ON THE WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO MY LIVED EXPERIENCE AS TEACHER RESEARCHER

by

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Abstract

There is a tension in the warp and weft of fabric woven from the stories shaping a teacher’s lived experience. The story of how I, as researcher, learn to recognize that tension and then accept settling into a location of resistance to dichotomous socially constructed frameworks for learning and teaching is the research path taken in this paper. Within the context of poststructuralism, bricolage and autoethnography, my lived experience as a teacher conducting classroom action research becomes a living inquiry exploring power relations, voice, and subjectivities in a narrative text that performs the complexities of the journey through the juxtaposition of voices, texts, and images.

Central to the journey’s narrative is how I grapple with failure as a construct within education, as the original research plan grinds to a halt due to technological constraints, an ensuing strike, and the arrival of a new student needing extensive individual support. Certain questions are evoked that speak to the lived experience of the teacher in context. How is failure measured? What might be necessary to reveal success? How are success and failure determined? Who determines them? What are the cultural meta-narratives that guide our construction of a dichotomy that emphasizes incremental categorizations and measures? What possible other, immeasurable learning might take place? How does arts-based learning and teaching enter into this world? How do we value that? Those questions are dramatized in the narrative of the main characters’ reactions to events unfolding, and in another narrative voice that explores, in arts-based research, “who teachers are these days” and the nature of teaching itself, expressed as poetry, recipes and images grounded in my own lived experience as teacher.

Focussing on the dynamic found in the tension of the tragic narrative trope to navigate a path toward hope and light, I, as researcher, write and cook my way into knowing my identity as a teacher who will return to the field of teaching, beyond the gridlock of dichotomy. This reflective journey of narrative inquiry has provided the possibility for me to live and teach settled in an unsettling location, where tensions and confusions are moments for creative contemplation.
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Introduction

The life of the teacher and researcher is not usually considered athletic. There are no races to run, no mountains to climb, no oceans to swim. There are no physical performance records to break. The work is, nonetheless, competitive: scholars compete for recognition and prizes all the time. Rewards, however, are secondary to the excitement of participating in idea events—discussions, debates, defenses—with every bit of mental skill and agility called in to play. The greatest exhilaration and thrill, for me, occurs when my own integrity, honesty and purpose is called into question in defense of my own ideas against the necessary and rigorous criticism of my work. It is all too easy to unquestioningly defer to the theories of the greatest thinkers of our times, to the stunning advances in science and technology and to the pressures of society and culture shaping education. What has been most surprising, though, is the unpredictability of the timing of the struggles. I have to be on my toes, warmed up, towel at the ready at all times, because sometimes I have to actually fight for even the smallest, most obvious things that I had taken for granted were there for the taking, without question.

Take, for instance...the incredible fight I engaged in to simply format this paper...

In one corner, we have the bulging muscles of a popular word processing program; in the other corner; the skinny lady schoolteacher, complete with a classroom action research project embedded in poetic vision and dreams of liberated minds. To any audience except the fatally idealistic, it is obvious from the start who will win.

Round One: chalk marks in a circle.

The schoolteacher, convinced of the power of her “l/eye,” rises from her corner stool without gloves, strolls to the centre of the ring and tells the program to insert three horizontal text boxes on one page in the same place. The program laughs and pushes her over with one hand, gently and playfully, so as not to hurt her too much.
She straightens up from face down collapse, dusts off her hands, and goes back to her stool to get her gloves on. Apparently, there will be a fight.

Round Two: *alignment.*

Gloves on, the schoolteacher fiddles with margins, clicks and drags, and then consults the textbox help menu. Advancing well-armed, she meets the program on its side of the ring and forcefully proves the might of full page selection and margin adjustments configured to the exacting standards of dissertation submission requirements. With a sharp uppercut to the chin, the program topples heavily onto its huge backside, stunned, as round two goes in favour of the skinny schoolteacher. The crowd goes wild.

Round Three: *the program makes a comeback.*

The coaches in the program corner are frantic. They know that horizontal text boxing is off limits in the ring, yet that is what this underdog teacher is up to. They have to stop her, she is breaking the rules. There she is, dukes up, building a template. The program muscles in with a left: every time she copies the template, the margins shove over one space to the right, until, after only two copies, they are beyond the acceptable dissertation margin limits. Yes, if she wants to, she could have her three way horizontal layering, but only if she fights long and hard and manually adjusts all four margins for each of three boxes on every single page of her one hundred page thesis. She retreats, stunned, to her corner.

Round Four: the teacher's down for the count.

Her coaches bring her tea and meals, her cat comes purring by, her daughter gives her a kiss, but it's all over. She calls for a replacement, (another “cheat” in text boxing rules) and her husband takes the stool. *This is a machine,* he says, *you have to talk to it like a machine; give it your best machine shot. Watch this,* he says, as he wades into the ring. With deft foot maneuvers and easy feints, he manages one hundred pages of perfectly aligned text boxing, and begins to flow the text into linked boxes so three stories can be told simultaneously.

The schoolteacher can now visualize how the three story strands will engage topically with each other: how a narrative of hope will stand in tension with a narrative of the tragic and critical realities of doing educational research, and how a creative space between those two strands will explore, in poetry, images, and recipes,
facets of teacher and student identity. There will be a three-level layering, a horizontal spreading of the roots of each story and a peeling of narrator masks to reveal identities at each relative depth. The program retreats to its corner, asking for its towel. The crowd is raucous amid cheers and choruses of boos ensuing from both sides.

Round Five: on the rebound, the program triumphs.

The teacher, giddy with success, confident and cocky, leaps in with text to fill the boxes. With a powerful punch of select, copy and paste, she overpowers the program, flooding the top layer. Words flow like blood from one linked box to the next, page upon page reddens with text. But, suddenly, the program surprises her with a right duck and a left undercut. All text stops at box 32. Again, it stops at 68. Links will not establish, pages will not delete. It is a stunning headshot that leaves the teacher staggering, blindly clutching at the ropes as she slides to the canvas. The teacher, lying in a pool of her own textual blood in the ring, signals for the medic, who arrives from another arena up on the hill. The medic bends low to whisper directly into the weakened fighter’s ear:

“You’re done. Take it on the chin. Let this one win. Find another way to fight, boxes aren’t your thing,” she advises. The teacher acknowledges her medic’s wisdom with a slight nod and slides into unconsciousness. The referee counts to ten and the judges call the fight.

Victory: the program wins, a knockout after only five rounds

The Boxer Puts Down Her Gloves: But a post-structuralist still needs structure.

Later, bewildered, I shook my head clear of the boxes and wandered the detailed pages of my text, seeking a location, a voice, a thread to pull as the weft weight in the tapestry of a complex research experience. But where would that location be, and would it be within a single thread? I recalled Patti Lather’s words: “...it is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of what frames our seeing—spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitutes powerknowledge”(1993). It seemed even science itself, in the form of the computer’s
word processing technology, was telling me to avoid framing this story of teaching into boxed entities with borders. I needed to further examine qualitatively, with the spirit of the *bricoleur*, the raw material to see what presented itself and then choose an appropriate representation of the research experience.

The qualitative researcher as *bricoleur*...uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials are at hand (Becker, 1998, p. 2). If new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choices as to which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily set in advance. The “choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context” (Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg, 1992, p.2), what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002, p.4)

Being by trade a writer as well as a teacher, I knew my questions about voice had already begun to frame the research experience as a written narrative. Also, a textual representation seemed to be the right alternative since the video technology had failed to provide the possible outcomes I had originally imagined for creating narratives based on imagery. (The particulars of equipment shortages and breakage, outdated technology and programming glitches are covered in the narrative.) I wanted to create a story that would be at once readable, revealing, probing and honest. Like the journalism I have practiced in the past, I wanted to “report” the experience of a typical teacher pursuing action research in her classroom.

It didn’t matter that the project had failed in its original intent: to me, that was interesting enough on its own. I had set an objective to be performed in the Behavioural Review Ethics Board application, and I had failed to achieve it, but to me that didn’t mean there was nothing further to research. In fact, there were many questions to research, either in light of my perception of failure, or in examining why there were so many barriers to adopting a new pedagogical practice.

Teachers in the field often work on complex independent research projects, without university sanction: they regularly seek to improvise, adapt and modify curriculum or pedagogy, and embark on such projects within the walls of their own classroom. However, they generally do so in isolation, without publication, and with little fanfare, sharing or celebration at all, either due to their lack of time to share their work due to the busyness of workdays that afford little conversation time with
colleagues, or the humble nature of some teachers who feel their "little unit plan" is of no great merit, and not worth discussion. News of huge successes, even without publication, travels haltingly by word of mouth and there is limited uptake and discussion among the profession. Possibly, some sort of publication or formal university based research may follow, and there may be a shift in teaching approaches. Of course, it is more often that the opposite occurs, and pedagogy changes on the direction of research at the university first. Given these barriers to publicizing "successful" teacher practitioner innovations, it would be safe to say that failures of innovation are much less likely to be communicated. But failures do occur, disheartening even to the most seasoned teachers, who then say little of their experience.

What happens when there are classroom research failures is, I think, the most interesting story and the largely untold one. In my case, the identity of the teacher as a positive intellectually transformative force, once disrupted, opened a raw space where emotion welled up, causing me to embark on an existential seeking for purpose. Admitting failure and, in particular, broadcasting it publicly is challenging to any individual’s sense of self-worth. Naturally, it is personally disappointing to see hours of research, planning and implementation time "wasted." Above all, it is tragic to see that all the effort and caring of a teacher has made "no measurable difference" in the personal outlook or academic achievement of the students, the very people the teacher is so closely connected and committed to.

Although I experienced strong feelings, along with the tears and cynical laughter I saved until the evening's recording of my experiences in my journal and field notes, I knew the words "wasted" and "no measurable difference" were just a point of view reflective of the moment. Learning from failure is always (eventually) valuable and revelatory for me, and I hoped that by writing this "failed research" story, I could yet reclaim my identity as the transformative intellectual—the teacher—and provide a teaching story that teacher practitioners and educators everywhere might examine. Perhaps in reading it they would question how and what teachers learn from "failure" and also see, most importantly, what other immeasurable learning takes place when the researcher fails to "fully meet" (B.C. Education Ministry’s performance standards' language) the research performance standard of the stated prescribed
learning outcome. To create a space for this hidden, immeasurable curriculum to be viewed and interrogated, to reveal the “unthought of our thoughts” (Lather, 1993) became my revised goal.

With narrative as my chosen method to represent the research, I considered how to employ its techniques—textual structure, plot, characters, voice, themes and motifs—in a way that would invite inquiry. I wanted to do that not only for myself as the researcher, but also for the reader, whom I expect will also engage in their own inquiry toward the nature of teaching while reading and connecting to the narrative. My own concerns in regard to the nature of teaching, the meta-narratives that guide our cultural expectations of education, and my purpose as a teacher I also felt needed to be present. However, I wanted to be sure that my interpretation and use of each narrative tool did not move too far away from the voices and issues surfacing in the field notes. My intent was not to mould the material to fit one overarching philosophy, but to find a way of seeing the material for what it is, by seeking clues and instances within it that evoke connections to various ways of theorizing about education. To achieve that end, the narrative must be structured to allow for the expression of a plurality of seeing and knowing and a polyphony of voices. Although the method of representation is narrative inquiry, the principles of *bricolage* continued to guide the interpretation of the research experience.

Returning to the field notes, to probe their spaces and frames, I discovered the work I had done was a detailed ethnography of a teacher’s daily lived experience. Autoethnography, with guidance from Claude Levi-Strauss’s seminal work *The Raw and the Cooked* (1979), encouraged me to see the axis of the “raw” and the “cooked” as a possible structural guideline to present the narrative with:

Levi-Strauss postulates that the raw/cooked axis is characteristic of all human culture, with elements falling along the raw side of the axis being those of natural origin, and those on the cooked side being of cultural origin—i.e. products of human creation. Symbolically, cooking marks the transition from nature to culture, by means of which the human state can be defined in accordance with all its attributes (Simonini, 2001).

Simonini thus continues in her work to critically analyze Boccaccio’s epic narrative *The Decameron* from Levi-Strauss’s anthropological perspective. However, as *bricoleur*, I saw how the process of her analysis could also be applied to create a
connection between Levi-Strauss’s structural theory to narratives of education. *Cooking* can operate as a metaphor for public education itself, in that its effect is to acculturate children to the ethics, values and knowledge of our society. Children in their uneducated “natural” state, could be seen as the *raw*, and education as the transition that renders them cultured, or *cooked*.

She goes on to quote Levi-Strauss in defining the cook as “a cultural agent whose function is to ‘mediate the conjunction of the raw product and the human consumer,’ the operation of which has the effect of ‘making sure the natural is at once cooked and socialized’ (2001). I extend the metaphor to include teachers as the cultural agents who transform the *raw* to serve the “human consumer,” which I read as our society and its need to consume or employ literate graduates.

Although Levi-Strauss proposes the raw/cooked axis within the structuralist school of thought, I feel it is an appropriate tool to assist in building a post-structuralist narrative for several reasons. First, it has close metaphorical connections to the transformative purpose of public education, as I have illustrated. Second, operating within this metaphor allows me to create a space and give voice within the narrative to honour and explore the intimate connection with cooking that many teachers have, which I have observed and recorded while working with them in the field. Third, using this axis does not exclude any particular voice or method of textual representation. Finally, I am hoping that by *simultaneously* representing many voices from both “sides” of the axis, any strict structural interpretations will be disrupted, to open possibilities of theorizing about what takes place both in my research experience and in the ensuing discussion of it.

**Characters and Voices**

To decide how to voice my “characters,” and how to build them from a single person’s experience first required working with my own voice within the field notes' text. Although it is tempting to think of the field notes as a monologue, in that they are entirely voiced or written by one researcher, Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of dialogics: distinguishes monologue from dialogue as single-voiced and double-voiced discourse, respectively. Monologic, single-voiced discourse is discourse that recognizes only itself and its object, discourse that does
not recognize other people’s words (Problems 185-87). Such discourse ‘is directed toward its referential object and constitutes the ultimate semantic authority within the limits of a given context’ (189). Dialogic, double-voiced discourse is discourse that contains a deliberate reference to someone else’s words (185-87). Such discourse inserts ‘a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own.’ (189) (in Zappen, 2000, Section 5 para.1)

The Platonic monologic form of rhetorical address was not evident overall in my field notes to any great extent, with the exception of a few short sections where I may have had a particular audience in mind, and spoke persuasively of my own opinions toward a particular point. Rather, the Socratic dialogic structure more closely characterized how the notes worked with many subjects and voices, including my own and representations of the people I worked with in the form of e-mails, artwork, and reported conversations. I had, in effect, kept a journal that was dialogic and could become a narrative with dialogue, and in turn, a narrative in dialogue with the audience in terms of their connection and discussion of the work. Within such a story, I needed to locate the voices and characters to build on the variety of points of view presented.

As I studied the way I had reported my lived experience¹ from day to day and considered the shifts in my own thinking and reflection during the progression of events, I was struck by the wide variations in my own voice that persisted in spite of my years of journalism training and experience. Certainly, the objective reporter was nowhere to be seen. I reported events inconsistently, whether I was directly involved in them or observing them from afar. It seemed as if the “I” of this researcher had in fact become several “I/eyes.” My view was not singular, but instead reflected multiple realities and subjectivities present in and characteristic of each particular social exigency.

Depending on the needs at the moment, I used different ways of knowing to understand and process what was happening. And, psychologically speaking, to “cope with the situation,” particularly if it was stressful or unexpected, I often interpreted or highlighted particular nuances of events at hand when committing them

¹Max van Manen’s view of the nature of data is that the “lifeworld” or lived experience, is “both the source and the object of phenomenological research” (1990, p.53).
to the page at the end of the day. In short, my subjectivity as researcher shaped how I perceived events and, in turn, the field notes.

With the eye of a storyteller, I began to look for consistencies of my storytelling habit within the many inconsistencies the daily vignettes of the teaching presented in my notes. It became obvious that I first reported challenges I encountered, and then told how I was either successful or unsuccessful in positively overcoming them. During my evening reflection on the day's work, I would relate the "story of the day" in my notes with a theme and vocabulary of either hope or fierce criticism. Interestingly, the criticism did not always follow a setback, nor did the hopeful stance always follow a success. Sometimes, even when faced with glaring injustices and dramatic opposition, hope ensued, which I found remarkable. In order to uncover what impact my interpretation of the world of my work had on my pedagogical practice, I began to trace this light thread of hope. From it, I created a voice and character: Ms. Goodhope. Her pleasant, efficient, cooperative voice begins the narrative.

Madam Sherlock, the second main voice and character in this narrative, is created from a darker thread woven throughout the field notes. She is the critical sort, who might be labelled as complaining. She pokes into political and economic theories, power relations, theories of inclusive learning and various other social and educational problems with varying degrees of discomfort, which eventually devolve into negativity and an outright desire to quit teaching. Personally, I would find Sherlock an unpleasant person to "write" over a long period of time: Ms. Goodhope helped to balance my task.

Bakhtin's theories of polyphony and heteroglossia inspired me to allow the texts of the two voices, Goodhope and Sherlock, to stand in juxtaposition in print on the page to simultaneously describe the events unfolding while I was attempting the action research project. I recognize that Bakhtin's notion of polyphony describes voices of separate characters, and not necessarily to characters created from a single person's experience. However, I considered how Zappen's (2000) study quoted Bakhtin's Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics (1984) in making my decision to create separate identities for my different streams of consciousness apparent in my field notes:
"It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature full of event potential and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses (Problems 81)." (Zappen, Section Three, para.1).

Bakhtin's "plurality of consciousnesses" guided my use of the polyphony in my field notes to create a narrative told by characters representing the strands of consciousnesses found within my own mind as the subjective researcher, while experiencing an event. The strands of consciousness also seemed to lend themselves to different narrative styles and structures, which I discuss later in this introduction, in the section about plot. To deepen and thicken the pluralities and complexities of voice, I also include the voices of others that shaped my perceptions of events: students, teaching coworkers, colleagues from the university, friends and family. Sometimes their stories are told through the voices of my two narrators, Goodhope and Sherlock, at other times their voices are represented through their texts, letters and reported conversations, or images they have created. Embedded in my idea for representing a multiplicity of voices is Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, "a complex mixture of languages and world views that is always, except in some imagined ideal condition, dialogized, as each language is viewed from the perspective of the others" (Zappen, Section Three, para.3).

My student's voices, in particular, were most troubling to me in terms of how I would represent them. In On the Way Home From School, the chapter entitled Spelling Out Voice describes my dashed hopes in regard to what I had imagined those voices could be. Instead of the rich and revealing video narratives I'd hoped to see and hear, I heard students whose voices were carefully schooled to give "right" answers, and could not be anything but that in front of me, the teacher of the school. They had donned a mask that I was so used to seeing, and they were so used to wearing, that neither I nor perhaps even they realized how stuck in place it was.

I had hoped my experimental pedagogy, based on multiliteracies, multimodalities and multimedia video instead of pencil and paper would empower the students' voices and reveal life narratives rich in detail and story. Although there were occasional fleeting suggestions of such voices, largely they were absent from the tiny
black and white line drawings, stilted vocal narrations and life stories that seemed to
be missing large integral pieces. Most of the students “drew” their life stories in a
series of eight or less 3” x 4” drawings, like a cartoon, although I had offered large
paper, paints, pastels, and an invitation to explore the art cupboard for supplies. Of
course, I had made a mistake: as the transformative intellectual teacher, I had
assumed that by changing my ways, the students would obligingly change theirs. I
assumed there would be a transformation in their learning and identity as students. If
such a thing occurred, it was not immediately apparent: their narrative voices did not
appear strongly, or at all.

Ultimately, I chose to represent student voices I could hear by bringing their
words and images to the narrative text by way of their line drawings and
conversations they shared with me. Sometimes their behaviour, reported through
Sherlock or Goodhope’s voice, also illustrates their voice in a physical and emotional
way. The truth is that I hesitated to claim the power to create a “student” character, as
the Spelling lesson taught me to mistrust my situatedness as teacher/writer in terms
of being able to write that perspective honestly. Instead, I knowingly placed them
either in the admittedly subjective and fictitious worlds of Goodhope and Sherlock, or I
included them in the third space I created at the bottom of the page.

The Third Space

The third space is the place between the light and dark voices and characters
of Goodhope and Sherlock, a place where I explore the masking and unmasking of
the narrator/researcher/teacher/mother/sister/woman that writes, with text and image.
I share this space with the voices of my students, their art, their stories, and their
masking as previously described. Often, instead of writing the events of the day in the
evening as usual, the cacophony of events elicited creative responses from me, in
poetry and cooking. The poetry I created and the recipes I researched, recollected,
adapted and developed stand here as historical and original texts that frame another
view into a teacher’s meaningful searching.
The third space also honours the arts-based learning critical to the people in my world: teachers, students, researchers, family members. In a psychological sense, the cooking and poetry I practise might be called subliminal, in that I engage in them to elide the sometimes overwhelming aspects of the work I do. Ideas and meditative searching while engaged in these activities bring into being alternate, creative representations of the problems and issues I deal with in my work, allowing for a deeper understanding of my purpose. In a practical sense, cooking and poetry are critical to the research work that I do, as the work cannot happen without them. They are a part of how I learn, and in turn represent my learning, my research, to the world.

This creative space is one that is not acknowledged without challenges to its validity, as it is one of the Bakhtinian "consciousnesses" that can become marginalized in the world of academia. I contend that it must take its place, in its own discourse, in its own location on the page, to disrupt and direct the academic /eye away to a world that is critical to the survival of this researcher and perhaps to research itself. The epistemic process of the researcher, expanded to include culturally and socially situated arts-based learning, as well as traditional learning from books and lectures, in turn shapes what research can be. I hope that new possibilities for research will emerge as philosophical discussion on this point continues, and boundaries between the writer and audience begin to recede through the personal and intimate revelations and connections encouraged in this third space.

The first creative expression in the third space, *The Way Inn*, is a poetic incantation that 'lifts the lids off all the bubbling pots' of the cooking metaphor for education and teaching. Poetry as ethnography is discussed in the work of Laurel Richardson, who suggests that "(w)riting is a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it, form and content are inseparable" (2002, p.923). Setting poetry into the exploratory space between the dialogic positions of Goodhope and Sherlock is my blending of form and content, allowing me to experiment with theory, fieldwork and questions I have about my location in my work.

Poetics and ethnography combined as one qualitative research method is discussed in depth by Miles Richardson, who suggests that research anthropologists are not always successful in their endeavours as "(t)heir poems...rarely addressed
the rich ethnographic record they compiled nor the anguish they felt about the free individual encountering coercive culture..." (2000, p.961).

Bearing this criticism in mind, I have directed my energy toward developing poetry that works with subjectivity, censorship, situatedness, taboos of addictions, power relations, voice and other educational problems I observed during the research process. I intend to offer a thick description\(^2\) of the teaching life by including these works of poetic verse and image.

While I have discussed cooking as a metaphor, I also want to promote its possibilities as an area of academic research. Significantly, as I write, the first class graduates from a new university in Pollonzo, Italy devoted entirely to the philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology and history of gastronomy. This is an institution that boasts not a single pot or pan. In a recent published interview, the director described the university's mandate:

> We will study the sociology of consuming, the history of gastronomy, the iconography: from the first scratching of an image of food on a wall to how it is depicted today on the Internet," said Vittorio Manganelli, the university's director. "There will be no pots, pans,...(w)e will have a humanistic, philosophical approach to food: where it's from, what it smells like, what it feels like...(t)here is nothing like this. (Bruni, 2004)

My research has revealed to me that indeed, there is very little academic work being done to explore the rich and varied human connections to food preparation. Cooking is well-known to be practised by a majority of educators, many of them women, and is brought into the educational setting for celebration, instruction, and social justice. Certainly, as the University of Gastronomic Sciences has recognized, the study of cooking is worth more than a mention of pots, pans, dirty dishes and domesticity, or the first-wave feminist condemnation of its practice and kitchens as simply a place for women's subjugation. I believe that such analyses do not do full service to what cooking means, particularly for women. Practically, the women I work with in the teaching field engage in cooking for celebration, community building, creative expression, nutritional and health instruction, and sometimes even to provide basic nourishment for hungry students so they may learn better. On a deeper

philosophical level, it is as if as cooks they are ritually and creatively performing the transformative work they do as teachers, intertwining the meaning and purpose of both roles in a way that integrates their knowing and being in the world.

