

Running With the Souls of Our Feet:  
Embracing Our Conflicts and Our Ecstasies

by

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### **Abstract/ion**

Teaching and learning are erotic acts. The processes of teaching and learning involve the ecstatic abandonment of self to the Other, the continual losing and finding of self in the Other, the intimate, sensual engagement of self with the world. It is eros, catalyzed by the bittersweet yearnings of ever-unfulfilled desire, that moves each of us to seek union with the Other. This vital, erotic evolution of both self and environment, is educational in the broadest sense of that word. (Pryer, 2001, 140-141)

This is a thesis that examines, illuminates, reveals and makes public a very personal journey – a journey that seeks to encompass and include all three aspects of the traveler: the spirit, the body and the mind. This is a thesis that explores and investigates ways in which both conflict and ecstasy can be invited to dwell inside the journey. This is a thesis that examines ways in which to include the dangerous, the dark and the shadow alongside ease, safety and bliss. And although the temptation to clutch on to recipes, codes and formulas will never be far, this thesis will also try to minimize their dependency and instead will provide the traveler with guides, footholds and caring companions to help navigate the journey.

This journey weaves its way in and out of school, home, church and other life spaces. This journey weaves its way in and out of yarn stitches. This journey weaves its way in and out of words and experiences. This journey weaves its way in and out of running trails, city streets, sky train paths and meadows. This journey is like the one which Dorothy takes in Baum's "The Wizard of Oz" and as such, Dorothy's timeless journey on her yellow brick road will weave in and out and through my own journey. This journey is both dangerous and difficult. Since every journey requires movement, action and experience, I will be both teaching and learning at every turn and as such, I will be losing and finding myself and, in turn, I will be losing and finding you over and over again. This journey begins in the middle, somewhat elevated and ends at a new beginning.

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## ***In Abundance***

*And this is for the Tinmen, Lions and Scarecrows who dared to mirror back the many faces of strength, courage and wisdom inside the classroom, workspace, street, home and running route.*

*To the Zandras, Christinas, Daves, and Allans represented in this academic fable.*

*To Carl, Shauna and Lynn for your unwavering belief in me despite my constant disbelief.*

*To Lizia, for walking alongside me and always thinking the best of me.*

*To my nonna and mamma and pappa.*

*There is no word to say what I feel in abundance, so I will let all the space in between my words acknowledge you, thank you, find you and hold you with the gratitude that will forever reside inside me.*

*And thank you anyways.*

*Love, Dorothy.*

## Beginning

*Invocation*

*beginning  
i open and i offer  
my heart as i place my moving hands  
before You  
may heart and hand splatter all that is You  
in amongst the stories and words  
memories and research*

*may Your Hands roll all the bits and pieces  
which are knotted in tears  
both of joy and sorrow  
scattered in random purpose*

*may Your*

*holed*

*whole*

*holy*

*Hands*

*gather these all in  
Your sacred circle  
as you roll my pieces into one straight yarn  
my sacred circle  
that you move with your hands into this  
our sacred circle*

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*Dorothy*

*Running on yellow brick  
i move forward  
i have long burned scarecrow  
and i have painted his ashes on my naked body  
in lines and waves and circles  
i have trampled on tin man  
    pummeled him into thin soft silver fabric  
    wrapped around my breasts and made into a mini skirt  
making visible the muscled stories inside my legs  
i am running along my yellow brick road  
i have married my long haired lion  
and we move together while we run apart  
the reflection of my tin mini skirt  
and the shadow of my dry wheat ashes  
informing Everybody  
    of my moving forward  
i am Dorothy and i am running  
i am running  
on my yellow brick road*

## Beginning

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.

(Jn 1: 1-4 Webster's Bible Trans.)

### Welcome

*A thousand mile journey begins with one step. (Zen proverb)*

I was raised inside an Italian home that geographically existed inside East Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada. I grew up inside the Little Italy community in Vancouver, so although I could not speak English when I began school, I did not feel so unusual. Besides I have a twin sister, so in my growing up, I have always had the buffer of someone growing up and living the world alongside me. You will hear about her along the journey for she is very much a part of this story.

More important than my Italian upbringing, I was raised inside a very precise Catholic home. Inside my home there was one right way of doing things and the right way was the absolute way. Obedience mattered. You obeyed your parents and you never questioned their authority, you obeyed your teachers and you never questioned their authority and you obeyed the priests, the nuns and all the teachings of the Catholic Church and you never questioned their authority. To challenge this authority was a sin – it was the opposite of Right – it was Wrong. Finding out the Truth was a very important endeavor and Truth led only to one answer, one selection that worked in every circumstance, in every situation, with every person. I never thought much about this because this way of living was understood and everyone else in the neighborhood lived under the same principle, but I have since spent a great deal of time looking at this and

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have come to understand truth as a consensual reality as defined by Arnold Mindell(2000).<sup>1</sup> But truth as an evolving, changing concept was to come much later, much *much* later.

I longed to be good. I longed to be Right and I spent a great deal of my time in an attempt to do the right thing. I think that maybe I still am.

I have grown up absorbed with the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church, so this means that the calendar year is infused with ebbs and flows of the story of Jesus. There is the time of Advent that prepares for the coming of the baby Jesus which is celebrated through Christmas. There are the daily feast days of this and that saint and when I was going to a Catholic school we would always do something special for the feast day of the saint whose name we bore. This was a delight when I was going to Saint Francis of Assisi school because this is a saint with a great deal of vigor and life and magic and adventure. As a child, I did not hear about how young Francesco openly criticized and challenged the practices of the Catholic church – I was to learn of this later but still I knew that he had stripped himself naked right there in the fancy sacred church to the shame and horror of his parents. Poor mamma and pappa Francesco must have

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<sup>1</sup> In his book, *Quantum Mind*, Arnold Mindell (2000) explores the relationship between quantum physics and Jungian psychology. Instead of using the term *real* or *true*, he uses the term “consensual reality”. Consensual reality “...refers mainly to the reality of physics, the classical, everyday cosmopolitan reality of everyday life in which terms such as space, time, size, age, particle, and even, person have fairly well-defined and collectively consented-upon meanings” (26). What is “real” and what is “true” is simply a perception from an agreed upon collective. The collective that determines “real” and “true” is largely the group that holds the political and cultural power. Thus, consensual reality, what communities and cultures collectively agree to accept as “true” is largely determined by those with the cultural and political clout to enforce or secure a particular version of consensual reality. In other words, “truth” is simply a version of a story that groups of people have agreed to believe as fact.

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been mortified at the very public proclamation announcing his difference, his very separate way of loving and listening to Jesus.

There was the preparation for the dying of Jesus with the forty days of fasting, of giving something up. I would give up candy, save it up in a little basket that was sitting underneath a picture of Jesus glued onto the back of a piece of construction paper. It was my little bag of offerings, seeing as I missed the gold, frankincense and myrrh from the first Christmas. I would pray in front of the picture of Jesus all the while salivating over my goodies and when Easter came, I hungrily ate the bits of candy only to be disappointed as they had grown stale and hard. And of course there was the Friday foregoing of meat which really didn't bother me too terribly as it wasn't on my top ten list of delicious.

The highlight of a Catholic mass is when the priest recreates the Last Supper and transforms wine into the blood of Jesus Christ and the bread into the body of Jesus Christ. The experience is called Holy Communion. As strange and cannibalistic as that may sound this has always been a place from where I receive a tremendous something – I am not quite sure if I can define what it is but it is a something. I am in awe of the celebration of eating God, eating and drinking Life and Death. My body gets to receive God in the simple act of chewing and swallowing. It is lovely to be reminded that God comes in the dailyness of what I do naturally.

So I grew up believing and participating in the rituals and traditions and teachings of my mother and father and of the Roman Catholic Church.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...*

### Beginning

In the beginning of my teaching career I ardently believed in the practice of words. On the first day of all of my English classes I always wrote, "Words are Power Tools" on the chalk board and I would discuss this statement with my students. I wanted them to know that words held enormous power. I wanted them to know that I essentially felt that my job in the classroom was to help them to be aware of, honour and utilize this power. I began my teaching career believing and preaching this doctrine with considerable vigor.

I have the tremendous fortune of teaching in the neighborhood not too far from where I grew up. There is a culturally diverse community with many points of view, many cultures, many traditions and not a lot of money. I have taught ESL, Dance, English, and mostly Theatre at one time or another inside the school walls. Not too far away is little Italy where I can get some pretty fine coffee. I have spent more time inside these school walls in the last ten years than anywhere else. There have been many, many hours of after school rehearsals, theatresports practices, basketball games, set painting and perhaps the one occasional water gun battle. I have learned far far more than I have ever taught and I cannot imagine myself without all my school stories residing somewhere inside me. "I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom where I can barely hold the joy," writes Parker Palmer (1999, 5), and I feel more than blessed to have experienced this abundance of joy. I know that I have experienced many Holy Communion here inside the school with pizza, take-out Chinese food, ju jubes, baby carrots and hot chocolate. I know that in between all this eating, my words are power tools with the potential to both raise the soul and crush it. But for all of the power and might of a word, they are limited. I don't believe that words can define truth, theory,



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God, or Right and Wrong. Words simply assemble scaffolds from which truths, faith, and theories place their hook.<sup>2</sup> The Word defines and makes public and brings into the light, allows conversation to take place, as well as criticism and examination. Words can be seen, quantified and managed, and as such, they help us to quantify and manage our experiences.

*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was a Power Tool.*

And so, what I would like to do, is invite you into a few of my words and have them speak to my passions – my knitting, my writing, my running, my teaching and my living. I would like to offer these words as a sort of starting point. At every Catholic mass, we recite a Creed. We publicly state what we as a living body, what we as a Catholic community, believe. And so, I will give you my creed, my public statement of proclamation. And I invite you, too, to notice yourself inside these stories, for as we will see, our world is simply an assembly of fragmented mirrors, each reflecting our selves, our words in all that is around us. “What is most personal is most universal,” says one of my favorite Catholic writers (Nouwen, 1996, 3). And it is my hope that you too will find your own voice through the personal referencing of this one journey.

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<sup>2</sup> Theories, like “truth,” are versions of a story that groups of people have agreed to believe as fact. In his book, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* Bohm (1980) writes, “So, instead of supposing that older theories are falsified at a certain point in time, we merely say that man is continually developing new forms of insight, which are clear up to a point and then tend to become unclear. The word *theory* derives from the Greek ‘theoria’, which has the same root as ‘theatre’, in a word meaning ‘to view’ or ‘to make a spectacle’. Thus, it might be said that a theory is primarily a form of *insight*, i.e. a way of looking at the world, and not a form of *knowledge* of how the world is” (4). If we see our theory or truth as a form of knowledge of how the world is, we are immediately limited, for we no longer spend our energy staying curious and finding out ‘what else’. We lose the possibility of receiving insight for we are too busy proving, protecting and defending the way we see our world. Truth and theory are ways of looking at the world. They are versions of a story that groups of people have agreed to believe as fact and nothing more. That these truth stories and unchanging, well, that is simply a well-defended myth. Theories move and truth moves.

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### **My Credo**

I am Dorothy. On white pages, in my theory, in my teaching, learning, playing, praying, I am both a flagrant liar and an ardent truth liver. I am in constant movement on my road, my Life Journey with and without its convenient golden path. I believe and have believed in the utter rite/fullness of Right while vehemently attempting to dismantle/burn/crush it. I am Dorothy, full of paradox, passion, curiosity and hypocrisy, madly trying to separate the white squares on my dress from the blue ones, desperately wanting the magic savior of Oz to swallow me back to Home, whining, then looking up to realize the larger gift of weak, helpless Oz - the very God within me. I am Dorothy, I am Lying and I am telling the Truth.

And I invite you to discover your own voice and to then experiment with its breadth, its depth, its width, and its ever-growing expansiveness. What is most personal is most universal and so maybe in our moving together, we can celebrate the sound of our stories dancing out loud.

### **Others Before Me**

Unless we change the *way* we do things, by which I mean the atmosphere, the rhythm, the texture of our engagements with the world, it won't matter whether our department goes on retreat every spring, or whether we meet in focus groups, redecorate the office, democratize decision making, or celebrate our successes. (Tompkins, 1996, 199)

There are many before me who have paved the road that I journey. Educators such as Jane Tompkins (1996) and Parker Palmer (1999) have strived to include the experiences, the heart and the emotions of the teacher as a vital component of the learning process. Palmer writes, "We must enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching so we can understand them better and negotiate them with more grace, not only to guard our own spirits but also to serve our students well" (1999, 2). His claim that "we teach who we are" opens the door for teachers to explore "inner landscapes." Essentially, this is what I am doing. I am exposing, examining and reflecting on my inner landscape in

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order to make public how all of these personal experiences and beliefs influence my teaching and my learning.

It is the way we inhabit our school spaces, our curriculum spaces and our living spaces that need examination, change and further scrutiny, as Jane Tompkins notes. And as Parker Palmer notes, it is also the way we inhabit our bodies that need examination, change and further scrutiny.

### Wild Writing

I am so small I can barely be seen.  
How can this great love be inside me?

*Look at your eyes. They are small,  
But they see enormous things. (Rumi, 1997, 279)*

Writing takes me to places that I am not allowed to go in my other journeys.

When I write I can imagine the possibilities of hope while leaving my despair unrestrained, and when the two mirror images are allowed to ooze out uncensored, something magical happens, because in the naming, in the speaking, in the writing, my possibility and my despair swim and meet and meld into something the same, something mutually okay, something possibly even playful, so that, in my writing, the despair and the possibility are two things which do not terrify as much as they do in the experience, in the feeling, in the silence and in the solitude. Writing takes my despair, wraps it in possibility and makes me laugh or cry or makes my heart beat, but writing names it, names both sides and in so doing, makes me examine it, peer inside its fruitful bellies and in so doing, I am being made to understand that I am going to be okay in all of this. I can laugh at it, play with it, somehow make myself more familiar with it so my fear becomes less, my recognition of this possibility and despair as viable life forms with both thorns

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and fragrance give me all that I need to have, to taste, to eat, to feel and to love all forms of my crucifixions and resurrections.

### Knitting Through Circles

One of the most important social myths we must debunk if we are to become a more loving culture is the one that teaches parents that abuse and neglect can coexist with love. Abuse and neglect negate love. Care and affirmation, the opposite of abuse and humiliation, are the foundation of love. No one can rightfully claim to be loving when behaving abusively. Yet parents do this all the time in our culture. Children are told that they are loved even though they are being abused. (hooks, 2000, 22)

My mom taught me how to knit when I was little. I would knit fairly successfully as long as no numbers were involved. I knit squares and rectangles but failed miserably when ever it came to casting on and casting off, or when I was asked to somehow manipulate the square into some other shape, for the knitting would inevitably be handed over to my mother who made sense of and then completed the frustrated object.

A few years back my friend challenged me to begin the discipline of knitting anew.

I can't.

Why not?

I can't count. I'm terrible with numbers.

I can teach you a way to knit without counting.

I can't.

Yes you can! I'll walk you through it.

Well...

It's easy. I'll show you how with bunches of colour too, Fair Isle kn...

What?!

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It's easy.

No, I can't.

Yes you can. I'll help you.

My friend pushed aside my non-confidence and this was the beginning of a continuing pattern, a recurring motif whereby she remained unperturbed by my fears for she saw straight through them, as they resembled so many of her own, and I would do the same for her in some reciprocal balance of casting on and casting off, creating two equal armholes, but that was all to come later. Right now, the only reason my friend won the argument was the fact that I could find no rebuttal for her "I'll help you." It was "I'll help you," period. How could I refute a period?

So off we went to the granny-knitting store. It was a tiny, narrow room packed with wall-to-wall wool, cotton, needlepoint kits, knitting projects, books and any paraphernalia known to womankind relating to the mysteries of textile art. Unless you love knitting, the store is claustrophobic. My friend hugs Granny Number One. There is apparently another granny in the store but she is gruff and jaded. Granny Number One has grey hair, glasses – bifocals, looped with a chain around her neck. She wears dark comfortable clothing and has that postmenopausal girth which belies a multitude of knitting stories. In short, she is Everygranny.

My friend introduces me to Everygranny. I murmur a hello. "She's my first prodigy," my friend coos; "I'm going to teach her how to knit!" "Oh!" remarks Number One, "How grand!" How grand, I think, who talks like that anymore? Still squinting at the array of mess, I listen to their banter, each updating the other on the journey of their knittings, weaving their stories with the multicoloured fabrics of their shared passion. I

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stand apart, too frightened at the prospect of knitting to feel jealous but somehow feeling like I should be jealous anyway.

All of these paradoxes collide in this tiny *knitting box* and I eye the door thinking of how I can maneuver a quick yet dignified getaway. Too late, for she is pushing me towards the yarn, putting colours upon colours that I would dare not look at yet alone touch: teals, burgundies, blacks, gray, purple...

Purple? Are you crazy?

No! Look, they're going to look great together, see?

It's too many colours.

It'll be fine. I'll help you.

There comes that period again. "Wow! That colour combination looks grand!" coos Number One. Grand, I think, just grand.

I purchase the requirements and walk to the restaurant sandwiched between my bag of impertinent colours and my granola friend. I am ambivalent to the point of dread but I am cornered and I cannot stop the ensuing train in motion. Nevertheless I complain all the way to the Naam restaurant which is later to become our ritual knitting hangout where over pots of tea and macrobiotic rice, we eavesdrop into other conversations, laugh, knit, cry, knit and laugh till we cry. Sometimes we held hands under the table to offer illicit prayers for each other's needs, but that is all to come. Now, my friend with a decidedly energetic fervor gently puts the pieces together; she casts some stitches on, and then shows me how and makes me do the rest, slowly, showing me how to read the chart and put the colours together and she knits, we knit, I knit a circle, a big round that grows right before my eyes. I become excited. I can see the possibility. I can see what she

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means. Seeds of understanding push their way through my fingers as I weave the colours, yes, even the purple, onto my canvas of confidence. It is merely half an inch, but my conviction grows along with the sweater. I feel like shouting "Waaaa-Waaaa" like Helen Keller in her epiphany, connecting words with things. I have discovered the wonder of playing with yarn connected by a continuous line with no beginning, no middle or end – I have discovered the communion between hands and soul through the medium of yarn.

And again, I marvel at how this private act of knitting did not come to life until it was shared – shared by something outside of me. My friend and I committing the private act of knitting in a public place, sharing the knitting circle in the comfort of our friendship.

### Finding Courage

We learn about love in childhood. Whether our homes are happy or troubled, our families functional or dysfunctional. It's the original school of love. I cannot remember ever wanting to ask my parents to define love. To my child's mind love was the good feeling you got when family treated you like you mattered and you treated them like you mattered. (hooks, 2000, 17)

I am in the middle of a quiet gathering in the middle of a theatre company class. A few of the students and I are talking and my cell phone rings. It is Christina. I am glad to hear her voice. Since last year's Bowen Island Play Writing Journey, Christina has continued to let the gravitation ebb and flow move her towards the small nest that is Theatre Company. Christina continues to swish inside the edge of drama space. Her continued consistent presence has begun to soften me in much the same way that the continual tides of water soften the edges of immovable rock so that I have found myself missing her stories and movement. She has just finished directing two small one act

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plays and so, she has spent many hours at the school. She presents herself at the edge of the office door, standing still, not sitting, not moving inside the office space. Only eventually, if we are alone, or if she is with others who bring safety, or if she is inadvertently trapped, will she sit inside the office. Her quiet presentings are always a surprise. Sometimes I am able to receive her presence, her "you will not believe what happened to me at work today," or her "I only slept two hours last night" or her "my landlord is crazy/my mother is crazy/my family is crazy." Sometimes, I am preoccupied or full, too full of my own stories, so that I distractedly place her on the margins or scurry on to my busyness.

And still she comes, quietly standing at the edge of the office.

I have watched her grow this year, expand and suss out the edges of her bigness, her possibilities. She has picked these two plays on her own, she has downloaded one from the internet, and she has chosen a second from a batch of Canadian plays that I had ordered. They are difficult and she has moved inside the dual challenges with a kind of quiet terror/confidence that awes me. At times, she asks for help, at times she brings me a bag of my favorite baby carrots (my connection with baby carrots has been one constant inside my teaching career here), and at times she shares a frustration or difficulty while insisting on her need to take care of it on her own. This year, I have noticed how she walks with a little more confidence, a little more decisiveness and independence, and I, alongside her, have noticed that I am not just walking beside a former student, but a young and determined adult. I am noticing that not only do I care for her but I like her.

Last summer on Bowen Island, I remember when Christina, Zandra and I were talking on the ferry and we were talking about Christina's "official" High School journey.



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Christina was a student and I use that word loosely, for she attended school primarily by standing metaphorically at the edge of the classroom doors and, as of yet, curriculum does not honour these kinds of knowledges. She has not officially graduated from the school and Zandra and I laughingly talk about the hundreds of unofficial school credits she continues to accumulate from this school. She should have a Master's by now, but curriculum does not yet give credit for Courage. Throughout the remainder of the summer, we have sporadically emailed our writings to each other, tentatively sharing little pieces – and sometimes, she offers me big pieces of her, which frighten me, or make me uncomfortable as I long to shut the Pandora's box, wishing to pretend clarity inside a very messy world. And after we continue to move forward, I realize I have nothing to feel frightened or uncomfortable about, and so she continues to teach me this lesson of finding comfort inside this chaos.

The plays have been rehearsed, scrambled, teched, performed and celebrated, and we are in the throes of the endings. So I respond to Christina that I will call her back later.

I know fragments of Christina's stories. I have heard several of the stories repeated, but still they did not form anything like a connected narrative; rather, they move like life itself, small bits of matter moving in structured possibilities inside expansive space. I know the stories, the small bits of matter a little, and I am growing increasingly comfortable and know more about sitting inside and beside the expansive spaces. I am listening to one of her stories sandwiched between my madly typing away on my computer trying to blast through a job application deadline. In the midst of all of my teaching and studying, I am trying to peel myself away from my job. Teaching inside

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this school box has felt increasingly limiting, unappreciated, overwhelming, unacknowledged. I can't breathe and I am desperately looking for clean air from which to push out and explore my growing confidence, knowledge and personal freedom. I do not tell her that I am typing my job application questions, and I feel a slight sense of sheepishness about the whole thing.

I am in my car warming it up and I return Christina's call. This feels like the right thing to do. We have sat outside the school waiting for our collective cars to warm up. I speak with Christina, and she keeps me company talking, sometimes laughing about this and that. There is the challenge of her beginning sobriety, her longtime friend and roommate, the latest antics of her landlord or the ongoing selection of characters she encounters in her work at the local beaches and community centers.

She is coming up to her second month anniversary of sobriety. I did not celebrate her birthday, even though she had talked about her disappointment with her father's inability to acknowledge her even during her birthday. I thought about doing something for her but had decided against it. I am always aware of trying to keep my "emotional boundaries." I am only a drama teacher I remind myself, not a parent. I am still wary of my tendency to try and "save the world." I remind myself that I will be lucky if I manage to save myself.

But lately, I have softened my deliberate black boxes. Christina has challenged me, reminded me of the permeability of cell walls, a necessary construct of nature that allows the exchange of both waste and nourishment. This is her second try at living sober, and inside all of this directing and managing, I am beginning to hear the stories of living wide awake:

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"I just realized how quiet I am when I'm with a group and I'm sober. I wish I could speak up more!"

"I'm going to get the study books to study for my GED test..."

"I am so mad at my sponsor. Sometimes she says the dumbest things..."

"Tim and Sara are driving me crazy. They aren't listening to me. No, I don't want you to do anything about it. I want to handle this by myself..."

I am happy to support this sobriety thing. I have quietly watched, sometimes ignored, sometimes pretended not to notice her altered states of awareness. There was the time she shamefully arrived at the edge of the office door with a black eye. I acknowledged the "shiner" without making any attempt to create a space to sort through the experience. I am busy, overwhelmed with my own inconsequential angst, and I feel utterly incapable in dealing with the circumstance.

And *still* she comes.

"Hey, Ms. G, you need a new car," says Christina with growing impudence. I have noticed that the combination of confidence, maturity and sobriety has enabled her to tease and even venture to jab at my own insecurities and weaknesses. Lately she has comfortably teased me about my "vertical challenge," my curly, okay, mostly frizzy hair, my "calm and serene" nature, and the state of affair with my car. My car has been an ever growing point of concern and by now, most of my students have been kept up to date with the aging Jetta, as well as my growing fantasy for a lime green VW bug.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, I know," I say "but there is no way that's going to happen."

We are in the middle of a deadly McDonald's run in between a tech rehearsal and

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performance at the Freddie Wood Theatre. I have elicited Christina's company, as she magically appeared at the theatre at the appropriate time.

"No, I think you really need a new car. What colour did you want that VW bug again?" she prods.

"Lime Green," I say, "But it's an impossibility, I'm in way over my head..." And as I begin my mantras, Christina places a green VW bug attached to a key chain. "You can just sit on this, put your laptop on your lap and go..." I am thrilled by the thoughtfulness and the playful keychain. Christina gently listens to my stories and I am grateful...

And as I become more comfortable with my bobbing inside this sea of living, I am better able to claim comfort with the vacillating tension that is to care. I am able to let go of my desire to set a black and white rule and my desire to sternly revere the rule. Rather, caring challenges me to take the small 5 degree turn away from the rule, onto the human being that lies in the illusive in between space between right and wrong, good and evil, teacher and student, powerful and powerless. Caring, in fact, is an act that happens in the in between spaces, in the car on the way to a festival, in the café in celebration of two months of sobriety, inside small notes emailed back and forth, in the bits of joking and play, and in the edges of office and classroom doors. As I continue floating inside this living joy, I am aware of how very few in between spaces our school and working communities support.

A few weeks ago, I received my final rejection letter for a job application. I officially informed my school administration of my intent to return to the school as a full

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time employee. I tell Christina about this, and after a careful silence, she responds, "I'm sorry that you didn't get the job you wanted... but I'm kinda glad you get to stay."

Yes, and finally, if I am honest with myself, I am kind of glad I get to stay too.

**So In The Beginning...**

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
There is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
The world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, languages, even the phrase *each other*  
Doesn't make any sense.  
(Rumi, 1995, 36)

So now I begin my journey, and now you know a little bit from where I begin this ride. I am on my way to look for Home. I am going to invite both conflict and ecstasy inside this journey and I am hoping that strength, courage and wisdom will meet me when I need them. And I am going to bring all of me and I do mean all of me – body, mind and spirit – along for the ride.

there is always the danger of thinking that words cannot be changed,  
cannot be moved – that some words must be caged, protected, announced  
as something that can never be anything other than what Some say so –  
there is a danger in thinking that Words are God, that is a "God" as an  
unmovable unchanging entity ... these are words we put in thick fences –  
in fact to cage a word is all illusion

and this belief is my black box

## Two: Journey Home

**Running With the Souls of Our Feet**

Every single particle of your physical body is in communion with each particle in the cosmos; every "space" within your physical body communicates with all spaces in the universe; the "unseen" matter flows without interruption between your body and the universe. Your thoughts extend to and from universal thought; your mind flows seamlessly within the cosmic mind sea. ([www.youareone.com](http://www.youareone.com))

Every time I run with my Y group, every Sunday morning that I make the choice to wake up early and drive into town to run with my 10-minute group, I am rewarded with an infinite number of stories, some of which stick to me as profound teachers. I always wonder if there will be one Sunday, one run where I will finish story free but this has yet to take place. This Sunday we are scheduled to run eighteen miles and I am fully prepared not to complete this run. It has been two weeks since I have come to the group. I have been doing too much. I have been tired. My Fibromyalgia begins to gather more and more attention thereby making me stop. So for the last two weeks I have slowed down. I pack my bus pass inside my running belt just in case and I buy a new kind of power bar as a "treat" just to encourage myself and to somehow counter the anxiety around not completing, not finishing, not keeping up.

There are many of us even though it is summer and a long weekend. Fifteen of us start. I have pumped myself full of asthma spray for I am ready for the complaints that my lungs will give me. I am uncharacteristically quiet and uneasy. I say hello quietly to some of the people inside the group but I mostly keep to myself and I lower my hat and focus on the run.

I run. I try to find my groove. It is that place both physically, mentally and emotionally where I can find my rhythm, my moving song/dance as it were. I don't. The first four miles find me shifting around the group trying to find my breath and not feeling

## Two: Journey Home

strong at all. On one hill, I lag far behind everyone else and I try to make this okay for myself but it is not.

We break at the McDonald's for water and a washroom break and I tell Allan, my running leader, that I may not finish the run. He doesn't appear to hear me and I don't feel like saying it any louder, but I check the bus pass in my running belt, spray my lungs and continue to remind myself of the option to quit or at least shorten the run.

I keep moving forward. The break at McDonald's helps me and I stay inside the middle of the group just behind Allan. At the top of the next hill Allan stops, "Let's walk everybody". I thank him for taking the break and he tells me how he doesn't want me to quit, that he wants to make sure that I am welcomed to make the long runs and "if we have to take a few more breaks, well that's okay because it's the summer group and we should be able to do that". And I am terribly grateful. I start to joke and banter with the people around me. As we move towards UBC and the half way point, I experience the euphoria of achievement. This is doable. I can do this – just two miles to the anchor and then six or seven miles to the Y. I can do this. I am buoyed by this awareness and I am quietly overjoyed. I continue to run with the group and I move forward inside the groove, inside the middle of the group, mostly listening and sometimes talking but always comfortable. I am happy.

Four miles left and my body once again screeches to a halt. I feel dizzy, my hip aches and pain shoots up and down my legs. I take one ibuprofen because I don't want to upset my stomach but I know it will help my legs, I drink as much as I can and I eat the new kind of power bar "treat" and I move forward. I have to take a lot of time to think

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about just putting one foot in front of the other. I am trying to run in a straight line for inevitably when I tire, my natural "straight line" looks far more like a circle.

I move forward with the rest of the group. There are others who struggle and I am not alone. We move forward and we get to the Burrard Street Bridge – the final obstacle before we reach home. I just take my time and I run it. I am not terribly worried about the fact that I am near last because I am finishing and I am aware that I will be finished soon and that running this bridge and completing this run, this is the ultimate success so I run and straggle near the end with another runner and we straggle on to finish the final piece to the Y and we are tired and achy and we talk about this as we continue to push forward. And we finish. It's not pretty but it's achievement. I am home.

### **Moving Home**

On Sunday, I quietly feel propelled to sit quietly and read my bible before I go to church. I wish for the psalms but the bible opens up to the story of Abraham and Sarah. I do not want to read the story because it feels far too much like my own but I decide to read it anyways. I read about Abraham and God's conversation, how God promises Abraham the impossible and Abraham politely reminds him of the circumstance and God continues to remind him of the promise. The Promise. I don't really know what to make of it except I begrudge the way Sarah is portrayed as bitter and hard without showing the numbing powerlessness and disappointment of her barren circumstance. I go to church and I am late. I miss the first reading. The priest begins the sermon by saying how all the readings are about movement; people being called to move, to act. There is a journey moving forward.



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I read the missal, searching the readings and there, the first reading that I missed, is the Abraham story, the exact portion which I read this morning.

So, I am on a journey and I am moving forward. This part I understand. By hearing the promise of God, reminding God of the present situation, and hearing the promise again, Abraham is moving forward and so is Sarah. He was asked to give an offering of thanksgiving and really to do nothing. Yes, but he is moving forward.

For so long, I waited to arrive, to get to the something, to the end. Now, I have realized, that the arrival IS the journey. I have arrived in the arriving and I am no longer waiting, hoping, expecting to get to THERE. There is a grieving in realizing this but there is also an acceptance, a growing awareness of comfort. God is calling me to be receiving in the now rather than waiting for the not yet. All this desire to leave my apartment, leave my job, leave my car, leave my debt, only to be held firmly entrenched in all of my escapings – having to find comfort in all of these domains, having to find rest in the places I pledge to escape, and finally, to be grateful for the very spaces I seek to leave. This is the THERE. This is the arrival. Me standing still on my square, letting the tide swish me forward while I sit still, listen and say thank you.

Thank you.

