the life worlds of others as "student-teacher distinctions based on the ownership of knowledge may break down in the face of the greater commonalities that we all share regardless of age" (Silin, 1995, p. 71).

Silin believes there is a curriculum for life hidden among the folds of death fabric, woven by all of us, living and dead. He scours the social and political world in which we live, as well as his personal life world, to find and name this curriculum. He emphasizes that it is not so much what we can do to help children cope with the realities of our world, but rather how we can be:

Is there a pedagogy for life hidden in the politics of dying? ... Are there experiences that children can have in school that would better prepare them to encounter death?

Perhaps it is not that the curriculum can prepare children for death, but that we might choose to live differently with them when keeping this knowledge consciously in front of us.... I do not want to protect children from pain during a romanticized period of innocence, nor do I see children as a way of purchasing immortality.... [T]oo much of the contemporary curriculum brings a deathly silence to the being of childhood and not enough of it speaks to the things that really matter in children's lives or in the lives of those who care for them.... The curriculum remains lifeless as long as it is cut off from the roots and connections that feed it.... A commitment to the curriculum must entail a commitment to the world, and none of us inhabits a world without death (1995, pp. 39-40).

In the footsteps of Jonathan Silin, phenomenological theorists, and bereaved women writers, I am attempting to simultaneously name the multiple parts of myself and others, and bridge the distance between them. I believe listening to and reflecting upon the spoken and unspoken
narratives of early childhood student, teacher, and researcher has enabled me to hear some of the ways in which we are connected. The autobiographical elements woven throughout the text forced me to dwell more thoughtfully among the stories of others, as "teachers cannot implement a liberatory pedagogy from a position of objectivity in which they themselves are deprived of their own being, their own life histories" (Silin, 1995, p. 53). In this thesis I have explored ways of doing as well as ways of being with children and death in the classroom, and I have explored ways in which death can act as bridge between these two notions. In the words of Ted Aoki:

[Educators] will do well to remember that any true bridge is more than a merely physical bridge. It is a clearing a site into which earth, sky, mortals, and divinities are admitted. Indeed, it is a dwelling place for humans who, in their longing to be together, belong together (1992, p. 28).
A LAYERED EXPLORATION OF DEATH

CHAPTER TWO
For the purpose of this thesis, I have explored one way of bringing death into an early childhood setting. As stated in my introduction, I chose to use the medium of story through which the children might offer their own stories and ideas of death. I then interviewed two teachers of young children regarding their ideas about bringing death into the early childhood classroom. I have sought this multi-voiced exploration of death with the intention of providing an example for educators so they may be better able to decide if they wish to explore death in their own classrooms, giving children and their teachers an opportunity to discuss this difficult issue, and allowing me the space to more closely connect my personal beliefs with my classroom practices.

However, my research at the University Child School is only a part of the inquiry conducted for this thesis. I have also attempted to document the ways in which participating in and then writing about these experiences have impacted me as a storyteller, interviewer, researcher, teacher, graduate student, and daughter, so soon after my mother's death. I have interspersed journal entries, dreams, stories, and past and present experiences throughout this work in an attempt to convey and legitimize the relationship between it and myself.

My desire to delve deeply into a small number of interactions led me to the qualitative methods of storytelling, open-ended interviews, journaling, and theming (Aoki, 1992). In this chapter I will describe these various methods and contextualize the experiences of myself and the other participants involved in utilizing them for the purposes of this research.
ENTERING THE FIELD

The four story sessions that were conducted for this research were held at the University Child School, a university-associated preschool located in an urban area of British Columbia. This school offers preschool and kindergarten programs to approximately 135 children ranging in age from two to six years old. Depending on the child's age and/or parental discretion, children are enrolled from one to four half-days per week. The majority of the children that attend this school are from middle to high-income earning families, and are "white" Canadians (see Roman, 1993). In the past few years, however, there has been an increasing number of students from families who have recently immigrated to Canada, and in which English is not their first language. The majority of these recently immigrated families are from Asian countries.

Choosing the Site

I chose to carry out my research at this preschool because, as I am employed there part-time (since September, 1995), I am familiar with and to the environment, staff, and many of its children and families. The school's association with the university and its research-friendly mandate made it particularly accessible. One of my responsibilities at the school entails implementing the early literacy program with a colleague, Cassandra. This program, which was initiated and further developed by Cassandra over the past four years, consists of maintaining and improving the school's library, organizing home reading programs for interested classrooms, supplying current information and research to teachers and parents, and providing weekly story sessions to each class.
In preparation for the 1995-96 school year, Cassandra and I discussed at length various storytelling methods and theories, including her own. As stated in the introduction, Cassandra is an avid storyteller and a children's literature enthusiast. She is currently working on her doctorate that incorporates her knowledge and experience in both of these areas. Cassandra's storytelling skill and its theoretical underpinnings will be displayed and discussed throughout this text. However, it is crucial to mention here her strong belief in telling stories which involve measurable complexity and ambiguity, as this project was conceived in the wake of my learning about and experimenting with these ideas.

In the Fall of 1995, I was writing a research proposal for this thesis that incorporated children and death. My desire for an organic research setting that would enable the children and their parents to feel as comfortable as possible with the subject of death prompted me to utilize the story sessions I was already conducting with four classes each week (Leggo, personal communication, December, 1995). As is often the case when reading to young children, they may comment on the story and/or interject related experiences. These spontaneous reactions and comments would comprise the "data." The story sessions would not differ in time, day, format, frequency, or location from the children's usual story session experience.

Obtaining Consent

Cassandra also reads to four different classes each week, and I thought it would be interesting to document both of our experiences; she being a much more experienced storyteller, and me having so recently experienced the death of my mother. I drafted the proposal after informally discussing my ideas with Cassandra. Cassandra agreed to
participate verbally and in written form after reviewing the proposal and further discussion (see Appendix One).

According to this preschool's policy, I advertised my study by placing a combined description/parental consent form in the "cubby" of each child in four classrooms (two morning and two afternoon classes), a total of 64 students (see Appendix One). Of these four classes, I was the weekly storyteller for one morning and one afternoon preschool class (three and four year olds), taught by Jane. Cassandra was the weekly storyteller for one morning preschool/kindergarten class (four and five year olds), and one afternoon kindergarten class (five and six year olds), taught by Miriam. These particular classrooms were chosen because the morning and afternoon classes are taught by the same teacher (therefore impacting the minimum number of teachers), because there was a good rapport established among the storytellers, children, and teachers, and because of the necessary distribution of research projects throughout the school.

Of the sixty-four parental consent forms that were distributed, forty-four were returned. Of the forty-four returned, thirty-four gave their child consent to participate, six refused their consent, and four were returned after the research had already been completed. The story sessions ranged in size from eight to nine students, were tape recorded, were held in the library of the school, and later fully transcribed. All the children whose parents gave consent to participate were asked by their storyteller at the beginning of the story session if they indeed did want to participate, after an explanation of the research and tape-recording procedures. All of the children gave their consent (see Appendix Two).
I have already mentioned in my review of literature the widely held belief among educators that children's literature is an established and appropriate way to help children learn about and cope with sensitive issues such as death (Guy, 1993; Hofschield, 1991; Seibert & Drolet, 1993). My objectives for the story sessions were to expose children to the topic through story characters with which they might empathize (Drake, 1992), to expose them to the experiences and notions of death held by their classmates (Hamilton & Weiss, 1990), and most of all to allow them to (re)explore their own notions and experiences of death through reflection, expression, and discussion.

Preschoolers are skilled narrators (Miller & Mehler cited in Dyson & Genishi, 1994). Providing children with opportunities to tell their stories and voice their beliefs within the classroom context has become increasingly recognized. Storytelling stimulates the imagination and incorporates language, reading, listening, speaking, thinking, and cooperative skills (Drake, 1992; Hamilton & Weiss, 1990). Personal storytelling validates and values the children's experiences (Drake, 1992; Rosen, 1988; Silin, 1995), and fosters self-confidence and self-worth. "[B]y introducing the child's experience into the classroom as the prime focus of attention, language itself in both spoken and written form can function as a privileged instrument by means of which the child's growth can be fostered" (Dewey quoted in Graham, 1991, p. 52).

Stories and storytelling connect children to others and to the world in which they live, and provide an arena to reflect upon these relationships (Drake, 1992; Graham, 1991; Mallan, 1991; Silin, 1995). Narrative can also serve as bridge between teacher and student, and
student and student, but also *within* each teacher and student (Witherell, 1995). In this thesis I attempt to use story, particularly stories of death, to bridge the selves and others of the early childhood classroom:

Particularly powerful stories may come about when children's stories function as a kind of crossroad: when they bring feelings, experiences, and language from the unofficial classroom world of peers and neighborhoods into the official classroom community and when those stories are themselves ways for children to make use of artistic tools and reflective processes valued in the official world (Dyson, 1994, p. 157).

I was also interested in children's notions about death for my own purposes: for this thesis, as well as my future work with children in the classroom. To my recollection, I had never discussed death with a child; this study gave me the opportunity to delve into this place of personal uncertainty and anxiety in a somewhat natural, but controlled, environment, and with support and consultation from Cassandra. It provided a rare opportunity for me to speak about death, hear death words pass through my lips, and explore my own notions of death being brought to life by the story characters. It also gave me the opportunity to observe and listen to Cassandra share written and lived stories of death with children.

When teachers choose to share their personal stories in the classroom, they provide a role-model for their students; they model living with vulnerability, diversity, loss, fear, pleasure, and questioning (Vascellaro & Genishi, 1994). Madeleine Grumet celebrates curriculum as "currere," which entails, "the safe return of [her] own voice" (quoted in Graham, 1991, p. 37). Teachers tell how storytelling was the medium through which they became more connected to students and within themselves:
I seek another voice in the classroom, one that will carry me further into the culture of the group, in roles not available to me in my customary teacher mode. I want to join the community of storytellers that surrounds me (Paley, 1995, p. 91).

When I began to involve myself in storytelling at my place of work, it was not, therefore, to take up something totally new, but to put to professional use what had been revolving in my head for as long as I could remember; so long, and so much of it, that I hardly know how to unravel the parts and identify the strands that influenced me most (Rosen, 1988, p. 8).

When teachers at the post-secondary level instruct those who are or soon will be teachers, another page is added to the story book. Jean Clandinin witnessed the weaving and raveling of stories by the students she was instructing in a teacher education course. The stories of her students swirled with the stories of her students' students, compelling them all to live new stories (1991, p. 72):

Many of their [the teacher education students] stories were stories of struggle as they tried to live new stories of teaching and learning, where they were as teachers in relation to children. As they lived out and wrote their stories, they saw their stories in the stories of their children. ... As they began to question, they were trying to hear not only their own stories, but the stories being lived and told by the children with whom they worked (1991, p. 73).

Later in this thesis I discuss the reciprocity that can occur among students and teachers if teachers are willing to share their own stories in the classroom.

Choice of Books

Deciding which book to read to the children was a big decision. For this purpose I read almost one hundred children's books on death, slowly narrowing the possibilities. I finally decided on The Very Best of Friends (1989), written by Margaret Wild and illustrated by Julie Vivas. I chose
this book because of its powerful illustrations, the range of emotions and reactions to death displayed by different characters, as well as within the same character over time. It also demonstrated the healing that occurs over time and the potential for new relationships. This story tells of Jessie and James, a couple who live and work on a farm, and their cat William. James and William are the very best of friends, and although Jessie doesn't like cats, she tries to be nice to William because James loves him so much. One day James dies suddenly. Jessie is extremely grief stricken, ceases to work, and withdraws into herself and her house, meanwhile neglecting William. William does not grasp the concept of James' death, and waits for him. William then tries to get Jessie's attention initially by being especially useful, and then by being especially nasty. When neither of these strategies is successful, William leaves. Jessie, however, eventually realizes her neglect of William, and invites him warmly back into the house. The book concludes with the newly established relationship between Jessie and William, and the hope that they, too, might someday be the very best of friends.

Cassandra chose to read two different books because her afternoon group was older and more experienced with complex stories. To her morning group she read Badger's Parting Gifts (1984) written and illustrated by Susan Varley. This story is about a wise, old Badger who knows that he will soon die and is accepting of his death, which is depicted as him running down a long tunnel. The grief-stricken community of animals reminisce about Badger and eventually realize that each one of them has a special memory of Badger, a skill that he taught them. The story concludes with Mole, who particularly admired Badger, thanking Badger for his parting gift.
Cassandra read *The Snow Goose* (1940; 1992) written by Paul Gallico and illustrated by Beth Peck to her afternoon group. This is a much longer and more complicated story of Phillip Rhayader, a hunchbacked artist and naturalist who comes to live in a lighthouse on an English marsh in the late 1930s. The story tells of the awkward friendship and eventual love that evolves between Phillip and Fritha, a local village girl who brings him an injured bird, a snow goose. It also tells of Phillip's daring rescue of Allied soldiers stranded on the beaches of Dunkirk during World War II. Although Phillip is killed during this rescue, the snow goose returns to Fritha to bring the message of his death and his love to her.

I felt strongly that Cassandra should be able to choose the books that she was going to read for her story sessions. Giving research participants more control over their part of the research, and minimizing the impact on established practices is advocated within critical theory of ethnographic research (Brodkey, 1987). I attempted to shift the traditional power relations, in which researcher is power-full and researched power-less, to more balanced power relations (Roman, 1993; Roman & Apple, 1990). Although this shift embodies a much more ethical and valid approach, as it allows my perceptions to be balanced by those of others, relinquishing control was sometimes difficult for me. I love the story *The Snow Goose*, and the ways in which Cassandra adapts this story for young children. However, I feared that it would be too long, and that the children would not have ample time to ask questions nor tell their own stories. I also worried that a long story session would require more time for transcription and analysis. It seems that research that attempts to blur the boundaries between researcher and researched requires a degree of trust. I was able to trust Cassandra, although not without hesitations, because we already had an existing relationship before the
research was initiated. I discuss the notions of trust and the risk it requires within the body of the text.

Preparation

In addition to the necessary preparation entailed in the orchestration of the story sessions, I also had to prepare for my role as storyteller/participant. In this sense I was able to experience my research as both researcher and researched; a truly nerve-wracking experience. Although I was interested in the reactions of the children to stories of death, I also desired to understand some of the ways in which a teacher is able to facilitate or suppress an environment of self-expression and sharing. I doubted my abilities to foster such an environment, and was nervous about having my interactions with the children recorded on tape. To minimize these anxieties, I read and reread *The Very Best of Friends*, preparing potential elaboration and connections, questions I might want to ask, and answers to what I thought might be asked. However, as the research dates approached, I became increasingly anxious, as my journal that week portrays:

Feelings regarding upcoming research:

I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm getting it done just the same. I feel as if I'm not doing enough; I should have more research, more kids, more sessions, more interviews, more preparation, more background information, more time. I'm just skimming the surface. I am unsure of myself and my abilities to address controversial topics with children. Parents question me, looking to me for expert answers that I don't have. Am I masquerading? I'm worried about the kids; will this be detrimental or beneficial? Will they talk? Will they listen? Will they cry? Will I cry? Can I do this?

I am anxious about the mechanics and logistics of the research: scheduling, organizing, coordinating, setting up the equipment. I have completed all the
required steps, yet am I prepared emotionally and psychologically? How will this affect my relationship with the children? with Cassandra? with my mother? I am prepared yet unprepared.

Days of Taping

The two sessions for which Cassandra was the storyteller were held on January 16, 1996. Orchestrating schedules, equipment, and ensuring that the children who were given and not given consent were in their appropriate groups was difficult while trying to attend to the needs of both Cassandra and Miriam (the classroom teacher). I suddenly felt as if I had placed too much of this research's responsibility on Cassandra. It was difficult to ascertain in my mind actually who was conducting this study. I also must mention that I had been very ill the night before, got very little sleep, and went to the student health services in between the two sessions. I observed and took notes during the two story sessions in which Cassandra was the storyteller.

The two story sessions for which I was the storyteller were held on January 18, 1996. Although I had already observed Cassandra's story sessions, used the equipment, and had practiced my story, I was still nervous, as I juggled my dual role of researcher and researched. I wondered how I would find a balance between being too emotional, and not emotional enough; between allowing the children to speak, and telling the story. After I had completed my morning session, I felt more confident in that it had gone reasonably well, but also less confident in that I had underestimated the range and depth of questions. After the afternoon session, I was amazed at the discrepancy of reactions and questions among the children. The story sessions had been so different, and yet each was interesting. I wrote notes before and after my story
sessions, and kept a journal of my thoughts and feelings during the research process, believing it important to document the ways in which the biases and experiences of the researcher impact the research (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Said, 1989).

I have just realized that a researcher is a person. A person with issues and stresses and context and last minute crises and health issues and dead mothers and fatigue and anxiety.

Research has stepped down from its pedestal. I read research more critically and distance myself from the results. I now know some of the potential mistakes that can occur and how they can be disguised. It is so subjective; a different day, a different book, a different group of children, a different researcher would all create totally different results.

What did research mean to me? Objectivity, certainty, and facts to legitimize my behavior and support my arguments as I strove for security. I feel as if something below me, a foundation perhaps, is crumbling. Yet I feel good about it—it is old and needs to be replaced.

During the story sessions the following week, the children had the opportunity to listen to the previous week's recording. They listened excitedly as they attempted to identify their voices and the voices of their classmates. For the sake of anonymity and the potentiality of a reader to follow particular children's responses, children were given pseudonyms that are used consistently throughout the text.

CONVERSATIONS OF DEATH

For the purpose of this thesis I interviewed Cassandra, my colleague and co-storyteller, and Miriam, a classroom teacher at the University Child School. These women are both white, Canadian born, in their late 30s or early 40s, and have taught preschool and kindergarten for many years. Both women hold Master's degrees, and Cassandra is currently working on
her doctorate. From the interviews I learned that both women have dealt with death in their early childhood classrooms and with their own children at home. I am also white, but differ from these women in that I was born in the United States, am in my late 20s, and have taught special education preschool and kindergarten for two years.

My objectives for these interviews were to ascertain if either Cassandra or Miriam had discussed death in their classrooms and if so how, their ideas and beliefs around children's and society's perceptions of death, their own personal experiences with death, and whether they felt these personal experiences impact their curricular decisions. In addition, I asked Cassandra to describe her story session experiences, the children's reactions, the meaningfulness of this project to the children and herself, and the ways she thought the project might have been done differently, or more ideally (see Appendix Three).

Each interview was begun with a brief overview of the interview objectives, signing consent forms, and asking each participant to choose a pseudonym (see Appendix One). Although I was guided by the open-ended questions I had prepared and the above objectives, I desired each interview to be an interactive, conversation-like process, rather than one of mere information gathering (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Therefore, I invited Miriam and Cassandra to offer related comments, stories, or experiences, to address any issues that I had overlooked, as well as to ask any personal or research related questions of me. This invitation was extended again after I had completed my pre-planned agenda. I believe these techniques served to balance the power relations between interviewer and interviewee, made the interview more comfortable, and resulted in a more interesting and meaningful conversation (Roman, 1993; Roman & Apple, 1990). Throughout the interviews I veered from my
interview schedule to seek clarification and examples, and to delve more deeply into a particular topic (Opie, 1993). Although this lack of structure was at times difficult for me, I was truly interested in the ways in which these experienced teachers had interacted with children and death. In the body of the text I explore the potential reciprocity that can occur when the interviewer risks divulging her or his own related experiences and research hesitations.

Conversation with Miriam

Because some of Miriam's students were to be participants in my research project, I had informed her both verbally and in writing about its details (see Appendix One). I thought interviewing the teacher of some of the child participants would be an interesting way to portray the events of this research from many perspectives. I personally approached Miriam with my request to interview her. At first she was reluctant, stating that she "was hoping I would ask someone else" (personal communication, January, 1996). She stated that she was by no means an expert on children and death. I explained that I was not an expert on children and death either, and that I hoped the interview would have a conversational style in which we would discuss some related issues. After Miriam reviewed the types of questions I would be asking, she agreed to do the interview.

The interview was held in Miriam's classroom on January 19, 1996. I felt guilty that I was taking some of her planning time, and was very nervous. I had not discussed my research with Miriam and did not know what she thought about the research nor about the appropriateness of discussing death with young children. My nervousness was displayed in my almost inaudible and often muddled questions. I particularly had
difficulty asking the more personal questions. Upon completion of my prepared interview schedule, Miriam raised the issue of parental responses to my research which I had completely overlooked. It is interesting to note that the conversation that transpired from Miriam's queries was much more relaxed, interactive, and constituted over one third of the interview.