Cooking is acknowledged as at once ritualistic and sacred, as studied by Elizabeth Luard in her ground-breaking work, *Sacred Food* (2001). She begins by suggesting that the invention of cooking has shaped our sense of community and given heart to storytelling:

If fires were first lit at the cave mouth for protection and warmth, we soon began to love what the fire could do to our food. We learned to appreciate the scent of roasting meat, the flavour of the rich, buttery fat as it browns and crisps, and turned grain soft and chewable. As with animals around a kill, those who dip their hand in the same pot are declaring their allegiance to the group. After the eating comes the storytelling. When the belly is full, the heart can roam. It was in the night, when the flames had died to glowing embers, that the storyteller came into his (sic) own. (p.015)

Luard's analysis moves on to artfully and carefully review instances of the ritual and religious significance of cooking throughout various cultures the world over. Essentially, she holds that "(s)acred food is the spiritual essence of all those things that sustain human life on earth..." and, for our ancestors, "...consuming sacred food allowed mortals to join the immortals in spirit..." (p.006).

To cook, claims Luard, is to become the magician, the wizard, the shaman, the priest: to gather the flesh, the blood, the fruit and grain of the earth, transform it with fire and water, and present it to the gods. Given this stance, how can one glibly define a humble daily ritual that nourishes the mind, the body, the soul, the senses? The complexity and nuance of the journey to transform the raw into the cooked, to create a meal that is superior to its individual ingredients demands deep questioning of its meaning in our contemporary world.

Perhaps, like quilting, cooking can be explored as political action, as social history, or as a culturally specific yet individually expressive art form. Arlene Voski Avakian’s (1997) book *Through the Kitchen Window* is a collection of essays by women from various cultures examining their relationship to cooking. From a study of recipes as socially and politically historic texts to intimate details of the psychological,
social, cultural and artistic identity of women who cook, these essays and case studies are the beginning of a field of research, where cooking is seen as a valuable arts-based, performative method of living inquiry.

I present the texts of recipes from my family's history, and from my friend's family's history, written and preserved for generations. The occasional names on them belong to who kept the recipes, not who created them. Often a recipe is held in a family for many generations by the women, and the advice, the cook's shorthand, the warnings, and the methods are all highly subjective and altered over the years, speaking to the shifts and allegiances of the cultural and social identity of that particular family. Some recipes I include are new, such as Pumpkin Aggression Soup, which I created myself, based on my knowledge and experience of the art of soup-making, to represent the emotion and frustration I was feeling about my work experience. The recipes I present are, I believe, mostly women's texts, although one, the ancient Acorn Tofu, was collected from a man.

The carnival purpose for including recipes in this narrative is to encourage discussion and debate about the presence of cooking as a topic of research in the academy, and I bring it to the page within this narrative of a research project to foster a query into why it is there. With feminist intent, I wish to see more official discourse devoted to a deep, multi-faceted investigation into the intimate relationship women have to cooking. Because cooking has long been considered women's work in the home, I believe it has been marginalized as a chore, or a craft at best. Unless practised as haute cuisine by chefs (who are mostly men) in expensive restaurants, cooking has not been seen as socially, historically, or artistically meaningful as it could be. Clair Wills (1996), in her article Upsetting the Public: Carnival, Hysteria and Women's Texts claims, too, that women's texts, such as the recipes I have included here, are often seen as "non-official" and unimportant:

(She) draws an analogy between Bakhtinian carnival, hysteria, and women's texts, noting that "both carnival and hysteria are excluded from official public norms" and seeking "to dialogue the public realm by bringing the excluded and 'non-official' into juxtaposition with the official" for the purpose of disrupting and remaking official norms and discourses (130-31). Wills notes the power of literature, demonstrated by Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais, to dialogize popular and official discourses within particular texts and institutional contexts (131-33). She argues by analogy that women's
texts can challenge literary norms and thereby challenge the cultural authority embedded within the literary canon. (Zappen Section 5 para. 3)

In accordance with Will’s theorizing, I ask that the recipe texts be considered as another “voice” within the narrative of research I present: a voice that represents the social, cultural and transformative work experience of people in the field of teaching. Each recipe has been selected to speak to a moment in the narrative, from the Lemon Dream Bars of the hopeful, wishful immigrant families to the White Bread of the displaced working class uncomfortable with the arrival of newcomers in their neighbourhood. Spinach, the mythical food of strength, acknowledged as such throughout history and most recently by Popeye the Sailor Man, reoccurs several times in my narrative as I sought the strength to continue with my teaching and research. Henri’s Fruitcake (Henri: short for Henriette) was a recipe that was nearly lost, and required searching among several distant family members before it could be offered here as a suitable ending to the narrative. It is a celebratory cake signifying love and birthing that has graced many Christmas tables and wedding feasts in my family for generations. Each recipe has its place, its meaning, and its purpose, and I invite the reader to perform each one of them to capture the essence of their meaning before continuing with the accompanying storytelling.

Plotline Events: A question of perspective.

Unlike many novelists, I did not consciously create a plotline, or a series of events based on a particular genre or popular storyline. The events in On the Way Home have been reported in a journalistic sense. Times, dates and events are all relatively accurate: relative, that is, to a given voice, reflecting its vocabulary and world view. It is not reasonably possible to present every single detail of every event of every day, hence, my subjectivity as researcher is enacted. I made my choices, selections, and deletions as to what events to report, what mattered and what didn’t. So, too, do all educators, in the process of reporting on students, of describing curriculum innovation, or in communicating their plans to other educators. Because the experience of teacher practitioners in the field is particularly complex, it requires a keen observant stance and a particular skill in “getting to the point.”
Elementary school teachers are called “generalists” but they truly are multitaskers. They must plan the lesson, facilitate its progress, observe carefully and simultaneously coach students individually and in small groups. The lesson can be anything from playing softball according to league rules to advanced geometry or haiku composition. The learning community must be carefully nurtured, as well. The emotional needs of students, who desire approval acceptance from their teachers and peers, must be attended to carefully. Professional colleagues desire collaboration, so conferences must be planned and presented. Then, there is the plethora of administrative minutiae: paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Each job and its purpose blends instantaneously with the other: it’s a chaotic blend of intentions and desires, all demanding attention, each with particular deadlines. Within that chaos, an order must be observed or all the teacher’s action risks becoming meaningless. Some events need to be ignored for the moment, others highlighted, and a prioritizing of events must be established toward a meaningful objective. Like the storyteller, the teacher, educator, and researcher must highlight and delete events when relating their experiences.

How we pick and choose which events to emphasize in narratives is filtered by our social, cultural and familial models. The subjectivity of the educator in turn shapes the educational narratives they tell. Herbert Kohl’s analysis of the Rosa Parks story in his book *Shall We Burn Babar?* (1995) describes how narratives are edited in accordance to greater cultural meta-narrative, and how those stories are then used in educational contexts. He traced the transformation of the story of the Alabama bus incident, as it was reiterated within many different elementary social studies textbooks and classroom lessons, through formal and informal editing, until it finally reflected the American cultural ideal of individualism rather than an ideal of a collective grassroots political movement.

The larger cultural meta-narrative of an individual rising up from poverty and obscurity to power, as in the story of Abraham Lincoln, is embedded in the minds of American educators and guides their selection of which Rosa Parks bus story elements to emphasize and which to delete. The result is that most Americans learn of Ms. Parks as an individualist who stood up to many, as one woman who was “tired” and had “had enough” and was going to be the “one” to make a difference. In reality,
she had worked for a long time within a local community group agitating for change and social justice prior to the bus incident, and was already closely associated with the not-yet-famous Martin Luther King. Also, she had been arrested for sitting on the bus in the wrong place before this event. In his careful study of how the narrative is changed from one of collective power to one of free agent individualism, Kohl interviews Parks to get her version of events, and contrasts her story with what a widespread variety of school textbooks state as historical fact.

I also believe that cultural meta-narratives guide the selection of highlights that make a “good” popular story. For example, does good always win over evil? When was the last time I watched a Hollywood movie or discovered a popular novel where evil really won? In reality, do the men in black hats, representing the chaos pressing in from the borderlands of our post-colonial frontier mentality, lurk yet, only to be ridden out of town by the sheriff on a white horse? Or worse, do we simply embue whoever wins with “good” qualities and hope for the best? In either case, I believe western contemporary culture strongly reveres the guy in the white hat, and equates progress with his triumph over the bad guys in black.

But I am also afraid that if that’s the main popular storyline, and it is continually reiterated, educators will have trouble recognizing the moment when the black hats have actually won. And, further, if the victim’s defeat is always portrayed as mere fleeting and a guy on a white horse unfailingly gallops in from just around the corner at exactly the right moment to restore the narrative toward the triumph of good over evil, how will we know when to save ourselves? Knowing when to act to preserve personal ethical and moral values defines one’s identity. It is not enough to justify what is happening by simply editing what events are being viewed to fit a meta-narrative where “good guys win.” Too often, such an approach leads to a dilemma for the individual who may have a sneaky feeling the story’s interpretation has left someone who really wasn’t evil at all bleeding on the barroom floor.

For educators, the dilemma of reflexively interpreting daily lived experiences lies in what Nicholas Burbules describes in his paper *Teaching and the Tragic Sense of Education* as “the recognition of a deep, intractable contradiction between competing aims and values” (1997, Section 1, para. 2). Once recognized, the black/white, good/evil dichotomy inherent in the dominant cultural metanarrative does
not serve to accurately relate events in the teaching day. Nor is it possible, in the marvellously chaotic existence of any educational event, to relegate what happened to the popular educational metanarrative binary of success/failure or in fact to any incremental measuring of degrees within that dichotomy. Just as people cannot become wholly good or evil, narrative plots of real events do not move only toward success, improvement, or progress. The recognition of this problem creates a tension in education, forcing educators to seek alternative narrative tropes to tell their stories of teaching.

Burbules proposes tragedy, “a perspective that argues...for a strong sense of hope...” as an alternative narrative trope or frame for the educator’s experience, and defines the “(t)he tragic sense as the point of tension between seeing the necessity of things as they are and the persistent imagining of them turning out otherwise” (Section 1, para. 1). I see a connection between Burbules’ “persistent imagining” and our cultural meta-narratives, in that an unchallenged expectation that good will triumph sets us to imagine that is the only valid story possibility. When such imagining is reiterated in media messages of all varieties as well, the “persistent imagining” may act to prop up a lop-sided simulacrum rather than a view of a world where infinite possibilities are a reality.

Burbules argues for inquiry into teaching framed by tragedy because “if we try to persuade teachers of the value of teaching...on the basis of hopes and possibilities that cannot be sustained, we do them no favours” (Introduction, para. 1). In fact, a study published in 2002 by Peter Grimmett, Associate Dean at the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, establishes new teacher attrition in Vancouver at about twenty percent, a figure that would be higher if non-contract status teachers on call were included in the count. This is a significant number of new teachers who are leaving the profession, which calls into question what their hopes are (or were) for teaching. Apparently the tension between their hope of what teaching could be and its realities was so unsettling they had to stop teaching. Although there is research reporting the reasons for departure given by teachers leaving the field, collected by the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation’s researcher Charlie Naylor recently, I

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3 Naylor published his study in 2001; the data was based on work done in 1999 and 2000, with secondary English teachers as research subjects.
wish those teachers had kept diaries to share with me, as I am curious to know how they told their stories.

I am also curious about their sense of disorientation, their selective method in grasping for story threads and how they sought meaning and purpose while located in a place where there is a disconnect between hope and reality. While fully cognizant of the tension between my persistent imagining and the reality of what was actually taking place during my research, I allowed all the events that came to the attention of my l/eye to surface on the pages of my narrative of teaching and research. Although I have previously stated that I did not consciously create the plot, obviously I selected certain events to spend more energy on than others. While writing up my research fieldnotes, I was often in a somewhat meditative state, wandering from thought to thought, image to image, in recollection of my day. I felt puzzled by some of my responses, in awe of others, and fearful of some. I wrote what commanded my attention: the things I felt needed dwelling on because they were most present in the moment: they needed tending. The cook, as it were, needed to mind the pot. As thus, the plotline for *On the Way Home From School* was created, as a series of events that were viewed within Burbule’s tragic perspective.

**Denouement and Resolution**

“What is closure?” I curiously remarked to the principal at my school when we felt we needed to get to the end of a meeting, and she wisely answered that it was just a name for... *something*. It was on the agenda, but clearly neither of us felt the end of the meeting had anything to do with its issues being resolved. In fact, the meeting had served to raise more issues.

Those moments of puzzlement, awe and fear that constitute the location my narrative examines in its representation of voices and events do not lead to closure. Such an *aporia*, after all, is the unsettling place where questions arise, not answers. It is not a comfortable place, it is disturbing: and that is its purpose. Unlike Plato’s theory of the *aporia* in *The Meno*, that this place of confusion is merely a stopping place on
the way to the discovery of a right answer, a truth, or a resolution, I support Burbule's sense of tragedy, where an acceptance of the tension invested in being in this place leads to a moment of research possibility, which is an end in itself, rather than a means to an end:

I believe that a great deal of insight can be gained by reflecting on the educational centrality of making mistakes, of being wrong, or feeling doubt or puzzlement; we seek to settle or satisfy these, but in doing so only create the conditions for new mistakes, errors, doubts, puzzlements. The tragic sense maintains a humble respect for such experiences, and accepts them as a condition of life rather than as something to be transcended, avoided or explained away. (Section 3, para.3)

It is not always appropriate to move forward, progress, or engage in an act of denouement toward a resolution, as in the popular narratives of our time. My video research project failed to reach its predetermined outcomes, came to "a bad end", so to speak, and yet I do not need to wear the black hat. Maybe I have, in spite of everything, taught something to somebody during this process, but for that I don't need to wear the white hat, either. I do, however, retain my identity as a teacher. Grateful for the privilege of experiencing this time of wondering, I am anticipating returning to the classroom with a sense of renewal, calm and curiosity. I have, in effect, settled with the validity of unknowing, and look forward to teaching in the field with this new perspective.

Rigourous academic research does not expect the researcher to set up an ideal and then go about collecting evidence to support it: that is not at all scientific. Instead, rigour demands that first the evidence be examined, and then theories developed and representations created to explain why the world is just so, at least from the researcher's perspective, and in true poststructuralist style. In the world where I teach, complexity, chaos, relativity and subjectivity demand that I learn to continually navigate the many different paths through them all, to find the momentary points of light. I end On the Way Home From School with a poem, Celestial Navigation, dedicated to all teachers who recognize that teaching is like that, and especially to those I have worked with at this university. Finally, if there is anything at all like a resolution in a narrative such as this, it is about knowing this space better, and learning how to be in it without my boxing gloves on.
As Ms. Goodhope Walked Into The Behavioural Review Ethics Board Office, she knew everything was going to work out very well indeed. This morning, she had made twenty copies of her application, which had been previously approved by her supervisor and the Department Head with little comment other than “Well done!” As she popped her fat envelope into the IN tray, she smiled. All the ingredients for making this research project a recipe for success were of the best quality, in fact. There were her twenty-five years of teaching experience, her solid academic background, and the supportive university environment with all the current research methods and education theories represented in the coursework complementing her research project. Everything was bubbling along quite nicely: this would be a feast of a project.

The group of six middle school students she planned to work with in the classroom all experienced learning challenges of varying degrees impacting their ability to write. Most had never written a coherent sentence, much less a paragraph or a narrative. It’s not that they weren’t in possession of stories, though, it was just that schools focussed so much on writing them down, Ms. Goodhope surmised. If there was another way to tell their stories, that could be evaluated and validated within the language arts curriculum, these students could experience academic and school success. Based on her readings of the great philosophers, everyone had voices to tell their stories. If there seemed to be a gap between voice and story, it was because there was not a safe arena for the enactment of individual agency. Her students were simply imprisoned by their pencils. What they needed was an opportunity to use current technology that would free them from the chains of manual writing, or writing at all. What they needed was imagery and the spoken word. If they could simply use their considerable artistic skills and just speak instead of write, they could—using video—narrate a life story to

**Naval Gazing**

I aye sir
eyeing the clock
answering to the captain of the ship.

I am, I am, that’s what I am,
I’m Popeye the Sailor Man.
Cruising through the watery world
just a fishy kind of girl
swimming against the school,

uncool.

I eye,
Yigh!

I wish I could see
which eye’s gone soft
when truth seems
sharp and clear.
(Except for a waver.)
Madam Sherlock Approached The IN Tray on the counter of the BREB office with no small degree of trepidation. Of course, it was good to have the process over with, the twenty copies collated and signed off, the “envelope, please.” But, this was not the Academy Awards in Hollywood, California. No, this was the university, THE ACADEMY. A different place: a place she didn’t feel a part of yet.

As a new graduate student with a pressing timeline due to the financial restraints of whopping tuition fees, Sherlock had adopted an attitude of efficiency. Best to get wading on immediately through the research application form process, and quickly onto the research project itself. If there was one thing she’d noticed in her twenty-five years of teaching, it was that few people digested the meaning of forms very carefully, so she knew that whatever she put there would simply have to fill in the slots carefully and correctly, not stand out too much or raise large red flags. She didn’t want anyone to notice it too much, or start interrogating her about her research project too closely.

Why? Because she actually had no idea what it would be about, that’s why. As a careful investigator and observer, Sherlock realized that teaching and learning were usually never about the proposed curriculum. You can set out with a particular set of objectives to be “learned,” but even if you do actually learn them, or teach them in a way that allows them to be learned, there is so much more learning that takes place that is never measured.

Definitions of eye/laye are hard to come by a dance along the waterline barefoot, calculating the waves to stick to my timing yet knowing they won’t.

1.1 Making masks for a dramatic presentation.
rival anything the “regular” kids wrote. Plus, they’d have an extra opportunity to learn how to handle a video camera, use editing software, and be able to present their work to the class on a DVD. Certainly these new found skills and the presentation of their work would also boost their social status with the rest of the class, too—and that was what was truly motivating Ms. Goodhope.

For years as a resource teacher, she had seen the “resource group” students suffer socially, in that they often became very quiet, submissive and withdrawn. True, there were the ones who went the opposite way, acting out and up, loudly and obnoxiously, demanding their status in a negative way. However, most of the “group” didn’t do that. Mostly, they tried to “fit in.” And, that was Ms. Goodhope’s job, actually: to find a place for them to “fit in” to the ministry curriculum, to the teacher’s lesson materials, to the physical place in their enrolling class. They would sit on the carpet for a separate lesson while the rest of the class worked at their desks, or maybe they’d nip out to the hall for extra coaching on the reading so their voices wouldn’t disrupt the read-aloud going on in the class, or maybe they’d go to the resource room for the whole period so they could work uninterrupted. In terms of the lesson materials, it was Ms. Goodhope’s job to re-write them with particular learning objectives left in to satisfy the grade level requirements and specific objectives added to address the learning outcomes in the student’s IEP’s.

The Way Inn

I found myself at a table staring down an order of specific items, counted and sorted into categories of taste: Sweet, savoury, raw, cooked.

so I selected something meaningful, colourful, textural, scented and warm, dreaming of bodily sensation and satiation.

The waiter wore a dreary black and white and blank expression,

The waiter checked the order twice, smiled with his teeth, and marched to the kitchen through secret swinging doors.
In fact, it is hardly reported at all, except in the wonderful coffee room and meeting table anecdotes that are rarely recorded. Sherlock had an amazing capacity for remembering those stories. In fact, she was a committed regular in the mornings, making it a habit to show up for coffee for at least fifteen minutes before the morning bell, and sometimes for a full half hour. Once there, she felt to be a part of the pulse of the school. The teacher’s stories about their students, their families, their love lives, their successes and failures in both lesson instruction and the politics of negotiation that teaching requires were the most entertaining and informative moments she had at work.

Then, there were also the teaching moments with the students, which, although clouded with the authority she held as “the teacher,” occasionally afforded some moments for sharing stories. Sometimes they told her what they thought—but then sometimes they just told her what they thought she wanted to hear, just to please her. Knowing this, and knowing that her proposed research on the BREB application was to elicit life stories told on video by middle school students with written output learning disabilities, made it difficult for Sherlock to believe that truthful and meaningful stories would come. A different teacher would have simply insisted on the students producing them, but then, how would they be true stories? Then, if one was to search for truth, how would one know it was there? With a sigh, she deposited the envelope in the IN tray, knowing that the succinctly worded research project on the application form was much like fulfilling any mandated curriculum.

Not surprisingly, at the table opposite to mine sat the Jack of Hearts, his menu upside down, sideways, at arms length, then very close. Finally, he tossed it over his shoulder and studied the room, the paintings, the walls, the windows, and me. The waiter waited with his usual blank expression. He had never met anyone quite like Jack, but knew him nonetheless. “I’ll order for the lady over there,” Jack clearly said, just so I’d know the game was on. And smiling then, he drew me in as if I’d never been away: the steady gaze, the breathless chase, the pounce, the prey, the kill.
"But sir, the lady’s ordered," the waiter then replied.
Jack boomed, "Ah, she may have done that,
but she won’t know what to get.
I’ll find an order for her
that makes her dreams come true."

Well, who was I to argue?
What did I have to lose?
This archetype of love,
this robber visceral
he charged at all my senses
knowing,
timing his attack
for the changing of the guard.

"Follow me," he said,
as he sauntered to my table
and gallantly, he offered me his arm.
"We should really tour the kitchen,
meet the chef and try the sauces,
just a taste of every stew,

before we commit
to what is right
for you.
Disregard those scratches on that menu,
the black and white of
paper taste and paper style
and forget that melancholy waiter
who’s only waiting
for us all
to go away.

So we left him
standing and waiting
while we ventured to seek
the source of true love and delight.
And just outside the kitchen
Jack opened with a flourish
a bottle of gewurztraminer
vintage 1999.

"Chef!" cried Jack
as we swung through the doors.
"Jack!" cried out the chef,
“It's been so long since someone's come—
I thought nobody cared!”
“I've brought a friend,” Jack said,
but I found I couldn't speak.
All my words seemed paltry amid the kitchen's opulence and plenty.

We scented paths through sauces of creamy hollandaise, spiced fruits and garlicked capers, mesquite seared cajun fowl filets of beef, pepper crusted; filoed salmon with dill and cucumber and sliced fresh peaches over French vanilla ice, washed down clean by 'traminer '99.

But that was just the short course, our path went labyrinthine trailing silky oysters, raw from northern seas and by the wayside, Asian chestnuts salted in sweet stew then scattered with chopped shiso leaf, ruffled purple by new frost.

There were cheeses ranked by odour and chocolates by their cream, and breads by crackling toughness, paired with butter set in pressed shapes of meadow flowers for each season or with oils green or golden from olive groves in Tuscany.

Jack I followed through every flavour, every texture, every scent until I knew those imperfections that always kept me seeking more: For salt I wanted sugar, for raw I wanted cooked, for spice I wanted green herbs, for wine I begged cool water.
But, tragically, what Ms. Goodhope was observing was not a "fitting in" on the part of a good number of students, but a "fading in." They became quiet and submissive, their most common response when asked a question being "Um, I don't know," even if it was absolutely impossible for them NOT to know. Their other stock response was "Never mind," whenever they were asked to repeat a barely mumbled, impossible-to-hear question. They were also suffering socially, as the students outside their group could easily see that the "resource group" could not do the regular lesson. As time progressed, the students in the "regular" class began to interact less and less with members of the "group." Hoping not to be noticed, hoping not to stand out too much, became the prime motivator for social deportment among the "group" members.