### **Our Mammias**

I am with my nonna, my mamma's mom. I am in Italy and I am maybe fifteen. We have come to Italy for our summer holiday. I am following my nonna around as she works. My nonna, she is in constant movement and her hands move always. We are washing windows and we are not using Windex. We are using some stinky vinegar and water with rags and muscles. I don't like the smell of the vinegar but I notice that it is

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doing a nice job on the windows. My nonna's hands are very strong. We are talking and she is moving the bucket along and rinsing the rags out into the vinegar water. The water gets continually darker as she thoroughly cleans all the parts of the window. She shows me how to get to the corners and the edges. Her hands are expert. She doesn't speak too much but I am asking her questions about my family. What was your life like? How did you meet nonno? What was my mamma like when she was a little girl? She continues to move around and I continue to follow her. I am rewarded with a bunch of stories and perspectives about my family. They are stories of deep poverty, survival, and work. My nonna's hands come from a long line of work stories. She tells me that the men did not tend the barns on Sunday and that it fell on the women to take care of livestock as well as the cooking and the tending of the children on the "seventh day of rest." She tells me how when she was first married to nonno he felt great compassion for her, and he would help her with the chores on Sunday only to be chastised by his brothers and told to stop. She continues to move and I continue to follow her. "What was *your* mamma like?" I ask, and she begins to tell me stories about her own mamma. We are in the kitchen now and I ask another question, "What do you remember about your mamma dying?" She has a dishrag in her hand now and she is wiping near the sink. She stops. Her hands put the dishrag down and they stop moving. She moves towards me and sits down in one of the kitchen chairs. She takes my hands and she holds them. I feel her hands on mine and she has somehow managed to make their rough and abrasive surface feel smooth and delicate. She is facing me and she is talking in a reverent whisper. "When you are born," she says, "the first word that you say when you learn to speak is *mamma*. And when you die," she whispers looking at my face attentively, "the last word that you will say is *mamma*." She

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says the word *mamma* with a solemnity that comes close to the sacred whisper that I hear when I sit beside her in mass. She is my nonna, she is old and I think she is closer to finishing her life than beginning it, but in her eyes, as she is telling me this, I see her as a little girl who aches for her *mamma*.

### **Our Mammams Are Our First Homes**

No matter how many stories our bodies collect we still ache to return to our original home, our *mammams*. Our first Kansas really is a womb. We are totally encased in protective darkness, we are swimming, we are floating. Our first place from which we define our comfort, our discomfort, our need and our satisfaction is surrounded by a tummy.

Our first space from which we experience encasement *comes* to us. We in fact do not search for our first home, seek a reputable realtor, negotiate a mortgage, search for a comfortable and affordable space. No. Our first home comes to us only in a receiving space, in a space of total darkness, in a space where we are powerless and decisionless. The first skill we learn as tiny unformed fetuses is one of utter powerlessness. Inside the tummy we are provided with some incredible role models as neighbours. There beneath us between the ground and our bodies, resides our *mamma's* sacrum, her initial place of center. There, above us to the right is the beating of the heart, moving the blood in and out, in and out, with its constant thumping mantra. Inside our first homes, we are wet, messy and weak. We are at the complete mercy and care of our *mamma*, even before our *mamma* might even know that we have taken up residence in her womb. We indeed may be squatters but we are squatters on sacred ground. We are infinitely connected and familiar to the interior life of our *mamma's* body. Our First Homes bring us close and

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connected to the inner workings of our mamma's body – in fact, we are an integral part of the body itself. Every move that our mamma makes effects us intimately whether it be her action, her diet and drink, her anxiety, her restlessness, her pain or her unbound ecstasy. There we begin our lives as powerless receivers unable to make basic decisions and communicate basic needs until perhaps we get big enough and strong enough to kick our Morse codes to mamma.

Yet in such horrid states of powerlessness we live inside our first homes. In the abundance of our swimming sacs we instinctively learn to appreciate our environments that ideally provide us with welcome, warmth, and food. Regardless of quality, our Mamma Homes ultimately provide us with enough to live, to develop and to come out as human beings.

Here inside our first homes we collect our initial stories, our First Stories, from which we begin to measure and weigh our future experiences. When we experience trauma, crisis, extreme pain, our bodies will intuitively, instinctively move to the return of our First Homes. A major head trauma will bring our bodies to a coma and we will retreat into the fetal position. When our souls, our spirits, our hearts feel the stirrings of depression, when our bodies seek *deep rest*, we will move into the coil, the natural imprint of our first home.

Our First Stories, our First Homes are so powerful that even if our initial experiences are painful, dangerous and unhealthy, our bodies will still seek our first place where we become conscious, aware of our aliveness, rooted here on the earth.

So my point here is that our mammas are our first homes. This is the place from which we measure all of our next experiences of Home. It is the space from which we

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begin. "In the beginning..." begins Genesis. "In the beginning, was the womb" is where our concrete body begins our own genesis. The body and the female body at that, is our Kansas from where we begin our beginning.

### Running Home

I have invited my father to come to speak to me inside my home. Although the invitation was somewhat casual, almost easy, it underscores an impossible moment. This is in fact the first time that my father has come into my home, without tools, without the comfort of his defining carpenter security blankets – hammers, drills, saws and skillsaws, nails and sanders. He is coming, for the first time, with the sole task of hearing and speaking words – the tools I see and hear my father use so rarely. He is coming inside my home, and I am dreadfully calm.

I am aware that tonight, I am creating a piece of future history and I complain to my dancing friend about how much *work* all of this *becoming* is, and how, although I feel very strong and clear, I am exhausted and fatigued. As much as I know that work is a necessary ingredient for change, for love, for understanding other, for forgiving and receiving, for hoping and for growing, I resist it. I complain and ache and pray for ease. Jesus, I pray, it doesn't always have to be about difficulty. It doesn't always have to be about pain. I am aware of the cross.

Jesus, help me receive and invite the resurrection.

I search for one of my marathon shirts because I want to bring my running story along for this journey. My most recent marathon shirt comes out first. It is my finishing shirt from my second Vancouver marathon. It is still my favorite marathon, where the joy of the journey is so good, so full, so pleasurable, that my strongest memory is one of

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feeling the smile on my face for much of the race, so much so, that, my face, the muscles on my face are the muscles that strain the most. My big quads, my precarious knees, my shifting ankles all held steadfast and firm. Even inside my difficult moments, I am happy and grateful for the wonderful inclusion of grace. My second Vancouver marathon is a memory of ease and I slip the shirt on with both a reverent pride and contentment.

Dad comes inside my home. He sees my new chain lock frozen in its plastic cardboard container. He opens it up and quickly chastises me, "Why didn't you tell me about this so that I could bring my tools?" I mumble something about wanting to try to do it on my own. He examines my pathetic assortment of tiny screwdrivers. He picks up the biggest paltry screwdriver and tries to unscrew the old door chain lock. "Don't even bother trying this, Emi, you need bigger tools."

I sit in the visitor couch, the small little couch that I never use, reserving it solely for the outside. I offer dad *my* sofa, my living sofa, where I knit, I type, I pray, I do. I want him to reside surrounded by my safety sofa. He unwittingly takes the bait and sits square middle inside my stories and I secretly feel as though I have already accomplished a coup of sorts.

My main intent in inviting my father inside my home is to begin a new dialogue between the two of us. Instead of speaking through others, especially my mother, I seek to have my father speak to me directly and conversely for me to seek a space inside my father's framework myself and for me to speak directly to him as well. I wanted to hear my father speak to me, towards me, with me. In fact, I ached for this, but really, when I am speaking to him, I am distancing myself from all of this ache. I don't want to cry, I want to be clear and I want to be strong because it is important for me that he hears me.

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We are talking now. "Dad, I need you to tell me what you think."

"I only want to intervene if there is a problem," he responds.

"No," I say, "I need you to tell me what is good too, I need to hear the good things Dad." In the midst of our conversation, we speak about many things, and he apologizes to me for his silence, for the misunderstanding of silence. He endeavors to work at communicating with me, he acknowledges my strengths and he tells me stuff I have never had the privilege to hear from my father, my pappa. We talk about many little pieces – we talk about church and faith, about mamma and my sister. He tells me about his aches, "It kills me to see that..." and really, I am hearing my father disclose such things for the first time. Later, I wonder why it has taken so long, so very long for me to hear this.

We are getting tired now of talking and aching. It is more than two hours, and for the two of us, both neophytes, this is a great deal. In the end, Dad says, "Thank you Emi. I am pleasantly surprised to have such an open conversation with my daughter. I feel like maybe tonight you opened some doors for me, and maybe even some windows."

I am struck by the poetry of this statement, so poignant for me, to hear my father, whom I so closely associate with his craft as carpenter, to end our communion with a metaphor of home.

He is leaving now. He opens my door and resolves to return. "Next time I come, I will bring my tools so I can put that lock on the door." I hold him company down to the lobby and we hug and remind each other how much we love and care and commit to each other and to our surrounding family.

## Two: Journey Home

I re-enter my home and I am stunned, content and happy. I leave my tiny screwdrivers on the counter. I think about my evening and I begrudgingly admit to its ease. Later, I prepare to sleep. I thank Jesus quietly for the magic that was tonight's historic conversation. I pray and I sleep with my marathon shirt.

## Journey

The news from today's physics is not just that matter  
expands  
but that matter is intrinsically energetic,  
vital,  
organized and  
organizing,  
busy,  
dancing,  
vibrating,  
seeking,  
moving,  
and finding order in the midst of  
chaos.

All things in motion –  
isn't this Aristotle's definition of soul,  
as that which produces locomotion from within? (Fox, 1999, 20)

I am in constant journey. My body, my mind, my heart, my very core of being seems to be defined by my constant flux of movement. If I was a part of a sentence, I would be a gerund for I am always in the process of -ing: running, writing, dancing, knitting, playing, fidgeting. I am always feeling as if I am in this constant state of moving. For a long time, for most of my life in fact, I have berated myself for this curse, but I have since gotten over this and I have learned to watch with anticipation and curiosity as to my next whereabouts. Like Dorothy I may have an end desire to find my way Home but like her too, I am not quite sure how to get there and what adventures lie ahead of me, before me and beneath me. Like Dorothy, my journeys do not follow a linear line; rather, they take on the look, feel and terror of chaos with seemingly



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incomprehensible through lines. It is only in the constant experience of past journeys that I have come to realize that when I choose to breathe and dive inside the chaos I am able to surrender to its secure organization.

It is with great comfort that I realize that all of life, in its minute micro to its expansive macro, all of life is in constant movement. The whole universe is a vast expanse of enormous stretches of space that bears witness to and celebrates the grand performance of living movement. It is not just that "all the world's a stage" as Shakespeare once claimed, but, in fact, "all the Cosmos' a stage" and every piece of matter is intrinsically performing that greatest play of all that is Living. So really, I am just one small piece made up of further small pieces that break into small and smaller pieces dancing, running, moving on my yellow brick road, participating and performing on the great Cosmic Stage that expands and contracts to infinity.

And because we begin and end our journeys in the communion of others, I do not take this journey alone. I will be provided with both the comfort and the terror of Other. So, I will need to develop the knowledge, the courage and the heart necessary to embrace both comfort and terror for our journeys will always bring us both. And this is what I am learning – I am inside my home when I am inside my sacred circle of people with whom I have established, created and invited an experience and practice of both giving and receiving love. My hook, my home, my safety is within the confines of people, not institutions, not land, not church. Home moves and shifts like that proverbial post in a body of water; it is not landed or situated inside something permanent. It meanders and dances within all of the in-between spaces where we try so hard, so very hard to "stick" our posts in. And my ability to let go and dance and meander through the space is

## Two: Journey Home

essentially the brand new narrative where I am learning to live inside. My apartment won't save me. My Culture won't save me. My Family won't save me. And my Church won't save me either. I am dancing, with the companionship of my sacred circle, learning to feel safety inside an ever-shifting landscape – one that moves with no real fixed direction, no typical pattern, in what appears to be at best, patterned chaos. And on this journey, I must be content to move, swayed inside a current, pushing in movement, playing with company, eating bread and drinking wine.

And this is my black box that I will once again repeat here in my home for just as I believe "to cage a word is all illusion," I also believe to cage a home is all illusion. As you will see in this journey over and over and over again, I continue to learn that any permanence, be that word, home, truth or experience is all illusion. And it is an illusion that I will often take desperate measures to both keep and annihilate.

**Two: Journey Home****Just Eye**

just as i am  
just as i look  
just as i be  
as i am  
i am home  
i am the  
promise  
of my  
wholeness

## Three: Safesacred Spaces

*Safesacred*

And

I

Put

these words together safe and sacred asking of god of all people if there is  
 any way that I can get a Hand taking some incredible risk by somehow  
 mitigating the terror by putting me in a circle ready to receive that which  
 maybe terrifies me like the way I cup my two Hands as I wait in  
 anticipation for some priest to put the unbelievable flimsy piece of bread  
 in my Hand my Hands make a safe and sacred space they make a safe and  
 sacred space and it is an honor I take seriously and I have never ever in all  
 my years of living I have never dropped you never let you fall both my  
 Hands have always managed to make a cup that holds you gladly and you  
 always gladly come so now I want from you what I do for you and I want  
 you to cup your Hands put

them

together

put

those

words

safesacred

together

so

that

i

can

put

my own piece of flimsy nothingness in the care of you and you get to taste  
 me and you get the chance to never in all your years of living never put me  
 down or drop me

### Three: Safesacred Spaces

#### Running in Oregon

Once again, I am in the van, beside Alexandra. We are listening to Charlotte Diamond and we are listening together. My mamma and my sister are in their usual spots in the front. Mamma has brought her usual array of goodies and I delve into the Tupperware container filled with cleaned fresh fruit.

The entry into this day has been filled with a different kind of energy. There has been an argument or two, there has been a threat to stay home from mamma who has felt the impending stress of the listening, the yelling, the inability to accept or accommodate the massive stretches that have been the changes inside the family. I take solace in this beginning ritual. I am comforted by the sameness – the fact that Alexandra and I take the same spots in the van, listen to the same tape, sing to our favourite songs, eat the same goodies, hear my sister banter with my mom while both of them occasionally take their pot shots.

Alexandra and I are singing loudly. “J’ai perdu le dos de ma clarinet, J’ai perdu le dos de ma clarinet...” This part we know and sing clearly. “Ah, si fa le mo le pas” This part I know does not make sense for I can’t make out the words. But it does not matter. We are just happy to be going through the motions of singing, out loud, playfully and with joy. It is not so much the problem of knowing the exact words. Our task is to follow the through line of joy and this does not require the rigour of knowing exact words, this instead requires the rigour of falling in step with the song. The important thing to do is to move forward, to sing loudly with great knowing and to enjoy the song. The actual words, well, this is just icing on the cake. No one in the van complains about our apparent

### Three: Safesacred Spaces

lack of lyrical knowledge.

"Hey, you two, can you turn the volume down? We can barely hear ourselves talking over here!"

Alexandra and I look at each other with that "What are those two going on about?" as we continue to sing. "Oh pac in a mao, Oh pac in a mao, Oh pao Oh pao Oh pao..." And we are happy.

I am hydrating for the Oregon marathon so I am once again obliged to make many pit stops and Lizia is obliged to tease me about this. I have had a difficult September and my training was curtailed, as there were weeks when I could not do much. Even though I know that I am unprepared I know I can finish. I am always excited to see what this new found present called a marathon will present to me. I am nervous but excited. Besides, I have already paid and I am going to insist on getting the medal, the rose and the sweatshirt.

It is mile seven and I am ready to quit. I feel terrible, I am dizzy and I am not running well. I eat my power bar and I try to see if this helps me. I am thinking in my head, giving myself permission to quit and allowing this to be acceptable and okay. I am also happy to move slowly and to move alone. This run is just about finishing. I have abandoned all expectation for myself knowing that this kind of surrender is important in my running journey.

My first Oregon marathon was my second marathon and it was the first time that I was running without my running group. I had trained alone for the summer months and I remember feeling terribly annoyed. I was incensed by the fact that I ran alone and I resisted.

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This time, I am aware of my comfort. I keep running. I remember that there were gummy bears handed out last year around the 13-mile mark and I anticipate them. There are remnants and trails of colourful gummy bears but I see none and I figure I have arrived too late and the gummy bears have been eaten up. I continue to move, diluting my water with Gatorade and hoping this will sustain me as I have no food left and my decision not to eat breakfast proves to be a dumb move by mile 14. But alas, up ahead I see a woman holding up a box of colourful salvation and I grab a delicate handful, conscious not to look piggy. The gummy bears go in my mouth and I am happily chewing as I continue to meander down the journey. I chat a bit with someone and I slowly move forward. Up ahead there is a train crossing and we are all compelled to stop. I am grateful for the forced stop and although it is taking too long, I take the time to stretch and breathe and enjoy the further invitation to slow down. The rain has stopped and I am not cold. The gummy bears have kicked in and I am not hungry.

The train finishes crossing, there is a spontaneous cheer from the tiny mob of gathered runners and I run. The forced stop has helped alleviate some of the stiffness and pains. I continue to run. I feel the grin on my face edge me forward as I enjoy bits of conversations, observations of people supporting other runners and the cheering strangers posted along the journey. I am aware that I am actually going to finish this race despite my painfully slow pace. I reach the mile nineteen marker and the man announcing the time is casually sitting in a lawn chair and speaking out through a speaker. "Welcome to mile nineteen!" says the pleasant voice. On the other side, there are a group of stretchers along with volunteers offering free massages. I decline the invitation while completely appreciating the generosity of the service. I walk into the experience of mile nineteen

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feeling as though I am the honoured guest of someone's welcoming home. I am happy.

I find my sister at mile 23. She is on her bike and she is keen and supportive. "You look great, Em. You're doing fantastic! Do you need anything? Here, let me take your running belt so that you don't have to carry it! I'll put your water bottle here so you can grab it! Hey, you are running a great pace!" She speaks in exclamation marks and I am happy to have her enthusiasm. I am aware of how her words of encouragement provide me with a kind of energy that the stretching and gummy bears could only marginally provide. I notice how the people around me are also energized by her presence and exclamation marks.

I finish the final bit with the consistent reminder of my twin's active punctuation throbbing inside my muscles. I wear my medal, I get my rose and my sister grabs my finisher's shirt as I walk towards the hotel. Inside the hotel, Alexandra and Mamma celebrate my completion. Alexandra takes my medal and continues to wear and play with it throughout our journey home. We stop off for my traditional celebratory cheeseburger. Alexandra walks into one of our pitstops and tells some strangers that "Zia just got this medal from running a marathon." Inside the van, we take our spots while Alexandra sings in fake Spanish and fake Cantonese. I am too tired to join her.

And running and training, this has somehow helped me to realize the importance of moving forward. It is easy for me in the concrete goal of marathon running, to understand and invite the challenge of moving forward. I can easily look at the gift that is meandering through the training and running of the marathon journey. I am not so concerned about when I arrive at my destination. I am not so concerned with "succeeding" or "failing." I am just happy to see myself move forward. The process



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brings with it a multitude of stories and moments that absorb inside me. They come inside and infest me in a way that transforms me. By the end of the race, I am never the same person that began the marathon. Simply moving forward transfigures me. Like singing with Alexandra knowing or not knowing the words isn't what matters. *It is not so much the problem of knowing the exact words. Our task is to follow the through line of joy and this does not require the rigour of knowing exact words. This instead requires the rigour of falling in step with the song. The important thing to do is to move forward, to sing loudly with great knowing and to enjoy the song. The actual words, well, this is just icing on the cake.*

Alexandra continues to sing beside me, "Oh pac in a mao, Oh pac in a mao, Oh pao Oh pao Oh pao..." And we are happy.

### Feeding Diversity

When we love children, we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights – that we respect and uphold their rights. Without justice there can be no love. (hooks, 2000, 30)

Food is quite a big deal in Italian culture and I grew up seeing, smelling and tasting both abundance and diversity especially during feast days and celebrations. There was always a lot of a lot. There were few complaints about why the green beans had to share space with the radicchio, or why there was wine and juice and water and Seven Up at the table. No one ever stirred up a fuss when the antipasto plate had to make room for the seafood linguine. And this is how I like to imagine diversity in community. We are all just many differences being served up on a white and red checkered tablecloth. Now I know this is very simplistic and I know that in reality, in the day-to-day movement of living, diversity demands a great deal of reverence and hard work, but I at least begin the

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journey dreaming this possibility. Just as we say a blessing on the food before we begin a meal I make the same blessing, imagining that we have the potential to be big sturdy tables holding abundant, diverse and wonderful blessings.

Parker Palmer quotes Evelyn Keller Fox who defines the highest form of love as "intimacy that does not annihilate difference" (1999, 55) and this is what I envision when I think about holding diversity in communities. What would it be like, I wonder, if I could think about holding intimacy without obliterating differences? What would happen if I could experience love both in the giving and receiving, without trying to make someone in the image of me, or mould myself in the image of other? This is what I think about when I think of safesacred communities.

#### Table Setting

Is the table big enough	strong enough
and value more than one opinion?	wide enough
Silence. Or does curiosity difference	more than one
Change Push your plate Push you Crash you Pummel you Out of	more than one
existence? Silence. Can a table that holds food in such abundance such	one politic
variety such diversity Can a table not hold such abundance such variety	anything? silence.
such diversity for beliefs ideas understandings? Silence. Is the table big	big enough
enough	long enough
long enough	To hold and
To hold and value	hold and value
version of god	and value me?
god one science	
More than one	
Is the table	
strong enough	
wide enough	
value me To	
me to hold	

So I run to make my own table and  
I am leaving and I am leaving and  
I am gone.

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#### **Diversity**

Means I see and I feel every colour be silly before me snap me invite me to play

Means            I must            I want  
                   you are good for me            you are bad for me  
                   and I managc you in my mouth with bread with wine and  
                   you taste different but always familiar and more or less what I expect and  
                   know            is fun            is magic            is not easy

Means I must always be ready for the not knowing

Means I get to eat you

#### **Holding Diversity**

If a group succeeds at diversity, it is a successful community and will work. If it cannot do this, it fails at the deepest spiritual level of community, becomes unsustainable within itself and does little for the world around it. (Mindell, 1995, 20)

I have grown up inside a belief system that valued one way as the only way of viewing the world and every other way as being misguided, faulty, flawed, even heretical. I have never felt that I have fit into the one-way-only system of living the world. And as I have already mentioned, I spent a great deal of time trying to fit into the One Way – studying it, examining it, discarding it, embracing it, rejecting it, proving it wrong and proving it right. But in the end I could not place myself inside its box. My body, my soul, my mind, the three of us could not all fit inside this very narrow space. I needed to learn how to accept and embrace diversity before I could accept and embrace myself for as I continue to learn in my journey, I am full of diversity, I am full of difference and I myself cannot even reconcile with the One Way system even inside my own personhood! And it would appear the Cosmos itself requires diversity, difference and change in order to continue. What makes me think that I am any different than this vast, wonderful Cosmos?

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## Inviting Safesacred

A quark is enfolded in an atom;  
     an atom is enfolded in a molecule;  
     a molecule into a cell;  
     a cell into an organism.  
 In each case, the holon gains more *depth*, because it lovingly embraces  
 more                      of the Kosmos in its own makeup.  
     Likewise with human holons:  
 when my identity and sympathy expand from me to my family;  
     from my family to friends,  
     communities, even nations;  
     from nations to all of humanity;  
     and from humanity to all sentient beings without exception –  
 what have I done?,  
     except take more and more souls into my own, and  
     increased thereby my own depth,  
     by moving increasingly out of me  
 and into the Kosmos at large,  
     until what I call my “self” and what I call the “Kosmos” are  
 one and              the same undeniable Fact, and the Love that moves the  
     sun and other stars now move me just as well;  
 and we are all embraced in a gentle compassion that knows  
     no others    nor outsiders,  
     that refuses fragmentation and  
     cannot remember sorrow’s many names. (Wilber, 2001, xxix)

I am going to tell you my favourite joke. There is a man who, while hiking, falls  
 down a deep crevice but as luck would have it, he manages to attach himself to a jutting  
 branch. As he holds on to the branch for dear life he looks up and says, “If there is a God  
 up there, please, *please* help me!” The clouds part and the booming voice of God  
 responds to the poor hiker, “Yes, I am here and I will help you!” The incredulous hiker,  
 now precariously dangling from the branch looks up and pleads, “Yes, thank-you, oh  
 thank-you! I’ll do anything, *anything* if you could just help me back on my hiking trail!”  
 “No problem, my child,” booms back the omnipotent God, “but first you have to let go of  
 the branch.” There is a slight pause from the hiker now holding the branch with one hand

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only, “What?” he says. “Just let go of the branch,” says God, “and I’ll help you get back on your hiking trail.” The desperate hiker, still holding the branch but barely, pauses and with his remaining strength yells back, “Is there anyone else up there, *anyone* who could give me a hand?”

In a time of prayer, I decide that what I would like to receive is safesacred. I want both the control and comfort of knowing that I am safe, that I will not be hurt while at the same time desiring the sacred, the Spirit self. Is this possible, I wonder, is it possible to hold both safety and sacred in the same breath or are these two words an incompatible polar opposite? Can I receive both the sacred and the safe, or does inviting sacred always imply a risk? I love the joke above so much because I can constantly relate to the plea of the earnest hiker – help me but don’t ask me to give up my branch. And although I think that risk is a vital component in supporting life in general, there is something to be said about honouring the need to feel safe. After all, Dorothy was always provided with the safesacred in her journey. She began with Toto, her faithful companion who provided her with a sense of the familiar. Toto helped Dorothy open the door and venture into the unknown and strange. Indeed, I think it is the orbit of others, the welcoming hands of others that inevitably help us move into opening our arms up to a wider and wider expanse of self and other.

### Finding Heart Inside Our Safesacred Journeys

If I go looking for my heart’s desire again, I have to go looking for it in my own back yard and if it isn’t there, then it wasn’t my heart’s desire in the first place. *Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz* (In Rushdie, 1992, 56)

I have somehow ventured into the counselling centre and I figured, while I was in there, I might as well see how Zandra was doing. “It’s like clockwork,” says Guido, the

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impertinent counsellor. He has this half grin on his face but I'm not quite sure what he's thinking. "It's 3:20 and you're here to see Zandra," he says. "I don't come here *everyday*," I say. For some reason, I'm offended. "You're here everyday." "I am *so not!*" I counter but by this time I have found Zandra and I am holding on to her jacket too far into the truth to concede and pretend otherwise.

It's true. I make excuses to come and see her and spending time with her is somehow a way that I ground myself in the school. Her presence, her energy helps me feel safe, somehow provides me with a sense of *terra firma*. It's not like I have something earth shattering to tell her and it's not like she delivers some deep profound wisdom every time we visit. It is in fact her very presence that draws me as it draws the other students. She is busy counselling, completing her Master's and seeking her own orbit. She is her own person but somehow she is also my landing strip, the place in my workspace where I can come down for rest and confidently push off and soar in my far away places. If the truth be known, I really have grown to love her.

My friend Zandra has been my teaching neighbour for the last few years. She teaches Drama and French and her home base is directly in front of the auditorium where I teach and beside the office which is my own home base. There is always a group of students milling about her desk in the morning, at break, and after school. They cluster around her talking about this and that, the movies, their days, their assignments, their whatevers. Every morning on my way to my own office, I pass by her room, her door open, the lights on and usually a kind of banter and chatter can be heard. I usually pass by and say good morning on my way to settling into my own workspace and then I find some reason to go in the room and talk to her.

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And so it would go. When something good happened I passed by her room and let her know. "You wouldn't believe what happened in class today!" I would start and then I would get the pleasure of sharing the good story with a good friend. It was the same if something difficult, stressful or otherwise painful came my way. "You wouldn't believe what happened in class today!" I would start and then I would get the pleasure of sharing the difficult story with a good friend.

When I first began to think seriously of making an exit from the school, the first person that I told was Zandra. It marked my first public admission that I was planning to leave. I wanted to let her know, give her the "heads up," as it were of my impending absence. I was so intent on my own leaving, it had never occurred to me that Zandra would go first.

"I'm leaving. I am going to take the position as counsellor." It is Zandra who is speaking to me. She is telling me that she has been offered and has decided to take the position of grade 11 counsellor here at the school. It is really not that big of a deal really. She is just moving upstairs. She leaves the office and I move in the direction of my class. I am quiet and I begin to teach my class, begin to participate in the familiar, but a growing abyss moves inside my middle. My gut feels something I have yet to put to words.

And they do not really move into words or anything at all for some time; instead, they take on the energy of tears as there in my office I begin to cry. I hate what tears announce at least in the confines of my working space – weakness, vulnerability, the sheer humanity which seems the antithesis of professional.

And so there I am crying and Zandra is once again sitting in the office and I am

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saying something about how it takes her leaving to realize just how much I rely on her. But still I cannot stop the water from leaving and I am sobbing now, all semblance of professionalism erased from my face and I am powerless to do anything about it for although Zandra has merely moved one floor above, she has left a huge gaping hole that has silently defined my centre here inside my workspace.

I continued to weep at the smallest provocation, and many times retreated to my office which no longer feels like my home base. I gave up attempting professional conduct and instead began feeling a sense of smug satisfaction at the growing river of water that pushed its way out of my body. Why are our tears so dangerous that they must be silenced? Why have I chosen to silence my own?

For the remainder of the year, I am reminded of the absence of my friend. I notice in the increased load of my work in the school. She had so often silently lend a helping hand, taking on rehearsals and tasks that needed extra hands and extra heart. I would continue to make my way over to her counselling office where she now struggled to create her new home, and sometimes she would meet me in the drama office where we would chat about this and that, and mercifully the moments of laughter, silliness and play began to edge their way back into our visits.

I rely on Zandra. In my school journey Zandra has been my Tinman. What is Tinman but an icon willing to empty out its inside, to expose only hollow so as to push out the entire core to the dangerous world of the outside? A Tinman is someone who simply by their presence mirrors back our very hearts. And Tinmen in the 'exposition of the sacred heart' create safesacred spaces from which to expose and thereby examine and celebrate and keep company our very own Heart. Tinmen are people in our homes,



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schools, churches, workspaces and communities who invite us to venture away from mediocrity. By their very presence, they announce the playful possibility that ecstasy and conflict just might not be as dangerous as we think, why perhaps, maybe even a little enjoyable. Tinmen remind those around them of their own hearts.

Who are the Tinmen in our journey? Who is it in our lives that represent heart, help us by mirroring our own hearts back to us? How do we invite and honour the role of Tinman in our workspaces? Do we do our best to keep them quiet, silent, and anonymous? Do we relegate them to the bottom of the service profession where they have the least access to positions of power and influence? What do we do with heart? And more importantly, are we ready to see our own? Are we ready to invite the hazardous ecstasy and the savage conflict that exist inside our hearts? Will we sit beside our Tinmen and dare see the reflection of our own naked hearts staring back at us? It is the Tinmen who model the quiet practice of care in our communities.

### There's No Place Like Home

And as strange as it may seem, this school box has become my new home. I have other homes like my Sunday running group, my circle of friends, my family of origin, but the school, especially the studio, the drama office and the auditorium, this is where I feel my greatest sense of self. The school is the space from which I position myself. It is the place from where I allow myself the *deep rest* that I need in order to take the journey of living. And even though throughout this journey, I am also attempting to leave, to say good-bye to this space I call home, it is still home. I know that if I ever do leave this space, this story of home is what I will measure any other stories of home from. Home will *feel* like my experiences here at school. Home will be a space from which I am

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allowed to both give and receive. It is a place where I get to have a voice as well as hear the voices of other. Home will be whatever place honours safety, risk and sacred all within the same breath.

And so, home does not necessarily mean a house with a mother, father and two children. I think what my school box continues to teach me is that Home can take place in a myriad of configurations.