Conversation with Cassandra

The interview with Cassandra was held at her home in the evening of January 21, 1996. I felt less nervous preparing for this interview, as Cassandra and I are friends, and had talked at length about the subject of death in children's literature and its appropriateness for young children. However, we had not had a chance to debrief after the week's story sessions, and I was both hesitant and anxious to hear her thoughts and feelings about the project thus far. This interview was to be Cassandra's final time-commitment to this project—I think we were both relieved that it would soon be over. I had already listened to the tape of my interview with Miriam and was upset that I had sounded unclear and unprofessional. Therefore, I was conscious of my attempts during this interview to ask my questions more distinctly.

Because Cassandra and I had previously engaged in conversations about our personal life and past experiences, asking her about her personal experiences with death did not seem as awkward as it had with Miriam; the interview seemed like a natural progression from the weeks' events. At times throughout the interview, Cassandra controlled its progress and direction as she asked questions of me regarding my reactions to the story sessions as well as how the research was affecting my ability to cope with the death of my mother. Although I desired this
kind of reflexive interaction, it was difficult for me to answer these questions at that time; difficult for me to access my more personal feelings while wearing the (straight)jacket of researcher.

Feedback

I had always intended to share the chapters that contained story session and interview fragments with Miriam and Cassandra before the final draft. In this way they could read their words and the context I had placed them in, checking for misrepresentation and misunderstanding (Brodkey, 1987; Opie, 1993; Roman, 1993). I think this feedback is crucial to the validity of the work. Yet how does it affect what I write and what I do not write? I must continue to work with Miriam, and Cassandra and I have established a friendship. I do not know the answer to this question, but I must, at least, raise it.

STO(stories)RIES

Not only am I a participant in this research as a storyteller with children, but also as lived-storyteller, narrating my journey of grief. Within this story of stories I tell my own stories. Ted Aoki describes narrating as a layered interplay between storying and theming, which "is meant to open ourselves to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the lived experiences we experienced, to a deepened sense of what it is to be human" (1992, p. 30).

I have attempted to reflect upon and record the ways in which this research has influenced the experiencing of my mother's death, as well as how my mother's death has influenced this work. Lingering within this sphere of influence has been a consistent struggle.
I don't want to write this journal that everyone tells me to write. Autobiography is too hard. I don't know how to begin. Is this beginning (words on paper), or has it already begun (frames reeling inside my head)? Words—tensile, like glass—are strong and tension-filled; they have the potential to shatter if the impact is too forceful—shatter me. And who will pick me up when I lay on the ground in ten thousand pieces? Not my mother for she is dead. I do not want to start my mother's death. As I write these words, they are accompanied by a motion picture of memory.

Other pedagogues realize the difficulty of telling one's story, yet stress the importance of undertaking the arduous task:

As I respond to personal experiences in my writing and teaching, I disclose my world. I make sense of it. I reflect on people, places, and problems with personal pertinence, hoping that other people will see themselves in that personal experience, too. But that is not an easy task. While in my teaching and writing I am motivated by the desire to make stories, I am also challenged by the difficulty of framing life in stories (Leggo, 1991, p. 123).

Artful stories do not smooth out or hide tensions, nor do they directly manipulate them—they craft them for display. And they do so by intermingling voices drenched in cultural meaning (Dyson, 1994, p. 168).

In reflecting critically on his or her practice, the perceptive teacher has a story to tell—a story which relates obstacles overcome or still looming large; conflicts resolved, displaced, or deepened; turning points for better or worse; climaxes and culminations (Pendlebury, 1995, p. 64).

Autobiography

Those who advocate autobiography are willing to struggle with constructing their own story because they know that in doing so, they are also constructing themselves:

... even as we attempt to reconstruct our past experiences to provide them with a retrospective pattern they may not have held for us at the initial moment of the experience, we are also constructing
ourselves, creating a fictional representation, an art object whose first audience and interpreter is ourselves, and from which process we may be able to extract some idea of the truth of our existence (Dewey quoted in Graham, 1991, p. 66, emphasis in original).

Autobiography can be seen as an activity emanating from within, an expression of a self already constituted, as well as originating from without, as a way of improving the self through the production of a text (Graham, 1991, pp. 144-45). John Dewey's notion, however, emphasizes the mutual influence that these processes can have upon each other, "Reflection is not simply a sequence of ideas, but a con-sequence, where each [idea] determines the next as its proper outcome, while each outcome in turn leans back on, or refers to, its predecessors" (quoted in Graham, 1991, p. 59, emphasis in original). Silin reminds us that autobiography is able to connect the multiple parts of our past, present, and future selves, "As I seek to make sense of the disparate parts of my life, writing has become a ceremony of connection, a ritualized attempt to sustain the links between past and present, to project a future in an impossible time" (1995, p. 176).

Autobiography not only allows for an interconnectedness within the writer, but is also a means to connect to others, and the world in which we live (Graham, 1991; Silin, 1995; Witherell, 1995). Autobiography is not a monologue, but a conversation, "and even if I am the only reader of my own story, as in the case of a private journal of jottings for no one but myself, as both the writer and reader of the tale, I am doubled" (Grumet, 1992, p. 36). Hershock goes a step further to say:

[P]ersons are not located in narratives. They are not a character, but rather a coming together of all the characters, all the actions, all the places and events that occur as what we refer to as "the world." ... there is nothing that we are not responsible for, nothing which we can point to and say "that is not me." As narration, our distinction of
inside and outside is purely dramatic. In actuality, there is no outside ... (1994, p. 693).

Through creating and enriching ourselves and our relationships with others, autobiography emotes generativity. Bruner describes autobiography as life-making (1994), while Witherell sees it as a means to join a living conversation (1995). Others emphasize that even in the face of death, autobiography lives, as do those it speaks from and about:


Narratives chronicle the passing of time. They are built on the tensions between stasis and change, sameness and difference, tensions that we learn in our bodies long before language becomes a primary way of knowing. Narrative is the final transformation of rhythms that have their origin in body time. It is a writing out of the body, a writing into life. I want to be assured that those whom I have loved and cared for are inscribed in the book of life (Silin, 1995, p. 35, emphasis added).

Just as artists give their objects eternal life, motherless daughters hope to do the same for their mothers and for themselves. Art, writing, and music offer a daughter the promise of an immortality she believes her mother was denied and also provide her with a means to bring the images of her mother ... back to life (Edelman, 1994, p. 269).

Details

Throughout this text I use various fonts and margins to differentiate the more traditional thesis writing from the more autobiographical elements. At times it may also mean a shift in time, as some fragments in the text were written before my mother died, while at other times "something my mother frequently said," or a brief comment might illuminate my point. I also attempted
to distinguish "The Ring" from the rest of the text as it simultaneously disrupts and connects the various chapters.

I also use the margins to visually distinguish different voices and time periods, and to prevent the text from listing to the left, potentially rolling over.
The Ring

I have been thinking about writing this series of events for some time. Initially I was excited about the idea, but now I hesitate, overwhelmed by the blank screen. So much pressure to write, to get it right. It's frustrating knowing that the words to follow aren't really what happened, not really. Perhaps this is an attempt to convince myself, more than anyone else, that this story matters.

Part One: Remembering

When I was 14 or so years old, my parents and I drove from Chicago to a small town in Ohio to visit our cousins that live there. My Uncle Ed owned a jewelry store, and each time we visited, we would browse in his shop. When I place myself into that shop that particular weekend, I can feel my mother exuding a no-nonsense, yet giddy attitude. I know from that feeling that my mother is about to buy something; it is just a matter of moments until she makes her final decision. (My mother's decisions were always fast and final.) When I momentarily chisel my pre-teen gaze from the women's wedding ring display, I see the object of my mother's desire. It is a ring—a substantial mixture of gold and jewels. I am silently exasperated, thinking that my mother really doesn't need another ring. Perhaps I was already in my anti-materialistic stage, or perhaps I was jealous that my Dad wasn't buying a ring for me too. (How can one sort and label these oh so long ago memories?) The ring was paid for and, I believe, worn out of the store.

My mother really liked that ring. She wore it every day from the day she bought it until days before she died, on the ring finger of her right hand. We never discussed why she liked that ring so much, but allow me to surmise. ("Never assume, Margot.") I'm sure my mother was very much attracted to its orderly rows of jewels glittering from within the thick gold
band; definitely an eye-catcher. Yet I believe it was its weight, its substantialness, that made it stay with her all those years, rather than being replaced with another. One could never really forget that it was on your finger. I know.

I mentioned that my mother wore that ring every day, but she didn't sleep or shower with it on. During these times, she placed the ring on top of her dresser among her perfume bottles. Some mornings while she was in the shower, I would sneak into her bedroom, tip-toe to her dresser, and try it on. All of this had to be done like lightning, as my mother's showers were only four minutes long. Unfortunately, that ring didn't fit the ring finger of my right hand, even though I always tried that finger first. Although I was young, I was already quite tall and large boned. My mother was not a small woman, but her fingers were narrow. Always disappointed, I slid the ring onto my pinky. I held it out and admired it, waved it around, and conducted imaginary conversations requiring much gesticulation. Off with the ring. Click on the dresser. Out of the room.

This trying on of the ring was a not so often but consistent activity throughout my life, since its purchase. As I grew older and returned home from university or the west coast, I still might sneak into my parent's bedroom to have a fitting. Each time I tried it on, I was hopeful that it might fit, but I had to remain contented with admiring it as it hung lopsidedly on my pinky.

My mother was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1992, and this led to numerous surgeries and hospital stays. Each time my mother was admitted to the hospital, she would leave her ring at home for fear of it being stolen. ("There are bad people out there, Margot.") I was living in Seattle at the time, and later moved to Vancouver. Disconcertingly, each time I went
home for a visit, my mother would end up in the hospital. (I began to consider not going home at all.) However, the fact that my mother was in the hospital and the ring and I were at home allowed for leisurely and extended fittings. These fittings enabled me to stay connected to my mother; more poignantly, the parts of my mother that were being etched away by sickness, pain, and medical treatments; the parts of her self that made her her—strength, endurance, resiliency. These qualities were epitomized by this prized ring wrapped 'round me. It was something I could grasp; something I could make stay. As I silently prepared for my mother's death and began to grieve for gems already lost, these fittings were especially memorable. Although I missed the fear of getting caught, I cherished the opportunity to dwell in that space, and to hold parts of my mother once solid, now molten.

When my mother returned from the hospital, her jewelry returned to her body like a dog runs to its master after being momentarily confused as to its whereabouts. Everything was back in order.

When my mother returned from what would be her last hospital stay, we had set up a bed in the family room on the first floor, and she was never again to return to her bedroom. We brought her jewelry to her. After all, a woman has to die with some dignity.

You may think it materialistic that my mother and I would hold a possession so dear, so essential. I do not deny for a moment that my mother was materialistic, especially after her diagnosis. ("At least I'm supporting the economy, Margot.") No one knew to what extent, however, until we opened her closets after she died. We found dresses and suits and outfits hanging with the tags still on them. Buying goods as buying time? Most definitely.
False hopes that she would one day be able to wear them? No doubt. But this piece is not about judgement, nor placing our values on my mother's life. It is about recalling, reliving, revisiting a space and time in the past. Please keep in mind that a story is only a fragment, a part of a whole. Perhaps I digress in an attempt to delay the end of this story; I had better proceed.

I was one of my mother's primary caregivers in her final weeks of life. The Sunday night after American Thanksgiving, 1994, was the last day my mother was conscious. Four days later, my father, sisters, and I made the decision to stop the intravenous antibiotics and fluids she was receiving. As the end grew near, my mother's hands began to swell, so my father removed her rings. It hurts to imagine how sad she would have been to part with those rings, engraved for so long on her flesh, now laid to rest on her dresser.

During the final days of my mother's life, I not only tried on the usual ring that I had been trying on for years, but also her wedding bands. It seemed somewhat sacrilegious, yet there I was—grasping, gasping.

In the early morning of December 4, 1994 my mom died. We put her rings in a small satin pouch inside her armoire.

* * *

Months later, my father, sisters, and I sat down at the kitchen table to begin to divide some of my mother's jewelry. I hesitantly put the ring in front of me, not as a final gesture, but as a suggestion. I questioned whether I would wear such a ring, whether such things fit with me and a
lifestyle like mine. Besides, the ring didn't even fit my finger. The lack of both physical and emotional fit made me think I shouldn't take it, but my father insisted on getting it sized for my finger if that was indeed what I wanted. I tried the ring on my pinky again and again. Did I really want this? Would I really wear this outside the carpeted space of my parent's bedroom? (My mother's quick decision making skills never wore off on me.)

I finally did decide to take it. The strange thing is, however, that after I made and then verbalized my decision to take the ring, just as we were beginning to get up from the table, I slipped the ring onto the ring finger of my right hand, and it slid all the way down. The ring fit.
OTHER IN SELF

CHAPTER THREE
BEGINNINGS

This is where the actual writing of my thesis began/is beginning. It's difficult to start in the middle. I could choose to disguise this fact along with this writing's many hesitations, self-doubts, struggles, and mistakes, but I want to make you aware of some of them. I want to show you the false beginnings as well as the real ones. To me, this thesis is a process as well as a product. I want to make this evident, I don't want to hide behind finalized black and white words; although I'm not sure if this is an attempt to quell your anxieties or mine.

My committee said to write so I am writing. Today I start to write my thesis. I have cleaned and straightened and organized and eaten. I have phoned locally and long distance. I am nervous and anxious but want to be done so badly; futuristic feelings of relief move my fingers along this keyboard. I just have to write they say. Yet writing is so final, so demanding of one's time and energy. It has to be polished, connected, cohesive, readable, understandable. This whole process seems insurmountable. The end is just becoming apparent on the horizon. It looks close and far in the same glance. I know the only way to get there is to begin—before the sun goes down and I am left to wallow in the darkness inside myself.

It is another day and I still haven't started. I've been busy with other projects and household chores. Will I ever begin? Will this ever end? I get increasingly more anxious each day. I don't know why writing is such a struggle for me, but it is. I want to convey the extent of my struggling. I want someone to understand, to stand under this difficulty with me (Lin-Alparaque, 1991). Why do I need someone to empathize with me? What comfort do I long for in this potential connection? A part of this chapter is about connection. Perhaps my desire for connection has caused me to see the connections within this work. Perhaps it makes me feel safe, taken care of—surrogate connections for those lost.

I want to finish this and I haven't even started. I want an end, a finality, a sense of completion, a degree. Some endings are desired, while others are avoided and feared. THE ending is not welcomed, but pushed away. Life as a process—our only non-product-oriented endeavor? I want, although am simultaneously advocating against, education towards end, towards polished, towards done.
My friend Lauren suggested that I think of this thesis as a big chocolate chip cookie. Just start with small bites. This is a big chocolate chip cookie. This is a big chocolate chip cookie. Here I go.

OTHER IN SELF

This chapter dwells within the spaces between the selves and others of the early childhood classroom. It attempts to find ways in which these spaces can be diminished but not eradicated: by entertaining the notion of a fragmented self, by sharing our lived stories, and by making connections with those around us. This chapter illustrates how difficult it is to find a balance between teacher and student, researcher and researched, life and death; how difficult it is to achieve the right distance (Taubman, 1992).

Sometimes the thought of being motherless is too unbearable, so I begin to look for ways in which she is still here. I had already begun this process while my mother was ill; already looking for ways to cope, to simply survive. As I sat in that summer-hot room listening to the words and silences of Ted Aoki along with other graduate students, I began to see and hear glimpses of her. The notion of a fragmented or divided self stuck to me, followed me throughout the day like a stray dog. It was a notion that might let my mother in; her into me and me into her. It would be a risk, for part of me would become ill and eventually die, but part of her would live on. The surrendered parts of my self would be replaced by parts of her; a gaining and a losing.
Yet I had struggled so many years to get out from under her influence. Was this a regression? Was I losing the independence that I had striven so hard to accomplish? As the stubborn part of myself fought to keep me whole, or at least force me to continue to believe that that was indeed the case, other parts of me were waiting; waiting for me to be open to a notion contrary to those I was taught and lived by. Entertaining this idea of disseminated self would mean relinquishing control of an image of me as solid, ruled solely by my will. I like control, and the little of it I have I protect like a vulture guarding its piece of the dead. But in order for me, a human being, to hold onto my piece of the dead, I had to let go.

The fragment below was written for that oh-so-long-ago graduate course, when I was just beginning to dilute the distinction between self and other. I believe it best portrays my enduring struggles with death past and present, and is an attempt to cultivate understanding of my disjointed experiences of grief for you, as well as for me, as, "we shall never be able to live at peace with the strangers around us if we are unable to tolerate the otherness in ourselves" (Kristeva, 1991 quoted in Aoki, 1993, p. 75). My story, like Cassandra's description of The Snow Goose, "[i]s a story that's put together in bits and pieces, from several different people" (story session, January, 1996). I am letting you in.

Many people who are now involved in re-writing modernity (Lyotard in Aoki's class discussion, 1994) are deconstructing the conception of the individualized self and the individualized other. Julia Kristeva (1991) has proposed the notion of a divided subject; each one of us is both self and other (cited in Aoki, 1993). James Clifford, in his discussion of ethnography, blurs the boundaries between self and other in his statement, "It has become
clear that every version of an 'other,' wherever found, is also
the construction of a 'self,'" (Clifford, 1986, p.23). Madeleine
Grumet attests that an approach to learning based upon the
division of self and other is not only an impossibility but is
also unjustified, as the world is not "experienced in discretely
organized units by persons who [can] isolate emotional responses
from intellectual ones, past from present, present from future, I
from me, and me from us ... " (1992, p.31).

This notion of a divided or fragmented self that allows for, I
believe, a greater interconnectedness or co-mingling between self
and other, resonates in the words of Francisco Ibanez:

Border writing ... shows the diaspora of me, a fragmented
Francisco, a bit of everything scattered in every place I
have been, in every vial of blood they have drawn from me, in
every kiss of now dead men, in every person I talked with
today. ... I leave traces of the explosion of myself that is
the explosion of yourself, because I am nothing new, I'm you
and I reflect the structures and habits and attitudes that
you and I have built together (1994, p.21).

As I grow older, I see more and more of my mother in myself.
I used to loathe it, suppress the parts of me that were her. But
now that I am faced with the possibility of her not being here, I
want to grasp her self in me, clutch this other in myself, and
make it stay. I want to do everything that modernity has taught
me: grasp, control, hold on. When I don't want its influence it
clings to me; when I want it to stay it eludes me. Slippery.

I can hear myself when I listen to the other: I can hear
myself in the other, or in the position of the other.
But the reverse is also true. I can hear the other when
I listen to myself; I can hear the other, or the
position of the other, in myself. Between myself and
the other, there are echoes and resonances: ... (Levin
Where will her Self go when she dies? Her opinions and figures of speech pass through my lips, her facial expressions and gestures texture my body. She is here. She is with me.

Envisioning my Self as divided, fragmented, dispersed (I prefer this last word as it connotes a flowing, a more gradual reaching) has allowed me to more thoughtfully map the terrain that stretches between my m(other) and my(self).

I sense angst and panic in these ancient words. My mother wasn't even dead yet and I can hear myself, feel myself clinging to bits of her I knew would not be within reach for much longer. Although I am only beginning to learn about the concept of a fragmented self, it comforts me. Part of her will be here with me always, and part of me died with her. This sharing of multi-generational selves, mother and daughter, helps me to live with my mother's death. This notion is not clear or certain, adjectives with which I usually like to surround myself, but it's here, she's here. I think it is worth the trade.

SELVES AND OTHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

After my research at the University Child School was completed and transcriptions read and reread, I began to broaden my conceptions of self and other to include students and teachers, listeners and tellers, researched and researcher—the selves and others of early childhood education and research. I realized that schools depend upon these sturdy, although not impermeable, walls that separate people into categories (Silin, 1995). However, there are many interactions that slip through the cracks, and many more that can be fostered to do so. In this chapter, I use
my own and others' voices to advocate for the breaking down of these barriers that serve to distance ourselves from those with whom we live.

"Where will her Self goes when she dies?"

Perhaps this is the quest(ion) that inspired my journey of selves and others. I couldn't fathom this world without my mother. She had to stay—at least parts of her. More and more pieces of herself slipped away between telephone calls. She was leaving. Where will she go? How strange it was to see and hear my own questions mirrored in the faces and echoed in the words of the children during three of the four story sessions. They are concerned and curious; like me, they want to know.