It was a stew, alright, but it was something Ms. Goodhope had seen enough of. Every year had its nuances, its flavours, its spices, but this year, she was going to create something different, something that would enable the emancipation of these student's voices. She kept a journal of her musings, poetry and observations during the year, and the first entries are as follows:

_I can't imagine how to start talking about what I do for a living, which is teaching. It's not just the students, the colleagues, the curriculum, the books, the schoolhouse. It's about a whole lot of intricate paths that connect and sometimes disconnect, it's about a way of being. Teaching isn't something you go and do at a place called school and then you're done and that's it, you're not a teacher because you're not at work. Believe it or not, I think I can say that there is no set of rules or particular path to follow while you are teaching. There aren't a bunch of standard ingredients, either, to always ensure the same result. You just can't apply x, y and z and presto...you get teaching._

_It's more like cooking, really, teaching is. You might copy a recipe and see if you like

_"When does imagination end?"
I sighed so blissfully,
And Jack smiled and kissed my head.

He said,
_"Stop using that old menu
from the waiter black and white,
instead just go and lift the lids off all the bubbling pots!
If you want some why not try some,
and see how it goes down?
If it's lacking,
take another from the oven,
or refrigerator,
or up on the pantry shelf.
You'll learn it all without me,
now that you've found a way
and anyways I'll never know exactly what you need."_
good and measurable, with appropriate boxes filled in to meet guidelines for all ethical concerns and legal contingencies. But what truths she would learn during the research were, as yet, unknown.

After all, it is much easier to identify facts that can be easily measured rather than truth, of course. Measuring truth, identifying truth, seeking truth, is all quite troublesome. Her job as teacher was to deliver curriculum as mandated, and to measure the student’s mastery of it against the series of performance standards provided in the Ministry’s Integrated Resource Packages. Those performances were then ranked and attached to letter grades, put on report cards, and sent home to parents.

Sherlock, as a resource teacher this year, had a group of students who were not “within expectations” for their grade level performance. All of them were “identified” as ESL or LAC or Special Needs, so they did not enter into any sort of ranking at all. They did not get letter grades—they got Individualized Education Plans. Every fall, Sherlock had to review their IEP’s, assess the students again with standardized tests, and assign them one of those Ministry designations, or the students would not get any individualized instruction. Before funding is released for alternative teaching materials or teaching staff for her students, she must label her students for the Ministry. But did the labelling give a true picture of the students? And, what truths were revealed in the labelling?

He smiled and then, reluctantly, I let him go.
I believe he seeks another heart that wants some wanting that only he can give. Is it someone that you know?

1.2 Portrait of the teacher, by Anthony C.
it, then modify it to suit your taste or to use the ingredients you have on hand. Ultimately, you can create your own once you get familiar with the basics. The trick is to find a way in, to get to know your taste, to see what might be easiest to begin with. There is no particular order in terms of where to start, either: people have to find what works for them.

Sept 16: Positively Meet the Class of 05/06

What a relief it was for Ms. Goodhope when she and her teaching partner Pam saw this year's class list. They share the Grade Six enrolling position, Goodhope has Thursdays and Fridays, Pam does Mondays to Wednesdays. On Mondays and Tuesdays, Goodhope works as a Resource Teacher for students with ESL, learning challenges and special needs in Grades Six and Seven. They swooped down upon the list, as it was finally revealed to them after holding last year's class for a final reunion during the first week of school. They counted and recounted: only 27 students! They tallied and crowed: only four with special needs! Only three who will need LAC! Only one beginner ESL! Mostly all the other ESL students have been in the country for at least five years! And look—a good wide spread on the marks scale, with a scattering at every level! Of course, this is a class that might have turned their hair prematurely grey five years ago, but these days they think they're lucky.

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Two Days' Say

Jed speaks in words that start in his eyes.
He looks into mine and stops while the message travels in waves to his lips that softly part.
He makes a sound he speaks my name.

I wait (nothing) no word yet.
Jed tries again, this time faster, rolling thoughts from his toes to his eyes, missing his lips entirely.
We both smile, I wait.
Then impatient children
Sherlock kept a journal of how her students were measured and evaluated every September, and her responses to this process.

The VP called me to a meeting to determine the status of the special needs designations for the September 30 deadline with about two minute’s notice. Without thinking, I agreed to come, and asked my student teacher to supervise the class and their work after a brief, intense and careful introduction of place value in numbers to six digits.

Got to the meeting and everything moved at such a slow pace, discussing the psychologist’s sick uncle and whatnot that I thought I might scream. (Sorry, but I’ve put twenty-five people on hold and a neophyte in a rather compromising teaching position to do something specific here, and I don’t want to hear about your summer holiday and your sick uncle!) Okay, I was feeling stressed and grumpy, too, because in fact the files that I needed with notes about reading test scores etc, that are required to precipitate any sort of testing for special placements I had left with the classroom teachers, to return “ASAP,” and it seems that meant about five days to them when it had meant about five hours to me. I’ll have to be clearer about the meaning of “ASAP” in the future. So, I had to run around and find the files, interrupt classes and take away info that one teacher said she really hadn’t time to read yet...could she get it back? These days nobody gets enough time to do a thorough job, to show enough respect to the students.

fill in his words for him,
speak for him,
tell their idea of him.
But Jed hasn’t spoken.
His voice is stuck behind
his eyes,
From where he looks into mine.

So he gives in, agrees,
what they said will do.
Next day, he speaks again
and tells me
his father moved back to China.
Important words, two days’ say,
saved for me.
Last year's class is now passed onto the next year's teachers, with some regrets, some jubilation. It was a banner year, with a group they grew so close to and grew so much with. The special needs were off the chart, with six students in their class and the same in the other two Grade Six classes. The LAC needs were double, the ESL needs triple. On top of that, some of the tensions that had developed around how children bully, tease and ostracize children who have physical, intellectual and social differences and disabilities were distracting from the possibility of academic growth for many students. Last year, in October, they decided to develop a curriculum based on developing happiness, contentment and caring because no real learning could happen until those objectives were achieved.

This year, however, after just a few days, it is apparent that they have a class that is already happy: a cohesive group that wants to work together and likes being with each other. Such a major hurdle, already achieved! They have no SEA time for the special needs support, but then these children can probably manage with a little extra Resource Teacher time, and there is more offered this year: about eight periods a week for the group of them. Nowhere near enough to achieve full academic potential, but enough so students won't totally stagnate like a couple did last year. Goodhope and Pam are both relieved that their work this year will not be so stressful. Even so, the day to day business of caring for and teaching 27 children in the various curricula of import to the Ministry, along with the assessment and reporting, is no small matter, and definitely not for the faint of heart.

A typical day has a plethora of minutiae to attend to, from counting fees for supplies to ensuring all lock combinations are memorized and a folder in cyberspace for 27 pieces of

Sept 27, 2005: Listing Faintly, Toward Beauty

Another day of so many things that a list just doesn’t do justice to...

Remembered the wood glue and fixed the rocking chair, this is true progress. Working with the hands, even if it is carpentry while wearing a pencil slim skirt and a silk scarf, is a wonderfully healing process.

Worked with Pam to reconfigure the seating in her classroom so all students could be facing the instruction as some are actually not even aware that instruction is occurring because their backs are turned. Also finalized some seating so working groups could be established, and got student crews to organize textbooks onto shelf. Must create a new numbering system to keep track of books and put library envelopes in the dozen books I've salvaged from my own children's shelves to donate to the book tree.
Or the teachers. The more I sat in that meeting, grumpy and feeling like the very embodiment of disruption, I realized that I should have been given time to think and prepare before being called to this meeting, that I should have said 'no, I'm not ready, how about next week after I've met with all the Grade 6/7 teachers and had a chance to see the students in question?' At the very least, I should have had time to book a supervision aide to be with the student teacher. Then I began to get a little calmer, as the meeting progressed and it became apparent that we were circumventing a lot of hoopla (who-pla?), getting to the point, and generating a list of high priority tasks to serve the needs of the kids. Without doing this groundwork, the Ministry will not grant us the education assistants, teachers, books and materials that the students need to learn with.

I just hate the whole procedure, though: the language, the labeling: I wish I'd had Jane, my resource team colleague, on tape. It went something like this:

“So why is Sally a ‘D’? Shouldn’t she be a ‘Q’? I mean, these letters don’t really give us a very clear picture. And, they keep changing them every few years, you have to keep on top of them and recategorize and be sure...I mean, doesn’t she seem more like a ‘Q’?”

I offered, probably unhelpfully I suppose, that the letters, as we knew, were totally inadequate and never gave a clear picture, that we had to rely

Got some planning time in to put together an outline for the video project. Very interesting, writing it up and visualizing it unfolding. May have about six students participating.

Turns out the school's vintage computer doesn't have enough memory to actually handle big video files, may have to bring my laptop to work, luckily my husband found the firewire on Sunday that is laptop friendly.

Did the school based team overview meeting of students in the school that need to be properly categorized for funding from the Ministry. Must have this to ensure staffing levels or will get our budget cut even further, which would be bloody disastrous as there isn't enough staff as it is.

Came down with a weird flushing, sore throat, aching back and extreme sinking tiredness in the middle of the categorization meeting. I think this type of meeting must make me sick.

Located “missing” adapted novel study materials that were ordered last year and are now needed to teach with by several teachers. Location: my very own cupboard, top shelf, tucked in the corner. Red faced, I went and photocopied the first one.
Collated thirty-page booklets by hand because brain stopped working sometime around noon due to recategorization meeting virus, which caused me to believe that the "group" button on the photocopy machine would reproduce each of six booklets in page order. Couldn't throw out and start over because of guilt about wasted paper and tree loss and global warming and...sigh. Can’t expect the LAC group to help out with this, either, this is exactly the sort of job that should not be handled by children with ADHD.

Tried to mark standardized tests and found my mind boggling, reading numbers crookedly and forgetting student names every ten seconds or so. Filed Johnny Chand under James Chin. Lost My Phan’s test entirely.

The principal came in looking for something, turns out she’s been missing her keys somewhere in my room...since last Friday. Checked my bag thoroughly once she left, praying they would not be in there. If God is truly good, I do not have the principal’s keys in any of my cabinet drawers, either. I am a notorious key napper and key loser, I have a history of merrily scooping other’s keys with abandon, then charging off, thinking they are mine, only to be dumbfounded when they do not open my door.

Scurried out to my car and drove to university, dreaming of coffee and muffins and talking about anything other than this list.

This stupid list crowded my mind throughout the whole class and caused me to feel ill all over again, I lost track of my purpose mid-sentence a few times. Scary, that’s never happened before. Usually my thoughts hold out until a semi-colon, at least.

Thought about how humans aspire to seek beauty, about Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine’s speech “What is Beauty?” about how Marlowe and his king subverted the church yet still insisted that God and Beauty were what men seek. Possibly I should have spent today contemplating beauty instead of listing, sinking and drowning.

What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?
If all the pens that poets ever held
Had fed the feeling of their master’s thoughts...
...all combined in beauty’s worthiness...
should there hover in their restless heads...
which into words no virtue can digest...
every warrior that is rapt with love
of fame, of valour and of victory
Must needs have beauty beat on his conceits...
(Marlowe, 1590, from the play Tamburlaine, V.i.)

Wrote a poem in evening to put thoughts of day in perspective:
Seekers of Beauty

There is beauty in the balance of the weave of light and dark,
in the warp and weft of fabric made from stories of the heart.
The wind finds the voice
of every storyteller bound
in tensions of the weave
and frees them high to spiral
joined in song,
a chant to remember,
a rhythm and pulse
my heart dances to.
I hear the wind come up
from the desert and the sea,
push ships’ rough sails wide and full,
blow sailors’ yarns to distant lands.
Once it even lifted
the lucent veils of Scheherazade
and teased tales of mystery
toward the Sultan’s ear.
She lived, we live,
the pattern in the cloth repeats.
The story holds, is treasured and re-told.
I remember
the strong silken stories
from the fabric of my past:
my little dark-haired boy stands tall
as the year he is old
to see his carp flag sail in the sun,
orange, spinning, snapping
before the breeze;
my little light-haired girl
comes running, following the wind,
trailing high above her head
a soft scarf of purple,
watching it lift into the light.
“Look, mommy, look!
It’s beautiful!” they say.
I know, I do,
I know this story well:
I’m giving it to you,
and you’re giving it to me,
wrapped in cloth,
woven in patterns light and dark:
tapestries of love,
stories we live.
narrative art. Lists are made of all kinds: to tally marks, to send to the office for attendance, to record novels read, to keep for emergency contacts, for the public health immunization records, for who will be the monitors every week, for who is in what club and when they must be at their meetings, for who will visit the Resource teacher and when, for who will visit the ESL teacher and when, for who will be whose kindergarten buddy for reading and crafts, for who will take hot lunch, for who will go home for lunch, for who will go to the after school programs, for who will need to have priority spots for educational assessments by the psychologists.

It’s a lot of who-ha, as some would say. Breathe in, breathe out, it is easy to do if you don’t get bogged down in it, and be sure to keep the lists all in one place. Warning: don’t try to keep these details in your head, there’s not enough room, it gives you wrinkles.

Then there’s the details of the books Goodhope has to hand out, the ones she doesn’t have, and the ones that are too embarrassingly old with swear words and rips and ragged covers and she missed that and the sweetest kid in the class just showed her, red-faced, the nastiest word they’ve ever seen in ink on the page of the book she’s handed them. Ditch that book in a show of disgust? Or rip out the page and save the rest that’s good so at least there’s 277 of 279 pages, and something to teach with as the new books, three years later, have still not arrived? They said they’d be here for sure by LAST fall. (She keeps the book, two pages lighter.)

Then there’s the inevitable tears, nervous laughter and acting out that comes along with 30 or so people in the room negotiating place and space, everybody checking everybody else out. People coming in with plans that must be carried forward and ideas about what everybody should do, and it’s not just the teacher who has these in mind! The spirits of last years’ teacher must be acknowledged, too: sometimes honoured; sometimes exorcised.

1.3 Shane Lee’s story: her “who” is the baby drawn very large with tears answering her mother’s tears, as her mother must leave her in the Philippines with her grandmother. Mother must go to Canada to work as a nanny.
more on anecdotal notes and samples of work to back up the Ministry labels all the time, so it would be important to keep doing that to give the high schools information they could work with.

Of course Jane agreed, these things we don’t really ever speak about because we are in perfect agreement as to the banality of the Ministry letters and categories for students with special needs. I guess I said it just to remind her that really, we were just doing what had to be done and the deal was to do it and not get too bogged down in its quagmire of stupidity, to move on and get to teaching and learning with real kids instead of with obfuscating letters. Every once in a while, in the midst of this sort of puzzling over how on earth to fit a child into these slots, the mind just boggles, really. This categorizing procedure is like having to do a rubric cube instead of something practical. Yes, it’s hard, certainly you feel some accomplishment when it’s done, but where’s the agency, the human connection, the purpose? We have to constantly be alert to the letters, we have to literally mind our P’s and Q’s or they start to take over.

Jane is one of the most respectful people I’ve encountered. She is simply baffled by the categories that are so rigid, that clearly impose realities on people without ever having their realities wholly considered in the first place.

I mean, crunching a bunch of numbers from a test like the Stanford-Binet or a Weschler doesn’t actually tell you how the child needs to learn.

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Aaron said he had never seen that kind of desk, or chair, or such long rows of bright, bright lights until he came to school in grade one. He said the lights, when he looked up, hurt his eyes.
Sept 16, Friday: Settling into a New Middle School Year: Minutiae, Details, Categories and Oh, um, Excuse Me? People?

Ms. Goodhope finds settling into a new middle school year generally hectic but exhilarating. There are few other places on this earth she can think of where you get to meet so many lovely, motivated, engaging, truthful, complex people all at once to embark on a collaborative project for ten month together. That said, the days can be sometimes trying and tedious. The following is a pretty close description of her day on Friday, Sept 18:

The VP asked me at 10:46, one minute after the recess bell, to go to a meeting with the psychologist about last year’s grade sixes (this year’s grade sevens) to get them on priority lists for psycho-educational assessments so that if they should need special program support in high school next year they might have the documentation done in time that must be in place before that support can be given. The only problem was that I had 27 students waiting, to whom I had planned to introduce the concept of place value to the sixth digit and how to round numbers. The administration keeps forgetting that I wear two hats, and they assume I am in constant touch with the Resource Team while simultaneously teaching in the classroom. The truth of the matter was that I was somewhat happy the psychologist was at the school because it is essential to get this done, especially since a strike is looming and it is necessary to get this kind of work out of the way before we are ruled to not attend meetings with administrators. I do not want to hold up the future for these kids, so I am actually prepared to work extra now so I don’t feel guilty about them, because I won’t “strike-break” later. So, after a nanosecond’s hesitation, I agreed to go to the meeting and said my student teacher could supervise the class after I had introduced the concepts in the math lesson.

1.5 Steven lives for Halloween. He likes the treats, but loves the tricks. He’s studying to be a funny guy, and practises his one-liners and routines daily. He dreams of being a stand up comic when he grows up.
It doesn’t tell you that they cannot function with noise or light or music or people in the room, or that they prefer to be naked, at any given time (maybe during social studies). Number-crunching does not tell anybody that this child will follow other kids home instead of going to his own home because he likes to be with that friend and then when that friend says goodbye and goes in his house, the child is lost because he doesn’t really know where he is and doesn’t think to ask anybody where he is, either, so he wanders around for a couple of hours trying to get back home while the entire school gets frantic and the police are called. These types of things happened to kids in my class last year, the lost child didn’t have a “letter” and the one who preferred nakedness actually had one that said she was definitely not in need of any extra support, that she could cope with an in-class program with modified work. Clothing, it appears, is not considered “curricular” for the Ministry. It isn’t on the test, I guess.

Meantime, here we are, still applying for letter labels and doing expensive and lengthy tests to verify those categories, when the truth is that experienced teachers can tell which students need particular types of educational settings just from the anecdotal stories about the child and their work samples.

Who is Mr. Stanford? Mr. Weschler? Mr. Binet? How truly do they know about the kids I teach? Why is their authority always, always greater than mine, or even the psychologist’s? The woman who tests, the school psychologist, is very capable of interpreting these tests, truly. But, even she is swayed by the numbers, and wouldn’t dream of any anecdotal incident overriding the test scores.

1.6 Mask making, my daughter helps.

1.7 Patience...
So, I did something I shouldn’t have: I put my student teacher completely in charge of the class after I had introduced the math concepts, while I went to the meeting. It only occurred to me later that I should have supplied a supervision aide to be in the room, as he is not to be teaching more than 20% just now and he had his French lesson to teach that day, as well as a Terry Fox run to supervise. Well, he did just fine and then it turned out he was completely unprepared to do the run in the afternoon anyway. He didn’t even know where the park was although it was only half a block away and he walks through it from the Skytrain station every day. He didn’t know the name of it. He hadn’t thought about how to supervise the children off the school grounds, or how to structure a run, or where to get the information about how the other teachers were meeting and what they were planning to do...in short, he was completely and utterly unprepared, and hadn’t considered it a lesson, really. I handled the Terry Fox Run. I’ll have to be more “on top of” getting him to consider all teaching situations as “lessons” needing some sort of preparation.

1.8 drying...

1.9 lifting...
1.10 Now you see it,

1.11 now you don't.
Migration of Birds and People: Struggling to Understand

Ms. Goodhope finds the people she works with great, the students delightful. Today Joe alerted all the teachers to children playing with the feathers of a dead crow that had fallen under a tree, and with his guidance they were able to find the area and seal it off, and await the arrival of the school board landscaper health squad that carts away dead bird bits for testing. It’s amazing that such procedures have been thought out and are in place, thinks Goodhope. Secretly, she looks forward to the birdie swat team arriving tomorrow outside her classroom window to pick up the feathers off the lawn. She hopes they look like John Cleese or Rowan Atkinson. But if it’s birds, maybe Peter Sellers would be best. He had such a good part in The Party, feeding the birdie its num nums.

Today Ms. Goodhope met a new student named Magdalena, who is newly arrived from West Africa, Ghana to be exact. Her accent is musical and at first catches Ms. Goodhope off guard, making understanding difficult. However, after a half hour it was apparent that she had extensive knowledge of English, and Ms. Goodhope was able to reassure the classroom teacher that she was in for a treat: a very intelligent, capable student with a rich cultural background and two caring parents, both doctors. As resource teacher, Ms. Goodhope is looking forward to meeting these parents, and hopes they do not have too much disappointment about finding work here in Canada as doctors. The medical system here does behave in an exclusionary way with foreign-trained doctors. Since this family has only been here for two months, she knows they must be feeling a little euphoric about their move.

LEMON DREAM BARS

Base:
1/3 cup butter
1 cup flour
2 tbsp. white sugar

Topping:
2 beaten eggs
1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar
3/4 cup coconut, chopped
1/2 cup nuts, chopped
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. vanilla

Icing: 2 tsp. grated lemon rind, 2 tbsp. lemon juice, 1 cup sifted icing sugar.

Madam Sherlock lives in a place that is populated by the families of unionized mill workers, Scott Paper workers, and mostly regular people that I thought understood about strikes and collective bargaining and all that. The last time there was a work stoppage by teachers, a one day of protest in January 2002, she was astonished by the reaction of her neighbours. Here are some of the things that were said either to her face or while she was with a group of parents waiting to pick up her kids from the school:

"Well, there wouldn’t be so much trouble with teachers if there was no teacher’s union."

"The government should just legislate them back to work. They shouldn’t be allowed to strike."

"They don’t need a raise, they already make good salaries, and they get way better holidays than anybody else."

"There’s no money. Teachers are supposed to be smart, can’t they figure that out? They teach math, don’t they?"

"They should just get jobs in the real world. That would shut them up. They don’t know how good they’ve got it."

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**KAFFEE KLATSCH CAKE** for ladies with time on their hands

**Cake:**
- ½ cup butter or margarine
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups flour

**Topping:**
- ½ cup flour
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 2 tbsp. butter
- 1⅛ tsp. cinnamon

1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. salt
1 cup dairy sour cream
½ cup raisins

**Glaze:**
- ¼ cup butter or margarine
- 2 tbsp. milk
- 2/3 cup icing sugar
- ¼ tsp. vanilla
Ms. Goodhope has lived overseas herself, which taught her that the first three months is like an exciting adventure. Then, around 12 to 15 weeks after arrival, the expat begins to feel some remorse for leaving home and longs for the predictability of family and friends, food and housing back home. She wrote in her journal:

*Everything back home seems sweeter than it really was, actually. Also, glaring clashes begin to occur in the new home that cannot be giggled away. Things start to get on your nerves and under your skin. You ask: WHY do these crazy people here do things this way? You begin to think everybody in the new place is a bit loopy, or sadly illogical, and that you are the only one who knows how life really should be lived. Then, there’s the weather to contend with, either wildly hot or unbearably cold. And what about these houses, these houses that just don’t seem to function the way houses should? Either they’re too drafty or too stuffy, or too sterile or too noisy, and what on earth is that you can see from the front porch, anyway? Shut the door.*

This phase can last for about another three months, it’s called the “trough” of the expat living experience. Whilst a-wallowing in this slough of despond, it is common to keep filling it up with private tears and rage and self-remorse for making the foolish decision to move in the first place. This is when many people give up on the new place and either move on to a new one or move back home, depending on their economic situation and problem solving style. Ms. Goodhope has met people who have been “traveling” for years, who never stayed more than six months anywhere at a time.

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Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, one at a time and beat until light and fluffy. Sift flour, baking powder, soda and salt together. Mix in raisins. Add alternately with sour cream to butter mixture. Pour into greased 9-inch spring form pan.

Combine ingredients for topping; sprinkle on top of batter. Bake in moderate oven, 350 F. for 50 to 60 minutes or until done. Cool on rack. Do not remove from pan.

Combine glaze ingredients in saucepan. Bring to boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Pour over cake and let cool completely. Remove from pan.

**THIS IS VERY, VERY GOOD. BEWARE**
The worst blow, though, came from an old friend of hers who had trained as a teacher but had not ever worked as one because she married a highly successful building contractor and could afford to stay home to raise her children. She was a guest at a party at Sherlock's house when she started a conversation about how much of a raise teachers deserved, and made it clear that she thought teachers should get quite a bit less than what the BCTF had put on the table. She asked Sherlock what her salary was, and whether or not she felt she needed such a "big" raise. Sherlock wrote in her journal about the incident:

At first I was stunned. Then, quickly, I asked her how much her husband made. She stopped, looked at me, and seemed a bit put out. I asked her again. She wouldn't answer. He'd known me and my ways since childhood, and was standing there smiling, apparently waiting for his wife to fall in the trap she'd set for herself.