We find our Homes when we run on the souls of our feet, when we find ways from which to move, run, dance, and gerund while grounded to the Earth. When our Spirit resides in the fertile ground, when we move in earnest, with passion, with a willingness to find courage, strength and wisdom, then we can embrace home. To run on the souls of our feet means that we move fearlessly, carrying our Homes with us acknowledging the places, spaces and experiences that delight us while saying good-bye to old ways of being and thinking that no longer make sense. In this way, we require the courage and the distance to leave bits of our Home and to strew them on our journey where they act as markers, bits of bread to be utilized by others while serving as reminders of our presence on the journey. To fearlessly run on the souls of our feet requires that we acknowledge the fact that we do indeed carry our Homes with us and that we are in the process of both building up and tearing down our comfort space, our Home, our resting space. Finding Home requires us to bring our feelings with us, to claim ownership to our passionate places. If we try to somehow separate ourselves from dirt and ground, if we somehow aspire to hold our souls high above our heads away from our bodies – both our own and the Earth's – we run the risk of assuming that we are somehow impervious to our feelings. We may hold the illusion that we can in fact

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separate our Spirit from our Body from our Mind. The biggest problem with this mind frame is that it lulls us into thinking that we no longer have to seek and struggle with balance. Our body, our mind and our spirit are in constant movement, constant flux and one does not have domain over another for they are so intertwined to be in fact the very same thing. Running with the souls of our feet means that we live with the understanding that we are designed and created to move and interact with other, with life, with feelings (both painful and ecstatic) and with passion. To be in journey (movement) and to be at home (rest) – they are flip sides of the same coin and to see them as mutually exclusive entities prevents us from moving into either with any sufficient depth. Holding on to the protective custody of permanent home cuts you off from receiving your journey; conversely, constantly moving inside journey without ever nurturing home will effectively have you repeating the same journey over and over and over again. Once again, the invitation is to find the balance between rest and movement rather than to privilege one over the other.

### Honouring In Between Spaces

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The Taoist symbol for Earth contains an open column of emptiness between two sets of lines. The common way to think about this image is to view it as three broken lines, three lines with a gap. But then the focus is on the lines and not the white space. The important element is the column of emptiness; it denotes the potential of energy to flow through. This requires a purposeful surrender, a willingness to be taught by tools or the wind or a horse leaping a fence. (Laird, 2001, 29)

Caring is primarily an act of communion. "One cares for something or someone if one has a regard for or an inclination toward that something or someone," writes Noddings (1984, 8). We connect with some aspect of something or someone or self, and

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our impulse or will moves us towards this. Caring is a directional force towards something, be it a hobby, a human, an idea or interest. This forward action propels an individual towards a desire. Even if the forward action is painful, begrudged, or distasteful, the action moves towards a “regard” or “inclination.” This movement is towards a want, a desire. Caring implies movement towards a want rather than movement away from a dislike. This propulsion forward rarely takes place in a straight line, rather, it moves in random, circular, multi-dimensional directions. If we view caring as an energy that requires random even chaotic systems of movement, we must dedicate spaces from which to allow caring to move. This is not unlike the vast amount of space required for cells to function. Cells, in fact, are primarily made up of water (90%) so it would be appropriate to think of ourselves swimming or floating inside our community spaces. How can we go about inviting space inside our increasingly cluttered work and school environments and conversely, how do we help individuals find comfort inside a medium of water-space? What kind of skills do individuals require in order to learn the ‘art’ of swimming and floating?

### Finding Communion

Communion is mutual trust, mutual belonging; it is the to-and-fro movement of love between two people where each one gives and each one receives. Communion is not a fixed state; it is an ever-growing and deepening reality that can turn sour if one person tries to possess the other, thus preventing growth. (Vanier, 1998, 28)

When caring is viewed as an act of communion, it becomes more than a series of actions or work. It invites us to integrate and include all aspects of our personhood, including our spiritual, physical and emotional selves. “To-and-fro movement of love” is transparent. It cannot be measured and studied inside a scientific model. To the consumer

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eye it is invisible. It is an energy force like the molecules of life itself. Caring as an act of communion requires us to abandon all of our conventions and to once again place our attention inside the in-between space. It's like throwing a stick out to a dog. You can direct your stick in the general direction of your dog. Your dog may catch the stick or not, and quite frankly for both you and the dog, catching the stick is beside the point. It is the process of playing, attempting to engage each other in the catch and return symbiosis of the game. Using this metaphor, communion exists in the space between the moment the stick leaves your hand to the moment the dog receives the stick. Inside that in-between moment there are many factors beyond the control of both the giver and receiver - the wind, the location, the body of both the stick thrower and the dog. Even if you were to practice throwing the stick, develop a strong and consistent technique, you could never guarantee the same results both of the throw and of the eventual retrieval. As soon as you try and create throwing and fetching into a formula, you have in fact killed the experience. Throwing and retrieving is a game; it is play and the wonderful thing about play is that the perfect execution of the game is not as important as the actual experience inside the play itself. Communion is an invitation to both throw and receive a stick and to abandon the need to know the outcome, to find ways of being content with the dance inside the game. We do this by honouring, appreciating and respecting the space of time and distance from which the stick travels. The "throw space" is unpredictable and beyond our control. It is the space from which we dance, learning to be aware of ourselves, the dog, and all that is inside the experience.

In the same way, you cannot dictate communion, you cannot make it into a formula, for the moment you try to "possess" it, place a stake into the ground, claiming

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an always absolute, you have in fact nailed communion to its coffin. What you can do, however, is create the space required from which to support and celebrate the experience of communion. You can provide the time, the park, the stick, the dog and the stick thrower. You can also provide models of others throwing and retrieving thereby providing positive role modeling. We cannot live without communion. Vanier writes:

A little boy cannot live except through communion, through the looks and hands and tenderness of his mother. All alone, he is in danger. He cannot take care of himself, he is too small, vulnerable, defenseless and helpless. If he feels that he is unloved, unwanted, that there is no place for him, he falls into terrible anguish. He lives through traumas of fear because if he is not loved and protected, then he is really in danger of death. (1997, 39)

And what happens when we do not experience communion? I think that maybe we carry with us the loss, the profound experience of abyss which begins to inform our everyday experiences. I think that we move around the world carrying heavy sacks of abandonment and unworthiness, and wonder why our lives are so difficult. As the experience of communion falls farther and farther away from our private and public communities we become further and further disconnected from our spirits and bodies. And then maybe we seek connection, sensation, from wherever we can. Maybe we will seek the experience of connection with whatever we think will contain the darkness that is our existence without communion. That is what I am thinking.

### Safesacred Words

Such an ethic does not attempt to reduce the need for human judgment with a series of "Thou shalts" and "Thou shalt nots". Rather, it recognizes and calls forth human judgment across a wide range of fact and feeling, and it allows for situations and conditions in which judgment (in the impersonal, logical sense) may properly be put aside in favor of faith and commitment. (Noddings, 1996, 25)

Can words help invite safesacred spaces? A concern and understanding for the

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community as a group of human beings seems to be a key requirement. I wouldn't want to work in a space that did not provide public, accountable ways for addressing disrespect whether inside a church, a school, a country or a global planet. Words address this need, but they only provide the outer parameters of our day-to-day actions. Words can address the outer boundaries and in this way act like a cell wall allowing the rest of the cell parts to do their job and hold a space from which to perform their tasks. Inside a drama space, I am careful to honour this invisible cell wall publicly holding everyone accountable, myself included, to respectful and caring practices. It doesn't happen by honouring and dictating rules as much as by honouring and celebrating students.

If communities are to make words count, the words must be backed by constant acts of care. I equate this kind of care as the equivalent to good spiritual direction. A good spiritual director directs me, walks with me on my journey towards discovering my life work. In the same way, community members can walk with individuals as they continue to seek Plato's "life worth living," providing support and care rather than just prescriptive roles and behaviors. This is the work of learning to get used to the glare of the "you" that everyone in community keeps reflecting back to you. Supporting and honouring safesacred spaces is so very difficult because we are just learning to acknowledge living cells as opposed to black and white boundaries which the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" seem to provide.

#### Ice

	Your lips are all the same
The letters on your face	read determined nothing
Your lips say make no	movement
It is a straight line and you cannot cross it	
I cannot cross it	
And you are simply crossed	

## Mystical Electricity

And so this is what I am thinking. That old belief that I embraced with only one way being the Right Way places a tremendous reliance on words and I am not so sure words have the power to address all parts of our living, being selves. Words may be power tools but this does not necessarily make them sacred. What happens if we look at sacred as “numinous energy at the heart of reality?” Synonyms for the word numinous include mystical, spiritual and magical and synonyms for energy include electricity, drive and force. The “numinous energy at the heart of reality” suggests the mystical electricity that resides inside that which we can account for. I love this definition of sacred because it honours the seen and the unseen, the magic and the real. It honours both the word and the space and experience in between the word. When Parker Palmer talks about including the sacred inside school spaces I think of the “numinous energy,” the mystical electricity that we cannot see, that we cannot measure in conventional terms and that we cannot capture solely inside words.

Ironically, the acknowledgement of “numinous energy at the heart of reality” has



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often been missing inside my experience of rules and commandments. I am not saying that we should do away with boundaries, rules and commandments; rather, I am suggesting that we include the sacred inside our boundaries. Bring in the 'mystical electricity' inside the commandments so that we are more prepared to see that just like Bohm's (1980) definition of theories, rules and commandments are also *evolving insights* and as such, require some respectful space. And once again, I think that it is the balancing of both words and experience that invites safesacred.

### Back to the Table

Oppression is so pandemic ... that you and others in your life may consider this uncomfortable state-of-mind normal. (Mindell, 1995, 39)

Resolving conflict is rarely about who is right. It is about acknowledgement and appreciation of differences. (Mindell, 1995, 49)

And this is where I want to get back to the table holding all that diversity of food, for our ability to see in between our words is in fact what will help us hold diversity, not only in our own bodies but in our communities as well. This is a message that has been taught to me over and over again inside my school space. When I hold safe spaces, sacred spaces, when I am welcomed and included, I am far more prepared to embrace and hold diversity. When I experience a sense of belonging and caring, I am far more open to hold difference without trying to place them in the margins. This is true both of the differences in my own being and the differences in the world around me. This has been a slow learning process for me for I am so quick to hold on to the rule, the code, the commandment; to uphold my Rightness, to uphold justice. It is the ebb and flow of classroom space, it is the experiencing of my students as loving, caring human beings, and it is our collective differences that have propelled me to sit in the spaces in between

### Three: Safesacred Spaces

the words, the safesacred spaces.

#### Safesacred Communities

Safe space: safety in this safe-space may not feel like the old definition of safe. In fact, it could feel scary and/or challenging because we are giving ourselves permission to look at and lay aside our positions. Safe spaces feel alive and growth-filled. They are places to take risks, to experiment with new ways of thinking and being. (Parry, 1991, 23)

And hope and care and communion and heart, they will all help us hold diversity in community. But they are not enough. Communities must be able to bear difference, risk, and conflict. Communities must not exist in order to protect us from our shadow selves but to invite a space where it is possible to see and heal and hold our shadow selves. If communities exist to “keep out the riff raff,” or remain gated among like minded others, it is not community – it’s a pseudo safe space and it is a bomb waiting to explode. We can just look around and see who is inviting and creating violence. It is all those people denying their shadow selves scapegoating their own shadow selves on others. Safe spaces are all about protecting our own terror and we all have places inside our communities or inside our very selves that contain pseudo safe spaces. The difference between pseudo safe spaces and safesacred spaces – for they will often look remarkably similar, and earnestly vie for goodness and openness – *is their ability to hold diversity and their ability, willingness and commitment to hold risk*. And before I move on to risk I want to make this point very clear – we need safesacred spaces in order to invite risk. We paradoxically need to feel valued, cared for, and loved before we can hold risk. We need to know that we matter. In a classroom, if I and my students, if we communally have not established a safesacred space, then we collectively will not take risks. I want my students to feel as loved and welcomed as Zandra makes me feel in our friendship

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journey. I want my students to experience safesacred spaces and safesacred arrives in communion. It arrives via Vanier's "to and fro movement of love between two people where each one gives and each one receives" (1998, 28). It arrives in our collective ability to be big and small, strong and weak, courageous and cowardly. Safesacred spaces come inside the collection of paradoxes.

As a teacher, I am aware that the edges of both sides of the paradox must be honoured in order to hold safesacred. I myself have to model both sides. It is not control that I must seek but the balance between power and powerlessness. I can't just model strength, but I must somehow find a way to model weakness too! Inviting communion inside community means I must make both edges safe and sacred. I cannot always have power, always be big, always be courageous, and always be in control of myself and the students in the classroom. If I am comfortable honouring only one of the edges, it is the equivalent of my attempting to keep communion with myself – the to and fro movement of love between me and me.

And so, inviting the safesacred means honouring abundance, honouring diversity and honouring the edges of our paradoxes. Our inability to hold our own edges, our own diversity as well as the edges and diversity of others will mean that our communities will get smaller, more uniform, more predictable and more lifeless.

Do you really want all that great variety of food to leave your table?

### **Holding Air**

Allow events to change you. You have to be willing to grow. Growth is different from something that happens to you: You produce it. You live it. The prerequisites for growth are the openness to experience events and the willingness to be changed by them. (Mau, 2001, 167)

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I am at my mamma's house, waiting for my sister to come with her two children. Alexandra is still little, she is maybe four years old at most and she fits neatly in the space between my arms as she comes for an embrace. Johnny is six but he still plops himself for cuddles which look a little more like slow-motion kick-offs, mock fighting, mock rough and tough. We are all happy to see each other. In the moment of greetings and welcomings little Alexandra commits what amounts to nothing short of a mortal sin in this Italian household – she refuses to hug and kiss nonna. In the grand moment of welcomes, she snubs the fountain of all things good and tasty. Nonna is not happy with this largest of snubs and demands an apology. The small collection of arms and legs and will realizes that something serious has happened and that she is in danger and so she runs up the stairs and hides. Nonna cannot understand the impertinence of such a small thing. I go and look for this bundle of impertinence and find her hiding underneath the bed; she is crying and her tears are big and fat, they almost look half her size. She lets me hold her and she is now clutching on to the space between my arms; she is holding on to me and I know that she will have to meet her inevitable fate; she will have to go down the stairs and apologize to Nonna who is downstairs, still reeling from the snub. I know that she cannot escape this learning even when it somehow felt unfair to ask for this apology in such a rigid way. Still I know she must somehow complete this task. “Are you ready to go downstairs to say sorry to Nonna?” I ask. And she responds with a shake of her head, not losing the beat of her crying and tears. “Do you need a hand?” I say. “What if I come with you?” She holds me tight but she shakes her head yes, so we slowly make our way down the stairs to Nonna. With each thud downward, the impending task weighs heavier and heavier on the shoulders of the little bundle, and so the wails and

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cries grow stronger and louder, and I can almost feel her grow heavier and heavier as we make our way downwards. We arrive at Nonna and she is greeted with a crescendo of a wail, but Alexandra still moves towards and then holds Nonna, all the while crying, but finally managing the “sorry” that is required in between gulps of air.

See, I say to God. See, this is what I want from You. I want from you what I give to Alexandra. I want you to hold me in the space between your Hands. I want you to hold me in my journey of difficult. It is not that I want to escape the task. It is not that I want to avoid the task. It is just that I want the hands to hold me, bring me down the stairs, meet me in my utter terror and move me forward. If I can so lovingly meet the need of my little niece, can the Infinite, can it not meet me too?

### **Exhaling**

And this is the journey, the path that melts in between safesacred and risk. It is both the learning and teaching journey that I experience inside my many communities.

God meets me there. God is here in between the spaces in my hands. God is holding me, embracing me always floating me forward because God *Is* the space between all my spaces.

## Four: Madness

**Starting Place**

There are parts of the journey where no matter how much practice and how much preparation I think that I have, I still feel hopelessly unprepared and undone. Inevitably, I have to come face to face with anger. This is by no means an exhaustive chapter examining anger. I am merely talking to myself, saying out loud what I need to hear in order to continue running on the soles of my feet. It is an opening place from which to challenge my initial story around anger. It is the piece of the journey that enables me to make the distinctions between my body, my mind and my spirit. It helps me to see the biology, the need and the importance of something which I have always held to be a quiet evil.

**Crush**

before you  
     burned the tattooed memories  
     of my survival  
         inside my muscled  
         victorious biceps

you crushed me first

before you  
     gave me the impenetrable  
     armour of knowing  
     compassion  
         that comes from the scourging  
         of my own mistakes

you crushed me first

before you  
     pushed my faith  
     outside trusting the unknown  
         into the profound confidence of knowing

you crushed me first

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before you  
     scoured me to my nakedness  
     emptied me to my core desire  
     thus revealing to me what  
 i was truly seeking

you crushed me first

before you  
     made me strong enough  
     to love my weaknesses  
     and nurse them back to health

you crushed me first

oh, you crushed me first  
 and you crushed me second and  
 you crushed me third but  
 when I finally stood up  
 or was carried  
 or pushed up

i was something else  
 and instead of staying dead  
 i arose  
 so before I became strong, and mighty and bold and wonderful  
 before I stood up and arrived with a smile and a might  
 before I believed and I laughed and I celebrated

before  
     and before  
         and before  
             and before...

you crushed me and you crushed me and you crushed me again

and I win.  
 ha.

**My Madness**

Many women have a problem with the direct expression of their anger and use it to manipulate others instead. But anger can be a powerful ally. When we feel angry, the anger is always related to something we need to acknowledge for ourselves. It is not necessarily about the situation / or

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person that provoked it. It is always a sign that on some level we're not meeting a personal need that we may have. (Northrup, 1998, 603)

I have grown up feeling terrified of anger - my own as well as everyone else's.

To be angry was to be alone and cut off from love. So instead I kept my emotions inside and hidden. I desperately wanted to keep my fear, my anger, my terror, my wrath, away from peering public eyes. When I later developed an eating disorder, I continued with the pattern of isolation and anonymous grief. I would squirrel myself inside the closet, close the door, and eat the bread, the cookies, or whatever I managed to steal from the kitchen and then I would eat it anonymously, shamefully all the while feeling like I was meeting some incomprehensible need. I remember feeling as though something was terribly wrong with me, that I did not in fact have the right to live, and still, I would keep on eating, feeling the anxiety of the impending "last cookie" which signaled the end of the comfort. I would pour out my angst in my journals and I would create elaborate dreamworlds where I was thin, popular and successful. Although I was active in school and sports, I nevertheless spent a great deal of time alone: Alone and terrified and unconsciously angry. Looking back, it is with real irony that I see how alone and cut off I was in my silence. I was living in my greatest fear.

So there I was, stuffing my anger down with mounds of bread and cookies, thinking that if I could just stuff it down, hide it in my body, I would be safe. I would still be loved.

But, inevitably, all that anger, when it gets turned inward, stuffed down with food and silence, brings disconnection, depression and death. "All women must learn that no one can make us angry. Our anger is ours, and it is telling us something we need to know," writes Northrup, "Anger is energy - our personal jet fuel. It is telling us that



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something needs adjustment in our lives. It is telling us that there is something we want that/ we don't know we want" (1998, 603). And so, this is my anger and claiming it as my own, not anyone else's, is the beginning of the challenge. Having access, acknowledging the existence of my own "personal jet fuel," this is a terrifying thing. It is not just the absence of power that is difficult, but the abundance of it that makes anger so dangerous. Being open to listening to the body shudder its "want that I don't know I want" requires a soft, open, humble heart. And lots of courage – that is why we must hold the hand of our Lions with a kind of softness reserved only for the very powerful and the very powerless.

**Pollyanna's Dream**

what is it  
 are you uncomfortable with the rage  
 the danger of the words  
 the danger of the thoughts  
 ah ha ha  
 and I am still here  
 I am still here  
 I wrote it  
 I wrote it  
 I wrote it  
 before I could say it  
 I wrote it  
 you are going to live and  
 so will I  
 I will not die  
 I will not die  
 and neither will you  
 oh ha  
 I am dancing  
 I will push you  
 I will crucify you  
 I will leave you and  
 I will wrap you in my arms and  
 love you but for now  
 I will wildly revel in my drug of choice  
 I will rage against you

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leave me alone  
get out of my space  
get

out

of

MY space

I will rage against you and  
later I will love  
later maybe I will love but for now  
I rage you  
now I rage you  
and

I wrote it then on the curve of an apple

I wrote

I ate

from the tree of knowledge and

it was for you to read and

it was for you to tie my hands and

put me in a room and

I did not tell you then but

I will tell you now

I wrote it on the dust of your mirror

I did not tell you then but I will tell you now

get out of my space

I wrote it

I did it

I wrote it

I did it

Fuck you

### Mapping Emotions

If the uterus, the ovaries, the white blood cells, and the heart all make the same chemicals as the brain makes when it thinks, where in the body is the mind? The answer is, the mind is located throughout the body. (Northrup, 1998, 30)

Candace Pert (1998) has researched the chemical and physiological relationship that takes place inside our bodies in response to our emotions. Pert outlines the intricate relationships and communication that takes place between physical and emotional states. New brain/body research suggests an intimate link between all body and brain functions that literally make the two distinctions inseparable. Rather than the Newtonian separation

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of mind and emotion, as well as the separation of mind and body, all these functions are intricately linked and connected to one another:

This view of the organism as an information network departs radically from the old Newtonian, mechanistic view. In the old paradigm, we saw the body in terms of energy and matter. Hardwired reflexes, caused by electrical stimulation across the synapse, ran the body in a more or less mechanical, reactive fashion, with little room for flexibility, change, or intelligence. With information added to the process, we see that there is an intelligence running things. It's not a matter of energy acting on matter to create behavior, but of intelligence in the form of information running all the systems and creating behavior. (1998, 185)

Pert uses the term *bodymind* to explain the network of constant communication that takes place between the body and the mind. There is no hierarchy, with the mind dominating the body, rather, "the process of communication, the flow of information throughout the whole organism, [is] evidence that the body is the actual manifestation, in physical space, of the mind" (1998, 187). In this new archetype, emotions are simply messengers that carry information (via peptides and receptors contained on a cellular level throughout the body) that link the different body systems and thus connect them into one entity. "Our entire concept of 'the mind' needs to be expanded considerably," writes Northrup. "The mind can no longer be thought of as being confined to the brain or to the intellect; it exists in every cell of our bodies. Every thought we think has a biochemical equivalent. Every emotion we feel has a biochemical equivalent" (1998, 30). In our *bodymind* framework, emotions are the great communicators in our body system. It is our emotions that alert, inform and celebrate our *bodymind*. It is only when our great communication system gets ignored, unheeded or betrayed that our *bodymind* begins to wage war on itself. Our emotions are like prophets coming into our towns and homes, announcing information relevant to our personal and communal state of being. It is easy to welcome

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the prophet when the information the prophet brings provides no challenge to our current way of being (our pleasant, "positive" emotions). But, what happens when the prophet comes into our space and lets us know that we have some changes to make, that we are going to have to make the proverbial left turn, that we may have to abandon some of our old ways of being and embrace new ones? We end up spending a great deal of our energy pummeling the poor earnest prophet, running her out of town, discrediting him, silencing her, or bludgeoning him to death. We literally shoot the messenger, both the ones in our communities as well as the ones in our bodies. We push, destroy or passionately ignore our recovery, thus ensuring the very disaster we desperately hoped to avert.

#### **Shooting the Messenger**

Because symbols and metaphors are the fundamental architecture of our social arrangements they are slow to change. Indeed it is easier to change ideas and doctrines in others' minds that it is to change their myths and symbols. The heart of the myth and symbol is metaphor, and without metaphor, change is impossible. Metaphor draws the imagination into a new logic that reveals the way to a new reality. (Kohlenschlag, 1988, 7)

And so this was me, hopelessly shoving my messengers down, intuitively fighting them on their own turf, for the gut, the entire lining of the intestines from the esophagus through the large intestine, is lined with cells containing some of the highest concentration of neuropeptides and receptors (messengers). And I think this is no accident. Our Creator placed the largest crowd of messengers right there in our gut, in our body space that receives, uses, stores, and eliminates both Bread and Wine. Our entire being is designed to link the earth and all of creation with the Creator. It is not just the tip of our fingers as in the famous Michelangelo fresco that connects with God; we literally consume and process our God from the inside out and our hands firmly hold both spirit

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and earth. Moreover, this integration exists by design. We have literally been designed to receive, struggle and celebrate with the apparent dualities of the bodymind. Viewing the bodymind as an interconnected, communicative, active process of becoming begins a new metaphor, a new way of viewing body and mind. Seeing our bodies as integral, thinking, communicative components inextricably linked to our minds begins "a new logic that reveals a new reality," as Kohlbenschlag (1988, 7) points out. We can no longer think of our bodies as something that brings our souls down, as suggested by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (26:41). There is no such thing as a separate spirit and a separate flesh for it is *all the very same thing*.

In my own journey of simply becoming I have learned first to listen to my messengers, most especially the ones I have with great purpose attempted to pummel and silence, namely my anger, grief and fear. Anger, grief and fear are vital, and as Pert reminds us:

We need anger to define boundaries, grief to deal with our losses, and fear to protect ourselves from danger. It's only when these feelings are denied, so that they cannot be easily and rapidly processed through the system and released, that the situation becomes toxic...And the more we deny them, the greater the ultimate toxicity, which often takes the form of an explosive release of pent-up emotion. (1998, 285-286)

Anger, in particular, is a powerful, energizing force that helps us to move forward. Anger is part of the "flickering fire within us" that Fox (1999, 99) talks about. If we cannot sit in our own fire, we simply do not move. Dorothy requires the red shoes of the evil witch to begin her journey in discovering Oz. It is the necessary gift of evil. The witch of the East may have used her anger as a force to punish, oppress and suppress, but it is misleading to think that the problem is the anger. "This emotion is only dangerous if we deny it and stuff it in our bodies," writes Northrup. "Anger and all other "negative" emotions can

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serve us well when we don't turn them in on ourselves as depression or lash out with them against others" (1998, 604). Anger after all, is an emotion that the body has taken great pains to conserve throughout the evolution journey, for it provides many advantages, not the least of which is that boost of life energy necessary for survival and for providing humans with the infusion of adrenaline and energy that is required when changing our metaphors and myths. "The capacity to become angry is an impressive gift which comes as part of our biological inheritance," writes Warren (1983, 77). How often is it that we hear anger being interpreted and acknowledged as gift?

#### **Naming the Fire in Our Bellies**

Negative emotions exist to let us know that we are not facing the clearest path to what we want. When we realize that our bodies and their symptoms – feelings – are our allies, point out what serves our highest good and what doesn't, we become free. (Northrup, 1998, 63)

In Baum's *Wizard of Oz*, the Witch of the East's shoes were all that remained once the house landed on the evil Witch, which in the movie were ruby red. These ruby red slippers then accompanied Dorothy on her journey that she was hoping would eventually take her home to Kansas. The slippers taken from the dead evil witch are the only items given to her as she leaves Munchkin Land in order to find the Wizard of Oz located in the Emerald City.

Red is the color of anger and rage. It is also the color of fire and passion. We "see red," "get all steamed up," "get all fired up," "boil over," and "get all heated up." Red is also the color of the first chakra, the root chakra, the one most closely connected to the ground, to the earth. The body centre connected to the root chakra is the sacrum (the sacred bone). The root chakra is critical because "all the other power centers depend on this one being engaged and alive, open and flowing" (Fox, 1999, 99). In other words, if

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you cannot invite the movement of the root chakra, you cannot effectively move through any of the other chakras. It is also the chakra that is responsible for grounding us both literally and spiritually. It is responsible for sound; as Fox states, "In the first chakra, we hear the whole, hear the music of all beings, singing and vibrating and dancing: no wonder the bone that picks up this cosmic music for us is called holy; music from all holy flesh flows through it" (1999, 101).

Before beginning her life journey, Dorothy receives anger and it is the ironic gift from her enemy. Like the root chakra, shoes are close to the ground, close to mother earth and they move her towards action. If we cannot listen and make the sound of anger, we cannot begin our journeys – we will forever be stuck in a small space, in a victim place and feeling stunted, cut off, and frozen. We will experience the death that freezes the wicked witch. This is exactly the anger we see and hear so often inside our daily lives and should not be confused with the life force anger which is a gift of "the sacred". The anger that stays inside our bodies is impotent. It is the immobilizing anger so commonly heard in the voice of the victim, the part in each of us that feels powerless or too terrified to take action. If we are to stand in our ruby red slippers without moving, our blood, our strength, our fire, pools down to the bottom of our feet. Frozen anger incapacitates us. As Northrup suggests, the organic expression of our emotions neutralizes the "dangerous" aspects of such powerful emotions as anger:

...if a woman is encouraged to stay with what she's feeling, to go into it, to make the sounds she needs to make, and to cry or yell as long as necessary, staying completely with her innermost self, she'll often discover that her body has the innate ability to heal even very painful memories and events from her past. When we are willing to be with "what is" instead of running away from it, we will often be able to work through painful experiences that have lain dormant and taken up our energy for years. (1998, 56)

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We have to “dance” our anger, as Fox (1999) and Lerner (1986) suggest. We have to move and release and speak and shout and listen and play and rage out anger or all that life transforming energy gets pushed inside a body, an ecosystem, that was never designed to confine it in, and like a terrified caged animal it will begin to ravage and destroy everything in its path. Anger is a life force designed to live in its immediate and open state and, as such, it becomes an awesome power tool. It is a blessing, a gift that meets our “sacred bone.” As Pert writes,

By letting emotions have their natural release, the “bad” ones are transformed to “good” ones, and, in Buddhist terms, we are then liberated from suffering. When your emotions are moving and your chemicals flowing, you will experience feelings of freedom, hopefulness, joy, because you are in a healthy, *whole* state. (1998, 286).

Emotions in movement then, bring us to wholeness, health and freedom.

#### Addressing Anger in the Now

Our anger may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met, or simply that something is not right. Our anger may tell us that we are not addressing an important emotional issue in our lives, or that too much of our self – our beliefs, values, desires, or ambitions – is being compromised in a relationship. (Lerner, 1986, 1)

When I watch TV, read the newspapers or listen to the radio, it would seem that the majority of people are in a constant state of anger. From cartoons, children’s games and video games, to television talk shows and action movies, we all seem to be in an unending loop of self-righteous anger. Even the news coverage drones a steady stream of angry people meting out justice or pushing for a voice inside the shifting bowl of power. It would seem that we are all walking around with large houses weighted on our poor bodies as we continue to wail and howl, “What did I do to deserve this? Why me?”



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wondering why we are always so tired, why we can't sleep and why we feel we are moving in slow motion. Many of us are in such states of unconsciousness that we do not even have any idea we are angry in the first place, so that when someone politely suggests we remove the houses from our backs (like Dorothy's house that lands on the Wicked Witch) and put on our ruby red slippers, we look on our witches, scarecrows, lions and tin men and quizzically respond, "House? What house?" And of course, it is the closed loop of impotent anger that we witness.

It is not until we embrace and 'make friends' with our root chakra, with our fire that we can begin to consider healing and weightlessness. Making friends with our root chakra as Northrup suggests, requires that we take it out of the closet, name and recognize it; "Lower-chakra wounds don't heal until they're witnessed. Someone has to say, 'Yes, this happened to you.' Such witnessing validates the existence of the wound; then the healing process can begin. A very important part of my work with women is this witnessing process" (1998, 95).

#### **Witness**

To name something is to bring it out of chaos, out of confusion, and to render it understandable. It is a terrible thing when certain realities, such as death, are never talked about and remain hidden. Then these realities are not named, they haunt us. (Vanier, 1998, 25)

I have had the privilege of both watching and experiencing the power of this witnessing inside movement workshops. Gabrielle Roth, the founder of dance therapy, writes about her experience as she began teaching movement to therapy groups, "Sometimes two hours of moving were as powerful as two years on the couch. I discovered that the body can't lie; put it in motion and the truth kicks in" (1998, xxi). When we dance, when we move our bodies, we begin the process of witnessing in a

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powerful way. When we allow our bodies to move, to dance wildly, ecstatically and with wasteful abandon, we allow our body to speak uninterrupted with Spirit. In the healing movement practice called authentic movement, you bring your body to stillness. When you are in a resting state you allow your body to make some kind of a move and you begin to amplify the position. While your eyes are closed you continue to move and make sounds. If you are in a group you may choose to interact with others or you may choose to move on your own. All the while, you have a partner who is witnessing you, watching you and staying present to your blind movements. After a certain period of time, both the witness and the dancer are invited to write, draw, or move their experience, and then both the witness and dancer share the experience. Dancing blind while being witnessed, this was one of the most healing moments of my life. I was aware that my body was moving through grief, rage, and delight in ways I did not even realize had been holding such stories in the first place. Allowing our anger and our grief and all of our emotions to be witnessed, especially through the body, through the heart, this is a powerful and life transforming privilege.