Cynthia: Um, where do people go when they die?
Cassandra: Does anybody know?
Several children at once: Heaven. They go to heaven.
Cassandra: Heaven?
Child: How do they go when they're dead, and the bones still left, they go into the graveyard.
Cassandra: Anybody else have any ideas?
Child: And they send the ashes.
Child: Now I know. Well, my dad went to see a big yard where all the people were buried when they died....
Child: How does that happen, do you know why?

***

After Badger dies a child asks: Where's Badger?
Child: In there (pointing to picture).
Cassandra: Well, he could be there....
Child: Up in the sky. His bones is there, up in the sky.
Cassandra: His bones did you say?
Child: It's up in the sky.
Child: His whole body.

***

Child: Where do we go when we die?
Child: Heaven.
Child: Buried into the ground.
Child: Some people believe that when you die you come back as another thing.

Neither Cassandra nor I had answers to the children's questions. We merely allowed them the opportunity to share their opinions and beliefs. As we dwelled together in our not-knowingness, I became aware of the precariousness of words such as teacher, student, knower, learner. And now, as I reflect upon these experiences, I see that we all left the sessions with the same degree of uncertainty and (not)knowing with which we entered. Except that we now understood that we shared this space with others.

SHARING OF SELVES

From within the autobiographical midst of the and between my mother and myself (Aoki, 1993), I began my research at the University Child School. During the story sessions on death, I saw the traditional notions of separate and distinct selves and others challenged. Teacher-student, student-student, teller-listener, and knower-learner became increasingly blurred. In what ways did the categories of selves and others remain separate, and in what ways did they intermingle within the context of the story sessions? When are our selves opened and shared? I found that much of this sharing occurs around stories, be they read/told from books or, particularly, be they pulled from the memory in bits and pieces. These shards of the past, inscribed with beliefs, ideas, and common experience, burst isolated bubbles of self in the present; they expose and make vulnerable, but they also create connections essential to learning and growth in the preschool classroom. "I find that personal experience is

Bradley: And my grandpa died, because he started with too, too um, too brave, he was too brave, and he just did some, actually, he was too too too smart, and he, and he did something, but he wasn't smart enough, and it didn't work, and you know what he was doing? He was trying, like to climb, like to be, like, jump to a building to building, but he fell off.

***

Stacey: Um, my mom died in, and, and, when uh, and one, and one morning, um, for Christmas, I got a um, um...
Me: Stacey, your mom didn't really die, did she?
Stacey: No.
Me: No. She's still alive.
Stacey: My mom didn't die, and, and, for Christmas I got a um, um, a puppy.

Who am I reassuring here?

While some stories, like the examples above, took the form of individuals recalling retelling past events, some underscored common experiences. In these cases it was difficult to ascertain which child was speaking as stories intermingled with and built upon one another.

Helen: Me! (hand raised)
Cassandra: Yes, Helen.
Helen: I, I, Miss Moneypenny died, when we took her to the vet, and then she, she gone to heaven now. Now we have a new cat.
Cassandra: How did that make you feel?
Helen: Mmmm, sad.
Kate: We had to have her have a shot, because, um, it was like gonna die, so. So, like, she wanted to die, because like, she was suffering.

The importance of sharing stories to establish and maintain connections with the deceased and among the bereaved was modeled in the stories that Cassandra and I read to the children. In Badger's Parting
Gifts, the animals reminisce about Badger. They share stories and their gratitude for the skills he taught them, skills that are then passed down to future generations.

Sometimes the stories Cassandra and I read were the actual vehicles through which sharing took place. At times we infused the stories with our own beliefs and experiences to respond to children's questions and comments. When a child suggested that Badger visit the doctor as he was feeling old and tired, Cassandra expressed a calm acceptance of death, like she had experienced with her own grandfather. "Actually, Badger was feeling ready, and I think this often happens, when someone's going to die, they're ready to die, unless it's a real accident" (story session, January, 1996). When elaborating on Jessie's feelings of grief and her neglect of William the cat in The Very Best of Friends, memories of my initial reactions to my mother's death flowed from me. "She [Jessie] didn't seem to see him or hear him [William], because sometimes when someone we love dies, we just don't care about anything, and we're kind of, just like in our own little world, and we want to be by ourselves" (story session, January, 1996).

8 October 1995
I dream about my mother. In these dreams, I am sometimes aware that she is dead, and I think how strange it is that I'm talking to her. But other times we are just together on a boat that's not a boat but a floating kitchen, at home that's not really our house but a school cafeteria, sometimes shopping, or together with the family. Sometimes I'm doing things and she's just there. When I wake up I feel like I've been with her, and I try hard to remember what we did, what she said. I must remember her; put her body with her voice with her face with her expressions. I must re-member to remember. This reconstructing is hard work. I fear that I will forget what she looks like, how she talks, her reactions to things.
6 March 1996
As I read the above words, dream fragments rush back into my head. I remember these images and being with her within them. I am grateful to myself for having written this down. With tears in my eyes I re-member. I don't want to lose her.

CONNECTIONS

What happens when we risk disseminating ourselves in the public space of classroom and the private space of autobiography? Connections are created that strain against institutional and personal barriers. Attempted, successful, and failed connections occur at all levels of this research. Stories enable us to make connections to our individual and common lived experience, to the curriculum, to the world, among ourselves, and within ourselves. The autobiographical work that is woven among the stories of students and teachers connects me with my mother, the research, the reader, my past experiences, and myself.

Conscious and Spontaneous Connections

Cassandra and I both attempted to establish ties with the children throughout the storytelling experience using various teaching techniques. Cassandra introduced The Snow Goose with a then recent anecdote:

Well, this morning, as I was coming out to go to school, Alim [her son] saw this book with all my things, and he said, "Mom, ... can you read it to me?" And I thought, this morning? ... "Please, please, please," he said. I said, "Well, it will be a long one but okay, you sit down." We were nearly late for school. As he was getting out of the car, he said, "Mom, those kids are so lucky, that is the best story I've ever heard" (story session, January, 1996).
I tried to interest and engage the children by making the characters likable and familiar. It seems as if children want so badly to connect with those around them, fictional and real:

Me: ... James and Jessie liked to do a lot of the same things. They liked to walk in the countryside together, they both liked to wake up early together, they both loved hot chocolate. But there was one thing...
Child: I love hot chocolate! I, I love that hot chocolate.
Children: Me too! Me too!
Child: You know what, that's my favorite drink.
Madeline: My brother's have hot chocolate. ...
Sarah: My Bubby, she, when she goes up to Starbucks with me and Bennys, she gives me hot chocolate.
Me: Does she? She must be a special Bubby.

The frequency and spontaneity of these kinds of comments increased throughout the course of the story as children became more involved and saw themselves as more connected to the characters and story:

Cassandra: The story takes place in England, and ...
Cynthia: That's where my dad comes from!
Kate: And that's my favorite place!

Not only do the children see themselves and their experiences reflected in the story, but the story helps to maintain and bring to the forefront bonds that have previously been established in their lives. Toward the end of *The Snow Goose*, Cynthia interrupts, "Cassandra, he's [Phillip] in love with her [Fritha] just like I'm in love with him" (puts her arm around Josh). Later, Helen shyly admits that she's in love with the same boy. Cassandra replies, "Are you? Well, we've got lots of love springing around this classroom" (story session, January, 1996). There truly was a warm feeling in the room as Cassandra dramatically portrayed the tragic love story between Phillip and Fritha.
Most teachers relish the moments in which their students make connections, especially to the ideas she or he is trying to illustrate.

Cassandra recalls an interaction she had with Steven during the reading of Badger's Parting Gifts:

[H]e says something along the line of, "These things I don't get," or "Sometimes I don't get it, but I get this; I got this." Which to me, that was the best part of the whole session, was that Steven got it. He got it! So developmentally he's a young three, or he's one of the youngest kids in the class, but because of the discussion, or maybe the story, or something connected with him, he could identify and really feel the story (interview, January, 1996).

However, Cassandra was frustrated after a conversation with Steven a few days later. Steven told Cassandra that he had gone home and told his mother about Badger, and his mother said that if you gave Badger a very strong medicine, he would come back to life. His mother also said that for people, doctors can put a machine in their heart to make them live. Cassandra asked Steven if he thought Badger had died. After reflecting for a moment, Steven concluded, "Yes, because he was an animal, but if it was a person he would come back to life" (personal communication, January, 1996).

People don't come back to life, Steven. Believe me, I've tried to make it happen. I've begged and bartered, pleaded and bargained. I've been good and I've been bad. I've had every kind of real and imaginary conversation with everyone I could think of. It hasn't worked. I know I sound as if I'm contradicting myself. I argue that my mother is here, and I do believe parts of her are. I am trying so desperately to keep those pieces alive, within myself and this thesis. But she's not alive. Each word I write is as much a reminder that she is not here than that she is. If she were alive, I'd still be writing my quantitative needs analysis of the integration of special needs children into regular classrooms. I'd probably be done by now.
Interconnections

Because the adults that participated in this research know each other and work with the same children and families, a particular child or event was viewed and then discussed from varying perspectives. This interconnection provided more texture and thickness to the work, and provoked new questions as often as it answered ones I had previously formulated. Lucy, a student in Miriam's class, illustrates this well. She participated in one of Cassandra's story sessions, which I observed, and was discussed by both Cassandra and Miriam in my interviews with them.

From the interview with Miriam, I learned that this past August Lucy experienced the death of her great-grandfather to whom she was very close. Lucy and her mother spent a lot of time "going through the process" at home, and they had already read Badger's Parting Gifts (interview, January, 1996). Her mother warned Miriam that the loss might come up in the classroom because Lucy was still quite upset about it, but it never did.

Lucy's mother gave her consent to Lucy's participation in this study, and prepared her for the story session. While Cassandra was introducing the story, Lucy stated, "I know that. I have this story at home.... They make me remind of my great-gramps that died.... He died when he was fast asleep.... And this guy died while he was sleeping" (story session, January, 1996). Lucy's connection to the story builds a bridge that the other children will use to connect with the story. She is also making connections within herself around death. She is eager to share, to give away pieces of herself that are disseminated in each story that we tell.

Lucy: I have memories about my great-gramps, because, um, sometimes when we were playing lion with him, but we had to play gentle lion because he was really old, but like gentle lion, and
pretend when he'd say, "Come here, lion," he'd have to tickle my back....
Cassandra: In fact, I was here when your great-gramps died, because I remember you coming into class and telling me about that.

I sat en(w)raptured in meaning as I watched Lucy re-live memorable experiences she shared with her great-gramps, Cassandra remembering the death, and them reflecting on that time together. It was during these moments that I was content with the research methods I had chosen and their positive effects on those involved. In her interview Cassandra reflected, "I think she [Lucy] got a lot of peace from being able to talk about her grandfather" (January, 1996).

I constantly vacillate between thinking that there is too much and not enough of myself in this thesis. I think I have too many transcription quotations, too many sources, and then I think I don't have enough. What am I supposed to write in here anyway? What do I want to write? How much do I want to share? Yet, isn't this all me? The quotations that I choose to include as well as the ones I omit are me. The connections I see and those I do not see are me. Every thesis is autobiographical, from the topic we choose to the font we use. Why am I only figuring this out now? Objectivity just doesn't exist.

Lingering Connections

The connections to which children grasp and cling are often unpredictable. In The Very Best of Friends, there was a character Boss the Bull, who James, Jessie, and William would hide from while plowing the fields. Recently, I was in a classroom working with Dylan, one of the students that participated in this project. We were drawing bison from an animal photography book, and as he was putting the finishing touches on his picture he stated, "Boss, Boss the bison. Even though Boss was really a bull" (personal interaction, March, 1996). I couldn't believe that he made
that oh-so-long-ago connection. It made me feel like I had made an impact, that perhaps at times what I do in the little library at the back of the school might seep out into the classroom and into their lives.

FINDING THE MIDPOINT

I am advocating for a reconceptualization of the self from separate and individual to dispersed and contextualized within our social surroundings (Kristeva, 1991 in Aoki, 1993; Silin, 1995). This reconfiguration would blur the boundaries between the many selves and others of the early childhood classroom, decreasing, but not eradicating, the distances among us which often result in our "ability/inability to recognize children's concerns" (Silin, 1995, p. 119). However, achieving the right distance between student and teacher, what Peter Taubman (1992) calls the midpoint, is a difficult predicament. Early childhood educators want to foster independence in young children while simultaneously staying connected to them. Teachers must traverse the tightrope between too much and too little distance. In my research I saw and heard about these difficulties that have consequences for planning and implementing curriculum experiences in the classroom.

Too Close for Comfort

When a person, event, or subject becomes too close for comfort, many people become anxious, uncomfortable, or frustrated. These situations are epitomized by too little perceived distance among those involved. People's tolerance for distance may vary at different times or within different environments. I believe we must linger in the potentially problematic space between challenging these perceived comfort levels and respecting people's needs and desires. Although most teachers agree that
the comfort limits of a child should be respected, it is often difficult to predict a child's response to a particular situation, and at times the dailiness of school life is not conducive to accounting for individual differences. There may also be instances when a child's limits should be pushed and challenged.

Most of the stories shared by the children in the story sessions were about grandparents, pets, or story characters. Except for the following example, in which Stephanie refers to her mother, parents and selves were not mentioned. One might assume that the reason for this is that young children do not see themselves as eventually going to die (Nagy cited in Gatliffe, 1988 and Ulin, 1977). Another explanation could be that they are well aware of their own and their loved ones' mortality, but acknowledging this blurs the boundary between security and insecurity beyond their level of comfort (Furman cited in McKeever, 1980). When Stephanie contemplated her mother's mortality, the other children quickly and definitively aided Cassandra in her attempts to comfort and assure Stephanie, and perhaps, themselves:

Stephanie: "My mom hasn't died yet."
Cassandra: "And your mom won't die for a long time, and people..."
Several children at once: "Yeah." "Oh, no!" "No, one's kind of old...."

Teachers bring their own conscious and unconscious levels of comfort into the classroom. Our needs for closeness and distance influence our interactions with children and parents. These comfort zones seem to fall into two categories: the personal (teachers' own level of emotional tolerance), and the political (what they believe to be controversial topics for parents and/or the school system). Both Miriam and Cassandra addressed these issues in considerable detail during our interviews. Miriam admitted that she would be uncomfortable with emotional and
personal acknowledgement of death in her classroom, although she believes the biological aspects of death should be discussed. Cassandra, however, advocates for both biological and emotional discussions of death:

Me: So do you feel that death is a difficult topic to talk about with young kids?
Miriam: I would probably find it difficult to talk about if it was related to something really personal. I find it may be sometimes awkward if children are, it actually hasn't where children have broken down and been really upset over a death that's recently happened in their life, but I might find that difficult.... But talking about it as a biological phenomena, I don't find that at all... (I cut her off)
Me: Right. So if it's like animals, then that's different than if someone...
Miriam: Yeah. If it's really personal. I think sometimes children bring up the fact that their dog died, you know, two years ago, or that their grandpa died, and I don't find that difficult either, but I think they've already distanced themselves from it. It's not an emotional experience for them.... If it's happened, it's happened in the past, so there's this distance that makes it a safe topic (interview, January, 1996).

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Cassandra: I found that it [an emotional treatment of death] springboards to learning, but I think you have to be very comfortable with that.... You have to be prepared to answer the questions, and as long as you are comfortable with that, and you know the children well enough, it's worthwhile (interview, January, 1996).

Both Miriam and Cassandra discuss the political constraints they feel as teachers:

Miriam: I do run across, when pets die, you know that it's in pet heaven, or things like that, and I tend to kind of try and circumvent that whole issue, because I know it can be quite delicate in many families (interview, January, 1996).

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Cassandra: Another area that I think a lot of teachers get very uncomfortable with, is the whole religious side of it, and we're really burned as a profession by political correctness ... you're so nervous I think that some teachers are uncomfortable talking about death, because you might be forced into saying something that is religiously at odds with a child in the group (interview, January, 1996).

Why are some parents and educators reluctant to bring death into an early childhood classroom? Both Cassandra and Miriam believe that adults who have not resolved their own issues around death have more difficulty discussing death with children. Adults may use children as an excuse to not confront their own fears about death (Hyminovitz, 1978; Silin, 1995). Cassandra states, "Parents, I think, the time you would run into problems with parents, and this is just my gut feeling, would be parents who've had difficulty themselves" (interview, January, 1996).

Miriam goes into more detail:

It's just that we [adults] have this thing about death, I think, that's what it is, I think. The adults feel queasy about it, cause maybe they haven't processed it, or it's much more personal to them.... The kids are all open, they don't have all these barriers.... And I think, probably, there's a fair number of educators who would try and sidestep the whole thing. And I know, I've come across many parents who feel that it's not appropriate to have a story that even has an unhappy ending, let alone a death. And some people I've worked with who, when we get to the end of a story, they're just like shocked that I would read something like that because it's so sad for them to deal with, and they find they want to protect the children from that too. So I think we tend not to deal with it.... they're maybe reflecting how they think onto the children, and maybe that's not fair to the children, because they don't see it the same way. It's a hard, a very difficult part of teaching, is to separate yourself from the kids that you're teaching, because your perceptions aren't the same.

I'm not advocating for more distance, but a more thoughtful one. We must acknowledge how we unconsciously place our own anxieties and
fears about death onto children. With this protective stance we convey death as a wholly negative experience, from which nothing can be learned. We must allow children their own relationships with death.

3 October 1995
I am overwhelmed by this experience of writing and remembering. Sometimes its pages and pages engulf me, muffle my experience while I am trying to expose it, capture it in inked words. It is difficult to distinguish my self as lived from my self as written. These selves swirl in what is fluid of me, inseparable.

I don't know if I can talk this way, think this way. I am told to locate myself, contextualize myself. What is myself? Who is myself? Where am I? On a road a sea a tight rope. If I use their language, it is not me. I don't want their words because I am trying to find mine. I want to find my own voice buried beneath the rubble of my experience. My own words, my own language, my own priorities and values. I cannot pretend to know what I do not, to have read what I have not. I must be true to myself even if I am still unearthing what that self actually is, and whether there is such a thing.

Too Much Distance

What happens when too much distance is created between the selves and others of the early childhood classroom? Other becomes stranger, connections fail, stories remain unshared. An example of too much distance between self and other occurred during the first pages of The Snow Goose, in which the children cannot connect or empathize with Phillip because of his physical appearance. Although this example does not deal specifically with death, it demonstrates the deep-seated beliefs and ideas we hold about people different than ourselves, especially those whom traditionally have been, and continue to be, marginalized by mainstream society. Cassandra recognizes the prejudices of the children,
and the fears that lie beneath them, and attempts to open their hearts and minds to let others in. When Cassandra showed the picture of Phillip using his clawed hand to hold the rope on his sailboat, a child said, "Yuck!"

Cassandra: That's just what frightens him.... If my hand was like that would you go, "yuck"?
Cynthia: That is yucky, but I wouldn't tell him that, I wouldn't tease him.
Kate: You can think it inside but you can't tell.
Cassandra: Well, what I'm going to propose is that during this session, we learn how to not even think it on the inside, that we learn that what a person looks like on the outside, can be so different from what they are like on the inside, that we have to really think hard.

Cassandra uses herself as an example to attempt to connect this abstract idea with the children's lives, "What if my hand was like this, [demonstrates a strictured position] and I held the book like this ... ? You would probably say yuck at first, but slowly ..."

Kendra: After you get used to it.
Cassandra: ... after you would get used to me, you would love me because of my stories, right? Well, I hope that happens in this story but I'm not sure it will.
Kendra: We'd like you just the way you are.
Cassandra: Yeah, that's why, try not to get frightened by things, 'cause that's just something that's different. Different things tend to frighten us, but really we need to look further, look deep, deep, deep.

We distance ourselves from others, those who stand on the opposite side of imaginary barriers assembled by society. Cassandra attempts to break these boundaries by leading the children through the process of tolerance and acceptance; looking for similarities in difference, good in bad, beauty in ugliness.

Later in the story, the children began to make comments connecting themselves to Phillip, such as, "People thought he was mean, but he was
really nice," "He seems very, he, he thinks things out carefully, and he's very kind," and "He's not an ogre!" Perhaps they did this because they knew it was what Cassandra wanted to hear, or perhaps she had succeeded, if only for a moment, in decreasing the distance between self and other. At the end of the story Cassandra revisits this theme:

Cassandra: Can I ask a question? Did any of the men say, I don't want to be helped by him. He's got a hump, he's got a claw. Did they even notice that? They were being saved. Remember what the man said, he was like ...
Child: An angel.