Finally I told her that it didn't seem right to me that my salary should be set by popular opinion, and that every time I wanted a raise it was a matter of a public press decision rather than a private discussion between my employer and myself. In fact, I continued, I was quite sure that her husband didn't have to defend his salary to everyone who had ever lived in a house just because he builds houses for a living. Why, I asked, does everyone who has ever been in school think they know what my salary should be, or whether or not I deserve it?
Some people, especially middle-class North Americans, live overseas and travel home several times a year for every possible extended holiday, even keeping summer cabins in Maine or the Gulf/Orca Islands.

These options are not available to many people from developing nation contexts. When they leave home, they cannot assume that they can easily return. Plane fares are expensive, and all the relatives back home expect major gifts from their newly “wealthy” North American kin on their return. Nor can the Third World expat assume that their future in North America will be easy. Most find subsistence wage jobs here. Some even leave their children in their home country with a trusted grandparent and send money to them so the children have good private schooling and all the clothing and toys that North American dollars can buy back home. Ms. Goodhope admires the courage, ambition and resolve behind the expat’s move to leave their home, and wishes there was more support for them for when they hit the trough, as they will. She tries to be supportive, but there’s not much she can do except put them in touch with Immigrant Services and be a willing listener should they wish to talk.

Often the refugee children, like Joe, suffer from some post-traumatic stress problems. He is still afraid that he might get sent back to a refugee camp like the one he lived in before. Ms. Goodhope’s journal excerpt reads: Today the student teacher taught a French lesson involving a cartoon in which a house burns down and the parents die. Joe decided he had to change the word, as he didn’t like the dying bit. That was a good decision, a healthy choice for him to make, I thought. But then, the word he changed it to was “abandon.” One of the students in his work group said, shocked, “What sort of parent would abandon their child?” They all looked at Joe questioningly. He just smiled and shrugged his shoulders. “It’s better than dead,” he said. I believe his anxiety must run deep.

Joe’s “who” started in a refugee camp for people fleeing Burma. He worries about abandonment, about family separation, about the impermanence of social relationships. He wants to stay at one school for more than one year. He doesn’t want to move again. He wants school to be a safe, welcoming place. It isn’t always like that: he often feels like an outsider.
Her husband, I added, surely had the right to ask for a raise whenever he
needed one, and it was a matter between himself and his boss. I, on the other hand,
was no longer even allowed to talk to my own boss at all, as all negotiation was now
legislated to go to a central bargaining agency called the BCPSEA, and; apparently,
through every press mill in the province before I could get my puny raise. Really, I said,
it's pretty embarrassing to have everybody discussing the details of your work as if
they had intimate knowledge of it, when in fact they know very little about it.

I had already withstood all the other callous and ignorant comments from
other neighbours. I was on a burn, and I let my temper get the better of me,
probably.

She apologized, I didn't. I gracefully accepted her apology and offered her
another drink, which she, too, gracefully accepted.

This story and the previous quotes are just some samples of the face-to-face
interactions that come up for teachers when contract negotiations hit the press and
strikes loom. Then, of course, there are the letters to the editor, the newspaper articles,
the radio announcers, all the advertising about what a "good" job the government is
doing "improving" education, the twists of numbers that make it look like there is
absolutely no reason for teachers to complain—it goes on and on.

WHISKEY SOUR

1 ½ oz. lemon juice 
1 ½ oz. blended whiskey 
½ tsp. sugar 
Maraschino cherry

Shake juice, sugar and whiskey well with cracked ice. Strain into either a sour glass
or an old-fashioned glass. Garnish with cherry.

Scotch Sour:
Substitute Scotch for blended whiskey in recipe above and mix as directed.

Rum Sour:
Substitute rum for blended whiskey in recipe above and mix as directed. A slice of
lemon or orange may be added.

(Note: horrible drink, best avoided, don't eat the cherry if forced to drink it.)
Ms. Goodhope considers the impact of culture clash and change in her journal, about how living within foreign cultures has changed her view of how she lives in her home culture:

_I always steel myself against the racism I encounter from the people who nostalgically yearn for the good old days when neighbourhoods were mostly white. They are shocked by the change, stunned to return to their old school to find that there is not one white face in the halls anymore. “What’s happening here?” they ask themselves now that the race shoe is on the other foot._

At a recent large gathering of old friends, when asked where I worked now, one of my acquaintances said “Hey, that was my old school.” Then, next beat, he asked, “How many white kids are there at the school these days? Like, a couple in every class?”

_I replied truthfully that there were none in my class last year and none in most of the classes in fact._

“That’s too bad,” he said. “Don’t you think it’s a crying shame?” he asked. “The old neighbourhood’s been completely taken over. I don’t even want to go there anymore.”

“Things change,” I said. “I think I’m over that now.”

He nodded thoughtfully, but changed the subject.

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**WHITE BREAD** (Mary’s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 cups milk</td>
<td>6 tbsp. sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups water</td>
<td>4 tbsp. shortening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pkgs. yeast (2 tbsp.)</td>
<td>11 1/2 cups flour, approximately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 tsp. salt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Scald milk and add cold water. Check to make sure of lukewarm temperature, then add sugar, salt and shortening to three cups of the milk/water mixture.

B. To the remaining 1 cup fluid, add 2 tsp. sugar and yeast. Let rise 10 minutes.

C. Add B mixture to A mixture and stir. Add to 5 cups of flour (heated slightly) in a large bowl and beat for a few minutes. Add remaining flour gradually and hand mix until a ball forms.

D. Put on greased board to knead five minutes.

E. Place in greased bowl to rise until double. Divide into 4 balls, let rise 15 minutes. Shape into 4 loaves. Allow to rise a second time. Approximate total time 2 1/4 hours.

F. Bake at 400F 35 to 40 minutes.
A person who teaches has to put blinkers on and try to ignore it all, or you just wind up angry, confused, disturbed and sad. Sherlock tends to lose sleep, foolishly ranting to herself about the big picture, in full cinemascopic dreamscape, like BG grade horror:

*If the public doesn’t want good public education, what will become of democracy?*

*Should I pull up and get out of this country if this is the direction it’s bound to go?*

*Do I want my own children to live in a country where people don’t care about rights to education and the freedom and equality that brings? Should we use my husband’s EEC passport and pack up and try to get work in Europe? Am I too stressed to move?*

*Why do we have to go down the old British/American cutback path all the time, like willing cattle to the slaughterhouse?*

*Doesn’t anyone ever examine how free or relatively cheap post-secondary education in Ireland and Italy and other European nations has been such a success, how it’s bolstered their economies and increased their employment rates?*

*If people don’t get a good education here, the corporations will be able to run everything right to the ground, there will be nobody educated enough to even be critical of them anymore.*

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**Beer Bread**

3 cups flour—self raising

1 bottle of beer

3 tb. sugar

mix. tog. put in loaf pan

350 in the morning
I'm lucky I've had ample educational experience with being on the other side of other, and I've been able to study what it means. Living as a large orange haired spotty skinned woman, looming at least a foot taller than most women and many men in Asia, was my prep school, and then being perceived as the flame-haired harlot, naked without purdah or birkah in the Middle East, was my finishing school. I remember saying to someone back home here that I felt like I was a TV set most of the time I was away, but it wasn't like I was a movie star. I got stared at like I had no feelings, like I wasn't a real person but an appliance.

I don't even want to begin to go into what a medical examination in those places was like. I think that is where I was truly an object of observation and, unfortunately, some experimentation. Doctors told me that because I was "different," so I couldn't have the same drugs as the locals, I'd have to have stronger drugs or more invasive procedures. And, I've noticed that carrying on conversations with doctors about medical matters in a language you grasp poorly is quite unsatisfactory. The doctor-patient relationship is generally quite different in various countries, as well, so to expect any repartee or in fact any say at all in what happens to you can be considered quite extraordinary and is not tolerated in some cultures.

I felt pretty vulnerable in some ways, as I have described, but I never felt the same level of fear for my personal safety on the streets that I live with here. It's not that the societies are any safer over there, but what was true was that I could not access local news very well, as I didn't really get the language well enough to actually want to sit down and read the newspaper on a daily basis, or listen to a radio.

Ron and Patty Muddling on George Carlin
Old guy speaks his piece, "Modern Man."
Who is that guy?
George Carlin?
What happened,
he looks even older and he's not dead yet?

So are / neither are / we.

Yeah, he says he's modern,
but I think he's actually post-modern,
and maybe he doesn't know that
he's gone past modern, now,
even if he isn't dead.
Do you think he's a structuralist,
or maybe he's given up on that

as an embodiment betrayed
by aching structures,
by creaking joints,
by the swellings and contusions
suffered at the brutal intersection
of modern man and history and age.
Perhaps this is post-structuralism
at its best: a kind of living death,
a being in eternity and in the body
at once and always
/knowing that/
between the rock of age
and the hard place of youth
there are only humans,
being,
to attend to all the small things
that make the world
spin on.
Oh, God, they're already uncritical...no! It's the press! It's the blatant disregard for the old Anti-Combines Legislation and allowing the press to consolidate in the hands of a few right wingers!!!!

The press is the mouthpiece of capitalism! I should get back into journalism again, like Debbie did, remember how she dethroned the premier over the Doman affair...now there's intelligence and courage!

Am I a wimp for dropping out of journalism?
AAAGH!!! I CAN'T SLEEP!!!!!

If I'm lucky, the peak of the press sniping and neighbourhood snooty looks does not coincide with my monthly PMS cycle. If that does happen, I'm out several nights sleep. Like I said before, middle age is no fun sometimes.

**Tuesday Sept 20: Time Slippage**

Strange day. Sherlock had no sleep because suddenly the night got beastly cold and she didn't have the winter duvet out of storage yet and was too sleepy to get up and get it. She stayed rigid and cold in her bed, numb, tensed against the chill and dreaming. She dreamed the neighbour's boy drove his new blue sports car into her hazelnut tree, a la Harry Potter. When she awoke, she was grumpy and argued with her husband over inconsequential things.

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**UPSIDE DOWN CAKE OR COTTAGE PUDDING** (Barb's)

- ¼ cup margarine
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tsp. vanilla
- 1 egg, well beaten
- 1½ cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ cup milk

Bake at 350 F. for 30 minutes.

(Okay, the point of this is to spoon the batter over fruit, like rhubarb or apple or berries, that has been mixed with a little sugar—brown or white—and melted butter. THEN you bake it. Watch that the spoon makes it from the bowl to the pan.)
The old adage, "no news is good news" really helped me to relax and enjoy some things, like evening walks, more than I do here. In the part of the Middle East I was in, the news was so censored and unavailable that there were never any problems at all, it seemed. Luckily some neighbours had a BBC shortwave and at least they were able to warn me of a possible border skirmish at one point, which would have occurred right in town, because that's where the border divided our desert oasis town in half. Happily, there was a verbal settlement and the attack didn't take place. I suppose if I'd never heard from my friend with the BBC shortwave that day, I would have felt even safer, since nothing ever happened anyway.

I wonder how much the immigrant parents of the children I teach understand of what goes on in this little place on the west coast of Canada. I wonder what their level of fear is, based on their experience of the world both in the past and in the present. I wonder what their future expectations are, especially for their children. For their children are the future, and I am in charge of educating them. It is a heavy responsibility, and I hope they trust me to do it. However, our expectations and experiences are so different, I wonder if we will be in agreement about how this learning shall proceed. Or, I wonder if they see the teacher-student relationship to be like the doctor-patient relationship, where there is no room for question. How can I ask? How would we know?

Right. I guess it's late, so tomorrow, I'll just carry on.

I think there are some more lovely people to meet.
Her colleague decided this was the day to go skull naked. She’s lost her hair since having her first child, and has been wearing a wig for months. However, she’s decided not to do that anymore. Sherlock applauds her bravery, admires her courage, yet cannot stop her eyes from straying to her beautiful bald head, covered in downy fluff. She cannot stop thinking about not looking. She tried to stay calm and normal. When her colleague asked her out to lunch, to get away from the staffroom, of course she went. They planned a staff pub night.

Time got turned over and around, too. Major meeting going on, everybody of any social and political import gathered in the principal’s office to determine the educational programming required for key special needs students for the year. Suddenly, out bursts the counselor, who gracefully lopes down the hall and says “Sherlock, could you give us Sam’s file? It’s signed out to you.”

Sam is not on her caseload anymore. She hasn’t seen his file in six months at least. Sherlock looks on the file sign out sheet, and there is her writing, today’s date, Sept. 20. Wow! She begins to wonder about the possibility of having some sort of strange mental affliction to whom she has not been previously introduced. The “other” Sherlock must have been here, right?

1.15 Portrait of the teacher, by Shane Lee.
Sept. 18, Sunday Evening, Second Wind: Studying for a Strike, 
or Recipes for Sublimation.

Ms. Goodhope keeps telling everyone that she’s on her second wind. Just three weeks ago, end of August, she was sick with flu and had strained ligaments in her left foot and couldn’t put weight on it. Plus, she was dealing with terrific back pain that was giving her remarkable headaches and on painkillers everyday, all day. That was the end of summer holidays, so it wasn’t exactly like she started the year full of bounce. In fact, her husband was astonished she was going in to work at all, he wanted her to take sick leave and stay home for the first week. She told him that would be for wimps, she was going in because she wasn’t contagious anyway.

She got wait listed and finally in to see “the best” physio, who of course discovered not one but three twisted vertebrae and asked whatever had she done. Ms. Goodhope is very active as a rule, and couldn’t remember doing anything remarkable, other than a bit of cliff climbing, some gardening and the usual walk/bike/swim stuff. She did run on the pavement in dress sandals for three or four blocks to get to a concert on time, maybe that was it? Well, she’s just not as bouncy as she used to be. Middle age, sheesh, who needs it? It’s not for the weak.

So, here she is, three weeks later, out for a bike ride and her foot held up and she hasn’t had a headache in nearly two weeks. Plus, no painkillers in over a week. The physio plan is working, life is good: resilience rules.

Coho Calzone

Dough:
1 cup of milk
2 cups of flour
3 big spoons of shortening
salt, pepper, rosemary to taste
baking powder, of course: try 2 little spoons.

Make biscuit dough, the usual way, by putting all the dry stuff on top of the chilled shortening and chopping, smashing and cutting with whatever you’ve got, like a fork or two knives in a criss-cross cut, or heavens, if you have one of those fancy pastry cutters, use that. When it looks like oatmeal, or like small peas, dump the milk over it and press it into a ball, folding it over a few times, but don’t knead it or it gets tough. Throw a handful of flour onto the rolling surface, put the ball on top, and press it out flat with your hands or with a rolling pin so it’s about ½ inch thick.
Later, she sees a tell-tale signature, just under her pathetically penciled scribble. It is the name of a colleague who worked with her last year but has since moved on: impossible that she signed out a file today. She examines the other signatures. They all looked plausible until...hold it. That date would have had to be a weekend...so, somebody, apparently, has flipped the pages in the sign-out book back an entire year to Sept 2004. Then, because there were spaces left on that page, this year’s people began to sign out today’s files on it. Confusion and disarray, that’s what it’s all about, grabbing you by the years when you’re not looking. She looked all over creation for Sam's file before finally solving the mystery, actually.

They don't call her Sherlock for nothing, you know.

Oct. 5: (Using Up the Free and Limitless) Body of Teaching: Sherlock’s Journal Entry

Well. I have not been away from work, but I’ve been very away from this journal for a while. I was so busy at work last week that I worked myself into a state of total dehydration, which can bring on migraine headaches, so the doctor says. I had a whopper, a bamboozler, a gruesome carouse-from-hell ride of a headache that lasted for two days. I must not do this again. He recommends I get a waistbelt with a water bottle attached and drink more water. I’ve never had a migraine before, and although I am suitably impressed with their severity I don’t think I’ll be waistbetting. I have lovely little magical curative tablets he prescribed, and I did take a day off to ride it out, and I will be very careful to drink lots of water and do my neck stretches religiously.

Filling:

Salmon:
Preferably leftover baked coho. Well drained canned stuff will do, but you’ll need at least two cans. You’ll need enough to lay a bunch down the centre of your biscuit dough.

Herb:
Choose dill or rosemary or cracked pepper. Don’t do lemon zest, it’s awful with salmon.

Sauce:
Depends. You can make a white sauce with dill, tartar sauce, barbecue sauce, cheese sauce. If you’re opting for speed, you can use readymade of all of the above, or ranch dressing with dill, cheez whiz (don’t tell anybody and add a bit of chili powder, too).

Extras:
Sautéed onions, chopped red peppers, jalapenos, celery, olives, grated cheddar. Keep it simple, or none at all.
She’s hoping resilience rules at work as well. The staff tried out the phone tree today and she was pleased to hear her colleague’s voice. He was preparing a meal of chicken for company. He’s a legendary cook and the staff waits all year for his “goody day” because he makes homemade soup in large cauldrons. Unlike the Soup Nazi, he takes orders in advance, asking if you prefer the broccoli cheddar cream soup or the chicken gumbo or the scotch broth. Then, it arrives next day. So, tomorrow, it’s a lunch-hour “cook-off” of sorts, Goodhope bringing her coho salmon calzone and Dan bringing his chicken curry and they’ll taste test each other’s cooking.

Of course this is not just a sublime way to spend lunch, it is also sublimation in a psychological sense. Both of them are worriers rather than warriors and the reason they have to test the phone tree is because the strike is coming, looming, welling up, overshadowing. BUT, they don’t want to talk about THAT, so cooking seems a healthy alternative. Much better to discuss the new recipe than the ridiculous press coverage teachers are getting or the uncomfortable stares from the parents in the neighbourhood who follow the press.

Method:
Okay, so first you choose if you’re making one great big calzone/roll creation that you can then slice up and serve to many, or whether you’re making separate little calzones, one for each person. I usually go with the big roll and slice it. Make sure the dough is rolled out in an oblong shape, about 14” x 8” or so. Put the salmon in the centre, longways. Sprinkle a bit of sauce on top of the salmon, maybe just two big spoonfuls, so it doesn’t get the dough too wet. Throw a few of the crunchy vegetables in, or the cheese, or whatever you’ve decided on as an extra. Then, bring the dough up from the long sides and pinch it together. Double-seal the ends, by pinching, rolling over, and pinching again. Now, you have to get the log onto a greased baking pan. The best method is to slide a wide bladed knife under it, and get the pan as close as possible before you move it. Move it swiftly, don’t hang around with the log stretched between your two hands in midair or the whole thing collapses and breaks, which means everything here you’ve been doing has been a big waste of time. Once you’ve got it onto the baking sheet, stick it in the oven at about 400 degrees until it’s nice and golden and hot in the middle, about twenty minutes at the most. Keep an eye on it, because everybody’s oven is different, and yours might bake at 375 or 425 for maybe 15 or 25 minutes.

Serve it with more sauce to pour over when it’s on the plate, and a big salad, and nice dry white wine, like gewürztraminer.
Madam Sherlock hates the hours she spends each week photocopying that is the source of most of her headaches. It isn’t just the toner fumes, that’s only the physical part of it, along with the wheezing and sneezing. The mental stress is major, and comes from her standing there, thinking: I could be teaching, I could be teaching, I could be teaching, but here I am, standing in front of this frigging machine again. The bottom line rules here: there’s no longer established budgets for government-approved subject-specific textbooks to teach with. And, Sherlock knows the book budget granted by the ministry to schools goes into a slush fund that is woefully inadequate for buying up-to-date alternative texts for entire classes. Okay, it’s true she’s now freed from the chains of the canonical text, and can create her own lessons for her students. Of course, writing and illustrating her own creative, individualized and topical lesson texts is supposed to be done in her free time on weekends and evenings instead of caring for her own family and children. So, busy mom teachers wind up buying cheap soft cover units, usually from large American educational publishing houses, and everything gets photocopied. Of course, the time she spends actually standing in front of the machine is also free, no cost. Could this be because there’s no invoice for her time spent doing this job? There used to be staff assistants to do the copying, but their positions were cut back well over ten years ago. Secretaries and supervision aides have union contract language that prohibits them from doing any copying because they are still in dispute over the staff assistant’s layoffs. Teachers are left in the dark, sniffing the toner bottle.

Every once in a while, a bewildered administrator wonders why the paper supply is out already by Easter when it was supposed to last until June, or why the copier always keeps breaking down. Some of the foggier ones actually have teachers record every copy made, and then cut off “high use offenders” at a certain limit. If Sherlock worked under this kind of plan, she’d revolt: rage against the machine!

Do you copy?
Rage against the machine,
rage against the budget-cutting,
rage against the government
who thinks kids are cookies that can be cut into letter shapes
for monsters I have known to gobble up.

The government
who thinks I am a nobody
not worth talking to
because
I'm just an old lady teacher
with no fancy office
or designer suit
and furthermore
I don't want one!
If they think I'm crazy
for taking on this job
with its low salary and lack of prestige,
they're right.
Crazy they call me,
and just wait,

they ain't seen nothing yet!
I'll send in budget requests
in iambic pentameter complete with Elizabethan imagery,
annual growth plan reports as video montage
and school wide reading results based on sand paintings.

They could never understand that, yet:
I can read their reports,
I understand their budget,
I GET their bottom line
because they keep it simple, stupid!

35 meetings between my union leaders
and the government's negotiators
and every single time
they won't talk to us
because of their bottom line:
zero.
A simple answer, from simple people.
Let's see, how crazy is that?

Just wait, crazy is just beginning.
1.16 Brave teacher, home from long morning of dodging the wrath of crows (see below, 1.17).
From Ms. Goodhope’s Strike Diary:

Picket Duty, October 7, 2005.

The crows are here: lining up along the power lines, thousands of them, all chuckling and guffawing as we stand under the great oaks in front of our 100 year old school, sipping coffee in the early morning dark. We are on strike, and a murder of crows appears to be delighted about this. It’s like they’ve come from all over the city to look down upon the spectacle of ten sleepy teachers standing on a sidewalk with picket signs at 6:30 A.M. And it isn’t only looks and laughs the crows are sending down; we also have to walk very carefully, glancing up now and again, wondering if we shouldn’t be wearing some sort of head covering. Then again, maybe the crows will provide that for us, too.

We are careful, sticking to the cover of the oaks and their sheltering leaves. Probably there are a couple or ten thousand crows. Obviously, this is the source of last weeks’ feather extravaganza. Why do birds gather like this, in such giant flocks, so regularly? Every crow in the Lower Mainland must be here right now, glistening black in the streetlights, wing to wing on the wires, jostling and ruffling and nuzzling each other. Then the sky lightens, the stars fade, and the denizens of darkness depart. Suddenly, there are no crows: just grey sky and a ball of fire in the east.

Cars pass regularly, drivers honking and waving at us. The first honk I heard, I thought some annoyed driver was trying to warn me to get off the road, as I was trying to tie up my shoes at my car and my door was open.

1.18 The crows Goodhope and Sherlock constantly dodged.
October 9, E-mail to All My Friends and Family: Why I'm on Strike.

Hello my friends and family:

Yes, I'm picketing, every day for three hours. So far, we've got $50 a day strike pay but I don't know how long that will last with the punitive fines the government is levying against the BCTF. I realize the government says we're breaking the law. However, they are in contravention of the Supreme Court of B.C's laws and International Labour Law in legislating our contracts and in ordering us back to work. The BCTF has paid lawyers to bring this matter to the attention of the courts, and has easily won each time. I am tired of having my working conditions settled by the corporate press and a dictatorial government. A public education system ensures equal opportunity for all and is a cornerstone of democracy. Our parents and grandparents worked hard to get the human rights to education and working conditions that we need to live in a just and fair society. I will not throw out all their hard work by submitting to laws that serve to create a "second class" education system for those who cannot afford private school. Nor will I allow my right to negotiate with my employer about my working conditions and salary to be taken away by what amounts to legislated bullying. Here's something to click and read that might be of interest if you have any unanswered questions about the teacher's strike, or what can be done to end it. If you can think of anyone who might like to read this article, or my letter, please send it on.  http://sevenoaksmag.com/features/82_feat2.html

Happy Thanksgiving to you all!