Anger just like joy needs to be public. It requires a safe and sacred space from which to venture out into the open and this needs to happen as a function inside cultures irrespective of gender. Like in the burning bush and the tongues of fire, God and Spirit reside in anger. Anger is a gift and moreover it is a sacred gift. Until we embrace this gift, until we sit inside this gift, we will forever find ourselves in perpetual states of anger. What we avoid and ignore we receive tenfold. Mindell (1995) cites people's fear of anger as a common reason why group negotiations break down. Our first task inside our sacred journeys is to *take the gift of the ruby red slippers*. Look at the witch straight

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in the eye and say thank you. Thank you. And then, put the shoes on and move. Just move and see what happens.

#### Scarecrow

And you huff and you puff and you blow your house down you blow the house down and you sit around thinking the world through finding evidence for the obvious letting your curious mind discover the reasons why living and life take place at all eating and drinking from the trees of knowledge climbing the towers of Babel and Babylon feeling the wood as it scratches your inside thighs pressing ever forward getting drunk on the feel of flying feeling close to god who lives in the scratches and scrapes collected on the movement forward and still you climb to reach your ecstasy to feel god's finger thinking that salvation comes in yesterday or tomorrow while bleeding scrapes of rapture now bleeding scrapes of rapture now bleeding scrapes of rapture now

What you know is made of straw

#### Where This Leaves Me

I still struggle with this gift of the ruby red slippers. I am still uncomfortable with my anger and I still feel terrified every time it appears inside me world, demanding attention. What continues to change is that I also see anger as a valuable function of my living. The connections between the body, the mind and the spirit have helped me to honour what I still see as such a volatile and dangerous emotion. What motivates me to deal with my anger is that in order to move more authentically towards my calling, I know that I have to meet my anger. There is nothing easy about this or at least if there is I haven't discovered it. All I know is that without my red slippers, I cannot move inside my journey. I cannot find Oz and later move past Oz. Ultimately, I cannot find the deep rest, the deep breath, the sense of ease without receiving my rage and this for me is a very strong incentive indeed.

## Five: Inviting Conflict and Ecstasy

### Responding With Life

We have been programmed to respond with deadness to the two most important moments in our lives – the moments of conflict and the moments of ecstasy. (Parry, 1991, 99)

Conflict terrifies me. I am only learning to work with conflict now, as I study it and teach it to my students, and as research suggests, teaching others provides a 90% learning and retention rate, the highest percentage of all teaching practices (Cram, 2000, 91). Before beginning my journey with conflict and ecstasy I thought that conflict was something to be avoided at all costs. My way of dealing with conflict was to first pretend that it wasn't there. If that didn't work, I would try and avoid the situation where conflict existed and if that didn't work, I would try and find a hero of some kind to fight my battle for me. Often, this would turn out to be my sister.

When I first started teaching I did not handle conflict very well. I was the teacher and I was in charge and what I said was Right. I began my teaching journey yelling a lot, and working even more, and if someone was to measure my blood pressure in the classroom, I am sure it would not be a very pretty number. Now the advantage of working in an inner city school is that I did not live inside such a belief system for very long as my students quickly taught me that this 'belief system' would not wash with them. And something else happened. I began to really love and appreciate all these packages of transition and energy staring at me from the drama space. I began to work and learn with these students and I began to realize that a perfect product, at times, was secondary to the importance of inviting the heart and the soul inside the classroom. As I've said in the first chapter, my students have taught me far more than I have ever taught them and this is one very precious lesson I learned.

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I indeed include myself as one of those people “programmed to respond to deadness” to both conflict and ecstasy. I lived very much in the middle, afraid of both, not willing to take the risk and make my little box any bigger. I am still learning this. I am still learning to stretch my box, to expand and invite both conflict and ecstasy in my world without running to my bed and pulling the covers over me. I imagine that I will be learning how to invite both conflict and ecstasy in my life up until the moment I die. Responding with life is part of the journey.

#### **Middle**

means finding a way a means a recipe to abandon all recipes to float in the  
absolute knowing that nothing is ever permanent  
means acknowledging that change and movement are signs of living and  
we can only receive such simple truths in the acting of staying still

#### **Medium**

means never pushing past the edge of dangerous  
means flirting with conflict  
flirting with ecstasy  
while never letting either hold their clutches on your body  
change erase and add their imprint  
means never drinking the cup of wine to the end  
to the edge  
to the dregs  
means never inviting sacred into the safe

#### **Listening to Ecstasy**

Our inner guidance system is mediated via our thoughts, emotions, dreams, and bodily feelings. Our bodies are designed to act as receiving and transmitting stations for energy and information. Living in touch with our inner guidance involves feeling our way through life using all of ourselves: mind, body, emotions, and spirit. (Northrup, 1998, 52)

How do we discover our points of passion? What is it that allows us to “receive the movements of ecstasy?” How do we begin the metaphor shift from grabbing and taking to floating and receiving? How do we learn, as Dorothy, Tinman, Scarecrow and

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Lion learned, to receive the power that was already within them, available to them, rather than madly look, find and hope for our Oz Saviors?

I cannot tell you what it is that you must do but I can share with you what I have learned while running on my journey. First and foremost, acknowledge the need for passion and challenge as a function of the human condition. This is ongoing. You do not find passion once or twice and then get your share. You do not get a quota of challenge and then put your feet up, grab a beer and watch TV smug in the knowledge that you have finally completed your allotment of life. This may sound mightily familiar, both in your own life and in the lives of those around you as you seek to anaesthetize yourself in believing the myth of the period that ends your verbs. And those who seek to view the world as if passion and challenge were limited and rationed; those who try to put a period at the end of passion and challenge are in danger of living in the lull of medium. "The world is drowning in its own mediocrity," writes Parry (1991, 99) and with these words, Parry acknowledges both the fluid water-like nature of living as well as the fact that mediocrity freezes you, annihilates your inherent sense of direction. Mediocrity makes moving stop or at least cages it, and as Parry reminds us "We have been programmed to respond with deadness to the two most important moments in our lives – the moments of conflict and the moments of ecstasy" (1991, 3).

Conflict and ecstasy are verbs – they suggest movement. Moreover, both conflict and ecstasy are temporary. They come to you for a time and then leave you only to find you again. Conflict and ecstasy are not permanent states. You seek and invite and move through both ecstasy and conflict. You are in constant movement and once you get this concept, once you wrap yourself around the idea that you never really finish, or complete

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or get to “mission accomplished”, rather, that you discover brand new circles, brand new Ozes, brand new yellow brick roads, different pods of communion, then you get to find out what it is like to receive, to embrace your journey rather than your final destination.

You become aware, you open our eyes, to the possibilities of both ecstasy and conflict. You become aware of your gerunds. Your first task is to become conscious and wide-awake as many assorted messengers invite you to do through their words and their stories. Stay inside the gerund. Don't be afraid of the comma, of the and, of the pause. When rain comes to meet your river, invite yourself to listen and listen deeply. Invite yourself to just move and breathe and see what happens.

### **Breathing**

Although our entire bodies are affected by our thoughts and emotions and their various parts talk to each other, each individual's body language is unique. No matter what has happened in her life, a woman has the power to change what that experience means to her and thus change her experience, both emotionally and physically. Therein lies her healing. (Northrup, 1998, 41)

Years ago, in the midst of another point of transition, I attended daily mass at a local church. There was a charismatic and wide-awake priest who embodied the energy and enthusiasm that belies the consumption of many sacred scraps of bread and sips of wine. During the consecration of the Eucharist, he would invite all of us to participate, forming our own circle around the table, serving bread and wine to each other. This was a time in my spiritual journey where I was continually surprised, overwhelmed and full. The priest has since passed away and I have yet to discover a spiritual community with the same ability to invite ecstasy inside the movement of bread and wine but this is perhaps another story.

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During one of these masses, the priest delivers a sermon about the widow woman prophet who was waiting for the Messiah. This old woman would pray night and day. She spent her life in service of church. When Mary walks into the synagogue with Joseph, holding the small scrap and sip of Jesus, the prophet jumps up and dances, demonstrates ecstasy as she sees and receives embodied Jesus for the first time. In his sermon, the priest talks about this story and he invites us to look at the true ability of the widow prophet. Little Jesus was encountered by hundreds. He passed through many and even though he was only nine days old there must have been many who saw him, felt his presence, heard his voice, but it was this old women who *listened*, who allowed herself to experience Sacred in all of what it is. I remember the priest asking us, asking me, would I recognize Jesus. Would I be like the widow woman or would I be like everyone else who came into contact with a nine day old baby. Would I recognize the Sacred if it stared at me in the most unexpected of ways?

This sermon has stayed with me these past dozen years for it profoundly challenged me, invited me to realize that Sacred is a two way street and that most likely, it was constantly happening right under my nose but that I was too full of busyness, assumptions, expectations and mediocrity to even notice. It made me wonder about my responsibility in the participation of the Sacred. Sacred is not a passive reception of grace that gets thrown at us. Receiving Sacred is an action. Yes, the act of receiving the Sacred is a gerund. Widow woman did not let the cultural assumptions of what Messiah would look like misinform her. She let herself be surprised. She stayed open to possibilities. I think that deep listening is like deep breathing. I can live without breathing deeply but I do not live deeply. I survive. I don't allow deep-rooted toxins an opportunity to exit. I do



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not exercise my lungs to their full capacity. I do not receive your full allotment of air. I breathe in the middle – we are a culture drowning in mediocrity and we are suffocating ourselves.

And this is what I am thinking. I listen but I do not listen to the edges of the capacity that I am designed for. I dare only to listen to as close to the middle as my body can safely protect, which is not very much. To listen deeply is to follow the Widow Messenger. To listen deeply is to play/place myself in a state of readiness – readiness to receive the Sacred, to let myself be surprised, to stay open to possibilities. Deep listening is like deep breathing – it is paying attention and bringing your focus to that which you do naturally, and this, although easy, is a lot of work.

And this is what I am thinking. We are all called to be prophets and messengers. We all have this capacity to receive and recognize the Sacred. This is not just for old widows and saints and you do not have to sit and pray in the synagogue in order to merit this gift. You do not need to take a vow of celibacy, you do not need to spend hours on your knees, you do not have to die virgins, martyred or in utter pain. You do not have to be punished in order to be messengers although you are likely to receive many a crucifixion, not by God, but from all those terrified people holding on to their medium.

There is nothing mysterious about recognizing Sacred. There is nothing mysterious about receiving the Sacred. It is as inherent in our lives as breathing. It is as easy as learning to listen with all the passion, ecstasy, conflict and challenge that it brings. And unavoidably, when the terror comes, you breathe in that, too, for in your seas of living, you will inevitably experience all.

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### Fa e Disfa e Dut Un Lavora

The mind is the space between the cells. (Northrup, 1998, 30)

You are living through an unusual time. You see that you are called to go toward solitude, prayer, hiddenness, and great simplicity. You see that, for the time being, you have to be limited in your movements, sparing with phone calls, and careful in letter writing. (Nouwen, 1996, 16)

When my mother first began to teach me to knit, she would begin with a square.

She would cast the first row with her swift expert fingers and she would knit the first few rows with neat, firm, uniform stitches. She would then carefully show me how to hold the needles and how to hold the yarn looped in between the fingers. She would pierce the loop of the closest stitch with the bluntly sharp instrument called the knitting needle, then wrap an additional loop with the very same knitting sword that invaded the original loop, and finally, she would miraculously create another stitch forever linked to the one so brutally pierced and on and on it would go. I would then get a turn to try the same method and she would peer over me, watching me, sometimes putting her hands over my hands until I would learn with my hand, with my eyes, with my ears and with the rest of me. Later, I would know this piercing and looping by feel, by sense, by spirit, but in the beginning, I was learning in all of the mechanical sense of knowing. This would go on, and my rows would begin to grow, compile upon each other, taking shape, making squares. Inevitably, I would make mistakes. Inevitably, I say now, knowing that this is part of the growing and the learning but then, as an eight year old, my mistakes would take me by surprise. They were a sign of disaster. Sometimes mamma would scrutinize my mistake and miraculously she would repair it. Hooray! I would be spared the undo. Other times, the mistake was irreparable and I would have to fix the error by eliminating everything that came before it. What comes before an error is mainly good stitches,

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uniform stitches and the idea of having to undo the good stitches just to get to the offending loop, well this was an unbearable task. I hated the idea of undoing, of going backwards. When this happened, my mother would say in her Italian dialect one of many proverbs, “Fa e disfa e dut un lavora” – roughly translated it means, “to do and undo are both the same work”. In my mamma’s knitting journey, I have often watched her pull apart and pull apart a section. Not only did mamma teach me the cultural proverb through words, but she consistently modeled the embodiment in her knitting. There are many qualities that I revere and respect about my mamma and this certainly makes the top three shortlist. How could she drop these stitches, yes with frustration, yes with some possible impatience, but nevertheless, get it done? *She* never cried and held a despairing tantrum which I abashedly admit has happened on more than one occasion for myself. “Fa e disfa e dut un lavora.” To this day, this is my favorite Furlan proverb and one that I carry with pride – something I wish to carry with me from my past, from my history.

Going backwards is something that I resist in my frenetic journey as knitter. It is not uncommon for a knitting project to remain untouched for months and months as I refuse to tear out the colors, the cables, the error. I panic, I pout, I grieve and I stubbornly refuse to admit to the undo and so I remain there frozen until I can come up with an alternate program – an alternate idea or the courage or fatigue to pull apart all the stories that live inside the pierced loops upon pierced loops. It literally hurts. Sometimes I call my mom but I would only get the despairing proverb, Fa e disfa e dut un lavora, in a tone of “What’s the problem? Did you expect to knit without ever undoing your knitting?” Of course the undo is a reality in our lives and I am not sure why I as an eight-year-old child, or as an older adult could ever think that any journey in life could be spared the undo –

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yet I resist, wanting desperately to hold on to this ill-fitting myth, “the good life requires no undos.”

Ah, the painfully blessed truth is that the good life is full of undos, full of backwards, full of tearing up the past, removing all the good piercings just to get to the mistake. In the Furlan culture full of work, structure, position, right and wrong, the idea of doing and undoing as one continual circle of achievement and completion came to be. Here in the mechanized world of fast, in the limited experiences of deep community, it is easy to pretend that the undo can be averted. Here on my computer, I can scan my words, cut and paste, do, undo, redo with the touch of buttons. I can somehow, miraculously leave the good bits alone, untouched. I am given the illusion, and often the experience of ease within my undos. In knitting, often, not always (for I have learned for myself some of my mamma’s knitting magic tricks!) an undo requires a backtracking, a peeling away and an elimination of the healthy, expert loops in order to implement a repair. It is the embodiment of the Jesus as shepherd story where he leaves all the safe sheep, risks their loss, perhaps even death, to go find the lost sheep.

The undo is dangerous, but it is also sacred.

When you participate in the undo, you are playing the role of Jesus. You risk the sheep that are not lost. You leave them behind and you honour the journey while seeking the lost. This requires some kind of faith, some kind of trust in the energetic knowing and perhaps an abandonment of the need to know and to invite surprise and play to somehow enter your journeys. God is alive and well in the undo.

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I have not managed the ease of the undo. I am a work in progress. I still ache, try to pretend that it is not a mistake and keep knitting forward. I still let my errors sit and stew until I am ready to move to the undo.

#### Discovering the Old Belief

This act of undoing – whether I view the undo in my knitting, in my writing, in my teaching or in my living – this helps point me to my old beliefs. Now, remember that I began this journey believing that there was only one correct way of doing things, living life, following God. Dismantling an old belief, an old way of believing is a terrifying venture, for to unravel one undo is to unravel the whole ball of yarn.

Our undos help us discover our old beliefs and this is a very exciting opportunity. It is the beginning of our tangle between conflict and ecstasy and there are times when I have struggled to discover which one is which, so enmeshed together inside the undo as they are. I believe that the terrible ache in my knitting undos is the ache my body feels with the need to enter into communion with my old belief.

#### what I am doing

and I am never quite sure

I am never quite sure

I just move  
wondering if this wander  
or will this wander

that I know what I am doing

what I am proving

I just dance while dying  
will ever push me towards my paradise

float me

into the absence of ecstasy and

still

I move

and dance in my doing

laugh in my crucifying

and dance in my dying

and dance some more and

dance my way forward

inside my coffin

### **There is No Beginning – There is No End**

A thought held long enough and repeated enough becomes a belief. The belief then becomes biology. Beliefs are energetic forces that create the physical basis for our individual lives and our health. If we don't work through our emotional distress, we set ourselves up for physical distress because of the biochemical effect that suppressed emotions have on our immune and endocrine systems. (Northrup, 1994, 35)

Every conflict is, in a way, the most important one. (Mindell, 1995, 20)

I have always believed that all journeys contained a straight line with a beginning, a middle and an end. Stories, fairytales, even *The Wizard of Oz*, depict journeys, albeit, long, windy and difficult, as linear entities and although it might be true that portions of our journeys depict straight lines in the grand scheme of life, journeys happen as the Universe happens – in large sweeping elliptical rounds with no real beginning, middle and end. From the tiniest “thing” that we can measure to the largest thing we can imagine, it is always a circle. We do not look to examine the beginning or the ending of the nucleolus, nor do we try to identify the point at which the Universe begins and ends. Although we continue to consider its center or origin, this is different from actually trying to locate “a place” that begins and “the place” that ends the Universe. Do you look at the planet Earth and ponder from where the rotation begins and where the rotation ends? Any point would be arbitrary and would exist because you will it to exist but not as an actual fact. Journeys move in spirals expanding upward and outward in the same way that life itself expands. Again, when you are ready to receive the inevitability of your journey as a state of forever, then you can paradoxically rest, and receive home.

And so it is the undo that reminds us so terribly of the mighty inevitability of death, of its ease and its arbitrary nature. This tearing away can seem unfair, violent and

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inefficient. The undo only makes sense if you have the grand vision, the big picture, the Final Sweater. Eliminating a round of rows, colour, pattern, eliminating a story, a block of time, an attempt at something, this requires a special kind of courage. For most of us, Knitting our lives without a pattern, without an awareness of what the Final Sweater looks like, or even, if it will eventually be a sweater at all scares us. You have to trust that the final revelation is worth the undo. Seeing the undo as an opportunity to include surprise and play in your journey is how you get there.

And sometimes the mistake stays there and transforms you anyways. I have made a replica of a rug design where I painstakingly researched, experimented and measured and inside the rug there is an error that I did not undo, and I've finished it, and there it is, on my newly painted walls, looking at me. And always, I look at the rug, and I love it, I love the colours and the many textures and I rub my hand across the squares and feel the stories inside the knitting. And I love it. But still, I look at the error, and I try to convince myself that you cannot really notice it and always, I notice it.

And I regret that I did not have to courage to complete that undo.

And I love it anyways.

### **Embracing Our Undos**

Conflict is an opportunity for intimacy. An eruption of energy characterized by a deep feeling of hurt, resentment, loss, fear and a challenge to one's self-esteem. (Parry, 1991, 21)

Your stories of undo mirror your stories of conflict. Like undos, conflict forces you to go backwards, and undo many good and uniform stories to get to the error. You have to painfully look behind and move backwards. And you have to keep your eyes wide open, carefully looking to seek the "deeper feeling" which is your Story of Origin:

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Where it all began. We have to die and invite crucifixion. Meeting your undos requires an unrelenting courage for there is not yet the experience, the magic of resurrection. You only have to trust that there is one coming up and in the meantime you must undo both the good and the wonderful, and the bad and the terrible. Conflict, as Mindell reminds us, requires that we honour the unknown because "sustainable community has always been based on respect for the unknown" (1995, 18). Conflict not only requires us to go backwards, to destroy our "good work," but it asks us to do this all blindfolded.

How do you get to a place where you begin to imagine conflict, to fathom your undos as "opportunities for intimacy," to see conflict as something that will enable you to accomplish all you desire? Such concepts and understandings of conflict seem almost blasphemous. Whenever I experience the gut-wrenching tension signaling the arrival of conflict, I am nowhere close to hearing myself say, "Oh boy, an opportunity for intimacy has arrived!" or "Wow, I get to receive an opportunity to accomplish all I desire! Come on over, conflict!" It is just so much easier to make myself silent, to run away, literally in my case, or to pretend that it is not there.

So how do you get to a place where you find the courage to look at conflict, hold its gaze and let it move through you, in you, around you and past you? How do you ever get to invite the movement of conflict without freezing it, forever making it stay inside the very cells, the very bones of your being? "Every time you work to free yourself from a sense of internal oppression, you begin to transform the cultures you live in," writes Mindell (1995, 38). Conflict, meeting our undos, transforms us from the inside out, and when you begin to make a personal change, however small and subtle, everything changes with it. Maturana (2001) speaks of this as two systems that change each other. A



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shoe worn on a foot transforms to the shape of the foot, but the foot too has been transformed by the shoe. Any kind of change, any kind of transformation, changes every single one and everything that you come in contact with, for your change, no matter how slight, changes the interaction you have with the world around you. Two systems that come in contact with each other will transform each other, and when one system changes, so does the system that it comes in contact with.

This is amazing! My small changes can transform a system. My tiny attempts at holding conflict and ecstasy, my tiny, slow baby steps on my yellow brick road, they can change the universe and isn't that good to know?

### Witnessing the Undo

Belonging is a beautiful but terrible reality. In every relationship, there are times of light and bliss, when two people call forth that which is most beautiful in each other. They discover the joy of moving from loneliness to togetherness, of giving and receiving; each feels a certain fullness of life.

However, there are times not only of light and bliss but of darkness and depression. In each one of us, there is a shadow side, which, from time to time, manifests itself in our consciousness through anger, frustration, or depression, through the refusal to belong, because belonging appears to be something that crushes freedom. (Vanier, 1998, 40)

I am trying desperately to write and work but something always comes up. I am in my office trying to write, and more of my students come into my office. They are all sitting here in costume, hairy legs sticking out from kilts, ready to perform a spoof on Macbeth. They are telling me about their stories, their scenes, their writing. I am trying to write and I am not sure what to do, how to kick them out. They quietly stream in.

Dave is telling me about a play that he is writing, hot chocolate – about a boy with a dysfunctional family who always hangs out with his best friend's family and sometimes

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spends the night there. His best friend's family is his place of refuge. He is describing some of the technical cues and ideas that he has and he has this great idea that takes place while he and his best friend are mountain-climbing.

A few weeks before, I come to school, once again looking forward to my prep block, where I get to spend time to gather my thoughts, write, and organize my marks. I have many ideas as to what I want to see happen. There, waiting for me at my office door is David, and I immediately realize things are not okay. His face is white and he is wearing the mask of the wounded boy. I quietly groan realizing that my need for quiet, writing, and organization are not going to take place. I pull him into my office and I wait. I quietly watch as this big boy gives permission for the stream of water to leave his body. I hand him a Kleenex and quietly wait some more. Despite the fact that my head is still mentally making notes about all the things I have to do, I am aware that I have been honored to enter into David's grief, his own sacred space. There is a reverence in the room and I am aware of something familiar. I recognize that look on his face as similar to my own last month. Sheer fatigue and busyness have pushed their way into his world. He begins to tell me about his own family, his little sister not coming home, his long day at the school, his mother's anger. I am just listening, asking questions. What is your need? How can I help you? I know the thing he needs the most is an ear and a body, a nurturing presence. I think of my own mamma too, and I think, what would she do for this boy right now. "Can I get you something to eat, Dave?" I say, "What about a hot chocolate?" His face is puffy from crying and he nods his head. I go to the cafeteria and buy a hot chocolate and I notice the big fluffy cinnamon buns and I get one of those too. I bring it down and I invite him to hang in my office as I go and inform some of his teachers about

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what has happened. I present him with the food and he says thank you. He has pulled out one of the plays from the bookshelf and is beginning to read it. I am uncomfortable, not sure what to say, not sure how much space to give him, feeling guilty about my competing desire to do work and write. Later that day, near the end of improv practice, Dave looks down at the floor and in the middle of other words he says, "Thanks, Ms. G. ... for everything." And I know exactly what he is talking about and I ask him if he is okay, and I remind him to get lots of sleep and to take care of himself over the weekend.

I felt like I had done so little, so not enough. I have almost forgotten about this story until now, when, once again, I try to resist the movement of my students with the competing need for my writing and solitude.

Hot chocolate.

It takes me a few seconds to make the obvious connection. Dave's home, his best friend, is here inside the school. Here is where he spends most of his time. He does not in fact have a best friend. He hangs with a larger group of improv guys and he works hard in many after school endeavors. He is known as someone who enjoys being in control, having a sense of power and authority over others, and we have, at times, had to deal with this.

And still he returns. Just like me, Dave has found home here inside an often sterile and institutional setting, and it is here, inside home, where we have both been allowed to honor our undos, honor our moments of despair. And in so doing, we have equally invited our ecstasy to enter. "As we try to connect ourselves and our subjects with our students," writes Parker Palmer, "we make ourselves, as well as our subjects, vulnerable to indifference, judgment, ridicule" (1999, 17). Yet, it is always my experience of

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vulnerability and of smallness that has produced my greatest learning. Teaching is dangerous for the very fact that we have countless opportunities to enter into vulnerability, judgment, indifference and ridicule.

And this for me is the experience of the undo. The undo inevitably reminds me of my smallness. It reminds me that I have my limits, I make mistakes, I am breakable, I indeed will die. But when I get to experience the smallness, the vulnerability of my students – when I get the privilege of walking alongside and witnessing my own smallness through the eyes and the bodies of my students – I suddenly see, that it is okay to be human. It is okay to be weak. It is okay to experience the grief of the undo.

### **Breathing in the Knots**

You know that something totally new, truly unique, is happening within you. It is clear that something in you is dying and something is being born. You must remain attentive, calm, and obedient to your best intuitions. (Nouwen, 1996, 17)

When I am in crisis, the first thing that I notice is my inability to breathe. I have to find some conscious way to put the air back inside my lungs and the very unconscious act of taking a breath in and letting the air escape back out, this becomes a very deliberate, sometimes painful activity. My breathing somehow finds opposition and the opposition exists inside my tummy, my gut, the place that resides right there in between my two halves. I will double over, sometimes put my hands on my knees and act as if I am finishing a sprint – trying to find some breath, some place of stasis after some kind of exertion, or some kind of blow. My response to crisis is a kinesthetic one, and although I am not alone in all of this experiencing of crisis inside my body, I am acutely aware of it. It is as though my body dramatizes the trauma, alerts me ever so forcefully of my need to find some balance, some equilibrium and in a hurry.

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This is precisely what happens when in the middle of my harvest of words, my computer breaks down again. I am in my drama office with two drama students and I am having words with the mega-store that has just finished a repair and created a new problem that did not exist before the repair but has now argued with me that it is my problem. I am sweating and the two boys are watching me, giving me plenty of room. I hang up with the mega-store knuckle head, and I double over trying desperately to breathe, and I let myself be small in front of my students. The two boys flank me, each one taking one side of me as they walk me to my class. They talk about what terrible service that mega-store provides and how, "If that was my dad, Ms. G, he would have gone there and really let him have it! You're too nice." I am trying to breathe, sucking in air in longish type pauses. The two boys take my computer and back up all my documents, and burn it on a CD. My laptop then gets sent to the library groupies where it stays for the remainder of the afternoon. Even as I rehearse with the theatresports team, there is a crowd of students trying to fix the computer, one with cell phone in tow, getting instructions from a cousin, one with some laptop expertise and so on. I come by to check up on how things are going and their heads turn, "Is this *your* lap tap, Ms. G? Oh, ahhhh, awwww," as I see them sympathetically wince. They realize the umbilical cord status of the laptop and I am sheepish at my dependence, but with such loving hands working on it, I feel grateful too. It is easy to be weak in front of such comforting people. Mark has taken over the mission. He actually graduated last year, but has not yet pried himself from the library nest which the two librarians have managed to establish. He keeps telling me to smile, and relax and he lets me know it is okay. I do my best sincere smile impression. He ends up taking the computer home with him, still unable to fix it, and I am still

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without my umbilical chord and I will see Mark on Sunday since I am bringing him my start-up disc.

It is not the work inside the computer which has mostly been backed up on the CD, and it is not the money, that makes me panic. It is the thought of being away from the words, being away from the opportunity to write, to capture the harvest - for mostly my whole body aches to be inside my cocoon of words. Breathe, just breathe.

This has happened so many times, so often, that I am realizing my need to abandon my direction and just turn left. I have finally found my groove, found my momentary place of “ah” and I am just learning to love the expansion, love the surfing of it all, and, then, I think, yes, finally, this is it, this is the payoff for all of that toil and waiting, and, then, bam, here comes the left turn. For now, the left turn is about leaving the laptop, leaving the words. At home, I am restless, uncomfortable, not quite sure what to do with myself and I do nothing, the pots mounting in the kitchen, the plants dry, the laundry stacked, the knitting frozen. Still, I do nothing, but sit on the couch, cuddle underneath the blanket my mamma knit and watch TV. I am not unhappy.

## Fall Back

and it doesn't matter  
if I close my eyes or not  
for I cannot see  
I cannot see

but there I stand

public moment of                      fully seen  
insanity

How can I possibly succeed?

and I see the rows of hands before me  
and I turn and face away  
and I know the hands behind me  
and I cannot possibly think  
they can hold me  
and all of me

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moving

Falling

Back

and there is that instant when I cannot change my mind

I cannot change my mind

I must fall back

And my body makes the frozen straight line

My body makes the frozen straight line

And oh

I die

Oh

I die

I feel the

whoosh

the wind

waving goodbye

As I freeze inside my moment

I freeze

I fall

I die

and pum

I feel the thud

the thump

the sudden exhale of many hands receiving me

my eyes open

my bones melt into circles

and I cannot hold my nothing

but there I am

there I have

I fall back

Alive

**Knot Gerunds**

Trust that God will give you that all-fulfilling love and will give it in a human way. Before you die, God will offer you the deepest satisfaction you can desire. Just stop running and start trusting and receiving.  
(Nouwen, 1996, 12)

I am not running. I am staying very close to the bone. Sometimes, living in the gerund means living in the *not* gerund, living in the knot. It is that same place you experience when you are finding a knot some kind of improper protrusion jutting out

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from your knitting project. It is what gently reminds you of your need to turn and move backwards.

Not running, this strikes me as odd, but abandoning it for now, is the impulse my body, my heart desires. Even if it feels counter-productive, I obey this request. It doesn't make sense, but it *feels* right. Whenever I tell myself I *should* run, I immediately feel my lungs constrict, oppress my airways. I am not entirely sure why but there it is. But since I have so many stories, so many transformative running stories under my belt it is not difficult to obey my body's request, I don't have to wait and hear it as a command, a scream, a thunderous roar. I can easily acknowledge that I am in a season of not running. The knot gerund is not so bad.

### Touching Our Ecstasy

Nature doesn't see conflict as negative. Nature uses conflict as a primary motivator for change...Conflict isn't negative, it just is. (Crum, 1991, 31)

Resolving conflict is rarely about who is right. It is about acknowledgement and appreciation of differences. (Mindell, 1995, 49)

You cannot try and find ecstasy while denying your conflict. When you attempt to do this, you create shadows, facsimiles, false fronts attempting to give the appearance, the flavor, but not the soul inside of ecstasy. You do this anytime you try seeking ecstasy without equally seeking and finding the willingness to receive conflict. You seek to literally fill up holes in attempt after attempt to experience your wholes.

I think one of the most prevalent examples in our Western culture is our continued fascination for things, for consumption, to consume. We are literally bloating ourselves with things, getting fat and sluggish as we carry our emptiness farther and farther into our consciousness. Our cars, our clothes, our things, our doing, our trips, our stories, our



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quick fix experiences, our badges of achievement and commodified relationships – all, and we still hunger. We still push our mouths ever wider, forcing down as much emptiness as we possibly can, in the hopes of satiating our desire for ecstasy as we seek an ever-distant relationship with conflict.

We seek our soulless ecstasies in our endless attempts to satiate our hungers. Just like infants seeking nourishment, we open our mouths in the intuitive hope of receiving milk, and more importantly, we instinctually seek the physical, sensual contact of our mother. We don't just fill our hunger with food. We touch our hunger. We bring our tiny lips and we meet our mother's nipples. We touch. We come into contact. We receive communion. And communion is a decidedly sensual experience. It is no longer wine and it is no longer bread – it is us. We receive bread on our tongues, we receive the cup, put our lips on it and receive wine. Communion is ever inside us and it is never the same once we take it. It disappears, it disintegrates into our bodies where we can no longer ever prove its existence as a separate entity for Communion is now our personhood. We *become* Communion.