Failed Connection

I call my friend Patty to express my condolences; her grandfather died last week. She says she is surprised at how sad she is, even though he was very old and ill. She expresses her belief that he's in a better place, with people he loves, including his wife. She is afraid to die but is perhaps now less afraid, knowing that one day she will be with him in that better place. Then she asks me what I think about this notion of after-life; how I feel about death in the wake of my mother's.

I am already partially distracted from this phone conversation as I'm sauteing onions and chopping vegetables for spaghetti sauce. As she speaks of her notions of after-life, I drift further away. I talk halfheartedly about my grandmother's death between stirring and can opening. I have to stop myself from scoffing at her ideas inside my head. I don't want to share my philosophies of death with her. I feel death is a subject between my mother and myself. Maybe it's the closeness, the intimacy that I fear—having to be vulnerable around an already vulnerable topic.

But it's only Patty, a long time friend.

Why can't I have a conversation about a topic that I spend all day reading and writing and thinking about? What have I gained if I'm not able to comfort a friend in a time of loss? It seems as if these pages and pages of words I write in this thesis have not been fully integrated into my everyday life, where rationality continues to rule and analytic distance governs conversations with
friends. I feel that after all this work I should be able to counsel, to advise, to comfort, to reach out. I'm disappointed that I haven't come further; that I haven't resolved and integrated and connected more. How can I expect myself to talk about death with kids in the classroom if not with friends on the telephone?

Rem(a)inder of Struggle
This is becoming a habit—a way of forcing myself to sit down and write. I get to wallow in my misery, share my anxieties with this machine in an attempt to win it over, as if it is against me. Every day it's the same struggle. It doesn't seem to get any easier. Writing as joyous? as liberating? Not for me. It's exhausting and strenuous. Hiking a mountain with my mind—an uphill battle, sweat trickling, muscles quivering, joints aching. When is this going to end? Who has dragged me out here in the middle of nowhere? Who can I blame for this misguided adventure? Why the hell am I doing this? To be at one with nature, to relish the view, to say I did it, to build strength and self confidence? Must one struggle so hard for growth? I'm not sure that this will ever be done. I fear that I will never have the satisfaction of saying I did it, because each day I think about abandoning the trip. I've wandered from the trail; I'm lost.

RECIPROCITY

When the boundaries between self and other are blurred, stories are shared, and connections are made, the possibilities for reciprocity are made possible. I differentiate these interactions from others because they are an on-going interplay or exchange of ideas that provide mutual support or understanding. It is often unexpected as the person perceived to have more power than those with whom they interact, such as teacher or interviewer, are the receivers of support. It is a dialogue that upsets the traditional model of the teacher-student diad, in which the adult as
knower transmits knowledge to the ignorant or innocent child (Silin, 1995). When traditional models are dismantled in practice, new and differing possibilities can be entertained; ones in which reciprocal relationships of listening and learning can flourish between teacher and student, teller and listener, and researcher and researched. Perhaps this reciprocity is the midpoint of which Taubman (1992) speaks when he states, "At the midpoint we ask grateful questions of our students as we become their students.... At that intersection that occurs in the realm of necessity, student and teacher meet at the crossroads" (p. 233).

It is difficult to jostle habitual patterns of interaction. Those whose weight tips the scales toward privilege must be willing to give, relinquishing their favor, although I would argue that what they receive in return is more weighty. Moments of reciprocity were infrequent in this research, but vibrant and meaningful. I would like to contrast these moments of reciprocity with moments of failed and/or severed connections among the research participants:

Deborah: My, my, my great-grandpa died, because he had cancer.  
Me: Did he? That's a sickness. 
Deborah: He was really old. 
Brandon: Well guess what? My mom's grandma died and, and my mom's grandpa died too, of can-cancer.

Brandon stutters over cancer, as do I. I chose not to share about the death of my mother with the children. I am shocked that the subject of cancer was raised. I hadn't even considered it in my preparation. Perhaps I underestimated the children's knowledge and awareness of such things. Yet aren't these the stereotypes that I am trying to subvert? Of course, I used the excuse that the children were too young to discuss cancer and to learn that my mother had died. I might upset them, they might go home and tell their parents. If I was going to be honest, however, I would be
forced to admit that it was my inability to discuss my mother's death with anyone; for fear that I might get upset. A teacher who cries in front of her students forever changes their perceptions; she becomes, heaven forbid, human.

When I do share personal experiences of loss, when I relinquish pedagogical control and allow the children to guide the flow of conversation, reciprocity pours into the space between teacher and student. Children learn from each other and I from them as common experiences are acknowledged:

Bradley: You know what? My grand, my grand, my other grandpa didn't die, only one of my grandpas.
Me: Yeah. Sometimes our grandparents are alive and sometimes they've died. My grandparents died too. A long time ago.
Bradley: How?
Me: Well one of them actually, she was very old, and so she died.
Bradley: Just of, just of old age?
Me: Yeah, she died of old age. And you know also why she died? Because a long, throughout her life, she had smoked cigarettes, and so sometimes when you do that, your heart, your lungs get very sick, and that's what she had done for a very long time in her life.
Deborah: She didn't quit?
Me: No.
Sarah: My grandma Lilly did it, but she quitted, so she didn't die. ...
Bradley: Well, my nana kept on smoking, but I got her to quit.
Maxine: My mom, um, she smokes cigarettes too much, but she stops sometimes....
Sarah: Um. Somebody else smokes cigarettes, and she smoked for 55 years. She will die.

There were also examples of reciprocity as well as severed connections in my interviews with Miriam and Cassandra. I will use two exchanges from the interview with Miriam to illustrate the difference between fostered and failed connections.

During my interview with Miriam, I asked her to share personal experiences around death, although I wielded my power as researcher
and chose not to do so. Miriam didn't seem nervous, but had expressed reservations about being interviewed. I felt insecure about my research methods and the project in general, nervous about conducting the interview, and vulnerable about discussing death with someone I do not know very well. My insecurities are apparent in my muddled request for information:

So I don't know if you want to share, I'm just wondering about. The reason I'm asking about personal experiences with death, um, is that, I'm also interested, besides the whole children thing, is that how as teachers if we've had a recent experience with death, or have never experienced a death, and how those experiences impact our decisions for what we talk about in the classroom. I don't necessarily mean you, if you don't feel comfortable describing any personal experiences, but whether you think maybe those ... (thankfully she cut me off) (interview, January, 1996).

Not until I began to ask the above question did its potential intrusiveness become apparent to me. I felt guilty for requesting this type of information, suddenly felt the need to justify my reasons for doing so, and then began to back-track. Later, when I reflected on the interview in my journal, I questioned my ability to carry out this research, "Maybe I'm not finished working through this stuff, not ready to pursue these issues with other people. But this helps me work through things, and besides, when is anyone finished anyway?" (journal entry, January, 1996). I believe that if I had been willing to share my own experiences with death prior to asking her to do so, creating more balanced power relations, the distance between researcher and researched would have been narrowed, and the space for growth widened. Allow me to contrast the above interaction, or lack there of, with one in which I chose to risk the exposure of myself.
When I had finished the questions that I had prepared for the interview, I asked Miriam if she thought I had forgotten anything. Miriam replied, "Um, maybe the parents' side, of how they feel. Like even you having this study, it really got parents talking about why they didn't want their children involved, or why they did" (interview, January, 1996).

It is ironic that she pinpointed this obvious oversight, because the issue of the role of parents in the school setting is one I have not yet resolved and have a tendency to ignore. I am grateful that Miriam, and later Cassandra, reminded me of the importance of the relationship between teacher, student, and family to the learning process, especially when dealing with sensitive issues.

I shared with Miriam the concerns I have around the issues of parent involvement. I asked her to share both the positive and negative comments she had heard from the parents. We discussed my hesitations about the study: that I didn't know the children well enough, that the topic was too delicate, that the children were too young, and that I couldn't predict how the children would react. Miriam defended my research. She assured me that it was age appropriate, and shared her experiences dealing with death with a class of three year olds. She also reminded me that this particular school's mandate includes educational research, so parents are aware of and usually comfortable with it. She listened and helped me think through some of my concerns and hesitations. For me, it was quite a learning experience. I left the interview feeling better about my methodology, because I had discussed it with Miriam. Cassandra summarizes the point nicely, "I think that one of the best things to do, and which is what people are most reluctant to do, is to talk to other people about it" (interview, January, 1996).
9 March 1996

Gratitude

Many months after my mother died I joined a grief group. On the last day the counselor led us in a short ceremony honoring our respective losses. At the end of the ceremony, we each chose an angel card, small rectangular cards on which is written a single word. That word is supposed to resonate with your own experience. I chose *gratitude*. I was disappointed as it didn't seem to have any striking relevance. I told the group that perhaps it meant that I should be more grateful for my mother and the things she did for me. However, this notion had a punitive, condescending tone that I didn't like.

But just now, as I'm writing and highlighting color-coded themes, I have a thought. That my mother was perhaps expressing her thanks and gratitude to me. Perhaps for coming home and helping care for her, or perhaps writing about her, or perhaps just for putting up with her for all those years. Or perhaps just for remembering. I think that's what she'd like the best—remembering her. She feared we wouldn't.

I had never talked about death with children before the research for this thesis. Even when I taught in the Seattle area and had the freedom to choose the curriculum, I rarely, spoke about sensitive issues. Yet I remember feeling strongly about not wanting to promote status quo and wishing I was able to partake in the deconstruction of systemic societal barriers such as sexism and racism in the classroom. Why is it that my personal beliefs were so far removed from my curricular practices? How can I blur my own boundaries between theory and practice in the future? How have the children and adults in this study taught me to be?

I believe that this journey within the space between self and other has created new possibilities; potential for life stories, sharing, connection, and reciprocity among students and teachers. It has shown me that there is room for true selves and multiple selves, past and present. We can bring ourselves, all of them, in.
11 March 1996

Dream

My mother and I are in our basement, I'm sitting on the floor, working on some sort of project. She is yelling at me. "Why do you do this? Why do you keep doing this?" She is not so much angry about what I'm doing, but how I'm doing it. I'm not taking her too seriously. I feel badly, but this isn't her yelling. This is her way of counseling me, trying to get me to learn from her experiences and failures. "You're just like me!" she yells, arms gesticulating in exasperation. Her face is angry but her eyes are smiling; she is happy about this. So am I.
The Ring
Part Two: Telling

Amidst the stress and emotions of that day, the fact that the ring suddenly fit my finger, after all those years of being too small, didn't seem that extraordinary. Or perhaps I thought that it was, but quickly dismissed it. Or perhaps I wouldn't allow myself to entertain the degree of its strangeness. I'm not sure.

The first time I told this story was to Cassandra, late one night at her house. This telling forced me to re-visit and re-member years of memory. Feelings connected with the remembered experiences bubbled to the surface, as did feelings about the telling itself.

My work this year at the University Child School, along with the influence of writing this thesis, has forced me to dwell among tellings and linger in the spaces between storyteller and listener. I feel I have improved my storytelling skills while simultaneously coming to understand the complexities of the task, pushing me further from my goal.

The first time I tell a story I am nervous and riddled with self-doubt. Uncertainties haunt me: how will the children react? how will I react to their reactions? will I emphasize the right themes while letting the others meld into the background? are they going to get this? will they think it's interesting and worth listening to? There is so much room, so much space—for anything. Fear of the unknown.

When telling a story to a friend, similar anxieties arise, even though I only have one person's reactions with which to contend, and the pedagogical pressures associated with the role of teacher are not as delineated or relevant. Yet there is still pressure to perform, to tell well. Self-doubts follow me outside the classroom to the broader context of
telling life stories to friends: is this worth her time? will I tell it right? will she get it? dare I tell a story to a storyteller? is this really of any significance or is this something I've exaggerated? It is a risk.

I worked the story and it worked for me. Cassandra loved it. During the telling, she sat across the table from me, slumped in her chair; her steady gaze luring each sentence out of my mouth. That really listening. Wow—someone is listening this hard to something that happened to me. As the ring slipped on my finger, her eyes opened that much more.

There's a space after one tells a story, just after the teller utters the last words, but before the reaction of the listener is uttered. It is a space for time travel, for moving from those storied moments to the present ones, remembering where we are and why we are here. For me, it is also a terror-full space, as I anxiously await a response:

"No way!" she says, astonished. "It's true," I said, and felt the weight of this statement—this actually happened to me. I'm not just telling a story, I'm telling a STORY, a piece of my life.
GAIN IN LOSS

CHAPTER FOUR
Once again I am intimidated by the empty screen. A new chapter, a new beginning. Will I ever stop playing this game with myself? I put off for days what needs to get done; precious moments that will only make it more difficult for me later. I understand this, but still cannot make myself sit down. What is the problem? the pressure? the anxiety? the fear of failure? the fear of accomplishment? the fear of completion? the fear of what is to come next in my life? Fear of beginnings

exciting but horrifying
motivating but debilitating
past present future in a single thought
too much time
blank screen needing to be filled
too much space
choosing words to be written here
too much possibility

day of birth (1 April, 1996)

It is my birthday and something is missing. A card, a present, a phone call, flowers—from my mother. Every phone call from others reminds me that she does not call. My family consciously and unconsciously attempts to fill her role, but we all know it is impossible. I am lonely and miss her. Today, her death is most poignant. It hurts.

It occurs to me that while one's birth is celebrated, a mother's pain and anguish preceding it remains unappreciated and forgotten. Twenty-eight years ago today my mother lay in a hospital bed screaming, giving birth to the next generation. And now that she is dead, the weight of next generation pushes more heavily on my shoulders. Unbearable weight; mine alone.

I write and delete, write and delete. The words are not flowing today. I cannot express what I am thinking, cannot think what I am feeling, cannot feel. I don't
have time to feel my mother's death because I have to write my mother's death. Strange. I realize these concepts cannot be compartmentalized; my procrastination is evidence that I cannot ignore my grief while simultaneously writing about it, organizing it, editing it, and handing it in. The writing must be of me and from me. If I do not allow this process to unfold, no words will be placed on this page. I only wish that my words could drip and spread on this paper as easily as my tears. Then I would have pages and pages and pages and ...

I take time away from my mother to be with my mother on my birthday. I light a candle, we talk. Twenty minutes is all it takes for me to touch her, exchange ideas and feelings, reminisce. It makes such a difference. It (en)lightens me, it helps me write. Tension dissipates. Relief radiates. Happy birth day, Mom.

GAIN IN LOSS

In this chapter, I attempt to deny the juxtaposition of death, associated only with pain and sadness, and life, associated with growth and happiness. I speak of the knowledge and insight I have gleaned from my personal experiences of death and my experiences with storying around death with children and teachers. I also listen to others as they describe how their experiences with death inside and outside the classroom positively affect their lives.

This story is a little bit of a sad story, in one part. But it tells us how even though life can be kind of sad sometimes, it gets better after time, and we can learn and grow from sad times (Margot, story session, January, 1996).

Although I weave myself in and out of sadness and anger and frustration and emptiness, I recognize that I have grown from experiencing the death of my mother at a relatively early age. I have read, discussed, and reflected upon issues I would have otherwise tried my best to ignore. I have gained confidence in myself and my abilities to weather difficult times, and I have learned to be more patient; not getting
so angry when things don't happen as planned, or so depressed when I can't seem to pull things together. Living through this experience has given me a feeling of accomplishment. Not that I believe that it is over, but acknowledging that I have survived thus far, and perhaps through the worst of it. This learning is my mother's legacy.

Others also speak of gain in loss. To Lucile Clifton (1987), death brings determination to herself and other black women "who got used to making it through murdered sons/and who grief kept on pushing" (quoted in Pinar, 1992, p. 94). William Pinar speaks of wholeness resulting from death, "To be whole means to experience the presence of those who have died" (1992, p. 93). Adults who lost a sibling during childhood also attribute positive outcomes to their loss, including feeling comfortable with death, being able to help others, and developing a sensitive and constructive outlook on life (Davies, 1991).

As I continually reflect upon my mother's life and death, spaces of potentiality are created where positive aspects of our shared experience linger alongside the more negative aspects of grief. Positive and negative notions become blurred when insight occurs during moments of intense pain. These moments are confusing, but reassuring; hope seeping through the wall of grief.

Too often death is seen as solely negative. Obviously it is a traumatic event brimming with sorrow, anger, regret, and pain. However, I have come to believe that death can be moulded into a more positive experience, etched with growth, knowledge, confidence, and relief. In this chapter I attempt to explore and reflect upon my mother's death, and death read and lived by participants during my research at the University Child School, from the space between pain and gain. I will question whether this distinction actually exists, or whether we, adults as well as
children, are looking for a simplistic mirage of the world. I believe
Cassandra's observation of children applies even more aptly to adults:

I like to at least plant the seed in children's minds that there's
good and bad in everything, and that you don't have the pure "bad
guy," which is what they're all looking for, because then it's clean,
they don't have to worry about their feelings, they don't have to
get into complexities (interview, January, 1996).

Gain or Loss?

My mother and I didn't have the type of relationship that fostered communication.
When she became ill, we began to have a series of conversations about our lives
and choices we'd made. These were our first real conversations. I believe she began
to see, in the most marginal of ways, my point of view on various issues, political and
personal. Unfortunately, we ran out of time. By the time I got back to Chicago for her
final months, stress and emotions were too high, illness too encompassing, drugs
doses and medical procedures too prevalent to sustain any real conversation. I
regret not having had more time to explore these issues with my mother, for her to get
to know me and I her. However, I believe, perhaps more unfortunately, that if she had
not become ill, we would never have had those conversations. So in a tragic sense,
her illness and impending death brought us closer than would have been possible in
the normal course of our relationship. Happiness and sadness, regret and
contentment, gain and loss.

I don't know how many men he take, but I think it be somewhere in the
neighborhood of 49 or 60, by the time he was finished. He kept goin' and comin'
back, goin' and comin' back, the big bird goin' with him every time. It was queer to
see that ruddy big goose flyin' around his boat, lit up by the fires like a white angel
against the smoke. A Stuka, another one, goes off, but he doesn't get us. We never
did find out what became of him, but it was because of him, him with his hump and
his little sailboat, it was because of him that we're alive today. A bloody good man
he was, that chap (Cassandra reading The Snow Goose, January, 1996).

Machine-gunned badly, you know. He was full of machine gun bullets. He was face
down in the water of his little boat. And there was a bird, sitting on the railing
(Cassandra reading The Snow Goose, January, 1996).
When I was planning my research at the University Child School, I hoped the story sessions would not only serve my own needs, but would also benefit the children involved. Much of the literature in the area of children and death stresses the importance of children having the opportunity to discuss death, particularly because children are constantly bombarded with images and stories of death on television, in the media, and in cartoons and movies, despite the efforts of some parents and teachers to protect children from the issue (Essa & Murray, 1994; Riley, 1989). Cassandra also advocates for death to be discussed with children, "I think it would be really great if they [children] could experience more positive feelings about death, that's why I would be really open to teachers reading some of the great books that deal with the whole coping with death." She lists other potential benefits for children: their exposure to varying perspectives of and models for coping with death and dying, children being given opportunities to perceive death as part of a whole, and perhaps integrating it into their own experience (interview, January, 1996).

During the story sessions, the children were indeed eager to share stories, experiences, feelings, fears, and ideas around death and illness. The children and adults were exposed to a wide range of responses to and perspectives of death. Growth and learning occurred for both teller and listeners, particularly for those children who played the dual role, transforming themselves into storyteller as they told their own stories and life experiences. In my interview with Cassandra, she mentioned the benefits for specific children, such as, "Lucy got a lot of peace from being able to talk about her grandfather," "She [Cynthia] took that whole session
very deeply," and "I think it was good for all the children. I don't think there were any fallouts from that" (interview, January, 1996).

The fact that children are interested in death and are full of questions and answers about it was evident in this study as well as Miriam's and Cassandra's previous classroom and home experiences. Yet many children do not have the opportunity to openly discuss the issue, of which Cassandra expresses her dismay:

I really truly believe they've [children] not been talked to about it [death] very much, and their questions aren't really entertained that much, other than in a cursory way like, "Oh, well this happened," or "Well, you don't have to worry about that," or "That's not going to happen to you," so they don't really get to ask all their questions.