Madam Sherlock

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Daring the Sea

In between waves
wondering when
another will come.

Endless possibilities
of foam and waterline
floating and sliding away.

She can never say
What the timing is.

She just WAITs and SEES
where and when

Then runs along the edge
TOUCH
daring the water to her.
I felt a surge of anger and panic, remembering another strike when people had yelled and thrown things at teachers. But then, another car came by in the dark, also honking. Minutes later, another honk; and this time I’m on the sidewalk, walking, and I know that these honks are from people who believe in what we’re doing. The honks build up: every car seems to have an encouraging toot for us.

Unbelievable: people support us! We weren’t sure what to expect, because with the CBC on strike and all the bad press we were getting, we imagined tensions and trouble. In fact, as the traffic volume and its accompanying honking increases, we begin to worry that the families in the neighbourhood will be awakened too early from their sleep. We decide not to worry about that after all, better to enjoy this time as it is. As the sun comes out and warms us, we begin walking the entire distance around the school, enjoying the chance to stride long and fast, take in a hill, check out the lay of the land. We are cheerful, chattering and hopeful. Surely the government will not win their repressive game when everyone supports us?

We have no news. Nobody has a radio, nobody wants to sit around in the car and listen anyway. We walk, and discuss the history of the land around us: which house was the first farmhouse, how the park used to be the hayfield, where the creek was, which of the trees are “original” from the old farm, saved now on urban house lots. Neighbourhood gardens are peeked at, guesses as to the hybridity of trees and plants, exclamations over giant late tomatoes and still-blooming roses, proclamations of soil richness and fertility not usually considered within the city.

1.19 My back garden needs weeding.

Everyone brought something sweet for the teachers to eat on the picket line today. First, there were the usual fresh Tim Hortons's doughnuts at 7 a.m., supplied by the teacher's local, delivered by a young teacher new to the on@all list. Then, at nine, the vice@principal just happened to bring, courtesy of her mother@law, a delectable hazelnut torte, an old Italian recipe. Just as they managed to devour that, Lena, the school engineer, arrives. She brings fritolet, a Greek specialty resembling a doughnut. It is a sweet yeast dough scented with lemon, full of plump golden raisins, deep@fried and rolled in caster sugar. Two of the women on staff recognize it from their own mother's recipes. Then, just as Sherlock tries to roll off the picket line at the end of shift, Wayne arrives with Chinese moon cakes, the yellow marron chestnut variety.

Manners and tradition require one to sample each offering and gratefully thank the bearer of the treasured gift. To offset the overwhelming sweetness, several cups of strong and bitter coffee are quaffed back. Two hours later, Sherlock the gourmand has sunk into a clear case of sugar blues, unable to lift her head from her writing desk at the university. The only solution is several litres of cool water, a few vitamins and a stroll in the fresh air while seeking a solid lunch of protein and vegetables.

Marion's Doughnuts
(This recipe assumes you bake a lot, and eat doughnuts a lot.)
-use basic sweet dough recipe
-add 3 eggs, 1 to 2 tabs more fat, 1/2 cup sugar
-rise once for 11/2 hours
-punch down, roll out approx. 1/2 inch thick
-cut as desired:
  1. doughnuts
  2. rolls
  3. bars
-let raise until double or looks light, (approx. 1 hour)
-fill pan with 2-3 inches beef fat or mazola oil
-drop three at a time, cook quick and hot
-Yield? Depends on size/dough recipe
Decorate: Roll in white sugar, or ice with maple sugar, chocolate or vanilla icing.
Under the oaks, an old Chinese lady, very short, gathers acorns into a plastic pail. Carefully, methodically, she picks up several, discards a couple, picks up several more. Her pail plunks and clinks as she gathers. We are curious and want to ask her what she wants them for, but we suspect she doesn't speak English and are afraid to enter into charades. We ask the ethnically Chinese teacher in our group about the acorns. Well, she doesn't speak Chinese, either, and no, she doesn't know what the purpose is for the gathering of the nuts. We shrug and carry on to the other side of the school. There, I spot another nut-gatherer, also Chinese, a man of perhaps seventy or more.

"Good morning," I say. He looks up and smiles. Immediately, I can tell by the way his eyes greet mine, that he will be able to communicate in English with me.

"Hello," he answers.

"I'm just curious about what you do with those nuts, I say, smiling. "I see another woman is getting some over there," I wave my arm, "and I think you must cook them somehow. Is that it?"

He also smiles, tentatively. "Yes," he says. "It's for a traditional food."

I thought that was all I was going to get out of him, but just then, my pal Dan, of the famous soup, comes sauntering along the sidewalk. "A recipe?" he asks.

The Chinese man smiles, relieved. Now, they can talk, man to man, about the best way to cook acorns. Here's what the Chinese man tells us:

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**Acorn Tofu**

Gather many nuts and let them ripen brown all over.  
Peel off the outer shell.  
Grind the nuts into a powder with mortar and pestle, or use food processor.  
Put the nuts in a pot and cover with water, 5x water to nuts.  
Boil well, so the water disappears and there is a gelling effect.  
The food should be the consistency of soft tofu, or jello.  
Cool, cut into squares.  
Serve with a savoury sauce, like mushroom sauce.
A quick survey of two nearby cafés and panic begins to set in. There is a
diabolical diabetic plot afoot, it seems, as one café has a broken grill, no sandwiches,
and the soup's sold out. They DO have any numbers of cakes, muffins, squares or
cookies for sale. The coffee's hot and smells great, but she passes. The next canteen
has one beef samosa left in the cooler that is at first passed over by the man in line in
front of her—but then he changes his mind! At the last second before she can
pounce on this lone surviving serving of meat in a jungle of baking, he scoops it up
from under her nose. She is forced to settle for fruit yogurt and tea and retire in a fit of
lassitude to the writing desk, dreaming of white fish and spinach for dinner later at
home: maybe with chicken broth.

Picketing is turning sour.

Oct. 11. A Change of Plans: From Cement to Open Sea

"Who'd like a ticket for the rally at the Legislature on Monday?" chirps the
cheeky little zone captain at 6:45 am.

"Monday?" chorus the sleepy teachers. "We're still going to be on strike on
MONDAY?" Nobody wants to go. We want to get back to work. We want a contract.
We want negotiations. We don't want a rally. We want the government to wake up
and smell the coffee that's right there with the doughnuts. We'd like them to eat all
the god damned doughnuts themselves. We'd like them to go to doughnut hell.

Quick Spinach

(To serve 4)

2 heads of spinach or more, washed and chopped.
4 cloves of garlic, peeled and minced
salt shaker
olive oil.

Heat a heavy pan, brown the garlic golden in oil. Pile in the spinach and fry until it's all cooked
down. Salt to taste, serve immediately.
“When I was a child,” he said, “we had no money for food. My parents always made this in the fall. It’s cheap and tasty, and it is very healthy for you. That is why I eat it, for my health.”

“Do you make it for your children?” I ask.

“Oh, no. They won’t eat this stuff. They don’t like this kind of thing, anyway. It’s an old recipe, maybe five or seven thousand years old. But it is not written down. When I die, nobody will have it written down. But young people these days they don’t care about this stuff anyway.”

“But you should write it down,” I say. “It’s important for the kids at the school to know about this. They see you here taking the nuts and they are curious, too. You could write it down and the children would know about what you do.”

He waves his hand, dismissively. “It’s old, this recipe. Too old.”

I’m not really disobeying him, writing this down. I’m just remembering for the children.

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Oct. 8, Thanksgiving: Pickets

Early in the morning under starry predawn skies
a middle aged woman steps lightly out her front door,
locking her sleeping children in behind her.

She leaves her old house,
Cape Cod,
small and snug,
closes the gate of her picket fence
and mentally makes note
that the roses want pruning
before the next wind storm,
the hedge needs trimming
and the lavender and quince
a good cutting back.
Wrapping her raincoat around her, she stoops to tighten an errant lace on her running shoe. She chooses the newer, safer car to drive the darkened streets and turns on the radio to CBC to see if it's there. The yellow brick schoolhouse windows are black, empty and lifeless. On the front walk a small group of men and women wait. She pulls up, signs up and picks up a picket sign of the times. All the people walk the walk and talk the talk for a very short time today. Then, under the old oaks they gather and share secret recipes from their families for celebrating the seasons for living well and joyfully for raising sons and daughters in the confusion of today in hope for tomorrow. The sun breaks through cloudy mountain passes on the horizon and dawn arrives. But soon the light changes from rosy to bleak and the weary people walk another day away on concrete cold and hard. The rain comes down the birds fly away and they are alone bewildered, surprised and wondering what lessons to prepare, how to evaluate progress, and who teachers are these days.
Ms. Goodhope’s Journal: Where There’s Tea, There’s Hope.  (October 17)

Alarm, switch off, get dressed, hear coffee machine switch on. Dog yawns, cat slithers over legs as I tie on sensible black hush puppies with orthopaedic inserts. Blue jeans, white shirt, black sweater, shapeless navy raincoat, one revolutionary black beret, wool, in case of chill. Husband’s chequered cashmere scarf. Gloves. Light bag, few essentials: painkillers, water, just in case. Money, I.D.

Get on the bus in front of the union hall downtown to find nobody I recognize. This is unusual, I know lots of people who work at VESTA (Vancouver Elementary Teacher’s Association). A woman about my age asks if she can sit beside me. I’m glad, she looks pleasant and intelligent. We share some tea and begin a rapid, caffeine-inspired conversation that deepens into a friendship, a knowing, an understanding. We spend the day together, find two others to join up with, have a day of camaraderie.

Highlights included finally reaching Victoria after five hours travel, via Horseshoe Bay and the Malahat Highway from Nanaimo. Never mind, the conversation was delightful, even if the Tsawassen ferries were full. I met up with a group of people who welcomed me to join them for the day.

Rally overwhelming in its size, couldn’t see anything, so many people cramming the streets, spilling over the waterfront in a strange, calm, yet orderly outrage. Mostly middle-aged people—many, many women—all dressed in yellow plastic raincoats or Gore-Tex. Signs on everybody. Costumes on some, the best being a massive donkey head, a martini glass, a Hawaiian shirt and shorts, a steering wheel and a sign saying: “Law? What law? Did I break a law?”

How to Make a Perfect Pot of Tea

1. Warm a brown betty teapot, by pouring hot water into it and letting it stand.
2. Bring water in the kettle just to the boiling point.
3. Empty tea pot, put in two bags of good quality tea.
4. Pour boiling point water over bags, fill pot.
5. Use a tea cosy to keep teapot hot, let stand five minutes.
6. Pour into a teacup and enjoy!
Sherlock offers to go to the rally in Victoria. What the heck, she figures this will be good for the spirits, a little change of scenery. She loves a boat ride, anyway, and there’s a small chance one of her ferry worker friends may be on the boat, and they could have a cup of tea. In fact, this could be a chance to socialize with a wider circle of friends.

**Where There’s Tea, There’s Hope**: in which Sherlock emails a bunch of people, friends from the university, family who work in education, neighbours. Maybe someone will go to the rally with her...

Hello my friends!
I’m already booked onto the 8:30 ferry on Monday morning to attend the day of protest at the legislature. I’d be delighted if anybody else was going, please let me know if you are. It might be nice to meet up and have...a cup of tea? *Where there’s tea, there’s hope!*

Madam Sherlock

Poor Madam Sherlock. Delusional with hope, she prepares to set off over the seas. The technology of e-mail allows for a camaraderie that does not require immediate physical embodiments or connections, so there is a surge of communications from friends assuring her that they will indeed have a cup of revolutionary tea with her on the steps of the legislature.

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**MILDRED’S SCONES** (Serve with tea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1/2 cup margarine</th>
<th>2 tbsp. baking powder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/3 cup sugar</td>
<td>1/2 cup currants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups flour</td>
<td>1 small cup of milk (scant?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biscuit method, cut in dry over marge. Add milk and currants, blend quickly, pat into greased round cake pan, make wedge cuts. Bake at 400 F. for 15 to 20 minutes.
The speakers are very encouraging. Not rude or radical, but reasonable. They speak clearly, get to main points quickly. Some are quite humourous, making gentle fun of some government people, causing ripples of laughter in the crowd. A high school student stands at the podium and speaking in support of us, her youth and positive idealism is touching. As I looked back from the legislature lawns, I am amazed to see that the crowd stretches along the entire waterfront harbour road, all the way past the Empress Hotel. I didn’t think they could hear way back there, but they cheer anyway. There really is a lot of quite harmless, middle aged, middle class people gathered today to protest, but then I guess that’s what teachers are. I begin my journey back to where the bus is parked just before the last speaker finishes so I won’t miss the departure time. People on the streets are friendly, honking. It is a carnival atmosphere and the good people of Victoria are kind.

It is a very, very long drive back the same route we came by. Again, we sip cups of tea on the ferry back from Nanaimo. This time, we are on the smaller boat going to Tsawassen. My husband picks me up, happy to see I’m not jailed or exhausted. I’ve done nothing but sit and talk and drink tea most of the day. I only had about one and a half hours in Victoria.

My children are happy to see me back. They ask me for details and I tell them about all the teacher leaders who came from every province in Canada, the international labour leader from New York, the union leaders from all over the province. I tell them that if people cooperate and work together, change can happen, that we are making history. I was glad to be able to attend to history today.

[Image of a newspaper article with text: "Edward Plans Devastating Reply to Archbishop"
"China's Generalissimo Still Alive"
"Council Orders Two Probes"
"Chiang Kai-Shek Stays Unharmed in Laundry of Marshal Chiang's Troops"

1.20 What's the story in history today?]
But everything imagined cannot always be enacted, and over the days before departure, a series of inalterable and unfortunate events eventually preclude any possibilities for intellectual tea with her peers. Everyone is apologetic, but how can it be avoided? Full bus schedules, poorly connected information phone lines, too few additional ferry sailings, and a thick fog that cancels seaplane connections all work in synchronicity to cancel any sort of tea party at all.

She gets on the extremely early Monday morning bus all by herself, and finds it full of strangers. After twenty-five years working for the school board, she cannot believe she is on a bus full of strangers. She reads her philosophy books after a brief chat with the teacher sitting beside her, and then, finds herself on the sailing after the one her ferry friend works. Too bad: no tea with him, either!

She eventually hooks up with the friends of the woman sitting beside her, and they walk the crowds, wear the buttons, stomp in time to the drums and music, and chant along together the various rhymes and songs prepared by the rally organizers. There are many speakers on the legislature lawns, and the crowd stands facing the great gothic building, listening and cheering.

One moment stands out about the rally, clearly, and she tells and retells the story of it to her friends, family and colleagues. It goes like this:

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_Academic Storying—Rewritten, Borrowed and Adapted from Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner:_

"(Teachers) as ethnographers function as a channel through which pass the emotional, economic, educational and social crises that must be negotiated by families coping with the contingencies of (educating their children.) They (teachers) occupy a unique, dynamic, holistic and engaged perspective. They are participants and observers and their private lives are deeply affected by their public and professional services. As storytellers and ethnographers, they have as much, if not more, to teach us about the concrete, everyday details associated with (educating children) as do scholars of (education)” (2002).

_in conversation, Carolyn suggested to Art that teachers did all these things after she listened to him attribute them to geriatric care givers. I wrote it up for Art, substituting the words where needed to make it work for teachers._
An e-mail from Ms. Goodhope’s pal who could not make it to the rally:

Hi Ms. Goodhope,

I hope you had a good day at the rally today. You should be exhausted by now! Well, I was at the float plane terminal from 9 to 11 this morning, all flights were cancelled today due to thick fog. It was disappointing. I hope there will be a support rally here too. Take care and best of luck in your fight!

Mila

Dear Mila!

Okay, so now I don't feel so bad about not getting to our first meeting spot until 12:45! Can you believe the bus we got on took us to NANAIMO because all the space on the Victoria ferries was booked, then we had to drive from Nanaimo to Victoria, then back to Nanaimo again after the rally, got the oldest creakiest ferry from there to Tsawassen. Got into my husband's waiting car at 8:05 p.m. Finally home! It was a great rally, will fill you in next time. In terms of rallies over here, Jim Sinclair says the next day of protest is Wednesday at "another location" in the province. I'm hoping it's here, that there is something city-wide like there was in Victoria...

Ms. Goodhope

(Perhaps we can meet for tea on campus sometime this week?)
A curious moment when a suited man from within the legislature building opened a second story window and stood there, regally waving. Who was he? Nobody knew, but as we studied the second floor windows, we noticed a meeting room about five windows over, with several large TV screens glowing and suited men with their backs to us and the windows, watching the screens.

The screens were so big we could see that the images on them were of us, the crowd outside. We could see our large banners and signs, views of the canopy over the speaker’s podium, the harbour. It was mostly men in the building, and they did not look out the window to see us, but kept their backs to us and watched our image as it was translated by the media. We watched them watching us for thirty minutes, and not once did one person from the second floor ever again glance out the window to look at us. To my knowledge, none of the people from inside the building ever came outside to listen to the speakers or talk to the crowd.

What truth did they seek? Do they live only by the rules of simulacra? Do they know we are here? Do they think we are not real? Are they afraid to see us naked without any media clothing? Who am I if the government chooses not to look at me?

I was at first amused, then angry. Now I am afraid of the future if power over it is held by people who will not trust their own eyes to see.

1.22 Mom used to think TV was a great thing.
I Will Vote Yes: A Response from the Union President, and How GoodHope Is Swayed

The president of the teacher’s union personally responded to Ms. Goodhope’s concerned communication requesting more details about their position in regards to accepting or rejecting the Ready deal. Goodhope had been weighing the pros and cons, and was wondering whether the discomfort of the past few weeks should be seen as “enough,” either way. Could she measure all her time she’d spent walking the cold and rainy pavement, dodging crows, missing her students and worrying about home finances as an effort toward forcing a better deal, vote no, and continue on with the strike? Or should she measure the tumult of the past two weeks as an effort toward an assurance that negotiations would ensue, vote yes, and get back to work? Problem was, she’d always hoped the two sides would get down to negotiations anyway, and really couldn’t believe the shenanigans at the bargaining table over the last few months had actually taken place.

For some of the people on the picket line, the “enough” measure was based solely on discomfort level: any response was good, they were tired of being cold and wet, and wanted to get back inside the building and back to the normal routines of work. Others were excited by the political climate, surprised to “discover” who they actually worked with, through the long shared, leisurely conversations while walking the line. Communities were being rebuilt, now based on news of the weddings, homes, children, parents, hobbies or studies her colleagues were excited about. Of course, teaching and politics were discussed too.

The truth was, Goodhope didn’t really have a clear idea how to vote. So, the president’s personal letter was welcome, and welcoming in its tone: Goodhope felt to be a valued member of the union, and was happy to receive it.
Oct. 19: Karl Marx and Hedda Hopper Have Tea

Madam Sherlock missed picket duty yesterday due to an extreme need to parent. Her children were very bored with mom gone to picket and rally all the time and dad working long hours per usual. Also, she needed to connect with the kitchen, laundry and cooking before whizzing off to the university for an afternoon class.

This morning on the picket line she tried to film the crows in the rain and the dark, but the camera wouldn’t pick them up in such low lights and then the battery tanked. They were there again, as ever, the black daws, screeching and ominously fluttering, busy and mindless of everyone else’s needs. She’ll have to give it another go tomorrow.

Philomena thought she said she had come to film the prose. She quipped back that maybe she could, anyway, because prose and crows are a bit like a poem and maybe, even if it didn’t rhyme, it would be okay. Phil, being one of the most experienced and wise teachers, understood perfectly.

Truth was, Sherlock thought there would be a greater labour protest today than there was. She expected something swift, big and decisive. Instead, a negotiator has been hired, but how does a negotiator work when the “deal” is already law? What’s to be negotiated? Everyone feels uncertain, helpless and not just a little hopeless. What we need now is someone to balance the scales in the court of public opinion.

1.24 Cross-wired crows.
Sometimes school is a big joke, a show, even a satiric melodrama. Steven makes sure of that, and it's something upon which even Karl and Hedda could agree. The power of humour is powerfully healing...
Here's Sherlock's journal report of what was discussed on the picket lines when she got back today:

The picket women say we need a reincarnation of Hedda Hopper, the Hollywood gossip columnist of the 1930's. Wild drama, large comedy, something everybody could seize on and tear up. We need somebody to set tongues wagging about the premier, to snoop and pry, to follow up every hairdresser's "did you hear THAT...?" to plaster it all over the pages of the tabloid press, to open every possible can of worms. Imagine if every grocery counter had the headlines screaming at the checkout stand, if every coffee shop had people gossiping! What drama! What comedy! What adventure!

But who would write it? The TV news seems oblivious, the papers must be on payroll to report as subjectively as they do, radio seems like its dial is stuck to the right. Everything always reflects the corporate/government agenda, which includes a premier as clean as the Man From Glad.

After three hours in the rain and drizzle, Sherlock lies in the hot bath and reads. This time, she reads a pamphlet that was pressed into her palm by an earnest young man at the Victoria rally. She examines it, sees it is well written, and agrees with all its points. She also sees that it is published by a Marxist organization.

She wonders if she's a Marxist now.
Strange.

Crow Rhyme

One for sorrow, two for mirth,
Three for a wedding, four for a birth,
Five for silver, six for gold,
Seven for a secret not to be told.
Eight for heaven, nine for hell,
And ten for the devil's own sell.

-anonymous folk rhyme-
1.26 ...so what's with this teacher? Oh right, she’s on strike.

Henri’s Habitant Soup

1 large ham hock  
1 lb split or whole peas, green or yellow  
1 cup chopped onion,  
1 cup chopped carrot  
1 cup chopped celery if you have it  
1 teas. salt or more  

Pickling bundle: cut a square of cheesecloth. Wrap up 6 whole cloves, a teas. of peppercorns, 2 bay leaves, 1 teas. celery seed if none fresh, and a small red chili pepper.

Throw everything in a big soup pot and add about 10-12 cups of water, make sure the hock can float. Bring to boil and let simmer a couple of hours, adding more water as needed. Take out the hock and pickling bag, then cream the soup with a mixer, or leave it chunky if you like. Add any ham from the hock, chopped. Adjust the salt and serve up with cornbread or biscuits and cheese. Good, filling, tasty, cheap, and keeps in the pot 'til it's nine days old.
She suspects she’s not alone, that others think the same way but haven’t put that name to it. Even the West Vancouver matron school teacher said this morning, “I can’t stand it! Do you know what they’re doing? They’re trying to make it so there are schools for the rich, and schools for the poor, and they don’t care at all about the children who are poor and disabled! Pretty soon, we’re only going to have the rich who can afford an education and then they’ll be guaranteed to be the only ones who will be able to run things!”

Sherlock wonders if she knows she might be a Marxist now, too.

So, here we have nice middle aged women from the suburbs carrying picket signs and turning into Marxists. What is the world coming to?

Is it madness, Sherlock wonders, or is it simply a turning point? Today she spoke to two of her cousins, three neighbours, and all her teaching colleagues, all on strike. Everyone works within a public or private sector union. They’re all either on strike or planning and saving now in case they go. Her cousin’s husband has been on the picket line for four months. Her neighbour, a nurse, is saving up for it.

So many middle class, educated, middle aged people going out on strike: something’s wrong with the state of the world. Sherlock wonders if everybody would agree with the Marxist pamphlet.