### To Receive Is Human

Conflict, when handled appropriately, can be a catalyst for increased awareness of ourselves and our connections to one another. It can be the crack in the hard shell of our persona that allows us to begin a journey to the center of our SELF. (Parry, 1991, 21)

And so, you drink from your mother's breasts. Your mouth opens ready to receive – this is your first instinct, before giving, before taking, before getting out there to save yourself. God helps those who help themselves. But firstly, and more importantly, God *receives* those who *receive* themselves. We have somehow minimized this act of receiving as something selfish and distasteful. If you do not have these initial experiences

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of receiving, if your initial stories of receiving have somehow brought you rejection, emptiness or maybe silence, then your initial stories of receiving will forever carry the stories of loss, abandonment and hopelessness.

Conflict brings you closer to yourself and your connections to one another. Again, as you move closer to embracing yourself, you will conversely move to accepting and connecting with other. The two are inseparable. You cannot find yourself and loathe your other. Receiving your old beliefs located inside your center means that you will also find an ease in receiving the old belief located in others. And as you move into your center, you will inevitably discover your First Story of Receiving and you will hopefully find your First Story of Communion. In the absence of Communion there will be that space that forever remains empty, compelling the body to ever keep its mouth open seeking something, anything to fill the communion space.

And so your bodies remember, the space in between our cells forever remind you of your First Story of Receiving. Without touch, without the Communion story beside your Receiving Story, what happens to you? What happens to your ability, your desire to place yourself in apparent harm's way?

In my journey, in my moving through the circle of the yellow brick road, what I have watched myself and those around me do over and over again, is what I think is an attempt to erase the pain. And I think to erase the pain is to pretend that the undo does not really exist.

### **Erasing Our Pain**

Evil is faceless because it can take over any one of our beings. No one is exempt from the possibility of evil. The reality of evil calls for alertness.  
(Fox, 1999, 9)

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You begin circulating untruths that protect you from experiencing those terrible stories. You push down your feminine, your mothers, your women, anything that closely resembles that moment you open your mouth and you receive the absence of Communion. You decide that all this passion stuff, this living out in your edges is all too painful so you huddle yourself and stay as close to your medium as you possibly can. You create a world where facts merit more power, more opportunity than feelings. And then you begin to root all of these terrible First Stories of Abandonment inside your theologies and laws, forever entrenching them in the largest untouchable myth of all – the direct separation of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, Black and White. All is separate - Body, Mind and Spirit. All is separate and something is better than something else, is better than something else.

And all of this you do with the utter conviction that God with a mighty capital “G” says so. You fool yourself into thinking that you did not create the Great Law, the Rule, but that it actually came from the Creator Himself. And then, after that, you freeze it. You resist the natural movement of every single organic entity. You say, this, this is Right for all ways for always and forever and forever. And then, when *this* moves, when it bursts its way out of its box as all of our *this*’ inevitably will, you try first to say, oh, *this* did not move, it only looked like it moved. Eliminating absolutes means you have to acknowledge the impermanence of living. Things move, rules move, life moves.

Where do I relax? Where do I get some time, to stop making decisions, stop thinking, to just stop?

And so, as much as I hate to admit it, my lines, my right and my wrongs, my recipes and formulas, they bring me comfort. As much as I rail against them I ache for

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them too. Embracing my conflict and ecstasy invites me to admit and honour the movement of lines and conversely to pay attention to the spaces in-between the line as much as the line itself.

Just like life, I have to reconcile with all of it, not pretend it is not there, not pretend one way is the only way, not pretend that lines of any kind will save the world. No. I have to live with the incredible discomfort of living in the middle, in between Judas and Jesus, knowing at any given time I behave more like one than the other.

And in the meantime, with all this wonderful messiness, I sit in the middle happily munching on my soft and crusty bread and downing it with some salient gulps of red, sweet wine. And that is just going to have to do for now.

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**From Where I Stand**

Honouring the body has not always been an easy thing for me to do. I have always battled with my body, trying to make it smaller, more invisible and visible at the same time. My body has never felt "good enough". When I first began teaching I remember feeling terrified of standing in front of a crowd. I would bumble my way, trying to hold on to some character, putting myself in some one else's body to try and alleviate the terror of feeling so inadequate in front of all those people who seemed ready to judge me. It was so public and it was scary.

Moving into conflict and ecstasy, I very quickly learned that I would have to re-examine my relationship with my body for I could not invite either without acknowledging the large participation of my physical self. My body carries both experiences and I needed to really look at what I believed and how this affected my body. And when I talk about body in this chapter, I am speaking about many global bodies. The church body, the earth body, the body of Christ – they are all mirrors of my own body.

**My Big Sacred Body**

But I believe that knowing, teaching, and learning are grounded in sacred soil and that renewing my vocation as a teacher required cultivating a sense of the sacred. (Palmer, 1999, 111)

Humans need passion and challenge in their lives and any workable definition of peace must honour that fact. Real peace is an active, alive process. It's a verb, not a noun. It encompasses the inner feeling that you are just where you're supposed to be, doing what you were destined to do, in harmony with those around you who are doing what they were meant to do and in harmony with your planet. (Parry, 1991, 21)

Whenever you try and pretend that your world does not move, that it is encased in forever, you run in opposition to creation, and by extension the Creator. If God created

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you in Her image and we are all circles of movement spanning vast in-between spaces, how do you suddenly justify the imposition of boundaries? How is it that a God who designs everything as a gerund, every thing within a thing within a thing as a moving entity – how is it that such a Being would then say to all this plethora of movement, “Hey, humans, I would like you to take care of all my creation by trying to put a cage around it?” How can that be? Yet, here you are and then, ironically you go back and hide behind the Creator’s coattails and have the audacity to respond, “This law is for you! We’re doing this to take care of you! Come protect me and be on my side!”

No, the staunch defenders of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, they have ironically turned God into their image – these gods looks an awful lot like the men who made them, little boys terrified of abandonment, hungry for the feel and the touch of their mother’s breasts.

Your body is sacred and all the desires inside it, the ones which seek ecstasy and the ones that seek conflict. It is all sacred.

**The Moving Body of God**

I will tell you truthfully that there is a Mahatma Gandhi and a Mother Teresa living in you and in me, waiting to be set free. And, there is also an Adolph Hitler and a Jim Jones in there, who are trying to get out and run things. If you can only own the Light in you and deny the Dark in you, then the Dark will come to rule you. Because you are unwilling to deal with your own Shadow, you will project it out onto others and call them ‘bad’ or ‘evil,’ the ‘enemy.’ The world is not in the dilemma it is in because of ‘the bad guys.’ It’s in this mess because of all these ‘good guys’ running around projecting their unowned darkness onto others and then feeling justified in ‘fixing’ them. Or, if that doesn’t work, killing them in the name of God or progress or democracy or even peace. (Parry, 1991, 54)

We create our gods to look like something safe, frozen and medium. Later we realize all this self-protection is actually suffocating us but we are falling asleep, drunk

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with complacency and mediocrity. Initially, absolutes may appear to protect the ruling power base, those who desperately feel they will have something to lose if the law or the rule or the commandment changes. Indeed they do but it is not what they think, for these codes and commandments not only protect their power, it freezes them too. They have their own oppression to lose.

Power comes from the Latin root, *poter*, to be able to. Frozen power, unaccountable, indisputable power limits everyone. It helps keep everyone in the middle, even the ruling class, the small few hold the big bag of power, trying to make sure all those Wrong, Evil people don't get theirs. That's a lot of weight to be holding and it takes a great deal of energy to constantly look around and kick all those people out of the way. There is a false assumption of scarcity – there is only so much to go around and I want my share, I deserve my share, for I am right and God says so. This principle of scarcity comes from a very early belief, one that maybe goes something like this: my mamma only has so much milk, so much love to go around, and I want it – for I do not want to be hungry. Even the small group of mostly men, holding that huge bag, they are suffering and they desperately hold on to their suffering, killing, destroying, both themselves and the world around them, ravaging everything around the bag, razing the ground, trapping nature, shooting, bombing all evildoers within a mile of their power bag.

Extreme begets extreme and the inequitable distribution of power pits those with too much with those with too little. Like two like magnets squaring off at each other, they repel each other. They are both so angry, they are both so Right, that they cannot recognize their own reflection in the gaze of their enemy. Power is the equivalent of 'to be able to.' What are all those poor people hopelessly protecting their power, what are

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they able to do? There is no energy left, there is no room left for anything else. It is inevitable, it will take time, but inevitably, they will crush under the weight of their own bag, too tired too heavy "to be able".

What are you so terribly afraid of? Could it be the look of our own impermanence, or what Milan Kundera(1984) describes as *the unbearable lightness of being*? In his novel with the same name, Kundera suggests that a great deal of our suffering comes from resisting our weightlessness, "We all reject out of hand the idea that the love of our life may be something light or weightless; we presume our love is what must be, that without it our life would no longer be the same...", (1984, 35). This is evident when we watch someone artificially attempt to eliminate suffering, protecting themselves from hearing or seeing or dealing with anyone or anything that brings suffering. In an attempt to avoid pain and suffering at all costs, they have inevitably limited their world, making a small box from which to "enjoy" their joy while fearfully scanning for any new *messages* that require ignoring. Eliminating suffering in fact invites suffering and stifles our opportunities for joy. Staying inside mediocrity, you don't have to look too carefully at your unbearable lightness of being. You get to fall asleep and simmer in your medium, all the while barely breathing, barely listening, barely living.

**Moving From the Middle**

Your pain, deep as it is, is connected with specific circumstances. You do not suffer in the abstract. You suffer because someone hurts you at a specific time and in a specific place. Your feelings of rejection, abandonment, and uselessness are rooted in the most concrete events. In this way all suffering is unique. (Nouwen, 1996, 103)

How do you begin to move? How do you begin to shake yourself out of your self-imposed cage? You first begin by inviting the ability to receive, to breathe, to relax into



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the experience, rather than take. You learn to receive so that you can invite not just the milk but the breast, the nipple, the touch back into your theologies, rules and laws. I often hear an aching mantra that begins something like this: "What's wrong with children these days? They always take and expect more. They never feel like they have enough." And I often wonder who we are addressing this to, the children in our homes and schools or the children in our own hearts.

Conflict makes you look at your undos in such a way as to uproot the very stories of your own being. With such vulnerability, with such stories of pain, is it any wonder that you attempt to hide your moments of receiving? Is it any wonder that you then work forever hard at working, taking, becoming independent entities so as to be spared the horror of relying on someone?

But it is a gift and without a deep understanding and embracing of receiving you cannot understand and appreciate the gifts of both giving and taking.

**Choosing the Undo**

Conflict (when it appears) will not "go away." Instead it will, when denied, go underground. It will burrow deep into your body and psyche. It's like pretending that a wound really isn't infected when it is and covering it with a tight bandage so you can't see it. It then spreads internally, infecting the entire organism, becoming much more difficult to heal. (Parry, 1991, 11)

So moving the undo, seeking to embrace your conflict means you go back and learn the act of receiving. This is a starting over for it is how you begin in your being. You turn and move *backwards*. You look for the Mistake which sometimes is not so obvious.

Walking on your journey you will inevitably find your undo. You will know you are there because your body will tell you. Your hands will curl inwards, your head will

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move in towards your belly, and you will feel as though your body seeks to return itself back into its mother's womb. You will feel angry, hurt, depressed, lonely, or maybe you will feel nothing at all. You may have to make a few more circles before you are ready to do anything about it for you may not be ready to receive it. Maybe you need to move inside the circle finding new tools or new friends that will somehow make the undo more palatable. Maybe you will get married and have children at least one of which will magnify your undo and mirror it back to you in ways more painful than you ever thought possible. And here you run the danger of pummeling, rejecting the innocent Messenger. Maybe you need to run around the circle until you are too exhausted, too bored of the scenery, too fatigued to do anything but lie still. It takes some kind of courage to face and recognize the undo for you will feel as if you are dying. And indeed this is exactly what is happening for an undo is an old belief that is ready to die. It no longer fits. It served you well once but it is now preventing you to seek to expand from your middle. So then, the undo begins.

The undo is not for the weak and cowardly, although you will feel this way as you fall, stumble and look anything but graceful. It is another paradox that you must experience many, many stories of the coward and weak before embracing and receiving courage. Your cowardly lion walked much of the yellow brick road before acknowledging his courage. Parry speaks of this in the Buddhist warrior tradition which defines the warrior as "one who has the courage to know oneself":

..they are talking about knowing all of oneself, not just the nice parts, the bright side, but the darkness in oneself as well. They knew that the only real battles you as a Warrior must face are the inner ones, where you go inside and face your inner dragons. The secret is that the Warrior does not slay the dragons; the Warrior transforms their energy into positive power and gives it back to the world in this transformed state. (1991, 4)

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So, facing conflict, facing your undos is about moving inwards. The battle is inside, not outside. It is with this courage that you begin tearing away at the good stitches being vigilant not to drop some more, and you tear away until you get to the source conflict, the Story of Origin, the old belief that has begged you for its exorcism. There it is, lodged somewhere in your body; maybe in your solar plexus, or there in your lower back, your prostate, your calf, your right trapezius shoulder muscle, somewhere in the midst of all that in-between space. Frozen someplace in your body, it lies like a wounded animal, waiting to be set free. And so you say good bye. You say goodbye to an old friend who by this time you probably cannot stand, hate even, but you have to resist the urge to rage against your half dead animal – you have to balance the rant with gratitude for if you do not see both the blessing and the burden of your old belief, you run the risk of keeping it locked more insidiously inside your body. You have to take it out with a kind of reverence, maybe spend some time with it there and honour both its evil and its goodness. You must practice balance at its very root.

### Root Exhaustion

...understanding, as well as truth, comes not only from the intellect but also from the body. When we begin to listen to our bodies, we begin to listen to reality through our own experiences; we begin to trust intuition, our hearts. The truth is also in the “earth” of our own bodies. So it is a question of moving from theories we have learned to listening to the reality that is in and around us. Truth flows from the earth. (Vanier, 1998, 26)

Meeting the undo is exhausting. Remember that you are eliminating many healthy stitches to get to the Mistake and you must remember to nurse your body. Drink a lot of water, sleep more, give yourself permission to do less. Receive as much communion as you dare. Honour your body as it grapples in its own grief for although the old belief may

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be toxic it is nevertheless a familiar friend, something that has lived inside the body cavity for a very long time. Moreover, that now unhealthy old belief at one time provided protection – it saved some part of you; otherwise, it wouldn't be lodged in you.

Otherwise, the old belief would have moved past you. Once you arrive at the Mistake you will see it for what it really is – a bit of crossed yarn. Undoing the Mistake is really the easiest part of the undo. Deciding to take the journey in the first place, deciding to blindly plunge backwards and then taking time to purge yourself past all the healthy loops, this is the most difficult task. So there you are facing your Mistake. Look squarely in the eye of your knot. It may look like one of these:

- You can trust no one.
- If I show my anger, I will be abandoned.
- If I obey the rules, if I follow the rules I will be rewarded.
- If I am Right, I am better than everyone who is Wrong.
- If you disagree with me, you don't love me.
- If I lose you, I will die.
- If I remain invisible, I won't be hurt.
- If I am silent, I will live.
- If I disagree with you, I am a sinner.
- I am unlovable.

Perhaps you recognize one of these beliefs as your own; perhaps you may feel protective, maybe even defensive about the need to eliminate your belief. Maybe you see this belief as your truth. Perhaps you write your truth with a capital "T", an immutable unchangeable Truth. Perhaps and it doesn't really matter for it is not up to me to invite

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you to discard your old beliefs. Your body will do that for you. It will remind you in the headache that won't go away, or in the recurring depression. It will tell you in your dreams where you wake up with your heart beating; it will tell you in the explosion of anger that meets you when a driver inadvertently skips your turn at the four way stop. I am not your God. Your body will tell you.

### Sorry Holes

I am talking to the counselor about some of my students and she asks me about me and I truthfully tell her what is happening and the act of telling opens this wound a little deeper. I tell her about what I am doing and what I am feeling and she listens carefully taking it all in without taking it inside so it bounces carefully back to me where I see all of my loops unravel, the twisted yarn sitting in a pile leaving behind that ever growing hole. It is the hole, it is the growing emptiness which brings such sorrow. Holes have no names, space has no position, it just is. Even though I have no desire to fill the hole, I am sorry it is there.

How do we name our sorry holes?

You are so afraid of dying alone. Your deeply hidden memories of a fearful birth make you suspect that your death will be equally fearful. You want to be sure that you won't cling to your present existence but will have the inner freedom to let go and trust that something new will be given to you. (Nouwen, 1996, 107)

My mamma's mom, my nonna whose name I bear – I have always felt some kind of affinity for her as we share the same name. My memories of her are around her hands. She had very big gnarly hands that were full of stories, full of knots and knobs and marks. They were anything but smooth. They held the stories of many hours of work, of hard labour. Her hands worked many hours in barns, milking cows, in the garden, in the farm,

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in the kitchen. Her hands, so thick and full of stories somehow managed to maneuver tiny threads, knitting needles, yarns and stitches. Her big hands managed delicate spaces.

Today I am wearing the knitted woolen socks that she had made just for me. They are small, thick and colorful and they fit my feet just so. There is rain and wet outside and the woolen socks bring me lots of comfort. My nonna, she is long gone, moved into fragments of in-between space, swirling orbits of paradise lost and found, but I am encased, my feet are surrounded by her stories. All those tiny, experienced stitches – I am in awe of her handiwork. It is no easy task to make a well-fitted woolen sock and mine are beautiful. Her big, clunky hands made beautiful tiny stitches. I have never knit a woolen sock. I have yet the desire to manage all those curves, all those angles all those rounds into two identical images. It still feels close to impossible.

My nonna taught me how to repair the holes in socks. She showed me how to carefully stitch around the hole, weaving line after line through the inside and then weaving line after line back into the stitches. Her sock repairs were works of art. My facsimiles bear no resemblance to her expert repairs for I do not put such heart in to my holes. Nevertheless, I remember my nonna every time I sew my sock holes. The work of her hands is what I admire most about her.

In her hands there are many stories; ones which bear both the shadow and light of a life lived sandwiched between world wars, poverty, struggle and living in a small one culture village. And too, there was her depression, her cancer, her slow, aching disintegration into nothing, which compressed all her unrefracted mirror bits into tiny black pieces of guilt, disappointment, fear and anger which eventually weaved their holes inside her body, painstakingly taking away all those memories where hope resided. She

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died in the most protracted and painful of ways. Her story did not end peacefully and it did not end easily. She did not live and maneuver the turns and corners in her life as well as those in the woolen socks I wear. The edges of life terrified her. I remember how we would gently tease her as she sat in the back of a car, reciting the rosary in a concentrated whisper, still not complicit to the idea of a safe car drive. (And she perhaps had good reason, what with the manic driving and the narrow village roads that define all of Italy). Somehow, the same hands that carried the weighted down pitchforks, meticulously screened the grass and weeds from the delicious baby radicchio, these same hands could not devise a way to make the same shifts inside her own way of living.

For my nonna, embracing life's undos was not something that she had opportunities to consider. How is it that those hands of hers, that embraced so many gerunds, how was it, that those hands could not translate the same sacred reverence for the undos, the turns, the circles that her stitches managed with such adeptness? Do not our bodies mold our minds, mold our souls? What is it that helps us to embrace all our undos? How do we turn and embrace all our holes made from moving inside our sacred circles?

**Death**

There is a picture on the news of a man who has heard of the death of some relatives from the AA flight 587. He lifts his hands high, he wails, he writhes, he moves and he aches loudly, oh, so loudly. His grief is organic. It is a whole body, a hole body experience.

This is how grief should be experienced, I think, as a terrible and mighty whole body heave with as much sound as the body needs to pry it loose.

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**Embracing Grief**

But maybe the death you fear is not simply the death at the end of your present life. Maybe the death at the end of your life won't be so fearful if you can die well now. (Nouwen, 1996, 107)

Removing a bit of crossed yarn, you might notice how much space that it has taken up in your knitting project, in your world, in your body. Such a small knot has catapulted you into something else completely. The old belief, *I am unlovable*, for example, may mean that you might have to in fact see in your world, how the people around you, actually believed this to be true or helped to perpetuate this belief. Your school, your church, your parents and families, they are in the midst of protecting and defending their beliefs too. Maybe you have to face the fact that people whom you loved and trusted actually supported your oppression. Maybe you have to look at how your culture, your rules, your codes, your commandments, actually supported your own injustices. This is not a time to blame and shame your oppressors – you might need to get angry, you might need to name the anger, name the oppression, label the disrespect yes, but you need to continue to attend to yourself. You need to be like those fearless warriors who find the courage to know themselves. Know thyself. An unexamined life is not worth living.

Saying goodbye to your old beliefs, you will sometimes feel an enormous grief. For example, to live with the old belief *I am unlovable* brings such intense anguish. How could it not? You might have questions like, "How could I have allowed myself to believe such a thing?" "Why did I believe that I was unlovable for so long?" "Who could ever find a child, and I was just a child, unlovable?" There are many questions that your grief may ask and it is important that you allow our grief to ask them. And you will be



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helpless to find answers for many of these questions and that's okay too. It is just important that you find the courage to hold your little children and let them *receive* all that nurturing that they have been aching to receive. The way to heal a whiney heart (and the dismantling of old beliefs may often feel as if they are whiney helpless children, as they most often are) is to provide the child with ample experiences of receiving. "Let the children come to me," Jesus implored his disciples, and I think Jesus as God, Spirit, Sacred, constantly invites all the inner children holding on to old survivalist beliefs to do the same. Jesus modeled this very act of caring, giving children the experiences of receiving. You have to be Jesus to your little children, you have to let them come to you, you have to play with them, thank them, create safesacred spaces for them, let them know that you are listening and that you appreciate their presence. They are important. They and their pain and their grief and their presence – they are all sacred. That hole left by the bit of crossed yarn is important. It is an in-between space and it is meant for you to watch and listen carefully. Inside the hole, after a little bit of sitting, after having your eyes adjust to the musty darkness, out will come the little girl that is you, holding the tattered belief and she needs you now to mother her. She needs cuddles and touch and all the assurance that you can possibly give her. You need to stay with your little girl for every old belief is held by the child within us that needed it most. It is in fact this little girl who has been creating such damage in your body. She is the one who has been wrestling with you and your outerworld for she was terrified to let go of her belief. Afterall, it kept her living. You will have to convince her to give up the belief.

And this is the hard part. You cannot take it from her. You cannot demand that she give you the stinky smelly rotting belief or else. You have to hold her, touch her,

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allow her all the experience of receiving she needs before she is ready to give it to you. You cannot take an old belief. You have to wait. You have to wait until your whiney child is ready to have you receive it from her. You have to wait inside the hole you don't really like much in the first place and that has really already caused you so much grief. You have to make peace with the hole, and sit there on the little girl's turf, for this is where she lives and you have to hold her, love her, gently mother her and father her, until she feels safe enough, sacred enough, to give you the old belief herself.

But how can I mamma her, how can I pappa this little girl, you might think to yourself? I don't have the skills, I don't have what it takes to parent this frantic being that sits inside me. How can I sit inside this hole when I myself have yet to experience this nurturing that you are asking me to give to this being? I am not ready to be this kind of parent to such a needy, unpleasant, desperate thing. This will take all the skill all the expertise you have in breathing, receiving and listening, for it is all of this that you will need in order to sit inside the hole. The fact that the little girl has dared to venture from her black hole, there inside the undo, means that you are ready too. Her presence announces your state of readiness, so, regardless of how you feel, it is time for you to parent her. The fact that you feel lost in the undo, this is a good sign. If everything looked familiar and tame, you would not be in the presence of the undo. The most painful thing that we will ever do is sit in the presence of your undos, inside your holes with your little girls and boys and wait and breathe and listen and receive.

Sometimes this takes a moment and sometimes this takes what seems like forever. But when it has happened you will know because again, your body will tell you. And the beautiful thing about this moment is that when the little girl finally feels safe enough to

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give you the old belief, she will already transform into something so much stronger and solid. She will turn into the large weighted base that will grow down, move into the center of your being, right there in your sacrum, there in your sacred, she will grow roots that will keep you firmly balanced to the earth. She will magically help root you, help you find balance as you discard the old belief and experience all that extra weightlessness. Your little girl will root you, remind you of your relationship with Earth. This is the transformation that takes place as you listen, receive, and embrace your undos, your conflicts and your ecstasies.

And then you knit forward as if you are repeating the same pattern from where you left off, but you have not for you are no longer where you thought you might be. You have moved already. You are that much farther away from mediocrity. You are moving and as much as this moving is a confirmation of the successful undo, it is nevertheless terrifying. Now you are truly blind for nothing is familiar and you have eliminated some of the shackles and chains that have held you frozen. You are lighter and you must now contend with *the unbearable lightness of being*.

**The Danger of Ecstasy**

As you liberate yourself from domination by mainstream values, your new behaviour may bring you into conflict with your family and other groups you have felt a part of. (Mindell, 1995, 38)

Finally, if we recovered a sense of the sacred, we would recover our capacity for wonder and surprise, an absolutely essential quality in education. I know what happens when we get surprised in an academic context. We reach for the nearest weapon and try to kill the surprise as quickly as we can, because we are scared to death. (Palmer, 2002, <http://csf.colorado.edu/sine/transcripts/palmer.html>)

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All these undos, all this willingness to step out and touch ecstasy and touch conflict, this is very dangerous work for we do not hold our beliefs alone. We in fact carry them in large even vast communities. Remember, our families hold unbalanced, survivalist beliefs as do our communities, our cultures, and religions and our schools. Although the work of meeting our ecstasies and conflicts is a very personal one, our entire family, community and cultural systems change whenever we complete our undos, and they may not be ready to receive your new weightlessness. They may in fact feel terrified by it. Even though you may outwardly think that nothing about you has changed, that you still go to work at the same time, wear the same clothes, make the same kind of meals and so on. Something has changed about you. Energetically, without any conscious awareness, the people around you know that something has shifted. They can sense your lightness, they can sense your new way of being. And they may not like it one single bit. You may suddenly lose friends that have been faithful companions and steady supporters. You may suddenly find that your very presence, your words, your thinking, even your new found laughter and joy, suddenly bring tremendous anger, or anxiety, or grief to the people around you. They are mostly frightened and they will certainly try to stop you.

Whenever you embrace your undos, whenever you have sat in the holes of your undos, whenever you have received the unbalanced survivalist belief from your little girl, you have turned an irreversible corner. Some of the people around you will be ready to receive your new weightlessness but some of the people around you will not. When you turn that corner, when you move your orbit even slightly farther out from your mediocrity, you can count on losing some people around you. You can expect some people around you to try to move you, push you very hard, back into the orbit that is

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closer to medium. There is a lot at stake in having you “go back to the way you were” but you cannot do that. They will try anyways and if the cost is too great, if they are entrenched inside their power bags as tiny as those power bags might be, if they are not willing to abandon some of it and meet you in your weightlessness, they will abandon you. Either with violence or indifference, you will be abandoned. You will be considered “lost” or “weak,” someone who has succumbed to the “weakness of the flesh.” Of course, this is partly true, for you have succumbed to the flesh, you have finally listened and received and breathed, and in all this doing, you have transformed yourself – you have succumbed to the power of the flesh and you are very dangerous indeed, for you are rooted in earth and weightless at the same time. You are learning to fly while rooted.

**Embracing Abandonment**

You have been wounded in many ways. The more you open yourself to being healed, the more you will discover how deep your wounds are. You will be tempted to become discouraged, because under every wound you uncover you will find others. Your search for true healing will be a suffering search. (Nouwen, 1996, 109)

Another word about our old beliefs – the dismantling of one will paradoxically teach you both its truth and its untruth. You may suddenly, realize, experience, know through the core of your body that you may in fact not be unlovable, and you may say, “Hey, I *am so* loveable! I am loveable just as I am, with all my opinions, failures and achievements, with all my conflicts and ecstasies, I am loveable!” Ah, you rejoice and feel the initial freedom that is your body unshackled from a burden that you were not meant ever to carry. *I am unlovable* is a myth! It is a lie! And this is a fact – it is a lie.

But, you will also, at some point, see the truth inside this old belief for indeed you will come face to face with the fact that yes, you are also unlovable. This truth will

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become evident when you begin to stretch into your orbit, when you dismantle the all myth side of one belief, you will also come into contact with the truth – you will come face to face with some of your greatest fears and they will turn out to be true. You will see the pieces about you that are unlovable, there will be many people, especially the ones you are most afraid of, who will gladly remind you of your unlovableness. You are *so* unlovable, they will say most often not with words but with movement, feeling and exclusion. Moving into the center of your old belief, you will learn that there are those around you who will find you unlovable. In fact, this response will most often be their own terror being mirrored back to them by your newfound lightness, and so, they will feel compelled to oppress you, reject you, abandon you. Your worst fears will come true. Aha, you will say, my father finds me unlovable, or my wife finds me undesirable, or my boss believes I have no value. Your worst fears will be realized. You will discover your incompetence, your unlovableness, your undesirability. Remember, there is a Mother Teresa and there is a Hitler that exists in each of us and you must embrace both or you run the risk of projecting all of your dark side, your shadow self on the world and the people around you. And as Parry reminds us, “The world is not in the dilemma it is in because of ‘the bad guys.’ It’s in this mess because of all these ‘good guys’ running around projecting their unowned darkness onto others and then feeling justified in ‘fixing’ them. Or, if that doesn’t work, killing them in the name of God or progress or democracy or even peace” (1991, 154). If you do not want to count yourself as one of those involved in ‘fixing’ or ‘killing’ the earth and all of its inhabitants, then you need to embrace the in-between space that exists there in the middle of your old beliefs. This means that you cannot blame your problems on the outside: “If only my husband would

## Six: Sacred Sacrum

do more around the house,” “If only my children would obey me and listen to me,” If only my friends would appreciate me more,” or “If only everyone would obey the Ten Commandments.” This journey to embracing both ecstasy and conflict is not about fixing everyone else. You cannot try to nail down your “problems” on perpendicular beams that you then nail to the ground. Trying to stake posts on others around you does not serve you. Dealing with your internal moving space will. And this journey moves you inward – physician heal thyself – you cannot go around organizing your world and the people inside it. You need to fix yourself. And once you get there, you will sheepishly see that the problems really are your own in the first place.

You will be abandoned. It will all happen, but it will not be anywhere as painful as you thought it might be, because you will be seeing it from closer to the center. Hopefully, when this awareness is realized you will be close enough to your center, closer to your sacrum, so that you will recognize it for what it is, a piece of the ecstasy or a piece of the conflict that exists, that must exist in order for you to live. If, for some reason, you see this inside your place of Absolute, this will be too terrifying too close for you to deal with. And so you will block it out, run away, drink a lot, eat a lot, shop a lot, or something else a lot and you will drown it out. You will only be able to acknowledge the presence of the old belief if you sit closer to the sacrum.

Moving into your center, finding balance, you will have to confront both sides – both conflict and ecstasy will meet you, scream at you, demand of you your full attention. Your practice at moving into the center will come in the presence of your undos. Sometimes, you will be able to pierce your undos with a shortcut, and in these times, the undo will be quick and rather painless. Sometimes you will be faced with an undo that

### Six: Sacred Sacrams

requires so much more. You may be required to enter the knot with a kind of depth, a kind of darkness that is anything but easy. You may be invited into the edges of conflict and ecstasy through crisis.

#### **Finishing**

But do not be afraid. The simple fact that you are more aware of your wounds shows that you have sufficient strength to face them. (Nouwen, 1996, 109)

Your ability to stay awake in the presence of ecstasy directly connects to your ability to stay awake in the presence of conflict. You cannot invite one without including the other, and the deeper the experience of conflict, the deeper your experience of ecstasy gets to be – the deeper your experience of ecstasy, the deeper your experience of conflict. It serves no one to minimize either experience, but there is good reason for our world to be drowning in a sea of mediocrity. Venturing outward, learning what it means to be rooted in weightlessness, this means you must go and attack your undos. You are going to get wet and you are going to get messy, for there is nothing neat and tidy about moving in the undo.