I think we very much underestimate children, and under-challenge them. I think we rarely give them benefit for sophisticated feelings. ... [We] treat them as not being mature enough or worldly enough to deal with it [death]. I think kids are quite sophisticated and they're also wanting and quite open to thinking about and engaging, they wonder about these things. Having it okay with a person ... as something you can talk about with a person you trust and know, I think it's a very good thing (interview, January, 1996).

Miriam discussed how talking about death with children can foster sensitivity. In her interview she told of her daughter's fourth grade teacher who did a unit on the Holocaust, "I think her [the teacher's] mandate was she wanted children to be sensitive to these things, and what did happen, and how could it have happened differently, and just be aware of how we communicate and what our belief system is...." Her child, Melissa, "was very interested in the whole thing and really learned a lot" (interview, January, 1996).

I have observed that some adults worry when a child is particularly interested in death. Miriam discussed such a child in our interview.
However, Miriam reminds us that an interest in death is most often one of many interests of the child, and only because of our own desires to avoid the topic are these questions noticed. Miriam explains, "We may sometimes think children are being morbid, but I think they're just as interested in birth, and the process of many other things. It's not morbid at all, it's just wanting to know, which is what kids are about" (interview, January, 1996).

Storyteller Gain

What I did not foresee when I was planning my research was the positive effects that the experience would have on Cassandra and myself as storytellers. In our interview, Cassandra complimented me on my preparation for the story sessions, which included hypothesizing about and reflecting upon questions the children might ask (interview, January, 1996). Miriam shared that my study was helpful for some families that were dealing with terminal illnesses and accidents that had sent grandparents to the hospital (interview, January, 1996). These comments validated my thoughts and actions, and allowed me to benefit from Miriam's and Cassandra's support and greater experience.

Cassandra also discussed the benefit and validation she received as a result of her participation in this project. I was delighted that after all her help with this project, it had been a learning experience for her as well:

Was it a meaningful experience for me? Of course I love reading those kind of books anyway, but I think this project has been meaningful to me, because as I said before, it's validated some of the things I feel strongly about.... So it's been good, it's kept the whole death experience, it's allowed me to revisit it, and every time you revisit it, I think you become more comfortable with it, and you become more, just being able to talk about it. I think it was a very good experience and has piggy-backed down to my kids. We've talked about it more in the last few days ... just because
it's been on my mind, it's good, to have it out in the open has been a really good experience for me and to have a purpose, not to have to make a setting for it (interview, January, 1996).

reLearning

These positive comments are not an attempt to hide the glitches that occurred during the research. Cassandra also shared some of the problems she had with my methodologies. Cassandra stated that she was not comfortable with the story session time constraints, wished the groups had been smaller, and wished she had known some of the students better:

I don't think it [the research] was an optimum thing, it would be better if we had more shots at it, for both the children and to get better information for yourself. I think they were a little caught up in the tape recorder.... Also, when I'm working with something like The Snow Goose, I like to really build up in other stories so that we have lots of stories to compare it with.... So the story is more meaningful and more compelling, and the learning that's going to come out of it is tripled, quadrupled, because they're making those connections.... I would have seen more discussion,... and stronger connections to lived experiences (interview, January, 1996).

Although it was difficult for me to hear these criticisms, I definitely agree with them. Throughout this research process I felt caught between what I knew to be more optimal teaching practices and research methodologies, and the personal and institutional constraints of writing a Master's thesis. Smaller groups would have meant turning down parents and children that had already decided to give consent. Not using a tape recorder would have meant relying solely on my memory and field notes. More and/or longer story sessions would have meant considerably more data to transcribe, analyze, and include. Although more data might have made these chapters stronger, I would be even more overwhelmed than I already am, and would have had to spend even more time organizing and
writing. However, these criticisms have caused me to reflect upon what I could have done differently, will inform any future research that I might conduct, and, most importantly, will help me to better prepare for reading about and discussing difficult issues with children in my future classrooms. Perhaps those who read this thesis will learn from and avoid my mistakes as well.

Cassandra as Mentor

When I taught preschool and kindergarten in the Seattle area, I had prided myself on being a good story reader. I would use storytelling techniques such as voices, volume, intonation, and gestures to enrich the written words. Most often I was able to capture the attention of my three to six year old special needs students. I also tried to be critical of the stories I chose to read in my classroom, attending to gender and racial stereotyping, and diversity of ethnic groups and family arrangements.

When Cassandra and I learned that we were to share the position of literacy coordinator at the University Child School, we sat down to discuss our plans for the upcoming year. It was then that I began to learn about her storytelling philosophies and her notion of "working a story." I realize that this is my thesis, not Cassandra's, and this is not an attempt to be a case study of her or a discussion of storytelling theories. Yet I feel I must make apparent the impact that her philosophies, vast knowledge of children's literature, methods of telling stories, and belief in developing complicated themes with young children had upon me, providing knowledge and encouragement for me throughout the research process. Allow me to share some fragments of her philosophies from our interview:

I find that the best story reading, of course, is when you're prepared for the eventualities, and it's always better the second or third time
you've told it, because you're figuring out where the kids might ask questions, and you know what you might do to elicit more involvement ... or how you can engage them, what parts you need to shorten.... I don't usually like to compromise speech dialogue, so if I know my story really well then I'm going to shorten whatever setting part, or whatever I can or need to, and I can zoom into the text. I call that working a story (Cassandra, interview, January, 1996).

Always within my own class, I developed really complex, and what others might consider trickier, sensitive topic areas, because I had on a gradual basis exposed them to tolerating complexity, ambiguity, different ways of thinking and approaching things. I think you really need to be able to work the group well, and know them well (Cassandra, interview, January, 1996).

I don't think you can give an instant message of that [the positive aspect of death] to a child, but I don't think you can give anything instant. It's a matter of planting a seed and letting it grow and develop, and you have to re-visit it over and over again. I don't think any kind of learning is ever done, but I think we can certainly plant a different kind of a seed than maybe those before us have, or society at large has. You know my bent, which is literature, I just look at some of the great books that are out there that help deconstruct some of the traditional images that go along with death, and also some of the typical and traditional ways of responding to death (Cassandra, interview, January, 1996).

This research has evolved into a powerful learning experience for me not solely as a result of my mother's death, nor my work with Cassandra, but by these two phenomena in tandem. This co-mingling of philosophies has forced me to question and reflect upon my teaching practices, educational philosophies, research methodologies, and personal interactions. What parts of each of their selves can and cannot be integrated into my own? What parts of my own philosophies and political beliefs can be brought into the classroom? How can children and I learn together about our relationships in the classroom, our families, and our
communities as well peoples, places, and events around the globe? I am writing to find out.

On a good day, writing is cleansing. The words are inside me, and by placing them on this page they enable a mutual letting go. I don't have to carry them around any more. I cry over the loss of my mother through the loss of these words. However, these words are not permanently lost. As I simultaneously write and see them on the page, they return to me, but to a different place. Before I write they are buried deep inside me, so deep that I do not know them. But on the page these death words come to life and it is this life that seeps back inside through my eyes and fingertips. Strewn bits of death replaced by bits of life; life that I need in order to go on living with death, and to go on living with and without my mother.

PAIN IN LOSS

During my mother's illness, I was experiencing a lot of pain. My thoughts and moods fluctuated, thinking this pain was both selfish and selfless. My world was crumbling and somehow I sensed the irreparable damage that was being done. My pain stemmed not only from listening to and then seeing my mother deteriorate, but also from the deterioration of my image of her. My mother—strong, indestructible, no-nonsense, dependable—was being beaten by a disease. It was unfathomable. I felt guilty for feeling this pain and for wanting comfort and support. How could I be so presumptuous when it was my mother who was sick and in pain—real pain. I now see the hierarchy of pain I created, physical higher than emotional; at least in this instance the medical model had prevailed.

During that summer graduate course with Ted Aoki, Marjorie McIntyre, an oncology nurse and doctoral candidate at the University of Colorado, spoke to us of her research on terminally ill cancer patients. She introduced me to the notion of illness as experience. I asked her if she thought it was truly possible to feel another's pain:
She responded to my concern with a notion that I am only beginning to unravel. The experience of illness. Illness as experienced by all those involved: patients, doctors, nurses, spouses, and yes, even daughters. My experience, my pain, can count too. Can I be so presumptuous? After all, it is my mother, not I, who has been cut open and sewed shut and hooked up and poked and prodded and robbed of her dignity. Yet if my mother is the sole experiencer of her cancer, why am I in so much pain? Much like those who actually have the disease, my pain is sometimes sharp and intense, while at other times it is more like a dull ache that annoys me and wears me out (McIntyre, 1994). How can my self feel this pain? "Just as we evade the fact of our deaths, we look the other way at the dying among us.... [W]e look the other way as outstretched arms and voices beg for life" (Pinar, 1992, p.93). I tried to look the other way, but now death holds my face so that I am forced to gaze into her eyes, and feel her pain.

I was riding the waves of grief, of pain. At times I chastised myself for not looking, and trying to avoid my mother's approaching death, but when I did, I felt presumptuous in the pain that exuded from those wounds. Grief is a complicated process, one with many contradictions. The five stages of grief that I read about in some of the literature do not adequately express this complexity. It is not like watching a parade, in which the various attractions pass slowly and orderly. It's about so many feelings layered into a single thought, a single sentence; so enmeshed that even myself reflecting on my own words cannot make order out of the chaos.
Pain All Told

The stories that Cassandra and I read to the children were pain full. They evoked sadness in storylisteners as well as storytellers. Yet I liked these stories in particular because they portrayed a range of reactions to death among and within characters over time; there is no one right way to grieve. At times the pictures, more than the words, more accurately portrayed the feelings of the characters. The illustrations in *The Very Best of Friends* resonated with my experience and persuaded me to use it for this project. Because this story and its illustrations spoke to me, I was able to speak through Jessie, elaborate on her experiences and provide more detail and background information for the children.

The varied reactions of William, the cat, to James' death portrays many of the common reactions young children have to the death of a family member, especially when their needs are ignored and they are left out of the family's grief process (Grollman, 1991). William, with the help of some of the more mature children, is able to dispel misconceptions in a non-didactic way:

Me: But William didn't really understand what dying was, William just thought that maybe James had gone on a little trip, and that he was coming back. So William was waiting for James to come back, but was James going to come back?
Sarah: No-o-o.
Me: No, James wasn't going to come back. But William didn't know that so he waited and waited for him.

When Jessie ignores William, he tries to get her attention by being especially nice and helpful. When this is unsuccessful, he becomes devious. When even these behaviours go unnoticed, he leaves, feeling betrayed, full of anger and hatred.
In *Badger's Parting Gifts*, Mole was particularly close to Badger. When Badger died, "he was especially lost, alone, and unhappy. In bed that night, Mole could only think of Badger. He wasn't like the others who were sad, but who could go along. He was so sad tears rolled down his velvety nose, and they soaked his blanket that he clung to for comfort" (Cassandra reading *Badger's Parting Gifts*, January, 1996).

Reactions of Pain

The children's reactions to the stories were quite varied. The most frequent reactions were the sharing of related experiences and asking questions pertaining to the details of the death and death in general, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, I would like to highlight a few of the responses that I believe can be attributed to the sadness these children felt, making them sad or uncomfortable.

Deborah is a very sensitive child, and in the beginning of the year would not come to the library with me for story. When she finally did come, she stood in back by the door, ready to escape if the story became "too scary," which she did do on a number of occasions. When I told the children in the beginning of the story that it was sad, her face revealed her anxiety. I was nervous that she would revert to her escape route. When James died, the tears welled up in her eyes, but she stayed:

Me: Because one Sunday morning, James died suddenly. (pause) And the ambulance came and took him away, and there's Jessie, and the dogs, and William, and the horses, and the chickens, all watched him go. (pause) So that's kinda sad.
Brandon: Yeah. That makes me sad too.
Me: Does that make you...? It makes me a little sad, doesn't it? ... Does that make you a little bit sad, Deborah?
Deborah: Yeah.
Me: It made Jessie sad too. How does Jessie look in this picture?
Child: Not too good.
Me: She [Jessie] looks kinda sad. She looks like she's been crying a lot, 'cause sometimes when someone we love dies, that's what we do, we feel sad, so we cry.
Deborah: She's sad.
Me: Yeah. She looks sad. Jessie became very quiet, and very forgetful. She didn't write any letters anymore, and she didn't collect the mail.
Child: She missed him, that man....
Me: She just watched TV all day and all night.
Brandon: Well that's a very long time.

Dylan and Stephanie also displayed their discomfort behaviourally. Throughout the story Dylan attempted to change the subject. He asked about the posters on the wall and the story's minor characters, and he became progressively squirmy, wanting to get up from story to look at something on my desk. Stephanie made spitting noises and talked to her neighbors while Cassandra was trying to read. She was fidgety and continually bothered the boy sitting next to her. Cassandra mentioned the behaviour of another girl, Kate, in our interview:

I think Kate, if any of the children, played up to the circumstance. Usually she's not that forthcoming with her personal experience.... She was quite demanding of attention, and response to her questions. I think that was her dealing with the situation, and she calmed down a bit as we got into it (interview, January, 1996).

Miriam described the long-term effects of a painful death on her own children:

When my children's pets died, their hamsters, often when I would put on some kind of music in a minor key ... they sensed that sadness, and they would associate it with the death of their pet and they would start to cry, and they would say, "Oh, that song reminds me of my hamster dying." ... It would even be a year or two afterwards (interview, January, 1996).
Although dealing with death is sometimes painful, exploring our own ideas and beliefs through discussion and literature leads to growth and learning. Miriam uses her own experience as an example:

I read a lot of adolescent fiction over the summer, ..., excellent writers, and they deal head on with death and the feelings; just reading it kind of unhinges you a little bit. You can go through this process, and I found it quite healing in a lot of ways. Not that I had this hang-up about it, but it kind of allowed me to just go with my emotions in a safe way (interview, January, 1996).

Anger Past

I did not choose this relatively new interest; it unfortunately chose me. Because I am forced into thinking about cancer and my mother having cancer, I am not prepared for the emotional onslaught. I am defensive and scared, angry at everything: the cancer, my father, my mother, and myself. I am especially angry at the medical system. The system that my father as doctor and my mother and sister as nurses have given their lives to, but cannot do anything for my mother in return.

Anger Present

I am angry a lot. I was angry a lot before my mother died, and often at her, so in some ways it's not such a big change. The reasons are just different or, rather, there's just one more reason added to the long list: she died. Now that there is no hope of ever letting her know how angry I was and still am, the anger stews inside me. I can't even be rude to her on the phone anymore. When I'm really mad I tell myself that this whole thesis thing is a waste of time—she's not here, she doesn't care, there's no blurring of boundaries, she's just dead and I have to deal with it. In a lot of ways this thesis puts her on a pedestal, the perfect mother, Saint Sandra—far from it. My mother bought herself a Lucite key chain with the word bitch on it and used it even after the end broke off and she was just a bit.

It's very difficult to be angry now that I am writing about her day in and day out. I feel I have to squelch this rage because I know that if I let it bubble to the surface I won't ever finish my thesis; I won't be willing to put in the necessary time or effort. So I suppress it and literally beg myself to let it simmer for a few more months. Although
this process of writing and reflecting about her positive attributes helps me grieve, and I realize, most of the time, it is something that I need to experience and integrate into my images of her, it also prolongs my grief, as I know that I need to deal with my anger—understudy wishing for catastrophe.

This public space of thesis is not where I want to talk about the deep-seated reasons for my anger. I just want you to know that they're there. I just want you to know what's not in this thesis.

SUBTLE DISTINCTIONS

I have discussed some of the pain as well as the gain I and others have experienced when faced with death. However, sometimes the boundary between these notions is indistinguishable. What seems hopeless at a glance becomes meaningful after reflection. Laughter can suddenly turn to tears. Good and bad, positive and negative, gain and loss swirl in a single moment. Death itself can be seen as a positive, even a beautiful, experience:

Cassandra: I feel very positively about death. I've had a very positive experience re my grandfather. It took me 'til he was 89 to barter him through to allow him to die. I had a wonderful experience with my grandmother that was totally unexpected, I mean, I was holding her hand, I was reading to her as she died, and just the whole thing of throwing her ashes into the sea and the little flowers. I have these wonderful memories of that, and her killing herself laughing, as we couldn't get the lid off the tureen, or whatever that is, like a little thermos (interview, January, 1996).

Miriam: I face it [death] in that my father is a candidate for an anytime death, because he's a heart patient and has had two heart attacks already, but he lives so joyously that he helps us all keep that at bay, you know.... And my grandfather, who's 95, is critically ill right now, but he's 95 and I feel he's had a really good life, I don't have any kind of sadness about him dying, because I think, probably he's actually maybe wishing he didn't have to survive so long (interview, January, 1996).
Parting Gifts

Although I can no longer physically interact with my mother, I can delve into my vast array of memories, and like a favorite movie, I can play and replay the scenes in my head. Not only do I reenact these moments, but I also reflect upon and reinterpret them. This thesis is one screen on which this show runs and reruns; where I come to understand the parts of her—skills, attitudes, ways of being—that she has left behind in me. Parting gifts.

After Badger's death, his friends and family tell their special stories of Badger: how he had taught Mole to cut paper chains, Frog to skate, Fox to tie a tie, and Mrs. Rabbit to bake her famous gingerbread rabbit cookies. "Each of the animals had a special memory of Badger. Something he had taught them that they could do extremely well" (Cassandra telling Badger's Parting Gifts, January, 1996). As each friend later taught this same skill to a young animal, each of them remembered Badger. "When Mole was thinking about how Badger had taught him, he felt very warm inside.... So, in a strange way, Badger had given a parting gift to each one of his friends, and they held something of Badger inside..."

Child: Of their heart.

Cassandra was also able to describe the notion of parting gifts while reading The Snow Goose. Although Phillip was dead, Fritha took what was left, the love from her dear Phillip and the painting from inside the lighthouse, and she went home to her village.... So while Fritha would fall in love again, and perhaps marry someone else, she would always have the painting to protect the love that she had learned with Rhayader, and would have the memories (January, 1996).
Ready to Die

Death can often mean freedom, relief, and comfort, as in this description of Badger's death:

Badger's dream was strange and wonderful. To his surprise, he was running, not walking with a cane, he was running in his dream, and ahead of him was a long space. His legs were sure and strong, and he was running down it. He no longer needed his cane, so he just put it down on the ground. And he ran. He was so happy and free in his heart, and he moved faster and faster, until his paws could no longer touch the earth, and he felt himself turning over and over, and it was almost like he fell out of his body (Cassandra reading Badger's Parting Gifts, January, 1996).

In their interviews, Cassandra and Miriam spoke of the notion of readiness for death. When someone is old or ill and is ready to die, death can be seen as a welcome relief to the one who will soon die and their loved ones. Miriam believes "there comes a point in some people's life where they, they're ready to die, and that makes it easier for other people to accept it too. They're not embracing it, but they're ready for it. They feel prepared for it" (interview, January, 1996). When Cassandra talks to her sons about dying, she expresses her belief:

that for the most part, we have a feeling that it's going to happen, and unless it is a sudden accident, and even then, I don't know about that, but the people that I have watched die otherwise, they come to be ready to die, especially if you die of old age ... so that's a very comforting thought (interview, January, 1996).

I was not always ready for my mother's death. My initial denial was only sometimes interrupted by disbelief, anger, and panic. I didn't want her to die, she couldn't die, was not going to die. Phone bills almost as high as my rent reassured me daily that she was still alive, still there if I needed her.
When I returned to Chicago in October, I saw the extent of her suffering, her deteriorating body, her failing doctors. "That's it," she would say as I held her barf bucket with one hand and my nose with the other, "Time to go. I can't take it anymore." I wouldn't listen.

My mother wrote a living will not to resuscitate her, which we taped to the wall beside her new bed in the family room, in case one of the night nurses panicked and called 911. She was very clear about wanting to die at home and for her death not to be prolonged. She was unconscious her final week, except for short outbursts, like waking from a nightmare—ours and hers. The pressure on my heart and chest and head was so great I could hardly breathe. I couldn't take it anymore. I pressured my father and sisters to agree to stop her antibiotics and fluids she was receiving intravenously. When we did, she died within a few days. We were all ready.

When I wrote the following passage in my journal months later, I was confused about readiness, and still am. One can never be truly ready for a mother's death.

My mom now has a break from death and I am happy. She was suffering and wanted to die. She was sick and tired and didn't like life anymore.

But she didn't want to die; she was afraid. We weren't ready.