This is it:

http://www.marxist.ca/Documents/05oct_pstrike.txt

1.27 We’ll all have to start budgeting for groceries. These prices grandmother paid out from her very limited income during the depression. She was a woman who never even wasted the thread or buttons from an old shirt.
The president thanked her for writing, and advised her that although the BCTF was recommending a yes vote, the VESTA executive were split and not making a recommendation, yet any member of those organizations was entitled to expressing their opinion as an individual. With that, the president said she would vote yes, and then outlined her three main reasons for doing so:

1. **Free Collective Bargaining.**

*We have just driven a great big truck through the essential service legislation. We have proved it is not worth the paper it is written on. They have not implemented the Wright report and we have Vince Ready inquiring to take another look.*

2. **Class size class composition.**

*For the first time ever the public understands some of the problems with class composition. As late as two weeks ago many people had no real idea what that meant. Now not only do they get it but they are supporting our demands for it to be addressed.*

3. **Salary**

*We have broken the 0, 0 mandate. There is a pay increase in there for many members. Not as much as we would like and unfortunately not all but the increase for most TOCs is significant. Bringing people up is good and we will for sure get a pay increase at the bargaining in the Spring. How much it will be is up to us.*

1.28 Depression house prices: beyond the average Joe's grasp.
Maybe all the nice middle class suburban moms on strike might like to read it,
too, to discover whether or not they agree with the basic principles of the article.
As she read, Sherlock was surprised to learn that most of the ideas were pretty
similar to the complaints she heard in the neighbourhood, at the playground, in
the mall, at the library. People complain about:

- not enough money for parks and rec programs
- not enough parks and public rec facilities
- our kids can't get the courses they want at the college, it's overcrowded
- local schools old and run down, portables, no upkeep on playing fields
- can't get good books at the library, underfunded programs
- hospital/doctor shortages, not enough money for health care, can't get
  a family doctor or grandma's STILL waiting for hip surgery...
- yes, you teachers strike, you go, girl!
- why should Darren Entwhistle get a stockholder's $20M bonus if he breaks
  the Telus union? How is that legal when your strike is illegal?
- what do they mean. there's no money? Look around!
- so look at the cost of the cars everyone's driving!
- and exactly **who** is able to afford all this expensive real estate?
- I keep hoping local mall will have a Strike Sale
- I'm putting in a winter garden in the back yard

---

Ruminations in the garden include:

Plant a row, grow a row to ease local hunger
Martha Stewart and social pressure
(What does her favourite artisan's garden look like?)
No time for this, no time for this, no time for this!
The utter madness of morning glory:
death to glory
Civilization of wild spaces,
ordering and sorting out
tiny colonies of bugs and spores,
little things that cling and creep.
So what is really so savage or so civilized?
Is it disturbing intricate natural orders?
Is it stripping away everything that gets in the way of
vegetable production?
Is it preferring arugula to thistles?
Mother kept a canning garden, 
that's what good country housewives of her day did. 
No questions asked, who cares it's the city now, 
she's out there every day, 
getting the supper beans in, 
lettuce, radishes, tomato treasures for salad. 
Putting up the strawberries every June, 
everyone together in the yard. 
Uncle Pete the merry pretender, 
helping with hulling 
but really snitching the best 
and then laughing at his crime! 
She'd push him out, 
get out, 
not in here, 
not your place. 
Boiling up; kitchen 110 degrees, 
sweet pink jam foam for us girls to scoop. 
Mason jars burning hot on bleached linen towels 
Sealing wax coating the pan, 
just a bit to shape into figures 
of stars and moons, 
and little fruits. 
And always one jar that wouldn't quite fill 
so it could be extra for ice-cream topping, 
to cool us all down when the job was done 
and the men came back with the best vanilla. 

Today, I need a place to sit in my garden, 
I'm all worn out from the work 
of hauling and mauling out weeds, 
just a little chair and a glass of water, 
maybe a tiny tomato. 
A piece of afternoon sunshine pokes through the 
clouds onto my back sweet and warm. 
No chair? 
Just make one! 
Here, 
carve up this old thorn bush for a joke, 
mother, a little thorn chair to rest in 
after a hard day's toil. 
Get your daughter to put the kettle on 
and we'll all have tea 
and tomatoes, tiny lumpen tomatoes 
grandma would scorn, 
not even good enough to make sauce! 
But one by one in the garden we eat them, 
we two. 

Laughing at the teddy in the thorn chair, 
we sit in the dirt, 
me guilty for not doing better, 
apologizing to sweet memories 
until I see my daughter smile, 
hear her sigh in ecstasy, 
as she eats, 
straight from my crooked garden of hopes and memories.
The Marxists talk about all sorts of ideas that many of the working and middle class people she knows would support: free education including university, the right to strike and collective bargaining, free health care, full employment and decent wages, action to protect the environment, an end to oppression of First Nations, the right to Quebecois self-determination, an end to racial discrimination. Two things would stick in the neighbour's throats, though: nationalization of the banks (although she would personally gloat over that one, having finally paid off a mortgage with a huge chunk of her money going to support their unprecedented profits) and public ownership of the fishing, lumber and farming industries. But the name, "Marxist," raises fears akin to the childhood bogeyman, and most people would be afraid to even pick up the pamphlet and read it. Sherlock herself did not read it in public, but waited until she was at home...she didn't want anyone to think she might be a Marxist! She didn't want them to think she was a raging radical, sort of half-baked and out of touch with the "real world."

Well, she'll struggle with that identity crisis some more another day...she may have to introduce the topic some time when she's chatting with the teachers over coffee at work. In the meantime, she's pondering how nationalizing the banks might affect her and her country. Hmmm...imagine how mortgages might work... principle-only payments, or simple rather than compound interest, at very low rates. HMMM. Wouldn't that stimulate the real estate industry, now? Maybe then she could have spent that extra $50,000 she gave the bank on something like early retirement!

1.30 My grandma and great grandma, retired and missing the posts from the front porch. They were burnt for fuel.
Oct. 22, 2005: Letter from Ms. Goodhope to the Teacher's Union President

Mary: In case I do not have time to attend the meeting on Sunday, and only vote (for sure), I want to say thank-you for your prompt response in what must be a very busy time.

After my initial "NO" reaction, (and before I saw the BCTF information) I sat down and crunched numbers, including the salary grids and the LTD/SID payments and calculated that there could possibly be about a 2% salary increase, and I thought long and hard about how things had played out in the court of public opinion. I also had some time to cool down after Campbell's inflammatory remarks. Re-reading Ready on Friday night, I realized that the recommendations are a very accessible public document that many parents in my neighbourhood have read as well. If this government disrespects it, they will have egg on their face and the fox will be caught. Also, already parents in New Westminster are saying things like "What's wrong, why won't the guy sign anything? If he really believes in the deal, it only takes five seconds to write his name on it!" I think the public has lost trust in the government substantially over this affair, and we have gained remarkably. As never before, poor working conditions for teachers are high profile in the media: this is a major turnaround from the usually critical media and public perspective of teachers. Going back to work now, with the media and parents on our side and Vince Ready working with us as watchdog/mediator is an excellent idea.

I will vote yes.

1.31 Home after a long day's strike duty.
October 21, 2005.
E-mail Sent from Sherlock to the Head of the Vancouver Teacher's Union.
Subject: Ready for what?

Dear Mary:

I am not very happy with the Vince Ready solutions. I will vote no. These are no guarantees for anything at all, just recommendations, and DeJong refuses to commit to anything at all in writing, "as that fundamentally alters" the deal. There is no attempt to get my collective bargaining rights back on class size/composition, and I probably won't get a raise because I teach in a "middle" income district. There doesn't seem to be anything in it at all for me from the government, particularly since Campbell has now claimed he's going to finance the recommended budget increases from what the boards have saved on my salary during the strike. Last week, Bond guaranteed they would not claw back salary savings from school boards. This week, they say they will. Not only do they say they will, but then Campbell has to do it in "NYAH NYAH" bullyGtyle, on public radio, CBC, saying "this will come directly out of teachers' pockets" just so we can make no mistake about how the "deal" gets funded. Why doesn't he just rub the sandbox sand in my face, now that he's got me lying facing down with a $500,000 fine on my back and no strike pay?

On top of that, the CBC is now making it look like it is Jinny Sims' insistence on something in writing to at least guarantee the class size/composition legislation that might stop the deal. Maybe what will stop the deal is our certain knowledge now that this government will come through with nothing unless we teachers pay for it ourselves.

1.32 If the sign was in the window in the afternoon, the neighbours' kids stayed home.
October 23, 2005: Nat Bailey Stadium

Ms. Goodhope voted yes at the rally at Nat Bailey Stadium but was rather unhappy with the invitation to arrive at 1:00 pm and then getting the agenda. Unfortunately, the agenda wanted her to stay and listen to rally-style speeches, question period, and open mike discussions before she was allowed to vote. Basically, they wanted her to hang out there for two and a half hours before the ballots opened, which was an audacious idea. This is Sunday, she has two kids’ soccer games, a dinner to prepare and a project to complete for university, all before ten at night when she planned to hit the sheets. She manages to get in the line of speakers to ask if they could adjourn and vote early when she notices a steady stream of people shaking their heads and leaving without voting. Luckily, a woman in front of her actually has the nerve to march up to the chair with her raucous child in tow, and demands to go to the front of the speaker’s line as a “point of privilege.” Then, she was able to put out for discussion the idea of adjourning for the vote, with the idea that the next person could make the motion. Goodhope returns to her seat at the top of the stadium, thinking it was in the bag. However, the next four speakers didn’t pick up on the idea, and instead grabbed the mike for reading their long and windy and PREPARED speeches.

Oh, please! She has to clamber back through the stadium seats to the mike line again. Luckily, a guy at the mike—actually her picket zone captain—did the right thing and tabled the motion.
Their current position means that my family has just donated my $2000 of lost salary these past two weeks to the Campbell government to fund public education. That's on top of the money I spend every year for books and materials to teach with, which is a collection of curriculum materials valued at over $1800. On top of that, I pay for all my own professional development workshops and university upgrading classes, which runs about $200 a year when I don't go to university, and about $6000 a year when I do.

I am feeling very upset about this. It's not just the money and the bullying. I can't face seeing my students with special needs go through another year of too little in the way of programs and materials. They got nowhere near enough instruction last year and pretty much "lost" that year. Why should they keep losing because the government has such disrespect for what I do for a living? I can't see returning to work to the same conditions for even another year, never mind two or three or who knows how much longer while this government decides whether or not they will pay for anything or talk to anyone connected with public education.

I cannot forget that this is a government that disregards binding arbitration, rips up contracts and legislates before it negotiates.

In short, I don't trust them as far as I can throw my chalk.

Sincerely,

Madam Sherlock.

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**Grocery List:**

eggs, cheddar cheese, feta cheese, cottage cheese, cream cheese, butter, milk, yogurt, almonds, walnuts, cinnamon, brown flour, cornmeal, oatmeal, cereal, brown sugar, phylo pastry, maple syrup, coffee, evap. milk, bread, bagels, soup stock (beef and chicken), split peas, popcorn, black beans, salsa, two chickens, roast, ground beef, sausages, ham hocks, bacon, stew beef, canned tomatoes, canned beans, strawberry jam, frozen blueberries, raisins, cocoa, apples, oranges, bananas, lettuce, cucumbers, onions, potatoes, carrots, spinach, celery, radishes, mushrooms, broccoli, green beans...

**Feeds four adult appetites for just over a week.**
About two thousand people at the stadium immediately seconded it and a stampede ensues to the polling stations at the top of the stadium stairs. The scrutineer lets her go third. Then, she has to climb out of the stadium from that very top mezzanine level down over all the chairs, etc, because all the people wanting to vote were blocking the stairs. She hasn’t climbed so many stadium seats since childhood at a boring football game at Empire Stadium in Hastings Park. Finally, she has to slither sideways under the rail at the bottom of the seating section, hoist herself sideways and jump down to the ground to get onto the field, all with her marked ballot firmly clutched in her hand. She drops it in the ballot box after sidestepping an oceanic mud puddle at the entrance to the stadium. Good thing she had agility instruction from one of Saskatchewan’s best cowboy bareback riders as a child. She was out of there in record time, in order to get home to building spanakopita pie and crow videos. She had to miss the two soccer games, but the kids came home hungry and loved spanakopita dinner (and her) anyway.

The vote was 77% in favour of returning to work.

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**Spanakopita**

**Ingredients:**

2 big bags of washed spinach, or 4-6 large bunches from the produce stand (2-3 pounds)

onions, chopped, two cups

fresh or dry basil and oregano, 1-2 teaspoons each or more to taste

a little salt

garlic cloves, 3-5

2-3 tablespoons flour

feta cheese, 2-3 cups crumbled

cottage cheese, or ricotta, 1 cup

black pepper

olive oil, ½ cup and melted butter 2 tablespoons

one box of filo pastry sheets (*well defrosted by sitting at room temperature for most of the day. Do this for sure or don’t bother making the pie, do it another day. If the dough is too chilly, it gets hard to handle, breaking off and tearing and causing all kinds of grief.*)
Monday October 17: Language Rules.

Madam Sherlock was astonished at how quickly she was stressed out by being back at work. Her journal, typed into her computer in a quiet corner of her home late at night after several cups of herbal tea, spoke of the day in retrospective: Okay, nobody wants to use the words “overwhelmed” or “stressed” because just saying them brings it on, like voodoo. But this was a whacker of a day.

Sherlock’s student teacher had lost some of his earlier “control” of students and lesson materials he’d demonstrated before the strike. Her teaching partner Pam was not impressed with this, and further commented that his command of the English language was questionable. She suggested they ask the university to discontinue his practicum.

Sherlock’s response:

Whew.

All day I am back pedalling, stalling, trying to sort out how to handle what seems like a frontal assault on my sensitivity to issues of intracultural living. This young man speaks three languages, and English is not his best language, which I do realize is the language of instruction here. But he is Canadian-born, spoke Tagalog at home, attended French elementary school in Montreal, and did high school and university in English. He is a gifted visual artist and will lead the class on a tour of the Art Gallery to learn about Picasso. He plays chess expertly and supervises a chess club at noon hour. It’s true his language arts and reading lessons are not inspiring, but I feel his many gifts outweigh his shortcomings: I have witnessed tremendous growth over six weeks and I see him as a “late bloomer” who will slowly but steadily come to fruition.

Now this is really special pie, completely worth the effort. However, be sure to use these recommended shortcuts because the effort can otherwise seem over the top. Usually you can assemble the pie in less than thirty minutes, if you have the tools on hand. You should have your olive oil in a bottle with one of those silver tips that lets it ooze out in a thin line onto the sheets of pastry, and then a fluffy soft pastry brush to spread it around a bit. You’ll need an 11x17 baking dish, glass or metal, but you can stretch the size to a turkey roasting pan if that’s all you’ve got.
Don't try to go smaller, because cutting the pastry is too fiddly. Have a clean dishtowel on hand to keep your pastry sheets covered once you've opened the box, unrolled the sheets and laid them out flat beside your chosen baking pan. As for the spinach, a wok with a lid is best for cooking down large amounts of it. Once you've got all the tools, you're ready to go.

Method:

Fry up the onions with a bit of oil, like 1 tablespoon, on low in the wok with the herbs and salt until they're soft but not brown. While that's cooking, chop the spinach and pile up as much as you can in the wok. Put the lid on and let it steam and cook down, for about three minutes, then add the rest of the spinach. Let it all cook down another couple of minutes. Chop the garlic cloves and stir them in. It will be pretty soupy, so add the 2-3 tablespoons of flour and stir, let it heat another two minutes, and take it off the heat. Stir in the cheeses and season with pepper. Filling's ready!

Drizzle some oil in squiggly lines all over the bottom of the pan and quickly brush it all around to make a light coating. Lay in two sheets of pastry, letting them climb evenly up the sides. Drizzle a bit more oil and brush it around on the top of the second sheet. Thereafter, you can choose to oil and brush after every sheet or every two sheets, depending on how much time you have and how flaky you want the pie crust to be. The more oiled layers, the flakier it gets. Basically, you want to do eight layers on the bottom, then put in half the spinach filling. Put four layers of filo in the middle, then the rest of the filling, then eight more layers on top. Oil and brush away until you get to the very last sheet on top, don't oil the top yet. Now, tuck and fold your loose edges into rolls around the corners and sides. These can burn, you see, unless they're tucked, and the crispy corners—well-buttered—are the coveted bits that will be fought over and scooped first, so make them nice. Brush the melted butter on top.

Bake uncovered for 45 minutes at 475 degrees until golden and crispy.

Let it stand about fifteen minutes before you cut it into eight squares. Goes great with nice cold dry white wine, like gewürztraminer. Okay, maybe even retsina or demestica will do!
Sherlock watches him carefully, remembering her training as an ESL teacher, and records his oral language ‘mistakes.’ They are minor, mostly problems with pronunciation and the occasional preposition or verb tense mistake, and amount to what ESL teachers would call an accent. There are one or two grammatical errors she has caught in his written lesson plans so far, which she pointed out to him and he corrected immediately. This student did pass university entrance requirements, so apparently his language is good enough to be a teacher in training. How, Sherlock wonders, can we fail him now, in the middle of a second practicum, at the end of a fourth semester of study, based on “language”? Sherlock suspects there is more than language being called into question in regard to this student. He is a young, coloured, accented man, and she thinks this is working against him. He does not fit the “identity” profile of the average teacher on staff: white, middle-aged and female. She knows her staff and her partner well, they would never do or say anything racist, they abhor racism. However, this is clearly an instance where his “otherness” is causing enough discomfort for them to focus on it, and unfortunately, what they see does not measure up to their experience and definition of “teacher” identity. They sense a problem with this young man, but think that it must be his language use.

In any case, it is one area where they can legitimately measure his performance and fail him if they want to make a case of it. The Teaching Profession Act of B.C., endorsed by the College of Teachers, contains guidelines for the Education and Competence of teachers. In section 3.1, it states that “teachers are literate, numerate and fluent in English or French.”

Word Perfect

The more I write, the less I talk.
I no longer trust those slippery conversations,
words flying around every which way—
I prefer them stuck on a page,
where they can’t get lost or drowned or erased by accidental interactions
or unintentional interpretations.
...spinach, cheese, golden and crispy, it's all good.
What is "fluent" is not defined, and therefore open to various interpretations and applications. The standard of fluency, then, can possibly be under or over applied, as it is not specific.

Last year, Sherlock and her partner passed a European young women with a heavy accent, whose pronunciation the students routinely corrected. A South American woman taught on staff for years with a strong Spanish accent. Both were women and mothers sharing common universal bonds with most of the staff. Their competency was rarely called into question. Where does this year's young man fit in? He doesn't, that's all.

Sherlock recalls reading Deborah Cameron's book Verbal Hygiene. One line from the essay Dr. Syntax and Mrs. Grundy: The Great Grammar Crusade, leaps to her mind: "(T)he narrowness and triviality of prevailing standards for language use are inescapable consequences of treating (and teaching) grammar as if it were the instrument not of language, but of discipline." (115)

The years spent by the women on staff teaching spelling and grammar, Sherlock thinks, has led to this poor young man's precarious predicament. Because he doesn't fit in socially, the teachers are inclined toward adjusting, correcting the one thing that is most obviously wrong to them: his language. So, is language control a subtle way to enforce adherence to social and political agendas? Is that what the correction of grammar, pronunciation and spelling is about?

Sherlock is afraid this may be so. She is very afraid this may be so.

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There on the page, black and white,
my power over them is complete,
I can do to them as I wish.
There is comfort in knowing that nobody is knowing my words.
I talk to the paper,
it don't talk back.
Back to Work! October 31: Joe’s Story

Ms. Goodhope was overjoyed to get back in the classroom, to see her students, and to finally get into gear with working on her university research project. Before the strike, she was too busy trying to get all the lists done and the files sorted, and was still getting to know the students. Of course, there was nothing to be done during the strike, either. But now—NOW—she could finally get back to it, with no further disruption, she hoped. She kept her lovely moleskin journal with her to record field notes in, and found today’s work particularly inspiring:

Joe drew me his life story to connect with the reading of the novel. He didn’t make any real connections to the novel yet, but his story telling, following the order of his drawings, was intense. I wish now I’d had a tape recorder, or the video camera with me at the time. I’ve asked him to think of how he will present it for me next Monday, when we have the camera signed out and can begin to record. He’s a boy who was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. He has so many interesting highlights in his life selected, about eight in all so far. The best, most fascinating to me, was his story of the snake and lizard in the great oak tree at the camp, how the python stayed in the tree with this lizard that usually never lived in trees at all, and that the two never bothered each other, never fought. The people of the camp decided it was a sign from Buddha that fighting would end. They put candles around the bottom of the tree and prayed to the snake and lizard in the oak tree. Joe remembers this above all things. I love this story, these people, this opportunity to be the teacher. I am lucky.

I mutter to the computer screen
so the Dragonspeak
won’t recognize me,
try on voices,
then
tap and fix them in place and space
to come back and consider at my own pace.
Then, I change ’em up and all around!
November 5: Spelling Out Voice

Madam Sherlock listened to all the “life stories” of the children the video literacy research group today, having the children speak rather than write their stories. She had given the students large 17” x 24” sheets of drawing paper and a choice of paints, crayons, coloured pencils and fine line black markers to work with. The children chose the fine line black markers and made very small drawings, dividing the paper up into sections so they could make several small black and white line drawings of their key life events to guide their talking. There was a lot of learning going on about the art of storytelling. They talked about the ordering of events by either time or interest. They talked about beginnings, middles, ends. They talked about the words that might be used to help the audience better understand, to describe the picture. They talked about making connections, about feelings, about how to get in more detail.

Sherlock hadn’t imagined all this would be necessary to work through, but then it dawned on her that with this group, the focus always had to be so much on the page, the pencil, the lines, the spelling, the handwriting, the interminable amount of time it takes to get the story down on the paper. As a result, they had never got to the finer points of actually voicing the story. The most revealing moment, ultimately, came when Madam Sherlock asked the students this question:

“What kind of words do we want to use when we are telling the story?”

Sherlock was thinking of phrases like “I remember when..." or “When I was little" or “First, next, then, finally" as at that point, they were working on how to order events in time.

Massacre them if I feel like it.
Push the delete button!
Smear 'em with whiteout!
Haul out the Pink Pearl
And decimate them if I want to!

No need for politeness or convention or tradition,
they’re ALL MINE and I can do what I want!
Gleefully preoccupied with the printed word,
I no longer have patience for talk, talk, talk.
Monday Nov. 14: Introduction to Video

Further work with Goodhopes’s video group, teaching them how to handle the camera, set up a tripod, attach camera to tripod. She has to explain that video includes sound and image, that ambient sound is picked up by the camera as you take in the image. This appears to be news, and certainly stops the students from giggling and making comments while the camera was on. Apparently they feel the need to present something more formal in their videos.

Quite a lot of new terminology again, Goodhope believes she’ll have to signify these words somehow, maybe pin them up on a poster board or something. The group learns names for camera parts, shots, and roles: lens, lens cap, play, record, pause, power switch, depress, tripod, film, image, camera person, narrator, wide angle, close-up, telephoto, pan, establishing shot, battery pack, AC connection, extension cord.

Joe really gets excited about being a narrator. “Can I be a narrator?” he asks excitedly. How Goodhope wishes she got that on video! His eyes lit up, he looked so animated. He wants to do the filming first, and then narrate over the image. Of course, that is technologically possible, but unfortunately it is not possible with the archaic equipment at her school. There are no mikes, and the computer might not handle the extra memory load. In fact, she’s not even sure if the computer can handle the video files, once they’re working with them. They keep disappearing, and have to be reloaded from the camera tape every day. When the computer teacher gets a minute, this can be sorted out. They’ve had to reload three days in a row, which eats up about an hour each day, reloading the six stories. Sophia has had to redo her filming twice on the camera, because someone taped over hers. Goodhope is waiting, hopefully, to see how this research project all pans out.

(Problem is, I can hardly talk anymore anyway.

I shiver up and clench my throat, nearly choke on the rush of ideas flooding through my mouth and nose like there’s no rules.)
The student's answers were:
"Ones with capitals."
"Words that are spelled right."
"Don't forget indents."

Each time, Madam Sherlock, eyebrows raised in surprise, answered with, "But we aren't writing these words, we're saying them, so it doesn't matter about that." Interestingly, she had to repeat her statement three times before the students stopped giving suggestions related to spelling and grammar. However, then they were at a loss, and did not have any suggestions for what sort of words to use when speaking. The bell went for recess, and Sherlock went to have coffee and discussion about today's teaching with her friends on staff.