## Seven: Crisis

**Facing Terror**

I am talking to a friend about my business. What am I so afraid of – Failure? Falling on your face? No, the truth is that I am terrified of success, terrified of being public, terrified of being right, terrified of being big. And I have been holding on to the branch in the water jutting out from the trunk of a mighty oak and I have been holding firmly, with all of my might on this branch, too afraid to let it go. And the water, the current has been getting stronger, more fierce, more urgent. And I have been holding ever tighter to the branch and the branch is finally broken and I am glad to be holding on in the flowing water in the current and tide, to my remnant of branch as I push inside the water and finally let go to the water. But I am holding the branch. The branch helps me to give in to receive the movement of water without fear. The branch is my Bread.

So really, where is my terror?

Sometimes the work of the undo requires our complete and undivided attention. Sometimes the undo takes us to a transformation, an edge, which means everything else must be sacrificed. Sometimes our undos ask us to give up even our branches and in those moments, we enter into crisis.

**Crisis**

When suddenly you seem to lose all you thought you had gained, do not despair. Your healing is not a straight line. You must expect setbacks and regressions. Don't say to yourself, "All is lost. I have to start all over again." This is not true. What you have gained, you have gained.  
(Nouwen, 1996, 38)

So, there you are. You have decided to enter the undo, you have worked inside you knots, you have sat inside your dark holes and mothered and fathered your little children. You have grudgingly worked at receiving; You have invited and listened to

## Seven: Crisis

your emotions, your personal messengers. You have learned to acknowledge the sacred inside your bodies and your world. You are beginning to feel that perhaps, all of this surfing, and navigating your way around the in-between space is not so bad. Learning to juggle weightlessness and rootedness, why, this might even be enjoyable.

And inevitably, somewhere before we get to finish the sentence, you drop one of the balls and you enter into crisis. Crisis comes, not as some punishment from God or as some signal of your failings, your incompetence or your weakness. Nor does crisis signal the irrevocable proof that you live in a fallen world. Eve got Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit from the nasty Tree of Knowledge so now that you desire to know too much, to be Godlike, you must suffer. Crisis is not a result of being booted out of Paradise for crisis existed in paradise too. If you eat you find crisis for your daily bread requires that you kill something – nourishment and life coming in direct conflict. Unless paradise required no food, conflict and in turn crisis thrived.

Crisis arrives because you are alive. Crisis is the Mother of all Undos. Crisis comes because death comes because life comes. You cannot have one without the other and the more you resist your deaths, the greater your surprise and terror at the arrival of your crisis. No matter your relationship with death, no matter your religion or what kind of lives you lead or how many times you go to mass or volunteer at the AIDS hospice, you will meet your crisis. Crisis arrives usually unannounced, unwelcome and completely unexpected. It is there in the announcement of your cancer or your chronic illness. It is there in the death of your youngest child in a car accident, the realization that your wife is having an affair with your friend, the termination of your job or in the celebration of your fortieth birthday. Maybe you have hit and/or hurt someone more powerless than you or

## Seven: Crisis

maybe you have received a beating yourself. Or maybe it announces itself in your unpaid electric bills, your low exam scores or your high exam scores, in your profound aloneness, in the gang beating/murder of a girl or in the crumbling of the Twin Towers. Or maybe you just wake up one day and think that your life has been a complete waste of time.

Henri Nouwen chronicled the journey inside one of his crisis in, "The Inner Voice of Love". He describes this journey as a time when; "I had come face to face with my own nothingness. It was as if all that had given my life meaning was pulled away and I could see nothing in front of me but a bottomless abyss" (1996, xiii). Inside every journey of saint and sinner, expect to meet your "bottomless abyss" for inevitably it will arrive, and often it will arrive when you are feeling some skill in balancing your body on the surfboard, gliding through in-between space. Maybe, you might have even learned the skill of falling/diving in the water gracefully/grace filled.

In the seemingly big and the impossibly small, crisis will come. If you are alive, even while drowning in your mediocrity, barely breathing, you will eventually experience crisis. It is your birthright. And even if you follow "the formula" or "the recipe" whatever formula or recipe you reside in, crisis will meet you, remind you of your impermanence, your non-deity status.

**Stumble**

sitting

inside

profound

darkness

while

sitting

still

being

quiet

## Seven: Crisis

and  
 speaking out  
 and  
 feeling the  
 maddening  
 restlessness  
 floating  
 fighting  
 fading  
 into what  
 melting  
 into what  
 drowning  
 into what?

**Crying Crisis**

Sometimes little things build up and make you lose ground for a moment. Fatigue, a seemingly cold remark, someone's inability to hear you, someone's innocent forgetfulness, which feels like rejection – when all these come together, they can make you feel as if you are right back where you started. (Nouwen, 1996, 38)

I think that I have managed to avert my crisis. I have felt a sense of smug satisfaction at my ability to listen more carefully and I have quietly obeyed the invitation to enter into less, to be in my own imposed state of high alert.

But my good Friday arrives anyways. It is a Tuesday and I am on a library field trip. From the beginning, there are problems, as I realize that I have forgotten to inform the office of my trip and a number of parents call. The principal deals with me with a great deal of professionalism and compassion and the first block of students that I take have no problem dealing with my glitches. Still, by the afternoon, several students have created havoc and I have managed to have several conversations with the security who tsk tsk me in such a way as to make me feel as though I have committed some criminal offence. In the midst of all of this, my computer once again crashes and by lunch-time I am shell shocked. I phone Zandra for support and I am crying. I decide to call my

## Seven: Crisis

principal. I am at a loss as to what to do, and I openly wonder if I should return to the school with my batch of grade eights. What should I do? Follow your gut the administrator says and this sudden command to go with my body comforts me profoundly, grounds me, reminds me that I hold with me my ruby red slippers, which for now are my sassy red boots. In the meantime, she offers the grade eight counselor who will come for extra supervision and support. This sounds okay, so I decide to wait for the grade eights outside the library prepared to read them the riot act, prepared to let them know what has happened in the morning and prepared to give them the choice to stay or go. I am completely unbalanced and I feel as though I continue to crash from my weightlessness which has once again appeared as a thin, precarious high wire. My red boots continue to feel the thud of the ensuing floor. I am outside of the library waiting for my crew of students and a former student walks by and we begin to talk. He is a grown man now, one of my first students from my first year at my school. I talk to him and ask him about his life and his living, and when he asks me about mine, I make no attempt to hide my chaos. He is decidedly compassionate. In the midst of all our talking I tell him about my computer and he offers to take a look at it. He is currently working as a computer technician and he is on his lunch break. He offers to help. After a little protest, but just a little, for by this time, I am already exhausted, I hand it to him. I am happy to shed the weighted beams to the care of a former student. He will deliver it back to me at the school in two days he promises and I say thank you. I meet the eights who promise to behave and we enter the library under the direct sneer of the security guards. The grade eight counselor arrives and I begin to cry as I tell him the story of the morning and he

## Seven: Crisis

listens with incredible care. What are you going to do to take care of yourself? I am not quite sure, except that by now, some time away from teaching feels all but inevitable.

The day continues with more antics from my students and another visit with the security guards who by now fail to acknowledge my presence and turn their backs on me and my exhausted apology. I have a coffee date with Christina and no way of reaching her to cancel as my phone battery is now extinguished so I meet her where I once again cry out my story. She says that she is glad to see me feeling and glad to hear that I am taking some time off. She celebrates my courage with me. Zandra calls me in the evening and once again I cry and she offers her support, her encouragement and, "if there's anything I can do for you, I'm happy to do it." I go back to the school in the morning and I meet with my administrator and I once again cry and she once again provides enormous compassion, professionalism and care. I spend the next two days preparing my students and my self for my absence from the classroom. Everything I do takes more time and although I feel as though I am doing everything fairly normally, I feel as though everything is taking an infinitely long and backwards time. My former student arrives with my computer, repaired, tested and finished. I tell a few more people of my time away. Everyone responds the same way: good idea, do what you need to do, let me know if there is something that I can do to help you. I am foggily overwhelmed and continue to mutter thank you. I have planned to be away for six teaching days but it still feels like an enormous block of time and yet, not enough.

I go home and I think about all the things that I need to do, to regroup and gather myself. I plan to go on my core diet plan. I plan to work out a little bit. I plan to write a lot. I plan and I feel nothing. I go home and I go to sleep at eight in the evening, and

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essentially I continue to sleep my way through the next few days, helpless to do much else.

**Unaware**  
 Sitting in pain  
 feeling the  
 cesarean split  
 me  
 open

there is too much of anything  
 too much of nothing.

**Sleeping With Bread**

During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, "Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow." (Linn, Linn & Linn, 1994, 1)

In one way or another, your crisis is a spiritual calling. Crisis requires you to stop, look and listen. You cannot move in a 'business as usual' way. In fact, this is what defines crisis. If you were to continue on as if nothing changed, it would not be crisis. Even if you act as if you are not in crisis, even if your response is to deny, you are still behaving differently, for whether you listen to the call of crisis consciously or unconsciously, your body will respond. Your body will listen to the call of crisis.

And your crisis is a spiritual calling. Spirit comes from the Latin *spire* to breathe. Holy Spirit is holy breath. Breath is invisible, it is the movement of air. *Moving air!* Spirit is moving air, another gerund. A spiritual calling is nothing more than an invitation

## Seven: Crisis

to move air, breathe, to participate in that which you already do naturally. This may feel impossibly simple but it is certainly not easy. Inside every crisis there is an abundance of grace and you are paradoxically required to both rest and respond. In your crisis, you come face to face with your orphan nature. You are lost, unattached even inside your own body and although you hunger so terribly for rest, you cannot find it. You have your bed, your warm home, your blankets (or maybe not) but you cannot find rest. You have your food (or maybe not) and you remain deeply hungry. When you experience your crisis, you are invited to discover your Bread, what gives you nourishment, what lets you rest. You are invited to sleep with Bread. Just as the World War II orphans needed to literally sleep with bread in order to acquiesce to rest, to find peace, you need to find ways from which to receive what has always been yours. Crisis is an invitation to sleep with Bread.

And your body will lead you through crisis. Just as Dorothy had everything she needed in order to receive Home, everything that you require to move through your crisis exists inside you. Sheila Linn describes this as a very kinesthetic, "gut" instinct, not unlike my administrator's request to "go with my gut" in my difficult moment at the library; "When I (Sheila) am in touch with the special purpose of my life and carrying out my sealed orders, I have a profound feeling of consolation or rightness and my whole body relaxes. I believe this sense of rightness expresses itself physiologically because the purpose of our life is built into the very cells of our body" (1994, 21).

**Calling**

Mightier than the crash  
of a thunderstorm,  
Mightier than the roar of the sea,  
is God's voice speaking  
in the depth of a listening heart.  
Psalm 93



## Seven: Crisis

How do you know what your impulse, what your natural direction is? How do you know what your lifework is? How do you move in the direction of your passion? How do you know if your movement is a motion towards ecstasy as opposed to a motion towards conflict? These are questions that will ache themselves forward as you move into your journeys, as you move into ecstasy and conflict.

My sense of calling has always been important to me. I have very early wanted to be assured that I was following the right path of God. As a child and a young adult, I was convinced that what I wanted in my life and what God wanted in my life were always two directionally opposed forces to each other. What I wanted, what I desired in my life had to be the opposite of what God desired in my life. Every impulse was a fight and this required an enormous energy in the task of living.

How do you know if your movement is a motion towards ecstasy as opposed to a motion towards conflict? You follow your gut, you follow your moving breath, you follow that place of natural inclination and you will notice that your body, rather than tightening and churning, relax. "Ohhhhh," your cells will say, "this is much more like it." Even if your choices look foolish, painful, even ludicrous to the outside world, your bodies in fact, will rejoice in the moving breath. "Finally," your cells will say, "you are taking us home".

And here you arrive full circle, for in your crisis, in your greatest awareness of impermanence, orphanhood and weakness, in this place of utter disillusionment and "bottomless abyss," you will find your hooks, you will find your branches. You will come to discover what it is that brings you rest. In your crisis, you will find your Bread and you will bring your bread to bed and you will finally rest. You will finally experience

## Seven: Crisis

in the very cells of your body the statement, "Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow."

Coming face to face with your nothingness, you truly learn about your somethingness.

You discover, what the Linn's call your *divine sealed orders*:

...it is as if before we were born, each of us talked over with God the special purpose of our time on earth. Throughout our lives each of us discovers more and more deeply our unique sealed orders, a way that only we are gifted to give and receive love. Because the purpose of our lives is built into every cell of our bodies, we don't need to look far to find it. We can find it by looking near, in the little everyday things that give us consolation and desolation. (1994, 21).

This is what it means to come home to your body, to discover what has always existed in the cells of your being and to finally satiate your hunger for Bread.

### Feeding Our Hunger

Wu-wei is the art of being. It is the art of being in such harmony with the Tao that everything happens as it should – not forced, not sought after, not planned, not bought, not desired – it just happens. (Palmer, 1991, 49)

I am the bread of life.  
He who comes to me will never be hungry;  
He who believes in me will never thirst. John 6:35

Crisis reminds you in an abundant manner, to stop and follow your Way, your Tao. Crisis reminds you to go back into your world of water and float inside your existence. The Tao notion of wu-wei is a wonderful way to describe this notion of being present, conscious and playful inside your own unique "art of being." It is the art of floating, meeting, receiving and melting into the current that will take you to Home by placing reflections, models, peopled stories that mirror yourself back to you. All these reflectors arrive through your journey reminding you that you are your own Kansas; you are your own Home. "Love your enemies because they are the instruments of your destiny," writes Campbell (1988, 159). Your enemies, your crisis, your conflict, your

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pain reminds you to turn left, to follow the current inside your wu-wei. It is a time to find your ease, your way of being with the world that meets the home inside your bodies. The art of being is the art of living and receiving Bread. It is not easy, this sitting still. It is not easy relearning the inimitable skill of receiving. Going back home to your wombs, this is all in fact a very difficult thing to do. I think that this ability to trust in the great big nothingness, the more years and stories you accumulate, the harder it is to return to Kansas. I am often resisting the urge to bolt, to leave, to find a way to somehow soften this place, this impossible place where I have to hold both failure and success. Hope is an in between space and it is perhaps one of the most dangerous and exhilarating, both renewing and destructive. Hope is sitting in that receiving space, living with both possibilities.

**Pollyanna Does Her Doctorate**

Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the penultimate truth – penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. It is beyond words, beyond images, beyond that bounding rim of the Buddhist Wheel of Becoming. Mythology pitches the mind beyond that rim, to what can be known but not told. So this is the penultimate truth. (Campbell, 1988, 161)

I am inside the grad office editing my sister's dissertation. This is one of many proofreadings and her work is getting more and more polished and cohesive. In the process of the reading, my own ability to proofread and pull out commas and rearrange sentences improves. It is Halloween day and I am feeling quite smug as I have the whole area, in fact the whole floor to myself. I am warm and outside it is raining and cold. I have brought my Walkman, so I am afforded the luxury of a steady stream of music while I look at the computer and read the words.

## Seven: Crisis

Intertwined with all of the academic musings, my sister has placed a mountain of personal stories. Her stories are framed around the metaphor of food, mostly wheat in the form of bread, but pizza, crackers, biscotti or pasta also find their way into the stories and academic discussion.

I too have brought my own food, so that I find myself munching on a crisp apple while reading the now familiar edible display of words. This time, while eating the final remains of the delectable apple, I am suddenly struck by the unbelievable good and happy upbeat tone of her stories. They are happy, nostalgic and grateful. They are full of sentiments of inclusion and joy. Even the difficult stories reek of an idyllic upbeat attitude that would make even the mildest of cynics wretch out of a diabetic coma. For a moment I am tempted to dismiss her stories as a simple glossing over of 'The Good Old Days' but only for a moment. For I know my sister this twin who appears as my image on the outside. For her, these stories are all true. They are her stories and they are her experiences.

Our differences I think can be best exemplified in our own abilities to make bread. While my sister has made successful bread, recipe free for years, I have yet to make a remotely edible loaf of bread. I have tried following the recipe religiously and not following the recipe at all, self rising yeast, instant yeast, refrigerated yeast and regular yeast, baking on hot days, baking on cold days. I have consulted my mother and have diligently written her instructions only to find my hapless bread only grudgingly risen to half its level while weighing-in close to half my body weight. I could have just formed them into the shape of barbells and saved myself the trouble. Even the Mixmaster has improved my breadmaking abilities little. "You just don't have the

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touch,” says my smug little mamma, “my bread today, it turned outa beYOOteful!” We have the same mother and the same father and the same brother. The hands weaving the dough, punching, turning and making it grow – were the same expert hands of our mother. My sister and I ate bread made from that same kneaded masterpiece, yet our stories, our experiences and our remembrances are vastly different. My experiences of growing up in that household were painful ones, difficult ones. I do not remember feeling included – I remember feeling terrified.

How could that be? How could two people, so physically alike that our teachers could not tell us apart and had to separate us, have such vastly differing experiences and stories. Is someone lying? Or, perhaps, am I only looking and focusing on the difficulty while my sister is merely highlighting and expanding on the positive? Perhaps.

I am struck by the many uncanny resemblance between my Master’s paper and her dissertation. Although we have polar experiences of family, our final thesis, our desire to include practice inside the theory discourse come together with a passion. We fight for more experiential based learning from our two polar opposite experiences, and this collective breadth of diversity has finally come to a place where rather than fighting and asserting our differences, we collectively work to change and influence the structures we value and desire to change.

I mull the idea for a moment, the idea that joy and optimism have a right to be included in narrative academic discourse. Just because it sounds suspiciously close to the fantasy narrative called Pollyanna doesn’t make it any less valid. If we can include the experiences of men and women in a diverse mix of racial, sexual orientation and political blendings, is it not time to welcome Polyanna to the academic table, too? Perhaps.

## Seven: Crisis

**Celebrating Crisis**

I am sitting at the Wazubee restaurant out in East Van. It is a hot day, the first real hot day of summer and I am waiting for Christina. I have convinced her with some reluctance to forgo the one-month coffee celebration for a real dinner. Afterall, this is her first six-month celebration of sobriety and she has never gotten this far. It is hard for her to receive and it was with some negotiation that she has allowed me this luxury. I am early and I settle down at one of the largish picnic tables with the church pews and kitschy icon candles of the sacred heart of Jesus. I pick a place where I can see her enter and begin reading. She nevertheless enters and presents herself in the quiet anonymous presence that begs for invisibility and so her entrance continues to surprise me. I welcome her and I am honestly happy to see her. She has had a flustering day at work and is arriving after having driven her mother's car that is indeterminately stuck on heat.

"Congratulations!" I say.

"Yeah, thanks," she responds back. I am used to the somewhat emotionless lilt of her voice for it often carries the very same intention of anonymity and invisibility as her entrances, but this time, I hear a detectable note of pride and self satisfaction. It is good to hear.

We are talking and she casually slides a card towards me, again with the nonchalance steadfastness that begs to control the flow of emotion to a controlled and steady heartbeat.

"Is this for me? I say, "Isn't this celebration for you?"

I open the card and there is a small picture of a little girl with her arms up and a smile on her face with the caption, "C'mon, say it... Who's your friend?" I don't quite

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get the joke but Christina is saying how it cracks her up. Inside the card, Christina has written, "Cute card, huh? I love, love, love having you in my garden!" Sweet.

And so now she is telling me how she is making a garden with flowers, representing each of her many friends and close connections. "What am I?" I ask. "I haven't decided yet," she says. I am chuckling at the thought of being represented in Christina's friendship garden while considering what color I will end up being. Upon further reflection, I am hoping not to be the inaccessibly thorny cactus, which, with Christina's impertinent sense of humour, may very well be her idea of retaliation for my generous lambasting of her love for country music. Our time together is punctuated with an increasing bouquet of laughter and we gossip about this and that and fill each other in on our life journeys. Each month's celebration brings more; more disclosure, more truthfulness, more vulnerability, more pot shots, more celebration, and mercifully, more laughter.

There is much on Christina's mind. She is moving out of her "egg" as I have affectionately coined her apartment which she has painted in Easter egg pastels, and she is sadly feeling the loss of her room mate who has provided her with a safe and comforting presence. She is moving out on her own and she has the previous memories of her self destructive stories – how she dealt with the painful stab and overwhelming rush of the stories of Before. She is understandably worried about losing her sobriety, about experiencing the painful wounding and memories which magically appear in the absence of other. She once again begins the now familiar ebb and flow, talking about the fears, then stopping and asking a question about me, completely off the topic, then beginning again to speak, only to once again retreat into superficial oblivion. I listen. Sometimes I

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will gently bring her back to her fears, sometimes I will entertain the superficial through line and then come back to the edge of her fear. She is continuing to investigate returning to school all the while feeling the panic of considering the possibility of success.

Somewhere in the midst of this, we have a conversation about relapse. I tell her that I am not prepared to meet with her in her disease, that my friendship is conditional and that I cannot go with her if she walks back into her disease. There is a pause and she says, that's fair, and the conversation slides forward. I am glad that I told her and I also feel strange about it. I am both comfortable and uncomfortable.

And so we both fumble in this way, pulling forward and scurrying back, continuing to meet the tension that is to move around in our life journeys. We are walking around the neighbourhood now, and I am aware that I will see her again. I am aware that I will meet her next month and probably even the next month after that and I am floating.

### **Finding My Bread in Crisis**

And this is what I am learning in my Mother of all Undos. This is what I have learned through my students and my communities. Celebrating and sharing helps me to let go of my branches and breathe in crisis. Both the act of witnessing to others and allowing others to witness to me have inadvertently helped me name and hold my greatest fear. I am so used to being small and anonymous. It is the invitation to hold and honor my bigness that has led me into crisis.

So, as crisis invites you to look deep inside yourself, to the spaces inside your body that speak your divine sealed orders, your calling, your wu-wei, you paradoxically require many mirrors outside yourself to reflect back and hold your bigness. You need



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the hand and the heart of Other to come and show you that it is okay to be big. It is okay to hold abundance. It is okay to breathe in the magnificence that is your wonderful being.

There is a great love inside you, struggling to expand out and it is this very Love that seeks your bigness, your abundance, and your magnificence and you will need those mirrors to float their way towards you.

But for now, let me drink this cup right down to its very last drop. Let me drink this cup to its final conclusion. Would you too like to join me as I drink this cup?

## Eight: Embracing Death

### Apologia

Christianity calls for *metanoia*, a change of perspective by all those who do theology and by those schools which claim to teach theology. It will no longer be possible to teach theology without art as meditation, without spiritual disciplines that are grounded in the body and that arouse the imagination, as an integral part of the curriculum. (Fox, 1988, 79)

So what am I learning, traveling through my yellow brick road? I am learning to begin my one thousand-mile journey with one step and to bring my passions along with me. I am continuing to acknowledge both conflict and ecstasy in my life and I am learning to move beyond receiving these two gifts with deadness as Parry reminds me and to instead respond with "living". I am continuing to learn that conflict and ecstasy reside in the very cells of my body and I am therefore a sacred being. I am learning that in order to hold diversity in community I must honour my very human need for safesacred spaces. I am learning that courage, heart and wisdom lie in the many people whom surround me and in order to receive my own, I will require their reflections and their presence. I am learning that moments of crisis are invitations to return and repair my undo. I am continuing to learn that anger, rage and wrath are sacred emotions – important messengers that will actually direct my journey.

It is your moment of crucifixion. Here on the journey of living you will arrive at your dying, for inevitably in all of your journeys you will receive your crucifixions. I am not alone in the receiving of crucifixion – it is not unique to me. Undoubtedly you have received your own. Before you can embrace your Easter, you have to first discover your Good Friday.

### Leaving God

God is an ambiguous word in our language because it appears to refer to something that is known. But the transcendent is unknowable and

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unknown. God is transcendent, finally, of anything like the name God. God is beyond names and forms. (Campbell, 1988, 49)

My crisis leads me here to this moment where I am confronted with Oz. My moments of journey, returning to my undos, sitting still with my little girl, waiting for her to hand me the old belief and to then return forward with her in tow, this has required an enormous energy. I thought that the moment of my undos was in fact as difficult as it gets but it is not. The undos simply free you forward, provide you with company on your way towards Oz. The undos free your little girls and your little boys to come with you and participate and witness to your journey. The undos are about journeying back and receiving – and let me not for one minute minimize the courage that it takes to do so. Arriving in your crisis, this inevitably leads you to your death for the death of an old belief is a death of a piece of you. Remember Northrup's claim that you are your belief systems; you embody your beliefs. So, when an old belief dies, you are experiencing your death and the deeper the old belief lies entrenched on your body, the more painful the dying.

I have staunchly believed in the One God that exists inside the conservative arm of the Catholic Church. I am very aware that even inside the one church that claims to have the Absolute authority of the One True God there are many versions, many points of viewing, many traditions, many descriptions of the One True God.

This One God was dependent on following many rules and traditions. In order to be a good Catholic I had to go to Mass every Sunday, I needed to receive Holy Communion on a regular basis, I needed to faithfully follow and protect all the official teachings of the church, I needed to go to confession and tell a priest all of my sins at least twice a year, I needed to obey. And in exchange, I would be rewarded; I would be

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satisfied with the desires of my heart. When I began to realize that this belief was flawed, that it in fact protected me from facing my own terrors, my own fears around risk, intimacy, and loneliness, I was utterly devastated. I had invested all of my life, all of my energy up until this point in one way or another thinking that if I just did it all right, I would be lovable.

So, in those many moments, those many undos and crisis, I was led into my God leaving. All those hands – my little girls, my tinmen, my lions, and my scarecrows – all led me to Oz and when the curtain was pulled back, and I in total disbelief, see this magnification of a little old man, I nearly double over in my grief. It does not take me long to realize that I myself was the one who participated, I wanted so badly to believe in a mighty Oz. I cannot say that any ease sat inside this revelation. I can say there was a tremendous amount of preparation for all those moments of undo, and crisis had prepared me for this moment of crucifixion. But the dying is unbearable. It is unbearable and unavoidable on my way to resurrection.

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**Oz Boy**

Hey you, I left Kansas, looking, dancing, searching for you. Pretty lady said you'd save me, pretty lady gave me stolen shoes from noiseless anger. Pretty lady told me you'd have everything I'd need and I came looking, my unconditional pot of gold, my satisfied smug designer who knew the cells inside my body.

**Refrain**

Thought you'd come and save me – thought you'd come and save me – thought you'd come and wrap your turin shroud up all around me freeing me while binding me freezing me to stillness oh, I thought you'd come and save me and you did no such thing.

Hey you, I listened to the pretty lady and all the big boys who said they held the Right directions on the way on the way to finding you and I looked and I danced in the direction of Directions and I found company and I found heart, courage and wisdom and I was sure I found you too

And now I watch you up close, see you standing far below me and you hide no gold and you veil no magic when I uncover you the only thing you hide is your existence and I am angry to find no saviour, no santa claus, no miracle, no man in white hat who will come and save me from the train that's coming, no train that's coming, no train that's coming...

Thought you'd come and save me, you did no such thing, only came to show me only came to tell me hey there's no train coming, all you really did was show me, tell me, dance me, feel and reveal that there's no train coming, no train coming, no train coming.

Hey you, thought you'd come and save me and here I am standing, looking, skipping, dancing, alive, strong and full. Thank god you did not come, thank god you did not come, thank god dear Oz boy, you did not come and save me.

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**Saying Goodbye**

Meister Eckhart said that the ultimate and the highest leave-taking is leaving God for God, leaving your notion of God for an experience of that which transcends all notions. (Campbell, 1988, 49)

What does it mean to be a non-theist christian? What am I praying to? How do I pray? How do I maneuver inside this new space? I am completely lost and I am in completely unfamiliar surroundings. The only thing that looks familiar is the remnant of branch that I am holding in my hand and maybe at some point I need to burn this too.

All my life I have believed in a power greater than myself that exists both inside and outside of me, but that mostly comes in the form of a human, and although the spirit has always been a powerful experience for me, in my times of prayer, in my times of asking and loving and resting and listening, I have always relied in the god in the form of a being. Whether that is a man or a woman, my world view has always been one of privileging the being over the spirit. And so now in my moments of prayer I am lost. I still feel the awed reverence of my current freedom that is my spiritual box exploded into tiny fragments of everything – ice, light, heat, cutting diamonds and soundlessness – but I am left to grieve my old beliefs in darkness, with no map and with no knowing. Just a fragment of my branch, just a fragment of my branch.

**Gravity Grave**

There is a breath

I am soundless

I cannot speak

I am one more time voiceless

I can breathe and I am living

I am alive

can you breathe?

But I can breathe

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**Embracing Death**

Because symbols and metaphors are the fundamental architecture of our social arrangements they are slow to change. Indeed it is easier to change ideas and doctrines in others' minds than it is to change their myths and symbols. The heart of the myth and symbol is metaphor, and without metaphor, change is impossible. Metaphor draws the imagination into a new logic that reveals the way to a new reality. (Kohlenschlag, 1988, 7)

You cannot stand to change directions. You painfully avoid our left-hand turns, your undos. You hate your dyings. You'd much rather work hard to support and maintain your illusions, your dreams of order and immortality. This is in part why you resist so strongly your shadow selves, your anger, your conflicts, and your crisis.

You do not enter crisis and exit crisis the same person. If crisis has not changed you, you have not yet finished dealing with your crisis. If we have not listened carefully and received the May Day-May Day-Alert-Alert from your crisis, then it is not yet finished. You need to go back and experience and listen until you have embraced your Bread, embraced your Divine Sealed Orders.

And your exit from crisis done properly does not so much bring you order and control as much as it brings you comfort in chaos. It does not so much affirm your roots as provide you with the awareness of your lightness, your ability to float in water and move through air without panicking. Crisis brings you to a new metaphor, a new myth, and as Kohlenschlag continues to remind us, we do not give up our myths and metaphors easily. These ultimate crucifixions, even with the promise of Easter do not die easily.

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**Courage**

there is a high cost  
to receiving  
power  
the idea of giving up  
is now weighted against  
the power of knowing  
i can change things  
and it is work  
not giving up  
instead running  
forward  
asking again and again  
what is it  
wanting still  
when it eludes me  
going back  
training harder  
smarter  
not giving up  
when it appears to be  
against  
easy providence  
it takes  
a certain kind of  
courage  
to stretch my  
tent pegs  
beyond  
impossible pain  
so as to live  
in a house  
big enough  
wide enough  
strong enough  
to hold  
endless stories  
defeat  
despair  
joy  
surprise  
mixed  
together  
becomes some kind of  
courage



## Paradigm Shifts

Prior to [the year A.D. 1600] human knowledge was dominated by the Church – by a dogma which confused and combined the eyes of contemplation, of reason, and of sense. If the Bible said the earth was created in six days, so be it; if the dogma said an object ten times heavier than another object falls to earth ten times faster, so be it. ...But then, around the year 1600, one Galileo Galilei stood on the Pisa Tower and dropped two objects – one heavy, one light – and they hit the ground at the same time. The world has never, but never, been the same. (Wilber, 2001, 12-13)

When individuals and collective communities change theories and truths, this is a decidedly troubling time as the ensuing changes lead to the feeling and experience of chaos. When, however, individuals and collective communities change myths and metaphors, they are entering into a paradigm shift. Regardless of whether this shift takes place on a personal or a universal level, the world will never, but never, be the same.

Thomas Kuhn studied paradigm shifts in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

According to Kuhn, paradigm shifts begin with an anomaly, that is, “a phenomenon for which one’s paradigm had not readied the investigator” (1970, 57). Anomalies can be any event, circumstance or experience that precipitates a crisis. It announces an awareness that the beliefs (read myths and metaphors) that shaped your world, somehow, no longer fit your present day experiences. It may also speak to the fact that your current worldview no longer supports the body, whether that body is yours, someone else’s or the planet’s. Anomalies in some way suggest to you (and even the universal you) that you are straying from your lifework. Being conscious of the anomaly is the first step for this acknowledgement of the anomaly’s existence brings us some kind of a breakthrough.

The second step is the undo process, the tearing down of the old beliefs, the old myths and metaphors. Undos are the ache that is the tearing down of your old beliefs. All

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that resistance, grief and separation, they are all a process for inviting the new.