Sad Stories—Happy Stories

Miriam and Cassandra blur the clear-cut distinction between the emotions of sadness and happiness in their preschool classrooms despite outside pressures. Miriam spoke of the pressures to keep preschool classrooms "up beat" which do not lend themselves to topics such as death, or even stories and music with unhappy or painful motifs. However, it is often the tearful stories, balanced with hopeful elements, that are most meaningful and memorable:
Miriam: ... even *I'll love You Forever*. Now that's a different kind of book that makes me cry when I read it to kids, but that's a whole, it's not the death part, it's more that, that unconditional love that is so, it's such a *wonderful* thing that it brings out the tears, it's not because it's a sad thing (interview, January, 1996).

Cassandra believes that it is these layers of emotion that are the essence of learning:

Cassandra: A lot of the books that I really like will have a death theme in them, because I find that a story really has to grab me, or move me, and sometimes stories about tragedy, and when something bad happens, it's usually balanced with something really good. It's that kind of swing of emotion that is a spark to learning. When a child's emotions are engaged, then that's a good springboard to further learning, or I have found it to be (interview, January, 1996).

Attempting to have children perceive the sometimes subtle differences between happy and sad elements in a story is challenging. However, Cassandra believes it is the teacher's responsibility to promote children's tolerance of ambiguity and complexity. These complex notions present children with an opportunity to make sense of a sometimes chaotic and hurtful world, while simultaneously communicating hope and efficacy. If Cassandra feels that a story lacks a strong message of hope, she works and stretches the story to accommodate one. As Cassandra introduced *The Snow Goose* to the children, and later concluded it, she challenged the children to find the message of happiness immersed in the book's sadness:

If I ever say that I'm reading *The Snow Goose*, everybody always says, "Oh, that's such a great story, but it's so sad." Most people know about the sadness in this book, but my boys know about the happiness in this book, and I was wondering, if by good listening today, you could find the happiness in this book, because I tell you, it has a very happy part. I also warn you that it has a very sad part. Okay? I think that you're up to it.
Cassandra: Put up your hand if you can tell me the sad part of the story.
Child: When he died.
Child: He died.
Child: When the goose went away.
Child: She probably went to visit her friends though.
Cassandra: Who can tell me a happy part ...?
Child: They fell in love.
Kendra: When the goose comes back.
Kate: When it, the nice part was to the goose, when she came to the man and got it fixed....
Cassandra: When Rhayader died, he died with a happy heart, and he was able to send the spirit back through the bird. How could he have died happy? Why was he happy to go to the war ...?
Beth: Because he wanted to come back and be married to the girl.
Cynthia: Because he liked to help people.
Kate: Because he wanted to....
Child: He feeled like he always wanted to feel.

With this legacy of knowledge, confidence, and tolerance, I will return to the classroom and I will speak about death. I will tell my stories and listen to the stories of my students, and from this sharing of stories we will learn and grow. My mother will be there with me in the classroom. As I teach, she is also teacher.

Thesis Writing and Grief

I'm depressed. I'm procrastinating. I grow increasingly anxious throughout the day. I finally lace up my boots and go for a walk in the rain. Sometimes a walk on the beach will turn my mood around, but today it doesn't seem to be working. I become even more anxious. I keep saying to myself, over and over, "the only way out is through, the only way out is through." For a moment I am confused. Out of what? Through what? Grief over my mother, or writing this thesis? And suddenly it dawns on me—both.

These emotional and intellectual processes that surround me are difficult, at times agonizing. Waves of grief and productivity wash over me. The only
way out is through. Avoiding either process increases my anxiety and decreases my ability to cope. Although the journey of my grief and of the writing of this thesis are similar, I know that the latter will end and the former will not. This thesis will eventually be completed, handed in, and defended. My grief goes on and on without end, although it becomes less innocuous, more subtle.

I continue walking. I don't know how long I've been standing here or how many people have passed me on this path. A few moments later a bald eagle flies low, directly over my head. Thanks, Mom.
The Ring
Part Three: Listening

A few days after I told the story to Cassandra, I was out to dinner with her and her two young sons. Having Cassandra for a mother, these boys are surrounded with stories. After dinner, they wanted to hear a story, and much to my surprise, they wanted to hear one from me. I really didn't want to practice my amateur skills on such an experienced audience. (Me, a storyteller?) Luckily, Cassandra came to the rescue. "Margot told me a story just the other day. A true story that actually happened," and thus the restorying began.

I heard my words and experiences flowing from Cassandra's mouth. I heard myself trying on the ring when I was young, and then later on when I was older. I saw myself scampering in and out of my parent's bedroom. I heard the shower running. I felt my disappointment when the ring, time and time again, didn't fit. I felt the sadness when Cassandra's boys and I learned that my mother had died. As my family and I sat at the kitchen table, I felt the weight of my decision as heavily as the weight of the ring on my pinky. And I felt, for the first time, sheer amazement, as the ring glided down the length of my ring finger, fitting snugly, yet comfortably, in its proper place.

At the end of my/casSANDRA's story, she asked her boys how it was possible for the ring to fit my finger after not fitting for so many years. She wondered, out loud, whether my mother's spirit had pushed the ring on my finger because she really wanted me to have it. The children had no answers; neither did we. The seed had been planted.

*   *   *
My responses to this retelling are so diverse, it's difficult to know where to begin: Cassandra telling my story, me listening to my story, me listening to her story. As she retold this part of myself, I sensed (a reliving of) my mother. Cassandra had introduced my mother to her children; this struck me.

Although my mother was the impetus for this study of children and death, the children at the University Child School did not know of my mother nor that my mother had died. The parts of her that are in me were in the library that day, but she wasn't really there, not independently of me. Her existence was not acknowledged, she was never introduced.

When the children and I sat on the floor of the library to read stories of death, I did not share my own stories of death, except for a few sentences about my grandmother. Yet Cassandra, in the presence of her children and myself, put into practice the notions I had been reading about: the importance of acknowledging our own histories and life stories, and how these stories bridge self and other, student and teacher, child and adult, and all of us to the world in which we live.

Cassandra and I had never discussed nor tried to explain how that ring came to fit on my finger. I listened in awe as I heard my buried questions asked and my secret intuitions pondered. My mother, or some part of her, had been watching; she wanted me to have that ring. So, after rolling her eyes at my indecision, she made it fit. Perhaps I also played a part; after I finally perceived the ring as mine, it had to fit, it just had to. Hearing Cassandra entertain these somewhat mystical notions with her children validated my own impressions, too strange to utter, I thought. I thought wrong.
I thought this would get easier over time, and in some ways it has. The process is more predictable, and at times I know what to do. However, it also becomes more difficult as I can't remember what I put where and which quote most reflects my ideas here and what I put in a previous chapter that would be better off in this one or what I took out and why. Rainbowed highlighters scar my transcriptions and drafts. This is such a chore.

The production of this thesis is quite a production. I write and I read and I attempt to subjugate this explosion of ideas into this str(u/i)cture of thesis. At times this task seems impossible; flattening experiences, corralling thoughts into paragraphs, under headings, onto lists. It is so dispersed, so unmanageable. My mind is a revolving door of ideas. Lists give birth to lists as I try to keep track of everything: "Things to Do," "Things to Include," "References to Get," "Miscellaneous Notes." On a bad day, it seems as if everything worth including is out and nothing worth including is in. I reread my words. Why did I write this? Am I saying anything here? Does this make any sense? Self doubts abound and I recall the self doubting I experienced during my research at the University Child School. Every part of this process has been a struggle. The protracted task of writing seems as difficult as the topic is personal and painful. But this may also make the writing easier, more free-flowing.

I realize I spend a lot of time trying to figure out just what, in this process, is so difficult for me. Maybe if I spent half as much time just doing it, I'd be done by now. But maybe these ponderings are the doing of it. I've lost track of what doing it is. Maybe I never knew.

LIFE IN DEATH

This chapter is an attempt to portray how death is indeed a part of life, and how those who have died continue to live. I will illustrate how children linger within the space between wanting and not wanting to know about death, and advocate that as teachers, we must enter into this space to explore death alongside children. I delve into the ways in which Cassandra and Miriam have lived with children and death in the
classroom, as well as how I have lived with death during the writing of this thesis in an attempt to bridge the distances we construct between our lives and death.

In some ways I feel that my mother still lives; that in death there is life. I have been encouraged by others who share this belief. Ann Stanford's (1970) poem, "The Fathers," describes the possibilities of past meshing with present, disappearance blending with presence, and how death is able to speak to and through the living (quoted in Pinar, 1992). The poem ends imploring unquieted spirits to let the living live in peace. But William Pinar, having recently lost his father, argues that this is not possible, nor desirable:

To "let me be" can mean to permit me some space of separation, of solitariness, of freedom, but they will not let us be completely. Nor do or should we wish to be free of them, for they are our origins; their flesh is our flesh, and to be truly free of them, is to lose them, and to lose ourselves (1992, p. 93).

Ted Aoki asks the question, "In death, life?" (1992, p. 22) when he writes of the late teacher and astronaut Christa McAuliffe, whose absence speaks to him of teaching.

Many linger with loved ones who have died. Anjin Yoo speaks to Mokwol nim, her esteemed teacher of poetry, at his grave:

I dwell in a belief that thou have just moved to a new place, the nearest and the most beautiful, the eternal home of poems and songs. There, we can visit and see thee whenever we desire, and there thou like the moon passing by the clouds, can go to the Yong-In market fair or walk to the neighboring village through a wheat field, wearing a flapping white coat and rubber shoes of size nineteen and a half (in Aoki, p. 694).

Yoo's relationship with her dead teacher defies the western notion of a rigid boundary separating life and death. She writes of being with her
teacher, talking with him and walking with him. Dare I say that her notions of death are childish as she does not seem to comprehend the cessation of bodily functioning? Mokwol nim lives on in his poems that she makes multiple allusions to at the end of the passage, as well as through his instruction and influence on Yoo as she writes her own poetry. His words, his wisdom, and his teachings live on through those he has touched in life, and continues to touch in death.

In this chapter I wish to bridge life and death, using ties between living and dead as construction materials; ties between my mother and myself, ties between story characters, and ties between children and teachers and those they have lost. Through the living, the dead live on. Perhaps this notion is only a coping strategy that I have fabricated to live with my grief. But it resonates within me, and with others to whom I have talked and read about; those who question the modern juxtaposition of life against death. Perhaps this is the fabrication. Do we hold these purported mutually exclusive categories to be true because it is what we have been taught and they allow for a greater degree of certainty and security? Do we create distance where there is none in our attempts to deny death? Adults and children cling to the sense of safety encapsulated life provides. I am suggesting that rather than clinging to the eroding shore, we learn to walk across the bridge.

WHEN DEATH MEETS LIFE

What happens when the topic of death is brought into an early childhood setting? Amongst the children at the University Child School, there was a wide range of verbal and behavioural reactions. Emotions such as sadness, fear, anxiety, and denial were apparent. Some consistently tried to change the subject and began to bother their
neighbours, while others showed disbelief, misunderstanding, or apparent indifference. However, the largest group of verbal reactions was children sharing experiences, memories, and stories of death. The next largest group of reactions was children questioning various aspects of the death experience.

Wanting to Know

I have already shared some of the children's stories of connection and their reactions that I believe were caused by the emotional pain in the stories that were read. Here, I would like to focus on the question, "How did he die?" which was some children's immediate reaction. Other children asked this question later on in the story session, or not at all. A few children in my morning group were extremely persistent in wanting to know the details and cause of the death. They were not satisfied with my explanation which contained some ambiguity, and continually interrupted the rest of the story offering some realistic, but mostly unrealistic, explanations of the death.

In the story *The Very Best of Friends*, how did James die? I asked myself this question while preparing for the story sessions. Because the details of death in the book were extremely vague, I felt the children needed more information for their own understanding, and to give death the presence it deserved. Yet what degree of uncertainty would they tolerate? How would I be able to remain within their range of comfort while pedagogically stretching their personal boundaries? I did not want to provide a false simplicity around death. I phoned Cassandra late the night before the story sessions, seeking advice and approval. We decided that I should offer additional information only if the children requested it.
Although I attempted to prepare myself for some of the questions the children might ask, I was neither prepared for the depth and variety of death related discussions, nor some children's persistence in wanting to know and their dissatisfaction with my explanations. They were impatient; they didn't want to wait for my backwards reach into prewritten notes and death experiences:

Me: One Sunday Morning, James died suddenly.
Child: Ooooh.
Jonathan: How did he die?
Me: Well, you know what? How he died is that, every morning, James and Jessie would take their tractors, and Jessie would plow the east field, and James would plow the west field, and then they would meet when they were finished. And so, Jessie had gone around, plowing her field, and then went to meet James in the middle, but James wasn't there.
Dylan: What happened to James?
Me: Sit back, I'm telling you what happened. So when James wasn't there with his tractor, Jessie got worried, so she jumped off her tractor, and she was running and running and looking and looking in the field. And then she saw James' tractor. She runs to it, but you know what? James was just slumped over the wheel.
Jonathan: How did he get slumped over the wheel?
Me: What must have happened is that maybe he, something was wrong with his heart, or something was wrong with his brain, and he just slumped over the wheel. So Jessie says, "James! James!" She put him on the ground. She didn't know whether to stay with James or whether to run back to the house to call for help. So she quickly...
Jonathan: I think it might be something, there was a little button on the wheel, and he was just lying down on the wheel to take a rest, then he pressed on the button with his, with his thing, and he couldn't get off in time to get off it, so he got, he ended up getting rolled over.
Me: Well, he didn't get rolled over by the tractor because he wasn't bloody, or anything like that. No, if somebody gets rolled over by a tractor, they're going to be bloody or something. But no, he wasn't like that. So what happened...
Dylan: Is that his tractor? (points to picture)
Me: No, this is when Jessie ran back to the house to call the hospital, and they came with their ambulance, and they took James away.
Children: Why?
Child: Where?
Me: When people die, they can't just stay in the house, they usually need to get buried in the ground, or sometimes they get cremated. So what happens is that the hospital comes and takes them away, to make sure that he really was dead, so they had to make sure. Dylan: I'm gonna show you something. Do you see something? (shows me his hand)
Me: I see a little scratch.
Dylan: Well, it's from my cat.
Benjamin: It's important to bury them because then they, the air stinks.
Dylan: He poked, he scraped me with his claw.
Me: Yes, they get buried because it's healthier.
Lilly: I left my cat on the...
Child: First they have to put them into a tomb.
Me: Sometimes people get put into a box called a coffin, and then they get buried into the ground. So that's...
Benjamin: And sometimes they get blown up in the thing.
Me: In what?
Child: And sometimes...
Benjamin: And sometimes they don't get buried up in a box.
Me: Sometimes they don't.
Child: And then the worms and the spiders get to eat them.... Jonathan: Um, did you know that sometimes they don't get buried in the tomb. Sometimes they get put in the tomb, and take you to church, and put you in the graveyard.
Me: Yes, you're right, they do get put in the graveyard. Dylan, your job is to sit right here, and listen to the story. Let me show you how Jessie felt after James died....
Jonathan: I guess he just got old....
Jonathan: Now I know how he died. Now I know what happened.
Me: How do you think he died, Jonathan?
Jonathan: One day, big bull, um, Boss, the bull, [story character] tears his body apart.
Me: Maybe a bull could do that, but not in this story, that's not how it happened.
Jonathan: Then how did it happen?
Me: Well remember, it happened, we don't know exactly how it happened, but sometimes people's hearts just stop. Sometimes they're a little bit older, and they're working too hard, and sometimes that just happens, and that's what happened to James. So it wasn't bloody or anything like that. His heart just stopped working.
Dylan: And the tractor, I mean, he left the tractor running, and it ran over him, and he couldn't get over the tractor.

We are all frustrated. I am frustrated because they want to know so badly and I don't have the answer. They are also frustrated that I don't have the answer. I have to know, I am the teacher, the adult. I am forcing them to entertain the possibility of an adult not knowing, of nobody knowing. I am breaking a pattern that they have come to need. I am sorry and not sorry at the same time.

My experience with the morning group did not prepare me for the afternoon group. The afternoon group's discussion consisted of much more sharing of experiences relating to the story and death. The children's immediate reaction was a silence filled with sadness, that I discussed in the last chapter. Eventually, Bradley did ask, "How did he die?" However, instead of pursuing this line of discussion, my explanation was interrupted by Sarah sharing a story about her grandfather, which the other children built upon with their own stories of death and cancer.

I believe the reactions were in part dependent upon already established group dynamics, the personalities and needs of the children involved, and my rapport with the group. I realize that a small group of boys dominated the morning session with their unrealistic, gory explanations of death. The other sessions were more gender balanced. One can never be truly prepared for the unpredictability of children, nor death.

Hesitations

During the weeks that my study was advertised at the University Child School, I received two telephone calls from parents who were concerned about consenting to their child's participation, because of the topic. Although I was already taking my research seriously, these calls made me realize the extent that my actions were impacting parents and children. This added layer
of pressure influenced my interactions with the children during the story sessions; I didn't want to push too hard, for fear of upsetting them. My writing is also affected. I want to represent the story sessions thoroughly and carefully. For this thesis is in part a tribute to the courage mustered by many wavering parents. For them, it was a risk. I do not purport to be an expert in early childhood education, nor death. I have a few years of teaching experience, and my knowledge of death lies only in the fact that my mother died, and the reading and talking and thinking that event has spurred. I am just beginning to learn about how children and I react to death in and out of the classroom. Sometimes I feel like an imposter, prematurely involving children in something I don't know enough about. Yet in this reciprocal space of uncertainty we teach and learn together. New pedagogical weighs. 

I hesitate before I include my interactions with the children during our story sessions, reluctant to share. I know that these words will, and should, beget criticism: "She should have said this, or expanded upon that. Her responses weren't appropriate. She wasn't prepared. She wasn't ready." Sharing my methods, my ideas, my reactions to the children, my interactions with my mother all involve risk. I didn't realize the extent of risk that writing, especially autobiography, involves. I feel most insecure about sharing my teaching methods and my interactions with other's children. Only I suffer in my relationship with my now dead mother. Only I suffer if this thesis is not acceptable. But teaching is a profound responsibility. Parents entrust the care of their children to me, and children look to teacher for comfort, support, and knowledge. Expectations are high, and my actions impact others. I must be held accountable, and print my words as I print the words of Cassandra and Miriam. I could leave out my words and mistakes, and probably to an extent I have. After all, I punch the keys on this keyboard, I am the gatekeeper of this thesis who controls what you can and cannot read. And as much as I try to acknowledge this power and minimize it, please remain wary; even those who speak of deconstructing relations of power and breaking down barriers, will sometimes use their weight to hold them up.

Not Wanting to Know

A few children did not understand, or perhaps did not want to believe, that death had occurred. After Cassandra finished reading
Badger's Parting Gifts, Stephanie asks, "Badger, Badger didn't really die, right?" Cassandra's response intertwines her beliefs about dying with her knowledge of Stephanie's tolerance for sensitive issues; earlier in the story Stephanie needed to be reassured that her mother was not going to die. In her explanation, Cassandra bridges life and death, finding solace in the notion that some parts of Badger will never die:

Well, he did die in life, his body is dead, but when I think about this story, the part that I find happy about it is I think, well, Badger didn't really die, because there's a little bit of him in Mole, and when Mole talks about making his paper chains, Badger's still a memory, so he's not really dead like finished. We have him alive in stories, but his body is dead. That's sort of how I see it (story session, January, 1996).

Although Cassandra is now able to see positive aspects in death, and attempts to transmit this thinking to the children, she remembers her childhood denial of the eventuality of her grandfather's death and how angry she was when her best friend in third grade forced her to confront this reality:

I remember having this argument on the way home with Robin Goodman [her friend], saying, "Gramps will never die," and she says, "Of course he's gonna die." I said, "Oh no he isn't." She said, "Well, are you gonna die?" I said, "Yes." "Is your Mom gonna die?" I said, "Yes." And I was getting really mad at her, but I was sticking my ground because I really believed it. Coming to grips with that [the fact that her Gramps would eventually die], I remember it took me weeks, and it was two weeks before my mom got us [Cassandra and Robin] together with popsicles on the front step, that I forgave her. I hated her for, you know, making me confront this ... from that time on I would barter with him [Gramps], I would sit down and barter with him that he couldn't die because I needed him (interview, January, 1996).