They asked Sherlock what the research was about and Sherlock gave her standard BREB-inspired synopsis. She said it was to encourage children with learning difficulties in writing to develop their narrative skill using video as a storytelling medium. Carla, the grade two teacher, immediately smiled in agreement and responded that she found far too many children imprisoned by their pencils. Years ago, she decided to experiment and would not allow the children to make any erasures or corrections until they'd finished writing down all their ideas. Sometimes, she wouldn't even let them use lined paper. And, she said all the grade three teachers always compliment her on what "good" writers her students are by the time they'd moved on to their classes.

Dan laughed and recounted a tale of a young writer in his grade four class who was stuck using a very limited spoken vocabulary about his feelings: he would only say "mad" instead of angry or frustrated or disgusted.

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What if, suddenly, I begin to speak
of magic spirits and longings and feathered canyons
when everyone else is hunkered down
on logic? Or on ontologia? Or irreducible epistemological phenomenologies?
On all those words that roll around so big and grand
and then settle into profundities
and power statements?
What if, suddenly, I begin to speak
of babies and vegetable gardens and cookie recipes or creatures of my childhood
when the topic is actually economic virtue or partisan politics or the state of the nation in regards to the corporate agenda?

How can I trust a voice that not only yearns to speak of things remote, but must?

In the land of real talk, I would be shoved out of the village without water to cool my burning throat, or caged and observed as an alien specimen.
Dan had been trying to get the boy to “talk” out a life story with him so more detail and description could be added to it. He asked the boy if he knew what the more descriptive and definitive words meant. The student said yes, but that he would never use them, not even when speaking, because he didn’t know how to spell them. The student’s logic was, as far as Dan could figure, that he didn’t really know a word unless he also knew how to spell it, and therefore, he couldn’t actually expand his spoken vocabulary until he’d properly learned the word by looking it up in the dictionary and memorizing the spelling, in case he made a mistake.

If Sherlock hadn’t heard the children in her group speaking about knowing the spelling, capitals and “indents” of spoken words, she would likely have thought Dan’s student was an extreme case. Apparently, Dan’s student and Sherlock’s learned in “good” company, as their perception that spelling or grammar must control voice, which they enact literally, is an idea held by experts such as Cameron and Susan Miller.

Sherlock sipped her coffee quietly, thoughtfully. Voice is big, she figures, bigger than she had ever imagined. How powerful are the forces that shape it, that are always/already present, that can censor the speaker, alter the story, and keep the speaker in their place. Both her student teacher and her students were struggling to find their voices.

Sherlock went to the ladies’ room to freshen up. Looking in the mirror, combing her hair, she examined her good, “teacherly” appearance.

“How powerful is my voice?” she asked herself, “and how would I describe it?”

Luckily, nobody is reading this:
I’m all alone
it’s late at night,
and I’m all snuggled up
with my words,
on the screen,
flickering quietly.)
1.37 Signed, sealed, and delivered...
Nov. 3: A Boy and a Bag of Pills

Madam Sherlock arrives at her classroom at 8:40 a.m. to see a note on their shared desk from Pam: “new student today.” So, she phones the janitor for a desk to be brought up from the basement, and then phones the office to see if the new student is here yet. Come on down to meet him, they say. Him, she thinks, a boy. That’s all she knows about this new student.

Ten minutes later, she’s been introduced to a tired-looking Caucasian boy who holds onto his foster father’s jacket, clinging. He looks uncertain, to say the least, as Madam Sherlock smiles and says “Hello, Abe, nice to meet you.” He peers at her, judging her, and reaches for his foster father’s hand. Glancing at his photocopied report card, she notices it says he was last in a class designed for children with special needs in social skills. Also, it says that he attended the class for the entire morning, had recess with the supervision of a child care worker, then went into a Grade Five class for math for one period, then went home for the day at 11:30. His program of “gradual integration” is to continue, recommends the report. As she lowers the report after a minute’s read, she notices baggies of pills are on the counter, that the foster father is giving the secretary the boy’s medication. The secretary requests a doctor’s release form to administer the drugs. It is not available.

Sherlock, sensing there could be a lengthy discussion, calls up to the classroom and asks the student teacher to supervise the students to silent read their novels while she attends to Abe. Sherlock feels lucky that she can rely on this student teacher to grant her the time she needs.

Pumpkin Aggression Soup

*Ingredients:*

Jack o’Lantern, large, from your front step.
2 medium onions, butter to fry in
2-3 cloves garlic
6 cups of chicken or vegetable stock

1 big thick-fleshed orange
1 small or big spoon of curry, (depending on your tolerance for spice)
salt and fresh ground pepper
Research Project on Hold Again, (Meeting Scheduled About New Student Instead.)

Ms. Goodhope attends the meeting held at 9:00 in the principal’s office with Abe’s foster father, the director of special needs learning services, the principal, and the vice-principal. Everyone is wondering how to plan for a boy when they have no permanent educational file, no legal documents of any kind except for faxes, and no legal guardian present. They decide, after seeing a copy of a doctor’s letter that says the boy is ADHD—still no tests to prove it—that of course the medications have to continue until either the doctor or guardian can be consulted.

They discover there is a student moving out of a social skills class at a nearby elementary school, where he can be reverse integrated—half day in social skills, half day in Grade Six. Short-term assistance of a temporary ed assistant is available to keep him in this school this week while all possibilities are considered and researched. Could there be a permanent ed assistant for Abe at this school? Or a youth and family worker? Could he attend half days at first to get more relaxed and familiar with home as well? Alternatives need to be made known, and time is needed see what happens with the child. How resilient is he? How he is going to adjust to the move, the upheaval, can he cope with full days at school in class. In short, not enough is known to make such a momentous decisions as relegating him to a “special” class.

Unfortunately, extra education assistants for children with special needs are usually afforded only through divine intervention, which the director of special needs learning services feels is not likely to be available.

Method:

Hack the Jack o’Lantern up with a big knife, a satisfying piece of work. Maybe pretend this Jack o’Lantern is actually someone you truly dislike. Clear the counter off, and if it is a butcher block counter, you can swing hard and bring the knife down clean and swift. Make chunks about 4”x 4.” Stuff 2 pounds of them into a big pot and cover them with water, then ruthlessly boil them until they’re soft, about 30 minutes.
There is no other information, just the photocopy of one report card, the pills, the boy. The foster father "has meetings all day" and asks not be contacted at work. If there’s any emergency, he says, call his wife, who is also at work but can come to the school if it’s necessary for her to administer the medications. While the secretary and the foster father are working out exactly what the pills are and when they are to be given, Sherlock slips over to a quiet corner and telephones the director of Special Needs Services at the head office. No sense messing around, she figures: this is all wrong, all wrong.

First, there should have been notice given of at least a week or two to the school to get services and staff organized for this child. Second, the boy’s guardians should have come in to meet with the teacher and the principal to discuss what his educational needs are prior to just dropping him at the office. Third, this school ALREADY has four students who have special needs at this age level who are entitled to special needs support workers and don’t get enough time allotted because there is no staff. Adding this boy into the mix is a crime. Sherlock feels her jaw tighten. She’s angry about the lack of protocol and the lack of respect for this child’s health and emotional well-being, never mind the lack of concern for his educational needs.

Then, she discovers the special needs director had only three day’s notice of this child’s arrival, has not yet received his file, has not met the guardian—who is the social worker—and that the boy just moved into his new foster home yesterday. Sherlock looks on the copied report card and telephones Abe’s last teacher, from another school board.

Drain, put the pot under the tap and run cold water over the pieces until you can handle them to scoop the flesh from the skin. If you prefer tedium and torture, you peel all the skin off the pieces before you boil them. If you can’t wait for the cooling effect of the cold water, wear rubber gloves and handle the pieces hot. Pick a way to do it, but just be sure you wind up with a big pot of cooked skinless pumpkin flesh.
It may be possible to have the temporary worker for a half day every day for four days next week. After that, nothing: no guarantees. Should Abe have an “impulsive outburst,” which the one faxed report says he has from “time to time” (what do they mean?) there will be no person to watch over him outside of the classroom teacher with the 27 others to teach at the same time. Because he is such an unknown entity, Goodhope feels a mistake could be made either way: they could be denying him a nice, safe, predictable and calm learning environment in a small social skills class. Or, they could be denying him a chance to join in with the real world of Grade Six. He has a right to both. She doesn’t know what to do.

She takes copious notes, observing him while he was working away. Again, she feels lucky to have a student teacher right now who is standing up there conducting the lesson, which gives her time to observe not only him, but Abe too. Also, a charming grandmotherly education assistant arrived as a “substitute” for three periods. Funny thing was, Ms. Goodhope never found out who she was substituting for.

Abe did very well. Every single time the students teacher changed the instructional subject, Abe asked her if he had to do the work like the other kids, couldn’t he do something else? She would calmly and positively tell him he had to try something out before he knew if it was for him or not, and that he should just join in and see how he did. Abe found that he could work in a group cutting and pasting posters of natural resources of Japan to identify how they were different from manufactured goods, and what was needed to make a can of tuna. Later, in Math, he was truly stumped, and switched to doing some addition practise that had been provided for him earlier instead of place value studies to the zillionths.

Now, smash up the pumpkin chunks with your portable blender stick, right in the pot. A hand blender works great, sucking all the smash into a whirl. Or, you can transfer all the pieces batch by batch into your blender and pulverize them there, which means of course you’ll have to clean that blender after. Next, chop the onions ‘til the tears pour down your face, along with the garlic, and fry them nice and golden yellow with some butter in a pan on the stovetop. Put them in a blender/ bowl and turn them into mush, then add them to the pumpkin sludge.
The teacher says the Ministry knew of the child’s pending move last June. He is sorry we weren’t told sooner. He is sad. He is angry. Above all, he is helpful: Sherlock asks him to fax all the most pertinent records, the ever-authoritative psychoeducational tests, that will identify whether or not Abe is designated as a student with special needs. This is done promptly, and the file couriered.

If copies of the psychoeducational assessments and recommendations are faxed, Sherlock can persuade head office of the need to hire an educational assistant to help this child manage in a new school, in a new type of program: her “regular” class. Or, possibly, he may be able to attend the local social skills class that has a program to suit his needs. The teacher also says that Abe can call him, to chat, if he wants to keep the connection.

Sherlock is hopeful that Abe will stay in her class. Things will work out, she thinks. Abe is pleasant to talk to, although he tends to grimace a bit and look away from her. She gives him a novel to read that the other children are enjoying, he devours it, well-focused, reading quickly. The janitor hasn’t brought the desk, but there are eight children away at a field trip so there’s plenty of space at the long table in the centre of the room, and he sits with some of the nicer kids in the class.

She takes him with her to the library when she goes during her prep period to read one of the stories she’s written to the children in Grade 5, in honour of Book Month. He is very focussed again, and asks questions about her story as they walk back to class. He is communicating and maybe even bonding with her. This is good, she thinks, as last year’s teacher said Abe likes to bond directly with one or two adults at his school. She introduces him to the supervision aide and sets him up with buddies to play with at recess.

Pour on the six cups of stock, either boxed, canned, reconstituted cubed or—wait for it—the stock you’ve made and saved from the Thanksgiving turkey bones! Now, get the face of that big old orange and rip its skin off on a fine grater until you have one or two teaspoons of zest. Throw that in, too. Heat to a simmering boil, stir it all up, and add the pepper, salt and curry. To get the curry right, begin by putting in small spoonfuls and keep tasting and adding until it’s just broad enough to be served with goat cheese, tomato and romaine salad, crusty French bread and butter, and a nice clean spicy white wine...like, say, gewurtraminer, chilled.
Outtakes

Delete that bit because—
it's too detailed
it's too unclear
it sounds too gushy
it's redundant
it's too long
the point isn't close enough
the point needs to be moved up
the word isn't right
the audience won't like it
I don't like it
it has useless words in it
it has useless action in it
it's out of character for the character
Maybe it's so bad it's embarrassing.
Maybe it's so close it's embarrassing.
Maybe I'll embarrass my friends because they'll recognize it's them.
Maybe they'll get mad at me if I write about their big secret.
Maybe I'll lose my big secret if I write it down for everyone to read,
which could be worse than going on Oprah,
it could be like dying from some kind of torture,
the torture of public scrutiny of your intimate secrets.
Rendered short, simple, to the point,
no fudge, no flowertalk,
measured in soundbytes and camera angles,
paced for advertising.
And there, now, on the shelf at Borders,
a new edition of the Dummies guide,
Your Life for Dummies.

My Life for Dummies,
the essential elements for quick comprehension
automatically formatted autobiography
available as a template on the net at LIFE.COM
blogging truth
no secrets, (but maybe a decoy or two,
a cover-up, a white lie.)
Is this the story that wasn't?
Is it the story that will be, should be, could be, must be?
Is this the story that IS?
He is on three different medications, administered four times a day, all for hyperactivity disorders. The tests Sherlock reads do not conclusively point to any particular disorder, not even ADHD, but “compulsive outbursts.” (What is a compulsive outburst, she thinks...could they mean impulsive?) He has no special needs “category.”

Am I missing something? Sherlock wonders.

Over the morning, while formally observing her student teacher’s lesson, and also observing Abe in class, Sherlock begins to feel sad. She’s starting to get that adoption feeling she’s had with other children before. Of course she knows that is not the answer, but how many times has she heard other teachers, too, say “if I could just take him home!” Sherlock notices that her eyes are misting up a bit.

Quickly, she gets up to phone again and check out the status of the desk and it’s nonarrival. The lunch bell rings and the student teacher dismisses all the children for lunch. About five minutes after that, they realize they’ve forgotten to take Abe to the office for the medications. They divide up and start searching for the “patient.” It takes about twenty minutes, but he is found and that is when Sherlock discovers that the release form for the medications is still not at the school. The secretary clandestinely gives Abe his pills, on the strength of the fax from the doctor’s office, which is not the legal document but will have to do.

Consider the outtakes, ugly little devils, unfit and unparalleled within the gleaming structure of a lie-f, purple and green amorphorous imps peeking out from behind sheer silvery pillars of truth, slipping and sliding down the whoopee skids of a rollercoaster support made entirely of glass, shrieking falsetto truths, hysterical lies, breathless and frantic not to be heard, whispering like disobedient children up past bedtime hoping nobody notices So they can stay.
The bell rings and as Sherlock exits the staffroom, still chewing her lunch, she finds Abe standing outside the office crying. He’s been punched in the chest. Two boys are being interrogated by the vice principal. They are well-known clients this time of day, often in need of private consultation with the principal about the status of their socialization skills during the noon hour. Usually, their skills are lacking. Today, they found Abe.

She leads Abe to the nurse’s office. He lifts his shirt, there is a fist-sized red patch where he has suffered the blow. He is calmed by Sherlock, and is asked by the principal to write a story about what happened. He describes a clear situation of bullying. The other two boys describe being attacked by him, but one Sherlock knows from past experience is not a reliable interpreter of reality. She sits in on the discipline “hearing” and sees that Abe is very frightened, especially when the principal says that fighting gets only one warning, and that on the next incident, you are suspended.

When the other boys leave, he bursts into tears. Sherlock tries not to cry along with him and her voice catches when she reminds the principal that this is Abe’s first day, that he just moved into his foster home yesterday, and that he didn’t know the rule about not being in the upper halls during recess breaks. The principal immediately takes back what she said, and asks him to stay with her to clam down and have a treat. He of course agrees: what else can he do? Later, Abe reports he got two chocolate bars out of the deal.

During a lull in teaching later, leaving the student teacher yet again in charge, Sherlock visits the principal and passionately demands that she speak to Abe’s “guardian” (the ministry/social worker).

So then, if you leave them be, who’s going to know? Auntie Mame? Uncle Richard? Is this any way to bring up your children? They should NOT be seen or heard at this hour, you know. (Oh, yes, them, are they still around? Off you go, then, off to bed, off, quickly now...)
How dare they, she asks, do this to this boy? HOW can they expect us to keep him safe when they won’t even come and talk to us, won’t give us enough time to properly prepare for his arrival, and put him in a foster home where the parents don’t even have the kindness to keep him home for a few days to get used to his new home before he’s put in a new school? The principal agrees, so the phone call is made. She politely but firmly drills the social worker about how the situation for this child is not safe, not well thought out, and simply lacking in care and attention. Then, the social worker is invited to a meeting to plan Abe’s individual educational program. She declines, “too busy.”

Sherlock is choked with rage: she can’t even guarantee physical safety for this child, never mind appropriate learning spaces. It took the day just to get the desk delivered! She telephones Pam, who says the best solution is to ask that he be put in the social skills class at the other school, where there is a low student teacher ratio and specific instructional programs. She says she can’t work with a child like this in the classroom, with no support systems in place, and neither should Sherlock.

“We’re not martyrs,” she says. Sherlock is plainly upset by all this. Everyone on the staff is buzzing about the boy and the bag of pills, nobody can believe that this is happening, after everything they picketed for. When a colleague asks Sherlock how she is doing after school, she says she just might dust off the old picket sign and wear it the next day in front of the school, and not come inside the building at all, because she can no longer abide some of the STUFF that happens in schools. In fact, says Sherlock, I should have gone into journalism after all. But all she can think about all that afternoon and long into the night is: what will become of Abe?

While I wrote this I took stuff out just for you, a gift for you, to keep for you some kind of truth. Think of all those deleted scenes, perfect and useless like little china dogs guarding your house, sitting by the fireplace. Woof, woof, tiny strangled barks aimed at the intruder by your door. They shatter when he kicks them, and you walk across the floor to sweep them up, thousands of tiny sharp bits in your toes, then. Look, there’s blood on the floor for the reason I’m leaving. And if that’s too self-indulgent, take it out.
It was during Math that Ms. Goodhope found out that Abe had spent his lunch hour unsupervised, when she had thought the ed assistant would stay with him from 12 to 1 to ensure he was safe. The story was that Abe had gone to the office and requested of the vice-principal that he be allowed to shake off his tail. He thought having an adult glued to him would interfere with his ability to make friends!

So, the VP agreed and took him outside to the basketball court, introduced him to some boys playing who allowed him to join in, and then kept a surreptitious eye on him while she did her usual lunch rounds. Abe, apparently, had a great time.

"I played with my friends at lunch today," he told Ms. Goodhope which led to her discovery of his solo flight. He seemed quite pleased to have played with "friends."

Then, in Art class, he sketched his teacher's portrait alongside everybody else, seated on the carpet. He made her look like a cross between a Piet Mondrian and a Matt Groenig cartoon. She sported jagged long nails, snaky hair, and piercing dark eyes with black patches under them. Ms. Goodhope will treasure the gift. Her student teacher has been instructing them in portraiture, so now Ms. Goodhope has a pretty crazy gallery of herself to view now, everything from artful and credible likenesses to children's cartoons.

At 3, Abe left happily, after asking for homework and providing an agenda for the student teacher to record his homework assignments in. In fact, Abe was easier to handle today than several other students in the class were. If there was an education assistant on a regular basis, based on today's experience, Goodhope thinks he'd be fine where he is.

Wildflower

Wildflower, your presence is my song.
Nod gently now in dances
composed by the wind.

Kings of nations stoop to breathe your perfume
and wonder at your creation.
Lions in their jungle dens roar
near you
where no man dares to tread.

Brave flower of the forest,
bloody wars may rage
but you bloom still.
Ghosts of Lists and Ghostly Boys

Sherlock's list is growing, there's so much to do in a day:

- finish testing the Grade Six classes with the district standard reading test
- seventeen formal, four page ministry required Individual Education Plans
- parent letters sent to each student to set up IEP goal setting conferences
- contact translators again, (always out of office)
- get new computing software installed on class computer
- start class reports, due to office for proofing in a couple of weeks
- draft year end report for student teacher
- oh, right, teach all day, every day

Then, of course, there's Abe, floating like a spectre in her mind, behind the smokescreen of the lists of what's to do. The idea outlined today was that he should probably just hang on where he is in class, and have a pass given to him so that if he feels a compulsive/impulsive outburst coming on or that "his buttons" are being pushed, he could just get the pass from the teacher's desk, take it to the library (where the teacher librarian is working with only one or two other classes at any given time) and show it to the librarian, who will then monitor him out of the corner of her eye for five minutes and then, when he's feeling better, he can come back to class. This was NOT Sherlock's idea, but she listened politely, which is always difficult for her when her patience is so stretched.

*What more can tomorrow bring?* she wonders.

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Moon River

Singing dreams of places
you and I have been
where possibilities of light and hope
strength and daring
lay open just for us to enter,

my body calms in rhythms
and harmonies of the heart
tensions of today are pulled away
to long afternoons of child adventures
where we learned what our futures could be
Actually, Tuesday is for Trees

Finally, Goodhope had the whole resource teaching room free and to herself. She thought it a perfect day to do the video filming. They did film Joe’s, but he would not use the tripod because the levers were difficult to manipulate and the camera motion boggled him. Goodhope often feels the same way. The lever action seems opposite to the direction the camera should move in, which is very confusing if you have dyslexia in the first place. Goodhope does, mildly, but Joe really struggles with that learning challenge. Well, without the tripod, his film was tremendously jiggly and lacking focus, and didn’t do justice to his line drawings.

So, they decided he should try filming using the tripod again, after showing him how to upload to the computer editing program with a firewire connection. She let him play around with making cuts and editing a bit with the footage he did have, which he enjoyed. Sophia and Anthony filmed theirs using the tripod, and what they had on tape looked pretty good. However, they do not have any speakers just yet, and so can’t hear what they’ve taped very well, as the camera volume alone is too quiet. Goodhope will have to get some headphones for the computer so the kids can edit better. Probably she’ll bring some old ones from her home as the school doesn’t have any to spare.

Things were going just great when, with no prior notice or warning, the grounds maintenance workers arrived with a chainsaw and began cutting down two big old trees right outside the classroom window. Of course the sound was mightily overwhelming, and picked up on the soundtrack for the videos, which ruined them. Goodhope supposes that the BREB limitations will not allow her to insert the kid’s shots of the workers to show where the background noise came from. She thinks Murphy’s Law is beginning to affect this project, but then she’s not all that superstitious as a rule.

We sang Moon River
back then, each of us
a huckleberry child
with a juice stained face
our voices echoing down the creek
our raft gliding over
great and fathomless depths.

When the poles got too short,
we settled back on the planks
sun hot on our shoulders
knowing the drift
would send us on
to the grey beach
of Wolf Island
Nobody seems to know what to do about Abe. The files have been read over and apparently this young person does not fit into any of the specific education ministry categories and therefore we may not be able to apply for any funding at all for counselling, play supervision, tutoring, classroom aides. The director will present Abe’s case to the central decision-making committee for the Vancouver School Board. In cases such as these, she is sometimes able to get extra funding for children who need more support. However, not one of these people have ever yet or likely ever will sit with Abe and actually talk to him, which makes me uneasy. The director has talked to us a bit, yet even though we’ve observed him for over a week and know the most about him, we are not invited to the decision making meeting about his future.

I have pressed my anecdotal notes of the past week upon the director with the hope that she will read them. I’m not sure if they are enough. I don’t know if she will take them to the meeting and I don’t know if she will read them. I feel like I’m waiting for the jury to finish its deliberation, to see what the sentence will be. I wish either Abe or I had a lawyer: we are voiceless in this endeavour.

a place of fabled mystery where gold was buried
we secretly knew, wolves prowled
(in whispered confidence)
Indians had died and spirits lingered.
There are a few saving graces here with me today. First, if the camera is not reasonably repairable, the Calgary Canon people have promised me a “substantial” discount on a new camera. Second, I am at home with the people I love, warm and comfortable: Blackie the cat is on my lap, too.

Third, and above all, the best news is that Abe has been allotted a spot in a special behaviour support class at my school, coming up Wednesday, and will still be allowed to “reverse integrate” with my class for whatever subject areas or activities we (foster parents, teachers, student) mutually agree upon. He will join us for the Friday afternoon trip to the Vancouver Art Gallery to see the works of Picasso, and will continue with the buddy reading I’ve set up with a Grade One boy. It turns out he has a special knack with younger children and he is a good, expressive reader, too. He was happy to see me this morning, smiling and greeting me in the basement play area. I think, from his appearance and behaviour, that his new foster home is working out. I am so glad it’s all worked out, that there will be enough support for this boy. I have found it unsettling just imagining all the things that might have gone wrong, things I have seen go wrong in other situations in the past. I am delighted and relieved that this time good decisions were made and that Abe remains happy and will have an appropriate learning environment. I know the teacher and the teaching aides in the behaviour support class are experienced, excellent, kind, intelligent and caring. They will love Abe. Honestly, I don’t know how he manages to survive with all the upheaval in his life. He’s an amazing child.