"Resistance is a sign that something deep is being challenged and a paradigm shift is a deep movement indeed," writes Fox (1986, 81). You are simply making way for the new. You are simply increasing the depth which Wilber (2001) speaks of when you evolve and engulf and envision a larger and larger concept of self. You are making new wineskins in preparation for your new wine. You are digging out from under your unconscious graves to make your communion cups, your cups of sorrow and your cups of joy, able to hold more, and more and more wine. This is the ravaging that is the undo. This is the ravaging of the paradigm shift.

**Branch**

Pulled wet and moist  
     from distraction  
 slippery  
 you cannot escape me  
 for I claw back  
 into  
 your exhausted  
     crevice  
     clutching  
 you with anticipation  
 of your  
 next move  
 and you will not escape me  
 you will not escape you  
 as you are  
 dead  
 already  
 and I am simply  
 clinging to  
     an old story  
     an old memory  
 of me  
 and you connected  
 to the big big tree and  
 you are wet and  
 you are dead and

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you provide me with  
     nothing  
 but a memory  
     of the lie  
 of my own comfort and security and  
 the dead story  
 somehow lets me move  
 inside something  
 more honest  
 which is me  
 inside a  
     current  
 of electricity  
 absent energy  
 swirling into everything else  
 patterned chaos  
 separately dancing  
 inside  
 an expansive  
     everything  
     everyone  
     everywhere

**Inhospitable Accidents**

I am feeling the deep disappointment of my father's broken promise. I am trying  
 to hold on to the tension that exists between hope and despair. I hope, I invite my father  
 to meet me in his promise and I despair in the countless number of times where my  
 promise was not met.

The weather is grey, wet and very windy. There has been a strong windstorm and  
 the weekend is full of wet, wet and more wet. I don't want to drive to my parent's home  
 in this weather. I phone mamma on Saturday and I tell her that I do not want to drive, that  
 I do not feel safe.

I eventually get a ride from Lizia. I hang and visit. Lizia tells dad that she is going  
 to get her son a haircut and dad insists that he come from the workshop and do it himself.

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He comes very very late with Lizia flustered, wondering whether to leave and at the moment she cannot wait any longer, he arrives and cuts the boy's hair and they all leave.

My quiet father is sitting on the couch and I am thinking of something to say to him. I decide on the story about the student and the machete for it is exciting and full of adventure. We inevitably wind into the private schools are better than public ones and from here we wind to church. This is my fifth conversation with my dad – the one at my house, the second in mediation, the one in the van and the one when I read him a piece of my writing. I feel myself getting better at this. “What is it that draws you to your faith?” I ask my dad, and he talks to me, tells me that what drives him. “Love for God and Love for the Church” he says in detail and with great passion. I am surprised and I tell him so. I would have never thought that what drives him is love. I thought it was fear and I tell him so. I do not see this motivation towards love and I remind him of our first conversation, where I request that he tells me about the good and he struggles with this idea, refutes it often. What is good I say, and he says, just open a bible and talk about what is good. Close the bible and tell me what is good, I say. “What is there?” he says, and I say, tell me what is good about you, about me, for instance. Such a hard concept for him. His opening lob at something good is to repeat the mantra, why are you going to school, why are you struggling so much, I want to see you settled and it seems to me you are not settled. I am laughing, thinking this is his opening shot at something good but I take it anyways. I thank him for the opportunity to speak to this, I tell him that it must be hard for a father to watch his daughter struggle. Yes, I have made mistakes, yes this has been difficult, yes this has not been easy, but has it ever occurred to you, has it ever occurred to you that maybe, this, *this*, is my calling. My school, my doctorate, has it ever occurred

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to you that this is what God want me to do? I watch my father transform, Oh, he says, I thought that you were doing it for enjoyment, why didn't you tell me this? Why didn't you tell me this? If this is so, I would do anything I can to help you, anything in my power, he says. And he crumbles and his eyes fill with water, he in fact is crying and I am puzzled and surprised and overwhelmed. My desire is to pull alongside him and let him know that he is loved and special, but I hold still. I look at him and then I too crumble inward and cry but just for a little as I once again compose myself to bring home the message, that is why it is important to talk I say, that is why it is important to have conversations about the good.

He leaves to get ready to go out for dinner and we both act as if nothing has happened but something has certainly changed. I notice my father's composure and he literally looks as if some weight has been removed from his shoulder. The beams of his cross at least temporarily suspended into thin air – away from his tired bones. He is relieved. I am puzzled by this, not quite sure why this line has touched him as it has.

He returns on the couch and he talks about his plans with my car and it is different and I just can't quite believe it.

Mom and dad drive me to my home, on their way to their dinner party. It is out of their way and my father insists that it is on his way and he takes me straight to my door. And I am home, shocked stunned and grateful.

I do not pretend to know the meaning within all of these strange stories and this one came from someplace so completely unexpected, unplanned, even unimagined but there it is. What I think is that perhaps the journey with my father, it is not unlike our journeys inside our own cars and vehicles. It is not unlike my father meeting me half way

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at the skytrain station, in my weakness – him having the courage to listen and I having the courage to be weak in his presence, and somehow, this meeting in the middle helps begin a place from where we can break bread. Here in the in between space, we can come to the table and speak. And maybe, in these small speakings we can find our way to reside inside a van, one receiving the ride, and the other conceding that his daughter's home is not such an imposition after all. That her Home may in fact, be simply a small detour that is "on the way". And maybe this meeting in the middle in between our weaknesses, this enables us to stumble onto one of those inhospitable accidents, where we are positioned in an unfriendly, unfeeling space that forces us to fall into healing despite our better judgement.

I have been trained not to expect change from my father, but the moment is sacred anyways. This inhospitable accident marks a moment where I get to meet my father in a place of strength. My doctorate, my writing, my calling, is my place from where I am strong, fully alive, aware both of awe and competence. It is the same experience of living inside church. Sometimes, in the middle of mass, or in the middle of sitting in the presence of Bread, I feel that inevitable presence of God and in those sacred moments the air is literally thick with sacrament. It is as if time slows to a standstill, and my body moves as if to pray. Just like Moses, recognizing God in the presence of fire, these sacred moments help us stop and receive God in the very breath that essentially marks our entrance into living.

Sacred moments. They are not only in the confined boxes of church or high challenging mountain tops. They are everywhere, everywhere and everywhere. And we

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are able to notice and appreciate these sacred moments when we learn to receive, hold and then let go of our crisis, of our undos, of our everything.

### The Color of Death

What characterizes the new paradigm? It is more aesthetic; neater; simpler than the old. What was once considered "trivial" in the previous paradigm – and here I include Mother Earth, wisdom literature of the Bible, science, mysticism and the Cosmic Christ – may with a new paradigm, become the very archetypes of significant scientific achievement. (Fox, 1988, 81)

I am in the middle of a scramble of activity. It is the frenetic energy that comes from jumping into something new and finding both a painful dread and a liberating freedom that comes from breaking another wall of I can't and transforming it into an open door that reveals one more new world. This part of the frenetic energy I know. It is the same transformation that takes place in the beginning of a new journey – my body experiences the same pit of fear and disbelief that propelled me into my knitting journey, my running journey, my marathon journey, my graduate school journey. This scramble of frenetic energy has been something that I have learned to embrace, for my journey of beginnings brings the freshness of awe – there is a respect in moving inside the beginning. Seeing a new world, wondering how it will be possible for me to finish this but finding an awe, in fact a kind of reverence for the privilege of participating in a brand new story – stretching my knowing in ways I had only previously dreamed about.

This part of the scramble of activity begins with my knitting friend. At first, I am only supposed to be helping her bottle her wine but it quickly becomes me too learning the art as I eye a can of black current juice and I remember the wonderful journey of Quebec and I decide to make my first batch of Cassis. And my knitting friend, who knows me well now, having traveled many of these beginnings with me, carefully has me

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write down the steps and lends me some of her material and tells me of some of the potential pitfalls and so there, in my kitchen is a big white pail of fermenting black current juice.

Add to this, my knitting friend brings me shopping and begins to talk to me about transforming my apartment, and so I end up buying accessories and paint and I begin with the guest bathroom, painting and using the power drill and my previous weeks sacred purchase of a screwdriver (Two Sundays ago, in prayer, I decide that it is time to stop waiting for my father or anyone else to repair my apartment and on my way to mass, I buy my first screwdriver, and when I get home, which is much later into the night, I screw the chain lock on my door. It is a strongly symbolic act of my power to care for myself). I am so excited by my audacity; I keep going in the bathroom to take a look at it all, the cotton candy blue walls and silver colored fixtures. It is so different yet it works!

I am appropriating my family's skills, and like the knitting before, I am learning to take them and do them myself and do them my way. It is not having to ask him, hear my father's consternation, even condemnation, and wait, if ever for a turn. All these colors, they are colors that they would have talked me out of, or told me of their unsuitability. Painting my apartment gives me an almost tribal feeling – A gut feeling of assertion and war. I feel like painting my face. I want to draw lines like in essence my painting is drawing a line. I am here. This is me. That is you. I am not you. I am NOT you.

Last night, I paint my den a shade of dark red and although I like the color, I have not painted well and it is uneven. I gain some smug satisfaction at my mediocre efforts.



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It's terrible but it's mine. I have painted the second bathroom the same red. I am happy with my bathrooms.

And for awhile, I have to stop all this painting and power drilling and deal with what I am madly avoiding. As beginnings move me to action, endings paralyze me. I am working on a workshop, my first workshop as a "Creative Edge Consultant". My dancing friend has hired me for her nursing instructors retreat. She is generous and supportive in her effort to make this easy for me as she can hear the trepidation and fear. Besides, I know I am her recommendation, and I am sure she does not want to look bad. I feel stupid. And yet, this is what I want. I want to speak about conflict and empowerment, and I want to teach communities how to do this and now, the closer I am to my dream, the more terrified I am. It is the same terror that paralyzed me in applying for my Master's degree. It has the same feel of my attempting to complete my first sweater. In both cases, someone else had to finish my ending for me. My mother finished my first (and second and third) sweater and my sister completed my first successful Masters application form. I do not understand this terror. I have only had it repeated so many times that I am able to recognize my difficulty in this passage.

What is it? Is it that I am more comfortable with failure or mediocrity, than success? What changes if I view myself as a person, capable of achieving my hearts desires? Haven't I? Haven't I already demonstrated this to myself? Is not every run, every marathon, every degree, every encounter, every respectful confrontation, every stitch, every sip of wine and bite of bread; is it not a ringing endorsement of my ability to achieve my hearts desire?

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I don't know. I don't know. I just know that now, instead of completing the workshop changes and notes, I am sitting here and writing.

And this is what I think. Resurrection is there, sitting in your undos, sitting in your deserts, sitting in your conflicts. And this is the mantra of the mystics from whatever tradition. "If I go looking for my heart's desire again, I have to go looking for it in my own back yard," says Dorothy, "and if it isn't there, then it wasn't my heart's desire in the first place". Yes, indeed, says Dorothy, the delightful mystic.

### Living our *i*'s

So fragmentation is in essence a confusion around the question of difference and sameness (or one-ness), but the clear perception of these categories is necessary in every phase of life. *To be confused about what is different and what is not, is to be confused about everything.* Thus, it is not an accident that our fragmentary form of thought is leading to such widespread range of crises, social, political, economic, ecological, psychological, etc., in the individual and in society as a whole. (Bohm, 1980, 16)

Math and sciences use imagination in abundance. The symbol *i* stands for an imaginary number, that is, a number that doesn't exist. It is an unknown quantity. An *i* is something we cannot measure, yet it is utilised in many theories and equations and no one bats an eye. Why? Why do you not challenge the unknown quantity in math? Why do you accept with quite little analysis, the imaginary number in your mathematical stories, yet somehow, in your literary stories, you minimize your *i*'s? *I*'s in math stand side by side numbers, your so called known quantities with little difficulty. You do not go around saying, "Why do imaginary numbers stand beside each other?" After all, imaginary numbers are not real. They do not exist. Nevertheless, they hold the same legitimacy as real numbers. The sciences have something to teach us. They have been celebrating imagination all this time. Why?

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This generosity does not exist inside our literary stories. Unknown quantities in literary stories are separated and hierarchized from so called known quantities.

Something that is true, our consensual collective agreed upon stories, are not placed alongside our myths or our non-consensual realities. They are separated. When it comes to language, we seem unprepared to place our imagination beside our truth.

Furthermore, *i*'s, once multiplied form a number, -1, and -1 once multiplied, forms 1, a whole number, a real number. Science allows imagination to unfold itself, and inside the unfolding, imagination becomes real! Wow! Imagine the possibilities if we allowed our literary stories to do the same, that is allow our imaginary numbers as it were to unfold themselves, and to unfold themselves again and form real numbers, real things. What if we allowed our dreams to stand alongside our daily accounts? What if our dreams, our myths, our hopes, our fantasies, our fears and wonderings, were treated as vital components of our "theories of livings"?

#### Christina's Dream

Christina dreams of death and dying  
     Spirits of the present past float home and beyond and back again  
 Telling her to say goodbye  
     Reminding her it will be alright      to leave the clutches of the  
 brown branch hanging  
     Helping her receive crucifixion  
 Leaving one leaving two leaving three more hearts behind her  
 Christina dreams of death and dying  
     Stories past come in to present reminding her of the inevitable  
     Death that comes tomorrow  
 Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow again  
 She dreams of death and dying  
     So when awake she stands alive

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**Theories of Living**

Our myths, both private and collective, hold tremendous power and are key in helping us see our wholeness. And I bring this up now, this idea of wholeness along with the imaginary *i*, because one of the ways from which I am able to receive water inside my floating is by creating my own imaginary number, my own *i*'s as it were. What if all my yearnings, all my illnesses, all my successes, my passions, my terrors, what if all of it simply moved me inside my calling, my own natural impulse forward? This is my imagining, this is my *i*. And when I unfold the *i*, I can move forward, I can hope, I can allow myself to fathom my possibilities, I can honour my dreams, and I can see my failures simply as functions, enfoldings of a larger success. And if I enfold the *i* one step further, if I enfold the what if again, I can hold my past stories, my undos, even the ache inside my undos and see their value, see their meaning-fullness as opposed to their meaning-less. It somehow allows me to honour and envision wholeness as opposed to hole-ness as it were.

So maybe in meeting the massive crisis that is our paradigm shift, our embracing of death, we bring with us our *i*. And of course we dance, did I mention that we dance?

**Celebrating Change**

I am at the Calabria coffee shop sitting in front of Christina. I have not seen her in a few months, having missed a few of our monthly celebrations. The last celebration that I had with Christina was when I attended her first year anniversary of her sobriety. It was an incredible experience to watch her speak in front of the large crowd.

I am at the Calabria coffee shop sitting in front of Christina. Much has happened to both of us in the last few months. She has come out of the twelve-step program, she

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has come out of the closet, she has come out of the mainstream culture and reclaimed her First Nations culture and she has just generally come out. She looks great. She has completed a hard term of studies and she has completely gotten rid of her debt. An unbelievable and powerful woman sits before me and she is not a fragment of the girl I knew in Drama 10. She is deeply inside her body and loving it.

I tell her about all my changes and she is not surprised. She says I look different too. I walk different and stand different. Yes, and I think I am more in my body too. I tell her about my fear, now that she has left the comfort of the AA nest. I am afraid of what this will look like. She knows my boundaries. I tell her that I am impressed with what I see in front of me. I have to leave, but our conversation was of two friends developing a deeper intimacy.

### **In Between the Dying and Living**

And in between the crucifixion and the resurrection, there is an in-between space. There is a chunk of time that rarely lasts the three days between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It is a time of breathing, healing, receiving and terrible nothingness. It is a time of waiting and listening and any attempt at running, moving and action inside this in between space only lessens the ease.

I have to tell you that I am not very happy here. This is the place from where I complain the most, second only to the entering of the crucifixion. From this place I want to panic, ask God, ask anyone to come and "fix it for me". These three days last an eternity. Mostly, I am terrified. Mostly, I want to actively 'find a solution'. Mostly, I am struggling to resist my new kind of learning, for to sit and wait "in joyful hope for the

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coming of the resurrection," oh, this is all about trusting in something that is both outside of you and all within you.

**Faith**

Because you said so  
                   I said so  
                   All said so  
 In the history of infinity  
           In the circle that promises  
 both my death and my life  
                                   You  
                                   I  
                                   All  
           Cannot lie  
 Every cell  
                   inside my being  
 Lives  
           Dies  
                   returns to life again

One big happy family

**Waiting in Joyful Hope**

The only action inside this in-between space is faith. The time in between the dying and the living is an enormous act of faith and it can only be done by you. Even if you are surrounded by many, the holding of space in-between dying and living is done alone.

You may even struggle with the possibility of having no bread and wine. It is temporary but it is a time of incredible growth. This in-between space may for some even feel more painful, more difficult, than the very death itself. Be not afraid, Jesus would say. It is alright to feel your terror I might say. Know that the in-between space is temporary, that it has an ending and hold resurrection, for the many stories of death and dying all point to life and your new living, my new living will come soon.

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And so, how do we sustain ourselves inside this in-between space? We wait. We do nothing. We hope. We wait for magic and we breathe.

**More**

i want	more magic
i want	more magic
i want	more magic
i want	my world
	my room
	my space

infused  
insufferable  
suffocated  
magic

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### Eventually

And eventually crucifixion gives way to resurrection. Eventually ache, terror, and fatigue, bring you life. Eventually magic, enchantment, wonder, mystery and surprise nudge you towards your Divine Sealed Orders. And your resurrections appear to you in accidents, long windy roads, moments of seeming nothingness – just as Crisis arrives, so will Resurrection. I promise you it will come and almost always, in a completely unexpected, unpredictable kind of way.

### Living Journey

To be human is to create sufficient order so that we can move on into insecurity and seeming disorder. (Vanier, 1998, 13)

I am waiting at the Budget Rental waiting for the fifteen-seat van that I had rented for our Theatre Company end-of-the-year celebration. The van has not yet arrived and I am annoyed that it has not arrived at the promised time. It is bad enough that I have to pick it up in Coquitlam and now, over an hour late, I am beginning to seethe. “Just give me the biggest van you have”, I say, “I have a class full of students waiting at the school and we’ve already missed our ferry.” I have been passing on my progress to Tim, my teaching partner, who balances my fluster with an almost impossible nonchalance, “We’ll just have to wait till you get here,” he says, “Don’t worry about it.” It is the end of a long and arduous school year whereby Zandra, Jim and I who collectively make up the Drama department have experienced the intensive bonding which comes from too many projects, too little support and an abundance of enthusiastic adolescent energy. The year has managed to solidify our collective strengths and weaknesses to a place of mutual appreciation and sharing. Instead of feeling annoyed at Tim’s “let life roll as it will” philosophy, I am comforted by his flexibility. The fifteen-seat van arrives and I roll out to



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the school. The theatre company students are all hanging in the Drama studio; some are playing cards, others are talking in groups, and others are pseudo studying for tomorrow's provincial exam. There is a relaxed and responsible energy and even though it is the end of the year and I have a mountain of stories that support this energy, I am still taken aback by its presence. Christina, a former student who continues to provide life saving technical support to the Drama program is here and I am grateful to see her. "Hey Christina, I want you to come and keep me company in the van. I need somebody to navigate while I drive. I have no sense of direction!" I am of course being redundant here, for she has been around long enough to know for herself my need for calm direction-givers while I plough along on my latest "Hey, this sounds like a great idea" venture. Christina agrees; Jim and I fill up our two rented vans with students, food and enthusiasm and we both head off to Horseshoe Bay. Dariel, one of our students, has a load of students in his van and apart from some questionable odometer readings (I am so going the speed limit!), takes his role as driver seriously. Zandra will come later, as she is invigilating an exam which some of our students are writing and so plans to come with them on a later ferry. Jim and Dariel drive ahead and despite the fact that Christina sits in the front passenger seat, we have already lost them by the time we reach Kingsway. "Hey, do you know how to get to Horseshoe Bay, I have no idea how to get there," I say. "Don't worry, I'll take you to Horseshoe Bay", says Christina. So far, so good: Christina DJ's, flipping her CD book, popping one song after another while taking requests from students and giving me directions. "Get into your left hand lane" she says, in between student musical requests. It is a sunny day and the Budget van has air conditioning, so with music, sunny skies and a cool van, we arrive at Horseshoe Bay and wait in line.

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While we wait, I decide to look down the car line to see if I can spot Tim. My cell rings but I cannot pick up the signal. There is no sign of Jim or Dariel and I begin to wonder where they are. The cell phone continues to ring and we continue to be unable to pick up the signal. The van is full of enthusiastic energy and chatter. The cell phone rings again and this time I hear Timothy, my trusty stage manager extraordinaire:

"Ms. G? Where are you Ms. G?"

"I'm here waiting in the line, where are you?"

"We're on the ferry, Ms. G"

"You're WHAT?"

"We're on the ferry. We tried calling you. You should be in lane 52."

"You mean we missed the ferry?"

"See you at the cabin."

How could we have missed the ferry?

I grudgingly drive the van over to lane 52 and I break the news to everyone, who seems to take it in much better stride than myself. Bryan, the comedian/leader-with-insight takes the moment in by pulling out a chicken drumstick and quietly eating it. This moment of frustration quickly calls for a diet coke and I enlist Christina in an attempt to find one. We do and I listen to her stories while I sip on the carcinogen. She is afraid of the ferry ride and she is afraid of water. She had watched a stepsister drown when she was a child and has feared the water ever since. We walk back to the van and I again mumble about the circumstance, "I can't believe we missed another ferry! At this rate, we'll be taking the same ferry as Zandra", I remark sarcastically, only to find her checking into lane 53 right along side the van. After my initial disappointment at being

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“lapped”, I am grateful for her company. Her presence, marked with the many stories brought on by the frantic pace of teaching, directing, supporting and listening provides me with a great sense of comfort. We have more room in the van, so we decide to park her car on Bowen Island. Christina quietly crosses the body of water.

And finally, finally, we are on the island. Zandra and DJ, another senior student/leader (I affectionately tease him about his apparent severe arthritic fingers which impaired his ability to complete his journal writing assignments, yet had no affect whatsoever on his stellar athletic performances and stage fighting scenes) have made the trip before. Christina holds the map and directions while continuing to DJ and I drive. “Turn right here,” she says. I do and Zandra and DJ correct her. It is not the way they remember going. Zandra takes the map and Christina remains quiet. Again, we are on our way along curving, albeit paved roads. “Turn right here,” says Zandra. “Yeah, that’s right,” corroborates Arthritis Fingers.

The road they point to looks precarious, almost dangerous but I trust their judgement implicitly. The road continues. It is rocky, narrow and full of holes, branches and dust. As we edge further down, both DJ and Zandra confirm this is the right way, but the road and the tension in the van begin to resemble my previous night’s visit to the PNE. Finally, straight in front is an impassable gully. There is no way this van will be able to proceed, although I struggle with the idea of turning back. I stop the van, and we all slide out. I look back and gawk at the road we have just covered and I am temporarily struck by the impossibility of turning the big fat van around and up towards the main road. I notice DJ has already assessed possible escape routes, “We can do this. You can back up and turn into this spot here and head up.” I see the possibility, we move a few

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rocks back and I get back into the van. Zandra, DJ and Bryan begin to organize, Jim and Timothy call and I pass on the phone responsibilities to Zandra who describes the location and scenario back to Tim. Meanwhile, we continue to push, reverse move forward, push back, burn rubber, make dust balls, rock and push and maneuver the van with limited success. "Ms. G, get out of the van. You need to look at what you're doing. Just get out of the car for a minute and look at where you are," says Bryan. He is sweating, as are the others. I walk out and look at the situation and listen again to Bryan's instructions. Again, I think, this is doable, and I get back in the van and we begin again. Some of the students have walked away or moved to the shade. Bryan and DJ position themselves on opposite sides of the van and along with Zandra provide complementary directions. Two other boys from the company try to take leadership, but as been the case throughout the year, they provide confusing, opposing information. Calm vision in the midst of confusion has not been their strength but they eventually help in the push/pull/move synergy. In the midst of this wildness, with the day half over, I find myself wearing a large, satisfied, proud smile. It is the same smile that found its way on my face during my last marathon, when during the journey of miles, in the actual moment of time in progress, I am happy, grateful, satisfied and completely enjoying the pilgrimage, without worrying about The Final destination. "Hey you guys. We're going to remember this as the best part of our trip. We're going to remember this story for the rest of our lives!" I say. I hear a chorus of agreement, "I'm already having fun. Yeah this is great. We'll be talking about this all right!" even as I watch Zandra and Christina's eyes show some apprehension as to our outcome. We continue. This round of push, reverse move forward, push back, burn rubber, make dust balls, rock and push and

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maneuver brings more success and we finally manage to turn the van towards the main road. There is a collective, tired cheer. Jim and Timothy arrive. Jim is casual and positive. Again, I am grateful for his completely scandalous unorthodox un-Italian like behavior. Slowly the van moves forward, taking some time to renegotiate the trail. How did we ever get down this road with a van-load of people in the first place? Jim directs me through a giant pothole. I move right through it watching Tim's face as he watches the underbelly of the van scrape the rocks and branches. He winces visibly, then gives me the thumbs up at the end of its successful completion. All the students walk up the hill as I snake up the obstacle course. We are almost at the end of the road and the water light screeches to the top. "I have to stop. The van is overheating," I say. We stop and we breathe. Jim takes a load of students in his van and drives them to the cabin which is only 3 minutes away. It is almost 2pm. We again resume up the hill onto the main road. The "correct" road is no more than 4 metres away from the road that we took. Zandra, DJ, and Christina are still in the van with me and we turn on to the correct road which is an improvement from the side road that we journeyed on but it is still tricky and again, Tim's cabin eludes us. The cell phone rings and Zandra again tells Jim where we are. He tells us to stop and wait and he comes to pick us up. Again, we wait, Jim comes and we finally, finally arrive at the cabin. The van is thick with dust and dirt and we are all tired and energized. "Okay, it's time to just relax and cool down," says Tim. Throughout this whole experience, he has remained gentle and calm. He never complained about the hassle and he never made any of us feel like imbeciles for not being able to read the map or for going down a barely there defunct logging road.

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At the cabin, we meet the other students and I feel a little sorry for them, because they have missed the incredible story that was our ride to Tim's cabin. Ivone wants to go swimming in the ocean and although I am a little self conscious of being in my swimsuit in front of the students, I volunteer. Ivone was one of the students in the van and she delightfully chattered and provided a background of playful energy throughout. She continues to provide the same energy. The water is freezing and she howls as she enters. I peel down to my swimsuit and enter the water. "Owwwwwweeeee oooooooo! It's soooo cooold," I howl back. Christina comes down to read and watch us. Frank, Ivone's boyfriend immerses himself in the water and we shiver and laugh and move into the water. Zach, is one of the boys with calm-vision-impairment. The four of us square off and throw the Frisbee back and forth. Christina begins to slowly wade into the water with her sweats and t-shirt. We hear her quietly howl about the cold water as she slowly makes her way towards the Frisbee square. With little fanfare, Christina challenges her fear of water in the midst of a quietly supportive community. We are all giggling in between the chattering of our teeth as we discover pools of warmer water and hypothesize as to how it got there. "Let's all pee so we can stay warm!" says Ivone. More students come into the water and a group decide to swim to a large rock about 300 meters away. They ask me to come and I balk but I want to be there to supervise. I spot the rubber dingy and I take it and escort them out. Ivone, Frank, Zach, Brendan, Ariel and Bryan all swim towards the rock. The water moves with greater force and turbulence as they move closer to the rock. Zach becomes uneasy, claims an asthma attack although I as an asthma sufferer see none of the tell tale signs of one and he comes into the dingy. Bryan deals with the turbulence by asking for help. "Somebody come and swim beside

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me. I don't want to quit. I just need some company." Brendan hears the distress signal and swims towards him and escorts him the last 25 meters. Bryan makes it and the crew stands on the rock victorious as Christina snaps a photo on land. I eventually find out that the dingy does not belong to Jim and the owner roundly informs us to put the dingy back in its spot. No harm done. The rest of the day is quiet with a potluck dinner and visiting. Zandra, Jim and I sing and play guitar together with varying degrees of success but with a great deal of enthusiasm. I am happy to sing out loud. We drive back to the ferry, Zandra picks up her car, I drive the students back to the school, I drive Christina to her friends' house and we chat and repeat the experiences of the day, especially our drive to the cabin. "I have never felt so happy for a whole day in a long time," she says. "Yeah, me too," I say. "I feel safe with everybody there," she says. "Yeah, me too," I say.

It is this happy safety that has challenged us past our metaphorical gullies in our steep, narrow stories. Christina, who crosses water twice despite never doing so without the aid of pharmaceuticals, and then walking into the cold ocean for a sorry game of Frisbee. It is me wearing my bathing suit, taking and rowing a dingy, singing out loud and feeling okay to make mistakes and publicly acknowledge my cellulite.

And this collective joy and safety is really the grand metaphor of the Theatre Company journey where we make friends and develop a community; interview and study a grade seven class; tackle a huge story idea; write, rewrite and write again a play collectively; ask for help and receive it; perform the play, continuing to be open to changing and replaying it; and to personally celebrate the achievement outside of public praise and criticism. This is the magic of our year together, encapsulated in a fifteen-seat rented van, dust imprinted with dozens of hand marks in both the front and back. I say

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good-bye to Christina, fill up the van with gas, take it through the car wash to eliminate potential incriminating evidence of our four wheel drive experience and drop it off at the Budget. I take one last look at the van and I see two lone trails of mud that have dripped down from the back windows. The large, satisfied, proud smile is still on my face. I drive home, shower and fall asleep where the smile slowly fades into the permanent memory of my heart and soul.

### Floating

I am enveloped, succumbing to the glorious movement that is wind water  
 living moving around me letting God's whispers kiss my  
 hopelessness/hopefulness as I move in swirls and wonder wander aloud in  
 random exactness letting myself breathe into the utter decadence of a soul  
 retiring to its rite full owner and in this moment I can almost bear almost  
 celebrate that unbearable lightness of being as I let the flowing medium  
 move me into blind and bleeding revelations and so find ways to celebrate  
 shadows darkness as simply markers directing my face towards warm  
 sunlight

### Finishing

The ground of being is the ground of our being, and when we simply turn outward, we see all of these little problems here and there. But, if we look inward, we see that we are the source of them all. (Campbell, 1988, 39)

I am on this planet-van and I am always moving. My moving only appears to obey the rules of the road and the directions on the map. It is just an illusion. Just as the great Oz can only allude or manufacture Omnipotence and Power, maps and directions only provide a guideline for getting you to your destination. All those students, all those teachers, they are just there, reflecting back the bits of me. They mirror back love, courage and wisdom that I could only see and receive if it was in me in the first place. All those outward problems, those rocks, those turns, those chasms and steep precipices,



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those knots and branches sticking out and “blocking” our way, they are simply invitations – invitations to maneuver and dance and discover the magic that is the in-between space.

And this *is* magic. This is the magic that Dorothy experienced along with the Lion, the Scarecrow and the Tinman and this is the magic of seeing you reflected back in every circumstance, lover, thing and enemy that crosses your path. There is the magic of facing the disappointment of meeting your Oz and all of his impotence and thanking him for it. There is the magic of listening and obeying the command to “get out of the car” and receive healing and insight in the most unexpected of faces. Indeed, there is the magic of moving through, breathing through impossible spaces such as grief, rage, terror, violence and ecstasy and realizing, that yes, you are still alive. You are still alive. And this is magic.

And this story has never left me. The lesson of that journey, inside the van, has never been erased. Like the trail of mud the car wash left behind, there is a trail of mud, somewhere on my body, forever reminding me of that incredible day.

**Home Fragment**

I have spent the Sunday cleaning and preparing for the realtor to come and assess my apartment. How much is this worth, how much am I worth? And I have changed some things and rearranged some things and cleaned my rooms. There is an abundance of dust that has made its way into the garbage. The mop is black with dust, the rags are black with dirt. Where does all this dust and dirt come from? There are a myriad of bits of paper, books, receipts, wonders, thoughts, obligations and I’ve put them in a box stored some safely and others to be organized later. I have thrown out some things that have needed to be thrown out. There are three bags of garbage full of grey dust, paper,

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black dirt and rotting food. Now there are a myriad of colours looking at me. I have taken out all the balls of wool and I have placed them all over in metal baskets. There is more to be cleaned out and taken away but for now, my place just sings and it is both full of colour and full of space. And after the realtor leaves, after she has spent some time looking around and telling me how warm and inviting the space looks, how well the colours look and to no, keep the cupboards white – you don't need to do anything more with this space. It is good enough just as it is. And I keep walking around the rooms and changing things just a little more and loving the new space loving the new space in awe of the new space. It doesn't matter that the home finally feels like my own only after I am resolved to leave it. My resolution to leave has finally allowed me to own my home. I know that I have learned to make my home wherever I am – I can paint, and fix and arrange and create. I can do and undo my home. I can undo and do my home. I inhabit my home and it is not the space I live in. My Kansas is me.