Allow me to retrace the steps of my own denial, as I wrote for the summer graduate course while my mother was still alive. My family
didn't really talk about my mother's illness, and truthfully I was relieved. I didn't want to talk about it or think about it or believe that it was actually happening to my family, my mother, me. Yet as the months trudged along, I was forced to walk across the reality of my mother's impending death:

My mother was diagnosed with colon cancer about a year and a half ago. After surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, and then twelve months of negative test results, her doctors, including my father who is also a doctor, spoke of cure. My family hardly spoke of it at all. At the end of the year we silently sighed in relief and hastily hurled death into the furthest corners of our minds. What conditions allowed us to so foolishly believe that we could separate ourselves from death?

The cancer woke us from our dreams. It was out of (and had a) re(mission). The doctors didn't know that it had spread until my mother was on the operating table again. And again. A string of complications has kept her in the hospital most of the spring and summer. In and out. In and out. A revolving door on life--on death.

One cannot close a revolving door. Death is here to stay.

When I first reread these words I was surprised. I hadn't remembered thinking about death during those months. I can't actually believe that I wrote it on paper, somehow making permanent, marking for death. During the periods that I had convinced myself that my mother was going to get better, talking about death, even entertaining the idea, seemed preposterous. But as I began to acknowledge my mother's deteriorating condition, death was just around the corner. In this way my grief rose and fell like waves, which is a common metaphor for grief in the
self-help literature. It is still like this for me. When I'm on one crest I can't remember what it was like being on the one I left behind. It amazes me how I ride both these waves in the same paragraph. Denial, acceptance, denial, acceptance. With each rise and fall a completely different set of emotions, thoughts, and ways of relating to the world envelopes me.

DEATH IN THE CLASSROOM

In addition to our shared death experiences at the University Child School, I also asked Miriam and Cassandra to share their past experiences of dealing with death in their classrooms. They both have had multiple experiences of discussing death with children, and have strong philosophies regarding the ways it should and should not be included in the classroom.

Miriam told me about a pet canary that died in her classroom last year. She explained that it had looked quite sickly, so she had attempted to prepare her students by discussing with them the probability of her having a disease and the possibility of her death:

Anyway, she did die, ... so the next day when she wasn't in there [the cage], I told the kids she had died, and that Frank [the custodian] had found her at the bottom of the cage, and we weren't quite sure why she died, but maybe we could think about what some of their ideas were. So we went through the whole thing of why she might have died, and there were a variety of responses, from something that could realistically happen, to things that were really crazy like somebody coming in and shooting her with a stargun and things like that. It was interesting because even two or three months after, the kids were still asking about the bird and where it was. We actually put her in a box and buried her. We had a little ceremony out here (points to yard), and we buried her in the garden. So she's still there. At the end of the term the kids wanted to dig her up and take a look at her, and see what she looked like.
Another time I initiated it. I had been for a walk over the weekend and found a dead mouse, and I thought, I could really see the kids getting really interested in this.... Again we problem solved of what could have happened to the mouse (interview, January, 1996).

Miriam used books about animals and their life cycles to help guide the children's responses. "The kids loved these books because it's like a puzzle. And this was kind of part of it, because this was a real situation. And they were really interested in it" (interview, January, 1996).

Miriam has dealt extensively with death as a biological phenomenon with young children, and advocates its inclusion in the preschool curriculum. She believes that the teacher should make a point of introducing the topic if it does not come up naturally. However, Miriam states, "I don't think it [the classroom] is a suitable place to talk about religious beliefs surrounding death, that kind of more, very personal issues, but death as a phenomenon, it's okay to discuss it" (interview, January, 1996).

Cassandra had also discussed death with children in her kindergarten and preschool classrooms. When a hamster died many years ago in Cassandra's classroom, the children were very interested in why she died and where it would go. Cassandra sought the help of a veterinarian to answer some of these questions:

It was a very difficult issue because the children were very attached to these two hamsters. I figured that it was important that they understand that we don't just replace animals, but you know, that they feel the death. And so we went through the whole procedure, we read some books related to death, we did a little memory ceremony about Honey, and had to do a lot of questions.... We wanted to know why Honey died, because that became a real focus with the children, because we had the body there....

[The veterinarian] wrote a letter back to the children, and then said about how she disposed of Honey's body, and said that the
animals, the big animals they bury in a different way, but the small animals they make into ashes, and then they use them to fertilize a very special garden ... and she talked about how the energy was transferred from the ashes to the new living things, so that all energy was a natural pattern. That was only in one sentence but that became a real focus of discussion, about how death was simply a transfer of energy, energy transferring from one place to another (interview, January, 1996).

Cassandra also participated in the grief process around the loss of the canary in Miriam's classroom, develops the theme of Remembrance Day with students, and often reads books about death to children at the University Child School. She explained that many of the books she really likes happen to have a death theme, as tragedy is often balanced with growth and hope. Cassandra bridges life and death as she describes how stories of death can come to life:

I think that it's like, when you really like a story, you make it come to life. I think if you are comfortable and have had a good experience with something, then you communicate that ... you have an aura about what you're communicating, you're not ... communicating negative things (interview, January, 1996).

Like Miriam, Cassandra also advocates for the inclusion of death in classrooms with young children. However, she believes that both the biological phenomenon as well as the emotional issues surrounding death should be addressed:

I think that any teacher can deal with it [death] scientifically, I think that's the least we can expect from a teacher.... To start to deal with emotions, I think is something that I hope we can start to expect of more from the school system.... I think if we don't deal with children's emotions, we really set ourselves up for a lot of unhealthy behaviors (interview, January, 1996).
Although Cassandra acknowledges that discussing personal and religious beliefs is controversial and challenging, she believes these obstacles can be overcome:

I feel that you can be fairly open, um, it doesn't always work every time, but you can say that some people believe that, and other people believe other things.... Before I really get into a lot of those issues, expecting them and encouraging them to tolerate ambiguity, I think you really need to be able to work the group well, and know them well (interview, January, 1996).

I avoided the issue of death in the classrooms in which I taught. Perhaps as I had never experienced the death of someone very close to me, I didn't think to bring it into the classroom. Now that death is such a big part of my life, however, it is difficult for me to conceive of leaving it behind as I walk through a classroom door. As Madeleine Grumet reminds us, I wouldn't really be leaving it behind anyway, for "the parts of the world that are not spoken do not disappear" (in Silin, 1995, p.ix). I still try to avoid death at times, but I am learning to accept that it is, and always has been, with me. This project has provided opportunities for me to acknowledge and interact with death in the classroom, and to listen to experienced teachers share their ideas and concerns about doing so. As I build a bridge between life and death, I also build bridges between my life inside and outside the classroom, and between children and myself.

I asked Miriam whether she thought our personal experiences with death impact our curricular choices:

Miriam: Oh yeah, for sure.
Me: Do you think that maybe a teacher who had just experienced a loss of someone closer to them, do you think that would make them more likely or less likely or any difference?
Miriam: Well, I think it also depends on where you are in your spiritual walk, or you know, your processing about the whole thing. If you're still really early on in that, I think it would be much more
difficult. But if you've come to a fairly strong foundation of what you believe about the whole thing, then I think it makes it easier to deal with. Even though you don't, maybe don't feel you can discuss that in relation with children or other people around, children in particular, I think it makes you stronger in yourself to be able to talk about it (interview, January, 1996).

Death is all around me. I cannot run from it, hide from it, or walk away. I can't leave when it gets hard—death follows me. Many people throw themselves into their work to temporarily forget or distance themselves from what is bothering them. I, by choice, do not have this option; my life is death, my work is death, my studies are death. I procrastinate because I don't want to write/read/talk death today. I do the dishes, go for a walk, organize my schedule, wash the floor. After my mom died, I would wake up each morning having forgotten that she was dead. I assumed she was alive and had to re-mind myself that she wasn't. Now, for the most part, I know she's dead. Because I have lived away from home for so long, I don't expect to see her, but I expect her to call, especially on the weekends when we used to talk most often. Sometimes in a panic I think, "Oh, shit. I haven't talked to my mom all week, I better call her or she's going to kill me." Sometimes I laugh at these mistakes, sometimes I cry, and sometimes I just know she's going to call. Do I do these things because I need to think my mother is still alive, or because she really is still alive in some ways?

Perceptions of Death

I asked Miriam and Cassandra to share their views of how they believe children perceive death. How would the ideas of experienced practitioners compare with the literature I had been reading? How does a child's age and experiences with death impact their ideas? I also wanted validation that children can and do entertain the complexities of death; that I was not forcing an inappropriate issue on them at too young an age:

Miriam: I had mostly three year olds when we did this canary thing.... There was differences in how they, the "threes" were definitely not as interested as the older kids.... There was more awareness of the whole phenomenon as they got older. ...

(interruption)
Me: So I was going to ask you about whether you think it's ever too young, or three year olds are too young...
Miriam: I think it's more how, where their thinking is at, because I have had very young children who were amazing in terms of their thinking, and I've had older children who were amazing in how little they think, so I don't think it's attached to age, but more kind of life experiences, or where their, how their analytical thinking ability probably (interview, January, 1996).

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Me: In what ways do you think young children perceive death?
Cassandra: Gosh, it's as many as there are children. And it depends if they've actually had a close relative or pet or something close to them die. If they've had that, I think they can still have a lot of misconceptions. Some perceive it as going to sleep, I think some perceive it as this very frightening thing that they never want to have happen ... they have an anxiety, they want to close and shut down, they don't want to think about it, put it away and think about something nice, give me something nice to think about. Other children have more questions and are more open about it, but can still be quite frightened about it, because they don't want their life as they know it to end. I do think children as young as kindergarten, at least in my experience, see death as a final issue, or a final experience to their body. They may all have different understandings of whether there's a soul, or whether there's not, but I do think they can conceive of it as being final, and that can be quite frightening....

[M]y children, as young as four and five not only were talking about death, but talking about that they knew it as an eventuality, it would be an eventuality for me, they worry about it....

I think it's also related to age, as they're getting a little older and they've come into more experience around this, they're going to ask more questions and relate it more to themselves, and the more books they've been exposed to (interview, January, 1996).

SOCIETAL CONTRADICTIONS

Children did display some fear and discomfort while listening to and discussing death in the story sessions. Some children depicted violent and gruesome explanations of death. How do children come to perceive death as gory, frightening, and dramatic? I believe that these notions are
planted by our society's love-hate relationship with death which is riddled with contradictions. In this study, three main contradictions about how society does and does not deal with death surfaced. There was the contradiction between wanting to protect children from death while simultaneously bombarding them with images and details of death on television and other media, society as unemotional yet overly dramatic, and death as emotion-full despite our anesthetization to it. I asked Miriam and Cassandra their ideas about ways in which our society deals with death:

Miriam: I sort of think that we as a society maybe protect children from the whole issue, and kind of try to sweep it under the rug.... I think that Western society tends to feel reserved about our emotional response, and so we don't deal with anything that's, death is all part of it.... So it's not necessarily death singled out ... it's just part of the bigger kind of emotional topics that we're not very good at dealing with. We intellectualize it (interview, January, 1996).

Cassandra: Avoidance. Big avoidance. I think that's the way the majority of society deals with it. I think every person has some sort of crutch, I don't mean crutch in the bad way, I mean coping mechanism, whatever.... I think it could be religion, ... to make your mark on life, ... prodigy, ... I think people find different ways to not think about death. I think we try to gloss over it a lot, and then when we do show things about death, be it on TV or in the media, it's always with blackness and around a coffin or a body at a graveyard. I was surprised the other day, were you taping? They all said that graveyards were scary places.... I think that's what we communicate to children.... We've got all those images everywhere they go, that whole horror thing.... I think that would add to the scariness of death, and also I guess it desensitizes them a bit, and again, distances them from the whole thing, because it's something scary, it's got to do with Halloween, it's not the real thing (interview, January, 1996).

When I ask myself in what ways society deals with death, I am bewildered by the stark contradictions that fail to make sense in my
mind. How is it that we read and hear and see the deaths of others every day on the news, television, radio, and in newspapers, yet simultaneously try to deny its effects on our lives and our children? Death cannot be discussed in classrooms, yet children are surrounded by death images outside the classroom. Society seeks death, is infatuated with it, pays money to be immersed in it; we are mesmerized by blood and gore and drama. How can we pursue death while simultaneously running from it? Connecting death with bizarre circumstances that will most likely not happen distances us from death and convinces us that we won't ever have to face death or die. As long as we experience death only through television, we don't have to live with death, we can change the channel.

All around me are books and papers of death. I want to suffocate death. I want to kill it. I want it to leave me alone. I'm living and feeling this death, not watching it. I can't leave the theater or turn the page. Perhaps writing helps me walk away. It allows me to pinpoint death; it's here on this paper and when I leave the room I leave it behind. It can't follow me.

BUILDING THE BRIDGE

Building a bridge between life and death is at times a frightening undertaking. Once ties are established, they are almost impossible to dismantle; the invitation is a permanent one. Perhaps this bridge already stands however, linking shores and ideas and experiences, but we have refused to acknowledge its existence. We have chosen to drive the more comfortable, longer way around only in times of necessity. I understand how difficult it is to have death as a constant companion, but I am beginning to realize that if I had made its acquaintance earlier, it wouldn't cling so.
Some of the children's comments seemed to dwell in the spaces between life and death. Although these ideas are not always clear, they act as girders supporting the bridge. Andrew ponders, "I know Badger's up, Badger, he brings out his shadow I think, and then he will, and then he comes to life, a ghost, or his note, he said the tunnel once. I think his shadow went out, his life shadow" (story session, January, 1996).

Cassandra also bridges life and death when she describes the negotiations that can occur around death. Although Cassandra's perceived involvement in her grandfather's death may be an attempt to control an uncontrollable situation and make her feel more secure, these negotiations can be seen as a connection to those that may soon die, or have died already:

I've felt okay the way Gramps died, I gave him the freedom. I felt he let a lot of that power be with me, maybe that wasn't how it happened, but I have very good feelings mixed with sad feelings, about that whole death experience (interview, January, 1996).

Cassandra previously mentioned the notion of bartering with her grandfather for more life. Bartering is often cited in the grief literature as one of the five stages one has to move through before accepting the loss. Bartering is a common topic of conversation between my mother and myself. I want her to come back to life, and in many ways this thesis is an attempt to make this wish come true. I make her come to life by telling her/our story.

Read Between the Lines: My Mother Lives
My mother is dead but she is in this thesis. Alive in this thesis? Living in this thesis? Do I live in my thesis? Does my thesis live? It works, it grows, it teaches, it annoys me, it scares me—like life, life-like. In my reading I have come across two contradictory notions of grief, letting go and getting reacquainted. Most grief literature touts letting go as the final stage in the grief
process. I don't want to let go. I won't do it; my mother's stubbornness pervades me. So, we talk, we negotiate, we reminisce. I am forced to dwell with my mother in new ways. It's tiring keeping up these new forms of communication, but I am becoming accustomed to them. She is a captive audience, and they're cheaper than long distance phone calls.

Knowing about Death

In the two stories that Cassandra read, there was a knowing about death; either the one who died or someone close to them predicted the death before it actually occurred. I believe these notions serve as building blocks to bridge life and death, and help children understand death's complexity and mystery:

Long before the goose came back, Fritha knew in her heart that something had happened. She knew that she had probably lost Rhayader, that he wasn't coming back. And so, when one day she heard the high-pitched hoooonk hooonk of the snow goose, she ran out, but she knew she wasn't going to see her Rhayader. (Cassandra reading The Snow Goose, January, 1996).

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Badger was so old, that he knew that he must soon die.... He wasn't afraid of death. No, dying only meant that he would leave his body behind. And as his body didn't work as well as it used to when he was younger, he wasn't very worried about that (Cassandra reading Badger's Parting Gifts, January, 1996).

Between Life and Death

My mother hallucinated at the end. She would be sleeping calmly, and then suddenly she would try to get out of bed, although the hospital bed railings kept her feet from going over. She would start to yell. Her dried lips would try to form words, but only vowel sounds came out. Tonal. We couldn't make out what she was saying. She looked scared. She looked angry. She wanted to get out of where she was, wanted to leave, to go. She couldn't stand it anymore, and truthfully neither could we. We told her to lay down and calm down. We told her who we were and where she
was. It didn't help. It makes me crazy to think of the things she was seeing, experiencing—like a nightmare you can't wake up from. We were told the morphine might make her hallucinate. Great. I wanted to tell her to wake up, to snap out of it. Her hands and face were so bony that she looked already dead and waking from it. We increased her morphine, not knowing whether it was for her or for us. I never knew what the screaming was about. Was she screaming from pain? Then I could remember these moments without cringing, without crying—I was easing her pain. But I'll never know, of course. Perhaps she was trying to tell us something and every time I hit the red button on her automatic morphine drip I took away her voice. Again and again and again, and finally forever.

WALKING ACROSS

To My Dear Friends,
I have gone down the long tunnel. Do not worry about me. I am ready to go. Please remember that I am with you, and try in your heart to find that spot of me, and then you will have a memory of me, and not miss me so much.
Goodbye,

Badger

Wise Badger knows that pieces of his self will live on in those that he touched in life. Badger's friends also grasp this idea over time. And perhaps, the children who listened to this story will begin to understand this notion as well, as Cassandra reinforces that Badger is still alive through those who remember him:

Cassandra: And Mole is remembering that special memory, and as he remembered, he had a part of Badger with him, right? ... So when Fox over here (points to picture) was teaching his son how to tie his tie, who did he remember, Stephanie?
Stephanie: Badger.
Cassandra: And when Frog was teaching his cousins how to skate, who did he remember?
Child: Badger.
Cassandra: When Rabbit was making gingerbread cookies for her grandchildren, who did she remember?
Children: Badger.
Cassandra: So, in a strange way, Badger had given a parting gift to each one of his friends, and they held something of Badger inside...
Child: Of their heart.

The characters in the stories that Cassandra and I read to the children live on within other characters as well as in the hearts and minds of storyteller and listener.

Horsey the Fish

Cassandra told this story to accompany the explanation she gave Stephanie about the ways in which people and animals continue to live through stories and memories after their death:

Cassandra: When our fish died out in the pond, it was very sad.... We tried very hard to save it, but there [had been] a terrible freeze-over, and it lived for a day, and then it looked like it was dying, and then it lived again, and finally it died, and both my boys cried very hard.... They didn't want Horsey [the fish] to die forever. We were looking for how we could remember Horsey, and how much we enjoyed him. Do you know what we did?
Child: You took a picture of him?
Cassandra: No, we took his dead body and we put paint on one side of it and then we pressed it on [a] piece of paper ... and we had the perfect imprint of his body. They framed it, and it's by their beds, and if you ever come over to my house, you'll see [it] (story session, January, 1996).

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One warm spring day as Mole was walking down the hillside where he had last seen Badger, he wanted to thank his friend for his parting gift. So he lifted his head up to the sky and he said, "Thank you, Badger," and he knew that somewhere, Badger would hear him, and somehow, Badger did (Cassandra reading Badger's Parting Gifts, January, 1996).

Part of me died when my mother died, yet through me and with me part of her lives. I dwell in this space called bridge between life and death; a pedagogical space. Learning is an entity concerned with life and hope, a
generative discipline (Jardine, 1992). My mother gave life to me at my birth, and as I write these death words and I learn from them—from her, she gives life to me once again. She whispers strength, guidance, and patience to me in her death, I can hear her:

Cries and whispers of the dead who live; cries and whispers of she who dies, who is resurrected, whose death testifies to life (Pinar, 1992, p.100).
Writing this chain of remembrances has been a difficult experience. It is a challenge to translate speaking into writing while attempting to make the telling stay. I don't have the comforting devices of emphasis such as tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures that I lean so heavily upon to make a story more meaningful and exciting. Can writing be more of a risk than telling? Because I cannot see the reaction of the reader, I do not have any power to influence her or his experience. Once these words are written, there is no room for manipulation. The finality of writing scares me, yet, there may be another possibility.

Although I no longer have the power to mould the space between myself and reader, like I do between myself and listener, perhaps you do. When you read these words, you can work this story to satisfy your own desires, and make your own connections. It is a matter of trust; a matter of passing the responsibility from teller/writer to the listener/reader. I realize that some readers won't think that these words are worth the effort, but others will wrestle with my words and meanings, will twist and stretch in accordance with their own lives and experiences.

Maybe there's hope for this story after all. Maybe there's hope for all stories, for all the pieces in our nonsensical lives that dwell together not only in our own minds, but in the minds of a few others. Maybe it's worth the risk; reaching out to others with my stories, defining myself and my world as I live, tell, listen, and write to the sounds of my self.