Sliding in, startling fishes from their calm
the barrel bottomed raft halts in the silt.
Five pairs of bare feet
slip into warm shore water,
mud springs up between fifty toes
standing silent waiting for company orders.
Thursday Nov. 17: King Murphy

Murphy’s Law Rules. Today, Sherlock decides to take Anthony and Sophia out of the last period of computer tech class to go to her resource room to learn how to edit their footage. First, of course, they have to get the information from the camera tape uploaded into the computer. BUT—the computer will not recognize the camera. She firewires the attachment through all three possible ports. She tries every conceivable combination of shutdown, restart, turn on the camera, set to play mode, press play, etc. and there is just no dice. She calls in the resident expert, the computer tech teacher whose job is to maintain a crumbling fleet of computers for the entire school, which is two labs and about thirty classrooms, some even networked and on the internet. He tries it all again, but this is a no go, nohow, for sure.

Who is this Mr. Murphy? Sherlock needs to talk to him.

Sherlock has options as follows:
- Bring more of her own technical gear to school to troubleshoot with.
- Ask computer tech teacher bring in another camera, another computer, more cables, hook them all in, test them all. Maybe on his lunch hour.

Oh, wait...that’s it, she’ll bring more of her stuff from home. Next day, she tests everything, including her neighbour’s borrowed camera, and discovers it’s her own camera that’s blown. She takes it in for repair, they only want $863. This is not covered by any sort of insurance, because Sherlock is not supposed to use her personal technical equipment from home for work; ever. But there isn’t access to any other up to date equipment in the school to do this research on.

$863.00?

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Plans are hatched and Commander Craig dispatches troops to reconnaissance all corners of the territory to seek out the mythic beasts the spirits and the horror to bring them back for supper tales of derring do over pizza and root beer.
Stealth and silence rule until
shriil screams disrupt the hunt
and Hell is unleashed.

We scramble to the source
to see a whisk of silver fur darting away,
tracks filling with water.

The perfect stillness in the bushes now
reveals we watchers, we seekers
as the watched and the sought.

Quickly, with no thought for care
we fall over each other on the trail
for the beach,
    the raft,
    the poles;
    and push off,
amid more screaming
and echoes of screams
up and down the creek
clanging in our fear drenched brains.

At last the raft swirls past
the tip of the land
yet still there’s screaming,
and there on the beach
is the one we forgot,
hopping up and down
to ward off the horror
of being
alone with the wolf.

We go back to get her,
poling sure and strong.

She won’t wade out to us
she won’t stop screaming,
we lift her onto the raft,
she hits and kicks,
terrified.
I can’t stay in this space much longer or I’ll explode.

I haven’t been writing about work because I am beginning to feel like this is griping. Things are not going very well, at all. I tried my own precious laptop last week, and even it did not recognize when the camera was firewired into the port. Obviously, the problem is with either the firewire cable or the camera, I think. So, I tried the firewire on my neighbour’s camera, and it worked just fine. It appears the old school computer has now blown out the chip card on my personal video camera, and this, to get repaired, will cost me $863.

Sherlock bravely considers the possibility of some tiny tools, a chip card and herself with a manual at the kitchen table. She envisions the little camera, laid open and whimpering: she can’t do it. What if she kills it for good? She loves her camera too much to risk blundering around in its guts, so instead calls up the customer help line, the 911 for beloved cameras.

They promise, if she just mails it out to Calgary, that they will either fix it or give her a substantial discount on a new camera. The warranty is past its date, so she will have to pay for repairs. They will phone first, so she can choose which: new (gulp) camera or repairs. Sherlock will have to wait for weeks to hear from them. She tries the school camera in the meantime. It has no manual, it is not easy to operate, it has different menus, it requires several hours of study to figure out.

Well.

Christmas is coming.

And so we sing the song
of the Big Bad Wolf
and she joins in with tears on her cheeks
sitting in the middle among us,
safe,
glaring,
then laughing,
finally shouting
the powerful child chant.
Today I sing long
to shake loose memories,
in which to bathe my heart.
Moon River is now frozen:
the river a crystal,
the moon a rock,
still as death, unmoving.
You stand on the grey beach
where the wolf
will
devour
you,
locked in the agony
of being alone,
of hopping up and down
and screaming;
listening to the echo of your own screaming.
Hearing you
hollows my bones
because I can’t go back
to save you anymore.
So to save me,
I sing of you.
Thursday November 24, 2005:
Sherlock Hears of Abe’s Attempt to Take Back Control of His Life

Yesterday, Sherlock’s son popped his head into her study and said, “Well, here you are!” as if her existence required verification. True, she’d been very quiet for a long time, but to her knowledge was still among the living. It seems the phone rang several times for her and he did not know where she was, so told callers she was not available. Sherlock almost wished she could return to that blissful moment of feigned nonexistence, because the story she finally got was not one she ever wanted to hear.

The most persistent caller had been her teaching partner Pam. Sherlock called her immediately, wondering what could be so important that she would call so often. Pam was in a state when Sherlock got hold of her, very upset because she had been the one in charge of the class when Abe finally erupted. He had a terrific meltdown, ripping and cutting up his work binder, refusing to stop. When the substitute classroom aide set the customary 3-step boundaries and asked him ultimately to leave the room with her, he began kicking, punching, thrashing, yelling and crawling under the tables. He yelled obscenities at the women, as well, which mightily shocked both Pam and the rest of the children in the class. They aren’t used to it at all. Finally, another aide from down the hall, who works in the special needs behaviour class, came running. It took two trained adult people to overpower Abe and bodily remove him from the class. Pam and three or four children in the class were so upset by all this that they were in tears. Abe, of course, was also crying once his rage subsided.

Sherlock wished this had never happened. She knew this could have been avoided if only there had been more time, more care, more thought, more planning and preparation. This incident, she felt, came from the cavalier manner in which fragile children are dealt with these days. Without respect, there is so little relief from the ongoing trauma children like Abe live within. Sherlock is all too aware there is no “perfect world” where things like this never happen, but this particular series of events, this story, did not need to end this way.
1.38 Portrait of teacher, by Sophia Lee.
There is no one person to lay blame on, it’s a systemic fault, because the education system at this point has no proper safety net for children like Abe, it’s all been “cut back.” Sherlock imagines the net reduced to the effectiveness of a butterfly net; designed for lip service purposes only: it carries no weight. Perhaps she’s been teaching too long? She is one of the few teachers who can actually recall better days. “Urgent Intervention Workers” would come in and stay for six weeks full time when the child needed them. Counsellors and nurses were in every school—not just the big ones—several days a week. She remembers many more children with special needs having full time education assistants.

Back in 1974, she worked for the Catholic Family and Children’s Service as a file clerk. Her friend’s big sister, a social worker at the same office, had 19 children in her care and thought that was too much, because she could only manage to visit each one at their homes once a week. Now, social workers have hundreds of charges and nobody even investigates the ones who die. Sherlock finds 713 such an auspicious number, the lucky seven and the malignant 13. That is the number of children in ministry care who have died, whose cause of death has not been investigated. What does that number mean? She worries: could this happen to Abe?

Sherlock has decided that our society no longer cares about children. Her personal opinion is that we are losing our future, and nobody seems to realize it. Today, she heard on national radio that B.C. has the highest child poverty rate in the country: one in four live below the poverty line. This big booming, high budget, fat happy province cannot keep its children in decent food and clothes, never mind educate them.

Her head has been sharply aching all day because she couldn’t sleep last night. If this keeps up, she’s going to go to Abe’s doctor for some of his drugs.

Abe is not allowed to go see the Picasso because his foster parents won’t take the time to come with him, even though it says in their Ministry Level 3 foster parenting contract that they are to be available for him 24/7 to meet his emotional (and presumably educational) needs. (For this they are paid $2700 a month, says the Ministry website.)
Anna's Road

Why does that streak o blood rip the petal of your cheek?

Anna Akhmatova asks
while another Anna
sits dully staring
by the side of a dusty road
not crying
not knowing
not seeing
destruction.

NO.

She cannot look at it.

Anna, Anna,
cradles her baby
sings its last lullaby.
Softly, gently,
she gives it her best shot
better than that last one
she didn’t hear
puff past her ear
and stop.

NO.

What bullet?
Anna, Anna
the song is over now,
there's
nothing to hear
nothing to see
nothing to do
but weep
and wonder why
have babies at all
if they grow up to be soldiers.

NO.

Our children die like flowers
torn from the earth.

Anna, Anna
no longer weeps
her eyes empty
she lifts his hand
one ragged fingernail
scratches a map
on her soft cheek
mixes in road dust
to make a scar
the world will see
when she screams to it:

NO.

1.40 Wild Orchid
Ms. Goodhope’s Thoughts on Her Weak Heart

How do those teachers of the special needs classes get through their work, day after day, without having their hearts broken? I would never want to have to live like a turtle, with a great thick shell on the outside and my soft heart tucked away inside where nobody could touch it. But, that is what I would have to do if I had their job. So, it’s not for me, that would be no kind of life. I wonder, though, if Abe’s made my heart any stronger. Maybe, with what I’ve learned, I could do that kind of teaching. I guess I’ll wait until another chance like this come up, to test it out again, to see if it breaks. It’s a risk I need to be ready for, in any case, because there are likely more guys like Abe that may turn up in my class.

Judging Waves

The moments between waves—

   waiting,
   not knowing:
   patience.

It hits the sand,
   too close,
   like you.
Sherlock Cannot Take Him off the School Grounds

...without a one-to-one supervision attendant in case he flips out again. She realizes she needs to keep him safe, what if he darted off at a Skytrain station or ran away in anger from them downtown? She cannot get an attendant, there is nobody from the school board who can be spared for field trips. She’s so unhappy about this, her shoulders are slumping and her chest aches. Abe really wanted to go, he thought he was finally joining in with “real” school. Sherlock feels apologies are due.

Abe was dejected, head down, and wouldn’t look at Sherlock in class. His foster parents told him Monday after school that he was leaving her class, even though they had been asked not to until a meeting with Abe and his new teacher could be arranged. The new teacher is lovely, he would like her if given time to adjust, to participate in deciding his future. Giving him the advance—as an inevitability—set him worrying and feeling like he was again not in control of his life.

His behaviour was very simply caused by his hurt feelings over the imminent “rejection” from the class and his perception of his lack of control over that eventuality. He figured he was going to be in control, and he was going to destroy something that would show the teacher that he could hurt her, too: thus, the book-cutting. It’s all pretty logical, even if it does devolve to an emotionally violent sideshow. Frankly, Sherlock thought she would have been just as frantic as a child in the same situation.

Slowly, over the day, Abe warmed up Sherlock. She encouraged him to go to music class, try out some math, mark all the good work he’d done, play outside at recess with his pals. It was, actually, an uneventful day. The substitute aide re-arranged her assignments to come for this last afternoon, which she wasn’t scheduled to do. Abe was overjoyed to see her again, even though he had battled her so thoroughly yesterday. It was a bit like redemption for him to have her back.

Finally, as Abe was about to start on his reward activity for having such a good day—a computer game called Caesar’s Empire—Sherlock took a moment to settle with him, to say a proper goodbye. Just Abe, the aide, and Sherlock were in the room. She told him that she knew he would be going to go to another class, that it is a good place, and that she’d miss him. She asked him if he wanted to hug goodbye, and he willingly did. She felt like she might cry as she held him: learning about Abe has been hard on Sherlock.
Friday November 25: Picasso

Today, Goodhope shook hands and chatted with Shirley Thomson, the ex-director of the National Gallery of Canada! She’s not sure if she should wash her hand, ever! Here’s how it happened: My student teacher was earnestly positioned in front of Picasso’s Woman with Tears, explaining to my students how it blends both cubism and abstract art principles. The students were highly engaged, and busily sketching into their notebooks, copying what they could so they could discuss it later, back in the classroom, and remember the feel of the lines. Ms. Thomson—may I call her Shirley?—walked over to me and asked if I was the teacher. Not knowing who she was, I said, “I am, but this man is my student teacher, and he is leading this class under my supervision. I’m lucky he has such an interest in art.” We exchanged pleasantries, and she remarked upon the speed and confidence with which the students worked. I pointed Joe out to her, because his sketchbook was easily filling up with masterful strokes, a joy to behold. She was impressed, and then told me she had also taught art. Then, I said that it was wonderful that children like Joe could do this sort of work, that he was a real artist with image and line, never mind that he couldn’t string two words together in a sentence. She agreed, and said in her experience, that was true of many great artists. Then she remarked that actually her art “teaching” career was at the National Gallery, where she had been the director!

Never Fail Pastry

5-6 cups flour
1 pound lard or shortening, chilled.
3 tabs. brown sugar
½ teas. salt

3 teas. baking powder
1 egg
scant cup of lukewarm water
1 tab. vinegar

Put lard in large bowl. Mix all dry ingredients together and put over lard. Use pastry cutter or two knives to cut in flour mixture until crumbs are small pea-sized. Break egg into a measuring cup, mix well with fork. Add vinegar, then lukewarm water in thin stream from tap, while mixing with fork, to make one cup of liquid. Pour over the crumb mix, fluffing with fork until all crumbs are moist. Press crumbs together to make a ball. DO NOT KNEAD more than three turns, or just enough so it holds together. Divide into two balls, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least thirty minutes until rolling out. Makes two double crust or four single crust large pies.

Use more flour to roll it out. For apple pie, add cinnamon to the recipe. For savoury pies, skip the sugar, try herbs such as rosemary, pepper or basil.
Picasso's Weeping Woman, the class all sat to sketch this work.
Just a School Teacher

Oh! I felt my face get a little flushed. I felt I was just a school teacher, not a great teacher like her. Of course, before this revelation she had ferreted out that I was working on my master’s degree at UBC and was interested in how children tell stories using image and video. She trumped me again, this time by mentioning that she had just received her honorary doctorates from UBC the day before. I was so happy to have met her, regardless of my great feelings of smallness. She genuinely complimented both me and my student teacher, and told us that what we were doing “breaks her heart” in a glad way, because it makes the gallery a living place to bring children to, when we give them the opportunity to see Picasso’s work and learn from it.

Then she went to commune with Emily Carr, and we all returned to our cool autumn afternoon in the gallery, with Picasso.

I loved the broken heart. It helped mend mine, although I still wish Abe could have been with us.

HENRI’S CHRISTMAS FRUITCAKE

Mix together:

1 lb. butter            2 cups brown sugar (dark)
1 cup milk              5 large eggs
1 tsp. soda, dissolved in a little hot water

Set aside while you mix the following:
4 cups flour
2 tsp. each of cloves, mace, nutmeg, allspice, cinnamon
Sherlock: End of December in Retrospect, from Feb. 13, 06

Sherlock couldn't believe it was possible; that this could happen. She'd heard rumour Abe wasn't in school, she thought she'd heard someone say “Children's Hospital” and his name in the same sentence. Maybe it was the Special Education Assistant assigned to his class, speaking with the principal. She didn't listen, refused to listen, walked away to the hallway, not wanting to comprehend. Later, in January, she returned to school to check mail and try to somehow download the students' video files from the computer that was pre-programmed not to write to CD. There was Abe's current teacher, also getting her mail.

Sherlock had to ask:

“What's become of Abe? Did I hear you say he's away from school?”

“Oh, yes, he's gone to live at a centre,” answered her colleague.

“But, do you mean a residential centre? Is he not with the foster parents anymore?”

“No, he was only in class for about a week and a half and he had a huge blowout with them on the weekend, so they drove him to Children's Hospital and committed him to the psych unit. They told us on the Monday, they said he was too much for them to handle.”

“Oh. Well. That's too bad. Poor kid, nothing really worked out, did it?”

“Well, they just spoil him at Children's, he doesn't have to do any work, there's no schedule, he gets to eat whatever he likes, anything goes there, really.”

“How long did he stay there before he went back to Kennedy?”

“I don't know, I've not heard a thing. Nobody's told us anything.”

Sherlock is Sisyphus, pushing not a rock but a bundle of caring, of emotion, of disappointment, forever up and away from her. It falls down and crushes her and she pretends not to notice.
December 14, 2005: Preparing to Leave

I feel like a cliché, because I sound like one of those career teachers who have no other life and cannot imagine retiring and being away from the classroom, the school house, the playground. I always used to think to myself “Well, now you can get a real life, right?” So, what happens to me today, on my day off, as I ponder who I will go to see the Narnia movie with? Well, I brilliantly plan on taking my class to see it as a field trip in January! Then, I actually go along with the whole idea for about five minutes, imagining which other classes might like to come, which theatre we would go to, whether it would be bus or SkyTrain. Finally, reality clicks in and I remember that I won’t actually be teaching in January, because it is then that I will be on academic leave.

How outrageous to be such a cliché. Really, I should get a life!

January 2, 2006: The Evening Before I Don’t Go Back to Work

Get a life. That’s what I said, right? So, I spent the entire holiday wishing the rain would stop so I could ski, reading a play over and over so I could envision the part I will perform in it, writing a story about Christmas when I was nine and testing my belief systems, cooking up a storm, eating indulgent food, drinking wine with friends, planning and implementing household redecoration schemes, attending family gatherings, helping my sister to do rehab (again), learning about how my children are growing and thinking and developing, figuring out how to get away on a holiday with my husband…well: it’s almost a holiday to get back to the idea of some structured, orderly thoughts about my research.

Add the fruits and nuts, combined, first to the flour mixture:

1 ½ lbs. dark raisins          1 lb. currants
1 lb. sultana raisins          ½ lb. mixed peel
½ lb. almonds (optional)       ½ lb. cherries (optional)

Add fruit and flour mixture to previously combined ingredients.
Jan 3: On Not Going to Work All Day

Okay, the day came and went. I did mean to call in, but then thought I might sound like a nervous Nellie, that maybe I needed to let the new teacher just do her thing by herself without me breathing down her neck. Besides, my husband is on a semester off from teaching, too, and thought it might be a great idea for us to take a very long walk and have sushi for lunch. I was not one to argue with his idea. We walked for a few hours, exploring the town and the waterfront, ate lovely sushi with miso soup and green tea, and reminisced and made future plans. It was lovely.

It was so lovely that we've decided to figure out exactly how soon we can both retire and find a way of life where we don't have to work so much, we can travel a bit, I can write, he can read. He loves to read every book in the library, it seems, not a week goes by without him polishing off at least four books. Imagine if we could be in a smaller town somewhere warm and not too far away, where the children could visit, I could have access to a great kitchen and lots of fish and wine to cook with, a good laptop and many, many books. It seems like a good life to plan for.

Line fruit-cake pans with greased brown paper and fill about 2/3 or ¾ full. Bake at 300 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes, then lower temperature to 275 degrees. If using regular Christmas cake pans, 3 sizes, bake the smallest about one hour, medium about two hours and the large size, three and a half hours.

(A note on the back of the recipe says 2 tbsp. molasses could be added and the milk changed to half sour cream).

Finish cooled cakes with either glaze, marzipan, or butter icing. Marzipan can be topped with icing, maybe a bit sweet. Decorate with holly leaves or candied fruits. Many choices, all good!
All the same, even with all that from the list, I do feel a bit odd about not going in to work tomorrow with Pam. If a dear neighbour and friend hadn’t come by to distract me with a glass of wine and an evening’s conversation a few hours ago, I’m sure I would have phoned my partner to make sure everything was okay. In fact, I’d like to go in tomorrow just to check and make sure, but that would probably be a bit insulting to the person taking over my position. I will stick around for any possible phone calls... or probably won’t be able to resist phoning in just to say hello.

The truth is I feel a bit glad I’m not going in, as I have read and re-read this journal and I have come to the realization that I am getting far too wound up emotionally with my work. It drains me. It’s been six years in the same position, and my attachments to the place and the people are like house and family attachments. In my darker moments, I sometimes wonder why I don’t just take up some work that pays as well but does not demand such a high level of emotional involvement. Maybe I should be a salesperson, hawking broken down old houses in a cheap part of town. Or a banker, perhaps, investing in abstract capitalist aggrandizement schemes. Of course, by the way I describe these jobs, it’s obvious what I think of them. Also, I’m pretty sure I’d find a way to get emotionally wrapped up in them, anyway. It’s just the way I am.

Hilarious invitation on the e-mail today: **I doubt, therefore I am.** This is some sort of workshop about how to lead your life in a Buddhist way.

I never imagined my questioning could be construed as Buddhist: I just assumed I lacked direction and conviction.

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**Fish in Wine**

- 4 salmon steaks
- Salt and pepper
- 1 onion, sliced thin
- 2 tbsp. butter
- 3 tbsp. cold water
- 1 tbsp. flour
- 6 stuffed olives, sliced
- 1 cup dry white table wine

Heat over to 350F. Butter a shallow baking dish large enough to hold the steaks in a single layer. Put steaks into prepared dish and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper.
Jan 6: Epiphany

A fitting day, aptly named. This morning, I put on Leonard Cohen’s album The Future after the children had left for school and proceeded to do my physiotherapy exercises. Well, they got too boring pretty quickly, and I soon found myself dancing to “Closing Time,” a great song about the lights coming on in a bar, where “the men all dance on the polka dots, the women tear their blouses off.” I turned it up, digging its raucousnous. Kruger, my pet schnauzer, thought this was great, and brought his bone over and dropped it between my moving feet so I could work in kicking it across the room to the rhythm of the song. We did our dog and human dance for at least five minutes, me singing along, him barking, the bone scuttling over the hardwood floor. When the song ended, I went to the kitchen to get some water. Obviously, too much caffeine in the system, eh? I glance up at the clock: it’s 9:00 AM.

Hmmm.

This is a very significant time of day for teachers who have taught since 1981. Lucky I took a break just then to get some water or I would have missed it—and never noticed at all.

Will retirement be like this on a regular basis? Will I dance every day at nine with my dog? Will I find more precious time to be with the people I love? Maybe, in fact, I could live with very little money at all, and never go back to work.

I’m not sure if I really need a purpose like teaching at all.

I’m thinking of selling the house and investing the money, moving to a less expensive place and writing. I’m starting a financial plan to do that. This is the longest time I’ve ever lived in one place, and I usually only work at one school for five or six years and move on. It’s been six years at this school.

Winds of change in the air.

It’s closing time.

Separate onion slices into rings and spread them over the surface of the fish. Dot with butter. Add wine to pan. Put in oven and bake about 15 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Baste often with wine. Transfer fish to hot platter and keep warm.

Pour liquid from baking pan into small saucepan. Measure 3 tbsp. cold water into a small dish. Add 1 tbsp. flour and stir until smooth. Add to liquid in saucepan gradually and heat, stirring constantly, until thickened slightly. Stir in sliced olives and a little more wine, to taste. Add salt and pepper, and any herb of your choice (basil, tarragon, rosemary) to taste. Pour over fish and serve immediately. (Serves four. Can substitute any firm fleshed fish, such as snapper, basa, cod....works for fillets as well).
Goodbye, and in closing, a poem for any teacher, anywhere, that we have loved.

Learning Celestial Navigation

Count the stars with me,  
gaze into the midnight black  
find one or two you've seen before,  
show them to me.  
Their patterns hold just for this moment,  
another look,  
another way to find a path back  
to the brightest one.  
No, look, there is now one brighter.  
Name the stars with me  
just this once  
they will change tomorrow:

tomorrow
I come back myself  
comforted by the sky,  
its velvet blanket over me  
this warm night.  
How far away tomorrow was—  
I am now an old woman who  
lies in this grassy field  
beside the lake  
looks at familiar stars  
ssearches for the paths between them  
and seeks some shelter  
from the tragedy of losing you:

losing you to show me stars,  
I remember how you did that,  
found paths between the points of light.  
I know how to do it now  
I guess I always did,  
I just needed to hear  
your voice naming them  
so I could learn how the sky covered you  
and then lift its blanket  
to see into your heart.
References