And the realtor said, I am warm and inviting, the realtor said my colours suit me, my realtor said I don't need to do anything more, that I am good enough just as I am. I am good enough just as I am.

And I am so glad that I can invite mirrors that tell me, remind me, that I am good enough, good enough, just as I am.

### Dancing

The tradition of dancing into ecstasy may have been burned at the stake, but its spirit is rising from those same ashes like a Phoenix. You and I were born in the right place at the right time to once again sweat our prayers. (Roth, 1998, 7)

Meister Eckhart said that the ultimate and the highest leave-taking is leaving God for God, leaving your notion of God for an experience of that which transcends all notions. (Campbell, 1988, 49)

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And so now, I discover and celebrate God in the Lord of the Dance. I find God in the prayerful mantra that is the movement of my hands in the assembly of stitches. I hear God in the swooshing and the wheezing that is me in my running. I seek God in the many, many Tinmen, Lions, and Scarecrows, as well as the Witches and the Ozes that inevitably surprise me in my journey. "When people are unfairly treated," writes Spong, "when their lives are being taken away from them brutally and unjustly, the need to survive almost always overwhelms everything else. The typical human response in those circumstances is to plead, to beg, to fight, to weep, to whine, or to curse – whichever response seems to offer some chance of survival" (2001, 142). In our struggle to balance, or even eliminate our old stories we will certainly experience our impulses to plead, whine and curse. Admittedly I have done my fair share of whining. It is our Story Journeys and our God experiences that invite us to breathe into both our conflicts and our ecstasies.

This is the Jesus I model my life around, the Jesus that exists inside the mirrors and stories that is the world around us. Writes Spong:

The being in Jesus called those around him into a new and deeper selfhood. Those who denied him were called into leadership. Cowards who forsook him and fled were called into heroism. Jews, trapped in their clannishness, were called into inclusiveness. Women were called into full humanity and full discipleship. Fearful people were called into courageous living. Outcasts were called into human dignity. Jesus thus reveals the ground of Being, and then he calls us to enter it. (2001, 143)

This is the Jesus of Dorothy not Oz. This Jesus *is*. "Jesus is the word of God, not God," writes Spong (2001,144). And as Spong(1999) has written earlier, we have confused the word with the experience. Thomas Aquinas (1938), a Roman Catholic saint, writer and teacher living in the twelfth century was intimate with both the word and experience of

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Jesus. In *Summa Theologica* (1938), his final book, Aquinas talks about receiving a vision, receiving a mystical God experience. After this vision he stopped writing and wished that all of his previous writings be burned for they all seemed meaningless to him in comparison to the experience. And what do we do as a church body? What do we say to Aquinas' God experience? We have elevated the writings of Aquinas; we have canonized him while we have marginalized the experience. St. Thomas Aquinas having received the mystical and powerful God experience burned his words. Do you dare burn your words? Do you dare burn your bibles, your canon laws, your encyclicals, your treatises? Do you invite the mystical, magical experiences to burn within you? If Jesus is the word of God, not God, do you dare to see your God directly? Do you dare, as Moses dared, to see God even if only for the briefest of seconds, to have your faces transformed, made whole and holy? Do you dare privilege the experience over the word?

God is the Source of Life who is worshiped when we live fully. God is the Source of Love who is worshiped when we love wastefully. God is the Ground of Being who is worshiped when we have the courage to be. Jesus is a God-presence; a doorway, an open channel. The fullness of his life reveals the Source of Life, the wastefulness of his love reveals the Source of Love and the being of his life reveals the Ground of All Being. (Spong, 2001, 145)

And this maybe is closer to where I am sitting. I have attempted to put words inside an experience that was all together wordless. I feel that the bulk of the experience itself has gone far beyond my own cognitive understanding. Much of the God leaving, I think, happens inside our bodies, veiled from our own consciousness. It is as though all the cells in the body get together (except for the brain, the brain does not come for in the midst of all its overwhelm, it does not even RSVP the rest of the body to announce its absence. It will, however act as a powerful witness later on in the journey). And one cell

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might say; "Okay, we have had enough. We are tired of carrying all these old stories, most of which weren't even ours in the first place. All these stories that you have agreed to take on from past generations, they are killing me. They are killing you! These stories don't even look good on you – they are not your colours! We are going to have to take matters in our own hands, and we are going to do our own spring-cleaning. We are going to put new colours in here, we are going to throw away all of these old stories, we are going to repair this faulty electrical wiring and oh, while we are doing this, we are going to have to shut everything down. Oh. And another thing, you will die, but if we don't do this cleaning, you're going to die without ever experiencing resurrection. All these old stories, they are beginning to rot in here."

My outward experience of leaving God for God was largely wordless, soundless, and motionless. Even now, as I try to find ways of putting a quantity, a story, a metaphor beside it, I cannot. And, it was by far, my greatest learning, my time of strongest insight – the time inside the Mother of all Undos.

Living inside this wordless experience enabled me to see the utter futility of words, the utter inadequacy of words to define mystical experience or provide insight into God leavings.

Maybe in my God leaving, I am embracing the God whom Jesus embodies as it were, inside the Dorothy story, the God whom Jesus embodies, inside my *Story Journey*. In both cases, the journey is far more important than the outcome. It is the movement, the action, the experience that matter. The precision, the exact rigor of staying in between the lines or following the "right road" does not ensure your safety, does not ensure your resurrection.

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This was a lesson that took me a very long time to learn. The God of Absolutes requires me to learn the rules and follow them in their precision. The God of the Journey requires me to listen carefully, to rely on impermanence more than the permanent and to move – to take one step inside my one thousand mile journey. The God of the Journey requires me to see the journey itself, not the destination, as sacred. The God of the Journey requires me to seek balance, to learn and embrace from both my shadow and light.

### Saying Goodbye

But experientially, please let it be noted, there is no essential difference between God and God's work, or between the ground of Being and Jesus' being, the Source of Love and Jesus' love, the Source of Life and Jesus' life. So in the ecstasy of the Christ-experience, in the transformation and expansion of our humanity, in the moment when love calls us beyond every barrier that has been designed to protect and therefore to thwart our humanity, we first listen to the question posed so long ago, "Who do you say that I am?" (Spong, 2001, 144)

"When you come to the end of one time and the beginning of a new one, it's a period of tremendous pain and turmoil," writes Joseph Campbell (1988, 17). Changing worldviews, changing metaphors, change of any kind brings pain and turmoil. And when you change from one end of time to begin a new one be they represented by rows of knitting, rows of words or rows of decimated relationships. Moving into another sphere, no matter how smooth a transition, brings with it tremendous upheaval. There are many leavings, many grieving, many deaths to contend with. Parting is such sweet sorrow no matter how much love and passion live inside it. I am inside what Meister Eckhart calls the highest leave taking. I am taking leave of God for God. And for me, right now, I see this as leaving the God of words and discovering the God of the Spirit, the God of dance, the God of moving breath, the God inside the experience.

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This divorce of spirit from flesh, masculine from feminine, light from dark is the loss of soul. The soul can only be present when body and spirit are one; it cannot breathe, exist, or move disconnected from the body. Your parents gave birth to your body, and your body is the womb of your soul. (Roth, 1998, 3-4)

God of the Spirit does not exist inside dualities. You cannot include, you cannot see, you cannot find the God of the Spirit inside your hierarchies. You need the body, the mind, the spirit – you cannot privilege one over the other for to do so is to annihilate or oppress the Spirit. How can Spirit be higher than mind be higher than body when the “body is the womb of your soul”? If you try to delineate, itemize and categorize each and every action and thing, if you try to codify and place a number value on each state of being, then you are in danger of killing Spirit for you are in effect, attempting to “stuff space” in the in-between spaces. Spirit, in fact, lives inside the in-between spaces. Spirit lives inside the spaces between the words, the spaces between the numbers, the spaces between the parts of our body and the parts of the universe. When you try to fill in the spaces, when you try and pretend that Spirit exists here, Body exists here, Mind exists here, you are living inside a very dangerous mythology for the convenience of the illusion that you live on firm ground with nice neat compartments. The mind as noted in an earlier chapter exists in every cell of our body and so does your soul.

In this divorce of spirit from flesh, we lost respect for the body and eventually we forgot that it was part of our sacredness. In the process, we also lost respect for all things feminine, which previously had been our metaphor for all things of the earth. And, because the feminine was associated with darkness, we lost respect for the shadow side of ourselves, the part of us that lives in the deepest recesses of our psyches. (Roth, 1988, 3)

As a Catholic, I have always felt the teachings and the practice of the church on this matter, very puzzling. If God created our bodies, and saw that it was Good, if we

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consume God who then exists in our bodies, and if our bodies are a Temple of the Lord, why then oh why, are our natural impulses evil? If God lives in us and God created us, how do we account for the idea that nature is corrupt and must be subjugated?

We need our shadow sides. We need our feminine. We need "the part of us that lives in the deepest recesses of our psyches." How can we even recognize Spirit if we are constantly looking at our Thou Shalt Nots? Spirit swims. Spirit dances, and if you are so busy panicking over what you cannot do, what you cannot see, hear and taste, how can you notice the yes? How do you honour what Spirit aches for you to do? Although Spirit lives in both light and shadow, it is paradoxically much easier to recognize Spirit in shadow for when all else is hidden we are much more open to honouring our moving breath. There is a great line from the Sen Sei in the movie, *The Karate Kid*. He is walking into a barn and it looks like he is getting ready for a battle but in fact, the men lurking in the shadows are fellow dancers and before he begins his dance he says, "Never trust a spiritual leader who cannot dance." I would go further and say, never trust an educational leader, or a corporate leader or any leader who cannot dance. A leader with a mind and soul disconnected to the body is at best only a partial leader and potentially a dangerous one. What waits for us in the shadows is not always our pain, our terror and our abandonment. What waits for us in our shadows is also our communion of dancers. What waits for us inside our shadow selves is always infused with an overwhelming abundance of Spirit for remember, *there is much more space in this universe than matter and all of space is Holy, Sacred Spirit.*

### Moving into the Age of the Spirit

... back in the thirteenth century there was this mystical Italian guy called Joachim who looked deep into his crystal-ball mind and saw "three eras of



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increasing spirituality – the Age of the Father (the Old Testament), the Age of the Son (The New Testament and the Church), and a coming Age of the Spirit, when the whole world would be suffused with the divine and the institutional Church would no longer be necessary.” Could it be that we are on the threshold of the time he envisioned so clearly? In my vision, we will dance across this threshold. (Roth, 1998, 7)

And like Roth, I intend to dance across this threshold and many times this dance will simply be the writhings of a spirit aching for the familiar while delighting with her new found home. It is the writhing that resists the dark and revels in the seeing.

I have been seeking bliss in magic. I have been seeking bliss in other be that the church, a man, my parents, popularity or my career. I have been seeking bliss in the something out there outside myself and have literally invested thousands of dollars and hours and prayers in that general direction to no avail but the fantasy was too strong, the mythology too grand. I did not want to believe anything less. And as I struggled with one asthma attack after another, one setback after another, I still resisted, so badly did I want to believe, that if I worked hard, kept my mouth shut, and “followed the rules,” I would get rewarded. I simply got sick and sicker, broke and broken.

The Age of the Spirit is about dancing in water, breathing in water, moving through water. The Age of the Spirit is about creating new communities new ways of being that invite diversity, invite tension and conflict and invite change and movement. I am in the threshold, announcing the Age of the Spirit and I am not alone, for there is a steadily growing army swimming towards the mainstream and it will not be long before the flood only this time, there will be no Ark. This time, there will simply be others, those many who have learned to water breathe and will help the rest of those still clinging on to logs and branches to come on down and breathe in water.

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## No Finish

... [L]et us remember one thing about the soul. It is like a wild animal: tough, self-sufficient, resilient, but also exceedingly shy. Let us remember that if we go crashing through the woods, screaming and yelling for the soul to come out, it will evade us all day and all night. We cannot beat the bushes and yell at each other if we expect this precious inwardness to emerge. But if you are willing to go into the woods and sit quietly at the base of a tree, that wild animal will, after a few hours, reveal itself to you. (Palmer, <http://csf.colourado.edu/sine/transcripts/palmer.html>)

...if you do follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in the field of your bliss, and they open the doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be. (Campbell, 1988, 120)

Spirit invites us to honor the trail, the life path, "that has been there all the while."

This is ease. This is the God experience. "You cannot have ease and control at the same time" says a good friend and her words continue to remind me that ease does not reside inside the can and cannot. Our cultural and personal struggle to define, create boundaries and fences is a struggle to control. Inside this paradigm of Dualism, Right and Wrong, we will not find our ease. Control is the antithesis to the God experience and we indeed require the big leap away that is to live inside the illusion that honoring all the rules will bring you joy. Spirit invites us to follow our ease, follow our God experience. Spirit invites you to put your maps down and to "follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be." And just past that door, you'll find a field.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
There is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
The world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, languages, even the phrase *each other*

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Doesn't make any sense.  
(Rumi, 1995, 36)

And so, when I meet you there on that field, I won't say a word. And  
nevertheless, I will welcome you home.

## Moving Beyond the Word

But experientially, please let it be noted, there is no essential difference between God and God's word, or between the Ground of Being and Jesus' Being, the Source of Love and Jesus' love, the Source of Life and Jesus' life. So in the ecstasy of the Christ-experience, in the transformation and expansion of our humanity, in the moment when love calls us beyond every barrier that has been designed to protect and therefore to thwart our humanity, we first listen to the question posed so long ago, "Who do you say that I am?" (Spong, 2001, 144)

In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. For life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. (Jn 1: 1-4 New Living Trans.)

I began this journey staunchly claiming that words are Words. Words are Powertools. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. I still believe that my words are power tools with the potential to both raise the soul and crush it but my belief does not end there.

I also believe in the power of experience and the experience as Joseph Campbell (1988) reminds us, is largely wordless. I believe in the God experience which I have experienced as both a wordless and soundless explosion and so, I believe in the experience, the story, the soul, the spirit that lies behind the word. So, I no longer see the word as God but merely a quiet facsimile of the God experience. Sacred, yes - God, no.

Is Jesus the ultimate Source of Love? No. I cannot make that claim. But one does, I believe, experience the unconditional quality of love through him. Is the medium, then, the message? No. That, I believe, is to assert more than we should. But the medium is the channel through which the message is received. (Spong, 2001, 144)

And certainly I have changed my ideas. I am not the same person I was when I began this journey. I have moved through conflict and I have moved through ecstasy and

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I have faced my fears, my terrors, my danger and I have returned here alive – changed for sure, and alive. “Jesus is the word of God, not God,” claims Spong. “In the beginning the Word already existed,” states the Gospel of John in the New Living Translation. And somehow, both of these quotes point to a new beginning, a new way of viewing the world. It is perhaps where I will begin as I journey onto my next yellow brick road.

### Francesco's Un-Catholic Moment

But for now, I see myself still as much a Catholic as the moment the young Francesco stripped down to naked in an Assisi church. I am not in any way trying to compare my piety to that of St. Francis; I am only saying that at the moment he takes his clothes off inside a church, he looks crazy, shameful and hopelessly anti-Catholic. In those moments when we turn from our straight lines and edge into our circles we certainly may appear insane. Paradigm shifts inside churches rarely come with ease. Yet, I have never felt closer to my divine sealed orders. I have never felt more connected to my path, my calling and my god leaving has only solidified my belief that God exists and is alive and thriving in my personal journey. My anger, my rants, only point to a passion – a struggle and a desire to have things done differently, to have myself and the church that I reside in live closer to the God experience.

And what about my belief in bread and wine? My belief in Bread as God, Wine as God, this remains my constant. This remains the place from where I have received magic over and over and over again. And as I have stated in the very first chapter, I know that I have received that same magic in its abundance inside the drama studio, the drama office and in between the school walls while tasting baby carrots, pizza or the last black ju jube.

## Knitting The Circles

I have purchased a copy of Kadinsky's Concentric Circles watercolor painting for the purpose of turning it into a knitting project. I am in the midst of painting my apartment and I see the Kadinsky painting full of colors full of circles and it attracts my attention. The delicate facsimile is sandwiched in between a piece of cardboard and plastic shrink-wrap. There is plenty of color and circles and curves but somehow they are less frightening, less daunting because they are packaged in between squares, in between straight lines. So although the colors submerge into each other and the circles blur from one to another so that it is sometimes hard to tell where one begins and one ends, the project feels manageable.

I bring the Kadinsky circles home with me and I look at them. I leave them in their shrink-wrap and instead I begin to map out lines and measurements and numbers on top of the plastic. I think about how many stitches I will need for each square and how these stitches with this size needle with this weight of yarn will measure out the circles. I spend a considerable amount of time calculating the numbers in an attempt to get the proportions right. I am not so much interested in how big or small my knitting project will be as I am in trying to capture the correct proportions of the circles and squares. It is the lines that help in this task and I continue to measure and graph and make smaller and smaller squares that inevitably make their way to stitches. This section counts for 52 stitches, this one over here is 64 and this one is around 60 stitches. I am smugly proud of my achievement of numbers and graphs and squares and numbers. I feel smart.

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Naturally, months later, I am to realize that I have the numbers all wrong and that my calculations would make wide oblong shapes that do not remotely resemble circles but by then it is too late. I have already begun – I have already engaged in the dance.

I have about twenty rows completed and I am exhausted. I find the task of knitting circles to be a very complicated, a very tedious endeavor and I tire of it easily. I end up letting the project sit there in my knitting basket, there on the circular knitting needles they will stay for a very long time. I will occasionally knit a row while gazing at my chart of numbers, trying to remember what this number meant and which row I was on and which row was next, but I do not get very far. I am lost and I am tired and I put the project to rest as I move on to live my life.

The project moves from one place to another, but essentially little work gets done on it as I paint, teach, run, and write my way through my world. The Kadinsky circles just sit in the basket.

So often in a Bikram's yoga class I will hear the instructor say that the resting time in between the yoga postures is the most important time of the class – sitting in stillness is the time when the healing begins, when the awareness begins, when the living begins. And I have learned this many times in my knitting practice, so that the time of my knot knitting, my not knitting are as valuable, as sacred, as my times of knitting.

It is not until months later, with my apartment long ago painted full of color that I finally decide to pick up my Kadinsky circles and ironically enough, it is my lines, it is another project full of straight lines that helps me see the ease of my circles.

In between the Kadinsky circles, I have already knitted the facsimile of the rug that continues to contain the undone undo. I have decided to knit a full sized rug based on

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the facsimile of the rug that stands prominently displayed on my wall. This time, I have decided to knit an actual rug that will sit on my floor and help me create an abode that exists there in my little living room. I have desired to create a small circle of hearth and I have seen in my head, the picture of this eggplant purple, this *aubergine* rug. The rug design is full of squares, lines, rectangles, squares within squares, neat little spaces where one color begins and another color ends and I have changed and modified some ideas and I have once again created a map that has numbers and graphs and squares that correspond with stitches and inches. And in some moment of insanity, I have decided to knit the rug lengthwise so that one row of stitches takes me at least one hour to knit and two thirds into the long project I tire.

So my tiring, my fatigue allows me to open up to the surprise which is the old Kadinsky circles – for surprise of surprises the project now feels comparatively simple and easy compared to the one hour row of stitches which makes barely a dint on the progress of the magical *aubergine* rug. So then, I use the Kadinsky circle project as a distraction when I get too tired and fatigued from the rug and with some astonishment I see that it has completed itself!

So there it sits on my guest bed, stacked in between towels and dozens of pins piercing its wall, trying to make it form something smooth, symmetrical and even. I have drowned it in water, and there it sits to dry into obedient formation. I am so happy to see it somewhat finished. I come back to look at it over and over. I have finished something and I like it. I *like* it!

And off I go to the little India section of Vancouver to talk about fusible interfacing and I talk to some lovely people and finally purchase some stuff I think will



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work and then I go to my favorite Home Depot and search for copper fencing and cannot find it but get a phone number and search some more but to no avail – the copper fencing alludes me. And I am loathe to abandon the picture in my head, so eventually I buy the metal fencing and spray paint it copper and mount the Circles on the wiring and iron-on interface them into place. I have only one month left in my apartment but I insist on placing it up and there they sit shouting out abundance and ease on my Dijon yellow living room walls.

And isn't it funny how all those straight lines help me knit, and play and celebrate my turns, my rounds, my circles in life?

### Painting My Goodbye

I am sitting in my office and as usual, my students have joined me, there sitting on the couch, both Rons, Dave and Irene. Zandra will be taking up my office and I want to do something special to celebrate her return. I have already told the students of my leaving and a celebration of Zandra feels like a great way to say good-bye. "Hey, I need to do something to get back at Zandra. I need to give her one final parting shot before I leave. What can I do?" We are batting forth a few ideas and Dave says, "We should paint her silhouette on the wall here, of her tripping on the sidewalk!" Ahhhh, this strikes a chord with all of us immediately.

A few weeks ago, Zandra comes to school sporting a large sock, crutches and a very sour expression on her face. "What happened?" I ask. She is hesitating, not willing to give up the information too easily, but finally it comes out, "I broke my ankle walking over a sidewalk curb right in front of the Rogers Video." There is a slight pause whereby I am trying to determine if the situation is serious enough not to warrant an onslaught of

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potshots. I try for clarification to buy me some time to make my decision, "You mean you tripped, walking *onto* the curb and *broke* your ankle?" A slight pause with an additional sour contortion of the lips and a look of *Don't start with me* signals the okay for the onslaught to begin. "What are the odds? Ohhhh, but if I could be a fly on the wall to watch that one. How big is that curb anyway? Do you want me to go and get you the wheelchair from the nurse's office? Thank goodness the school is set up for wheelchair accessibility now, eh?" I am laughing and underneath the ashen grey sour puss look of extreme discomfort, maybe even a little pain, I can see a look of befuddled amusement.

"Dave that is a *great* idea," I say.

Over the next couple of weeks we start trying to figure out how to make this happen and of course, the idea morphs and moves and it eventually becomes a complete painting of the drama office. And Bryan, a former student who has turned into a magnificent magician and Zen enthusiast has also come by to share his world and he gets enlisted. Then Kate, another enthusiastic student also refuses to be left behind and she comes on board. I tell Christina about the impending painting date and she is indignant that she is working. She changes her work schedule and she too appears on the appointed date. And there we are! A bunch of students both past and present, assorted colors of paint, brushes, enthusiasm and lots of ideas.

Christina arrives with several gifts – a bunch of rah-rah American stickers for the car, an antenna ball for the car with an American flag on it and another VW bug key chain. This time the bug is blue with American State patrol symbols on it and if you press the button at the bottom the headlights flash red. This is her way of encouraging me to follow my dream and for now the dream is a job that would land me in Southern

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California. I have very uncharacteristically spoken my dream out loud. I have let all the people around me know my dream. I have taken the big leap that is to perhaps publicly “fail” and I have placed my heart’s desire out in the open, all in public. I am not so sure why I have chosen to do this; afterall, every job that I have applied for this year, did not bear fruit. I have even shared my dream with my students who are already planning a road trip to come visit me on the summer of their graduation.

It is the last week of June and all of the exams have been completed. I look at this small office and I imagine that the job will take maybe two hours. Of course, it does not, as in two days later, we are still putting our finishing touches but by then it doesn’t matter.

In the beginning, we are all straggling in as one by one the paint shirts and paint pants come marching in and we begin to discuss the arrangement of colors. The blue from my guest bathroom will cover the bulletin board, the red from the den will cover the frame of the bulletin board, the yellow from a drama project will be the background for that one wall. We are deciding what to do with the green that looks like it belongs in a dentist’s office, and I place a swatch of the green that I painted in my bedroom on one of the walls.

“What do you think of this green you guys?”

“Eww, it’s gross”

“It looks like puke.”

“Yeah, it looks like somebody puked all over the wall.”

“Really? I like it. It’s the color of my bedroom”

Pause.

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"It's too dark Ms. G."

"What else do we have?"

The room gathers some steam and a small debate ensues and the green of my bedroom wins only because there is enough paint to cover the two walls and so we paint. The dentist's green goes on the window frames on either side of the office. Bryan and I are in the office together while other students are collecting ladders and more stuff.

"This is a terrible puke green"

"Look Bryan, this is the color of your heart when you are *inside* your heart"

"What are you talking about? What about all those red hearts on Valentine's day?"

"No, really. When blood hasn't been oxygenated, this is what it looks like. You get to have the experience of being inside your heart, get it?"

Pause.

"It's still ugly Ms. G."

And so, the banter goes on and Kate and Irene begin to paint the two doors with a collage of colors and dots and flowers and images and the yellow goes up, and one of the Ron's is meticulously taping the windows in preparation for the paint while the other Ron slaps the paint on without any taping and Christina quietly goes around fine tuning the edges of all the painting mistakes and there is all kinds of banter and excitement.

"This looks like a Kindergarten classroom."

"This place is so Romper Room"

"Hey, it's Kindergarten chic!"

"You know, this puke green doesn't look so bad when it dries"

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"Yeah, because you know, this is the *same* color you see if you are looking from the inside of your heart, did you know that?"

"Quit mocking me Bryan!"

"It's just so easy Ms. G."

In addition, we are painting each other's shirts with souvenir remembrances and later that night when I arrive home to my shower I am to realize that all that paint gets permeated onto my skin. The American flag that Christina has painted on my shirt back is replicated there on my naked body. It takes a very long time to scrub off.

At lunch I order lots of Chinese and we eat it in one of the science rooms and we spread out all the stuff into one big line and we pick and choose and there is so much left over I collect it and save it for tomorrow.

I am surprised to see the job very incomplete by the end of the day. The next morning, Christina arrives with our take-out coffees from the Calabria and we paint and I have to leave for an appointment in the afternoon so I leave all the students there to complete the project and when I return, the room is messy but complete. There is no picture of Zandra tripping on a curb, but we have nevertheless managed to both honor her and tease her at the same time. They have painted their hands in different colors and pressed them on the bulletin board. At the very top of the room, we have written some of our favorite sayings:

*Remember, curbs and sidewalks are our friends.*

If you see a fork on the road, take it.

Don't sweat the small stuff, use deodorant.

You are thinking of the seven of clubs.

Just Do It!

Life is like a fridge full of vegetables.

At one point in time it all goes to waste.

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**Carpe Diem**

When?

For which you have, you have not.

**Rhetorical Nonsense**

For some a curb is like a step up in life

But for one it can bring trouble.

The notes I play are no better than most pianists  
It is the pauses in between where the art resides.

**A thousand mile journey begins with one step.**

And I think about the many thousand mile journeys we have taken in this room, I think of the many do and undos, the many stories of strength, courage and wisdom, the many tears and points of laughter that live inside these colored walls.

At the staff goodbye luncheon I stand up to say my goodbye and once again, my tears overwhelm me and I am rendered soundless. I blather out a thank you, I say something about being blessed to have collected so many wonderful stories, so many wonderful memories, but mostly I say nothing. I attempt a little tap dance routine to break the tension and the staff break out into applause, and I just say thank you, thank you and thank you and I leave and I walk out with Zandra right beside me and we together go straight inside the puke green, dentist green, Kindergarten chic drama office, and she holds me and lets me cry.

And what I really want to tell everybody, how I really want to say good-bye is to tell everyone how when I first started at this school, my heart was of average size. And what I have managed to receive, was the unbearable abundance of story after story after story that has stretched and expanded my heart to such depth, such breadth, such width that it has taken up my very being. I breathe my heart, I run my heart, I live my heart and

## Ten: In the New Beginning

I am learning to no longer be afraid of my heart – this big, expansive entity which holds  
the enormous experience of receiving story after story after story.

**Free Fall**

And just when you think  
You can no longer breathe  
Take in more oxygen  
From the fast flowing pressure that is you  
Moving  
Falling  
Blasting blindly  
Forward

Just when you think  
You can no longer wait  
For the split second pause  
That will take you to breath  
Take you to balance  
Take you to rooted

Just when you think  
You can hold  
The not knowing  
The clutching of  
You holding illusion of control

Just when you think  
You can no longer think  
You fall  
You keep falling  
Down  
Down  
And more down

Holding your breath  
Waiting for thud  
Waiting for thud  
Opening the door  
You fall  
Farther  
And you exhale  
As you notice up ahead  
The reflection of your back  
In front of you  
And you arrive  
Alive

## Ten: In the New Beginning

**Living Inside the Happily Ever After**

Shout for joy, you barren women who bore no children!  
 Break into cries of joy and gladness, you who were never in labor!  
 For the sons of the forsaken one are more in number than the sons of the  
 wedded wife, says Yahweh  
 Widen the space of your tent,  
 Stretch out your hangings freely,  
 Lengthen your ropes, make your pegs firm;  
 For you will burst out to right and left.  
 Your race will take possessions of the nations and people the abandoned  
 cities.  
 Do not be afraid, you will not be put to shame  
 Do not be dismayed, you will not be disgraced. (Isaiah 54: 1-4)

I cannot leave you here with the impression that this new beginning equals a  
 happy ever after; nor can I leave you here with the impression that I have tied up all my  
 endings neatly with a big bow. Life does not suddenly get less messy when you begin a  
 new journey. I have packed up my belongings and all the contents in my apartment and I  
 have stored it neatly in a 10 x 10 storage locker. I am temporarily without a home. I did  
 not get the job in Southern California and I am still not sure as to where I will work. Not  
 everyone has welcomed this new journey and I have left some people behind. I leave you  
 in this new beginning fittingly in an in-between space. I am continuing to "widen the  
 space in my tent" and I am now, more than ever surrounded in chaos.

I am experiencing the moment of frozen not-knowing inside the trust fall. I am  
 experiencing the journey of Bread moving from the father's hands into my own hands. I  
 am inside the risk on route to the safesacred. I do not know what is next and I still  
 experience moments where I long bitterly for the touch and hold of a branch.

The unbearable lightness of being is not easy.



## Ten: In the New Beginning

**The End**

I arrive  
 Here I am  
 Finally caught  
 Finally found  
 Finally  
 Final  
 In between space  
 Finally does not allude me  
 For there it is                      here it is  
 Right here  
 In the palm of my hand  
 Oh I clutch thee still  
 Oh and I clutch you  
 And you are everything              that i imagine you to be  
 Everything I dream you to be  
 Here in the end              I finally meet you  
 I with my devilish grin              I lick paradise  
 Kiss my hand that holds you  
 Slowly wait to unravel the arrival  
 Make this moment last a little longer  
 Hold my breath  
 As I wait in joyful hope  
 Watching as my moving hand reveals the magic of  
 the finally  
 Fingers slowly dance              showing off  
 What I have ached towards for so long  
 For so hard  
 My hand open finally shows me  
 I arrive at absolutely nothing  
 And I am in paradise

## Ten: In the New Beginning

**Final Word**

And ironically, what I give back to you is a collection of words. They are a shadow a mere facsimile of the experiences I ache to have you hold and understand. And it is this marriage of word and experience, line and curve, danger and ecstasy that will continue to both inform and elude me.

I imagine that now, after I have unraveled my hand to reveal just space, that some of you are disappointed. I am sure that I am not the only one a little surprised and a little let down to find my magic as a ball of air. I make no apologies for leading you to your invisible paradise. And I must thank you one more time, for coming here inside my journey, for being such good company, for allowing me the privilege of a wonderful witness. I think that it is now my turn to keep you company, to hold your hand as you walk your yellow brick road. I will be happy to witness *your* abundance, *your* stories, *your* unbearable lightness of being. It will be my privilege.

I will insist, though, that this time, it is your turn to bring the bread and the wine.

## Ten: In the New Beginning

## Revoke

I breathe you  
I dance you  
I meet you  
I receive you

And I blow you away  
And I just breathe you back

I dance you forward  
I meet you backward  
I run towards you and  
you blow me away

And I breathe you bliss  
I breathe you magic  
I breathe you spirit  
ah

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