The happening is different from the telling, than from the listening, than from the writing. No one experience is better, nor more real, nor more true. Each is its own experience, and when one takes the time to
reflect, one can glean its individual significance, as well as its connection to the whole. This story does matter, yet it took all these stories to force me to see that this was so. What a powerful tool writing is; as turning these stories into the actual black and white matter to which your eyes are now fixed, was what made me realize that they do indeed matter.
REACHING:

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

CHAPTER SIX
I am still fearful of not being able to finish this project. I want to be done so badly but something, as usual, holds me back. Perhaps I don't want to finish writing/living/reliving my mother's death. I haven't experienced her death, nor my grief, without this distraction of thesis. What is life like without it? I can't remember, and I am terrified to find out. This degree is something she wanted me to finish. Why do I continue to rebel against her wishes and expectations even after she is dead? Will I ever be free? Do I want to be free? Still so many uncertainties. I want to finish, but I don't want to lose her when it is finished. She lives through me. Writing makes her permanent; my mother in the library, bound, texted, catalogued, forever.

Early in this process called thesis, my committee talked about and suggested I begin to think about the ways in which my work could potentially impact others: teachers, students (young children and graduate students), the bereaved. I never understood what they meant, but I continued to nod enthusiastically, and write down their suggestions during our committee meetings.

Throughout the year, I would tell people who inquired in casual conversations what I was researching and writing about for my thesis. Most people were curious, and wanted to know what I had been learning from my conversations of death. Some showed interest in reading my thesis when it was finished. I was perplexed. My confusion peaked, and then slowly began to dissipate on 2 May, 1996, when I presented this work at a conference titled, "Curriculum as Narrative/Narrative as Curriculum: Lingering in the Spaces," held at the University of British Columbia. Allow me to share with you a journal entry that I wrote the day following my presentation:

I am amazed that the feedback I received at the conference was so positive. They listened to me and through me. They laughed at my sarcastic, dark humour that my mother and I share(d). I believe there was sadness too as I spoke, although perhaps I only imagined people dragging embarrassed
fingers under watery eyes. They cried with me, for their own loved ones alive and dead. They asked questions about the children's reactions and the teachers' philosophies. Their questions are my questions. Maybe there is a reason for this anger, sadness, inquiry, after all. They supported my attempts to bring death into the classroom; it is a part of life, they said—inseparable. They also encouraged me in my attempts to blend my personal life with my academic life, and for sharing these interminglings with them, for letting them in. Afterwards, they shared their stories and experiences of death—mothers, sons, friends. A few told me I had courage, and sharing my struggles gave them courage. I am stunned.

Before this conference presentation, I was unable to visualize how my thesis could affect the lives of others. Since uttering these death words in public, however, I am beginning to understand how this work of death can act as bridge between private and public spheres, between myself and others. I had talked about bridging the distance between teachers and students in the classroom, but these listeners taught me how death is able to bridge the banks of another landscape; there was telling in their listening. And now I can begin to reflect upon the ways this work can reach out to others—all of us teachers and students—affected by death, and life.

A slip in the wake of the conference:
Some friends and I were sitting around a table having tea, discussing the conference that had just ended. The conversation then turned to some photographs of mine that were recently developed. One of my friends slipped, and said that I should send copies to my mother. We all laughed nervously; another friend joked about potential fax capabilities to heaven. To me, however, this suggestion didn't seem so strange. After two days of talking and thinking about my mother at the conference, she seemed so alive. Although dwelling with/on her life/death makes it more difficult for me to convince myself that she is really dead, it also reminds me that she really isn't.
I told fifty faces that my mother died, 
then Ted Aoki told two hundred. 
My life lays (like) patient on the table—
lights  scalpel  camera  action 
movie of my life—private made public. 
How do I feel about the debut? 
proud, honest, connected—for the reviews were positive 
exposed, vulnerable, lonely—for the story is no longer mine. 
My story in its dissemination/dissection now belongs 
to all those eyes and ears that watched and listened to the explosion of myself 
that no surgeon glue editor can piece back together 
(no longer mine, if it ever was). 

LOSS    again 

gain too, eventually, but for now I must sit with the empty feeling 
inside of me 
that no food conversation writing reading 
can fill. 
S       P       A       C       E 
Concave chest 
from 
starvation of self. 
Soon 
it will be replenished 
filled 
with growth understanding connection. 
But first, I am learning to believe, it is important 
to sit and listen 
to the echoes and stagnance 
of empty space. 
Listen, Margot, 
to the silence. Hover inside it. 
Let it fill you and comfort the fear that it instills. 
It will not kill you.
It just steals your breath for a moment—
so that you can truly listen to the no thing ness
without distraction.

Sit still.

Empty vessel filling up...

drip

trickle

rushhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Hesitant Reaching

It is difficult for me to name ways in which this work might speak to others; connections are unpredictable, slippery. I do not want to assume that someone who has, for example, experienced the death of her mother, has had or will have feelings similar to mine. Like in the classroom, I strive to find a balance between connection and over-generalization. As I remember how helpful and meaningful the stories of bereaved women were to me in my grief, I wonder if perhaps this work could comfort those who have experienced the death of someone close to them.

I then turn my thoughts to other graduate students who struggle, like me, to complete their degrees while also juggling work and family, and the dilemmas that undoubtedly arise within each of these spheres. I feel especially connected to other graduate students who wrestle, both bureaucratically and emotionally, with bringing their life stories and experiences into their academic work in the form of autobiography. I hope that my honest portrayal of my frustrations with and gratification from
this process, can provide a model and encouragement to those who choose to take this path.

Throughout this work I have probably been most concerned with the issues that arise from bringing death into an early childhood setting. I have tried to portray one way in which this might be accomplished, and hope that educators and parents will learn from the successes and failures of this project, and put this knowledge into practice with the young children in their lives. I hope that I have persuaded the skeptics, like myself, that death has so much to teach us about life and the ways we choose to live it. Curriculum is not an objective blueprint of goals, objectives, lesson plans, and lists of materials, but an inter-subjective swirling of relationships and interactions. Teachers worry, they make mistakes, and they revel in connections made, as I have tried to illustrate. Perhaps the question is not so much how this work can be integrated into an already existing curriculum, but how this work *is* curriculum (Goelman, personal communication, May, 1996).

Transition to Transformation

The ponderings above speak to how this project may or may not impact those who have read or participated in it. But how has the experience of writing/living death influenced my life and my relationship with my mother? In my introduction, I described how my mother's illness and death initiated a series of transitions in my life—physical, academic, and emotional. Yet I believe the decision to tell stories of death, particularly my own story, has pushed me further, has indeed transformed the ways in which I live (Davies, paper presentation, 1996). As I transform the stories of children and teachers into the text of this thesis, interspersed with my reactions and interactions, this thesis in turn
transforms me and the story of my grief. In some ways I feel more closely connected to my mother than I ever have before, and I believe we understand each other better now; rather than letting go, we've gotten reacquainted.

This thesis has also allowed me to take time to reflect upon some of the assumptions that underlie my teaching practices and the ways in which I interact with children. It is not so much that my teaching skills nor my educational philosophies have been dramatically transformed, but rather the ways in which I think about and linger with these notions have shifted. I am now committed to intermingling the multiple parts of myself inside and outside the classroom, more closely aligning my personal beliefs with my curricular choices, and relying more heavily upon the lived, told, and written stories of my students and myself to guide our pedagogical journey. In these ways we will transform, and be transformed by, our classroom experiences and relationships.

True Bridge

Throughout this thesis I have spoken of bridges and bridging among students and teachers, children and adults, researcher and researched, storytellers and listeners, and my mother and myself. I have tried to convey the possibilities that can occur when people choose to walk across these bridges: other in self, gain in loss, life in death. Ted Aoki describes bridges as dwelling places for people (Aoki, 1992). Within this work I have dwelled with the living and the dead, and have learned that by doing so I can reach out to others; death teaches me to reach. As death bridges the selves and others of the early childhood classroom "it allows the coming into being of the banks across which it spans" (Richter, 1993,
p. 7). By reaching/connecting with others, we, as those who are bridged, come into being:

[The bridge] does not just connect the banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream (Heidegger, 1977, quoted in Richter, 1993, p. 7).

In this thesis, I have bridged wor(l)ds past and present in an attempt to trace the crests and troughs of my grief. I have found anger, sadness, and pain, as well as confidence, endurance, and tolerance. I hope that as the wake of my personal and academic experiences disperses from my self, others will wade in these words before they are washed up on distant shores.
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Appendix One

Consent Forms

Dear Cassandra, December 20, 1995

As you know, I am currently enrolled in the Master of Arts programme. You are also well aware that as part of the early literacy programme at the University Child School, we both take small groups of children to the school's library and read stories to them once a week for approximately 20 minutes.

I would like to use these existing storytelling sessions to gather data for my Master's thesis. My project is entitled, *An Exploration of the Concept of Death in a Preschool Setting*. I am interested in children's and teachers' perceptions of and responses to death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. I would like to document the experience of children listening to a children's story about death. I am writing this letter to formally request your participation in this study. I would like to observe you reading a story about death to two groups of children during their 20 minute story sessions. The groups will consist of approximately 4-8 children. As is often the case when reading to young children, they may comment on the story and/or interject related experiences. It is these spontaneous comments and reactions to the story that will comprise the data. You will not be required to ask the children any questions about death at any time during or after the story. The storytelling sessions will not differ in time, day, frequency, location, format, or duration from the usual storytelling experience. I will also be reading a children's story about death to two different groups of children.

After we both have had the opportunity to read about death to children, we will meet at the University Child School to discuss our experiences for no longer than one hour. The maximum amount of time I am requesting that you dedicate to this study is one hour and forty minutes. I will also interview a preschool teacher regarding her perceptions of the inclusion of death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. I intend to audio-tape and transcribe the storytelling sessions and interviews.

It is important to note that you would have the right to refuse to participate at any time before, during, or after the story sessions, and that such withdrawal would not jeopardize in any way your involvement with the University Child School. The children also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, which I will explain to them to the best of my ability.

Please be advised that the identities of all participants in this study will be held in the strictest of confidence. I will use pseudonyms for all participants as well as the name of the school. The audio-tapes and transcriptions of the story sessions and interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

If you have any inquiries concerning the procedures of this project, please feel free to contact me at home at 730-****, or at the University Child School on Tuesdays and
Thursdays. You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Hillel Goelman, at 822-**** for further information or clarification.

Sincerely,

Margot Rosenberg

Your signature below indicates that you have read and fully understood all aspects of the above study, hereby give your CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE, and have received a copy of this consent form, including all attachments, for your own records.

Signature ____________________________ Date ________________
December 20, 1995

Dear Jane,

I am writing this letter to inform you that my proposed research project for my Master of Arts degree was approved by the university ethics committee last week. The project is entitled, *An Exploration of the Concept of Death in a Preschool Setting*, and I am interested in children's and teachers' perceptions of and responses to death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. My study will entail documenting the reactions of children listening to a children's story about death, documenting the experiences of the adult storytellers, and interviewing a preschool teacher regarding her perceptions of the inclusion of death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. I intend to use our already existing storytelling sessions in which to gather the data for this project. I have chosen your morning and afternoon classrooms so that I will have two opportunities to read to children with whom I feel I have a good rapport, and to minimize the number of teachers involved. I will also be observing Cassandra read to Miriam's students.

I will be distributing consent forms to the parents in both your morning and afternoon classes on Monday, January 8, 1996, and placing a collection envelope outside your classroom. Ideally, I want to conduct the research on Thursday, January 18, 1996, providing I receive a sufficient number of parent consent forms. If I do not have enough participants, I will conduct the research the following Thursday. Although the storytelling sessions will not differ in time, day, format, frequency, location, or duration from the student's normal story experience, only those students whose parents give consent can attend the session. I will provide you with a list of the participating students one or two days before the session. I am also required to ask permission of the students themselves. I will explain the situation to the best of my ability upon entering the library. Children who do not wish to participate must be escorted back to the classroom by an adult.

It is important to note that the children's spontaneous comments, questions, and reactions to the story will comprise the data. The children will not be asked any direct questions about death or required to share their experiences about death at any time during or after the story. The books that Cassandra and I will be reading will be on display in the library for parents and teachers to review. These sessions will be audio-taped.

Please feel free to speak to me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this project. You can contact me at school or at home at 730-****. I apologize in advance for any inconvenience this may cause you or your students.

Sincerely,

Margot Rosenberg
December 20, 1995

Dear Miriam,

I am writing this letter to inform you that my proposed research project for my Master of Arts degree was approved by the university ethics committee last week. The project is entitled, *An Exploration of the Concept of Death in a Preschool Setting*, and I am interested in children's and teachers' perceptions of and responses to death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. My study will entail documenting the reactions of children listening to a children's story about death, documenting the experiences of the adult storytellers, and interviewing a preschool teacher regarding her perceptions of the inclusion of death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. I intend to use your already existing storytelling sessions with Cassandra in which to gather the data for this project. I have chosen your morning and afternoon classrooms so that Cassandra will have multiple opportunities to read to children with whom she has a good rapport, and to minimize the number of teachers involved. I will also be reading to Jane's students.

I will be distributing consent forms to the parents in both your morning and afternoon classes on Monday, January 8, 1996, and placing a collection envelope outside your classroom. Ideally, I want to conduct the research on Tuesday, January 16, 1996, providing I receive a sufficient number of parent consent forms. If I do not have enough participants, I will conduct the research the following Tuesday. Although the storytelling sessions will not differ in time, day, format, frequency, location, or duration from the student's normal story experience, only those students whose parents give consent can attend the session. Perhaps if approximately half of the parents respond, the class can be divided into participating and non-participating groups. I will provide you with a list of the participating students one or two days before the session. I am also required to ask permission of the students themselves. I will explain the situation to the best of my ability upon entering the library. Children who do not wish to participate must be escorted back to the classroom by an adult.

It is important to note that the children's spontaneous comments, questions, and reactions to the story will comprise the data. The children will not be asked any direct questions about death or required to share their experiences about death at any time during or after the story. The books that Cassandra and I will be reading will be on display in the library for parents and teachers to review. These sessions will be audio-taped.

Please feel free to speak to me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this project. You can contact me at school or at home at 730-****. I apologize in advance for any inconvenience this may cause you or your students.

Sincerely,

Margot Rosenberg
Dear Parent,

My name is Margot Rosenberg and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Arts programme. Some of you may know me as a Graduate Assistant at the University Child School. Part of my Assistantship entails implementing the early literacy programme with another Graduate Assistant. Once a week we take the children out of their classrooms in small groups and read stories to them in the school's library for approximately 20 minutes.

I would like to use these existing storytelling sessions to gather data for my Master's thesis. My project is entitled, *An Exploration of the Concept of Death in a Preschool Setting*. I am interested in children's and teachers' perceptions of and responses to death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. During one of your child's story sessions, I would like him or her to listen to a children's story about death. As is often the case when reading to young children, they may comment on the story and/or interject related experiences. It is these spontaneous comments and reactions to the story that will comprise the data. Your child will not be asked any questions or be required to share his or her experiences about death at any time during or after the story. The storytelling sessions will not differ in time, day, format, frequency, location, or duration from your child's usual storytelling experience. The story will be read by your child's usual storyteller, either the other Graduate Assistant or myself. The books that will be read will be on display in the school's library. Please feel free to read them at any time.

I intend to audio-tape and transcribe these storytelling sessions, as well as observe the sessions in which the other Graduate Assistant is the storyteller. After we have both had the opportunity to read about death to the children, we will meet to discuss our experiences. I will also interview a preschool teacher regarding her perceptions of the inclusion of death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum.

It is important to note that you and your child would have the right to refuse to participate at any time before, during, or after the story session, and that such withdrawal would not jeopardize in any way your or your child's involvement with the University Child School. I will explain this right of withdrawal to your child to the best of my ability. If you or your child do not consent to participate, your child will remain with her or his teacher and other half of the class in the classroom.

Please be advised that the identities of all participants in this study will be held in the strictest of confidence. I will use pseudonyms for all participants as well as the name of the school. The audio-tapes and transcriptions of the story sessions will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

If you have any inquiries concerning the procedures of this project, please feel free to contact me at home at 730-****, or at the University Child School on Tuesdays and Thursdays. You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Hillel Goelman, at 822-**** for further information or clarification. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Margot Rosenberg
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood all aspects of the above study, and have retained a copy of this form, including all its attachments, for your own records.

I CONSENT / I DO NOT CONSENT (circle one) to my child's participation in Margot Rosenberg's study.

Signature ______________________   Date ________________

Child's Name ____________________   Teacher ______________

Parent's Name ____________________
Dear Miriam,

My name is Margot Rosenberg, and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Arts programme. As you know, I am also a Graduate Assistant at the University Child School. Part of my Assistantship entails implementing the early literacy programme with another Graduate Assistant, usually referred to as Story.

I would like to use these existing storytelling sessions and related adult interviews to gather data for my Master's thesis. Allow me to briefly explain my intended research project. My project is entitled, *An Exploration of the Concept of Death in a Preschool Setting*, and I am interested in children's and teachers' perceptions of and responses to death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. My study will entail documenting the reactions of children listening to a children's story about death, documenting the experiences of the adult storytellers, and interviewing a preschool teacher regarding her perceptions of the inclusion of death in the early childhood classroom and curriculum. I am writing this letter to formally request your participation in this study in the role of the preschool teacher.

This interview would last no longer than one hour and would be conducted at the University Child School. I intend to audio-tape and then transcribe this interview. Please be advised that the identities of all participants in this study will be held in the strictest of confidence. I will use pseudonyms for all participants as well as the name of the school. The audio-tapes and transcriptions of the story sessions and interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

It is important to note that you would have the right to refuse to participate at any time before, during, or after the interview, and that such withdrawal would not jeopardize in any way your involvement with the University Child School.

If you have any inquiries concerning the procedures of this project, please feel free to contact me at home at 730-****, or at the University Child School on Tuesdays and Thursdays. You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Hillel Goelman, at 822-**** for further information or clarification.

Sincerely,

Margot Rosenberg

Your signature below indicates that you have read and fully understood all aspects of the above study, hereby give your CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE, and have received a copy of this consent form, including all attachments, for your own records.

Signature ____________________________  Date ___________________
Appendix Two

Story Session Groupings

Miriam's Morning Class
Cassandra reading *Badger's Parting Gifts*

Andrew  Boy 1  Girl 1
Steven  Boy 2  Girl 2
Lucy  Boy 3
Stephanie

Miriam's Afternoon Class
Cassandra reading *The Snow Goose*

Helen  Kendra  Boy 1
Josh  Beth  Boy 2
Cynthia  
Kate

Jane's Morning Class
Margot reading *The Very Best of Friends*

Dylan  Girl 1  Boy 1
Jonathan  Girl 2  Boy 2
Benjamin  

Jane's Afternoon Class
Margot reading *The Very Best of Friends*

Madeline  Maxine  Girl 1
Sarah  Bradley
Stacey  Brandon
Deborah

Note: The children above who do not have pseudonyms either were not quoted in the text, or I was unable to identify their voice on the tape (these latter children are identified by "child" in the text). It does not necessarily mean that they did not contribute to the discussion.
Appendix Three

Interview Questions

Have you ever dealt with or discussed death in a preschool classroom? Tell me about these experiences. Why do you think the topic of death has never been addressed?

Do you feel that death is a difficult topic to talk about with young children? Why or why not?

Do you think that the classroom is an appropriate place for young children to discuss death? Why or why not?

In what ways do you think young children perceive death?

In what ways do you think our society deals with death? In what ways do you think our society avoids death?

Have you had any personal experiences with death? Could you briefly describe these experiences? Do you think these experiences have impacted your choice to include or exclude death in your classroom? In what ways?

Can you list some ways that you or another preschool teacher might approach death in the classroom?

Do you think that you or this other teacher would need any additional support or resources to deal with death in a preschool classroom? Could you give me a few examples of the types of support that would be necessary or helpful?
Additional questions for Cassandra:

Describe your experiences reading to and dialoguing with children around death.

Could you describe some of the children's reactions to the story?

Do you think this was a meaningful experience for you?
   Could you give me an example of this?

Do you think this was a meaningful experience for the children?
   Could you give me an example of this?

Would you discuss death with young children in a similar setting again?
   Would you do anything differently?
   Describe what you think would be a more ideal or beneficial experience for yourself and the children.